

## Levels and trends in international migration

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**Introduction.** In today's increasingly interconnected world, international migration has become a reality that touches nearly all corners of the globe. Modern transportation has made it easier, cheaper and faster for people to move in search of jobs, opportunity, education and quality of life. At the same time conflict, poverty, inequality and a lack of sustainable livelihoods compel people to leave their homes to seek a better future for themselves and their families abroad.

When supported by appropriate policies, migration can contribute to inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development in both home and host communities. In 2016, migrants from developing countries sent home an estimated US \$413 billion in remittances.<sup>2</sup> Remittances constitute a significant source of household income that improves the livelihoods of families and communities through investments in education, health, sanitation, housing and infrastructure. Countries of destination benefit significantly from migration as migrants often fill critical labour gaps, create jobs as entrepreneurs, and pay taxes and social security contributions. Some migrants are among the most dynamic members of the host society contributing to the development of science and technology and enriching their host communities by providing cultural diversity.

Despite the significant benefits of migration, some migrants remain among the most vulnerable members of society. Migrants are often the first to lose their jobs in the event of an economic downturn. Some work for less pay, for longer hours, and in worse conditions than native-born workers. While migration is often an empowering experience, some migrants endure human rights violations, abuse and discrimination. Migrants, particularly women and children, may fall victim to human trafficking and the heinous forms of exploitation that it entails.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its commitment to leave no one behind, recognises that international migration is of major relevance for the development of countries of origin, transit and destination, requiring coherent and comprehensive responses. In the Agenda, Governments pledged to "facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies" (SDG target 10.7). The 2030 Agenda also seeks to reduce remittance transfer fees, to promote labour standards for migrant workers, and to eliminate human trafficking.

In an effort to address large movements of refugees and migrants, on 19 September 2016, the General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants calling for the development of two global compacts in 2018. A refugee compact, to be prepared under the auspices of the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR), and a migration compact to be negotiated by the General Assembly. The migration compact will be presented for adoption at an intergovernmental conference to be held in 2018. While the compacts will be developed through distinct processes, the New York Declaration reaffirmed the commitment of Member States to protect the human rights of all migrants, regardless of status. The Declaration agreed to a set of commitments that apply to both refugees and other migrants, as well as separate sets of commitments for refugees and for other migrants.

Accurate, consistent and timely data on international migration are essential for assessing current and future trends and for setting policy priorities. To track systematically levels and trends in international migration around the world, the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations prepares, at regular intervals, estimates of the number of international migrants disaggregated by age, sex, country of destination and country of origin for all countries and areas of the world as well as analytical reports to assess the current state of international migrants and migration in the

world.

This report presents the highlights of the International Migration Report 2017, which analyses levels and trends of international migration, based on the 2017 revision of the international migrant stock. The data for the number of international migrants in this report are derived from the publication Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision, while the estimates and projections of the total population and of net migration are derived from the publication World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, DVD Edition. The status of ratification of the migration-related legal instruments of the United Nations is based on information from the United Nations Treaty Section (<http://treaties.un.org>). The annex of this publication provides the estimates of the number of international migrants for 2000 and 2017, the percentage of migrants in the total population, the percentage of female migrants, and the median age of migrants for 232 countries or areas of the world.

#### International migrant stock by age, sex and origin: Definitions and data availability

The estimates of the number (or “stock”) of international migrants disaggregated by age, sex and country or area of origin presented in the International Migration Report 2017 are based on national statistics, in most cases obtained from population censuses. Additionally, population registers and nationally representative surveys provided information on the number and composition of international migrants. By definition, an international migrant is a person who is living in a country other than his or her country of birth. To estimate the international migrant stock, data on place of birth are the preferred source of information. Data on the foreign-born were available for 182 countries, or three quarters of the 232 countries and areas included in this analysis. When data on the foreign-born were not available, data on foreign citizens were used. Among the 232 countries or areas included in this publication, 214, representing 92 per cent of the total, had at least one data source on the total number of international migrants since the 2000 census round, while 77 per cent of countries or areas had at least one recent data source on the age of international migrants and 81 per cent had at least one data source on their place of origin. Of the 258 million migrants worldwide, 93 per cent, or 240 million, are included in at least one data source since the 2000 census round. The availability of data on the total migrant population, as well as on the age and origin of international migrants, differs between regions (table 1). In Africa, 17 per cent of countries did not have a recent data source on the total number of international migrants, while 43 per cent and 31 per cent of countries did not have recent data on the age or origin of international migrants, respectively. In Asia, 12 per cent of the countries did not provide recent data on the number of international migrants, while 26 per cent were lacking recent data on the age of international migrants, and 32 per cent on the origin of international migrants.

