

Reimagining Migration and Mobility

NEW IDEAS
FOR AN AGE-OLD
HUMAN PHENOMENON



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of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

The School of International Futures (SOIF) is a non-profit group of practitioners that uses futures and foresight methods to identify future-facing insights, build capability and create change. Its expertise spans the public, non-profit and intergovernmental sectors. It is headquartered in the United Kingdom, works internationally, and is regarded as a leader globally in translating futures thinking into effective strategy, policy and innovation.

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Acknowledgements

This paper is informed by a meeting of experts in Istanbul in October 2023 who used a selection of futures tools to stretch thinking. The experts reflected diverse geographies, sectors, institutions, disciplines and genders.¹ We thank them for their contribution to the discussion. Errors are those of the authors alone, not of the experts who informed the contents of this paper. The authors are grateful to the anonymous peer reviewers for their helpful comments on the draft.

¹ See the Appendix for a list of participants and a summary of the methodology.



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Foreword

In the face of the world's unprecedented pace of change, marked by an “age of accelerations,” the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions, climate crises, and the emerging “age of permacrisis,” the necessity for foresight in governance and multilateral cooperation has never been more acute. Recognizing this, the International Organization for Migration engaged the School of International Futures (SOIF) to draw upon its “three horizon” methodology and work with some of the leading migration practitioners and scholars in the world to “re-imagine migration and mobility”.

This initiative aligns with the Secretary-General's vision outlined in “Our Common Agenda” and is one modest component of IOM's contribution toward the United Nations Summit of the Future later this year.

Through a collaborative approach, involving a wide array of external partners and stakeholders, this project leverages IOM's global convening power to foster strategic foresight on migration and mobility. By hosting a futures research workshop and partnering with SOIF, we engaged with experts across sectors and geographies to explore innovative solutions to the complex challenges of migration. This reflection is part of how we can collaboratively contribute to shaping policies that are adaptive, inclusive, and

forward-looking, ensuring that migration remains a positive force for global development.

As we present the findings and insights from this journey, it's important to acknowledge the collective effort that has brought us here. The dedication and expertise of our partners, workshop participants, and the broader migration community through its growing evidence base have been instrumental in redefining the narrative around migration and mobility.

This publication offers the chance for reflection on migration and mobility in a highly competitive and contested world. We have reached a defining moment in the global approach to migration and a new strategic direction to deliver on the promise of migration. We hope that it offers a new hope toward a more constructive and evidence-based narrative on migration that underpins informed decision-making going forward.

We stand at the threshold of a new era, one that demands bold ideas and decisive action. Let this “think piece” serve not only as a testament to our shared vision but also as a call to action for all stakeholders to embrace the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead in reimagining migration and mobility for a better future.



Ugochi Daniels

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Workers from surrounding provinces often move to urban cities in search of employment opportunities. They work in construction sites, as house helps, janitors, vendors, taxi drivers or other “blue-collar” jobs. © IOM 2009

Executive summary

Migration and mobility have been a part of human history for as long as humans have been active on the planet. The benefits of migration – to destination countries, to countries of origin, and to migrants and their families – are well documented. Migration improves economic, social and cultural outcomes, and when permitted, civic and political outcomes.

However, as globalization has deepened, so migration has become increasingly regulated, with some regions and corridors having greater mobility, while others experience more restricted migration. In many countries, the political discourse about migration has become toxic.

This short publication is therefore intended to explore some ideas about how to improve the value of migration, and the experience of it, in a contested world. It is informed by an expert workshop held in Istanbul in October 2023, convened by the International Organization for Migration and facilitated by the School of International Futures, which used futures methods to open up the discussion.² The ideas correspond, broadly, to the themes under discussion at the Summit of the Future.

Beyond geography, migration is positively or negatively shaped by five significant factors. These are: geopolitics, climate change, demographics, technology, and values. These interact with each other.

In terms of rethinking migration and mobility:

- Migration is usually a response to labour demand, not to labour supply. All developed countries have ageing and declining populations. Migration can ensure that these countries maintain their economic vitality.
- Migrants bring cultural and civic energy to the destination countries. However, they are often excluded from civic participation. Participation reduces the potential for exploitation and related illicit practices that go hand-in-hand with exploitation and manipulation, and enables migrants to contribute fully to their host countries.
- Displacement as a result of climate change is an inevitability. Countries facing this prospect also need help to adapt, as well as to manage displacement impacts. This is about climate justice and needs to be fully incorporated

within finance discussions about loss and damage.

- There are calls for better data and better use of smart systems to manage migration processes. The humanitarian approach to the use of such technologies would adopt the fiduciary principle of doing no harm. Machine systems should advise humans running migration systems, not the other way around.
- Migrants skew towards younger generations. This means that it is high on the agenda for intergenerational fairness, both within countries and between them. It is hard to argue against the principle of intergenerational fairness. It could therefore be a broader frame through which migration might be successfully reimagined.

However, in the short and medium term, reimagining migration and mobility is a challenge that requires new public narratives. The politics of migration is a struggle over values, and the values of the younger generations are more aligned with the stories of opportunity, fairness and trust that sit at the heart of migration.

² See the Appendix for a list of participants and a summary of the methodology.



By flying thousands of Venezuelans out of remote Roraima to cities with better job prospects, the “interiorization” strategy, which operates with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other UN agencies, helps refugees and migrants from Venezuela get a fresh start. © IOM 2023/Gema CORTES



Setting out

People move. They move willingly, or reluctantly, or because they are forced to. They move in search of work and opportunity, to escape persecution, to flee a disaster. For a variety of reasons, people move – and they have done so since the human species first emerged (Charnysh, 2023).

In this short paper we reimagine migration and mobility, and offer some suggestions for reorienting global thinking and local action.

New ideas are essential, but they must be informed by established, evidence-based analysis and historical understanding. Migration is a complex issue and a sophisticated technical field. Its legal and policy foundations are diverse, addressing multiple concerns in countries of origin, transit and destination. Furthermore, the management of migration is now becoming the subject of new forms of governance, at every level from the global right down to the local.

Nonetheless, the essence of migration is well understood by most people. As an age-old

phenomenon, migration is part of our collective histories, and – quite literally – part of our DNA.

We are not, therefore, providing comprehensive coverage of all issues for all geographies; this would be impossible. Rather, we present some new ideas and explore how the international community can reconstruct aspects of migration and mobility in a divided world.

The landscape of migration is shaped by three contradictions. The first of these is the most obvious and familiar: it exists in the gap between what the data tell us about migration and the way the political discourse describes it.

The second operates at a more rarefied level: the Refugee Convention of 1951 is recognized as a cornerstone of the post-war human rights project, and even those who stoke fear about migration find it hard to deny the rights of refugees fleeing persecution and danger.

The third contradiction manifests as a discourse about skilled migrants (more desirable) versus less

skilled migrants (less so), even though the briefest look at labour market data shows migrants doing essential and often low-paid work in care homes, farms, hospitals, sanitation services and transport. This distribution of labour became particularly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic measures. Meanwhile, the foundational assumptions about nationality, ethnicity and religion that sit beneath this discourse are hard to deny – though they are denied, frequently and loudly.

These contradictions show that reimagining migration also implies a twenty-first century reinvention of the social solidarity that informed the global human rights framework and instruments.³ It is about making visible the contribution of migrants and about changing for the better the public and political language about migration – an urgent change in the context of increasing geopolitical instability, environmental degradation, climate change and rapidly evolving technologies.

³ For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Charter.



