Global Migration of Professionals Disaggregated by Gender, Education, and Industry

Tom Theile[1], Aliakbar Akbaritabar[1], Elizabeth Jacobs[2], Daniela Perrotta[1], Carolina Coimbra Vieira[1], Emilio Zagheni[1]

[1] *Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research;* [2] *University of Connecticut*

The global movement of skilled professional migrants makes up a substantial and growing component of international migration flows. The population of highly educated migrants is growing three times faster than less-educated groups, and most immigrants to OECD countries now have a college education (Kerr et al. 2016; d'Aiglepierre et al. 2020; Walton-Roberts 2022). Yet despite its increasing significance, we lack a comprehensive global understanding of skilled, professional migration and how these patterns have changed over time. In particular, our understanding of the determinants of gender differentials in skilled migration flows remains limited.

This work provides timely and detailed global estimates of trends in the migration of professionals from 2000 to 2023. We leverage a dataset of over 600 million public LinkedIn user profiles' CV entries to construct migration trajectories to provide new insights into gender differentials in global migration flows, and how these flows are shaped by industry and education in different migration corridors. Our analysis addresses longstanding limitations in migration statistics, particularly in regions where official data remain incomplete or outdated, by combining LinkedIn-derived indicators with calibration methods based on Eurostat, IPUMS-International, and IPUMS-USA data to reduce biases associated with uneven platform penetration. Figure 1 illustrates LinkedIn penetration rates across the world between 2000 and 2023, showing the highest levels in North America, Western Europe, and Australia, moderate penetration in Central and South America, and lower rates in Africa and East Asia.

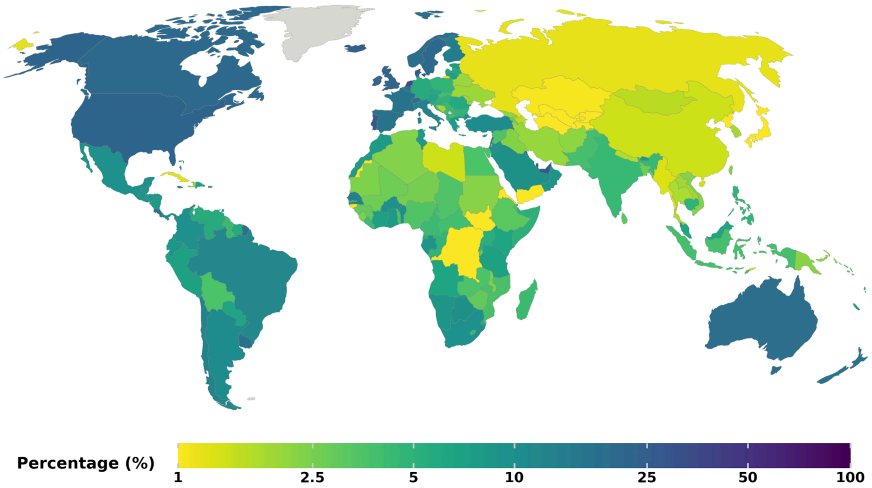

Figure 1. LinkedIn Penetration Rate, 2000-2023 (Revelio Labs data on public LinkedIn profiles and Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital)

Preliminary findings reveal a steady increase in the global stock of professional migrants over the past three decades, interrupted by disruptions linked to the 2008 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, and Australia emerged as the principal destination countries for professional migrants on LinkedIn. Persistent migration corridors such as India–United States continue to dominate global flows, while new corridors, including India–United Arab Emirates, have gained prominence. Figure 2 visualizes these global migration flows by region in 2023 through a chord diagram, highlighting Europe's dominant role in both intra- and inter-regional migration, as well as major corridors linking Asia with Northern America and Oceania. The figure also reveals important regional asymmetries, with Northern America and Northern Europe functioning as net attractors of migrants, while Southern Asia and parts of Africa remain major sending regions.

We also observed an increasing participation of women among professional migrants since 2000, although growth has slowed somewhat after 2015. Considerable variation exists across regions and migration corridors: countries such as Australia approach gender parity among migrant professionals, whereas migration systems in the Middle East remain predominantly male. Gendered migration corridors are particularly evident, with some flows strongly male-dominated, such as India–UAE, and others more female-dominated, such as China–USA.

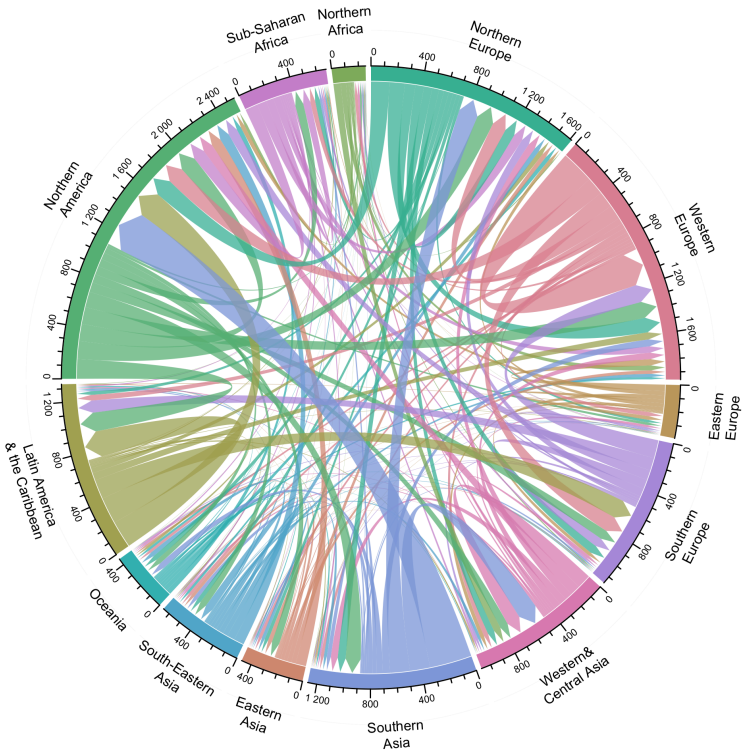

Figure 2. Estimated unweighted international migration flows in 2023 across regions. Each tick corresponds to 100,000 people. The arrow lines represent the total number of people migrating between countries within each region and are sorted in descending order. Please note that these flows are not yet weighted.

Additionally, we find that on LinkedIn, the top industries employing professional migrants globally are Manufacturing/Trade/Logistics and Consulting. Beyond offering new estimates on professional migration, this paper presents data and analysis that enrich research on the feminization of migration with greater global scale and sociodemographic detail. We find that women comprise an increasing share of professional migrants on LinkedIn since 2000, though the rate of growth has somewhat slowed since 2015. We observe some countries at gender parity among migrant professionals, especially in Europe, while other regions, such as the Middle East, primarily attract male migrants. In particular, we observe gendered migration corridors that are predominantly male (India-UAE) and predominantly female (China-USA). The preliminary estimates from LinkedIn presented in this draft offer a benchmark, which we will use for comparison with weighted data in the full analysis. We discuss the implications of the preliminary findings for understanding changing global professional migration dynamics and future labor force needs.

Overall, this work demonstrates the value of digital trace data for monitoring global professional mobility with unprecedented temporal and sociodemographic granularity. By integrating gender-, education-, and industry-specific indicators with transparent weighting procedures, the study provides a new empirical foundation for understanding changing global labor markets and migration systems, particularly in understudied regions such as Latin America, where LinkedIn penetration is comparatively high. These data offer researchers and policymakers a globally comparable resource for analyzing how skilled migration is reshaping labor markets and demographic dynamics in the twenty-first century.

References

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