**The Interface between Internal and International Migration**

**[Chapter 7]**

**Introduction**

Scholarship on migration has traditionally been fragmented between the study of internal and international migration, with the focus swinging back and forth like a pendulum (Skeldon 2006). In recent decades the field has been dominated by attention to international migration.

Yet there are a number of reasons why it is imperative to engage more robustly with internal migration. *First, numerically*: those moving internally within a country far outnumber international migrants. By 2017, there were nearly 260 million international migrants globally – according to the UN definition of having lived abroad for a year or longer – representing 3.5 per cent of the world’s population (World Bank 2018). By contrast, even by 2009 there were already four times as many internal migrants: some 740 million people moved within their own respective countries, a share of 12 per cent of the global population in that year (UNDP 2009, 21). This number will have undoubtedly increased since. Within China alone internal migrant numbers stood at nearly 274 million by 2014.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Second, *internal migration’s link to development* as this migration type is one of the most important opportunities for large numbers of poorer people in the developing countries of the Global South to improve their well-being. This is a dual factor of both the numerical spread of such migration, as well as by being more accessible to the poor than international movements (Deshingkar and Grimm 2005). Moreover, development impacts of internal migration go beyond individual families. Lampert’s (2014) study of Nigerian Home Town Associations (HTAs) revealed that in fact it was the internal diaspora which was more effective and therefore, played a more important role in local development, than those based abroad.

Finally, *internal migration will often intertwine with* international migration in complex ways, both forming part of livelihood strategies for millions of the poor in the Global South. *Thus, internal and international migration* may act as alternatives to each other, but often co-exist – contemporaneously or sequentially – within the same family, neighbourhood, local community and country. As such, focusing on either of the two migration types singularly is likely to provide only a partial understanding of migrants’ lived realities (for an empirical justification of this view, see Aguayo-Téllez and Martínez-Navarro 2013). Hence the argument of this chapter is that our approach should be one that considers both migration types as linked conceptually as they are empirically (see Pryor’s 1980 seminal work, and more recently, Skeldon 2006; King and Skeldon 2010; Vullnetari 2012; Xiao 2009; Hickey and Yeoh 2016). The need for such an approach is arguably more pressing than ever in light of increasing complexity and speed of global interconnections, accompanied by an equal complexity of barriers to mobility for the poor, and continued and anticipated large-scale displacements due to conflicts and environmental stressors. In making the case for such an integrated approach, the literature reviewed in this chapter both reflects these dynamic complexities, and presents examples of how such research could be conceptualised and operationalised.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. I first outline key *similarities* between internal and international migration, grouped under: (i) drivers, and (ii) networks. This is followed by a discussion of key *differences* where my focus is on: (i) the structural impacts of immigration regimes, and (ii) migrant selectivity. Next, I outline some *configurations of how the two migration types intertwine.* The final section concludes.

Throughout this review I use examples from the empirical material collected as part of my doctoral research, which examined the links between internal and international migration from a development perspective in Albania. Fieldwork for this research took place between 2005 and 2006 and was published in Vullnetari (2012). Nevertheless, I also draw on other studies and examples from around the world.

**Similarities**

*Drivers*

Key scholars of migration and development have long argued that internal and international migration share *common drivers*. Adepoju (1998, 389) has long argued that in the African continent, both internal and international migration derive ‘from the same set of fundamental causes’. Similarly in Mexico, Cohen and Rios (2016) confirm that common drivers and motivations for migration were at the centre of decision making for both internal and international migrants in their study. Nevertheless, whilst these structural drivers may be similar for both migration strands, they do not impact everyone in the same way. Moreover, individual characteristics and other cognitive factors such as desire, aspiration, and not least ability to migrate, can differ.

*Networks*

De Haas (2010) argues that migrant networks play a key role in supporting and perpetuating migration. This function is commonly found in studies of both internal and international migration, as examples from Mexico demonstrate (see e.g. Lindstrom and Lauster 2001). In their study of migration in the Philippines, De Jong et al. (1983, 481) also found that kinship and friendship networks were the most salient factor in both internal and international migration streams. Not only have networks been important for both types of migrants separately, but they may be linked, as some internal networks may extend abroad; similarly, networks of international migrants may extend internally upon return. Moreover, these networks are important beyond their simple function of facilitating migration – they serve as key channels through which financial and social remittances are transferred, thus directly linked to how migration and development may interact.

