

The background

Limiting *irregular migration* plays a key role in European migration policy and the national policy of EU member states. It concerns people who want to settle in another country without the necessary authorisation. One of the policy instruments for tackling the root causes of this migration is international cooperation.

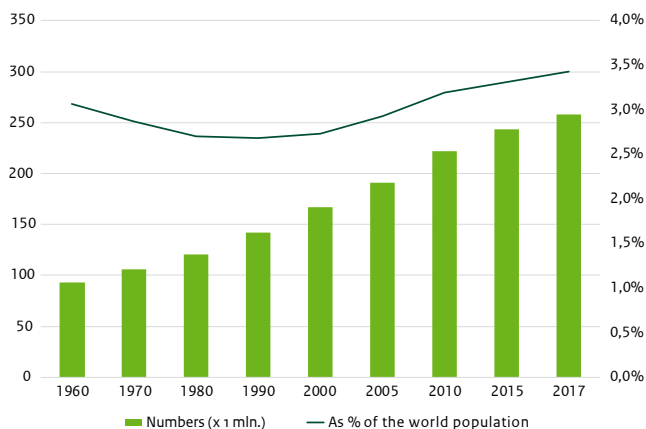
This is a priority for the Netherlands as well. The cabinet wants to invest in economic development, security and the rule of law in the countries of origin and in transition countries. In doing so, the Netherlands will focus on the regions of West Africa/Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and North Africa. The cabinet is mobilising an additional EUR 128 million a year for regional reception, EUR 25 million for migration cooperation and EUR 80 million to tackle the root causes of poverty, migration and terror. Part of the additional resources for humanitarian aid (EUR 162 million a year) will be used for the reception of refugees.

Academics have different views about how to tackle irregular migration. Some believe this kind of a policy can be effective, while others argue it will be counterproductive. IOB examined these diverging viewpoints based on the literature and its own analyses.

The figures

The figures show that migration is an important aspect of globalisation, and its importance is only likely to increase in the future. Until 2000, on average 3% of the world's population lived in a country that was not his or her country of birth. By 2017, that figure had risen to 3.4%. Roughly one-third of this increase is attributable to the rise in the number of refugees.

Figure 1 Development of international migration

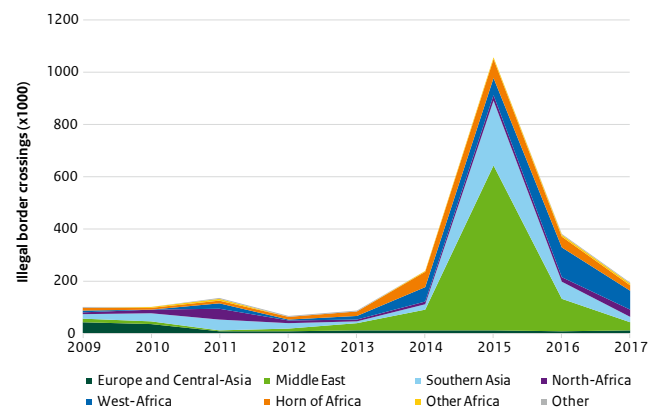


Source: World Bank; UN DESA; IOM (2018).

Between 1990 and 2005 the number of refugees in the world decreased almost every year. Since then, these figures have been on the rise again, especially from 2012 onwards, as a result of the crises in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. More than eighty per cent of refugees are given shelter in neighbouring countries.

A characteristic of recent migration is the strong growth of irregular forms of it. Figures on irregular migration are almost by definition difficult to provide. Estimates vary from about ten per cent to over a third of overall migration. More than three-quarters of the migrants that attempted to enter Europe through irregular channels came from Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq. After 2015, irregular migration to Europe decreased dramatically again (see figure 2).

Figure 2 Illegal entry into the EU 2009-2017*



* Excluding entry through the Western Balkan route
Source: Frontex (2018).

Most migrants enter the European Union through regular channels. About 40% of the migrants in the Netherlands have a Western background. Another 17% come from Indonesia, Suriname or the Netherlands Antilles, and the same percentage comes from Turkey or Morocco.

The debate

Migration is primarily the result of an international prosperity gap. All migration experts essentially agree on that point. But that is not the case when it comes to the relationship between development and migration. Standard economic theories argue that an increase in prosperity will reduce emigration. In addition, individual push and pull factors influence people's decision to migrate. These factors include job opportunities, security, freedom and good health care, for example.

