International migration at the beginning of the twenty-first century: global trends and issues*

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In the second half of the twentieth century, international migration emerged as one of the main factors in social transformation and development in all regions of the world. Its significance looks set to increase further in the twenty-first century, as population mobility grows in volume and takes on new forms. Migration is a result of the integration of local communities and national economies into global relationships. At the same time, it is a cause of further social transformations in both migrant-sending and receiving countries. In traditional societies, many people spent their whole lives in their native village or neighbourhood. Today, migration is becoming increasingly common as people move in search of security and a better livelihood: from villages to towns, from one region to another in their home country, or between countries and continents. Even those who do not migrate are affected as relatives, friends or descendants of migrants; or through experiences of change in their community as a result of departure of neighbours or arrival of newcomers.

Migration is often a result of economic and social development. In turn, migration may contribute to further development and improved economic and social conditions, or alternatively may help to perpetuate stagnation and inequality. Much depends on the character of migration and the actions taken by the governments and other stakeholders concerned. Migration helps to erode traditional boundaries between languages, cultures, ethnic groups and nation-states. It therefore challenges cultural traditions, national identity and political institutions, and contributes to a decline in the autonomy of the nation-state.

This article seeks to provide an overview of some of the main trends and issues which are likely to shape international population mobility in the period ahead. More detailed accounts of migrations affecting specific regions and countries will be given in other articles in this issue.

Definitions and types

Migration means crossing the boundary of a political or administrative unit for a certain minimum period (Boyle et al. 1998, chapter 2). Internal migration refers to a move from one area (a province, district or municipality) to another within one country. International migration means crossing the frontiers which separate one of the world’s approximately 200 states from another. Many scholars argue that internal and international migration are part of the same process, and should be analysed together (Skeldon 1997, 9–10). Rigid
distinctions can be misleading: international migration may be over short distances and between culturally similar people (e.g. between the southern Philippines and Sabah in Malaysia), while international migration can span great distances and bring together very different people (e.g. movements of Uigur ‘national minority’ people from the western provinces of China to cities in the East). Sometimes the frontiers ‘migrate’, rather than the people, making internal migrants into international ones. For instance, the break-up of the former Soviet Union turned millions of former internal migrants into foreigners in the successor states. However, this article focuses specifically on international migration, because of its links to globalisation and its significance in creating multi-ethnic societies.

The great majority of border crossings do not imply migration: most travellers are tourists or business visitors who have no intention of staying for long. Migration means taking up residence for a certain minimum period—say 6 months or a year. Most countries have a number of categories in their migration policies and statistics. For instance, Australia distinguishes between permanent immigrants, long-term temporary immigrants who stay at least 12 months usually for work, business or education, and short-term temporary visitors. Yet Australia is seen as a ‘classical country of immigration’ because of its tradition of nation-building through immigration, and nearly all public debate is focused on permanent immigration. Other countries prefer to see immigration as essentially temporary. When the German Federal Republic started to recruit so-called ‘guestworkers’ in the 1960s, some were allowed in for a few months only as ‘seasonal workers’ while others received one-year permits. In time, it became difficult to limit residence so tightly: people who had been resident for a certain time obtained 2-years, then 5-years and finally unlimited permits.

Such variations highlight the fact that there is nothing objective about definitions of migration: they are the result of state policies, introduced in response to political and economic goals and public attitudes. International migration arises in a world divided up into nation-states, in which remaining in the country of birth is still seen as a norm and moving to another country as a deviation. That is why migration tends to be regarded as problematic: something to be controlled and even curbed, because it may bring about unpredictable changes. Problems of comparison arise not just because statistical categories differ, but because such differences reflect real variations in the social meaning of migration in differing contexts. One way in which states seek to improve control is by dividing up international migrants into categories:

- **Temporary labour migrants** (also known as guest-workers or overseas contract workers): men and women who migrate for a limited period (from a few months to several years) in order to take up employment and send money home (remittances).
- **Highly skilled and business migrants**: people with qualifications as managers, executives, professionals, technicians or similar, who move within the internal labour markets of transnational corporations and international organisations, or who seek employment through international labour markets for scarce skills. Many countries welcome such migrants and have special ‘skilled and business migration’ programmes to encourage them to come.
- **Irregular migrants** (also known as undocumented or illegal migrants): people who enter a country, usually in search of employment, without the necessary documents and permits. Many labour migration flows consist predominantly of undocumented migrants. In some cases immigration countries tacitly permit such migration since it allows mobilisation of labour in response to employer demands without social costs or measures for protection of migrants.
- **Refugees**: according to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person residing outside his or her country of nationality, who is unable or unwilling to return because of a ‘well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion’. Signatories to the Convention undertake to protect refugees by allowing them to enter and granting temporary or permanent residence status. Refugee organisations, especially the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), seek to distinguish clearly between refugees and migrants, but they do share many common characteristics with regard to social needs and cultural impacts in their place of settlement (UNHCR 1997).
- **Asylum-seekers**: people who move across borders in search of protection, but who may not
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fulfil the strict criteria laid down by the 1951 Convention. In many contemporary conflict situations in less developed countries it is difficult to distinguish between flight because of personal persecution and departure caused by the destruction of the economic and social infrastructure needed for survival. Both political and economic motivations for migration are linked to the generalised and persistent violence that has resulted from rapid processes of de-colonisation and globalisation under conditions determined by the developed countries (Zolberg et al. 1989).

- Forced migration: in a broader sense, this includes not only refugees and asylum seekers but also people forced to move by environmental catastrophes or development projects (such as new factories, roads or dams).
- Family members (also known as family reunion or family reunification migrants): migration to join people who have already entered an immigration country under one of the above categories. Many countries, including the USA, Canada, Australia and most European Union (EU) member states recognise in principle the right to family reunion for legal immigrants. Other countries, especially those with contract labour systems, deny the right to family reunion. In such cases, family members may enter illegally.
- Return migrants: people who return to their countries of origin after a period in another country. Return migrants are often looked on favourably as they may bring with them capital, skills and experience useful for economic development. Many countries have special schemes to make use of this ‘development potential’. However, some governments view returnees with suspicion since they may act as agents of cultural or political change.

None of these categories are explicitly based on the race, ethnicity or origins of migrants, and, indeed, there are few countries today which admit to discriminating on the basis of such criteria. The exceptions are countries which give preference to people considered to be returning to an ancestral homeland such as ‘patrials’ to Britain, ‘ethnic Germans’ to Germany, Jews to Israel, or Nikkeijin from Brazil to Japan. This situation contrasts with the quite recent past: the USA, Canada, Australia and other countries had selection policies based on national origins or race until the 1960s. However, selection policies ostensibly based on economic, social and humanitarian criteria may have unconscious racial and ethnic biases built into them. Using skills, language knowledge, possession of capital or assumptions on ‘settlement capability’ may favour people from certain countries or backgrounds over others.

Causes of migration

There is a large empirical and theoretical literature on the causes of migration, which cannot be reviewed here (see Boyle et al. 1998, chapter 3; Castles and Miller 1998, chapter 2; Massey et al. 1993, Skeldon 1997). International migration is an integral part of globalisation, which may be characterised as the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life (Held et al. 1999, 2). The key indicator of globalisation is the rapid increase in cross-border flows of all sorts: finance, trade, ideas, pollution, media products and people. The key organising structure for all these flows is the transnational network, which can take the form of transnational corporations, global markets, international governmental and nongovernmental organisations, global criminal syndicates, or transnational cultural communities. The key tool is modern information and communications technology, including the internet, improved telephone connections and cheap air travel (Castells 1996). Flows of capital and commodities are generally welcomed by the holders of economic and political power, but immigration and cultural difference are seen as potential threats to national sovereignty and identity, and many governments and political movements seek to restrict them. Yet the reality is that population mobility is inextricably bound up with the other types of cross-border flows.