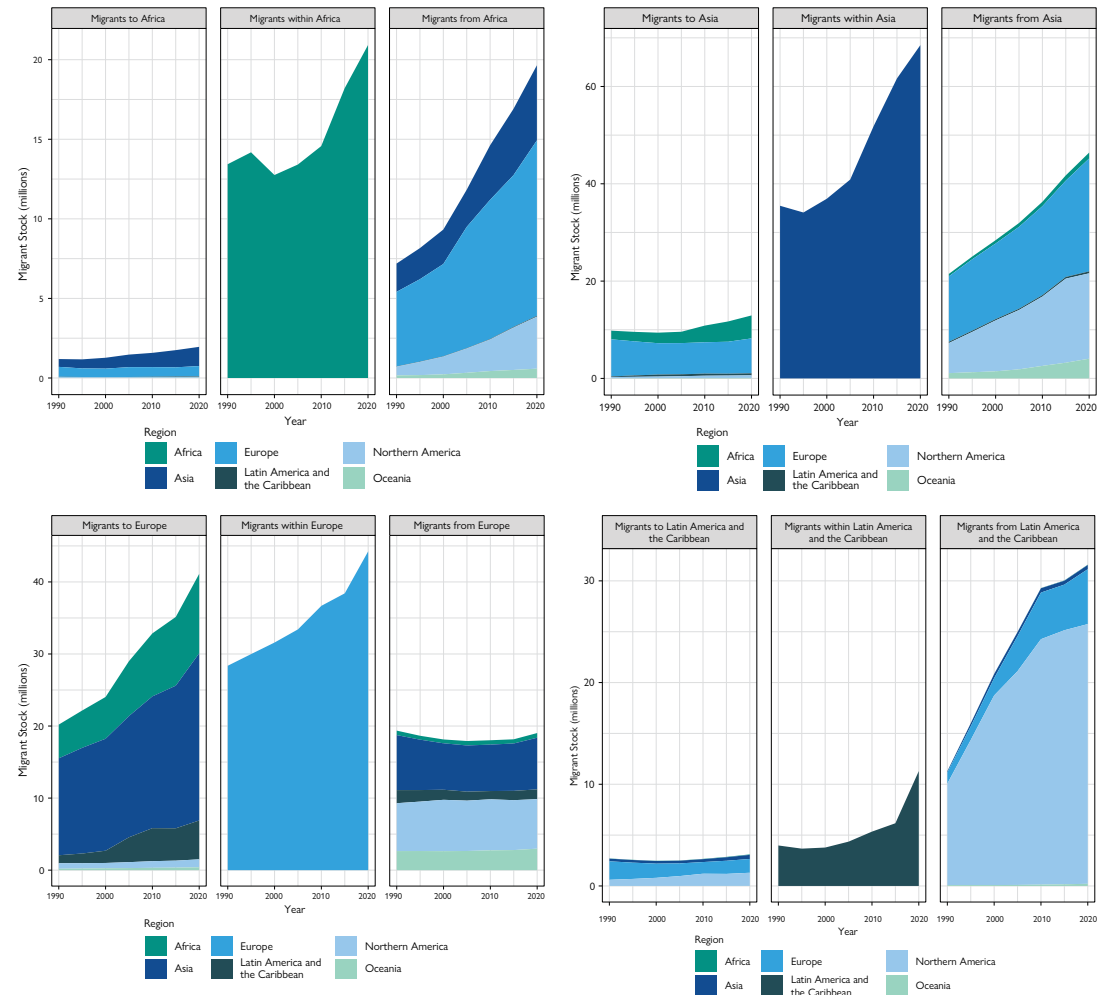
Flow of migrants in transit at the delegation of the National Institute of Migration in Danlí, El Paraíso. © IOM 2022/Erick ESCOTO

Looking back

Good futures thinking needs a grounding in history. Taking a long view of the past can bring the present into sharper focus. Recent research findings born out of new technologies allow us to look back afresh and see that the history of human migration is much more widespread and much more complex than we had previously been led to believe (Shah, 2020).

Geography played a major role in ancient human migration dynamics and remains one of the most important factors in all forms of migration today. Migration trends spanning the last several decades highlight the importance of geography in the formation of long-term patterns of migration. We can see in Figure 1 below, for example, clear differences in the international migration trends for Africa, Asia and Europe, especially compared with the distinctive patterns for Latin America and the Caribbean, which are dominated by migration to the most significant destination country in the world, the United States of America. But we also know from long-term data that regular migration options for people from developing countries have narrowed over the last 25 years (McAuliffe et al., 2024).

Figure 1. Migration to, within and from United Nations regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean, 1990–2020



Source: McAuliffe and Ocho (eds.), 2024 based on UN DESA data.

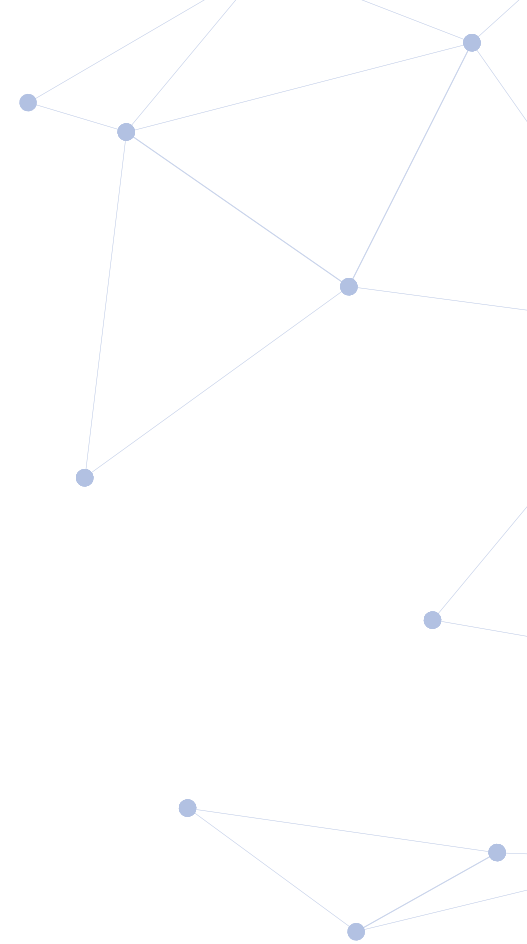
Migration has been central to human evolution

In her book *The Next Great Migration* (Shah, 2020), the science writer Sonia Shah argues that migration has been central to the evolution of humans, in terms of both biology and history. The full extent of this has been revealed by new research techniques, drawing on both genetics and navigational technologies.

In contrast, the idea that people, along with animals and plants, are from a specific place (captured in names such as “Canada” geese or “Japanese” maple) is a product of taxonomies created in the eighteenth century “when European naturalists started cataloguing the natural world”. This was driven by an underlying assumption that the catalogued species had always been where they were found by explorers or colonists – and people likewise.

As a result, migration is portrayed as “anomalous and disruptive”. Shah describes the evidence for these arguments as “flimsy”. In practice, migration in both human and non-human species seems to have evolved as an adaptive response to environmental instability. Species that live in more unstable environments are more likely to migrate.

Research into why humans move does not produce simple outcomes. For example, attempts to reduce it to a formula about economic opportunity have failed. However, there is physiological evidence that migration is physically encoded into our bodies. Shah cites the geographer Richard Black as saying the idea that migration has a single cause is “rooted in a sedentarist notion” in which migration is seen, falsely, as “an exception to the norm”.



The landscape unfolding

Geography will continue to be the biggest single shaper of migration, coupled with geopolitics. The uptick in persecution, conflicts and disasters has resulted in a significant increase in cross-

border displacement and an even greater volume of internal displacement.

The futures of migration will be shaped by five significant factors: geopolitics, climate change,

demographics, technology and values. These factors are entangled with each other, and unfold slowly, at generational timescales. In this section, we review each of these briefly in turn.

Geopolitics

There are currently 183 continuing conflicts globally – the highest number for three decades (IISS, 2023). Increasing numbers of these are “internationalized intra-State conflicts” – internal wars in which international actors are involved (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023). These are a form of proxy war. The International

Institute for Strategic Studies notes that “Global energy-transition and climate-change-mitigation strategies are also becoming an increasingly important focus of geopolitical competition.”

There is no single cause for this, but the roots of it can be traced back to unresolved geopolitical issues from the 1970s, which saw the global oil

shock, the end of the Bretton Woods financial system and the entry of China into the global economy (Thompson, 2022). The impact of these was delayed by two decades of low oil prices and a decade of cheap money, together with a Western strategy to achieve international political alignment through economic convergence (Tooze, 2023). None of these is still true.

Figure 2. Number of conflicts per year by type of conflict, 1976–2021



Source: UCDP-PRIO, 2022.

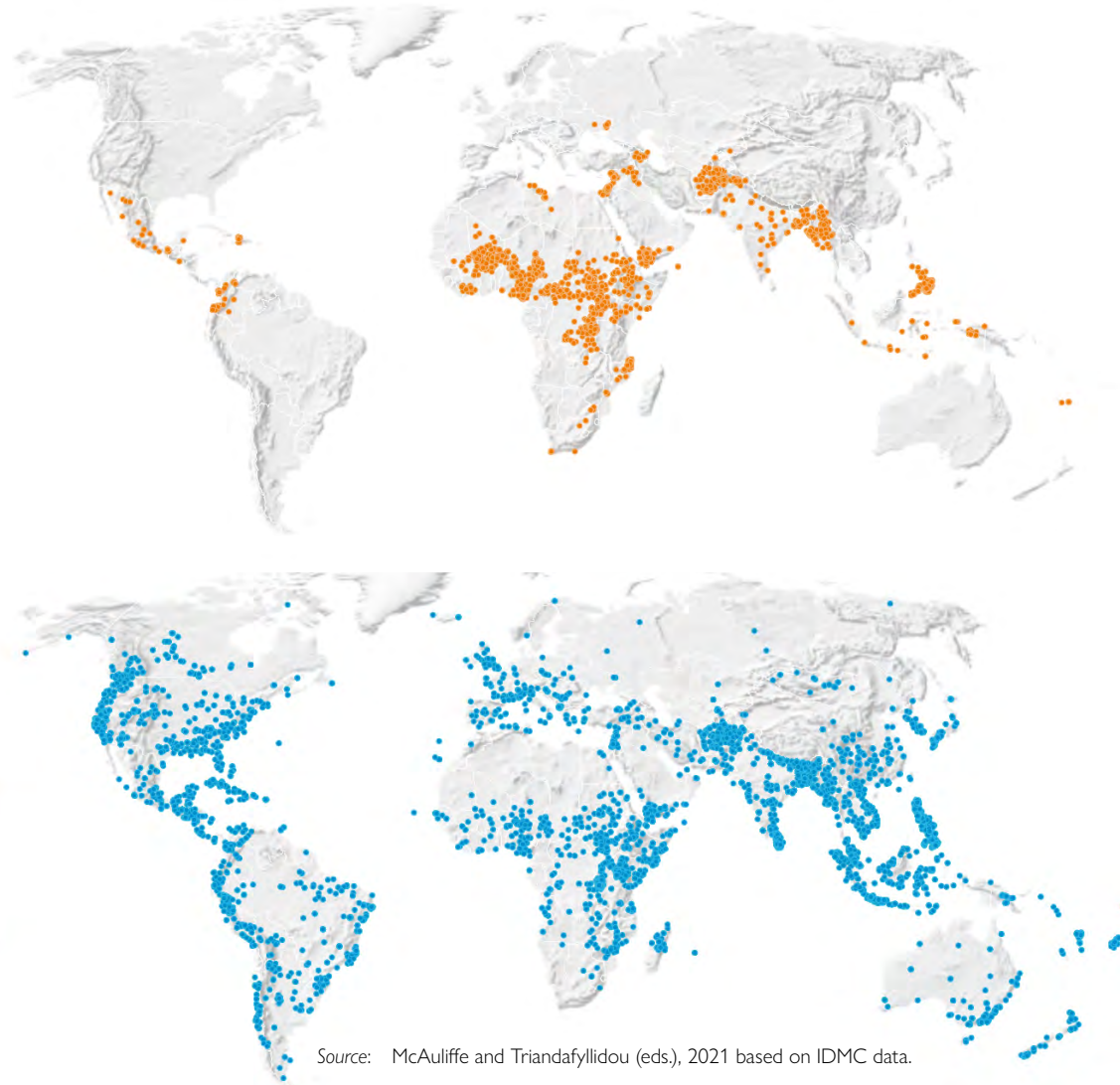
The effects of this breakdown have been exacerbated by the pandemic and by global shocks from the Russian Federation–Ukraine war. For fragile States, as the IISS notes, these factors have reinforced “root causes of conflict while curtailing resources available to address or at least mitigate them”. The United Nations Secretary General spoke of the centrality of geopolitics at the start of 2024 when he highlighted that “geopolitical divides are preventing us from coming together around global solutions for global challenges. It is little wonder that people everywhere are losing faith in government, institutions and financial and economic systems.” (Guterres, 2024).

