The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The IOM Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) Regional Data Hub (RDH) team would like to extend special thanks to ROAP Director Dr. Maria Nenette Motus, Regional Thematic Specialists and other IOM colleagues for their constructive feedback on the draft chapters, including Andrea Milan, Andrew Lind, Donato Colucci, Isai Vriend, Jula Black, Kate Dearden, Maria Moita, Maria Veger, Nikkie Henwang, Pablo Rojas Coppari, Patrick Duigan, Poppi Kivimäki-Siddiq, Roberto Roca, Tomas Martin, Ernst, Vivianne Van de Vorst and Yunwan Jiang. The RDH team also thanks Valerie Hagger and the IOM Publication Team for their contribution in finalizing this report.

RDH team: Chandan Nayak, Anny Yip-Ching Yu, Gabriela Alvarez Sanchez, Emanuele Albarosa, Venkatesh Balaji, Bridgette Hogan and Zikria Takamul.

This project has received funding from Migration Resource Allocation Committee (MiRAC).

MiRAC
Migration Resource Allocation Committee

International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

18th Floor, Rajanakarn Building
3 South Sathorn Road
Bangkok 10120
Thailand
Tel: +66 2 343 9400
Email: robangkok@iom.int
Web: www.iom.int/asia-and-pacific

Regional Data Hub

Email: rdhroap@iom.int
twitter: https://twitter.com/RDHAsiaPacific

© IOM 2021

Some rights reserved. This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 IGO License (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 IGO).

For further specifications please see the Copyright and Terms of Use.

This publication should not be used, published or redistributed for purposes primarily intended for or directed towards commercial advantage or monetary compensation, with the exception of educational purposes e.g. to be included in textbooks.

Permissions: Requests for commercial use or further rights and licensing should be submitted to publications@iom.int

PUB2021/119/R
For several decades, countries in the Asia-Pacific region have been characterized as the places of origin, destination, and transit for millions of migrants. Migration to, from and within the region has been motivated by economic opportunities, labour demand from abroad, emerging threats and conflicts, natural disasters, and the effects of unsustainable development.

However, in 2020, these drivers of migration were heavily disrupted by the global pandemic. COVID-19 influenced most migration movements, as border closures and movement restrictions reduced mobility worldwide.

Well into the middle of 2021, COVID-19 has continued to disrupt and affect migration and displacement. Notably, however, the response to the pandemic has also highlighted stories of migrant resilience and their immense contributions to societies across the region and world. It is, therefore, imperative that improved and up-to-date information is made available to better understand migration pathways, drivers, and decision-making as well as to design effective and comprehensive policies.

In July 2020, the Regional Data Hub for Asia and the Pacific adopted its objectives, in line with IOM’s Global Migration Data Strategy and guided by IOM Strategic Vision 2019–2023 as well as the Asia Pacific Regional Strategy 2020–2024 to strengthen the regional evidence base on migration, enhance IOM’s data collection and analysis capabilities and to ensure more evidence-based IOM, UN-wide and government engagement on migration issues.

I am pleased that the Asia–Pacific Migration Data Report 2020 represents a significant step towards meeting these objectives. Based on data availability, the report brings out the main elements of migration dynamics in the region and their interaction with associate policies vis-à-vis the influence of COVID-19 and serves as a guide to understand the main regional migration dynamics in the region and beyond.

In line with Objective 1 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration to “collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies”, the Report captures the consequences of COVID-19 on migration and on migrants’ lives across the Asia-Pacific region.

Notably, the Report provides a significant set of recommendations to improve data collection activities in the region in various areas including migration statistics, types of migration, migration policy, vulnerabilities, and development, which are intended for consideration by partners, stakeholders, and government counterparts in the region.

It is with this in mind, that I look forward to the Asia–Pacific Migration Data Report 2020 richly contributing to discussions on and better understanding of migration, as well as fostering regional collaboration that facilitates orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

Dr. Maria Nenette Motus
Regional Director,
IOM Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACAPS</td>
<td>Assessment Capacities Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTDC</td>
<td>Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTM</td>
<td>Displacement Tracking Matrix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOSOC</td>
<td>United Nations Economic and Social Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC</td>
<td>Gulf Cooperation Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDMC</td>
<td>Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDPs</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGI</td>
<td>Migration Governance Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDH</td>
<td>Regional Data Hub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROAP</td>
<td>Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN DESA</td>
<td>United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNODC</td>
<td>United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN OCHA</td>
<td>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TERMINOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Asia–Pacific / Asia and the Pacific</strong></th>
<th><strong>Definition</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In this document, the referral of countries within the Asia-Pacific region follows IOM’s definition and includes the following countries:</strong> Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Kiribati, Republic of Korea, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Viet Nam and Vanuatu.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Asylum seeker</strong></th>
<th><strong>Definition</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“A person who seeks safety from persecution or serious harm in a country other than his or her own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments. In case of a negative decision, the person must leave the country and may be expelled, as may any non-national in an irregular or unlawful situation, unless permission to stay is provided on humanitarian or other related grounds.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>East Asia</strong></th>
<th><strong>Definition</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The East Asia subregion under IOM definition includes China, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Japan and Republic of Korea.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Forced migration</strong></th>
<th><strong>Definition</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forced migration is “a migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion.” The definition includes a note that clarifies that, “while not an international legal concept, this term has been used to describe the movements of refugees, displaced persons (including those displaced by disasters or development projects), and, in some instances, victims of trafficking. At the international level, the use of this term is debated because of the widespread recognition that a continuum of agency exists rather than a voluntary/forced dichotomy and that it might undermine the existing legal international protection regime.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>International migrant</strong></th>
<th><strong>Definition</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Any person who is outside a State of which he or she is a citizen or national, or, in the case of a stateless person, his or her State of birth or habitual residence. The term includes migrants who intend to move permanently or temporarily, and those who move in a regular or documented manner as well as migrants in irregular situations.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Internally displaced persons (IDPs)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Definition</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Irregular migration</strong></th>
<th><strong>Definition</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Labour migrant / Migrant worker</strong></th>
<th><strong>Definition</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“A person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

2. Ibid.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration Policy</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Policy and Governance</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1 Mobility Restrictions and Containment Measures in Response to COVID-19</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.2 Internal Restrictions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.3 Discussion</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration Statistics</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Migrant Stock</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1 Emigration</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2 Immigration</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.3 Discussion</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Migration</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Labour Migration</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1 Regional Overview of International Labour Migration</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.2 Specific Labour Migration Corridors</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.3 Discussion</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Forced Migration</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1 Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Internally Displaced Persons</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1.1 Refugees and Asylum Seekers</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1.2 Internally Displaced Persons</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2 Refugee Resettlement</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.3 Discussion</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Return Migration</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Stranded Migrants</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Voluntary Return</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2.1 Assisted Voluntary Return</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2.2 Voluntary Repatriation</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3 Forced Return</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.4 The Link between COVID-19 and Return Migration</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.5 Discussion</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Irregular Migration</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1 Document Falsification</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2 Migrant Smuggling</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.3 Discussion</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration and Vulnerability</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Emergencies</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1 Vulnerabilities Related to COVID-19</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1.1 Health</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1.2 Food Security</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1.3 Employment</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1.4 Social Impact</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1.5 Discussion</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2 Vulnerabilities Related to Forced Displacement</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2.1 Emergencies and Forced Displacement</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2.2 COVID-19, Climate Change and Internally Displaced Persons</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2.3 Discussion</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Trafficking in Persons</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1 Discussion</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Migrant Deaths and Disappearances</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Discussion</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration and Development</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Remittances</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.1 Discussion</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion and Recommendations</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex I: Sustainable Development Goals Indicators with Reference to Migration</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex II: Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration Objectives</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex III: Migration Governance Indicators</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables
Table 1  Labour Mobility Schemes in the Pacific Region
Table 2  Pacific workers in destination countries by May 2020
Table 3  Largest disaster displacement events in the Asia-Pacific region in 2020
Table 4  Summary of health-related vulnerabilities
Table 5  Income and livelihood related vulnerabilities
Table 6  Female migrant workers’ vulnerabilities and risks
Table 7  Average costs of remitting USD 200 as a share of total transfer sent from Thailand (Q4 2020)
Table 8  Sustainable Development Goals indicators with explicit reference to migration
Table 9  Global Compact for Migration objectives
Table 10 Migration Governance Indicators

Figures
Figure 1  Regional Data Hub thematic pillars
Figure 2  Mobility restrictions and conditions for authorized entry by type (10 March–29 December 2020)
Figure 3  Entry restrictions versus conditions for authorized entry – overview for the Asia-Pacific region (March 2020–February 2021)
Figure 4  Changes in operational status of PoEs in the Asia-Pacific region (April–December 2020)
Figure 5  Notable policy updates on movement restrictions in the Asia–Pacific region (April–December 2020)
Figure 6  Number and type of restrictions in areas of interest by IOM region (March 2020–January 2021)
Figure 7  Government Response Stringency Index in Asia and the Pacific (16 April 2020)
Figure 8  Government Response Stringency Index in Asia and the Pacific (31 December 2020)
Figure 9  Asia-Pacific countries with the largest relative change in Government Response Stringency Index (16 April–31 December 2020)
Figure 10 Global and regional averages of Government Response Stringency Index, and Asia-Pacific countries with the most stringent measures as of 31 December 2020

