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## DRIVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA FORWARD – THE ROLE OF MIGRANTS AND DIASPORAS

by Marion Noack

**In this fourth article of the series, we feature concrete ways on how to promote migrants and diasporas contributions in countries of origin and residence, drawing on ICMPD’s longstanding work with migrants and diasporas and governments. We focus in particular on a holistic approach and real partnership as the foundations for effective engagement that reflects the needs of all segments of migrants and diasporas. The global compact on migration, but also the global compact on refugees, needs to follow the core principle of the Sustainable Development Agenda – leaving no one behind. Too often approaches that aim to promote the contributions of migrants and diasporas focus on the successful actors and disregard those in need.**

Evidence shows that migrants and diasporas have a core role to play to contribute to development in their residence and origin countries (see for example the ICMPD’s [study](#) on the transnational activities of the Georgian migrant and diaspora communities). What is less clear however is how to concretely promote their contributions to development in a holistic manner. Approaches have often been limited to punctual support in migrants’ and diasporas’ countries of origin without taking a holistic view that includes the context of the countries of residence. In addition, the notion of development in the discourse on diaspora engagement has been understood as geographically limited to countries in the Global South rather than as the development of people wherever they are. The Global Compact on Migration now offers the opportunity to shape a new global consensus that regards migrants and diasporas as actors in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the “spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people” ([Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)).

To develop effective diaspora engagement policies, we call for new modalities based on four axes for action:

- Dissolve barriers to migrants and diasporas transnational lives;

- Develop inclusive diaspora engagement policies that cater for all segments of the diaspora;
- Empower migrants and diasporas as actors;
- Mainstream the role of migrants and diasporas in migration governance.

## **Dissolving barriers to migrants and diasporas transnational lives**

Migrants and diasporas engage in a variety of ways and in several societies – however, to do so, they have to overcome many barriers, as a [study](#) conducted by ICMPD showed. These barriers take various forms. One of them is that in political discussions integration and transnational engagement are often treated as two different and even incompatible processes and policy fields, despite the fact that research has shown the contrary. Hence, an important empowering factor to promote contributions of diaspora to development is the integration process in the country of residence. Furthermore, in the discussions at global level on promoting migrants’ and diasporas’ contributions to development, references to discrimination and racism as one factor of why migrants and diasporas continuously engage in their countries of origin are absent. This critical perspective, however, should be included in discussions in line with the [Sutherland report](#), the report of the UN Secretary-General’s former Special Representative on Migration, Peter Sutherland, and the commitment enshrined in the [New York Declaration](#) that “[s]trongly condemn[s] xenophobia against refugees and migrants [...]”.

Entrepreneurial activities and financial transfers to the country of origin are the most tangible contributions migrants and diasporas make and removing related barriers will have positive impacts. ICMPD’s [Link Up! study](#) shows that there are three main gaps within existing business-enabling structures, namely access to information, know-how and capital in order to fully unleash the potential of diaspora entrepreneurs. MEETAfrica, a [Rabat Process](#) flagship initiative, concretely supports young entrepreneurs in Africa. The Sutherland report, recommends actions to “promote faster, cheaper and safer transfers of migrant remittances in both source and recipient countries, including through a reduction in transaction costs”. ICMPD has recently launched its [technical support action](#) to the African Institute for Remittances (AIR) to work towards AIR’s main objective to lower remittances costs within Africa.

Countries have also realised that effective promotion of diasporas and migrants contributions needs real partnership, participation and making them part of a joint vision for sustainable

development. Some countries, such as Senegal, have started to experiment what real partnership means and have - for example - reserved seats in parliament for their diasporas.

## **Inclusive diaspora engagement policies that cater for all segments of the diaspora**

As stated in our [working paper](#), we believe that in order to be successful diaspora policies have to address all aspects of human migration: the risks and vulnerabilities as well as the resources and opportunities that are created by mobility. Embassies and consulates have a key role in supporting migrants and diasporas in need and the Sutherland report calls on International Organisations to support states in strengthening “their consular services and operate a global network of assistance centres for migrants”. For countries with limited financial and human resources, however, ensuring widespread consular coverage and having the capacities to assist diaspora members is a challenge. To address this need, ICMPD has developed a method called “[mobile counselling](#)” to better serve and engage with diaspora members. Presently, ICMPD also supports the Jordanian administration to reach out and engage effectively with its expatriate communities ([JEMPAS](#), 2016-2018).

