

Poverty, International Migration and Asylum

Christina Boswell and Jeff Crisp



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FOREWORD

In recent years, substantial numbers of people have migrated, or sought to migrate, from regions that are afflicted by poverty and insecurity to more prosperous and stable parts of the world. By the year 2000, the United Nations estimated that about 140 million persons – roughly two per cent of the world's population – resided in a country where they were not born.

Such population flows, involving increasingly tortuous and dangerous long-distance journeys, have been both prompted and facilitated by a variety of factors associated with the process of globalization: growing disparity in the level of human security to be found in different parts of the world; improved transportation, communications and information technology systems; the expansion of transnational social networks; and the emergence of a commercial (and sometimes criminal) industry devoted to conveying people across international borders.

The implications of international migration raise a number of challenges and dilemmas for policy makers that are not going to recede. A number of trends suggest that international migration is likely to increase over the coming decades. The process of globalization, if anything, appears to be exacerbating global economic disparities. It may also be contributing to the instability and conflict that force people to flee to other countries.

This policy brief summarizes the key issues presented at the UNU-WIDER conference on Poverty, International Migration and Asylum in Helsinki during 27-28 September 2002 organized by George Borjas of Harvard University, and Jeff Crisp of UNHCR. An edited volume resulting from the UNU-WIDER conference and the project on Refugees, International Migration and Poverty is expected to be published in 2004.

Tony Shorrocks
Director, UNU-WIDER
March 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, the issues of international migration and asylum have risen to the top of the international agenda. The pressures and opportunities linked to the process of globalization have led to an increase in the number of people moving from one country and continent to another. At the same time, insecurity and armed conflict in many of the world's poorest and economically marginalized states have triggered new waves of displaced people.

The increased scale of international migration has been profoundly troubling to many receiving countries. While the industrialized states derive many benefits from immigration, there remains considerable public and political resistance to any liberalization of migration and asylum policy. This resistance is linked to a range of popular concerns about the apparently negative impact of immigration and refugee flows on employment, welfare systems, national security and identity. While such fears are often unfounded – indeed, there is a strong economic and demographic case for loosening restrictions on migration – governments and opposition parties continue to mobilize electoral support through promises to obstruct, deter or limit the arrival of foreign nationals.

The contradiction between the economic case for liberalization and the political pressures for closure has contributed to a number of negative and for the most part unintended consequences. First, the absence of legal routes for migration has led to a significant expansion in human trafficking and smuggling networks which are both dangerous and exploitative in nature. For the majority of would-be migrants and refugees, these routes represent the only way to enter one of the industrialized states.

Second, restrictive entry policies and the corresponding increase in illegal patterns of international migration have undermined the international refugee protection regime. Many of those people who are most in need of asylum find themselves unable to leave their country or region of origin in order to seek asylum in one of the industrialized states; while many migrants who do reach an industrialized state attempt to remain there by submitting an asylum claim, despite the fact that they are not bona fide refugees. This has led to a decline in public confidence in asylum systems and increasing gaps in the system of international refugee protection.

Third and not least, political pressures to retain restrictive immigration policies have encouraged states to limit recruitment to those with high skills. Such selective migration policies have exacerbated the 'brain drain' problem experienced by many low-income countries, thereby impeding their development.

These problems suggest the need for a serious rethink of national and international migration policies. This WIDER Policy Brief explores the different options available, examining issues such as the liberalizing migration policies; protecting refugees in

regions of origin; addressing the root causes of migration and refugee flows; influencing perceptions of the costs and benefits of migration; and developing international migration management. While none of these options provides a panacea to the challenges of migration and asylum, they might in combination lead to a more effective and equitable international response to the issue of human mobility.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the issues of migration and asylum have risen to the very top of the international agenda. This is partly a question of numbers. Around 175 million people now live in a country other than the one in which they were born, and there is a general perception that more people than ever are now moving from one country and region to another. But it is not simply the scale of migration and refugee movements that has altered. So too have methods of travel and entry, the profile and country of origin of many of those moving, the chosen countries of destination, as well as their status and treatment in countries of destination.

These changes have had a range of implications for countries of origin, transit and destination, as well as migrants and refugees themselves. Many of these implications are positive. Migration can contribute to development or reform in source countries through transnational migrant networks which can transfer resources, information and ideas to those at home. Immigration can also bring tangible economic benefits to countries of destination, providing a cheap and flexible source of labour to fill gaps in labour supply or cushion seasonal and cyclical fluctuations.

Many receiving societies have recognized how immigration can be culturally enriching, providing a source of fresh talent and ideas. From the perspective of migrants, the possibility of temporary or permanent migration can be a means of supplementing incomes, supporting families at home, or having access to a better way of life. For refugees, it can mean safety from conflict, violence or persecution.

Yet far more media and public attention has been focused on the negative impacts of migration. Emigration can impede development in source countries through the loss of skilled and creative workers, and by delaying the need for economic restructuring to create more jobs. In many countries of destination, migration and especially asylum are seen as imposing an inordinate burden on welfare systems and public resources, while economic migrants are often seen as threatening the jobs and wages of native workers. Immigration has also been increasingly seen as a threat to a shared cultural identity and even to security, especially after the events of 11 September 2001.

The response of most receiving states has been to restrict access to asylum systems and to close most legal routes for immigration. Yet this has had the unintended consequence of forcing many would-be migrants and refugees to resort to the use of human smugglers and traffickers to reach countries of destination. Many have lost their lives being smuggled via dangerous land and sea routes, while others have been subject to gross exploitation and human rights abuses in countries of transit and destination. Tougher measures on asylum and illegal immigrants in receiving countries have meanwhile forced many to live in sub-standard conditions, with precarious legal status and limited rights.

These mixed implications of international migration raise a number of challenges and dilemmas for policy makers:

- how to maximize the positive impact of emigration on development?
- how to create better chances at home for those prepared to risk their lives through smuggling routes?
- how to combat trafficking and prevent abuse of asylum systems without jeopardizing refugee protection?
- how to reconcile the economic need for immigration with political resistance in receiving countries?

Current migration and asylum management practices are a long way from addressing these predicaments. Indeed, in many senses they have contributed to current problems. Expensive and cumbersome asylum systems are failing to ensure protection for those most in need while creating scope for abuse by those who are not; restricted channels for legal movement have encouraged the burgeoning of dangerous and exploitative smuggling and trafficking practices; while dwindling resources for development and refugee assistance to poorer regions of the world often shift the burden to those countries least able to cope, in turn fuelling further migration and forced displacement.

The urgency of addressing these dilemmas is not going to recede. Indeed, a number of trends suggest that the problem of immigration will if anything increase over the coming decades. For one, the pressures of economic globalization appear to be exacerbating global economic disparities. They are also contributing to the insecurity and conflict that force people to flee to other countries. Meanwhile, the availability of cheap communication, transport and expanding migrant networks will increase the incentives and opportunities for people to move.

