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Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Executive summary

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Marta Foresti and Jessica Hagen-Zanker

1 Migration, development and the 2030 Agenda

Migration is one of the defining features of the 21st century. It contributes significantly to all aspects of economic and social development everywhere, and as such will be key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Different opportunities and levels of development in origin countries can drive migration. At the same time, migration can increase development and investment in origin countries, fill labour gaps in host countries and contribute to development along the journey (or, in so-called ‘transit countries’). It is a strong poverty reduction tool – not just for migrants themselves, but also for their families and their wider communities. But migration can also negatively impact development, and though the relationship between the two is increasingly recognised, it remains under-explored.

Migration can contribute to positive development outcomes and, ultimately, to realising the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the ‘2030 Agenda’). To do this, it is essential to understand the impacts of migration on the achievement of all SDGs, and – equally – the impact this achievement will have on future migration patterns. As the details of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) are being debated, it is more important than ever to understand these relationships and their implications for policy.

In a series of eight policy briefings, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) analyses the interrelationship between migration¹ and key development areas: gender, health, urbanisation, climate change, social protection, education, citizenship and poverty. Each briefing explores how the links between migration and these different development areas affect the achievement of the SDGs, and offers pragmatic recommendations to incorporate migration into the 2030 Agenda and beyond to ensure it contributes to positive development outcomes.

1.1 Why the 2030 Agenda can be a useful policy framework for migration

The 2030 Agenda is well placed to reflect and exploit the links between migration and development for three reasons. For migration, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs represent an incredibly important step in development policy-making. The global Targets are the first to formally recognise migration in international development frameworks and processes. This highlights the importance of migration as an issue, and cements it as a factor which can contribute to development and poverty reduction.

The multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral nature of the 2030 Agenda is a useful platform to assess the impact of migration and human mobility on a range of development areas (Lönnback, 2014). This is not just important in terms of problem analysis – for instance, in considering the effects of migration across different dimensions of development – but also offers opportunities for finding policy solutions. The SDGs’ multi-disciplinary nature increases the potential for multi-stakeholder collaboration in labour mobility (Mosler Vidal, 2017).

Crucially, the 2030 Agenda is supported by the necessary political ‘traction’ in different member states and in the multilateral system. The impacts of migration can be felt at all stages of the journey – notably in both origin and host countries – and as such it interacts with different sectors, requiring coordination between multiple actors and enhanced coherence across policies. This kind of coordination is only possible with high-level buy-in, something the SDGs have already secured.

1.2 Migration in the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda does explicitly refer to migration, and recognises the economic value of migrants: migrant workers are expressly considered in SDG 8 on economic growth and decent work; issues of trafficking noted as part of SDG 16 on peaceful societies; SDG 10 calls for a reduction in the transaction costs of remittances; and migrant status is mentioned in SDG 17 as a factor for disaggregation during review and follow up (Table 1). Finally, Target 10.7 – the cornerstone of migration in the

1. The main focus of the project was on international labour migration, though the briefings also considered internal migration (notably the briefing on Urbanisation) and forced displacement (particularly the briefings on Climate change and Education).

Table 1: The Targets that mention migration

8.8	Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.
10.7	Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.
10.c	By 2030, reduce to less than 3% the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5%.
16.2	End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.
17.18	By 2020, enhance capacity building support to developing countries, including for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

Note: That is, those Targets which mention the word ‘migration’, ‘migrant’ or ‘trafficking’.

2030 Agenda – calls for the facilitation of ‘safe, regular and responsible migration’ and the implementation of ‘well-managed migration policies’.

But while migration and remittances are covered by several Targets (Table 1), the relationship between migration and development does not feature elsewhere in the Goals, nor has it been consistently explored.

