



# Development on the Move

Measuring and Optimising Migration's Economic and Social Impacts

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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MIGRATION



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## About GDN

GDN – the Global Development Network – is a small, independent international organisation that allies researchers and institutes in development globally. GDN aims to support researchers in developing and transition countries to generate and share applied social science research to advance social and economic development. It was founded in 1999 on the premise that good policy research, properly applied, can accelerate development and improve people's lives. GDN's core business is research capacity building. The aspiration is to achieve a critical mass of researchers who are globally interconnected and produce good research to inform public policy.

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# Foreword

This report captures the main results from *Development on the Move: Measuring and Optimising Migration's Economic and Social Impacts*, a joint project of the Global Development Network (GDN) and the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr). We believe that this project is a unique and important contribution to the study of one of the most important phenomena of our time: international migration. It is a ground-breaking global research project that has gathered new, comparative qualitative and quantitative data about migration's development impacts. It has done so through an ambitious methodology involving primary research in seven countries, across six continents. The researchers have spoken to close to a hundred thousand people and gathered comparable in-depth data from almost 10,000 households.

The project has also been ambitiously broad, looking at a wide range of migration's development impacts, thinking about how migration *as a whole* affects development *as a whole*. And the project is uniquely policy focused, with policymaker inputs at various stages of the research and with fresh, workable policy ideas as one of the key project goals.

The range of outputs the project has produced is diverse, including workshops, a working paper series, a short film, a household dataset and a set of in-depth country studies, and this final report. In keeping with the spirit of GDN's and ippr's objectives, all materials from this project (including our survey instruments and the data) will be made available in the public domain, via our websites. This report, to be read in conjunction with the other outputs, summarises the work of the last three-and-a-half years, setting out what was done, what has been found, what it means for policymakers, and what we have learnt from the process.

The project owes its success to the hard work of countless people. While many of these people are thanked in the acknowledgements section of the report, we would like to note our particular gratitude to two groups of people. First, to the international group of donors, without whose support GDN and ippr could not have embarked on such a project. And secondly to the many colleagues past and present at GDN and ippr who have contributed to this project over the last few years.

At GDN, we are particularly grateful to Lyn Squire (the former President), who played a critical role in getting the project off the ground; Ramona Angelescu Naqvi, who has been the intellectual, strategic and administrative backbone of the project from even before it was started; and George Mavrotas for his intellectual leadership, academic advice and econometric expertise during the life of the project and for being instrumental at the crucial dissemination stage. At ippr we are incredibly grateful to Laura Chappell who has worked tirelessly to coordinate every aspect of this very large project, and never losing her infectious enthusiasm for the value of what we have been working towards.

Finally, we wanted to underline the collaborative nature of this endeavour. GDN and ippr have tried from the outset to ensure that *Development on the Move* has been an open and collaborative endeavour between partners from all over the world hoping to learn from one another while adding to the global stock of knowledge. We hope that what we have produced will be of use to researchers and policymakers for years to come. While this report marks the end of this project, we would be delighted to hear from people who have comments and suggestions on how to take this endeavour forward. It is a promising beginning but hopefully much more can be learned, taking advantage of this path-breaking global research project.

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May 2010

# Executive Summary

## Project background and aims

This report presents the main findings from the major global research project, *Development on the Move*, carried out between 2006 and 2010. The project has examined a wide range of migration's impacts on development, including through gathering new, comparable data in Colombia, Fiji<sup>3</sup>, Georgia, Ghana, Jamaica, Macedonia and Vietnam. While the already-published country studies provide details of findings in each country, this report seeks to draw out the main comparative lessons.

The project aimed to make five key contributions to the study of migration's development impacts:

