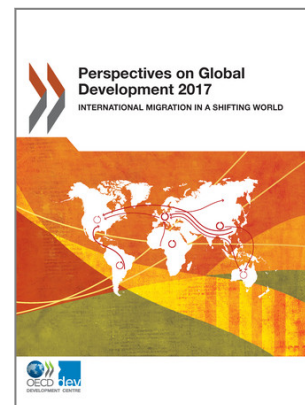


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Perspectives on Global Development 2017

International Migration in a Shifting World

Summary in English



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Global economic development is boosting migration

Some 243 million people were living outside their country of birth in 2015, accounting for 3.3% of the world's population, up from 2.7% in 1995. The shift in global economic activity towards developing countries (low- and middle-income countries) in the last two decades has not led to a parallel shift in migration towards these countries. Using a new threeway classification of countries to explore the impact of shifting wealth on migration, this report shows that migrants are instead increasingly attracted to traditional, high-income destination countries. Between 1995 and 2015, the share of immigrants to these countries increased by 13 percentage points to nearly two-thirds of the world total. Furthermore, economic development in developing countries has boosted international migration as more people have the financial resources needed to migrate.

People are drawn to these destinations not just by higher incomes but also by higher levels of well-being. Despite progress in many developing economies, the gap in incomes with high-income countries has been increasing and differences in well-being remain large. The presence of migrant networks (family, friends and community) already living in traditional destination countries also helps to reduce the costs of migration, thereby reinforcing the concentration in a few preferred destinations.

Public policies also influence migration. A broad array of policies, beyond migration policies, influence migration flows and patterns in many, often complex ways. Understanding them is central to maximise the benefits and minimise the costs of migration for both origin and destination countries and migrants themselves.

While most international migrants move voluntarily, some are forced by armed conflict or violence. By the end of 2015, refugee numbers totalled 16.1 million. Contrary to other international migrants, most refugees – 87% – are accommodated in developing countries.

Making migration a driver of development

International migration presents an opportunity for countries of origin and destination and for migrants themselves. However, the benefits from migration are not yet fully realised and more needs to be done to reap the gains from an increasingly mobile world. In a context where more people are aspiring to migrate than can actually do so, a three-pronged approach is needed to ensure that migration can be a driver of development.

The first prong: Designing policies that incorporate the development dimension

Migration is not a prerequisite for development, yet it can contribute significantly to the development of countries of both origin and destination. Policy makers should design migration and development strategies to minimise the costs induced by human mobility and maximise its benefits.

In countries of origin, policy objectives include lowering the costs of remittances and channelling them towards productive investments, bringing diasporas into development initiatives, attracting back and

reintegrating emigrants, and providing support to families who stay behind. If countries are concerned about high rates of emigration, efforts need to be redoubled to improve conditions at home, in particular creating decent jobs and improving well-being.

In countries receiving migrants, measures include improving labour markets, reducing the size of the informal sector, expanding the fiscal base, and strengthening financial markets to maximise the economic benefits of immigration, promoting integration and social cohesion by providing language training, education and health benefits to immigrants, protecting immigrants' rights regardless of their migratory status, and designing communication strategies to change public attitudes on immigration.

Policy makers across sectors also need to take better account of the interrelations between migration policy and other public policies by integrating migration into their development strategies.

The second prong: Fostering policy and institutional coherence

Policy makers should aim to promote a better co-ordination of public initiatives to enhance the contribution of migration to development. Better policy coherence can help balance policy trade-offs in a way that is sensitive to the needs and well-being of all stakeholders, especially migrants.

Achieving policy and institutional coherence at the domestic level requires adopting mechanisms to facilitate intra-governmental co-ordination, encouraging local initiatives since local authorities are often at the forefront of managing immigration, and promoting consultation and partnerships with non-governmental actors who have a stake in migration and development.

Policies in one country also have spillover effects on other countries. For example, trade protectionism in high-income countries, especially in the agricultural and textile sectors, constitutes a barrier to the development of low-wage countries and therefore contributes indirectly to increasing migration pressures from developing countries. Therefore policymakers need to take into account these trade-offs to have more coherent policies.

The third prong: Strengthening international co-operation

The international community needs to strengthen co-operation mechanisms to address the present and future shared migration challenges.

Bilateral agreements can improve the benefits and efficiency of migration. Examples are visa agreements to adjust the number of visas to the changing situation in both countries, mutual skills recognition and qualification framework agreements, partnerships to develop skills, and pension portability.

To encourage regional mobility, countries could include free mobility in their regional trade agreements and regional employment agencies could provide workers with information about jobs available in other countries.

The global governance of international migration is currently limited. The inclusion of migration-related targets in the Sustainable Development Goals should establish commitments that can be monitored multilaterally, regionally and nationally. The Global Compact on Refugees and a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration that are scheduled to be adopted in 2018 would be further welcome additions to the global governance architecture.

Responding to refugee crises requires greater international solidarity. High-income countries should help refugee host countries by providing more financing, by developing resettlement agreements and by increasing access to alternative pathways for refugees (e.g. labour migration, student visas).

Migration is an important dimension of globalisation and will become more important in the future. Better data, more research and evidence-based policy action are needed. The international community must find durable solutions that will address the future challenges of an increasingly mobile world and to resolve situations that precipitate spikes of desperate people seeking escape from wars. Much more needs to be done to foster sustainable development and harness the contributions of migration to it.

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