



Global Migration Futures

A conceptual and methodological framework for research and analysis

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July 2010

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Introduction

The Global Migration Futures is a joint initiative by the James Martin 21st Century School, the International Migration Institute (IMI) at the University of Oxford, and the Dutch Foundation ‘*The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration*’ (THP). The project has benefited from funding from the Boeing Global Corporate Citizenship programme, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNESCO and from the James Martin 21st Century School.

The objective of this (initially 2-year) project, which was launched in 2009, is to assess future regional and global trends and their effects on receiving countries in Europe and transit and sending countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East through the elaboration of scenarios, taking into account future social, cultural, economic, political, demographic and environmental changes. The aim of this paper is to outline the background of the project, its methods and in particular the scenarios approach. While the latter has hitherto been applied primarily in the business sector, it can also be helpful to explore the future of world migration.

Background: migration issues and migration uncertainties

Over recent years, the issue of migration has risen high on policy and research agendas. While policy makers are often concerned with the ‘management’ of migration and its consequences in receiving and sending societies, researchers have increasingly explored the causes of migration alongside its developmental implications (Castles and Miller, 2009, Massey et al., 1998, UNDP, 2009). While our understanding of some of the major demographic and economic factors driving past (Hatton and Williamson, 1998) and more recent migration (Skeldon, 1997, Massey, 1991) has increased, there is still a lack of systematic insights into the multi-level drivers of migration, their mutual interaction as well as feedback mechanisms (de Haas, 2010a). Furthermore, several fundamental changes in global migration patterns are likely to raise new intellectual and practical challenges for humanity in the 21st century, which both policy and research need to be prepared for.

First, while the proportion of the world’s population that migrates internationally has not changed dramatically, current international migration appears to be characterized by **growing complexity** as migration connects people and societies over ever larger distances and over an increasingly diverse array of countries and places of origin and destination. This process has been driven both by the globalisation of labour, commodity, and capital as well as the revolutions in transport and communication technology (Castles and Miller, 2009, de Haas, 2009).

Second, the conventional **categories** (economic – asylum – family – student; temporary vs. permanent; settlement vs. return; low skilled vs. high skilled; forced vs. voluntary) that underpin most migration policies and research have proved to be largely inadequate, and may actually impede our understanding of the nature and drivers of migration processes. Simple categories and dichotomies used to characterise migrants primarily reflect bureaucratic and legal categories but conceal the often complex, mixed and shifting motivations of migrants. Also the traditional ‘sending vs. receiving countries’, ‘South towards North’ dichotomy is

static and obscures the complex character of migration, with many countries simultaneously experiencing emigration, immigration and transit migration (IMI, 2006).

Third, and related to the previous points, the increasingly *transnational character* of migrants' lives and identities not only challenges classical models of migrant integration, citizenship and the nation states (de Haas, 2005), but also calls into question clear-cut dichotomies of 'origin' and 'destination'. These are difficult to sustain in a world in which the lives of migrants are often increasingly characterised by circulation and simultaneous commitment to two or more societies (Cohen, 2008, Van Hear, 1998, Vertovec, 2004).

Fourth, the role of many countries and regions in the global migration order may fundamentally change over the coming decades, with some of the current major emigration countries potentially transforming into major destination countries. There is substantial evidence that as countries become integrated into the global capitalist economy they tend to go through *migration transitions* (Zelinsky, 1971, Skeldon, 1997, de Haas, 2010b). Parallel with broader demographic and economic transitions, several middle-income sending countries in North Africa and the Middle East (e.g. Turkey, Tunisia and Morocco), the Americas (e.g. Mexico, Brazil) and Asia (e.g. China, Thailand, Malaysia) may become major immigration countries, while the capabilities and aspirations increasing effects of human development in the poorest countries (such as in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia) might boost emigration from these countries. This raises two fundamental questions: (1) how will population ageing and evolving economic dynamics affect the global demand for migrant labour and (2) where will future migrants come from?

Fifth, sending countries, in stark contrast with receiving countries, have increasingly linked migration to *human development*. In particular, the recent, spectacular surge in remittances has boosted a new wave of optimism in thinking about the issue of migration and development (de Haas, 2010a). Remittances have already been dubbed a new development mantra (Kapur, 2004) and 'manna from heaven' (Vargas-Silva, 2008). However, the alleged developmental potential of remittances has not materialized in many cases. The development impacts of migration are more positive in some cases and neutral or negative in some other cases. In fact, there is no automatic mechanism through which migration leads to more development (Papademetriou and Martin, 1991). For instance, the migration of educated workers can deprive origin countries from the skilled labour that is essential for achieving sustained economic growth. Yet, there is a lack of systematic understanding of the complex interaction between these factors. Therefore it is necessary to better conceptualise the nature and relative weigh of migration uncertainties to which we now turn.

