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Anna Triandafyllidou
Toronto Metropolitan University

Daniela Ghio
Toronto Metropolitan University

Luisa Veronis
University of Ottawa

Robert McLeman
Wilfrid Laurier University

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MEMO is a multidisciplinary research partnership that examines migration patterns focusing on three regional systems. By uncovering new connections between macro-level, contextual drivers (such as economic or political conditions) and individual determinants (such as the cultural and emotional factors that influence a migrant's personal decisions), the project aims to uncover new knowledge and develop a framework for a better understanding of migration.

MEMO is a formal partnership between 19 research organizations and involves numerous affiliate academic institutions and community partners, including service providers, NGOs and international organizations. Participating organizations and their representatives can be found on this web page. The partnership is led by CERC Migration at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Abstract

International migration is both an opportunity and a global challenge. It can foster social and technological innovation but also exacerbate social inequalities and socio-political tensions. We consider migratory flows as integral part of wider processes of societal transformation, rather than as a crisis or as an exception to the rule. The drivers of migration are multi-faceted, operate at different levels (macro, meso, and micro) and interact with one another. The aim of this paper is to review the relevant literature and develop an analytical framework that will form the basis for comparative empirical analysis and analytical reflections on the dynamics of international migration, within the framework of the MEMO Partnership Project. This paper starts by reviewing the relevant literature on the role of different drivers in shaping migratory flows within and between migration systems. We therefore discuss the social, economic, political, demographic, and environmental drivers of migration at the macro-level; analyse the role of intermediaries (networks and institutions) at the meso-level and also focus on the micro-level dynamics of individual and household decision-making, across spatial and cultural contexts. The paper also reflects on the voluntary or forced character of migratory flows – recognising that there are degrees of voluntariness or forced decision-making. Last but not least, we view migration as a non-linear process that often involves multiple destinations and intermediate stops or new beginnings.

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Introduction

Migration is a feature of modern life, both across borders and within countries (King, 2012; King & Skeldon, 2010). The 2022 World Migration report (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2022) estimated that people who have relocated internationally (most commonly in search of better living and working conditions or to reunite with family) account today for 3.6% of the global population, or 281 million people, up from 173 million or 2.8% of the global population in 2000. Estimates of those who move voluntarily within countries range considerably given challenges in assembling necessary data but are many times greater than international migration (Bell et al., 2015). The number of people forced to move across international borders in search of protection from persecution, conflict and violence has grown in recent decades, and approaches nearly 90 million people at the end of 2021 to reach more than 101 million in 2022 (UNHCR, 2022). Yet this number likely underestimates the number of people who have moved across borders involuntarily because their motivations do not easily align with legal definitions of what constitutes a refugee, or because they have motivations that are a mix of economic and humanitarian in nature (Triandafyllidou, 2017; Kent, 2020; Mixed Migration Centre Review, 2019). The reality is that what is often labelled as 'forced' migration describes movements that emerge from complex political, economic, environmental, and social interactions at local levels, and often reflects the inability of governments to provide the conditions necessary for people to meet their basic needs (Jubilut & Casagrande, 2019; Betts, 2013).

Overall, migration is a lived experience of many across the world and also a powerful lever of social and economic development. At the same time migration presents itself as an important challenge for many governments because they see unregulated migration as a threat, in need of management and control. Governments in the Global North are eager to find ways to anticipate future migration flows and govern international migration efficiently (OECD, 2018; Ferris & Martin, 2019). During the last 15 years a global governance framework has emerged, which culminated in the signature in December 2018, in Morocco, of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2019) and the Global Compact on Refugees (2018). With the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) confirmed as a UN organisation, an approach to ensuring stable, predictable flows of migration, regulated through common agreements was affirmed (Ferris & Martin, 2019).

Understanding the complex factors that result in migration and the dynamic nature of migrant decision-making is necessary in order to achieve rights-based, efficient and effective migration governance. The question for resilient and rights-based migration governance is especially timely in the aftermath of the global Covid-19 pandemic which has shown the fragile and not sustainable character of our current migration governance framework (Triandafyllidou & Yeoh, 2023).

It has been argued that a grand theory of migration is not possible, and that researchers and policy makers should be content with meso-theories that focus on specific drivers, contexts, or actors (Portes, 2010; Massey et al., 1993; Faist, 2000). As a counter-argument, such compartmentalisation prevents us from seeing the complete picture and connecting migration to wider socio-economic and political transformations that are taking place today (Van Hear, 2010). The MEMO Partnership challenges prior approaches to migration governance by developing an innovative, comprehensive, analytical model that integrates micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors in a dynamic framework (Van Hear, 2010; McLeman et al., 2020; Triandafyllidou, 2017). This framework brings together social, economic, political, demographic, and environmental drivers of migration (*macro-level*); takes into account the role of governance actors and institutions (*meso-level*); and focuses on how these factors shape the *micro-level* of individual and household decision-making in different cultural contexts (Bruch & Feinberg, 2017).

Our multi-level and dynamic approach to understanding how different drivers, and how processes at macro-, meso- and micro-level ultimately shape human migration contrasts to the

more linear perspective reflected in the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) which focuses on risk management, predictability and stability, elements that generally do not reflect the realities and lived experiences of migrants. These are much more uncertain, dominated by unpredictable events and high levels of variability. Safety is of course sought by migrants, but not necessarily through order and regularity, features that may constrain rather than enable flexibility and adaptive response. The framing of 'safe, orderly and regular' migration that dominates global compacts, and all 23 of the articles of the 2018 migration compact, is one derived from countries who want to manage irregular migration. It is not rooted in the realities of migrations and the understandings of migrants themselves, where conditions of uncertainty dominate (Scoones et al., 2022).

The MEMO Partnership builds on earlier studies that have focused on specific migration drivers (e.g., economic, political, environmental) or types of migration (e.g., humanitarian vs. labour; international vs. internal) with a view to offering a more holistic approach. Our work focuses on mixed migration flows (IOM et al., n.d.) and develops a socio-ecological systems approach that integrates the different drivers and types of migration within a single framework, without drawing a hard line between immigrants and asylum-seekers, but rather encompassing different categories of migrants.

We will test and develop our analytical framework by simultaneously investigating three specific migration systems and the multiple corridors of population flows that run within them in different directions: (1) the Americas migration system examines migration flows from the northern countries of Central America (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador) to Mexico and further North to the USA and Canada; (2) the West Africa migration system focuses on Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Ivory Coast, and their inter-related flows to each other, to neighbouring countries in West Africa and towards Europe and Canada; and (3) the migration system of the northeastern part of South Asia centres on Nepal and Bangladesh, internal and cross border flows within South Asia, to Malaysia, and Canada. We have chosen these three migration systems because of their size, complexity, and variegated flows. Through these features, the specified corridors lend themselves toward forming a natural laboratory that will help improve our understanding of migration drivers and how they interact with one another.

This paper aims at developing our analytical framework and discussing the methodological tools that we shall use. The following section discusses our overall analytical approach to migration as a phenomenon that needs to be seen within a broader context of social, economic, and political transformations rather than as an isolated outcome of development imbalances or of conflicts. We discuss specifically the notions of complexity and uncertainty in studying the dynamics of international migration today. The next section briefly introduces the different types of drivers that we consider and how they relate to one another, while the following section turns to discuss our use of the concept of migration system, migrant network, and human agency. The remaining sections discuss in some more detail the macro, meso, and micro drivers at hand. The concluding section of the paper discusses briefly how we plan to organise our comparative analysis both within and across the three migration systems.

