



Trade-off between openness and rights

Date Jun 5, 2025

Main Arguments

- The regulation of high-skilled migration is a complex phenomenon involving reconciling competing interests. Governments tend to be more open to admitting high-skilled migrants because these workers are perceived to generate greater economic returns. At the same time, high-skilled migrants are typically granted more rights, while low-skilled migrants are subject to more restrictive entry conditions and limited rights.
- Ruhs emphasizes that this dual logic—greater openness and rights for the skilled, greater restrictions for the low-skilled—is a function of state agency and policy design. Policymakers operate within specific “national policy spaces” that reflect institutional arrangements, political pressures, and legal frameworks, allowing them to tailor migration regimes to national interests.

Why is this important?

- Rather than assuming that more migration and more rights go hand-in-hand, Ruhs introduces the concept of a rights openness trade-off.

- Ruhs makes visible the moral or ethical costs of policy choices that prioritize economic efficiency over equality.
- It offers a sound policy empirical description of labour migration policies in the last 30 years in high-income countries.

Questions

- Do you agree that Rhus explanation of a trade-off between rights and economic profit is inevitable in labour migration policy?
- How can we balance economic needs, political feasibility, and human rights in designing a labour migration policy?
- What are the consequences of the “instrumental” view of rights for low-skilled and undocumented migrants, but also for high-skilled migrants? What does it tell us about rights in general?
- How does Ruhs’ concept of a “trade-off between openness and rights” reflect broader structures of global inequality and North–South relations?