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Globalization, migration, and ethnicity



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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This article presents an overview of global migration and the unique issues facing immigrants, host countries, and practitioners, identifying considerations for practice.

Background: Perceptions of the effects of human migration are major drivers of country attitudes, policies, and programs. Increasingly complex global interconnectedness has altered relationships among sending, receiving, and transit countries. The Global North, with its aging and declining populations, requires a healthy and young workforce; the Global South, with limited resources, a high birthrate, and an overall youthful population, can fill the gaps of the former, but with several implications for receiving and sending nations.

Methods and results: This article reviews literature and data on current migration worldwide, with particular emphasis on immigration. Despite the complexities of human migration and extant theories that dissect the phenomenon, the fundamental elements of Lee's early push-and-pull theory of migration continue to hold true. Generally, people are drawn to improved opportunities or leave challenging environments, whether temporarily or permanently. Two salient dimensions undergird the study of migration: (1) migration trends—who migrates and why, and the size and direction of migration flows; and (2) the impact of migration—how migration changes receiving, transit, and sending countries. Receiving/transit nations are particularly apprehensive about whether immigrants fill their needs and how they impact resources. They speculate about immigrant preparedness for the workforce, ability to integrate into the society, and consequences for the racial/phenotypic profile of the nation. Immigrants also experience these worries.

Conclusions: Ethnicity, which is associated with common ancestry and culture, including language, religion, traditions, and behavioral norms, often contributes to, and challenges, a receiving nation's world view. This can have implications for several segments of its society, including the health profession, which could find that in the delivery of services it must grapple with the complex relationship between migrant, health, and health services utilization.

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Introduction

In 2017, approximately 258 million people, about 3.4% of the world's population, were considered by the United Nations to be migrants. This number has been rising steadily—having been 173 million in 2010.¹ The proportion of the population made up by migrants has particularly increased in nations with slow or negative domestic population growth. Furthermore, both migrant flows from sending to receiving countries and movement within host nations have changed. No longer are urban areas the only major magnets; many immigrants make their homes in rural areas where ethnic and cultural diversity are limited.²

Amid economic fears and rising nationalism, perceptions of the effects of human migration are major drivers of country attitudes, policies, and programs. While human beings have migrated since time immemorial, increasingly complex global interconnectedness has altered relationships among sending, receiving, and transit countries. Migrants who move, voluntarily or not, always seek to improve the quality of their lives, while receiving nations attempt to manage the size and profile of entrants along a range of economic, practical, social, philosophical, and attitudinal factors.

The movement of people has long ranging effects on the individuals and groups who migrate and also on the receiving, sending, and even transit countries. This article focuses specifically on global immigration or entry into a country, and while recognizing the significance of several extant theories and perspectives on migration³ and the complex interaction of economic, political, legal, sociocultural, and demographic factors,^{4–6} it underscores the continuing efficacy and understandable perspective of Lee's 1966, basic push-and-pull theory of migration.⁷ Generally, people move, either temporarily or permanently, to enhance their lives. They may be pulled toward improved opportunities in host nations or pushed to leave challenging environments in their native countries or both. While not in the scope of this article, practitioners will need to assess country-specific migration in the context of the current intricacies of a myriad of global, national, and regional factors.

The debate

Nations around the world are torn about the benefits of immigration, and while this discussion is not new, increasing globalization and the ease of movement between nations and across continents have recently heightened xenophobia, economic fears, and nationalism. Most literature and empirical evidence suggests that, on balance, economically and practically immigrants benefit a receiving country. However, concerns about cultural contamination, changing values, and, most recently, the dread of terrorism tend to color host country attitudes.

Those who support immigration identify at least the three following points: (i) immigrants benefit the country economically, (ii) immigrants enrich the culture, and (iii) a country with resources should help others in need. Conversely, those who believe that immigration should be limited indicate concerns that (i) immigrants deplete the country by taking

jobs and overutilizing resources, (ii) immigrants destroy the culture, and (iii) immigration is a privilege that has to be earned.

