



After the Fact | [A World in Motion: Global Demographics Explained - Part One](#)

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TRANSCRIPT

Dan LeDuc, host: Over the course of world history, history itself has been defined by how people move around the globe. Traversing land bridges that once linked continents, sailing on primitive ships, fleeing famines.

That is not just history, of course. It's also today: Millions of people are on the move around the globe and again changing the world as we know it.

Over the next two episodes, we're talking about those population shifts—where people are coming from and where they're going.

[Theme music]

Dan LeDuc: This is "After the Fact" from The Pew Charitable Trusts. I'm Dan LeDuc.

One of the world's largest cities to experience dramatic demographic changes is London.

A recent study from the Centre for London, an independent think tank there, reveals something about how the city is changing: Seventy percent of children now born in London have at least one foreign-born parent. And that's our data point.

Seven in 10 children born in London have a parent who wasn't.

What's occurring in London is in some ways a microcosm of migration trends around the globe.

To learn more about that bigger picture, we sat down with Mark Hugo Lopez, director of global migration and demography research at the Pew Research Center.

Dan LeDuc: As we mentioned, the data point for this episode is that 70 percent of the babies born in London have at least one foreign-born parent.



The world is a really changing place right now. People are moving, and migration is happening. What you do tracks that. What's the big picture in global migration right now?

Mark Hugo Lopez, director, global migration and demography research, Pew Research Center: So worldwide, about 3.3 percent of the world's population is an immigrant. Now that's actually slightly up from, say, the 1960s when it was about 2.7 percent who were an immigrant, but the number is reaching new highs every year. We're now at about 255 million people worldwide, as of 2017, who are living in a country in which they were not born. So this is a worldwide phenomenon. Largely, though, I would say a phenomenon of a few countries.

You should know the United States, for example, has, of that 250-plus million, 45 million live in the United States. So that's the single largest population of immigrants anywhere in the world. But in the case of the U.K., the U.K. is actually one of the world's leading destinations for migrants. It's in the top five of countries worldwide in terms of the number of people—more than 3 million—who are born in another country. So in many respects London's experience reflects that large foreign-born population that lives in the U.K.

If you take a look at the world migrant flows today, where are the big migration corridors? So where are they today?

The biggest ones, of course, are the Middle East to Europe. There continues to be a flow of people, although it's significantly reduced in recent years as Europe has struck deals to slow the flow. Also, from Africa to Europe. That's another big migrant flow.

Within the Americas, Mexico used to be the world's biggest corridor of people moving. Now, actually, to the United States, within the Americas, you see people coming from Central America. Now we've heard a lot in the news about unaccompanied minors or families crossing the border in the last summer, for example. So you have a lot of people coming from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, also from Cuba, and Venezuela, which has had an economic meltdown.

And as a result, there's a lot of people who have left Venezuela, many of whom have come to the United States to seek asylum. So the U.S., in terms of big arrows coming to the U.S. from Latin America, Mexico less so, Central America, Venezuela and Cuba more so, which is, I think, interesting. On top of that, the U.S. tracks people from around the world with a big flow coming annually—in fact, bigger than Mexico—from India and—

Dan LeDuc: More from India.



Mark Hugo Lopez: —from China. In fact, those are the two leading countries of new arrivals in the United States. And that's been the case for about five years now. So Mexico is no longer the leading sender of people to the U.S. It's actually Asian countries now.

So you talk about all these flows. Those are just some examples of where you have some of these big arrows. But Africa and the Middle East are the two places that are sending people the most worldwide at the moment.

Dan LeDuc: Sub-Saharan Africa, that seems to be poised to become one of the really dominant places that we need to watch as a people outflow. What was some of the data that you've been exploring? What are some of the signs we should be looking for?

Mark Hugo Lopez: This is a big question among policymakers in Europe. Who and how many might come from Africa, and will Europe be their destination? In some of the surveys that we've done, we've asked migrants in countries like Ghana, for example, in Tanzania, Senegal, and South Africa and Kenya and Nigeria: If you have the means and opportunity to do so, would you leave your country for another country?

And we've found, for example, in Ghana, 75 percent of Ghana adults said, yes, they would leave if they had the means and opportunity to do so. We also asked: Would you do it in the next five years? And we found that in Ghana, again, about 45 percent, almost half, said that they would or they plan to leave sometime in the next five years. You ask where they want to go: What's your top destination? And we found that the United States is often the top destination, followed by Europe and then, of course, many other places in the world. But the U.S. and Europe are the two top destinations.

Dan LeDuc: Our country, the United States, has always been viewed as a country of immigrants. We can look back at waves in history here, whether it's the Irish or the Germans. Where does what's going on now fit in historically like that in terms of numbers and impact?

Mark Hugo Lopez: So the U.S. has had large waves of migrants before. For example, in the mid-19th century, it was largely an Irish and a German wave of migration of maybe about 14 million people. The migration wave that we're currently in in the United States, it started in 1965 when the U.S. changed its immigration law and created the current system that we have. Since then, about 59 million people have come to the U.S.

