
HOW MIGRATION CAN ADVANCE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

COUNCIL STATEMENT

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The tenth plenary meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration

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Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

International migration and development are inextricably linked—migration has a strong impact on the living standards of vast numbers of people, and on the financial stability of developing countries. The technology, skills, and connections that migrants can offer to their countries of origin are also drivers of development. Yet the solid evidence base that demonstrates these linkages is underexplored and underappreciated—and thus policymakers do not draw upon it as much as they should.

While international migration is a complex process with varied outcomes, in some arenas enough evidence has accumulated to support concrete recommendations. This statement of the 10th plenary meeting of the Transatlantic Council on Migration distills the Council's discussions on the connection between migration and development, emphasizing evidence-based recommendations for improving the development outcomes of migration. The statement focuses on the most pragmatic ways to advance international cooperation in this area, identifying the points of greatest consensus as the most productive way forward for both origin and destination countries.

Among the most promising areas for more robust international cooperation are reducing the costs of migration and helping remittance receivers in origin countries put these resources to maximal use. Another area ready for greater collaboration between origin and destination countries is devising qualification recognition and training systems to ensure that migrants' skills are not wasted—and that they can make the greatest contribution to the communities in which they settle.

International migration and development are inextricably linked.

The May 2014 Global Forum on Migration and Development and the ongoing effort to incorporate migration into the post-2015 United Nations development agenda are important next steps in making meaningful progress in harnessing the power of migration for improved development outcomes.

I. Introduction

In the last ten years, we have gained significant knowledge about how migration can advance economic, social, and human development goals—by reducing poverty, improving access to education, and connecting developing countries to networks of knowledge and innovation. The October 2013 United Nations High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development—the second such meeting since 2006—kicked off a series of global exchanges that offer rare opportunities to consolidate the gains made over the past decade and place migration firmly in the context of development policymaking. These opportunities include the May 2014 Global Forum on Migration and Development and the ongoing effort to incorporate migration into the post-2015 United Nations development agenda.

We know that migration is the most direct and effective means of raising the incomes of individual migrants, and that migrants' financial remittances—which dwarf formal development aid—have raised living standards, and health and education outcomes, for hundreds of millions of people in the developing world. But in the long run, the technology, skills, and connections that migrants bestow on their countries of origin might be even more important for development than the money they remit. Yet the solid evidence base that demonstrates the impact of migration on development remains underexplored and underappreciated—and thus policymakers do not draw upon it as much as they should.

This statement distills the Transatlantic Council on Migration's discussions on the migration and development nexus, focusing on collaborative actions that improve the development outcomes of migration.



The Council has produced several recommendations on where international cooperation is most needed, where it is most viable, and how best to nurture it at the bilateral, regional, and global levels. This statement focuses on policy ideas with the best chance of success—because they offer true innovation or because they have reached near consensus and thus have a real chance of being implemented, or both.

II. Recommendations for Building and Using Evidence on the Migration and Development Relationship

International migration has a profound impact on the living standards of hundreds of millions of poor and middle-income people around the world. It also bolsters the economic stability of poor countries by shoring up their balance of payments through remittance inflows, allowing them to finance critical imports, and improving their credit ratings—thereby lowering interest payments on national debt.

Yet the policy framework for migration and development remains weak, and few development agencies make it a priority to understand, consolidate, and promote the gains from international migration. And in some circles, migration is still seen as a drain on a country's human resources, rather than a way for individuals to become more productive and, if the circumstances are right, to contribute more to the development of their countries of origin than they could have if they had not emigrated.

Migration does have some negative consequences, especially in areas that are difficult to measure—such as the impact on families separated by migration, the abuse of migrants' basic rights, or integration failures at destination that reduce social cohesion. In addition, those who cannot find a legal channel of migration often court serious danger by putting themselves in the hands of smugglers, corrupt officials, and unscrupulous employers. And the effects of migration on host communities are felt unevenly, generating both winners and losers. But the consensus of expert opinion, supported by empirical research, is that migration generally promotes greater prosperity for most migrants and, often, for countries of origin that adopt policies to take advantage of the inflows of money and knowledge that migration stimulates.

