

*Background Paper on Migration and Mobility within the Post-2015 Agenda<sup>1</sup>*

*Migration and mobility have been drivers of human advancement throughout history. These phenomena affect the life-chances of many beyond the one billion people who move. The individual migrants, their family members as well as the countries of origin and destination stand to benefit. Recognizing that migration will be an important enabler for a number of development goals, we need partnerships, the aim of which is that no one is forced to move and that those who choose to move do so under conditions that expand their capabilities, with basic human rights guaranteed. This requires that governments plan for the opportunities that migration brings and the challenges that arise. In essence, this implies a dual track approach which recognizes both the need for partnerships around migration, and the mainstreaming of migration in the efforts to achieve other development goals.*

### **Migration as a Global Opportunity**

With almost one billion migrants in the world today, either as internal migrants (740 million) or international migrants (214 million), this group makes up approximately one seventh of the world's population. As such, migration is absolutely natural to the human condition and make up a key manifestation of today's interconnected world. Internal migrants form part of a transformative urbanization across the world and according to global estimates, more than 90 per cent of international migrants move for economic purposes. The majority of the latter group remain within their own geographical region and the global patterns show that South-South migration is as dominant as South-North migration.<sup>2</sup>

Migration is both transformative and one of the most powerful and immediate strategies for poverty reduction, at a global level and the individual level. Recognizing its importance in this regard, migration has been termed the oldest action against poverty for most of human history.<sup>3</sup> It is of key importance for local, national, regional and global governance. Failure to include migration in the post-2015 development agenda could therefore jeopardise the relevance of the vision we propose.

The experience of living in another country, or moving to the city, often changes people's aspirations and their demands on their governments. It may change their norms, such as attitudes toward the roles of men and women, or their views on urban and rural ways of life. Migration also transforms societies, introducing diversity into migrant-receiving communities and weaving communities into a dense fabric of transnational exchange.

As a strategy for poverty reduction, economic modelling suggests that the gains from liberalizing the movement of labour across borders, and facilitating circular mobility, would

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<sup>1</sup> This background paper draws on the deliberations at, and background materials from, a *High-level Panel Expert Policy Dialogue on the role of migration in the post-2015 development agenda*, hosted in Stockholm, 26 February, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> UNDP (2009) Human Development Report, *Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development*.

<sup>3</sup> Galbraith, J. K., (1979) *The Economics of Mass Poverty*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

be at least as great, or possibly even greater, than the potential gains from further liberalization of the movement of goods or capital.<sup>4</sup> For individuals, leaving a poor country for a rich one and finding work in their normal occupations is likely to multiply their incomes many times over.<sup>5</sup> The ability to move, or mobility, is thus a freedom that expands human capabilities and is a core of the human development agenda.

Concern is sometimes expressed that the potential impact of migration on the reduction of extreme poverty is limited because the poorest people do not have the resources needed in order to move. But migration does not only affect the people who move. It is estimated that migrants in higher income countries sent back more than USD 400 billion to recipients in lower income countries in 2012.<sup>6</sup> Remittances are thus three times the level of official development aid to the same countries. Some of this money is used by family members to purchase goods and services locally, with multiplier effects; the benefits from migrant driven trade and investments as well as skills brought back also spread across societies.

In essence this means that migration affects life-chances of many more than the one billion people who migrate. Still, migration is distinct from other enablers in that it is an individual undertaking. Without the migrant there would be no migration. This underlines that our approach to migration in the post-2015 development agenda needs to be people-centred.

### **Links to the post-2015 development agenda**

As the High-level Panel meets to reflect on partnerships and cooperation for development, we are focusing in on strategies for implementation of the development agenda. By so doing, we are addressing one of the key shortcomings of the MDG-framework – i.e. the limited attention to *how* to achieve the goals that were set. In the work of the UN Task Team on the post-2015 development agenda, calls have been made for acknowledging *enablers*, i.e. the means towards development. Migration has been recognized as one such enabler.<sup>7</sup>

The Millennium Development Goals do include one goal that is more instrumental in nature than the others: MDG 8 calls on the international community to “develop a global partnership for development.” Its constituent elements address functional issues such as trade liberalization, development assistance, access to essential medicines and information and communications technology etc. In order to shape a global consensus on the new development agenda, we need to consider some of the challenges of the current development agenda and the global partnerships entailed therein. The review of these partnerships by the UN Task Team concludes that they are weakened both by the absence of concrete targets and by the lack of explicit linkages between the partnerships and the other development goals (MDG 1-7).<sup>8</sup> It emphasises the importance of considering a number of global trends that affect the possibilities of achieving development objectives. Migration is, again, identified among these trends.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/01/29/five-things-economists-know-about-immigration/>

<sup>5</sup> UNDP (2009) Human Development Report, *Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development*.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank (2012) Migration and Development Brief 19, November 20.

