Towards a New Agenda for International Migration Research

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Introduction

International migration is one of the key factors which shape the world in which we live. Migration plays a central role in current global processes of social, economic and political change; it is both moulded by and helps to mould these global transformations. Several fundamental changes in global migration patterns and processes raise new intellectual and practical challenges for humanity in the 21st century.

This paper presents some of the initial ideas of the International Migration Institute (IMI), which was set up in early 2006 as part of the James Martin 21st Century School. It starts with a brief analysis of the current state of global migration and its emerging trends, and highlights some of the gaps in existing research efforts and policy responses. We then present four broad themes of migration research that need to be considered in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the changing face of international migration. We take these themes as the foundation for a new research agenda, which we will be taking forward within the International Migration Institute, starting with a programme of research focused on migration patterns and processes within, to and from Africa.

The International Migration Institute at the University of Oxford has been established through the initiative of the existing migration focused research centres in Oxford, the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) and the ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS). The RSC focuses on research into forced migration around the world, while COMPAS has a geographical focus on migration dynamics affecting the UK and the EU and the interlinked regions of origin of migrants. The IMI will work in close collaboration with these centres in order to develop a long-term and comprehensive perspective on global migration. Its research will complement that of a number of other institutes at Oxford (under the auspices of the James Martin 21st Century School), which bring interdisciplinary research to bear on complex problems of our times.

The aim of the International Migration Institute is not simply to undertake a project or programme of research, although that will be part of its work. Rather, it is aiming both to contribute to the development of new theoretical and methodological approaches to research and to help strengthen the global capacity for ongoing research in order to keep up with the continually changing process and patterns of human mobility across the world. In the rest of this paper, we lay out the IMI's initial research agenda.

This is a discussion paper, which reflects the current state of an on-going debate on conceptual frameworks, methodologies and research priorities. We welcome comments and suggestions from readers.

The current state of global migration dynamics

Migration has been a major area of research for social scientists for at least a century. It has been a concern of states and policy makers for even longer. While many theories of migration have been elaborated by academics from different fields – in particular economics, geography and sociology – they are fragmented and no dominant paradigm has been established. Moreover, migration studies developed in the epoch of nationalism, and most migration research was linked to specific national assumptions on migration and minorities. One of the major challenges for migration researchers today is that the process has become multi-layered and dynamic – taking on new forms, involving new populations and destinations, and adapting to the ever changing global context.

Four inter-related arenas of change can be identified and will continue to be critical in the shaping of global migration over the coming decades:

- The global context for migration: the relationship between globalisation and the development of ever more complex patterns and processes of international migration. This refers not only to economic globalisation and the development of global governance, but also the emergence of global cultural and social connectivity.

- The role of individual states and regions in migration systems: the relationship between demographic, economic, social and political changes and patterns of movement. Here it is necessary to look at the changing characteristics of nation-states and the complex ways they are embedded in regional and global relationships.

- The nature of migratory behaviour at the micro-level: the way migration brings about transformations in communities of both sending and receiving areas, the involvement of different socio-economic groups in migration and the transnational character of migrants' identities and livelihoods that challenge classical notions of migrant integration and the nation state.

- The policy environment: the factors that encourage but also hamper effective policy-making and collaboration across boundaries, changing popular views of migration and its perceived impacts, which create new pressures on nation states to manage both inward and outward migration, while sustaining their place in the globalised economy.

Growing complexity

International migration patterns are becoming increasingly complex as they connect people and societies over ever larger distances. While the proportion of the world's population that migrate internationally has not changed dramatically over the last thirty years, migrants' destinations, motivations and modes of travel are now much more diverse. Once established these links are sustained and reproduced through an expanding web of social networks that cross the globe. This process has been both driven and facilitated by the globalisation of labour, commodity, and financial

markets that has offered new incentives and new means for the international migration of people in all directions. The technical and cultural changes central to globalisation also help create both the means and the motivation to migrate.

With this complexity of movements, the simple categorisations that underpin most migration policies are proving inadequate. People's motivations for migration are rarely straightforward and they do not easily fit the bureaucratic and legal categories required by states. Countries are witnessing multiple and inter-related movements of people over large distances from a diverse array of countries for a wide range of inter-related reasons: work, joining family members, study or retirement and the search for protection from violent conflict, political oppression or human rights violations.

