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Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region

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Over half the world's population lives in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2005, Asia hosted 53 million out of the world's 191 million migrants according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

In the 1970s and 1980s, international migration from Asia grew dramatically. The main destinations were North America, Australia, and the oil economies of the Middle East.

Since the 1990s, migration within Asia has grown, particularly from less-developed countries with massive labor surpluses to fast-growing newly industrializing countries.

Indeed, all countries Asia experience both emigration and immigration — and often transit migration. But it is possible to differentiate between mainly destination countries (Brunei, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan), countries with both significant immigration and emigration (Malaysia and Thailand), and mainly source countries (Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam).

Migration agents and labor brokers organize most recruitment of Asian migrant workers both to the gulf and within Asia. Their dominance is partly due to the unwillingness of receiving states to make bilateral temporary-worker agreements with countries of origin. Although countries like the Philippines regulate such agencies, some recruiters have engaged in the smuggling and trafficking of workers.

Asian governments seek to strictly control migration, and migrants' rights are often very limited. Policymakers encourage temporary labor migration but generally prohibit family reunion and permanent settlement. While most migration in the region is temporary, trends toward long-term stay are becoming evident in some places.

This article examines the main Asian migration systems: movement to Western countries, contract labor to the Middle East, intra-Asian labor migration, movement of highly skilled workers, student mobility, and refugee movements. Most of these movements include substantial illegal migration. This often takes the form of tourist visa-holders overstaying their permits, but smuggling and trafficking of people is also frequent.

Asia includes the Middle East, but we focus here on South Asia (the Indian subcontinent), East Asia, and Southeast Asia, with some discussion of Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific islands.

The Development of Asian Migration

Asian migration is not new: westward movements from Central Asia helped shape European history in the Middle Ages, while Chinese migration to Southeast Asia goes back centuries. In the colonial period, millions of indentured workers were recruited, often by force.

About This Article
This article is based on the chapter "Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region" in *The Age of Migration*, fourth edition. A more detailed version can be found in the book. The *Age of Migration* **website** contains more material, including a virtual symposium on the global financial crisis and migration.

Chinese settlers in Southeast Asian countries and South Asians in Africa became trading

minorities with an important intermediary role for colonialism. This often led to hostility — and even mass expulsions — after independence.

However, it also helped create the ethnic networks that encouraged more recent migrations. In the 19th century, hundreds of thousands migrated from China and Japan to the United States, Canada, and Australia. In all three destination countries, discriminatory legislation was enacted to prevent these movements.

Migration from Asia was low in the early part of the 20th century owing to such legislation and the restrictive policies of colonial powers.

Movements within Asia continued, often connected with political struggles. Japan recruited 40,000 workers from its then colony, Korea, between 1921 and 1941.

Some 25 million people migrated from densely populated Chinese provinces to Manchuria between the 1890s to the 1930s; about 8 million remained there to defend China from Japanese expansionism.

In the often-violent mass population transfers following Indian independence in 1947, about 5 million Hindus and Sikhs left Pakistan for India, and about 6 million Muslims moved to Pakistan from India.

Movement to the West started to grow in the 1960s for complex reasons. Discriminatory rules against Asian entries were repealed in Canada, the United States, and Australia. Increased foreign investment and trade helped create the communicative networks needed for migration.

The US military presence in Korea, Vietnam, and other Asian countries forged transnational links, with some servicemen bringing home Asian brides.

The Vietnam War caused large-scale refugee movements. The openness of the United States, Canada, and Australia to family migration meant that primary movements from Vietnam, whatever their cause, gave rise to further entries of permanent settlers.

The huge construction projects in the gulf oil countries caused mass recruitment of temporary contract workers. Rapid economic growth in several Asian countries led to movements of both highly skilled and unskilled workers.

Internal Movement

This article does not cover internal migration, but it is important to note such patterns in Asia as international movements are often linked to internal migration.

India is experiencing large-scale internal migration and urbanization. Accurate figures are not available, but there are an estimated 100 million migrant workers, many of them poor rural-urban migrants who return temporarily to their villages when agricultural labor demands are high and permanently in old age.

In China, massive flows from rural areas in the center and west to the new industrial areas of the east (especially Beijing, Shanghai, and the Pearl River Delta) have created a "floating population" of 100 to 150 million people.

