

### Editor's Introduction

## International Perspectives of Contemporary Migration, Urbanisation and Development in Asia Pacific and Across the Pacific

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**Abstract:** Recent years have witnessed increased population mobility, both within and across countries. While internal migration which has resulted in rapid urban growth is of greater magnitude than international migration, it has received relatively less attention than the latter. The papers presented in this special issue draw attention to the fact observation that international migration has become more globalised and complex, with increasing mobility of different forms and involving a greater number of countries. The close association between migration and development has also been clearly demonstrated. While migrants may not always be welcomed, migration which is instrumental in the re-allocation of human resources in response to market forces, has contributed positively to places of origin and destination. However, there is still a need to improve on the management of migration and urbanisation. Efforts should be made to improve on data collection and analysis to guide policy formulation and implementation.

Key words: Development, migration, urbanisation

JEL classification: F22, J61, R110

### 1. Introduction

In 1994, 179 countries, including Malaysia, adopted a 20-year Programme of Action (PoA) at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo for the integration of population with development. The PoA devoted a chapter on population distribution, urbanisation and internal migration and another on international migration and development, to underscore the importance of migration in development. A key issue identified was the rapid urbanisation and expansion of urban centers as a result of rural-urban migration. While the cities may serve as centers of growth, the preponderance of a single major city or agglomeration in some countries had resulted in economic, social and environmental challenges (United Nations 1994). Many cities and towns are not adequately equipped to deal with the unprecedented challenges posed. Hence, one of the main objectives of the ICPD PoA was to address population distribution and sustainable development by fostering a more balanced spatial distribution of the population, and reducing the role of the various push factors as they relate to migration flows.

The world is becoming increasingly inter-connected and inter-dependent, and more people are moving to seek better opportunities in life. Increased population mobility,

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both within and between countries is closely linked to structural and economic inequalities, and is influenced by socio-cultural, political and environmental conditions, which in turn affect those conditions at the places of origin and destination (United Nations 2014). Orderly migration can have positive impacts on both the countries/communities of origin and destination, providing the former with remittances (De Haas 2005), and the latter with needed human resources (Pillai 1995), as well as lower costs of production that help fuel growth. However, some commentators argue that the use of low cost unskilled foreign labour can impede technological innovation and efficiency of production. Unplanned migration and an influx of undocumented international migrants and asylum seekers impose great challenges and burdens to the receiving communities/countries (UN 1994; 2014). Illegal migrants can also be a source of bilateral friction between sending and receiving countries (Liow 2003).

The changing migration dynamics has profound ramifications for national development and family wellbeing at the places of origin and destination. As mentioned above, migration takes place in response to market conditions, as people seek to improve their own well-being. However, the benefits of migration come with costs, as migrants may compete for the use of amenities and services, and deprive the locals of job opportunities, while out-flows of the more resourceful segments of the population may retard growth of the sending countries/areas. Many studies, however, have found positive effects of migration on development (Appleyard 1989; Anh Dang *et al.* 1997; Skeldon 2008). In propounding the benefits of migration, Taylor *et al.* (1996) argue that given a supportive mix of macroeconomic policies and infrastructure, planned migration may function as a dynamic force promoting economic growth and national development.

## **2. Recent Trends in Migration around the World**

A global survey by the United Nations in 2012 found that 740 million people worldwide live outside their region of birth, and more and more women are migrating on their own or as heads of households and principal wage earners (Bell and Muhidin 2009). As a result of the influx to urban centres, especially the big cities, urban populations have been growing rapidly, and the urbanisation level for the world surpassed 50 per cent by 2008. Cities are now growing at an estimated 1.3 million persons per week. Between 1990 and 2010, 90 per cent of the growth in the urban population occurred in developing countries. As a result of rapid population growth in the urban areas in the developing countries, the proportion of the population living in urban areas in these countries had increased to 46 per cent in 2010, from 35 per cent in 1990 (United Nations 2014). Urban areas are expected to absorb all population growth over the next 40 years. Despite its magnitude and importance, internal migration, the main contributor of rapid urban growth, has received scant attention in policy debate and research, as compared to international migration.

