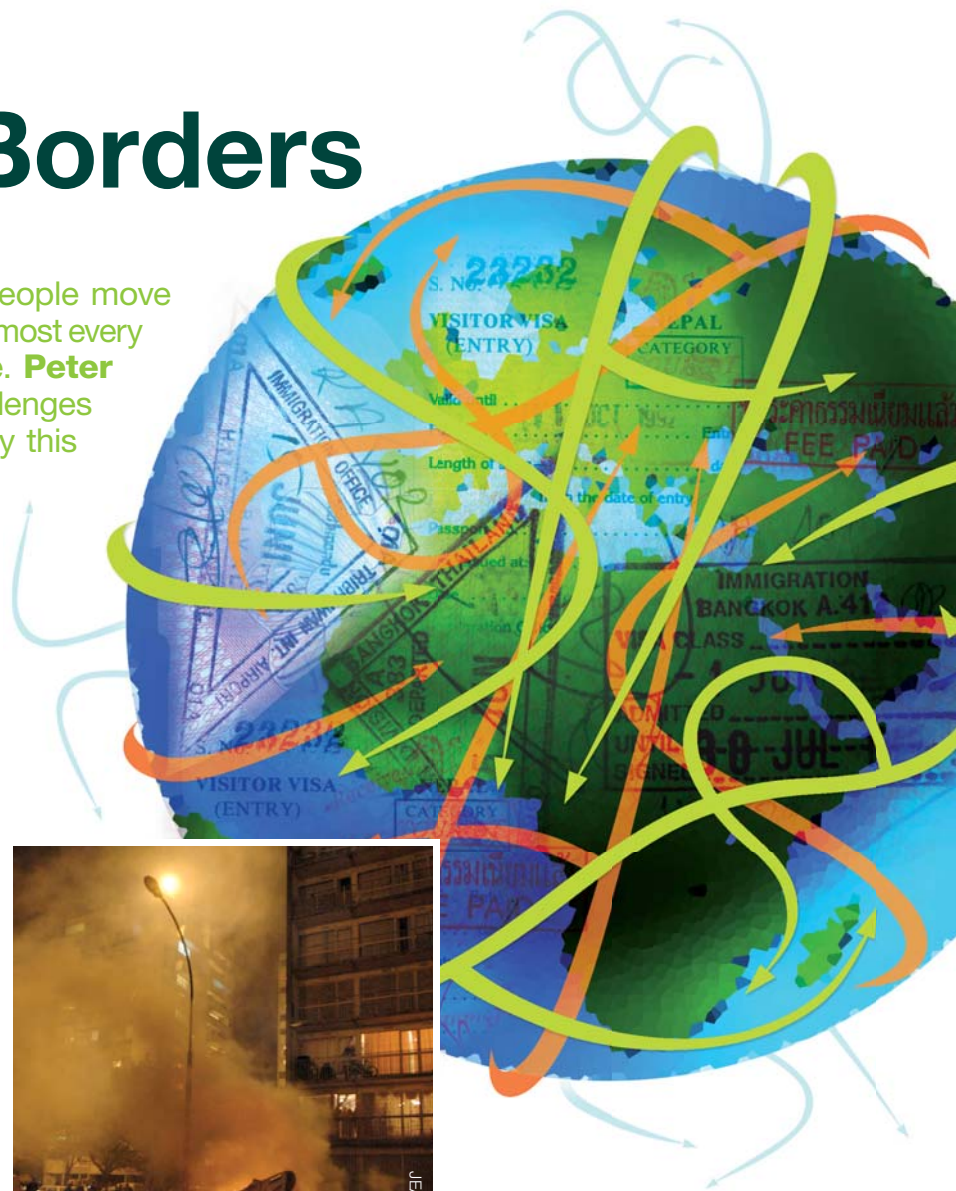


# Beyond Borders

In today's globalised world, people move from every part of the world to almost every other in pursuit of a better life. **Peter Sutherland** looks at the challenges and opportunities presented by this new age of mobility.



The banlieues of Paris were burning on the day Kofi Annan called me in the autumn of 2005 to ask if I would serve as his special representative for migration. The immigrant neighbourhoods around Clichy-sous-Bois had erupted in a frenzy of violence which spread to other parts of France. Two months earlier, the headlines had been dominated by the plight of desperate Africans trying to hurl themselves over barbed wire fences into the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. In the US, meanwhile, immigration reform was at an impasse.

In other words, the politics of migration were at a nadir and the then secretary general wanted to turn the debate around. The goal he set was to foster an international conversation about migration that would be positive in spirit. The UN General Assembly had scheduled its first ever summit meeting on migration issues for the following year, in September 2006. Annan asked me to generate interest in the summit – which many feared would turn into a shouting match between north and south – and to ensure that it focused on how countries could work together to make the most of migration.

The urge to move in pursuit of a better life is one of the most natural and powerful of human instincts. Globalisation, together with advances in communication and transportation, has greatly increased the number of people who have the desire and capacity to move. Meanwhile, satellite TV, inexpensive airfares, and penny-a-minute phone calls have fundamentally reshaped the experience of being a migrant, allowing people to maintain lives and relationships in two countries at once.

As a consequence, we have entered an age of mobility which seems permanent in nature.



