

BOOK REVIEW

Peter H. Koehn: Transnational Mobility and Global Health. Traversing Borders and Boundaries

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The monograph “Transnational Mobility and Global Health. Traversing Borders and Boundaries”¹ by Peter H. Koehn is a part of the Routledge Studies in Development, Mobilities and Migration books series, which is dedicated to the field of mobilities and migration, the importance of which is undeniable great – and constantly growing. The fact that the importance of migration has increased enormously in the 21st century is undeniable, but there have not been many synthesizing works that address both migration and its health implications. Koehn’s monographs sets out to do just that.

The author is a Professor of Political Science, Director of the Global Public Health Program and his aim in this book is to give a detailed overview of transnational mobility, global health and their various interfaces. At the beginning of the book, the author states that “[t]he book explores the interacting political, economic, social, cultural and climatic drivers of health and migration, proposing innovative ways to enhance global health and care provision in an era of transnational mobility. As health security continues to rise up the agenda in international politics, the book also analyses the political determinants of health and migration.” It is already apparent from this opening statement that the author assumes an enormous task. Both areas are diverse and vast individually, and their correlation is just as rich a topic.

Besides the introduction, the book consists of eight substantive chapters. The chapters contain many small text boxes that help the reader to gain a deeper understanding through real examples or, where appropriate, to lighten up the analysis of a larger set of data.

In the introduction, the reader gets an elaborated theoretical basis as regards both transnational migration and global health issues – and later the interconnection between them. It is beneficial to have a system in which we can see the topics of the book already at the beginning. We can learn about the framework of the analysis: the book is focused on field analysis, practice, and insights. This method of analysis one of the book’s strengths. There are lots of works where the focus is solely on theoretical approaches, but here we can experience the opposite. The author uses data and field experiences well and adds his own views to these.

The first chapter (“Transnational travel as health insurance”) provides an appropriate introduction to the correct interpretation of the other chapters. We can learn about the concept of “transnational care”, and we can find information about which diseases occur most frequently in which groups. For example, travelers who are visiting friends and family tend to be at higher risk because they are more likely to stay longer, visit remote areas and consume local food and water, and less likely

¹ Peter H. Koehn, *Transnational Mobility and Global Health. Traversing Borders and Boundaries*, Routledge, Oxon, 2020. 280 p.

to take precautions. Medical tourism is a unique part of this chapter, and the author approaches the institution from several important aspects. He highlights the differences between the North and the South and raises awareness of an important question, namely, biosecurity as the spread of diseases via international travel presents a growing challenge.

The second chapter, entitled “Health challenges for refugees and conflict-included migrants” focuses on Southern conflicts and conflict-included migrants. It is a fact – highlighted by the author too – that the rise of terrorist groups further aggravates the living conditions for vulnerable populations. Despite the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the protection of non-combatants is not always guaranteed, they can be easily affected in incidental or direct ways, and these are highly harmful to their health status both physically and mentally. The chapter includes a nuanced part about how many people suffered what injuries in which conflict, but as I see it, the transition to the next minor topic – which concerns the challenges of access to health-care – is not as smooth as it could have been – or maybe the previous section was not closed off sufficiently. However, the end of this chapter is very interesting, where the author writes about health as a bridge to peace: it contains fascinating elements, for instance the engagement of medical personnel in peacemaking and conflict resolution.

The third chapter, called “Health challenges for other survival migrants on the move North” is one of the most informative parts of the book. By mentioning the category of “survival migrants” the author gave a great start to this chapter. This concept, as Koehn writes, can be linked to complex-humanitarian crises, and with that in mind, he provides a well-structured description of the related emerging issues. The author mentions the category of irregular migrants as well, though it is not entirely clear whether – in his opinion – this category and the survival migrant concept overlap, in whole or in part, or whether they should be treated entirely separately. If these two are separate categories, then in my view it would have been preferable to differentiate between them more clearly. The author’s description of the International Detention Coalition is a welcome addition, as not a lot of literature deals with their work.

