NEW MIGRATIONS

Catherine Wihtol de Wenden

- Why are more people on the move than ever before and where they are going?

ABSTRACT

With more people on the move than ever before – an estimated 1 billion – it is crucial to understand who these people are, why they are moving and where they are going. In this article, Catherine Wihtol de Wenden does just that by offering a panorama of contemporary migration patterns. The author sets out how migration became a globalised and – paradoxically - a regionalised phenomena, examining, for example, the flux of migrants from Latin America to North America and the migratory system that focusses on Russia. She then addresses several “new migratory situations” including the Chinese arriving in Africa and wealthy retirees from the Global North finding homes in the Global South. Refugees and undocumented migrants are given special focus given the author’s belief that these categories of migrants are likely to increase or become more diversified in the near future. The article concludes by addressing three aspects which will continue to shape “new migrations”: the increase in the world population and international migration; the relationship between urbanisation and migration; and finally, climate change.

KEYWORDS
Migration | Population | Urbanisation | Refugees | Irregular migrants | Climate change
At the beginning of the 21st century, international migration reached unprecedented levels. Unlike the past, however, it is not the Europeans who are migrating around the world. On the contrary, with its population in decline, Europe has become one of the top destinations for migrants. But, in fact, the entire planet is on the move, especially the Global South. New destinations have emerged, such as the Gulf States, the African continent and some Asian countries, whereas former countries of origin have now become host or transit countries, such as those in southern Europe, and more recently, Mexico, Turkey and Northwest Africa (Maghreb).

Over the past thirty years, migration has globalised. Since the mid-1970s, the number of migrants has tripled: there were 77 million in 1975, 120 million in 1999, 150 million in the early 2000s and 244 million today. The tendency is for this process to continue, as the factors contributing to this mobility are unlikely to disappear. These factors include: differences in the levels of human development (which include life expectancy, level of education and level of well-being) along the main fault lines in the world; political and environmental crises that “produce” refugees and displaced persons; reduced transportation costs; the increased number of passports being issued, even in countries from which it used to be difficult leave; lack of hope in poor and poorly governed countries; the role of the media; greater awareness of the fact that it is possible to alter the course of one’s life by migrating abroad; and, finally, climate change.

In terms of migration flows, the European Union continues to be the most sought after destination in the world, ahead of other major poles of migration, such as: the United States of America (U.S.) (in second place), the Gulf countries (third) and Russia (fourth). While the South-North flows are a predominant issue in debates on migration, the flows towards the South of the planet (close to 120 million, including the South-South and North-to-South flows) have now matched the number of those moving to the North (close to 120 million: South-North and North-North). Together, they add up to a total of 244 million international migrants – equivalent to 3.5% of the world population. To this, one must add close to 740 million internal migrants who are migrating within their own countries. Therefore, there are 1 billion migrants in the world; in relation to the global population, this means one in every seven people.

The redistribution of migration in the world can be explained by the new trends in migration: women account for 51% of international migrants. There are close to 40 million environmentally displaced persons. Refugee flows are estimated at 60 million. That is not to mention the unaccompanied minors, retirees moving to milder climates and North-North migration related to the economic crisis.

1 • The globalisation and regionalisation of flows

This gradual mutation took place over a period of 20 years - a period marked by the globalisation of migration flows. The same causes - urbanisation and metropolisation, population pressure, unemployment, information and the transnationalisation of migration
networks - generated the same effects all over the world, namely the increase in the mobility of populations that had previously been sedentary. That said, due to the lack of means to leave, the poorest still remain where they are. Some places were particularly affected by the new flows such as the islands of the Mediterranean Sea and the Caribbean, as well as certain border areas - such as Thrace, between Greece and Turkey - as they differentiate the world of free circulation from the one whose borders are closed to the majority of migrants. New countries are attracting migrants, such as the emerging economies, or the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). At the same time, a tremendous amount of internal migration is also underway. There are as many Chinese migrants within China as there are international migrants at the global level: close to 240 million.

