



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
The UN Migration Agency

WORLD MIGRATION REPORT

Update

International Migrants

www.iom.int/wmr/world-migration-report-2018

This World Migration Report update provides an overview of the latest global data on the international migrant stock from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). Released in December 2017, the updated UN DESA data sets estimate the number of international migrants by age, sex and origin.¹ In addition to presenting current data on international migrants, the update briefly discusses trends in international migration.

International migrants: Numbers and trends

Overall, the estimated number of international migrants has increased over the past four-and-a-half decades. The total estimated 258 million people living in a country other than their country of birth in 2017 is 100 million more than it was in 1990 (when it was 153 million), and over three times the estimated number in 1970 (84 million). While the proportion of international migrants globally has increased over this period, it is evident that the vast majority of people continue to live in the country in which they were born. Most international migrants in 2017 (around 74%) were of working age (20 to 64 years of age), with a slight decrease in migrants aged less than 20 between 2015 and 2017 (15% to 14%), and a constant share (around 12%) of international migrants aged 65 years or more since 2000.

International migrants, 1970–2017

Year	Number of migrants	Number of migrants as a % of world's population
1970	84,460,125	2.3%
1975	90,368,010	2.2%
1980	101,983,149	2.3%

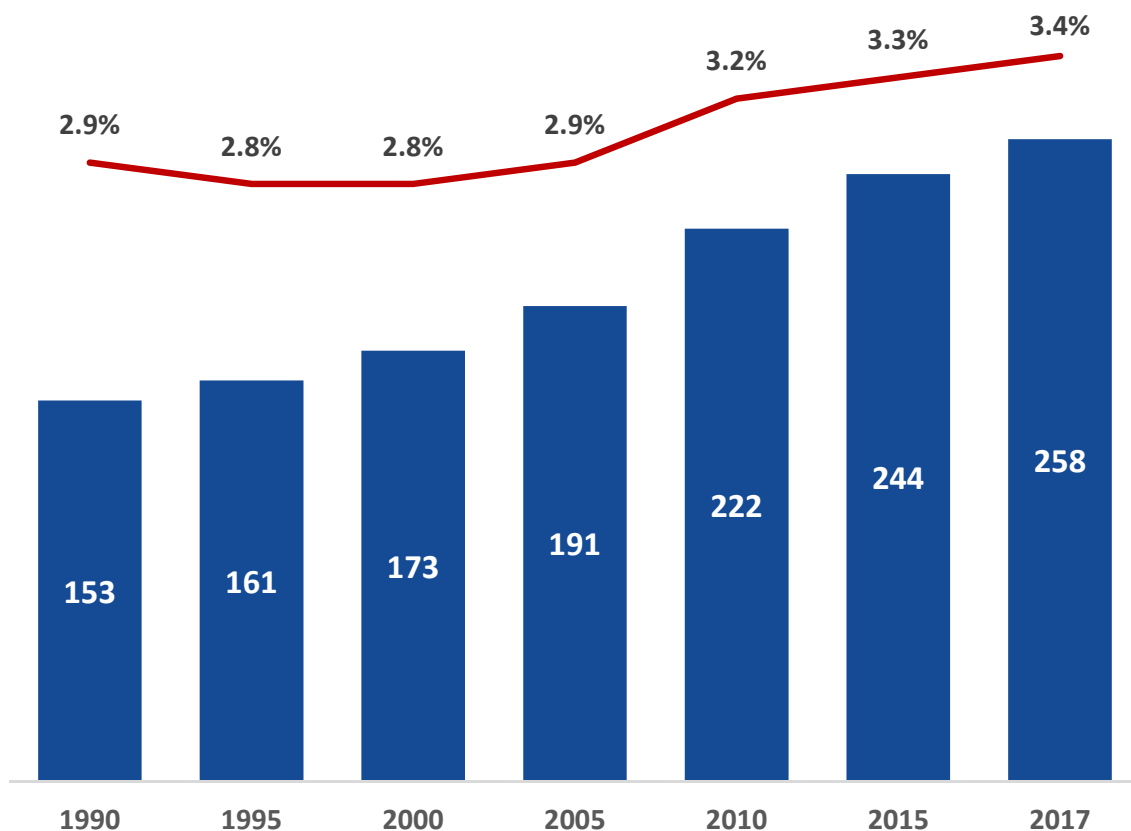
¹ UN DESA, 2017.

Year	Number of migrants	Number of migrants as a % of world's population
1985	113,206,691	2.3%
1990	152,563,212	2.9%
1995	160,801,752	2.8%
2000	172,703,309	2.8%
2005	191,269,100	2.9%
2010	221,714,243	3.2%
2015	243,700,236	3.3%
2017	257,715,425	3.4%

Source: UN DESA, 2008, 2015 and 2017.

