

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF YOUNG MIGRANTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This article provides a detailed comparative analysis of the challenges and opportunities in protecting the rights of young migrants across different countries. As migration continues to shape global demographics, the protection of young migrants' rights has become an urgent issue. The paper examines the legal frameworks, social protection programs, and integration policies in the United States, Germany, Canada, and Sweden, highlighting both successes and ongoing challenges. By analyzing these countries' experiences, the study offers insights into best practices and suggests recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of policies aimed at protecting young migrants' rights.

Keywords: young migrants, legal protection, integration, comparative analysis, social protection, migration policy, international migration.

Introduction

Global migration trends have brought the issue of protecting young migrants' rights to the forefront of international discourse. As the number of young migrants continues to grow, countries around the world are grappling with the complex task of integrating these individuals into their societies while ensuring that their fundamental rights are protected. The conditions under which young migrants live, their access to education, healthcare, and employment, and their overall integration into society are critical factors that determine their future success and well-being.

According to the United Nations, there were approximately 281 million international migrants in 2020, of which an estimated 36 million were children under the age of 18. This demographic shift underscores the importance of understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with protecting young migrants' rights. The diverse experiences of different countries in managing migration provide valuable lessons that can inform global strategies for improving the protection of young migrants. [1]

Today, the world is home to more young people than ever before, with a staggering 1.8 billion individuals, marking the largest youth generation in history. Of the 258 million international migrants in the world, about 11 percent were under the age of 24 in 2017. Young people are particularly inclined to migrate, more so than any other age group. [2]

In an increasingly connected world, today's youth are brimming with potential and represent a valuable resource worth investing in. When young people are empowered and equipped with the right tools, they can leverage their energy, creativity, and talents to transform an uncertain future into a landscape filled with opportunities. Active and meaningful participation in their communities enhances their ability to support and contribute to societal growth. Moreover, youth can play a pivotal role in policy discussions, advocating for their rights and opportunities, and ensuring they have a voice in decision-making processes. A notable example of this is the global youth movement against climate change.

While the role of youth has been explored from various perspectives, this Dialogue on Migration seeks to create a global, multi-stakeholder platform for a more comprehensive, inclusive, and diverse discussion. The focus is on engaging youth with migration policy decision-makers, as well as with international, regional, and national actors, businesses, scholars, and diaspora groups, linking their involvement directly to migration issues.

This article explores the key challenges and opportunities in protecting the rights of young migrants by conducting a comparative analysis of four countries: the United States, Germany, Canada, and Sweden. These countries were selected due to their diverse migration policies and their significant migrant populations. The study examines each country's legal frameworks, social protection programs, and integration policies, offering a comprehensive overview of the various approaches to protecting young migrants.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a comparative analysis methodology to evaluate the approaches of the United States, Germany, Canada, and Sweden in protecting the rights of young migrants. The research is based on data obtained from international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Labour Organization, and various government agencies in the countries under study. Academic literature, policy reports, and statistical databases were also utilized to provide a robust foundation for the analysis.

The criteria for comparison include:

1. **Legal Frameworks:** The existence and effectiveness of laws and regulations that protect young migrants' rights, including access to education, healthcare, and employment.
2. **Social Protection Programs:** The availability and accessibility of social services, including education, healthcare, housing, and social security benefits, tailored to the needs of young migrants.
3. **Integration Policies:** The effectiveness of programs designed to facilitate the social and economic integration of young migrants, including language courses, vocational training, and anti-discrimination measures.

Statistical data on the number of young migrants, their demographic characteristics, and their outcomes in education, employment, and health were gathered from reports by the United Nations, World Bank, International Labour Organization, and other international bodies. This data was used to analyze the impact of different policies and practices on the well-being of young migrants in each country.

Literature view

Migration has long been a defining feature of human history, but the scale and complexity of migration in the 21st century present unprecedented challenges and opportunities. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2022), there were approximately 281 million international migrants globally in 2020, of which around 36 million were under the age of 18. This substantial number underscores the importance of focusing on young migrants, who represent a vulnerable yet critical segment of the global migrant population. The propensity to migrate is especially high among young people, driven by factors such as economic opportunities, education, conflict, and environmental changes (United Nations, 2021). [3]

International legal frameworks play a crucial role in defining and protecting the rights of migrants, including young migrants. Key instruments include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990). These conventions emphasize the importance of safeguarding the rights of young migrants, including their right to education, healthcare, and protection from exploitation and abuse (UNICEF, 2021). [4]

Despite the existence of these frameworks, the implementation and enforcement of migrant rights vary significantly across countries. As noted by the International Labour Organization (2023), legal protections are often undermined by restrictive immigration policies and a lack of political will, particularly in regions where anti-immigrant sentiment is strong. This inconsistency in the application of international norms highlights the need for stronger global governance and cooperation in protecting the rights of young migrants.

