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**THE MIGRATION INFORMATION SOURCE:  
A WEB-BASED RESOURCE FOR UP-TO-DATE MIGRATION  
NEWS, DATA AND ANALYSIS \***

Migration Policy Institute \*\*

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**The Migration Information Source:  
A web-based resource for up-to-date migration news, data,  
and analysis**

**[www.migrationinformation.org](http://www.migrationinformation.org)**

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## Introduction

International migration is a defining force of our times. Its impact continues to deepen everywhere around the globe. Yet, despite the magnitude of its influence on social, economic, political, and cultural change, *there is no single, authoritative source of current, wide-ranging, and regularly updated information and analysis about migration.*

Many organizations have been working steadily to collect and codify migration data and have made great strides in providing data and highlighting the need for coherent and comparable information. For expert analysts, demographers, and others familiar with the intricacies of international migration, the availability of data has greatly improved.

For those, however, who are not steeped in international migration history, lore, and organizations, information that is available is often confusing and sometimes misleading. It tends to be organized in ways that respond to the habits of bureaucracies rather than to the interests of the public or to the needs of policymakers or journalists. Most importantly, there is no systematic guidance about how to interpret data, how to compare different sources, and how to make sense of conflicting information. This is especially important when a growing volume of migration policy and analysis is produced primarily with political and ideological objectives in mind – whether pro- or anti-immigration.

Poor-quality information, faulty interpretation, and disinformation feed prejudice, stereotyping, and social discord. They distort public debate and set the stage for counterproductive and ill-judged public policy. Without reliable, accessible, and balanced information, wise management of migration-induced change is exceptionally difficult.

### **The Migration Information Source:**

#### **A web-based resource for migration data and analysis**

The Migration Information Source ([www.migrationinformation.org](http://www.migrationinformation.org)) is a project of the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), a non-profit think tank based in Washington, DC. As part of its mission, MPI delivers sound and accurate data and analysis on migration trends and refugee issues.

The Source is best understood as a web-based tool for policymakers, opinion shapers, researchers, and others. At the Source, users find easy-to-understand, issue-oriented articles based on sound analysis as well as actual and accurate data to support efforts to design, critique, or influence migration-related policy.

Three overarching goals shape the information available on the Migration Information Source. First, The Source is designed to enhance public understanding of the movement of people worldwide and, by extension, to inform public policy. Second, The Source intends to become a primary reference for understandable, reliable, comparable, and relevant data on migration by partnering with organizations, governments, and international agencies working in this area. Finally, the Source is

committed to producing thought-provoking, compelling journalism that stimulates interest and informed debate about the causes and consequences of migration.

The Source is not a forum for advocacy or editorial commentary. Rather, the initiative contributes to the worldwide dialogue on international migration by filling the need for a centralized and authoritative resource. In this way, The Source grounds migration debates and policy in real numbers rather than in rhetoric and provides a solid base for informed conversations about international migration trends and effective responses. While we will discuss international migration issues – which in and of themselves may be controversial – the Source maintains a balanced approach, based on the best available data.

### **Data and Analysis Available on the Source**

Broadly speaking, The Source works on two fronts. The first and most innovative is the development of an interactive database that allows users to access easily country-specific information. The second is a series of articles and short analytical pieces on international migration and refugee issues.

#### **Global Data Center**

One of the primary features of The Source is our “Global Data Center.” This is a unique tool that allows users to answer essential questions about international migration stocks and flows, and graph these trends along the way. This tool anchors the Migration Information Source and is continually expanded with additional country data as they become available.

Data for the Source are derived from primary sources, including census, survey, and governmental/administrative data, and secondary sources, such as reports and publications. The site includes public use data provided by our foreign correspondents as well as data downloaded from the World Wide Web. We work with a variety of governments, international agencies, and individuals to support this database and to make the data accessible.

Currently, the Global Data Center has three main features:

- *Countries by Numbers* – allows users to generate tables and create graphs from those tables instantly, thus providing an important visual aspect to migration data. A variety of both stock and flow data are available for several different countries.
- *Comparative Charts and Tables* – provides ready-made charts and downloadable Excel spreadsheets that focus on a single issue, such as “percent foreign-born” or “number of asylum applications.” These charts compare migration-related data through time for several different countries, enabling our users to visualize comparative trends and levels.
- *U.S. Historical Trends* – provides charts that focus on changes in the foreign-born stock and the inflow of the migrants through time. The goal of these charts is to provide the current migration dialogue in the United States with a visual

historic context, providing a better understanding of broader immigration trends and patterns.

