



# CONFERENCE

## Forty-first Session

Rome, 22-29 June 2019

## The State of Food and Agriculture: Migration, Agriculture and Rural Development

### Executive Summary

Despite the challenges it might present, migration is part and parcel of economic, social and human development and a means of reducing inequality both within and between countries. Rural migration constitutes a considerable portion of both internal and international migration flows. Policy coherence between migration and agriculture and rural development policies is essential to ensure safe, orderly, and regular migration. However, policy priorities relating to rural migration depend on country contexts that are continuously evolving: these will be different for countries in protracted crisis situations, countries where rural youth employment is a challenge, countries in economic and demographic transition, and for developed countries receiving migrant workers.

### Suggested action by the Conference

The Conference is invited to:

- a) Recognize that rural migration is a phenomenon that presents both opportunities and challenges, benefits as well as costs, for migrants themselves and for societies in general.
- b) Note that policy priorities relating to rural migration depend on country contexts.
- c) Stress that – aside from the case of forced migration linked to crisis situations – it is important not to consider migration *per se* as a problem that requires a solution. As such, policies should not aim to either stem or promote migration.
- d) Emphasize that the objective of migration-related policies must be to make migration a choice, not a necessity, and to maximize the positive impacts while minimizing the negative ones.
- e) Acknowledge that it is important to provide attractive alternative opportunities to prospective rural migrants, not least by promoting development in rural areas or in their proximity; but also recognize that rural migration will continue and that there are situations where it makes sense to facilitate migration and help prospective migrants overcome the constraints they might face.

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## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

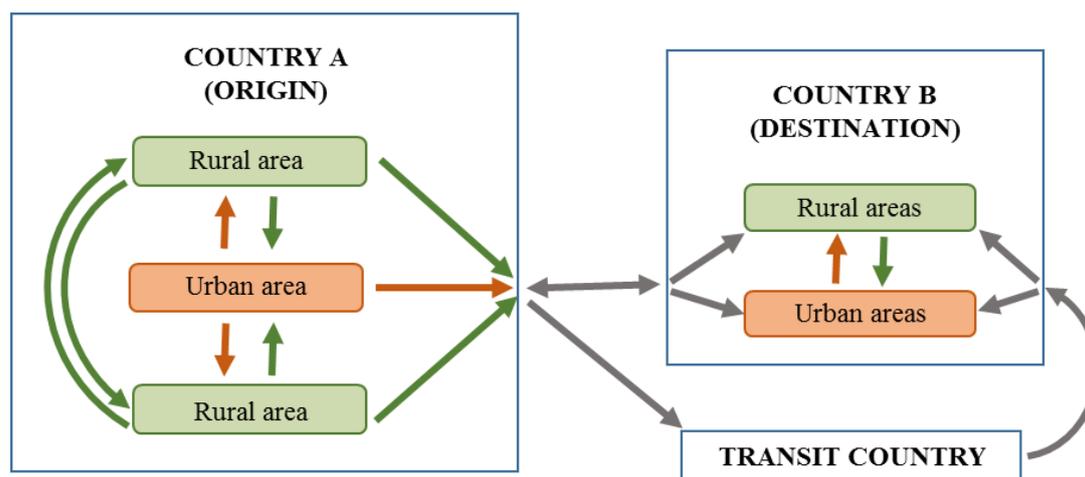
1. Concerns over the growing numbers of migrants and refugees moving across borders have increasingly directed attention towards international migration, which has made it to the top of the international policy agenda. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) it embraces, clearly recognize the importance of migration, the challenges it poses and the opportunities it provides, including for reducing inequalities. Furthermore, in September 2016 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which led to the launch of two Global Compacts for safe, orderly and regular migration and on refugees, respectively.

2. The 2018 State of Food and Agriculture Report finds that rural migration constitutes a considerable portion of both internal and international migration flows. Rural migration is closely linked not only with agriculture and rural development, but also with the overall development of societies. By rural migration we mean migration from, to and between rural areas, whether the move occurs within a country or involves crossing a border. In many countries, especially those at less advanced levels of development and that still have large rural populations, migration between rural areas exceeds rural-urban migration. What is more, a large number of international refugees – at least 30 percent at the global level and more than 80 percent in sub-Saharan Africa – are found in rural areas of their host countries. Understanding rural migration – its magnitude, characteristics, drivers and impacts – must therefore feature prominently when addressing development.

