

Moving towards peace: migration in peacebuilding policy and practice

Andrea Grossenbacher, swisspeace



Introduction

Protracted violent conflicts, human rights violations, effects of climate change, professional opportunities and increasing levels of inequality are some of the factors that force or motivate people to seek safety, well-being, and alternative livelihood opportunities elsewhere. In recent years, the numbers of refugees, internally displaced persons, and other migrants¹ have increased. At the same time, with the rise of populism and authoritarianism, there has been a global shift towards restrictive migration policies, mainly at the level of nation states. In this context, the governance of migration and the protection of migrants, people affected by migration and host communities has become increasingly challenging.

In view of the complexity of impacts related to migration at the individual, national, and international level, the UN, and most of its member states, have recognized the need for alternative approaches to migration governance, including peacebuilding approaches. The recently adopted Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the Global Compact for Refugees, as well as the Agenda 2030 are international policy frameworks that build on and demand cooperation across various sectors to improve migration governance and contribute to peaceful and striving communities. In this context, the intersection of migration and peacebuilding deserves critical attention. The peacebuilding sector is not only well suited to engage with the diverse range of actors involved in migration, but its strategic engagement with migration is also essential to the successful implementation of above-mentioned policies and, ultimately, to achieving sustainable peace.

The following findings result from a joint learning process on peace and migration facilitated by KOFF – the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding.

The Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding KOFF facilitated a [joint learning process on peace and migration](#) (May 2019 – Jan 2021). The multi-stakeholder process included perspectives of governmental and non-governmental institutions active in peacebuilding, humanitarian aid, development cooperation, human rights, gender, security sector governance and migration in Switzerland and beyond. It provided a safer space for reflection, exchange and learning about the opportunities and risks of the peace-migration nexus. The variety of experiences were collected, analyzed, and systematized through desk research, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and learning meetings, which resulted in the publication of one of the first toolboxes on migration in peacebuilding ([web](#) or [PDF](#)).

Key findings

1. Migration plays an important role in shaping peace and conflict dynamics.

The relation between migration, conflict and peace is multifaceted. Migration is not only a consequence of conflict, but it can also contribute positively or negatively to the prevention and resolution of violent conflicts. Most importantly, migrants, people affected by migration and host communities are impacted by and play a role in shaping peace and conflict dynamics, for instance as peacebuilders. Hence, their inclusion and consultation in formal and informal peace processes, as well as other peacebuilding efforts, is crucial. Moreover, engaging with migration actors and policies, as well as understanding migration dynamics, is necessary to minimize the negative impact migration can have (e.g., the risk that migration to a certain

1 For efficiency purposes, in this policy brief “migrant(s)” is used to refer to all “migrants, including refugees and IDPs.” “Refugee(s)” and “IDP(s)” are used when referring specifically to one or the other category of migrants.

area exacerbates pre-existing tensions or that a migration policy creates new tensions), and leverage its positive potential for peacebuilding.

2. Migration is relevant in different phases of conflict.

Migration and conflict cycles intersect at different stages, creating challenges and opportunities for peacebuilding. For instance, the cycles might intersect in a post-conflict and post-migration phase (e.g., when displaced people return to their places of origin after an armed conflict), or before conflict and during migration (e.g., when migrants are trapped in situations that risk escalating into violence and conflict). The implications of these intersections are context specific. An integrated analysis of migration and conflict enables peacebuilders to identify such intersections, and address risks and build on opportunities of migration for conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and dealing with the past in this specific context.

3. Peacebuilders can address migration in at least three areas: social cohesion, migration governance, and participation & inclusion.

Experiences in migration contexts indicate a need for a more strategic and systematic peacebuilding engagement with migration in the areas of social cohesion, migration governance, and participation/inclusion. This includes addressing social cohesion by improving conflicting relationships between different groups of migrants, host communities, government(s), service providers, and international or national NGOs in migration contexts, including in countries of origin and destination. Moreover, it includes engaging with migration actors and policies to minimize the risk of migration governance leading to conflict and to enhance its positive impact for peace and, ensuring meaningful participation of migrants and including migration phenomena in peace processes.

