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International Migration in a Globalizing World: The Role of Youth

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NOTE

The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

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The term "country" as used in this paper also refers, as appropriate, to territories or boundaries, — r pr r

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Explanatory notes

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of capital letters combined with figures.

Various symbols have been used in the tables throughout this report, as follows:

Two dots (..) indicate that data are not available or are not separately reported.

An em dash (—) indicates that the population is less than 500 persons.

A hyphen (-) indicates that the item is not applicable.

A minus sign (-) before a figure indicates a decrease.

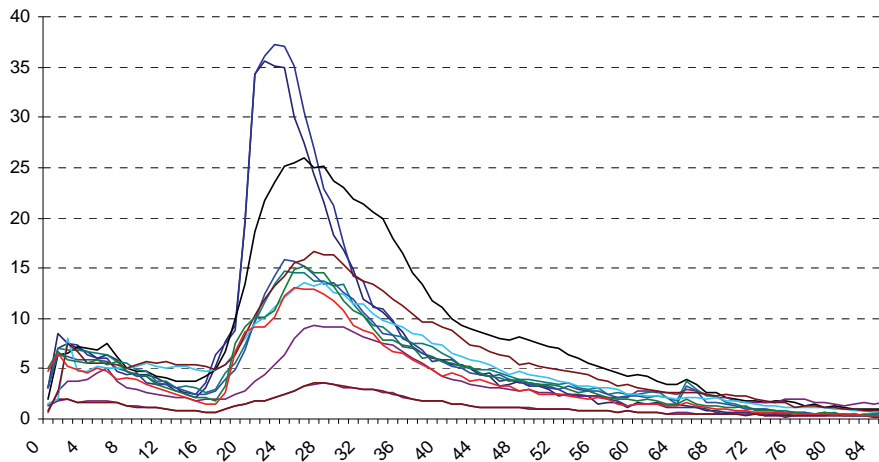
A full stop (.) is used to indicate decimals.

Years given begin with 1 July.

Use of a hyphen (-) between years, for example, 2000-2005, signifies the full period involved, from 1 July of the beginning year to 1 July of the end year.

Percentages in tables and figures do not necessarily add to 100 percent because of rounding.

Figure 2. Emigration rates by single year of age for selected countries
(per 1,000 population)



The limited data available on migration flows classified by age do not permit us to corroborate these findings for all other countries in the world. Nevertheless, as this paper will show, there is a considerable body of additional indirect evidence to suggest that both regionally and globally, the age range 18 to 29 accounts for a large proportion of the persons changing country of residence in a given year, proportions that can be 50 per cent or even higher for some countries. That is, any discussion of the dynamics of international migration must address, whether implicitly or explicitly, the factors that underlie the high propensity of young people to migrate in relation to that of persons of other ages.

B. HOW IS YOUTH DEFINED?

The legal perspective

In general terms, youth is characterized as the period of transition from childhood to

Moreover, ages at which various rights or powers may be exercised often differ from the age of majority. Thus, countries may set different minimum ages to contract marriage, to conduct economic activity, to be enlisted in the military, to own property, to vote etc. These minimum ages may also differ by sex. In South Africa for instance, the age of majority is 18, the minimum age for criminal responsibility is 17, the minimum age for military enlistment is 17, the minimum age of consent for HIV testing is 12, and the minimum age of consent to sexual activity is 12 for girls and 14 for boys (UNICEF, 2011).

The statistical perspective

Given that national law does not determine unambiguously where youth begins, other means of establishing international standards are used. In 1980, the General Assembly of the United Nations designated 1985 as the first International Youth Year. An Advisory Committee

189,000, the Russian Federation with 137,000, Japan with 127,000, Italy with 68,000 and South Africa with 64,000. Those nine countries accounted for 72 per cent of all tertiary-level students studying abroad in 2008.

Regarding the origin of foreign students at the tertiary level, 69 per cent originated in developing countries in 2008, including 53 per cent in Asia, 12 per cent in Africa and 6 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. The 31 per cent originating in developed countries included 25 per cent from European countries and 3 per cent from Canada and the United States. China was the largest source of tertiary-level students studying abroad (438,000 in 2008). It was followed by India (173,000) and the Republic of Korea (114,000).

The data on foreign students at the tertiary level are not classified by age. However, since tertiary-level education generally starts at age 18 or 19 and, at the undergraduate level, is usually

within their respective regions partly because parents in neighbouring countries prefer to send their children to a country with cultural values similar to their own.