Table 1

#### Availability of data on international migrants, overall and with classification by age and origin, 1995 to 2017

Regions and number of countries or areas	Countries or areas with at least one data source						Number of migrants included in data from the 2000 census round or later	
	Number			Percentage			(thousands)	Percentage
	Total	By age	By origin	Total	By age	By origin		
World (232)	214	179	187	92	77	81	240,176	93
Africa (58)	48	33	40	83	57	69	19,479	79
Asia (50)	44	37	34	88	74	68	67,259	85
Europe (48)	47	43	44	98	90	92	77,895	100

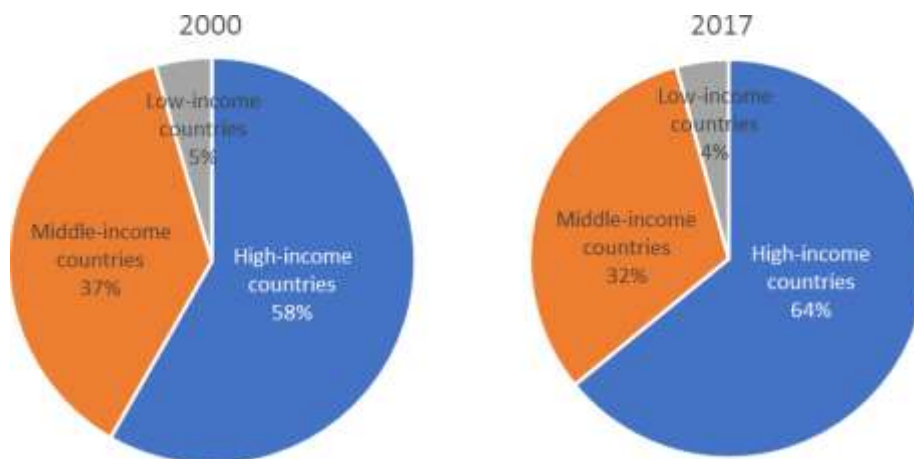
Latin America and the Caribbean (48)	47	44	45	98	92	94	9,468	100
Northern America (5)	5	5	5	100	100	100	57,664	100
Oceania (23)	23	17	19	100	74	83	8,411	100

The number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow over the past seventeen years, reaching 258 million in 2017, up from 248 million in 2015, 220 million in 2010, 191 million in 2005 and 173 million in 2000. Between 2000 and 2005, the international migrant stock grew by an average of 2 per cent per year. During the period 2005-2010, the annual growth rate accelerated, reaching 2.9 per cent. Since then, however, it has slowed, falling to around 2.4 per cent per year during the period 2010-2015 and to 2.0 per cent per year during the period 2015-2017.

High-income countries host almost two thirds of all international migrants. As of 2017, 64 per cent of all international migrants worldwide - equal to 165 million international migrants - lived in high-income countries. Thirty-six per cent - or 92 million - of the world's migrants lived in middle- or low-income countries. Of these, 81 million resided in middle-income countries and 11 million in low-income countries. In comparison to 2000, the share of international migrants living in high income countries increased slightly, while the share of middle- and low- income countries fell (figure 1).

Figure 1

**Percentage of international migrants by income group, 2000 and 2017**



Source: United Nations (2017a)

Note: For both charts, the classification of countries and areas by income level is based on 2016 gross national income (GNI) per capita, in U.S. dollars, calculated by the World Bank.

