

Economic Migration in Early Modern Europe

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Human beings in pre-modern Europe were intensely mobile, despite restrictions in many places, such as those due to serfdom. On a seasonal or permanent basis, highly qualified craftsmen and ordinary workers moved to regions with higher wages, while merchants sought out more lucrative sales markets. Regional conditions thus brought about the development of certain migration systems. Mobility, however, is not always an indication of freedom. The authorities often moved serfs and convicts to remote locations, e.g. for infrastructure projects. Poverty reduced many people to wandering beggars and day laborers with inferior legal status. In these phenomena, modernity and pre-modernity are mirrored in a striking way.

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Introduction

Contrary to what one might assume about the centuries preceding the railroad, many people in early modern Europe were nonetheless highly mobile, sometimes over long distances. While pilgrimages – which were an important strand of mobility into the 16th century – became less important, labor and economic migration increased from about 1500. One reason for this was the impetus that colonial expansion (→ [Media Link #ab](#)) also gave to Europe's domestic economy. Such mobility was overlooked until the 1970s, even by historians and human geographers like Wilbur Zelinsky (1921–2013) (→ [Media Link #ac](#)). Zelinsky assumed, for instance, that significant labor migration began only with the modernizations (→ [Media Link #ad](#)) of the 19th century. Migration did in fact start to surge in the 1800s, but it was also widespread in the previous centuries. In the first half of the 16th century, nearly eight million Europeans were migrants in one way or another; in the last half of the 18th century, the figure was nearly 25 million. If one excludes from this the settlement colonization (→ [Media Link #ae](#)) within Europe and emigration (mainly to the "New World"), then in the first period a good 6.5 million, in the second period 22 million Europeans were mobile, mainly for economic reasons.¹

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These figures also comprise people who fled their home territory on account of their religion. Their relative share had peaks in the three phases 1550 to 1600, 1600 to 1650, and 1750 to 1800, with the latter including political refugees. In none of these phases, however, did the figure exceed 400,000. In other words, the number remained small compared to labor migration. Nonetheless, the long-standing research interest in the history of territorial states and in the Reformation had focused attention principally on these groups (→ [Media Link #af](#)). Religious persecution also aroused and continues to arouse more empathy than day-to-day practices. Consequently, even the contemporaries produced more source material on this subject matter, which further facilitated related research. The mundane and unassuming practice of labor migration was initially less noticeable to researchers. Certainly, after the dislocations of the Thirty Years War (→ [Media Link #ag](#)), states began to regulate migration in terms of their economic and confessional interests, and passports and other documents of legitimacy were increasingly issued, carried, and inspected. But it was

only in the course of the 19th century – with the emergence of modern nation-states, the expansion of bureaucracy, the introduction of a modern passport system, etc. – that efficient state control became possible, which also produced a much denser source material that could be used by scholars.² Prior to this, the socio-cultural affiliation(s) of people in Europe was (were) not yet determined by national categories and borders, but by estates: craft guilds, merchant guilds, nobility, clergy, peasantry. At most, boundary lines within an estate were defined according to faith. The estates thus also had transnational affiliations and corresponding mobility. Examples include the journeyman's migration or the marriage alliances of the nobility (→ Media Link #ah).³

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On the other hand, considerable portions of the European population remained excluded from such mobility. The modern concept of free movement was unknown. To understand early modern mobility, it is important to not lose sight of this fact. Large groups were rendered immobile primarily because more powerful actors – such as noble landlords, urban elites, and monasteries, etc. – required their labor. The serfs were most affected, but so were free peasants and many less privileged city dwellers, who were prohibited from moving away from the territory and often even from their birthplace. Many, however, simply ignored this.

▲ 3

In the case of labor migration, voluntary migration for economic gain must be distinguished from forced migration to nearby or more distant work locations (→ Media Link #ai). Various groups found better earning opportunities abroad, which also offered them a place – even if mostly subordinate – in the society of the estates. Among them were highly qualified artisans, a large portion of women (including many young single women) in the textile trades, less qualified farm workers, household servants, and mercenaries. Places of work had existential importance, because non-sedentary behavior, even if temporary, was associated with dishonor and dishonesty. From the late 15th century and increasingly from the middle of the 16th century, the "itinerant folk," who were in fact more and more dependent on begging in the face of general crises, were increasingly criminalized. Territorial sovereigns and the authorities of the cities (where people especially hoped to improve their lot) began to associate the wandering poor with begging, prostitution, disease, and theft, and with a drain on the coffers intended to support the resident poor. With expulsion, corporal punishment, dishonorable mutilation (even branding) and forced labor in penitentiaries (→ Media Link #aj) or their forced employment in the construction of fortifications, attempts were made to push the migrant poor at least out of one's own territory.⁴ In already highly centralized France, the royal police force of the *Maréchaussée* had been taking vagrants to the galleys since 1687. Convicted offenders were sold outright from Württemberg and Hessen, often to Venice, where they also ended up as galley slaves.⁵ In Russia, serfs were not only forced to do certain jobs in their respective home regions, but in the 18th century thousands were forcibly relocated to work in the mines and ironworks in the Ural. In the early 1700s, tens of thousands were put to work at the mouth of the Neva River, where they had to lay the foundations for the construction of St. Petersburg.⁶

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Economic migration, on the other hand, is understood as the migration of merchants and other entrepreneurial actors to promising trading and commercial centers (→ Media Link #ak), where they often established their own businesses. Those who were already established in their field no longer had to go to such lengths. For newcomers, however, this type of migration offered special opportunities for advancement. One condition for economic and labor migration was that those concerned were well informed about their earning potential in more distant places. This knowledge was disseminated in an evident way, including through the networks established with the migration systems (see below).

