

Migration and Development, without Care?

Abstract

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Highly-restrictive temporary labour migration schemes have become commonplace throughout the Indo-Pacific region and continue to expand amid increasing demand for low-wage labour and sustained policy enthusiasm for ‘migration-development’. The developmental benefits of these ‘guestworker’ migration schemes are routinely evaluated according to narrow economic criteria, such as remittances and human capital formation, with little consideration given to transnational family separation and the displacement of *socially reproductive* labour that sustains everyday life. Indeed, ‘migration’, ‘development’ and ‘care’ are deeply interlinked political economic processes that have, for the most part, been theorised in partial isolation. We attempt to reconcile these disjunctures by situating the developmental implications of temporary labour migration in relation to the total social organisation of labour in countries of origin and destination. To do so, we firstly conceptualise a typology of transnational care practices to delineate between proximate care activities disrupted by migration and aspatial care roles that continue across borders. In the second section of the paper, this conceptual framework guides our identification of critical gaps between partially overlapping literatures on ‘migration and development’, ‘gender and development’ and ‘migration and care’. These lacunae inform our analytical framework for a ‘migration-care-development’ nexus that promotes the identification, evaluation and policy redress of developmentally unsustainable disruptions to care practices. Finally, we operationalise our conceptual and analytical frameworks in the context of Australia’s Pacific Labour Scheme to illustrate the developmental consequences of transnationally disassembled (and incompletely reassembled) care practices for Pasifika households and communities. We conclude by foregrounding the need for ‘decent care’ policies to address care deficits in support of sustainable and gender-equitable development.

Author’s Bio

Matt Withers is a research fellow within the Department of Sociology at Macquarie University. His research addresses the developmental implications of temporary labour migration and remittances throughout the Indo-Pacific region, with an emphasis on South Asia and Pacific Island Countries. His current project examines how temporary labour migration interfaces with the work and care arrangements of transnational migrant households, using the concepts of ‘decent wages’ and ‘decent care’ to frame the need for improved labour governance and gender-equitable policymaking in support of sustainable development outcomes.