

RE-CITY

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"FOR AN INTER-CULTURAL FUTURE" CYCLE

"THE ECONOMIC BALANCE OF MIGRATIONS"

SESSION WITH **MARTA FORESTI**



The Economic Balance of Migrations

Guest Speaker: Marta Foresti, Main Researcher and Director of the Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) Human Mobility Initiative

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This document summarises a debate held with Prof. Foresti in the Re-City project's "For an Inter-Cultural Future" cycle of lectures. Each one consists of a public lecture and a seminar with Catalan scholars. This is followed by a gala dinner attended by sundry figures from Catalonia's economic, social, political, and business circles.

These activities were held in Barcelona's Palau Macaya (a palace built in the Modernist style) in November 2019. The contents in this summary follow a thematic order rather than that taken by Director Foresti. Re-City is a project carried out by Fundació Catalunya Europa [Catalonia-Europe Foundation] in collaboration with the Catalan Government, Barcelona's Metropolitan Area, Barcelona City Council, "la Caixa" [bank] and The Club of Rome. "For an Inter-cultural Future" is the third challenge in the Re-City project. The two previous challenges were: "Fighting Inequality" and "Facing up to Climate Change".

Biography

Marta Foresti is an Italian Social Scientist and Politologist, with over twenty years experience working in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe. **She is currently Principal Researcher at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI)** in London, and is the **Director of the Human Mobility Initiative**. She leads work in the migration and development fields and oversees the Institute's outside commitments at every level. Foresti is also Visiting Senior Researcher at the Institute of Global Affairs at the London School of Economics (LSE)¹, and Principal Advisor on Global Compact on Migration policies and the Research Syndicate of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

In 1994, she graduated in European Studies from Universiteit van Amsterdam (UvA). In 1996, she was awarded a Master Degree and a Degree in The Philosophy of Science and Logic by Università degli Studi di Milano La Statale (UniMi), and in 2000 a Master Degree in Research Methods in The Social Sciences by LSE. Foresti worked as an Associate Principal Researcher at Amnesty International in London, and as Principal Advisor on Local Development Programmes and Policies at The Treasury Department, Italy's Ministry of Finances. In 2006, she entered ODI and was a member of the management team up until 2018. During this period, she played a major role in drawing up the strategic agenda and main goals².

Her areas of interest and specialisation are wide-ranging but ones that stand out are: The Political Economy of Development; Rights and Justice; Accountability and Transparency in Aid; Social Inclusion; Migration and Human Mobility. Foresti combines these activities with Institute duties, including lectures, seminars, and debates. Her list of scholarly publications is a long one. Recent publications include *Migration Policy Practice* (Foresti et al., 2018a), which explores the relationship between migration and various development fields, and how this affects the scope for implementing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³. Another work, *Migration and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (Foresti et al., 2018b) makes recommendations for incorporating migration in Agenda 2030 to ensure it contributes to positive development results. Yet another key work is *Europe's refugees and migrants: hidden flows, tightened borders and spiralling costs*, (Foresti et al., 2016), which concludes that Europe has to take a more practical approach to migration so that the issue can be managed better and in a way that stops blindly focusing on control and dissuasion.

¹ *London School of Economics* (n.d.). Marta Foresti. Accessed 5th January 2020, from: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/iga/people/Marta-Foresti>

² Marta Foresti (n.d.). Accessed 5th January 2020, de: <https://www.odi.org/experts/133-marta-foresti>

³ Naciones Unidas. Objetivos y metas de desarrollo sostenible - Desarrollo Sostenible. Accessed 5th January 2020 from: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/objetivos-de-desarrollo-sostenible/>

The Economic Balance of Migrations

Guest Speaker: Marta Foresti, Main Researcher and Director of the Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) Human Mobility Initiative

Summary

“The Economic Balance of Migrations” was the second title in the cycle “For an Inter-cultural Future”. The session was led by Marta Foresti, an expert in migrations and Director of the Human Mobility Initiative at the Overseas Development Institute. The moderator was Josep Oliver, Full Professor of Applied Economics at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB).

