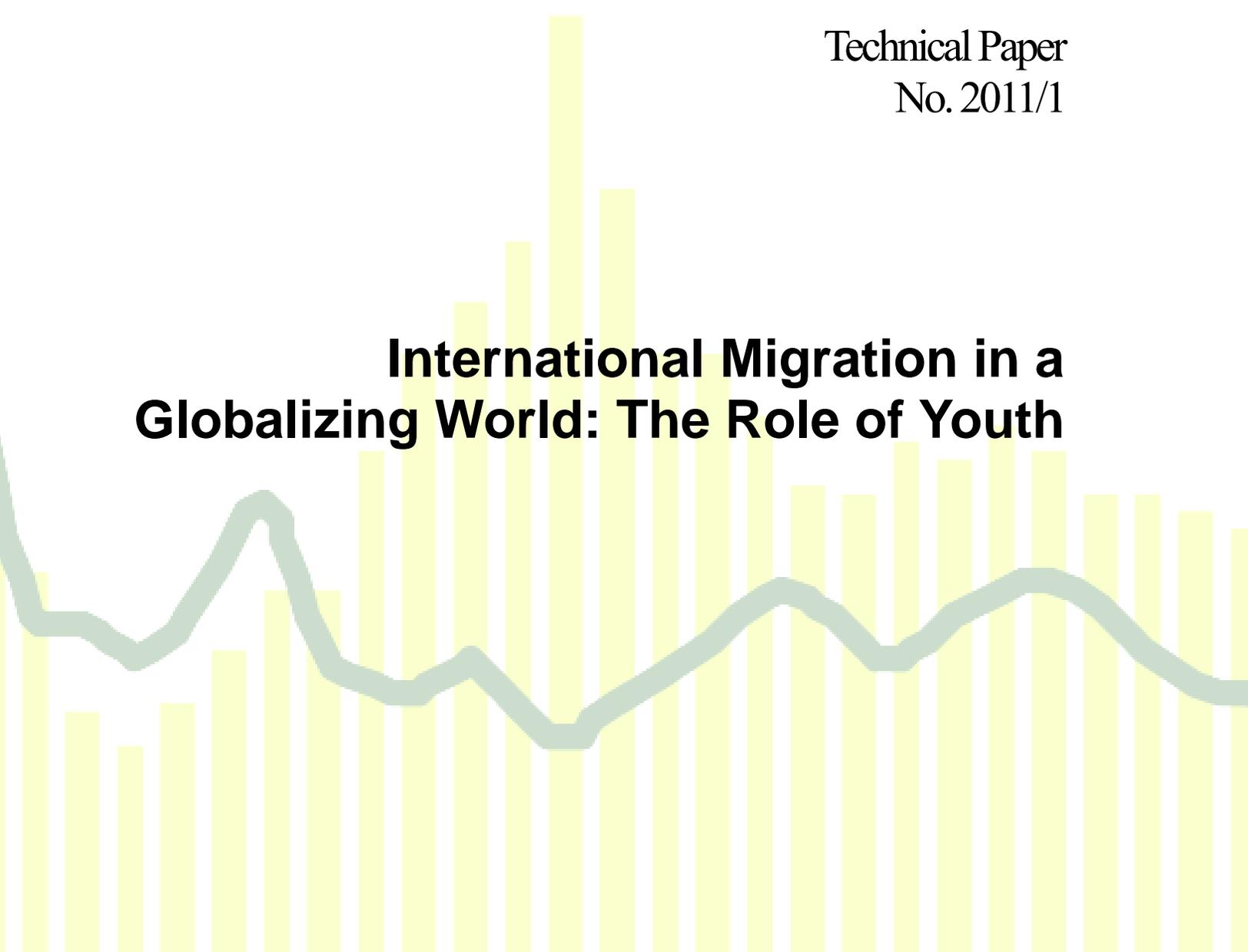


United Nations  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs



Population Division

Technical Paper  
No. 2011/1

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# **International Migration in a Globalizing World: The Role of Youth**

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Population Division

Technical Paper

No. 2011/1

# International Migration in a Globalizing World: The Role of Youth



#### 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 areas.

This publication has been issued without formal editing.

## PREFACE

The Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the United Nations Secretariat is responsible for providing the international community with up-to-date and objective information on population and development. The Population Division provides guidance to the United Nations General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Population and Development on population and development issues and undertakes regular studies on population levels, trends and dynamics, including trends of international migration, changes in population policies and the interrelationships between population and development.

As part of its work on international migration, the Population Division estimates the global number of international migrants at regular intervals, monitors levels, trends and policies of international migration, collects and analyses information on the relationship between international migration and development, and provides substantive support to intergovernmental processes at the United Nations on international migration and development.

This technical paper *International Migration in a Globalizing World: The Role of Youth* highlights the role of youth in international migration. While there is no universally accepted definition of youth, the United Nations defines youth, for statistical purposes, as persons aged 15 to 24 years. The paper shows that youth and young adults, that is, those aged 18 to 29, are the most mobile among people of all ages. The paper discusses the main reasons for the migration of youth and young adults, including employment, education, family formation and reunification as well as conflict and persecution. Unfortunately, much of the administrative data produced by immigration authorities on the reasons for migration are not disaggregated by age and sex, constraining the analysis of the migration of youth.

Newly available estimates of the migrant stock by age, produced by the Population Division of DESA, indicate that, by mid-2010, the global number of international migrants aged 15 to 24 was estimated at 27 million, constituting about one-eighth of the global migrant stock of 214 million. In 2010, persons aged 15 to 24 accounted for almost 15 per cent of all international migrants in developing countries compared to 11 per cent in developed countries. In developed countries, youth migrants constitute almost nine per cent of the population aged 15 to 24, compared to 1.2 per cent in developing countries.

This paper is available as a downloadable PDF file on the websites of the Population Division ([www.unpopulation.org](http://www.unpopulation.org); [www.unmigration.org](http://www.unmigration.org)). For more information about this paper, please contact Ms. Hania Zlotnik, Director, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, by telephone (+1 212) 963-3179, fax (+1 212) 963-2147 or e-mail ([migrationp@un.org](mailto:migrationp@un.org)).

