

Research on Global Migration and Labour Market through Bibliometric Lens

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Abstract. *Migration is a dynamic phenomenon, keeping pace with global changes in the economy, climate, geopolitics, and policies. Being interconnected with labour, migration becomes a common feature of globalization. Having in mind the importance of continued research in this field, this paper aims to investigate through bibliometric lens the most representative papers, authors, and themes on the nexus of global migration and the labour market. Using the Web of Science database and the R package Bibliometrix, we conducted a performance analysis to measure scientific impact and citations, followed by a science mapping to visually represent the scientific research and its development in the academic field. The performance analysis allowed us to answer the first two research questions of the paper, as we evaluated the trend of research in the field between 1992 and 2024 and identified the most influential articles, authors, journals, countries, and collaboration patterns in this field. Among the main findings that arose was the fact that the United States has the strongest collaborations with the United Kingdom and China, while also having the most citations and articles published. Finally, the thematic map allowed us to answer the third research question by highlighting the main hot topics and emerging themes in the field of global migration and labour. These findings could guide both governmental and corporate decision-makers in making informed policies and strategies.*

Keywords: global migration, labour market, bibliometric analysis, Bibliometrix, Web of Science.

Introduction

Throughout human history, migration has been a fundamental aspect shaping societies, economies, and cultures globally. Before establishing settlements that evolved into the countries known today, humans moved from one land to another, being the fastest dominant species to spread across most of the planet. Environmental conditions could not be an obstacle to our ancestors, especially due to clothing and housing, two inventions that helped them withstand different climates (McNeill, 1984). At present, the migration phenomenon remains at the attention of states and international organisations, as 3.6% of the world's population is represented by migrants seeking better lives, and new opportunities. Unfortunately, some of them fall into the category of displaced people because of wars, conflicts and socioeconomic instability that affect their homes and existence (International Organization for Migration, 2024).

To a great extent, migration is often directly interlinked with work. Labour migration is a common characteristic of today's globalised economy and a key policy priority for many countries and regions. In 2022, 4.7% of the overall labour force was constituted of international migrants, counting 30 million more people than in 2013. As stated by the International Labour Organization

(2024), the growth in the number of labour migrants was more intense during the years 2013-2019, with an annual average of 2.8%, then slowed down to less than 1% due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Labour migrants play a crucial role not only for the destination country but also for the origin one. Thereby, on the one hand, they represent a source of cultural exchange and can successfully address the labour force shortages in the destination country. On the other hand, they support their origin country through remittances or, in case they return, through their newly acquired skills, experience, and knowledge.

Considering the relevance of the topic, this paper aims to investigate the most representative papers, authors, and themes on the nexus of global migration and labour market. Since the existing literature research through bibliometric analysis is quite scarce, we decided to fill in the gap in the field and further explore it through the bibliometric lens. Firstly, we conducted a performance analysis using the Web of Science (WoS) database to measure scientific impact and citations to better understand the research field in terms of structure and trends in academic activity. Secondly, the analysis was further extended with a science mapping to visually represent the scientific research and its development in the academic field. The following research questions were considered:

RQ1: How do we evaluate the trend of research on the nexus between global migration and the labour market between 1992 and 2024 based on the performance of publications and citations?

RQ2: What are the most influential articles, authors, journals, countries, and collaboration patterns in this field?

RQ3: What are the main hot topics and emerging themes in the field of global migration and labour? These findings could guide both governmental and corporate decision-makers to make informed policies and strategies.

The structure of the paper is the following: Section 2 serves as a brief literature review on the nexus between migration and labour studied through bibliometric analysis. Section 3 summarizes the main methodological aspects of our investigation, while Section 4 discusses the main results of our bibliometric analysis. Finally, the last section concludes.

Literature review

The state of the art on the nexus between migration and labour studied through bibliometric analysis recently indicates a growing interest in the field, with particularly significant findings arising in the context of (1) migration health, (2) scientific migration, (3) the social and economic impact of migration, as well as (4) migration and environmental issues, as evidenced by various studies.

Regarding the topic of global migration health, Sweileh et al. (2018) conducted a bibliometric analysis using a very large database of documents extracted from Scopus for the period 2000–2016. Most of the investigated documents were about patients' mobility across international borders, refugees and asylum seekers, migrant workers, victims of human trafficking or international students. Many of the publications were in the psychosocial and mental health domain, as well as on health policy and systems. The study showed a low contribution of authors and institutions in Asian countries, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern European countries on the topic, emphasizing the need for a structured research agenda to address health issues related to migration.