<sup>7</sup> UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, (2012) *Realizing the Future we Want for All: Report to the Secretary General*.

<sup>8</sup> UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, (2012) *New partnerships to implement a post-2015 development agenda*. Discussion note, March 2012.

Considerable evidence exists to document how this trend enables development at different levels:

- 1) Migration can be an enabler of individual capabilities and human development by enhancing people's income, health, and education. The 2009 Human Development Report found that those migrants who moved from countries with a low human development index (HDI) to a higher HDI country experienced, on average, a 15-fold increase in income; a doubling in education enrolment rate; and a 16-fold reduction in child mortality.<sup>9</sup>
- 2) Remittances have been shown to reduce poverty among families left behind by supplementing household incomes and enabling them to invest in housing, health and education.
- 3) Migration can also enable national development opportunities by supplying countries with needed labour and skills, and by promoting innovation<sup>10</sup>.
- 4) For a number of countries, remittance flows make up a significant share of GDP and represent the largest source of foreign currency earnings, allowing countries to pay for critical imports, gain access to private capital markets, and pay lower interest rates on sovereign debt.<sup>11</sup>

Migration is thus a key driver of development for the individual migrants, their family members as well as the countries of origin and destination.

Linking this to the current MDGs, there are strong indications, beyond the evidence above, that migration has enabled and impacted progress towards all of the seven development goals to varying degrees. Through accessing labour markets, whether internally or internationally, and remitting savings to family members back home, migrants have increased levels of income (MDG 1). Household surveys show that remittance-receiving households commonly invest in the education of their children, enabling progress toward MDG 2. They also show that remittance-receiving households have better access to medicines and health care, enabling progress toward MDGs 4, 5 and 6. With regards to gender equality and empowerment, there are signs of increasing numbers of women migrating independently to find work, many of whom may enjoy increased independence and higher status within the household and among their peers. Those who remain at home while the head of household emigrates may find themselves taking on additional responsibilities, but also gaining greater autonomy, thus contributing towards MDG 3. Even the targets set under MDG 7, pertaining to living conditions, access to water and sanitation, are affected by migration. On the one hand, increased income from migration allows investment in such goods. On the other, urbanization can lead to an increase in the number of people in slum dwellings and a stress on basic services.

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<sup>9</sup> UNDP (2009) Human Development Report, *Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development*. The HDR also found that the selectivity of migration flows – the tendency for those who move to be better off and better educated in the first place – can only explain a fraction of these gains.

<sup>10</sup> Economic research suggests that foreign nationals living in the United States accounted for 25.6 percent of all patent applications and founded 26 percent of start-ups, including a majority of Silicon Valley start-ups. An expansion of high-skilled visas passed in 1998 increased revenue at affected companies by 15 percent. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/01/29/five-things-economists-know-about-immigration/>

<sup>11</sup> World Bank (2012) Migration and Development Brief 19, November 20.

But the impacts of migration are extremely complex and at times contradictory. While remittances may lead to better access to health care for households that receive them, it is commonly believed that the emigration of medical personnel has disrupted health care in some settings. Notwithstanding the challenge this poses to countries experiencing this type of *brain drain*, health care systems in countries of origin may benefit from ties to doctors, nurses and medical researchers in the diaspora. Linkages to development outcomes are usually non-linear and context-specific.

Another example of this complexity can be found in the impact of migration on women's empowerment. While there is evidence that migration has contributed towards this aim, many women encounter grave risks in the process of migration, and find themselves radically disempowered in exploitative or abusive situations. This is often linked to broader gender inequalities in society or a lack of legal protection in the sectors in which they find work. Returning or visiting migrants may bring with them more egalitarian views of gender roles – or more restrictive ones, depending on the norms in their countries of destination, and whether migrants embrace or reject them.

If the contribution of migration to development goals is overlooked, development planners are neglecting a huge potential for development. Similarly, badly managed migration can expose migrants to extreme vulnerabilities and lead to tensions in both countries of origin and destination. Hence, in order to maximize the positive effect of migration on development and minimize its negative implications, government-policy conducive to expanding the capabilities of migrants is needed, along with partnerships between and within countries and with non-state actors such as the private sector and civil society.

