

## Trends in international migration, 2015

### 1. The number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow rapidly over the past fifteen years.

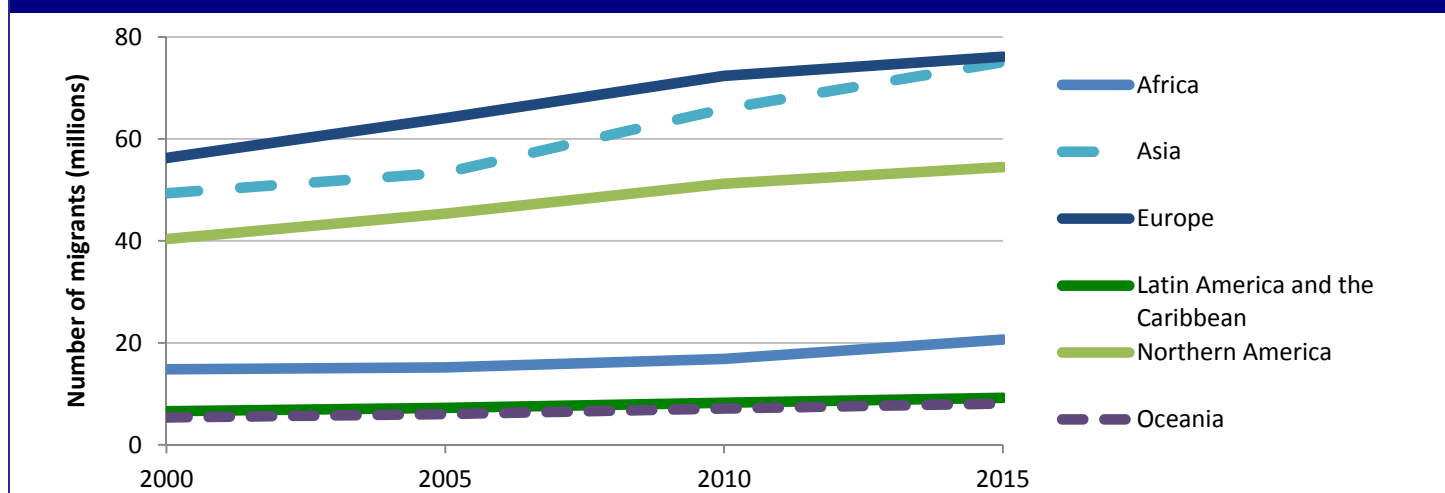
The number of international migrants — persons living in a country other than where they were born — reached 244 million in 2015 for the world as a whole, an increase of 71 million, or 41 per cent, compared to 2000. Nearly two thirds of all international migrants live in Europe (76 million) or Asia (75 million). Northern America hosts 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 of the world. Asia gained 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). Both 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).

In many parts of the world, migration occurs primarily between countries that are located within the same major area. In 2015, the majority of the international migrants living in Africa (87 per cent), Asia (82 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (66 per cent) and Europe (53 per cent) originated from another country located in the same major area. In contrast, the majority of international migrants living in Northern America (98 per cent) and Oceania (87 per cent) were born in a major area other than the one where they currently reside.

In 2015, two thirds (67 per cent) of all international migrants were living in just twenty countries. The largest number of international migrants (47 million) resides in the United States of America, equal to about a fifth (19 per cent) of the world's total. Germany and the Russian Federation host the second and third largest numbers of migrants worldwide (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 countries of destination for international migrants worldwide, nine are located in Asia, seven in Europe, two in Northern America, and one each in Africa and Oceania.

