

# Comments on Betts and Collier's Framework

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## **Sustainable migration**

Start by saying that I am strongly in favour of this endeavor. It is visionary and bold. And it addresses, head on, one of the most comprehensive and conflict ridden challenges of our time. Besides, it is tremendously ambitious. Even though it is necessary to be – tremendously ambitious in order to come to grips with the complexities of the international migration order, this is of course also where invited critics and commentators like myself will have to dig.

In stead of writing it off as utopian or at least not feasible in today's world order, I see it as a constructive start on a process that most people will agree is absolutely necessary.

I see my role here today in trying to disentangle some of the components of the approach, looking more closely into the possible functioning of the model in a concrete context – the Nordic and the Norwegian welfare societies.

The authors claim that sustainable migration (SM) cannot only be about the distribution of costs and benefits; it's inherently political and inherently ethical.

A key contribution of the Collier-Betts model is the emphasis on democratic sustainability in combination with ethical scrutiny of both receiving society, sending society and individuals in political or economic danger.

It does the whole thing – sets out to square the circle. But, I would say – *since* democratic sustainability is emphasized so strongly, the model establishes a connection to *realpolitik*.

Indirectly, the model thus brings in the essential power-dimension and the comprehensive conflicting interests involved.

Through this criteria-based approach, the Collier-Betts paper provides a basic **methodology** that is anchored in existing power structures. Political legitimacy based in a democratic structure is a central part of the sustainability discussion. This is a necessary place to start, as far as I am concerned.

Having said this, the power dimension and the conflicting interests are of course *also* what represents the greatest challenge to the success of the approach, and which makes the initial statement of the authors somewhat optimistic - that the model is “entirely feasible” to implement.

Nevertheless, in my mind, the discussion on ethics is one of the greatest contribution of the paper. What defines “good migration policies”? To whom does the state have obligations and where are the conflicts and trade-offs? And most important: how should these be reconciled?

As to criterias:

First and foremost: states have primary obligation towards their own citizens. This is actually not a truism, so it’s important to state as a basic point of reference.

Secondly rich states do have obligation towards 1) mass poverty and 2) towards refugees.

The authors stress a *collective* dimension here:

One should be careful not to recruit talented people from poor countries unless it serves the poor society, and the refugee rescue has to be reconciled with the long term interests of the majority of refugees waiting in the neighbouring areas.

This is a point I’d like to underline, as it serves as a corrective and supplement to the dominating *individualistic* take on migration and refugee thinking.

The sustainability-approach requires two basic conditions to be met, according to the authors:

1. Condition: To maintain the required political support from governments and citizens **over time** – the support of the median voter in both global North and South is necessary.

The important message here – and on which I agree – is that political support is not a fixed entity, **and the chosen policies are essential for the outcome.**

Gradual nudging popular attitudes. Find the balance between pragmatism and vision. And again: **What is done must have a democratic mandate.**

Sustainability is thus relative to historical context, which is of course absolutely true.

2. condition: Sustainability requires mutually beneficial self-interest – and they add: the self-interest must be *enlightened*.

Here I believe we find an important problem in the model: it is currently not possible to both fulfil the core duty of rescue AND find a solution that takes care of “mutually beneficial self-interests”. Something has to give before hopefully a comprehensive international system is in place.

Maybe the word *enlightened* rescues the model theoretically here – as the authors define it with a “no regret” condition: “Choices at period 1 should be in harmony with hypothetical choices at a future period 2”. So, the TIME dimension is central in the analysis and in reality.

But how can one possibly rely on such a thing. Individuals and societies ARE not enlightened in this way, and besides future development means unpredictability very basically. None of us control essential factors for future outcomes of current choices.

Most often one does not foresee long term consequences in the short run. So this *premise* as to the definition of sustainability is close to impossible to use in practice.

If we for a moment have a **nation state** perspective here; the Nordic states for example, definitely wanted to have control over immigration when the new regulation was introduced during the 1970s – in the early days of the inflow from the global South. They *thought* they brought in place a political tool that would make immigration sustainable for the welfare societies in the long run. Today we can analyze all the unforeseen consequences of this very policy.

The problem is that the state and the population often do not discover the problematic consequences of policies until it is late in the day, and meanwhile structural changes may have created new conditions for action.

Furthermore, According to the authors, three points are important in the strategy:

- a. To have policies be evidence-based;
- b. To have politicians think beyond the electoral cycle; and
- c. To create an “enabling environment” for potential migrants in their home societies.

Again, extremely important factors on which we can all agree. Evidence –based policies – I couldn’t agree more, yet even here today people disagree on what the evidence is.

- b. to have politicians think beyond the electoral cycle is not impossible, but it most likely needs international institutional buffering.
- c. to create an “enabling environment” for potential migrants is essential in order to reduce push factors, but it is one of the tallest orders in the proposal. Again,

tall orders are necessary, but we need tools to develop how to get there, and here we are in the midst of international political economy that does not easily lend itself to governance in the first place.

The paper stresses the need to differentiate between economic and refugee migration.

If we now first look at the economic category – labour migration,

1. The authors state: There is no *right to migrate per se*. It should be mutually beneficial. Compatibility with human rights. And they argue for an international collaborative system – where migrants can be allocated to the place in which it is in demand. (s. 16)

The separate approach towards economic and refugee migration is already in place in many contexts – e.g. in the Nordic region. Billions of kroners are used to apply this differentiation in practice. So a new approach that accommodates the complexities of this operation – being both mutually beneficial AND taking care of HR – would certainly be extremely attractive.

