



### BACKGROUND NOTE

## How will international migrations be taken into account in the 2030 Agenda?

**T**he subject of international migration and mobility is scattered across different goals and targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Development aid has often focused on helping people to live securely in their own countries, yet demand for mobility across borders remains high, not just from South to North, and not only due to political, economic or environmental risks. The issue will remain a concern well into the future, regardless of whether or not such migration is considered desirable. We must therefore consider how mobility could be better integrated into the 2030 Agenda and its implementation, which is centrally organised and based on the responsibility of sovereign nation states within their geographical limits. This is a critical issue in a period when migrations and refugees make the headlines and fuel political tensions.

### 1. CONTEXT

The increase in international and intra-country mobility appears to be a steady trend that is unlikely to abate in the short- to medium-term (more than 200 million people were considered migrants in 2015, compared to 75 million in 1965). There are many reasons for this, including political factors ranging from oppression to war and open conflict, and socio-economic factors related to demographic growth as well as globalisation, impacting the distribution of job opportunities between countries and regions providing people with freedom of mobility. Environmental changes, both one-off shocks and gradual degradation, have come to the fore as a root cause of the increase in mobility. These changes increase risks, especially to vulnerable people. Migrating to another region within the same country or to neighbouring countries can be considered a possible adaptation strategy, for those who can afford it, but a whole continuum of situations must be considered, between voluntary and forced migration, including official displacement policies.

Moreover, demand for greater cross-border mobility is particularly important for young people and not only from South to North. Indeed, South-South international mobility is actually increasing, and only one third of recent international mobility involves migration from a developing to a developed country. Cross-border mobility

for future generations may be aimed at improving education prospects or job opportunities, but not necessarily intended to result in a permanent move. It will also occur particularly within regional spaces, a scale at which free trade zones supporting the emergence of common markets for goods and services could possibly be linked with agreements on cross-border mobility.

Mobility across national borders is currently a politically sensitive issue worldwide, from Europe and the United States to developing countries in Western Africa or, for instance, countries in crisis like the Central African Republic. Immigration is a growing source of controversy and rejection in domestic debates. This is leading to difficulties in terms of humanitarian aid and how to host the significant numbers of new migrants. This can be seen even in a country like Germany, which has committed considerable resources to the assistance of refugees, but has faced difficult internal policy debates concerning this commitment.

***Migration in the SDG Agenda: SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities has a specific target 10.7 that focuses on well-managed migration policies. SDG 8 on Economic Growth and Decent Work mentions particularly the situation of migrant workers. SDG 16 on Peaceful Societies mentions the issue of trafficking. SDG 17 on Partnerships for the goals mentions migration status as an important category for follow up and review.***

The impact of mobility on destination countries, as well as on the country of origin is debated in the economic literature. Assessments of the costs for destination countries tend to show a benefit for the national economy as well as for the welfare system of ageing societies. Economic studies on distributive effects between and within countries, as well as on overall welfare, still fail to make a convincing case for migration restrictions. While many studies insist on the risk for countries of origin in terms of losing a skilled and highly productive workforce, they also emphasise the role of remittances from migrants in financing local development. Some research also highlights the role of the diaspora in creating key networks, not only for financial flows, but also for knowledge, learning processes and innovation exchanges, potentially both for host and origin societies.

## 2. ISSUES/SOLUTIONS

Against this background, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development revolves around the central role of national governments, within their sovereign borders. They set national targets and are to identify their own specific pathways to sustainable development. However, the ways in which development pathways incorporate cross-border mobility, particularly to deliver benefits for both destination countries and countries of origin, remains under-debated. In which political arena will the sustainable development/mobility relationship be discussed? Regional institutions (e.g., economic commissions of the UN, and economic communities) will play a key role in addressing this blind spot. However, the issue of mobility is one of the interconnections between distant societies beyond regional boundaries, and it intrinsically calls for the involvement of global institutions and arenas in addressing a series of major challenges:

◇ *Gaining a better understanding of cross-border mobility patterns and trends*

Many studies and research teams produce crucial data on migration patterns, their causes and motivations. A better understanding of the differences in these patterns between population groups, and particularly in relation to gender, will be key to ensure that the capacity or the obligation to migrate is not a reinforcing factor of inequality. A better comprehension of the demand for cross-border mobility will be critical to feed the debate at all scales.

◇ *Discussing the possibility of and right to cross-border mobility*

Even if it is a controversial and sensitive issue, the possibility and even the right to cross-border mobility must be discussed in an international policy arena. As discussed above, regional institutions might be the most relevant, particularly when they encompass both a free trade/common market agenda and a relevant governance structure (commission of the ECOWAS, for instance). Such institutions could legitimately put the cross-border mobility issue onto the agenda, even when national governments are reluctant to do so. But as mobility can happen outside the region of origin, global political arenas also have to consider their regulatory responsibility. Advancing the legal status of international migrants and refugees, including environmental migration, could play a key role in this regard.

◇ *Contributing to national level political debates on the role of cross-border mobility for development and sustainability*

Domestic debates will be critical to better integrate cross-border mobility into action and planning to reach development objectives. Failure to analyse domestic debates will inevitably lead to misunderstandings and possibly conflicts, to the detriment of the potential benefits for development and for sustainability. Debates on immigration are often heated, and it is therefore crucial that researchers and experts develop a capacity to feed these debates with proper, nuanced and relevant information, while think tanks and political parties must also develop proposals to integrate the various mobility-related issues.

## 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE SESSION/QUESTIONS

The session will try to better identify the trends and nature of cross border mobility, and how the emphasis put on sovereign nation states in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda can be made more consistent with such trends.

- What do we know about the trends and patterns of cross-border mobility, the demand for it, and its impacts? What do we not know?
- What are the relevant international arenas to advance the debate on the possibility or the right to cross-border mobility: intergovernmental or coordination of non governmental actors, regional or global? Can the 2030 Agenda implementation processes be better coordinated with these arenas?
- How to ensure that national political debates can better integrate cross-border mobility when they deal with development? Can the sustainable development agenda be a relevant way to reframe these questions? Who can play an instrumental role to contributing to such a discussion?

## REFERENCES

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