



Migration as an opportunity

Evidence of labour migration initiatives

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A teal-colored circle containing the text 'Key messages' in white.

Key messages

- After a wide literature review, we found evidence of 231 public – and private-sector interventions, adopted by countries around the world to facilitate labour migration – either by directly matching migrants with jobs or by providing training.
- These interventions show that, despite the current political debates which suggest otherwise, regular pathways for migration do exist and there is a potential for reform.
- However, there is little evidence as to the effectiveness or impact of these interventions.
- Such evidence is crucial to make policies and programmes more adaptable to the needs of destination markets and the capacities of migrants, and regular labour migration more predictable.

Introduction

In recent years, the debate over migration has dominated the policy-making agenda around the world. Jobs are considered to be the motivation for people to move voluntarily, as well as a catalyst for restrictive migration policy. At the same time, facilitating access to the labour market has been at the heart of debates on achieving sustainable livelihoods for refugees and asylum seekers. Added to this are debates around the socioeconomic integration of migrants (OECD, 2017), and calls to fulfil the labour and skills needs of destination countries.

So, what do we know about labour mobility initiatives? Do they exist? What do they look like and who do they target? Through a collaboration between the ODI and the London School of Economics (LSE), we looked at evidence of interventions from around the world during the last 20 years that aimed to provide pathways for migrants to improve their livelihood opportunities.

Experiences from these interventions need to be known, evaluated and considered in reforming the current system, not least because they prove one fundamental point: beyond the binary and simplistic debate of open versus closed borders, there is a middle ground – one that is based on the kind of incremental experiences that have been instrumental in trying to foster other aspects of globalisation such as trade, climate and human rights.

Distinctions are sometimes difficult to make, but official figures suggest that 9 out of 10 migrants moved for economic reasons in 2017.¹ About three quarters of the 258 million migrants worldwide come from low- and middle-income countries, with the rest being from high-income countries (UNDESA, 2017). Some 160 million are medium- and low-skilled workers (McKinsey Global Institute, 2016).

These migrant workers constitute a force for global development. The very essence of labour migration lies in the huge income differentials that exist globally: a worker from a low-income country can earn significantly more in a high-income country, thus being able to improve standards of living for their families. With multiplier effects in both host and origin countries, this makes migration one of the most powerful poverty reduction instruments (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2017). The chance to take advantage of a wage and productivity gap (Clemens et al., 2008) by moving to a more enabling economic environment allows migrants to multiply their personal

income² and their contribution to global gross domestic product, which is almost three times larger than their share of the global population (9.4% versus 3.4%) (McKinsey Global Institute, 2016). Mobility unbinds entrepreneurial potential (for both skilled and low-skilled migrants) and provides a demographic bonus to ageing destination societies. In the case of receiving low- and middle-income countries, skilled migrants can make a fundamental contribution by moving up the value chain (OECD, 2017). In social and economic environments as diverse as Argentina, Australia, Costa Rica, Ghana, Malaysia, South Africa, Thailand, the UK or the US, skilled migrants underpin destination economies by fulfilling significant skills shortages (e.g. OECD, 2013).

From the perspective of origin countries, migrant workers constitute a phenomenal source of income for families and communities through remittances – \$429 billion, according to the latest World Bank data for 2016 (World Bank, 2017). But migrants are valuable not only for the income they bring: diasporas and returned migrants can play a critical role in providing ‘social remittances’ that underpin social, economic and democratic reforms at home.

Economic migration, however, can also come at a cost. Origin countries can suffer from labour shortages (particularly of skilled and highly educated workers) and those left behind can pay a high price in the form of uprooted families and weakened communities. Migrants also face high levels of vulnerability in relation to social, legal and economic security as well as protection and integration challenges (see for example, Foresti and Hagen-Zanker, 2017).

The net result of human mobility can be optimised for the common interest with well-designed, targeted national integration measures and policies that facilitate asylum seekers’ and refugees’ access to work. As we show in the next section, there is no shortage of such attempts from governmental and non-governmental actors.

This briefing note begins by mapping the existence and nature of those policy interventions, which cover the full diversity of human mobility. They show that, despite the toxic debates which suggest otherwise, regular pathways for migration do exist and there is a potential for reform. However, while we know that such pathways exist, evidence is lacking on their delivery and impacts. Evidence is crucial to make policies and programmes more adaptable to the needs of destination markets and the capacities of migrants, and regular labour migration more predictable.