Migration and Societal Transformation

Most migration theories focus on specific drivers, contexts, or actors (Portes, 2010; Massey et al., 1993; Faist, 2000). Such compartmentalisation prevents us from seeing the complete picture and connecting migration to wider socio-economic and political transformations that are taking place today (Van Hear, 2010). Our epistemological approach in MEMO is different. We see migration as a multi-faceted phenomenon, that develops at both individual and collective levels, and that is part and parcel of broader transformation processes (Castles, 2010). Humanitarian emergencies such as those in Afghanistan and the Ukraine; the ongoing crisis in Venezuela and Syria; ongoing severe droughts in East Africa; the breakdown of mobility during the pandemic; and the current

frantic return to different types of migration – temporary, permanent or circular – are but different sides of the same process, influenced by wider processes like economic and cultural globalisation, climate change, the exponential growth of advanced digital technologies and the related changes in communication and transport infrastructures.

While global movements existed for thousands of years, advanced technologies and socio-political-economic dynamics within and across nations have contributed to intensified cross-border mobility of people—with different reasons and objectives (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2022). The increase in the cross-border mobility of people is a hallmark of the current era of human history. In a recent study, Recchi et al. (2019) estimate global transnational mobility at 3 billion trips annually worldwide (in the period 2011-2016) compared to an estimated 10 million migration episodes annually in the early 2010s (Abel & Sander, 2014). The rise of human migration is both a global challenge as it is an opportunity; it fosters social and technological innovation but may also exacerbate social inequalities and socio-political tensions; there are also questions with regard to its environmental consequences, the potential for the spread of pandemics, and the emergence of global systemic risks (Centeno et al., 2015). In the MEMO partnership, we see migration as a complex social process rather than as a response to development imbalances, or as a solution to problems like unemployment, poverty, or population ageing.

At the individual and household level, human migration is acknowledged both as a right (the right to emigrate, to leave one's country), as a positive element in people's lives (the capacity and freedom to move) and as a crisis (when people are forced to move because of a natural disaster, a war, or simply the search for a better future). People migrate in search for better living and working conditions but also to seek protection. Communities may also be displaced internally or across national borders (Sassen, 2014), both spatially and culturally (Tomiak, 2017; Dorries et al., 2019).

There are two considerations that arise from this contextual understanding of migration, notably the need to recognise complexity (Verweij & Thompson, 2006) and uncertainty (Scoones, 2004, 2019; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) as crucial elements in contemporary societal realities overall and of migration specifically. As these elements are often missing from both scholarly and policy accounts on international migration and its governance, they occupy a central position in the critical analytical approach of this project (Triandafyllidou, 2022).

Speaking about complexity, we consider migration as complex at different levels: it is complex in the sense that it is not linear – it is fragmented and multi-directional, involving multiple stops and new departures or returns; it is complex in the sense that it happens at different geographical scales, involving movements within a country, across borders and to faraway destinations; and it is complex in the sense that it involves different types of drivers and motivations that cannot be neatly classified as economic or humanitarian; likewise, movement may take place through legal or irregular pathways.

Migration happens in a context of fundamental uncertainty (Stirling, 2010; Scoones, 2004, 2019). Uncertainty is different from risk in both ontological and epistemological ways. Risk is about a calculation of what can go wrong and about mitigation by estimating the probability that something goes wrong and putting in place remedies. Uncertainty is about acknowledging that we do not fully know what we do not know. It is about accepting that some factors that may condition migration in the near future, are not yet in our sight. But we need to make room for those factors in our understanding of migration dynamics (Triandafyllidou, 2022). Migrants operate in a non-equilibrium environment and need to adapt to changing circumstances, whether at destination or when returning or moving again. Earlier research (Scoones, 2004) looking at pastoral systems and their resilience but also at the ways in which critical infrastructure systems, financial markets, or health services react to disease outbreaks (Scoones, 2019) points to the need for acknowledging uncertainty and complexity in order to understand how migration systems work.

In line with the above ontological and epistemological perspective on migration, our approach to migration governance invites to consider complexity. We take into account that migration governance takes place at multiple levels, and authority may be dispersed away from national governments, upwards (supranational), downwards (to subnational jurisdictions), and sideways (to public-private networks) (Marks & Hooghe, 2004). More specifically, our approach is multi-scalar as it considers "the local, regional, national, pan-regional and global levels of analysis as part of mutually constituting institutional and personal networks of unequal power within which people both with and without migrant histories live their lives" (Glick-Schiller, 2015, p. 2276).

We conceive of migration as a fundamentally transnational reality and hence borrow from relevant transnationalism approaches in developing our theoretical tool (Faist et al., 2013). Even though the national state is the dominant framework that determines migration control, migrant integration as well as work or welfare, our approach seeks to refute methodological nationalism and to point to relations that develop between localities, across borders or at transnational spaces (Levitt et al., 2003) where migrants and their families operate.

When diaspora always refers to a community with defined profiles and characteristics, transnationalism is shaped by different patterns depending on the empirical context of the analysis. Transnationalism is linked to globalization because migrants crossing borders increase the connectedness across countries. Vertovec (2009) claimed that the meaning of transnationalism is grounded in six theoretical conditions: social morphology (social networks spanning borders), type of consciousness (multiple identities and sense of belonging), mode of cultural reproduction (hybridisation of various cultural phenomena), avenue of capital (activities of transnational corporations), site of political engagement (cross-border public participation and political organization through technologies), and (re)construction of places (creation of new social spaces across countries).

Transnationalism has been related to return migration, but both temporal and spatial dimensions play a significant role in the adoption of transnational practices and return decisions. For instance, the age of migrants and geographical proximity may influence the relationships between the origin and destination countries (measured in terms of frequency of visits, social and personal connections, facilities in the exchanges of remittances etc.). Yet, living across borders with hybrid identities, trans-migrants may suffer from exclusion and discrimination in both countries.

Recently, the notion of transnationalism has been increasingly associated with the notion of connectivity. The digital revolution, characterized by a large diffusion of internet, has drastically changed individuals' social, economic, and political daily life (Billari et al., 2019). On this basis, authors have argued the internetization of international migration (Pesando et al., 2023), facilitating the sharing of information and experiences, stimulating the willingness to move, and lowering the economic and social costs linked with migration decisions. Nevertheless, more than a new driver of migration, internet represents a supportive agent that facilitate the choice of a transnational lifestyle (Favell & Recchi, 2019).

Multiple Drivers and Complex Migration Flows

Following from the above considerations, this section outlines the major drivers of international migration and how they interact with one another. We pay special attention to the economic, environmental, political, and cultural drivers that shape migration as well as to historical ties and institutional factors that structure relations among countries and influence the size and direction of flows. We also point to the need for considering migration flows as complex, in terms of size, directionality, and level (internal, intra-regional and inter-continental).