The most obvious cause of migration is the disparity in levels of income, employment and social well-being between differing areas. Differences in demographic patterns with regard to fertility, mortality, age-structure and labourforce growth are also important (Hugo 1998). According to neo-classical economic theory, the main cause of migration is individuals’ efforts to maximise their income by moving from low-wage to high-wage economies (Borjas 1989). However, causes of international migration are often quite complex. Movements may
be initiated and regulated by powerful institutions, while state control of borders by states creates barriers to market forces (Portes & Böröcz 1989). An alternative economic approach is provided by the ‘new economics of labour migration’ (Stark 1991), which argues that migration cannot simply be explained by income differences between two countries, but also by factors such as chances of secure employment, availability of capital for entrepreneurial activity, and the need to manage risk over long periods. Migration decisions are made not just by individuals—they often represent family strategies to maximise income and survival chances (Hugo 1994). Use of remittances for consumption and investment can only be fully understood through a ‘whole-household economy’ approach (Taylor 1999, 64).

Thus there is no simple relationship between poverty and emigration. Departures from the very poorest areas may be rare, because people lack the economic capital needed to travel, the cultural capital needed to become aware of opportunities elsewhere, and the social capital (or networks) needed to successfully find work and to cope in a new environment. However, in the event of a catastrophe (such as war or environmental degradation) which destroys minimal subsistence levels, even the poorest may be forced to migrate, usually under very bad conditions. Migration is thus both a result and a cause of development. Development leads to migration, because economic and educational improvements make people capable of seeking better opportunities elsewhere. Research shows that it is middle-income groups in developing areas that are most likely to depart. As incomes rise, emigration tends to decline (United Nations Working Group on International Migration 1998).

A useful approach to analysing the various factors causing emigration is to be found in ‘migration systems theory’ (Kritz et al. 1992). A migration system is constituted by two or more countries which exchange migrants with each other. It is necessary to examine both ends of the flow and study all the linkages (economic, cultural, political, military etc.) between the places concerned. Migratory movements generally arise from the existence of prior links between sending and receiving countries based on colonisation, political influence, trade, investment or cultural ties. For instance, Caribbean migrants have tended to move to their respective former colonial power: for example, from Jamaica to Britain, Martinique to France and Surinam to the Netherlands. The Algerian migration to France is a consequence of the French colonial presence in Algeria, while the Turkish presence in Germany is the result of direct labour recruitment by Germany in the 1960s and early 1970s. Both the Korean and the Vietnamese migrations to the USA derive from US military involvement in the countries of origin.

Typically migratory chains are started by an external factor, such as recruitment or military service, or by an initial movement of young (usually male) pioneers. Once a movement is established, the migrants mainly follow ‘beaten paths’ (Stahl 1993) and are helped by relatives and friends already in the area of immigration. Networks based on family or on common place of origin help provide shelter, work, assistance with bureaucratic procedures and support in personal difficulties. These social networks make the migratory process safer and more manageable for the migrants and their families. Migratory movements, once started, become self-sustaining social processes. Some people (both migrants and non-migrants) become facilitators of migration. A ‘migration industry’ emerges, consisting of recruitment organisations, lawyers, agents, smugglers and other middle-people. Such people can be both helpers and exploiters of migrants. The emergence of a migration industry with a strong interest in the continuation of migration has often confounded government efforts to control or stop movements.

The links between migrant community and area of origin may persist over generations. Remittances fall off and visits home may decline in frequency, but familial and cultural links remain. People stay in touch with their area of origin, and may seek marriage partners there. Migration continues along the established chains—and may increase dramatically at a time of crisis, as shown in the early 1990s by the mass refugee movement of former Yugoslavs to Germany, where they joined compatriots who had migrated as workers 20 years earlier. In the long run, migrations may lead to international communicative networks, which affect economic relations, social and political institutions, and the culture and national identity of all the countries concerned (Basch et al. 1994).
Historical trends

Population movements in response to demographic growth, climatic change and economic needs have always been part of human history. Warfare and formation of nations, states and empires have all led to migrations, both voluntary and forced. However, from the fifteenth century onwards, European nation-state formation, colonialism and industrialisation led to a rapid growth in migration (Cohen 1987, 1995, Moch 1992). Colonialism involved overseas emigration of Europeans as sailors, soldiers, farmers, traders, priests and administrators. Colonial labour was provided first through forced migration of African slaves (some 15 million between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries), and later through use of indentured workers, who were transported large distances within colonial empires. Industrialisation in Western Europe led to landlessness and impoverishment, which encouraged mass emigration to other continents. Economic growth and nation-building in the USA relied heavily on immigration, with an estimated 30 million people entering from 1861 to 1920. Within Western Europe, industrialising economies made considerable use of migrant workers: Irish in Britain, Poles in Germany, Italians in France and so on (Noiriel 1988, 308–18).

