

# **UN SYSTEM TASK TEAM ON THE **POST-2015** UN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA**



## **Migration and human mobility**

**Thematic Think Piece**

**IOM, UNDESA**

The views expressed in this paper are those of the signing agencies and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

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Following on the outcome of the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations Secretary-General established the UN System Task Team in September 2011 to support UN system-wide preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda, in consultation with all stakeholders. The Task Team is led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme and brings together senior experts from over 50 UN entities and international organizations to provide system-wide support to the post-2015 consultation process, including analytical input, expertise and outreach.

## Migration and human mobility

### 1. Relevance of migration at the global level

International migration is a growing phenomenon, both in scope and in complexity, affecting almost all countries in the world. DESA estimates that in 2010 there were some 214 million international migrants worldwide, representing three per cent of the total global population.<sup>1</sup> According to recent DESA estimates, there is as much international migration between less developed countries (due to a large extent to the growth of emerging markets) as there is international migration from less developed countries to more developed countries. According to the 2009 Human Development Report, there are also some 740 million internal migrants. In total, therefore, about 1 billion persons, or one in seven, currently live outside their country or region of origin.<sup>2</sup> These estimates are however conservative, as they do not include many persons migrating on a seasonal or temporary basis.

The broad social, economic and political underpinnings of this mobility are diverse and not always known, although they are often linked to the notion of globalization in broad terms. They include factors as diverse as international patterns of demand for and supply of labour; the relative cheapness of international transport; the advent of systems of electronic communication; and the emergence of transnational family networks. There is, however, one set of factors that is often regarded as being of singular importance. They are related to social, economic and demographic inequalities, whether experienced in terms of employment opportunities, resources, education or human rights. Population dynamics underlie many of these discrepancies. In 2011, the world population reached 7 billion, and is projected to surpass 9 billion by 2050. Most of the expected future population growth will occur in developing countries, and will be concentrated in the least developed countries. It is in these countries that development challenges will be felt the most strongly, under the stress of high unemployment, poverty, low education, and high population growth rates. By

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Trends in International Migration Stocks: Migrants by Age and Sex (New York, 2011)

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2009 – Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development (New York, 2009)

contrast, the population of the more developed regions is expected to change minimally, passing from 1.2 billion in 2011 to 1.3 billion in 2050. With low and declining fertility, many developed countries are experiencing shrinking working-age populations and rapid population ageing. In order to counterbalance these trends, some of these countries are already reassessing established economic, social and political policies and programmes, including those relating to international migration. Research shows that international migration can play a role in limiting population decline, reductions of the working-age population and population ageing, especially in countries with low fertility, although it cannot reverse these trends. Thus, population dynamics, with international migration as an increasingly important component, will continue to affect development in both developing and developed countries.

## **2. Reasoning for placing migration on the global development agenda**

The migration-development equation is complex. Does underdevelopment cause migration? Does migration impede development? Can migration promote development? While there are many linkages between people who leave on a temporary or permanent basis and the development of their country of origin, it is extremely difficult to establish a clear-cut cause-effect relationship between both phenomena. There is, however, a general consensus on three associations.

Firstly, manifestations of underdevelopment are among the root causes of international migration, specifically including push-factors such as income disparities between countries, socio-economic instability, and population pressures. Secondly, international migration can adversely affect the development of countries of origin through loss of essential human resources, often referred to as “brain drain”, as well as through potential depletion of the national labour force due to movements at all skill-levels.

In the past, attention has mainly focused upon these two connections. Increasingly, however, the international community is focusing on the third and most significant linkage: international migration could hold important benefits for home country development. It

holds very significant potential for the development of livelihood strategies for under-resourced communities and can directly contribute through remittance transfers to poverty reduction at the individual level. Diasporas accumulate human and financial capital during the process of migration that can contribute to the development of their local home communities as well as to national economic and social development. Resulting transnational communities establish and reinforce multi-sectoral links between countries of origin and destination. Migrants can thus promote foreign investment in their home countries as investors. Networks linking scientific and technical personnel at home with their migrant counterparts abroad lead to transfer of knowledge and of productive and technological know-how. Upon return, migrants establish businesses which generate wealth and create jobs. Economically driven migration thus creates opportunities for development in both countries of origin and destination.