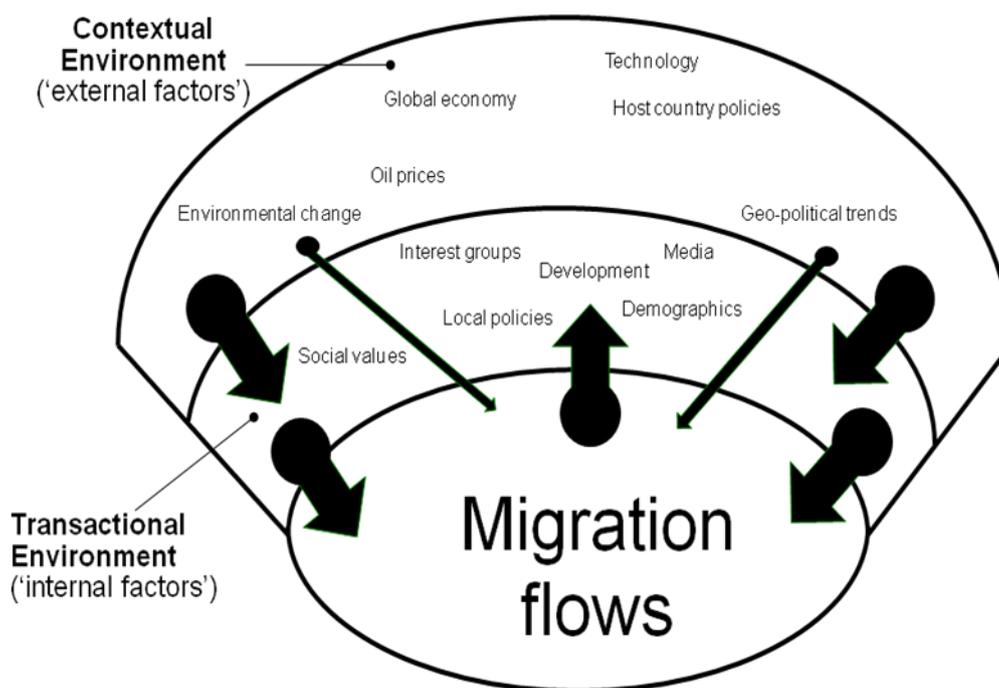


Figure 1 –Levels of Impacts and Feedback in the Migration Process.

Model and contextual uncertainties

The above examples reveal two major uncertainties in our thinking about future world migration. First, *model uncertainties* are related to the still limited theoretical understanding of how social, economic, cultural and political factors affect the volume, direction and nature of migration. Second, *contextual uncertainties* pertain to the constantly changing macro-contextual situation in which migration occurs. In other words, this pertains to the direction the main factors affecting migration are likely to evolve in the future.

With regards to *model uncertainties*, despite the progress made in recent decades, our understanding of the nature, drivers and feedback mechanisms underlying migration processes is still limited. As shown in Figure 1 there are different layers of complexity in migration processes. While some factors can be considered as more or less exogenous, other factors are rather endogenous because they do not only affect migration, but are also affected by migration processes itself. These internal dynamics of migration processes (such as network formation) create feedback mechanisms which can give migration processes their own momentum (de Haas, 2008).

The frequent failure of migration policies to meet their stated objectives is related to limited understanding of the fundamental dynamics that drive world migration (Castles, 2004a). While states tend to welcome highly-skilled migrants, most low-skilled migrants are excluded through legal obstacles that are at odds with policies promoting the ‘globalisation’ of trade and capital. However, the continuous demand for unskilled migrant labour and the migration-facilitating role of migrant networks defy restrictive immigration policies, leading not to a reduction in migration, but rather to unintended and undesired outcomes, notably increases in people smuggling, trafficking and undocumented migration, at a significant and rising human cost (Düvell, 2005). Failure to find collaborative ways of regulating migration and protecting

migrants leads to exploitation, social divisions and the weakening of the rule of law. Restrictive policies also tend to have several other unforeseen effects such as increasing irregular migration, settlement and family reunion (Castles, 2004b, Entzinger, 1985). It is crucial to analyse migration as an integral part of global transformation processes rather than as a problem to be solved. Yet this requires a more nuanced and thorough understanding of the forces driving international migration. For instance, the idea that migration is the result of poverty and fragile institutions is challenged by empirical evidence that social and economic development often coincides with increasing migration and mobility (de Haas, 2010b).

Contextual uncertainties are the second source of errors in policy planning, particularly with regards to the more long term future of global migration. These are related to future structural changes in the external environment in which migration will occur. For instance, the trend towards population aging is predictable in the short to medium-run, yet it remains uncertain in the long-run. Lutz and Goldstein (2004) argue that there remain fundamental uncertainties in the three main components of demographic change, that are, fertility, mortality and migration. With respect to thinking about the future, Lutz and Goldstein argue that:

“in the pursuit of our daily life, be it at the individual level or as a society, we are constantly guided by expectations about the future. Typically, these expectations are based on the assumption that the future is going to be more or less the same as what we currently experience or that there are clearly predictable regularities such as day and night and the change of seasons” (Lutz and Goldstein, 2004).

While we are familiar with a range of regularities in various spheres of social life, we remain largely uncertain about how future social, economic and political change will affect the contextual environment in which future migrations will take place. In order to imagine how such migration futures may look like, it is essential to think beyond current migration models and trends, and to become *creative* in imagining which fundamental changes on the global and international level may alter the macro-structure within which migration takes places. Such social, economic and political transformations may either confirm or invalidate (or both) the models with which we currently analyse migration. In other words, for a successful exploration we need to think “out of the box” and to conceive what we find difficult to imagine within the current context. For instance, it is often implicitly assumed that there is a quasi-unlimited supply of cheap labour in developing countries ready to migrate to the West. The question is whether this assumption will hold in the future in view of global demographic change and economic growth in many developing countries. As we will argue below, the scenarios methodology is particularly well-g geared to stimulate such creative thinking about plausible and less-plausible ways in which the contextual environment of migration may change in the future.

The west European experience with ‘guest-workers’ is a case in point for the difficulty to perceive significant structural change and the discontinuities from past migration trends such transformations tend to cause. In the 1960s, the presumably “temporary” workers from Mediterranean countries were expected to return to their origin countries after a few years of work in Western Europe. The 1973 Oil Crisis sent shockwaves through European economies and formed the onset of a long period of economic recession, economic restructuring and rising unemployment, which also heralded the end of labour recruitment and the instauration of progressively restrictive immigration policies. However, the consequence was not a massive return or declining migration. Rather, as presented in Figure 2, many former ‘guest workers’ decided to stay put in Europe, rather than face much more arduous and uncertain

circumstances in origin countries. In addition, immigration restrictions paradoxically pushed migrants into permanent settlement. These processes set in motion large-scale family migration. As Max Frisch famously said “we wanted workers, we got people” or in Philip Martin’s own terms “there is nothing more permanent than temporary foreign workers” (Martin, 2001).

