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Roundtable 2: Migrant Integration, reintegration and circulation for development

Session 2.1: Inclusion, protection and acceptance of migrants in society; linking human rights and migrant empowerment for development

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1. Introduction

This paper provides a starting point for discussion during Session 2.1 of Round Table 2 at the Civil Society days of the Global Forum on Migration and Development on 'Inclusion, protection and acceptance of migrants in society: linking human rights and migrant empowerment for development.' In particular the paper seeks to inform discussion of three questions: What does integration mean for different types of migrants? What is the relationship between migrant integration and development for different types of migrants? What is the gender dimension of migrant empowerment and its effects on development? Throughout the paper the particular role played by civil society in promoting the linkages between migrant integration is highlighted. The paper concludes by identifying a number of issues for further discussion.

2. Concepts and definitions

Integration can be defined as '...the process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups'.^[1] Integration is a two-way process, involving immigrants and the receiving society. Furthermore it takes place both at the individual and collective level. A distinction is often made between economic, social, and political integration by migrants and migrant communities. A further distinction exists between different 'models' of integration, primarily assimilation and multiculturalism. Key components of integration policy include: labour market policies; policies related to ethnic entrepreneurship and self-employment; support for

vocational or professional training; support for education; housing policies; health policies; naturalisation policies; and promotion of civic and political participation.^[2] Particular attention has been paid in recent years to integration in urban areas, and the role of local and regional governments in the process.^[3]

Institutions – including civil society - have a critical role in the process of integration.^[4] Significant civil society actors include churches, trade unions, employers' organizations, political parties, and the media, both in origin and destination countries. In destination countries civil society lobbies for the rights of migrant workers; functions as a direct partner in implementing policies; monitors and evaluates the impact of policies; influences the political climate and political outcomes; and is an important agent in combating exclusion, discrimination, and xenophobia. In countries of origin civil society provides information on rights, obligations, and potential abuses in destination countries; provides training for potential migrants; and promotes bilateral labour agreements to ensure the protection of migrant workers. Government policies that aim at steering processes of integration should actively involve not only migrants themselves, but also civil society in both origin and destination countries.

The concept development is used in this paper in three ways. First it refers to 'human capital development', encompassing human rights for all migrants and supporting their ability to realize their full potential. Second it refers to economic development in destination countries. Third it refers to economic development in countries of origin, with a particular focus on the processes of remittances and return. The extent to which integration in settlement countries is successful impacts development at all three levels, but it is also important to note that integration is not the only variable affecting the links between migration and development.

What does integration mean for different types of migrants?

Integration policies tend to vary between migrants admitted for permanent settlement and those admitted on a temporary basis; between low-skilled and high-skilled migrants; and between legal and irregular migrants. *Civil society advocates have argued that all migration should lead to full citizenship if desired, but in reality most governments maintain distinctions between these migrant types in terms of integration policies and possibilities for citizenship.*

For those admitted for permanent settlement, the Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) identifies six key policy areas that shape an individual migrant's journey to full citizenship: labour market access, family reunion, long-term residence, political participation, access to nationality, and anti-discrimination.^[5] At the same time specific integration measures are often required for different types of migrant admitted for permanent settlement. For family reunification, for example, measures adopted in most settlement countries include language acquisition, orientation courses, family-related social services, and support for integration into the labour market and/or education system. For asylum seekers specific short-term support measures may be required, including psychological counselling and trauma-related services. *Civil society actors are often involved in identifying those in need of specific integration support and specifying what support is required.*

While there is a broad consensus on the main policy approaches required to assist the integration of migrants admitted for permanent settlement, in most countries integration has been less successful for certain sectors of the migrant population - whether defined along ethnic, religious or gender lines – for example as measured in terms of labour market participation or educational achievement. *Effective implementation of integration policies is critical, and civil society has a key role to play in this regard for example in terms of identifying migrants in particular need; and monitoring and evaluating policies.*

There is less consensus – including among civil society actors - about to what extent and how far to integrate migrants admitted on a temporary basis. From a state perspective the balance to strike is between permitting migrants to stay long enough to generate savings, but not so long that the likelihood of return diminishes. Trade unions in certain countries and a number of civil society organizations have argued that from a rights-based perspective, liberal democracies should not maintain migrants indefinitely without extending to them broad integration rights, including access to permanent residence and the right to family reunion.[\[6\]](#)

