



## INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

### PRESS RELEASE

# UN statistics show migration as a dynamic and diversifying force in global development

(UNITED NATIONS NEW YORK, 12 September) As preparations for the first-ever session of the UN General Assembly on migration and development take shape, national, regional and global statistics made available by the United Nations draw a complex picture of the movement of people between countries in the twenty-first century.

Conceived and scheduled more than two years ago by the General Assembly, the 14–15 September High-level Dialogue follows a period of intense public attention to the cross-border movement of people, and a quickening pace of multilateral talks on international migration. The meeting will focus on ways to maximize the development benefits of international migration and reduce difficulties.

Three per cent of the world's population (191 million) lived in a country other than the one in which they were born in 2005, with one third having moved from a developing country to one that is developed, one third moving from one developing nation to another, and another third originating in the developed world, according to an analysis of migration and development prepared by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

A greater share of workers moving to developed countries are college educated, and without migration the size of the labour force in the developed world will begin shrinking drastically beginning in 2010, according to UN DESA. (Even given the current rate of immigration it is likely to decline, but at a more gradual pace.)

A UN compilation of migration statistics from 228 countries and areas indicates that the United States leads the world as a host country, with 38 million migrants in 2005 constituting almost 13 per cent of its population. But the share of the population who are migrants is larger still in Australia (19.6 per cent in 2005) and Canada (18.9 per cent).

In regional terms, however, Europe's migrant population of 64 million in 2005 is almost fifty per cent greater than the 45 million in Northern America. Western Asia, with its oil producing nations, also hosts a considerable share of the world's migrants, totaling 22 million in 2005.

In Western Europe, many countries from which migrants departed in large numbers in the past century are now major destinations, especially Italy, Ireland, Portugal and especially Spain.

A similar pattern – countries that start by being the origin of large numbers of emigrants and then transition to lower emigration of citizens and increasing inflows of foreigners—has also occurred in some countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Asia.

Asian nations becoming important countries of destination include China, Hong Kong SAR, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, and Thailand, following the lead of Japan. In the meantime, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, the Philippines,

Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam remain important origins for international migrants, both moving within Asia and overseas. China is both a major source of migrants and a destination for students and persons with skills. On a smaller scale Thailand is important both as host country and as of the origin of migrant workers.

### **Women migrants, remittances and refugees**

Nearly half of the world's migrants now are women, the UN reports, and they outnumber male migrants in the developed countries.

The most recent estimate of the total amount of remittances that migrant workers send home to developing countries is US\$167 billion, in 2005. This estimate is double the amount actually reported but may not reflect entirely the remittance flows going through informal channels. Moreover, the multiplier effect of these transfers in the countries that receive them has been estimated at 2 or 2.5 resulting from the fact that remittances, even when used for consumption, stimulate demand and support local enterprises. Hence, overall, remittances could have an impact equivalent to about half a trillion US dollars.

The apparent stagnation in the number of migrants within regions often stems from the settlement of civil conflicts and the subsequent repatriation of refugees, rather than from a slowing of cross-border movement for other purposes, according to UN demographers. Slow growth in the number of international migrants living in Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, is accounted for by a drop in the number of refugees from 5.4 million in 1990 to 2.75 million in 2005, offsetting other gains. The overall recent decline of the migrant stock in Latin America is due to repatriation of 1.2 million Central American refugees in the 1990s.

Figures from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development show that Eastern European countries have replaced those in North Africa as major sources of migrants to Western Europe. They also indicate that sometime around the end of the twentieth century, China replaced Mexico as the major source of migrants to the 30 economically advanced OECD countries—primarily to those outside of Europe.

Despite tensions in many receiving countries, more than 50 per cent of governments surveyed by the UN in 2005 expressed an intention to maintain incoming migrant flows at roughly the same level. Just about 20 per cent had as objective the reduction of incoming flows, but that share was down from 40 per cent in 1996. Six per cent of governments favoured higher levels of immigration in 2005.

**To request a preview interview with a senior UN official or obtain regional fact sheets on migration and development, contact Oisika Chakrabarti, 1-212-963-8264, [chakrabarti@un.org](mailto:chakrabarti@un.org), or Tim Wall, 1-212-963-5851, [wallt@un.org](mailto:wallt@un.org), of the UN Department of Public Information, Development Section.**

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