International migration has also intensified in recent years. The number of international migrants increased from 125 million in 1994 to 232 million in 2013, and they make up 3 per cent of the world population. Of the contemporary international migrants, 59 per cent were in developed countries where they make up 10.8 per cent of the total population in these countries. In contrast, international migrants constitute

1.6 per cent of the population in developing countries (United Nations 1994; World Bank 2013a; 2013b). However, international migration has become more globalised and complex, as more and more migrants from a broader spectrum of backgrounds are moving between developing countries. The complexity of international migration is exacerbated by return migration and two-way flows, as some countries have experienced increased inflows and outflows simultaneously (Castles and Miller 2003; Nyberg-Sorenson *et al.* 2002). The rapid rise in the number of undocumented or irregular migration of unskilled workers, and refugees has imposed great challenges and burdens on the receiving countries (United Nations 2014).

### **3. Recent Trends in Migration in Malaysia and Policy Response**

Malaysia is both a labour receiving and labour sending country, with a diaspora numbering 1.446 million in 2013, a three-fold increase from 482,000 in 1990 (United Nations 2013). The largest group (of a little more than a million) went to Singapore, and 145,000 went to Australia (United Nations 2013). The emigrants comprise mostly skilled professional workers. Concerns over the negative effects of brain drain on national development led to the setting up of Talent Corporation in January 2011 under the Prime Minister's Department, as part of the Economic Transformation Plan, to formulate and facilitate initiatives to address the availability of talent in line with the country's economic transformation. The inflow of migrant workers has continued, with the migrant stock increasing from 1.014 million in 1990 to 2.47 million in 2013. Most foreign workers are low skilled or semi-skilled workers, with expatriates making up only 3 per cent. The share of the foreigners in the labour force increased from 3.5 per cent to 9.5 per cent in 2010 (World Bank 2013a). In 2009, Malaysia was ranked the 11<sup>th</sup> top remittance sending country (USD6.8 billion) (World Bank 2013a), and this outflow is expected to continue at the current rate of immigration. While there is growing concern over the dependence on migrant workers, the inflows of irregular workers has led to a paradox due to the tight labour market; the nation is seeking to recruit workers from more countries. The policies and measures aimed at curbing the undocumented inflows have also failed to meet their targets.

Based on results of a survey, the World Bank report (2013b) concludes that immigration has presented Malaysia with more economic benefits than economic costs. However, the report recommends a revamp of the immigration policy and overall system to be more effective in meeting the country's future economic needs.

The second Population Strategic Plan Study conducted by the National Population and Family Development Board in 2009/2010 identified international migration as a key area of concern for intervention. Subsequently, a special survey on Indonesian migrant workers in Sabah was conducted to collect information on the migrants and the attitudes of the local population toward these migrants.

### **4. Internal and International Migration**

The papers in this issue were presented at an international conference on migration, urbanisation and development, convened in July 2013 by the Population Studies Unit, University of Malaya and the National Population and Family Development Board,

Malaysia. The main objectives of the conference were to take stock of migration (internal and international) and urbanisation in Malaysia, and to share this experience with other countries so as to have a better understanding of the immigrants from and emigrants to these countries.

In her paper, Azizah Kassim describes the changing patterns of immigration in Malaysia, which has risen sharply since 1980 when there were only 63,700 foreigners, to 2.3 million in 2010. She reckons that the figure is probably an under-estimate due to the presence of a large number of undocumented migrants. While noting that Malaysia is both a labour receiving and labour sending country, she has confined her discussion on immigration due to unavailability of information on emigration. The welcome flows as identified by the author include the expatriates, foreign students and participants of Malaysia "My Second Home" Programme, while the majority comprising the legal low skilled workers, the irregular or undocumented workers, and asylum seekers and refugees were identified as problematic flows. In 2012, the much sought after high skilled expatriates made up only 2.7 per cent of the foreign migrants, and they came mainly from various parts of Asia. The internationalisation of education saw a sharp increase in the enrolment of students in institutions of higher learning from 32,000 in 2003 to 86,036 in 2011, and it is expected to hit 150,000 in 2015 and 200,000 in 2020. Malaysia is less enthusiastic about the inflow of low skilled workers, and is taking measures to control the problematic flows of the irregular or undocumented inflows and asylum seekers/refugees. The Indonesians are the largest group (about 47%), followed by the Nepalese (19%). Most of the foreign workers are in the urban areas, and the increasing number of irregular migrants has caused public resentment towards them because of the competition they pose to the local urban poor, especially for petty trading opportunities; and the crimes committed by foreigners often highlighted in the media. Migrant workers have contributed significantly to economic development, but they have also caused social problems. According to Azizah Kassim's assessment, the various policy measures, including the amnesty, regularisation and 6P programmes have not been effective in restricting the number of irregular migrants, due to inconsistencies in the implementation and lack of coordination among the different agencies. Looking forward, she reckons that migrants are here to stay, and socio-political turmoil in neighbouring countries would probably result in more asylum seekers coming onshore. The paper concludes that the way forward is to find the right formula to minimise the negative impacts of labour inflows and maximise their benefits.

