As rapid population growth was the primary demographic issue of concern during the latter half of the 20th century, international migration and population aging are likely to be the major demographic headlines for the first half of the 21st century. Although it seems that demographic waves appear suddenly with potentially catastrophic consequences unless checked by radical policy interventions, there is usually a long time horizon for most population trends. Moreover, demographic shifts are generally the product of underlying social, economic, and political changes with deep interconnections to other social institutions. Effective policy responses have to be fashioned with an understanding of the causes of demographic shifts as well as the pressures and opportunities created by population trends and structures.

International migration, as with internal migration, is generally a response to the mismatch between the spatial distributions of labor supply and labor demand. As domestic labor reserves diminished after World War II, there was a gradual opening for increasing labor migration to industrial countries in Europe and North America. Because cheap labor, not immigrants, was desired, a large share of international migration was organized as guest (temporary) or clandestine (outside of the legal framework) migrant workers. Over time, however, some of the temporary workers acquired local attachments, and they began to recruit additional family members and settle permanently.

Population aging in industrial countries has followed directly from the decline in fertility several decades earlier. In recent years, this has lead to slower growth in the domestic working-
age population and has accelerated the demand for cheaper and more flexible migrant workers. The growth of the elderly population has also stimulated a growing demand for service workers. International migration is a response to the economic aspirations of workers and their families in developing countries as well as the labor needs of industrial counties. It is a flow that is unlikely to be stopped or even reduced in the coming decades.

The papers by Andrea Rossi and by Kenneth Harttgen and Stephan Klasen call attention to a topic that has been neglected in the international migration literature—the welfare of children left behind by their migrant parents, those who accompany their migrant parents to new destination, and those who migrate independently—some of whom are being transported and sold into bondage. Because data are generally lacking and research frameworks are underdeveloped, both papers tend to focus on general description as well as definitional and conceptual issues rather than syntheses of the empirical literature. There are, however, important findings and implications reported in both papers.

Rossi’s paper highlights the surprising findings from many studies which show that “children left behind” in developing countries have better health, lower levels of poverty, and are more likely to attend school and to have higher cognitive scores than children without migrant parents. With higher family incomes, adolescents in households with a migrant worker are less likely to be pressured to quit school early.

These findings are surprising because parental absence is thought to weaken the social, economic, and emotional support necessary for successful child development. These potential losses, however, appear to be more than compensated for by the economic boost from remittances sent home by parents working abroad. As Rossi notes, the volume of economic remittances sent by migrant workers is much larger than any other source of international
transfers including international aid or export earnings. Moreover, unlike other international transfers, remittances are directed to poor families and poor communities. The following diagram represents the implicit causal model in Rossi’s discussion of the impact of migration on child welfare through family structure and remittances.

In addition to the monetary value of remittances, Rossi highlights “social remittances” (the term coined by Peggy Levitt), which are the ideas and behaviors brought home by the migrants. The experience of international migration is an investment in human capital—similar to education. Migrants learn new skills and knowledge that are imparted to family and friends in the community of origin. Through their words of encouragement and personal example, migrant parents may raise their children’s motivations for schooling and aspirations for life beyond their home village. The positive effects of having a migrant parent are not the same everywhere. Some studies find that urban children benefit more than rural children, and that it is better to have an absent migrant father and stay-at-home mother than the reverse.

Rossi finds it impossible to draw any conclusions about forced migration and trafficking of children because of the lack of reliable data. Children almost certainly suffer disproportionately in refugee flows because of their overrepresentation among dependent populations and the lack of traditional community supports in refugee camps and situations.
Based on fewer empirical studies, Rossi finds that most migrant children, accompanied by their families, in developing countries generally have positive health and educational outcomes. This appears to result from better access to health and schooling in destination countries and regions. In this case, international migrants are probably similar to domestic migrants in developing countries. In spite of the loss of familiarity and community with migration, most migrants and their families have improved lives relative to nonmigrants in the community of origin.

Harttgen and Klasen, in contrast to Rossi’s primary focus on children left behind, examine the status of migrant children in destination regions, primarily in Europe. After a long review of definitions, theories of migration, and European migration history, Harttgen and Klasen examine the research literature on immigrant communities, including children, relative to non-migrant communities (natives) in destination areas. This perspective yields a much bleaker view of the consequences of migration for children than did Rossi’s paper. In general, immigrants to Europe tend to work for lower wages than natives and to live in segregated communities. While the economic gap between immigrants and natives is partially due to differences in skills and human capital, immigrants and their children also suffer from “social exclusion.” Social exclusion, or the lack of participation in mainstream society, is a product of many factors, including access to citizenship and social discrimination.

The combination of poorer economic circumstances and social exclusion leads to educational disadvantages for the second generation—the children of immigrants. In addition, immigrant youth are less likely to participate in mainstream social, cultural, and leisure activities with native youth. This may lead to alienation and social pathologies among immigrant youth.
Harttgen and Klasen review potential data sources that could be used to study the plight of immigrant children and youth in Europe. This inquiry is entirely European-centric, without theoretical or empirical links to the countries of origin and other potential comparisons.