Migration is largely caused by economic inequality and migrants' desire for a better life, better employment, and higher income. However, the relationship between economic development levels and migration trends follows an inverted U-shape: migration increases with economic development until a critical threshold is reached, after which it is shown to decrease (Dao et al., 2018; McKenzie, 2017; De Haas, 2010). Poverty shapes not only the likelihood of people migrating, but also where they go: poor people are more likely to move when migration costs are low, networks are developed, and policies allow them to do so. They also tend to migrate shorter distances and within the same region (McKenzie, 2017). In a study on Ecuador, Bertoli et al. (2013) showed that after an economic crisis the very poor stayed put, while those with some skills and income moved to Spain, and individuals with higher skills and income opted for the US. Yet, Bazzi's study on Indonesia (2017) showed that affluent households tend to migrate less if there are more opportunities for income at home. By contrast, Gueye's work on Senegal (2019) has shown that in the face of precarious economic and harsh ecological conditions, low income families mobilise different resources to support irregular migration ambitions of younger members toward Southern European destinations. A closer look at return and remigration dynamics shows the understudied role of indebtedness in propelling further migration and influencing household decisions (Datta & Aznar, 2019; Rahman, 2013; O'Connell Davidson, 2013). These studies highlight the importance of investigating the role of economic drivers in both initiating and continuing migration, and in interaction with other factors.

Migration has been conceptualised as one method of adaptation to climate and environmental change, with the caveat that those most affected often do not have the means to migrate internationally (Mezdour & Veronis, 2012; Gore, 2020; Riosmena et al., 2018; Obokata et al., 2014; Adger et al., 2015; Nawrotzki et al., 2016). Various case studies have highlighted these dynamics. Notably, Schmidt (2018) has studied how climate stressors (e.g., natural disasters such as hurricanes) aggravate socio-economic inequalities, as the capacity to adapt by emigrating is conditioned by age, gender, individual preferences, cultural context, personal attributes, and access to migrant networks. Martin et al.'s 2014 study of three localities in Bangladesh analysed how perceptions of climate change and the social acceptability of migrating may shape migration behaviour. The authors emphasised that while the general objective may be higher income and a better life, it is important to understand the complex factors underlying motivations, decisions, and actions. For instance, the prolonged drought in Central America (*el corridor seco*), the region's seasonal hurricanes (Eta and Iota in 2020), and the lack of support for victims of flooding in both Central America and South Asia generated indirect migration pressures. The socio-ecological systems approach adopted in this research will shed light on how environmental conditions alter local and regional systems of production, which in turn affect migration pressures.

Violence and conflict are also among the main drivers that lead people to move from their homes (Adhikari, 2012; Cummings et al., 2015; Melander & Öberg, 2006). Conflict is often both a cause and consequence of state fragility. State fragility, including endemic corruption and the impossibility of countries to provide for the basic needs of their population (e.g., water, roads, safety and security, public health services), remain one of the central challenges for sustainable global development and poverty reduction (Ziaja et al., 2019). Political violence and weak institutions can lead to institutional collapse, a loss of legitimacy, and large-scale displacement (Araya, 2013). Further, countries with weak institutions are not able to respond adequately and are particularly vulnerable to transnational organised crime that may also lead to migration, as is happening in Central America (Dudley, 2012; Leutert, 2018). There are important links between state-fragility/conflict and environmental degradation, since fragile states are ill-positioned to prevent or respond to disaster emergencies. The Horn of Africa and Sahel regions are relevant examples (Mach et al., 2020; Veronis et al., 2018). We therefore need to investigate the interaction between poverty, inequality, violence, and state fragility as drivers of mixed migration flows.

Linked to these factors are geographical proximity and historical ties among countries that may relate to their colonial history, as well as to ethnic, cultural, and linguistic ties among their populations. Such proximity shapes cross-border flows and the creation of regional economies and migration clusters – as is the case in our selected migration systems (Cerrutti & Parrado, 2015; Maher, 2017; Masferrer et al., 2019, Sharma & Thapa, 2013).

In addition to the above factors, migration flows are influenced by migration regimes (Koslowski, 2011), notably institutions, networks, actors, and policies that structure international mobility. These include also what other scholars have called migration infrastructures notably systems of transport, communication, but also digital technologies used for both fencing and gatekeeping the border (Xiang & Lindquist, 2018; Lin et al., 2017; Triandafyllidou & Ambrosini, 2011). We consider these as meso-factors that mediate the macro-level dynamics with the micro-level decision-making. This calls for a multi-level and multi-scalar perspective (Panizzon & Van Riemsdijk, 2019) that considers the complexity of the governance structures bringing together the national, sub-national, and transnational levels (see also Fakhoury, 2018).

Special attention must be paid to the concerns and interests of not only those in the destination, but also in origin, transit and return countries. It is important to factor in the role, specific interests, and organisational cultures of different sectors of government (e.g., ministries and departments) (Mouthaan, 2018; Akanle, 2018), the private sector (migrant employers, travel and employment agencies, post-secondary institutions), and even illicit networks like migrant smuggling groups (Zhang et al., 2018; Triandafyllidou, 2018; Alvarez Velasco, 2018; Sanchez, 2018).

Unlike most other studies that focus either on internal or on international migration, our approach here aims at analysing the dynamic relationship among internal, intra-regional and intercontinental migration. Past research has considered internal migration as the stepping stone to international migration (Vullnetari, 2012) and in fact a common perspective has been that of 'step migration'. These approaches postulated that internal migration from the country side to urban centres (e.g., within Albania as per Vullnetari 2012; or within Bangladesh, see Biswas et al. 2019) aimed at accumulating material resources and developing social networks that would support a subsequent move abroad. Other studies have shown that international migrants might initially choose a destination within a given world region (e.g., from Bangladesh to Malaysia or from the Philippines to the UAE) to save money, accumulate expert knowledge on migration procedures, and prepare the documentation for a more long term project to move to Canada for instance or Europe. However, Skeldon and King have shown that the relationship is more complex and can work either way (Skeldon, 2006; King & Skeldon, 2010; McLeman et al., 2018) in the sense that initial moves may lead to staying to the initial destination, returning to the country of origin or indeed to onwards migration.

The dynamics and directionality of the 'step' process should not be taken for granted as bringing the migrant from a nearby and short term, to a necessarily long term and distant destination. In the MEMO partnership we privilege the term complex migration to emphasise that migration is not a linear process between an origin and a destination country involving an out-migration phase and possibly also a return (whether voluntary or forced). We consider that contemporary migration more often than not involves multi-step journeys, with intermediate stops and new departures as well as returns (Gemi & Triandafyllidou, 2021). At each phase of the process there are multiple factors at play both as regards macro-drivers, meso-level factors and the micro-level of migrant decision making. We will consider those relationships by investigating the different directions and interactions of migration moves to neighbouring countries and remote destinations. This will allow for appreciating the complex position of countries like Mexico, Nigeria, or Bangladesh, which may be, at the same time, origin, transit, return and destination countries within a migration system.

After having reviewed here our approach to drivers and flows, the following section focuses on our analytical framework for considering the interaction between the macro, meso, and micro level of migration dynamics and their governance.

Migration Systems, Migrant Networks, and Migrant Agency

This section introduces the notions of migration systems, migrant networks, and migrant agency as our overall analytical framework that informs our analysis of the macro-, meso-, and micro-level in analysing migration dynamics.

