

Colloquia on Science Diplomacy

MMXXII

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Migration in the Post-Pandemic World

Luigi Maria Vignali
António Vitorino
José Luís Cardoso
Giorgio Parisi
and Wolfango Plastino

crises, and not shy away from the challenges they present to his

Discussion *

António Vitorino, José Luís Cardoso, Giorgio Parisi
and Wolfgang Plastino

Wolfgang Plastino: *What lessons should we learn from the Covid-19 pandemic from a migration perspective?*

António Vitorino: To begin I will say in a nutshell that for the first time there has been recognition that migrants are essential workers, for a number of critical activities, to the benefit of the entire community. The ones who took the health risks were the migrants; they were the ones in the front lines, but the beneficiaries were the entire community.

Secondly, we were not prepared for the pandemic. And we need to prepare for the next pandemic. Let's be very honest: there will be a new pandemic one day. If the public opinions of our countries have accepted that, to a certain extent, we have run after the disaster – I mean, we have tried to respond to the pandemic, because we were totally ignorant of the impacts of the pandemic – when there is a new pandemic I think that the public opinion will not have the same tolerance and the same patience towards the public authorities. And there will be a need to show that we have learned the lessons from the previous pandemic, and that we are prepared for the next one.

And last but not least, I think that one has to recognize that universal health care is not just a tribute to the fundamental rights of migrants and a sign of respect for their human dignity, but at the same time it's in the key interest of the host communities; because if we allow migrants to become a source of spreading the virus because we do not allow them to have access to healthcare, of course we are creating stigmatization against the migrants – that's quite clear – but at the same time we are putting the entire community at risk. So it is in the name of the self-preservation of the

* The text below is the full transcript of the roundtable that followed the *Lectio Magistralis* by H.E. António Vitorino, Director General of the United Nations International Organization for Migration.

entire community that we need to make an effort to guarantee that all migrants, irrespective of their legal status, have access to healthcare, and particularly now in the present moment to vaccinations.

José Luís Cardoso: First I would like to thank the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei for this kind invitation to participate in this roundtable. It is indeed a great honour and a pleasure to take part in this discussion, and my greetings to professors Plastino and Parisi and President Antonelli from the Accademia dei Lincei, and to all Excellencies present at this *colloquium*. And allow me to single out my special *cumprimentos – muita estima* – to the Director General, António Vitorino.

In his presentation, Director General Vitorino has given a very rich picture and a broad presentation of all the problems we will be discussing at this roundtable. So I guess that a certain amount of overlapping is unavoidable, although by repeating some of the things that have been said we might get a stronger message from this roundtable. Although a bit gloomy, as Vitorino said, this does not mean that his presentation was not realistic, and especially that he has not presented how to respond to the challenges and the problems that the pandemic has created as far as the issues surrounding immigration are concerned.

For the benefit of brevity, I would like to stress two particular points which I believe are the key lessons from this Covid-19 pandemic in terms of the consequences for migration issues.

The first one, as has already been emphasized by António Vitorino, is the need to include migrants in social and economic recovery plans. And this means putting forward not only legal channels that give migrants the possibility to benefit from inclusive public policies, special health policies; this is not only an issue of legal measures, but it is a process of including migrants in the recovery plans in each country that accommodates and receives migrants due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Also, I believe that one of the lessons to learn here is urgency. We come to realize how urgent it is for us to achieve rapid responses regarding the efforts to foster transnational cooperation, namely in vaccination plans and the activation of public health practices. And the transnational message, which I would like to focus on here, might be the outcome of something we've realized with Covid-19, but which was not born with the Covid-19 pandemic: namely, the great divergence that exists between rich countries, or high-income countries, and low-income or low-resource countries. And if, when we try to understand the reasons

for economic growth in different countries, we talk about this great divergence that occurred in the long 19th century, I think that this divergence may be becoming greater again, and all these phenomena, like the pandemic, are unavoidably, and unfortunately, making things much worse than they were in the past.