Economic stagnation and political turmoil led to reduced migration between 1918 and 1945. In the USA, ‘nativist’ groups claimed that Southern and Eastern Europeans were ‘unassimilable’ and presented threats to public order and American values. Congress enacted a national origins quota system which stopped large-scale immigration until the 1960s. France was the only country to recruit foreign workers in this period: colonies of Italians and Poles sprang up in the heavy industrial towns of the North and East, while there were Spanish and Italian agricultural settlements in the Southwest. In the depression of the 1930s, many migrants were deported and the foreign population fell half a million by 1936 (Cross 1983). In Nazi Germany, the regime recruited enormous numbers of foreign workers—mainly by force—to replace German men conscripted for military service.

After the Second World War, international migration expanded in volume and scope. More
Table 1. Migrant population by region, 1965 and 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Estimated foreign-born population</th>
<th>As percentage of total population of region</th>
<th>As percentage of migrant stock world total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World total</td>
<td></td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>119.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed countries</td>
<td></td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing countries</td>
<td></td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern America</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and former USSR</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>25.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Zlotnik (1999) Tables 1a and 1b.

and more countries were affected by migration, while immigration countries received entrants from a broad spectrum of economic, social and cultural backgrounds. Two main phases can be distinguished. The first lasted from 1945 to 1973: the long boom stimulated large-scale labour migration to Western Europe, North America and Oceania from less-developed areas. This phase ended around 1973, with the ‘Oil Crisis’, which triggered a major recession. In a second phase from the mid-1970s, capital investment shifted away from the old centres, and transnational forms of production and distribution reshaped the world economy. The older industrial countries experienced new types of inflows, while new immigration countries emerged in Southern Europe, the Gulf oil countries, Latin America, Africa and Asia. The late 1980s and early 1990s were a period of unprecedented migration. These contemporary movements will not be described here, as they are the theme of other papers in this issue of ISSJ. However, some general data on international migration will be given.

The volume of contemporary migration

The most comprehensive recent figures have been provided by a study carried out by the United Nations Population Division, which gives estimates on migrant stock (the number of foreign-born residents) in 218 countries or territories (Zlotnik 1999) (see Table 1).

The UN figures show that the global migrant stock (the number of people resident in a place outside their country of birth) grew from 75 million in 1965 to 120 million in 1990. The 1990 figure was roughly equal to 2% of the world’s population. The number of migrants grew slightly faster than world population as a whole, but the annual growth rate (1.9% for the whole period but increasing to 2.6% from 1985–90) was not dramatic. However, international migration appears to have grown more rapidly in the 1990s, reaching an estimated 135–140 million people, including some 13 million UNHCR-recognised refugees by 1997. Nonetheless, international migrants remain a fairly small minority, with most of the world’s people remaining in their country of origin. Internal migration, by contrast, is much larger: for instance the number of internal migrants in India in 1981 was some 200 million, more than double the number of international migrants in the whole world at the time. Overall, in the second half of the 1980s, between 750 million and one billion people (about one in six of the world’s population) migrated—mainly internally (Skeldon 1997, 4).

