There are more international migrants today than ever before, and their number is certain to increase for the foreseeable future. Almost every country on earth is, and will continue, to be affected. Migration is inextricably linked with other important global issues, including development, poverty, and human rights. Migrants are often the most entrepreneurial and dynamic members of society; historically migration has underpinned economic growth and nation-building and enriched cultures. Migration also presents significant challenges. Some migrants are exploited and their human rights abused; integration in destination countries can be difficult; and migration can deprive origin countries of important skills. For all these reasons and more, migration matters.

A brief history of international migration
The history of migration begins with the origins of mankind in the Rift Valley in Africa, from where between about 1.5 million and 5000 BC Homo erectus and Homo sapiens spread initially into Europe and later into other continents. In the ancient world, Greek colonization and Roman expansion depended on migration, and outside Europe significant movements were also associated with the Mesopotamian, Inca, Indus, and Zhou empires. Other significant
migrations in early history include that of the Vikings and of the Crusaders to the Holy Land.

In more recent history, in other words in the last two or three centuries, it is possible to discern a series of major migration periods or events, according to migration historian Robin Cohen. Probably the predominant migration event in the 18th and 19th centuries was the forced transportation of slaves. An estimated 12 million people were forced from mainly western Africa to the New World, but also in lesser numbers across the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean. Besides its scale, one of the reasons this migration is so important is that it still resonates for descendants of slaves and

1. The US–Mexico border is the most frequently crossed international border in the world – about 350 million people cross it each year
among African Americans in particular. After the collapse of slavery, indentured labour from China, India, and Japan moved in significant numbers – some 1.5 million from India alone – to continue working the plantations of the European powers.

European expansion was also associated with large-scale voluntary resettlement from Europe, particularly to the colonies of settlement, the dominions, and the Americas. The great mercantile powers – Britain, the Netherlands, Spain and France – all promoted settlement of their nationals abroad, not just of workers but also peasants, dissident soldiers, convicts, and orphans. Migration associated with expansion largely came to an end with the rise of anti-colonial movements towards the end of the 19th century, and indeed over the next 50 years or so there were some significant reverse flows back to Europe, for example, of the so-called *pieds noirs* to France.

The next period of migration was marked by the rise of the United States of America (USA) as an industrial power. Millions of workers from the stagnant economic regions and repressive political regimes of Northern, Southern, and Eastern Europe, not to mention those escaping the Irish famine, went to the USA from the 1850s until the Great Depression of the 1930s. Some 12 million of these migrants landed at Ellis Island in New York harbour for immigration inspections.

The next major period of migration was after the Second World War, when labour was needed to sustain booming post-war economies in Europe, North America, and Australia. This was the era when many Turkish migrants arrived to work in Germany and North Africans in France and Belgium, for example. It was also the period when about one million Britons migrated to Australia as so-called ‘Ten Pound Poms’. Their passage and a grant of £10 were paid by the Australian government in its efforts to attract new settlers. During the same era decolonization was still having a migration impact in other parts of the world, most significantly in
the movement of millions of Hindus and Muslims as a result of the Partition of India in 1947 and of Jews and Palestinians after the creation of Israel.

By the 1970s the international migrant labour boom was over in Europe, although it continued into the early 1990s in the USA. The engine-room of the global economy has begun to shift decisively to Asia, where labour migration is, in contrast, still growing. As we shall see later in this volume, the movement of asylum-seekers and refugees and irregular migrants has also become increasingly significant across the industrialized world in the last 20 years or so.

The purpose of this inevitably selective overview of international migration in recent history is not simply to make the point that migration is not a new phenomenon. It is also intended to signpost themes that will recur throughout this volume. That migration is associated with significant global events – revolutions, wars, and the rise and fall of empires; that it is associated with significant change – economic expansion, nation-building, and political transformations, and that it is also associated with significant problems – conflict, persecution, and dispossession. Migration has mattered through history, and continues to matter today.

Dimensions and dynamics of international migration

The United Nations (UN) defines as an international migrant a person who stays outside their usual country of residence for at least one year. According to that definition, the UN estimated that in 2005 there were about 200 million international migrants worldwide, including about 9 million refugees. This is roughly the equivalent of the fifth most populous country on earth, Brazil. One in every 35 people in the world today is an international migrant.

