Global 'Megatrends' for Future International Migration

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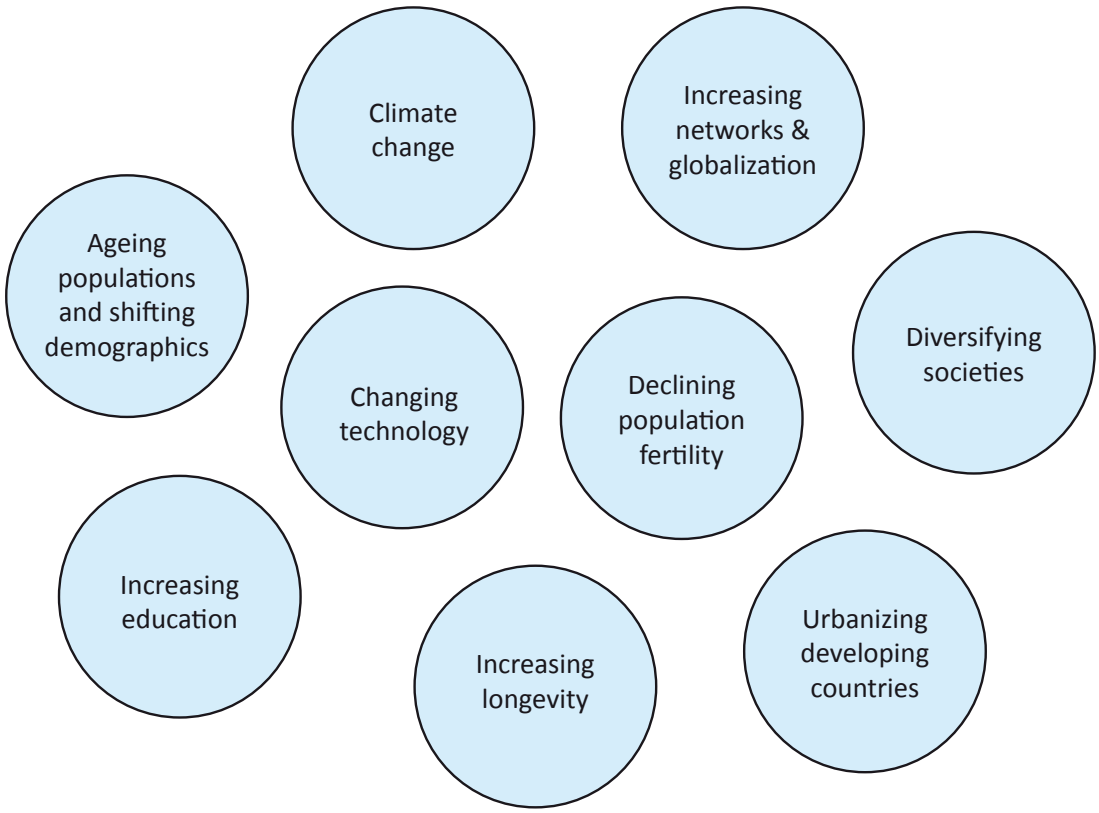
Which factors are **relatively certain** when thinking about the long-term future of migration?

Answering this question is central to using the scenario methodology to study future international migration, for it reveals the 'megatrends' for future migration. Megatrends are '**long-term driving forces** or…trends that influence almost everything at all levels of society. They have great importance now, and we are relatively sure they will also have great importance in the future.'[1]

Megatrends form the inner structure of all of the scenarios developed by the International Migration Institute's Global Migration Futures (GMF) project. Paradoxically, megatrends help to reveal areas of great uncertainty for the future. For instance, we know that population ageing is taking place in Europe, but within the context of labour markets, we are uncertain as to whether this will increase the demand for foreign workers as this depends on a range of other factors such as economic growth and labour market structures. The way in which megatrends interact with one another also highlights areas of future uncertainty. For instance, we know that technology will advance and the proportion of working-age individuals relative to the total population will decline, but the uncertain interaction between these two trends raises questions about how the future structure of labour markets will impact technological change and to what extent advancing technology may mitigate the effects of a smaller working population through increasing productivity. Hence, we can learn a lot about the future – both what we know and what we don't – by carrying out a rigorous examination of megatrends.

GMF stakeholders from academia, civil society, governments, businesses, and international organizations discussed migration megatrends during workshops in The Hague and in Cairo (see Figure 1). The GMF team refined and further developed the megatrends to better understand their potential roles in future migration scenarios. This policy briefing outlines three megatrends for future international migration.

Figure 1: Global 'megatrends' for future international migration



[1] H. Perrson et al. (2008: 6) 'Strategic Futures Studies', Member report No. 2, Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies: Copenhagen.