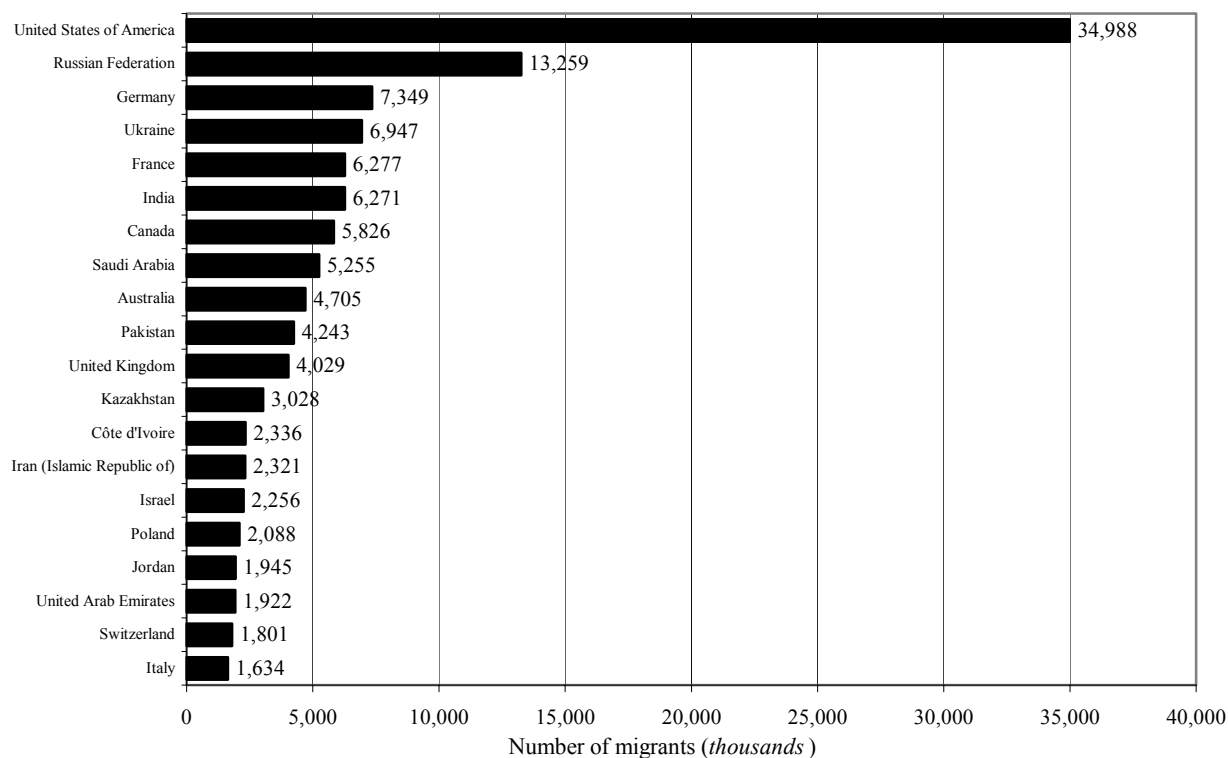
Migration dynamics will also be significantly affected by the growing demand for migrant labour in developed countries. Gaps in labour supply, low fertility rates and the phenomenon of ageing populations are set to increase the demand for labour, which will act as an important pull factor for South-North migration. Yet popular pressures for migration control also show no signs of receding. The rise in electoral support for far-right parties in Europe, and continued efforts to restrict illegal immigration and asylum, imply a continued resolve to limit flows into developed countries. And we are seeing the emergence of similar patterns in a number of ‘new migration’ countries in Latin America, Central East Europe, Asia and South Africa.

These trends, as well as their mixed impacts on states and migrants, raise a number of key issues for policy makers and researchers. First, we need a better understanding of the causes and dynamics of movement, including the socio-economic and political factors prompting emigration, the influence of conditions in countries of destination and the role of migration networks, and factors explaining choice of travel and country of

destination. Second, we need to better understand the impact of flows on source, transit and destination countries as well as on migrants themselves. And third, we need to examine what policies can work to reduce or mitigate migration pressures, to minimise the negative impact of migration on sending and receiving countries, to combat the exploitation of migrants through trafficking, and to ensure international protection and migrant rights are upheld.

This Policy Brief provides an overview of the issues that need to be examined and addressed in order to begin to respond to these challenges. Drawing on the findings of a UNU-WIDER conference on poverty, international migration and asylum, it examines a number of key issues raised by the changing causes and patterns of movement, and their multiple impacts on countries of origin, transit and destination.

Countries with the largest international migrant stock, 2000



Source: United Nations Population Division, International Migration Report 2002.

GLOBALIZATION, POVERTY AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Globalization – the liberalization of international trade and the revolution in communications – has been one of the most important factors generating increased levels of migration. Trade liberalization has placed developing economies under immense economic pressure, often generating increased unemployment, reduced social spending and a decline in living standards.¹

These pressures can also generate political insecurity, creating grievances over limited or inequitably distributed resources, or frustration at the declining capacity of states to provide socio-economic security. Meanwhile, restructuring has disrupted traditional labour patterns and social structures, inducing rural-urban migration. Where multinational companies (MNCs) relocate to developing countries, this has created a pool of low-skilled wage labour exposed to standards of western consumption and representing a potential source of emigration.²

Globalization has not only increased so-called ‘push factors’ inducing emigration, but has expanded possibilities for the flow of information, communications, and movement between states. People in developing countries are increasingly exposed to western culture and (often unrealistic) impressions of standards of living. Cheaper telephone costs and the internet make it easier to stay in touch with friends and relatives who have moved to other countries. And cheaper transport costs have made international travel more widely available – at least for those able to obtain business, tourist or student visas to western countries.

There is a third way in which globalization may generate increased migration: through increasing demand for both high and low skilled workers in highly industrialized states. The most obvious example of this is in the burgeoning information and communications technology (ICT) sector, where developed countries are now competing for highly qualified specialists. But the exponential growth of the service industry has also created demand for low-skilled workers to complement high-skilled jobs.

Moreover, as trade liberalization has forced manufacturing companies in developed states to become more flexible and competitive, many have become increasingly dependent on the supply of low-cost, flexible labour, often employed on an irregular

¹ See, for example, Donald P. Chimanikire, ‘African Migration: Causes, Consequences and Future Prospects and Policy Options’, paper presented at the UNU-WIDER conference on Poverty, International Migration and Asylum, Helsinki, 27–28 September 2002. (Henceforth, papers presented at this conference will simply be referred to as ‘UNU-WIDER conference papers’.)

² Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

basis.³ One example of this is the phenomenon of ‘sweatshops’ employing irregular migrants on below legal wages, which have become more widespread in west Europe over the past two decades.

While globalization is increasing the pressures and opportunities for international migration, paradoxically the movement of labour remains highly restricted. Indeed, it has almost become a commonplace to point out the contradiction between liberalization in the movement of goods, capital and services, and continued restrictions on movement of labour.

To be sure, there are some limited provisions on mobility of labour under international agreements. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) contains provisions on the movement of service providers, while the European Economic Area permits free movement for nationals of their 18 states. But these are a far cry from the sort of liberalization that has occurred for other factors of production.

The restriction on labour mobility is all the more paradoxical when one considers that from a purely economic perspective, free movement of labour would almost certainly generate huge global economic gains. Labour migration can increase the efficiency of labour markets, expanding production in countries of destination and reducing the social costs of surplus labour in source countries. Research presented at UNU-WIDER suggested that the gains to global GDP from free movement of workers could be between 15–67 per cent with full liberalization,⁴ or 3–10 per cent if only skilled migration is liberalized.⁵

Why, then, is this economic logic not translated into policy? One explanation for resistance to this liberalizing agenda is that these benefits would not be equally distributed between countries: it would benefit the nationals of poorer countries far more than those of richer ones. Nor would the benefits be distributed evenly between social groups within receiving countries. While an expanded supply of labour would increase overall efficiency, thereby expanding production and employment, this would disproportionately benefit employers. Native workers, by contrast, may face a decline in salary or – where there is a surplus of labour – even displacement from jobs.⁶

³ Hans Overbeek, ‘Globalisation and Governance: Contradictions of Neo-Liberal Migration Management’, Hamburg Institute of International Economics, Discussion Paper 174, 2002.

