

Children, Adolescents and Migration: Filling the Evidence Gap

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Introduction¹

Since the 2006 High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, organized by the United Nations General Assembly, and the creation of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, the issue of international migration has risen on the agenda of policymakers around the world. The increased demand for policy relevant migration information has exposed serious deficiencies in the availability of basic data on global migration levels, trends and characteristics. Many countries collect data on persons under 20 years of age, who were born outside the country of enumeration and who may or may not be a citizen of that country, usually as part of their population census or through administrative means, and at different intervals. While more information on migrant children and adolescents has become available in the recent past, harmonized estimates for all countries and areas in the world at regular intervals are currently not available. Answers to basic questions, such as “how many children and adolescents are participating in international migration?”, “what are the age profiles of those moving across borders?”, “do girls and boys have the same propensity to migrate?”, and “how does migration affects children and adolescents moving across borders and those who stay behind?” remain elusive.

The absence of information on basic migration trends and its impacts on children and adolescents severely hampers one of UNICEF’s main concerns—to ensure children’s, adolescents’ and women’s rights in receiving societies regardless of citizenship and migratory status—and also constrains the endeavors of policymakers at national and regional levels to design and implement evidence-based policies in order to maximize the positive effects of migration and to minimize its negative effects on migrant families and migrant communities of origin and destination.

To fill this void, UNICEF has partnered with the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA) to develop estimates of the global stock of international migrant children and adolescents. These estimates will allow policymakers to understand the patterns of child and adolescent migration across the world and to support partners in developing countries and developed countries to formulate coherent policies to ensure the rights of migrant children and adolescents in accordance with the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant international instruments.

As a first step, the *United Nations Global Migration Database (UNGMD)* was created to collect all available tabulations of the international migrant stock by age and sex. The database contains more than 4,000

¹ The views expressed in this brief are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of, and should not be attributed to, United Nations Children’s Fund or the University of Houston.

tabulations from 230 countries or areas since the 1970s. Launched in December 2008, the database has more than 2,000 registered users (see: <http://esa.un.org/unmigration>). The database was developed by the Population Division of UN/DESA with the support of UNICEF and UNDP's Special Unit for South-South Cooperation and in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division, the World Bank, the University of Sussex and IPUMS International, University of Minnesota. A recent web application to disseminate these data is available at MigrantInfo.org a collaborative project between the Population Division of UN/DESA, UNICEF and the University of Houston.

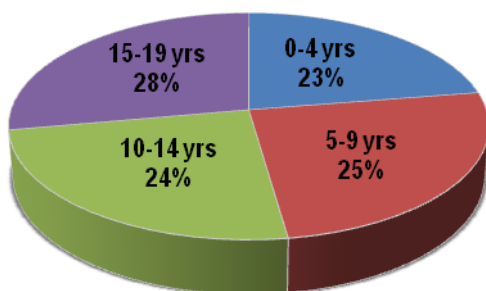
The 2010 round of population censuses, currently underway, is a unique opportunity to improve the quality and availability of gender and age disaggregated migration data. Through its country offices, UNICEF actively promotes the collection of policy relevant migration information through censuses and specialized household surveys focusing on the impact of migration on children and adolescents. These activities are fully consistent with the report *Migrants Count: Five Steps Toward Better Migration Data*, published by the Center for Global Development in 2009 and fully endorsed by UNICEF. This handout visualizes empirical data on the stock of international migrants by country of birth and citizenship contained in the *United Nations Global Migration Database* and highlights opportunities for further research and analysis on child and adolescent migration.

International Migrants under 20 Years of Age: In Developing and Developed Countries (Latest data available)*

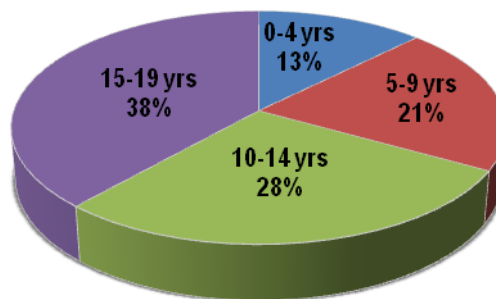
Developing countries**, host a higher proportion of migrants under 20 years of age. The percentage of migrants under the age of 20 in developing countries is 18 per cent, while the percentage in more developed countries*** is 11 percent.

