

## INTRODUCTION

# Youth Migration and Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries

By  
FATIMA JUÁREZ,  
THOMAS LEGRAND,  
CYNTHIA B. LLOYD,  
SUSHEELA SINGH,  
and  
VÉRONIQUE HERTRICH

Currently, it is estimated that there are 1.1 billion young people aged 15–24 in the developing world, accounting for nearly one-fifth (18.6 percent) of the total population

*Fatima Juárez is a professor at the Center for Demographic, Urban, and Environmental Studies, El Colegio de Mexico. She is member of the governing council of the IUSSP Council, member of the Advisory Board on the Population Policies of the National Council of Population of Mexico. Her research focuses on reproductive health in developing countries (including clandestine abortion and HIV/AIDS), in particular among adolescents.*

*Thomas LeGrand is chair of the Université de Montréal Demography Department, vice president of the Canadian Federation of Demographers, and a member of the governing council of the IUSSP. His research focuses on developing countries (mostly Africa), reproductive health, transitions to adulthood, linkages between fertility and mortality, and population and development.*

*Cynthia B. Lloyd is consulting senior associate for the Population Council and an independent research consultant for various international agencies and foundations. She is the author of fifty-five articles and more than twenty books and monographs. She is best known for her role as chair of the National Academy of Sciences' Panel on Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries and editor of a book resulting from this role: *Growing up Global: the Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries* (The National Academies Press 2005).*

*Susheela Singh oversees research at the Guttmacher Institute. Her expertise is in social and demographic research on sexual and reproductive health, areas in which she has published extensively. Her current areas of international research include adolescent sexual health, unintended pregnancy, abortion, and the costs and benefits of reproductive health care in developing countries.*

*Véronique Hertrich heads the methodological unit on developing countries (Pole Suds) at the French National Institute for Demographic Studies (INED/France), and is a member of the governing council of the IUSSP. Her main fields of research relate to population, marriage, and family changes in sub-Saharan Africa from a gender perspective.*

DOI: 10.1177/0002716213485052

(United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2013). During this time of life, young people experience enormous changes due to physical maturation, which is accompanied by cognitive, social/emotional, and interpersonal changes. It is a period when the influence of parents and families gradually diminishes and the influence of external factors, such as peers; the media; the educational environment; and, more generally, the economic, social, and cultural environments in which they live, are increasingly prominent (Spano 2004).

The study of the process of maturing and becoming an adult in the sociodemographic literature has typically focused on a number of key transitions, including the establishment of romantic partnerships, sexual initiation, completing school and entering the job market, leaving the family home, entering into marriage and parenthood, and, for some, migrating to cities or across international borders (Juárez et al. 2008; Grant and Furstenberg 2007; Lloyd 2005). These events are interrelated and are affected by many variables at the family, community, national, and international levels, including the poverty and vulnerability that are part of the lives of many young people in low-income countries. The pathways to adulthood that occur over these short years—some purposefully chosen and others imposed by families or society—greatly affect young people's future lives. These pathways vary considerably across and within societies.

For many adolescents living in the developing world or with origins in developing countries, the migration experience, both within and across country boundaries, is an integral part of the transition to adulthood. Migration of children and youths has long occurred as part of a collective family strategy in search of educational and apprenticeship opportunities and, in some parts of the world, for child fosterage (UNFPA 2006). In countries where early marriage patterns predominate, girls have often migrated at young ages to join their promised husband's family. Seasonal labor migration of young unmarried men, both internally and internationally, is common in many parts of the world, and short- and medium-term labor migration has become more frequent for young women as well. In addition, many adolescents are the children of migrants and are living their youth in social environments that are often distant from the environments that their parents experienced at their same age with respect to culture, language, religion, legal status, and normative behaviors.

While migration literature is abundant, including many theories and extensive substantive findings (Massey et al. 1993; Arango 2000; White and Lindstrom 2005; Collinson et al. 2009), there has been little research on the migration of youths in the context of other transitions to adulthood. The paucity of research is due, at least in part, to difficulties in obtaining longitudinal data that track migration while simultaneously following other transitions. Traditional microeconomic theories of labor migration are predicated on assumptions of free choice and economic rationality. The decision-maker is presumed to be an adult. Individuals are assumed to desire to maximize their well-being in a context of uncertainty: they consider the costs and benefits of moving to different places and the related

risks most often in terms of economic factors—income and unemployment in particular. The “new economics of migration” theory (Stark and Bloom 1985) has expanded these traditional frameworks to incorporate family migration strategies as part of efforts to diversify sources of income and limit uncertainty.