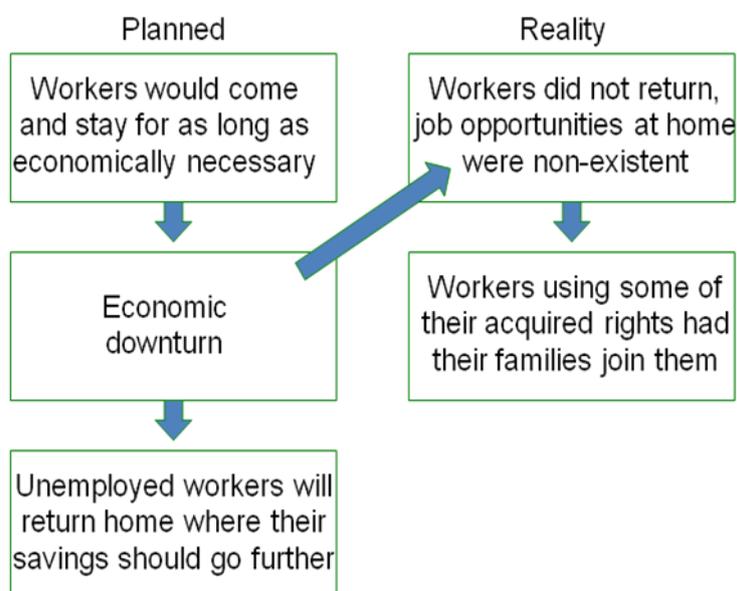


Figure 2 – The Planned and Actual Result of the Guest-Worker Programs.

The guest worker case exemplifies that migration policies are often developed without sufficient consideration of the wider national and global context in which migration occurs, and how future changes and related sources of uncertainties in global demography, economic growth and environmental change may affect migration patterns in the long term.

Conventional approaches exploring the future of migration include the use of statistical analysis to analyze the previous trends, making assumptions about the main relationships with key “independent” variables and forecasting migration flows into the future. However, such approaches have several limitations. First, we must assume that *the structure of our model remains the same across time*. By structure we mean the relationship between migration and its main determinants. Second, the lack of data for many migration corridors often implies that *parameters of projection models must be estimated using historical migration data for other countries*. This obliges one to assume the structure does not change across countries and over time.

Nonetheless, even when there is data available, we still face significant model uncertainties because of poor theoretical understanding of the complex, multi-level drivers of the migration process. As a result of these limitations, too often future migration trends are explored using simple projections of current trends without taking into consideration future cultural, economic and environmental change on the global level. Such factors are likely to lead to fundamental changes in the direction, volume and complexity of international migration, but cannot be easily accounted for using traditional forecasting methods.

Previous attempts to predict the impact of events such as the EU accession of the A8 countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) on migration to the UK, or the changes in migration at end of the guest-worker programme in Germany during the 1970s, have been rather disappointing. For instance, the UK decided to open labour markets to the A10 (the A8 plus Cyprus and Malta) countries on 1 May 2004. The report commissioned by the Home Office to forecast net immigration from the A10 to the UK after the enlargement of the EU argued that it was safe to assume that their estimates “are predictions at the upper bound of potential immigration” (Dustmann et al., 2003). According to their estimates net immigration to the UK from the A10 would have been “relatively small at between 5,000 and 13,000 immigrants per year up to 2010.” Nonetheless, the estimates for September 2009 for net migration from the A8 to the UK differed significantly from the predictions of the report and were close to 700,000 immigrants (Sumption and Somerville, 2010).

This may lead us to ask: Why were there such big differences between the prediction and the outcome? By all means the analysis conducted in the Home Office report was a rigorous estimation. Nonetheless, the authors were confronted with a lack of historical data about migration from the A8 countries to the UK and as such had to estimate the parameters of their model using data for other countries. Moreover, the authors had to make strong assumptions about the decisions of other European countries in regards to opening their markets to the A8 workers. Nonetheless, even with the best statistical models, exploring the future of migration remains a difficult task.

One of the key challenges has to do with the lack of data and, therefore, of solid statistical evidence about many issues related to migration. We do not have good quality data on the stock or flows of migrants in many countries. Moreover, we currently lack the procedures to actually measure the inflows of migrants, especially when it comes to irregular migration. As a result policy makers design and implement policies without having a reliable idea about the current (and future) figures on migration and its determinants.

Common assertions on the future of migration frequently reveal a limited understanding of the complex contextual drivers of migration. Typically, such predictions take the form of deterministically linking a presumed (and contested) future change in one contextual variable to a fixed migration outcome, thereby ignoring the interaction with other drivers of migration. For example, common assertions that population ageing in wealthy society will fuel mass immigration or that climate change and impoverishment will force millions to migrate are based on speculation and assumptions rather than on a sound analysis of the complex and multi-level drivers of migration processes, as well as the fact that it is difficult to ‘predict’ migration outcomes while focusing on just one potential driver while assuming the other drivers to remain constant. This *ceteris paribus* assumption is highly unlikely to hold in practice. This reveals the need to take into consideration all major migration drivers simultaneously as well as to study their interaction, so that scenarios become internally consistent and, hence, more plausible.

Objective and aims

While the global migration order is likely to witness important transformations, rich and poor societies alike are ill prepared for these changes. There is therefore a need to develop

comprehensive migration scenarios which investigate future migration trends and their possible consequences. Because the future is full of uncertainties, we need to combine conventional scientific with imaginative approaches to migration research in order to address at the same time model and contextual uncertainties. This requires creative thinking and fresh perspectives that allow us to develop a range of expected and less expected migration scenarios. While scenarios approaches have hitherto been mainly applied in the military as well as business sector, they can also be very helpful in stimulating creative thinking about the future of world migration as well as other social phenomena.

