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Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In its decision 2017/101 (see [E/2017/25](#)), the Commission on Population and Development decided that the theme for its fifty-first session, in 2018, would be “Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration”. The present report has been prepared to inform the Commission’s deliberations on the theme, as part of the Commission’s ongoing follow-up and review of relevant sections of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994. In the present report, the latest trends in urbanization and internal migration, human mobility and international migration are analysed primarily on the basis of estimates and projections prepared by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat. The factors driving the growth of cities and the relationship between migration and economic development are also assessed. Following an overview of current policies in these various domains, critical gaps in data and evidence to inform policymaking are described. The report concludes with a set of recommendations.

* [E/CN.9/2018/1](#).



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I. Introduction

1. Cities are centres of social, economic and political activity that concentrate an increasing share of the world's population and attract internal and international migrants alike. The movement of people from rural to urban areas, between urban settlements of various sizes and from one country to another will continue to affect the distribution of the population within and across national boundaries.

2. The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in 1994, recognized that urbanization and internal migration, while integrally related to development, could have negative consequences if there were unbridled urban growth or an excessive concentration of population in large cities. The New Urban Agenda, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), set out a new road map to make urbanization an engine of sustained and inclusive economic growth, social and cultural development and environmental protection.

3. Since the adoption of the Programme of Action, which contains one of the most comprehensive negotiated texts on international migration to date, the issue of international migration and its relation to development has become increasingly prominent. The High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, held in September 2006, was the first high-level meeting of the General Assembly exclusively dedicated to the topic. The declaration adopted at the second High-level Dialogue, held in 2013 (see General Assembly resolution 68/4), recognized human mobility as a key factor for sustainable development and paved the way for including migration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (see Assembly resolution 70/1).¹

4. The Sustainable Development Goals include several migration-related targets, including one for the facilitation of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, while the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, adopted at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, in 2015, includes practical recommendations to strengthen the contribution of migration and remittances to development (see General Assembly resolution 69/313). In 2016, the Assembly decided to develop two global compacts, one on refugees and one for safe, orderly and regular migration, both to be adopted in 2018 (see Assembly resolution 71/1).

5. Both urbanization and international migration are inextricably linked with the process of development. While undergoing economic transformation and demographic transition, most countries experience a large shift of population from rural areas to cities, as well as migration between urban areas.

6. Urbanization promotes development through economies of agglomeration and specialization, efficient service delivery and greater productivity of labour. In a similar vein, cross-border migration can act as a driver of economic development in countries of origin and destination. However, the realization of the beneficial effects of urbanization and international migration and the mitigation of their negative consequences require proper regulation and smart policy interventions.²

¹ The third High-level Dialogue will be held during the first half of 2019.

² Michael Clemens, "Migration is a form of development: the need for innovation to regulate migration for mutual benefit", Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, technical paper No. 2017/8 (New York, United Nations, 2017).

II. Trends in urbanization and internal migration

7. The process of urbanization, or “urban transition”, refers to a shift in a population from one that is dispersed across small rural settlements, in which agriculture is the dominant economic activity, towards one that is concentrated in larger and denser urban settlements characterized, in recent centuries, by a dominance of industrial and service activities. There is no single global definition of what constitutes an urban settlement. Rather, the definition of “urban”, as employed by national statistical offices, varies across countries and, in some cases, has changed over time within countries. The criteria for classifying an area as urban may be based on one or a combination of characteristics, such as a minimum population threshold, population density, proportion of workforce employed in non-agricultural sectors and availability of infrastructure or of education, health and other services. The data presented in the present report are mostly based on national urban definitions, usually obtained from censuses. In some cases, adjustments have been made to ensure a consistent definition of urban settlements within a country over time (see box 1).

Box 1

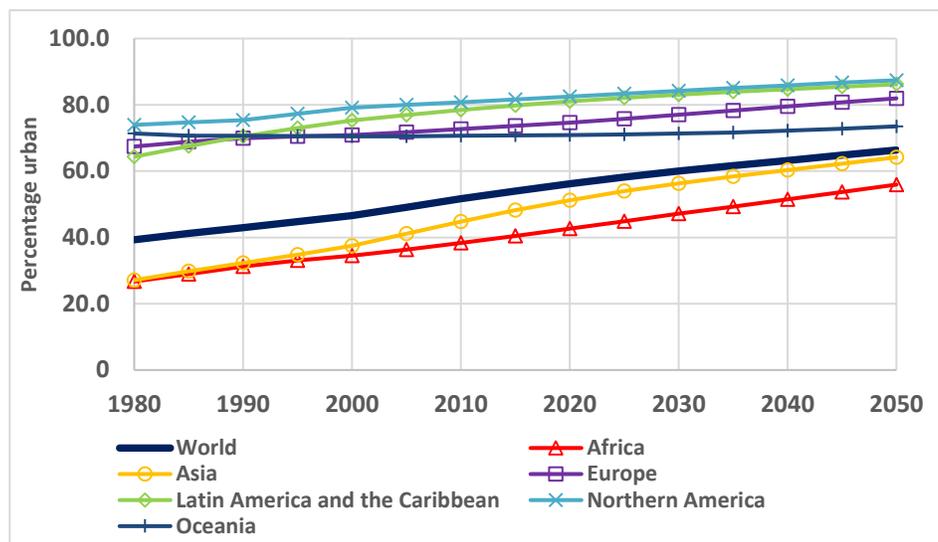
Defining cities

Population data are often reported for geographical areas delimited by administrative boundaries that do not coincide with the urbanized territory following other standards. Therefore, the “city proper”, defined by administrative boundaries, may not include suburban areas where a substantial portion of the population working or studying in the city resides. Furthermore, in some cases, although governed by different local authorities, two or more adjacent cities may form a single urbanized area. Two supplementary concepts have been used to improve the comparability of measurements of city populations across countries and over time. “Urban agglomeration” refers to the population contained within the contours of a contiguous territory inhabited at urban levels of residential density. “Metropolitan region” comprises an urban agglomeration and surrounding areas at a lower settlement density with strong economic and social linkages to the city.