In the MEMO partnership, we conceptualise the macro level as a migration system that brings together a number of countries in a given world region. A migration system is defined as two or more countries connected to each other by flows and counterflows of people, goods, services, and information (Mabogunje, 1970; Faist, 1998; de Haas, 2009). A migration system involves situations of quasi-organized migratory flows (Mabogunje, 1970), which by linking people, families, and communities over space, often result in a 'geographical structuring and clustering of migration flows' (de Haas, 2009).

Migration systems are not established solely by the fact of movement as such but rather by a 'cumulative causation' effect of past migrations (Massey et al., 1993) alongside other social, economic, cultural, and historical ties. This is certainly a feature of, for instance, migrations within South Asia among Nepal, Bangladesh and India as well as between, for instance, South Asia and the United Kingdom; or between the Northern Triangle countries in Central America and Mexico and the United States; or also among countries in West Africa, notably Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Ivory Coast and between those countries for instance and former colonial powers such as France or the United Kingdom. Migration systems though need not be tied to former colonial relations as they incorporate also emerging socio-economic and political linkages such as within West Africa as part of the ECOWAS dynamics; or between South Asian countries and Canada, a more recently emerged system mainly related to earlier labour migrations that facilitate more recent flows.

Traditionally, the migration systems' approach viewed migrant settlement as an end-state and static process based on the assumption that once migrants have settled in the country of destination, the migratory flow becomes self-perpetuating since it tends to establish socio-economic structures (see e.g., networks) which are phenomenally able to sustain the process (Castles & Miller, 2009; Bakewell et al., 2012). The migration systems approach while important in determining the framework within which migration flows develop, offers only a partial view of their dynamics. The notion of migration networks and the related migration network theory is useful here in highlighting the dynamic and evolving character of migration systems (Faist, 2000; Massey et al., 1993). Specifically, migration network theory lays strong emphasis on explaining how the past migration experience, the settled migrants, and established ethnic communities in specific countries of destination facilitate the arrival of new migrants (Stark & Wang, 2002). In fact, it is commonly known that the social capital embedded within migrant networks in destination countries lowers the costs and risks of migration movements and hence increases the likelihood of new migration flows (Bashi, 2007). This approach, however, tends to neglect the structural or contextual implications that migration flows have on both the origin and destination countries' contexts at the macro level, which is best captured by the migration systems perspective.

Thus, bringing together a migration system macro-level perspective and a migrant network meso-level perspective we are able to bring together the structural and dynamic elements in either. A migration system, therefore, can be altered by important changes in the initial socio-economic conditions that shaped it and under which migration unfolded (de Haas, 2010). In addition, the meso level of the transnational, ethnic, and social networks that emerge play an important role in mitigating the effects of the structural changes above and framing the micro level

of migrant agency. Last but not least, migrants exercise their agency by developing new strategies for responding to the evolving situation (Gemi, 2014). It is important, therefore, to acknowledge that migration involves changing, often fragmented, trajectories with several 'stop' and 'go' and 'return' moments. Adopting a similar theoretical perspective in their study of southeastern Europe, Gemi and Triandafyllidou (2021) showed how the economic crisis of the early 2010s in Greece and Italy led many settled immigrants from Albania to return to their country of origin. The study documents, though, different return and reintegration or remigration trajectories of people who started a business back home or engaged into a transnational economic activity on the basis of their previously established network, returned to the initial destination country or emigrated to a different destination. Such local and transnational networks involved family members as well as professional or co-ethnic connections.

The role of migrant agency is crucial here as a pivotal element that brings together the analysis of the structural factors built into the migration system, the networks that develop, and the contextual changes. Agency implies that the migrant is able to exert a certain degree of control over structural factors and social relations. But more importantly agency here denotes the intentional action of the migrant who seeks to navigate a set of given conditions and opportunity structures as they evolve. Thus, our framework aims at bringing together macro-level conditions (e.g., poverty, unemployment, political instability, urban violence, environmental change) and the meso-level factors (intermediaries that facilitate migration, including employment agencies, lawyers, educational institutions, or employers, for instance, and important support networks at local, national or transnational level (family, friends, co-villagers, co-workers), with a view to focusing on the micro level of the migrant and the specific household. Looking at the meso level, we also acknowledge the role of values and culture, notably the emergence of a 'culture of migration' within a particular migration system (Massey et al., 1993, p. 453). This is often strongly associated with individual socio-economic success, thereby turning migration into a prevailing social norm or a rite of passage for young adults and for entire households.

The proposed framework of macro, meso, and micro level offers several vantage points for studying complex migration flows. The notion of a migration system points to the importance of looking at countries of origin, transit and destination in their varied roles and examining possible multi-directional, onwards or return migration movements. The focus on the meso-level factors of networks and intermediaries allows us also to delve into the ways in which migrants mobilise social and material resources to navigate the policy options available to them (see also Triandafyllidou, 2017) as well as to consider the inter-generational dimension of these complex migrant trajectories. Within the same household there can be different trajectories for the first- and second-generation migrants and their settlement, return, or onwards migration trajectories. Putting these elements within wider migration system framework allows for a holistic analysis of the interactive nature of migration decisions and actions.

The sections that follow discuss in some more detail the macro, meso and micro drivers of migration and we consider within each of these broader sets of elements.

Macro-level Drivers of Migration

Scholars have explored migration alongside population, economic, social, and environmental development (Parrish et al., 2020; Piguet, 2013), but systematic and comparable insights on the factors driving movements and their mutual interactions at different territorial levels, are still lacking (Bates-Eamer, 2019; Piguet, 2022; Willett & Sears, 2020). The MEMO project aims to fill gaps in the current scientific knowledge providing a conceptual framework on migration drivers and how they are intertwined. This requires the adoption of a comprehensive method, which analyses the evolution of migration systems across space and over time. In its scope, MEMO will formulate a novel multidimensional and comprehensive approach to capture the multiple forms,

directions, and heterogeneity of human (im)mobility, in the process of global transformations (Fawcett, 1989; Zlotnik, 1992; DeWaard et al., 2012; Bakewell, 2014; Hauer, 2017; Windzio et al., 2021; Leal, 2021).

In this section, we describe some preliminary components of the MEMO future framework, focusing on the macro drivers, defined as the structural elements that facilitate, constrain, or trigger migration. These factors may affect population movements directly, such as conflicts, and indirectly, such as climate change and environmental conditions, acting as part of configurated migration systems. Key categories of macro drivers identified by Black et al. (2011) (see also McLeman & Smit, 2006; McLeman & Hunter, 2010 for applications) include: demographic, economic, socio-cultural, political, and environmental conditions (see Figure 1). Because migration decisions are inherently context-specific, there is considerable variance in the strength of influence of different types of drivers from one region and scale to another. Unavoidably the analysis has to be selective. Our aim will be to select dominant contextual factors and assess their role and how they interact with one another, in each migration system. For example: demographic factors are discussed based on demographic theories adopted to interpret dynamics of international and internal migration at global, regional, or local levels.
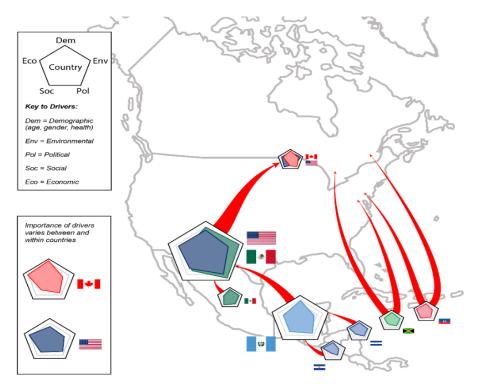
Figure 1. Multiple Drivers and Complex Migration Flows Interaction