### **The impact of remittances**

According to World Bank estimates, officially recorded remittance flows to developing countries were projected to reach US\$ 372 billion in 2011, up from US\$ 332 billion in 2010.<sup>3</sup> However, official remittance statistics tend to underestimate the actual size of remittance flows, which exclude unrecorded flows through official and unofficial channels. Overall, remittance flows have remained steady during the economic and financial crisis in all regions of the world, and are projected to grow by 7-8 per cent over 2012-2014. Remittances are private funds and should not be considered a substitute for official development assistance. Nevertheless, a growing body of research suggests that remittances, which are often invested in education, health and housing, can help to achieve the attainment of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. The development potential of remittances could be further enhanced by increasing competition among money-transfer companies and banks, reducing transfer fees, improving access to banking services and expanding financial literacy among migrants

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<sup>3</sup> The World Bank, Migration and Development Brief 18 – Remittance flows in 2011, an update (Washington D.C., 2012), available at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1110315015165/MigrationandDevelopmentBrief18.pdf>

## **The importance of labour migration**

Foreign workers can be a social and economic asset for both countries of origin and destination. Given the benefits accruing from remittance, knowledge and technology transfers, a number of governments actively promote overseas employment for their citizens as one strategy to increase economic growth and bring about full employment. Some governments invest substantial public resources every year in efforts to gain access to employment markets abroad for their citizens, where salaries are often 10 to 20 times local wages, and to help protect the rights and well-being of their citizens abroad. This model is being emulated in various Asian, African, the Caribbean and countries and the Pacific Islands.

In some countries of destination, labour markets are highly dependent on foreign workers, some being permanent, others circular or temporary. They often fill jobs that the native-born population is unwilling to take. Moreover, population ageing drives a growing demand for labour, as the ratio of workers to dependents decreases. Most migrant workers complement the skills of domestic workers rather than competing with them. Due to their entrepreneurial capacities, migrants can further contribute to economic growth in receiving countries.

## **The place of highly skilled migrants**

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the global number of foreign students pursuing tertiary education abroad increased from 1.6 million in 1999 to 2.8 million in 2008.<sup>4</sup> Overall, there has been an expansion of arrangements whereby universities from high-income countries either partner with universities in developing countries or establish branch campuses there. Governments have supported or encouraged these arrangements, hoping to improve training opportunities for their citizens in the region and to attract qualified foreign students.

These people are sought after for diverse reasons. One prime rationale is to be found in the emergence of knowledge-based societies requiring professionals able to access, understand

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Data extract (Paris, 2011), accessed on 19 April 2011 at: <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer>

and use knowledge for technological and economic development. Highly skilled migrants can operate as creators, multipliers and transmitters of knowledge. They are valued for bringing a diversity of viewpoints and cultural enrichment to workplaces that design and produce goods for the global market. They are also esteemed for their willingness to take risk (including obviously the risk of mobility) and for their entrepreneurial flair and ability.

At the same time, the emigration of highly skilled workers (“brain drain”) can also undermine development efforts of small developing economies particularly in crucial sectors such as health and education. In the past, highly skilled labour migration was therefore often seen as a winner-takes-all game, in which developed countries make full use of their powers of attraction to entice the best among the world’s tertiary educated persons, to the detriment of the developing countries that had invested in their education. More recently however, it has become apparent that there can be winners on both sides. Countries of origin can benefit in several different ways. First, through the remittances received from their citizens abroad; second from the creation of knowledge-and-know-how transfer circuits through which, for instance, new technology can be acquired; and from the eventual return of the highly skilled migrants themselves as potential industry leaders and investors. The important pre-condition for these development gains is the setting up of effective policies and an enabling environment covering all aspects of the migration cycle.

### **The question of human rights**

The contribution of international migrants to both countries of origin and destination depends crucially on whether their human rights are safeguarded and they are protected from discrimination. Labour rights are essential to prevent migrants from being exploited. Migrants in irregular situations are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, as well as adolescents and youth. Human trafficking and migrant smuggling add a further layer of complexity to the challenge of upholding the human rights of migrants. Any discussion of the contribution of international migrants to development should thus include a consideration of their human rights.

### **The significance of female migration**

For several decades now, women have made up about half of the migrant population. It is only recently, however, that there has been proper acknowledgement of the place they occupy in contemporary migration. The large labour movements in Europe and the US in the 60s and 70s were male dominated and women and children migrated as dependents. Changes in the migratory behaviour of women first appeared in the 80s and 90s with the development of service sector employment and, in particular, the growing need for nurses and teachers. Women are now also likely to seek employment opportunities abroad in domains previously dominated by men. This “feminization” of migration can be empowering for women, but also have broad impacts on social structures in countries of origin, whether at the household or community level, particularly when children are left behind. Some categories of female migrants face a high risk of exploitation and abuse. Domestic workers, the large majority of whom are women, are often not covered by existing labour laws and are thus particularly vulnerable.

