

A conversation with Kathleen Newland on April 2, 2014

Participants

- Kathleen Newland — Co-Founder, Migration Policy Institute
- Alexander Berger — Senior Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: These notes, compiled by GiveWell, give an overview of the points made by Kathleen Newland in the conversation.

Summary

Kathleen Newland is the Co-Founder of the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), Director of its Migrants, Migration, and Development Program, and leader of its refugee protection work.

GiveWell spoke to Ms. Newland as part of its investigation of labor mobility as a charitable cause. Conversation topics included issues related to migration, MPI's work, and other organizations working on migration.

Issues related to migration

Research on migration and development

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) recently released a report entitled "What We Know About Migration and Development" (<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/what-we-know-about-migration-and-development>). The World Bank has done extensive research on remittances, but there is generally a great need for more policy-oriented research on migration and development.

Organizing diaspora networks to benefit home countries

Members of diasporas contribute to their countries of origin through remittances and other contacts.

Many countries are currently expanding efforts to work with their diasporas. MPI recently worked with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to produce a handbook for migrant-sending countries on how to relate to their diasporas. IOM held a conference for government ministers and other senior officials responsible for managing diasporas from more than 50 countries (26 of which have dedicated diaspora ministries), one of the first large international meetings of diaspora ministers. Many countries have asked MPI for advice on how to manage their diasporas. A "diaspora academy" could collect and share knowledge between various countries. Further research and possibly activism could help sending-country governments work with diaspora members to benefit the people still living in the countries.

The Rockefeller Foundation and the Aspen Institute started the Rockefeller-Aspen Diaspora Program to help diasporas contribute to entrepreneurialism in origin countries. MPI produced 15 profiles of diaspora groups in the US to assist the program.

Refugee protection

The current system of care and maintenance for refugees is unsustainable. Conflicts in Syria, Mali, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and other countries have generated a very large number of refugees. Due to prolonged conflicts and disruptions in home countries, the average refugee today has been a refugee for 17 years.

However, care and maintenance of refugees is still conducted as if people will only be refugees for a short time. For example, refugees are often housed in special camps and are not allowed to work. Many experts agree that this system is too expensive and must be revamped. Still, most humanitarian actors focus on strengthening the traditional agenda of humanitarian access to refugees as well as care and maintenance rather than fundamental change.

Management of refugees should be rethought via a policy exercise involving many stakeholders, combined with pilot projects that allow refugees to enter the labor market. It may be expedient to create new visa categories to allow refugees to work.

Asylum

Of about 10 million current refugees throughout the world, only about 100,000 will permanently resettle in a new country. Refugees are expected to begin working once they permanently resettle. However, refugees who apply for asylum and move to another country to resettle are usually restricted from working until their application for asylum is decided, which can take years. About a decade ago, the US reformed its asylum system so that refugees can get a temporary work permit if their asylum case is not resolved within six months. The US does in fact resolve most cases within six months. In Europe, refugees often have to wait much longer. While they wait, they are generally not allowed to work and must live off of public assistance, which is often unpopular with natives. Or they work in the underground economy, undercutting local wages and often being subjected to exploitation.

Emerging immigration countries

Many middle-income countries that formerly had sent many migrants are becoming countries of transit or migration destinations. These include Morocco, Mexico, Chile, Malaysia, Brazil, and Turkey. The countries making this transition had not previously carefully formulated immigration laws and now need help to do so as well as advice on implementing the new laws. Particularly, policymakers from transitioning countries should consult with policymakers from experienced immigration countries. Researchers should monitor what immigration laws new immigration countries devise and how well these policies work.

Integrating immigrants into society

Researchers should study how to integrate immigrants into society successfully and without unintended consequences. The US does little to help immigrants integrate. Immigrants have nevertheless integrated fairly well, due to the US's history as a country of immigration and its relatively open labor market. In Europe, immigrants have not integrated as well.

Circular migration

Circular migration differs from temporary migration in that it typically refers to people who have permanent legal status in both countries. For example, Australia has a sizeable population of dual

citizens who may have homes, businesses, and family in Australia and another country and who move frequently between the two countries. These dual citizens (or people who have citizenship of one country and permanent legal residence in another) encourage economic growth by arbitraging differences in labor markets and manufacturing sectors, making connections between businesses across the two countries, and setting up outsourcing arrangements. They can smooth out frictions from transnational operations between branches of a corporation because they are comfortable in two different settings. The large role of circular migrants in economic growth is understudied. Circular migrants also connect the US and Mexico, the US and India, and other countries.

Labor mobility

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) plans to allow skilled workers to migrate freely between member countries starting in 2015. This would require mutual recognition of professional credentials between ASEAN countries. An MPI staff member in Manila has been working with the Asian Development Bank to develop a program on the policy framework and mechanics of skilled worker migration to implement ASEAN's plan.

The Economic Community of West African States allows relatively free movement between member countries, but in practice immigration regulations are not strictly enforced anyway. The Mercosur countries in South American allow relatively free labor migration between members. Turkey allows visa-free travel from most countries on the Black Sea and from much of the former Soviet Union.

The TN status allows Mexican and, particularly, Canadian workers in certain professions to come to the US for work. Americans have been resistant to Mexican labor migration, particularly during and after the 2007-9 recession. The experience of the bracero program of the 40s-60s made Mexico reluctant to arrange more special unskilled labor migration programs with the US. Neither the US nor Mexico seems to be very interested in increasing labor mobility from Mexico to the US, at least not until the legal status of Mexicans already in the US can be resolved.

