



MIGRATION DRC TRAINING DAY
RETURN MIGRATION: POLICY OPTIONS AND POLICY EFFECTS

Tues January 13th,
William Sangster Room, Central Hall, London SW1

Event report

Session 1: Return Migration: The Development Context

RICHARD BLACK – Sussex Centre for Migration Research

Presentation synopsis: The presentation provided a broad overview of the topic of return migration, including an introduction to theories of migrant return and a discussion of research carried out by the Migration DRC on return migration. Richard discussed different types of return, noting that most migrants who return home do so without government assistance. He noted that at least three actors have a primary interest in return migration, including the host country, the country of origin, and returnees themselves, and that these actors are likely to have different ideas about what makes return migration 'successful' or 'sustainable'. He suggested that sustainable return could be evaluated (ideally one year after return had taken place) according to several criteria: that the desire of returnees to re-emigrate is no higher than the general desire to emigrate of people in the country; that, at a minimum, returnees' socio-economic status and fear of persecution is no greater than the rest of the population; and that the receiving country's socio-economic conditions and levels of violence and persecution are not significantly worsened by return. Additionally, he noted that the context of return is important, including the profile of returnees, whether they receive assistance and the size of countries of origin (as smaller countries can be more affected by an influx of returnees).

He noted that several Migration DRC studies had attempted to gauge the sustainability of return. A recently completed study of assisted return to Sri Lanka carried out by Mike Collyer had shown that there was a high desire to re-emigrate among many returnees, and that a number of them had had difficulties in setting up successful business ventures at home. A 2004 study on assisted return to Kosovo and Bosnia similarly found a high desire to re-emigrate, that many returnees were poor (not unlike the rest of the population), and that those who had had secure status abroad, or who returned without assistance, felt most insecure upon return. A 2001 study on return to Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, by contrast, focused mostly on migrants who had returned without government assistance. The study found evidence that some returnees invested in business activities at home (particularly in Ghana) – and that returnees who were doing this had usually worked abroad and accumulated savings. Return assistance funds were not found to be a relevant factor in these returnees deciding to start businesses.

[Reader note: see 'further reading' document included on event report web-page for more information on these studies].

Discussion:

One participant expressed surprise that the Migration DRC's study on return to Kosovo and Bosnia had found that some returnees felt less secure upon return, as this had differed in other

studies on return. Another participant pointed out with regard to the Migration DRC's study on return to Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, that return assistance is often quite important if migrants do not have savings or return to family-based support networks. Another participant pointed out that the significant cost of the initial migration process is often an important factor in delaying migrant return, as migrants stay in host countries to pay off debts incurred to go abroad. There was also a question as to the potential role that diaspora could play in return.

Richard noted that in the case of Bosnia, one could hypothesize that people who were secure while abroad may have felt less secure when they returned home to a relatively insecure environment. He noted that the Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire study was a specific look at 300 migrants, and in this context assisted return was found not to be a factor in migrants starting businesses – and may differ in other cases. He noted that the high cost of migration is noted in the Sri Lanka project. Finally, he said that while the definition of 'diaspora' is ambiguous, social networks are undoubtedly very important in channelling migration, and it is likely that in many cases this also influences return.

Group activity:

Participants were split up into five groups. Each group considered the following questions for a particular region or country.

1. What is the scale of return to this region/country, and over what time period has return been of particular UK policy interest?
2. What is the scope for individual monitoring of return? Who could do this? What would be the most interesting questions?
3. What comparative data is available that would allow experience of returnees to be placed in context?

There has been a conflict-driven increase in immigration to the UK from several countries in Central and East Africa, including from the Democratic Republic of Congo (especially from 1998-2004), Angola (1992-2002), and Zimbabwe (especially in 2008). The high level of immigration has led these countries to become a target focus for migrant return of the UK government, including assisted voluntary return (AVR). The most interesting questions for monitoring return would be why nationals come to the UK in the first place, and what motivates them to return. It would appear that assisted voluntary packages are not a significant motivating factor driving return. For example, assisted return to Zimbabwe from the UK has remained steady, despite the deteriorating situation there, suggesting that return may be motivated by family issues, including a death or illness in the family.

In the case of Sudan, there have been about 12-15 cases of AVR from the UK in the past year, and a number of these have been entrepreneurs who have started businesses back home. It would be good to monitor these migrants both against other migrants who haven't returned home and versus non-migrants in Sudan. While a meaningful evaluation of the sustainability of return is not likely to be possible after six months, finding returnees after a year is likely to be more difficult.