Forced internal displacement is also a major problem. In 2006, there were 3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Asia, not including the 2.7 million in the Middle East. The main causes were conflict, violence, or human rights abuses.

Millions more are displaced by development projects, such as large dams, while others flee environmental change and natural disasters like volcanoes and floods. In some places, vulnerable groups (especially indigenous peoples or ethnic minorities) may experience multiple types of displacement.

Emigration for employment from countries within the region has grown at about 6 percent annually over the last two decades, with about 2.6 million people leaving their homes in search of work each year.

In the early 21st century, some 6.1 million Asians were employed outside their own countries within the Asian region according to Australian demographer Graeme Hugo. He roughly estimated the number of illegal migrants in Southeast Asia countries in the early 2000s at about 3.8 million.

Huge estimates about 8.7 million Asian migrants in the Middle East and over 20 million Asian migrant workers worldwide.

Asian Migration to Western Europe, North America, and Oceania

Three European countries experienced large Asian migrations connected with decolonization after World War II: the Netherlands from the former Netherlands East

Indies (Indonesia); France from Vietnam; and the United Kingdom from the Indian subcontinent and Hong Kong. There were also some smaller movements, like those from Goa, Macau, and East Timor to Portugal. Such movements had declined considerably by the late 1970s.

In the 1980s, Vietnamese workers were recruited by the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and the German Democratic Republic. Although often called trainees, these migrants shared many of the characteristics of contract workers. After German reunification in 1990, many remained.

Asian migration to countries across Europe, a recent trend, has grown. Top European destinations include Italy, Hungary, and the United Kingdom. China, India, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand are all significant source countries.

The migrants include medical and information technology personnel, female domestic workers (especially in Southern Europe), and manual workers who often move illegally.

In 2005, three Asian countries made the top 10 source countries for foreign residents in Italy: China (127,800 immigrants), the Philippines (89,700), and India (61,800). Indian nationals made up the largest group within the UK foreign-born population, with an estimated 627,000 residents in 2008; Pakistan was in fourth place with 416,000.

Most Asian migrants live in the traditional immigration countries: the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In the United States, the number of migrants from Asia increased from 17,000 in 1965, the year the US Congress dismantled the quota system, to an average of more than 250,000 annually in the 1980s and over 350,000 per year in the early 1990s.

Most Asians came to the United States through family reunification provisions, though refugee or skilled worker movements were often the first link in the migratory chain. According to the US Census Bureau's 2007 American Community Survey, immigrants from the Philippines (1.70 million) made up the second largest group after Mexico. Indian immigrants (1.50 million) were the third largest group, followed by Chinese immigrants (1.36 million).

Asian immigration to Australia developed after the repeal of the White Australia Policy in 1973, with additional stimulus from the Indo-Chinese refugee movement at the end of the 1970s.

Among Australia's top 10 source countries in 2005 were China (third after New Zealand and the United Kingdom), India, the Philippines, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Hong Kong. The 2006 Australian census put the Asia-born population at about 1.2 million, over one-quarter of all immigrants.

In Canada, nondiscriminatory selection criteria and an emphasis on family and refugee entry opened the door to Asian migration in 1976. Since 1993, over half of all immigrants have come from Asia, mainly China, India, and the Philippines. By the 2006 census, the roughly 2.3 million residents of Asian origin (not including Oceania or the Middle East) made up over a third of the total immigrant population of 6.5 million.

New Zealand began opening up in the 1950s, as economic and political links with nearby Pacific islands gave rise to new inflows. From 1991, policies encouraged immigration of people with professional skills and capital for investment. Most of these came from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan.

According to New Zealand's 2006 census, China was the second most common birthplace after England. India and Korea were also in the top nine, as were Samoa and Fiji.

Contract Labor Migration to the Middle East

Labor migration from Asia to the Middle East developed rapidly after the oil-price rises of 1973. Oil-rich gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates imported labor first from India and Pakistan, then from the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and Korea, and later from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

In the 1970s, mainly male migrants worked on construction projects. The governments of India, Pakistan, and the Philippines actively marketed their labor abroad and made labor-

supply agreements with gulf countries.

Korean construction companies took on contracts in the Arab region, which included provision of labor. The Asian labor-sending countries also allowed private agencies to organize recruitment.

