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Contribution of Migrants to Development:
Trade, Investment and Development Linkages

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INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION TRENDS

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International Migration Trends

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I wish to thank UNCTAD and, in particular, my friend Mr. Supachai for inviting me to this interesting meeting. My task today is to present the highlights of international migration trends worldwide.

In the Department of Economic and Social Affairs that I direct, the Population Division has just released new estimates and short-term projections of the number of international migrants by country. So my presentation will make use of those new numbers.

Before I start, let me note that, in preparing these estimates, international migrants are defined as persons born outside the country in which they reside, that is, they are the foreign-born. Thus, the estimates presented are mostly derived from information on the foreign-born provided by population censuses or population registers. Censuses do not exclude migrants in an irregular situation and, in fact, census counts can be the basis for estimating the number of migrants in an irregular situation. In addition, the estimates I will present include the number of refugees as reported by UNHCR.

Slide 2: According to our latest estimates, the number of international migrants in the world increased from 155 million in 1990 to 195 million in 2005 and is likely to reach 214 million in 2010.

The majority of international migrants live in the more developed countries (MDCs): 123 million in 2005 and an expected 133 million in 2010. The developed countries include all of Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, the United States and the CIS countries (that is, the former USSR). Therefore our estimates show that, today, about 66 per cent of all international migrants live in this group of countries.

The developing countries (LDCs in the graph) had 72 million migrants in 2005 and are expected to have 81 million in 2010.

Slide 3: These overall numbers include refugees. As this slide shows, the number of refugees in the world was declining until 2005 and has since increased, passing from 19 million in 1990 to 14 million in 2005 and expected to be at about 16 million by 2010. This trend is determined mainly by the number of refugees in the less developed countries, because in the more developed countries the number of refugees, though low, increased in the 1990s.

Slide 4: The trend in the number of refugees affects the growth rate of the total migrant stock. As this graph shows, the average annual growth rate of the total number of migrants, including refugees, rose from 1990 to 2005 and is expected to remain unchanged until 2010 at 1.8 per cent per year. However, when refugees are excluded from the migrant stock, the growth rate peaks in the early part of this decade and then declines markedly, from 2.2 per cent annually during 2000-2005 to 1.7 per cent per year during 2005-2010. This is the expected effect of the economic downturn that we are experiencing: an important reduction of the rate of growth of the number of international migrants excluding refugees.

Slide 5. As this graph shows, the slowdown in the growth rate of the migrant stock is mainly driven by a reduction in the growth rate of the migrant stock in the more developed countries which is noticeable whether refugees are included or not in the numbers, as shown in this graph.

Slide 6. In contrast, in developing countries, the growth rate of the migrant stock increased during this decade mainly because of the growing number of refugees (there is no increase in the white line that represents the growth rate of the number of international migrants excluding refugees). That is, this decade is already witnessing an increase in forced migration among developing countries.

Slide 7. Since the 1990s, international migrants have become increasingly concentrated in rich countries. Among the 214 million migrants expected in 2010, 57 per cent will be living in high-income countries: 104 million in high-income developed countries and 17 million in high-income developing countries (including the oil-producing countries of the Persian Gulf).

Slide 8. This graph shows the increase in the number of international migrants from 1990 to 2010 by income group of the receiving countries. The high-income developed countries experienced the largest gain in international migrants, from 57 million in 1990 to 104 million in 2010, an increase of 47 million. There is also a marked increase in the number of migrants in the high-income developing countries, from 10 million to 17 million, and small increases in the countries with medium-high and medium-low incomes. However, the number of migrants decreased in the low-income countries. These trends indicate that prosperous economies with ageing populations were major attractors of international migrants and suggest that the current economic recession, which is affecting them markedly, will have a dampening effect on international migration flows although it is unlikely to stop the growth of the international migrant stock in the immediate future.

Slides 9 to 11: Between 1990 and 2000, the number of international migrants increased in the majority of countries, as these maps indicate (the map becomes darker as more countries accumulate more migrants). Currently, the United States is by far the main receiving country with a projected 43 million in 2010. It is followed by the Russian Federation with 12 million, Germany with 11 million, and Saudi Arabia, Canada and France with about 7 million each.

Slides 12 to 14: The proportion of migrants in the world population is rising. Globally, international migrants accounted for 2.9 per cent of the world population in 1990 and are expected to account for 3.1 per cent in 2010. In addition, migrants are increasing as a share of the population in high-income countries. Note that the map becomes darker in Europe but lighter in Africa, where the proportion of migrants has declined in several countries.

Slides 15 to 17: What about the feminization of migration? According to our most recent estimates, the proportion female among migrants has ceased to increase globally: dropping from 49.4 per cent in 2000 to 49 per cent in 2010, as the graph indicates. The next graph shows that there has been a major drop in the proportion female among migrants in Northern America, mainly because of the preponderance of male migrants from Latin America to the United States. In addition, the proportion female remains low and has not changed much in Asia, the continent that is often cited as a region where migration is becoming more feminized.

Slides 18 and 19: What do we know about the origin of international migrants? Data gathered around the year 2000 allow us to estimate that among the estimated 178 million migrants in 2000, about a third originated in a developing country and were living in a developed country (the blue arrow); another third were migrants from developing countries living in developing countries (the yellow arrow); 28 per cent had moved from developed countries to other developed countries (the green arrow), and just about 7 per cent had moved from developed to developing countries. According to these estimates, "South-to-South" migrants (i.e., those from developing to developing countries) were NOT more numerous than those from "South-to-North". Furthermore, "North-to-North" migration was also quite common.

Slide 20: Data relative to the OECD countries, most of which are high-income and major destinations of international migrants, allow an assessment of the origins of migrants by region. As this graph shows, in the OECD around the year 2000, about a quarter of all migrants originate in Latin America and the Caribbean, a fifth in Asia, another fifth in the EU of 15 and slightly less than a fifth in other European countries. Only about a tenth of all migrants in the OECD originated in Africa.

Slide 21: The next graph shows that there are major differences in the origin of migrants to different parts of the OECD. Migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean are predominantly concentrated in the United States and account for half of all migrants in that country. Migrants from Asia account for about a tenth of all migrants to OECD countries in Europe, a quarter of those in the United States and about a third of migrants in other OECD countries (which include, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan). Members of EU15 are important sources of migrants for OECD countries in Europe and those overseas. Note that migrants from Africa account for a higher proportion of all migrants in OECD Europe than for overseas OECD countries.

To conclude, let me review some of the major trends and characteristics of international migration worldwide.

- Excluding refugees, there has been a deceleration in the growth of the number of international migrants in recent years.
- There has also been a growing concentration of international migrants in high-income countries.
- Among those high-income countries, the United States is by far the major destination of international migrants.
- The high unemployment that is already affecting the majority of the high-income developed countries will likely dampen future migration flows, although the accumulated stock of international migrants is not expected to decline in the near future.
- The growing feminization of the international migrant stock has ceased and the proportion female among all international migrants has declined slightly. This trend owes much to the increasing proportion of male migrants among those living in the United States.
- Among all international migrants, South-to-North migrants are almost as numerous as those who have moved from a developing country to another (South-to-South). However, the origin of inter-regional migrants varies considerably from one receiving region to another. Thus, migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean are concentrated mostly in Northern America, while those originating in Africa are more likely to be living in Europe.

The new estimates of the migrant stock can be accessed at: www.unmigration.org