JOURNAL OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES (JDS)
VOL.6-NO.1(6)-2025

ISSN 2667-9922

Discourse Analysis: Economic Framing of the Migration-Development Nexus against Developmental Practice in Low-Income States

Vano Sesitashvili[1], Luka Badridze[2]

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted: September 28, 2025
Approved: December 15, 2025

Keywords:

Migration, Development, Remittances, Neoliberalism, Global Inequality, International Financial Institutions, Migration-Development Nexus.

ABSTRACT

Migration has increasingly been framed as a driver of development in low-income countries, particularly through its economic contributions such as remittances. Although this perspective has gained prominence in international policy discourse, it often oversimplifies the complex relationship between migration and development and overlooks important social and political dimensions.

This article provides a qualitative discourse analysis of how international organisations, especially the IMF and World Bank, portrayed migration between 1990 and 2010. The study examines the dominant economic framing of migration, identifies the neoliberal assumptions embedded in global migration governance, and contrasts these narratives with empirical evidence from India, Mexico, and Cape Verde.

The findings show that remittance-led development produces household-level benefits but rarely results in long-term structural transformation and can deepen social inequalities and vulnerabilities. The article contributes to ongoing debates by demonstrating how economic framings obscure the broader consequences of migration and reinforce power asymmetries between the Global North and South.

The study concludes that effective migration governance must move beyond narrow economic indicators and incorporate social protection, labour rights, and investments in local development capacities.

1 Charles University, Czech Republic. https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5600-3632
2 University of Tartu, Estonia. https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4596-4635

Introduction

Migration has long been intertwined with the discourse on development, which is especially relevant in the context of low-income countries. Since the end of the 20th century, migration has been portrayed as an essential component of development strategies, with the economic benefits that migration can provide through remittances emphasised in particular. Financial transfers from migrant workers to their families in their home countries have been seen as a vital source of income for developing states, sometimes surpassing official development aid (Nyberg-Sørensen, *et al*., 2002). However, this perception puts the focus on the economic aspects of migration, leaving less attention paid to the social and cultural dynamics, which are also important for understanding the full impact that migration might have on development.

Based on the patterns mentioned above, the migration-development nexus has become a key topic in international policy discussions. By portraying migration as an instrument for development, many international organisations and governments have underlined the potential for remittances to enhance household welfare, contribute to economic growth, and reduce the level of poverty (Taylor, *et al*., 1996). However, this kind of portrayal sometimes fails to account for more complicated and, in some cases, adverse outcomes. Even though remittances can reduce poverty at the household level, this does not mean that they will automatically translate into broader economic development, especially when socio-political structures remain underdeveloped in the migrant-sending countries (Taylor, *et al*., 1996; Nyberg-Sørensen, *et al*., 2002).

Throughout history, migration has been seen as a response to underdevelopment, war, economic issues, and lack of opportunity – driving people to seek a better future abroad. This view is particularly prominent in the development policies of the mid-20th century. By the dawn of the 21st century, perceptions of international migration had changed – from being considered a consequence of underdevelopment to being recognised as a potential catalyst for development (Nyberg-Sørensen, *et al*., 2002). The reframing of the linkage between these two concepts is directly connected to the redefinition of development, which shifted from a focus on economic growth to an emphasis on the fulfilment of basic needs, reducing poverty, and improving household living conditions (Raghuram, 2009). Accordingly, in this article, the term *development* is used within this redefined framework.

The concept of economic development has transformed greatly over time. It was traditionally associated with economic growth – putting emphasis on rising GDP, productivity, and national income. This framework was rooted in modernisation theory and promoted by major international institutions throughout the post-war period (Geiger & Pécoud, 2013). However, from the 1980s onward, a more critical understanding emerged. According to Raghuram (2009), the term “development” was increasingly used to refer to basic needs, poverty reduction, and broader human well-being. This reframing also changed how migration was linked to development: migrants were no longer viewed solely as contributors to national income via remittances, but also as actors in social and community-level development. At the same time, critics argue that this shift has not entirely escaped neoliberal logics, as international organisations continue to instrumentalise migration in the service of economic agendas (Boucher, 2008; Raghuram, 2009).

