

**INF.2 Session 2: Leaving no one behind**  
**HELPING COUNTRIES REPORT ON SDG INDICATORS BY MIGRATORY STATUS**

Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC)  
International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Elisa Mosler Vidal  
March 2020

**Abstract:** *There are several references to migration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and migration is a cross-cutting theme across the Sustainable Development Goals. While the inclusion of migration is a key opportunity to improve migration governance, it presents countries with a series of new data challenges, including that of disaggregating indicators by migratory status. Firstly, the paper examines the need to identify migrants in statistics across sectors and to produce SDG indicators across topics disaggregated by migratory status. Secondly, the paper focuses on how best to assist countries to disaggregate SDG indicators by migratory status and introduce key components and steps to do this. The paper ends by summarizing some open questions for migratory status disaggregation and calling for collaboration on the topic going forward.*

## Introduction

There are several direct references to migration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), including Target 10.7 which calls for countries to “facilitate orderly, safe and regular migration through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”. Meanwhile, migration can be linked to most Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and its motto to “leave no one behind” is a clear call for sustainable development to be inclusive, including for migrant groups.

While the inclusion of migration in the 2030 Agenda is a key opportunity to advance good migration governance, it also presents countries with a series of new data challenges and reporting requirements, as large amounts of migration-relevant data are required for SDG monitoring. Relevant data frameworks and practices have largely not yet risen to these challenges; many SDG indicators that relate to migration have relatively under-developed methodologies and countries find it difficult to regularly produce relevant data. This is linked to the wider lack of quality data on migration, as recognized most recently in objective 1 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration ([GCM](#)).

One specific challenge is the need to disaggregate indicators by migratory status. Target 17.18 calls for greater support to developing countries to increase significantly the availability of “high-quality, timely and reliable data, disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, and **migratory status**”<sup>1</sup>. This call is part of a growing understanding in the world of development data that disaggregation is an important way to ensure inclusiveness and prevent discrimination. There are many key dimensions of disaggregation, such as sex, age and disability, and disaggregation is one of nine pillars of the “[data revolution](#)” calling for sustainable development to improve the quality and availability of statistics.

Disaggregation of data by migratory status presents a formidable challenge to many National Statistical Offices (NSOs) around the world. As countries have made efforts to monitor SDG indicators and many have set up dedicated platforms for SDG tracking, levels of disaggregation of reported indicators by migratory status remains low<sup>2</sup>. This means that as we rapidly approach 2030 we still do not know what the effects of the SDGs are for migrants, and whether and to what extent they are being left behind.

This short paper discusses the need to disaggregate SDG indicators by migratory status and how these data could be used. Following this, the paper explores some steps countries can take to disaggregate SDG data by migratory status, based partly on ongoing work of the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC).

### Why disaggregation by migratory status?

With effective disaggregation, policymakers can look beyond averages in SDG data to study sustainable development outcomes for migrants and track these over time. Disaggregation is a key tool for policymakers to use to refine SDG programming, as it can provide a strong evidence base to learn where interventions may need to more proactively target and reach migrants so that nobody is left behind. For example, disaggregation of indicator 3.1.1 (*Maternal mortality ratio*) would show whether migrant women may have a higher mortality rate than non-migrant women.

Data disaggregated by migratory status are fundamental for policymakers to understand migrants’ characteristics across sectors such as health, education, employment and others, to support

---

<sup>1</sup>Promoting greater data disaggregation is also a key goal of the New York Declaration on Migrants and Refugees, and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (in particular, Objective 1).

<sup>2</sup> See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/50th-session/documents/BG-Item3a-Data-Disaggregation-E.pdf>

policymaking beyond the SDGs. There is a [paucity of data](#) on migrant well-being and migrant integration in countries, which disaggregation can help address. Once disaggregated data are available, policymakers can explore why migrants' outcomes may be different to non-migrants', examine whether and how any inequalities between these groups change over time, and explore possible reasons behind this. Disaggregated data can provide valuable evidence in topics from affordable housing to access to clean energy, enabling policymakers to treat migration as a cross-cutting theme when designing policies in these sectors.

Disaggregated data could have value beyond SDG implementation and national policymaking. The GCM is composed of 23 objectives on policy areas from decent work to access to basic services, yet has no follow-up and review framework. Having disaggregated data across policy areas would give policymakers a stronger evidence base on which to base many [GCM interventions](#).