Similarly, Agan et al. (2022) studied the literature concerning migration health and the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 1,953 publications were extracted from Scopus for the year 2020. The investigation placed the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health,

as well as the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine institution, in top publications on the topic. Regarding international research collaboration, the strongest link was between the USA and China, while the main themes of the research consisted of public health interventions, disease epidemiology and mathematical modelling, and policy impact assessment.

When studying international scientific migration between developing and developed countries, Moed and Halevi (2014) underscored the importance of learning how academic mobility reflects broader migration patterns. Moreover, Robinson-Garcia et al. (2019) identified nearly 16 million individual authors from WoS during 2008-2015 and proposed a general classification for analysing scientific mobility using institutional affiliation changes. They distinguished between travellers—authors who kept their affiliation with their country of origin while gaining additional affiliations versus migrants—authors who have ruptured with their country of origin. In particular, Zhao et al. (2022) focused on the career stages and gender disparities between researchers who remain in Germany, those who emigrate, and those who eventually return using Scopus from 1996 to 2020. They emphasize the gender-imbalanced return migration of published researchers, which is critical for the development of science policy. Similarly, Miranda-Gonzalez et al. (2020) traced over 1.1 million scholars on Scopus between Mexican states and provided key demographic measures of internal migration during 1996-2018. They proposed a new framework for studying internal migration among researchers by combining demographic and network science techniques to improve the understanding of internal migration patterns within country boundaries. Their findings point to Mexico City and the surrounding states as preferences for migration destinations.

Considering the social and economic impact of migration, Xu and Chang'an (2023) focused on the role of migration in reducing relative poverty in rural China, arguing that migration serves as a compensatory mechanism for labour market imbalances. The socio-economic implications of labour migration are further elaborated by Aswani and Bhat (2022), who reviewed the literature on labour migration's causes and impacts, emphasizing its role in economic development. They argued that migration is a critical factor for population expansion and economic growth, which aligns with findings from McDonald (2017), who notes that immigration has significantly contributed to employment growth in Australia.

Furthermore, the impact of migration on specific sectors, such as construction, is evident through the work of Haakestad and Friberg (2017), who explored the deskilling processes concerning labour migration in Norway. They show how large-scale migration has transformed work organization and authority relations within the industry, as labour migration generates shifts in occupational structures. Their results are also in line with those of Arnholtz and Wright (2023), who investigated the effects of labour migration on institutional changes in the construction sectors of Denmark and Australia. Their findings suggest that labour migration can significantly alter skill-sourcing practices and policies and that bibliometric approaches can thus be applied to understand the institutional impacts of migration.

Finally, Anuar et al. (2022) examined the relationship between immigration and environmental degradation through bibliometric analysis using 1,372 articles published from 2000 to 2020 from Scopus. They found the United States to be the leading country in contributing to this topic with publications. At the same time, the most significant fields of research on immigration and environmental degradation were environmental science, agricultural and biological sciences, arts and humanities and earth and planetary sciences. On a similar approach, Milan-Garcia et al. (2021) studied the nexus between climate change and migration from 1999 to 2019. Using both WoS and Scopus, their bibliometric analysis on a total of 333 documents placed the US, UK, Germany, and China as the most productive countries, with a predominance of North American

organizations fostering research on these topics. They identified a transition from concepts like climate change, vulnerability, land degradation, refugees, and security to international migration, sustainability, human rights, and disaster risk reduction, among others.

In conclusion, the current state of the art highlights the multifaceted nature of migration's impact on labour markets. Studying the nexus between migration and labour through bibliometric analyses offers a comprehensive framework for analysing various facets of migration research, revealing trends, identifying gaps, and informing policy directions. It thus underscores the importance of continued research in this field.

Methodology

The bibliometric methodology is primarily based on the quantitative techniques applied to bibliometric data. Even though bibliometrics is not new, it has recently become a widely used research tool in all sorts of fields, from business, accounting, and management to economics, econometrics, and social sciences (Donthu et al., 2021; Passas, 2024). Bibliometrics implies the examination of the characteristics of a selected bibliography, such as the number of papers, authors, citations, journals, co-authorship rates, institutions, and countries, as well as the links between these characteristics forming social, conceptual, and intellectual structures (Öztürk et al., 2024).

The application of bibliometrics in this study required some well-defined steps to deliver a clear understanding of the literature regarding migration and the labour market. The approach is detailed in figure 1.

