



Global Migration Group

Acting together in a world on the move

GMG Briefing Note

Migration, food security, agriculture and rural development

Overview

Over 70 percent of the extreme poor worldwide live in rural areas and base their livelihoods on agriculture and other rural activities.¹ The number of chronically undernourished people in the world stands at 815 million², with most living in low-income and lower middle-income countries, many of which have yet to make the necessary headway towards the structural economic transformation.

Although we live in an increasingly urbanized world, it is expected that in 2050 much of the population in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) will still live in rural areas.³ In the context of structural and rural transformation, an increasingly important role is played by rural towns and small cities, as points of intermediation between rural and urban areas.⁴

Poverty, food insecurity, scarce resources, pursuit of education or employment, fear of conflict and violence, limited public services, gender-based discrimination, and the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation are among the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave rural areas of origin. The movement of people in search of better employment opportunities is an inherent part of structural transformation processes in rural economies. In fact, migration of one or more household members is a key component of livelihood strategies for millions of rural households that aim at maximizing income and minimizing livelihood risks.⁵ Once a migrant's journey has begun, food and

¹ ILO. 2008. Promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction. Available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_091721.pdf

² FAO. 2017. The State of Food and Agriculture. Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-17658e.pdf>

³ UNDESA. 2014. World Urbanization Prospects. Available at <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2014-Highlights.pdf>

⁴ FAO. 2017. The State of Food and Agriculture. Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-17658e.pdf>

⁵ Warner, K., Afifi, T., Henry, K., Rawe, T., Smith, C., & De Sherbinin, A. (2012). Where the rain falls: Climate change, food and livelihood security, and migration. Global Policy Report of the Where the Rain Falls Project. Bonn: CARE France and UNU-EHS; Stark, O., & Levhari, D. 1982. On migration and risk in LDCs. *Economic development and cultural change*, 31(1), 191-196.

economic security are important factors in a migrant's decision about whether to continue a journey or settle in the first relatively secure location. Food insecurity concerns are also evidenced along the migratory journey, given the lack of income opportunities and adverse travel conditions, in addition to the potentially crippling costs of transit.⁶ Young female migrants are especially vulnerable to such risks, including the risk of sexual exchange for food and protection.

While no global estimates on the number of international migrants originating from rural areas are available, it is estimated that up to 40 percent of international remittances are sent to rural areas⁷, which provides an indication of the rural origin of a significant percentage of the world's 258 million international migrants. As per the ILO global estimates, 11.1 per cent of the 150 million international migrant workers are concentrated in the agricultural sector.⁸

In rural areas of origin, the contribution of migrants is a valuable resource for agriculture and rural development. Where the credit and/or insurance markets in rural areas are absent or poorly functioning, remittances become a vital risk management tool, relaxing liquidity constraints and providing insurance in case of crisis and shocks, strengthening in this way the resilience of rural populations. In addition, remittances foster investment in agriculture and other rural economic activities with potential for job creation.⁹ Diaspora organizations and returned migrants also help rural areas in the countries of origin through capital investments, skills and technology transfers, information exchange, philanthropy, and social networks. Depending on the context, women who stay behind may gain greater control over productive resources and services, potentially helping to close the gender gap in agriculture and can be a vehicle for their empowerment.

Nevertheless, when people move out of rural areas because of necessity and desperation rather than out of an informed voluntary choice, the risks and challenges associated with migration increase, and the benefits decrease. While migration may reduce pressure on local labour markets in rural areas of origin and foster a more efficient allocation of labour and higher wages in agriculture¹⁰, it is worth noting that rural areas of origin are losing the younger, most vital and dynamic share of their workforce. Where the youth populations are high, strategic investment in their empowerment, education and labour market opportunities are needed to give them the possibility to live to their full potential at home and to stem the tide of out-ward migration.

⁶ WFP. 2017. At the Root of Exodus: food security, conflict and international migration. Available at <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/communications/wfp291884.pdf>

⁷ IFAD. 2016. Migration and Transformative Pathways: a rural perspective. Available at <https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/5eb19611-d4b5-49b0-97ed-81688cf1c6a7>

⁸ ILO Global estimates of migrant workers and migrant domestic workers: results and methodology / International Labour Office - Geneva: ILO, 2015, http://www.ilo.ch/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_436343.pdf

⁹ See GMG briefing note on Remittances, 2018.

¹⁰ FAO. 2016. Migration, Agriculture and Rural Development: addressing the root causes of migration and harnessing its potential for development. Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6064e.pdf>; FAO. 2016. Addressing Rural Youth Migration at its Root Causes: a conceptual framework. Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5718e.pdf>; IFAD. 2016. Migration and Transformative Pathways: a rural perspective. Available at <https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/5eb19611-d4b5-49b0-97ed-81688cf1c6a7>

Key policy issues

Data: A prerequisite to ensuring that migration works for rural populations is to obtain a better understanding of where migrants come from and why they leave their areas of origin through data and evidence aimed to inform evidence-based policies and programmes that address the drivers of migration and moreover support responses in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. At present, only limited data and evidence are available on sub-national areas of origin, migratory reasons, as well as the impacts of migration on rural areas.