Another way to put this is that only 3 per cent of the world’s population today is an international migrant. But migration affects
far more people than just those who migrate – as will be explained in detail later in this book, it has important social, economic, and political impacts at home and abroad. According to Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, authors of the influential book *The Age of Migration* (2003),

> There can be few people in either industrialized or less developed countries today who do not have personal experience of migration and its effects; this universal experience has become the hallmark of the age of migration. (p. 5)

The number of international migrants has more than doubled in just 25 years, and about 25 million were added in only the first five years of the 21st century (Table 1.1). Before 1990 most of the world’s international migrants lived in the developing world; today the majority lives in the developed world and their proportion is growing. Between 1980 and 2000 the number of migrants in the developed world increased from about 48 million to 110 million, compared with an increase from 52 million to 65 million in the developing world. In 2000 there were about 60 million migrants in Europe, 44 million in Asia, 41 million in North America, 16 million in Africa, and 6 million in both Latin America and Australia. Almost 20 per cent of the world’s migrants in 2000 – about

Table 1.1. International migrants by world region, 1970–2005 (millions)

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<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>99.8</td>
<td>154.0</td>
<td>174.9</td>
<td>200 (estimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>110.3</td>
<td>no data</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>64.6</td>
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35 million – lived in the USA. The Russian Federation was the second most important host country for migrants, with about 13 million, or nearly 8 per cent of the global total. Germany, the Ukraine, and India followed in the rankings, each with between 6 and 7 million migrants.

It is much harder to say which countries most migrants come from, largely because origin countries do not keep count of how many of their nationals are living abroad. It has been estimated nevertheless that at least 35 million Chinese currently live outside their country, 20 million Indians, and 8 million Filipinos.

These facts and figures convey a striking message, and that is that international migration today affects every part of the world. Movements from ‘South’ to ‘North’ have increased as a proportion of total global migration; indeed as I shall explain in Chapter 3 there are powerful reasons why people should leave poorer countries and head for richer ones. At the same time, it is important not to ignore the significant movements that still take place within regions. There are about 5 million Asian migrants working in the Gulf States. It is estimated that there are somewhere between 2.5 million and 8 million irregular migrants in South Africa, almost all of them from sub-Saharan African countries. As we shall see in Chapter 6, there are far more refugees in the developing world than the developed world. Equally, more Europeans come to the UK each year, for example, than do people from outside Europe; and many of these Europeans are British citizens returning from stints overseas.

Besides the dimensions and changing geography of international migration, there are at least three trends that signify an important departure from earlier patterns and processes. First, the proportion of women among migrants has increased rapidly. Very nearly half the world’s migrants were women in 2005; just over half of them living in the developed world and just under half in the developing world. According to UN statistics, in 2005 there were more female than male migrants in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean,
North America, Oceania, and the former USSR. What is more, whereas women have traditionally migrated to join their partners abroad, an increasing proportion who migrate today do so independently; they are often the primary breadwinners for the families they leave behind.

There are a number of reasons why women comprise an increasing proportion of the world’s migrants. One is that the demand for foreign labour, especially in more developed countries, is becoming increasingly gender-selective in favour of jobs typically fulfilled by women – services, healthcare, and entertainment. Second, an increasing number of countries have extended the right of family reunion to migrants – in other words allowing them to be joined by their spouses and children. Most often these spouses are women. Changing gender relations in some countries of origin also mean that women have more independence to migrate than previously. Finally, and especially in Asia, there has been a growth in the migration of women for domestic work (sometimes called the ‘maid trade’); organized migration for marriage (sometimes referred to as ‘mail order brides’), and the trafficking of women into the sex industry.

Second, the traditional distinction between countries of origin, transit, and destination for migrants has become increasingly blurred. Today almost every country in the world fulfils all three roles – migrants leave, pass through, and head for all of them. Perhaps no part of the world better illustrates the blurring boundaries between origin, transit, and destination countries than the Mediterranean. About 50 years ago the situation was fairly straightforward. All the countries of the Mediterranean – in both North Africa and Southern Europe – were countries of origin for migrants who mainly went to Northern Europe to work. About 20 years ago Southern Europe changed from a region of emigration to a region of immigration, as increasing numbers of North Africans arrived to work in their growing economies and at the same time fewer Southern Europeans had an incentive to head north for work
anymore. Today, North Africa is changing from an origin to a transit and destination region. Increasing numbers of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa are arriving in countries like Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia. Some remain, others cross the Mediterranean into Southern Europe, usually illegally, where again some stay and others try to move on into Northern Europe.

Finally, while most of the major movements that took place over the last few centuries were permanent, today temporary migration has become much more important. Even people who have lived abroad for most of their lives often have a ‘dream to return’ to the place of their birth, and it is now relatively unusual for people to migrate from one country to another and remain there for the rest of their lives.

