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Migration and sustainable development

1. Introduction

As discussions for Rio+20 progress, migration has been recognized for its increasing importance and relevance to the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, as well as for its influence on all regions of the world. This issues brief serves as a contribution to the discussions: it provides an overview of migration in the context of sustainable development, reviews related international commitments and their achievements since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and sketches a way forward for future discussions.

2. Significance of migration to sustainable development

Human mobility at international and internal scales is at its highest levels in recorded history. Although the share of international migrants in the world's population has remained at approximately 3 per cent for more than 20 years, their absolute numbers have increased significantly: in 1990, approximately 156 million people lived outside their country of birth, but today this figure has increased to approximately 215 million. At the same time, today approximately 740 million internal migrants are estimated to have moved away from their places of birth within the borders of their own countries. The headline figure is thus that one person in seven in the world is in a migratory state in some form: migration has accelerated to become a global megatrend of the 21st century. Moreover, migrants are more culturally and ethnically diverse than ever before, and more women are migrating today either on their own or as heads of households.

In recent years, international and internal migration has increasingly been recognized as a positive force for development, as migrants transfer knowledge and skills to both receiving and origin locations, channel investments and remittances, and foster economic linkages and business opportunities between countries and regions. Carefully managed migration can promote economic growth and innovation in destination locations, and poverty reduction in origin locations. At the same time, while migration can to a certain extent offset labour surpluses in sending countries, receiving countries are taking on associated multiple challenges, including managing labour markets. Harnessing the opportunities that migration provides while addressing its challenges will require countries to create policy and legal frameworks that recognize the patterns and drivers of migration, as well as the characteristics of migrants themselves.

3. Patterns and drivers of migration

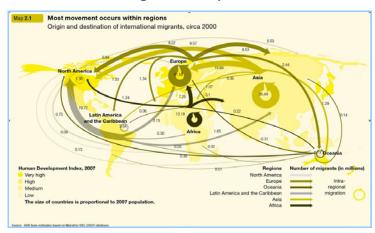
3.1 International migration

If current rates of international migration continue, the number of international migrants worldwide could reach 405 million by 2050. While South-North movement patterns previously dominated the migration landscape, today international migrants

move in equal share from developing to developed countries and between developing countries. Migration is also no longer only unidirectional and permanent; it is increasingly multiphase and multidirectional, often occurring on a temporary or circular basis. 6

Figure 1 shows patterns of inter- and intra-regional movements based on the most recent global census conducted by the United Nations, reflecting that most movement occurs within regions, particularly within Asia and Europe. World Bank data from 2010 indicates that the top migration corridors (excluding the former Soviet Union, which has high number of migrants between the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan) were between Mexico-United States (11.6 million), Bangladesh-India (3.3 million), Turkey-Germany (2.7 million), China-Hong Kong SAR, China (2.2 million) and India-United Arab Emirates (2.2 million).

Figure 1. Origin and destination of international migrants, based on latest global census period 1995-2005⁸



Note: The figure's absolute magnitudes of migration are shown by the thickness of the arrows, the size of each region is represented in proportion to its population, and the colouring of each country represents its Human Development Index category.

Economic migrants are the world's fastest growing group of migrants. At the micro level, individual migrants can be motivated to leave their homes in pursuit of what are perceived to be better economic and social opportunities elsewhere. On a macro-level, migration is stimulated by the globalization of trade, transport and communications technologies, as well as by demographic dynamics: The decline in fertility and working-age populations in many high-income countries is leading to an increasing demand for workers from abroad -- many of whom are young and have limited opportunities at home -- to help sustain national economies. The United Nations Population Division reports that without international migration, the working-age population in more developed regions would decline by 77

million, or 11 per cent, by 2050. In addition, the Population Division reports that migration can help slow the continuing decline in population size in regions such as Europe, but add to population growth in regions such as North America. ¹¹

The majority of migrants today are low- or semi-skilled labourers, many of whom have irregular status in countries and contribute to the growth of illegal employment or non-standard job contracts. While these workers may benefit economically, they risk unfair exploitation and human rights violations. Conversely, professional, technical and skilled migrants are finding that many developed nations are encouraging movement. The Europe Union's legislative agenda on migration, for instance, includes facilitating the flow of intra-corporate transferees. It is also clear that rising economic centres, such as Mumbai, Shanghai, and Abu Dhabi, are benefiting from attracting a highly mobile and skilled labour force.