Levels of and trends in urbanization

8. A growing proportion of humanity is concentrated in urban settlements. The share of the world’s population living in urban areas is expected to increase from 55 per cent in 2018 to 60 per cent in 2030 (see figure I). In 2018, Northern America was the most urbanized region of the world, with 82 per cent of its population concentrated in urban settlements, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (81 per cent) and Europe (74 per cent). While Africa and Asia currently have the lowest levels of urbanization, with 42 per cent and 50 per cent of their respective populations living in urban areas, the current pace of urbanization in those regions is faster than in other regions. By 2030, urban settlements are projected to host 47 per cent of the population in Africa, 56 per cent in Asia, 71 per cent in Oceania, 77 per cent in Europe and more than 80 per cent in the Americas. Between now and 2050, the urban population of Africa is likely to triple and that of Asia to increase by 61 per cent, so that by 2050 most of the world’s urban population will be concentrated in Asia (52 per cent) and Africa (21 per cent).

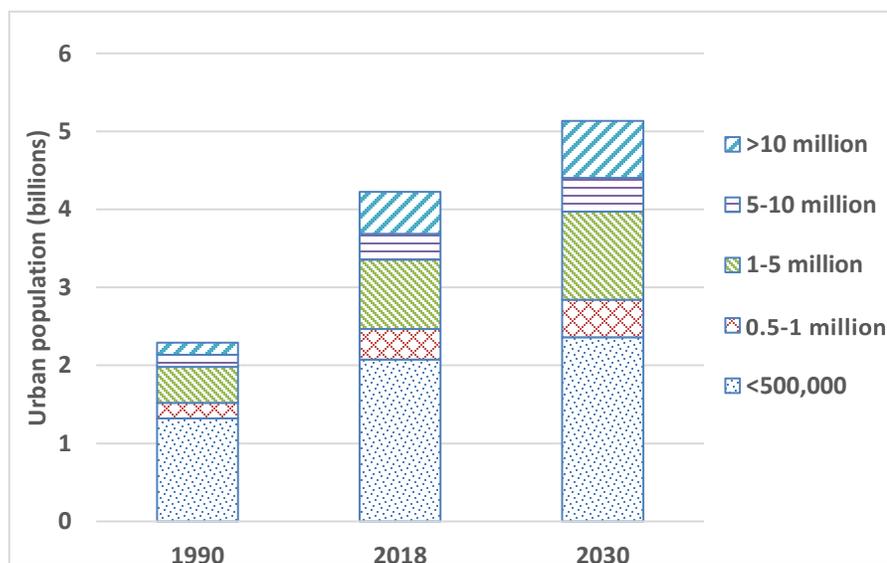
Figure I
Proportion of total population residing in urban areas for the world and geographic regions, 1980–2050



Source: United Nations, *World Urbanization Prospects: the 2014 Revision* (New York, 2014).

9. The global growth in the urban population has coincided with an increase in the number of cities and, in many cases, their size. In 1990, 10 urban agglomerations were characterized as “megacities”, with each hosting more than 10 million inhabitants. Together, they accounted for 7 per cent of the global urban population. In 2018, 33 megacities host 13 per cent of the global urban population. By 2030, the number of cities with at least 10 million inhabitants is projected to increase to 41, with 14 per cent of urban dwellers worldwide residing in megacities (see figure II).

Figure II
Urban population by category of city size in 1990, 2018 and 2030



Source: United Nations, *World Urbanization Prospects: the 2014 Revision* (New York, 2014).

10. Urban population growth has been propelled by the growth of cities of all sizes. The number of “large cities”, with between 5 and 10 million inhabitants, more than doubled between 1990 and 2018, from 21 to 49, and projections indicate that there will be 63 cities in this range in 2030. The number of “medium-sized cities”, with between 1 and 5 million inhabitants, and of smaller cities, with fewer than 1 million inhabitants, has increased significantly as well. Nevertheless, the share of the world’s urban dwellers residing in cities with fewer than 1 million inhabitants is expected to decline from 58 per cent in 2018 to 55 per cent in 2030, balanced by an increasing share who will reside in larger cities.

Levels of and trends in internal migration

11. Statistical data on internal migration are obtained from censuses and surveys, which provide data on the place of residence of individuals at a point in time, and from administrative systems that record changes of residence over a given time interval. While population censuses yield useful information about internal migration, they generally do not record returns and onward moves within an observation period and therefore tend to underestimate the total number of migratory events. Absent a single global standard definition of internal migration, internationally comparable indicators require a consistent time dimension for change of residence (after one year, five years or since birth) and spatial dimension (movements across state, provincial, district or municipal borders).³

12. Recent cross-national studies⁴ show large variations in levels of internal migration across countries and both within and between geographic regions. Measured over a period of one year or five years, high levels of internal migration are generally found in high-income countries in Oceania (Australia and New Zealand), Northern America, Northern and Western Europe and Eastern Asia (Japan and the Republic of Korea). Internal migration has been generally low in Eastern Europe and in South-Central, South-Eastern and Western Asia. Substantial variation exists among countries in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean. Over time, levels of internal migration have been stable or declining since the 1990s, with China being a notable exception.

13. The impact of internal migration on the spatial distribution of populations is greatest in countries with intermediate levels of internal migration,⁵ which, in the process of urbanization and development, experience large regional economic differentials that spur migration. For high-income countries, which are generally well advanced in this process, most internal movements are between urban areas.⁶

³ Martin Bell and others, “Global trends in internal migration”, in *Internal Migration in the Developed World: Are We Becoming Less Mobile?* Tony Champion, Thomas Cooke and Ian Shuttleworth, eds. (Routledge, New York, 2018).

⁴ Martin Bell and others, “Internal migration data around the world: assessing contemporary practice”, *Population, Space and Place*, vol. 21, No. 1 (January 2015), pp. 1–17; and Martin Bell and others, “Global trends in internal migration”.

⁵ Philip Rees and others, “The impact of internal migration on population redistribution: an international comparison”, *Population, Space and Place*, vol. 23, No. 6 (August 2017).

⁶ Hermanus Geyer, “Expanding the theoretical foundations of differential urbanization”, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, vol. 87, No. 1 (February 1996), pp. 44–59; and Ronald Skeldon, “Migration transitions revisited: their continued relevance for the development of migration theory”, *Population, Space and Place*, vol. 18, No. 2 (March/April 2012), pp. 154–166.

