

About the Author

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Reader's Note

A lack of clear terminology is a major source of confusion about migration. It is therefore important to clarify a number of key concepts discussed in this book. First of all, this pertains to the term 'migration'. Geographical mobility only counts as migration if it involves a *change in habitual residence* across administrative borders. Another important distinction is between *internal* – or domestic – and *international* migration, with the first implying a movement between municipalities, states or provinces within countries, and the second a change of residence across international borders. *Immigration* means people moving into a country from abroad, and *emigration* means residents moving out of a country.

If people change residence across administrative borders for a certain period of time – in most administrative systems, six to twelve months – this counts as migration *irrespective of people's main migration motive*. Based on this definition, a migrant is a person who lives in a place or country other than their place or country of birth. This book applies the category of international migrants only to the foreign-born. In debates on the subject, children and even grandchildren of migrants are commonly included in migrant populations. While this practice is debatable, to avoid unnecessary confusion I will systematically refer to second-or third-generation migrants when doing so, but the term 'migrants' is reserved for people who have actually made the move themselves.

Within the broad migrant category, important migrant types are labour migrants or migrant workers, family migrants, student migrants and business migrants, as well as forced migrants – or refugees. With regard to labour migrants, the terms 'higher-skilled' and 'lower-skilled'

are problematic, because they may evoke an image of some migrants being more intelligent than others, and because, in practice, more and more jobs are in fact 'mid-skilled'. Perhaps a more useful distinction is between manual or blue-collar and white-collar workers, but for the purposes of this book I will retain the common usage of lower-and higher-skilled migration, emphasizing that this is about the jobs that migrants do, not their actual intelligence, knowledge and skills. In fact, many migrants do jobs for which they are overqualified.

The category of *forced migrants* concerns people who primarily move because they face violence or persecution in their origin countries. Although forced migrants are commonly referred to as 'refugees', an important legal distinction is that between asylum seekers and refugees. An *asylum seeker* is a person who has applied for refugee status and is still awaiting a decision on their recognition as a refugee. According to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, a *refugee* is a person who 'owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country'. People who flee their regions of origin but who stay within their own country are usually referred to as 'internally displaced persons' (IDPs).

Another important source of confusion is between smuggling and trafficking. Although these concepts are constantly conflated in media and political discourse, they are entirely different. *Smuggling* is the use by migrants of paid or unpaid intermediaries (smugglers) to cross borders without prior authorization, either as part of a business transaction or humanitarian activism. Contrary to common perceptions, smuggling is essentially a form of service delivery that migrants (including refugees) are willing to pay for and voluntarily engage in to cross borders without being arrested. *Trafficking* is not about abduction or smuggling, but rather the severe exploitation of vulnerable workers through deceit and coercion. In fact, many cases of trafficking don't involve any migration at all, and if migrant workers

are involved, severe exploitation often happens in the context of legal migration and legal employment.

Illegal migration – the unauthorized crossing of borders – is another controversial topic and a much-confused term. Legally speaking, the spontaneous arrival of asylum seekers at international borders doesn't count as illegal migration, as, according to the UN Refugee Convention, it is a fundamental right of people to cross international borders to seek protection from violence and persecution. This book therefore uses the term 'unsolicited border arrivals' to cover the arrival of both illegal migrants and asylum seekers. The distinction between *illegal entry* and *illegal stay* is essential. In fact, the biggest source of illegal stay is migrants who entered legally but who have 'overstayed' the duration of their visa or residence permit.

There is a long debate in academia, media and politics about the appropriateness of the use of terminology like 'illegal migration' and 'illegal migrants'. On one side, there is the argument that acts can be illegal, but people cannot; that nobody is illegal, and that it is therefore unacceptable to label human beings as 'illegal'. Such critique has led to the use of alternative terms, such as 'irregular', 'undocumented' and 'unauthorized'. Although these terms can be useful, besides their obfuscating nature they have their own problems – for instance, 'undocumented' migrants lack residence rights but often possess a range of documents such as drivers' licences, registration documents, insurance papers and tax files. The counterargument is that the legal status of migrants does matter to their lives and decisions as well as to governments; in fact, migrants often use these terms themselves, and so I would argue that such words should therefore not be avoided at all costs but rather used more carefully. This book will generally avoid referring to individual persons as 'illegal', but will use the phrases 'illegal migration' and 'illegal migrants' when describing migration at a group or more general level.