The nature and welfare consequences of youth migration are distinct from those of other age groups, as the migration event overlaps with many other transitions, including transitions to work, sexual maturation, marriage and childbearing, and citizenship. Migration adds another layer of complexity to the conditions of entry into adulthood, including a changed social and physical environment and often reduced oversight and guidance from kin and communities with respect to young people’s behaviors, resulting in changes in attitudes, aspirations, and behaviors. Migration brings new opportunities and freedom from traditional cultural constraints—factors that may be especially important for young women. Indeed, with regard to permanent long-distance family migrations, parents frequently speak of the move as both a personal sacrifice and an investment in their children’s well-being by way of better schooling and subsequent employment opportunities. On the other hand, the new living environment is also a source of vulnerability, often with less family and social support during a period of life that is already characterized by risk-taking and psychological stress, and a greater likelihood of abuse and exploitation.

Rapid changes in the contemporary world are further affecting migration patterns at the local, national, and international levels, with important consequences for young people. Globalization, mass media, the Internet, and higher levels of education have combined to alter young people’s expectations and attitudes, reducing traditional influences and plausibly leading to larger and more diversified flows of migration during adolescence and young adulthood. On the other hand, the evolving international context (e.g., restrictions that developed countries have placed on immigration) and local situations (e.g., the sustained economic recession in African countries that has limited the absorptive capacity of some labor markets and reduced families’ abilities to finance moves) have constrained some migration flows.

The effects of migration on youths’ transitions are hard to generalize, given the huge diversity of situations in which they occur. Do young people move with their families, within well-organized frameworks that provide adequate oversight to their activities and assistance when necessary, or as individuals who are largely cut off from their families and friends? To what extent are the migrations the result of their own decisions or that of others, and to what degree are their needs and aspirations taken into account during or after the move? Are the motivations underlying migrations economic in nature, for marriage, in response to external events such as civil wars, because of political persecution or environmental crises, or due to exploitation and trafficking? And at what age do the migrations occur, as physical and emotional maturity, and thus the ability to deal with new situations and adversity, surely differ greatly between a 14-year-old teenager and a 22-year-old young adult?

## The Seminar That Led to This Volume

The Scientific Panel on Adolescent Life Course in Developing Countries of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) organized an international seminar on Youth Migration and Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries in December 2010 to bring together researchers and experts on adolescent migration.<sup>1</sup> The main goal of the seminar was to examine youth migration and its consequences for the various other transitions to adulthood, including reproductive outcomes and educational, employment, and marital outcomes; and the specific strategies underlying migration and its consequences. A better understanding of these issues is urgently needed if we are to develop more effective policies and interventions that target the welfare of youth migrants from developing countries. A second goal was to stimulate more research on this little-studied topic and to heighten researchers' and policymakers' awareness of these issues. The twenty-four papers presented at the seminar looked at different types of migration in a broad variety of developing country contexts. Issues of youth empowerment and gender differences were recurrent themes in many of the papers.

This volume of *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* includes twelve of the studies that represent new empirical evidence on a range of topics presented at the seminar and for which there currently exists very limited or no knowledge. The articles vary greatly in their methodological approaches and the type of migration examined—internal or international, short term or long term, with or without accompanying parents. Some researchers conducted secondary analysis of survey data while others collected their own quantitative data. The models used in the empirical analysis included multilevel modeling, logistic regressions, and event history analysis, among others. Some researchers employed qualitative approaches to collect information using in-depth interviews alone or jointly with focus groups and participant observation, and one used a mixed-method approach. The different methodological approaches were chosen according to the objectives of the research, and together they provide a wealth of information for better understanding youth migration and youths' transitions to adulthood. The qualitative methodologies based on the narratives of those interviewed provide insight into people's values, attitudes, and behaviors (the "why"), while the articles that used quantitative approaches use statistical associations and significance to describe and analyze the migration condition and the transitions to adulthood process. There has been a wide discussion in the literature on the transition to adulthood about the importance of age in the analysis (Dixon-Mueller 2008; Lloyd 2005). These articles also vary in respect to the age groups examined, with some using their own definitions of adolescence and youth depending on the topic being addressed, while others use the more standard 15–24 age group.

