



Included or Excluded? Migration in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

An assessment of the Proposal of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

Pascal Fendrich, August 2014

On July 19 2014, the United Nations General Assembly (GA) Open Working Group (OWG) adopted its proposal on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (1). This outcome document concludes a series of 13 meetings between 70 UN member states organised in 30 different groups of countries. This also closes a critical sequence in the process of negotiations and formulation of the global development agenda that should succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the end of 2015 (2).

The result of these preliminary intergovernmental negotiations is a dense 20-page document proposing 17 goals and 167 targets. The proposal is therefore still far from the UN Secretary General stated objective of building the new agenda on “a set of concise goals and targets” (3). While the proposal will be further discussed, revised and certainly condensed in the coming GA negotiations, it already proposes an interesting snapshot of the possible priorities of the coming agenda and gives a feeling of the points of consensus and cleavages. Left in a highly visible manner in the right top corner of the page, the time of finalisation of the document – *Sat 19 July 1:20 pm* – already indicates the difficulty of reaching a compromise and serves as a reminder of the political nature of the discussions. In this respect, ‘round 2’ of the negotiations promises some heated debates on the final shape of the document and on specific issues such as climate change, governance or means of implementation. Less publicised are the discussions about the possible integration of migration into the post-2015 agenda. This short article provides a closer look at the way migration and migrants are being considered in the current draft.

The rationale: Why does it matter if migration and migrants are included?

While reference was made to migrants in the 2000 Millennium Declaration (4), they are absent from the MDGs and related targets (5). Migration is however difficult to detach from discussions on poverty reduction and development, taking into account the complex inter-linkages entailed. While migration is diverse and context specific, it often constitutes a strategy adopted by poor households and represents a possibility to lift oneself out of poverty (6). Migration is in parallel increasingly recognized as an “enabler for development” (7). Migrants contribute significantly to the development of countries of destination, transit and origin, with remittances representing one of the most tangible benefits. Along the same line, migrants contributed significantly to the achievements of some MDGs (8). Despite these observations, the status of migrant often means specific costs and vulnerabilities, ranging from the costs of recruitment or sending remittances for migrant workers, to physical and legal safety during travel and stay at destination or access to basic services such as health or education. Migrants are therefore to be explicitly recognized as both “actors and subjects” (9) of development.

The need to better include and articulate migration within the new global development agenda has been emphasized in various fora. For instance, the 2013 formal Declaration of the High Level Dialogue (HLD) on international Migration and Development “*recognized that human mobility is a key factor for sustainable development which should be adequately considered in the elaboration of the post-2015 agenda*” (10). Co-chaired by Bangladesh and Switzerland, the Dhaka Global Expert Meeting on Migration in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which gathered representatives from 62 states (36 of them being members of the OWG), international organisations and civil society further proposed a set of concrete recommendations to integrate migration into the formulation of the agenda (11). More recently, the international civil society agreed on a number of proposed goals and targets that connect migrants and migration with human and economic development (12). While emphasizing the need for the coming development agenda to tackle the root causes of migration, the so-called Stockholm agenda proposes to include a stand-alone goal promoting international cooperation for a better-governed, safer migration and for maximizing its benefits on development. In a complementary way, the cross-cutting nature of migration also implies its articulation with broader SDGs in order for migrants to be explicitly linked to the agenda (for instance to ensure they are fully integrated in the promotion of universal rights

such as education or health) and their specific needs taken into account (relating for instance to recruitment costs, remittances, legal status and rights in countries of destination, etc.).

About one out of seven human beings is today 'on the move' (if one combines internal and external migration) (13), but the potential and needs of this significant ratio of the global population are not yet systematically attached to the development agenda. Including migration in the new development framework will ensure migrants receive the necessary political attention and support coordination and possibly convergence on the ways to approach the many issues relating to migration.

What is the place for migrants in the OWG Outcome Document?