Practical examples of addressing migration through peacebuilding

Social cohesion, migration governance, and participation & inclusion are relevant areas of engagement for policymakers who are interested in an integrated approach to migration, conflict, and peace that mitigates risks and leverages the potential of migration for conflict prevention, conflict resolution and dealing with the past. The following practical examples illustrate this.

Social cohesion

Social cohesion is a key issue at the intersection of peace and migration. Horizontal relationships (e.g. between migrants and host communities, or among different groups of migrants) are thereby equally important as vertical relationships (e.g., between host communities and local authorities, or migrants and service providers). In this context, peacebuilding actors can play a role in addressing factors that disrupt or enhance social cohesion. On the one hand, a good understanding of factors that disrupt the cohesion in a migration context is essential to prevent conflicts and sustain peace. On the other hand, building on factors that strengthen social cohesion in a migration context can contribute to peacebuilding.

Practical example: Bangladesh/Myanmar

In the context of the Rohingya “refugee crisis” in Bangladesh, horizontal and vertical relationships between different actors (e.g., between service providers and host community members; the host and the Rohingya community; or the local media and the Rohingya refugees) were affected negatively. Peacebuilding actors are well suited to address the issues that divide (disrupting factors) or connect the different groups (factors that strengthen cohesion) in this geographical context, as well as across transnational borders (e.g. between actors in Bangladesh and Myanmar). For more information, read the [case study on social cohesion](#) in the context of the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh.

Migration governance

Migration policies can exacerbate pre-existing or create new tensions that impact negatively on peacebuilding and peace processes. Conflict-sensitive migration policies, in turn, can offer useful frameworks for cross-sector cooperation, including opportunities for peacebuilding. At the same time, migration-sensitive peacebuilding initiatives and peace policies can enhance the positive impact of migration policies at different stages of a migration cycle and are essential to avoid negative effects on migration dynamics. Collaboration between migration governance and peace actors is thus essential to align policies and practice, thereby contributing to preventing conflicts and sustaining peace. Peacebuilding actors can complement and support migration governance actors for instance by assuming convening roles, advising on conflict sensitivity, and addressing long-term transformation of societal relationships.

Practical example: Ethiopia/Eritrea

In Ethiopia, Eritrean refugees are facing increasingly restrictive policies since the signing of the peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Tigrayans living in northern Ethiopia have historically had good relationships with the Eritrean refugees, but tense relationships with both the Ethiopian and the Eritrean government. Hence, the deteriorating relationship between Eritrean refugees and the Ethiopian government due to new restrictions, including the closure of refugee camps, might fuel the already tense relationship between the Tigrayans – as they side with the refugees – and the Ethiopian government. The effect that the peace agreement had on migration policies in this region must be taken into consideration from a peacebuilding perspective, as it adds another layer of complexity to the instable and conflict-affected border region. For more information, see [case study on migration governance, peace and conflict in Ethiopia](#).

Participation & inclusion

Migrants often have a stake in peace processes. Their perspective and knowledge are essential to reaching sustainable peace. Failure to include migrants and a migration sensitive lens into a peace process might jeopardize the entire process. Acknowledging the complexity of migratory experiences, as well as the diversity of identities and views among migrants, and understanding how that complexity impacts participation, is important to ensure meaningful participation.

Practical example: Colombia/Switzerland

The participation of the diaspora in the Colombian Truth Commission is a good example from which lessons can be drawn on how to include migration as a topic and how to enable meaningful participation of members of a diaspora in dealing with the past processes in their country of origin. For instance, it has shown that being involved in administrative and political processes in the host country, while at the same time engaging in a dealing with the past process in the country of origin, is challenging and can create personal and administrative dilemmas. Hence, engaging with domestic (im-)migration actors and policies in the host country leads to better understanding of the obstacles to participation. Moreover, the participation of diaspora in a dealing with the past process should be accompanied by professional and culturally sensitive psychosocial support, given the risk of re-traumatization

and the potential negative effects on people's lives and relationships. This is particularly important because migrants and members of the diaspora often live in precarious, insecure, and isolated situations, as foreigners. For more information, see [case study on participation and inclusion of the Colombian diaspora in the Colombian Truth Commission](#).