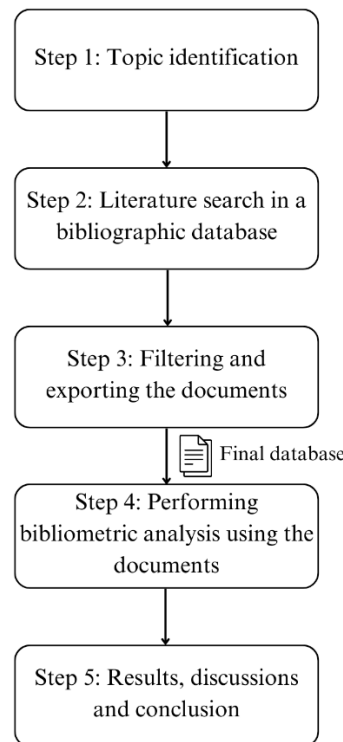


Figure 1. Methodology steps

Source: Authors' own creation using Canva.

For the following bibliometric analysis, publications were extracted from WoS. Initially, 647 documents were retrieved (as of January 31st, 2025) using the basic search query. The search

query included the title, the abstract and the author's keywords. For these three categories, words such as migration and labour (or labor, US English) were included as follows: "*migration**" and ("*labour*" or "*labor*"). Then, the documents were filtered by language and final publication year, and only those published in English between 1992-2024 were selected. The final database comprises 545 documents after eliminating four more documents off-topic.

The 545 documents were exported in plain text file format. The R package Bibliometrix was used, as it offers a simple-to-use web interface for bibliometric analysis. It explores sources, authors, documents, and social, intellectual, and conceptual patterns. Bibliographic data can be imported from multiple sources, such as WoS, Scopus, PubMed, Cochrane, or Digital Science Dimensions.

The main concepts and principles on which the bibliometric analysis was performed include three major directions. The first one is characterized by emphasising the general trend of research in the field of labour migration. Here, the general structure of the database, the annual scientific production and the average annual citations were investigated. Then, the analysis continues by highlighting the most influential articles, authors, journals and countries, as well as the collaboration network between them. In this part, Lotka's law was used to identify the most productive authors, describing the frequency of publications by researchers in the field. A collaboration network between countries was also applied to map the clusters of international co-authorships. Finally, to capture the structural evolution of the labour migration theme, a thematic map with author's keywords was created, splitting them into four groups according to two dimensions: the development and the relevance of the research subjects.

Results and discussions

General trend of research in the field

The general structure of the investigated database is summarised in table 1. After initial data processing and filtering, the final database of publications used in the bibliometric analysis consisted of 545 documents published in 378 journals between 1992 and 2024. The average age of these documents was almost 8 years, which means the papers are relatively recent compared to the 32-year timespan. The average number of citations per document was 13.11. Each document had, on average, at least two authors, while 42.57% of the papers were single-authored. The rate of international co-authorships was rather moderate, with only 20.37% of the documents written by authors from different countries, while the main type of publications in the database was articles.

Table 1. General report on the database's structure

Description	Results
No. of documents retrieved by the query search	647
No. of documents accepted in the analysis	545
Timespan	1992-2024
No. of sources	378
Document average age (years)	7.95
Average citations per document	13.11
No. of references	21,717
No. of authors	1,105
Single-authored documents	232
Authors per document	2.03
Co-authors per document	2.2

Description	Results
International co-authorships	20.37%
Article (of total documents)	82.75%
Proceedings paper (of total documents)	11.93%
Other types (of total documents)	5.32%

Source: Authors' own research results.

The evolution of the number of documents published annually (figure 2) has an irregular trend throughout the selected period, with a sharp increase since 2009. The significantly higher number of published papers from 2009 until now may indicate a growing interest in labour migration. Keeping in mind that there has been a delay between the writing and the publication of the documents, the increased interest in this topic since 2009 should be viewed as a consequence of the global events of previous years. Thereby, a possible explanation could be the 2008 financial crisis, which negatively impacted economies and, implicitly, labour markets around the world. The estimations show that the number of unemployed people drastically increased to 212 million in 2009 compared to 34 million in 2007 (International Labour Organization, 2010). One of the most vulnerable categories affected by the crisis was represented by migrant workers facing the risk of unemployment in the destination countries, the lack of social protection, worsened working conditions and, for some of them, the return to their origin countries (Awad, 2009).

The most productive years in terms of published papers were 2022, followed by 2020 and 2024. These findings confirm the increasing interest in labour migration in recent years, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic outburst which hindered worldwide mobility and, therefore, labour migration conditions as well.

