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# International Migration: Trends, Determinants, and Policy Effects

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## Introduction

WHAT HAVE BEEN the main trends in and drivers of international migration over the last century? Are borders “largely beyond control” (Bhagwati 2003, 99) or are states generally effective in regulating migration? These questions go to the core of contemporary debates about migration. In wealthy countries, immigration, in particular of low-skilled workers and asylum seekers, is often viewed as a problem in need of control. In the face of the apparent failure to curb immigration, the effectiveness of migration policies has been highly contested (Castles 2004).

Immigration-control skeptics argue that international migration is mainly driven by structural economic and political factors such as labor market demand, income inequalities, and conflict in origin countries, while migrant networks, employers, and other intermediaries (such as recruiters, smugglers, advocacy groups, and lawyers) create the social structures that give migration movements their own momentum (Massey 1990; Xiang and Lindquist 2014; de Haas 2010b). In addition, Western liberal democracies are said to be confronted with a “liberal paradox” (Hollifield 1992) as their immigration policies would have a built-in tendency to liberalize. For instance, the leverage to restrict immigration is limited by human rights, constitutional norms, or legal activism (Hollifield 1992; Joppke 1998), while client politics allows economic actors to lobby for the liberalization of immigration policy (Freeman 1995).

Other researchers have countered such skepticism by arguing that there is no major migration management crisis (Bonjour 2011; Brochmann and Hammar 1999; Geddes 2003). They point at the fact that the institutional and technological capacity of states to detect unauthorized migrants has increased (Broeders and Engbersen 2007) and that poor people face

increasing difficulties to migrate to wealthy countries because of immigration restrictions (Carling 2002). Also, the vast majority of migratory movements around the world occurs through legal channels, even if media coverage of migrants scaling fences or crossing deserts and seas may suggest the contrary (Castles et al. 2014).

This debate around migration policy effectiveness suffers from two main weaknesses: First, claims of alleged migration policy failure are based on two assumptions that have rarely been subject to rigorous empirical verification, namely that (1) international migration has accelerated; and that (2) migration policies have become more restrictive. Second, assertions on migration policy effectiveness are often based on mere statistical associations between migration policies and migration trends, which do not prove a causal connection.

The observation that international migration has continued or increased despite policy restrictions is no proof that policies have not been effective, let alone that they have failed. One could argue that immigration would have been even higher without migration restrictions. Conversely, decreasing migration is no evidence that policy restrictions are successful, as this can also be the result of an economic recession in destination countries or the end of conflict in origin countries. For instance, it has been contested whether the post-2008 decrease in Mexican migration to the US was the result of increased US border enforcement or rather triggered by decreasing US labor demand, as well as improving economic conditions and a slowing of population growth in Mexico (Villarreal 2014). In all likelihood, both policy and economic factors play a role, and it is therefore essential to simultaneously assess the weight of all relevant factors.

In addition, the claim that migration policies are generally ineffective has been largely informed by research and debates on one particular case: the Mexico-US migration corridor. In this particular setting, there was clearly an acceleration of migration from the late 1970s through 2005 in the context of rising border enforcement, pointing to the limited and potentially counterproductive effects of migration restrictions. Cornelius (2001; 2005), for instance, found that border enforcement increased migrant mortality by redirecting unauthorized migrants to more hazardous areas, raised smuggling fees (see also Gathmann 2008), and discouraged unauthorized migrants already in the US from returning to Mexico. He found no evidence that border enforcement significantly decreased new illegal entries, particularly because of the absence of serious efforts to curtail employment of unauthorized migrants through worksite enforcement. Angelucci (2012) observed that stricter border controls actually increased the size of unauthorized migrant populations between 1972 and 1986 (and only had a significantly negative effect after 1997), suggesting that the return-reducing effects of border controls exceeded their inflow-reducing effects in the short- to medium term. In the same vein, Massey et al. (2015) found that

the main effect of border enforcement has been a rapid decrease in circularity amongst unauthorized migrants. Massey and Pren (2012, 1) therefore concluded that post-1965 immigration restrictions for Mexicans and other Latin Americans “set off a chain of events that in the ensuing decades had the paradoxical effect of producing more rather than fewer Latino immigrants.” Similar observations have been made for migration along a few other prominent South-North “labor frontiers” (Skeldon 1997)—the imaginary line separating net labor importers from net labor exporters—such as between Morocco and Turkey and the EU (Berriane et al. 2015; de Haas and Vezzoli 2013). However, these particular experiences are not representative of global migration trends and migration policy effectiveness more generally.

To redress the geographical bias of the debate and challenge its underlying assumptions, this paper presents global empirical evidence on migration trends and policies, as well as major insights on migration policy effectiveness. Ultimately, the relevant question is not whether, on average, policy restrictions reduce immigration, but how strong this effect is. Assessing what policies can—and cannot—achieve thus requires determining the relative magnitude of policy effects compared to and in interaction with other migration determinants in origin and destination countries.

To do so, this article answers the following key questions:

- What have been the main global migration trends?
- What are the main drivers of international migration in origin and destination countries?
- What has been the nature and evolution of migration policies?
- What are the effects of migration policies independently of and in interaction with other migration determinants?

These questions guided the DEMIG project: *The Determinants of International Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment of Policy, Origin and Destination Effects* conducted at the University of Oxford. DEMIG investigated how policies of destination and origin states shape the volume, geographical orientation, composition, and timing of international migration. This article reviews the main findings of the project. The analyses draw on novel databases on bilateral migration flows (DEMIG C2C<sup>1</sup>), total in- and outflows (DEMIG TOTAL<sup>2</sup>), migration policies (DEMIG POLICY<sup>3</sup>), and travel visa requirements (DEMIG VISA<sup>4</sup>), which give an unprecedented coverage, in terms of countries and years, of migration flows and migration policies. In addition to large-scale quantitative analyses, we conducted mixed-method, comparative regional case studies, particularly on the Caribbean, the Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa, South- and South East Asia, and the EU. By synthesizing the DEMIG findings previously published as working papers, journal articles, and book chapters, this article aims to

enhance insights into the complex causal links between migration policies and migration trends, and particularly to disentangle policy effects from structural migration determinants.

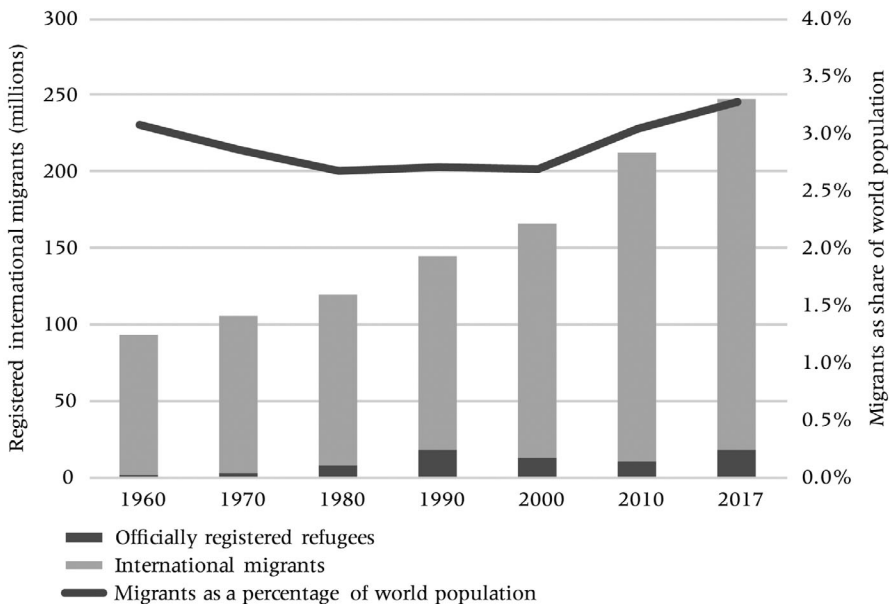
## Trends and patterns of global migration

### The changing geography of world migration since 1945

It is commonly thought that international migration has accelerated over the past decades, that migrants travel over increasingly long distances, and that origins and destinations have become much more diverse (Arango 2000). Scholars argued that there has been a “globalisation of migration,” which is “the tendency for more and more countries to be crucially affected by migratory movements at the same time” (Castles and Miller 2009, 10). However, our analyses of global migration data question the widespread idea that the volume, diversity, and geographical scope of international migration have increased significantly (Czaika and de Haas 2014).

Between 1950 and 2017, the relative number of international migrants has remained relatively stable, fluctuating between 2.7 and 3.3 percent of the world population (see Figure 1). In other words, the total number of international migrants has increased at a pace roughly equal to that of the world population. Because registration of international migrants and,

**FIGURE 1 International migrants and registered refugees, as a percentage of world population, 1960–2017**



SOURCES: Authors' calculations based on the Global Migrant Origin Database (World Bank) (1960–1980 data) and UN Population Division Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision (1990–2017 data).