**Differences**

*Immigration regimes and borders*

Arguably the most important difference between internal and international migration is whether a migrant’s entry and stay are regulated and controlled through visas and permits. Zolberg (1989, 405) has argued that international migration is a ‘distinctive social process’ because of the control that states exercise over their own borders. As global interconnections have increased, including through cultural and technological diffusion, whilst options for the poor to migrate from less-developed countries to the richer Global North have narrowed down, it seems migrants are undertaking increasingly dangerous journeys to escape conditions of underdevelopment or simply improve life chances for themselves and their families. International migration, closely intertwined with these political country borders, thus becomes a very distinct movement from internal migration, especially in the resulting consequences for migrants and their families. These include financial, psychological, emotional and physical costs, especially when migrants pay the ultimate price by losing their life on dangerous journeys crossing these borders (see for an example Kovras and Robins 2016). Indeed, as Squire argues (2016) for the US and Europe (EU), migrant deaths and border violence have become key features of contemporary international migratory politics. If recent political developments are anything to go by, such immigration and border controls will likely increase and become more punitive for the poor, in turn raising the cost of international migration. For example, Cohen and Rios (2015) show how the tightening in recent years of border controls and punishments for Mexicans migrating to the US increased both the risks and the cost of such migration, resulting in some migrants giving up this endeavour altogether. Many re-routed their journeys to destinations within Mexico instead.

Beyond the crossing of international borders, the legal right of stay and work form the basis on which citizenship rights (e.g. voting, social housing, education, healthcare) are subsequently accessed in the destination country. For irregular migrants, psychological costs can continue beyond the trauma experienced during the migration journey, as they try to evade arrest once they have arrived in the host country. Random, unannounced dawn raids by immigration enforcement agents at these migrants’ residences or workplaces in countries such as the UK can often result in lasting mental health issues (Griffiths 2014).

Although internal migrants do not face violence and death whilst crossing administrative borders within a country as international migrants often do, the violence accompanying slum clearances and forced evictions within big cities such as Dhaka, Bangalore, Colombo, or Phnom Penh has been well documented (see Springer 2016 for Phnom Penh; Collyer at al. 2017 for Colombo). Internal rural-urban migrants, who make up a significant share of slums and other informal population settlements in cities of the developing world, are confronted with hostility from their own governments and local authorities of urban areas, who see them as a ‘problem’ that result in congested and unsustainable cities (Tacoli et al. 2014). For instance, a UN (2013, 107) survey of 185 countries in 2013 found that 80 percent of Governments had policies in place that aimed to reduce rural-urban migration. This share was highest (88 percent) for least developed countries.

Arguably the most prominent (and researched) policy on limiting rural-urban migration is the *hukou* system in China, the closest we have today to an international visa regime of migration. Introduced in China in 1958, the *hukou* is a household registration system that assigns households an ‘agricultural’ or ‘non-agricultural’ status in rural and urban areas respectively. It plays thus a crucial role in distributing key social welfare services and benefits such as free healthcare, education, social housing and old-age pensions. These benefits favour urban *hukou* holders, but rural-urban migrants are unable to access them as the *hukou* status is inherited by birth and an agricultural *hukou* is not readily transferable upon migration to urban areas, at least not for the poor. Despite the key role that these rural-urban migrants have played in China’s spectacular economic growth since the late 1990s, the system continues to present serious challenges for them. The label ‘floating population’ describing these migrants reflects this sense of perpetual temporariness, resulting from the insecure migration status and the consequent limited access to social welfare (Chan 2012; Zhang 2014).[[2]](#endnote-2)

In other countries, more informal ways of exclusion from accessing citizenship rights are widespread, as Abbas (2015) notes in her study of internal migrants in Mumbai and Kolkata. Abbas (2015) argues that for countries such as India, many internal migrations resemble international movements because migrants are moving between regions that are ethnically and linguistically very different from each other, albeit within the same political state boundaries. Thus, many newcomers form ethnolinguistic minorities upon arrival, leading to marginalisation and exclusion from full citizenship rights. The study underscores how in many less developed countries citizenship regimes are shaped more deeply by internal than international migration.

