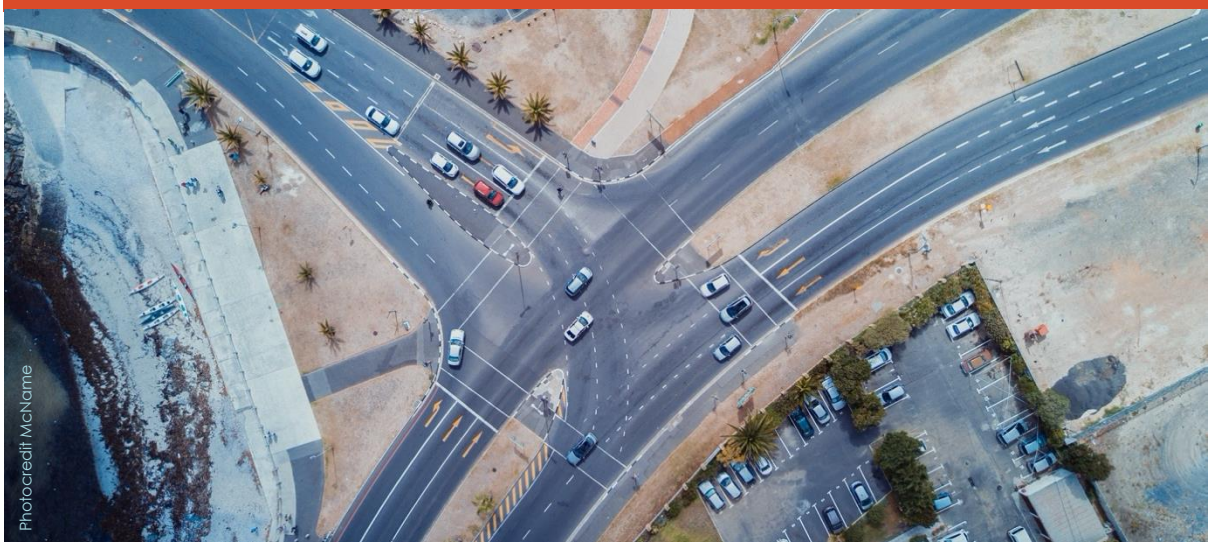
Unlocking Human Mobility's Development Potential within the Global South

POLICY BRIEF



SUMMARY

This conference reframed South–South migration as a central development issue, highlighting overlooked mobility patterns, unequal data power, and donor incoherence. It underscored the contributions of migrants, systemic underfunding, and the need for policies rooted in Southern realities across all stages of the mobility journey.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

South-South migration is the dominant yet neglected form of global mobility, demanding far greater political attention, evidence, and investment.

Effective responses must be context-specific and better integrated across development, labour, protection, and migration policies, rather than treated in isolated silos.

Unlocking the development potential of South-South migration requires a shift beyond remittances toward inclusive, data-driven, and protection-sensitive approaches that reflect its diverse realities.

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On 11–12 September 2024, the OECD Development Centre, MIDEQ, the University of Coventry, the Institut de Recherche pour le Developpement (IRD), the African Union Commission (AUC), and Statistics Sweden (SCB) co-hosted an international policy conference titled *"Unlocking Human Mobility's Development Potential within the Global South"*. The event provided a platform to reflect on the state of knowledge and evidence on migration and displacement within the Global South and to engage in dialogue on policies that could help maximise its contribution to sustainable development.

The conference was held online and brought together a wide range of stakeholders working on migration and development, including representatives from governments, regional organisations, civil society, international agencies, academia, and the donor community. Two hundred and sixty-five (265) participants joined the event from 65 different countries, contributing to lively discussions across six sessions. The event aimed to foster collaboration among these stakeholders by connecting national, regional, and international perspectives on the often overlooked and underfunded dynamics of South-South migration.

This conference was conceived as a direct contribution to global dialogues on international migration and forced displacement, including the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) regional reviews, the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF), and the Global Refugee Forum (GRF). At its core, the event sought to recenter attention on the realities, needs, and contributions of migrants and displaced people within the Global South, particularly in the face of mounting global challenges—climate change, inequality, protracted crises, and the unmet ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

At the heart of the discussions was the recognition that while human mobility is increasingly acknowledged as a driver of development, South-South migration remains under-researched, under-represented in policy debates, and under-resourced in development funding. Roughly half of all international migrants from the Global South remain in the South, and more than two-thirds of the world's forcibly displaced people are hosted in neighbouring developing countries. These patterns are not only shaped by geography and affordability, but also by deepening regional ties, restrictive Northern migration policies, and shifting labour market demands within and across developing regions.