A final note on the use of migration statistics in this book. Unless stated otherwise, I will draw on global migrant population data from the *Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision* database, compiled by the Population Division of the Department of

Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations. Despite its various imperfections – such as the use of interpolation and other statistical techniques to fill in missing data – it is the best source of internationally comparative statistics that give a good insight into overall patterns and trends of global migration. The book doesn't use more recent versions of the database because many recent estimates seem to be based on extrapolations rather than actual data. For more detailed, country-level analyses of recent migration flows, I have drawn on databases compiled for the Determinants of International Migration (DEMIG) project at Oxford University's International Migration Institute (IMI). For data on population, economy and education and other country-level data, this book has drawn on the World Development Indicators (WDI) database from the World Bank, unless indicated otherwise.

Introduction

We seem to be living in times of unprecedented mass migration. Images of ‘caravans’ of Central Americans trying to reach the Mexico–US border, Africans crammed into unseaworthy boats desperately trying to cross the Mediterranean, and illegal migrants crossing the Channel into Britain all seem to confirm fears that migration is spinning out of control. A toxic combination of poverty, inequality, violence, oppression, climate change and rampant population growth appear to be pushing growing numbers of Africans, Asians and Latin Americans to embark upon increasingly desperate journeys to reach the shores of the ‘Wealthy West’.

We are told that, through making false promises about jobs and luxurious lives in the West, human traffickers and smugglers prey on the vulnerability of migrants by luring them into increasingly dangerous journeys, only for those migrants to find themselves horribly exploited in slavery-like conditions; that is, if they survive the trip at all. Fears that migration is spinning out of control have compounded doubts about the ability and willingness of immigrants to adapt to destination societies and cultures. Images of migrant communities living ‘parallel lives’ in segregated, impoverished and crime-infested neighbourhoods have instilled a general belief that immigrant integration has often failed. All of this has amalgamated in the notion of a ‘migration crisis’ that requires drastic countermeasures – such as stronger border enforcement, refugee resettlement schemes, and development aid for poor countries.

Not everybody agrees with these views. On the other side of the debate there are the politicians, economists and activists telling us that migration is not a problem but a *solution* to pressing problems

such as labour shortages and population ageing. They argue that we are in desperate *need* of migrants to boost growth and innovation and to rejuvenate our societies. In this view, the diversity that immigration brings is not a threat but a good thing, as it sparks innovation and cultural renewal. They also claim that migration benefits growth in origin countries because of the huge amounts of money that migrants remit back home, and because of the vital role of expatriates in stimulating trade and boosting entrepreneurship in origin countries. They tell us that we need workers of all skill levels, and that we should open our borders in order to fill pressing labour shortages.

This book will show that the ideas on both sides represent partial, simplistic and often outright misleading views on migration, which crumble in the face of evidence. To overcome an increasingly polarized debate, this book presents evidence that challenges simplistic pro- *and* anti-migration narratives. I will tell a different story – one that contradicts the conventional ideas about migration taught in schools and universities and espoused by media, pundits, humanitarian organizations, think tanks, movies, magazines and popular books. I will do so because we are in dire need of a radically new vision of migration, which is based not on political interests or ideological views but instead looks at migration *as it is*.

This book does not present an ideological view of migration as either a problem to be solved or a solution to problems, but one that tries to understand the nature and causes of migration from a scientific point of view. By necessity, this is a holistic view that tries to understand migration as an intrinsic and therefore inseparable part of broader processes of social, cultural and economic change affecting our societies and our world, and one that benefits some people more than others, can have downsides for some, but *cannot be thought or wished away*.

This book also aims to answer the biggest unresolved questions about migration. For example, why have politicians across the West failed to curb immigration despite massive investments of taxpayer money in border enforcement? Why is illegal migration continuing despite politicians' promises to destroy the business model of smugglers? Why have governments been so ineffective in preventing

the exploitation of migrant workers, despite their repeated promises to viciously crack down on such abuses? How have politicians got away with selling the same false promises or outright lies about immigration? And, most importantly, what policies can we put in place in order to deal more effectively with migration?