The evidence accumulated over the last decade points to several concrete ways that countries of origin can increase the benefits of international migration. The Council discussed a set of *actionable* goals that, together, begin to create a blueprint for international cooperation:

- **Reduce the costs of remittances** to ensure more resources reach families in need and encourage investment in human capital.
- **Drive down the costs of international labor recruitment** through a combination of regulation, law enforcement, and organic cooperation with civil society. Information campaigns targeting intending migrants have also shown progress in this regard.
- **Calibrate skills training and education** to the sectors with good prospects for robust job growth in the receiving country's labor market, and tap into the networks of highly skilled emigrants to create more opportunities for newcomers.
- **Maintain ties with migrants and their descendants** and involve them in development plans and programs in the country of origin so that precious investments made in human capital do not accrue only to countries of destination.
- **Engage in intensive bilateral and regional interactions** with a country's natural migration partners (either as sources or destinations of a country's migrant population) on issues of concern, especially protecting migrant rights. As migration patterns shift over the coming years in response to demographic changes, these migration partnerships will be increasingly important.



- **Remove obstacles to circular migration** so that individuals wishing to have close(r) ties with their country of origin can do so. This is also the means for diasporas to maintain contact and engage more organically with their communities and countries of origin—building upon the interconnectedness that migration engenders.
- **Accept dual citizenship** (as most countries already do, at least de facto). Countries may also consider offering special status to those who are not in a position to accept or access dual citizenship because the destination country does not permit it or the origin country raises unreasonable obstacles.
- **Invest in a better understanding of the dynamics of international migration** by adopting more comprehensive, high-quality data collection practices.

The evidence of the effectiveness of these and similar policy ideas is overwhelmingly in one direction: that migration framed by coherent and effective policies can be a powerful force for development.

III. Where Does the Impetus to Cooperate on Migration Issues Come From—and What Tools Do We Have?

The changing face of migration has created new common ground among countries. The traditional dichotomies between countries of origin and destination, between permanent and temporary movements, and between high-income countries and the rest of the world are slowly giving way to the concept of *mobility*. These changes are opening up new possibilities for cooperation. Rather than thinking of emigration as a loss to origin countries, there is an increasing shift in focus toward the actual and potential *benefits* of migration that go far beyond remittances (without underestimating the importance of remittances for the reduction of poverty among individuals and for the macroeconomic stability of countries).

Diasporas can be sources of investment, facilitators of stronger trade ties, and fonts of technology transfers for countries of origin. Governments in source *and* destination countries have also discovered a common interest in protecting the basic rights of migrants—for example, so that migrants have decent work and do not undercut the wages and working conditions of those who work alongside them. Finally, origin and destination countries have an interest in combating the role of “bad actors” who profit immensely from the act of moving migrants across borders, endangering and exploiting their “clients,” and challenging the rule of law all along the migration pathway.

Governments at all levels, from the national to the local, understand much better the value of cooperating with civil-society organizations (including diaspora and migrant associations) and the private sector to identify priorities, develop common approaches, and implement new programs. Remaining differences of opinion—for example, between those who feel that a normative framework is necessary to guide international cooperation and those who favor pragmatic global and regional approaches—are less and less likely to impede joint efforts. The passage of International Labor Organization Convention 189 on the rights of domestic workers is a good case in point. The Convention involved the efforts of both source and destination countries, trade unions, human rights advocates, migrants’ groups, international organizations, and even some employers’ groups, as the treaty was seen to have both normative and practical benefits.

Tools to Facilitate International Cooperation

In the eight years since the first convening of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), the Forum has proven to be a useful vehicle for bringing states together (and facilitating their growing communication with civil society). These large, informal, non-binding multilateral meetings serve a distinct purpose: to create key *preconditions* for progress, such as building trust, creating coalitions of the like-minded, and building consensus around specific courses of action. Perhaps the most important



function of GFMD is its agenda-setting role. Issues that have received repeated attention at the Forum, both in the official roundtables and meetings in the margins, have been elevated in the agendas of the participants and maintained momentum. GFMD is not meant to be an implementing institution; rather, it is an instigator. The process of articulating common challenges, identifying allies, building *habits of cooperation*, and developing practical approaches are the first steps to concrete collaboration on complex and often contentious issues that might otherwise remain intractable.

