



MIGRATION AND YOUTH: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES*

Executive Summary

This Thematic Report by the Global Migration Group (GMG) offers a comprehensive overview of the many facets of youth migration, from contexts of rural marginalization and environmental degradation where many young migrants begin their journey to the challenges they face in countries of destination, such as realising their rights, accessing decent work and social protection. It discusses a range of specific issues, ranging from employment to gender to health, education and participation. The report is intended as an action-oriented contribution to the migration policy debate.

In addition to elaborating on perspectives of 12 UN bodies with GMG membership, it also includes chapters prepared by the OECD, scholars, and non-governmental organisations devoted to youth and migration issues. Going beyond a rich and thorough background introduction, chapters include examples of good practices, succinct messages and concrete, forward-thinking policy options for realising the opportunities offered by youth migration.

YOUTH MIGRATION

Today, there are approximately 232 million international migrants (this estimate includes all people living in a country or area other than that in which they were born,), according to the 2013 UN estimate of global migrant stocks,¹ of whom roughly 12 per cent are between 15 and 24 years of age. Young people comprise a considerably larger share of contemporary migration flows.

Acknowledging that it remains difficult to determine drivers of migration among adolescents and youth, the report notes that young people's motivations to migrate are often linked to the search for decent livelihoods due to lack of employment and/or under-employment, indecent working conditions and poor economic prospects in countries of origin. Furthering education, family reunification and escaping from regions affected by war, persecution, humanitarian crises or natural disasters are also important motives for migration. In many cases, gender-based discrimination, including gender-based violence or restrictions on women's rights, is another reason for migration.

WHY ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH?

The report focuses on migrant adolescents and youth because they represent a specific category of migrants whose unique needs, rights and challenges are not addressed as part of the larger migration policy debate. It refers to youth/adolescent migrants as persons aged 15-24, those the United Nations (UN) defines as ‘youth’ “without prejudice to other definitions by Member States.”² The report on occasion references groups other than those aged 15-to-24. Several chapters include discussions of internal as well as international migration issues, and certain chapters also address youth/adolescents affected by migration in other ways, such as children born to immigrant parents in destination countries.

Adolescence and youth are pivotal stages of human development, during which young people make the transition from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood. During adolescence the investments and gains of early and middle childhood come to fruition; however, these gains must be sustained and consolidated to ensure an effective transition into adulthood.³ It is also a period during which social, economic, biological and other events occur that set the stage for adult life.

A positive migration experience during this age period can set young migrants on a successful path toward capitalising on their accomplishments and developing economic and social assets for their future. However, if migration takes place during these years and the circumstances are negative, the experience can have particularly dire and traumatizing consequences for adolescents’ short- and long-term future. Not only can they lose a valuable opportunity for full human development, but their countries of birth and destination stand to lose an enormous potential contribution to social, economic and cultural development.

Getting today’s policies right concerning adolescent and youth migrants also means planning for the future. By 2025 – when the global population is expected to reach 8 billion – countries around the globe will be impacted by demographic changes evolving today. The majority of the next billion people will be born in low- and middle-income countries.⁴ While developed countries are simultaneously facing low fertility rates, ageing populations and declining workforces, many less developed countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia continue experiencing higher birth rates and a significant “youth bulge”.⁵ The former need workers while growing numbers of young

people in less-developed countries need jobs. Migration will be a major factor in response to those trends.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH MIGRANTS

Adolescent and youth migrants are generally resourceful, resilient, adaptable to new environments and able to learn and speak new languages. Many have skills and qualifications and are familiar with new technologies. For many young people migration represents an important step toward achieving a sustainable life for themselves and their families. For others migration is a way to escape from chronic poverty, violence, gender-based discrimination or the effects of climate change.

In host communities, equality of treatment and opportunity allows migrants to contribute as productive members of communities, as workers, students, entrepreneurs, artists, and consumers. If migration becomes a productive and empowering experience and opens up new opportunities, young people can gain more skills through education and/or work experience and earn higher wages, allowing them to support their families and contribute to the development of their communities of origin as well as the societies where they live and work. Especially for young women, migration can also be a socially empowering experience. As the recipient of remittances or as a breadwinner in a new country, they may gain decision-making power and they may experience greater rights and personal autonomy and be able to participate in political processes.