⁴ Anna María Iregui argues that welfare gains of liberalization would amount to 15–67 per cent of world GDP. See Iregui, ‘[Efficiency Gains from the Elimination of Global Restrictions on Labour Mobility: An Analysis using a Multiregional CGE Model](#)’, UNU-WIDER conference paper. Jonathon Moses and Bjørn Letnes calculate the gains would amount to 15–40 per cent GNP, with lowest the adjusted figure at 8.3 per cent for 1998. Moses and Letnes, ‘The Economic Costs of International Labor Restrictions’, UNU-WIDER conference paper.

⁵ Iregui (*ibid.*).

⁶ See, for example, Daniel Gottlieb’s paper on the case of Israel. Gottlieb, ‘The Effect of Migrant Workers on Employment, Real Wages and Inequality: The Case of Israel – 1995 to 2000’, UNU-WIDER conference paper.

Whether or not these effects occur will depend on a number of other factors, including labour market flexibility, and the sectors and skills levels of immigrant workers. If immigrants have complementary skills they may create additional jobs for native workers, instead of displacing native workers or depreciating salaries. On the other hand, if labour markets are rigid – for example labour costs are very high – one might expect an influx of immigrants with identical skills to increase unemployment, or generate an expansion in illegal employment. While empirical research suggests that these effects on salary or employment for native workers may be minimal, the notion that labour immigration will displace nationals has been one of the central popular concerns articulated by anti-immigrant groups in developed countries.

Of course, much of the resistance to liberalizing labour mobility is not based on economic argumentation at all, but less tangible fears about security and identity. Here we enter the realms of sociology and political science, where scholars have tried to explain rising concerns about immigration and asylum in receiving countries. We shall explore some of these ideas later on. What is important to note now is that these sorts of popular concerns militate against the economic logic of open borders.

The tension between the economic case for free movement and political pressures for closure has encouraged developed states to introduce increasingly selective immigration policies. This selective approach aims to limit total numbers while attracting the most economically beneficial and least controversial workers: namely, the high-skilled.

The trend towards selective immigration rules is evident not just in the US and Canada, but also in many west European countries which are competing to attract the best skills. Yet this targeting of high-skilled labour has the effect of sharply exacerbating disparities in the distribution of the benefits of migration. Developed countries are clear winners, able to expand their ICT sectors, fill gaps in public services and create new jobs for complementary low-skilled workers. Sending countries meanwhile are pretty much all-round losers: they are deprived of much needed skills and talent, and forfeit a return in public investment in education.

With this bigger picture in mind, we shall now take a closer look at the causes, dynamics and impact of emigration from developing countries.

SOURCE COUNTRIES: CAUSES AND IMPACT OF EMIGRATION

The literature on the causes of emigration usually distinguishes between refugee flows and voluntary economic migration. In practice, such a distinction is often difficult to sustain. The factors triggering migration usually comprise a complex mix of political, social and economic conditions, as well as individual psychological factors, and in many cases it makes little sense to ask if movement is voluntary or coerced. Moreover, many of those who leave for predominantly economic reasons may attempt to secure residence in destination countries through applying for asylum, producing what has been coined ‘asylum migration’ – a phenomenon which further complicates the distinction between forced and voluntary movement.

Nonetheless, when analysing ‘push’ factors in countries of origin one can distinguish between those related to political and security conditions – including human rights violations, persecution of minority groups, armed conflict and generalized violence; and those related to socio-economic conditions, including poverty, lack of employment opportunities, inadequate welfare, education or social services, environmental degradation, or demographic growth creating a surplus of labour.

Much research has been devoted to the causes of economic migration, and in particular attempts to delineate the general social and economic ‘macro’ variables that induce migration. Yet most scholars are now in agreement that income and employment variables alone cannot explain patterns and levels of emigration. In fact, most economic migration does not occur from least developed countries (LDCs), but from middle income countries or those undergoing a phase of transition.

There are two main reasons for this. One is the so-called ‘poverty constraint’, which prevents the poorest sections of the population or those from LDCs from raising the financial resources necessary to move.⁷ The poverty constraint has become more important in shaping migration decisions as international movement has become more expensive, often requiring substantial resources to pay smuggling or trafficking agents. Thus many of the poorest either do not move, or if they do, move internally or to neighbouring countries.

The second reason why more migration occurs from relatively developed countries and not LDCs is that development processes themselves can be an important trigger for emigration. Economic restructuring can upset traditional livelihoods and labour patterns, with substantial repercussions for traditional family and social structures. A typical scenario is where restructuring or trade liberalization pushes people from rural areas to towns, which in turn are saturated with labour, creating pressures for a further outlet through international migration.

⁷ Timothy J. Hatton and Jeffrey G. Williamson, ‘What Fundamentals Drive World Migration?’, UNU-WIDER conference paper.

Within sending countries a number of factors will determine which social groups move. In many societies young single males are the most mobile group. But research on regions such as the Caribbean also points to the growing frustration of young women who are exposed to notions of gender equality which are not being realized in places of origin.⁸ In cases where emigration is motivated by a combination of political and economic factors, ethnic minority groups facing systematic discrimination may well be more likely to move.⁹

Other scholars have focused on the ‘micro’ level of explaining decision-making on migration. Recent research has emphasized that emigration is often not an individual decision, but may be a collective family strategy for enhancing incomes. This has been referred to as a form of ‘portfolio diversification’: an attempt to manage the costs and risks involved in migration through selecting one family member to move.¹⁰ Another typical strategy is for the male head of the family to move first to secure a job or legal status in the country of destination before being joined by the rest of his family. In some cases it is judged more effective to send a child or a female member, because of the perceived higher prospects for being granted asylum.

Thus far we have largely focused on ‘macro’-theories of the general conditions creating migration pressures, and ‘micro’-theories of individual or family decision-making processes. But the so-called ‘meso’-level of migration theory is also crucial in explaining who moves, and their choice of destination.

Of central importance here are migrant networks, which provide a source of information, financial assistance and support for those considering moving, and which can provide economic, social and psychological support on arrival. Such networks can mean that migration flows between particular places become self-perpetuating, encouraging the chain migration of people, despite changes in macro-conditions in the place of origin.

Migration has a number of implications for those left behind. In a positive sense, it can provide an invaluable source of remittances for families in source countries, who are often able to purchase accommodation or land, invest in education, machinery or businesses, or increase consumption with money from relatives abroad. For governments, remittances can provide crucial foreign currency to help balance current accounts. In many sending countries the level of remittances far outweighs total inflows

⁸ Susan Mains, ‘Mobility and Exclusion: Towards an Understanding of Migration in the Context of Jamaica’, UNU-WIDER conference paper.

⁹ On the example of Iraqi emigrants, see Géraldine Chatelard, ‘[Iraqi Forced Migration in Jordan: Conditions, Religious Networks, and the Smuggling Process](#)’, UNU-WIDER conference paper.

¹⁰ Claude Sumata, ‘Risk Aversion, International Migration and Remittances: Congolese Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Western Countries’, UNU-WIDER conference paper.

from development assistance and foreign direct investment – a recent estimate put total flows in 2000 at as much as US\$ 100 billion.¹¹

Levels of remittances will depend on a number of factors, including if migration is temporary or long-term, how secure the migrant's status is in the country of destination, how much he or she can earn, if he or she has moved alone or with a family, and how strong ties remain with his/her family or places of origin. For example, some research suggests that migrants entering through selective programmes for the highly skilled are likely to remit less because their relatively stable legal status allows family reunion, thus severing ties with those at home.¹²

Others have suggested that so-called 'wider diaspora' in regions further afield will be able to send more resources than 'near diaspora' in poorer neighbouring countries.¹³ It should be pointed out that there is some debate as to whether such remittances are always positive, with some scholars arguing they increase inequalities between families with relatives abroad and those without, and that the increased spending on consumption may fuel inflation.