Overall findings indicate that immigrants tend to benefit the economy, particularly in developed countries, as they often take jobs not filled by natives and, being entrepreneurial, frequently start businesses that hire natives and immigrants.⁸ However, migration may depress incomes and opportunities for low-wage and less educated individuals.^{9,10} There is no 'one size fits all' model, and attitudes toward migrants are highly complex,¹¹ varying based on different immigrant groups and the 'threats' perceived. Thus, economic fears, for example in the United Kingdom, are around Eastern Europeans, while security fears reflect perceptions of Muslims.¹² The extent of immigrant integration also affects views of their benefits. Regardless of academic findings of the advantages of immigration, the 'disconnect' between academic research and public perception is significant; economic benefits seem to have little effect in offsetting perceptions of immigrants as 'the Other'.¹³

Depending on the prevailing sociopolitical and economic conditions of the world, or particular countries, certain forms of migration movements dominate media coverage. The recent Syrian refugee crisis has focused the world's attention toward refugees, and the pervasive current view is that refugees constitute the majority migrant group. However, they make up only 10% of the all international migrants.¹⁴ At other times, perceptions are that the Global North is being overrun by unauthorized migrants, and nations are challenged and changed by masses of 'illegal' people. The reality is that most immigrants are voluntary migrants, not refugees, and most enter a country with appropriate documentation.

It is, nevertheless, important to recognize that individuals cross international boundaries under a range of circumstances, and these circumstances influence how they are perceived and categorized which then affect the resources to which they are entitled in the destination country. In addition, even when they emigrate under similar circumstances, two immigrants from the same country of origin may have very different migration stories; much depends on their social and economic status in the home country, their experience there, their human capital,¹⁵ and their personal aspirations.

Globalization

The global economy, the ease of travel, and transnational communication have enhanced international population mobility and offered migration opportunities heretofore unavailable to many. Because of the several spheres of globalization, in the 21st Century, connections with countries of origin remain strong and are accessible to almost all international migrants. Growing international remittances,¹⁶ expanding transnational communities,¹⁷ increasing international labor migration (including seasonal and serial migration and guest worker programs^{18–20}), and rising Diaspora engagement are some impactful consequences of globalization on migration. Furthermore, across disciplines, but particularly in health services, is the continuing development and expression of integrated health care and the integrated

workforce.²¹ This has opened migration opportunities in health care for people in several health-related disciplines.

Immigrant groups: definitions

Research often classifies migrants by a number of variables: national origins, educational level, gender, other demographic characteristics, etc. However, it may be particularly useful to understand them in the light of two salient factors, choice (voluntary/involuntary movement) and visa status (authorized/unauthorized entry). These two factors (Fig. 1) act in concert to define the resources immigrants can access in the host country, how they are perceived, and may suggest immigrant social and/or human capital.

Immigrants/voluntary migrants

Voluntary migrants move from their homelands because, on balance, they believe their opportunities in another country will improve. They carefully plan the exit, deciding when to leave, by what route, with whom, and what to take with them. They identify the destination, often mobilizing their networks in the receiving country. Before leaving, most have identified at least a temporary place to live, know something about work opportunities, and have an idea of the environment to which they are headed. Voluntary migrants are ‘pulled’ to a new abode,¹ and they may be authorized, with all the requisite papers (Fig. 1, Quadrant I), or unauthorized, either entering without appropriate documents or remaining after visa expiration (Fig. 1, Quadrant II).

Refugees/involuntary migrants

Refugees are compelled (‘pushed’) to leave their homes to avoid dangerous conditions.¹ Leaving unwillingly and quickly, with little or no planning, and, on the spur of the moment, they carry with them whatever they believe they will need; they generally have no inkling of where they will go, how they will travel, or how long it will take. They do not know whether they will survive the journey or be harmed along the way, falling victim to danger, exploitation, or harsh elements. They may leave with family members but may get separated and

may find that they are dependent on those they neither know nor trust.

‘Refugees are persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection.’²² The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) makes a determination whether particular groups meet the identified criteria for refugee status and can be granted international protection (Fig. 1, Quadrant III).

Asylum seekers/asylees

Asylum seekers are outside their home country seeking sanctuary but are in the asylum country without appropriate authorization (Fig. 1, Quadrant II). They request international protection, making application to the UNHCR or to the asylum country seeking refugee status. While their applications are pending, they are considered asylees and must prove the risk of persecution in their homeland because of demographic characteristics, not for economic reasons or because it is unsafe in their home countries. A very small proportion of the approximately one million asylum seekers worldwide are actually granted refugee status.