The gulf countries made it clear, however, that these workers would not be allowed to permanently settle or bring their families, a situation that has not changed.

By 1985, there were 3.2 million Asian workers in the gulf states according to economist Manolo Abella, but some 450,000 Asians returned to their countries of origin after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the 1990-1991 gulf war.

After the war, gulf countries' recruitment of Asian workers increased again, partly due to reconstruction needs but also because the gulf countries wanted to replace "politically unreliable" Palestinians in Kuwait and Yemenis in Saudi Arabia. Israel began to recruit Thais and Filipinos for agriculture, construction, and domestic work, after security measures blocked entry of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza.

The temporary decline of the construction sector after 1985 encouraged more diverse employment of contract workers. The demand for domestic workers, nurses, sales staff, and other service personnel surged, leading to a marked feminization of migrant labor flows, with Sri Lanka and Indonesia as the main sources. In later years, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel also became labor-importing countries.

Around 2002, Hugo estimated the number of Asian workers in the Middle East at 3 million Indians, 1 million Pakistanis, 1.8 million Bangladeshis, 0.9 million Sri Lankans, 1.5 million Filipinos, and 0.4 million Indonesians.

While all workers in the Middle East have limited rights, female domestic workers are highly vulnerable to exploitation and sexual abuse, and it is difficult for the authorities of their countries of origin to provide protection.

The governments of Bangladesh, Iran, Nepal, the Philippines, and Pakistan banned some types of female migration to the gulf but found the ban impossible to enforce due to the activities of illegal recruitment agents. The bans have mostly been lifted although some limitations remain.

Asian migration to the Middle East has become more differentiated over time. While many migrants remain low-skilled laborers, others have semiskilled or skilled jobs as drivers, mechanics, or building tradesmen.

Others came with professional or paraprofessional qualification (engineers, nurses, and medical practitioners). Asians fill many managerial and technical posts but sometimes report to senior personnel recruited from Europe or North America.

In many cases, Asian labor migrants were not part of the unemployed rural and urban poor at home. Rather, they tend to have above-average education levels, and they are attracted to the gulf by the relatively high wage levels promised (though not always delivered).

In 2004, Asians made up between 40 and 70 percent of the workforce in gulf countries according to the International Labor Organization (ILO).

With growing populations of young people who need jobs, gulf states have attempted to reduce dependence on Asian labor since the late 1990s by recruiting local workers, restricting new entries, and deporting illegal migrants. The completion of some large construction projects has further reduced labor inflows, especially of male manual workers.

Labor Migration within Asia

Since the mid-1980s, rapid economic growth and declining fertility have led to strong demand for labor in the new industrial economies of East and Southeast Asia. Labor migration within Asia grew exponentially in the first half of the 1990s. Some migrants returned home during the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1999, but labor migration resumed quickly.

Early flows were mainly low-skilled workers. In recent years, flows of the highly skilled have increased throughout the region, and demand for health-care workers is increasing (see section on highly qualified migrants).

Yet Asian migrants do not dominate the workforces of other Asian countries they way do in gulf countries. According to estimates from ILO, in 2004-2005, migrants made up less than 2 percent of the workforce in Japan, 12 percent in Malaysia, and 28 percent in Singapore.

While existing flows from countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines have continued, new source countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma have become more significant. It is impossible to detail here the complex experience of each Asian country. Instead we will discuss some general trends.

Feminization of Migration

The demand for female domestic workers surged first in the Middle East, and, from the 1990s, within Asia, particularly Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. In 2002-2003, women made up 65 to 73 percent of labor migrants departing from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Bangaladesh according to Hugo.

Figures for destination countries are not always available, but ILO reported in 2006 that there were 202,900 women migrants in domestic work in Hong Kong in 2000, while Malaysia had 155,000 documented and "many more undocumented migrant domestic workers" in 2002.

Beyond domestic work, most migrant women within Asia have "typically female" jobs: entertainers (often a euphemism for prostitutes), restaurant and hotel staff, and assembly-line workers in clothing and electronics. These jobs offer poor pay, conditions, and status, and are associated with patriarchal stereotypes of female docility, obedience, and willingness to give personal service. As in gulf countries, Asian countries rarely allow them to permanently settle or bring over their families.