Table 1. Macro drivers of migration, preliminary overview

Category	Macro factors (examples)
Demographic	Population structure by age and sex; population dynamics (fertility and mortality) over time; population distribution by place
Social-cultural	Cultural norms Migrant networks

Economic	Income and economic disparities
	Labour market disequilibrium
Political	Conflicts, persecutions
	Political instability
Environmental conditions	Sudden-onset events Natural disasters and shocks
	Slow-onset climate changes and natural conditions

Demographic Drivers

Differences in the age-structures of populations drive migration. Currently, many countries are already facing the shrinking of their working age populations (Ghio et al., 2022), when retired generations are not entirely replaced by new generations of workers, while the majority of developing countries continues experiencing sustained fertility rates and population growth, which implies that the raising share of the working age groups on the total of population. The theory of demographic transition depicts these pathways in population dynamics (Zelinsky, 1971). Specifically, it describes the shift towards longer lives and social development that all countries have entered-in or already completed.

In the earliest phase of demographic transition, levels of fertility and mortality are high in a population and its size relatively stable. Then, mortality rates begin to decline, especially among infants and children, while fertility remains high leading the population to expand in size. In the intermediate stage, mortality levels drop further, and fertility levels start to decline; population growth accelerates due to a large and sustained excess of births over deaths. For populations in the later stages of demographic transition, fertility and mortality have reached low levels and aging challenges retirement systems, increasing the demand of social security, and the provision of care and support for the older populations. From this perspective, international migration is the most sizeable demographic factor that may attenuate or counteract population decline (Skeldon, 2006; Lutz et al., 2019). By contrast, for countries in earlier stage of demographic transition, higher fertility rates generate a youth bulge that can likely increase migration when places of origin are not able to meet young needs *(*Migali et al., 2018*)*.

From Zelinsky's pioneering work, migration has been deeply investigated in the context of urbanization (Lerch, 2010). Specifically, the hypothesis of migration transition describes how regularities in mobility patterns across regions and over time reflect common population trajectories (Davis, 1965). The schema suggests a five-stage model to explain population distribution, where the intra and inter *urban to rural* mobility increase over time, while international migration and *rural to urban* mobility first increase, become stable and then decline. Similarities with the demographic transition are evident: both models may be represented as a series of transition sequences, where migration integrates both spatial and temporal perspectives. The temporal perspective is also considered in terms of the age-selectivity of migration, which represents the most prominent pattern found in empirical analyses (Rogers & Castro, 1998). Recent studies have documented the heterogeneity of demographic profiles across territories, with the coexistence of different trends, such as the shrinking of cities (Kabisch & Haase, 2011) and the revitalization of urban centres tentatively explained by the migration of younger populations attracted by the services and amenities in urban settings (Kashnitsky et al., 2020; Ghio et al., 2022).

Social-cultural Drivers

Migration and mobility have always been part of human history and human socio-economic development. The way we understand and regulate international migration today finds its roots

into the Westphalian system of inter-national order. It is the nationalist doctrine – a modern inventions (Gellner, 1983) – that determines that ethnic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries need to coincide with political-territorial borders. Within the (inter-)national order, migration becomes an anomaly because, as Abdelmalek Sayad (2006) put it, migrants are present where they should not be (at their host country) and are absent from where they should be (their country of origin).

However, it is not uncommon for countries and particularly for regions within a country to have developed a 'culture of migration'. The historical experience of past emigration or transit migration flows may have transformed migration into a rite of passage for young men or women, intertwined with gendered norms of behaviour and even with family norms. Thus, there may be in a community an expectation that the older male children will migrate regionally or internationally to provide for their parents and younger siblings. Or it may be expected that a young man who wants to marry needs first to go abroad to earn some money for his future household. We find such patterns today in emigration of young Sub-Saharan African men who speak about the moral responsibility they carry on their shoulders (Triandafyllidou & Maroukis, 2012), while we also find it for instance in post-World War II migrations from southern Europe to northern Europe, or overseas. We also find such a culture of migration arising today in relation to middle class households in South Asia whose young adult children are encouraged to migrate in search of a better education and a better professional future to countries such as Australia, the UK or Canada (Nanda et al., 2022).

Cultures of migration are shaped by a variety of factors including gender, race, ethnicity, language, and class, all of which, with their intersections, shape household decisions on who migrates, as well as migrants' labour market integration (Kofman & Raghuram, 2006; Triandafyllidou & Isaakyan, 2016). Recent research shows (Veronis, 2014; Obokata & Veronis, 2018) that women's household responsibilities vary in different spatial and cultural contexts, thus influencing their participation (or not) in local or international migration.

Economic Drivers

A conventional theoretical literature remains devoted to the identification of income and economic conditions as the main drivers of migration. Friedman (1957) distinguishes between transitory and permanent incomes, attesting the temporal relevance of the economic differentials across countries: future expectations for income and expenditure differentials drive migration over the individuals' life course. Borjas (1985) explains migration through the comparisons of incomes across countries. Under some assumptions, his model proposes a formal definition of the optimal choice of immigrants to sort destination countries based on the income maximization hypothesis, as necessary condition for the individual utility maximization. The income-maximization hypothesis has been used successfully in the human capital literature to explain migration as a human capital investment. Sjaastad (1962) proposes a cost-benefit analysis, where migration decision derives from the higher benefits and the lower costs, while Lee's push-pull model (1966) suggests that people emigrate because the lack of opportunities in the origin countries is compensated by the expected utility in destination countries. Nevertheless, according to the new-economics of migration, the analysis of migration drivers should be formulated in terms of labor market equilibrium, since migration may be an adjustment mechanism between the demand and supply of labour (Stark & Bloom, 1985).

The theme of labor market disequilibrium is approached by Harris and Todaro (1970) to explain why rural-urban mobility persists when there are positive marginal effects in agricultural activities and high levels of urban unemployment. Their model adopts a neoclassic approach to show how migration responds to the urban-rural differentials in expected earnings, with the urban employment rates acting as equilibrator of the rural-urban flows. Harris and Todaro (1970) argued that, in the absence of wage flexibility, "an optimal policy is a 'policy package', including both

partial wage subsidies (or direct government employment) and measures to restrict free migration" (p. 127). Empirical analyses have demonstrated how higher GDP attracts migrants (Ortega & Peri, 2013); these effects are particularly relevant in the developing regions (Ruyssen & Rayp, 2014).

Political Drivers

Conflicts, violence, and insecurity are factors affecting migration. For instance, in in Sub-Saharan Africa, Naudé (2010) documented how an additional year of conflict could raise emigration by 1.7 per 1,000 inhabitants. In Columbia, Ibáñez and Vélez (2008) found that violent events, in addition to perceptions of violence and a generalised lack of security, were determinants of forced population movements. Analysing migration data from 1964 to 1989, Davenport et al. (2003) explained that migration flows are mainly driven by higher likelihood of conflicts that occur in countries exposed to political instability.

