

Employment and Development

What Do We Know and What Can We Do?

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Workshop 6 Summary

“Labour Mobility and Employment in Developing and Transition Countries”

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What do we know?

The scope of migration has increased to significant degrees –both from developing to developed countries as well as within developing regions on a national and international scale. Apart from a brain drain, migration involves substantial monetary transfers from migrants to their remaining families. There is nowadays a broad consensus in the economic literature that labour mobility improves the allocation of resources. In this context, “diversity” as achieved through regional or international migration is often viewed as desirable. In addition, such diversity needs to be acknowledged to foster integration and to promote workers according to their skills. However, it may seem that this consensus is based on assumptions rather than on research findings and hard evidence, especially for people outside the academia. Historically, development policy was viewed as a means to avoiding migration (by fostering development). Although this view and the approach towards development policy has substantially changed, evidence-based policymaking is still limited in the area of labour mobility, employment and development.

There are many opinions about labour mobility and employment, but few of these are actually based on facts. It is therefore important to disseminate the existing knowledge and evidence in this area (“myth

busting”). Due to its function as a mechanism for efficient resource allocation, labour mobility may even be the key to development and, hence, practitioners in development cooperation should view labour mobility as an integral part of their tool kit. To foster worldwide labour mobility, the international recognition of qualifications and multinational migration agreements are both identified as central areas where action is needed.

In addition, there are still significant gaps in policy-relevant knowledge which can be partly explained by a lack of adequate data. Furthermore, research should incorporate and focus more strongly on alternative outcome measures (e.g., subjective well-being, happiness). Finally, multi-disciplinary approaches are still scarce, but such attempts involve a sizeable potential to move the research frontier beyond what is currently known.

What can we do?

Two areas were identified in which substantial progress is needed with respect to the key challenges in the field of labour mobility, employment and development:

- “Improving and investigating the social and economic impact of migration in home and host societies”
- “Assessing whether available data and current research agendas are sufficiently linked to practice”

Two groups have intensively discussed the major obstacles to improvements in these areas. Against this background, they have moreover developed two concrete proposals:

1. Migrants as messengers

Migrants are insufficiently utilised as “messengers between two worlds”. For example, in the context of rural-to-urban migration, providing relevant information to newly-arrived migrants could substantially improve their social and economic integration. In addition, there is insufficient feedback provided to potential migrants in rural areas. To tackle the first issue, establishing “migrant contact points” in the cities appears to be a very useful strategy. These contact points could provide information about vacant jobs, job search strategies, health-related issues, as well as the transfer of remittances to the families left behind. To facilitate the knowledge and information transfer to rural areas, establishing groups of migrants that visit rural areas (e.g., theatre groups) seems feasible and promising.

2. World Development Report

To improve the dissemination of existing knowledge and, at the same time, to make persons outside academia aware of research gaps and underlying constraints, it would be very useful to establish “Migration and Labour Mobility” as a core topic of the World Development Report.

As a first step, this would require the establishment of a multi-disciplinary task force. This group should then strive to convince relevant persons and stakeholders of the idea. Finally, the team should jointly develop concrete proposals to deliver to the editorial team.



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