



# UNITED NATIONS WORLD YOUTH REPORT YOUTH & MIGRATION

**THE WORLD YOUTH REPORT** explores the situation of young migrants from the perspective of young migrants themselves. The report highlights some of the concerns, challenges and successes experienced by young migrants based on their own lives and told in their own voices. Experiences during the different phases of migration are examined including preparation, journey and transit, challenges faced in the destination, as well as awareness and engagement of young people on migration issues.

Young people are crucial stakeholders in the pursuit of successful migration outcomes. However, too often their voices go unheard. As such, the World Youth Report aims to explore youth migration issues primarily through the words of young people themselves around the world. To this effect, the Report was developed through a range of participatory consultations designed to draw on the perspectives of young people on how migration affects them. These consultative sessions included a five-week e-consultation process, a survey on youth migration and development, a call for visual art illustrating the daily life experiences of young migrants as well as youth initiatives on migration and development, and a Google+ Hangout to identify sustainable solutions for addressing youth migration challenges.

Recognizing the diversity of youth migrants is important for understanding the impact of migration on the human development of young men and women as well as on their countries of origin and destination. It is also essential for designing specific interventions that address their unique vulnerabilities and enable them to realize their hopes and aspirations.

International migration has increased steadily over the years and now stands at some **232 million international migrants worldwide, of whom some 30 per cent are aged under 29 years**. Young people attest to a variety of reasons for migrating including personal and socio-economic circumstances, such as job and educational prospects as

well as the political situation in their country of origin. A smaller, although significant, number of young people are forced to migrate, as a result of natural or man-made circumstances; and in 2013, 15 million international migrants were refugees.

The impacts of youth migration are mixed. When young people migrate, they tend to improve both their own financial situation and the economic circumstances of their families through the income they earn and the remittances they send home, while destination countries benefit from greater economic efficiency. Gender equity can also be reinforced as young women's decision making authority within families and society can be increased. However, countries of origin can suffer from negative impacts of human capital flight, or brain drain, notably of health and education professionals. At the same time, youth left behind by migrant parents may miss parental guidance in their formative years, but can gain increased capacity in assuming greater responsibility for their household and greater family resources from remittances if spent on education, health care and other basic needs.

The process of migration itself brings different challenges and experiences and can affect overall outcomes for young people. Prior to migration, young people may be excited at the prospect of leaving home and discovering a new place, while they also face challenges. Participants in online consultations most often cited the difficulty of obtaining accurate information about their intended destination. Similarly, practicalities such as obtaining the necessary documents and arranging travel and accommodation can be complicated, expensive and time consuming. Without accurate information, young people can fall vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. To ease the preparatory stage, young people recommended the development of tools to help those thinking of migration to assess their readiness and to facilitate decision-making and planning, including peer-to-peer initiatives, pre-departure orientation programmes and awareness-raising campaigns.

**“I faced unique challenges migrating as a young person. I was vulnerable to any situation at that time. People took advantage of me.”**

In their journey from country of origin to their final destination, some international migrants spend time in a transit country. Although careful planning may reduce travel risks, evidence suggests that the transit journey can be the most dangerous part of the migration process; as many migrants have limited social networks and support they can be vulnerable to threats that could affect their well-being and ability to reach a

destination country. A number of participants affirmed that support at this stage helped their transit, they highlighted assistance ranging from strangers in the transit country translating labels in shops, to provision of emergency health-care services, and help from diaspora communities and friends and family back home.

**“The most [valuable] support my wife and I received . . . was care and concern.”**

Once they reach their destination country, the experiences of migrant youth vary greatly depending on migration motives, gender and migration status. Recent arrivals often experience **culture shock and loneliness**. They also have to cope with finding accommodation, employment, deal with transport and may have to overcome **communication barriers**. In the longer term, they may face **stereotyping and discrimination at work and in society** at large. These challenges may interfere with their social and economic integration and limit their opportunities for development. **Social networks and establishing connections in new places helps newcomers settle in**, while maintaining ties with their countries of origin eases their transition and provides emotional continuity. Young migrants lacking access to such support systems tend to experience slower or less effective integration and are more likely to be subjected to abuse and exploitation.

Looking at work and life experiences in the destination, moderately or highly skilled youth with higher levels of education, knowledge of the working language(s), and some work experience have a better chance of securing a decent job after migrating. While young migrants in irregular situations, those seeking a job for the first-time, as well as those from poorer economic backgrounds with fewer skills and lower educational attainment are more likely to work in dirty, difficult and dangerous conditions. Young migrants in irregular situations can face additional vulnerabilities including in access to health care which they may avoid using for fear of arrest and deportation. These challenges are intensified at times of economic downturn when young immigrants are more likely than others to lose their jobs.

**“These youth migrants work under harsh conditions in destination countries. There’s often a thin line between the victims of legal migration and the victims of irregular migration.”**

Overall, migration outcomes vary widely. While youth are especially vulnerable to the risks and dangers associated with migration, their capacity as agents of social change and development should not be underestimated. Some young migrants return to their country of origin, either voluntarily or involuntarily, whereas others remain in the destination. Whatever they decide, young people typically find that the migration experience has transformed them.

## Continuing the journey forward

Recognizing the valuable knowledge that young migrants and youth affected by migration possess, Governments and development partners in a number of countries engage young people in developing national planning strategies and policies. At the same time, a number of national youth commissions, youth-led organizations and other youth civil society networks have been directly involved in official decision-making structures at the highest levels. However, engagement remains exceptional and many young people, particularly the most vulnerable, lack knowledge of how to participate in relevant networks. An increased commitment among young people, youth-led organizations and greater political will of decision makers at all levels are needed for meaningful youth participation in migration and development policy planning. Promoting awareness of young people and to enable their full engagement in migration-centred initiatives can facilitate their experience and enable them to assume ownership of their contribution to development.