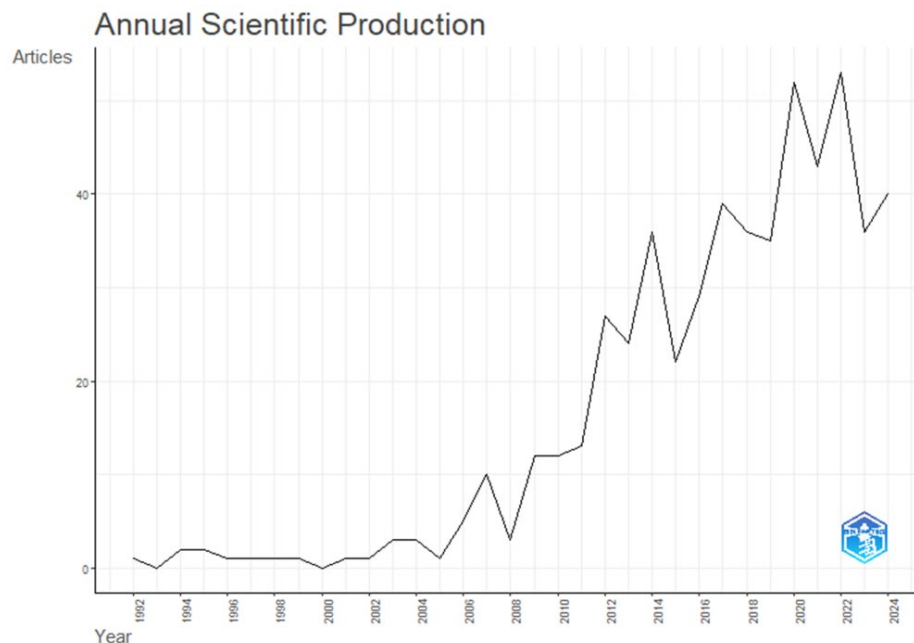


Figure 2. Annual scientific production of papers

Source: Authors' own research results.

The evolution of the average number of citations per year (figure 3) presents quite a steady trend, except for 2002, when the average number of citations was 14.08. This was due to Cindy

Fan's paper with 338 citations. This work addresses the influence of the state on rural-to-urban migration and labour market processes in a socialist and transitional economy (Fan, 2002).

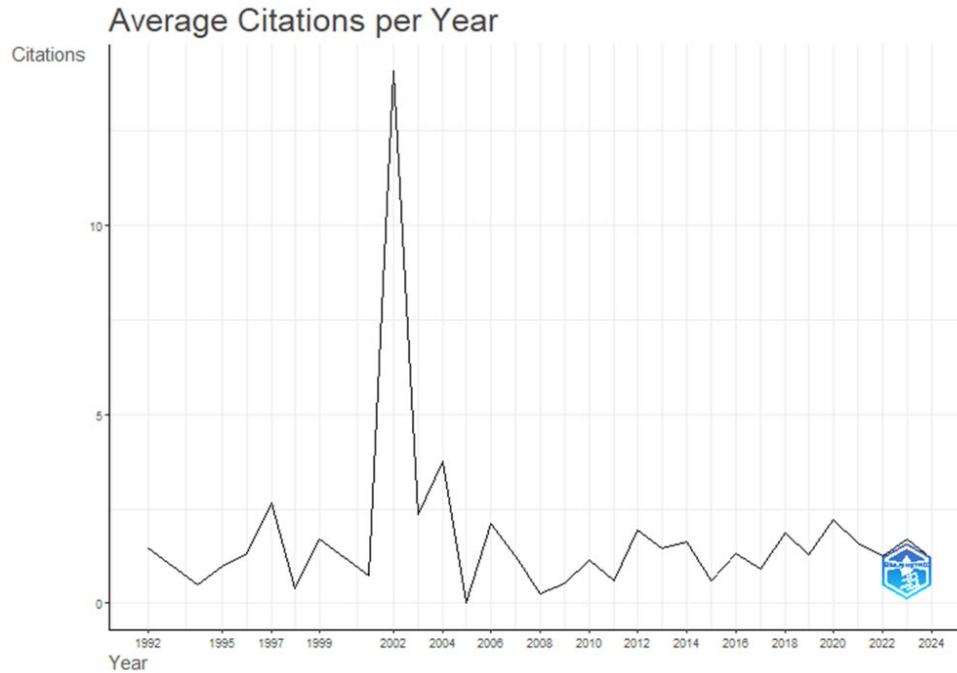


Figure 3. Average annual citations of papers

Source: Authors' own research results.

Most influential articles, authors, journals, and countries in the field and collaboration patterns

To understand the research field in terms of structure and trends in academic activity, we conducted a performance analysis and identified the most influential articles, authors, journals, and countries in the field. Moreover, we investigated the general collaboration patterns between authors and countries on this topic.

