



Empowering Migrants: A Win-Win Situation

A Global Perspective
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Executive Summary

“Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all” is the theme of the United Nations Fifty-Second Session of the Commission for Social Development. In light of this and the fact that increasingly more people are migrating worldwide whether by choice, duress, or necessity, the International Presentation Association (IPA) studied the particular plight of migrants. After arriving in a host country, the migrant faces many challenges including detention, isolation, limited employment and educational opportunities, fears of deportation, stress, and discrimination. However, if the migrant is empowered, the influx of migrants into a country will strengthen its economy and will bring new ideas, technology and traditions that enrich societies and further the development of civilization itself. To accomplish this, the human rights and fundamental freedoms of migrants need to be recognized. As a first step, action on the recommendations as set forth in the Declaration of the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, dated 1 October 2013, is required. More specifically, resettlement programs, educational programs, just wages, and a reasonable path to citizenship should be made available to all migrants. Empowering the migrant is a win-win situation for all.



Migrant Stories

THE POWER OF WOMEN

In 2013, the IPA reached out to organizations, volunteers and migrants themselves in an attempt to explore the experiences of different types of migrants – their challenges, special situations, and the impact of government policies on their lives. For brevity, the term migrant as used here includes those who sought asylum, those who were forced to leave their country through no fault of their own but due to war or persecution, climate changes, as victims of trafficking schemes or simply seeking work and relief from poverty. Over 100 migrants from 22 different countries were interviewed.

Below is a summary of what the IPA learned, followed by some concrete policy recommendations for addressing the plight of migrants.

1. Challenges of the migrants

Many migrants arrive in the host country with almost nothing—no money, clothes or a sense of where to go for help. Upon arriving, often after a perilous journey, the migrant may be subjected to detention, sometimes of indefinite duration. Keeping already traumatized people in detention or isolated areas aggravates and perpetuates any mental health issues they may have. Additionally, they are sometimes forced to leave the host country or are subjected to arbitrary arrest.

For example, Barat is a young man who, in his home country, had been forced to become a child soldier and then was tortured and imprisoned. Upon escaping to another country he was jailed for being stateless. Eventually journeying to yet another country, Barat was placed in a group house with other sixteen-year old boys and started drinking as an escape. Suffering from horrific nightmares, he often fights with others and his school attendance is poor.

Migrants like Majid, an asylum-seeker held in detention for months, may find themselves alone in a new and strange country, knowing that they may never again see loved ones left behind. Particularly painful for Majid was leaving behind the woman he loves. He currently receives minimal assistance and lives in an isolated suburb, far from educational and work opportunities.

These stories are not unusual. Many migrants are tormented by memories of their past life, fear of being deported back to danger, and concern for their families left behind. In some host countries, migrant families are unnecessarily fractured by the deportation of parents of children who are citizens of the host country. With little or no knowledge of the language, law or customs of the host country and often facing discrimination, migrants suffer from stress, depression, loneliness and fear.



Another problem faced by the migrant is employment. Finding employment is fundamental to the migrant's needs to obtain food and decent affordable housing. However, the ability of migrants to find employment is often limited by language barriers and perhaps even by laws not allowing them to work. Migrants often have to deal with the unwarranted suspicions and fears of the host country citizens towards different cultures and a perceived competition for jobs. Language barriers and the cost of education hinder any efforts to further education or earn qualifications. Brian, for example, is a refugee who was not able to complete his computer course because he was unable to pay the examination fee.

If migrants find work, it is often low-skill and low-pay positions, especially for women who suffer most from language barriers. For example, Mai, who migrated to be with her husband, finds herself working in mines and in cleaning jobs. Furthermore, even if a migrant is qualified, the migrant might face problems similar to Alice's. Although granted refugee status, it took five months before Alice was able to leave the hostel for asylum seekers and find accommodations for herself and her family. She is in her mid-fifties and does not speak the language of her host country. Although she was a cardiologist in her home country, her host country did not recognize her educational qualifications.

Many migrants who are fortunate enough to obtain a job do not have reliable means of transportation to get to their place of employment on a daily basis. They either are not allowed to apply for a driver's license or lack the money to use transportation. Any public transportation that may be available may not only be costly, but also inadequate.

The issues above are just a subset of the wide variety of challenges migrants face in their host countries. Due to their past traumatic experiences, some are hesitant to trust those in authority. Although services or assistance may be available to them, the migrants may not be aware of them or do not understand the legal and civic systems of their host countries. Any legal assistance that may be available to them is limited.

2. Special Cases

In addition to the typical adolescent issues, teenage migrants face particular challenges. Consider Hashini, a young girl forced to flee from her home country with her family. On their journey, they lived in tents and jungles and subsequently were imprisoned and abused. During this time, Hashini's father died and she was separated from her mother. Eventually surviving a boat journey to another country, Hashini suffers from nightmares and is nervous, particularly around strange men. She fears being deported back to danger; she does not know if she will ever see her mother again. She is anxious about turning eighteen because the agency that houses her will then turn her out. Despite the negativism towards asylum seekers she sees on television, Hashini tries to remain hopeful.