I wrote this book out of a deep sense of urgency. There is much academic research on migration, but so little of that has filtered through into public debate or the policies proposed by politicians and international organizations, which partly explains why policies frequently fail or even backfire. From the years of research I have undertaken and shared, the public lectures I have given, the radio and TV debates in which I have participated, and the work I have done with governments and international organizations, I have concluded that speaking ‘truth to power’ isn’t enough to change the tone and improve the quality of debates.

In other words, just spreading ‘facts’ doesn’t work. Politicians and other policymakers will ignore the facts they find inconvenient. For instance, typically, after I give a lecture to senior policymakers, they enthusiastically come up to me during the drinks reception and congratulate me for the ‘fascinating presentation’, but then immediately quip, ‘We can never implement your insights, because that would be political suicide.’ Hence, my aim with this book is to cut straight through to you, the general reader, and equip you with the knowledge that will enable you to more critically scrutinize claims made by politicians, pundits and experts, and see through the various forms of misinformation and propaganda that abound on this subject.

The knowledge presented in this book is partly based on three decades of primary research I have conducted on migration in various countries around the world, and through leading research projects and working with teams at the University of Oxford and the University of Amsterdam. It also summarizes insights on migration that have emerged from research literature in the burgeoning field of migration studies, including many excellent studies conducted by researchers from across the social sciences and beyond – in fields ranging from anthropology and sociology to geography, demography

and economics, as well as historical, legal and psychological sciences.

In 2015, I moved back to the Netherlands after having spent ten years researching and teaching migration at the University of Oxford. I had been freshly appointed as professor of sociology at the University of Amsterdam, at the height of the Syrian refugee crisis: the large-scale arrival of about 1 million – predominantly Syrian – refugees in Europe that led to heated debates in the Netherlands and all around Europe. I was invited to one as a migration expert, alongside local politicians and activists – including a member of an action group that organized local resistance against the establishment of asylum seeker centres. The debate quickly devolved into a clash of opinions and cheap character attacks, with nobody willing to really listen to anyone else.

While the journalist leading the debate was happy with the heat, I was frustrated that all the nuance had evaporated in favour of petty bickering. It reminded me of previous, similarly challenging experiences of debating migration, but I had been struggling for a while to really understand what was wrong with these kinds of ‘migration debates’ and why they were so exasperating. The epiphany came when the journalist asked the audience for a show of hands: ‘Who is, with Professor De Haas, pro-immigration, and who is anti-immigration?’

At that moment, the penny dropped, as it suddenly occurred to me what was wrong with all of these debates: their simplistic framing in pro-and anti-migration terms. The journalist was annoyed when I interrupted to attack his framing, but I had learned a very important lesson: the persistent casting of migration debates in pro-and anti-terms renders them unworthy of the word ‘debate’ as it leaves no room for nuance.

I had also increasingly started to realize that we, as researchers, should not only spread ‘facts’ about migration, but should also change the entire way we talk about the subject. This is because the facts of migration don’t speak for themselves; they make sense only as part of a broader story about immigration and what it means to people. After all, migration is too diverse a phenomenon to fit into a

simple box of 'good' or 'bad'. Such dichotomous narratives tend to create a caricature of immigrants (as victims, heroes or villains, depending on the storyline) that defies the more complex reality and often deprives them of their humanity. More generally, the entire casting of migration debates in pro/anti terms is like questioning or thinking away a fundamental part of who we are, as human beings and as societies, and who we've always been. Migration is literally of all times, and is as old as humanity. People have always moved. Discussing migration in pro/anti terms therefore precludes an understanding of the nature, causes and consequences of migration as a *normal* process.

A few analogies may help to show how naive this pro/anti framing really is. To be generally in favour of, or against, migration would be like being generally in favour of or against, say, the economy. No serious person would ask an economist whether he is in favour of or against the economy, or markets. Or a geographer whether she is in favour of or against urbanization. Or an agronomist whether he is in favour of or against agriculture. Or a biologist whether she is in favour of or against the environment. Still, this is the way the migration debates are usually conducted, particularly in the media and politics.

