

Book Review

International Migration: A Very Short Introduction. By Khalid Koser. Oxford University Press. New York, 2007. 138 pp. ISBN 0199298017

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This book review intends to analyse the way the migration phenomenon has been approached in terms of its complexity and diversity in the book “*International Migration: A Very Short Introduction*”, written, in 2007, by Khalid Koser, a world-wide authority on international migration policy, refugees and internally displaced persons, and who has been working for and with a number of academic and international institutions.

As one of the titles in the “Very Short Introduction” series published by OUP, since 1995, Koser’s book is only 123 pages long. The author aims to provide a comprehensive overview of current debates relating to migration whilst making use of didactic language, giving real-life examples to illustrate the themes discussed, and providing the reader with a number of references for further investigation.

“*Why migration matters?*” is the question introducing the first chapter and is shortly answered by a number of well elaborated arguments supported by statistics. Migration matters because it is a key part of human life and is a subject affecting many nations, societies, groups of people, and individuals. According to Koser, migration also matters as it is directly connected to significant global events, such as social, economic and political change; and conflicts, of course. Migration also affects all kinds of countries, be it places of origin and also of destination, as well as different people with very different reasons to migrate, i.e. qualified skilled workers, unskilled workers, forced migrants, international students, family members left behind, and those united by international marriages. Indeed, it is impossible to think of today’s world without migration.

The author then moves on to categorise different types of migrants (Chapter 2). He explains the difficulty to quantify the exact number of migrants due to the lack of precise statistical data and also because some of the categories overlap and, in many cases, the status of the migrant change with time.

Recent globalisation processes (Chapter 3) have contributed to international migration. In addition, international migration is currently being strengthened by existing transnational migration networks that provide information, financial support for the journey, a place to stay and social assistance

to settle upon arrival. The communications and transportation revolutions have reduced geographic and cultural distances, have also standardised some moral values, and have advertised economic opportunities available in some parts of the globe.

The controversial nexus between migration and development is also explored by the author in the Chapter 4. Under-development in the country of origin - which might have triggered the migration process in the first place – has started to benefit of the high figures of remittances sent by nationals living abroad. Formal remittances have played an important role in reducing the number of impoverished citizens and fostering the local economy of sending countries. Furthermore, it has been noticed that development in the country of origin can also be strengthened by the return of migrants, who have often accumulated enough savings to start a small entrepreneurship or to establish a trade business with the previous country of residence. By contrast, migration of high qualified workers (brain drain) might have depleted sending countries of skilled workers to foster development.

Koser then dedicates chapter 5 to the issue of irregular migrants. He starts by clarifying the distinction between what is considered to be irregular and illegal migration and the difficulty to quantify the number of individuals in this situation, which has been often linked to the “invisibility” of these migrants with regards to governmental institutions and to the frequent transformation of their migratory status which leads to irregularity.

The issue of forced migration is addressed in a clear way in Chapter 6, as Koser presents the context in which the conceptualisation of the term “refugee” took place, the constitution of the current international refugee regime, the 1951 UN Convention on Refugee, and the main causes of refugee movements. He also discusses about protracted refugee situations and how they have become a major concern for UNHCR. Koser raises awareness on the shortfalls of the 1951 Convention and how the document has been unable to cover some contemporary issues that generate forced migration, such as natural disasters and persecution based on same-sex relationship. Regretfully, this chapter has failed to address two other crucial topics for this debate: the situation of Palestinian refugees under the mandate of the UNRWA and the recent changes in RSD procedures put forth by a number of states which have challenged their ability to fairly comply with *non-refoulement*.

In Chapter 7, the author presents some examples of how migrants have historically enriched host societies and have contributed for a diverse and tolerant environment. Conversely, harmonious interaction and solid integration with the host society has tended to be reached only by second and third generations of migrants. Nevertheless, migrants have been aware of their rights and have urged to

participate in the political sphere in order to experience full citizenship and to improve their living conditions in the host country.

The book is then finalised with some brief but relevant reflection on the migration topics considered to be most relevant in the upcoming years in the political agenda, namely: transnationalism; Asian migration; high skilled migration; temporary migration; management of irregular migration; internal displacement; and migrants' rights.

It can be said in conclusion, that the great accomplishment of the book is the amount and diversity of issues considered in a short space. It identifies gaps in current debate on the subject and even recommends improvements as how certain topics could be addressed in the future. However, when recent changes in the migration phenomenon were explored by the author - such as temporary migration and feminisation – a good opportunity of introducing the topic of “mix migration flow” might have been overlooked. In general, one could say that he might have missed the opportunity to bring up the discussion on the roles and contents of Human Rights Instruments that deal with migration.