Moreover, it is now difficult to distinguish between countries of emigration, immigration and transit, as a growing number of countries are simultaneously witnessing all these types of migration. Some migrants may move to settle permanently in the perceived destination country. Others migrate with every intention of returning to their place of origin, while 'transit migrants' aim to settle temporarily and hold on to the hope of moving on to a better destination.

However, perceived 'final destinations' can change through the migration process. Despite the intention of many migrants to stay only temporarily, economic factors in both sending and receiving countries, educational needs of their children, and a range of social factors often results in long-term or permanent settlement. Transit migration can be a precursor to settlement, and 'transit countries' can therefore become immigration countries.

Migration transitions

The role of many countries and whole regions in the global migration order may fundamentally change over the coming decades, with consequences which are hard to predict. For example, due to demographic and economic transformations, several middle-income sending countries in North Africa and the Middle East (Turkey, Tunisia, Morocco), Central America (Mexico) and Asia (Thailand, Malaysia) might become countries of net immigration. China may follow suit in the foreseeable future.

There is substantial evidence that countries tend to go through such a migration transition in parallel with economic restructuring and concomitant social change and demographic transitions. Changes at local, national, and global levels contribute to peoples' growing capabilities and aspirations to migrate. As a result, it has been observed that socio-economic development is associated with an initial growth in migration, the 'migration hump'. At the local level, the mechanisation of agriculture, increasing inequality (leading to higher incomes for some but destitution and land-flight for others), improvements in transport and communication infrastructure, and better education encourage internal movement from villages to urban areas. Lack of sufficient urban employment often encourages onward international migration. The process is accelerated by national and global factors including the penetration of global capital, the market dominance of multi-national corporations and neo-liberal structural adjustment policies imposed by multilateral financial agencies (IMF, World Bank and regional banks). Only in the longer term, after sustained growth and a reduction in the gap between domestic and international opportunities, does the

outward migration of people slow down and countries of emigration are transformed into countries of net immigration.

This is not a new phenomenon. Between 1750 and 1950, most western European countries went through such a 'migration hump'. Britain is a typical case; at the time of the most rapid industrialisation, there was also mass emigration to the USA, Australia and other overseas destinations. At the same time, Irish workers were recruited to provide low-skilled labour at exploitative wages for factories, canal-digging and railway-building. In recent decades, countries such as Spain, Italy, Greece and Ireland in Europe and Taiwan and South Korea in Asia have completed their migration transition, while Malaysia is well advanced in this process.

However, even when countries cross the thresholds of economic and political 'progress' envisaged by the migration transition theory, we should not assume that such historical models will automatically apply to future migration patterns. Many of the countries that appear to be on brink of a migration transition are already receiving significant numbers of so-called 'transit migrants'. Their role as transit migration countries facilitates emigration from relatively peripheral and generally less developed countries in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and central and Southeast Asia to the migration poles located in North America, Europe, the Gulf and East Asia. The growth in transit migration may herald a possible future transition towards destination countries. However, if these transit migrants are successful in leaving, it may prolong the role of these countries as zones of emigration.

Over the coming decades, the global decline in fertility and the already pronounced population ageing in industrialised states will change the distribution of the global labour force. This might herald the end of the abundant supply of immigrants in some regions and stimulate new international competition for labour. This may fundamentally change the way that states, corporations and societies view migration and their interests in it. In such a future, new theories of migration will be required, as many of the key assumptions on patterns of labour demand and supply underpinning our current models may no longer hold.

In any case these general models are already questioned by a richer understanding of the complex patterns of migration that underlie the net flows. Within the global 'South', for instance, the number of 'regional' migration poles is growing (e.g., South Africa, Nigeria, Libya, Argentina, Mexico, Thailand). These attract a large number of South-South migrants in their own right. South-South migration between labour-surplus countries and faster-growing economies in less developed continents has grown rapidly, although precise data is often lacking.

