



Movers & Shakers: Big Ideas In Migration ILM interviews L. Alan Winters

What would it take to move the migration agenda forward?

Lots of things are necessary, but let me nominate squashing the idea that more migration means unlimited migration – that letting one potential migrant in means letting them all in. Very few of us believe that there can be no restrictions on migration, but many of us believe that allowing a finite increase in migration from the developing to the developed world would be to the advantage of both. The threat of unlimited numbers of migrants is a powerful argument in terms of political rhetorical, but it is a complete red-herring in the debate about actual policy-making and we should confront those who make it.

It is possible to devise reasonable and humane methods of managing migration at rates above zero. I would include well designed temporary migration programmes (seasonal and guest worker schemes) among such methods. The view that such schemes will inevitably lead to large-scale over-staying is just wrong: the vast majority of temporary entrants will accept that departure is part of the package and still welcome the chance to earn and learn in the meantime. (After all, think how many wish to move to the Gulf despite the unattractive conditions there.)

There is an argument that even if migration offers great benefits to the migrant, it offers nothing, or even harm, to those left behind. Even if this were true, that is no different from the hospital or a school which has only a limited domain (as Michael Clemens has observed), but in fact it is not true. Migrants remit and many also return with more capital, connections and capacities, either because they wanted to or because they were admitted under a temporary migration/mobility scheme in the first place. Moreover, what is wrong with helping some people to better life? The evidence that the loss of skilled workers harms those left behind is not particularly convincing and, anyway, we don't believe in preventing personal mobility merely for the sake of others.

What existing notion or belief do you think we need to shake off?

My key suggestion would be to inculcate the idea that migration is an entirely normal piece of human behaviour. It is not special or abnormal, but since the beginning of time people have moved to make the most of their circumstances. This is not to say that migration is comfortable or even desirable, but that it is – or is expected to be – better than the alternative. Communities sometimes resist incomers, but if one looks across societies, it is those that accommodate people from outside that evolve and prosper.

L. Alan Winters is CEO of Migrating out of Poverty and Professor of Economics in the University of Sussex. He is a Research Fellow and former Programme Director of the Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR, London) and Fellow of IZA, Bonn. From 2008 to 2011 he was Chief Economist at the British government's Department for International Development (DFID), and from 2004 to 2007 Director of the Development Research Group of the World Bank, the world's largest and leading group of development economists. He has previously worked as Division Chief and Research Manager (1994-99) and Economist (1983-85) in the World Bank and in the Universities of Cambridge, Bristol, Bangor and Birmingham.



Movers & Shakers is a series of mini-interviews that calls on leading thinkers and do-ers to offer frank and bold suggestions for how to move the migration agenda forward and how to shake off the misconceptions that prevent its advancement. The World Bank's International Labor Mobility (ILM) Program convenes thought-leaders and policymakers through this thoughtpiece series to promote a broader and more productive dialogue about migration policy.

7.1 billion
Estimated World Population, 2013

1.2%
World Population Annual Growth Rate, 2012

232 million
Estimated Number of International Migrants, 2013

1.6%
International Migrant Stock Annual Growth Rate, 2010-2013

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- ALAN WINTERS