The conference featured sessions dedicated to different phases of the migration journey—pre-departure, transit, integration in host countries, and diaspora engagement. It also included a dedicated session on how donors and development actors can better support the linkages between migration and development in the Global South. Cross-cutting themes such as gender, youth, inequality, and environmental pressures were systematically addressed, recognising their role in shaping mobility decisions and outcomes.

Panellists examined the extent to which migrants within the Global South are being integrated into host societies, labour markets, and social protection systems. They also discussed the importance of data and knowledge production, particularly the need to shift epistemic power toward researchers and institutions in the South. The limitations of current development aid structures were scrutinised, especially regarding the lack of coherence between migration programmes and broader development cooperation. Participants called attention to missed synergies, short-term programming, and the persistence of a narrow, securitised framing of migration—often dominated by the concerns of the Global North.

By providing a forum that placed the experiences and expertise of developing countries at the centre of the conversation, the conference aimed to reshape the migration and development agenda to reflect today's realities and tomorrow's challenges.

The following brief summarises the key insights, policy recommendations, and takeaways from the discussions.

What do we know about human mobility in the Global South?

The first session of the conference focused on understanding the scale, nature, and policy implications of human mobility within the Global South.

By shifting the narrative, empowering local actors, and realigning policies with on-the-ground realities, there is an opportunity to unlock the full development potential of human mobility within the Global South. This session provided a compelling foundation for rethinking not only how we understand South-South migration, but how we act on it.

While nearly half of all international migration occurs between developing countries, South-South migration continues to be under-studied, under-represented in global policy discourse, and under-resourced. This session brought to light the complexities, misclassifications, and untapped potential associated with South-South mobility, and emphasised the importance of revising both research and policy frameworks to better capture the realities on the ground.

Rethinking Definitions and Terminology

Speakers highlighted that traditional migration classifications—such as "forced" versus "voluntary" or "economic" versus "refugee"—do not adequately capture the experiences of migrants in the Global South. The lack of consistency in defining migration categories and the political underpinnings of such terminology were seen as significant obstacles to effective policymaking and support. For instance, pastoralist or seasonal labour flows within Africa often

fall outside official migration statistics, despite their economic and social significance. Participants called for more flexible, context-sensitive definitions that reflect local migration practices and perceptions.

Similarly, the concept of the "Global South" itself was problematised. Rather than being a fixed geographic term, it was presented as a political construct reflecting global inequalities in economic and political power. Migration research must therefore be careful not to treat the Global South as a homogeneous bloc and must recognise diverse experiences and institutional capacities across regions.

Knowledge Production and Power Asymmetries
A major theme was the structural imbalance in knowledge production between the Global North and South. Most funding, data infrastructure, and academic publishing power remain concentrated in Northern institutions. Speakers advocated for reversing this trend by supporting South-based research centres and networks, empowering local researchers to define research questions, and ensuring their visibility through co-authorship and open-access publishing.

The MIDEQ model was showcased as a good practice: rather than relying on externally defined agendas, MIDEQ enables Global South researchers to lead inquiry based on local priorities, using locally relevant languages and methodologies. Similar efforts include the African Migration Observatory (Rabat), the Migration Research Centre in Bamako, and other regional initiatives aiming to harmonise data collection and build policy-relevant evidence.

Policy Implications
Migration in the Global South is often circular, seasonal, and deeply embedded in livelihoods. Rather than viewing it as a problem to be managed, participants encouraged policymakers to frame migration as a development strategy—especially in light of demographic, economic, and environmental transitions. Examples included the Sahel and Horn of Africa, where mobility is both a necessity and an opportunity.

The panel stressed the need to decouple migration policies from security agendas. Framing migration as a threat undermines the potential for inclusive development strategies and exacerbates inequalities, both between and within countries.

Furthermore, harmonisation of migration data and standards—both within the Global South and in coordination with international frameworks—is essential. Inconsistent metrics and poorly adapted categories impede cross-country comparisons, data-driven policymaking, and the ability to advocate for migration-sensitive development approaches in global forums.