The significance of migration as a major factor in societal change lies in the fact that it is concentrated in certain countries and regions. The UN study shows that 90% of the world’s migrants were living in just 55 countries. In absolute terms, most migration is between less-developed countries: in 1990, 55% of all migrants were to be found in such areas. But in relative terms, the developed world has been far more affected by immigration:
4.6% of the population of the developed countries were migrants in 1990, compared with 1.6% in developing countries. An examination by geographical regions confirms this concentration: the 1990 immigrant share in total population was highest in Oceania (17.8%) followed by North America (8.6%) and Western Europe (6.1%). The immigrant share in population was far lower in Asia (1.4%), Latin America and the Caribbean (1.7%) and Africa (2.5%) (Zlotnik 1999). In the 1980s and 1990s, flows from less-developed to developed countries have grown rapidly, despite attempts by receiving countries to restrict such movements. In addition, there have been large flows of labour migrants from the least developed countries of the South to the newly industrialising countries (NICs), especially in East Asia.

Migration affects certain areas within both sending and receiving countries more than others. As migratory chains develop, large proportions of the young men and women of specific villages or neighbourhoods leave, which may lead to local labour shortages as well as major changes in family and community life. In immigration countries, newcomers become concentrated in industrial areas and urban centres where there are chances of employment and where previous migrants can provide help with settlement. In Europe for instance, virtually all major cities have large concentrations of immigrants. Typically, certain neighbourhoods become centres of immigrant settlement, marked by distinctive businesses, associations, social facilities and places of worship. Such neighbourhoods are the basis for ethnic community formation and cultural and linguistic maintenance.

Another recent trend has been the feminisation of migration. Although women have always formed a large proportion of migrants, their share has gradually increased: by 1995 about 48% of all international migrants were women, and they outnumbered male migrants in about a quarter of receiving countries (Zlotnik 1999). More important was the shift in the character of female migration, with a trend away from movement as family members of male workers or refugees and an increase in the number of women who moved independently or as heads of households. However, such changes were not always reflected in public perceptions, nor in migration regulations, which tended to automatically treat women as dependents (Lutz et al. 1995).

Migration and development

Over the last half-century, international migration has grown considerably, and taken on forms which were not anticipated by governments and planners. This poses new challenges for societies and policymakers all over the world. The most important question for countries of origin is whether migration assists or hinders development. Migration may hinder development by siphoning of qualified personnel (the ‘brain drain’), removing dynamic young workers and reducing pressures for social change. Migration often involves a transfer of the most valuable economic resource—human capital—from a poor country to a rich one. The family, local community and state of the place of origin have borne the costs of upbringing of the migrant to young adulthood. The immigration country will reap the benefits of this investment, and the migrant will often return home after completing his or her working life to once again be the responsibility of the country of origin. It is only worthwhile for the emigration country if the gain in human capital (enhanced skills and productivity) through working abroad can be productively utilised upon return and the transfer of income from immigration to emigration country outweighs the costs of upbringing of the migrant.

Both labour-importing and labour-exporting countries often pursue short-term aims. The former are concerned with obtaining a flexible, low-cost labour force. The latter are mainly concerned with generating jobs for an under-utilised workforce and with getting the maximum possible inflow of worker remittances (Abella 1995, Tomas 1999). Other declared objectives include preventing exploitation of workers and protecting nationals while abroad. Many countries actively encourage emigration for employment. This may mean actual government involvement in recruitment and deployment of workers, regulation of non-governmental recruitment agencies, or simply laissez-faire with regard to spontaneous movements. Some Asian governments have set up special departments or agencies to manage labour emigration, such as the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) in Bangladesh, or the Office of the Protector of Emigrants within the Ministry of Labour in India (Shah 1994, 239). However, regulation of emigration from less-developed countries is often ineffective, as the large number of irregular
migrants demonstrates. This allows exploitative employment and abuses like the trafficking of women and children for prostitution.

Remittances are a key objective: they make a massive contribution to the national accounts of many emigration countries, and could help to fund development investments. Global migrant remittances increased from US$2 billion in 1970 to US$70 billion in 1995 (Taylor 1999, 68). Orderly transfer of remittances is essential if the potential benefits are to be realised—otherwise remittances will be transferred in irregular ways, often in the form of cash or consumer goods. Money which goes through the banking system may be more conducive to investment than cash transfers. Realistic exchange rates, low bank charges, and availability of reliable financial services in both area of employment and area of origin are vital. Special investment schemes to encourage migrants to combine their savings to set up companies or carry out infrastructure projects in the home community could play a part, although worker companies set up by Turkish migrants in the 1970s were not particularly successful.