All ‘victims’ are not refugees

Determining whether someone is a refugee is not always clear. Forced migration has ‘many faces,’ and even the legal category of refugee can be interpreted in various ways; different people may be identified as refugees in varying situations, places, and times.²³ However, only UNHCR adjudicated ‘refugees’ are entitled to international protection. This does not, however, mean that individual nations cannot grant asylum seekers the refugee status and provide them legal entry and protection.

Victims of natural disasters

The UNHCR’s definition of ‘refugee’ does not take into account all forms of forced migration. Thus, those forced to leave their homes because of catastrophic events, such as natural

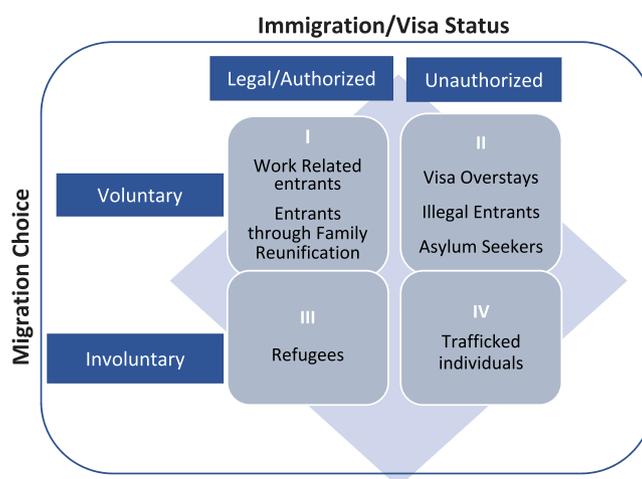


Fig. 1 – Immigrant categories.

disasters, are not considered refugees. Although they may be in 'refugee-like' situations, they are not eligible for the same services as refugees.

Victims of family dysfunction/societal norms

Victims of family dysfunction, such as domestic violence, or of societal norms, such as female genital mutilation, often seek asylum outside their home countries. Although they are harmed and are vulnerable, the UNHCR definition does not qualify them for refugee status. Their experiences are either idiosyncratic (to their particular families and situations) or may reflect a societal norm (to which all are subjected), but they are not correlated with membership in a group that is the target of persecution.

Economic migrants

Extreme unemployment, poverty, and the inability to survive in the poor economic conditions in the homeland do not qualify one as a refugee. Although one may be a victim of the country's economy, one is not persecuted because of one's ethnicity or race, thoughts, or beliefs, and one's life is not in danger. Economic migrants are, in fact, voluntary migrants seeking improved economic opportunities.

Trafficked individuals

Human trafficking is both an international and domestic phenomenon, exploiting individuals for commercial purposes, usually in the form of forced labor or sexual services and prostitution.²⁴ Internationally trafficked people often leave their homes willingly but with little awareness of what is in store, spending several years if not the rest of their lives in what is now also known as contemporary slavery.^{25,26} Although many may have left their homelands voluntarily, they soon realize that they are at the mercy of traffickers who may have tricked them, and they are, in reality, involuntary migrants.

Temporary migrants

Temporary migrants, such as seasonal or migrant workers, often obscured in discussions of 'permanent' migration, also substantially influence both sending and receiving nations. Their movement is circular as they enter host nations for paid work and return home when the work is completed. Often exploited, they frequently work for low wages in hazardous health conditions^{27,28} and are essential to a host nation's workforce. Many aspire to permanency, and although this is becoming possible in some instances,²⁹ it eludes most.

The second generation

Although the children of immigrants, the second generation, are born in the host country and usually counted among the native population in national statistics, their experiences require that they navigate at least two cultures. Nevertheless, recent literature suggests that members of this group tend to integrate themselves into the host country's norms, even when there are social and economic disadvantages.³⁰ Overall, their well-being seems to be correlated with their own perception of their level of integration with the host society.^{31,32}

Migration flows

There is a general perception that most, if not all, migration is from the Global South to the Global North. It is true that about half the migration is from South to North, but it is also true that within-region migration is substantial, with most migrants moving between countries within a region.¹⁴

The Pew Hispanic Center, in February 2018, revealed its findings of global migrant stocks, providing a fascinating interactive map of migration flows, both in and out of each nation, over the last three and a half decades.³⁹ Clearly, all nations are touched by migration, but most voluntary migrants tend to move from middle-income nations to high-income nations,¹⁴ often in the same region. Movement from low-income countries to high-income countries does occur but in disproportionately lower numbers. There is substantial movement from low-income countries to other developing countries within the same region.

