



Legal and Regulatory Frameworks and Scientific Mobility

Giving Something Back: Exploring Making a Contribution at a Distance: Policy and Practice

Policy Brief

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The key policy issue addressed within this Policy Brief is that of tailoring migration policies and schemes developed within the European Research Area to the context of developing countries. The Policy Brief explores the theme of 'giving something back' with the aim of contributing to the evolution of policies that are designed to harness the contributions of 'the Diaspora' to the benefit of the sending countries. Within the longer thematic paper Oliver argues that the key to understanding knowledge flows between countries that send or receive science professionals is to understand how scientists engage with the sending country within the context of international networks of scientific actors and resources. The professional contributions that scientists make to the sending country whilst they are based abroad are individually motivated and directed. For formal Diaspora schemes to be effective we should first understand what is happening 'on the ground' and then think about how to harness these activities. Oliver used analysis of qualitative interviews with Turkish and South African scientists to understand the “what, why and how” of contributing professionally to the sending country at a distance.

The Situation

- Developments and debates in the area of migration and development – place emphasis on the role that developing countries should play in seeking to gain from migration.
- In this context Diaspora networks, both amorphous and formally constituted have become seen as a key source of both intellectual and financial resources.
- Little is known however about how the individual activities of researchers working overseas support scientific development in the sending countries and therefore the best way or supporting such activities is unclear.
- It is commonly understood that receiving countries have a role to play in mitigating the adverse effects of brain-drain however such policy development is taking place within the context of global competition for skilled human resources and the emphasis continues to be placed on encouraging migration. EU policy for example seeks to promote a 'symbiotic' relationship with sending countries whilst encouraging researchers to move to work within the European Research Area.
- Whilst sending countries have begun to develop policies to engage the Diaspora – could receiving countries do more to support these initiatives and how should 'knowledge remittances' be supported by receiving countries?

Migration, Internationalization and Development are commonly addressed through different policy fields and in different ways by sending and receiving countries – Efforts are underway to 'join up' these fields this should be encouraged.

How Do Individual Scientists 'Give Something Back' to the Sending Country?

- This study supports the message that effective return and professional reintegration where possible is the key to knowledge transfer and exchange.
- However the activities of those who contribute professionally to the sending country prior to or in lieu of return are currently overlooked and could be better supported.

Policy makers in receiving countries should not be complacent about the impact that highly skilled migration has on developing countries. Every effort to support effective knowledge transfer and exchange should be made. Supporting networking and circulatory migration patterns should supplement and not replace attempts to support return.

- Professional activities conducted at a distance ranged from informal knowledge exchange and sharing ideas to training doctoral candidates, delivering professional training, conferences and seminars through to joint collaborative projects.
- A combination of professional and friendship relationships bolstered by concrete activities was central to the success of many of the examples of cross national collaboration.
- A further key to success was maintaining research interests in fields that were relevant to the sending countries. This supported the continued relevance and further development of existing social networks.

International networking grants already exist (for example FP 7 International Staff Exchange Scheme or the UK Royal Society Networking Scheme). Consideration should be given to developing a specific 'Diaspora Grant' based on the principle of providing 'seed corn' funding to support migrant scientists based in the EU to develop or maintain professional networks within the sending country.

- National identities and ongoing connections with the sending country are the sources of affinity and feelings of belonging that do not cease when researchers move to work in another country.
- The motivation to contribute to the scientific development of the sending country often reflects the context of the initial move and importantly the intention to return. Those respondents who did not intend to return were more likely to actively seek opportunities to contribute at a distance whilst those who intend to return anticipate that they will share their knowledge when they go back. For those seeking to engage the scientific Diaspora the latter group may be an important group to target, for many migrants an intention to return is not realised; helping individuals to maintain connections with the host country could prevent years from being 'lost' in anticipation of return.

Policy makers should support migrant scientists to maintain contact with colleagues in the sending country even where stays are relatively short-term and migrants (or the mobility grant itself) anticipate return.

- Motivations and intentions to contribute also reflect the career stage of the individual. Many early career researchers interviewed within this study felt too junior to contribute, feeling that they didn't have much to offer to the sending country.
- Some respondents expressed a feeling that 'giving something back' entails making an outstanding or major contribution. It would be useful to investigate the value of smaller scale and 'more every day' contributions and to communicate that back to scientists working abroad.

Receiving countries should investigate the value of relatively small scale individual activities and support early career researchers to undertake them.

Smaller scale Diaspora Networking grants could be used to promote the value of engaging with activities such as presenting research, writing papers and planning grant applications. These could be targeted at early career researchers.

- Some forms of contribution at a distance such as training doctoral candidates and staff exchanges whilst serving to strengthen the links between key teams also contributed to the emigration of human resources.

Could capacity building activities and funding be targeted at teams with long term and established links in the sending country. The Royal Society/National Research Foundation Joint Collaborative Programme could be a useful model here.