In developing countries migrants between 15 and 19 years of age represent 28 per cent of all migrants under 20 years of age, whereas in developed countries, migrants aged between 15 and 19 years account for almost 38 per cent of all migrants under 20 years of age.

Developing Countries



Developed Countries



International Migrants Under 20 Years of Age (Latest data available)*

There are relatively few young international migrants. On average, some 36 per cent of the global population is younger than 20 years. However, only 13 per cent of all international migrants are under the age of 20 (See Figure 1).

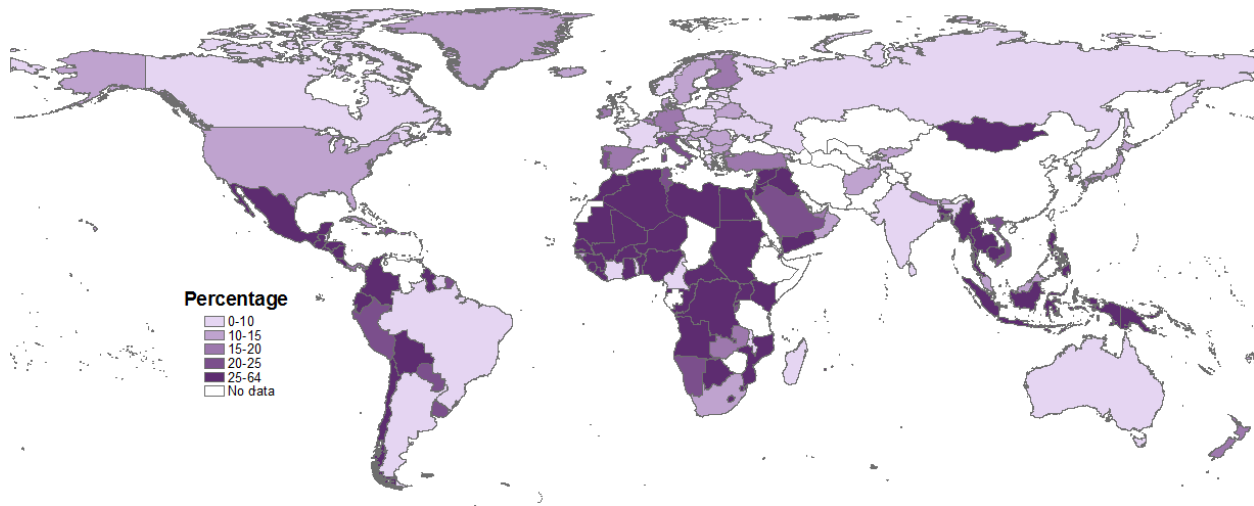


FIGURE 1: MIGRANTS UNDER 20 YEARS OF AGE

Source: Author with data from the United Nations Global Migration Database

International Migrants Under 20 Years of Age: Sex Ratio (Latest data available)*

Male migrants under 20 years of age outnumber female migrants. Globally, there are 94 female migrants for every 100 male migrants under the age of 20. Migrant females are least numerous in developing countries in comparison to developed countries. For every 100 male migrants under 20 years of age in developing countries, there are only 80 female migrants. In contrast, in developed countries this trend is reversed. For every 100 female migrants under 20 years of age, there are 98 male migrants.

The differences between countries can be explained by the unique nature of each migration corridor. For instance, migration from Latin America & the Caribbean to the United States has been characterized by an over-representation of young male migrants seeking employment opportunities.