For many young people, studying abroad is the first step in establishing permanent residence in the host country. The migration regulations of the traditional countries of immigration have generally allowed foreign students permission to work for a period after they complete their studies and to adjust their status as a migrant if they find long-term employment. More recently, several countries in Europe have adopted similar strategies. Currently, most OECD countries allow foreign students to work for a specified period after completing their studies.¹¹

resident status in 2009. In Australia and Canada, the spouses of citizens or permanent residents accounted for 22 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, of all immigrants admitted in 2003. In Italy and Sweden, at least 40 per cent of all immigrants were spouses reuniting with residents in those countries in 2003.¹⁷

In some countries in Asia, the practice of being husbands abroad is of long standing and the trend has been increasing because of growing sex and educational imbalances in their populations. The prevalence of son preference in some cultures has meant that, over the past 20 years, considerably more boys have been born than girls, leading to a growing imbalance between the number of young men and their potential brides. Moreover, the increasing educational attainment of women, which in some countries surpassing that of men, gives rise to yet another kind of imbalance because women with higher education are reluctant to marry men with lower qualifications. Partly because of those imbalances, the number of men seeking brides abroad has been rising in some countries.¹⁸ In Hong Kong, Special Administrative Region of China, the number of cross-border marriages between residents and mainland Chinese has increased ten-fold from 1995 to 2005, accounting for more than one-third of all registered marriages in 2005. In Taiwan, Province of China, marriages with brides from China, Indonesia and Viet Nam accounted for 27 per cent of all marriages in 2002. International marriages accounted for almost 14 per cent of all marriages in the Republic of Korea in 2005. Japan, the share of international marriages among all marriages has risen from less than 1 per cent in 1980 to almost 6 per cent in 2005. Chinese farmers are increasingly seeking wives in countries such as the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam.²⁰

Once more, data on international marriages showing the age distribution of the migrant partner are not available. Nevertheless, one can assume that most international marriages involve young people and that brides, who are generally younger than grooms, tend to be in their 20s.

Because most countries allow the foreign spouses of citizens to settle in their territories, marriage has been used as a means of gaining access to the labour market of countries of destination. In addition, there is concern that marriage migration and the securing of foreign wives may put women at risk of spousal abuse or other forms of exploitation, especially when

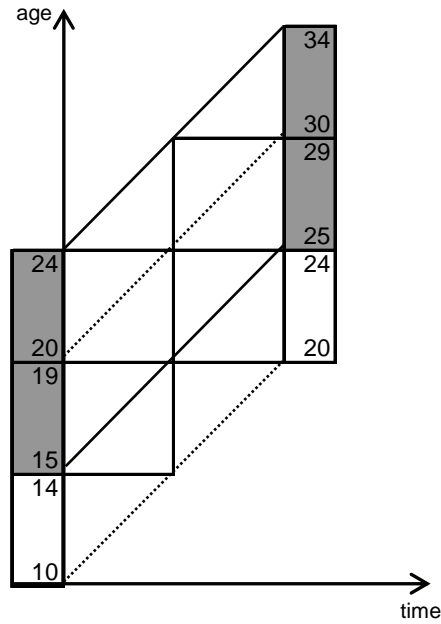
five years of age at the time of adoption but that percentage varies widely from country to country. Adoptions of children over age five are often related to intentional re-marriage and result when the children of a spouse are adopted by the other spouse as a step-parent. Those types of adoption are common in some countries including the United States. For example, although the numbers are not large, it is worth noting that the children involved may be aged 15 or over and would therefore belong to the category of youth. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes that a child should be able to express an opinion as to

gain access to the labour market of the country of destination. The case of unaccompanied minors illustrates clearly the importance of age in assessing the potential impact of migration.

D. LEVELS AND TRENDS IN THE NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS BY AGE WITH A FOCUS ON YOUTH

This paper has argued that even when one is

Figure 3. Lexis diagram of changing cohorts over time



Take persons aged 15 to 19 at the start of the period. The two diagonal lines that tie them to age group 25 to 29 at the end of the period indicate that, on the first year incoming migrants aged 15 to 19 will be added to the group, on the second year, the group will be aged 16 to 20, and therefore migrants aged 16 to 20 will be added to it. Five years later, the group will be aged 21 to 25 and, consequently, any migrants aged 21 to 25 will be added to it. Over the period considered, therefore, the migrants added annually will pass from being those aged 15 to 19 to those aged 24 to 28. That is, the change in number of migrants from 15-19 to 25-29 will be caused by the deaths they experience during the

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS IN SELECTED AGE GROUPS
 BY DEVELOPMENT GROUP
 1990, 2000 AND 2010
 (millions)

Development group	Year	0-14	15-24	25-34	Total
World	1990	21.6	23.8	30.9	156
	2000	21.0	24.6	35.2	178

The proportion of migrants aged 15 to 24 among international migrants is higher in developing countries than in developed countries and is high among the least developed countries. Yet, in all those groups of countries, that proportion has been decreasing. In 2010, migrants aged 15 to 24 accounted for 10.8 per cent of migrants in developed countries, 14.8 per cent of those in developing countries and 20.4 per cent of the ones in the least developed countries (table 3). In all those groups of countries, the percentage of migrants aged 25 to 34 is higher than the percentage aged 15 to 24, with the difference between the two being highest in developed countries.