Fig. 2 provides a recent snapshot of the leading migrant receiving countries.³³ The United States clearly has the largest number of international migrants at almost 50 million; however, its share of the overall population is only 15.3%. On the other hand, the 8.3 million migrants in the United Arab Emirates constitute 88.4% of the total population of 9.4 million. The Pew Hispanic Center's interactive map, above, provides a decade by decade view of the flow of migrants between nations. This reveals its origins and destinations and, along with Figs. 2 and 3, allows insight into its potential economic, social, political, and cultural impact on receiving nations.

Refugees are more likely to move to bordering countries and are overrepresented in developing nations. Eighty-four percent of the world's refugees are found in developing countries, not in the developed nations of the Global North.³⁴ Despite news reports of the influx of Syrian refugees to Europe, the country that has hosted and continues to host the largest number of Syrian refugees is Turkey; Pakistan, formerly the leader in hosting refugees, fell to second place in 2016 and 2017, and is primarily host to Afghani refugees.³⁴ Germany is the only country in the European Union that is on the list of top 10 refugee hosting nations (Fig. 3).

When migrants from source countries are dispersed across several receiving nations, their social, cultural, political, and demographic impact is less than it is when large numbers from one source nation settle in a single destination country. Thus, the greater the share of the migrant population in the host nation, as indicated in Fig. 2, the greater is its impact across several spheres of society.

Perceptions of immigrants

Census figures in several countries of the Global North continue to reveal dropping birth rates and increasing longevity resulting in gaps in the labor force and concerns about perpetuation of society and culture. The most immediate and practical resolution to address labor force gaps in the North is through increased and targeted immigration; nevertheless, most nations have long been

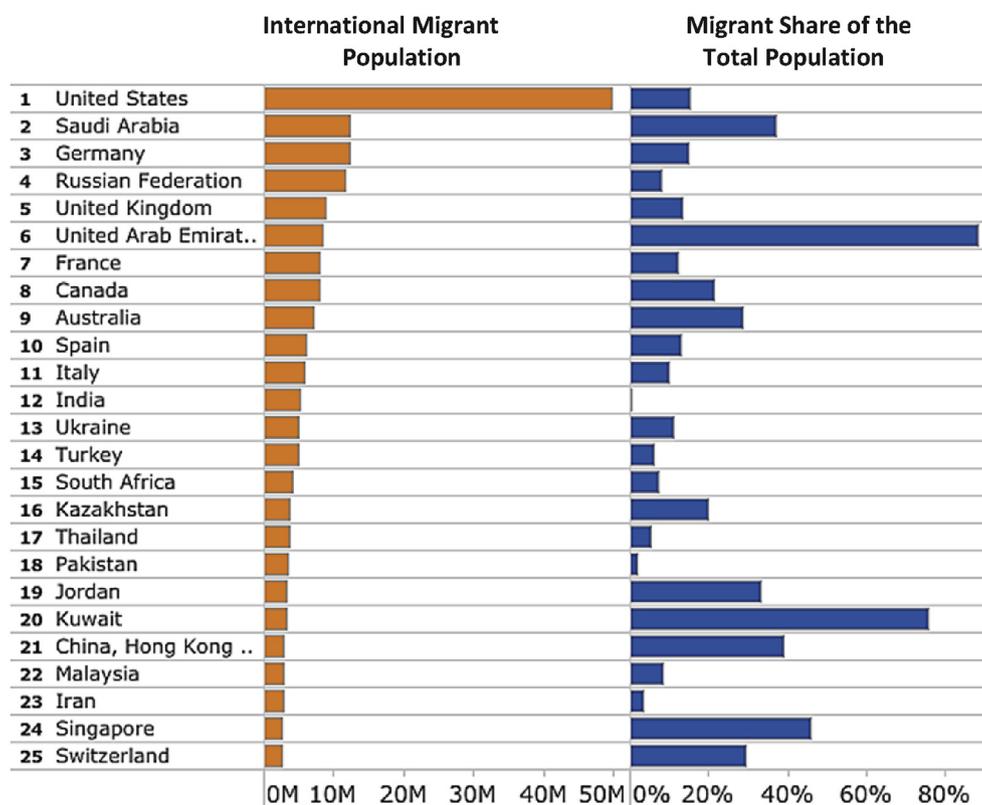


Fig. 2 – International migrant population and migrant share of the population. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/top-25-destinations-international-migrants>.

