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Editorial of GCSP Policy Brief No. 12 Potential Outcomes of Migration Flux in a Globalized World and Its Security Implications

**Dr. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan
Senior Scholar in Geostrategy and
Director of the Program on the
Geopolitical Implications of Globalization
and Transnational Security
Geneva Centre for Security Policy**

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To comment, please email Bethany Webster at b.webster@gcsp.ch.

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Review and Critique

While migration has occurred throughout human history, we are currently in a period in which significant and growing numbers of people are on the move. As a result, international migration can often cause unease and tension. In recent years, immigration has become elevated to a national security issue in many countries in the West. Part of the reason for this is linked to the ambiguity surrounding the social, economic, and cultural consequences of immigration. In Europe, the end of the Cold War focused attention on “new” threats to security, including international migration. The response has often been alarmist, in part because law enforcement agencies have been important in framing the agenda. The 9/11 attacks, as well as those in Madrid and London, have also heightened the salience of international migration in security discourse.¹ Examples of “securitized immigration” include, for instance, a sharp increase in border controls and concept of a link between immigration and terrorism.

For policy makers, the difficulty is to balance the need for immigration with the security challenges it can present. Many countries are dependent upon imported skilled and unskilled labor. This is especially the case given changing demographic trends in many developed countries, which are facing a shortage of labor and difficulties in funding public pensions, for example. International migration can, therefore, play a role in easing the budgetary strains on developed countries, as well as filling gaps in the labor force.

However, uncontrolled immigration presents a problem for receiving countries. Slobodan Djajic identifies several challenges posed by the expanding potential for international migration for host countries in a globalizing world.² He notes that unsolicited migration can result in nationalistic and racist responses from within the host country populations as indigenous populaces perceive, rightly or wrongly, that their jobs are at risk.³ Unsolicited migration may also result in a reduction in wages for some segments of the host country’s population and the social welfare system may come under strain, as well. In the source countries, emigration can also result in a loss of skilled workers, which not only means that the country loses some of its “best and brightest” professionals, who were trained at the expense of their countries of origin, but also that the donor countries’ prospects for development are reduced.

Illegal immigration can also adversely affect human security. Many people are willing to put themselves at great risk in attempting to enter host countries illegally and are extremely vulnerable to human trafficking. Moreover, those who survive these often perilous journeys are more likely to be exposed to dangerous working conditions and abuse than workers with permits.

In addition, Djajic highlights that an increasing number of host countries have responded to the challenges they face by tightening immigration controls. States around the world, especially in the West, are cracking down on immigration, even increasing restrictions on legal immigrants and visitors. Ironically, these efforts have often led to undesired outcomes, namely illegal immigration.

In short, Djajic addresses an important aspect of the globalization debate, namely the linkage between immigration and security. Increased accessibility to affordable transport and increased possibilities for communication have rendered migration attractive and feasible for many individuals. At the same time, however, unsolicited immigration raises a number of concerns, both for host and source countries.

Dilemmas and Our Recommendations

International immigration presents both opportunities as well as challenges for states. What the correct policy framework should be remains highly contested, as governments often face alarmist media campaigns that make it difficult to address the issue in a balanced way. How governments respond to immigration needs and related policy areas will be crucial in achieving prosperity, maintaining generous social welfare systems, and nurturing good inter-cultural relations. We highlight eight dilemmas related to this issue area and eight corresponding recommendations that may contribute to appropriate policy choices.



The policy dilemmas and recommendations presented here are directly linked to policy challenges currently faced by governments across the globe. One of the most formidable challenges that governments face is reconciling the need for foreign labor in order to successfully manage the consequences of lower birth rates and aging populations in the West with the anxieties and tensions that an increased presence of people from unfamiliar cultures necessarily implies. Without adequate policy responses from governments, immigration – whether legal or illegal – may result in increased tensions between immigrant communities and dominant national groups within host countries. This may, in turn, lead to feelings of alienation amongst immigrant communities or threats to their human or societal security,⁴ and even conflict. It is, thus, vital for countries not only to develop open, targeted immigration policies, but also to develop and implement policies aimed at recognizing the long-term social, cultural, and economic contributions of migration.

An additional issue for policy makers is the need to promote legal immigration and to prevent illegal immigration, human trafficking, abuse, and criminality without infringing on civil liberties and human rights. Following 9/11, for example, the atmosphere of fear in some countries meant that many migrants were afraid to speak out about alleged violations of their civil liberties by over-enthusiastic law enforcement agencies.⁵ This will require an open, targeted immigration policy that minimizes the impulse for illegal migration, while making a distinction between legal and illegal immigrants.

Another dilemma mentioned earlier is the need to balance the needs of developed countries against those of developing countries. The prosperity of both depends upon well-conceived immigration policies in the developed world. Policies should be conceived in such a way as to ensure that migration results in a net gain for all involved. Djajic, for example, suggests that immigration policies should give migrant workers an incentive to return to, as well as to consume and invest in, their countries of origin. He also proposes that this might be achieved by encouraging migrants to spend remittances on locally produced goods and services, the transfer of technology and skills through return migration, and investments by migrants in local business activities, to improve the development prospects in their home countries.

Conclusion

History has long included migratory movements that have benefited the advancement of humankind. The increased incentive for migration contributes to the capacity of states around the world to attain sustained economic growth and prosperity and, as such economic security. However, if not managed effectively, migration can negatively affect not only economic security but also human and societal security. The challenge is to encourage states to develop targeted immigration policies that minimize the incentives for illegal immigration, as well as tensions between host and immigrant populations, and to cooperate effectively with other states to reduce illicit immigration and human trafficking.

References

¹ James C. Ross, "Securitizing Migration after 11 March," *Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y Estratégicos*, March 2004, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/460/ARI-56-2004-I.pdf#search=Securitizing%20Migration%20after%2011%20March>.

² For the brief in its entirety, please see the policy brief series as a part of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy's Program on the Geopolitical Implications of Globalization and Transnational Security at <http://www.gcsp.ch/e/publications/Globalisation/index.htm>.

³ P. Hough, *Understanding Global Security* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 109.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Ross, *op. cit.*, note 1, p. 4.