

MOVING YOUNG



state of world population 2006 youth supplement

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Youth Supplement

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MOVING YOUNG: PREFACE

This report explores the lives of young women and young men who have ventured into new lands to chase their dreams or to escape oppression, war, poverty or misfortune. It profiles the lives of young women and men from ten countries – Burkina Faso, Colombia, India, Kenya, Liberia, Moldova, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Suriname and Zambia. Some have never migrated, but their lives are marked by the experiences of spouses or relatives who have moved abroad. They were interviewed by journalists Martin Caparros and Shyamala Shiveshwarkar in their countries of origin or destination.

From a desire and intention to migrate (Bibi, Suriname) to a search for a better life in a new land (Falcao, Colombia; Myanmar; Noraida, the Philippines); from the hunt for an advanced education and freedom from gender biases (Kakenya, Kenya) to the spill-over effect of relatives who moved abroad (Rajini, India; and Edna, Zambia); from the construction of a new cultural identity (Khadija, born to Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands) to the risks and challenges of crossing borders (Natalia, Moldova; Adama, Burkina Faso); to escaping violence and persecution (Richard, Liberia); the profiles of

young people presented in this report show a picture marked by hope and success but also by disillusionment and desperation.

The report includes a brief introduction with overall information about young people who move. Because young people have been largely invisible in debates and policies about international migration, the information available is very limited. We hope that by listening to the voices of young people touched by migration, by showing their human faces as they live their lives and by sharing their concerns and needs for education, employment, health, security and peace, this report will help to call attention to young people, as part of the discussion on international migration.

The ten young people interviewed in this report talked with honesty, courage, and openness. They show that even in the most adverse and risky situations young people have an extraordinary resilience and ability to cope.

In addressing migration issues, governments have an opportunity to release the resourcefulness and vitality that young migrants bring with them rather than considering them as a burden or a risk. In September 2006, member states will meet in a special session of the United

Nations General Assembly to discuss international migration. This High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development represents a unique chance to address the concerns of young people on the move.

We hope this report will raise awareness about the need to develop responses that protect the human rights of young migrants, regardless of their place of origin, their sex, their age or their ethnic background. It calls for appreciation of the contributions that young people make to countries both of origin and destination; contributions that could be much enhanced with closer attention to their diverse needs and rights. Their stories remind us that there are millions of young women and men like Natalia, Edna, Falcao, Adama, Bibi, Rajini, Richard, Kakenya, Khadija and Noraida. They cross borders every day, driven by insecurity, violence or poverty or in search of better opportunities, whatever the odds, to achieve their legitimate desire to lead better lives.

MOVING YOUNG: INTRODUCTION

More than ever, young people move. Over the past few decades, political, economic, social and demographic changes in many parts of the world have uprooted many people and stimulated migration to cities and abroad. The growing volume of trade, faster and cheaper transport, and easier communication have encouraged more young people to migrate within and across national borders.

The dream of better opportunities and demand for their labour from abroad sets many young people in motion. Violence, war, poverty, unemployment, crime or persecution drive many others to escape.

Many leave with few belongings, little money and scanty information about their destination; but they take with them the great assets of youth, resilience, resourcefulness and perseverance. But, precisely because of their age, they face obstacles and risks that test their endurance.

Young people on the move are determined. Many lack working papers, and cross borders as visitors or tourists. Others pay smugglers to get them in. If necessary they cross oceans in precarious boats, or burning deserts hidden in cars. They find a way.

On the move, young people are vulnerable. They may be taken by smugglers to a different destination than they set out for. What started as a move for a better life may end up for many, in particular young women, as a trap: in the nets of sex traffickers, or consigned as domestic workers to semi-slavery. Some young people are hurled into the maelstrom of war or civil conflict. They are taken as soldiers or escape as best they can, with their families or without.

The international migration of young people has demographic, social, cultural, and economic implications. Young people aged 10 to 24 now account for more than 30 per cent of the population of developing countries.¹ Most of the young migrants come from these countries.

Many countries, in particular those with aging populations, benefit from young migrants who fill the lowest-paid jobs that no one else wants, contributing to the huge machinery that moves cities and communities. They provide manual labour in agriculture and construction; they do domestic work and service jobs in homes, hotels and restaurants. There is also a growing demand for qualified workers in such

areas as health care, communication technologies, and sports.

The emigration of young people reduces the labour force among a highly productive age group in sending countries, including many who are newly qualified or skilled. But young migrants send money back to their home countries, and bring their skills and experience with them when they return.

Migration means losing the networks of family and friends that give young people support and a sense of identity and direction. On the other hand, young women especially may find some liberation from traditional restrictions.

Integration largely depends on the host countries' policies to help young migrants learn the language, find employment, housing, education and health care, and protect them from racism, xenophobia and discrimination. It also depends on migrants' ability to adapt. Young people are often more flexible and eager to learn and can help their elders.

Young women who migrate alone may join the host society on their own terms and enjoy the autonomy conferred by education and employment: but within the family the

instinct in many immigrant communities is to limit their daughters' "outside" contact and the risks that go with it. Such issues can set up tensions between migrants and their hosts, and within immigrant communities, which are only now being fully recognised.

In spite of the risks of moving abroad, most young people find it a rewarding experience, offering employment, increased skills, knowledge of the world and networks with benefits for both host and home countries.

Dreaming of Moving Abroad

Globalisation and greater access to information may have made young people more aware of the opportunities they lack at home. Exposure to cinema and TV, increased access to the internet, the tales of migrants, and what they can see of the lives of better-off people in their own countries motivate their dreams.

Young people hope for a future where their visions and full potential can be realized. With limited and unequal opportu-

Their wishes seldom become reality. Few make actual plans to leave, and even fewer make it to the countries they set out for. Nevertheless, the realization that so many young people contemplate their escape has become a contentious issue for many societies.

How Many Go Abroad?

Little is known of the full diversity and complexity of young people's international migration. Data are extremely limited, because for many years international migrants were presumed to be men of working age. Women and young people were presumed to migrate only as part of family units. Many countries now collect information on women and young people migrating alone, but few make it available in a usable form and fewer still analyse it. Young people remain largely invisible in research, public debates and policy about international migration.

Despite their absence in debates about international migration, experts agree that

It is estimated that the proportion of youth from developing countries who cross borders is about a third of the overall migration flow and about a quarter of the total number of immigrants worldwide,⁹ with numbers ranging from 20 percent of all Tajikistanis in Russia¹⁰ to 50 percent of all Nicaraguan migrants established in Costa Rica.¹¹ If we were to extend the definition of youth to also include those who are between the ages 25 to 29, youth would constitute half of the migrant flow and a third of the stock.¹²

Women migrate as much as men.¹³ It could be assumed that the same applies for young people. For example, young women are a major share of domestic workers and nurses who migrate. Young men predominate among migrants from Central America.

In today's world physical mobility is increasingly equated with upward socio-economic mobility. Early in life, without an established job or family, the perceived benefits of migrating in search of new and improved

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