Migration is relevant to many of the other Goals. If countries are to achieve the SDGs, they need to consider the impact of migration at all levels and on all outcomes, beyond the migration-specific Targets. Our analysis, which has explored the links between migration and 13 of the 17 SDGs (Table 2), shows that migration is not a development ‘problem’ to be solved (as is the focus of SDG 10.7), but a mechanism that can contribute to the achievement of many of the Goals. To do this, governments must identify the linkages between migration and different Goals and Targets as shown in Table 2. Finally, countries must also recognise that migrants may be a particularly vulnerable group who should be considered under the general principle of ‘leaving no-one behind’.

2 Linking migration, development and the 2030 Agenda

Four main conclusions emerge from our analysis of the relationship between migration and different development areas:

1. Migration is a powerful poverty reduction tool, which can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs

Labour migration can reduce poverty for migrants themselves, their families, and their origin and host countries. Migrants and their families benefit from increased income and knowledge, which allows them to spend more on basic needs, access education and health services, and make investments – directly impacting SDG 1, SDG 3 and SDG 4. For female migrants, increased economic resources can improve their autonomy and

socioeconomic status, impacting SDG 5. In origin countries, migration can lead to increased wages and greater economic growth through higher incomes, spending and investment of migrant households. In host countries, migrants can fill labour gaps and contribute to services and the fiscal balance, impacting on SDG 1, SDG 8 and SDG 9.

However, migration does not always achieve its full potential. Our analysis on migration and urbanisation finds that poor, urban migrants often work in the informal sector where the rewards of migration are lower (Lucci et al., 2016). In relation to poverty, our research reveals that the high costs involved in different stages of the migration process reduce financial payoffs, and that restrictions on mobility prevent those who would benefit the most from migrating in a regular and orderly way (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2017b). Large and unexpected migration flows can also disrupt education systems, disadvantage migrant and refugee children, and create tensions in host communities (Nicolai et al., 2017).

2. The specific risks and vulnerabilities of migrants are often overlooked

The risks and vulnerabilities of migrants throughout the migration process are often overlooked in development processes, the 2030 Agenda included. Migrants experience both migration-specific vulnerabilities – that is, experienced by migrants only – and migration-intensified vulnerabilities – when migration exacerbates a disadvantage that can be experienced by all (Sabates-Wheeler and Waite, 2003). For instance, a migration-specific vulnerability is that female migrants, working in less regulated and less visible sectors, are at greater risk of exploitation and abuse, including trafficking (O’Neil et al., 2016). Or that migration due to climate change can lead to further risk accumulation in cities (Wilkinson et al., 2016). An example of a migration-intensified vulnerability is that migrants are more likely to live in informal settlements, lacking access to health, education, water and social protection services (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2017a; Nicolai et al., 2017; Tulloch et al.,

2016). Beyond SDG 16.2 (trafficking) and 8.8 (labour rights and secure work environments), these risks and vulnerabilities are not considered in the 2030 Agenda.

3. The implementation of existing programmes of support for migrants is often weak

In principle, three quarters of the world's migrants are entitled to some form of social protection through a multilateral, bilateral or unilateral agreement. But in practice, enforcement of these agreements is poor (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2017a). Access to basic services, such as health, education and social protection, is key for migrants' livelihoods and development prospects. But while in some cases, migrants can access such services through existing or specifically designed programmes, the implementation of such programmes is often weak and levels of uptake low.

A number of factors contribute to this, including limited capacity in implementing institutions, funding gaps, a lack of political support and reluctance among migrants to participate. For instance, while migrants in Thailand are covered by the country's universal health care scheme, uptake is low due to language and cultural barriers, fear of discrimination, fear of losing work due to absence and poor employer compliance with the scheme (Tulloch et al., 2016). Likewise, while often eligible for education, immigrant students tend to face greater difficulties than their host country peers in accessing education and achieving good learning outcomes (Nicolai et al., 2017).

