ADVANCING SCIENCE FOR SOCIETY: HEALTH, MIGRATION AND TECHNOLOGIES
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SUSTAINABLE MIGRATION

DEFINING THE ISSUE

Migration is part of the human condition. It affects all people, everywhere—directly or indirectly. Our focus, international migration, concerns people moving from their home country to another on either a permanent or temporary basis. Currently, the number of international migrants, i.e. moving from their home country to another on either a permanent (at least a one-year stay) or temporary basis (between 3 and 12 months) was estimated to be just over 304 million. This represents a 74% increase since 2000.[1] Labour migrants and forcibly displaced persons make up the two largest groups and neither are exclusive categories though certain classes of labour are often seen as desirable for sustainable migration and demographic planning purposes.[2]

What makes migration "sustainable" is a complex question involving a range of factors. Sustainable international migration ensures a well-balanced distribution of costs and benefits for the individuals, societies and states affected. For host countries, current discourse highlights the importance of social cohesion, and many point out that the integration of immigrants is not possible without feeling a sense of belonging and being part of a shared project.[3] For sending countries, there are concerns about sustainability in terms of loss of skills and resources, unstable remittances, weakened diasporic connections, and an overall brain-drain in light of the stark economic and demographic disparities. For people in the process of migration, priorities include safety and security for themselves, their families, and their communities, employment, dignity, and the fundamental respect for and recognition of their human rights.

The capacity of all countries and regions to provide safe, secure, and prosperous futures for their citizens and the international community is tested by the multifaceted factors behind migration such as armed conflict, growing economic volatility, labour precarity, political instability, environmental degradation, climate change, gender discrimination, and religious intolerance. These factors can lead to acute social, economic, and cultural vulnerability, with a knock-on effect being migration - by choice, coercion, or force.

PRAGMATIC APPROACHES TO MIGRATION

Questions about the most appropriate, effective, and sustainable migration policies are laced with tensions which manifest, for example, in hate crimes targeting individual migrants and migrant communities. Implicit in such questions are assumptions about whom migration is for, such as sending societies, host societies, or individual migrants and

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1 Data informing this number come from International Migrant Stock 2024. https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock

2 Two studies have informed these number: IOM (International Organization for Migration) UN Migration's *The World Migration Report 2024* https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2024 and UNHCR's *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023* https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2023.

3 OECD (2024), *International Migration Outlook 2024*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 106, https://doi.org/10.1787/50b0353e-en.

their families and communities, and what the end goal of any migration policy should be. The goals and objectives for migrants in host countries can align with the existing citizenry in economic pursuits, shared values and family reunification, but sharp divergences can emerge when it comes to labour competition or to a person or group's class, race, social identity, and/or gender. This exposes tensions that may be complicated further by the very laws and regulations that are intended to govern and regulate the movement of people. Think here of policies in effect among those countries often referred to as "white settler societies" such as the United States, Australia, and Canada. These countries, until the late 1960s, promoted white immigration to the detriment of migrants from other backgrounds.

While immigration policies are often structured around categories of movement that are meant to reflect hierarchies of desirability (e.g. labour) and the reasons why people migrate and how they do it, the lived reality for the person in transition from one country to another is complex. Host states use classification categories of migration (refugee, labourer, student, spouse) to restrict or regulate movement across regional, national, or international borders yet not all migrants can fit within the often-narrow categories. People inherently possess multiple and shifting identities—migrant, yes, but perhaps also woman, mother, and doctor. Additionally, the distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration is complex and often involves varying degrees of choice and coercion, depending on the context. The rise in the number of "undocumented" migrants is influenced by the fact that increasingly complex legal landscapes and restrictive migration governance make it easy for people to fall outside of official categories of movement. This encourages further state interventions, which can be unsustainable in terms of policy consistency and the expenditure of resources. In terms of social cohesion, increasingly complex migration management regimes are problematic since they erase and suppress migrant agency, constrain labour mobility, impede integration and place significant (and additional) pressure upon the bureaucracies of host country to 'categorize' migrants. It also ignores how one country's gain can be another country's loss.

