



Reducing distress migration through decent rural employment

Challenges and opportunities

Migration affects the lives of hundreds of millions of people worldwide. In the next decades, demographic trends, globalization, inequality, and climate change are likely to further increase migration pressures both within and across countries.

In 2013, the number of international migrants reached [232 million](#). Of these, nearly 59% lived in the developed regions. However, the large majority of migrants, about [740 million](#), move within their countries, from rural to urban areas or from a rural area to another. Many engage in temporary or circular migration, traditionally linked to seasonal work activities in agriculture.

Migration is a complex phenomenon. It can benefit migrants and their families, but there are also major challenges (Table 1). Migration is a key component of rural livelihoods, by which households aim to diversify their income sources, and thus escape poverty and food insecurity. In many developing countries, [remittances](#) are an important share of national income and can be larger than the size of official development assistance, while an estimated 40% goes to rural areas. Migration can also bring social change, especially by [changing gender roles](#).

Many rural youths choose to migrate in search of a better life. About a third of all international migrants are [young](#), aged between 15 and 34. Many move away because of the lack of decent jobs in rural areas and the unattractiveness of low-

Table 1 | Migration: Challenges and opportunities for rural areas

Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loss of human capital, highly skilled workers and agricultural labour may affect crop production and food availability.• Migration of young men may cause ageing and feminization of rural populations and increased work burdens on those left behind.• Remittances may be used towards consumption rather than productive investments.• Remittances may lead to changes in land use and titling. Conversion of agricultural land to land for housing may lead to rising land prices and falling agricultural production, which may affect food security.• Irregular or distress migration may be dangerous for the migrants themselves. Low-skilled migrants are more vulnerable to precarious jobs, unsafe working conditions, and weak access to social protection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Migration can reduce pressures on local labour markets and resources, as migrants find employment opportunities elsewhere.• Female migration and women's control over remittances can contribute to rural women's empowerment.• Remittances reduce liquidity constraints. They can cover for basic needs, provide insurance in case of crisis and shocks, or be invested in agriculture. Remittances can improve the stability of access to quality food and support food production.• Migrants can increase local human capital, through skills and technology transfers, know-how, and social networks.• Diaspora groups can help rural areas in countries of origin through capital investments and assistance.



productivity agriculture. As a result, rural areas lose a vital and potentially dynamic share of their workforce. This raises questions regarding the future of agriculture given that, worldwide, farmers are ageing while deep-seated changes in agricultural practices are needed to step up food productivity and make agricultural production sustainable.

FAO's role

FAO works to enhance benefits from migration, while addressing the root causes of distress migration from rural areas. Jointly with its partners:

- **FAO advises countries on how to better manage rural labour mobility**, by fostering rural-urban linkages and promoting the investment of remittances in rural farm and non-farm activities. As developing countries undergo processes of structural economic transformation, FAO works to generate viable options for rural people by creating [decent rural employment opportunities](#). Giving priority to the creation of employment and agro-entrepreneurial opportunities can contribute not only to enhance food security and reduce rural poverty, but also to [ease migratory pressures](#).
- **FAO supports [youth development and employment programmes](#)**. Policy responses should be coordinated with initiatives geared towards

increasing youth's involvement in agriculture. By supporting a new generation of agro-entrepreneurs, countries can minimize the negative impacts of massive out-migration, pressure on urban labour markets and tap into the potential of a sizeable and growing young population.

- **FAO generates knowledge about the root causes of migration**. There is still a paucity of information about the movement and contribution of migration to agriculture. In part, as a result of this, many countries lack incentive structures that take advantage of the positive effects of migration (e.g., workers moving to labour scarce areas, leveraging remittances for agricultural investment, etc.), while mitigating the risks associated with large migratory flows.
- **FAO advocates to ensure safe mobility**, by increasing incentives for regular migration and promoting better working conditions for migrant workers, as well as disseminating good practices, for instance on seasonal agricultural migration.
- **FAO actively contributes to global cooperation mechanisms**, such as the Global Migration Group (GMG), and engages with key partners like the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank, and the International Labour Organization (ILO).