## II. Rural migration is central to economic transformation

3. Migration from, to and between rural areas is an important component of both international and internal migration. The reallocation of labour from less productive to more productive sectors of the economy is an integral component of economic development. The large flows of internal migration described in the 2018 *State of Food and Agriculture* report suggest that reallocation of labour resources in many developing countries is contributing to economic transformation and development. Nevertheless, internal migration is closely interlinked with international migration as potential migrants are particularly attracted to opportunities in countries with higher levels of income and overall development (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. A schematic representation of migration flows**



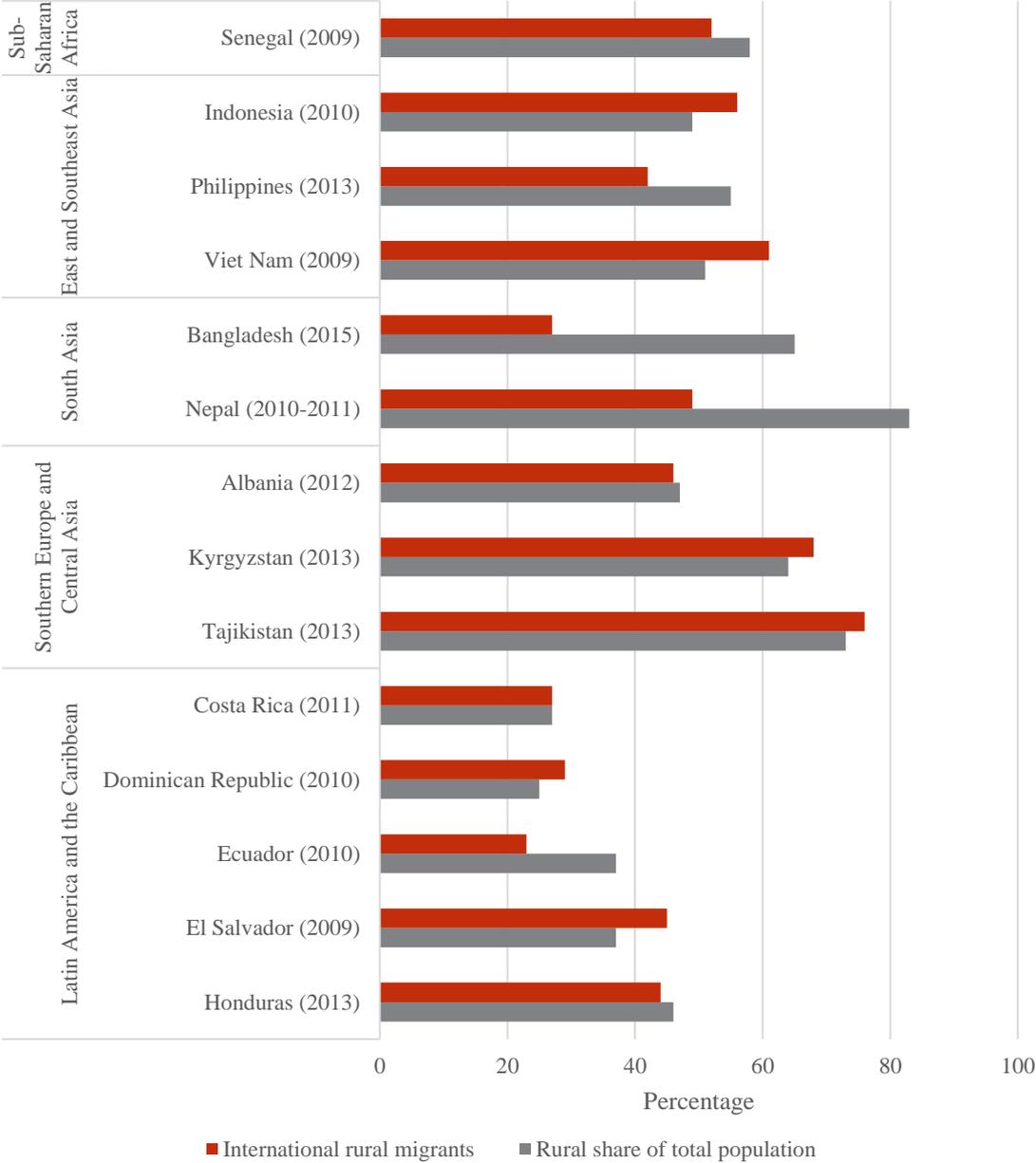
Note: The green arrows represent migration flows from rural areas, the orange arrows represent those from urban areas, and the grey arrows represent flows of either rural or urban origin.

Source: FAO. 2018.

<sup>1</sup> This document is based on: FAO. 2018. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2018. Migration, agriculture and rural development*. Rome (<http://www.fao.org/3/I9549EN/i9549en.pdf>). For more detailed analysis and discussion, readers are invited to consult this report.

4. Data from a selection of recent national censuses or nationally representative surveys allow us to estimate the share of international migrants coming from rural areas over total international migrants. When compared with the share of the rural population over the total population in the same countries, this can shed light on the relative propensity to migrate from rural and urban areas (Figure 2). As Figure 2 shows, in all cases a significant share of international migrants originate from rural areas. In most cases, the share of international migrants coming from rural areas is very similar to that of the population residing in rural areas in countries of origin. This indicates that, broadly speaking, the propensity to migrate internationally from rural and urban areas is relatively similar.

