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**CONSEQUENCES  
OF THE FORCED MASS REPATRIATION  
OF MIGRANT COMMUNITIES:  
Recent Cases from West Africa and the Middle East**

**by Nicholas Van Hear**

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**United Nations Research Institute  
for Social Development  
Palais des Nations  
1211 Geneva 10  
Switzerland**

**E-mail: [info@unrisd.org](mailto:info@unrisd.org)  
World Wide Web Site: [www.unrisd.org](http://www.unrisd.org)**

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## PREFACE

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of occasions when migrant, expatriate or alien communities have been obliged to leave en masse the countries in which they have chosen to work or settle. The expulsion of two million Ghanaians and other West African migrants from Nigeria, reciprocal mass expulsions from Senegal and Mauritania, the expulsion of ethnic Turks from Bulgaria, the recent mass exodus from Iraq and Kuwait, and the expulsion of Yemenis from Saudi Arabia are just the better-known cases of such mass movements over the last decade.

Drawing on examples from Africa and the Middle East, the author examines the consequences of mass expulsion or exodus for the countries to which those affected return. He looks briefly at the immediate problems of reception, accommodation and dispersal; then the medium-term issues are examined: employment implications, the loss of remittances, and other economic, social and ecological consequences such as pressure on housing, prices, social services, water supply and other resources. After considering the longer term consequences of mass return, the author suggests that these may not all be negative.

Expellees and other returnees of this kind are not usually refugees, but they may find themselves in refugee-like situations. The paper examines how, if at all, they are protected and assisted by the international community, and suggests some ways in which such episodes may be better handled. Mass exodus of migrants and aliens of the kind explored in this paper has been of only peripheral concern in international forums. The episodes considered illustrate that since official interventions, national and international, rarely touch directly more than a small proportion of repatriates, close attention should be paid to migrants' own initiatives to get home, to resettle themselves and then to find or create employment, at home or abroad. Realising the potential of the mass returns to each of these countries will only be accomplished if the right macro-level conditions can be created to assist repatriates to resettle or reintegrate themselves. Countries faced with sudden, large returnee populations may take some comfort from the experience of other countries that have found that in the longer term such mass returns do not turn out to be damaging, but can be ultimately beneficial.

The paper concludes by speculating on the future course of the mass exodus of migrant communities. The forms of mass exodus considered in this paper are a manifestation of two contemporary global trends: the restructuring of the international labour market and the recrudescence of ethnic nationalism in the context of the emergence or reconstitution of nation-states. By the restructuring of the international labour market is meant changes in the pattern of production and in its global distribution - and the consequences of such changes for migrant labour. By the recrudescence of ethnic nationalism is meant the tendency, particularly noticeable currently in parts of East and Central Europe, for the 'homogenization' of ethnic populations within a particular nation-state. This is likely to entail more mass movements of minorities. For this reason if for no other, the international community should heed the recent history of mass exodus of alien and minority communities as much as that of migrant workers.

The UNRISD research programme on Refugees, Returnees and Local Society is concerned with analysing mass movements from one developing country to another and devotes special attention to issues that constitute a link between the situation of refugees or returnees and the long-term development of the area where they arrived or to which they returned. Nicholas Van Hear is Crown Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, Researcher in Refugee Studies at the University of Oxford.

November 1992

Dharam Ghai  
Director

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of occasions when migrant, expatriate or alien communities have been obliged to leave en masse the countries in which they have chosen to work or settle. The expulsion of two million Ghanaians and other West African migrants from Nigeria, reciprocal mass expulsions from Senegal and Mauritania, the expulsion of ethnic Turks from Bulgaria, the recent mass exodus from Iraq and Kuwait, and the expulsion of Yemenis from Saudi Arabia are just the better-known cases of such mass movements over the last decade. Drawing on some of these examples, this paper examines the socio-economic consequences of such mass exodus for the countries to which these forced migrants return.