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Collier and Betts recommend **temporary migration** as the most useful model for unskilled. A kind of a Gulf-state strategy.

For the time being – I have some concern as to the applicability in the Norwegian and the Nordic setting. Firstly, in the current institutional context, Norway can satisfy demand for manual labour through the EU market. And will – with high wages and good living condition - most likely continue to have this source of extra labour in foreseeable future – with new candidate member states coming up and possibly also with Brexit in mind.

But more important, large scale unskilled temporary labour immigration represents a serious systemic challenge to the labour market model.

This model has represented a fine-tuned institutional set-up: a small, open-market economy relying on an interplay between stability oriented macro-economic policies, an organized working life with coordinated wage setting and a comprehensive public, tax-based welfare system. Based on a regulated labour market governed by social partners, its key traits are: pooling of risks through extensive social insurance, corporatist coordination and low inequality.

Norway actually has a **test case** going on as to temporary labour immigration, through the free movement of services- system – the posting of workers. This fully legal system that has been introduced to Norway through the EU system, has already imposed severe institutional problems, most markedly in the construction sector in the Oslo area.

Low wage competition through temporary work agencies and international subcontractors have become increasingly salient in this industry, undermining working conditions, wages and labour organization. It creates increased inequality and disorganization in the labour market, which is potentially serious for the basic structure of the Norwegian model, which rely on a high degree of equality and compressed wages, for the sustainability of the Labour/welfare dynamics.

Generally, the social partners are concerned about spill over effects, substitution effects and a race to the bottom that eventually may endanger the sustainability of labour and welfare institutions. If wages in low paid work are pressured downwards, the level of welfare benefits will also come under downward pressure to maintain the incentives to work.

So here we have a clear cut contradiction that needs to be handled within the sustainability complex. Something has to give, and if politicians are not fully “enlightened” on the long term risks, or do not manage **or** do not have interest in seeing beyond the next election, the welfare model may be at risk if the interests of the temporary migrants – and their companies are given precedence.

Refugees:

As to the refugee category, Collier and Betts are addressing essential problems here in a visionary way. The merit of their contribution is the way in which they incorporate this thinking within their comprehensive model for sustainability and the way they discuss the ethical dilemmas involved more systematically.

This should be highly welcomed.

2. They argue that Refugees represent a different category, with the duty to rescue up front. Access to safe haven. The logic of compassion. It's NOT about providing an alternative migratory pathway. The current system is ineffective, inequitable and unjust. “Effective institutional design is needed to ensure that the core functions of the refugee system can be fulfilled more sustainably.” Protection closer to home is a key word.

Approach-wise I think though, that there is a tendency in the paper **to presuppose things that represent the core of the problem:**

E.g: it's stated: “The Northern states need to preserve spontaneous asylum arrival as a *last resort*.” I agree with this principally, but the existence of this possibility may continuously undermine the intention of sustainability. This is

what we saw in 2015 and which literally led to a break down of the possibility of spontaneous asylum arrivals.

This is the exact problem to be handled: How to *keep* it as a solution of last resort.

But I fully agree with the over-arching claim; that resettlement cannot be seen as a discrete element of the overall refugee regime, “but rather be an integral component of a wider strategic vision”.

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Will end by commenting on the three first of **The ten basic principles to guide political leadership – nationally and globally** (as the time is running short):

- 1) *Consider what sustainability means in context.* Absolutely. Each society do have different tipping points along different dimensions related to migration. Very important – fully agree. But the problem is that the tipping points have a tendency to appear post-hoc. The paper presupposes full control and foresight, the lack of which is the core of the problem.
- 2) *Distinguish the refugee and migration system.* Yes, the two categories need to be viewed according to a different logic. As I have mentioned, in Scandinavia the two groups are already handled with distinctly different approaches. But important here: The fact that you have both kinds of immigration at the same time, implies that the flows affect each other: In Scandinavia it can clearly be argued that access to EU-labour through the market system, makes asylum immigration LESS sustainable. They are competing in the same segments of the labour market. And the accessibility of EU labour by and large satisfy the extra labour demand in the Scandinavian economies, thus in practice reduces the attractiveness of opening other legal channels for immigration from the global South.

3) *Recognize the underlying purpose of refuge.* 1. duty of rescue 2. Ensure autonomy – access jobs and education 3. Route out of limbo – go home or be integrated.

*Good*, but temporary protection has a tendency to become permanent because conflicts are often lasting and besides, refugees get integrated along the way – get rights, that you seem to support – in order to get them out of limbo. So – then asylum tends to become an immigration route as a consequence. This is the core of the problem. Here we need concrete mechanisms for handling the trade-offs.

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Finally, the basic merit of the paper, I believe, is that it addresses global inequality. It argues well for a triple-win system, but it's weaker on analysis as to under what conditions – politically and institutionally – it can be realized. One may ask whether it presuppose a planned economy and a new institutional world order?

I have to conclude in an ambiguous way: this is stimulating, important and visionary,

But I'm afraid that I do not believe that it is possible to design a global migration system that is beneficial to all thinkable actors and institutions at the same time. And forge a new grand consensus. There are too many contradictions – too many factors that politicians do not control. Too many collective action problems – and too few international over-arching institutions that can govern and control gainful allocations.

But this does not mean that it is not worth trying nevertheless.

Now – need to formulate a concrete strategy – where to start – which parts to emphasize most in the first round, as it will not be possible to do all things at the same time.

I do not blame you for not having done that – it will take years of innovation and negotiation. But I do believe that this paper is an important contribution to think more systematically and comprehensively when governance of international migration is on the agenda.