Additional facets of international migration patterns are those of "brain waste" and "brain drain". Labour market dynamics and legal and policy frameworks in many receiving countries are leading to significant "brain waste", where highly qualified migrants are limited to low-skilled occupations. In addition, the "brain drain" of certain professions can have devastating impacts in developing countries, where lower numbers of professionals already limit social and economic growth. The International Labour Organization has estimated that developing countries lose between 10 and 30 per cent of skilled workers to labour opportunities abroad, with Least Developed Countries most affected.¹⁴

3.2 Internal migration

Like international migration, movement within the borders of a country is driven by the search for better opportunities. Ruralurban and urban-urban migration is primarily driven by economic and social causes, with environmental change increasingly influencing movement. In Asia, workers are increasingly moving to cities and manufacturing centres due to wage differentials and labour opportunities. Case studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have indicated that structural adjustment programmes have also increased rural-urban mobility "as people have diversified [their] occupation portfolios, many of which involve travelling to nearby trade centres". 15 Urban-urban migration is the most common form of movement in Latin America, often taking place from large urban centres to their respective peripheries. In the Middle East and North Africa, regional migration has also increased with downsizing and public resulting occupational diversification. 16 In all regions, temporary migration, or "floating populations", are common, especially for poorer people, who tend to move shorter distances because of "limited resources, skills, networks and market intelligence." 17

As discussed in Issues Brief Number 14 on Population Dynamics and Sustainable Development, rural-urban and urban-urban

migration is expected to contribute to the significant urbanization of Africa and Asia in coming decades, with most growth taking place in medium-sized cities (those with populations between 500,000 and 1 million people). 18 An increasingly urban population provides many opportunities for achieving poverty reduction and sustainable development. When migrants are attracted to cities because of employment opportunities, net benefits are likely to accrue as the concentration of ideas, skill, and capital lead to positive spill-over. 19 Cities have the potential to concentrate and make education, health, finance and other services more accessible, and communication and transport networks contribute to engagement in public life. Remittances -- a portion of migrant earnings -- also help lift families out of poverty in migrant-sending communities, as discussed below. Without sufficient planning, though, troubling existing trends in many urban areas, including rapid slum growth affecting many migrants, could be significantly exacerbated. Today, over one billion people already live in urban slums, and without appropriate interventions that respond to the housing, land, health, education, employment, and other needs of migrants, this number can only be expected to grow. 20 In addition, when migration is driven by falling opportunities in places of origin, the rate of migration to urban centres can exceed demand, resulting in high structural unemployment and underemployment.²¹

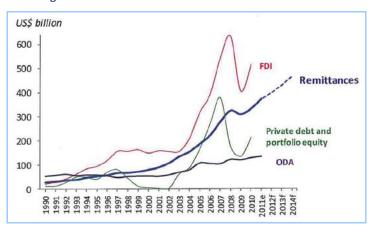
4. Remittances and development

Figure 2 shows that the global volume of international remittances from migrants to their families in low- and middleincome countries is now greater than foreign direct investment and official development assistance (ODA). 22 Remittances help reduce poverty by providing families in countries of origin with additional income that can be used for consumer goods and for investments in education and health. Remittances are also used to finance community projects, such as hospitals or schools, or are invested in business ventures. Increased financial resources can also lead to the reduction of child labour and help households to be better prepared for adverse environmental shocks such as droughts, earthquakes, and cyclones. 23 One study found that "on average, a 10 per cent increase in the share of international remittances in a country's GDP will lead to a 1.6 per cent decline in the share of people living in poverty."24 The World Bank estimated that in 2011, remittance flows to developing countries reached approximately \$372 billion, an increase of 12.1 per cent over 2010, reflecting a steady increase from the global financial crisis of 2008. The top recipients of officially recorded remittances in 2010 were India (\$64 billion), China (\$62 billion), Mexico (\$24 billion), and the Philippines (\$23 billion). Other large recipients included Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Vietnam, and Lebanon.²⁵

While internal remittances are under-reported, evidence indicates that internal migration, like international migration, can contribute significantly to poverty reduction. Studies in India, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Mexico, and Indonesia, have found poverty

rates in households with a migrant fall by as much as one-half during periods studied. A study in Ghana indicated that seasonal migrant earnings contributed to approximately seven per cent of total household income and 14 per cent of total cash income. In Morocco, remittances from urban to rural areas are estimated to account for up to 30 per cent of the income of poor people; in China, \$45 billion were remitted to rural households by approximately 98 million out-migrants in 2003. Elike remittances from international migrants, internal remittances may be spent in ways that generate local employment, contribute to the establishment or expansion of businesses, or lead to improved education or health of household members.

