

Migration: challenges and opportunities from the perspective of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Migración: retos y oportunidades desde la perspectiva de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS)

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Abstract

In line with the growing consensus that a post in the 2015 development agenda demands the approach of contemporary international migration with the aim of reducing poverty and inequality, while fighting against discrimination, exclusion and marginalization, this article describes how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), framed in the 2030 Agenda, make visible and include migrations and refugees as topics for discussion. To do so, the article begins with a literature review regarding the normative and conceptual bases of the relationship between migration and development, providing a brief status of the migration behavior flows in Ibero-America with a focus on Latin American and the Caribbean—particularly the case of Venezuela and the exodus it is currently experiencing as a result of economic contraction, humanitarian crisis and political and social conflict—, to end with a reflection on the actors invited to participate in this effort and the actions that can be deployed in order to reduce the «involuntary large-scale migration» caused by «conflicts, disasters or environmental or economic reasons», which is within the top 10 global risks repeatedly contemplated in the reports published by the World Economic Forum between 2016 and 2018. The article hopes to contribute to the debate in favor of migratory and integration policies with better planning and management, and real impact on the lives of migrants.

Resumen

Al tenor del creciente consenso en torno a que una agenda para el desarrollo después de 2015 demanda el abordaje de la migración internacional contemporánea con el ánimo de reducir la pobreza y la desigualdad, a la par que combatir la discriminación, la exclusión y la marginalización, se describe, de modo sucinto, cómo los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS), enmarcados en la Agenda 2030, visibilizan e incluyen a las migraciones y el refugio como temas de discusión. Para ello, se parte de una revisión documental en torno a las bases normativas y conceptuales que sustentan la relación entre la migración y el desarrollo, brindando luego un breve estatus de la situación migratoria en Iberoamérica con foco en América Latina y el Caribe —particularmente el caso de Venezuela y el éxodo por el que atraviesa en la actualidad como producto de la contracción económica, la crisis humanitaria y la conflictividad político-social—, para finalizar con una reflexión en torno a los actores convocados a hacer parte de este esfuerzo y las acciones que pueden desplegar de cara a aminorar la «migración involuntaria a gran escala» provocada por «conflictos, desastres o por motivos ambientales o económicos», la cual figura dentro de los 10 principales riesgos mundiales contemplados de manera reiterada en los informes publicados por el Foro Económico Mundial entre 2016 y 2018.

Keywords | palabras clave

Migration, refugees, displaced persons, sustainable development goals, diasporas, human rights.
Migración, refugiados, desplazados, objetivos de desarrollo sostenible, diásporas, derechos humanos.

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1. Introduction

Migration is not a new phenomenon. Almost always, leaving one's place of origin or moving to another place of residence, either within a country or abroad, especially in the case of the inhabitants of developing countries, may be the best, if not the only way to improve income opportunities, or have access to more and better education services and health. In making this decision, which is not exempt from uncertainty, lies the hope of combining one's talents with the resources of the destination country, for the personal benefit of close family members—who often accompany the migrant or follow them afterwards—, those who are left behind and for the new society (Castillo, 2015, UNDP, 2009).

However, migrants often suffer the rejection of those who fear «newcomers», which shows the impact of their presence on the cultural dimensions and attitudes of people in receiving societies, given the observed growth in the volume of displaced individuals and refugees during recent years due to political instability, criminal violence, persecution, natural disasters, environmental degradation linked to climate change, poverty and inequality (Vatican, 2017). This is the irruption of risks and vulnerabilities to which a large part of migrants are exposed; for example, refugees, who remain close to the country from which they flee, usually living in camps until the situation at home allows them to return; or the victims of human trafficking (accompanied by violence and sexual abuse), especially young women who are deceived with promises of a better life (World Economic Forum, 2018).

