



# Developmental impacts of interventions to support legal migration

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## Question

*What is the extent of high quality (systematic review, impact evaluation) evidence on the developmental (positive/negative) impacts of interventions to support regular, well managed, legal migration between low and low-middle income countries? Identify any gaps in research, and list key researchers/organisations working on this topic.*

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## 1. Overview

There is very little impact evaluation evidence of the developmental outcomes of interventions to support regular migration. The review identified only one migration intervention (the New Zealand Recognised Seasonal Employment Programme) which had had rigorous impact evaluations conducted: the scheme was found to have positive impacts on employers, migrants and origin countries (Gibson & McKenzie, 2013; Winters, 2016). Otherwise the evidence base in relation to migration interventions was found to be consistently weak. The literature highlights the lack of ‘an evaluation culture’ in relation to migration policies and programmes, despite growing numbers of interventions; it stresses the need for strengthened impact evaluation and makes recommendations to promote this. Research on migration and development as a whole, however, is growing, with a number of research organisations working on these issues.

**Impacts of migration interventions** - A meta-analysis of active labour market programmes (ALMPs) in Europe (Butschek and Walter, 2014) found that wage subsidies had the most positive impact on labour market outcomes for immigrants - more than training. This is confirmed by another paper (Rinne, 2012) which reviewed immigration policies: programmes closely linked to the labour market (i.e. work experience and wage subsidies) were found to generate relatively large positive effects; by contrast, settlement policies did not appear to improve the economic and social outcomes of immigrants. A 2015 review (McKenzie & Yang) of evidence on policies to increase the developmental impacts of international migration found that areas of policy success included bilateral migration agreements for countries whose workers have few other migration options, development of new savings and remittance products, and initiatives to provide financial education to migrants and their families. However, the available research offered reasons to be cautious about some measures, e.g. enforcing strong migrant rights. A research study on the state of evidence for programming on safer labour migration (Freedom Fund, 2016) found that initiatives addressing pre-departure awareness-raising and skill building were relevant and well-received by community stakeholders.

**Weak evidence base** – the literature highlights the limited empirical evidence available to guide the growing policy interest and efforts in relation to migration and development. Available evidence focuses on process evaluations, rather than impact (Rinne, 2012; McKenzie & Yang, 2015), and is gender blind. Underlying this weak evidence base is a lack of an evaluation culture in relation to migration policies and programmes.

**Evaluation gaps in migration interventions** - Reasons for the evaluation gaps include: fear of exposing problems and failings in policies/programmes; lack of capacity; lack of data; cost constraints; technical challenges; the rapid expansion in migration programming; migration interventions not traditionally being seen as a tool to promote development; and the lack of knowledge sharing among practitioners (Chappell & Laczko, 2011; Laczko, 2011). Suggestions to strengthen impact evaluation in relation to migration include: strengthening data collection; sharing costs between governments through joint evaluations; starting with evaluation of less contentious policies/programmes (e.g. remittance interventions); and sharing evaluation findings ((Chappell & Laczko, 2011; Laczko, 2011)).

**Key research on migration and development** – while impact evaluations of migration interventions are scarce, there is a growing body of research on migration and development generally. Leading entities undertaking this work include the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Migration Policy Institute (MPI).

## 2. Impact of specific migration policies and programmes

This review came across negligible impact evaluations of interventions to support legal migration, with even fewer looking at the effects in both origin and destination countries. Those that were found generally related to migration to developed countries, and were confined to the achievement of programme/policy objectives rather than the wider impact on development. The available literature and evidence is summarised below:

### **New Zealand Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) Programme**

The RSE programme began in 2007 with the aim of easing labour shortages in New Zealand's horticulture and viticulture industries, whilst promoting economic development in the Pacific Islands. Under the scheme, up to 8,000 Pacific Islanders can work in New Zealand during the agricultural season (Winter, 2016: 4). The RSE programme is one of the few migration interventions to have been subjected to a formal impact assessment. An independent evaluation conducted in 2010 for the New Zealand Department of Labour reported 'wins' for employers, migrant workers and the Pacific states involved in the programme. The RSE provides employers with a reliable, stable and – as workers return after each season – increasingly skilled seasonal workforce. The evaluation described the RSE as 'one of the most effective development interventions for which rigorous evaluations are available....heralded as international best practice. The large development impacts seen here should lead other countries to consider similar policies' (Winter, 2016: 4).

