

Exploring the Future of Migration

International
Migration
Institute



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The problem

Looking at the future of migration flows can be quite challenging. Previous attempts to predict the impact of events such as the EU accession of the A8 countries on migration to the UK, or the changes in migration at end of the guest-worker programme in Germany during the 1970s, have been very disappointing.

There are several reasons for the difficulties in forecasting migration flows. First, the lack of migration data often implies that parameters of projection models must be estimated using historical migration data from other countries. This method is problematic as it assumes that the same structure exists across countries. Second, even when data are available, we still face significant model uncertainties that pertain to a deficient theoretical understanding of the complex, multi-level drivers of the migration process.

As a result of these limitations, future migration trends are explored too often using simple projections of current trends without taking into consideration future cultural, economic and environmental change at global level. Such structural

changes are likely to lead to fundamental shifts in the volume and complexity of world migration, yet cannot be easily accounted for using traditional forecasting methods.

An alternative approach

The International Migration Institute (IMI), part of the Oxford Martin School and the Oxford Department of International Development, has adopted an alternative methodology to explore the future of migration. This approach is the key component of the Global Migration Futures (GMF) project, implemented with the support of The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration (THP). It builds upon some of the tools typically used in the business sector for scenario analysis. The project aims to develop comprehensive scenarios - stories about possible futures for migration.

IMI believes that scenarios are essential as a method to understand how future global change might structurally reconfigure migration. This involves an improved ability to re-think our assumptions about migration, to identify key uncertainties, and to encourage thinking 'outside the box'. This is

made possible thanks to the collaboration with the Institute for Science, Innovation and Society at the University of Oxford.

Events and stakeholder engagement

One of the components of scenario methodology is the active involvement of stakeholders in migration such as entrepreneurs, policy-makers, community leaders, labour organisations, scholars, and migrants and their associations. IMI has engaged with these stakeholders by making them active contributors to the production of knowledge through interviews and participation in key events.

To gain feedback on the methodology, the GMF team has been presenting its scenarios approach to policy-making and academic audiences at international events:

- December 2009: the project was presented at a meeting of the UK's European Migration Network sponsored by the UK Border Agency and designed to increase the impact of research on policy-making. The event was attended by personnel of the UK Border Office and members of the European Migration Network from other European countries.
- February 2010: the project was presented at an inter-agency seminar in Geneva organised by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In addition to IOM staff, members of organisations such as the International Labour Organization, the World Health Organization and several other United Nations divisions attended the seminar.
- February 2010: the project was presented at a conference sponsored by the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management at the University of Maastricht.

These and other events have generated great interest amongst participants and will feed into a major stakeholders' workshop, which will be held in 2010 in The Hague, the Netherlands. The workshop has been organised with THP. Through a participative discussion, the workshop will lead to the creation of initial migration scenarios. Fully developed scenarios on the future of migration will be presented towards the end of 2010.

Impact and contributions

The GMF project envisions that the final scenarios will be helpful for stakeholders primarily by presenting insights into the multi-level forces driving global migration patterns. In addition:

- Policy-makers could gain insights into developing policies that withstand major shifts in global migration patterns.
- Academics could increase their awareness of lines of scientific investigation that have so far remained overlooked.
- Business leaders could enhance their capacity to plan for future labour needs, and gain insight into futures trends and the geography of global low- and high-skilled labour supply.
- Civil society leaders could identify strategies to prepare their communities for any major challenges that future policies in sending and receiving countries may bring.

IMI and THP are committed to exploring the future migration trends. For more information see: www.imi.ox.ac.uk and www.thehagueprocess.org.