Policy recommendations

The reflections above indicate the multifaceted nature of the relationship between migration and peace. The KOFF learning process clearly demonstrated a need for peacebuilding engagement with migration.

However, while a more strategic and systematic engagement with migration is essential to prevent and resolve violent conflicts, it is important to keep in mind that peacebuilding alone cannot eliminate the root causes of forced migration. The interplay of economic, political, environmental, and security issues shaping migration demands a holistic, multilateral and multisectoral approach (to this end, an [integrated analysis](#) of migration and conflict is a helpful tool). A holistic approach to migration includes aligning domestic and foreign state policies regarding migration. This would for example mean protecting migrants' rights within and outside one's own state borders. It also includes the integration of a human rights, decolonial and intersectional gender lens (check [this article](#) for a reflection on the gender dimension). Finally, the aim of peacebuilding engagement on migration should not be to shape, prevent or reduce migration, but rather focus on sustaining peace at different stages of a migration journey.

To this end, some areas need further investment and attention from the peace policy sector. The **following recommendations** are essential to equip peace policy with the means to contribute to integrated approaches to migration and build on the positive potential of migration for peacebuilding.

- 1. Promote integrated approaches to migration and conflict.** Currently, migration is mainly addressed from a migration governance, state security, or humanitarian aid perspective. However, migration policies should adopt a broader perspective to avoid doing harm and leverage the positive potential of migration for peace. Moreover, peace policies rarely consider migration dynamics comprehensively. Yet, a comprehensive understanding of the intersections of migration, conflict and peace is essential to peacebuild-

ing. Hence, there is a need for conflict sensitive migration policies and migration sensitive peace policies. The peace-migration nexus calls for an **integrated analysis** of migration and conflict, as well as more **strategic coordination** between key policy sectors, such as migration governance, security, humanitarian aid, human rights, development, and peacebuilding. Such an integrated approach is key to mitigating risks of migration for conflict and building on its potential for conflict prevention, resolution, and dealing with the past.

Opportunities for Swiss peace policy

- Support, develop, and offer trainings on integrated approaches to migration and conflict for staff and partners, including in Switzerland and abroad (e.g., for Human Security Advisors).
- Encourage and prioritize regular and institutionalized exchange and coordination not only within the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA (e.g., through the Interdepartmental Migration Working Groups), but also with other federal departments (e.g., State Secretariat for Migration SEM), the UN and other partners (i.e., international organizations, Swiss NGOs, think tanks, academia).
- Secondment of peace and conflict advisors to organizations tasked with the implementation of migration policies.

The Peace & Human Rights Division (PHRD) of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) consists of four interlinked sections: the Peace Policy Section, the Human Rights Section, the Humanitarian Section and the Section on Forced Displacement and Migration. This setup offers unique opportunities to promote integrated approaches to migration and conflict.

2. Invest in research on the peace-migration nexus.

Research on migration and peace is often conducted separately in the areas of migration, and peace studies, respectively. Moreover, migration data which informs migration policies, is predominantly quantitative. Yet, qualitative studies are helpful to deepen understanding, acquire a more nuanced analysis, explore the multifaceted dimensions of migration, and, most importantly, to better understand the voices of migrants and civil society,

including groups who lack representation. Investment in qualitative research on the nexus is a step toward improving peace policy and practice. Peacebuilding practitioners and researchers from peace and conflict studies are uniquely suited to collect evidence from people experiencing the nexus, including data on vulnerabilities, resilience, and capacities for peace. There is a need for **cross-sector evidence generation** to deepen understanding, for instance by combining displacement data with data collected about conflicts. Moreover, an investment in learning and developing different ways of doing research is essential to move towards more **horizontal research relationships**. On the one hand, this might include developing research methods that create the conditions for researchers to speak with marginalized persons on a basis of equality and motivated by mutual interests. On the other hand, it includes investing in research that is conducted with **migrants as researchers**, rather than as subjects of the research only.

