Managing the costs and benefits of transit migration

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Background on the research project

Transit migration and development

- Transit migration affects **local, national and regional development** economically, socially and politically
- Impacts remain **insufficiently** understood and **taken into account** in the **development of** local and regional **migration and development policies**

→ the World Bank, OECD, UNDP and MMC partnered for a research project on this topic, focusing on LMICs
Methodology

Key research questions

• How does transit migration affect – positively or negatively – local economies and social cohesion? How do different types of transit migration affect transit hubs differently?

• Who are the main actors that benefit from / are negatively affected by transit migration?

• What are the implications of transit migration for municipalities (e.g., budget, infrastructure, public services, security)? How do they respond?

• How coordinated are national and local responses to the transit phenomenon?

• How can governments maximise the economic and social benefits of transit migration, while minimising the abuse and exploitation of migrants, and tension with local citizens?

• How can transit migration be better incorporated into local, national, regional and global migration and development policy processes?

• What are the research gaps and options going forward?
Methodology

Secondary research
• Desk review
• Expert meeting
→ Scoping paper

Primary research
• Qualitative interviews in:
  • Esquipulas (Guatemala)
  • Van (Türkiye)
  • Medenine and Zarzis (Tunisia)
  • Obock (Djibouti)
• Quantitative data: analysis of relevant 4Mi data available (not for all locations)
Findings

Trends in transit migration

• Dynamics varied between locations, regarding:
  • duration of stay at the transit location
  • visibility of the transit flow
  • profiles

• Common feature: most migrants are in irregular status in the country of transit or at least enter irregularly

• Strong gaps in official data on transit migration trends and dynamics
Findings

Trends in transit migration – 4Mi data from Medenine / Zarzis

Duration of stay in Medenine / Zarzis from arrival until interview

- 1-30 days: 19%
- 31-90 days: 4%
- 91-120 days: 6%
- 120-365 days: 24%
- More than 1 year: 45%

Preferred destination for 4Mi respondents in Medenine / Zarzis

- Europe: 38%
- Canada: 10%
- France: 9%
- Germany: 8%
- United States (US): 8%
- Belgium: 5%
- Sweden: 5%
- Netherlands: 3%
- Denmark: 3%
- Norway: 2%
- Switzerland: 2%
- Australia: 2%
- Italy: 1%
- Ireland: 1%
- Don't Know: 1%

Reason for stopping in Medenine / Zarzis

- Applying for asylum: 67%
- Immigration control and related procedures or obstacles: 26%
- Resting: 22%
- Working to earn money for the next stretch of the journey: 14%
Findings

Economic impacts

- **Some positive impact** on the local economy in most locations. **Exception**: the country with the most restrictive stance on migration

- The specific positive impacts **vary depending on the migration dynamics**: paying vs providing workforce

- **Facilitation of irregular movements as a source of livelihood** for the local community in all the fieldwork locations

- **Fears** among the local residents about an **increase in unemployment** or a **decrease in salaries**

- **Limited evidence** found regarding an additional **burden on public services**

- The positive economic impacts of transit migration often **do not translate into additional resources** for the local authorities:
Findings

Impact on security

• In most locations, no concrete negative impact of transit migration on security. Exception: clashes between ethnicities in Obock

HOWEVER many still mentioned a vague sense of insecurity connected to the unknown background of the migrants

• Perceived threat for local security: not transit migration per se, but transnational networks involved in the facilitation of irregular movements

• In one location, contribution to police corruption, in turn a security threat

• Insecurity caused by operations aimed at countering the facilitation of irregular migration
Findings

Perceptions among the local community

• Better perception of migrants who are only in transit compared to those who decide to settle

• Generosity and solidarity toward migrants in transit often linked to the local population’s own experience of and connections with emigration or displacement

• Instances of discrimination and rejection were also mentioned, especially:
  • migrants who are perceived as more culturally distant
  • migrants accused of not respecting local customs
Findings

Response from the local authorities

• Local authorities do not count with a formal migration department or unit, or with a local migration policy or a specific budget

→ A proactive local migration response depends on individual good will by public officials

• Lack of an adequate legal and policy framework on migration at the national level as a major obstacle for adequate local response, as local policies are supposed to derive from national ones
Findings

Response from the national authorities

• No specific legal or policy framework for managing transit migration

• National authorities often limit their response to border control and immigration enforcement. Even this response is however perceived as partial and often jeopardized by corruption

• The local perception of the role of national authorities (or lack thereof) is mostly negative
Findings

Coordination between actors

• **Strong disconnection between national and local authorities** regarding migration response, and a **lack of involvement of local authorities in migration policy making** at the national level

• **Formal coordination mechanisms** between national and local authorities and between the authorities, civil society and UN agencies are either **lacking or ineffective**

• Rather than coordinating with civil society and UN agencies, **the authorities often delegate the response to transit migration** to these actors
Policy implications

• Data collection and analysis
  • Strong need to improve data collection and analysis on migration, especially transit migration, to be able to develop evidence-based, well-informed policies

• Economic development:
  • Tension between the benefits of the informal contribution of migrants and the migration “industry” to the local economy and the losses connected to such informality for local and national authorities

• Migration policy:
  • Smuggling dynamics and immigration enforcement play a central role in determining the impact of transit migration on local economies and societies
  • The (limited) response to transit migration seems to be overwhelmingly focused on security, border management and law enforcement → it does not include a development perspective. Vice versa, local development plans do not adequately factor in the role of transit migration
Policy implications

• Role of local authorities:
  • Despite being at the forefront of migration response, **local authorities have very limited human and financial resources, and usually no legal mandate** for migration response

• Coordination between different actors:
  • **Coordination mechanisms** mostly play the role of **mere platforms for information sharing**. Opportunities to make them a platform to develop comprehensive, harmonized and “development sensitive” migration responses are currently missed
  
  • Part of the **response** to transit migration is often **delegated to UN agencies and other actors** who should have a subsidiary rather than leading role in these areas. This **risk undermining the role of authorities**
THANK YOU

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