Snapshot of International Migrants 2017

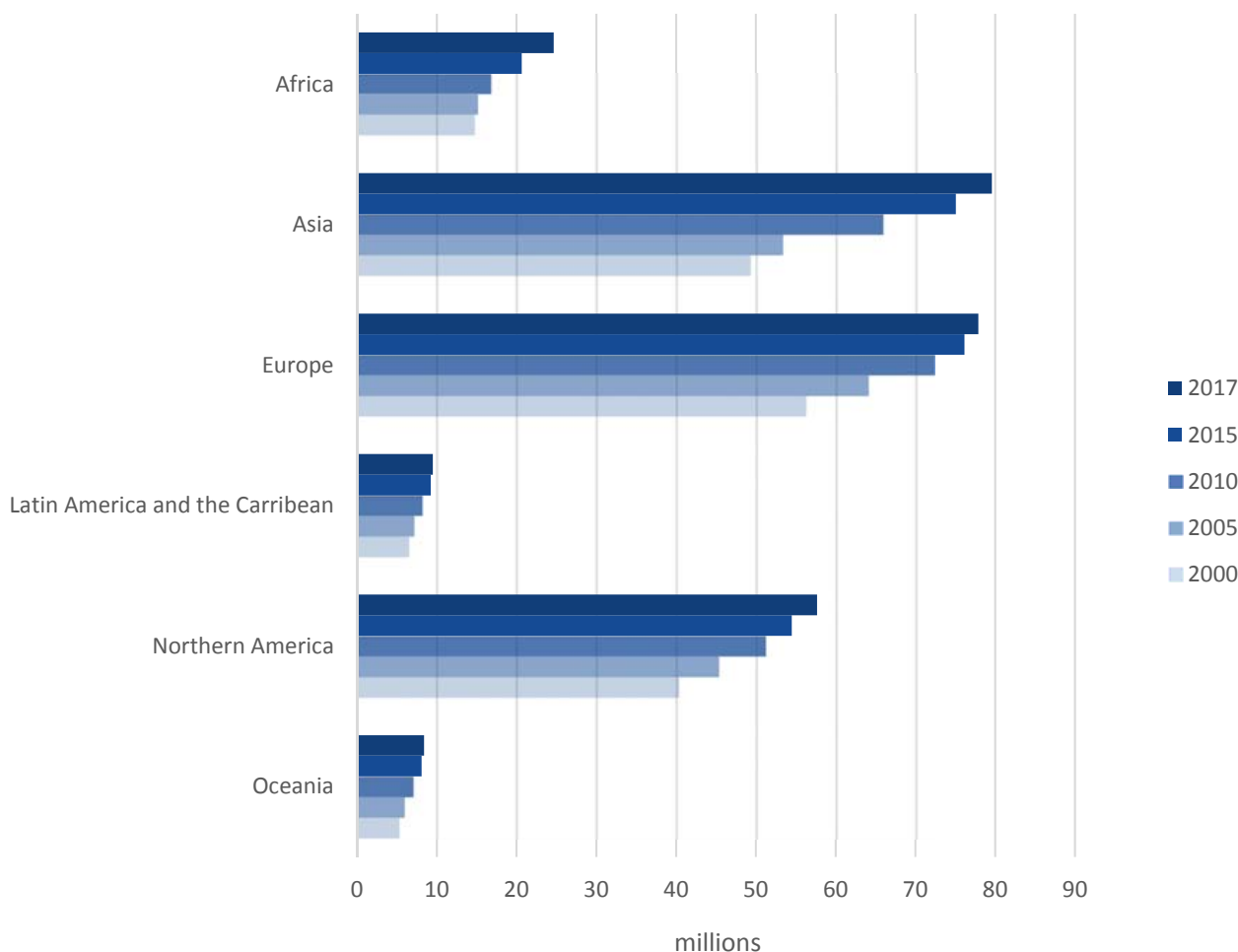
Figure 1: The international migrant population globally has increased in size but remained relatively stable as a proportion of the world's population (millions)



Note: Chart created by Migration Research Division (IOM), drawing on UN DESA data (UN DESA, 2017).

In 2017, over 60 per cent of all international migrants lived in Asia (80 million) or Europe (78 million) (See figure 2). These regions were followed by North America, with 58 million international migrants, Africa at 25 million, Latin America and the Caribbean at 10 million and Oceania at 8 million.² When compared with the size of the population in each region, shares of international migrants in 2017 were highest in Oceania, North America and Europe, where international migrants represented, respectively, 20.7 per cent, 16 per cent and 10.5 per cent of the total population. In comparison, the share of international migrants is relatively small in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean (1.8, 2.0 and 1.5%, respectively).³

Figure 2: International migrants, by major region of residence, 2000 to 2017 (millions)



Source: UN DESA, 2017.

The United States of America has been the main country of destination for international migrants since 1970.⁴ Since then, the number of foreign-born people residing in the country has more than quadrupled — from less than 12 million in 1970, to 50 million in 2017. Saudi Arabia and Germany were the second top countries of destination per UN DESA estimates in 2017, with around 12 million migrants residing in each country. Prior to 2005, the Russian Federation had been the second largest host country of international migrants for roughly 15 years, since the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991. A list of the top 20 destination countries of international migrants is provided in the left-hand column of figure 3 below.