The articles can be classified into three themes: (1) migration in the context of transitions to adulthood, including schooling, employment, and family formation;

(2) consequences of migration for health, reproductive outcomes, and childbearing; and (3) migration strategies and consequences. All the articles presented here are innovative in their approach, and their findings advance our understanding of youths' migration and transitions to adulthood in developing countries.

### *Migration in the context of transitions to adulthood*

Each of the five articles included in this section uses an innovative approach to explore several transitions simultaneously. Four articles on Mexico, Malawi, China, and Indonesia are quantitative, while the fifth article is based on qualitative evidence from Mexicans in the United States. The two articles that look at Mexico focus on international migration, while the articles on Malawi, China, and Indonesia deal with internal migration.

The study by Rene Zenteno, Silvia Giorguli, and Edith Gutiérrez examines existing theories of international migration and concludes that they have failed to distinguish age-related variations. The article examines how migration motivations vary depending on the stage in the life course, particularly during the youth-to-adult transition among adolescent men and women migrating to the United States. The authors estimate discrete-time hazard models using retrospective life history data from the Mexican Migration Project. A key finding of the article is that the migration process operates differently in adolescence than it does later in the life course. The article also examines how adolescent migration is influenced by other major markers of the transition to adulthood, such as education, labor force experience, and family formation.

The article from Kathleen Beegle and Michelle Poulin investigates the relationship among major life events, household characteristics, and migration among adolescents and young adults in Malawi. Using two years of panel data (2007 and 2009) from the Marriage Transitions Survey in Malawi, designed to explore socioeconomic and demographic aspects of youth transitions to adulthood, the authors find important gender differences in migration patterns among adolescents and young adults. While migrations during youth are common in the country, young women are found to be significantly more likely to migrate than are young men. Although a quarter of men reported moving for work-related reasons, the predominant reasons for migration for both genders are, nonetheless, noneconomic. A woman typically moves because of marriage or just after marrying, and her migration is more likely to be influenced by school attendance and wealth than by age per se, a pattern different from that observed in the past. In addition, the authors report that closer ties to the head of the household are associated with less mobility for both young women and men.

Juhua Yang's article addresses the important topic of social exclusion of young rural-urban migrants in China. Using the 2005 National One Percent Population Survey data, she applies multilevel models to examine the characteristics and correlates of migrants' socioeconomic integration. Her results indicate that young rural-urban migrants achieve lower socioeconomic outcomes when compared to

local (nonmigrant) youths and to urban-urban migratory youth. Young migrants coming from rural areas are less likely to obtain employment positions that provide high incomes, better social benefits, and housing subsidies—resources that are mainly reserved for local urban residents. She concludes that the potentially beneficial effects of migration on personal development and economic success are compromised by institutional barriers that exclude migrants from rural areas and, to a lesser degree, other outsiders, particularly youths, from succeeding in city life.

The article by Ariane Utomo, Anna Reimondos, Iwu Dwisetyani Utomo, Peter McDonald, and Terrence Hull examines the impact of internal migration and its timing on young women's transitions to adulthood in Greater Jakarta, Indonesia. The authors use data from the 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood Survey to explore the timing of five key adulthood markers: leaving the parental home, leaving school, entering the workforce, marrying, and having children. Specially, they investigate the role of variations in education, marriage, and fertility patterns in explaining migrant and nonmigrant women's current employment outcomes. To provide a deeper insight into migration motivations and the life strategies that these women adopt to navigate their transitions to adulthood, they complement their statistical analysis with qualitative data from a series of in-depth interviews.

Finally, Georgina Rojas-García uses a qualitative approach to examine the process through which "Generation 1.5" Mexican student-migrants to the United States manage to obtain a college education in the United States and the uncertainty that surrounds their future careers. These young adults were born in Mexico and taken to the United States by their parents in their formative years. The analysis shows that, despite often being poor and vulnerable, young illegal immigrants can be high achievers in the academic arena, although their subsequent employment prospects are limited due to their legal status. She finds that enrollment in a higher education institution does not alter the students' official migration status or increase their chances of obtaining citizenship or residency. Their situation could thus be characterized as "qualified but excluded," as their existence as residents is not legally recognized.