Figure 1. Number of international migrants by major area of destination, 2000 to 2015

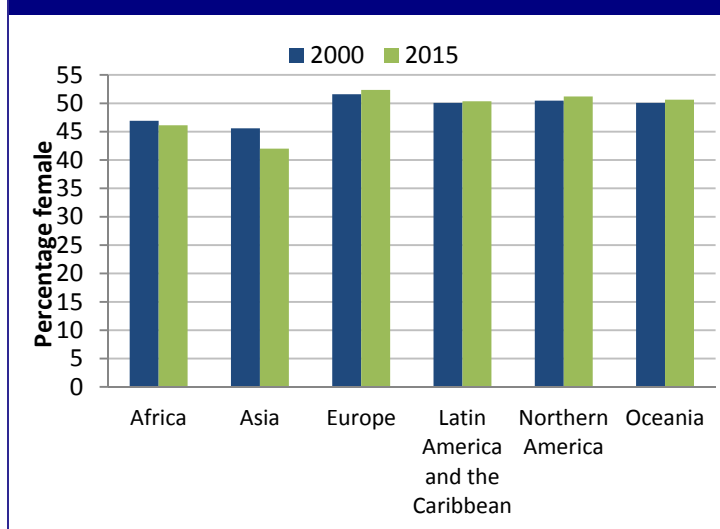


Data source: United Nations (2015a).

## 2. Women comprise slightly less than half of all international migrants.

Between 2000 and 2015, the female share in the global international migrant stock fell slightly, from 49.1 per cent to 48.2 per cent. In 2015, the percentage female among all international migrants was highest in Europe (52.4 per cent) and Northern America (51.2 per cent). It is much lower in Asia (42.0 per cent) and Africa (46.1 per cent), where male migrants significantly outnumber female migrants. Latin America and the Caribbean and Oceania host almost equal numbers of female and male migrants (figure 2).

**Figure 2. Percentage female among international migrants by major area, 2000 and 2015**



Data source: United Nations (2015a).

In recent years, Asia has witnessed a rapid increase in the number of international migrants. The stock of male migrants in Asia grew by 62 per cent, from 27 million in 2000 to 44 million in 2015, while the stock of female migrants increased by more than 40 per cent, from 22 million to 32 million. Africa also experienced a more pronounced growth in the number of male compared to female migrants. By contrast, in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America and Oceania, the migrant stock grew faster for women than for men. The increasing number of male migrants in Asia has been fuelled by a strong demand for migrant workers in the oil-producing countries of Western Asia. In Europe and Northern America, the greater number of female compared to male migrants is due in part to the presence of many older migrants in the population and the fact that women tend to live longer men.

## 3. Most international migrants are of working age.

The median age of foreign-born persons worldwide was 39 years in 2015, a slight increase from 38 years in 2000.

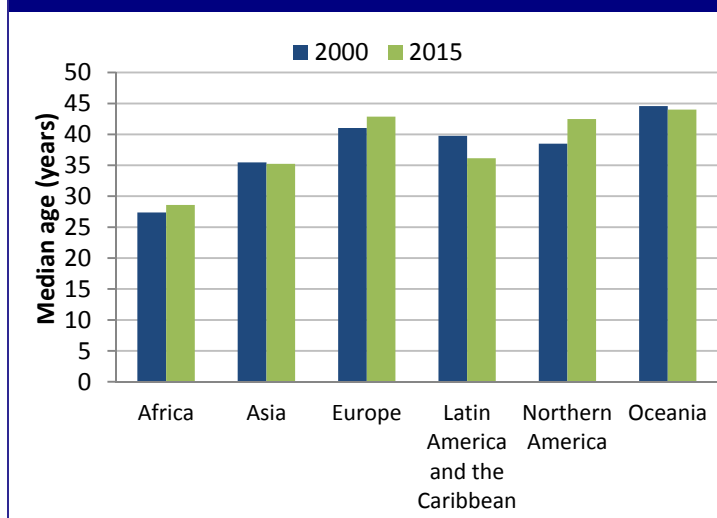
International migrants living in Africa are the youngest, with a median age of 29, followed by Asia (35 years) and Latin America and the Caribbean (36 years). Migrants are older in Northern America, Europe, and Oceania, where the median age is 42, 43 and 44 years, respectively (figure 3).