Diverse communities and transnational lives

Past assumptions that primary migration streams consisted overwhelmingly of young men, who were moving in the hope of employment, can no longer be sustained. The feminisation of migration has been widely observed and there is also growing recognition of mobility associated with various stages of people's lifecycle, such as migration at retirement or family relocation for improved access to health or education facilities. It is not clear how far this represents new trends in migration or simply the belated acknowledgement of long-standing movements; the migration of

women or older people may have been rendered invisible by their exclusion from both formal migration channels and academic research.

The social diversity of migration has also increased, as people of all skill levels are drawn by new employment opportunities. Even more significant is the increased cultural diversity, as people from across the globe become concentrated in booming global cities, where anything from 10-40 per cent of the population may consist of migrants with differing languages, religions and backgrounds. This increased diversity is the result of a revolution in the way migrants go about moving, establishing themselves in new countries and maintaining their links with their country of origin. In particular, dramatic improvements in transportation and communications have enabled migrants to sustain, develop and reproduce their social, political, cultural and economic links across national borders, creating 'transnational' identities, networks and livelihoods.

While many migrants still follow traditional patterns of permanent settlement or temporary labour mobility, increasing numbers adopt transnational behaviour and consciousness. Some people move in a repeated and circular fashion between their country of origin and a single host country. Others migrate from one host country to another, often within the economic networks of multinational corporations or the socio-cultural networks of diasporas or transnational communities. Today, a person may work in one country, live in a second and be a citizen of a third. Businesses take on a transnational character, while migrants send back remittance for both family and community purposes, and maintain close social and cultural links with communities of origin. Marriage partners may be sought in communities of origin, and multi-layered permanent linkages can develop between distant places.

Migration has always been part of the social transformations brought about by economic and political change, and has in turn been a force for further change both in regions of origin and of destination. However, under conditions of globalisation, these processes accelerate and become more intensive. In some origin areas, emigration is a normal practice for young people lacking opportunities at home – a rite of passage. Absence of young adults transforms community dynamics, while economic and social structures can be reconfigured through the remittances of successful migrants. Gender imbalances – for instance where large numbers of women go to work abroad – can change family structures, gender roles and care patterns. Returnees bring 'social remittances' such as technical knowledge, new social attitudes and changed cultural values. Migration is thus a catalyst for accelerated change in areas already opening up to global influences.

In receiving countries, immigrants have taken on a range of economic and social positions in the context of economic restructuring and demographic and social change. Migration – itself a symptom of global change – has been misinterpreted as the root cause of transformation. Migrants are blamed for economic insecurity, loss of national sovereignty and threats to cultural identity. Particularly disadvantaged groups like asylum seekers and labour migrants from poor countries have become the scapegoats for globalisation, and the prime targets for extreme-right racist movements.

Yet host societies – especially democracies based on citizenship and political participation – have to find ways of incorporating immigrants into society. In the past,

the answer was assimilation or 'the melting pot', conceived in the early 20th century USA as a way of building a common nation out of diverse elements through public schooling, naturalisation and equal economic opportunities. The failure of assimilation to eliminate discrimination and ethnic inequality led to new approaches, variously labelled as multiculturalism, minorities policies, inclusion or integration. Immigrant receiving countries introduced public policies to recognise cultural and religious difference, and to combat social exclusion and racism. Nationality laws were changed to allow easier naturalisation and to confer citizenship on children of immigrants. However, all such policies are today under siege, for they have failed to resolve dilemmas of inequality and difference, or to prevent social conflict.

The crisis of immigrant incorporation is exacerbated by globalisation and transnationalism. If new forms of transport and communication allow migrants to live across borders, this questions models of political belonging based on an undivided affiliation to a single nation-state. Traditionalists call for measures to secure national unity and loyalty – for instance through citizenship tests, border walls, and rapid deportation of offenders. Others argue that such processes of change require new approaches to citizenship and human rights, which go beyond national boundaries. It is clear that the transnationalisation of migrants' lives is undermining classical models of migrant integration and the political constructs of the nation-state and citizenship. This calls into question clear-cut dichotomies of 'origin' or 'destination' and categories such as 'permanent', 'temporary', 'transit' and 'return' migration. These are difficult to sustain in a world in which the lives of migrants are increasingly characterised by circulation and simultaneous commitment to two or more societies.