An assessment of the current proposal leads to somewhat ambivalent observations. On the one hand, the OWG opens the door for the inclusion of migration and migrants into the post-2015 agenda. On the other hand one can only speak of a 'discrete admission'. The current document first shows that there is no general support for a stand-alone goal on migration. Migration is thereby considered as a crosscutting issue. But a careful reading shows that instead of a systematic attempt to link migration issues to broader development goals, one should rather speak of a 'sprinkling' of migration issues in the proposal.

The document nevertheless displays important innovations: First, the introduction insists on the Rio+20 promise of a "*growth that should benefit all [...] without distinction of any kind such as migratory status*". The document further confirms the commitment to migration and development as expressed in the HLD 2013. The introduction and later Goal 17 on means of implementation insist on the importance of gathering (and supporting countries to gather) **high quality and reliable data** disaggregated also according to migratory status (14). This is a critically important development, as it would imply developing capacities to collect the necessary information on migrants and ensure monitoring on progress also for this specific population group. If they are kept in the final document, the implementation of such provisions would make migrants and their specific needs visible in the post-2015 agenda.

While migrants are formally included as a target group of the coming agenda, they are rarely explicitly referred to in the rest of the document when it comes to broader universal goals such as access to water, health or education. The wide diversity of goals and targets may also imply that the definition of target groups evolves according to the subject matter covered (is the target group for the objective of ending extreme poverty the same as for social protection?). An explicit referral to migrants would prevent from the risk of a case-by-case definition of universality and clarify intentions. Interestingly, in the domains of health (Goal 3) and education (Goal 4), mobility and migration are only considered with reference to the means of implementation.

Another important development is that certain proposed targets specifically deal with migration related potential, costs and risks. In terms of protection, the document recalls a complete ban on the trafficking of women and children (Targets 5.2 and 16.2). Goal 8 on inclusive and sustainable growth further insists on decent work and Target 8.8 calls for "*protecting labour rights and promoting safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, particularly women migrants*". However, the target does not specify which standard of labour rights should be applied. The choice of indicator will thus be critical in assessing the added value of this new target. This is also true for Target 10.7, which seeks to "*facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies*". While it touches a number of very relevant issues starting from promoting mobility, to the governance of recruitment agencies, the level of ambition of this target remains abstract and could even be read in a rather conservative manner if national migration policies are made the independent variable. Once again, the definition of indicators for this target will determine the level of ambition. Finally, the focus on remittances (Target 10c, means of implementation) is a very welcome point, but one could have embraced a broader perspective on the specific costs relating to migration.

In conclusion, when considered under the dimension of migration, the current proposal has the key merit of making migrants visible in the new agenda. If kept intact in the coming negotiations, this should ensure that migrants and their specific vulnerabilities are kept under the radar when translating the agenda into national goals and for monitoring implementation. The above brief assessment however shows that the picture is incomplete and that migration is not always articulated in a systematic or sufficiently precise manner throughout the document. Migrants could have been more explicitly linked to broader goals, the formulation of some targets and their exact level of ambition remains dependent on the definition of indicators. Finally, the cautious avoidance of referring to human rights or international standards as possible targets in the whole proposal will also affect the protection of migrants. In contrast to the process of defining the MDGs, which was predominantly led by experts, the definition of the post-2015 agenda has been more inclusive, debated and in the end also more political. The current proposal certainly reflects intense debates and a fragile compromise. In this respect, the decision on whether to reduce the number of goals and targets will be critical as it may reopen a competition between focus areas and on the overall balance of the document. In such a context, it is not clear how

good migration would do and the political support it would get. The coming stages, starting with the UN Secretary General' synthesis report, will give a first indication as to whether 'migration' was admitted on a 'permanent' or solely 'temporary' status in the post-2015 roadmap.