1 The number of official refugees and asylum seekers was 25.9 million. The distinction matters at first, since the admission norms and institutions that accompany each of these categories are different. Yet, in practice, aspirations, journeys and behaviours are often shared, and all migrants eventually seek out protection and livelihoods.

2 A typical worker from an average developing country would earn 2.5 to 3 times their income if they moved to the US, for instance (Clemens et al., 2008).

The evidence on labour migration initiatives

Understanding *existing* initiatives that aim to maximise the economic benefit of migration is crucial to understanding their future potential. With this in mind, we conducted with LSE a review of existing public- and private-sector initiatives worldwide that aim to provide migrants with regular pathways to improve their livelihood outcomes.

We undertook a rigorous, evidence-focused literature review, which relied on some of the core principles of systematic reviews in order to generate a focused and comprehensive assessment (Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2013). Our scope was, however, limited to mostly English-language literature (four Spanish publications were included). While the searches had also initially screened Arabic, French and Spanish sources, the articles found were deemed to be not as comprehensive as those available in English. This of course has implications for the documentation of policies and programmes

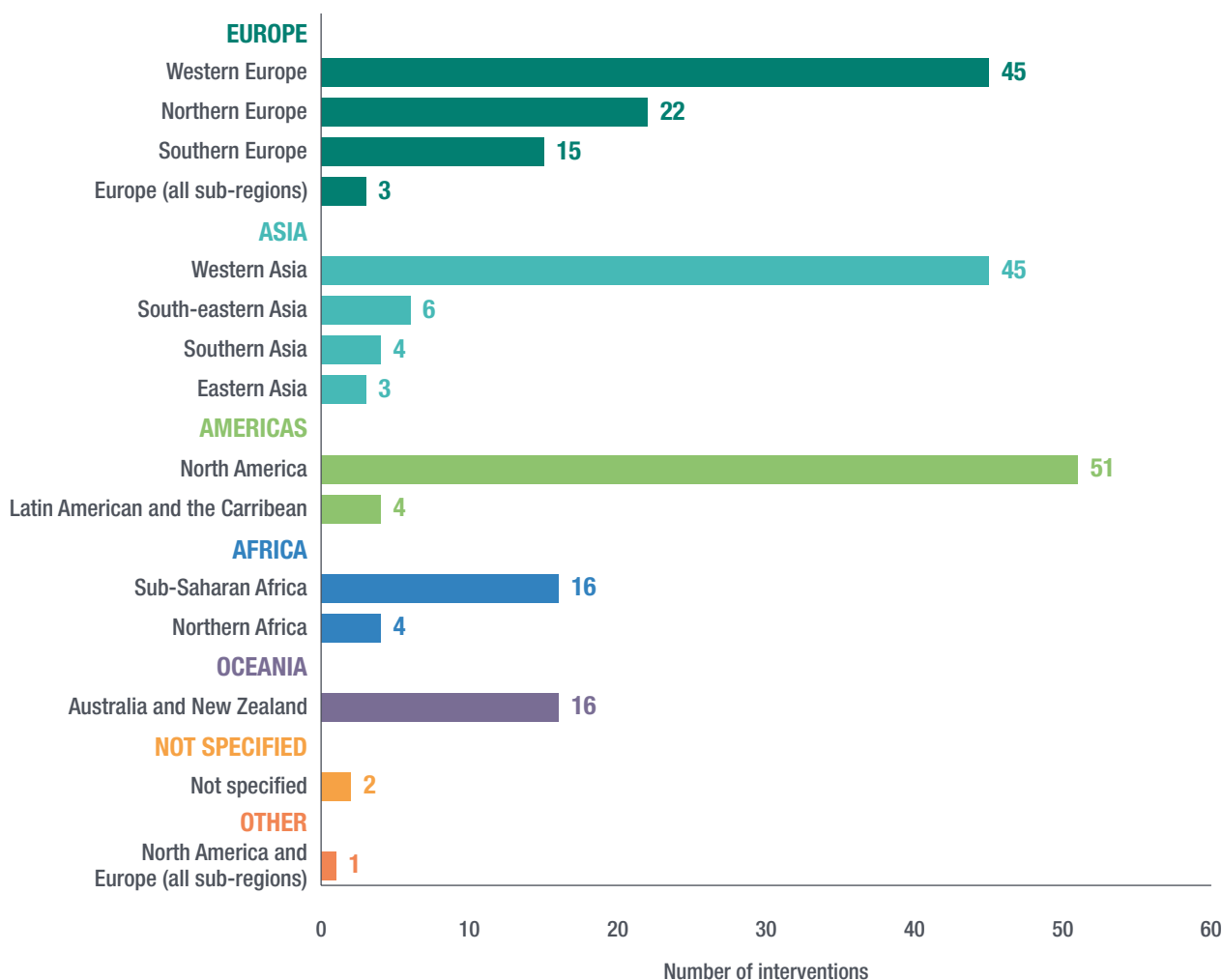
and means that the review is likely to have omitted interventions that exist in non-English speaking countries. Figure 1 depicts interventions by region and sub-region: most interventions found are in developed countries.