The failure of migration policies

International migration is facilitated by the globalisation of labour, commodity and financial markets. States recognise the importance of managing the process in order to maintain their competitiveness in the global economy. For the most part this involves distinguishing between highly-skilled and low-skilled migrants. The former are seen as desirable and policies are designed to facilitate their movement, while the vast majority of the latter are excluded through legal obstacles that paradoxically try to go against the 'globalising' trends.

However, the continuous demand for unskilled migrant labour and the growth of transnational networks defy restrictive immigration policies, leading not to a reduction in migration, but rather to unintended and undesired outcomes, notably increases in people smuggling, trafficking and undocumented migration, at a significant and rising human cost. Failure to find collaborative ways of regulating migration and protecting migrants leads to exploitation, social divisions and the weakening of the rule of law. While different states across the world have attempted to put measures in place to control the migration of people, these policies are based on a very limited understanding of migrants' motives and the fundamental dynamics that drive world migration. When these policies fail to meet their stated objectives, harsher measures are put in place. This establishes a vicious circle of restrictions on the movement of people across borders, which is likely to result in an ever-widening gap between policy objectives and the reality of peoples' behaviour. While the changing

patterns of migration have become a topic of greater concern to nation states, they seem to be increasingly resistant to control.

The popular large scale view of an inexorable flow of people migrating towards industrialised states not only magnifies the scale of migration numbers but also hides the complexity of peoples' stories and motivations for moving. While it is often presented as a major problem requiring ever more drastic solutions, the mobility of people across national borders is imperative for the social, economic and political transformations that underlie the process of globalisation. Moreover, migration tends to become self-perpetuating, because it creates the social structure to sustain the process. Therefore, the extent to which international migration can be curbed is open to debate, as is the question of whether this would be desirable.

Research and policy gaps

International migration is not going to disappear in the coming decades and there is considerable evidence to suggest that it will rise. The decline of fertility in many highly-developed countries is leading to ageing populations and declining labour forces. Together with economic restructuring this is likely to sustain demand for migrant labour for both unskilled and skilled jobs. Persistent disparities in income, life perspectives and human security, improved infrastructure as well as growing aspirations as a consequence of improved education and media exposure is likely to motivate young people in the developing world to migrate internationally.

Current and future migration transitions are, therefore, likely to play a major role in the transformation of societies across the world in the 21st century. However, despite the efforts of scholars and policy makers, migration theory remains underdeveloped and the process of migration is still poorly understood. A number of gaps in conceptualising migration have hampered research and policy.

- Migration research has its roots in social scientific approaches developed in the epoch of nationalism, when the control of migration and minorities was seen as crucial to nation-building. As a result, migration studies have tended to be based on distinct national assumptions and organizational models. Until the 1980s, many migration researchers focused on the analysis of people's experience as they exited from one specific society and became part of another one. The complexity of mobility under globalisation and the rise of transnational consciousness have changed this task: people now move more frequently and in more complex ways, and multiple identities and affiliations have proliferated. If the dynamics of social relations transcend borders, then so must the theories and methods used to study them.

- There is a common failure to analyse migration as an integral part of development and global transformation processes rather than a problem to be 'managed' or 'solved' by tackling its perceived root causes. There are clearly many problems associated with migration, such as the challenges of integration, exploitation and smuggling. However, this discourse of 'migration as a problem' frames much of the migration research, setting its agenda and the questions that it addresses, to the exclusion of other perspectives.

- A major strength of migration research is that it cuts across many academic disciplines. However, economists, anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, lawyers, and other relevant disciplines have different theoretical and methodological approaches and academic traditions. Communication across disciplinary boundaries is often difficult.

- Scholars tend to focus more on migration decisions and integration issues than the process of migration itself. This bipolar approach which looks at the 'beginning' and 'ending' of people's journeys makes it difficult to understand how people move and how their experience of travelling affects, among other things, their identity, their relationships and the societies through which they pass.

