



Tackling the root causes of the narrative on migration and development

Europe is currently experiencing a political and structural crisis due to lack of capacity to cope with an acute increase in mixed inward migration. This is a serious situation that must be addressed at many levels. Unfortunately, the European response to managing increased migration has included a heavy focus on *stopping* migration through a securitised approach based heavily on interdiction. By defining migration as a general security problem to be addressed through all possible means, this approach has recast the many complex, diverse, and overlapping drivers of human movement as challenges – for Europe. This problematization and securitization of migration is distorting European foreign and development policy in a number of ways, including by paying lip service to the well-documented benefits of mobility and migration while pursuing efforts to limit them.

In this context, even a welcome new attention to situations of mass and protracted displacement can lead to a Euro-centric emphasis on viewing a real and serious problem – like conflict – through the lens of just one of its negative outcomes – forced displacement. This may bring much-needed resources and attention to responding to displacement, but also risks diverting some resources from an equally urgent need to address situations of conflict and fragility on their own terms and in all their impacts, including on those people who don't or can't flee.

1. Redefining the narrative

Why do people migrate?

Migration refers to the movement of people within and across borders. People may be on the move for many and often multiple reasons, including pursuing educational or job opportunities or seeking to reunite with family; as a coping mechanism in response to sudden or acute events like conflict, disasters, abuses and repression, and destruction of livelihoods; or to chronic problems like climate change, the outcomes of inequality and corruption, and lack of economic opportunity.

Migration is complex; people may move for one or many different reasons, and their reasons may change as they move. A person might flee from conflict, and find when they arrive at a destination there are no prospects to be self-sufficient and so move on to somewhere else. Someone moving to another country where they have family who will also give them a job may suffer violence or discrimination when they arrive, and so move onward. What all migrants, and all human beings share is a desire for a better life. In that respect, the fundamental “root cause” of migration is human nature, and this is why Oxfam does not talk about “the root causes of migration” as an issue to be “solved”.

How should Europe and the OECD address migration?

First of all, migration per se is not a problem that needs to be “addressed”. Migration is and has been a normal feature of human existence for millennia. It is not a threat to be stopped; it is a complex

phenomenon to be managed for the benefit and safety of all involved, and in full respect of fundamental rights.

The impact of migration is often favourable, with net benefits for the receiving countries in the areas of labour market, taxes and social contributions, and general economic growth¹. Mobility and free movement is an important aspect of regional integration, as demonstrated by the European Union in the formation of its own internal market and free movement zone². Migration also has some benefits for communities in countries of origin, including remittances, which while not a replacement for aid, have been shown to contribute to poverty reduction and development³.

Migration has many different “push” factors – reasons people might leave where they are -- and “pull” factors – reasons people might move to a particular place. Some push factors like conflict, abuse, lack of opportunities, the effects of climate change and inequality, and even negative impacts of development are situations that must be addressed and prevented. People who leave their homes due to negative push factors can be generally considered displaced.

What about people who are forced to migrate?

There are many situations in which people lose their homes or leave their homes in order to cope with a threat – for example from violence, conflict, disaster, abuse, unsustainable loss of livelihood. Such displacement should be addressed by serving the immediate and longer-term needs of the affected populations, including host communities, and by supporting durable solutions to displacement.

When acute crises result in large and sudden movements as people flee, displaced people can become part of complex situations for transit and receiving states. This can lead to a securitised approach to dealing with mass displacement that risks scapegoating people who’ve fled conflict in another place. Displaced people should not be portrayed as a security problem. They should be considered first as people in need of protection and whose rights need to be respected. Insecurity and violence are causes of displacement, and not their effect.

2. The objective of development is to fight poverty and inequality

Can development help to tackle the “root causes” of migration?

The premise of the question is flawed; migration is a normal phenomenon, not a problem whose origins must be tackled. Migration has been a human reality for millennia, and in more recent times the global rate of migration has held steady since the 1960s, with international migrants accounting for approximately 3% of the world population.⁴ Problematizing this reality is unhelpful and potentially harmful.

