

MIGRANTS IN COUNTRIES IN CRISIS

RESEARCH

Supporting an Evidence-Based
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Cooperative State Action



RESEARCH BRIEF

MIGRANTS IN COUNTRIES IN CRISIS INITIATIVE

Long-Term Socio-Economic Implications of 'Crisis-Induced' Return Migration on Countries of Origin

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SUMMARY

This Research Brief evaluates the potential long-term socio-economic implications of return migration on countries of origin in the 'post-crisis' phase because both the circumstances and consequences of return during 'ordinary times' are likely to be different from crisis-induced return. Because of the dearth of available data on the micro-, meso-, and macro- level outcomes of return resulting from conflicts or natural disasters in host countries, the literature on return in 'ordinary times' is used as an entry point. Given the different historical, political, economic and social contexts of countries affected by crises and the countries of origins to which migrants return, this Research Brief proposes key avenues for investigation.

The impact of crisis on migrants will vary depending on a wide range of factors such as the economic stability and geo-political positioning of the origin or host country, the high-profile (or low-profile) nature of the crisis and resulting external responses, the socio-economic status of migrants, their relationships with non-migrant populations and with the origin state or host state, as well as migrants' "preparedness" and "resource mobilisation" (Cassarino, 2004), which is particularly relevant for crisis-induced returns. Furthermore, the long-term consequences of crisis on host or origin countries and on migrants themselves differ according to migrants' social qualifiers such as age, gender and legal status.

Return migrants, regardless of the circumstances of their return or their socio-economic status, may or may not bring back human capital (skills), social capital (networks abroad) and financial capital (savings) though it has been rather difficult to measure the actual impact of these transfers (Ammassari and Black, 2001: 25-30). Therefore, while it is impossible to cover all the possible outcomes of crisis-induced return, this Research Brief explores likely scenarios emanating from desk-based research for the European Union-funded Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) research component examining six case studies, namely: Côte d'Ivoire, Lebanon, South Africa, Libya, Thailand and Central African Republic.

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

It is important to state at the outset that return migration to countries of origin will have varying consequences for households, communities and states, depending on who returns, for how long and how prepared they are for that return. Return has both a spatial and a temporal quality, and can be divided between temporary return and permanent return (Ammassari and Black, 2001: 21). Migrants may return for short, medium, long or cyclical periods of time and may classify as “occasional, seasonal or temporary returnees” (Sinatti, 2011: 154) depending on prevailing circumstances in the country of origin, including, but not limited to: 1) political (in) stability in the country of origin; 2) career advancement (or lack thereof) in the country of origin; 3) poor or favourable work environments in the country of origin; 4) job mobility (or lack thereof) in the country of origin; 5) the availability or unavailability of modern equipment in the country of origin; 6) and the standards of living in the country of origin (Changgui and Zweig, 1995: 3).

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Chadians leave the Central African Republic (CAR) en route back to Chad. This was the 19th evacuation flight conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for Third Country Nationals (TCNs) exiting CAR.
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Migrants' access to different forms of capital and their resource profiles may create different 'types' of return or non-return. For instance, migrants who have established positions in the host country and are relatively economically and socially secure and privileged may differ from those dependent on precarious wage labour who are excluded from or on the margins of the host society. The return or non-return of migrants from these latter groups is likely to have different long-term impacts on the origin or host country than the return or non-return of those relatively more privileged depending on the opportunity structures available to them.

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In addition to the impacts that can be attributed to the return of a particular 'type' of migrant, there may also be broader impacts that are associated with the (temporary or permanent) loss of a migration destination, in the case of return. These may include new opportunities for people to invest in their country of origin while abandoning ideas of further emigration, or it could stimulate the rise of new destinations for potential migrants. Scale and area of settlement are also important factors when considering the broader implications of migrant returns on countries of origin. For instance, an exodus of 1,000 formerly Libya-based migrants from Ghana returning to the bustling urban hub of Accra may or may not have as much of an impact as that of a similar number of Burkinabé migrants returning to a village of a smaller size in Burkina Faso.

Thus, we may assume the long-term impacts of return migration to be proportional to the population size and the size of the economy of the country of origin. Long-term consequences of crisis-induced return may also vary considerably depending on migrants' preparedness, particularly their willingness and/or readiness to return (repatriating savings and assets, securing identity documents, etc.) (Cassarino, 2004: 271-275). As Cassarino posits, “the higher the level of preparedness, the greater the ability of returnees to mobilise

resources autonomously and the stronger their contribution to development” (2004: 275). Although this assertion also applies to non-return, it can be argued that the level of preparedness for return during times of crises may likely be very limited.