Furthermore, the traditional pattern of migrating once then returning home seems to be phasing out. An increasing number of

2. A truck loaded with migrants leaving Agadez in Niger and bound for North Africa
people migrate several times during their lives, often to different countries or parts of the world, returning home in the intervening periods. Even those who are away for long periods of time return home at more and more frequent intervals, as international travel has become so much cheaper and more accessible. ‘Sojourning’, involving circulation between origin and destination and only a temporary commitment to the place of destination, has a long history: much of the Chinese migration to South-East Asia and Australia in the 19th and early 20th centuries, for example. However, this circulation is now occurring on an unprecedented scale and has been facilitated by developments such as transport and communications revolutions.

‘Circular’ migration

In his 2005 report to the Council of Europe on *Current Trends in International Migration in Europe* (OECD) migration expert John Salt identifies several new types of flow in Europe (p. 19): ‘Algerian migratory routes have undergone radical change. The traditional labour migration into France has been replaced by forms of circulation in which many Algerians have become suitcase traders throughout the Mediterranean region. Often serving tourist markets, their moves take place within family networks which allow them to seize trading opportunities in whichever city they are presented. Romanians have also been observed to circulate within informal transnational networks which they use to exploit whatever work niches are opened to illegal workers. The migration of ethnic Germans from Transylvania to Germany in the early 1990s has also become a circulatory movement with periods of work in Germany interspersed with living back in Romania.’
Opportunities of international migration

Migration has been a constant and influential feature of human history. It has supported the growth of the world economy; contributed to the evolution of states and societies, and enriched many cultures and civilizations. Migrants have been amongst the most dynamic and entrepreneurial members of society; people who are prepared to take the risk of leaving their homes in order to create new opportunities for themselves and their children. The history of United States economic growth, for example, is in many ways the history of migrants: Andrew Carnegie (steel), Adolphus Busch (beer), Samuel Goldwyn (movies), and Helena Rubenstein (cosmetics) were all migrants. Kodak, Atlantic Records, RCA, NBC, Google, Intel, Hotmail, Sun Microsoft, Yahoo, and ebay were all started or co-founded by migrants.

In the contemporary world, international migration continues to play an important – although often unacknowledged – role in national, regional, and global affairs. In many developing countries, the money that migrants send home is a more important source of income than the official aid provided by richer countries. In certain developed countries, entire sectors of the economy and many public services have become highly dependent on migrant workers and would collapse almost literally overnight if their labour were withdrawn. It is often said – though difficult actually to prove – that migrants are worth more to the UK economy than North Sea oil. It has been estimated by the World Bank that migrant labour around the world earns US$20 trillion – the vast majority of which is invested in the countries where they work. Another study indicates that about 15 million foreign-born workers in the USA add over US$10 billion to the US economy. Migrant labour, it is argued, has therefore contributed significantly to economic growth. Throughout much of the world, migrants are not only employed in jobs that nationals are reluctant to do, but are also engaged in high-value activities that local people lack the skills to do.
Migrants and migration do not just contribute to economic growth; in fact their impact is probably most keenly felt in the social and cultural spheres of life. Throughout the world, people of different national origins, who speak different languages, and who have different customs, religions, and ways of living are coming into unprecedented contact with each other. Whether they are willing to admit it or not, most societies today are characterized by at least a degree of diversity. I often make this point in lectures to university students in the UK by pointing out that in the last 24 hours they have almost certainly eaten food or listened to music originating elsewhere in the world, or watched a top-flight sports team that includes foreign-born players, or the descendants of migrants. It is no coincidence that some of the largest concentrations of migrants are to be found in ‘global cities’ like Hong Kong, London, or New York; dynamic, innovative and highly cosmopolitan urban centres that enable people, places, and cultures in different parts of the world to become increasingly interconnected.

Challenges of international migration

It would be naïve, at the same time, to deny that international migration today also poses important challenges. Perhaps the most talked about is the linkage between migration and security. Especially after 9/11 there has been a perception of a close connection between international migration and terrorism. This has been compounded by more recent attacks in Madrid and London. Irregular migration, which appears to be growing in scale in many parts of the world, is sometimes regarded by politicians and the public alike as a threat to national sovereignty and public security. In a number of destination countries, host societies have become increasingly fearful about the presence of migrant communities, especially those with unfamiliar cultures that come from parts of the world associated with extremism and violence.

These are legitimate concerns that should not be underestimated; they are examined in greater depth in the chapters that follow. At
the same time, there has probably been too much attention paid to the challenges posed by migration for destination countries and societies in which migrants settle; and not enough to those that arise for the migrants themselves, their families, as well as for the people and societies they leave behind.

