

# Future of Migration





## The Global Challenge

Immigrant integration and increasing diversity in Europe and the North are significant questions for today's societies. However, I would like to focus on three other major challenges that are often ignored in public debate. All rest on the assumption that migration is a challenge for poor countries too:

- First, most poorer people in the world are unable to migrate internationally, and so are unable to share in any benefits of international migration; and that even where they do, the ability of their home communities and families to benefit from this migration is often limited.
- Second, less visible forms of migration, such as internal, temporary, seasonal or child migration usually offer much lower benefits, yet often carry greater costs for poor people.
- Third, migration to newer regional centres in the Middle East, Central, East and SE Asia or parts of Africa give rise to new challenges in countries that have limited infrastructure or policies to deal with immigrant rights, integration or 'multicultural' societies in the Western sense.
- What is the role of education in giving poor people access to international migration opportunities, and can policies on migration and education be combined in a way that gives rise to a 'virtuous circle', rather than so-called 'brain drain'?
- How can migrants' remittances to poor countries - which are currently greater in monetary terms than international aid flows - be built upon to stimulate a wider process of development (whilst recognising that these are private rather than public flows of capital)?

Second, in relation to the less visible forms of migration that poor people do participate in:

- How can such forms of migration be facilitated in such a way that they deliver tangible benefits for migrants and their families, as well as the wider population in sending and receiving areas?
- Is it possible to drive down the cost to relatively poor people of sending relatively small amounts of money, or to use such remittances to release capital constraints, for example through stimulating the microfinance sector?
- What forms of exploitation and abuse do internal, temporary, seasonal or child migrants face, and how can these be reduced or eliminated?

Third, in relation to those who migrate to emerging regional centres in rapidly growing economies:

- Are there lessons that can be learned from European or North American responses to immigrant integration and diversity, or are entirely new models required in other parts of the world?

All three of these challenges impact a larger number of people, to a greater degree of significance, than the 'classic' challenges of integration and diversity that currently hold such a strong policy focus in the global 'North'. If we focus on the consequences of migration for poor people and poor countries, then a number of associated questions come into play that are of importance over the next decade.

First, in relation to the exclusion or limited involvement of poor people from international migration, questions include:

- Is there scope for relaxation of controls on migration, particularly where this can be demonstrated to have beneficial macro-economic effects on sending and receiving countries?

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## Options and Possibilities

The major 'channels' of international migration will be the same in 2020 as they are today.

Although international migration has increased over the last few decades, it has done so slowly, rising from just 2% to around 3% of the world's population over the period from 1970 to 2005. It seems highly probable that this percentage will continue to rise slowly over the coming decade, or at least not fall, implying that by 2020 there will be more international migrants in the world than there are today.

In addition, although it appears that new migration flows - in terms of origins and destinations - are emerging all the time, it also seems likely that the major 'channels' of international migration will be the same in 2020 as they are today, with few new major 'poles of attraction', and few new emerging countries of emigration - beyond the possibility of mass exodus associated with economic or political collapse in a small number of countries.

However, perhaps even more guaranteed is that there will be a greater proportion of the world's population living in urban areas, both as a result of urban growth (an excess of births over deaths in many of the developing world's major cities) but also as a result of continued rural-urban migration. This process of urbanisation appears to be particularly strong in Africa, currently the least urbanised continent in the world, but where the proportion of the population living in urban areas is expected by the UN to rise from around 35% in 2000, to around 45% in 2020 and 50% by 2030.

There is of course a degree of uncertainty even in relation to the points above. For example, the recent global economic crisis appears to have hit some poor migrants particularly hard, as they often work in manufacturing and service industries that are orientated towards global export markets that have been significantly affected by the downturn. The Chinese authorities have estimated, for example, that as many as 20 million migrant workers may return from urban to rural areas as a result of the crisis. If such processes were to turn into a medium-term trend, this could have a major downward impact both on rates of urban growth, and potentially on international migration.