Recommendations

1. **Support Decentralised Knowledge Production**: Donors and international organisations should fund South-based research institutions and prioritise co-authored and open-access publishing to reduce dependency on Northern agendas.
2. **Reform Migration Definitions**: Develop context-sensitive, flexible typologies of migration that reflect realities in the Global South and avoid over-reliance on rigid categories like "forced" or "voluntary".
3. **Promote Inclusive Data Systems**: Invest in statistical capacity and infrastructure across the Global South, particularly through collaboration with national statistical offices, to improve data availability and comparability.
4. **Frame Migration as Development**: Recognise the positive contributions of South-South mobility to labour markets, resilience, and regional integration; avoid security-dominated narratives.
5. **Champion Political Will**: Use global platforms—such as the GFMD, IMRF, and GCM reviews—to elevate the importance of South-South migration and support its mainstreaming into national development planning.

How can migrants and forcibly displaced persons be better integrated in the Global South?

Session 2 focused on integration practices and policy frameworks for migrants and forcibly displaced persons in the Global South.

This session affirmed that migrant integration is both a human rights imperative and a development opportunity. By embedding integration in national development plans, leveraging local governance, and ensuring migrant voices are heard, the Global South can craft inclusive societies where migration strengthens—not strains—resilience and progress.

With inputs from Colombia, Ecuador, Nigeria, Malaysia, and Cameroon, the session underscored the need to move beyond short-term humanitarian responses and toward sustainable, development-oriented integration. Integration was broadly conceived—not only in legal or economic terms, but also in social, institutional, and community dimensions. The discussion highlighted promising practices, persistent challenges, and the need for coordinated, multilevel action to ensure migrants are meaningfully included in host societies.

From Humanitarian Response to Development Strategy
Panellists from Bogotá and Ecuador emphasised the importance of shifting from a humanitarian to a development approach. Bogotá's integration narrative focused on migrants as agents of change and contributors to urban development, not just recipients of aid. With close to one million Venezuelans in the city, Bogotá has mainstreamed migrant inclusion in local policies, particularly in education (with over

69,000 migrant children enrolled) and social protection. Similarly, Ecuador emphasised sustainable solutions through the involvement of civil society, development banks, and local governments via its national human mobility roundtable and collaboration with regional entities such as the Consorcio de Gobiernos Autónomos Provinciales del Ecuador (Congope).

National Policy Innovations
Nigeria and Malaysia presented robust national frameworks that link migration policy with labour market integration. Nigeria's National Policy on Labour Migration and its Migrant Resource Centres provide counselling, skills training, and employment support across the country. These efforts are supported by regional cooperation under the ECOWAS free movement protocol, which guarantees mobility for work and education across West Africa. Malaysia's TalentCorp initiative, the 6P regularisation programme, and partnerships with employers and NGOs demonstrate how integration policies can improve migrant access to legal work, healthcare, education, and family reunification. A pilot programme to allow Rohingya refugees to work in certain sectors was cited as a promising step.

Local Action and Multilevel Governance
The panel highlighted that while national frameworks set the tone, integration ultimately happens at the local level. In Bogotá, local authorities have tailored national migration indicators to better reflect local challenges, including job access and service provision. Cameroon's decentralisation policy has empowered communities to design localised responses in fragile regions, including joint water-access projects and community engagement around internally displaced persons and returning combatants.
Coordination between local and national levels remains uneven. In Colombia, a multidimensional integration index (covering needs, economic, social, and institutional factors) was adapted by Bogotá to include locally relevant parameters. This approach fosters accountability, improves measurement, and helps target interventions more effectively.

Measuring Integration: Emerging Tools and Gaps
Several tools and methodologies are being used to measure integration. Colombia's integration index, Malaysia's labour force and education surveys, Nigeria's vocational training and labour inspections, and Cameroon's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) are examples of data-driven approaches. However, challenges remain—particularly in capturing undocumented migrants, ensuring data consistency, and using results to improve programme design. Qualitative studies and participatory research, such as those conducted by Malaysian NGOs, provide valuable complementary insights.

The IOM's "Migrant Presence" tool was mentioned as a potentially holistic measure, though it has not yet been tested in all contexts. Participants noted that the lack of legal status, ethical recruitment, and discrimination remain unmeasured barriers that limit migrants' full integration.

Key Challenges

Despite good practices, integration across the Global South continues to face several structural barriers:

- **Legal and Regulatory Status**: Irregular status prevents access to services and formal employment. Regularisation remains politically sensitive and under-resourced.
- **Access to Basic Services**: Health, education, and housing are unevenly available to migrants. Community-level solutions, like clinics or schools, are often under strain.
- **Discrimination and Xenophobia**: Negative public attitudes hinder social inclusion. Public awareness campaigns, such as those run in Malaysia, are important to shift perceptions.
- **Lack of Cohesive Strategies**: Fragmentation between national, regional, and local authorities often hampers the coherence of integration efforts.
- **Insufficient Migrant Involvement**: One participant noted that migrants are often missing from the design and evaluation of integration policies, reducing relevance and effectiveness.