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Causes, motives

A key trigger of all these movements were wage and price disparities that extended across geographical space: Those who wanted (or needed) to sell their labor were drawn seasonally or permanently to regions with higher wages. Therefore, some people migrated on a seasonal basis, while others chose to remain at their destinations. Merchants were usually attracted to markets with higher prices. Conversely, many commercial entrepreneurs – especially in labour-intensive sectors such as textile production – were happy to settle in low-wage regions. The goods produced there at lower costs could then be sold at high prices, in high-wage regions if possible.

▲ 6

Mobility was encouraged by a number of factors. Operating at the macro level was the wage and price differential that extended from southwestern to northeastern Europe from at least the late Middle Ages and grew more pronounced from the 16th century onward. Part of the disparity was due to the global distribution of precious metal deposits: At that time, the richest gold mines were located in sub-Saharan West Africa, from where gold reached North Africa and Southern Europe via caravan routes. Silver mining also flourished in Central Europe beginning in the Middle Ages, but was surpassed many times over from the 1540s onward by silver mining in Mexico and Peru (→ Media Link #al).⁷ Gold also began to flow to Europe from Brazil in the 1690s. Money coined with the precious metals from the Americas and the increase in book-entry money (held in the accounts of European merchants) led to the growth of the volume of money and thus to a gradual inflation – the so-called "Price Revolution" – that lasted until the 19th century. The silver and gold from the Americas flowed eastward by trade from Spain and Portugal, and thus, with some delay, inflation also reached middle and eastern Europe and (with even more delay) Asia. Lagging somewhat behind prices, wages also increased. Many workers from more eastern regions of Europe took advantage of the resulting disparity by seeking wage employment further west.

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At the meso level, urban growth was the most important factor driving labor migration. Not only the cost of living, but wages too were generally higher in urban areas, which encouraged the in-migration from rural locations. In the 15th and 16th centuries, prominent examples include Rome or Naples. In the 16th century, the "Price Revolution" turned Iberian cities such as Seville, Madrid, or Lisbon into major magnets.⁸ In the 17th and 18th centuries, as the European centers of trade and commerce shifted to the northwest, London and the many Dutch cities grew, most notably Amsterdam.⁹ The founding of St. Petersburg should be seen in this context: It was literally dug out of the swampy ground as the port connecting Russia with this economic region, which was growing steadily due to maritime trade and colonial expansion. Within the Holy Roman Empire (→ Media Link #am), the shift of urban centers becomes evident with the population losses that the previously dominant South German cities suffered in the Thirty Years' War. Cities like Augsburg, Ulm or Nuremberg did not reach their former size again until the 19th century. Hamburg, by contrast, grew from 40,000 to about 75,000 inhabitants in the period from 1600 to 1650; Paris grew from 100,000 to 580,000 inhabitants between 1500 and 1800, and London from 40,000 to 865,000. In Naples, Europe's largest Mediterranean city, the figure rose from 150,000 to nearly 430,000 over the same period.¹⁰ To all cities, more women than men migrated, which is explained by female employment opportunities. Women worked as housemaids, market women, seamstresses, laundresses etc.¹¹

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In addition to the demand for labor in urban trades and services, the high mortality rate in all large cities of the pre-modern era spurred permanent in-migration. Estimates suggest that there was excess mortality in all cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants. Among the causes were cramped and densely occupied dwellings, poor drinking water, and, for the more impoverished, generally worse nutrition than in the countryside.¹²

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Most of those who migrated from the city had another city as their destination. Migration to the countryside, on the other hand, was quite negligible, at least in Western Europe. This was due, among other things, to the process of land concentration in the hands of agricultural businesses that had begun in many regions and the subsequent squeezing out of smaller farmers. Beginning in the late Middle Ages, it was largely spurred by the rise of the cloth trades, which led to the expansion of pastureland due to the demand for sheep's wool. Sheep farmers in Italy, Spain, and England paid landowners – mostly nobles, churches, and monasteries – higher rents than subsistence farmers could afford for their small- to medium-sized farmsteads. In some regions, especially in England, this process of "enclosures" was accelerated by the Reformation: The Crown confiscated the land of the churches and monasteries and sold it to courtiers or investors. Ignoring the customary rights of the small hereditary peasants, they transformed their new estates into large-scale agrarian holdings.¹³ The former tenants who had become landless now had to find work as day laborers on these agricultural estates or in the urban trades. Here, the woolen cloth trades deserve special mention. It was in this context that Charles Tilly remarked that 18th century Western Europe – unlike Eastern Europe, and unlike comparably developed regions in Southern and East Asia – had already been characterized by the proletarianization of large segments of the population. The latter, in turn, were forced to become increasingly mobile.¹⁴

