

MIGRATION RESEARCH LEADERS SYNDICATE  
IN SUPPORT OF THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON MIGRATION

# Supporting Communities Under Migration Pressure: The Role of Opportunities, Information and Resilience to Shocks



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

---

The UN Migration Agency

The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

This publication has been issued without formal editing by IOM. Any errors or oversights in this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Suggested citation: Mbaye, L.M. (2017) 'Supporting Communities Under Migration Pressure: The Role of Opportunities, Information and Resilience to Shocks', in McAuliffe, M. and M. Klein Solomon (Conveners) (2017) *Ideas to Inform International Cooperation on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, IOM: Geneva.

Publisher: International Organization for Migration  
17 route des Morillons  
P.O. Box 17  
1211 Geneva 19  
Switzerland  
Tel: + 41 22 717 91 11  
Fax: + 41 22 798 61 50  
E-mail: [hq@iom.int](mailto:hq@iom.int)  
Internet: [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)

---

© 2017 International Organization for Migration (IOM)

---

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.



# Supporting Communities Under Migration Pressure: The Role of Opportunities, Information and Resilience to Shocks

Linguère Mously Mbaye<sup>1</sup>

## Executive summary

International migration is at the core of the international debate. However, while a major part of the discussions focus on migration policies in receiving countries, it is important to recall that most people are not willing to migrate permanently to another country. It is thus crucial that policymakers also support those who prefer to remain in their communities of origin to resist the migration pressure they may be facing. Consequently, this analysis aims first to identify what drives this migration pressure, and second to formulate a set of recommendations to support those communities.

With regard to the drivers, evidence suggests that, contrary to a common belief, poverty reduction will not necessarily alleviate migration pressure. Reducing poverty is an aim, per se, no matter its effect on migration. However, it is not a panacea, and other factors explaining the migration pressure should be considered. The urge to move can be due to the fact that potential migrants, in particular those willing to migrate illegally, tend to formulate biased expectations about their earnings and living conditions abroad. For people who have not moved yet, expectations from the migration experience are often based upon perceptions of the living conditions of their families and relatives who migrated. Those relatives – through their remittances and the status their families that are left behind acquire within the communities – can lead some to think that success is guaranteed with migration. This in turn can spark the desire to move at any cost, raising the issue of relative concerns about what matters in the decision to leave. Another possible driver of migration pressure is negative shocks, such as adverse climatic conditions. Climatic factors and natural disasters can lead to more migration if other survival strategies have failed, when the severity of the shocks does not leave any other option than moving, and when people can afford migration costs.

It is important to recall that, in the face of adverse conditions, migration remains a mitigation strategy. Consequently, the best way to support sedentary communities is not necessarily by stopping them from migrating but enlarging their set of choices. To alleviate the migration pressure on communities, it is thus crucial to make migration one option among others, and not the only choice available. We thus formulate various recommendations to deal with the aforementioned causes and support people who would like to stay in their communities. Recommendations include creating opportunities which could guarantee that success is also possible at home. Innovative and affordable tools such as information and communications technology could be used to support such initiatives. Other options consist of improving the quality of the information potential to which migrants have access. This could be a good way of lowering misrepresentations of living conditions abroad. Finally, it is also crucial to build resilience to shocks through private and public mechanisms.

---

<sup>1</sup> Research Affiliate, IZA, Institute of Labour Economics, Bonn, Germany. E-mail: [l.mbaye@afdb.org](mailto:l.mbaye@afdb.org)

## I. Introduction

Population movement is more than ever at the core of the international debate. According to the Gallup World Poll, 710 million people, representing 14 per cent of the world adult population, were willing to migrate permanently to another country between 2013 and 2016. However, there are disparities between regions. Sub-Saharan Africa is the continent with the highest score, with one third of its adult population desiring to migrate. Moreover, although the share of the adult population in the Middle East and North Africa region willing to migrate permanently has increased compared to its 2010–2012 level (+3 percentage points), it is estimated at 22 per cent, which is comparable to that of the European Union, estimated at 21 per cent of its adult population.<sup>2</sup>

These figures reveal interesting features. First, they show, de facto, that 86 per cent and 69 per cent of the world and African adult population, respectively, do not want to migrate permanently. Subsequently, as receiving countries wonder about migration policies at the destination, policymakers should also care about ways to support the major part of the population which prefers to remain at home. Second, this survey highlights that, in some cases, the desire to migrate can be comparable between regions experiencing adverse shocks and those that are relatively more stable. This indicates that helping sedentary communities is a complex issue because there is not a single type of migration pressure. Supporting people who prefer to remain at home thus implies identifying what explains the pressure to move and tailoring answers and recommendations to each of these drivers.

