



Ministerie van  
**Buitenlandse Zaken**

IOM International Organization for Migration  
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations  
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

## **INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON MIGRATION Intersessional Workshop**

### **Migration and Development: Mainstreaming Migration into Development Policy Agendas\***

#### **Panel 2**

#### **Migration and the Millenium Development Goals**

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## **The Millennium Development Goals and Migration**

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The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have become the guiding principles of countries seeking to eradicate poverty and improve the welfare of people around the world. The Millennium Declaration, signed by 189 countries in September 2000, led to the adoption of the MDGs, which consist of eight goals with 18 specific targets to achieve those goals. Population migration is not one of these goals and does not figure directly or indirectly in the various targets that will be used to judge progress towards the goals themselves. This statement does not mean that migration is absent from the development horizon of the international community. The Secretary General of the United Nations is well aware of the global significance of population migration as a force of change and of political concern around the world. He has set up the Global Commission on International Migration to report back to him on how the international community should best respond to the situation. We will no doubt hear from members of that commission on the results of their enquiry at this meeting. Without in any way trying to second-guess the results of that enquiry, I think that it is fair to say that migration is the most complex of the population variables and that its relationship with development is both contested and highly variable.

Should migration have been included as one of the goals of the MDGs? Here, I will stick out my neck and say "no". This might seem strange, given that I am going to go on to argue that migration is a fundamental dimension of the MDGs, but the MDGs consist of clear goals and targets that I think are difficult to apply to migration. We cannot say, for example, that we need to increase migration by  $x$ , or decrease migration by  $y$ , by 2015, in order to improve people's welfare in areas  $a$ ,  $b$ , or  $c$ . Even to say that we must increase migrant protection through the full application of certain international conventions by 2015 would be contentious. Why, some might argue, should migrants be singled out for special attention among a whole series of potentially vulnerable groups? While we could probably secure agreement to reduce the transaction costs of migrant remittances by 60 or 70 or 80 per cent by 2015. However, such a target would not quite have the same weight as the existing MDG targets of reducing child and maternal mortality, increasing basic education and reducing poverty.

Yet, migration is inextricably bound in with the achievement of the MDGs and it would be remiss of governments and the international community not to take this fact into consideration when pursuing policies to achieve the MDGs. Let me, in the few minutes allocated to me, just touch upon linkages between migration and four of the MDGs: goal 1, to eradicate poverty; goal 2, to achieve universal primary education; goal 6, to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; and goal 7, to achieve environmental sustainability. However, every MDG has some linkage, direct or indirect, with migration.

We know that the remittances sent back by migrants can have a significant impact on poverty reduction. To take one example, in the south Indian state of Kerala the remittance income in the year 1999-2000 was estimated by Indian researchers at the Centre for Development Studies at Trivandrum at over US\$3 billion and represented 23 per cent of the state domestic product and 113 per cent of government expenditure. The migration, primarily to the countries of West Asia, has

been such as to reduce the natural increase of the population, the level of unemployment and, perhaps most importantly, the incidence of poverty by 12 per cent. However, remittances cannot be seen as a general panacea to poverty alleviation. Relatively few people from any population migrate across international boundaries and those that do tend to come from a fairly small number of areas of origin in any country. That is, international migration is unlikely to be the decisive factor in the eradication of poverty at the national level; the majority of those who move do so internally and the emphasis on the linkages between migration and poverty must be upon internal population movements. And that implies the linkages between rural and urban sectors. Remittances from internal migrants back to the villages may be a significant factor in poverty alleviation. A recent report from the Ministry of Agriculture in China draws attention to the fact that up to 40 per cent of average peasant income in that vast country may come from remittances from towns and cities. While some caution in interpretation of the numbers is required, the data suggest that the sharp reduction in poverty in China over recent years has been at least partially due to increasing internal population mobility.