According to the *Global Forum on Migration and Development GFMD Turkey 2014-2015*, until 2014 the number of international migrants had increased by approximately 32%, reaching 232 million people, after which the remittances sent by them to developing countries experienced an increase of more than five times, registering an estimated sum of 436 billion US dollars. In the meantime, the number of forcefully displaced people following crisis situations (refugees and asylum seekers) reached 59.5 million of people.

Up to day, the migratory phenomenon is even more complex and permeable to negative readings due to the natural tension posed by globalization to the Westphalian nation-states with full sovereignty to manage and control their borders (Pinazo, 2017). As a result, those who want or are forced to migrate face more and more obstacles erected by governments to restrict, if not close, the entry and displacement, even in the midst of the paradox that is the reduction of barriers for the exchange of goods (UNDP, 2009).

Within this scenario, policies in the destination countries tend to favor people with a higher level of education, with students commonly being invited to settle with their families or to stay as soon as they get a degree. On the contrary, workers with low academic qualifications or few specialized skills face more impediments, being relegated to the demand for labor in sectors such as agriculture, construction, industry, manufacturing and services, which generates great controversy by the fact that they cover «vacant positions», but also oust local workers and cause lower wages.

All in all, migrants, regardless the reasons they have to leave their place of origin, deserve to be respected in their dignity, rights and freedoms, revealing the need to offer a joint response through international cooperation and shared responsibility to

promote and adopt effective measures that protect and contribute to the improvement of their situation along with that of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people, preventing them from becoming victims of criminal bands and human trafficking, exploitation and abuse (Vatican, 2017).

This is how, a post-2015 development agenda demands the approach of contemporary international migration with the aim of reducing poverty and inequality, while combating discrimination, exclusion and marginalization; this article describes how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), framed in the 2030 Agenda, make visible and include migration and refugees as topics for discussion. It is based on a literature review about the normative and conceptual bases that sustain the relationship between migration and development, providing a brief status of the migratory situation in Ibero-America with a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean, to conclude with a reflection on the actors invited to participate in this effort and the actions they can take.

2. Migration, development and 2030 Agenda

With the advent of the 21st century, migration occupied an important place in the policy framework of the majority of the Member States of the United Nations (UN), a milestone in this line being the «High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development», whose first edition was held in September 2006. This space provided the participating countries the possibility to approach migration from multidimensional perspectives, in order to determine the best mechanisms to maximize their benefits for the development and minimize their negative repercussions. Hence, the creation of the Global Forum on Migration and Development as a voluntary and non-binding platform aimed primarily at cooperation, together with the Global Migration Group, which is responsible for the follow-up on the application of international instruments and regional standards, in addition to the promotion of coherent, comprehensive and coordinated inter-institutional approaches.

This initiative would be endorsed by the II High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development: *Getting the migration to work*, carried out on October 3 and 4, 2013 under the 68th annual session of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN). The statement derived from this meeting highlighted the nature of human mobility as a crucial driver for sustainable development, underlining its contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). On this basis, States were explicitly urged to defend the Human Rights of migrants, refugees and internally displaced people, and guarantee their enjoyment of freedoms.

In this way, the Declaration defines the context and tone of the Post-2015 Agenda, undoubtedly making a decisive contribution to the 2030 Agenda on the basis of an action plan that includes 17 objectives and 169 goals for the attention of the challenges that the three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, social and environmental—imply in the light of a global, integral and balanced vision in order to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all. It also includes the commitment to cooperate at an international level to ensure that migration is orderly, safe and regular, reaffirming the promise to «leave no one behind».

In accordance with this trend, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was approved by Heads of State and senior government representatives during the meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) held in September 2015, being enforced from January 1, 2016. This first step was followed by the report of the General Secretary of the organization entitled *In conditions of security and dignity: response to the large displacements of refugees and migrants*, published in April 2016, which paved the way for an Extraordinary Summit in September. This led to the *New York Declaration*, in which the Member States of the United Nations Organization (UN) agreed to share the responsibility of receiving and providing assistance to migrants, with the aim of approving in 2018 a «Global Compact on Migration» in order to set up a global governance system to address human mobility (IOM, 2017: I).

