

International voluntary work as a part of international migration



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Temporary international migration is an increasing phenomenon. One example of it is Voluntary Service Overseas, VSO's functions to send skilled professionals to share their knowledge and experience with people living in poverty. VSO tackles poverty by using the skills, commitment and enthusiasm of individuals from around the world. For 50 years, it has been recruiting volunteers aged between 18 and 75 to live and work in the heart of local communities. Volunteers are employed by the partner organization in the country where they work for periods of between six weeks and two years.

VSO's international volunteers transfer knowledge and experience not locally available, while the national volunteers who VSO support use their skills and cultural understanding to make an impact in their own countries. VSO also create specific opportunities for young people and those with origins in developing nations but who now live elsewhere in the world ("diaspora" communities), linking them to their country of heritage. So far, more than 40,000 VSO volunteers of 94 nationalities have brought about lasting change by sharing their skills in over 90 countries.

Voluntary Service Overseas' type of activity is connected to wider theme of migration and development. Individual migrants and their associations, local authorities, civil society, NGOs, the private sector, the academic sector, etc. have become key actors in development cooperation. The international community has increasingly supported the creation of synergies with and between these small-scale actors, who have the potential to better link the migration and development dimensions of interventions. The human

development approach has also influenced the way in which migrants' contributions to development are perceived: not only financial remittances, but also social remittances such as networks and relations, skills and knowledge, ideas and values embed developmental potential.

Networks bringing together key actors within the migration and development scene may not only facilitate the formation of one-to-one partnerships, but they may also form the basis for larger network structures. These are an important precondition for exchange of information that may lead to up-scaling and replication of best practices, ensuring coordination between ongoing interventions, and guiding new actors who wish to enter the migration and development scene on what works best and why.

The transfer of professional skills and technical knowledge is at the core of most projects that small-scale actors undertake with a focus on migrant human capital. Actions within this realm provide opportunities for the transfer of competences when the skills and knowledge held by migrants are in line with local needs. This requires relying on migrants to deliver trainings or provide other expert services during short-term missions.

Sources:

Joint Migration and Development Initiative (2011): Migration for Development: A Bottom-Up Approach. A Handbook for Practitioners and Policy-makers. Brussels. 165 p.

Voluntary Service Overseas, VSO: www.vso.org.uk/