

PROMOTING GOOD MIGRATION GOVERNANCE FOR SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

CONTRIBUTION TO THE CARIBBEAN REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE SAMOA PATHWAY MID-TERM REVIEW

Background

The migration and development discourse has evolved considerably over the past decade. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Addis Ababa Action Agenda for example, were the first major multilateral development frameworks since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development to integrate migration issues. There is also a strong focus on the linkages between migration and urban development in the New Urban Agenda, and references to climate and disaster-related human mobility issues in the Paris Climate Agreement and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction respectively.

Although the SIDS Accelerated Modalities for Action (SAMOA) Pathway document includes references to some aspects of migration, the issue is not as well integrated as it could be. The mid-term review of the SAMOA Pathway is therefore an opportunity to better address migration in the development context of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). With migration now integrated as a core, cross-cutting dimension of numerous multilateral frameworks, the international community has recognised the need to better link migration and development policies across the board, and to strengthen migration governance at all levels in order to maximise the benefits of migration, while mitigating its risks.

How migration is addressed in the SAMOA Pathway

The most visible dimension of migration addressed in the SAMOA Pathway relates to migrant remittances. Paragraph 106 (d) calls on governments to ‘reduce transfer costs related to remittances while pursuing the international targets and agreed outcomes of important international initiatives set by the United Nations system concerning remittances, given their importance for the economic growth of small island developing States’.

The need to ‘strengthen and support contingency planning and provisions for disaster preparedness and response, emergency relief and population evacuation, in particular for vulnerable groups including displaced persons, is also addressed through specific SAMOA commitments. There is also a brief reference in paragraph 24 highlighting that ‘migrants and diaspora communities and organizations ... play an important role in enhancing development in their communities of origin’, though that aspect is not supported through a specific commitment.

Though important in their own right, these limited references represent the extent to which migration is addressed in the SAMOA Pathway document, despite its much broader relevance to sustainable development, including in SIDS countries.

Towards a broader approach: the links between migration and development

When it is well governed, migration presents numerous benefits for origin and destination countries and migrants themselves. Migrants bring significant benefits to their new communities in the form of skills, labour force, investment and cultural diversity. Migrants also play a role in improving the lives of

communities in their countries of origin through the transfer of skills and financial resources, contributing to positive development outcomes.

However, if migration is poorly governed, it can negatively impact on development. For example, migrants in an irregular situation are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, which can lead to incidences of trafficking in persons, modern slavery and other human rights abuses. Failure to properly welcome and integrate migrants in the destination country can undermine social cohesion and produce poor socio-economic outcomes for migrants, which in turn limits their contributions to society.

As much as migration has an impact on development, migration is also affected by development. Both development and the absence of development can lead to migration. Populations residing in fragile, under-developed communities may move in search of better opportunities. The challenges of climate change and the impacts of sudden and slow-onset disasters can similarly force people to seek out safety, new homes and livelihoods elsewhere.

The reality is that the migration and development relationship is complex, non-linear in time and context specific. Research over the last 15 years, particularly at the individual and household level, confirms that the relationship between migration and development is far from straightforward.¹ It depends on the dynamics and interconnection between individual migrants, their communities in origin and destination countries and the laws, policies and practices that governments put in place to support good migration governance.

In short, migration is affected by and affects all areas of governance and therefore needs a whole-of-government approach whereby migration and migrants' needs are considered across all policy areas from health to education and from fiscal policies to trade. Policy coherence in migration and development is also crucial if we are to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensure that no one is left behind: unhealthy migrants cannot participate in and contribute to society; irregular migrants cannot access decent work; global labour demand and supply cannot be met without safe, orderly and regular migration.

Critical issues for SIDS countries

This broader understanding of the relationship between migration and development has several implications for SIDS countries. Foremost is that migration must be better reflected in the policies put in place to address the issues of most interest to SIDS. This would include better and more visibly integrating migration into the SAMOA Pathway and other frameworks that support the development of SIDS countries. Many of the priorities outlined in the SAMOA Pathway itself impact and are impacted by migration, and should incorporate a migration perspective. Examples include:

- *Sustained and sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth with decent work for all:* While job creation at home is the first best option, an increasing number of countries see overseas employment as part of a national development strategy for taking advantage of global employment opportunities and bringing in foreign exchange. Although the loss of skills through emigration can be a significant challenge for some SIDS, finding an effective balance that utilizes

¹ Migration Policy Institute (2018): Moving Beyond Root Causes: The Complicated Relationship between Development and Migration.

labour migration, remittances and return could create positive outcomes for development, as some programmes in the Pacific have shown. Exploring policy options to support labour migration – whether through bilateral or regional approaches – should therefore form part of sustainable development activities in the SIDS. This would also have to include efforts to protect migrants from exploitation and abuse, including to address vulnerability to and prosecute instances of human trafficking.

- *Climate change*: The impact of climate change on SIDS countries is consistently amongst the most pressing issues highlighted in related political discussions. The potential impacts of climate change on migratory flows is well known and debated, yet the SAMOA Pathway is relatively muted on that point. This is in part due to a political preference to emphasise collective action to address climate change as a first priority, however migration resulting from climate change is already a reality in many places, and must be given adequate attention. Efforts to incorporate migration in the climate change dimensions of the SAMOA Pathway should include strategies to: (a) prevent forced migration that results from environmental factors to the extent possible, including by encouraging climate adaptation and mitigation measures in countries of origin; (b) provide assistance and protection to affected populations when forced migration does occur, and to seek durable solutions to their situation; (c) facilitate migration as a climate change adaptation strategy, and promote the involvement of diasporas and migrant communities abroad in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts and to enhance the resilience of affected communities.
- *Disaster risk reduction*: Disasters triggered by natural hazards are increasingly caused or magnified by environmental factors, climate change and the compounding effects of fast-paced urbanization, population growth and rising inequalities. Beyond the direct human, material and environmental costs on affected communities and countries, disasters frequently result in large-scale population movements. While mobility is principally understood as a negative impact or factor that can give rise to heightened vulnerability and new risks for people on the move, it is also the case that mobility decisions can reduce risk and promote resilience. Efforts to promote disaster risk reduction in the context of the SAMOA Pathway should recognise mobility as a fundamental human process that can increase risk, but can also be central to building resilience in contexts of sudden or slow-onset disasters, whether natural or man-made.

Besides these critical areas, many other aspects of the SAMOA Pathway are related in a number of ways to migration. For example, sustainable energy, oceans and seas, food security and nutrition, water and sanitation, health and non-communicable diseases, gender equality and women's empowerment, and social development, all have implications for migration, both as issues that impact upon livelihoods (and that can therefore act as drivers of migration), and as issues that affect people on the move. The Mid-Term Review of the SAMOA Pathway is an opportunity to better link the SIDS discourse to migration and to the migration-dimensions of sustainable development, as outlined in the 2030 Agenda and other multilateral frameworks. A tried and tested mechanism to achieve better policy coherence has been to mainstream migration into development and other governance policies.