4. There are major data gaps

Finally, data is often not disaggregated by migrant status or comparable across different groups and countries. As a result, we do not know the share of migrants actually able to participate in social protection programmes, access health services or attend school. The collection and monitoring of this disaggregated data, accompanied by migrant-specific indicators, is vital to understand the vulnerabilities and needs of migrants. Only then can governments and NGOs design migrant specific and sensitive support. Unfortunately, there are no internationally standardised approaches for collecting this data, and coordination of the data that different actors have already collected is limited. Within the 2030 Agenda, there are two Targets that could facilitate the implementation of coherent policies and programmes to support better coordination and data. Target 17.18 focuses on data and monitoring, crucially including a call for disaggregation of data by migrant status. Meanwhile, Target 16.6 calls for the development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions through which migrants could have recourse to hold governments, service providers and individuals to account.

3 Implications for migration and development policies

Development policies and programmes can be part of a comprehensive strategy to better manage migration and make the most of its economic and social benefits. To do this, migration must be 'mainstreamed' in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda: the links, opportunities and challenges related to migration under specific Goals and Targets need to be identified and highlighted. Policy-makers need to consider, measure and take account of migration to harness its positive benefits and reduce potential challenges.

The multiple facets of the relationship between migration and development offer concrete policy entry points to help achieve the SDGs – including in specific sectors, such as health and education. For instance, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) decent work agenda is highly relevant to migration. Any programming as part of this agenda should consider the specific vulnerabilities of migrants in the workplace (see Lucci et al., 2016) and the specific barriers migrants face in accessing work-place social protection schemes (see Hagen-Zanker et al., 2017a).

3.1 The Global Compact for Migration: a unique moment of opportunity

The links between migration and development also have implications for migration policy and practice, particularly the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), which will be agreed by the UN member states in 2018. The GCM – an effort by states to work towards a common approach to address global migration – represents a unique moment of opportunity to put the nexus between migration and development on the global policy agenda. After years of debate that saw limited contact and collaboration between migration and development policy and practice communities, we are now at an important crossroads. Two years after the agreement of the SDGs and one year from the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the GCM is a chance to contribute to real progress. The SDGs should be a part of this (Foresti, 2017).

The SDGs provide a holistic and comprehensive framework to ground the migration-development nexus in the GCM. It will be important not to limit the focus to specific Targets on migration and remittances, but rather consider the role of human mobility to achieve all the Goals (ibid.). And, while the GCM framework and aspirations are global and grounded in international cooperation, actions need to be locally led and rooted in specific contexts, countries, regions and markets where particular development opportunities and challenges exist (ibid.).

3.2 The need for a new narrative

But how to do development is as important as what to do. There is the risk that viewing migration through a development lens may reinforce or replicate unhelpful dichotomies of donor and recipient or origin and host country. For example, the fact that in some host countries (especially in Europe) development aid is being used as part of a broader strategy to deter migration raises many concerns; not only it is ineffectual (there is no evidence that aid can affect migration patterns) but it also risks misinforming the public about the positive relationship between migration and development. Instead, the SDGs are an opportunity to frame migration and development relationships between countries as reciprocal and mutual, under a global framework.

The GCM consultation process also highlighted the need for a fresh narrative that goes beyond the negative connotations and perceptions that are present in both migration and development debates. A new vocabulary could help achieve this, and avoid replicating common misconceptions. We propose three new ways to talk about migration and development to move the debate along (Foresti, 2017): investment, innovation and inclusion.

- **Investment.** Beyond aid or remittances alone, focus on investing in future societies for all, in line with the 'leave no one behind' imperative. This includes harnessing the potential of diaspora, civil society innovators and entrepreneurs as private sectors and civil society.
- **Innovation.** Build and expand on the initiatives that already exist especially at local and country levels: diaspora bonds, global skills partnership, extension of rights for citizens on the move, financial inclusion through digital technology/mobile money, training and skills matching/investment etc.
- **Inclusion.** It is key for development and migration policies to be inclusive and not targeted at specific groups alone. They also need to be explicitly aimed at expanding rights and opportunities. In practice, there is a need to broaden access to services, ensure portability of benefits and expand access to inclusive finance.