Opportunities for Swiss Peace Policy

- Finance and support research projects that address issues at the intersection of migration, conflict, and peace, resulting in practical recommendations for peace policy & practice in Switzerland and abroad.
- Encourage cross-sector evidence and horizontal research relationships.
- Ensure that policy & practice is informed by evidence from research.

The PHRD and other Swiss actors such as the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), the State Secretariat on Migration (SEM), as well as institutions in the realm of academic and applied research, are well placed to promote innovative, interdisciplinary, and cross-sector approaches to the study of migration and peace. Moreover, an in-depth understanding of the interlinkages between peace, conflict and migration is relevant for Switzerland's engagement in peacebuilding, humanitarian aid and development cooperation.

3. Close the gap between global and local migration policy and practice.

Often there is a gap between global migration policies and local realities. To avoid doing harm, the implementation of policies as envisaged at a global level requires an **adaptation to the local context and recalibration of responsibilities** among national, regional, and local authorities. While it is important to recognize the complexity of this policy change, there is a risk attached to the slow implementation of a presumably progressive policy, which must be considered and mitigated to prevent tensions from escalating. Therefore, on the one hand, there is a need for initiatives that allow for and support the translation of global, regional, and national migration policies into local policies and concrete activities. These initiatives should involve actors from different sectors and levels, while ensuring ownership of the state. On the other hand, global policies should **build on existing** knowledge and **local capacities for peace**. Hence, it is crucial to create space for local actors, including migrants, local authorities, communities, civil society, etc. to share experiences and knowledge, and to support mechanisms, ensuring the translation into the global policy arena.

Opportunities for Swiss Peace Policy

- Support governmental and civil society initiatives that aim at shaping and contributing to the implementation of migration policies by adapting them to local realities and recalibrating responsibilities.
- Promote, support, and facilitate consultations before, during and after the implementation of migration policies, with governmental and non-governmental actors that have migration and peacebuilding expertise, as well as migrants, host communities, and other people affected by migration.

In Switzerland, there is a wide range of state and civil society actors with longstanding partnerships to local actors abroad (including the SEM, PHRD, and SDC). Promoting exchange and collaboration between state and civil society actors thus offers opportunities for Switzerland to play an active role in promoting policies that build on and reflect local realities at the national and together with like-minded states, at the international level (e.g., at the UN, EU or the OSCE).

4. Ensure flexible, coordinated, and long-term funding.

Funding at the peace-migration nexus should **encourage and enable integrated approaches** to the nexus and contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. To this end, funding must be flexible, coordinated, and long-term oriented. Such an approach is key to avoid duplication, inefficiency and misuse of resources resulting from separate policy processes. Moreover, the impact or success of such initiatives should not be measured only in quantitative ways (e.g., reduced numbers of migrants), but rather focus on **qualitative indicators** such as quality of life, human rights, social change, behavioral and attitudinal change, reduction of violence, or prevention/transformation of conflicts.

Opportunities for Swiss Peace Policy

- Support the development of agile funding formats that enable multisectoral and multilateral cooperation on migration, and measure impact with qualitative indicators.
- Provide flexible and long-term funding to projects that operate at the intersection of peace, conflict, and migration, aimed at sustaining peace at different stages of a migration journey (e.g., countries of origin, transit, and destination) and irrespective of the causes and drivers of migration (e.g., war, climate change, poverty, lack of opportunities etc.). Such projects might focus on preventing, resolving, or dealing with past violent conflicts by addressing structural, cultural, and direct violence, or protecting human rights.

