

Mapping Intra-Regional Migrant Patterns

A comparative study of selected island countries from the Pacific and the Caribbean region

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With a rooted history of intra-regional mobility, developing countries are diversifying from traditional to non-traditional exports. In essence, policy makers are searching for avenues to increase economic productivity by means of exporting labour. In light of the growing consensus on trade in services through the establishment of General Agreement in Trade in Services (GATS) in 1995 under Uruguay Rounds negotiations, this paper particularly recognizes labour mobility as one of the potential strategies to complement trade in the developing countries. The World Bank Institute (2010) has identified labour mobility as another extension to export diversification. The World Bank (2006) emphasizes that small states should integrate globally through diversifying their economies by not only improving their domestic business environments and product baskets, but also through the export of labour to deliver services to industrialized countries. The study presents an overview of the reasons for the movement of the early migrants in the Pacific and Caribbean Island Countries. The study further explores the contrasting contemporary patterns in intra-regional mobility using the most recently available migrant stock database (UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs, Population Division 2015) and country census statistics.

Conventional literature supports the view that the existing regional networks and alliances have largely facilitated intra-regional mobility previously. However, despite numerous arrangements, in practice there exist tensions amongst member countries which appear to create administrative bureaucracy and strategical procedural delays. The Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce is one case study which exemplified the chaos between partner countries in the Pacific. In this respect, the GATS framework is applied to evaluate the regional regional commitments. Based on these coordinated pacts, this study provides a new viewpoint to why heavy intra-regional migration still persists. To evaluate and compare the regional migration distribution patterns, the concentration index has been estimated, the paper finds that the migration hump phenomenon holds for the 21 Pacific Island Countries. Furthermore, potential bi-directional links subsists between intra-regional trade vis-à-vis intra-regional mobility. This study demonstrates how the intensity of migration as well as the distribution of migrants have transformed overtime for the small island nations within each region and presents some plausible arguments of the changing trends. The paper contributes to the pertinent regional relationship and its influence on shifting migrant patterns.