Moreover, evidence suggests that increasing human development in less developed countries is associated with higher, rather than lower, levels of mobility – both emigration and immigration⁵. In

¹ OECD, “Is migration good for the economy?”, *Migration Policy Debates*, May 2014.

² In the EU, post-enlargement mobility has boosted the long-term GDP of the “older” Member States (EU-15) by 1%, according to a report by Holland, Dawn, Tatiana Fic, Ana Rincon-Aznar, Lucy Stokes, and Pawel Paluchowski, *Labour Mobility within the EU – The impact of enlargement and the functioning of the transitional arrangements*, National Institute of Economic and Social Research, 2011.

³ United National Development Programme, “Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development”, *Human Development Report 2009*, pp.73

⁴ Czaika, Mathias and Hein de Haas, “The Globalization of Migration: Has the World Become More Migratory?” *International Migration Review*, volume 48 issue 2, Summer 2014: pp 283-323

⁵ *Inter alia*: de Haas, Hein: “Migration transitions: a theoretical and empirical inquiry into the developmental drivers of international migration”, *Working Papers*, International Migration Institute. University of Oxford: 2010.

this respect, migration in general is positively linked to development, rather than an issue that development helps to “solve”.

Finally, the purpose of development aid is to reduce and eradicate poverty and inequality. Development aid should under no circumstances be used or instrumentalised to restrict any kind of mobility, as this does not pertain to its central purpose of poverty reduction and may even work counter to that purpose. In this respect development policy should take account of the potential contributions of increased mobility and certainly should not attempt to stifle it.

What about the causes of irregular migration?

The classification of “irregular” as applied to the movement or residency status of individuals is not directly relevant to development policy as it is a classification made by authorities based on national border and home affairs policy; there are no organic “causes” separate from those that motivate human movement in general. Nor does “irregularity” amount to a determination of status that is meaningful on the basis of international law, like that which governs refugee status. By contrast, any person can objectively be deemed displaced when forced from their home.

From the perspective of formulating effective development policy, distinctions between the origins of different forms of mobility, cyclical movement (e.g. nomadic pastoralism) and types of displacement may all be relevant for the purposes of promoting or accommodating movement, or else preventing situations that cause people to flee. A person’s mode of entry into another state -- and how that mode will be classified by the state -- is a different matter, with no direct connection to the “causes” of a person’s movement.

What is clear is that all people, regardless of their immigration status, have inalienable fundamental rights that must be respected and may have basic needs that must be met. Donors and partners must clearly distinguish between development aimed at addressing forced displacement and people-centred management of migration, and security co-operation aimed at addressing irregular migration.

What about the causes of conflict and forced displacement⁶?

While there is a lot that development aid can do both to improve the situation for people affected by forced displacement and to reduce the risks of such displacement occurring in the first place, any framing that puts these on equal footing is logically problematic. Conflict *is* the “root cause” of forced displacement; and it is also the cause of many other disastrous impacts, not least for those who don’t or can’t flee.

Development policy must always be conflict-sensitive, and not only when conflicts produce or may result in displacement. In every situation, development cooperation should aim at dealing holistically with crises and chronic problems to prevent situations of fragility and conflict on their own terms, and not solely as potential drivers of displacement.

The drivers of conflicts are numerous and complex. Nearly all of them are systemic and require long-term responses and thus long-term commitment. While aid for displaced populations is imperative, short-term and especially securitised approaches aimed simply at stemming immediate forced displacement may siphon resources from, and even harm, the long-term investment in peace and development needed to reduce fragility and militate against drivers of conflict.

3. How should development aid address conflicts and displacement?

⁶ “forced displacement” in this sense means conflict-induced displacement, as distinct from other causes or events that lead people to flee for safety.

Prioritize long-term development and peacebuilding interventions which are informed and designed by tools such as conflict sensitive approaches and conflict analysis which aim to tackle the root causes and drivers of conflict. This includes establishing sufficient political independence for the institutions which are tasked with promoting long-term peacebuilding and development in order to avoid co-option into serving short-term crisis response and security objectives.