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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.

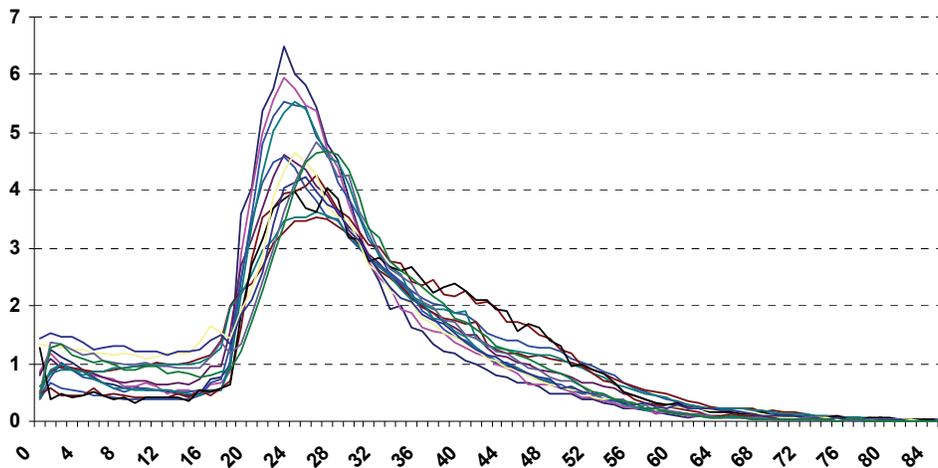
Use of a hyphen (-) between years, for example, 2000-2005, signifies the full period involved, from 1 July of the beginning year to 1 July of the end year.

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

## A. YOUNG PEOPLE REPRESENT A MAJOR PROPORTION OF THOSE MIGRATING ANNUALLY

The age selectivity of international migration is well known. As the distributions of migrant inflows to selected countries in Europe<sup>1</sup> show, a high proportion of the foreigners entering a country as migrants in any given year is concentrated in the younger adult ages (figure 1). The age distribution of migrants generally peaks in the 20s. Thus, among the distributions shown in figure 1, the modal ages range from 23 to 27 years. In addition, the proportions of migrants below age 18 are low, implying that the distribution by age rises steeply from age 18 to the modal age. In the cases considered, the age range 18 to 29 accounts for between 36 per cent and 57 per cent of international migrants and, on average, 2 out of every 5 newly arriving migrants are aged 18 to 29. No other age range of similar length concentrates such a high proportion of international migrants.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of inflows of foreign migrants by age

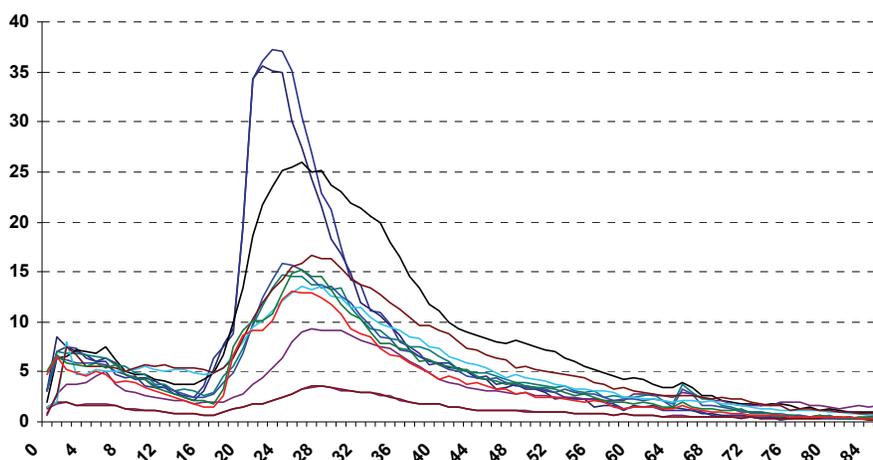


The propensity to migrate also tends to be highest among young people. Figure 2 shows emigration rates for selected countries in Europe.<sup>2</sup> The general shape of emigration rates by age is similar to the distribution of migrant inflows by age. Emigration rates are low among persons under age 18, increase rapidly starting at age 18 until a peak is reached somewhere in the 20s and then decline. Data for the countries considered confirm that emigration rates tend to be highest in the 20s.

<sup>1</sup> The data presented in figure 1 refer to foreigners establishing residence in a country over a year and include data for 2008 and 2009 for the following countries: Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden.

<sup>2</sup> The data presented in figure 2 are emigration rates calculated from the total number of emigrants from a given country over a year (including both citizens and foreigners). The data are for 2008 and 2009 and for the following countries: Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden.

**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 very 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 adulthood. Therefore a good starting point to define youth in terms of age is to consider what childhood means. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that “For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (Article 1). Given that 192 countries are State Parties to the Convention, this definition can be considered nearly universal.

Nevertheless, not all countries have established by law 18 years as the age of majority, that is, the age at which minors assume legal responsibility for themselves, their actions and decisions and therefore cease to be under the legal control or to be the legal responsibility of their parents or guardians. According to data reported to UNICEF, 153 countries have established an age of majority. In 118 of those countries, the age of majority is 18, but it is 21 in 16 countries. In an additional 16 countries, the age at majority is often 18, but is 19 years in Canada and 20 years in Morocco, New Zealand and Tunisia.

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 7, 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).<sup>3</sup>

The age of majority matters for purposes of migration because it generally determines the moment at which a person is entitled to seek admission into another country on his or her own right, without being necessarily a dependant of someone else. In addition, for certain categories of migrants, countries of destination impose restrictions based on age. For instance, countries allowing family reunification often establish a maximum age for children to be admitted as dependants and that age is not necessarily the age of majority. Thus, immediate relatives of U.S. citizens include children under age 21, whereas in most of the states of the United States the age of majority is 18. In the European Union, although directive 2003/86/EC<sup>4</sup> recognizes the right to family reunification for third country nationals, it establishes that member States can restrict family reunification rights for children if they apply after the age of fifteen or States may refuse to allow the entry of children over the age of twelve if they travel separately from their family. Family reunification can also be refused for spouses under the age of 21 years.

