



Defining Migration Priorities in an Interdependent World

Migration Policy Issues

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I. What constitutes the migration “process”?

II. Dimensions of migration today

- Labour migration
- Irregular migration
- Migration and security
- Rights of migrants
- Health and migration
- Migration and development

III. A comprehensive and cooperative migration management approach

- Increase coordination among government agencies
- Promote consistency and coherence of migration policies
- Develop statistical information regarding migration
- Strengthen international cooperation
- Include all relevant actors in the policy-making process

IV. IOM’s role in managing migration

The world’s population is increasingly mobile. As the level of international migration rises, so does its impact on economic, social, cultural and political policies in most countries of the world. The phenomenon of international migration brings into play many sensitive issues of national security and identity, of social change and cultural adaptation, and of economic vitality and development. All of these questions represent important challenges to migration policy makers. Policy choices made now will help to determine whether migration is managed to maximize its benefits, or whether it will continue to be a source of concern, potential social disruption and friction between States. The key is not to prevent or obstruct mobility but to better manage it.

A comprehensive and cooperative approach to international migration management is required to deal with migration pressures of this century. To be successful, this endeavour cannot be undertaken by governments alone. It calls for the close involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations and the business community.

Introduction

Today, networks for producing and exchanging goods, services and information stretch across the world. Growing hand in hand with these global networks is the international movement of people. Whether of a temporary or permanent nature, international migration is more and more an integral component of contemporary life. Globalization, together with trade liberalization and global economic integration, encourages a more mobile labour force, but also appears to increase the gap in the standard of living between the developing and the developed worlds. In light of the changing nature of migration, new methods are needed to achieve and maintain an orderly movement of persons in the midst of a global society that is more and more committed to mobility.

For a long time, governments have responded to changing migratory trends on an ad hoc basis, responding to the “issue of the day”, often without considering broader impacts. Contemporary migration can no longer be treated as an isolated “issue”, but must be considered as a process to be managed in a comprehensive manner. While forced migration must be prevented, migration, if properly managed, can be positive for individuals, business and societies.

I. What constitutes the migration “process”?

The migration process could be said to begin with the impetus for migration (including root causes - the push and pull factors, and whether forced or voluntary), moving through the various stages of travel and entry (either by regular or irregular means, and either facilitated - legally or illegally - or spontaneous), settlement and/or return, integration and/or reintegration, and ultimately, in some cases, the acquisition of nationality. There are a number of offshoot relationships, including the potential contribution that diaspora can make to the economic development of their countries of origin as well as cross-cutting themes such as protection and health.

The stages of the migration process are interlinked, and involve a variety of actors, partnerships and policy considerations at different levels. Participants in the migration process of today include such diverse public and private individuals and institutions as employers, family members and community organizations, private business, government migration managers, international organizations, and smugglers and traffickers. The migration process includes linkages between economic, social, trade, labour, health, cultural and security policy areas, as well as rights and obligations, including at the international level, on the part of migrants and States.

This complex set of relationships highlights the need for a global understanding and approach to migration management which takes into account the relationship of migration to other contemporary issues of a social, economic and political nature such as labour market developments, security concerns and evolving national identities.

II. Dimensions of Migration

1. Labour migration

Labour migration poses one of the principal challenges to migration policy makers in the 21st century. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that today between 60 and 65 million persons are economically active in a country other than their own, with or without authorization. Three key determining factors - the “pull” of changing demographics and labour market needs in many industrialized countries, the “push” of population, unemployment and crisis pressures in less developed countries, as well as established inter-country networks based on family, culture and history – will continue to fuel this kind of movement. An alarmingly large proportion of labour migration occurs illegally, with a clandestine industry, including criminal, ready to abet it.



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Albanian citizen Klodian Grozhdani has now a steady job in Italy, thanks to IOM's labour migration programme that connects Albanians with the Italian labour market.