Figure 11  Admission of asylum seekers in Asia-Pacific countries (April–October 2020)
Figure 12  International migration stock between 1990 and mid-2020
Figure 13  Distribution of emigration stock in Asia and the Pacific by subregion by mid-2020
Figure 14  Percentage change in emigration stock between 2019 and mid-2020 in Asia and the Pacific
Figure 15  Top 10 countries of origin for migration in Asia and the Pacific by mid-2020
Figure 16  Migration flows from the Asia-Pacific region by mid-2020
Figure 17  Gender distribution of the emigrant population in Asia and the Pacific by mid-2020
Figure 18  Female emigration and immigration share in Asia and the Pacific by mid-2020
Figure 19  Distribution of immigration stock in Asia and the Pacific by subregion by mid-2020
Figure 20  Percentage change in immigration stock between 2019 and mid-2020 in Asia and the Pacific
Figure 21  Top 10 countries of destination for migrants in Asia and the Pacific by mid-2020
Figure 22  Gender composition of immigrants in Asia and the Pacific by mid-2020
Figure 23  Percentage of the international migration stock in Asia and the Pacific by age groups by mid-2020
Figure 24  Relative change in outflow of workers by country of origin (2019–2020); (January=100)
Figure 25  Relative change in inflow of foreign workers by country/area of destination (2019–2020); (January=100)
Figure 26  Main refugee populations from the Asia-Pacific region in 2020
Figure 27  Main destinations of refugees from the Asia-Pacific region in 2020
Figure 28  Main host regions or countries of asylum seekers from Asia and the Pacific in 2020
Figure 29  Number of asylum applications made by migrants from Asia and the Pacific from 2015 to 2020
Figure 30  Stock of conflict-induced IDPs as of December 2020
Figure 31  New displacements of IDPs as of December 2020
Figure 32  Top 10 Asia-Pacific countries of departure for IOM-assisted resettlement by sex of resettled persons (2020)
Figure 33  Age distribution of IOM-assisted resettled persons from top 10 Asia-Pacific countries of departure (2020)
Figure 34  Top 10 destination countries of IOM-assisted resettlement from Asia and the Pacific by sex of resettled persons (2020)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Various types of return migration by location, nature and means of implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Number of IOM-assisted voluntary returns hosted in the Asia-Pacific region by type, gender and age (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Top 5 Asia-Pacific host countries of IOM-assisted voluntary returns by type of returnees and COVID-19 related voluntary return hosted in India by country of origin (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>COVID-19 related returns as a share of all IOM-assisted voluntary returns to Asia-Pacific countries (2020); (N=6,410)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Distribution of COVID-19 related voluntary returns to Asia-Pacific countries by type of returnees (2020); (N=300)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Top 5 Asia-Pacific countries of origin of IOM-assisted voluntary returns by type of returnees (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Intraregional voluntary returns as a share of all IOM-assisted voluntary returns (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Major host countries of intraregional voluntary assisted returns (2020); (N=621)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Country of previous residence prior to voluntary repatriation of registered Afghan refugees (2020); (N=2,147)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Monthly trends of voluntary repatriation of registered Afghan refugees by country of previous residence (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Enforced returns originating from Asia-Pacific region from 14 European countries (2019 Q1–2020 Q3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>European host countries of enforced returns originating from Asia-Pacific countries (Q1–Q3 2020); (N=176)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Top 5 countries of citizenship of enforced returnees from 14 European countries (2019 Q1–2020 Q3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Returnees from EU with Asia-Pacific countries as country of citizenship by type of return (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Top 6 Asia-Pacific countries of citizenship for enforced return from EU (2019); (N=12,175)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Cumulative count of recorded inflow of deported Afghans by country or region of departure (Q1–Q4 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Number of respondents and the share of female respondents by country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Main reasons for return in relation to COVID-19 (multiple answers possible except for Myanmar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Intention to remigrate as soon as the COVID-19 pandemic or related travel restrictions end among interviewees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Number of passport checks from Verifier T&amp;B system by result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Tier ranking in counter-trafficking efforts in the Asia-Pacific region (April 2019–March 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Number of IOM-assisted human trafficking victims from and/or exploited in the Asia-Pacific region (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Major countries of origin for IOM-assisted human trafficking victims from the Asia-Pacific region (2020); (N=409)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Type of exploitation for IOM-assisted human trafficking victims from the Asia-Pacific region (2020); (N=409)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Region of exploitation for IOM-assisted human trafficking victims in the Asia-Pacific region (2020); (N=409)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Major countries of exploitation for IOM-assisted human trafficking victims in the Asia-Pacific region (2020); (N=385)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Heat map of reported cases of migrant deaths and disappearances in the Asia-Pacific region (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Number of reported cases of deaths and disappearances in the Asia-Pacific region (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Sex and age composition of all reported cases of migrant deaths and disappearances in the Asia-Pacific region (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Report number of incidents related to natural disasters and conflict in Afghanistan by province (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Report number of fatalities related to natural disasters and conflict in Afghanistan by province (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Report number of natural disaster incidents at interviewed host settlements in Afghanistan (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Report number of security incidents at interviewed host settlements in Afghanistan (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Estimated changes in global and subregional remittance flows (2019–2020) projected by World Bank and ADB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Remittance inflows to and outflows from the Asia-Pacific region in 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Top 7 Asia-Pacific countries receiving the largest remittance inflows in 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Top 7 Asia-Pacific countries with the largest remittance outflows in 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Top 7 Asia-Pacific countries with the highest remittance inflow as a share of GDP in 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Reported annual remittance inflows in 2020 from Central Banks and percentage changes from 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Annual remittance inflows as percentage of GDP and percentage point difference (2019–2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Quarterly remittance inflows in USD millions (Q1–Q4 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Relative contribution by quarter to annual remittance inflows in USD millions (Q1–Q4 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Average costs of remitting USD 200 as a share of total transfer sent by location of receipt (2018–2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Average costs of remitting USD 200 as a share of total transfer sent by location of receipt and type of transfer (2020)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Migration Data Report 2020 of the Asia–Pacific Regional Data Hub (RDH) presents the latest evidence on migration dynamics in Asia and the Pacific in 2020. It offers evidence-based insights to better guide the governance of migration, which constitutes an essential step on the road towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report focuses especially on how the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic affected migration dynamics in the region, allowing to draw implications about the potential role of migrants and migration-related policies in the recovery from the current global crisis. The report also highlights the main areas of data gaps, shedding light on potential avenues to strengthening regional migration data collection.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many drastic changes in our societies. However, only few of these changes have been as disruptive and far-reaching as the impact on migration. Extensive travel restrictions and stricter border control policies were among the first responses that governments took to slow down the spread of the virus. The profound economic crisis that followed left millions of people in great need of protection, particularly migrants. Difficult or lack of access to health care, lack of jobs and economic security, and the impact of strict national lockdowns are all consequences of the pandemic to which migrants are especially vulnerable. For this reason, this report analyses migration trends in 2020 through the lens of the COVID-19 crisis and begins with how governments’ responses to the pandemic have influenced the evolution of international and internal migration.

As the origin of more than 83 million and the destination of 42 million international migrants, Asia and the Pacific are a relevant region to the study of global migration trends. This report portrays the situation of migrants in the region in all its complexity, delving into the analysis of migration trends and the main types of migration – major labour migration corridors in and outside the region, return migration flows, international and internal displacements and irregular migration. The current challenges that migrants and displaced populations face (from human trafficking and the dangers of migrant smuggling to health, social and economic risks) are reviewed and discussed, indications for better policy responses are also provided. Finally, the report reviews how remittances intertwine with the social and economic development of Asia and the Pacific region, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the collection and availability of data on migration in Asia and the Pacific still have many limitations, the accessible information allows us to investigate many relevant aspects of the issues at the core of this study. Below are the main findings of this report:

By mid-2020, 83 million people from the Asia-Pacific region were living outside their countries of birth, that is, almost 30 per cent of the world’s international migrant stock.

South Asia and South-East Asia constituted the principal subregions of origin for emigrants from the region.

MOBILITY RESTRICTIONS IN RESPONSES TO COVID-19

By the end of 2020, the Asia-Pacific region was among the top three regions in the world with the highest number of entry restrictions. From April to December 2020, the number of fully closed Points of Entry assessed with known operational status in the region decreased from 43 to 19 per cent.

The region also showed a high level of stringency regarding mobility restrictions. By the end of December 2020, 15 out of 32 countries and areas assessed in the Asia-Pacific region scored higher than the global average in terms of government response stringency.

By mid-2020, 83 million people from the Asia-Pacific region were living outside their countries of birth, that is, almost 30 per cent of the world’s international migrant stock.

By mid-2020, 83 million people from the Asia-Pacific region were living outside their countries of birth, that is, almost 30 per cent of the world’s international migrant stock.

By mid-2020, 83 million people from the Asia-Pacific region were living outside their countries of birth, that is, almost 30 per cent of the world’s international migrant stock.

The region hosted 42.6 million immigrants from all around the world, representing 15 per cent of the global international migrant stock.

South-East Asia hosted the largest stock of immigrants followed by the Pacific and East Asia.

Migration Statistics

Women constituted nearly 44 per cent of emigrants from Asia and the Pacific in 2020. However, female migration was considerably higher in some countries including Thailand (61%), Malaysia (57%) and Laos’ People Democratic Republic (56%).

The male and female population of immigrants in the region was roughly balanced, at 50 and 49 per cent respectively. At the country level, in Nepal, women represented 70 per cent of total immigrant population in the country. This trend was similar in China and Singapore.

International immigrants were concentrated in prime working ages, with 73 per cent (or close to 31 million) aged 20 to 64 years in 2020. However, the Islamic Republic of Iran displayed the largest population of migrant children. The country hosted 1.2 million migrant children, that is, 46 per cent of the total immigrant population in the country.

Women constituted nearly 44 per cent of emigrants from Asia and the Pacific in 2020. However, female migration was considerably higher in some countries including Thailand (61%), Malaysia (57%) and Laos’ People Democratic Republic (56%).

The region hosted 42.6 million immigrants from all around the world, representing 15 per cent of the global international migrant stock.

South-East Asia hosted the largest stock of immigrants followed by the Pacific and East Asia.

Migration Statistics

Women constituted nearly 44 per cent of emigrants from Asia and the Pacific in 2020. However, female migration was considerably higher in some countries including Thailand (61%), Malaysia (57%) and Laos’ People Democratic Republic (56%).

The male and female population of immigrants in the region was roughly balanced, at 50 and 49 per cent respectively. At the country level, in Nepal, women represented 70 per cent of total immigrant population in the country. This trend was similar in China and Singapore.

International immigrants were concentrated in prime working ages, with 73 per cent (or close to 31 million) aged 20 to 64 years in 2020. However, the Islamic Republic of Iran displayed the largest population of migrant children. The country hosted 1.2 million migrant children, that is, 46 per cent of the total immigrant population in the country.

Women constituted nearly 44 per cent of emigrants from Asia and the Pacific in 2020. However, female migration was considerably higher in some countries including Thailand (61%), Malaysia (57%) and Laos’ People Democratic Republic (56%).

The region hosted 42.6 million immigrants from all around the world, representing 15 per cent of the global international migrant stock.

South-East Asia hosted the largest stock of immigrants followed by the Pacific and East Asia.

Migration Statistics
LABOUR MIGRATION

Available data on labour migration flows suggested the contraction of prominent labour migration corridors in the Asia-Pacific region. Countries from the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) showed a decline in labour migration outflows and inflows. By December 2020, Thailand, a main regional migration hub within the GMS, observed a decline of 18 per cent in the number of registered migrant workers coming mainly from Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam. A clear reduction in the number of inflows of foreign workers was observed in Gulf Cooperation Council countries, particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a major host country of migrant workers, from South Asia in particular. The number of visas issued by Saudi Arabia in the second half of 2020 dropped by 91 per cent compared to the same period in 2019.

