

The 2015 'Migration Crisis': Do we need to rethink the links between development, inequality and change?

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Asylum seekers at Budapest Keleti Railway Station, 4.9.15 – on the way to Germany



A 'new normal'?

The central question:

Is the rapid growth of migration to Europe in 2015 merely a passing phenomenon or a 'new normal', not just for Europe but for the world as whole?

If we are in fact facing a new and enduring situation, that would make it necessary for states and international agencies to develop long-term strategies – not to seal borders and stop migration – but to address the deep-rooted problems of inequality and conflict.

Rohingya refugees in SE Asia, 2015





Central American minors on the roof of 'the Beast', 2014

Inequality

- Neoliberal globalization since mid-1970s
- Structural adjustment – role of IMF, World Bank:
 - ‘level playing field’, cuts in health, education, welfare.
- Huge income differentials between rich and poor countries
- Increase in income inequality within many countries since 1970s
- Financialization: production often less profitable than speculation
- Global and regional trade pacts enforce interests of TNCs
- Global value chains: production in several countries with value capture by TNCs
- Commodification of knowledge through Intellectual property control

Rural-urban migration and demographic change

- People often migrate because **existing livelihood becomes unviable**
- **Internal migration** more common than international
 - (UNDP est. 740m in 2009)
- For example: Green Revolution and transnational agribusiness lead to concentration of land ownership and **land flight** by displaced farmers
- **Lack of formal sector jobs** in growing southern cities
- Much rural-urban migration takes place **across national borders**
- **Demographic growth** in poorer countries and **demographic decline** in post-industrial and emerging industrial countries stimulates migration
 - E.g. S. Korea: Total Fertility Rate: 6.0 in 1960; 1.2 in 2013.
 - Nigeria: TFR 2013: 6.0; Cambodia 2013: 2.9

Global labour market hierarchies

- Meritocracy: '**human capital**' as justification for inequality
 - But **educational privilege** still transmitted across generations
- **Labour market hierarchies** based on gender, race, ethnicity, origins, location and legal status
 - **Intersectionality**: black migrant women face multiple exclusion
- **Outsourcing**: first of manufacturing – then 'back office' jobs; now even routine research and development
- **Informal economies** in both poor and rich countries
- **Precarious employment** – even for the highly-skilled
 - (e.g. university lecturers)

Violence, conflict, lack of human security

Forced migration: people flee wars and generalized violence, persecution, and denial of human rights.

Displacement now at highest level since WWII: **59.5m** at end 2014

- Internally displaced persons (IDPs): **38.2m**
- Refugees: **19.5m**
- Asylum seekers: **1.8m**

Syria 2015: Total population: **23m**

4.4m refugees (mainly in neighbouring countries)

7.6m IDPS (still in Syria)

Half the Syrian population are now displaced.

Networks, media and communications

THE LINKS BETWEEN pressure to leave place of origin and knowledge (or beliefs) about opportunities at possible destinations

- Past migration leads to more migration:
 - *'well-trodden paths'* but also *'path dependence'*
- Networks provide social and cultural capital to facilitate mobility
- New forms of communication strengthen migration networks
- Global mass media provide information – but often giving misleading messages about opportunities in rich countries
- New forms of mobility: temporary, circular, repeated
- Media, communications and cheaper transport encourage transnationalism

METHODOLOGY: Multiscalar analysis

- Global forces for social transformation and increased human mobility affect most countries and regions
- But the form of the transformations and mobility – and perceptions of these – varies according to national and local histories and cultures
- Processes of mediation and resistance need to be analyzed at the *global, national and local levels*

Change and resistance: examples

- Resistance to land grabs (e.g. China, India)
- In areas affected by economic restructuring and immigration:
 - Very limited awareness of globalization and neoliberalism
 - Tendency to blame immigrants and refugees for social problems, such as rising rents, drugs and violence
 - But also support for multiculturalism among some groups
- National level: rise of anti-immigrant movements, especially against asylum seekers and Muslims
- Criminalization of migration: official and popular discourses on ‘traffickers’
- Migrant worker movements:
 - Struggle for inclusion in mainstream unions (e.g. USA)
 - Where unions are exclusionary: migrant trade unions (Korea)
 - People’s Global Action for Migration Development and Human Rights

National, regional and global governance

Ambiguity of **national** governments:

- migration needed for economic and demographic reasons
- But goes against national priority and myths of cultural homogeneity

Regional agreements are mainly about regulation and exclusion

- Except EU free movement – but for EU citizens only
- ECOWAS, ASEAN etc,: strictly limited temporary labour migration
- Systematic use of irregular migrant labour (e.g. USA)

Global governance of migration

- Failure to establish a global body to monitor rights and standards
- Rejection of 1990 UN Convention by immigration countries
- GFMD as a modest beginning to dialogue

Migration and development

Optimistic view:

Migration → remittances and skills transfer → development → reduced inequality
→ less migration

Pessimistic view

Most migrants from middle-income groups → remittances increase inequality →
little skills acquisition → more migration

An emerging consensus?

Migration alone cannot support development. Need for improvements in
infrastructure, reduction of corruption and investment-friendly climate

Development → increased migration → long-term migration transition

RESEARCH NEEDED: when and where are elites willing to reform?

Mixed flows



Governments and international agencies want to fit migrants into **neat bureaucratic categories**, e.g.:

- Skilled, manual workers, family, marriage, refugees, etc.

In reality many migrants need both protection and the possibility of building a new life

Much future South → North migration is likely to take the form of MIXED FLOWS

Need for new approaches

Conclusion

Q. Is the rapid growth of migration in 2015 merely a passing phenomenon or a 'new normal', not just for Europe but for the world as whole?

My answer: The factors that lead to increased migration and to 'migration crises' seem likely to remain active.

The experience of 2015 could indeed be the shape of things to come, unless a coalition for fundamental change can be built.

Migration scholars have a responsibility to help provide the scientific and intellectual basis for change.

A 'real utopia':

Can we imagine – or better still help create – the conditions for:

- Democratization of 'migration management'
- cooperative action to resolve global problems
- recognition of human rights for all, including both the right to migrate and the right not to migrate?



The End

Aerial view of the Zaatari Refugee camp

MPI's top ten migration issues of 2015

1. [Migration Crisis Tests European Consensus and Governance](#)
2. [Displacement Reaches Record as Wars Continue and New Conflicts Emerge](#)
3. [Obama and Congress Remain Deadlocked on Immigration](#)
4. [Big Business of Smuggling : Mass Movement of People for Enormous Profits](#)
5. [Governments Increasingly Restrict Citizenship](#)
6. [Refugee Crisis Deepens Political Polarization in the West](#)
7. [Climate Change and Natural Disasters Displace Millions, Affect Migration Flows](#)
8. [Europe and the United States Confront Flows of Unaccompanied Child Migrants](#)
9. [Border Skirmishes Resonate in National Domestic Politics](#)
10. [Shine Wears Off Investor Visa Programs as Questions about Economic Benefits and Fraud Lead to Reforms](#)