



Section 3. Wold economy

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TRENDS IN THE GLOBAL LABOR MARKET AND HIGH-SKILLED MIGRATION

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Abstract

This paper examines global trends in highly skilled migration, focusing on the role of destination countries' policies in attracting qualified professionals. As labor markets become increasingly globalized, the demand for skilled workers continues to grow. The study outlines historical shifts in skilled migration since the 1950s and analyzes recent data on migration flows to top destination countries. Findings highlight that international students and highly educated migrants are central to talent attraction strategies, with countries like the United States, Canada, and Germany leading globally. The results emphasize the importance of targeted migration policies in shaping global talent mobility.

Keywords: high-skilled migration, talent mobility, temporary work visas, international students, immigration policy, knowledge economy

Introduction

The global labor market has undergone significant transformations in recent decades, with international migration emerging as a key driver of inclusive growth and sustainable development. The United Nations "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (United Nations, 2015) highlights the positive contribution of migrants, especially highly skilled individuals, in accelerating national and social development through innovation and knowledge exchange.

In recent years, notable shifts have been observed in both the scale and composition of global migration. According to the January 2025 data released by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the number of international migrants reached approximately 304 million in 2024—nearly double the figure in 1990 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2025). Despite this absolute growth, the share of migrants in the global population remains relatively low, increasing only from 2.9% in 1990 to 3.7% in 2024.

A key dimension of this transformation is the increasing role of highly skilled migrants in shaping global labor dynamics. High-income countries such as the United States, Germany, Canada, and Australia have implemented targeted visa programs and talent attraction strategies, becoming major destinations for specialists in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, finance, healthcare, and emerging technologies. This shift reflects the growing international competition for skilled human capital in an increasingly knowledge-based and digitized global economy.

Literature Review

In recent years, there has been a steady increase in scholarly interest in high-skilled migration (HSM) as a key factor in the global redistribution of human capital. According to (Docquier and Rapoport 2012), the international mobility of highly qualified professionals has long transcended the traditional concept of “brain drain” and has become a systemic component of the global knowledge economy. Contemporary studies increasingly interpret HSM as a process influenced by both demand-side (destination countries’ policies) and supply-side (individual motivations) factors (Kuptsch, 2020; Boucher & Cerna, 2021).

One of the most actively explored directions in HSM research involves government-led visa programs aimed at attracting qualified labor. For instance, studies by (Avato and Koettl 2019) emphasize that schemes such as the H-1B in the U.S., the EU Blue Card, and Australia’s Global Talent Visa are essential instruments not only for addressing labor shortages but also for participating in the global competition for talent. These programs offer clear pathways from temporary employment to long-term immigration, which is a key incentive for many migrants.

Another important focus in the literature is the migration of international students. (Tremblay 2022) and (Della Posta 2023) argue that in countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, international students are increasingly viewed not merely as learners but as prospective high-skilled migrants – especially in contexts where post-study work rights and residency opportunities are available.

Recent work also draws attention to spatial and gender disparities in the distribution of high-skilled migrants. (Bielewska 2021), for example, highlights that women remain underrepresented among internationally mobile professionals, particularly in STEM fields, which underscores the need for more inclusive and targeted migration policies.

Methodology

This study applies a mixed-method approach, combining descriptive statistical analysis with a policy-oriented review of global high-skilled migration (HSM). It uses publicly available data from institutions such as UN DESA, USCIS, and UNESCO to examine trends from 1990 to 2024, with emphasis on the post-2010 period.

The analysis focuses on temporary and selective visa programs (e.g., H-1B, J-1), evaluating their role in shaping talent flows by country of origin, sector, and geopolitical context. Migration patterns are studied by destination income groups using World Bank classifications.

Statistical findings are presented through time-series data and comparative charts, with attention to regional and gender disparities. This framework supports a comprehensive view of how visa regimes influence the global distribution of high-skilled labor.

Result and Discussion

International labor migration, particularly the movement of highly skilled professionals, is closely linked to global changes in the world economy. As labor markets become more globalized, the demand and supply of skilled workers are shaped at the international level. The post-World War II economic system has increased the significance of migration, making it a key factor in economic growth and demographic dynamics. This table analyzes high-skilled migration across four main phases.

At each stage, international political and economic factors – such as scientific and technological progress, globalization, the digital economy, and geopolitical crises – have significantly influenced the demand for skilled labor and the directions of migration flows.

