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## Migration Nation



By Mark Zandi, September 27, 2015

The global immigration crisis is staggering. Waves of desperate people are flooding into Europe from shattered countries in the Middle East and Africa. Drove of Latin Americans fleeing crime and poverty are showing up at our border.

And these are only some of the 60 million people across the world who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. To grasp the magnitude of this exodus, consider that it is as if nearly the entire British nation were homeless and scrambling for a place to live.

The instinct of many is to erect a stronger fence to keep the displaced out. At least one GOP presidential candidate has proposed deporting all 11 million undocumented migrants already here, which would only add to the problem. Others even advocate reducing the number of legal immigrants who can come here each year, including the highly educated and skilled.

This is wrongheaded. Not necessarily for humanitarian reasons - although taking in our fair share of refugees seems a moral imperative that resonates with me - but for economic ones.

First, there is no feasible way to force millions of undocumented people to return to their countries of origin. This would prove extraordinarily disruptive to the wide array of American companies where these people work. Paying for this mass deportation would also cost U.S. taxpayers a bundle.

We should do the opposite, and provide a path to citizenship for the undocumented. Many of them are scared and vulnerable due to their illegal status. They are working at jobs that don't take advantage of the skills they came with or have acquired working here, sometimes for many years. As legal residents, they will be empowered to take more productive jobs and earn better pay, allowing them to spend more and pay more in taxes.

We should also allow more skilled workers to come here from overseas. If we don't, our economy's growth will slow sharply over the next quarter century, as growth in the labor force comes to a crawl. The large baby-boom generation is quickly headed toward

retirement, with some already there. Without more migrants to replace them, our biggest problem in a few years won't be unemployment, but a severe shortage of qualified workers.

The argument that immigrants take jobs from Americans is wrong. Immigrants generally either come with few skills and little education or are highly skilled and well-educated. Many immigrants thus do menial work in agriculture, construction, and services such as housekeeping and landscaping, taking jobs that otherwise would go begging. Prices for everything from fresh fruits and vegetables to child care would be higher.

Many other immigrants are among the world's best and brightest. The percentage of Ph.D.s among immigrants to the United States is nearly twice that of the general population. Immigrants file for patents at a rate three times that of other U.S. citizens. These are the scientists and researchers who drive innovation and technological change.

Restrictions on immigration are actually costing us high-quality jobs. Since U.S. businesses cannot bring workers here, they are hiring them overseas. Highly skilled and paid workers from computer programmers to engineers are providing services to us, but doing it from their home countries, and not here in the U.S., where they would like to be.

Immigrants also tend to be entrepreneurial. They start new businesses nearly a third more often than do native-born Americans, helping drive future job growth. Such risk-taking is what has historically allowed the U.S. economy to shine brighter than the rest of the global economy.

The argument that immigrants are a burden on U.S. taxpayers is specious. Taxes paid by legal and undocumented immigrants and their children dwarf the costs of the government services they use. Consistent with this, the Social Security Administration says that without immigration, the Social Security system would be on even shakier financial ground.

Concern that immigrants aren't assimilating is also misplaced. Nearly all children of foreign-born U.S. residents speak English after a few years of living here, and the percentage isn't materially different today from what it was half a century ago. The perception that immigrants are disproportionately incarcerated is also simply incorrect.

Given all this, why not at the very least give a work visa to any foreign student who graduates from an accredited U.S. university? Our schools attract the world's best, and many want to stay after they obtain their degrees but can't. If you earn a degree, you should also earn a visa.

Nothing is more important to our economic future than remaining open to the world. Sure, some of those who come will be a problem, but the overwhelming majority will make our economy stronger and our nation a better place. We should embrace all those who want to build a life here, not turn them away.

[http://www.philly.com/philly/business/20150927\\_Migration\\_Nation.html#skh7ZB8siyPr3X EZ.99](http://www.philly.com/philly/business/20150927_Migration_Nation.html#skh7ZB8siyPr3X EZ.99)