Editorial

Russell King (Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex)

The launch of a new journal is always a significant and exciting event and is especially welcome in the burgeoning field of migration studies. The *Mediterranean Journal of Migration* will play a major role in showcasing scholarship on migration in a region of global significance for contemporary (and past) population movements.

Let me reflect for a moment on the publishing landscape for journals on migration. Five journals stand out as well-known outlets with a global remit for papers on migration. Three of these are long-established: the *International Migration Review*, the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* and *International Migration* (all of them going since the 1960s or 1970s). Two, *Migration Studies* and *Comparative Migration Studies*, are more recent (both since 2013). Then there are two important journals which do not have the word 'migration' in their titles but which have the majority of their papers on migration topics – these are *Ethnic and Racial Studies* and *Population, Space and Place*.

Zooming in on Europe, we note the fairly recent foundation of two regional migration journals: the *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* (in 2011) and the *Central and Eastern European Migration Review* (2012). Therefore, an obvious gap in geographical coverage exists for Southern Europe and the wider realm of the Mediterranean countries. Of course, it remains to be defined as to exactly what constitutes 'Mediterranean' in the context of this new journal but I can imagine that the editor and her advisory board will take a flexible view.

The above listing of key migration journals is not meant to be exhaustive, not least because it is limited to English-language journals. We should not overlook, therefore, important migration journals published in other languages. Three examples which pertain to countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea are *Migraciones*, the *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* and *Studi Emigrazione*, all of which publish some articles in English.

Turning now to the six articles which make up the first issue of '*MJM*', we see an understandable focus on Malta in most of them. The papers are otherwise an eclectic mix, which reflects the interdisciplinary nature of migration as a social, spatial, economic and political process. Human rights is a critical issue with migrants and, in fact, most papers have at least a partial human-rights perspective.

At a time when so many migration papers are single-country case-studies, it is good that this inaugural issue kicks off with a duo of countries. Despite their vastly different sizes, Italy and Malta are locked together in terms of their geographical positionality in the face of cross-Mediterranean flows of asylum-seekers and irregular migrants. Omar Grech and Monika Wohlfeld extend this comparative link to the context of Covid-19 and the pandemic's restrictions of the movement of refugees and undocumented migrants, who suffered both 'pushback' (prevented from landing from the sea) and 'pullback' (prevented from returning to their home countries). The authors show that the pandemic led to an excessively securitised response which had a significant negative impact on (irregular) migrants' human rights. This impact derived from actions at two levels. The first was Covid measures put in place for the general population but which impacted especially on irregular migrants: loss of work, inability to access social welfare support, deterioration of living conditions in reception centres, difficulties for children to access online education when schools were closed etc. The second level consisted of measures which more specifically targeted migrants' mobility on sea and land: suspension of international travel, closure of ports and refusal of entry to vessels carrying migrants, detention of rescue boats, offshore quarantining of migrants on boats etc.

The second paper, by Mary Grace Vella, focuses on Malta and the phenomenon of 'crimmigration' – or 'the intertwinement and integration of the immigration and criminal spheres' of legal rules and behaviours. The result is that crimmigration leads to harsher consequences for immigrants and non-citizens in legal adjudications and enforcement practices. This is set within an evolving demographic landscape wherein the number of foreign nationals as a share of the Maltese population leapt from less than 5% in 2011 to more than 22% in 2021 (and to 27% of the country's workforce), and yet foreign inmates account for 56% of the incarcerated population in 2021. Using documentary data and scrutinising official statistics sourced from the police department, the courts of justice and the prison system, Vella exposes an increasingly hostile environment, characterised by an over-reliance on criminalisation and incarceration as opposed to community-based solutions to what are essentially 'bureaucratic' crimes such as the possession of false papers. Such punitive measures raise important moral and social questions and can have devastating practical and psychological consequences on those affected. Fiscal costs are also out of proportion due the overburdening of the prison and detention system.

The focus on Malta continues in the third paper, by Alexis Galand, which is about the contradiction between the proposed acceleration of asylum procedures in the EU and the preservation of asylum-seekers' human rights. Malta already implements such accelerated procedures whereby asylum-seekers coming from countries deemed 'safe' are subject to a rapid cycle of rejection, detention and removal to their countries of origin, with only three days to appeal. Whilst some might endorse these proposed mechanisms on the grounds of speed and efficiency in migration management/control, others point to the erosion and violation of the human rights of those affected. The increased automation of asylum application decisions based largely on country of origin and taking limited account of personal circumstances and protection needs puts the burden of proof entirely on the applicant. The wider context includes rising asylum numbers, heavy workload pressure on assessors and a long list – longer than for most other EU countries – of 'safe' origins, including countries like Ghana, Morocco and Bangladesh, which criminalise same-sex relationships and persecute LGBTIQ+ individuals. Malta provides a clear example of the shortcomings of such a system and the human-rights abuses it can lead to. However, as the author's conclusion shows, Malta is not alone in these infringements.

The next paper, by Ted Bikin-kita, Nefertiti Bikin-kita and Néhémie Bikin-kita combines ideas from previous papers in the set by utilising a legal perspective and the 'crimmigration' theoretical framework to interrogate the continuing relevance of the 1951 Convention on Refugees. Two further neologisms are proposed: the 'inquisitorialisation' of asylum procedures, leading to the outcome of 'crimasylisation', which is the trend towards the criminalisation of asylum-seekers during the very process by which they seek protection and sanctuary. France and Malta are taken as the main case-studies, with some reference also to Switzerland following the latter's adhesion to the Schengen and Dublin processes and that country's adoption of explicitly inquisitorial techniques, defined as 'harsh, difficult and prolonged questioning'. Whilst some have argued that the 1951 Convention has become outdated in the contemporary era, the authors suggest that it is as relevant today as it ever was, in fact even more so. The problem has been its interpretation and implementation, using aggressive inquisitorial techniques and the normalisation of human-rights violations such as pushbacks at sea and prolonged detention in inadequate conditions.

And then, for something completely different. John Vella's paper on a museological perspective on Mediterranean migrations takes us in a different direction. It breaks new ground in its coverage and develops new perspectives on how migration is represented. The paper is not just about contemporary migrations or even those in recent history but follows some of the museums in tracing population movements in the ancient past, including prehistory. In ancient, classical, medieval and early-modern times, the Mediterranean served as a theatre, conduit and stepping-stone for expansive colonising activities with their attendant migrations of colonisation and displacement. The point here is that colonial authorities and nation-states often influenced the content of the museums under their jurisdiction. More recently, the field of sociomuseology seeks to adjust the museum to present-day realities, including migration, refugee movements, the formation of new identities and the growth of inequalities, the last of which can lead to migration to escape poverty. Empirically, the study by Vella surveyed 14 migration

museums in 11 Mediterranean countries. Data were collected from museum websites, social media, press reports and scholarly literature on the museums. In the analysis, attention is given to how museums choose to include and represent migration and the realities facing migrants. A description is given of each museum in turn and tabulated classifications are made of types of migration (internal, emigration, immigration), migrant artefacts and various kinds of display material. An interesting tension is discussed between presenting 'objective' information on migration to the general visiting public and giving the migrants represented a voice and making them feel included rather than 'spoken for'.

The final paper, by Justin Spiteri and Heathcliff Schembri, is a preliminary study of Syrian refugee children's experiences in Maltese schools, based on semi-structured interviews with four such pupils aged 11–13 years. Although the children faced barriers such as language and occasional bullying, overall their experiences were positive. The paper is set within wider debates about developing a more complete policy of multicultural education in Maltese.