In the framework of the programme [Support to the Silk Routes Partnership for Migration under the Budapest Process](#), ICMPD aims to facilitate the policy development process towards Iraqi diaspora engagement. While Iraq encourages its nationals abroad to return home and support the development processes of the country, with a strong emphasis on attracting qualified and skilled Iraqis, low levels of trust towards national institutions as well as an emotional distance from home and multiple vulnerabilities partly related to their histories of forced migration impede migrants and diasporas engagement. A more nuanced approach that also addresses these vulnerabilities instead of overemphasising remittances and skills will contribute to the process of building trust as one precondition for effective diaspora engagement.

## **Empower migrants and diasporas as actors**

Recognising migrants and diasporas contributions to development is essential. In countries of residence, a number of intertwined factors empower diasporas and support their engagement in development processes. An important one is the institutional and/or financial support provided to migrants and diaspora organisations. In countries of origin, and in addition to embassies and consulates, establishing government institutions or focal points specifically mandated to work on diaspora issues gives a strong signal of commitment and recognition to a diaspora.

ICMPD's engagement with diaspora organisations has been most visible through the ongoing support to the establishment of the platform for African diaspora organisations in Europe. The aim of the [Africa-Europe Diaspora Development Platform](#) (ADEPT) is to improve and enhance the capacity and impact of African diaspora organisations involved in development activities in Africa. We strongly believe that supporting platforms and associations of migrants and diaspora actors functions as an important empowering factor as networking and being part of this larger platform supports the creation of a common language and helps the parties involved to make sense of the global discourse on development in general, and migration and development in particular. The past has shown that a platform building process can only be successful if the platform creates benefits for all those who are involved and to pay attention to the different realities and levels of organisation of migrants and diasporas.

The recent upsurge in establishing migrants and diaspora platforms at EU and national levels is a strong signal of political opportunities that are conducive for migrants and diaspora engagement which is a success in itself. Nevertheless, expectations still persist that the creation of one single organisation will be able to represent the concerns and needs of all migrants and diasporas. These expectations are not only unrealistic but should also not be the objectives of supporting networks, platforms and migrants associations. Migrants and diasporas are not a homogeneous group, they have different interests, needs and expectations but being part of a platform certainly makes migrants and diasporas stronger.

### **Mainstream the role of migrants and diasporas in migration governance**

The Sustainable Development Goal 17 "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development" gives important impetus for involving migrants and diasporas as actors in all relevant policy fields. They should be recognised as actors throughout the migration cycle and in all fields of migration governance.

The inclusion of migrants and diaspora actors in the development of diaspora engagement strategies, as pursued in the actions of the joint EU-ICMPD initiative [Migration EU eXpertise \(MIEUX\)](#) for example in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana or Malawi, is important but needs to be expanded to other policy fields. Diaspora organisations facilitate integration and provide support to migrants in countries of destination while supporting development processes in their countries of origin. Migrants and diasporas who have returned to their countries of origin often provide important support in the reintegration process and all this makes them, without doubt, important stakeholders. The [Guidelines to Protect Migrants in Countries Experiencing Conflict or Natural Disaster](#), established in the Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) initiative which is supported by ICMPD, emphasise the role of migrants and diasporas in reaching

migrants in an irregular immigration status and others who may be hard to access in crisis situation.

Migrants and diasporas have carved out their role in global and regional political dialogues on migration, since the global attention has focussed on the links between migration and development. But still, they have a long way to go to ensure their full involvement. The focus of the upcoming thematic session is particularly appropriate as it includes the development impact of migrants and diasporas on countries of origin and residence as well as the barriers and obstacles they face in both contexts. Now it will be important to define concrete and measurable targets in all areas which implies to go broader than only focussing on remittances and migrants' and diasporas' financial contributions. And lastly, the process towards the Global Compact on Migration should lead by example and proof that migrants and diasporas have to be at one table with policymakers.

*The views expressed here are those of the author, and not necessarily those of ICMPD.*

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*On the 24-25 July 2017, UN Member States, intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations and the private sector will discuss how to enhance the contributions of migrants and diasporas to development in the fourth thematic session of the global compact for migration. In our Expert Voice Series we aim to draw out significant lines of inquiry that can and should be addressed within the global compact process.*

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#### **Related Links:**

[Download this article \(PDF\)](#)

[Selection of ICMPD's initiatives and publications on diaspora relates issues](#)

[Rabat Process](#)

[New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#)

[Global Compact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration](#)

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