In 2015, the number of international migrants below age 20 reached 37 million, or 15 per cent of the global migrant stock. Among the major areas of the world, Africa hosts the highest proportion of young persons among all international migrants (34 per cent), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (24 per cent) and Asia (18 per cent). In Europe (9 per cent) and in Northern America and Oceania (11 per cent each), the share of those under age 20 is smaller. In all areas, the relatively low share of young migrants is due to the fact that children born to international migrants are not considered to be migrants in some countries.

Most international migrants are of working age. In 2015, 177 million international migrants, equal to 72 per cent of the global total, were between the ages of 20 and 64. Europe and Northern America have the largest share of migrants of working age (75 per cent each), followed by Asia (73 per cent) and Oceania (71 per cent).

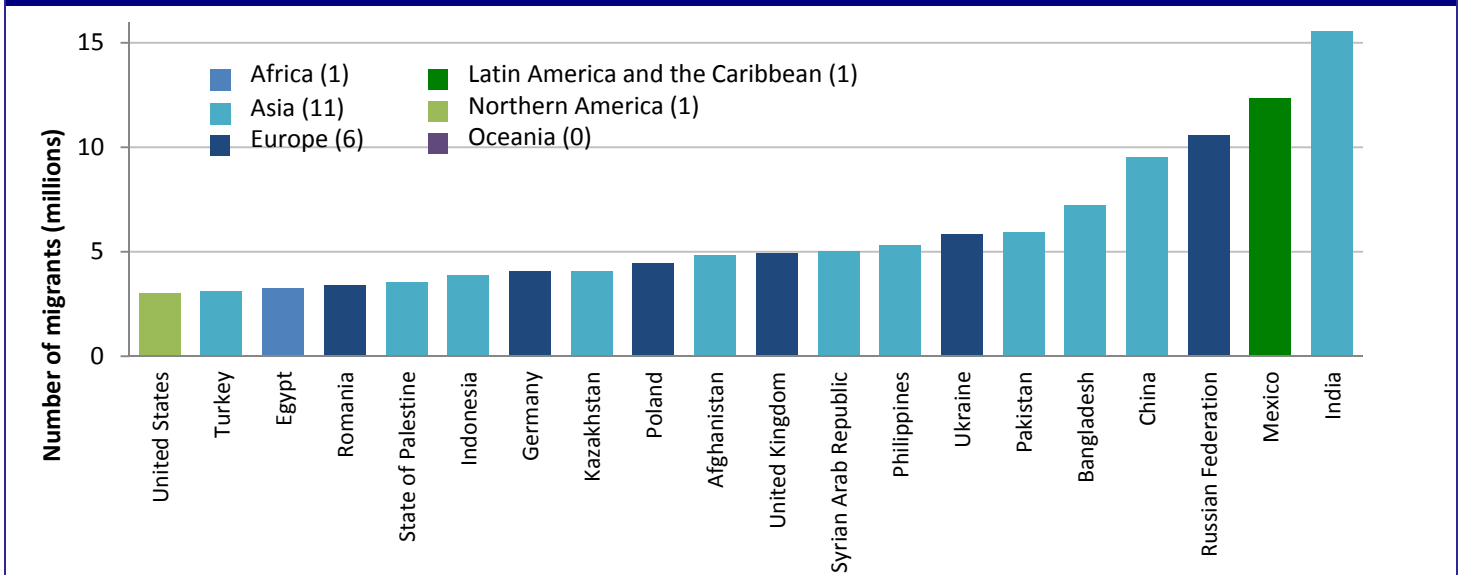
In 2015, the world hosted an estimated 30 million international migrants aged 65 or over, equal to 12 per cent of the global migrant stock. Europe and Oceania record the largest share of migrants in that age range (16 and 18 per cent, respectively), while in Africa (5 per cent) and Asia (9 per cent), the share of migrants aged 65 or older is small. The relatively low share of older migrants is due to a combination of factors, including the age of international migrants at arrival, the majority being of working age, and the fact that many migrants eventually return to their country of origin.

**Figure 3. Median age among international migrants by major area, 2000 and 2015**



Data source: United Nations (2015a).

Figure 4. Countries or areas with the largest number of international migrants living abroad, 2015



Note: "United Kingdom" stands for United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and "United States" for United States of America.

