



2018



# THE STATE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

## Migration, agriculture and rural development

**M**igration is an expanding global reality, one that allows millions of people to seek new opportunities. But it also involves challenges for migrants and for societies, both in areas of origin and of destination. This report analyses migratory flows – internal and international – and how they are linked to processes of economic development, demographic change and natural-resource pressure. The focus is on rural migration, the many forms it takes and the important role it plays in both developing and developed countries. The report investigates the drivers and impacts of rural migration and highlights how related policy priorities depend on country contexts that are in continuous evolution. These priorities will be different for countries in protracted crises, countries where rural youth employment is a challenge, countries in economic and demographic transition, and developed countries in need of migrant workers, not least to support agriculture and rural economies.

### **MIGRATION IS PART OF THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIETIES**

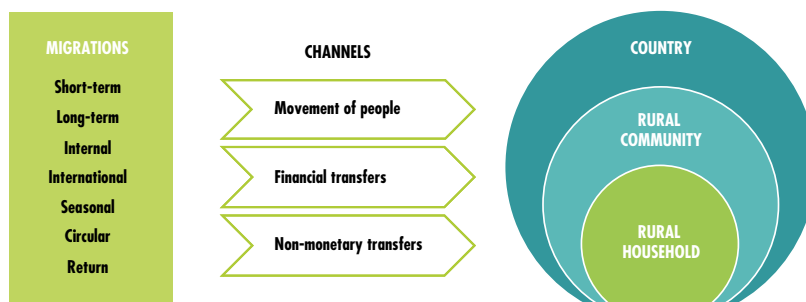
The last century has witnessed dramatic changes in international migration flows, which have occurred alongside one of the most sweeping transformations in human society: the transition from predominantly rural to increasingly urban societies, in which internal migration, particularly from rural to urban areas, has played a major role. Globally, internal migration is a significantly larger phenomenon than international migration, and an essential component of the process of economic development.

Based on 2015 data, more international migrants have moved between developing countries (38 percent of the total stock of international migrants) than from a developing to a developed country (35 percent).

### **RURAL MIGRATION IS CENTRAL TO ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION**

The large flows of internal migration described in this report suggest that reallocation of labour resources in many developing countries is contributing to economic transformation and development. Nevertheless, internal migration will continue to be closely interlinked

### IMPACT CHANNELS OF MIGRATION



SOURCE: FAO.

with international migration as potential migrants are particularly attracted to opportunities in countries with higher levels of income and overall development. While this can contribute to improving the prospects of international migrants, there are also negative aspects to this process. Although they may send back remittances and other benefits, migrants essentially represent a productive resource that is being diverted out of their respective country or area of origin.

### **IMMIGRANTS PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AREAS IN DEVELOPED 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.

### **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.

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. ■

## **CORE MESSAGES OF SOFA 2018**

- 1** Migration, despite the challenges it may present, is part and parcel of economic, social and human development and a means of reducing inequality both within and between countries.
- 2** At different points in their development, all countries will be areas of origin, transit or destination – sometimes a combination of the three – for international migration.
- 3** Globally, international migration is a significantly smaller phenomenon than internal migration: more than 1 billion people living in developing countries have moved internally.
- 4** International and internal migration flows share some of the same drivers and constitute an integrated system: for example, in low-income countries internal migrants are five times more likely to migrate internationally than individuals who have not moved.
- 5** 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** Rural out-migration can be a means of income diversification, as well as an adaptation mechanism to slow-onset environmental stressors such as severe water scarcity. However, it is not often an option for the poorest, who face the greatest constraints to mobility.
- 7** Rural areas host large numbers of displaced populations during protracted crises, leading to further challenges and potentially negative effects. This burden can be alleviated through rural development policies that focus on the economic and social integration of migrants, resulting in outcomes that benefit both displaced people and their host areas.
- 8** In many developed countries immigrants can help fill labour shortages in high-value agriculture activities that are difficult to mechanize, but integration can pose challenges both for immigrants and for host countries. Implementing and enforcing regulatory schemes and programmes to protect their labour rights can help improve their working conditions.
- 9** Policy coherence between migration and agriculture and rural development policies is essential to ensure safe, orderly, and regular migration. Policies should not aim to reduce or accelerate migratory flows, but rather to maximize the economic and social benefits while minimizing the costs to migrants and societies.
- 10** 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 in need of migrant workers.



*The State of Food and Agriculture*, FAO's major annual flagship report, aims at bringing to a wider audience balanced science-based assessments of important issues in the field of food and agriculture.

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