



How do social remittances affect development?

Policy interventions aiming to boost the impacts of migration on development in communities of origin must take into account the less direct, less visible and often underestimated effects.

Beyond financial remittances, migration can shape communities of origin through the changing of social norms and values, including girls' school enrolment.

The effects of migration can result in both beneficial and adverse development outcomes.

Policy makers need to monitor the diverse effects of migration at the local level in order to support the positive effects, while mitigating possible negative effects.

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In Sal Rei, Cabo Verde, remittances have facilitated schooling for generations of children.

Source: Jørgen Carling for MIGNEX.

The development impacts of migration have long been of interest to policy makers in countries of origin and destination. Yet, the focus has mainly been on how to foster and invest financial remittances.

Cases in point are the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Migration, which have specific targets on reducing the transaction costs of sending remittances, while placing less emphasis on the social and cultural dimensions of migration.¹

Yet the development impacts of migration amount to much more than money being received, and awareness of the indirect or less visible effects would support better development outcomes.

This Policy Brief provides new insights into these effects and their implications for policymaking, drawing on the MIGNEX survey with more than 13,000 young adults, across 26 research areas in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

This Policy Brief is based on research documented in MIGNEX Background Papers *The direct effects of migration on development* and *The indirect effects of migration on development*.²

Migrants send more than money

Migrants often send financial remittances, and these generally result in positive development

impacts on household members staying back and the wider communities.

But migration can have less direct, less (immediately) visible effects on development outcomes in communities of origin. Migration is also the absence of the people who left. This can change dynamics in communities of origin, for instance in the family or labour market. And importantly, migrants also send ‘social remittances’: ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital that are transmitted from migrants to origin communities.³

Migration has wide-reaching effects, including on social and cultural norms

Across all 26 MIGNEX research areas, we found that the higher the number of emigrants in a community, the higher the levels of girls’ school enrolment in the same community.

This suggests that migratory experiences may have an effect on community gender norms and attitudes, which then in turn result in higher enrolment.

We also found that higher levels of emigration positively correlated with higher civic and political participation. This may be due to changes in perceptions of what constitute quality governance, as a result of the experiences of migrants.

These examples also suggest that *seeing leads to imitation*. Migration is often a very visible phenomenon locally and in most of

communities, people knew the individuals migrating from their community and the effects on the family staying back. This kind of observation alone also resulted in higher levels of civic participation and enrolment of girls in school.

My uncle was the first to have migrated. When he got there, he came for other relatives, and they are all doing something profitable in the community. As for the kids, they make sure that they get good education and so I think migration benefits the community.⁴

Because these kinds of effects are often invisible to policy makers, the overall effects of migration are often underestimated. This evidence points to the need for greater policy attention to migration dynamics at the community level and their wide-ranging effects on development.

Effects can be positive, negative or neutral

Policymakers need to be attuned to the different effects of migration to harness the development impacts of migration.

In doing so, it's important to bear in mind that migration can have positive, negative and mixed effects; a pattern the wider literature

also echoes.⁵ For instance, we found that in households with a migrant abroad, the household's children were less likely to be enrolled in school.

Awareness of negative effects means that policy makers can put policies in place to counter-balance them, for instance: additional support given to ensure children enrol in school, and increased local social care services to support households with an adult abroad.

Awareness of the indirect or less visible effects of migration would support better development outcomes

The indirect, non-financial and less visible effects of migration have received little attention in policy circles and academic literature alike.

Yet greater policy awareness of the diverse, indirect and less visible effects of migration would enable more positive development outcomes. MIGNEX research quantifies the wide-ranging, understudied effects of migration, and we offer the following implications for policymaking:

- The true effects of migration in a community are often underestimated as effects extend beyond migrant households themselves.