Data source: United Nations (2015a).

#### 4. India has the largest diaspora in the world, followed by Mexico and the Russian Federation.

Nearly half of all international migrants worldwide were born in Asia. In 2015, of the 244 million international migrants worldwide, 104 million, or 43 per cent of the total, were born in Asia. Europe was the birthplace of the second largest number of international migrants (62 million, or 25 per cent), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (37 million, or 15 per cent) and Africa (34 million, or 14 per cent). Relatively few international migrants were born in Northern America (4 million, or 2 per cent) or Oceania (2 million, or 1 per cent).

Between 2000 and 2015, the number of international migrants born in Asia grew more than twice as fast as the number born in Europe. During 2000-2015, the average annual growth rate of the migrant stock originating in Asia exceeded that of all other major areas. Over the same period, the number of migrants from Asia grew by 2.8 per cent per year, compared to 1.2 per cent for those from Europe. Other major areas that experienced a rapid growth in their "diasporas" were Africa (2.7 per cent per annum), Latin America and the Caribbean (2.5), Oceania (2.4) and Northern America (2.1).

In 2015, 16 million persons from India were living outside of their country of birth compared to 12 million from Mexico (figure 4). Other countries with large diasporas include the Russian Federation (11 million), China (10 million), Bangladesh (7 million), and Pakistan and the Ukraine (6 million each). Of the twenty countries with the largest number of international migrants living abroad, 11 were located in Asia, 6 in Europe, and one each in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Northern America.

#### 5. While international migration can contribute to population growth, it cannot reverse the trend of population ageing.

The number of international migrants has grown faster than the world's population. As a result, the share of migrants in the global population reached 3.3 per cent in 2015, up from 2.8 per cent in 2000. There are, however, considerable differences between major areas. In Europe, Northern America and Oceania, international migrants account for at least 10 per cent of the total population. By contrast, in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, less than 2 per cent of the population is an international migrant.

Between 2000 and 2015, positive net migration<sup>1</sup> contributed 42 per cent of total population growth in Northern America and 32 per cent in Oceania. In Europe, the population would have declined during the period 2000-2015 in the absence of positive net migration. In Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean in this period, negative net migration contributed marginally to slowing population growth.

Net migration is projected to have an increasingly significant impact on the future size of populations. In Europe, although current migration levels will not be sufficient to compensate for the surplus of deaths over births (figure 5), population decline would be more pronounced and would have started earlier under a scenario of zero net migration. In Northern America, under a zero net migration scenario, the size of the population would start to decline during the period 2040-2045, whereas with the maintenance of current migration patterns, the population is projected to continue growing.

For Oceania, a zero net migration scenario would reduce by more than half the projected increase of population during 2045-2050.

Because international migrants tend to include a larger proportion of working-age persons compared to the overall population, positive net migration can contribute to reducing old-age dependency ratios. However, international migration cannot reverse, or halt, the long-term trend toward population ageing. Even if current migration patterns continue, all major areas are projected to have significantly higher old-age dependency ratios in 2050.

Assuming a continuation of current migration patterns, in Asia, for every 100 persons of working age (from 15 to 64 years), there will be 28 dependent older persons (aged 65 or older) in 2050, compared to a ratio of 11 per 100 in 2015. Likewise, during the period 2015-2050, old-age dependency ratios are projected to increase from 26 to 48

per 100 in Europe, from 22 to 38 per 100 in Northern America, from 11 to 31 per 100 in Latin America and the Caribbean, and from 18 to 30 per 100 in Oceania. Only Africa is projected to have an old-age dependency ratio below 10 per 100 by 2050.