Role of internal migration in urban growth

14. Urban population growth can result from an excess of births over deaths among the urban population, from rural-to-urban migration and from the reclassification of rural localities as urban. During the 1980s and 1990s, the excess of births over deaths among urban residents accounted for 62 per cent of the urban growth that took place in developing countries as a whole, with rural-to-urban migration and reclassification accounting for the remaining 38 per cent.⁷ In some countries, however, rural-to-urban migration and reclassification together accounted for more than half of the urban growth, such as in China and Thailand (80 per cent), Rwanda (79 per cent), Indonesia (68 per cent) and Namibia (59 per cent). Between 2000 and 2010, 57 per cent to 65 per cent of China's urban population growth could be attributed to rural-to-urban migration.⁸

15. In Latin America and the Caribbean, a highly urbanized region, rural-to-urban migration has played a small role in city growth in recent years and has been the main driver of rural depopulation. In this region, urban-to-urban migration, in particular from small to large cities, has contributed to a concentration of the urban population in a relatively small number of populous urban areas.⁹

Cities and international migration

16. A large number and proportion of international migrants arrive and settle in the cities of destination countries. Many immigrants settle in large metropolitan areas or "global cities", which serve as "immigrant gateways"; others settle in non-gateway cities, college towns, small towns and rural areas, especially in Northern America and Europe. By one recent estimate, nearly one in five of the world's foreign-born population lived in major global cities; for 18 of these global cities, at least 20 per cent of the inhabitants were international migrants.¹⁰

17. In metropolitan areas around the world, the share of foreign-born persons in the total population exceeds the global average of 3.4 per cent by a large margin. In a recent study,¹¹ it was reported that 22 metropolitan areas each hosted 1 million or more foreign-born residents in 2015. In total, these metropolitan areas hosted an estimated 44 million international migrants, representing 18 per cent of the global total. An additional 180 cities hosted between a few thousand and 1 million foreign-born residents, comprising around a third (34 per cent) of the global foreign-born population in 2015.

18. An analysis of 23 city regions revealed that international migration can be as important to city growth as or a greater contributor to city growth than the excess of

⁷ Guy Stecklov, "The components of urban growth in developing countries", paper prepared for the United Nations, 2008.

⁸ See Yu Zhu, "The urban transition and beyond: facing new challenges of the mobility and settlement transitions in Asia", paper prepared for United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Cities, Human Mobility and International Migration, New York, 7–8 September 2017.

⁹ Jorge Rodriguez, "Drivers of global trends in migration and urbanization: migration and cities in Latin America and the Caribbean", paper prepared for Expert Group Meeting, New York, September 2017.

¹⁰ Ayşe Çağlar, "Urban migration trends, challenges and opportunities in Europe" (December 2014), background paper prepared for International Organization for Migration (IOM), *World Migration Report 2015: Migrants and cities — new partnerships to manage mobility* (Geneva, 2015).

¹¹ Marie Price, "Revisiting global immigrant gateways: hyper-diverse, established and emerging turnstiles of human settlement", paper prepared for Expert Group Meeting, New York, September 2017.

births over deaths (natural increase) or internal migration in particular settings.¹² Brasilia, Macao, China, Mexico City, Minsk, Jakarta, Singapore, Washington, D.C., and Zurich, Switzerland, are among the cities where international migration made sizeable contributions to population growth in the period from 1990 to 2010.

19. International migrants make important contributions to work, entrepreneurship and cultural diversity in host communities. However, migration also poses challenges for cities, especially if accompanied by high levels of spatial segregation and a lack of integration. While the integration of foreigners generally increases over time, some migrants continue to live in segregated communities many years after their arrival in destination countries.¹³

Other forms of mobility

20. Other forms of internal and international mobility that shape present-day cities include return and circular migration, commuting and tourism. Many migrants return to their places of origin after years of residence abroad. Some of them do so at a relatively young adult age after just a few years in the host country,¹⁴ while others return at a later stage of the life cycle, including after retirement from the workforce. In some cases, returning migrants are motivated by a desire to live closer to family members who can care for them in old age or to seek affordable institutional care. Some studies suggest that migrants from some Central and Eastern European countries who had returned to their country of origin within 10 years of emigrating represented between 6 and 8 per cent of the adult population of those countries. Also, it has been estimated that nearly a third of migrants to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Denmark had returned to their country of origin within five years of arrival.¹⁵

21. An important part of the movements to cities can be characterized as circular, that is, repeated movements of migrants between home regions and urban areas. This form of human mobility has increased in part because of cheaper transportation and the availability of modern telecommunications. Circular migration occurs both within and across countries. In China, for example, a large share of migrant workers may be considered circular migrants. Households with circular migrants may diversify their economic activity across rural and urban areas, obtaining earnings in high-wage urban areas while making expenditures in lower-cost rural areas. Circular migration may also reduce the strain on urban areas to provide services and infrastructure to non-permanent migrants. Potential disadvantages related to circular migration include the separation of families and the informality or precariousness of work available to migrants.¹⁶

22. Daily commuting is another form of mobility with implications for the planning and sustainability of cities and their environment. Many people living in suburban or

¹² Mathias Lerch, “International migration and city growth”, paper prepared for the United Nations, 2017.

¹³ Richard Alba, “Immigrant residential contexts in North America and Western Europe: how segregated? How unequal?”; and Michael White, “Migrant integration in cities: considerations for policy”, papers prepared for Expert Group Meeting, New York, September 2017.

¹⁴ Melanie Jolivet, Theodora Xenogiani and Jean-Christophe Dumont, “Measuring return migration: some preliminary findings in times of crisis”, paper prepared for Economic Commission for Europe, Conference of European Statisticians, Geneva, October 2012.

¹⁵ Agnieszka Fihel, paper prepared for the United Nations, 2017.

¹⁶ Graeme Hugo, “Urban migration trends, challenges, responses and policy in the Asia-Pacific” (December 2014), background paper prepared for IOM, *World Migration Report 2015*. Available from www.iom.int/sites/default/files/WMR-2015-Background-Paper-GHugo.pdf.

rural areas adjacent to urban areas work in the city, despite traffic congestion and long commuting times, which are traded off for the benefits of suburban living. The decisions of individuals and households have aggregate consequences for urban sprawl, congestion and air pollution, among other things. More dispersed patterns of urbanization require the adaptation of the governing structures and institutions and better planning for sustainability.¹⁷

23. International tourism arrivals have increased rapidly in recent years, reaching a total of 1.2 billion in 2015. Tourism entails large-scale, short-term human mobility, often towards metropolitan areas. Tourism has significant economic impacts, generating 1 in 11 jobs worldwide and accounting for 7 per cent of exports globally.¹⁸ The tourism industry attracts large numbers of migrant workers in hospitality and related services. By spurring property prices, large-scale tourism can propel migratory movements, including circular migration.¹⁹

III. Trends in international migration

24. The number of international migrants at a given point in time, also known as the “international migrant stock”, is generally measured as the number of persons born abroad (“foreign-born”). Population censuses and population registers constitute the main source of information for the number and characteristics of international migrants (see box 2).