Therefore, the general *objective* of the Global Migration Futures project is to explore future global and regional migration trends and their effects on European receiving countries and sending countries mainly located in Africa, Asia and the Middle East through the elaboration of scenarios. These scenarios will take into account future social, cultural, economic, political, demographic and environmental changes. In order to encourage innovative thinking about the future of migration, our distinctive methodology seeks to actively involve non-academic ‘stakeholders’ (from business, policy, civil society, and elsewhere) in the development of scenarios. We expect stakeholders to be active contributors in the process of identifying uncertainties in the future of migration, as well as key users of this information.

The aims of the project are:

- To fill gaps in current research and provide a comprehensive conceptual framework on the forces driving international migration by introducing the scenario approach which future research can further improve and expand.
- To initiate a debate among policy makers, representatives of the private sector, academics and other stakeholders about expected and less expected future migration patterns and their consequences for development in sending and receiving countries.
- To inform policy makers in Europe (later also in other regions) about the implications of migration policies and the potential for transformation of the contextual environment through the elaboration of long term perspectives. This may enhance policy coherence and effectiveness for receiving and sending countries in order to maximise the benefits and minimise the adverse consequences of migration.

Our overall purpose is to develop novel understandings about the future of migration, which will benefit a diverse range of research users within and outside academia. This requires the elaboration of *comprehensive* migration approaches which analyse the evolution of migration systems across space and time – integrating sending, transit and receiving contexts and linking the multiple ways in which development and change affect, and are affected by, migration. A deeper understanding of past and present migration dynamics and their interaction with broader global transformations will provide the basis for the scenarios.

Accordingly, our research is based on the following initial assumptions¹:

- Migration is an integral part of global transformation and development processes rather than a problem to be solved.

¹ This partly reflects the general intellectual starting points as outlined in the initial IMI research agenda (IMI 2006).

- Current migration patterns are linked to historical trends and can be understood as continuities and discontinuities.
- Micro-level approaches to migration are necessary to understand macro-level trends.
- Changes that occur in the political, economic, social and demographic sphere influence the scope, direction and size of future migration.

It follows that the project will explore migration futures on four inter-related basic dimensions:

- *Scale* of migration – the changing numbers of different migrant flows disaggregated, as far as possible, by gender, age, education level, origins and destinations.
- *Spatial patterns* of migration – the origins of migrants to the EU and the countries where they settle, possible trends towards diversification, migration routes used and forms of migration (circular, temporary, step migration; regular/irregular migration).
- *Rationale* for migration – the mixed and continuously evolving (over life cycles and periods) combinations of migrants' motivations for moving, such as employment, family reunification, (higher) education, retirement, political environment, security, welfare services (health, basic education) and social norms (e.g., migration as a *rite of passage*).
- *Consequences* of migration trends for development in sending and receiving countries, for instance through its effects on economic growth, poverty reduction, health care and systems, human capital formation (brain drain / brain gain), remittances, investment, political and cultural change: How does migration reshape the development in which it takes place?

Methodology

In order to simultaneously address *model* and *contextual* uncertainties, this project combines a conventional, hypothesis-testing scientific methodology with a scenario methodology. We will thus focus on four research components:

1. Elaboration of a ***theoretical framework*** of the social, political, cultural, economic, demographic and environmental factors in sending and receiving countries driving international migration and the interactions between these factors (***model uncertainties***).
2. Elaboration of ***migration scenarios***, mapping out a range of possible outcomes and their consequences for change processes in sending and receiving countries through stakeholders' interviews and stakeholders' workshops (***contextual uncertainties***)

3. ***Refining and substantiating the scenarios*** using data for specific case-study countries in regions of importance for migration to and from Europe in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.²
4. ***Generating and testing hypotheses about migration*** using the insights gained from the scenario exercise and the theoretical framework (combining parts 1, 2 and 3).

The scenarios produced by this project will establish linkages between the different factors in terms of the **direction of changes and causality**. For example, a possible scenario may be that past reductions in fertility combined with sustained economic growth will reduce new entries on the labour market and unemployment and drive up wages in middle-income countries such as Mexico, Morocco and Turkey (which have been the major post-WWII labour suppliers to the US and the EU). As a result, there could be decreasing emigration and increasing demand of low-skilled workers within those countries. While on the surface this might be welcomed by the countries which are ‘fighting’ undocumented migration of low-skilled migrants, in reality this might force government and business in the EU and the US to revisit their strategy to recruit the labour force they need. In this context, one scenario that could be explored by the project is increased international competition for low skilled workers and the rise of sub-Saharan and South-Asian countries as new major sources of migrant labour. This may lead to structural changes in the volume and, particularly, direction and selectivity of migration, which are also likely to affect processes of change and development in sending countries.

Part 1: Theoretical framework

The first component of the project elaborates a theoretical framework on the multi-level drivers of migration processes. This will be done by synthesising state-of-the-art insights from existing migration theories. This framework will capture how broader processes of regional and global social, economic, cultural and political change have affected migration patterns and trends. It will also explore how migration itself affects the contextual environment both in sending and receiving countries through feedback mechanisms. This will be done by integrating insights from various branches of social sciences including economics, sociology, political science, geography, anthropology and history. Throughout the project, the initial analytical framework will be refined in the light of the comprehensive review of the migration literature conducted for other IMI projects (DEMIG, THEMIS, EUMAGINE) which are part of the overall research programme *Global Migration in the 21st Century: Driving forces, future trends and policy challenges*³. This exercise is meant to identify and possibly reduce model uncertainties and to provide the tools to undertake a more realistic, yet creative, assessment of the migratory effects of future contextual change embodied in the scenarios exercises of part 2.

The theoretical review will also allow us to select the main driving contextual factors of migration and to consider, from a theoretical point of view, how future changes in contextual

² In a later phase (and subject to funding) this project will possibly be extended in order to run multidisciplinary scenario gaming workshops to identify policies to respond to contemporary and future migration challenges and opportunities as well as to broaden the scope to regions other than the EU.

³ This programme received generous funding from the matching grant by James Martin 21st Century School Challenge at the University of Oxford.

factors may affect migration in ways which may defy conventional wisdom. On the basis of preliminary research conducted so far we have explored four major factors affecting migration which are likely to be elaborated further in our theoretical framework. Let us review them in turn.

