Migration in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

IS Academy Policy Brief | No. 16

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

I+S academie

Introduction

How does migration enable development through migrants' economic and social transfers? What roles can businesses or cities play to enhance the positive effects of migration on development? What do we know about the conditions that migrants find themselves in with regards to the labour market, and how can we achieve a more just working environment? And finally, how should migration be incorporated into the Post-2015 Development Agenda?

These were some of the questions asked at the International Policy Debate held at the ILO in Geneva on 21-22 November 2013 as part of the IS Academy Migration and Development: A World in Motion project. The event brought together country representatives, policy-makers, practitioners, international organizations and academics to reflect on the broader migration and development dialogue context. This was a follow-up to the Global Forum for Migration and Development thematic meetings and split into three thematic areas: 1) migrant empowerment and voluntary social and economic assets transfer; 2) the harmonization of employment and labour migration policy; and 3) the role of the private sector in the migration-development nexus. The closing session discussed the implications of the panel sessions for moving the dialogue forward on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. This brief presents highlights from the debate.

Maastricht Graduate School of Governance

Background

International migration is frequently discussed in association with development. We often hear that there are some 314 million international migrants, and that one in seven people is a migrant when internal mobility is included. These numbers emphasize the increasing significance of migration, yet it remains a complex phenomenon. There is great variation in the conditions faced by migrants – a variation mirrored in the developmental impacts. Furthermore, migration can also be seen as a product of development. At the High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development, held in New York on 3-4 October 2013, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon placed migration firmly in the Post-2015 development agenda. This policy debate therefore presented a timely opportunity to debate key issues within the ongoing dialogue.

Theme 1:
The way forward on migrant empowerment and voluntary social and economic assets transfer

Migrants are often referred to as 'agents of development'. Inherent to this perspective, however, are normative judgements about the actions or decisions of migrants. The empowerment of migrants relates to the creation of enabling environments for migrants to foster human capital: inclusion is empowerment. Health and education are core building blocks of human capital, which in return is part and parcel of empowerment. Empowered migrants are able to make choices, *and if that choice enables development it can be seen as a positive factor.*

Financial and Social Transfers

Migrants can contribute towards development through financial and social transfers although there is a mixed and incomplete evidence base on these linkages.

Financial transfers increase spending capacity but can also have negative effects. For example, an increase of social inequality between remittance recipients and non-recipients may negative implications for community cohesion. Financial transfers may have other non-economic impacts as well. Namely, UNICEF has investigated the negative psychological effects for children left behind and dependency on income[1]. Yet research results on this topic are inconclusive, as research conducted at UNU-MERIT and its School of Governance has not found such strong negative effects when looking at the multi-dimensional well-being of children left behind[2].

Social transfers or *social remittances refer to the transfer of* knowledge, social capital, norms and values. These assets represent a key contribution that migrants can make to development. The World Migration Report 2013 finds that, even if migrants moving within the South experience fewer improvements in their living conditions than those going to the North, these flows still contribute to development[3]. In Senegal, for instance, several health practices have been improved, such as the increased usage of mosquito nets[4]. Yet the picture remains incomplete, indicating a need for more research on social transfers.

E. Debebe

[1] http://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/Postscript_Formatted__Migration_Development_and_Children_Left_Behind.pdf

[2] http://www.merit.unu.edu/research/6-migration-and-development/projects/study-on-children-and-elderly-left-behind-in-moldova-and-georgia-2010-2013/

[3] http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/WMR2013_EN.pdf

[4] http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/WMR2013_EN.pdf

[5] Al-Ali, N., Black, R. and Koser, K. (2001b) 'Refugees and transnationalism: The experience of Bosnians and Eritreans in Europe', Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 27 (4): 615-34.

Integration and Development

There is an increasing body of evidence showing a connection between integration and transnational engagement. Khalid Koser and Richard Black's work with Bosnian and Eritrean refugees in the UK found that the individuals most engaged with development issues were those who had employment and a full set of rights, including legal status and freedom of movement[5]. This is in line with the key findings of a PhD thesis arising from the IS Academy project. Ozge Bilgili finds a clear positive association between integration and transnational activities for Afghans, Moroccans, Burundians and Ethiopians living in the Netherlands.

Consequently, while it is clear that simplifying access to citizenship for migrants is a major ask for many countries, it is important to understand that integration and transnational activities may be inherently linked and therefore that the settlement environment is connected to development outcomes. Thus, integration policies and development policies should be treated as 'two sides of the same coin'.