Different forms of conflict and violence have different impacts on migration flows. Based on a pooled time-series analysis using datasets provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR), Schmeidl (1997) argued that generalized violence has stronger predictive power on international migration than other forms of human rights violations. Furthermore, Shellman and Stewart (2007) found a direct connection between the surges of political violence in Haiti and emigration to the United States. Differences in the types of migration were also captured by Moore and Shellman (2006), examining data for a global sample of countries from 1952 to 1995. The authors demonstrated that violence perpetuated by States against civilian populations likely generate international flows, while violence against dissidents tend to increase more internal displacements than international mobility.

Empirical analyses have tentatively measured the correlation between the intensity of violence and the distance between the places of origin and destination. Looking at the forced migration during the civil conflict in south-central Nepal, Bohra-Mishra and Massey (2011) proved that the effect of violence increases when the distance between the places of origin and destination increases. The authors concluded that violence, below a certain threshold, may have limited effects on migration. Using data on flows between Mexico and the United States from 1995 to 2012, Chort and de la Rupelle (2016) found that violence increases out-migration from border states, while it decreases migration from other Mexican states.

Environmental Drivers

The role of climate change as a predisposing driver of internal and international migration has been studies extensively at macro level, from the first conceptualizations of anthropogenic climate change (Ravenstein, 1889). Although no consensus has been reached on the nexus between climate change and migration, scholars have recognized that environmentally influenced migration is closely linked with populations' adaptive capacity (McLeman & Hunter, 2010; Fussell et al., 2014).

Migratory responses (temporary, permanent, mobility or international migration) are associated with the types of environmental events: sudden-onset events (tornadoes, hurricanes, etc.) or slow-onset changes (droughts, land degradation, etc.). On this basis, migration results from the interactions between climate conditions and vulnerabilities, as a sort of adaptation strategies. Vulnerability depends on the degree of exposure and the ability of exposed populations and their socio-economic and cultural systems to react to the environmental changes (Wiegel et al., 2019). To interpret heterogeneity in behavioral outcomes across populations, Lutz and

Muttarak (2017) re-elaborate the concept of demographic metabolism, which explains how the changing in the educational compositions of future populations can influence societies' adaptive capacity to climate change. This provides an analytical toolbox to forecast important aspects of societal changes that influence populations' adaptive capacity in the future. Nevertheless, the lack of empirical evidence at global level limits the universal recognition of these conceptualizations.

This overview has briefly identified and described the main factors that influence migration at macro level. Nevertheless, their effects may vary consistently across countries due to the role played by stakeholders that can facilitate or limit migration, as it will be explained in the following section.

Meso-level Stakeholders and Intermediaries in Origin, Transit, and Destination Countries

The meso-level involves a broad range of stakeholders and intermediary processes, which are very diverse in terms of their role and nature, including: state, para-state, and supra-national institutions; non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, civil society, faith-based/religious and grassroots groups, community and migrant associations; the media and information and communication technologies (ICTs); as well as the private sector, from large transnational companies to small ethnic businesses and entrepreneurs. Among these, some work towards facilitating and enabling mobility, migration, and connections or flows between places (of origin, transit, and destination), while others, on the contrary, aim to control, police, impede, and/or prevent migration.

It is important to underline that meso-level stakeholders and intermediaries constitute a complex apparatus – or "system" – that is intertwined with both macro-level drivers and micro-level actors (individuals and families). Moreover, this apparatus includes a variety of formal and legal stakeholders and institutions, but also more informal organizations, and even outright illegal groups and activities (e.g., traffickers) that have their own interests and agendas. Nevertheless, it is often the case that formal as well as informal and illegal stakeholders emerge in response to state policies and (macro-level) forces that aim to control or manage migration (e.g., Geneva Convention on Refugees, regional integration agreements; see Nakache et al. 2015).

Because of the complex nature and role of meso-level actors and processes and the fact that they are enmeshed with drivers at the macro and micro-level, they mainly correspond to networks and flows and can therefore be approached through an institutions and systems lens. We first present stakeholders that facilitate migrant flows, followed by those that impede them; we then discuss the role of transversal actors intermediaries, and processes, including the media, ICTs, and diasporic communities that contribute to transnational flows and connections.

Facilitators of Migration in Origin, Transit, and Destination countries

A range of formal state and parastate stakeholders participate in processes that facilitate and support migrant flows in countries of origin, transit, and destination. These include policy making and implementing entities such as states, state agencies, elected officials, policy makers, and bureaucrats/civil servants (e.g., at ministries of immigration, interior, external affairs, labour/employment), lawyers, judges, and asylum and refugee boards. In addition, agents, representatives and/or working groups of supranational institutions are involved in policy development for the global governance of migration, and on the ground monitoring, such as from the IOM, and the overall UN migration network, as well as regional integration agreements (e.g., the EU, MERCOSUR) and other types of economic agreements (e.g., CARICOM, ECOWAS) that can include mobility provisions (especially for labour) among signatory members.

In some instances, origin and destination states engage in bilateral agreements that encourage the migration of specific types of workers – e.g., Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP, Basok, 2004), the former Live-in Caregiver program (Hu, 2018; Cockram et al., 2018) among others. Some origin states have developed such programs to 'export' migrant workers, mainly with an interest in the remittances that they will send back; examples include countries such as the Philippines (Parreñas, 2021) and Indonesia (Silvey, 2004). Educational institutions are involved in the development of such skilled worker programs in order to train and encourage recent graduates to migrate; this is the case of health-care professionals from India and the Philippines (Thomson & Walton-Roberts, 2019; Walton-Roberts et al., 2017).

Indeed, educational (especially postsecondary) institutions have also become increasingly involved as key actors in international flows of migrants (Waters & Brooks 2011), primarily in the context of the so-called "global race for talent" (Arthur, 2013, Geddie 2015). Partnerships and agreements exist between institutions in origin and destination countries to facilitate student, staff, and professor mobility, along with broader regional or international educational programs (e.g., Erasmus in Europe ; Emerging Leaders in the Americas Program in Canada s), some of which are overseen by international or supranational institutions (Agences Universitaires de la Francophonie). Since the early 2000s, this "education-migration nexus" (Robertson, 2013) has grown more significant i, whereby international study programs increasingly serve as a "multi-step migration" strategy by incorporating pathways to achieve permanent residence in the destination country (Akbar 2022).

Several other intermediaries exist whose role is to support, assist, and meet the needs of migrant groups and individuals – especially in transit and destination countries. These include a variety of non-governmental organizations along with civil society, grassroots and faith-based groups, community and immigrant associations that provide various types of resources and/or services to migrants – from food, shelter, emergency health care, information and paralegal services (e.g., for undocumented migrants or asylum seekers) to more formal settlement and integration programs to newly arrived immigrants and permanent residents (e.g., language training, employment counselling). Some non-governmental and civil society organizations may receive (part or most of) their funding from governments – as in Canada –, in which case they become part of a para-state apparatus (Trudeau & Veronis, 2009, Veronis, 2019). But others function as independent, non-profit, and charitable organizations that raise their own funds and/or rely on donations, which they can then direct to services for various groups of migrants regardless of their category or status. Large NGOs often rely on both sources of income, notably private donations and funding campaigns as well as large state subsidies in exchange of providing frontline services (e.g., I shelter, food, clothing, health care, legal advice) thus enabling them to serve a range of vulnerable populations.