A second major impact for sending countries concerns the outflow of skilled workers. Migration research has consistently shown that emigration is self-selective, that is to say it is usually the brightest, most skilled or enterprising who move. While this thesis may be somewhat overstated – many are also compelled to migrate because of a real lack of alternatives, rather than above-average prospects – the emigration of skilled and talented people is clearly immensely costly for sending countries. In some cases the departure of skilled doctors, nurses, teachers, or ICT specialists may start with a brain outflow of surplus skilled labour.¹⁴

But as this outflow leads to a deterioration in education, research or business opportunities, or a decline in standards of social services, it may well generate a brain drain of middle-class, qualified nationals. Examples of this phenomenon include Zambia, Pakistan and Romania, where brain drains have led to a serious deterioration in health and education services, public administration, and the private sector. Moreover, the loss to sending countries is not simply a function of the absence of skills, but also results from the huge costs of investing in education and training for those who subsequently move.

Some scholars have argued that the mere possibility of being able to participate in such a skilled migration programme encourages more people to invest in education, potentially benefiting those who end up staying at home. But other scholars have

¹¹ The figures are from Philip Martin, cited in Khalid Koser and Nick Van Hear, 'Asylum Migration: Implications for Countries of Origin', UNU-WIDER conference paper.

¹² Riccardo Faini, 'Migration, Remittances and Growth', UNU-WIDER conference paper.

¹³ Koser and Van Hear (*supra*, 11).

¹⁴ Arno Tanner, 'Country of Origin and Democratic Responsibility. Argumentation in National Labour Immigration Policy – Brain Drain and Domestic Racism Focused', UNU-WIDER conference paper.

questioned this more optimistic thesis, pointing out that enrolment in tertiary education does not seem to be higher in high-skilled migrant sending countries.¹⁵ The problem of brain drain is likely to be reinforced by selective entry policies in receiving states. And it represents an unresolved tension in developed states' migration policies: recruiting high qualified migrants may seriously undermine efforts at development, in turn creating additional migration pressures.

¹⁵ Faini (*supra*, 12); and Margo Alofs, 'Legal Migration Probabilities, Illegal Migration and the Brain Drain', UNU-WIDER conference paper.

PATTERNS OF MOVEMENT

Many, if not most, migrants and refugees do not travel directly from source to destination countries through regular routes. Limited possibilities for legal entry and stay in most countries of destination mean a large proportion attempt to reach other states without legal documentation, and often through long, tortuous and dangerous travel routes. Inadequate information on employment opportunities or options for legal residence in ‘first choice’ countries also means many people end up moving on to destinations other than those originally intended. The role of people smugglers or traffickers who help people with illegal travel or employment further complicates these patterns of movement, with travel, routes and preferred destinations often being determined by available trafficking or smuggling services.

In fact, the most striking feature of these new patterns is the apparently huge increase in the use of smuggling and trafficking agents. Kurdish migrants reaching Italy in dangerous boats, Afghani refugees stranded off the coast of Australia, or Chinese migrants smuggled by truck into the UK are just a few of the cases that have attracted particular media attention.

The attempt to prevent or deter this type of highly dangerous illegal travel has become a major priority of governments in both receiving and many sending countries. So too have efforts to tackle gross exploitation of illegal immigrants by people traffickers, who may force migrants to work in intolerable conditions in sweatshops, farms, mines or prostitution to pay off trafficking debts.

Yet there are many gaps in our knowledge on the structures and strategies of smuggling and trafficking networks, as well as the intentions and motives of those prepared to use them. To be sure, we now know a fair amount about the most widely used smuggling routes, and something about some of the actors involved in organizing them.¹⁶ But recent research indicates that the phenomenon is far more diverse and multifarious than popular media images and discourse would suggest.

The first thing to note here is the wide divergence of perceptions of such practices in different countries. Research on the experiences of individuals who have been smuggled or trafficked suggests the absolute necessity of such services for many people fleeing poverty, discrimination or persecution. It is frequently pointed out that a substantial proportion of refugees who reach Western European countries have only been able to move thanks to the assistance of smugglers and traffickers. Migrants and refugees themselves often view smuggling agents as performing a legitimate even life-saving function, rather than as cynical profiteers or criminals, as is the predominant view in receiving countries.

¹⁶ See, for example, Raimo Väyrynen, ‘[Illegal Immigration, Human Trafficking, and Organized Crime](#)’, UNU-WIDER conference paper.

Second, such services are in many cases not linked to organized criminal syndicates, as often supposed. Rather, they frequently take the form of small scale firms such as temporary employment agencies or fake travel agencies, or simply informal networks of individuals which operate locally in source or transit countries.¹⁷ Such agents may assist with forging of travel documents, bribing border or consular officials, or providing transport for border crossing.

Others, by contrast, are more large-scale, with extensive international contacts, hierarchical structures, and sophisticated equipment. There is also evidence of organized criminal networks already engaged in goods smuggling branching into people smuggling using pre-existing international networks.

A third aspect on which we have limited information is the strategies and intentions of those using smuggling and trafficking services. In some cases, migrants appear to be recruited locally with the clear intention of entering or working illegally in a particular country. In others, people may revise their plans and chosen destinations at different steps along the route, because of changing information, resources, or legal possibilities.¹⁸

Many people only resort to smuggling or trafficking services in transit countries once it becomes clear they have limited prospects of employment or securing legal status. This is the case with many Iraqis in Jordan, for example, who set out with the intention of staying closer to home but are subsequently forced to consider alternative options because of intolerable conditions there.¹⁹

The Iraqi case also illustrates the role of information – or lack of it – in influencing decisions. There are extremely limited possibilities for getting access to external information sources in Iraq, because of restrictions on foreign media, international travel and communications. The reverse appears to be true in the case of Albania, where people have access to extensive information and emigration strategies are a standard topic of conversation.²⁰

Fourthly, in most cases fees are substantial and far beyond what individuals or single families can afford on their own. A typical strategy is to borrow money from friends or relatives, often those already in a western destination country, which will then be paid back once they have found a job. Others have to work for traffickers as part of the deal, and others still are entirely misled about their fate on arrival and even the country of destination, as in the case of women from eastern Europe forced to work as prostitutes in the Western Balkans.

¹⁷ See Väyrynen, *ibid*; and on the Albanian case, Beryl Nicholson, ‘Economic Migration and Asylum: A Case for Rethinking Immigration Policies’, UNU-WIDER conference paper.

¹⁸ Anders Lisborg, ‘Destination Denmark – Human Smuggling and Migration Strategies Among Spontaneous’ Asylum Seekers’, UNU-WIDER conference paper.

¹⁹ Chatelard (*supra*, 9).

²⁰ See, respectively, Chatelard and Nicholson (*supra*, 9 and 17).

This raises a number of important questions about the intentions, strategies and methods of those moving. How much do people know about the risks involved in travel, and conditions on arrival in countries of destination? Would they still move if they had access to better information? How far would routes and destinations change if smuggling and trafficking services were not available? Finally, in what ways do the costs of smuggling or trafficking – both financial and security-related – penalize or favour different social groups?

A common assumption is that it is a more feasible option for those with financial resources, young people and males – who may not be those most in need of protection. But it may also privilege those with relatives in destination countries, or those with supportive religious or ethnic networks prepared to help with contacts and costs, or those who happen to live in areas where recruitment takes place.

Research on these questions is clearly vital, but also faces a number of obstacles. Researchers need to establish sufficient trust with interview partners to find out about their intentions, the agents they used, payments and routes. And where smuggling or trafficking involves larger-scale organized criminal groups, attempts to investigate their internal structures or modes of operating can be highly dangerous.

