

9th International Forum of NGOs in Official Partnership with UNESCO
“Another Perspective on Migration”

UNU-GCM Policy Brief - “The Role of NGOs and Civil Society to Support Migrants as Actors of Sustainable Development”

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Summary and recommendations

This policy brief aims to provide some recommendations to NGOs, and civil society associations more generally, so as for them to know how to better support migrants as actors of sustainable development. These recommendations come from the consideration of three key aspects through which migrants stimulate sustainable development:

1) Migrants contribute to sustainable development with both material and non-material resources. While the first are measurable and definitely important, migrants’ contribution to sustainable development through non-material resources, such as their ideas and actions that innovate and stimulate socio-cultural, technological and economic dynamism of the world, is inestimable.

2) Migrants could contribute to sustainable development also through sharing best practices and green innovation and alternative solutions to common issues in both countries of origin and of destination, if truly empowered. Although migration should always

be a choice and not the last resource left to people, due to climate change, it sometimes constitute one of the very few resilient strategies that people are left to find adequate opportunities for their lives. In addition, their very move sometimes becomes a resilient strategy also for places of reception, in particular when migrants reach areas subject to depopulation.

3) The third aspect that must be emphasized is that sustainable development through the reduction of global inequalities means that it needs to be fully recognised that everybody can equally contribute to this world, wherever they are or live, whatever is their culture, religion, sex, age and origin. In such a light, because migrants can truly be actors of sustainable development, it is key to hear also from their voices what they need in order to be truly empowered and what tools would allow them to boost their material and non-material contribution to sustainable development. Their opinions matter; their knowledge and experiences are deeply relevant and can make a difference in a top-down designed approach to govern the phenomenon of migration.

In such a light, fours recommendations were formulated to NGOs and civil society associations in order to support migrants in their role of actors of sustainable development:

- 1) To make all possible efforts to resonate the extraordinary contributions of migration and migrants to the human history and to sustainable development in particular. This needs to happen through education programmes, but also through

audio-visuals programmes, which are key means of communications and are amongst the most important factors affecting attitudes towards migration as a research conducted on prejudice in several European countries shows¹. If people would have clear in mind the positive dimension of migration, there would definitely be more opportunities for migrants around the world. For instance, more true and fiction positive stories around the theme of migration need to be portrayed.

- 2) To create platforms, programmes and forums at different levels, from the international level to the national and the local level, networking with diaspora groups, where migrants can have the opportunity to share their experiences in green innovations and sustainable practices, where they explain possible alternatives to mainstream approaches, where it is possible to consider new strategies and programmes to take into account more easily and sooner the skills of newcomers.

- 3) To establish connections between local governments of areas subject to depopulation and countries of origin to consider possibilities to provide safe and regular entries in depopulated places for migrants, in order to both strength sustainable and local development in those areas and create genuine opportunities of inclusion for those persons who are looking

¹ Bello, V. (2017) "Interculturalism as a framework to reduce prejudice in times of crisis", *International Migration* 55(2):23-38. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/imig.12262> (Last accessed 12 October 2018).

for new places where to find improved chances for their life, no matter their size.

- 4) To give voices to migrants' representatives at all levels of governance to make sure that the measures conceived to improve their opportunities to contribute to development are sustainable also for them, as human beings, and not only for either their countries of origin or of destination. There is no sustainable future and development if their planning does not engage with all the parties involved in the process. Migrants are very often excluded from voting. NGOs and other civil society associations play the very crucial role to help migrants' voices to be heard. There are several ways to achieve this and through which NGOs can support migrants' expression in both host and origin countries, through for example the organization of exhibitions and talks during local holidays and public events. Occupying the public space with civic and political participation is always a powerful exercise of democracy and a powerful way to contribute to sustainable development.

Context

In our interconnected world, where socio-economic, cultural and political dynamics cross the borders of states, NGOs, due to their work on the ground and their proximity to everyday community life, play an indispensable role in the multidimensional and multilevel governance of global phenomena at all levels towards the

achievement not only of development *per se* but of “sustainable development”, which is the road ahead.

In particular, the role of NGOs is key to make sure that those tools conceived at the highest and national levels meet the specific needs of a local context and group of people. They often constitute a bridge between international and national communities on one side, and those local places where the policy recommendations and the policy provisions need to be implemented, on the other. NGOs also represent and give voices to those civil societies and local communities and groups who are amongst the most interested that good policies and best practices are in place. So, the action of NGOs is part of those key interventions that ensure that global governance achieves sustainable – and durable – development in its factual implementation in different places.