The literature has explored various causes for people's displacement. However, in this study, we start by discussing why poverty reduction is not a panacea for decreasing migration. We then focus on other factors – such as relative concerns, climatic shocks and natural disasters – that are among the most challenging issues that could drive migration pressure. They can be identified as push factors, taking into account the drivers of migration from the source countries' perspective. However, migration decisions are also taken by comparing the situation between origin and destination countries, and the picture would not be complete if we do not also consider the pull factors from the receiving countries' perspective by looking at the role of potential migrants' expectations. Finally, we propose concrete and pragmatic measures that can be taken to deal with these issues in the short term and reinforced in the long term.<sup>3</sup>

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 describes the relationship between poverty reduction and migration before exploring the role of expectations, relative concerns, climatic conditions and natural disasters in determining the migration pressure. Section 3 concludes and presents recommendations on the ways to support people who prefer to remain at home.

## 2. On the drivers of migration pressure

Identifying the drivers of migration pressure precedes knowing how to support sedentary communities. In this section, we start by discussing why poverty reduction will not necessarily reduce migration pressure. We then focus on the role of other determinants, such as expectations of potential migrants, relative concerns, climatic shocks and natural disasters.

### 2.1. Poverty reduction and migration

A piece of conventional wisdom is that development of poor countries will decrease their emigration flows. While this rhetoric has been widely used, it has not been empirically verified. Moreover, it is argued that a perspective that considers poverty as the only driver of migration would be too narrow.<sup>4</sup> First, richer countries

2 N. Esipova, J. Ray and A. Pugliese, Gallup News, "Number of Potential Migrants Worldwide Tops 700 Million", 8 June 2017. Available from [www.gallup.com/poll/211883/number-potential-migrants-worldwide-tops-700-million.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/211883/number-potential-migrants-worldwide-tops-700-million.aspx).

3 We do not focus on migration pressure due to conflict or institutional issues such as lack of democracy or political instability, because the implication of promoting peace-building and good governance in migrants' source countries is straightforward.

4 De Haas, H., "Turning the Tide? Why Development Will Not Stop Migration", *Development and Change*, vol. 38, No. 5, 2007, pp. 821–844.

do not necessarily have lower emigration rates than poorer countries. Second, the relationship between development and migration presents some non-linearities. Indeed, evidence suggests that development is associated with an increase in emigration among low- and lower-middle-income countries. The relationship between development and migration becomes negative among countries above an estimated level of income per capita of USD 6,000–8,000 adjusted for purchasing power parity.<sup>5</sup> Put differently, this means that, in poor countries, development will first increase emigration and will start decreasing it only once the countries have reached a status of upper-middle- and high-income countries. Among the reasons explaining this non-linear relationship is the fact that, as people get richer, they can afford migration costs and have more expectations and incentives to migrate. This is consistent with the idea that immigrants are positively selected compared to the remaining population of their origin countries and do not necessarily belong to the lower part of the income distribution.<sup>6</sup>

Reducing poverty should be the priority no matter its effect on migration. However, these findings suggest that decreasing migration pressure is not about solving poverty issues only. Consequently, in the following part of this section, we discuss other drivers, such as the role of expectations, relative concerns and climatic shocks.

## 2.2. The role of expectations

Expectations can positively affect the willingness to migrate, in particular by using illegal methods. It is thus interesting to know how these expectations are formed. Migrants' networks play a crucial role in generating those expectations. In general, they help reduce migration costs, and share information on labour market conditions in the receiving country, border crossings and funding opportunities.<sup>7</sup> However, their role goes further, since potential migrants also derive their expectations from the perceptions of their relatives' earnings abroad. Family and friends' relatives who have successfully migrated can send remittances and help people left behind, and also provide information on their living conditions, which may or may not correspond to reality. Subsequently, migrants' networks can misrepresent their situation in the receiving country and shape potential migrants' beliefs that success is guaranteed with migration. This is illustrated from findings of a survey conducted in Dakar, Senegal, between 2006 and 2007, where information on the characteristics and motivations of potential legal and illegal migrants was collected. Results of this study show that the expected earnings of people willing to migrate illegally are positively related to their migration intentions. Moreover, they are closely related to their perceptions of the earnings of their relatives who have successfully migrated. More interestingly, expectations with respect to earnings were quite high and did not necessarily match reality. The average and median expected monthly wages of potential illegal migrants were estimated at EUR 1,740 and EUR 1,218, respectively. For comparative purposes and according to the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* of Spain, in 2007, the annual average income in this country – which was the preferred destination country for potential illegal migrants – of an immigrant coming from outside the European Union was estimated at EUR 5,792 per person, corresponding to EUR 483 per month.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.3. The role of relative concerns