In all countries, a conducive policy environment can tap into young people's energy, propensity to innovate and familiarity with new technologies to revitalise economies. The young and mobile represent human resources and development potential for both the countries where they were born and those to which they migrate.

SPECIFIC NEEDS AND VULNERABILITIES OF ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH MIGRANTS

Risks faced by migrants are exacerbated in the case of adolescents and youth. Young migrants are more vulnerable when, in combination with their age and stage of life, they experience isolation, exclusion, discrimination and insecurity. Moreover, in the migration process young people can lose their social networks and may also be without parents or family members to provide guidance and care. Young people may be

particularly affected by xenophobia and discrimination and suffer further marginalization due to lack of fluency in the local language, new and different cultural norms and lack of information about laws and regulations.

Young migrants are particularly vulnerable to risks when they are in irregular situations and face threats of exploitation, trafficking, exclusion, detection, detention and deportation. Adolescent and youth migrants, especially girls, are vulnerable to human rights violations such as child marriage, sexual exploitation, violence and unpaid labour.

To overcome these risks and to enhance their development potential and their contributions to their countries of origin and destination, young migrants need to be able to realise their rights, such as the right and access to education, health care, non-discrimination, including in employment, participation in decision-making, and family life.

YOUTH, MIGRATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

In framing this report, GMG agencies recognized that migration is not a panacea for achieving development, nor can promoting migration substitute for appropriate public policies on development or on governing migration. However, it is a global reality that, if addressed wisely, migration can benefit all concerned and involve adolescents and youth. GMG members share the premise that *the migration experience can be beneficial to adolescents and youth if – and only if –* migration policies are anchored in a system that protects young migrants' human and labour rights.

With the approach of 2015, the target year for achieving the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) set in 2000, global debates now revolve around establishing development goals for the post-2015 era. The UN post-2015 Task Team acknowledged migration and mobility as important enablers for inclusive and sustainable development and growth.⁶ Global consultations on population dynamics also strongly urged integrating migration into the new development framework.

This report contributes to the discussions about the post-2015 agenda through its comprehensive and exclusive focus on migration as it affects adolescents and youth. It complements and supports the GMG Position Paper on Migration and the post- 2015 Development Agenda.⁷ The challenge is not only how to make youth and migration

relevant to the global agenda, but also how to make that agenda relevant to youth and the realities of global interconnectedness and mobility.

CONTENT AND ORGANISATION

The following summary of chapter content reflects the organisation of the full report into five thematic sections that explore different aspects of the situation faced by millions of young people as migrants, potential migrants, or sons and daughters of migrant parents.

Each chapter describes and analyses an important area of concern related to youth migration and offers policy options that could improve outcomes for young people, the countries they leave, and those they move to. Each chapter identifies key messages and policy recommendations, in some cases specific to concerned government entities and related stakeholders.

The conclusion offers a succinct summary of the key findings of the report. For easy reference, two final sections list the Key Messages and Policy Recommendations from the chapters of the full report, intended for consideration in national policies and practices or by specialised government institutions and non-governmental stakeholders.

Facts, figures and trends

Chapter 1: *Youth Migration: Facts & Figures*, authored by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA), and building on the joint work between UN/DESA and UNICEF to gather and analyse data available on youth migration, provides an overview of available facts and figures on youth migration and offers recommendations for improving the evidence base in this regard. It highlights the need for migration data disaggregated by age, sex and other relevant factors to: reveal an accurate picture of the situation of young migrants; gain better understanding of the youth migration phenomenon; and provide the foundation for evidence-based policy-making. The main recommendations are: to strengthen the evidence base on youth migration by investing in collection, dissemination and analysis of age- and sex-disaggregated data; to build the capacity of governments to obtain, disseminate and analyse such data; and to support qualitative and quantitative research.

