

UN meeting looks at impact of migration

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UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - After a decade of failed attempts, delegates from some 140 nations on Thursday open a two-day ministerial meeting on migration, an issue many countries once restricted to domestic policy.

But with more and more people leaving home to escape poverty, repression and warfare, or seek adventure or opportunities elsewhere, world leaders are more receptive to discussions on the impact of migration, U.N. and other experts say.

Nearly 200 million people, about 3 percent of the world's population, no longer live in the country of their birth, double the number of 25 years ago, according to the U.N. Population Division.

Most come from poor nations or those marked by conflict in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Six out of 10 live in rich countries and one out of five lives in the United States. The rest flock to other developing countries.

But too often migrants find themselves in a life worse or as bad as the one they left, subject to abuse, exploitation or lured into prostitution in both rich and poor countries.

Jeff Crisp, an adviser to the U.N. refugee agency and co-director of the U.N. University World Institute for Development Economics Research, said the increase in migration had fueled human trafficking.

"The consequences of being labeled either as a refugee or as a migrant are very, very major" and could be life-threatening, Crisp told a news conference on Monday.

To coincide with the conference, Human Rights Watch issued a report on Libya, accusing authorities of subjecting migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to serious beatings, false arrests and a return to countries where they face torture.

Libya is the host for tens of thousands of migrants, who provide cheap labor and who either stay in the north African country or try to reach Europe. Libya is also one of many nations that need technical help in asylum procedures, Crisp said.

Still, migrants fuel their home countries' economy by \$240 billion a year and spend more than \$2 trillion in their host nation, according to a report by The Global Commission on International Migration, a 19-member independent panel.

In industrial nations, which often keep migrants at arms length, reports over the past five years insist they are anything but a burden to society. Rich nations, especially those in Europe, are increasingly dependent on migrants because of their aging populations and low birthrates.

At the same time developing nations are urged to initiate programs to keep doctors, nurses and teachers at home or sponsor exchange programs to make their return worthwhile.

"We need to think through what we can do to provide them with security, safety and jobs in their own countries," Crisp said."

A dialogue on international migration was first proposed at a 1994 conference on population and development in Cairo. Two years ago the U.N. General Assembly decided to host this week's session.