



INTEGRATING MIGRATION INTO THE POST-2015 UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

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Executive Summary

By September 2015, the Member States of the United Nations will have negotiated a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and subsidiary targets and indicators. These goals will frame a new international development agenda to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which expire at the end of 2015.

The MDGs did not contain any target setting on migration and development. However, since they were adopted in 2000, international migration has increased by 32 per cent and recorded remittances have increased fivefold. Today, almost as many people are migrating from one country in the global South to another as are moving in the more traditional South-to-North direction. Of the migrants who move to increase their earnings, the evidence indicates that many succeed. The funds they send home are economic lifelines for their families and communities, and in the aggregate may be so large as to impact the national economies of their countries of origin. Meanwhile, migrants make a crucial contribution to the labour markets of their destination countries. In many cases countries of origin and destination have become interdependent, forging links that are likely to only strengthen in the future. Yet migrants face high costs, painful trade-offs, and many risks in the process of migrating.

It is anticipated that the United Nations development agenda (post-2015) will set clear targets and mobilize global action to improve the quality of the migration process. If so, substantial benefits could accrue to 232 million international migrants and their dependents—and, in the form of more development to both their countries of origin and destination. This Issue in Brief looks at the case for migration and development, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region and how migration can be integrated into the post-2015 development agenda. The brief highlights that the following three areas require specific attention: (1) fostering partnerships to promote development, (2) promoting and protecting migrants' rights and well-being, (3) reducing the costs – and risks – of human mobility.



I. Migration and the new development agenda

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were born out of the Millennium Declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2000. Eight distinct goals, together with specific targets, were agreed upon with a target date of 2015. Several of the goals have been met: the halving of extreme poverty, gender parity in primary school enrolment, and a rolling back of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Where the MDGs were successful, it was because of the clear and attainable targets they set, which inspired a concentration of funding and the efforts of civil society and research communities on a number of transformative issues.

As the 15-year span of the MDGs approached its end, the international community set out to develop a framework to succeed the MDGs, commonly called the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. The United Nations initiated the effort with a series of global thematic consultations. Migration became part of a broader dialogue on population dynamics from 2012. Based on a mandate from the conclusions of the second Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 2012, United Nations Member States gathered in New York in the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals to draft a new list of development goals for the post-2015 period.

In September 2013 the United Nations General Assembly agreed formally to convene a global conference at the highest level to establish a new development framework. The conference is planned to be held at the United Nations headquarters in New York City in September 2015.

What has then transpired from the mentioned global consultations and what are main characteristics we can expect to see on a global development agenda for the next 15 years?¹ Judging from the ongoing debate, it seems that several new points will be acknowledged:

- The terms “developed” and “developing,” as used to describe countries, are becoming less relevant; instead, the new agenda will likely highlight the interdependence between the global North and South.
- There is a need to address inequalities between and within countries, leaving no one behind.
- Development assistance has diversified beyond governments, to include the private sector, and private foundations, and alternative sources of financing.
- Partnerships to promote development are key, and may include public-private financing, South-South cooperation, and triangular cooperation.

The main features of today’s unprecedented proliferation of human mobility dovetail remarkably with the above-mentioned points. Migratory flows no longer go in only in a South-North direction, but are multi-directional; migrant remittances have alongside official development assistance (ODA) become a means of improving the living standards of migrant families and communities. Countries of origin and destination alike have major interests in partnering to promote the well-being of migrants and to plan for more predictable flows. Table 1 charts these synchronous elements of development and migration – that policymakers need to be aware of when thinking about migration in post-2015.