To achieve sustainable development everywhere, 17 SDGs have been identified and among these, SDG 10: Reducing Inequalities, where migration is a crucial component. Three aspects and four recommendations will highlight in what ways the role of migrants as actors of sustainable development can be boosted. These considerations could be particularly relevant for the improvements that NGOs through their actions can promote in the field.

It is very well known that those persons on the move are important catalysts of innovation and change. They stimulate investment and promote specialization and new businesses in their new places. So, it is also well-known that an important tool to make sure that part of this success is shared with their families and communities and more

generally with their home countries, is that the cost of remittances lowers. However, material contribution to development is not the solely important means through which migrants contribute to sustainable development. On their substantive contributions many considerations can be done, and at this forum it is possible to learn from each other the infinite ways human beings, with their unique and diverse own ways, incredibly and positively innovate and enhance progress across the world. But too many times migrants found themselves in a hostile environment, which does not allow them to fully develop their potentials, and unfortunately this is particularly true in recent years.

Hence, the first aspect that is key to highlight is that those persons who look for improved opportunities far from their homes do not only contribute to both home and their new places solely with material resources. They also importantly enrich societies with their ideas, with their culture, with the very innovation that every single encounter between diverse persons brings into this world. Diversity itself is an important driver of innovation and progress. Let us for examples consider the incredible achievements that the entire world has gained through the scientific and hi-tech and artistic innovations that have been inspired by persons who were living in a place different from the one of their origin. There are plenty of examples of important personalities that have contributed a lot to this world and they were actually migrants. And if we consider that this happens daily at all possible levels of human organization and industries, then it becomes clear that the true contribution of migration to the world progress is probably inestimable. This is such an extraordinary

contribution, whose effects are very often felt for many generations, and though it still needs to be fully recognised for the enduring effect that it holds on sustainable development. However, too many are the times that migrants have to live their lives in a hostile environment that does not fully recognize their potentials or their actual contributions. Many barriers often hinder this recognition, including the impossibility to travel regularly and to reach the places where, through their social networks, migrants would find it easier to make profit of their skills. Without a more general positive attitude towards migration by part of both policymakers and the general society, those barriers to their successful inclusion in the social, economic and political life of their new places, will never be dismantled.

Therefore, the first recommendation that needs to be stressed is 1) to make all possible efforts to resonate the extraordinary contributions of migration and migrants to the human history and to sustainable development in particular. This needs to happen through education programmes, but also through audio-visuals programmes, which are key means of communications and are amongst the most important factors affecting attitudes towards migration as a research that was conducted on prejudice in several European countries shows². If people would have clear in mind the positive dimension of migration, there would definitely be more opportunities for migrants around the world. For instance, more true and fiction positive stories around the theme of migration need to be portrayed.

² Bello, V. (2016) "Interculturalism as a New Framework to Reduce Prejudice in Times of Crisis in European Countries", *International Migration*, 55(2), 23-38.

The second aspect that is important to emphasize is that sustainable development actually means not only to grow, but also to grow in a way that is sustainable, for both the planet and all its inhabitants.

Migrants can contribute to the sustainable development of this planet by sharing best practices and ideas in both countries of origin and their new places on how to live a life that is sustainable, how to produce and consume in a sustainable way and by creating green innovations. Those persons who have lived in different places are those who better know how to share experiences, because migrants are first of all actors of encounters. In a process of global governance that strives for sustainable development, their natural role would be to ease communications between different areas of the world. The learning experience is never a univocal process where knowledge comes from one side and reaches another. A true learning process is always dialogical, which means that it happens in the exchange of communications with one another, when all the persons involved in the process learn together. Migrants have very often important knowledge to share but they do not have the actual possibility to contribute because their skills are not taken in due account. NGOs in both countries of origin and receiving countries need to network with diasporas in receiving countries to develop programmes that help include migrants in the socio-economic life according to their real skills.