This analysis focuses on highly skilled migrants, primarily including international students and professionals working under

non-immigrant (temporary) employment visas. In particular, migration flows under U.S. visa categories such as H-1B, J-1, L-1, and O-1 are examined.

Table 1. *Phases of Global Trends Influencing High-Skilled Migration (1950s-2020s)*

Phase	In-Demand Professionals	Impact on the Global Economy
Phase 1 (1950s-1960s) Scientific-technical revolution; decolonization	Engineers, physicists, rocket scientists, medical doctors	Acceleration of scientific and technological progress; independence of former European colonies
Phase 2 (1970s-1980s) Technological advancement; geopolitical shifts	IT specialists, programmers, academics, researchers	Growth in computing and electronics; US–USSR technological competition; rise of transnational corporations and expansion of global economic networks
Phase 3 (1990s-2010) Globalization and transition to market economies	Software developers, startup founders, business managers, engineers	Collapse of the USSR; development of the Internet and digital technologies; formation of global markets; emergence of innovation-driven economies
Phase 4 (2010-present) Digital economy, AI, pandemics, trade conflicts	AI specialists, data analysts, cybersecurity and fintech experts	Rapid automation and AI integration; US–China trade war; COVID-19 pandemic accelerated global transformations; stricter migration policies

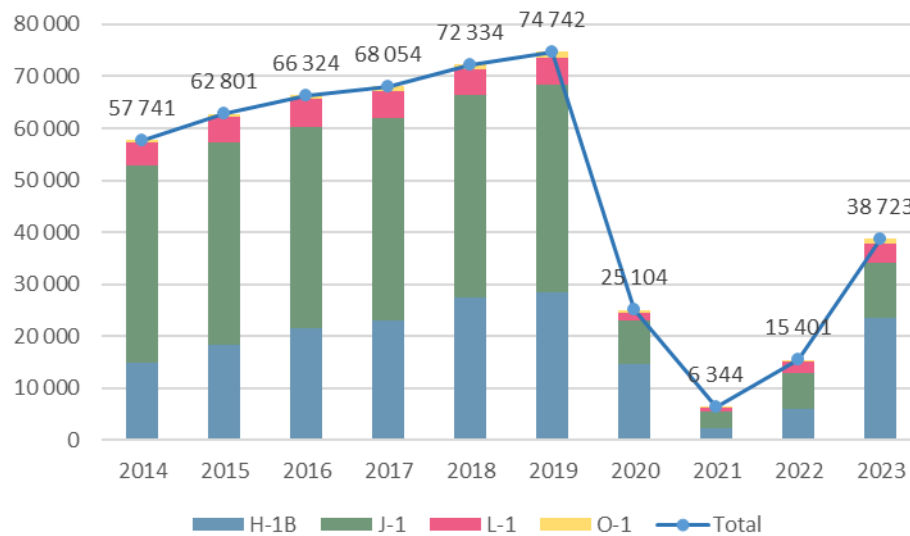
Source: Compiled by the author

In the United States, highly skilled migrants are primarily admitted under non-immigrant visa categories (see Table 2). According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) data, the number of such visas reached 636,141 in the 2019 fiscal year and increased to 678,135 by the 2023 fiscal year (U. S. Department of State, 2025; <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics/nonimmigrant-visa-statistics.html>), following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2. *Types of U. S. Non-Immigrant (Temporary) Employment Visas for Professionals*

Visa Type	Description	Eligible Applicants	Duration
H-1B	Temporary work visa for highly skilled professionals	STEM professionals, specialists in IT, engineering, finance, health-care, and related fields	Initially 3 years; extendable up to 6 years
J-1	Exchange visitor visa	Students, professors, researchers, physicians, interns, and other exchange participants	6 months to 7 years, depending on the program
L-1	Intra-company transfer visa	Managers, executives, or employees with specialized knowledge transferring within international companies	Initially 1 year (for new offices) or 3 years; extendable up to 7 years
O-1	Visa for individuals with extraordinary ability	Persons with proven achievements in science, arts, sports, business, or education	Initially 3 years; renewable annually

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS, 2025)