wary of foreigners, and particularly those from societies socially, economically, and culturally different from them. This was particularly evident in 2018, as thousands of Syrian refugees and many other Middle Eastern and African migrants attempted to cross into and through the European Union (EU). Concerns of usurpation of jobs, effects on the economy, cultural contamination, changing social identities, and resource allocations continue to challenge several EU countries and were instrumental in BREXIT, the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the EU. The current political climate of protectionism in the United States is increasing its nationalism, xenophobia, and discrimination but has also influenced worldwide perceptions of immigrants. The Global South, likewise, does not necessarily welcome foreigners and is also highly suspicious of Western influences and the ‘Americanization’ of the world.

Native born individuals in several nations believe that the sizes of their immigrant populations are significantly larger than they are in reality.³⁵ A recent telephone study of over 24,000 respondents across 15 EU nations revealed that natives felt migration to their countries should either remain the same or be decreased. Many doubted if immigrants could truly be nationals if they were not either ‘born in the country’ or had ancestral ties to it.³⁶ In these days of relatively easy migration and at a time when developed nations have declining workforces and need to

boost their working-age populations, these perceptions can pose a challenge.

Increased interactions with immigrants as well as more education, economic security, and higher socioeconomic status tend to bolster acceptance of migration.³⁷ Approval of migrants is predicated on the receiving nation’s economic need for them as well as on the level of congruence between their social and political perspectives and values and those of the host country. Xenophobia is frequently the offshoot of lack of experience, knowledge, and unfounded fears that are repeatedly fanned by the prevailing social, political, and economic climate and affect both the migrant and the destination nation. Overall, the current world view of migrants is negative, with 34% of those in the receiving nation preferring a decrease in the rate of immigration, 21% comfortable with an increase, and 22% believing that immigration should be kept at the current levels.³⁸

Regardless of public opinion, welcome, and perceptions of the ability to integrate, the host country needs immigrants to integrate fully and efficiently, and it is a shared responsibility between the host and the immigrant. The host must provide the opportunity and resources for integration in exchange for the economic benefits offered by the immigrant; the immigrant must utilize these resources and make a commitment to the host country in exchange for expected opportunities. Both must work in tandem for the success of the integration process.