As we will see, such framing also makes for notoriously bad policy. Migration policies have often failed or been counterproductive because they are based on a series of false assumptions, or myths, about the nature, causes and impacts of migration. Further drawing on the analogy with economic debates, if we wonder how to regulate markets, the premise is seldom to abolish markets (and we know how such experiments ended) or to simply deny their existence. Rather, we look at how to influence them, and how to achieve these goals. This is also the way we should be discussing migration, but it is striking how the technical, non-ideological side of migration debates – which policies work, which policies fail, and which have backfired – is almost completely ignored, particularly given the large body of scientific evidence.

In fact, most current migration debates are not debates at all, in their almost exclusive focus on opinion or wishful thinking rather than fact – on what migration *ought to be*, rather than on what migration *is*

in terms of its actual trends, patterns, causes and impacts, and how policies could best deal with the realities on the ground to produce desired outcomes and avoid the errors of the past. As debates have become more and more entrenched in ideological bickering between pro-and anti-immigration camps, there is barely any place for evidence. Instead, what we usually see is that anti-immigration voices often exaggerate the downsides of migration, while corporate lobbies and liberal groups tend to exaggerate the benefits of immigration, and that each side cherry-picks evidence and arguments that fit their storyline – and simply ignores everything that is inconvenient.

In truth, most people have ambivalent feelings about immigration. As we will see time and time again in this book, there is often a large gap between how people think about immigration in general and how they relate to the migrants and refugees they meet in their personal lives. People can be concerned about immigration and be in favour of stricter border enforcement, but at the same time see it as their 'love thy neighbour' duty to help individual refugees and migrants living in their community. Although immigration is not as massive and transformative on a national scale as we often think, the impacts of immigration can be quite life-altering – and sometimes disruptive – on the local scale of neighbourhoods or towns. Yet political debates, with their increasing polarization between pro-and anti-immigration views, don't reflect such ambiguities. What typically gets lost is nuance, and nuance is what we urgently need in order to take the heat out of debates about immigration and related issues such as diversity, identity and racism, which have grown increasingly toxic.

Since the end of the Cold War, Western politicians have been waging a War on Immigration.

In Europe, this started with political panic about the large-scale arrival of asylum seekers fleeing warfare in former Yugoslavia and conflicts in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. In the 2000s this was followed by a backlash against multiculturalism, and growing concerns about segregation and a perceived lack of integration, particularly of Muslim immigrants. From 2015, large-scale arrivals of Syrian refugees and more general concerns about trans-

Mediterranean boat migration took debates to fever pitch. In Britain, ever since Tony Blair raised suspicion about ‘bogus’ asylum seekers, politicians have been vowing to crack down on unsolicited migrant arrivals on British shores, while the seemingly unstoppable arrival of East European workers was a major factor in the 2016 Brexit vote.

In the US, Ronald Reagan’s Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 provided amnesty to 2.7 million immigrants, but also fired the starting shot for increasing border enforcement to prevent illegal immigration from Mexico and Central America under the Bush and Clinton administrations. The terror attacks of 9/11 reinforced these trends, with politicians increasingly portraying immigration as a potential threat to national security. Concerns about illegal immigration prompted the Bush and Obama administrations to pour billions of dollars (three times higher than the FBI budget) into the militarization of border controls and the detention and deportation of illegal migrants. This trend culminated in Trump winning the 2016 election on an anti-immigration platform. While there hasn’t been serious hope of comprehensive immigration reform since the George W. Bush presidency, the left and right have continued to brawl over immigration policy.

Western governments have invested massive resources to curb inflows of foreign workers and their families – coming from Mexico and Central America to the US, from South Asia and eastern Europe to Britain, and from Turkey and North Africa to western Europe. For decades now, politicians from across the political spectrum have repeatedly pledged to ‘fix our broken immigration system’, to ‘take back control on immigration’ and to ‘crack down on smuggling and trafficking’. Others have proposed using aid to curb immigration from poor countries. However, politicians have consistently failed to deliver on these promises. In fact, the evidence shows that many of these policies have backfired, as they paradoxically produce *more* migration while stimulating illegal migration and facilitating the exploitation of migrant workers.