MIGRATION AS ROUTE TO DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainable migration requires all parties to understand—or endeavour to understand—the complexities inherent within a person's decision to move across international borders and the motivations of a host country for opening immigration pathways. Strategies for sustainability must consider the demographic imbalance between rich and poor countries and its impact on national labour forces. Legal categories of refugees and labour migrants do not always capture the complexity of the reality. However, there is a legal and moral requirement for distinguishing amongst impulses for movement. Legally, the 1951 Refugee Convention stipulates protections for refugees by providing against non-refoulement and insisting that no person seeking refuge should be sent back before their case for refuge has been assessed. This compels host countries to protect the human rights of those whose home countries do not or cannot. When the lines become blurred, such as when people suffer economic hardship in their countries of origin for reasons of ethnic background, sexual orientation, or climate change, host countries need to consider carefully the fundamental difference between migrants and refugees. Under these circumstances, host countries have an obligation to provide the political protections for people whose home country do not or will not protect them and to provide employment opportunities that accommodate their skills.

DISRUPTION OF DEMOCRACIES WITH DISINFORMATION

Disinformation, which includes the demonization and the spreading of false information about the effects of migration, is causing significant harm to receiving societies and to individual migrants by undermining their ability to cross borders safely and securely. Moreover, on one level, disinformation about the putative cost of migration to receiving countries and the threat posed to the legal institutions that its citizens depend upon for the good governance of their societies. This undermines trust in democratic principles and erodes social cohesion. On another level, disinformation about the opportunities available to migrants in host countries sets unrealistic expectations of what life will be like for them upon arrival. Combatting disinformation requires a long-term commitment across the political spectrum to push against disinformation. Care must be taken to ensure that the language used in relation to migrants and migration does not create or foster social division. The inadvertent perpetuation of stereotypes and myths about migrants inhibits socio-economic inclusion and this is especially damaging to young people who often find themselves caught between two or more worlds. Additionally, and since return migration is common, enabling a positive experience in the host state has the potential to inform long-lasting and formative change in home states particularly among women, children and young people, and sexual minorities.

DAMAGING THE GLOBAL RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM

As the science academies of the G7 nations, we are particularly concerned about the impact that the forced migration and displacement of scientists from a growing number of countries around the world is having upon the sustainability of our global research ecosystem. The loss of scientific expertise in a growing number of nations due to war, conflict, and persecution is causing major disruptions to or decimating research capability. Universities, colleges, and research institutes tend to be the early targets of authoritarians, oppressors, and/or dictators with the result being the loss of large numbers of highly skilled and highly educated people through intimidation, disappearance, murder, or forced displacement. The exact number of displaced scientists is impossible to know but what is certain is that the consequences of such a dramatic loss of scientific capital to a country's post-conflict future are catastrophic. This loss undermines or eliminates opportunities for diplomacy, the recovery of vulnerable economies, the preservation of language and culture, and discovery research.

While recognizing that patterns of migration are shaped by dynamic and ever-changing economic, environmental, political, and cultural factors, it is essential that we adhere to the SDG's guiding principle of leaving no one behind which means doing what we can to level the field. The S7 academies are committed to ensuring the dignity of all human beings. Communicating the diversity of the migrant experience in the past and present, and across a range of geographical spaces can support the kind of informed and evidence-based integration strategies that make all our societies more innovative, resilient, and sustainable.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1
The creation of a co-developed training program wherein policy makers, researchers, and other experts come together to acquire deeper awareness of the complexities and differences inherent in short-term and long-term migration. Expanding insights on the various acute and chronic factors associated with migration in response to changing climatic conditions or internal sectarian or political violence, for example, and how these may influence involuntary displacement and/or adaptive migration can build stronger pathways for secure and stable refuge.

RECOMMENDATION 2
That particular attention be paid to the most vulnerable migrant groups and that appropriate protections and strategies for their inclusion be put in place to enable them to reach their full potential and to help our societies progress in sustainable, prosperous, and inclusive ways.

RECOMMENDATION 3
The creation of a multilateral agreement to develop a process whereby the credentials of displaced scientists may be recognized and accepted by the host country. We also recommend the introduction of dedicated funding streams to enable universities to provide longer-term (3+ years) placements, language training, and health supports for displaced researchers.

RECOMMENDATION 4
The development of more robust communication strategies to combat disinformation within both migrant communities and host countries. More must be done to highlight the contributions that migrants and their descendants make and have made to the evolution of our national stories and to the public good. We see a strong need for a special focus on employment, specifically the needs of host countries and the actual roles that migrant populations play in national labour markets.

RECOMMENDATION 5
That additional supports be put in place to ensure that newcomers are equipped with the information needed to adapt and integrate with host countries over the long term. Specifically, we recommend enhancing the ways in which information about the host country and society, such as that relating to housing, employment, and education, is provided so that newcomers will be able to make informed decisions about the integration pathways available to them.

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The German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, the National Academy of Sciences, and the Royal Society abstained from endorsing this document.