

BECOMING AN IMMIGRATION MAGNET:

Migrants' profiles and the impact of migration on human development in Trinidad and Tobago

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What is the **impact of migration on emigrants and immigrants themselves**, and does migration contribute to the development of Trinidad and Tobago? The study seeks to answer these questions, examining the profiles of emigrants, return migrants and immigrants, and investigating the effects of migration on these groups in terms of earning potential, skill development, families and communities, remittance behaviour, life satisfaction and attitudes regarding social values and human rights.

The study aims to contribute to the **understanding of the impact of South-South migration on development** and to strengthen the migration components in development policies through recommendations tailored to the Trinidadian and Tobagonian context.

Methodology

A **qualitative and quantitative methodology** was utilized for the study. The **household survey** took place between May 2012 and September 2012 and consisted of 1000 questionnaires executed in Trinidad and 200 in Tobago. In order to ensure representativeness, the sample frames were sub-divided into frequencies of high, medium and low migration. In the first stage, the primary sampling units were selected. In the second stage, households were selected from the primary sampling units. The data collected (responses) were coded electronically using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program.

In addition, a number of **executive interviews (19) were conducted with key stakeholders**. These included officials from ministries, representatives from donor agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and national associations, multinational corporations, embassies and consulates, and communities and gender Groups.

Key findings

Emigration

Emigrants tend to move to countries in the North to improve their standards of living and gain qualifications.

The study finds numerous positive implications of migration for migrants themselves, including in regards to economic outcomes and life satisfaction, among others.

Absent migrants (emigrants) currently reside in the **United States (65.9%), Canada (18.1%), the United Kingdom (8.4%), and Jamaica (1.3%)**. Emigration is thus an overwhelmingly South–North phenomenon. Both absent and returned migrants used their time abroad to obtain certifications and qualifications, as well as to seek employment. In fact, the study indicates that 57.7 per cent of absent migrants obtained certifications and qualifications while living abroad.

Differences in profile of emigrants going North and South emerged from the study. Both groups tend to have higher skill levels than the general population, but **while emigrants in the North are mainly motivated by the potential of higher earnings, employment and educational opportunities, those going South are more likely to migrate for family reasons.**

The flow of remittances to Trinidad and Tobago is one of the major benefits of migration to local households. When asked about the frequency of these remittances, 32.4 per cent of respondents in Trinidad indicated that absent migrants sent remittances monthly, highlighting the fact that this money is used for recurrent expenditures of the household. Another 23.5 per cent indicated that the money was sent “every couple of months,” while approximately one third (29.4%) of respondents indicated that absent migrants sent remittances only for “emergencies or on other special occasions.” In general, it would appear that **remittances are sent fairly regularly and can be considered a part of the household income of these families.**

Return migration

Historically, **many of Trinidad and Tobago's emigrants do return to the country**, and the study captured information regarding their reasons for their return. For instance, 22.9 per cent indicated that they returned home for family reasons, 13.4 per cent because they had completed their studies, 11.9 per cent returned because they felt that Trinidad and Tobago was their home and had a sense of belonging, while 8.9 per cent indicated that they returned on completion of their contract.

Over 80% of returned migrants indicated that while they were abroad they did not go through periods of unemployment. In relation to the perceived quality of life while living abroad, 40.7 per cent of returned migrants indicated that they were much more satisfied with life abroad, and 18.1 per cent indicated that they were slightly more satisfied. It is also interesting to observe that 95.3 per cent of the returned migrants indicated that they were glad that they went to live abroad, and 69.6 per cent indicated that if they had a choice they would migrate again.

The study ascertained that return migrants spent most of their time abroad in developed countries – the United States of America (51.1%), United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (24.4%), and Canada (13.3%). In terms of skills development, 51.3 per cent of returned migrants indicated that they had obtained certifications and qualifications while living abroad.

Immigration

The study highlights that **immigrants mainly originate in developing (South) countries and move to Trinidad and Tobago for employment and study purposes.** Other significant reasons for migrating was to join family members already residing in Trinidad and Tobago (17.8 %) and to follow family members who decided to live there (16.7 %). Apart from 14 per cent that migrated from the United States of America, the **vast majority of immigrants came from countries in the South, including Guyana (21%), the CARICOM territories (22 %).** In addition, some immigrants came to the country from other developing countries, such as Cameroon, Ethiopia, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa and Venezuela.

The majority of the immigrants (53.1%) indicated that they felt that Trinidad and Tobago was their home, and they had no intention of leaving the country. 62.7 per cent of the respondents reported having higher standards of living as compared to their home countries, and 90.3 per cent of the respondents believed that their lives have become better by migrating to Tobago. As the majority of the immigrants have come from Southern countries, this South-South migration to Trinidad and Tobago appears to be of benefit to the majority of the immigrants.

Perception of migration

The study confirms that **Trinidad and Tobago has witnessed significant intraregional and interregional migratory flows into the island as well as outflows of nationals of Trinidad and Tobago.** The consequences of this migration are far-reaching for the national development of Trinidad and Tobago, with **emigrants playing a crucial role in the form of monetary injections into the economy as well as goods that are needed by family members** who remain behind in Trinidad and Tobago. The returned migrants' contribution to national development includes the injection of new skills and greater qualification and certification.

Despite this, **the study observed that a higher proportion of the sample perceived that migration had a negative impact on Trinidad and Tobago than a positive impact.** When asked their opinions on how they think emigration is affecting life in Trinidad and Tobago, most respondents named its negative economic impacts rather than social impacts. The largest proportion of respondents (32.3%) indicated that emigration leads to skills deficits in the country, while the second largest group (16.1%) felt that there was a loss to the State given government expenditures on educating those who emigrated.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that 11.8 per cent of respondents indicated that they perceived emigration to lead to breakdown in the families. While 23.6 per cent of respondents indicated that it made no difference whether or not people migrated, 11.2 per cent of respondents indicated that migration had a positive effect on the economy as the migrants gained skills overseas and returned to make a positive contribution to national development.

Recommendations

The study points to the fact that **migration policies in countries in the South are generally underdeveloped when compared to the policies that currently exist in the North**. Specifically in relation to Trinidad and Tobago, the study proposes a number of recommendations to facilitate the migratory process and maximize the positive impacts of migration on development. These include:

- a) The establishment of a government department or agency to deal exclusively with migrant issues;
- b) The formulation of a clear legal framework to protect migrant workers, firmly based in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago;
- c) The establishment of an inter-agency mechanism for migrant service delivery for the efficient, affordable “one-stop shop” approach to pre-departure preparations for emigrants;
- d) The establishment of a database of information that will make available to migrants all requisite information that is needed for their entry into Trinidad and Tobago.

The study demonstrates the **need for further research into the area of migration, as well as the need for Trinidad and Tobago to develop policy frameworks and institutions that deal exclusively with migration**.

The study also highlights the need for the creation of synergies and coherence between these institutions, agencies and bodies, at the national, regional and international levels.

See the report for references

