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EUROMED Migration III, Legal Migration Meeting

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How to make migration work for development? How to achieve a “win-win-win” situation for countries of origin and host countries, including migrants themselves? These questions remain still with no proper answer, three decades after the first dialogue on the migration development nexus was launched. In early 90s, a period of economic prosperity for most countries of destination, the contribution of migrants to the development was reflected to their migration policies, which were welcoming and open to foreign workers.

Today, in times of recession and even economic crisis, the positive role of migrants to the development of host countries is under consideration, if not denied. Highly skilled migrants are the only exception to this generalised approach to migration.

The world has changed radically but unfortunately not in the direction towards a more balanced international economic system. The gap between developed and developing countries persists, the reduction of poverty is still a dream and people continue to migrate mainly out of need and not out of choice.

The state of play concerning the link between migration and development can be reviewed as following;

Host countries recruit highly qualified migrants with a view to meet their labour market needs. Countries of origin often undergo brain drain, or in other words lose their human capital which could boost development. They have high rates of unemployment specifically among their less qualified citizens, who are more inclined to search better opportunities in the rich countries,

In case that developed countries shut down most of the legal migration channels for semi-skilled and low-skilled migrants, people in need try to migrate illegally.

We should keep in mind that both countries of origin and destination are different in terms of both demography and economy, at least in case of the south- north migration. Developed countries suffer underpopulation while developing ones overpopulation. Developed economies are labour low-intensive and capital and knowledge high intensive while developing economies are labour high-intensive, suffer low productivity and investments, characteristics that in combination with brain drain and lack of know-how lead to low competitiveness in the framework of today's globalized market.

Taking into consideration this context, I will try to approach the migration development nexus as an exercise of cooperation between countries of origin and host countries, which, following my suggestion, can better respond to the new socio-economic challenges worldwide.

People migrate in their majority for economic reasons. During the years of economic growth in Europe, jobs were available in almost all sectors of economy, even if they were what we used to call three D jobs (dangerous, dirty, disadvantageous).

Migrants' insertion in the labour market (being sometimes grey or black) guaranteed their 'structural' integration in the host society. The main concern of receiving countries was at that

time how to promote cultural integration, by overcoming obstacles such as language learning, active participation in the social and civic life and sharing of the so called European values with new comers.

Low skilled or semi-skilled migrants were not excluded from reception programs and even irregular migrants had an opportunity to find a job. In southern European countries like Greece, Spain and Italy, unauthorised migrants could acquire legal residence and work permit through specific regularisation programs.

Nowadays, jobs are difficult to find not only for new comers or second generation migrants but for natives themselves in host countries.

Europe opts either for highly skilled migrants or in smaller numbers for those who can at least respond to specific labour market demands such as care-giving, catering, tourism and services.

Only those which have standardised and recognised skills, following certain professional criteria, linguistic ones included, have chances to obtain a residence and work permit allowing them to make a living, to have access under certain conditions ,to family reunification or to remit back home.

At that point, I would like to clarify that I don't refer to highly skilled migrants who are always attractive for host countries but to the less privileged ones who have to prove their ability to contribute in the western economies.

How can countries of origin and receiving countries assist these people to migrate if they decide so, without risking their lives or losing their dignity. How can they assist them to avoid smuggling, trafficking, detention and forced return, in case they violate migration legislation of the receiving countries.

I will first refer separately to policies that, in my understanding, countries of origin and destination countries can adopt in order to achieve these objectives.

As countries of origin are concerned, the main challenge they have to face is the elimination of illiteracy, being either formal or functional.

Illiterate migrants are more inclined to become victims of trafficking, they are less capable to stand for their rights and learn the language of their country of residence and they can be more easily exploited by their employers, if they find a job in times of crisis.

Host countries, in their turn, should allow semi skilled and low skilled migrants to orderly migrate.

Vocational training constitutes a sine qua non condition for getting employed in developed countries and as it seems to me a most powerful opportunity to foster cooperation between countries of origin and host countries with a view to achieve orderly migration, to boost development and to protect migrants' rights.

