Dimensions and Dynamics of Contemporary International Migration

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Introduction

There are more international migrants today than ever before, and their number is certain to increase for the foreseeable future. Almost every country on earth is, and will continue, to be affected. Migration is inextricably linked with other important global issues, including development, poverty and human rights. Migrants are often the most entrepreneurial and dynamic members of society; historically migration has underpinned economic growth and nation-building and enriched cultures. Migration also presents significant challenges: Some migrants are exploited and their human rights abused; integration in destination countries can be difficult; and migration can deprive origin countries of important skills. For all these reasons and more, migration matters.

Dimensions and dynamics

The United Nations (UN) defines as an international migrant a person who stays outside their usual country of residence for at least one year. According to that definition, the UN estimated that in 2005 there were about 200 million international migrants worldwide, including about ten million refugees. This is roughly the equivalent of the fifth most populous country on earth, Brazil. One in every 35 people in the world today is an international migrant.

Another way to put this is that only three per cent of the world's population today is an international migrant. But migration affects far more people than just those who migrate – it has important social, economic and political impacts at home and abroad. According to Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, authors of the influential book *The Age of Migration*, 'There can be few people in either industrialized or less developed countries today who

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do not have personal experience of migration and its effects; this universal experience has become the hallmark of the age of migration'.

Trends

The number of international migrants has more than doubled in just 25 years, and about 25 million were added in only the first five years of the 21st Century (Table 1). Before 1990 most of the world's international migrants lived in the developing world; today the majority lives in the developed world and their proportion is growing. Between 1980 and 2000 the number of migrants in the developed world increased from about 48 million to 110 million, compared with an increase from 52 million to 65 million in the developing world. In 2000 there were about 60 million migrants in Europe, 44 million in Asia, 41 million in North America, 16 million in Africa and six million in both Latin America and Australia. Almost 20 percent of the world's migrants in 2000 – about 35 million - lived in the USA. The Russian Federation was the second most important host country for migrants, with about 13 million, or nearly eight percent of the global total. Germany, the Ukraine and India followed in the rankings, each with between six and seven million migrants.

Table 1.1 International migrants by world region, 1970-2005 (millions)

Year	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005
World	81.5	99.8	154.0	174.9	200 (estimate)
Developed	38.3	47.7	89.7	110.3	no data
Developing	43.2	52.1	64.3	64.6	no data

Source: UNDESA, *World Economic and Social Survey: International Migration (*New York: UN, 2004)

It is much harder to say which countries most migrants come from, largely because origin countries do not keep count of how many of their nationals are living abroad. It has been estimated nevertheless that at least 35 million Chinese currently live outside their country, 20 million Indians and eight million Filipinos.

These facts and figures convey a striking message, and that is that international migration today affects every part of the world. Movements from 'South' to 'North' have increased as a proportion of total global migration. At the same time, it is important not to ignore the significant movements that still take place within regions. There are about five million Asian migrants working in the Gulf States. It is estimated that there are somewhere between 2.5 million and eight million irregular migrants in South Africa, almost all of them from sub-Saharan African countries. There are far more refugees in the developing world than the developed world. Equally, more Europeans come to the UK each year, for example, than do people from outside Europe; and many of these Europeans are British citizens returning from stints overseas.

Besides the dimensions and changing geography of international migration, there are at least three trends that signify an important departure from earlier patterns and processes.

The feminization of international migration

First, the proportion of women among migrants has increased rapidly. Very nearly half the world's migrants were women in 2005; just over half of them living in the developed world and just under half in the developing world. According to UN statistics, in 2005 there were more female than male migrants in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, Oceania and the former USSR. What is more, whereas women have traditionally migrated to join their partners abroad, an increasing proportion who migrate today do so independently; they are often the primary breadwinners for the families they leave behind.

There are a number of reasons why women comprise an increasing proportion of the world's migrants. One is that the demand for foreign labour, especially in more developed countries, is becoming increasingly gender-selective in favour of jobs typically fulfilled by women – services, healthcare and entertainment. Second, an increasing number of countries have extended the right of family reunion to migrants – in other words allowing them to be joined by their spouses and children. Most often these spouses are women. Changing gender relations in some countries of origin also mean that women

have more independence to migrate than previously. Finally, and especially in Asia, there has been a growth in the migration of women for domestic work (sometimes called the 'maid trade'); organized migration for marriage (sometimes referred to as 'mail order brides'), and the trafficking of women especially into the sex industry.

