

# THE EUROPEAN MIGRATION CRISIS: CAN DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES DO BETTER?

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The unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants to Europe has increased the visibility of the long-standing nexus of migration, development, and security. The emphasis on terrorism and national security is understandable but myopic if the essential benefits of migration and development are to be realized. The UN will host three key meetings on migration in 2016, an opportunity to rethink how development agencies can contribute.

Over the last 15 years, the United Nations and the European Union (EU) have spearheaded new practices that link development and migration. Most recently at the Valletta Summit in November 2015, the EU launched the €1.8 billion Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, one of the largest such packages to date. The EU also committed €3 billion in bilateral aid to Turkey to support Syrians and prevent irregular migration to Europe. Preoccupations with national security and terrorism—including the threat to the 20 year old Schengen area—should be tempered in order not to forfeit the crucial benefits of migration and development.

Migration and development projects can have a crucial impact if insulated from an obsession with national security. The migration and development (M&D) nexus emphasizes the potentially reinforcing connections among root causes, remittances, state capacity, and migration. These synergies may be compromised, however, if the EU—or the UN or non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—make development assistance conditional on securing external borders to the detriment of wider objectives.

More than half of those arriving in Europe in 2015-2016 are fleeing Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq.<sup>1</sup> These are refugees fleeing war, not economic migrants fleeing poverty. They are a security and political not development concern. Development cannot end civil wars and eradicate terrorism, but some initiatives have been proposed to provide vulnerable people with alternative livelihoods in neighboring host countries.

To be clear, there are economic migrants who have traveled the same routes to Europe for decades and are intermixed with current refugees. In certain circumstances, development assistance can help reduce poverty and create economic opportunities that address the root causes of migration while facilitating greater growth. Yet much of the recent financing is designed to secure borders and fund larger and more militarized forces. A different approach is urgently needed.

## THE EVOLUTION OF MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENTS

Migration and development were first linked in academic research before being embraced by policymakers, with scholars linking migration to poverty, conflict, and aid.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, policy analysts understood the salience and potential traction in domestic politics of the M&D nexus.

The potential of migrants for the development industry was reflected in a number of international gatherings. Table 1 sketches major events in development cooperation on migration over the last two decades. As early as 1994, for example, the UN emphasized in Chapter X of the Cairo Programme of Action that dialogue should “increase the likelihood that migration has positive consequences for the development of both sending and receiving countries.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1995, the EU Barcelona Process initiated cooperation among member states, including the Mediterranean Economic Development Assistance programs—both MEDA I (1995-1999) and MEDA II (2000-2005) which supported economic development through increased free trade and foreign direct investment.

In 2004, the European Commission created the Aeneas Programme to facilitate cooperation on migration, particularly the deportation of irregular migrants.<sup>4</sup> Along with other migration and development programs, this effort conditioned funding on the support of EU migration control. Economic incentives were visible, but they also reaffirmed that irregular migrants were deportable when European governments found it politically advantageous.

In 2006, the UN organized its first High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development that sought to “maximize its development benefits and minimize its negative impacts.”<sup>5</sup> Representatives from some 160 member states, in addition to 42 intergovernmental entities and civil society, discussed a broad

agenda to reduce costs for remittances and to encourage temporary or return migration.

From 2005 to 2015, high-level dialogue among EU member states and partners continued, sweetened with more resources and driven by the arrival of some 1 million refugees. In 2015, the SDGs recognized the role of migrants in four of the 17 goals, particularly in labor rights (Goal 8) and inequality (Goal 10). In addition, the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda acknowledged the “multidimensional reality” of migration, while focusing on combatting human trafficking and reducing transfer costs of remittances.

This rhetorical base is an important step, but greater integration is required across all UN organizations active in this arena.

## TYPES OF PROJECTS

Donor support for migration and development funds six types of projects: diaspora, remittances, education, migrant rights, impact of migration, and border security. Projects focusing on diaspora attempt to foster social or cultural ties to the home country of migrants to encourage remittances or foreign investment. The World Bank is active on research about remittances and reducing transfer costs. Another type of project aims to improve educational opportunities and jobs in order to reduce brain drain. The Africa-EU Partnership included over €15 million funding in 2014 for African Union research grants and higher education to improve education opportunities on the continent and reduce emigration of skilled migrants to western universities.<sup>6</sup>

In 1999, the UN Commission on Human Rights created the post of special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants to protect particularly vulnerable and undocumented individuals. Renewed five times since, the special rapporteurs’ research,

consultations, and country visits recently have focused on the arbitrary detention of migrants.

A fifth type of project attempts to alleviate the potential negative consequences of migration in host countries, which include funding local integration of migrants, employment assistance, and voluntary return. Because emigration often changes the structures of households, some projects focus on gender empowerment and the changing role of women in the labor market.