At the time, the document called for a multifactorial reading of migration from a complex perspective that, articulated with the dynamics of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), recognized the needs of migrants as a vulnerable group in need of empowerment. Thus, although human mobility does not appear to be established as a specific objective or goal, transversally it can be seen as an explicit field with groups themes in which political action is inscribed, namely:

- The protection of Human Rights over other cultural or nationality factors.
- The fight against organized trafficking and human trafficking networks, given the high feminization component of migratory flows.
- The implementation of urgent measures with regard to the immediate schooling of infants as a first measure of social integration (access programs to primary and secondary education).
- The promotion of a host culture as opposed to expressions of xenophobia and racism.
- Support to the main receiving countries of migrants and refugees.
- The deployment of housing policies.
- The exceptional and temporary nature of the refugee camps.
- The commitment to expand legal channels for resettlement.
- The scientific analysis of data that allow to delimit the coordinates of migrations and the understanding of their causes (Fernández *et al.*, 2017).

Based on these considerations, in the breakdown of the objectives and goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, migration finds its place and reference as follows:

- Objective 1: End of poverty.
 - Goal 1.3. Implement social protection systems, including minimum levels, and achieve sustainable coverage of the poor and vulnerable.
 - Goal 1.5. Strengthen the resilience of the poor and those most exposed to economic, social and environmental crises and disasters.

- Objective 3. Health & Wellness.
 - Goal 3.8. Achieve universal health coverage.
 - Goal 3.c. Increase health financing and train health personnel to service developing countries.
 - Goal 3.d. Strengthen the capacity of countries in terms of early warning, risk reduction and risk management for national and global health.
- Objective 4. Quality education.
 - Goal 4.b. Promotion of scholarships for international education opportunities (student mobility).
- Objective 5. Gender equality.
 - Goal 5.2. Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.
 - Goal 5.6. Guarantee universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.
- Objective 8. Decent work and economic growth.
 - Goal 8.7. Eradicate forced labor, end modern forms of slavery and human trafficking; eliminate child labor.
 - Goal 8.8. Protect labor rights and promote a safe and risk-free work environment for all workers, including migrant workers.
- Objective 10. Reduction of inequalities.
 - Goal 10.7. Facilitate orderly and safe migration through well-managed migration policies.
 - Goal 10.c. Reduction of the remittance costs.
- Objective 11. Sustainable cities and communities.
 - Goal 11.1. Ensure access to adequate housing and services; improve marginal neighborhoods.
 - Goal 11.5. Reduce the number of deaths and people affected by disasters, as well as the associated economic losses.
- Objective 13. Action for the weather.
 - Goal 13.1. Resilience against the risks related to climate and natural disasters.
- Objective 16. Peace, justice and solid institutions.
 - Goal 16.1. Reduce violence and corresponding mortality rates.
 - Goal 16.2. End the mistreatment, exploitation, trafficking, violence and torture against children.

- Objective 17. Alliances to achieve the objectives.
 - Goal 17.16. Strengthen global partnerships among multiple stakeholders to promote the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries.
 - Goal 17.18. Assist developing countries in increasing the availability of high quality data disaggregated by migratory situation (IOM, 2018).

In particular, Goal 10.7, which addresses migration in the broader context of reducing inequalities of all kinds [SDG 10], reflects the imperative for all States to improve the management and planning of their migration policies. This involves monitoring and measuring progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the national level, taking into account their multiple dimensions (both qualitative and quantitative), with the understanding that migration governance frameworks must be evaluated in three dimensions: investment in people; effectiveness for the creation of institutional capacity for the States (political coherence and policy coverage); and success in terms of opening more avenues for legal migration. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure the existence of a normative framework that promotes safe, orderly and regular migration; verify that the measures and methodologies applied are adequate for the purposes intended; define the indicators to be measured and the terms in which the goals and objectives to be achieved are described; and generate new sources of disaggregated data based on migratory status, gender, age and other relevant factors (IOM, 2017, pp. 13-14).