In the US, for instance, massive investments in border enforcement since the late 1980s by both Republican and Democratic administrations turned a largely circular flow of Mexican workers

going back and forth to California and Texas into an 11-million-strong population of permanently settled families living all across the United States. At the same time, despite massive investments in border enforcement and deportations, continuing labour shortages drove new migration from Latin America and other countries underground, leading the undocumented population to soar from 3.5 million to 11 million.

Likewise, in Europe, growing border restrictions pushed Turkish and North African 'guest workers' into permanent settlement by discouraging their return and encouraging large-scale family migration over the 1980s and 1990s – while three decades of massive investment in border controls in the Mediterranean failed to stop legal and illegal immigration from North and West Africa into southern Europe. In the UK, earlier efforts to curb immigration from Commonwealth countries equally had counterproductive effects, consolidating rather than preventing the permanent settlement of rapidly growing Caribbean and South Asian populations in Britain. More recently, instead of incentivizing East European workers to return to origin countries, Brexit only seems to have strengthened the determination of Polish, Romanian and Bulgarian workers to stay permanently, with immigration to the UK paradoxically reaching an all-time high in the post-Brexit years.

In both the US and Europe (including the United Kingdom), politicians have manifestly failed to fix their 'broken immigration systems' and curb growing immigration; similarly, three decades of efforts to limit the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees have failed to produce any meaningful results. At the same time, politicians have failed to address problems of segregation and the integration of marginalized immigrant and minority groups that find themselves the subject of exploitation and racist discrimination. Nor have efforts to combat smuggling and trafficking produced any meaningful results, as illegal migration continues to exact a high toll in terms of human suffering and border deaths.

Immigration restrictions and 'pushbacks' have not deterred refugees from seeking safety across borders, while consistent backlogs and administrative failures have left asylum seekers in a

debilitating legal limbo for many years, deepening trauma, perpetuating the separation of families, and restricting people from building a new life for themselves through study and work. Meanwhile, the failure of governments in the US, the UK and continental Europe to address the situation of marginalized – often undocumented – migrant workers comes with the serious risk of the formation of a new underclass.

As this book will show, politicians have not only failed to deliver on their long-standing and endlessly repeated promises, but in many ways their policies have made things *worse*. Immigration and integration policies have not only fallen short of their objectives, they have also been counterproductive, because they are not based on a scientific understanding of how migration really works. In other words, these policies are part of the problem. The central claim of this book is therefore that such policies are bound to fail because they are in fact *among the very causes* of the problems they pretend to solve.

Why then, as so many students have asked me, do we keep on recycling the same policies that have so blatantly failed in the past? There is no simple answer to that question. Partly, this is because politicians and other decision-makers have ignored scientific evidence about the trends, causes and impacts of migration. For the most part, however, this does not reflect a lack of information or innocence, but a conscious refusal to acknowledge the facts. Politicians (from left to right, from conservative to liberal), interest groups and international organizations perpetuate a series of myths as part of *deliberate* strategies to distort the truth about migration. Such propaganda is part of active efforts to sow unjustified fear and misinformation – as exposure to the truth would expose not only politicians' failure to address problems, but also their own complicity in creating and aggravating them. In that sense, politicians have got caught up in their own lies.

But this is not only about politicians indulging in immigration fearmongering and immigrant scapegoating to win the next election. It is also about interest groups like trade unions and business lobbies that exaggerate the harms – or benefits – of migration. It's about UN

agencies like the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) exaggerating or misrepresenting migrant and refugee numbers in an apparent bid to generate publicity and funding. It's about politicians portraying migrants and 'bogus' asylum seekers as job thieves or welfare scroungers, to distract attention away from the real causes of declining job security, wage stagnation, growing financial insecurity, and increasingly expensive education, housing and healthcare. It's about corporate lobbies portraying migrants as heroes that will ensure nations retain their competitiveness in the global race for talent. And humanitarian organizations denying the ability of migrants and refugees to think for themselves and act in their own best interests, by unilaterally depicting them as victims who needed to be 'rescued' from smugglers and traffickers. And climate activists hijacking the migration issue and fabricating myths about waves of climate refugees to help make their (otherwise justified) case for drastically cutting greenhouse-gas emissions.

