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Editorial: Migration, security and diplomacy

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Editorial on the Research Topic Migration, security and diplomacy

The *Migration, Security and Diplomacy* section of *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* was established as a space for interdisciplinary engagement with the intricate and often contested intersections between human mobility, state policy, and international diplomacy. In a time marked by rising nationalism, securitized borders, and global inequality, the section aims to generate empirically rich and conceptually grounded insights into how migration operates as both a subject of governance and a vehicle of transformation (Ullah and Ferdous, 2024). The five articles presented in this Research Topic provide a timely and thought-provoking contribution to the field, tackling diverse themes—from intermediary labor practices and community resilience to urban expansion and ideological perceptions of migration.

Together, these articles reflect the core ambition illuminate the evolving terrain of global migration through lenses that account for policy, agency, structure, and ideology. They invite readers to grapple with the nuanced ways migration is governed, imagined, and experienced, particularly in the Global South, where security concerns and development imperatives often converge.

In “*Middle Space Actors (Intermediaries): The Case of Nepali Migrant Workers to Malaysia*,” Khor offers an incisive analysis of how migration brokers and recruitment agents operate in the shadow of formal state-to-state agreements. Drawing from extensive fieldwork along the Nepal-Malaysia corridor, the article reveals how even well-intentioned policies, such as “zero-cost migration,” may reproduce new hierarchies and exclusions. This piece is especially relevant to contemporary debates on migration governance, as it foregrounds the pivotal—but often invisible—role of intermediaries. By showing how informal networks circumvent or reshape state mandates, the article contributes to the growing literature on migration infrastructures and soft diplomacy. As Ullah (2014) has argued, intermediaries are not merely service providers but political actors who mediate legality and vulnerability in transnational contexts.

Meanwhile, Nurlinah and Haryanto’s article, “*Transmigration Village Development: The State and Community Organizations in Rural Indonesia*,” explores the intersection of state-led relocation programs and grassroots development. Set against the historical backdrop of Indonesia’s ambitious transmigration schemes, this article examines how Village Community Organizations (VCOs) have emerged as key actors in development in otherwise neglected rural settlements. Employing a community-driven development approach, it argues that grassroots agency—through women’s groups, youth associations, and village enterprises—can mitigate some of the systemic failures of state-led development. Notably, this article speaks to a broader theoretical shift toward decentralized

governance and community resilience in migration literature. It aligns with Ullah and Haque's (2020) observation that "migration-related development interventions must be analyzed not merely for their economic outcomes, but also for the socio-political subjectivities they produce".

The third article, "Exploring the Nexus of Migration Dynamics and Urban Expansion: Key Drivers of Horizontal Spatial Transformation," adopts a more spatial and ecological perspective (Fente et al.). It examines how urbanization in the Global South, particularly in secondary cities, is influenced by inward migration flows. Using a mixed-methods approach, the authors map the consequences of unregulated expansion, revealing how migrant settlement patterns often outpace infrastructure provision, thereby creating new zones of exclusion and precarity. What stands out in this contribution is its integration of urban political ecology with migration studies—a valuable step in bridging disciplinary silos. The article contributes to our understanding of how migration is shaped not only by security and policy but also by the materiality of space, land, and ecological access.

In a complementary but distinct vein, the article "Relational Integration: Assimilation? A Critical Dialogue with Postcolonial and Mainstream Frameworks" offers a deeply theoretical intervention (Polynin). It critiques the binary between assimilation and multiculturalism that dominates much of the Global North's migration discourse, advocating instead for a relational perspective grounded in postcolonial theory. Drawing on examples from Europe and the Middle East, the author critiques the normative assumptions embedded in mainstream integration models, calling for an epistemic shift that centers histories of colonialism, power, and resistance. This article resonates with the broader intellectual project of decolonizing migration studies. It aligns with the editorial vision of this section, which seeks to challenge inherited categories and open space for alternative imaginaries.

Finally, the article "Political Interest, Political Ideology, and Attitudes Toward Immigration" brings a behavioral and psychological lens to the study of migration politics (Hannuksela et al.). Based on large-scale survey data, it examines how political orientation and engagement shape public attitudes toward immigrants. The findings offer significant insights for both policymakers and scholars. This contribution is particularly timely in an era of polarized political discourses where migration has become a lightning rod for broader anxieties about identity, sovereignty, and security. It also provides a valuable methodological counterpoint to the largely qualitative orientation of the other articles in the Research Topic.

What binds these diverse articles together is a shared concern with the *micro-politics of migration governance*—how policies, institutions, actors, and ideologies interact to shape mobility outcomes. From the role of village organizations in Indonesia to the ideological leanings of urban voters in the West, each article unpacks the complex, layered, and often contradictory logics of migration governance. They also align with the commitment to bridging empirical depth with conceptual innovation. Collectively, they underscore that migration is not just about movement across borders, but also about contestation, negotiation, and adaptation.

This set of articles pushes the frontier of migration scholarship by expanding the geographic lens beyond the over-researched transatlantic corridors. With case studies spanning Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia, and transnational urban spaces, the issue foregrounds voices, geographies, and methodologies often marginalized in mainstream debates. In doing so, it reinforces the section's role as a platform for global, plural, and situated knowledge production on migration.

Conclusion

The section continues to evolve as a critical site for rethinking the intersection of mobility, sovereignty, development, and identity. These five articles provide fresh perspectives that challenge conventional wisdom and offer new conceptual and policy insights. As global migration regimes confront mounting pressures the need for interdisciplinary, empirically grounded, and ethically engaged scholarship becomes ever more urgent. In amplifying these diverse yet interconnected voices, this Research Topic reaffirms our collective commitment to shaping migration research that is both inclusive and incisive. We hope that these contributions will inspire further inquiry and debate on how to govern, resist, and reimagine human mobility in a world marked by unequal freedoms.

Author contributions

AU: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. JF: Conceptualization, Project administration, Writing – review & editing.

Conflict of interest

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