Although generally undocumented refugees and asylum seekers were not included in this review, we did include them in the case of right-to-work schemes. Also excluded are interventions that indirectly create livelihood opportunities – such as visas for spouses of migrants or citizens.

As part of this study, we found 231 unique interventions aimed at:

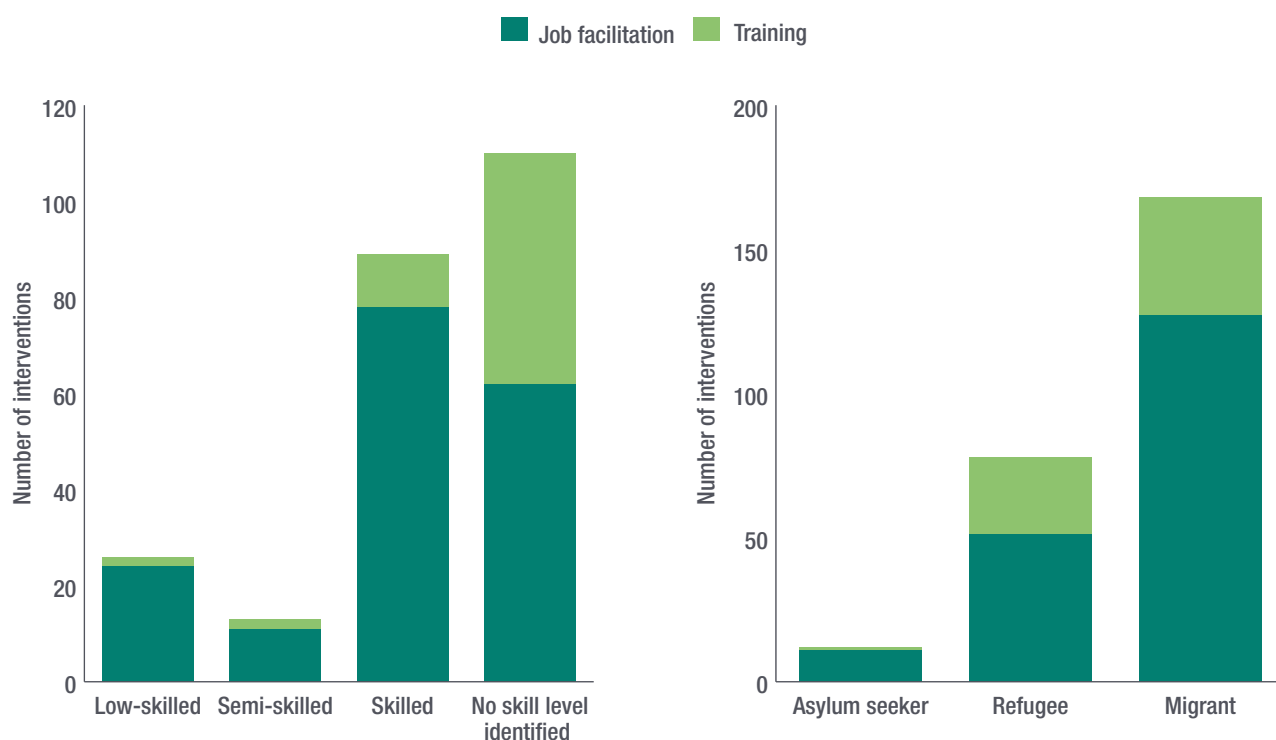
1. *job facilitation* that links migrants to employment opportunities in the host country (e.g. temporary work permits) (n=168)
2. *training* that provides migrants with the necessary knowledge and skills that promote labour market participation (e.g. language-based or vocational training) (n=63).

