

FRANCIS CHENEVAL
& JOHAN ROCHEL | **An Ethical View on
Remittances and
Labor Migration**

Abstract: The present contribution defends that remittances should be taken into account and integrated into an ethical framework on migration. This main thesis is two-fold. First, we argue that if a normative approach to migration is to claim practical relevance, it should integrate remittances as a relevant empirical parameter into an ethical framework. The empirical assessment of the scientific evidence available on remittances therefore proves to be extremely important. Secondly, assuming that remittances have to be taken seriously, we consider their positive and negative impacts against two backgrounds. First, we emphasize the increased autonomy of persons who pull themselves and their dependents out of economic hardship. Second, affluent states who enable this process through their labor legislation contribute to the fulfillment of their duty of assistance. In this respect, our thesis is to claim that remittances should be considered as an amplifying factor for normative arguments in favor of a liberalization of labor migration. Remittances stand for a liberal way of fulfilling a responsibility to help, namely through the elimination of obstacles which in turn allow people to support themselves and lead an autonomous life.

Key words: remittances, migration, free movement, global justice



Introduction

The debate over the normative foundations of migration policies is mainly led under the headline of “securitization”.¹ Consequently, migration is seen as a zero-sum game: the alleged or real claims of would-be migrants and their corresponding effects are opposed to claims held by institutions and members of immigration countries. These conflicting claims are justified with recourse to specific arguments, ranging from individual rights to social, ecological, cultural or democratic claims of the would-be migrants and resident populations.

In the present contribution, we choose another way to frame the debate, namely by integrating the paradigm of “developmentalization”.² In this other paradigm, the focus lies on the developmental-political scenarios in both emigration and immigration countries, highlighting the ways in which they can be advantageous and enriching for all stakeholders. Among all the relevant aspects of this conceptual framework, we will concentrate our enquiry on remittances. These voluntary money transfers from labor migrants to their family members and relatives in the countries of origin represent an important aspect of both developmental and economic dimensions of global migration. The paradigm

¹ On “securitization” and “developmentalization”, see Kühn, *Sicherheit und Entwicklung in der Weltgesellschaft: liberales Paradigma und Statebuilding in Afghanistan* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010).

² On the so-called “nexus” between migration and development, see Faist, Fauser and Kivisto (ed.), *The Migration-Development Nexus : a Transnational Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

of “developmentalization” is also of interest when dealing with non-monetary, cultural, societal, and political aspects of migration.³

After having briefly presented empirical evidence related to remittances, the present contribution aims to put remittances into a broader ethical perspective on migration. Our main thesis is two-fold. First, we argue that current ethical literature on migration has not given remittances the emphasis they deserve. If a comprehensive normative approach to migration is to claim practical relevance, it should integrate remittances as a relevant empirical parameter. This first claim also provides the occasion to briefly address some underlying methodological issues pertaining to the type of normative approach one strives for.

Secondly, given that remittances have to be taken seriously, we consider their positive and negative impacts against the background of the autonomy of persons who pull themselves and their dependents out of economic hardship, as well as of the duty of assistance of affluent states. In this respect, our main thesis is that remittances should be considered to be an *amplifying factor* for normative arguments in favor of the promotion of the free movement of people. The use of “amplifying” in a quasi-technical sense is meant to emphasize the fact that taking remittances into account *strengthens* the normative arguments used to argue for such free movement. Our contribution intends to show that integrating remittances into a coherent ethical framework on migration underpins a forceful argument for a sustainable and regulated liberalization of labor migration.

The developmental and economic signification of remittances

A note of caution

Before proceeding further, the assessment of empirical relevance related to remittances calls for a note of caution. In the most recent contribution on this issue, Faist et al. distinguish between different historical peaks of interests on the nexus between development and migration.⁴ After a first quite optimistic approach (1950-1960), dependency theories have cast a more skeptical view on the alleged advantages of migration in terms of development (1970-1980).⁵ Since the 1990s, Faist et al. have diagnosed the return of an optimistic view, highlighting alleged co-advantages for all stakeholders. In a similar vein, de Haas proposes to broadly distinguish between migration optimists and pessimists and also claims

³ On this, de Haas, "International Migration, Remittances and Development: Myths and Facts", *Third World Quarterly* 26/8 (2005), 1243-1258, pp. 1244-1245. We do not consider that this developmental scenario entirely replaces that of securitization or that the normative considerations associated with it appear fully irrelevant. Remittances in particular, but also developmental aspects in general, should be considered from a broader point of view, both in the developmentalization and securitization frameworks.