*Migrant selectivity*

Internal and international migration are produced differently through segmented access but also migrant selectivity. Internal migration is more accessible to the poor, whilst international migration is often the realm of the better-off sections of society. Financial ability does not act alone in shaping selectivity, but intersects with identity markers such as gender, age and formal education, to produce differentiated impacts not only on places and communities, but more importantly, on migrants themselves (see also Bastia 2011). For instance, in my research in Albania, the highly skilled migrated internally to the country’s capital Tirana. Their skills would have been wasted in Greece – the key international destination for Albanians throughout the 1990s – where almost all Albanian migrants worked in manual jobs such as agriculture, construction, or domestic and care services. Those who moved to Tirana were able to find professional jobs in banking, teaching or medicine, or started their own small businesses. Aguayo-Téllez, E. and Martínez-Navarro, J. (2013) found similar patterns in Mexico. In their analysis of micro data from Mexico and the 2000 US population census, considering both migration types in a single model, they found strong migrant selectivity (data between 1995 and 2000). Education combined with age were noted in particular, whereby those moving internally within Mexico were often younger and better educated than international migrants to the US; migrants to the US were often older males, whereas women participated more as internal movers within Mexico. In both cases, the combination of human and social capital can provide the environment for educated and well-connected individuals to gain more from migrating internally, especially to cities. In contrast, unless using specific skilled migration schemes, such as those attracting skilled migrants in the US, Canada or Australia, most labour migrants encounter difficulties finding jobs commensurate with their level of education abroad, both due to limited transferability of most degrees and limited linguistic ability. Nevertheless, internal migration to cities may be followed by a move internationally at a later time, as the internal destination opens up opportunities for accumulation of financial, social and cultural capital.

Continuing with the Albanian case and migrant selectivity there, particularly prominent in internal movements were young, single women who were attracted to the capital for the opportunities it provided to both pursue tertiary education, and escape social control from the oppressive conservatism of their rural and small urban communities of origin. Thus, as Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) argues in the case of Mexican migrant women to the US, migration in this context offers more gains for women than men precisely for these reasons. Within the Albanian patriarchal society context, migration abroad of single young women for work, and outside the family unit, was viewed as morally suspect. On the other hand, education was and continues to be highly regarded for its potential for upward social mobility. Thus, beyond its intrinsic value, education for these women was also a means to ‘legitimately’ engage in – affordable – migration, as well as a door to opportunities for future onward migration abroad (see also Boehm 2012 for similar findings on Mexican migration to the US). Moreover, international migration can be framed by society as highly dangerous and unsuitable for women. Cohen and Rios (2016) writing about historical and contemporary Mexican internal migration, found that Mexican-US border crossings were constructed in deeply gendered terms by rural Oaxacans, as posing higher risks for women than for men. Women migrated mostly internally, motivated by a combination of pursuing post-secondary education and escape from social control including domestic violence (see also Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Linking this to financial ability, those who emigrated to study were not the poorest but came from households that had a certain level of financial affluence. In another study of Oaxacan communities, Sandoval-Cervantes (2017) showed how it is not unusual that the *same household* will have migrant sons in the USA and migrant daughters in Mexico City.

The gendering that shapes selectivity of internal and international migration is not influenced simply by the patriarchal structures in (rural) areas of origin, but also by similarly patriarchal capitalist restructuring of global labour markets. For instance, in many countries of the Global South, the penetration of predatory global capital in search of cheaper labour to enable extraction of higher profit margins has shaped national economies and participation in the global markets along sharply gendered and racial lines (Silvey 2006). Garment manufacturing is a typical example of this, where the vast majority of the labour force is made up of women, who have often migrated from rural areas. Capitals such as Dhaka and Phnom Penh, key manufacturing sites for high street chains and other shops in the Global North, thus become spaces where young single migrant women negotiate a precarious existence with new-found freedom, empowerment, but also new constraints (see e.g. Parsons and Lawreniuk 2016; Zhang 2014).