Now the U.S. is a much bigger country today, in terms of population, and migrants make up about 13.7 percent of the U.S. population, according to the most recent statistics from the Census Bureau from 2017. That puts us not at a record but approaching a record. And the record was set in 1890 when we had almost 15 percent of the U.S.



population foreign-born. So in terms of the share of the U.S. population, we're not at historic numbers yet, though we're very close. In terms of the number of people living in the U.S. as immigrants, we've never had as many as we have now.

Dan LeDuc: And it's just a lot of people.

Mark Hugo Lopez: It's a lot of people. It's a big country.

Dan LeDuc: Yeah. You have this great—thanks to this great job you have—global perch. You get to look back and see. What are you going to watch? What are the trends that you're most closely watching, say, over the next two decades that most of us are going to live through and see some impact from?

Mark Hugo Lopez: There are many trends that are worth looking at and keeping an eye on. The first, of course, is the big questions about who are and where will the big sources of new migrants be. That seems to be Africa and the Middle East that are the two most poised, partly because of demographics and high fertility rates and relatively young populations. I think also, though there's many questions to be asked, about international policy: How are countries going to address migration? Are they going to continue to want to attract migrants? And how will they attract migrants?

Think about Japan. In the case of Japan, the Japanese government has opened the door some to migration, allowing workers to come in through various programs. And keep in mind that it has an aging population and has a demographic challenge. Yet, many of those workers are not allowed to bring their families. So Japan has opened the door some to immigration but hasn't opened the door entirely like the United States, say, or like the U.K. So how countries respond is another big trend. I think it's worth considering.

Finally, I think, is the question about what happens to these migrant populations in the countries where they settle. Will we see a story of integration, a story of people intermarrying, and their children essentially becoming part of those countries in a way that we've tended to see here in the United States? The second generation, the children born here, for example, tend to do better than their immigrant parents.

Or will we see a story that's somewhat different, where integration doesn't happen successfully and the subsequent generation who's born in a country where the parents or grandparents migrated to have limited opportunities and perhaps don't even learn the language of that new destination country like their parents may have. So they may be in Germany, for example, and not really learn German but instead continue to speak Turkish. So these questions of integration, I think, and trends are ones that are worth keeping an eye on because there are so many migrants around the world.



Dan LeDuc: You know, some of the major cities in the world are just growing amazingly. How are the migrants contributing to this renaissance that we're seeing in so many cities like New York and London and elsewhere?

Mark Hugo Lopez: Migrants are a big part of the story for growth in cities everywhere, and not just international migrants but internal migrants too. So in the case of London, for example, that's an international city that's attracting migrants from around the world, people of many different talents, who are coming to London to pursue careers. New York is another city that's drawn a worldwide population of folks, people who have talents, who can succeed in a place like New York. Same thing with Silicon Valley in the United States.

But internally, there are also many people who are moving to cities as well. So the migration story is not just about cross-border, but it's really to cities. And China is really—when we think about internal migration, there are more internal migrants, according to United Nations, in China than there are international migrants worldwide. So that's just—

Dan LeDuc: So you're talking about the folks in the rural areas of China being attracted to the major cities.

Mark Hugo Lopez: That's correct.

Dan LeDuc: That movement—

Mark Hugo Lopez: Is bigger, more than 250 million more people—

Dan LeDuc: Wow.

Mark Hugo Lopez: —than the number of international migrants in the world. Cities are really the attraction here because that's where jobs are and opportunities are. But also, many cities are struggling to deal with an influx of migrants. Cities in Latin America, for example, like Mexico City, have a hard time with the infrastructure, providing water, for example, for many parts of the city where people have built barrios or shanties.

You have a similar problem in many parts of Asia as well. So while it is a world in motion and cities like London have benefited greatly, other cities are struggling to cope with the number of people moving into those cities.

More than half of the world's population today lives in cities, but that's a relatively recent development. We used to have most of the world's population, just 50 years ago, living outside of cities. So urban spaces have become the place where the majority of



the human population lives. And it's really recent migration, a lot of it in China, a lot of it in Africa, a lot of it, of course, in the West as well, where people have moved to cities to pursue opportunities, to pursue jobs, to pursue careers, and so forth.

So that really does give you some sense of the perspective of a world in motion, which is really what this is. It's more than just about international borders.

[Theme music]

Dan LeDuc: In our next episode we're headed to a city in motion—London—and we'll take you on a tour through the vibrant neighborhood of Brixton with Ben Rogers, director of the Centre for London.

Ben Rogers, director, the Centre for London: London has changed, actually, in a way in which I think has even taken the experts, the demographers, by surprise. I remember when we had the last census in 2010, it transpired that the proportion of white British people in London was now less than 50 percent, which no one was expecting.

[Music continues]

Dan LeDuc: Pew has other resources on global migration. The latest edition of our *Trust* magazine features an article on the emerging sub-Saharan exodus that is sending millions of Africans to Western Europe and the United States. And you can read Pew Research Center reports on the topic, too.

All that and more are on our website at pewtrusts.org/afterthefact.

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[Closing theme music]

Dan LeDuc: Thanks for listening. For The Pew Charitable Trusts, I'm Dan LeDuc, and this is "After the Fact."