Climate change

The influence of climate change on migration and mobility is, so far, the hardest to quantify. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre has estimated that 376 million people worldwide have been displaced by extreme weather events since 2008, with a sharp upward trend – in both volume and cost – since 2020 (IDMC, 2023). Data on internal displacements in 2020 show that 144 countries experienced internal displacements from disaster, compared with 42 from conflict, as seen in Figure 3 (IDMC, 2021).

Future impacts will vary with the extent of global warming and are likely to increase the scale of cross-border displacement, as discussed in Section 5 below. Heavily populated countries such as Bangladesh are already experiencing high levels of internal displacement as a result of increasing salination from the Bengal Sea in the south and more intense deluges in the north. Even at lower levels of global warming, some countries, including small island States, will disappear completely. Internal displacement due to climate change is unlikely to be exclusive to developing States, and cross-border displacement due to climate change impacts is inevitable, even though the overall scale remains uncertain, if widely debated.

Figure 3. Internal conflict displacements (top) and internal disaster displacements (bottom) in 2020 by location



Source: McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou (eds.), 2021 based on IDMC data.

Demographics

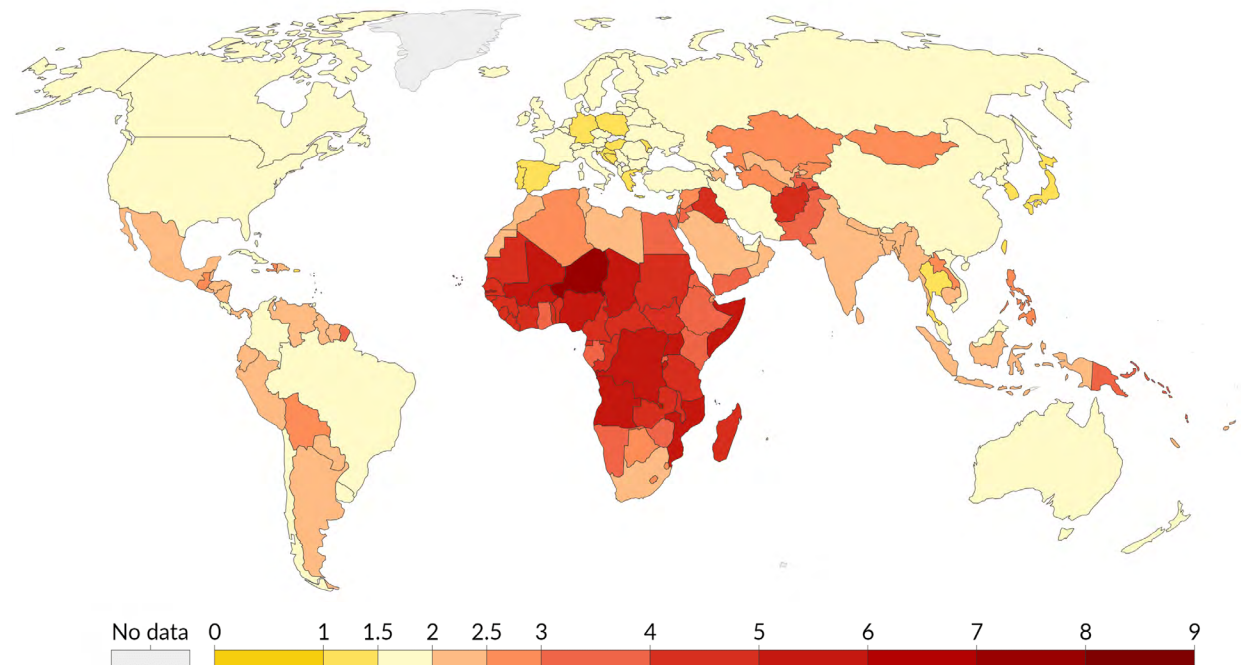
More-developed countries, without exception, have fertility rates below population replacement: their populations are shrinking and ageing. This has economic implications, most notably an increase in the “dependency ratio” – the cost of providing income and services to non-workers, relative to tax receipts.⁴ The notion of the dependency ratio is complex and contested. To some extent it is being moderated by the increasing economic participation of older workers in developed economies, and managed, with some political risk, by delaying pension payments (Harasty and Ostermeier, 2020). However, there is also a clear interaction between ageing demographics and migration (Zaiceva and Zimmermann, 2016). Countries with high fertility rates are mostly clustered in sub-Saharan Africa. These rates are starting to decline in line with historic experience elsewhere; the speed at which this is likely to happen is contested (Vollset et al., 2020).

Research also shows a correlation between immigration rates and economic growth, which is typically linked closely to the size of the working

population and with innovation (Peri, 2020). Restrictions on immigration tend to have both short- and long-term adverse economic effects. As such, some countries have introduced dual

citizenship to address this demographic deficit, while others have taken advantage of more fluid post-pandemic work arrangements to attract people on long-stay work visas.

Figure 4: Worldwide fertility rates by country, 2019



Source: Our World In Data/Gapminder (n.d.).

Note: The Total Fertility Rate measures the number of children born to a woman if she lives to the end of her childbearing years, assessed by age-specific fertility rates and country.

⁴ It is also argued that an ageing population reduces the level of innovation in the economy, but this is contested.

Technological change

There is potential for new technologies, such as AI-based international recruitment platforms, to facilitate rapid large-scale job-matching and skills transfer across the world (Chen, 2023; World Bank, 2023). On the other hand, it is widely anticipated that emerging technologies, especially artificial intelligence, will reduce labour demand, particularly at the middle- and low-skilled end of the market (Brekelmans and Petropoulos, 2020; Goldman Sachs, 2023). Other issues relating to migration and technology are discussed in Section 5.

Some experts argue that in addition, inequality across the world, both between countries and within countries, will be exacerbated with the roll-out of AI and the expansion of data-reliant technologies (BBC, 2024; McAuliffe, 2023). The technology is evolving quickly and it is not yet clear how newer forms of AI (such as generative AI and artificial general intelligence or AGI) will impact the future of work, including automation and augmentation, although it is generally

expected that labour markets of advanced economies will be more deeply affected (Gmyrek et al., 2023). The IMF forecasts that in advanced economies around 60 per cent of jobs will be affected by AI, with around half benefiting from the integration of AI, while the other half risk automation as “AI will have the ability to perform key tasks that are currently executed by humans”. This is likely to lower demand for labour, affecting wages and even eradicating jobs (BBC, 2024).

This view is contested, however. In an MIT study on the impact of AI, with an American focus, Autor et al. (2022) argue that:

... in the next two decades, industrialized countries will have more job openings than workers to fill them, and that robotics and automation will play an increasingly crucial role in closing these gaps. Nevertheless, the impact of robotics and automation on workers will not be benign.

The reason for this is that the extent to which the gains from automation are shared is a policy question.⁵

More speculatively, the automation of service work may be limited by the cost of the robotics involved, however, even as the costs of robotics are reducing as technologies are scaled and refined (Wong and Jessen, 2023). Green (2023) found that the net impact of AI was likely to be ambiguous and that high-skilled occupations have been most exposed to progress in AI, but that empirical studies “do not find any statistically significant decrease in employment”. Research in Japan, which invested strongly in eldercare technologies, found that they are unpopular and require more labour than they save (Vogt and König, 2023). But the so-called “reverse centaur” model, as exemplified by Amazon warehouse workers, could suggest that new technologies will not eradicate the demand for migrant labour, but might further deskill and devalue it (O’Connor, 2021).

