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Migration to advance human development outcomes

The Global Compact for Migration, signed in Marrakech in December 2018, lays the ground for international migration governance

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Because migration is intrinsically linked with global trends like globalisation, digitalisation and urbanisation, it is shaping our world at every turn. How we govern migration at international, regional, national and local levels will have a significant

impact on the future of our societies and economies. In recent years, migration has been propelled to the forefront of national political agendas around the globe, though often in a fragmented way through a focus on domestic security. Using the universal lens of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we have a unique opportunity to connect migration with broader policy considerations. This can allow us to reap the

benefits of migration while addressing the risks and vulnerabilities migration can cause.

Under the right enabling conditions, migrants make significant economic, social and cultural contributions to communities around the globe. Migration opens new markets and trade opportunities, spurs economic growth, and leads to improved human development outcomes in areas like health and education.

◀ **Migrants from Honduras en route to seek work in the US, crossing the Suchiate River from Guatemala into Mexico. If they reach the US, the migrants face a hostile reception involving incarceration and the separation of children from their families**

Yet these development benefits are not guaranteed. Migration is a complex phenomenon bound by larger social, cultural, political and economic structures. Migratory movements are influenced by an array of contextual conditions such as economic opportunity, conflict and insecurity, and climate change, as well as a range of individual aspirations, motivations and resources.

Wider issues

Our ability to connect this multidimensional reality of migration with policymaking is therefore crucial. The 2030 Agenda stands as a long-awaited platform that invites us to do just that. Target 10.7, calling for the facilitation of “orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”, represents the most explicit reference to migration. Yet the 2030 Agenda is also wrought with goals and targets for which success is contingent upon the due consideration of migrants and migration.

For example, we will not achieve SDG 13 on climate action if we do not act now to build human mobility considerations into policies and strategies that address the pressing needs of environmental change, land degradation, natural disasters and climate change. Similarly, we cannot close the gender gap as envisioned in SDG 5 if we do not adequately address the intersecting forms of discrimination that migrant women face in their origin, transit and host communities. These and many other migration linkages are outlined in the recent International Organization for Migration (IOM) publication *Migration and the 2030 Agenda: A Guide for Practitioners*.

We must also draw on the broader promise to ‘leave no one behind’ and connect migration with wider issues such as inequality, as captured in SDG 10.

Migration itself is a highly visible reflection of our global inequalities. The ability to move around the world is not equally shared among all people. The dichotomy between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ passports, and the relative importance of individual characteristics such as ethnicity, age, gender and immigration background are likely to increase.

While the skilled, the middle class and those in the Global North will find it easy to remain mobile, people with fewer skills, limited financial resources or specific individual characteristics may find it increasingly more difficult to move around the world.

We must dare to assess and address migration in new and innovative ways

It is imperative that we uncover these diverging trajectories and acknowledge that migration can be both a driver for sustainable development and also a source of perpetuating inequality. After all, migrants routinely face barriers, discrimination and unequal access to rights, social resources and economic opportunities in their communities worldwide. If we want to advance migration governance, our charge must be to raise migrants up as a litmus test. We must recognise that if we fail to eliminate inequalities for migrants, we fail to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), rooted in the 2030 Agenda, can serve as a roadmap to guide these efforts. The GCM declares migration to be “a source of prosperity, innovation and sustainable development in our globalised world”.

This bold statement must be our way forward. We must capitalise on this position and exploit the gains delivered by the universal lens of the 2030 Agenda, which holds migration as a fundamental and cross-cutting issue inextricably tied to the success of the Global Goals. We must go beyond the existing migration

management mechanisms and strategies and dare to assess and address migration in new and innovative ways. If we are to succeed in realising the claim outlined in the GCM, we must develop policy solutions and interventions that articulate migration not only with sustainable development, but also with larger global considerations such as peace, security and the rule of law.

Innovative solutions

The IOM is already making great strides in this direction. Knowing that enhancing pathways for safe and regular migration requires a more holistic approach that responds to future labour-market dynamics, new approaches are being tested to improve intra-African labour migration and mobility schemes.

Understanding that innovative partnerships with the private sector are critical to strengthening migrants’ rights and access to decent work in supply chains, the IOM is scaling up efforts on the International Recruitment Integrity System and is helping to provide remedy to victims of exploitation identified in supply chains. Honouring the progress made and existing thematic competence, the IOM is working with key partners such as the International Labour Organization and UNESCO via a ‘Global Skills Partnership’ to elaborate strategic approaches to skills development, transfer and recognition.

The IOM will advance innovative solutions like those mentioned above and harness the opportunity to work in partnership across the UN development system and beyond to maximise the potential of migration to achieve sustainable development outcomes. But this alone will not yield success without the full mobilisation of governments.

With demonstrated global interest and an emerging governance framework, the upcoming months hold the key to unlocking the potential of migration for stable, prosperous societies. Establishing effective global governance of migration requires the collective effort of all actors working in tandem to continually prioritise migration in the policy agenda, building on its multidimensional reality. ●