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Editor's Note: This chapter first appeared in the *World Migration Report 2020*. The research for this chapter inspired us to delve deeper into the topic of disinformation, resulting in Chapter 8 on disinformation about migration (in this volume). The last two years, however, have shown us that the issue has not abated. In fact, with COVID-19 disinformation, the massive challenges concerning balanced and accurate accounts of migrants' contributions have only become worse. So, here it is again, repeated in this volume, to remind us of the importance of the topic and so additional readers can draw upon its contents.

12 REFLECTIONS ON MIGRANTS' CONTRIBUTIONS IN AN ERA OF INCREASING DISRUPTION AND DISINFORMATION¹

Introduction

A glance through previous World Migration Reports, and other policy and scientific publications on international migration, shows that at least two observations have been prevalent over time: i) recognition that migration, particularly immigration, has emerged as a prominent international and national policy issue; and ii) that the public discourse on migration has increasingly become polarized with the space for balanced, rigorous, and evidence-based analyses having diminished over time.² While the nature of the public discourse has changed over time, there is widespread recognition that the “toxicity” of the migration debate has further intensified over the last few years, with the politics of fear and division increasingly framing discussions.³ Disruption and disinformation are increasingly being deployed as part of tactical pursuits of power, with negative impacts on public, political and social media discourse, on societal values, and on public policy issues such as migration, displacement and migrants (including refugees).⁴

In the face of often negatively skewed discussions on migration and migrants, one can lose sight of the fact that human endeavours to improve peace and prosperity in modern times that are underpinned by migration have been on the whole successful, and in specific key areas very successful (such as the eradication or control of specific, deadly diseases and the dramatic decline in infant mortality following the efforts of Nations under the 2000–2015 Millennium Development Goals).⁵ Migrants provide a source of dynamism globally, and are overrepresented in innovation and patents, arts and sciences awards, start-ups and successful companies. Such historical and contemporary contributions have become increasingly overlooked or ignored in recent discussions on international migration, with many contributions being “normalized” over time but nevertheless evident (at times conspicuously so).

It is also easy to lose sight of the fact that international migration remains a relatively uncommon phenomenon, with a mere 3.5 per cent of the world's population being international migrants (see Chapter 2 of this report for details). Notwithstanding this small proportion, the total number of international migrants has increased in recent decades to reach as high as 272 million, or close to the national population of Indonesia (269 million).⁶ What we currently know is that mobility, as opposed to migration, is becoming much more prevalent, making some argue that now is the time to rethink how we conceptualize and discuss these issues.⁷

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2 GCIM, 2005; Martin, Larkin and Nathanson, 2000; McAuliffe and Ruhs, 2017.

3 Fisher, 2017; Kaufmann, 2017; Zappettini and Krzyzanowski, 2019.

4 Morgan, 2018.

5 Mathers et al., 2018.

6 UN DESA, 2019.

7 Deutschmann and Recchi, 2019; Skeldon, 2018. See also the discussion on mobility in Chapter 1.

In this context, revisiting the many ways in which migrants have contributed – at the transnational, national and local levels – is important in presenting a balanced discussion on migration. This is not to suggest that international migration and displacement do not pose challenges for communities in origin, transit and destination countries (as well as migrants) – many other chapters in this report are focused on such challenges. However, in writing this chapter, we acknowledge that the many ways in which migrants contribute to societies are currently being overlooked, downplayed or taken for granted, and it is the purpose of this chapter to bring these contributions of migrants to the forefront.

The next section describes key concepts related to contributions, providing an analytical framework for this chapter in the context of a rich body of academic and policy work on the topic. We then go on to describe and analyse migrants' contributions globally, with reference to sociocultural, civic–political and economic aspects. The chapter then discusses emerging impediments to the recognition of migrants' contributions globally, before outlining the implications for policy deliberations and for further research.

What are “contributions”?

To contribute means to give something – money, time, ideas, labour, material goods – in order to achieve something with other people.⁸ Outside of personal relationships, such as those with family and friends, and in the context of sociology and social change theory, “contributions” are part of broader interactions and engagement with individuals, groups and institutions in society. In other words, contributions occur as part of broader structural settings and social processes that support and shape societies. They can be broadly categorized as being in sociocultural, civic–political or economic domains (see text box for definitions).

Sociocultural relates to different groups of people in society and their habits, traditions and beliefs.

Civic–political relates to participation in civic duties in the context of accepted authority of the State.

Economic relates to aspects concerned with trade, industry or money.

Sources: Cambridge Dictionary, 2019; Almond and Verba, 1963.