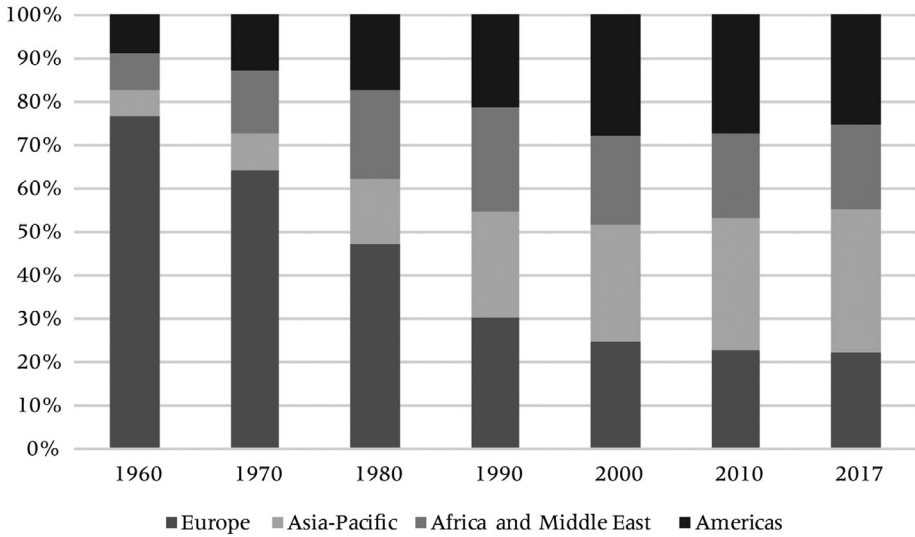
particularly, refugees (Fransen and de Haas 2019) has improved over recent decades, it is questionable whether there has been a significant increase in reality. Some scholars have suggested that past numbers may actually have been higher. For instance, between 1846 and 1924, 48 million Europeans emigrated, representing about 12 percent of the European population in 1900. In the same period, about 17 million people left the British Isles, equal to 41 percent of Britain's population in 1900 (Massey 1988, 386).

Global migration has thus not accelerated. Post-WWII migration shifts have been predominantly directional, reflecting the transformation of (western) Europe from a region of colonizers and emigrants into predominantly a region of immigration since the 1950s, as well as the rise of the Gulf region, with its wealthy oil states, as a global migration destination since the 1970s. Decolonization led to the end of large-scale European emigration and to the—voluntary or forced—departure of European settlers, colonial administrators, and military personnel from Africa and Asia. In parallel, the political and economic upheavals around independence encouraged the emigration, both recruitment-based and spontaneous, of migrant workers toward mainly northwestern Europe (Collyer 2003; Berriane et al. 2015; Natter 2014).

Since the 1960s, as southern European countries transformed into destinations in their own right, Europe's "labor frontier" shifted across the Mediterranean with Turkey and the Maghreb becoming predominant sources of migrant workers in Western and Southern Europe. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, countries in central and eastern Europe also evolved into labor suppliers to western European economies, creating a new migration frontier on Europe's eastern periphery. While African emigration to Europe has generally been dominated by the Maghreb, immigration from sub-Saharan Africa, although still limited, has increased in recent decades (Flahaux and de Haas 2016). Finally, immigration from Latin America and Asia to Europe also gained ground since the 2000s. Together, these trends drove the diversification of migrant origins in Europe.

From the 1950s and the 1960s, decreasing emigration from Europe also had fundamental consequences for immigration to traditional European settler societies in the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand, who increasingly relied on immigration from Latin America and Asia. This diversification of migrant origins was further encouraged by the abolishment of racist "Whites only" immigration policies in former European settler societies (FitzGerald and Cook-Martín 2014). For instance, while in 1960 about 85 percent of the foreign-born living in the US were from Europe (and Canada), this share had shrunk to 13 percent in 2016 (Radford and Budiman 2018).

Since the 1973 oil shock, the Gulf countries as well as Libya emerged as new global migration destinations, initially for workers from oil-poor Arab countries, such as Egypt, Sudan, and Jordan, but increasingly also

**FIGURE 2** Regional origins of inter-continental migrants, 1960–2017

SOURCES: Authors' calculations based on the Global Bilateral Migration Database (World Bank) (1960–1980 data) and UN Population Division Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision (1990–2017 data).

from Asian countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and Nepal, as well as from countries in the Horn of Africa countries such as Eritrea and Ethiopia (Fargues 2011; Thiollet 2007; Shah 2013). At the same time, rapid economic growth in East Asian countries, initially in Japan and followed by Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea, contributed to redirecting migration within Asia toward new growth poles (Skeldon 2006). Sub-Saharan countries such as Ivory Coast and South Africa emerged as regional migration poles.

Figure 2 shows the origins of intercontinental migrants, defined as migrants living outside their region of birth. While Europeans made up 76 percent of all such long-distance migrants in 1960, this percentage decreased to 22 percent in 2017, coinciding with increasing long-distance migration from other world regions, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. In 1960, an estimated 8 percent of emigrants from Asia had moved outside the region; in 2017 this share had soared to 58 percent.

### The changing composition of world migration

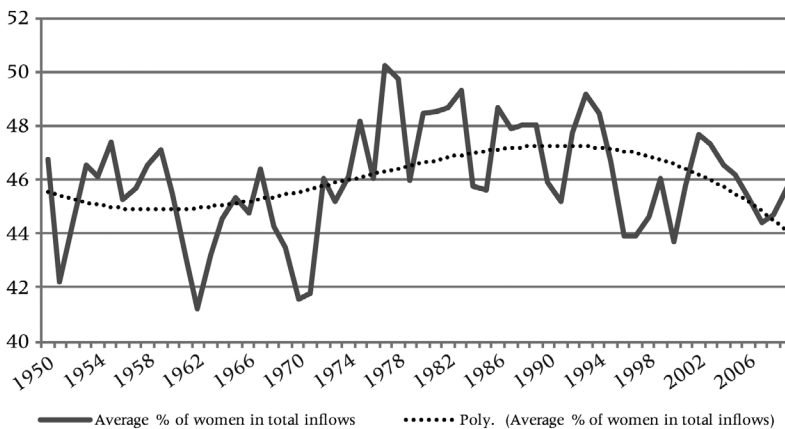
Apart from the transformation of western Europe from a global source to a global destination of migrants, migrant characteristics have also undergone changes. In particular, immigrants' skill levels have gone up. This reflects the overall increase in education levels worldwide, as well as the growing demand for skilled labor in the highly specialized and segmented labor markets of middle- and high-income countries. In parallel, however,

demand for lower-skilled migrant labor in agriculture, construction, catering, and domestic and care work has been sustained (Czaika 2018).

Refugee numbers are small compared to labor and family migration and typically fluctuate depending on the level of conflict in origin areas (Hatton 2009). Through most of the post-WWII era, refugees have represented less than 10 percent of the global migrant population (see Figure 1). In addition, the statistical increase in refugees number since 1960 largely reflects the growing number of countries included in statistics of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) from 20 in 1960, to 114 in 1980, 195 in 2000, and 214 in 2016 (Fransen and de Haas 2019). Official refugee numbers peaked in 1992 mainly as a result of the wars in former Yugoslavia. Between 1992 and 2005, the number of refugees decreased from 17.8 million to 8.7 million, reflecting decreasing levels of conflict and oppression, particularly in Africa and Latin America.<sup>5</sup> By the end of 2017, the number rebounded to 19.9 million (UNHCR 2018), primarily as a result of the wars in Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan, but also because of the inclusion of refugees in Africa and elsewhere who were previously not recorded. More than 80 percent of all refugees currently stay in developing countries (particularly Turkey, Uganda, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Iran,) and this share has increased rather than decreased over recent decades (Czaika 2015a).

Our data revealed that the proportion of women among persons migrating to OECD countries has remained rather stable, fluctuating around 46 percent over the last six decades and showing a slight decrease in recent decades (see Figure 3). This questions the widespread assumption that international migration has undergone a process of feminization (Donato et al. 2011). It suggests that the perceived feminization of migration

**FIGURE 3 Women as percentage of total immigration, average of 28 reporting countries<sup>11</sup>, 1950–2009**



SOURCE: DEMIG C2C Database. Trend line: third order polynomial.

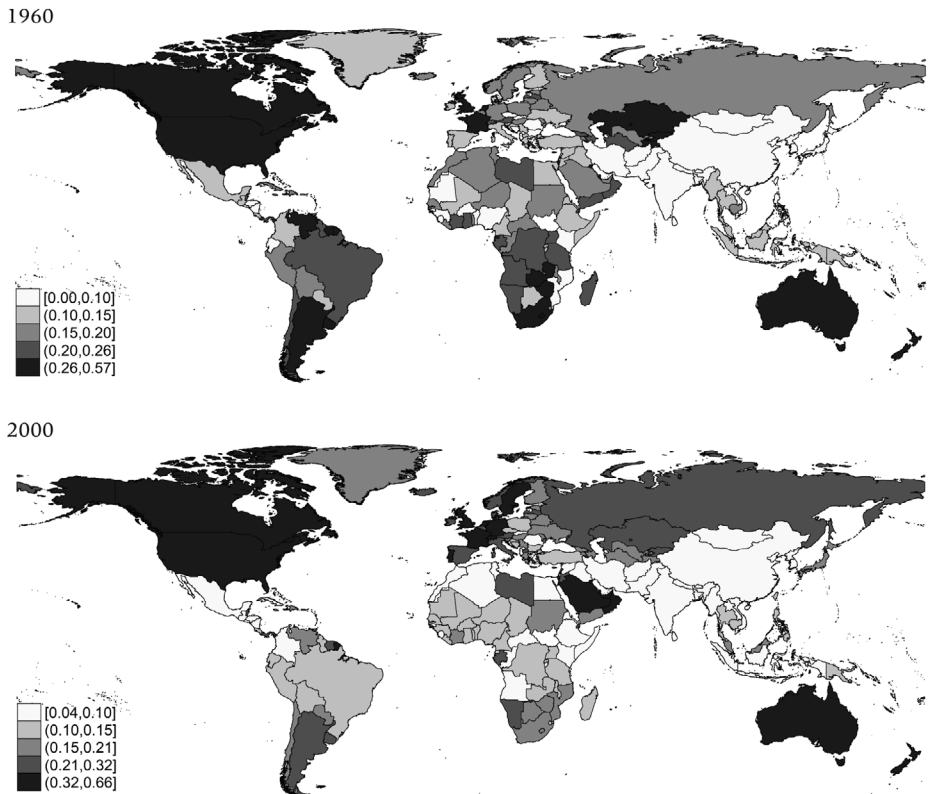


primarily reflects increasing attention to female migration in the context of generally growing concern about gender issues and the fact that women increasingly migrate as independent labor migrants instead of moving in the context of family migration.

