MIGRATION

Strengthening Data on Migration to Inform Policy Making

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Abstract

International migration constitutes a central component of the globalized world, motivated for the search to improve life prospects. It has become a more complex phenomenon regarding the drivers, management and governability, and reception and integration. In this context, there is a need to count on robust empirical based evidence to inform and contribute to policy discussions and recommendations about international migration matters. It is necessary to better understand how individuals and states can best take advantage of the opportunities migration offers while addressing its challenges for societies and individuals in full respect of their human rights.

Challenge

International migration constitutes a phenomenon that affects most countries at a global level. However, debates about international migration remain poorly informed, leading to misconceptions and stereotypical views about both drivers and impacts of migration. The need to improve the contributions of international migration to sustainable development while reducing the risks and vulnerability that migrants confront at different stages of the migratory process drove the attention of the international community that is currently debating the promotion of safe, orderly and regular migration. Both the Global Compact on Migration[1] and the 2030 Sustainable Development agenda require that States share basic concepts, produce compatible and comparable data, and promote instruments to design and monitor migration related policies. Nowadays the availability of information on migration processes and migrants themselves vary considerably across countries. Data collection systems and data sources differ in number and quality. There is still a poor understanding about the drivers of migration, migration types, migrants' contributions to both host and origin countries and the overall impacts of specific migration policies.

The aim of this Policy Brief is to propose how to reinforce traditional public data collection systems but also develop more innovative ways to gather and produce official information by public offices on migration and migration processes, at regional and international levels.

The main challenges for G20 countries are:

- To improve data production on international migration using appropriate, compatible, updated and comparable information that will serve to inform and monitor migration related policies.

- To enhance the understanding of the drivers of migrations, the contributions of migrations for host and origin countries, and migrants' integration and its determinants.

- To strengthen international cooperation to improve data collection and research on international migration in accordance with the objectives of the Global Compact on Migration.

Proposal

1. Reaching agreements on definitions and on minimum standards of data collection systems on international migration

International migration constitutes a global phenomenon but each country defines categories of migrants and establishes particular ways to measure and characterized them. IOM defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence. This definition is not straightforwardly transformed into an operational, unequivocal mode of data collection.[iii]

Countries should reach an agreement in order to globally and **comparably count migrants and returnee stocks**. There is also a need to gather information on migration flows using similar methodologies and using similar variables. Thus, the **harmonization of administrative sources (examples, border records, visas and residence permits) to improve the assessment on migrant flows should be promoted. It would be essential that stock and flow** data furnish information about migrants' characteristics.

There is considerable debate on the operational definitions of other, more complex, situations that are difficult to measure, such as transit, temporary, circular or permanent migration; voluntary or forced nature of migration (ie, differentiation between a migrant and an asylum seeker or refugee is particularly relevant); and variations within irregular statuses.

G20 should urge that countries' official statistical system reach agreements on how to define and to measure these aforementioned phenomena in order to inform policy making.

2. Assessing migrants' contribution to development and integration challenges

Migration and development are linked in several and complex ways.[iv] Nowadays there appears to be an increasing divergence between those who assess international migration as a contributor to human and economic development and those who regard it as a threat to the economy, identity and security in receiving countries. In this context it is important to **better establish and understand the drivers and contributions of migrants** in order

to propose migration policies in receiving countries that will not promote unintended effects, such as xenophobic and discriminatory practices.

Bi-national and multisite studies conducted in sending and receiving countries shed light on the drivers and impacts of migration and such studies should be promoted. Migrants' contributions are highly dependent upon the opportunities that host environments provide for them. Therefore, it is also important to assess empirical evidence about migrants' integration processes. Integration is a multidimensional process highly affected by migration related policies. To measure it, data on a wide range of topics are needed, such as economic, social, cultural, and political integration to host society.

G20 should urge the promotion of standardized ways to collect information and measure migrants' integration in immigrant receiving countries. Efforts should be devoted to collecting information through household or labour surveys (by adding specific modules) using multisited approaches, and by implementing a World Migration Survey to gather comparable information on various migration processes that cannot be captured with standard sources of migration statistics. Specific attention should be paid to gender and age differences in migratory processes.

3. Prevent and prepare: improving measures on forced mobility

In 2016, over 65.5 million people throughout the world were forcibly displaced.[v] A recent report has established that millions of children have migrated across borders in search for better life opportunities. In 2016, children made up about half of refugees and asylum seekers, at around 12 million globally.[vi] Yet most of the figures are only estimates of an unknown reality. Information on forced migration remains considerably thin and efforts should be made to better assess the situation of asylum seekers, refugees, and others forced to leave their homes.

Innovative ways of data collection should be promoted in response to humanitarian emergencies. Responsible and sensitive use of big data may help to provide estimates on migration flows during emergencies and post-disaster situations. Call Detail Records (CDR) from mobile phone networks have been used in several recent studies to track population movements in the aftermath of disasters[vii]. Use of Twitter and open-source newspaper articles are also being used to forecast mass movements of people[viii].

