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GLOBAL RESEARCH TRENDS IN MIGRATION: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF SCOPUS-INDEXED LITERATURE (1975– 2025)

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ABSTRACT

Migration has emerged as a major area of interdisciplinary research encompassing international mobility, return migration, remittances, repatriation, labour migration, population dynamics and migrant-related social and economic processes. This study presents a bibliometric analysis of Scopus-indexed literature on migration published between 1975 and 2025. A total of 326 documents from 192 sources, involving 528 authors, were analysed using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny in R. The analysis examines annual scientific production, relevant sources, author productivity, institutional contributions, highly cited documents, keyword patterns and thematic development. The dataset records an annual growth rate of 3.65% and an average of 18.7 citations per document. Return migration, international migration, migration, population dynamics, migrants' remittance and repatriation are among the prominent terms. The thematic analysis indicates that international migration is an important developed theme, while return migration, migrants, remittances and repatriation constitute a significant thematic area. The findings demonstrate the expanding and multidisciplinary nature of migration research and provide directions for future studies.

Keywords: Migration; International Migration; Return Migration; Remittances; Repatriation; Bibliometric Analysis; Scopus; Biblioshiny.

I. INTRODUCTION

Migration is a multidimensional phenomenon that has attracted sustained scholarly attention across economics, sociology, demography, geography, development studies and public policy. Research encompasses international migration, labour migration, refugee movements, return migration, remittances and the social and economic consequences of mobility. The expansion of migration research over several decades has produced a substantial body of scholarly literature. The present dataset contains 326 publications from 192 sources covering 1975–2025, demonstrating long-term scholarly interest in the field. Bibliometric analysis provides a systematic quantitative approach for examining publication productivity, sources, authors, citations, keywords and thematic relationships. It can therefore complement conventional literature reviews by revealing the structure and evolution of a research field. This study applies bibliometric techniques to Scopus-indexed migration literature from 1975 to 2025. It examines publication growth, major sources, productive authors and affiliations, highly cited documents, frequently occurring keywords and thematic development. The dataset contains 728 Author Keywords and 855 Keywords Plus, indicating substantial thematic diversity. The study aims to provide a concise overview of the development of migration research and identify directions for future research.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the growth and development of migration research from 1975 to 2025.
- To identify the major journals, authors and institutional contributors to migration research.
- To identify the most influential publications through citation analysis.
- To identify the major keywords and thematic areas shaping migration research.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Source and Study Period

The analysis draws on bibliographic records retrieved from the Scopus database, covering publications from 1975 to 2025. It contains 326 documents published across 192 sources. The records were analysed using Bibliometrix and the Biblioshiny interface in R (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

3.2 Bibliometric Analysis

The analysis focused on annual scientific production, relevant sources, author productivity, institutional affiliations, globally cited documents, frequently occurring keywords and thematic structure (Donthu et al., 2021). The dataset contains 528 authors. Biblioshiny reports 169 authors of single-authored documents and 181 single-authored documents in its collaboration indicators; these are retained as separate measures. The average number of co-authors per document is 1.8, and international co-authorship is 18.71%.

Table 1. Bibliometric Profile of the Dataset

Indicator	Value
Timespan	1975–2025
Sources	192
Documents	326
Annual Growth Rate	3.65%
Document Average Age	12 years
Average Citations per Document	18.7
Authors	528