The main purpose of this second session was to: introduce an economic perspective into the debate on immigration policies; consider the general state of affairs for the migrant population in the host country; examine public management in this field. More specifically, Josep Oliver noted the situation regarding migration in Spain and Catalonia, which provides key insights into socio-economic and cultural trends from the late 1990s to the present. Oliver argued that the combination of declining birth rates at the end of the 1980s and an education system over-focused on giving youngsters a university education spurred firms to look for workers abroad. This in turn boosted migration to Spain. At the outset, the demand was for youngsters with middling to high professional qualifications but once begun, the process proved to be self-sustaining, sucking in workers to meet a much wider range of needs. The result was demographic growth and a boom economy between 1997 and 2007, 40% of the growth being directly attributable to immigration according to Banco de España (Spain's Central Bank). In the Spanish and Catalan cases, the majority of migration arrived in an uncontrolled and irregular fashion. In general, they were unskilled and took jobs in low added-value sectors — generally services and construction. Many workers found jobs in sectors that were protected from competition, and had rising wages but whose productivity was waning. This in turn led to rising foreign debt, distortion of the labour market, which had knock-on effects on other sectors (housing, finances, demand and consumption, etc.).

Oliver said that these events have been seen as an unfolding disaster but the conclusion to be drawn is that the country needs more immigration if it is to grow. It is also vital that public policies regulate immigration to ensure that the country can properly absorb newcomers and integrate them in a reasonable and effective manner. In this respect, one needs to grasp the economic and productive structure of the labour market if one is to properly manage demand for migrant workers. Such rational management would ensure that immigrants are not concentrated in some sectors because this would lead to downward pressure on wages and make for shaky, poorly-paid jobs.

Marta Foresti argued that from an economic perspective, global migration meant speaking about mobility and development. She concentrated on evaluating migratory dynamics and their relationship

with international development. When the so-called ‘Refugee Crisis’ blew up in Europe in 2015, illegal migration hit the headlines and became a political hot potato. In the context of a one-off crisis, it was self-evident that people move between countries and do so for personal betterment. That is why both the way the debate is approached and the narrative used are vital when speaking of migration.

The upshot was the creation of a highly-polarised ‘either/or’ scenario in which two mutually-exclusive categories were employed: (1) economic migrants; (2) refugees. A great deal of effort was put into drawing a distinction between them — a futile exercise for it perpetuates a distorted vision of migration. Both categories are inextricably linked for in characterising the collective imaginary, one cannot paint everything in black or white. Life has infinite shades of grey. Instead, one needs to dispel the myths and discover what the migrants are really like, why they are moving, and what their aspirations and expectations are.

Globally, migratory flows have grown and diversified and it is envisaged that both trends will wax in the future, becoming one of the defining features of modern societies. Most migrations happen at the local or regional level as one might expect but international migration is also rising. As countries become more economically developed, the resources and information people have at their disposal also rises. Cheap, modern transport cuts the cost of migrating, making it much easier for people to move.

The overall picture thus yields an alternative view of the benefits of migration, given that it is the outcome of economic development. Looked at like this, migration is not only inevitable but is also the result of progress — hence the need to focus on drawing up and implementing public policies. These policies need to maximise migration’s potential and minimise its negative impacts over the short, medium, and long terms.

MIGRATION’S CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT

The economic debate on migration: combating the figures story with the development story

For some time now, the economic debate on migration has been high on the list when it comes to the agendas and rhetoric of both political parties and public institutions. The general view is that politicians and institutions have performed badly, with a huge gap between host-nation citizens’ views on migration and the real state of affairs. The evidence has not been considered on its merits and simplistic narratives have only fed myths and social prejudices on migration. This is where the host society’s feeling of being overrun comes from — something made worse by Europe’s ‘refugee crisis’. The Far-Right, with its xenophobic, anti-immigration ideas, has ruthlessly exploited these fears to win votes. Nevertheless, the population in general is not against immigration *per se* but rather is worried that it is out of control.