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In the less urbanized territories of the Holy Roman Empire, migrant labor was widespread in rural areas. Villagers relied on itinerant trade and services, whereas those roaming the countryside, who were often criminalized by the authorities, were better able to escape policing. Hundreds of thousands eked out a living in this often lifelong subsistence migration, as "peddlers, scavengers (rags, glass, ashes), scissor grinders, tinkers, sellers of remedies or other medical-magical 'service providers', and entertainers". Their share of the

total population may have been between 5 and 10 percent.¹⁵ They were marginalized from the "respectable" population for a wide variety of reasons, such as being born out of wedlock, suffering from an unsightly physical ailment, having a conviction, or simply because of their family's poverty. They also included crippled soldiers and numerous agricultural and construction workers who could not find employment during the winter. Many were members of the Jewish and Roma and Sinti minorities, among whom poverty was especially widespread because of permanent discrimination. Depending on the circumstances, a high percentage switched back and forth between odd jobs, begging, and subsistence crime. For example, the siblings Maria, Jakob and Philipp Hörl from Mondsee in Austria sought work abroad as children because their parents could not support them. They alternated between begging and honest work, during which the girl was sexually harassed. Their travels brought them to Bavaria, Styria, Carinthia and finally to Salzburg. Here they got caught up in the throes of the prosecution system which, between 1675 and 1681, ruled against hundreds of beggars and vagrants on the basis of a new "Policeyordnung." These regulations had been issued under the archbishop Maximilian Gandolf von Kuenberg (1622–1687) (→ Media Link #an), among other things to suppress "Bettelunwesen" (mendicancy). More than 130 mostly juveniles were convicted and executed, many for "witchcraft." The Hörl siblings managed to make it out alive.¹⁶

▲ 11

To a certain extent, this subsistence or rural poverty migration was perpetuated by agriculture. After all, this is a sector with highly fluctuating labor demand and is therefore particularly dependent on high labor mobility. The seasonal peaks in demand for sowing or harvesting caused strong migrations at the micro and macro levels, and also meant unemployment for many during the remaining months. However, because of the urgency of the work, especially during the harvest season, comparatively good wages were offered under certain circumstances.

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Spaces

The concept of migration systems allows for a robust description of labor mobility in spatial terms. Such systems formed in particular spaces according to specific patterns that were stabilized by professional as well as family networks and dense communication, usually over generations. The systems were designed partly for short-distance migration and partly for long-distance migration spanning hundreds of kilometers. In this context, permanent departures and temporary or seasonal movements often coexisted.¹⁷

▲ 13

For the century between 1650 and 1750, historical research has identified four major European inland migration systems:¹⁸

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the so-called North Sea system, in which mainly the Netherlands, but also England, attracted labor from more southern and eastern regions (→ Media Link #ao);

an Iberian-French system in which labor migrated to Spain and, in some cases, Portugal, mainly from rural central France;

the Baltic Sea region system, with a complex overlap of commercial migration between the port cities (→ Media Link #ap), 1500–1750, expert migration, as with the Walloon and German mining specialists in demand in Sweden, and in-migration from the hinterland to the ports.

In the fourth system, sought-after specialists (mainly craftsmen, but also many nobles) from Central Europe went to Russia, mostly on a permanent basis.

This fourth internal system was atypical: It targeted a region with generally lower wage levels (unlike, for example, the Iberian-French system) and one that otherwise recruited mostly agricultural settlers from Central Europe by offering them land.¹⁹ A fifth system should not be overlooked: early emigration to the Americas, which was directed primarily to the northern subcontinent even before the start of the mass migration of the 19th century.

▲ 15

This fifth system was not only fueled by Great Britain, which dominated most of the North American East Coast, but also by German-speaking territories. Many people there were drawn by the prospects of owning their own land and greater freedom of worship, as well as by generally higher wage levels.

The fifth system was, in a sense, a transatlantic extension of the North Sea system. In the Americas, Europeans preferred to settle in the climatically temperate regions.²⁰ The tropical humid areas were lucrative for the production of goods such as sugar or tobacco, but epidemiologically hazardous. As a result, the European contract laborers and convicts – so-called "indentured servants" or "engagés" – who were deployed there from the 1620s onwards were exposed to higher mortality rates. The forced migration of enslaved people from Africa to colonies such as Jamaica and Saint-Domingue increased dramatically only from the 1680s onwards, with the massive expansion of sugar cane cultivation in these colonies. One reason was that people from sub-Saharan Africa have better natural defenses against tropical diseases (→ Media Link #aq) such as malaria (→ Media Link #ar) and yellow fever. Moreover, the hiring of white "servants" became more difficult as labor demand and wages in Europe rose again after the end of the Thirty Years' War. Until the 1820s, over a period of more than 400 years, four times as many displaced Africans arrived in the Americas as did free migrants from Europe; it was not until the 1840s that the latter constituted the majority.²¹

▲ 16

In Europe, the North Sea system remained stable after 1750. At the same time, the ever-growing metropolises of Paris, London, and Madrid incorporated the agrarian hinterland into new, urban-centered systems. On the Mediterranean coast (→ Media Link #as), migration patterns formed from the hinterland to Valencia, Barcelona and Marseille, and from the Alps and the Apennines to the cities of the Po Valley and to Rome. Separate systems also emerged around Moscow and St Petersburg during this period.