Internal and international migration affects nearly all regions of the world. While the lines between categories of migrants and countries became increasingly blurred as they globalised, the globalisation of migration has – paradoxically – been accompanied by the regionalisation of migratory flows. At the global level, migration is organised geographically into complex systems of migration that revolve around the same region, in which complementarities are built between the zones of departure and arrival. These complementarities are related to geographical proximity; historical, linguistic and cultural ties; transnational networks built by migrants; and when “pull” and “push” factors related to labour come together to form a formal or informal space for circulation, which may or may not be accompanied by an institutional facilitation of travel. There are various informal and formal ways to regroup migrants, for example: “migratory pairs” in which migrants who are essentially from the same country all go to another country, as in the case of Algeria and France; “diaspora migration”, when one group builds links with several host countries, such as Italian, Moroccan and Turkish migrants; or when the migration flow of people from one country is spread globally over numerous countries, as is the case of migrants from India (close to 30 million in the world) and China (close to 50 million). Even so, regionalisation still dominates the logic of the migration flows. This is why in any given region of the world, there are more migrants coming from the same region than from other regions of the world.³

This holds true for the Americas. The bulk of migration flows towards the U.S. (close to 43 million people born abroad) comes from Latin America and the Caribbean. In South America, host countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Venezuela) receive migrants mainly from neighbouring countries, especially from the Andean region and Central America (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras and Peru). In “Brasiguay”, Brazilians go to develop land in Paraguay, while Paraguayan peasants go to work in Brazil. Historically, this was not the case - several decades ago the migratory contingent was essentially made up of Europeans on their way to the U.S., Canada, Argentina and Brazil. The same scenario exists in Europe: with some 30 million foreigners, Europe maintains migratory synergy with the southern coast of the Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Africa up to the Equator. South Africa absorbs the bulk of flows from southern Africa. Previously, the Europeans were in these regions for exploration, colonisation, missionary and trade purposes (the 3 “Ms” in Africa: military, missionaries and merchants).
The Russian world constitutes another migration system; there are approximately 13 million foreigners currently in Russia. The centrifugal and centripetal movements that have intensified since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 are reshaping the former USSR: Russia’s ageing population and demand for labour attracts people from the independent Muslim republics that maintain strong cultural ties with Russia (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan) and from neighbouring China along its eastern border. Sovietism, the Russian language and the elimination of visas between the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Russian Federation have led to the constitution of a privileged network of migration.

Southeast Asia – which, together with India and China, has the largest supply of migrants in the world – is part of another migration system. Rich and/or ageing countries such as Japan and South Korea, but also Taiwan and Singapore, attract migrants from China. The Philippines, where one out of every ten inhabitants lives abroad, constitutes an abundant source of labour for both the region and abroad, namely the Gulf States, Europe and the U.S. Depending on the situation at the time, Malaysia and Thailand can be either host countries or countries of departure in the region. Australia and New Zealand, which had previously been largely populated by Europeans, are now fed by migration from Southeast Asia. Migration from India and Pakistan also “irrigates” the region, but continues, at the same time, to be as globalised as migration from China. Rich and sparsely populated, the Gulf countries attract their share of South-South migration from the southern coast of the Mediterranean (Egypt, the Maghreb and the Horn of Africa), Pakistan and the Philippines.

2 • New migratory situations

The regionalisation of migration flows combines with new transversal intercontinental migration flows. The most recent flow to emerge is that of Chinese migrants moving to Africa. Rich in raw materials (oil, minerals, fish and wood) and in need of infrastructure (telephone, Internet, buildings and public works), the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa are now hosting Chinese businessmen and temporary workers who fill up on marine and underground resources.