Labour migration schemes in Australia and New Zealand supported the deployment of almost 3,500 migrant workers in 2020 from several Pacific countries particularly from Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

RETURN MIGRATION

One of the most direct effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on international migration was the unprecedented scale of and challenges to return migration. As of 13 July 2020, 976,869 migrants from around the world were recorded to be stranded within the Asia-Pacific region. Assessments conducted in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and the Philippines in 2020 revealed that most return migrants interviewed attributed their return either directly or indirectly to the COVID-19 pandemic.

FORCED MIGRATION

By the end of 2020 about 4.7 million refugees and 742,469 asylum seekers from countries in the Asia-Pacific region were forcibly displaced. The majority (75%) were hosted within the region. Around 55 per cent of refugees and 32 per cent of asylum seekers came from Afghanistan. This makes Afghanistan the country with the highest number of cross-border displacements due to conflict and violence.

Regarding internal displacement, disasters accounted for the major cause of new displacement in the region by the end of 2020. The Asia-Pacific region reached 21.3 million new disaster-induced displacements.

Regarding voluntary repatriation, 2,147 registered Afghan refugees, mostly residing in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, were recorded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to be voluntarily repatriated between January and December 2020. A total of 8,740 migrants from Asia-Pacific countries were forcibly returned from 14 European countries between January and September 2020. Most of these returns came from Pakistan and Afghanistan, collectively accounting for more than 60 per cent of all such cases.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Data collected from the IOM Document Examination Support Center (DESC) Initiative show a dramatic decrease in the number of secondary inspections of passport travel documents in 18 Asia–Pacific countries between 2019 and 2020. However, the share of observed frauds among total inspections remained approximately constant around 10 per cent.

Over 40 per cent of interviewed Afghan refugees and returnees reported that demand for smugglers during the pandemic increased in Afghanistan. Migrants in India, Indonesia and Malaysia, however, did not report the same.

Migrants in Afghanistan, India, Indonesia and Malaysia report that smuggling routes have moved to more dangerous areas in response to border closures and increased controls.

As migrants’ need for smuggling services increased, so did their dependency on smugglers. Interviewed migrants reported that smugglers are amongst the groups most likely to commit violent acts against migrants.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Out of 38 Asia–Pacific countries, territories and areas assessed against government efforts in counter trafficking, the United States Department of State ranked nearly 70 per cent under Tier 2 or Tier 2 watch list.

A total of 793 IOM-assisted cases of human trafficking victims originating from or exploited in the Asia–Pacific region were recorded. Men represented slightly more than half of the cases.

Available data suggest that migrant workers from the Asia-Pacific region faced exploitative working conditions and were unable to refuse to work, coerced and threatened with dismissal or violence by their employers.

VULNERABILITIES RELATED TO COVID-19 AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Available data on migrants’ experiences during COVID-19 has revealed a concerning scenario regarding migrant’s inability to access adequate health care in destination countries.

Overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions have put migrants from the Asia-Pacific at a heightened risk of contracting COVID-19.

COVID-19 has reduced migrants’ capacity to afford and access food supplies.

Containment measures and the global economic recession have affected migrant workers livelihoods and well-being in destination countries.

National lockdowns triggered the mass exodus of thousands of internal migrants from urban centres to home villages.

Migrants have been exposed to negative views and xenophobic attitudes since the COVID-19 outbreak. Unfounded public perceptions and misinformation about migrants being carriers of the virus have disseminated across the region.

Forcibly displaced populations – particularly Afghan refugees and Rohingya refugees in Cox Bazar – have also faced challenges when accessing health care in 2020. Lack of health insurance coverage, inadequate infrastructure and reluctance to attend medical centres due to cultural beliefs and misconceptions are some of the identified barriers.

COVID-19 mobility restrictions complicated the delivery of aid to internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by several disasters that occurred in some Asia–Pacific subregions, including the Pacific and South Asia.

MIGRATION AND VULNERABILITIES

MIGRANT DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES

The IOM Missing Migrants Project observed a decrease in the recorded cases of migrant deaths and disappearances by 21 per cent between 2019 and 2020, which is likely related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection and availability, and the ability to monitor specific migration routes.

Eighty-five per cent of recorded cases of migrant deaths and disappearances in the Asia–Pacific region occurred in the South-East Asia subregion; Rohingya refugees were the main group of victims in South-East Asia (84%).

Around 86 per cent of these IOM-assisted victims of human trafficking came from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Sri Lanka; the main type of exploitation was forced labour.

As for cases in the South Asia subregion, 38 per cent were reported deaths at the Iran-Afghanistan border.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Out of 38 Asia–Pacific countries, territories and areas assessed against government efforts in counter trafficking, the United States Department of State ranked nearly 70 per cent under Tier 2 or Tier 2 watch list.

A total of 793 IOM-assisted cases of human trafficking victims originating from or exploited in the Asia–Pacific region were recorded. Men represented slightly more than half of the cases.

Available data suggest that migrant workers from the Asia-Pacific region faced exploitative working conditions and were unable to refuse to work, coerced and threatened with dismissal or violence by their employers.

VULNERABILITIES RELATED TO COVID-19 AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Available data on migrants’ experiences during COVID-19 has revealed a concerning scenario regarding migrant’s inability to access adequate health care in destination countries.

Overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions have put migrants from the Asia-Pacific at a heightened risk of contracting COVID-19.

COVID-19 has reduced migrants’ capacity to afford and access food supplies.

Containment measures and the global economic recession have affected migrant workers livelihoods and well-being in destination countries.

National lockdowns triggered the mass exodus of thousands of internal migrants from urban centres to home villages.

Migrants have been exposed to negative views and xenophobic attitudes since the COVID-19 outbreak. Unfounded public perceptions and misinformation about migrants being carriers of the virus have disseminated across the region.

Forcibly displaced populations – particularly Afghan refugees and Rohingya refugees in Cox Bazar – have also faced challenges when accessing health care in 2020. Lack of health insurance coverage, inadequate infrastructure and reluctance to attend medical centres due to cultural beliefs and misconceptions are some of the identified barriers.

COVID-19 mobility restrictions complicated the delivery of aid to internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by several disasters that occurred in some Asia–Pacific subregions, including the Pacific and South Asia.

MIGRATION AND VULNERABILITIES

MIGRANT DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES

The IOM Missing Migrants Project observed a decrease in the recorded cases of migrant deaths and disappearances by 21 per cent between 2019 and 2020, which is likely related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection and availability, and the ability to monitor specific migration routes.

Eighty-five per cent of recorded cases of migrant deaths and disappearances in the Asia–Pacific region occurred in the South-East Asia subregion; Rohingya refugees were the main group of victims in South-East Asia (84%).

Around 86 per cent of these IOM-assisted victims of human trafficking came from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Sri Lanka; the main type of exploitation was forced labour.

As for cases in the South Asia subregion, 38 per cent were reported deaths at the Iran-Afghanistan border.
World Bank data suggested that the volume of remittance inflows to the Asia–Pacific region decreased by 1.1 per cent from USD 302,273 million United States dollars (USD) in 2019 to USD 298,928 million in 2020. The volume of remittance outflows from the region decreased by 12.3 per cent from USD 82,102 million in 2019 to USD 71,980 million in 2020.

Resilience in remittance flows shows in the fact that 17 out of 32 Asia–Pacific countries experienced growth in remittance inflows in 2020 from the previous year.

Data collected from 12 Central Banks of Asia–Pacific countries further revealed an increase either in the absolute amount of remittance inflows or in the amount of remittance inflows as a share of gross domestic product (GDP).

Comparing the remittance costs in the fourth quarter of 2019 and 2020, there was a common downward trend worldwide and at the subregional level of Asia and the Pacific. However, gap remains from SDG Target 10.c that the remittance cost should stand at less than 3 per cent of the total amount of transfer.
International migration is a fundamental component of social dynamics in Asia and the Pacific. Out of the 282 million international migrants in the world, about one in three comes from the region and one in seven lives there (UN DESA, 2020). In 2020, Asia and the Pacific received 42 per cent of global remittances (World Bank, 2021), which in many countries represent a significant share of families’ livelihoods. Millions of refugees and asylum seekers come from this region, which in the last years has also witnessed an unprecedented number of individuals forcibly displaced by disasters and conflicts. This report explores the complex and multifaceted aspects of migration in Asia and the Pacific to provide evidence and guidance to improve the social conditions of people living in the region and to highlight the main areas where updated relevant information on migration trends is still missing or needs improvement.

By the end of 2020, there have been 82,659,128 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 1,871,783 deaths, reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2021). Eighteen per cent of confirmed cases and 15 per cent of deaths worldwide occurred in Asia and the Pacific region. WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on 11 March 2020, which had repercussions at an unforeseen and unprecedented magnitude. COVID-19 is no longer limited to be a public health emergency but as a multifaceted crisis, with complex political, social, economic, and other implications.

The ongoing pandemic triggered what is thought to be the most severe global recession since the end of World War II (World Bank, 2020a) and reversed decades of progress on poverty, healthcare, and education (United Nations, 2020a). The consequences of such economic and social rupture have been severe across the Asia–Pacific region (ADB, 2020), which was not on track to achieve the 17 SDGs even before the crisis (UN ESCAP, 2021).

In a time of dramatic social and economic changes as those we experienced since 2020, few social phenomena have been as deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as migration. As almost every country in the world introduced new and often strict travel and mobility restrictions, the current economic crisis has put millions of people in a situation of financial vulnerability and distress—especially individuals who were already marginalized. For these and many other reasons, migrants’ livelihoods and prospects have been greatly affected by the social and economic turmoil COVID-19 has caused.

To date, estimates concerning the COVID-19 impact on global development, especially on migration in Asia and the Pacific region, have often relied on assumptions and forecasting, while data availability has only recently begun to catch up. Migration data quality and comprehensiveness, however, is still limited because the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing challenges to migration data collection and hindered many related activities (IOM Migration Data Portal, 2021; World Bank, 2020b). The limited statistical information available is a challenge to the understanding of regional migration dynamics in 2020, which also needs to consider the interconnectedness between various themes of migration, and the potential heterogeneity of the effects of COVID-19 across the region. These consequences are subject to a multitude of national and local variations such as infection levels, government responses and pre-crisis conditions.