Figure 2. Evolution of remittances flows since 2008²⁹



While remittances clearly help lift families and communities out of poverty, it is important to note that investment effects can take many years to materialize in full, with time lags in reception while migrants adapt to new homes and locate adequately paying work, or from political or economic conditions in the place of origin. In addition, relying on remittances for long-term development can lead countries to "overlook more sustainable, productive, wealth generating and equitable development paths that work towards ensuring equal economic opportunities at home so that jobs are generated nationally and individuals are not forced to seek employment or economic opportunities abroad." Addressing economic and social challenges, and providing alternatives to migration, are essential to sustainable development as well.

5. Women and migration

While the large labour movements in Europe and United States in the 1960s and 1970s were male dominated and women and children migrated for family reunification, an increasingly globalized economy and the need for low-paid service sector workers, as well as nurses and teachers, spurred female migration in the 1980s and 1990s. Today, women comprise almost one-half of all migrants. Temale migrants not only make significant contributions to receiving destinations through their labour and knowledge – often filling labour gaps in the domestic and service

sectors -- but also to their places of origin, through sizeable remittances as well as new-found attitudes and skills that can lead to increased independence and greater gender equality. Evidence indicates that while women migrants may receive less in pay than men, they typically send higher proportions of their earnings home regularly and consistently. In addition, women tend to invest remittances in their children more than men, spending on daily needs, health and education, rather than on consumer items. ³⁴

Despite the many benefits that their migration can bestow, however, women are vulnerable to a wide range of risks. While highly-skilled women migrants may exploit the same opportunities as men in the global marketplace or take advantage of open channels for formal nursing or teaching work, many women migrants are often restricted to unstable jobs marked by low wages, the absence of social services, and poor working conditions -- recent research pinpoints the special vulnerabilities of women regarding their "de-skilling" in the labour market. 35 Even when migrating legally, women are often subject to discrimination, arbitrary employment terms and abuses. 36 In the worse manifestation of abuse, women can be victims of trafficking and forced work in the sex trade. The international community is faced with the challenge of how best to harness the contributions of female migration and ensuring the protection of their human and legal rights. 37

6. Environmental migration

The relationship between environment and migration is complex and interwoven with the other socio-economic factors that drive people to move, either voluntarily or by necessity. Some estimates indicate, however, that extreme weather events (e.g., tropical storms, floods, heat waves, etc.) and environmental degradation (e.g., desertification, soil and coastal erosion, etc.) – both of which will be exacerbated by climate change – will move, or permanently displace, up to 200 million people by 2050. Other studies deliberately argue against putting numbers on climate induced displacement because (a) the different climate change scenarios are likely to generate vastly different migration outcomes, and (b) equally significant are the numbers of people becoming immobilized by climate change, as their resources and ability to move dwindle. 39 40

Be that as it may, the majority of environmental migrants are likely to move short distances, from rural to urban areas, as their livelihoods are impacted by environmental degradation and climate change impacts. However, environmentally induced migration out of urban areas is also likely to increase: 10 per cent of the world's population, and 13 per cent of the world's urban population, reside in the Low Elevation Coastal Zone (LECZ) – the contiguous area along the coast that is less than 10 metres above sea-level -- and are at risk from sea-level rise, stronger storms and other seaward hazards induced by climate change. Vulnerable and socially marginalized groups, such as the poor, children, women, and older persons within these regions tend to be the

most vulnerable to environmental hazards. They are also the least likely to have the means to move out of harm's way.

While migration is often considered a survival strategy, it can also be a proactive adaptation approach and key to sustainable development. Migration can reduce risk to lives, livelihoods and ecosystems, and help households and communities cope with adverse environmental effects. The transfer of remittances, knowledge and skills upon migrant return to place of origin can strengthen the livelihoods of families and communities facing environmental challenges. At the same time, though, if not properly planned for and addressed, migration can exacerbate degradation in places of origin, as fewer and fewer remain to tend to resources and those left behind are exposed to more vulnerability, livelihood deterioration and poverty.

7. Current international commitments

Several international agreements recognize the importance of migration to sustainable development. Agenda 21 from the 1992 Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro focuses on expanding knowledge on linkages between migration and the environment, and the development of policies and programmes to address environmental migrants. The 1994 International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD) included an entire chapter on International Migration, focusing on issues related to international migration and development, documented migrants, undocumented migrants, and refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced persons. Other agreements, such as The United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries, the Monterrey Consensus, and UNFCCC Conference of Parties 16 also highlight additional aspects of migration and development, including the need to facilitate remittance transfer and better utilize newfound knowledge and skills of returning migrants. In the 2011 Cannes Summit Final Declaration, G20 countries agreed to reduce the average cost of transferring remittances from 10 per cent to 5 per cent by 2014, "contributing to an additional 15 billion USD per year for recipient families." 45

Due to space limitations, not all commitments located in agreements regarding migration can be listed here. Table 1 below provides selected non-time bound commitments. Beyond the G20 Cannes Summit Final Declaration, no time-bound commitments were located in the reviewed agreements.