- The bulk of international migration research has focused on the movement, settlement, and integration of migrants in Europe, North America and other industrialised countries. This bias tends to obscures the complex causes and consequences of migration in societies that are experiencing net emigration. For instance, although migration is commonly seen as the product of poverty and oppression, it is not the poorest who tend to migrate most; the countries with the highest rates of out-migration are typically upper-lower and lower-middle income countries rather than the lowest income countries. Migration tends to fundamentally affect sending societies through financial and social remittances as well as the influence of migrant diasporas on social and political change. These migration impacts are in their turn likely to affect aspirations and capabilities of people to migrate.

- Simple categories and dichotomies used to characterise migrants (economic – asylum – family – student; temporary vs. permanent; settlement vs. return) primarily reflect bureaucratic and legal categories but conceal the often complex, mixed and shifting motivations of migrants.

- The traditional 'sending vs. receiving countries', 'South towards North' dichotomy is static and obscures the complex character of migration, with many (transitional) countries simultaneously experiencing emigration, immigration and transit migration. There is an even poorer understanding of transit migration and the role of transit migration countries in the current transformation of global migration systems.

- There is a tendency towards 'snapshot' approaches in analysing migration systems that cannot capture their continuous mutation. Consequently, there is a limited capacity to comprehend the past and current dynamics of migration and to gain a sense of how it will evolve in future decades. For instance, there is little recognition that through population ageing and economic restructuring and growth, prototypical emigration countries like Mexico, Turkey and Morocco might represent a declining potential for emigration and an increasing potential for immigration in the medium to long term. Even China, which is mainly considered today as a country of huge internal migration and potentially large emigration, may become an immigration country in the foreseeable future, due to the decline in fertility and the gender imbalance associated with the 'one child policy'. Nevertheless, because demographic

change is only one component of a complex chain of social, economic and political transformations, it is very hard to forecast how global demographic change may affect global migration patterns.

New directions in international migration research

A new perspective on migration is required if we are to address the intellectual and practical challenges it poses for humanity in the 21st century. We need to adopt more comprehensive approaches, analysing the evolution of *entire* migration systems across space and time – integrating sending, transitional and receiving contexts – that allow us to achieve a deeper understanding of past and present migration dynamics and their interaction with broader global transformation processes. Such approaches must avoid seeing migration systems as closed-off entities, instead examining the overlaps and blurred boundaries that are becoming increasingly significant.

To this end, the International Migration Institute is committed to making a contribution to the development of a long-term and comprehensive perspective on global migration dynamics. In the light of the current and future challenges and the existing gaps in research and policy, it has identified four broad themes for research that will enable it to participate in the strengthening of our knowledge and understanding of international migration.

- *Looking at migration as an integral part of global transformation processes rather than a problem to be solved.* IMI research focuses on the reciprocal interactions between migration processes and global social and economic changes, recognising that migration is both shaped by and helps to shape these wider processes. Economic globalisation means that economies of less-developed countries are built into the global supply chains of multinational corporations, while systems of economic governance are reconfigured through the structural adjustment policies of multilateral financial institutions. These processes lead to radical social transformations at the local and national levels. Individual and family migration strategies can only be fully understood in this context. This requires looking at the root causes of migration particularly from the neglected 'sending side' where they interlinked with development issues; this is a shift away from the traditional focus on migrants' decision-making, integration issues and policies at the receiving side. As a corollary, we should not assume that it is only migration which must be explained; we must also ask why some people stay while others move. IMI researchers are interested in exploring how migration affects societies *as a whole,* including the social, cultural and political impacts of peoples' movement, rather than focusing narrowly on the direct impact of remittances on migrants' individual livelihoods and states' economies.

- *Relating current migration patterns with historical trends by analysing continuities and discontinuities.* While migration is often portrayed as an anomaly of the modern age, there is substantial evidence that many migration paths have become established over many generations or even centuries. It is particularly important to recognise the *continuity* between current migration paths and those of the past, because this is helps to identify areas of *discontinuity* and their structural causes. For example, the end of the Cold War created a fundamental shift in migration patterns, opening up new possibilities, but at the

same time, it also enabled old migration routes to be re-established. A rising number of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa use and re-establish ancient Saharan caravan trading and migration routes on their journey to North Africa. By mapping past and present migration patterns at local, international and intercontinental levels, the IMI aims to highlight the structural changes in international migration systems, including refugee flows, and the changing role of different countries in these systems.