A number of new labour migration trends are emerging:

- Greater attention is being given to the movement of highly skilled professionals in Europe, Japan, and North America;
- A larger number of women are migrating as independent wage earners, which is tending to increase exploitation of women (and children) by traffickers or unscrupulous employers;
- The private sector plays a key role in making labour migration demand driven in destination countries and in recruiting workers in countries of origin;
- The clandestine movement and employment of unskilled or semi-skilled labour migrants continues to rise;
- An increasing number of countries of origin are adopting policies and practices that seek to actively promote foreign employment of part of their workforce. World-wide, the total value of remittances probably exceeds USD 100 billion per year with more than sixty percent going to developing countries, exceeding official development assistance;
- A new category is emerging of developing and transition countries in South-East Asia, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa comprised of net importers of certain categories of labour.

Inter-state cooperation aiming at responding to these trends and at managing labour migration is more active at the bilateral and regional level than at the global level. Some of the recently emerging Regional Consultative Processes on Migration, in particular the Intergovernmental Consultations on Asylum, Refugee and Migration Policies in Europe, North America and Australia (IGC), the Migration Dialogue in Southern Africa (MIDSA), and the Conference on Western Mediterranean Cooperation (5 plus 5), have included issues of labour migration in their agendas. At the global level, the “General Agreement on Trade in Services” (GATS) negotiations as part of the WTO trade negotiations represent the only direct attempt to manage the movement of people for labour purposes. Launched in 2001 in Doha, the new negotiation round is expected to lead to an expansion of the current low level of governmental commitments on the movement of natural persons as providers of services.

2. Irregular migration

Traditionally, countries receiving migrants have tried to reduce irregular migration by strengthening control or enforcement procedures. What is needed today is a more systemic approach. To address the issue of irregular migration effectively, one must recognize the links between the movement of people and the economic, social, political, trade, labour, health, cultural, security, and foreign and development policy spheres.

What must be avoided is having two types of migration; one that is managed by governments and another parallel irregular inflow that feeds on policy inconsistencies (e.g., between migration and employment), facilitated by smuggling networks taking advantage of loopholes within the governmental approach. One of the big challenges for governments in this area is to establish credibility, best achieved by providing legitimate channels of entry while deterring irregular movement.

3. Migration and security

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have had a significant effect on migration issues. There has been a natural reaction of concern about national security, and how migration impacts on social and economic security and stability. Does unlimited geographic mobility accelerated by globalization represent a security threat to States and societies and play into the hands of international terrorism? The effects of September 11 have brought a new clarity of focus on the importance of managing migration effectively, and a growing realization that ad hoc approaches are no longer sufficient.

Various measures are being undertaken by States to tighten their migration systems and combat terrorism. Inter-state cooperation and establishing connections between security considerations and migration are of growing importance. Additionally, since the integration of migrants into host societies is an important tool to prevent the development of negative attitudes of migrants towards the host society and to combat the rise of extremism both within and related to migrant communities, effective integration policies need to be developed.

4. Protection of rights

The protection needs of refugees and responsibilities of States towards them are well-known. The phenomenon of mixed flows of refugees/asylum seekers with other voluntary migrants using asylum procedures to gain access to the country of destination, and of asylum seekers travelling through multiple transit countries, often by means of smugglers or traffickers, to reach their desired country of asylum, poses particular challenges for policy-makers.

Beyond these, however, are growing challenges to protection of the rights of migrants more generally. These take many forms and include, most notably, a dramatic increase in the incidence of migrants subjected to abuse and exploitation by traffickers in this new “slave trade.” Migrants in an irregular situation are entitled to protection of their fundamental human rights but are nonetheless vulnerable to discrimination and to exploitation. They do not enjoy access to a range of social services and other forms of protection of the host society. In addition, in some countries lawful migrants continue to be subjected to widespread xenophobic and racist tendencies.