References

- (1) United Nations Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (2014). Outcome Document. July 19, 2014, New York. http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/4518SDGs_FINAL_Proposal%20of%20OWG_19%20July%20at%201320hrsver3.pdf
- (2) For a very brief overview of the different consultations and processes organised on the post-2015 agenda, see for instance: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: Post-2015 process. Accessed on July 31, 2014. <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1561>
- (3) UN Secretary General (2013). Report to the UN General Assembly – A Life of Dignity for All - A/68/202. July 26, 2013, New York. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/A%20Life%20of%20Dignity%20for%20All.pdf>
- (4) United Nations General Assembly (Resolution) (2000). United Nations Millennium Declaration - A/55/L.2. September 8, 2000, New York. <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>
- (5) United Nations General Assembly (2000). Millennium Development Goals. September 2000. <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/gti.htm>
- (6) For a better understanding of the (complex) linkages between migration and poverty see for instance: Arjan De Haan (2000). Migrants, Livelihoods and Rights: the Relevance of Migration in Development Policies. Social Development Working Paper No. 4, February 2000. <http://eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0708/doc7584.pdf>
- (7) This narrative is now broadly used and was the focus of one of the thematic groups of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, see for instance: Global Migration Group (2014). GMG Issues Brief No.3: Migration as an enabler for inclusive social development. <http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/sites/default/files/uploads/news/GMG-Issues-Brief-Migration-as-an-enabler-for-inclusive-social-development-FINAL.pdf>
On the linkages between migration and development, see for instance: Kathleen Newland (2013). What we know about migration and development. Migration Policy Institute Policy Brief Nr. 9, September 2013. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/what-we-know-about-migration-and-development>
- (8) UN Special Representative for International Migration and an informal working group of states, agencies, experts, and civil society (2014). Why and How migration should be included in the global partnership of the post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda, Submission to the Open Working Group by the UN Special Representative for International Migration and an informal group of states, agencies, experts and civil society. February 2014. http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/twelfthcoord2014/documents/backgrounddocs/SRSG_Informals_Reference_Document.pdf
- (9) Formulation taken from: Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Global Coalition on Migration, NGO Committee on Migration New York, MADE. (2014). Civil Society "Stockholm Agenda" on migrant and migration-related goals and targets in post-2015 global and national development agenda. June, 2014. http://oppenheimer.mcgill.ca/IMG/pdf/Civil_Society_Stockholm_Agenda.pdf
- (10) United Nations General Assembly (2013). Declaration of the High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development – A/68/L.5. October 1, 2013. <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/68/L.5>
- (11) This meeting was co-chaired by Bangladesh and Switzerland - former lead countries in the global thematic discussions on population dynamics in the context of the post 2015 agenda. On the meeting and the substance of the recommendations, see: Global Expert Meeting on Migration and Post-2015 Development Agenda: Recommendations. Dhaka, Bangladesh, April 28-29, 2014. http://iom.org.bd/iom_ftp/Global_Expert_Meeting/Documents_of_Global_Expert_Meeting/Final%20Recommendations.pdf
- (12) Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Global Coalition on Migration, NGO Committee on Migration New York, MADE. (2014). Civil Society "Stockholm Agenda" on migrant and migration-related goals and targets in post-2015 global and national development agenda. June, 2014. http://oppenheimer.mcgill.ca/IMG/pdf/Civil_Society_Stockholm_Agenda.pdf
- (13) See for instance: International Organisation for Migration (2014). IOM Position on the post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda. <http://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/What-We-Do/docs/IOM-Position-Paper-on-Post-2015.pdf>
- (14) For further reflections on the need and ambition of collecting more and better data in the post-2015 development agenda, see: Bernd Steimann (2014). A Post-2015 'Data Revolution' for whom – and by Whom?. Poverty-Wellbeing.net, November 2013. http://www.poverty-wellbeing.net/en/Home/Current_Poverty_Issues/MDGs_and_Post_2015/A_Post_2015_Data_Revolution_for_Whom_and_by_Whom