The portrayal of migration in a positive light in international forums such as the United Nations (UN) suggests that migration can benefit both sending and receiving countries. Remittances are viewed as a source of improved living conditions and a direct form of foreign currency exchange which can strengthen local economies (Nyberg-Sørensen, *et al*., 2002). In addition to this, diaspora communities are recognised for their role in facilitating investment and transferring knowledge between developing and developed countries. And yet these portrayals often neglect factors such as the exploitation of migrant labour and the social and cultural costs of separation between families (Kalm, 2010).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, an increasing number of studies have highlighted the detrimental effects of family disunity on children and youth. However, research on the effects of parental out-migration on children's well-being shows considerable variation, largely shaped by how the phenomenon is measured. Some differences arise from the social and local contexts of families, while others result from methodological approaches – especially whether gender aspects of migration and the involvement of grandparents are included (Lei, *et al*., 2020).

Scholars have begun to question whether remittances, along with migrant labour, can truly serve as sustainable instruments for development. Even though remittances are important for households, they do not counter structural problems that sustain underdevelopment in low-income nations, such as social inequality, misgovernment, and a lack of infrastructure. Migration policies that prioritise economic contributions usually fail to defend migrant rights. This often leads to the exploitation of the migrant workforce (Nyberg-Sørensen, *et al*., 2002).

This article aims to examine the economic framing and instrumentalisation of migration in low-income states. The heavy focus on the economic dimensions of migration oversimplifies the effect migration can have on development. By focusing on economic growth and remittances, they risk overlooking the socio-political factors of migration, which are necessary for understanding its overall impact. The article also explores the potential undesirable outcomes of this economic framing. Rather than viewing migration as merely an instrument for economic growth, it is of utmost importance to recognise the broader factors that influence out-migration, as well as its impacts.

1. Methodology

The paper employs qualitative methods to provide a discourse analysis that portrays the contrast between the economic framing of the migration–development nexus and real-world development experiences in low-income states. It aims to highlight the negative consequences of focusing on migration solely through an economic lens – a perspective that emerged from linking migration and development policies. The timeframe of 1990-2010 was selected for this study, as it represents a critical period, during which the migration-development nexus became institutionalised in global policy discourses. This article attempts to present and address:

- The main discourse and dominant economic framing of the migration-development nexus;
- The neoliberal bias in World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) evaluations of international migration in developing countries;
- The non-economic indicators of migration in selected high-remittance migrant-sending states using secondary data analysis.

Accordingly, qualitative methods were used in the study, considering the peculiarities of the topic and research goals. More precisely, analysis of scientific and analytical publications on the topic was employed at the first stage, since the article aims to portray the dominant discourse and framing of the topic. The relevant materials we reviewed contributed to finding patterns in the discussion about the migration-development nexus.

The first step in gathering data indicated that the World Bank and IMF are among the most influential international organisations impacting the economic instrumentalisation of migration, and they have been doing so for decades. Therefore, publications of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank that addressed migration from 1990 to 2010 were also analysed. More precisely, 33 publications were reviewed – 18 from the IMF and 15 from the World Bank – in order to highlight the tendencies in framing migration (the list of analysed publications can be found in Appendix A). These materials were accessed through the official websites of the organisations. The main selection criteria were: (a) to express the official position of the institution (therefore, working papers or other materials explicitly stating that their content might not represent the position of the organisation were not included in the analysis); (b) to have been published within the chosen timeframe of 1990–2010; (c) to be entirely or partly focused on migration or its attributes.

During the review process, we examined how often and in what contexts “migration” and “development” were used. Additionally, attention was paid to how prominently the issue is framed through an economic lens, and whether other dimensions are considered in the publications.

We also searched for data about the living conditions, needs, and challenges of the people in migrant-sending countries so as to display the results of instrumentalisation of migration for development, on the one hand, and to portray the contrast between the economic framing of migration and actual hardships felt by the locals, on the other. For the latter, three cases – India, Mexico, and Cape Verde – were examined. The selection was non-random and purposive, as the criteria were defined to include leading states (or regions) in emigration and remittance flows. Cape Verde was selected because it has one of the highest proportions of emigrants relative to its population; India and Mexico were included because they are among the top remittance-receiving countries. This secondary data analysis provided meaningful, contrasting, non-economic indicators that challenge the economic framing of "beneficial" migration.

2. Literature Review

In the late 20th century, migration and development drew particular attention, and academic interest in these topics has only grown since. Numerous papers have been published seeking to explain and evaluate migration through the lens of development.

