



IOM Policy Brief



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Migration and the Millennium Development Goals

Introduction

Under the auspices of the United Nations, 191 states adopted the Millennium Declaration in September 2000 and identified eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs aim to:

1. end extreme poverty and hunger;
2. provide universal primary education;
3. achieve gender equality;
4. reduce child mortality;
5. improve maternal health;
6. combat HIV/AIDS;
7. ensure environmental sustainability;
8. develop a global partnership for development.

Although migration is not an MDG, migration can have an important impact on the achievement of the MDGs. For example, migrant remittances are more important than official development aid, and despite the global economic crisis, remain the second largest financial flow to developing countries after foreign direct investment. “Social remittances” – the skills, know-how, networks and other less tangible resources that migrants contribute to their families and communities – also have a direct impact on the prospects of individuals and their extended families in achieving development targets. Therefore, there is a strong case for factoring migration into plans to achieve the MDGs.

IOM’s position is that migration needs to be better incorporated into all development policies and programmes, including the MDGs. Ignoring the linkages between migration and the achievement of the MDGs is likely to make it harder to actively harness migration’s beneficial effects and mitigate its negative consequences. Strategies to enhance the positive impact of migration on the achievement of the MDGs need to be developed. This paper provides some examples of the linkages between migration and the MDGs, and suggests a number of concrete steps which could be taken to ensure that migration is better incorporated into plans to achieve the MDGs.

Some examples of the links between migration and the MDGs

There is now a growing body of research on the impact of migration on development which demonstrates the effects of migration on poverty, gender equality, health and education (see IPPR/GDN 2010, for the results of recent international research). IOM has also published many studies



on migration and development over the last 10 years (see <http://publications.iom.int/bookstore>). In 2005, IOM published a first report highlighting the linkages between “the Millennium Development Goals and Migration”. In this report, IOM discussed the linkages between migration and the eight MDGs, with specific focus on poverty alleviation, gender, health, environmental sustainability and global partnerships.

IOM found that the interlinkages between migration and the MDGs are complex and can be both positive and negative. For example, concerning MDG 1 (“eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”), whilst international migration can contribute to a decline in the number of people living in poverty, the issue of brain drain may present a serious challenge to development efforts in some countries of migrant origin.

Concerning MDG 3 (“promote gender equality and empower women”), migration can allow rural women to gain autonomy when they move to urban areas and take paid work outside the home. Qualitative studies in Ecuador, Mexico and Thailand have demonstrated such effects (UNDP, 2009). However, migration can also pose problems for the achievement of gender equality. A whole set of issues concerning the vulnerability of female migrants, ranging from the access of women to legal channels of migration in the country of destination to counter-trafficking measures in countries of origin, needs to be addressed.

International migration has important consequences for all health-related MDGs – from reducing child and maternal mortality to combating the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis (Economic Commission for Africa, 2006). Remittances can improve child and maternal health by allowing the purchase of additional nutritional and medical inputs. On the other hand, the movement of health workers from Africa to richer countries can contribute to the loss of essential skills in the health sector and make it more difficult to improve infant, child and maternal survival rates.

In order to “ensure environmental sustainability” (MDG 7), policymakers will need to understand better how environmental change is likely to affect the movement of people. They will also need to understand better how migration linked to environmental change will impact the achievement of development goals. Most commentators agree that migration resulting from environmental change is likely to continue to increase in the foreseeable future. An increasing number of people in developing countries are being displaced due to the rise in the number of natural disasters. In 2008, 20 million people were displaced as a result of sudden-onset climate-related weather events. Many more people may choose to migrate due to the impact of slow-onset changes in the environment which make it increasingly difficult to maintain their livelihoods in their current location.

Discussion of mechanisms for managing environmental migration is in its infancy, with few countries having developed specific policy instruments in this area. At the same time, the existing frameworks which have been developed to help poorer countries adapt to climate change, such as National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) include few references to migration (IOM, 2009). Mainstreaming migration into development, climate change and environment policy to minimize the risks and maximize the benefits of human mobility should be acknowledged as a priority issue for policymakers as they seek to plan for environmental and climate related challenges in the future.

Lastly, it should be noted that a lack of respect for the human rights of migrants in the countries of destination reduces their ability to contribute to development. When not enough attention



is paid to the role of human rights during the migration process the protection of migrants is not given priority. Where migration is seen only in economic terms, migrants may come to be regarded as commodities, rather than as individuals entitled to the full enjoyment of their human rights. Migration, development and human rights are intrinsically interconnected. Respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of all migrants is essential in order to reap the full benefits of migration for development.

Migration still ignored in MDGs debates

A recent review of MDGs country strategy documents found that none of them systematically incorporates the role of migration to any significant extent (Lucas, 2008). Migration receives limited attention in the mid-term review of achievement of the MDGs. More recently, the 2008 and 2009 United Nations reports on progress in achieving the MDGs included references to internal migration as a factor in explaining increasing urban poverty and addressed refugees and conflict-displacement, but did not discuss other areas in which migration might positively or negatively affect the achievement of the MDGs (Martin, 2009).

