

First Contribution: Drivers

In the past 60 years we have witnessed a considerable increase in migration flows all over the world. It is not only a matter of numbers of people on the move, but also of geographical scope and numbers of countries significantly involved as departure, transit, or destination places. As a result of the different globalization processes, the beginning of the third Millennium has been remarkably characterized by human mobility. «Unfortunately, in the majority of cases this movement is forced, caused by conflict, natural disasters, persecution, climate change, violence, extreme poverty and inhumane living conditions» (Pope Francis 2017)

Regarding the drivers, the background paper of the current session is certainly a good starting point. Nonetheless, I would like to point out three elements that I consider the main drivers of contemporary and future migration: global inequality, conflicts and climate crisis. «Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape» (Pope Francis 2013:53). In such a scenario, migration becomes the only credible way out.

Inequality is strictly related to conflicts, a second relevant trigger of human displacement. «Inequality eventually engenders a violence which recourse to arms cannot and never will be able to resolve. It serves only to offer false hopes to those clamoring for heightened security, even though nowadays we know that weapons and violence, rather than providing solutions, create new and more serious conflicts» (Pope Francis 2013:60). The first 23 years of the third Millennium have been dramatically marked by violence and conflicts in different regions of the world. As Pope Francis has repeatedly stated, we are assisting to “a third world war fought piecemeal”, which threatens to become a genuine global conflict. And sometimes I wonder whether the current battlefields aren’t just distant scenarios of someone else’s war games.

Inequality is also related to the climate crisis, since resources for resilience are not equally distributed. «Fierce storms, violent hurricanes and disastrous cyclones continue to rage. [...] We see growing numbers of people displaced on account of the crippling impacts of the climate crisis and other manifestations of the ecological crisis. [...] Many of them are forced to flee their homelands in search of safety and security» (M&R Section 2021:1). Climate crisis is also related to conflicts: «In some situations, climate crisis leads to the depletion of natural resources which in turn can spark conflicts between communities and nations for the possession of scarce resources» (M&R Section 2021:1).

Regarding the Development-Migration Nexus, I agree with many scholars pointing out its “paradox,” which might be viewed from different perspectives. In my opinion, the two opposite facts are on one side the lack of development – or development possibilities – as one of the main migration drivers (strictly related with inequality, conflicts and climate crisis), and the development potential of migration, on the other.

Actually, the starting point should be the very concept of development. A quick glance at the specialized literature reveals that the concept of development is the object of a great variety of epistemological and ideological approaches, ranging from cultural relativism to universally agreed upon determination. In many cases, the emphasis on economic indicators seems to promote a “consumeristic” understanding of development. The United Nations reacted to this

by coining the term “human development” that refers to the conditions by which people can enjoy longer, healthier and more creative lives.

While recognizing the relevance of the UN definition, in my opinion it remains limited as it does not seem to take into proper consideration the relational dimension of the human being. From a Christian perspective, we are used to refer to the “integral human development”, meaning the total fulfillment of the whole person and of all persons, as individual, member of a family and member of a community, in accordance with the unique and unrepeatable character of each human being.

Such a personalistic approach leads to a concept of development that is indeed flexible and dynamic. However, it doesn't jeopardize the possibility of defining universal indicators of development. From my previous experiences in development programs in different regions of the world, I tried to identify some indicators of what I like to call “sound” development: holistic, sustainable, environmentally friendly, inclusive, encultured, locally grounded, gender sensitive and responsabilizing. Unfortunately, the time constraints of this session do not allow me to further describe each of these elements.

Going back to the paradox of the development-migration nexus, the starting point should be the acknowledgment that the initial connection arises at an etiological level. In most cases, in fact, it is precisely the lack of development - real or perceived - that is the main reason for the decision to migrate. And even in this case, the missing development should not be interpreted in purely economic terms. In fact, there are many elements, entailed in the concept of development, whose absence constitutes a push factor: security, justice, equal access to the common good, opportunities for social mobility, the possibility to access education, political stability, access to medical care, and the opportunity to ensure a better future for their family.