Table 1: Development and migration in parallel²

| Contemporary development narrative | Corresponding migration realities |
|---|--|
| The dichotomy between “developed” and “developing” countries is becoming less relevant. | More states are simultaneously sending and receiving significant numbers of immigrants (for example, India and China). |
| The relative importance of official development assistance is decreasing. | Remittances are growing in importance for the gross domestic product of developing countries. |
| New forms of development partnerships are emerging: for example, South–South cooperation and public-private partnerships. | Global and regional consultative processes on migration are increasing. |
| The importance of policy coherence to tackle social, economic and sustainability challenges. | The topic of migration is rarely integrated into development planning, at any level. |

II. Raising awareness of the migration-development nexus (1992–2013)

The relevance of migration for development was highlighted in a string of international conferences starting in the early 1990s. At the first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the importance of migration in the context of the environment and climate change was discussed, as was the vulnerability of migrants (United Nations, 1992). Two years later, participants in the Cairo Conference on Population and Development recognized that “orderly international migration can have positive effects on both communities of origin and those of destination.” (United Nations, 1995) At the time the international community was still concerned with addressing the “root causes”³ of migration, a notion that was abandoned (Hass, 2010) by the fourth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (2011), which focused on supporting the development outcomes of migration by increasing mobility between LDCs and developed partners, and by lowering the costs of migration, as well as the transaction costs of remittances.⁴ This was followed up at the second Earth Summit in 2013, “Rio+20,” where participants (i) counted migrants as stakeholders in sustainable development, (ii) stated that migration needs to be included in an analysis of population dynamics and development, and (iii) insisted that the human rights of migrants be protected (United Nations, 2012).

Several other calls to integrate migration in development planning have been made, notably at the two UNGA High-level Dialogues (HLDs) on International Migration and Development in 2006 and 2013. As a result of the first HLD, participating states created a regular forum for discussing migration outside the United Nations system: the Global Forum on Migration and Development. At the same time the United Nations Secretary-General brought together an interagency group, consisting of relevant United Nations agencies and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), called the Global Migration Group (GMG).⁵ The HLD in 2013 issued a call to integrate migration into post-2015 planning.⁶

III. The case for migration and development

Migration has always been a strategy for improving the human condition, and it remains so today. Human mobility is in our genes. Since the first humans left Africa some 60,000 years ago (National Geographic,

Migration has important impacts on households.

2014), lands have been settled and resettled, cultures conquered, and populations assimilated and merged. Today, some of the most successful societies are those that embrace the complexities of multi-culturalism. Looking at future challenges, Peter Sutherland (2013), the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration, notes that “rising demographic imbalances and economic inequalities, high youth unemployment, the prospect of more frequent economic shocks and environmental disasters, and global competition for skills and talent – all combine to require a collaborative global approach to migration and development over the coming decades.”

Since the MDGs were elaborated in 2000, human mobility and its impact on development has undergone some dramatic changes. First, the number of international migrants has increased by 32 per cent since 2000; there are now an estimated 232 million international migrants (UN DESA, 2013). Second, migrant remittances are growing fast, having increased fivefold since 2000; recorded remittances to developing countries were USD 404 billion in 2013 (World Bank, 2014d). Third, the rate of South-South migration is now comparable to the more traditional South-North migration; IOM estimates that 33 per cent of all migration goes South-South while 40 per cent goes South-North (IOM, 2013).

Migrants typically improve their situation, mainly through increased incomes, and they directly affect the well-being of hundreds of millions more, as families and communities in countries of origin receive remittances and benefit from migrants’ economic and social investments. To add to the global picture of mobility, there are an estimated 740 million internal migrants (that is, migrating within the same nation-state), many of them now in cities (UNDP, 2009). Internal migration has transformed societies, and is expected to continue doing so over the coming decades.

Migration has important impacts on households. Studies demonstrate that migration leads to increased incomes, improved health outcomes, and higher levels of school enrolment (UNDP, 2009). For example, a



study in Pakistan showed that remittances reduce household-level poverty by 7.8 per cent; moreover, the Gini coefficient (a measure of inequality) declined by 4.8 per cent among households that receive remittances (Ahmed, Sugiyarto, and Jha, 2010). At the national level, diaspora groups and transnational communities play an important role in facilitating trade, investment, skills, and technology transfers, and in forging cultural links between countries. For instance, foreign nationals in the United States account for about one-quarter of patent applications and start-ups (Wadhwa, 2008). Migrant remittances represent a high proportion of the gross domestic product (GDP) of many developing countries, comparable to export earnings (World Bank, 2014d).