Another form of female migration is for marriage. Since the 1990s, foreign brides have been sought by farmers in rural areas of Japan and Taiwan due to the exodus of local women to more attractive urban settings. This is one of the few forms of permanent immigration permitted in Asia.

In the last decade, marriage migration to Korea has increased, with international marriages accounting for almost 14 percent of all marriages in Korea in 2005; percentages are higher in rural areas. Indian men now recruit brides in Bangladesh, and Chinese farmers, due to severe gender imbalances resulting from the one-child policy, seek wives from Vietnam, Laos, and Burma.

Illegal Migration

Illegal migration has grown rapidly and affects many countries in the region. Up to one in four migrant workers in Asia may have illegal status according to ILO. Labor flows from Indonesia to Malaysia have been largely illegal, as have the movements of Thai workers to Malaysia and other countries. Thailand itself hosts up to 1.7 million illegal workers, mainly from Burma, according to the International Organization for Migration.

The growth of illegal migration in Asia is linked to governments' unwillingness to effectively manage migration and to employers' desire for easily available and exploitable workers. Spontaneous illegal migration can meet labor needs effectively, but it creates a situation of insecurity and rightlessness for workers.

Unlike some Western countries (especially Spain and Italy), which have regularized illegal migrants, Asian countries have tended to turn a blind eye to illegal workers at times of economic growth with campaigns of mass expulsion in economic downturns.

However, deportations have often been limited both by lack of institutional capacity and employer demands to retain migrant workers in low-wage sectors such as catering, domestic work, and plantations.

Malaysia is a good example: mass expulsions have been announced on a number of

occasions, particularly during the 1997-1999 financial crisis and more recently in response to the global recession. Irregular migrants have been blamed not only for unemployment but also for crime and disease. Vigilante groups have been encouraged to support the authorities in seeking out irregular migrants, leading in some cases to violence.

Recently, Asian governments' desire to combat drug trafficking and terrorism have led to attempts at multilateral cooperation to prevent illegal migration. For instance, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has adopted a Plan of Action on Immigration Matters designed to encourage skilled migration, facilitate legal movement between ASEAN countries, and combat people smuggling and trafficking.

The broader regional association, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, held a meeting of high-ranking officials in August 2008 to discuss use of new technologies in migration control.

Highly Qualified Migrants and Students

Most Asian migration is of low-skilled workers, but mobility of professionals, executives, technicians, and other highly skilled personnel has grown in the last 30 years. This "brain -drain" can mean a serious loss of human capital in medicine, science, engineering, management, and education. Depending on the origin country's labor needs, losing such people can present a major obstacle to development.

At the same time, highly skilled migrants can be a source of remittances and investment for countries of origin and help homeland producers gain new markets abroad. Today, a key debate centers on what states can do to minimize brain drain and to facilitate "brain circulation," or the return of talent, permanently or temporarily. Here we will look at some of the Asian trends.

Country studies show substantial skill losses for Asian countries in the 1980s and 1990s. In the Philippines, 40 percent of permanent emigrants had a college education, and 30 percent of IT workers and 60 percent of physicians emigrated according to the work of demographer B. Lindsay Lowell and others. For Sri Lanka, academically qualified professionals comprised up to one-third of outflows in the 1980s and 1990s.

The opposite side of the coin is developed countries' reliance on immigrant professionals. In the United States, the 2000 census revealed that half of the graduates who arrived in the 1990s were from Asia, with India and China as the largest sources. Almost one-third worked in natural and social sciences, engineering, and computer-related occupations.

Another form of highly qualified migration concerns executives and experts transferred within multinational enterprises, or officials posted abroad by international organizations. China had some 200,000 foreign specialists in 2000, while Malaysia had 32,000 and Vietnam about 30,000. They came from other Asian countries, but also from the United States, Europe, and Australia.

Student mobility is often a precursor to skilled migration. Between 1998 and 2003, 2.6 million Asian students studied in other countries. The Chinese were the largest group (471,000), followed by South Koreans (214,000), Indians (207,000), and Japanese (191,000).

