

A look back at migration trends over the past 25 years

Howard Duncan

Abstract

Any discussion of a quarter century of migration trends is bound to be idiosyncratic to the author; choose another author and you will have a different selection and interpretation of trends. In this short article, I will review some of the trends that strike me as of special significance, particularly from the point of view of policy for managing migration, the integration of migrants, and the overall effects of migration on both receiving societies and countries of origin. My limited hope is to generate a discussion amongst researchers and officials about what we need to take into account to ensure that our responses to migration phenomena, whether we be academic researchers or policy makers, are pertinent to contemporary realities. Many of our deepest assumptions about migration are rooted in past trends and, unless we want to risk misleading analysis, it is our responsibility to understand how migration changes. A look back at a quarter of a century affords an opportunity to do just this.

Howard Duncan - Head of the Metropolis Project, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

More migration

We have been witnessing a significant growth in migration itself, in research on migration, and in policy activities in the field. No longer is migration on the lower shelves of the policy world and no longer does it occupy a marginal status amongst social scientists. The magnitude of migration commands attention and does so globally. At roughly 232 million migrants in 2013, the world's stock of migrants has more than doubled since 1980, and the UN Population Division projects it to grow to 400 million by 2050, a growth level that outstrips the growth in global population. Why we are observing this trend towards ever greater numbers of international migrants is an exceedingly complex story, but part of the story is that global wealth levels have increased and this has enabled more people to migrate. The "migration hump" effect, first described by Phillip Martin in 1993, is on full display here. Wealth gains throughout the world, but especially in rapidly developing countries such as China and India, have helped to make emigration possible for more people and their families. Of note in this regard is that, in 2010, South-North migration outnumbered South-South migration for the first time. Migration to the North is more expensive than migration to other countries in the South, and wealth gains in the South have fuelled migration to wealthier countries for not only work but increasingly for education. Of course, the wherewithal to leave will affect migration levels only if there are countries of destination willing to receive migrants. In the North, this has been the case with growing numbers of countries seeking migrants and opening their borders to those who qualify for admission, especially those with skills on offer, who can contribute to their economies, and who can offset some of the effects of demographic stagnation or outright decline. There has been a sharp increase in the awareness of demographic trends and their implications for economic and overall societal well-being. Over the past quarter century, this awareness has shifted towards acceptance and, as a result, more countries are turning to actively managing migration to counter some of the effects of population ageing if not decline.

Accompanying growing wealth and a rising appetite for migrants in many countries have been improvements in technology that have reduced the costs of migration and reduced the risks of leaving one's homeland. For one, transportation costs have fallen dramatically over the past 25 years, allowing more people to migrate and more often. Extraordinary developments in personal communications technologies have allowed migrants and those back home to remain in close contact at little expense, something that was not possible before the proliferation of cheap cell phones and internet-based e-mail and other communications tools such as Skype and various social media. More frequent communications and more frequent physical returns to the homeland as well as visits by family members to the destination societies reduces greatly the personal and social costs of migration. Whereas emigration once meant a nearly complete rupturing of connection save for postal services, it is no longer so

with the result that more are not only able to migrate but more are willing to do so, either temporarily or relatively permanently. For employers, lower travel costs mean that it is easier for them to bring migrant workers to their job sites, and for the workers, it is more feasible for them to work abroad temporarily and to re-unite with their families more often, again reducing the social costs of migration. The technologies that we associate with globalization have changed migration patterns in ways to be discussed later, and they have also changed the ways in and degrees to which newcomers integrate into their societies of destination. Each of these has had and continues to have major impacts on societies and their governments.

But it has been not only the greater willingness of countries to receive migrants that has driven numbers higher. Over the past generation we have witnessed the effects of societies that had been closed opening their borders to allow their citizens to leave. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the re-configuration of Europe have seen an enormous impact on migration both out of the former Soviet Union but of migration to Russia, especially from former Soviet states. Russia now stands as the world's second largest migrant receiving country, whose migrant stocks are second only to those of the United States. The opening of China sent millions of migrants to destinations throughout the world including to countries in the North whose immigration objectives were met to a large extent by Chinese outflows. Today, approximately 60 million Chinese live outside China, most in East and South-East Asia but with growing numbers in the West and in African countries.