Blurring distinctions between origin, transit and destination countries

Second, the traditional distinction between countries of origin, transit and destination for migrants has become increasingly blurred. Today almost every country in the world fulfills all three roles – migrants leave, pass through and head for all of them. Perhaps no part of the world better illustrates the blurring boundaries between origin, transit and destination countries than the Mediterranean. About 50 years ago the situation was fairly straightforward. All the countries of the Mediterranean – in both North Africa and Southern Europe – were countries of origin for migrants who mainly went to northern Europe to work. About 20 years ago Southern Europe changed from a region of emigration to a region of immigration, as increasing numbers of North Africans arrived to work in their growing economies and at the same time fewer southern Europeans had an incentive to head north for work anymore. Today, North Africa is changing from an origin to a transit and destination region. Increasing numbers of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa are arriving in countries like Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. Some remain, others cross the Mediterranean into Southern Europe, usually illegally, where again some stay and others try to move on into Northern Europe.

The growth of temporary and circular migration

Finally, while most of the major movements that took place over the last few centuries were permanent, today temporary migration has become much more important. Furthermore, the traditional pattern of migrating once then returning home seems to be phasing out. An increasing number of people migrate several times during their lives, often to different countries or parts of the world, returning home in the intervening periods. Even those who are away for long periods of time return home at more and more frequent intervals, as international travel has become so much cheaper and more accessible. 'Sojourning', involving circulation between origin and destination and only a

temporary commitment to the place of destination has a long history: much of the Chinese migration to Southeast Asia and Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example. However this circulation is now occurring on an unprecedented scale and has been facilitated by developments such as transport and communications revolutions.

Causes of international migration

International migration is an important dimension of globalization, and has become increasingly embedded in changes in global economic and social structures. Today, there are more reasons and additional means to migrate than ever before.

Growing disparities

Development is a difficult concept to measure. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has developed a widely-cited Human Development Index (HDI), which ranks countries according to a combination of three dimensions – income, health and education. According to the 2005 report, while the HDI has risen across the developed world and most of the developing world, there have been unprecedented reversals in some of the very poorest countries. Eighteen countries recorded lower HDIs in 2005 than they had in 1980; twelve of them were in sub-Saharan Africa. Not only is human welfare in those countries therefore deteriorating, at the same time the gaps between these countries and the rest of the world are increasing.

Some of the statistics provided by UNDP are very depressing indeed. Around 550 million of the people in work around the world earn less than one US dollar per day. More than 850 million people, including one in three preschool children worldwide, suffer from malnutrition. More than one billion people lack access to safe water and 2.6 billion do not have adequate sanitation. Worldwide about 115 million children are denied even basic primary education – most of them in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. On average girls can expect to receive one year less of education than boys in African and Arab states and two years less in South Asia. In the developing world as a whole, only 58 percent of women are literate, compared with 68 percent of men.

A lack of development is compounded by growing population pressure. Almost five billion people, or 80 per cent of the world's population, currently live in poor or at best middle-income countries. While many of the world's more prosperous countries have declining populations, they are burgeoning in many poorer countries: virtually all of the world's population growth currently takes place in developing nations. The average woman in Africa today has 5.2 children while the average European woman has just 1.4. These trends mean that the share of the world's residents in developing countries will rise even further. And as a result of such high rates of child birth in the developing world, there is also a far higher proportion of younger people there than in the developed world, who need to be absorbed by the labour market or migrate elsewhere to find work.

It is no coincidence that a good number of poor countries are also states where the democratic process is fragile, where the rule of law is weak and where corruption is rife (although corruption is certainly not limited to poor countries). By migrating, people try to protect themselves and their families against the effects of a weak economy and volatile market, and from political crises, armed conflicts and other risks. In some cases, people are forced to flee as refugees, as the state can no longer protect them from the impact of conflict or from persecution. In the very worst cases, it is the states themselves that are responsible for these offences.

But it is important to stress that it is not necessarily underdevelopment or overpopulation or poor governance *per se* that cause migration, but rather differentials between different parts of the world. Per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 66 times higher in the developed world than in the developing world. A child born in Burkina Faso today can expect to live 35 fewer years than a child born in Japan; and somebody born in India can expect to live 14 fewer years than somebody born in the United States. Limited school enrolment and low literacy levels in poorer countries compare with almost universal enrolment and full literacy in the richer ones. And with very few exceptions the most corrupt and undemocratic governments are in the poorest countries.