Recommendations

1. **Adopt a Multilevel Approach**: Strengthen coordination between national, regional, and local governments to align integration policies with actual implementation capacity.
2. **Regularise Legal Status**: Promote regularisation schemes that provide legal certainty and access to services for undocumented migrants, including refugees and displaced persons.
3. **Invest in Data and Measurement Tools**: Expand the use of integration indices, surveys, and participatory methods to evaluate impact and guide improvements.
4. **Involve Migrants in Policy Design**: Foster participatory approaches that include migrants in the formulation, implementation, and assessment of integration programmes.
5. **Promote Public Awareness and Social Cohesion**: Implement campaigns that combat discrimination and highlight migrants' contributions to society and the economy.
6. **Bridge Humanitarian and Development Responses**: Design integration strategies that link emergency responses with long-term development objectives, especially in fragile settings.

How can access to justice for migrants in the Global South contribute to development?

Overview
Session 3 explored the deep and often underacknowledged link between access to justice for migrants and inclusive, sustainable development.

Access to justice for migrants is not only a legal issue—it is a development imperative. Ensuring equal rights and protections for all strengthens social cohesion, advances the Sustainable Development Goals, and upholds the dignity of millions whose voices are too often marginalised.

Panellists stressed that without meaningful legal and social protections, migrants—particularly those in irregular or precarious situations—remain vulnerable to exploitation, exclusion, and abuse. The session also underscored the mismatch between formal international commitments to migrant rights and the limited or symbolic nature of their domestic implementation. Justice, participants agreed, must move beyond abstract legal rights to tangible protections that migrants can actually access and exercise.

Barriers to Justice: Legal, Social, and Structural
The discussion highlighted several persistent barriers to justice in the Global South. Chief among them is the lack of official identification, which disproportionately affects women and marginalised groups and blocks access to essential services. Migrants are often treated as second-class citisens, both in law and in public perception, reinforcing social exclusion. In many contexts, migration intersects with class, race, and gender inequalities, particularly for domestic workers and LGBTQ migrants, who face compounded vulnerabilities and inadequate legal protections.

Despite the ratification of international instruments, implementation remains weak. Countries like South Africa, with progressive constitutions, still fail to fully enforce migrants' rights in practice. In Ghana, legal frameworks restrict migrants' labour market participation despite regional ECOWAS commitments. Where progress exists, it often stems from local activism, rather than systemic government action.

Migrants as Rights-Holders, Not Commodities
Speakers called for a paradigm shift in how migrants are viewed—from economic inputs to rights-bearing individuals. Many migrants move not by choice, but due to economic necessity or displacement. Yet systems often treat them as temporary labourers or commodities, with rights contingent on their economic utility. The discussion challenged the assumption that migration is always voluntary and advocated for policies that acknowledge the structural drivers of movement and the lived experiences of migrants.

Participants stressed that formal recognition of rights is not enough. In contexts like Lebanon, legal avenues exist on paper but are inaccessible due to the Kafala system, financial burdens, or administrative hurdles. In practice, many migrants must navigate unjust systems that offer only "aesthetic" solutions—appearing to protect, but failing to deliver.

The Role of Trade Unions and Civil Society
Trade unions in the Global South face varying degrees of restriction, but where permitted, they can serve as vital vehicles for migrant inclusion. Initiatives like the Africa Trade and Migration Network (ATUMNET) and the International Trade Union Confederation-Africa (ITUC-Africa) have begun organising migrant workers and advocating for equal labour rights. In South Africa, campaigns such as Copanan Africa have mobilised workers—regardless of nationality—around the principle that "labour has no borders."

Yet unions must move beyond symbolic inclusion to meaningful participation. Migrant-led advocacy, independent worker organisations, and collaboration with civil society, faith-based groups, and academia are key to ensuring that migrant voices are not tokenised but heard. Case studies from Burkina Faso and the Asia-Pacific region show promising models of extending union membership to informal workers and organising across national boundaries.

Measuring Justice and Bridging Gaps
Panellists noted that formal legal commitments, such as the Global Compact for Migration, are often disconnected from local realities. Governments may report progress at the international level, while on the ground, migrants face exclusion, discrimination, and lack of due process. Community-led activism—such as South Africa's Africa Unite or research validation processes under MIDEQ—emerged as critical in closing these gaps.