The final type of project focuses on state capacities to control migration. These projects include funding to enhance border security through databases, detention centers, walls, and other border equipment such as boats, drones, and night vision. Recent funding also aims at human trafficking, including a UN toolkit to combat smuggling.

The M&D nexus still is rife with contradictions. Funding and projects have increased in the last 15 years and are likely to continue, and so it is worth probing further the underlying assumptions about merging migration and development.

## THREE DEBATABLE ASSUMPTIONS

Originally conceptualized to convey the multiple links between migration and development, the framework has led to questionable logic behind funding. Actors have used the M&D nexus based on three different and sometimes contradictory assumptions:

1. Development aid addresses the *root causes* of migration by reducing poverty in migrant-sending countries.
2. Migrants are a key development tool because of *remittances*.
3. Irregular migration stems from the lack of *state capacity* and border controls in transit countries.

Each working proposition does not necessarily follow the same logic or result in the same policy prescriptions. The breadth and ambiguity of international agreements on migration and development are especially striking.

### *Root Causes: Development as Cure*

The first assumption rests on the idea that the root cause of migration is poverty. If development assistance can improve local economies, people will not respond as readily to the push to leave or the pull of wealthier countries. This assumption is flawed on several counts. First, studies show that for countries with low income per capita, economic growth increases emigration because the poor can use income to pay for migration costs. Only in countries with incomes per capita above \$7,300 is economic growth associated with decreases in emigration.<sup>7</sup> Poverty reduction is a laudable objective in itself—as featured in the MDGs and the new SDGs—but development funding can result in increased migration.

Three economists also note: “more aid to a country intensifies the attractiveness of the donor country for citizens of the recipient country,” especially in the higher education sector.<sup>8</sup> Development projects can increase the attractiveness of migration with increased

Table 1: Timeline of Migration and Development Agreements

Year	Program	Budget
1994	UN Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo	
1995	EU Barcelona Process	Funded through the MEDA I & II and ENP
1996-1999	EU Mediterranean Economic Development Assistance (MEDA) program	€3.42 billion
1999	UN Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights of Migrants and the Committee on Migrant Workers	
2000-2006	EU MEDA II program	€5.35 billion
2003-2005	UN Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM)	€3.7 million
2003	UN Geneva Migration Group	
2004	UN International Agenda for Migration Management (IAMM)	
2004	EU AENEAS program	€122 million
2006	UN Special representative (SRSG) on international migration and development	
2006	UN 1st UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development	
2006	UN Global Migration Group	
2006-2013	EU European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)	€12 billion
2006	AU African Common Position on Migration and Development	
2007	UN Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD)	
2008	EU Africa-EU Partnership (Partnership 7: Migration, Mobility, and Employment)	€17.4 million annually
2008	EU Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED)	
2012-2014	EU Migration EU eXpertise (MIEUX)	€4.5 million
2013	UN 2nd UN High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development	
2013	WB Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD)	
2013	OECD Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development (IPPMAD)	
2014-2020	EU Aid To Uprooted People (AUP)	€122 million
2015	EU European Agenda on Migration	
2015	UN Sustainable Development Goals	
2015	EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa	€1.8 billion

awareness of the donor country and networks of contacts that facilitate migration. The size of the diaspora living in the donor country has increased development aid for their home country through lobbying activity.<sup>9</sup>

The Syrian refugees remind us that violent conflicts and political instability often are the major push factors. In addition, poor governance can be another, especially for highly skilled migrants who can earn exponentially higher incomes and send money home.

#### ***Remittances: Migrant-driven Development***

The second assumption of the M&D nexus recognizes the positive impact from migrants whose remittances flow back to their countries of origin. Since the 1990s, remittances have surpassed official development assistance (ODA). In 2014, they amounted to some \$583 billion dollars, almost four times ODA.<sup>10</sup>

Since 2003, the World Bank has encouraged policies that facilitate remittances, which emphasize how to channel resources from the diaspora and to encourage return migration to reverse or attenuate the brain drain. In 2007, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recommended circulatory schemes to encourage high-skilled migrants to return home after acquiring skills or working for a period of time. In addition, work permits could reduce irregular migration among low-skilled migrants.<sup>11</sup> The migration cycle has been described as the three R's: recruitment, remittances, and return.<sup>12</sup> Individuals are "recruited" to migrate through employers and family networks. During their time of absence, migrants send remittances and eventually return home having gained financially and, in some cases, skills and education. This approach has been criticized for focusing mainly on the economic life of migrants.

Another disputed aspect is the role of remittances in funding civil war. Paul Collier and others have documented that post-conflict countries with larger diasporas are more at risk for restarting wars than those with smaller ones.<sup>13</sup> Members of a diaspora can have more extreme views than those who remain because they usually do not face the same physical risks of renewed violence.