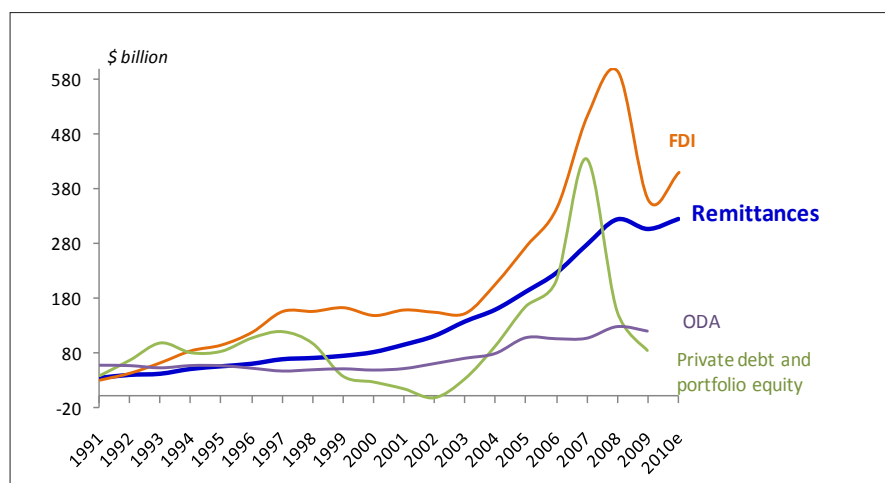
⁴ Faist, Fauser and Kivisto (ed.) (2011), Introduction.

⁵ Among others, Russell, "Migrant Remittances and Development", *International Migration* 30/3-4 (1992), 267-287, Rubinstein, "Migration. Development and Remittances in Rural Mexico", *International Migration* 30/2 (1992), 127-153.

that optimists are back to the forefront of the academic and political discourse.⁶ As we will show in the following, our argument does not presuppose a detailed answer to the question of the macro-economic effects of remittances. It only presupposes that the current evidence allows one to conclude overall positive effects. In this respect, we follow the conclusions defended by the International Organization for Migration(IOM) and the World Bank in several studies.⁷ It is also important to stress that our argument does not presuppose any specific view on how the remittances are used in a single case. Quite on the contrary, we think that remittances should not be analyzed from an allegedly “ethical point of view” by criticizing how people use their private financial resources.⁸

Presenting the empirical evidence

93% of the more than 215 million people living outside the borders of their country of birth (about 3% of the world population) are imputed to labor migration. The remittances sent home every year exceed more than three times the official development assistance worldwide. They represent important means of subsistence for millions of people and serve as an essential economic pillar for numerous developing and emerging countries. For 2010, the total amount of remittances is expected to have reached 325 billion USD.⁹



FDI: foreign direct investment; ODA: official development aid.

Source: World Bank, *Migration and Development Brief 13*, Nov. 2010.

In countries like Tadjikistan, Tonga, Lesotho, Moldova, Lebanon and Samoa, remittances represent far more than 20% of the yearly GDP. In numerous other

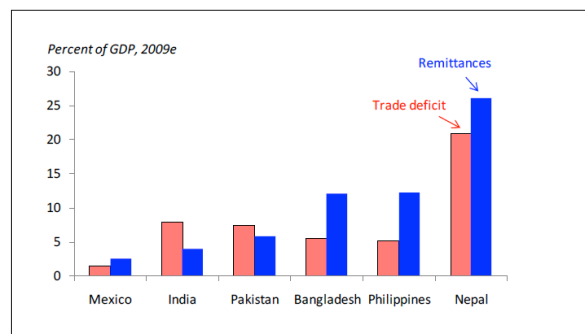
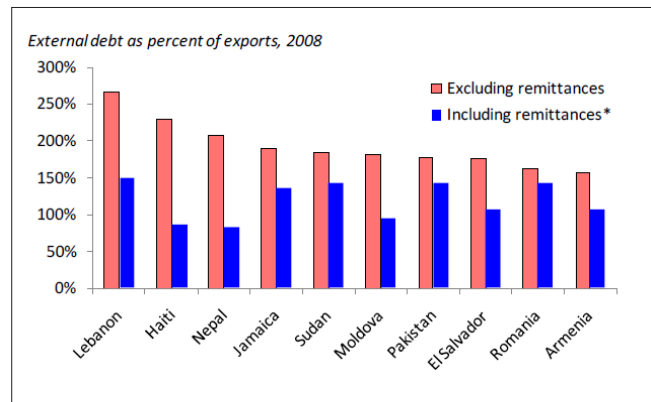
6 de Haas, "Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective", *International Migration Review* 44/1 (2010), 227-264.

7 International Organization for Migration. *World Migration 2005: Costs and Benefits of International Migration*, 2005 ; World Bank, *Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011*.

