Research priorities in international migration and mobilities: Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and its legacies: Synthesis

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Take-home messages

- International migration has:
  - become one of the main policy challenges of our time,
  - attracted the attention of demographers and other experts in related disciplines,
  - needs to be reconceptualized and measured innovatively, and
  - has significant implications for research, training and policy during and post COVID-19.
Why is demographic research on international migration needed?

- International migrations have increased substantially in scale, complexity and diversity in recent decades (272 m, 3.4% of the world population).

- It presents major multinational, national, subnational and community challenges.

- The growing volume of human mobility is a key driver to the disease outbreaks due to COVID-19.

- The pandemic has caused challenges for international mobilities and created opportunities for data collection, measurement, and policy interventions.

- Traditional approaches to management of international migration have become less appropriate, and thus, there is a need for rethinking and innovation on the definition and measurement of international mobilities.
A Continuum of Migration

Voluntary Movement

Forced Movement
Research questions on int’l migration

- Who is voluntarily or forcibly moved? How and why?
- What are the sources of information for migrants?
- The decision making process for migration (networks vs family members)?
- Reasons for choosing and the planned pathways to the destinations
- Social and demographic characteristics as well as adaptation patterns of migrants
- Role of diaspora in the development of home countries
- The implications of the pandemic on int’l mobilities
- Policies for support of migrants at the origin or destination places
Re-conceptualisation

- New forms of mobilities
- Im/mobilities post COVID-19
- The need for a new and comprehensive framework for the explanation of international mobilities
Methodological challenges with international migration data

- **What event?**
  - Different actors categorize events differently.

- **What numbers?**
  - Sometimes we might get multiple sources; which one is the most accurate?

- **Which numbers to take, and when?**
  - Migration numbers change over time. When is the best time to take the number that accurately reflects instances of movements?

- **Lack of disaggregated data** (age, sex, location, and duration of movements to monitor regular intervals over time)
Data for measuring population movements

Traditional

- Census data
- Cross-border and traffic surveys
- Household travel history surveys

Novel

- Smartphone/app location history
- Satellite nightlights
- Anonymized mobile phone call detail records
- Air and shipping statistics
- Personal GPS

Tatem, *Int Health*, 2014; Ruktanonchai et al, *IJHG*, 2018
The need for dynamic and innovative measures of migration (Ayman Zohry)

- Measures of mixed migration
- Measures of circular migration
- Measures of seasonal migration
- Measures of irregular migration
- Measures of crises-related migration
Impacts of COVID-19 on the situation of undocumented migrants and refugees

- Lack of documentation hinders their access to services (i.e. online services, banking, education, health, etc)
- Economic situation and the rise of unemployment and job losses affects both low and middle-class natives and migrants, and has significant implications for their wellbeing.
- National priorities vs migrants (particularly undocumented ones) in every host country
- The economic situation post COVID-19 pandemic may be worse with low prospect of recovery
- Thus, studies on the situation of disadvantaged migrants in the destination places is important
Research priorities during and post COVID-19 (Marie McAuliffe)

- Mobility restriction impacts
  - Beyond acute health crisis, new mobility regimes? Intensifying inequality?
- Protections/vulnerabilities
  - Trafficking, displaced persons, social protection, etc
- International remittances
  - Improving analysis of remittance data, behavioral aspects of crisis and tech
What can Demography add to the understanding of international migration?

• Development of better systems of data collection and the integration of new forms of geography and demographic data (i.e. mobile phones, GPS, apps etc) [i.e WorldPop]

• Measuring and modelling the scales and new patterns of international mobilities

• Analysis of characteristics – gender, age, education, socio-economic status, language, ethnicity

• Developing a more nuanced understanding of the drivers of international migration

• Understanding the impacts of migration on both origin and destinations
The way forward

- The need for reconceptualization of international migration and human mobility post COVID-19

- The need for dynamic data and innovative techniques for measuring and modeling international im/mobility

- Need for multidisciplinary approach and comprehensive theories

- The need for offering demographic courses including new migration theories and methodologies for training of junior demographers
Thank you

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