Australia changed its immigration rules in 1999 to take advantage of foreign students, mainly from China and India, educated at Australian universities. Rather than having to leave Australia on graduation and wait three years before applying to migrate, they are allowed to remain in the country as they pursue their immigration applications. By 2002, as social scientist Lesleyanne Hawthorne found, over half of Australia's skilled-migrant applications came from former students.

However, fewer Chinese and Indian students are going abroad as the quality of universities at home rise. Asian countries are also recruiting foreign students. China's foreign student inflows (especially from Thailand) are increasing. Japan has seen substantial growth in foreign students: by 2008, 118,000 were enrolled, and the Japanese government planned to increase this number to 300,000 by 2020.

An important emerging trend is the growth of highly skilled mobility within Asia. Regional migration flows are becoming far more diverse. India, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, Korea,

and Malaysia are all seeking to attract overseas professionals either on a temporary or permanent basis. Like developed countries, they have introduced privileged immigration and residence regimes for this category.

Often Asian countries are seeking to lure back their own diasporas — the professionals and students who left when there were few opportunities at home. Taiwan has been especially successful in maintaining contacts with expatriates and drawing them back as industrialization progressed.

China and India are following this example. The Chinese diaspora has been a crucial source of capital and expertise in China's economic growth. India began formalizing its relationship with its diaspora in 2000. In 2004, the government established a Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs to court the diaspora with special investment measures and "overseas citizenship" that allows for lifelong visa-free travel to India, among other benefits.

Refugees

In terms of refugee movements, East Asia and the Pacific have stayed relatively peaceful in recent decades compared with the Middle East, South Asia, and Central Asia.

At the end of 2008, war-torn Afghanistan — which millions of people first fled in 1979 when the Soviet Union invaded — remained the biggest global source of refugees, with 2.8 million (one-fourth of the global refugee population) in 69 different asylum countries according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Pakistan hosted the most refugees of any country in 2008, with 1.8 million, nearly all from Afghanistan.

Before Afghanistan, the region's main refugee situation arose when the Vietnam War ended in 1975. More than 3 million people fled from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, many as "boat people," sailing long distances in overcrowded small boats, at risk of shipwreck and pirate attacks.

During the next 20 years, 2.5 million found new homes elsewhere, while a half million returned. Over a million Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians were resettled in the United States, with smaller numbers in Australia, Canada, and Western Europe. China accepted about 300,000 refugees, mainly of ethnic Chinese origin. Other Asian countries were unwilling to accept settlers.

The Afghan emergency in 1979 came just after the Indo-Chinese exodus, and Western countries showed little willingness to provide homes for new waves of refugees. Indeed, most Afghans went to Pakistan and Iran, which were willing to provide refuge for extended periods.

When Russia left Afghanistan, in 1992, about 1.5 million Afghan refugees returned home. However, Taliban rule, a four-year drought, and the devastated condition of the country delayed the return of others. To help fund the costs of rebuilding their villages, increasing numbers of Afghans went to work in the gulf states, while others sought asylum in Western countries.

The US-led invasion of Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001, attacks was designed to destroy Al-Qaida and the Taliban, establish a legitimate government, and permit the return of refugees. In March 2002, the Afghan Transitional Authority and UNHCR started a mass return program. By July 2002, more than 1.3 million Afghans had returned, 1.2 million from Pakistan and 100,000 from Iran. This unexpectedly rapid repatriation put severe strain on UNHCR finances.

Meanwhile, the governments of Australia, the United Kingdom, and other Western countries began sending back Afghan asylum seekers, even though it was far from clear that conditions were safe in Afghanistan. The intensification of hostilities between US-led forces and the Taliban from 2005 hindered further returns. Pakistan and Iran continued to host the largest refugee populations in the world.

Apart from these two huge refugee movements, Asia has seen many smaller exoduses smaller in numbers.

After the failure of the democracy movement in 1989, thousands of Chinese sought

asylum overseas. Conflicts linked to the break-up of the former Soviet Union led to mass displacements in the 1990s affecting many new states, including Georgia, Chechnya, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan.

At least 50,000 North Koreans have fled to China, South Korea, and elsewhere. Other long-standing refugee populations include Tibetans and Bhutanese in India and Nepal, and Burmese in Thailand and Bangladesh. In 2005-2006, Muslims from both southern Thailand and southern Philippines fled to Malaysia to escape persistent internal conflict.