8 For instance, Brock seems to regret that people invest their money “on private consumption such as food, clothing, consumer goods and improving housing”. Brock, *Global Justice: a Cosmopolitan Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 205.

9 World Bank, *Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011*.

countries, the percentage rate is above 15%. In many cases, remittances are so important that they can considerably reduce external debt.



Source: WB Migration and Development Brief 12, 23, April 2010

Emerging countries such as China and India draw yearly more than 50 billion USD through remittances. It is also important to note that countries such as France, Germany and Spain, with more than 10 billion USD in remittances, are among the top 10 countries worldwide that profit most from remittances.¹⁰ This evidence demonstrates quite clearly that the advantages flowing from remittances out of labor migration also profit developed countries to a considerable extent. During the last financial crisis, remittances slightly decreased however; yet, against the background of economic recession in the developed countries, they have proven to be relatively resistant to crisis.¹¹

One of the biggest drawbacks for labor migrants sending remittances remains the high transaction costs associated with doing so. Because of increased competition among providers, those costs have nevertheless followed a pattern of decline.¹² As a result, people in the country of origin profit directly from remittances, without

¹⁰ World Bank Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011

¹¹ Dilip Ratha, 'Dollars Without Borders: Can the Global Flow of Remittances Survive the Crisis?' *Foreign Affairs*, October 16, (2009), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65448/dilip-ratha/dollars-without-borders>.

¹² Remittance Prices Worldwide database; "An Analysis of Trends in the Average Total Cost of Migrant Remittance Services" Policy Note, Payments Systems Development Group, Financial and Private Sector Development Vice-Presidency, World Bank, April 23, 2010.

having to face the institutional transaction costs or problems caused by corrupt national and international administrations.¹³ Furthermore, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) assumes that remittances have a multiplying effect: they are directly further invested by receivers in health care, education and domestic infrastructure¹⁴. Remittances should be understood in general as complementary to other (economic) means of solving structural problems in the countries of origin. In several countries, remittances are also associated with a high propensity to save. Although to be taken with a grain of salt, extrapolations tend to support the conclusion that a complete liberalization of worldwide labor migration (as, for instance, within the EU) would double the global GDP.¹⁵ Regarding this aspect, comparisons with other dimensions of liberalization are especially interesting. According to the calculations presented in two studies, the increased trade volume flowing from a conclusion of the WTO Doha-Round over several years would amount to something comprised between 287 billion USD¹⁶ and 330 billion USD.¹⁷

The difference is indeed very important, but the middle value lies around 300 billion USD. This is a considerable amount of money, but it represents only one year of global remittances. The economist Dani Rodrik writes that “if international policy makers were really interested in maximizing worldwide efficiency, they would spend little of their energies on a new trade round(...) They would all be busy (...) liberalizing immigration restrictions.”¹⁸ Similarly, Clemens argues that “when it comes to policies that restrict emigration, there appear to be trillion-dollar bills on the sidewalk.”¹⁹

Assessing the empirical evidence

To sum up, it can be affirmed that remittances have a redistribution effect which contributes significantly to alleviate poverty in developing and emerging countries. As a general matter, in comparison to the phenomenon of “brain drain” – which is often linked to labor migration – the IOM affirms that advantages

13 Defending similar conclusions, Kapur and McHale, "Effects of Emigration: Sending Countries" in Rosenblum and Tichenor (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Migration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

14 International Organization for Migration. *World Migration 2005: Costs and Benefits of International Migration*, 2005.

15 For an early work on this, Hamilton and Whalley, "Efficiency and Distributional Implications of Global Restrictions on Labour Mobility: Calculations and Policy Implications", *Journal of Development Economics* 14/1 (1984). For a recent contribution, Clemens, "Economics and Emigration: Trillion-Dollar Bills on the Sidewalk?", *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25/3 (2011), 83-106.

16 Anderson, Martin and van der Mensbrugge, "Doha Policies: Where are the Pay-Offs" in Newfarmer (ed.), *Trade, Doha, and Development: Window into the Issues* (World Bank, 2005).

17 Decreux and Fontagné, "A Quantitative Assessment of the Outcome of the Doha Development Agenda", *CEPII Working Papers* 10 (2006).

18 Dani Rodrik, Comments at the Conference on "Immigration Policy and the Welfare State", Trieste, June 23rd 2001, quoted in Trachtman, *The International Law of Economic Migration: Toward the Fourth Freedom* (Kalamazoo: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2009), 7. See also Rodrik "Labor Markets: The Unexploited Frontier of Globalization" (31.05.2011), www.theglobalist.com.

