BRIEFING PAPER
Enhancing the contributions of young migrants to development
IOM, UN Women and UNDP

Policy Recommendations

- Undertake policy-relevant and action-oriented research, informed by documented good practices, to identify and develop evidence-based strategies for enhancing the well-being and contributions of young migrants to development;

- The views and experiences of children and young persons as well as those of young migrants’ associations must be considered and constitute an integral part of strategies developed to enhance the well-being of young migrants;

- Mainstream gender and human rights in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies, programmes and development plans with respect to children and young migrants, including in the areas of health, education, employment, non-discrimination, and social and economic integration;

- Strengthen capacity development and skill sets of children and young persons, in particular, young migrants to enhance and maximize their contributions to development in both countries of origin and destination;

- Develop and ensure the enforcement of protection mechanisms for young migrants and their families throughout the migration process;

- Raise public awareness on the rights of young migrants and their families as well as their contributions to development;

- Strengthen regional and bilateral partnerships on migration through dialogue and cooperation at the inter-State and inter-agency levels as well as with civil society and other stakeholders to enhance the well-being of young migrants and their contributions to development.

- Implement mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation of women and youth voices when planning developing policies that may affect them, especially in countries of origin.
**Introduction**

The definition of young migrants often varies from one context to another but broadly encompasses migrant youth, adolescents and children.\(^1\) For the purposes of this paper, emphasis will be placed on young migrants with regard to two main issues, namely:

- The central role that respect for, and protection and fulfillment of the human rights of young migrants plays in countries’ developmental processes;
- The promotion of decent work for all migrant youth through gender-sensitive migration management as a catalyst to spur economic and social development and mitigate the distress of migration.

Development can be defined as the process of improving the overall quality of life of a group of people and in particular by expanding the range of opportunities open to them.\(^2\) While it is important to note that the welfare of young migrants is distinct from young migrants’ contributions to national development processes, the two are inter-dependent. Increasing the well-being of young migrants, including in the areas of health, education, vocational training, employment, non-discrimination, social and economic integration is directly linked to the strengthening of their contributions to development. Similarly, the promotion of gender equality, the protection and enforcement of the human rights of young migrants strengthens their potential to contribute to development for the benefits of migrants as well as societies in countries of origin, transit and destination.

Today, a significant number of the world’s youth, approximately 87% reside in developing countries,\(^3\), the majority of whom live in rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa, south-eastern and south-central Asia and Oceania.\(^4\) Youth account for nearly half of the world’s total unemployed despite the fact that they comprise just 25% of the working age population over 15 years of age.\(^5\) Globally there are an estimated 33 million migrants under the age of 20 years, which represents approximately 15 per cent of the total migrant population.\(^6\)

Migrants are among the workers worst affected by the global economic and financial crisis as they tend to be younger, are more likely to be in temporary jobs, have less formal education and are concentrated in the hardest-hit employment sectors.\(^7\) Policymakers need to address the challenges experienced by young migrant women from developing countries who are disproportionately represented as being neither in school nor working in the countries of destination. These destination countries include

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1. In order to establish more clearly the various issues of relevance with regard to young migrants it is important to briefly outline the composite elements. Migrant youth may be defined as young migrants between the ages of 15 and 24 years. The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines ‘youth’, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. This definition was developed during preparations for the International Youth Year (1985), and endorsed by the General Assembly (A/36/215 and resolution 36/28, 1981). The definition of adolescents refers to people between the ages of 10 and 19 years (UNICEF (2002) Adolescence: A Time that Matters). By contrast, children may be defined as persons under the age of 18 years of age unless, if under applicable laws, majority status is attained earlier (Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).
5. OECD (2009) Promoting Pro-Poor Growth Employment, Youth Employment, page 120.
Argentina, South Africa, Spain and the United States, although many young male migrants from the global South also fall under this category in certain countries.\(^8\)

Studies show that girls and young women migrating independently from developing countries face particular risks and challenges. Women and girls are disproportionately represented in human trafficking and migrant smuggling statistics. The UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) states that in 2006, based on available data from 61 countries, 79% of human trafficking victims were female – 66% were women, and 13% were girls.\(^9\) Often in situations where young women do migrate autonomously, they are compelled to seek employment in order to support their families, often more so than their male counterpart, who may have a greater degree of independence from family control. Several researchers point to the Philippines as one such society, where the majority of migrants are young women.\(^10\)

Young women often migrate to accompany or join their migrant spouses, while young male migrants are much less likely to be married.\(^11\) Young migrants who find employment are concentrated in gendered jobs and sectors. Male youth tend to work in physically intensive jobs like construction and agricultural labour, while female youth are most likely to be employed as domestic workers, waitresses, cooks, cashiers and sales clerks.\(^12\) Therefore, whilst migration often presents a viable livelihood and/or adaptation strategy for young migrants and their families in the face of an ever-changing geo-political, social and economic landscape, it needs to be recognized that young migrants may be exposed to negative aspects related to migration. Both angles will be canvassed in greater depth in the ensuing sessions.