**Figure 2. Share of international migrants originating from rural areas vs share of rural population in national population – selected countries**



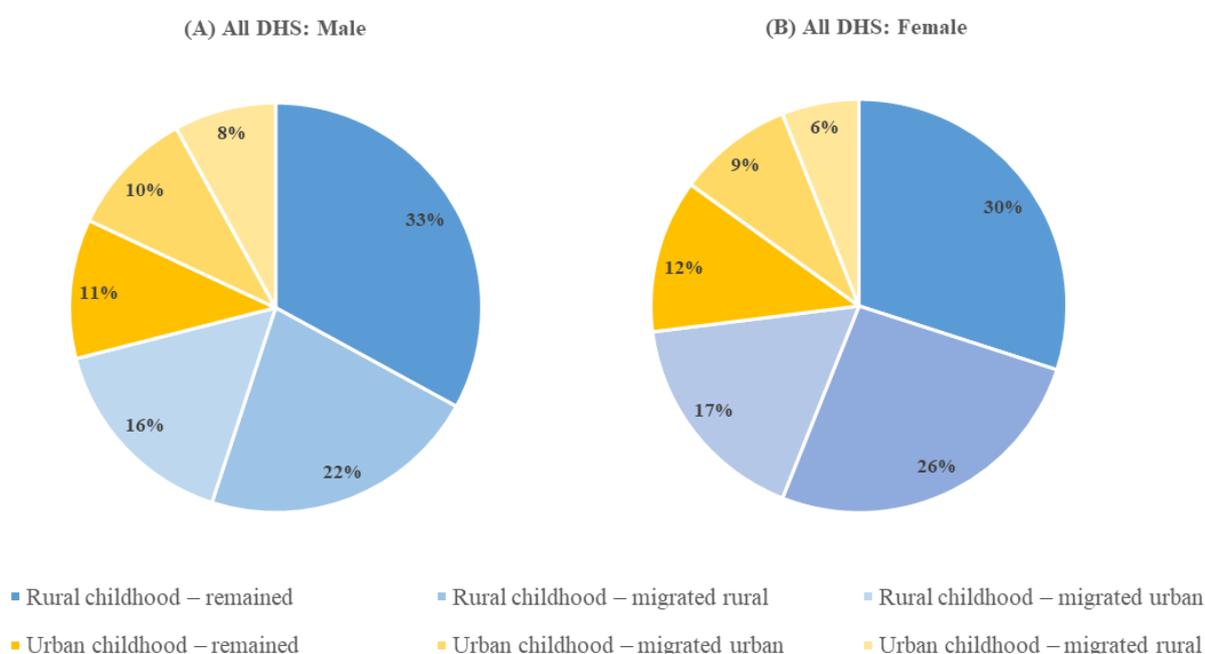
Source: FAO. 2018.

### III. Internal migration is characterized by the movement of people from and to rural areas, but is also linked to international migration

5. As a whole, internal migration is a significantly larger phenomenon than international migration and exhibits different patterns across countries. Although comprehensive global estimates are difficult to come by due to both scarcity of data and varying definitions of internal migration, by one estimate the number of internal lifetime (having lived in an area other than their birthplace) migrants in 2005 was four times the number of international lifetime migrants. In developing regions with high urbanization rates, rural migration in all its forms accounts for at least 50 percent of all internal movements. In sub-Saharan Africa the share is greater than 75 percent.

6. Across countries evaluated in USAID Demographic and Health Surveys, more than half the population originating in rural areas have migrated internally at least once. Rural-to-urban migration flows are larger than urban-to-rural, implying that net rural-urban migration is the norm. However, a larger share of people migrate between rural areas than from rural to urban areas (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Share of population that migrated or remained based on childhood residence and current location – aggregate for 31 countries**