19 Clemens (2011), pp. 83-84.

outweigh drawbacks.²⁰ In that regard, the potential of remittances still remains to be fully exploited.²¹ First, the developmental dimension of migration as a global phenomenon must be analyzed against the general background of factor mobility. In the end, the mobility of people, services, capital, and goods are relevant. Furthermore, the migration of people not only offers new opportunities for the migrants themselves, but also for those who receive remittances. In this respect, the incentives provoked by remittances (education, investment e.g.) for people in the sending country also deserve consideration.²² Secondly, remittances are structurally very important for entire economies: they produce macro-economic redistribution effects able to alleviate poverty. On the contrary, the hypothesis according to which global poverty would be far graver without the 300 billion USD remittances has some plausibility.

It is often argued that only a relatively well-off minority of the poor people can hope to migrate. In the face of the core number of people who live in dire needs, the remittances of this privileged minority, so the argument, are almost irrelevant.²³ For instance, Thomas Pogge treats the issue of remittances in one sentence with the consideration that addressees of remittances belong to the privileged members of sending countries, even if some exceptional cases of (really) poor people sending money back home do sometimes exist. Pogge argues that remittances “cement and entrench the oppression of the poorest” without presenting empirical evidence or discussing the economic signification of remittances.²⁴ As our analysis has clearly shown, Pogge’s anecdotal consideration of remittances does not do justice to the importance of the phenomenon.

However, it remains absolutely clear that migration is not the “silver-bullet solution” to the challenge of global poverty.²⁵ A comprehensive analysis of remittances cannot ignore negative aspects. First, the high transaction costs and the associated absorption of value by the service providers occur at the expense of addressees and countries of origin. Secondly, there are few comprehensive studies that look at the situation and consequences for migrants in situ sending money home. In many cases, the migrant has been supported by his family and must therefore pay back this sponsoring. Remittances do not appear in such cases as purely voluntary gifts, but rather have to be seen as parts of an almost contractual

20 International Organization for Migration. *World Migration 2005: Costs and Benefits of International Migration*, 2005.

21 For a similar thesis, de Haas, "Migration, Remittances and Regional Development in Southern Morocco", *Geoforum* 37/4 (2006), 565-580.

22 For similar conclusions, see Barry, "Immigration and Global Justice", *Global Justice Theory Practice Rhetoric* 4/1 (2011), 30-38, p. 34.

23 Pogge, "Migration and Poverty" in Goodin and Pettit (ed.), *Contemporary Political Philosophy: an Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 710-721, pp. 712 ff.

24 Ibid.

25 Empirical studies highlight the importance of taking into account national and regional structures for the effects of remittances. See de Haas (2010).

agreement between the different parties. In this type of situation, special attention to the existence of inadequate pressure on the migrant and the possibility to control it are required. Thirdly, remittances could also be considered under the aspect of “moral hazard.” In the end, they can produce long-term dependence and passivity on the side of the family members in the country of origin.

Remittances in an ethical perspective on migration

In this section, we consider the ethical dimension of remittances. The main thesis defended is two-fold. First, we claim that a comprehensive normative evaluation of migration – if it is to have practical relevance – must take remittances into account. Second, we claim that remittances should be seen as an amplifying factor for normative arguments in favor of the liberalization of labor migration, i.e. as strengthening those normative arguments. This thesis is to be explained and justified on the basis of two normative arguments, namely the claim to individual autonomy and the general responsibility to help held by affluent states. Full development of this thesis will require a short outline of the broader theoretical framework in which we will evaluate the ethical significance of remittances.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to further specify what is meant by the liberalization of labor migration. Our focus is not on the general issue of the state opening or closing its national political borders, but rather on access to the labor market and the facilitation of financial transactions (for remittance-related matters). We interpret the promotion of the free movement of people as liberalization of the labor migration policy in the case in which the recognition of a right to seek employment in another state is rendered possible. With this recognition, the migrant shall enjoy the right to apply for employment, and a residence permit is then granted upon hiring.²⁶ Here, we assume that the legal and social employment conditions in the country of destination remain stable. Liberal-democratic states – which are the focus of this contribution – are in the position to ensure that an increase in labor migration does not undermine the standards of labor regulation. Liberalization, in this sense, is thus not to be understood as the complete deregulation of employment conditions. We will come back to this in the final part of this contribution.