Traumatic images from childhood and their journey to the host country haunt the minds of the youth. In addition they worry about sufficiently learning a new language to study or get a job. A boy, whose father has been killed, suffers from anxiety over protecting his mother and siblings now that he has become the "man of the family".

Tormented by horrid experiences suffered at a young age, teenagers worry about loved ones left behind and may grow to distrust people. Detention often delays their social and intellectual development; many have little or no formal education. Children who have been separated from their parents or have lived in isolated areas may grow up without a sense of their identity or roots. The media often damages their self-image by portraying them as criminals. As a final hardship, teenagers live with the uncertainty of whether they will reach adulthood before a decision is made on their visas. If they do, the process must be started again and they will continue to live under the stress of an uncertain future.

Trafficked women, some branded like cattle, live with the fear that their family at home will be harmed or shamed. Changes in caseworkers or other support personnel unsettle them. Some are like Phan, who was trafficked from her homeland and found in a brothel in the host country. Phan participated in the court case against her trafficker but was forced back into prostitution when, in dire financial straits, she was unable to pay for housing.

Finally there are the "forced climate migrants" who are displaced because of the impacts of climate change. Those under particular threat are people living on low lying islands and atolls. There they face the combined impacts of sea level rise, ocean warming and acidification, as well as more frequent and extreme weather events. These phenomena lead to coastal erosion, contamination of fresh water supplies, destruction of food crops, and destruction of infrastructure. The nation states composed solely of atolls face the prospect of their entire population eventually having to move to another sovereign state. Those who can move within their national borders face multiple challenges in re-establishing sustainable livelihoods.

In addition to the challenges previously mentioned, the forced climate migrants face the challenge of building relationships with local communities in another nation or another part of their own country. The younger people have hopes of resettlement and employment. For example, Naomi is one of the young people living on an island in the Pacific Ocean. She received training in the nursing profession in hopes of facilitating her integration into another country when her homeland becomes uninhabitable. Unfortunately, the elderly population faces a deep uncertainty regarding their future lives.

3. Advantages to the Host Country

A host country benefits from the flux of migrants to its shores. Over centuries migrations have contributed to the development of civilization by the work contributions of the migrants and the spread of ideas, technology, cultures, and traditions. Reducing the number of unnecessary deportations and facilitating the ability of migrants to find employment by providing fair and efficient means of gaining citizenship and opportunities for education, especially for the young, may result in a significant boost to the economy of the host country. Those who today seek safety, food and shelter have bolstered labor forces in agriculture and in the construction, hotel and restaurant industries. Migrants have filled vital labor positions to which citizens of the host country are not attracted. The diversity of cultures and traditions and the integration of such into the social life of the host country foster the development of civilization as it has for so many ages.

Moreover, it is only fair and reasonable to assist the very people who are contributing to a country's economic health. To do otherwise would amount to no less than the exploitation of vulnerable human beings who seek only to satisfy basic human needs.

4. Recommendations

First and foremost, we support and applaud the unanimous adoption of the First Declaration of the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, 1 October 2013, by all Member States. This document effectively sets forth recommendations to support international migration and development, including the promotion of the rights of migrants in the workplace, the strong condemnation of human trafficking and intolerance towards the migrant; the need to promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of migrants, especially those of women and children; and the need to recognize the contributions of migrants to the development of our societies and countries.

Acknowledging that policies for migrants must allow, on one hand, for nations to have the right to control arrivals into their countries and, on the other hand, for respect for the human rights of the individual and the family, we offer the following recommendations formulated as a result of our work with the migrant community worldwide.



- Increase humanitarian resettlement programs that, despite all of the challenges facing the migrants, have proven to be very effective.
- Promote international and regional cooperation in particular with respect to asylum seekers and forced climate migrants.
- Cease the detention of children, the indefinite mandatory detention and detention for all migrants other than those charged with a serious crime.
- Maintain a timely, transparent and fair system of refugee status determination, providing interpreter services for processing.
- Provide access to basic human rights such as food, housing, medical care, education and work.
- Promote a policy reflecting family unity including access to citizenship for family reunification and eliminating deportation for minor offenses.
- Facilitate the ability to earn a living by providing for a path to citizenship for those who want to work and have no criminal record, by ensuring just wages for all and by removing bans against migrants obtaining licenses to drive.
- Provide basic legal support and awareness of available services.
- Ensure safe, secure and affordable accommodations for those women who have been trafficked.
- Provide the opportunity to learn the language of the host country and for higher education, which is especially important for young adults.

People have been migrating for ages and, as long as there remains poverty, persecution, or natural phenomena or disasters forcing movement, people will continue to migrate. However, empowering the migrant can become a win-win situation for both the migrant and the host country, indeed perhaps the world.

Statistics

- The number of international migrants worldwide reached 232 million in 2013. This number accounts for 3% of the total world population.
- Human trafficking is a \$32 billion industry worldwide. At least 12.3 million people are trafficked worldwide and more than one million children are victims of trafficking.
- In 2010 over 38 million people were forcibly displaced by climate-related events (mainly floods and storms).
- There were 937,000 asylum seekers worldwide in 2012.

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