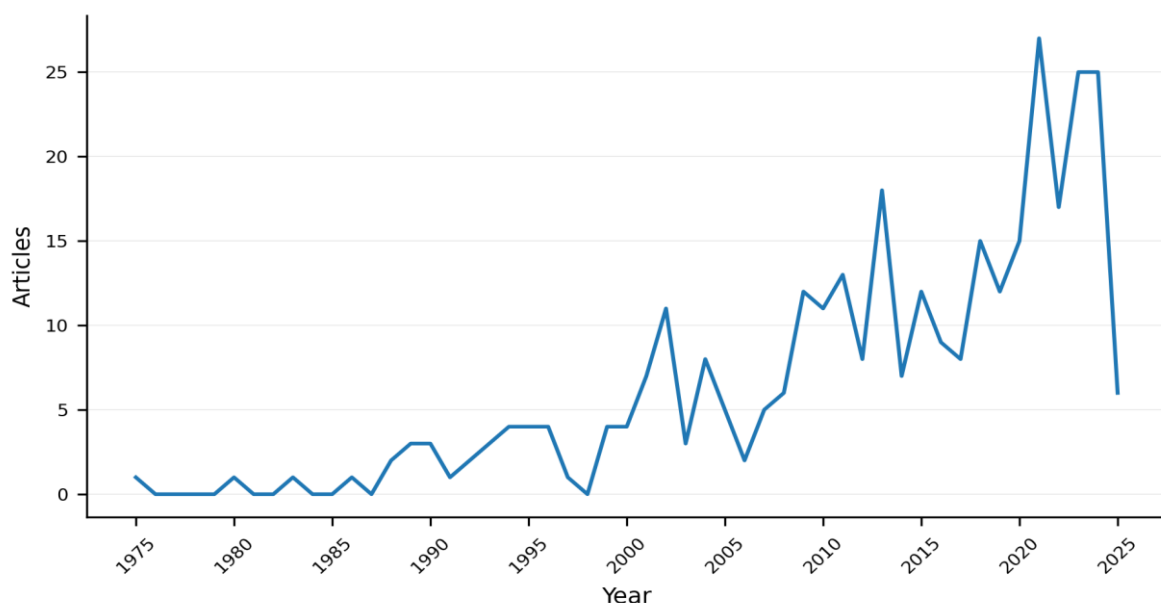
Source: Author's analysis based on Scopus data using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings obtained from bibliometric analysis of migration research based on the selected Scopus- indexed publications. The findings are organized to highlight the major patterns in publication activity, influential sources and authors, institutional contributions, highly cited documents, and prominent research themes.

4.1 Annual Scientific Production

Annual scientific production was examined to analyse the improvement of migration research during the period 1975-2025. The annual distribution of publications shows the changing research activity in the field over time. Figure 1 presents the annual scientific production of migration research during the above-mentioned period.

Figure 1: Annual scientific Production of Migration Research, 1975-2025

Source: Author's analysis based on Scopus data using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny

Annual scientific production shows a gradual development of migration research. Early publication output was comparatively low and irregular. From the middle of the 1990s, output increased gradually, followed by a stronger expansion during the late 2000s. The overall trajectory is upward although annual fluctuations are present. The citation-per-year pattern is more uneven, with an early peak around 1981 followed by lower activity. Later increases are visible around 1997 and 2005–2007, while recent years show comparatively modest annual citation levels. The 2025 publication output should be interpreted cautiously because it may not represent complete annual coverage. The publication pattern reveals distinct phases in the development of migration research. The initial period is characterised by limited scholarly output, whereas the later years show a marked strengthening of research activity. The increasing number of publications, despite intermittent fluctuations, suggests that migration has gained sustained attention as a research field. The pronounced rise in publication activity in the most recent years further indicates the growing relevance of migration-related issues in contemporary academic research. Overall, the trend reflects a transition from a relatively small and fragmented body of literature towards a more established and actively developing research domain.

4.2 Most Relevant Sources

The most relevant sources were identified based on the number of documents published in each journal during the study period. The results show that the following journals have been important publication outlets for migration research.

Table 2. Most Relevant Sources in Migration Research

Rank	Source	Documents
1	International Migration	20
2	Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies	18
3	Journal of Refugee Studies	14
4	Population, Space and Place	13
5	Asian and Pacific Migration Journal	9
6	Refugee Survey Quarterly	9
7	International Migration Review	6
8	Refuge	5
10	Journal of International Migration and Integration	4

Source: Author's analysis based on Scopus data using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny

International Migration is the most productive source, with 20 documents, followed by the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies with 18 and the Journal of Refugee Studies with 14. Population, Space and Place and the Asian and Pacific Migration Journal also make notable contributions. The distribution demonstrates the importance of specialist migration journals and interdisciplinary publication outlets.

4.3 Most Relevant Authors

The author distribution indicates that publication activity is concentrated among a limited number of researchers who frequently contribute. The presence of six authors among the leading contributors reflects a relatively focused authorship pattern within the analysed migration research literature.

Table 3. Most relevant authors in migration research

Rank	Author	Documents
1	Connell, J.	6
2	Cohen, N.	4
3	King, R.	4
4	Omata, N.	4
5	Kusari, K.	3
6	Rajan, S.	3

Source: Author's analysis based on Scopus data using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny

Connell, J. is the most productive author in the available analysis, with six documents. Cohen, N., King, R. and Omata, N. have four documents each, while Kusari, K. and Rajan, S. have three each. The distribution suggests a broad scholarly contribution rather than domination by a single author.