Respecting human rights, social protection and gender

The second section of the report reviews the manner in which human rights, social protection gender and refugee protection intersect with youth migration. The first chapter, *Human Rights of Adolescents and Youth in the Context of Migration*, was prepared under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with contributions by the National University of Lanús (Argentina), the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) and UNICEF. The chapter describes how, despite an international framework designed to protect and promote the rights of all individuals, and despite the specific provisions of the CRC protecting those under the age of 18, adolescent and youth migrants experience numerous human rights violations. The chapter includes an in-depth look at the impacts of immigration-related detention and restricted access to education on the rights, well-being and development of undocumented adolescents and youth, highlighting specific challenges around mental health and psycho- social development. The contribution concludes by calling on the international community and national policy-makers and stakeholders to adopt a rights- based, age- and gender-sensitive, and equity-focused approach to youth migration and development, stressing that the special protections granted to children under international and national law and policy should not automatically disappear when the child reaches 18 years

The third chapter, *Role and Relevance of Social Protection*, prepared by Patrick Taran, Global Migration Policy Associates, based on submissions by Sheila Murthy and Natalia Winder of UNICEF and contributions by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and publication co-editors, explores the social protection rights and needs of migrant adolescents and youth. It highlights social protection measures that could be offered to young migrants in countries of origin and destination to ensure their access to essential services, health care, and a minimal standard of living. The chapter focuses particularly on social security coverage, from which many young migrants are excluded due to their migration status – or are subject to losing upon departure from their country of origin or when they move from country to country. Facilitating equitable access to social protection, including health care and/or insurance for young migrants and their families, enhances their well-being and development contributions. Overall, the chapter recommends incorporating migrant youth into national social security systems.

Chapter 4: *Adolescent and Young Women Migrants*, written by Professor Susan Martin of Georgetown University in consultation with UN Women, examines the lives, needs and accomplishments of adolescent girls and young women affected by migration. It describes the causes and forms of their migration, gaps in law and policy, and three areas of particular importance in understanding the impact of migration on gender roles and on young women: education, health and employment. The gender issues analysed in this chapter and reflected elsewhere in the text highlight similarities, differences and inequities that exist in both origin and destination countries, which may be reinforced or weakened by economic, political and social institutions.¹⁵ Equality for adolescent and young women migrants must be considered in policy and practice through the development of gender-responsive measures, laws and practices to protect their rights.

Chapter 5: *The Refugee Dimension: Adolescents' and Youths' Right to Seek and Access Asylum and Protection* was prepared by Noëmi Fivat with Monika Sandvik-Nylund, Grith Norgaard and Sumbul Rizvi of UNHCR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). It focuses on the risks and vulnerabilities facing the growing number of adolescents and youth, including unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), seeking refugee protection in a context of increased mobility but intensified control over movement of people. It provides case studies of refugee youth and unaccompanied minors, and details challenges in ensuring access to refugee protection and to appropriate services and child protection in mixed flows. The chapter discusses and recommends implementation of five key responses: protection sensitive entry systems, child protection systems, alternatives to detention of children and adolescents, family tracing and reunification for UASC, and expanding regularized migration alternatives.

Employment, education and health

Seven chapters of the GMG report address issues related to employment, education and health, issues that impact on the policy agendas of different government institutions as well as social partners and civil society. The sixth chapter, *Youth-Migration-Employment: Burning Issues for Governance, Development and Social Cohesion Worldwide*, written by Patrick Taran of Global Migration Policy Associates in collaboration with the ILO, explains the centrality of employment and decent work to migration, highlighting the risks of precarious work, exploitation and sub-standard working conditions to which many adolescent and

youth migrants are susceptible. It highlights labour market and demographic trends that are fomenting significantly increased demand for migrant skills and labour in many countries, and outlines policy challenges and possible solutions. The chapter concludes that ensuring decent work for young migrants contributes toward realising both the economic and social development benefits of migration and young peoples' social protection and inclusion.

Chapter 7: *Labour, Employment and Youth: Perspectives from West Africa*, prepared by Drs Eleni Bizas and Jérôme Elie of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, highlights that intra-regional mobility is the most common among youth in the context of Africa's regional economic communities, where migration is key to integration and development. It identifies and discusses policy needs in six critical areas: education, decent work, safe mobility, labour-intensive investment, health services and protection. Policies that address the obstacles posed by local realities could alternatively enable youth to stay at home, make migration safer for those on the move, or empower youth to maximise their potential when seeking employment in local, regional or global markets. Recommendations for policy-makers include: strengthen implementation of international and ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) legal frameworks; improve data gathering; focus on education and training for rural youth; provide information about available employment; and incorporate migration into economic and social development policies and strategies.