Figure 1 Interventions by region and sub-region



Note: while this graph represents all the interventions we reviewed, some interventions took place in multiple locations. This accounts for the fact that 237 interventions are graphically represented, while 231 were reviewed.

Figure 2 Groups and skill levels targeted for job facilitation and training interventions



Both job facilitation and training interventions target other migrants more frequently than refugees and asylum seekers (Figure 2). The review showed that asylum seekers are targeted the least – particularly for training-related interventions. Most interventions don't explicitly target by skill level. When they do, they are mostly targeted at the highly skilled.

The evidence reviewed shows that there are significantly more studies evaluating job facilitation schemes than those evaluating training schemes. While there is no linear correlation between number of schemes and evaluations conducted, this does suggest that, on the whole, job facilitation schemes tend to be more common.

Job facilitation

There are five different scheme types or modalities for *job facilitation* interventions. These range from temporary visa schemes to return programmes for nationals which aim to facilitate integration into the labour market. We define modalities under each type of intervention by the assumptions underlying their design. Table 1 shows this for job facilitation interventions.

Schemes targeting skilled migrants

These are designed in such a way to attract and select migrants with the desired skills and expertise (Facchini and Lodigiani, 2014; Hawthorne, 2008). The primary

Table 1 Job facilitation intervention modalities and assumptions

Modalities	Main assumptions	Number of interventions found
1 Schemes targeting skilled migrants	Gaps in the host country's labour market due to specific skill sets being absent or lacking among native workers	37
2 Seasonal, circular and temporary visa schemes	Gaps in the host country's labour market due to the native workforce not wanting to work in certain sectors	20
3 Right-to-work schemes for asylum seekers and refugees	Need for self-reliance opportunities and sources of income; dwindling humanitarian funds	15
4 Schemes leveraging technology to broker jobs	Mismatched information between employers and job seekers	7
5 Return programmes for nationals	Gaps/specific needs in the origin country's labour market may be filled by returning nationals	26
6 Skills development and job placements	Need for skills/experiences and hands-on job brokering support	63

assumption behind these interventions is that migrants can fulfil labour market demands when recruited through skills-selective measures. There are three primary, though not mutually exclusive, designs for these types of schemes:

- offering visas that are tied to a specific employer and job
- offering visas to those possessing the professional skills and qualifications desired by the host country (e.g. a points-based system)
- offering qualification recognition to skilled migrants (e.g. automatic mutual recognition agreements).

There are many examples of schemes targeting skilled migrants – especially in developed countries. These include the US’s H-1B visa, Canada and Australia’s points systems, the EU’s Blue Card and the EU’s automatic mutual recognition agreements. The literature shows, however, that while visa schemes are effective in recruiting skilled labour, migrants are often unable to fully leverage their professional expertise in the labour market (Facchini and Lodigiani, 2014; Iredale, 2000).

Seasonal, circular and temporary visa schemes

These are underpinned by a rationale to overcome a shortage in local workers willing to take seasonal jobs due to harsh working conditions and low wages (Beckford, 2016; Castles, 2006; Gibson and McKenzie, 2010). An example of this is New Zealand’s Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme, which was created in 2007 to solve the long-standing problems of meeting the labour needs of the country’s horticulture and viticulture industries. Tonga and Vanuatu are two of the main countries participating in this programme. Results show that earnings of migrants from these countries increased by 28% and that there has been a general increase in per capital incomes of households participating in the scheme of more than 30%.

Right-to-work schemes for asylum seekers and refugees

On the other hand, modalities targeting refugees and asylum seekers under the right-to-work schemes are more limited in scale and impact. Participating in those schemes is usually conditional on obtaining an official protection status after a set period of time (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2016). The evidence shows that low-skilled refugees and asylum seekers often face greater barriers to employment. In Turkey, for example, employed refugees must not exceed 10% of the local workforce and employers may only hire a refugee after declaring that no Turkish national possesses an equal skill set (İçduygu, 2016). This means low-skilled refugees struggle to find work in the formal economy.