### The asymmetric globalization of migration

To further investigate changing patterns of world migration, we developed country-level indices that simultaneously capture the variety, distance, and intensity of immigration and emigration for all countries in the world between 1960 and 2000 (Czaika and de Haas 2014; see Figure 4).<sup>6</sup> The findings show that the average geographical distance between origin and destination countries has increased only slightly: while several European and former European settler societies (US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) now host an increasingly diverse array of non-western immigrant groups, we cannot extrapolate this observation to the global level. In fact, between 1960 and 2000, the number of net emigration countries has increased from

**FIGURE 4** Immigration diversification index scores in 1960 and 2000



SOURCE: Czaika and de Haas 2014.

124 to 148 while the number of net immigration countries has decreased from 102 to 78. This reveals a trend toward greater concentration of international migrants in a limited number of major migration destinations.

In fact, the magnitude (relative to total population size) and diversity of immigration has decreased in several regions, particularly in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. Countries such as Brazil and Venezuela have experienced reverse migration transitions: while they previously attracted large numbers of migrants from Europe and beyond, including Japan, India, China, and Lebanon, economic stagnation and political turmoil has diminished immigration and increased emigration, particularly toward the United States, Canada, and Europe. In a similar vein, the geographical scope, intensity and diversity of immigration to and emigration from sub-Saharan Africa has decreased rather than increased over the post-WWII period.

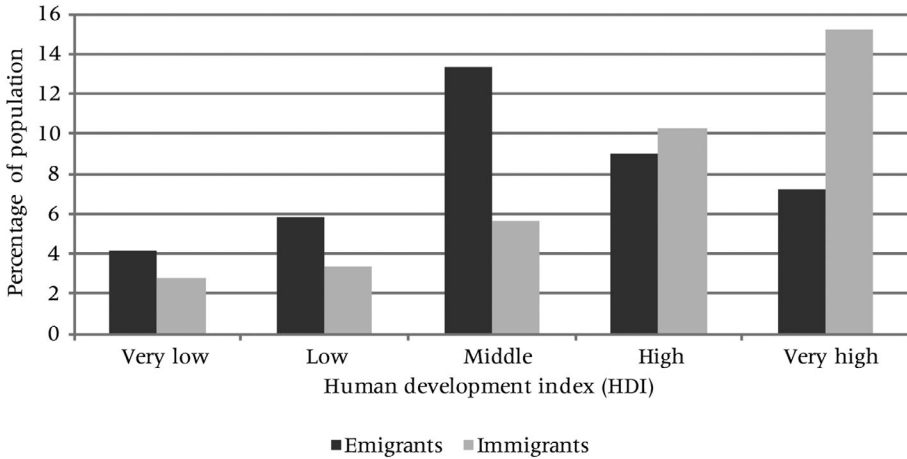
The perception that international migration has accelerated and become more diverse therefore primarily reflects a western-centric worldview. Migrants from an increasingly diverse array of non-European origin countries have concentrated in a relatively small and shrinking pool of prime destination countries predominantly located in western Europe, North America, and the Gulf (Czaika and de Haas 2014). The global migration map has become more skewed, rather than more diverse *per se*. Instead of rejecting the idea that migration has “globalized,” this reflects the asymmetric nature of economic globalization processes over the past decades. As we will see in section 4, this is consistent with trends in immigration policies, which have increasingly privileged immigration of the skilled and wealthy as well as citizens of regional blocks, while maintaining (rather than necessarily increasing) immigration and travel barriers for lower-skilled migrants, asylum seekers and non-regional citizens.

## Global migration determinants

### Development in origin areas: The migration transition

The popular idea that south-north migration is essentially driven by poverty in origin countries ignores evidence that most migration neither occurs from the poorest countries nor is undertaken by the poorest segments of the population. In fact, the opposite: middle-income countries tend to be the most migratory and international migrants predominantly come from relatively better-off sections of origin populations (Czaika 2012; Mahendra 2014a). According to migration transition theory (Zelinsky 1971; Skeldon 1997; de Haas 2010b), demographic shifts, economic development, and state formation initially increase internal (rural-to-urban) and international emigration. Only when countries achieve higher development levels does emigration decrease alongside increasing immigration, leading to their transformation from net emigration to net immigration countries.

**FIGURE 5 Association between levels of development and migration patterns, 2000 data**



SOURCE: de Haas 2010a.<sup>12</sup>

Drawing on 2000 data from the Global Bilateral Migration Database (GBMD), de Haas (2010a) provided a first global assessment of the relation between various origin and destination country migration determinants and levels of immigration and emigration. This analysis confirmed migration transition theory, finding an inverted U-shaped association between development and emigration. Subsequent research further confirmed that higher levels of economic and human development—measured by GDP per capita and the Human Development Index (HDI)—are initially associated to higher levels of emigration (Clemens 2014; de Haas and Fransen 2018). Only with growing prosperity and development does emigration decrease—Clemens (2014, 6) estimated a wealth-threshold at a per capita GDP level of roughly PPP\$ 7,000–8,000. At the same time, the relation between development and immigration is robustly positive and largely linear, showing that industrializing societies are likely to attract increasing numbers of immigrants as they become prosperous (see Figure 5).

Importantly, multivariate analyses did not find a significant effect of fertility levels and other demographic factors such as the share of young people (18–35) on immigration and emigration rates (de Haas 2010a; de Haas and Fransen 2018). This suggests that demographic factors play an empirically uncertain and only indirect role in migration processes. This questions the emphasis that is often put on demographic factors to explain or predict migration, and highlights the need for alternative explanations for the non-linear relationship between levels of development and levels of emigration (de Haas 2010a).

At the micro-behavioral level, the positive relation between development and emigration makes sense if we conceptualize migration as a

function of capabilities and aspirations to migrate (Carling 2002; de Haas 2003, 2014a). Human and economic development tends to be initially associated with increasing emigration, because access to resources—such as money, knowledge, and networks, improved infrastructure, and awareness of economic opportunities and lifestyles elsewhere—tends to give people the capabilities and aspirations to migrate to urban areas or foreign lands. Processes of modernization, education, media and the concomitant exposure to new images, ideals, and ideas of the ‘good life’ also tend to shift preferences in terms of work, lifestyles, and perceived material needs. This can increase aspirations to migrate either as an instrumental means to realize such new life aspirations or to fulfill the more innate, intrinsic meaning attached to exploring new horizons. Even under conditions of fast economic development, we can therefore expect emigration to increase as long as aspirations rise faster than local opportunities (de Haas 2003).

At the macro-level, the transition from agriculture-based economies to more diversified, capitalist economies compels young people—whose perceptions of the good life have changed—to migrate to urban areas and abroad, where the industrial and service sectors provide job opportunities. Simultaneously, mechanization, increasing scale of production as well as trade, tend to undermine traditional peasant livelihoods, leading to decreasing agrarian employment opportunities. Although the degree to which rural-urban migration spills over in cross-border movements partly depends on factors such as the creation of domestic employment opportunities (de Haas and Fransen 2018), the underlying social and cultural transformations leading to changing aspirations and growing disaffection of young people with rural lifestyles seem structurally irreversible.

While migration transition theory focuses on long-term associations between development and migration (with transitions usually taking several generations), the concept of the “migration hump” (Martin 1993; Martin and Taylor 1996) theorizes short- to medium-term emigration spikes in the wake of trade reforms or political-economic shocks. The experiences with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) showed that adjustment to new economic conditions is never instantaneous and may lead to economic dislocations and rising unemployment, for instance by driving Mexican *campesinos* out of business through imports of cheap US agrarian products (Martin 1993; Martin and Taylor 1996). Our analysis confirmed that NAFTA triggered increasing migration from Mexico to the US in the first 15–20 years after the enactment of the trade agreement, corroborating the existence a “migration hump” (Mahendra 2014b). In a somehow similar vein, the sudden shift of political-economic regimes and concomitant market liberalization in central and eastern Europe after 1989 contributed to an unprecedented emigration surge (Kureková 2013). This suggests that even if the long-term effects of economic liberalization would be beneficial for the poorer population groups (which remains to be questioned; see

Rodrik 2011), we can expect a short- to medium-term increase in emigration in the wake of fundamental political-economic reforms or shocks.

### International, domestic, and community-level inequality

According to conventional neoclassical and “push-pull” models, international economic inequalities—such as wage gaps—are the most common explanation for migration. However, our research suggests that economic inequality is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for substantial international migration to occur. This is because people need resources to move and are generally unlikely to migrate without concrete opportunities and prospects in destination countries such as jobs and family or network assistance. However, the most important observation is that although they can obviously motivate people to migrate, international and national economic inequalities have limited explanatory power compared to community-level inequalities.

