

# **Perspectives on Human Mobility: Normative and Political**

Achin Chakraborty

## *Abstract*

The word 'migrant' usually evokes, for good reason, images of people at their most vulnerable. The perspectives to illuminate the complexity of what may be generally called *human mobility* are therefore overshadowed by a commonplace moral concern that overwhelms the numerous accounts of vulnerabilities of migrants. In this lecture I start with an outline of a normative framework that was articulated in UNDP's *Human Development report 2009*. The perspective here is of freedom – taken in the sense of either opportunity or capability – and therefore when an individual chooses to move, her capability set is supposed to expand. Acknowledging as I do the importance of the vulnerability narrative, it is worth recalling that the majority of migrants, far from being victims, tend to be successful in the narrow sense of income gain, even though their exposure risks increases manifold and their freedom in several dimensions remain restricted. Following this perspective it is hard to see why the direction of policy in the origin country/sub-national entities should be towards 'holding back' the prospective out-migrants. By contrast, there are positive-analytic approaches that address questions like why do people migrate? We contrast these perspectives with a political economy approach which is needed to understand why the governments respond to the 'problem' of immigration (or in-migration) as they do. I argue that a judicious combination of arguments drawn from these apparently diverging perspectives may help us understand the policy issues better.