

3.1 Strengthening Data and Research Tools on Migration and Development

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Resource Persons: Michael Clemens, Andrea Rossi, Richard Black

I. Introduction

The 2007 GFMD in Brussels brought to light the chronic lack of research and institutional coherence regarding migration statistics and flows, and thus, it is unsurprising that data gathering and research is one of the focuses of this year's forum. There is a need to search for common definitions and to better evaluate how migration and development impact each other. In his introduction, the chairperson outlined three key questions:

1. What are the critical gaps in data on migration-development inter-linkages and how research analysis can aid policy formulation?
2. What are the key indicators of migration policies on development?
3. How can CSO and other actors be more involved in data collection, research and analysis?

The presentations of the three resource persons – Michael Clemens, Andrea Rossi, and Richard Black – were followed by a dialogue which elicited numerous responses from the participants. The discussions highlighted the important role of civil society organizations (CSOs) as additional support for governments' data collecting efforts, data accessibility issues (especially in the South), and most importantly, the significance of treating migrants as human beings, and not just statistics and numbers.

II. Key Issues

Whose obligation is data collection?

The primary responsibility for data collection is and should be the governments'. The role of NGOs in data collection vis-à-vis governments reveals a relationship that is at once complementary and interrogatory. CSOs can fill in existing data gaps and elaborate on government data, but they can also offer a critique of governmental data. CSOs must demand data from governments (e.g., data on deaths at the borders); CSOs can also pressure governments to produce accurate and timely migration data.

Data as a public good and accessibility issues

Many participants pointed towards the fact that data is a public good, and the importance of collecting and sharing data in order to create an updated picture of migration and development issues is critical. Indeed, there should be as much a focus on data

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availability as on collection. However, there are several obstacles to accessing migration data, including high costs and geographic inaccessibility, particularly in the south. There seems to be a monopoly on data, which is more available in Northern states. Also, data is often collected but rarely widely disseminated to end-users (researchers, networks, NGOs, general public). Thus, the potential and relevance of data and statistics on the migration-development nexus are not fully appreciated.

The responsible use of data by the media was mentioned.

Funding issues

Funding is crucial for research efforts, and this is a major factor contributing to more research being conducted in the North than in the South. There must be efforts towards increased data sharing in an effort to “de-colonize” migration statistics. Aside from funding, we also need to develop more alternatives and help NGOs create their own paradigm. Since funding agencies may define the research agenda, NGOs can be part of a movement towards more independent research and data analysis. A concern was raised whether the money spent on collecting migration data could be better spent on poverty reduction initiatives.

Governments, international multilateral donors, foundations and the private sector can be possible sources of funds to support research and data-related initiatives. It is important to support the development of standardized country-level statistics to allow meaningful cross-country comparisons.

Clearinghouse of migration research and data; sharing data

Several participants shared projects concerning the development of database and clearinghouse (e.g., African women migrants’ data base; a website on best practices from the field).

There is a need for researchers to dialogue with each other. Aside from collecting data, there is also the challenge to develop theoretical approaches,

Gaps in data, unanswered questions

Despite certain best practices regarding data collection (refer to Michael Clemens paper); there are still many research questions that are going unanswered. These include the effect of migration policy on migratory flows (before and after migration), the people left behind, human capital formation; effects of diasporas, superstar returnees, and technology transfers.

III. Recommendations

Data on migration and development should be disaggregated by gender and age

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Increased access to data

- To support access to micro data for research purposes
- To increase responsible data sharing and access to data between North and South
- To establish a clearinghouse, including the use of websites, of migration research and data

Civil society can be more engaged in data collection:

- To be more rigorous in how they collect and use data
- To strengthen linkages and partnerships with research networks and diaspora organizations

Need to address data gaps on “difficult” issues, including:

- Deaths at border, racism occurring at the border
- Specific groups of migrants, such as children, women, and trafficked persons
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There were other written recommendations given by the participants and they are outlined in Annex 1.

IV. Others

- Indicators and data on the social costs as well as the benefits of migration should be developed.
- Unless social costs are “quantified,” the qualitative data collected by NGOs are regarded as “anecdotal evidence.” (One resource person commented that qualitative data is increasingly being recognized as relevant and useful data.)
- The involvement of an NGO as a research partner with two international organizations helped build its research capacity.
- How can we deal with governments that want to hide data on undocumented migrants? For example, how many children in Sabah are stateless?
- Responsible use of data that does not prejudice migrants

V. Annex 1

These comments were not made during the roundtable discussion because of lack of time; these written comments were submitted by several participants at the end of the session and after the summary presentations.

Data Gaps

- Governments need to seriously look into issues of migration patterns that are not straightforward, including visitors and tourists who enter a country legally

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and do not return. There is a need for a committee to look into these complicated migration patterns.

Improved data collection

- Call on international, multilateral and private donors to set up a grants facility on jumpstarting and sustaining national-level international migration and development statistics. In the future, this can develop into a mechanism to enhance the comparability of international migration and development data.