Box 2

Who is an international migrant?

An international migrant is a person who changes his or her country of usual residence. “Long-term” international migrants are those who establish residence in a different country for a period of at least a year, while “short-term” migrants move to a country other than their country of usual residence for a period of at least three months, but less than a year. Categories of legal admission include education or training, employment, family reunification or formation, right to free establishment or movement, long-term or permanent settlement, humanitarian reasons and regularization of legal status.

Source: *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.14).

¹⁷ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), *World Cities Report 2016: Urbanization and Development — Emerging Futures* (Nairobi, 2016). Available from <https://unhabitat.org/books/world-cities-report/>.

¹⁸ World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), “UNWTO tourism highlights, 2016 edition” (Madrid, 2016). Available from <http://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284418145>; and UNWTO, “International tourist arrivals up 4% reach a record 1.2 billion in 2015”, 18 January 2016. Available from <http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2016-01-18/international-tourist-arrivals-4-reach-record-12-billion-2015>.

¹⁹ Ronald Skeldon, “International migration, internal migration, mobility and urbanization: towards more integrated approaches”, paper prepared for Expert Group Meeting, New York, September 2017.

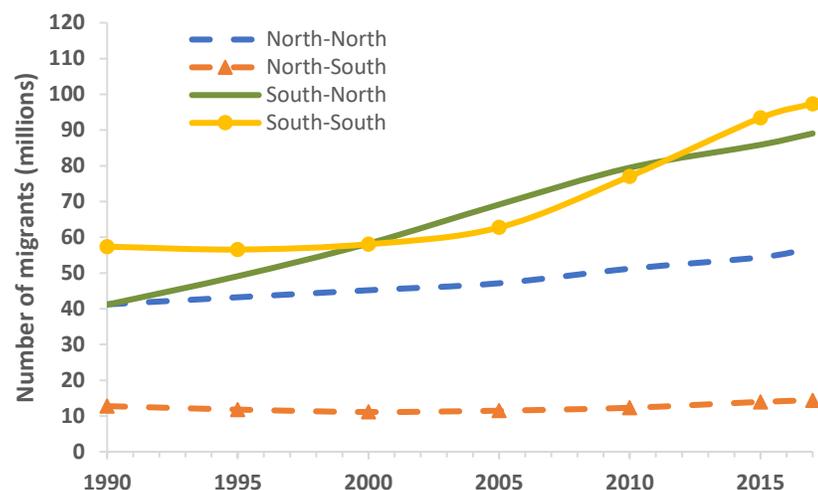
Trends in the stock of international migrants

25. Since 1990, the global number of international migrants has increased by an estimated 105 million persons, or 69 per cent, reaching 258 million in 2017.²⁰ In 2017, international migrants comprised around 3.4 per cent of the world's population, compared with 2.9 per cent in 1990. In the more developed regions, also referred to as the “North”, around 12 per cent of inhabitants are international migrants, compared with 2 per cent in the less developed regions (the “South”).

26. In 2017, some 38 per cent of the world's international migrants were born in the South and residing in another country in the South (“South-South migrants”) (see figure III). The second largest category of international migrants (35 per cent) are those who were born in the South but reside in the North (“South-North migrants”). Another 21 per cent of all international migrants were born in the North and reside in the North (“North-North migrants”), while 6 per cent were born in the North but reside in the South (“North-South migrants”).

Figure III

Origin and destination of international migrants by development group, 1990–2017



Source: “Trends in international migrant stock: the 2017 revision”, United Nations database, December 2017.

27. In 2017, 48 per cent of all international migrants were women. The percentage of female migrants varied by region, from 44 per cent in the South to 52 per cent in the North. The relatively high share of female migrants in Europe and Northern America (52 per cent) is mainly the result of “ageing-in-place” of migrants who had arrived decades earlier, combined with the fact that women tend to live longer than men. The low share of women among migrants in the South is primarily the result of the rapid expansion of migratory movements to Western Asia, many of which concern men.

28. Both in the North and the South, around 70 per cent of all international migrants are between 20 and 59 years of age. In the North, migrants aged 60 years or over (“older migrants”) outnumber those under the age of 20 (“young migrants”), while

²⁰ The analysis in the present section is based on “Trends in international migrant stock: the 2017 revision”, United Nations database, December 2017.

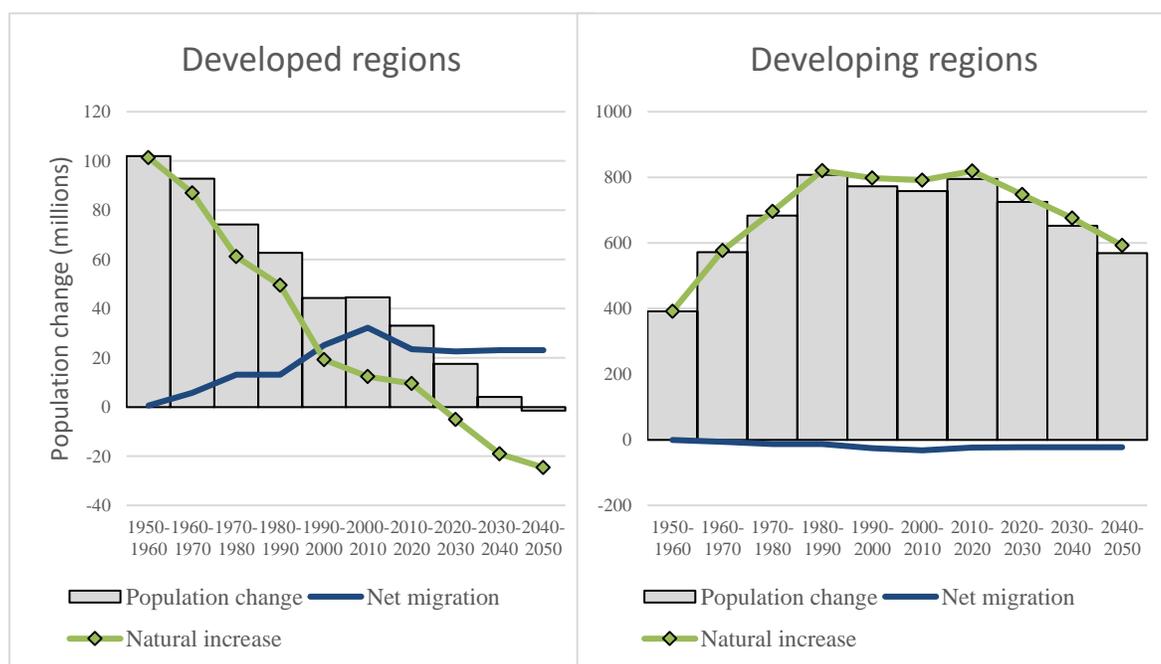
younger migrants outnumber older migrants in the South. In the South, 21 per cent of all international migrants are young, more than double the share of older migrants (10 per cent). In contrast, the proportion of older migrants in the North (21 per cent) is more than double the share of young migrants (9 per cent).