But there is another point that I would like to stress here, which is that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish what are the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, as far as migration issues are concerned, and what are the consequences of other factors explaining migration, including other factors explaining the attitude toward migration. One of the lessons that I think is very important is the risk of anti-migrant sentiments, especially in rich and high-income countries. The reason I am referring to this risk is that sometimes Covid-19 explains only some of the reasons why this sentiment is getting more complicated and more difficult to deal with. This is a political issue, of course. We know – as António Vitorino has discussed – how the war in Ukraine might raise new challenges in need of a strong response, and especially as far as the sentiment of insecurity of migrants goes. Sometimes political contexts and political decisions are much more relevant than the simple or difficult effects originated by the pandemic.

What I mean is that there is a risk at the moment, not only due to the pandemic, but also due to the situation of war in which we are living, and the situation of defaulting which some economies are facing at the moment; all of this creates a sentiment of aggressive nationalism which renders the lives of migrants much more difficult than before. So when discussing the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, I guess that we should not forget the consequences for the lives of migrants that come from the political arena in which we are living now in Europe.

So this is my quick answer to the difficult question that Professor Plastino has invited us to discuss.

Giorgio Parisi: I think that this question from Wolfango was deeply discussed by the two previous speakers. I would like to add in any case some viewpoints from our special observatory, Italy, which is an important country, but with some of its own peculiarities.

First, I would like to recall a document that has been prepared by the Accademia dei Lincei more than two years ago, in May 2020, in which we stressed the need to avoid labelling migrants as illegal immigrants, because one should try to provide some kind of official recognition of the people that are present in the country;

they should have the possibility of accessing all types of health programmes, without having to be treated as illegal immigrants. And therefore it's clear that, while in principle in Italy everybody has the right to the national health service, people who are in some kind of illegality may refrain from making use of it, and therefore we made a document which stressed the need for this type of official recognition of migrants. This is also, as His Excellency stated, related to the things that were happening at that time in Singapore, because in Singapore there had just been the first wave of Covid-19, which was more or less controlled, but then there was a second wave of Covid that essentially ripped through the places where migrants were sleeping; these migrants lived in high-density housing, and in unhygienic conditions, so there was a greater possibility of airborne transmission of Covid to other people, and so it was clear that this explosion in Singapore was due to the poor conditions of migrants. But this explosion of Covid amongst migrants later affected society as a whole, because afterwards it spread to other sectors of society.

Concerning the effects of Covid, first of all, we have to understand that Covid has shown that our hyper-connected world, the world of the global economy, is very fragile. Once our supply chain become extremely long, even planet-wide, it's clear that everything becomes more difficult, and disruptions of the supply chain may have a dramatic effect that would not play out if we had local short chains. I think of the beginning of the pandemic, when Europe discovered that there was no company that was producing individual-protection facemasks, and these had to come from very far away, and this was not easy, because there was a worldwide shortage.

Coming back to the consequences for migrants, one thing that happened because of the Covid pandemic was that an incredible strain was placed on the healthcare and medical services in Italy, and this had a number of negative consequences, because the working conditions of doctors worsened, and what happened in Italy is a phenomenon that already existed in the past: namely, that many Italian doctors emigrated abroad. So we have in Italy, thanks to the combination of a somewhat low number of medical school graduates and a strong overseas migration, a decrease in the number of doctors, and this is dramatic, because there is a serious staffing shortage in many public positions, especially in emergency rooms, because these are one of the worst places of work from many points of view, beginning from the stress of it. And so it happened that in this particular

case, Covid had a dramatic effect on Italy, exposing it as a country short on healthcare workers due to emigration, which was already a well-known characteristic for Italian scientists; but this was something still more dramatic, because it is something that affects our society as a whole.