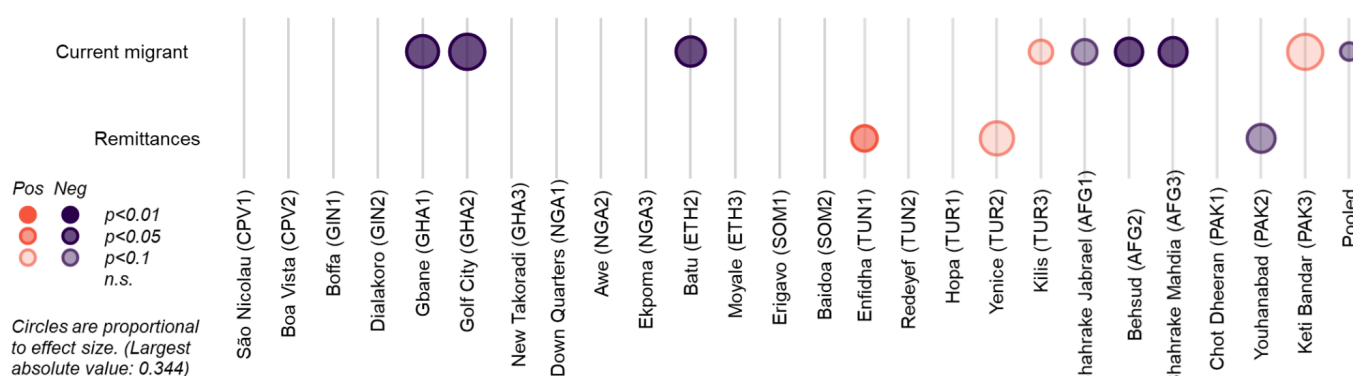


Figure 1. Effects of having a migrant in the family and receiving remittances on secondary school enrollment.

Source: MIGNEX Survey.

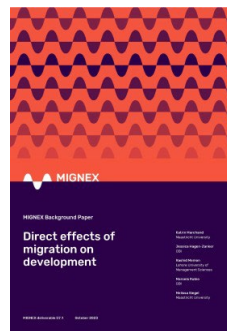
- As social remittances can have positive effects on development, policy makers also need to stimulate them, alongside financial remittances. For example, by fostering strong communication platforms and diverse diaspora engagement platforms and mechanisms.
- The effects of migration and remittances vary across different areas and can result in both beneficial and adverse development outcomes. Therefore, policy makers need to monitor how migration affects local communities, in order to create environments for the positive effects to flourish while mitigating possible negative effects.

Further reading



Memon R., Rubio M., Marchand K., Hagen-Zanker J. and Siegel M. (2023) The indirect effects of migration on development. MIGNEX Background Paper.

www.mignex.org/d072



Marchand K., Hagen-Zanker J., Memon, R., Rubio, M. and Siegel, M. (2023). Direct effects of migration on development. MIGNEX Background Paper.

www.mignex.org/d071

Notes

1. Global Compact for Migration: Objective 20: (20) Promote faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances and foster financial inclusion of migrants; 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: SDG 10.c commits, by 2030, to reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent.
2. This policy brief is based on research documented in Memon R., Rubio M., Marchand K., Hagen-Zanker J. and Siegel M. (2023) The indirect effects of migration on development. MIGNEX Background Paper. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo. Available at www.mignex.org/d072. and Marchand K., Hagen-Zanker J., Memon, R., Rubio, M. and Siegel, M. (2023). Direct effects of migration on development. MIGNEX Background Paper. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo. Available at www.mignex.org/d071.
3. Levitt, P. (1998). Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion. *The International Migration Review*, 32(4), 926–948. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2547666>.
4. Respondent in MIGNEX Focus Group Discussion with women in New Takoradi, Ghana.
5. For an example on health, see: Fellmeth, G., Rose-Clarke, K., Zhao, C., Busert, L. K., Zheng, Y., Massazza, A., Sonmez, H., Eder, B., Blewitt, A., Lertgrai, W., Orcutt, M., Ricci, K., Mohamed-Ahmed, O., Burns, R., Knipe, D., Hargreaves, S., Hesketh, T., Opondo, C., & Devakumar, D. (2018). Health impacts of parental migration on left-behind children and adolescents: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Lancet (London, England)*, 392(10164), 2567–2582. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)32558-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32558-3).

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