Role of international migration in population growth and ageing

29. Since the 1990s, migration has been the primary source of population growth in the developed regions (see figure IV). Net migration is projected to be the only driver of population growth after 2020. By 2050, the projected population of the developed regions will start to decline, as the net inflow of migrants will no longer be sufficient to compensate for the excess of deaths over births. By contrast, the impact of migration on population growth in the developing regions is expected to remain minimal. Indeed, for the next several decades, high levels of fertility in the developing regions will continue to dwarf the role of net migration, which is negative but relatively small.

Figure IV

Contributions of the excess of births over deaths (natural increase) and the balance of immigration over emigration (net migration) to population change by development group, from 1950–1960 to 2040–2050



30. Net immigration has played a relatively modest role in forestalling population decline in most developed countries so far. Because most international migrants are of working age at the time they move, however, continued migration can contribute to slowing population ageing and postponing population decline in host countries. International migration originating in countries with a large excess of births over deaths and concomitant youthful populations has produced some ageing in the places of origin.²¹ Furthermore, continued emigration from developing countries that are

²¹ Agnieszka Fihel, paper prepared for the United Nations, 2017.

experiencing an increase in the size and share of their working-age population can help to ease the demographic pressure on labour markets and contribute to economic growth through remittances, diaspora investments and return.

31. The effect of migration on the size and structure of the population can be measured by comparing the results of the “medium variant” of the United Nations population projections, which assumes a continuation of recent levels of net migration in future years, with the “zero net migration” scenario, which implies equal numbers of immigrants and emigrants, starting in 2015–2020. With zero net migration, the populations of Northern America and Oceania would be 13 per cent smaller in 2050 than if current migration trends continued. In Europe, this difference would amount to 6 per cent.

32. Continued net migration would also mitigate the changes in the population age structure: under the zero net migration scenario, the median age in the developed regions would be 1.7 years higher in 2050 than under the medium variant. Also, in the absence of international migration, the population aged 20 to 64 would fall considerably in Northern America (by 16 per cent), Oceania (by 15 per cent) and Europe (by 8 per cent), while the projected old-age dependency ratio in Europe, Northern America and Oceania would increase by 4 to 6 persons aged 65 or over for every 100 persons aged 20 to 64 years by 2050.²²

Irregular migration

33. Owing to its very nature, the scope of irregular migration is difficult to ascertain. While irregular migration takes place in all regions of the world, systematic efforts to estimate levels of irregular migration are mostly limited to Europe and Northern America.

34. In the United States of America, the number of unauthorized immigrants was estimated at 11.1 million in 2014, representing around 25 per cent of the total foreign-born population. In the European Union, the irregular foreign resident population was estimated to be between 1.9 million and 3.8 million persons in 2008, representing between 7 and 13 per cent of the total foreign population.²³ A more recent study cites estimates varying from 2.8 million to 6 million persons without a regular residence status in 2014.²⁴

35. Human trafficking, a form of exploitation that can include sexual exploitation, forced labour or forced marriage, is often associated with irregular migration.²⁵ Between 2012 and 2014, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime detected around 63,300 victims of human trafficking in 106 different countries and territories. Some 70 per cent of the detected victims were female.²⁶ The increase in the share of men among detected victims, from 13 per cent in 2004 to 21 per cent in 2014, reflects

²² *International Migration Report 2017: Highlights* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.XIII.4).

²³ European Commission, “Clandestino Project: final report”, 2009. Available from http://cordis.europa.eu/publication/rcn/12080_en.html.

²⁴ Varun Aggarwal, Federica La China and Lucia Vaculova, “Irregular migration, refugees and informal labour markets in the EU: the rise of European sweatshops?”, paper prepared for European Institute for Asian Studies. Available from www.eias.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Irregular_Migration_Website-1.pdf.

²⁵ Data on smuggling of migrants is too incomplete for a global analysis.

²⁶ *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2016* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.16.IV.6).

in part a growing awareness among policymakers and criminal justice practitioners of the diversity in the forms of exploitation that trafficking entails.

Forced displacement

36. Forcibly displaced persons comprise refugees, asylum seekers, persons in refugee-like situations and internally displaced persons. The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as someone with a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons related to race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, who resides outside their country of nationality and who is unable to return to it. In Africa, persons fleeing armed conflict and violence are also considered refugees (see box 3). Persons in a refugee-like situation may receive protection from forced return through complementary, humanitarian or other forms of temporary protection. Asylum seekers are individuals whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined. Internally displaced persons are persons who have been forced to leave their habitual residence owing to armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-caused disasters but who have not crossed an international border.

Box 3

Who is a refugee?

Refugees refer to persons protected under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees of 1967 and those falling under the provisions of the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Refugees are also considered persons who fall under the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

37. At the end of 2016, the total number of refugees and asylum seekers in the world reached 26 million, or nearly 10 per cent of all international migrants. Although a large number of refugees live in camps in rural areas, around 60 per cent of all refugees registered with UNHCR reside in urban areas.²⁷

38. Protracted crises and armed conflict have led to a sharp increase in the global refugee population. In 2016, over half of the entire refugee population originated from three countries: Afghanistan, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. With more than half of its population displaced internally or abroad, the Syrian Arab Republic continues to be the country with the largest forcibly displaced population worldwide, approximating 12 million people by the end of 2016. In 2017, violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar, compelled over 620,000 Rohingya refugees to leave Myanmar for Bangladesh in the three months following the onset of the crisis.²⁸

39. Most forcibly displaced persons in the world are displaced within their own country. By the end of 2016, an estimated 40.3 million people were internally

²⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Global trends: forced displacement in 2016”, 19 June 2017.

