

## Faith on the Move: The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants

### Fact Sheet: Global

#### OVERVIEW

*Faith on the Move* draws on a new database created by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life that combines hundreds of censuses, surveys and other sources to shed light on the origins, destinations and religious affiliations of international migrants. Using the new Global Religion and Migration Database, Pew Forum researchers are able to present a global portrait of where migrants have come from, where they have gone and their religious composition.

The study focuses on the total number (or cumulative "stocks") of migrants living around the world as of 2010 rather than the annual rate of migration (or current "flows"). An international migrant is defined as a person who has been living for a year or longer in a country other than the one in which he or she was born.

*Faith on the Move* and the Global Religion and Migration Database are part of the [Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures project](#), an effort funded by [The Pew Charitable Trusts](#) and the [John Templeton Foundation](#) to analyze religious change and its impact on societies around the world.

The Pew Forum plans to conduct additional studies on religion and migration over time. The full report, which includes a companion quiz, interactive map and sortable data tables, is available on the Pew Forum's [website](#).

#### GLOBAL KEY FINDINGS

- **Nearly half of the world's migrants are Christian, and more than a quarter are Muslim.** Christians comprise an estimated 106 million, or 49%, of the world's 214 million international migrants. Muslims make up the second-largest group – almost 60 million, or 27%. The remaining quarter are a mix of Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, adherents of other faiths and the religiously unaffiliated (those who identify as atheists and agnostics or say they have no particular religion).
- In some respects, the religious affiliation of migrants mirrors the religious composition of the world's population. For instance, Christians and Muslims are the two largest religious groups among migrants as well as the two largest religious groups in general. However, Christians comprise a much greater share of migrants (about one-in-two) than they do of the general population (nearly one-in-three). Muslims also are somewhat overrepresented among migrants, though not by as large a margin. They comprise only a slightly higher share of migrants (27%) than of the world's population (23%). On the other hand, some religious groups are underrepresented among migrants. Hindus, for example, comprise 5% of international migrants but 10-15% of the global population.
- In percentage terms, Jews have by far the highest level of migration. About one-quarter of Jews alive today (25%) have left the country in which they were born and now live somewhere else. By contrast, just 5% of Christians, 4% of Muslims and less than 3% of members of other religious groups have migrated across international borders.

## COUNTRY- AND REGION-LEVEL KEY FINDINGS

- The United States has been the world's No. 1 destination for Christian migrants. Of the 43 million foreign-born people living in the U.S. as of 2010, an estimated 32 million (74%) are Christian. For more on the U.S., see the [U.S. fact sheet](#).
- Mexico has been the largest single country of origin for Christian migrants. Most of them now reside in the United States. In fact, the U.S. has received about as many migrants (of all religions) from Mexico alone (more than 12 million, including both legal immigrants and unauthorized ones) as any other nation has received *from all sources combined*.
- Christian immigrants (an estimated 26 million) outnumber Muslim immigrants (nearly 13 million) in the 27 countries of the European Union, but the numbers are closer when migration within the European Union is excluded. For more on the E.U., see the [European Union fact sheet](#).
- Saudi Arabia has been the top destination for Muslim migrants, most of whom are workers from nearby Arab countries, the Indian subcontinent, Indonesia and the Philippines.
- Israel has been the top destination for Jewish migrants, including many from Russia.
- India has been both the top origin and top destination for Hindu migrants. The U.S. has been the second-leading destination for Hindu immigrants.
- China has been the top country of origin for religiously unaffiliated migrants. It also has been the second-leading country of origin for Buddhist migrants (after Vietnam).

###

*The Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life conducts surveys, demographic analyses and other social science research on important aspects of religion and public life in the U.S. and around the world. As part of the Washington-based Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan, non-advocacy organization, the Pew Forum does not take positions on policy debates or any of the issues it covers.*