1. To develop better methodologies for assessing migration's impacts. The project designed a new, holistic approach to the study of migration and development. Our aim was to examine the range of various effects that international migration – both immigration and emigration – has on economic and social development.
2. To improve the evidence base. The project commissioned a set of new country studies, each of which was conducted in the same way, combining analysis of the existing literature with new data taken from extensive, in-depth household surveys and stakeholder interviews.
3. To carry out comparative work. There is a clear need for more analysis that examines similar research questions, using similar definitions of migration and development, and gathering similar kinds of data in similar ways. This kind of analysis should give us a much greater insight into general lessons and the factors that appear to be at the root of differences in impacts.
4. To analyse policy impacts and options. An explicit focus of the project was current and potential policy frameworks for managing migration and its impacts. We wanted to explore how policymakers could enhance positive impacts and reduce negative ones.
5. To build research capacity on migration. In order to help build migration research capacity and strengthen research networks, especially in developing countries, teams based in the countries studied conducted the majority of research for the project, with support and coordination from GDN and ippr staff and advisers.
6. To promote multi-disciplinary analysis. By adopting a multi-disciplinary framework and by assembling researchers and advisers from different methodological backgrounds, the project aimed to go beyond the narrow focus of much current migration research, and to promote holistic analysis.

## Methodology

The project has analysed a wide range of migration's effects. These include:

- Economic impacts, educational impacts, health impacts, gender impacts and 'wider' social impacts
- Impacts for individual migrants themselves, plus their families, communities and nations
- Impacts that occur both directly as a result of movement (through immigration, emigration and return) and indirectly (for example, through remittances, other 'transfers' (like the transfer of investment funds or of ideas), and the potential that migration has to change people's behaviour).

In each of the 'case study' countries we worked with local researchers who gathered together the existing evidence on this diverse range of impacts and complemented it with two additional kinds of new data – information gathered from stakeholder

3. Analysis from Fiji is not included in this main report as the Fiji dataset and report were not complete at the time this report was being prepared. We anticipate its publication later in 2010.

interviews, and a new, nationally-representative household survey. The survey was the most important and innovative aspect of our approach. We designed it specifically for this project to give us reliable data on how common migration is and to investigate a range of its development impacts.

In each country the survey was carried out in such a way that it provided nationally representative results (with the exception of Colombia which, for logistical and financial reasons, was representative of urban areas only), meaning that this project is able to draw a picture of the scale and impacts of migration across the countries as a whole. This means that policymakers can draw on the findings with confidence, knowing that they depict trends for their entire country, not just certain specific groups or areas.

The final dataset includes information from almost 10,000 households, each of which was asked around 178 questions. The topics covered included household members' characteristics (such as age, occupation, gender) and their experiences of migration, as well as information on the household as a whole (such as their consumption patterns and receipt of remittances). Households both with and without migrants were included, the latter as a basis for comparison, to try to understand migration's effects.

Attributing causality – that is, understanding when migration is genuinely the cause of a particular trend – is a key issue in interpreting data on migration. For example, if the data show that households with migrants have higher incomes than households without, how can we be sure that migration has caused the increase in incomes? An alternative explanation is that members of richer households are simply more likely to be able to afford to migrate. To overcome this problem, we have used a range of techniques which include:

- (a) Advanced econometric tools (such as propensity score matching and instrumental variable analysis)
- (b) The use of retrospective questions to plot how things have changed within households over time
- (c) Asking migrants themselves about what they believe was cause and what was effect
- (d) Drawing on our other methodologies (such as existing literature and interviews with experts) to try to contextualise and explain findings.

### **Findings 1: How common is migration?**

Table 1 (overleaf) provides a summary of existing estimates of migration, as well as our own calculations.

Two points in particular emerge. First, it is interesting to note that the kind of emigration often assumed to have the greatest development impacts – that is, recent emigration in which the migrant leaves other household members behind – does not constitute as large a proportion of all emigration from the countries studied as might have been expected: no more than 60 per cent for the countries we have data for, and in some places far less than this, just above 10 per cent for Georgia, for instance.

Second, the project presents the first nationally representative and comparable statistics on return migration that have ever been collected, as far as we are aware. When 'rates of return' are calculated we find that although they vary somewhat between countries, in no cases are they very high. In Georgia we estimate about 12 out of every 100 emigrants have returned, in Vietnam about 16 out of every 100, and in Jamaica about 20. Ghana and Macedonia see somewhat higher levels of return with 34 migrants returning to Macedonia for every 100 who have departed, and 37 out of 100 in Ghana.

Even where rates of return appear broadly similar, that does not mean that return migration is composed of similar people across countries, or that it is driven by similar forces or has the same development effects. Migration's nature and its impacts need to be explored explicitly and separately from its scale.