⁵ Much of the work on the adverse impact of AI on labour markets has come out of the United States, where “low-wage US workers earn substantially less than low-wage workers in almost all other wealthy industrialized countries” (Autor, 2022). However, this appears to be down to labour market institutions, not technology.

Values

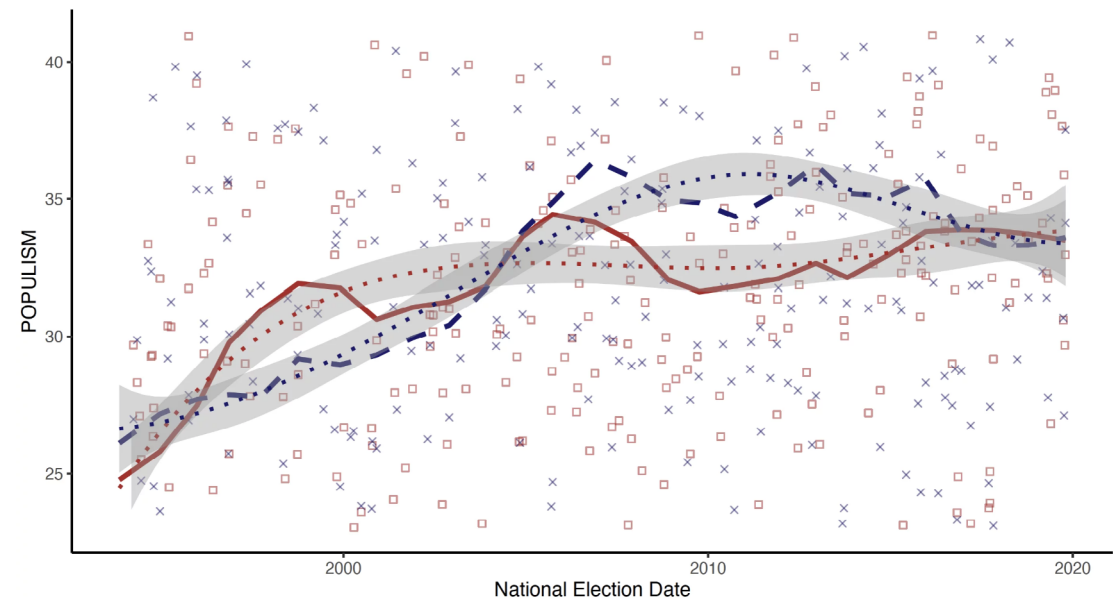
Conflicts over values have been a feature of both competition between States and intergenerational differences within States over much of the last two decades. In both cases it is associated with an increase in forms of authoritarianism and populism. At a State level, Etkind (2023) characterizes this as a competition between two different types of modernity. One is locked into the industrial and energy systems of the twentieth century, while the other looks towards a post-fossil world. The new modernity is “cosmopolitan” and “cherishes anthropological diversity”. In response, in many parts of the world authoritarian leaders have had a “project of reversing modernity”.

Within States, the best single explanation of the surge of right-wing populism is as an intergenerational conflict over values, amplified by economic insecurity (Rodrik, 2021). In this explanation, populism is characterized by intergenerational differences in values and by spatial differences in lived experience (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). The political base of right-wing populist parties tends to be older and less urban. Right-wing populist narratives are amplified through mainstream and social media (Cerulus and Schaart, 2019) and funded by money from right-wing foundations in the United States of America and elsewhere (Fitzgerald and Provost, 2019).

One effect of this is that centrist and centre-right political parties accommodate pressure from populists by enacting more restrictive legislation and extending the domains of migration control. In the case of the European Union, we have seen immigration management rolled into trade agreements with countries of the less-developed world, and the policing of migration “outsourced” into social domains such as education, health and employment.

This politics of populism is already in conflict with the economic consequences of demographic change. All the same, the so-called “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory illustrates the extent to which empirical evidence can be rearranged into a compelling narrative that plays on fears and insecurities among those left behind by globalization. Climate change is likely to accelerate this interaction, even as it becomes a political battleground in its own right.

Figure 5: The evolution of average populism over time by populist ideology



Source: Stöckl and Rode, 2021.

Note: Red line shows right-wing populism, dotted blue line shows left-wing populism. Data from 331 elections in 41 European Union and OECD countries.



Migrants fleeing violence in Darfur cross the Chad–Sudan border in Adre in June 2023. More than 180,000 persons including Chadian returnees, Sudanese refugees and migrants from other countries have fled Sudan into Chad. © IOM 2023

The facts on the ground

The basic facts are clear: migration is a strong driver of human development, generating benefits for destination and origin countries, as well as for migrants and their families. These beneficial effects can be categorized in three spheres: economic, sociocultural and civic-political.

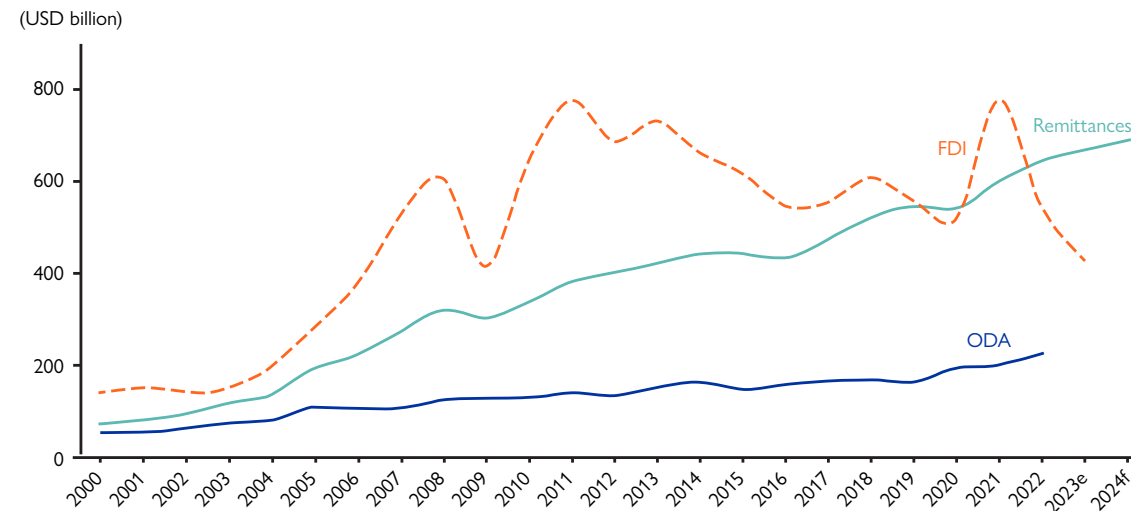
Economic benefits of migration

The economic contribution is the easiest to measure. It is estimated that in 2019 there were 169 million workers worldwide living outside of their country of origin (ILO, 2021); for most of them, migration represents an opportunity to earn more overseas.

In destination countries, migration provides skills that would take years to fill through education and training; migration is the result of demand for labour (see p.13). In low- and middle-income countries of origin, meanwhile, international remittances typically represent the largest source of overseas payments, having outstripped official development assistance for decades and having recently overtaken foreign direct investment (Ratha et al., 2023).

Migrants are also overrepresented in more innovative economic sectors; they are responsible for a disproportionate number of patents and business start-ups, and they establish new trade and investment links (Goldin, 2018). Migrants are also overrepresented in the arts and sciences (McAuliffe et al., 2019).

Figure 6. Remittances, foreign direct investment (FDI) and official development assistance (ODA) flows to low- and middle-income countries (2000–2024)



Source: World Bank, 2022.

Sociocultural benefits of migration

The cultural impact of migration is most visible in food cultures, transformed by migrants who “travel with their culinary practices and habits, while acquiring new food customs that they adopt naturally to their new life” (Oussedik, 2012); those new customs also travel in the other direction (McAuliffe et al., 2019). Food makes a fine metaphor for migration itself, as new ingredients, techniques and recipes find new audiences and markets in the host country – perhaps more a *smörgåsbord* than a melting-pot.

Music, too, has benefited from migration. Much of global musical innovation in the past 40 years has come from the migration of musicians. New styles of song emerge in “cities where different cultures meet and mingle, sharing their distinctive songs and ways of life” (Gioia, 2023). In diaspora communities, music also provides a means “for strengthening a group’s cultural identity as well as transcending it, and for reinforcing boundaries between groups as well as perforating them” (Lidskog, 2017). Top-tier sport would likewise

be unrecognizable without migration. When the French team won the men’s football World Cup for the second time in 2018, 17 members of the 23-person squad were eligible to play for other countries (Adler, 2022).

These indicators of cultural integration and exchange are hiding in plain sight; it is their everydayness that makes them invisible.

Civic–political benefits of migration

The civic and political contributions of migrants are still harder to see. Often manifest at the community level or in diaspora organizations, they enable inclusion and increase economic and social participation. Such organizations have a cultural impact: community events established by migrants – such as the carnivals of London and Toronto, founded by Caribbean diaspora – can become signifiers of their host city as a whole. In countries in conflict, meanwhile, refugees have played crucial roles in peacebuilding and mediation processes (Kitimbo et al., 2021).