Moreover, while the 2030 Agenda provides a useful, broad policy framework with political traction, on its own it will not be enough to achieve change. We need to build coalitions and partnerships – between countries, cities, with development organisations and actors, with private sector – and to identify and work on realistic and politically viable objectives. Strategies should be flexible and modalities of intervention should adapt to specific needs and opportunities. It will be important to avoid 'blueprint' approaches and unrealistic promises if we are to make the most of bringing these two interlinked agendas together for concrete change.

Table 2: The impact of migration on different SDGs and Targets

Goal	Target	Link with migration	Briefing
 <p>1 NO POVERTY</p>	1.1	Migration is a powerful poverty reduction strategy, for migrants themselves and their families in origin countries. It has substantial positive impacts on income and other areas of human development.	Poverty
		Increased immigration does not lead to higher poverty rates in host countries; in fact, migrants often add value to domestic economies.	Poverty
		Rural to urban migration contributes to economic development and to overall poverty reduction.	Urbanisation
		Access to education for migrants can lead to rising incomes.	Education
	1.3	Labour migrants can be a particularly poor and vulnerable group, but often lack eligibility for legal social protection and/or are not effectively covered. Where migrants are covered, benefits are often non-portable, further reducing coverage amongst a group that is highly mobile.	Social Protection
	1.4	Migration can help families in countries of origin to improve their wellbeing through increased income and consumption. Indirect effects include higher savings, investment and protection from shocks and stresses.	Poverty
	1.5	The poor are the most vulnerable to climate change. They are likely to live in high-risk areas, have fewer means to prepare, and lack information to anticipate, and respond to, a disaster. Yet they are also the people who will find it hardest to migrate.	Climate change
	1.a	Labour migrants present an opportunity to increase the tax base, and a greater number of contributors to social insurance-type schemes leads to better risk pooling and financial sustainability.	Social Protection
		Remittances and other forms of diaspora financing can be mobilised to improve infrastructure, services and development more generally.	Poverty
 <p>2 ZERO HUNGER</p>	2.2	Migrants are a particularly vulnerable group but may not be reached by assistance programmes aimed at improving nutrition.	Health
 <p>3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</p>	3.1	Eligibility for health access is often tied to citizenship/permanent residency status, with only some countries opening up (emergency) health care to all, regardless of status.	Citizenship
		Migrants, particularly those without legal residence permits, sometimes experience higher maternal mortality and morbidity relative to the host populations.	Health
	3.8	As internal migrants are often in the informal sector they risk exclusion from coverage of insurance schemes and in many cases are not considered in universal health coverage programmes.	Health
 <p>4 QUALITY EDUCATION</p>	4.1, 4.2, 4.5,	Migration helps improve education access and educational outcomes for families in origin countries, yet migrant children in host countries often suffer disadvantages in accessing quality education.	Education
		4.1	Eligibility for primary and secondary school education can be tied to citizenship/permanent residency status, which means that migrant children can be prevented from accessing education, particularly children who are undocumented. Often this also includes second generation migrants.
	4.4	Internal migrants often lack the skills and training required to access decent jobs and as a result end up working in low-productivity jobs in the informal sector.	Urbanisation
	4.7	Education plays an important role in social integration, economic mobility and learning outcomes for migrant children.	Education
	 <p>5 GENDER EQUALITY</p>	5.2	Migrant and refugee women and girls can experience violence at all stages of the migration process, especially during transit (e.g. at refugee camps) or at their destination (e.g. by an employer).
5.4		Many migrant domestic workers are female. Actions that increase the value of domestic work would reduce the burden of unpaid work and enhance the well-being, dignity and status of paid and unpaid care and domestic workers, including migrants.	Urbanisation