The paper first identifies the groups which are obliged to leave en masse. There are two main vulnerable groups: migrant workers, whose intent to stay in a host country is usually short-term, and 'alien' communities, who may be former migrants but are often long-settled. The paper draws attention to some of the conceptual problems surrounding this categorization. The paper then considers the form of such mass exodus, the degree of compulsion it entails, and the motivations of states for inducing or encouraging such out-movements. It explores some conceptual problems surrounding the notion of compulsion in such episodes.

Drawing on examples from Africa and the Middle East, the main body of the paper examines the consequences of mass expulsion or exodus for the countries to which those affected return. The paper looks briefly at the immediate problems of reception, accommodation and dispersal. It then examines the medium-term issues: employment implications, the loss of remittances, and other economic, social and ecological consequences such as pressure on housing, prices, social services, water supply and other resources. The longer term consequences of mass return are then addressed; the paper suggests that they may not all be negative.

Expellees and other returnees of this kind are not usually refugees, but they may find themselves in refugee-like situations. The paper examines how, if at all, they are protected and assisted by the international community, and suggests some ways in which such episodes may be better handled. It concludes by speculating on the future course of the mass exodus of migrant communities.

## **I. MASS EXODUS OF MIGRANT WORKERS AND ALIEN COMMUNITIES: AN OVERVIEW**

### **1. Recent commentary on mass exodus of migrant and 'alien' communities**

Although they have not received as much attention as other forms of involuntary migration, episodes of mass expulsion and mass exodus of migrant workers and alien communities have featured in the historical, socio-economic and international relations literatures. They have also been subject to commentary in legal and human rights forums, particularly over the last decade.

The historical perspective on mass expulsions and related involuntary population movements is rich (for an overview, see de Zayas 1988). Mass expulsion or forced transfer of religious and ethnic minorities - among them Jews and Muslims from medieval Spain, Huguenots from France in the seventeenth century, Jews from the Austrian empire in the eighteenth century, and autochthonous and settler populations in the New World of the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries - have been subject to investigation by historians. In the early part of the twentieth century the collapse of European empires spawned a number of compulsory population transfers, notably that of minorities in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey (Marrus 1985; Hirschon 1989; Poulton 1991). Both Hitler and Stalin were exponents of forcible population transfers. Hitler oversaw the relocation of ethnic Germans and the expulsion of non-Germans before and during the Second World War; Stalin oversaw forced relocations within the Soviet Union, and the post-War settlement with the Soviet Union involved the forcible relocation of Germans and of other central European ethnic populations (de Zayas 1979, 1988; Coles 1983; Marrus 1985; Bramwell 1988; Dowty 1987).

Outside Europe, the formation of new states with the demise of colonialism generated further involuntary population movements of this kind (de Zayas 1988; Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo 1989). Perhaps the two most significant comparable post-war mass involuntary displacements were those of the Arab population from Palestine with the emergence of the state of Israel, and the mass flight of Muslims and Hindus as India was partitioned (de Zayas 1988; Coles 1983; Dowty 1987; Morris 1987; Zolberg et al. 1989). North America has featured at least one major post-war episode akin to mass expulsion in the form of 'Operation Wetback', the mass deportation of Mexican workers from the USA in 1954 (Garcia 1980).

Comparable episodes have occurred in almost every part of the world in more recent years. Africa has seen many such episodes (see, for example Addo 1982). The expulsion of Ugandan Asians in 1972 has been extensively investigated from political and socio-economic perspectives (Twaddle 1975; Tribe 1975; Jain 1990). The forced flight of the Banyarwanda a decade later has also been examined, often by writers for advocacy groups (Clay 1984; Watson 1991). The Nigerian expulsions in the first half of the 1980s attracted considerable attention (Van Hear 1983, 1985 and 1987; Okolo 1984; Brydon 1985; Gravil 1985; Aluko 1985; Adepoju 1984 and 1986; Ricca 1989; Swindell 1990; Arhin 1991). These contributions dealt largely with political and economic aspects of the expulsions. The recent forcible population transfers between Senegal and Mauritania have been the subject of a number of studies (Horowitz 1989 and 1991; Ritmeijer 1991; Lomax and Garside 1991), as well as of scrutiny by human rights organizations (Amnesty International 1990; Human Rights Watch 1991).