Finally, debates and research about migration are also haunted by a more general bias towards the impacts of migration on Western 'receiving' or 'host' societies. This 'receiving-country bias' has led to a one-sided focus on issues such as integration, assimilation, segregation, race and identity from a destination-country perspective. However important these issues are, this has gone along with a striking lack of interest in and research on the causes and consequences of migration from the perspective of *origin* countries.

This bias is obviously very problematic. After all, how can we develop a realistic view on migration if we miss half the picture? As we will see in this book, neglecting the 'other side' of migration hampers a proper understanding of its nature and very causes. This helps to explain why politicians, interest groups, international organizations, media, school books, experts and pundits continue to get away with reproducing a whole series of pseudoscientific truths about migration without ever being corrected.

This book is organized into three sections. The first will explore trends in global migration patterns. It looks at recent changes in the scale,

magnitude and direction of migration and what factors have caused such changes. It also dispels common claims and popular myths about the causes of migration, and will show which factors really explain recent changes in global migration patterns.

The second section explores the impacts of migration on both destination and origin societies. It analyses the reasons why most migrant groups have integrated rather smoothly but others have experienced marginalization and protracted segregation. It also critically scrutinizes various (exaggerated) claims and counterclaims about the negative and positive social, cultural and economic impacts of migration, to arrive at a more balanced position.

The third and final section reveals how various popular ideas championed by politicians, interest groups and international organizations are part of deliberate strategies to distort the truth about immigration. These include the considerable gap between politicians' tough talk on immigration and their much more lenient policy practices, and the intuitive but rather misleading idea that migration restrictions reduce migration. I also dismantle several popular but scientifically unfounded myths: that public opinion has turned against immigration, that smuggling is the main cause of illegal migration, that human trafficking is a form of modern slavery, and that climate change will lead to mass migration.

In all, there are twenty-two chapters, each of which tackles a long-standing myth about migration. In the first part of each chapter, I will briefly set out the myth – and the typical narratives in which it is cast – as well as its origin as it pertains to the politicians, interest groups and international organizations that create and recycle such myths. The second part – *How it really works* – dismantles the myth by drawing on data and evidence from history, anthropology, sociology, geography, demography and economics. The aim of each chapter, and the book as a whole, is to provide evidence on the real trends, causes and impacts of migration as an intrinsic part of broader social, cultural and economic change in origin and destination societies.

By providing deep insights based on cutting-edge evidence, this book goes beyond a myth-busting exercise, aiming to build, chapter by chapter, a new, holistic vision of migration as an intrinsic part of

broader national and global change. The chapters have been written in such a way that they can be read separately – which is useful for readers with specific interests – but all are part of an overarching narrative. The order of chapters builds a more general argument to guide the reader to deep insights as they continue towards the conclusion. While I will eschew unnecessary academic jargon, I will not stay away from addressing the complexity of issues and the nuances that are needed to achieve a fundamental understanding of migration processes.

I wrote this book to equip readers with an understanding of how migration really works, in a way that is firmly rooted in the best data and scientific insight, with the goal of stimulating a *real* debate on migration, in which politicians no longer get away with plain propaganda or policy solutions that perhaps satisfy the desire for political showmanship – and may help them win the next election – but don't solve any real problems and instead make them *worse*. We can do so much better.

And we have reasons to be hopeful about the prospects of doing so because, as this book will also show, research reveals that most people have nuanced opinions about migration. It is simply not true that public opinion has massively turned against immigration. The political polarization in pro/anti-immigration camps is not reflected in how most people think and feel about migration. While many people have valid concerns about immigration, integration and segregation, most also understand that migration is to a certain extent inevitable, that migrant workers fulfil essential roles, and that immigrants and refugees deserve fundamental rights – and they understand the dilemmas this generates.

Above all, this book will show that there are no easy solutions to complex migration problems. However, once we do away with unnecessary panic and fear, which has already paralysed debates for too long, we create space for an informed debate about the benefits and downsides of immigration, and about how to design better and more effective policies that avoid the errors of the past and work better for *all* members of our societies.