8. Delivery on commitments

Progress on achieving international commitments for migration has been mixed. 46 Positive examples and trends include initiatives such as the annual Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and the Global Migration Group, which seek to improve data on the impacts of migration for both sending and receiving countries, address linkages between migration and development, and provide a venue for policy discussions and best practices exchanges at an international level. In addition, in 2010, 16 out of 40 countries in Africa ratified the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families,

and 11 of these countries were implementing the convention. ⁴⁷ In the Caribbean, several countries have taken steps to include migration in development planning. The Government of Mozambique has officially recognized the impact of rural-urban economy and implemented measures to address the internal brain-drain this movement is causing. ⁴⁸

Table 1. Non-time bound commitments on migration

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Source	Selected non time-bound Commitments
Agenda 21	5.9 Better modelling capabilities should be developed, identifying the range of possible outcomes of current human activities, especially the interrelated impact of demographic trends and factors, per capita resource use and wealth distribution, as well as the major migration flows that may be expected with increasing climatic events and cumulative environmental change that may destroy people's local livelihoods.
	5.20 Research should be conducted on how environmental factors interact with socio-economic factors as a cause of migration.
	5.33 Policies and programmes should be developed for handling the various types of migrations that result from or induce environmental disruptions, with special attention to women and vulnerable groups.
	5.34 Demographic concerns, including concerns for environmental migrants and displaced people, should be incorporated in the programmes for sustainable development of relevant international and regional institutions.
	5.39 The capacity of the relevant United Nations organs, organizations and bodies, international and regional intergovernmental bodies, non-governmental organizations and local communities should, as appropriate, be enhanced to help countries develop sustainable development policies on request and, as appropriate, provide assistance to environmental migrants and displaced people.
ICPD, Chapter 3	9.20 (a) To offer adequate protection and assistance to persons displaced within their country, particularly women, children and the elderly, who are the most vulnerable, and to find solutions to the root causes of their displacement in view of preventing it and, when appropriate, to facilitate return or resettlement; (b) To put an end to all forms of forced migration, including 'ethnic cleansing'.
	10. 2(a) To address the root causes of migration, especially those related to poverty; (b) To encourage more cooperation and dialogue between countries of origin and countries of destination in order to maximize the benefits of migration to those concerned and increase the likelihood that migration has positive consequences for the development of both sending and receiving countries; (c) To facilitate the reintegration process of returning

migrants.

Source	Selected non time-bound Commitments
	10.10 (a) To ensure the social and economic integration of documented migrants, especially of those who have acquired the right to long-term residence in the country of destination, and their equal treatment before the law; (b) To eliminate discriminatory practices against documented migrants, especially women, children and the elderly; (c) To ensure protection against racism, ethnocentrism and xenophobia; (d) To promote the welfare of documented migrants and members of their families; (e) To ensure the respect of the cultural and religious values, beliefs and practices of documented migrants, in so far as they accord with national legislation and universally recognized human rights; (f) To take into account the special needs and circumstances of temporary migrants.
	10.16 (a) To address the root causes of undocumented migration; (b) To reduce substantially the number of undocumented migrants, while ensuring that those in need of international protection receive it; to prevent the exploitation of undocumented migrants and to ensure that their basic human rights are protected; (c) To prevent all international trafficking in migrants, especially for the purposes of prostitution; (d) To ensure protection against racism, ethnocentrism and xenophobia.
UN Conference on LDCs	Action by least developed countries: (a) Make efforts to improve access to financing and banking services for easy transaction of remittances; (b) Simplify migration procedures to reduce the cost of outward migration; (c) Take appropriate measures to better utilize knowledge, skills and earnings of the returning migrants; (d) Provide necessary information, as available, to workers seeking foreign employment
Monterrey Consensus	18. It is also important to reduce the transfer costs of migrant workers' remittances and create opportunities for development-oriented investments, including housing. (Note: see also para 124 in 4 th UN Conference on Least Development Countries).
COP 16	14. Invites all parties to [undertake] (f) Measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation, where appropriate, at the national, regional and international levels; (Note: see also paragraph 101 in 4 th UN Conference on Least Development Countries).