Schemes leveraging technology to broker jobs

At the same time, stakeholders in both the public and private sectors have employed new and innovative ways to support the socioeconomic integration of migrants

(OECD, 2017). This includes using technology to improve the migrants’ labour market access. There is limited evidence on these type of approaches (only seven studies). One ODI study (Hunt et al., 2017) examines the potential of the gig economy for helping Syrian refugee women in Jordan find work, especially women who are restricted in their mobility due to cultural, transport and family constraints . It concludes that though the gig economy does have potential in Jordan, it remains limited in scale and is constrained by legal barriers regulating this type of work in general.

Return programmes for nationals

Another type of intervention promotes temporary or long-term return of migrants currently living in host countries. Half of the interventions identified in our study fall under the former category and are iterations of the Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals model. For example, in Afghanistan, a project targeted qualified doctors to secure and share resources and deliver new trainings for local medical staff to supplement the country’s outdated medical curriculum (Leith and Rivas, 2015).

Skills development and job placements

Lastly, there are many interventions that combine an educational component with job placement. These interventions assume that migrants need both learning-based and job brokering support in order to access and participate in the labour market. Overall, the reported outcomes under this type of intervention are mixed: some report high employment rates, increased earnings and programme satisfaction among participants, while others paint a bleaker picture, emphasising that the intervention has done little to change the economic situation of the migrant or refugee (Birrell and McIsaac, 2006; Gugliemelli, 2012; Olliff, 2010). One instrumental criticism of such programmes is that migrant needs are often overlooked, even in the training being offered. A positive example is the Cambrian Credit Union programme in Canada, which offers intensive orientation and training as well as on-the-job learning opportunities through internship placements. Under this programme, 78% of participants were able to secure permanent employment opportunities at their respective internship placement sites (Olliff, 2010).

Overall, the literature reviewed suggests that job facilitation schemes are generally effective in satisfying labour demand and in connecting migrants to jobs. The number of visas made available are usually dependent on and determined by labour market needs: for example, in the US, the number of H-2B visas offered changes from year to year depending on market need.

Training

Training interventions can be divided into three modalities: skills development; support schemes; and cooperative training programmes. We define each scheme by the assumptions underlying its design (Table 2).

Table 2 Training intervention modalities and assumptions

	Modalities	Main assumptions	Number of interventions found
1	Skills development programmes	Migrants' lack or have limited skills appropriate to accessing formal employment in the host country	47
2	Support schemes	Limited access to social and informational networks about training programmes and work opportunities, and to job-seeking skills, are primary barriers to accessing job opportunities	11
3	Cooperative training programmes	Temporary work experience fosters necessary soft and hard skills needed for effective labour market participation	5

Skills development programmes

These assume that migrants need to be upskilled to access work opportunities. Typically, these programmes include a combination of training in the host language and in vocational skills, and occasionally offer only one of these activities. The rationale behind these interventions is that upskilling beneficiaries will generate the human capital migrants need to access formal employment. Interventions under this modality tend to be developed and delivered through collaborations between actors in the non-for-profit, public and sometimes even private sectors. Yet, some assessments suggest that these programmes only have limited success. Cray and Currie (2004), for example, found that the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada still falls short of what is needed to fully integrate into the labour market despite a general improvement of the English-language skills of migrants.

Support schemes

Support schemes, on the other hand, assume that limited access to information on work opportunities and labour-market programmes, training programmes, and resources that assist individuals to gain employment are primary barriers migrants face in accessing employment and integrating into the labour market (Lemaître and Liebig, 2007; Joonas and Nekby, 2012). For example, Australia's programme, 'Stepping Stones to Small Business', assumes that female refugees arrive in Australia with experience and skills, but also limited social networks, familiarity with the local business sector and entrepreneurial skills, which restrict their access to gainful employment. The programme seeks to enhance the economic participation of refugee women through forming small businesses, and builds on consultations with refugee women. It shows positive outcomes: well over 50% of participants completed the business, language training and mentorship modules, which led to 90% reporting a positive employment situation (e.g. approval for a micro-business loan, business formation and job attainment).

