



Migration DRC Training Day
Migration Policies: UK Perspectives in a Global Context
Friday 22nd January 2010
One Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AA

SESSION 1 Making Migration Work for Development: a UK Perspective
RICHARD BLACK - Sussex Centre for Migration Research

The day was opened by Richard Black who started with a 'Migration Pub Quiz' which asked each table 10 questions about migration giving participants a chance to discuss different dimensions of migration as well as issues of data collection and sources. The quiz had questions on international migration and migration to the UK - both questions and answers are available at http://www.migrationdrc.org/news/reports/migration_policies/Quiz220110.pdf

After the quiz Richard turned to his presentation entitled Making Migration Work for Development which outlined the findings of the research programme of the Development Research Centre on Migration and Development since its inception in June 2003. There are 10 key findings outlined in the report which is accessible [\[here\]](#). A two page version of the report is available and finally the presentation can be seen [\[here\]](#).

SESSION 2 Irregular Status and the Migration Experience
RACHEL SABATES-WHEELER – Institute for Development Studies

Rachel Sabates-Wheeler's interest in the issues around migrant worker 'legality' emerged from her extensive research into the migration-social protection nexus. She first explained her use of the term 'irregular' as opposed to 'illegal' because of the connotations of criminality that the label of 'illegal' holds. Beyond issues of terminology, her findings show that the fixed binary of legal/illegal doesn't accurately describe reality for migrant workers as their legal status is very fluid. She argues that looking at migrant 'compliance' is more helpful. In many cases, migrants 'choose' their status and there is a broad spectrum of compliance statuses.

There is no significant difference between regular/irregular migrants in terms of their characteristics (education, occupation, upward mobility, etc.). There are also clear problems of measurement when it comes to determining numbers of irregular migrants; IOM and UKBA, amongst others, are only able to produce 'guesstimates' with some suggestions that irregular migrants might constitute 10% of total migrant stock.

When 'choosing' whether to comply or not, migrant workers face a certain number of trade-offs (between compliance and potential higher economic return). In some unregulated labour markets, being 'irregular' (i.e. non-compliant) yields higher economic gains; in other places, becoming 'legal' involves considerable transaction costs. In addition, poor provision and lack of

portability of social protection benefits (health, pensions, etc.) act as a strong disincentive to seeking 'regular' status. Moreover, previous research (see [MMP project](#)) has shown that legal status doesn't automatically provide higher benefits; what matters are language and citizenship. From the point of view of destination countries, there is also no evidence of the negative impact of 'irregular migration' on unemployment rates or of excessive pressure on the welfare system.

The full presentation is available [\[here\]](#)

Overall, Rachel Sabates-Wheeler demonstrated that managing irregular migration is not about controlling the entry of people at the borders; there is no evidence to suggest that increased border controls have a positive impact on curbing 'irregular migration'. Most migrants enter legally, and become 'irregular' by working without the right to or overstaying their visas. It is therefore reasonable to expect that many migrants will continue to come and work in the UK without official permits. Each table of participants was given one of the following options and prepared a case to advocate for it.

1. Temporary labour migration programmes

Accounting for the fact that some migrants are able to pay thousands of dollars to smugglers, would it be possible to formalise this process by making these people pay for a temporary bond which would allow them work for a fixed period of time in the destination country? The revenue raised would then be reinvested into developmental programmes in countries of origin. This could be complemented by greater incentivizing of return for migrants who have overstayed their visas, with greater involvement by countries of origin in fostering return. Switzerland has such a programme in place which provides migrants with five year visas; spouses and dependents should also be taken into account. Other previous examples of successful temporary labour schemes include the seasonal agricultural scheme.

2. Encourage voluntary return

AVR offers a quick and efficient solution for encouraging migrants to return, but also a more humane and dignified approach for migrants themselves. It is also very cost-effective as data shows that returning an individual via AVR only cost 1/10 relative to enforced removal. In order to increase uptake by irregular migrants, it might be worth considering offering an incentivization package as is the case for failed asylum seekers. In addition, greater support both pre and post return would facilitate reintegration, whereby successful reintegration reduces the probability of re-migrating and also makes AVR more attractive to other potential returnees. To be most successful, AVR should be made part of a larger policy package which provides for 'legal' low-skilled migration channels on the one hand, and support capacity building in country of origin governments.