Linked to the empowerment of migrants, it is also crucial that migrants are given a voice in the debate. The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), for example, has created a European "diaspora for development" network. As part of these efforts ICMPD invited 70 members of various diasporas in Europe who also work on development to discuss how to include migration in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Yet this raises questions of representation: how do we define diaspora(s)? Who are they and how can we ensure that multiple voices are heard?

"Empowerment means better choices, if that choice is development that is great, if not, we still need to respect migrants". (Khalid Koser)

Flickr M Renner

Theme 2:
Harmonization of employment and labour migration policy

The search for employment is a strong motivation for migration, both internally and internationally. Bearing in mind that a large share of labour migrants among international migrants (almost 90 per cent when families are included), the ILO strongly advocates the harmonization of employment and labour migration policies. This involves tackling issues that directly affect workers such as recruitment, visa procedures, access to rights in the destination country and skills recognition.

The Swedish Approach: 'Keeping it Simple'

As many countries consider regional integration, labour market assessments become more and more important in linking migration and development. Tools are needed to assist in ensuring the coherence between policies on labour migration and on actual labour market needs.

In Sweden there has been a shift away from the use of labour market needs assessments. It is seen as an unnecessary bureaucratic tool, so they give employers the benefit of the doubt in identifying whom they need. They prefer to give all origin countries outside of the EU the same standing. This also means they are less in favour of bilateral agreements offering special treatments to nationals of specific countries. One of the benefits of the system is that it speeds up the process and allows the labour market to be more responsive. Remaining "skills-neutral", they recognize that employers need a range of skill levels to fill open positions.

The Swedish model represents a radical shift, which has received criticism both nationally and internationally for opening up space for employer exploitation. The Swedes maintain that, by spending less time collecting data from employers on labour market needs, they can better spend resources on identifying gaps and incidences of employer abuses. In other words, they focus on the regulatory environment and compliance as opposed to micro-managing based on complex and frequently changing data.

Maastricht Graduate School of Governance

Skills Recognition

The recognition of foreign qualifications and competences is a key issue for migrant integration into the labour market. For those coming from developing countries, diplomas and work experience are frequently neither recognized nor valued in OECD countries, meaning that migrants are often overqualified for the positions that they hold. For many, the categorical outcome of this is brain waste.

One of the causes of this problem is the high level of fragmentation and complexity of domestic recognition policies. To take the example of the medical profession, complex procedures are implemented to protect public health and safety. Thus, in many countries, to certify that a doctor is qualified to practice involves ensuring that the curriculum followed abroad meets the requirements of the domestic curriculum, involving input from education authorities. Ensuring that this is done correctly is of interest not only to health authorities but also to the general public who wish to be treated by people who have been trained to the highest standards. In addition, different educational structures, language barriers, and differences in grading systems can all affect the interpretation of a migrant's qualification abroad. Systems such as ECTS in Europe allow for better comparisons to be made, however issues within Europe still exist.

According to a recent MPI Study[6], the recognition process should occur early in the migration process because of the scarring effect that entering a position below one's skill level can have on career progression, as well as on the potential opportunities available upon return. For example, a doctor working as a janitor abroad for 10 years is likely to experience deskilling, which will affect his opportunities to practice medicine should he decide to return.

In some countries this is addressed by having mandatory assessments prior to admission, yet this raises questions regarding autonomy. In a perfect world, migrants should work at their proper skill level, however to say that migration cannot take place if migrants cannot match their skill level is patronizing to those migrants who wish to find paid employment irrespective of the task at hand. For example, a migrant working as a janitor in Canada may earn more than a doctor in the Philippines and thus be able to educate his children as doctors in Canada. In other words, the generation effect is also important.

The complexity of this issue brings us back to the main message of the first session: policies should enable migrants to make choices but ultimately the choice is theirs.

Theme 3:
Private Sector Role in the Migration-Development Nexus

Given the high percentage of labour migrants represented in current migration estimates, it is increasingly recognized that businesses have a significant role to play: a role that extends beyond Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Companies are the employers of migrants and are often more supportive than others of simplifying and streamlining visa processes to increase efficiency. Khalid Koser outlines five ways in which businesses can be involved.

Five Roles for Businesses in the **Migration and Development Dialogue**

Reality Check: At a recent meeting at the High Level Dialogue in New York, a business representative said: "Ladies and gentleman from the UN, we are impressed with your work but I need to share you the truth, in my sector you would fail" [given the lack of ability to deliver on targets]. The private sector can help us to think through issues and to reassess the value of what we are doing in a meaningful and measureable way.