Chapter 8: *Labour, Rural Youth and Migration*, prepared by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), explores conditions in the rural areas from which many young migrants begin their journey, and urges policy measures aimed at providing employment, financial credit and market opportunities as alternatives to migration for young people as well as at encouraging return from abroad, in order to retain or return talent and social and financial capital in/to places of origin. The overarching message of the chapter is that decent work, economic growth and sustainable development that increase opportunities and social mobility for youth are critical to ensuring that migration is a matter of informed choice rather than necessity. The theme of its recommendations is to provide youth in rural areas with alternatives to outmigration.

Remittances sent by migrants to family members remaining at home play an important role in poverty reduction. Chapter 9: *Remittances, Development and Youth* builds on

contributions by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the University of Sussex. It explores obstacles faced by young people seeking to send remittances, noting that remittances by young migrants play an ever-stronger role in the economies of many developing countries, often helping the most disadvantaged families. The chapter highlights the need for measures to facilitate remittances and lower their costs for young migrants, as well as to enhance access by young migrants to financial services.

Chapter 10: *Offspring of Immigrants in OECD Education Systems and Labour Markets*¹⁶, contributed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), offers perspectives from OECD countries on an important group of children and young people: the children of immigrants, either born in the destination country or who migrated with, or joined, immigrant parents. It shows that although children of immigrants constitute a substantial and growing share of youth in many OECD countries, their educational achievement and access to employment often lag behind peer nationals. It recommends several steps to include children of immigrants in integration policies through targeted approaches, such as expanding their access to pre-school, increasing their opportunities for job training and apprenticeships, and incorporating their parents into labour markets.

Chapter 11: *Migration and Tertiary Education*, prepared by UNESCO, points out that the number of youth studying abroad is growing rapidly, creating a need for international cooperation and regulatory agreements to oversee quality control of higher education and accreditation frameworks. It further stresses the need for dialogue and cooperation among countries to acknowledge educational qualifications obtained in other countries. Enhancing quality and harmonising standards of cross-border tertiary and vocational education can lead to 'win-win' situations for students and employers in both countries of origin and destination. To facilitate mobility for higher education, regional frameworks on accreditation, qualifications and quality assurance represent an important first step.

The final chapter in this section, *Health, Youth Migration and Development*, provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), focuses on the social determinants of migrant health. It examines how the failure to protect and promote rights, along with restrictive immigration and employment policies and pervasive anti-immigrant attitudes, lead to unequal access to health care and services, thus increasing the health risks of young migrants. Since certain health risks are elevated for young migrants and further heightened

by other risks associated with migration, the overarching recommendation is to ensure that adequate health services are available for, and accessible by, adolescent and youth migrants.

Mainstreaming migration

The third section of the book explores the issue of mainstreaming migration; that is, the incorporation of migration into national governance frameworks, mandates, policy-making and activities related to development planning, as well as activities of local governments. It also explores the crucial concern of youth migrant participation.

Chapter 13: *Mainstreaming Youth Migration into National Development Strategies*, prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), assesses the extent to which youth migration has been incorporated into development planning, through an analysis of relevant policies and programmes. It finds that most countries fall short in this endeavour. The chapter highlights promising approaches and urges greater efforts to mainstream youth migration into all relevant aspects of governance, which it argues is critical to achieving coherent and effective policy and practice.

The next chapter (*Local Authorities, Migration and Youth*), contributed by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), underscores the centrality of local government in addressing the impact and consequences of migration and migrants – migrant youth in particular – on local economies, employment, services and community life. It urges local authorities to pay special attention to the integration of migrant communities and to involve migrant youth in consultations and activities. Since cities are epicentres of human mobility, local authorities are well-placed to identify and address issues faced by young migrants and encourage youth involvement through local policies and practices.

