Migration and the 2030 Agenda: Making Everyone Count Migrants and Refugees in the Sustainable Development Goals

Summary

With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its guiding principle "Leave no one behind", the international community has set itself the goal of improving the living conditions of poor and marginalised groups. In many cases, these groups include migrants and refugees. A sophisticated review process has been set up to monitor the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Here, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) play a decisive role. Migrants and refugees were explicitly included from the outset. However, this creates additional data requirements: Data disaggregated by migratory status is necessary to capture changes in the living conditions of migrant population groups within the structured review and follow up process of the SDGs. This disaggregation allows to draw conclusions about the well-being of migrants and refugees. SDG 17.18 explicitly calls for the differentiated consideration of this population group in the SDGs, where relevant, and the necessary building up of capacities for data collection and analysis.

Census data, data from national administrative registers and sample surveys are possible data sources to achieve this objective. These data sets, however, differ in their scope and extent to which they capture different types of information. Hence, each represents only a partial reality.

Five years after the adoption of the SDGs, the balance sheet is sobering: Data disaggregated by migratory status are still lacking in most countries. As a result, there is a growing danger that existing disadvantages will become more permanent or more pronounced. In line with its overarching commitment to the implementation of the SDGs, the German government should work to ensure that migrants and refugees are systematically taken into account in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. For the remaining period until 2030 – touted as the Decade of Action and Delivery - the following recommendations are derived:

- Harmonise migration definitions: Data collections should apply definitions and methods recommended by the UN Statistical Commission.

- Support data collection: The personnel and financial capacities of the national statistical authorities in partner countries should be systematically strengthened.

- Strengthen synergies: Bridges should be built between migration-specific data initiatives and thematically broader data initiatives that are closely linked to the SDG process.

- Expand migration expertise in the SDG review process: Migration expertise should be more systematically integrated into the SDG review process than has been the case to date in order to take greater account of changes in the living conditions of migrants and refugees.
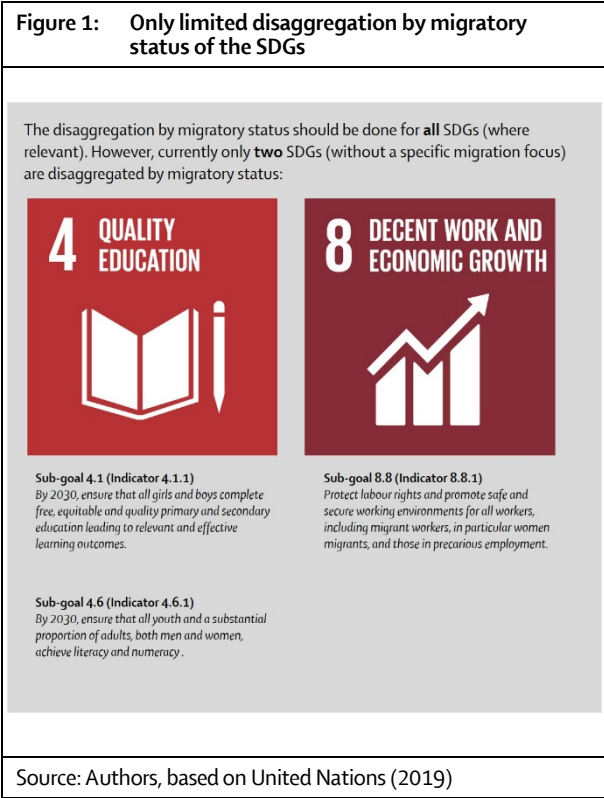
Introduction