In this regard, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in keeping with the status of an intergovernmental body conferred on it as a related agency of the United Nations (UN), supports its partners in the international community to face the challenges posed by migration management. Hence, the monitoring that it has carried out on the specific goals about Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in addition to accompanying intergovernmental negotiations with a view to the «Global Compact for Safe, Ordered and Regular Migration», to be adopted in 2018.

In this process, the «Migration Governance Framework» (MIGOF) approved by the Council of Member Countries of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) through the Resolution No. 1310 of November 24, 2015, is notable. It embodies a valuable instrument for the administration of country evaluations based on a set of three principles and three coherent, comprehensive and balanced objectives, specifically:

- Principles:
 1. Adherence to international standards and respect for the rights of migrants.
 2. Formulation of contrasted policies and application of integrated government approaches.
 3. Collaboration with its partners to address migration and related issues.
- Goals:
 1. Promote the socioeconomic well-being of migrants and society.

2. Effectively address issues related to mobility in crisis situations.
3. Ensure that migration takes place in a safe, orderly and dignified manner (IOM, 2017b).

Another one is the «Migration Governance Index» (MGI), developed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in association with *The Economist Intelligence Unit* designed with the purpose of helping governments to measure the performance of their migration governance structures, taking into account its priorities, progress and shortcomings in five different policy areas:

1. Institutional capacity.
2. Rights of migrants.
3. Labor migration.
4. Management of a safe and orderly migration.
5. Regional and international cooperation and other alliances (IOM, 2017, p. 23).

Additionally, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) deploys its action through the «International Dialogue on Migration», a body founded in 2001 at the request of the member states of the organization, in the process of setting up a forum to sponsor more understanding of international migration problems; the establishment of groups of experts from different spheres and regions, with those responsible for formulating public policies to exchange normative points of view and effective practices in the future, and consolidate cooperation among governments with other partners dealing with this issue. In 2016, it convened two workshops focused on the review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and, in particular, on the goals related to migration in the context of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The first workshop took place at the headquarters of the United Nations Organization (UN), in New York, from February 29 to March 1, while the second was held in Geneva, on October 11 and 12 (IOM, 2017, p. 3).

However, each of the aforementioned instances has paved the way for the Global Action on Migration, which is expected to establish the principles and approaches to manage migratory flows at an international level in an innovative way during the following decades and promote more coherence among the migration policies of each of the States.

3. Main migration trends in Latin America

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2017), the majority of international migrants remain in their region of origin, with South-South migration emerging as the geographic component of fastest growth in human mobility, despite the fact that, as a tendency, currents have always been defined by the transit from developing countries to the developed countries of Europe, North America and Australasia (UNDP, 2009). In this context, the concern for migrations and refuge has been triggered exponentially in Ibero-America, revealing the difference in development between

the countries of origin, transit and reception as the cause of the so-called «migratory bridges or corridors» (Fernández *et al.*, 2017).

It is no coincidence that the succession of Ibero-American Summits held since 1991, understood as a regional mechanism for meeting and dialogue, has created a space for the discussion of the main concerns and challenges in the field of migration in the Latin American context. In this sense, the meeting held in Montevideo (Uruguay) in November 2006 can be considered particularly significant, which led to the «Montevideo Commitment on Migration and Development», ultimately a valuable political instrument for guiding action insofar as it points out the relevance of migrations for the understanding of the history of this region of the world, positively assessing their social and intercultural contributions, without undermining the contributions to the economies of the host countries (Universidad Pontificia de Comillas and OBIMID, 2017).

Following the «Montevideo Commitment», the first two editions of the Ibero-American Forum on Migration and Development (FIBEMYD) held in Cuenca (Ecuador, 2008) and San Salvador (El Salvador, 2010) took place. Both initiatives would be endorsed by the South American Conference on Migration (CSM) held in 2010, serving as a backdrop for the approval of the «South American Plan for the Human Development of Migration, Context and Perspectives», which is based on a conception of governance migration focused on the Human Rights of migrants, regardless of their national, religious or ethnic origin; non-criminalization according to their migratory administrative situation, and non-use as an adjustment variable of the economies or labor markets.