We found that the effects of origin-country income inequality on the relative size of emigrant populations are small and rather ambiguous (Czaika and de Haas 2012). This is because people are more likely to compare and pitch their own aspirations against the living standards within the social networks they identify with, rather than those of urban elites or foreign populations. This resonates with the “new economics of labor migration” (NELM) theory (Stark 1978; 1991), which argues that relative deprivation within origin communities is a prime migration-motivating factor, since this is the level at which people make meaningful social comparisons (Bhandari 2004; Stark and Taylor 1989; Quinn 2006; Stark et al. 2009).

Our analysis of data from a large number of developed and developing countries showed that high levels of horizontal inequality between different ethnic groups are associated to lower emigration while higher levels of vertical inequality within ethnic groups are associated with higher emigration (Czaika 2013). This corroborates the idea that feelings of relative deprivation and, hence, migration aspirations, primarily emerge within, not between, social groups. Yet, under certain circumstances, the fear of discrimination by majority groups can create migration aspirations among minority groups. In Suriname, for instance, tensions between different ethnic groups, combined with the overall political uncertainty generated by impending independence from the Netherlands in 1975, boosted pre-independence migration particularly from minority groups (Vezzoli 2015).

Inequality may also have differing impacts on short- and long-distance migration. In Indonesia, for instance, poverty or other resource constraints typically preclude poor people from engaging in long-distance internal as well as international migration (Mahendra 2014a). In the same vein, relatively well-off households in India are more likely to have male family

members migrating abroad for work or study, while short-distance internal migration is dominated by women from poorer households primarily moving for family reasons (Czaika 2012). Evidence from global data on economic inequality across ethnic groups suggests that the positive effect of within-group inequality on emigration increases with skill levels (Czaika 2013). This supports the idea that education increases personal life aspirations, thus migration aspirations, and that the higher-skilled have greater capability to realize such aspirations because of their better access to money, knowledge, and social connections (Czaika 2013; de Haas 2014a; Schewel and Fransen 2018). This provides additional explanations for the paradoxical phenomenon of development-driven emigration hikes.

### Labor markets and social welfare

Labor demand in destination countries is arguably the most important force driving international migration, particularly if we consider that family migration is, more often than not, the indirect consequence of labor migration. Statistical evidence shows that levels of immigration—and to a lesser extent emigration—tend to be closely associated with business cycles and job opportunities in destination countries, particularly under liberal migration regimes (Czaika 2015b; Czaika and de Haas 2014; Hatton and Williamson 2005).

This largely confirms the key insights from Piore's (1979) dual labor market theory, which is that the structure and segmentation of labor markets in modern industrial societies create a chronic and unavoidable demand for foreign workers. Challenging the common idea that immigration is caused by wage gaps or "push" factors in origin societies, Piore argued that, as a consequence of increasing education, greater female labor market participation, and population aging, the number of natives willing and able to do manual agricultural, industrial, and low-level service jobs has decreased (see also Sassen 1991). Social status considerations also explain why native workers often shun unattractive jobs at the bottom of occupational hierarchies even in case of domestic high unemployment.

Migrants are often willing to do such jobs as long as communities of origin remain their primary social reference group. What may appear as low salaries and poor working conditions from a destination-country perspective can represent a major gain in income, status, and well-being from an origin-country perspective. Job opportunities in destination countries combined with relative deprivation in origin communities drive much lower-skilled migration. This is consistent with the new economics of labor migration (Stark 1991, see above) arguing that migration, particularly of the relatively poor, is often a strategy pursued by families and households to diversify incomes and generate remittances, rather than an endeavor pursued by income-maximizing individuals as neo-classical migration

models suggest. Migration allows families to reduce income risks and secure livelihoods, which seems particularly relevant for migration in the context of uncertainty, weak institutions, and failing markets prevailing in many developing societies.

Given the role of migration as a risk diversification strategy, welfare and social protection policies in destination and origin countries can potentially affect migration patterns. The “welfare magnet” hypothesis, initially proposed by Borjas (1999), posits that countries with generous welfare systems attract higher numbers of migrants; particularly the lower-skilled. However, empirical tests have yielded mixed results, with generally ambiguous and weak effects of welfare provisions on levels of immigration (Giulietti 2014; Gordon and Handler 1999; Kureková 2013; UNDP 2009). While concrete job opportunities are a direct driver of migration, welfare-state generosity might possibly play an indirect role in retaining settled migrants and discouraging return migration.

Compared to extensive research on the contested “welfare magnet,” the empirical literature has overlooked the migratory effects of social protection in origin countries. Conceptually, the effect of origin-country social protection on migration is ambiguous. On one hand, we could expect that people living in areas with lower levels of social protection have higher aspirations to migrate in order to diversify income risks (Massey et al. 1993). However, while higher levels of social security may decrease migration aspirations, enhanced access to resources can also endow families with the capabilities they require to migrate, particularly over larger distances and across borders. In other words, social policies, such as cash transfers to poor people, can increase migration as long as the capabilities-enhancing effects of the additional income exceed the aspirations-decreasing effect of reduced livelihood risks. From a theoretical perspective, the effects of welfare on migration are therefore intrinsically ambiguous.

Both micro- and macro-level evidence seems to confirm this. For instance, our micro-level study in Indonesia showed that cash transfers increased migration within Indonesia (presumably through releasing resource constraints) but had no significant impact on international migration (where migration costs are much higher) (Mahendra 2014a). This is in line with evidence from other world regions confirming that the effects of social security schemes and public services can significantly differ for short- and long-distance migration (Angelucci 2015; Phan 2012; Stecklov et al. 2005; Massey et al. 2010).

Also, our macro-level study of south-north migration over the 1985–2010 period suggests that public spending by origin-country governments on free public education, accessible health facilities, or unemployment benefits reduces international emigration, because they decrease relative deprivation as well as the aspiration to migrate as a strategy to acquire such services privately through remittances (Mahendra forthcoming). In

central and eastern Europe, countries with limited social protection and unemployment benefits experienced larger out-migration of relatively deprived people compared to countries with more extensive welfare provisions (Kureková 2013). This shows that the conceptualization of migration as a strategy to mitigate livelihood risks is not only relevant to developing countries, but is also potentially useful to explain migration of the relatively poor from industrialized societies.

### State formation, conflict, and political regimes

States have played a crucial role in shaping contemporary migration patterns. They have had a particularly large impact in the initiation of migration, whether through warfare, military occupation, colonialism, forced transfer in the form of the slave trade, recruitment, political repression, or a combination thereof (Castles et al. 2014; Hoerder 2002; Massey et al. 1998; Penninx 1982; Skeldon 1997; Vezzoli 2014b). The fact that global migration is highly concentrated in a relatively low number of migration corridors (around 20 percent of world migration is within 15 bilateral corridors), partly reflects such colonial and other historical ties between states (Czaika and de Haas 2014; Flahaux and de Haas 2016; Vezzoli and Flahaux 2017; Natter 2014; Vezzoli 2015).<sup>7</sup>

The emergence of “migration policies” is a direct consequence of modern nation-state formation and their intrinsic need to control people’s “legitimate means of movement” (Torpey 1998). From the nineteenth century, the consolidation of centralized national governments made population an essential economic and political resource: it provided workforce, tax revenue, and military recruits. A central concern of modern states is therefore to define who is a member of the citizenry and who is not, and to determine how such membership can be acquired. This led to the emergence of modern passport and visa systems. While these were initially focused on controlling the departure of citizens, the removal of exit controls by many states (Zolberg 2007) since the late nineteenth century has coincided with a shift from states controlling emigration (of citizens) to controlling immigration (of foreigners) (de Haas and Vezzoli 2011).

The consolidation of new states has often coincided with the expulsion, forced assimilation, or genocide of unwanted minorities that were threatening the official, unitary ideology of nation states (Dowty 1987). Particularly when notions of citizenship are strongly based on commonly imagined religious or ethnic affiliation (Anderson 1983), states tend to expel minorities while encouraging the immigration of co-ethnic populations in an effort to create more homogeneous populations.<sup>8</sup> In the wake of decolonization, state formation in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia crucially affected world migration. Institutional, socio-cultural, and linguistic ties resulting from colonialism, combined with labor demand in destination



countries, facilitated migration from former colonies to the former colonizing countries. Governments of some newly independent countries—like Morocco or the Philippines—favored emigration as a political-economic safety valve and a source of hard currency through remittances. Governments of other states, such as socialist or non-aligned bloc countries—like Algeria, India, and many sub-Saharan African countries—adopted hostile attitudes toward emigration to the former colonizing states. At the same time, nation-state formation and concomitant rising nationalism often coincided with restrictive immigration and visa regimes, particularly in Africa (Flahaux and de Haas 2016).

The role of state violence and authoritarianism on emigration remains ambiguous. Although several empirical studies have found significant effects of violent conflict on the arrivals of asylum seekers fleeing it (Czaika and Hobolth 2016; Hatton 2009; Moore and Shellman 2007), the effect of authoritarianism on overall emigration levels (including of non-asylum seekers) is not as straightforward. In fact, empirical analyses fail to find a significant effect of a lack of political rights (de Haas 2010a) or levels of political terror on emigration rates (Czaika and de Haas 2012). So, while forced displacement across borders is indeed linked to violence, authoritarianism and violence do not have a significant effect on overall levels of emigration. The conceptualization of migration as a function of aspirations and capabilities—instead of a response to push and pull factors—can help to understand such counterintuitive findings, as the hypothetically positive effect of authoritarianism on the desire to leave may be counterbalanced by administrative obstacles that autocratic states put in place to prevent the emigration of their citizens: While authoritarianism may increase migration aspirations, it may decrease migration capabilities.

