

## South–South Migration: Challenges for development and social policy

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**ABSTRACT** *The renewed attention paid to the migration–development nexus by both researchers and policy-makers has predominantly focused on flows from South to North, whereas the consequences of South–South migration are under-researched. Furthermore, studies on the developmental impacts of out-migration on developing countries have tended to focus on monetary aspects and specific types of migrants. Katja Hujo and Nicola Piper address the missing linkages between various migrations, social development and social policy.*

**KEYWORDS** *international migration; south to south; social development; social policy*

### Introduction

Over the past two decades, international migration has resurfaced as a prominent feature of contemporary social and economic life, as reflected in current political and academic debates in countries across the world.<sup>1</sup> Both researchers and policy-makers are paying increasing attention to a variety of social and development problems linked to migration, as well as opportunities for the countries, communities and migrants involved (International Labour Organization, 2004; Global Commission on International Migration, 2005; United Nations, 2006). Much of existing research, however, has focused on a specific flow of migration, namely from South to North, whereas the consequences of South–South migration are under-researched. Yet, recent World Bank research supports our thesis that migration flows between developing countries are highly relevant: nearly half of the migrants from developing countries reside in countries of the South (74 million), almost 80 percent of these migration flows take place between neighbouring countries and South–South remittances are estimated to range from 10 to 29 percent of total remittance receipts for developing countries in 2005 (Ratha and Shaw, 2007: 3).

In three developing regions, South–South migration flows are greater than South–North flows (Table 1). Furthermore, many of the most important migration corridors are in the South.<sup>2</sup> There are several reasons explaining these South–South movements:

- shorter distances between countries of origin and destination reduce costs of migration,

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Table 1. *South–North Migration as Percent of Total Migration from Developing Countries*

<i>Latin America and Caribbean</i>	<i>East Asia and Pacific</i>	<i>South Asia</i>	<i>Europe and Central Asia</i>	<i>Middle East and North Africa</i>	<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>
86.8	84.4	49.9	35.9	80.3	30.7

Source: Ratha and Shaw, 2007: 7 (Table 2).

- networks based on ethnic, community and family ties facilitate the migration process,
- middle-income countries attract migrants from nearby low-income countries,
- some countries in the South evolved as important transit countries for migrants who eventually aim at a northern destination and
- refugees from conflicts, wars and natural disasters often go to nearby developing countries.

Migrants contribute to development in destination countries and to some extent also in their countries of origin. They and their families (accompanying or left behind), however, often exhibit specific vulnerabilities and needs that have to be addressed by governments at both ends of the migration process. Social policy has the potential to benefit all people living in a country regardless of whether they are nationals, residents or migrants, fostering social cohesion, integration and development. But too rarely have migration policies been linked to other areas of policy, most importantly social policy.

### Social policy and migration

Social policy is increasingly recognized as a powerful instrument to enhance well-being, democratic legitimization and economic development simultaneously, and as such has to be conceived as a broad category of public policy that goes beyond risk management and poverty reduction (Mkandawire, 2004). Social policy is not only concerned with protection and redistribution but also with social cohesion, equality, rights, democratization and the productive and reproductive system (the latter referring to the regime of paid and unpaid care work).

Studies on the developmental impacts of out-migration on developing countries have tended to focus on financial and human resource flows, particularly remittances and skilled labour migration ('brain drain'). On the whole, there has been little systematic analysis of the linkages between migration, social development and social policy.<sup>3</sup> And so far, scholars and the policy community have largely ignored how developing destination countries manage (or cope with) immigration, how immigration affects social development and what policies have been successful with regard to the integration and protection of migrants. What are the reasons for this neglect?

National policy regimes are still far from adequately incorporating migration into their social policy frameworks. Even new donor-promoted social policy instruments, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), are silent on issues of migration. Rather, migration policy is an 'orphan' that does not comfortably 'fit' anywhere in an integrated manner and often turns politically controversial when issues of security, identity and the basis and extension of the social contract are involved. This is also true for social partners, especially trade unions, in many origin countries in the South. As a result, national approaches to migration or migrant welfare are atomistic and even contradictory when juxtaposed against those of other countries and other policy areas, especially economic (Nyberg-Sørensen *et al.*, 2002; Cohen, 2006), while social policies directed toward migrants are often piecemeal at best or nonexistent at worst.