3. Regularisation/ amnesty

Discussants envisaged two possible avenues to a regularisation programme which might be applicable to the UK context. The first approach suggested a one-off regularisation programme as a solution to 'clear up' the terrible situation which occurred in the early 2000's when the asylum process came to a block in the UK, which resulted in a high number of asylum seekers ending up with no status and no options. Such a regularisation policy would avoid the UK becoming a 'magnet' since this would only be a one-off programme seeking to address the situation of an identifiable set of individuals. The second option which was discussed picked up on the finding from Rachel Sabates-Wheeler's presentation about 'legality' not really bringing greater benefits to migrants, whereas 'citizenship' did. This option looked at implementing a

mass citizenship programme which would be open to a large set of people, as long as they met a certain set of defined criteria. Nevertheless, any mass regularisation programme carries significant associated challenges for policy-makers to address. One such challenge would be the need to prepare public opinion; another – as previous examples in other countries have shown – is that regularisation would have to take place in a period of economic boom, rather than during a downturn.

4. Improving remittance systems for all

A better functioning and less costly remittance system would allow for regularisation of flows and greater diaspora engagement. Some country of origin governments have set up systems which enhance the positive developmental effects of remittances: the Mexican government adds \$1 for every \$3 of remittances sent; Eritrea has a 2% diaspora tax. Southern governments could also consider accepting the use of other currencies. For undocumented migrants, a consular card could give them access to using official banks. Some initiatives have also sought to reduce the cost of official transfers by increasing competition (see www.sendmoneyhome.org). Finally, further technological support should be provided for recipient banking systems.

SESSION 3 The Global Economic Downturn, Migration and Labour Market Flexibility

RONALD SKELDON – Sussex Centre for Migration Research

Ronald Skeldon outlined how deeply the recession was biting and what the likely effects on migration might be. He compared this recession and migration patterns with past economic ups and downs. The economic downturn is deemed to have little long-term effect on most migration flows to the UK for a number of reasons. Partly because migrants benefit from the UK's flexible labour market and still have high rates of employment in the UK, partly as many come from countries where conditions at home are still much worse; so in two respects they are better off staying in the UK: to send money home and because they might face unemployment at home. Lastly restrictive migration policies mean that even if migrants felt that returning home for a while, during recession, would be a good idea, they are deterred by the difficulties of re-migrating once economic conditions improve. Return migration tends to be found where freedom of movement across borders exists. Where movement is made difficult through tight border controls or where it is expensive, return migrations have been limited. Remittances globally are likely to slow in growth if not decline slightly in 2009 but this pattern varies across the world with migrant remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean declining, whilst those to Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Philippines continue to grow, reflecting relative robustness of migration to the Gulf states and within Asia compared to migration to the U.S.

The full presentation is available [\[here\]](#)

The discussion followed in two parts; firstly, what policies are available to governments to respond in terms of labour market flexibility, migration 'management' and other social policies and secondly to review David Cameron's proposal for a cap on migration in terms of feasibility and likely outcomes.

The discussions noted that the government had already tightened the regulations around the points based system by increasing the financial requirements for Tier 1 entrants and increasing the length of time a job has to be advertised in the UK before it can go to a migrant. However, in general the points based system was thought to be too recent to offer a pre and during

downturn comparison. Also, government options to manage migration were limited due to the importance of migration from the EU that was an integral part of membership of that grouping. The humanitarian and family reunification channels were also difficult to restrict given the UK's international obligations.

It was felt that any attempt to respond in terms of macro migration policy by the government would be likely to suffer from a lack of timely information and could end up stifling economic growth more than protecting workers.

Some positive suggestions for encouraging flows which respond appropriately to demand during a downturn included

- Reducing the amount of time migrants have to stay at home before they are allowed to migrate again to encourage return in recession
- Reducing the transaction costs of migration such as visa fees
- Decreasing costs of sending remittances home

When it came to discussing a cap aimed at reducing total migration most participants were in agreement that it would be unfeasible to have a cap because of the UK's commitment to international agreements, at global or EU level, which account for the migration of families, free movement within Europe, migration of refugees etc. It would only be at tier one or two where there is any leeway and these tiers are considered to be of most benefit to the UK economically and to account for only a small proportion of migrants. There was some discussion of how far limits to student migration could be introduced, either by reducing the rights of students to stay on after graduation or by limiting the numbers of students coming to study in the UK, but the negative effects of this were expected to be very high both for universities and employers.

Other areas of discussion included how far the political impact of making a statement like this could contribute to preventing the growth of far right political parties, if at all, and whether the government should promote emigration of UK citizens (i.e. to the Costa del Sol) to reduce population numbers!

Prof Skeldon concluded by reiterating that there is little any government can do in terms of policy, to reduce migration, especially as the economy recovers. Instead it is vital to communicate the beneficial effects of migration, to look to the future and see that there will be a need for other sources of migrants both skilled and unskilled in 10-15 years time and to mediate possible tensions between local and national government. If a cap were to be introduced it would have to be on the Canadian model, where they have a high threshold, it does not vary from year to year and the cap prepares government agencies for a specific and non-variable number of migrants.