The amount of remittances sent to developing countries – USD 404 billion in 2013 – is predicted to grow to around USD 516 billion by 2016 (World Bank, 2014d). Remittances are more resilient to economic shocks than other inward financial flows, such as foreign direct investment (FDI). Much remains to be done, however, to lower transaction costs, open new South-South remittance corridors, and increase investment opportunities for diasporas (World Bank, 2014d). Finally, migration is a key factor mediating the supply and demand of labour (Ruhs and Anderson, 2010).

Some studies have been made on the dividends, in econometric terms, that might result from policies to ease mobility. The estimated dividends are comparable to those from increasing development-friendly trade and reducing tax evasion in developing countries, both aims suggested for inclusion in the post-2015 development agenda (Martins, Glennie, and Mustapha, 2013).

As mentioned, one way to ease migrants' burden is to lower the costs of sending remittances, the goal of several initiatives (including one promoted by the G20). While the global average for transaction fees remains high, at over 8 per cent, the cost decreases that have been achieved so far have resulted in savings of around USD 46 billion (World Bank, 2014e).

Remittance fees do not pose the only drain on migrant resources. Even as development outcomes related to migration are increasing in importance, migrants' capacities and potential are too often squandered by exploitation, discrimination, and exorbitant recruitment costs. When the needs of migrants are overlooked, society as a whole suffers. This is true, too, of the most vulnerable migrants, such as those displaced by conflict, climate change, and environmental degradation (IOM, 2012). According

to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, approximately 3.2 million people were internally displaced in South and Southeast Asia at the end of 2013 due to conflict and violence (NRC and IDMC, 2014).

IV. The Asia-Pacific context

Policymakers focused on the Asia-Pacific region – and in particular those looking at the new drivers of development in the region – need to pay close attention to migration trends, especially labour migration and its conditions; the scale and impact of remittances; and population movements brought on by climate change. The region hosts more than 60 per cent of the global population (UN DESA, 2012). The movement of people in the region is complex and multi-dimensional.

Since the mid-2000s the Asia-Pacific region has seen a dramatic increase in human mobility. Much of this is in response to growth in newly industrialized countries (NICs), labour shortages due to the ageing populations of many developed countries, and an increase in natural and human disasters in the region. Almost 10 years ago Professor Graeme Hugo wrote about Asia-Pacific migration trends: “All countries in the region are now influenced to some degree by international migration although the nature and level of that impact vary greatly. International migration is a topic of unprecedented interest in the region among both governments and the population with newspapers and other media reporting on it daily; the issue is constantly in the public consciousness” (Hugo, 2005). The region is a good starting point for research on any of a wide range of issues, including marriage migration, undocumented migration, student mobility, displaced persons, and refugees.

Many diaspora communities worldwide have their origins in Asia. India and China have produced the world's largest diasporas, and have become countries of origin, transit, and destination. Other Asian countries that have large diaspora communities outside Asia include Afghanistan, Cambodia, Japan, and Vietnam (Agunias and Newland, 2012). Meanwhile, around the world diaspora communities are undertaking initiatives to contribute to sustainable development in their origin countries. For example, Diosdado Banatao, a Filipino philanthropist and electrical engineer who resides in the United States, has worked with other Filipino Americans and the government of the Philippines to promote science and technology education in the Philippines (Agunias and Newland, 2012).