Table 2 contains the top 5 most global cited documents produced between 2002 and 2013. We noticed that the most cited paper is also the oldest among these five.

Table 2. Top 5 most global cited papers

First author (year), journal	Paper title	First author's country	Total citations
Fan C. Cindy (2002), Annals of the American Association of Geographers	The elite, the natives, and the outsiders: Migration and labor market segmentation in urban China	USA	338
Weine Stevan M. (2012), AIDS and Behavior	Labor migration and HIV risk: a systematic review of the literature	USA	175
Raghuram Parvati (2004), Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies	The difference that skills make: gender, family migration strategies and regulated labour markets	UK	134
Engbersen Godfried (2013), Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies	On the Differential Attachments of Migrants from Central and Eastern Europe: A Typology of Labour Migration	The Netherlands	121

First author (year), journal	Paper title	First author's country	Total citations
Partridge Mark D. (2012), Regional Science and Urban Economics	Dwindling U.S. internal migration: Evidence of spatial equilibrium or structural shifts in local labor markets?	USA	116

Source: Authors' own research results.

Fan (2002) explores the influence of the Chinese state on rural-urban migration. The study is based on the data from two surveys: a qualitative one from 1995 carried out in the villages of the province of Sichuan and a quantitative one from 1998 conducted in Guangzhou. It is argued that the resident status represents the most important factor impacting migration and the labour market. Thus, the *permanent migrants*, i.e. the people who come from rural areas of China and manage to obtain urban citizenship, are the most advantaged in terms of labour opportunities and mobility.

The second most cited paper addresses the topic of labour migration and migrants' reproductive health. Weine and Kashuba (2012) make a systematic review of 97 articles about HIV risk. They identify a series of socioeconomic, health and cultural determinants associated with HIV risk, among which are financial situation, housing, low social support, lack of testing, substance use, limited STI knowledge or low perceived risk. The geographical distribution of the articles suggests that these determinants are present globally, therefore, worldwide interventions and policies are necessary to limit the spreading of HIV.

The next two documents are both published in the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies. Raghuram (2004) adopts a literature debate approach to migration, gender, labour and family. When considering international migration flows of skilled workers, it is found that women are less mentioned than men in the literature. Also, the author highlights the importance of labour sectors in impacting the migration of the skilled and their families. In the other article, Engbersen et al. (2013) study the types of attachment of migrants from Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria. A survey was conducted among these migrants in the Netherlands about their attachment to the origin country and the country they were either living in, working in or both. The cluster analysis of the respondents indicated four groups: settlers, circulars, bi-nationals, and footloose. It was discovered that circulars and footloose could not integrate into Dutch society as well as settlers and bi-nationals, consequently having less stability in terms of labour market positions. However, when considering the attachment to the origin country, circulars and bi-nationals expressed a much stronger one than the other categories, also contributing to a higher amount of remittances.

The fifth most cited document is an article published in the journal Regional Science and Urban Economics. Partridge et al. (2012) investigate the gross migration in the US after 2000. The key finding of this study shows that regional population growth was less responsive to economic demand shocks affecting different areas unevenly. Apart from this, it was found that people working or actively seeking jobs were less flexible. Thus, the US labour market followed the European model, in which the migration rates were lower. This statement was confirmed through statistical testing, which involved instrumental variable estimation, and quantile regression analysis.

For the analysis of the most relevant author's keywords, it was necessary to aggregate the two forms of the word *labour* (or *labor*, in US English). Hence, the ten most used words of the authors are presented in figure 4. It is observed that *labour migration* is by far the most preferred, with 230 appearances, followed by *migration*, *labour market*, *labour*, and *international migration*. *Gender* is also among these keywords, which could mean that there was an interest in discussing

gender differences or inequalities manifested in the phenomenon of labour migration. *Nepal* and *China*, both with 16 appearances, suggest the relevance of these two countries regarding migrant workers, while *migration policy* draws attention to the subject of migration regulation.