A 2013 evaluation, focused on the islands of Tonga and Vanuatu, found that the RSE had had positive developmental impacts: 'it has increased income, consumption and savings of households, durable goods ownership, and subjective standard of living; the results also suggest that child schooling improved in Tonga' (Gibson & McKenzie, 2013: 1). The authors note that finding similar positive results from two different countries – Tonga and Vanuatu – suggests that the results are not specific to a single context and could have broader relevance. Much of the success is attributed to the careful thought that went into designing the programme, and to addressing concerns such as about migrants' overstaying and exploitation of workers (Gibson & McKenzie, 2013).

### **Meta-analysis of evaluation literature on active labour market programmes in Europe**

Butschek and Walter's 2014 paper focuses on the employment effects of active labour market programmes (ALMPs) on immigrants in Europe. In their meta-analysis, the authors condensed 93 estimates from 33 empirical studies of the effectiveness of four types of ALMPs: training, job search assistance, wage subsidies and subsidised public sector employment. The interventions evaluated were implemented in the Nordic countries, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland between 1984 and 2007. The paper reports a growing consensus with regard to the effects of ALMPs on all unemployed workers (natives and immigrants): job search assistance and, to some extent, wage subsidies are effective in the short-term, and training in the longer-term, while public works schemes are generally ineffective. In contrast, the meta-analysis of evaluation literature for immigrants suggests that subsidised employment in the private sector (wage subsidies) have more positive labour market outcomes for immigrants than training. The authors concluded that only wage subsidies could be confidently recommended to policy-makers.

## Evaluation of immigration policies

Rinne (2012) distinguishes between two broad categories of immigration policies: a) those before and upon the arrival of immigration policies including immigration and settlement policies; b) policies and programmes after immigrants' arrival and settlement in the host country to improve their economic and social outcomes. The latter can be further distinguished into: a) introduction programmes; b) language training; c) active labour market programmes; and d) anti-discrimination policies.

Rinne notes that empirical evidence on the effects of immigrant selection and settlement policies is scarce, and 'the literature is far from being conclusive about the impacts of these policies' (ibid: 12). The general pattern that emerges is that more sophisticated regimes to manage immigration are effective policy tools, and lead to improved labour market integration (ibid: 19), but settlement policies do not appear to improve the economic and social outcomes of immigrants (ibid).

Similarly, while there are some studies evaluating the effects of policies for immigrants in the host country, Rinne says it is difficult to draw any general conclusions from this literature (ibid: 14). 'One consistent finding, however, is that programs that are closely linked to the labour market (i.e. work experience and wage subsidies) generate relatively large positive effects' (ibid).

## State of evidence for programming on safer labour migration

The Freedom Fund (2016) commissioned research on the state of evidence for programming on safer labour migration and community-based prevention of exploitation. As well as risks and protective factors associated with migration, the study looked at safer labour migration interventions to prevent exploitation. 19 evaluated interventions were identified, but the study found that few of these were able to capture impact because of methodological design limitations and the absence of economic analyses of intervention costs. Nonetheless, the findings suggested that programmes addressing pre-departure awareness-raising and skill-building were relevant and well-received by community stakeholders. Common recommendations made in the evaluation reports reviewed in the study included:

- ensuring awareness campaigns include culturally sensitive material with proven relevance to the audience in that context;
- increasing health promotion strategies;
- establishing regular monitoring and evaluation activities to capture impact using both qualitative and cost effectiveness analyses.

## Evidence on policies to increase the development impacts of international migration

McKenzie and Yang (2015) carried out a review of recent research on the effectiveness of policies to enhance the development benefits of international migration and mitigate the potential costs (e.g. trafficking, human rights, loss of skilled workers). They examined policies at three stages of the migration process: pre-departure, during migration and directed towards possible return. Areas of policy success based on the existing evidence base included: bilateral migration agreements for countries whose workers have few other migration options; development of new savings and remittance products that allow migrants more control over how their money is used; and initiatives to provide financial education to migrants and their families. McKenzie and Yang also identified a second tier of interventions for which 'suggestive evidence, together with theory, offers support': lowering cost of remittances, reducing passport costs, offering dual citizenship,

and removing exit barriers to migration (2015: 1). Finally, they identified a third group of policies for which research offered reasons to be cautious, including policies enforcing strong rights, e.g. high minimum wages, for migrants. Overall, though, McKenzie and Yang found the evidence base too weak for many policies (see Section 3 below).