4.4 Most Relevant Affiliations

The affiliation analysis highlights the institutions that have contributed most strongly to the migration research literature in the selected dataset. The following affiliations indicate contributions were from institutions across different international settings.

Table 4. Most relevant affiliations in migration research

Rank	Affiliation	Documents
1	University of Sussex	12
2	University of Oxford	9
3	University of Sydney	6
4	University of Calgary	5
5	Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	4
6	Purdue University	4
7	University of Ghana	4
8	University of Manchester	4
9	University of North Carolina	4
10	University of Waikato	4

Source: Author's analysis based on Scopus data using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny

The University of Sussex records the highest contribution, while the University of Sydney follows in the ranking. The geographical diversity of leading affiliations demonstrates the international institutional character of migration scholarship.

4.5 Most Globally Cited Documents

Citation analysis highlights the publications that have received the greatest scholarly attention within the selected migration research dataset. The most globally cited documents indicate the influential contributions that have shaped research on migration and related development issues.

Table 5. Most globally cited documents in migration research

Rank	Author	Year	Source as displayed	Global Citations
1	Lupton M	1980	World Development	339
2	De Haas H	2007	Development and Change	272
3	Zweig G	2006	International Labour Review	193
4	Dustmann C	2010	Journal of Development Economics	132
5	Connell J	2000	International Journal of Urban and Regional Research	118

Source: Author's analysis based on Scopus data using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny

The citation analysis identifies several highly influential documents. The highest global citation count reported is 339, followed by 272 and 193. These works span different migration and development-related outlets and indicate that migration research draws on multiple disciplinary perspectives.

4.6 Keyword Analysis

Keyword analysis highlights the terms that appear most frequently in the selected migration research literature. The frequency pattern indicates that return migration, international migration, and broader population- related themes receive substantial attention in the literature.

Table 6. Most frequent keywords in migration research

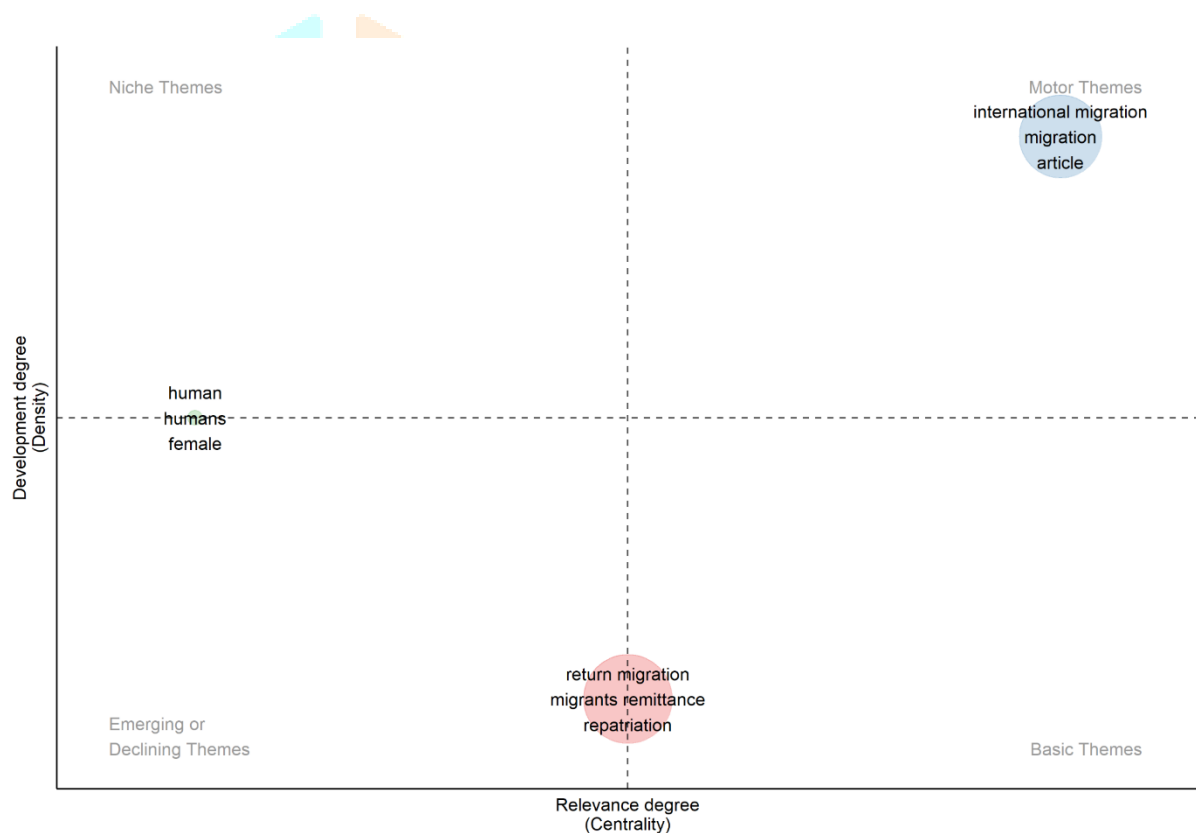
Keyword	Occurrences
Return migration	163
International migration	61
Migration	55
Population dynamics	52
Population	51
Migrants' remittance	50
Repatriation	49
Refugee	45
Asia	41
Labor migration	38