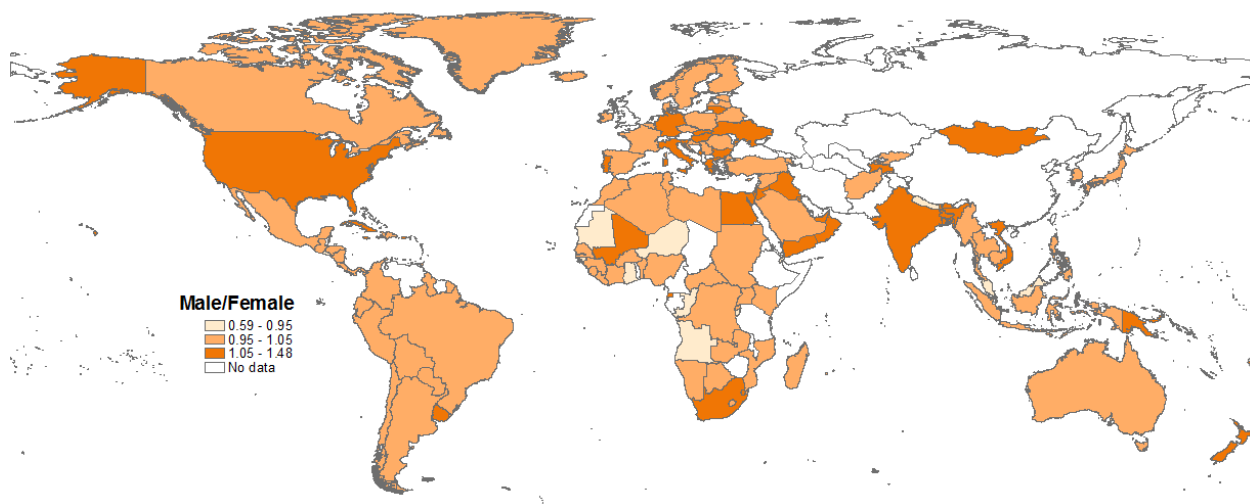


FIGURE 2: MIGRANTS UNDER 20 YEARS OF AGE: SEX RATIO
 Source: Author with data from the United Nations Global Migration Database

International Migrants Under 20 Years of Age: Age Distribution (Latest data available)*

Among the migrants under 20 years of age, the group of 15 to 19 years is the largest group, accounting for some 33 per cent of all migrants under the age of 20, followed by the age group 10 to 14, which represent around 27 per cent of the total migrant population under 20 years of age, while the age groups 5 to 9 and 0 to 4, represent 23 per cent and 17 per cent of the total migrant population under 20 years of age.

Migrants under the age of 20 constitute the largest group of the total migrant population in Africa (24%), followed by the Caribbean, Central and South America (18%), Asia (16%), Europe and Northern America (4%) and Oceania (4%). There are regional variations among migrants under 20 years of age. In Europe & Northern America, Africa, Oceania and the Caribbean, Central and South America, the group of 15 to 19 years represents 39, 36, 29 and 27 per cent of total migrant population under the age of 20, respectively. In Asia, the group of 5 to 9 years represents 26 per cent of the total migrant population under 20 years of age.

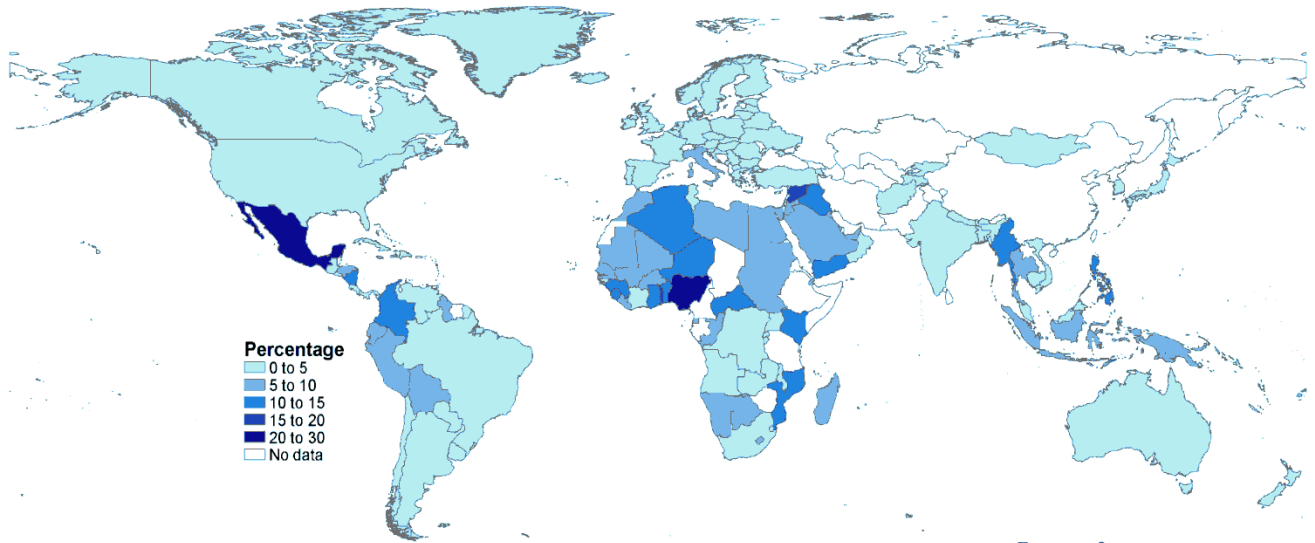


FIGURE 3:
INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT CHILDREN AGES 0-4
Source: Author with data from the United Nations Global Migration Database

