



The overlooked opportunities of short distance and short-term migration

Listening to how young adults talk about migration shows that migration is often thought of as short-distance and temporary. Tailored development policies are key to enhancing the benefits of such migration.

Long-distance international migration receives much attention, though it is a small part of global mobilities. Most migration is internal to countries, or within regions.

National policies insufficiently recognise and facilitate short-distance and short-term migration, to the detriment of development processes, especially in urban areas.

Investing in flexible migration pathways, that facilitate short-distance and short-term migration, is apt and supportive of the Global Compact for Migration.

Marta Bivand Erdal
Peace Research Institute Oslo

Marie Godin
University of Oxford and
University of Leicester

Maisie Fitzmaurice
Peace Research Institute Oslo



Much migration takes place along highways, as here near the border of Ethiopia and Kenya

Tewelde Adhanom for MIGNEX.

In a context where attention toward migration internationally is often associated with migrant deaths at borders and states' focus on controlling their borders, the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) was adopted in 2018.

The objective of the GCM is to call for 'safe and orderly migration'. Within this, it stresses the need for 'availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration' (Objective 5).

While many national and EU policy agendas prioritise the restriction of migration to Europe, it would be pertinent to acknowledge and support the more commonplace mobilities. The human development potential of said 'flexible' migration pathways depends on tailored policy at local, national and regional levels.

This Policy Brief is based on research documented in the MIGNEX Background Paper: *Determination of migration through focus group data*.¹ For this research, we conducted 104 group discussions with young adults in 26 local communities in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Participants shared their thoughts about livelihoods, migration, and the future. We find that the migration talked about was mainly 'flexible'. That is, it was thought of as: short-distance, temporary, and sometimes circular.

Centring short-term and short-distance migration is essential in local, national, and international policy

When migration is discussed in policy contexts, international migration is usually the exclusive focus. This is despite the widely known fact that the number of people who move internally within their own countries is vastly higher than the numbers of refugees and other migrants who move across an international border. The same holds for regional mobility; short distance movements are often very much part of people's lives and have been so for centuries.

While international, long-distance emigration is an important part of global mobility, it is a specific sub-set of migration, though one of particular salience in nation-states' policymaking.

Internal mobilities within countries, and regional migration, such as South-South migration between South Asia and the Gulf states, or within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), are often more significant numerically and may matter more in development terms too. Some of these movements are short distance, others could be across greater distances, but are not inter-continental.

In this Policy Brief we encourage more attention to the most common types of migration globally. National development

policies, across many countries, would benefit from recognition of the prevalence of different forms of mobility, especially migration to urban centres and circular migration.

Migration could realise aspirations for a good life for individuals, families, and communities 'here' in the places people leave from and might return to

In the places we did research, multiple forms of migration were present. Yet, globally, and in our research areas, more people stay than leave, and this basic fact shapes how migration is talked about.

Migration was often considered with a view to what it could achieve 'here', for families, individuals, and local communities. Notably, return migration was often an implicit expectation, with the idea that migrants come back to work, invest in the community, and live.

Remittances too were a crucial part of how migration was talked about, and central to conversations about the relationship between migration and development, for individuals, families, and communities.

The hope of a good life is universal, and for many people it is located 'here', at home. Development policies at the local and national levels would benefit from more substantively including people's potential and actual mobilities in both planning and goals.

The GCM can contribute to realizing migration and development policy goals

The fact that migration and social change – or 'development' – interact, is well-known. How policy should navigate different priorities on outcomes across locations, with potentially conflicting interests, is a political question.

EU migration policies currently refer to 'development' mainly instrumentally, with an 'external' focus on deterrence and readmission agreements, which are being leveraged for European migration management objectives.

Meanwhile, the GCM outlines a comprehensive approach to international migration. Though not legally binding, GCM's Objective 5 focuses on 'the availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration', as linked to objectives of safe migration.

The lack of engagement with the GCM in the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, however, raises concerns over policy coherence. Its approach indicates that the most common forms of migration, short-term and short-distance, and their developmental potential, continue to be overlooked.

Simultaneously, individual EU member states have initiatives facilitating 'flexible migration pathways' through e.g., 'Skills Mobility Partnerships' (SMPs). These initiatives also respond to the GCM's Objective 18 on 'skills development and partnerships.' Such 'skills partnerships' are necessary at local,



Researchers solicited focus group participants' thoughts about livelihoods, migration, and the future

Marie Godin for MIGNEX. (See mignex.org/d041 and mignex.org/d042 for details on focus group methodology.)

national, and regional levels, in addition to bilateral cooperation. Further investment in different ‘skills partnerships’ can contribute to both the existence and availability of a variety of ‘flexible’ migration pathways.

These policy initiatives represent a step in the right direction, but could gain both from being mainstreamed, and a regional focus.

Integrating commonplace mobilities into national policies and supporting flexible migration pathways has the potential to realize developmental aims

Drawing on the above, we suggest that:

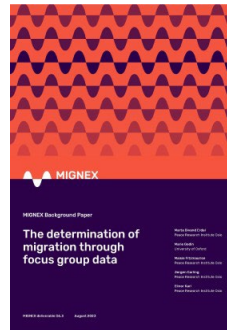
- Further integration of *mobility* into policies on *development* is needed. This is relevant at all levels, including for local and national planning. Integrating awareness of commonplace mobilities in policy would support development aims by better reflecting local realities. This would facilitate addressing existing challenges.
- National, international and EU policies often fail to recognise (and facilitate) short-distance and short-term migration, and circular mobilities, within countries and regionally. This is despite their prevalence and importance in development processes, especially for ongoing urbanisation. Including commonplace mobilities in national policies supports development aims, e.g., by recognizing urban growth.

Notes

¹ This policy brief is based on research documented in Erdal M.B., Godin M., Fitzmaurice M., Carling J. and Karl E. (2023) The determination of migration through focus group data. MIGNEX Background Paper. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo. Available at www.mignex.org/d063.

² See Godin M., Gabrielsen Jumbert M., Lebon-McGregor E., Schweers J. and Hatleskog Tjønn M. (2022) Internal (in)coherence in European migration policies. MIGNEX Background Paper. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo. Available at www.mignex.org/d092.

Further reading



Erdal, M.B. Godin, M. Fitzmaurice, M. Carling, J. and Karl, E. (2023) The determination of migration through focus group data. MIGNEX Background Paper. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.

www.mignex.org/d063



Godin, M. Gabrielsen Jumbert, M. Lebon-McGregor, E. Schweers, J. and Tjønn, M.H. (2022) Internal (in)coherence in European migration policies. MIGNEX Background Paper. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.

www.mignex.org/d092

This can allow for more accurate planning, e.g., for infrastructure, schools, or health.

- While juggling inherent dilemmas and conflicting interests, EU policies on migration and development would be well-advised to focus more on supporting safe, internal, and especially regional mobility opportunities, such as via ECOWAS, and other regional cooperation organizations. This has the potential to realize developmental aims, by addressing GCM’s Objectives 5 and 18 jointly.

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MIGNEX – Aligning Migration Management and the Migration-Development Nexus – is a five-year research project (2018-2023) with the core ambition of creating new knowledge on migration, development and policy. It is carried out by a consortium of nine partners: The Peace Research Institute Oslo (coordinator), Danube University Krems, the University of Ghana, Koç University, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Maastricht University, ODI, the University of Oxford and Samuel Hall.

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