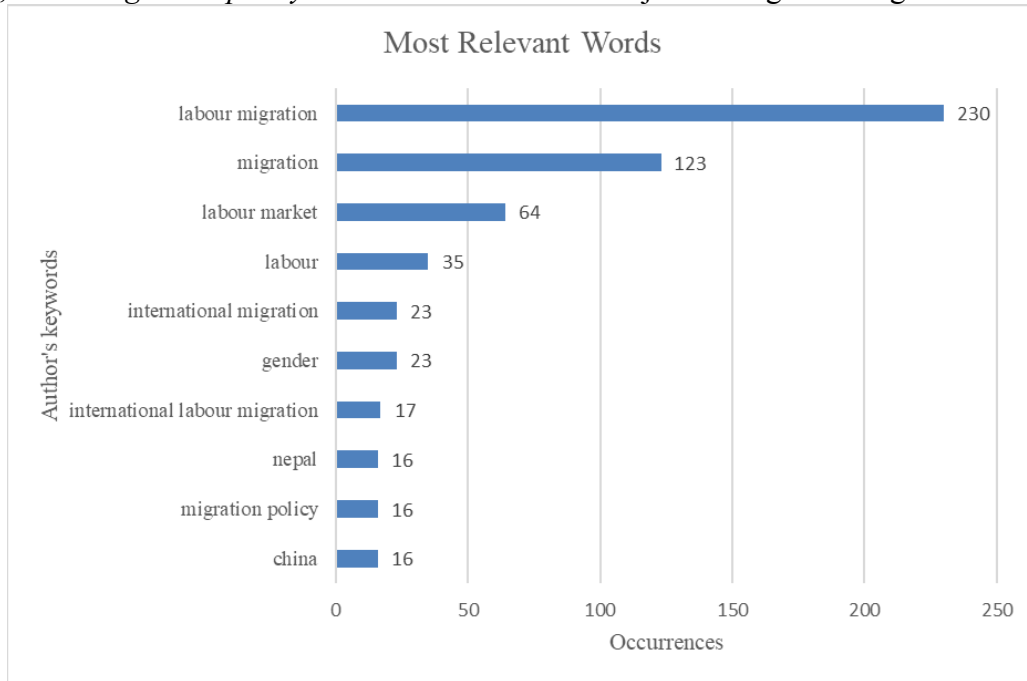


Figure 4. Most relevant author's keywords

Source: Authors' own research results.

The distribution of published papers by journals (table 3) shows that the three most influential sources were the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, Population Space and Place and Sustainability. The first one belongs to the well-known publisher Taylor & Francis, having an Impact Factor of 2.8 in 2023, which is the average number of citations received by articles published over a two-year period. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies focuses primarily on all subjects about migration and its consequences, aiming to contribute to policy innovation. Population Space and Place presents an Impact Factor of 2.6 in 2023, its publisher being Wiley Online Library. Its main fields of interest include studies on population, demography, and geography. Last but not least, Sustainability, published by MDPI, with an Impact Factor of 3.3 in 2023, comprises articles related to the topic of sustainability and sustainable development. The top 5 research areas extracted from WoS, respectively business economics, demography, geography, environmental sciences ecology, and government law, are in accordance with the distribution of journals.

Table 3. Top 10 most influential sources

Sources	Documents	Percentage of total documents
Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies	21	3.85%
Population Space and Place	10	1.83%
Sustainability	9	1.65%
Migration Letters	7	1.28%
Economics & Sociology	5	0.92%
Journal of International Migration and Integration	5	0.92%

Sources	Documents	Percentage of total documents
Land Use Policy	5	0.92%
Asian and Pacific Migration Journal	4	0.73%
Environment and Planning A-Economy and Space	4	0.73%
Labour Mobility in the Enlarged Single European Market	4	0.73%

Source: Authors' own research results.

The author's productivity can be measured using Lotka's Law (figure 5). There are 1028 authors (93.03% of the total) who have published only one document. These are considered occasional authors. As the number of papers published increases, the number of authors with a single article on the topic decreases. Given that the maximum number of articles per author published is five, those who have published at least 3 documents can be deemed core authors (only 1% of the total).

