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232 million international migrants living abroad worldwide— new UN global migration statistics reveal

Forthcoming UN High-level Dialogue aims to enhance benefits of migration for all

New York, 11 September—There are as many international migrants born in the South living in other countries in the South as in countries in the North, reflecting changing patterns of Asian migration, but globally the United States remains the most popular destination, according to new data presented by the United Nations today.

More people than ever are living abroad. In 2013, 232 million people, or 3.2 per cent of the world's population, were international migrants, compared with 175 million in 2000 and 154 million in 1990.

The new estimates include breakdowns by region and country of destination and origin, and by sex and age. The North, or developed countries, is home to 136 million international migrants, compared to 96 million in the South, or developing countries. Most international migrants are of working age (20 to 64 years) and account for 74 per cent of the total. Globally, women account for 48 per cent of all international migrants.

High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development next month

The data were released in advance of the upcoming High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, which will take place 3-4 October 2013 at UN Headquarters. The purpose of the High-level Dialogue is to identify concrete measures to strengthen coherence and cooperation at all levels, with a view to enhancing the benefits of international migration for migrants and countries alike and its important links to development, while reducing its negative implications.

“Migration, when governed fairly, can make a very important contribution to social and economic development both in the countries of origin and in the countries of destination,” said Mr. Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. “Migration broadens the opportunities available to individuals and is a crucial means of broadening access to resources and reducing poverty.”

South-South is as common as South-North migration

The data show that South-South migration is as common as South-North migration. In 2013, about 82.3 million international migrants who were born in the South were residing in the

South, which is slightly higher than the 81.9 million international migrants originating in the South and living in the North.

Asians and Latin Americans living outside of their home regions form the largest global diaspora groups. In 2013, Asians represented the largest group, accounting for about 19 million migrants living in Europe, some 16 million in Northern America and about 3 million in Oceania. Migrants born in Latin America and the Caribbean represented the second largest diaspora group with the majority, 26 million, living in Northern America.

In 2013, South Asians were the largest group of international migrants living outside of their home region. Of the 36 million international migrants from South Asia, 13.5 million resided in the oil-producing countries in Western Asia. International migrants originating from Central America, including Mexico, represented another large group of migrants living outside their home region. About 16.3 million, out of 17.4 million Central American migrants lived in the US.

Most migrants live in Europe and Asia

Europe and Asia combined host nearly two-thirds of all international migrants worldwide. Europe remains the most popular destination region with 72 million international migrants in 2013, compared to 71 million in Asia. Since 1990, Northern America recorded the largest gain in the absolute number of international migrants, adding 25 million, and experienced the fastest growth in migrant stock by an average of 2.8 per cent per year.

“New sources and destinations of migrants are emerging, and in some cases, countries have become important points of origin, transit and destination simultaneously,” said John Wilmoth, Director of the Population Division in the UN’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Compared to other regions of destination, Asia saw the largest increase of international migrants since 2000, adding some 20 million migrants in 13 years. Mr. Wilmoth said this growth was mainly fuelled by the increasing demand for foreign labour in the oil-producing countries of Western Asia and in South-Eastern Asian countries with rapidly growing economies, such as Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

International migration remains highly concentrated

In 2013, half of all international migrants lived in 10 countries, with the US hosting the largest number (45.8 million), followed by the Russian Federation (11 million); Germany (9.8 million); Saudi Arabia (9.1 million); United Arab Emirates (7.8 million); United Kingdom (7.8 million); France (7.4 million); Canada (7.3 million); Australia (6.5 million); and Spain (6.5 million).

The US gained the largest absolute number of international migrants between 1990 and 2013—nearly 23 million, equal to one million additional migrants per year. The United Arab Emirates recorded the second largest gain with seven million, followed by Spain with six million.

For comprehensive factsheets on the global migration data and information on the High-level Dialogue, please visit www.unmigration.org.

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