Parallel to these efforts, the growing immigration in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean has responded to an intraregional character due to the regional integration agreements, but also due to the economic and political crises that the countries face at different moments in their history (IOM and ECLAC, 2018). In this regard, according to the report of the Organization of American States (OAS) of 2015, until that year the zone had hosted 9.2 million migrants, from which half migrated to the United States and Canada, a quarter moved to other regions, and the other quarter moved among other countries of America.

Mesoamerica and the Caribbean are considered sub-regions of origin and transit, although irregular migratory flows from Cuba and Haiti, as well as from Asian and African countries, have increased significantly there. The countries that have most recently attracted intra-regional flows, such as Mexico, Belize, El Salvador, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago, have consolidated as countries of destination (IOM, 2017b).

With regard to South America, since the implementation of the Mercosur Residency Agreement (2009), more than two million temporary and permanent residences have been granted to nationals of the region, positioning Argentina as the main recipient country of immigrant flows from the region, seconded by Chile and Brazil. Workers represent the majority of the migration in sectors with high levels of low-skilled employment, subjected to irregular and precarious conditions (agriculture, construction, domestic work and self-employment). Recently, the countries of South America have received a growing number of extra-regional migrants from Africa, Asia, Europe, the United States and the Caribbean. Regarding extra-regional emigration, the

United States, Spain and other European countries and, to a lesser extent, Japan, are the main countries of destination (IOM, 2017b).

Currently, in the sub-region, the situation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela stands out, following the changes observed in its migratory tradition. Although it continues to be the second receiving country in terms of population, at the same time it registers an important increase in emigration, which practically doubled during the intercensal period of 2000-2010 to different countries, with the United States and Spain leading the list as the main destinations (185,000 and 155,000, respectively), and Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Mexico, Costa Rica, Argentina and Chile (IOM and ECLAC, 2018). Since 2012, the climate of political and social conflict has intensified, with the aggravating circumstance that the country has once again entered a phase of economic contraction, with high levels of indebtedness, shortage of basic products and inflation that have strongly affected the population's purchasing power (Universidad Pontificia de Comillas and OBIMID, 2017).

Curiously, the Venezuelan government approved a Migration and Alien Status Law in 2004, stating the commitment to comply with the instruments subscribed and ratified in the various international scenarios and integration processes that the country is part of. However, the document does not include any title (or chapter) referring to the registration of Venezuelans residing abroad and the protection of their rights, which results in the lack of an action plan against the diaspora (Fernández, et al., 2017). From this point of view, the governmental spheres in Venezuela have not granted recognition to the growing cross-border community, because it would imply admitting that the political and economic model generates emigrants, because the political organization of Venezuelans abroad generates a bad image for the country's regime—for example, the protests led by groups in different cities of the world, denouncing the lack of civil and political freedoms: the famous «escraches» (BBC World, 2017). This fact has allowed official instances to politicize the issue and place it in a nationalist discourse that identifies the country and its sovereignty with the socialist project, presenting migration, in a symbolic context, as an «escape valve» due to internal pressures—exporting the opposition—, from which follows the legitimization of their exclusion and the moral justification of their repression—traitors to the homeland/allies of a foreign enemy (Bobes, 2012).

Since 2004, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reflected the increase of Venezuelan citizens seeking protection in other countries, who have been granted the status of refugees or similar. In this context, UNHCR urges the receiving states and/or those that already host Venezuelans to adopt mechanisms aimed at providing international protection as a humanitarian act consistent with the spirit of solidarity, in accordance with the Convention on the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the Declaration of Cartagena. Recognizing this challenge, minimum standards must be guaranteed under all circumstances, specifically equality, accessibility, basic rights (medical care, education, family unity, freedom of movement, access to housing and the right to work), and guarantees of no return (UNHCR, 2018).