The number of migrants and refugees (both cross-border refugees and internally displaced persons) is increasing worldwide. Many of them live in precarious conditions for extended periods without access to adequate basic services or education opportunities, and with no possibility for political participation. The 2030 Agenda – the universal framework for sustainable development – aims to improve the living conditions of poor and marginalised groups. Refugees and migrants were explicitly included from the outset: The global indicator framework developed by the Statistical Commission of the United Nations (UN) to measure progress towards the SDGs was preceded by a passage calling for a disaggregation of indicators, where relevant, by income, sex, age, and migratory status, among other things. It remained unclear, however, how the immense data requirements that arise from this could be met. Particularly in the field of migration, the urgent need for a comprehensive disaggregation of data has received little attention. A debate on the more general implications and relevance of the 2030 Agenda for migration is still missing. The attention has so far been put solely on the few SDGs with a specific focus on migration, such as SDG 10.7, which aims to facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration, SDG 4.b on the expansion of transnational scholarship programmes, SDG 8.8 regarding the protection of migrants' labour rights, and SDG 10.c, which seeks to reduce the fees for sending remittances to countries of origin (see Figure 1). This focus on SDGs with explicit reference to migration ignores the fact that migrants and refugees, as groups that are frequently marginalised, should be considered in all SDGs.

Figure 1: Only limited disaggregation by migratory status of the SDGs

The disaggregation by migratory status should be done for **all** SDGs (where relevant). However, currently only **two** SDGs (without a specific migration focus) are disaggregated by migratory status:

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Sub-goal 4.1 (Indicator 4.1.1)
By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

Sub-goal 4.6 (Indicator 4.6.1)
By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy .

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Sub-goal 8.8 (Indicator 8.8.1)
Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

Source: Authors, based on United Nations (2019)

Lack of consideration in follow-up and review

In order to document progress and obstacles to the implementation of the SDGs and allow for corresponding discussions at the UN level, a structured review process was set up. The reference point for the preparation of the review documents is the global indicator framework, a comprehensive catalogue of indicators negotiated by the participating states. With the help of the catalogue, the implementation of the 169 targets that specify the content of the SDGs is to be reviewed. This sophisticated procedure, however, entails the risk that groups and aspects not explicitly covered by the indicators will remain statistically invisible. This is precisely what can be observed in relation to migrants and refugees.

SDG 11.1, which aims at giving all people access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing, offers an illustration. The target is particularly important for irregular migrants and refugees, who often live in precarious accommodations without access to adequate basic services. However, the corresponding indicator does not take into account the situation of this population group separately. Any migration-specific disadvantages therefore remain hidden behind statistical averages. Hence, SDG 11.1 does not create any pressure for governments to improve the housing conditions of migrants and refugees.

In order to fulfil the promise of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind, migrant populations need to be systematically included in its follow-up and review. This, in turn, requires the collection of data disaggregated by migratory status, which could be used to analyse current living conditions, design measures for improvement, and track changes.

Data needs and potential data sources

Given that the topics of migration and forced displacement have been high up on the political agenda for several years, there have been frequent demands for strengthening the evidence base of related policy decisions. The first objective of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, for example, is devoted to improving data collection and analysis. In the public debate, the focus is typically on gaining a better understanding of migratory movements, whereas for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, socio-economic data on the living conditions of migrant population groups are key. So far, few countries systematically collect such data. However, there are a number of data sets that contain relevant information. These differ in their scope and the extent to which they capture different types of information. As a result, they each represent only a partial reality.

Census data can be an important source for measuring the size of the migrant population as well as its share of the total population. However, they do not provide detailed information on the reasons for migration or the living standards of migrants. Moreover, refugees are only considered in exceptional cases. The advantage of gaining a nationwide overview is offset by the disadvantage of the large time intervals between surveys – census data are usually collected once every 10 years.

Data from national administrative registers are much better suited for recording continuous migratory movements, but they are often not comparable across countries. Another shortcoming is that internally displaced persons and irregular migrants are not usually included in administrative registers.

Sample surveys can specifically target migrant populations. They also offer the opportunity to provide information on the causes and consequences of migration and displacement and can provide insights into the living conditions of irregular migrants or internally displaced persons, who otherwise often remain statistically invisible. However, conducting sample surveys involves many challenges – such as maintaining anonymity – and the results are usually not representative. Moreover, sample surveys are often not publicly accessible, as they are usually collected by non-state actors.