Some countries – particularly the Gulf States – strictly prohibit any kind of political contribution by migrants. By contrast, over 15 per cent of the representatives returned by the United States 2022 Congressional elections were first- or second-generation migrants – the highest proportion ever and part of a continuing trend in Congress towards greater ethnic diversity (Chavda, 2023).

These benefits are easy enough to spot; they have surely been noticed by those who argue most strongly against migration. Demographic

anxieties have been proposed as an explanation of the appeal of right-wing populism in the United States in particular, and the electoral statistics cited above suggest that the visibility of ethnicities is becoming more noticeable.

That the obvious advantages of migration are so little discussed presents a challenge – but also an opportunity. To reimagine migration, we will need to build a new narrative around the facts on the ground. In the rest of this section, we look at five areas for innovation: labour, law, climate, technology, and intergenerational fairness.

New approaches to migration

A – Opportunity for all: migration and labour

The discourse around migration and labour gets it the wrong way around. Migration does not increase the labour *supply* in the destination country;⁶ rather, it is a response to labour *demand*, and therefore employment opportunity, in the destination country.

This explains the strong evidence showing that migration has almost no effect on wages, largely depending on context (Thiollet and Oswald, 2020). There is also evidence that international migrants actively seek countries where their skills will be highly valued (Fenoll and Kuehn, 2019). This is true of migrants moving from the less developed to the developed world, and also of those moving from developed countries to work elsewhere.

International migration is also more constrained than is generally believed. Half of the world's migrants live in just 10 countries worldwide; one third come from only 10 countries of origin (Fasani et al., 2020). The skills pool in countries of origin is reduced, to the benefit of

destination countries. This is offset somewhat by international remittances: these payment flows are now three times as large as international aid (Ratha et al., 2023), and half goes to rural areas in the less developed world, where the majority of the world's poor and food insecure live.⁷

Almost all highly developed countries have below-replacement level fertility rates (see p.8), meaning their working age population is shrinking. Migrants – almost universally young – are thus an economic advantage, even a necessity, if destination countries seek to maintain their standards of living and provision of public goods. Thus, labour demand in highly developed countries is likely to increase, even as climate conditions make living and working conditions in less developed countries more difficult.

A number of countries, notably in the so-called “Anglosphere”, have implemented policies that prefer highly skilled workers; this may prove counterproductive in the long term. Notions of national security are expanding to incorporate

food and energy (Chatham House, 2022a and 2022b) – goals that require practical and vocational skills, as do responses to climate change and the burgeoning care-work deficit.

While it is argued that new technologies will reduce or obviate the need for migrant labour, the cases offered can tell the opposite story. For example, the Japanese Government has in recent years poured considerable funds into the development of robots for eldercare, inspiring a whole genre of techno-optimistic think pieces. However, Japan's robots turn out to be unpopular with carers and carees alike, and tend to increase costs rather than reduce them (Wright, 2019). This partly explains the gradual adjustment of Japanese immigration policy to make migrant care labour more attractive and viable in the long term (Vogt, 2023), which has led to an almost twentyfold increase in migrant care workers in the country between 2017 and 2022 (*The Japan News*, 2023).

⁶ This claim is sometimes known as the “lump-of-labour fallacy”.

⁷ The United Nations estimates that around 15 per cent of income earned by international migrants becomes remittances.

Reimagining migrant labour through expanding regular pathways

In summary, skills deficits are likely to change in the medium to long term, and we anticipate that developed nations will start to adjust immigration policies as they recognize this.

One approach would be to encourage migrants with agricultural or renewable energy skills to contribute to the regeneration of rural areas

weakened by depopulation. This would bolster food- and energy-security policies, and support growth in manufacturing, which is an important driver of jobs and productivity in rural economies (Marshallian et al., 2023). Initiatives of this sort can also benefit from the relative autonomy of regional and local administrations in some States.

Given the stereotype of rural areas as hostile to migrants, this approach may appear risky, but the lived experience of migrants who are working and contributing to the local community will

probably influence attitudes. Religious groups and other community organizations could also help with this transition.

The likelihood of such strategies succeeding will be increased if the prevailing paradigm of exploitation – and its associated narrative of “illegal workers” – can be reduced through a combination of regularization (see p.14–15) and better labour market regulation. Likewise, matching migrants to appropriate skill deficits would be made easier with more detailed data on both sides of the exchange (p.18–19).

B – Voices and votes: migration and inclusion

Migrants bring new energy into their destination country, not least its civic and political scenes, but this typically goes unnoticed. Some of them may even have moved to escape restrictions on their civic and political activities. However, they frequently encounter new restrictions, whether explicit (such as restrictions attached to visas or residency permits) or implicit (fears of attracting negative attention). The civic contributions of migrants would be much enhanced by greater inclusion, boosting their ability and willingness to enrich the civic and political landscapes of their destination countries. Measures such as changing immigration status allow for a more inclusive

approach to boost social cohesion, and to support greater integration and civic engagement.

Greater inclusion as a route to civic engagement

Some migrants can be living in a country for months or years with partial or no status. This can be particularly pronounced during periods of unanticipated movements due to political instability or conflict. Providing people status through administrative processes such as “regularization” furnishes migrants with legal status and protection, a prerequisite of open and safe participation in civic activities.⁸ With

legal status, migrants gain access to various rights and resources such as education, health care and other social services, which are essential for informed and healthy participation in society.

By removing the constant threat of irregularity, removal or legal action, regularization reduces the vulnerability of migrants to exploitation and discrimination. This enables them to voice their concerns, report injustices and advocate for themselves and others. Regularized migrants are more likely to develop stronger ties with their local communities, which foster a sense of belonging and encourage active participation in communal and civic affairs (Levinson, 2005).

⁸ The *IOM Glossary on Migration* (IOM, 2019) describes “regularization” as “any process or programme by which the authorities of a State allow non-nationals in an irregular situation to stay lawfully in the country, by granting them a regular status”. A “regularized” migrant is therefore one who has passed through such a system of regularization.

Greater emphasis on inclusive approaches that enable migrants to be part of communities often leads to better job opportunities and economic stability for migrants, which in turn enables them to contribute through local commerce, taxes and community investment, which in turn facilitates more active civic engagement. Ultimately, inclusion paves the way to the right to vote in local elections, as is the case for those migrants who are not citizens in many parts of the world, particularly across Europe. In New Zealand, for example, non-citizen resident migrants are able to vote in national elections. Such political participation is the epitome of civic engagement, allowing migrants to engage with policies and decisions that affect their lives. This in turn enables migrants to be included in civic-political engagement and to be integrated into governance processes.

Reimagining civic-political inclusion

In addition to the benefits that accrue to migrants themselves, civic-political inclusion also offers policy gains. It reduces crimes associated with trafficking and enriches economic and cultural integration. Furthermore, regularization is not a magic bullet: effective regularization is contingent on, for instance, the improved enforcement of already existing labour rights.

Prevailing systems penalize migrants for their involvement in labour systems if they do not

have the necessary documentation. This has the problem the wrong way around. The damaging social issue is the exploitation of migrant labour by unscrupulous employers, and in more “regularized” political, legal and regulatory environments, such employers should face the legal consequences of their actions. This shift should also reduce prejudice against migrant workers, removing the stigma of irregularity and making their economic contribution more visible.

Beneath the layers of political narrative, there is a deeper case to be made that regularization is a moral obligation, affirming the dignity and rights of migrants as integral members of their destination society. There is a wider context here: that affirming the dignity and rights of all of those who are part of society is necessary to rebuild social cohesion and solidarity, and rebuild political trust.

MERCOSUR as a model of a regional migration agreement

MERCOSUR (Mercado Común del Sur or Southern Common Market) is an economic and political union in South America, established in 1991 between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela became a full member in 2012, but has been suspended since 2016; the Plurinational State of Bolivia is in the process of ratification.

The union’s aim is to promote free movement of goods, currency and people among its member States. Inspired by the European Union model, MERCOSUR’s framework has resulted in economic, social and political advancement among member States (O’Neil, 2019).

The framework takes a progressive approach, pushing for regularization of migration within the bloc. This has reduced irregular migration and related challenges, such as human trafficking and labour exploitation. Regularization has not increased the overall volume of movement, but has resulted in a more orderly, regular and human migration process.⁹

The agreement has faced challenges such as shifts to geopolitical and economic stability, and high-profile corruption has impacted its efficacy. Wildcard factors – such as the COVID-19 pandemic and a global recession – have also obstructed its development in recent years. Nonetheless, in addition to economic and migratory integration, MERCOSUR has led to cross-national sharing of education, culture, science and technology, weaving a rich tapestry across the South American continent.

⁹ Conversation with workshop participant.

C – Winds of change: mobility and climate

It is generally accepted that climate change impacts will increase migration. Beyond this, almost everything is uncertain. It is almost impossible to project the scale of such migration. The extent to which people will be internally displaced or displaced across borders is also difficult to estimate, particularly when the extent of the implementation of mitigation and adaptation measures remain unclear. At the level of international governance there are also unresolved questions about the status of people displaced now or in the future by climate change.

