

30 October 2018

## (The minimum of) What you should know about migration...

Despite the challenges it may present, migration has been part and parcel of the history of world development. All countries in the world have been, at some stage of their history, a region of departure, arrival or transit of international migratory flows. Similarly, in each country, considerable population movements have occurred within national boundaries.

Contrarily to what many people believe, the poorest people are not those that migrate most: they only rarely have the possibility of migrating, as they are less able to overcome barriers to migration (i.e. restrictive legal framework, lack of education, lack of resources to travel).

This is what is stated in a report by FAO on Migration, agriculture and rural development that is part of the series of reports on The State of Food and Agriculture that has been running since 1947.



Estimates are that currently one billion people in the world have been involved in migration during their life, most of them living in poor countries. Often people start by moving within their own country from one rural area to another or towards an urban area, before possibly moving to a foreign country.

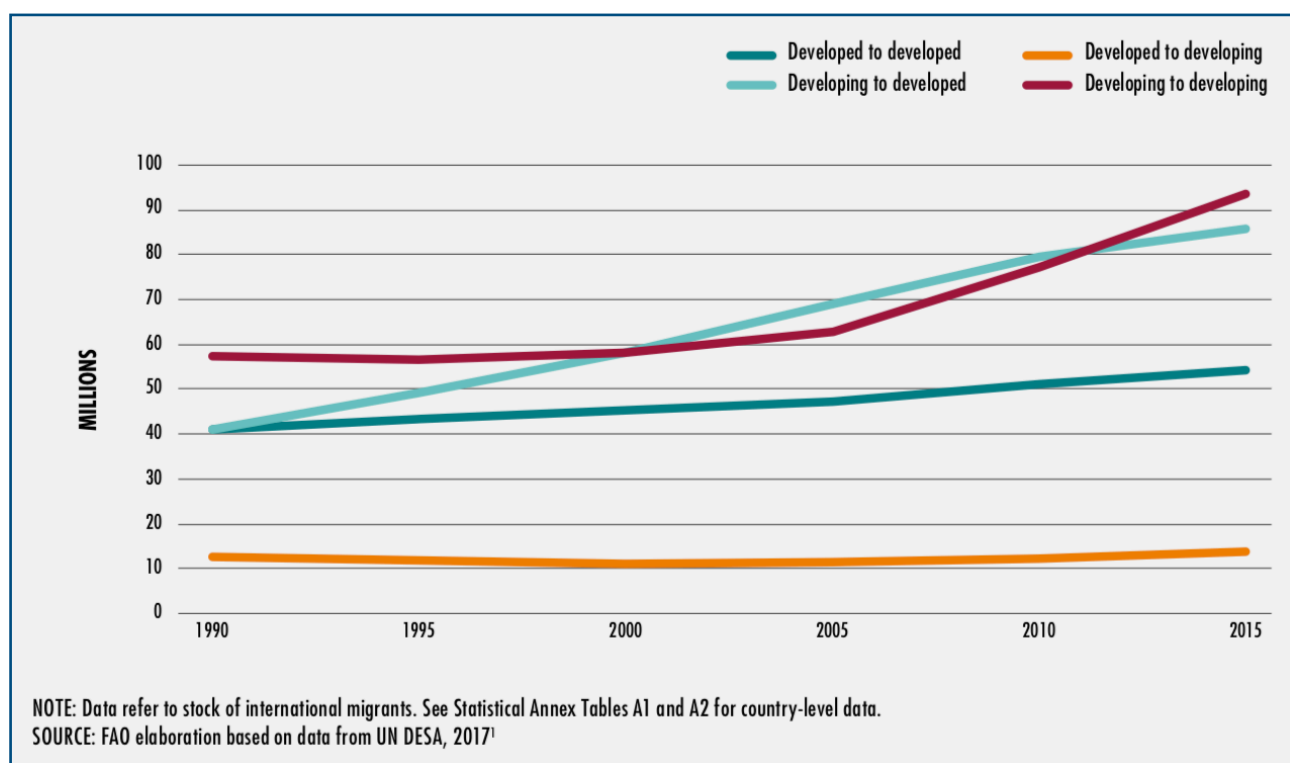
Migrations are often linked to crisis situations (economic crises, war, political unrest, natural disasters such as storms, floods, droughts or earthquakes) and the integration of newcomers to the place of arrival requires their social rights - particularly labour laws - to

be enforced. It is when this condition is fulfilled that migration allows to reduce inequalities and that it can become an important source of economic growth. In some aging countries, migration brings in a young labour force indispensable for maintaining a sustainable social and economic system.

The authors of the FAO report work towards providing proofs of the inaccuracy of some commonplaces on migrations by using a very well designed questionnaire that provides answers in a rather didactic way. Some important points made are summarised here:

- Even though there has been an increase of migrations over the last 25 years, the increment was relatively modest (+14% increase of the share of world population involved).
- Internal migrations that take place within a country - they are often rather difficult to estimate - are much more important than international migrations, and they usually take place from one rural area to another, particularly in the case of seasonal migration and in poorer countries.
- Around 85% of international refugees are being hosted in so-called « developing countries », and at least one-third of them live in rural areas.

### International migrants, by origin and destination



- Women are increasingly involved in migration.
- It is often the most dynamic members of households who migrate; this reduces labour available locally and may impact on agricultural production. But their absence is compensated by remittances sent by migrants to their families. Migration also contributes to the inflow of new ideas and to bringing changes to social and cultural models in countries of origin.

- Countries hosting migrants have the benefit of additional labour - often qualified<sup>1</sup> - without having had to bear the cost of caring and educating children.

It is clear from the data presented in the FAO report that migration is characterised by a great diversity of situations. One may lament that the medias only rarely properly report on this.

One may also lament that migration is being used by some political leaders who try to exploit it for political purposes, in particular with the view to develop xenophobic views among their compatriots. This fact is observed even in countries or regions where the number of arrivals of migrants is minimal.

The FAO report stresses the need to well understand the causes of migration if the objective is to take proper policy measures in order to create opportunities for improving living conditions of potential migrants in their country of origin, and thus help to keep migratory flow under control and to reduce the human tragedies that go with it.

From this point of view, [hungerexplained.org](http://hungerexplained.org) has already shown on several occasion that initiatives taken by certain countries and their development partners in the area of food and agriculture have had deleterious effects [see in particular our “Investment” section]

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To know more :

- FAO, The State of Food and Agriculture 2018. Migration, agriculture and rural development, FAO, 2018.
- FAO, Summary and questionnaire on "Migrations, agriculture and rural development", 2018.

Earlier articles on [hungerexplained.org](http://hungerexplained.org) related to the topic:

- Fences, walls, aid and fairer trade: reflecting on international migrations, 2016
- AfDB's new agricultural strategy: for a so-called “modern” agriculture that will be neither sustainable nor inclusive and will only benefit a minority, 2016
- Valletta Summit on migration: 1.8 billion euros for Africa to stop Africa-to-Europe migration - Illusion or irresponsibility? 2015
- MacMillan, A., Lampedusa, Westgate and Famine in the Horn of Africa - It's All too Easy to Forget, 2013.

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<sup>1</sup> For example in Sri Lanka, half of the 250,000 persons migrating out of the country every year are qualified (Source: National statistics).