The planning, formulation and adaptation of effective policy responses to recent developments in regional migration dynamics requires a reliable, nuanced and harmonized evidence base that is in line with the emphases of Objective 1 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration calling for collection and utilization of accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies and

Target 17.18 of the SDGs calling for increasing the availability of “high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity and migratory status.” In this spirit, the Asia-Pacific RDH seeks to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the migration landscape in the region in 2020, to identify lessons learnt and ways forward, especially towards building stronger migration governance, facilitating orderly, safe, and responsible migration and optimizing the impact of migration on development. The SDGs, the Global Compact for Migration and the Migration Governance Indicators (MGI) are seen in this report as the main benchmarks for international, regional and national development. The main objectives of the Asia-Pacific RDH Migration Data Report 2020 are threefold:

1. To consolidate available international, regional and national data and identify migration dynamics in the region in 2020, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To monitor the region’s progress towards achieving the SDGs and the objectives of the Global Compact for Migration and MGI.
3. To provide policy recommendations on RDH migration themes.

To achieve these objectives, this report gathers 2020 data from diverse sources, including publicly available global and regional data identified in the RDH Regional Secondary Data Review, national data, IOM data, as well as media reporting. Data availability is the prerequisite of thematic coverage in this report. In subthemes where data are sufficient, additional regional, subregional and/or national analyses are presented. In addition, the report focuses on the influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on mobilities and vulnerabilities, wherein the interlinkages between COVID-19 and migration were particularly apparent. The interlinkages between various migration themes will also be highlighted in the discussion of each theme by cross-referencing to other relevant subsections in the report.

The structure of this report is built upon the RDH thematic pillars (Figure 1): (1) Migration Statistics, (2) Types of Migration, (3) Migration Policy, (4) Migration and Vulnerabilities, and (5) Migration and Development. The report will begin with outlining the migration policy landscape as influenced by COVID-19, which shapes the context for the development of all other migration dynamics. Under each thematic pillar, sub-themes with adequate data availability will be presented, concluding with discussions and recommendations. All data and discussions presented in this report were updated as of 21 June 2021.

FIGURE 1: RDH THEMATIC PILLARS
REFERENCES

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

IOM Migration Data Portal
2021 Are migrants left behind? How COVID-19 hinders better migration data.

United Nations (UN)

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)

United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
2021 ECOSOC’s response to COVID-19. ECOSOC.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), Population Division

World Bank

World Health Organization (WHO)
A woman crosses a river during the dry season in Udayapur, Nepal, one of the regions in the country vulnerable to the impacts of climate change | © IOM 2016/Amanda NERO
1.1 POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

1.1.1 BORDER MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

As of 29 December 2020, a total of 110,324 movement restrictions, including entry restrictions, conditions for authorized entry, and other restrictions were imposed in 227 countries, territories and areas around the world (Figure 2). About 25 per cent involved total entry restrictions for passengers of a given country, territory or area, including complete border closure, nationality ban, suspension of visa issuance, and suspension of flights (IOM, 2021a). Over time, the imposition of entry restrictions has seen a general downward trend worldwide, though to a lesser extent in Asia and the Pacific region. In other regions of the world, entry restrictions as a share of all types of movement restrictions imposed has sharply reduced since their peak level – from almost 100 per cent at the peak periods to below 10 per cent towards the end of the year in Central and North America, the Caribbean, and Central and West Africa (ibid.).

In Asia and the Pacific region, even after the peak in April, the imposition of entry restrictions has remained a core component of pandemic control measures (Figure 3). By the end of 2020, the Asia–Pacific region was among the top three regions in the world with the highest number of imposed entry restrictions alongside the European Economic Area and South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The escalation of containment measures in response to the pandemic has affected international mobilities as well as internal movements within national borders. As of 31 March 2020, at least 91 per cent of the global population were living in countries with international travel restrictions, and 39 per cent in countries with complete border closures (Pew Research Center, 2020). According to 4mi data of the Mixed Migration Centre (2021a), nearly 15 per cent out of 1,655 migrants interviewed in Asia from April through December 2020 reported facing increased difficulty to cross borders and about 29 per cent indicated that mobility within countries was affected.

The policy landscape rapidly evolved with changes in local epidemic situations, leading to different policies concerning mobility restriction measures in different parts of the world. These policies set the context for migration dynamics by directly affecting various forms of migration and mobilities (Section 3) as well as interacting with conditions in the countries of destination and origin – ultimately enhancing, mitigating or reducing the effects of migration on development (Section 4 and Section 3). Considering the complexities and influences of these migration policies, border management in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner, as called for in Objective 11 of the Global Compact for Migration, and facilitating orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies, as called for in SDG Target 10.7, has emerged as an issue of unprecedented urgency.

3. Entry restrictions refer to “total restrictions which do not allow the entry of passengers of a given country, territory, or area (C/T/A). These include a complete border closure, nationality ban, suspension of visa issuances, and suspension of flights, etc.” (IOM, 2021).

4. Conditions for authorized entry refer to “partial restrictions in the form of specific requirements upon which entry is incumbent. These conditions include medical measures, new requirements on visa/travel documents or other specific requirements for entry. Partial restrictions may be applicable to all passengers or exempt groups such as specific nationalities or immigration status.” (IOM, 2021).
Three out of the top six countries, territories or areas in the world issuing the highest number of additional requirements for authorized entry were from the Asia–Pacific region – Singapore (53), the Philippines (44), and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), China (32) (ibid.). The most common additional conditions for authorized entry were quarantine, health declaration forms and medical certificates of negative COVID-19 test results. Asia and the Pacific adopted some of the world’s tightest movement restrictions in response to the pandemic, considering both their prevalence and intensity.

In addition to movement restriction policies, national border management policies can be assessed from the operational statuses and restrictions at Points of Entry (PoE) which include airports, blue border crossing points on sea, river or lake, and land border crossing points including rail. This information is available in the IOM Points of Entry Global Reference Database which collects data at various types of PoEs. From April through December 2020, a total of 666 PoEs in Asia and the Pacific region were assessed (IOM, 2021c). Figure 4 illustrates the high level of mobility restrictions at the onset of the pandemic in the Asia–Pacific region, which was then with the partial resumption of international travel in some countries, despite a growing number of new COVID-19 cases from April onwards and continued presence of entry restrictions and conditions in the region. Figure 5 shows some of the notable policy updates on mobility restrictions during different stages of the pandemic.
1.1.1.2 INTERNAL RESTRICTIONS

In addition to international mobility, information on the level of internal movement restrictions can be retrieved from the IOM Mobility and Restrictions Mapping (MRM). In the Asia–Pacific region, 29 out of 40 countries, territories or areas imposed significant internal mobility restrictions (IOM, 2021d). This assessment was conducted between March 2020 and January 2021 in 481 assessed areas chosen from sub-national units of interest, such as areas of COVID-19 outbreak or areas under lockdown or quarantine. Figure 6 shows the most common types of restrictions implemented worldwide. Alternative work arrangements, cancelled or postponed public events, restricted public hours for public establishments and school closures were the dominant forms of restrictive measures in the region.

The stringency of these measures has been assessed by the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (2021), which is a composite measure based on nine response indicators, including school closures, workplace closures, cancellation of public events, restrictions on gatherings, closure of public transport, public information campaigns, stay-at-home measures, restrictions on internal movements, international travel controls, testing policy, contact tracing and vaccination policy, on a scale from 0 to 100. Figure 7 and Figure 8 show the changes in the Government Response Stringency Index from mid-April, about a month after WHO’s declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, to the end of December 2020. Towards the end of 2020, as most governments in the world as well as in the Asia–Pacific region largely relaxed restrictions, a polarizing trend was observed in some countries in the region. Figure 9 shows the Asia–Pacific countries with the largest relative changes between mid-April and end of December. The largest relative reductions (by over 70%) in response stringency were observed in Afghanistan, New Zealand and Vanuatu, whereas the largest increase was seen in the Islamic Republic of Iran (by 43%), China (37%), Mongolia (15%), Hong Kong SAR, China (7%) and Japan (2%) were other countries or areas observing an increase in response stringency by December 2020.

As of 31 December 2020, 15 out of 32 countries and areas assessed in the Asia–Pacific region scored higher than the global average in terms of government response stringency, although the regional average was slightly below the global average. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, China, Myanmar, Mongolia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hong Kong SAR, China, Australia, India and Malaysia (in descending order) were the top 10 countries or areas in the region in terms of government response stringency (Figure 10). Countries and areas with the lowest scores in the region were (in ascending order) Afghanistan, Taiwan Province of People’s Republic of China, Kiribati, New Zealand, Vanuatu, Macao SAR, China, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Brunei Darussalam. The stringency of internal movement restrictions imposed, in some cases, corresponds to the severity of pandemic in that specific country or area, as some with the least stringent government response recorded very low numbers of new COVID-19 cases, such as Taiwan Province of the People’s Republic of China, Macao SAR, China and New Zealand.
This map is for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

The dotted line line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

FIGURE 8:
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STRINGENCY INDEX IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (31 DECEMBER 2020)

This map is for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.


FIGURE 9:
ASIA–PACIFIC COUNTRIES WITH THE LARGEST RELATIVE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STRINGENCY INDEX (16 APRIL–31 DECEMBER 2020)


FIGURE 10:
GLOBAL AND REGIONAL AVERAGES OF GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STRINGENCY INDEX, AND ASIA–PACIFIC COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST STRINGENT MEASURES AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2020

1.1.1.3 DISCUSSION

Mobility restrictions and measures aimed to contain the virus have had wide-ranging influences on migration, as well as unintended social and humanitarian consequences. As millions of migrants were left stranded abroad or internally (see Section 3.3.1), people in situations of vulnerability have been hit the hardest. The protection needs of the displaced populations have become even more pressing (Section 4.1.2).

Travel restrictions (Section 1.1.1), suspension of resettlement travel (Section 3.2.2) and repatriations (Section 3.3.2 and Section 3.3.3) forced many to stay in crowded shelters or detention centres in inadequate conditions (WHO, 2020a). Moreover, from mid-March to the end of May 2020, at least 63 per cent of Asia-Pacific countries1 for which data is available closed their borders without exceptions for people seeking asylum, with only some countries partially lifting restrictions in the remaining months of the year (UN ESCAP, 2021, p.43) (Figure 11).