Furthermore, political repression in destination countries paradoxically appeared to have a positive effect on the size of immigrant populations (de Haas 2010a). A plausible explanation is that states that give fewer rights to their own citizens—and even fewer to migrants—are less sensitive to domestic political pressure for immigration restrictions. Many states that are dependent on high immigration, like those in the Gulf region, have relatively generous entry policies but systematically discriminate against migrant workers. This might support the hypothesis that there can be a trade-off between the numbers of migrants allowed in by a state and the rights granted to them (Ruhs 2013).

## The nature and evolution of migration policies<sup>9</sup>

### The ambiguous nature of migration policies

This preponderant role of states in shaping and driving migration processes needs to be distinguished from the more specific—and arguably more

limited—role played by migration policies in affecting migration. Migration policies can be defined as rules (i.e., laws, regulations, measures, and procedures) that national states enact with the explicit objective of affecting the volume, origin, direction, and composition of migration (Czaika and de Haas 2013). Migration policies are typically a compromise among competing interests, which explains why their stated and real objectives are generally multiple and sometimes inherently contradictory (Bonjour 2011; Boswell 2007; Boswell and Geddes 2011; Czaika and de Haas 2013; Freeman 1995; Hollifield 1992). For instance, while businesses often lobby for more liberal immigration policies, trade unions have historically seen immigration as threatening the wages and interests of native workers.

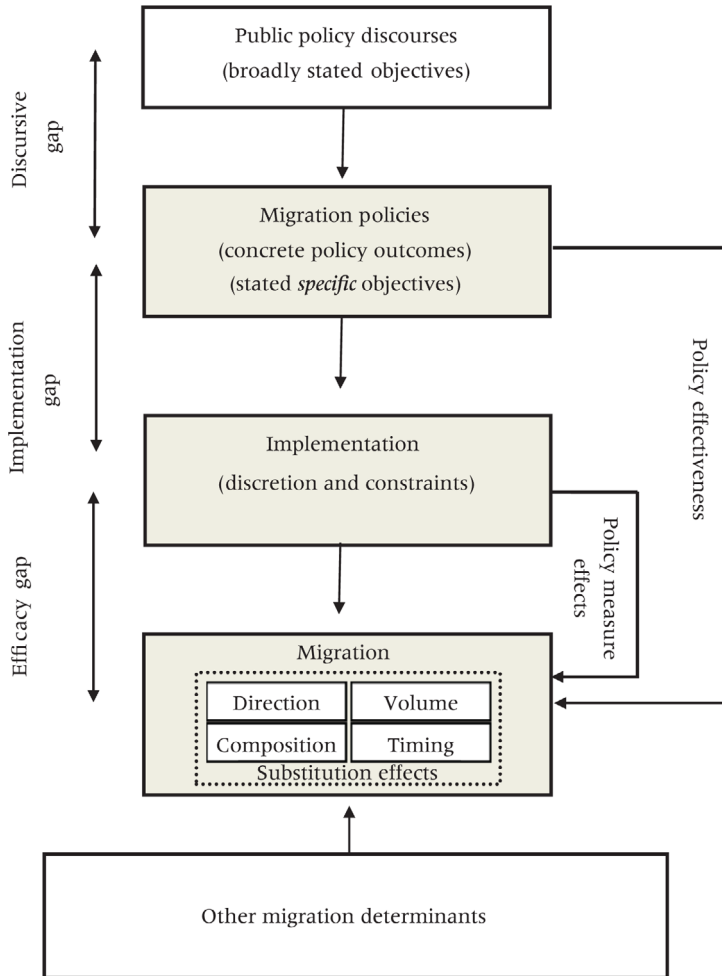
This explains why the migration issue does not neatly cut across the left-right spectrum: Analyses of the DEMIG POLICY database failed to find a clear effect of the ideological color of governments (as measured by party composition) on immigration policy restrictiveness (de Haas and Natter 2014). This highlights the extent to which migration issues divide political parties internally, typically pitting pro-immigration supporters of economic market liberalism of the right and cosmopolitan-humanitarian streams of the left against anti-immigration cultural conservatives of the right and left-wing economic protectionists (Massey 1999; Odmalm 2011; Schain 2008). The perception that right-wing parties are “tougher” on immigration thus mainly reflects a gap between rhetoric and practice.

Further blurring the ideological split, immigration policies are the outcome of often countervailing lobbies as well as power struggles within governments and bureaucracies (de Haas and Vezzoli 2011; Natter 2018; Gamlen 2008), rendering state approaches toward emigration intrinsically ambivalent. Authoritarian states are often confronted with a trade-off between the perceived benefits of emigration, such as remittances, and the possibility that the diaspora may form a political opposition from abroad. Political leaders in both destination and origin countries might therefore pay lip service to goals such as combating illegal migration while doing little to introduce or enforce emigration or immigration restrictions in practice—either because they lack the capacity to do so or because they derive economic and political benefits from migration.

### Policy gaps and policy effectiveness

To better understand how migration policies shape migration, it is important to distinguish their *effects* from their effectiveness. “Effect” refers to the actual impact of a particular (implemented) policy on migration, whereas “effectiveness” refers to the extent to which the policy objectives have been achieved. To improve conceptual clarity, we can distinguish four levels at which migration policies can be analyzed: (1) public policy discourses; (2) actual migration policies on paper; (3) policy implementation; and

**FIGURE 6 Conceptual framework of immigration and emigration policy effects and effectiveness**



SOURCES: Based on Czaika and de Haas 2013; de Haas and Vezzoli 2011.

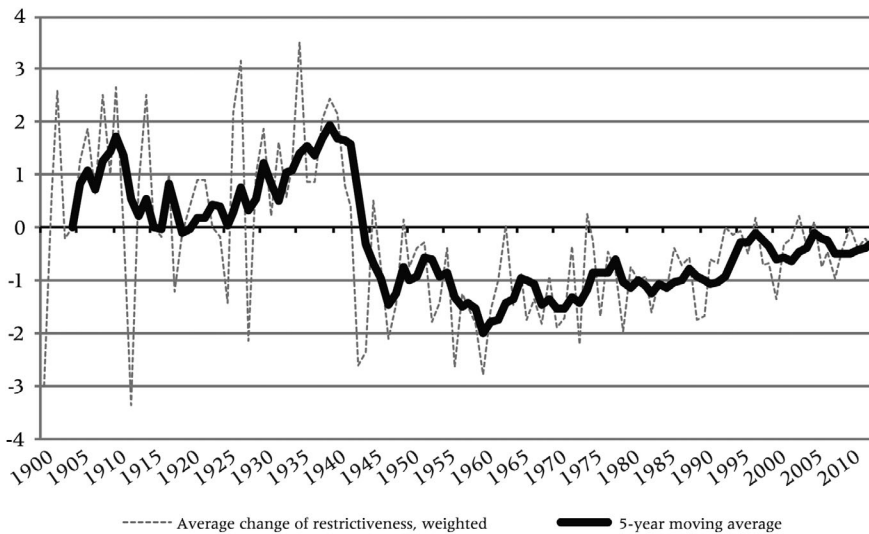
(4) policy (migration) outcomes (see Figure 6). These distinctions enable the identification of three policy gaps that can explain perceived or real policy ineffectiveness: the first is the *discursive gap* between the stated objectives of politicians' often "tough" discourses and the often more watered-down concrete policies. The second is the *implementation gap* between policies on paper and their actual implementation. The third is the *efficacy gap* reflecting the degree to which *implemented* policies have the intended effect on the volume, timing, direction, and composition of migration, independently and in interaction with other migration determinants (Czaika and de Haas 2013; de Haas and Vezzoli 2011).

## The evolution of migration policies

It is often assumed that migration policies have become more restrictive and have therefore been ineffective in curbing migration, without empirically verifying whether policies have actually become more restrictive. While particular migration corridors (such as between Mexico and the US, or Morocco and the EU) may have seen increasing restriction since the 1970s, this does not reflect migration policy trends as a whole. Analyses of migration policy changes in 45 countries clearly counter this assumption, as they show that, since 1945, migration policies have overall become more liberal, with 54 percent of all recorded policy changes introducing liberal changes and only 36 percent introducing restrictive changes (Figure 7) (de Haas et al. 2018).

Over the first half of the twentieth century did migration policies generally became more restrictive. This reflected the turn toward protectionism and nationalism during and after the Great Depression (Timmer and Williams 1998). It also coincided with the introduction of modern passport systems (Torpey 2000) and an increasing focus on immigration policies, replacing the previous preoccupation with exit policies (Zolberg 2007). However, the period from the 1950s to the 1980s saw an accelerated liberalization of entry and post-entry rights for most migrant groups as part of major overhauls of migration regimes. Particularly in Europe, it meant that legal systems gradually came to terms with their new *de facto* status

**FIGURE 7** Yearly average of weighted changes in migration policy restrictiveness, 45 countries<sup>13</sup>, 1900–2014



SOURCES: de Haas et al. 2016, based on DEMIG POLICY data. Values below zero signify that, on average, liberal migration policy changes have outweighed restrictive migration policy changes in that year.

of immigration countries. Since 1990, the proportion of restrictive policy changes has increased again. Besides measures targeting border control, and the expulsion of irregular immigrants, this pertained to efforts by certain governments to restrict access to citizenship and family reunification, and the rights of asylum seekers. However, the data clearly shows that liberal policy changes have continued to outnumber restrictive ones. Rather than a turn toward increasing restrictiveness, this shows that there has been a deceleration of liberalization since the 1990s (de Haas et al. 2018).

