

**Department of Economic and Social Affairs**  
Population Division

# **World Population Prospects**

## **The 2006 Revision**

Highlights



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#### IV. INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Estimates of net migration between the major development groups show that since 1960 the more developed regions have been net gainers of emigrants from the less developed regions (table IV.1). Furthermore, net migration to the more developed regions has been increasing steadily from 1960 to 2000. During 1990-2000, the more developed regions were gaining annually 2.5 million migrants. About half of that net flow was directed to Northern America (1.3 million annually). During 2000-2010, the level of net migration to the more developed regions as a whole changes only slightly, but there is some increase in the net number of migrants received by Northern America (1.5 million annually). Over the rest of the projection period, net migration to the more developed regions is projected to remain at about 2.3 million per year, of which 1.3 million are directed to Northern America.

With respect to the other major areas, Asia was by far the major source of migrants during 2000-2010 (1.3 million annually), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (1.1 million annually) and then Africa (0.4 million annually). Over the projection period, more than half of all the net number of emigrants from the less developed regions are expected to be from Asia, between 25 per cent to 30 per cent from Latin America and the Caribbean, and the remaining from Africa.

At the country level, during 2000-2010, 33 of the 45 developed countries have been net receivers of international migrants. This group includes traditional countries of immigration such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States, most of the populous countries in Northern, Southern and Western Europe as well as the Russian Federation and Japan. The movement of people from less developed regions to more developed regions has dominated the world migration patterns for almost half a century, but flows among developing countries have also been important. Several developing countries or areas have been attracting migrants in large numbers, including Hong Kong SAR China, Israel, Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates. Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic have been the primary receivers of refugees from Iraq. Many African countries have been the destination of refugee flows from neighbouring countries.

During 2000-2010, the countries having the highest levels of net emigration included China, India, Indonesia, Mexico and the Philippines. Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran also registered high levels of net emigration, partly as a result of the repatriation of Afghani refugees.

International migration is the component of population change most difficult to measure and estimate reliably. Thus, the quality and quantity of the data used in the estimation and projection of net migration varies considerably by country. Furthermore, the movement of people across international boundaries, which is very often a response to changing socio-economic, political and environmental forces, is subject to a great deal of volatility. Refugee movements, for instance, may involve large numbers of people moving across boundaries in a short time. For these reasons, projections of future international migration levels are the least robust part of current population projections and reflect mainly a continuation of recent levels and trends in net migration.

TABLE IV.1. AVERAGE ANNUAL NET NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS PER DECADE BY MAJOR DEVELOPMENT GROUP AND MAJOR AREA, 1950-2050 (MEDIUM VARIANT)

Major area	Net number of migrants (thousands)									
	1950-1960	1960-1970	1970-1980	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020	2020-2030	2030-2040	2040-2050
More developed regions.....	-3	556	1 088	1 530	2 493	2 902	2 268	2 269	2 272	2 272
Less developed regions.....	3	-556	-1 088	-1 530	-2 493	-2 902	-2 268	-2 269	-2 272	-2 272
Least developed countries.....	-104	-148	-447	-788	-37	-29	-277	-373	-375	-375
Other less developed countries.....	108	-409	-641	-742	-2 456	-2 873	-1 991	-1 896	-1 897	-1 897
Africa.....	-125	-242	-289	-267	-310	-416	-377	-395	-393	-393
Asia.....	194	-22	-377	-451	-1 340	-1 311	-1 210	-1 221	-1 222	-1 222
Europe.....	-489	-31	288	441	1 051	1 271	799	805	808	808
Latin America and the Caribbean.....	-68	-293	-415	-781	-775	-1 108	-616	-590	-595	-595
Northern America.....	403	479	748	972	1 277	1 453	1 305	1 300	1 300	1 300
Oceania.....	85	109	44	86	96	111	99	101	102	102

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2007). World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision, Highlights. New York: United Nations.