Here, **the economic debate needs to counteract these narratives by appealing to facts and evidence.** In 1990, the volume of global migration was estimated at 153 million people. In 2017, the figure had grown to about 258 million, representing about 3.4% of the world's population. Migration exists and the outlook is for ever more in the future, given that transport is becoming ever cheaper and more accessible. Furthermore, would-be migrants not only have greater information at their disposal but they are now better able to interpret it. Such resources and information are vital for those fleeing from poverty and war. Despite popular perceptions, international emigration only makes up a small part of all emigration, most of which continues to be local and regional, either within the same country or to neighbouring countries both for reasons of geographical and cultural proximity. For instance, 53% of African migrants stay in other African countries. Thus, emigrational behaviour varies greatly depending on the context — an aspect that should not be forgotten in political debates. This is why one should avoid a purely 'North-South' perspective and instead consider national and local migrations. This means combating national perceptions that overestimate the number of migrants and refugees, the management costs, the subsidies received, and the impact on pension systems. For example, according to data from the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees (ACNUR), in 2018 the percentage of refugees and migrants in The United Kingdom was 14% whereas citizens put it at up to 27%.

In cases where people flee from war or poverty, they risk death to make better lives for themselves. The lack of safe, legal routes means that they run the risk of dying on the way. According to Foresti, life expectations and aspirations play an important role in the decision to migrate — part of the puzzle that neither the public nor politicians seem to take into account yet both are vital if one is host countries are to take the right measures. The idea that we can change the fate of these people by sealing borders is a mistaken one and doomed to failure, as the so-called 2015 'Refugee Crisis' showed. Given that migration is inevitable, one needs to adopt more practical, positive policies. Hence events and how they are managed need to be made clear to the public at large. Costs must be taken into account but these must be seen as an investment from which everyone will gain through greater economic development.

Migration and contact with diverse people are needed to create a policy context in which better social and economic results can be achieved over the short, medium, and long terms. **Diversity should be seen as showering benefits, not as a threat to governance.**

In addition, **the economic debate also needs to shift to give a much deeper insight into the dynamics of mobility, and the aspirations and expectations driving emigration.** In this respect, there is an **inextricable link between migration and development.** Greater economic development (and wage growth), and social development (rising levels of education and better access to information) in countries of origin mean that people can move more easily. They will do so if they think they can boost their productivity, income, and living standards. This is the case in less developed countries, where many emigrate to nations with middling incomes. Only when average income in less developed countries rises does emigration slacken.

In this new perspective on the issue, one should bear the use that host countries give international aid to under-developed countries or to migrants' countries of origin. This aid has been badly used in the past and often has strings attached, making it a powerful instrument of international diplomacy.

Migration is a recent example of the same approach. Many countries of origin (for example, Niger) receive aid on the condition that they close their frontiers to stop their populations migrating. This policy has worsened instability and conflict in aid-recipient nations. Quite simply, it is an approach that does not work. That is why **Foresti proposed a new perspective, based on the idea of using this aid as an investment in transit facilities with a view to creating development opportunities** in those countries migrants pass through on their way to their final destination. The idea is to use such aid not to hinder migration but to help it from a developmental standpoint. This in turn would radically change the migration narrative, with effective impacts on host countries.

Public policies: from dichotomy to cross-cutting co-ordination in policy design and implementation

The importance of articulating the economic debate on migration in developmental terms calls for new public policies. These policies should be drawn up and implemented to exploit the link between migration and development.

To ensure that this is the case, **the first ‘best practice’ is to treat migration as a cross-cutting variable** in public policies, not as a specific policy. Here, it should not be dealt with as a variable that needs solving but rather as one that needs to be borne in mind so that the community as a whole benefits. This means ditching the debate on migrant or refugee status and the polarisation it gives rise to. There is a need to talk less about migration and efforts to come to terms with it, and to talk more about integration so that its social benefits can be reaped swiftly. This cross-cutting approach is based on: **acknowledging diversity, the need for interaction, and equality of opportunities**. Foresti mentioned three ways in which solutions could be found. First, there are the barriers to entry, interaction, and integration. These barriers include not knowing the language of the host country, and the spatial, social, economic, and political segregation of migrant communities. Second, there is a need to combat educational failure and to boost immigrants’ political participation. This would ensure that the system takes immigrants’ interests into account. Third, convergence is required between public institutions, the labour market, and business interests. This would give the State more control over migration after analysing labour market demand, choosing those migrants best qualified to meet employment needs.