With the expansion of "irregular" immigration – especially at key border zones such as the Mediterranean, Central and North America (Guatemala-Mexico and Mexico-US border) and South Asia (e.g., India-Bangladesh border) –in addition to contexts of conflict and/or natural disasters, humanitarian organizations and their staff (e.g., Red Cross, Médecins sans frontières, UNHCR) play a key role by intervening, helping to prevent the loss of human life, providing emergency services, and meeting basic needs, including setting up camps for refugees and/or displacees. Moreover, since the refugee crisis of 2015, private citizens and sponsorship groups have emerged as engaged actors in various countries – e.g., Canada (Hamilton et al., 2020) , and to a lesser extent the UK, the US or Italy – to assist with international efforts for the resettlement of large numbers of refugees – including following the conflict in Syria (2011-onwards), in Afghanistan (2021), and in Ukraine (2022).

It is important to also highlight that the private sector represents an influential stakeholder in these processes. With aging societies in countries of the Global North and looming labour shortages, the private sector sometimes aims to shape migration policies and/or encourages

specific types of migration through its practices (e.g., lobbying for temporary migrant programs, employing international students, undocumented migrants). Large transnational companies (b, Google, Amazon, Nike, Apple, etc.) can also influence the flows of both domestic and international migrant workers (Wright 2006). Lastly, smaller employers, ethnic businesses, and entrepreneurs can play roles of different magnitude by sponsoring refugees, making employment offers to potential migrants, and/or hiring co-ethnics and international students.

Meanwhile, international efforts to manage migration have contributed to the emergence of a range of actors – sometimes referred to as the "migration industry" – some of which may be formal and legal (e.g., charities, faith-based organizations, civil society, and community groups), but also many others that can be considered as informal and even illegal (Nakache et al., 2015). Among those that fall in a grey area are recruitment agencies, travel agencies, consultants and paralegals who assist would-be migrants with providing information and various types of services (e.g., legal services, filling documents, completing applications), etc. Yet some such actors or "service providers" may be fraudulent and even outright illegal – such as shady recruiters and consultants, and even bogus educational institutions whose aim is to rob would be migrants (e.g., international students). In addition, other actors exist that provide transportation and other services (in origin and transit countries) to individuals who cannot migrate through legal channels (e.g., traffickers, *passeurs*, *coyotes*.).

Hindering Migration Flows in Origin, Transit, and Destination Countries

Migration policies, while encouraging or supporting some types of migrant flows, tend to simultaneously control, manage, prevent, and impede the mobility of other social groups. Thus states, state agencies, policy makers, elected officials, as well as representatives of supra-national institutions and economic agreements contribute to both facilitating and hindering migration at the same time. Meanwhile, a variety of stakeholders are employed to develop and implement these policies and regulations, including border services, bureaucrats/civil servants, asylum and refugee boards, judges, lawyers, along with other policing, detention, legal agents and service providers (Mountz 2010, 2020) . To enforce migration-related policies, some states develop public-private partnerships with security companies (e.g., Frontex in the case of Europe) and/or hire them to do this job; occasionally, states also engage with the military-industrial complex to develop surveillance equipment in order to monitor borders and intercept or prevent "irregular" crossings (e.g., building fences, satellite monitoring, infra-red vision tools, and other digital and technological tools, including artificial intelligence; Amoore 2006).

Policies and their enforcement may, as an unintended effect, pave the way for the emergence of intermediaries that see opportunities to become a part of the apparatus or system, and to benefit from it – either legally or illegally. Informal organizations and/or illegal groups can thus emerge that also intervene to prevent border crossings, either directly (e.g., paramilitary groups and militias at the Mexico-US border), or indirectly (e.g., gangs, organized crime, pirates who attack, rob, kidnap, even kill would-be migrants). As such, there can be an overlap between stakeholders and actors who contribute to facilitating and supporting migrant flows, and those that impede or prevent mobility. For this reason, also, there can be a very fine line between legal and illegal activities when recruiters, consultants, paralegals, and traffickers become involved to "assist" would-be migrants.

Transnational Intermediaries: Media, ICTS, and Diasporic Communities

In this third section, we outline a number of transnational intermediaries, who operate across borders and whose influence on migration flows may vary, depending on the context – including the media, ICTs, and diasporic communities. First, starting with official, "mainstream' media (e.g., national and international press, radio, television, including through digital formats such as the Internet) contribute to building public discourses and narratives by circulating pro-migrant and/or anti-immigrant and xenophobic views. As such, they can influence policy makers, elected officials, and the broader public's attitudes and sentiment regarding migrant flows – i.e., whether migrants in general or specific migrant groups are desired and/or welcome, or not (e.g., deserving versus undeserving migrants; Meltzer et al., 2017; Theorin & Strömbäck 2020).

The significance and power of the media is arguably evident during the "2015 migrant crisis" when Canadians called for the federal government to support the resettlement of Syrian refugees, which ultimately contributed to ousting Harper's Conservative government and in electing Trudeau's Liberals (whose election platform included the resettlement of 25,000 Syrian refugees; see Hamilton et al., 2020). This situation contrasted with much more ambivalent views in Europe, where different countries and different groups adopted diverse views depending on how they were positioned with regard to migrant flows (Krzyzanowski et al., 2018). Moreover, mainstream media can also influence would be migrants in origin (and transit) countries by communicating information, discussing policies, and/or providing stories and images (real or fake) of successful or failed migrant journeys (Nakache et al., 2015). Similarly, ethnic and diasporic media (i.e., media produced by/for and/or destined to specific ethnic, migrant, and diasporic groups) can play a role by circulating information, images, and stories that may influence individuals in the countries of origin (and/or transit) to initiate migration plans (or not).

Meanwhile, the rise and ongoing development of ICTs and social media, along with new digital technologies (smartphones) are providing new platforms for information sharing as well as new tools and infrastructure that can help support migrants in their journeys (e.g., Google maps, Google translate; Stein 2022, Veronis et al., 2018). ICTs and social media have made access to information and resources much more ubiquitous, but they also represent a double-edged sword insofar as they can contribute to misinformation and disinformation, and/or opportunities for fraud and other mal-intentioned activities (e.g., recruitment agencies, bogus educational institutions, traffickers, etc.).

Lastly, diasporic communities also play a role, whether directly or indirectly, by engaging in transional flows and connections – social, cultural, economic, religious, and political (Levitt & Jarowsky 2007). Among other things, they can shape and facilitate migratory movements in multiple ways, including:

- social and cultural networks provide information, services, and supports throughout the journey of potential migrations (from decision-making in countries of origin, to reaching transit countries, and/or when settling in destination countries);
- ethnic businesses and entrepreneurs can become employers and/or help to support economic flows (trade, circulation of goods) between countries of origin, destination, and other countries where the diaspora is established, which may lead to more mobility and migration;
- faith-based and ethnoreligious organizations can offer various forms of support (information, resources, services) to newcomers, temporary migrants, international students, and/or to migrants with irregular status;
- And through economic and political intervention in the country of origin (e.g., sending remittances for development, financing political parties, etc.).