North-to-South migration flows, for their part, are also generating new trends in migration. “Britishland”, where the British go to retire in Western France (Normandy, Bretagne and Aquitaine), is one example of this. Relatively well-off retirees are also migrating to Spain (the Germans and the British), southern Portugal (the British), Greece, Morocco, Tunisia and Senegal (the French). The same phenomenon can be found in the Caribbean, this time with retirees from the U.S. and Canada. Bulgaria has been seeking to play this role since it joined the European Union in 2004. These migration trends are an extension of international tourism, where comparative advantages such as the cost of living, the quality of services and the climate work in favour of sunny countries. Another type of intercontinental migration flows - of unaccompanied minors or youth in search of work or asylum - complete this increasingly fragmented portrait: Afghans seeking to enter the United Kingdom, prostitutes from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, who take great risk to do so.
Two large categories of migrants deserve special mention, which are likely to increase or become more diversified: refugees and undocumented migrants. The term “refugee” was defined by the Geneva Convention in 1951, which was drafted in the context of the Cold War and with the tendency to protect dissidents from the Soviet Union and the entire Communist bloc in particular. Initially limited to Europe, this category has gradually been extended to the rest of the world since 1967 and the volume of refugees increased significantly throughout the 1980-2016 period due to the major crises shaking the world: civil wars in Latin America, conflicts in the Middle East, ex-Yugoslavia, Algeria, the African Great Lakes region, the Ivory Coast, Kurdish regions, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Darfur, Myanmar, Eritrea and Somalia, and now Syria...

The majority of these conflicts led to people being displaced to neighbouring regions, protected by non-governmental organisations: they are known as “internally displaced persons”. Other conflicts produced asylum seekers who sought recognition for their status as refugees. Host countries, which used to grant this status generously in the past, have shown themselves to be much more hesitant due to restrictions on migration policies in general and the fact that the profiles of refugees have changed considerably in relation to the Geneva Convention: applicants are collective, not individual, and threatened not by their states, but by civil society (in the case of Islamic terrorism, for example), or flee their countries for more social than political reasons (gender, in the case of women, or sexual orientation, social class, ethnicity and religion). Therefore, at times, the recognition of the right to asylum has evolved based on a dual tendency – humanitarian and security – which has resulted in declining rates of recognition.

Could the environmentally displaced be considered refugees, given that they are also constitute a type of forced migration? Although the phenomenon is not new, it has only recently become a political issue related to global warming. Until now, coverage under the right to asylum has been basically inexistent. A specific status for the environmentally displaced would need to be created within the United Nations (U.N.) framework – not one that simply extends the coverage of the Geneva Convention to them, but rather one that puts them under the protection of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. There are multiple causes of environmental displacement: in addition to desertification linked to climate change, natural disasters (cyclones, tornadoes, earthquakes and volcano eruptions), deforestation, the melting of glaciers, the submersion of flood zones (Maldives and Tuvalu islands, the Halligen Islands in Germany, Bangladesh), invasions of insects and mudslides can all cause displacement. The majority of the focal points of environmental crises are located in the South, in poor countries whose states rarely have the means to address them. According to climate experts (of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), the number of displaced persons could reach between 50 and 150 million by 2050, and even be as high as 200 million by the end of the 21st century.

Another group of displaced persons is that of stateless individuals who have either lost their nationality or never had one due to state succession, the redefining of borders or processes
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to rebuild states that exclude certain minorities. Many of them can be found in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Their status is defined by the 1954 Statelessness Convention, but states seek to reduce the number of stateless persons by offering them access to nationality.

Migrants in an irregular situation are part of a global, though disperse, category. They include those who have entered a country illegally without the required documents (passports and visas), have entered legally, but prolonged their stay beyond the legal limits or have accessed the labour market without due authorisation to work (namely students or family members). Their number - which, by definition, is uncertain - is estimated to be between 11 and 12 million in the U.S. and 5 million in Europe. They are also present in Russia and countries of the South (the Maghreb, Turkey and Mexico), as these countries went quickly from being countries of departure to host countries without having immigration policies in place. This was the case thirty years ago in southern Europe, which conducted mass regularisations of “batches” of immigrants in irregular situations from 1985 to 2000 (Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal).