Rally: Around the world today governments find it harder to make the case for migration. In times of recession, anti-migration sentiments rise. The media is not always responsible and governments are trapped in election cycles. Business can make 'The business case for migration'. There is room for a creative alliance between businesses and governments.

Responsibility: CSR is the low hanging fruit. Migration is not always on the top of the CSR agenda, however companies are responsible for their workers. For example, what is the responsibility of businesses in developing standard operating procedures to help get workers out of a crisis situation?

Resources: How can organizations working on migration issues attract private sector resources? Example: IKEA recently donated US$100million to UNHCR for work in Kenya.

Represent: In many cases the number of migrant established businesses is significant. Migrant entrepreneurs can be a key in making a case for migration.

---

[6] http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/credentialing-strategies.pdf

The Hague Process (THP), an NGO based in The Hague, has worked for several years on a number of initiatives relating to the engagement of the private sector and cities in addressing migration and refugee challenges. THP has come to see that the private sector's approach and interest in migration depends heavily on the terminology used. For businesses, for example, the term "labour mobility" is generally seen as more relevant than "migration". For improved dialogue, we need to assess whether the terminology dominating discourses on migration are appropriate in other contexts, and we need to be able to modify it if and when necessary. Paying attention to language will improve dialogue with partners, especially with businesses and city governments. We also need to find ways to access the 'correct' person to speak to within city governments on migration issues.

Conclusion: Post-2015

Reflections on the needs for better evidence based policy making

One of the key successes of the MDGs has been the clear and measurable targets, which couple as a clever communication tool. If we want to put migration in the Post-2015 Development Agenda we have to be able to provide evidence. Can we prove systematically that migration is an enabler of development? There is concern that such a framework does not yet exist.

While we have made a start in trying to develop the statistics on migration, little is known about what it means to be a migrant nowadays. We need better indicators to measure it. This is the rationale behind ILO's pilot methodology for understanding whether migration has led to better decent work outcomes for migrants, which is currently being tested.

Projects such as the IS Academy, facilitated through the Dutch Government, are to be commended for offering the space for independent research on migration and development. It is however imperative that evidence is listened to, irrespective of whether it goes against conventional wisdom.

Significance of talking the same language

We need to rethink the jargon used when talking about migration and development in order to engage with other stakeholders. While many steps have been taken by the migration community to communicate with policy makers, the communication lines between policy makers and politicians are less established.

Additionally, those working in the field of migration dominate the current debate and the development community is under-

ILO Building Flickr US Mission Geneva

represented. From a development perspective, we want to empower people, not just migrants. Migrants represent a small proportion of the total population, yet migration affects many more people. Therefore, we need to ask how migration can work toward the goal of empowering as many people as possible. In doing so we turn the debate on its head and think about how development policies affect migration.

When talking to businesses, we need to understand their language and speak to their needs while ensuring that the rights of migrants remain at the centre of the conversation.

When looking at South-South migration, we need to acknowledge that the terminology of the North-South divide

may not be relevant. We need to develop new ways of thinking about migration in these contexts while recognizing that these categories are highly heterogeneous.

Ultimately it may prove beneficial to start thinking in terms of mobility as opposed to migration, extending the debate to the much larger number of internal migrants in the world. By taking cities as the unit of analysis, and thus considering reception environments, we may be better able to foster the enabling role that migration can have for development.

Concluding Remarks

At the High Level Dialogue in New York on 2-3 October 2013, there was overwhelming support for including migration in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Nevertheless it is clear that migration will not have a standalone goal and this is arguably correct. Some actors are calling for migration to be included in a renegotiated version of MDG 8 on global partnerships. While certainly interesting, it may be worth looking at regional integration policies first: thus walking before we can run.

Clearly migration is part of the underlying narrative of population dynamics along with fertility and mortality. As the debate continues, the migration community should take stock of existing evidence on the relationship between the current MDGs and migration and consider how migration impacts development, as well as how development impacts migration. By doing so we can put ourselves in a better position to make meaningful and realistic recommendations about how migration can be incorporated into the Post-2015 Development Agenda in a way that empowers migrants.

About the Authors

Elaine McGregor is a researcher at UNU-MERIT and its School of Governance and works on a number of migration related projects.

Özge Bilgili is a PhD researcher for the IS Academy Project at UNU-MERIT and its School of Governance, specialized in migrants' economic and socio-cultural integration, and their transnational involvement with a focus of social and economic transfers.

Melissa Siegel is an Associate Professor and Head of Migration Studies at UNU-MERIT and its School of Governance.