Cooperative training programmes

Lastly, training programmes generally assume that temporary work experience helps migrants grow the

skills needed for effective labour market participation. Unpaid and temporary placements offer a unique learning experience for migrants seeking labour market entry. Such unpaid work placements are nearly always combined with either counselling or skills development services (Aranki et al., 2006; Scrinzi, 2011). For example, the CalWORKS programme in California conditions placements on successfully completing one vocational course (Chun-Chun Chow and Vue, 2011). While welfare dependency declined by 46% among migrants, according to the authors, this is attributed to factors external to the programme. Despite training and placements, participants continued to face employment barriers after the programme ended due to a lack of English proficiency and insufficient educational qualifications (ibid).

Across all training interventions, the evidence shows that a combination of mentorship and job-seeking resources improves the probability of getting a job. For example, an assessment of Sweden's Introduction Programme concluded that adding an 'intensive coaching' dimension to the existing language and employment preparation courses does increase employment probability. It is worth noting that on the whole the evidence on support schemes and cooperative training schemes is limited, with only a handful of studies assessing these interventions.

What do we know about design, delivery and impacts?

For both types of interventions there is generally a lack of detailed and rigorous impact evaluations, making it difficult to draw conclusions on potential outcomes of sustainable livelihood creation for migrants. Moreover, of the literature reviewed, very few linked outputs with outcomes. In most cases it is therefore not possible to draw causal links on, for example, the knowledge gained through training and finding relevant job opportunities. The reviewed literature showed a strong gap in terms of rigorous and reliable impact evaluations.

In terms of outcomes reviewed, we see that for both types of interventions the impact on the country of origin is largely absent in the literature, with fewer than 1 in 10 studies referencing origin country outcomes. In fact, the literature that assessed job facilitation

interventions mostly looked at migrant and host country impacts, while reviews of training-related initiatives are almost exclusively migrant focused. Studies assessing migrant outcomes tend to focus on remittances, while not necessarily evaluating more meaningful outcomes considering actual changes in migrant livelihoods – such as household poverty levels. One explanation for the limited focus on origin country and meaningful migrant outcomes is the frequent absence, or limited involvement, of countries of origin in designing and implementing these interventions.

More broadly, the analysis also considered the stakeholders involved in the design and delivery processes. Job facilitation interventions tend to be driven by the public sector of the host country and bilateral agreements between origin and host countries prevail, particularly for seasonal or circular visas and initiatives that facilitate the return of skilled migrants. Conversely, the evidence on training interventions shows that only a third is provided by governmental agencies, with most being designed and delivered by private or third-sector organisations, as well as by intergovernmental organisations like the UN Refugee Agency and the UN Relief and Works Agency.

Conclusion

This background note highlights the existence and potential impacts of the broad range of labour migration initiatives that exist globally. Given the weak evidence base, it is not yet possible to generalise on their impacts on migrants and host and origin countries. This kind of review nevertheless has an important role in migration debates. These experiences have the potential to contribute positively to debates around the tension between migration aspirations that will only grow in future years and the growing political reluctance in

destination countries to welcome and integrate migrants. So, how can policies facilitate human mobility and maximise the economic potential of migration?

Generally, policies ought to be politically ‘palatable’ and based on evidence of what works and what does not. This recognition prompted our evidence and data review. Despite the value of such analysis, our review of existing interventions on migrant livelihoods and jobs also highlights a clear gap in the literature. Our study confirms that measuring the impact of such interventions in destination economies is fundamental and clearly plays a vital role in determining the kind of approach that will be adopted. Such understanding will allow us to improve on those interventions, extend their coverage, be able to better determine who to target, to where and how, and ultimately *predict* development net gains as a result of such initiatives.

Any sensible solution will include a combination of skills-matching and recognition, and favourable social and labour conditions that promote integration as well as return and circular migration. It will also entail a strong focus on integration as a key determinant of the process’ outcomes. As this note has demonstrated, such interventions do exist. Yet, they lack a comprehensive, global and common approach and agenda to reach their potential at national, regional and global levels. Moreover, there is very little investment in assessing the impact as well as effectiveness of such interventions on a wider scale to enable them to dictate and inform migration policies.

To maximise the economic potential of migrants through these as well as similar interventions, migrant livelihoods need to be established as a core design objective, the design and implementation of interventions need to address labour market needs, more impact evaluations of legal pathways need to be conducted, and collaboration across countries and within different sectors in-country needs to be maximised.

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