Ensure the security-development nexus is always based on human and not state security. Security and development go hand in hand, but only when development is linked to the security of the individual and society at large rather than on the security – e.g. territorial integrity -- of the state. Ensuring human security and sustainable peace requires addressing root causes of violence and insecurity *inter alia* by supporting governance, access to justice and economic opportunities for all, inclusive decision-making, tackling corruption, etc. On this basis, using development funds to build the capacities of military actors and to provide them with equipment may contradict the well-established and fundamental principle of aid working impartially to advance the well-being and rights of people in the face of violence and abuse by all conflict actors, including security services.

Put people at the center of development policies and interventions, notably by supporting and engaging with citizens, local communities, and grassroots-level organisations in order to generate policies which are context-sensitive and serve long-term stability. This is crucial in fragile and post-conflict contexts where development processes are frequently interrupted and set back by violence and unresolved conflicts, weak institutions, lack of rule of law and/or corruption. Analysis which fails to take into account local and marginalised voices, such as children, women, people with disabilities, etc., can miss the multiple drivers and competing narratives of conflict, and reinforce patterns of exclusion.

Build development cooperation on a principled foundation. Engagement with third countries should take account of human rights and the rule of law and promote political systems which are able to manage conflict and broader developmental change peacefully. Development interventions which are undertaken in fragile and/or conflict-affected countries and regions must be conflict- and gender-sensitive, and respect the 'do no harm' principle. Addressing the security-development nexus in fragile environments should be underpinned by a long-term commitment which prioritises the establishment of the rule of law and respect for rights, and addresses the underlying drivers of conflict and fragility, in line with the provisions of the [New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States](#).

Reject short-term securitised approaches to migration while working to improve the response to protracted displacement. While situations of conflict and instability can have serious knock-on effects for the security of neighbouring areas or countries, it is important to ensure that the refugees, internally displaced people and other migrants aren't scapegoated for the crises they have fled. Development cooperation should encourage and support a constructive approach to addressing displacement, especially protracted displacement where development interventions are especially crucial over the longer term. In these situations, displaced populations should be counted as a development constituency – and not only a humanitarian caseload -- within local and national planning. This inclusion implies an integrated approach that considers the needs and development potential of displaced people alongside those of host communities. In turn, the fiscal impacts of this inclusion must be accounted for and financially supported by the donor community.

Keep development aid fit for purpose. The purpose of development cooperation is to lift people out of poverty. Aid must always be planned and allocated in a way that best and most effectively serves this purpose, and geographic allocation of development aid must be in accordance with needs; a country or region's potential to be a source of outward migration is not an appropriate criterion. This means:

- **Ensuring innovation in modalities serves the right objectives.** Innovation and evolution in development cooperation is important, but it can only be effective if continues to serve the interests of the poorest and most marginalized. New channels, pools, or other funding mechanisms should not undermine existing development cooperation planning and the objectives set by partner governments, or divert funding from these objectives towards areas that serve the interests of donors rather than the population. This includes ensuring that short-term objectives aren't prioritized over the long-term perspective that development planning requires.
- **Development should not be used as a bargaining chip** to obtain agreements or concessions on areas of strategic interest for donors. Development aid must not be linked to or conditioned by agreements on readmission, stronger border control or stifling of mobility, cooperation on organised crime, or other areas not directly associated with the efficacy of action to reduce poverty and fight inequality.
- **In-donor refugee costs should not be counted as ODA.** Resettlement and housing of refugees in rich countries is a human rights obligation, but it should not be considered part of development aid. Supporting refugees, including in rich countries is vital - it forms part of our international responsibilities and human rights obligations - but it is not development assistance. This type of spending does not link to any development objectives of improving the welfare of poor people in those countries which are refugees' countries of origin. Aid given for the wrong reasons - to help the donor more than the recipient country - is less effective at reducing poverty and inequality and addressing humanitarian need.