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RETURN OF SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY MOBILE MIGRANTS

Socially and economically mobile migrants, broadly defined, may be successful business owners or well-paid, formal sector employees. Before a crisis in their countries of settlement, they may be well connected to the ruling elites or at least embedded in the rising middle-classes. They may also have strong political and/or economic ties to the country of origin through their partisan support and investment assets. Furthermore, the return of elite migrants implies a return of skills and experience – ‘brain gain’ – where migrants come back with ideas and experiences that can build or rejuvenate enterprise. Nevertheless, the ability of skilled and elite migrants to contribute to socio-economic development will largely depend on the opportunity structures available in countries of origin.

Based on her study of Ghanaian and Ivorian elite return migration from North America and Europe, Ammassari (2009) posits that elite migrants seem to have more chances of impacting their nations of origin by accessing positions of authority and influence upon return, given their human, financial, and social capital accumulated abroad (Ammassari, 2009: 4). Although the adjustment of return can be difficult, return migrants can be seen as transforming “traditional modes of social, economic, and political organisation and of long-established value systems” (Ammassari, 2009: 5). While Ammassari’s research focuses on non-crisis induced return migration, in which the development potential of returnees may or may not be different from those fleeing conflict or natural disasters, her study is still relevant for assessing the potential impact of elite migrant returns in the ‘post-crisis’ phase. In the study, Ammassari evaluates the impact of return at three different levels. At the micro level, Ivorian and Ghanaian return migrants seemed to have improved relative income levels, thereby being satisfied with their working conditions and appreciating a higher quality of life in the country of origin. At the meso level, return migrants provided support to their families and kin amidst traditionally prevailing expectations and pressures, further

introducing new knowledge, skills and ideas in the workplace. And at the macro level, return migrants promoted socio-economic and political transformation through the creation of new businesses and the establishment of various community development initiatives. Ammassari’s study suggests that the development potential of relatively well-off return migrants is more meaningful when these migrants have acquired educational qualifications and relevant work experience abroad.

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However, there are a number of potentially negative impacts of the return of economically and socially mobile migrants to countries of origin, beginning with migrants’ own inability to quickly integrate into the labour market, or precarious self-employment as a “last resort” (Kveder and Flahaux, 2013: 231, 235). These apply in cases of return during ‘ordinary’ times as well during times of crisis, beginning with individual level challenges of re-integration. In the case of returns from countries affected by crisis, additional negative impacts may arise at the meso- and macro levels.

At the meso level, the loss of remittances through return migration may limit considerably the purchasing power of households accustomed to receiving them, notably in contexts where remittances are often used to pay for social services such as health and education. Aside from the potential loss of remittances for households in countries of origin, economically and socially mobile migrants may also lose all their productive assets as a result of crisis, thereby arriving ‘home’ impoverished. Whether or not this is a concern for the country of origin will depend on the volume

and scale of migrant capital. Conversely, migrants could repatriate all of their capital back to the countries of origin, yet struggle to find places to invest it depending on the climate for investment, so it is effectively 'wasted' or re-exported.

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The return of elite migrants will also have political implications at the macro level. The sudden dislocation of a group of (relatively) wealthy, politically active and well-connected returnees may help generate new political configurations in the country of origin. Migrants may also retain their transnational political networks while operating from the country of origin in the 'post-crisis' phase, and therefore pose a threat to the establishment.

RETURN OF POOR MIGRANTS

When it comes to the return of poorer migrants precipitated by a wider crisis in the country of destination, the outcomes may be different from that of the socially mobile and elite depending on the conditions of movement. Given their limited resource base, it is likely that poorer returnees will come back with very little capital and very few means to re-establish a livelihood, making them essentially "empty handed returnees" (Carling, 2004: 121-122). In the event that the state is unable to provide alternative livelihoods for poorer migrants, acute tensions may arise leading to social unrest and political turmoil in already fragile contexts, particularly in situations of mass return.

Poorer migrants may also be indebted to smugglers and their crisis-induced return may further exacerbate their vulnerability to exploitation. If they are returning to poor urban or rural communities in areas of excess labour and high unemployment, their return may set back the local economy in three ways: the loss of remittances (which may have been small but still important for poor families); their impact on the labour market, increasing competition for jobs and depressing wages; and their increasing consumption reducing the disposable income for households. Return may also place a strain on access to infrastructure and basic social services such as electricity, water, education and health.