### The migration–development nexus

The existing literature on the migration–development nexus (Papademetriou and Martin, 1991;

**Q1** Nyberg-Sørensen *et al.*, 2002; Solimano, 2003; De Haas, 2005; Kapur, 2005) has helped to shift the emphasis in the migration studies literature from the primarily industrialized destination countries toward the implications of migration for sending countries in the developing world. The migration–development literature has also played a critical, and indeed corrective, role in altering the negative resonance of migration policy debates in OECD destination countries by shifting attention toward migrants as potential ‘agents of development’ in the South, especially in connection with the formation of ‘diasporas’ or ‘transnational communities’ (Levitt and Nyberg Sørensen, 2004). It is argued that this is done not only by sending remittances but also by returning with newly acquired skills and valuable knowledge to their country of origin (‘social remittances’).

**Q2** On the other hand, there has been a general tendency toward excessive (or at least premature) optimism with respect to the development potential of migration, while research is based largely on very specific case studies in the context of South–North migration. More solid evidence and analysis is needed to explore to what extent migration can play a developmental role in the context of migration flows between developing countries, both origin and destination. It is especially of interest to assess the applicability of analytic frameworks for phenomena like remittances, ‘brain drain’, the ‘global care chain’ or ‘transnationalism’ for contexts of South–South migration and their relevance for social policy.

### Remittances and social development

Migrants’ remittances have been the dominant yardstick for assessing the impact of migration on developing countries. Official global remittance flows have increased significantly during the last years both in nominal terms and relative to source countries’ GDP (Table 2). In many countries, they actually exceed other types of capital flows like foreign direct investment or official development assistance. Furthermore, they seem to be more stable than foreign investment flows and, unlike other flows, tend to increase during economic crises serving as a counter-cyclical instrument (World Bank, 2005).

Whereas in macroeconomic terms remittances provide foreign exchange to finance and stabilize the balance-of-payments, at the micro level they increase the income, consumption and social protection of receiving households (contributing to demand stabilization), foster investment in education and health, agriculture and small business and add to local development through investment in social infrastructure and community projects (Ramamurthy, 2003).

The literature on South–North migration also suggests that remittances are a mixed blessing, and they are not a cure for the multiple problems of development and poverty in peripheral countries (Ghosh, 2006). Adverse effects include remittance dependency and related negative incentives, Dutch disease effects, regressive distributional impacts and delay of structural reforms. Additionally, the impact of remittances cannot be

Table 2. *Global Flows of International Migrant Remittances (US\$ billions)*

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006e
Total	85	96	117	145	165	193	206
East Asia and Pacific	17	20	29	35	39	45	47
Europe and Central Asia	13	13	14	17	23	31	32
Latin America and Caribbean	20	24	28	35	41	48	53
Middle East and North Africa	13	15	16	20	23	24	25
South Asia	17	19	24	31	31	36	41
Sub-Saharan Africa	5	5	5	6	8	9	9

Global Development Finance (2007: 54) (e-estimate).

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judged in an isolated manner without taking into account the broader effects of migration on households, communities and states.

Remittances have often been approached from the viewpoint of regular migrants – those who have secure residential statuses, and who remit through institutional arrangements of so-called HomeTown Associations (HTAs) that mainly exist in northern countries such as the US.<sup>4</sup> When looking at South–South migration, by contrast, we are dealing primarily with migrants who are temporary contract workers whose overseas stay rarely leads to the acquisition of long-term residential rights, let alone citizenship or the right to family reunification. Among this group of migrants, return and re-migration is far more eminent, and hence the establishment of HTA like organizations does not occur. In addition, the number of undocumented migrants is high. Most existing research suggests that unskilled and semi-skilled migrants generate a greater total volume of remittances than highly skilled and professionals whose numbers are much smaller and who tend to have their families with them (Ramamurthy, 2003). At the same time, due to temporary employment arrangements, the excessive charging of recruitment and remittance transfer fees and the widespread abuse of labour standards, their earning capacity is limited (Verité, 2005; Piper, 2006b). These challenges require a more critical analysis of such migration's 'developmental' impact.

### Human resource flows: brain drain versus brain gain?

The negative face of migration is also recognized in discussions of 'brain drain'. The consequences of losing a significant part of an already limited skilled labour force has been a matter of concern to many developing countries, especially with regard to professionals in the health and education sectors. State revenues from taxation may also decline, as skilled migrants are more likely to be among the highest income earners. On the other hand, out-migration might relieve labour market pressures in countries of origin and give chances to previously unemployed (United

Nations, 2005). Positive effects also occur, when migrants maintain close linkages with or return to their home countries, converting 'brain drain' into 'brain gain' (Skeldon, 2005). Nonetheless, this conceptual framework (Adams, 1968; Stark, 2004), as well as the 'diaspora/transnational communities' framework (Glick Schiller *et al.*, 1992; Smith and Guarnizo, 1999; Levitt and Nyberg Sørensen, 2004; Vertovec, 2004), involves numerically a small number of 'elite' migrants moving across continents where longer-term migration, and even settlement, is an option. Significant proportions of migration, however, occur, as mentioned earlier, among countries of the South. Furthermore, as South–South migration often involves immediate cross-border flows or the covering of shorter distances than migration to the North, this tends to involve the poorer strata and less skilled migrants. It is unclear whether the concept of 'brain drain' is equally applicable from the perspective of South–South flows.