Given that much of international migration happens for the purpose of working abroad, another important consideration is the age at which young people are allowed to work. The ILO Minimum Age Convention of 1973, which has been ratified by 158 Member States, establishes that each State Party to the Convention must set a minimum age for admission to employment or work within its territory and on means of transport registered in its territory (Article 2) and that such minimum age shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than 15 years. For Member States whose economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed, the Convention allows the minimum age for admission to employment or work to be initially set at 14 years. The Convention also establishes that the minimum age for admission to any type of employment or work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons shall not be less than 18 years (Article 3). Data on the economically active population for numerous countries show that a significant proportion of young people start their working life before age 18, particularly when compulsory education includes only primary schooling and enrolment in secondary education is low.

In view of the above, although the age of majority is a useful indicator of where childhood ends and youth may begin, it is not ideal in all circumstances as the indicator of the moment in which minors take responsibilities more commonly associated with adult life and it is not always the marker of dependency or minority according to immigration laws.

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (2011). UNICEF database on age of children in different contexts. Extrapolated from State Party reports to the CRC Committee.

<sup>4</sup> European Union (2003). Council Directive 2003/86/EC of 22 September 2003 on the right to family reunification.

### *The statistical perspective*

Given that national law does not determine unambiguously where youth begins, other means of establishing international standards must be used. In 1980, the General Assembly of the United Nations designated 1985 as the first International Youth Year. An Advisory Committee set to guide the preparations for that year noted in its report<sup>5</sup> that:

“... there is no universally agreed upon definition of youth. A chronological definition of who is young, as opposed to who is a child or who is an adult, varies with each nation and culture. However, the United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 as youth without prejudice to other definitions by Member States.” (A/36/215, annex).

Within the United Nations, this statistical definition has been used in the preparation of annual yearbooks on population, education, employment and health. It has also been adopted in the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.<sup>6</sup> However, compliance with that definition has not been universal. Thus, the World Youth Report, published by the World Bank in 2007, focused mainly on the age group 12-24. Moreover, different institutions have introduced different concepts to call attention to different subgroups of young people. For instance, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) have used the terms “adolescent” to refer to persons aged 10 to 19 and “young people” to refer to persons aged 10 to 24. The wider age range (10-24) is meant to underscore that policies directed at youth often need to influence outcomes before the age of 15.

In the context of international migration, the data suggest that the young people of greatest relevance include those aged 18 to 29. Setting the lower limit at age 18 takes account of the legal implications of the age of majority, although, as noted above, it is common for certain provisions of immigration laws and regulations to use other ages as cut-off points. Using an upper limit above 24 is based on the observation that the highest migration rates and the highest concentration of migrants occur in the expanded age range, 18 to 29 and not necessarily in 18 to 24.

As in the case of other studies, there are several arguments to support widening the focus in considering youth and international migration. The major one is related to statistical constraints. Although a lower age limit of 18 may be desirable, there is a dearth of migration data classified by single years of age, therefore making a comprehensive assessment impossible. For that reason, one has to use data classified by five-year age groups, thus making it easier to comply with the statistical standard set by the Advisory Committee on the International Youth Year. Even if data classified by single years of age were more commonly available, the high level of age misreporting in much of the world would likely result in biased and possibly misleading results for an age group starting at age 18.

Lastly, for purposes of assessing the impact of the migration of young people, the most comprehensive source of information refers to stocks of international migrants and not to flows. Given that the stock of migrants results from both the cumulative effect of migration flows over time and the ageing of the migrant population, it is possible to estimate indirectly the contribution that the migration of young people makes to the size of the migrant cohorts aged 15 to 24 at a particular time if one has information on the number of migrant children aged 10-14 five and ten years earlier, thus justifying consideration of that age group.

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations (1981). Report of the Advisory Committee for the International Youth Year. A/36/215, annex.

<sup>6</sup> A/RES/50/81.

C. TYPES OF MIGRATION IN RELATION TO THE PROCESSES LEADING  
YOUNG PEOPLE TO MIGRATE

For young people, the decision to migrate is often related to important life transitions, such as obtaining higher education, starting work or getting married. Therefore, it is useful to review the availability of information on migration by purpose from the perspective of youth.

*Student mobility*

Responding to the forces of globalization, increasing numbers of young people are migrating in order to study abroad. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics compiles data on the number of foreign students enrolled in tertiary education. According to those data, the global number of foreign students pursuing tertiary education abroad increased from 1.6 million in 1999 to 2.8 million in 2008.<sup>7, 8</sup> Although the numbers of foreign students have been increasing in both developed and developing countries, the increase has been faster in developing countries, where the number of foreign students has more than tripled over the decade (from 130,000 in 1999 to 443,000 in 2008). As a result, the proportion of foreign students in developed countries has declined from 92 per cent in 1999 to 84 per cent in 2008.

As table 1 shows, Europe and Northern America host the highest proportion of foreign students in tertiary education, but those proportions declined between 1999 and 2008: from 51 per cent to 49 per cent in the case of Europe and from 30 per cent to 22 per cent in the case of

TABLE 1. FOREIGN STUDENTS ENROLLED IN TERTIARY EDUCATION BY MAJOR AREA  
OF DESTINATION, 1999 AND 2008  
(thousands)

	<i>Number of foreign students (thousands)</i>		<i>Percentage</i>	
	<i>1999</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2008</i>
World .....	1 635	2 849	100	100
Developed countries .....	1 506	2 406	92	84
Developing countries.....	130	443	8	16
Africa .....	48	79	3	3
Asia .....	128	437	8	15
Latin America and the Caribbean.....	10	47	1	2
Northern America.....	484	624	30	22
Europe .....	840	1 392	51	49
Oceania.....	124	270	8	9

*Source:* UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Data Centre.

