Briefing

Development Research Centre on
Migration, Globalisation & Poverty

Measuring the Migration-Development Nexus:
An Overview of Available Data

Overview

This briefing considers some of the major issues that currently exist in relation to data on migration and development, highlighting examples of 'best evidence' in the areas of macro, micro and contextual/impact data. The briefing also discusses policy areas where hard evidence is difficult to find, and considers key areas that are often overlooked by policy-makers but where better data collection is theoretically possible. Finally, it outlines some of the steps that could be taken to improve data on migration flows and their relationship with development.

'Best evidence' on migration and development

Policy-makers have increasingly acknowledged the importance of the migration–development nexus in the past decade, yet available data to inform policy in this area remain patchy. Despite some recent improvements, international data on migrant stocks remain limited in many areas. Their collection is complicated by a lack of consistency in survey data and by the very mobility of migrants, which makes their numbers hard to measure. At the same time, development policy-makers have long complained about a lack of data on the development impacts of a range of policies and processes. Despite the intensifying policy focus on development in recent years, best exemplified by the Millennium Development Goals, data on development indicators are of poor quality or limited scale in many poorer countries where research capacity remains limited.

This is not to say, however, that data on migration and development have not improved in recent years. States in the developed world have moved swiftly to build up biometric databases, which hold significant potential to monitor the flow of migrants — even if they are unlikely to be available to researchers. In a different vein, there have been a number of initiatives and projects aimed at collecting different types of data on migration and development. These projects have improved the knowledge base on the migration–development nexus and in many cases hint at ways forward for future data collection efforts.

Macro data on migration
Several recent initiatives have improved the availability of tabulated 'macro data' on migration. Resulting data sets include the **Docquier–Marfouk data set** on international migration by gender and educational attainment; the UN Population Division's **Trends in the Total Migration Stock** (2005 revision); and the **Global Migrant Origin Database** assembled by the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty (Migration DRC). The latter, based on the 2000–01 census round, is the only 'complete' dataset on migrant stocks in all countries worldwide, although it is based on substantial assumptions — including, for example, the need to disaggregate migrant stocks from more than one country where these are simply listed as 'other' (see box on Page 3 for more information on the Migration DRC's efforts to improve the accessibility of data on migration).

There are a number of drawbacks to using census data to compile tabulations of macro data on migration, as countries conduct censuses in different years and employ varying definitions, which makes cross-country comparisons imprecise. Moreover, census data do not distinguish between short-term and long-term migrants, which is a useful distinction for policy discussions. Despite these limitations, censuses remain the most powerful tool for the collection of data on both internal and international migration. The introduction of direct questions on migration in many census questionnaires in recent decades provides much more robust data on both these types of migration.

Micro data on migration
In addition to tabulated macro data, there have also been a number of recent initiatives to support the collection of new micro data on migration and development, including a six-country comparative survey coordinated in 2008 by the UK's Institute for Public Policy Research and the Global Development Network. One of the most successful

Rural–urban migration is becoming more prominent in Ghana — and in many other countries in the Global South. However, internal migration remains absent from many policy discussions and available data on this type of migration are relatively poorly developed in comparison to data on international migration.

initiatives on micro data is the Mexican Migration Project (MMP), a retrospective survey built up over the last 20 years, which has provided huge insights into what influences migration, remittance flows and return/circular migration between Mexico and the US. A key finding of the MMP was the importance of social networks in both facilitating international migration flows and supporting transnational development initiatives. The MMP has employed an 'ethnosurvey' methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative data — an approach replicated by the Latin American Migration Project (LAMP), and in Europe by, amongst others, the INTAS ethnosurvey and the Migration from Africa to Europe project (MAFE).

Contextual and impact data
In addition to data on migration itself, it is also important for analyses of the relationship between migration and development to have access to good data on the contexts, drivers and consequences of migration. One area where this type of data has improved significantly is the measurement of international remittances. Efforts spearheaded by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in conjunction with national governments and central banks, have massively improved reporting of these transfers. In turn, this has highlighted the significance of remittances which, alongside aid and foreign direct investment, have been identified as a key potential source of investment for development.