However, what is much more uncertain is the way in which sending and receiving societies might or might not benefit more from the migration into the future.

For example, the 'benefits' of migration are often indirect and therefore neither clear, nor easy to predict. Few in the UK would now dispute that migration has had a significant and positive impact on the range and quality of food in restaurants across the country. Yet there are almost certainly wider benefits ranging from art and culture to entrepreneurship, technology and the quality of healthcare that are difficult to measure (and predict) but no less real. Such benefits are not limited to the UK, or to international migration - for example the increasing presence of rural migrants in urban centres can lead to the development of trade links between rural and urban areas, as well as contributing to social and cultural transformations.

There also appears to be a growing interest at international level in the potential benefits of migration for development, as encompassed in initiatives such as the 'Global Forum on Migration and Development', a major international initiative to promote good policy practice in this field. Yet to date the translation of these initiatives into changed policy at national level is highly limited, with continued suspicion of migration and mobility amongst many policy-makers.



## Proposed Path Forward

In the field of migration, talk of 'solutions' is not straightforward. For example, the issues involved are complex, politically highly contentious, and research evidence is patchy. Indeed, there are few countries in which there is a mature public debate about migration, whether this is movement of poor people from rural to urban areas, or immigration to new and emerging urban centres.

There is some prospect that the development of new technologies might go some way to addressing the problems faced by poorer people in deriving benefits from migration. For example, in the field of money transfer by migrants, significant advances have been made in terms of online and mobile-phone based electronic transfers, sometimes to the benefit of very poor people. The challenge is to make sure that these technologies are available to the poor, at low cost, and functioning in ways that they engender trust that the hard-earned cash of migrants is safe.

However, in relation to all three challenges identified above, 'solutions' are most likely to arise from a more mature public and policy debate, which in turn is likely to rely heavily on the availability of robust research evidence. Yet there are many areas in which such evidence is lacking. For example, although the number of international migrants in the world is now broadly accepted to be around 200 million people, these are figures for migrant stocks rather than flows; there is in contrast no consensus at all on how many people move across borders on a seasonal or annual basis, let alone the numbers of people moving within their own countries. Such data is not easy to obtain either: borders are long, and often un-policed; few countries have the kind of residential registration systems that allow tracking of internal mobility, and in many societies such systems would either be impractical or meet fierce political resistance on civil liberties grounds.

Technological advances are already proceeding fast in the field of migration, particularly in terms of migrant remittances. There is the prospect too that the mobile phone in particular can become the source of trusted

information on safe migration - in practice, many migrants and would-be migrants already use mobile phones extensively to plan their journeys, and to make the necessary contacts along the way to enable them to continue towards their destinations.

Solutions involving more rational public debate based on better research evidence are perhaps less probable, but still eminently possible, at least in some contexts. To take one example, in Bangladesh, a mature public debate is emerging on the causes and benefits of migration for the country, and successive governments, democratic and military, have taken at least some action, based on emerging research evidence of the significance of migration for the country's economy and society. This has led to some relaxation on the rules for travel overseas by women, with likely benefits in terms of reduced exploitation of women who were previously forced to move illegally if they moved at all. A combination of research and lobbying by organisations such as the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit in Dhaka has also led to the granting of citizenship to one of Bangladesh's historic 'migrant' groups - Urdu-speaking Biharis who moved to the country during colonial times or around partition, many of whom had been confined to camp-like settlements since 1971. Meanwhile, the country's most recent Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper deals in depth with both internal and international migration, highlighting a number of areas in which policy change might enhance the benefits of migration to the poorest sections of society. These include investigation of labour demand overseas, improved services to overseas workers, and attempts to find innovative ways to finance the initial cost of migration by the poor.

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Yet the potential for global impact here is surely more limited: out of a total of over 80 PRSPs completed in nearly 60 countries since 2001, little more than a handful deal in any depth with the issue of migration based on robust evidence. Most simply identify migration - and especially the internal movement of the poor - as a problem, based on no hard evidence at all.