It is worth remembering, for a start, that many migrants leave their homes because they have no choice. In 2005 there were about 9 million refugees worldwide – these are people who had been forced to flee their homes for fear of persecution or death. Once their journey has begun, many migrants (and not just refugees) perish en route. Some migrants, furthermore, find themselves exploited and their human rights abused once they have arrived at their destination. This is most particularly true for the victims of human trafficking who can effectively be enslaved, often in the sex industry. Domestic workers, too, can face abuse and suffer violence at the hands of their employers. More generally, many migrants and their children face discrimination and prejudice, even years after they have settled abroad. Migration matters just as much because of its negative consequences for migrants themselves as it does for the challenges it poses for destination societies.

Migration also can have important implications for the societies migrants leave. As I shall explain in Chapter 4, this is especially the case where migrants have skills that are in short supply in their home countries. While the impact of the so-called brain drain has been felt most severely in the health sector, it is significant in the education sector too. Not only does it reduce the ability of poor countries to deliver essential services, it also means that public investment in the education and training of these people is effectively lost to the country.

A very short introduction to international migration

For the sorts of reasons outlined in this chapter, international migration has risen towards the top of political agendas in many
countries, attracts considerable media coverage, and has become a common topic of public interest more generally. Yet all too often the debate on migration is unsatisfactory. Concepts are unclear – the terms ‘asylum-seeker’, ‘refugee’, and ‘irregular’ or ‘illegal’ migrant, for example, are regularly used interchangeably. Statistics are at times quoted in ways that alarm rather than inform. Only a very partial picture of migration is normally presented. Overall, the real diversity and complexity of migration is often ignored.

Against this background, the intention of this ‘Very Short Introduction’ is to try to provide the reader with the explanations, analysis, and data required to understand today’s key migration issues, and hopefully to engage in reasonable debate. As someone who has taught and researched migration and related issues for over 15 years, I naturally have my own perspectives and opinions. But I have tried to keep these in the background, in order to present a full picture of the debates that surround migration today. Equally, this book is not centrally concerned with migration policy, but where relevant some commentary on policy implications is included.

To try to condense any large field of research, writing, and political argument into such a short book inevitably requires selectivity, and different authors would make different choices faced with this challenge. It is initially worth emphasizing that, as the book’s title indicates, its focus is migration across borders. The main reasons are that international migration has been the subject of far more research and writing than internal migration, and has also attracted far more political and media attention and public discourse. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that there are far more internal migrants than international migrants and the distinction between internal and international migration can be unclear. Internal migration deserves far more academic attention than it has received to date, and as we shall see in the final chapter of this book, is likely to shape international migration in the future.
My overall approach to international migration has three main features. First, where possible I have tried to adopt a global perspective on what is, after all, a truly global issue. At times this has been limited by a lack of research, information, and data on migration in certain parts of the world, as well as shortcomings in my own knowledge. Second, I have tried to make use of ‘real life’ examples that are taken from my own research – this is one way to try to gain a perspective on the experiences of migrants themselves. To supplement my own limited knowledge, I have also referred to the published findings of research by scholars in the field. Third, I have structured the book around what I view as the most topical and relevant issues in international migration today, rather, for example, than writing a chapter on migration in each of the world’s main regions. Coverage of each of these issues is necessarily concise, and so at the end of the book I refer the reader to other sources to which they can turn for more detailed information and analysis.

This chapter has asked why migration matters; the next one asks ‘Who is a migrant?’ It examines the various definitions of international migration, how it is normally categorized, and reflects on just how difficult it is to actually measure it. It also introduces debates about state politics and shifting definitions of citizenship. Chapter 3 considers the relationship between migration and globalization to try to provide a structural explanation for why migration occurs.

Thereafter, the chapters focus on a series of key migration issues in turn. Chapter 4 examines the links between development and migration. A lack of development can cause migration, but equally migrants can contribute to development back home. Chapter 5 turns to one of the most topical of migration issues today, namely irregular migration (among other things the chapter argues that the term ‘irregular’ is preferable to ‘illegal’). It includes particular discussion of the phenomena of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Equally topical, and indeed often confused with irregular migration, are refugees and asylum-seekers, and they are
the focus for Chapter 6. Here in particular a global perspective is important. Chapter 7 looks at the vexed issue of the impacts of immigrants on destination societies. Finally, Chapter 8 identifies some of the main trends that are likely to influence the future of international migration.