For Asia, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan and China, given the very different country contexts in this region, there were very different responses to the questions posed. In countries such as China, the return of 1,000 people is not a large issue. Migrant remittances are important to a number of countries in the region, including Bangladesh. There has been a low uptake of AVR to Bangladesh, but an IOM country officer has been assigned to the country recently and this has resulted in an increase of uptake. In the case of IOM administered

programmes, migrant monitoring is done six and 12 months after return, although this takes place on a voluntary basis.

The UK's priority for Ghana is to return foreign national prisoners and failed asylum seekers. The Ghanaian government wants to encourage the return of irregular migrants in the UK, many of whom are relatively well educated but have overstayed the right to remain in the UK, to fill skill gaps in Ghana. In this regard, they are hoping that the UK government will do more to provide incentives for this group of migrants to return. There is also an issue of a significant number of Ghanaians being returned from other countries in Africa, usually with no return transitional assistance. The most interesting questions to ask would be to investigate what role families play in migrants' decisions to leave, and return. The role of the current financial crisis in influencing migrants to return would also be of interest.

About 1,000 people are returned to Jamaica from the UK every year, and these returnees have a mixed profile, including prisoners released from UK prisons. This latter type of return has been an issue since 2006, when the issue of foreign national prisoners not being deported after their release caused negative media headlines. There are currently about 1,000 Jamaican citizens in UK jails, so this will be a continuing issue in the next several years. Returnees can be monitored relatively easily, and the UK government is supporting some reintegration activities in Jamaica, including social reintegration programmes for criminal offenders and halfway houses for returnees with no families to return to. There is a large desire among these returnees to re-emigrate, however, and this is unsurprising as many of them have family in the UK.

One participant noted that it is important to think about which migrants return schemes should be pitched at. Another noted that in the case of Ghana, it's extremely important for migrants to return to the country with resources to help support their families, as families often invest substantial funds in order to send migrants abroad. This is where assistance packages may prove useful.

Session Two: Deportation as an Element of Return Migration to the Caribbean

MARGARET BYRON – Kings College London

Presentation synopsis: This presentation looked at the human and social consequences of deportation to Jamaica. Margaret began her presentation by drawing out the historical migration context of Jamaica, and the Caribbean islands more generally. Her sources for the study of return have included the censuses of England and Wales, the International Passenger Survey, and censuses conducted in Jamaica itself.

Deportation has become an increasing element of the return process, with on average about 2,500 people deported back to Jamaica each year. A large proportion of deportations are from the US, which has been less open to negotiation over this issue. Indeed, between 1995 and 2005, 30,000 criminals were deported from the US alone, and the impact of this must be gauged in relation to the total population of Jamaica, which is only about 4 million. In general, however, the country has been seeing a net loss of its population.

A question on terminology was raised at this point -- were these 'deportations' or 'removals'. The UK government distinguishes between these two in that removals could apply for re-entry, with the possibility of reapplication dependent on the reason for removal, and return possible

on a sliding scale. Margaret was quoting the language used in the media in Jamaica, which cited these as 'deportations'.

Margaret's interest lay in what becomes of the deported in Jamaica. While some are rescued and reintegrated into the family and society, others are quickly adopted by local gangs, or left to fend for themselves on the streets of Jamaica. Countries deporting people should be concerned about the outcomes for the states they return to, Margaret argued, as they threaten national security in countries that have far fewer resources to contain crime.

Group Discussions:

Questions were posed to participants about the impact of deportation, both in terms of its transnational implications and its impact on local communities. Participants were also encouraged to think about policy approaches for countries of origin receiving deportees, and how a social justice framework might be integrated into deportation practices.

The discussions here centred around impact on countries deported to, the onus of responsibility on countries deporting, and the lives of the individuals concerned. Would the appropriate reaction be to stop deporting, or supporting the country to which criminals are being deported? If criminals or those overstaying their visas or travelling irregularly were allowed to stay on in the destination country, it might send the wrong message – that they were being rewarded for doing wrong. On the other hand, if criminals, for instance, had completed their sentence and then were deported to a place where they no longer had friends or connections, it would be akin to a double sentence.

Value was placed on understanding the countries of origin in terms of how far these supported the policy interests of the returning country, what family and other social structures were like, and varying the type of assistance based on how long people have been in the deporting country etc, though these measures would then have to be rolled out across the board to all countries, not just Jamaica.

There is also the fraught issue of the distinction between voluntary returns and deportations or forced removals. If, for instance, all categories are travelling on the same plane, the anonymity of those voluntarily returning could become compromised. Furthermore, sometimes those deported for small crimes, like drug mules, are already the most vulnerable in society – and are largely women.