How to manage and integrate the rights and obligations of all migrants and the imperative for States to manage migration effectively are issues of growing concern. Governments, civil society and the private sector cooperatively need to promote non-discriminatory practices which address the basic rights of migrants.

5. Health and migration

Migration patterns are constantly changing and travel time is faster, often shorter than the incubation period of an infectious agent. Mobile people - whether tourists, business travellers or migrants - can trigger health issues, for example by introducing new or re-emerging diseases to countries they transit or go to, or by being vulnerable to conditions acquired from their new host communities and by taking back diseases unknown to their regions of origin. There is a critical relationship between population mobility and emerging or re-emerging infectious diseases such as TB and HIV.

Beyond physical conditions such as communicable diseases, today's mobility patterns are also posing challenges to the integration prospects or coping potential of the migrants, host communities and the relevant health systems. The negative physical and behavioural implications of mobility upon health status and service delivery can often result in insufficient control of communicable diseases.

The link between health and migration is not limited to negative consequences. The exposure to socio-cultural adaptation sometimes brings positive behaviours acquired by either migrants or hosts as a result of the new relationship. In this sense, migration has a positive impact on health, both of migrants and host communities. Additionally, there are a growing number of bilateral and multilateral migration arrangements that facilitate the exchange of health workers, either distinctly or as part of protocols for qualified labour. If understood and managed proactively, this potential of migration may be harnessed for the benefit of host and migrant communities. It is becoming increasingly clear that in order to draw upon the positive potential of migration and to effectively manage the risks there is an urgent need to expand upon existing knowledge and information related to the impact and consequences of migration health.

6. Migration and development

Development and migration are closely linked. Many States owe their wealth - whether human or economic - to population movements over the centuries. In the particular case of developing countries or countries in transition, the need to build a bridge between national development needs and the human and economic capital found in their diasporas is becoming more and more apparent as a means to contribute to growth.

Several key issues are implicated, including:

- “brain drain” or “brain circulation” which can result in the loss of skills, frequently without any immediate return. This loss often aggravates the deterioration of social and economic condition of States that suffer from conflict, natural disasters and HIV/Aids;
- involvement of the diaspora in strategies to counterbalance the loss of skills, and to promote sustainable development. These strategies tap the expertise and newly acquired skills and contacts of diaspora for the development of home countries, through capacity building, education, technology transfer and private investments;
- the significance of migrants' resources as financial potential for development (as previously mentioned globally an estimated USD 100 billion are remitted to developing countries which substantially exceeds official development assistance). There is a need to bundle and channel remittances to maximize their development potential.



Returnee Dr. Rashid Aman. Expert in molecular biology at the Institute of Primate Research in Kenya.

III. A comprehensive and cooperative migration management approach

Partnerships and international cooperation are essential to managing today's international migration trends. Effectively balancing measures addressing various migration-related issues, without creating improvement in one area to the detriment of another is a key challenge. Identifying essential parts of a national migration policy is one important step in the development of a strategy to manage migratory flows both at the national and international level. These various policy elements should be developed to take account of the impact one has on the other, and integrated into a comprehensive whole, capable of managing migration in an orderly manner.

Should any and all migration policy issues be considered within a national, regional and/or international comprehensive approach? Are some elements more important than others? Should the elements be common to all States or will each State develop its own package based upon domestic priorities?

In considering which **elements** are key to a comprehensive approach, the following could be a starting point:

- programmes to address push-factors of migration, including development aid to facilitate sustainable development of countries of origin and targeting of international trade and investment;
- opportunities for legal migration and development of orderly migration programmes coordinated between host and home countries;
- effective border management arrangements (for security of borders, protection against crime, combating trafficking, maintaining the integrity of the asylum system);
- voluntary return in safety and dignity and sustainable reintegration of illegal migrants;
- acceptance and participation of migrants in the host society;
- recognition and respect of the rights of migrants and refugees.