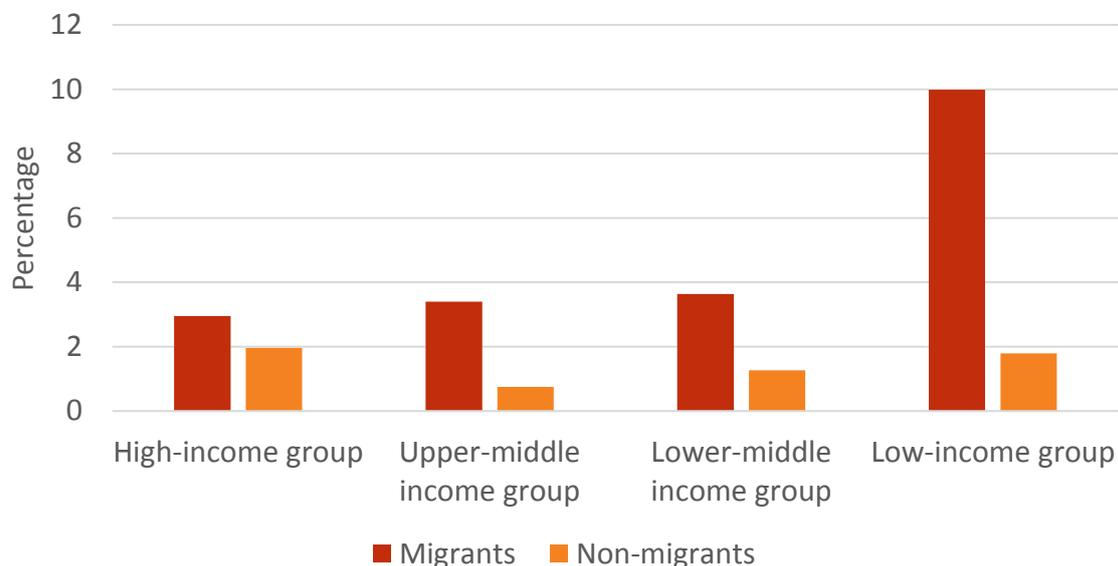


Note: Countries included in the sample in alphabetical order: Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, Haiti, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Senegal, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Togo, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Zambia.

Source: FAO. 2018.

7. Internal migration is often linked to international migration, frequently through a step-wise process. For instance, a migrant may initially move internally and later on migrate internationally, or vice versa. Data suggest that people who have already undertaken internal migration are more likely to migrate internationally. Indeed, across all country income groups, the share of people planning to migrate internationally is higher for those who have moved internally in the last five years compared to those who have not. In low-income countries internal migrants are five times more likely to migrate internationally than individuals who have not moved. (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Share of people planning to migrate internationally in the following 12 months by country income group and by internal migrants/non-migrants, 2013**



Note: Based on nationally representative samples for 138 countries. Migrants refer to people who have migrated internally within the last five years and non-migrants to those who have not.

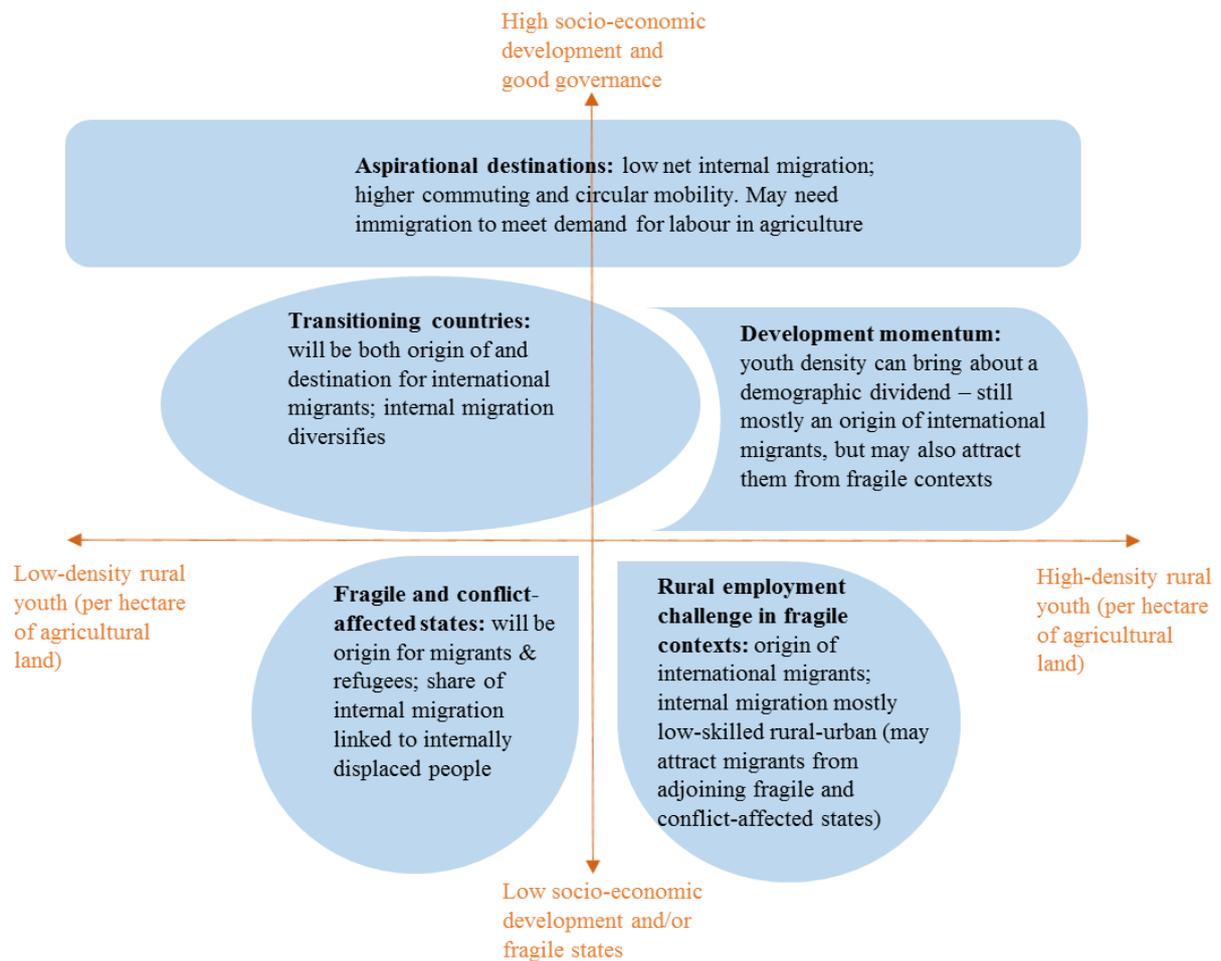
Source: FAO. 2018.

