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A One-Size-Fits-All Approach to International Migration is Doomed to Fail

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This commentary was first published in the [Economist's Online Debate on International Migration](#).

A one-size-fits-all approach to international migration is simply unworkable given the highly varied contexts in which migration takes place. Therefore, the motion stating that 'there is too much international migration' does not in my view lend itself to a meaningful debate.

The causes of migration are complex and myriad, and result in no small measure from the phenomenon of globalization in the economic, political and cultural spheres. Factors including demographic and skills deficits in much of the industrialized world coupled with insufficient employment possibilities in much of the developing world, persistent economic disparities and global supply chains resulting from economic integration, mean that migration is both necessary and here to stay.

Human rights violations, armed conflict, natural disasters, and increasingly climate change and environmental degradation also contribute to this unprecedented tide in human mobility.

Today, there are an estimated 214 million international migrants worldwide, more than two and a half times more than in 1965. In an increasingly mobile and inter-connected world structured on the promotion of ever freer movement of capital, goods and services, people necessarily follow. The search for employment is as much at the heart of most of today's migratory movements as it has ever been.

Numbers tell part of the story: in the developed world as a whole, demographic trends show that without immigration, the working age population is expected to decline by 23% by 2050. During this time, the working age population for Africa alone is expected to triple from 408 million in 2005 to 1.12 billion while China and India are likely to account for 40 per cent of the global workforce by 2030.

So the priority for developed and developing countries alike as well as for the global economy as a whole is to have planned and predictable ways of matching international labour demand with supply in safe, legal and humane ways.

Without this, surely the issue is "there is too much irregular migration and too few options for people to migrate regularly in search of work" instead of the argument that there is too much international migration.

I would argue that the real issue regarding migration is how to make it take place as a matter of choice rather than necessity and to ensure that this happens safely, legally and orderly so that people don't have to resort to using human smugglers and traffickers. It would eliminate not just the obscene profits these criminal networks make at the enormous physical, emotional and financial expense of migrants but would make migration essentially positive for individuals and



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societies at both ends of the migration spectrum.

To simply state there is too much international migration underlines the obvious undertone of the motion – that international migration is essentially detrimental to individuals and societies.

It ignores the fundamental fact that the prime motivation for people to migrate is their ardent desire to seek better socio-economic opportunities abroad, with economically active migrants contributing substantially not only to their own well-being and that of their families, but also to host and home countries. Families can and do move out of poverty as a result of migration, with remittances often making education and healthcare possible for family members back home.

Beyond this, the knowledge, know-how, investment and other financial and social remittances migrants can bring to their countries of origin potentially open new possibilities for growth and stability. Moreover, the person-power, skills, innovation and entrepreneurship they bring to their host societies can make a real difference, as is neatly illustrated by the percentage of new patents being taken out by immigrants in the US, a staggering 52 percent.

Where a rational case for labour migration can be made –and this should be done in a context-specific manner - this should happen, and the required accompanying policies and actions put in place.

The support of host country populations is essential to successful integration, and this in turn is the only way to ensure that immigrants get a fair chance of contributing, for their benefit and that of the host society.

Therefore, it is critical that countries have a comprehensive understanding of their labour market needs and demographic trends, and, consequent to that, formulate migration policies and practices that allow them to attract migrants they need and in the numbers they need them in. What Country A needs by way of labour migrants may not necessarily be what Country B needs, whatever other similarities they may have. Carefully tailored and thought-out country or region specific migration policies and programs are the key.

Equally, it is critical that we not lose sight of the human element which, unfortunately, is too often forgotten in migration discourse. Consideration is hardly ever given to what all would agree is a legitimate human aspiration -- employment, without which a livelihood and other basic human rights and freedoms are not easily attainable.

Would acknowledgment of the human element contribute to reducing the stigma often associated with migrants, especially those in the lower skilled category? Would appreciation of their legitimate quest for a better life, and of the contribution that migrants have and continue to make to host and home societies, help in further redressing policy incoherence that plays into the hands of smugglers and traffickers, thereby giving rise to the undesired form of migration?

It would certainly be a good first step.

September 2009