UN
DP

Human Mobility, Shared Opportunities

A Review of the 2009 Human Development Report and the Way Ahead

Executive summary

This report looks back and connects UNDP's Human Development Report (HDR) of 2009 to ongoing trends and emerging issues a decade later. The 2009 HDR was the first major report to look at people's mobility through the lens of human development and propose a package of reforms to further migration-related human freedoms. Since its publication, mobility has gained recognition as a central component of development, but has also generated controversy as the number of people on the move has grown, and the politics of migration has turned negative in many countries. The report explores policy ideas associated with the HDR that could improve international responses to migration and displacement, enhancing the contributions of human mobility to sustainable development.

Chapter 2 discusses both patterns and trends in migration, showing some continuity with the 2009 HDR and some trends that represent divergence or a sharp acceleration. Among the former are population aging on a global basis (particularly in more industrialized economies), the high proportion of women among international migrants, and the predominance of migration within countries rather than across national boundaries (although poor data continue to limit understanding of internal migration). Major changes include the numbers of refugees and internally displaced people, which reached an all-time high of about 70 million in 2019, and the increasing number of people compelled to move due to climate change. Awareness has grown of the particular challenges migrant women face, such as employment in the least visible sectors of the economy, including household employment, as well as continuing unequal constraints on their freedom of movement. In some contexts, however (Western Europe, for example) women migrants achieve better overall outcomes than men.

Global patterns of migration show, as might be expected, that the majority—almost three quarters—of

migrants continue to move to countries that rank very high on the Human Development Index (HDI). Migrants who move from low to higher HDI countries make great gains in terms of income, as well as health, education and safety. However, both within and across countries, it is typically not the poorest who move. Higher incomes and education give people the means to move as well as access to the networks and knowledge that facilitate migration.

Despite the accumulating evidence that migration brings gains for migrants and their families, as well as for countries of origin and destination, public discourse on migration (especially in host countries) has become increasingly polarized and, often, negative. Facts are often insufficient and even ignored to alter strongly held views, although people with direct personal experience with immigrants tend to have more positive feelings. It is important to understand and address the sources of concern, whether based in material changes or in attitudes and emotions, and to counter xenophobic rhetoric used to manipulate electoral politics.

The six pillars of HDR 2009 together presented an integrated package of reforms to increase the benefits of migration for human development. Chapter 3 considers how subsequent policy innovations (or the lack thereof) have moved toward or away from the 2009 proposals:

- The expansion of legal pathways for migration (Pillar I) has proceeded through regional mobility agreements such as in the European Union, the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the increasing number of migrants with dual nationality or legal permanent residence. Little progress has been made, however, in visa liberalization for low-skilled migrants. In fact, skill levels of international migrants have been increasing and policy changes increasingly favour people with skills or wealth.

- Protection of the rights of migrants (Pillar II) has progressed on paper, but implementation is increasingly flawed. Migrants' access to services and social protection is limited legally and in practice in most countries.

- Transaction costs (Pillar III), for documents, travel and money transfer remain stubbornly high. In low-income countries, 45 percent of women and 30 percent of men do not have an official identity document.

- Pillar IV highlights the growing number of studies that show that migration is usually a win-win situation for migrants and host communities—and the world economy at large. The public discourse, however, has turned sharply negative in many countries of destination.

- Another welcome development is that restrictions on internal mobility (Pillar V) had diminished in the 2010–2019 period (prior to COVID-19), with very few countries maintaining formal restrictions, although informal barriers may persist.

- At both national and international levels, migration has been mainstreamed into national and local development strategies (Pillar VI), with governments, especially of countries of origin, increasingly recognizing the development potential of migration, and implementing programmes to mobilize their diasporas and create opportunities for more

productive uses of remittances. Powerful structural obstacles to the development potential remain, however.

Chapter 4 examines the ways global migration policy frameworks have evolved over the decade, culminating in the adoption in 2018 of two Global Compacts, on refugees and for safe, orderly and regular migration. Both were adopted by an overwhelming majority of States in the UN General Assembly. Although neither is legally binding, both compacts embody a commitment for States to pursue a broad set of objectives on international migration. In 2019, the UN Secretary-General established a high-level panel to find solutions for internally displaced people and their host communities. A more inclusive agenda-setting process involving civil society, local authorities and the private sector, pioneered by the Global Forum on Migration and Development, augmented the efforts of States to arrive at new policy frameworks.

The articulation of new policy frameworks was accompanied by structural changes in the UN system, notably the inclusion of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as a related agency of the UN. As part of the broader UN reform effort, the Secretary-General established a UN Network on Migration involving all the UN agencies with migration portfolios, as well as other stakeholders, with IOM in the coordinating role. As the migration agenda evolved, so has the global development agenda. Migration has been recognized as a powerful enabler of development, although still not a substitute for sound development policy.

Human development as a concept with intrinsic as well as instrumental value has been more widely acknowledged since the 2009 HDR was published. Chapter 5 looks at the continuing relevance of the HDR 2009 pillars, and contemplates next steps to move their aims forward. It examines some of the global trends that are changing debates on migration and displacement in fundamental ways and will continue to do so—trends such as climate change, the changing nature of work, rising global inequality and the prevalence of mixed movements of migrants and refugees. These trends have profound implications for UNDP and the broader international system. They call for policy innovations and new and collective efforts to address and invest in medium- and long-term solutions to negative drivers of migration. Coalitions of States will need to form to tackle these major challenges.

Specific recommendations for migration policy and programming include new and creative efforts to open legal pathways for migration, including temporary migration for temporary labour needs. Greater participation of migrants and diaspora communities is required to bring experience and insights to the design and implementation of programmes; transformative development benefits; and social safety nets in origin countries to reduce movements driven by necessity rather than choice. The root causes of displacement must be addressed head-on to end protracted displacement. The international community as a whole must cooperate to address the challenges and offer benefits for migrants, refugees, IDPs, host communities, origin and destination countries alike. The menu of necessary change is difficult but urgent.