The current *International Year of Youth*, running from 12 August 2010 to 11 August 2011, presents a timely opportunity to consider strategies for enhancing the well-being of youth and contributions to development of young migrants.

**Evidence**

Fulfillment of the human rights of young migrants is directly linked to their development potential and ultimately the real and potential contributions they can make to development objectives in countries of origin and destination. To these ends, there is a need to include the following key factors:

- Young migrants are not merely passive subjects but active agents of development in both countries of origin and destination and, as such, have the right to participate in social, economic and political platforms and processes meaningfully. To this end young migrants are key drivers of diaspora engagement in countries of origin and destination, also serving as a bridge across different cultures and societies;

- It is essential to invest in promoting access to effective youth-friendly facilities with regard to education, vocational training, health - including sexual and reproductive health - and other social services, information dissemination on the value of diverse, inclusive and integrated societies, promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment and the promotion and protection of human rights of all young people and in particular young migrants;

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\(^10\) Ibid, p. 6.

\(^11\) Ibid, p. 10.

\(^12\) Ibid, p. 15.
That social as well as economic integration, is a prerequisite for the full enjoyment of young migrants’ human rights, it is a process that begins in the country of origin continues in the country of destination and throughout the migration cycle (including return and reintegration). Information-sharing on the human rights of migrants is critical throughout the migration process; and

There is a need to create and consolidate sex- and age-disaggregated migration data, especially on child and youth migrants. This will form the evidence base for upholding young migrants’ human rights, and harnessing their well-being and contributions to development.

Responses that provide safe and viable channels for youth employment and labour mobility are an essential means of harnessing the development potential of migrant youth. Specific examples include the following:

- Joint programmes on Youth, Employment and Migration (YEM) sponsored by the Spanish Millennium Development Goal Achievement Fund (MDGF);
- Investments in education, vocational training, job creation, decent standards of work, social security and in facilitating the portability as well as totalization of social benefits for young migrant women and men;
- Multi-level engagement of governments, employers, local communities, civil society organisations, UN agencies, international organizations, regional bodies and inter-regional fora (IRF) on youth employment and labour mobility which enhances the contribution of migrant youth to development. Increased dialogue on migration at national, regional and global levels, specifically aimed at developing tailored policy responses targeting young migrants, is also essential.

Gaps and Challenges

- Lack of reliable disaggregated data (by sex and age) as well as research on the movement of young migrants, more so those made vulnerable because they are in an irregular situation, are unaccompanied or separated children. The same challenge holds true with regard to children who remain/ are left behind in the countries of origin;
- Lack of effective protection mechanisms for young migrants, including protection against gender based and domestic violence. Often where protection mechanism do exist, young migrants are either not aware of their existence or have limited access to them. The lack of youth- as well as migrant-friendly and gender-sensitive facilities and services is also an obstacle to enhancing the well-being and development of young migrants, which ultimately also limits their contributions to development;
- Lack of consideration of the views and experiences of young migrants and young migrant associations in the development of strategies concerning them;
- Rising levels of xenophobia and discrimination against migrants that are often fuelled by deep-seated gender, racial, ethnic, religious and social biases, incorrect perceptions of migrants taking jobs from host populations, and exacerbated by a limited understanding of migrants’ contributions to the development of communities in countries of destination. Upon return and during the reintegration process, similar discrimination may also be experienced in the countries of origin;
- Increased vulnerability of young migrants, in particular female migrants to gender-based violence, to exploitation and abuse throughout the migration process including those in an irregular situation, especially young women and girls and unaccompanied migrant children;
• Human trafficking and migrant smuggling, in particular of young children;
• Need for improved cooperation on migration at all levels, greater policy coherence and more action-oriented responses to address the gaps and challenges associated with young migrants.

Conclusions

The importance of mainstreaming gender and human rights considerations in policy-relevant research and migration data that informs holistic policy and programmatic interventions for young migrants cannot be over-emphasized. The well-being and contributions of young migrants can be enhanced by promoting and protecting gender equality and women’s empowerment and human rights, including access to education, health, and other social services and forms of assistance. This will facilitate safe, humane and orderly migration; create viable and sustainable alternatives to forced/distress migration and realize the human development outcomes envisaged by key development indicators including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for all young people in both countries of origin and destination.

Sources/Acknowledgements:


UN General Assembly (A/36/215 and resolution 36/28, 1981.


About the GMG The Global Migration Group (GMG) is an inter-agency group bringing together 16 agencies including ILO, IOM, OHCHR, UNCTAD, UN/DESA, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNIGC, UNITAR, UNODC, UN Regional Commissions, UN Women, World Bank, and WHO to promote the wider application of all relevant international and regional instruments and norms relating to international migration, and to encourage the adoption of more coherent, comprehensive and better coordinated approaches to the issue of international migration. The GMG is particularly concerned with improving the overall effectiveness of its members and other stakeholders in capitalizing upon the opportunities and responding to the challenges presented by international migration. For further information: www.globalmigrationgroup.org