### **Migration and environmental/climate change**

The relation between environmental or climate change, migration and development is receiving increasing attention from policymakers. In the first Assessment Report of the IPCC in 1990, human migration was presented as one of the major consequences of climate change on populations. There is, however, much debate about the number of people who may have to move due to climate change and environmental degradation in the coming decades. Much will depend on the particular climate change scenarios that will emerge.

Current research indicates that migratory behaviours in response to climate and/or environmental change may exhibit considerable variation, ranging from massed forced displacement to gradual anticipatory “adaptive” movement. Precise figures are lacking, but it is believed that the large majority of people whose migration is fuelled by environmental considerations move over relatively short distances and rarely across borders. Paradoxically, significant numbers of people may end up “trapped” rather than displaced by climate or environmental change: that is in a location where they are at risk yet unable to move away. In other situations, people migrating in response to climatic or environmental



factors may actually have no option but to move towards rather than away from locations where they are vulnerable.

For affected countries the development implications are serious. Disaster risk reduction policies need to take account of the importance of minimizing forced or unplanned migration. Sustainable development requires building the resilience of countries and communities affected by a changing climate, environmental hazards and structural factors of vulnerability. Integrating migration in disaster risk reduction strategies and National Adaptation Plans of Action can both help minimize negative forms of migration and enhance the potential of migration to serve as a positive adaptation strategy. Disaster risk management (DRM), disaster risk reduction (DDR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) provide necessary frameworks and tools to build resilience of communities while contributing to sustainable development.

### **3. Current international commitments on migration**

Chapter X of the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) remains one of the most comprehensive negotiated texts on international migration to date. Major United Nations conferences and summits and their outcome documents, including the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995), the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), the United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000) and the World Summit Outcome (2005) contain texts on the multi-dimensional aspects of international migration.<sup>5</sup>

Since the 1994 ICPD, international migration and development has been discussed biennially in the second committee of the General Assembly, while its third committee addresses the protection of migrants and refugees, violence against women migrant workers, and trafficking in women and girls. At the turn of the century, a number of more specialized, open-ended, multilateral processes – such as the Berne Initiative and The Hague

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<sup>5</sup> For further detail, see United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Compendium of Recommendations on International Migration and Development: The United Nations Development Agenda and the Global Commission on International Migration Compared* (New York, 2006)

Process - sought to explore the relationship between migration and development. They raised global awareness of attendant issues and created a context favourable to the convening in 2003, at the initiative of the UN Secretary-General, of the Global Commission on International Migration, whose recommendations paved the way for the 2006 General Assembly's first High-level Dialogue (HLD) on International Migration and Development, which will be followed by a second High-level Dialogue in 2013. The HLD led directly to the establishment of the Global Forum on Migration and Development that provides a large platform for governments and civil society to discuss policy issues surrounding that theme. The Commission on Population and Development (CPD), responsible for monitoring the implementation of the goals and objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action, debated international migration in 2006 and will discuss the demographic aspects of migration in 2013.

These and kindred consultative events have helped to lift the profile of migration and development as an issue of multilateral interest but more work is required for it to link firmly with and be addressed effectively within the global development agenda. The 2009 report by the UN Secretary-General on the status of the implementation of commitments on sustainable development identified migration as one of the seven key domains for the acceleration of international cooperation towards sustainable development. It went on to observe, however, that progress in this area has been mixed, in part because of national restrictions on migration.

A review of MDG country strategy documents in 2008 found that none of them systematically acknowledged the role of migration to any significant extent. Furthermore, a survey conducted in 2011 within a UNDP/IOM project on mainstreaming of migration into development planning found that few countries have mainstreamed migration into national development plans or instruments. The conclusion is that while some progress has been made at the global level in recognising the linkages between migration and development, at the national level, despite many commitments, migration remains poorly integrated into broader, overarching development frameworks.

Several reasons why migration has not featured much in development plans and MDG reviews can be identified, such as; (i) a lack of national data and indicators, (ii) migration being a fragmented portfolio falling under the responsibility of various government departments and (iii) migration being a politically sensitive issue, often leading to a focus on border management and control rather than international development.