Demographic factors, including geographically differentiated fertility levels and age structure are likely to have both an indirect and direct affect on the future of global migration. By implications, global and regional shifts in longevity, fertility and gender relations are likely to affect the global supply and demand for migrants. Such analysis has to be gender specific. For instance, among other things, the ageing process across wealthy countries, prolonged education and increased labour market participation of women have increased the demand for caregivers and various types of, often informal, labour. Concomitant changes in their labour market partly explain the increase in the number of independent female labour migrants. To add a further layer of complexity, the decrease in fertility rates seems to be a rather universal phenomenon. It can therefore be argued that the worldwide decrease in fertility rates may significantly reduce the relative (to demand) global and national supplies of high *and* low skilled labour migrants, potentially leading to generic wage increases of migrants. This may increasingly question the assumption underlying current migration models that there is a quasi-unlimited supply of cheap foreign labour (Piore 1979). The long-term effects of these two contradictory forces on the size of international migration remain unclear.

Economic factors, particularly international and national labour market structures and the future structure of global income and other opportunity differentials, are likely to exert a profound influence on future migration, although the direction is difficult to predict because of fundamental model uncertainties. We can only achieve an improved understanding of migration patterns by going beyond crude comparisons of mean income differentials, by considering the *internal* structure of economies and labour markets. For instance, labour markets are not homogeneous, but highly segmented. This can explain a sustained demand for migrant labour in particular segments of the economy, even under conditions of high formal unemployment and economic recession. In the past decades, particular sectors such as agriculture, construction, cleaning, gardening and catering have increasingly attracted migrant labour. However, depending on the nature of future changes in the global economy, migration might be affected in various ways. Trade and the outsourcing of economic activities to low-income countries may also have a decreasing effect on migration, and partly counterbalance the migration-facilitating effect of technological progress. At the same time, however, future economic growth in the poorest countries, for instance in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, can paradoxically have a migration-*increasing* effect because income increases may allow more people to migrate over large distances. Contextual factors are therefore sine qua non for understanding the shifting relation between economic factors and international migration.

The **policy environment** obviously exerts an important influence on migration. An emerging literature has demonstrated that migration policies significantly impact on the volume, directions and nature of international migration, although not always in the direction intended by politicians (Teitelbaum, 1984, Zolberg et al., 1986). For example, the relative increase of irregular migration over recent decades illustrates the limitations of policies to reduce migration along established migration corridors and, in turn, the shifting capacities of state to enforce entry and exit rules. Under such conditions, and particularly if economies of receiving countries are thriving, restrictions are more likely to influence the nature (e.g.,

increasing reliance on family migration channels and increasing irregular migration) and direction (e.g., exploration of new migration routes and destinations) rather than the volume of migration. This explains why regular *and* irregular migration to the US and the EU has *increased* despite growing migration restrictions. By augmenting selectivity and the risks and costs associated with migration, restrictive migration policies also tend to decrease the development potential of migration (UNDP, 2009). Many scholars are sceptical about states' ability to control migration, while others have argued that migration policies do not reflect states' intention to control migration (Hollifield, 2000). Yet others scholars have argued that, on the whole, (restrictive?) migration policies have been largely effective and that there is no major migration control crisis (Brochmann and Hammar, 1999, Strikwerda, 1999). It follows that major model uncertainties are relevant also in this domain.

Environmental factors are also frequently ascribed as having an important role on migration processes (Piguet, 2008, Unruh et al., 2004). Localised forms of environmental degradation (for instance, land degradation in semi-arid environments) and future global warming are often assumed to significantly affect global migration. Nevertheless, the existence, volume and directions of such effects are in fact highly contested. Some analysts believe that such crises may cause large-scale forced migration, creating international tensions and threatening social cohesion (Fritz, 2010; Warner et al. 2009). But there is little empirical data on the coping strategies adopted by local communities as their environments change. To the contrary, available data seems to defy such apocalyptic scenarios and suggests that migration may only be one of a range of possible responses to climate change (Castles, 2002, Jonsson, 2010). In addition, vulnerable groups which will be potentially affected by climate change may simply not be able to migrate because they lack the resources to do so.

The above examples illustrate that much conventional thinking on the presumed migratory effects of demographic, economic, environmental and policy factors are in fact based on rather questionable assumptions on the nature and causes of migration. Second, much conventional thinking on migration tends to artificially isolate one particular “cause” of migration. For instance, it would be difficult to argue that environmental degradation by itself is a powerful determinant of migration, given that environmental change interacts with socio-economic factors which in turn determine the feasibility and attractiveness of migration. In combining insights from various social science disciplines, the theoretical framework aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding on the complex, multi-level drivers of migration processes and sources of contextual uncertainties.

Part 2: Elaboration of Migration Scenarios

Applying scenarios to the study of migration

Making conjectures about the future is not new. For example extensive analysis has been conducted, both in academia and in the policy fields, on strategic planning. There is more. It is common to discuss the possibilities that may develop in the future in sports to analyze possible strategies of the other team in the next game. Likewise, during election campaign politicians often look at possible future outcomes to develop responses to the campaign strategies of the adversary.

The scenario approach has its roots in the military sector and was later adapted to the business sector. Here one of the objectives has been to promote more insightful strategic planning and to help corporations gain a competitive advantage. The *intuitive logics school* of scenario planning suggests techniques to understand the future in a rigorous manner, but the methodology can vary according to the objectives of different scenarios (i.e. exploratory, norming or strategic)⁴, the resources available and the objectives of the scenario team. With regard to the latter, our objectives as a research team are unlike the specific aims of a consultant building scenarios for a corporate client. The most commonly known user of this scenario approach is Shell corporation, which, since the 1960s has been using and developing this methodology as a way of looking into the future. For instance, one of the recent projects at Shell looks at carbon dioxide emissions and develops two scenarios for the future.⁵

1. **Scramble** – policymakers pay no attention to efficient energy use until it is too late. Also, greenhouse gas emissions are not addressed until there are major climate shocks.
2. **Blueprints** – local actions begin to address the challenges of economic development, energy security and environmental pollution. A price is put on critical mass of emissions providing an incentive for the creation of clean energy technologies. The result is lower carbon dioxide emissions.