Social justice might be met if those deported were provided assistance to integrate back into the society they came from, as the impact on the receiving country in terms of social disharmony is quite high. On the other hand, while help may be offered, host countries cannot walk away from the problem and must look after their own citizens.

Also to bear in mind are size and context. Return and policies on return will have a much higher impact on smaller societies as compared to more populous countries for which it would hardly be an issue. The receiving country would be concerned about the problems return generates, but sending countries might find points of negotiation to make return more acceptable -- for example, opportunities return might present (e.g. the government of Ghana welcoming back irregular migrants to Northern countries as these are usually skilled people), or other political or economic areas that might offer leverage.

Session Three: Management and Reintegration of Return Migrants: The Role of Return Programmes

MIKE COLLYER – Sussex Centre for Migration Research

Presentation synopsis: The presentation provided an overview of assisted migration programmes of European countries and focused on a recently completed research project on assisted voluntary return from the UK to Sri Lanka. European assisted return programmes, including programmes in the Netherlands and France in the mid-1970s through mid-1980s, and Spain's programme which began in 2008, have all had several common features. They have offered migrants money to return to their countries of origin, but they have had a small uptake as assistance packages have not induced migrants to return home. Moreover, efforts to integrate return and development – through providing returnees with funds to start businesses, for example – have had limited success in most cases. In all cases, attempts to meet targets of returnees have been largely fruitless.

The Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) in the UK has returned 989 people to Sri Lanka between December 2002 and January 2008. The programme provides returnees with travel support, a relocation grant (£500) and in kind support. In his study, Mike interviewed 53 of these Sri Lankan returnees, all of whom were illegally resident in the UK. The ethnic profile of the interviewees was 82 per cent Tamil, 15 percent Muslim and 3 per cent Sinhalese. He found that the main reason that people returned was family, and the majority of the migrants were married men who had left their families behind in Sri Lanka. Overall, migrants' main reason for returning with VARRP was that it eased the significant documentation problems these migrants would otherwise have faced in returning. Most returnees opted for assistance grants to help them start small businesses in Sri Lanka, but the initial findings of the study suggest that a large number of these businesses were failing, which was partly related to a deteriorating security situation in the country. There was also a large desire by many migrants to re-emigrate.

Discussion: One participant expressed surprise at the study's findings, and mentioned that business clusters have been established in Sri Lanka to assist returnee businesses. Other questions were posed about whether VARRP ever rejects business plans proposed by returnees, whether business training provided by IOM for returnees is adequate, and whether business failure is widespread through the country. Participants also queried whether or not business failures were based on security problems, what people did if businesses failed, and whether the study had disaggregated findings for different sizes of businesses.

Mike noted that the analysis of the study's findings was still in its initial stages, and that more analysis is needed to draw out many of the answers to the questions posed. He said that the security situation had unquestionably had a detrimental effect on businesses, including in business clusters. Returnees were given a level of advice and support by IOM, including 2-3 day courses, but it was unclear whether or not this was adequate. Mike also mentioned the high regard with which returnees held the personnel at IOM – which was nearly universal among returnees surveyed. People who failed in their business ventures worked in a diverse range of jobs, including working for NGOs, and only a small number of returnees (perhaps 3 per cent) could be described as destitute. For the most part, returnee businesses employed only 1-2 people, and it was rare for the businesses to have more than five employees, although one returnee had started a construction company which employed around 150 people and was building houses for the Red Cross.

Group activity: in this activity, each group of event participants considered a specific issue related to return programmes.

The goal of assisted return programmes were seen to vary for different actors. In the case of the UK government, the goal is to show that government isn't just about forced return. It is also important from the perspective of return migration being carried out in a discreet manner, in a way that does not capture negative media attention. For migrants, return programmes allow them to return home with a measure of dignity, and assistance funds cushion their transition to their home countries.

There are numerous actors who have an interest in return programmes. The list included, but was not necessarily limited to: returnees, host and receiving governments, IOM and other groups which facilitate return, families and communities of migrants (which may stand to lose the benefit of remittances if migrants return from abroad), irregular migrants (who may have no simple way of leaving host countries), and NGOs and civil society actors (including migrant groups in host countries and development actors in receiving countries).

The concerns of the distinct actors involved in return programmes were seen to be diverse. For governments, issues include how to make return sustainable, how to measure success (given that target numbers of returnees haven't been reached in the past) and how to carry out return programmes in light of negative taxpayer opinions toward public expenditure on migrants. For individuals, there is a question of whether they are getting what they were promised out of return programmes, whether they can return home without losing face, and whether return is compatible with their plans for the long-term future. For receiving countries, there are issues surrounding how many migrants are coming back (relative the overall population) and what the profile of these migrants is (foreign national prisoners as compared to skilled irregular migrants). For groups like IOM, there are concerns about whether or not they have adequate resources and manpower to make return 'sustainable'.

