

(Un)sustainable migration regimes: experiences from the Global South

Conveners:

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Over the last decade, researchers and international organizations have been exploring the potential for governments to foster more positive relationships between migration and development. The literature speaks of a potential win-win-win scenario for individual migrants, sending as well as receiving states – where the potential for development can be realized if states undertake substantial immigration policy reform. Governments have consequently been enjoined to adopt policies that facilitate international migration and protect migrant rights while encouraging people to move within formal channels.

However, due to the lack of empirical research on how migration policies are designed and implemented beyond Europe and North America, we still know fairly little about whether these initiatives will have their desired effect. This is a problem, considering that we know how also the most powerful states struggle to implement their immigration policies. What, then, are the chances that weak and developing states will be able to succeed where others have not?

In order to answer such questions, we need to pay attention to the factors that determine why some governments are better at regulating migration than others. This involves several moves. On the one hand, we need to broaden our the scope of our inquiry beyond policy analysis and immigration departments, to include the broader range of state and non-state actors that shape how people move across borders and on what terms. On the other hand, we need to recognize that migrants themselves are actors in these processes, whom make independent decisions around where they want to work and live. These strategies are, in turn, productive of the way migration regimes function, and may play a significant role in subverting, re-orienting and/ or fundamentally reconstituting migration control regimes. From this perspective, the challenge for policy-makers is thus not simply how to provide incentives for migrants to switch from informal to formal migration regimes, but also how to respond to, anticipate and make use of migrants' ubiquitous resolve to govern themselves.

Aiming to contribute to ongoing efforts to promote good governance of international migration in the Global South, this panel asks the question of what is actually required for the creation of more sustainable migration regimes, which are conducive of development while simultaneously safeguarding the well-being, safety and room to maneuver of migrating populations. In approaching this, we invite papers that are empirically grounded in contexts in the Global South and which seek to address how state and non-state actors transform policies into governing practice and how migrants respond to these changing efforts to control their lives. Such papers can focus a broad set of issues, ranging from examinations of existing policy frameworks around (non)citizenship, labor migration and the 'outsourcing' of functions to non-state actors to the way that migrants themselves navigate the systems set up to govern their mobility.