Smuggling and trafficking also occurs with the passive or active collaboration of officials in sending, transit and receiving countries, making it difficult to investigate. It can be equally difficult to gain information on the victims of trafficking, who are often afraid to contact officials because of concerns they could be prosecuted. These problems in gaining information clearly make it difficult to get a complete picture, but should not detract from the need for a better understanding of patterns of movement.

MIGRANT NETWORKS

Until fairly recently, most migration research tended to conceive of migration in terms of push and pull factors inducing movement from countries of origin to countries of destination. According to this approach, the objects of research were migrants, sending and receiving states. Some researchers then began to conceive of these as operating within migration systems, that is, a set of economic, social, political and cultural ties or dependencies linking sending and receiving countries.

Much recent scholarship has attempted to shift the emphasis to understanding the more complex relationships and dynamics between multiple actors involved in or affected by migration processes. These include not only migrants and states, but a range of other actors – potential migrants, families of migrants, firms, religious or social groups – who are linked together by multiple social and symbolic ties, transcending national boundaries. These networks are conceived of as operating within transnational social spaces, arenas in which people, goods, ideas, information, and cultural symbols are exchanged.²¹

The focus on migrant networks can shed light on a number of dynamics that traditional macro-theories have neglected. Migrant networks are crucial for understanding not only causes and patterns of migration, but also integration processes, and the impact of migration on individuals and societies in both countries of origin and destination. We have already seen how networks can influence emigration in source countries. Contacts with friends, family or ethnic communities in countries of destination are often the chief source of information on legal or employment opportunities. Such networks may provide resources to fund travel, can help new immigrants with accommodation, jobs, and legal and administrative arrangements, and provide valuable socio-psychological support.

The resources that flow through networks make migration a more attractive and feasible option for those in countries of origin, influencing decisions to move, as well as entry routes, length of stay, and capacity to settle and integrate in countries of destination. In this way, networks may generate chain migration – that is, serial, large-scale migration between particular areas of origin and destination. This can help explain why particular places produce far more emigrants than others, despite comparable socio-economic or political conditions; and why particular countries of destination attract people from particular places of origin.

Networks can create a range of positive externalities, benefiting not only new immigrants but also those left behind in countries of origin. The most obvious benefit is through the transfer of remittances. Networks may also transfer other goods such as business links or ideas, support for local charitable initiatives, or pressure for political and social reform. Where returning migrants retain links with networks in former host

²¹ Thomas Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 13.

countries, they may establish new import and export chains, or bring valuable skills and business experience.²² Links between migrant communities and those in countries of origin can also intensify bilateral relations between governments.

But there are also instances where networks have a negative impact on countries of origin, especially where they are supporting parties to a conflict at home through the supply of remittances. They may also supply arms or act as a training and organizational base for militias, as in the case of the KLA in Switzerland and Germany.

Clearly, there are wide variations in the character and intensity of these ties between different communities. In some cases such as Shiite Muslims from Iraq, religious networks provide a high level of support for members of their group and especially clergymen.²³ ‘Near’ and ‘wider’ diaspora retain close contacts with communities at home, and there are intensive exchanges of resources, information and support. In other cases networks may be less significant because of a weaker sense of collective identity; or because migrants move with their families and cut off links with those at home; or because the diaspora is fragmented because of political, ethnic or social cleavages.²⁴

The crucial role of migrant networks has several implications for migration management. First, it implies that a substantial component of the causes and dynamics of migration are largely closed to influence by sending or receiving countries. While states or international organizations may have some impact on macro-conditions through development policy, conflict prevention, or human rights advocacy, they have minimal scope for influencing personal and cultural ties between members of migrant networks. Second, the phenomenon of chain migration also suggests that policies of selecting high-skilled migrants from new places of destination may well generate a self-perpetuating dynamic of continued migration flows, regardless of attempts to limit quotas. This has certainly been the experience with immigration to Western Europe from countries providing a source of ‘guest workers’ in the 1950s and 1960s – flows which continued into the 1970s and beyond, despite attempts at restriction.

But on a final and more positive note, research on migrant networks suggests the huge potential that such networks have in maximizing the benefits of migration for both sending and receiving countries. Sending countries can benefit from the flow of ideas, resources and information from emigrants, which can make an important contribution to development. And receiving countries can benefit from the support provided by networks for integration. Some sending and receiving countries have recently begun to develop these ideas, exploring ways of enhancing the contribution of such linkages to processes of development, integration and inter-cultural understanding.²⁵

²² See, for example, Nicholson on the Albanian case (*supra*, 17).

²³ Chatelard (*supra*, 9).

²⁴ An example of this is described in Aspasia Papadopoulou, ‘Kurdish Asylum Seekers in Greece: The Role of Networks in the Migration Process’, UNU-WIDER conference paper.

²⁵ One example is EU dialogue with Mediterranean countries on migration issues in the framework of the ‘Barcelona Process’.

IMPACT ON RECEIVING COUNTRIES

The term ‘receiving countries’ – in its strict sense – denotes any country hosting immigrants or refugees, or a country to which flows are directed. In fact, this definition would cover just about every country in the world. In much of the literature on international migration, the term is used in a more narrow sense to refer to the most frequent destination countries for migrants and refugees, particularly developed western countries: Western Europe, North America and Australia.

These are of course not the only countries to receive large numbers of immigrants, and indeed a number of countries in Asia, the Middle East, South America, Central and East Europe and South Africa are increasingly becoming the preferred destination for migrants. Moreover, most refugees in fact choose to or are compelled to stay in countries closer to home. But these Western states remain the first choice destination for many immigrants from the south, a trend which has become more pronounced since the 1980s.²⁶ They have also generally been the most outspoken in their opposition to and attempts to control immigration and refugee intake since the early to mid-1970s. Hence much of the discussion of the impact of migration on ‘receiving countries’ has focused on these western industrialized states.

The major patterns of migration flows to Western countries since the 1970s have been well covered in the literature, and can be relatively quickly summarized.²⁷ Until the 1970s most western states received considerable numbers of immigrants through legal migration schemes and as refugees. A number of factors combined to produce more restrictive policies from around 1972–3: the oil crisis and ensuing economic recession; growing concerns about integration and inter-ethnic relations; and growing levels of south-north migration and refugee flows.

After initial attempts to restrict these flows through limiting legal migration channels in the 1970s, many immigrants began to use alternative channels for entering the west: family reunion, or asylum systems. This triggered in turn a series of measures to restrict numbers of asylum-seekers and possibilities for family reunion. One result of this was to shift flows into more nefarious channels, in particular illegal migration through illegal entry or overstay, and the increased use of smugglers and traffickers. Illegal migration appears to be still on the rise, although it is difficult to obtain reliable statistics. Asylum also remains a popular route for entering western countries. After a

²⁶ Stocks of migrants in US, France, Germany, Canada, Australia and the UK rose by 25 per cent in 1986/7–1996/7; see Susan F. Martin, Andrew I. Schoenholtz and David Fisher, ‘[Impact of Asylum on Receiving Countries](#)’, UNU-WIDER conference paper.

²⁷ Brief overviews are provided in Stephen Castles and Sean Loughna, ‘[Trends in Asylum Migration to Industrialized Countries 1990–2001](#)’; Matthew Gibney and Randall Hansen, ‘[Asylum Policy in the West: Past Trends, Future Possibilities](#)’; and Christina Boswell, ‘Explaining Public Policy Responses to Asylum and Migration’. All three were presented at the UNU-WIDER Conference.

decline in applications in the second half of the 1990s, numbers have again risen in most western receiving states.

In looking at how these flows have affected receiving countries, we need to be careful to disentangle different types of impacts. Many sections of the population and political parties have been highly vocal in their resistance to immigration, emphasizing numerous negative impacts of migration. Some of these are fairly concrete financial or social costs, which may be possible to measure. For example, there have been estimates of the costs of reception and application processing for asylum seekers.²⁸ There have also been some studies on the fiscal and economic impact of labour migrants, although less on the impact of employed asylum seekers and refugees. Other measurable social impacts of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees may be derived from statistics on criminality or the performance of schools in areas of high immigration.