#### SOURCES

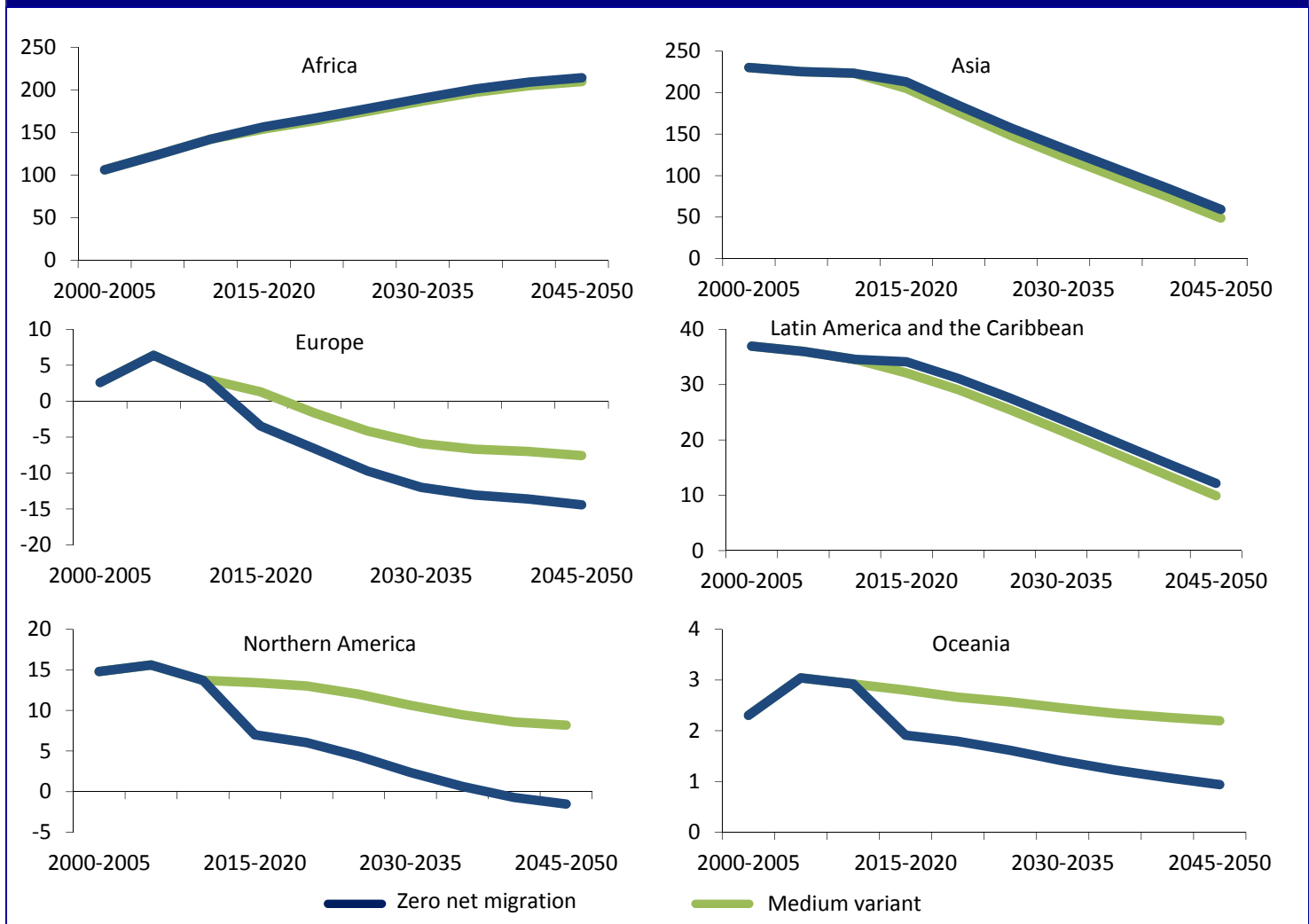
United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015a). *Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 revision* (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2015).

(2015b). *World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision*, DVD Edition.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Net international migration refers to the difference between the number of immigrants and the number of emigrants. If more people immigrate to a country than emigrate from it, the country experiences positive net migration. When more people emigrate than immigrate, the country experiences negative net migration.

**Figure 5. Actual and projected change in total population during five-year time periods by major area, from 2000 to 2050, with and without international migration starting in 2015 (in thousands)**



Data source: United Nations (2015b).