Ethics of migration: remittances as amplifying factor

What we call ethics of migration is to be understood as a set of theses that, taken together, represent a cogent answer to normative challenges related to the

²⁶ As a matter of example, the free movement agreement between the EU and Switzerland functions according to this (very) simplified scheme.

phenomenon of migration. In current literature, migration is mostly treated as a policy question for liberal-democratic affluent states. In this context, the issue of a morally justified immigration policy materializes in a debate on the ethical adequacy of a certain level of openness of borders. For years, the question of whether and under which modalities a state is allowed to restrict immigration has been the leading issue in the so called “open/closed borders” debate.²⁷ This theoretical balancing between different normative elements playing a role in the justification of border policy entails moral, political, prudential and practical considerations.²⁸

With regard to the different positions developed in current literature, three main normative positions can be distinguished.²⁹ First, an ethical perspective on migration must be able to make sense of the strong claim individuals have in being able to exercise freedom of movement (liberty-based argument).³⁰ Secondly, the importance of global responsibilities held by affluent states should be integrated into the normative framework (justice-based argument). Against the background of the moral equality of every human being, it is assumed that states have the responsibility to duly consider the situation of all those who live in dire need.³¹ Based on this premise, we submit the minimalistic assumption that affluent states have a responsibility to alleviate extreme poverty in the form of a general duty of assistance. We will discuss its justification below. Thirdly, the normative framework must make room for the ethical-political value of a community (self-determination-based argument). Its signification – above all from the modern national state – is mostly discussed under the headline of a right to political self-determination and a responsibility to protect its members.³² The competence of

27 For a good overview on the different subtopics in the open/closed borders debate, refer to Bader, "The Ethics of Immigration", *Constellations* 12/3 (2005), 331-361, Seglow, "The Ethics of Immigration", *Political Studies Review* 3/3 (2005), 317-334, Wellman, "Immigration", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2010). For an argument on the requirement to consider procedural-political arguments, see Abizadeh, "Closed Borders, Human Rights, and Democratic Legitimation" in David (ed.), *Driven from Home, Protecting the Rights of Forced Migrants* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 147-166.

28 For a similar approach and a distinction between different categories of would-be migrants, see Seglow, "Just Borders" (Conference on Responsibility in International Political Philosophy, Graz, 2010). For a discussion on the different types of considerations, Bader (2005), p. 335.

29 Bauböck speaks of the “three main clusters of normative arguments”. Bauböck, “Global Justice, Freedom of Movement and Democratic Citizenship”, *European Journal of Sociology*, 50/1 (2009), 1-31. For similar approaches, Bader (2005), Seglow (2005), Abizadeh (2010).

30 On free movement as a human right, Nett, "The Civil Right We Are Not Ready For: The Right of Free Movement of People on the Face of the Earth", *Ethics* 81/3 (1971), 212-227. Kirloskar-Steinbach, *Gibt es ein Menschenrecht auf Immigration? politische und philosophische Positionen zur Einwanderungsproblematik* (München: Fink, 2007). Valadez, “Is Immigration a Human Right?”, in Pierik and Wouter (ed.), *Cosmopolitanism in Context: Perspectives From International Law and Political Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 221-249.

31 The focus is here on states-like bodies. That does not mean that individuals do not have any sort of responsibility. See classical texts by Singer, *Practical Ethics*, (Cambridge 1980). Murphy, *Institutions and the Demands of Justice, Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 27(4) (1998), 251-291.

32 This line of argumentation shares some features of a communitarian argument but shall not be confused with it (Seglow (2005), p. 330.) The main point here is not the safeguard of a national culture, but the prerogative of a political community to decide upon its common destiny. For a communitarian argument, see Meilaender, *Towards a Theory of Immigration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

the community to decide freely upon important matters (such as its composition, but also the allocation of scarce communal resources) is understood as a central aspect of this self-determination and the effective guarantee of rights³³.

If remittances are to be taken seriously by a normative theory of migration, then the question naturally arises: which normative consequences would it produce? Our main thesis is that remittances play *an amplifying role* in the promotion of the liberalization of labor migration: they strengthen the moral case for liberalization. Our argument will discuss in more detail two normative claims: individual autonomy as a good to be fostered and the duty of assistance held by affluent states that ought to be fulfilled in order to assure communities a decent self-determined existence. We link these claims to the issue of remittances and show that, contingent upon empirical evidence actually available, the results speak in favor of a liberalization of labor migration.

Regarding the justification of the two normative imperatives (foster individual autonomy, fulfill the duty of assistance), we will pursue an ecumenical strategy, striving for a minimal and overlapping justification.³⁴ Our main purpose is to evaluate the positive effect of remittances on autonomy and assistance to self-determination rather than the justification of these moral purposes themselves. In this regard, our thesis is not dependent upon a specific justification and is compatible with distinct argumentative strategies.