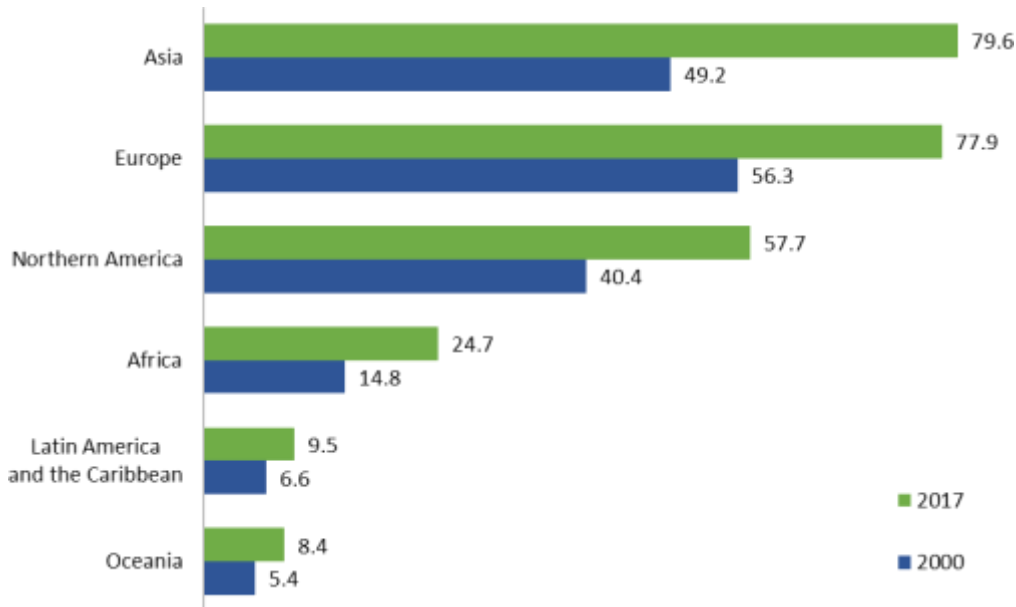
High-income countries have absorbed most of the recent growth in the global population of international migrants, gaining 64 million of the 85 million migrants added worldwide between 2000 and 2017. As a result, the rate of growth of the migrant population was highest during 2000-2017 (2.9 per cent per year) in high-income countries. The average growth rate in low-income countries was around 2.4 per cent per year. After declining in the period from 2000 to 2010, the rate of growth of the migrant population in low-income countries accelerated to 6.6 per cent per year in 2010 to 2015, and slowed again, to 2.0 per cent per year, most recently (2015-2017). In middle-income countries, the growth rate was the lowest during this period (1.4 per cent per year).

Analysing data by geographic region provides additional insights into current trends. More than 60

per cent of all international migrants worldwide live in Asia or Europe. In 2017, 80 million international migrants were residing in Asia, compared to 78 million in Europe. Northern America hosted the third largest number of international migrants (58 million), followed by Africa (25 million), Latin America and the Caribbean (10 million), and Oceania (8 million) (figure 2).

Figure 2

**Number of international migrants (millions) by region of destination, 2000 and 2017**



Between 2000 and 2017, Asia added more international migrants than any other region. Asia gained some 30 million international migrants during this period, representing a net increase of about 1.8 million migrants per annum. Europe added the second largest number of international migrants between 2000 and 2017 (22 million), followed by Northern America (17 million) and Africa (10 million). Latin America and the Caribbean and Oceania added comparatively smaller numbers of migrants during this period (3 million in each of these regions). Despite this continued growth, international migrants accounted for two per cent or less of the total population of Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. By contrast, in Europe, Northern America and Oceania, international migrants comprised at least 10 per cent of the total population.