The second ‘best practice’ concerns the need for greater institutional co-ordination and co-operation among the many tiers of public administration. Public administrations have different powers and scope when it comes to managing migration and societal diversity. That is why co-ordination and co-operation are vital to ensure successful migration management. Failure to collaborate might well create legal loopholes in global accords and national legislation and/or a clash between the two. At the same time, all these commitments and legislative provisions can be turned into specific measures and strategies at regional and local levels. In this respect, Foresti mentioned **the importance of pooling experience with other cities** so as to see how others tackle the same challenges and problems, and to find areas worth exploring and collaborating in.

The benefits of migration: what and how

Marta Foresti and Josep Oliver agreed that **migration makes a clear contribution to all aspects of economic growth. Put baldly, if one wants growth, one needs migration.** The economic debate on migration's contribution has often focused on rigorous cost-benefit analyses for the host country. In the process, too little stress is placed on the balance between context-based contingency, and on the impact good or bad political management has on outcomes. It is a simplistic (and a mistaken) notion that migration is good for everyone and everywhere. Here, both factors again highlight the gulf between public perception of the issue and reality in drawing up this balance. Given the over-politicised debate on immigration, Foresti notes the need to deal with economic resources more intelligently. That is to say, one **needs to take an approach that seeks benefits for society as a whole and to ensure sustainable economic, social and cultural development of communities at the local level.** Cities have a particularly important role to play here in shortening the time it takes for the community to see the benefits brought by immigration.

In a more detailed manner, Oliver and Foresti split the **costs and benefits of migration** into three dimensions: economic; social; cultural. On **the economic level**, there is broad agreement among economists on migration's contribution to GDP growth and productivity gains around the world. Demand in host countries rises sharply, resulting in more consumption. There is also a rise in revenues in migrants' countries of origin thanks to the money they send 'home'. By contrast, job growth in host countries is less clear-cut both with regard to salaries and the fiscal balance. Often, over-concentration of immigrants in certain sectors leads to shrinking productivity in those fields, with falling wages and competitiveness. In Spain's case, Oliver explained that immigration between 1997 and 2007 boosted employment from 12 million to 20 million. Most of the new jobs were unskilled ones, mainly in construction and in service sectors. This led to two diametrically opposed wage effects for the native population, wholly upsetting the country's production structure and greatly boosting inequality. On the one hand, that part of the population working in the aforementioned sectors saw their wages fall given that they were competing with large numbers of immigrants. On the other hand, demand for high added-value jobs rose. The winners here were skilled workers, professionals, and technical staff. On the same lines, given that most immigrants were employed in the same sectors most affected by the crisis, they were the ones worst hit by rising unemployment. Bearing in mind that migration was uncontrolled, no thought had been given to Spain's economic and productive needs. Furthermore, many of these immigrants had neither the skills nor the qualifications to look for jobs in other sectors. The end result was that a great many immigrants joining the ranks of the long-term unemployed.

The intersection between the labour market and migration was an aspect that both Marta Foresti and Josep Oliver paused to consider, giving examples of **the highly precarious nature of the jobs done by immigrants.** In doing so, they examined: (1) the link between migration and development; (2) how migration drives productivity and decent jobs in the host country. With regard to the first, evidence suggests that working conditions or lack of jobs in the country of origin are both strong drivers of emigration, but so too is the perception of a much more positive atmosphere in the host country, with greater education opportunities and more freedom and flexibility in the workplace. Image and status are important dimensions when someone gets or loses a job. The harsh reality is that immigrants are much more likely to hold shaky jobs in host countries than are the natives. According to the

International Labor Organization (ILO) statistics for 2014, 16% of immigrants had low-skill jobs compared with 7% of the native population in OECD nations. The reasons for this situation are complex. Here, one should add that although many immigrants know their jobs could vanish in a thrice, they would still rather hang on in the host country rather than bear the shame and disappointment of returning 'home'. They also tend to cling to the idea that if they stay, new opportunities will come along. They believe that if they learn the language and new skills, they will be better placed to expand their social networks. Until such a transformation occurs, integrating immigrants into society becomes a complex challenge or, as some would term it, 'a wicked issue'.

