

DESCRIPTIVE CLASSIFICATIONS OF MIGRATION

Fabio Baggio

The understanding of the migration phenomenon and the development of “migration classifications” should be always based on the consideration of both objective criteria and subjective motivations. The balanced assessment of both elements is critical to the comprehension of the phenomenon. At first only the descriptive classifications of migration will be considered while the interpretative classifications (i.e. migration theories) will be discussed later on.

1. Geographical Classification

The geographical classification considers the phenomenon of migration based on the distance covered in terms of human geography, namely the administrative and political organization of the territory (e.g. municipality, province, region, state, federation of states, continent, etc.) and the population distribution in it (e.g. residents, citizens, nationals, etc.). With regard to the territories serving as reference, the following categories can be distinguished:

- a) Internal migration: it is the migration movement within a state, region or area, depending on the territory that is considered as an indivisible unit. There are different categories of internal migration:
 - Rural-Urban migration: migration from the countryside to the city;
 - Interurban migration: migration from one city to another;
 - Urban-Rural migration: migration from the city for the countryside;
 - Interrural migration: migration from one countryside to another;
 - Nomadism: continuous movement within a territory (homeless);
 - Transhumance: displacement from the mountains to the plane due to sheepherding;
 - Intermunicipal migration: migration from one municipality to another;
 - Interprovincial migration: migration from one province to another;
 - Interregional migration: migration from one region to another.¹
- b) International migration: migration crossing the borders of one or more states. International migration may be divided in different categories based on geographic contexts:
 - Transoceanic migration: international migration involving the crossing of one or more oceans;
 - Transcontinental migration: international migration involving the movement from one continent to another;
 - Border migration: when international migration takes place between two border locations;
 - Neighbor migration: when international migratory movement takes place between two neighbor countries;

¹ In this case the term “region” refers to a geographical division within a country. In the case of international migration, “region” normally indicates a group of countries sharing the same supranational territory.

- Regional migration: international migration as the movement takes place within a region.

However, when the direction of migration flows serves as reference, the following categories of migration can be highlighted:

- a) Emigration: the action of leaving a country or other geographic context. It is migration considered from the perspective of the place of origin.
- b) Immigration: the action of entering into a country or other geographic context. It is migration considered from the perspective of the place of destination.²
- c) Transit Migration: migration across a country or other geographic context without intent to stop or settle on it and with the sole intention to get to another country or geographic context.
- d) Circular Migration: migration that, in its original intention, departs from a place of origin, reaches a destination and then returns to the same place of origin within a limited timeframe.
- e) Return³ or re-migration: migration from the place of destination back to the place of origin.

2. Chronological Classification

The chronological classification considers the phenomenon of migration based on its length in subjective terms (intentional duration) and/or objective terms (effective duration). In this sense there are different categories of migration:

- a) Intentional duration: the period of time a person (or group of people) intends to stay out of his/her place of origin⁴. Considering the intentional duration, the following categories can be highlighted:
 - Temporary migration: when, in the intention of the migrant, the time to be spent away from his/her place of habitual residence has a limited duration.
 - Permanent migration: when, in the intention of the migrant, the time to be spent away from his/her place of habitual residence has no limited duration.
 - Undetermined migration: when, in the intention of the migrant, there is no specific length of time allotted to the migration experience.
- b) Effective Duration: the period of time a person (or group of people) remains effectively outside his/her place of origin. Considering the effective duration, the following categories can be highlighted:
 - Temporary migration: when the sojourn of a person (or a group of people) outside his/her usual place of residence has a limited duration. There are different categories of temporary migration:
 - Contract migration: labor migration regulated by a temporary workers' program, where the length corresponds to the duration of a temporary employment contract;
 - Seasonal migration: when the length of stay is less than one year and repeated over time; it is often linked to particular conditions of life and work (farming, harvest, service sector, etc.).

² Please note that, only in English, many authors would use "immigration" to indicate the migration movement aiming at settling in the place of destination.

³ In some countries, like Chile, the terms "return" and "returnee" refer the exiles, refugees or displaced people due to political reasons who, upon the termination of the adverse conditions, may return to their homeland.

⁴ Please note that in many cases the intended duration does not match with the effective duration and the former may change along the migration experience.

- Pendular migration: when the duration is less than 24 hours (one day) and the movement is repeated every working day;
- Permanent migration: when the sojourn of a person (or a group of people) outside his/her usual place of residence does not have a limited duration.