NOTE: See text for data considerations.

Northern America. The share lost by Northern America has been gained by Asia, which now hosts 15 per cent of all tertiary-level students studying abroad, and by Oceania, which hosts 9 per cent of all tertiary level foreign students. In 2008, the main countries of destination of foreign students at the tertiary level were the United States of America with 625,000 foreign students, the United Kingdom with 342,000, France with 243,000, Australia with 231,000, Germany with

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Institute for Statistics (2011). Data extract, 19 April 2011, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer>.

<sup>8</sup> See page 7 for data considerations.

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 ages 18 or 19 and, at the undergraduate level, is usually completed by the mid-20s, one can assume that most of the foreign students enrolled in tertiary education belong to the 18 to 29 age range. Although the data on foreign students are not strictly comparable to the estimates of the number of international migrants by age group discussed later in this paper, the global number of foreign tertiary-level students represent about 7 per cent of the global migrant population aged 18-29 in 2008.

The increase in the number of foreign students is driven by several factors. The first is the rising numbers of young people completing secondary education and continuing on to tertiary education. UNESCO estimates that the number of tertiary-level foreign students is equivalent to 2 per cent of all tertiary-level students studying in their own countries, a ratio that has barely changed from 1999 to 2007 (UNESCO, 2009).<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the increase in the global number of tertiary-level students studying abroad has been commensurate with the global increase in student enrolment in tertiary education.

The second factor causing the rising number of foreign students is the increasing affluence in many developing countries, which has made it possible for more parents to afford the cost of educating their children abroad.

The third factor behind growing student mobility is the globalization of education, be it through the establishment of foreign branches of prestigious Western universities in developing countries or via the promotion of student mobility within integrated markets, such as within the European Union or between the countries of the Pacific and Australia. According to the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education based in London, in June 2005 there were 100 branch campuses of Western universities worldwide and by 2010 a more recent study by the same group reported 162 such campuses.<sup>10</sup> Established mostly since the mid-1990s, most of the branch campuses are located in Asia, including in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in Western Asia, Malaysia, Singapore and Viet Nam in South-eastern Asia, China, India and some countries in Central Asia. Most of the branch campuses are sponsored by American and Australian universities, with smaller numbers operated by British, Malaysian or Singaporean institutions. Malaysia and Qatar have built special education enclaves (“educities”) to host the Asian campuses of foreign universities. The objective of host countries is mainly to provide high-quality tertiary education to its citizens at home and thus obviate the need to leave the country in search for education. Some of the branch campuses, however, are also attracting foreign students from

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<sup>9</sup> *Global Education Digest 2009. Comparing Education Statistics Across the World*. United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2009). Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>10</sup> *The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World*, Ben Wildavsky, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2010.

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 to immigrant 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.<sup>11</sup> Hence, student migration is a source of the highly-skilled migrants that host countries need.

Lastly, it should be noted that the statistics published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics are not complete because not all countries provide reports on the number of tertiary-level foreign students in their territories. In addition, student mobility also occurs at other than tertiary-level. In particular, significant numbers of students go abroad for language training. In some countries, visa requirements to attend a language-training institution are not as stringent as those to attend an institution for tertiary education and, because foreign students are given permission to engage in conditional part-time employment, student migration is related to migration for employment. Currently, countries that allow foreign students to engage in conditional part-time employment include Australia, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States.<sup>12</sup>

### *Migration for employment*

Labour migration is today most common among developing countries, particularly those in Asia. Several developed countries admit migrant workers on a temporary basis under special programmes for seasonal workers or workers with needed skills. Young people are likely to be important actors in labour migration but an assessment of their relevance is not possible because the data available are not classified by age. In addition, because most programmes allowing the temporary admission of migrant workers also allow the extension or renewal of work permits, understanding the role of youth in the dynamics of labour migration requires not only data classified by age but also by whether a migrant is being admitted for the first time or is being readmitted after the renewal of a visa or permit.

Indirect evidence suggests that young people may account for a significant proportion of labour migrants admitted for the first time. In the health sector, for instance, young women in countries such as the Philippines are known to enroll in nursing schools that provide support in meeting the certification requirements of receiving countries so that successful candidates may migrate as soon as possible and probably while they are still in their 20s. Seasonal worker programmes that engage workers for the agricultural, construction or tourism sectors are also likely to favour young workers, who may be perceived as better able to adapt both to a new environment and to the demands of the work involved.

In addition, there are some temporary-worker programmes explicitly designed to attract young people. Australia and New Zealand, for instance, allow the entry of students on holiday

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<sup>11</sup> *International Migration Outlook: SOPEMI 2010*, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, France, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> “Educationally channeled international labor mobility: Contemporary student migration from China to Japan”, Gracia Liu-Farrer, *International Migration Review*, vol. 43, No. 1 (Spring 2009), pp. 178-201.

who wish to work temporarily in those countries (they are admitted as “working holiday makers”). Several countries have programmes allowing the admission of “trainees” who work while improving their skills. Although trainee programmes generally do not establish explicit age criteria for admission, the expectation is that “trainees” would be young workers. Countries allowing the admission of trainees include Germany, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland and the United States.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, as already mentioned, in countries that allow foreign students to work part-time in occupations that meet certain criteria, migration for education is partly a means of getting access to the labour market and the possibility of working while studying is an additional incentive for young people to engage in that type of migration.

Even when migrants are not admitted explicitly for employment purposes, they are more likely to be economically active than natives although they may not fare as well as natives in the labour market. In developed countries, data on unemployment among migrants typically show that it is higher among young migrants than among older migrants and also higher among young migrants than among young natives.<sup>14</sup> High unemployment among young migrants is a concern because it is often indicative of problems in adapting to the host society. Studies in selected countries suggest that successful adaptation is more likely the younger a child is when migration occurs.<sup>15</sup> Young children are better able to become fluent in the local language, a major advantage in later life. When young persons migrate as teenagers, both language acquisition and adaptation are more difficult.