There is probably no 'best' path forward on migration, nor is a world 'free of constraints' realistic. Migration provides opportunities to some, but also poses challenges for others, such that the task of dealing with it is always likely to be beset by the constraints

associated with managing competing interests. For example, if new migrants arrive in a labour market, they clearly may compete for jobs with existing workers (even if in some cases they do not, and in all cases, they also contribute to demand which stimulates overall employment). Where such competition does emerge, it is likely to be felt most keenly by other recently-arrived migrants, often at the lower end of the labour market.

In this context, I would argue for a more limited goal: creating the space in which well-informed debate about the benefits and costs of migration, and appropriate policy responses, is possible.

## Impacts and Implications

Ultimately, the biggest problem in finding solutions to the issues and challenges raised by migration is the polarised nature of the debate. For many people, migration is a symptom of the failure of states or societies to provide adequate living conditions so that people can stay in their home areas. In contrast, for many others, migration is a 'right' that is limited by the actions of governments and societies that are xenophobic or racist.

Yet surely a middle ground needs to be found. For many migrants, movement is an essential means of securing a livelihood or a better life, but migration is often also an undesired, and undesirable outcome of poverty, underdevelopment, environmental degradation or armed conflict. Indeed, for an individual migrant, the desire to escape difficult conditions at home, and seize opportunities elsewhere can easily go hand in hand.

In this context, we need compromise between polarised positions that seek to classify migration as 'good' or 'bad' - or between positions that see migrants as 'deserving' or 'undeserving'. That does, however, require policy-makers to rise above polarised public

debates, to see the phenomenon of migration in a detached way, based on the best available evidence.

The consequences of taking a more rounded view on migration are not easy to predict.

Socially, a more open and tolerant attitude towards migration (whether or not numbers of migrants actually rise) could be at the cost of increased social tension, if that process is poorly managed or explained. But equally, it could almost certainly contribute to improved social relations, if understanding of the benefits of migration and diversity can be clearly articulated. This is as relevant a conclusion for migrant-receiving areas



in the global 'South', such as commercial agricultural plantations in Côte d'Ivoire or the slums of capital cities, as it is for economically-advanced societies in Europe and North America.

Economically, we still do not completely understand the broader consequences of migration, although there is growing evidence of the benefits of migration both in macro-economic terms, as well as for individual sending and receiving communities.

Finally, technologically, it seems clear that a more open approach to migration could contribute to the stimulation of new technologies (such as the 'skype' and other VOIP technologies, used intensively by many families split across countries and continents) as well as to new uses for existing technologies (such as the growth of money transfer systems that use mobile phones and the internet).

In terms of impacts on other issues, migration is perhaps the archetypal cross-cutting issue, and as such, it arguably impacts on all of the other topics for this initiative. Thus: in the energy world, the extraction of raw materials for energy often provides a stimulus for inward migration, but equally can lead to the displacement of populations in affected areas (e.g. through the building of dams, or conversion of

agricultural land for the production of biofuels); food insecurity is a classic cause of distress migration; both too much water (floods) and too little (droughts) can be associated with quite large migrations and displacements; the influence of climate change makes these particularly difficult to predict into the future; growing urbanisation contributes to one of the major challenges facing the world in the 21st century - how to deal with rising urban waste; migration throws into question established identities, and contributes to the creation of new, sometimes 'hybrid' identities; the use of new technology by migrants, and to control migrants, raises significant issues to do with privacy; without connectivity and transport, migration doesn't happen; with migration, connectivity and transport links can be stimulated and developed; migration is blamed (not entirely fairly) for decimating the health workforces of many smaller or poorer nations; in turn, without migrants, Britain's NHS and other advanced country health systems would likely grind to a halt; cities are growing in the developing world, at least in part due to migration; migrant remittances outweigh either international aid, and/or foreign direct investment, in a significant number of countries and lastly; is migration a choice? That is a key question.

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