



Infosheet No 5

Migrants' contributions globally

At a time when discussions on migration and migrants are often negatively skewed, it is important to reflect on the contributions that migrants have made, both to their communities of origin and destination. Chapter 5 begins by describing the key concepts related to contributions, while providing an analytical framework in the context of a rich body of academic and policy work on the topic. The chapter then describes and analyses migrants' contributions globally in reference to three aspects: sociocultural, civic-political and economic.

Emerging impediments to the recognition of migrants' contributions globally are also discussed, before outlining the implications for policy deliberations and for further research.

In an ideal world, there would be no need for this chapter to be written. The topic itself would be so obvious and uncontroversial as to render it irrelevant. And yet, it is more important now than at any other time in modern, post-war history to reflect on migrants' contributions to countries and communities around the world. Simply put, this is because it is becoming increasingly difficult to hear balanced perspectives in public debates on important policy issues, such as international migration. Given this context, this chapter is not about quantitative cost-benefit analyses of migration. Instead, the chapter has looked at the often neglected but core determinant of the migrant(s) as contributors to communities of destination as well as those back in their places of origin.

KEY FINDINGS

Today in the twenty-first century, migrants may be better able to make contributions to these domains than they were in the last century (or prior) largely because of the phenomenal improvements in development that have taken place in most countries, as well as strong recognition of the need to ensure that global development and stability are underpinned by human rights.

Yet, this chapter also drives home the point that the contributions of migrants to societies, politics and the economies globally have not only been largely overlooked, downplayed and taken for granted, but also hindered, through proliferation of disruption and disinformation against migrants. Recent research and analysis show that some forms of technology are impacting our media, social and political interactions, and

are becoming more pressing for governance, both in relation to the regulation of newer forms of technology and how they are shaping democratic processes. The question therefore remains as to what would be a balanced strategy to make the contributions optimally, if not maximally, visible, acknowledged and accepted on the global and national policy agendas. The following implications for policy, practice and research are offered:

- Balanced public discussions require greater scrutiny of “fake” social media content, including by promoting a better understanding of the responsibilities that go hand-in-hand with free speech. This is currently a “hot” issue in many parts of the world, with stricter regulatory regimes being actively considered, or having been put in place.
- There is clearly a place for greater emphasis on migrant-centric research and analyses, as well as research on the social media activists’ influence on bolstering unbalanced political discourse (and ultimately political decisions). Ideally, this research would examine the impacts of a wide range of distorted messaging, noting that existing studies outlined in this chapter indicate that the negative, anti-migrant interest groups appear to be increasingly using social media platforms to great effect, at times regardless of accuracy or truthful representations.
- Both historically and contemporarily, there is strong evidence that migrants have made substantial contributions in a variety of settings and in a variety of important ways. However, it is also clear that there are structural limits that act to circumscribe migrants’ contributions in ways that are counterproductive for communities, States and migrants. The most obvious examples exist with respect to irregular or undocumented migrants who may be doing low-prestige, underpaid work that is, in many cases, nevertheless much needed. Structural reforms combined with migration policy initiatives (such as regularization and enhanced regular pathways) offer the opportunity to optimize migrants’ contributions and support sectors and communities.
- There is room to build on innovations delivered by new technology – such as mobile money apps – to help facilitate migrants’ contributions in origin and destination settings. Migrant tech has the ability to support migrants all the way through the migration cycle, including as a means of supporting safe, regular and orderly migration. Further support of migrant tech start-ups is one practical approach, noting the work already underway in this area.
- There is considerable room to improve recognition of the enormous value of sociocultural and civic-political contributions of migrants in societies and globally, including in political, media and research spheres. While this can be challenging, the tendency to focus on economic issues without fully acknowledging the importance of other aspects leads to a transactional view of societies and nation States. Expanding research, for example, on the influence migrants can have as positive leaders (for example, the “Salah effect”), as well as on the relationship between culinary knowledge transfer and health and well-being, would enable policymakers and general audiences to better appreciate the important contributions migrants have already made to modern life globally, as well as what further contributions they will offer.

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