

# YOUTH AND MIGRATION



## HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2010, there were 27 million international migrants aged 15 to 24 in the world, accounting for 12.4 per cent of the 214 million international migrants worldwide<sup>1</sup>.
- In 2010, the proportion of migrants aged 15 to 24 among all international migrants was higher in developing countries than in developed countries<sup>2</sup>. At the global level, the percentage of females among migrants aged 15 to 24 is lower (48.3 per cent) than among the whole migrant population (49.0 per cent)<sup>3</sup>.
- When migrants in the 25-34 age group are included, young migrants comprise almost one-third of all international migrants.
- The most prominent reasons for young people to migrate are in search of alternative livelihoods and opportunities in education, employment, marriage and family reunification, as well as protection from conflict and persecution<sup>4</sup>.
- 27 million young people leave their countries of birth to seek employment abroad as international migrants<sup>5</sup>.

In 2010, there were 27 million international migrants aged 15 to 24 in the world, accounting for 12.4 per cent of the 214 million international migrants worldwide, and when migrants between the ages of 25 and 34 are added young migrants represent over 30 per cent of the total number of international migrants.

For young people, the decision to migrate is often related to important life transitions, such as obtaining higher education, starting work or getting married. Internal or international migration can have a positive impact on young people by opening up new opportunities, a path to participate in higher education, a better and decent job, a chance to gain professional experience or to pursue personal development, by building self-confidence, and allowing them to acquire skills and competencies beneficial to themselves and their countries and communities of origin as well as destination. Through international migration, young people are able to build and expand their

<sup>1</sup> UNDESA, (2011) International Migration in a Globalizing World: The Role of Youth. available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/technicalpapers/TP2011-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> UNDESA, (2011) International Migration in a Globalizing World: The Role of Youth. available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/technicalpapers/TP2011-1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> UNDESA, (2011) International Migration in a Globalizing World: The Role of Youth. available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/technicalpapers/TP2011-1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> UNDESA, (2011) International Migration in a Globalizing World: The Role of Youth. available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/technicalpapers/TP2011-1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> UNDESA, (2011) International Migration in a Globalizing World: The Role of Youth. available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/technicalpapers/TP2011-1.pdf>





professional networks, which in many cases are important in facilitating employment and access to opportunities.

However, for some young people, especially young women and those in irregular situations, the migration process confronts them with particular challenges and confers to them certain vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities include discrimination based on gender, migration status, ethnicity or religion; poor working conditions (often exacerbated by the relatively low levels of bargaining power and trade union membership among young migrant workers compared to their adult counterparts); lack of access to basic social services such as health; risks associated with sexual and reproductive health; and lack of social protection or loss of social protection entirely once the migration status of the young migrant changes (from student to graduate, for example). Therefore, the migration experience can end up representing either an opportunity or a risk for young people and can either lead to their development or the very opposite, depending on policies and measures supporting them.

There are various components and motivations for youth migration. Although young people themselves attest to a complex interplay of factors and considerations that are not always predominantly economic—such as, a wish to satisfy a desire for adventure or to challenge oneself in a different cultural context—there is little doubt that decent employment is the main motivation for young people in their decision to migrate. This has become all the more evident in the wake of the global economic crisis. Currently, some 73.8 million young people globally are unemployed; consequently, millions of young women and men are pushed toward the decision to migrate with the purpose of seeking alternatives to improve their job prospects.

Moreover, responding to the forces of globalization, increasing numbers of young people are migrating in order to study abroad. The UN estimates that the number of foreign students pursuing tertiary education abroad increased from 1.6 million in 1999 to 2.8 million in 2008. The migration regulations of the traditional countries of immigration, such as the United States of America, Australia, Canada and many OECD countries, have generally allowed foreign students permission to work for a period after they complete their studies and to adjust their status to long-term migrant or resident if they find long-term employment. Countries such as Australia, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States allow foreign students to engage in conditional part-time employment. Therefore, student migration, in many cases leads to highly-skilled labour migration for young people and as such one can assume that student migration can be related to migration for employment. However, due to the economic crisis and the possibility of high youth unemployment rates in both country of origin and destination, some young people choose to stay in the education system and give up the job search all together due to discouragement.

Another component is marriage, which is an important reason for young people to migrate. Given the increasing numbers of young persons that are internationally mobile, marriages between persons with different nationalities are rising in frequency. Lastly, youth are heavily represented in migration for humanitarian reasons, which includes refugees, asylum-seekers and other persons affected by environmental change and those in need of protection, including unaccompanied minors.