Building upon the tools typically used in the business sector and following valuable advice from the Institute for Science, Innovation and Society at Oxford, IMI has adapted scenarios analysis to study the future of global migration.

Key characteristics of scenarios

Studies forecasting the future of migration are often based on certain assumptions that affect the specification of the model (e.g., convergence in relative income, high/low fertility, etc.). These are commonly known as forecasting scenarios that cover a series of possible outcomes based on modifications of current trends into the future. In our use of the term, a scenario is not a forecast, an alternative specification of the forecasting model or a prediction. Instead, scenarios are *stories about possible futures for migration* that aim to prepare us for the eventuality of significant changes in the broader context within which migration takes place. As such, we do not necessarily expect them to come true. Rather, they represent a variety of plausible future developments in migration trends (Van der Heijden, 2005).

The peculiarity and usefulness of this methodology is its ability to break down the complexity of the global environment in which migration occurs into workable dimensions. In so doing, it provides a method to explore the future in a more systematic manner. *Time* and *space* (or scale) are the two key factors considered in scenario planning. Time is understood as encompassing three dimensions that emphasize the often continuous presence of underlying processes over time (and into the future). The three dimensions include: (1) our commonly held conception of time that from the present looks at objectives in the near future and short-term strategies to obtain such objectives; (2) the consideration of events and processes that have occurred or started in the past and will have effects in the future (e.g. a bilateral

⁴ For more on this see Studies, C. I. f. F. (2008) Strategic Future studies. Copenhagen.

⁵ Shell International BV (2008) Shell Energy Scenarios to 2050. The Hague: Shell International BV.

agreement signed last year that will be implemented next year); and (3) the events that we already know will happen in the future (e.g. next election date).

The space or scale dimension introduced by scenario methodology intends to reduce the level of complexity. It does so by creating a fictitious separation between types or scales of environment. To start with, a scenario must have a perspective, which is achieved by selecting a unit of analysis. From here on, it is possible to define the space in which a unit of analysis can have large impact. In the scenarios literature, this area is typically called the *transactional environment* where the unit of analysis has significant influence, that is, where feedback mechanisms play an important role. Beyond this area, we find the *contextual environment*, where the unit of analysis is not or barely able to extend its influence. In the case of migration, an example of such a “transactional environment” can be migration policies or the formation of networks, which might be affected by (changing) migration flows, and have a subsequent impact on these migration flows. An example of contextual environment can be the international economic conjuncture or military intervention. Although migration can have a certain influence on such issues, this impact is small and mostly indirect.

It is important to note that despite the virtual inability for the unit of analysis to affect the contextual environment where global forces are at play, these forces have the ability to greatly influence the actions of the unit of analysis in the transactional environment. What marks the difference with the ‘transactional environment’ is the virtual absence of feedback. Because of the rather ‘uncontrollable’ influence of the contextual environment, scenarios focus specifically on understanding which might be the forces that will influence the contextual environment and, directly or indirectly, our unit of analysis.

An important way in which scenarios methodology introduces a creative dimension is by including perspectives from society broadly defined (I would be more precise here). The aim is to gain a comprehensive view of migration today and to shed light on possible insights of its future. This is achieved by analyzing the vision of individuals representing the sectors that occupy the transactional environment in the scenario building exercises. In our analysis of possible future outcomes for international migration, individuals with possible insight and interest in future changes in migration patterns and trends include scholars, business people, policy-makers and civil society representatives. Their perspectives on migration are likely to differ from the perspectives and models used by academics and might therefore be useful to think more creatively about future changes in the contextual environment of migration.

By unpacking knowledge of past migration and reviewing our (often implicit) assumptions on the forces driving past, current and future migration, the scenario methodology offers us a potential way to break away from conventional ways of thinking about the future. In particular, the techniques used in scenario development compel to identify the *uncertainties* that face us in the future. So, rather than discarding uncertainties as unfit for the model and focusing on or rather certain and predictable trends, the most important uncertainties they become the center of the research. Through a process of identification of what is possible and not possible to know today about the future, uncertainties are included in the creation of plausible and coherent stories. Due to the intensive process of deconstruction of the ‘old’ and reframing into ‘new possibilities’, the value of the scenario methodology rests not simply on its outcomes, but first and foremost on its process. The following sections will highlight look more closely at what the process involves.

Preparatory activities

The scenario component of the Global Migration Futures project consists of practical activities and exercises that involve the expertise of scholars as well as the participation of other stakeholders who might hold very different views about migration. The objective of the activities is to elicit the insights of a broad range of stakeholders on what certainties and uncertainties of migration in the future in order to stimulate creative and “out-of-the-box” thinking.

The sections below summarize the activities that the IMI has developed as part of the scenario development process. This consists of more than 30 interviews with key stakeholders, the preparation of a key themes document drawn from the interviewees’ statements, the organisation of an internal migration scenarios workshop, presentation of the methodology to various audiences (e.g. policy, academic, etc.), and the organisation of a key stakeholders workshop in The Hague. As indicated by Figure 3, all these activities will lead to creation of the first generation scenarios that will be later expanded by the IMI. Next we provide a short description of each of the activities.

