

research evidence for policy



Kyrgyz woman selling plastic shoes imported from China on the market of Almaty, Kazakhstan. Many labour migrants find job opportunities in the urban trade sector (Photo by K. Ahmed & S. Thieme, 2007).

Making migration safer



Case studies featured here were conducted in: India, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Pakistan

Policy Message

- Labour migrants in the low-skilled sector have a strong potential to be development agents in poverty alleviation.
- Considering migration in development means taking into account the different stages of migration, from departure to return. For example, information and vocational training benefit migrants before they leave the country.
- Circular migration should be facilitated by governments with measures such as flexible residency, citizenship rights and portable benefits.
- The migrants' social and economic security and the impact on families left behind should be considered.

- In a globalising market, labour migration in low-skilled sectors plays a particularly important role. A growing number of poor people move between their villages of origin, the capital and international destinations, while financially sustaining their families and regions. The positive role of remittances for alleviating the poverty of sending countries is widely acknowledged.
- However, migration also leads to a growing imbalance between rural and urban areas and unfavourable societal changes. Drawing on case studies in Central and South Asia, this issue of *evidence for policy* examines the challenges of making migration safer for low-skilled workers and more beneficial for their families left behind.

Circular migration

- Worldwide, more than 200 million people live outside their countries of origin. About one half of these are labour migrants, making significant contributions to the economies of both receiving (host) and sending (home) countries. This has resulted in a widespread recognition of the advantages of migration. Policymakers and development agencies now consider migrants with their incomes as new development agents. In one example, the UN has initiated a High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (2006).

In another, Nepal is drafting a new Non Resident Nepalese policy to enhance the role of migrants in national development efforts.

Despite this improvement in the perception of migrants, there is still a long way to go in terms of clarifying their legal status. NCCR North-South research on migration in Asian countries has shown that due to their perceived temporary status and high mobility, migrants' rights as citizens as well as their living and working conditions are still not of enough concern to either host or home country.

Circular migration

The World Migration Report 2008 of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines circular migration as the fluid movement of people between countries, including temporary or long-term movement, which may be beneficial to all involved if occurring voluntarily and linked to the labour needs of countries of origin and destination. www.iom.int



People demonstrating for the rights of migrants in Kathmandu. For poor countries like Nepal, remittances are an important source of external finance (Photo by G. Gurung, 2006).

Remittances

Remittances are transfers of money by migrant workers to recipients in their home countries. According to the World Bank, remittances are an important source of external finance for developing countries, with remittances larger than official development assistance and foreign direct investment in many countries. www.worldbank.org
www.ilo.org
www.migrationanddevelopment.net

- **Remittance economies in Asia**
- Migration benefits both host and home nations. Host nations benefit economically, because migrants complement their labour markets. The economies of the countries benefit because migrants send home remittances. Remittances are the second-most important source of external funding for South Asian countries such as Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.

- During the conflict in Nepal, remittances provided the economic lifeline for many Nepali families and even for the state. In Pakistan, remittances were a major source of funding in rebuilding the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) after the earthquake in 2005. Examples from Central Asia show that Kyrgyz migrants working in Russia and Kazakhstan send home remittances worth 30 per cent of their country's GDP.

Alleviating poverty

- The positive role of remittances and their potential contribution to poverty alleviation has been recognised across the South Asian region. Bangladesh and Pakistan have set up separate ministries for the welfare of their migrant communities overseas. In rural communities with little cash income, even small transfers of money are highly valued as they reduce vulnerability to risks such as harvest failure, food shortages or disease. For Nepali migrants and their families, having family members in neighbouring India assures access to medical treatment and education. It also means there are fewer family members to burden the household budget.

Economies that have grown dependent on remittances, however, are vulnerable. Scholars find that irregular remittances represent one of the major financial threats for households in rural NWFP, Pakistan. Remittances alone cannot replace the overall contribution of a family member to a family (e.g. parental care) or of a citizen to the state (e.g. participating in politics).

Rural–urban divide

A typical migrant may start out by moving from a village to the city and later abroad. The interdependence of internal and international migration is clearly manifested. In the Indian state of Kerala, workers are departing in masses to the Gulf. This has resulted in a labour shortage in Kerala, leading to a large inflow of migrant labour from other parts of India.

While the urban–rural divide is a driving factor of migration, it is also perpetuated as a result of migration. People leave their villages in search of opportunities in the cities – in their own country or abroad. A study in Kyrgyzstan has shown that although most migrants wish to return to their home country, their first choice would be the capital Bishkek, rather than their village of origin. Reasons not to return to rural areas include fewer economic opportunities and a lack of social or medical services.

Social change

Migration redefines the division of labour and responsibilities within a family. In Pakistan, agricultural work is increasingly “feminised” due to male outmigration. In the case of migrants’ wives in parts of Nepal, NCCR North-South researchers have found an increased workload but also a greater participation in decision-making. During the decade-long conflict in Nepal, women were left to negotiate with the conflicting parties, which was new in the Nepali context.

Social and economic protection

While remittances of migrants are welcomed in the home countries, the migrants themselves are rarely considered in policymaking and development interventions. In the host countries, migrants’ moves are often restricted, their livelihoods unprotected and they themselves harassed by the authorities. Lack of adequate

education and knowledge about the host country as well as insecure working and living conditions make it hard for migrants to recover financial costs associated with migration (debts, placement fees, travel), secure support of the family back home and save enough money to invest in the future. Many migrants live from hand to mouth.

The female face of migration

National migration policies are often gendered, limiting the international migration of women. In Nepal, for example, women were not allowed to migrate to specific countries like the Gulf States or Malaysia. This was done in the name of positive discrimination, to protect women from potential exploitation and harassment in domestic work. However, women continued to migrate in many other often illegal and more risky ways, increasing their vulnerabilities. In Pakistan, female labour migration was not allowed at all. Now, for the first time, the new draft policy currently under discussion would enable broad-based female labour migration.