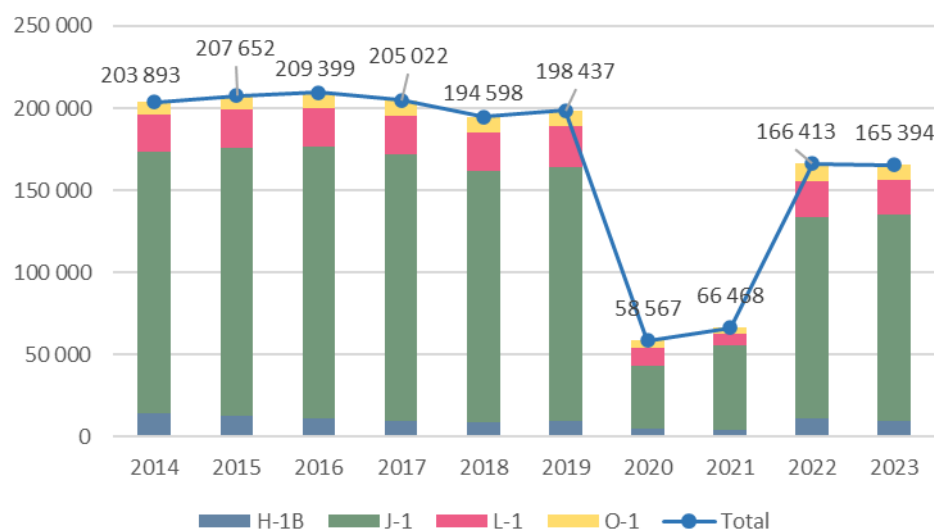
Figure 1. Number and Trend of U.S. Non-Immigrant Employment
Visas Issued to Chinese Nationals, 2014–2023

Source: Compiled by the author based on publicly available online sources: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics/nonimmigrant-visa-statistics.html>

The number of non-immigrant employment visas issued to Chinese nationals has averaged around 70,000 per year. The peak was recorded in 2019, with 74,742 visas issued. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this number dropped sharply, reaching its lowest point in 2021. Since 2022, the figure has gradually begun to recover, reach-

ing 38,723 visas issued to Chinese nationals in 2023 (see Figure 1).

Before the pandemic, the number of non-immigrant employment visas issued to European nationals remained stable, averaging around 200,000 per year. The peak was reached in 2016, with 209,399 visas issued (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Number and Trend of U.S. Non-Immigrant Employment
Visas Issued to European Nationals, 2014–2023

Source: Compiled by the author based on publicly available online sources: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics/nonimmigrant-visa-statistics.html>

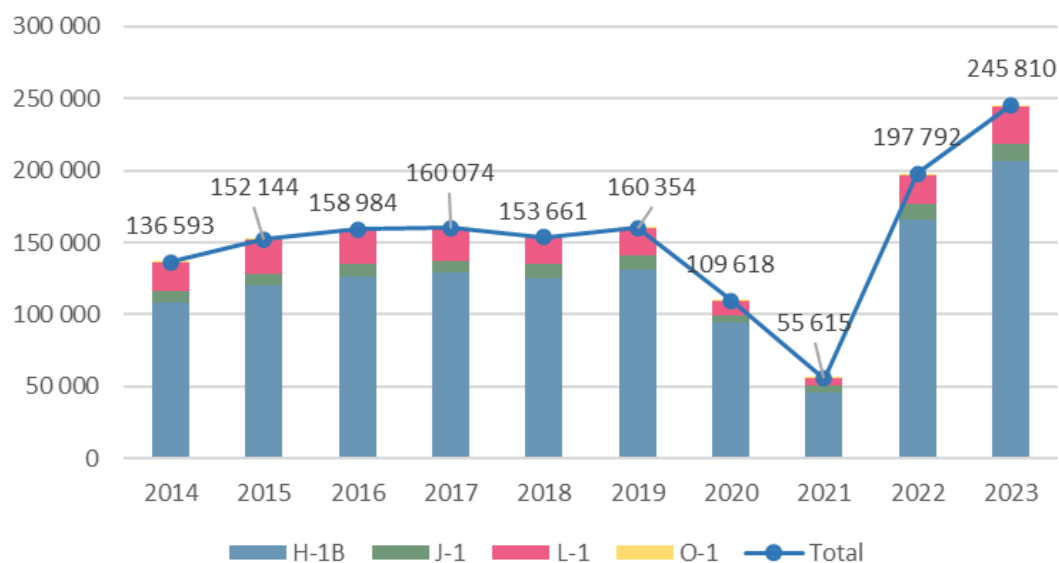
In contrast, the number of such visas issued to Indian nationals showed steady growth, reaching its highest point in 2019 with 160,354 visas granted (see Figure 3).