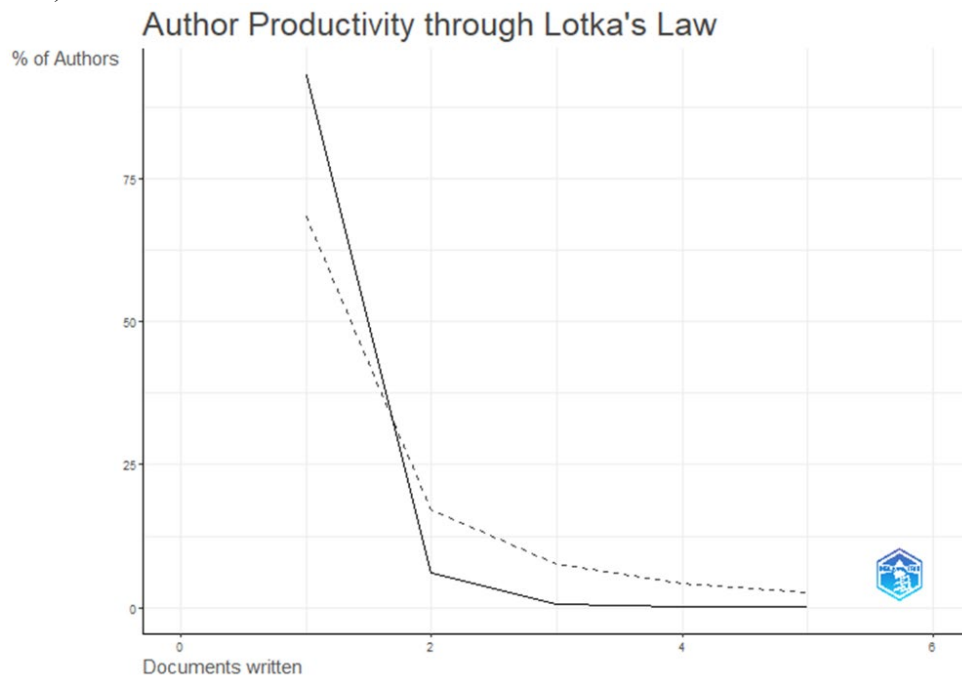


Figure 5. Lotka's law

Source: Authors' own research results.

Regarding the core authors, Agadjanian Victor was the most productive author from 1992 to 2024, having a Hirsch index of 4 and 5 papers published in the field. It was closely followed by Sunam Ramesh, with 4 published papers on the topic of migration and labour and a Hirsch index of 4, as well as by Kancs d'Artis and Liu Ying with 4 published papers and a Hirsch index of 3 each.

From 1992 until 2024, 584 institutions investigated labour migration as a global phenomenon. Table 4 lists the institutions with at least 10 published documents. The first place is taken by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, with 32 papers.

Table 4. Institutions with at least 10 published papers

Institution	Articles	Country
Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine	32	Ukraine
University of London	16	UK
Chinese Academy of Sciences	12	China
University of California System	12	USA
Bucharest University of Economic Studies	10	Romania
University System of Ohio	10	USA

Source: Authors' own research results.

Regarding the most cited countries (table 5), the USA is the leader with 1904 citations and an average article citation of 25.1, followed by the UK, China, Australia, and Germany. Our results are consistent with those of Agan et al. (2022) and Milan-Garcia et al. (2021).

Table 5. Top 10 most cited countries

Country	Citations	Average Article Citations
USA	1,904	25.1
UK	842	20
China	597	9.9
Australia	584	22.5
Germany	462	17.8
Netherlands	254	25.4
Canada	241	15.1
Italy	198	19.8
Sweden	175	14.6
Spain	168	12.9

Source: Authors' own research results.

When considering only the corresponding author's country, papers about migration and labour have been published by researchers from 65 countries between 1992-2024. As can be seen in figure 6 about the top 20 countries, the USA takes the first place regarding the number of documents published, with 76 articles (13.95% of the total), followed by China, the UK, Russia, Australia, and Germany. The articles are grouped into two categories: Single Country Publication (SCP) and Multiple Country Publication (MCP). The higher the MCP measure, the greater the international collaboration is. The Netherlands and Italy present the highest MCP, with 40% of their articles made in partnership with at least one author from another country. On the other side, Sweden had no international collaboration.

Source: Authors' own research results.

Source: Authors' own research results.

The thematic map (figure 8) created using Bibliometrix is based on the author's keywords. The themes are split into four categories depending on the development and the relevance degree. Thus,

niche themes present a high density and low centrality, while basic themes are the opposite, having a low density and high centrality. In the same way, motor themes and emerging (or declining) themes are antagonistic, the first having a high density and high centrality, while the second having a low density and low centrality (Bretas & Alon, 2021). Internal associations between the author's keywords constitute the basis of the density of the map, whereas centrality is built on external associations (Wilczewski & Alon, 2023).

