Managing Migration in a Globalizing World: A Conference Report

Philip L. Martin

Abstract
The 6th Migration Conference held in Lisbon in June 2018 featured hundreds of presentations on various aspects of international migration, including why people move, their experiences crossing borders and settling abroad, and the efforts of national governments and international organizations to improve the management of migration. Many young researchers presented case studies of how particular groups were faring in host societies, including Portugal. The TMC 2018 line up of keynote speakers included leading academics including Joaquin Arango from Complutense University Madrid and European Union and Portuguese politicians such as Pedro Calado, The High Commissioner for Migration and Michelle Leighton, Chief of the Labour Migration Branch, International Labour Organization.

Keywords: The Migration Conference 2018; managing migration; globalisation; migrant workers.

JEL Classification: F22, F24

Introduction
The 6th Migration Conference (TMC 2018) held in Lisbon in June 2018 featured hundreds of presentations on various aspects of international migration, including why people move, their experiences crossing borders and settling abroad, and the efforts of national governments and international organizations to improve the management of migration (See Tilbe and Topaloglu, 2018). Many young researchers presented case studies of how particular groups were faring in host societies, including Portugal.

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Some 150 parallel sessions featured 600 presentations from over 70 countries. Although the main language was English, there were also sessions in Spanish and Portuguese that increased local and regional engagement in the universal quest to improve the management of migration.

This article discusses the major international migration trends, and summarizes some of the trends and challenges in managing migrant workers.

**International Migration**

The UN estimated there were 258 million international migrants in 2017, making 3.4 percent of the world’s people migrants, including 18 million or seven percent who were considered refugees. Most people cross international borders for economic reasons. The ILO estimated that two-thirds of international migrants were in the labor forces of the countries to which they moved.

There are four major migration corridors: south-south, south-north, north-north, and north-south. Most migrants are in industrial or northern countries, 57 percent, but the largest of the four corridors was south to south, involving the 97 million migrants who moved from one developing country to another. Some 57 million international migrants moved from north to north or from one industrial country to another, and six percent moved from north to south or from an industrial to a developing country.

**Table 1. Migrants by Major Migration Corridors, 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>Totals</th>
<th>Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>145.9</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>97.4</td>
<td>111.8</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>186.4</td>
<td>257.7</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UN DESA

The countries hosting the most migrants in 2017 were the US with 48 million, Germany with 13 million, Saudi Arabia and Russia, 12 million each, UK nine million, and UAE, Canada, and France, eight million each. These eight countries hosted almost 45 percent of all international migrants. The leading origin countries for migrants were India, 16 million, Mexico, 12 million, Russia, 11 million, China 10 million,
Bangladesh and Syria, eight million each, and Pakistan, Ukraine, and the Philippines, six million each. These nine countries accounted for a third of international migrants.

Many of the papers presented at the Migration Conference focused on why people leave and the remittances they send home. Many young people left Eastern European countries after they joined the EU May 1, 2004 and had the right to travel to and work in many of the so-called old EU-15 member states, especially Germany and the UK. Researchers studied the financial and social remittances sent home by migrants, and emphasized that women sometimes sent money to female relatives rather than their husbands in order to ensure that it was used for their children.

Over five percent of the 10.6 million residents are Portugal were legal migrants, led by those born in the former colonies of Brazil, Cape Verde, and Angola. There is relatively little anti-migrant sentiment in Portugal, in part because many of the migrants speak Portuguese and integrate quickly, although a 2007 law that ended special privileges for Portuguese speakers has given Portugal a more diverse immigrant population.

Portugal has had a so-called golden or investor visa that allows foreigners and their families that invest at least €350,000 in real estate or a qualified investment fund to become Portuguese citizens after six years by staying in the country seven days a year. The goal is to attract foreign investment, but the effect has been to attract Chinese investment in real estate in Lisbon and Porto, helping to push up prices. The program has led to some controversy for making housing more expensive and providing a path for Chinese investors to send their children to English-speaking schools in Portugal and later to British universities.