#### **IV. The challenges and opportunities of migration depend on countries' contexts and development paths**

8. The 2018 *State of Food and Agriculture* report uses a broad categorization of countries in terms of rural migration, which reflect different migration challenges and drivers (Figure 5). Although some countries may have characteristics pertaining to two or more categories, 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 generate employment for youth;
- iv. transitioning countries with economic momentum, advanced urbanization and demographic transitions; and
- v. aspirational destinations with high levels of development.

**Figure 5. A typology of country profiles based on drivers of rural migration as a function of development, governance and rural demographics**



Source: FAO. 2018.

9. Unique challenges and opportunities can be identified for each category, implying that different policy areas need to be prioritized. In fragile contexts such as prolonged conflicts and protracted crises, people may be forced to move for reasons of safety and security, presenting enormous challenges for areas of origin and destination. Countries where rural youth employment is a challenge have large and/or growing populations of rural youth, without the development momentum to absorb added labour market entrants. This is typical in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where urbanization has not been matched by comparable growth in manufacturing or modern service sectors, and where people exiting low-productivity agriculture move mostly into low-productivity informal services, usually in urban areas. This challenge is made more acute by the prediction that in the decades ahead, sub-Saharan Africa in particular will face large increases in its rural youth population. Although facing a similar challenge of large numbers of rural youth, countries with development momentum can generate employment and use the demographic profile to their advantage. Transitioning countries have made major advances towards becoming aspirational destinations – that is, poles of attraction for international migration.

10. For countries in the last category – aspirational destinations – the primary policy issue has increasingly revolved around the growing numbers of international migrants. Among policy-makers, an apparent solution is to stem migration flows by promoting development in countries of origin. However, evidence suggests that for low- and lower-middle income countries, development and rising incomes initially lead to increased levels of emigration; only when countries reach upper-middle-income status do levels of emigration tend to decline. This process will normally continue over decades. Development should therefore be considered as desirable in its own right, and not merely as a means of curbing emigration.

## V. Understanding migration drivers is crucial for the development of strategies that lead to improved livelihoods and inclusive economic transformation

11. **Migration is driven by unequal opportunities.** Rural migration is primarily driven by differentials in employment opportunities and in access to public services. Productivity differences and corresponding income gaps between agriculture and other sectors of the economy, such as manufacturing and services, constitute one driver of rural-urban migration. Also, in rural areas of developing countries a lack of social services and infrastructure, combined with demographic factors, often create an incentive to leave. In countries with large numbers of rural youth, unless adequate employment opportunities are created in or in proximity to rural areas, the lack and the scarcity of farmland are likely to induce vast numbers of these youth to seek opportunities in cities and abroad.

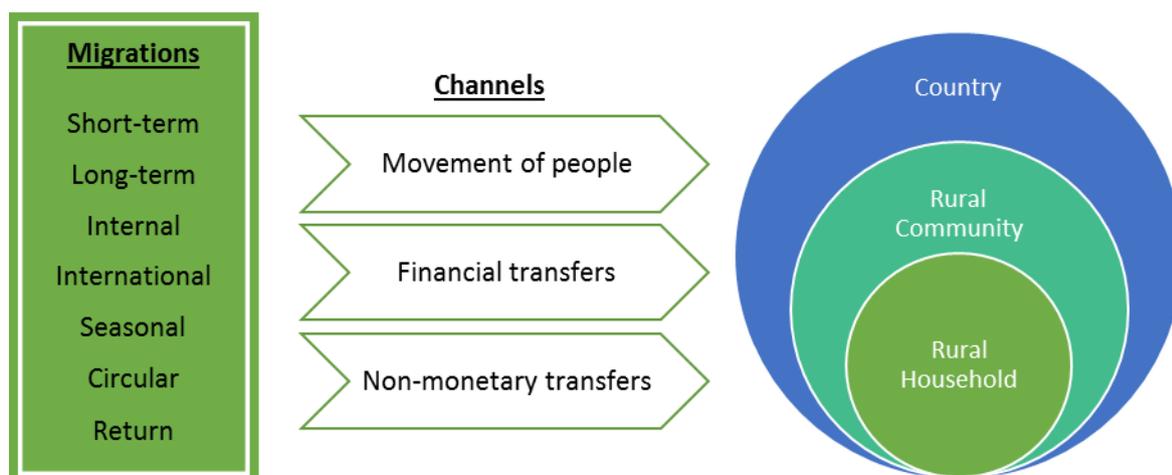
12. **Understanding the conditioning factors affecting migration is key to identifying potential interventions.** Various factors can constrain rural migration. The costs make it an unviable option for many, particularly for far-away destinations. These costs are financial as well as psychological, social and cultural. Yet migration can also be useful as a risk-management strategy for rural households, as it reduces their dependence on uncertain agricultural incomes and diversifies their sources of livelihood. Social networks of migrants in destination areas can play a role in facilitating this rural migration: they can help migrants mitigate social and cultural costs and provide them with necessary information. This can also be ensured by recruitment agencies, both formal and informal, to assist migrants in finding jobs and navigating bureaucratic procedures.