If poor migrants return to sites of labour scarcity, most likely in rural areas, which may have been subject to large volumes of out-migration, the influx of working-age people could conceivably help boost productivity, if those returning engage

in production. Of course, the extent of these impacts will depend on the geographical distribution of returns. If large numbers of migrants return to one area, their impact is likely to be much more pronounced. In particular, their potential effect on local labour markets will be negligible if they are scattered widely across the country of origin.

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The negative impacts may be mitigated if the returning migrants were able to maintain their social networks and political and economic ties with their areas of origin while abroad. Generally, however, poorer migrants might sustain more limited connections over time compared to those who hold fixed assets, especially houses and land in the country of origin. Those impoverished migrants who are forced to return after a long period, possibly even generations, and effectively come back as strangers with no substantive connections with the community to which they have 'returned' are likely to face the most challenges in re-establishing themselves. Their return seems likely to have more negative development consequences for the wider community compared to that of migrants who are seen to belong and can be rapidly socially integrated. So, the return of poorer migrants may not have as 'feeble' an impact on development as suggested by Sinatti (2011).

BROADER SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Aside from the specific impacts of the return of 'elite' and 'non-elite' migrants from countries affected by crisis, there are broader implications for countries of origin. Given that "economic, social, cultural and political conditions at 'home'

may be radically different from those that existed before" (Kibreab, 2002: 54), return will likely pose a number of challenges and opportunities for returnees, their social networks at home and abroad as well as their countries of origin.

LAND AND OTHER RESOURCES

Returnees may pose a threat or a boon to non-returnee populations in the allocation of presumed finite resources such as "land, water, pasture, forest produce, jobs, housing, healthcare, school places, veterinary services, extension services, credit facilities and employment opportunities" (Kibreab, 2002: 54). For example, in her analysis of return migration to Zimbabwe, Hammar (2014: 20) assesses how "new landscapes of inclusion and exclusion" in the 2000s reconfigured rural "agrarian systems of settlement, tenure, labour, and land access and use" as well as how "hyperinflation and wide-scale business closures created mass unemployment, undermining the financial rewards and status of formal jobs" in urban settings.

In a further case study on the return of Burkinabé relocating from Côte d'Ivoire during that country's political unrest in 2002, land became a source of

conflict amongst local authorities, returnees, and state actors (Reister, 2011: 185). Non-returnees who became custodians of the resources of migrants (whether legitimately or illegitimately)—such as land—may also resent the return, as it will likely translate into displacement for them and the networks that depend on them (Kibreab, 2002: 54). Nevertheless, there are a number of cases in which returnees have not necessarily returned (or been reintegrated into) to their precise places of origin (Kibreab, 2002: 72; Hammond, 2004). Furthermore, return migration may present an opportunity for renegotiation of land resources thus resulting in favourable terms and conditions for returnees and non-returnees alike (Kibreab, 2002: 74), since the value and meaning of land may have significantly changed for returnees (Kibreab, 2002: 75). While returnees may usurp resources otherwise allocated for non-returnees, they could conversely contribute to the expansion of resources.

LABOUR MARKETS, SKILLS AND (UN)EMPLOYMENT

It is fair to assume that return migrants bring skills that could be incorporated into either the formal or informal economies of countries of origin. Depending on their skills and levels of education—and whether or not said qualifications require revalidation or certification from abroad—returnees may compete with non-returnees for jobs, and possibly exacerbate already high levels of unemployment (Kibreab, 2002: 54). Conversely, however, entrepreneurial returnees may create jobs thus mitigating the problem of unemployment. Kibreab (2002: 71) suggests that "changes and transformations in occupations, settlement patterns, consumption habits and

development of trans-ethnic and trans-religious social relations and networks" may either help or hinder socio-political and economic cohesion amongst returnees and non-returnees. Or it could do both simultaneously. For example, given that the Libyan conflict displaced hundreds of thousands of Egyptians, many of whom returned to "impoverished rural zones in the Nile Delta and Upper Egypt" which have higher unemployment rates than other parts of the country, especially among youth, it is clear that these regions will find it difficult to integrate returnees into already challenged labour market structures (Marfleet and Hanieh, 2014: 39).

STATELESSNESS, CITIZENSHIP AND BELONGING

One of the major potential impacts of return migration is that it could create an unprecedented number of stateless persons who do not have a nationality based on the restrictive citizenship regimes of their countries of birth or ancestry. Some migrants who do not possess identity documents from neither their countries of origin nor their countries of settlement will likely face challenges transiting through third party countries or returning to their countries of origin in the 'post-crisis' phase. For example, when Chadians fled the Central African Republic crisis in July 2014, many of them did not have identity documents to prove citizenship or previous residence in their country of origin (Flahaux and Sgro, 2015: 10). This

undoubtedly has made it difficult for them to access basic rights and entitlements of citizenship, including access to land.