At times, these people form “neither...nor...” contingents: neither able to regularise their situation given the legal criteria used (stable employment, family ties), nor can they be expelled, as they come from countries at war. They work in the informal market in sectors often neglected by native workers (the 3 “Ds” - difficult, dirty and dangerous): restaurants, construction, public works, factory work, cleaning, domestic services and providing care for the elderly. Though generally deprived of their rights, they can sometimes exercise some of them, such as access to education for their children and emergency medical care.

Their mobilisation in host countries has often led to an awareness of the need to shift migration policies from a strict policy to one with more flexibility, since they are often a valve which can be adjusted to reflect the realities of the labour market. They are also contributing to the emergence of the right to mobility as a human right of the 21st century and to a reflection on the global governance of migration as a whole: a multilateral management structure is needed that brings countries of departure, host countries, migrant associations, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, trade unions, churches and employers together to ensure that migration is beneficial to host countries, countries of departure and to migrants themselves, thus becoming a global public good. If the world were to stop moving, the gaps between the rich and the poor and between youth and seniors would become even greater. The U.N. has been supporting this process by holding annual global forums on migration and development since 2006.

Since the early 21st century, the migration of elites has drawn special attention from host countries and countries of origin. The latter began to take interest in their emigrants, especially the most highly skilled and trained. Conscious of the risks of competition in the recruitment of brains for their leading sectors from all over the world, host countries opened their borders to skilled migration: point-based systems were adopted in Canada, Australia and Germany in 2005; “selective” immigration in France, since 2006, and bilateral agreements have been signed between neighbouring countries or
countries of the South. The countries that attract the highest number of elite and students are the U.S., Canada and Western Europe. Those watching their brains leave are Eastern European countries, Russia after the fall of Communism in 1991 and, in particular, countries of the South (Sub-Saharan Africa, the Maghreb, the Middle East, India and China). Are we seeing a brain drain (brains fleeing the country) or brain gain (a diaspora of knowledge that contributes to development through exile)? It all depends on the situation. The departure of a highly skilled worker from countries like India or China with over a billion inhabitants does not have the same impact as the departure of a doctor from a sparsely populated African country. Studies reveal that contrary to the longstanding belief that migration represents a loss for the country of origin, migration contributes to development due to both remittances and also its potential repercussions on the labour market of certain countries (Indian information technology specialists providing work in India; Chinese investors in China, for example). The more migration there is, the more human development there will be.

Conversely, development often induces migration, as was the case of rural exodus in 19th century Europe – a phenomenon that can be observed today in many countries of the South, especially in Africa. The monetisation of the economy, advances in information and education, the abandonment of fatalism, the hope of fulfilling one’s lifelong dreams, the individualisation of migration routes and the availability of travel shifted internal migration to international migration. Sometimes, a gap emerges between the populations that do better, for whom migration is a source of well-being, and their countries of origin, which do not offer any opportunities for improvement in the short run. Restoring migrants’ confidence in countries of the South appears to be a necessary condition for their return and for productive investments that go beyond the family environment.

Finally, there are the transmigrants, who complete this panorama of new migratory situations. Appearing in the 1990s-2000s at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, they formed the bulk of East-West migration in Europe. Anticipating their entry into the European Union, they began to develop various forms of circular migration, as they adopted mobility as a way of life. Initially they were travelling sales people from the East to the West, then seasonal or domestic workers in Eastern Europe on their way to Southern Europe, fake tourists seeking work or merchants selling wares occasionally in the markets. Eventually they began to constitute a new category at the turn of the 21st century, before their gradual access to the formal European labour market made them less visible. They carry out their lives “here” and “there”, as one out of every two transmigrants live from the force of transnational migration ties. This kind of circular migration exists in other regions close to fault lines in the world, but there, the legal conditions are less favourable, as migrants are required to have visas. Those who have a privileged status (dual nationality, multiple entry visas, merchants and businesspersons, intellectuals) constitute networks for migrating back and forth between the two shores of the Mediterranean, which are buzzing with entrepreneurial and commercial activities. The more open borders are, the more migrants circulate and the less they settle definitively.
in one place, as it broadens their living space. Conversely, the more borders are closed, the more irregular migrants tend to settle in one place, as they fear that if they return to their countries of origin, they will not be able to return to their country of destination. Circular migration is one of the main trends underlying new mobility today.