## The United Nations and youth and migration

While considerable attention is given to the issue of migration and its potential economic and social impacts on origin, transit and destination countries, to date very little attention has been given to understanding the livelihood struggles and opportunities that migration presents for migrants themselves, and in particular, young migrants. Young people and youth-led organizations working on migration issues have on various occasions requested a UN study on the situation of youth migration. To this end, the 2013 World Youth Report (WYR) is purposed to fill this gap by offering a multidimensional account of the life experiences of young migrants and young people affected by migration. The report will highlight the perspectives of those young people who continue to form a significant part of international migrants but have had limited opportunities to share their views on migration, its opportunities and challenges. Furthermore the report will highlight the role of youth, especially youth-led organizations in addressing migration's challenges and enhancing its opportunities for youth and countries alike. The report is due to be launched at the end of 2013. For more information on the forthcoming report please visit:

[www.unworldyouthreport.org](http://www.unworldyouthreport.org).

## Progress

Migration has been acknowledged as a global challenge that needs to be understood not only within the broader context of internationalized labour markets but also for its consequences for the increasing numbers of young people who migrate annually in search of alternative livelihoods and opportunities within their countries and abroad. Some countries have implemented programmes that aim to facilitate the youth migration experience. For example, China developed an integrated Life Skills Training Package to prevent young migrant workers from unsafe migration and support them in adapting to city life. The Package was integrated in both short-term programmes for pre-departure training and regular school/vocational training centre courses. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there are centres for information, counselling and training for young migrants. The Bosnian Public Employment Services provides youth aged 15 to 30 years old with: Information on the labour market, education and training opportunities and regular migration. There has been a wide array of implementations of youth migration policies and programmes at country level; however, many young migrants –especially irregular migrants, domestic workers and female migrants, forced migrants and native or foreign born immigrants - continue to confront multiple forms of discrimination in many aspects of their daily lives, from conditions at the workplace to access to education, social security and mechanisms of legal remedy.

## The way forward

Youth in the age of globalization have easy access to information as well relatively cheap and easy means of transport. Furthermore, population growth trends across the world – below replacement





level fertility rates in most destination or developed countries , aging migrant populations and the youth bulge in most developing countries - reflects the relevance of youth migration and young migrants in sustaining and promoting inclusive economic growth in the years to come. Promoting cooperation at all levels - local, national, regional and international – as well as strengthening meaningful youth participation in the migration policy debate and programmes will be critical to managing migration to harness the development potential of youth migration while mitigating associated risks.

States should ensure that all legislation, policies and administrative regulations that affect young migrants comply with international obligations under international human rights, labour, and refugee law. All labour migration policies or schemes should be transparent, reflect concretely consultation with the social partners (employers' and workers' organisations as well as young people), and recognize and respect migrants' labour and human rights, regardless of their migration status. Continuous efforts should be made to ensure that migrants are not subject to discriminatory policies or practices, and States should ensure that all migrants, including young migrants, have effective access to redress and remedies in this context. Furthermore, States, in coordination with the social partners, migrant associations and representatives of migrant youth, should promote coherence among policies of different sectors that may affect young migrants' ability to access health services and other social benefits. Governments of both origin and destination countries—in cooperation and consultation with the social partners and civil society including youth-led organizations—should mainstream components of national youth development strategies or policies into their migration policies and national plans whilst also addressing gender-specific issues. Mainstreaming migration into national development strategies and policies is critical to addressing the challenges and opportunities that youth face in the migration process (i.e. pre-departure, in-transit, arrival, post-arrival and return/no-return) as well as promoting integrated approach towards ensuring that youth migration becomes a matter of choice rather than a necessity for most young people.

## For further reading

- ILO Youth Employment Programme (YEP):  
[www.ilo.org/yep](http://www.ilo.org/yep)
- World Youth Report 2013  
[www.unworldyouthreport.org](http://www.unworldyouthreport.org)
- ILO International Migration Branch:  
<http://www.ilo.org/migrant/lang--en/index.htm>
- Resource Guide on youth employment:  
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/resource/subject/youth.htm>





- Global Employment Trends for Youth 2012: [http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/youth/2012/WCMS\\_180976/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/youth/2012/WCMS_180976/lang--en/index.htm)
- The youth employment crisis: A call for action: [http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/101stSession/texts-adopted/WCMS\\_185950/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/101stSession/texts-adopted/WCMS_185950/lang--en/index.htm)
- Knowledge Management Facility on Youth Employment and Migration: <http://www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/kmf-yem/lang--en/index.htm>
- UN (United Nations). 2011. "International Migration in a Globalizing World: The Role of Youth". Technical Paper No. 2011/1. New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/technicalpapers/TP2011-1.pdf>

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