JEAN-MICHEL TURPIN/CORBIS

Vehicles were set alight as rioting erupted on the streets around Clichy-sous-Bois in October 2005

Already, we are seeing migration records fall: in February, the Pew Research Center predicted that the proportion of immigrants in the US population over the next four decades will surpass that of the last great wave of immigration in the early 1900s – in 2050, nearly one in five US residents is forecast to be an immigrant, compared with one in eight in 2005. Similar projections have been made for many European countries.

There can be no question that the promise of migration is accompanied by wrenching hardship. It can divide families and deprive countries of their best and brightest. The speed and magnitude of migration in today's world, coupled with our underinvestment in integration, can also generate

severe social tensions. Smugglers and traffickers, meanwhile, have made a multibillion dollar business by exploiting human hope.

Too often, though, our public debate pays insufficient attention to the ways in which immigrants contribute to both their native and adoptive countries. Immigrants are using their skills and savings to help their native countries grow, even when they remain abroad. Think of Bangalore, which has risen to global prominence in part thanks to the capital and experience of Indian immigrants who cut their teeth in Silicon Valley. Or consider the many scientists who returned home to help transform South Korea into an innovation economy. And it is hardly surprising that onetime countries

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of emigration, from Spain to Greece to Ireland, now have thriving economies and are themselves magnets for migrants.

The dynamics of mobility are evolving with remarkable speed. Even in the short time since I became special representative in early 2006, several new threads in the compelling story of human movement have emerged. The notion of 'climate refugees', for instance, and of migration driven by environmental change has begun to seize headlines. The allure of Asia for migrants is becoming ever more compelling, as workers of all skill levels seek to tap into the booming economies of India and China. Meanwhile, countries thought of primarily as magnets for migrants are seeing emigration of their own that is startling in size – 150,000 Germans left their country last year, and some ten per cent of British citizens now live outside the UK.

All this movement has placed extraordinary demands on our societies. The burden is especially acute for policymakers: they are being asked not only to track and understand this new age of mobility, but also to create new policy tools to manage the flow of people. And they must do all this in a political environment that is often toxic and dominated by populist cant dangerously thin on facts.

The task of policymakers is further complicated by the need to cooperate and coordinate with their counterparts from around the world. No longer are migration relationships mostly about movements between proximate countries – Portuguese going to France, Turks to Germany, Mexicans to the US. Humans now move from every point in the world to nearly every other in pursuit of a better life. Chinese migrants now constitute one of the largest groups in Ireland. Africans are now increasingly moving to China. And so forth.

Faced with this ever more complex web of global relationships, Kofi Annan and I decided to propose the creation of a states-led, informal, and non-binding Global Forum on Migration and Development. The main focus of the Forum would be to spread knowledge of what policymakers can do to make migration work more consistently for development, and to share the many experiments in managing migration being tried around the world.

Last July, the government of Belgium took the lead in hosting the inaugural Global Forum. Astonishingly, 155 UN Member States participated in the two day event, which unfolded in a collegial atmosphere focused on spreading knowledge about how policymakers can leverage migration to meet their development goals. Nearly 1,000 delegates debated issues such as how remittances can help stabilise economies in developing countries and spread financial education to the 'unbanked'. Among many other

subjects, they also discussed a new generation of bilateral and multilateral agreements – mobility partnerships, in EU parlance – that aim to regulate movement between countries while also promoting development goals.

This coming October, the Forum will move to the Philippines, which will turn the spotlight onto a new set of issues – including how the protection of migrant rights contributes to development. Next year, Greece will play host to the Forum. One key to the Forum's success is that it engages those senior officials who must contend with migration and development issues on a policy level, rather than a political one. The Forum, held under the Chatham House Rule, allows them to openly share their experiences, thus helping to educate each other and to create an environment in which cooperative relationships can be built.

The Global Forum, in short, offers proof that solutions to many of the problems raised by migration are to be found in constructive engagement and debate. We are better positioned than ever to confront the challenges of migration and seize the opportunities it presents. Now if only we could get the politicians to listen. ■



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## Migration Studies Unit

The Migration Studies Unit (MSU) is a new and promising organisation at LSE. Founded just one year ago, it is a multidisciplinary research unit spanning the fields of political science, sociology, anthropology, geography, economics and law. The unit was launched to provide a home for migration scholars from inside and outside LSE, and to serve as a forum for research ideas and discussion. Among a remarkable array of activities for a fledgling institution, the Migration Studies Unit has organised an engaging and stimulating public lecture series that has featured UK home secretary Jacqui Smith, 'Britishness' test creator Sir Bernard Crick, and migration guru Professor Stephen Castles.

The MSU manages a successful fortnightly reading group to exchange ideas about new books and articles. As the host for the London Migration Research Group (LMRG), an inter-university and interdisciplinary network of migration scholars, the MSU serves as a centre of dialogue. In fostering new research and innovative thinking, the unit coordinates grant applications for novel projects and hosts working papers from lecture series participants, research students and scholars. Among the broad variety of issues being explored, the MSU's members are examining everything from European refugee asylum to border control, from migrant social services to political alienation among European Muslims. For more information, visit [www.lse.ac.uk/collections/MSU](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/MSU)