There is wide range of experiences relating to the conditions attached to temporary employment permits, as regards their duration and renewability; occupational mobility; procedures governing migrants' rights upon loss of employment; possibilities for permanent residence; family reunion; and other social rights. Better conditions tend to be attached to employment-based immigration programmes, and offered to skilled workers. *There is a role for civil society in lobbying governments to maximize the rights associated with temporary employment permits so as to increase the potential of these migrant workers to contribute to development.*

The length of time a work permit is valid can have important consequences. Programmes with permits with too short a duration and no possibility for renewal may find it difficult to attract even unskilled workers. In contrast temporary labour migration programmes aimed at more skilled workers tend to offer longer initial periods for permits, a straightforward procedure for renewal, and often also a path to permanent residence.

There is a wide variety of experiences regarding the extent to which migrant workers are 'contract workers' tied to a particular employer, or 'free agents' with uninhibited access to the labour market. In general, entrants under highly skilled migration programmes can be free agents, either immediately upon entry or after a certain number of years – although there are exceptions. Low-skilled migrants in contrast tend to be tied to particular employers either for the duration of their permit or for longer periods than is the case for highly-skilled migrants, and the rules governing their access to other jobs are more rigorous. The Live-in Caregiver Programme in Canada is widely cited as best practice in this areas (Box1). *Civil society advocates argue that freedom to change jobs in destination country labour markets can be an important protection for lower-skilled migrants, allowing them to escape abusive employers.*[\[7\]](#) Even where unskilled migrant workers do have limited rights regarding occupational mobility, they have been found in various studies either not fully to understand their rights, or to be nervous to assert them. *Various strategies, including*

the right to trade union membership and collective bargaining, information dissemination, and access to NGOs, have been proposed to try to bridge this gap.

Box 1 The Live-in Caregiver Programme in Canada

The Live-in Caregiver Programme in Canada allows workers to change employers whilst in the country, provide that the new employment offer is confirmed by the authorities. At the same time studies have demonstrated that the workers themselves are now always aware of this right.

There is a consensus in the specific ILO and UN standards that if a migrant worker loses his or her job, he or she does not necessarily or immediately have to leave the country but should be viewed as part of the normal workforce. *It has been argued by civil society advocates that a reasonable period (not less than six months) to seek employment in the event of the termination of previous employment and equality as regards access to core benefits are basic rights that should be granted even to temporary migrants to empower their rights and protect them from exploitation.*

Other social rights, for example access to public services, also vary between countries and programmes. An important factor is proof of a close association between the applicant and the country from which payment is claimed – as found in Irish and European law (Box 2). Another issue that arises is the extent to which any contributions made by migrant workers to social security systems are portable back to their origin country. In an increasing number of countries bilateral agreements include provisions for portable benefits. Generally, temporary labour migration programmes deny the right to family reunion.

Box 2 Factors determining access to social benefits in Irish and European law

- Length and continuity of residence
- Length and purpose of any absence
- Nature and pattern of employment
- Applicant's main centre of interest
- Future intentions of applicant as they appeal from all the circumstances

Possibilities to apply for permanent residence for workers admitted on temporary migration programmes are limited. Destination countries use a range of criteria to decide whether to grant permanent immigrant status to migrants employed on temporary work permits, and these may vary over time. The Canadian criteria for eligibility for permanent residence are often cited as good practice (Box 3). Destination countries may also grant temporary migrants permanent residence on non-economic grounds such as marriage to a citizen. A third position is never to grant permanent residence to any – or certain categories of – migrant workers admitted on temporary permits.

Box 3 Eligibility criteria for permanent residence in Canada

The Canadian system for transferring migrants employed on temporary labour programmes into permanent residence is often cited as good practice. To be eligible, applicants must:

- Meet certain minimum work experience requirements

- Prove that they have the funds required for settlement
- Earn enough points on six selection factors – education, language skills, experience, age, arranged employment in Canada and ‘adaptability’

In most settlement countries irregular migrants are excluded from any integration measures; and rely at the local level on support from NGOs, church institutions, and individuals.[\[8\]](#)

What is the relationship between migrant integration and development for different types of migrants?

