



Policy priorities relating to rural migration depend on country contexts

Rural migration in various country contexts

The vastly unequal distribution of income and opportunities in the world – both within and between countries – will continue to drive rural migration, both internal and international. The unequal distribution is itself driven by myriad economic and social factors, which may differ from country to country. In the case of rural migration, though, it is possible to configure a typology of country profiles based on its main drivers. One such typology, presented in Figure 1, is synthesized from two indicators:

1. The level of economic development and governance, expressed by the composite Human Development Index (HDI), integrating life expectancy at birth, expected years of schooling, and gross national income per capita;
2. The density of rural youth per hectare of agricultural land, as an approximation of the labour absorption capacity of agricultural and rural areas.

In this typology, the following five broad profiles are identified: (i) fragile and conflict-affected states; (ii) countries facing a rural youth employment challenge in fragile contexts; (iii) countries with development momentum, allowing them to absorb youth labour market entrants; (iv) transitioning countries with economic momentum and a high level of urbanization; and (v) aspirational destinations with high levels of development.

Governments should prioritize policies based on their rural migration context

Many different policies affect rural migration through their impacts on agriculture, rural development, food insecurity and poverty. The challenge for policy-makers is to maximize the benefits of rural migration while minimizing the negative effects. Just as importantly, migration must be – as much as possible – a voluntary decision based on real and informed choices. For this purpose policies must aim at creating attractive rural livelihood opportunities, removing constraints to rural migration, preventing crises that lead to forced



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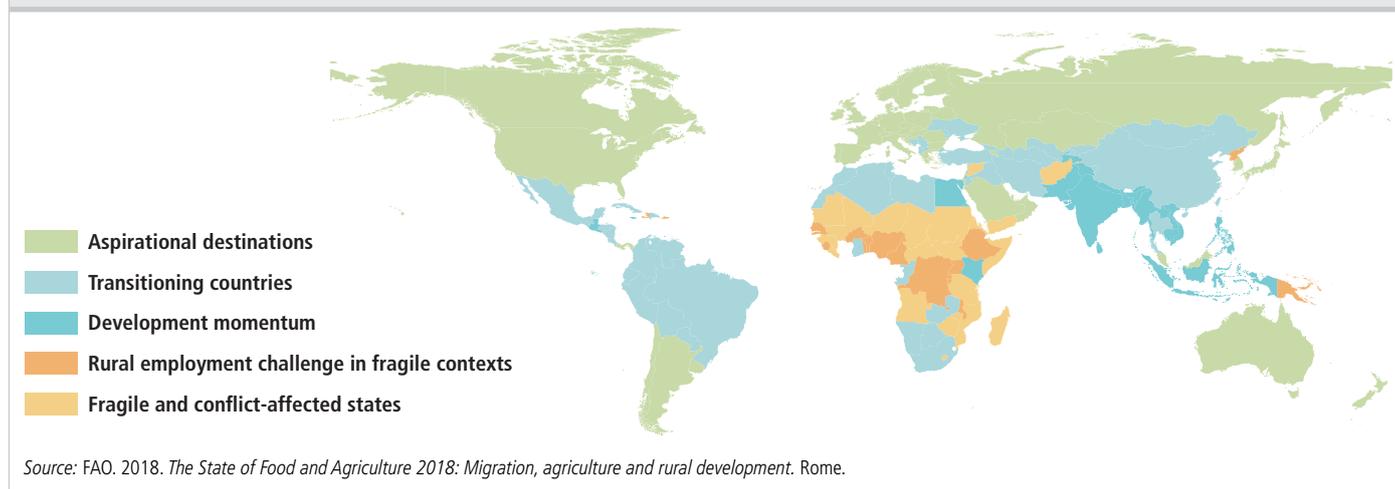
KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ Governments need to prioritize different policy areas on rural migration, depending on their country contexts and development objectives.
- ▶ Countries with development momentum can focus on creating employment opportunities by strengthening agricultural value chains and developing regional urban centres close to rural areas.
- ▶ Countries facing a rural youth employment challenge in fragile contexts should promote rural livelihoods while supporting productive capacity in areas subject to out-migration.
- ▶ During protracted crises, strategies integrating humanitarian and development approaches can improve the self-reliance and resilience of displaced people and host communities.
- ▶ For transitioning countries at an intermediate level of development, national development strategies need to focus on improving rural–urban linkages in order to expand economic opportunities and reduce depopulation in rural areas.
- ▶ Developed countries in need of agricultural workers should ensure policy coherence between migration and agricultural and rural development policies in order to protect immigrant rights and promote their social integration.

migration, and limiting the negative impacts on migrants and host communities. Context matters for policy formulation and implementation, as countries at different levels of development face different challenges and policy priorities.

- ▶ **Countries with development momentum**, having a large pool of youth in rural areas, may need to focus on promoting employment opportunities in agricultural value

FIGURE 1. A typology of country profiles based on drivers of rural migration



chains and encouraging the development of regional urban centres to provide opportunities for rural residents. Human capital development, social protection and the provision of information can then prepare rural youth to take advantage of these opportunities. Moreover, for prospective migrants facing various constraints to out-migration (such as the poorest populations in rural India, for whom rural out-migration is rare), social protection programmes can help them bear migration costs and provide a sort of insurance in the areas of destination.

- ▲ **Countries facing a rural youth employment challenge in fragile contexts**, which do not have the development momentum to absorb labour market entrants in rural areas, need to promote rural livelihoods and provide options for youth in rural areas while supporting productive capacity in areas subject to out-migration. Those countries emerging from crisis situations also need to support returnees and communities of origin. Countries with large diaspora communities can promote programmes to maximize the benefits to be gained from migrants: in addition to remittances, there is also potential for investment. In Burkina Faso, for example, return migrant households have a higher propensity to invest in agricultural assets.
- ▲ **Fragile and conflict-affected states**, often in situations of protracted crisis, must focus on addressing the needs of migrants and host communities while fostering preventive measures. Agriculture must be a priority, as rural areas tend to be the most affected by crises and also host substantial numbers of refugees. The integration of humanitarian and development approaches can address the needs of both refugees and host communities, as seen in various African countries such as Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.

- ▲ **Transitioning countries** at an intermediate level of development are already urbanizing and have undergone a demographic transition towards lower birth rates. They will want to advance some of the policies for employment generation suggested for previous country profiles, but may need to focus particularly on rural–urban linkages as well in order to expand economic opportunities. In South Africa and China, for example, rural–urban migration is seen as bridging a persistent rural–urban wage gap. Another priority area is investing in public services in rural areas to counter the risk of depopulation of remote areas.
- ▲ **Developed countries** (i.e. aspirational destinations) in need of agricultural workers should focus on the issue of poor integration of immigrants, which can limit their contribution to host countries. Thus these countries need to protect immigrant rights as well as promote their social and economic integration. International cooperation instruments with countries of origin, including bilateral agreements promoting temporary or seasonal migration (as have been adopted by Australia, Canada and New Zealand, among others), can respond to agricultural labour needs while protecting immigrant rights.

Country contexts will change over time along with the policy priorities regarding rural migration. Just as European countries have become destinations for migration after having been a long-time source of migration, emerging countries are likely to become regional hubs and receive more immigrants as they advance in their development. As income differentials between developing countries widen, the successful ones will attract migrants from less advanced neighbouring countries. This will have profound implications for national and regional development strategies.

The State of Food and Agriculture

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