



International migrants numbered 272 million in 2019, continuing an upward trend in all major world regions

1. The number of international migrants continues to increase in both developed and developing regions

In 2019, international migrants numbered an estimated 272 million, an increase of 51 million since 2010. Because the number of international migrants is growing faster than the total population, their share of the world's population has been increasing. Currently, international migrants comprise 3.5 per cent of the global population, compared to 2.8 per cent in the year 2000. In the North,¹ almost 12 of every 100 inhabitants are international migrants, compared to only 2 in 100 in the South.²

The share of international migrants living in the South increased from 39 per cent in 2005 to 44 per cent in 2019. Within the South, most of the growth has taken place in high-income and upper-middle-income countries, which now host 70 per cent of all migrants living in the South.

2. In recent years, forced migration (involving refugees and asylum seekers) has grown much faster than voluntary migration

The number of refugees and asylum seekers increased by about 13 million between 2010 and 2017,³ accounting for close to a quarter of the increase in the number of international migrants. Refugees and asylum seekers increased at an annual average rate of over 8 per cent between 2010 and 2017, while other migrants increased at an annual rate of under 2 per cent between 2010 and 2019. As of 2017, over 83 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers lived in the South.

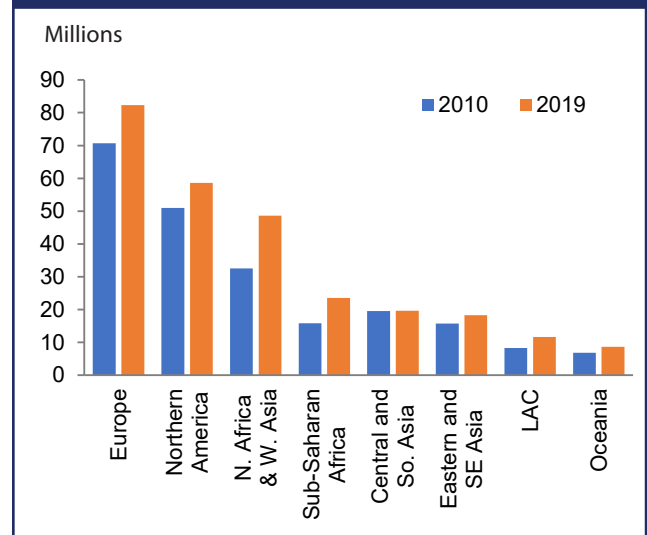
In 2017, Northern Africa and Western Asia hosted 46 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers globally, most of which (close to 90 per cent) resided in Western Asia sub-region. Sub-Saharan Africa hosted close to 21 per cent (5.9 million), while Central and Southern Asia and Europe each hosted close to 13 per cent of the global total (3.6 million each).

The other four Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) regions hosted a total of less than 9 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers in 2017. Northern America hosted 3.8 per cent (1.1 million), Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, 2.2 per cent (0.6 million), Latin American and the Caribbean, 2.1 per cent (0.6 million), and Oceania, 0.4 per cent (0.1 million).

3. Although Europe and Northern America continue to host the largest numbers of international migrants, migrant populations have grown more rapidly in Northern Africa and Western Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa

Just over half of all international migrants reside in Europe and Northern America. In 2019, Europe hosted the largest number of international migrants (82.3 million), followed by Northern America (58.6 million) and Northern Africa and Western Asia (48.6 million) (figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of international migrants by SDG region of destination, 2010 and 2019



Note: N. Africa and W. Asia = Northern Africa and Western Asia; Central and So. Asia = Central and Southern Asia; Eastern and SE Asia = Eastern and South-Eastern Asia; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean

Between 2010 and 2019, the fastest increase in the number of international migrants was observed in Northern Africa and Western Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa, which both grew at an average annual rate of 4.4 per cent. Latin America and the Caribbean followed, at an annual rate of 3.8 per cent, and Oceania, at 2.5 per cent.

Over the same period, the number of international migrants rose more slowly, at a rate of 1.7 per cent annually, both in Europe, and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, and 1.6 per cent annually in Northern America, while it remained essentially unchanged in Central and Southern Asia.