We analysed different types of sources, concentrating on the period from 1990 to 2010, in order to reveal general trends in thinking and rethinking of migration. This timeframe is marked by the consolidation of neoliberal policy frameworks within major international organisations, which increasingly framed migration as an instrument for global economic growth (Boucher, 2008; Kalm, 2010; Geiger & Pécoud, 2013). One of the first critical re-evaluations of the migration-development relationship emerged from questioning the role of international organisations responsible for development projects, and examining the incentives created by their policies. Measures such as opening economies to trade, modernising agriculture, and prioritising urban industries contributed to increased rural–urban migration. Taken together, these shifts caused underemployment and harsh living conditions, which impelled both internal and external migration (Martin, 1992).

At the beginning of the 21st century, global migration management was vastly influenced by states. Although a few global forums had been held, and some agencies were established, their decisions were non-binding, and relations between developed and developing countries were asymmetrical, in favour of the Global North (Kalm, 2010). As a result, debates on migration at the global level during the 2000s can be described as (a) usual, common, and (b) potentially effective (Kalm, 2010).

The dominant method, portraying migration as a normal phenomenon, is easily noticeable in the UN system, such as within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) publications, created on the topic of or overlapping migration issues (Kalm, 2010). It should be noted that the same UN agencies, GCIM, and the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), firmly underlined and advocated the positive potential of migration, and described it as beneficial for both the receiving states and the sending countries (Kalm, 2010).

It has already been noted that the beginning of the 21st century was characterised by a mostly positive attitude toward migration among the political elite and academic fields. Indeed, some authors put great effort into promoting the recognised benefits of emigration for the sending countries. The main focus was on remittances; more precisely, on their role in household and family members' welfare, on the local communities, and even for broader society (Nyberg–Sørensen, *et al.*, 2002). Even the mass immigration of refugees was considered to be a productive event in the long term for the receiving country, as it brings both economic and social capital (Nyberg–Sørensen, *et al.*, 2002).

Some reasons for this early positivity can be found in the reassessment of remittances and its positive role: 1) remittances for that period were around double the size of foreign aid in low-income countries; 2) increased engagement of migrant diasporas in transnational activities, impacting international development cooperation; 3) demand for immigrant workforces in the developed states, and; 4) the growing number of migrant-sending countries implementing special policies and protections for emigrants to benefit from remittances (Nyberg–Sørensen, *et al*., 2002).

Nyberg–Sørensen, Hear and Engberg–Pedersen (2002) emphasise the three types of migration-development regimes: "(1) closure and containment, aimed at control of migrants and refugees; (2) selectivity towards immigration and development support; and (3) liberalisation and transnationalism in the fields of labour mobility, diaspora activities, and refugee protection." According to the authors, the latter is heavily promoted, as it is considered to be equally beneficial for the migrant-receiving and -sending countries with regards the direct and indirect positive effects of remittances (Nyberg–Sørensen, *et al*., 2002).

Migration is not a new phenomenon, yet the international debate about migration is – and from the beginning, that debate has been closely tied to development. This strong link exists largely because migration itself was not initially a central topic of global concern. Instead, its association with development provided an indirect pathway for bringing migration into the international spotlight (Skeldon, 2008). Ronald Skeldon, in 2008, tried to rethink migration and development, and, by comparing positive and negative aspects of migration, he highlighted that, on the one hand, it is legitimate to analyse migration in the context of development, yet he notes that the challenge lies in avoiding the perception of migration merely as a tool to promote development (Skeldon, 2008).

One of the main issues when studying the migration-development nexus is the lack of scientific materials created in developing states, which leads to a one-sided framing of migration policies and discussions. This results in the marginalisation of perspectives from the Global South in both research and policymaking. Western academics, often lacking local knowledge and socio-political understanding of the migrant sending countries, tend to dominate the discourse, which limits the scope of development programmes. Some scholars have underlined the need to incorporate knowledge produced in the Global South, arguing that such inclusion would enable a more context-specific approach to migration governance (Jiménez, 2019).

The asymmetries of power between developed and developing countries have impacted the design and implementation of migration policies. For instance, international agreements on migration management, often portrayed as fair and balanced, tend to favour the interests of the Global North, while neglecting the potential risks for the Global South (Geiger & Pécoud, 2013; Pina-Delgado, 2013). In this case, the example of Cape Verde will be examined, as its emigrant population is more than twice as large as its domestic population (International Organization for Migration, 2025) – and its migration-related national income stood at about 50% in the 1990s (Carling, 2002).

