

Module: EU Health Issues

Title: The Governance of Migration in Times of Multiple Crisis

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World Migration in Numbers

Human migration and mobility **may well be age-old phenomena** touching almost every society around the world.

The current United Nations global estimate is that there were around **281 million international migrants in the world in 2020,**

This equates to **3.6 per cent of the global population.**

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the **interconnections between migration and mobility**, with COVID-19 travel restrictions **resulting in hundreds of millions of people being unable to travel for months** and leaving **many thousands of migrants stranded and in need of assistance.**

During 2020, we have witnessed countries making **unprecedented decisions, restricting international travel, and closing borders** but also **chartering flights to bring in migrant workers employed in essential sectors.**

While important (internal) travel restrictions were first **implemented by China in late February 2020**, the **relevance of borders in relation to controlling the pandemic became internationally visible** when the **United States banned EU citizens from entering the country on 14 March 2020** as Covid-19 cases and victims sharply rose in Italy and a number of other European countries.

A sweeping closure of the EU external borders to all non-EU citizens was announced on 17 March 2020.

The pandemic border closures left **many migrants stranded at destination countries**, at origin or also, for some, **while in transit**.

Some (as happened in Japan for legally staying migrants) **were not allowed entry back to their country of residence** even if they had lived there for the previous ten years.

Some who were ready to emigrate, had a new job and a new life waiting for them at a new country, **were left stranded, waiting for borders to reopen to foreigners**.

And yet others, those more vulnerable, like asylum seekers or migrant low skill workers (e.g., domestic or construction workers) **found themselves locked up in dormitories** (as in Singapore or the UAE) **or refugee camps** (as in Greece).

States have adopted a mixed ‘citizens first’ approach in terms of public health protection and restriction of mobility enforcing territorial border closures.

TRENDS IN MIGRATION

The last two years also saw major **migration and displacement events**; events that have caused great hardship and trauma, as well as loss of life.

Foremost have been the **displacements of millions of people due to conflict** (such as within and from the Syria, Yemen, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan), or **severe economic and political instability** (such as that faced by millions of Venezuelans and Afghans).

There have also been **large-scale displacements triggered by climate** and weather-related disasters in many parts of the world in 2020 and 2021, including in China, the Philippines, Bangladesh, India, the United States of America.

LABOUR MIGRATION

From the above 281 million globally in 2020, with nearly two thirds being labour migrants.

A global drive to attract foreigners with skills, especially those that fall between physical labor and a physics Ph.D., is underway as the pandemic heads into its third year.

Many wealthy nations hope to lure those young workers with fast-track visas and promises of permanent residency.

Covid's disruptions have exposed demographic imbalances: rapidly aging rich nations produce too few new workers, while countries with a surplus of young people often don't have enough work for them all.

New approaches to that mismatch could influence the worldwide debate over immigration, especially as European governments differ on how to handle new waves of asylum seekers.

In Germany, a new Immigration Act offers accelerated work visas to qualified professionals and six months to visit and find a job. Canada plans to give residency to 1.2 million new immigrants by 2023. And Israel recently finalized a deal to bring health care workers from Nepal.

WHAT ABOUT REFUGEE MIGRATION?

Refugee migration is at the center of political debates and has been the subject of an expanding body of academic research.

The bias toward the “present” often obstructs the analysis of longer-term trends of refugee migration as well as the factors explaining structural changes in these trends.

First, earlier studies have shown that the scale of refugee migration has fluctuated considerably since the mid-twentieth century and that the vast majority of refugees in the world stay close to their countries of origin in what is often referred to as the “Global South”. In 2017, for instance, about 80 percent of refugees worldwide resided in countries neighboring their origin country and 85 percent were in developing countries.

Second, prior research indicates that fluctuations in refugee numbers are primarily determined by levels of conflict, oppression, and political stability in origin countries. Conflict also affects people's resources and livelihood opportunities and can have a destructive effect on the physical and economic infrastructure of countries, factors which may also prompt people to leave. In that sense, the socioeconomic context of the origin country, deteriorated by conflict, also plays a role in driving refugee migration.

Prior research has refuted the idea that refugee migration is, to any significant degree, directly driven by socioeconomic factors in destination countries. This is quite different from processes of labor migration, which tend to be primarily driven by destination-country labor demand and recruitment. It is argued that instead of responding to greater wage opportunities and institutional democracy, people go where others have gone before them, usually crossing a nearby border. What does play a more significant role in destination choice, as with other forms of migration, is the location of family and community members already living abroad, with new refugees often

following the beaten track. The most powerful variable determining the destination choice of asylumseekers is the population of previous migrants from the same origin country.