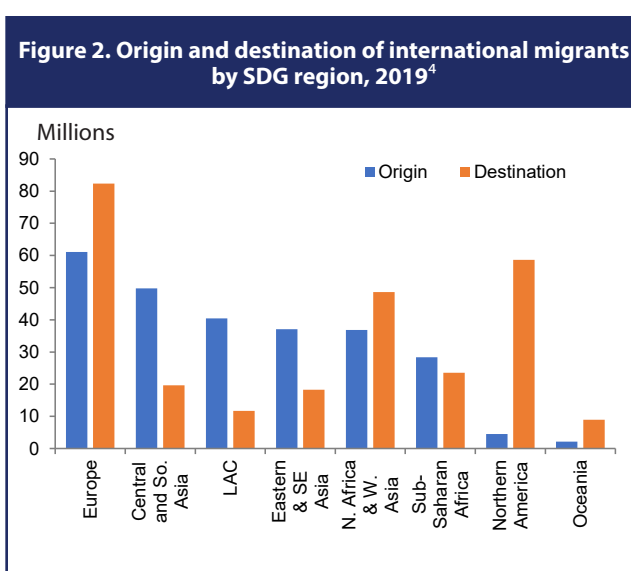
4. The distribution of international migrants by SDG region is changing

Table 1 shows the share of international migrants by SDG region in 2010 and 2019. Because of the differences in rates of growth just noted, Europe and Northern America, together with Central and Southern Asia, and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, have seen a drop in their share of migrants.

SDG region	2010	2019	Change
Europe	32.0	30.3	-1.7
Northern America	23.1	21.6	-1.5
Northern Africa and Western Asia	14.7	17.9	3.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	7.2	8.7	1.5
Central and Southern Asia	8.9	7.2	-1.6
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	7.1	6.7	-0.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	3.7	4.3	0.6
Oceania	3.2	3.3	0.1
World	100.0	100.0	

The share of international migrants in Northern Africa and Western Asia increased from 14.7 per cent in 2010 to 17.9 per cent in 2019. Increases were also observed in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Oceania, though of a lesser magnitude.

Over two fifths of all international migrants were born in Europe or in Central and Southern Asia. As shown in figure 2, in 2019, these two regions were the origin of around 111 million migrants. Latin America and the Caribbean was the source of an additional 40 million international migrants, with another 37 million originating in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia.



Note: Central and So. Asia = Central and Southern Asia; LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; Eastern and SE Asia = Eastern and South-Eastern Asia; N. Africa and W. Asia = Northern Africa and Western Asia

The top five regional corridors (origin-destination pairs) account for almost a half (46 per cent) of the world's international migrants. As seen in table 2, three of the top five migration corridors are intra-regional, with two in the South (migration within Northern Africa and Western Asia and within sub-Saharan Africa) and one in the North (within Europe). Of the remaining two top corridors, one involves migration from South to South (from Central and Southern Asia to Northern Africa and Western Asia), and the other from South to North (from Latin America and the Caribbean to Northern America).

Origin	Destination	Number (millions)	Share of total (%)
Europe	Europe	41.9	15.4
LAC	N. America	26.6	9.8
N. Africa & W. Asia	N. Africa & W. Asia	18.9	7.0
Central & So. Asia	N. Africa & W. Asia	18.5	6.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	18.3	6.7
Total of 5 corridors		124.2	45.7

Note: LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; N. America = Northern America; N. Africa and W. Asia = Northern Africa and Western Asia; Central and So. Asia = Central and Southern Asia

5. Most international migrants move to other countries within their region of birth⁴

Over two thirds of all European-born international migrants reside in Europe. In 2019, 42 million of the 61 million international migrants born in Europe resided in European countries (69 per cent). Most migrants from sub-Saharan Africa were living in other countries of sub-Saharan Africa (65 per cent), with somewhat lower figures for Northern Africa and Western Asia (51 per cent) and Oceania (50 per cent). By contrast, for Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (39 per cent), Northern America (30 per cent), Central and Southern Asia (23 per cent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (20 per cent), a majority of out-migrants were residing outside the region.