### *Consequences of migration for health, reproductive outcomes, and childbearing*

This subsection contains three empirical studies that use data from India, Kenya, and a cross-section of sub-Saharan African countries. By contrast with the first set of articles, these articles show the negative consequences of youth migration on reproductive health outcomes.

The study by Rajib Acharya, K. G. Santhya, and Shireen Jejeebhoy provides valuable evidence for the relationship between unmarried young people's migration experiences during adolescence and young adulthood and their sexual behaviors in India. Using multivariate logistic regression models, their findings



show that migrant youths are more likely than others to experience romantic relationships and initiate sex before marriage. Moreover, among the sexually experienced, young men who had migrated are more likely than others to report having had multiple sexual partners. Their study contributes to the body of literature on population mobility and its relationship to the sexual behavior of young people, a subject for which information is scarce in India.

The article from Hongwei Xu, Blessing Mberu, Rachel Goldberg, and Nancy Luke investigates how the timing and frequency of rural-to-urban moves in Kenya are associated with premarital pregnancy. Using event history methods, their results show a higher risk of premarital pregnancy among migrants than nonmigrants. Their study employs a novel survey instrument called the "Relationship History Calendar" (RHC) from the Urban Life among Youth in Kisumu Project conducted in 2007. This study is one of the first to adopt a life course approach to investigate how multiple dimensions of the rural-to-urban migration experience act to hasten or delay the event of premarital pregnancy. The authors conclude that migration incurs or enhances specific risks for youth, creating a greater need for sexual and reproductive health education services, services that should be made available to new urban residents.

Monica Magadi's study examines migration as a risk factor for HIV infections among youths in sub-Saharan Africa. Taking into account country- and regional-level variations, she estimates multilevel models using the youth samples of the Demographic and Health Surveys from nineteen countries in the region, conducted between 2003 and 2008. Her results suggest that young migrants are more vulnerable to contracting HIV compared to nonmigrants. However, the higher risks observed for migrants are, to a large extent, explained by differences in their background demographic and socioeconomic factors. In particular, migrants are more likely to be older, to have been married, or to live in urban areas, all of which are associated with higher risks of HIV. Her article also highlights the vulnerability of orphans and ever-married young female migrants, calling for further research to better understand the underlying mechanisms for increased risk among these specific subgroups.

### *Migration strategies and consequences*

In the last section, which contains four qualitative studies from West Africa—two from Mali, one from Mauritania, and one from Senegal. Claudine Sauvain-Dugerdil explores the impact of unprecedented individual youth mobility among the Sarnyéré Dogon in Mali. She asks whether youth migration acts as a mitigating factor to cope with new uncertainties in contemporary life or whether it is instead a dimension of ongoing social disintegration. She finds that youth mobility, especially that of girls, is a new phenomenon because it is grounded primarily in individual rather than collective (family) strategies. Although these migrations are typically short term and occur over relatively short distances, they provide precious alternatives to local work and life in this

agricultural subsistence setting. However, whereas economic reasons underpin boys' moves, for young unmarried girls the predominant driving force for migrations is to discover the outside world. Sauvain-Dugerdil finds that, in regard to intergenerational relations, there is a delicate redistribution of power that is occurring within the society. Real generational conflicts seem to be avoided, however, thanks to the realism of the older generations, which are resigned to the fact that "times are changing."

The study by Véronique Hertrich and Marie Lesclingand investigates the challenge to gender and intergenerational relationships of adolescent migration in rural Mali. In the context under study, most adolescents engage in labor migration, which occurs mainly within the country or to neighboring countries. The article examines the experiences, expectations, and perceptions of adolescent migration from different perspectives and takes into account gender and generation. Their findings reveal that expectations are very different for the two genders: adolescent boys use migration to strengthen their status within the family, while adolescent girls express strong expectations in terms of learning. Young men's labor mobility has developed in line with family strategies and is perceived positively by local society. Conversely, the growth of labor migration among adolescent girls has developed independently of family projects and caters to more personal desires. The authors conclude that, for young girls, migration increases self-esteem and opens the range of possibilities for their adult lives.