#### *Migration for family reunification, including marriage migration*

Migration for family reunification is one of the major components of the migration flows directed to developed countries. Admissions of immediate relatives (that is, spouses, children, parents and other relatives) of citizens and migrants with permanent residence status accounted for at least half of all admissions to Australia, Canada, France, Italy, New Zealand, Sweden and the United States in 2003.<sup>16</sup> As already noted, some countries allow the admission of unmarried sons and daughters of citizens and permanent residents provided they are under 21 years of age. Consequently, some of the children reported under family reunification belong to the category of youth. However, the lack of data classified by age makes it impossible to arrive at a better characterization of the migration of youth for family reunification.

Marriage 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. Migration and marriage can occur in two ways: marriage may be a cause for migration or migration may lead to marriage. Thus, a person may meet a foreign partner, marry and then join him or her in his or her country of residence (meet then marry and migrate) or a person may migrate for a different purpose, then meet a partner resident in the country of destination, marry and remain there (migrate, meet then marry). In most countries, the spouses of citizens are allowed to immigrate and are granted the right to residence. Spouses constitute a sizable proportion of the migrants admitted by major receiving countries. In 2003, 45 per cent of all long-term immigrants to France were spouses reuniting from abroad. In the United States, spouses of U.S. citizens accounted for 28 of all persons granted permanent

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<sup>13</sup> *International Migration Outlook: SOPEMI 2006*, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, France, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> *International Migration Outlook: SOPEMI 2009*, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, France, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> “The gradient in immigrant age-at-arrival effects on socioeconomic outcomes in the U.S.,” Dowell Myers, Xin Gao and Amon Emeka, *International Migration Review*, vol. 43, No. 1 (Spring, 2009), pp. 205-229.

<sup>16</sup> *International Migration Outlook: SOPEMI 2006*, op.cit.

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.<sup>17</sup>

In some countries in Asia, the practice of seeking husbands abroad is of long standing and the trend has been increasing because of the 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 is 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> In 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.<sup>20</sup>

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 marriage migration is used as a cover for trafficking. For those reasons, Governments have been tightening the requirements for admission of foreign spouses and taking measures to ensure that women do not fall prey to traffickers. Those requirements usually include a minimum age for foreign spouses, proof of economic self-sufficiency by grooms and evidence that the partners know each other and that the marriage is not a fraud.

Another aspect of family migration that has gained importance over the past two decades is migration for adoption. Around 2005, approximately 40,000 children moved annually as a result of intercountry adoptions, up from an estimated 20,000 annually in the 1980s.<sup>21</sup> The scant data available on the age of children adopted internationally suggest that 60 per cent were under

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<sup>17</sup> Including children.

<sup>18</sup> *Asian Cross-border Marriage Migration: Demographic Patterns and Social Issues*. Wen-Shan Yan and Melody Chia-Wen Lu, eds. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> "Migration in the Asia-Pacific region", Stephen Castles, *Migration Information Source*, July 2009, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?ID=733> (accessed on 10 May 2011).

<sup>20</sup> "Key trends and challenges on international migration and development in Asia and the Pacific", paper prepared for the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 20-21 September 2008, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2009, [http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/EGM\\_Ittmig\\_Asia/BGpaper\\_ESCAP.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/EGM_Ittmig_Asia/BGpaper_ESCAP.pdf) (accessed on 10 May 2011).

<sup>21</sup> *Child Adoption: Trends and Policies*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.XIII.4.

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 international 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 in Europe and, 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 his or her adoption. The child's age of consent for adoption is established by law. About 90 countries have established an age above which the consent of the child is either required or sought before the adoption is authorized. In most cases, that age is 10 years.

### *Humanitarian migration*

Humanitarian migration includes refugees, asylum-seekers and other persons in need of protection, including unaccompanied minors. UNHCR publishes data on the number of refugees classified by age, but the age groups used in reporting the data do not show explicitly the percentage of persons aged 15 to 24. At the end of 2009, 41 percent of refugees were under age 18 of whom 15 per cent were aged 12 to 17 years. Since most refugee populations originate in countries with relatively young populations, the proportion of young persons among refugees is expected to be high (UNHCR, 2010).<sup>22</sup>

Data on age of asylum-seekers are scarce, but the available evidence suggests that 27 per cent are under 18 years of age. Further, it is known that young single men are more numerous among asylum-seekers than young single women. Women are more likely to be seeking asylum as part of a family group or to be married (UNHCR, 2010).

Unaccompanied minors are persons under the age of majority who find themselves in a country other than that of their nationality and who are not accompanied by a parent, guardian or other adult who by law or custom is responsible for them. Because they are minors they are not entitled to exercise certain civil and political rights and may have difficulty making a claim for asylum in their own right. Their vulnerability often makes them easy prey for unscrupulous employers or traffickers.<sup>23</sup> In 2009, 12,200 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in the European Union, according to Eurostat.<sup>24</sup> Most were boys between the ages of 16 and 18 and they originated primarily from Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. Their main countries of destination were France, the United Kingdom and Sweden, in order of importance.

Policies and procedures for the treatment of unaccompanied and separated minors have been evolving and differ significantly among countries. Age is an important consideration in determining the rights that a minor may exercise on his own. More needs to be done to harmonize approaches because, even within countries, different agencies apply different criteria, with some considering unaccompanied minors as deserving protection and others considering them as migrants in an irregular situation. This group of migrants, though small, exemplifies the implications of the different legal basis for determining the start of youth. Because persons aged 15 or over can exercise the right to work, young people aged 15 to 17 find themselves in a grey area where they are still technically minors but can be viewed also as potential workers trying to

<sup>22</sup> *UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2009*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, Switzerland, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> *Glossary on Migration*, Second Edition, International Organization for Migration, Geneva, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> "Unaccompanied immigrant children: A growing phenomenon with few easy solutions", Amanda Levinson, *Migration Information Source*, 24 January 2011. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/print.cfm?ID=823> (accessed on 9 May 2011).