The importance of remittances should be kept in perspective, however. They benefit first and foremost migrants' relatives in home communities and may not necessarily be invested in development activities. Indeed, there are sometimes significant geographical disparities in remittance flows, indicating the need for comparative data on communities where migration is *not* prominent. There is also a demand for more detailed data on development outcomes at the community level: here, the MMP's compilation of longitudinal datasets on community development in Mexico is again an example of best practice.

Key policy areas where data collection is difficult

Although initiatives are in train to improve the quality of data on migration in general, there are a number of specific areas where improved data can be seen as particularly important:

'Irregular' migrants
Irregular migration is politically highly contentious, yet data remain unreliable in this area. A number of estimates exist of the number of irregular migrants globally and in particular countries and regions, but the basis for these estimates is often very weak — and different estimates vary widely. A traditional approach to estimating the number of 'irregular' migrants is the 'residual method', which involves subtracting the total number of migrants in census data from the number of legal migrants admitted over a period of time. However, this requires both good systems for recording numbers of legal migrants, and an assumption that 'irregular' migrants are recorded in censuses — which often they are not.

Trafficked persons
There is particular concern that human trafficking may negatively impact development, but the basis for producing estimates of this type of migration is even weaker than that for irregular migrants. Clearly those who engage in human trafficking try to keep trafficked persons 'invisible' from the public and policy-makers; yet at the same time, where 'irregular' migrants are caught by immigration authorities, they may claim they have been trafficked — making even approximate estimates extremely difficult.

Diaspora populations
Developing countries could benefit from having better profiles of their diaspora populations, but gathering data on these groups is also difficult because of a lack of conceptual clarity about who belongs to a 'diaspora'. For example, Persons of Indian Origin are officially defined in Indian law as including up to fourth-generation Indian emigrants. In contrast, 'Overseas Chinese' are generally defined as anyone who self-identifies as being of Chinese origin living

outside China. In neither case is it possible to easily identify these groups through existing data from population censuses.

Key areas overlooked by policy

Whilst some aspects of migration are difficult to document, there are other types of migration where data are relatively poorly developed because of a lack of policy interest. In theory, better data collection should be attainable in these areas:

Internal migrants

In comparison to international migration, internal migration is often absent from policy discussions, even though it clearly has the greatest implications for poverty and poor people. However, census data do provide some insight into the scope of internal migration. For example, official estimates indicate that there were 309 million internal migrants in India at the time of the 2001 census and 140 million internal migrants in China in 2000. However, the figures for India refer to all internal migrants, including those who move within districts and states, while the Chinese data captures only those who move between provinces. Here there are definitional issues at stake — not least the distance that a person needs to travel, and the amount of time they must spend in this new location, to be considered a 'migrant'.

Female migration

Nearly 25 years ago, researcher Mirjana Morakvaśić wrote, referring to migrants, that 'birds of passage are also women' — yet the stereotype of labour migrants as predominantly young men remains extremely powerful in policy circles. In practice, the UN estimates that women make up around 50 percent of the world's migrant population, yet gender disaggregations in data on migrant flows arguably remain the exception rather than the rule.

Ways forward

Clearly, data on migration and development are available from a variety of sources, and the diverse range of actors and parties involved in migration and development research and policy may have differing visions about what data are the most important. Arguably, what is needed more than anything is information on the basic geography of migration flows, which could be improved at least in part by widening access to existing data sources. In addition, three questions could be included in all new censuses: place of birth, place of residence five years previously and country of citizenship. The addition of these questions to population censuses would allow for better tabulation of bilateral migration and would also reveal potential changes in the characteristics of migration between censuses.

