

EDITORIAL
**Approaching Migration: The Dynamic
Nature of Human Mobility** | Jeffrey H. Cohen[‡]

Migration is a dynamic process, difficult to frame and even harder to predict. Unlike other key events (most specifically death), migration follows uncertain pathways and reflects securities and insecurities that tend to play out across diverse social landscapes and include movers, non-movers as well as households and communities. Nevertheless, as the articles in this volume of *Migration Letters* reveal we continue to explore migration and its history; model decision-making and the challenges that movers face as they select new pathways; and explore as well as predict outcomes of remittance practices, policymaking and status.

The articles in this issue and throughout our journal are often focused on what Tomas Faist (and others) call the crucial meso-level (Faist 1997). This is the space where the decisions of individuals encounter and engage the household and other movers as well as non-movers, the community and the state. The encounters and engagements that occur at the meso-level remind us that migration is not a simple decision, made by an independent actor. Rather, the decisions to move—whether as a migrant or refugee; whether across an international border or across a town—are complex and include many different voices, challenges and trials.

If migration were easy, we would likely be in constant motion. We would be in almost constant movement as we sorted and resorted always looking for advantage, opportunity and inclusion. However, migration is not easy or simple. The complexities and insecurities that are part of migration mean that most people stay put. They seek local opportunities and manage local limits to meet best the challenges of everyday life (Cohen 2002).

Migration occurs when the insecurities that define life and that range from the simple to the complex as well as the mental and physical become so challenging as to render exit a reasonable and effective alternative (see our discussion in Cohen and Sirkeci 2011; Sirkeci 2006). In this scenario, migration is a decision made to escape insecurity and limit loss rather than find something better like

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a job or higher wages. Economics is always central to migration outcomes, my point is that there are other concerns as well. Ecology, religion, persecution, personal choice, education and more drive migration and influence how destinations are selected.

It can be hard to understand why one destination is preferred over another. This is particularly the case when the movers in question make choices that do not seem to hold any advantage. An emphasis on history, decision-making, the meso-level and the ways in which insecurities influence outcomes can aid in defining choices, pathways and outcomes. Humans migrate and have migrated for millennia, yet we are not birds; there is no biological imperative that directs us to leave. In fact, there are many examples of people who chose not to migrate but remain in insecure, uncertain positions even as others take their exit. Nevertheless, by defining history, the meso-level and the complex play of security and insecurity we can unlock the story of mobility and unlock the dynamics of migration.

References

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