

Christians make up half of the world's migrants

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Christians comprise half of the world's 214 million migrants—those who have moved from their country of birth and are now living permanently in a different country—a new study released March 8 has concluded.

The study by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life concluded that 106 million Christians constitute 49 percent of the world's migrants. At nearly 60 million, Muslims are the second-largest group of those living permanently outside their nation of origin—some 27 percent of migrants, according to the study.

However, the report found that in terms of percentages by religious groups, Jews have the highest percentage level of migration. Twenty-five percent of Jews live in different countries from where they were born. By contrast, 5 percent of Christians and 4 percent of Muslims have migrated across international borders.

Less than 3 percent of other groups have migrated and are generally underrepresented among those migrating. As an example, Hindus constitute 10 to 15 percent of the world's population but make up only about 5 percent of international migrants, the study said.

The report, "Faith on the Move: The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants," defines an international migrant as someone living for more than a year in a country other than the one in which that person was born.

Other key findings:

- In the 27 countries of the European Union, Christian immigrants, some 26 million, outnumber Muslim immigrants, nearly 13 million, the study said. But the numbers of the two groups are closer "when migration within the European Union is excluded," according to the report.
- The United States is the world's leading destination for Christian migrants. Of the 43 million foreign-born people living in the U.S. as of 2010, nearly three-quarters, some 32 million, are Christian.
- The U.S. is the primary destination for Buddhists. About 1.7 million foreign-born Buddhists live here, many of them from Vietnam. America is also the top spot for immigrants with no religion, about 4.4 million people, many of whom come from China.
- Predominantly Roman Catholic Mexico is the largest single country of origin for migrants who identify as Christian, with most of those now living in the United States.

"In fact," the report said, "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."

No other major religious group approached the 25 percent migration rate of the Jews, said Phillip Connor, the senior researcher on the study. On average, he said, only 3 percent of the world's population migrates. What may be surprising to people is that overwhelmingly "people do stay put," Connor said.

"The world Jewish community is consolidating," said Jonathan Sarna, a professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University who did not work on the study. "Jews are abandoning Third World countries where historically they had been persecuted and moving to large and generally free First World countries."

Sarna said that of the vast majority of the 13.3 million Jews worldwide, 43 percent live in Israel and 39 percent live in the United States. A major driver of Jewish migration is the establishment of Israel in 1948 and

continued migration there. Sarna also noted the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Jews from the former Soviet Union decades ago.

A

positive spin on Jewish migratory trends is that Jews, so often persecuted in their homelands, are safer in their new countries. But "what we're losing is one of the great themes of Jewish history," said Sarna, referring to the collapse of Jewish communities in the Middle East, North Africa and other lands where they had lived for millennia.

—ENI, RNS