But such estimates of the costs or benefits of migration should also be treated with caution. One reason is that migration and asylum policies themselves can be a major determinant of costs. Thus, for example, the extensive use of accommodation centres or detention for asylum seekers can substantially increase reception costs, while denying access to labour markets can increase fiscal costs.

Other costs relate to more abstract anxieties about the impact of immigration on identity or security. Here it is extremely difficult to ascertain how far such concerns are actually caused by immigration as such. On the one hand, immigration since the second world war has clearly had a major impact on society and identity in western European countries, and it is not surprising that this would have major repercussions. This is especially likely where immigrant communities are concentrated in areas of social deprivation, or where problems with language, cultural norms or discrimination impede integration. The rise in illegal immigration has also been viewed as a security threat, as have fears about immigrants active in international terrorist networks, especially in the wake of 11 September 2001.

But on the other hand, fears about cultural identity are clearly also located in a number of other socio-economic and political changes. Some authors have linked concerns about immigration to processes of globalization and modernization, which have eroded traditional categories of identity in developed countries – be these based on class, ideology, extended family, religion or the nation-state.

It has been argued that this has generated a search for new categories of membership, including those which differentiate between nationals and foreigners, or residents versus newcomers. Another, not incompatible thesis, is that pressures of globalization and EU integration have brought about significant changes in the role and competence of nation-states. These changes, it has been argued, also generate insecurity about the capacity of states to protect citizens from security threats, or to protect their privileged

²⁸ Martin, Schoenholtz and Fisher (*supra*, 26).

socio-economic status from competition from outsiders. According to these accounts, immigration simply provides a symbolic issue on which to pin these anxieties.

Whether or not one understands these concerns as a function of migration flows or as a ‘construct’, the fact remains that public concerns are very real, and certainly cannot be ignored by political parties and governments seeking legitimacy and electoral support.

Discussions on the benefits of immigration have tended to be much less prominent. One exception is the clear and growing recognition of the economic benefits of high-skilled labour migration. But there is less explicit acceptance of the benefits of low-skilled labour – an oversight that many see as hypocritical, given the structural dependence of most industrialized states on cheap flexible labour.

Nor is much said about the cultural gains of immigration. There have been attempts by some to emphasize the contribution of immigrants to receiving societies, often highlighting the achievements of sports players, artists or entrepreneurs. But this overlooks the wider and less tangible contribution of immigrant communities to the cultural and social life of receiving societies – for example how far immigration contributes to the dynamism of multi-cultural cities like London, New York, Berlin or Amsterdam.

Perhaps a more balanced discussion on the costs and benefits of migration will emerge as demographic pressures increase the demand for labour migration in developed countries. Governments may feel increasingly pressured to make a more positive case for immigration as the need for immigration becomes more urgent.

POLICY RESPONSES

In considering policy responses to migration and refugee flows, it also makes sense to start with the major western receiving states discussed above. West European states, the US, Canada and Australia have been at the forefront of developing instruments designed to control and restrict flows, ever since the 1970s when the problem of unwanted immigration and asylum flows began to emerge. As we shall see later, these policy responses subsequently set a standard or pattern for other, ‘new’ immigration countries or transit countries on Europe’s borders, as well as influencing more restrictive policies in other regions.

Policy responses since the 1970s have emerged in a largely *ad hoc* fashion, in reaction to changes in the nature and scale of flows, as well as shifting public perceptions of the problem. In the early 1970s Western European states were largely preoccupied with restricting labour migration. But as the stop to labour migration generated a rise in alternative routes – family reunion and asylum applications – the policy focus shifted to finding ways of limiting abuse of these two routes. In fact, liberal democratic states had relatively little margin of manoeuvre in terms of limiting family reunion, bound as they were by various constitutional and normative commitments to long-term residents and their close family members.

An easier target for many countries was asylum seekers, who were increasingly characterized as economic migrants abusing generous western welfare systems. Moreover, the fact that they were new arrivals with an essentially temporary or ‘pending’ status limited their political leverage and capacity to mobilize for more extended rights.²⁹ From the early 1980s onwards a wide spectrum of measures was introduced designed to limit both the numbers of asylum seekers, and the costs of receiving them and processing their claims.

Among the first of these were measures to limit access to territory, including visa requirements for source countries, carrier sanctions and reinforced border controls.

A second set of measures attempted to restrict the reception conditions of asylum seekers, partly to reduce costs but probably more importantly to provide disincentives for the ‘abuse’ of asylum systems by economic migrants. Measures included housing asylum seekers in collective accommodation centres or dispersing them throughout the country, reducing welfare benefits or introducing ‘in kind’ benefits, denying access to the labour market, and – more recently – the wider use of detention centres.

Thirdly, western states introduced a number of reforms to legal procedures and standards for processing and recognizing claims, to limit the numbers of those granted refugee status. These included a narrower definition of ‘refugee’; the creation of or

²⁹ Boswell (*supra*, 27).

wider use of new categories of ‘temporary protection’; accelerated procedures for manifestly unfounded applicants; and the return of asylum seekers to so-called safe countries of origin or transit, implemented through readmission agreements.

A fourth policy priority has been control of illegal immigration. This emerged as a particular concern from the mid- to late 1990s as the level of illegal entry through smuggling and trafficking expanded – in itself very much a consequence of more restrictive asylum policies. Measures to combat illegal migration have focused on border controls and cooperation with sending and transit countries to combat trafficking and smuggling. States have also stepped up a range of internal controls, including internal checks on residents and employer sanctions. Also important are efforts to prevent overstay, especially by rejected asylum applicants, through detention and deportation.

Many of these approaches have also been developed at the regional level by EU states through their cooperation in the field of Justice and Home Affairs. One important aspect of this is the Schengen agreement which established free movement between most EU member states, accompanied by the tightening of shared external borders. EU states have also embarked on an ambitious process of ‘harmonizing’ legislation in immigration and asylum, to help ensure consistency in policy and to limit irregular flows between and into EU states.

These various attempts to limit inflows raise three major questions. The first is what impact such measures have on immigrants and especially asylum seekers and refugees trying to reach or attain legal status in receiving countries. In fact, most researchers on refugee and migration have been highly critical of these restrictive trends. Many have pointed out how measures to restrict access to asylum systems or to reduce the numbers granted protection have undermined the 1951 Convention and led to the general erosion of international protection standards. Others have critiqued the decline in reception conditions for asylum seekers, which have increased the social, economic and political marginalization of asylum seekers.

But unsavoury as these restriction measures may be from an ethical and humanitarian perspective, it is also important to understand the political context in which they emerge. As we saw earlier, the phenomenon of unwanted influx has triggered deep-seated anxieties amongst many sections of the public in western receiving states, concerns which have been mobilized by political parties in receiving states. As a result, governments have found themselves under pressure to demonstrate their willingness and capacity to control these flows, partly to retain legitimacy and electoral support. Such restrictive measures are also seen as a necessary means of limiting inter-ethnic tensions. Indeed, a common assumption of most western policies has been that effective integration, good inter-ethnic relations and refugee protection are only possible if states can demonstrate an ability to control further unwanted inflows and to limit abuse of asylum systems.

The second question is whether such policies are effective in realizing the goals of restriction and control. Many have argued they are not.³⁰ Two central debates are worth highlighting here. The first addresses the question of the unintended consequences of migration and refugee policies. It has been argued that far from restricting flows, *ad hoc* and short-termist policy responses have simply channelled flows into more nefarious forms. On this account, restricting labour migration generated increased asylum, and restricting asylum created a burgeoning in the use of trafficking. Ever more sophisticated instruments for combating trafficking will not reduce flows, but simply force people to pay higher fees and risk more dangerous routes.