Box 1.1 The Migration DRC and data accessibility

The Migration DRC has pursued two projects aimed at making existing macro data related to migration more acceptable: the Global Migrant Origin Database and the Migration in National Surveys (MiNS) catalogue. The Global Migrant Origin Database is the first 'complete' dataset on international migration, listing bilateral migration stocks, based on the 2000–01 round of population censuses. There are four different versions of the data set available, ranging from raw data derived from censuses to complete matrices of international flows, which required large assumptions in order to disaggregate some countries' census data on 'foreign-born' stocks. The Global Migration Origin Database has been used by the World Bank to underpin a substantial analysis of the global impact of migration on well-being: *Global Economic Prospects 2006: Implications of Remittances and Migration*.

MiNS is being compiled to improve the availability and use of data on migration that can be extracted from national surveys. In addition to providing direct links to each country's most recent survey data, it provides summary information on each survey, including how it defines terms related to migration. The catalogue includes Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Integrated Surveys (IS), Population and Household Censuses (PHC) and Child Labour Surveys (CLS). The construction of MiNS began in 2006, with an additional emphasis on children added in 2007. MiNS will soon be expanded to include Labour Force Surveys (LFS).

Both databases are available online: MiNS at <www.migrationdrc.org/publications/resource_guides/ Migration_Nationalsurveys/index.html>; and the Global Migrant Origin Database at <www.migrationdrc.org/research/ typesofmigration/global_migrant_origin_database.html>.

Other ways to improve data on migration include countries providing open access to anonymised micro data on migrants; the unification of Labour Force Surveys (LFS) worldwide into a single, annually updated database; and the piloting of a core standardised migration module in Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS). We suggest in addition that it would be worthwhile to increase engagement with migrants themselves. This is hardly ever mentioned in discussions about how to improve data on migration, yet migrants are well-placed to provide insights into what factors enable or constrain migration's impact on development, and these perspectives could be valuable in guiding future data initiatives.

A major 'Commission for International Migration Data on Development Research' is also looking at these issues, and will launch its findings in January 2009. For more information, see <www.cgdev.org/section/initiatives/_active/migrationanddevelopment/data_commission>

Key readings

Black, R. (2008). 'Overview Paper: Strengthening Data and Research Tools on Migration and Development'. Prepared for the Civil Society Days of the Global Forum for Migration and Development, Manila, Philippines, October 2008.

Castaldo, A. and G. Sondhi. (forthcoming 2008). 'Child Migration in National Surveys'. To be published as a Migration DRC working paper later this year; will be available at <www.migrationdrc.org/publications working_papers.html>.

Clemens, M. (2008). 'Draft Findings: Commission on International Migration Data for Development Research'. Presented at the Civil Society Days of the Global Forum for Migration and Development, Manila, Philippines, October 2008.

Parsons, C., Skeldon, R., Walmsley, T. and Winters, A. (2005). 'Quantifying the Bilateral Movements of Migrants'. Migration DRC Working Paper T13. Brighton: Migration DRC, University of Sussex. Available at: <www.migrationdrc.org/publications/working_papers/WP-T13.pdf>.

Institute for Public Policy (2008). 'Working Paper: Strengthening Data and Research Tools on Migration and Development'. Prepared for the Civil Society Days of the Global Forum for Migration and Development, Manila, Philippines, October 2008.

Rossi, A. and A. Castaldo (2008). 'The Impact of Migration on Children in Developing Countries: Existing Evidence and Data'. Presented at the Civil Society Days of the Global Forum for Migration and Development, Manila, Philippines, October 2008.

Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty

The Migration DRC aims to promote policy approaches that will help to maximise the potential benefits of migration for poor people, whilst minimising its risks and costs. Since 2003, the Migration DRC has undertaken a programme of research, capacity-building, training and promotion of dialogue to provide the strong evidential and conceptual bases needed for such policy approaches. This knowledge has also been shared with poor migrants, with the aim of contributing both directly and indirectly to the elimination of poverty. The Migration DRC is funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development, although the views expressed in this policy briefing do not express DFID's official policy.

How to Contact Us

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