Wolfgang Plastino: *What role does data play in understanding migration dynamics?*

António Vitorino: It plays a crucial role, because if we want to prepare policies based on evidence, we need to collect data. It's quite a challenge, because as you can imagine, not all governments worldwide are equally equipped to collect data. IOM collects data; we have our system, which is the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM; it's an awful name, I do recognize that). DTM is deployed in one hundred countries all over the world, particularly in countries which are more relevant in terms of the source of migratory flows. So we collect the data, and we analyze the data, but we are always in search of a more and more granular understanding of the data. We have data on stocks of migrants, and data on flows. But we need to go the extra mile, and disaggregate this data, for instance by gender, by age, by some specific characteristics, like disability, because that's the only way we can understand the flows. And it would be desirable to use big data and artificial intelligence in forecasting. We are doing forecasting now, with all the precautionary measures that forecasting human mobility and human nature requires.

But I think that the progress in technology has been extremely relevant. We have changed lots of things that we have done historically, by switching to online, embracing technology, and now we have kept those processes in the house. That will allow us to have a better capacity to collect and to analyze data. But – and there is a big but – of course in the developing world, many countries do not have the capacity to collect data. And so we need to invest in supporting them in two critical areas: first, data collection, having data statistics and the capacity to collect reliable data; and second, legal identity. I will not elaborate on this point, but having legal documents is extremely important. There is a large number of countries that do not have a civil registry, that do not have identity cards, and in order to promote lawful migration, we need to guarantee that people have access to legal identity and to legal documents. It's worth supporting those countries in those two areas: data and legal identity.

José Luís Cardoso: Of course I agree that data is instrumental for the design and implementation of foreign policies, and managing data is paramount for politicians to make the right decisions and justify their choices; this is obvious. Also because data is fundamental in order to render political problems and political issues and political decisions as technical ones. The only way of presenting something as the outcome of evidence is to have data, and I do believe that the work being done by the IOM is absolutely fundamental for this purpose, and I also agree that national statistical institutes or bureaus should be compelled or should be required to provide adequate data allowing for the monitoring of migration policies.

It's not only an issue of quantitative data. I would like to raise an issue that should not be forgotten: we also need qualitative data on this for the development and monitoring of migration policies – namely, migration as a source that can explain the change and transformation of labour regimes and business activities. And it is important to understand how migrants can bring this change to the countries in which they come to work, and so this data on the change of labour regimes and the participation in different business activities, I believe, is quite important.

Another point is to understand migration in diasporas as channels of transmission of cultural, economic and social innovations. And so a better understanding of these plural identities that migrations bring to the new countries that receive them is also fundamental to understand the dynamic process of migration.

So I would not stress only quantitative data, which is absolutely paramount for the design of public policies, but we also need a better understanding of migration in terms of the changes and the transformations that migrants bring to the cultural, economic and social world in which they are now living.

Giorgio Parisi: I think that data are crucial, because otherwise without any carefully taken data – because one also has to be careful to try to understand the biases that might be in the data – one can only rely on prejudice in making decisions.

And of course, the higher the quality of the data, the more we know about the immigrants or what they do, the more data available on their socio-economic situation of their country before becoming immigrants – all this is extremely important, because it provides us also with some information on the kinds of migrants that have been integrated into society and those that have not been integrated. Of course, this kind of data is extremely difficult to gather, but it is important, however tentative.

However, speaking of general arguments on data, I think that it is extremely important that this data, as far as possible, should be made public; I mean that people from universities, from institutes of research, from all kinds of activities, that want to understand what is happening, should be able to access it. It's wonderful to use modern technologies to make predictions, but of course there could be different ways to make predictions, different ways to analyze the data, and if you want to sum up this kind of prediction that you are making in scientific predictions, you need the data to be open to the whole of the scientific community. And opening the data to the scientific community is not simple, because you need first of all to decide to open them, you need an organization that organizes the data in such a way that they can be made open, and of course there are all the privacy concerns and so on, so it's a big effort to open the data, but I think that it is absolutely essential. The more people can get their hands on what the data are and what the data imply, the less noise there will be about immigration, and the more facts about it.