The global jobs crisis

One of the most powerful incentives to migrate is to find work. Although there are important variations, overall unemployment has reduced in the developed world in recent years. In contrast it has increased or remained at a stable but high level in large parts of the developing world. The highest incidence of unemployment in the world's major regions is in the Middle East and North Africa at over 12 per cent, compared with about six per cent across the industrialized economies.

Being out of work is not the only dimension of the current global jobs crisis. Many people are underemployed. Usually they work in the informal sector, where employment is unpredictable; opportunities come and go by the season and in some cases by the week or even day, and where working conditions can be appalling. Even for those who are employed, wages are often barely sufficient for survival. UNDP estimates that although poverty is likely to decrease, it will still remain substantial for the foreseeable future and that in 2015 some 380 million people will still be trying to survive on less that one US dollar per day. Another aspect of the global jobs crisis is the 12 million people estimated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to currently be working in situations of forced labour.

A population that is under particular stress in the developing world is those who rely on agriculture for their income. They comprise about half of the entire labour force – some 1.3 billion people. Many have small farms that are threatened by commercial expansion and environmental degradation. They are also often taxed disproportionately because of their weak political position. The income gap between farming and non-farming activities in developing countries has increased dramatically in recent years. One result has been increasing rural-urban migration, as farmers and their families head for towns and cities to try to find a better source of livelihood. For many of these people, internal migration to the city is the first step towards international migration out of their country.

The segmentation of labour markets

High income economies are increasingly becoming characterized by the segmentation of labour markets. This occurs where sectors of the labour market are eschewed by national workers because they are low paying, have little security and are low status, and thus have become dominated by migrant workers. These are often described as '3D jobs' – entailing work that is dirty, dangerous or difficult, and often a combination. They are concentrated in sectors such as agriculture, forestry, plantations, heavy industry, construction and domestic services. Often the migrants who work in these sectors are undocumented or have irregular status, for they more than others are willing to work for very low wages and in insecure conditions.

The communications and transportation revolutions

The communications revolution is a central element of globalization process. Much of the academic literature on globalization has focused on the recent explosion in hi-tech developments such as e-mail and the internet, electronic bulletin boards and satellite television stations, as well as cell phones and cheap international telephone calls. It has been estimated, for example, that between 1990 and 2000 the number of telephone lines worldwide increased from 700 million to 2.5 billion, while the number of internet users increased from scarcely one million to over one billion. This revolution has facilitated increasing global linkages and, in effect, reduced the distance between different parts of the world. It is relevant to migration for two reasons. First, it makes people aware of disparities; of what life is like in other parts of the world. Second, it makes people aware of opportunities to move and to work abroad.

At the same time it is possible to overstate the communications revolution. There is a still a significant global 'digital divide', which is the term given to the gap in access to information resources that exists between poor and rich countries. This was most strikingly illustrated in a speech by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2000, when he said that 'Half the world's population has never made or received a phone call', although this statistic has been widely debated ever since. Bridging the digital divide is nevertheless considered important for achieving global equality, increasing social mobility, encouraging democracy and promoting economic growth.

Another 'revolution' often referred to in the globalization literature is in transportation. This refers on the one hand to the increasing range of options for international travel and on the other to decreasing costs. It has particularly arisen because of the proliferation of competition between airline companies. Once again it would be a mistake to assume that this revolution has reached every part of the world, but it is nevertheless estimated that today it costs no more than US$ 2,500 to travel legally between any two places in the world. It can be far more expensive – but is still possible - to travel illegally (Table 2).

Table 2 Mean costs for migrant smuggling (2005)

Routes	**Mean costs (US$)**
Asia-Americas	26,041
Europe-Asia	16,462
Asia-Australasia	14,011
Asia-Asia	12,240
Asia-Europe	9,374
Europe-Australasia	7,400
Africa-Europe	6,533
Europe-Americas	6,389
Americas-Europe	4,528
Americas-Americas	2,984
Europe-Europe	2,708
Africa-Americas	2,200
Africa-Australasia	1,951
Africa-Africa	203

Source: Petros, M. The costs of human smuggling and trafficking, Global Migration Perspectives 31, (2005, Global Commission on International Migration)

If the communications revolution has made many would-be migrants more aware of reasons to migrate, the transportation revolution has made migration more feasible. At the same time travelling internationally is still prohibitively expensive for the majority of the

world's population, and many face administrative obstacles such as obtaining passports and visas.

Migration networks

Most migrants move to countries where they have friends or family already established, forming what is often referred to as transnational migration networks. It has been argued that one of the main reasons why migration is increasing today is migration networks, which establish a self-perpetuating cycle. The expansion of migration means that more people than ever before have friends or family already living abroad, and the changing geography of migration means that more often than previously these networks link would-be migrants in poor countries with potential destinations in richer countries.