Before providing recommendations, the High-level Panel will need to consider some of the highly political reasons why migration was not included in the Millennium Declaration or the current MDGs.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, migration has to do with national sovereignty of deciding who enters a country, on what terms and for how long. As such it touches upon a very national agenda. On the other hand, migration is a manifestation of the right to leave any country, which is enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Reconciling individual mobility with national sovereignty is thus at the heart of this controversy. Adding to this, although migration is partly a transnational phenomenon, migration has been inadequately addressed in multilateral settings.

### **Concrete suggestions/recommendations**

As the High-level Panel, we have been tasked to provide the vision of a bold and practical development agenda. We should not shy away from this challenging task. Hence, despite what is often referred to as the “toxic politics of migration”, we need to present a narrative that acknowledges the contribution of migration to the development goals, as an enabler, and propose partnerships that are politically viable and could gain consensus.

A starting point for such a consensus would be that *migration should not be forced*. Nonetheless, recognizing that migration is a natural condition of mankind, we should equally respect that mobility, i.e. the freedom of movement, is a human right. We must still respect the sovereignty of states to decide who gets to enter and on what terms. This suggests that our

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<sup>12</sup> Migrants as a group were mentioned under human rights, noting the need for special measures to ensure the respect for and protection of the human rights of this group. However, migration as a phenomenon that contributes to development was not mentioned.

efforts should focus on the *quality*, not the *quantity*, of migration. This also resonates well with adopting a *people-centred approach*. Our proposition should thus strive towards a situation whereby *those who choose to move do so under conditions that expand their capabilities and with basic human rights guaranteed*. This requires that *governments plan for the opportunities that migration brings and the challenges that arise*.

Seeking to capture the essence of the narrative, the aim of such partnerships might read, “Creating cooperative agreements for human mobility to ensure safe, lawful, less costly movements across or within borders.” Examples of such voluntary partnerships, negotiated by relevant states, local authorities and other stakeholders include: the G20’s commitment to reduce the transaction costs of remittances by five percentage points by 2014<sup>13</sup>; regional mobility schemes; and the Chinese experience of opening up internal mobility, which has contributed to industrialization, urbanization, economic growth and labour market development<sup>14</sup>.

As suggested above, for partnerships to be meaningful, they need to be based on, and support, the specific goals that we set ourselves. They cannot be elaborated in the void. The proposed partnerships thus need to be concretized both in terms of targets and in relation to how they enable other goals. This could imply targets for reducing the costs of migration (including e.g. recruitment, documentation, discrimination and exploitation), but this would need to be complemented by how it enables access to *decent work*, to *empowerment of women* or enjoyment of *human rights* etc. Other targets could relate to increasing the portability of assets accrued by migrants (e.g. savings, pensions, work experience and qualifications). Again such targets would need to clarify how they enable goals related to *levels of income*, *school completion rates*, *health outcomes*, *social protection* etc.

Regardless of how the development goals come to be formulated, migration will be a key enabler for a number of them. The narrative that links migration and mobility to the post-2015 agenda could thus draw on the linkages illustrated above. In order to ensure that we maintain a people-centred agenda, any formulation of targets or indicators for vulnerable groups in the post-2015 development agenda, should also consider inclusion of vulnerable migrants.

In terms of the specificity for the means of implementation, partnerships on migration would need to be considered among other partnerships. Countries would need to prioritise among these and interpret what they mean in their specific contexts, at various levels. As stakeholders engage with this exercise, it could be valuable to approach it from a perspective of positive and negative freedoms: removing barriers to human capabilities and providing the means for realizing them. In one country, barriers may include restrictions on dual citizenship and in another, limitations on circular mobility. In terms of providing the means for realizing human capabilities through migration, some countries may want to facilitate recognition of skills, and others provision of services to reduce the transaction costs of remittances.

In short, since migration has been a driver of human advancement throughout history and remains one of the most effective strategies for individuals and their families to improve their lives, the post-2015 development agenda needs to articulate the potential benefits it holds and ways to increase them.

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<sup>13</sup> G20 2011 Cannes Summit Final Declaration. Building Our Common Future: Renewed Collective Action for the Benefit of All, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2011/2011-cannes-declaration-111104-en.html>

<sup>14</sup> Fang, C. et al., (2009) Human Development Research Paper, 2009/09, *Migration and Labor Mobility in China*, UNDP, [http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2009/papers/HDRP\\_2009\\_09.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2009/papers/HDRP_2009_09.pdf)