Social protection and integration policies are essential for ensuring that young migrants have access to the services and opportunities they need to thrive. Research by the International Organization for Migration (2023) indicates that countries with comprehensive social protection systems, such as Canada and Sweden, tend to have more successful integration outcomes for young migrants. These systems provide access to education, healthcare, and social services, which are critical for the well-being and development of young migrants. [5]

However, as observed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2022), there is significant variation in the effectiveness of social protection programs across different countries. In many cases, young migrants face barriers to accessing these services due to legal status, language barriers, or discrimination. For instance, in the United States, undocumented young migrants often face significant challenges in accessing education and healthcare, despite the existence of programs like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (Migration Policy Institute, 2022).

Education and employment are key determinants of successful integration for young migrants. As noted by the World Bank (2023), access to quality education and vocational training is crucial for young migrants to develop the skills they need to succeed in their new environment. Countries like Germany and Canada have implemented robust educational programs aimed at integrating young migrants into the education system and labor market. Germany's dual education system, which combines academic learning with vocational training, has been particularly effective in helping young migrants secure employment (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2021). [6]

Nevertheless, disparities in educational outcomes between native-born and migrant youth persist in many countries. Research by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2022) highlights that migrant youth in the EU are more likely to drop out of school and face higher unemployment rates compared to their native-born peers. These challenges are often exacerbated by discrimination, lack of language skills, and limited access to resources.

Discussion and results

The United States Experience

The United States is home to a significant population of young migrants, many of whom face considerable challenges in accessing basic services and opportunities. As of 2023, there were approximately 10.5 million children of immigrants under the age of 18 in the U.S., representing 26% of

the total child population. This large and diverse group includes children of both documented and undocumented immigrants, each facing unique challenges.

A 2022 report by the Migration Policy Institute highlighted that 34% of children of immigrants in the U.S. lived in poverty, compared to 17% of children of U.S.-born parents. This economic disparity is compounded by legal and institutional barriers that limit access to education, healthcare, and social services. For instance, approximately 15% of young migrants in the U.S. are undocumented, which significantly restricts their access to higher education and healthcare. Programs like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) have provided temporary relief to some undocumented youth, granting them work permits and protection from deportation. However, DACA's limited scope and uncertain future have left many young migrants in a precarious situation.

Educational attainment among young migrants in the U.S. also lags behind that of their native-born peers. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the high school graduation rate for immigrant children was 65% in 2022, compared to 85% for U.S.-born children. Additionally, young migrants are more likely to attend under-resourced schools, further exacerbating educational disparities. The challenges faced by young migrants in the U.S. are indicative of the broader difficulties in integrating this population into American society. [7]

The United Nations recognizes young people as rights-holders, and promotes and facilitates transparency, accountability and responsiveness from duty bearers toward young people. The Youth Strategy uses a human-rights based, gender-transformative, sensitive and responsive approach. It also recognizes that it cannot achieve its mission without partnering with young people and ensuring that they are “not only heard but understood, not only engaged but empowered, and not only supporting but leading global efforts and processes”.⁵ The 2018 World Youth Report⁶ emphasizes that the goals, targets and instruments incorporated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offer increased opportunities to advance youth development objectives in the context of social, economic and environmentally sustainable development efforts. [8]

The German Experience

Germany has taken a proactive approach to migrant integration, particularly since the influx of refugees in 2015. As of 2022, Germany hosted nearly 3.2 million children of migrants, making up 30% of the total population under 18. Germany's integration strategy is centered on education and vocational training, with a strong emphasis on language acquisition and cultural orientation.

