

# POVERTY ERADICATION THROUGH SAFE, HUMANE AND ORDERLY MIGRATION

Inter-agency Expert Group Meeting

On the Implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018-2027)

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## INTRODUCTION

Migration and poverty have been for decades problematized as matters of international policy. Poverty eradication has been a key objective of development policy and practice, and the relationship between migration and poverty has been embedded in the international debate concerning migration and development. Migration, has become particularly 'visible' recently (e.g. through images of people landing on the shores of Europe, moving in 'caravans' in Latin America, fleeing conflict in other regions). At the same time, perceptions and discourses surrounding migration have become increasingly polarized, even though the share of international migrants as part of the world's population has remained stable at around three per cent for decades.

In the predominant discourse on migration and development, poverty tends to be portrayed as a 'root cause' of migration. As such, policy and practice relying on this approach has focused on migrants' resource mobilization to enhance development and alleviate poverty to stem migration. However, the growing recognition of the social dimensions of migration and of people's agency and aspirations have led to question the oversimplification underlying such conventional approaches in favor of a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of migration and its reciprocal links to development, calling for greater policy coherence.

Recognizing that migration is first and foremost an aspect inherent to development, understood as social change, the paper suggests that migration can influence the achievement of sectoral (development) policy goals, as much as the latter can shape migration dynamics in multiple ways. Therefore, it is argued that recognizing the reciprocal nature of the link between migration and development provides an alternative basis for discussion and action to implement the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, whereby development is fostered to leave no one behind, rather than reduced to an instrument of migration policy.

## POVERTY AND THE "MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT NEXUS"

Poverty has been problematized as a central priority of international development policy. From the basic needs approach, to neoliberal structural adjustment programs, to human security, to the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, development policy has always comprised poverty reduction. For many decades, development has even been conflated with economic growth and poverty and underdevelopment have been closely associated.

Likewise, the relationship between migration and poverty has been long debated and analyzed, especially in the conceptualization of the 'migration and development nexus'. Approaches to migration and development (hereafter M&D), including the relationship between poverty and migration, have been strongly influenced by different development paradigms, alternating between 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' approaches (de Haas, 2010; 2012).

Optimistic approaches generally see migration as a driver of development. Neoclassical economics explain migration as the result of rational cost-benefit calculations, and the new economics of migration as a household strategy to diversify sources of income and cope with risks (Massey et al., 1993). These approaches are strongly influenced by the modernization paradigm of development (1950s), which conceives of the later as an irreversible and linear transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity' (following the model of industrialized nations), and explains underdevelopment as the result of societies' own political, sociocultural and economic characteristics (e.g. 'archaic' beliefs and methods, lack of knowledge and capital; see Nurkse, 1953). Optimistic approaches tend to portray migrants as agents of 'development' who can contribute resources (e.g. remittances, skills, knowledge, technologies) to reducing poverty, a 'root cause' of migration.

Pessimistic approaches, influenced by the dependency theory of development (late 1950s to 1970s), highlight instead the structural inequalities inherent to the world capitalist economic system, whereby the development of wealthier nations is achieved at the expense of poorer nations (Dos Santos, 1970; Cardoso and Faletto, 1979). Migration is considered a strategy to cope with poverty, and a factor aggravating structural inequalities through the transfer of both (cheap) labour and skills (e.g. 'brain drain') from developing to developed countries, contributing to further underdevelopment, poverty and emigration from countries of origin.

Overall, optimistic approaches to migration and development seem to have prevailed, somewhat endorsing the widespread, yet controversial idea, that poverty reduction and development (of the South) can alleviate migration pressures (to the North), drawing criticism for reducing development to an instrument of migration policy (Sorensen et al. 2002). Policies and practices aimed at addressing the 'root causes of migration', including poverty, tend to focus on the mobilization of migrants' resources for the development of the countries of origin. For example, by fostering diaspora engagement, promoting the return of skills (permanently, temporarily or virtually), and channeling remittance transfers to 'productive' investments.