India and Mexico have remained among the top remittance-receiving countries for years, and their experiences will be discussed later in the article. Another case is the labour market in North America, where migrant workforce import is used to maintain welfare programmes in the Global North, without clear benefits for the sending countries (Geiger & Pécoud, 2013).

Examining the above-mentioned type of agreement between the European Union and Cape Verde has demonstrated potential risks for Cape Verde, as it is vastly dependent on remittances, and the negative effects of stricter migration control are not compensated by development assistance (Pina-Delgado, 2013). Migration has long been a central feature of Cape Verde's national identity and economic survival. With a diaspora at least twice the size of the resident population, Cape Verde relies on transnational ties as a key driver of development (Resende-Santos, 2015).

In 2023, an estimated 13.2% of the Cape Verde population lived below the poverty line, a significant improvement from 49.5% in 2002, reflecting substantial yet fragile progress (Macrotrends, n.d.). Remittances and emigrant bank deposits constituted up to 40% of GDP, making Cape Verde one of the most remittance-dependent countries in the world (Resende-Santos, 2015). In 2013 alone, Cape Verde received $172 million in remittances – three times the amount it receives in foreign aid, and more than its merchandise exports and foreign direct investment combined, amounting to $352 per capita, more than double the national monthly minimum wage (Resende-Santos, 2015).

However, despite this, economic transformation remains incomplete. The tourism sector, despite growing, is disconnected from the rest of the economy, and unemployment remains structurally high. While emigrant deposits have fuelled banking investment and liquidity, they also carry risk, as sudden withdrawals could destabilise the economy (Resende-Santos, 2015). Cape Verde's future depends on continued remittances and expanding diaspora participation into new sectors like entrepreneurship, knowledge transfer, and "nostalgic trade" (Resende-Santos, 2015).

Migration and remittances have had a positive impact on children's development in Cape Verde. Financial support from emigrant family members has contributed to significant improvements in child health indicators. Infant mortality rates decreased from 24.9 per 1000 live births in 2008 to 15.8 in 2017, and under-five mortality rates declined from 28.1 to 17.0 in the same period (UNICEF, 2019). These improvements are partly attributed to greater access to parental and vaccination services, which have been bolstered by remittance inflows (UNICEF, 2019).

In spite of economic and financial improvements, Cape Verdean children were noted to have experienced psycho-social challenges linked to family separation. Female out-migration from Cape Verde has been vividly common since the 1970s, resulting in reduced maternal care (Lobo, 2020). Mothers' emigration has been proven to have an even more severe impact on children, as the personal ties between mother and children tend to be stronger (Carling, 2004).

Existing literature provides particular examples that question the long-term effectiveness of remittance-led development. For example, the state of Kerala in India experienced massive emigration of its labour force and received one of the largest amounts of remittances globally. While this flow of money improved local health and education indicators, it failed to result in sustainable economic growth (Skeldon, 2008).

Moreover, despite the large scale of migration and remittances sent to India, a study conducted among children aged 11 to 16 in the highly emigrated regions of Kerala and Tamil Nadu revealed that 36.9% of girls and 38.8% of boys experienced stunted growth, while 50.1% of girls and 64.6% of boys were affected by unhealthy thinness (Haboubi & Shaikh, 2009). Although a father's out-migration might have a positive financial impact on the family overall, reduced parental care can constrain access to home-prepared meals, lessen sanitation conditions, and decrease the number of doctor visits, all of which may contribute to the aforementioned child development disorders (Lei, *et al*., 2020). The study also showed that around 13% of early adolescents had experienced their fathers' migration in the five years preceding 2011–2012 (Lei, *et al*., 2020).

A number of empirical studies from the west-central region of Mexico provide controversial evidence regarding the negative or insufficiently positive outcomes of remittances (Wise & Covarrubias, 2009). In rural Mexico, widespread emigration of labour has led to substantial remittance flows, with estimates reaching 14.5 billion US dollars in 2003, surpassing tourism and foreign direct investment as sources of foreign currency (Hildebrandt & McKenzie, 2005). As of 2003, Mexico was receiving remittances worth 63 billion USD, making it the second largest recipient globally after India (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.). These financial flows contributed to improvements in child health. For instance, children in migrant households were found to have significantly lower rates of infant mortality and higher birthweights compared to those in non-migrant households (Hildebrandt & McKenzie, 2005). Specifically, migration was associated with a 3-4.5% reduction in infant mortality and an increase in average birthweight by over 360 grams (Hildebrandt & McKenzie, 2005). However, the same study also found that children in migrant households were less likely to be breastfed, vaccinated, or taken to a doctor during infancy (Hildebrandt & McKenzie, 2005).