13. **Legal frameworks and public policies can encourage or discourage migration through a variety of channels.** From a legal standpoint, weak land rights are a factor that can dissuade potential migrants from leaving rural areas. Similarly, labour laws – such as setting a minimum wage – and anti-discrimination laws may affect migration and the choice of destination. On the policy side, foremost for agriculture are those that aim to boost the adoption of mechanization as a tool to promote agricultural productivity, which often frees up labour to move into other sectors. To compensate for this, promoting agri-territorial development – which aims to expand food systems and create non-farm employment in rural areas – may reduce rural out-migration by offering people opportunities to improve their incomes and diversify their livelihoods close to their homes. However, these policies can also increase migration by improving rural incomes and thus helping many prospective migrants to overcome financial constraints.

14. In this context, social and employment policies affect migration but can have different impacts according to location and circumstances. Social protection can deter migration when access is conditional on physical presence in rural areas. On the other hand, if beneficiaries are constrained by a lack of funds to cover migration costs, unconditional cash transfers could help overcome this and allow them to migrate. Credit policies can also affect migration for households facing financial or liquidity constraints.

## VI. Migration can have a variety of impacts on rural areas

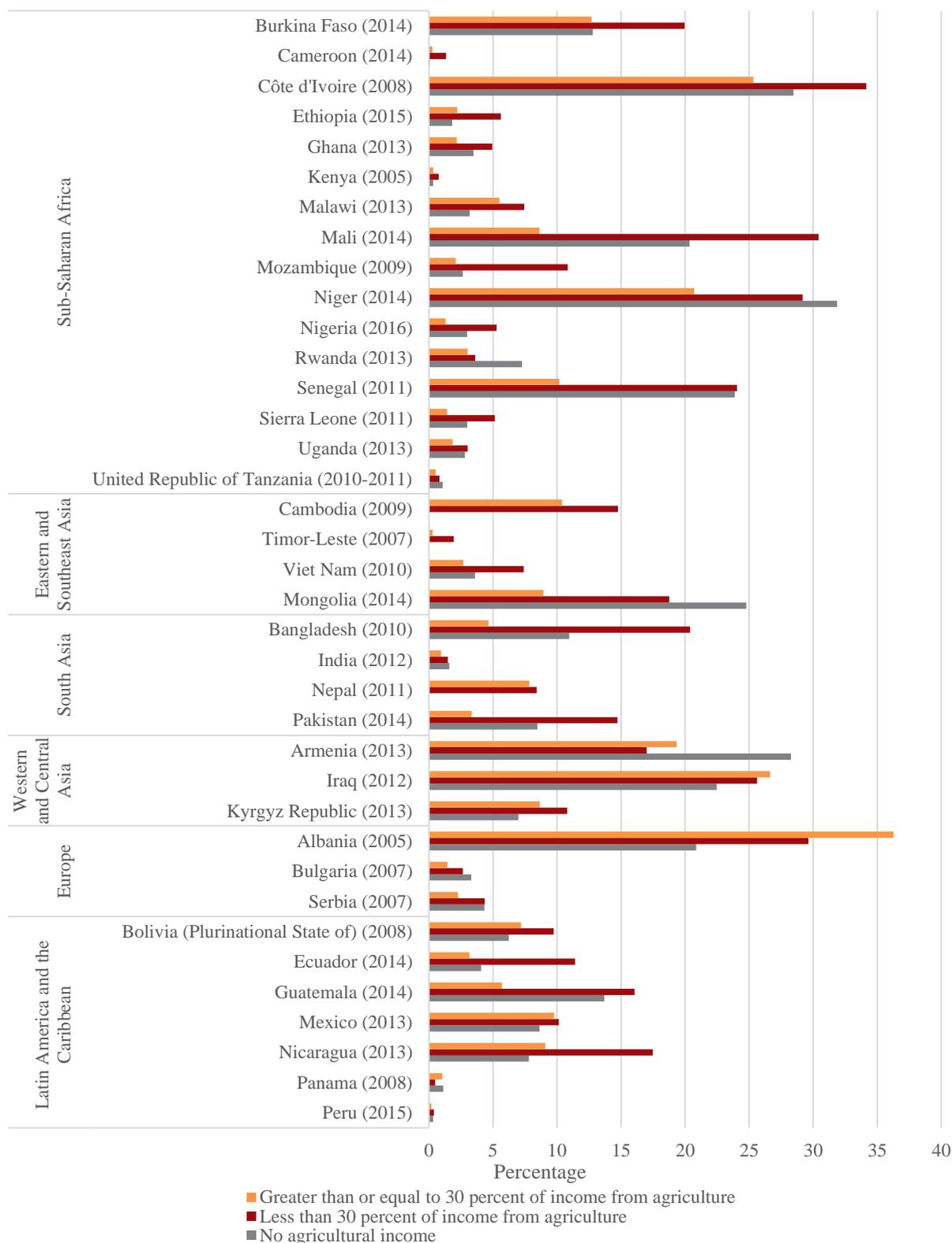
15. **Migration in its different forms has impacts both on areas of origin and of destination.** Rural migration, in particular out-migration, can have profound effects on rural development, food security and nutrition, and poverty. The impacts of migration are conveyed through three main channels. First, there is a loss of available labour for the sending households and on rural labour markets. Second, the remittances sent back by migrants can affect consumption patterns and livelihoods in rural communities of origin. Third, there may be non-monetary transfers as well – referred to as “social” remittances – such as ideas, skills and new social patterns brought back or transmitted by migrants (Figure 6). Impacts on households and societies can be negative or positive, depending on the form of migration, the characteristics of the migrants, and the migration context.