Optimistic and pessimistic approaches tend to adopt a sedentary bias (Bakewell, 2007) and to disregard the social dimensions of migration, including the dynamics of social networks and other factors such as institutions, transnationalism and people's aspirations and agency. The human development approach introduced a new dimension to econometric explanations, by defining development as the process of enlarging people's choices and capabilities (Sen, 1999; UNDP, 1990). Poverty reduction is seen as the means, rather than the end of development. Recognizing people's agency, this approach implies that migration (human mobility) is a dimension of human freedom (UNDP, 2010: 15); an expression of people's enlarged freedoms and capabilities. As such, development may enable human mobility (de Haas 2007; 2009; Clemens 2014). This view recognizes that not only do people need resources and freedoms to move but, depending on the conditions under which that mobility occurs, migration may also have different effects on development and on people's capabilities and freedoms.

Since the 1990s, policy and practice endorsing optimistic approaches focused on 'managing' migration to optimize its positive effects and mitigate its negative impacts, regaining salience the context of migration dynamics across the Mediterranean since 2015 (Carling and Talleraas, 2016). Throughout the 2000s, migration started to be mainstreamed in development policies and poverty reduction strategies (of countries of 'origin' and 'transit') (GCIM, 2005; GMG 2010). However, pioneer mainstreaming exercises fell short of proving means to overcome deeply rooted dichotomies in the migration and development debate by targeting ('poor') countries of origin and transit, rather than expanding this approach to all countries, irrespective of their level of income or geographical location.

Only recently has migration been recognized as a factor that can potentially affect different aspects of 'development' or sectors of governance as demonstrated by the inclusion of migration in the 2030 Agenda, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNGA A/RES/70/1, 2015). This denotes both distancing from the idea that poverty reduction is *per se* a migration-reduction strategy, and the recognition of the relationship between migration and

development as complex and non-linear. This complex relationship between migration and development and its implications in terms of the implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty are further explored in what follows.

## FROM ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION TO MIGRATION AS SOCIAL CHANGE

Poverty, constructed as a root cause of migration, has been firmly embedded in the international migration and development discourse, policy and practice. Departing from this reductionist approach requires fundamental conceptual and policy changes, of which recognizing migration as an *inherent* aspect of development is perhaps an essential step.

Migration is determined by, and simultaneously determines individual, household, local, national and international dynamics, including issues such as globalization and development, which affect, in turn, people's aspirations and capabilities to migrate, as well as the outcomes of such migration. As such, not only can migration affect development; but development can also shape migration decisions, conditions, patterns and outcomes in many ways. The political, economic, and social context in which migration occurs shapes migration's impacts on development and *vice versa*. In sum, migration can shape the outcomes of sectoral policies, as much as the latter shape migration dynamics and, "this mutual relationship materializes in positive or negative ways" (IOM 2019: 14).

Therefore, migration can be all at once a driver of development (e.g. contributing labour force and fiscal revenue to ageing societies), a consequence of development (e.g. when development projects compel people to move), and an inherent aspect of development (e.g. embedded in regional economic integration processes that promote the freedom of movement). Migration is, therefore, neither fundamentally positive nor negative for development, it is simply part of larger processes of social change. Likewise, not all migrants wish or are able to engage in development processes. However, migrants' inclusion underlies the link between migration and development, insofar as enabling conditions that facilitate migrants' access to resources, experience, opportunities and networks to realize their potential, enhance their capabilities, participate in society and feel protected must be in place for them to succeed, and this, whether or not they decide to 'give back' to their countries of origin (IOM, 2019). Effective integration policies can create such enabling conditions for migrants to communicate, use and develop their skills and participate in the societies where they belong and that they bridge.

Beyond recognizing migration as inherent to social change, the concepts of *reciprocity* and *policy coherence* can foster a better understanding of global interdependencies to address in a more comprehensive manner the mutual effects of migration and development. The root cause approach tends to locate the economic (e.g. poverty), political (e.g. persecution, conflict), or environmental (e.g. climate change effects) conditions that induce migration in the areas 'of origin' geographically, socially or politically distant and disconnected from the dynamics of the more 'affluent' countries of 'destination'.

Instead, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals provide a useful a framework to understand migration as an aspect that affects multiple dimensions of development in countries of origin, transit and destination alike, owing to the interdependencies that characterize contemporary societies. For example, from the key transformations of our lifestyles, production and consumption models, to different spheres of governance, including the economy, agriculture and nutrition, health, education, gender equality, water resources' management, energy, employment, infrastructure, inequalities, urbanization, trade, climate, justice and international cooperation. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda acknowledges the international community's shared responsibility to achieve sustainable development, and the interconnections among its different dimensions for all countries (IOM, 2018).