3. Demographic-Economic Classification

The demographic-economic classification considers the phenomenon of migration based on the demographic and economic conditions of migrants. From this perspective there are different categories of migration:

- a) Subjects of migration: categories based on the characteristics of the people who migrate:
- Individual migration: when the subject is an individual;
 - Family migration: when the subject is a family;
 - Massive migration (exodus): when a huge number of people are involved in the movement;
 - Male/female migration: when the criterion is the gender of the person (or group of people) who migrate;
 - Child/adult/elderly migration: when the criterion is the age of the person (or group of people) who migrate;
 - First generation: the group of migrants composed by whom actually migrated from their home country to a new place;
 - Second generation: generally, the children of the first generation either born in the home country or in the place of destination (but there are discussions about the real definition);
 - Third generation: the grandchildren of the first generation, who are born in the place of destination.
 - Migration flow: is the number of individuals moving from one place to another during in a certain period of time (e.g. 1 year). Depending on its direction, it is called either emigration flow or immigration flow.
 - Migration Stock: the number of foreigners (or migrants) residing in a country (or territory) at a certain moment in time (e.g. 31 December 2010).
 - Migrant population: the assembly of foreigners (or migrants) and their descendants who reside in a country (or territory) at a certain moment in time. Depending on the collective contexts of reference, there are some sub-categories: foreign community, ethnic community, ethnic or foreign minority, etc..
 - Migrant “human-power”: refers to migrants of working age residents in a given territory.
- b) Employment: there are different categories of migration depending on the kind of work performed by migrants:
- Migration of rural workers, industrial workers, service workers, etc., depending on the sector in which migrants are employed;
 - Highly skilled migration: migration of people who are employed in a job requiring a high degree of professionalism;⁵

⁵ Kindly note that, in most cases, the qualification of migrant workers does not depend on the professional level reached in their country, but rather on the work they get in the country of destination.

- Skilled migration: migration of people who are employed in professional jobs;
- Unskilled migration (or low skilled migration): migration of people who are employed in jobs that do not require any professional qualification;
- Brain drain: massive international migration (with little prospect of return) of persons with high qualifications in their country of origin;
- Technology migration: migration of human resources highly skilled in the technology sector;
- Migrants with independent or autonomous work: foreign workers (or migrants) who are working on their own, as individuals or as a company;
- Migrants with dependent or subordinate work: foreign workers (or migrants) who are employed under a labor contract.

4. Political and Legal Classification

The political-legal classification refers to the legal-administrative system or the migration policy of the sending or the receiving countries. The categories are as many as the systems and policies. But, more generally, the following categories can be identified:

- a) Free migration⁶: migration that is not controlled (promoted, blocked, limited, etc.) by the government of the concerned sending or receiving country. The movement simply responds to the needs of the labor market and the free initiative of employers and workers.
- b) Managed (or controlled) migration: the migration that is either assisted or organized or promoted or limited or regulated by rules issued by the concerned government of the sending or receiving country or through bilateral or multilateral agreements between countries of origin and destinations or at the regional level (e.g. Mercosur, European Union, etc.).
- c) Regular or authorized migration: the migration, free or managed, which takes place in due respect of all emigration and immigration rules issued by the concerned sending and receiving countries.
- d) Irregular or unauthorized migration⁷: the migration that takes place breaking one or more emigration and/or immigration rules of the concerned sending or receiving countries. There are several types of irregular migration, but this matter will be discussed later on.

5. Causal Classification

The causal classification of human mobility is based on the causes, reasons and motivations that have generated it. In this sense the following categories can be identified:

- a) Free or spontaneous human mobility: when the movement is the result of the free choice of the person (or group) who migrates. The reasons for the free migration may be the following:
 - Economic or labor migration: when the motivation for migration is working in a place other than home;
 - Health migration: when the motivation for migration is the realization of a medical treatment, therapy or surgery in a place other than home;

⁶ In the definition of free migration, it should be considered that there are socio-political contexts that pretend to leave economic migration to the free initiative of the people, but in fact they "force" people to migrate. Therefore to define the category of a specific migration it is important to identify the motivational criteria and assess the phenomenon from different point of view.

⁷ Though many scholars use it frequently, the term "illegal" migration seems to respond to ideological and malicious connotations and therefore must be avoided.

- Study migration: when the motivation for migration is the realization of studies in a place other than home;
 - Tourism: when the motivation for the movement is visiting a place other than home;
 - Pilgrimage, when the motivation for migration is a religious pilgrimage to a sacred place far from the place of origin;
 - Business migration: when the motivation for migration is to conduct business in a place other than home.
- b) Forced Migration: when the movement is forced by conflict, natural disasters, persecution, discrimination and deportation:
- Refugee: person recognized as a victim of forced migration by the hosting country or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR);
 - Asylum seeker: a victim of forced migration who has filed an application for asylum and is awaiting a response;
 - Displaced person⁸: person who is victim of forced migration; the victims of forced migration moving within a national territory are called “internally displaced persons” (IDPs).
 - Exile: person forced by the government of his/her own country to leave his/her homeland and reside abroad;
 - Deported: a person forced to leave the foreign country in which he/she stays for different reasons.

⁸ In Latin America the term is often used to define particularly a displaced person who is victim of armed conflicts within a country.