The IPCC (2022) assessed the displacement effects of climate change in this way:

Climate and weather extremes are increasingly driving displacement in all regions (high confidence), with small island States disproportionately affected (high confidence). Flood and drought-related acute food insecurity and malnutrition have increased in Africa (high confidence) and Central and South America (high confidence).

It is clear that when it comes to migration, climate change acts in the same way as it does

on other issues: to increase existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, which in turn amplifies imbalances of power, both within States and between them.

The prognosis is also severe. By 2050 more than a billion people are likely to be at risk from specific coastal climate hazards, while two degrees of warming more than triples the number of people worldwide exposed to risk of agricultural drought and exposes 350 million people to uninhabitable temperatures by 2050 (IOM, 2023).

However, the relationship between climate change and migration is both complex and multi-causal, which is why the potential scale is difficult to project. They are, in effect, part of the same problem. Researchers estimate a threefold increase in the scale of global climate migration if we stay within the Paris Agreement's 1.5 degrees of warming, and a sixfold increase if we overshoot (Smirnov et al., 2022) – but these estimates assume that future institutions, and their responses, will resemble those of today. They further find that cooperative international approaches to the issue are more effective than unilateral national policy approaches.

Reimagining climate mobility

There have been attempts to define a new class of “climate refugees” (e.g. Apap and Harju, 2023) in order to protect people displaced by global warming. However, this is legally problematic and may be counterproductive. People may move in anticipation of coming changes, for example, rather than waiting for disaster to strike. The clear legal frameworks around persecution that exist in the Convention on Refugees do not apply, and therefore extending this framework to those displaced by climate may undermine the existing provisions for refugees.

At the legal level, then, the better way forward is likely to be based on regional agreements such as the Kampala Convention and the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility; the relevant article of the Kampala Convention is within a binding instrument and makes explicit provision for those displaced through climate change (Allinson, 2022).

Some of the areas most likely to be affected are already leading the way when it comes to planning. Bangladesh, referenced earlier, has an internal displacement management strategy that includes a resettlement component and provides vocational training for new arrivals to its cities; this plan is considered to be among the best developed in the world (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, 2021; Kusnetz, 2023). With appropriate levels of funding and infrastructure, Bangladesh is planning for the resettlement of up to 10 million internally displaced people.

The above shows that this is a global question of climate justice between North and South. This suggests that the global North should support countries of the global South in their internal resettlement programmes. The Loss and Damage Fund agreed at COP28 might provide a framework for this, as and when the funding increases, although it is currently more focused on damage than prevention. This may change as the Santiago Network becomes fully operational (UNDRR, 2023).

Doing it for themselves: responding to climate change in the small island States

The Pacific island countries signed a path-making Regional Framework on Climate Mobility at the end of 2023 that is designed to protect communities in the region whose safety and mobility are affected by the effects of climate change (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2023).

The agreement is the first of its kind globally to address issues of migration, displacement and planned relocation in a comprehensive way. It is framed to uphold human rights, preserve culture and identity, and protect communities at risk of displacement.

Already 50,000 people a year are being displaced in the Pacific region by events related to climate and disaster, and the low-lying islands in the region are among the most vulnerable in the world to adverse changes in climate and biodiversity (ibid.). As well as the small island States, the Forum includes regional leaders such as Australia and New Zealand.

In a separate bilateral agreement, Australia and Tuvalu have announced the Falepili Union, under which Australia will fund climate adaptation projects on Tuvalu, disaster relief and security protection, and provide a small number of Tuvaluans annually with residency, work and study rights (Ober and Waters, 2023). In exchange, Australia will gain the right of veto over other Tuvaluan security agreements, a response to Great Power competition in the region.

Some experts suggest that the focus on the security aspects of climate change in the Pacific is unhelpful, and call attention to the importance of both material and non-material security, including aspects of culture and identity. In Pacific cultures, security “is strongly linked to the group, to the land (and associated terrestrial, biological, atmospheric, and marine ecosystems) and to the spiritual world” (Campbell and Farbotko, 2023).

Kiribati, meanwhile, threatened with disappearance by climate change, has a “migration with dignity” programme to train its young people in transferable skills such as nursing, and has bought land in Fiji to relocate people (Vince, 2023). Fiji has identified 600 communities at risk from rising seas and expects to absorb many of these within its borders (Kusnetz, 2023).

D – From models to stories: migration and data

The demand for more data collection, and technology to handle it, is paradigmatic: migration is hardly unique. However, while data, and technologies bundled under the generic label of “artificial intelligence”, can – and surely will – play a role in migration monitoring and management, we should be wary of the temptation to see them as “solutions”. To propose technological “solutions” to migration is implicitly to frame migration as a human “problem”.¹⁰

More practically, supposedly objective systems have been repeatedly shown to reproduce and amplify the biases and inequalities already existing in the societies that developed them. The area of migration provides plentiful evidence. Recent examples include a smartphone app for asylum applications that struggles to register darker-skinned Black applicants (del Bosque, 2023) and a reliance on machine translation for less common languages that results in garbled applications that fail the applicants and further overload the system (Biron, 2023). The intention is good:

improving the speed of asylum applications or worker regularization should benefit everyone, particularly those on the move. However, the implementation of such solutions frequently falls short.

The British think tank Chatham House acknowledges frequent calls in policy for “human control over automated systems”, but observes that merely having a “human in the loop” is a low bar that does not guarantee just results (Forster, 2022). Furthermore, as data systems become increasingly opaque, effective human control becomes ever harder to achieve. Data-technological systems for the migration sector will require multi-stakeholder development, but the volatility of immigration policy is likely to deter competent, ethical and trustworthy private-sector actors from engaging with such projects. On this basis, Chatham House recommends a ban or moratorium on their use, “until solutions such as ‘explainable AI’ are well developed”.

Reimagining migration data

A humanitarian approach to data and migration should start from the same fiduciary ethic that informs medical practice: “first of all, do no harm”. This principle makes a positive reimagining of migration challenging: the use of technology seems both unavoidable and fraught with risk.

Others have written extensively on ethical considerations and about the cautious, piecemeal development required of any humanitarian data project (e.g. Dodgson et al., 2020); we will not rehearse those arguments here. However, the complexity of the technologies involved, and the associated political, social and ethical risks, suggest that reimagining data should involve simplification.

As such, we will make only one proposal: that when people on the move, for whatever reason, encounter systems intended to monitor and manage migration and mobility, those systems should not be technologies that include a “human in the loop”, but should rather be human organizations that keep a “machine in the loop” to support and enable their work.

¹⁰ Indeed, there is an argument to be made that “technological solutionism” (Morozov, 2013) has already amplified dehumanizing patterns of thought and rhetoric across the world, albeit as an unintended side-effect.

This proposal may sound simple, but it is both radical and profound. It implies not just a reckoning with particular technologies in a particular domain, but a broader reckoning with technology in general, and its role in a global society. As such, we may be putting the cart before the horse: it may be that re-examining our reflex recourse to technological “solutions” is a prerequisite to a truly just approach to migration management.

Although there is a widespread view that new and better data could lead to new narratives about migration, the reverse is likely to be true; the narratives might need to come first.

Improving the public data

Workshop participants agreed that reliable data on migrants and migration are sorely lacking. Acquiring more and better data would improve the management and monitoring of migration, and support the production of new narratives against the distorted depictions of migration as a problem or threat – an active reframing, rather than a reactive response to the prevailing populist frame.

A process of data aggregation and disaggregation would be required: first, data from a variety of organizations and States should be “brought together for comparison” and standardized, before being disaggregated again to minimize the risk of misuse. Migration data should be comparable and wide-ranging (i.e. go beyond the mere quantification of flows), “composite, credible and harmonized”; accessible to all pertinent stakeholders; held and managed by a specific organization, formed for that purpose; and gathered, processed and protected with regard to legal and ethical best practice in humanitarian work.

E – Tomorrow people: future generations and migration

Intergenerational fairness (IGF) is self-explanatory: plans for the future should be developed so as to ensure that one generation does not gain at the cost of another. Migration is well-suited to being seen through the lens of IGF, and this lens can provide clarification at different scales.

In this section, we draw on SOIF’s sector-leading expertise in the field of intergenerational fairness to suggest protocols and processes through which international policies and narratives around

migration and mobility might be developed, scrutinized and improved (see SOIF, 2021).

As discussed earlier, migrants tend to be young and to be relatively high-skilled in their countries of origin. When they move for better paid work elsewhere, they leave behind a skills deficit with a distinctive demographic shape, as well as a diminished tax base. These impacts are partly compensated by remittances and other international financial mechanisms, such

as diaspora bonds. However, the structural imbalance remains, and with it a weakening in the situation of older generations in countries of origin.

At the other end of the journey, the destination country finds its skills deficits addressed, its population replacement rate propped up, and its tax base strengthened – but it may not provide a welcoming environment beyond economic opportunity. Given the tendency for migrants

to be young, this may result in a significant proportion of a generation being treated as second-class citizens, tacitly or openly.

Furthermore, while this issue has hardly gone unaddressed, it still bears noting that older generations in destination countries can and do end up feeling that their country is changing in a way that alienates them. The failure to address these concerns with honest yet positive narratives has provided an opportunity for populist rhetoric that scapegoats migrants while still reaping the economic benefits of their presence.