Some policy arenas that showcase real progress toward consensus-based action include the following:

- ***Reducing the costs of migration.*** The current focus on this topic is on the costs of recruitment, but other areas such as the expenses of documentation, travel, and communication are also on the agenda. Reducing the transaction costs of remittances, a priority that predates GFMD, was the first of these issues to gain attention from policymakers, and shows the potential for action on cost-related matters.
- ***Getting more out of remittances and other asset transfers.*** Remittances are largely spent on consumption and investing in human capital. Other forms of investment are limited because many remittance receivers face limited options for productive investment beyond land, houses, and livestock. Expanding opportunities for migrants and their families to invest their earnings is the focus of efforts to increase the number and quality of financial services available to migrant families. Similarly, creating outlets for migrants to use their knowledge and skills more productively in partnership with communities and countries of origin is an effective way to promote development.
- ***Maximizing the potential of migrants' skills.*** Making sure that migrants are employed in jobs commensurate with their skill level and earning fair wages is a development goal that has spurred conversations (and the beginnings of cooperation) on cross-border recognition of skills and professional qualifications. The decent-work agenda for migrants on the lower rungs of the jobs ladder has also gained resonance. It is the focus of efforts involving both countries of origin and countries of destination in the GFMD, and in debates on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda.
- ***Negotiating the portability of assets and earned benefits.*** Allowing migrants to retain the fruits of their labors is becoming a major agenda item in international conversations—both within and outside of GFMD. While progress is very spotty, the presentation of the issue as one of basic fairness increasingly resonates with a broad set of actors.
- ***Protecting migrants in crisis situations.*** Migrants who are living in countries that fall into crises through armed conflict, natural disasters, or political upheaval are particularly vulnerable, as the consular services of their home countries are often unable to provide protection or assist their return. A coalition of interested countries has coalesced to explore systematic responses to this challenge.
- ***Securing better data on international migration and its consequences.*** There is complete consensus that much more systematic cooperation is needed among source and destination countries, assisted by international organizations, to improve the quality and availability of data on international migration, especially among developing countries.

As states turn greater attention to multilateral cooperation on migration issues, the success of these efforts will also depend on domestic policy priorities. Governments face growing pressure to manage migration and its consequences. Admissions policies of individual states, outside of their humanitarian obligations, remain off the table in multilateral discussions. And this is as it should be. But highlighting good practices in immigrant integration, for example, is an opportunity for states and communities to learn from the experiences of others.



IV. Recommendations: How to Move Forward on the Clear Areas of Consensus

The Council discussed a constructive scenario to deal with the challenges of migration. Its elements are: promoting the maintenance of migrants' ties with their countries of origin, reducing the costs of migration, promoting the integration of migrants in communities of destination, protecting the basic rights of migrants, providing assistance to vulnerable migrants, and, when circumstances warrant it, facilitating mobility. These goals, which closely overlap those articulated by International Organization for Migration Director-General William Lacy Swing, are aligned with the agenda that has emerged from the GFMD and other bilateral, regional, and sectoral forums.

Nonetheless, different countries and constituencies will inevitably have varying objectives and priorities in migration policy. The keys to continued progress in international cooperation lie in achieving a balance among a range of objectives, and in basing policies on what we know of migration dynamics and real-world policy impacts.

Basing policy on the preponderance of evidence, rather than the selective use of evidence that characterizes some advocacy efforts, has a much better chance of success as data and experience have accumulated over the past ten years. But this should not be grounds for complacency. Smart policymaking still depends on a realistic sense of what the market will bear. With a focus on pragmatism, the Council has identified key lessons of the past ten years:

- ***The most effective way to build cooperation is to work together on solving specific, practical problems.*** Working together to solve discrete, concrete problems lays a foundation for greater cooperation. The conversation about migrants in crisis, for example, represents a step toward solving a concrete problem that can inch states toward further meaningful collaboration. Reducing the costs of recruitment and remittances, and working to recognize skills and make benefits more portable, are other areas ripe for progress.
- ***Galvanize energy on the issues, not on the mechanisms.*** The international community already has a plethora of bilateral, regional, and multilateral forums in place—with GFMD the largest among them. Now, countries must identify priorities, promote these issues in existing forums, and recruit like-minded partners willing to work collaboratively to solve problems—rather than create new mechanisms.
- ***Use regional and global forums as stepping stones to greater cooperation, not as the end result.*** It is important not to expect too much from large multilateral meetings. Such meetings serve a critical role in pushing forward a consensus on agenda setting, and identifying groups of countries willing to work together. Real cooperation, however, often happens in the margins of these forums, and it is thus one of the underappreciated benefits of such processes.
- ***Focus on tools, not only goals.*** In many cases, a well-functioning system does not require more policies or regulations, but the means to enforce what is already there. And in most cases, this comes down to costs and political will.
- ***Give the private sector incentives to help make migration safer and less costly.*** The vast majority of migrants (international and internal alike) are motivated by the prospect of economic gains. As a result, the best migration systems are *not* ones that treat migration merely or even primarily as a transaction between two governments. Specifically, employers play a seminal role, as do the middlemen—“service” providers who might operate within or outside the law. The providers of recruitment, travel, visa, and other services have enormous influence over where migrants go and how they get there. Understanding the business models of these individuals and organizations is an important element of successful migration policy implementation.