Table 1: Estimates of frequency of migration

Country	Population size	Total emigrant stock <sup>1</sup>	Stock of emigrants who departed within last decade leaving some household members behind <sup>2</sup>	Total stock of returned migrants <sup>3</sup>	Total immigrant stock <sup>4</sup>
Colombia <sup>5</sup>	44,530,000	460,000 – 3,300,000. Consensus is above 1,500,000	–	–	110,000 – 115,000
Georgia	4,680,000	196,000 – 1,500,000. Consensus around 900,000	140,000	138,000	167,000 – 526,000
Ghana	23,350,000	960,000 – 4,000,000	541,000	877,000	614,000 – 1,852,000
Jamaica	2,690,000	1,000,000+	130,000	240,000	13,000 – 30,000
Macedonia	2,040,000	3300 – 700,000. Consensus between 250,000 and 500,000	163,000	159,000	33,000 – 130,000
Vietnam	86,210,000	2,000,000 – 3,000,000+	1,200,000	479,000	22,000 – 69,000

[1] Sources: University of Sussex's Global Migrant Origin (GMO) database and statistics used in-country; [2] Source: DotM; [3] Source: DotM; [4] Sources: DotM, GMO and UN population division; in most cases the DotM immigration estimate falls between the UN and GMO estimates; [5] No DotM statistics are provided for Colombia because the survey there was only representative for urban areas and not the country as a whole.

## Findings 2: Why do people migrate?

Our survey gives an insight into the motivations driving emigration and return across a range of countries in the developing world. Drivers of emigration appear remarkably consistent across countries, with the pursuit of economic opportunity clearly emerging as the major reason to depart. Employment opportunities and higher wages on offer abroad are by far the strongest motivators of movement, with having the opportunity to remit the third most important. The prominence given to remittances demonstrates explicitly that migrants do not leave just to further their own economic prospects, but also to improve their families' economic welfare.

After these economic factors come two other broad categories of motivation – learning (migration for formal study, to learn a language or to acquire other skills) and family (migrating alongside family members, or to join those already living abroad). It is striking that reasons relating to social and political problems in the country of origin were rarely identified, even in countries such as Colombia which have experienced turmoil and instability in recent years. But this does not mean that such problems *are not* drivers of emigration – political and social problems often create the economic conditions that drive economic emigration.

While reasons for departure were broadly consistent across countries, reasons for return were much less so both between and within countries, though family and personal reasons were the most commonly reported. The desire to be with family was the biggest driver motivating migrants to return. After family considerations come two sets of reasons: 'completion' motivators (the migrant finishes their job or contract, their study, or makes the amount of money they went abroad to earn) and visa and related issues (people returning because of having a bond placed on

them,<sup>4</sup> people returning voluntarily because their visa has expired, or people who are deported). It would seem that immigration regimes in countries of destination do drive some return migration, despite assertions by some that they have no effect. Another relatively common set of reasons revolve around the migrant either being disappointed with their life overseas, or missing the culture and lifestyle at 'home'.

New economic opportunities in the country of origin, such as a new job, or wanting to start a new business, and government or other schemes to motivate return, are mentioned rarely. This is likely to be disappointing for policymakers in both origin and destination countries who hope to tempt returnees back by highlighting new economic opportunities or providing specially tailored programmes, such as voluntary return packages.

### Findings 3: Remittance patterns

Table 2 highlights the proportion of absent migrants who remit to the household they left behind when they migrated – somewhere between one third and three quarters, depending on the country in question. Given the information we have on the proportion of households in each country that have a migrant, we are able to calculate the proportion of the population in each country that receives remittances from their own absent migrant. This ranges between 2 and 11 per cent.

Our research also shows that it is very common for households to receive funds from migrants who were not previously members of their households – typically more distant relatives, or in some cases (especially in Jamaica), friends. In three countries (Colombia, Jamaica and Vietnam), more households are estimated to benefit from this kind of remittance than those sent money by their 'own' absent migrant. Those 'non-household member' remitters send less money, and send it less frequently, than a household's own absent migrant, but the differences tend not to be very great. This makes clear that the development impacts of migration extend beyond the migrant's own household into the wider community: an important finding, challenging the commonly held perception that migration's benefits may only go as far as their immediate household.