3 • Perspectives

Borders determine the nature of flows – regular or irregular, skilled or unskilled, internal or external – and emigration and immigration policies. For flows originating in the South, in countries of South-to-North emigration, borders define the conditions for nationals leaving the country (exit visas, now in disuse; travel documents in order) and conditions for entry (repatriation, promotion of return). In countries of immigration, borders establish the conditions for entry (whether a visa is required or not, selection of immigrants through a system of points or quotas), stay (access to the labour market and social and political rights, requirements for obtaining nationality) and departure (deportation and return policies). These rules also apply to South-South migration, though less rigidly, as many countries lack migration policies and seek, at the same time, to protect their nationals abroad (assistance and protection for emigrants, regulation of money transfers and facilitating emigrants’ right to vote in elections in their country). Some regional systems allowing for the free movement of persons guarantee nationals the freedom to circulate in their respective member-states, to work and to settle, and access to social and political rights. Access to these rights may also be extended to immigrants established there on a long-term basis. The regime for migration flows originating in the North is completely different, as migrants from these countries are free to come and go in countries of emigration (free exit) and immigration (free entry). As for flows of migrants between countries of the North, access to fundamental rights is guaranteed, even though migrants must meet certain conditions in order to obtain nationality. In regards to North-to-South flows, while host countries of the South welcome permanency, migrants are rarely given equal access to the same rights as nationals: naturalisation is difficult, if not impossible; there is an absence of political rights for foreigners and access to property is sometimes restricted. One third of the population of the planet, in the North, benefits from the right to migrate to the North and to the South, whereas other two thirds cannot move freely from the South to the North and are also deprived of rights and guarantees when moving from the South to the South. Borders also influence the profile of migrants, as the elite, migrants in an irregular situation and East-West migration are the result of either open or closed borders. Borders also accentuate the lag between migration flows and policies, and hinder the formation of regional migration spaces that respond to their own rationale. In light of global inequalities, migration will continue, but with new configurations.

To conclude this article, three aspects of this issue are worth highlighting: the increase in the world population and international migration; the relationship between urbanisation and migration; and finally, climate change.
Population and international migration

In a world with 9 billion inhabitants by 2040, Asia will be home to more than half of the global population (57%). India, China, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, the U.S., Brazil and Mexico will be the most densely populated countries on the planet. In the North, the European continent will have to address the accelerated ageing of its population, especially in countries in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe. In the Global South, in countries of departure, which will be affected differently by the demographic transition, ties will remain between the transition and international migration.

The demographic transition may bring transformation to the economy of migration. This transformation will consist mainly of a shift from the altruistic and collective approach to migration of migrants of the past (whose goal was to feed their family and improve their living conditions) to an individualist approach (carry out their life plan). New migrants are confronted with new urban, consumerist values linked to the increase in the level of education and a way of life geared towards mobility thanks to their transnational ties.

Therefore, characterised by the greater availability of young adults with fewer children than their elders, migration is the flip side of another possible outcome: revolt (exit or voice, according to the Hirschman model). The tendency of young migrants to give priority to their individual projects and to turn to the diaspora to accumulate human capital and diversify their remittances is accentuated by host countries’ decisions to choose highly skilled migrants over labourers in order to reunite families. The new profiles of international migration are thus linked to demographic transitions.