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

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

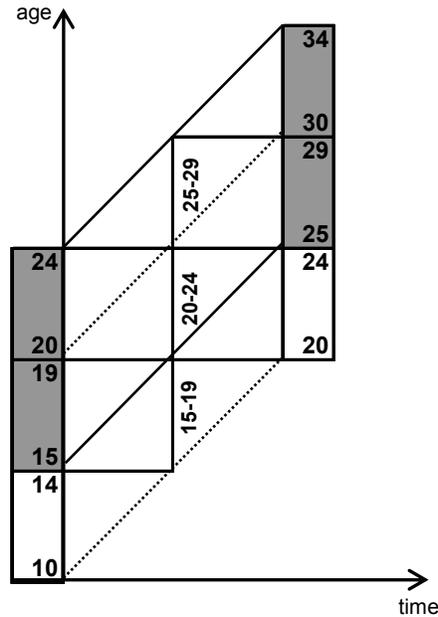
This paper has argued that even when one is interested in the experience of youth, defined as persons aged 15 to 24, it is useful to consider the experience of persons in adjacent age groups, at least for the purpose of migration analysis. This section focuses on the analysis of a new set of estimates prepared by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, namely, estimates of the number of international migrants classified by five-year age group and sex in each country for the years 1990, 2000 and 2010.<sup>25</sup> Those estimates are measures of the stock of international migrants, that is, they represent the cumulative effect of net inflows and outflows of migrants by age and sex as well as the impact of mortality. The age distribution of international migrants at a particular time is shaped by the migration experience of a country over the past 70 or 80 years. When one focuses on the population under a given age, say 30, the past 30 years of migration experience are imprinted in that population.

One advantage of having estimates of the number of international migrants by age that are ten years apart is that one can trace the change over time of different migrant cohorts and estimate the changes that have taken place within the ten-year period separating the estimates. To do so, let us recall how cohorts age. Figure 3 presents a diagram of the population aged 0 to 25 as it ages over a ten-year period. The vertical line in the middle represents the mid-point of the period and thus divides it into two segments of five years each. The diagonals trace the ageing of five-year cohorts over time. For instance, persons who start at ages 15 to 19 on the left, become 20 to 24 after five years (the central vertical line) and 25 to 29 after ten years (the rightmost line). Such a diagram is useful because it helps to illustrate that, in order to assess the quantitative effect of the migration of young people (those aged 15 to 24) one needs to consider the age range starting at 10 at the start of the period and ending at age 35 at the end of the period.

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<sup>25</sup> The estimates were derived mostly from census data referring to the foreign-born population classified by age and sex. For some countries, population registers or large sample surveys were the source of the age distribution of international migrations. In addition, for countries where the data on migrants referred to foreigners rather than to the foreign born, those data were used instead. The full set of estimates will be issued on CD-Rom under the title *Trends in International Migrant Stock: Migrants by Age and Sex*.

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, but 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 of the number of migrants from 15-19 to 25-29 will be caused by the deaths they experience during the period and the addition of migrants whose ages will slide over time from 15-19 to 24-28, therefore covering more ages than those associated with the term “youth”. More generally, over the ten-year period, the migrants aged 15 to 24 at the time of arrival will contribute, at least in part, to changes in the cohorts aged 10-14, 15-19 and 20-24 at the start of the period, which ten years later will be aged 20-24, 25-29 and 30-34. Bearing these observations in mind, let us consider next what the data on the number of international migrants by age tell us about the migration of youth since 1990.

*The number and distribution of young migrants by age*

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 (table 2). As in the total population of the world, the proportion of youth among the migrant population has been decreasing and so has the proportion of children aged 0 to 14 (table 3). Furthermore, the migrant population has a lower proportion aged 15 to 24 than the population of the world (12.4 per cent vs. 17.6 per cent) and has, in general, an older age structure than the overall world population.

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

<i>Development group</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>0-14</i>	<i>15-24</i>	<i>25-34</i>	<i>Total</i>
World .....	1990	21.6	23.8	30.9	156
	2000	21.0	24.6	35.2	178
	2010	22.1	26.6	41.4	214
Developed countries .....	1990	7.9	11.4	16.1	82
	2000	8.0	13.0	19.9	104
	2010	7.8	13.8	23.4	128
Developing countries.....	1990	13.7	12.3	14.8	73
	2000	13.0	11.6	15.3	74
	2010	14.3	12.8	18.0	86
Least developed countries .....	1990	2.6	2.7	2.4	11
	2000	2.2	2.4	2.5	11
	2010	2.2	2.3	2.6	12
Other developing countries.....	1990	11.1	9.7	12.4	62
	2000	10.8	9.2	12.8	63
	2010	12.1	10.4	15.5	75

TABLE 3. PERCENTAGE OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS IN SELECTED AGE GROUPS  
BY DEVELOPMENT GROUP,  
1990, 2000 AND 2010

<i>Development group</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>0-14</i>	<i>15-24</i>	<i>25-34</i>
World.....	1990	13.9	15.3	19.9
	2000	11.8	13.8	19.7
	2010	10.3	12.4	19.3
Developed countries .....	1990	9.6	13.9	19.5
	2000	7.6	12.5	19.1
	2010	6.1	10.8	18.3
Developing countries.....	1990	18.7	16.9	20.2
	2000	17.6	15.6	20.6
	2010	16.6	14.8	20.9
Least developed countries.....	1990	23.3	24.1	21.5
	2000	20.4	21.8	22.9
	2010	19.4	20.4	22.2
Other developing countries.....	1990	17.9	15.6	20.0
	2000	17.1	14.6	20.2
	2010	16.2	13.9	20.7

The proportion of migrants aged 15 to 24 among all international migrants is higher in developing countries than in developed countries and is highest 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*