The article by Fabienne Tanon and Abdoulaye Sow examines a set of issues related to risky and illegal unaccompanied youth migration from Mauritania to Europe, which is strongly encouraged by the positive cultural perception of emigrants in Mauritanian society. The authors find that youths' desire to enhance their social prestige is the main reason for migration, and therefore, the "migrant" embodies a new emblematic figure of success whose social visibility is undeniable. The authors argue that any discourse urging adolescents to remain in their home country (with the exception of the firstborn son) is *de facto* in contradiction with the fundamental pillars of the society. Their analysis is supported by a rich reflection on the nature of local culture and on historical developments, in which the idealized role of migrants is grounded, highlighting the enormous challenge of designing policy that could effectively halt high-risk youth migration to Europe.

The last article, by Nathalie Mondain, Alioune Diagne, and Sara Randall, brings a qualitative perspective to the transitory phase of life that European migration represents to many young Senegalese men. The authors' research reveals a complex picture of the situations of prospective and current emigrants in the study site, and of relations of reciprocity and solidarity within the kin network. They find that predominant motivations to emigrate are related to the social prestige associated with being viewed as a successful migrant and to the obligation young people feel toward their elders to provide them with the means to live out their old age in the best conditions. In line with this idea of



intergenerational responsibilities, they also report that most emigrants require the support of their elders to fund their migration, thus reinforcing their feelings of obligation toward them.

To conclude, these studies and their findings clearly attest to the enormous diversity of situations of youth migration, transitions to adulthood, and the contexts in which they occur. For some adolescents and young adults, migration brings with it very serious risks and often negative consequences, while for others it opens horizons and is associated with expanding opportunities in both the social and economic spheres. Factors that influence the nature of the migration and its outcome include the young person's age at the time of the move, whether the migration occurred alone or within the framework of the family, and the activities and living conditions of the young migrant at the place of destination. We hope that these articles will encourage others to pursue research in this important and largely neglected area, work that is of great value to better understand the stakes involved in youth migration and to inform policy to address the needs of these often vulnerable youth.

## Note

1. This seminar was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 8 to 10 December 2010, and was coorganized by the IUSSP scientific panel, the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), and the Centre for Demographic, Urban and Environmental Studies (CEDUA) of El Colegio de México. Panel members were Fatima Juárez (chair), Véronique Hertrich, Shireen Jejeebhoy, Thomas LeGrand, Cynthia Lloyd, and Susheela Singh.

## References

- Arango, Joaquin. 2000. Explaining migration: A critical view. *International Social Sciences Journal* 165:283–96.
- Collinson Mark, Kubaje Adazu, Michael White, and Sally Findley, eds. 2009. *The dynamics of migration, health and livelihoods*. London: Ashgate.
- Dixon-Mueller, Ruth. 2008. How young is “too young”? Comparative perspectives on adolescent sexual, marital, and reproductive transitions. *Studies in Family Planning* 39 (4): 247–62.
- Grant, Monica, and Frank F. Furstenberg Jr. 2007. Changes in the transition to adulthood in less developed countries. *European Journal of Population/Revue Européenne de Démographie* 23 (3–4): 415–28.
- Juárez, Fatima, Thomas LeGrand, Cynthia Lloyd, and Susheela Singh. 2008. Introduction: Adolescent sexual and reproductive health in sub-Saharan Africa. *Studies in Family Planning* 39 (4): 239–44.
- Lloyd, Cynthia B., ed. 2005. *Growing up global: The changing transitions to adulthood in developing countries*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, Panel on Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries, National Research Council.
- Massey, Douglas S., Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino, and J. Edward Taylor. 1993. Theories of international migration: A review and appraisal. *Population and Development Review* 19 (3): 431–66.
- Spano, Sedra. 2004. *Stages of adolescent development*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, University of Rochester, and the New York State Center for School Safety. Available from [http://www.actforyouth.net/resources/rf/rf\\_stages\\_0504.pdf](http://www.actforyouth.net/resources/rf/rf_stages_0504.pdf) (accessed 18 February 2013).

- Stark, Oded, and David Bloom. 1985. The new economics of labor migration. *American Economic Review* 75 (2): 173–78.
- UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). 2006. *Moving young. Youth supplement to the UNFPA state of world population 2006*. New York, NY: UNFPA.
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2013. *World population prospects: The 2010 revision*. New York, NY: UN. Available from [http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/unpp/panel\\_indicators.htm](http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/unpp/panel_indicators.htm) (assessed February 2013).
- White, Michael, and David Lindstrom. 2005. Internal migration. In *Handbook of population*, eds. Dudley L. Poston, and Michael Micklin, 311–46. New York, NY: Springer.