²⁸ UNHCR, “Rohingya emergency”. Available from <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/rohingya-emergency.html>.

displaced as a result of conflict and violence. This figure has nearly doubled since 2000.²⁹

Environmental factors and climate change

40. Migration in response to environmental factors or climate change ranges from gradual movements in response to slow-onset environmental change to mass displacement owing to sudden-onset disasters. Although reliable figures are lacking, it is believed that most environment- and climate-related migration takes place over relatively short distances and only rarely involves cross-border movements.³⁰ While many victims of disasters are able to return to their homes in a relatively short period of time, in some cases they live in protracted situations or require permanent relocation.

41. While environmental factors can be important drivers of migration and displacement, they are difficult to separate from other migration motives, including political, economic and humanitarian factors. Since hazards relating to climate change and environmental degradation are likely to increase in frequency and intensity, disaster-induced displacement could well become more widespread in the future.

IV. International migration and development: a two-way street

42. Migration and development can be considered two sides of the same coin. Economic research suggests that development leads to migration and, by the same token, migration contributes to development.³¹

43. Historically, economic development has usually been accompanied by higher emigration rates.³² As countries develop, rates of emigration tend to rise before they fall. Emigration rates in middle-income countries have been found to triple those of low-income countries. Furthermore, in developing countries at the early or intermediate stages of the demographic transition, emigration is spurred by the large cohorts of relatively well-educated young people entering the labour market.

44. Migration can also propel economic development through increased labour productivity. Research suggests that migration sharply raises the rewards to labour for the less skilled and to education for the more skilled, lifting millions of migrants and their families out of poverty.

45. Concerns remain widespread that skilled migration inflicts net economic harm on countries of origin of international migrants through the loss of human capital. While large-scale outflows of skilled workers do represent a loss to origin countries and can affect service delivery in those countries, such as in the case of nurses and teachers, there is little evidence that policy responses intended to restrict the emigration of skilled workers, such as emigration restrictions or taxes, have increased

²⁹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, “Global report on internal displacement”, May 2017. Available from <http://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2017/>.

³⁰ United Kingdom, Government Office for Science, *Migration and Global Environmental Change: Future Challenges and Opportunities*, final project report (London, 2011).

³¹ The present section is largely based on Michael Clemens, “Migration is a form of development”.

³² Hein de Haas, “Turning the tide? Why development will not stop migration”, *Development and Change*, vol. 38, No. 5 (September 2007), pp. 819–841.

the number of skilled workers, improved service delivery or promoted development outcomes in developing countries.

46. With regard to the potential impact of international migration on inequality in countries of destination, research suggests that even high levels of immigration have had limited effects on wages and employment of the native-born population. However, sudden inflows of low-skilled migrants have been found to displace low-skilled native workers in the short term and in countries with rigid labour markets.

47. Despite its obvious benefits for development, migration is not necessarily beneficial to all groups of people. Development is often an uneven process, producing some degree of upheaval and discomfort. Disadvantaged people who are bearing the brunt of these changes should be properly supported.

48. In sum, economic research suggests that global migration is a powerful driver of economic development, but that the benefits do not accrue evenly for individuals or across countries. Maximizing and sharing the benefits of international migration requires proper regulation and policies to prevent and address the problems of informality of labour markets, upholding labour standards, avoiding the strain of social services and addressing concerns about national security. With appropriate measures in place, however, safe, orderly and regular migration can indeed support global prosperity.

V. Policies on sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration³³

49. The Programme of Action lists several actions to be undertaken regarding urbanization, as well as internal and international migration. The 2030 Agenda has given further prominence to the role of urbanization and international migration in sustainable development. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants provides important guidance to Member States in addressing the challenges of large movements of refugees and migrants.

Spatial distribution

50. Key challenges for sustainable development related to the spatial distribution of the population include rapid urbanization, urban sprawl, concentration of population in large urban centres, rural exodus and depopulation and internal displacement. Poverty, limited access to education and on- and off-farm employment opportunities in rural areas are among the major factors for people to move to urban areas.

51. By 2015, four out of five Governments in the world had implemented policies or strategies to manage the spatial distribution of the population, while 72 per cent of Governments had policies to reduce migration from rural to urban areas.³⁴ Around 75 per cent of Governments promoted rural development strategies with a view to decreasing migration pressures. Thirty-nine per cent of Governments had adopted policies to decentralize populations from large urban centres to smaller urban, suburban or rural areas, while 21 per cent were seeking to relocate populations out of environmentally fragile areas.

³³ Unless otherwise noted, the source of the data in the present section is the United Nations World Population Policies Database (2016).

³⁴ United Nations, "Policies on spatial distribution and urbanization: data booklet", 2016.

Sustainable urbanization

52. Well-managed urbanization has the potential to improve people's access to education, health care and housing, to increase their productivity and to expand opportunity. However, rapid, unbridled urbanization represents challenges to sustainable urban planning, including for the management of slums and the provision of basic services. To reap the benefits of economies of agglomeration while minimizing the environmental and other adverse impacts of urban growth, Governments need to adopt strategies to plan for future urban growth.

53. In 2015, 72 per cent of Governments in the world had adopted policy measures to increase energy efficiency in transport and buildings, but only 28 per cent had stringent environmental regulations for industries within or surrounding large urban centres. Improved solid waste management systems was the most common measure, adopted by 88 per cent of Governments in more developed regions and 86 per cent in less developed regions in the past five years. Three quarters of Governments had adopted measures to secure access to water and sanitation, while 81 per cent promoted secure land tenure and adequate housing for the urban poor. However, concrete measures to improve living conditions of the urban poor were found to be lacking in developing countries with elevated proportions of slum dwellers and a faster pace of urbanization, especially in Africa.³⁵

54. Urbanization policies need to take into consideration the close link between migration and urbanization. Policies aimed at integrating foreign residents should consider that most migrants tend to settle in gateway cities and metropolitan areas. Increasingly, city authorities recognize the role played by immigrants in their communities and seek to integrate foreign residents in their policies and programmes.³⁶

The role of cities in migration governance

55. While national authorities are responsible for governing the entry, stay and work of foreign nationals, in practice, city governments have varying degrees of autonomy in settling and integrating migrants.