The international community has, for several decades, been engaged in exploring the potential migration offers for the realization of development goals and vice versa. Opportunities for progress have, to a certain extent, been conditioned by differences in goals and strategies between countries of origin and countries of destination. The GFMD was established, in part, to remedy this and to contribute to the building of confidence as well as the development of a common language among all participating stakeholders. Results to date have been positively reviewed. Separately, at the initiative of the UN Secretary-General, the Global Migration Group (GMG) was established and now includes 15 UN entities -- including UN DESA, UNDP, UNFPA, OHCHR, ILO and the World Bank -- and IOM.

The international community has for several decades been engaged in assuming commitments on migration and development. However, there are real challenges when it comes to establishing robust international governance structures that could take on the sensitive and the complex tasks at hand.<sup>6</sup> Even if the series of High-Level Dialogues under way and the GFMD have produced some progress, there is still a clear lack of results with regard to the realisation of the full developmental potential of migration.

## **4. Ways to include migration into the global development agenda**

When looking ahead at the post-2015 landscape, it first of all has to be noted that there are increasing arguments for the global development framework not to focus solely on the development of the poorest countries, but also to encompass measures to promote the development of all countries. Such a view would focus less on resource transfers and more

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations, World Economic and Social Survey 2010, Retooling Global Development (New York, 2010)

on dynamic interaction and partnership. Migration fits extremely well with such an approach.

Since migration is relevant for such a broad range of development factors, a substantial case can be made for the inclusion of migration as a cross-cutting issue. Simply put, when addressing a specific development goal, this would require examination of the potential migration might hold towards the advancement of that goal, or alternatively, the extent to which migration – especially unmanaged migration – would be a constraint.

Innovative and evidence-based policies and programmes are needed to enhance the development potential of international migration. To this end, comparable, reliable, timely and accessible data are needed to better assess migration trends, and, in particular, to enhance the impact of migration for human development at the national, regional and international levels. A global programme to improve migration data from all sources, including censuses, registers, administrative sources and household surveys is urgently needed. Data collection should be accompanied by institutional capacity-building, a long-term process that requires a sustained effort and resources.

One specific approach that has been developed in recent years is the concept of “mainstreaming migration into development planning”. This method is based on the view that in order for migration not to create only haphazard windfalls for development, the main development planning tools at the disposal of governments must be put to use to ensure convergence of the dividends of migration. Such convergence would make migration dividends both more visible and raise the prospects for such dividends being put to maximum productivity. There are numerous sectoral programmes with close linkages to migration such as those covering social protection, health services, and financial services into which migration could be mainstreamed, with multiplier benefits.

Also, integrating migration in disaster risk reduction strategies and National Adaptation Plans of Action can both help minimize potentially negative forms of migration and enhance the ability of migration to serve as a positive adaptation strategy, allowing for

diversification of income streams for migrants and their families and reducing dependence on already fragile ecosystems.

In conclusion, due to the multifaceted nature of migration it seems best to treat migration as a cross-cutting issue within a post-2015 development agenda. Methods of mainstreaming migration into development planning should be promoted as should mainstreaming migration into resilience and adaptation strategies.

## **UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda**

### **Membership**

*Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Co-Chair*

*United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Co-Chair*

*Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*

*Department of Public Information (DPI)*

*Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)*

*Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)*

*Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)*

*Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)*

*Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)*

*Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG)*

*Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

*Global Environment Facility (GEF)*

*International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)*

*International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)*

*International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)*

*International Labour Organization (ILO)*

*International Maritime Organization (IMO)*

*International Monetary Fund (IMF)*

*International Organization for Migration (IOM)*

*International Telecommunication Union (ITU)*

*Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)*

*Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS)*

*Office of the Deputy Secretary-General (ODSG)*

*Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR)*

*Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS)*

*Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSAA)*

*Peace building Support Office (PBSO)*

*United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)*

*United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)*

*United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)*  
*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)*  
*United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women)*  
*United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)*  
*United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)*  
*United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP)*  
*United Nations Global Compact Office*  
*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)*  
*United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)*  
*United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)*  
*United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)*  
*United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)*  
*United Nations Millennium Campaign*  
*United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA)*  
*United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)*  
*United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)*  
*United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)*  
*United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)*  
*United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)*  
*United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination Secretariat (CEB)*  
*United Nations University (UNU)*  
*United Nations Volunteers (UNV)*  
*United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)*  
*Universal Postal Union (UPU)*  
*World Bank*  
*World Food Programme (WFP)*  
*World Health Organization (WHO)*  
*World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)*  
*World Meteorological Organization (WMO)*  
*World Trade Organization (WTO)*