Ultimately, the ideological radicalization staged in recent years in Venezuela, along with political polarization, has led to disdain for the emigrants and the application of a «policy of no politics» as a result of having left the country and the political

project led by Hugo Chávez, continued since 2013 by Nicolás Maduro (Muñoz, 2016). For the General Secretary of International Amnesty (AI), Salil Shetty, the «humanitarian and human rights crisis» that exists in Venezuela «is lurking» in South America, which calls for a «political» and «regional» solution.

4. Final guidelines

Managing migration effectively implies adopting a holistic approach that favors the human treatment of migrants—regardless their migratory status—, highlighting their dimensions and essential aspects as human beings.

Currently, there are many calls to create a global system of migration governance that allows governments to face challenges in a shared manner and generate responses, highlighting human development in the public policy agenda to increase benefits from the increasingly complex patterns of human movement in the world. Additionally, it is not crazy to assert that, from now on, they should consider the integration of migration into their respective planning processes and instruments, such as local, national and regional development plans.

The «how» and the «when» of the reforms will depend on a realistic examination of the economic and social conditions of each country, with the understanding that migration is a multidimensional and transnational phenomenon in which all, without distinction, are emitters, receivers and, even, places of transit for people. Hence, international cooperation, through bilateral or regional agreements, can result not only in a more efficient protection of the rights of migrants, but also in the exploitation of their potential and, with it, an increase of their contributions to the development of countries and communities of origin as well as the development of host countries and communities, in the framework of an inclusive globalization process.

However, it is not only the responsibility of governments to fulfill these objectives; rather, the achievements will be subject to a large extent, to their capacity to incorporate other people involved in the process, such as the business sector, civil society and diaspora communities. In the case of the former, their contribution is evident as it is one of the main drivers of long-term value creation in economic terms, with private companies being the main employers for the majority of migrants who move in search of jobs, in addition to providing recruitment services, travel services and transfer of funds. From this point of view, companies must not tolerate discrimination related to race, ethnic origin or religion, either in the workplace or in the supply chain, while also avoiding exploitation practices. Likewise, they must respect the rights of migrant workers to freedom of association and engagement in collective bargaining, raising awareness of the impact benefits of diversity on aspects such as innovation, new markets and productivity (MF Saltaji, 2017; IOM, 2017).

Regarding civil society, the acceptance of migrants represents an opportunity for new interactions based on mutual enrichment, identifying and overcoming, through awareness campaigns, sources of hostility and social tensions. The «invisibility» of migrants, which entailed leaving aside the consideration of their rights, their dignity and their needs, has now given way to sustained attention based on stereotypes, stigmas and generalized prejudices.

Last but not least, it is worth highlighting the role of diasporas in their potential as «bridges» between societies and agents of development, since they facilitate access to ideas, knowledge and resources that complement and, in some cases, intensify progress in the countries of origin (UNDP, 2009). Therefore, the next step is a more systematic study of migration profiles and their benefits, costs and risks on the part of States with significant departures of population abroad, coupled with the empowerment of a department or ministry dedicated to diaspora affairs, without discounting the assumption of national policies that offer support and defend the interests of migrant communities by appealing to consular protection and legal services (Vatican, 2017).

However, the knowledge of diasporas is not enough to promote collaboration; rather, effective participation strategies demand the creation of trust (IOM, 2017). It requires the adoption of different mechanisms to know how much of the population has established outside the national territory and under what circumstances, to form links with communities abroad and promote activities that contribute to the preservation of their links with their country.

These considerations agree with the approaches of international organizations in order to promote understanding about the dynamics of migration, the conditions in which it occurs, along with the opportunities and demands that it causes. The official recognition of the contribution of migration to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embodies a major breakthrough, promoting the design of integration strategies with real impact on the lives of the 244 million international migrants in the world, while simultaneously promoting regional and global debates in favor of better planned and managed migratory policies.

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