Participants also emphasised the importance of ensuring that international frameworks are made legally binding and tied to mechanisms for cross-border accountability. Greater collaboration among governments, NGOs, trade unions, and migrant-led groups is essential for harmonising laws and ensuring enforcement. Practical and affordable legal pathways—not theoretical rights—are key to inclusive development.

Recommendations

1. **Ensure Accessible Legal Identity and Documentation**: Governments must prioritise issuing identification and legal status to migrants to allow access to services and protections, particularly for vulnerable groups like women and LGBTQ+ migrants.
2. **Translate Commitments into Binding National Law**: Countries should not only ratify international frameworks but also integrate them into enforceable domestic laws with accountability mechanisms.
3. **Empower Migrant-Led Advocacy**: Invest in grassroots leadership and independent migrant organisations to ensure representation is authentic and not tokenistic.

4. **Support Inclusive Trade Unionism**: Trade unions should actively include migrants and adapt their structures to protect both local and foreign workers from labour exploitation and wage suppression.

5. **Bridge Legal and Practical Gaps**: Eliminate "aesthetic" legal solutions by designing rights-based pathways that are realistically attainable—financially, logistically, and administratively.

6. **Adopt Intersectional Approaches**: Recognise the multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities faced by migrants based on gender, class, legal status, and ethnicity to craft more responsive protections.

7. **Foster Solidarity with Host Communities**: Focus on shared struggles—like lack of housing, healthcare, or decent work—as a way to unite migrants and locals in common demands for justice.

Transit Migration in the Global South – Realities, Narratives, and Policy Gaps

Session 4 focused on the often misunderstood and under-prioritised phenomenon of transit migration in the Global South.

Ultimately, the session underscored that transit is not a neutral term. It is deeply political—shaped by narratives, incentives, and structures that often serve to exclude. Addressing the realities of transit migration requires a deliberate shift in policy logic: from mobility control to rights and inclusion, and from externalisation to shared responsibility.

The session brought together researchers, policy practitioners, and representatives of international and local organisations to explore how "transit" is defined, experienced, governed, and funded, and how these dynamics shape both migrant outcomes and policy responses. Across the discussion, a central concern emerged: the dissonance between the label "transit" and the lived realities of migrants and forcibly displaced persons who remain in "transit countries" for extended, sometimes indefinite, periods.

Participants questioned the validity and utility of "transit" as a policy category. Many so-called transit countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are in fact long-term destinations, hosting migrants for years or even decades without recognition, protection, or durable solutions. In such settings, migrants often face limited legal status, exclusion from public services, and a lack of livelihood opportunities—while being simultaneously invisible in national development plans and global mobility frameworks. The language of "transit" was described as externally imposed, often by donors or destination countries, and used to justify containment and border externalisation policies. As such, it can obscure both the complexity of migrant trajectories and the responsibilities of those shaping global migration governance.

Invisible Populations, Absent Policies

The session revealed that the transit phase of migration is often defined not by movement but by exclusion—legal, spatial, economic, and social. Migrants and refugees in prolonged transit face structural barriers that prevent onward movement, local integration, or safe return. They are often stranded in conditions of uncertainty, navigating survival through informal work, community solidarity, or self-organisation. Despite these challenges, migrants in transit frequently contribute to local economies and social cohesion, yet receive little recognition or support.

This disconnect between the designation of "transit" and the actual experiences of migrants results in policy frameworks that overlook or misrepresent the needs of people on the move. Instead of addressing the complex realities of long-term presence, many national and donor strategies focus on short-term management of flows or on return agendas. This misalignment prevents investments in sustainable solutions and leaves migrants trapped in legal limbo, without clear pathways forward.

Policy Disconnects and Donor Priorities

There is also a profound mismatch between policy frameworks and the funding landscape. International assistance tends to focus on border security, surveillance, or voluntary returns—rather than building inclusive service delivery systems, investing in host communities, or supporting local actors that are filling the governance gap. This development-blind approach undermines both migrant well-being and broader goals of resilience and social cohesion. As one speaker noted, "you cannot build protection on the move if there is no willingness to invest where people stay."

Panelists emphasised the need for donors and development agencies to rethink their engagement with transit countries. Funding mechanisms must support more than mobility control and deterrence—they should address basic service provision, promote local integration, and build the capacities of local authorities and civil society. Participants called for greater flexibility in funding streams, better alignment with local realities, and a shift away from securitised approaches that treat migrants as threats rather than agents of development.

Power, Narratives, and the Politics of Transit

The discussion also examined the political economy of transit. The designation of countries as transit spaces is often strategic—used to offload responsibility and deflect attention from restrictive migration policies in the Global North. This not only places the burden on lower-income countries to host and manage mobile populations with limited resources, but also entrenches power asymmetries in global migration governance. In this context, reframing transit is not merely a technical correction, but a political imperative.

