POLICY PRIMER

Mixed Migration:
Policy Challenges

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This policy primer explores the policy challenges of mixed migration – the need for policy to take account of the mixed motivations of migrants and the mixed migratory streams they find themselves in.

The issue: the growing salience of mixed migration

Over the last twenty years, there has been increasing recognition that much mobility has mixed motivations and that many migration streams include both people who move to escape conflict or distress and those that are seeking betterment. People may move to escape life or death circumstances; they may move to escape intolerable living conditions; they may move to better themselves; or they move for a combination of these and other reasons. Migration can be mixed in several senses, which to some degree relate to stages of the migratory process: motivations may be mixed at the point of making the decision to move; migrants may make use of the same agents and brokers; they may travel with others in mixed migratory flows; motivations may change en route and after arrival; and people may find themselves in mixed communities during their journeys or at their destination.

Increasing recognition of these complex migration dynamics and the challenges they pose for migration policy has led to the growing purchase in policy circles of the notion of 'mixed migration'. Managing such diverse migratory populations present obvious policy challenges. Who should be admitted and on what grounds? What rights and entitlements should different types of migrants have once admitted? These are among the questions that 'mixed migration' poses to the UK and many other governments of countries that receive migrants. The key challenge lies in the tension between the character of migration policy and the nature of migratory movements. Policy regimes tend to classify migrants by discrete categories based on a single motivation for migration – labour, highly skilled, refugee, family, student etc – and organise entry and entitlements accordingly. But, as already suggested, in reality migration may be driven by a combination of these kinds of motivation – the search for livelihood, for safety, to rejoin family members, for study and so on – which need a correspondingly variegated policy approach to address them.

Mixed migration as an analytical concept: understanding the continuum between 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration

Current migration features a bewildering variety of forms and types of movement. The term 'migrant' can encompass highly diverse types of people on the move, both within and between countries: among them are permanent emigrants and settlers; temporary contract workers; labour, professional, business and trader migrants; students; refugees and asylum-seekers; people who move from rural settings to cities, or from smaller towns to larger ones; and people who seek safety from conflict within their own countries. Moreover, people often shift between these categories: they may enter a country as students, tourists or visitors, for example, but then overstay, work, ask for asylum, or seek permanent settlement, and eventually become naturalised as citizens. Likewise, internal migrants driven by conflict or in search of opportunity may in time cross state borders and become international migrants. How is this great diversity of migratory trajectories to be made sense of? And how should policy address this unwieldy mix?

In the analysis of migration a basic distinction is often made between those who chose to move and those who are compelled to – that is, between 'voluntary' and 'forced' migrants. This distinction is maintained in the policy world, where the governance of international migration is shaped by the conceptual distinction between 'voluntary' and 'forced' migration as mutually exclusive categories: this is reflected not least in the different institutional architecture for refugees and other kinds of migrant. In reality of course the distinction is far from clear-cut. For those who are classed as 'voluntary', especially towards the lower levels of the socio-economic scale – such as labour migrants from lower income backgrounds -- there may be only limited choices available. Conversely, those classed as refugees or asylum seekers – that is 'forced migrants' – may look to expand their life opportunities, especially

once they have reached a place of relative safety; in a way they may transmute from refugees to economic or betterment migrants. Often poverty, inequality and conflict co-exist: those who flee a country where conflict, persecution, discrimination and human rights abuse are rife, for example, may also be trying to escape dire economic circumstances -- which may themselves feed into such conflict, persecution, discrimination and human rights abuse.

Researchers and analysts pointed increasingly to this continuum between 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration from the 1990s (Richmond 1994, Van Hear 1998). This perspective was increasingly taken up in the policy arena, where it found expression as concern with 'mixed migration' and the somewhat grander term the 'Migration-Asylum Nexus', particularly after around 2000.

The emergence of mixed migration as a policy concept among multilateral organisations

It was in the refugee field that the policy impact of mixed migration was first felt most strongly, and its implications were pursued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). While they had some currency beforehand, the terms 'mixed migration' and the 'migration–asylum nexus' took hold during the Global Consultations on International Protection, launched by UNHCR in 2000 against the background of what the organisation saw as a crisis in international protection of refugees at the time of the 50th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention. A major part of that crisis was the increasing perception by the governments and publics of western countries – not least in the UK -- that large scale abuses of the asylum system were taking place: the view was that asylum seekers were really economic migrants in disguise. The exploration of the 'nexus between migration and asylum' (UNHCR 2001a: 1) was in part undertaken to address such anxieties, and spawned a number of position papers drafted jointly by UNHCR, ILO, IOM and other agencies (UNHCR 2001a and b). The notion found its way into the outcome of the Global Consultations, the Agenda for Protection, under which states reaffirmed their support for the 1951 Convention and pledged

support for the goal of 'protecting refugees within broader migration movements' (UNGA 2002: 10).

