



# Migration and Development Research is Moving Far Beyond Remittances

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**Summary.** — Research on migration and development has recently changed, in two ways. First, it has grown sharply in volume, emerging as a proper subfield. Second, while it once embraced principally rural–urban migration and international remittances, migration and development research has broadened to consider a range of international development processes. These include human capital investment, global diaspora networks, circular or temporary migration, and the transfer of technology and cultural norms. For this special issue, we present a selection of frontier migration-and-development research that instantiates these trends.  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Most migrants search for a better life. They must often overcome tremendous geographic, cultural, and legal barriers. And they have countless stories: *migration* means an Afghan refugee crossing the ocean from Java to Christmas Island, a Mexican nanny crossing the Rio Grande into Texas, a Mumbai computer scientist flying business class to Dubai. Each story implies a very different effect of migration on migrants, people back home, and people at the destination. Each story is caused by, and in turn affects, the development process. These causes and effects are increasingly important but poorly understood.

But that is changing. Recently, economic research on migration and development has undergone two shifts: in quantity and in focus. First, development researchers devote increasing attention to migration, and migration researchers devote increasing attention to development. Second, that research has expanded greatly in scope. Early research focused on rural–urban migration, and the limited work on international migration tended to focus on remittances. Recent research stresses global migration flows and the complex links between migration and the broader development process, far beyond cash sent home. Development policymakers and analysts all over the world are likewise paying more attention to migration and its complex links with development.

A simple bibliometric exercise reveals researchers' rapidly growing interest in migration and development. We counted the number of journal articles with certain title keywords in the RePEc IDEAS database of economic literature, 1970–2013. [Figure 1](#) shows, in black dots, the fraction of articles with development-related keywords that also contain migration-related keywords. The white dots show the fraction of articles with migration-related keywords that also contain development-related keywords.<sup>1</sup>

The figure shows that economists of the early 1970s were quite interested in migration and development. The most influential work, however, was not on international migration but on domestic, rural–urban mobility (e.g., [Fields, 1975; Harris &](#)

[Todaro, 1970](#)). An exception to this domestic focus is the seminal theoretical work during this period on the development effects of high-skill international migration (e.g., [Bhagwati & Hamada, 1974](#)). This interest waned somewhat in the 1980s. It bounced back in the late 1990s, led by theoretical work suggesting that skilled migration could induce human capital investment at the origin ([Mountford, 1997; Stark, Helmenstein, & Prskawetz, 1997; Vidal, 1998; Docquier & Rapoport, 1999](#)).<sup>2</sup>

Since the early 1990s, research on migration and development has risen steadily. The fraction of development papers studying migration has more than doubled; the fraction of migration papers studying development has almost doubled. A key to this surge has been the availability of new datasets on macro-level migration stocks and flows ([Docquier & Marfouk, 2006; Dumont & Lemaître, 2005; Parsons, Skeldon, Walmsley, & Winters, 2005; Beine et al., 2007; Özden, Parsons, Schiff, & Walmsley, 2011](#)) and the rising inclusion of migration questions on censuses and household surveys worldwide ([Santo Tomas, Summers, & Clemens, 2009](#)). These have allowed empirical tests, for the first time, of earlier theoretical work.

This renewed interest, especially the possibility of more rigorous empirical analysis, has coincided with the initiation of the World Bank Research Group's Research Program on International Migration and Development in 2004. Its main objective was to improve our knowledge on migration and strengthen evidence-based policymaking. Many of the databases cited above (such as those by [Docquier and Marfouk, Beine et al., Özden et al.](#)) were products of this program. In addition to these numerous databases, books, academic papers, and policy notes, one of the main outputs of this program has been the organization since 2008 of the Annual Migration and Development Conference, jointly with the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). For the last

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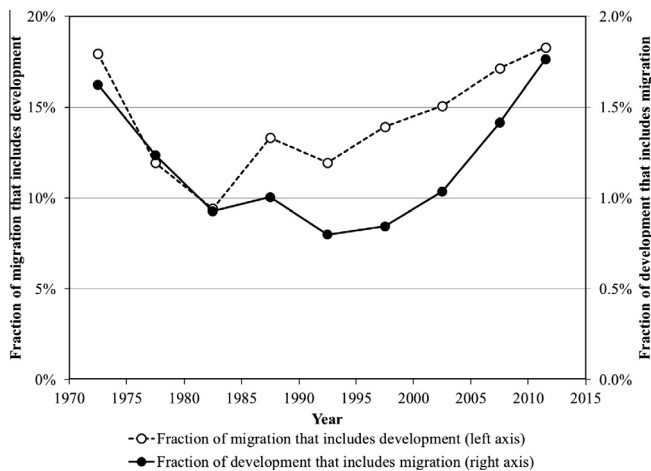