Switzerland, including the SEM, PHRD and SDC, can build on its capacities to contribute to effective, human rights based, and sustainable solutions at the intersection of conflict and migration, thereby taking a leading role in promoting alternative approaches.

5. Strengthen ownership of states and protect civil society space.

The governments of sending, transit, and receiving countries play an important role in addressing migration and preventing conflicts. Hence, policy at the nexus of peace and migration should **strengthen the ownership of states** and include accountability mechanisms. Moreover, civil society actors often play an important role in migration contexts, for instance by delivering aid, engaging in advo-

cacy, providing peace education, addressing negative narratives, or offering psycho-social support. States should ensure an enabling environment for and **provide support to civil society actors** that contribute to conflict prevention, resolution, and dealing with the past in these contexts.

Opportunities for Swiss Peace Policy

- Promote and support initiatives that strengthen state ownership in the countries of origin, transit, and destination in addressing challenges related to migration and peacebuilding.
- Support and facilitate exchange and joint learning between governments in countries of origin, transit, and destination on the challenges and opportunities of migration as it relates to peace and conflict (e.g., on diaspora participation).
- Enhance intergovernmental partnerships that go beyond collaboration on return and resettlement, to enhance transnationally coordinated political and civic engagement aimed at sustaining peace in countries of origin, transit, and destination.
- Emphasize the importance of independent civil society with guaranteed civil, political, social, cultural, and economic rights and freedoms.

In its engagement with governments and civil society abroad (i.e., international cooperation programs, humanitarian interventions, good offices, human rights dialogues, embassies, etc.), Switzerland can build on its expertise, partnerships, and international reputation and is therefore well placed to implement the above recommendations.

6. Enable cross-sectoral exchange and learning at different levels.

The peace-migration nexus concerns a wide range of actors and spans a wide range of issues, including domestic and foreign policy actors in immigration, migration governance, security, health, education, business, and more. It is therefore necessary to create **opportunities for exchange and joint learning** across different sectors and levels. This must include dialogue across horizontal & vertical relationships. Moreover, while separate processes at

different levels are relevant, high-level processes should also **link with civil society**, social movements, and other grassroots processes, including those led by migrants themselves.

Opportunities for Swiss Peace Policy

- Support and facilitate exchange and learning among peace and migration actors in Switzerland and other countries, including at different levels.
- Support civil society actors who bring together stakeholders and actors from the peacebuilding and migration sectors to learn from each other, coordinate efforts and strategize.

The PHRD, SDC and SEM can build on and continue to implement good practices for exchange and joint learning on migration, such as the Durable Solutions Initiatives in Somalia and Ethiopia, the Interdepartmental Migration Working Group, or the KOFF Joint Learning Process on Peacebuilding & Migration.

7. Ensure meaningful participation of migrants in formal and informal peace processes.

The contribution of migrants to formal and informal peace processes in countries of origin, transit and destination is valuable and essential to ensure sustainable solutions in the short, mid, and long-term. Hence, **enabling participation of migrants** as well as **migrants' self-determined civic and political engagement**, are important elements of peace processes and peacebuilding in countries of origin, transit, and destination. However, domestic, and foreign policy regarding migration are often separate processes. As a result, foreign policy actors in receiving states might engage in peace processes in countries of origin but fail to engage with the diaspora and (im-)migration actors in their own country. **Linking domestic and foreign policy** in this regard is key to a holistic approach to the peace-migration nexus.

Opportunities for Swiss Peace Policy

- Promote coherence, coordination, and cooperation between domestic and foreign policy across the peace and migration sectors.
- Support and finance initiatives that promote and facilitate participation of migrants or diasporas in formal and informal peace processes in their countries of origin.
- Support and finance initiatives that enhance self-determined civic and political engagement of migrants or diaspora groups in host countries.

Switzerland can build on good practices regarding coordination of peace and migration actors in specific geographic contexts (such as the cooperation between the SEM, PHRD, and SDC in the South-East-Asia interdepartmental working group on migration), which could be replicated to allow for increased meaningful participation of migrants in peace processes and peacebuilding.