Chapter 15: *Strengthening Participation by Young Migrants*, was prepared by Patrick Taran of Global Migration Policy Associates and Alison Raphael, UNICEF editorial consultant, with inputs from several sources including UN-HABITAT, UNESCO and UNICEF. The chapter highlights imperatives and challenges of young migrants' participation in the life and decision-making of the communities where they live and in the policies that affect them. It grounds discussion in the rights to youth and adolescent participation enumerated in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. It discusses concepts and definitions for youth participation, including community, social and political participation as well as in

policy making. It recommends facilitating migrant youth participation in civil society organisations, unions and community groups; recognizing migrant youth and diaspora organisations, facilitating networking and joint projects between young locals and young migrants, and involving government and non-governmental stakeholders.

Environmental change and migration

The chapters in this section highlight the vulnerability of young people to the effects of environmental degradation and climate change, as well as their potentially instrumental role in encouraging local development and resilience. A brief introduction to the section by Dr Benjamin Schraven of the German Development Institute highlights the complex and interrelated environmental, socio-economic, cultural, political and demographic factors that influence the climate change/environmental degradation-migration nexus.

Chapter 16: *Youth, Environmental Change and Migration*, by the IOM and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), discusses environmental change as a migration trigger, observing that different types of environmental change lead to different types of migration. It highlights that migration should not be viewed as a failure to adapt to environmental change; on the contrary, migration is often part of adaptation strategies. The chapter provides an analysis of the relationships between young people, migration and environmental change, stressing the urgent need to improve the knowledge base on the inter-linkages between youth migration and environmental change.

The other chapter in this section (*Climate Change, International Migration and Youth*), authored by Professor Susan Martin of Georgetown University, reviews the current understanding about climate change and migration, emphasising the now-recognised potential for climate change to uproot large numbers of people. In this context, youth may migrate locally or internationally, and migration may be voluntary or forced. It notes that climate change-displaced migrants tend to be young people who are responsible for supporting their families in the face of environmental disaster, via financial or in-kind remittances.

Both of these chapters make the case that changes in the environment (whether sudden or gradual onset), directly and indirectly influence the propensity to migrate; that these changes and the resulting displacement are likely to increase in the coming years and will particularly impact youth; and that existing laws, policies and institutional arrangements

are inadequate to deal with this complex phenomenon. Overall, this section presents several recommendations that underline the need for more research and data-gathering and for the development of common guiding principles, particularly regarding the protection of those displaced as a result of environmental or climate change. In particular it stresses the importance of youth-sensitive, participatory and proactive approaches, including comprehensive migration governance strategies and development agendas, as well as support for disaster risk reduction and humanitarian responses.

KEY MESSAGES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The final sections of the GMG report, bringing together Key Messages and Policy Recommendations from all 17 chapters, are included in full below. The key messages provide a summary overview of the main issues and challenges identified in each chapter of the report. The recommendations are likewise reproduced from each chapter.

Together, the recommendations suggest a comprehensive policy agenda to address youth migration. It should be noted that the listing does not reflect any prioritisation by the GMG, nor does it select a 'short list' for concentrated advocacy. Several sections convey general recommendations for national policy and practice regarding youth migration, while others focus on specialised areas of policy and the respective government institutions and non-governmental stakeholders

NOTES

- 1 See data sets at: <http://esa.un.org/unmigration/TIMSA2013/migrantstocks2013.htm> and press release at: <http://esa.un.org/unmigration/wallchart2013.htm>
- 2 United Nations (1981), 'Report of the Advisory Committee for the International Youth Year', UN document A/36/215, Annex, United Nations, New York.
- 3 UNICEF (2011), *The State of the World's Children 2011: Adolescence – An Age of Opportunity*, New York.
- 4 See: Danzhen You and David Anthony (2012), "Generation 2025 and Beyond", UNICEF, New York.
- 5 See: ILO, *The Youth Employment Crisis: Time for Action*, Report V: 101st International Labour Conference, June 2012, ILC.101/V, International Labour Office, Geneva http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_175421.pdf
- 6 "Realizing the Future We Want for All." Report to the Secretary-General by the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda. United Nations, New York, June 2012. Available at: http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf
- 7 GMG (2013) «Integrating migration in the post-2015 UN Development Agenda: Position Paper». Global Migration Group. September 2013. <http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/uploads/news/GMG-position-paper-Migration-and-post-2015-Development-Agenda.pdf>