In the late 2000s and the early 2010s, a critical review of the migration-development nexus began. In 2009, Raúl Delgado Wise and Humberto Márquez Covarrubias tried to explain the past relationship between migration and development, and suggested a new theoretical approach to the research agenda. More precisely, they argued that seeing the essentiality of migration to achieve some growth is a mistake, and the study process should rather be based on various dimensions and multi-spatial analysis of development (Wise & Covarrubias, 2009). The authors criticised various international organisations and global actors for exhibiting a neoliberal bias, which undermined a comprehensive understanding of the challenges arising during the implementation of their policy programmes. This approach led to incoherent development processes and, ultimately, exacerbated underdevelopment and increased emigration (Wise & Covarrubias, 2009). The authors suggested the following classification of general trends in studying and addressing migration-development issues:

1. The vicious circle – migration is perceived in a negative context, and these types of studies do not see positive outcomes of migration for development.
2. The virtuous circle – most researchers share this position and believe that migration, supported by the right control mechanisms and social networks, is equipped to facilitate both local and regional development (Wise & Covarrubias, 2009).

Moreover, in most of the studies – which are also subject to the "virtuous circle" framing – a common pattern emerges: migration is treated as an independent variable, explanations focus primarily on the capabilities of migrants, and analyses concentrate on local or regional factors while neglecting the role of other variables and the influence of macro-structural forces on migratory flows (Wise & Covarrubias, 2009). Critical analysis and rethinking of the migration-development nexus led the authors toward a new analytical approach, according to which the research agenda should concentrate on: (1) the variety of relations between the North-South, considering the inherent features of both; (2) the cross-influence between different types of parameters (on the spatial and social levels); (3) the demand for a new critical and multidisciplinary model that supports a reconstructed perception of reality and challenges predominant views; and (4) revising the decontextualised and conceptual definitions of development, while putting emphasis on the significance of social transition toward enhanced living conditions (Wise & Covarrubias, 2009).

While the majority of studies focus on the macroeconomic aspects of migration, only a few address the actual needs of families in emigrating states. Malnutrition – still a significant issue in middle- and low-income countries – can negatively affect pregnancy outcomes in women, and lead to various infectious diseases and stunting in adolescents (Lei, *et al*., 2020).

It should also be noted that migration often results in single-parent families, when one parent – typically the father in patriarchal societies such as India – migrates to provide financial support (Lei, *et al*., 2020). This separation can significantly impact children's development, as full parental care is closely linked to economic and socio-cultural resources (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). While fathers' outmigration tends to be a positive economic contribution, it also results in a decline in parental care for children because of the increased burden of caregiving on other family members (Lei, *et al*., 2020). Furthermore, reduced parenting has various direct or indirect detrimental effects on children, such as lower after-birth breastfeeding rates and thus an overall weakened immune system (Hildebrandt & McKenzie, 2005), and, in adolescents, higher chances of deviant and unhealthy behaviour like smoking, drinking, and drug use (Coley & Medeiros, 2007; Wen, *et al*., 2015).

3. Discussion

The research process revealed challenges in addressing the actual problems faced by people in the developing world. One of the main explanations for this is imbalance in power relations between global actors – in other words, influencing of decision-making by the Global North. Asymmetries of power relations might be demonstrated in the contradictory perception of development, that it should lower gaps between high- and low-income states without changing the power structure among them (Geiger & Pécoud, 2013). Moreover, negotiations and agreements on migration management between developed and developing states are thought to be fair, and a tool for addressing the interests of both parties (Geiger & Pécoud, 2013). According to modern trends, Western states engage in agreements with low-income countries that link development assistance to joint migration management (Adepoju, *et al*., 2010). However, because developing states possess far less bargaining power, such negotiations are inherently unequal and shaped by benefits that reflect these imbalanced power relations (Pina-Delgado, 2013).