IOM has developed the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), which is a system to track and monitor the displacement and population mobility. It is designed to regularly and systematically capture, process and disseminate information to provide a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs of displaced populations, whether on site or en route. It delivers primary flow data and information on displacement, both in specific countries and at the global level.

G20 should improve financial collaborations for these types of data collection systems since they serve to foster humanitarian assistance to migrants in need.

4. Data to protect vulnerable migrants' groups

Among migrant populations there are vulnerable groups, whose rights are often violated, such as irregular migrants, transit migrants, and victims of traffic and smuggling. Often, unsafe, exploitative and unregulated migration practices involve smuggling, which can eventually lead to the death of thousands of people each year. Migrants in these situations demand specific treatment and policies in order to protect their rights.

Migrant women are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and abuse; both during the journey and upon arrival in transit or host countries. Gender equality among migrants in an economic, social and political sense starts with a better understanding of gender disparities through disaggregated data. G20 should urge official statistical systems to breakdown their data on migration (enumerations as well as registries) on the bases of both sex and age.

Within migrant groups, children are especially vulnerable. They are exposed to greater risks of smuggling, trafficking or other forms of abuse, especially when travelling on their own. Reliable, timely and disaggregated data by age are essential for evidence-based policymaking that reflects the needs of migrant children.[ix] Several efforts have been made worldwide to better account and capture these situations, such as a new IOM-UNICEF-UNHCR collaboration designed to protect unaccompanied and separated migrant and refugee children in Libya.[x] Therefore there is a call for Governments to collect and share data about child migrants in a standardized way.

G20 should urge governments to design a unified data base with information provided by different governmental offices on the situation of migrant children who have been subjects of different forms of abuse. Records should contain institutional responses to protect the rights of children and to follow up their situation over time.
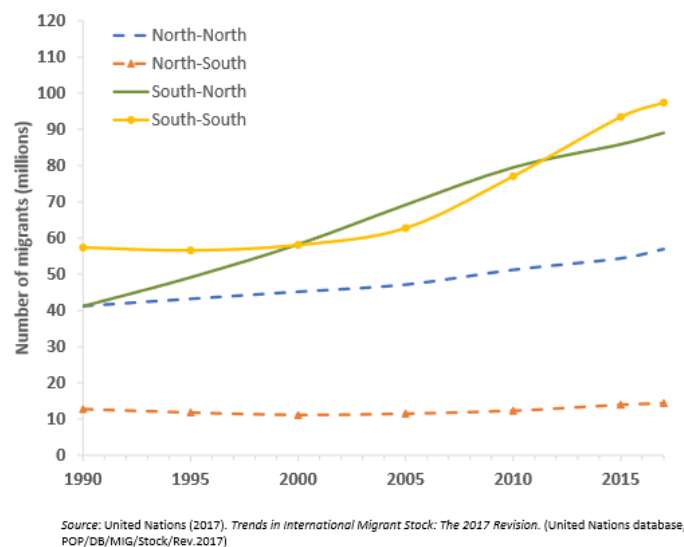
5. Strengthening cooperation on information systems within regional corridors

According to UN estimates two-third (165 million) of the total number of people living outside their country of birth (258 million) reside in high-income countries. Yet among all international flows (see Figure 1) the largest group of immigrants is comprised nowadays by those who were born in the South and live in other country in the South (38% of all migrants). South-South

migration often occurs within regional spaces, and in some specific cases they are regulated by regional agreements (Intergovernmental Authority on Development, IGAD; Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS; Common Market of the South, MERCOSUR, among others). However, migration regimes outside Europe and North America are not well understood, particularly regarding drivers and impacts.

Figure 1. Origin and destination of international migrants by development group, 1990-2017 (millions)

Source: United Nations (2017). *Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision.* (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2017)

A significant component of migration management within regional spaces is to count on timely and accurate information on migration movements and migrants. Member states of regional agreements should develop integrated migration statistical systems to share and exchange information. These systems should be sensitive to gender and age and also use international compatible definitions and standards.

By collecting and sharing information on a regular basis about labor migration, border crossings, migrants' integration in host countries, smuggling and trafficking, and by better informing migrants on their rights and obligations, governments will better manage human mobility across regional spaces in a safe, orderly and regular manner.

G20 should promote that, as part of regional agreements, countries should reach specific agreements about harmonized data collection systems on migration as a way to follow up on commitments made in relation to the process of social and economic integration of migrants.

References

[i] The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is expected to be the first, intergovernmentally negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, to cover all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner. The process to develop this global compact for migration started in April 2017 and the UN General Assembly will hold an intergovernmental conference in December 2018 with a view to adopting the global compact.

[ii] International migration has been included in the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development. Specifically, the goal of reducing inequalities within and among countries has as one of its targets to Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies (SDG 10.7).

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