

International Migrant Stock 2019

Statement by Mr. John Wilmoth, Director, Population Division
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*Excellencies,
Distinguished members of the United Nations press corps,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

My name is John Wilmoth and I am the Director of the Population Division in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak with you today about the release of the latest global data on international migration.

The link between migration and development is well established, as acknowledged in a series of landmark agreements adopted by UN Member States, including the Programme of Action from the International Conference on Population and Development held in 1994, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants from 2016, and most recently, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in December 2018.

The 2018 migration compact was the first negotiated global agreement covering all dimensions of migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Governments placed a strong emphasis on data by including, as the first of its 23 objectives, the “Collection and utilization of accurate and disaggregated [migration] data as a basis for evidence-based policies”.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Strengthening the evidence base on international migration is an area where the Population Division has a long-standing track record. Specifically, the Division has played a crucial role in providing the international community with regularly updated, accurate, timely and impartial information about many facets of migration, including estimates of the number of international migrants, often called the

migrant stock data set, as well as estimates of numbers of migrants moving across borders and the regular compilation and analysis of Government policies on international migration. The Population Division has been producing and publishing comparable and timely estimates of numbers of international migrants and their basic characteristics since the 1970s.

Thus, it is my great pleasure to share with you some of the key findings from our most recent update of this data set, the *International Migrant Stock 2019*. The data set includes global estimates of the number of international migrants, defined in most cases as persons who are living outside their country of birth. These estimates have been produced for 232 countries or areas of the world and are disaggregated by age, sex, country of origin and country of destination. The estimates cover the period from 1990 to 2019.

In this brief overview, I would like to highlight some of the major trends in international migration and key findings that have emerged from this work.

Global trends

According to our latest estimates, the number of international migrants worldwide has reached 272 million in 2019, up from 221 million in 2010. Around 56 per cent of all international migrants live in the more developed regions. In recent years, however, the share of international migrants living in the less developed regions has increased, from 39 per cent in 2005 to 44 per cent in 2019.

Worldwide, international migrants account for a rather small share of the total population. Nevertheless, this share has increased from 2.8 per cent in 2000 to 3.5 per cent in 2019, signifying that in recent years the number of international migrants has grown faster than the world's population.

We find that the number of migrants as a share of the total population varies widely by region. Although Europe and Northern America continue to host more than half of all international migrants (82 million in Europe and 59 million in Northern America), the fastest growth of migrant populations has been observed in Northern Africa and Western Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa.

We also find that international migrants are highly concentrated in a small number of countries. The largest number of international migrants reside in the United States of America, equal to 51 million or about 19 per cent of the world's total.

Germany and Saudi Arabia host the second and third largest numbers of migrants worldwide, with around 13 million migrants living in each of these two countries.

Migrants by age and sex

Most international migrants are of working age — defined as between 20 and 64 years of age — numbering 202 million and accounting for nearly three quarters of the total migrant population. By contrast, one of every seven international migrants are below the age of 20 years. This is equivalent to 38 million migrants or 14 per cent of the global migrant stock. A remaining 32 million international migrants, or 12 per cent of the global total, are aged 65 years or older.

Women comprise slightly less than half of all international migrants. We estimate that the share of women in the total fell slightly, from just above 49 per cent in 2000 to just below 48 per cent in 2019. The share of migrant women varies by region, with the highest representation in Northern America (51 per cent) and Europe (52 per cent). By contrast, female migrants account for 48 per cent of total migrants in sub-Saharan Africa and for just 36 per cent in Northern Africa and Western Asia, where the demand for male labour is driven by the continuing boom in construction.

Migrants by origin

In terms of their place of origin, 61 million international migrants were born in countries of Europe and 50 million in Central and Southern Asia, making these two regions the origin of about two fifths of all international migrants worldwide. Latin America and the Caribbean is the source of an additional 40 million international migrants, with another 37 million originating in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia.

Globally, one-third of all international migrants originate in only ten countries. India is the leading country of origin, with roughly 18 million persons having been born in India who are now living abroad. Migrants from Mexico constitute the second largest “diaspora” with 12 million migrants, followed by China, the Russian Federation, and the Syrian Arab Republic.

In many parts of the world, migration occurs primarily between countries located within the same region. For example, more than 80 per cent of the international migrants residing in sub-Saharan Africa or in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia were born in another country of the region in which they now reside. By contrast, around 98 per cent of the international migrants living in Northern America and 88 per cent of those in Oceania were born in a region other than where they are living today.

Forced displacements

Refugees and asylum seekers account for a relatively small proportion of the global migrant population, numbering 29 million in 2017 or around 11 per cent of the total. Nevertheless, the number of persons worldwide who have been forcibly displaced across international borders has continued to rise. In fact, the number of refugees and asylum seekers increased by about 13 million between 2010 and 2017, accounting for close to a quarter of the total increase in the number of international migrants. The region of Northern Africa and Western Asia hosts 46 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide, followed by sub-Saharan Africa, hosting close to 21 per cent of the global total.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These are some of the major trends and key findings from our latest compilation and analysis of the international migrant stock. For additional details, I invite you to visit the Population Division's website dedicated to international migration, www.unmigration.org, where you will find the updated 2019 data set. You will also find a wealth of related information and materials, including this statement, the press release, a list of 10 key findings, a policy brief, a wall chart and country profiles providing a snapshot of migration levels and trends for each country or area.

Let me conclude by thanking you for your interest and participation in today's briefing. I would also like to thank Mr. Vinod Mishra and his team for their work in preparing the new data set.

At this time, I would welcome any questions that you may have.