Existing visa structures could be used to facilitate more migration for lower-skill workers, as Michael Clemens has advocated.

Including migration in the 2015 UN Development Goals

Groups of experts, UN agencies, and governments are currently coming together informally to discuss the role migration should play in the UN's post-2015 development agenda and what strategies could be used to raise the profile of migration within the agenda. As a UN exercise involving many stakeholders, crafting the agenda is an extremely complex process.

MPI's work

MPI's process

MPI's team, which spans many areas of expertise, looks out for interesting potential projects. MPI strives to look beyond current policy debates and also determine what laws, policies, and structures will be needed for the future.

When exploring a new policy area, MPI usually conducts research, publishes a policy paper, hosts a

convening, and then works with policymakers to develop policy.

MPI communicates its own and others' policy-relevant research findings directly to policymakers. MPI releases policy briefs, but more importantly, it takes advantage of its connections in government and international organizations to directly disseminate research to state-level policymakers and program implementers, the National Security Council, the State Department, the White House Domestic Policy Council, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Homeland Security as well as Congressional staff and members of Congress. MPI's European branch in Brussels communicates regularly with the European Commission and the EU Council of Ministers. MPI holds one-on-one meetings to share its research with government officials in the U.S., Europe and, increasingly, Asia. Many MPI staff have held senior positions in government and continue to stay in touch with their former colleagues.

Convening policymakers

Both MPI's US office and its Europe office in Brussels host convenings for policymakers. MPI's Transatlantic Council on Migration convenes policymakers to review research and engage with each other and with migration experts in a collegial and confidential setting. MPI's Regional Migration Study Group convened stakeholders from the US, Mexico, and Central America to discuss migration policy in the region.

Technical assistance

Ms. Newland visited Australia for strategic consultations with particular emphasis on maritime migration in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the Gulf of Aden/Red Sea, and the sea approaches to Australia.

Ms. Newland helped Moldova set up its Bureau for Diaspora Relations. Moldova had asked the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for help managing its diaspora, and IOM brought in MPI. About 1/3 of Moldovans live outside of the country, which is very dependent on remittances. However, until recently, the country had very little policy in place to work with its diaspora. The Bureau for Diaspora Relations is currently putting into action the plan for its first two years of operations that Ms. Newland helped develop. She is currently advising the government of Kyrgyzstan, another similarly remittance-dependent country, along similar lines.

A group of prominent Syrian entrepreneurs in exile in Turkey is trying to help less-established Syrian entrepreneurs in exile take advantage of their time away from Syria to set up business connections. Ms. Newland asked Turkey to set up a special economic zone for Syrian entrepreneurs in southern Turkey, and the Turkish government seems to be considering doing so. It has already issued regulations allowing Syrians in Turkey to work for Syrian enterprises.

US immigration policy

MPI has put forward multiple proposals for immigration reform in the US, some of which have become the basis for legislation or administrative action, including around the DREAM Act. MPI analyzed various policy proposals to evaluate probable outcomes, such as the number of people likely to be affected. MPI worked with state governments to arrange for the children of immigrants to be integrated into early childhood education.

Organizations working on migration issues

International and non-governmental organizations

- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) implements migration-related projects for governments as well as providing technical assistance and policy advice. It works closely with the UN but not technically part of the UN system.
- The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees works closely with IOM, since many flows of migrants who lack prior authorization to migrate are a mixture of refugees and non-refugees.
- The International Labor Organization is becoming more active on migration issues.
- The Global Forum on Migration and Development has provided a space for nations to come together to discuss issues related to migration. The Forum's emphasis has broadened, beyond the intersection of migration and development, to also deliberate on migrants' rights. Until recently, the Forum received funding from the MacArthur Foundation in addition to its major funding from participating governments.
- Diaspora organizations such as PhilDev (for the Philippine diaspora in the US) attempt to promote development in home countries. There are a large number of these organizations, and many are highly effective. Comic Relief has a program focused on the African diaspora in the UK, which MPI has helped with.

Funders

The Open Society Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation have been the major funders of immigration reform in the US, along with Atlantic Philanthropies. The Hewlett and Kellogg Foundations have also supported research on domestic immigration issues.

Business

Business has a large stake in migration policy but has not been mobilized effectively on the issue. The World Economic Forum has a council on migration, but its work has been limited. Most corporations that engage with migration do so through their corporate social responsibility arms. However, migration is in fact a major bottom-line concern for companies. Corporations should work together to remedy the chaos and abuses that sometimes occur in international recruiting. IOM is developing a new system for managing international recruitment, which has drawn interest from business and international organizations.

Academic programs

Georgetown University, the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, and Oxford University have academic programs focused on global migration. The International Migration Institute at Oxford has done interesting work on North Africa, particularly Morocco, and on migration across the Mediterranean.

People for GiveWell to talk to

- Michael Fix, Chief Executive Officer and Director of Studies, MPI
- Marc Rosenblum, Deputy Director, US Immigration Policy Program, MPI
- Elizabeth Collett, Director of MPI-Europe and Senior Advisor to MPI's Transatlantic

Council on Migration

- Hein de Haas, Co-Director, International Migration Institute, Department of International Development, University of Oxford
- Federico Soda, Head, Labor Migration and Human Development Division, International Organization for Migration
- Patricia Pittman, Professor, Department of Health Policy, George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services.
- Bill Frelick, Director of Refugee Programs at Human Rights Watch

All GiveWell conversations are available at <http://www.givewell.org/conversations>.