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Soldiers and sailors

Roughly between 1860 and 1914, compulsory military service (→ Media Link #at) was introduced in most European countries and was largely abolished again (→ Media Link #au) following the Cold War at the end of the 20th century. The idea of patriotism toward one's own nation was increasingly associated with military service. This modern perspective has long led researchers to disregard early modern war service as gainful employment. However, the original German term "Kriegshandwerk" (soldiering) bears witness to the sober view of this profession, where one could offer one's services to any wartime ruler (even foreign), preferably to the highest bidder. Many soldiers were therefore mercenaries. The associated notion of dishonor goes back a long time, but did not predominate until the modern era. This also applies to the nobility and high aristocracy, from which the early modern armies recruited their officers.

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Among the most significant types of labor migration, soldiers and sailors stand out as the largest group in numerical terms. Seafarers accounted for about one-tenth of the total. With the expansion of armies and navies (→ Media Link #av), the number of land and naval combatants in Europe grew from about one million in the 1630s to two million in the 1780s; about half of these were permanently mobile. If one adds to this the soldiers' entourage – wives and children (→ Media Link #aw), sutlers, servants, prostitutes, etc. – the number increases by at least 50 percent.

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The majority of the soldiers or mercenaries were recruited from the poor and most impoverished groups of the population. These included journeymen, farmhands, vagrants and beggars, the lower classes of peasants or landless tenants and day laborers. Occasionally, recruits came from the workhouses and penitentiaries. Regions of origin were often low-yield areas, such as mountainous Switzerland or the poorer parts of Ireland.²² Skilled captains could rise to the rank of war contractor if they assembled entire companies from such regions in one go and then offered them, under their command, to a ruler. This role otherwise was largely carried out by nobles.²³ As a rule, it was not the nation but the denomination that demanded loyalty. The fact that many armies in the Thirty Years' War were confessionally mixed is more an indication of the collapse of established structures. In line with the prevailing patterns, Catholic soldiers from Ireland and Switzerland, for example, preferred to serve Catholic powers that could afford mercenaries from such impoverished regions. The Vatican's Swiss Guard is one remnant of this. Confessional loyalty was even more pronounced among the French Reformed, while Swiss Calvinists favored serving in the Netherlands.²⁴ The Catholic Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736) (→ Media Link #ax) also initially wanted to enlist as an officer with Louis XIV of France (1638–1715) (→ Media Link #ay). After being rejected, he turned to the Spanish court and to the Habsburg Emperor Leopold I (1640–1705) (→ Media Link #az). Under Leopold, he rose to become a successful general in the wars (→ Media Link #bo) against the Ottoman Empire – and a hero of the Habsburg Empire.

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Many regiments were on the move even in peacetime. Since there were still very few barracks, they were quartered in villages and towns, which, in turn, had to contribute to the soldiers' subsistence. Once the resources were exhausted, they moved on. Quartering was also a means of repression. In France, for example, Huguenot communities (→ Media Link #b1) were especially burdened by it from the time of Louis XIV. Smaller rulers (notably in Germany and Italy) hired out their troops in peacetime to states at war in order to cover the high cost of their upkeep or to create alliances (→ Media Link #b2). Even in peacetime, the privations of life in a state of constant deployment led in some armies to a mortality rate of between 10 and 20 percent per year.²⁵ The "Price Revolution" caused long-term declines in real wages in this occupation as well. It was still possible to have a distinguished career, but only at the extreme risks of early death or disability.²⁶

▲ 21

Rural-urban migration

In numerical terms, migration to cities ranks second. In the 16th and 18th centuries, some nine million people, respectively, moved to large cities (→ Media Link #b3) in Europe. In the more troubled 17th century, the figure was around six million (places with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants are not recorded).²⁷ This phenomenon is vividly illustrated by the example of the strongly urbanized Netherlands (→ Media Link #b4). The "urban graveyard effect," i.e. the persistent excess mortality in the larger cities mentioned above, was a factor there as well. It was about 10 percent a year in Dordrecht from 1550 to 1700, and "for all Dutch cities combined at least 5 percent. Only after 1850 was return to natural growth possible." Intense migration not only made up for the population gaps caused by untimely deaths, but led to population expansion. The number of townspeople not born in the town was correspondingly high: In Amsterdam and Leiden, around the year 1650, it was 40 percent. In the Netherlands overall, the share was 8 percent, but slowly declined again after 1650. In the second half of the 19th century, the proportion of foreign-born was less than 2 percent nationwide. This was a consequence of the migration barriers created by the modern nation-states and the great advances in medicine and hygiene.²⁸

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The migrants (→ Media Link #b5) belonged to all the professions that were represented in the city: brickmakers, bricklayers, craftsmen of all kinds, boatmen, merchants, scribes, textile bleachers and dyers, many female garment workers, chimney sweeps, itinerant merchants, etc. The largest group was probably made up of servants, who were largely female. In the Netherlands in the 17th and 18th centuries, they amounted to five to six percent of the urban population.²⁹

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In some places, skilled workers were attracted with privileges – for example, in 1657, in the Paris neighborhood of Faubourg Saint-Antoine (→ Media Link #b6), the king exempted artisans from the master craftsman requirement and from inspections by Parisian jurymen. This further encouraged the settlement of many German artisans (especially cabinetmakers and engravers), who enjoyed a good reputation in France.³⁰ Even without such interventions, ethnic or professional groups often settled in specific neighborhoods, such as the shoemakers and metalworkers in Toledo, who came from the French Massif Central. In Madrid, many French and Italians lived near the hospitals and churches built by their communities.³¹ Trading cities such as Cadiz attracted thousands of merchants from abroad until the loss of the American colonies; in Cadiz they were mainly Italians and French, who accordingly also recruited much of their domestic staff from their respective homelands. Their numbers exceeded those of their masters many times over.