The role of relative concerns is closely related to that of potential migrants' expectations. The aforementioned survey shows that 77 per cent of potential illegal migrants interviewed are willing to accept risking their lives. Moreover, half of them are willing to accept a risk of death equal to or higher than 25 per cent. This indicates that people willing to migrate illegally are fully aware of the risks, but also signals a large utility gap between staying in Senegal and migrating. The important question here is, "What explains this utility

5 Clemens, M. A., "Does development reduce migration?", *International Handbook on Migration and Economic Development*, 2014, pp. 152-185.

6 Chiquiar, D. and G.H. Hanson, "International migration, self-selection, and the distribution of wages: Evidence from Mexico and the United States", *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 113, No. 2, 2005, pp. 239–281.

7 Dolfin S. and G. Genicot, "What do networks do? The role of networks on migration and 'coyote' use", *Review of Development Economics*, vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 343–359.

8 Mbaye, L.M., "'Barcelona or die': Understanding illegal migration from Senegal", *IZA Journal of Migration*, vol. 3, No. 21, 2014.

gap?” – in particular in a context where there is no conflict and the political situation is stable. A possible answer lies in the role that migrants play in their communities. In many countries, migrants have an important economic power through their remittances, which can contribute significantly to economic growth. For instance, in Tajikistan, remittances represented 41.7 per cent of gross domestic product in 2014, making it the number one remittances-receiving country with respect to the share of gross domestic product. For the same year, migrants’ transfers represented 24.6 per cent and 10.3 per cent of gross domestic product in Liberia or Senegal, respectively.<sup>9</sup> In the context of Senegal, many households with good living standards, both in rural and urban areas, have migrants abroad. Migrants’ families also have a higher social status within their communities, which reinforces the idea that success is guaranteed with migration. This also highlights the role of relatives and peers as a source of information that is more trusted than official channels, such as media or local institutions.

#### 2.4. The role of climatic shocks and natural disasters

The relationship between climatic factors, natural disasters and migration is a complex one. Migration responses to climatic factors and natural disasters depend on various factors, such as the nature and severity of the shock, the level of vulnerability of people and the liquidity constraints they face. Consequently, people will migrate only if other survival strategies have failed, if the nature of the shock (e.g. rapid onsets such as floods or storms) do not leave the option to stay, and if they are not bound by liquidity constraints and are able to afford migration costs.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, climatic shocks can also affect migration through an indirect channel, such as their negative impact on agricultural productivity.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Moving forward: Recommendations on how to make migration an option among others

It is important to highlight that the aim is not necessarily to prevent migration, which remains a coping strategy and a way to diversify risk in case of adverse shocks, but to support communities whose people would not migrate if they were not forced to do so. We thus formulate recommendations on how to provide various options which could allow communities to resist the migration pressure.

#### 3.1. Recommendation 1: Create opportunities in countries of origin

With the example of Senegal, we have seen that migration pressure can be high, even in countries that are politically stable. Illegal migration is an expensive project for many people; in the aforementioned survey, migrants were asked why they did not choose to invest the money they collected for migrating into a professional project at home. The answers revealed that among people willing to migrate illegally, 74.47 per cent declared that it was because they thought that, in any case, the project would fail. There were 57.45 per cent who declared that it was because they would not receive any assistance to start a business, while 31.91 per cent declared that they did not have the needed skills to do so. In this context, illegal migration is the result of the perception that success is only possible abroad. This suggests that potential illegal migrants perceive that the rate of return on investing abroad may be much higher than investing in a project at home. However, this is conditional on having a successful migration experience, implying high risk in the case of illegal migration. It is thus crucial to provide to the population – above all the youth – opportunities, incentives and favourable labour market conditions for succeeding in their countries of origin with good jobs that are safe and sustainable, and allow a decent life.

9 World Bank Group, *Migration and Remittances Factbook 2016*, third edition, (Washington, D.C., 2016). Available from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/23743>.