Intergenerational fairness can also clarify migration issues when seen from an international perspective. Climate change, for example, has been described as short-selling the future for profit in the present, and the generational distribution of wealth – or its lack – is a well-explored topic. As such, migration begins to look more like an opportunity than a problem: here is a phenomenon by which wealth and security are already finding ways to redistribute themselves across generations, as well as across geographies.

Furthermore, while it has become difficult for arguments in favour of migration to be heard, thanks to the populist turn, it is relatively easy to argue that future generations should get as fair a deal as present generations. In other words, migration is an opportunity to advance intergenerational fairness; and intergenerational fairness might be the frame through which migration might be successfully reimagined.

Reimagining migration as an intergenerational issue

SOIF's analysis of emerging IGF practice suggests a three-part "recipe for success" for a focus on fairness. The process requires:

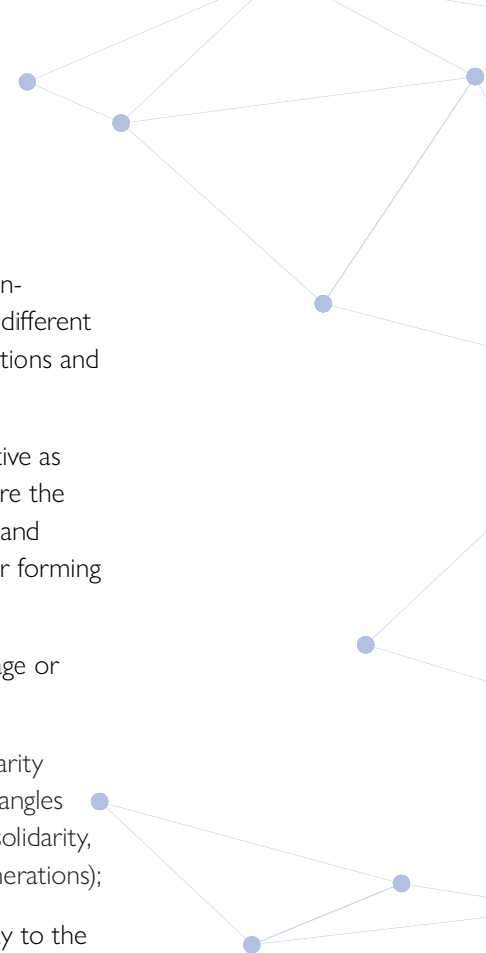
- (a) a leader who will champion and hold the agenda, who may come from almost any part of the policy ecosystem, but who needs the backing of a coalition from across its multiple subsystems;
- (b) a catalysing moment, an event that unlocks the possibility for change across the whole ecosystem, rooted in a strong and local "why now?" narrative;

- (c) external support, catalysing coalition-building, sharing good practice and different ways to innovate, providing connections and networks for peer-led learning.

The IGF agenda relies strongly on narrative as both metaphor and method; this is where the similarities and synergies with migration and mobility are clearest. Three strategies for forming new narratives have been proposed:

- (a) the construction of a shared language or terminology;
- (b) the demonstration of complementarity between different approaches and angles (i.e. the framing should emphasize solidarity, rather than trade-offs between generations);
- (c) a strong awareness of and sensitivity to the power dynamics around the issues.

In the following section, we will draw on the IGF experience and strategies as we bring together the findings and proposals of the preceding parts of this paper, and develop an outline of the road ahead for migration and mobility.



The road ahead: a (geo)politics of migration

Because parties and politicians across the world make political capital out of migration, the public and political discourse around migration is routinely described as “toxic”. In a recent article about the narrative construction of “migration”, Sommer (2022) notes that

pragmatic policy narratives of crisis management clash with aggressive discourses of xenophobia and racism, cosmopolitan counter-narratives and the humanitarian storytelling employed by NGOs.

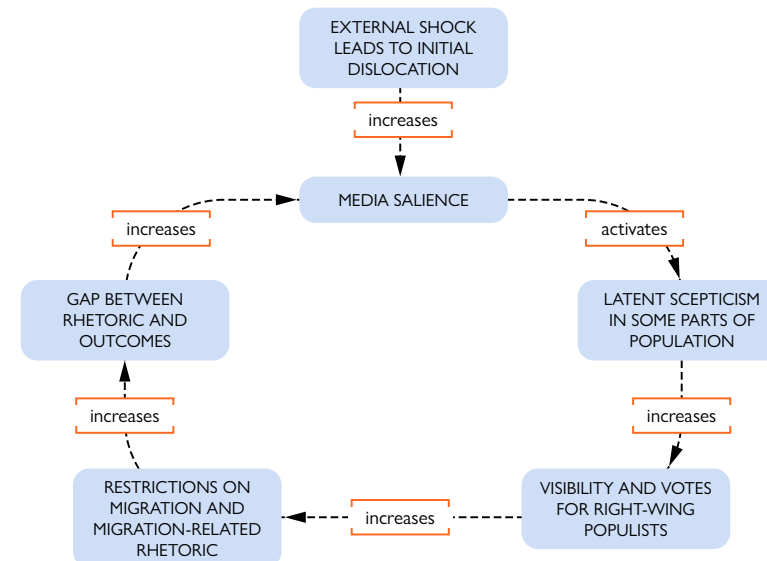
Over the last decade, though, it is these populist and “xenophobic” discourses on migration that have been normalized by the mainstream. These play out in public attitudes. More than with any other policy area, there is a chasm between what the data tell us about migration, and what people believe to be true about it. In a survey of six developed countries,

respondents greatly overestimate the total number of immigrants, think immigrants are culturally and religiously more distant from them, and economically weaker – less educated, more unemployed, and more reliant on and favored by government transfers – than they actually are (Alesina et al., 2022).

This fits with a perspective which says that the rise of global populism is a reaction to two things: the over-reach of globalization in the 1980s and 1990s, and a long secular shift in generational values (Inglehart and Norris, 2019). Alesina et al. (2022) say “there is compelling evidence, from a variety of settings, that globalisation shocks, often working through culture and identity, have played an important role in driving up support for populist, particularly right-wing, movements.” This also positions “reimagining of migration and mobility” as a fundamentally political project.

Processes therefore matter. Different political and media actors are enrolled at different moments in a cycle that uses migration to feed right-wing rhetoric (see Figure 7, below). External shock leads to an internal dislocation of some kind, which becomes a media subject in traditional and social media. This then feeds through into the political system, at the level of both rhetoric and regulation (Angeli, 2018). Since migration is a necessary part of well-functioning labour markets, however, there is always a gap between the rhetoric and the outcomes.

Figure 7: The vicious cycle of migration discourse



Source: Angeli, 2018, adapted by SOIF.

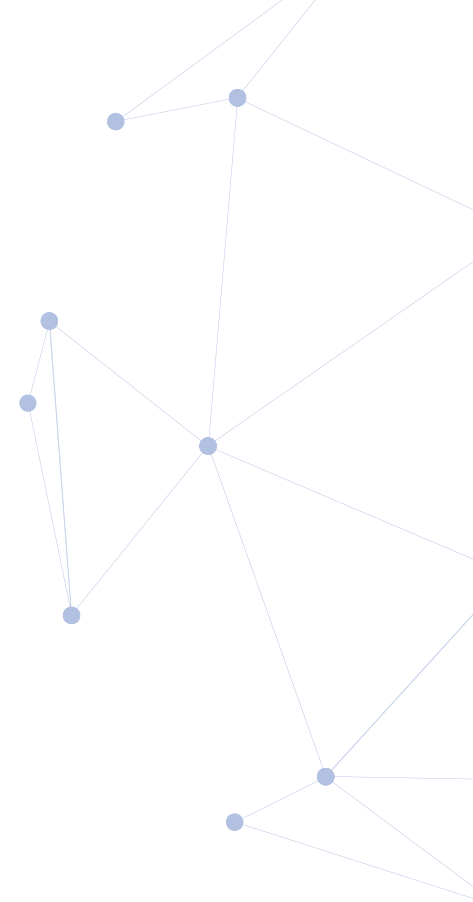
Recent behavioural research has focused on the construction of the underlying schema of “migration as crisis” that sits behind this cycle. Taking the Ukraine war and the Afghanistan evacuation as examples, Cantat et al. (2023) observe that migration is not always a “crisis”. The activation of that particular framing is always a choice.

On this reading, “migration” and its “control” become an expression of deeper anxiety about the control of the State, at both a national level and an individual level. This “crisis” framing is then expressed through rhetoric about “control” and “containment” that is always incomplete. This is the policy cycle that sits behind the political cycle in Figure 7.

These narratives

... rely on the assumption that migration is not (or should not be) a normal phenomenon... This blocks the recognition of migration as a structural feature of today’s world, and the elaboration of long-term, systemic political strategies (ibid.).

Migration, then, which became an issue with the development of the modern nation-State in the twentieth century, has become a signifier of a whole range of problems experienced by the twenty-first century State. This suggests that rethinking migration requires strategies that can operate at two levels. There is the immediate challenge of finding ways to break the political cycle; then there is a deeper challenge, which is to detach the notion of “migration” from the deeper anxieties for which it has become a proxy.