Examining the distribution of poverty by sector, we find that poverty throughout most of the developing world is still concentrated primarily in the rural sector. In the mid-1990s, in Bangladesh, for example, the proportion of the rural population living below the poverty line was virtually 40 per cent compared with but 14 per cent in urban areas. For Ghana, over one third of the rural population was deemed to be living in poverty compared with around one quarter in urban areas. In Guatemala, the respective figures for rural and urban poverty levels were 72 and 4 per cent. While there were a few exceptions to this picture, World Bank figures published in 2002 suggest an overwhelming bias in the distribution of poverty towards the rural sector. Thus, any target to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day, or to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger (goal 1 to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), implies some change in the nature of the relationship between urban and rural. It would be naïve to assume that policies to reduce poverty can be achieved without a redistribution of population towards urban areas.

It is also worth looking at target 11, one of the three targets to achieve goal 7, environmental sustainability. Target 11 proposes a significant improvement by 2020 in the lives of 100 million urban slum dwellers. One assumes that the most significant improvement would be access to regular and remunerative employment under humane conditions. However, the results of programmes to improve significantly the lives of urban slum dwellers will be quickly passed by word of mouth to the rural sector that will encourage further migration to urban areas to take advantage of the improvements.

Much of the migration to urban areas need not necessarily be permanent: research has shown that there is much circulation between rural and urban sectors as rural people incorporate opportunities in urban areas into a portfolio of activities that help to create a more diverse and risk-averse livelihood strategy. However, rural-to-urban population movements, some short-term, others more long term, will be an integral part of any concerted attempt to reduce poverty and policy makers will need to plan accordingly. One note of caution, however. The idea exists that migration might be used as a "tool" to improve the welfare of the poor. I am somewhat doubtful about this idea. Migration must not be reified into something that can easily be manipulated. It does not exist "out there" separate from the economic, political and social factors that give rise to it. Migration is the result of people

responding to the opportunities that are available to them: it is essentially a consequence of the programmes of development that are put in place such as those that attempt to achieve the MDGs.

One way that people will respond to these opportunities is through improved levels of education. Goal 2, that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education will almost certainly lead to higher levels of population migration both directly and indirectly: directly, because not all the educational facilities will be able to be built precisely where the children are located. Some daily and weekly commuting on foot, bus or boat will be required taking the children outside the immediate community. More important, however, will be the indirect effects of raising aspirations and expectations that cannot be met in the community. Accelerated migration to nearby towns, cities and even overseas are likely to be outcomes of the successful achievement of this MDG, although these migrations are likely to facilitate a movement out of poverty.

The migrations discussed above are largely seen as positively contributing to the process of development. One might argue that there is also a negative side to population movement. Certainly, migrants can be placed into vulnerable positions that might exacerbate poverty but the particular issue I want to touch upon here relates to goal 6, to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. It is known that highly mobile groups such as truck drivers and commercial sex workers are instrumental in the diffusion of HIV. Of course, it must be recognized that it is not the movement of people, as such, that directly leads to the spread of HIV but the high-risk behaviour of the movers at points along the way. Hence, the restriction of movement is unlikely to achieve results; the emphasis must be on behaviour change at critical "hot spots" along the migration or mobility routes, at truck stops, rural and urban markets and brothels. Despite this, migrants themselves, and particularly contract labourers, are often seen as key vectors in the spread of the disease. There is little empirical evidence to suggest that migrants in general, as distinct from a few particular high-risk groups who engage in frequent short-term movements, have a higher prevalence of HIV than the populations from which they come.

Coming towards a conclusion, I think that, in an ideal world, and in contradiction to my initial remark, we could indeed have a "migration MDG" and that would be "to halve by 2015 the fear that migrants seem to engender in any state or any community". However, I am not sure which indicators we could realistically use to measure any such goal. I am also unsure if there would be the political will to pursue such a goal. Thus, remaining in a real as opposed to an ideal world, I argue that we need to build migration in to the present MDGs to see how policies implemented to achieve the MDGs are likely to impact on population migration. Thus, we need migration impact statements for the targets of the MDGs. Given the fear that migration always seems to create, both nationally and internationally, the temptation will always exist to construct barriers to migration and to attempt to slow or even reverse population flows. Any such temptation must be resisted at all cost as it seems likely that policies that accept the wider mobility of people will contribute to the attainment of the MDGs while attempts to limit migration, internal and international, will act to slow the progress towards their attainment.