The second debate locates the question in the discourse on the decline (or not) of the nation-state. Here the contention is that globalization is eroding states' sovereignty over territory, and on norms governing whom they should admit. States simply cannot resist the ineluctable trend towards free movement and open borders. Migration restriction is at best a last-ditch attempt to convince electorates that states are able to manage influx, but these attempts are becoming increasingly symbolic. Others have argued that states do indeed have limited control over migration, but this derives not so much from globalization or international regimes, as from internal constraints inherent in liberal democratic systems: constitutions, norms of equal rights or concerns to promote good inter-ethnic relations, which constrain liberal democracies from introducing excessively harsh measures.³¹

The third central question is whether there are any alternatives to restrictive policies. There is a lively and expanding debate on possible 'third ways', including promoting the reception of refugees in regions of origin, measures to reduce the causes of migration and forced displacement, or resettlement schemes as a possible replacement to in-country asylum processing. These certainly merit further exploration, and we shall discuss the options further in the last section. But they all have inherent problems, and it is clear that there is no 'quick fix' to the tensions between the numbers of those in need of protection or seeking a better life, and public concerns about their impact on receiving societies.

³⁰ See, for example, Eiko R. Thielemann, 'Does Policy Matter? On Governments' Attempts to Regulate Asylum Flows', UNU-WIDER conference paper.

³¹ Gibney and Hanson; Boswell (*supra*, 27).

THE ‘NEW’ IMMIGRATION COUNTRIES

West Europe, North America and Australia are not the only receiving states affected by new patterns in international migration. There are a number of ‘new’ receiving countries which have experienced a significant rise in numbers of immigrants or refugees over the past two decades. There are two main dynamics responsible for this. The first is economic expansion in a number of industrializing states, which makes them an attractive destination for those from poorer countries. Thus countries which used to be net sending countries have become receiving countries, because of increased job opportunities and higher living standards. Examples of this include southern European countries such as Italy and Spain, which since the 1980s have become important destination countries. A similar trend can be seen in the Asian tiger countries – from the 1980s onwards Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Taiwan became popular destination countries for labour migrants.

One can observe these dynamics now in some of the more successful former communist countries in Central Europe, which are receiving increased levels of immigration. In fact, researchers have pointed out that there is nothing new in this pattern of evolution from sending to receiving country. West Europe was a major sending region for migration to the US in the nineteenth century, before industrial expansion made it a net recipient of immigrants.³²

However, the second main dynamic accounting for the emergence of new immigration countries *does* represent a qualitative shift from previous patterns: it is linked to the complex phenomenon of transit migration. As first choice destination countries in the west have become more difficult to reach, we have seen the emergence of a new phenomenon of transit migration, which often evolves into long-term stay or permanent settlement.

The countries affected tend to be those at the periphery of western receiving states, or those with stops *en route*. Thus Poland and Hungary have become major transit countries for nationals from the former Soviet Union; Morocco and Tunisia are important stops for West African migrants trying to reach Southern Europe; and Turkey has become a transit country for people from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Some of these countries appear to remain places of transit, with the stopover *en route* remaining just that. Countries such as Indonesia, a common stop for Australia, or Cuba and the Bahamas off the coast of Florida, have limited capacity to absorb additional labour or offer protection for refugees. But in many of the relatively more prosperous transit countries such as Poland, Hungary, Turkey or Tunisia people stay longer, trying to get work to finance further movement, or awaiting documents or an opportunity to travel. Others end up staying permanently, because they are able to find work or

³² Hatton and Williamson (*supra*, 7).

discover that they have limited prospects for entering or settling in the planned destination country.³³ Still others are sent back to transit countries under readmission agreements with western destination countries, and they may then stay in the previous transit country as asylum seekers or illegal immigrants.

Faced with higher numbers of illegal immigrants or asylum seekers, many of these new migration countries have begun to adopt restrictive policies similar to those of their western neighbours. Part of the reason is clearly a concern to limit the socio-economic costs of unwanted immigration, or to allay public concerns.

But there also appears to be a ‘copy cat’ effect, with new migration countries influenced by the example set by western receiving countries. If these comparatively rich and liberal democratic states have introduced restrictive treatment of illegal immigrants or asylum seekers with impunity, then there appears to be no convincing case why less wealthy states should not do the same. In this sense, western receiving states both offer examples of different means of restricting immigration, and appear to legitimize such measures for new receiving states.

A second important factor generating more restrictive policies in these countries is what has been dubbed the ‘externalization’ of EU immigration and asylum policies. In other words, the tendency of the EU to influence the migration and asylum policies of third countries through the use of incentives or pressure.

One important aspect of this is the use of readmission agreements, which have made transit countries surrounding the EU responsible for accepting asylum seekers or illegal migrants who passed through their territory. This has encouraged many Central European countries to conclude similar readmission agreements with their neighbours to the east, in an attempt to further shift the burden of responsibility. Thus Poland has concluded agreements with most of her neighbours in Eastern Europe and the Baltics. Other countries such as Morocco and Tunisia have been forced to introduce more rigorous border controls and measures to combat trafficking under pressure from the EU.

Perhaps the strongest form of externalization, though, is through the EU accession process itself. This obliges future EU member states to adapt their immigration and asylum legislation and practices to conform to existing EU rules, the so-called EU ‘acquis’. Thus EU candidate countries in Central Europe have adopted provisions on border controls, visa regimes and asylum systems to bring them in line with EU standards.

In many cases these measures are not suited to national contexts. For example, Hungary’s application of the EU visa regime has raised concerns about the fate of the ethnic Hungarian minority living outside the enlarged EU. While accelerated procedures

³³ See, for example, Papadopoulou on the case of Kurds in Greece (*supra*, 24).

are hardly pertinent to countries such as Estonia, which currently receives less than 30 applicants per year.³⁴

This tendency to externalize EU policies is set to expand. Readmission agreements are now a standard clause in the EU's association and partnership agreements with third countries.³⁵ And the externalization of EU policies through enlargement will be geographically extended with further waves of enlargement incorporating Romania, Bulgaria, the Western Balkans and probably Turkey. The expansion of the EU/Schengen area will almost certainly mean that countries on the borders of the enlarged EU will assume a larger burden than before as transit/receiving countries.

³⁴ Catherine Phuong, 'Controlling Asylum Migration to the Enlarged EU: The Impact of EU Accession on Asylum and Immigration Policies in Central and Eastern Europe', UNU-WIDER conference paper.

³⁵ Agnès Thurwitz, 'The Externalization of EU Policies on Migration and Asylum: Readmission Agreements and Comprehensive Approaches', UNU-WIDER conference paper.

TOWARDS BETTER MIGRATION POLICIES

New patterns of international migration raise critical challenges for states and international organizations engaged in refugee and migration policy. But it is clear that current approaches are inadequate. Restrictive policies are jeopardizing the protection needs of refugees, and are pressuring economic migrants to use dangerous travel routes and exploitative trafficking networks. Selective migration programmes are undermining development in sending countries, primarily through the brain drain. And the prevalence of illegal flows, trafficking and asylum abuse are fuelling anti-immigrant sentiment and concerns about security and control in receiving and transit countries.

More effective national and international migration regimes need to be tailored to better meet a number of central goals.

