Chapter 2
The International Status of Migrant Workers: Freedom of Movement or Fear of Abuse?

Elizabeth Christopher
Macquarie University, Australia

ABSTRACT

April 2018 marked the 50th anniversary month in the UK of Enoch Powell’s “rivers of blood” speech, widely condemned for its anti-immigrant, racist rhetoric. Time has shown how wrong Powell was; and over the decades Britain has become more, not less, tolerant. The concept of workforce diversity has gained enormous support, due in part to international politics of economic competition, technological progress, increasing emphasis on the importance of human rights; and immigration. The article discusses answers to the question: in the face of this consensus, why are xenophobic arguments (communicated worldwide through mass media) increasingly allowed to foster global climates of fear of, and resistance to, immigrant labour? Answers seem to lie in political and social pressures on governments that constrain them to discriminate against migrants and refugees seeking immigration. Reasons for this are discussed and - since consensus is so strong on the benefits of workforce diversity - possible remedies are suggested.

INTRODUCTION: HUMAN RIGHTS, WORKFORCE DIVERSITY AND DISCRIMINATION

Human Rights

No two human beings are alike; people are different not only in gender, culture, race, social and psychological characteristics but also in their perspectives and prejudices. All societies have always discriminated on these bases (Kruglanski & Stroebe, 2012), but The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) was proclaimed in Paris on December 10, 1948 as a common standard for all peoples and all nations.

The International Status of Migrant Workers

It set out, for the first time, fundamental human rights that must be universally protected - with non-discrimination as an overriding principle. It is present in all the major human rights treaties and conventions that have followed, such as the April 2018 launch of the Global Migration Group principles and guidelines on the human rights protection of migrants in vulnerable situations (Committee on Migrant Workers, 2018). One example of such protection is that UK Ministers in May 2018 suspended controversial arrangements under which the National Health Service had shared patients’ details with the Home Office, so it could trace people breaking immigration rules (Campbell, 2018).

Workforce Diversity and Discrimination

Diversity in employment practices not only respects and protects human rights but has been shown to benefit organizational and national economies (Dustmann et al., 2003; Saxena, 2014). Given the weight of opinion on the humanitarian and practical, local and national benefits of a diverse population from which to recruit workers, why the present climate of prejudice against immigrants?

The chapter discusses two aspects of the management of diversity. The first is recognition of its importance not only for human rights but also for organizational and national prosperity. The second is the growing social and political prejudice against immigrant labour - resulting partly from recent massive increases worldwide of refugee immigrants; there were 258 million international migrants in 2017, representing 3.4 percent of the global population (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017). Immigration is now one of the most controversial items on the political agendas of liberal states across Europe and North America (Rankin, 2018; Thompson, 2018).

The objectives of the chapter are to identify reasons for this conflict of interests and to seek practical ways to resolve or at least reduce it. Conflict arises because there is, on the one hand, recognition of the practical and humanitarian importance of workforce diversity; and on the other, global discrimination against employment of immigrants.

BACKGROUND

Methodology

The research basis was a literature review. It covered books, journal and newspaper articles, social media and websites, organisational and institutional reports. The methodology was qualitative, a form of exploratory research - in this case to gain information on underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations behind the geopolitics of immigrant labour; and to seek support or refutation for the thesis of the chapter: that international political, social and media pressures on governments and organizations constrain them to discriminate against migrants and refugees seeking immigration. For the purposes of the research, the following definitions were made, based on the literature review.

Immigrant Labour

This refers to the employment of people who work in a country where they arrived - either as refugees or as migrants - with the intention to settle there. Brooks (1996) described immigration as the permanent movement of people to one country from another, for many reasons - to be with their families, to obtain