



## **CARIM EAST – CONSORTIUM FOR APPLIED RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

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### ***Transforming research into an engaging policy story: how to write a policy brief***

**Svitlana Kobzar**

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## What is a policy brief?

A policy brief is a piece of writing, a standalone report, designed for those interested in policy-making (e.g. officials, bureaucrats, lobbyists, donors and those working for non-governmental organisations). Policy briefs help explain the findings of research in a succinct and understandable manner to an educated audience who may not come from a research background. Optimising the understanding of your research by policy officials is one of the ways of ensuring its visibility and impact. Engaging in this form of dissemination may be challenging for many researchers. The format of policy briefs differs sharply from academic papers.

## Writing for policy-makers: key strategies

When writing a policy brief, several strategies are worth keeping in mind. These include special attention to the target audience, in particular the interests and constraints of that audience (for instance time constraints). While researchers are often interested in the methodology and the processes taken to reach conclusions, a policy audience is likely to be more interested in the findings and what they mean for their policy portfolio.

Busy policy-makers may glance at the summary and conclusions and skim through parts of the document that interest them. Thus, policy briefs should communicate the core messages in a clear way. Overall, when writing a policy brief the following questions may be helpful: What is the core message? Is the message communicated in a brief, clear and straightforward way? Why should policy-makers (or others interested in policy) care about it?

## Creating a policy story and making your ideas ‘stick’

It is also helpful to note some of the findings from other disciplines, for instance marketing and communications, to learn some of the ways in which a coherent policy story can be written. For instance, in the book titled ‘Made to Stick’, Chip and Dan Heath (2007) outline several principles that help some ideas to be communicated in a way that they ‘stick’ in people’s minds. They define ‘stick’ as being those ideas that are ‘understood and remembered, and have a lasting impact’ as well as ‘change your audience’s opinions’ or behaviour’ (Heath and Heath, 2007: 8). The six principles outlined by Heath and Heath are (1) simplicity, (2) unexpectedness; (3) concreteness; (4) credibility; (5) emotion; (6) stories.

In terms of simplicity, the authors recommend finding the core of the message and weeding out any material that is not directly linked to that core. However, while cutting down the material that is not directly linked to the core message may be relatively straightforward, ‘the hard part is weeding out ideas that may be really important but just are *not the most important idea*’ (emphasis original, Heath and Heath, 2007: 29). Nevertheless, the length and the nature of policy briefs mean that it is important to learn how to be ‘masters of exclusion’.

The principle of unexpectedness can ‘increase alertness’, ‘cause focus’ and ‘grab people’s attention’ (Heath and Heath, 2007: 16). When choosing material for a policy brief, it is important to ask yourself: what elements of the research conclusions are difficult to anticipate? What are some of the ‘gaps in the knowledge’ that policy-makers may have that this policy brief can address?

Another important principle for communicating ideas effectively is the principle of ‘concreteness’. Heath and Heath state that ‘naturally sticky ideas are full of concrete images because our brains are wired to remember concrete language’ (2007: 17). In the case of policy writing, concrete may include case studies, message-led graphs and charts as well as powerful statistics.

Establishing credibility and using emotions are other ‘sticky’ principles. For policy briefs, this may mean explaining briefly the methodology used to arrive at the final conclusion. Finding case studies and examples that may trigger people’s emotions may also help them remember the core messages better. But as Heath and Heath point out, ‘sometimes the hard part is finding the right emotions to harness’ (2007: 18). And for policy briefs, triggering emotions may not be always applicable.

Lastly, it is important to ensure that there is a consistent story line across all the sections. The story should be part of an overarching message, the ‘core’ of the policy brief that links together the findings, recommendations and conclusions.

Overall, not all of the ‘sticky’ components outlined above may be applicable to every policy brief. It is helpful bearing them in mind when deciding how to structure your policy brief and which elements to use. The chart below, outlines the check-list from the book ‘Made to Stick’ that can be used when checking whether the overall messages meets the criteria of ‘stickiness’.

**Figure 1. ‘Made to stick’ check-list**

Checklist	Message
Simple	X
Unexpected	-
Concrete	X
Credible	X
Emotional	-
Story	X

Source: adapted from Heath and Heath (2007)

### ***Different types of policy briefs and their main functions***

There are different kinds of policy briefs, some are longer while others are short, that serve different purposes. These can range from short one-page briefs to the longer versions, including two to four-page and eight to ten-page briefs. While the short briefs are aimed at communicating the most important messages in a compact way with links to the longer reports, the longer briefs contain more factual information and evidence used to back up the conclusions and proposed recommendations.