This became a key concept in subsequent policy statements. In its report to the UN General Assembly of October 2003, under the heading of the 'Asylum and Migration Nexus', UNHCR noted:

> Although different in scope and nature, efforts to develop better systems for migration and for asylum go hand in hand. Asylum systems cannot function effectively without well-managed migration; and migration management will not work without coherent systems and procedures for the international protection of refugees. Asylum and managed migration systems should, however, be based on a clear distinction between the different categories of persons...

> It is important to maintain the credibility of asylum systems and regular migration channels. Factors which could contribute to this objective in the asylum area include simplifying asylum procedures, strengthening protection capacities in host countries, as well as promoting durable solutions (UNGA 2003: 11).

This was a fairly succinct statement of the migration-asylum nexus problematic and showed the extent to which UNHCR had endorsed the related and wider notion of 'migration management'.

The notion also found organisational expression in the European Union, where the High Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration (HLWG) was set up in 1999 to draw together member government representatives on justice and home affairs, foreign, security, development and economic policy. The HLWG's responsibility was to develop a framework across such different government interests to improve the EU's approach to asylum and migration policy. While the brief of the HLWG was to seek comprehensive approaches – including for example addressing the root causes of forced movements – in practice the thrust of its approach was the containment of migration, and the cajoling of countries of origin and transit through aid to take steps towards that end (Castles and Van Hear 2005). Immigration and asylum were conflated in major subsequent EU policy

statements, and the notion underlay policy trends in relations with 'third countries', often in the developing world and notably with respect to readmission agreements for rejected asylum seekers and other returnees.

The growing salience of the notions of mixed migration and the migration–asylum nexus can therefore be seen as an outcome of pressure from at least two directions. The first was analysis from the 1990s that highlighted the increasingly common roots of movement, where economic factors were often linked with human rights abuses and violence: this analysis became increasingly integrated into policy circles. The second thrust was recognition or acknowledgement by multilateral agencies that governments in the 'global north' (or at least their Home or Interior Ministries) and their publics did have a case that the asylum system was being abused and used for immigration purposes to some degree – although the scale of this abuse was a subject of much dispute in the UK as much as in other key countries of reception. Not surprisingly human rights and refugee advocates did not agree with this – while acknowledging the pointers from research that the motivations for movement were mixed. The adoption of the notions of 'mixed migration' and the 'migration-asylum nexus' in the policy world can perhaps then be viewed as a liberal response to state concerns as well as to the findings of researchers on refugees and migration. That liberal response can be seen as an attempt to take the political steam out of the highly charged asylum debate in northern receiving countries in the 1990s and early 2000s: the balancing act was to acknowledge state and public concerns about migration overall while trying to maintain liberal position on the acceptance of refugees. This arguably partly accounts for the embrace of the concept of mixed migration by UNHCR and other agencies, seen in a series of policy initiatives (for a recent manifestation see CHOGM 2009).

The circumstances under which UNHCR might become engaged in broader migration issues included then (UNHCR 2007a and b):

- Mixed motivations: the recognition that people impelled to leave their countries may be driven by a combination of fears, uncertainties, hopes and aspirations that may be difficult to unravel.

- Mixed migration, where refugees and other migrants moved alongside each other, making use of the same routes and means of transport and the engaging the services of the same smugglers.
- Onward or secondary movement, where people who have secured protection in one state moved on to another country, or where asylum seekers moved through a number of different countries (some of which may be considered safe) before submitting a claim for refugee status.
- The change in character of movement from what was principally a refugee exodus to more mixed movements as fewer people moved to seek protection and more and more moved for other reasons, such as betterment.

However, the UNHCR's acknowledgement of the significance of mixed migration for its work was tempered by a wariness of being sucked into wider migration issues that could be at odds with the organisation's mandate.