Many of the research presentations focused on migrant workers, people born in one country who work in another. The ILO estimated that 150 million international migrants were in the labor forces of the countries to which they moved in 2013, so that 73 percent of international migrants 15 and older were employed or seeking jobs, compared to 64 percent of non-migrants 15 and older (ILO, 2015). A third of migrant workers were in Europe, a quarter in North America, and most of the rest in Asia. Three fourths of migrant workers are in what the ILO considers to be high-income countries, while only two percent are in the lowest-income countries. The highest shares of migrants in host-country labor forces were in the Gulf oil-exporting countries, where 90 percent or more of private sector workers are migrants.
Most of these migrant workers are immigrants, including naturalized citizens, not guest workers. Migrants are not distributed the same as native-born workers (Figure 1). The ILO estimated that 11 percent of the world’s migrant workers in 2013 were employed in agriculture, 18 percent in industry, and 71 percent in services, including almost eight percent or 12 million in domestic work (ILO, 2015).

**Figure 1.** Employed Workers by Sector, 2013 and 2017

Since 60 percent of the world’s migrants are in high-income countries, this means that migrants are more over-represented in agriculture in high-income countries than in industry and services. Particular sub-sectors of host-country labor markets have the highest shares of migrant workers, including seasonal fruit and vegetable agriculture, meatpacking and residential construction, and domestic work, personal care, and janitorial and food preparation.

**Protecting Migrant Workers**

ILO conventions and the national laws of many countries call for migrants to be treated equally in the workplace, which means that migrant workers should receive the same wages and benefits as local workers. Equal treatment is the “right thing to do” as well as the best way to protect local workers from “unfair” competition from migrants, who may be willing to work for lower wages than local workers. Truly equal treatment is hard to achieve, in part because migrant workers
are normally tied by contracts to one employer, while local workers can change employers. Migrants who lose their jobs may be required to leave the country.

The UN General Assembly in September 2016 proposed a Global Compact for “safe, orderly, and regular” Migration (GCM) to encourage world leaders to adopt “common principles” and “action items” to strengthen the global governance of migration and to promote the “positive contributions” of migrants (http://refugees.migrants.un.org/). The agreement is expected to be signed by most of the 193 UN member states in Morocco in December 2018. The US withdrew from the GCM process in December 2017, and Hungary withdrew in July 2018.

GCM Recommendation five deals with labor migration. It calls on governments to “enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration” that reflect “demographic and global labor market realities” by developing model labor mobility agreements by sector, different guest worker programs for agriculture than hotels, and to admit migrant workers at all skill levels. Governments are asked to develop labor mobility schemes for “temporary, seasonal, circular, and fast-track migrants in areas of labor shortages,” and to allow migrant workers to bring or unify their families abroad, that is, the GCM calls for the abolishment of income and language, type of visa, and length of stay tests for family accompaniment.

Recommendation six calls for fair and ethical recruitment, including prohibiting recruiters from charging any fees to migrant workers and having expansive joint liability to make all of the beneficiaries of the work performed migrants jointly accountable for any labor law violations committed by contractors and subcontractors throughout the supply chain. Recommendation 6(h) calls on governments to issue portable visas that allow migrants to change employers and to change the duration of their stay abroad “with minimal administrative processes.”

GCM recommendations five and six would turn migrant worker into immigration programs and are not likely to be adopted by most countries that allow their employers to recruit migrants. If adopted, migrant workers could arrive with their families, family members could get work authorization and services such as education and health care for children, and migrants could decide to change employers and extend their stays. Matching workers with jobs has costs, and recommending that employers pay all recruitment costs, but allowing migrant workers to change employers, seems unlikely to be implemented (Martin, 2017). The GCM may be a missed opportunity,
an example of the quest for perfection preventing the world from taking incremental steps to improve migrant protections.

Bibliography