The report also explores how the characteristics of migrants influence their remitting behaviour. Neither gender nor the migrant's level of education prior to departure has a clear or consistent influence over the likelihood that they will remit or the amounts they send. Rather, patterns vary by country, with for example

Table 2: Frequency of remittances

Country	Proportion of absent migrants that remit to their household of origin	Est. proportion of all households in country who receive funds from their own absent migrant	Est. proportion of all households in country who receive remittances from a 'non-member remitter'
Colombia <sup>1</sup>	43%	2%	4%
Georgia	72%	11%	10%
Ghana	66%	6%	4%
Jamaica	67%	7%	28%
Macedonia	36%	9%	7%
Vietnam	77%	4%	9%

Source: DotM household surveys 2007 / 2008

[1] In Colombia these are estimates for the proportion of households in urban areas receiving remittances from each source.

4. Bonds are arrangements whereby when a migrant goes abroad supported by the government of their country of origin (often for study), they agree to return, and if they do not return they have to pay a certain amount to the government.

Vietnamese women remitting more than men while Macedonian women remit less than their male counterparts. Other characteristics appear to have more consistent effects – for example, if the migrant leaves close family behind (such as a partner or children), they remit more. This is unsurprising, but may raise awkward trade-off questions in policymakers' minds, especially in countries of origin, for while extended periods of separation are no doubt bad for family welfare, there may be a temptation to pursue that kind of migration to maximise remittance flows.

#### **Findings 4: The economic impacts of migration**

Our research finds that individual migrants' own disposable income is improved – quite often dramatically – by migration. Typically between 70 and 90 per cent of migrants are reported to have experienced an increase in their real disposable incomes while abroad, the majority seeing large increases. Of the remainder, the majority experience no change and only a few see their incomes decline.

Our research suggests that not only does migration raise individual migrants' incomes: it also raises the incomes of households they come from and/or remit to. (While there is some overlap between households that receive remittances and those with an absent migrant, they are not the same – see Table 2). For example, in Colombia households that receive remittances are 12 per cent less likely to be below the national poverty line than those who do not. In Georgia having an absent migrant makes a household more likely to have built up its assets, for example being 10 percentage points more likely to have acquired a DVD player over the preceding five years.

We also found that receiving remittances seems to have a positive impact on business ownership. In Colombia, for example, receiving remittances raises the likelihood that a household has a bank account used for running a business by 5 percentage points. On the other hand, having an absent migrant in the household does not appear to increase business ownership. The general trend for households with returned migrants suggests that on the whole this, too, increases the likelihood of the household owning a business. Here, results vary significantly by country, however: while the presence of a returned migrant in Georgia appears to have no effect on business ownership, in Macedonia it dramatically increases the likelihood. Doing business in Georgia is generally regarded as relatively easy, and in Macedonia less so, and it may be that this means that there is relatively less need in Georgia for the advantages that migration brings.

Receiving remittances appears, on the whole, to have little impact on household members' labour force participation or unemployment. Nor does return migration affect household members' employment status, though the returning migrants themselves tend to have a greater chance of being unemployed for the first 12 months after return than would be expected of people with similar characteristics (after that they appear to adjust and this risk dissipates). The evidence on the impact of having an absent migrant is more divided but the most notable results suggest that migration increases employment. In Georgia having an absent migrant reduces the likelihood that anyone in the household is unemployed by 37 per cent, and a result of a similar magnitude is found in Jamaica.

Both households receiving remittances and those with absent migrants see an increase in their *savings*. In Colombia, for example, households in receipt of remittances save US\$4 more per capita per month than otherwise, and households with absent migrants US\$3 per capita per month (the World Bank estimates the average monthly per capita income in Colombia is US\$228). Return migrants appear to have no effect on savings one way or the other.

#### **Findings 5: The educational impacts of migration**

The evidence suggests that being in receipt of remittances and having an absent migrant have a positive impact on household spending on education. Households in Ghana with absent migrants, for example, spend US\$107 more per year on education



than those without (the World Bank estimates average annual per capita household income in Ghana is US\$670). Return migrants appear to have no particular impact one way or the other.

In terms of school attendance, however, on the whole migration seems not to have any effects – whether household experience is through the receipt of remittances, having a migrant away or having a returned migrant in their household. Putting these two results together suggests that households with migrants are probably making improvements to the quality of children’s education, investing in materials like books, or sending them to better schools, rather than making larger changes such as enrolling them for an extra year’s schooling.