An increase was also observed in refoulement of refugees at the borders, immediate refusals of asylum seekers, raids on migrant camps and port closures (Akkerman, 2020). An example is the pushbacks of boats carrying hundreds of Rohingya refugees because of the Malaysian government’s hardened stance on border restrictions in response to the pandemic (MMC, 2021b). As shown in Section 4.3, an overwhelming proportion of recorded deaths and disappearances during migration in the region were Rohingya refugees who died in the Andaman Sea. With Objective 8 of the Global Compact for Migration calling for saving lives and establishing coordinated international efforts on missing migrants, these observations point to the gap in the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, especially in such times of heightened humanitarian needs. In addition to their impact on humanitarian responses, travel restrictions and containment measures affected regional migration dynamics in 2020 because of their implications on different types of migration (Section 3), vulnerabilities of migrants (Section 4) and impact of migration on development (Section 5). The specific ways in which the crisis has influenced different themes and subthemes of migration will be further investigated in the following sections.

FIGURE 11: ADMISSION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN ASIA–PACIFIC COUNTRIES (APRIL–OCTOBER 2020)

Source: Compiled from UN ESCAP Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020 (2020)

5. A note has to be made that UN ESCAP definition of Asia–Pacific region differs from that of IOM definition mentioned in the Terminology section by additionally including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, American Samoa, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Niue, and Northern Mariana Islands.
REFERENCES

Akkerman, M.

Connor, P.

Hale, T., N. Angrist, R. Goldszmidt, B. Kira, A. Petherick, T. Phillips, S. Webster, E. Cameron-Blake, L. Hallas, S. Majumdar and H. Tatlow

International Organization for Migration (IOM)
2020 COVID-19 Impact on Points of Entry: Six Month Review of Changes in Operational Status. IOM.
2021a COVID-19 Travel Restrictions Output — 22 February 2021. IOM.
2021d COVID-19 Impact on Key Locations of Internal Monthly Analysis. IOM.

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)
2021b A Perfect Storm: Malaysia’s Forced Deportation of Refugees and Migrants from Myanmar amid the Military Coup. MMC.

World Health Organization (WHO)
A community leader for a women’s group attending health education and COVID-19 awareness sessions run by IOM’s Rapid Response Team in Herat, Afghanistan | © IOM 2021/ Musa MOHAMMED
2.1 MIGRANT STOCK

By mid-2020, it was estimated that the number of people living outside their countries of origin reached 281 million, compared with 272 million in mid-2019 (UN DESA, 2020a). The number of international migrant stock has grown by 83 per cent over the past thirty years (Figure 12). Despite the increase in absolute numbers of migrants worldwide, the share of international migrants in proportion to the world’s population has remained relatively stable between 1990 and 2020 at around 2.8 to 3.6 per cent (ibid.). The stock of emigrants originating from Asia and the Pacific region stalled at 83 million in 2020, that is, almost 30 per cent of the world’s international migrant stock. Compared with 2019, the estimated stock of emigrants from the Asia–Pacific region has slightly increased by 2.9 per cent. By mid-2020, 1 in every 51 people from Asia–Pacific countries has emigrated to another country.

South Asia (36%) and South-East Asia (28%) were the main subregions of origin for emigrants from Asia–Pacific countries (Figure 13). These countries have seen the largest growth in emigration rates in the region between 2019 and 2020 with a surge of 8 per cent (1.7 million) (Figure 14). Contrarily, the Pacific region experienced a decrease in emigration rates by 7 per cent. Papua New Guinea experienced the sharpest decline in emigration in the region, with a decrease by 98 per cent from 219,126 in 2019 to 4,810 emigrants in 2020. This could be explained by mobility restrictions imposed by the Government to stop the spread of the COVID-19.6

Migration has shaped societies across the globe and, when supported by the right policies, can positively contribute to sustainable development in countries of origin as well as destination. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected human mobility in all forms, as countries, including those from Asia and the Pacific region, enforced border restrictions and travel bans (see Section 1.1.1), compelling millions of people to cancel or delay their plans of migration abroad (United Nations, 2020). Furthermore, millions of migrants were stranded, unable to return to their home countries (Section 3.3.1); others were forced to return (Section 3.3.3) as economic recession drove many out of work (UN DESA, 2020b).

Against this background, to what extent have the direct and indirect effects of COVID-19 affected international migration in Asia and the Pacific region? The following section analyses the changes in migration stock in the region in 2020 from two angles: emigration and immigration. The analysis will make use of data from the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) on international migrant stocks, which provide estimations of the total number of international migrants present in a given country at a particular time (UN DESA, 2017, p.9). By the end of the review period of this report, the most updated estimates available were up to mid-2020.

FIGURE 13: DISTRIBUTION OF EMIGRATION STOCK IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC BY SUBREGION BY MID-2020

- **16%** South-West Asia
- **18%** East Asia
- **28%** South-East Asia
- **36%** South Asia
- **2%** Pacific

Source: Compiled from UN DESA International Migrant Stock (2020)
The major countries of origin in Asia and the Pacific region in 2020 were, in descending order, India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Myanmar, Viet Nam and Nepal (Figure 15). Together, they made up 83 per cent of the total emigrant population from countries in the region.

Almost 39 million, or 42 per cent of all emigrants from countries in Asia and the Pacific, moved to another country in the region, most notably to India (4.4 million), China (4 million), Australia (3.8 million), Thailand (3.6 million), Malaysia (3.2 million) and Pakistan (3.2 million). Ten out of the 20 largest migration corridors in Asia are in South Asia, four of which are intraregional: Bangladesh–India, Afghanistan–Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan–Pakistan, and India–Pakistan (IOM Migration Data Portal, 2021). About half of emigrants from South-East Asia, nearly 12 million, remained within the Asia-Pacific region. Around 7.1 million moved within South-East Asia, more than two thirds of the 10.6 million migrants in the subregion (UN DESA, 2020a). These figures make Asia and the Pacific the main destination for emigrants from the Gulf Cooperation Countries (27%) – 9.4 million to Saudi Arabia and 6.6 million to United Arab Emirates – and the United States (14%) (Figure 16).
Emigrant populations exceeded the total resident populations in several Pacific countries. By mid-2020, the 21,000 emigrants from the Cook Islands were 120 per cent of the total population. The small resident populations of Pacific countries can explain this high percentage. Samoa (68%) and Tonga (71%) also had many emigrants in comparison with the resident population. Among countries with a population of more than 1 million, the largest emigrant population came from Lao People’s Democratic Republic, whose 1.2 million emigrants comprised 18 per cent of the total resident population of the country.

Concerning the gender ratio in the region, women constituted nearly 44 per cent of emigrants from Asia and the Pacific region in 2020. However, female emigration was comparatively high in East Asia (53%), the Pacific (51%), and South-East Asia (50%); (Figure 17). Between 2019 and 2020, the gender ratio at the regional level has remained largely consistent. However, female migration was considerably higher in some countries, particularly from South-East Asia. In Thailand, women constituted 61 per cent of migrants travelling abroad. This makes Thailand the country with the largest ratio of female emigrants followed by Malaysia (57%) and Lao’s People Democratic Republic (56%) (Figure 18). Furthermore, in 11 out 15 countries from the Pacific, female emigration showed a higher ratio than male emigration. The feminization of migration in the Pacific and South-East Asia has been attributed to out-migration of women from poor rural areas for economic reasons and other opportunities such as access to education, as well as escaping patriarchal control and gendered expectations about the roles of females (McAdam, 2020).

Concerning the gender ratio in the region, women constituted nearly 44 per cent of emigrants from Asia and the Pacific region in 2020. However, female emigration was comparatively high in East Asia (53%), the Pacific (51%), and South-East Asia (50%); (Figure 17). Between 2019 and 2020, the gender ratio at the regional level has remained largely consistent. However, female migration was considerably higher in some countries, particularly from South-East Asia. In Thailand, women constituted 61 per cent of migrants travelling abroad. This makes Thailand the country with the largest ratio of female emigrants followed by Malaysia (57%) and Lao’s People Democratic Republic (56%) (Figure 18). Furthermore, in 11 out 15 countries from the Pacific, female emigration showed a higher ratio than male emigration. The feminization of migration in the Pacific and South-East Asia has been attributed to out-migration of women from poor rural areas for economic reasons and other opportunities such as access to education, as well as escaping patriarchal control and gendered expectations about the roles of females (McAdam, 2020).

Concerning the gender ratio in the region, women constituted nearly 44 per cent of emigrants from Asia and the Pacific region in 2020. However, female emigration was comparatively high in East Asia (53%), the Pacific (51%), and South-East Asia (50%); (Figure 17). Between 2019 and 2020, the gender ratio at the regional level has remained largely consistent. However, female migration was considerably higher in some countries, particularly from South-East Asia. In Thailand, women constituted 61 per cent of migrants travelling abroad. This makes Thailand the country with the largest ratio of female emigrants followed by Malaysia (57%) and Lao’s People Democratic Republic (56%) (Figure 18). Furthermore, in 11 out 15 countries from the Pacific, female emigration showed a higher ratio than male emigration. The feminization of migration in the Pacific and South-East Asia has been attributed to out-migration of women from poor rural areas for economic reasons and other opportunities such as access to education, as well as escaping patriarchal control and gendered expectations about the roles of females (McAdam, 2020).

Concerning the gender ratio in the region, women constituted nearly 44 per cent of emigrants from Asia and the Pacific region in 2020. However, female emigration was comparatively high in East Asia (53%), the Pacific (51%), and South-East Asia (50%); (Figure 17). Between 2019 and 2020, the gender ratio at the regional level has remained largely consistent. However, female migration was considerably higher in some countries, particularly from South-East Asia. In Thailand, women constituted 61 per cent of migrants travelling abroad. This makes Thailand the country with the largest ratio of female emigrants followed by Malaysia (57%) and Lao’s People Democratic Republic (56%) (Figure 18). Furthermore, in 11 out 15 countries from the Pacific, female emigration showed a higher ratio than male emigration. The feminization of migration in the Pacific and South-East Asia has been attributed to out-migration of women from poor rural areas for economic reasons and other opportunities such as access to education, as well as escaping patriarchal control and gendered expectations about the roles of females (McAdam, 2020).
FIGURE 18: FEMALE EMIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION SHARE IN THE ASIA–PACIFIC REGION BY MID-2020

This map is for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

The dotted line line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

Source: Compiled from UN DESA International Migrant Stock (2020).
By mid-2020, the Asia-Pacific region hosted 42.6 million immigrants from all around the world (UN DESA, 2020a). Between 2019 and mid-2020, the number of immigrants in the region increased by nearly 4 per cent. While the region comprises 55 per cent of the global population, it hosted 15 per cent of the global international migrant stock. Immigrants in the region represented 1 per cent of the total resident population in the region. However, there were significant variations at the subregional level. While immigrants represented 0.5 per cent of the total resident population in South Asia and East Asia, they made up 22 per cent of the total population in the Pacific countries. South-East Asia hosted the largest stock of immigrants (25%) followed by the Pacific (21%) and East Asia (21%); (Figure 19). East Asia has seen the largest increase in immigration by almost 11 per cent from 2019 to 2020 (Figure 20). The Republic of Korea alone experienced a surge of over 5 million immigrants, an increase of 49 per cent.