However, achievement on commitments has been slow on many fronts. The knowledge base on migration has progressed substantially since 1992; however, it has been severely hamstrung by the lack of common definitions and the timely release of vital statistics, making aggregation and compilation difficult. Unlike other global policy areas, migration also lacks a mechanism for coherent international governance, and countries have signed relatively few multilateral treaties on this issue. ⁴⁹ Instead, migration tends to be a fragmented portfolio within national boundaries, often falling under the responsibility areas of various government departments, rather than under one authority with a focused mandate. As such, migration issues on

the whole tend to be insufficiently acknowledged in development planning tools at the national level, remaining at a conceptual, rather than practical, phase. Surveys completed in 2008 and 2011 found that few countries had mainstreamed migration into MDG frameworks and/or national development plans or strategies. In addition, while some poverty reduction strategy papers refer to the benefits of remittances, others refer to migration in a more negative light, focusing on human trafficking, the loss of skilled professionals, health-related problems and the spread of disease, increased poverty and slum-dwelling, and criminality. In these instances, policy measures tend toward lawenforcement activities, such as curbing irregular migration and trafficking and strengthening immigration and customs services, rather than harnessing the full range of beneficial aspects of migration described above.

9. Towards a new outlook on migration and sustainable development

If managed with forward-looking policies and strategies, both international and internal migration can contribute significantly to sustainable development: it can build social and political networks, help address skills shortages and provide sources of capital, investment and transfer of knowledge. However, if poorly managed – e.g., through lack of legal means for movement, inadequate capture of transferred skills, and barriers to remittance flow – migration can potentially contribute to chronic labour market imbalances, chronic fiscal imbalances and severe income disparity – all of which are risks to the global economy. Si Given these high stakes, as well as the multi-faceted nature of migration, discussions for Rio+20 and for the post 2015 development agenda should recognize migration as a vital crosscutting issue, and ensure mainstreaming of migration into development planning and resilience and adaptation strategies.

Mainstreaming migration and development issues into country level planning frameworks is the most systematic and appropriate way to harness migration's benefits and to mitigate its potentially negative consequences. Mainstreaming aims to ensure that migration and development concerns are addressed in legislation, policies and programmes at all levels -- in sectors such as employment, social protection, health services, and financial services -- and integrated into all stages of development planning, including design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. This would allow migration to be embedded in a broader development strategy, "fostering a coherent approach rather than piecemeal, uncoordinated actions", and help facilitate funding and technical assistance for migration-related activities.⁵⁴

Mainstreaming migration into disaster risk reduction strategies and National Adaptation Plans of Action is particularly important in helping countries build resilience against environmental impacts, including those due to climate change. Both can help minimize potentially negative forms of migration and enhance the ability of migration to serve as a positive adaptation strategy,

allowing for the movement of people in an orderly manner out of harm's way, diversifying income streams for migrants and their families, and reducing dependence on already fragile ecosystems.

Within the context of on-going negotiations for the outcome document of Rio+20, migration could be treated as a crosscutting issue and addressed in a number of different substantive policy areas, including health and population, sustainable cities, small island developing states, natural disasters, climate change, education, gender equality and - in the case of remittances -financing. In addition, when addressing specific development goals for other sectors, it would be useful to analyze the extent to which migration can potentially advance progress towards the goal, as well as the extent to which unmanaged migration might pose a risk to developmental targets. Understanding, for example, how migration and remittances can help achieve primary education goals for girls and boys in rural areas may factor in policy decisions toward easing flow of transactions, while incorporating information on internal migration can promote the development of sustainable cities.

Developing clear-cut developmental goals for migration issues themselves for Rio+20 and beyond may not be meaningful, as the dynamics of people on the move cannot be modelled along strictly deterministic parameters. Goals that involve sovereignty issues would be equally difficult and sensitive to raise. However, it may be possible to discuss certain targets, such as lowering transaction costs for remittances, or even the "transaction-cost" of migration itself due to complex procedures and/or middlemen. Better defined indicators could be developed for measuring progress on putting the proceeds or social-remittances of migration to better developmental use. Such targets and indicators have been discussed in the Global Forum on Migration and Development, but little actionable consensus has emerged to date.

When looking ahead at the post-MDG 2015 landscape, 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 shift the focus on transfers to one on dynamic interaction and partnership. This thinking supports the case for factoring migration into any new global development framework, given the importance of partnerships in this regard for fostering the positive effects for countries of both origin and destination.

The purpose of the Rio 2012 Issues Briefs is to provide a channel for policymakers and other interested stakeholders to discuss and review issues relevant to the objective and themes of the conference, including a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, as well as the institutional framework for sustainable development.

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All Briefs are available here: http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?menu=61

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