56. Given that the drivers and impacts of migration are most strongly felt at the local level, be it in terms of the labour market, demographic composition or service delivery, city and local governments have important roles to play in migration governance. Several recent initiatives, including those implemented by the Joint Migration and Development Initiative, seek to strengthen the local dimension of migration and development programmes.³⁷ At the fourth Mayoral Forum on Mobility, Migration and Development, held in Berlin on 26 and 27 June 2017, more than 150 mayors from around the world, together with representatives from local, national and regional governments, international organizations, philanthropic foundations and civil society, discussed the crucial role that cities play in governing human mobility.³⁸

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Summary report of the New York City global mayors summit on migration and refugee policy and practice, New York, 18 and 19 September 2017, in Concordia, "Annual summit report", pp. 92–101. Available from <https://uploads.concordia.net/2017/10/16163130/2017ConcordiaAnnualSummitReport.pdf>.

³⁷ See www.migration4development.org/en/content/about-jmdi.

³⁸ See www.unitar.org/mayoral-forum-mobility-migration-and-development-berlin.

Immigration policies

57. In 2015, 75 per cent of all Governments at the global level had policies to maintain their current level of immigration or did not have policies to influence it. Thirteen per cent of Governments had policies to lower the level of immigration and 12 per cent had policies to raise it. Since the mid-1990s, the proportion of Governments with policies to lower immigration had declined, while the percentage with policies to raise immigration levels had increased. Governments in more developed regions were more likely to have policies to raise immigration than to lower it, while the opposite was true in the less developed regions.

58. Governments have demonstrated a growing interest in attracting skilled workers from abroad. In 2015, 44 per cent of countries with available data had adopted policies to raise immigration for highly skilled workers, 4 per cent aimed to lower it, and the remaining 52 per cent had policies aimed at maintaining current levels or had no policies in that regard. The percentage of Governments that had policies to raise immigration of highly skilled workers doubled from 22 per cent in 2005 to 44 per cent in 2015.

59. The dominant rationale behind national immigration policies are labour market considerations. In 2015, 68 per cent of Governments identified meeting labour market demands as the main underlying reason for their immigration policy. A large share of Governments (46 per cent) viewed their immigration policy as a tool to safeguard employment opportunities for their citizens, while 13 per cent of Governments pursued their immigration policy to counter population decline and 15 per cent to address population ageing.

Emigration policies

60. Emigration generates both opportunities and challenges for sending countries, especially in developing regions. In 2015, most Governments either had no explicit policy on emigration (36 per cent) or sought to maintain current levels (23 per cent). Only 9 per cent of Governments sought to raise the level of emigration of their citizens, while 32 per cent had policies to reduce it.

Government responses to irregular migration

61. Migrants in an irregular situation are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and abuse, and to be drawn into human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Both the 2030 Agenda and the New York Declaration contain commitments aimed at combating trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. Increasingly, Governments have addressed irregular migration by reforming their immigration laws, promoting the return of irregular migrants and implementing regularization programmes.

62. In 2015, of the 177 countries with information on policy measures to address irregular immigration, 137 had penalties for employers of migrants in an irregular situation, 175 used fines, detention or deportation of migrants in an irregular situation and 60 facilitated the regularization of their legal status through defined schemes or specific conditions.

63. While the number of countries with legislation criminalizing trafficking in persons increased from 33 in 2003 to 158 in 2016, progress in implementing these laws remains uneven. Many countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, have yet to develop national frameworks to prevent and combat human trafficking. International

cooperation and joint investigations are needed to detect and prosecute cross-border cases of trafficking in persons. Victims of human trafficking, especially women and children, should be accorded protection and assistance.

Refugee policies

64. Addressing the long-term needs of refugees requires the identification of appropriate durable solutions. Voluntary repatriation, the most common solution, may be promoted through “go and see” visits, education, legal aid and family reunification, along with development programmes in returnee areas prioritizing health care and infrastructure. Measures to promote local integration may include granting refugees freedom of movement and access to the labour market and to basic services. Successful resettlement of refugees in third countries can be facilitated by providing cultural orientation, language and vocational training and access to education and employment.

65. In 2012, the Nansen Initiative was launched to address the protection gap for international migrants displaced by natural disasters. In 2015, 109 governmental delegations endorsed the “Agenda for the protection of cross-border displaced persons in the context of disasters and climate change”.³⁹ In December 2015, at its twenty-first session, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change established a task force on displacement to develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change.

Migrant integration and inclusion

66. In the New York Declaration, Member States condemned acts and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance against refugees and migrants. They also committed to fully protect the human rights of all refugees and migrants and to change negative perceptions and attitudes towards refugees and migrants.

67. Access to education, health care, justice and language training can promote migrant integration and contribute to achieving inclusive and sustainable economic growth. In 2015, 52 per cent of all countries had policies in place to protect foreign residents against discrimination, 37 per cent offered language skills training to immigrants and 36 per cent facilitated the transfer of professional credentials.

Diaspora engagement

68. Increasingly, Governments encourage the active involvement of diaspora communities in the development process of their country of origin. Many countries have implemented policies to promote investment by members of the diaspora and to facilitate the transfer of remittances. Both the Sustainable Development Goals and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda call for reducing the costs of transferring remittances.

69. Globally, 42 per cent of all countries with available data had instituted one or more policy measures to encourage investments by their diaspora. Twenty-six per cent of Governments had policies to reduce the transfer costs of remittances, 21 per cent offered tax exemptions or breaks for their diaspora and 21 per cent granted their diaspora preferential treatment when providing credit or allotting licences.

³⁹ See <https://nanseninitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/PROTECTION-AGENDA-VOLUME-1.pdf>.

VI. Data gaps

70. Evidence-based decision-making is a recognized foundation of good governance and the overall efficient management of social and economic affairs. Relevant, accurate and timely population data disaggregated by age, sex, geographical location and migratory status, among other things, are needed for planning and decision-making, enabling Governments to anticipate needs, determine the impact of public policies and confirm the pace of progress.

71. Given the centrality of cities for migration and mobility, systematic data are needed to gain a better understanding of migratory patterns to and from cities and their linkages with places of origin. New data sources, most notably remote-sensing satellite imagery, are offering exciting opportunities to understand the urban footprint and how it is changing over time. Moreover, “big data” sources, such as cell phone signals, can shed light on people’s mobility in and around cities, which could provide useful information for city planners. Governments need to develop policies and guidelines for the accessibility and use of such new data sources, including safeguards for privacy and confidentiality.

