

# HUMAN MOBILITY IN THE CARIBBEAN: *Circulation of skills and immigration from the South*

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Although migratory movements in the Caribbean have a **long historical precedence** and are deeply embedded in the behaviour of its people, so far there has **not been sufficient research** on the factors that influence them and the extent of their effects. This study examines three countries with high migrant stocks in the region: **Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and Saint Kitts and Nevis**, exploring the impact of migration on receiving and sending countries, with particular focus on its costs and benefits for migrants and their families.

**Four principal migration categories were examined: labour mobility, student mobility, undocumented/irregular migration and parental migration.** The aforementioned categories of migration pose various challenges and opportunities for the development of countries in the subregion, many of which are transit, sending and receiving countries.

The study was informed by **surveys carried out with both migrants and policymakers** in order to complement gaps in the literature and respond to the difficulties arising from limited access to official data. To a large extent, data must be taken from extra-regional organizations due to a current lack of reliable, consistent and harmonized data collection throughout the region.

## Causes of migration

**More pull than push factors were identified as motivators of intraregional migration.** Improved economic prospects – particularly higher wages and income – are key pull factors for immigrants in Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados, whereas relative economic stability and a policy of hereditary migration is a major pull factor for migrants from the Dominican Republic to Saint Kitts and Nevis.

## The impacts of migration on the receiving country

Concerning economic benefits for the receiving countries, **migrants bring skillsets in high demand** – particularly in the construction sector and in the civil service – to supplement local skills shortages. Regular migrants also contribute via **taxes and social security payments**.

## The impacts of migration on migrants and their families

Migration was found to have a **limited negative impact on migrant families** in Trinidad and Tobago, including difficulties for children left behind by their parents. The **accessibility of services and general treatment of immigrants was found to be highly dependent on migrants' nationality**, and irregular migrants, particularly those from African countries, experienced discrimination and maltreatment at the hands of the State. One major challenge migrants face is the **high cost of migration**.

The majority of migrants lamented the **poor implementation of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME)** stipulations and perceived much of the difficulty in accessing benefits under the CSME was due to hindrances at the federal level. With regard to labour mobility, the implementation of the CSME has been deficient, and **various anomalies are highlighted**. Despite the provision for labour mobility under the CSME, the current study found that **migrants face discrimination in accessing health care and education**, and stereotyping of certain nationalities is prevalent.

Indeed, **discrimination was found to be based largely on nationality**: migrants from more disadvantaged countries were generally treated worse than those from more developed countries. Nationals with lower levels of education were perceived as more likely to mistreat non-nationals regardless of the origin of non-nationals. No significant difficulties were reported when families moved to Saint Kitts and Nevis. The strong nationalistic sentiment among many nationals often translates into xenophobia or more tacit forms of discrimination against non-nationals, although general treatment is relative to other variables such as nationality, socioeconomic status or ethnicity. Non-nationals did not face resistance in acquiring capital or establishing their economic base (for example, acquiring property, accessing financial services, and so forth).

## The survey findings

The data garnered from the survey of policymakers suggest that while there is an acknowledgement of the broader importance of migration issues to the development agenda of Caribbean countries, **little has been done so far to sensitize officials on the importance of regular, reliable and timely enumeration of migration**. There was also some divergence between officials' perceptions of migrants' realities in their countries and the actual situation of migrants. **Much of what policymakers perceived about migration issues were reflective of the general public opinion** on issues ranging from the impact of migrants on social services to the broader societal perceptions and prejudices against migrants.

## Recommendations

### Improved **data collection**

- a. Sensitize officials on the importance of regular, reliable and timely enumeration of migration information;
- b. Bring together **statistical and academic bodies** from the region to focus on means of harmonizing data collection and sharing best practices;
- c. Pay special attention to the **need for disaggregated data**, in particular, for careful analysis of the socioeconomic impact of migration on wages, income distribution, South–South remittances, gender, health and migrant rights;
- d. Address the **absence of centralized data-collection units** that can gather intelligence from other agencies.

### Sharing and dissemination of migration data

- a. Sensitize officials in various ministries on the **need to address data and information deficiencies aggressively**, while elevating the priority of migration issues in the policy discussion through the ambit of CARICOM;
- b. Elevate the priority of migration issues to ensure that the **appropriate financial, technical and human resources are committed**, such that policy reform can become a reality in the medium to long term.

## Policy change

- a. Ensure wider and more sustained engagement/**consultation with civil society** on policies through town hall meetings, NGO interaction with government ministries, and discussion forums;
- b. Sensitize the leadership of key agencies, such as in ministries of national security, on the importance of migration issues, the nexus between migration and development and promote awareness of the leadership on the importance of research for better policymaking;
- c. Ensure **comprehensive reform to immigration policy** based on priority economic sectors and labour needs;
- d. Develop **well-articulated immigration policy** that identifies which skillsets the particular country is seeking to attract and promote stricter implementation of stipulations under countries' respective immigration acts;
- e. Strengthen national border patrols to reduce irregular migration and ensure greater collaboration with the regional and international security apparatus to curtail human trafficking;
- f. **Develop a specific refugee policy** that honours the commitment to international conventions to protect human rights of refugees.

## CSME and labour mobility

- a. Ratify legislation on six-month stays by all countries participating in the CSME;
- b. Renew **commitment to the spirit and letter of the CSME**;
- c. Address **anomalies in immigration practice that are discriminatory** and which run counter to the agreed treaty governing human mobility under the CSME;
- d. Lessen bureaucracy in the application process for CSME skills certificates;
- e. Ensure that CSME implementation units are fully active and equipped in all participating countries, including proper data entry and collection methods.

See study for detailed references