The male and female population of immigrants in the region was roughly balanced at 50.4 per cent and 49.6 per cent respectively. At the subregional level, South Asia and East Asia exhibited the largest share of female immigrants, at 52 per cent (Figure 22). From 2019 to 2020, the immigrant gender distribution in the region did not vary significantly. At the country level, some distinctive trends regarding the gender ratio can be observed. In Nepal, 70 per cent of the total immigrant population were women. This trend was similar in China and Singapore, where female immigrants comprised 56 per cent of all immigrants in both countries (Figure 18).
The age structure of the region’s immigrant population is like that of the international migrant stock worldwide. International immigrants in the region were concentrated in prime working ages, with 73 per cent (30.8 million) of working age (20–64 years old) in 2020 (UN DESA, 2020a). (Figure 23). Immigrants represent an important work force in the region, as resident population in some subregions (East Asia and the Pacific) are rapidly ageing (UN ESCAP, 2017, p.22; UNFPA, 2021).

By mid-2020, the Asia–Pacific region hosted 6.2 million child immigrants (aged 19 years or younger). The largest population of migrant children were residing in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is important to mention that from 2019 to mid-2020, the country experienced a surge of immigrants younger than 20 years, from 500,000 to 1.2 million. Hence, migrant children accounted for 46 per cent of the total immigrant population in the country. Although no official figures confirming the origin of these group of child immigrants are available, it is possible to assume that they might not, therefore, capture the full spectrum of Afghan child migration experiences.

Mousavi and Bozorgmehr’s (2020) experience working with Afghan children in Tehran may shed light on the initial estimates between mid-2019 and mid-2020 migration stock figures presented in this section show interesting trends and changes regarding emigration and immigration movements in the region. The outbreak of COVID-19 influenced the year 2020, with changes to mobility not only in the region but around the world. While it is too early to predict the full extent of the pandemic’s impact on international migration, according to UN DESA (2020b), mobility disruptions caused by COVID-19 may have reduced the global number of international migrants – and this trend may be similar in the Asia–Pacific region. With an assumption of zero-growth in the stock migrants between 1 March and 1 July 2020, estimates suggest a decline by nearly 2 million international migrants globally compared to the initial estimates between mid-2019 and mid-2020 (ibid.). The region will possibly not experience a full recovery of migration in 2021; however, the decline in the number of international migration stocks might be temporary. The easing of mobility restrictions in some countries in the region and COVID-19 vaccine rollout programmes may eventually encourage people to (re)migrate. As well, deep economic consequences of the pandemic across the region may act as drivers, consequently triggering new migratory waves.

Moreover, data on regional migration statistics can be strengthened in several aspects. The full discussion of data gaps can be found in the RDH Regional Secondary Data Review (2021). Three relevant data limitation issues are highlighted here. First, data on regional migration flows in 2020 are not yet available. Second, the figures of international migrant stock based on administrative sources are unlikely to reflect the magnitude of irregular migration, in a region wherein irregular migration is prominent (it was estimated that one-third of migrant workers in the region have an irregular status in their destination countries) (ILO, 2011).

Furthermore, analysis of international migration stock has shown that the Asia–Pacific is more characterized as a region of origin than a region of destination. India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Philippines, in descending order, are the top five major countries of origin (UN DESA, 2020a). With the pandemic significantly altering global mobility, the question is whether these major countries of origin will remain in the top five in the future. Destination countries such as those in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries could possibly transform from destination to transit countries for migrants aiming to migrate to the West (Kadria and Mishra, 2021). Considering the impact of COVID-19 on migration data, achieving Objective 1 and 3 of Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is crucial, as they aim to collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies and to provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration.
REFERENCES

Australia Government, Department of Home Affairs
2020 Country Profile – United Kingdom.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

IOM Migration Data Portal
2021 Migration data in Southern Asia.

Kadria, B. and R. Mishra

McAdam, M.
2020 COVID-19 Impacts on the Labour Migration and Mobility of Young Women and Girls in South-East Asia and the Pacific. ILO, Geneva.

Mousavi, S. and G. Bozorgmehr

United Nations
2020 Policy brief: COVID-19 and people on the move. UN.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), Population Division

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), Statistics Division

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)
2017 Addressing the Challenges of Population Ageing in Asia and the Pacific. UN ESCAP, Bangkok.

United Nations Popular Fund (UNFPA)
2020 Addressing Population Ageing in Asia and the Pacific Region: A Life-Cycle Approach. UNFPA.
TYPES OF MIGRATION

Children attend disaster awareness classes in Kokopo, Papua New Guinea | © IOM 2016/Muse MOHAMMED
By mid-2020, Asia and the Pacific region were the origin of almost 30 per cent of international migrants, and hosted around 15 per cent of international migrants worldwide by mid-2020 (UN DESA, 2020); therefore migration drivers in the region are multiple and varied (IOM, 2019). Some of the main drivers of outward migration in the region include income inequalities, labour market and income differentials, pursuit of economic and educational opportunities, long-standing conflict, political instability, violence and repression, slow-onset and rapid-onset disasters related to natural hazards and climate change, and population structure (ibid.). Although data availability is limited, the latest figures on labour migration (Section 3.1), forced migration (Section 3.2), return migration (Section 3.3) and irregular migration (Section 3.4) enable us to explore how various types of migration responded to and evolved throughout the pandemic.

The latest figures on labour migration stock estimate that 25 million migrant workers were hosted in the region by 2017 (ILO, 2018a). The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all these forms of labour migration. On one hand, many countries in the region introduced and maintained visa issuance and border restrictions, and suspended deployment of migrant workers to destination countries. On the other, the negative effects on major host economies led to business closures and reduction in demand for labour. ILO (2020b) estimated that, in the second quarter of 2020, the total working hour losses in Asia and the Pacific region was 15.2 per cent – compared with the fourth quarter of 2019, which is equivalent to 265 million full-time jobs. The largest loss was predicted for South Asia, with a decline of 27.3 per cent in the second quarter of 2020, equivalent to 170 million full-time jobs.

As a result, labour migration in and from the region was expected to drop as a result of the decrease in the deployment of workers, admission of foreign workers and internal migration for employment, and the increase in repatriation and return of workers from abroad (Section 3.3) – although returns might be complicated by the presence of stranded migrant workers (Section 3.3.1). Even though regional and national data on labour migration exists, updates on the stock and flow figures up to 2020 remain largely absent by the end of the review period. Nevertheless, labour migration flows in some countries in the Asia-Pacific region have been identified. Based on available data, a general overview will first be presented to outline the prominent labour migration inflows and outflows in some major origin and destination countries in the region in various periods of 2020, followed by a focused discussion on three of the main migration corridors for migrant workers from the region: the Greater Mekong Subregion, from South Asia to GCC countries, and in the Pacific subregion. The patterns and trends in labour migration in these migration corridors will be explored in the following section, focusing on the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3.1.1 Regional Overview of International Labour Migration

The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2018a) estimated that the Asia-Pacific region hosted 25 million migrant workers in 2017, which accounted for more than 15 per cent of all labour migrants worldwide. Although comprehensive regional statistics on the stock or flow of labour migration throughout 2020 are not yet available, a consistent pattern of decline in labour migration inflow and outflow has been observed in some of the main countries of destination and origin during the observation periods, as jointly reported by the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and ILO (2021) (Figure 24).

As one of the countries sending the largest number of migrant workers in the region, the Philippines deployed 2.2 million workers overseas from April to September in 2019 (Philippines Statistics Authority, 2020). However, an overall decline by 60 per cent was recorded between January and May 2020 compared to same period in 2019, reaching 99.8 per cent between April 2019 and 2020. Another major origin country of migrant workers, China, recorded a drop in its stock of contract migrant workers abroad from 1.01 million in November 2019 to 644,000 in June 2020 (ADBI, OECD and ILO, 2021).

In 2019, 635,000 migrant workers from Pakistan were deployed abroad, but the total number dropped by 64 per cent in 2020 (ibid.). The Pakistan Overseas Employment Promoter Association estimated that the deployment of about 200,000 workers had been delayed between March and July 2020. In India, a sharp decline by about 98 per cent was recorded between April and September 2020 with respect to the same period in 2019, with the deployment of 175,400 migrant workers abroad (ibid.). Even though percentage changes are very sensitive to the length and timing of the reporting period, these figures constitute evidence of the disruption of labour migration flows from countries in the region following the pandemic. In Nepal, a drop of 28 per cent between the first and fourth quarter of 2020 was largely attributable to the suspension in deployment from March 2020 onwards. For Thailand, the reduction of 61 per cent from January to June 2020 was in part explained by the country’s temporary ban on deployment to certain destinations in OECD countries (ibid.).

The changes in the number of inflow or stock of foreign workers in 2020 are not as widely available by the end of the review period. Nevertheless, a clear reduction is observed in countries with available data – all in East Asia except Saudi Arabia, one of the main destinations in GCC countries – as presented by ADBI, OECD and ILO, 2021 (Figure 25). Saudi Arabia, a major host of migrant workers, especially from South and South-East Asia, which issued 943,000 work visas in just the first quarter of 2019 alone – reduced issuance of work visas by 91 per cent in the second quarter of 2020, compared with the same period in 2019. Japan saw a decline of 99 per cent in the number of non-nationals who were granted entry on a work visa (excluding re-entry) between April and August 2019 – when 123,000 individuals were allowed in the country – and the same period in 2020. Business visits were allowed from July onwards despite initial restrictions on travel from certain countries such as Thailand and Viet Nam. The admission of foreigners on various types of work visa in the Republic of Korea also saw a steep decline by about 80 per cent between March and June in 2019 compared to the same period in 2020, which was closely related to tightened regulations on visa issuance and temporary suspension of short-term visa validity. For Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of People’s Republic of China, the issuance of employment and investment visas decreased by 61 per cent in 2020 with respect to 2019. In Singapore, the stock of migrant workers decreased by 70,000 (5%) between January and June 2020 with respect to the same period in 2019.

Note: OFW refers to overseas Filipino workers.
3.1.2 Labour Migration Corridors

Labour Migration Corridor I: Within the Greater Mekong Subregion

The GMS is formally integrated by six nations: Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam in addition to the Yunnan and Guizhou Provinces of People’s Republic of China. Migration within the GMS is mainly characterized by international migration, internal migration and cross-border mobility. According to previous reports, labour migration in the GMS has long been driven by two factors: unequal social and economic development and existing links between countries (ADB, 2013).