72. Among other initiatives to increase the comparability of urban Sustainable Development Goal indicators across countries, recommendations by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and other agencies collaborating to develop indicators for Goal 11 include the adoption of the “urban extent” as a statistical concept for the delimitation and measurement of cities and urban agglomerations, the creation of national samples of cities and the adoption of an integrated monitoring platform for Sustainable Development Goal indicators related to sustainable urbanization.⁴⁰

73. Traditional data collection systems on migration, including censuses, surveys and administrative records, should be strengthened. Internationally comparable definitions and measures of different types of migration, including multiple moves over the life course and permanent, temporary, seasonal, return and circular migration, are needed to capture the diversity and complexity of internal and international migration systems.

74. The 2030 Agenda and other policy initiatives on international migration, including the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, call for timely and fit-for-purpose migration data and statistics. Yet there are significant gaps that require action. Of the 29 Sustainable Development Goal indicators that are either directly or indirectly related to migration, only 10 have internationally established methodologies and standards and data that is produced regularly. There is also a need to develop guidelines aimed at harmonizing concepts and definitions related to international migration statistics, building on the existing United Nations standards and definitions. The disaggregation of socioeconomic characteristics by migratory status is needed to monitor differences between migrants and non-migrants and across different groups of migrants.

75. Population and housing censuses remain a critically important source of data on cities of different types and sizes and on internal and international migration. Household survey data, such as those collected in the Demographic and Health Survey and multiple indicator cluster surveys, as well as administrative sources that

⁴⁰ UN-Habitat, “Concepts, definitions and data sources for the study of urbanization: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, paper prepared for Expert Group Meeting, New York, September 2017.

collect data on migration, are also essential. The use of new technologies for data collection will be especially useful in improving the efficiency of data processing and dissemination.

76. Cooperation both within countries and across countries and regions is crucial to addressing data gaps in migration. National mechanisms include improved coordination among national statistical offices and ministries in charge of collecting migration data. International, regional and subregional organizations can also contribute by coordinating efforts on developing methodologies, collecting data and providing technical assistance to improve migration data, including those required to monitor migration-relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators and the implementation of the global compact on migration.

77. Steps to improve migration data could comprise the inclusion of migration-relevant questions in the 2020 census round; use of administrative records to produce and disseminate migration-related statistics; inclusion of a question on the country of birth and of citizenship in household surveys; creating partnerships with the private sector to leverage “big data” for measuring migration; and enhancing national capacities for the collection and use of migration-related data and indicators to support policymaking.⁴¹

VII. Recommendations

78. As an increasing number of people live in cities, well-managed urbanization can help cities to reap the benefits of agglomeration while minimizing environmental degradation and other adverse impacts of urban growth. Urban planning is critical for the sustainable development of an urban infrastructure for providing access for all, especially the urban poor, to essential services, including safe water and sanitation, health care, education and adequate housing.

79. Planning for the delivery of services to urban and rural dwellers should include consideration of different scenarios for the future growth of urban centres and surrounding rural settlements, considering patterns of internal migration and mobility and the spatial distribution of the population.

80. The needs of women, including for equal access to education and health care and to decent work, property rights and political participation, should be considered in policy formulation and implementation. Priority should be given to improving access to reproductive health-care services, including family planning, for all women, including migrant women.

81. National and local governments should address the needs of the rapidly growing number of older persons in both urban and rural areas, including policies to promote healthy ageing and improve access to infrastructure and services, giving special attention to the needs of older persons and children left behind in rural areas.

82. Local governments, working in partnership with national authorities and civil society, should promote the integration of migrants and their families into the host society while ensuring the protection and fulfilment of their human rights.

⁴¹ International Organization for Migration, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and United Nations, “Improving data for safe, orderly and regular migration”. Available from http://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/stocktaking_un_iom_oecd.pdf.

83. Local authorities should encourage and support the active involvement of civil society organizations, including those representing migrant groups, in efforts to improve housing, infrastructure and social services for the poor and to reduce the vulnerability of low-income groups to environmental hazards.
84. Migration policies should seek to minimize the potential negative impacts of migration on countries of origin, including loss of human capital and separation of families, and to maximize the potential benefits by reducing the transfer costs of remittances, promoting the recognition of skills and credentials, ensuring the portability of earned benefits and supporting the engagement of diaspora groups and communities in their countries of origin.
85. The development of standardized definitions and categories for the delimitation of cities and urban agglomerations is needed to facilitate the effective review and evaluation of progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and targets related to sustainable urbanization.
86. Where necessary, standardized concepts and definitions should be developed on topics such as internal and international migration, short-term mobility, and circular and return migration.
87. Concerted efforts are required to accelerate the development of methodologies to measure migration-related indicators of sustainable development and to generate data on key development targets that are disaggregated by migratory status.
88. Governments should seek to improve information on the demographic components of urban growth, including growth as a result of internal or international migration. Such data are needed to gain a better understanding of migratory patterns to and from cities and the linkages between urban areas and places of origin.
89. Remote-sensing and satellite imagery can improve understanding of the “urban footprint”, including changes over time, while “big data”, such as cell phone records, can be used for documenting and analysing local patterns of migration and mobility.
90. In developing policies and guidelines for the use of new data sources, Governments should protect individual privacy and the confidentiality of information, while developing regulated mechanisms to facilitate public access to relevant data collected by the private sector.
91. Governments, international organizations and civil society should work in partnership to promote capacity-building and technical cooperation, including South-South cooperation, to improve the collection, dissemination and analysis of data on sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration at the national, regional and local levels.
92. Census data on the populations of urban and rural areas and on internal and international migration should be collected, compiled and disseminated in a timely fashion. The use of new technologies should be encouraged to reduce the time required for data collection, processing and dissemination.
93. Data collection on internal and international migrants and migration through household survey programmes, such as the Demographic and Health Survey and the multiple indicator cluster surveys, and the use of existing data from administrative records should be expanded and strengthened.

94. **Cooperation within and across countries and regions is crucial to address data gaps in international migration. National institutions and stakeholders, including statistical offices and ministries in charge of migration issues, should coordinate data collection programmes and share available information.**

95. **International and regional organizations should coordinate their efforts in developing programmes and methodologies and providing technical assistance to improve the collection and use of data in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to facilitate the successful implementation of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration proposed for adoption in 2018.**