Figure 1. *Two waves of economic research on migration and development.* Source: Numbers of published economics journal articles in the RePEc IDEAS database, accessed April 30, 2014. “Development” papers include one or more development-related terms in the title; “migration” papers include one or more migration-related terms in the title. Sexennial averages (due to IDEAS search interface) inclusive of endpoint years (e.g., 1970–75, 1975–80, etc.) except the final period, which covers 2010–13 inclusive.

three years, Center for Global Development (CGD) in Washington, DC, joined the group. The papers presented in this special issue were presented at the 5th Conference held at AFD Headquarters in Paris in 2012. This conference was preceded by the 2008 conference at the University of Lille, the 2009 conference at the World Bank headquarters in Washington DC, the 2010 conference at the Paris School of Economics, the 2011 conference at the Harvard University, USA and followed by the 2013 Conference at the Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco. The 7th migration and Development Conference is scheduled for the Oxford University, UK in July 2014.

In a short time, these conferences became one of the most important venues for the presentation of the leading research

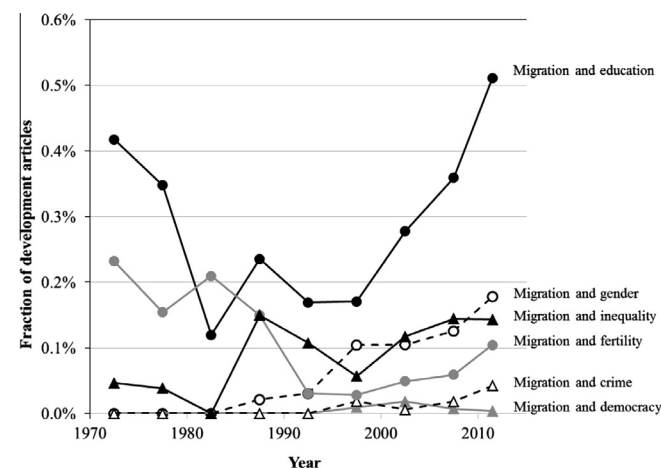


Figure 2. *Migration and development articles cover a growing range of human development topics.* Source: Numbers of published economics journal articles in the RePEc IDEAS database, accessed April 30, 2014. “Development” papers include one or more development-related terms in the title; “migration” papers include one or more migration-related terms in the title. Sexennial averages (due to IDEAS search interface) inclusive of endpoint years (e.g., 1970–75, 1975–80, etc.) except the final period, which covers 2010–13 inclusive.

at the intersection of the migration and development literature. A very large portion of the widely cited and influential papers have been presented in these conferences, and subsequently published in the special issues that came out in various academic journals.<sup>3</sup>

The papers presented at the various conferences have subtly shifted over time. In the earlier years, there were many more papers on remittances, their determinants, and impact on the families left behind—especially with regard to typical development concerns such as poverty, education, and entrepreneurship. There were also quite a few more papers on high-skill migration from developing to developed countries (sometimes called “brain drain”), using the newly available databases. In recent years, as these questions were being answered, the focus has shifted to more nuanced issues such as the role of networks or diasporas, linkages between cultural norms and migration, and different types of migration flows such as temporary, circular, or transit migration. These issues are closely related to the “new economics of migration” where the complex social and cultural roles of variables are explored in explaining the determinants of migration as well as its impact. Researchers are using data from a variety of sources, including those from surveys designed for the specific migration questions that they would like to answer.

Figure 2 shows some of these topical shifts in the same RePEc data analyzed for Figure 1. Each line shows the fraction of all articles with development-related title keywords that also have migration keywords *and* a second subject area, such as “education” or “gender”. Since the early 1990s, and continuing during the period of the Migration and Development Conferences, a rising fraction of migration-and-development research considers subtopics related to broader processes of development.

The papers in this issue were selected from among two dozen submissions, all presented at the 2012 Conference, and went through the regular refereeing process. You will see this changing focus in the academic literature in this special issue as well. While one paper explores global migration patterns and their determinants, the rest highlight the cultural, personal, and social dimension of migration.

## 2. GLOBAL PATTERNS OF SKILLED MIGRATION

Any discourse on migration starts with the numbers. How many people have moved from country A to country B at a given point in time? This simple-sounding question turns out to be quite difficult to answer due to data availability, definitional complexities, changing borders, and several other problems as discussed in Özden *et al.* (2011). These problems are more complex for skilled migration, a key strand of the migration and development literature. For example, many destination countries do not collect or publish data on their immigrants by skill level. In many other cases, census dates, skill, or education definitions are inconsistent across countries and over time.

The paper in this issue by Artuc, Docquier, and Parsons (2014) addresses these challenges in multiple ways. First, they collect the existing immigrant stock data from 100 destination countries for 2000 and 61 countries in 1990, by gender and education level. Then they develop a gravity-based model to estimate migrant stocks, again by gender and education level, for the missing countries. The gravity model enables them to assess the relative importance of key determinants of bilateral migration such as common language, border, distance, colonial relationships, and diaspora links. The resulting migration

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