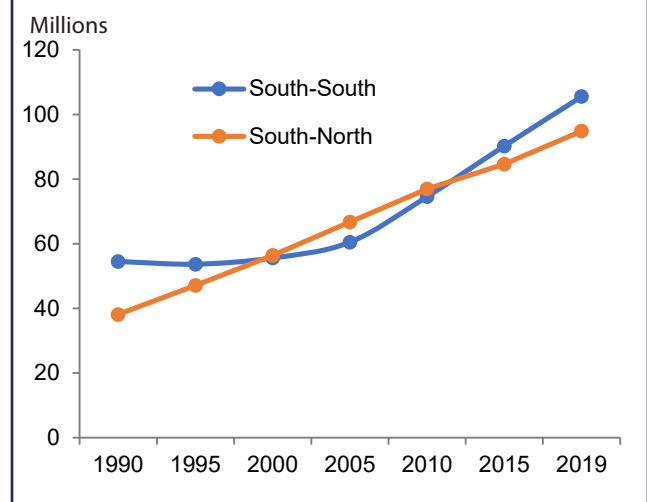
In 2019, more than 8 out of every 10 international migrants in sub-Saharan Africa (89 per cent) and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (83 per cent) were born in their region of residence. The majority of international migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean (73 per cent), Central and Southern Asia (63 per cent) and Europe (52 per cent) also originated in that same region. In contrast, a large proportion of international migrants residing in Oceania (88 per cent) and Northern America (98 per cent) were born in another region.

6. More international migrants from the South reside in the South than in the North

Since 2005, South-South migration has grown faster than South-North migration. The South hosts around 84 per cent of the world's total population and is the origin of around 74 per cent of all international migrants. While the number of South-North migrants (originating in the South, living in the North) has increased by around 9 million every five years since 1990, the number of South-South migrants remained almost unchanged at about 60 million from 1990 to 2005 and then increased rapidly to over 105 million in 2019 (figure 3).

About two fifths of all international migrants have moved from one developing country to another. In 2019, 39 per cent of all international migrants were born in a country of the less developed regions and were residing in another developing country ("South-South migrants"), while 35 per cent were born in the South but residing in the North ("South-North migrants"). About one in five international migrants were born in the North and residing in the North ("North-North migrants"), while 5 per cent were born in the North but residing in the South ("North-South migrants").

Figure 3. South-South migration versus South-North migration, 1990 to 2019



7. Migration is a global phenomenon, but most movements involve a limited set of countries

The top 10 countries of destination host about half of all international migrants. The United States is the leading country of destination, hosting 50.7 million international migrants in 2019 or 19 per cent of the world's total. Germany and Saudi Arabia host the second and third largest numbers of migrants (13.1 million each), followed by the Russian Federation (11.6 million), the United Kingdom (9.6 million), the United Arab Emirates (8.6 million), France (8.3 million), Canada (8.0 million), Australia (7.5 million) and Italy (6.3 million).

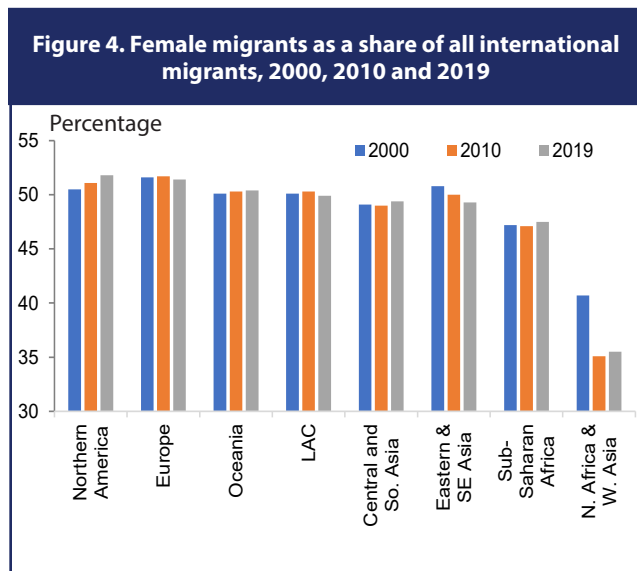
The top 10 countries of origin account for one third of all international migrants. In 2019, with 17.5 million persons living abroad, India was the leading country of origin of international migrants. Migrants from Mexico constituted the second largest "diaspora" (11.8 million), followed by China (10.7 million), the Russian Federation (10.5 million), Syrian Arab Republic (8.2 million), Bangladesh (7.8 million), Pakistan (6.3 million), Ukraine (5.9 million), the Philippines (5.4 million) and Afghanistan (5.1 million).

