International Migration

Evolving Trends from the Early Twentieth Century to the Present

States have long been wary of putting international migration on the global agenda. As an issue that defines sovereignty – that is, who enters and remains on a state's territory – international migration has called for protection of national prerogatives and unilateral actions. However, since the end of World War I, governments have sought ways to address various aspects of international migration in a collaborative manner. This book examines how these efforts to increase international cooperation have evolved from the early twentieth century to the present. The scope encompasses all of the components of international migration: labor migration, family reunification, refugees, human trafficking, and smuggling, as well as newly emerging forms of displacement (including movements likely to result from global climate change). The final chapter assesses the progress (and lack thereof) in developing an international migration regime and makes recommendations toward strengthening international cooperation in this area.

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Foreword

Peter D. Sutherland

UN Secretary General's Special Representative on International Migration and Development

On October 3, 2013, the UN General Assembly convened to discuss international migration for only the second time in its history. As Secretary General Ban Ki-moon opened the meeting that morning, four thousand miles away, in the Mediterranean Sea, rescue crews were recovering the bodies of hundreds of migrants who had drowned the previous night in their desperate attempt to reach Europe. Human smugglers had packed them like lemmings into a rickety boat; more than 350 died. A few days later, another boat capsized; still more children, women, and men perished.

The juxtaposition between the formal setting of the General Assembly and the macabre one on the southern shores of Europe begged an obvious question: What precisely can we do to make it safer for migrants to cross international borders? How can we ensure that their determined, courageous, and often desperate pursuit of a better life pays dividends for them, for their families, and for receiving communities – rather than for those who exploit them?

The twenty-first-century scale and complexity of international migration far exceeds our current capacity to govern it well. To redress that imbalance we must first understand the recent history of human mobility. And there is no better place to start than with Susan Martin's masterful overview of how the international community has addressed the challenges of refugees and international migrants over the past century.

Today, migrants are coming from, and going to, more places than ever before. In less than a decade, membership in the International Organization for Migration has soared from 90 states to 154. The old paradigm of people moving from poor countries to a handful of richer ones – the United States, the countries of Europe, Canada, and Australia – has been shattered. Almost half of international migrants now head to developing countries. As a result, dozens of states with little prior experience of contending with migration are being forced to wrestle with it.

The political calculus of governing migration is maddeningly complex. It is where sovereignty, human rights, powerful economic interests, national identity, and the individual will for a better life all intersect. Since 9/11, security concerns have scrambled the calculus even further. Perhaps no other governance issue poses such challenges. National politicians tend to shrink from it, given how migration can damage poll numbers and careers. This neuralgia makes it even harder for policy makers to address migration in the context of international cooperation.

Yet cooperate we must. Our ability to contend with migration not only affects hundreds of millions of lives; it also stands as a test of whether we can effectively manage a globalized world, of which migrants are the human face. Our approach to migration will speak volumes about our ability to address a range of fundamental challenges: Do we know how to build truly diverse, well-functioning societies? Can we slay the monsters of discrimination and xenophobia? How do we address extreme inequality?

Above all, as it has been throughout history, migration remains the most effective strategy for people to lead safer, more fulfilling lives. John Kenneth Galbraith put this best. "Migration is the oldest action against poverty," he wrote. "It selects those who most want help. It is good for the country to which they go; it helps break the equilibrium of poverty in the country from which they come." This remains as true as ever – perhaps even more so in our era of extraordinary inequality.

Fortunately, we have seen important progress over the past decade. In 2006, Kofi Annan and I advocated for the creation of a Global Forum on Migration and Development. The Forum's design – it is linked to the UN but led by member states – allowed states to maintain their sovereignty while also fostering cooperation. In the seven years of its existence, the Forum has prompted not only a common understanding of migration among states and stakeholders but also a convergence in what they see as priorities for action.

In the outcome document of the October 2013 UN High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development, member states unanimously acknowledged "that the Global Forum on Migration and Development has proved to be a valuable forum for holding frank and open discussions, and that it has helped to build trust among participating stakeholders through the exchange of experiences and good practices, and by virtue of its voluntary, informal State-led character." Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, noting the changed mood since 2006, underscored "this progress has been made possible by the climate of trust that we established in the Global Forum on Migration and Development."

Now we must move to action. In doing so, we would do well to focus on challenges where the interests of states clearly converge.

Broadly speaking, the first such area is where the rights of migrants are violated by bad actors – smugglers, traffickers, rapacious recruiters, unscrupulous employers. "Too often, migrants live in fear – of being victimized as the so-called 'other'; of having little recourse to justice; or of having their wages

or passports withheld by an unscrupulous employer," Ban Ki-moon said at the 2013 High-Level Dialogue.

There are myriad ways in which we can protect migrant rights and reduce or eliminate discrimination against them in the workplace and in the neighborhoods in which they live. We already have made significant progress on several migration-related fronts – for example, in prosecuting human traffickers. Also, I have urged states to define how we can better protect migrants affected by humanitarian crises such as civil conflicts and natural and manmade disasters. The United States and the Philippines, working with international agencies and experts, have offered to lead an initiative to address this challenge. This kind of "mini-multilateralism" – whereby small groups of interested stakeholders work together closely and efficiently to develop innovative ideas that are then debated in more formal settings – can help propel cooperation and strengthen the international system from the bottom up.

The second realm for immediate action is in drawing out the development benefits from migration. In the autumn of 2013, the World Bank released its latest figures on remittances from migrants to developing countries. These are expected to total $414 billion in 2013 (up 6.3 percent over 2012), and $540 billion by 2016. Yet, about 9 percent of these funds get lost to wire transfer fees. If we could get this down to 5 percent, we would liberate an extra $20 billion annually for some of the world's neediest families and communities. (By way of comparison, in 2012, all overseas development assistance combined totaled just $133.5 billion.) Many billions more could be saved by reforms to how migrants are recruited.

Susan F. Martin is not content just with demystifying the history of how the international community has contended with refugees and international migrants over the past century. She also offers many smart ideas for how the international community might organize itself to address the twenty-first-century challenges and opportunities of migration. We have a long way to go to turn rhetoric into action and safer, better lives for migrants and our societies. Reading this book is an important first step in making that journey.

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Acronyms

American Relief Administration (ARA)
General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)
Global Commission for International Migration (GCIM)
Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)
High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development (HLD)
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
International Committee on Refugees (ICR)
International Conference on Refugees in Africa (ICARA)
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)
International Labour Organization (ILO)
International Migrants Bill of Rights (IMBR)
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
International Refugee Organisation (IRO)
League of Nations
Nansen Refugee Office
Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations (OFRRO)
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)
Organisation of African Unity/African Union (OAU)
Poverty Reduction and Economic Management, World Bank (PREM)
Provisional Intergovernmental Committee for the Movement of Migrants from Europe (PICMME)
Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN)
UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
UN Development Programme (UNDP)
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
UN Korean Rehabilitation Administration (UNKRA)
UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR)
UN Population Fund (UNFPA)
UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP)
UNAIDS
UNICEF
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN GIFT)
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA)
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)
United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
United Nations Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)