Likewise, the *Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration* (hereafter GCM) provides a framework to address the multiple dimensions of development relevant to migration dynamics. The GCM presents a non-legally binding, cooperative framework that outlines a set of common principles, commitments and understandings, and shared responsibilities concerning international migration governance in all its dimensions. Grounded in the 2030 Agenda, as reflected in Objective 2, the GCM denotes a more comprehensive understanding of the links between the

achievement of the 2030 Agenda and fostering safe, orderly and regular migration, and the conditions under which migration can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (UNGA A/RES/73/195, 2018).

Overall, the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty offers an opportunity to rethink the links between migration, poverty and development in terms of reciprocity and policy coherence, and to make sectoral development priorities more sensitive to their effects on migration dynamics, and at the same time, make migration policy more sensitive to Goal 1 and the rest of the Sustainable Development Goals.

## THE WAY FORWARD: IMPLEMENTING THE THIRD UN DECADE ON POVERTY ERADICATION FROM A MIGRATION PERSPECTIVE

In 2018 the United Nations system committed to support the implementation of an inter-agency, system-wide plan of action for poverty eradication, launching the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018-2027). One of the main objectives of this agenda is transforming current growth paths, which require more integrated national and international policy frameworks, and greater policy coherence between different sectors of governance. The plan of action identifies ten principles underlying the United Nations system action on poverty eradication, including evidence building, policy coherence, addressing inequalities, respect for human rights, gender mainstreaming, inclusion, ownership and capacity building, and partnerships to deliver (all of which are in line with the principles guiding the GCM).

While the effects of migration on 'development', especially in countries of origin, are generally well understood and promoted, the effects of development on migration remain inadequately understood and migration is rarely mainstreamed across different sectoral policies. The Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty provides a platform and an opportunity to enhance the evidence and mainstream migration across the wide range of issues outlined in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, based on the principle of universality; that is, without distinctions concerning countries' geopolitical classification (e.g. as countries of origin, transit or destination) or level of income.

Likewise, the plan of action identifies seven thematic policy areas to drive structural transformations for poverty eradication. Four out of the seven priority areas have key impacts on migrants' participation (employment, social protection, human capability development and inequalities). The remaining three areas highlight structural transformations that affect and are affected by migration (the future of food and sustainable agriculture, climate change, fragile humanitarian contexts). As such, these priorities can be fully achieved only if migration and migrants are considered.

Productive employment and decent work, social protection, and human capability development are intimately linked to inclusion and social cohesion. Migrants are particularly affected by underemployment, unemployment, informal work, and precarious working conditions, especially when they perform low-wage jobs with little security and possibilities for social mobility, sometimes being exposed to the risk of human trafficking and exploitation. The intersections between migration, employment and poverty eradication (related to SDGs 5, 8 and 16), indicate that migration should be mainstreamed in the plan of action to enhance pathways for regular migration, extend guarantees for ethical recruitment and decent work to migrants, and enhance collaboration with the private sector and social partners in this regard.

Social protection is key to prevent and reduce vulnerabilities. Social protection is one of the areas where migration's contributions to development are more tangible, for example, in terms of labour force and tax revenue in ageing societies. It is also an area where the links between migration, gender and other social inequalities (e.g. class, ethnicity, nationality) are more visible, as epitomized in the phenomenon of 'care chains', in which migrant women engage in low-wage and precarious jobs as domestic workers abroad, allowing other women to participate in the formal labour market, while their own caring responsibilities are delegated to another woman, either a female family member or another woman in a subordinate position. Beyond facilitating migrants' access to and the transferability and portability of social protection benefits, the contribution of social protection to gender equality is fundamental insofar as the provision of public care services and infrastructure can help redistributing care responsibilities and recognizing and valuing unpaid work (performed also by migrant women and men).

Education and health are essential to enhance people's capabilities and participation in society and are key to foster social inclusion and social cohesion. Both health and education can drive, enable, constrain or benefit from migration. As such, SDG 4 explicitly addresses international student mobility and should consider migrants to achieve universal education. Likewise, migration is a social determinant of health and SDG 5 should consider migrants to achieve universal health coverage and all health targets, as well as to strengthen health emergency preparedness, develop inclusive health policies and enhance access to migrant-sensitive health services (IOM, 2018). Because the relationship between migration and development is contextualized and materializes in different ways depending on the conditions under which migration occurs, access to education and health is essential to empower migrants, irrespective of their willingness and ability to engage in development processes in countries of origin.