#### ***Border Control: Development of State Capacity***

The third assumption suggests that irregular migration stems from the lack of state capacity and border controls in sending and transit countries. If states build higher walls, add more border guards, and invest in advanced security technology, migrants could be better controlled. However, evidence suggests that attempts to make borders more secure actually force irregular migrants to use human traffickers and more dangerous border crossings.<sup>14</sup>

EU migration policy was securitized because migrants were seen as a threat to the welfare state and as potential terrorists. As lower internal frontiers created a common market, the EU securitized external borders to limit access to its area of free movement.

The EU began to implement its external migration policy by subcontracting to neighboring states the task of preventing irregular crossings and readmitting deported migrants.<sup>15</sup> The EU focused on

building the capacity of states like Morocco and Ukraine with border fences, detection of migrants at the frontier, detention facilities, and biometric databases of repatriated migrants. The development of state capacity, not the economy, is the motivation behind increasing the state's ability to control and suppress migration.

The logic of reducing root causes and embracing the benefits of migration contrasts sharply with the third assumption of the M&D nexus. Indeed, it abandons the hope of genuine development in favor of more authoritarian state control.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the domestic politics in most host countries, especially in the West,<sup>16</sup> the continued emphasis on national security in debates about migration and development is likely. Nonetheless, development assistance should reflect clear assumptions about its relationship to economic development and migration.

The UN, EU, and NGOs should reflect on the following:

- 1. Recognize that development in lower-income countries leads to increased emigration***

Donor countries should accept that emigration is a welcome side effect of development in poor countries. When economies grow, people have more money to travel, work abroad, and send money home. Policy makers should anticipate and plan for some level of emigration as part of growth in developing countries.
- 2. Embrace circular migration policies and the economic drivers of diasporas***

Donor countries should implement policies that encourage circular migration as a supplement to formal development funding. Diaspora communities are under-valued actors that should be included in planning and decisions about how to spend aid as well as invited to spearhead private-public partnerships.
- 3. Integrate refugees into labor markets with the right to work in special economic zones in neighboring countries***

Alexander Betts and Paul Collier argued recently for greater investment in special economic zones (SEZ) in Jordan to foster self-reliance among Syrian refugees.<sup>17</sup> Their proposal for "zonal development" would allow the displaced Syrians to work in an SEZ in Jordan as well as relocate Syrian companies that are unable to operate in the war zone. Programs that support this type of development would reduce the need for humanitarian assistance and prevent Syrians from fleeing the region or joining militant groups.
- 4. Decouple security agreements from development funding***

Migration and ODA should not be conditional on neighbors accepting draconian security agreements. While the externalization of EU security policies is not new, recent actual and foiled terrorist attacks have raised additional concerns about vetting migrants. There is no evidence that detaining migrants in neighboring countries is more effective than robust security measures within the EU. Development actors should be skeptical about additional resources if security measures are a condition.

## 5. Reinforce the human rights infrastructure for migrants

However, if development resources are to be conditional, they should be coupled with vigilance about the human rights of migrants in aid-receiving countries. The mandate of the UN special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants has been strengthened by the Human Rights Council. It could be strengthened further if M&D packages required states regularly to report on the human rights of migrants, especially those detained or deported. Further, the EU should integrate human rights into the readmission agreements currently used to facilitate forced repatriation of refused asylum seekers.

## CONCLUSION

This briefing calls for rethinking the migration and development nexus. Rather than being a clear-cut economic trade-off, it fuses three assumptions that do not necessarily reinforce one another: that M&D addresses the economic root causes of migration; that it fosters development by increasing remittances; and that it develops state capacity to manage and prevent irregular migration.

The M&D nexus has been used mainly to justify building higher barriers and cordoning off borders. Instead, the EU and other development actors should reframe migrants as new constituents and ask, “In what ways can ODA be used to support the livelihoods of

vulnerable migrants? How can development facilitate productive circular migration? In what ways can aid prioritize the human rights of migrants in transit?”

Linking M&D assistance to security compromises the potential contributions from large diasporas and the potential for return migration. Future development funding should work to harness the power of migration, not resist it.

2016 is a propitious year for rethinking UN approaches to migration and development with the election of Filippo Grandi as the new UN high commissioner for refugees and three UN meetings on migration. Ban Ki-moon will host the Syria Donors Conference in February; UNHCR will host a conference on resettlement of Syrian refugees in March; and OCHA will host the World Humanitarian Summit in May. They provide the opportunity to reinvent UN action by focusing on the economic benefits of migrants and delinking programs from security. In addition, Grandi’s decades of experience with forced migrants from several wars—ranging from Syria to Lebanon, from Iraq to Afghanistan—provide the UN system with a new voice for a conversation about how best to reimagine the sequencing and priorities from UN organizations across the development and humanitarian spectrum.

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