This overall trend is robust for the liberal democracies in western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand. However, several countries in Asia and Latin America exhibit an opposite trend, characterized by high levels of restrictiveness up to the 1970s, and an opening-up of immigration regimes since then. In some Asian countries, migration policy liberalization is closely tied to broader economic trends: the partial dismantling of protectionist economic policies in the 1970s and 1980s coincided with more liberal immigration policies in Japan, China, and South Korea, while India and Indonesia abandoned exit restrictions and embarked upon more pro-active labor export policies (Kim 1996).

Latin American trends suggest a link between democratization and migration policy liberalization. Policy restrictiveness in Latin America peaked in the 1970s and 1980s, a period dominated by autocratic regimes. Since then, states have adopted—at least on paper—liberal and human-rights oriented migration policies (Cantor et al. 2013; Acosta Arcarazo and Freier 2015). Yet, there is no automatic relation between democratic governance and liberal migration policies. As FitzGerald and Cook-Martín (2014) showed in their historical study on immigration policies in the Americas, democracies were the first countries to select immigrants by race, and autocracies were the first to outlaw such discrimination. Also, autocracies in the Gulf have remarkably open entry policies although they strictly curtail the post-entry rights of labor migrants. Liberal immigration systems therefore seem like a feature of liberal economic systems rather than a characteristic of democratic governance *per se*.

The overall liberalization of migration policies exemplifies the existence of a significant discursive gap between politicians' tough rhetoric and the actual policies that are enforced, which are often responsive to powerful business lobbies favoring liberal immigration regimes (Freeman 1995; Facchini et al. 2011), as well as subject to legal constraints regarding the extent to which migrants' rights can be curtailed (Bonjour 2011; Hollifield 1992; Joppke 1998). The increasing deployment of control policies such as border patrolling, the erection of fences, irregular immigrant detention and expulsion exemplifies that migration policy discourses and practices have a strong symbolic, "performative" (Geiger and Pécoud 2010) dimension. The common confounding of (tougher) public discourses with (more liberal) actual policies can lead to unduly pessimistic conclusions about migration

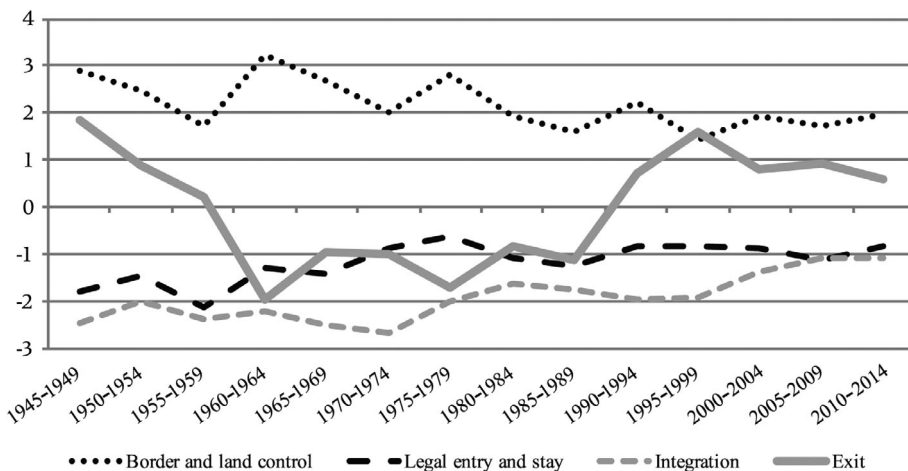
policy effectiveness. In particular, the misleading impression that policies have become more restrictive has inflated the perception of policy failure.

### Selecting the “right” migrants

While post-WWII migration policies have generally become more liberal, trends differ significantly across policy areas and migrant categories. Entry and integration policies have consistently become more liberal, while border control and, since the 1990s, exit policies have become increasingly restrictive (see Figure 8). Also, while (highly publicized) restrictions mostly target undocumented migrants, prospective asylum seekers, and family members of low-skilled migrants, a larger number of (generally less-visible and less-publicized) policies targeting higher- and lower-skilled workers, students and also asylum applicants have become more liberal (de Haas et al. 2018).

This shows that modern migration policies are primarily instruments of migrant selection, based on skill, wealth, or family background of migrants, which have been partly superimposed upon national or “racial” origin criteria that dominated earlier policymaking. For instance, European immigration policies targeting most (lower-skilled) African citizens reveal a trend toward more restrictiveness over time (Flahaux 2017), although the higher-skilled have been increasingly welcomed. Large-scale quantitative analyses showed that instruments such as points-based systems or occupational shortage lists are usually more successful in affecting the skill *composition* rather than the *volume* of skilled immigration. Also, skill-selective policy instruments seem more effective in filtering out or

**FIGURE 8 Weighted changes in migration policy restrictiveness by policy area, 45 countries, 1945–2014**



SOURCES: DEMIG POLICY data.

discouraging entry of low-skilled workers rather than in attracting the highly-skilled (Czaika and Parsons 2017).

Generally, restrictive policies target migrants who are publicly portrayed as less desired (mainly asylum seekers and some categories of lower-skilled workers, see Bonjour and Duyvendak 2018) through a combination of border surveillance, visa policies, carrier sanctions, and deportation. These policies seek to prevent migrants from crossing the border, because, once on the national territory, particularly vulnerable migrant categories like asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, and pregnant women have access to a certain number of rights. The fact that actual rights of lower-skilled migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in most destination countries have generally liberalized over the past decades—as DEMIG POLICY analyses exemplify—may in fact have strengthened the incentive for states to prevent their arrival in the first place.

### The evolution of travel visa regimes

Although formally not part of immigration regimes, over recent decades states have increasingly used travel visas as a means to block the entry of potential asylum seekers and presumed visa over-stayers. Indeed, “overstaying” is a more frequent form of unauthorized stay compared to unauthorized border crossings. As visas can be generally imposed through executive decrees or other administrative measures, governments deploy visa restrictions as quick, discrete, and effective instruments to curb migration (Czaika and de Haas 2016; Czaika et al. 2018; Czaika and Neumayer 2017). Since the 1980s, destination countries also progressively introduced carrier sanctions to prevent asylum seekers and other migrants without a visa from boarding airplanes and ships, this contributed to the externalization and privatization of migration controls to private enterprises and countries of origin and transit (Neumayer 2006).

Global travel visa data from DEMIG VISA shows that around 73 percent of all bilateral corridors worldwide require a visa (Czaika et al. 2018). However, levels of visa restrictiveness were already high back in the 1970s, suggesting that visas have always been the rule rather than the exception, which challenges perceptions that destination states have slammed their doors shut—the doors have always been only partly open. The most clear-cut trend, has been the lifting of *exit* restrictions, down from 26 to 16 percent of all bilateral corridors between 1973 and 2008, particularly in Europe and the Americas.

While European and North American countries have relatively high—but generally not increasing—levels of entry visa restrictiveness, particularly for African and Asian citizens, the most restrictive entry visa regimes of the world are found in sub-Saharan Africa as well as south and south east Asia. While citizens of wealthy (mainly OECD) countries enjoy the greatest

visa-free travel opportunities, this primarily reflects their freedom to travel to other OECD countries. In general, visa-free travel is predominantly realized among geographically-proximate countries of integrated regional blocs such as CARICOM, CIS, ECOWAS, the EU, GCC, and MERCOSUR, which have formed clusters of internal visa opening and continued external closure.

## The effectiveness of migration policies

### The unintended consequences of migration policies

Given our knowledge about the trends and drivers of migration, what can we say about the effectiveness of migration policies? First of all, it is important to observe that migration controls generally work: The majority of migrants travel in possession of the required paperwork and therefore through legal channels (Flahaux and de Haas 2016). For instance, recent estimates of African migration to Europe suggest that about nine in 10 Africans move to Europe within the law (de Haas forthcoming). Media images and political rhetoric often inflate the relative magnitude of unauthorized migration. Also, the focus on particular cases where controls have arguably been less effective—such as along the Mexico-US migration corridor and the Morocco-EU route—unduly creates a perception that migration is *generally* out of control.

Corroborating the idea that restrictions generally reduce inflows, our multi-country study (Czaika and de Haas 2016) using DEMIG C2C and DEMIG POLICY data found significant effects of migration policy restrictiveness on the number of migrant arrivals. However, a myopic focus on the short-term effects of policies on inflows in one particular migration corridor fails to capture the long-term effects of restrictions on migration and circulation patterns. This is because migration policies can have unintended side effects that limit their effectiveness to achieve intended goals. We identified four types of such “substitution effects”: (1) *spatial* substitution through the diversion of migration via other routes or to other destinations; (2) *categorical* substitution through a reorientation toward other legal or illegal channels; (3) *inter-temporal* substitution affecting the timing of migration in the expectation or fear of future tightening of policies; and (4) *reverse flow* substitution if immigration restrictions interrupt circulation by discouraging return and encouraging permanent settlement. This makes the effects of restrictions on net migration and the growth of migrant communities (the usual focus of political debates) theoretically ambiguous (de Haas 2011).

### Spatial substitution: geographical diversion

Spatial substitution occurs when policies divert migrants to countries with more liberal regulations or encourage migrants to follow alternative



geographical itineraries. For instance, increasing immigration restrictions by France, Belgium, and the Netherlands over the 1970s and 1980s contributed to a diversification of destinations for Moroccan emigrants, particularly to Spain and Italy and, mainly for the higher-skilled, to the United States and Canada (Berriane et al. 2015; de Haas 2014b; Natter 2014). When Spain started to patrol its borders more intensively in the 1990s, this led to a diversification of terrestrial routes and maritime crossing points, as well as an increasing reliance on smuggling for Moroccan emigrants and transiting sub-Saharan African migrants (Brachet 2005; Bredeloup and Pliez 2005; Crawley et al. 2016; de Haas 2008). Similar geographical diversion mechanisms in response to border restrictions have been observed on the Mexico-US migration corridor (Massey et al. 2016).