Individual autonomy

As already sketched above, we assume that individual autonomy represents a moral value. This autonomy is defined by the possibility every human being should enjoy in freely deciding upon their own life plans and shaping their existence with others accordingly. Freedom to migrate is an important part of our autonomy. It has an important social aspect in that it enables people to meet and build networks across borders. Furthermore, freedom to migrate has a central instrumental value in a range of significant contexts. It makes possible the realization of countless opportunities, be they of private (educational, professional, relational, recreational, etc.) or public (associational, NGO-related, transnational associations of political parties, etc.) relevance. For theorists defending such an approach, the moral significance of this freedom could be seen as more or less urgent. On the one side, in extreme cases where the personal autonomy – indeed life – of a person can only be saved through migration into

³³ Some theorists have argued that this competence is indeed *essential* for the existence and safeguard of a community. For such arguments, see Walzer, *Spheres of Justice : a Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1983), Miller, "Immigration: the Case for Limits" in Cohen and Wellman (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 193-206.

³⁴ For a similar strategy, compare Schlothfeldt, "Ökonomische Migration und globale Verteilungsgerechtigkeit" in Märker and Schlothfeldt (ed.), *Was schulden wir Flüchtlingen und Migranten? Grundlagen einer gerechten Zuwanderungspolitik* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002), 93-109, pp. 96-97; Bader (2005), p. 353.

another country, the moral value of the claim to migrate is extremely high.³⁵ On the other side, freedom to migrate loses much of its instrumental moral value when it only helps secure access to luxury goods. Although the present article is not the right place to discuss this issue at length, there are good grounds to argue that this purely instrumental view on the value of the freedom to move misses several aspects. Most importantly, short of whether someone already has access to sufficient number of goods or opportunities, freedom to move remains an important part of what we mean by saying that a person should be free to lead his or her life as they want.

As a matter of fact, in most real-world situations, freedom to move is seen as instrumentally valuable in giving access to employment opportunities. Finding means of subsistence through employment are in this sense instrumentally valuable in securing the possibility of an autonomous life.³⁶ In order to be able to care for themselves and thereby do justice to their claim to a decent life, people have to rely on minimal subsistence means. Migrants able to successfully apply for a job gain access to the employment market and are thereby able to secure an income.

In turn, this generates the opportunity for migrants to send remittances back home. As a result, economic independence of senders and receivers improves. Disadvantaged persons are in this way supported in their personal autonomy, for instance through the improvement of housing facilities, health care, or education. As was shown in the empirical discussion, those contributions are not only bilateral in nature, but also have significant macro-economic effects on the entire society the addressees live in. As we will consider shortly, remittances are in this regard also an important means to improve the collective autonomy of developing and emerging countries.

If personal autonomy is to be recognized as an important value – as we assume it should – then taking remittances into account within a normative framework highlights the multiplicative effect on securing the autonomy of further individuals, both in the immigration country and in the country of origin. Remittances function as an amplifying factor for the normative argument related

³⁵ The distinction asylum and “economic” migration (and the corresponding international asylum system) are built upon this assumption. See Gibney, *The Ethics and Politics of Asylum: Liberal Democracy and the Response to Refugees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³⁶ According to Raz, autonomy has three conditions: appropriate mental abilities, adequate range of options, and independence. Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 372-378. Other lines of argumentation are possible. For example, Carens distinguishes between freedom to move to secure equality of opportunities or to secure material equality. Carens, "Migration and Morality: A Liberal Egalitarian Perspective" in Barry and Goodin (ed.), *Free movement: Ethical Issues in The Transnational Migration of People and Money* (Harvester-Wheatsheaf and Penn State University Press, 1992), 25-47.

to autonomy. Through freedom to migrate, would-be migrants are able to access conditions of personal economic independence. Based upon their individual decisions and actions – specifically the search for employment, access to the employment market, and the sending of remittances – migrants can in turn support their relatives in their autonomy. This then has broader effects on entire sub-national and national structures.

Duty of assistance

The responsibility of affluent states to alleviate extreme poverty and support people living in dire need could be justified in several ways. As sketched above, we pursue a minimal argumentative strategy and, for our present purposes, distinct arguments are indeed acceptable.³⁷ Whether this responsibility to help is to be considered as a responsibility towards humanity based upon a sort of benevolence³⁸ or as a substantive duty of global justice³⁹ can be left unanswered within this contribution.