The list of largest migrant origin countries is shown in the right-hand panel in figure 3. Most international migrants worldwide in 2017 were born in Asia (106 million),⁵ primarily originating from India (the largest country of origin), China, and other South Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Mexico was the second largest country of origin, followed by a number of European countries that have sizable numbers of emigrants.

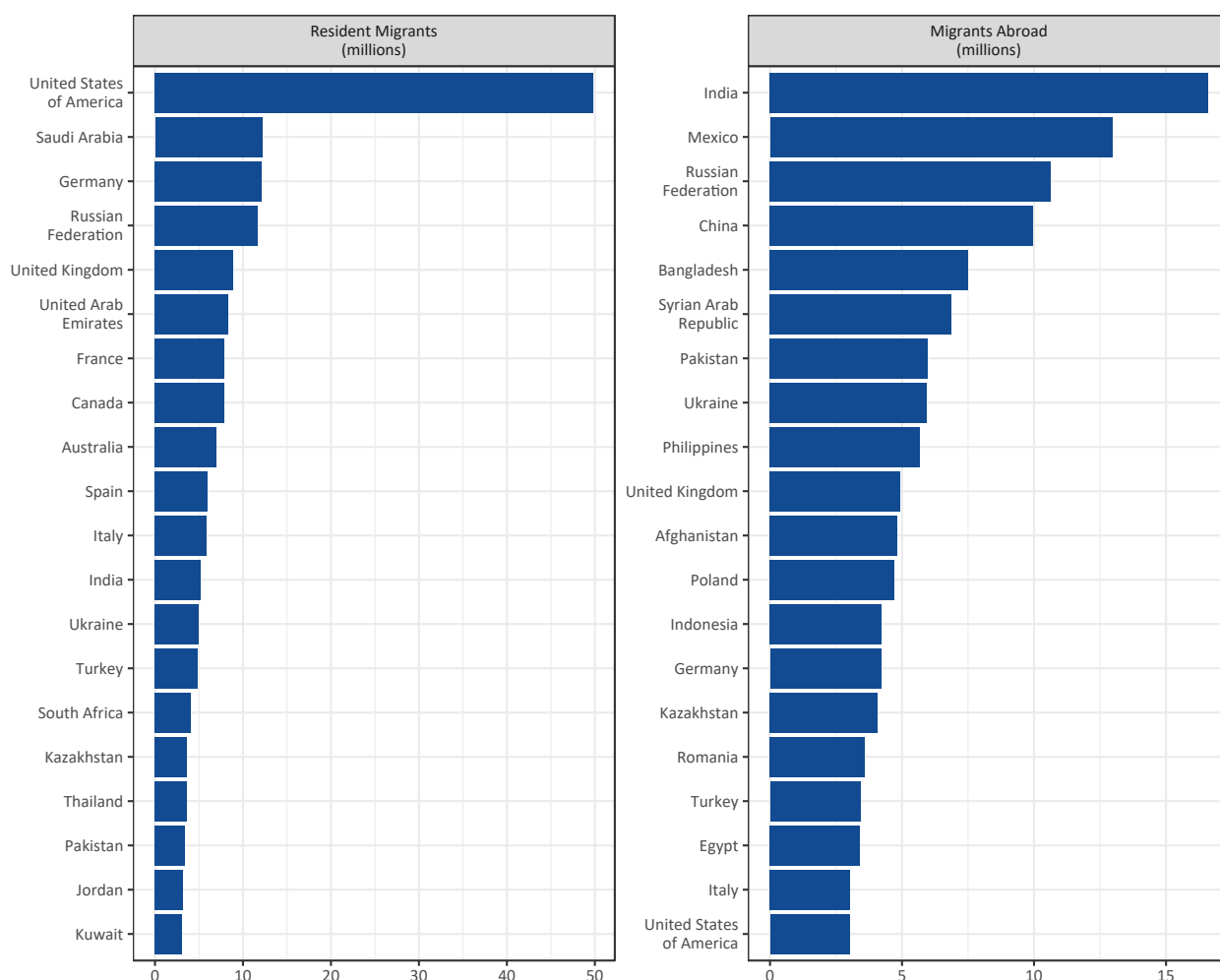
² UN DESA, 2017.

³ Ibid.

⁴ UN DESA, 2008; UN DESA, 2017.

⁵ UN DESA, 2017.

Figure 3: Top 20 destinations (left) and origins (right) of international migrants in 2017 (millions)



Source: UN DESA, 2017.

In regard to the distribution of international migrants by countries' income group, about two thirds of international migrants resided in high-income economies in 2017 – around 164 million. This compares with 81 million foreign-born who resided in middle-income countries (about one third of the total migrant stock) and almost 11 million in low-income countries in the same year.

For more information, please refer to World Migration Report 2018 or UN DESA websites below:

- World Migration Report 2018
www.iom.int/wmr/world-migration-report-2018
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)
www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/index.shtml

References

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

- 2008 *International Migrant Stock: The 2008 Revision*. United Nations, New York. Available from <https://esa.un.org/migration/index.asp?panel=1>
- 2015 *International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision*. United Nations, New York. Available from www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml
- 2017 *International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision*. United Nations, New York. Available from www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.shtml