As displayed above, the Cape Verdean population has benefited a lot from emigration-based income, but the data have also revealed that the link between a rise in consumption, improved living or health conditions does not correlate to structural economic or social development. Resende-Santos (2015) provided numerous statistics on how remittances contributed to growth, but he also paid attention to the instability of the Cape Verdean economy. In other words, this ambiguity leads to the assumption that "economic growth" and "development" are different terms, and, in particular cases, they might even contradict each other. More precisely, remittance-based rises in the economy tend to become highly dependent on money transfers, which lessens the diversification of economic sectors and makes them more vulnerable to crises, often outside the region. Moreover, despite the improvement in children's health conditions, deeper socio-cultural challenges, possibly linked to parental out-migration, are not sufficiently addressed. Lobo (2020) discussed in the article that female emigration was high for decades in Cape Verde, and, accordingly, the results of insufficient maternal care might be severe on those Cape Verdean generations in the longer-term.

As we have already shown in the literature review, publications about migration and development tend to underline positive outcomes of migration, especially concentrating on and portraying how beneficial it might be for the sending countries. This tendency also reveals that overemphasis on viewing migration as a development tool has resulted in ignorance or insufficient explanation of its harmful aspects. Firstly, the significance of the workforce for economic growth should be pointed out. Moreover, despite the skilfulness of emigrants, promoting emigration leads to mid- and long-term economic issues; more precisely, massive emigration might impede technological progress and the growth of GDP per capita (Son & Noja, 2013). Consequently, high-income countries become economic centres and attract the best human capital, while the future and vital need for improvement in low-income states remains unpromising. Some studies have shown that the biggest migration flows occur from relatively low-income to high-income states and regions, while, in contrast, only 6% of global migration originates from the developed world (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016).

Another issue that merits attention is remittances and the negative consequences that arise from insufficient analysis of their impacts. Remittances are often presented as the primary mechanism for assessing the effectiveness of migration in sending states. Although economic growth may be stimulated through the instrumentalisation of these financial transfers, the key question is whether such growth can be sustained over time (Skeldon, 2008). In addition, the importance of diversified economies is frequently overlooked.

While remittances have already played an important role in reducing the general level of poverty in different states, these money flows are not directed to the poorest communities or households, and, at some point, they increase the initial inequality (Skeldon, 2008). Accordingly, remittances and development aid are not interchangeable.

Another argument is that while remittances flow into households, foreign aid should be concentrated on improving micro-/macro-economic structures, and be directed to the poorest social groups – those who do not even have access to additional incomes like remittances.

Furthermore, some data contradict the idea that remittances, as "the most effective tool," can overcome all the problems faced by the studied communities. Looking at the example of Kerala alone, we might argue that remittances could improve human capital and welfare, but they also contribute to family dependence on money transfers and discourage them from engaging in local economic activities, which raises concerns about the sustainability of remittance-based economies (Skeldon, 2008). Studies have shown that the example of Kerala region in India has a lot in common with that of Cape Verde in terms of migration, not in numbers, but in the general trends: despite the substantial remittances sent to India, and particularly to the state of Kerala, children's well-being did not improve proportionally (Haboubi & Shaikh, 2009; Lei, *et al*., 2020).

This highlights the importance of questioning the economic instrumentalisation of remittances. It is quite simple: increased inflows of money boost household consumption, producing a temporary improvement in certain indicators. However, evidence from India reinforces the idea that migration-related issues are so complex and multifaceted that the overall effects of migration cannot be evaluated solely through economic measures. Indian families go through various hardships, and parental out-migration often exacerbates challenges that children face. As such, based on the above-mentioned data, those issues cannot be balanced by the rise in family income.

Empirical studies about the impacts of remittances in the west-central region of Mexico suggest that, although these money transfers can ease various social problems, they also directly or indirectly contribute to economic challenges, and may ultimately hinder regional development (Wise & Covarrubias, 2009). The authors suggest that remittance-driven regional development may lead to increased social inequality, rising land prices, and, consequently, the concentration of resources in the hands of a few – potentially resulting in the impoverishment of other economic groups (Wise & Covarrubias, 2009). Hildebrandt and McKenzie (2005) have shown that while migration improved immediate health outcomes in Mexico, it also introduced risks caused by reduced preventive care. The Mexican case goes even deeper, as it contributes to broadening the scale of negative aspects that the economic framing of migration might have. Previously, considering the examples of India and Cape Verde, we mainly addressed the issues that go beyond the financial variables, and which are rooted in socio-cultural structures, but the case of Mexico outlines that a remittance-led economy might deepen socio-economic challenges linked to inequality and sustainability.