There is, however, an exception to this general statement, as *parental migration* does appear to have a substantial impact. Some evidence suggests that when a parent migrates, this has a considerable effect on whether or not their children, left behind in the country of origin, are in education (though results vary significantly by country). In Jamaica, parental absence is associated with younger children in particular being much less likely to be in school, whereas in Vietnam and Macedonia the result is reversed, with parental migration being associated with children having a substantially greater chance of being in school. However, the models that examine these impacts do not control for causality, and so it is difficult to know how much of this association is driven by migration, and how much by reverse causality.

Turning to the effect that migration has on *national skills stocks*, it seems likely that in some of the DotM countries (particularly Jamaica, but possibly also Ghana and Macedonia) migration’s overall effect on a country’s stock of skills may be negative. In other words, the positive effects that migration can have on skills stocks (through immigration, return, remittances and incentive effects) are not able to compensate for the direct impact of skilled people emigrating. In Vietnam, Georgia and Colombia, on the other hand, it seems possible that while skills are being lost through emigration, they are being compensated for through migration’s other channels. Indeed, it may be that these countries now have more skilled people than they otherwise would have had, had no one been able to migrate.

### **Findings 6: The health impacts of migration**

Where households receive remittances, there is some strong evidence from across the studies that spending on health increases. In Vietnam, for example, regional fixed effects analysis suggests that not only does receiving remittances raise healthcare spending, but remittances also appear to raise health spending more dramatically than other forms of income. And having an absent migrant on the whole appears to increase spending on healthcare, although here the evidence is thinner and less consistent.

Having a returned migrant seems to affect healthcare spending. In Jamaica, for example, each additional returned migrant in a household increases healthcare spending by more than 50 per cent. The patterns of spending change too, so that less emphasis is placed on traditional Jamaican medicines and more on the kinds of treatments that migrants will have been exposed to in the countries they have been living in (predominantly the USA, UK and Canada). We suggest that while this analysis is based on OLS modelling and thus does not explicitly address questions of causality, these combined findings do point towards migration being the cause of the changed behaviour.

Returning migrants, while they appear to boost healthcare spending, do not affect household members’ reported health status, and neither on the whole (except for in Colombia, where effects are negative), do absent migrants or remittances. As in education, there is a distinction between spending patterns and outcomes – migration appears to have positive impacts on spending on health and education but not, on the whole, to the extent that outcomes such as household members’ health, or school attendance, improve.

**“Households with migrants are probably making improvements to the quality of children’s education, investing in materials like books, or sending them to better schools”**

The report also looks into the effect that migration has on a country's *healthcare provision* – an issue that often gains attention because of fears that ‘brain drain’ draws healthcare professionals out of a developing country. Our evidence suggests that the damage caused by brain drain can often be overstated because opportunities to emigrate may actually drive additional people into healthcare professions through ‘incentive effects’. The resulting net effect on healthcare provision seems to vary across countries. In Jamaica and Ghana 20 per cent and 25 per cent of medically trained personnel respectively are located abroad, which may be levels that these countries have found difficult to cope with. On the other hand, Vietnam and possibly Georgia might actually have more healthcare staff than they do at present if they had higher levels of medical migration, as the more powerful incentive effects might well outweigh the numbers of people who actually leave.

### **Findings 7: The gender and other social impacts of migration**

Exposure to different norms and experiences while abroad can, it is suggested, change people's *attitudes towards gender* roles. Among returned migrants this was indeed the case: typically more than 70 per cent of migrants from each country said that as a result of their experiences, they were more committed to efforts to achieve gender equality in their country of origin. However, changes in attitudes do not seem to translate into changes in behaviour within returned migrants' own households (or in households in receipt of remittances or with absent migrants). None of the evidence gathered on this issue suggests that migration is changing who – men or women – undertakes household tasks (such as childcare, home repairs or cooking).

When it comes to migration's effects on *family structure*, our research suggests that while some migration does split nuclear families, this does not occur as often as one might expect. For example estimates suggest that emigration from Colombia makes it 6 per cent less likely that parents and children are living together. These numbers are so low partly because much of the emigration that takes place is of whole households.

