**Dividing Lines: The Human Face of Global Migration [Part 4]**

By Haley Sweetland Edwards *TIME Magazine, February 4 – 11, 2019*

Measuring the total economic impact of migrants across all industries is an impossible task. Migrants’ collective influence on an economy shifts depending on their skills and levels of education, and the industries in which they work. But in general, studies show that while first-generation migrants use more social services and rely more heavily on the safety net than native-born citizens, they reduce their need for such aid over time. The economic outcomes of children of immigrants tend to converge with those of children of native-born parents, according to a 2018 study by the Brookings Institution.

There’s also widespread agreement among researchers that migration, as a whole, raises a nation’s total economic output, according to analysis by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. By increasing the number of workers in the labor force, immigrants, who also drive demand for goods and services, make the U.S. economy more productive and contribute to state and federal coffers. One study estimated that foreign-born workers contributed roughly $2 trillion to the U.S. economy in 2016. That’s about 10% of annual GDP.

Basil Bacall, 54, fled Iraq in the 1980s and now owns 22 hotels in Michigan, which together gross more than $100 million each year. As a philanthropist, Bacall has raised more than $10 million for his nonprofit, which supports refugees, and as the CEO of Elite Hospitality Group, a development and management company, he employs more than 1,000 people, about 40% of whom he estimates are foreign-born. Without that immigrant workforce, he says, he’d struggle to keep growing while keeping prices down. “We could not sustain the same amount of development or create as many jobs,” he says.

Bacall is a Republican, but he disagrees with the Trump Administration’s immigration policy. If he had been a young migrant from Iraq today, he says, there’s “zero chance” he’d be let in. “I wouldn’t have had a chance to make an impact or give back.”

The challenge for leaders, in a changing world awash in an enormous population of international migrants, is to ease the fears of native-born populations while simultaneously maximizing the benefits of the pluralistic societies already taking root. Framing the challenge honestly is a good place to start.

Despite the fevered rhetoric in Washington, there were actually fewer undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. in 2016 than in 2007, according to a Pew Research Center study. Apprehensions along the border with Mexico plummeted in 2017 to their lowest level since 1971. Inside the U.S., immigrants are less likely than U.S. natives to commit crimes (despite Trump’s suggestion to the contrary) and are overwhelmingly more educated than immigrants were in the past. According to a Brookings Institution analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data, the biggest group, 41%, of new immigrants from 2010 to 2017 came not from Latin America but from Asia. And as whole, 45% of immigrants to the U.S. had college degrees—compared with roughly 35% of non-Hispanic white Americans.

But statistics go only so far. In elections, facts often matter less than voters’ feelings. In fact, studies show that native-born U.S. and European citizens’ perception of immigration writ large, and the character of new immigrants in particular, is largely wrong. Native-born citizens dramatically overestimate how many immigrants live in their own communities. They also underestimate the average immigrant’s skills and education levels while overestimating their poverty rate and dependence on social safety nets. Native-born citizens also overestimate the share of immigrants who are Muslim.

But as always in politics, perception is reality. A 2017 study by Democracy Corps, a research firm co-founded by Democratic pollster Stanley Greenberg, found that white Trump voters without a bachelor’s degree, who had voted for Obama and identified as Democrats or Independents, overwhelmingly felt that their culture was under siege. America, they reported, was divided between white, struggling, working-class people like “us” and a nonwhite, often immigrant “them.” That sense of cultural siege held even in a community that remains more than 80% white, the study found. Researchers in a 2018 Harvard study on immigrant perception reported similar findings. “While all respondents have misperceptions” about immigrant communities, the researchers wrote, “those with the largest ones are systematically the right-wing, the non-college-educated and the low-skilled working in immigration-intensive sectors.”

Experts say correcting misperceptions about newcomers is only half the battle. The other half requires wealthy nations, like the U.S. and much of Europe, to rationalize their immigration policies, streamline asylum systems to eliminate torturous wait times, create a better system of temporary work visas and consider offering safety nets to the low-wage native-born workers most likely to compete with immigrant labor.