Barriers to improving data quality and availability

There are a number of initiatives closely linked to the SDG process that aim at improving the quality and availability of development-related data, including the Paris21 and Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data networks and the UN Group on the Data Revolution. At the same time, institutions such as the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre of the International Organization for Migration, the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the World Bank are specifically dedicated to the task of improving the quality and availability of data on migration and displacement. However, since these migration-specific data initiatives are not systematically integrated into the overarching SDG process, their contribution to the review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda is limited.

In addition to this, three factors make it difficult to improve the quality and availability of migration data. First, most countries lack the human and financial resources to collect and analyse the relevant data. SDG 17.18 addresses this by emphasising the need to support developing countries in building up capacities for data collection and analysis. Second, due to the lack of internationally agreed and harmonised migration definitions, migration-related data is difficult to compare across countries. Despite concrete UN recommendations for gradual harmonisation, as of yet there are no internationally valid definitions of the different types of migration (see Box 1). However, as long as migration statistics are not harmonised, the size of the migrant population and changes in their well-

being will be difficult to measure. Third, many countries lack the political will to expose the often poor living conditions of migrant populations for fear of reputational damage or international criticism.

Decade of implementation – but how?

Five years after the adoption of the SDGs, the period remaining until 2030 is now touted as the "Decade of Action and Delivery". In this context, there is a growing recognition that the collection of data disaggregated by migratory status is an essential prerequisite for the review and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. However, the technical and administrative efforts required to provide this type of data for all SDG indicators would severely overstretch the resources and capacities of national institutions. The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators has identified a feasible way out of this dilemma: It recommends to focus the efforts of collecting data disaggregated by migratory status on a limited number of SDGs that are of particular relevance to people on the move. The suggested priorities for migrants comprise access to basic state services in education and health care; employment and the protection of workers' rights; anti-discrimination measures; the containment of xenophobic violence; and access to information. For refugees, basic needs and housing; income opportunities and economic independence; as well as political and civil rights are at the forefront. Under the current circumstances, such a focus would be a step in the right direction. However, this should not detract from the long-term goal of collecting data disaggregated by migratory status across all SDGs to identify and counteract related disadvantages.

Recommendations for policy-makers

Socio-economic data disaggregated by migratory status are essential to ensure that migrants and refugees are systematically taken into account in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. German policy-makers, in cooperation with their European partners, should focus on the following aspects:

Harmonise and disclose migration definitions. Migration data can only be compared across countries and types of migration if the legal and administrative definitions underlying the respective national data collection processes are harmonised. Until such harmonisation is achieved, the definitions used should at least be disclosed to facilitate interpretation of the available data. For new surveys, the definitions and methods recommended by the UN Statistical Commission and the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (EGRIS) should be applied.

Targeted support for data collection. Knowledge of the socio-economic situation of migrant population groups must be increased through targeted data collection. To this end, the personnel and financial capacities of the national statistical authorities in partner countries should be systematically strengthened. This is particularly relevant with regard to

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Box 1:	Migrant definition recommended by the UN

According to the UN definition a person must satisfy the following conditions to be considered as an immigrant of a country:

- entering the country by crossing the border
- having been a usual resident of another country before entering or not a usual resident of the country when entering
- staying or intending to stay in the country for at least 12 months

Source: Authors, based on UN (2017)

internally displaced persons and irregular migrants: These make up a large proportion of the migrant population, but the data available for both groups are clearly insufficient.

Strengthen synergies between data initiatives. The existing initiatives to improve the data availability in the area of migration and flight offer cause for hope. It is important to avoid duplication and strengthen synergies. In addition, bridges should be built between the centres for migration-specific data and thematically broader data initiatives that are closely linked to the SDG process, such as Paris21.

Expand migration expertise in the SDG review process. Migration expertise should be more systematically integrated into the SDG review process than has been the case to date in order to take greater account of changes in the living conditions of migrants and refugees in the future. The German government could encourage this in various contexts – for example, at the biannual meetings of the Partners for Review network and the meetings organised by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) to prepare the reviews, which take place annually in New York at the High-level Political Forum.

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