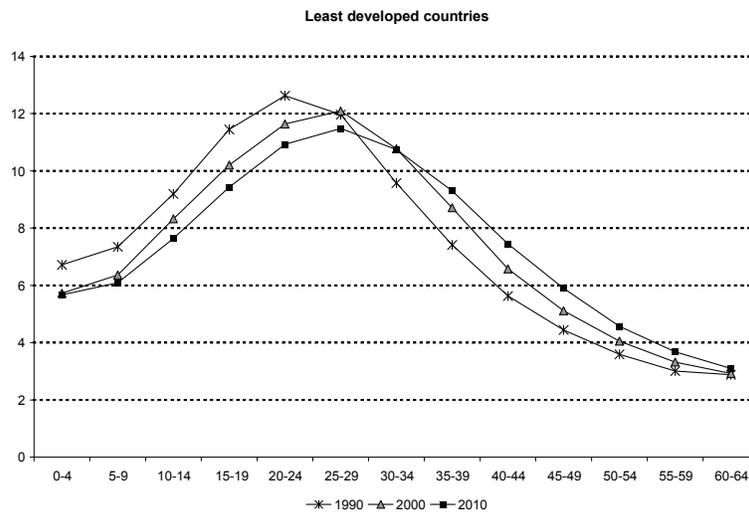
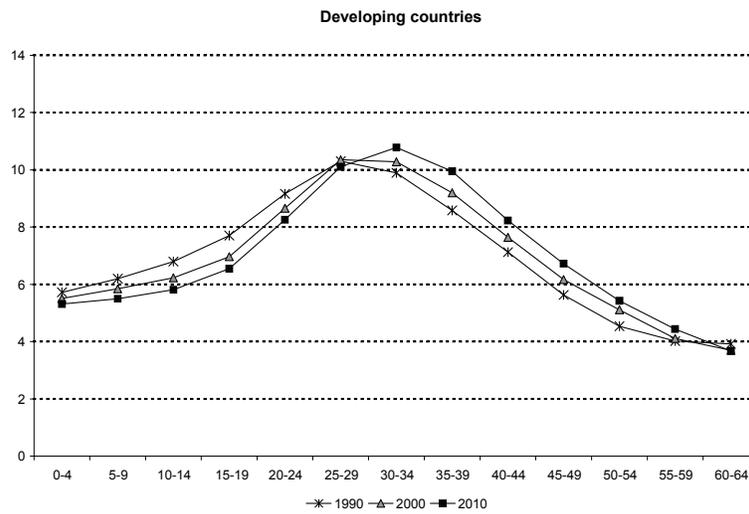
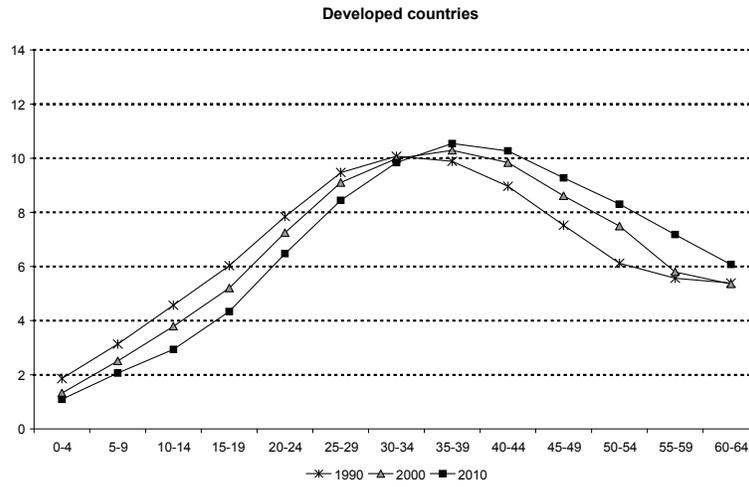
In 2010, international migrants accounted for 2.2 per cent of the population aged 15 to 24 in the world, a lower proportion than that of the overall number of migrants in the world population (3.1 per cent). Furthermore, whereas migrants as a proportion of the world population had been rising, they have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

<i>Development group</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>0-14</i>	<i>15-24</i>	<i>25-34</i>	<i>Total</i>
World.....	1990	1.2	2.4	3.8	2.9
	2000	1.1	2.3	3.6	2.9
	2010	1.2	2.2	3.9	3.1
Developed countries .....	1990	3.3	6.8	8.9	7.2
	2000	3.6	7.9	11.5	8.7
	2010	3.8	8.7	13.6	10.3
Developing countries.....	1990	0.9	1.5	2.3	1.8
	2000	0.8	1.3	1.9	1.5
	2010	0.9	1.2	2.0	1.5
Least developed countries.....	1990	1.1	2.6	3.4	2.1
	2000	0.8	1.7	2.6	1.6
	2010	0.7	1.4	2.0	1.3
Other developing countries.....	1990	0.9	1.3	2.2	1.7
	2000	0.8	1.2	1.8	1.5
	2010	0.9	1.2	2.0	1.6

**Figure 4. Percentage distribution of the migrant population by age group for development groups, 1990, 2000 and 2010**



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, passing from 2.6 per cent in 1990 to 1.4 per cent in 2010.

*The distribution of young migrants among development groups and major areas*

In 2010, developed countries hosted nearly 60 per cent of all international migrants but just 52 per cent of those aged 15 to 24 and a low 35 per cent of migrants under age 15. Just under half of all young migrants live in developing countries. Asia hosts the largest number of migrants aged 15 to 24, amounting to 8.3 million or 32 per cent of the world’s migrants in 2010. Europe has the second largest population of young migrants, with 7.7 million or 29 per cent, and Northern America has the third, with 5.2 million or 19 per cent. Africa accounts for a further 3.7 million and Latin America and the Caribbean for a million, while Oceania hosts the remainder 600,000.

Because the number of migrants aged 15 to 24 has been declining in the least developed countries, their share of the overall migrant population in that age group has also been decreasing to reach 8.8 per cent in 2010 (table 5). The rest of the developing countries also experienced a reduction in their share of the migrant population aged 15 to 24 between 1990 and 2000, but that share rose again between 2000 and 2010, reaching 39 per cent.