The second element of the paradox has gained the most relevance in recent scientific and political debates. It focuses on the contribution that migration can offer to sustainable development. In this regard, it should be noted that the exaggerated emphasis on the enormous financial potential of migrant remittances has led to a sort of "myth" of remittances, considered as the panacea for the development issues faced by the countries of origin. I don't intend to deny the fact that migration constitutes a great potential for development, but I believe that its release is not automatic. At least three essential conditions must be pursued: a) a coherent, realistic and far-sighted political framework, both at a national and international level; b) a favorable equation between the costs and benefits of migration; and c) the participation of all actors, each according to their own prerogatives and responsibilities.

Second Contribution: Solutions

In this session devoted to solutions, I would like to start from the urgent need for all the stakeholders to engage in a genuine dialogue on global governance of migration flows. «It is [...] necessary to promote a common and co-responsible approach to the governance of migration flows, which appear set to increase in the coming years» (Pope Francis 2023b). Several years ago the international community embarked on this effort. As a result, in 2018 the Global Compact on safe, orderly and regular migration, and the Global Compact on refugees were adopted by the vast majority of states. These two Global Compacts represent a historic enhancement in our shared responsibility to act in solidarity on behalf of people on the move, especially those who find themselves in very precarious situations and those forced to leave. Nonetheless, we are still waiting for actions of concrete engagement following from the words codified in the two aforementioned agreements.

The first action entails joint and honest efforts aimed at eliminating the root causes of forced migrations. «This commitment begins with asking what we can do, but also what we need to stop doing. We need to make every effort to halt the arms race, economic colonialism, the plundering of other people's resources and the devastation of our common home» (Pope Francis 2023a). Moreover, all political and social actors are called to a common commitment for the cessation of all conflicts, the end of hegemonic dictatorships, the elimination of persecution and the prevention of natural disasters, particularly those caused by the abusive exploitation of natural resources.

The second action is ensuring the minimum conditions through which each person, without exception, can be fulfilled individually and as a family: equal participation in the common good, fundamental rights and personal dignity, and access to sustainable development. To achieve this, the main responsibility lies with the countries of origin and their leaders, called to exercise "good politics" at the service of everyone, especially the most vulnerable. However, their conditions to be able to operate in this direction must be ensured, without being repeatedly plundered of their natural and human resources and without external interference due to elite interests. There is also a significant role to be played by the international community within the framework of a global co-responsibility aimed at a common good, which is not limited to national borders. The development of the economically poorest countries depends on the ability to share among all countries.

The third action is building welcoming environments for migrants and refugees. They are long-term goals. The necessary changes take a long time. In the meantime, we must still expect huge migration flows in the forthcoming years. For this reason, «we are called to show maximum respect for the dignity of each migrant; this entails accompanying and managing waves of migration as best we can, constructing bridges and not walls, [...]. In whatever place we decide to build our future, in the country of our birth or elsewhere, the important thing is that there always be a community ready to welcome, protect, promote and integrate everyone, without distinctions and without excluding anyone» (Pope Francis 2023a).

The fourth action is ensuring regular and safe migration channels. We should start by providing fair and reliable information to prospect migrants and displaced people in countries of departure, «in order to avoid great numbers of men, women and children falling victim to perilous illusions or unscrupulous traffickers» (Pope Francis 2023a). Security is indeed a shared concern: but whose security is at stake? «All of us must strive to make the road safer,

so that today's travelers do not fall victim to bandits. We need to multiply our efforts to combat the criminal networks that exploit the hopes and dreams of migrants. It is likewise necessary to indicate safer routes. This means that efforts must be made to expand regular migration channels» (Pope Francis 2023b).

The fifth action is promoting the dialogue among demographic, economic and migration policies to overcome the evident disconnect. From the outcomes of my research undertaken mostly in countries of origin, I had the chance to ascertain that often there is more “disconnect” than nexus between migration and development policies, both at the national and local levels. This is frequently true also in countries of destination. And the disconnection also entails population policies. «In the current world situation, it is clearly necessary to bring demographic and economic policies into dialogue with migration policies for the sake of all those involved, without ever forgetting to put the most vulnerable at the centre» (Pope Francis 2023b).

References

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