SESSION 4 Developmental Effects of Return

MIKE COLLYER - Sussex Centre for Migration Research

Return is no longer seen as the last stage in the migration process. The decision to return can be taken for many different reasons. There are also very different concepts of what constitutes 'sustainable return' depending on who is defining it, and a variety of factors which will influence whether return is successful and/or sustainable. UK statistics show that whilst forced removals had been politically difficult, and therefore limited in number during the early 2000's, their

numbers increased up until 2005-6 but fell again in the years to 2009, whilst the uptake of AVR rose. This explains the continued political attention paid to AVR.

Mike Collyer outlined the fact that his research looked specifically at return to Sri Lanka under the VARRP programme (Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme), and sought to explore its developmental potential, as opposed to a means of making people leave the UK. He carried out interviews with 48 migrants who returned to Sri Lanka between 2002 – 2008, the gender imbalance in the sample reflects the gender imbalance in the uptake of VARRP in general (only 13% were women). A very large proportion of returnees under VARRP took up reintegration support to set up businesses and the uptake of this form of support is particularly high amongst Sri Lankans. Evidence of success in reintegrating included employing others or wealth generation. And determinants of success/failure included political contacts, previous business success, business sense/knowing the market, experience in the UK. Mike Collyer insisted that his results did, in part at least, support the positive assessment made by IOM in 2004 of the programme. He also found a clear positive relation between the amount of time spent abroad and the amount of savings/remittances which the returnees had been able to make use of upon return. However, individuals who had returned more recently had arrived in a UK context which was much more restrictive and controlled – as a result, their return to Sri Lanka was much less successful. Overall, he attributed individuals' 'failed return' to an increasingly poor security context from 2005 and persistent intimidation and corruption – which all still constitute key issues for returnees to Sri Lanka.

From a developmental perspective, the AVR focus on business development is already there, with systems for post-return training already in place. But Mike Collyer suggested thinking about pre-return business training and providing low interest loans which might produce more viable business projects for returnee migrants.

Discussants raised a few points on the presentation. A first question asked about the overall rate of business failure in Sri Lanka, which might put into perspective the failure rate of return migrants. Another participant commented that an implication of the findings (factors of success) might be that reintegration support be made more selective in order to achieve greater success rates. Mike Collyer however pointed out that this would not have to be the case; the provision of pre-return training to all could produce more successful outcomes. It was also highlighted that not all return migrants were, and therefore should not be seen as, entrepreneurs: return migrants to Sri Lanka are overall older and more experienced than other returnees. IOM tries to provide tailored support, but also encourages other types of reintegration; one of the issues facing the beneficiaries of reintegration support is that the timeframe for planning return is actually quite short, whereas developing a good business plan takes time.

The full presentation is available [\[here\]](#)

The 2008 EC 'Returns Directive' originally provided for countries to monitor 'all returns' (both forced and assisted voluntary) of 'illegally staying third-country nationals'. This provision was eventually dropped as implementing such a requirement was deemed too difficult and unrealistic. Any improvement in return programmes does nevertheless call for a better understanding of the situation of migrants upon return. Mike Collyer thus first asked the participants how research could best support the policy process in the field of return, and secondly, what they thought might be the challenges in so doing from both the policy and the research perspectives.

On the types and areas of research which would best support developing return policy, participants mentioned collecting more evidence of the economic cost effectiveness of AVR packages, as compared to enforced removal; moving away from a generic model of AVR and identifying what works (and what does not) in different countries and for different individuals; exploring factors and determinants of take up, and how to make the VARRP programme in particular more attractive. On this last point Mike Collyer pointed out that he had found that there was already widespread knowledge about the programme amongst the Sri Lankan community, but that take up was dependent on factors other than the size of the incentive package. Further insight into this area would however require research into individuals who had signed up to VARRP but then dropped out – not an easy task.

Building on the comments to the presentation and answers to the first question, participants suggested some of the obstacles might include that: tailoring packages to every country would be very expensive; take up and success of the programme were mostly dependent on the political and economic situation upon return, beyond the control of the implementers; most return countries do not have the capacity to carry out research and monitor their returnees (it was said that there was previous experience in DR Congo of using local NGOs); better cooperation between the various UK departments which have a stake in the programme. In terms of policy suggestions, it was mentioned that, building on the idea behind IOM's best practice cluster approach, new programmes might want to envisage collective packages, or using the expertise of previous successful returnees to guide and support new return migrants.

In conclusion, Richard Black thanked the participants for their stimulating contributions and looked forward to building on the success of the day's activities.