9. International Migration

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INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

International migration has often been referred to as the neglected step-child of demography, a discipline that is very prone to the simplifying assumption of a "closed population." Yet international migration has played an extremely critical role in the economic development of many now-developed countries and is thought to have been and continue to be important to the development of many poor (and also 'newly rich') countries. In fact, it has been and is an important component of total population growth in many of these nations.

The pattern and also the determinants and consequences of international migration seem to vary enormously between regions and often between countries, as well as over time. For the moment at least, no set of general propositions--say, a theory of the international migration transition--has acquired any meaning in the field. While the variable appears to be one that can best be approached by analyzing specific cases in all their particulars, it is not unlikely that there are some important generalizations awaiting to be discovered.

It is well to recognize that not all of the policy issues presented by international migration are ones that can be coped with adequately within the framework of national policies and bilateral agreements. In the future there may be increasing pressure exerted by the nations of the densely populated regions to take up the more general question of the global inequality in the distribution of manpower over the land areas of this earth and the ethical dilemmas that are raised by the present situation. At least, the issue of a new economic order for international labor and the human rights of migrant workers are almost certain to gain increasing attention in international forums.

Measurement of the Flows, Stocks, and Characteristics of International Migrants

Unlike migrants who move from one place to another within the same country, international migrants are usually obliged to fill out forms, present identification and, often, a previously obtained visa when they cross national boundaries. The information collected at points of entry and exit provides an abundant amount of data on international migration. Unfortunately, in the case of migration between developing countries or between developed and developing countries, this information does not always present an accurate picture of the true situation. The main problems are, first, that such statistics are heavily dominated by short-term movements which, when procedures for processing the data are imperfect, means that longer-term or permanent migration may be difficult to sort out with any accuracy; and, second, that international migration is sometimes clandestine or "illegal," in which case it is impossible to know the exact number of people involved.

The basic source of data on international migration continues to be the population census, which includes questions on place of birth and nationality that are later cross-tabulated with certain socioeconomic characteristics. It does, however, present several limitations. First, some countries in which international migration is an important phenomenon have not conducted censuses. Even in countries where censuses do exist, some have not asked the
appropriate questions while others fail to publish the necessary tabulations. Second, a census provides a view of migration at a particular point in time and as such permits an estimate of the stock rather than the flow of migrants. Finally, censuses are not generally undertaken simultaneously in different nations of a region—a practice which would constitute a source of information allowing the construction of an "input-output table" of international migration.

Obviously, detailed data regarding the effect of migration on the welfare of the migrant's family, the impact of remittances, the volume and nature of return migration, etc.—all important factors for an understanding of the determinants and consequences of international migration—can only be obtained through specialized surveys. But such surveys, which could also supplement census information by providing additional reference points for estimating intercensal migration trends, are quite scarce. Furthermore, unlike the case of internal migration, neither the survey nor the census is able to interview out-migrants; only in-migrants and return migrants are present in the country in question.

In terms of estimating flows, stock, and characteristics of international migrants, the greatest difficulties are with respect to illegal migrants. There is little hope that illegal migrants will either be fully represented in the censuses of the country of destination or that if interviewed they will respond truthfully to questions on country of birth and place of earlier residence. The illegal or clandestine migration between a large number of Latin American and Caribbean countries and the United States certainly represents one of the most blatant examples of the unsatisfactory nature of quantitative information on this type of movement. At the moment, there is nothing that could be considered as even approaching a reliable estimate of the number of Mexican citizens currently residing in the United States (Keely, 1977). One approach that seems to hold some promise of improving this situation is intensive interviewing in the country of origin in an attempt to identify out-migrants on the basis of information obtained from relatives.

The Determinants of International Migration

The reasons why most people move from one country to another often appear to be similar to the reasons why people move from one place to another within the same country. Economic motivations are uppermost—migrants are attracted by higher wages and greater probability of finding a job as well as, on occasion, better educational opportunities—in short, the chance to improve their standard of living. There are, however, important exceptions where economic motivation is not or may not be uppermost, as in the case of political or religious refugees.

But such considerations constitute only one side (and probably the least important side) of the equation. Immigration laws and the provisions for their enforcement in the receiving countries to a large extent determine the amount and character of out-migration. Changes in the immigration laws of most developed countries in the past 15 years have had an important influence on the composition of migratory flows from the Third World. The changes, which in general relaxed restrictions on race and country of origin and placed greater emphasis on skills, greatly exacerbated the so-called "brain-drain" or
loss of highly skilled manpower by the developing countries (Appleyard, 1977, p. 291).