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Very few of the 25 million or so who moved to the larger European cities between 1500 and 1800 actually achieved social advancement. After a few years in the metropolis, many younger people went back to their hometowns anyway, where their savings made it easier to start a family. In fact, young unmarried people in northwestern Europe have demonstrated high labor mobility and early independence from the parental home since the 15th and 16th centuries. Younger peasant children with no prospects of taking over the farm were expected to fend for themselves – and at the earliest opportunity. Consequently, in the already heavily urbanized Netherlands, in England, Flanders and the Rhineland, a labor market and corresponding training opportunities developed at an early stage. In the Netherlands around 1600, the literacy rate (→ Media Link #b7), as an indicator of competence, was already 50 percent for men and over 30 percent for women. Young women also therefore gained more freedom in choosing a spouse, improved premarital bargaining power, and, finally, better standing in marriage. Good educational and earning prospects caused the average age at marriage to climb in such regions, and the age gap between the bride and groom to decrease. By contrast, in more traditional societies, the bride was much younger than the groom, and marriages were usually arranged by the parents. The number of people living permanently without

a spouse also grew in northwestern Europe. These characteristics, whose development should be understood against a background of widespread mobility, have been summarized by the concept of the "European marriage pattern" (although it is not applicable to the whole of Europe).³²

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The vast group of all these migrant workers from the countryside was highly stratified. Poverty or even destitution forced many into migrant work. For example, in villages of French regions such as Brittany, the Limousin, or Burgundy, up to one tenth of the inhabitants did not live permanently in the village. According to the tax rolls, these were the worst off; in times of crisis, their share could grow to as much as one-third.³³ At the same time, there were families who were able to greatly improve their circumstances through migration. In the growth phase after the Thirty Years' War, for example, many men from the linen regions of Westphalia combined seasonal work in the Netherlands (the "Hollandgang") with trade. As "Kiepenträger" (pannier carriers) (→ Media Link #b8) they took linen fabrics along with them to sell in the Netherlands. This resulted in noticeable prosperity especially in the Tecklenburger Land and in the northern Münsterland.

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Migration in agriculture and fishing

Whether asparagus cutting, strawberry picking, fruit or grape harvesting: Today, as in the past, seasonal peaks in demand for labor occur in certain agricultural sectors, which can only be met with labor migration. In the period from 1600 to 1650 alone, there may have been as many as 1.2 million seasonal workers in European agriculture.³⁴ For instance, grain harvesting – reaping and threshing – which is largely mechanized today, was very labor-intensive until the 19th century and drew many day laborers each year to growing regions such as Castile, Brittany, or the Thuringian Basin (one modern combine harvester replaces about 10,000 farm workers). Since many crops are harvested earlier in more southerly regions of Europe, many of these farm laborers would slowly move northward from August to late fall, from one estate to the next, in order to maximize earning opportunities.

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The highly developed intensive agriculture of the Netherlands (dairy farming, vegetables, tulips, etc.) also attracted workers. From Northwest Germany, there were about 17,000 "Hollandgänger" (itinerant workers to Holland) (→ Media Link #b9) around 1700 alone, who worked there as reapers, peat cutters or in the also seasonal herring fishery; around 1790, there were as many as 30,000. In order to allow men to be absent from their own farm, complex inter-family divisions of labor were organized. This can be observed not only in Westphalia, but also in rural Ireland, from where men departed seasonally for England.³⁵

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Especially in the more eastern regions of Europe, the nobility and feudal lords intensified grain production for export to the West from the 16th to the 19th century, and consequently strengthened serfdom ("second serfdom").³⁶ They sought to prevent the founding of new towns and to inhibit the growth of existing ones, as these offered runaway serfs a hiding place and a livelihood. In other words, cities made people free, or at least a little freer. Cities, which were more independent of the crown and nobility, were also more likely to protect runaways from the grasp of their former landlords and vassals.³⁷ In rural Russia (→ Media Link #bb), which was sparsely populated, labor was so scarce that many landowners took in those who had escaped from neighboring estates. Some even offered incentives for workers to run away. This practice appears to have been so widespread that the landowners in question were subject to draconian punishments, up to and including the death penalty in the 18th century.³⁸

▲ 29

Craftsman and expert migration

From the 14th and 15th centuries, the guild constitutions of many regions established compulsory migration for craftsman assistants (→ Media Link #bc). Master craftsmen usually trained more assistants than they could employ, and the number of masters in any one place was limited. With the migration requirement, it was possible to reduce the number of assistants. Artisan pilgrimage also promoted the exchange of expertise and new techniques across Europe. This became more important when the old and essential crafts – bakers, butchers, tailors, shoemakers – were joined by the "fine and new mechanical arts (painters, goldsmiths (→ Media Link #bd) and instrument makers or printers, watchmakers and gunsmiths)."³⁹ Thus, the migration of craftsmen encompassed much more

than the journey of young craftsmen that is still common among some "trades" today. It ranged from the "handing over of the son of a village craftsman to the workshop in the next larger town" to the "trans-European migrations of goldsmiths." Moreover, there was the "targeted poaching of particularly gifted and skilled craftsmen by towns and sovereigns," which from the 16th century became "an instrument of mercantilist economic policy" and also targeted renowned master craftsmen. Mining and metallurgical experts (→ Media Link #be) were also in demand beyond regional borders. Some proto-industrial regions feared that technical secrets would be betrayed and responded by banning migration.⁴⁰