Increasing education

In the 1990s, the international community set a target of universal primary education by 2015. Although we know that this target will not be reached, governments are making significant gains. For instance, the primary school enrolment rate in sub-Saharan Africa increased from 59 per cent in 1999 to 77 per cent in 2009.[2] This rate will continue to rise in the future, and with it, enrolment figures for secondary and tertiary education. In 2008 more than 4.5 million individuals were receiving tertiary-level education in sub-Saharan Africa, which is an increase greater than 2,000 per cent from 1970. There remains significant room for future growth, as 4.5 million represents just 6 per cent of those who have the potential to receive such education based on their age.[3]

We know that increasing education is a megatrend that is vital to any study of, or policy directed towards, future international migration, because migration is often involved in attaining education and may result from receiving education. A better educated population will have the ability to obtain higher degrees and specialized skills at regionally or internationally competitive institutions. Additionally, increased education levels increases employment qualifications, opportunities and salaries and consequently, mobility to obtain jobs.[4] Education also raises awareness of employment opportunities elsewhere and may increase life and migration aspirations.[5]

Changing technology

Between 2005 and 2010, the number of internet users doubled worldwide, and this number continues to grow, in developing countries. For instance in Africa in 2010, mobile telecommunication penetration reached approximately 40 per cent, and African governments invested in submarine and terrestrial telecommunication cables to improve bandwidth and reduce costs, creating a significant potential for future growth.[6] Already the price of internet bandwidth on the continent has decreased by up to 90 per cent since the introduction of the internet in the 1990s.[7] In terms of production systems, we have seen governments across the globe invest in developing alternative and cleaner energies and set targets for future technological advancements at both product and manufacturing levels.

Technological change is a megatrend that is vital to any study of, or policy directed towards, future international migration because of its potentially profound impacts on human mobility. Future advances in technology can further reduce the costs of migration by reducing transportation costs and breaking down many of the barriers that prevent people from migrating, including a lack of knowledge about housing markets, job opportunities, and language and culture in a destination. At the same time, future technologies may mitigate the need or desire to permanently migrate by allowing individuals to work remotely or stay connected with their families over large distances. In this way, we may not observe marked increases in future permanent migration; rather, technology may facilitate a shift towards a much more mobile, but not necessarily more migratory, world.

Climate change

Climate change is one of the most uncertain megatrends for migration. According to the International Panel on Climate Change, atmospheric temperatures are on the rise, glaciers are retreating, sea levels are rising, instances of extreme temperatures are increasing, and instances of severe storms and other weather events are likely to increase and intensify in the future.[8] While many elements of climate change are now generally accepted as fact, the impact that this megatrend has on migration is less clear because the links between climate change and migration are more indirect and complex than is often suggested. However, climate change is increasingly present in discussions on future international migration, particularly among policy makers.

What we have already observed concerning human responses to environmental shifts is that in many cases, people learn to adapt to their changing environments, where possible, and migration is only one of the many possible adaptive responses to environmental stress. Where migration does occur, it is often because environmental disruptions take place in conjunction with other factors; for instance, when severe drought occurs alongside a governmental inability or unwillingness to carry out effective safeguards or damage controls.[9] Moreover, in cases of rapid-onset disasters from extreme weather events, scholars have observed the tendency to migrate to safer locations nearby and for a temporary period of time.

Given the uncertainty surrounding the speed and scope of climate change and its potential consequences for migration, especially as it interacts with other factors such as governance and national infrastructure, this megatrend deserves further study and attention.

[2] UNESCO (2011) 'Universal Primary Education', Fact Sheet No. 8, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Montreal.

[3] UNESCO (2010) 'Trends in Tertiary Education: Sub-Saharan Africa', Fact Sheet No. 10, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Montreal.

[4] A. Adepoju (2008) 'Migration and Social Policy in sub-Saharan Africa', Social Policy and Migration in Developing Countries, UNRISD (UN Research Institute for Social Development), IOM, Institute for Futures Studies, Geneva; S. S. Berry (1970) 'The Marketing of Migrant Labor Services in African Countries: A Relatively Unexplored Topic', *African Urban Notes* 5(Fall): 144-53.

[5] N.-H. Blunch (2009) 'Multidimensional human capital, wages, and endogenous employment status in Ghana', in R. Kanbur and J. Svejnar (eds.) *Labour Markets and Economic Development*, Routledge Studies in Development Economics, Abingdon: pp. 367-86; G. Tati (2009) 'Some emerging theoretical perspectives on youth migration in the global migratory systems: The African experience', NEW FRONTIERS OF CHILD AND YOUTH RESEARCH IN AFRICA. Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, Douala, Cameroun.

[6] ITU (2010) 'The World in 2010', ITU Market Information and Statistics Division, Geneva. Available at: www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/FactsFigures2010.pdf; P. Lange (2011) 'Africa - Internet, Broadband and Digital Media Statistics', Paul Budde Communication Pty Ltd. Available at: https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Africa-Internet-Broadband-and-Digital-Media-Statistics-tables-only.html?r=51.

[7] P. Lange (2011) 'Africa - Internet, Broadband and Digital Media Statistics', Paul Budde Communication Pty Ltd. Available at: https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Africa-Internet-Broadband-and-Digital-Media-Statistics-tables-only.html?r=51.

[8] J. Houghton (2008, August 31) '20 Years of IPCC Working Group I Assessment', Presentation at the 20th anniversary of the IPCC, Geneva.

[9] S. Castles and C. Rajah (2010) 'Environmental Degradation, Climate Change, Migration and Development', 5th Accion Global de los Pueblos sobre Migracion, Desarrollo y Derechos Humanos, Mexico City.