

Should countries encourage migration today?

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Migration is defined as the permanent movement of people away from their place of origin, constantly on the move to seek better lives due to their innate survival instincts. This is a phenomenon that has been occurring since the start of civilisation. However, the causes of migration today are slightly more nuanced and complex, as an increasing number of people migrate to evade political persecution, war, conflict, poverty and starvation in their countries. This makes this issue of migration highly debatable, with the debate – which stems from the vastly differing stances of countries which are politically, economically and culturally diverse – showing no signs of abating. This essay will attempt to expound on the possible reasons why countries should, or should not encourage migration.

As the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights rightfully and solemnly states, “All humans have the right to food, shelter, peace and protection.” However, in the real world where conflicts and wars are rife, this statement sounds more like an aspiration to the people living under the rule of the Janjaweed in South Sudan, or the schoolgirls whose pursuit of education in Pakistan have their lives threatened by the Taliban. Ethically, they deserve to escape to seek peace and protection, even when their own countries and governments do not have the power to grant them so. This is because the ethics of the situation rule clearly that as humans, they deserve to lead the best lives possible, and given that wars and ideologies led by extremist groups would require a long time to eradicate, their only way to make a better life is simply to migrate.

The picture of Aylan Kurdi, a three year old Syrian boy whose picture was shared over social media hundreds of thousands of times within the span of a few days, is but one of the many other Syrians, whose lives – if they are even alive after all – were utterly shattered by the bloody Syrian War. When migration is no longer an issue of the stakes – whether economic, social, political or even environmental – of individual countries, but one that has erupted into an urgent call for humanitarian aid with the need to save millions of lives, this is when I believe that countries should be more open to migration, as saving lives should be a collective global priority. Up to date, the catastrophic conflict between the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Syria’s ruler, al-Assad, has displaced 5.5 million Syrians, and caused hundreds of thousands to die at sea due to their unsafe transportation methods. The ones that stay arguably await an even bleaker future. With the daily bombings and explosions, there would be more Aylans appearing on our media outlets, should our global leaders not decide to join hands and work together to solve this crisis.

The commonly forgotten aspect of migration is any debate of all is domestic migration, which involves the movement of people within a country, usually from the rural to the urban parts of a country. This phenomenon is evident in countries that have a large land area, such as China, Brazil and India. People often migrate to the city in search of a better life, as they perceive the city to be able to offer them better educational and career opportunities, and a better quality of life in general. This is because of the concentration of domestic and foreign investment such as Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and educational clusters, to equip the people residing around with the necessary skill sets to enter the workforce. The migration of people to these areas would be beneficial, as the increase in

labour pool, coupled with the opportunities to upgrade and utilise their skill sets, enable them to earn a higher wage, which can then be remitted to their rural homes. Hence, developing countries with such situations should encourage domestic migration.

However, there is a reason why, despite numerous protests and global conferences that are pro-migration, with the intent of saving lives, governments of European countries are still adopting conservative stances towards accepting refugees: the quality of lives of their citizens is severely compromised. In Norway, the government recently announced that they would be paying refugees 1000 pounds each to return home; in Germany, Angela Merkel's relentless 'Open Door' policy has been met with protests on the streets; in the Eastern European states like Lithuania and Hungary, authorities have already sealed their borders completely; in Denmark, the government would confiscate any valuables that the refugees own, to 'pay' for their stay in their country; and the list goes on. With the sudden influx of refugees, both the authorities and the citizens do not have sufficient time to prepare and put in place measures for their arrival to ensure a smooth transition into the Western society, which is vastly different from their Eastern one. This has led to growing tensions between the refugees and the citizens, and crime, resulting in the dissatisfaction of the citizens. In Norway, after the murder of a 22-year-old social worker by a man residing in a refugee centre who hailed from the Middle East, and numerous reports of molestation and rape of white Norwegian girls by "Asian looking men", the outraged public took the stance that refugees are merely troublemakers, and the influx of more refugees would only spell more disaster for their usually peaceful country. This has led to the rise of anti-immigration political parties, which furthered their stance on refusing to accept any more refugees. Given that a government, or the ruling body of any kind, is supposed to be "by its people, with the people, and for the people", it is only right that these governments place the interests of their citizens first, especially when their well being and safety is being compromised.

The effects of migration can be varied, with the different stakeholders achieving different ends from the process. When a highly skilled and economically competent person migrates from a developing country to a developed country, the host country would evidently benefit more than the country he or she leaves. When a large number of such people leave their developing nations, the problem of "brain drain" surfaces, as their best and brightest leave in search of better opportunities. For example, this can be seen in the poorest Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam and Myanmar, where many leave their poor nations to further themselves in the rich and advanced society of America. The rapid flow of migrants from Central and South American nations like Haiti, Mexico and Colombia also attests to this pattern. However, this in turn leaves the developing nations in a worse state, making it harder for them to develop in the absence of their intelligent and knowledgeable minds, rendering them to be trapped in their cycles of poverty for a longer time.

Together with the host of benefits that economic migrants from the rural areas bring to the cities come an array of problems. The city planning authorities might not be able to anticipate when or how many migrants would be coming to the city at any point in time, and therefore they may not have built enough infrastructure. The amenities would be stretched, and this could result in many migrants living in dilapidated housing or slums without proper sanitation facilities. Moreover, the resources might be overstretched as the population of the city grows within a short period of time, leading to environmental degradation such as dirty waterways and deforestation to clear land. For example, Brazil,

with its urban population growing every year, has the highest deforestation rate globally. Moreover, other problems such as traffic congestion and overcrowding at public places would also result. Hence, authorities should closely monitor this situation so as to best cushion the people and the area from any harmful effects that may result.

In conclusion, when migration has turned into a massive global humanitarian crisis, it is pertinent that countries work together collectively and do their best to facilitate the migration process, to prevent the further loss of life. Given that the nature of every country is different, there is definitely no “one size fits all” approach when it comes to migration, much less a clear, definite answer on whether countries should at least put in measures to protect both their citizens and help migrate, especially when their safety and lives are at stake, and treat them humanely regardless of what their stances towards the issue may be.

Comments:

Consider why migration can help to increase the population of developed countries that need a larger labour force. Consider governments who may wish to decentralise urban areas which are overpopulated. Link ideas to whether migration should be encouraged. Evaluate the problem of city life when this happens, and recent policies in China to encourage the development of inland regions.