



**Migration Symposium 9 & 10 May 2019 on Curaçao**  
**Migration and Socioeconomic Development**  
**Policy challenges and options**

**Break Out Session 4: Changing the narrative on migrants**

What are popular misconceptions about migrants? How to counter these misconceptions? How to deal with the liberal paradox? Integration of (irregular) migrants: what is the rationale? Is policy needed? Why? Or do migrants integrate themselves? If so, under what kind of policy frameworks?

**Moderator: Kate Hooper**

**Note taker: Jordan Hooi**

**Part 1**

**Introduction**

This session is focusing on the issue on how migrants are seen and referred to and also how we as a country can make it easier for them instead of making them feel like they are some strangers here on the island. The way of thinking is something that needs to change and how the media describes the migrants also plays a role. Taking migrants from other countries into consideration, the main focus will be the current biggest “issue” which are the Venezuelan migrants.

**Joeri Arion and Iteke Witteveen (Human Rights Caribbean): *The politization of the Venezuelan migratory flow and re-evaluating citizenship***



The idea of citizenship is contested across citizenship regimes. The public discourse shows a contestation of the category of migrant along juridical lines and matters of cultural belonging. However, the HRC determines that the inability of local government(s) to meet the humanitarian requirements of the migratory movement in a sound manner, is counterproductive and affirms the hostilities underlying this public debate.

**Izza Leghtas (Refugees International): *Migration - Correcting Misconceptions, Recognizing Opportunities***

Overview of some common misconceptions about migrants and refugees. How the narrative on migration often contributes to divisiveness, hostility towards people who were displaced; What is missing in the debate about migration: a recognition of the opportunities migrants and refugees provide to their host society (skills and expertise, taxes, consumption). Laws and policies to enable refugees and migrants to access legal status and livelihoods: examples of best practices in Latin America and in the Syria context.

It's a must to start correcting misconceptions and recognizing opportunities. Around the world there are cases of migrants and the sad part is that everywhere you have to deal with the misconceptions about migrants. It's only a matter of changing the way people see migrants or treat them and start looking for the good in them and treating them as they were one of your own.

**Charles do Rego (Independent researcher): *Moving in a wider context: not limiting ourselves too much to the actual borders***

Policy makers will have to take greater geographical areas as their point of reference. People are coming in from a great variety of countries and regions and we should take this geographical factor more into account and not limit ourselves too much to the actual borders. This asks for efficient and transparent processes of admission with adequate control and above all: enough time to give the process of inclusion a real chance. Controlled immigration, social inclusion and cooperation in a wider context should be leading policy elements.



The first part was all about the misconceptions that need to be corrected and how to do that. The first question was “How do we change the way thinking about migrants?”. After that question the discussions started.

Media has one of the biggest roles in this case. Whenever you see something in the paper about migrants, they put a bad label on them like “Venezuelan guy robs a family” or “Venezuelan prostitutes...” etc. Those labels do not help changing the way of thinking on this country but only makes it worse. There should be a way to start guiding the media, whether it’s social media, paper, radio or any other type of media to stop generalizing and making the migrants seem like they are all bad guys. Not all women migrants are prostitutes, not all men migrants are drug dealers or killers, not all teen migrants are robbing or selling weapons.

Looking at places abroad, they are starting to give these people jobs so they can live and fill in the jobs nobody else would want to do. And by doing so you will get a better picture of what the migrants have to offer. That is something that should also be done here. Start seeing it as an opportunity instead of only a threat. An example was given on how there are double standards for the migrants. One moment they (locals) are sitting on their laptops fighting against the migrant while at the same time they ask for a working permit for a migrant to babysit their kids or clean their houses etc. Some of these immigrants are people who studied to have a title, but because of their situation lots of people won’t give them a chance and actually take advantage of them when it comes to jobs and yet discriminate them. There are a lot of people who feel for these migrants, but at the same time don’t do anything because of how a big part of the population thinks about this situation.