## **Impact of an integration programme for immigrants to Finland**

Sarvimaki and Hamalainen (2010) evaluate the effects of an integration programme for immigrants introduced in Finland in the late 1990s. The programme was introduced as part of the Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (or Integration Act), which came into force on 1 May 1999. The Act placed an obligation on local administrations to prepare integration plans for newly arrived immigrants (not working and not studying). The plans consisted of an individualised sequence of training and subsidised employment, including language courses, vocational training, career counselling, rehabilitation and work practice. Participation was obligatory for immigrants entering the population register after 1 May 1997, with non-compliance sanctioned by reductions in welfare benefits. The aim was to closely consider the individual characteristics of each immigrant and to design a sequence of measures expected to best meet his or her needs.

The research study took advantage of the phased introduction of the policy reform: those entering the population register just before and just after the threshold date of 1 May 1997 were comparable (as entry decisions by immigrants had to be made at least a year before), but only the latter were obligated to participate in the integration programmes. The study found that the integration plans improved the labour market performance of immigrants – substantially increasing employment and annual earnings - and reduced their welfare dependency (Sarvimaki & Hamalainen, 2010). The plans increased participation in courses aimed at building up host country-specific human capital, but did not affect sanctioning of non-compliance (ibid: 18-19).

## **3. State of evaluation of migration interventions**

### **Lack of an ‘evaluation culture’**

The literature consistently highlights the lack of an ‘evaluation culture’ in relation to migration policies and programmes. This is despite the growing interest in migration policies and growing awareness of the links between migration and development, and the growing investment in this: one estimate put multilateral assistance for international migration and development at USD 250 million (UNDESA, 2011 cited in Laczko, 2011). IOM alone received USD 177 million for migration and development projects in the five years up to 2011 (ibid).

A study of evaluation practices in several Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries found that national and international public agencies operating in the field of migration undertake relatively few impact evaluation activities (Chappell & Laczko, 2011). Ardittis and Laczko (2008: 16) note that ‘it is surprising how little information is available about the impact and cost effectiveness of migration policies and programmes, and there is a dearth of comparative data to permit cross-national comparisons’. In a 2010 survey for the Global Forum for Migration and Development, only nine participant countries reported carrying out any assessment work at all on migration and development policies (Chappell & Laczko, 2011).

Chappell and Laczko (2011: 1) point to a growing body of research focused on how to measure the broader social and economic effects of migration on development, but add that much less attention 'has been given to assessing the impact of the growing number of migration programs and projects, which either directly or indirectly affect the ways in which migration and development interact'. McKenzie and Yang echo this, noting that 'the substantial policy interest and growing policy efforts stand in stark contrast to the limited empirical evidence that can help to guide policy' (2015: 2). They stress that the existing literature on migration policies largely addresses the question, 'Does a particular policy work as intended?' rather than 'Should this particular policy be implemented?' (ibid). Similarly, the Freedom Fund review found that 'whilst growing, the evidence emerging from evaluation of safer migration interventions remains extremely limited, and is often exclusively from process evaluations' (Freedom Fund, 2016: 3).

There are repeated calls in the available literature for greater evaluation of migration interventions. 'Without more rigorous methods to assess impact, it is not possible to determine the extent to which the interventions achieved the programs' objectives' (Freedom Fund, 2016: 3). 'It is hard to formulate and implement effective policy when it is not clear who the targets of that policy are, how many they are, where they are and what their problems are. And it is simply bad practice not to assess the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of policy' (Global Commission on International Migration, 2005 cited in Laczko, 2011). 'Governments from all regions need to improve their capacity to develop effective assessment mechanisms' (GFMD Ad hoc Working Group on Policy Coherence, Data and Research, 2010, cited in Laczko, 2011.). 'There is a strong need for research to provide better evidence on many of these migration policies to ensure that they can enhance the development impacts of international migration' (McKenzie & Yang, 2015: 20).

## Challenges

A number of challenges are identified in the literature as contributing to the lack of evaluation of migration policies and programmes. Some of these relate to the difficulties involved in carrying out rigorous impact evaluations in general (i.e. not confined to migration), including: the fear that a programme/project is not having the desired outcome and this 'failure' would be highlighted in a rigorous evaluation; the costs and time involved in carrying out rigorous impact evaluations; and the requirement for technical expertise and capacity, which are not always available (Chappell & Laczko, 2011).