Wolfgang Plastino: *Often we talk about migrants, but not with migrants. What are your views on engaging the diaspora in conversations about migration, and contributions to both country of origin and destination?*

António Vitorino: You have touched upon a very critical issue. I think that IOM now has given an absolute priority to organizing the diaspora, thanks to the very good example that we have of engaging the diaspora, not just supporting the integration of new generations of migrants in these societies, but also in terms of the development of countries of origin.

There is a lot to be done in this respect, I must say. But I can give you one very concrete example. Ukraine is a country that has a very strong diaspora all over the world. There are 20 million Ukrainians all over the world who are very well organized as a diaspora and who have been extremely relevant in supporting the Ukrainians that have left Ukraine after the breakout of the war. That's why in May of this year, in Dublin, together with the government of Ireland, we organized a global diaspora summit that approved a declaration, which has been subscribed to, up to now, by thirty countries all over the world; this declaration was channeled to the Progress Declaration of the International Migration Review Forum, and was endorsed by the UN General Assembly.

The agenda is precisely how can we mobilize the diaspora in terms of fostering the development of countries of origin.

I have given you the figures of the remittances. This year the remittances will surpass 700 billion US dollars. That's 700 billion US dollars. The remittances are more than foreign direct investment and external health assistance together. So we are talking about a huge potential to use that money not just to support the families back home (which is of course very important) but also to channel it into the development of the countries of origin. I believe that the international financial institutions, starting with the World Bank, should be much more focused on how to make that money, that huge amount of money, more productive, to address the deep-rooted causes of migration in the countries of origin.

José Luís Cardoso: I believe that, even more important than talking about migrants and talking with migrants, is listening to them, and giving them the voice they need to express their problems, their feelings and their motivations. So I think that we should foster the construction of narratives, allowing a new awareness of the role of migrants to contribute to economic recovery in their destination countries, and also their contribution to social demographic imbalances, as is the case of Portugal, where there is the problem of decreasing population. I think that we should rely on these kinds of new forms of argumentation based on facts and life stories, justifying their interests and explaining their claims. We should give the migrants a stronger and a louder voice.

The narratives of resilience, for instance, denouncing the suffering which is associated with the pandemic but also with their difficult conditions of living, and the solutions that they can propose. By doing this, we give an alert to the world on issues that have global impact, I believe.

These narratives and giving migrants a voice is also, as António Vitorino was just stressing, a challenging instrument of diplomacy, since these narratives allow the expression of the voices of citizens who are most of the time marginalized or even denied, and who therefore have no possibility of expressing their problems in the political and diplomatic arenas. So again, there is a political issue here: the relevance of the political context and the political constraints that may or may not allow migrants to raise their voices. And this is of course a question of rights, the constitution of organizations that are representative of migrants; it is a matter especially of insisting on the Humans Rights acts and the freedom of expression that we should give them.

Migrants are not merely workers. They are persons, and their narratives can better explain the world and the problems of the world we live in.

Giorgio Parisi: I think that this idea that we have of listening to migrants is extremely important, because immigration is a very important phenomenon in these days, as we know, and we are observing most of it from our viewpoint, which is clearly a partial viewpoint. There are so many, many things that we do not understand. For example, why, in some countries, immigrants from some countries have been more integrated than immigrants from other countries, without any clear evidence of this being related to the socio-economic conditions of the initial country. One has to understand what are the real factors which make it difficult for some communities to integrate, and we have to remove these.

The other extremely important thing in speaking with migrants is to understand what the motivations that brought people to decide to immigrate to our countries actually were. It's clear that in most cases, the migrants were not satisfied with their position in the countries where they were, but knowing exactly what were the most difficult problems that they faced, we could maybe try to help them, in order to construct a better life in the place where they come from. It's clear that if that country has some specific issues, we should push to help this country in that particular direction. But being a scientist, my idea is always that the more we know, the more we have the power to understand the world and to change it.