According to the analysis provided in IMF and World Bank publications, it seems arguable that, in the period from 1990 to 2010, they began reframing migration from being a criterion of underdevelopment to being a tool for economic growth. The study process has revealed that while the word "migration" was less often used in publications than the word "development," these publications paid major attention to the instrumentalisation of migration through remittances. None of the IMF publications addressed aspects of migration other than economic dimensions, while the majority of them portrayed migration as a beneficial factor in reducing poverty, increasing household welfare, and contributing to economic growth. The latter finding also applies to the World Bank, as, there too, minimal attention was paid to non-economic issues.

Although these publications emphasise migration's contributions to poverty reduction and household welfare, social dimensions – such as child well-being, family separation, and structural inequalities – receive little to no attention. Consequently, around 2/3 of publications positively assessed migration or remittances and, as a result, underestimated the multi-layered outcomes of migration by overemphasising its economic instrumentalisation. The main issue remains that, despite growing evidence of these unintended consequences, for decades, migration governance has remained based on the same neoliberal criteria, reinforcing structural inequalities rather than addressing them.

Conclusion

This study critically assessed how international institutions and policy actors have framed migration as an economic instrument for development in low-income states. The analysis shows that the dominant neoliberal perspective, which emphasises remittances, household welfare gains, and migrant self-reliance, provides an incomplete and sometimes misleading understanding of migration's developmental impact. By reviewing global policy discourse and examining empirical cases from Cape Verde, India, and Mexico, the article demonstrates that remittance-led development produces short-term improvements, but does not generate long-lasting structural transformation. Instead, it deepens social and economic vulnerabilities. These findings challenge the common assumption, especially within IMF and World Bank publications, that migration functions as a reliable or sustainable development strategy.

The main academic contribution of this article is that it shows how economic framings have overshadowed the social, political, and institutional dimensions of migration. This has narrowed the global policy agenda and shaped development strategies that overlook structural inequalities. By combining discourse analysis with secondary empirical evidence, the study provides an integrated critique of the migration–development nexus, and demonstrates how international migration governance reproduces power asymmetries between the Global North and South. This adds to existing scholarship by revealing that the dominant framing of migration is conceptually limited, and can also have harmful consequences when applied uncritically in low-income contexts.

In practical terms, the findings highlight the need for migration governance to move beyond economic indicators and incorporate social protection mechanisms, labour rights, and investments in domestic development capacity. Policymakers should recognise that household-level gains from remittances cannot replace coherent national development strategies, nor can migration compensate for persistent inequalities, weak institutions, or the absence of welfare systems.

The study also has several limitations. First, it relies on secondary data and document analysis, which means it does not include fieldwork or interviews that could provide a deeper understanding of local experiences. Second, the case selection of India, Mexico, and Cape Verde, although conceptually justified, does not capture the full range of migrant-sending contexts. Third, the chosen timeframe of 1990 to 2010, while important for understanding the institutionalisation of the migration–development nexus, limits the ability to draw conclusions about more recent global trends after 2015. These limitations suggest the need for future research that includes field-based evidence, wider comparative case studies, and updated analysis of post-2010 migration governance.

Overall, the study argues that migration cannot be understood or governed solely through economic metrics. Effective and equitable migration management requires confronting structural inequalities, strengthening social protections, and recognising the multidimensional realities experienced by migrants and their communities. Only through such an approach can migration governance contribute to sustainable and inclusive development, rather than reinforcing dependency and vulnerability.

References

Adepoju, A., Noorloos, F. V., & Zoomers, A. (2010). Europe’s Migration Agreements with Migrant-Sending Countries in the Global South: A Critical Review. *International Migration, 48*(3), 42-75.

Boucher, G. (2008). A Critique of Global Policy Discourses on Managing International Migration. *Third World Quarterly, 29*(7), 1461-1471.

Carling, J. (2002). Cape Verde: Towards the End of Emigration? *Migration Information Source*. Retrieved from https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/cape-verde-towards-end-emigration

Carling, J. (2004). Emigration, Return and Development in Cape Verde: The Impact of Closing Borders. *Population, Space and Place, 10*, 113-132.

Coley, R. L., & Medeiros, B. L. (2007). Reciprocal longitudinal relations between nonresident father involvement and adolescent delinquency. *Child Development, 78*(1), 132-147.