By mid-2020 (excluding the Yunnan and Guizhou Provinces of China), the region hosted around 4 million immigrants, with over 90 per cent residing in Thailand. Most immigrants (89%) came from countries within the GMS (UN DESA, 2020). Although international migration stock figures are not disaggregated by labour migrant status, available data could serve as a useful tool to provide a general understanding of the labour migration dynamics in the GMS, considering that South-East Asia has long been seen an important source of labour migration. IOM estimated that about one third of working migrants from South-East Asia are currently hosted in countries within the same subregion (IOM Migration Data Portal, 2021b). Notwithstanding, these figures should be interpreted carefully as the scale of labour migration in the GMS is largely unknown due to the large presence of irregular migrants, which is very difficult to capture.

Available data on outflows and inflows show a general decline in labour migration in some parts of the Asia-Pacific region in 2020. Countries from the GMS also portrayed a similar trend regarding labour migration outflows and inflows. The following subsection examines these fluctuations which took place in 2020 in Thailand — the main country of destination.

This subsection also outlines the situation of migrant workers from Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam residing in Thailand.

Thailand as the Destination Country

Thailand is an important regional migration hub within the GMS and in South-East Asia more generally. As of December 2019, the number of registered migrant workers in Thailand stood at 3 million, mainly coming from Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam, while the number of undocumented migrant workers is unknown. By December 2020, registered migrant workers in the country had declined to 2.4 million, i.e. by 18 per cent (Thai Ministry of Labour, 2021, 2020). This reduction could be explained by the increase in the number of migrant workers returning to their home countries because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Migrants in Thailand are employed in a range of sectors including construction, manufacturing, fisheries, agriculture, hospitality, food preparation services and domestic work (FRC, 2020; IOM, 2020a). Based on a study conducted by ILO, the average cost for a migrant worker to come and work in Thailand was USD 461. Regular migrants paid on average USD 497 in recruitment costs, compared with irregular migrants who paid USD 474 (ILO, 2020a, p.40).

Migrant Workers from Cambodia

Thailand is the preferred destination for Cambodian migrant workers. The majority are employed in the construction, manufacturing and agricultural sectors and tend to stay for around one year (IOM and ILO, 2017). Cambodian migrant workers mostly rely on social networks and unlicensed brokers to emigrate. Only a small proportion use regular channels to migrate, in part due to expensive, time-consuming and complex administrative processes (ibid.). Furthermore, it is estimated that Cambodian migrant workers who use regular channels pay approximately USD 592 in recruitment costs to go and work in Thailand, while irregular migrant workers pay USD 522 (ILO, 2020b).

As economic activities reduced in Thailand due to the measures imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19, in April 2020 Thailand experienced a sharp increase in migrant workers departing to return to their home countries, including Cambodia (ILO, 2020b). Based on official statistics of the Immigration Bureau of Thailand, around 71,292 Cambodian migrant workers returned to their country between March 2020 and April 2021. IOM’s assessment conducted in June 2020 revealed that most migrants returning from Thailand were low-skilled labour workers, with primary education. Also, it is estimated that most migrants earned a monthly income of between USD 101 to USD 500 while they were employed in Thailand (IOM, 2020a, pp.2–4). Despite the substantial number of returnees, many Cambodian migrant workers have expressed their desire to re-migrate to Thailand when COVID-19 restrictions are lifted (ibid., p.10).

Migrant Workers from Myanmar

It is estimated that over 4 million Myanmar workers reside abroad, of whom approximately 2 million are in Thailand (ILO, 2020a; p.2). Myanmar migrant workers are typically employed in seasonal agriculture: oil palm plantations in Malaysia, rubber plantations in Thailand, and sugarcane farms in southern China (TNI, 2020, p.10). Workers who migrate to Thailand usually stay for over three years and earn on average USD 260 per month. Like Cambodian migrants, most use irregular channels to migrate, particularly unlicensed brokers (ILO, 2020a; IOM and ILO, 2017). As well, it is estimated that the average amount paid to recruitment agencies or brokers is USD 441 for Myanmar nationals aiming to work in Thailand using regular channels. The recruitment costs paid by irregular migrant workers are estimated at USD 317 (ILO, 2020a).

Between March 2020 and April 2021, 183,375 migrant workers were recorded leaving Thailand and entering Myanmar (Immigration Bureau of Thailand, 2020). Approximately 36,000 migrant workers returned from China and 131 from Lao People’s Democratic Republic. Two thirds of the recorded return migrant workers were men (ILO, 2020a, p.3). With regards to re-migration plans, many Myanmar migrant workers expressed their willingness to go back abroad and work as soon as travel is possible (TNI, 2020, p.35).

8. Survey conducted by ILO from July to September 2018. The aim of the study was to explore recruitment fees and related costs paid by low-skills migrants working in Thailand. The survey interviewed 1,200 migrants workers from Cambodia (899), the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (202), and Myanmar (518).

9. The assessment was conducted by IOM Cambodia research team between 19 and 24 June 2020. A total of 242 Cambodian migrants who returned from Thailand were identified and interviewed.

10. The number of migrants returning cross border may be higher as the borders are porous and some migrants may cross undetected.
MIGRANT WORKERS FROM LAO PEOPLE’S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Around 940,000 Lao migrants were residing in Thailand as of mid-2020 (UN DESA, 2020). Lao migrant workers are mostly employed in the domestic, construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and entertainment sectors. The average length of stay of Lao migrant workers in Thailand is two years and their estimated salary ranges between USD 300 and USD 399 per month (IOM, 2020, p.ii; IOM and ILO, 2017). Large wage differentials are a potential driver of migration – while the average monthly wage in Lao People’s Democratic Republic is USD 110, the minimum wage in Thailand is double that amount (ILO, 2021b). It is important to mention that women were over represented among migrants from Lao People’s Democratic Republic (56%); they were mostly hired in the domestic sector in Thailand through informal channels (ibid.). It is also estimated that Lao regular migrants spend on average USD 543 on recruitment fees, while migrants using irregular channels pay USD 401 (ILO, 2020a). More than 280,000 migrant workers were recorded to return to Lao People’s Democratic Republic from Thailand between March and April 2021 (Immigration Bureau of Thailand, 2020), most of them low-skilled and with lower secondary education (IOM, 2020a). It was also reported that most migrants expressed the desire to re-migrate internationally again to resume their old jobs in Thailand. The main reasons to seek work abroad include higher wages, better living conditions and being able to join their family and friends in Thailand (ibid.).

MIGRANT WORKERS FROM VIET NAM

About 50,000 Vietnamese migrant workers were estimated to reside in Thailand in 2019 (ILO, 2021a). This figure considers migrants who have used the ASEAN free visa policy to work in Thailand. The number of migrant workers without documentation, however, is unknown. Vietnamese migrant workers are mostly employed in the fishery, manufacturing and domestic sectors (IOM and ILO, 2017). The average period of stay among Vietnamese migrants in Thailand is four years, during which they earn an average monthly salary of USD 420. Regarding recruitment fees, it is estimated that migrants from Viet Nam pay approximately USD 276 to come and work in Thailand (ibid.). Another important destination country for Vietnamese workers is Malaysia. The number of Vietnamese migrant workers residing in Malaysia is estimated to be similar to that of those residing in Thailand (50,000) (ibid.). When using a recruitment agent or broker, Vietnamese migrants pay on average of USD 1,380 to come and work in Malaysia (ILO, 2018b, p.13).

In 2020, Viet Nam experienced a sharp decline in outgoing workers. Labour migration outflows in the second quarter were only 6 per cent of what was recorded in the first quarter (ADB, OECD and ILO, 2021, p.6). Despite a slight increase in the third quarter, the total deployment for the first three quarters was only 41 per cent of that for 2019, with 60,000 fewer Vietnamese migrating abroad for employment (ibid.).

Labour Migration Corridor II: From South Asia to the Gulf Countries

South Asia is a dynamic region with millions of people crossing borders within and outside the Asia-Pacific region. Two South Asian countries, India and Bangladesh, featured in the world’s top 20 countries of origin in international migration, with India being the top country of origin as of mid-2020 (UN DESA, 2020). Collectively, there were around 30 million nationals from South Asia living outside of their countries of origin (ibid.). Employment is the main driver of migration out of South Asia (ILO, 2018c). Since 1973, the hike in oil prices led to a significant demand for low and semi-skilled labour in the Middle East (ILO, 2011). Since then, contract workers and temporary migrants from South Asian countries – especially Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka – have migrated to the Middle East, particularly to the GCC countries. Labour migration between South Asia and the GCC is considered by far the most prominent work corridor for South Asian immigrants (ILO, 2018c; IOM, 2021a). By mid-2020, approximately 50 per cent of all migrants from South Asia migrated to the GCC (UN DESA, 2020). Employment and residence permits in these countries are temporary, and migrants are mostly employed in the construction and domestic sectors (ILO, 2011).

The year 2020 saw a drastic change in labour migration flows between the GCC and South Asian countries mainly because of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the fall in oil prices (Kuttapann, 2021). According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2020), the GCC economies were estimated to contract by 7.1 per cent in 2020 – which in turn led to a substantial decline in the inflows of migrant workers. As mentioned previously, the number of visas issued by Saudi Arabia in the first quarter of 2020 experienced a decline of 33 per cent compared with the first quarter of 2019. This decline reached 91 per cent in the second half of 2020 (OECD, ILO, UNHCR and IOM, 2020). Moreover, issuance of entry permits in the United Arab Emirates was suspended between March and September 2020 and only restarted in October 2020 (ADBI, OECD and ILO, 2021).

Labour migration outflows in South Asian countries have shown a similar trend. In India, in 2019, around 360,000 people migrated abroad through eMigrate, a channel set up by the Indian Government to ensure fair migration. In 2020, that number decreased by 75 per cent. Bangladesh experienced a similar decrease in labour migration outflows. Official data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) has revealed a 74 per cent decline in migration outflows in 2020 compared to 2019 (from 700,000 workers to 180,000). However, labour migration outflows bounced back in December 2020 to almost half of the level in December 2019 (BMET, 2020; ADBI, OECD and ILO, 2021).

In Sri Lanka, the number of deployed workers in March 2020 was only half of what was previously predicted, and from mid-March to the end of May, the outflow of workers dropped by about 38,000 (Weeraratne, 2020). In Nepal, the official outflows of workers (both new and renewed contracts) for the fiscal year 2019–2020, which ended in mid-July 2020, went down by 28 per cent from the previous fiscal year, with the bulk of the decline explained by the suspension in deployment from March 2020 (ADBI, OECD and ILO, 2021).