Migration is sometime also a resilient strategy for those who could no longer live in a land that, due to climate change, was rendered inhospitable. Although migration should always be a choice and not

the last resource left, migrants also contribute to sustainable development by sometime the very act of moving to other lands, and this becomes even more so when migrants move to places that are affected by depopulation. Although it is true that most migrants still head to major cities, following the obvious urbanization dynamics, it actually increasingly happens that particularly families and youths who have already been in major cities unsuccessfully have found it easier to establish themselves in small towns and even villages. From a recent fieldwork in remote areas in the Southern part of Italy³, it is clear that in small towns and villages, persons on the move can be strangers for a couple of days, perhaps one week, but then the family becomes in very few time an important part of the local community, the part that has helped keep a school open, local shops open, who boosts creativity and creates reasons to revive local traditions that before everybody knew, and learn new traditions and activities. You cannot imagine the joy for a 200 person village and their communities to taste new biscuits and pastries, to listen and tell new and old stories to children in a finally newly used public library, to hear again the voices and songs of children playing together in a playground. And imagine the joy of a family on the move to feel again “at home”. These things all help create a more positive environment for both migrants and local communities.

So, some additional recommendations for NGOs to help migrants enable their role of actors of sustainable development include:

³ See the Research Project “Places of Welcome. Best Practices in the Sustainable Inclusion of Newcomers”, <https://gcm.unu.edu/research/places-of-welcome-best-practices-in-the-sustainable-inclusion-of-newcomers.html#outline>

2) Creating platforms, programmes and forums at different levels, from the international level to the national and the local level, networking with diaspora groups, where migrants can have the opportunity to share their experiences in green innovations and sustainable practices, where they explain possible alternatives to mainstream approaches, where it is possible to consider new strategies and programmes to take into account more easily and sooner the skills of newcomers.

3) Establishing connections between local governments of areas subject to depopulation and countries of origin to consider possibilities to provide safe and regular entries in depopulated places for migrants, in order to both strength sustainable and local development in those areas and create genuine opportunities of inclusion for those persons who are looking for new places where to find improved chances for their life, no matter their size.

The third key aspect to recap is that sustainable development through the reduction of global inequalities means to “Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status” (GDGs 10, indicator 10.2). The inclusion of everybody means that it needs to be fully recognised that everybody can equally contribute to this world, wherever they are or live, whatever is their culture, religion, sex, age and origin. In such a light, because migrants can truly be actors of sustainable development, it is key to hear also from their voices what they need in order to be truly empowered and what tools would allow them to boost their material

and non-material contribution to sustainable development. Their opinions matter. Their knowledge and experiences are deeply relevant and can make a difference in a top-down designed approach to govern the phenomenon of migration.

The world is experiencing such an exponential change due to hi-tech, that the future has opened up new imaginaries whose limits are of difficult identification. This means that we all human beings are living in an age of crucial changes. Although it is true that the future has always been *the unknown* rather than the certainty, “what has yet to come”, in our age, possibly becomes even more undetermined. But this also means that all human beings have the opportunities to determine the direction of this change, to decide, to govern the future with a new understanding. In order to be truly empowered and thus contribute to sustainable development, migrants have to be heard and consulted about what their needs and opinions truly are, and what equality truly means for them.

So, the fourth and last recommendation consequently is to give voices to migrants’ representatives at all levels of governance to make sure that the measures conceived to improve their opportunities to contribute to development are sustainable also for them, as human beings, and not only for either their countries of origin or of destination. There is no sustainable future and development if their planning does not engage with all the parties involved in the process. Migrants are very often excluded from voting. NGOs and other civil society associations play the very crucial role to help migrants’ voices to be heard. There are several ways to

achieve this and through which NGOs can support migrants' expression in both host and origin countries, through for example the organization of exhibitions and talks during local holidays and public events. Occupying the public space with civic and political participation is always a powerful exercise of democracy and a powerful way to contribute to sustainable development.

Concluding Remarks

This policy brief reflects the intervention that was provided at the 9th International Forum of NGOs in official partnership with UNESCO, which provided an understanding of how NGOs and civil society association more generally can contribute to improving the opportunities for migrants to be actors of sustainable development. Several other ways to help represent and support migration as a positive world phenomenon rather than a challenge emerged within the 9th International Forum of NGOs in official partnership with UNESCO.

UNESCO and the NGOs liaison committee will publish a résumé, which will provide more information on the entire discussion that developed in that context, with the aim of offering an accurate representation of how migrants can enrich our societies, if we consider a different perspective on migration.