As a general matter, it can be said that this responsibility to help is part of the “moral respect” we owe every human being.⁴⁰ This respect requires doing justice to the demands made by those living in dire need to lead an autonomous and decent life. Thereby, affluent states – in particular though not exclusively – have a responsibility to act and render possible the establishment of conditions that will do justice to the claims of the poorest. Secondly, we follow Rawls’ distributive argument that people have a duty to assist burdened societies in becoming full members of the society of peoples and in reaching a fuller degree of political autonomy.⁴¹ For our present argumentation, the difficult issue of the best strategy to fulfill this responsibility can also remain unanswered. In any case, the choice is often presented in a binary way: state-based development aid or a more generous policy of open borders.⁴² However, this confrontation appears artificial. It is

37 Theorists arguing on a *sufficientarian* basis plead for the recognition of a minimal threshold (in terms of resources) which every human being should be able to reach (skeptical Casal, "Why Sufficientarianism is not enough?", *Ethics* 117 (2007), 296-326.). *Egalitarians* defend a more comprehensive and more demanding responsibility regarding the redistribution of resources. In a nutshell, the guiding ideal is global equality in terms of resources or opportunities. See e.g. Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999). Proponents of a *harm-principle* argue that affluent states have a responsibility to stop and redress negative global effects of their actions. See e.g. Pogge, *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right: Who Owes What to the Very Poor?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). The three strategies share that affluent states have a responsibility to help alleviate extreme poverty. For an argument against such a responsibility, see Narveson, "We Don't Owe Them a Thing! A Tough-Minded but Soft-Hearted View of Aid to the Faraway Needy", *The Monist* 86/3 (2003), 419-433.

38 In a similar way to Rawls’ “duty of assistance” for burdened society in Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 112.

39 As e.g., the needs-based model by Brock (2009).

40 See Schaber for an argumentation based upon “dignity”, Schaber, "Globale Hilfspflichten" in Schaber and Bleisch (ed.), *Weltarmut und Ethik* (Paderborn: Mentis, 2007), 139-152.

41 Rawls (2002), pp. 113-120.

42 For examples, Pogge (2005), Schlothfeldt (2002). On this, also Perry, "Immigration, Justice and Culture" in Schwartz (ed.), *Justice in Immigration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 285-303 ; Mona, *Das Recht auf Immigration: rechtsphilosophische Begründung eines originären Rechts auf Einwanderung im liberalen Staat* (Basel:

much more important to insist on the complementarity of the different means that could be mobilized efficiently.⁴³ For our thesis, it is important to keep in mind that remittances should be integrated into the picture by highlighting the fact that they represent an indirect way to fulfill the duty of assistance. Through the facilitation of labor migration, potential migrants can access the employment market and support people back home. By facilitating access to their employment market for labor migrants, affluent states can in part fulfill their duty of assistance.

This idea is of course not new. But to take remittances into account in an ethical perspective on migration allows us to reconsider the fight against poverty. Against the argument that the admittance of more people is an ineffective solution to alleviate poverty⁴⁴, it is important to stress that remittances have an important multiplicative effect in the countries of origin. Without saying that the complex problem of global poverty could be solved in this way, remittances should have due place in the discussion regarding how affluent states fulfill their duty of assistance and where exactly this element shall fit into the ethical discussion on migration.

Furthermore, considering remittances allows for a better response to the argument according to which a liberalized migration policy would not profit the (very) poor people in the countries of origin. On the one hand, we have clearly shown that not only migrants – who possess enough resources to be able to migrate – are supported in their independence and in their ability to live an autonomous life, but much broader groups of people who actually stay home are benefitted as well. On the other hand, remittances associated with liberalized labor migration have significant effects on the macro-level of countries where they flow in. This in turn has positive effects on the poor people who stayed home in the first place and will improve the conditions of a successful alleviation of poverty.

Remittances and social effects in host countries

However convincing in itself, our argument could awaken fears of social mistrust. As we stipulated above, we assume that the legal and social employment conditions in the country of destination remain stable and that liberalization in this sense is not to be understood as deregulation of employment conditions. This could indeed be put into question by arguing that the liberalization of labor migration will necessarily have social consequences in the host society. Following Macedo's lead in identifying the "moral dilemma of the US immigration policy"⁴⁵, this potential danger is often presented as a conflict of duties for the

Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 2007).

43 So also Mona (2007) ; Schaber, "Migration und globale Armut" in Zurbuchen (ed.), *Bürgerschaft und Migration: Einwanderung und Einbürgerung aus ethisch-politischer Perspektive* (Wien: Lit, 2007).

44 So Pogge (2005).

45 Macedo, "The Moral Dilemma of U.S. Immigration Policy: Open Borders versus Social Justice?" in Swain (ed.),

host society. On one hand, the global poor are entitled to gain access to the labor market (as argued above). On the other hand, “local poor” (meaning the least well-off members of the host society, generally in terms of vulnerability to job competition and/or economic resources) could see their social rights put under pressure by the arrival of new labor rivals. If those two aspects are correct, the host society faces something like a conflict of duties, being incapable of satisfying both simultaneously. For Macedo, this conflict is especially severe with respect to two points: on the one side wage competition, and strain on the welfare state on the other.