Several speakers highlighted how the transit narrative serves the interests of external actors, allowing them to distance themselves from their obligations under international protection frameworks. By framing

movement through a "transit" lens, destination countries shift focus away from rights and inclusion toward control and containment. This approach enables the externalisation of migration management and legitimises minimal investment in durable solutions.

Towards Inclusion: Shifting the Policy Logic
Speakers called for a shift in the way transit is conceptualised and addressed. Rather than treating transit as a moment to be managed or shortened, it should be understood as a potential site of inclusion. Policies and programmes must reflect the fact that people in transit are not temporary by default, and their rights and contributions must be recognised accordingly. Local governments, civil society, and migrant-led organisations require greater support to deliver services, ensure protection, and facilitate participation. Durable solutions—be they integration, onward movement, or voluntary return—can only emerge when transit conditions are stable, humane, and rights-based.

Recommendations

1. Abandon rigid, externally imposed definitions of "transit" that obscure migrant realities and justify exclusion.
2. Integrate migrants in transit into national development plans, legal frameworks, and local service provision systems.
3. Rebalance international funding to support host communities and governance structures in the Global South.
4. Recognise the agency of migrants in transit and investing in platforms for their participation and leadership.
5. Support regional cooperation and solidarity to manage mobility in ways that promote rights and development, rather than containment.

How can remittances and the role of diasporas in the Global South be leveraged for development in countries of origin?

Session 5 focused on the economic and social potential of remittances and diaspora engagement for development in countries of the Global South.

Maximising the development potential of remittances and diaspora engagement requires more than financial instruments. It demands inclusive policy ecosystems, trust-building, and recognition of migrants and returnees as agents of change—not merely sources of income.

While remittances have long served as lifelines for families and communities, they remain underutilised as strategic tools for broader development goals. Participants discussed persistent challenges—including high costs, limited formal channels, trust gaps, and underdeveloped policy environments—and shared examples of government and diaspora-led initiatives. The session also highlighted the need to go beyond financial remittances and recognise the value of social remittances, such as knowledge transfer, innovation, and skills.

Remittance Flows and Data Gaps
Remittance flows in the Global South are substantial, but their development impact is constrained by persistent data gaps and high transfer costs. MIDEQ research across six regions showed an increasing use of mobile money platforms, especially in Africa and Asia, although service providers often withhold data from researchers and regulators. The shift from informal to formal channels is ongoing but remains incomplete—due in part to cost, convenience, and access. In Nepal, for example, about 20–30% of remittances still flow through informal channels, particularly via the open border with India. Mobile transfers are dominant in rural areas but are limited by infrastructure and trust issues, particularly among unbanked populations.

Efforts to bring remittance flows into the formal financial system are often hampered by the absence of detailed, disaggregated data. There is little understanding of who uses informal vs. formal channels, and how decisions vary by gender, location, or socioeconomic status. Regulators and central banks need to be integrated into national migration coordination frameworks to ensure better oversight, transparency, and collaboration with private service providers.

Gender and Household Dynamics
The session explored the nuanced gender dynamics of remittance sending and receiving. In many South-South migration corridors, men dominate the migrant workforce (as seen in Nepal), while women remain the primary recipients and financial managers. This creates household power imbalances and influences spending patterns. Evidence suggests that remittances managed by women are more likely to be used for education and skills development, rather than consumption. However, cultural dynamics and intra-family tensions can obscure the true use and impact of remittances. Participants emphasised the need for more gender-disaggregated data and tailored financial inclusion policies.

Government Strategies to Reduce Costs and Improve Impact
Several countries have taken policy steps to reduce the cost of remittances and improve their development impact. Zimbabwe introduced a 5% incentive scheme to promote formal transfers, allocating a portion of the bonus to recipients and remittance service providers. Still, informal channels remain widely used and poorly understood. In response to COVID-19 disruptions, many governments realised the need for more resilient remittance ecosystems.

Participants stressed that governments must also create investment vehicles and financial instruments suited to the needs of the diaspora. In Nepal, where remittances account for over 25% of GDP, the government has attempted to attract diaspora investment in infrastructure and development projects.

However, high costs, legal barriers (e.g. dual citisenship restrictions), and weak trust in public institutions deter most migrants, particularly those in low-skilled jobs or working in the Gulf, Malaysia, and India.