It does appear that the temporary separation of families may lead to permanent breakdowns in relationships, however, even when migrants return to their country of origin. For example, in Vietnam rates of separation and divorce are higher among returned migrants than the non-migrant population, as are numbers of single parent families, who make up 4.5 per cent of non-migrant families but 6.7 per cent of returned migrant families. That said, there is no investigation of causality here (and it may be that people migrate to escape from a bad relationship, or feel freer to go because their family life is poor), and the rates are still quite low.

### **Policy implications**

The findings from *Development on the Move* provide some useful insights for policymakers. We hope that as well as providing some insight into which specific policy levers could be used to maximise migration's contributions to development, this report also helps policymakers to look beyond the immediate imperatives that often seem to drive migration policy.

At the individual and household level, this project contributes further evidence that in almost all cases migration can be an important way of improving livelihoods and expanding capabilities. This is an important reminder to policymakers and practitioners that migration should not be seen primarily as a ‘problem’ for development. While it may create challenges migration does allow people – many of whom may have few alternatives – to improve their own standard of living and that of their families and others to whom they remit. The evidence suggests, moreover, that through spillover effects such as business creation it may also improve development outcomes, even for people without a direct relationship with a migrant.

That said, poor economic opportunities in developing countries drive migration and may also make return less attractive. Plus, while migration is improving many outcomes for people in developing countries, these changes tend to be incremental. Nothing in the findings of this project suggests that migration is

transformational at the societal level, or that alone it can be relied on to act as a national strategy for development. Rather, the fact that people are migrating in order to achieve certain goals (and are not being attracted back by opportunities at 'home') should be taken as a reflection of people struggling to achieve their aims and improve their lives in their country of origin, and that more needs to be done to promote sustainable national development. This is not news – policymakers do not need migration to remind them of the need for development – but it is important to note because there is a danger that migration and its benefits are used as a reason for development to be pursued with less urgency, when it should be seen as another indicator that successful long-term development strategies must be devised and pursued.

An equally important implication of this project's broad framework has been to underline the complexity of impacts that migration can generate. For example, while large-scale emigration from one particular sector (such as health) can in some instances have a negative impact, there are many other ways in which the departure of those migrants may be having positive impacts on the society they have left behind. Development on the Move has cast light on some of the better known of those impacts (such as the economic benefits of remittances) and those that have not been studied as much (such as attitudes to gender equality). The research suggests that any attempt to intervene based on a narrow or short-term view of migration's impacts could be counterproductive.

More generally, the findings emphasise how powerful a force migration is – it is very common; it is successful in improving key aspects of migrants' and others' lives; and the policies put in place around it can shape but not control or determine it. This implies that policies that acknowledge and even facilitate people's migration ambitions are likely to be more effective than those that inhibit and frustrate them.

As such, policies that open legal routes for migration that make it easier for migrants to invest and buy property in their country of origin while away; or that reduce remittance costs are likely to boost migration's development impacts, as are all policies that recognise and work with the grain of people's migratory intentions and migrants' interactions with their country of origin. In contrast, policies that try to stop emigration, to induce return without changing the wider policy environment, or even those that are simply poorly connected to the lives migrants live (such as policies that try to induce migrants to invest in community development projects over which they have little control or to which they have few links) are much more likely to fail. Good policy interventions should be based on a sound understanding of migrants' motivations and real life experiences, and should 'go with the flow' of migration as an unstoppable fact of life in the 21st century.

Finally, by taking a wide definition of international migration (examining all movements of three months or more both into and out of a country), and looking at all sorts of interactions (going beyond remittances to consider ideas and attitudes transmitted from abroad, for example), this project has also uncovered new evidence of the scale, nature and even the impacts of migration. In some countries there has been much more short-term migration of a duration that falls below the generally accepted threshold of what is defined 'migration'. It also may not be officially recorded as migration by immigration agencies. For example, when a Jamaican goes to the United States and works cash-in-hand for a few months before returning home, this is generally not classed as international migration. Yet such behaviour does seem to be common in some contexts and potentially has development impacts as important as those from longer-term migration. The project also finds that new communication technologies appear to be transforming the ways that migrants can interact with their home countries.

Policymakers interested in managing migration, let alone harnessing its development benefits, should recognise, then, that today's migration patterns do not mirror those of yesterday. While migration may be an age-old human strategy for seeking betterment, the conditions under which migration takes place and the nature of its impacts seem to be evolving constantly.