### **‘Dos and don’ts’ of policy briefs**

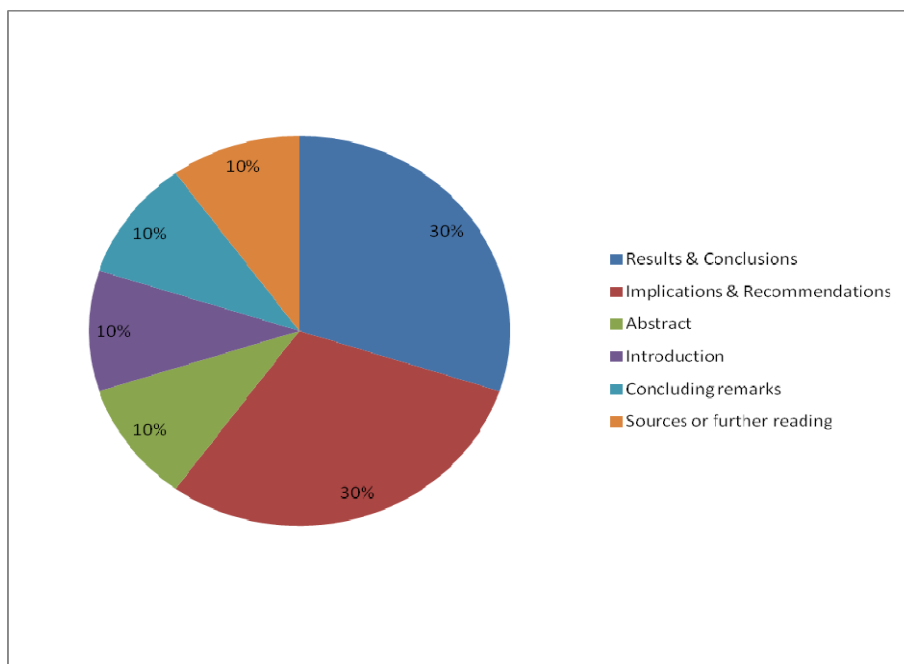
While writing a policy brief often happens at the end of the research project as part of the dissemination effort, it is important to begin thinking about your policy story earlier. Particularly, when new findings begin to emerge, it is important to ask yourself: what is unexpected and surprising about these findings?, what is the core message and what impact could it have on the current policy? Keeping the overall policy context, both immediate (ex. the EU asylum policy) and the broader (ex. the financial crisis) and how your research fits into that context is also important.

It is helpful to the reader if the structure and the visual outline and font are as simple as possible with emphasis made only on essential parts of the brief. At the same time, you can capture your readers' attention by action-oriented titles and sub-titles (as opposed to pure description). For instance, instead of the title 'Mobility Partnerships: legal migration and mobility', a more effective one is 'Mobility Partnerships – what impact do they have on legal migration and mobility?'

### Turning a research paper into a policy brief

Using a policy brief template may help in turning a research paper into a policy brief (see attached). Based on the template, the following graph helps to illustrate each section and proportion of the length that can be used to write a two to four-page brief.

**Figure 1. The length of each section of the policy brief should stress the results and the implication of the research**



Source: adapted from Overseas Development Institute.

The following sections outline the content of each section of the template developed for writing a policy brief.

- **Abstract:** Should answer the following questions – why is the topic relevant for the target audience (policy-makers/media/academia)? What is the main argument (which policy is flawed or problematic)? What is the policy solution/recommendation?
- **Introduction:** Highlights the urgency of the issue discussed in the policy brief. Gives a brief overview of the conclusion and key recommendations, the outline/direction of the rest of the brief.
- **Section 1: methodology:** Should be very brief. It is designed to strengthen the credibility of the brief by explaining how the findings and recommendations were arrived at. This section may be omitted, as it is not always applicable or necessary to have it in a policy brief.
- **Section 2: results and conclusions:** Designed as an overview of the findings/facts. Constructed around the line(s) of argument behind the policy recommendations.

- **Section 3: implications or recommendations:** Usually limited to three implications or recommendations. Recommendations, which are direct and clear suggestions for action, are preferred, but less direct implication may be more appropriate depending on the policy context.
- **Concluding remarks:** This section may be omitted if the preceding section addresses some of the concluding points. If included, this section should focus on the ‘so what’ question. What is the overall core message of the research that is most useful to the main audience?
- **Sources or further reading:** Helps readers find out more on the issue if they require further information. Keep references to a minimum, but include seminal pieces of work on the issue.