Source: Author's analysis based on Scopus data using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny

Keyword analysis is used to identify the most prominent terms and examine the thematic focus of a research field (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015). Return migration is the most frequent term, with 163 occurrences. International migration and migration follow with 61 and 55. Population dynamics, population, migrants' remittance and repatriation are also prominent. The keyword profile demonstrates that the literature combines broad migration processes with demographic, economic and return-related concerns. The distribution of these keywords suggests that migration research has developed around both broad migration processes and specific aspects of migrant experiences. The prominence of return migration indicates a notable research interest in the conditions and processes associated with migrant's return and subsequent adjustment. The occurrence of remittance, repatriation and labor migration further indicates the multidimensional nature of the field, encompassing economic, demographic and mobility-related dimensions.

4.7 Thematic Structure

The thematic structure provides an overview of the major research themes and their relative positioning within the field of migration research (Hassan et al., 2019). The thematic map illustrates the conceptual organisation of the research domain using centrality and density. Similar bibliometric mapping of migration studies has demonstrated changes in thematic focus and the relationship among research topics over time (Pisarevskaya et al., 2020). The thematic structure reflects the diversity of research interests within the migration literature and shows how different topics are positioned in relation to their importance and development. It provides a broader understanding of the major areas that have received attention in migration research and the connections among them. The identified themes also indicate that migration research has expanded beyond general migration issues to include more specific areas such as return migration, migrants, remittances and repatriation.



Source: Author's analysis based on Scopus data using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny

In the present study, international migration/migration occupies an important developed position. A further thematic area is associated with return migration, migrants, remittance and repatriation. The thematic position of return migration and related concepts indicates an important connection with the broader migration literature and provides scope for more specialised investigation of post-return outcomes, including economic adjustment, livelihood reconstruction and institutional support.

V. RESEARCH GAP AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The bibliometric evidence shows that migration research has developed into a broad and continuously expanding field, with considerable attention to international migration, return migration, remittances and repatriation.

A useful direction for future research is to examine what happens after migrants return. Greater attention can be given to employment recovery, self-employment, utilisation of skills and overseas experience, access to finance, institutional support and longer-term livelihood sustainability.

Future bibliometric studies can expand database coverage beyond Scopus and use complete cited-reference records to conduct co-citation and bibliographic-coupling analyses. Substantive studies can complement bibliometric evidence through empirical investigation of the economic and institutional dimensions of return migration.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined global research trends in migration using 326 Scopus-indexed documents published between 1975 and 2025. The literature covers 192 sources and involves 528 authors. The dataset indicates a 3.65% annual growth rate, with an average document age of 12 years and 18.7 citations per document. It also contains 728 Author Keywords and 855 Keywords Plus. The source analysis identifies International Migration as the leading source, while author and institutional analyses demonstrate broad scholarly participation. The keyword analysis identifies return migration, international migration, migration, population dynamics, migrants' remittance and repatriation as prominent components of the research landscape. Overall, migration research is a diverse, interdisciplinary and continuously developing field. The prominence of return migration suggests an important avenue for future scholarship, particularly research examining the economic, institutional and livelihood consequences of return.

VII. LIMITATIONS

The study is based exclusively on Scopus-indexed records and therefore does not cover literature indexed in other databases. The 2025 records may not represent complete annual coverage. The Biblioshiny dataset reports zero cited references; therefore, co-citation and cited-reference network interpretations are not made. Finally, bibliometric indicators describe patterns of scholarly production and influence but cannot by themselves establish the substantive quality or theoretical contribution of individual studies.

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