Urbanisation and migration

Among the factors that will influence the evolution of migration flows, the rapid urbanisation of the planet is high on the list. The number of megalopolises with more than ten million inhabitants, which was 16 in 2009, is expected to increase to 29 by 2025. These megalopolises will be home to 10.3% of the world’s entire urban population. Three quarters of the cities that will exceed the 10 million inhabitant mark by 2025 are located in developing countries. Three of the ten largest cities in 2030 will be in India and five of the 25 biggest cities will be in China. According to U.N. estimates, cities that will have more than 20 million inhabitants by 2030 include: Tokyo, Delhi, Bombay, São Paulo, Dhaka, Mexico City, New York, Calcutta, Shanghai and Karachi. These cities constitute places where not only economic activities are concentrated, but also migrants who are part of the rural exodus and migrants in transit. They are where information is exchanged on travel networks and where prospective migrants find job niches that enable them to survive before their great journey. While the rural exodus affects the poorest, few of them cross borders; many, such as the environmentally displaced and internal refugees, remain limited to internal migration. But urban life is full of exchanges of information, travel opportunities and places where people compare national wages with those earned...
abroad, as well as ways of life. Many internal migrants make their plans after passing through the city, which is sometimes turned into a metropolis.

Cities in Africa will grow the most, followed by cities in Asia, according to U.N. predictions. In 2030, more than 80% of the world’s urban population will live in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Countries with the largest urban populations will continue to have sizeable rural populations: in China and India, which together have 1.5 billion urban dwellers, more than one billion people will still be living in rural areas.

Women currently account for 50% of international migrants. Millions of women leave their country of origin every year. They tend to be more numerous than men in rich countries affected by the ageing of their populations, which require caregivers and nurses. The consequences of female migration are, in addition to the care drain (the exodus of health care professionals), the risk of family breakdown in countries of origin and their dependency on new flows – a kind of chain migration.

Climate change

The interest in migration due to climate change is recent. It is still difficult to determine who are the people migrating for environmental reasons. It is perhaps necessary to distinguish between climate and environmental migrants, as the impacts of climate change on migration are uncertain. In fact, according to specialists, while climate conditions do influence migration, their influence is limited in relation to other socioeconomic or political factors (in the case of refugees), as there is often more than one cause for migration. The migration they generate is more temporary than permanent, as people are displaced within the country and located in the South. As for the dynamics of environmental migration observed throughout the world, the volume of international migrants linked to the environment is still small. Among the affected regions, the Mediterranean basin – the most densely populated arid region in the world – is highly exposed to the impacts of drought, especially in Egypt, Yemen, Algeria and Morocco. Migration as an individual adaptation strategy will be confronted by the political and societal choices adopted by states. The poorest households will be affected the most and, to a lesser extent, those who benefit from remittances and who have the choice of moving somewhere else. In the Southern hemisphere, cyclones can make temporary migration permanent, when income is lost. In Bangladesh, Vietnam, China and Mozambique, the population, which is already more accustomed to environmental shocks, is moving due to the risks of flooding. They are more mobile there than in the Maghreb, where the population continues to be more sedentary. However, the poorest do not want to move or do not have the means to: for them, migration is the last resort, as they are aware of the absence of effective government action and the failure of collective solutions to reduce their vulnerability.

Sometimes, climate change can affect people’s mobility indirectly – for example, when it causes a food crisis and reducing dependency on agriculture can reduce the effects of the crisis, as
can the generalised trend of urbanisation. What needs to be planned, then: local development or the development of mobility? While international organisations are unanimous on the need to prevent forced migration, the fact the Geneva Convention on Refugees does not take climate change into account leads us to other policies on the international scene, such as land-use planning, the regional approach and the issue of climate justice.

NOTES

1 • Editor’s note: When no specific reference is given for quantitative data cited in this article, the data is from a compilation carried out by the author, based on numerous sources, for two of her main works: Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, Atlas des Migrations - Un Équilibre Mondial à Inventer, 4th ed. (Paris: Autrement, 2016); and Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, Les Nouvelles Migrations - Lieux, Hommes, Politiques (Paris: Ellipses, 2013).

2 • Wenden, Les Nouvelles Migrations.


4 • Editor’s note: Created in 1991, this organisation is made up of Slavic States that used to be part of the USSR: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldavia, Kirgizstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, the Ukraine and Uzbekistan.


7 • Albert Hirschman, Exit, Voice or Loyalty - Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).


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Received in March 2016.
Original in French. Translated by Deisy Ventura (from French to Portuguese) and Karen Lang (Portuguese to English).