The two cardinal drivers of migration – disparity in economic growth, and demographic trends – continue to affect the region. Much of the resulting immigration is from one Asian country to another: an estimated 43 per cent of Asian migrants move within the region (IOM, 2008). South Korea; Hong Kong, China; China; and the Taiwan Province of China systematically rely on immigrants from other parts of Asia to meet labour shortages and to expand their economies, as do the Southeast Asian countries of Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia (Ducanes, 2013). Furthermore, it should be noted that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN's) "economic community blueprint," adopted in 2007, includes freedom of movement of skilled workers, to be realized by 2015 (IOM, 2008). Despite the various obstacles to achieving this goal, the region is gearing up for increased and multi-dimensional migration.

Among the 10 countries that received the most remittances in 2013, six are in Asia: India received about USD 71 billion; China, USD 60 billion; the Philippines, USD 26 billion; Pakistan, USD 15 billion; Bangladesh, USD 14 billion; and Vietnam, USD 11 billion (World Bank, 2014a). Remittances are important sources of foreign exchange earnings, in some cases even exceeding ODA and export earnings (World Bank, 2013). Some economists, meanwhile, warn against relying on remittances to drive growth, since this may draw attention away from the need for structural economic reforms (World Bank, 2014b; Metriyakool, 2011).

Women account for almost half of all migrants worldwide, and represent 48 per cent of overall migration flows in Asia (IOM, 2008). The increase in female migration is a boon for the region, as female migrants tend to remit a higher proportion of their income, and send payments more consistently and over longer periods of time. Women who receive remittances, meanwhile, also do more to boost family welfare. Women have been found to better utilize remittances by investing them in their children's education, health care for the elderly, and savings plans for their family's future (TWG Migration, 2012).

Environmental and climate-change-induced displacement and migration are becoming increasingly common in the region and are expected to only increase. In 2012, global induced disaster displacement was calculated at 32.4 million people, of which around 22 million (or 68%) moved within Asia (NRC and IDMC, 2013).

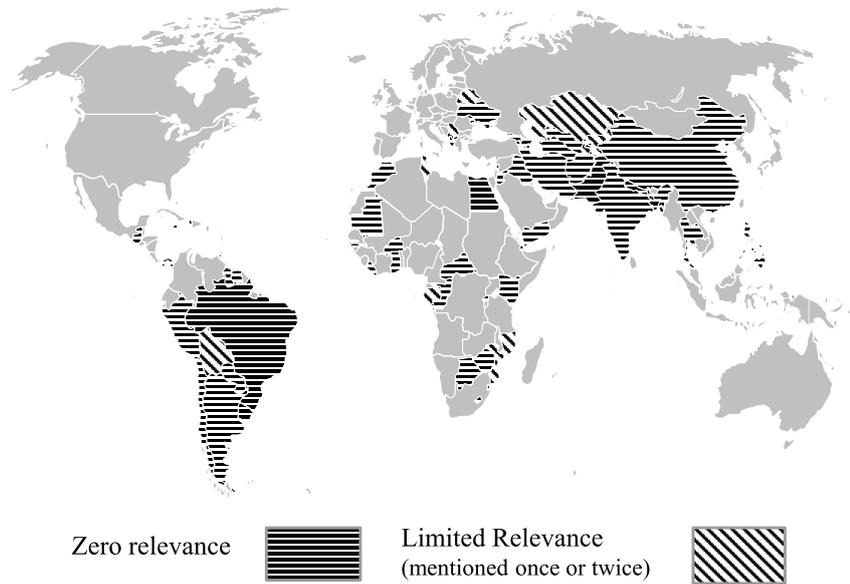
V. Stumbling blocks

Despite the evidence base and the international commitments, the truth is that migration receives only a fraction of the attention and funding of other developmental drivers. A comparison could be made with the area "Aid for Trade" which involves development assistance that aims to enable and strengthen the capacity of developing countries to profit from trade liberalisation. In the current discussion on the post-2015 development agenda, migration and trade are both seen as "drivers of development" and both involve capacity building and infrastructure adaptation. In 2011, overall funding for Aid for Trade stood at USD 122 billion. Of that, support for policy, regulation, and trade stood at USD 1.6 billion (OECD and WTO, 2013). Guidelines for Aid for Trade are adopted periodically by the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference; global activity on Aid for Trade is monitored by the WTO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Migration and development programmes, on the other hand, are scattered across several international agencies, and broad coordination among donors does not exist. There is no integrated programme on migration and development that comes close to the Aid for Trade programmes in terms of cohesion and support.