**Figure 6. Impact channels of migration**

Source: FAO. 2018.

16. **Impacts of migration on households of origin are significant but mixed.** Coping with the reduction in family labour can be challenging for farming households if the labour cannot be replaced. The loss of family labour can negatively affect levels of household farm and non-farm production, and may encourage households engaged in agriculture to shift production towards less labour-intensive crops and activities. At the same time, migrant remittances can help cash-constrained households invest in new technologies. However, household survey data from several countries show that in most countries there are proportionally fewer households receiving remittances among those that engage the most in agriculture (Figure 7). By diversifying income, remittances provide an insurance against risk and can encourage households to adopt higher-return production technologies in agriculture or to launch non-farm business activities. Ultimately, the impact of migration on sending households depends on the net effect of the loss of family labour and the positive impacts of receiving remittances.

**Figure 7. Share of rural households receiving international remittances, by participation in agriculture**



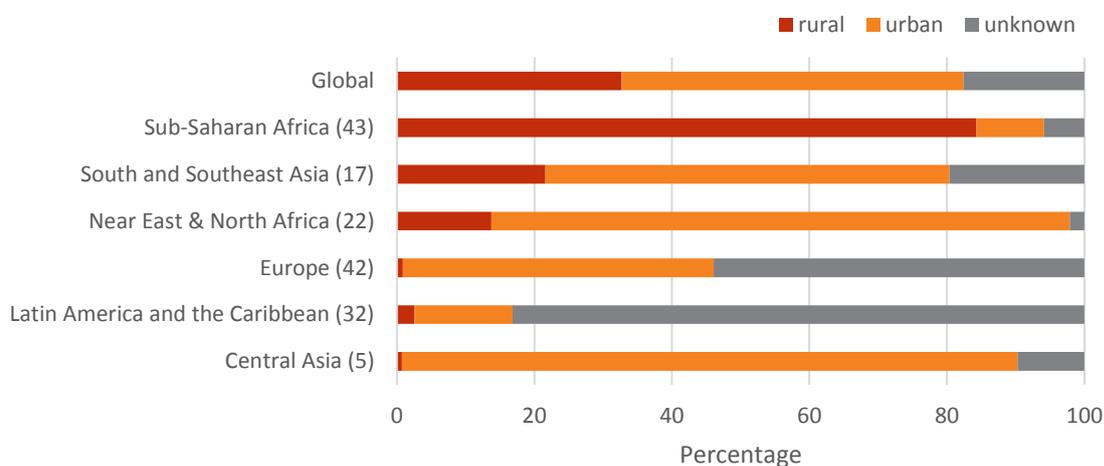
Source: FAO. 2018.

17. Migration can also lead to changes in the intra-household division of labour along gender and generational lines. Often male out-migration leads to an increased role of women in agriculture in terms of greater workloads, but also of potentially more decision-making power. However, this “feminization” of agriculture is not universally observed, and in many societies female out-migration is more prevalent than male out-migration.

18. **Indirect impacts of rural migration can spread beyond households of origin to communities and societies at large.** The positive impacts of out-migration can spread to entire rural communities, as out-migration pushes up local wages and remittances are spent on local goods and invested in local economic activities, leading to increased incomes and employment. Migrants can also contribute to broader development in rural communities through monetary remittances and involvement in community development projects. Return migrants also contribute positively to local communities.