But other challenges are specific to migration policies and programmes:

- **'Fear factor'** – Chappell and Laczko (2011) note that the usual fear factor with regard to policy makers and evaluation 'is raised several notches when the evaluation is to be applied to a migration program'. 'Migration is a contentious and often highly politicized issue in many countries' which comes for higher levels of scrutiny by the media, political opposition and the public. This can make policy-makers particularly reluctant to carry out impact evaluations and 'potentially expose problems and failures' (ibid).
- **Lack of capacity** – as with the fear factor, lack of capacity in relation to evaluation is more pronounced for migration policy officials: 'unlike in the humanitarian and development fields, there are no dedicated training courses or training materials available on the evaluation of migration programs' (Chappell and Laczko, 2011).
- **Technical challenges** – Chappell and Laczko (2011) highlight the particular technical challenges associated with the evaluation of migration programmes. Evaluation entails

comparison of intervention groups with control groups; the latter must be 'selected in a random manner so there are no systematic differences between the groups except for the intervention' (ibid). But for migration programmes it can be difficult to compare intervention and control groups; moreover, the effects of migration policy often extend beyond individuals and households directly participating in the programme. Rinne (2012) highlights further challenges: it is often hard to isolate the impacts of a single policy parameter because in reality, policy parameters are frequently changed at the same time; and in many countries, immigration status is defined in terms of citizenship, so naturalised immigrants would be included with the native population when looking at the effects of interventions such as ALMPs.

- **Lack of reliable data** – This is a major challenge for migration evaluation. A 2009 report for the Commission of International Migration Data for Development Research and Policy cited the nonexistence or inaccessibility of 'detailed, comparable, disaggregated data on migrant stocks and flows as the greatest obstacle to the formulation of evidence-based policies to maximise the benefits of migration for economic development' (cited in Laczko, 2016: 6). Understanding the impacts of policies on origin and destination countries requires data from both, which is rarely available (Rinne, 2012).
- **Rapid expansion of migration programmes** – investment in evaluation has not kept pace with the rapid growth of migration programmes and projects over the last decade and a half (Laczko, 2011)
- **Migration not seen as tool to promote development** – Laczko (2011) points out that migration policy is not traditionally seen as a means of promoting development, and hence is not evaluated from that perspective. A related issue is that migration interventions tended to be primarily geared to affecting outcomes in destination countries, particularly in the north, and hence policies and programmes have been designed and evaluated from that perspective. It is only recently that thinking about migration and development has changed to also focus on origin countries. Nonetheless 'the bulk of migration programs and projects have not been planned with any thought to development impacts', and very few are evaluated in terms of developmental outcomes (Chappell & Laczko, 2011).
- **Little sharing of evaluations among practitioners** – Chappell and Laczko (2011) contrast the development of 'communities of practice' in other development sectors, in which evaluation results are shared so all can benefit from the lessons learned, with migration and development in which 'the relatively few existing...evaluations tend to be scattered and not shared systematically between states'. They note that while some important evaluations have been conducted in recent years 'this information tends to be difficult to find; there is no database or clearing house to facilitate the sharing of the results of these evaluation' (ibid).

Rinne (2012: 20) identifies a number of factors that make it hard to draw general conclusions from the available evaluation literature on immigration policies:

- Most of the evaluation studies concentrate on the effects of participation for those involved in the programme, making it hard to judge what effects would result if the programme were extended. For example, at least part of the reason why wage subsidies are relatively effective might be that they are typically employed only at a small scale.
- Most of the studies only evaluate the short-term effects of programmes, but these could be very different from the long-term effects, as for example participation in one programme could lead to participation in another programme.

- Most evaluation studies that exist provide evidence for Nordic countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. This is very likely related to better access to high-quality data in these countries, but it nevertheless appears hard to generalise from findings that may be specific to a particular institutional environment.
- There are virtually no studies that evaluate the efficiency of programmes or assess the comparative effectiveness (or efficiency) of different interventions. However, these results would be particularly relevant from a policy perspective as they could provide the basis for evidence-based policy making.

Ardittis and Laczko (2008) describe and compare the ways in which some of the major immigration countries in the world and some key international bodies, such as the European Commission, assess the costs and impacts of their migration policies and programmes. They highlight the challenges facing policymakers in evaluating migration policies.

### Recommendations

Chappell and Laczko (2011) put forward a number of arguments and recommendations to overcome the challenges faced and to strengthen evaluation of migration and development interventions:

- It is important to prioritise data collection, drawing on existing data collection tools and approaches, and making data widely available;
- Costs of impact evaluations should be balanced against expenditure on migration programmes, which can be substantial and is growing. Identification of effective interventions that should be scaled up will ensure money is well spent; highlighting programme aspects that are not working allows for improvements to promote effectiveness and efficiency; and identification of failing programmes releases funds that could be better spent elsewhere;
- Costs can be reduced through cost sharing: governments could come together to identify a few key policies and programmes of mutual interest that could be the subject of a 'thematic evaluation', leading within a few years to a sound stock of evidence on how key policies and programmes might best be designed. Such an approach would also encourage countries of origin, transit and destination to work together to conduct joint evaluations;
- While identification of intervention and control groups can be difficult, this is not a reason to avoid evaluation altogether. Instead, it means being realistic in defining what the best possible information might be and how it might be uncovered;
- To overcome the current lack of knowledge sharing, it would not be too onerous a task to gather together existing migration evaluations and draw out key lessons, both for conducting future evaluations and in terms of implications for policy. Capacity could be built through experts and governments with some experience in this area sharing their knowledge through handbooks, trainings and other capacity building tools;
- The highly political nature of migration – rather than being a reason to avoid (fear) evaluation - makes it all the more important that governments identify what works in migration policy and programming. One way to proceed would be to start with less contentious policies and programmes, where the trade-offs and associated costs are small, e.g. measures to promote sending of remittances, rather than interventions aimed at border control. Such an approach would allow the migration policymaking community

to begin to gain familiarity with evaluation techniques and their usefulness to policymaking, and thus build towards an evaluation culture.

Ardittis and Laczko (2008) also make recommendations to strengthen evaluation of migration policies. Melde (2012) has developed a (more) comprehensive set of indicators for measuring the impact of migration on human development, and vice versa. The indicators are listed alongside type of impact (e.g. material poverty of migrant), level (e.g. individual level, household level), the theoretical linkage with development (e.g. migration can improve income) and potential sources of data (e.g. Living Standard Measurement Survey).

## 4. Relevant research organisations

This review identified a number of organisations/research institutions working on issues of migration and development:

Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) – GFMD is a voluntary, informal, non-binding and government-led process open to all UN members and observers, to advance understanding and cooperation on the mutually reinforcing relationship between migration and development and to foster practical and action-oriented outcomes (<https://gfmd.org/process>). The GFMD process brings together expertise from all regions and countries at all stages of economic, social and political development; it also engages with civil society representatives. The GFMD policy and practice database (PPD) details migration and development interventions from across the world (<https://gfmd.org/pfp/ppd>).

Migrating Out of Poverty (MOOP), University of Sussex – MOOP is a seven-year research programme consortium (RPC), led by the University of Sussex, and funded by DFID. MOOP focuses on the relationship between internal and regional migration and poverty and is located in six regions across Asia, Africa and Europe. MOOP RPC works to produce research which sheds light on the circumstances in which migration can most effectively reduce poverty. A recent relevant publication is *Strengthening Migration Data for Decision-Making: Innovations in Design and Collection* (MOOP, 2017).

International Organization for Migration (IOM) – IOM describes itself as ‘the leading inter-governmental organisation in the field of migration’ (<http://www.iom.int/about-iom>). IOM works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration, to promote international cooperation on migration issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems as well as to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need. It produces a large variety of publications in the field of migration policy and research. There have been some exercises conducted to evaluate the impact of specific IOM interventions, but not in a consistent manner and only for internal use (expert comment).

International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) – set up in 1993 by Austria and Switzerland, ICMPD now has 15 member states, all from Europe. ICMPD works to promote innovative, comprehensive and sustainable migration policies and to function as a service exchange mechanism for governments and organisations. It focuses on migratory flows to European receiving countries. ICMPD produces policy briefs and more in-depth working papers on a range of migration issues, including migration and development. See: <https://www.icmpd.org/publications/publications/migration-development/>

Migration Policy Institute (MPI) - The Migration Policy Institute is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank in Washington, DC dedicated to analysis of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at local, national, and international levels. It carries out research on a range of issues, including migration and development. See: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/topics/migration-development>.

Migration Observatory – based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory ‘provides impartial, independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues’ (MO website). Publications are available at: <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/about/browse-all-content/>

Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development (MACIMIDE) – this is the interdisciplinary research platform of Maastricht University that brings together scholars working in the fields of migration, mobility, citizenship, development and family life, in order to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics and consequences of transnational migration and mobility in a European and global context. Under the research theme ‘migration and development’ the Centre focuses on the relationship between origin and destination countries. Research projects on migration and development are given at: <https://macimide.maastrichtuniversity.nl/migration-and-development/>

The above is by no means a comprehensive list. There are many other research institutes and organisations working on migration and development, including the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the Institute of Labour Economics (IZA) in Bonn, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

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## Key websites

- Global Forum on Migration and Development: <https://gfmd.org/>
- Migrating Out of Poverty (MOOP) Research Programme Consortium (RPC): <http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/>
- International Organization for Migration (IOM): <http://www.iom.int>

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