Table 2. Overview of Meso-level Drivers

	Formal-Official/Legal	Informal/Illegal
Facilitate migration in origin, transit and destination countries	**State and para-state institutions** -state agents, representatives ofand para-state institutions, supra-national institutions and, regional/bilateral trade agreements, elected officials, policy makers, bilateral and trade agreements civil servants/bureaucrats, immigration agents, judges, lawyers, refugee/asylum boards, consular services, service providers **Immigration industry** - immigration industry: recruitment agencies, consultants, paralegal agents, travel agencies, lawyers, educational institutions **Civil society** -civil society organizations, grassroots activism, citizens and sponsorship groups, charities, services providers, immigrant associations, faith-based and religious groups, humanitarian organizations **Private sector** - transnational corporations, local employers, ethnic businesses and entrepreneurs	-immigration industry: recruitment agents, consultants, migration agents, traffickers (*coyotes*, *passeurs*) -informal support groups, migrant networks, community and activist groups, diasporas - informal economy (employers, ethnic businesses, entrepreneurs) -bogus educational institutions
Impede or hinder migration in origin, transit and destination countries	**State and para-state institutions** -border services, state agents, representatives of supra-national institutions and regional/bilateral trade agreements and parastate institutions, elected officials, policy makers, bureaucrats/civil servants, border services, immigration agents, police, detention agents, judges, lawyers, refugee/asylum boards, security companies	Paramilitary groups, militias, organized crime, gangs, traffickers, pirates
Transnational intermediaries	**Media** -national and international mainstream media (traditional/online press, TV, and radio) **Ethnic and diasporic media** - traditional/online press, TV, and radio **ICTs** -surveillance tools and apparatus, digital data bases, AI -social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, snapchat, messenger) -smartphones -sofware (Google Maps, Google Translate, AI) **Diasporic communities** -social, cultural, religious, economic, and political flows and connections	**ICTs** -surveillance tools and apparatus -digital data bases -organized crime/fraudulent activities

Micro-drivers: Migrant Decision-Making and Intersectionality

Migrant decision-making and agency have received increasing attention in recent years regarding the role of desire, hope, and imagination in shaping decisions to migrate and the interplay between motivation, opportunity, and ability to migrate (Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016; Belloni, 2016; Bal, 2014; Carling & Schewel, 2017; Collins, 2017; Nakache, Pellerin & Veronis, 2015).

The micro-level experience is of course shaped by structural factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, language, and class, all of which, with their intersections, shape household decisions on who migrates, as well as migrants' labour market integration (Kofman & Raghuram, 2006; Triandafyllidou & Isaakyan, 2016). Recent research shows (Veronis, 2014; Obokata & Veronis, 2018) that women's household responsibilities vary in different spatial and cultural contexts, thus influencing their participation (or not) in local or international migration. From a governance perspective, migration and related policies around labour, development, welfare, health and security are all gendered, often assuming a male breadwinner/primary migrant model (Kofman, 2004; Kofman et al., 2010). The MEMO project adopts an intersectional lens (Anthias, 2013; Collins, 2019) including gender, class, race, and other forms of distinctions, such as sexual orientation, health, (dis)ability in studying how macro and meso-level factors shape micro-level decisions at the household and individual levels.

Building on the above studies, our work in the MEMO partnership investigates decision-making in multiple socio-economic and cultural contexts, taking into account socio-cognitive mechanisms like biased risk calculation and self-deception (Syed Zwick, 2020; Grossmann et al., 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2019) to gain a deeper understanding of how macro-drivers and meso-level factors shape decision-making at the household and individual levels.

In relation to the above, we acknowledge that migrant agency involves degrees of voluntariness and agency or that migrants may feel they are forced to migrate or return. Forced here is not understood in the sense of fleeing persecution or violence (i.e., seeking asylum) but as involving a range of constraints that limit one's choices and push one towards a specific direction. For instance, the lack of adequate income, underemployment and political instability may be strong motivating factors that lead a young person to search for a better life elsewhere. The collapse of basic services like electricity, water, transport, or education after a sudden climate event – e.g., severe flooding or an earthquake – may lead people to leave. While technically speaking people in those situations are not refugees, their feeling of whether they had other options or were 'forced' to flee can defy legal categorisations of economic vs humanitarian migration.

We thus feel that it is important to account for the different degrees of voluntariness (see also Ottonelli & Torresi, 2013), proactive planning of migration, or accounts of feeling obliged by circumstances to leave, return or remigrate as these are subjectively experienced by migrants. We also consider acquiescent vs involuntary immobility (Carling, 2002; Schewel, 2015) where migrants may feel obliged to stay at their place of origin because they do not have options for remigrating (involuntary immobility) while they may choose to stay (acquiescent immobility) because they do not wish to migrate regardless of their capability to leave (Schewel, 2015).

In order to make sense of how migrants make decisions to return, stay, or move from one country to another or indeed to the initial destination, we seek to identify tipping points or critical junctures where the migrant's decision-making is triggered. Crises have been theorised in migration research mostly in relation to humanitarian factors (Martin et al., 2014; Lindley, 2014). The 2015-2016 refugee emergency in Europe, however, has given rise to an important critical debate as to who defines, and for whom, what is a crisis (Krzyzanowski et al., 2018), while there has been widespread discussion during the 2010s about the impact of the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 (Ghosh, 2013). We acknowledge the complexity and pitfalls of crisis as a concept and opt for a broader operational definition of tipping points or critical junctures that we want to explore in each of the studied migration systems.

Concluding Remarks: Studying Complex Migration Flows in Comparative Perspective

This paper offers an overview of the current state of knowledge on the drivers and determinants of population movements. Although disciplines elaborate different conceptualisations to describe and explain migration, there are three common features that are highlighted. Migration is a multidimensional process resulting from complex interactions and interdependencies of different factors. Migration drivers operate within and across (origin, destination) places, but also in between (transit locations), along the individual journey. Migration drivers are not static per se but may change dynamically. Some structural factors may change rapidly, generating shocks, while other drivers may change slowly over time, or they may be perceived differently along the life course.

The MEMO project seeks to explore complex interlinkages among heterogeneous drivers, accounting for spatial interactions, through the definition of regional migration systems. It also considers the temporal dimension assessing both the change of policies and conditions on the ground and also adopting a life course perspective that considers how different drivers may shape the behaviour of individuals at different stages of their life course (e.g., young adult, young family, middle aged adult, or older person).

The project adopts a mixed method approach starting with innovative statistical and visualisation tools and big datasets on different factors such as demographic data, economic and political indicators, and environmental conditions researching relations among them that may have shaped emigration or immigration flows within each of the three migration systems examined. Through these innovative tools the project will identify (a) major trends and relations e.g., between changes in environmental conditions and cross border migration patterns; and (b) 'hot spots' of migration, notably more specific areas within each migration system where in a given time period there were significant inflows or outflows. Based on these initial insights, we shall engage into case studies, using surveys, interviews, focus groups as well as desk research, in each migration system seeking to uncover the dynamics in these hotspots. These case studies will connect the macro-drivers with the meso-drivers – notably intermediaries and networks – with the micro-level of individual and household decision making.

We will analyse our case studies comparatively both within and across migration systems. Thus, we shall compare similar case studies within, for instance, the West African migration system but we will also seek for comparable case studies between the West African and the Central American migration system. The aim will be to understand better both contextual and broader drivers and processes of migration. The later phase of the project will delve deeper into issues of decision making through experimental manipulations. Our aim there will be to isolate decision-making processes and seek to analyse them in comparative perspective.

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