During the pandemic, the number of visas issued to Indian nationals declined sharply, reaching only 34.7% of the 2019 level by 2021. However, amid the easing of migration policies in both the United States and India, the figure rose to 197,792 in 2022 and

further increased to a new historical high of 245,810 in 2023.

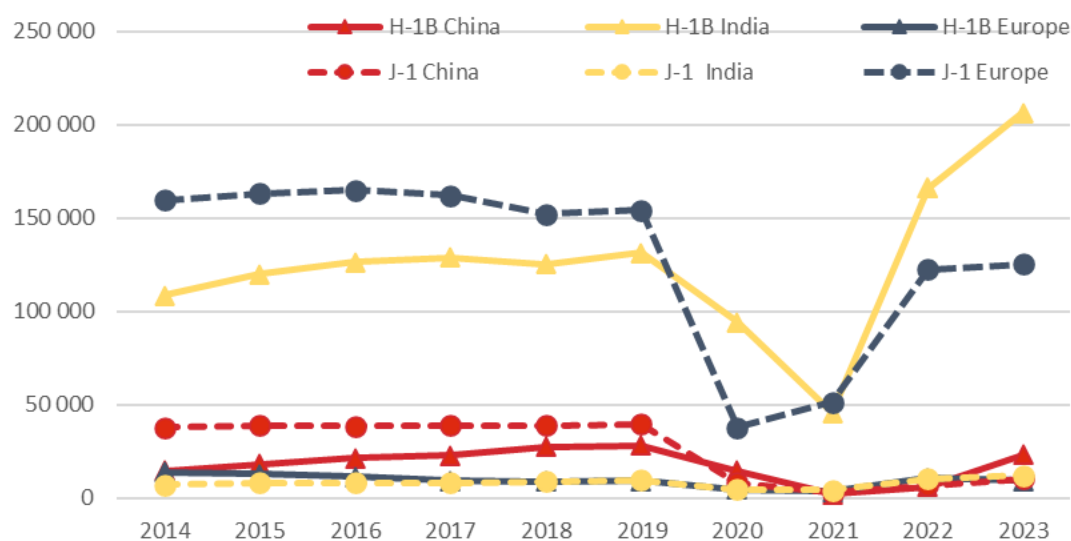
Trends in H-1B and J-1 visa categories vary significantly across countries. India leads in the H-1B segment, with the number of visas increasing from 108,817 in 2014 to 206,591 in 2023. In contrast, the number of H-1B visas issued to Chinese and European nationals remains significantly lower—23,482 for Chinese and only 9,309 for Europeans in 2023.

Figure 3. Number and Trend of U.S. Non-Immigrant Employment Visas Issued to Indian Nationals, 2014–2023



Source: Compiled by the author based on publicly available online sources: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics/nonimmigrant-visa-statistics.html>

Figure 4. Trends in H-1B and J-1 Non-Immigrant Employment Visas, 2014–2023



Source: Compiled by the author based on publicly available online sources

J-1 visas, primarily intended for academic and research exchange, are dominated by European nationals. Between 2014 and 2019, Europeans received over 150,000 J-1 visas annually. Although the numbers dropped sharply during the pandemic, a recovery was observed in 2022–2023, with 125,526 J-1 visas issued to Europeans in 2023. For Chinese and Indian nationals, the annual number of J-1 visas has remained steady at around 10,000 to 12,000.

According to the data, India is the leading source of high-skilled labor to the U.S. under the H-1B program, particularly in the technology and scientific sectors. Europe remains the dominant region under the J-1 visa category. China shows moderate figures in both categories, with J-1 visa levels comparable to India's, but significantly lower H-1B issuance.

Conclusion

The analysis of temporary high-skilled migration to the United States demonstrates that the country actively employs targeted visa programs to attract talent, strengthening its position in the global competition for human capital. The most significant programs include H-1B, J-1, L-1, and O-1 visas, each designed for specific categories of professionals. Notably, J-1 visa holders are predominantly from European countries, likely due to Europe's strong engagement in academic and exchange programs. In contrast, H-1B visa recipients are largely from India, which can be attributed to the country's substantial pool of IT specialists and the strong demand from the U.S. labor market for technology professionals. Overall, the structure of temporary high-skilled migration to the United States reflects both global economic trends and the dynamics of international labor division.

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