Building Trust and Unlocking Diaspora Investment
Trust is essential for unlocking diaspora contributions beyond consumption. Return migrants from Nepal reported little confidence in national social protection systems and a lack of exposure to contributory schemes, leading to low engagement. Trust can be strengthened through institutional responsiveness—for example, by improving the repatriation process for deceased migrants—and by publicly acknowledging the diaspora's contributions. Celebratory events like national Diaspora Days and matching fund programs (e.g., Mexico's 3x1) were highlighted as good practices.

Diaspora investment is also shaped by the enabling environment in origin countries. Governments must ensure transparent governance, repatriation of profits, simplified administrative procedures, and political stability. In countries like Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, initiatives have encouraged diaspora returnees to bring back not only capital, but also new agricultural methods and entrepreneurial models, helping to diversify and strengthen local economies.

Recognising and Leveraging Social Remittances
Beyond financial transfers, migrants return with knowledge, values, and skills—collectively known as social remittances—that can contribute significantly to development. Migrants returning from countries in the Global South may face fewer cultural barriers than those returning from Europe or North America, making it easier to apply innovations in sectors like agriculture, tech, and services. Governments should explicitly recognise these contributions by supporting reintegration programs, diaspora entrepreneurship, and inclusion in policy design and governance.

The African Union's migration policy framework recognises people of African descent globally as a developmental force. Similarly, governments like Ghana are targeting second-generation diaspora members with opportunities to invest, volunteer, or participate in public-private partnerships, even if they have never lived in the country.

Recommendations

1. **Lower Remittance Costs**: Governments should implement incentives and regulatory reforms to reduce transfer fees, especially for South-South corridors.
2. **Close Data Gaps**: Invest in collecting and sharing disaggregated remittance and diaspora data through collaboration with mobile money providers, central banks, and regional actors.
3. **Foster Trust with the Diaspora**: Ensure transparency, celebrate diaspora contributions, and offer timely responses to migrants' needs and crises.
4. **Develop Tailored Investment Instruments**: Create mechanisms for diaspora engagement based on their income levels, investment capacity, and interests—including micro-investments, cooperative funds, and bonds.
5. **Promote Financial and Digital Inclusion**: Expand access to formal financial systems, especially in rural and underbanked areas, and raise awareness of mobile platforms.
6. **Leverage Social Remittances**: Recognise returnees' knowledge and integrate diaspora professionals into national development strategies.
7. **Strengthen Bilateral and Regional Cooperation**: Countries of origin and destination must work together to ensure remittance security, protect migrant rights, and enable circular migration and reintegration.

What role can development actors play in supporting the positive contribution of migration to development in the Global South?

The final session of the conference addressed the critical role of development actors in mainstreaming migration across broader development efforts in the Global South.

Development actors must move from fragmented, short-term responses to systemic engagement with migration as a structural dimension of development. Doing so requires coordination, political will, and a commitment to equity and inclusion across all levels of governance.

Participants underscored that while human mobility is increasingly recognised in global policy discourse, it remains inconsistently integrated into national development planning and aid programming. The session examined how development actors can better support data systems, foster inclusive local governance, leverage migration for decent job creation, and ensure coherence between migration and broader development objectives—particularly in labour, education, and climate sectors.

Supporting Migration Data and Statistics in the Global South
A recurring theme was the chronic underfunding of migration data systems. Speakers emphasised the need to move beyond humanitarian crisis-driven data collection to build regular, disaggregated statistics that support policy across origin, transit, and destination contexts. Recommendations included increasing funding for field-based research and surveys, supporting national statistical offices, and establishing regional research centres in the Global South.

Examples like Senegal's national migration policy, supported by development actors in 9 of its 13 regions,

show what is possible when coordination is strong. However, data is often outdated and inconsistently defined, limiting its utility. International actors—including donors, UN agencies, and research institutions—must support data harmonisation and localisation. This includes overcoming the perception that migration data production is solely a state responsibility, as framed in Objective 1 of the Global Compact for Migration.

Unlocking Economic Opportunities and Shifting Narratives

Speakers emphasised that development actors need to help create meaningful economic opportunities for migrants and host communities alike. UNDP noted that short-term livelihood support or humanitarian responses are not enough—true development requires long-term access to employment, entrepreneurship, and financial systems. Participants highlighted the need for structural reforms to enable access to bank accounts, labour rights, and formal education systems.

Migration was repeatedly linked to economic insecurity, especially among youth. In Senegal, many young migrants are employed but underpaid, prompting them to seek opportunities abroad. GIZ and others emphasised the need to support entrepreneurship and vocational training to prevent forced or irregular migration, while also improving regular pathways aligned with development goals.