To correctly assess this argument for the sake of the present contribution, it is important to recognize that, although widely forgotten in public and political discourse on immigration, economic studies clearly show that labor migration is responsible for positive economic dynamics within the country of destination.⁴⁶ Generally speaking, the entire host society benefits from a liberalization of labor migration. With respect to Macedo’s first point, it also clearly appears that the individuals who are the closest competitors to the new migrants (mainly low-skilled workers who are themselves older immigrants) suffer at most from increasing job competition⁴⁷. Regarding the second aspect (strain on the welfare state), there is no empirical evidence showing that the economic burden of new immigrants on the host society’s welfare provisions would last. On the contrary, the overall effect of immigration is in many cases an economic surplus.

For the sake of the present argument, this empirical evidence has the decisive effect of transforming what could have been interpreted as a conflict of duties into an internal distributive issue. To put it plainly, given that both the global poor and the entire host society benefit from the arrival of new labor migrants, the challenge is to ensure a fair internal redistribution and to take measures to minimize the negative collateral effects on the least well-off members of the host society.

Economic resources should be mobilized to ensure that the weakest members

Debating Immigration (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

46 A comprehensive empirical survey is here not possible. For two recent surveys, Okkerse, "How to Measure Labour Market Effects of Immigration: A Review", *Journal of Economic Surveys* 22/1 (2008), 1-30. Kerr and Kerr, "Economic Impacts of Immigration: A Survey", NBER Working Paper 09-13 (2011), 1-48. For a critical voice, see Borjas, "The Labor Demand Curve is Downward Sloping: Reexamining the Impact of Immigration on the Labor Market", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118/4 (2003), 1335-1374. For broader normative reflections along the lines proposed here, Chang, "The Immigration Paradox: Poverty, Distributive Justice, and Liberal Egalitarianism", *DePaul Law Review* 52/759 (2003).

47 Interestingly, Abizadeh, Pandey and Abizadeh note that this empirical evidence puts into question the traditional argument on the relative priority of the host society’s “own poor”. Because immigration has mainly negative effects on foreign-born residents (older immigrants themselves), it begs the question what is precisely the nature of the relationship between national citizens and those “own poor” that is supposed to justify restricting immigration. See Abizadeh, Pandey and Abizadeh, "The Special Obligations Challenge to More Open Borders: Lessons from Low-Skilled Wage Competition" (Conference on Migration in Legal and Political Theory: Remaining Challenges, Cambridge, 2011)

of the society will not be harmed by the arrival of labor migrants. With respect to those resources and their internal distribution, our conviction is that liberal-democratic societies have the means to cope with this challenge. Instead of repressing immigration, they should reinforce or develop domestic mechanisms of solidarity. This shall not only be understood as financial transfers in the form of welfare provisions, but also as institutional mechanisms to train low-skilled workers and enable them to adapt to changing professional challenges.

Although theoretically perfectly coherent and empirically well-founded, this argument about economic resources should not leave the broader perspective of the host society forgotten. This discourse on a putative win-win situation – although empirically sound – faces political problems in terms of popular approval. Political resources relate to the political goodwill a society is able to demonstrate in accommodating and accepting new labor migrants. Those resources are far more difficult to quantify and they seem to escape a rational discourse as being only the result of political debates and conflicts. However, in the context of this practice-oriented normative argument, they cannot be entirely discarded.

In this respect, it shall be stressed again that taking into account the importance of remittances strengthens the normative arguments in favor of a *gradual* liberalization of labor migration which remains *under the control* of the government. The argument is not about totally and immediately opening the employment market; our main point is about taking remittances into account when assessing the different normatively relevant elements of this complex trade-off.

Conclusion

The present contribution has argued that remittances should be integrated into an ethical framework on migration and has tried to show how this could be done. Although remittances remain very dependent on diverse specific contexts, their economic, social, and societal significance is empirically well established. Remittances not only have positive micro-effects for family members and acquaintances in the different countries of origin, but macro-effects for regional and national structures as well.

According to our main thesis, remittances should be interpreted as an amplifying factor regarding arguments in favor of a liberalization of labor migration. The existence and significance of remittances do not appear as a self-standing argument regarding further liberalization of free movement of people in the sense of the recognition of a right to seek employment in another state. Remittances amplify the normative weight accorded to the two arguments discussed above. On the one hand, labor migration – through remittances – will help migrants and those they support improve their individual and collective

autonomy. We could also formulate our claim in a negative way and affirm that a more restrictive policy regarding labor migration would have negative effects for all people affected by remittances. In any case, a backlash below the status quo should certainly be avoided in the developed world. On the other hand, a more liberal policy would help affluent states to indirectly support people living in dire need, in both individual and collective dimensions.

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