The vulnerable position of the South Asian and Chinese diaspora in South-East Asia and further afield have been the subject of study, with the induced flight of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam in the late 1970s the subject of particular attention (see, for example, Tinker 1990 on South Asians; Strauch 1980 on the Chinese in Vietnam). Instability in the Middle East has generated a number of mass expulsions in addition to the forced flight of Palestinians. The war between Iran and Iraq led to several mass expulsions, migrant workers in the oil-rich states of the region have been repeatedly deported en masse, and the recent mass exodus of migrants and others from Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia is the subject of investigation by the present writer (ICIHI 1986; Van Hear 1991a, 1991b; Feen 1991). Latin America and the Caribbean have also featured such episodes; the expulsion of Salvadorans from Honduras has been investigated in detail (Anderson 1981), while the recent mass deportation of Haitian workers from the Dominican Republic awaits examination. As the make-up of central and eastern Europe becomes ever more uncertain, expulsions and other forced population transfers look likely to recur. One case, the expulsion of ethnic Turks from Bulgaria, has come under the scrutiny of human rights groups (Poulton/Minority Rights Group 1989; Zang/Helsinki Watch 1989; see also Council of Europe 1991).

Comparative studies of or approaches to such exoduses have been less in evidence. The **Study on Human Rights and Massive Exoduses**, initiated by the UN Commission on Human

Rights, made reference to a number of mass expulsion episodes in the decade 1970-1980 (Aga Khan 1981). The International Institute of Humanitarian Law convened a Working Group on Mass Expulsion in 1983, at which issues surrounding such episodes were considered (International Institute of Humanitarian Law 1983; Coles 1983). The Institute revisited the subject in May 1990 at a round table convened jointly with the International Organization for Migration on new developments in the movement of people; passing reference was made to mass expulsion of migrant workers or of ethnic or cultural minorities (International Institute of Humanitarian Law/IOM: 1990). Other works covering legal aspects of migratory movement have also discussed such episodes (see, in particular, part three of Goodwin-Gill 1978; IBHI 1988). Mass exodus of migrant and alien communities was considered at some length by the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues (ICIHI), whose report **Refugees: Dynamics of Displacement**, covered mass expulsions in a chapter written by the present author (ICIHI 1986). The ICIHI set up a working group on mass expulsions in 1984 and later produced a report, to which this writer also contributed (Van Hear 1987), and which covered historical, legal and socio-economic aspects of such episodes (Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues 1988).

By incorporating into this literature some research by the writer on recent episodes of mass exodus and mass repatriation in West Africa and the Middle East, this paper aims to lay the foundations for the comparative study that is needed. The paper focuses on the medium- and longer term consequences of such episodes, an area which has hitherto been under-researched.

## 2. Groups vulnerable to involuntary mass exodus

Two main groups are particularly vulnerable to expulsion or to being obliged to leave en masse: migrant workers, whose intent to stay in a host country is usually or ostensibly short-term, and 'alien' communities, who may be former short-term migrants, but are often long-settled. The definitions of 'migrant' and 'alien' are problematic, as indeed is the distinction between them.

The term 'migrant worker' encompasses very diverse types of migrant. This diversity is recognized in the new UN Convention on migrant workers (discussed below, page 61). The Convention provides a universal definition of a migrant worker as 'a person who is to be engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national' (UN General Assembly, International Convention on the protection of the rights of all migrant workers, 1990, Article 2.1). But it goes on to identify eight types of migrant worker: 'frontier worker', 'seasonal worker', 'seafarer', 'worker on an offshore installation', 'itinerant worker', 'project-tied worker', 'specified-employment worker' (subdivided into three further categories), and 'self-employed worker' (UN Convention on migrant workers 1990, Article 2.2). The term 'transient professional' to describe executives, managers, administrators, technicians and others is another

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