Another important factor in destination choice is access to resources. Generally, the socioeconomic background of forced migrants determines and, as such, those who flee from low-income countries often have little influence on the destination choice. For governments of destination countries, the greater degree of social identification with refugee populations from neighboring countries often makes it more difficult to close the borders and to prevent citizens from helping co-ethnic and co-religious people to cross them. Sometimes, nearby states welcome refugees from neighboring countries (at least initially) for various political, diplomatic, and economic reasons.

For instance, in response to the influx of asylum seekers - mainly from Syria - to Europe in 2015 and 2016, Jordan leveraged its refugee-hosting capacity in order to negotiate financial and other support from wealthy states in the “Global North”, while Turkey was also able to use the presence of millions of Syrian refugees to its economic and diplomatic advantage.

Asylum policies in destination countries often do matter but are generally of secondary importance in determining destination choice. Analyses using quantified policy indexes show that border controls and restrictive asylum policies have a significant deterrent effect while welfare policies do not. It is argued that the 2016 agreement between the European Union and Turkey showed that arrivals of asylum seekers can be curbed drastically only through the application of draconian policies and in close cooperation with “transit” countries. There is also evidence that restrictive immigration policies can push prospective asylum seekers into an undocumented status or re-route migration to other destinations.

Public discourse and scholarly analysis have recently suggested that levels and patterns of refugee migration have undergone quantitative and qualitative changes. Since 2010, refugee numbers seem to have surged and refugees are increasingly applying for asylum in Western countries.

WHY?

First of all, the recent increase in refugee arrivals in Europe and North America may reflect the simple fact that conflicts such as in Syria and Central America have occurred in geographic proximity to Western destinations. Second, a general analysis of long-term trends in population mobility has questioned the idea that international migration has accelerated as a consequence of globalization.

It is found that, while, since WWII, the overall intensity of global migration had remained stable at levels of around 3 percent of the world population, the main changes in global migration were in terms of the geographic direction of migration flows. This is particularly seen in the demise both of Europe as a global source of settlers and migrants and South America as a global migration destination, as well as the emergence of Europe and the Middle East as new global migration destinations. It is therefore, concluded that the global migration map has become more skewed -

with more countries converting from net immigration into net emigration countries - and that this reflects the asymmetric nature of globalization processes.

MIGRATION CORRIDORS

Long-term data on international migration have taught us that migration is not uniform across the world, but is shaped by economic, geographic, demographic and other factors, resulting in distinct migration patterns, such as migration “corridors” being developed over many years.

The largest corridors tend to be from developing countries to larger economies, such as those of the United States, and Germany; large corridors can also reflect protracted conflict and related displacement, such as from the Syriac to Turkey (the second largest corridor in the world).

While many long-term corridors are likely to continue to feature in the immediate future, COVID-19 has shed light on the intensification of digitalization and the potential for greater automation of work around the world that is likely to affect key labour migration corridors.

ALBANIA

Albania remains predominantly a country of emigration. In 2017, Albania had about 1.5 million citizens outside its territory, or about half of the country’s population.

The majority of migrant communities are present in neighbouring countries, like Italy (448,407) and Greece (356,848), although there is a growing trend of Albanians residing in other European Union Member States as well as in North America and Canada.

Emigration from Albania is primarily driven by economic reasons (caused by unemployment and the search for a better life) although other considerations have been prominent, too. According to INSTAT, five factors are estimated to currently influence emigration toward the EU, including; the work opportunities abroad (84%), family reunification (4.6%), unemployment rates in Albania (4.2%), study opportunities abroad (3.5%) and other factors (3.6%).

Another category of Albanian citizens abroad includes persons whose asylum claims were rejected or who otherwise resided irregularly in EU countries. The majority of involuntary returns from EU countries and neighbouring countries have been made with repatriation operations (from land and air). In 2017, there is a significant increase in the return of unaccompanied minors.

The impact of the migratory movements of the Albanian population on the country’s social and economic development have been significant. For many years, remittances helped overcome the poverty.

Although Albania continues to be heavily dependent on remittances, the inflows gradually declined during the economic crisis in Southern Europe from the peak of EUR 952 million in 2007 to EUR 547 million in 2013. Since then, they have recovered and reached EUR 637 million in 2017 and are expected to rise further with growth returning in host countries, therefore, providing migrant households and local economies with an extraordinary and irreplaceable source of finance.