TABLE 5. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF MIGRANTS IN SELECTED AGE GROUPS  
BY DEVELOPMENT GROUP,  
1990, 2000 AND 2010

<i>Development group</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>0-14</i>	<i>15-24</i>	<i>25-34</i>	<i>Total</i>
Developed countries.....	1990	36.5	48.1	52.1	53.0
	2000	38.0	52.9	56.6	58.5
	2010	35.2	52.0	56.5	59.7
Developing countries.....	1990	63.5	51.9	47.9	47.0
	2000	62.0	47.1	43.4	41.5
	2010	64.8	48.0	43.5	40.3
Least developed countries .....	1990	12.0	11.3	7.8	7.1
	2000	10.6	9.7	7.1	6.1
	2010	10.1	8.8	6.2	5.4
Other developing countries.....	1990	51.5	40.7	40.1	39.9
	2000	51.4	37.4	36.3	35.4
	2010	54.7	39.2	37.4	34.9

*The sex distribution of young international migrants*

At the world level, the percentage female among migrants aged 15 to 24 is lower (48.3 per cent) than among the whole migrant population (49.0 per cent). Nevertheless, the percentage female has been increasing among migrants aged 15 to 24, whereas it decreased between 2000 and 2010 among all international migrants (table 6).

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

<i>Development group</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Percentage female</i>			
		<i>0-14</i>	<i>15-24</i>	<i>25-34</i>	<i>Total</i>
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
Developing countries .....	1990	48.6	46.5	42.8	45.9
	2000	48.9	47.4	43.0	46.1
	2010	48.9	47.7	42.3	45.3
Least developed countries .....	1990	48.1	47.5	46.9	46.7
	2000	47.8	48.4	47.2	47.4
	2010	48.4	48.9	47.2	47.5
Other developing countries .....	1990	48.7	46.2	42.1	45.8
	2000	49.1	47.1	42.1	45.9
	2010	49.0	47.4	41.5	45.0

In developed countries, females are underrepresented among young migrants (they constitute 48.9 per cent of migrants aged 15 to 24), whereas they are overrepresented among all migrants (they account for 51.5 per cent of the totality of international migrants in developed countries).

Female migrants are even more underrepresented among young migrants in developing countries and especially among the group of developing countries that excludes the least developed countries. In that group of countries, the rising proportion of males as age increases is striking: the percentage of males passes from 52.6 per cent among migrants aged 15 to 24 in 2010 to 58.5 per cent among migrants aged 25 to 34. Nevertheless, female representation among young migrants in this group of countries is higher than among their overall migrant population.

Changes in the percentage of women in different age groups of migrants do not support the existence of a clear trend toward the increasing feminization of migration. In developed countries, the overall percentage female in the migrant population has been decreasing, with the younger cohorts showing a deficit of women. The preponderance of women in the overall migrant population is the result of high proportions of women at older ages, an outcome that probably owes more to the higher longevity of women with respect to men than to the feminization of migration.

Among developing countries, the picture is mixed. There is some evidence of feminization among the least developed countries, but the trend is not clear among the rest of the developing countries where the overall percentage female declined between 2000 and 2010.

## 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 net 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 3. 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 development groups. At the world level, the highest net migration gain was estimated for the migrant population aged 25 to 29 in 2000 and in 2010. During 1990-2000, net migration to developed countries associated with that age group accounted for 68 per cent of the world total and in 2000-2010, it accounted for 59 per cent. In 1990-2000, the share of net migration of developed countries was well above 68 per cent for the other age groups shown in table 7.

During 1990-2000, developing countries not only accounted for a small share of net migration to the age groups considered but they also experienced very low net migration gains in absolute terms. Net migration to developing countries increased considerably between 1990-2000 and 2000-2010, particularly for the age groups most affected by inflows of young migrants. Net migration doubled or more for age groups 15-19 and 30-34 and increased by around 70 per cent

TABLE 7. ESTIMATES OF THE NET NUMBER OF MIGRANTS PER DECADE,  
1990-2000 AND 2000-2010  
(millions)

<i>Development group</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>10-14</i>	<i>15-19</i>	<i>20-24</i>	<i>25-29</i>	<i>30-34</i>
World .....	1990-2000	3.0	3.6	5.4	6.8	4.3
	2000-2010	3.5	4.3	6.9	9.1	5.9
Developed countries .....	1990-2000	2.4	2.9	3.8	4.6	3.1
	2000-2010	2.4	2.9	4.3	5.4	3.3
Developing countries.....	1990-2000	0.6	0.7	1.5	2.2	1.1
	2000-2010	1.1	1.4	2.6	3.7	2.5
Least developed countries .....	1990-2000	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.0
	2000-2010	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.1
Other developing countries.....	1990-2000	0.4	0.4	1.3	2.1	1.2
	2000-2010	0.8	1.0	2.2	3.4	2.4

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 to 30-34 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 flexible in using different lower limits depending on the analysis being carried out.

The review presented has made plain the limitations of the data available in regard to the analysis of the migration of young people. Most types of administrative data lack information on age or provide information grouped in such a way that it is not possible to identify young people according to the statistical definition that is ordinarily used. Given that the experience and status of young migrants may vary considerably according to whether or not they fall below or above the thresholds established by laws or regulations for the exercise of certain rights or as requirements for migration, lack of statistics classified by age make it impossible to ascertain the implications of those regulations.

Newly available estimates of the migrant stock by age permit to quantify at the global and regional levels the cumulative effects of the migration of youth and to characterize young migrants in terms of their geographical distribution and their distribution by sex. Estimates of net migration derived from the information on stock permit a better assessment of the changing flows of international migrant by age even if, as discussed in this paper, with data ten years apart, the contribution of migrants aged 15 to 29 at the time of migration is shared by different five-year cohorts.

The main finding of the analysis carried out is to corroborate that the majority of young migrants over the past two decades have moved to developed countries, that the number of young migrants in developing countries decreased between 1990 and 2000, and that the age distribution of all migrants is considerably older in developed countries than in the developing world, although in both regions the migrant population is ageing. Therefore, youth migration is important in slowing the ageing of the migrant population and, consequently, the overall population of receiving countries.