

The 2011 Competition

The 2011 Competition on Youth Migration was launched on January 17, 2011. Young people around the world were invited to submit essays and videos responding to the following questions:

- *How has migration (international or internal, in a sending or a receiving country) affected you, your family, your community, or your country?*
- *How do you perceive the benefits of migration (increased opportunities for young people, remittances) versus the risks (brain drain, illegal immigration and exploitation of young immigrants)?*
- *What actions can you recommend for broadening opportunities for young migrants in their countries of destination and their countries of origin?*



The competition attracted more than 2,000 submissions in English, French and Spanish from 140 countries (95% of submissions came from developing countries).

Reviewers observations and general conclusions from essay review

Throughout the review process (each reviewer read approximately 250 essays), reviewers were asked to record the issues, risks and benefits of youth migration cited most often by young people, as well as the innovative ways young people are tackling these issues. Some of the general conclusions are as follows:

1. As to how migration impacts a young person's life:

- Migration is a predominant issue for young people: whether receiving remittances from family members abroad or contemplating migrating themselves, there is a general sense that migration may be a young person's best chance to improve his / her economic opportunities and quality of life.
- Many young people feel pressured to choose careers (i.e. nursing) that will allow them to work abroad to send money back home.
- Children of immigrants must often bear the responsibility of their parents' expectations. The sacrifices made by parents that migrated so that their children would have a better life, can weigh heavily on young people.
- In many countries, it is a symbol of prestige to have a family member studying or working abroad; many young people do not return home after studying abroad simply for fear of being viewed as a failure.

2. What do young people see as the main benefits of migration:

- Remittances - which are sometimes large enough to meet the basic needs of an entire extended family, and seen as more effective than aid in terms of directly benefiting poor households.
- Exchange of ideas and knowledge that result from migration, technology and skill transfer, cultural exchange, language acquisition, etc, can benefit both receiving and sending countries and promote "multicultural" societies and increased understanding across nations.
- "Brain gain" – many young people have benefitted for example from a teacher or doctor that had trained abroad and returned to use his / her skills to benefit local populations. While many young authors hoped for or had been given the opportunity to study abroad – the will to return and make a difference in their home country was viewed as the biggest challenge to harnessing the largest benefits of migration.

¹ The full Essay Competition Report is available upon request





- Escape from political, religious or racial persecution - migration to a more tolerant country can be the only opportunity for oppressed populations to live in dignity.

3. ... and the main risks:

- Rural to urban migration may be responsible for the downward trend of agricultural development in many countries - ultimately increasing the poverty rate of rural communities. Rural villages and communities devastated from the exodus of the young population – older generation left to fend for themselves.
- Remittance dependent economy : many young people fear their country is overly dependent on remittances which, while providing short-term benefits, will not contribute to long term economic growth.
- Brain drain: the high cost of losing a country's educated youth is not easily compensated and young people recognize brain drain and "brain waste" (e.g., doctor going abroad to work as a nurse to get a higher wage - the deskilling of a country's human resources) as major contributors to chronic underdevelopment.
- Families torn apart by migration – children growing up without parents while also having to care for younger siblings, essentially losing their youth to distress migration; families separated for years and sometimes permanently due to changing immigration laws which inhibit family reunification.
- Exploitation of migrants – many young migrants experience wage theft, abuse and inhuman working conditions, regardless of legal or illegal status in the host country, as they are largely uninformed of their rights as migrants.
- Discrimination – many young people wrote of the discrimination they faced studying abroad and difficulties overcoming longstanding cultural prejudices to integrate in a foreign country.
- Illegal migration, human trafficking, sexual slavery – young people with dreams of a better life are easy targets for illegal migration schemes.
- Labor migration – mainly men, entering the manual labor market at a very young age but being forced to exit early due to the strenuous physical demands thus diminishing the capacity to earn after age 40.
- Young female migrants who often go abroad into individualized work environments (e.g., domestic service) are prone to isolation and depression as they have less chance of integrating and establishing social support networks.