- *Linking micro-level understanding of migration to macro-level trends.* Research at IMI aims to get below the surface of the broad picture of gross migration flows between countries and continents, in order to understand the multiple, often hierarchical layers of migration which make up the overall patterns of movement. For instance, net emigration from a country might coincide with substantial immigration. Likewise, net emigration from a (sub) continent is likely to conceal the existence of several migration sub-systems centred on migration poles, such as Libya, Nigeria and South Africa within Africa. Macro-level explanations of migration do not necessarily apply on the micro-level. For instance, people generally do not move 'because of' abstract concepts such as 'demographic pressure' or a 'degraded environment'. A genuine understanding of migration motives requires looking in detail at the circumstances and decision making around migration at the individual, household and community levels.

- *Looking to the future by developing scenarios for migration trends, taking account of political, economic and demographic change.* The IMI examines the reciprocal links between migration trends and broader demographic, social and economic transformations and the ways in which these interactions are likely to change future migration dynamics. A fundamental underlying trend affecting future migration dynamics in the next three decades will be demographic change. The global decline in fertility may call into question the assumption that there will be an infinite future pool of labour migrants ready to move into industrialised states to meet economic demand. As countries move through the demographic transition their dependency ratios will grow in the coming decades. In the medium to long term, an increased competition for labour may radically transform the global migration picture and policy responses in ways that are currently difficult to imagine. For instance, China's low birth rate may create a significant shortfall of labour for this new industrialised giant and in the longer term similar shortages of labour may arise in other typical emigration regions such as North Africa and Latin America, where birth rates have been falling rapidly.

Research agenda

These themes are shaping the research agenda of the IMI, designed to develop a broader and richer understanding of the interaction between social and economic transformations and shifting global migration patterns and policy processes. This is to be achieved by consolidating and integrating existing migration research and by undertaking new interdisciplinary research initiatives to generate new knowledge and methodologies.

The IMI is developing a research agenda that addresses questions around three inter-related areas of enquiry: lives in transit, migration transitions, and migration and

transformation. We recognise that many of the points raised here are not new and there are already many excellent research initiatives into different aspects of migration in various institutions across the world. What is new is the attempt to integrate these themes into a coherent and dynamic framework that contributes to our overall understanding of migration today and in the changing context of the 21st century.

Some specific questions that might be addressed within these areas are suggested below:

- *Lives in transit* – exploring the experience of migration at the level of individuals, households and communities:
    - Migrants as social actors: how different people (e.g. migrants, families, smugglers, officials) exercise agency in the migration process, how their room to manoeuvre changes, and what constrains it.
    - The changing relationship between actors in migration processes: the effects of changing places and distance on the shifting balance of power as people move between different social, political and economic settings.
    - Migration practices; routes followed, timescales, shifting intentions (permanent relocation, step migration, return migration).
    - Migration experiences; journeys, settlement, integration, temporary residence, transnationalism.

- *Migration transitions* – analysing changing patterns of migration across and to and from continents:
    - Historical patterns of movement: pre-colonial, colonial and modern migration systems; analysing continuities and discontinuities.
    - Critical analysis of countries moving through migration transition: from being zones of rising emigration, a simultaneous coexistence of significant emigration and increasing immigration, to eventually become net immigration countries.
    - The multi-layered character of migration systems: identifying trans-continental migration systems and the sub-systems they contain, as well as how these systems are linked to intra-continental migration systems.
    - Interaction between forced and voluntary migration patterns: refugee flows establishing migration paths for economic migrants, economic migrants creating safer pathways for refugees, mixed motivations and the migration-asylum nexus.
    - Relationships between demographic trends and migration.
    - Reciprocal relationships between social, economic and demographic change and migration flows.
    - Changes in the policy environment for migration: development of new policy priorities and governance regimes, for instance in response to growing immigration and transit migration for North African countries and South Africa.