The impact on human capital development of the lack of integration of migrants into the formal labour market is clear. Research demonstrates that migrant groups are especially prone to poverty and social exclusion. When they are forced into relative poverty this can become a vicious circle, as poverty and exclusion leads in turn to a further set of barriers and obstacles to accessing the labour market including isolation (lack of access to information and networks, physical disability); lack of work experience and references; homelessness; lack of affordable help with caring responsibilities; dependence on the welfare system; crime; mental health, drugs, drinking and other health problems; and prejudice by employers. In this way a lack of integration thus also inhibits the potential of migrants to contribute to development in origin and destination countries.

Local level action by civil society actors can address some of these issues through: supporting sensitivity to the employment potential of, and to the barriers to employment for, immigrant populations; building up sustainable relationships with local employers to support flexible approaches to employment; developing an holistic approach bringing together a variety of agencies to tackle the multi-faceted problems faced by these groups; and providing outreach services to hard-to-reach groups that are isolated from mainstream services in the fields of information, training and entrepreneurship. See Box 4 for some examples from Europe.[\[9\]](#)

Box 4 Examples of the contribution of civil society to migrant integration in Europe

- Fundacion Cear-Consejo de Apoyo a Los Refugiados (Spain) supported Ensename Africa to run a public awareness campaign to highlight the realities of refugee migration, emphasizing the problems faced by migrants and the impact of displacement on their lives.
- The Mother Child Education Foundation based in Turkey has implemented mother and child education initiatives in Germany, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands which targeted Turkish citizens living in these countries and aimed to help parents become more aware of the education system in these countries.
- The Lecco Community Foundation (Italy) provided funding to the Namaste Volunteer Association to provide training for Arab immigrants to help gain access to employment
- The Digital Opportunities Foundation (Germany) supported a website with links and resources for migrants

The development contribution of migrants to their countries of origin through both remittances and returns is closely linked to integration and social and economic protection for migrants.[10] Legal status is an important variable in determining the extent to which migrants make contributions to their country of origin.[11] Irregular status is a significant obstacle to optimizing the development benefits of migration, as irregular migrants are excluded from most public services, social welfare, and the financial services required for safe, credit-attracting remittances and other transfers back home. Some migrants in a vulnerable situation (such as asylum seekers) may also not avail themselves of a facility offered by the authorities of a government they may be seeking asylum from.[12] Irregular status, along with short migration periods, have also been found to be important variables determining the choice of transfer channel for remittances, and the decision to rely on informal rather than formal channels,[13] and it has been demonstrated that there is a shift from informal to formal channels of remittances when policies that enhance integration are put into place.[14] This is significant as research demonstrates a correlation between increasing remittances and multiple options for money transfers.[15] *In this regard there is a development-based argument to support lobbying by civil society groups for regularization programmes.*

Most of the existing evidence does not support the idea of ‘remittance decay’, namely that migrants send home fewer remittances the longer they stay in a destination country.[16] *A more important determinant of remittance decay simply than time spent abroad is the extent to which links are maintained with the origin country, and in this regard civil society has urged governments to foster these linkages, for example by permitting migrants to return temporarily to their origin countries on a regular basis.*[17]

There are two main ways that return can contribute to development in their country of origin. First, returnees often become a direct source of investment in their country of origin, especially where they set up businesses and become self-employed. Second returnees also can bring home human capital, for example knowledge and familiarity with the latest technologies. In both cases there are clear links between integration in destination countries and the extent to which the return of migrants contributes towards development in their origin countries. Migrants with long-term or permanent residence in their host country have been found to be more successful upon return – either temporary or permanent – than temporary migrants. Migrants with education and skills have also been found to be more successful upon return than low-skilled and poorly-educated returning migrants. One of the critical factors that facilitate entrepreneurial activities among returnees is their capacity to save while abroad,[18] supporting the conclusion that contracts should be long enough to allow migrant workers to save.

While there is some evidence for local investments and the transfer of technology by temporary migrants,[19] most studies have found that returning temporary migrants often did not learn new skills abroad especially when they were working in low-skill sectors; and they rarely saved. Many of them were unemployed upon return.[20] *Trade unions and employers organizations in countries of origin can help facilitate*

the reincorporation of returning migrant workers by providing information on the job market and creating support cooperatives.

