

244 million international migrants living abroad worldwide, new UN statistics reveal

The number of international migrants has grown faster than the world's population

New York, 12 January 2016 -- The number of international migrants -- persons living in a country other than where they were born -- reached 244 million in 2015 for the world as a whole, a 41 per cent increase compared to 2000, according to new data presented by the United Nations today. This figure includes almost 20 million refugees.

In November, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced a roadmap to address the issues on migrants and refugees. In response, the General Assembly decided to convene a high-level meeting on large movements of migrants and refugees on 19 September 2016. The Secretary-General has now appointed a Special Adviser to prepare the high-level meeting, Ms. Karen AbuZayd.

“The rise in the number of international migrants reflects the increasing importance of international migration, which has become an integral part of our economies and societies. Well-managed migration brings important benefits to countries of origin and destination, as well as to migrants and their families,” noted Mr. Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, the importance of international migration.

The new UN dataset, “Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision,” shows that the number of international migrants has grown faster than the world’s population. As a result, the share of migrants in the global population reached 3.3 per cent in 2015, up from 2.8 per cent in 2000. There are, however, considerable differences between large regions of the world. In Europe, Northern America and Oceania, international migrants account for at least 10 per cent of the total population. By contrast, in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, fewer than 2 per cent of the population are international migrants.

Rapid increase of migrants in Asia, with intra-regional migration dominating worldwide

In 2015, two out of three international migrants lived in Europe or Asia. Nearly half of all international migrants worldwide were born in Asia. Among major regions of the world, Northern America hosts the third largest number of international migrants, followed by Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Oceania. Between 2000 and 2015, Asia added more international migrants than any other major region, or a total of 26 million additional migrants.

In many parts of the world, however, migration occurs primarily between countries located within the same geographic zone. In 2015, most international migrants living in Africa, or 87 per cent of the total, originated from another country of the same region. The equivalent value was 82 per cent for Asia, 66 per cent for Latin America and the Caribbean, and 53 per cent for Europe. In contrast, a substantial majority of international migrants living in Northern America (98 per cent) and Oceania (87 per cent) were born in a major region other than the one where they currently reside.

In 2015, two thirds of all international migrants were living in only 20 countries, starting with the USA, which hosted 19 per cent of all migrants, followed by Germany, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates.

India has the largest diaspora in the world, followed by Mexico and Russia

In 2015, 16 million people from India were living outside of their country, compared to 12 million from Mexico. Other countries with large diasporas included the Russian Federation, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Ukraine. Of the twenty countries with the largest number of international migrants living abroad, 11 were in Asia, 6 in Europe, and one each in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Northern America.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by world leaders last September at the United Nations, stresses the multidimensional reality of migration. The Agenda calls on countries to implement planned and well-managed migration policies, eradicate human trafficking, respect the labour rights of migrant workers and reduce the transaction costs of migrant remittances. The Agenda also highlights the vulnerability of migrants, refugees and IDPs, and emphasises that forced displacement and related humanitarian crises threaten to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades.

UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said migrants need to be protected: “We need to take greater responsibility for protecting the lives of many thousands of migrants – men, women and children – who are compelled to undertake dangerous and sometimes fatal journeys. Those forced to flee should never be denied safe haven or rescue. Migrants, as all people, deserve protection and empathy.”

About the dataset “Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision”:

The Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimates the global number of international migrants at regular intervals, monitors levels, trends and policies related to international migration, and collects and analyses information on the relationship between international migration and development. The dataset represents the most recent information available on numbers of international migrants for all countries or areas of the world.

The dataset is available at www.unmigration.org.

####

Media contacts

UN Department of Public Information

Francyne Harrigan, T: +1 917 367 5414 | E: harriganf@un.org

Sok-Min Seo, T: +1 212 963 1841 | E: seo1@un.org

For more information, please visit the Sustainable Development website:

www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment or follow us on Twitter at @GlobalGoalsUN and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/globalgoalsUN.