

Exploring the Future of Migration

Using scenarios to challenge assumptions and to think long-term about global migration

International
Migration
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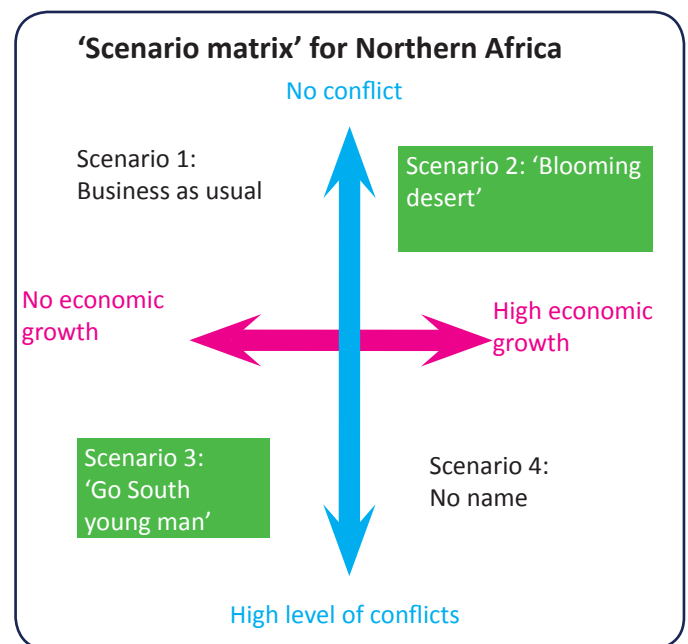
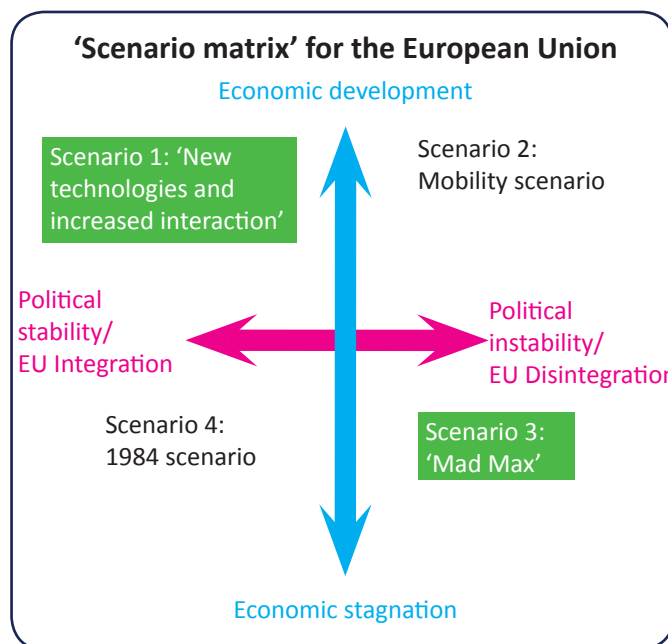
What if Europe ceases to be a major destination for migrants? What if industries and services begin to move, rather than people? What if the effect of environmental change on international migration is more complex than we thought? These are just some of the questions arising out of a recent workshop organised as part of IMI's Global Migration Futures project. The project explores how migration dynamics may evolve in the years up to 2050, based on a thorough understanding of past and current migration trends.

The Global Migration Futures project employs an innovative scenario-based methodology normally found in business contexts. Traditional forecasting techniques assume the continuation of recent trends, but this new methodology stimulates creative and unconventional thinking.

IMI and The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration (THP) held the first major project workshop in The Hague in June 2010. There were 20 participants including experts from the private

sector, policy makers, academics, and NGO staff from across the world. IMI is now identifying and developing the migration scenarios discussed at this workshop. Systematic and substantive interactions with stakeholders combined with rigorous research on the multiple drivers of migration have already yielded a number of interesting ideas about the future course of global migration.

See overleaf for a summary of these ideas...



The above figures summarise the scenarios discussed during the workshop in The Hague in June 2010, and are based on the insights and feedback provided by invited stakeholders. These scenarios are still preliminary and may be subject to change as the research proceeds.

Changing direction of migration

The scenario methodology makes it possible to imagine a future in which Europe will no longer attract migrants. The rise of new migration poles in Asia, Africa and Latin America may lead to increasing global competition for high and low skilled labour and may incentivise migrants to move South or East rather than North. This raises a number of challenging questions. To what extent will future migration continue as we know it today? What are the likely responses of states to increased competition for migrant labour? What will a future look like in which states use borders to prevent people from leaving rather than entering?

Migration of skills and services

The current discussion about migration is normally centred on the movement of people. What if our unit of analysis changes? In the future migration may increasingly involve industries and services rather than people. Industries may move depending on skill availability and favourable market and financial conditions. The concurrent proliferation and accessibility of communication technologies and the rise in global wealth may have an effect on people's willingness and even their need to move. What would a world in which more and more people decide not to move look like? How would decreased mobility influence migration policies?

Climate change leading to mass South-North migration?

While the impact of changing environmental conditions on the depth and direction of internal and international migration remains highly uncertain, it is clear that environment will have some bearing on mobility in the future. Hence, perhaps paradoxically, changing environmental conditions were not deemed a key uncertainty with regard to migration, during the June 2010 workshop. How can current understandings of, and responses to, environmental crises go beyond standard sensational views of massive outflows?