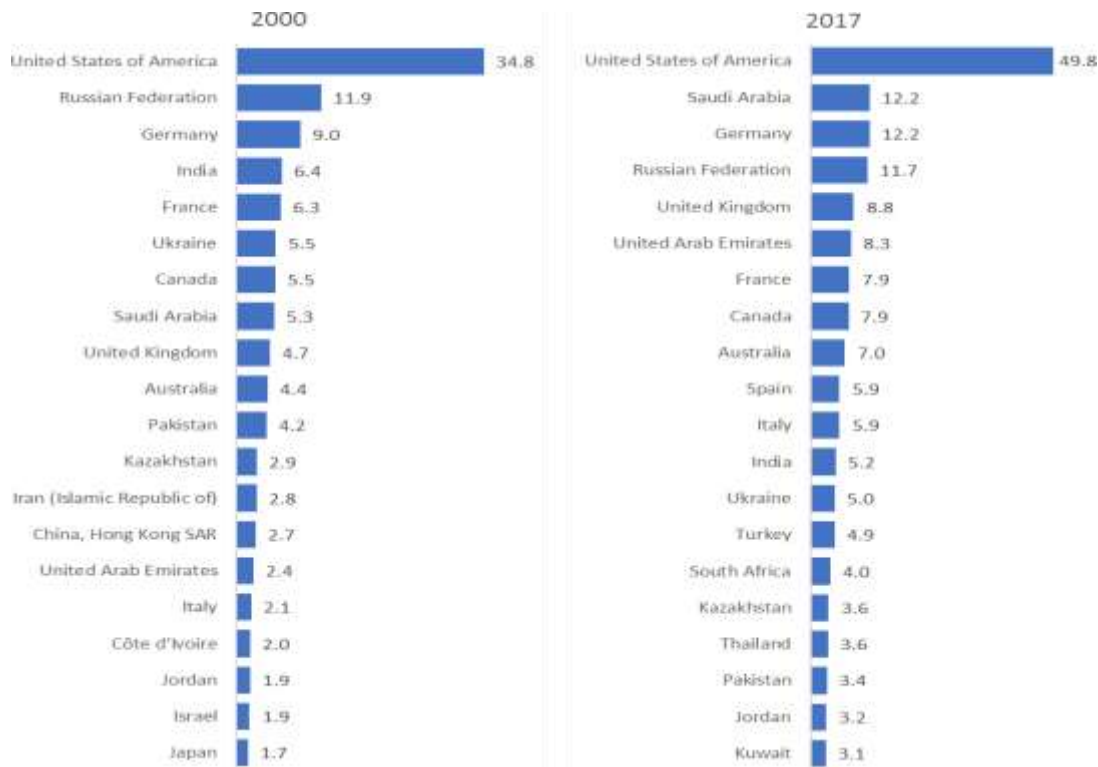
The number of international migrants worldwide has grown faster than the world's population. Due to this faster growth rate, the share of migrants in the total population increased from 2.8 in 2000 to 3.4 per cent in 2017. The pace of growth in the migrant population varies significantly across regions. Between 2000 and 2017, the number of international migrants in Africa and Asia grew by an average of 3.0 and 2.8 per cent per annum, respectively. Oceania recorded the third fastest average annual growth rate in the international migrant stock during this period (2.7 per cent) followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (2.2 per cent). Europe and Northern America, where the size of the migrant stock was already large, experienced a slightly slower pace of change, with an average annual growth rate of 2.1 per cent in North America and 1.9 per cent in Europe.

Most of the world's migrants live in a relatively small number of countries. In 2017, more than 50 per cent of all international migrants in the world were living in just ten countries or areas, while only twenty countries or areas hosted 67 per cent of the global number of international migrants. The largest number of international migrants resided in the United States of America: 50 million, equal to 19 per cent of the world's total (figure 3). Saudi Arabia, Germany and the Russian Federation hosted the second, third and fourth largest numbers of migrants worldwide (around 12 million each), followed by the United

Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (nearly 9 million), and the United Arab Emirates (8 million). Of the twenty largest countries of destination of international migrants worldwide, nine are located in Asia, seven in Europe, two in Northern America, and one each in Africa and Oceania.