In the Caribbean, countries whose borders with the former colonial metropole were closed experienced a higher diversification of migration destinations than countries that retained free mobility with the former metropole (Flahaux and Vezzoli 2017). While migration restrictions introduced *after* independence encouraged the concentration of migration and the formation of migration-facilitating networks in the former colonizing state (as in the case of Surinamese migration to the Netherlands), migration restrictions introduced *before* independence tended to divert migration to alternative destinations (e.g., Guyanese migration largely shifted from Britain, its former colonizer, to North America; see Vezzoli 2015). The specific timing and sequencing of border restrictions and independence can thus importantly affect spatial diversion patterns of migration. In addition, there is significant variation in the size of such effects: destination substitutability tends to be stronger when destination societies are similar in terms of culture, language, and opportunities, in which case migrants are more likely to opt for alternative destinations rather than cancel their migration plans (Czaika and de Haas forthcoming).

### Categorical substitution

Categorical substitution occurs when entry through one particular migration channel becomes more difficult and migrants reorient toward other legal—or unauthorized—channels. On the one hand, the lack of legal immigration opportunities for low-skilled workers has compelled people who primarily migrated for work to use family-, asylum-, or student channels (Harris 2002; Massey 2004; Castles 2004; van Liempt and Doomernik 2006; Van Liempt 2007). For instance, migration from the Maghreb to north-west Europe continued after the suspension of guest worker recruitment in 1973 largely because of a switch to family migration (de Haas 2014b; Natter 2014). Also, while the 1976 US Immigration Act made immigration more

difficult, migration from Guyana to the US continued through an increasing reliance on family reunification, marriage, and visa overstaying (Vezzoli 2014a). Similar dynamics have been observed for Mexico-US migration after 1965 (Massey and Pren 2012).

Restrictions can also divert migration into unauthorized channels. For instance, the introduction of visa requirements by Spain and Italy in 1991 kick-started unauthorized “boat migration” by Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians, and, increasingly since the 2000s, sub-Saharan Africans. The same applies to asylum-seeking migration. This also seems to apply to asylum migration. Our analysis of 29 European countries over the 2001–2011 period (Czaika and Hobolth 2016) estimated that a 10 percent increase in short-stay visa rejections for asylum seekers led to an increase in unauthorized border entries by 4 to 7 percent. While restrictive asylum policies reduce the number of persons claiming protection, a 10 percent increase in asylum rejections across Europe raised the number of (apprehended) unauthorized migrants by on average about 3 percent. The deterrence effect of restrictive asylum and visa policies is thus partly counteracted by a reorientation of asylum seekers into irregularity.

### **Inter-temporal substitution: Now-or-never migration**

Inter-temporal substitution or “now-or-never migration” may occur if migration surges in the expectation—real or imagined—of a future tightening of migration regulations. For instance, Caribbean migration to the UK surged before restrictions were introduced in 1962 in order to “beat the ban” (Peach 1968). In a similar fashion, the Dutch government pushed for Surinamese independence in 1975 primarily because it sought to prevent immigration. However, this prompted about 40 percent of the Surinamese population to emigrate to the Netherlands before visas were introduced in 1980 (Vezzoli 2015). Restrictions can thus become counterproductive when future decreases in immigration are exceeded by the pre-measure surge in inflows.

Conversely, liberalizations, as well, can generate temporary migration surges. For instance, the introduction of free mobility in the context of the 2004 EU enlargement led to emigration hikes from Poland and the Baltic republics. However, migration consolidated on lower levels after a few years, after which it became increasingly circular (de Haas et al. 2019). The EU enlargement experience suggests that such migration increases are often temporary, particularly when potential migrants gain trust that borders will remain open, calming down now-or-never panic reactions driven by the fear that migration controls may be reintroduced. Such surges, however, can make immigration liberalizations self-defeating through adverse public reaction. In Ecuador, for instance, the implementation

of universal visa freedom in June 2008 was partly reversed later on as immigration from newly visa-exempted countries, particularly China, increased by almost 30 percent and triggered public discontent (Acosta Arcarazo and Freier 2015; Freier 2013).

Inter-temporal substitution effects are also confirmed by multivariate analyses using DEMIG VISA and DEMIG C2C (Czaika and de Haas 2016). Mirroring the experience with EU enlargement, migration flows respond almost immediately to the removal of travel visas and even “overshoot” temporarily for a few years before stabilizing at lower levels. Interestingly, such temporal substitution effects do not systematically occur in anticipation of the introduction of visas, which may be explained by the fact that visa introductions are generally not announced well in advance, preventing prospective migrants from anticipating impending restrictions by rushing to cross borders before it is too late.

### **Reverse flow substitution: Interrupting circulation**

Reverse flow substitution occurs when immigration restrictions discourage return, push migrants into permanent settlement and therefore interrupt circulation. For instance, restrictive immigration policies have discouraged return in the case of Turkish and Moroccan guest workers who settled in northwest Europe after the post-1973 recruitment ban (De Mas 1990; Entzinger 1985), and Mexican migrants who increasingly settled in the United States after 1965 (Massey et al. 2016). This exemplifies the importance of policies in retaining migrants and provides a powerful argument to go beyond the usual one-sided focus on arrivals.

Quantitative analyses of travel visa requirements showed that on average, the immigration-reducing effect of visa restrictions is largely counterbalanced by their emigration (return) reducing effect (Czaika and de Haas 2016). Visa requirements significantly decrease inflows (67 percent on average), but also outflows (88 percent on average) of the same migrant groups, yielding an average circulation-interrupting effect of 75 percent.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the effects of the lifting and introduction of migration restrictions tend to be asymmetrical: while liberalizing measures often have immediate effects in producing migration increases, restrictions tend to have smaller effects and their effects on reducing inflows take more time to materialize. The migration-facilitating function of migrant networks seems to largely explain such lagged effects (Czaika and de Haas 2016).

Finally, the volume of migration in visa-free corridors strongly correlates with business cycles in destination societies, with immigration surging during high economic growth and entries decreasing and returns increasing during economic downturns. By contrast, migration is much less responsive to economic cycles in visa-constrained migration corridors. Thus, the circulation-interrupting effect of migration restrictions

largely undercuts the natural responsiveness of (unconstrained) migration to economic fluctuations and job opportunities in destination countries (Czaika and de Haas 2016). This indicates that decisions to return—or to move to another country—depend on the prospect of re-migrating in the future.

This effect also applies to highly-skilled migrants. Among Indian academics, for instance, migration policies do not significantly determine the attraction of destination countries, but they do play a significant role in migrants' retention and subsequent moves. Indian students and researchers with aspirations to move elsewhere or to return to India tend to remain in their countries of destination until they obtain permanent residency or citizenship rights as a means of insurance for onward mobility (Toma and Villares-Varela 2017). Also, Senegalese migrants in France, Italy, and Spain are less likely to return over time due to increasing entry restrictions (Flahaux 2017). The acquisition of permanent residency or citizenship sets migrants free to either return or move on without fear of losing their right to re-migrate. A similar dynamic seems to explain why migration sometimes remain lower in the context of freedom of movement compared to restricted migration regimes. Vezzoli's (2015) comparative study of emigration from Guyana, Suriname, and French Guyana is particularly illustrative to explain this migration policy paradox. Although Guyana and Suriname were exposed to stringent migration restrictions around independence, almost half of their population has migrated abroad in anticipation or reaction to such restrictions. By contrast, emigration from French Guyana, whose inhabitants are French citizens and have thus freedom of mobility, has remained very low.

Robust empirical evidence on substitution effects highlights the importance of analyzing the effects of migration policies on long-term migration processes and overall patterns of circulation rather than on short-term inflows alone. Different substitution effects also tend to reinforce each other, such as border restrictions prompting labor migrants to cancel return plans (reverse flow substitution), to switch from labor to family migration alongside increasing unauthorized migration (categorical substitution) or to diversify their migration routes (spatial substitution). Also, substitution effects are more likely to occur if strong migrant networks are in place, as these increase migrants' social capital and adaptability in the face of adverse policy changes, particularly through the migration facilitating function of networks. In prime migration corridors, such as between Mexico and the US, or Turkey and Morocco and the EU, the combination of substitution effects has made migration restrictions largely counterproductive as they interrupted circulation and triggered large-scale permanent settlement of migrant communities. Migration restrictions therefore tend to become less effective as the number of migrants already settled at the destination increases.

## Conclusion

This article synthesized the key insights gained in the DEMIG project on the trends and drivers of international migration and migration policies in the post-WWII period. The empirical evidence challenges the two common assumptions that (1) migration has accelerated and that (2) migration policies have become more restrictive. Drawing on four novel datasets, the paper synthesized evidence on the various ways in which migration policies affect migration patterns. It disentangled migration policy effects from structural migration determinants and a comprehensive view on what policies can—and cannot—achieve.