As in the case of Malaysia, population ageing and migration have become increasingly important emerging issues in Indonesia. In the era of globalisation, international population mobility is becoming a more important demographic process, with profound ramifications for economic development in Indonesia and other countries, ASEAN and beyond. Since the early 1980s, the issues of overseas workers have received more political attention than that of internal migration, as remittances from these workers are a major source of funds for development and family wellbeing. Aris Ananta and Evi Nurvidya Arifin examine the new migration trends in Indonesia. Up until the last couple of years, there has been an increased outflow of Indonesians to take up jobs and to pursue higher education, or even to settle down in other countries. Large numbers of Indonesian workers began going to the Middle East in the 1980s and 1990s, while Malaysia

has been the second most popular destination. Hence, outflows reported in this paper represent the inflows to Malaysia, as reported by Azizah Kassim. Both papers have recognised the problems faced by the migrant workers. The number of Indonesians settling down (including marriage migration) in another country is still rather small. It is noted that rapid development in Indonesia has slowed down the outflow of migrants and even attracted return migrants. Moreover, there has also been a trend for the inflow of foreign direct investment, and for foreigners to settle down in Indonesia. Aris and Evi speculate that if the trend continues, Indonesia may be the new destination for foreign capital and workers. They conclude the paper with a call for international collaboration in migration research.

The ASEAN region is both an increasingly important destination and an origin of international migrants in the contemporary world. Citing the imminent creation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, Graeme Hugo foresees intensification of movements in South-east Asia, based on the experience of other parts of the world where the breaking down of barriers to trade and financial flows has involved some relaxation of migration constraints. He begins with an overview of contemporary ASEAN international migration using traditional demographic migration data sources, followed by focusing on a single corridor of ASEAN population movement for which comprehensive information is available – that between ASEAN countries and Australia. One new trend of migration in this region is the increased intra-ASEAN migration which accounts for 68.9 per cent of all immigration to ASEAN countries, due to inter-country disparity in development (GNP), demography (labour force) and democracy (forced migration). He then focuses his discussion on the ASEAN-Australia flow, noting the changing countries of origin, characteristics of the migrants, and type of migrants (family, students, skilled workers, and asylum seekers). He then proceeds to discuss return and reciprocal migration. In conclusion, Hugo noted that the international migration linkages are much more than corridors to channel the brain drain out of the region, but should be seen as offering enormous potential to facilitate trade, finance, investment, knowledge exchange, tourism and other forms that can assist in economic development and poverty reduction in South-east Asia.

Historically the United States is seen as a “nation of immigrants”- almost 13 per cent of the American population is foreign born, and if the children of the foreign born are included, about 1 in 4 Americans can be counted as part of the recent immigrant community. The United States continues to be the favourite country of destination for many new migrants. Of the 220 million international migrants in the world in 2010, 40 million were in the United States. Charles Hirschman describes the recent trends and future prospects of immigration in United States of America, and the consequences of the influx of migrants. Although the focus of the paper is on recent trends, Hirschman also provides a historical account of immigration to USA dating back to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. He states that there is still lingering prejudice and popular fears of immigrants. Based on a vigorous situational analysis of the impact of immigration, he concludes that there is growing evidence that, on balance, immigrants make a positive contribution to the American economy and society. On the other hand, there is little evidence that immigrants have an adverse impact on the wages and employment of native born Americans. Moreover,

immigrants and their children are well assimilated and disproportionately represented in a broad variety of scientific and cultural fields.