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) reported that in 2023, 85% of young migrants participated in integration courses, which include language learning and cultural orientation. These courses are designed to help young migrants adapt to German society and improve their chances of success in the education system and labor market. Germany's dual education system, which combines classroom instruction with apprenticeships, has been particularly effective in integrating young migrants into the workforce. A 2021 study by the Bertelsmann Stiftung found that 75% of young migrants who completed vocational training programs were employed within a year, highlighting the effectiveness of this approach. [9]

Despite these successes, challenges remain. Young migrants in Germany still face discrimination in the labor market and are more likely to be unemployed than their native-born peers. Additionally, the education system, while effective for those who complete vocational training, has been criticized for tracking students at an early age, which can limit the opportunities available to young migrants.

Ensuring that all young migrants have equal access to educational and employment opportunities remains a key challenge for Germany.

The Canadian Experience

Canada is often hailed as a global leader in migrant integration, with policies that emphasize inclusivity and equal access to services for all residents, including young migrants. In 2021, Canada had over 1.3 million children of immigrants, representing 25% of the total youth population. Canada's approach to migrant integration is characterized by a comprehensive support system that includes education, healthcare, and community engagement.

According to Statistics Canada, 92% of young migrants were enrolled in school in 2021, and 89% reported having access to healthcare services. The Canadian government's Settlement Program plays a crucial role in supporting young migrants, offering language training, employment services, and social support. These services are designed to help young migrants integrate into Canadian society and succeed in their new environment. [10]

A 2022 survey by the Canadian Council for Refugees found that 88% of young migrants felt they were well-integrated into Canadian society, a significant increase from 75% in 2015. This high level of satisfaction is reflected in the educational outcomes of young migrants, with 85% completing high school and 70% pursuing post-secondary education. Additionally, Canada's emphasis on multiculturalism and anti-discrimination policies has contributed to a more inclusive environment for young migrants.

However, challenges persist, particularly in rural areas where access to services may be limited. Additionally, while Canada's policies are generally inclusive, the experiences of young migrants can vary depending on their country of origin, language skills, and socioeconomic status. Addressing these disparities is crucial for ensuring that all young migrants have equal opportunities to succeed in Canada.

The Swedish Experience

Sweden is recognized for its comprehensive approach to migrant integration, particularly in its support for young migrants. As of 2023, there were approximately 580,000 children of immigrants in Sweden, comprising 21% of the total youth population. Sweden's approach to integration is built on the principles of equality and inclusivity, with a focus on providing young migrants with the resources they need to succeed.

The Swedish Migration Agency reports that 95% of young migrants have access to education and healthcare services, both of which are provided free of charge. Sweden's "Introduction Program" for young migrants includes language classes, vocational training, and mentorship programs aimed at facilitating their integration into society. These programs have been highly effective, with a 2023 report by the Swedish Institute for Social Research finding that 80% of young migrants who participated in the program were either employed or enrolled in higher education within two years. [11]

Sweden's commitment to anti-discrimination policies has also been crucial in ensuring that young migrants are treated equitably. The country's robust legal framework provides strong protections against discrimination in education, employment, and access to services. Despite these successes, challenges remain, particularly in addressing the disparities in employment outcomes between native-born and migrant youth. Ensuring that young migrants have equal opportunities in the labor market is a key focus for Swedish policymakers moving forward. [12]

The comparative analysis of the United States, Germany, Canada, and Sweden reveals significant differences in the approaches to protecting the rights of young migrants. While all four countries have implemented programs aimed at supporting young migrants, the effectiveness of these programs varies depending on the legal, social, and economic context of each country.