### **How to disaggregate by migratory status?**

In many ways, disaggregating data by migratory status can be more challenging than by dimensions such as sex or age. Many migrants are part of hidden populations that are not easily counted, and the most vulnerable may rarely appear in official statistics. The general dearth of quality migration data and relative underdevelopment of relevant frameworks means that often, data on migrants are poorer than on other population groups, presenting a particular issue when focusing on this disaggregation compared to that of other population groups. Further, as explored below, some important concepts relevant to disaggregation lack internationally agreed definitions.

As the focus on data disaggregation continues to grow<sup>3</sup>, some guidance specifically on disaggregation by migratory status has been developed<sup>4</sup>. While a key first step, much of this is not yet designed to fit individual country needs and capacities, and does not focus on providing step-by-step practical assistance. In response to this need, IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) has [begun work](#) to strengthen capacity of practitioners to disaggregate SDG indicators by migratory status, by [producing user-friendly guidance](#) on this. While steps may vary across contexts, below are some key components and steps to begin doing this, as identified by IOM's ongoing work.

#### *Identify indicators to disaggregate*

The Inter-Agency Expert Group (IAEG) on SDG indicators recommends that 24 indicators be disaggregated by migratory status to capture characteristics key to understanding the living conditions of migrants in receiving countries<sup>5</sup>. However, many more can be disaggregated; while some indicators cannot be easily disaggregated at the global level as they are composite indicators or collected by different countries, individual countries may be able to. There is overall a very wide range of SDG indicators spanning sectors that policymakers may wish to disaggregate.

---

<sup>3</sup> For example, there is a [workstream](#) on data disaggregation under the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs).

<sup>4</sup> For example, the United Nations Statistics Division, in collaboration with the Population Division and IOM, organized the Expert Group Meeting on Improving Migration data in the context of the 2030 Agenda, which released [guidance on a step-wise approach](#) to data disaggregation by migratory status. There have also been efforts focusing on disaggregation of specific data sources. For example, IOM's "[A Pilot study on Disaggregating SDG Indicators by Migratory Status](#)" on census data.

<sup>5</sup> "These indicators are selected based on several criteria: (a) the indicator measures whether there is equal treatment and non-discrimination between migrants and non-migrants in terms of access to basic services including essential health care, basic education and social protection; (b) the indicator assesses how well migrants are integrated into the host society, in terms of their education level, labour market outcomes, employment conditions and poverty; and (c) the indicator measures whether migrants are more likely to be subject to violence compared to non-migrants". See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/meetings/2017/new-york-egm-migration-data/Background%20paper.pdf>

Often resources will not permit all SDG indicators to be disaggregated, and/or not all will be relevant. It may be necessary to identify and prioritize indicators that are most relevant to migration in a given context<sup>6</sup>. Any such prioritization process should be inclusive, involving data producers and users across government as necessary. Data disaggregation by migratory status can require high levels of collaboration, including between representatives from NSOs, relevant line ministries and migration policymakers.

#### *Consider disaggregation needs: concepts and definitions*

Next the exact disaggregation needs of indicators need to be identified, based on an assessment of who may be most at risk of being left behind in the area covered by the indicator. The most accepted standard variables of migratory status disaggregation are country of birth (to distinguish between foreign-born and native-born population) and/or country of citizenship (to distinguish between foreigners and citizens)<sup>7</sup>.

It is possible to go beyond this. If there is a need to distinguish between first and second-generation migrants, this may be done by disaggregating by country of birth of the person and parents<sup>8</sup>. Further, there are many additional variables that cover diverse migrant subgroups, which would provide data with even richer detail for policymakers. For example, these include reason for migration, duration of stay in the country, refugees and asylum seekers, internal migrants or internally displaced persons (IDPs). Note that internationally agreed harmonised definitions do not yet exist for all of these<sup>9</sup>. It is possible to further disaggregate using nationally defined variables, including for example particular legal categories of migrants<sup>10</sup>. This is how disaggregation may be most responsive to a country's needs and most directly link back to migration policy. However, as these are generally not internationally comparable, they should be considered only in addition to the above standard variables. Finally, as far as possible disaggregation of migration data by other dimensions such as age, sex, occupation, employment status and others should be considered, to help policymakers gain further insights into migrant populations.