Countries of origin and destination are more often than not linked either because of geographical reasons(they belong to the same region) or due to historical ones (excolonies, traditional allays etc).They sometimes have bilateral agreements allowing legal migration. Certain receiving countries have favourable migration policies such as quota systems for specific countries of origin.

Agreements providing for legal channels of migration should be further developed. The cooperation between the official employment agencies and the training institutions in countries of origin and receiving countries is necessary for matching demand and supply as well as for identifying skills and standards which migrants should dispose of in order to get the available jobs.

Training can start in the country of origin in cooperation with the receiving country. EU m-s can use for this purpose, what in the EU jargon are called pre-departure measures. Currently m-s are financing through the European Integration Fund, language courses, civic orientation and information on the everyday life to potential migrants.

Within the next multi-annual programming of the new European Fund of Migration, Asylum and Integration m-s will have the choice to finance pre-departure measures for migrant's preparation to enter the labour market.

Pre departure measures can become a tool for vocational training which, in my understanding is of equal importance as having elementary linguistic skills. Been properly prepared for the professional profile one should have in order to be efficient and productive in practicing ones job is of paramount importance for migrants smooth insertion in the labour market of his/her country of residence.

The case of Philippines, one of the very few countries of origin which dispose of an emigration policy and offer tailored made training to its citizens who intend to migrate in order to respond to the skills and standards of receiving countries is extremely interesting to be examined from this point of view.

I strongly believe, that if countries of origin and receiving countries can join their efforts in training would be migrants, the results will be multiplied.

Mobility Partnerships can also create conducive conditions for a broad multilateral cooperation between the signing parties which might provide for vocational training and matching demand and supply.

However, in all the above mentioned frameworks, within which training and job placement can be implemented, with the exception of Philippines, the responsibility lies on the host EU countries.

A more genuine and on equal footing cooperation between countries of origin and destination, calls for a shared responsibility on migration management, on the integration in the country of establishment and on fighting against trafficking and smuggling.

Shared responsibility can generate shared development. Regular migrants ,well integrated in the host country can remit, move back and forward, invest under conducive conditions, transfer skills, know-how and innovation , create jobs and in general boost development back home.

A more active role of countries of origin at the pre departure stage, including information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration and the opportunities of orderly one, might reduce as well the pressures of receiving countries for readmission agreements, since joint efforts can tackle or even prevent unauthorised migration

Last but not least, as I already mentioned cooperation in the field of employment and vocational training can boost development to the countries of origin through remittances and skill-gain.

Qualified migrants who can further develop their skills through continuing training both in the country of origin and the host country can remit more. We are all aware that the global volume of official remittances in developing countries is more than the total volume of Official Development Assistance and about half of the volume of foreign direct investments.

Among the main recipient countries are Morocco, Egypt, Turkey and the Philippines.

What is even more important is that skilled migrants can voluntary return, following a successful migration project and invest their professional, economic and social capital, acquired abroad, to their countries of origin.

And while the impact of remittances on the macroeconomic development of recipient countries is still a matter of debate, the return of skilled migrants, bringing not only their savings but as well innovation in the traditional sectors of economy in home countries is a major stimulus for development and can foster growth, provided there is sufficient surplus production capacity.

I think that the time has come to refresh the debate about brain-drain, brain-gain, brain waste, brain circulation, that is to say, about highly skilled or "super migrants", who –in any case– find easily their way to successful and well paid careers in developed countries, by re-initiating the topic of "common" migrants, who can provide services and goods in other sectors than those of knowledge and high technology or informatics.

This approach does not intend to underestimate the contribution of highly skilled migrants to developed economies or the negative impact of brain drain to the development of third countries. It is about introducing into the discourse on migration facts and everyday reality.

Are exclusively the highly qualified people inclined to migrate? Semi skilled or low skilled poor people constitute the main bulk of migrants all over the world, searching for better opportunities and using illegal channels if no other alternative is at hand.

Selected migration (la fameuse migration choisie), which is currently 'à la mode' will never become the only migratory option.

