

# WORLD IN MOTION

Global population shifts will continue to increase – and policymakers need to face up to the challenges this presents, says **Professor Stephen Castles**.

“Trends in global migration are extremely hard to forecast because of the number of unpredictable factors, including people’s reasons for deciding to migrate. Some do so because of warfare, or human rights abuse; others to better themselves. The biggest displacements of people today are caused by development: building a big dam, for instance, can cause hundreds of thousands of people to lose their land. The World Bank estimates that 10-15 million people a year are displaced through development – far more than through conflict.

We don’t yet know what impact climate change will have on migration, though most experts don’t believe it will be massive. Micro-level studies suggest people develop a range of strategies in addition to migration, and the majority of people currently experiencing climate change aren’t migrating.

One of policymakers’ biggest mistakes is to assume development will reduce migration – it actually has the opposite effect. More resources and new communication technologies make it much easier for people to move. Throughout history people have improved their lives through the human right of migration, and we believe it will continue to increase.

Yet migration is an undeveloped area in terms of global governance. There’s no equivalent of the World Bank or the World Trade Organization in migration, and we need a world body to facilitate co-operation between destination and origin countries. It is essential for policymakers to understand the drivers of migration, because all are open to policy intervention.

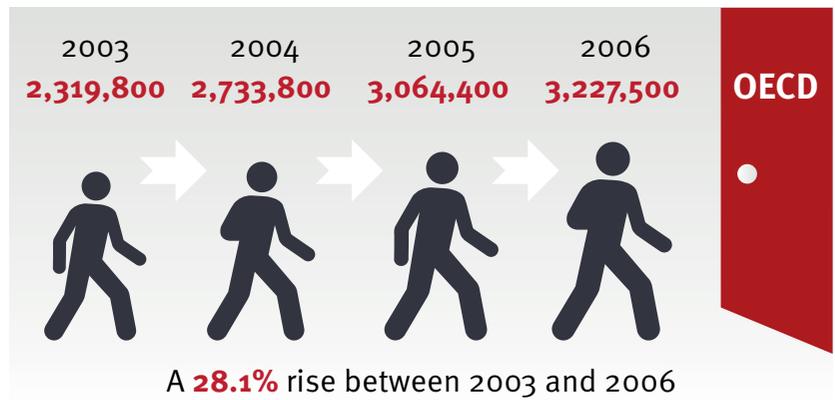
## The need for labour

The long-term assumption in Europe is that there will be a strong need for migrant labour in the future, from highly skilled personnel to medium- and low-skilled jobs. This will be driven by demographic change. Declining birth rates will increase age dependency ratios, meaning there will be fewer people of working age, and more older people will have to be supported by relatives. Britain has less of an issue because it has had a lot of immigration, which creates a younger population and higher fertility rates.

Governments don’t like to admit it but there’s a growing need for low-skilled workers in Europe’s

## THE MIGRATION CHALLENGE

Inflows of legal migrants into OECD countries\*



Source: OECD International Migration Outlook 2008 \*excludes Belgium

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## THREE BIG CHALLENGES

- » 1 Ensure policymakers understand the drivers of migration.
- » 2 Resolve the tension between the state and the market over low-skilled migrant labour.
- » 3 Create an international body to oversee a co-ordinated approach to migration.

high-wage economies, in sectors such as cleaning, construction and catering. Yet while all developed countries have systems to attract highly skilled workers, most claim there’s no need for low-skilled migrant labour.

However, there is a conflict between the state and the market, which creates jobs for people even as the state says they can’t stay. This results in the growing numbers of ‘irregular’ migrants. Britain, for example, is said to have 500,000-600,000 undocumented migrants, while the EU has between 2.8 and 8 million (0.6-1.6 per cent of its population) and the numbers are growing despite strict border controls. People break immigration restrictions because economic forces are pushing them. As long as there are jobs, people will keep coming.

The big question is whether European policymakers will face up to that need and bring in systems to allow all migration. Most employers would prefer to use legal, reliable labour rather than rely on irregular migrants. The challenge is to bring people into the system in a legal and effective manner.”

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