Policies that are specifically designed for different return contexts might better address actors' concerns. There is an issue of how much assistance is enough. As policy currently stands, VARRP provides the same assistance for return to all countries, even though there are great differences in what resources are needed in different country contexts. It is apparent from the Sri Lanka study that one important aspect of VARRP is that it enables people to return by providing them with legal documents, and that this, rather than monetary support, is important.

The success rate of the Sri Lankan programme was also discussed. The high failure of businesses in Sri Lanka raises the question of whether or not tax-payer money should be used on such a programme. It might be worthwhile to look to other successful programmes to see what models they use, and if there are lessons for the Sri Lankan context. One point that should be noted about VARRP, however, is that since its establishment in 2002 there has been a steady annual incline in the number of returns, whereas previously numbers of return had been quite erratic.

One participant pointed out that in the case of Kerala, India, the most successful returning migrants do not necessarily invest in businesses, but rather invest in other areas such as real estate or schooling which may have a greater return in the long run than a small business does.

Session Four: Transnational Lives: Beyond Return

KAVERI HARRISS AND FILIPPO OSELLA – Department of Anthropology, University of Sussex

Kaveri and Filippo presented an overview of research they are about to undertake on transnationalism in the context of Punjab-UK migration as part of a three-year study under the Trans-Net programme of the European Commission. The study examines the continuing links maintained across borders, spreading back not just to the country of origin but also to other locations the group might have migrated to. Rather than return, migrants here move back and forth between locations, effecting political, socio-cultural, economic and educational transformations between and over generations. The research seeks to answer how migrants' activities across national borders emerge, function and change, and how they are related to the processes of governance in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Discussion: Three questions were posed to the audience in terms of the potential within transnationalism for meeting developmental objectives, both within countries of origin and destination; the challenges posed in terms of citizenship and entitlement to movement, and relevance to the work of the ministries/departments represented at the event.

Only a minimal, if any, role was envisaged for the government in harnessing developmental potential, as it seemed to happen any way, through remittances, business links, investment, student flows and cultural benefits. It was argued, though, that any sort of restriction on movement made it difficult to realise the full potential migration could bring. The challenges, however, are many, ranging from issues of social cohesion and balancing security interests, to differences in definitions of citizenship and nationality across countries, and the problem of some countries not granting dual citizenship. Entitlements to movement sometimes made it difficult to set policy – for example, the City is particularly sensitive to changes in tax rates, and there is a fear that the most productive migrants will up and leave in a moment of crisis, such as the current recession.

Some of the issues not discussed but raised included transnationalism as an agency shaping migration flows (particularly relevant in the context of migration to the Middle East, for instance, where settlement is not an option); ways in which circulation could be made possible; and the contributions of different generations to development.

Closing Remarks

RICHARD BLACK – Sussex Centre for Migration Research

Richard concluded the event by reviewing three key areas of return migration that had been covered: objectives of return for different actors; contexts of return; and whether return is sustainable.

The objectives of return clearly vary for different actors. For the UK government, these include cost effectiveness, that it is done discretely out of the media spotlight, and that it is seen as a gesture of goodwill. For migrants, it is important that they are able to return with dignity and with their livelihoods intact. For receiving countries, objectives include harnessing the potential for development, although in cases where the receiving country has a very large population, return is likely to be less of a policy concern.

In terms of context, migration can be seen as an ongoing historical process. Few countries have not been touched in some way by migration and in many cases migration may be linked

to strong historical circumstances. It would be unreasonable to expect return programmes to convince people not to re-emigrate, particularly when they retain links abroad. The return programme might be deemed a success if the level of re-migration of returnees is on par with the levels of migration from the country. Similarly, the business success rate of returnees' businesses must be judged in relation to the success rate of other businesses in the countries they return to. In some cases migrants are returning to a rather bleak reality where either there is a bad business climate, or people are trying to leave the country for other reasons. What is vital is that assisted return programmes are run with professionalism, ensuring the dignity of migrants. Indeed, this might be more important than economic viability, though there is need to pay attention to the economic side too.

In terms of the sustainability of return, there is the question of what this is measured against – the context of those who never left, or those who left and did not return. The Migration DRC's studies in this area have been relatively small in scale. Inevitably, the sustainability of return involves assessing what people are going back to, and what they are losing by going home. Moreover, the notion that migrants are able to retain their mobility in the future might also be considered as a basis for the success of return.