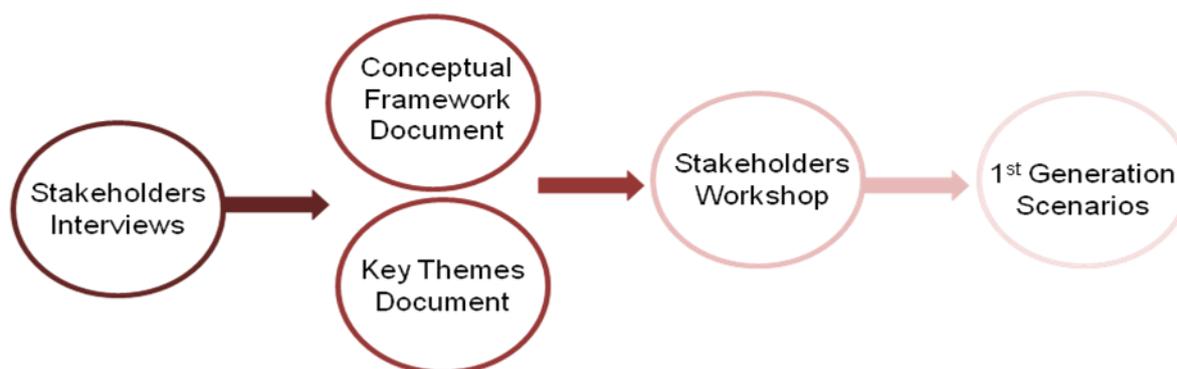


Figure 3 - From zero to initial scenarios.

Stakeholder interviews

Initiating and deepening a continuous dialogue among major stakeholders working on migration is essential to ensure that the project develops scenarios that are i) credible; ii) able to shed light on the critical uncertainties of the future; and, iii) relevant to those working in the field. The first step in this dialogue is a series of individual interviews with a range of stakeholders selected for their experience related to migration. They represent academia, the business community, local, national and international government institutions, migrant associations and other civil society organisations. The interviews are instrumental in generating a broad picture about competing views on the factors that are important in determining the future of world migration.

Candidates for interviews are selected on the basis of two criteria: 1) the need to include a wide variety of different sectors related to international migration, 2) the need to involve individuals with in-depth knowledge of the current state of migration affairs and a vision on the future of migration.

Semi-structured interviews are used to prompt the interviewees to explore the subject freely and from their own point of views (not their organizations). These interviews form the basis of a report summarising these key points, i.e. the “key theme paper” and to be distributed to the participants of the workshop to which we now turn.

Stakeholders’ Workshop

The first opportunity for an open dialogue among a wider range of ‘migration stakeholders’ is the international workshop which brings together about 20 to 25 stakeholders. The objective of this meeting is threefold:

1. Gather and compare the perspectives that various stakeholders have on the future of migration and examine the factors that they consider important in defining migration today and in the future. These will allow us to identify and then develop scenarios on future migration flows and consider the policy implications.
2. Initiate a constructive dialogue and create an expert focus group on future migration flows and policies which will be sustained throughout the whole project.
3. Involve stakeholders in the process of developing scenarios from an early stage so that they become active contributors to the production of knowledge, as well as ‘users’ of scenarios in future work.

Through the discussions and activities of the workshop, the participants will produce and select the preliminary scenarios which will be fully expanded by the IMI research team. This workshop thus aims to provide a mutual learning experience whereby academics, policy makers and others have the opportunity to share and exchanges ideas about migration uncertainties and future scenarios. Ample time will be allowed for discussions and for brainstorming. This event will also provide the participants with the opportunity to network with migration specialists from other countries. *Possible* types of countries to elaborate scenarios include:

- Destination countries: Northern Europe: UK and the Netherlands.
- Destination countries: Southern Europe: Italy and Spain.
- Sending countries: Sub-Saharan Africa
- Sending countries: South-east Asia
- Sending countries: Latin America and the Caribbean
- Transit countries: North Africa and Turkey

Part 3. Refining the scenarios

From the first generation scenarios created during the workshop, we will select three or four scenarios with the guidance of the workshop participants. Given the lack of migration and non-migration data for many countries (especially developing countries), the final choice of scenarios will be guided, among other things, by data availability and quality. This is

because, for each scenario, we will collect data from the pertinent countries to elaborate descriptions of how the “world” (i.e., the external environment) would look like if the selected scenarios were to become true and what such changes would mean for migration.

These scenarios will serve to examine how social, economic, cultural and environmental changes may affect and be affected by mobility. We will create a “story”, narrated in about 2050, that describes the events that happened in the country during the last four decades and how economic actors, governments, interest groups responded to the changes triggered by the events. From this, we will further substantiate the future scenarios and cross-check their consistency using existing theoretical insights into the drivers of migration as well as available evidence on the key relationship between key variables, i.e., the ways in which macro-contextual factors are known to affect migration. The goal is to present plausible chains of events and subsequent reactions that are internally consistent from the present into the future that we are describing. We will show how some of the key variables develop over time using qualitative as well as quantitative analysis. The purpose of including quantitative data (figures and tables) is to serve as a visual aid to illustrate the story. Here the emphasis is not on exact volumes or growth rates, but rather on theoretical and empirical consistency of the way in which the relationship between key variables are described.

In order to describe these possible “worlds” we will make use of estimations of the relationship between the main variables of interest (using current and historical data). For instance, say that we have selected economic growth in Europe and potential barriers to trade in Europe with regards to non-EU members as the key uncertainties to construct migration scenarios for a developing country located in the North Africa region (e.g. Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt). Suppose that in one of the scenarios (let’s call it the *Inward-Looking and Pitiabale Growth Scenario*), there is economic decline in Europe and European countries decide to integrate with each other fully, but at the same time pay little attention to the rest of the world. Part of the animosity against the rest of the world includes strong restrictions on trade with non-EU countries. The slower economic growth in Europe may discourage migration, while the relationship between trade and migration can go both ways (i.e. positive or negative) suggesting possible distinct scenarios for the future.

In order to shed some light on how the world would look like in this scenario we can for instance take data from Maghreb countries or Turkey and we can explore questions such as: How has economic growth in Maghreb countries and Turkey as well as migration policies in European countries affected migration patterns and trends within and from those countries to Europe? In which different directions may economic growth in the Maghreb and Turkey as well as immigration policies evolve in the future in different combinations (scenarios)? Based on our current theoretical and empirical knowledge of migration determinants, how are these contextual changes likely to affect migration?

