

Overview

Recent Trends In International Migration

International migrants are defined as persons who stay outside of their country of birth for at least one year. The number of international migrants have been increased from 103 million to 220 million during the period from 1980 to 2010. In 2013, the figure was 232 million, and is projected to be double reaching 400 million by 2050¹. However, in 2013, international migrants comprised only about 3.2% of the world population, compared to 2.9% in 1990². The number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow rapidly over the past fifteen years reaching up 244 million in 2015, from 222 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 3 per cent. Since then, however, it has slowed, falling to around 1.9 per cent per year during the period 2010-2015. In 2015, two thirds (67 per cent) of international migrants were living in just twenty countries. The largest number of international migrants (47 million) has been residing in the United States of America, equal to about a fifth (19 per cent) of the world's total migrants. Germany and the Russian Federation hosted the second and third largest numbers of migrants worldwide (12 million each), followed by Saudi Arabia (10 million).⁹

Women comprise slightly less than half of all international migrants. The share of female migrants fell from 49 per cent in 2000 to 48 per cent in 2015. Female migrants outnumber male migrants in Europe and Northern America, while in Africa and Asia, particularly Western Asia, migrants are predominantly men.¹⁰

In 2015, worldwide median age for international migrants was 39, which was 38 in 2000. The median age of international migrants worldwide was 39 years in 2015, a slight increase from 38 years in 2000. Yet in some major areas, the migrant stock is becoming younger. Between 2000 and 2015, the median age of international migrants declined in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Oceania. Most migrants worldwide are of working age. In 2015, 72 per cent of all international migrants were aged between 20 to 64 years old, which is 58 per cent of the total population (figure 7). Younger persons, below age 20, tend to be underrepresented amongst international migrants. Globally, 15 per cent of the entire migrants were under 20 years of age, which is 34 per cent of the total population. Thirteen per cent of migrants worldwide were below 65 years old, nearly twice as high as the percentage of persons over 65 years globally.¹¹

There are considerable differences across major areas in the proportion of women among all international migrants. Since 2000, the proportion of female migrants increased in all major areas with the exception of Africa and Asia. In Europe, the female share of migrants rose from 51.6 per cent in 2000 to 52.4 per cent in 2015. Likewise, in Northern America, the percentage of women among all international migrants rose from 50.5 to 51.2 per cent during

¹-Philip Martin, "The Global Challenge of Managing Migration", *Population Bulletin* 68, No. 02 (2013).

²-OECD-UNDESA, "World Migration in Figures", October 2013

⁹- Population Division of Dept. of Economic & Social Affairs, United Nations, International migration report 2015.

¹⁰- do

¹¹- do

this period. The larger proportion of female migrants in those major areas was mainly the outcome of the aging in place of migrants who had arrived decades earlier and the fact that females, including female migrants, tend to have longer life expectancies compared to males. By contrast, in Asia the percentage of female migrants fell from 45.6 per cent in 2000 to 42 per cent in 2015. The reason for this decline rests primarily with the high concentration of males among recent migrant inflows.¹²

In Asia, the number of male migrants grew significantly more than the number of female migrants. The stock of male migrants in Asia grew by 62 per cent, from 27 million in 2000 to 44 million in 2015. This increase was fuelled in part by the strong demand for male migrant workers in the oil-producing countries of Western Asia. The stock of female migrants in Asia increased by 40 per cent from 22 million in 2000 to 32 million in 2015. Africa also experienced a more pronounced growth in male migrants (42 per cent) during the period 2000 - 2015 compared to female migrants (37 per cent). By contrast, in Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, Northern America and Oceania, the stock of female migrants grew more rapidly than the stock of male migrants.¹³

The countries of northern region (called as “Developed Countries”) in the world have given shelter for 136 million international migrants, while the developing countries in the southern region have sheltered 96 million international migrants. The most international migrants are in the working age (20 to 64 years) and account for 74 per cent of the total. Women account for 48 per cent of all international migrants³.

According to the United Nations Population Division, South Asians were the largest group of international migrants living outside of their home region in 2013. Out 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 of their home region. About 16.3 million, out of 17.4 million Central American migrants lived in the US. Europe and Asia 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 year⁴. The Majority of people are economic migrants. There's a prominent claim among immigration opponents that the majority of people who are entering Europe through irregular means during this crisis are not refugees, but rather economic migrants searching for economic opportunities.⁵

When the regions of destinations are concerned, Asia had the largest increase of international migrants since 2000, adding some 20 million migrants in 13 years. This growth was mainly caused 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 Thailand⁶.

³ -Population Division of Dept. of Economic & Social Affairs, United Nations, Press Release 11th Sept. 2013.

⁴ -do-

⁶ -do-

⁵ - Nick Robins – Early world reporter, The Huffington post

¹² - Population Division of Dept. of Economic & Social Affairs, United Nations, International migration report 2015.