The main findings from the DEMIG project can be summarized as follows:

- Questioning popular images of rapidly increasing migration, international migration has remained remarkably stable at around 3 percent of the world population. Rather than a global acceleration of migration, main migratory shifts have been directional. While Europeans made up 76 percent of inter-continental migrants in 1960, this percentage had decreased to 22 percent in 2017. Instead, an increasing share of inter-continental migrants come from Africa, Latin America, and—particularly—Asia. This global migration reversal has coincided with the emergence of Europe, the Gulf, and some East Asian countries as new global migration destinations, while migration to Latin America and Africa has decreased. The idea that international migration has accelerated and has become more diverse thus primarily reflects a Western-centric worldview.
- The growing structural complexity and segmentation of labor markets, as well as concomitant increases in educational levels and occupational specialization, encourage people to migrate for work, education, and family. More generally, economic and human development in low-income societies tends to boost migration because it increases people's capabilities and aspirations to migrate. This refutes push-pull models and exemplifies the need to conceptualize migration as an intrinsic part of broader development and social transformation processes. It also corroborates transition theories that hypothesize that the relation between development and levels of emigration is non-linear, first increasing in the transition from low- to middle-income country status, and only decreasing if societies become wealthier.
- International inequality is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for migration, and migration can therefore not be reduced to a function of wage and income gaps. Most migration occurs between middle-income and high-income societies and most migrants from low-income countries belong to middle-income groups. Absolute poverty is associated with

lower emigration levels, as resource constraints deprive people of the capability to emigrate. In line with the “new economics of labor migration,” relative deprivation within origin communities is a stronger migration determinant than inequalities on the national or international level.

- Non-migration policies in the areas of labor markets, education, health care, welfare, and social protection pursued by origin and destination states have potentially strong—but theoretically ambiguous—consequences for migration, because they may simultaneously (1) decrease people’s migration aspirations and (2) endow people with resources that increase their migration capabilities.
- Contemporary migration regimes are about selection rather than numbers. Migration policies involve sophisticated sets of policy instruments that simultaneously encourage and discourage the migration of particular groups according to criteria such as citizenship, age, gender, skills, job offers, and income. Policies have increasingly followed an economically utilitarian and class-based logic in determining which migrants are granted preferential access to legal opportunities for migration and settlement. Rather than regulating the numbers of migrants coming in, contemporary migration policies aim to increase the ability of states to control who is allowed to immigrate and, particularly, claim rights. Migration regimes thus tend to work as filters rather than taps.
- Although tough political rhetoric may suggest otherwise, since WWII immigration and emigration policies have generally become more liberal, with 54 percent of all recorded policy changes introducing liberal changes and only 36 percent introducing restrictive changes. The 1950–1990 period saw an accelerated liberalization of entry and post-entry rights. Since 1990, the proportion of restrictive policy changes has increased, but liberal policy changes have continued to outnumber restrictive changes. Although there are variations across world regions, in general there has been a deceleration of liberalization rather than a reversal toward more restrictions.
- While rules around legal entry, stay, and exit of most migrant categories have generally been liberalized, a combination of visa and border control policies have served a central role in attempts to preventing the entry of asylum seekers and other officially “unwanted” migrants. Visa policies play an important role in states’ attempts to prevent people from certain origin countries from entering. Overall, visa regimes have been restrictive, with 73 percent of all bilateral corridors worldwide requiring a visa. But such restrictiveness has been stable over time, defying the popular idea of growing restrictiveness. Many developing countries maintain highly restrictive immigration and visa policies and free mobility is primarily realized within regional blocks. This evidence questions the idea of a growing global mobility divide (Mau et al. 2015) between north and south, and

exemplifies the multi-polar and multi-layered nature of international relations and migration regimes.

- Although media and political discourses often suggest otherwise, migration policies are generally effective. The extensive media and political attention to “migration crises” can contribute to an overestimation of the degree of policy failure. The large majority of migrants abide by the law and migrate regularly, in the possession of visas and other necessary paperwork. In fact, the increasingly sophisticated instruments of migration regimes seem to generally achieve their objectives of influencing the selection (rather than volume) of migrants.
- Although borders are generally not largely “beyond control,” (Bhagwati 2003) the capacity of migration policies to steer migration is limited by powerful structural migration determinants, while ill-conceived policies can to unintended consequences. Four different types of substitution effects can undermine the effectiveness of migration controls by (1) diverting migration through other geographical routes and to other destinations, (2) shifting migration to other legal and unauthorized channels, (3) triggering “now-or-never” migration surges in anticipation of restrictions or (4) discouraging return and interrupting circulation.
- Immigration restrictions simultaneously reduce return as well as immigration, rendering the effect on net migration and the growth of immigrant communities theoretically ambiguous. Immigration restrictions may be effective at lowering migrant arrivals but not at reducing net migration and the growth of migrant populations.
- Such counterproductive effects tend to be particularly strong when migration-facilitating networks have already formed and when there is a discrepancy between migration policies and more fundamental migration drivers, such as labor demand in destination countries. In particular, the circulation-interrupting effects of immigration restrictions severely reduce the much-desired responsiveness of (unconstrained) migration to economic fluctuations and job opportunities in destination countries.

This evidence does not imply that governments cannot or should not control migration. Rather, it shows that liberal immigration policies do not necessarily lead to mass migration and that ill-conceived migration restrictions can be counterproductive. This highlights the importance of looking beyond migration policies *per se*. A fundamental mismatch between structural migration determinants—such as low-skilled labor demand in the absence of legal migration channels combined with weak workplace enforcement, or violence and conflict in the absence of asylum channels—is likely to translate into an increasing incidence of migrants overstaying their visas as well as unauthorized border crossings. A thorough understanding of how processes of economic development and social transformation in destination

and origin countries affect long-term migration patterns also increases our ability to assess the specific role and effectiveness of migration policies.

Given the importance of structural, macro-level migration drivers in shaping long-term migration processes, it is crucial to assess the extent to which migration policies can shape the volume, composition, timing, or geographical direction of migration independently and in interaction with other migration determinants. The evidence presented in this article shows that migration policies are generally effective in achieving their goals, but that their ability to shape migration is constrained by structural migration determinants. The more migration policies go against structural migration determinants, the more likely they will have unintended consequences. Thus, perceived or real migration policy failure is generally explained by an inability or unwillingness to understand the complex and often counter-intuitive ways in which structural social, economic, and political transformations affect migration in mostly indirect, but powerful ways, which lie largely beyond the reach of migration policies.

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## Notes

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1 DEMIG C2C (“country-to-country”) covers bilateral migration flow data for 34

reporting countries over the 1946–2011 period. It comprises about 50,000 country-to-country year dyads and over 2.5 million data points (see de Haas et al. 2014).

2 DEMIG TOTAL reports total immigration, total emigration and total net migration for 163 countries ranging from several decades to over one century, covering 15,792 data points (see de Haas et al. 2014).

3 DEMIG POLICY captures 6,500 immigration and emigration policy changes in 45 countries over the 1900–2014 period (see de Haas et al. 2015).

4 DEMIG VISA provides global bilateral coverage of annual entry visa end exit permit requirements between 1973 and 2014, covering 1,135,680 data points in total (see Czaika et al. 2018).

5 These data do not include the 5 million Palestinian refugees, which are not covered by the UNHCR, but by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

6 For further details on the methodology, see Czaika and de Haas 2014. Figure 4 depicts the diversity of immigrant populations in terms of the origin country variety, the average geographical distance to origin countries as well as the size of immigrant



populations for each country of the world in 1960 and 2000.

7 A migration corridor refers to a country-to-country dyad. In a world of 193 UN member states (as of 2019), international migration can theoretically take place from 193 countries of origin to 192 countries of destination, i.e. within about 37,000 bilateral corridors. However, most of all corridors do see very little migration as the overwhelming majority of migrants concentrates within a few major corridors. The top migration corridors are Mexico-US, Russia-Ukraine and Ukraine-Russia, Bangladesh-India, and Turkey-Germany.

8 The population exchanges in 1923 between Greece and Turkey, the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, the Palestinian exodus (the “Nakbah”) during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, and the large-scale displacement during the 1991–1995 Yugoslav wars are examples of such violent processes.

9 The analyses draw on the DEMIG POLICY dataset that codes changes in migration policy restrictiveness. Because migration policies are typically a mix of contradictory measures, DEMIG POLICY disaggregated policies into their different measures. Each measure was coded separately in terms of policy content, policy restrictiveness and the magnitude of the change. (1) Policy content was coded through four variables: *policy area* (such as border controls, entry or integration), *policy tool* (such as work visas, regularizations, or employer liabilities), *migrant category* (such as low-skilled workers, family members, or asylum seekers), and *geographical origin* (nationality or region). (2) Policy restrictiveness was coded through an ordinal variable assessing the *relative change in restrictiveness* in a specific policy field. A policy measure was coded as introducing a more or less restrictive change compared

to the previous policy framework in place when it, respectively, extended or restricted the rights attributed to the targeted migrant group. (3) Lastly, we assessed the magnitude of the change. To determine whether a measure constitutes a “fine-tuning,” “minor,” “mid-level,” or “major” change, we used two criteria: the degree of coverage and the degree of departure from the previous policy framework. The methodology is detailed in de Haas et al. (2015).

10 These are average effects. The specific inflow-outflow trade-off is likely to vary according to contextual factors such as the strength of migrant networks, the ease of acquiring visas, and other migration policies.

11 The 28 countries included are Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United States of America, and Uruguay.

12 The following Human Development Index scores were used to calculate quintile groups: low (<0.5336); very low (0.5336–0.7286); middle (0.7286–0.79740); high (0.7974–0.8744); very high (>0.8744) (2015 values).

13 The 45 countries included are Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, German Democratic Republic, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Yugoslavia.

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