Wolfgang Plastino: *The climate change will have an impact on patterns of mobility, and we need to address this comprehensively. What does that mean in concrete terms?*

António Vitorino: If you want concrete terms, I'll give you concrete terms. In 2021, we estimate that 23.7 million people were forcibly displaced because of extreme weather events, natural disasters and slow-onset environment degradation. This shows us that climate change is ever playing a more crucial role in putting people on the move. Climate change is ever more and more associated with food and security, because climate change changes the conditions of life above all in rural areas. If you look at the African continent, you will see that there is a strong trend of urbanization, people moving from rural areas to the city, cities that are not prepared for such an inflow, and many of the reasons why people

move is because the traditional way of life in the rural areas is no longer viable because there is a shortage of water, because there are constant floods or because there is drought. Just look at what is happening today: 30% of Pakistan is flooded. That's almost the territory of Germany. You have a terrible drought that has displaced millions of people in Somalia, in Ethiopia and in Kenya.

This is true also in Central America. It was very interesting when Professor Parisi was speaking about motivations. We do screenings about motivations, and one critical motivation for Central Americans to migrate to the United States is clearly family reunification. But then, historically speaking, the second reason was violence by gangs. What we see today in our surveys is that climate change and the impacts of climate change in Central America and in the Caribbean is surpassing violence of gangs as a reason to migrate. It is expressly assumed by migrants, who say they could not go on living the way they were.

So the challenge is first to understand that we need to build resilience in these communities. I am not saying that the solution is to migrate. In fact, the figures that I've just given you, 23.7 million people, in the vast majority of cases, do not become migrants, they become internally displaced people. They move inside the same country. The point being that, once you start moving, you can easily cross one international border, and no longer be an internally displaced person, but also an international migrant by definition.

So we need to address the impacts of climate change. Just read the Groundswell Report that was published by the World Bank. The World Bank is very clear: if we do nothing in building the resilience of these communities, by 2050, we might have something like 260 million people on the move because of climate change.¹ The priority now is to look at the fragile sites, those places where we have rising water, persistent drought, or constant floods, typhoons, cyclones, which are becoming ever more frequent and harsher; we need to plan in those areas to build resilience in the communities, to invest in adaptation, and in mitigation of the impacts of climate change. Otherwise, the impulse to movement will be unstoppable.

José Luís Cardoso: The quick response is of course that climate change is not fake news, and that we should not accept climate

¹ World Bank Group, *Groundswell: Acting on Internal Climate Migration*, Part 2, 2021 (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36248>).

change being denied by politicians. Every day we are confronted with the terrible news of the lack of water in some countries, excessive rain in others, hot temperatures, coastal erosion, the increasing CO₂ emissions, and of course the increasing vulnerability of the populations that are left behind, escaping from floods and natural catastrophes, but also escaping from wars, starvation and malnutrition.

There is this idea that the environment cannot be controlled as it was supposed to be in the recent past, and there is also this growing concern with the capacity of human beings to create or keep the conditions for securing their future on Earth. These human predatory activities are a permanent threat to a sustainable planet. Of course, as far as migrant dynamics are concerned, we have to accept people's expectations for safety and of well-being, and the prospects that they have to lead a dignified life in their area of origin or in their potential destination area, where they are moving. There are of course these processes of adaptation and mitigation, and we believe that rich countries should embrace the responsibility of taking care of those who suffer more from the losses caused by extreme phenomena associated with climate change.

Here, I would like to come to one of the gloomy visions presented by Director General António Vitorino when he referred to the risk of not being able to reach the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda in 2030. I think that the political response to this is to trust that this agenda of sustainable development goals – for everything is there in these 17 goals – should be reinforced, and politicians should be encouraged in their countries to put forward the measures that face the big issues that the United Nations and also the European Union Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals have identified, so that they can be really reachable in 2030.