The other major change that influenced the pattern of international migration to and from developing countries in this period was the opening up of substantial differences in wages and standards of living among developing countries due to differential rates of economic growth. These increased differences had the effect of intensifying migration between countries in the same region. The most extreme case is that of West Asia, where rapidly rising oil revenues led to spiraling wages in a few countries, while much of the region was untouched by this bonanza (Tabarrah, Mamish, and Gemayel, 1978). Important differences in economic growth among countries in both Latin America and Africa have led to increased intra-regional migration in those areas, too.

One point that deserves emphasis is the close relationship that often exists between internal and international migration. Indeed, the difficulty of distinguishing between the two is often noted in the African context. Both form part of the migration "process" in a given country, and it is usually advantageous to incorporate them in the same theoretical framework.

The Consequences of International Migration

When discussing the consequences of international migration, it is customary to distinguish between the migration of manpower with limited skills (migrant workers) and that of highly qualified personnel ("brain-drain"). This distinction is observed below, but it should be recognized that the intermediate case, corresponding to skilled workers in construction and other trades, is becoming increasingly important. In both cases, the issues can be analyzed from three points of view: that of the sending countries, that of the receiving countries, and that of the migrants and their families.

Migrant workers. From the point of view of the receiving (and generally more-developed) countries, it has been argued that it is not in their best economic interest to voluntarily permit or encourage such migration since the migrant workers are often not badly needed and compete with native workers in categories where unemployment in the receiving countries is often highest, such as among the least skilled youth entering the labor force and poorly educated minorities. It is further argued that, even if the labor shortage is real, there are better ways of dealing with it--for example, by tapping the large reserve of women outside the labor force (Davis, 1974, p. 104). On the other hand, it has been observed that migrant workers generally occupy employment levels that are being vacated by the native labor force as it continually moves into more skilled jobs or jobs involving less personal hardship. More important, in most receiving countries, unemployment among native labor in the main occupations of the migrant workers is generally not high (Kayser, 1977, p. 9) and is, at any rate, much less than the volume of migrant workers in the country. Even in the United States, where it is certain that some competition exists between the large number of illegal or seasonal migrants and the national agricultural labor force, it has been argued that the large majority of these migrant workers are filling jobs that would not have been taken by American citizens (Tabbarah, 1977, p. 308). In a dynamic perspective, however, such propositions may lose some of their force: the fact that the low-level, poorly paid positions exist at all is related to the present
availability of migrant workers to fill them. If migrant workers were not available, a quite different structure of employment might emerge. At the present time, analysis of this sort is not well developed and definite conclusions about the economic repercussions of sizeable inflows of migrant workers are not available.

From the point of view of the less-developed sending countries, the emigration of workers is sometimes thought to constitute a welcome relief to unemployment, a source of foreign exchange, and a means by which to increase the skill level of labor (Tabbarah, 1977). Yet in countries where migrant workers abroad constitute a sizeable proportion of the domestic labor force, there is also apt to be concern for longer-term problems related to the eventual reintegration of migrants and the opportunity costs that may be attached to having some of the country's most able workers spend the prime years of their productive lives abroad. In some countries, such as the Yemen Arab Republic, where as much as 20 percent of the labor force is working abroad, there may even emerge a concern for labor shortages among national planning authorities.

Finally, from the point of view of the migrants and their families, the serious dimensions of the problems created by the policies of developed countries to regulate migration according to their fluctuating need for foreign labor are too obvious and well known to be elaborated here. The resulting insecurity of employment, the separation of families, and other related issues have, in fact, been the subject of many resolutions of the ILO in the past several years (Bohning, 1977, pp. 314-318).

The "brain-drain." As was already mentioned, the changes in immigration laws of the 1960s in the developed, receiving countries, which favored education and skills rather than national and ethnic origin, resulted in a sudden upsurge in the migration of skilled and professional workers from less-developed countries. It seems clear that the developed, receiving countries are benefiting from the immigration of highly qualified manpower from developing countries and that, on the other hand, the developing countries are losing very costly resources. It does not necessarily follow, however, that legal restrictions should be placed on this type of migration by the developing countries. For one thing, many of the highly qualified emigrants are specialized in fields where few or no employment opportunities exist in their home countries, at least at wage levels commensurate with the living standards these individuals aspire to. Legal restrictions of this type may also raise questions of human rights or result in frustration on the part of the potential emigrants that would negate the benefits derived from keeping them in their native country.

The questions of which country benefits, which country loses, or whether both gain or lose from international migration constitute intricate problems in welfare economics that have attracted considerable academic attention in recent years. Some of the earlier theoretical analyses of the "brain-drain," which were based on pure neo-classical assumptions with little or no institutional content, came to the happy conclusion that international migration of this sort did not constitute a problem for either the sending or the receiving country. More recent treatments, however, include richer and more plausible assumptions regarding how labor markets operate and the way that
education is financed in developing countries, introduce additional considerations such as national pride in the presence of technical personnel per se, and reach much less comforting results regarding the welfare of those left behind in the country of origin (Bhagwait and Rodríguez, 1975).