As the salience of migration has risen in public policy and research spheres, there has been a new and greater focus on migrants per se – as distinct subpopulations within larger national populations, with reference to the structural settings they encounter, especially in the destination countries.⁹ The way in which people enter, stay and settle in a new country occupies the time of an increasing number of researchers, policymakers and those in the media:¹⁰ the first focusing on understanding the demographic, geographic, economic, legal/policy and other factors;¹¹ the

8 Cambridge Dictionary, 2019.

9 Dennison and Drazanova, 2018.

10 Chapter 4 quantifies the increase in research output; Chapter 11 discusses global migration governance.

11 See, for example, writings on cumulative causation (Massey, 1990), neoclassical economics (Todaro, 1989), world system theory (Wallerstein, 1974; Portes and Walton, 1981), new economics of labour migration (Stark and Bloom, 1985) and social network theory (Boyd, 1989).

second on how best to meet policy objectives (however defined); and the third scrutinizing and commenting on both. Research continues to explore the dynamic relationships that exist between migrants (including potential migrants) and migration processes and related factors. We know from existing evidence and analysis, for example, that the contributions migrants are able to make in destination as well as origin settings do partly depend on legal–policy frameworks, such as those impacting the ability of both regular and irregular migrants to stay, participate in civic activities, work lawfully and send remittances, as well as to return home (see Chapter 6 of this report).¹² Contributions are also related to demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, with those who choose to migrate having higher skills, education and opportunity, ultimately also reflecting a greater likelihood of contributing in origin and destination countries in a variety of ways.¹³

Consistent with migration research more generally (see Chapter 4 of this report), there is recognition that much of the analysis on migrants has been undertaken from a destination country perspective,¹⁴ with some arguing that the most significant immigration country in the world – the United States – has disproportionately influenced the study of migrants globally.¹⁵ With this in mind, this chapter attempts to reflect broader experiences of international migrants' contributions by incorporating recent research and analysis focusing on destination *and* origin.¹⁶ In scoping and presenting the chapter in this way, we acknowledge that we are not seeking to summarize all existing literature, nor are we suggesting that the findings highlighted in the chapter are representative. What we do recognize, however, is the importance of encapsulating a reasonable geographic and thematic *diversity* of research and analysis on the topic in what, after all, would make a migration report truly a *World Migration Report*.

Importantly, this chapter does not assess the overall impacts of migration in these settings. Studies on the impacts of migration are numerous and well documented (see examples in the text box below);¹⁷ they provide important insights and analyses. This body of work is focused mainly on economic impacts rather than sociocultural or civic–political impacts, including because economic variables are to a greater extent standardized, thereby supporting comparative analysis. Some examples of recent publications on the economic impacts of migration, including some empirical estimates, are included in the text box below.

12 Baldwin-Edwards, 2008; Kanko and Teller, 2014; Shah, 2009.

13 Goldin, 2018; Hunt, 2010.

14 Carling, 2015; Castles, 2010; McAuliffe and Laczko, 2016; Morawska, 2008.

15 FitzGerald, 2014.

16 While this chapter focuses on *international* migration, we acknowledge that it may also be relevant to internal migration in some countries. See Weiner (1978) for examples of disruptions and disinformation leading to conflict and discrimination faced by inter-State migrants within India.

17 See also the *World Migration Report 2005* (IOM, 2005).

Assessing the economic impacts of migration

Estimating overall economic impacts of migration is a topic of intense debate in political and policy circles. Some recent publications on the topic include:

- *Exceptional People: How Migration Shaped Our World and Will Define Our Future*, by Goldin, Cameron and Balarajan, shows that there is broad consensus among economists that, for destination countries, immigration is a catalyst for economic growth at an aggregate level and produces net economic benefits. However, the authors also acknowledge that there are ongoing debates on how to measure these effects.^a
- The McKinsey Global Institute's report, *People on the Move: Global Migration's Impact and Opportunity*, echoes these findings, showing that migrants contributed over 9 per cent, or USD 6.7 trillion, to global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2015.^b
- *International Migration: Recent Trends, Economic Impacts, and Policy Implications*, by the International Monetary Fund, concludes that the economic impacts of migration vary across countries, and that, while migration brings challenges, it also confers benefits to origin and destination countries.^c
- *Migration and the Economy: Economic Realities, Social Impacts and Political Choices*, by Goldin et al., affirms that immigration impacts positively on economic growth, and that this happens in a number of ways: many migrants are comparatively younger than local populations and thus have a significant positive impact on both GDP per capita and overall (aggregate) GDP; migration enhances output per worker by increasing human capital; and migration bolsters total factor productivity as well as innovation. The report finds that, had immigration to the United Kingdom and Germany ceased in 1990, both countries' real GDP in 2014 would have been lower by GBP 175 billion and GBP 155 billion, respectively.^d
- The impacts on labour markets, including on wages, vary widely, are often negligible and are largely driven by how complementary migrants' skills are to those of local workers;^e these may be reversible in the longer run, as economies adjust to immigration, as Ruhs argues in *The Price of Rights: Regulating International Labor Migration*.^f
- *The Economic and Fiscal Effects of Granting Refugees Formal Labor Market Access*, by Clemens, Huang and Graham, suggests that most evidence shows that the average effect of refugee inflows is on labour markets for both developed and developing countries is small or null.^g

a Goldin, Cameron and Balarajan, 2011.

b McKinsey Global Institute, 2016.

c IMF, 2015.

d Goldin et al., 2018.

e Ibid.

f Ruhs, 2013.

g Clemens, Huang and Graham, 2018.

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