Without that, there will be terrible consequences, and of course migrants are undoubtedly amongst those who suffer the most.

Giorgio Parisi: I think that the effect of climate change on migration is one of the worst effects of climate change. The problem, as has been pointed out, is that climate change has the effect of changing the global atmospheric circulation; more water is evaporating, because it's hotter, and so there is more rain, and this rain is now falling preferentially over soils where it fell less before, while some other places are much drier than before. So it's clear that this may produce effects that are a complete disaster for agriculture, and the point is that it's very, very difficult to predict exactly what's going to happen, because it's very difficult to predict weather effects.

Something that I hope we will never see, but which is an open possibility, is that the effect of climate change will stop the Gulf Stream. If the Gulf Stream is stopped, we will see many climate migrants from Norway, Scandinavia, England, and many parts of Europe, because that will correspond to a ten degree fall in the temperatures in Northern Europe. So it's clear that this has possible effects that are difficult for us to quantify and to predict in advance.

In any case, it would be best to make forecasts, as much as possible, five years or ten years ahead, and to try to do what is needed; and it's clear, for example in the situation of Pakistan, that there is very little that you really can do. I mean, it's difficult to understand exactly how to improve such a situation. Of course, we should try to watch everything, water and so on. But it's definitely not easy.

Wolfgang Plastino: *What advice would you give to the next generation of migration scholars?*

António Vitorino: For the next generation of migration scholars, I have very good news: you will not be out of a job! There are so many things we need to understand and to learn, and we need to be very humble and recognize that we do not know. You will have plenty of work and plenty of jobs.

This is not advice, it's only a suggestion: be as multidisciplinary as possible. Because what we see in real life is that the causes of migration intersect with one another, and they are very diversified. There is no one-size-fits-all system, so we need to go to the field and to understand this deeply human phenomenon that is migration. Therefore we need economists, but we need data analysts; we need social scientists, but we also need anthropologists, who have a key role to play to explain to us the interaction of the different peoples worldwide. Be as multidisciplinary as possible; no one alone can achieve everything. Joint work, teamwork, sharing experiences and sharing knowledge – that would be my strongest suggestion.

José Luis Cardoso: This is not the one-million dollar question, but the two-million dollar question that you have raised. Of course, I agree with what Director General António Vitorino has just said. I think that we need to understand that the study of human mobility is the study of the difference between high-income countries and low-income countries, and the study of social inclusion and

exclusion and social and economic inequalities. Of course, we need academia and we need scholars to raise these issues again and again.

We especially must have no doubts about the defence of the principles of citizenship and basic human rights. Without the defence of these principles, we cannot understand how to incorporate migrants in our societies. These principles are sacred, I would say.

Also, we need education against xenophobia, against racism, against all the varieties of social discrimination, and we need to voice very loudly these basic principles of our life in democracies.

Then, there is the political fight, within the rules of the democratic game, against the discrimination and inequality of course affecting the migrants' lives. I believe that, apart from all the contributions from the different social sciences and from different scientific fields, we also need a political response; we must understand that migrants are not those who should be always left behind, but those who should live and share the well-being of richer societies.

Giorgio Parisi: What I would like to say to them is very simple: there must be many of you. We need many scholars, climate scholars, so there should be many of you because there will be an incredible amount of work to be done.

But let me add that in order to have many scholars on climate that have all the characteristics that we have stressed before, for instance interdisciplinarity and things like that, it's clear that the university must start to contemplate preparing them. There should be a doctorate, some kind of interdisciplinary doctorate, in order to prepare people to do this kind of job. Because if we do not prepare people to do interdisciplinary jobs on migrant movements, migrant scholarship, if we do not prepare migrant scholars we will have just a few of them. If there are to be many of them, think that we have to ask our universities to prepare many of them. Otherwise, we will have a shortage, and if we have a shortage, we will not be able to understand what is going on.