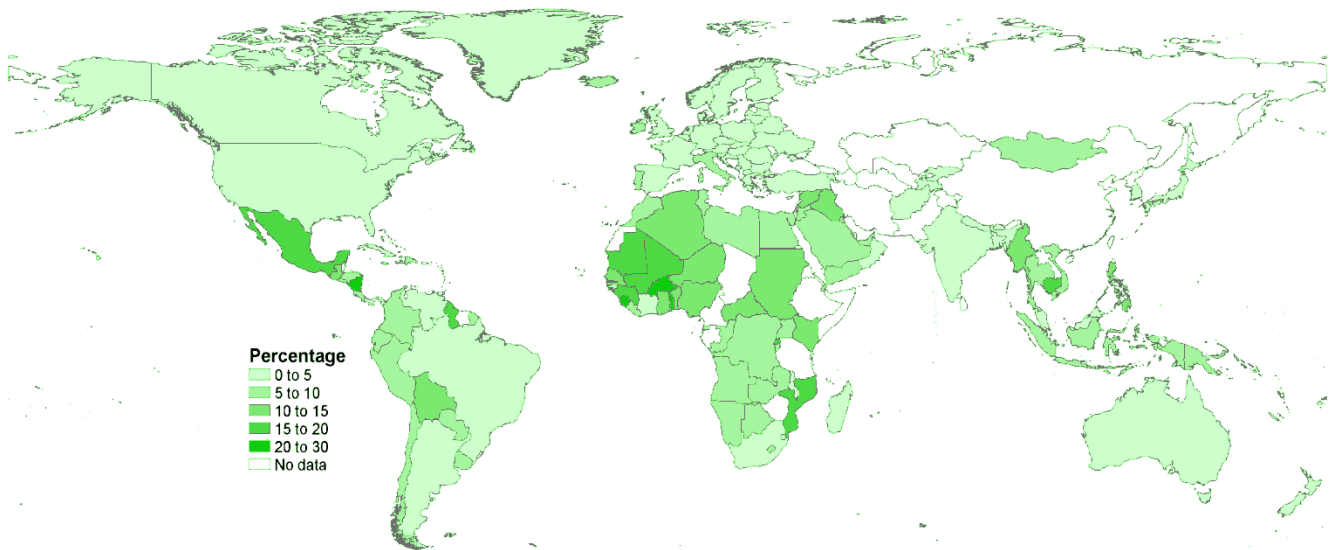


FIGURE 4:
INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT CHILDREN AGES 5-9
Source: Author with data from the United Nations Global Migration Database