SECOND GENERATION – A CASE STUDY

Whilst there is considerable academic work on integration, circular, and transnational mobility of Albanians in Greece and Italy there is a gap in research on actual return migration and mobility of second-generation migrants. It should be acknowledged, however, that this is a relatively new phenomenon and field of study given the recent (historical time) apocalyptic exodus of Albanians in the early 1990s.

This analysis points to their return journey narratives, their (re)integration challenges, and post-return experiences as it seeks to map out the mobility patterns (internal and international) before and after the return to Albania. The young people interviewed in this study were born in the destination country or moved there at pre-school age, with little if any memories of their parents' homeland. They have gone through the Greek and Italian school systems, developed social identities rooted in references to the mainstream population and its institutions, mastered the Greek or Italian language, and often form very solid relationships with native peers

While the term 'return' is traditionally used to illustrate the resettlement of the first generation in their homeland, it sounds quite problematic to use it for the second generation since they decide to move to or settle in a country which is probably not seen as 'home' as they were not born and raised there. This blurred image or feeling about 'home' can be best explained by what is seen as the second generation's specific situation, where return is viewed as an episode in their migration mobilities, including their transnational family ties to the country of origin.

When it comes to 'return mobilities', it should be underlined that in contrast to the first generation, the second generation has a different understanding of home and different perception of identity and sense of belonging. Their upbringing and patterns of socialization as both Greek/Italian and EU citizens in connection with transnational links to Albania have created a hybrid construction of identity, belonging, and home.

In their attempt to integrate and be de-stigmatized, the majority of second-generation Albanians were forced to hide their identity, highlight their 'Greekness', and disassociate themselves from people who represented the stereotypical image of Albanians in Greece.

Practices adopted as part of Albanian migrants' efforts to remain 'invisible' in Greece included changing their names and being baptized Orthodox. This supports the argument of adjustment

strategy developed by second-generation Albanians as a response to the assimilationist pressures of Greek society.

With regards to mobility, recent studies have shown that even in a situation of crisis, rather than going back to Albania or staying in Greece, second-generation Albanians have recently embarked on an onward migration journey to other Western countries they consider more advanced.

In fact, the return process is conceptualized as a continuum of experiences unfolded at different stages, including post-return mobilities and remigration. In some studies post-return mobilities are considered key to the wellbeing of returnees by making the country of origin an ‘alternative home’. In this sense, ‘home’ could be either here or there, or simultaneously here and there, providing that migrants are rational ‘players’ whose choices are shaped by economic factors, mobility resources, and emotional necessities. The existence of transnational family ties is important as both cultural (mentality) and social (networks) capital, while transnational living becomes the norm, either as an ongoing lifestyle or for specific periods of time.

Our analysis has shown that the return decision for this second generation is clearly affected by the impact of the economic crisis in Greece and Italy on themselves and their families by altering their life, education, and employment prospects. The second generation’s choices, of course, were also limited by age and life stage. Those younger than 18 had little say in the overall decision and often simply followed their parents, while those who returned as young adults were still significantly constrained by the overall circumstances as they had barely finished their studies or landed their first job. At the same time their life stage offered them the opportunity to consider return to Albania or onward migration as a new option for life.

Focusing on their motivations and their making sense of their ‘return’, we have identified four types of return/onward mobility: for education, for employment, for emotional reasons, and as a resilience strategy counteracting downwards socio-economic mobility.

Whether return is more utilitarian (job, school) or symbolic (making a new beginning, rediscovering the homeland of their parents), our second-generation returnees show a high level of adaptability and resilience mobilizing their cultural and social resources from both origin and destination countries. They navigate available opportunities, turning their migration experience into an asset, but rather than choosing between the two countries, our interviews testify to the existence of a ‘transnational space’ that these young second-generation returnees navigate. This transnational space does not only include Greece or Italy and Albania but also third countries to which they have transnational family ties, in which they may have lived, or to which they may aspire to emigrate.

While they are acutely aware of their identity and the experiences of exclusion they faced growing up, they are also particularly flexible in connecting and blurring the ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘origin’ and ‘destination’. This shows that it may indeed be meaningless to speak about this second generation as returning ‘home’ because the sense of ‘belonging’ to a country may no longer be the overarching aspiration and a state of hybrid identity is perceived as a desirable condition.

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