South-North migration and South-South migration are now of similar magnitudes at approximately 35% of world totals each, again, with South-North having a small edge; North-North migration accounts for a growing number and now stands at 23% while North-South migration remains low at 6% of world totals. Long ignored, South-South migration is now receiving greater attention in the academy and by the international community, in part owing to the explosive growth in interest in the development effects of migration about which I will say more later in this article. Another notable trend that is receiving considerable attention is the proportion of women amongst the world's migrants. Although this proportion has hovered around 50% since 1960, what is gaining attention is the rising population of female labour migration. Women no longer move principally to accompany their husband; rather they are more and more moving in order to work and to remit money to their families in the homeland. The effects of this shift in female migration patterns on families and social structures in the homeland are now being carefully studied in the universities as well as by civil society organizations. These studies often bring with them cautions about these effects and advocate that measures be taken to mitigate harms caused.

New paradigms

Much traditional thinking about migration is rooted in an assumption that, by and large, those who migrate to a new country do so intending to remain in that country for the rest of their lives or at least until well into retirement when a desire to end one's life in the homeland may come to prevail. The idea of migration as a uni-directional permanent flow has not only long dominated the academic treatment of the phenomena but has to a significant degree determined policy on migration, integration, and citizenship as well as advocacy on the migrants' behalf. Those states that invested in immigration and integration management did so in the belief that the migrants were going to stay and that the enduring nature of their coming to a new country justified the investment. It is not uncommon that states that invest in integrating newcomers do so for only those with permanent residency visas and not for temporary residents. And to extend the logic, many countries that offered permanent residency to migrants expected them to naturalize as citizens and thereby transfer their allegiances to their new homeland.

Although this traditional picture of the immigration-integration-citizenship process still finds a great many examples in 2014, it can no longer be said to be the only norm. Once again, it is tempting to locate the underlying forces behind the new multiple migration paradigm in contemporary globalization, particularly the reduced costs of travel, the overall lower costs and risks associated with migration, and the exceptional ease of global communications including the transmission of knowledge. In addition, however, here we must add in the effects of the global war for talent, described in the late-1990s by the consulting firm McKinsey and Company and still the subject of serious analysis by them and now many others.

The war for talent is rooted in demographic trends, shifting global economic power centers, a steep rise in knowledge-based economic activity, and a sharp increase in demand for workers with higher levels of education. As time has gone by, the demand for brains has grown over that for muscles, but the supply of those with the education-in-demand remains insufficient and the talent war has resulted. This is not going away any time soon as a quick look at the contemporary global demographic projections will show. UN population projections are of global growth through to 2100, levelling off at approximately 10 billion inhabitants. All projected growth will be in developing countries and none in the developed world taken as an aggregate. Again, the demand for talent will be worldwide and not only in more developed countries. The problem arises in the current and projected future age structures of the world. Now, 90% of people age 15 and under are in developing countries. This is a large part of the world's future work force, and yet many of these young people will not receive an education that will equip them with skills in demand by modern businesses not only in the OECD countries but throughout the world. The competition for talent is with us now and will only intensify in the future.

This competition is already having an effect on migration trends and has seen new players enter the field of countries seeking immigrants, especially those with high skills. Prominent among these new players are China, Korea, Japan, and India whose need for highly skilled workers far exceeds the domestic supply. This situation will certainly change the nature of immigration policy in the future as countries and their businesses and universities will need to establish themselves as highly attractive destinations. This policy imperative will affect not only those countries new to the game but as well as the traditional settler societies of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and Israel who are already facing pressures from the new entrants to the competition. Canada, for example, has lost an estimated 500,000 of its citizens to China which now offers highly competitive opportunities that were simply unavailable even a decade ago. Once a concern primarily for countries of origin, net migration, the difference between inflows and outflows, has begun to take on much greater importance for destination societies, some of which saw reversals of flow as a result of the global recession that began in 2007.

What this means for those with skills is a far greater set of options than would have been available to them 25 years ago. This is what has led to the multiple migration paradigm. Talented individuals and their families are now able to migrate from one country to another easily because of the high quality and lucrative jobs on offer throughout the world. One form that this takes is what is becoming *traditional transnationalism* whereby people live in more than one country simultaneously, travelling between them for business, familial, or social purposes. But more recently, we are seeing patterns of migration in which people move from one country to another to another with no stable home that anchors them. This “new mobility” may not yet represent the bulk of migrants, but it is a significant aspect of contemporary migration, one that academic researchers and policy officials alike have yet to fully incorporate into their work. Not only do these recent patterns diverge from what we have long considered the norm, they will change the policy landscape not only with regard to managing migration in a newly competitive environment that has, notably, replaced an environment in which managing migration meant primarily preventing its occurrence but also with regard to the management of integration and citizenship.