Establishing a **comprehensive** approach to migration management is not an easy task. On the contrary, it requires a number of necessary preconditions which must be progressively developed, through **cooperation** and **coordination** at both the national and the international level. Discussion of methods to ensure effective management of the key elements to migration management could include:

1. Increase coordination among government agencies

Working toward a more systemic approach to migration management begins at the national level. Unless there is rationalization within the country, there will be little progress at the international level. Often migration related issues are managed with little or even no coordination among concerned government agencies within the same government. Typically, for example, ministries of interior or justice deal with entry control issues, ministries of foreign affairs handle humanitarian issues, ministries of social affairs are responsible for integration, and so on. A comprehensive approach would include consideration of the implications and impact of certain policies vis à vis others, requiring coordination and partnerships among all relevant government agencies within a national government.

2. Promote consistency and coherence of migration policies

Consistency, coherence and transparency of migration policy and practice are key elements of a comprehensive management approach. It is important that all actors involved in the migration process, including migrants and the host population, have access to consistent and unambiguous information regarding roles, rights, procedures and expectations. For example, to limit the incidence of migrant trafficking and smuggling, it is important for migrants to be aware of legal migration possibilities. To limit the incidence of xenophobia and discrimination in host societies, it is important for migrants to be aware of the requirements of local law (and to abide by them) and for migrant hosting societies to be aware of the positive contributions that migrants can make to their communities.

A comprehensive migration management approach should be based on an agreed framework of guiding principles/common understandings rather than a prescriptive set of measures. This framework would also serve to enhance policy consistency and coherence. While States obviously must continue to have prime responsibility for migration management, common principles would serve to facilitate this. Among others, consistency, coherence and transparency, including common principles, may serve to mitigate irregular movement, facilitate acceptance of migrants and enhance social cohesion.

3. Develop statistical information regarding migration

Meaningful data on migration stocks and flows is one key element of effective migration management. At present, much of the statistical and documentary information required for sound decision making is not available or does not reach policy makers. In addition, information is not shared between governments, partly because information provision and requirements vary from country to country. Reliable data is essential for monitoring flows and understanding trends as a basis for policy and programme development and cooperation.

4. Strengthen international cooperation

Very few countries are unaffected by international migration. Given the internationalization of migration, national migration strategies developed in isolation are unlikely to result in effective migration management. Thus, a *sine qua non* for migration management is inter-state cooperation.

One clear trend in this regard is toward regional dialogue and cooperation as shown by the increasing number of Regional Consultative Processes on migration emerging in all world regions. Regional Consultative Processes are cooperative mechanisms for managing international migration which have included discussions on the benefits of common approaches and even, in some cases, harmonizing policies. There is growing convergence of ideas amongst most Regional Consultative Processes regarding many key elements and principles guiding international migration management, including safeguarding migrant rights, refugee protection, border management, addressing root causes and others.

5. Include all relevant actors in the policy-making process

A comprehensive approach should consider migration issues from all perspectives, with relevant government and non-government partners, and recognizing its interrelationship with other cross-cutting issues. To develop a comprehensive approach to the process of migration, a range of stakeholders need to become involved – including governments, international organizations, NGOs, employers, community organizations and migrants.

IV. IOM's role in managing migration

The International Organization for Migration has been working with governments and other international and non-governmental organizations for over fifty years to assist in meeting the growing challenges of migration management.

IOM's activities include advancing understanding of migration issues through research, dialogue and cooperation, programmes and services in migration management as well as capacity-building and technical cooperation in such diverse fields as labour migration, health, home country development, movement and counter trafficking. As an inter-governmental agency, one of the core mandates of IOM is to assist Governments at all points of the migration spectrum to develop effective and comprehensive national and international migration management systems.

It is becoming increasingly important for Governments to develop a proactive course of action to address today's complex migration flows and trends. IOM's mission to promote the humane and orderly management of migration for the benefit of migrants and societies, and expertise in this regard, can be a valuable resource to the international community.

→ **For further reading:**

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