Choice: A key policy issue for the international community is how to ensure that migration from rural areas remains a matter of choice rather than an act of desperation. The adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave rural areas are complex and inter-related, and they must be addressed in a holistic way, with a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. In addition, effective preparedness and response measures fostering resilience are needed to address natural disasters in a timely and effective manner. This includes developing shock-responsive safety nets and delivering emergency responses.

Regular pathways: Another key policy issue is how to ensure that regular pathways and support services for migrants are available, accessible and affordable for rural populations that are often left at the margins of labour migration schemes, with the notable exception of temporary and seasonal labour migration schemes in the agricultural sector. These regular pathways must be gender-responsive and ensure the protection of the human rights of all migrants, including their right to work, their rights at work and access to decent work.

Skill recognition: A related policy question is how to ensure the full recognition of skills of migrants working in agriculture, along agricultural value chains and its sub-sectors that can allow them to receive higher salaries than they would if their skills were not recognized. This issue is particularly important for migrant women who tend to be overrepresented in the low-skill sector of the labour market, partly because their skills are either undervalued or not recognized.

Food insecurity crises: Large movements of migrants can trigger food insecurity crises that have to be addressed collectively, through a whole-of-government, whole-of society approach and through international cooperation. Countries and locations that are a source of as well as a host to large numbers of migrants, require a strong and established social protection floor and safety nets that can both mitigate the impact of large-scale shocks and support households after a crisis hits. In this context, particular attention must be given to the nutritional needs of migrants in vulnerable situations, such as pregnant women or nursing mothers, infants, young children and adolescent girls. These categories of migrants warrant a more targeted approach as they are exposed to higher risks of food and nutrition insecurity, and they are often in need of temporary food assistance.

Ways forward

There are three areas in which the international community needs to redouble its efforts to ensure that migration works for rural populations which in turn would help achieve the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). The GCM, as the first overarching international agreement of its kind, presents a unique opportunity for

UN Member States to agree on a common vision on how to make migration work for the benefit of all nations and populations.

Investment in food systems, agriculture and rural development: Responsible investments in food systems, agriculture and rural development are indispensable to ensure that migration remains a matter of choice rather than an act of desperation, especially for rural populations – to achieve inclusive growth, and to achieve the SDGs in areas of origin, curbing the adverse drivers of migration and structural factors that compel people to leave. This requires increased and targeted investment in food security and poverty reduction, through more sustainable food systems, and strengthening of gender-responsive value chains and rural development.

Rural youth are those most likely to migrate in response to the lack of gainful employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, particularly in agriculture and the rural economy. As a consequence, the availability of seasonal/circular labour migration schemes targeting agricultural/rural migrant workers (and especially youth) are key to safe, orderly and regular migration from rural areas. These programmes work even better when complemented with skill-development programmes matching agricultural and rural labour market needs, and supported by public-private partnerships guaranteeing portability of rural workers' skills.

Creating an enabling environment for migrant and diaspora contributions: Member States benefit greatly from creating an enabling environment for migrants and diaspora to contribute to the rural economies of both countries of origin and destination.

Remittances and diaspora investments represent an important source of finance for development in the countries of origin of migrants. Considering that many rural migrants move within their own countries, the amount of remittances received by rural populations become even more relevant. Reducing transaction costs associated with remittances, promoting productive use of remittances and financial inclusion and financial literacy of migrants and their families are concrete measures that help leverage remittances for development.

Diasporas also promote skills transfer, knowledge exchange and social development as development tools for their home countries. At the same time, migrant workers are also widely contributing to the economy of the countries of destination, filling the gaps in labour markets and through the taxes they pay. Existing best practices on the promotion of migrants and diaspora engagement in both countries of origin and destination should be replicated and scaled up.

Horizontal and vertical policy coherence: Given the multi-dimensional nature of migration, Member States often struggle with policy coherence, needing to ensure that agriculture and rural development policies and strategic planning processes take into account all dimensions of migration management and vice versa. A key ingredient of successful and coherent migration policies and agriculture and rural development policies is horizontal and vertical policy coherence through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, by also addressing food insecurity.¹¹ Development cooperation and public-private partnerships have an important role to play in supporting developing countries through capacity building, technical support and technology transfer, enabling them to develop an effective migration governance that proves responsive to rural migrants' needs.

¹¹ FAO. 2016. Policy Guidance Note: Rural migration. Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i8166e.pdf>