V. Conclusion

There is growing consensus that individual nations cannot solve global challenges on their own, but the *form* of international cooperation has been a matter of contention. While there may be little appetite for global agreements that would introduce rigidity in a system that depends on flexibility, softer forms of cooperation can be very useful. In the overwhelming majority of cases, bilateral and regional (rather than global) mechanisms may in fact be the most appropriate means of forging a path forward on challenging issues.

Focusing on pragmatic ways to address the matters of greatest consensus is the most productive way forward, for both origin and destination countries. Promising issues for progress in international cooperation on migration and development issues include reducing the costs of migration, enacting programs to help remittance receivers in origin countries put these resources to maximal use, and devising qualification recognition and training systems to ensure that migrants' skills are not wasted—and that they can make the greatest contribution to the communities in which they settle.

Focusing on pragmatic ways to address the matters of greatest consensus is the most productive way forward.

On the long road ahead to incorporating what we know about migration more fully into development planning and goal-setting, it is the habit of cooperation forged in venues such as the Global Forum that may prove to be the most important precondition for success. Even ten years ago, migration was seen by many as a no-go area for multilateral initiatives, because it was perceived as a zero-sum game between sending and receiving countries. The confidence to cooperate has been gradually built up through dialogue and through the practical experience of collaboration among states and other stakeholders. The last decade has seen considerable growth in opportunities for joint action to address common concerns arising from international migration. The evidence of improved development results in turn reinforces the motives for joint efforts, and may offer the glimmer of a virtuous circle to policymakers and migrants alike.

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About the Authors

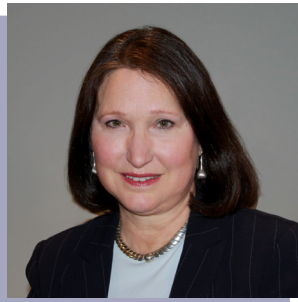


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Dr. Papademetriou co-founded *Metropolis: An International Forum for Research and Policy on Migration and Cities*; and has served as Chair of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Migration (2009-11); Chair of the Migration Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); Director for Immigration Policy and Research at the U.S. Department of Labor and Chair of the Secretary of Labor's Immigration Policy Task Force; and Executive Editor of the *International Migration Review*.

He has published more than 270 books, articles, monographs, and research reports on migration topics, and advises foundations and other grant-making organizations and senior government and political party officials in dozens of countries. Dr. Papademetriou holds a PhD in comparative public policy and international relations.



Kathleen Newland is Co-Founder of the Migration Policy Institute and directs MPI's program on Migrants, Migration, and Development; she also leads the Institute's refugee protection work. Her research focuses on the relationship between migration and development, the governance of international migration, and refugee protection. She is also the Founding Director of the International diaspora Engagement Alliance (IdEA) during its incubation phase at MPI from 2011-13; IdEA was established as a partnership among MPI, the State Department, and U.S. Agency for International Development.

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Ms. Newland is author or editor of eight books, including *Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries* (MPI and International Organization for Migration, 2012); and *Diasporas: New Partners in Global Development Policy* (MPI, 2010). She has also written numerous shorter monographs, policy papers, articles, and book chapters. Ms. Newland is a graduate of Harvard University and the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University. She did additional graduate work at the London School of Economics.



The Migration Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national, and international levels. It aims to meet the rising demand for pragmatic and thoughtful responses to the challenges and opportunities that large-scale migration, whether voluntary or forced, presents to communities and institutions in an increasingly integrated world.

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