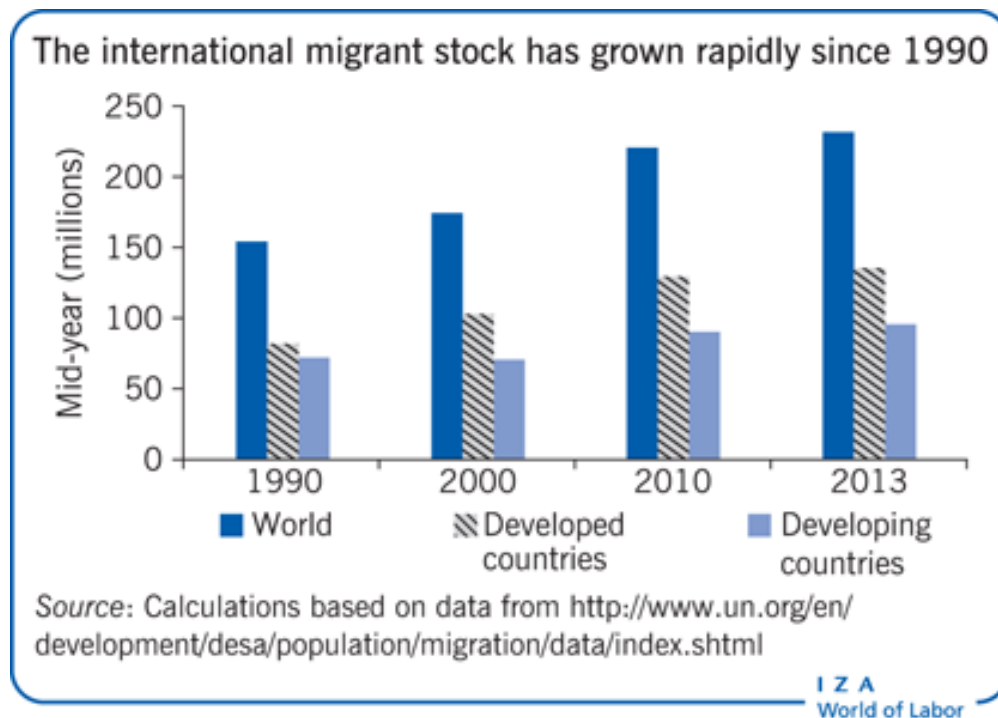


Table 1: The international migrant stock has grown rapidly since 1990

Around a billion people globally either live and work outside their country of birth or migrate within their own country away from their region of origin. Traditionally, labor migration is seen as economically beneficial to the family members left behind, primarily through remittances. However, this separation can also lead to various negative effects on the education, health, labor participation, and social status of those who do not migrate. Determining the direct impact of migration on the well-being of these family members is a complex empirical challenge, with research providing mixed and inconclusive results. [13]

In the United States, the challenges faced by young migrants are deeply intertwined with the country's complex immigration system. The lack of a clear path to legal status for undocumented youth, coupled with significant disparities in access to education and healthcare, has created a precarious situation for many young migrants. While programs like DACA have provided temporary relief, the long-term protection of young migrants in the U.S. requires comprehensive immigration reform. [14]

Germany's approach to migrant integration, with its focus on education and vocational training, has proven effective in helping young migrants enter the labor market. However, the challenges of discrimination and unequal opportunities persist, highlighting the need for ongoing efforts to promote equity in education and employment. Germany's experience underscores the importance of providing young migrants with the tools they need to succeed, while also addressing the broader social and economic barriers they face.

Canada's holistic approach to migrant integration, which combines access to education, healthcare, and social services, has been highly successful in promoting the integration of young migrants. The high levels of satisfaction and engagement reported by young migrants in Canada are a testament to the effectiveness of these policies. However, disparities in access to services and opportunities, particularly in rural areas, remain a challenge that requires attention.

Sweden's comprehensive support programs and strong anti-discrimination policies have contributed to high levels of integration and success among young migrants. The country's commitment to equality and inclusivity serves as a model for other countries seeking to improve the protection of young migrants. However, as in other countries, disparities in employment outcomes remain a challenge, highlighting the need for ongoing efforts to ensure that all young migrants have equal opportunities to succeed.

Immigrants from outside EU and emigrants to outside EU, EU, 2013–2022
 (million)