Chapter four (“Migrant health in Northern reception countries”) addresses the impact of unequal mobility. Northern countries have a variety of immigrants with different statuses, and this has a powerful influence on the issue of health access. The author introduces the differences through the lens of migrant workers and irregular migrants with regards to their mental health as well. He describes the “healthy immigrants’ paradox”, the importance of education and its deficiencies, and the skills that a well-prepared medical worker should possess. In this section, all information about the necessary skills is elaborated, but Koehn at the same time keeps the text quite interesting, so the reader does not get lost among all the information.

The “Migration, health and sustainable development linkages” chapter examines health and migration conditions in the complicated context of sustainable development challenges in developing countries. The first part of the chapter focuses on poverty and its immediate consequences for the South, but as we move on, the focus also shifts to examination of how states can achieve sustainable development and improve their health systems simultaneously. The so called “brain-drain” effect in the field of health expertise is an interesting part of the chapter, unfortunately, the author did not pay sufficient attention to this topic. Following some thoughts about circular migration and its potential benefits for the health and development challenges, the author closes out this chapter by substantiated arguments and conclusions.

“Pathogens without borders”, the sixth chapter provides some lessons in connection with the ongoing pandemic too. It is interesting to see global leaders’ lack of preparedness for COVID-19, despite the precedent of earlier large-scale cross-border epidemics. The author explores the impacts

of Northern pandemic fears and vulnerabilities, public-health services in impoverished areas, and related migration impulses. He provides a definition of Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases (ERID), which is necessary as this chapter is strongly based on this concept. Koehn provides many interesting pieces of information, for example, that 61% of emerging infectious diseases are caused by zoonoses, and three-fourth of these involve transmissions from wildlife to human populations. It is noted that people on the move can introduce new, previously undetected diseases to destination places. He highlights the importance of local and transnational health perspectives and immediate contact tracing, talks about the strict measures of quarantine and isolation, which inevitably involve human rights challenges. Based on this chapter, it can be stated that the most effective response to an ERID is prevention and rapid treatment.

The seventh chapter is about “Climate change, health and migration”, namely extreme climatic events and slow-onset changes in climate and environmental conditions as well as consequent ecological, economic and social disruptions related to population mobility and unequal global health outcomes. The author uses China’s national and subnational policies as examples related to the responses to air pollution, sea-level rise and rising temperature. Naturally, these kinds of events are the root causes of growing population displacement and migration. With regards to these, there is an important term to use, which is climate migration. The author interprets the concept well, the chapter is accurately built and coherent.

The closing chapter is aptly titled “Where should we “move” from here?”. This ultimate section of the book provides the necessary concluding discussion to round out the foregoing analysis. This is also more of a thought-provoking part that focuses on the future more than any other chapter of the book. The author talks about the relevance of health-care education, mostly as regards transnational competences, and the need for a partnership between the North and the South on several levels because the collaboration is beneficial for them both, for instance, it can be a great way for the development of institutional and individual capacities at multiple institutions. The author highlights the importance of innovation, mentioning artificial intelligence too, which is a very hot topic nowadays in almost every field of research. The issues of volunteerism and voluntourism are also on the table – in my view, this is perhaps the most interesting part of this concluding chapter. Finally, the author devotes a section to the Global Health and Migration Corps proposal – this exposé is well detailed and contains very useful information about the relevant recommendation of the US Institute of Medicine.

Overall, many exciting topics are discussed by the author in this topical and important monograph, although in some instances, only a few sentences are devoted to some very interesting issues (such as pre-arrival health checks, for instance) that are only mentioned in a quasi-introductory way at the beginning of the chapter, although it could help to understand this complex subject better if the author explained them in a more detailed way. The style of the monograph is scientific and professional, but at the same time, it could be understandable to people who do not know the subject deeply. Overall, the book is essentially a gap-filling work that will prove very useful for those who are researching the health aspects of migration, be they political scientists, lawyers, or even health professionals or policymakers.