10 Mbaye, L.M., “Climate change, natural disasters, and migration”, IZA World of Labor, March 2017. Available from <https://wol.iza.org/articles/climate-change-natural-disasters-and-migration/long>.

11 Cai, R., S. Feng, M. Oppenheimer and M. Pytlikova, “Climate variability and international migration: The importance of the agricultural linkage”, *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, vol. 79, 2016, pp. 135–151.

### 3.2. Recommendation 2: Rely on tools such as information and communications technology

One way of enhancing the business environment is to rely on new tools, such as mobile phones or information and communications technology more generally, which are affordable and could be used to encourage and develop local initiatives. According to the International Telecommunication Union, 95 per cent of the world population lives in areas covered by mobile cellular networks. In developing countries, the penetration rate is estimated at 41 per cent and is growing very fast.<sup>12</sup>

It has been demonstrated that mobile phones and new information technologies help connect not only individuals, but also services and markets. They reduce information and communication costs in many sectors, such as the agricultural and service sectors. For instance, mobile phones can be used to provide price information in marketplaces or learn about job opportunities in different cities. Moreover, the pioneering initiative of M-PESA in Kenya has allowed the development of mobile banking and helped millions of people to use their mobile phones for financial transactions and money transfers.<sup>13</sup>

This example shows that mobile phones can become an important tool for financial inclusion, which indirectly also leads to social inclusion. Another way to use technologies could be through a television show demonstrating success in areas such as agriculture which is, a priori, not attractive to young people, and which could shape their expectations. This would also provide alternative narratives of success and showcase role models who succeed at home.

### 3.3. Recommendation 3: Improve the quality of the information delivered to potential migrants

A priori, it could seem contradictory that, in an era of globalization and wide use of mobile phones, as we have just discussed, people can still be misinformed on what to expect from their migration experience. However, in reality, there is no contradiction, if we consider that the nature of the information they get also depends on the filter through which they receive it. In section 2, we have explained how having relatives who have migrated can both decrease information asymmetry related to costs, job opportunities and travel procedures, and at the same time reinforce misrepresentations of the migration experience. It is thus crucial to design effective tools to improve the quality of the information mediated by trusted sources and received by potential migrants to help them formulate expectations closer to reality and adjust their migration decisions accordingly.

### 3.4. Recommendation 4: Build resilience to shocks

In a context of economic uncertainty and climate change, it is necessary to reinforce private and public mechanisms to deal with shocks to support people willing to stay in their communities. With respect to private mechanisms, previous community members who migrated can support those left behind through their remittances, in case they face adverse shocks. This will allow sedentary communities not to be forced to move when they have to deal with such risk. Such solutions could be supported with a reduction of the costs of sending remittances, which remain too high. Public mechanisms require that governments build resilience before and after the occurrence of shocks.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, public mechanisms will help people who cannot necessarily rely on private insurance channels to deal with shocks, and are thus complementary with private mechanisms. Consequently, support should be provided to governments in source countries to build insurance mechanisms and better social protection, to face not only adverse climatic conditions, but also more generally economic instability. Finally, it is important to stress that, in most poor countries, the economy still relies heavily on the agricultural sector, which is sensitive to climatic factors and subject to commodity price volatility. Building resilience for populations highly dependent on these sectors will also require scaling up the sector from subsistence-oriented agriculture to business agriculture, and a diversification of the economy.

12 International Telecommunication Union, *ICT Facts and Figures 2016* (2016, Geneva).

13 Aker, J.C. and I.M. Mbiti, "Mobile phones and economic development in Africa", *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 24, No. 3, 2010, pp. 207–232.

14 Mbaye, L.M., "Climate change, natural disasters, and migration", IZA World of Labor, March 2017. Available from <https://wol.iza.org/articles/climate-change-natural-disasters-and-migration/long>.

## Acknowledgements

I thank workshop participants at the Migration Research Leaders' Syndicate workshop, September 2017, in Geneva, Switzerland, for their comments.







Linguère Mously Mbaye is working at the Macroeconomic Policy, Forecasting and Research Department of the African Development Bank (AfDB) in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. She is also affiliated to IZA, Institute of Labor Economics, Bonn, Germany and the Global Labor Organisation (GLO). From 2012 to 2015, Linguère worked as a Research Associate and Deputy Program Director for the Employment and Development Area of IZA.

She completed her PhD from the Center for Studies and Research in International Development (CERDI)-University of Auvergne (France) in April 2013. Her main fields of interest are Development Economics, Migration, Labor Economics, and Gender.