Migration networks have been shown to encourage migration in three main ways. First, they provide information, often taking advantage of the new communications technology described above. Second, they finance trips by lending would-be migrants money. Third, they have also been shown to play a crucial role in helping new migrants to settle, by providing an initial place to stay, helping them find a job and providing other economic and social assistance.

New rights and entitlements

There has been a significant expansion of rights and entitlements that allows certain people to cross borders and stay abroad far more easily than ever before. The dismantling of internal borders in the European Union (EU), for example, allows for the free movement of EU citizens within the region, while the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and regional economic agreements in other parts of the world, including Africa and South America, also contain some provisions for the free movement of workers. Furthermore, certain categories of people – such as business-people, academics and students, sports and entertainment performers – often either do not require visas or can apply via fast-track procedures. Almost every country in the developed world allows long-term migrant workers to be joined by members of their immediate family. Most countries in the world, furthermore, have also signed the 1951 UN Refugee

Convention which guarantees protection and assistance to refugees outside their country (perhaps the most significant non-signatory is India).

The extent of these new rights and entitlements can however be exaggerated. The free movement of labour has not yet been realized in most regional economic agreements outside the EU. Applicants for family reunion face increasingly rigorous administrative processes. There are also increasing restrictions on the mobility of many other people – the low-skilled and asylum seekers for example. In particular, the phenomenon of 'irregular' migration (also referred to as 'undocumented' or 'unauthorized' migration) has risen quickly on political agendas worldwide.

The migration industry

Migration is facilitated by a wide range of individuals and agents including labour recruiters, immigration lawyers, travel agents, brokers, housing providers, remittances agencies, immigration and customs officials, as well as by entire institutions such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) which is often responsible for transporting migrants and refugees for official resettlement or return programmes and NGOs that provide assistance and shelter to migrants and refugees. These have been described by some analysts as forming a new migration 'industry' or migration 'business'. There is also an illegitimate part of the migration industry, comprising human traffickers and migrant smugglers. The enormous profits that the immigration industry makes from migration, it has been argued, add considerable momentum to the process.

Explaining migration

This section has briefly explained some of the key structural changes in the global economy that together provide increasing incentives and opportunities for people to migrate. Yet these need to be reconciled with the fact that still only about three per cent of the world's population is an international migrant. Given growing inequalities, widening awareness of opportunities for a better life elsewhere and increasing access to transportation, a legitimate question to ask is why do so few people migrate?

Some of the answers to this question have already been alluded to. The very poorest people, those most affected by global inequalities, simply cannot afford to move. Many people who do migrate in response to poverty move internally, normally from the countryside to the city, and not internationally. There are far more unemployed or underemployed people in the poor world than jobs for them even in the segmented labour markets of the rich economies. The communications and transportation revolution are not as far-reaching as some commentators believe, neither are migration networks. Rights and entitlements to move on the whole apply to the privileged few. And the migration industry depends on profit and so has an incentive to keep migration costs up.

At least three other reasons emerge from the literature. The most important is inertia. Most people do not want to move away from family, friends and a familiar culture, so most people stay in the country where they were born. Another reason is that governments can control migration. Communist countries used to stop people leaving, but since the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War this is rarely the case anymore (Cuba and North Korea are notable exceptions). Certain countries in Africa and the Middle East nevertheless still require citizens to be granted permission to leave. Much more common today are destination countries controlling migration – although their efforts are not always effective. An additional reason is that as countries develop, emigration eventually reduces, and despite the depressing statistics earlier in this section, most countries in the world are developing, albeit at times at a painfully slow rate. The next section turns to the links between migration and development.

Consequences of international migration

Migration has been a constant and influential feature of human history. It has supported the growth of the world economy; contributed to the evolution of states and societies, and enriched many cultures and civilizations. Migrants have been amongst the most dynamic and entrepreneurial members of society; people who are prepared to take the risk of leaving their homes in order to create new opportunities for themselves and their children. The history of United States economic growth, for example, is in many ways the history of migrants: Andrew Carnegie (steel), Adolphus Busch (beer), Samuel

Goldwyn (movies) and Helena Rubenstein (cosmetics) were all migrants. Kodak, Atlantic Records, RCA, NBC, Google, Intel, Hotmail, Sun Microsoft, Yahoo and ebay were all started or co-founded by migrants.