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The "new arts" also included the dyeing of cotton and silk fabrics with exotic colorants such as indigo, which were not available in Europe in larger quantities until the 18th century. The experts here were in similarly high demand and tremendously mobile throughout the centers of the textile industry, as shown, for example, by the passport registers of the Prussian consulate in Marseille. There, Armenian cotton dyers and printers from the Turkish-Persian border region had already introduced the techniques in the 1660s. The city became a European center of this sector and attracted professionals into the 19th century.⁴¹ For example, Abraham Louis Olivier and Daniel Henry Pellaton, workers from Neuchâtel in Switzerland (then a Prussian exclave), traveled from Marseille to Aix-en-Provence in 1799; Pellaton intended to continue to Nantes. In the following year, a dyer and two apprentices from Berlin went to Lyon via Marseille. Others – Germans, French – came to Marseille via Amsterdam, Venice or Smyrna. All these cities were centers of cotton and silk processing.

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These examples demonstrate the extraordinary mobility of skilled workers, and also disprove still widespread notions of institutionally imposed barriers to innovation in the skilled trades. If one follows the liberal critique going back to the 19th century, guilds were primarily devoted to the interests of the established masters (and their sons), tended to be monopolistic, and were economically inefficient as a whole. Recent work has shown that they operated in a much more open manner. Louis XIV even forced the inclusion of women in some crafts with a view to a general increase in commercial capacity. In many places (especially in larger cities such as Frankfurt am Main or Paris) guilds set annual quotas to ensure the influx of master craftsmen from elsewhere. At times, this was imposed by the sovereign, as in the case of Gent.⁴²

▲ 32

Economic migration

The often far-flung migrations of merchants and other entrepreneurs show how much the categories mentioned here overlapped. They include urban-urban and rural-urban movements as well as short- and long-distance migrations; in many cases, they cannot be clearly separated from those of craftsmen and even less from confessional migrations. Merchant migration to a city usually was aimed at permanent settlement. More humble actors without capital of their own also roamed rural areas as itinerant merchants (→ Media Link #bf). Before the expansion of modern retail trade, the country side depended on vendors for a variety of goods: odds and ends, printed matter, devotional objects, household goods, stimulants such as coffee and tobacco, etc.⁴³

▲ 33

From the late Middle Ages until the 17th century, merchants of common regional origin settled in distant cities were usually united corporatively in "*nationes*." Often they had their own building (even their own jurisdiction) and were typically represented by a consul. Examples would be the Hanseatic Steelyard in London (→ Media Link #bg), the Fondaco of the German merchants in Venice (→ Media Link #bh), or the Old English Court in Moscow (→ Media Link #bi). In the final decades of the 17th century, these corporate structures, and the massive trade fairs, lost their importance. With increasingly reliable postal and transport routes (→ Media Link #bj) and harmonization of trade laws and practices, as well as increasingly efficient payment techniques and cargo insurance, even smaller players were able to enter long-distance trade. The more successful of these were organized into family networks, with sons, nephews, or sons-in-law settling permanently in distant commercial centers (→ Media Link #bk) of strategic importance. In these locations, marriage alliances with established families strengthened their legal status and networks, and they contributed to the cosmopolitan character of these merchant elites.⁴⁴

▲ 34

For British and Dutch merchants, the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean Sea were strategically vital for trade. The Spanish and Portuguese ports, through which one could also supply the extremely lucrative markets of Ibero-America were also important for Germans, Dutch, French and British.⁴⁵ Ports like Bordeaux or Porto attracted wine importers from the north. For the distribution of Mediterranean fruits and olive oil, merchant families from the Italian Alps established their networks in German and Dutch cities. From the French Alpine town of Barcelonnette, itinerant traders moved seasonally over generations as far as Spain. Some of the Germans and French settled in Mexico and Peru in the late 18th and 19th centuries – places, in other words, where the "Price Revolution" made particularly high profits possible.⁴⁶ From proto-industrial areas of the Holy Roman Empire, merchants went to the major ports of western Europe to sell the products of their region: linen from Westphalia (→ Media Link #bl) and Silesia, metal goods from the Bergisches Land, high-quality Bohemian glass, clocks from the Black Forest. The glass merchants from Bohemia, who had been established in many Spanish, Portuguese and Ottoman cities since about 1700, developed a distinct mobility pattern. Because of the feudal order in force there until 1781, they were only allowed to marry within the seigniorship of their birth. Consequently, they established families in their small places of origin and always traveled back to these locations at the turn of the year (using the opportunity to draw up balance sheets with business partners there).⁴⁷

▲ 35

As a result, seemingly remote and land-locked villages were closely linked to global trading cities such as Amsterdam, London or Cadiz. A substantial amount of a wide range of goods (but above all linen) went to West Africa under British, Portuguese or French flags, as barter for the purchase of slaves. The main protagonists of this export business did not come from cities, but from the non-guild trades in the countryside. At first, there was often the Holland trade in linen or a modest itinerant trade in glass. But in places like London or Bordeaux, some of these merchants rose to the first ranks of the great shipowners and financiers, such as the Schröders (→ Media Link #bn) from Quakenbrück in Westphalia towards the end of the 18th century, who were soon among the leading merchant bankers in London.⁴⁸