With regard to migration as a driver of production growth and jobs the overall impact on host countries' labour markets is slight. However, the picture is much more varied at the national scale. Gender is an important aspect here, in which native women seem to be the group worst affected as a result of the influx of migrant women in the labour market. Studies argue that the over-representation of women in temp and other shaky jobs makes them more vulnerable when they find themselves competing with new (immigrant) workers in the market. In transit countries, migratory flows, together with aid from host countries boosts the local economy by creating new migration-linked jobs. It also boosts local demand and consumption. Meanwhile, in countries of origin, money sent by overseas migrants can be used to work economic change, create jobs, and stimulate labour demand (Mallet, 2018).

When it comes to the **social dimension**, it is hard to measure (and thus to assess) the contribution made by the migrant population. One can focus on aspects such as Human Capital, Education, Health, and Welfare. Foresti's vision involved analysing the investment needed to integrate migrants in society so that they have the same rights and duties as natives. She argued that in general terms, migrants can confer broad benefits but this depends largely on the context and on the costs and investments society is willing to shoulder. In this respect, Foresti highlighted education as a crucial element for ensuring long-term gains. Both migrants and natives access education in the same way. Accordingly, the policy responses have nothing to do with migration but instead involve educating the population as a whole and so redress economic and market ills.

On the **cultural dimension**, Foresti noted that this had the most unknowns. A beginning has yet to be made on cultural aspects to ensure that people from different cultures do not clash. Although cultures often mix, the cultural question is dealt with separately and this helps perpetuate stigma, myths, and segregation. She proposed that when we speak of culture, it should be in relation to society as a whole. Here, we should be made aware that diversity is part of society, that the benefits must be shared out fairly, and that everyone's needs must be met.

International co-operation: from setting terms to investment

Migration has to be seen from a global standpoint as something that is strongly linked to development, demanding international co-operation that pulls in the same direction. Here, Foresti highlighted the strides made by the UN in creating a general conceptual framework that covers both development and migration. The UN's **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) were approved in 2015 as part of Agenda 2030. Despite efforts by many sectors to introduce migration as one more goal, this was finally

mentioned as an aim within various SDGs. Foresti highlighted Goal 10: The reduction of inequalities, specifically in goal 10.7 (“Facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”), and opportunities stemming from the link between migration and development (Foresti *et al.*, 2018). The framework is of an abstract, general nature — something Foresti saw as an advantage because it can easily be adapted to local and national public policies. She gave examples of its implementation in several cities. Her first example was **Barcelona**, which played a major role in promoting Agenda 2030 to re-launch international co-operation in the critical Euro-Mediterranean region. This city now has a set of strategies and plans that dovetail with the contents (goals and targets) set out in Agenda 2030⁴. Another example is the **Rio de Janeiro** Metropolitan Region, which is a leader in sustainable development and urban networks, especially at the sub-national implementation level, of Goal 11: “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. **New York**⁵ is a leader when it comes to launching a plan called “OneNYC”, based on principles of growth, equity, sustainability, and resilience. OneNYC’s goals are aligned with the equivalent SDGs. The aim is to gauge the scope of existing policies and to tease out their design and implementation gaps.

On **migration**, the World Migration Pact⁶ was passed in 2018. The Pact was the first to take a common approach to all dimensions of international migration. The 23 goals making up the accord stressed shared responsibilities between origin, transit, and destination countries. The goals also highlighted the need to seek innovative solutions for spurring collaboration among agents.