But empirical questions may be even more important than appropriate theoretical development in evaluating the impact of international migration of both skilled and unskilled labor. The chief example concerns remittances that migrants may make to relatives at home and the savings they return with if their migration is temporary. Information on such transfers is understandably scarce and rarely "representative" of all migrants. Yet there are indications that average annual remittances by migrant workers in Western Europe exceed US$1000 and that lesser but still substantial amounts are remitted by migrant workers in the United States and Canada (Bohning, 1977, and Cornelius, 1976).

While nearly all attention regarding the consequences of international flows of highly educated labor has been directed toward movement from less-developed to more-developed countries, it is worth noting that there also exist flows in the other direction. This counterflow to the "brain drain"—which is not well investigated as to size, characteristics, or consequences—is of a quite different nature, being made up largely of individuals on assignment with developed country organizations (businesses, governments, international organizations, donors, and so on) rather than individuals seeking improvements in their standard of living or a wider range of opportunities.

**International Migration Policies**

Government policies directly related to international migration are implemented by both the receiving and the sending country. Clearly the principal policies of the receiving countries are immigration laws and the provisions for their enforcement, which can be designed to either promote or limit different types of migration. But another, albeit drastic, policy alternative that has been used by some receiving countries is the expulsion of immigrants who are already legally or quasi-legally settled. Foreigners have been expelled from several African countries, the most notable example being the expulsion of large numbers of Nigerians residing in Ghana.

In the case of legal migration, the direct impact of changes in immigration laws, treaties, and enforcement provisions on migration to the receiving country is readily apparent. What, of course, remains largely unknown is the impact of changes in laws and enforcement provisions on clandestine migration.

The other sorts of international migration policies are those that are implemented by the sending country. At one extreme, these can include the negotiation of international agreements whereby a country will seek permission to send a part of its population abroad. (El Salvador is currently involved in efforts of this sort.) More frequently, developing countries formulate less explicit policies to promote or at least facilitate the temporary emigration of manpower to comparatively lucrative employment in either developed or newly rich developing countries. At the other extreme are policies designed to promote the repatriation of skilled manpower residing abroad or to limit
and control the emigration of qualified personnel. The former are by now quite common in developing countries, yet few country-specific or comparative studies of the effectiveness of such programs have been undertaken.

Increasingly, governments are seeking ways of gaining greater control over the export and import of unskilled and semi-skilled labor. Some primarily receiving countries such as Singapore and Kuwait have placed very strict limitations on the rights of migrants. The restrictions are more often than not aimed explicitly at the rights of migrants to marry and have children. On the other hand, a growing number of primarily sending countries such as the Philippines and South Korea are organizing and promoting group contract labor schemes in which remittances can be paid directly by the employer to the sending state.

Another policy approach hinges on the entire issue of taxation in relation to the flow of highly skilled manpower from developing to developed countries. The compensation argument, which provides a rationale for generating flows of resources from the North to the South, has been voiced most convincingly by Bhagwati (1978). In a similar vein, the Crown Prince of Jordan (1977) recently proposed the establishment of an "International Labour Compensatory Facility" that would divert resources from labor-importing countries to developing labor-exporting countries 'in proportions relative to the estimated cost incurred due to the loss of labour.'

TOWARD ESTABLISHING A POLICY-RELEVANT RESEARCH AGENDA

The importance of international migration to governments often exceeds its quantitative importance in terms of numbers of people and strictly economic impact. A whole series of issues come into play, involving a country's international image, its foreign policy, and its leverage in international negotiations. Emigration of "indocumentados," for example, tends to expose in a dramatic way the apparent failure of a country's national development policies to provide for the basic needs of its population, as well as to constitute a sort of liability in terms of its bargaining power with the receiving country since the latter always has the option of attempting to deport illegal residents. The problems created for the receiving country are perhaps equally sensitive. There is apt to be considerable popular and political controversy as to the correct course of action regarding any sort of international migration, and sudden changes in or "vigorous" attempts to enforce immigration statutes may involve cruelty and infringement on the human rights of immigrants.