Opportunities for Swiss Peace Policy

- Support and finance initiatives that include accessible, professional, and culturally accepted psycho-social support for the beneficiaries, partners, and staff.
- Support and finance practice-oriented and academic research on psycho-social effects and approaches around migration, conflict, and peacebuilding.
- Encourage and support like-minded states and partners, domestically and abroad, to prioritize a psycho-social approach in their migration and peacebuilding work.

Both the SEM and SDC have expertise and experiences in integrating psychosocial approaches into their work. These experiences offer an opportunity for their cooperation with Swiss peace policy actors regarding migration.

8. Integrate psychosocial support in initiatives at the nexus.

Migration is often traumatizing, including in contexts of violent conflicts and other forms of cultural, structural, and direct violence, which can occur along a migration journey and in the country of destination. To ensure the space and capacity for healing, an investment in culturally accepted psychosocial support is key. Working and interacting with migrants should include a sensitivity for trauma, migration experiences and knowledge about psycho-social approaches.

9. Contribute to a nuanced narrative on migration, conflict, and peace.

All too often, media and public discourse reveals a linear and narrow understanding of the peace-migration nexus, e.g., that the challenges related to migration in countries of transit and destination will stop once the conflict in the country of origin is resolved. This narrative is not only misleading in terms of the impact peacebuilding can have on migration governance and migration flows, but it can also get instrumentalized for national security and economic interests and reinforce externalization and securitized approaches to migration. The latter can have negative effects on the lives of migrants and citizens of host societies. Moreover, harmful narratives on migration or migrants, as well as misinformation, can impact on pre-existing tensions and create new conflict dynamics among different groups of migrants, or between hosting societies and migrants. In this context, the media, including social media, can play an important role in contributing to a more nuanced and fact-based narrative. Policymakers can make use of their sphere of influence to shape the narrative, for instance in press/media statements, development, and presentations of new strategies, or by supporting organizations that work in media and journalism.

Opportunities for Swiss Peace Policy

- Supporting and financing initiatives that aim at providing information, building capacities of journalists, and addressing misinformation, especially in migration contexts.
- Promoting a nuanced narrative on migration, conflict and peace that speaks to challenges and highlights opportunities of migration for peacebuilding in all interactions at the national and international level (i.e., messages to Parliament, statements at the UN, etc.)

Swiss actors engaging at the intersection (i.e., SEM, PHRD, and SDC) can take a leading role in contributing to nuanced narratives on migration, conflict, and peace.

About this brief

This policy brief summarizes the findings of a joint learning process on peacebuilding and migration, facilitated by KOFF – the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding, and the resulting [web toolbox](#) on migration in peacebuilding. It highlights the relevance of a systematic and strategic engagement with migration in peacebuilding, showcases some practical examples and points to areas that need further investment and attention from the peace policy sector.

About the author

Andrea Grossenbacher is a Program Officer at [swisspeace](#) and in this function is a project staff of [KOFF - the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding](#).

In this capacity she promotes exchange and joint learning in the platform KOFF and beyond, and engages in projects and mandates on different topics, such as gender, women, peace and security, culture of non-violence and peace, the arts and peacebuilding, and migration. Over the past years, she has conducted extensive practice-oriented research on the intersection of migration, conflict, and peace(building). In 2018, Andrea co-authored a [desk study](#) on the peace and migration nexus. From 2019-21, she led the KOFF project “joint learning process on peacebuilding & migration” and, in 2020, she published a [toolbox](#) on migration in peacebuilding.

Before joining swisspeace, Andrea worked for the NGO PeaceWomen Across the Globe. She also completed a training in online facilitation provided by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation, and subsequently co-facilitated a dialogue for their project “European Refuge/es”. Andrea holds a masters degree in Peace, Conflict and Development Studies at the University of Bradford.