**Intertwining internal and international migration**

As the previous section has shown, whilst some differences between the two migration types are very sharp, most others blur and overlap, pointing particularly to some of the ways in which the two intertwine and connect. Parrenas’ work (2000) on Filipina domestic migrant workers and the literature on ‘Global Care Chains’ that followed have been exemplary for engaging with both internal and international migration. In this body of work, women’s lives across the globe are linked together in a series of connecting ‘chains’, as reproductive and emotional labour are transferred amongst internal, international and non-migrant women from rural areas of origin, to urban areas internally within a developing country, to a (often) city abroad (Hoschchild 2001). Unpacking this intertwining in other contexts reveals a range of configurations at the individual, local and national level separately and combined. Together, they produce differentiated trajectories and outcomes for women (and children, and men) involved in these care chains, that reflect deeply unequal power geometries across gender, ethnic, racial, wealth and geographical lines (see also Huang 2016 for an example in the Chinese context).

*At the individual level, the same migrant may undertake both migrations, obviously at different times*. King and Skeldon (2010, 1622) produce a typology of sequencing composed of a range of migration pathways (10 in total). These include variations of a step-wise migration from the village to the nearest city to the capital and then abroad, where again movement internally within this destination country may follow, but alternatives include onward migration to a third country, or indeed return to the country of origin. This step-wise migration features particularly in the literature on Mexican migration internally and across the border to the USA (see the review in Lozano-Ascencio et al. 1999; also del Ray Poveda 2007; and for similar patterns of migrations in Indonesia, Lyon and Ford 2007). However, Skeldon (2006) has argued that step migration is only a temporary phase, most likely in the initial stages of migration from one particular origin. Once direct linkages between origin and destination (whether internally or abroad) have been established, direct migration can take place without the intermediate ‘step’. The combination of many origins with different phases of development of migration patterns give an impression that step-wise migration is more important than in reality (Skeldon 2006). Nevertheless, there are also direct linkages between origin and destination that develop without any initial intermediate ‘step’. This is usually outmigration from border communities to the neighbouring country (again migration from Albania to Greece and Mexico to the US, are prime examples of this). Other examples include migration through schemes such as the US visa ‘lottery’, Canada’s skilled workers’ programme or through marriage. When return takes place, this may be to the same village of origin or to another place in the country, often a city such as the capital. It is these return migrants from abroad that have contributed in large part to the rural-urban migration within developing countries such as Albania and Morocco (see, e.g. King et al. 2003; de Haas 2006). Savings of international migrants are used upon return to fund the construction of new and modern homes in these urban areas, in turn attracting migrant labour from other parts of the country who find employment in the construction sector, domestic and care work.

*At the family level, internal and international migration can be undertaken by different members of the same family, at the same time (or indeed different times).* This configuration was prominent amongst many migrants I interviewed in my research. For instance, often the household livelihood strategy included aspiration for higher education for young family members, usually women. International migration provided the financial capital to achieve this, whilst internal relocation gave access to the site where universities were located. Usually, this was in the country’s capital Tirana, where education facilities were numerous and of a higher quality than elsewhere in the country. The intertwining of the two migration types is reflected here in how different members of the *same family* took different migration pathways to contribute to this goal.[[3]](#endnote-3) The internal migrant benefiting from the education was often a young female member of the family, whereas the remittances to enable such a move were sent by a male member of the family, usually a young brother, or sometimes the father, who had migrated clandestinely to neighbouring Greece or Italy. Direct international non-family migration for young single women through regular channels was not accessible due to the difficulty of obtaining entry visas, or affordable due to the high cost. As mentioned earlier, international clandestine journeys – usually the only ways for most Albanians to emigrate abroad at the time – were fraught with dangers and enormous risks, thus considered as unsuitable for women.[[4]](#endnote-4) Under this configuration, in both Albania and other countries, the ‘residual’ parts of the international migrant’s family may fully relocate internally once some remittances have been sent from abroad to enable this move. Similarly, in their study of internal and international migration in Nepal, Bohras and Massey (2009) found that international remittances financed both the cost of internal (rural-urban) migration of the recipient family, and the education of young family members in the urban area on arrival.