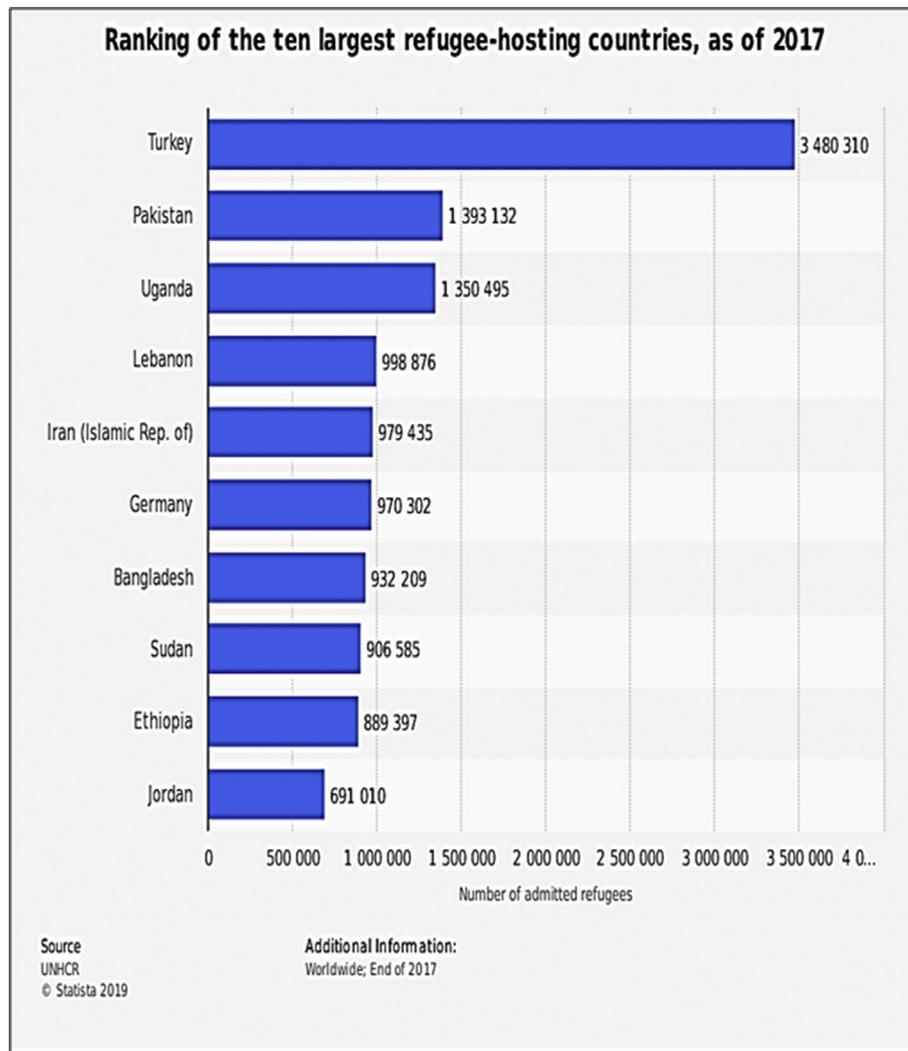


Fig. 3 – Major refugee hosting countries. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/06/eighty-four-percent-of-refugees-live-in-developing-countries/>.

Migration, ethnicity, and race

Receiving/transit nations are particularly apprehensive about how immigrants fill their needs and impact their resources. They speculate about immigrant preparedness to enter the workforce and the ability to integrate into the region and the culture. Immigrants also experience these worries.

When the movement of people is to neighboring countries, the likelihood is that there are phenotypic similarities, and by the second generation, visible differences between migrant and host become negligible. Movement across continents, on the other hand, results in the melding of genetic variations. Migrants not only affect the receiving nation's culture, they alter the racial/phenotypic profile of a nation through entry and intermarriage, often disturbing the native population. However, it is ethnicity, regardless of phenotype, which is

associated with common ancestry and culture, including language, religion, traditions, and behavioral norms that can contribute to, and challenge, a receiving nation's world view. When traditions clash, are devalued, or interfere with established patterns of interaction and behavior, fear and discrimination escalate, resulting in barriers that seem impossible to navigate.

Furthermore, cultural differences can have implications for several segments of its society, including the health profession, which could find that in delivering services, it must grapple with the complex relationship between migrant, health, healthy behaviors, health access, and health services utilization. Migrants are likely to engage in practices that are consistent with their own customs, including the extent to which they¹ utilize traditional medicine,² adhere to patterns of behavior that may be less than healthy, as in dietary habits,³ evidence confidence in contemporary medicine and practitioners,⁴ participate in preventative health care, and⁵ comply with medical directives.

Summary

This article, in providing an overview of immigration, has sought to emphasize that with increasing globalization and the inequitable distribution of resources, the flow of migrants from countries with fewer opportunities to those with more assets will both continue and increase. Declining populations in the majority of the advanced economies require that their governments establish programs that both attract migrants and ensure their economic and social integration.

Among Swiss playwright and novelist Max Frisch's many famous quotes was his reference to immigrants: 'We wanted workers, but we got people instead.' A receiving nation will find that it must be prepared to accept immigrants with all their complexities, recognizing that even as they bring their many human and personal skills and strengths that benefit the host country, their integration will change its national profile and culture. Likewise, migrants must be aware that economic integration usually requires sociocultural adaptation which will also affect their cultures. Maximal benefits to both the host and the migrant will only be realized when host country policies, programs, and services are prepared to recognize and adapt to diverse sociodemographic changes even as immigrants learn to integrate into host country patterns, and both realize that, in the final analysis, we are more similar than we are different.

Author statements

Ethical approval

No ethical approval was sought as this is a conceptual paper. Primary data were not collected from any source nor were human subjects involved in this project.

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Competing interests

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