Addressing mixed migration: a balancing act

IUNHCR set out its approach to refugees within mixed migratory flows in a 'Ten point plan of action' (UNHCR 2007c). The plan called for:

- the establishment of entry systems sensitive to protection needs
- appropriate reception arrangements to meet the basic needs of people involved in mixed movements, including provision of registration and temporary documentation
- profiling: an initial determination to find out the motives for departure and the appropriate next step – such as refugee status determination, assisted voluntary return, assistance for victims of trafficking
- referral to the appropriate agencies – such as UNHCR for refugee status determination
- solutions for refugees: as well as the classic three 'durable solutions' (resettlement, local integration and repatriation), these included legal migration opportunities where appropriate
- means of addressing secondary movements, including circumstances where refugees have moved on from countries where there have already found

safety
- return in safety and dignity for those who do not need international protection or the provision of temporary migration options, including staying legally in the country of arrival or moving on to a third country
- providing information in countries of origin, transit and destination to alert people to the dangers of irregular movement and the difficulties that might be faced after arrival
- collaboration/coordination among key partners
- better data collection and analysis

It is noteworthy that most of these measures were directed at places of arrival or destination, even though 'mixed migration' features at all stages of the migratory process. It is true that information campaigns were partly geared to the country of origin and there was mention of safety at sea in the course of the journey itself. But the bulk of the initiatives were directed to the period after arrival. Understandably given that the plan was developed by UNHCR, most of these were directed at refugees, with some reference to the need for differentiating different categories of migrants. But this – effectively a call for better and fairer sorting -- did not really resolve the issue of people migrating for a mix of motivations. Nevertheless, a welcome innovatory aspect was the recognition of further migration as a possible solution for refugees and other kinds of migrants, considered further below.

In 2008 UNHCR reconsidered its perspective on the Migration–Asylum Nexus and began to distance itself from the notion (Crisp 2008). While the organisation still recognised the importance of mixed migration both in terms of global migration and its particular mandate, it was felt that the discourse associated with Migration–Asylum Nexus could compromise UNHCR's core purpose of refugee protection. The 'more prosaic notion of 'refugee protection and durable solutions in the context of international migration" was now preferred (Crisp 2008: 3).

The principal reasons for this shift were that the Migration–Asylum Nexus discourse had become too closely associated with the agenda of the migrant-receiving countries of the 'global north' -- concerns with irregular migration, control of borders, unfounded

asylum claims, the return of asylum seekers whose claims for refugee status had been rejected, and so on -- an agenda that could conflict with the UNHCR's mandate to protect those fleeing harm. Likewise, the Migration-Asylum Nexus had become too much identified with movement from the 'global south' to the 'global north', reinforcing the somewhat blinkered view that the world's most important migration issue was movement of people from poorer parts of the world to more affluent countries rather than within developing regions (Crisp 2008).

Nevertheless the need to address refuge protection and solutions within the context of the wider international migration arena remained. UNHCR found itself 'engaged in a difficult balancing act':

> On one hand, the organisation recognises the need to underline the distinctive status, rights and obligation of refugees, and is sensitive to charges that it wishes to extend its mandate to broader migration issues that lie beyond its legitimate concern. At the same time, UNHCR was aware that human mobility is growing in scope, scale and complexity, and acknowledged that other stakeholders, especially states, increasingly regarded the movement of refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants as part of a single (and often unwanted) phenomenon (Crisp 2008: 9).

This 'balancing act' remains a challenge in the wider policy debate on mixed migration.

Implications for policy debates: immigration concerns and transnational connections

The debate about the implications of mixed migration for policy has been conducted largely at a multilateral level rather than at the national one. The UNHCR has been the main forum for this debate and has therefore featured prominently in the discussion above. Like other governments which encounter the outcomes of mixed migration, the UK government has been party to these multilateral deliberations. Some arms of government – such as those addressing development issues – are more sensitive to the implications of mixed migration than others – such as Home or Interior Ministries

concerned with entry controls. Mixed migration remains a challenge for the latter, in the UK no less than in other countries receiving migrants. Though a points system could potentially address combinations of motivations for migration (as does Canada's to some degree, for example), there are few signs that compartmentalisation of migrant categories will be the subject of review. The tension will therefore remain between sorting of migrants into such categories and their mixed motivations for moving. Nevertheless, acknowledging the significance of mixed migration and in particular building on the potential for further mobility – such as onward movement or circular migration – point to areas of policy that could be productively developed. This is particularly the case for policy towards migrants' places of origin.

As is now increasingly well recognised, the resources that move among transnational households and communities are potent means of relief, recovery and development in conflict and other settings that generate mixed migration. Remittances and other flows and exchanges tend to be an effective means of reaching people in need, since they are often one-to-one flows, rather than the more generalised distributions implemented through aid. Transnational connections may be vital in sustaining families and communities in upheaval or under strain. Building on such potential involves understanding that such sustainability may be predicated on some family or community members staying abroad and having reasonably secure residence, whether their migration was driven by the search for safety, betterment or a combination of both.

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Based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory provides independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues. The Observatory's analysis involves experts from a wide range of disciplines and departments at the University of Oxford.

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