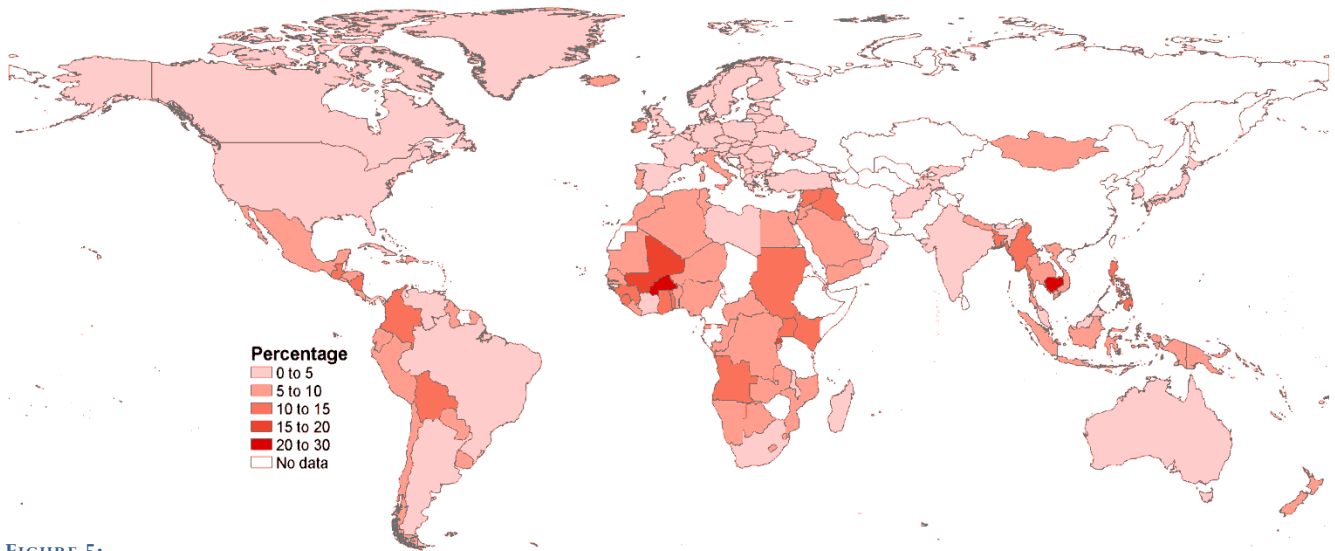


FIGURE 5:
INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT
CHILDREN AGES 10-14

Source: Author with data from the United Nations Global Migration Database

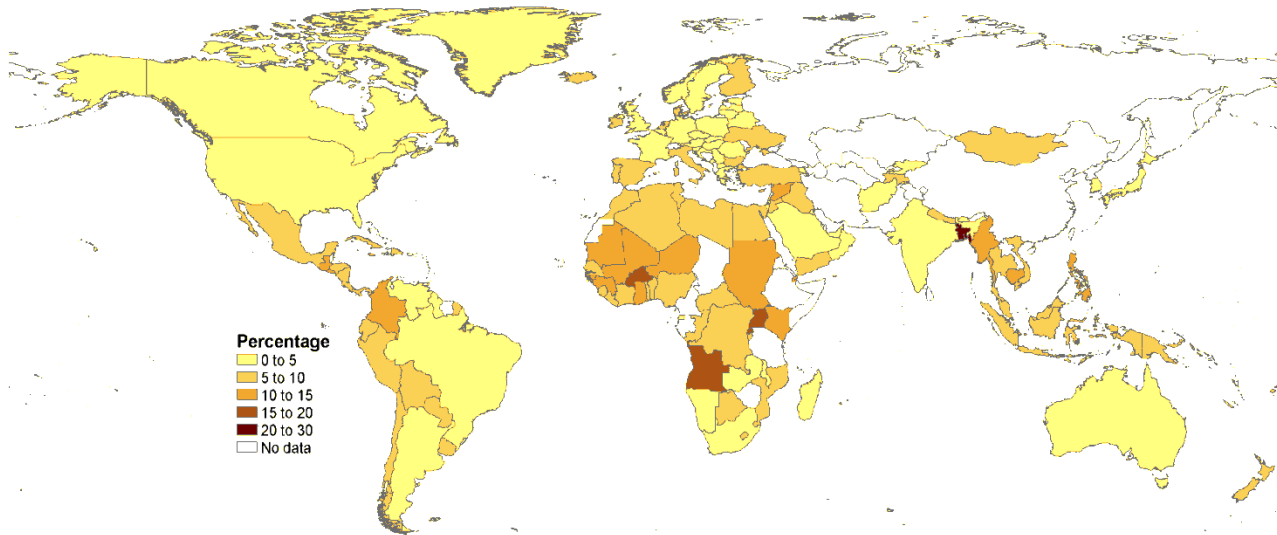


FIGURE 6:
INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT
CHILDREN AGES 15-19

Source: Author with data from the United Nations Global Migration Database

Notes:

* Includes foreign born and foreign citizens. Foreign born refers to persons born outside the country of enumeration. Foreign citizen refers to persons who do not have the citizenship of the country of enumeration.

** Africa, Asia (excluding Japan), Latin America and the Caribbean, Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia

*** Europe, Northern America, Australia/New Zealand, and Japan

The boundaries and the names shown and the designations used on all of these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.