Geiger, M., & Pécoud, A. (2013). Migration, Development and the ‘Migration and Development Nexus’. *Population, Space and Place, 19*, 369-374.

Haboubi, G. J., & Shaikh, R. B. (2009). A Comparison of the Nutritional Status of Adolescents from Selected Schools of South India and UAE: A Cross-sectional Study. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine, 34*(2), 108-111.

Hildebrandt, N., & McKenzie, D. J. (2005). *The Effects of Migration on Child Health in Mexico.* Washington, DC: World Bank Policy Research Working Papers.

International Organization for Migration. (2025). *Cabo Verde.* Retrieved from International Organization for Migration (IOM) Official Web Site: https://www.iom.int/countries/cabo-verde#:~:text=For%20years%2C%20Cabo%20Verde%20has,including%20100%2C000%20people%20in%20Portugal

Jiménez, J. C. (2019). Ignoring the Brandt Line? Dimensions and Implications of the North-South Divide from Today's Policy Perspective. In H. M. Grimm, *Public Policy Research in the Global South | A Cross-Country Perspective* (pp. 17-26). Springer, Cham.

Kalm, S. (2010). Liberalizing Movements? The Political Rationality of Global Migration Management. In M. Geiger, & A. Pécoud, *The Politics of International Migration Management* (pp. 21-44). London: Palgrave Macmillan .

Lei, L., Desai, S., & Chen, F. (2020). Fathers' Migration and Nutritional Status of Children in India: Do the Effects Vary by Community Context? *Demographic Research, 43*, 545–580.

Lobo, A. d. (2020). The challenges of making family at a distance. Some reflections on migrations and family dynamics in Cape Verde. *Análise Social, 55*(237), 840-866.

Macrotrends. (n.d.). *Cabo Verde Poverty Rate 2001-2025.* Retrieved from Macrotrends Official Web site: https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/CPV/cabo-verde/poverty-rate

Martin, P. (1992). Migration and Development. *International Migration Review, 26*(3), 1000 – 1012.

Mavroudi, E., & Nagel, C. (2016). *Global Migration: Patterns, processes, and politics* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

McLanahan, S., & Sandefur, G. (1994). *Growing Up with a Single Parent. What Hurts, What Helps.* (Vol. 2). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Migration Policy Institute. (n.d.). *Remittance Trends over Time.* Retrieved from Migration Policy Institute Official Web site: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/remittance-trends-over-time?width=1000&height=850&iframe=true

Nyberg-Sørensen, N., Hear, N. V., & Engberg-Pedersen, P. (2002). The Migration-Development Nexus Evidence and Policy Options State-of-the-Art Overview. *International Migration, 40*(5), 3-47.

Nyberg–Sørensen, N., Hear, N. V., & Engberg–Pedersen, P. (2002). The Migration–Development Nexus: Evidence and Policy Options. *International Migration, 40*(5), 49-73.

Pina-Delgado, J. (2013). The Current Scheme to Manage Migration between Europe and Cape Verde: Promoter of Development or Tool for Border Closure? *Population, Space and Place, 19*, 404-414.

Raghuram, P. (2009). Which Migration, What Development? Unsettling the Edifice of Migration and Development. *Population, Space and Place, 15*, 103-117.

Resende-Santos, J. (2015). Cape Verde and Its Diaspora: Economic Transnationalism and Homeland Development. *Journal of Cape Verdean Studies, 2*(1), 69-107.

Skeldon, R. (2008). International Migration as a Tool in Development Policy: A Passing Phase? *Population and Development Review, 34*(1), 1-18.

Son, L., & Noja, G. G. (2013). The role of the human capital and investment in human capital within the sustainable socio-economic development. How labour force migration affects competitiveness? *Theoretical and Applied Economics, 20*(10), 111-126.

Taylor, J. E., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Massey, D. S., & Pellegrino, A. (1996). International Migration and National Development. *Population Index, 62*(2), 181-212.

UNICEF. (2019). *Country Office Annual Report 2019: Cabo Verde.* UNICEF.

Wen, M., Su, S., Li, X., & Lin, D. (2015). Positive youth development in rural China: the role of parental migration. *Social Science & Medicine*, 261-269.

Wise, R. D., & Covarrubias, H. M. (2009). Understanding the Relationship between Migration and Development| Toward a New Theoretical Approach. *Social Analysis, 53*(3), 85-105.