Opportunities

In the contemporary world, international migration continues to play an important – although often unacknowledged - role in national, regional and global affairs. In many developing countries, the money that migrants send home is a more important source of income than the official aid provided by richer countries. In certain developed countries, entire sectors of the economy and many public services have become highly dependent on migrant workers and would collapse almost literally overnight if their labour were withdrawn. It is often said – though difficult actually to prove – that migrants are worth more to the UK economy than North Sea oil. It has been estimated by the World Bank that migrant labour around the world earns US$ 20 trillion – the vast majority of which is invested in the countries where they work. Another study indicates that about 15 million foreign born workers in the USA add over US$ 10 billion to the US economy. Migrant labour, it is argued, has therefore contributed significantly to economic growth. Throughout much of the world, migrants are not only employed in jobs that nationals are reluctant to do, but are also engaged in high-value activities that local people lack the skills to do.

Migrants and migration do not just contribute to economic growth; in fact their impact is probably most keenly felt in the social and cultural and social spheres of life. Throughout the world, people of different national origins, who speak different languages, and who have different customs, religions and ways of living are coming into unprecedented contact with each other. Whether they are willing to admit it or not, most societies today are characterized by at least a degree of diversity. I often make this point in lectures to University students in the UK by pointing out that in the last 24 hours they have almost certainly eaten food or listened to music originating elsewhere in the world, or watched a top-flight sports team that includes foreign-born players, or the descendants of migrants. It is no coincidence that some of the largest concentrations of migrants are to be found in

‘global cities’ like Hong Kong, London or New York; dynamic, innovative and highly cosmopolitan urban centres that enable people, places and cultures in different parts of the world to be come increasingly interconnected.

Challenges

It would be naïve, at the same time, to deny that international migration today also poses important challenges. Perhaps the most talked about is the linkage between migration and security. Especially after 9/11 there has been a perception of a close connection between international migration and terrorism. This has been compounded by more recent attacks in Madrid and London. Irregular migration, which appears to be growing in scale in many parts of the world, is sometimes regarded by politicians and the public alike as a threat to national sovereignty and public security. In a number of destination countries, host societies have become increasingly fearful about the presence of migrant communities, especially those with unfamiliar cultures that come from parts of the world associated with extremism and violence.

These are legitimate concerns that should not be underestimated. At the same time, there has probably been too much attention paid to the challenges posed by migration for destination countries and societies in which migrants settle; and not enough to those that arise for the migrants themselves, their families, as well as for the people and societies they leave behind.

It is worth remembering, for a start, that many migrants leave their homes because they have no choice. There are about ten million refugees worldwide – these are people who had been forced to flee their homes for fear of persecution or death. Once their journey has begun, many migrants (and not just refugees) perish *en route*. Some migrants, furthermore, find themselves exploited and their human rights abused once they have arrived in their destination. This is most particularly true for the victims of human trafficking who can effectively be enslaved, often in the sex industry. Domestic workers, too, can face abuse and suffer violence at the hands of their employers. More generally, many migrants and their children face discrimination and prejudice, even years after they

have settled abroad. Migration matters just as much because of its negative consequences for migrants themselves as it does for the challenges it poses for destination societies.

Migration also can have important implications for the societies migrants leave. This is especially the case where migrants have skills that are in short supply in their home countries. While the impact of the so-called brain drain has been felt most severely in the health sector, it is also significant in the education sector too. Not only does it reduce the ability of poor countries to deliver essential services, it also means that public investment in the education and training of these people is effectively lost to the country.

Conclusions

For the sorts of reasons outlined in this paper, international migration has risen towards the top of political agendas in many countries, attracts considerable media coverage and has become a common topic of public interest more generally. Yet all too often the debate on migration is unsatisfactory. Concepts are unclear – the terms 'asylum seeker', 'refugee' and 'irregular' or 'illegal' migrant, for example, are regularly used interchangeably. Statistics are at times quoted in ways that alarm rather than inform. Only a very partial picture of migration is normally presented. Overall, the real diversity and complexity of migration is often ignored. My hope is that this meeting will provide participants with the explanations, analysis and data required to understand today's key migration issues, and hopefully to engage in reasonable debate and propose realistic policies.

Suggestions for further reading

IOM, 2005, *World Migration 2005: Costs and Benefits of International Migration* (Geneva: IOM)

Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, 2003, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (London: Macmillan, Third Edition)

Khalid Koser (2007) *International Migration: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Relevant internet sources

www.compas.ox.ac.uk
www.gcim.org
www.iom.int
www.migrationinformation.org