Most emigration country governments have policies to prevent abuse or exploitation of their citizens while abroad, and to provide assistance in case of illness, accident, death, trouble with the law, disputes with employers or other emergencies. For instance the Philippines has set up the Overseas Workers’ Welfare Administration (OWWA), which provides a range of services, including pre-departure orientation seminars and special officials at consulates to assist migrants (Tomas 1999). However, measures and services for the protection of emigrants are frequently ineffective. They are not available to the irregular migrants, who may face the worst problems. The number of consular officials is often far too small to cope with the case-load. Even legal migrants are so dependent on finding and keeping employment abroad that they hesitate to complain about abuses. Moreover, sending country authorities hesitate to antagonise the authorities and employers in the countries of immigration, for fear that these will prefer workers from other countries. In a situation of global oversupply of low-skilled migrants, the market power lies with the recruiting countries.

There is a lack of coordinated strategies to assist returning migrants with re-integration. Most migrants are left to their own devices and frequently face difficulty in finding employment commensurate with the skills they have acquired abroad. They may end up running small unproductive businesses which often fail. Savings may be spent on consumption and dowries rather than investment. The experience of returnees is thus very uneven, but there is sufficient experience to permit some policy-relevant conclusions. It seems that adequate counselling and information both before and after return, as well as help in obtaining investment credits are factors conducive to successful reininsertion and maximisation of positive effects on development. Returnees are more likely to be successful if advised and supported by governmental agencies and NGOs. Maintenance of social networks in the home country is crucial for a successful return. Cooperation between sending and receiving countries, as well as international organisations, can play an important part in achieving a successful return (United Nations 1998, 63–9).

**International cooperation on migration**

International cooperation could help to ensure orderly migration and to enhance the contribution of migration to development. However, efforts and outcomes so far have been disappointing. The main reasons for this are lack of long-term strategies by both emigration and immigration countries, and the reluctance of immigration countries to take steps which might increase the cost of migrant labour to employers. Major elements of an international regulatory framework already exist in ILO Conventions No. 97 of 1949 and No. 143 of 1975, and in the 1990 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. These standards need to be linked together in a comprehensive framework to regulate the rights and conditions of migrant workers. However, the main problem is that relatively few countries (especially immigration countries) have ratified these instruments. Action is needed to persuade more countries to sign up and implement the Conventions. A world intergovernmental conference on migration might be one way of raising awareness of the need for such measures.

Currently, most countries (especially emigration countries) lack effective systems for monitoring international migration. Moreover, definitions and statistical categories vary considerably.
Effective monitoring and comprehensive and internally comparable statistics are essential for effective multilateral action.

Trends towards regional economic integration and political cooperation in many parts of the world often include consideration of labour migration. Some regional bodies have highly developed policies with regard to movements between the member countries. This applies particularly to the European Union, which has introduced almost totally free movement for citizens of member states as part of European citizenship. However, none of the regional economic bodies have yet introduced comprehensive common policies with regard to migrants from third countries. Common policies on migration, both from member states and from third countries, should be seen as an essential part of regional integration, and should be linked to policies on international cooperation and development.

Emigration countries frequently seek to make bilateral agreements with immigration countries on the regulation of migration and the rights and conditions of their citizens. Such bilateral agreements played a major role in labour migration to Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, and did much to improve the social security and rights of migrant workers and their families. More recently, immigration countries have been reluctant to conclude such agreements. International efforts should be made to encourage bilateral cooperation, by showing that it can bring benefits for all parties concerned. The migrants would gain through enhanced protection and greater social security (for instance through transferability of pension entitlements). The emigration countries would gain because such agreements could facilitate transfer of remittances and make it harder for agents and recruiters to cream off profits from migration. Immigration countries would gain through improved control of migration and the creation of a more stable and better-trained migrant workforce.

