

Global Migration Futures Project

Third Stakeholders Workshop, The Azores, 11 September 2011

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On 11 September 2011, the Global Migration Futures (GMF) project (International Migration Institute, University of Oxford) convened its third stakeholders workshop in Ponta Delgada, the Azores. The workshop brought together 11 experts from academia, international organizations, and the media. It was hosted by the 16th International Metropolis Conference on 'Migration Futures: Perspectives on Global Changes', as a pre-conference day. The primary objectives of the workshop were to:

- challenge participants' existing assumptions about migration and prompt creative thinking about future migration drivers, patterns, and trends;
- improve GMF's understanding of future global megatrends and uncertainties and their implications for future international migration, particularly their potential roles as key structural migration determinants;
- collaborate with experts to identify new research initiatives for the field of migration futures.

The workshop

The project's first two stakeholders workshops (June 2010 and May 2011) focused on building scenarios based largely on future uncertainties. This third workshop examined future contextual and macro-level patterns and trends that stakeholders in the first two workshops perceived to be relatively certain in terms of their future evolution, with strong but uncertain impacts on international migration. These patterns and trends were:

- environmental change
- demographic shifts
- technological change
- xenophobia

The GMF team invited a select group of people to this workshop, each of whom had expertise in various aspects of these issues, including climate and environmental change; population; international labour markets, production systems, information and communication technologies, and remittances; and migration policy-making



and public opinion. The stakeholders presented syntheses of the relatively certain versus relatively uncertain future trends in their respective fields, and led discussions with participants on the direct and indirect implications of these trends for future international migration.

The next section highlights the insights for migration futures relating to two of the trends: demographic shifts and technological change.

Insights for migration futures

Demographic shifts

Experts discussed future demographic shifts largely in the context of population growth rates, fertility, and longevity. Some key trends that population experts identified are:

- Population growth in Europe will decline as other regions, particularly in the developing world, continue to experience steady, though declining growth.
- Europe will experience a decline in its youth and a rise in its elderly populations. Europe experienced its 'youth bulge' in the latter half of the twentieth century. Today, North Africa is currently experiencing this youth bulge, and in 2030, sub-Saharan Africa will go through it.
- Fertility will decline and longevity will increase worldwide, particularly in the developed world. Already, women are having fewer children, and both family-building and marriage is taking place later in life. As a part of this trend, extended family structures will decline and nuclear family structures will become increasingly dominant.

Participants agreed that the links between demographic shifts and future migration are ambiguous and probabilistic rather than deterministic, and difficult to identify independently of other migration determinants.

The segment of the population with the highest potential to migrate has remained constant: individuals aged between 20 and 35. In the past, many young individuals migrated with families. Now migrants are increasingly likely to be single, as family formation is taking place later in life, raising the likelihood that they will marry and have children in destination countries.

Additionally, population ageing in Europe may increase demand in certain segments of the labour market and may prompt the re-evaluation and re-skilling of certain jobs. For instance, care-worker jobs may be valued more highly than they were previously, and may require an expansion of previous skill sets to include greater medical or therapeutic training. Population ageing may also increase the demand for more temporary forms of migration, to fill particular labour shortages, for instance in the service sector.

Experts agreed that future research should explore the extent to which migration may serve to offset the impacts of demographic shifts, in comparison to other ways of dealing with labour shortages such as off-shoring or enlarging areas of free movement and trade agreements; and, in particular, the extent to which temporary or more permanent migrants may contribute to the needs of ageing societies.

Technological change

The team broadly defined technology in the context of migration to include information and communication technologies, production system technologies, border control and surveillance technologies, as well as transport technologies. Some key trends that experts identified related to future technological change are:

- Forms of business organization are likely to become increasingly decentralized, with non-core functions being outsourced. Outsourcing itself is likely to evolve and become constrained

as international standards, such as those aimed at reducing environmental costs, dictate appropriate business partners.

- There will be an increasing incidence of micro-multinational businesses models, which are small businesses that find greater efficiency in obtaining resources, operating, and targeting appropriate audiences on a global rather than local or national level.
- There will be an increase in outsourcing to independent individuals and crowds, i.e. 'crowd sourcing'.
- There will be a continued shift away from permanent jobs towards more flexible, non-standardized work.
- Jobs will continue to be polarized towards the higher- and lower-skilled, potentially eroding the middle class.

Participants discussed the fact that technology could significantly impact migration by facilitating it in some cases and by reducing it in others. In particular, in interacting with the global labour market, technology can both create and destroy jobs and be skill-biased or skill-neutral.

Experts also noted that technology was likely to shape migration patterns, by making flows more short-term and circular; hence, a shift towards mobility and away from traditional conceptions of permanent migration. Participants agreed that a key area for future migration research lay in the interaction between technology and production structures, labour markets, and demographic shifts.

Insights for the scenario methodology

The workshop not only provided the GMF team with insight into key, relatively certain future trends for international migration, but also contributed to the iterative process of migration scenario building, combining scenario methodologies with more conventional methodologies of the social sciences. This workshop served as a crucial step to reflect upon, analyse, and mediate the experience-driven data of stakeholders in the first two workshops. It uncovered more empirically-driven data that contextualized many of the project's influential uncertainties for international migration.



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