



Sometimes nomads

20 million – Number of people living outside their country of birth

42% – share of Tajikistan GDP from global remittances

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Elective migration, cheap travel, international knowledge sharing, and increasingly transient working models create connected nomads who mix the traditions of home with the values and customs of their host location.

People move around for all sorts of different reasons, good and bad. The World Bank estimates that about 250 million people live outside the country of their birth and, adding in those who have moved internally, about one in every seven of us could be defined as a migrant. Increasing numbers of people are fleeing violence but many others move for work, love and adventure. This mass movement of humanity, combined with cheap and easy travel options and free-flowing communication technology, is creating a world where cultures are dissolving and the traditional understanding of what it means to belong is being challenged

The privileged few, fortified by sought-after skills and protected by the passports of their choice, dominate the top echelons of the corporate world. Their lifestyles, irrespective of location, remain broadly unchanged; tapping into local culture is an option but not an obligation. Their peers also hail from diverse corners of the globe and many will find more in common with those in similar circumstances than friends and family from home. Corporate executives, working on a global scale, are able to use the power and influence of the organisations that employ them to drive material change in ways that national governments can only dream of. Unilever, for example, has set a target for 2020 that aims to help more than a billion people improve their health and hygiene and help to reduce obesity. The Tata Group spends around 3% of its net profits, (USD17 million in 2014), on programmes related to education, health and the environment.

Many people who migrate for professional reasons use their education as a ticket to riches, making their homes in centres such as Silicon Valley, Singapore or Berlin. The US is the number one destination of choice for many, and the previous record high of 14.8% foreign-born population in 1890 will be passed by 2025, rising to nearly 19% by 2060. These days most arrivals are qualified in some way - in 2013 41% of newly arrived immigrants to the US had at least a bachelor's degree. In 1970, that share was just 20%. Indian Americans are now the richest ethnic group with a median household income of about \$88,000, compared with economic output of less than \$1,600 a head in India. As the focus of world trade shifts, and the opportunities for corporate development expand, expect this tiny but influential group to look towards new locations in the emerging economies in South America or Asia.

China has been encouraging students to learn abroad in order to improve its education since the late 1970s. Chinese youths currently make up over a fifth of all international students in higher education in the OECD, with more than a quarter of them in America - making it likely that there are more US-based Chinese PhD students than American. Meanwhile the number coming back has grown even faster; more than 350,000 Chinese returned from overseas study in 2013, up from just 20,000 ten years earlier.

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Our habitat



The western population's absorption of other cultures is not always reciprocal, however. During the 2013/14 academic year the US hosted 886,000 of the world's 4.5m mobile higher education population - more than twice the UK, the next entry on the list – yet fewer than 10% of US college students travel abroad in their undergraduate years. If this imbalance remains, it could begin to create questions around the readiness of the US workforce to participate in a more globalized world.

From cleaners in Hong Kong to lawyers in London, migrants also send cash to their families, a huge impact in developing economies. The World Bank estimates that Nigerians abroad sent back some \$21 billion in 2013, adding up to a quarter of their country's earnings from oil exports. Many send money either through Facebook or via their mobile phone. Such has been the impact of technology on economic migration that global remittances are now worth more than twice as much as foreign aid, comprising 10% of the Philippines' GDP and 42% of Tajikistan's. Last year India received \$70 billion – more than any other country.

For the majority of migrant workers the “hubs” of choice are New York, London and Singapore and it is there that the influence of that cultural blending is most obvious. Few would think it curious for an Indian woman to eat at a Japanese restaurant in London before enjoying an evening watching a Russian ballet but this internationalism, even for London, has been a transformation of the past three decades.

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Not every migrant is privileged. Increasingly the less fortunate find themselves in unfamiliar places where there is little opportunity or hope for a better life. Obligated to leave all their possessions behind to start again, these displaced people may only have tradition and belief to give them a sense of self. Low-cost connectivity links the poor and the displaced to their past, enabling them to retain a sense of identity and belonging in the most taxing environments. What seems certain is that the next decade will see an increase in the number of people who feel, at least for some of the time, that they do not fully belong to a specific nation or country. As a result they are likely to fashion new forms of belonging, reflecting new types of social membership, a reaction to what they are experiencing or the transient results of increasingly fluid social networking, the automaticity of easy travel and instantaneous communication.

Blended cultures may become the new norm.

As the world becomes smaller through migration and mobility, both virtual and real, it may be that people and groups will express themselves more insistently through multiple identity lenses. Blended cultures may become the new norm. Key questions remain however. How will we protect and respect apparently contradictory and multiple identities? Will it be through multiple personas that we define others and ourselves or will it be from an integrated set of values? Given the multi-layered and multi-dimensional nature of nations, communities and individuals, the challenge to coexist peacefully is twofold: how to develop a set of values with due regard for diversity and individual rights to which all can agree, and how to find successful ways of promoting difference while also identifying and embedding a shared identity among community members.

Related insights

Education revolution



Broader access to improved education acts as a major catalyst for empowerment, sustained economic growth, overcoming inequality and reducing conflict. We need an education system fit for the digital revolution.

Imbalanced Population Growth



A growing population adds another billion people but it is also rapidly ageing: a child born next year will live 6 months longer than one born today. While migration helps to rebalance, increasing dependency ratios challenge many.

Intra city collaboration



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Skills concentrations



The need to build and develop capabilities becomes increasingly challenging for companies and workers alike. Those who benefit from the high-skill reward opportunities remain a select group who move ahead of the urban pack.