The long civil war in Sri Lanka led to mass internal displacement as well as refugee outflows. In 2001, an estimated 144,000 Sri Lankan Tamils were living in camps in India, while other Tamils were dispersed around the world. The resurgence of fighting in 2006 led to new displacements, especially of Tamils from the north of the island.

In January 2009, UNHCR counted 137,752 Sri Lankan refugees around the world, and over half a million persons internally displaced within Sri Lanka. The final offensive of April-May 2009 led to many civilian deaths and injuries and to further large-scale flight. In early July 2009, 280,000 persons were reported to be housed in government camps in northern Sri Lanka.

The majority of the population of East Timor was forced to flee violence at the time of the vote for independence in 1999. Most were able to return after the UN peacekeeping mission, but new violence forced 150,000 from their homes in 2006.

The major political shifts in Indonesia after 1998 led to massive internal displacements, as well as refugee flows from areas of civil war, such as Aceh. Again, recent peace settlements have allowed many people to return.

Looking Ahead

Asian migration has become much more complex, yet some general features remain. One is the lack of long-term planning: movements have been shaped not only by government labor policies, but also by the actions of employers, migrants, and the migration industry.

Second, illegal migration is very high, and agents and brokers play a major role.

Third, the weakness of migration management in some countries contrasts with the dominant Asian model of migration: strict control of foreign workers, prohibition of settlement and family reunification, and denial of worker rights.

Finally, East Asian authorities emphasize the importance of maintaining ethnic homogeneity, while Southeast Asian governments wish to safeguard existing ethnic balances. But the globalization of migration is bringing about rapid changes, and it is far from clear that Asian governments will be able to prevent unforeseen shifts.

By the early 21st century, Asia was beginning to see signs of increasing dependence on foreign workers for dirty, dangerous, and difficult (so-called 3-D) jobs as labor force growth slows in industrializing countries and local workers reject menial tasks.

In these circumstances, employers sought to retain "good workers," migrants prolonged their stays, and family reunion or formation of new families in the receiving country took place. Processes of permanent settlement were beginning to become evident, especially for the highly skilled, but also often for less-skilled workers willing to take on the jobs that nationals rejected.

Trends toward democracy and the rule of law were also making it hard to ignore human rights. The growth of nongovernment organizations working for migrants' rights in Japan, Malaysia, and the Philippines indicated the growing strength of civil society. It therefore seemed reasonable to predict that settlement and increased cultural diversity would affect many Asian labor-importing countries; yet Asian governments were only just beginning to think about the need for plans to deal with long-term effects of migration.

The onset of the global recession seems to have interrupted the growth of Asian labor migration. Early analyses predicted relative economic stability in the gulf countries, where most migrants from the Indian sub-continent are concentrated, but forecast large falls in economic growth in Southeast and East Asian countries, where most migrants from Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma are employed.

Export-dependent economies have been hit particularly hard. As of July 2009, economic forecasts for the gulf countries look less positive, while production declines in East and Southeast Asia seem even more severe, with falls in output of up to 40 percent in some sectors in Malaysia, South Korea, and Japan.

Migrant workers are often the first to be laid off, and some countries (such as South Korea) have suspended their migrant worker recruitment programs. Yet conditions are often even worse in origin countries, so that unemployed migrants are often reluctant to return home, while new migrants continue to seek ways of moving abroad.

It is too early to predict the recession's long-term effects on Asian migration. Much depends on the length, depth, and characteristics of the crisis. A long recession might well lead to increased popular hostility against immigrants and to protectionist measures.

On the other hand, processes of economic change resulting from the downturn might well contribute to a shift in economic power to new industrial regions.

This could enhance long-term employment prospects in Asia. Despite recent growth, migratory movements are still quite small in comparison with Asia's vast population. Migrant workers make up a far smaller proportion of the labor force in countries like Japan and Korea than in European countries (although the proportion is large in Singapore and Malaysia).

The potential for growth following the recession appears obvious. The economies of East and Southeast Asia seem likely to pull in large numbers of migrant workers in the future, a trend that may have far-reaching social and political consequences.

The 21st century has been dubbed the "Pacific century" in terms of economic and political development, but it may also be an epoch of rapidly growing migration and population diversity in Asia.

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