*At the meso level, both migration types can, and often do, co-exist within a local community such as a neighbourhood, village or city*. The implications for such combinations can be negative for some areas, for instance large-scale depopulation, which in turn affects the sustainability of social services and overall community life. Many remote and mountainous areas in Albania for instance, have suffered this fate, leaving behind those who either cannot (the very poor) or do not wish to (usually older people) move to fend for themselves in dire circumstances. Yet in other regions, precisely this combination ensures that village life thrives as internal migrants continue to travel back regularly to the village of origin where they maintain crops and other produce, whilst international migrants pump remittances into the local economy. These are often rural areas near main axes of transport and communication (such as my study villages in Albania located near the key motorway that links Albania to Greece), or near large cities. In other cases, the strategic favourable geographic position near a capital city acts as a magnet for internal rural migrants who cannot afford to settle in the city, who in turn have migrant family members abroad. In Albania again, in the late 1980s Kamza, a small town at the edge of the capital Tirana, had merely 6000 (registered) residents. The 2011 census revealed that its population had shot to over 100,000 over those two decades, attracting internal migrants, due primarily to its proximity to the capital (in combination with other factors such as availability of state-owned land that could be ‘claimed’ by in-coming poor rural migrants; see Vullnetari 2012).

Finally, *at a national level, the combination of internal and international migration* can have regional repercussions through ‘replacement migration’, and more general implications for planning, urban and rural development (c.f. Skeldon 2006). For instance, in Albania migrants from the poorer northern regions, or remote mountainous villages, have migrated internally not only to the coastal areas of the country which has attracted the vast majority of those moving within the country, but also to the south where the villages have been emptied by emigration to Greece (see also King et al. 2003). There, they support the local economy and those older people who still remain in the villages, whilst over time become permanent members of these communities.

**Conclusions**

At a time of heightened global connections, fragmented migratory journeys, increasing complexity of immigration bureaucracies to be navigated, as well as rising anti-immigrant sentiments in the Global North, migrant livelihood strategies and migrant trajectories that are composed of both internal and international migration are likely to increase. In tandem with this, increasing rural-urban migration and a rising urban population as the countries of the Global South develop economically, present new challenges for sustainable development (Tacoli et al. 2014). Understanding the ways in which such migratory trajectories and journeys entwine and interact with development processes thus becomes crucial in being able to address these challenges. It is indeed the case that there are key differences between internal and international migration, especially in crossing an international border and in migrant selectivity. However, this is only part of the story. Both migration types share common features such as drivers and networks, and interact in complex and dynamic ways. This chapter has sought to unpack this complexity at various spatial scales and over time, in so doing highlighting the need for an integrated approach to migration, from both the academe and policymaking. While more remains to be done, the discussion here is a small – but important – step in this direction.

**Acknowledgment**

I would like to thank the book editors for their very valuable and constructive comments and feedback, which have enriched the chapter. Any errors or omissions are my own.

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**Notes**

1. Figure quoted by Dr Nana Zhang, Lecturer in Sociology at Southampton University, at the lecture ‘Rural-urban migration in China’ for the ‘Migration and Development’ module, Geography and Environment, University of Southampton, February 2017. Source: NBSC (2015) <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201504/t20150429_797821.html> . It must be noted, however, that the figures on both internal and international migration are likely to be underestimates of the total population engaging in these respective migrations. For instance, the UNDP (2009) used large units to define internal migration for their 2009 Human Development report – provinces in China and states in India. Similarly, the 12-month criterion that the UN uses to define international migration overlooks the more voluminous, but shorter term seasonal movements that take place throughout the world (with thanks to Prof. Skeldon for his feedback on this.) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Whilst such examples are rare in our contemporary post-socialist/post-Cold War world, historical examples in other former communist states (Albania being an extreme such case), or the pass system in Apartheid South Africa can be instructive, not least of the importance of temporality in understanding migration processes. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. To be clear, this was often not the *sole purpose* of migration*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Internal student migration increased rapidly in post-communist countries such as Albania, as the secondary and tertiary education infrastructure expanded exponentially through the emergence of a significant private sector. But internal student migration has been noted in other context as well (e.g. de Haas 2006 in Morocco). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)