Towards Better Migration Policies

- Goal 1** Ensuring international protection for those fleeing persecution, armed conflict or generalized violence.
- Goal 2** Limiting abuse of asylum systems by those not in need of international protection.
- Goal 3** Combating dangerous practices of people smuggling and trafficking which put migrants at risk of death or serious exploitation.
- Goal 4** Ensuring that migration flows are orderly, and do not pose a threat to the security or stability of transit and receiving countries.
- Goal 5** Minimizing the negative impact of emigration on development in source countries, in particular the phenomenon of brain drain.
- Goal 6** Meeting the economic needs of receiving countries, consistent with goal 5.

How well do recent proposals for alternative approaches to international migration management fair when assessed against these goals or criteria?

Option one: liberalizing migration policies

This option would involve easing restrictions on labour mobility, not just for the high-skilled but also, as far as it is politically feasible, for larger numbers of low-skilled migrants. The rationale would be that expanding legal routes for low skilled workers

could take the pressure off asylum systems and reduce the level of illegal immigration. Arguably, it could thereby contribute to goals 1–4 and 6 listed above. Moreover, it could provide an outlet for low-skilled workers from developing countries, thus easing labour market and demographic pressures (goal 5).

This option clearly needs further reflection, and could be part of a more comprehensive strategy for managing international migration. However, it also makes two questionable assumptions. The first is that migration flows are somehow finite, and a proportion of them can be absorbed by expanded legal migration schemes. Yet legal channels are unlikely to be broad enough to absorb all would-be migrants. Moreover, migration research has convincingly shown that networks can make migration flows self-perpetuating, implying that a small expansion of legal routes could in fact increase the demand for illegal migration.

Second, it is unclear that receiving states will be willing or able to convince their electorates of the necessity for such liberalization. At most, intensive campaigning and public information might pave the way for a partial expansion of schemes. But as already suggested, this will hardly provide sufficient legal channels to address the problems of asylum abuse or trafficking.

Option two: promoting protection in regions of origin

This option would aim to shift the venue of protection or refugee processing to regions of origin. The rationale would be to take the pressure off in-country asylum systems and reduce the demand for trafficking (goals 2–4), whilst ensuring protection for those who need it (goal 1).

There have been a number of proposals falling under this category: reinforcing reception of refugees in neighbouring countries, through better funding of refugee camps, asylum systems or local integration; more effective protection of IDPs or better support for those repatriating; and more robust intervention to ensure the human rights of those at risk of persecution *sur place*. Such regional protection could be combined with expanded resettlement programmes for vulnerable or high risk cases unable to stay in regions of origin, and possibly also mechanisms for processing asylum applications in regions of origin, for example, through consulates.

The practical and ethical problems with such approaches have been widely discussed. First, such schemes would not stop *economic* migration pressures, and would therefore have limited prospects for significantly reducing the phenomenon of illegal migration and trafficking.

Second, almost all analysts have concluded that such regional protection could not provide an exclusive locus for protection – in other words, could not be a total *substitute* for asylum systems in receiving countries. Protection systems in the region of origin would be bound to be imperfect, and states would need to keep open possibilities for

asylum processing for spontaneous arrivals, in order to respect the principle of non-refoulement.

Third, the focus on regions or origin would shift responsibility for protection to poorer countries, imposing not only a financial burden (which could in principle be compensated), but also in many cases generating social or ethnic tensions. And finally, it remains unclear if regional processing would be practically feasible. Opening up possibilities for regional processing would almost certainly trigger a huge rise in applications to consulates. If interior and home ministries already face huge administrative problems processing asylum cases, it is questionable if consulates will be better able to avoid large backlogs and delays in processing.

Option three: addressing the root causes of movement

This option would aim to reduce migration pressures in countries of origin through more targeted use of development aid, foreign direct investment, trade liberalization, humanitarian assistance, human rights policy and conflict prevention to reduce migration pressures in countries of origin. This proposal is far from new, but has recently received renewed emphasis through NAFTA and EU policies to address the causes of migration and displacement in places of origin.³⁶

There is a growing literature on root cause approaches, especially the relationship between development and migration, which has highlighted a number of obstacles to such strategies. The first is the problem of the ‘migration hump’, which implies that development can at least in the short term increase migration pressures. The second is the fact that development or foreign policies targeted to reduce migration pressures would tend to channel resources to actual or potential source countries. This could divert development aid from non-sending countries, which may include some of the poorest regions. For these reasons the development community has been wary of embracing the root cause agenda.

These problems apart, more research needs to be done on the relationship between socio-economic transition and migration pressures, and on the ways in which development assistance could be targeted to reduce migration pressures caused by development processes. Moreover, as many have pointed out, far more could be done to enhance the positive externalities of migration for sending countries, including through better channelling and investment of remittances, and making better use of the resources transferred through migration networks, including promoting return of skilled migrants.

³⁶ Joanne van Selm, ‘The High Level Working Group: Can Foreign Policy, Development Policy and Immigration Policy Really Be Mixed?’, UNU-WIDER conference paper.

Option four: influencing perceptions of migration

Migration processes are often characterized by lack of or incorrect information. This can be the case for both migrants whose choice of destination or route is often based on incomplete or incorrect information; and receiving communities, many of whose concerns about the motives of asylum seekers or the impact migration may be ill-informed. Arguably, better public information and a more extensive and transparent debate on the causes and consequences of migration could go some way to addressing these problems. This would involve three main aspects.

First, better information for potential migrants on the risks of moving and conditions in receiving countries. This is not a new idea, and information campaigns have been carried out in some sending countries by IOM, inter alia. But if such campaigns can help prevent exploitation by traffickers of the use of dangerous travel routes, they should certainly be expanded.

Second, those in receiving states could be offered more accurate and balanced information on the social and economic impacts of immigration, including the benefits of labour migration. This could help make the case for the first option of expanded legal migration schemes.

And third, as has often been stressed by refugee campaigners, attitudes towards refugees and immigrants could be influenced by better education and information on the conditions in sending countries which force people to move. Clearly, many of the concerns generating resistance to immigration are not simply a function of misinformation. Nonetheless, a more open and balanced debate on migration causes and patterns could be an important component of a better managed international migration system.

Option five: establishing an international migration regime

Finally, many of these challenges could be better addressed through more effective international cooperation. This implies not just bilateral or intra-regional coordination, but an international forum that could address the multiple causes and impacts of migration and refugee flows in a more global and holistic fashion. The tasks of such a forum could be to analyse migration processes and policy options, develop norms and standards for managing migration, and share information and lessons from national experiences and policies. The themes addressed could include:

- The migration/development nexus: impact of development on migration, problems of brain drain and programmes for the return of skilled migrants, best practice on channelling and using remittances, and maximizing the resources offered by migrant networks.

- Trafficking and illegal migration: developing comprehensive strategies for addressing the causes of trafficking, norms and standards for assisting victims, cooperation to combat trafficking and smuggling networks, analysis and information exchange on the causes and patterns of movement and on protection implications.
- Protection options: explore regional protection policies and their impact on refugees and regions of origin, feasibility of extended resettlement programmes, as well as the implications of and alternatives to readmission agreements.
- Migrant rights and integration: develop norms and best practice on social and economic rights of immigrants, naturalization, inter-ethnic relations and integration.

None of these five options – or even a clever combination of all of them – can provide a panacea to the challenges of international migration. But they certainly deserve more careful scrutiny by researchers and policy makers. They could also be the object of a wider and more intensive international dialogue, possibly within a new international forum on migration.

Importantly, though, attempts to develop new solutions will need to take into account the often conflicting interests and values at stake in migration policy: refugee protection; the rights and welfare of migrants and asylum seekers; concerns about state sovereignty and control; goals of development and economic growth; and internal stability in receiving or transit states. Policy responses to date have failed to take sufficient heed of how policies will impact on these factors, to the detriment of states, local communities, migrants and refugees. We simply cannot afford to continue neglecting these impacts, and making the same mistakes in migration policy.

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