19. **Forced migration due to protracted crises disrupts rural livelihoods and threatens food security and nutrition in areas of both origin and destination.** Mass displacements of people and the associated loss of assets can severely impact economic development, including rural development, not only in the country or location from which people flee but also in host countries – most of which are developing countries – and locations. A large number of international refugees – at least 30 percent at the global level and more than 80 percent in sub-Saharan Africa – are found in rural areas of their host countries (Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Distribution of refugee population by type of locality, globally and by selected regions, 2016**



Note: In the parentheses are the number countries for each region. Global estimate includes North America (2) and Oceania (8).

Source: FAO. 2018.

20. These large influxes of refugees and internationally displaced people can create serious challenges for host countries and locations. They can, *inter alia*, lead to strains on local food markets and limit basic services. Nonetheless, there is evidence that integrating refugees in local economies can be mutually beneficial. Well-managed inflows of displaced people can have positive effects on local economies by filling labour shortages, promoting knowledge diffusion and boosting demand for local goods and services.

21. **Immigrants play a crucial role in supporting agriculture and rural areas in developed destination countries.** For many developed countries experiencing rural depopulation, international migrants can contribute to the development of rural areas by filling labour shortages in agriculture. In North America and Europe for instance, foreign labour constitutes the backbone of agricultural production. However, protection of labour rights and the working conditions of migrants are often poor. In many rural areas agricultural labourers often work informally, earn less than legal salaries and are subject to exploitation. Providing decent working conditions for migrant agricultural workers can ensure that the migration experience is positive both for migrants and their host countries.

## VII. Making migration work for all

22. **Policies must aim to harness the benefits of rural migration while reducing the negative impacts.** The challenge for policy-makers is to maximize the benefits of rural migration while minimizing the negative effects. As much as possible, migration must be a voluntary decision made by migrants, based on real and informed choices. In terms of rural migration, this involves creating attractive rural livelihood opportunities. It also requires removing constraints to rural migration and facilitating regular migration for those who decide to move, as well as developing human capital in rural areas through training and skills development, allowing prospective migrants to take advantage of opportunities. Furthermore, this involves preventing crises that lead to forced migration and limiting the negative impacts on migrants and host communities.

23. **Countries at different levels of development face different challenges in relation to rural migration.** The following broad policy priorities can be identified for the categories of countries presented in Figure 5.

- *Countries with development momentum*, although having a large pool of youth in rural areas, may need to focus on promoting employment opportunities in agricultural value chains while encouraging the development of regional urban centres to provide opportunities for rural residents closer to their areas of residence. Supporting human capital development in rural areas will prepare rural youth to take advantage of new opportunities. It is also important to facilitate migration by providing information on opportunities available elsewhere and assistance to prospective migrants.
- *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. When emerging from crisis situations, they need to provide support to returnees and communities of origin.
- *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 and many refugees are found in rural areas.
- *Transitioning countries*, which are at an intermediate level of development, are already urbanizing and have undergone a demographic transition due to lower birth rates. They will want to advance some of the policies suggested in the previous points for employment generation. However, they may need to focus particularly on increasing the mobility in labour markets by removing barriers to rural migration, and develop education and services in rural areas before depopulation takes hold.
- *Aspirational destinations* must address challenges posed by the poor integration of migrants and lack of social cohesion, which can limit the success and thus the contributions of immigrants. These countries need to protect immigrants' rights and promote their social and economic integration. International cooperation instruments with countries of origin, such as bilateral agreements promoting temporary or seasonal migration, can facilitate this process.

24. Country contexts will change over time. No country is just a host, transit or destination country, but rather two or three at the same time. 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, particularly in light of the rapidly increasing populations in many developing countries, the limits to the absorption capacity of developed countries, and the importance of intraregional migration. As income differentials between developing countries widen, the successful ones will attract migrants from less advanced neighbouring countries, which will have implications for national and regional development strategies.

### VIII. Enhancing the development potential of migration

25. It is important to enhance the contributions migrants make to the development of their rural areas of origin through remittances and in other ways. Several policy areas can contribute, including facilitating and reducing the cost of sending remittances and promoting the investment of remittances in rural areas, for example by providing matching funds. The facilitation of circular and seasonal migration, both internal and international, can boost incomes in rural areas. The contribution of return migrants to rural areas can also be enhanced by providing a conducive environment for business and investment and supporting migrants' integration into local labour markets. Finally, it is important to ensure coherence and cooperation on policies related to migration across sectors, among different actors and levels of government, as well as between countries. In this respect the Global Compacts on migration and refugees, respectively, can play a key role.

26. Rural migration will continue to be an essential element of processes of economic and social development. Developing clear and coherent policies, both for migration and for rural development more broadly, is essential for a successful process of development that can benefit migrants, their areas of origin and their areas of destination.

### IX. References

**FAO. 2018.** *The State of Food and Agriculture 2018. Migration, agriculture and rural development.* Rome