Another way to analyse how migration is integrated in development planning across the globe is to look at the United Nations' own development planning tools: the UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs),⁷ and how they have integrated migration. Figures 1–2 illustrate how four significant topics mentioned in the United Nations Secretary-General's eight-point plan "Making Migration Work,"⁸ presented to the HLD at the UNGA in 2013, are integrated in United Nations country teams' main planning tools. The four chosen topics are: the public perception of migrants, evidence of the links between migration and development, the human rights of migrants, and remittances.

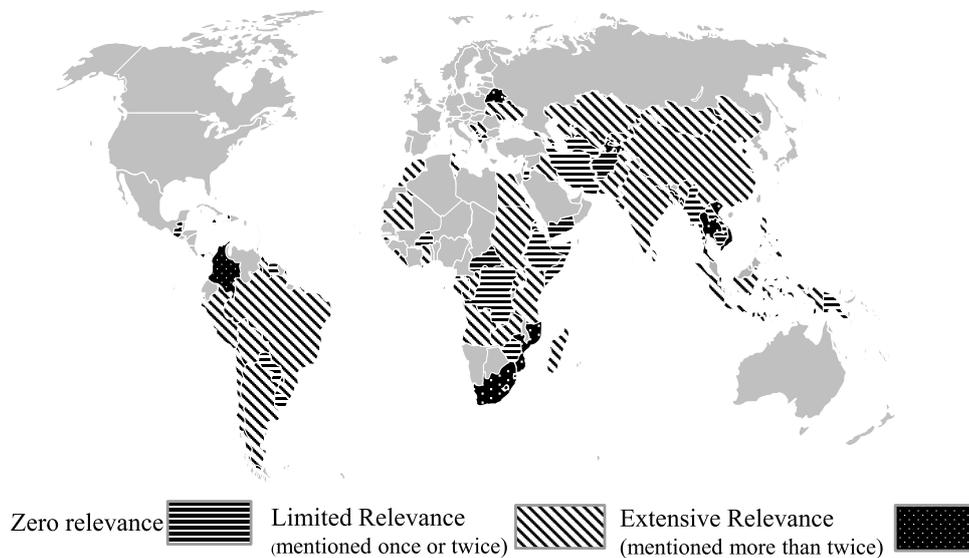
Women account for almost half of all migrants worldwide, and represent 48 per cent of overall migration flows in Asia.

Figure 1: The Relevance of Migrant Evidence Base in UN Development Assistance Frameworks



Source: Lars Lönnback.

Figure 2: The Relevance of Human Rights of Migrants in UNDAFs



Source: Lars Lönnback.

These maps indicate to what extent the UNDAFs include the four chosen migration-related issues, and identify the relevance of these issues to each country. If the issue is of importance in the country but did not receive due attention, that gap may be seen on the map. It should be noted that not all United Nations countries are included, but only those where the number of migrants or the total amount

of remittances is significant. These maps show that if the UNDAFs are a reliable guide to planning practice, migration has been considered to only a limited extent by development planners. Further studies along these lines would be useful to uncover gaps and new methods for integrating migration into development planning.