Policy implications

NCCR North-South research highlights opportunities for policy interventions to make migration safer for the mobile population and their relatives:

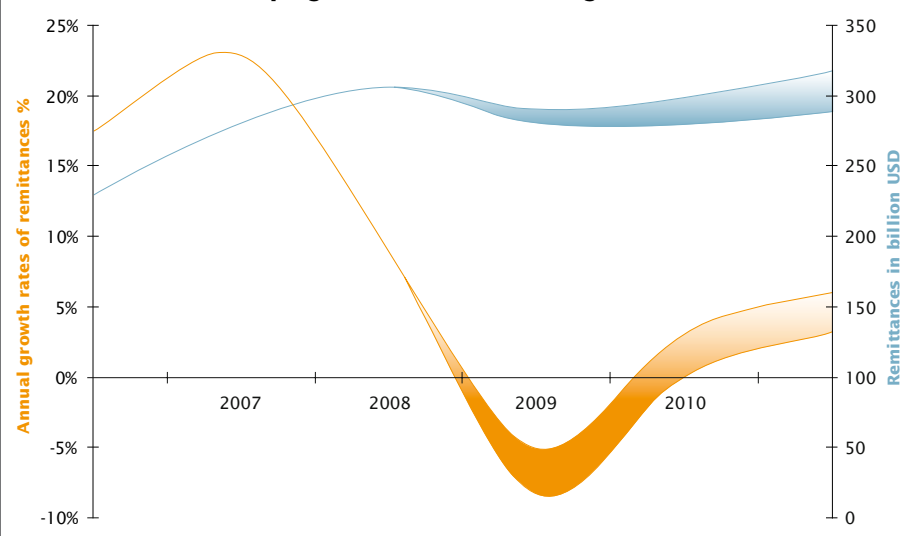
- Policies should take into account separately the different stages of migration: life in the home country, pre-departure preparations, travelling to as well as working and living in the host country. The lives and journeys of low-skilled workers who originally departed mostly from rural areas should be systematically taken into consideration in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development programmes in both home and host countries. There should also be greater cooperation between institutions that are formally in charge of migration issues and others that are not, such as migrants' associations or local micro-finance groups.
- Facilitating circular migration requires the removal of disincentives to circulation, primarily by providing flexible residency and citizenship rights. This would allow migrants to limit expenses associated with migration, enabling them to save money and acquire the skills needed for a more successful return.

- Migrants are in need of assurance for permanency in terms of social and economic security such as pension funds, health insurance as well as career security. The increase in insecurity for the non-migrant family members requires mitigation efforts. Researchers call for an improvement in the living conditions of the families left behind in rural areas: access to health care, childcare and education, and investments in rural infrastructure such as a functional transport and communication system.
- Policymakers and the private sector should make migration safer and more beneficial for migrants by providing adequate information on the migration process and destination. Before leaving, workers should be given the opportunity to receive training required by the labour markets of host countries.



The POURAKHI radio programme run by migrants broadcasts information on practical issues and the potentials and risks of labour migration (Photo by G. Gurung, 2007).

Remittances to developing countries are declining



The World Bank predicts that international remittance flows to developing countries will decline by 5-8 percent in 2009 in US dollar terms. This corresponds to a fall in nominal terms from USD 305 billion in 2008 to USD 280-290 billion in 2009. In many developing countries, however, remittances will stay resilient and become even more important as a source of external financing (Adapted from: <http://peoplemove.worldbank.org/en/content/remittances-expected-to-fall-by-5-to-8-percent-in-2009>).



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evidence for policy

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NCCR North-South case studies on the link between migration and development in Central and South Asia

Radio programme for Nepalese migrants

In Nepal, outmigration has progressed to become an increasingly important livelihood strategy. Research results suggest that migrants from rural areas often lack the basis for making informed choices with regard to working abroad, as public and private services are concentrated in Kathmandu. A radio project has made it possible to better inform migrants and potential migrants of the dangers and opportunities they face. The programme was set up as an information bulletin in partnership with an NGO, researchers and a group of women migrant returnees. About 200 local "listeners' clubs" were established to provide radio access, collect feedback and encourage wider dissemination of information. As no sound migration policy and official information mechanisms exist in Nepal to date, the programme has been able to bridge the information gap.

Missing focus on infrastructure development in Kyrgyz migration areas

Small and medium-sized towns are important intermediary points between rural and urban areas in Kyrgyzstan. They provide social and economic services that not only make a return of migrants more likely but also enable non-migrants to have access to health care, childcare and education. Scholars call for policies that support urban-rural integration and provide public investment to encourage the flow of goods and resources across sectors and locations. A more integrated economy offers more choices and allows individuals and households to pursue their own best paths out of poverty. The rise of a more diversified non-farm economy can thus result in positive transformation.

Strengthening migrants' wives in Pakistan

Male labour migration increases the vulnerability of the remaining families in Pakistan. Migrants' wives face greater difficulties in accessing health care facilities as male company is required for venturing outside the homestead. Yet, international experience has shown that social networks based on women's common interests and characterised by more egalitarian relations between their members have the potential to enhance their resilience. Therefore, village organisations, researchers and NGOs promote in partnership the formation of inter-household, village-level organisations among transnational migrants' wives in the Upper Dir district.

Further information

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The NCCR North-South is a worldwide research network including seven partner institutions in Switzerland and some 160 universities, research institutions and development organisations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. Approximately 350 researchers worldwide contribute to the activities of the NCCR North-South.

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This issue

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