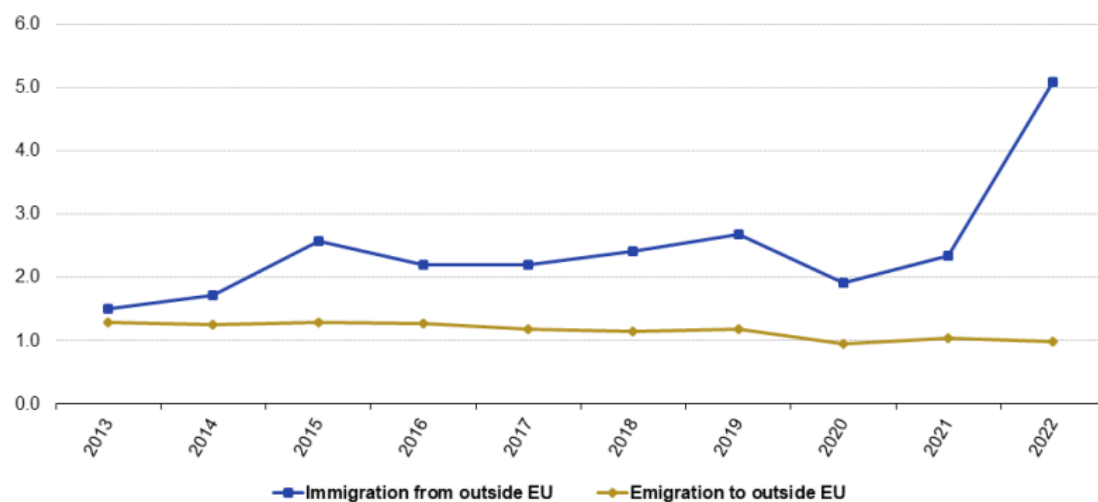


Table 2: Immigrants from outside EU and emigrants to outside EU 2013-2022

In 2022, the European Union saw the arrival of 5.1 million immigrants from non-EU countries, alongside 1.5 million individuals who moved from one EU Member State to another. Additionally, 0.4 million people with unknown previous residence also migrated to an EU Member State, bringing the total number of international arrivals to 7.0 million. Conversely, approximately 2.7 million people emigrated from the EU, with around 1.0 million of them leaving an EU Member State to move to a non-EU country. For comparison, in 2021, the EU recorded an estimated 2.4 million immigrants from non-EU countries and 1.4 million individuals migrating between EU Member States. Around 1.0 million people emigrated from the EU to non-EU countries that year. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2019, there were approximately 2.7 million immigrants to the EU from non-EU countries, 1.4 million people moving between EU Member States, and about 1.2 million people emigrating from the EU to non-EU countries. [15]

The 20 young men, aged between 17 and 23 years, were first interviewed when they had recently migrated. For 11 of them, the trading center was their initial destination after leaving home. The remaining nine had previously worked in other towns before arriving at the trading center, often due

to challenges with their jobs or living arrangements. Their decision to move was frequently influenced by information about job opportunities in the trading center.

The young men's stories revealed that they were navigating a constantly changing social environment, often beyond their control, as they sought ways to succeed. While much of the existing literature on male migration emphasizes the pursuit of paid work, we found that these young men employed various other strategies to earn money and establish themselves in their new surroundings.

At the time of the interviews, all the young men were earning some income, though most did not have a stable wage. Four were trainees in metalwork or motor mechanics shops, eight were selling food items at a road toll on the main road through the town, and two were making and selling chapatis (pancakes made from flour, oil, and water) on the streets. Two others were fishing at a nearby site, one was working on a rice farm, one in a video shop, and another as a cleaner in a guesthouse. Despite the precarious nature of their earnings, all of them had aspirations for the future, often talking about plans to move to a larger town where they could start a business, build a house, and settle down once they had enough money. [16]

This paper focuses on the experiences of three of these young men, referred to as Bosco, Davis, and Isaac. Through their stories, we gain insights into the challenges faced by all the young men as they adjusted to life in a new place. Most of them had moved from within southern Uganda, with about half, including Bosco and Davis, having relocated less than 50 kilometers from their homes. Others, like Isaac, who had traveled more than five hours by public transport from his family home, had come from more distant areas. Two of the young men were originally from Rwanda, although both had previously worked in another town in Uganda before moving to the trading center.

The stories of Bosco, Davis, and Isaac reflect the broader experiences and migration journeys of all the young men. This paper first explores their upbringing before delving into the risks they faced and the strategies they employed to protect themselves in their new environment.

Conclusion

The protection of young migrants' rights is a critical issue that requires a multifaceted approach, combining legal protection, social support, and opportunities for education and employment. The experiences of the United States, Germany, Canada, and Sweden provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with protecting young migrants. While each country has made significant strides in supporting young migrants, there is still much work to be done to ensure that all young migrants have the opportunity to succeed.

Countries like Canada and Sweden, which emphasize inclusivity and provide comprehensive support to young migrants, serve as models for best practices in this area. The adoption of holistic, inclusive policies that address the specific needs of young migrants is essential for ensuring their successful integration into society. Additionally, international cooperation and the sharing of best practices can help countries address the common challenges faced by young migrants and improve the overall protection of their rights.

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