There are four main reasons why migration is not considered more in development policy, as follows:

- *The political economy of international migration.* Even though the migration and development policy debate focuses on increasing the quality of migration and not on increasing migration in numerical terms, the topic remains politically toxic at the national level in many countries, where politicians shy away from bringing up even the positive aspects of migration. Development specialists, on the other hand, often focus on assistance-based policy and disregard less easily measured drivers of development (Lucci and Martins, 2013).
- *The lack of international cooperation on migration.* Control over migration is seen as one of the key aspects of state sovereignty.⁹ But today migration entails numerous issues that cannot be managed by state policy alone. Nonetheless, the degree to which states have chosen to engage on migration at the international level is considerably lower than in other areas such as trade, health, and human rights (Betts, 2011).
- *Differing approaches to migration policy.* Practitioners dealing with migration have a tendency to assemble in one of two camps; either the focus is on the well-being of migrants themselves, or on the broader context of the impact of migration (including on development). Both camps accuse each other, either for callously using migrants for development ends or for grand-standing and giving priority to largely ineffective human rights instruments related to migrants and migration processes.
- *Migration is not included in the MDGs.* Even though migration was mentioned in the Millennium Declaration that formed the basis for the MDGs, migration was not included in the MDG goal/target framework.¹⁰

VI. The place for migration in the post-2015 development agenda

In light of the above, this brief argues that if the post-2015 development agenda can set clear targets and mobilize global action to improve the quality of migration, this will in turn improve the situation of migrants, as well as migrants' dependents and home communities – and contribute to the development of

their countries of origin and destination. Three specific actions promise a measurable outcome:

- Foster partnerships on mobility and development.
- Promote and protect migrants' rights and well-being.
- Reduce the costs of human mobility.

Best practices from the MDG framework should inform the post-2015 goals. For instance, the MDGs on education and health have been successful in drawing the engagement and funding of multiple stakeholders (United Nations, 2013c). Participants at Rio+20 agreed on some specific guidelines: “sustainable development goals should be action oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature, and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities, and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.” (United Nations, 2012)

Meanwhile, the United Nations' statistical community has gathered considerable experience on what can successfully be monitored at a global level as a result of 15 years of monitoring the MDGs. These conclusions have been publicized and are being used in the post-2015 process (UN, 2003; UNTT, 2013; UN, 2014a).

For specific migration targets and indicators, the following guidelines are suggested:

- Break down the challenges into attainable and measurable parts.
- Build consensus between countries of origin and destination, and engage all stakeholders.
- Define responsibilities and foster accountability through periodic reviews.
- Promote an integrated approach to actions that are seen as mutually supportive.
- Focus on core development issues.

Based on the above-mentioned development outcomes of migration, the following three migration targets and elements for indicators could be suggested for integrating migration in the post-2015 development agenda:

Migration target number 1 (within an SDG on “means of implementation and partnerships”): “Enhance



global cooperation to facilitate the orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and managed migration policies that facilitate migrants' contribution to sustainable development."

The main aim would be to forge partnerships among countries of origin, transit, and destination in a global forum and in regional consultations, supported by key stakeholders such as international organisations, researchers, and other civil society actors, including the private sector. Over the period 2015–2030, it will be important to track progress toward the attainment of the mentioned targets using a number of precise indicators. Indicators are usually expressed in numerals or percentages. The indicators are used to register changes over time to document (or indicate) the degree to which a target is likely to be achieved. The following might be considered as such indicators:

- The number of South-South remittance corridors;
- Percentage of migrants families with "financial literacy";
- Proportion of diaspora communities offered opportunities to invest in countries of origin;
- Proportion of migrants covered by bilateral accords on social security transportability; and
- International agreements and frameworks promoting skills recognition.

Migration target number 2 (within an SDG on "decreasing poverty and inequalities"): "Empower and promote the social and economic inclusion of the poor, the marginalized and people in vulnerable situations, including . . . migrants".

The post-2015 framework might recognize a number of vulnerabilities related to poverty, health, education, employment, gender, and equality, among others (United Nations, 2014b). Since the Rio+20 outcome document recognized migrants as stakeholders of sustainable development, it will be important to assess the well-being of migrants, which requires dedicated targets, indicators, and disaggregated data.

For this reason, it is important to include disaggregated data for migrants within targets related to:

- Universal health coverage;
- Access to education, skills development, and vocational training;

- Social protection measures;
- Decent work;
- Systems for enhancing the integrity of labour migration recruitment; and
- Reducing trafficking in human beings.