Integration and citizenship

As noted earlier, our standard views on integration and citizenship have leaned on the assumption that migration was one-way and permanent, that integration was what one might term the “natural desired outcome” for newcomers to a society given that it was to be their new home. That integration was natural and desired meant that policy and programs in this regard tended to emphasize removing barriers to this otherwise natural process, barriers such as language, limited access to jobs, discrimination, affordable housing, and access to education, health care, and other social services. From the point of view of societies of destination, integration was attractive because it enabled

immigrants to work and otherwise contribute to the society, it fostered social harmony and co-operation in part by creating a shared language, and it allowed the citizens of the society to feel confident that immigration was not going to endanger their norms and values. Note, however, that the operating premise here was that immigrants wanted to integrate into the mainstream of the society of destination, that it was in their interest to do so. Traditionally, this seems to have been the case. It was the societal mainstream that offered the best jobs and opportunities to lead a more comfortable life. It was the societal mainstream that would educate one's children and allow them the opportunity for a bright future. And so on. But the incentive structures change entirely when permanent residency is not part of the immigrant's plans.

Many migrate for relatively short stays to gain education, work experience, and simply to experience another society. Following these stays, migrants, especially those with higher skills, may move to a third country or return to their homelands to apply their human capital newly enhanced by their experience as migrants. Again, the lower costs of migration make this a more realistic option than in the past and the ubiquity of global communications means that migrants are fully aware of the opportunities that may await them back home or elsewhere. Increasingly, migrants want mobility over stability and this means that destination societies must work harder to convince migrants to stay. Consider the tools of higher mobility. Key among them are either permanent residence visas or passports, both of which permit much greater mobility than temporary work or study visas. The incentive structures for entering a country on a permanent residence visa are no longer restricted to the ability to live and work in that society for an indefinite time. Rather, that type of visa allows the migrant to come and go. Acquiring citizenship, once thought to be a product of deep integration and a transfer of allegiance and commitment to the society of destination, is more often now an instrumental matter of acquiring the greatly enhanced mobility afforded by the passport of a fully developed country such as Canada or the United States or the United Kingdom. As much as countries issuing passports may decry these incentives and argue that it is an abuse of a nation's generosity, the migrants' goal of mobility is now part of the environment within which they set citizenship policy. Some countries have responded by increasing the cost of acquiring citizenship through lengthening the required residency period or stiffening the citizenship test requirements. But they do so at their peril given that the quest for mobility is part of the global war for talent; states that restrict access to citizenship may find themselves less able to attract the talent they seek.

Another trend that has emerged over the past 25 years that should affect how we think about integration is that of the middle class suburban ethnic enclave, a phenomenon termed the "ethnoburb" by US geographer, Wei Li. The attractions of the modern middle class enclave are sufficiently strong that they are not the normal places of transitional residence that we normally consider enclaves to be. Traditionally the enclave was a place of initial

residence for an immigrant, a place that was poor, offered limited employment, but also offered a lower-cost lifestyle. Immigrants who lived in the enclave tended to live in very modest and often crowded housing, would work and save money in order to leave, perhaps to live in an attractive suburb. The end result of the incentive to a better neighborhood was that most enclave residents would leave to live in mainstream neighborhoods, a strong mark of integration. The modern middle class ethnoburb defies this pattern by offering high quality housing, good schools, good jobs including professional careers, and virtually all of the services that one would want in a neighborhood and often provided in the homeland language. Increasingly, immigrants, especially those with higher skills, move to these types of enclave upon arrival and remain for extended durations. And in keeping with the new mobility, their departures are not necessarily to a mainstream neighborhood but to another country.

Again, we see incentives structures turned on their heads. Whereas we could once assume that integration into the societal mainstream was virtually guaranteed with the removal of impediments, the new middle class enclave has become its own point of reference for immigrant integration. The enclave has become a competitor for the integration aspirations of more of today's immigrants. It is unlikely that the removal of barriers to integration with the mainstream will have much impact on these dynamics and no society calling itself a democracy can break them up. But societies that are concerned that these enclaves represent integration failures, parallel societies, or security threats will need to understand that the root of the situation lies in incentives. If the societal mainstream is going to be the integration reference group of choice, it will need to offer incentives to overcome what is on offer in the modern middle class enclave. Without competitive incentives, mainstream and enclave are going to need to develop ways to work together towards common civic interests if unwanted forms of parallel society are to be avoided.