### Further reading

The following books may be helpful for learning more about how to communicate your research effectively and different ways to display quantitative data:

- Heath, C. And Heath, D., (2007) *Made to Stick*. London: Random House Books.
- McCandless, D., (2009) *Information is beautiful*. London: HarperCollins.
- Moon, J., (2008) *How to make an impact*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Overseas Development Institute (ODI) *How to Write a Policy Brief*. RAPID (Research and Policy in Development), 1-2.
- Steel, J. (2007) *Perfect Pitch. The art of selling ideas and winning new business*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Tufte, E.R., (2007) *The visual display of quantitative information*. 2nd ed. Cheshire, Connecticut: Graphics Press LLC.
- Zelazny, G., (2001) *Say it with charts*. 4th ed. McGraw-Hill.

# Mobility Partnerships – what impact do they have on legal migration and mobility?

## Abstract

Mobility Partnerships (MPs) have been promoted as a flagship tool of the EU's Global Approach on Migration for five years now. The expectations for increased mobility have been very high, but they still have not been fulfilled, to the point that in the academic circles this instrument is sarcastically called 'Immobility Partnerships'. Is the criticism justified? What should we do next with the tool? Can it be saved, and most importantly – should it be? This policy brief analyses MPs and the progress with which this tool have been implemented.

*Agnieszka Weinar, Scientific Coordinator of CARIM East and MIGMEDCIS*

Mobility Partnerships (MPs) have been signed with Cape Verde, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Armenia – all countries of rather discreet migratory impact on the EU. All the political evaluations to date<sup>[1]</sup> show that MPs are an effective tool to enhance international cooperation as well as introduce more coherence in the internal governance of migration in the sending country. According to participating governments and the European Commission, the MPs have been critical to get state officials together around one table and force them to think about their migration policies and to cooperate, also on the issues of legal migration and mobility. But what impact do MPs have on

legally mobile migrants and migrant workers? On societies? On labour markets?

## What are we talking about when discussing legal migration and mobility in the EU context?

Until now it is quite clear that MPs have focused only on a few aspects of the European Commission's concept of legal migration and mobility, namely: prevention of illegal migration and border governance. Less attention has been paid to economic migration, portability of rights or skills recognition. Other issues as family reunification or integration in the destination countries have been largely disregarded. Unfortunately the majority of the EU Member States involved in the MPs have not been generous enough to propose real change under this umbrella; instead, many decided to offer already existing legal migration bilateral schemes as their contribution to legal migration part of MPs.

Apart from the fact that the avenues of legal migration have not been really open<sup>[2]</sup>, the institutional changes helping people to be mobile have not materialized either. First, visa policy has not been used fully in this case. Visa facilitation with Cape Verde, initially almost blocked by the EU Member States in the EU Council, has been signed with considerable delay, because inter alia of tough requirements of the readmission agreement. However a Common Visa Application Centre in Cape Verde is another example of facilitated mobility.<sup>[3]</sup>

## What is the future of legal migration and mobility in Mobility Partnerships?

If we want to keep the concept, the partners need to decisively improve the component

of legal migration and mobility. To achieve this, partners should focus on one major challenge: the value added. In other words – what makes the partnerships a valuable tool over the existing bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the area of legal migration and mobility? What will make ordinary people more mobile?

### 1) Targeted change in the legal order

The clear value added of a Mobility Partnership on the level of a Member State is when this Member State changes its legal order to accommodate a mobility of a national of the partner third country. There are only two examples to date that clearly illustrate this: (1) a Polish initiative opening its labour market to the temporary labour migration from the countries which signed the MP; (2) the German initiative to offer to its long-term residents the possibility of return to home country for extended periods of time (up to 2 years) without losing the residence rights. These are pretty direct and straightforward initiatives that bring more value into the MPs.

Other mobility enhancers have included agreements on portability of rights. The importance of MPs for completing these agreements is less obvious as it is not clear that they would not have taken place hadn't it been for the MPs. This leads to the next point.

### 2) Going beyond the bilateral relations

Bilateral relations are clearly the best setting to solve migration management issues.

Due to the division of competences, the EU cannot address the most common requirements which have been put forward by prospective partners: economic migration channels, skills recognition, or

integration policy. These are domains of the EU Member States. And thus the Mobility Partnership must be in this case a sum of offers of participating Member States. To the date, all 27 have never signed up for one MP. This is often seen as a weakness of the instrument, but is it really? When a Tunisian official wants economic migration channels to the EU, he surely does not mean sending Tunisians to Bulgaria or Latvia, rather to France or Italy. Does he need a MP to do this? Certainly not. Of course, one may argue, there is a rationale for including bilateral agreements into the MP – when a bilateral legal migration scheme with France will make Tunisia cooperate with other EU Member States on the issues of illegal migration. However, usually illegal and legal flows tend to end in the same destination.