Changing the narrative

Battles over narratives are typically also battles over political frames. Lakoff (2004) characterizes the difference between conservative frames and progressive frames as being expressed in metaphors about the family. Conservative ideas stem from a notion of “the strict family”; progressive ideas from a notion of “the nurturant family”. These conflicting sets of ideas can also be seen in the frames deployed against modernity and for it, by authoritarians and populists and their political opponents respectively, as discussed earlier. Clearly the current discourse about migration comes from “the strict family”.

In Lakoff’s description, the values that sit behind the nurturing family include freedom, opportunity, prosperity, fairness, community-building and trust. The advantages that flow from migration – economic, sociocultural and civic-political, reviewed earlier in Section 4 – resonate strongly with these values. They also underpin a different narrative about the purpose

of the State. They speak beyond migration to tell broader stories to all citizens about the role of a supportive and infrastructural twenty-first century form of government.

As Sommer (2022) says, “The pro-migrant narrative and the anti-migrant narrative are incommensurable.” Reframing involves telling your story on your terms, rather than trying to argue with opponents on their terrain, which serves only to make their argument resonate more strongly. In the words of Alesina et al. (2022), “views on immigration are more sensitive to salience and narratives than to hard facts.”

The challenge of reframing, therefore, is to build a base that is willing to speak for migration in narratives that progressive and centrist voters can support. Since part of the politics around migration is a response to globalization, this cannot only be done top-down by global institutions. However, local activist groups get lost in the noise; the contrast between well-

funded and organized anti-migration parties and the bootstrapped community groups that seek to defend refugees and migration could not be sharper.

Filling this gap requires a serious coalition-building project – bridging the local, the national and the international. One successful precedent would be the peacebuilding project, which brings together concerned scientists and technical experts with religious groups such as the Quakers that work both locally and globally.

This is slow work. As Lakoff reminds us, when your opponents have control of the frame, it takes time to build a different version of it; but there is a political audience for this story and it is likely to grow as time passes. Migration politics is at its core a struggle over values, and the values of the younger generations are much more aligned with the story of opportunity, fairness and trust.



Venezuelan migrant families trek from Peru's northern border to the capital Lima in search of a better life. The caminantes (walkers) travel thousands of kilometres by foot, along highways, in hazardous terrain, and in extreme weather conditions, putting themselves at risk for all kinds of danger and threats, including criminal groups and smugglers. © IOM 2024/Gema CORTES



Conclusion

There is a surprising number of songs about migration and mobility, in many languages. The calypso artist Lord Kitchener's optimistic song *London is the place for me* was written on the *Empire Windrush* as it carried West Indian immigrants across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom. For Steve Earle, Chicago is a "city of immigrants", a hard-working place where he can see the world from his doorstep. At the other end of the spectrum, Hugh Masekela's *Coal Train* is about trans-shipped labourers in Southern Africa. Sierra Leone's Refugee All-Stars sing that "living like a refugee is not easy".¹¹

The songs speak to the centrality of migration and mobility in the human experience, as well as the struggles and difficulties involved. If migration is a normal part of human behaviour, then it is also a freedom that we have lost in many parts of the world. This risks being a perverse outcome for many around the globe, since migration can bestow so many benefits.

We can't control the future, but we can influence it. We do this by asking both "what if?" and "why not?" questions.

Sometimes these questions are pragmatic. They operate at the level of policy. They can frame alternative solutions to policy issues – such as a shrinking labour force and falling tax receipts – as Japan has done in changing immigration policy. Or they can challenge existing presumptions to remove adverse effects, as the evidence from Mercosur suggests: transnational migration has not increased, but the criminality previously associated with migration has fallen.

Or these questions can simply be good policy. Supporting early climate adaptation through the loss and damage fund is much more cost-effective and more humane than financing resettlement in response to disaster.

Sometimes, it is just about advocating that we should do the right thing. Using technology ethically is better than using it unethically. Intergenerational fairness is better than intergenerational unfairness.

In doing all of this, we need to create new narratives about migration and mobility that are at once both pragmatic and aspirational. However, they need to have a set of values at their heart that are good for everyone. It is only by telling these stories that we can create a political space in which migration is not a crisis, but an opportunity – an opportunity for everybody.

At the end, this is a human story, with people at its heart. Because, in the words of the song by Sara Bareilles and John Legend, we all need "a safe place to land".

¹¹ The workshop participants created a playlist, [Migration and Mobility '23](#), which can be heard on Spotify.

Appendix

“Reimagining Migration and Mobility Workshop”, Istanbul, 26–27 October 2023

Facilitators:

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 Ms Lisa Ratcliffe, Senior Writer, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
 Ambassador Yvette Stevens, Executive-in-Residence, Geneva Centre for Security Policy
 Dr Kees van der Geest, Head of Environment and Migration Section, UNU Institute for Climate and Human Security
 Prof Steve Vertovec, Managing Director, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Methodology: The Three Horizons approach¹²

The Three Horizons technique connects the present with desired (or espoused) futures, and helps to identify the divergent futures that may emerge as a result of conflict between the embedded present and these imagined futures. It enables futures analysis to be connected to underlying systems and structures, to the different speeds of change in different parts of the system, and also to tools and processes which facilitate strategic analysis. In doing so, it also focuses on the disruptive nature of any transition between systems.

The first Three Horizons futures model emerged from initial work by Anthony Hodgson, and was then adapted further by the technologist Bill Sharpe, in work for the UK Government Foresight project on Intelligent Infrastructure systems. He used it as a framework to project the 50-year evolution of the transport sector in a paper co-authored with Anthony Hodgson

(Sharpe and Hodgson, 2006). The futures team on the project, led by Andrew Curry, worked with Hodgson to apply a version of Three Horizons to understand the likely dynamics of longer-term change in the project's scenarios, which also took a 50-year view.

A critical development of this model transformed Three Horizons from the McKinsey version in *The Alchemy of Growth* into a valuable futures tool. Rather than seeing the horizons as successive states, as in *The Alchemy of Growth*, it characterized all three as existing in parallel, but with different levels of social salience at any given time.

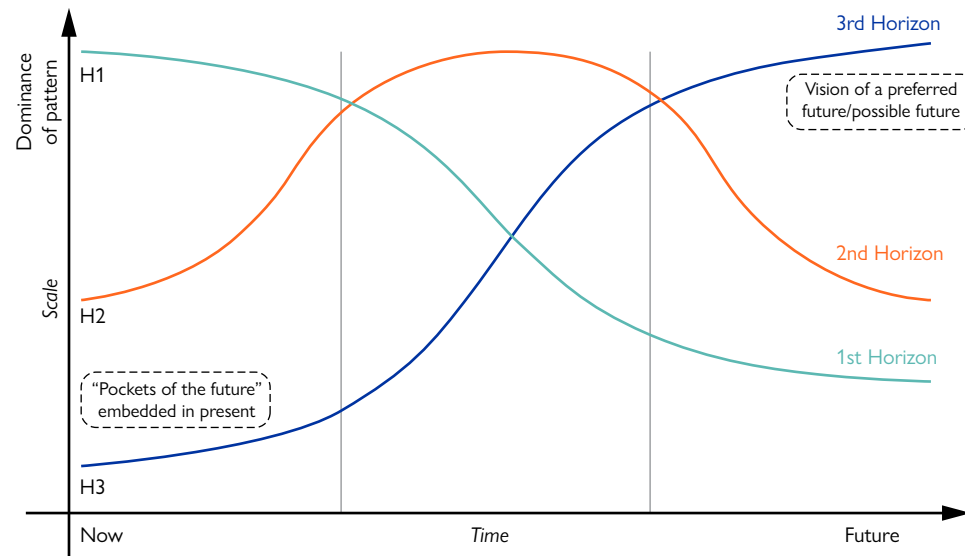
Since then, the model has been used in many contexts and countries. Bill Sharpe's book, *Three Horizons*, published in 2013, which explored the method as a tool for developing preferred futures, has also been influential (Sharpe, 2013).

In summary, the futures-oriented version of the model, shown below, comprises:

- (i) "1st Horizon": the current prevailing system as it continues into the future, which loses "fit" over time as its external environment changes;
- (ii) "3rd Horizon": ideas or arguments about the future of the system which are, at best, marginal in the present. Over time these may have the potential to displace the world of the 1st Horizon, because they represent a more effective response to changes in the external environment. Although the diagram suggests there is only one such "3rd Horizon," in practice, especially in the early stages, multiple 3rd Horizon arguments will be articulated;
- (iii) "2nd Horizon": an intermediate space in which the first and third horizons collide. This is a space of transition which is typically unstable. It is characterized by clashes of values in which competing alternative paths to the future are proposed by actors.

¹² Adapted from Curry and Hodgson, 2020.

Figure: Schematic of the Three Horizons model



The 1st Horizon can also be thought of as the domain of “maintainers”, who keep existing systems running; the 3rd Horizon of “visionaries”, who envision a wholly new system; the 2nd Horizon of “entrepreneurs”, who see opportunity for change in the transition...

These systems transitions are inherently both messy and non-linear. In summary, different groups will respond to the failing system in Horizon 1 by advocating multiple alternatives, and there will be different experiments, informed by different assessments of risk, cost, performance, and social and political values. Some ideas fail, despite having substantial resources expended on them. A new prevailing system does emerge from this complex process, but it is impossible to predict the eventual shape of this system. These are processes of political, social, and public negotiation, occurring within complex adaptive systems.

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