Research and policy

As the size of migrant flows has grown along with their resulting stocks, we have seen a growth in the attention paid to migration by researchers in the academy, civil society, and think tanks as well as by policy officials in government and international organizations. The magnitude of migration to the North has had a tremendous effect on domestic policy as well as on the international debate with a sizeable growth in the number of regular regional discussions and discussions among "like-minded" states. The volume of research has grown exponentially over the past 25 years as has its level of sophistication. Organizations around the world have invested in data collection on migration and its effects on societies of both destination and origin, and these data have enriched both the research and policy efforts and, accordingly, the debates on the issues. This has been positive in the main, although data can be used for many purposes including to argue for ever greater restrictions on migration regardless of its benefits. Border controls have

been tightened in many countries over the years despite the recognition that migration, well-managed, confers benefits on destination societies and migrants alike. There have been two principal reasons for the tightening of border controls, one demographic and the other concerning security.

With countries in the global South having very young populations and economies that, although growing, have been unable to offer satisfactory employment to enough of them, the motivations for many of these young adults to migrate have been very high. With only limited legal entries on offer from developed countries, many of these young people turn to unauthorized ways to enter them in search of employment. This situation may well intensify, especially in countries whose economies and political infrastructures are struggling. Large smuggling and immigration consulting industries have grown throughout the world to try to accommodate the wishes of those who want to leave their homelands, and in response governments in the global North have tightened their borders. This can be manifest physically through the erection of walls and fences, patrolling waterways, and intercepting those who are in the act of crossing borders without authorization. But border controls now also include increasingly sophisticated means of issuing travel documents and screening their authenticity at airports and other border points. Security has become a big business, much of it directed towards immigration, including the seeking of asylum. Over the past 25 years, officials have noted the use of the asylum system by those whose purpose is employment rather than protection. Other legal avenues of entry have been exploited by those who may not qualify with the help of smugglers and the immigration fraud industry which has become large and highly capable of circumventing the measures that governments introduce to control migration. But so long as demographic conditions remain as they are and countries in the South are unable to fully employ their citizens, the appetite to move, legally or not, will remain high, and countries of destination will continue to enact strong measures to assert their sovereignty.

National security became a highly significant motivation for strong border controls going back far beyond the 25 years we are looking at here. The emergence of international terrorism in the 1970s and the proliferation of airplane hijackings turned governments' eyes towards border crossings as a vehicle through which to commit terrorism in countries beyond one's own. The emergence of the Al Qaeda threat which culminated in the attacks on New York and Washington in 2001 changed dramatically how borders were managed and how migration was controlled. We still live with the imperative to control borders first and to allow economic migration only once borders are fully secured.

The highly public worries over security and uncontrolled irregular migration have turned the public against immigration and asylum in many countries, perhaps most notably in Europe, although the United States, a country with a very long and positive history of welcoming immigrants and refugees, is now experiencing a serious backlash against immigration over what many regard as out-of-control unauthorized flows. These worries have fed anti-immigration politics which have gained considerable ground in many countries, reversing to a certain extent the acceptance of the demographic and economic need for immigration in many of these same countries. This disappointing shift in public opinion in some European countries comes after a long-awaited recognition that immigration is in their long-term interests and that immigrants should receive support from the host society in the form of integration programs. Much of this positive sentiment has been stilled and immigrant-citizen relations have soured significantly.

More positively, we have also seen over the past quarter century a rise in concern for the human rights of migrants including migrant workers, children, and women. The international community has responded dynamically to research in this area and calls from civil society for action to protect these rights. The United Nations has created new offices and positions in this regard supported by member states and other institutions of the international community most notably the International Organization for Migration. Partly in response to the growing concerns over the rights of migrants, we witnessed a continuing effort towards the governance of migration for the mutual benefit of host societies, countries of origin, and the migrants themselves. Calls for the creation of a World Migration Organization on analogy with the World Trade Organization proliferated in the 1990s and led to a number of initiatives such as the Bern Initiative, the Global Commission on International Migration, the United Nations High Level Dialogues on Migration and Development, and the Global Forum on Migration and Development which continues today. Common to each of these efforts has been the protection of the rights of migrants and an expression of frustration at the failure of the UN Convention on the rights of migrant workers and their families to find significant support, especially in developed countries. Nevertheless, developed countries are major players in these other fora, which is an indication not of their cynicism but of their genuine interest in these issues. As is often the case with the international community, progress has been slow and there is no realistic expectation of a World Migration Organization with normative authorities emerging any time soon. But the fact that the Global Forum on Migration and Development continues is reason for some optimism.