Different researchers argue that development initially leads to more – not less – migration. Increased prosperity, which goes hand in hand with better education and higher incomes, not only affects

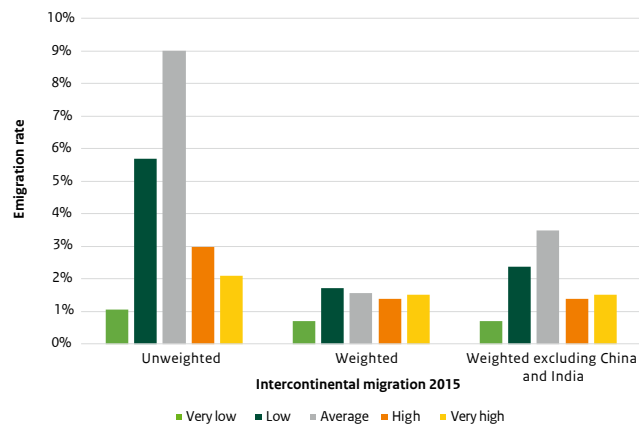
opportunities for migration, but also, and perhaps more so, the desire to migrate. According to these researchers, emigration generally peaks at an income of about USD 7,000-13,000 or a development index (HDI) of 0.75. This is why they are critical of the idea of limiting (irregular) migration by means of international cooperation.

The evidence

A comparison between countries confirms the existence of a migration hump. This relationship is not as strong as graphic illustrations sometimes suggest, however. The top of the curve is often dominated by (very) small countries. But if population size were taken into account, then the top of the curve would be much lower.

The example below illustrates this. Here we are using the relationship with the UN's Human Development Index.¹ The example shows that if all countries are given equal weight in determining the average figure, the emigration rate initially increases to 9% for countries with an average development index. In practice, however, the overall emigration rate for this category is much lower (less than 2%), because larger countries have a much lower emigration rate. If China and India are excluded, then a curve emerges again, mainly due to the high figures of a few countries (such as Mexico). The conclusion is that countries with an income of between USD 7,000 and USD 13,000 or a development index of about 0.75 do indeed have a high emigration rate, but it is much lower than in smaller countries. This also means that the influence of development on emigration is not as pronounced as sometimes suggested.

Figure 3 The relationship between development and intercontinental migration



Source: UN DESA and UNDP (2018).

¹ The relationship between this index and migration is stronger than the one between income and migration. The effect of weighting is even stronger for the relationship with income. The example concerns intercontinental migration because that form of migration is the most relevant to this discussion.

Irregular migration

Many *irregular migrants* are not only driven by a desire to gain a higher income and adopt a different lifestyle, but also by insecurity and the loss of possessions and income as a result of repression and violence. For 'economic refugees', the loss of confidence in the ability to build a decent existence and put one's education to use in the country of origin plays an important role. Unemployment, low expectations regarding work and income, and frustration are important considerations guiding young African people's decision to migrate. The number of migrants is also determined by the existence of networks, remittances, population growth, distance, the cost and challenge of moving, and the chances of finding (informal) work in Europe. Remittances can make migration possible, but they are also a driver.

Africa

The debate on (irregular) migrants often zeroes in on Africa. With the exception of North Africa, intercontinental emigration is still low there (less than 1%). According to official UN figures, in 2000 approximately 5 million Africans lived in Europe. In 2009 there were more than 9 million (55% of whom were from North Africa).



Photo: Roel Burgler (Hollandse Hoogte)

Based on the trend in recent years and the relationship with development, the number of Africans living in a different continent could increase from 16 million people in 2017 to 30-50 million in 2050. If the current trends persist, then less than half of these people will choose a destination in the EU. A large part of this increase is the result of the projected doubling of the population in Africa. One uncertain factor is the number of refugees. If further development in sub-Saharan Africa goes hand in hand with violent political conflict, then the number of refugees could increase, as the case of Syria demonstrates.

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What works?

Research on the relationship between development cooperation and migration is still in its infancy. Publications about the general relationship have not been able to draw firm conclusions yet. More targeted research focusing on specific themes or groups suggests that it is possible to influence irregular migration with targeted policy measures. Interventions are relatively expensive, however, in part because only a small number of potential migrants actually leave their country.

The biggest *bang for the buck* is in poorer countries, where official development aid is still relatively extensive compared to other

financial flows. For these countries, the study advocates a joint effort focusing on education and work and stimulating the agricultural sector, the labour-intensive industry and modern services. This can be achieved through an enabling policy in the area of land rights, infrastructure, financing, innovation, competition, legal protection and quality assurance. Promoting (secondary) education for girls helps to curb population growth.

In more developed countries, foreign investment and remittances outweigh development assistance. Cooperation in the area of trade and investment, in conjunction with agreements on temporary migration and internal measures, aimed at limiting irregular migration, is more effective there.