▲ 36

Those who did not primarily want to sell, but to produce, tended not to go to the West, but to the low-wage regions in the East. For instance, the Nuremberg textile entrepreneurs of the 16th century partially relocated their linen production to Silesia and Lusatia.⁴⁹

▲ 37

While many Huguenot merchants went to the tolerant cities of London and Amsterdam after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (→ Media Link #bo) in 1685, as religious refugees they do not entirely lie within the scope of this article. In any event, the small group of these French Calvinists that settled in Hamburg were discriminated against by Lutheran orthodoxy until well into the following century in much the same way as they had been under Louis XIV. This demonstrates both the importance of confession (→ Media Link #bp), but also that economic interests could even outweigh religious discrimination. In Hamburg, the Huguenots very profitably sold French colonial goods (sugar, coffee), and also established a shipyard there, which primarily supplied the French *Compagnie des Indes*. In Hamburg, they were furthermore able to buy linen and other labor-intensive export products manufactured in German territories more cheaply than in France.⁵⁰

▲ 38

The most successful of these mobile cosmopolitan elites both created and controlled commodity chains that linked production sites and markets in Europe, the Americas, West Africa, and, in some cases, Asia. In many ways, their entrepreneurial ventures more closely resemble those of the globalized 21st century than of the 19th and 20th centuries, which were more mired in national and imperial boundaries.

▲ 39

Outlook

Today, historical research on migration permits transcultural comparisons of the processes described here: either synchronously with other regions of the world or diachronically with similar processes in other eras. Work and migration are constitutive practices in all cultures, which is why many categories and parameters lend themselves to methodologically robust comparisons. This allows for a more critical and reflective view, including of the present. For example, for the 18th century, one can compare the influx of textile

workers into the proto-industrial export regions of central Europe and India, or brickmakers in 18th and 19th century northwestern Europe with those in 19th and 20th century India, or seasonal agricultural workers in contemporary Europe with those in pre-modern Europe.⁵¹

▲ 40

From such perspectives, modes of production and forms of work organization in South Asia, for example, appear much less exotic or backward than they are often still portrayed. This, in turn, puts into perspective the image of Europe (especially Western Europe) as an area in which individual freedoms were developed at an early stage. Even today, many Europeans work under coercion. Subject to economic pressure, especially in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, they accept poorly paid and highly stressful work, e.g. in the German agricultural and construction industries, or in the meat industry. Over the centuries, this has always gone hand in hand with macroeconomic and political processes, such as the increase in the acreage of farms involved in intensive agriculture (fruit, wine). In Rheinland-Pfalz, for instance, the average size in intensive farming was about five hectares in 1960; by 2007, it had increased almost sixfold. The farms in the more extensive agrarian areas of eastern Germany are even larger. All of them can only be managed with migrant workers, whose recruitment has increased since the eastward expansion of the European Union. The agricultural sector in Germany alone employs about 300,000 seasonal workers annually.⁵² In Poland, which has become a catchment area for such workers, migrants are now arriving from Ukraine. These phenomena, which are fueled by large economic disparities between countries as well as by social and, in some cases, legal inequality, bring modernity and pre-modernity face to face.

▲ 41

Klaus Weber (→ Media Link #bq)

Appendix

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- Economy / Trade (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/backgrounds/economy-trade/philipp-roessner-economy-trade>)

Link #al





- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/eine-silbermine-in-potosi-bolivien>
A silver mine in Potosí, Bolivia

Link #am

- Reich (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/crossroads/political-spaces/joachim-whaley-reich>)

Link #an

- Maximilian Gandolf von Kuenberg (1622–1687) VIAF  (<http://viaf.org/viaf/49956362>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/115524991>) ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd115524991.html>)

Link #ao



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/tueoetten-figur-von-anne-daubenspeck-focke-1988-in-mettingen>
Tüötten statue in Mettingen

Link #ap

- Early Modern Ports (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/crossroads/courts-and-cities/catia-antunes-early-modern-ports-1500-1750>)

Link #aq

- Global Health (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/theories-and-methods/knowledge-transfer/walter-bruchhausen-global-health-in-the-colonial-era-the-expansion-of-european-medicine>)

Link #ar



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/tasche-zur-aufbewahrung-von-chinarinde-peru-177720131785>
Bag for storing cinchona bark, Peru, 1777–1785

Link #as

- Mediterraneum (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/crossroads/border-regions/manuel-borutta-mediterraneum>)

Link #at

- Conscription (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/alliances-and-wars/war-as-an-agent-of-transfer/conscription/kevin-linch-conscription>)

Link #au



- http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/copy_of_conscription-map-of-the-world-2009
Conscription map of the world 2009

Link #av

- Transfer of Military Organizations and Institutions (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/alliances-and-wars/alliances-and-treaties/philip-martin-rink-transfer-of-military-organizations-and-institutions>)

Link #aw



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/daniel-chodowiecki-das-bettelnde-soldatenweib-1764>

Daniel Chodowiecki, A Soldier's Wife Begging, 1764

Link #ax

- Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736) VIAF [☞](http://viaf.org/viaf/64800019) (http://viaf.org/viaf/64800019) DNB [☞](http://d-nb.info/gnd/118605941) (http://d-nb.info/gnd/118605941) ADB/NDB [☞](http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118605941.html) (http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118605941.html)