Abdul Rahman Hasan and Prema Letha Nair show that economic growth in Malaysia not only has brought about rapid increase in the number of towns and urban centres but also resulted in the expansion of major towns outwards to sprawl into the peripheries. Internal migrants and external migrants tend to be attracted to the big cities and large urban centres rather than to smaller towns. Internal migration, natural increase and reclassification contributed to the rapid urbanisation in Malaysia. However, as the country has become more urbanised, urban-urban migration has led to the growth of the metropolitan centres. The urbanisation level varies widely by state, due to historical and socio-economic reasons, and government policies have also played an important role, as it has a different impact on the various sub-groups in bringing about restructuring of society, and more balanced regional development. Unlike neighbouring countries, Malaysia does not have a dominant mega city. Instead, metropolitan areas are spread out in all states, reflecting the effectiveness of government policies for a more balanced regional development.

Gavin Jones discusses the measurement issues and the problems of working with official data. The list of misleading data and UN studies is very telling. Citing the examples of Indonesia and Malaysia, he demonstrates that the proportion in different urban size class groups fluctuates when cities move from one size class to another. Lack of awareness of these measurement issues can lead to incorrect assessments of trends in urbanisation, and in some cases inappropriate policy recommendations. He then proceeds to discuss the growth of mega-urban regions, and appropriate ways of analysing trends in such regions, recommending the use of zonal analysis to better understand the dynamics of change in these complex regions. The key point is that cities are growing at the periphery. Within the cores of the mega urban region, there is a tendency for a significant redistribution of population from the over-crowded central urban district to the outer part of the core. While focusing his discussion on South-east Asia, Gavin Jones also provides some interesting regional comparisons with other parts of the world. The paper concludes by raising various issues regarding the uniqueness of South-east Asian patterns of urbanisation, and the political economy of urbanisation trends in the region.

Internal migration involves a temporal and spatial dimension, and has an important role in population redistribution and development. It is instrumental for redistribution of human resources and improving productivity. Using the 2 per cent sample data of the 1991 and 2000 population censuses, Nai-Peng Tey analyses inter-state and inter-regional migration. He begins with a description of the trends and patterns of inter-state migration, tracing back to 1970 when the New Economic Policy (NEP) sought to restructure society through internal migration. During the early period of the NEP, the Klang Valley (comprising Kuala Lumpur and the four adjacent districts in Selangor) serving as the administrative, commercial, industrial and educational hub, had already emerged as the main destination for all urban-ward migrants; while Pahang was a distant second, drawing migrants to the Federal Land Development Scheme. In 1991 and 2000, the Klang Valley was the only region with a net gain of migrants. Among internal migrants, inter-state migrants outnumbered intra-state migrants. The characteristics of the migrants are consistent with those found in most migration studies – being selective of the young and the better

educated. Young females and Malays were also found to have a higher propensity to move, to take up jobs in the manufacturing and services sectors, and for the latter the NEP has probably played an important role. The causes of the migration patterns and the socio-demographic impacts are discussed next. The paper concludes that while there is no direct policy on internal migration, various socio-economic policies do have an impact on population mobility.

## 5. Conclusion

Through these papers, it is clear international migration has become more globalised and complex, with increased mobility of different forms and involving more countries. The close association between migration and development is clearly demonstrated. The main driver for migration is economic disparity within countries and across countries. Most migration decisions are economically motivated. The papers also show that education migration is also of importance, and marriage migration is emerging as a new trend. Migration plays an important role in the urbanisation process, and migrants tend to be attracted by the bright lights of the cities. One common conclusion in all these papers is that despite some negative perceptions and prejudice towards migrants, on balance, migration has contributed to development and family/individual well-being in both sending and receiving countries/regions. However, there is a need to further improve the management of migration and urban growth.

Despite its growing importance, migration research is limited by the paucity of data (Hugo 2006). There is a need to coordinate and improve data collection by researchers and the relevant agencies to provide a sound analysis based on reliable data for effective management of migration. As recommended by Aris and Evi, there is also a need for international collaboration in migration research.

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