Inequality is multidimensional and can manifest in various and intersecting forms combining different factors (e.g. socioeconomic status, gender, nationality, ethnicity, age, migratory status) with significant impacts on people's overall wellbeing, capabilities, aspirations, participation, access to resources, and agency. Target 10.7 under Goal 10 "Reduce inequality within and among countries", specifically calls for action to implement well-managed migration policies and reduce remittance costs. Remittances are multidirectional, voluntary, and private international monetary transfers that migrants make, individually or collectively, to people with whom they maintain close links (although they are often conflated with diaspora investment, savings and other financial transactions; IOM, 2015). While remittances may constitute a source of supplementary income for many households, they may also entail social costs. IOM's rights-based approach to remittances is thus attentive to the conditions under which remittances are earned, sent and used, by promoting migrants' inclusion, ethical recruitment and decent work in accordance with international standards; fostering financial inclusion and literacy; improving transparency in service provision, including information on transaction costs; and assisting governments to deliver more inclusive services.

Furthermore, migration is a cross-cutting issue for thematic priorities concerning the future of food and sustainable agriculture, climate change, and fighting poverty in fragile and humanitarian contexts. Rural-urban migration and internal displacement are part of larger and intersecting dynamics of poverty, food insecurity, instability, natural-resource depletion and degradation, climate change impacts, and actual or perceived inequalities concerning employment opportunities, access to services and social protection. If a large share of migrants originates from rural areas (FAO, 2018), migration has become an increasingly urban phenomenon. Migrations' impacts on integration, poverty reduction, basic service provision, disaster risk reduction and management, etc. are often most tangible at the local level. Building, resilient, prepared and inclusive cities and urban settlements requires integrating migration into urban planning, land management, and natural resource management, through participatory processes (including migrants). Likewise, considering migration in rural development, food, nutrition and agriculture-related policies and practice can help addressing migration-related dynamics embedded in agricultural production and rural livelihoods (e.g. seasonal labour), food and nutrition (e.g. access, distribution, consumption).

In addition, displacement, migration, environmental degradation and climate change are deeply intertwined, and climate change is intrinsically linked to economic growth. Sudden-onset disasters (e.g. floods, cyclones, tsunamis) and slow-onset events (e.g. sea-level rise, droughts) can drive or heighten structural vulnerabilities (including poverty), and trigger or exacerbate social tensions (e.g. linked to increased competition for resources). As set out in the GCM, climate action and climate change policy and practice should therefore consider migration and displacement in evidence building, adaptation, resilience, and disaster preparedness strategies. It is also necessary to include migrants in disaster risk reduction and management to prevent and address the potential or increased vulnerabilities they may be exposed to (IOM 2018).

Lastly, fragile humanitarian contexts are usually deeply intertwined with protracted displacement and exposure to prolonged situations of uncertainty and insecurity, with long-lasting effects on sustainable development and on peoples' capabilities, agency and overall wellbeing. Seemingly, the notion of 'root causes' originally appeared in debates about conflict-driven displacement, leading to preventing violence, ending human rights abuses, and facilitating peacebuilding as part of humanitarian action. Migration can both help alleviating humanitarian crises and create assistance needs (Carling and Talleraas, 2016: 6 and 36). In these contexts, it is important to respond to the needs of migrants (and non-migrants) in situations of vulnerability adopting human rights-based, gender- and disability-responsive, as well as

age-sensitive approaches. Addressing the complex links between humanitarian action and development planning can capitalize on the synergies between humanitarian, development and migration policy and practice, including the implementation of the GCM; along with progress in the achievement of SDGs 16 and 17.

In conclusion, the implementation of the Third United Nations Decade on Poverty Eradication provides an opportunity to recognize migration's and development's mutual impacts and consider migration a key factor in achieving Goal 1 and all Sustainable Development Goals. It is an opportunity for IOM and the UN system for more coherent and collaborative action to support international commitments and make the conditions under which migration occurs more enabling, so that migrants are empowered to contribute to and benefit from sustainable development and that, should they decide to engage in development processes, they are more likely to succeed irrespective of where they are.

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