In some cases, we may face major data restrictions and will have to make some theoretical assumptions about relationships between key variables. However, our priority is to construct a logically consistent story. While constructing the scenario it is important to avoid focusing just on quantitative data and specific forecasts. Even though these may appear reliable; their apparent precision can be a distraction from the key uncertainties that relate to migration. In addition, a typical feature of macro-contextual changes, particularly when they are of a non-economic nature, is that they are notoriously difficult to quantify.

In a final step, the scenario will also be compared with results from traditional forecasting techniques and subject to funding and theoretical considerations, the choice of countries and number of scenarios can be modified and extended.

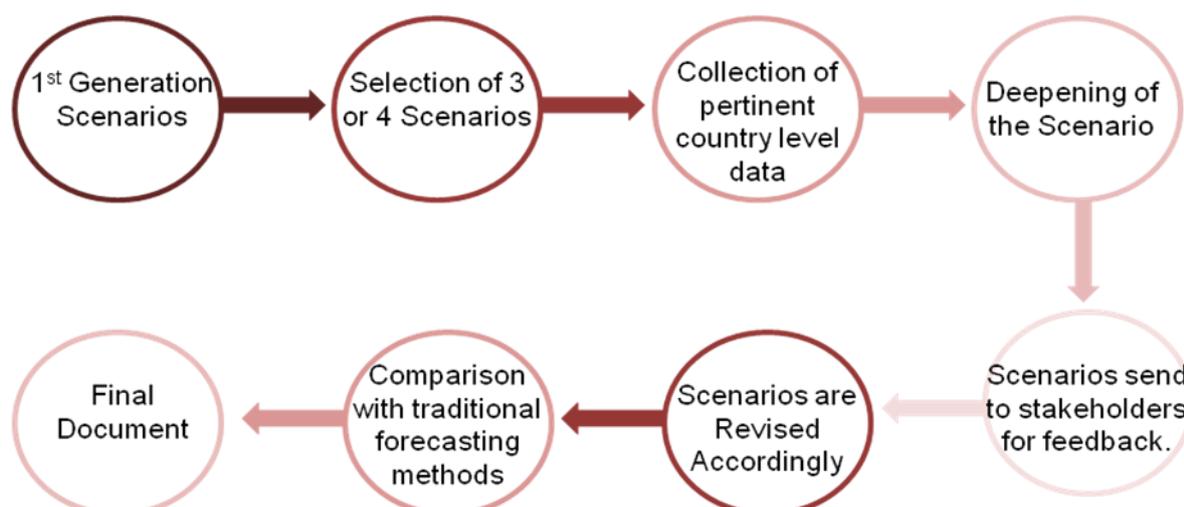


Figure 4 - From First Generation Scenarios to Final Scenarios.

Part 4. Hypotheses Development and Testing

If we were to stop here we would have gained insights into certainties and uncertainties and a set of scenarios on the future of migration. Yet in this project we wish to make a further contribution by taking scenarios a step further. The insights that we have gained from the scenario generating process (especially with regard to certainties and uncertainties) will be applied to test “interesting” hypotheses that have been developed in the course of the project.

In the business world the benefit of scenarios is the formulation of specific strategies for the future of the company that address alternative future settings. For policymakers, the benefit may be the formulation of improved migration policies that address possible changes in the future and maximize the benefits of migration, while minimising its negative effects. We envision that the benefit of these scenarios for *academic* purposes is to become aware of areas of research and questions that have remained overlooked so far. It is also possible that, in the process of developing the scenarios, we realize that there is a key question related to migration that we need to focus on in order to have a clear perspective on the future of migration from/to a certain country. For instance, it is possible that in the North Africa example we come to realize that a key issue for the future of migration in these countries is the relationship between trade with Europe and migration. If that was the case then we will focus on testing this relationship and exploring whether migration and trade are substitutes (e.g. Mundell, 1957) or complements (e.g. Markusen 1983) for these countries. Hence, the question doesn’t have to be totally new; it may just be the case that a known question gains importance within the scope of a specific scenario for the future.

Moreover, while demographic, economic and, to a certain extent, policy variables and environmental change can be quantified, this will be more difficult for some other variables, in particular relating to social change. For this we will rely on qualitative analysis. Results of quantitative and qualitative analysis will be triangulated and country-level analyses will be systematically compared.

Dissemination and Policy Dialogue

Although the project will be driven by intellectual questions, the results are intended to initiate a broad debate about the policy responses to future migration challenges. To ensure stakeholders' feedback and their ownership of the research process, a *continuous* dialogue will be set up by establishing an internet community of interested people and organising regular meetings. THP's network of some 2000 global migration and refugee experts as well as the extensive research and policy networks established by the James Martin 21st Century School and the International Migration Institute at the University of Oxford will be actively informed with a view to building collaborative research partnerships and strengthening dissemination. Results of the analysis will be disseminated through papers in academic journals and policy briefs. They will also be presented at academic and policy seminars and conferences. If possible, an international conference will be held close to the end of the project to allow peer review of the approach and findings.

Conclusion

A scenarios methodology can be a valuable tool, complementary to conventional scientific methods, to explore the future of global migrations. It is a particularly useful methodology to explore the underlying structural forces and the contextual uncertainties that make the future difficult to predict. Through this methodology, it is also possible to compel participants in the scenario-building activities to rethink their conscious or unconscious assumptions about migration. Crucially, scenarios aim to explore the possible instead of just the probable and use the uncertainties as a building block to inform us about possible future challenges. In times of crisis or of rapid change, we are often too overwhelmed to be able to sit back and rationally analyze the situation. For this reason, the scenario process helps us to analyse how the future might be different from the present before there is a need to act. In the end, *if we do not think creatively about the possibilities for the future, it would be impossible to think creatively about the responses to those possibilities.*

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