- *Migration and transformation* – analysing the interaction between migration and social, economic and political transformation at the national, regional and global levels:

- Root causes of migration: how can the occurrence of certain types of migration be explained from broader social and economic transformations.
- The effects of migration on social and economic development in societies and communities of origin: the general and specific factors that explain why migration has positive effects in some migrant-sending societies and less positive or negative effects in others.
- Impact of international migration on social structures: how international migration is affecting social and cultural institutions, for example pressures on families caused by separation and the need for new forms of intergenerational care.
- Impact of differential migration policies on opportunity structures: how notions of skilled and unskilled labour used in international migration policies affect the value placed on skills in domestic society.
- Transnational linkages, aspirations and changing conceptions of well-being: how migrant networks and communication affect perceptions of comparative well-being and aspirations, and change migration options.

Through research around these three areas of enquiry and exploration of the inter-linkages between them, the IMI aims to generate empirical data and contribute to new theoretical insights on the changing patterns and processes of international migration.

The IMI also aims to build global expertise and research capacity in the analysis of international migration by developing research partnerships across the world. The IMI is committed to bringing together researchers and synthesising empirical research findings that have often remained isolated or scattered up to now. This allows integrating and capitalising on existing empirical work instead of reinventing the wheel. Moreover, the IMI aims to make data and research results publicly accessible through its own website. Finally, the IMI is committed to maintaining a continuous dialogue with policy makers and practitioners.

African migrations programme

In order to ensure that the research can be grounded within a particular empirical context, the initial focus of IMI's work is on migration processes relating to Africa as a whole. This will include both migration within the continent and external migration to and from the continent. While migration out of Africa has become the subject of growing interest, especially in Europe, there has been much less research into international migration within the continent, a small fraction of which may result in journeys to Europe, the US and beyond.

While there are many gaps in migration research in Africa, there has been a considerable volume of work, directly or indirectly addressing some of the issues outlined above. However, much work has remained scattered and unpublished. The IMI African migrations programme aims to contribute to understanding migration dynamics in the continent by drawing together research from different regions of the continent.

This integration will be facilitated by bridging the geographical divisions between sub-Saharan and North Africa as well as the linguistic and cultural divide between Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone and Arabic academic traditions.

Comprehensive migration research in the continent has been hampered by such – essentially colonial – divisions, which are however becoming more obsolete than ever in the light of growing intra-African migration and the evolution of large transit migration zones such as the Sahara and the Sahel.

Perhaps more fundamentally, African migration research has suffered from a chronic lack of resources to gather and analyse data. The IMI will not only help to address some of theses research gaps, but it will also work closely with African researchers to develop their capacity to continue research into migration processes on the continent. Through establishing an online directory of researchers and institutes studying African migration, and organising workshops and new research initiatives, the IMI aims to contribute to the cross-fertilisation of research in the continent and to reinforce connections among research traditions as well as among researchers in North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world.

The IMI staff are preparing a detailed review of the literature on African migrations (including and integrating Francophone and Anglophone sources) which addresses the core themes outlined above. They are actively developing links with researchers, universities, civil society, policy makers and other actors across Africa. In order to increase African research capacity, the IMI aims to establish research projects in strategic sites across Africa in collaboration with African partners.

Besides working in close collaboration with RSC and COMPAS in Oxford, the IMI is building wider partnerships with researchers, policy makers, business leaders and civil society organisations in both less-developed and industrialised countries. In particular, it aims to support African institutions and a new generation of researchers in developing their capacity for research and analysis in migration issues.

Conclusion

This research agenda is broad and it is certain that one institution cannot address it in full, nor is it desirable that it should try. International migration by its very nature cuts across geographical and academic boundaries. Therefore this research requires the insights and perspectives of people from different places, backgrounds and experiences.

In order to achieve this, the work of the International Migration Institute must be collaborative and involve partners from across the world. There is a huge amount of existing knowledge and more is being generated all the time. A major part of IMI's work will be to build on this base and to draw it together in new and innovative forms. It will also contribute to the growth of this knowledge by establishing programmes of new research.

In addition to the outputs of its research, the measure of the IMI's success will be the extent to which it facilitates the growth of global capacity for research and analysis in migration, especially in the global south; and contributes to a shift in the terms of debate about migration.

While we lay out the IMI's initial research agenda in this brief paper, it is as a point of departure rather than as a finished product. We hope it will act as a stimulus to debate and also encourage others to work with us to develop these ideas further.