In many ways the policy issues raised by international migration lie somewhat to one side of the social sciences. Critical aspects are related to ethics, law, diplomacy, and international relations as much as to sociology, economics, or demography. The one policy area that is directly affected by international migration and that is closely tied to the social sciences is manpower planning. It is often claimed that the principal long-term solution to the "brain drain" is the design and implementation of educational and training programs that will prepare people to perform the jobs that are available and need to be done in their native country. 26/

26. It must be noted, however, that policy-makers from a number of countries--India is prominent among them--are inclined to view the emigration of highly skilled manpower as a process beneficial to the national economy, not necessarily reflective of a misallocation of domestic resources.
Responsibility for international migration policy is usually not localized in a specific government agency or ministry, but rather is generally shared among a number of departments. The ministry of foreign relations clearly plays a major role in defining and protecting the interests of nationals residing in other countries, and the interior ministry is apt to have the primary responsibility for setting policy on who should be admitted into the country and on what terms. The IRG was understandably not able to involve representative policy-makers from such ministries in its work, but from what was said at the three regional workshops regarding international migration issues and what is generally known about the priorities of individual countries in this area, we can be reasonably sure that governments of primarily sending countries are eager to have both better data on number and types of migrants, amount of remittances, and so on, as well as more complete knowledge about the impact of different public policies that affect international migration either directly or indirectly.

The interests of policy-makers in the primarily receiving countries in more and better research on international migration is less obvious. What is clear is that in many of these countries myths and misinformation about the quantitative importance of the phenomenon and the economic roles played by migrants, whether legal or illegal, are exploited for a variety of political purposes, almost always in ways that are prejudicial to the interests of the migrants themselves who to a greater or lesser degree are used as scapegoats. In these countries social scientists would seem to have an independent responsibility to conduct research that would lead to a fair appreciation of the situation and an upgrading of the level of policy debate.

Before turning to the Group's specific recommendations in this area, it is well worth pointing out that here, as in the discussions of the influence of policy on the other demographic variables, there is the issue of how to "restructure development." In this case, however, the question refers to the pattern of international development and the appropriate division of effort between rich and poor countries in the production of labor as against capital-intensive goods. In some measure, migrant workers go to developed countries to produce labor-intensive goods that the developed country might otherwise import from the sending country. The tariffs and quotas on imports of manufactured goods and agricultural exports from LDCs that developed countries incorporate in their trade policies are thought to be among the factors responsible for the enormous difference in wages between developed and developing countries.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Measurement of International Migration

There is no question as to the priority that should be attached to obtaining more and better data on international migration. In particular, special efforts should be devoted to developing and applying methodology for obtaining indirect estimates of the stocks and flows of clandestine migrants to and from developing countries. The most promising lead seems to be interviewing the population resident in the sending country, both with specialized survey questionnaires and special questions included in censuses. As soon as an acceptable set of questions and the corresponding techniques for deriving
estimates have been developed, support should be provided for experimental testing and eventual full-scale application of this methodology.

Specialized surveys of international migration applied on either a national basis or in selected areas of the sending country can provide a remarkable amount of information on migration other than indications as to its volume. Surveys of this type can be used to determine reasons for migrating, the average length of stay, the amount of remittance and returned savings, the costs of migration, and the characteristics of the migrant—all of which can be used to clarify often factless discussions of the determinants and consequences of the phenomenon. As evidence of the interest that policy-makers have in this sort of information, it is worth noting that the government of Mexico is now spending about $900,000 on a national survey of migration to the northern border and to the United States.

Consequences

There is a general need for further research on the consequences of international migration in those developing countries that experience sizeable migratory flows, either temporary or permanent, of skilled or unskilled manpower. Projects on this topic should not be undertaken with a view to determining the net benefit or cost to the country concerned, but rather should focus on the particular aspects of the phenomenon—social, economic, or political—that seem to be most important in the case at hand. Especially in need of investigation are the economic and social effects of the recently initiated flows of skilled and semi-skilled workers from several Asian and African countries to the oil-rich countries of the Middle East. Part of the justification for such research is the insights such studies might provide as to measures that the sending countries could take to increase the benefits obtained from this migration by both the places of origin and the migrants themselves.

Policy Evaluation

Efforts on the part of developing country governments to modify international migration have become sufficiently widespread and are of a sufficiently diverse nature that a comprehensive evaluative study of a comparative nature—such as that recommended on policies to modify internal migration—seems called for. In particular need of comparative evaluation are the wide variety of measures that have been taken to induce highly trained nationals to return home. So too are the emerging policies that a number of countries are adopting with regard to the organized export of unskilled and semi-skilled labor. Once again, the questions to be answered are: to what degree was the policy actually implemented, what was the design or mode of operation, to what extent was the stated purpose.
achieved, and how beneficial were the end results for the different parties concerned. Finally, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive comparative evaluation of the legal rights accorded to non-citizen residents in both developed and developing countries that could serve as the basis for international discussions within the United Nations of the need to both redefine and enforce international codes to protect the human rights of migrants and refugees.
REFERENCES