The goal of managed migration remains in place for many states but it is a distant reality for some whose migration inflows are largely irregular. We have seen a growing desire and willingness on the part of regional groupings of states or states that share certain approaches and program structures to collaborate, if only to share

information and experiences. We have seen impressive gains in this form of international diplomacy in the Americas, in Oceania, in the ASEAN group, and, of course, in the European Union where migration management has achieved much but where the challenges of irregular migration and labour migration from outside the EU are still largely unresolved. The dream of some to establish a system of global governance will remain but a dream for the foreseeable future. The agendas of the North and the South are far too divergent for a normative agreement to be achieved. For many years, the disagreements have focussed on the rights of workers from the South to enter countries of the North for employment, the North insisting on retaining sovereignty over who lives and works in their territory and the South seeking concessions, often in the name of broad human rights. This political deadlock prevented the United Nations from holding a conference on migration, but what might have been an end to global discussions on migration proved instead a beginning owing to the link between the issue of work to the issue of development. The first United Nations High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development in 2006 identified a basis for global discussion in the mutual development benefits of migration for both countries of destination and origin.

Although the initial impetus for the discussion began at the United Nations, the momentum has been carried through the Global Forum on Migration and Development which is states-led and therefore does not bring with it a risk of normative measures. Lowering the political stakes has allowed both North and South to participate in the discussions which have raised awareness of the issues associated with migration as it affects development and led to a greater degree of understanding of what governments and the international community can do to enhance the contributions that migration is able to make to development. The difficult issues of who has authority to manage international migration have been allowed to sit on the sidelines while countries turn their attention to measures that can help, even if they are less than dramatic in their effect.

Much of the discussion over the past 15 years has been on remittances, particularly as their magnitude grows to well beyond levels of official development aid. Attempts have been made, and with some progress achieved, to reduce the cost of sending remittances; this is no simple matter given the concomitant concerns with money laundering systems, some of which have supported international terrorism. Human rights have commanded considerable attention, in particular the rights of migrant workers. But we have also seen a trend to look at the role of diaspora in homeland development, a trend that is fully evident in the attention that diaspora are receiving not only by governments and civil society but by academic researchers. A rapidly growing number of states have created ministries responsible for diaspora relations in the hopes of attracting investments, remittances, and return flows. The potential for the return of émigrés with enhanced human capital is growing as the economies of developing countries begin to offer stronger incentives to return to the homeland either permanently or transnationally. China

and India are perhaps at the forefront now, but return migration is growing throughout the world and policy on managing return migration and re-integration is gaining traction. This is a significant change from 25 years ago when managing migration was seen almost entirely as a matter of reducing flows out of countries of origin. Return migration being motivated by economic developments in the homeland is far more positive than it being brought about by deportations from destination countries.

Some closing observations

Broad characterizations of a quarter century of migration will always be limited in their scope given the complexity of the phenomena and the many distinct situations that exist. The world is not headed in a single direction in migration or its management or integration and its management. But we can make a few general points, especially owing to the greater availability of statistical data. Migration levels have grown and grown faster than the rate of population growth. We know that South-North and South-South migration dominate global flows and that most flows are regulated. Governments have become more knowledgeable and sophisticated in their thinking on migration and its effects on their societies as have academic researchers and civil society. The result of this is greater visibility of migration-related policy throughout the world and more and more countries becoming actively involved in the processes, including in international collaboration. In broad terms, this is for the better, not only for destination societies but countries of origin and the migrants themselves. We have seen a much greater acceptance of the inevitability of migration and of its widespread benefits so long as it is managed responsibly. This is a marked change from even 15 years ago when it was common for national migration policy to be oriented towards preventing migration altogether. This has given way to objectives of managing the entry of migrants for national ends.

This is not to say that no ground has been lost. Attitudes towards immigration have hardened sharply in many countries; human trafficking and migrant smuggling continue apace with devastating consequences as the demand for irregular entry rises; political conflicts have resulted in a staggering number of refugees, internally displaced persons, and others in need of protection; and the largest share of the burden has been placed upon neighboring countries whose capacity to support these desperate people is stretched to all possible limits. Environmental disasters have produced large numbers of internally displaced persons as well as what some wish to term 'environmental refugees', and there is a fear that climate change will produce ever greater numbers. Here again, we are seeing academic and policy responses to these situations which offer a measure of hope that the challenges will at least not be ignored.

These problems present challenges to not only national governments and civil society but to the international community which is perhaps not as well-equipped with modern legal instruments as it might wish to be. The refugee convention is by all accounts outdated, but no one will risk opening it to amendment for fear of losing ground in the process. The ideal for some of a general agreement on labour migration has not moved forward, even within most trade blocs, and the intensifying global competition for skills could reveal the risks of this lacuna for countries in both the North and the South.

But the drive for the respect for migrants' rights, the recognition by more and more of the widespread value of migration for both receiving societies and homelands, the enhanced levels of trust amongst states through the global discussions on migration and development, and the overall greater degree of sophistication that is being brought to the issues leave grounds for optimism that the situation will improve over the next 25 years.