What is the gender dimension of migrant empowerment and its effects on development?

Women form an increasing proportion of labour migrants and have been shown to make major contributions to household welfare, and education and health, both in destination countries and as senders of remittances.^[21] Yet women face particular barriers to integration.^[22] These relate to migration history (especially for asylum seekers and refugees and for those who have personal difficulties arising from trauma and violence in the origin country); skills and competencies levels upon arrival (language skills, lack of education in the origin country, lack of recognition of qualifications, lack of previous work experience); cultural background, attitudes and motivations (cultural norms and aspiration and attitudes towards work); personal obligations (family structures and norms and dependents); and employer attitudes, knowledge and discrimination (prejudice and discrimination). Furthermore labour market segmentation often occurs along gendered lines, such that women are frequently concentrated in low skilled, unprotected sectors, and more vulnerable to irregular migration and exploitation.

Traditional immigration countries such as Australia and Canada have extensive resettlement support programmes that cater to the special needs of women. Canada also has a longstanding Gender-Based Analysis approach to all new migration policies. In contrast few destination countries in Asia, the Middle East or Africa provide for special integration needs of women. *Civil society can play an important role in supporting the integration of women in destination countries* (Box 5).

Box 5 Examples of the contribution of civil society to the integration of women in Europe

- Compagnia di San Paolo (Italy) supported Associazione Alouanar Onlus in running a project entitled 'family care' in the city of Turin the overall aim of which was to support the integration process for migrant families. It provided a variety of services including a family-run micro-nursery for children aged 0-3 years and a play-circle for children aged 0-6 years.
- The Allen Lane Foundation (UK) funded the Central African Association, South Wales, which encouraged refugee women from Africa to participate in a sewing group with a view to helping them set up their own business.

Civil society has an important role to play in providing information and training both prior to departure and in the destination country to help raise women's awareness of gender-specific risks, and empower them through legal advice, re-skilling, skills upgrading, medical assistance, and social and cultural support. The Philippines for example has established centres abroad to provide personal and vocational development support, re-skilling, training, legal advice and support to runaways. Additionally welfare officers both in the Philippines and abroad tend to be women. Sri Lanka also organizes similar community out-reach services to its women migrant workers abroad.^[23]

Standard contracts are an important means to ensure labour standards for female migrants across bilateral labour agreements. *In the Philippines and Sri Lanka civil society has lobbied for standard contracts as a means to enforce minimum wages for their migrant workers.* The benchmarks established in standard contracts for women migrant workers by the Philippines give particular regard to their potential vulnerability, including abuse and long working hours. UNIFEM works with recruitment agents in Asia, under its Regional Programme on Empowering Women, to negotiate favourable contracts, benefits and working conditions for women, and to inform them of their rights. This has led to increased gender awareness among migrants and agents, and to the establishment of a Covenant of Ethical Conduct and Good Practices of Overseas Employment Service Providers (2005).

Limited research shows that women may also face specific problems in terms of making their contribution to origin countries through remittances or return. Research suggests that a significant obstacle to the involvement in economic, political and social activities revolves around issues related to gender roles and relations. Some women have lost not only their homes and families, but also their economic independence and support networks. Many professional women are unable to find comparable jobs in destination countries and are either forced to take up menial work or stay at home with the children. This situation undermines their self-confidence and increases dependence on their husbands.

Especially where women with families have migrated alone, they often encounter severe social pressure to remit to families at home, leaving themselves poor and vulnerable in destination countries. Women can also face greater obstacles upon return than men, even when return is temporary. This is especially the case where women have worked in industries such as entertainment to which there is a social stigma attached in origin countries.[\[24\]](#) *There is a role for civil society in countries of origin to support returning women reintegrate in the face of such obstacles.*

Issues for further discussion

It seems unlikely that many states will accede to civil society demands that full citizenship is an option even for temporary migrants, when desired. Is it possible for civil society participants at the Global Forum to reach a consensus on acceptable integration levels for temporary migrants short of full citizenship?

How can civil society in origin and destination states work with destination state governments to enhance integration for development? Is it possible to identify examples of best practice that are broadly transferable?

How can civil society contribute to overcoming the obstacles to integration and development for women migrants? Is it possible to identify examples of best practice that are broadly transferable?

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