There are many reasons why migration has not featured much in development plans and MDGs frameworks to date:

- Lack of data and indicators on migration is a major constraint in many countries.
- There is a lack of capacity, expertise and/or financial resources to understand and address these linkages.
- Migration is a fragmented portfolio often falling under the responsibility of various government departments (foreign affairs, interior, social security, health, development, labour).
- Migration is a politically sensitive issue, often leading to a focus on border management and control rather than international development.
- The multiplicity of development planning tools used by developing countries can complicate matters. Most countries employ several poverty reduction/development frameworks, with different stakeholders, agendas, and time frames.

Case for mainstreaming migration into development agendas

Mainstreaming migration into development plans may be defined as the process of assessing the implications of migration on any action (or goals) planned in a development and poverty reduction strategy. Migration issues should be integrated into the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation stages of development and poverty reduction strategies and policies.

The following are the advantages of better linking migration to MDGs frameworks of action and to development plans, more generally:

- Allows migration to be embedded in the broader development debate, which fosters a coherent approach rather than piecemeal uncoordinated actions.
- Ensures that migration is included in national development priorities.
- Promotes coordination among all government departments and the creation of synergies between the work of national actors.



- Places migration within a holistic planning framework which involves assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Facilitates funding and technical assistance for migration activities through the mobilization of resources from international partners for development plans.

Ensuring that migration is better integrated into development policy frameworks is likely to require substantial investments in capacity development. This does not necessarily imply an increase in public spending; it can also refer to the elimination of outdated, inappropriate or inefficient systems, laws or policies.

Developing the capacities to enable countries to mainstream migration into development plans

The theme of IOM's 2010 World Migration Report is the "Future of Migration: Building Capacities for Change". This year's report focuses on the capacities that will be required by States, regional and international organizations, civil society and the private sector to manage migration successfully over the coming decades, including measures which will need to be taken to enhance the benefits of migration for development.

A shortly-to-be-published inter-agency handbook on "Mainstreaming Migration into Development Planning" identifies in detail the capacity-building priorities for mainstreaming migration into development planning. Critical steps include:

- establishing a plan to collect and analyse relevant data;
- preparing national migration profiles;
- creating an institutional migration and development structure;
- developing a national plan of action on migration and development;
- securing international organization expertise;
- setting up a core team including a national focal point and expert facilitator;
- promoting awareness-raising among governments, donors, international organizations, NGOs, academia and the private sector.

Cross-cutting capacity requirements include expert advice on institutional reform, leadership capacities, training and mechanisms for accountability. The next step will be to test out the handbook in some pilot countries to demonstrate in practice how capacities to mainstream migration into national development plans can be enhanced. A key first step will be to assess data gaps and develop a plan to produce the data and indicators that will be required by policymakers.

Better evidence on linkages between migration and the MDGs – Migration Profiles

Migration does not figure directly or indirectly in the various targets that are used to evaluate progress towards the MDGs. The lack of data and indicators on migration in many developing countries is a major constraint limiting our ability to mainstream migration into development plans and to track how migration impacts on the MDGs. Most developing countries do not produce a



regular report concerning their national migration situation. And most reports about the national human development situation in a country include few references to migrants and the impact of migration on development.

A recent report from the Commission on International Migration Data for Development Research and Policy, for instance, cites the non-existence or inaccessibility of “detailed, comparable, disaggregated data on migrant stocks and flows as the greatest obstacle to the formulation of evidence-based policies to maximize the benefits of migration for economic development around the world” (CGD, 2009). Many countries already collect a wealth of data on foreign citizens and immigrants, but often fail to take full advantage of this knowledge as information is often dispersed between different ministries and agencies.

The European Commission in 2005 proposed that each country around the world prepare a national migration profile which would bring together in a systematic fashion the existing data on migration in a given country. Through the preparation of such reports, States could better identify data gaps and obtain a better understanding of the overall impact of migration related policies. If such reports are updated regularly, they can provide a means to track the impact of migration on development over time. The process of preparing a migration profile can promote discussion about how to develop a more coherent migration policy and greater coordination between different ministries and stakeholders.

In recent years, IOM has worked with national governments to help them prepare migration profiles in over 30 countries around the world, including Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe. Originally, migration profiles were conceived of as a concise statistical report, prepared according to a common framework, which could make it easier to understand “at a glance” the migration situation in a particular country. Over time, the migration profile has evolved into a more elaborate process involving consultation with many different actors, in an effort to help identify and develop strategies to address data gaps and produce the evidence required to inform policy. A new generation of “extended migration profiles” are being developed which will aim to develop new indicators and data sources based on original research and data capacity-building.

It should be stressed that Migration Profiles are owned by governments and concerned countries define the priorities, objectives and scope of a national profile. International agencies support the process. The preparation of a Migration Profile is a sustained process of activity that should be implemented by special inter-ministerial task forces or similar entities, to be supported by technical cooperation among specialized international agencies.

Conclusion

Factoring migration into plans to achieve the MDGs is a matter of concern for both development and migration policy. On the one hand, it means better integrating migration concerns into development strategies; on the other hand, it requires improved understanding of how development policies will affect migration patterns. It is therefore important that the opportunities of migration are seen as one factor in the context of necessary local and national policies to achieve the MDGs, together with other relevant policies and assistance.



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