In the future, we will expand the Global Data Center to incorporate several additional features, including: country-specific charts and tables, using both recent and historic data; global charts and tables, focusing on worldwide trends, such as the “top ten” countries with the highest number of asylum-seekers; and *Data Notes*, a series of short articles that explain some of the important concepts behind international migration data and definitions.

Other data-related features of The Source include a list of internet links to international statistical agencies, U.S. statistical agencies, and non-governmental data sources.

### Articles and Analysis

The articles and analyses presented by the Source come from a variety of solicited sources, including leading thinkers on the issues and correspondents in the field. In addition to their editorial and production roles, the Source staff also contribute issue-oriented articles and analyses.

Several types of articles are available. These include:

- *Feature Story* – an in-depth analysis of an important issue written by a leading migration expert.
- *In the News* – a review of a topical issue drawn from global policy debates.
- *Country Profiles* – summaries of migration numbers, policies, and trends for selected countries.
- *Migration Fundamentals* – primers on key migration-related topics.
- *US in Focus* – fact sheets on a single topic.
- *Policy Beat* – reviews of the latest migration-related policy developments in the United States.
- *Interviews* – conversations with senior policymakers.

Additional features include: a glossary of definitions; an events page where users can list migration-related conferences and meetings; and a press room where journalists can access tools for writing stories on global migration.

### Dissemination of Information

The World Wide Web makes this initiative readily accessible to a wide range of users. In addition, The Source issues a “news flash” through its listserv two times per month to announce additions to the Global Data Center and new stories available on the site.

In the future, The Source team will conduct special briefings and trainings for specific groups of users interested in understanding international migration data.

### Difficulties in Obtaining Data

Obtaining data for The Source from the various international statistical agencies is a slow and gradual process. Working with the UN Population Division, the UNHCR, and other governments and individuals, we have built a strong base for the Global Data Center. Conversations are underway with other organizations to continue to enhance the database.

Access and use of data is limited by two factors: financial and definitional. Time, staff, and cost constraints limit the speed with which the Global Data Center can be developed. Fortunately, much of the country data is publicly available, and much of it is available on-line. In many countries, however, data is not publicly available, or requires a special tabulation, and therefore must be purchased – sometimes at high monetary costs (especially for a non-profit organization). Special requests for data made directly to the various statistical agencies have been generally well received.

Even when data are available, there are definitional constraints to the data. None of this is surprising given the challenges of standardizing the field. For the purposes of The Source, this means that extra care is required in explaining, defining, and footnoting sources.

## **Opportunities for Collaboration**

One of the comparative advantages of the Source is the technology behind the Global Data Center. It allows the user to develop charts “on-the-fly” and to compare data from various countries. Because the comparative framework is so important from a sociological as well as a policy point of view, The Source is a potential resource for organizations that focus on collecting country-specific data but which require comparative analyses. By augmenting the range of variables and the countries covered within the Global Data Center, the Source will eventually allow users to view a broad array of characteristics in a comparative context. To the extent that more data become more easily accessible, this tool can be greatly enhanced.

Similarly, The Source is concerned about the limits to comparability driven by different national definitions, accounting, and reporting of migration-related data. This lack of comparability ranges from the use of alternative categories (such as different age groups, which is a minor problem) to the use of non-comparable concepts (such as *foreign-born* vs. *foreigner*, which is a major problem). Advances in this area will greatly enhance collaborative efforts.

## **The Migration Policy Institute**

In response to a growing need for sound analysis of international migration trends and policies, the Migration Policy Institute emerged in 2000 as an independent think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. Formerly a program of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, MPI now stands alone as a premier organization where thoughtful proposals are generated, vetted, and disseminated. We aim to meet the rising demand for pragmatic responses to the challenges and the

opportunities that migration, whether voluntary or forced, presents to states, communities, and institutions in this ever more integrated world.

Because of the nature of migration and refugee flows, MPI's context is global. We seek, through better informed policy and interventions, to capture the benefits of migration for individuals, sending countries, receiving countries, and employers. At the same time, we work to reduce the challenges that migration poses.

We accomplish this by stimulating serious policy discussions among key actors in the international migration area; injecting objective analysis into the development and evaluation of public policies; and gathering, analyzing, and widely disseminating sound information.

Four substantive themes shape our priorities in this endeavor:

- Migration management
- Refugee protection
- North American borders and migration
- Immigrant settlement and integration

Each of the four “pillars” of the MPI program of work involves a combination of research, high-level policy roundtable discussions, seminars, policy papers, public briefings, publications and media work. A dual emphasis on high-level consultations and outreach aimed at a broad policy community, as well as the informed public, is designed to bring MPI and its ideas maximum exposure and influence.