Leave no one behind in practice

Migration

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Migration is an opportunity to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals – to leave no one behind

The leave no one behind commitment of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development aims to end absolute poverty and address inequality to ensure disadvantaged and discriminated against groups – those that have been 'left behind'– catch up with those who have experienced greater progress. Often marginalised and facing specific vulnerabilities, migrants are one such group at risk of being left behind. This is especially the case for migrants in precarious situations, such as the forcibly displaced trapped in protracted crises, those with irregular migration and employment status and those with increased exposure to risks, such as women and children.

Without addressing the specific needs of migrants, they will be left behind, and progress to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) will be hampered. However, migration is not just a problem to be solved. It is also an important poverty reduction tool for migrants, their families, origin and host communities. When effectively harnessed, migration represents an opportunity to achieve the SDGs, reduce poverty and inequality, and to leave no one behind.

In a series of 12 briefings and an interactive data visualisation tool, the Overseas Development Institute – with support from SDC – demonstrates how migration is fundamental to the achievement of all SDG to leave no one behind (Read more here).

Migrants can be marginalised and risk being left behind

Migrants can face specific vulnerabilities, at all stages of the migration process: pre-migration, in transit, in host countries, and on return. In host countries, migrant workers are more likely to work in precarious forms of employment. In particular, women migrants tend to work in low-paid, less visible and regulated sectors, such as domestic work, and consequently face an increased risk of exploitation, abuse and poor working conditions.

Partly as they are more likely to live in precarious conditions, migrants often lack good access to health, education, water and sanitation and social protection services. Even when eligible, migrants face many barriers in accessing services, such as language and cultural barriers, fear of or actual discrimination by service providers, financial costs, lack of information and knowledge about entitlements and fear of deportation for those with insecure migration status. Data is typically not disaggregated by migrant status, meaning migrants are invisible, which undermines understanding of their needs and gaps in access to basic services. This is particularly the case for hard to reach groups who tend to be missing from official statistics and SDG progress reports, such as migrants living in informal settings, IDPs, and refugees.

Whilst little is known about the take up of social protection coverage for migrants, around 25% of regular migrants are estimated to have no access to social protection. Further, as many migrants move between low and middle-income countries with weak national social protection systems, *effective* social protection coverage for migrants is thought to be much lower.

In transit, accessing basic services is particularly challenging for migrants, availability of water and sanitation is limited and quality of services is often low, even in more formalised refugee settlements. Refugee women and girls on the move are vulnerable to violence, sexual abuse and trafficking.

In order to address the inequalities they face as a marginalised population, there is a need for national governments and development partners to implement specific policies and programmes for migrant groups at risk of being left behind. Those in crisis are even more at risk of falling through the cracks or to be explicitly excluded by governments, and thus progress for this group depends largely on the efforts of the international community.

Further, unless migrants are more visible in data, their needs are not fully and actors thus risk leaving migrants behind. A key priority is to address data gaps and collect migrant-disaggregated data, in order to identify needs, improve coverage of services and accountability of governments and service providers.

Migration can be an effective poverty reduction tool

Migration can increase development, reduce poverty for migrants themselves, their families and their host and origin countries, and can thus be a specific tool to ensure no one is left behind. Migrants themselves earn higher wages as a consequence of migrating – incomes of those who move from lower to higher income countries increase three to six times.[1] Remittances have an important poverty-reducing effect for migrants' families, found to lead to improved health and education access and outcomes.

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[1] World Bank (2018) *Moving for Prosperity http://www.worldbank.org/en/research/publication/moving-for-prosperity*

In migrants' home communities, remittances can drive localised economic change for instance creating jobs by stimulating demand for labour. On a more macro level, emittances often contribute more to GDP than development aid. In host countries too, migration can be beneficial as migrants can contribute to the fiscal balance of countries, through taxes and fill labour gaps.

Aside from beneficial economic development outcomes, migration can have a positive impact on societal norms. Migration can be empowering for women, who return to home communities with increased agency and social standing, influencing home communities to adopt more equitable norms and gender roles.

The potential of migration is not always achieved

However, migration doesn't always achieve its full poverty reducing potential. Financial and legal barriers at all stages of the migration process restrict many people from moving in the first place and reduce the poverty-reducing potential of migration. Migration costs are higher for low-skilled workers and prevent the poor – who have the most to gain – from migrating. Indeed, countries with lower GDP per capita have lower emigration rates. Further, legal barriers to mobility prevent many from migrating in a safe and regular way.

Low and semi-skilled labour migrants are more likely to be in precarious and low paid work, particularly women who are overrepresented in irregular work. Low wages and low-quality work limit the potential economic returns of migration. Similarly, remittance transaction costs are often high, which undermines the poverty reducing potential of migration. For instance, sending remittances costs the African continent nearly $2 billion a year.

In order to harness the full poverty-reducing potential of migration, it is important to lower the costs for those wishing to migrate and reduce transaction costs for remittances. More inclusive, legal pathways for migration would allow all parties to better reap the benefits from migration, allowing the poorest families to benefit from migration and ensuring that no one is left behind.