Figure 3

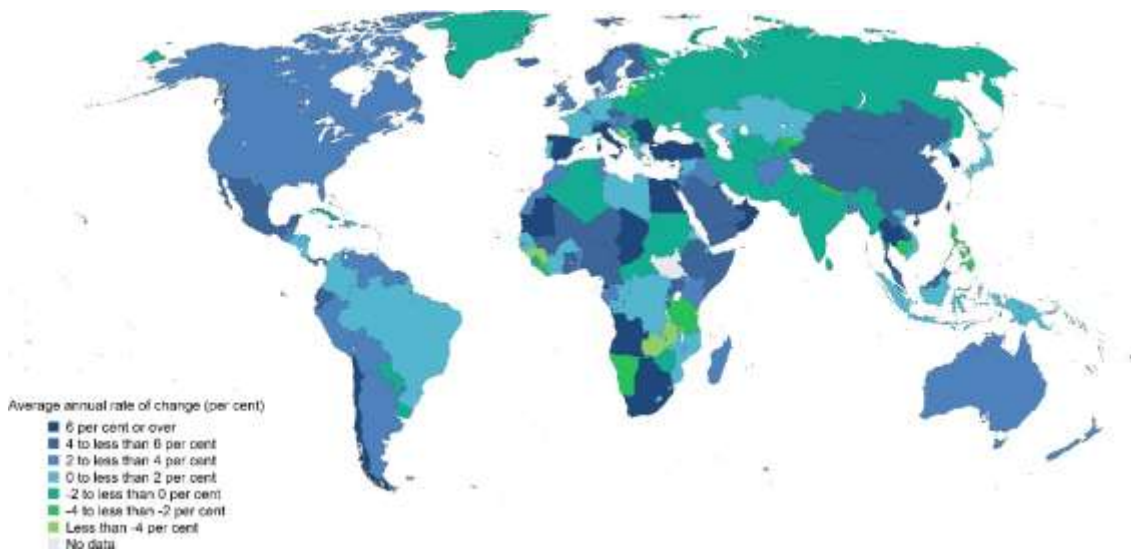
**Twenty countries or areas hosting the largest numbers of international migrants, 2000 and 2017, number of migrants (millions)**



Changes in the number of international migrants differ widely by country. Between 2000 and 2017, the number of international migrants increased in 172 countries or areas worldwide. In 70 of these countries, the migrant population grew by less than 2 per cent per annum (map 1). In 102 countries or areas, however, the pace of growth during the period 2000-2017 was considerably faster, with 21 countries or areas recording an average annual growth rate of 6 per cent or more. Among the countries or areas experiencing the fastest rate of growth during this period were Angola, Qatar and Chile. In contrast, in 56 countries or areas, the population of international migrants declined during the period 2000-2017. In 35 countries or areas, the pace of decline was less than 2 per cent per annum. In 21 countries or areas, however, the international migrant stock shrunk more rapidly, with 5 countries or areas recording an average decline of more than 4 per cent per annum.

Map 1

**Average annual rate of change in the number of international migrants by country or area of destination, 2000 to 2017**



The global level of forced displacement across international borders continues to rise. By the end of 2016, the total number of refugees and asylum seekers in the world was estimated at 25.9 million representing 10.1 per cent of all international migrants. The developing regions hosted 82.5 per cent of the world's refugees and asylum seekers. In 2016, Turkey recorded the largest refugee population, hosting some approximately 3.1 million refugees and asylum seekers. The country experienced the most significant increase in the refugee population since 2000 when it hosted just over 3,000 refugees. In 2016, the second largest country of asylum was Jordan, hosting around 2.9 million refugees, followed by the State of Palestine (2.2 million), Lebanon (1.6) and Pakistan (1.4 million). Germany (1.3 million) and Uganda (1.2 million) also hosted more than one million refugees and asylum seekers in 2016. Given that a large majority of refugees is hosted by developing countries, and that many refugees reside in countries of first asylum for over a decade, there is an urgent need for sharing the burden and responsibility of hosting and caring for refugees more equitably.

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