Goal	Target	Link with migration	Briefing
	6.1, 6.2	Large-scale movements of people could increase stress on fragile water supply systems.	Health
		8.5	Migration, in particular remittances, can lead to economic growth in origin countries. It can also lead to a reduction in unemployment and increase wages in countries of origin, also affecting poverty indirectly.
		Female migrants and refugees may be prevented from working, or may experience de-skilling or being confined to 'feminine' jobs, often paid or valued less than other work.	Gender
8.8		Low-skilled rural to urban migrants seeking better job opportunities in the city often end up working in precarious occupations in the informal economy.	Urbanisation
		Female migrants in stereotypically 'feminine' work (e.g. live-in care and domestic work) are frequently isolated and therefore more vulnerable to exploitation, violence and abuse.	Gender
	9.5	Migration leads to greater diversity in host countries, and this can foster innovation.	Poverty
		In origin countries, migration can also foster innovation through social remittances, skills transfers and return migration.	Poverty
	10.1	Migration can reduce global inequalities, among countries and people, as people migrate from low- to high-income countries, and send remittances back home.	Poverty
		Whether migration reduces inequality within origin countries depends on where migrants sit on the income distribution. In some contexts, migration can lead to higher inequality as the poorest are often unable to migrate. When the costs of migration are reduced, the potential to reduce inequality is also greater.	Poverty
	10.2	Education can improve the social, economic and political inclusion of migrant children, particularly if they are better educated regarding their host country and able to speak the majority language.	Education
	10.3	Removing legal barriers to accessing education – particularly for the children of irregular migrants and refugee children – would boost enrolment rates, as would ensuring that all people have a legal identity and the necessary paperwork to allow them to enrol in school.	Education
	10.4	Social protection policies often do not guarantee equal access to all workers, which means that labour migrants have lower eligibility for and take-up of social protection. If vulnerable groups are unable to participate in social protection, inequalities widen.	Social Protection
	11.3	Actions that take into account the needs of poor internal migrants, and the urban poor more generally, enhance their well-being and are more likely to maximise benefits of migration for the host city economy.	Urbanisation
	13.1, 13.3	People affected by climate change will seek to diversify their livelihoods and rely on remittances from relatives elsewhere to cope with seasonal variation, extreme events and longer term trends. Adaptation policies can ensure income diversification into less climate vulnerable sectors.	Climate change
	13.2	Not taking into account rural-to-urban migration patterns in the future could result in incomplete adaptation plans, which fail to protect important economic sectors from climate change impacts.	Climate change
	13.3, 13.a	Better consideration of migration as a response to climate change – both extreme and slow-onset changes – and better financial planning are required to divert funds from adaptation to addressing a migration crisis.	Climate change

Goal	Target	Link with migration	Briefing
	16.2	Attempts to eliminate child labour, exploitation and trafficking through financial support to families are all likely to boost education for migrant children by freeing them to receive an education that they would not otherwise be able to have.	Education
		Irregular and young migrants are at greater risk of violence, trafficking and exploitation. Migrant girls are more likely to be trafficked or experience sexual exploitation than boys.	Gender
		When migrants, including second-generation migrants, cannot obtain citizenship or residency status, they are more vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers.	Citizenship
	16.7	Migration can contribute to making host countries more diverse and inclusive. Lack of citizenship or residency can prevent migrants from being full members of society, including access to services, and can lead to tensions and conflict.	Citizenship
	17.8	Data on migration, particularly on internal migration, is very limited. Improving the evidence base is fundamental in order to better understand the scale and impact of internal migration, and design better policies.	Urbanisation
		Data pertaining to migration background and education level should be collected together. This information should be used to support vulnerable groups, and not for reporting to security-related institutions.	Education
	17.18	There are no international standardised approaches for monitoring variables relating to the health of migrants. Development of data collection, monitoring and surveillance mechanisms is needed to understand migrant health needs.	Health

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Overseas Development Institute

203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7922 0300
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7922 0399
E-mail: info@odi.org.uk

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