Both documents deal with aspects that generally fall to national governments. Yet this does not have to be the case. The fact that the goals are not binding and that there is no system for making periodic assessments sheds doubt on whether States will do anything to improve matters. By contrast, many hopes are pinned on implementation at the regional and local levels, where the link between migration and development is much more tangible. That in turn makes it more likely that measures there will be more effective. For instance, matters bearing on the integration of migrants in local communities and in the labour market largely depend on local political structures, with the focus on the provision of services, empowerment, and skills. Here, Foresti stressed that big strides had been made of late, for example, in the 5th Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and Development⁷, held during 2018 Summit in Marrakesh. The Forum is an annual gathering of local leaders who pool practical, innovative solutions in the governance of migration, protection of rights, and the promotion of urban economic growth and inclusiveness.

Foresti concluded that **international co-operation on migration needs to shift from setting terms to long-term**

⁴ La ciutat compta amb el Compromís Ciutadà per la Sostenibilitat 2012-2022, l’Estratègia d’inclusió i de reducció de les desigualtats socials 2017-2027, el Pla per a la Justícia de Gènere 2016-2020, el Pla Director de Cooperació per a la Justícia Global de Barcelona 2018-2021. Vegeu: Ajuntament de Barcelona. (2019). *Informe sobre localització dels Objectius de Desenvolupament Sostenible (ODS) 2030 a Barcelona* (p. 3-4). Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona. Source: https://www.diba.cat/documents/167993676/190765953/AJTBCN_InformeLocalitzaci%C3%B3Agenda2030aBarcelona_20190329.pdf/6689959b-881d-43e8-ae1e-8c64fb9920d5

⁵ Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) (2016). *Getting started with the SDGs in Cities*. SDSN. Source: <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/6f2c9f57/files/uploaded/Cities-SDG-Guide.pdf>

⁶ Global Compact on Migration (2020). <https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration>

⁷ Global Mayoral Forum | Migration for Development, 2020. <http://www.migration4development.org/en/events/global-mayoral-forum>

investment, and from short-term consequences to long-term causes. This change in global paradigm will only occur if development forms part of the equation.

The role of cities: the practical scenario and the bottom-linked approach

Cities have historically been places where people from everywhere met and shared a wish to better their lot. As a result of this interchange, cities became places that constantly battled against situations or decisions that threatened attainment of their full potential. Daily governance therefore meant abandoning rhetoric and focusing on **less political, more practical matters** that served everyone's interests.

In this respect, **Foresti proposed a new 'bottom-linked approach' to forging a connection between migration and development, and for taking action.** This involves stressing those measures arising from the people who are directly involved, and that foster public management that is committed to taking part in the Diaspora⁸, grasping its features, ensuring that communities work well and integrate within wider society. At the same time, one needs public management that is capable of earmarking resources and investment for special measures and programmes (Education, Health, Social Services). Such public management would ensure an equitable, efficient redistribution of resources, deal with shortcomings, and enhance citizens' view of the way things were run.

Last but not least, such governance pragmatism stems from a concept of the city as something that is of the wider world rather an 'island entire of itself', to borrow Donne's words. In a world characterised by growing interdependence, local autonomy has a greater role to play. **The full potential of cities can only be realised through co-operation** that is based on constant, mutual learning.

The main ideas emerging from the session are summarised under the following four broad heads. **First:** That the economic debate on migration should be based on pragmatism. This will help people grasp that the drivers of migration are inextricably bound up with development. **Second:** That examination of the link between migration and development shows that diversity benefits society as a whole — hence the need to ensure sustainable development which does not threaten economic, social, and cultural structures. **Third:** That development and co-operation aid must be seen as a way of fostering the economic advancement of transit counties through which migrants move. **Fourth:** That public policies covering migration and the management of diversity should take a cross-cutting approach both in the way they are drawn up and in how they are carried out. These policies also require co-ordination and co-operation among all institutional levels and tiers of government, embracing all social actors. It is precisely in cities and the local sphere where the 'bottom-linked' governance paradigm is most relevant. That is why these are the best places to begin putting it into action.

⁸ By Diaspora, we mean a set of peoples or communities of the same origin or same nature, established in different countries.

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