4. Suggestions to help ensure a positive outcome to youth migration:

- Increase information on migration with a focus on migrant workers' rights, visa and work permit issues, legitimate job opportunities, brokers and contacts, while exposing fraudulent immigration schemes and illegal practices. Would be migrants, students, and immigrant communities would be target populations. Websites, facebook groups, hotline telephone numbers, volunteer information offices, youth-focused travel agencies and diaspora groups were noted as channels for disseminating information.
- Promotion of business process outsourcing and the use of technology to allow people to work in their home country for companies thousands of kilometers away, thus permitting families to stay together while reducing labor costs and immigration issues for destination country.
- Proportional migration – link migration to the availability of jobs thus reducing anti-immigration sentiment in receiving countries and ensuring legitimate job opportunities for migrants.
- Target education to labor market needs to increase young graduates' prospects of finding a job in their home country.
- Study abroad programs must include incentives for young people to return home – such as guaranteed employment or reimbursement of school fees upon return. Reducing brain drain is the main area where young people believe government action is imperative.
- Still, young people overall recognized their own responsibility to use skills learned abroad to contribute to effecting change in their home country

Selected Quotes from Various Essays²

"But all reasons that can go from searching for a job that provides a better income, a safer place to live or a better education, can be reduced into one common desire: finding a place where opportunities are in reach, a place where life isn't only about survival but, above all, about living and being able to live – a place where a father can work and be paid enough to buy basic necessities for his wife and children; a place



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where a mother doesn't have to worry about her family not receiving medical care when needed; a place where kids of all different ages and backgrounds can dream, play and receive a good education." (Brazil)

"Empty streets, broken families and lonely children – that's the payment for that desperate hope for a better life." (Moldova)

"When it is the young people that migrate, the exchange of ideas and knowledge that comes with moving people around is amplified as with whatever means we have we become more and more connected to each other across borders. This is the basis of a bright future where we will interact as good business partners, good trade partners, good neighbors and good citizens of the world. If the world opens the doors to us we have a great chance of being more culturally sensitive, more driven, more knowledgeable – and the world will have an enlightened generation." (Indonesia)

"Only a literate youth would know that there is a better and safer route to Italy than paddling across the Mediterranean." (Nigeria)

"The populations of the North African countries of Tunisia and Egypt – whose median ages are 29.7 and 24, respectively (Index Mundi) – would not have been nearly as successful in their political revolutions without their young population, who were not only quite likely the most informed about how much more ethical and functional their society could be, but also able to rally support internationally through social networking media such as Facebook and Twitter. There has been no better example in recent history of the necessity of youth in both societal progression and the realization of globalization in a nation. The youth of these countries have proven quite clearly that groups of young people are the most effective and necessary vehicle for ideological progression on a national level." (USA)

"In one way or the other, those that travelled out of the country are often exalted. The government is quick to employ anybody who studies abroad, leaving those who studied at home with the slimmest of opportunities. This is easily verifiable: most of my lecturers at the university studied abroad; all prominent doctors studied abroad; old and current government officials studied abroad; even our president studied abroad. Families who have nobody abroad feel left out in the society. Such families often strive to let the younger generation have the opportunity to travel out. Their whole lives after sending somebody abroad lies completely on the probability of that person being successful." (Cameroon)

"If you live in a country where you were born, you take it for granted. If your citizenship is a result of conscious choice, you will always remember the price that stands behind it: relatives and friends left of the previous life, the inability to express one's thoughts in native language, not knowing how your career would have developed and how your children would have succeeded in the same school that you graduated. The immigrants' destinies are very different, but the sacrifices are the same - they are always enormous." (Ukraine)

"Why is it that people migrate? What are they emigrating from and what are they immigrating to? In order to confront the complications of migration, we must stare head on at issues of global inequality, poverty, access to water, employment, governance, and human rights. In this sense, respecting and working towards the millennium development goals is a huge step in the way of slowing the flow of involuntary migration, and even of lessening the flow of voluntary migration. Migration – in particular, irregular migration – should not be framed as the problem, as it so often is in traditional receiving countries, but rather should be seen as a symptom of greater global inequities that urgently need to be addressed." (USA)

"We could recommend heaven and earth on the issues of youth migration for years and not live to ensure it. We owe it to ourselves as the youth to change our mindsets about our countries of origin. We must do our part to make our own nations better. We must work together wherever possible to change the direction of our troubled nations, into our direction of peace and sustainable development. Our choices today may write our dirge or lyrics of survival tomorrow!" (Nigeria)

The Essay Competition is an annual worldwide competition targeting youths aged 18-25, managed by the World Bank's Paris Office. Launched for the first time in 2004, its objective is to provide an opportunity for youth around the world to share their ideas on critical development issues. The competition is designed and implemented in partnership with the following organizations: Africa Leadership Forum, Jadavpur University, European Students' Forum (AEGEE), Junior Achievement Worldwide, AIESEC International, Conciencia Association, Local Youth Corner, University Paris East, London International Development Centre, World Bank Development Economics Department and Youthink!