A feasible way to avoid as much as possible what in French is called "migration subie", the unwanted migration which is often the root of the trouble between host countries and countries of origin, is to foster cooperation for matching demand and supply and for sharing profits and challenges of migration.

Since cooperation is always a matter of political will and decision making and this forum is an expert's one, I hope that the thoughts I shared with you might give food for thought to policy makers of all parts involved and I will from now on follow the dominating mentality which gives emphasis on best practices, result oriented measures and lessons learned.

I will give you concrete examples of skill matching in Greece.

The majority of migrants in the country originate from the neighbouring Albania. In the 1980s, when the first inflows of Albanians arrived in Greece, the Greek agriculture was declining, abandoned by the great majority of natives. Young peasants were leaving their farms looking for employment in the sector of services. The contribution of Albanian migrants to the revival of the primary sector and the sector of construction is broadly recognised by the public opinion and the researchers. Albanians supplied the agricultural labour market with missing skills and fulfilled labour shortages in the field.

What were the assets that made Albanians more useful and welcomed in Greece comparing to migrants of other nationalities?

They had experience from similar crops in their home country, they had similar working mentality with the Greek farmers, they shared the culture and the values of the Greek society, coming from a neighbour Balkan country with many common ways of living and thinking and they learned easily the Greek language.

Most of them were irregular in the beginning but were the ones which took most advantage of the regularisation programs that have been implemented by the Greek governments.

Many of them are permanently established with their families in Greece, a great number are well off and they have their own small business, others have returned home or left for other European countries due to the recent economic crisis.

Albanian migration to Greece is an ideal, a 'success' story, which did not entail any integration problems to be tackled with by the Greek governments, as in case of other EU countries in the 1980s and 1990s.

We nevertheless admit that this was rather incidental and not the result of a planned and well organised migration, integration and developmental policy. It came across an unusual conjunction of circumstances, which does not however undermine the importance of the example and the lessons learned.

Greece has taken a couple of initiatives to facilitate orderly migration from Moldova and Georgia, through pre-departure measures within the European Integration Fund.

These were two countries of origin of mainly female migrants, working as care givers for elderly and children or as domestic workers.

Given the nature of their employment (needed skills were considered to be part of their social role playing, determined by their gender) emphasis was put to the acquirement of the necessary linguistic skills and the familiarisation with the Greek way of living.

These programs can be show-cased as good practices in the field, following the indicators we have fixed to assess them (the number of would be migrants who assisted successfully the relevant courses).

Nevertheless, I am persuaded that for the years to come, bearing in mind the economic crisis and the high rates of unemployment in Europe, pre-departure measures should be more employment oriented, targeting to match the skills as well as demand and supply in source and receiving countries.

Another element which should be taken into consideration for maximising the effectiveness not only of these measures but of the cooperation between countries of origin and host countries, is the geographical vicinity and the cultural bonds which entails for populations sharing a certain region, as in case of the Mediterranean basin.

The cooperation on migration at regional level is easier to be launched and followed up, as shows international practice.

It is worth mentioning that although Greece is situated in the northern Mediterranean region it remains a country of destination for migrants coming from the Balkans rather than from the southern coast of 'mare nostrum'.

Migrants originating from the Magreb are under-represented in the country, compared to those from the Balkans and the ex Soviet Union region (Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Armenia), Morocco being the exception the last few years.

Unfortunately most of the Moroccans in Greece are unauthorised. Since no official cooperation has been established between the two countries and it is to be examined if this might be a side effect of the existing gap in the field.

On the contrary, migrants coming from Egypt, just to refer to countries represented in this session, are more numerous and in a large number regular, probably due to historical bonds (the establishment of a Greek historical community in Alexandria and the Cairo) and undoubtedly due to the bilateral agreement on migration issues.

I would like to conclude my presentation with an appeal to source and receiving countries to establish and enhance the cooperation in the field of labour market and skill circulation with a view to achieve orderly migration, the wellbeing of migrants and the promotion of the development for all.