Migration target number 3 (within an SDG on "economic growth and decent work"): "By 2030 lower the overall costs of migration processes and minimize the transaction costs of remittances."

Indicators for this target could be:

- The transaction costs of remittances, globally and by region;
- Effective rates of labour recruitment costs; and
- Administrative costs.

VII. Conclusion

Since the establishment of the MDGs, migration has been acknowledged as a major driver of development in countries of origin and destination alike. Migration remittances to developing countries have reached the same level as major international capital flows for development. In a world that faces severe skills shortages on various levels, migration is already playing an essential role by filling labour market gaps. In the context of natural or manmade catastrophes and crises, remittances and migration can support the resilience of populations both staying and going.

Compared to other policy areas, the development community has been slow or reluctant to take action to harness the potential of migration. While some regions have seen increased regulated mobility, government policy is mainly occupied with controlling migration. Therefore, the development effects of migration take place autonomously, but sometimes at huge costs to individual migrants, who may lose their lives on the migratory route or be forced into servitude.

The main reasons for this inaction is the toxicity of the issue and the ensuing political reluctance to embrace it; a lack of international governance on migration; a lack of an integrated approach, pitting human rights and econometric approaches against each other; and, finally, from the fact that migration was omitted from the MDGs.

This brief suggests that if the post-2015 agenda can muster broad agreement on a set of targets for migration and development that focus on the quality of migration, this could be beneficial to 232 million international migrants and their dependents, and increase development in their countries of origin and in the countries where they live. This could be done by formulating targets within the SDGs on (i) “means of implementation,” to establish a global partnership on migration and development; (ii) “inequalities,” to track the well-being of migrants with regard to education and health care; and (iii) “decent work,” to tackle discrimination against migrant workers and trafficking in human beings.

Irrespective of what gets on the post-2015 development agenda, the targets suggested above provide a basic checklist to be utilized by development planners and practitioners, with a view to redressing the major gaps illustrated above. Resources such as the GMG handbook on mainstreaming migration into development planning¹¹ can be used to construct more detailed plans of action for specific countries.

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4. The outcome report of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries is being made available as document A/66/134, para. 30.
5. <http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org>. The GMG Multi-annual Workplan adopted by GMG Principals includes strategic work on mainstreaming migration to development plans, notably through developing guidance on this topic for United Nations Country Teams.
6. Cf. A/RES/61/208 and A/RES/68/4.
7. United Nation Development Assistance Framework: <http://www.undg.org/?P=232>.
8. “Making Migration Work: An Eight-point Agenda for Action” presented at the UN High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, New York. http://www.un.org/en/ga/68/meetings/migration/pdf/migration_8points_en.pdf.
9. For example, the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, art. III 267, para. 5.
10. Subsequent studies show that migration in fact has had considerable impact on the realization of the MDGs: see IOM (2014a).
11. See Global Migration Group’s Mainstreaming Migration into Development Planning: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners. http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/sites/default/files/uploads/UNCT_Corner/theme7/mainstreamingmigration.pdf.

Endnotes

1. This brief assumes, as suggested by the *Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda* (cf. p. 13), that the new agenda will cover the period 2015–30.
2. Adapted from Rosengaertner and Lönnback (2013).
3. For example, Cairo Conference Action Plan, para. 10.

About the Author



Lars Johan Lönnback is Head of Division for International Processes within the International Cooperation and Partnerships Division at the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM’s) headquarters in Geneva. He joined the IOM in 2010. Between 1996 and 2010, Lönnback was employed in the Swedish Foreign Service. He most recently served as the Swedish Permanent Representative as Counsellor, and prior to that, as Detached National Expert in the European Commission. Previously, he was a political officer in the Office of the High Representative for the Dayton Peace Accords, based in Sarajevo. He has served with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the Russian Federation (1994) and in Iraq (1991). Mr. Lönnback received his LLM in international law from the University of Stockholm.

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