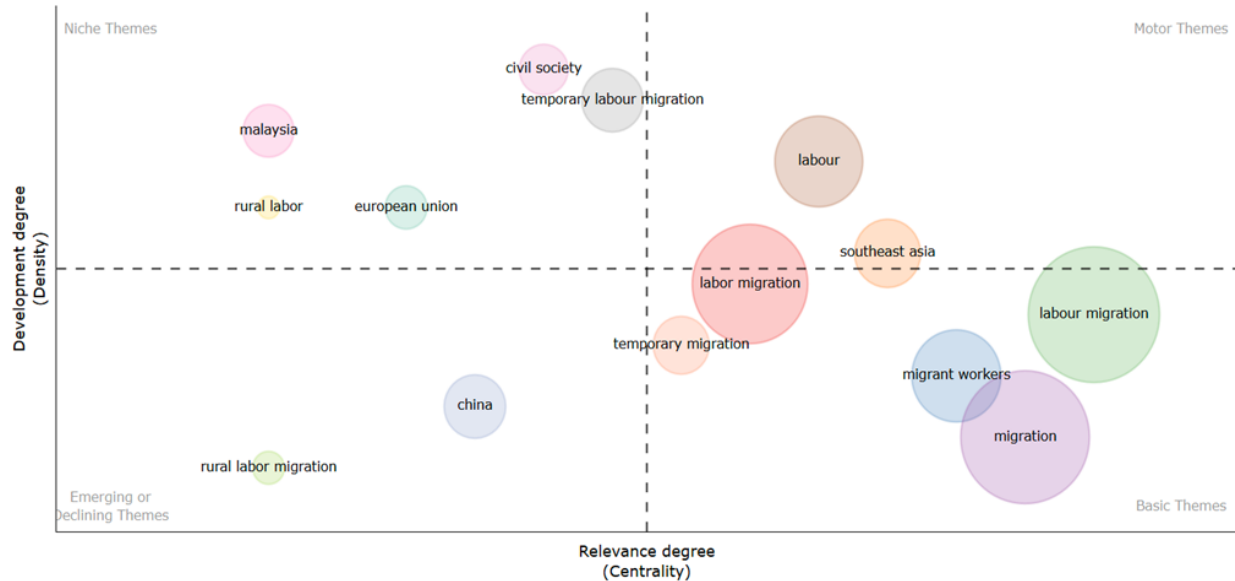


Figure 8. Thematic map

Source: Authors' own research results.

The motor themes are in the upper right quadrant of the map. These themes are regarded as essential to the specialized literature. Taking into consideration the author's keywords, the motor theme is *labour*. Looking at the whole right half of the map, it is observed that *Southeast Asia* and *labor/labour migration* cannot be exactly framed into the motor or basic themes. However, *Southeast Asia* should be classified as a motor theme as it has a higher development degree, being mostly positioned in the upper half of the graph, while *labor/labour migration* is more in the lower half. Alongside *labor/labour migration*, *temporary migration*, *migrant workers*, and *migration* are also basic themes, reflecting the typical nature of papers that address these issues.

Moving to the left half of the thematic map, it is observed that *civil society*, *temporary labour migration*, *Malaysia*, *European Union*, and *rural labor* fall into the category of niche themes. These present a low relevance degree since they target specific study groups, but a high development degree. Finally, the lower left quadrant encompasses *China* and *rural labor migration* as emerging or declining themes, emphasizing that these subjects are less investigated.

Conclusion

The topic of migration remains a dynamic study field, keeping pace with global changes in the economy, climate, geopolitics, and policies. The growing body of literature on this topic reveals its complexity, as well as researchers' high interest. To a large extent, the phenomenon of migration is interconnected with labour, thus becoming a common feature of globalisation. Through their work, migrants contribute to both the countries of destination and those of origin, making up 4.7% of the world's labour force in 2022, as stated in the estimations of the International Labour Organization (2024).

This paper aimed to investigate the most representative papers, authors, and themes on the nexus of global migration and the labour market through bibliometric lens. Firstly, we conducted a performance analysis to measure scientific impact and citations, followed by a science mapping.

The performance analysis allowed us to answer the first two research questions raised in the paper. We first evaluated the trend of research on the nexus between global migration and the labour market during 1992-2024 based on the performance of publications and citations (RQ1) and noticed a sharp interest in research in recent years.

Next, we identified the most influential articles, authors, journals, and countries in this field, and discussed the main collaboration patterns (RQ2). Among the main findings that arose was the fact that the USA has the strongest collaborations with the UK and China while also having the most citations and articles published.

Finally, the thematic map allowed us to highlight the main hot topics and emerging themes in global migration and labour (RQ3). These findings could guide both governmental and corporate decision-makers in making informed policies and strategies.

Our investigation has, however, some limitations in terms of methodology and data collection. While most papers conducting bibliometric analysis rely entirely on a single data source, a more comprehensive research would be reached by merging two or more databases of publications. Moreover, in terms of data collection strategy, according to Sweileh et al. (2018) the spectrum of defining international migrants when selecting publications could include several other components like: migrant workers, refugees/asylum seekers, international students, trafficked victims, patients' mobility across borders, and immigration.

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