As figure 4 shows, the distribution of migrants in all development groups has been ageing, with that of developed countries being the oldest. An indicator of the shift toward older ages is the modal age group, that is, the age group where the distribution peaks: it is 35-39 for developed countries, 30-34 for developing countries and 25-29 for the least developed countries. These changes suggest that recent inflows of migrants to developed countries have been older, on average, than those to developing countries or to the least developed countries.

Migrants as a proportion of the population

In 2010, international migrants accounted for 2.2 per cent of the population aged 15 to 24 in the world, a lower proportion than that of the overall number of migrants in the world population (3.1 per cent). Furthermore, whereas migrants as a proportion of the world population had been rising, they have been declining as a proportion of the population aged 15 to 24 (table 4).

Whereas in developed countries migrants accounted for 8.7 per cent of the population aged 15 to 24 in 2010, in developing countries they accounted for just 1.2 per cent of the population in that age group. Furthermore, in developed countries that proportion has been increasing as the population aged 15 to 24 declines, but in developing countries it has been

TABLE 4. PERCENTAGE OF MIGRANTS AMONG THE POPULATION IN SELECTED AGE GROUPS BY DEVELOPMENT GROUP, 1990, 2000 AND 2010

Development group	Year	0-14	15-24	25-34	Total
World.....	1990	1.2	2.4	3.8	2.9
	2000				

declining, partly because their migrant population aged 15 to 24 countries decreased from 1990 to 2000. That decline occurred both in the least developed countries and in the rest of the developing countries, but whereas the migrant population aged 15 to 24 continued to decline in the least developed countries between 2000 and 2010, it increased in the rest of the developing world (table 2). Consequently, the proportion of migrants among persons aged 15 to 24 dropped markedly in the least developed countries, pa

TABLE 6. PERCENTAGE FEMALE AMONG INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS IN SELECTED AGE GROUPS
 BY DEVELOPMENT GROUP
 1990, 2000 AND 2010

Development group	Year	Percentage female			
		0-14	15-24	25-34	Total
World	1990	49.0	47.7	46.5	49.1
	2000	49.1	48.2	47.1	49.4
	2010	48.9	48.3	46.5	49.0
Developed countries.....	1990	49.8	49.1	49.9	52.0
	2000	49.4	49.0	50.2	51.8
	2010	49.0	48.9	49.7	51.5

Net migration

The availability of estimates of the number of migrants classified by five-year age groups for 1990, 2000 and 2010 allows the estimation of migration over the intervening periods by taking account of mortality. The estimation is straightforward: persons aged 10 to 14 in 1990, for instance, will be aged 20 to 24 in 2000 if they remain in the population and survive. Using estimates of survival probabilities over the period one can estimate the expected number of survivors in 2000. If the number of migrants aged 20 to 24 in 2000 is higher than the expected number of survivors, the difference can be attributed to net migration over the period. Note that the estimates obtained reflect net migration, that is, they reveal nothing about the number of emigrants when the number of immigrants surpasses that of emigrants. For that reason, it is also not a reflection of the actual level of immigration.

Furthermore, recall the diagram in figure 1. The net migration associated with the age group 20 to 24 in 2000 is actually supplied by people whose ages at the time of migration shift from 10 to 14 at the start of the period to 19 to 23 at the end. Therefore, the net migration to age group 20 to 24 reflects the composite contribution of persons that belonged to different age groups at the time of migration and should not be interpreted to mean the migration of persons aged 20 to 24.

The estimates obtained are presented in table 7 by five-year age group from 10-14 to 30-34 and for the world and each of the developmen

for 20-24 and 25-29. Most of that increase occurred among the group of developing countries that excludes the least developed countries.

In contrast, net migration to developed countries increased only moderately between 1990-2000 and 2000-2010 for age groups 20-24 and 25-29 but, because these are the age groups most affected by the migration of youth over each decade, this finding suggests that the inflow of young migrants to developed countries has been substantial even if it has not increased as much as that toward developing countries.

E. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has presented an overview of evidence regarding the migration of young people, its interrelations with the major types of migrants and the basis on which youth may be characterized in regard to international migration. It underscored that the lower age limit for defining youth has not been unambiguously established and that there are reasons for being