Nearly two thirds of all international migrants worldwide live in Europe or Asia. In 2015, 76 million international migrants were residing in Europe, compared to 75 million in Asia. Northern America hosted the third largest number of international migrants (54 million), followed by Africa (21 million), Latin America and the Caribbean (9 million), and Oceania (8 million). Between 2000 and 2015, Asia added more international migrants than any other major area. Asia gained some 26 million international migrants during this period or 1.7 million additional migrants per annum. Europe added the second largest number of international migrants between 2000 and 2015 (20 million, or 1.3 million per year), followed by Northern America (14 million, or 0.9 million per year) and Africa (6 million, or 0.4 million per year). Latin America and the Caribbean and Oceania added comparatively smaller numbers of migrants during this period (3 million, or 0.2 million per year each). Despite this continued growth, international migrants accounted for less than 2 per cent of the 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 population.⁷

In 2015, 67 per cent of all international migrants in the world were living in just twenty countries. The largest number of international migrants have been residing in the United States of America: 47 million, equal to 19 per cent of the world's total. Germany and the Russian Federation hosted the second and third largest numbers of migrants worldwide (around 12 million each), followed by Saudi Arabia (10 million), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (nearly 9 million), and the United Arab Emirates (8 million). Of the top twenty destinations of international migrants' worldwide, nine were in Asia, seven in Europe, two in Northern America, and one each in Africa and Oceania.⁸

⁷-International Migration Report - 2015

⁸-Population Division of Dept. of Economic & Social Affairs, United Nations, International migration report 2015.

The Sri Lankan Context

The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) has been established under the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act No. 21 of 1985 amended by the Act No. 04 of 1994 and Act No. 56 of 2009. The SLBFE which is currently under the purview of Ministry of Foreign Employment is the sole authority in Sri Lanka which is basically responsible for governance and regulation of the foreign employment industry, protection and welfare of migrant workers and their family members, and promotion and development of employment opportunities for Sri Lankans outside Sri Lanka.

Foreign employment has become the largest source of foreign exchange in the Sri Lankan economy during the past few years. Since 1970's when formal employment migration commenced, foreign employment has generated substantial inflows of remittance while relieving pressure on unemployment of youth by providing employment abroad. A total of 263,307 persons (males 66%, females 34%) left for foreign employment in 2015. During the year 2015, the workers' remittances accounted a sum of Rs. 948,957million and it was around 9% of the GDP of the Country, Foreign employment has also been important in terms of skills transfer, investment, brain circulation in addition to contributing to overcome the problems of balance of payment, unemployment etc. However, it is obvious that labour migration has both positive and negative socio-economic impact and other consequences.

Analysis of statistics discloses that the total departures for foreign employment in 2015 decreased by 12.4% compared to 2014. Increase in departures through private sources by 18.2% and decrease in recruitments by licensed foreign employment agencies by 33.9% caused this change in total departures.

Migration of women for employment, to a greater extent, remained steady from 1995 to 2015 and declined to 34% in 2015 due to the rapid upward swing in men's migration. Further, several policy decisions taken by the SLBFE during the latter half of the year 2013 have also caused the decline females migration in 2014. Increasing the minimum age limit of women migrating for domestic work, upgrading the training given to female domestic workers to the level 3 of National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and making this qualification compulsory for women migrating to Saudi Arabia for domestic work, and introducing the mandatory requirement for potential women migrant workers to submit a family background report etc; are among the most influential policy decisions.

Increase in departures of professionals by 16.5% in year 2015 compare to year 2014, and increase in number of persons left for skilled level jobs by 12.2% are among the other important developments taken place in 2015. Colombo district contributed to 11.9% of total number of persons migrated for employment while the Kandy district has scored the second highest percentage (10.1) in 2015. Gampaha district contributed to 10% of total number of foreign employment departures. Middle East remains the major region of destination of Sri Lankan migrant employees while the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait are the major receiving countries. In 2015, 84% of the total migrant employees were recruited by these 4 Middle Eastern countries.

Although the statistics given in this report provide an idea that the number of vacancies seemed to be significantly higher than the number of persons sent abroad for employment, a further analysis of data available with SLBFE disclose that actual number of available vacancies would be somewhat lower than the figures indicated in the statistical tables, as certain foreign employment agencies or the employers place the same job order (a list of vacancies) with several local licensed foreign employment agencies. In addition, increase in local wage levels and cost of recruitment, and decrease in wage levels offered by foreign employers are among the factors lowering the motivation of Sri Lankan employees to go for foreign employment.

However, it is stressed that there is a huge demand for Sri Lankan human resources in abroad. Therefore, professional education and vocational training courses are yet to be enhanced aligning with foreign requirements, providing foreign language skills (English) and on the job training in more effective manner. Since the work experience also a major concern of foreign employers, establishment of a proper centralized mechanism to facilitate the passed out students to earn job experience has become a highest priority.