Beyond the threat of statelessness and the challenge of not possessing national identity documents, return migrants may be confronted with citizenship laws that changed during their time abroad as a result of constitutional reforms. In this instance, return migrants who may have legally retained their country of origin citizenships may find that their rights and entitlements as previous citizens abroad may be significantly altered, or even limited.

STATE INTERVENTION AND TARGETED SUPPORT

In response to return migration, governments may adopt targeted 'development' schemes of reintegration that frame migrants as 'needy' victims, thereby soliciting donor assistance and quite possibly the ire of local residents (Reister, 2011: 192). For instance, after the crises in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya Nigerien state officials instituted an assistance programme for over 250,000 returnees that included the provision of temporary food and livestock rations, agricultural inputs and seeds, micro-credit facilities, as well as cash transfers to kick-start economic integration and income generation (Flahaux and Sgro, 2015: 18; 20). Similarly, Burkina Faso attempted to reintegrate its nationals returning from the political crises in Côte d'Ivoire by employing returnee skills and assets "to boost agricultural, halieutic and forest production, while supporting their reinsertion and allowing them to earn incomes" (Flahaux and Sgro, 2015: 20).

These schemes, though understandable as a response to large-scale return, may likely place a strain on already limited national resources and funding. In countries of origin with significant migrant populations abroad, returnees may likely benefit from the support of ministries/agencies established specifically to attend to the needs of diasporic populations, such as the Superior Coun-

cil for Burkinabé Abroad in Burkina Faso (Reister, 2011: 193), or it could be assumed that their return may facilitate a surge in economic activity where there was none before. This could create high expectations on the part of state actors and local residents for returnees to perform well and maintain a semblance of self-sufficiency.



Malian returnees from Central African Republic (CAR) are welcomed at Bamako Airport by the Minister of Malians Abroad, Abdrahamane Sylla, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Mali Chief of Mission, Bakary Doumbia.

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SECURITY, POLITICAL STABILITY AND RETURN

Depending on how fragile/insecure a particular country of origin is, migrants returning from countries affected by crises may face challenges being reinserted into local and national politics, especially if they are perceived by authorities as threatening to peace and security. They may also be unfairly classified as politically toxic, as was the case with Chadians returning from Libya who were accused of being mercenaries recruited to

fight alongside pro-Gaddafi forces in Libya (Flahaux and Sgro, 2015: 9). Migrants will also likely struggle to cope with shifting power structures, in which case they may introduce new political demands and have slightly higher expectations of their power brokers. They could, as a result, potentially reconfigure political systems, and this may lead to further crisis in places where instability is likely to arise.

ZIMBABWEANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Zimbabweans have long relied on migrant remittances to stave off poverty and disillusionment in times of hyperinflation and political violence. In 2005 alone, it was estimated that 50 per cent of households in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital, received remittances, "with poorer households relying on contributions from regional migration to pay essential bills and to buy food, and those in wealthier neighbourhoods tending

to rely on an international migrant" (Bracking, 2014: 170). With some Zimbabwean migrants returning to their country of origin as a result of xenophobic violence in South Africa, it is plausible to assume that remittance flows to certain households have tapered off. This is likely the case for most, if not all, countries of origin which receive their nationals fleeing crises in other locales.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Given the various understandings of return migration, the process remains relatively "hazy" because "its magnitude and configuration are scarcely measurable and comparable, owing to the lack of reliable large-scale quantitative data" (Cassarino, 2004: 253). Furthermore, while there has been considerable empirical research conducted on return, crisis-induced return has been relatively understudied. Therefore, return remains an area worthy of continued inquiry, particularly as it relates to migrants returning from countries affected by crises.

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As demonstrated in the widely divergent scenarios detailed in this Research Brief, it is safe to argue that the impact of crisis-induced return migration on countries of origin—long-term or otherwise—is inevitably conditional, or as Cassarino (2004: 257) argues, situational, contextual and structural. Impacts depend on who returns, when they return, where they return, how they return, what they return with, and how said return is perceived and received by migrants themselves, their families, their communities and their states. The Research Component of the EU-funded MICIC project "Supporting an Evidence-Based Approach for Effective and Cooperative State Action" aims at addressing these issues and more through case study analysis based on desk research and fieldwork in 12 countries.

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