### Migration, gender and care regimes

In addition, the 'feminization'<sup>5</sup> of certain migration streams calls for a gender analysis that is largely missing in the existing literature on the impact of migration on development (Piper, 2005; Kofman, 2006). In the context of social reform processes, a few studies have shown how migration leads to changing gender relations and how it impacts on existing paid and un-paid care regimes. Although perhaps not explicitly, this literature is tied to the idea of 'social remittances' – a concept that has emerged among social scientists who highlight the fact that migrants not only contribute financial resources but also ideas and behaviour, knowledge and experience, adding up to the accumulation of social capital (Levitt, 1998; Goldring, 2003). Another conceptual approach trying to capture phenomena like migrant care workers, globalization of families and internationalization of care services is the 'global care chain' concept (Yeates, 2005). In how far this emerging analytical tool is applicable to contexts of South–South migration and what implications it entails for the reproductive role of social

policy constitutes a challenging issue for future research.

### Political dimensions of migration

The extent to which such social remittances impact upon the political and organizational processes that influence social reform is yet to be explored in more detail, but evidence suggests that activities by migrants in their home countries are indeed stretching the traditional boundaries of citizenship in many regions.

For instance, research on civil society activism by, or on behalf of, migrant workers in Asia has highlighted the significance of transnational advocacy networks with regard to 'educating' migrants and activists about existing human rights standards and how to organize to voice migrants' grievances. In the realm of work, it is trade unionism that historically had an important role in the struggle for workers' rights globally, but national unions tend to maintain a national-oriented way of operating. In recent years, however, trade unions have begun taking a new approach to migrant workers, leading to some promising developments, which include new strategies that have begun to emerge in the form of intra-organizational policy shifts or reform processes and inter-organizational alliances within and across borders (Piper, 2006a, b).

It remains to be seen whether and how these transnational groups and networks – or remittances or labour market effects, for that matter – interact with political and social policy systems when the migrant destination country is not among the richest countries in the world.

### Conclusions

Regionalization and globalization continue to 'push boundaries', putting pressure on national welfare policy while simultaneously forcing labour to be more flexible. Whereas dominant economic policy advice based on the (post-) Washington consensus framework continues to emphasize the advantages of liberalizing trade and capital flows, there 'is no globalization of labour' (Nayyar, 2000: 13). Most governments effectively restrict migration flows or at best adopt a managed migration approach, although the inseparability of liberalized trade and migration is increasingly recognized (Nayyar, 1994; Cohen, 2006). The benefits and costs of globalization are distributed rather unequally between 'poor' and 'rich' nations and their citizens, making debates on issues of global governance and the rules of the game of globalization highly controversial.

Migration has an impact on social development at the macro level and individual (and household) well-being at the micro level, and at both levels, it brings economic, social, political and distributional consequences. Insofar as migration affects equity, equality, social justice and implies changing welfare needs, it requires that states find new ways to meet them. This is especially true for development contexts, where economic liberalization only exacerbated the challenges posed to already 'underdeveloped' systems of social provisioning and the social tensions this has created. Given this context, it is simply no longer reasonable or feasible to continue to treat the movement of people across borders separately from the ways in which societies define their social contracts and insert themselves into the global market economy.

### Notes

- 1 This article is based on the research project entitled 'Migration and Social Policy in Developing Countries', which will be carried out by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in collaboration with the Institute for Futures Studies (IFS) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2007–2008. Excellent research assistance from Shea McClanahan is gratefully acknowledged.
- 2 For example Russia–Ukraine, Ukraine–Russia, Bangladesh–India, Afghanistan–Iran, Pakistan–India and Burkina Faso–Cote d'Ivoire; see Ratha and Shaw (2007), Tables 3a and 3b.
- 3 A notable exception is recent work carried out on regional migration and migrants' utilization of health services in Argentina (Jelin *et al.*, 2005).
- 4 In North America, many migrants have permanent resident status and eventually become naturalized citizens.
- 5 For a detailed discussion of what this phenomenon means, see Piper (2007).

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