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/prince-eugene-of-savoy-166320131736>
Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736)

Link #ay

- Louis XIV of France (1638–1715) VIAF [☞](http://viaf.org/viaf/268675767) (http://viaf.org/viaf/268675767) DNB [☞](http://d-nb.info/gnd/118816829) (http://d-nb.info/gnd/118816829) ADB/NDB [☞](http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118816829.html) (http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118816829.html)



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/louis-xiv-of-france-163820131715>
Louis XIV of France (1638–1715)

Link #az

- Emperor Leopold I (1640–1705) VIAF [☞](http://viaf.org/viaf/54156429) (http://viaf.org/viaf/54156429) DNB [☞](http://d-nb.info/gnd/118571869) (http://d-nb.info/gnd/118571869) ADB/NDB [☞](http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118571869.html) (http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118571869.html)

Link #bo

- Ottoman History of South-East Europe (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/models-and-stereotypes/from-the-turkish-menace-to-orientalism/markus-koller-ottoman-history-of-south-east-europe>)

Link #b1

- Confessional Migration of the Huguenots (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/europe-on-the-road/confessional-migration/ute-lotz-heumann-confessional-migration-of-the-reformed-the-huguenots>)

Link #b2

- Alliances and Treaties (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/alliances-and-wars/alliances-and-treaties/mike-rapport-alliances-and-treaties-cooperation-and-exchange-in-war-and-peace>)

Link #b3

- Population of important European cities around 1750, in: Digitaler Atlas zur Geschichte Europas / Digital Atlas on the History of Europe, © IEG-Mainz/Andreas Kunz [☞](http://www.ieg-ego.eu) (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu>http://www.atlas-europa.de/t04/bevoelkerung/europ_staedte/map-e_bev_Eu1750_Stadt_dt.htm)

Link #b4

- The "Dutch Century" (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/models-and-stereotypes/the-dutch-century/dagmar-freist-the-dutch-century>)

Link #b5



- (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/gerrit-adriaensz-berckheyde-the-great-market-in-harleem-with-st-bavos-church-in-the-background-1696>)
Gerrit Adriaensz Berckheyde, The Great Market in Harleem with St. Bavo's Church in the Background, 1696

Link #b6



- (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/de/mediainfo/cour-du-faubourg-saint-antoine>)
Cour du Faubourg Saint-Antoine

Link #b7

- Literacy (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/backgrounds/literacy/robert-a-houston-literacy>)

Link #b8



- (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/kippenkerl>)
Pannier Lad

Link #b9



- (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/hollandgaenger-in-uelsen>)
Itinerant traders in Uelsen

Link #bb

- Russia and Europe (1547–1917) (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/europe-and-the-world/knowledge-transfer/martin-aust-russia-and-europe-1547-1917>)

Link #bc



- (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/kundschaft-fuer-einen-tischlergesellen>)
"Kundschaft" for a journeyman carpenter

Link #bd



- (<http://www.ieg-ego.euhttps://digital.slub-dresden.de/werkansicht/df/7451/63>)
Der Goldtschmid, in: Hans Sachs, Eygentliche Beschreibung Aller Stände auff Erden 1568, Digitalisat: SLUB [↗](#)

Link #be



- (<http://www.ieg-ego.euhttps://digital.slub-dresden.de/werkansicht/df/7451/219>)
Der Bergknapp, in: Hans Sachs, Eygentliche Beschreibung Aller Stände auff Erden 1568, Digitalisat: SLUB [↗](#)

Link #bf



- (<http://www.ieg-ego.euhttps://digital.slub-dresden.de/werkansicht/df/7451/77>)
Der Krämer, in: Hans Sachs, Eygentliche Beschreibung Aller Stände auff Erden 1568, Digitalisat: SLUB [↗](#)

Link #bg



- (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/steelyard-london>)
Hanseatic Steelyard in London 1667

Link #bh



- (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/fondaco-dei-tedeschi-in-venice>)
Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venice

Link #bi



- (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/alter-englischer-hof-in-moskau>)
Old English Court in Moscow

Link #bj



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/european-postal-routes-in-1563>
European Postal Routes in 1563

Link #bk

- Trading Companies (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/european-networks/economic-networks/mark-haerberlein-trading-companies>)

Link #bl



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/torhaus-der-leinenlegge-in-tecklenburg>
Gatehouse of the Leinenlegge in Tecklenburg

Link #bn



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/christian-matthias-schroeder>
Christian Matthias Schröder (1742–1821)

Link #bo



- <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/mediainfo/henry-iv-of-france-signs-the-edict-of-nantes>
Henry IV of France signs the "Edict of Nantes"

Link #bp

- Confessional Migration (<http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/europe-on-the-road/confessional-migration/ulrich-niggemann-confessional-migration>)

Link #bq

- Klaus Weber [VIAF](http://viaf.org/viaf/53669728) [↗](http://viaf.org/viaf/53669728) (<http://viaf.org/viaf/53669728>) [DNB](http://d-nb.info/gnd/137277504) [↗](http://d-nb.info/gnd/137277504) (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/137277504>) [ADB/NDB](http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd137277504.html) [↗](http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd137277504.html)
(<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd137277504.html>)