#### *Assess indicator metadata and decide course of action*

If the aim is to disaggregate an SDG indicator that is already monitored, there is a need first to assess the existing disaggregation throughout the data lifecycle. Often, for example, at sub-national level data collected are disaggregated but this detail is lost in national-level reporting. If the aim is to disaggregate an SDG indicator not already monitored or to adjust data for an existing indicator, there is a need to examine available metadata to assess how best to do this. This involves assessing what existing data may be used towards the indicator, focusing as far as possible on data already collected in censuses, surveys, and administrative records. It is also possible to explore proxy indicators using existing data if necessary. If there are resources available, new data collection could be considered to monitor the indicator.

---

<sup>6</sup> Various IOM tools to identify migration-SDG priorities may be helpful to this end. See Section 2, Prioritization, in particular Discussion Guide with prioritization questions and principles: [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/sdg\\_en.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/sdg_en.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> As defined at the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Improving Migration Data in the content of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a [stepwise approach](#).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> There is a recognised need to facilitate harmonisation of relevant definitions and categories to ensure comparability and this is an active area. For example, the Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics (EGRIS) identified 12 priority SDG indicators to be disaggregated by forced displacement categories; see International Recommendations on IDP Statistics ([IRIS](#)).

<sup>10</sup> For example, the Italian NSO (Istat) [has taken steps](#) in its [SDGs Information System](#) (English 2019 [report](#)) to disaggregate several indicators by country of citizenship, and further distinguish between first and second generation migrants by using the categorisation of the Invalsi (National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training system).

As SDG indicators can use different data sources, there is a need to consider specific disaggregation issues for key sources. In particular, many indicators use Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other household surveys, where a common challenge for disaggregation includes sample size. Their often limited sample sizes make it difficult to identify certain groups such as migrants, as sampling methodologies were not originally designed for analysis of specific population sub-groups. Given the larger sample sizes needed for effective disaggregation by migratory status and other migrant sub-groups, setting up new survey instruments can be expensive. Exploring the use of administrative data sources or census microdata for SDG indicators can be a helpful alternative, in particular as Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) data can already disaggregate indicators by nativity status for many countries<sup>11</sup>. Note that combining multiple data sources for indicators makes disaggregation more challenging, as comparisons across sources usually cannot be made given methodologies may vary. Any potential risks to migrant individuals and groups need to be considered, and appropriate ethical and data protection concerns addressed using necessary safeguards in data systems and processes<sup>12</sup>.

### *Beyond data collection*

There are several other important considerations concerning data disaggregation, for example, specialised awareness-raising, reporting and communications. Before embarking on a migratory status disaggregation exercise, there may be a need to build awareness of NSO representatives and others of the importance of this, for example through workshops linking these with migration policymakers. It is important to ensure disaggregation is reflected in all relevant SDG reporting platforms at local, national, regional and international level, and that any policy-relevant conclusions drawn from disaggregated data are included in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). To have the highest possible impact, disaggregated data often need specific communications and dissemination strategies. As these data should be reaching migration policymakers across line ministries, tailored approaches may be needed to convey messages on different indicators and promote their use in policymaking.

### **Conclusion**

Measuring the linkages between migration and development is challenging. Disaggregation would contribute a practical solution to at least one important component of this, which is to measure sustainable development outcomes on migrants themselves. Nevertheless, disaggregating data by migratory status can be more challenging than by other dimensions. As efforts continue to develop relevant guidance for practitioners on this, many questions remain open for discussion. For example, whether and how to adopt harmonized questions to selected variables, such as reason for and duration of migration, and how to best use administrative records towards disaggregated SDG data<sup>13</sup>.

There is a need for all those working in disaggregation efforts to partner together. This should include working closely with countries, involving NSOs and line ministries, to discuss experiences, good practices and lessons learned, as well as to continue defining and addressing country needs, priorities and challenges. In particular, innovative examples of countries tackling specific challenges such as improving disaggregation without significant additional resources will be useful to ensure practical progress can be made in the near future. In 2020 IOM will, through broad-based consultation, develop practical guidance on disaggregation of SDG indicators by migratory status and in this way hopes to make some progress in addressing some of the above challenges.

---

<sup>11</sup> See IOM [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/a\\_pilot\\_study\\_on\\_disaggregating\\_sdg\\_indicators.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/a_pilot_study_on_disaggregating_sdg_indicators.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> One relevant tool is A Human Rights-Based Approach to Data (HRBAD) by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which includes guidance on partnering between NSOs and human rights institutions.

<sup>13</sup> Many were already mentioned in 2017 at the aforementioned Expert Meeting: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/meetings/2017/new-york--egm-migration-data/Background%20paper.pdf>