Settlement and ethnic diversity

For receiving countries, the key question is whether immigration will lead to settlement, formation of ethnic communities, and new forms of ethnic and cultural diversity. In the 1960s, Western European policy-makers thought that ‘guest-workers’ would not settle permanently. However, after the Oil Crisis, family reunion and community formation took place. The Gulf oil countries do not allow family reunion and settlement, yet their economies are structurally dependent on foreign labour. This is leading to increased length of stay and family formation, despite the rules. Similarly, there is evidence of settlement and emergence of ethnic neighbourhoods in Japan and other Asian labour-importing countries (Komai 1995, Mori 1997). It seems that migration almost inevitably leads to settlement of a certain proportion of the migrants, whatever policy-makers expect. This is partly due to the social nature of the migration process, which is sustained by informal networks once it gets started. Another factor is the increasing strength of human rights safeguards in many countries, which make it difficult for governments to deport migrants or to deny them the right to live with their families.

Immigrants often differ from the receiving populations in many ways: they may come from different types of societies (for example, agrarian-rural rather than urban-industrial) with different traditions, religions and political institutions. They often speak a different language and follow different cultural practices. They may be visibly different, through physical appearance (skin colour, features, hair type and so on) or style of dress. Some migrant groups become concentrated in certain types of work (generally of low social status) and live in low-income residential areas. The position of immigrants is often marked by a specific legal status: that of the foreigner or non-citizen. The social meaning of ethnic diversity depends to a large extent on the significance attached to it by the populations and states of the receiving countries. In many cases, immigration complicates existing ethnic or racial divisions in societies with long-standing minorities. Culturally distinct settler groups almost always maintain their languages and some elements of their homeland cultures, at least for a few generations. Where governments have recognised permanent settlement, there has been a tendency to move from policies of individual assimilation to acceptance of some degree of cultural difference. The result has been granting of minority cultural and political rights, as embodied in the policies of pluralism or multi-culturalism introduced in various forms in North America, Oceania and parts of Western Europe since the 1970s. Governments which reject the idea of permanent settlement also oppose pluralism, which they see as a threat to national
unity and identity. In such cases, immigrants tend to turn into marginalised ethnic minorities. In other cases, governments may accept the reality of settlement, but demand individual cultural assimilation as the price for granting of rights and citizenship.

Whatever the policies of the governments, immigration may lead to strong reactions from some sections of the population. Immigration often takes place at the same time as economic restructuring and far-reaching social change. People whose conditions of life are already changing in an unpredictable way often see the newcomers as the cause of insecurity. Migrations and minorities are seen as a danger to living standards, life styles and social cohesion. In Europe, extreme-right parties have grown and flourished through anti-immigrant campaigns. Similarly, one reaction to the Asian Crisis of 1997–99 was to blame immigrants for unemployment and other social ills, and to introduce policies for large-scale deportations. The overall experience of the last 50 years is that immigration almost always leads to cultural changes, which may be perceived as threatening. Since political leaders generally do little to prepare their populations for such developments, the result is often a politicisation of issues connected with migration and the emergence of conflicts which may take many years to resolve.

**Migration as a challenge to the nation-state**

As a major factor in globalisation, migration is one of the forces eroding the power of the nation-state. One area in which this is particularly apparent is that of border-control— which is usually seen as a crucial aspect of nation-state sovereignty. Reference has already been made to the difficulties experienced by emigration countries in controlling migration flows. Indeed the very fact that large numbers of people have to go abroad to seek a reasonable livelihood exposes the inability of the state to bring about economic development, and may lead to a crisis of confidence. Where the state of the country of origin is unable to provide effective protection to nationals abroad, this may lead to a public outcry, as was shown dramatically in the Philippines in the Flor Contemplación case in 1995 (Castles 1998, Lim and Oishi 1996).

However, immigration countries also find it difficult to prevent unwanted migratory flows. The Schengen Agreement in Europe and the tightening of border controls in the USA may have reduced irregular movements, but they certainly have not stopped them altogether. Several African and Asian countries have carried out quite draconian measures, such as mass expulsions of foreign workers (e.g., Nigeria, Libya, Malaysia), building fences and walls along borders (South Africa, Israel, Malaysia), severe punishments for illegal entrants (corporal punishment in Singapore; imprisonment or a bar on future admission in many countries) and sanctions against employers (South Africa, Japan and other countries). Despite such measures unauthorised migration remains a concern almost everywhere.