Churches also play a big part in this situation. Churches here in Curacao still get a lot of people attending. They need to stop worrying only on topics like same sex marriage and start focusing on the topic like migration. Start teaching the people how to treat them. Start putting it in people’s minds that not every migrant is the same and that there are a lot of migrants who have potential to become something more than what they have been labeled to be.

It has also been mentioned that the government needs to start giving more updates on this situation and show what they are doing, why they are doing it and how. Teach the rest how situations like these need to be handled instead of keeping everything behind the curtain. Otherwise it will seem like nothing is being done. Start informing the public



about every detail or at least the more important ones before the situation is not in their hands anymore and becomes headlines in the media, which is known for twisting and turning statements and news. They need to start using the radio more, social media where everyone can access, not only a small group. Talk where you know the public will hear you and try not to create space for any other media platform to work in the opposite direction. Start spreading the awareness around and start looking through survey's what the perception of the public is so you know what road you need to take. Seems like even the coast guard is treating every one of them as if they were criminals.

What was also brought forward was how when SHELL got up and took everything from here, it was Venezuela who helped us get back on our feet again and this is one of the major reasons, apart from human rights, why we as a country cannot turn our back on the Venezuelan migrants. It's not their fault they are going through what they are going through.

Inclusion of the migrant in your country is important because today it's them but you never know when it's you that would be needing them. Everything that needs to happen must happen through policies that show them that they are not forgotten or stored away. Remembering that they are all humans and should be treated equal, they should be given a chance.

## Part 2

How to include the migrants in your society?

First of all, what is needed is data. That's one important factor. Data on who is coming in, who is staying where, who is related to whom and coming together, what were their jobs, what did they study, why they are coming etc. This so you can have a better view on who you are dealing with. This is also a way you can see what their skills are and where they would fit best when it comes to having a job.

They should be given the right to have a regular status. Provide a pathway herefor. They should be able to get a legal status so they can work and take care of their families. If they can't find jobs, like many come to do, then they would go out and steal or rob. But if they could just get jobs, we know no one would easily do, it would make them happy.



They can't get a European passport but they can get a work- and living permit to stay here and provide for their families.

One person also said that there should not be age discrimination. For example, a migrant above 50 years would not get a permit to work here while she is a sweet and hardworking lady who wants to work. Also, there are some of the migrants who deserve better jobs than what they are given like the ones who studied to become doctors or accountants. They should be able to practice what they have learned or have practiced in Venezuela.

What is also important is the fear of the public. That fear needs to go away. They are judging a book by its cover. They feel attacked or as they are going to have to compete with the migrants. This is why education is key. The awareness needs to be spread around so people know what they are dealing with and how to deal with it instead of letting their fears take over. Also, police needs to be trained because they are also the ones who are informing the public of what is going on. Schools need to start bringing this awareness among the students.

Someone said that first aid is important and that you should be able to give them this service but with control of registration. So, you have an idea of who is getting in and what type of aid they are in need of. Lots of them also seek asylum which is difficult but at the same time possible if everyone is aboard. This is an issue because there is a dear lock in the Kingdom. Some countries are pro, some are against it and that way you will never have a consensus. We need to step up as a kingdom and show the Netherlands that they need to also step up and help with this matter.

After an interesting discussion, to summarize the session, Ms. Hooper gave everyone the chance to give their opinion/view on the situation and what the main solutions are for them. It was given in this sequence:

- Change in mentality, and the only way to do that is to involve the media, schools, church and NGO's.
- Discrimination of age and job need to stop. They have the same right as everyone.
- Comprehensive control strategy.
- Misconceptions need to stop and be corrected.
- Education and awareness.
- Define the groups that come in. Better control and can help them better that way.
- Pass a law in the kingdom that would benefit them so we can help them more.
- Educating the police so they don't treat all of them as if they were all criminals.



- Public opinion surveys to see what their views are on the topic, where and how they get their information etc. This way you can trigger the misconceptions better.
- Bring migration policy and make it part of your population policy.
- Emergency sector for refugees.
- Influence way of thinking about immigrants.
- Construct a pathway for regular status.