To give the MPs more value added, the legal migration and mobility should go beyond bilateral relations. Participating Member States should think about multilateral initiatives, which bring a real EU dividend. These can be proposed by two actors: by a group of the cooperating Member States and by the European Commission

### 3) Legal migration and mobility of Mobility Partnership country nationals – what can the EU Member States do?

One idea would be the creation of partially-open labour markets created between two or more EU Member States, where the nationals of a Mobility Partnership country could find employment in specific sectors (e.g. seasonal workers harvesting different crops throughout the season), and could be jobseekers freely circulating across the borders to this end. The system could be created on the basis of a multilateral treaty between the involved EU member States and the Mobility Partnership country. In addition, these mini-zones would assure

that all the rights acquired in different MSs add up and can be taken with the migrant to his/her next EU destination or back home.

Another way of changing the status quo and rewarding the partner country would be to introduce, besides EU preference, a Mobility Partnership preference on the labour market.

#### 4) Legal migration and mobility of Mobility Partnership country nationals –what can the European Commission do?

The EU should bring what it has at hand: mobility understood as visa policy. It has been clearly proposed in the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility and this should be supported. Especially visa liberalisation is a highly worthwhile tool creating a real partnership. The experience of Visa Liberalisation Dialogues with Moldova and Ukraine shows how some countries can implement the EU requirements for secure environment and thus cut short the worries about the negative consequences of enhanced mobility.

When visa liberalisation for all is impossible, it should be considered for certain categories of people. Again, one can say that with the development of the EU Registered Traveller Programme the obstacles to mobility will hopefully diminish. However, this solution is devised for all the countries in the world and hence, there needs to be something extra for the MP countries in it.

Another possibility is to follow the already established path for coordination of social security systems between the EU and Associated Countries[4] and offer the same solution to the Mobility Partnership countries, e.g. while testing the proposed EU Social Security Agreements.[5]

### Concluding remarks

Mobility Partnerships are still the tools-in-the-making and we need to give them time, as it usually happens in international cooperation. It would be unfair to sentence MPs right now. But it is reasonable to expect that they keep on improving and developing in the right direction with more elements that fulfil their main promise: more mobility to the ordinary people. This includes more of special treatment of the nationals of the partner third countries: more innovative visa facilitation instruments, more visa liberalisation, and more real labour migration.

### Sources:

[1] Commission (2009). *Mobility Partnerships as a tool of the Global Approach to Migration*. SEC (2009) 1240.

[2] The few examples include small circular migration schemes between Czech Republic and Georgia, Portugal and

Cape Verde or France's programme for young professionals – all involving relatively limited number of people (the data on how many exactly is not publicly available).

[3] E.g. an applicant does not need to travel to another country in order to apply for a visa even if the Schengen state he/she wants to travel to is not represented in his home country.

[4] See e.g. 2010/697/EU Council Decision of 21 October 2010 on the position to be taken by the European Union within the Association Council set up by the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an association between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Kingdom of Morocco, of the other part, with regard to the adoption of provisions on the coordination of social security systems. Other draft proposals available in the OJ of the EU, L 306, Volume 53, 23 November 2010.

[5] As proposed by the European Commission in its Communication on the External Dimension of the EU Social Security Coordination. COM(2012)153 final



# Title

## Abstract

[10%]

Should answer following questions – why is the topic relevant for the target audience (policymakers/media/academia)? What is the main argument (which policy is flawed or problematic)? What is policy solution/recommendation?

*Author, Title*

[Optional: contact information]

## Introduction: 10-15%

Highlights the urgency of the issue discussed in the policy brief. Gives a brief overview of the conclusion and key recommendations, the outline/direction of the rest of the brief.

## Section 1: methodology (5-10%)

It should be very brief. It is designed to strengthen the credibility of the brief by explaining how the findings and recommendations were arrived at. This section may be omitted, as it is not always applicable or necessary to have it in a policy brief.

## Section 2: results and conclusions (30%)

Designed as an overview of the findings/facts. Constructed around the line(s) of argument behind the policy recommendations.

## Section 3: Implications or recommendations (30%)

Usually limited to three implications or recommendations. Recommendations, which are direct and clear suggestions for action, are preferred, but less direct implication may be more appropriate depending on the policy context.

### Figure 1

Up to 2 figures per brief, please use figures selectively to stress the core points made in the text.

## Concluding remarks (10%)

This section may be omitted if the preceding one addresses some of the concluding points. If included, this section should focus on 'so what' question. What is the overall core message of the research that is most useful to the main audience?

## Sources or further reading (brief):

Helps readers find out more on the issue if they require more information. Keep references to a minimum (no more than 10% of the policy brief), but include seminar pieces of work on the issue.