8. The sex composition of international migrants varies greatly across regions

Female migrants outnumber male migrants in the North, whereas male migrants outnumber female migrants in the South. In 2019, 47.9 per cent of all international migrants were women, but that percentage ranged from 43.4 per cent in the less developed regions to 51.5 per cent in the more developed regions. Although female migrants outnumber male migrants in Northern America (51.8

per cent), Europe (51.4 per cent) and Oceania (50.4 per cent), they are less numerous in Latin America and the Caribbean (49.9 per cent), Central and Southern Asia (49.4 per cent), Eastern and South Eastern Asia (49.3 per cent), sub-Saharan Africa (47.5 per cent) and Northern Africa and Western Asia (35.5 per cent).

Between 2000 and 2019, the percentage of female migrants increased in sub-Saharan Africa, Central and Southern Asia, Oceania and Northern America, while it decreased in Northern Africa and Western Asia, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe (figure 4). These regional differences result from a combination of factors, such as varying levels of labour migration, population ageing of migrants and forced migration.



Note: LAC = Latin America and the Caribbean; Central and So. Asia = Central and Southern Asia; Eastern and SE Asia = Eastern and South-Eastern Asia; N. Africa and W. Asia = Northern Africa and Western Asia

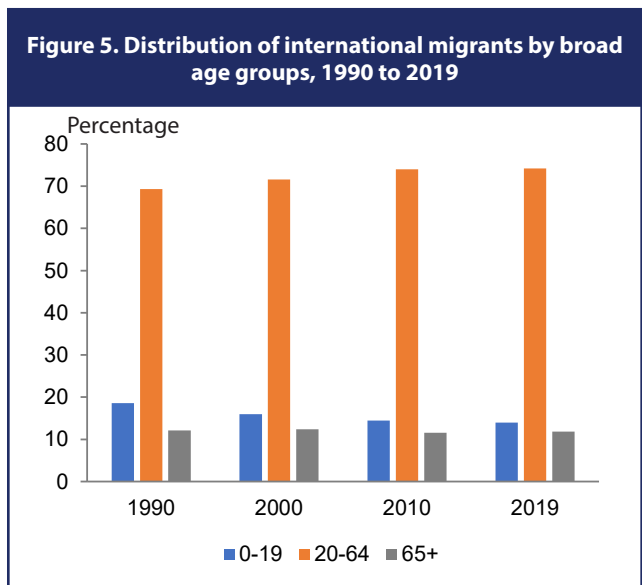
9. A growing proportion of migrants are adults of working age (20-64 years)

Globally, the proportion of migrants between 20 and 64 years of age increased from 69 per cent in

1990 to 74 per cent in 2010 and has remained at that level since (figure 5). For women, the change has been from 68 per cent in 1990 to 72 per cent in 2019, while for men it has increased from 71 per cent to 76 per cent.

The percentage of older migrants, 65 years or over, has remained stable since 1990 at around 10 per cent for older men, 14 per cent for older women and 12 per cent for both sexes combined. The percentage of young migrants under 20 years of age has declined from 19 per cent in 1990 to 14 per cent in 2019.

Older migrants outnumber younger migrants in the North, whereas younger migrants outnumber older migrants in the South. In 2019, 20 per cent of all international migrants in the South were under the age of 20 years, compared to less than 8 per cent for migrants aged 65 years or over. In contrast, in the North, the share of the migrant population aged 65 years or over was much higher (15 per cent) than the share of migrants under 20 years (9 per cent).



Notes

1. North refers to more developed regions: Europe and Northern America, plus Australia, New Zealand and Japan.
2. South refers to less developed regions: Africa, Asia excluding Japan, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand.
3. The latest available data on refugees and asylum seekers at the time of the 2019 revision of the international migrant stock was for 2017.
4. Data refer to migrants with known countries of origin only.

Source

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *International Migrant Stock 2019* (United Nations database, POP/DB/MIG/Stock/Rev.2019). Available at: www.unmigration.org.



Prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. For more information, please see: www.unpopulation.org. Copyright © 2019 by United Nations, made available under a Creative Commons license (CC BY 3.0 IGO) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/igo/>