The difficulty in achieving effective control is not hard to understand. Barriers to mobility contradict the powerful forces which are leading towards greater economic and cultural interchange. In an increasingly international economy, it is difficult to open borders for movements of information, commodities and capital and yet close them to people. Most states welcome tourists and students, and favour international labour markets for highly skilled personnel, yet seek to limit flows of manual workers, family members, and asylum-seekers. Such distinctions are hard to enforce, and millions of people move irregularly. They are aided by a transnational ‘migration industry’ consisting of recruiters, labour brokers, travel agents—working both legally and illegally.

The nation-state, as it has developed since the eighteenth century, is premised on the idea of cultural as well as political unity. In many countries, ethnic homogeneity, defined in terms of common language, culture, traditions and history, has been seen as the basis of the nation-state. This unity has often been fictitious—a construction of the ruling elite—but it has provided powerful national myths. Immigration and ethnic diversity threaten such ideas of the nation, because they create a people without common ethnic origins. Democratic states tend to integrate immigrants by offering them and their children citizenship. However, the failure of assimilation policies and the growth of ethnic communities mean that the new citizens are often not nationals (in the sense of sharing the dominant culture). The emergence of multicultural societies creates major challenges to national identities. Institutions are likely to change in response to diverse values and needs (Castles and Davidson 2000).
The classical countries of immigration have been able to cope with this situation most easily, since absorption of immigrants has been part of their myth of nation-building. But countries which place a common culture at the heart of their nation-building process have found it very difficult to resolve the contradiction. This applies to many European countries, but also to many of the new post-colonial nation-states which are being constructed in other continents. Asian states have tended to adopt quite restrictive rules on naturalisation and citizenship, and find it very difficult to accept the possibility of integrating new immigrant populations (Castles and Davidson 2000, Davidson and Weekley 1999). The recent trend to development of transnational communities is a further challenge to the nation-state: modern forms of transport and communication make it possible for immigrants and their descendants to maintain long-term links with the ancestral homeland or with diaspora groups elsewhere (Basch et al. 1994, Cohen 1997). Thus the idea that a state must be based on a relatively homogeneous nation is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the 1990s, migration suddenly took a prominent place on the international political agenda: the upheavals surrounding the collapse of the Soviet bloc led to uncontrolled influxes of irregular migrants and asylum-seekers to Western Europe and North America. The result was a flurry of diplomatic activity and international meetings, leading to stricter border controls and attempts to limit certain types of mobility. By the late 1990s, it became clear that the mass migrations would not eventuate, and migration was once again seen as a secondary issue in western countries. However, in East Asia, the Financial Crisis of 1997–99 led to a similar politicisation of migration, with migrants being blamed for economic and social problems. Attempts at mass deportation and stricter border control were made, with limited success. Such events demonstrate the close links between economic and political change and population movements, which seem to be an integral part of globalisation. However, attempts by nation-states and the international community to regulate migration have been sporadic and ad hoc—driven by spectacular events rather than by any long-term perspectives. There is an urgent need for an international strategy to ensure that migration corresponds with agreed political, economic and social goals. Migration needs to take place in an orderly way so as to safeguard the human rights of migrants, to prevent exploitation by agents and recruiters, and to avoid conflict with receiving populations. Migration should also be linked to strategies of sustainable development. That requires a bargain between labour-importing and exporting countries, so that the former can obtain the active young workers they need, in return for remittances, skills transfer and return migration which will facilitate development in the labour-exporting countries. Finally, it is important to develop the understanding that all types of migration lead to social and cultural change. Attempts to suppress such transformations can lead to racism and conflict. On the other hand, communities and societies which develop participatory approaches to understanding and regulating change are likely to experience positive outcomes. Globalisation seems to lead inexorably towards more diverse societies and multicultural citizenship.

References