Development actors must also challenge harmful narratives that reduce migrants to passive beneficiaries or security risks. In contexts like Pakistan, where millions of Afghan refugees were deported under harsh conditions, development actors hesitated to engage due to the political sensitivity of migration. Yet silence risks legitimising rights violations. Advocates called for a more values-based and coordinated approach among international partners.

Mainstreaming Migration into Development Programming

A consistent message was that migration should not be treated in isolation. Speakers argued for greater integration of migration into sectoral policies—education, energy, labour, health—as well as into national development plans. For instance, the African diaspora could help address skills gaps in sectors like renewable energy, but governments need the systems to map and engage their talents.

UNDP shared the example of Colombia's effective integration strategy for Venezuelan migrants: instead of standalone programming, the government mandated that 10% of all development interventions include the migrant population. This model of horizontal mainstreaming could be replicated elsewhere, ensuring that migrants benefit from—and contribute to—existing systems and services.

Local Governance and Vertical Coherence

Participants stressed the vital role of local governments, where the impacts of migration are most directly felt. Yet international support often bypasses municipal actors, leading to fragmentation and inefficiencies. UNDP and IOM have worked for over a decade to mainstream migration at the local level, but vertical coordination remains weak.

While some cautioned against directly funding local authorities without national alignment, there was consensus on the need for coherent approaches that align local and national strategies. This includes supporting local governments to manage services, scale up infrastructure (schools, clinics), and develop inclusive urban planning strategies in high-mobility areas.

Donor Coordination and Policy Coherence

Finally, the session examined how donor countries and agencies can align migration funding with broader development priorities. Speakers criticised the tendency to treat migration as a standalone issue, disconnected from broader aid strategies. Some noted that donor involvement in migration programming should be carefully unpacked—highlighting risks of political influence, territorial competition, and lack of synergies across actors.

Oumar called for a rotating donor chair system and more effective coordination mechanisms. Several panellists agreed that donors should not duplicate efforts or impose conflicting migration agendas. Instead, they should focus on supporting local ecosystems, improving the informal economy, and promoting decent work—especially for youth.

Recommendations

1. **Invest in Migration Data Systems**: Support national statistical offices and fund field-based research and South-based research centres to ensure timely, disaggregated migration data.
2. **Mainstream Migration Across Development Sectors**: Integrate migration into programming in education, labour, energy, and health; avoid isolating migration in silos.
3. **Create Inclusive Economic Opportunities**: Expand access to jobs, finance, and entrepreneurship for migrants and returnees; support structural reforms to enable integration.
4. **Strengthen Vertical Coherence**: Align national and local government efforts on migration governance through joint planning, funding, and accountability.
5. **Coordinate Donor Approaches**: Reduce duplication and competition by establishing collaborative donor mechanisms and shared migration-development objectives.
6. **Address the Political Economy of Migration**: Development actors should not avoid politically sensitive migration issues; silence reinforces harmful practices.

7. **Engage the Private Sector and Diaspora**: Foster partnerships for skills development, innovation, and diaspora engagement in national development planning.

Conclusion: Rethinking Migration and Development in the Global South

This conference brought together a wide range of voices to reflect on the realities and opportunities of South-South migration. Several key messages emerged:

1. **There is no single migration profile**—neither in the Global North nor in the Global South. Migration is shaped by local, regional, and sectoral contexts, and any effective response must be rooted in these specificities.
2. **South-South migration remains under-prioritised and under-researched**. While global narratives and policy frameworks overwhelmingly focus on South-North flows, the majority of international migrants from the South move within the South—yet this receives scant attention in mainstream debates.
3. **The lack of visibility is closely tied to limited data, capacity, and investment in migration statistics in the Global South**. Strengthening national data systems, funding research institutions, and harmonising concepts are essential steps forward.
4. **Development partners and aid providers often fail to align their broader support with migration realities in partner countries**. Migration governance remains siloed, missing key opportunities to improve coherence across development and mobility-related programmes.
5. **Migration within the Global South is often more informal, irregular, and marked by higher levels of forced displacement**, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. These dimensions demand more flexible, inclusive, and protection-sensitive policy responses.
6. **The development potential of migration in the Global South is severely under-explored**. Research, programming, and funding must move beyond remittances to address the full spectrum of migration–development linkages, from labour markets and skills to social inclusion and governance.

The conference underscored the need for a paradigm shift: placing South-South migration at the centre of both migration and development agendas—not as a peripheral concern, but as a key driver of resilience, opportunity, and transformation in the 21st century.

Partners

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