

International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU)

Concept Paper: Movement of People

Prepared by International Migration Institute, University of Oxford

[Draft 12.12.2005. Please contact the authors with comments: Stephen Castles, stephen.castles@geh.ox.ac.uk; Steve Vertovec, steven.vertovec@compas.ox.ac.uk]

Introduction

The movement of people is an integral part of globalisation. Economic and demographic change, growing disparities in incomes, welfare and human security, and improvements in technology are driving massive increases in mobility. Hundreds of millions move each year for short periods as tourists or business travellers. Others move for longer periods as students, temporary workers or mobile professionals. About 200 million are counted as long-term international migrants – those who have lived outside their countries of birth for at least a year. Not everyone moves voluntarily: there are some 14m refugees, two-thirds of them in situations of long-term exile with little chance of resolution. About half a million people seek asylum each year, and find that borders are often closed to them.

Internal migration has reached even higher levels: millions move each year in fast-changing states like China, India, Brazil, Nigeria – often throwing up the same sorts of social, cultural and political challenges as international migration. Many internal migrants are also forced to flee by violence or destruction of their livelihoods. An estimated 25m people (more than half in Africa) have been displaced internally by violence and persecution, while another 10m a year are forced from their homes by development projects including dams, industrialisation and the establishment of conservation areas. Environmental change and natural disasters displace millions more. Internal migration can lead to urban slums, conflict and onward migration across borders.

Migration is a major factor in economic, social and cultural change. It may be caused by poverty and conflict, but can in turn be a barrier to development and undermine already precarious states. Countries of origin fear loss of skills, but hope for development impetus through remittances and technology transfer. In receiving countries, migration is seen by some as a threat to national identity, wages and welfare, and a key security issue. Yet demographic and economic change is leading to strong demand for both highly-skilled and lower-skilled workers. New communication and transport technologies undermine traditional models of immigrant incorporation. More and more people live their lives across borders and develop a transnational consciousness, posing important dilemmas for the nation-state and citizenship.

In most countries in the world today – whether migrant-sending, -receiving, -transit or a combination of these, migration is high on the policy agenda. Migrant-receiving countries are very concerned with integration issues, migrant-sending ones are focussed on issues such as brain drain and the role of remittances in development,

migrant-transit countries are worried about disruptive social and economic effects and all have heightened interests in a range of security matters.

The international community has developed collaborative rules and institutions to handle some of the key flows that make up globalisation: the WTO for trade, the IMF and the World Bank for investment, and so on. But in the migration area there is a serious governance deficit: existing UN conventions are poorly ratified and largely ignored, and there is no powerful collaborative institution. The recent Global Commission on International Migration has put forward some modest suggestions for reform, but their implementation remains uncertain. National and regional migration policies are piecemeal and often fail to achieve their goals. The result is irregular movements, trafficking and exploitation. Finding better ways of realistically responding to movement of people is one of the key challenges of the 21st century.

Scale and Scope of Possible IARU Research

One of the key problems in improving international collaboration on movement of people is the strongly held principle that control of both internal and cross-border population movements is a central aspect of national sovereignty. On a scientific level, this principle is mirrored in a widespread ‘methodological nationalism’ in migration research: until recently researchers have tended to focus mainly on the causes and impacts of migration at the national level, and have accepted national models of migration control and immigrant incorporation. This field of research has been quite strongly policy driven, and has often been relatively isolated from mainstream social-scientific debates on theory and methodology.

The international collaborative approach advocated by IARU offers obvious benefits in the study of movement of people. By working together at an international and indeed an intercontinental level it will be possible to overcome the national perspective and develop research questions of global and regional scope. Social sciences in respective IARU countries often have distinct theoretical and methodological traditions; international collaboration can bring the best of these traditions to bear on key common issues. All IARU universities are in countries that currently face major scientific and policy issues connected with movement of people:

- Australia (ANU): has the largest immigrant share in population of any major country, and faces important dilemmas of regulation migration and managing diversity.
- China (Beijing University): major issues of internal mobility linked to industrialisation, as well as significant issues of external migration.
- Denmark (Copenhagen): high levels of both asylum and economic migration, combined with a decline in popular support for multiculturalism.
- Japan (Tokyo): problems of demographic decline, unmet labour demand, and managing diversity in a largely mono-cultural country.
- Singapore (NUS): high levels of immigration, and difficulties in implementing differential policies based on human capital and ethnic origins.
- Switzerland (ETH): the highest proportion of immigrants in Europe contrasts with a highly restrictive citizenship approach.
- UK (Oxford and Cambridge): recent growth in both asylum and economic migration has led to severe strains in migration management, while the increasing diversity of the population also raises important policy challenges.

- USA (Berkeley, Yale): Still the premier world destination for immigrants, with a large and increasing irregular labour force. Traditional models of assimilation are losing their efficacy in a situation of growing diversity and mobility, while new proposals on temporary labour recruitment face considerable scepticism.

Even at this very general and superficial level, it is evident that there is considerable scope for mutual learning and collaborative research projects. It is proposed that the IARU universities:

- Compile a database of staff expertise, previous work and research interests in this field.
- Identify an initial set of key issues for joint work.
- Hold international workshops to exchange existing knowledge on key issues, and to map out areas that would specially benefit from joint work.
- Put forward joint proposals for funding.
- Investigate how national research models, theory and methods could be transferable to other socio-economic and political contexts.

Key Issues

Social-scientific challenges

1. Overcoming 'methodological nationalism' through a transnational perspective on globalisation and social transformation.
2. Providing new and comparable datasets where currently none or poor ones exist.
3. Linking the global and the local in globalisation research.
4. Combining top-down and bottom-up approach (bringing in agency).
5. International, inter-regional and north-south scientific cooperation essential.
6. Network research as the appropriate approach to understanding global problems.
7. Assisting in training and development of migration studies in countries relatively new to the field.

Practical and policy challenges

1. What conditions and policies are needed to make migration serve development? In particular how could better cooperation between sending, receiving and transit countries be achieved?
2. Are contract labour systems a viable and desirable approach to meeting labour needs, and, if so, how can they be optimally designed?
3. How could cross-border migration be managed to avoid abuses and exploitation and to reduce irregular movements?
4. How can protection and assistance be improved for forced migrants (including refugees, asylum seekers, and persons displaced internally by violence or persecution, by development projects, and by disasters)?
5. How can humanitarian and developmental approaches be combined to address the root causes of forced migration?
6. What strategies for incorporation of migrants into receiving societies are most like to succeed?

7. How can governments and civil society address the challenges of globalised migration and transnational communities?
8. What strategies could be adopted to address the governance deficit in the migration field? This includes consideration of the role of civil society (including associations of migrants and of non-migrant populations).

Possible Issues for IARU Joint Research

IARU research needs to address the theoretical and methodological implications of the social-scientific problems mentioned above, in order to find appropriate ways of dealing with the practical and policy issues. In this way, advances can be obtained both in scientific knowledge and in practical outputs. In principle, any of the issues listed here could be topics for joint research. Choice should depend on the interests of the researchers at the various universities. As an initial programme, we propose the following themes:

1. Comparative theory, methods and training in migration studies.
2. The transformation or displacement of longstanding regional migration systems (such as Latin America – USA, East & Southeast Asia – Australia, South Asia – UK, North Africa and Middle East to EU countries).
3. Immigration impacts and how best to manage them: labour market, social structures and relations, economic productivity, public opinion, policy challenges
4. The governance deficit in migration: national and international dimensions.
5. The relationship between large-scale internal and international migration.
6. The development of long-term, regional and global perspectives on migration.
7. North-South cooperation on migration and development.