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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MANAGING MIGRATION IN SOUTH AFRICA'S NATIONAL INTEREST

IN LATE 2008 CDE held a Round Table aimed at establishing what South Africa could learn from international best practice in migration management.

The event was enriched by the participation of two migration experts from the United States: **Professor Philip Martin**, chair of the migration programme at the University of California-Davis, and advisor to the United Nations and numerous governments on migration policy; and **Tamar Jacoby**, president of ImmigrationWorks USA, a federation of employers working for immigration reform in the United States.

GLOBAL MIGRATION TRENDS

Philip Martin noted the following:

Migration is the exception and not the rule. Most people live and die in the country in which they are born, and only about 3 per cent of the world population are migrants or refugees. As a result, fears that migration will get out of control are almost always exaggerated.

Managing migration requires adequate data. It makes a big difference whether the number of people involved is 300 000 or three million.

Migration is a permanent part of the human condition. There will always be a minority of people who will migrate. It is not a problem that can be resolved, but a natural process that needs to be managed.

Given improved communications, and growing disparities between developed and poor countries or regions, global migration is likely to increase.



The main beneficiaries of migration are migrants, but there are spill-over effects which benefit employers as well as the receiving country.

On average, each immigrant to the United States adds about \$80 000 to public finances. However, if the immigrant in question has a college education, that figure rises to \$200 000. Receiving countries cannot go wrong by taking college-educated people.

Sending countries lose skilled people, but gain from migrant remittances. Remittances make up about a third of all financial flows to developing countries.

Policy-makers cannot achieve their policy goals solely by means of altering rights and rules. They should ensure that incentives for migrants and employers are aligned with those goals.

‘If one just withdraws migrants’ rights to stay without paying any attention to incentives, and relies on the police to try to find and jail them, one has a recipe for a large underground population, a proliferation of fake documents, and a high level of corruption on the streets and at the borders.’

Simple policies are best. ‘Complex policies require enormous bureaucratic capacity which very few countries and certainly no developing countries have. Complexity also creates confusion, delay, and opportunities for corruption.’

LESSONS FROM MIGRATION REFORM IN THE UNITED STATES

Tamar Jacoby outlined a major campaign over the past few years to change immigration law in the United States. This had not yet succeeded, but contained important lessons for South Africa.

The campaign involved a broad coalition with very different concerns: business wanted more workers; unions were troubled by the growing numbers of irregular workers; and human rights and religious groups were troubled by migrants’ lack of rights. However, all agreed that America’s immigration policies were out of step with its economic needs.

Many voters believed immigration was out of control, so increased enforcement had to be part of the package. This seemed to create an impossible dilemma: simultaneously satisfying those who wanted more immigration, and those who wanted tighter controls. However, closer analysis reveals that these goals are not really incompatible; in fact, they form part of a coherent package. This is because migration policies that are totally out of touch with reality cannot be effectively enforced.

Therefore, the idea at the heart of the reform package was to adopt a more realistic policy that would legally let in the numbers of people the economy actually needed, and then enforce the rules rigorously.



The key to enforcing an immigration policy is to do it in the workplace. ‘You can only do so much with border fences. As we say in the US, show me a 50-foot wall, and I will show you a 51-foot ladder.’

Workplace enforcement works because, if employers can reliably tell whether or not workers were legal, and if there are enough legal workers to fill their vacant jobs, they do not have an incentive to hire illegal workers. Equally, people without visas then do not have an incentive to enter the country.

‘The first and most important step is to accept the inevitability of migration. You can’t use the law to deny demographics, or fight the dynamics of the world economy. Recognise the reality that migrants are going to keep coming. The job of government is to manage both benefits and costs in the national interest.’

EXPERIENCES IN AUSTRALIA AND INDIA

Elizabeth Campbell, First Secretary at the Australian High Commission in South Africa, outlined immigration’s key role in Australia’s development. Large numbers of skilled immigrants entered the country after World War Two, and its needs for skilled immigrants continue. Left to itself, Australia’s labour force would become stagnant and decline. Immigration now forms an integral part of a wider policy for growing the country’s skills base.

Suresh Kalra, Indian Deputy Consul in South Africa, noted that India was affected by emigration as well as immigration. While known as a major sending country, India also harbours a large immigrant population from neighbouring states. However, xenophobic violence is minimal. Following initial concerns, Indians have come to realise that the ‘brain drain’ also has positive effects. Skilled people working in rich countries send back huge volumes of remittances, and many return with large sums of money to invest as well as new ideas and technologies.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Dr Mamphela Ramphele, co-chair of the Global Commission on International Migration, said South Africa did not have a coherent migration policy, and was not taking advantage of globalisation. More should be done to educate South Africans about their bonds with the rest of Africa. Government needs to be seen to be competently managing migration and social services.

Dr John Carneson of the Department of Home Affairs said South Africa had to base its migration policy on its national interests, including physical and food security. But its national interests also have to be located in its historical African context, and in the context of regional development.



Neva Makgetla of the DBSA and South African Presidency said South Africa should adopt a more active approach to regional development, thus helping its neighbours to strengthen their economies and create their own jobs. Even then, people would continue to come to South Africa in large numbers, and the country needs to develop a rational system for managing this. Policy planners are committed to attracting more skilled immigrants, but are struggling to change the negative mind-set in the Department of Home Affairs and in South African embassies. South Africa should move towards a simple demand-driven system to attract and manage skilled immigration.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE WORKSHOP

Ann Bernstein, CDE's executive director, summarised the insights gained as follows:

Increased migration is inevitable, and South Africa is no exception. It has long, porous borders, and is a relatively prosperous and stable country at the bottom of a mainly poor and often unstable continent.

Only a minority migrate. Immigration will not determine the fate of any large nation. Migrants tend to be unusually energetic, and willing to accept risks.

Good migration management depends on reliable information. Countries need to develop a clear sense of how many people are arriving and leaving, and learn as much as possible about them and their activities and motivations.

Countries benefit enormously from skilled and entrepreneurial immigrants. These kinds of immigrants expand the tax base, create new businesses and jobs, link the country to global markets, and pass on their skills to local people.

The effects of unskilled migration are less clearly understood and are more likely to depend on the specific circumstances of each country or city. However, many unskilled immigrants make a positive contribution by doing work that local people can't or won't do.

It is possible to construct a **coalition of opinion-formers and policy-makers** to achieve a politically viable and economically sensible migration policy. Strong leadership and effective communications are required.

Successful migration policies respond flexibly to the economic needs of the receiving country. Trying to implement a migration system that lets in fewer immigrants than the economy requires will simply create a large population of irregular migrants.

Middle-income destination countries like South Africa should keep their migration management systems simple. Only the richest and most experienced destination countries can successfully implement complex systems.

Citizens need to have confidence in their government's ability to manage its borders and advance their interests. Many citizens are concerned that migration



could damage their job prospects, or change their country's culture. However, most are willing to accept immigration if they can be reassured that its consequences are being managed and the phenomenon will benefit their country.

Countries need a strategy for facilitating integration. Immigrants need to support the values of their new host country and local people must come to feel that newcomers are politically and socially integrated into their new country.

Migration issues are far more important to South Africa's hopes of economic growth and development than policy-makers have realised or acknowledged. **Bold leadership and effective implementation is required.**

The full-length report of this Round Table is available from CDE.



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