Labour Migration Corridor III: Within the Pacific Subregion

Over the past decade, labour migration in the Pacific region has been predominantly temporary and seasonal through the channel of labour mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand (ILO, 2019) (Table 1). In 2020, the spread of the COVID-19 disease has substantially affected Pacific migrant workers’ mobility, as some migrants participating in these schemes were stranded and unable to return to their countries of origin due to border restrictions (World Bank, 2020). Conversely, some migrant workers residing in Australia and New Zealand continued working either with their existing employers or with a new employer (IOM, 2020d) (Table 2). According to this IOM assessment13 conducted in mid-2020 in several Pacific countries (Fiji, Marshall Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu), around 6,938 migrant workers under the Seasonal Workers Programme (SWP) in Australia were unable to return home. However, with the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), 1,989 SWP workers were reassigned to new employers (ibid.). Furthermore, DESE approved over 2,000 new visas allowing SWP workers to remain legally in the country for up to 12 months. Likewise, 460 Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) workers were residing in Australia by May 2020. Almost all workers who were in the country in March 2020 continued to be employed under the PLS scheme with 74 workers redeployed to new employers (ibid.).

The same IOM assessment shows that, despite the border closure implemented as of March 2020, 11,152 migrant workers had arrived in New Zealand under the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme since July 2019. Between March and June 2020, 5,329 workers were still residing in New Zealand. While 3,329 workers were unable to return to their countries because their visas expired, all of them were granted extension until September 2020. Moreover, as of mid-2020, over 1,500 RSE workers from Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu continued to be employed either with current or new employers (ibid.).

The three labour mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand are a path to continued activation and reinforcement of labour migration in the Pacific region despite the disruptions to global mobility and the economy caused by COVID-19, thanks to the active engagement of many employers in these programmes. Migrant workers, particularly those involved in the agriculture sector in both Australia and New Zealand, have significantly supported the production and supply of food to the local population during the pandemic. While they represent a vulnerable population in times of crisis, migrant workers can also play a crucial role in national recovery responses as key contributors to the development of their host countries’ economies.

### Table 1: Labour Mobility Schemes in the Pacific Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labour Mobility Scheme</th>
<th>Country of Destination</th>
<th>Eligible Pacific Countries</th>
<th>Industries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal Workers Programme (SWP)</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Tonga, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Tuvalu</td>
<td>Horticulture, aquaculture, cane and cotton agricultural sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS)</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu</td>
<td>Agriculture, horticulture, forestry, hospitality, tourism, fisheries, meat processing, and the elderly care sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE)</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu</td>
<td>Horticulture and viticulture sectors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) and New Zealand Government, Immigration Department.

### Table 2: Pacific Workers in Destination Countries by May 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of migrants under the Seasonal Workers Programme (SWP) unable to return home</th>
<th>Number of Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) migrant workers</th>
<th>Number of Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) migrant workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>1,061</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>1,662</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1,474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>3,336</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>3,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,938</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>5,329</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from IOM’s Rapid Assessment of the Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Labour Mobility in the Pacific Region (2020),

13. Assessment conducted between 11 May 2020 to 5 June 2020 with the principal aim to understand how COVID-19 affected labour mobility in the Pacific region. Countries covered under this assessment include the Pacific Island countries of Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Australia and New Zealand are referred to as countries of destination for seasonal workers and temporary migrants from Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, and the United States is discussed in relation to the Marshall Islands.
3.1.3 Discussion

Labour migration in the Asia-Pacific region has gone through unprecedented changes in 2020. COVID-19 has influenced most movements, especially those driven by labour demand in destination countries. Based on the information presented in this section, the overall labour demand in major destination countries for migrant workers from the region has declined sharply in 2020. Labour migration corridors which were normally very active contracted in response to the COVID-19 crisis and the ensuing economic recession. Thousands of migrants were left without employment opportunities and many had to return to their home countries. Support for migrant workers from host country governments has shown to be an important source of resilience against these shocks, as seen in the case of Pacific countries. For example, the labour mobility schemes in Australia and New Zealand have protected migrants from being stranded illegally and allowed some to seek job opportunities with new employers. Such examples showcase the possibility of maintaining labour mobility under formal channels while ensuring migrant protection. Furthermore, labour migration programmes constitute a fundamental tool to ensure that migrant workers get better access to skills training that can support the sustainable development of their host countries.

The economic recovery scenario in the main destination countries for Asian migrant workers is mixed. For example, the GDP of Japan is expected to decline by 5.8 per cent in 2020 and only increase 1.5 per cent in 2021, while China, India and Indonesia are expected to fully recover in 2021. Saudi Arabia, the main destination for South Asian migrant workers, is expected to experience a drop in GDP of 6.8 per cent in 2020 before a slight growth of 3.2 per cent in 2021 (ADBI, OECD and ILO, 2021). Despite this unclear picture, it has been observed that most Asian countries have experienced less austere cumulative lockdowns than non-Asian OECD countries (ibid.). This could lead to a period of openness while restrictions remain in other regions. However, repeated waves of infections in the upcoming months and years might slow down the economic recovery of the major destination countries for migrant workers.

This section highlights prominent trends regarding labour migration outflows and inflows from, within and into the Asia-Pacific region in 2020; however, determining the scale of international labour migration remains a challenging task. Labour migrants who work under short-term or temporary job schemes are not always captured in censuses or labour force surveys – the primary sources of labour migration stock figures. Moreover, an unknown share of migrant workers moves between countries illegally and is therefore unregistered. Finally, the motives of migration are largely mixed in the region. Consequently, the above figures do not necessarily reflect the real spectrum of migration driven by labour demand. In addition, while this section has portrayed labour migration trends in three major Asia–Pacific corridors, other prominent corridors have been left out of the analysis due to lack of data for 2020. The Philippines is known to be one of the major countries of origin of migrant workers in the region. However, limited information regarding labour migration outflows from the Philippines for 2020 is available during the review period.

Collecting and analysing data on labour migration represents a useful tool to better understand the dynamics in major labour corridors in the region and the potential economic impact of remittances sent by migrant workers to their countries of in the region. The interaction between labour migration dynamics identified in 2020 and remittance flows in the region will be further explored in Section 5.1.

Finally, understanding how the pandemic has affected the social and economic vulnerabilities of migrant workers is crucial, in accordance with SDG Target 8.8, which aims to protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments of all workers, including migrant workers, particularly women migrants, and those in precarious employment. Objective 5 of the Global Compact for Migration, which aims to enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration, and, Objective 6 of the Global Compact for Migration, which aims to facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work. These vulnerabilities (as discussed in Section 4) reflect structural flaws in the labour migration systems in many countries (ADBI, OECD and ILO, 2021). Migrant workers have been excluded from health-care access, unemployment benefits and income relief leading to a humanitarian crisis among migrant populations. COVID-19 may represent an opportunity to revisit the existing systems of labour migration with the objective of building them back better. This new model of labour migration would be a more resilient model and would better respond to future crises and to their effects on labour migration, migrant workers and their families.
REFERENCES

Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and International Labour Organization (ILO)

2021 Labor Migration in Asia: Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis and the Post-Pandemic Future. ADBI, OECD and ILO.

Immigration Bureau of Thailand

2020 Immigration Highlights.

International Energy Agency’s (IEA)


International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)


International Labour Organization (ILO)

2011 Labour migration in South Asia: A review of issues, policies and practices

2018a ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers – Results and Methodology.

2018b Worker-paid migration costs in the Viet Nam-Malaysia corridor. ILO, Bangkok.

2018c International labour migration statistics in South Asia: Establishing a subregional database and improving data collection for evidence-based policy-making.

2019 Labour Mobility in Pacific Island Countries. ILO, Suva.

2020a Recruitment fees and related costs: What migrant workers from Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, and Myanmar pay to work in Thailand. ILO, Bangkok.


2021a TRIANGLE in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note: Viet Nam (July–December 2020). ILO, Bangkok.

2021b TRIANGLE in ASEAN Quarterly Briefing Note: Lao PDR (October–December 2020). ILO, Bangkok.

International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Organization for Migration (IOM)

2017 Risks and rewards: Outcomes of labour migration in South-East Asia. ILO and IOM, Bangkok.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)


2020b Rapid Assessment of the Socioeconomic Impacts of COVID-19 on Labour Mobility in the Pacific Region. IOM, Suva.

2020c Cambodia Returning Migrants Survey. IOM, Phnom Penh.

2020d Rapid assessment Round 3: COVID-19 related vulnerabilities and perceptions of non-Thai populations in Thailand. IOM.


International Monetary Fund (IMF)

2020 Regional Economic Outlook Update: Middle East and Central Asia.

Kuttappan, R.

2021 South Asia’s migrant workers are facing a jobs crisis both at home and abroad. Equal Times, 15 February.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM)


Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)

2020 Latest Release: Total Number of OFWs Estimated at 2.2 Million (Ref. No.: 2020-099).

Thai Ministry of Labour (MOL)


Transnational Institute (TNI)

2020 Myanmar’s cross-border: migrant workers and the Covid-19 pandemic: Their life stories and the social structures shaping them. TNI.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), Population Division


Weeraratne, B.


World Bank

3.2 FORCED MIGRATION

Most migrants move in search of better opportunities for themselves and their families. When this is the case, mobility is voluntary. However, others are forced to move and leave their homes in response to crisis, including disaster, climate change, armed conflict and persecution. Though the drivers could be diverse, forced migration refers to migratory movements that involve force, compulsion, or coercion (IOM, 2019, p.77). While not recognized as an international legal concept, this term has been used to describe the movements of refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs. The study of forced migration normally involves the distinction of causes, most commonly between conflict-induced and disaster-induced displacement. While the definition of these two concepts is useful, the distinction between them may be blurred in practice as natural disasters could be caused by human activities such as landslides, and conflicts may arise as a result of disagreements over natural resources (IOM, 2021a).

By the end of 2020, over 82 million people around the world had been forcibly displaced due to conflict (UNHCR, 2021) – that is, more than 1 per cent of humanity and 40.5 million new internal displacements were recorded as a result of conflicts as well as natural disasters (IDMC, 2021a). The Asia-Pacific region accounted for a significant portion of the global figures of forced displacement. Despite movement restrictions and border closures caused by the pandemic (see Section 1.1.1), political crises, conflicts, violence and a series of natural hazards did not stop the displacement of millions of people in and from the region; however, progress in achieving durable solutions for the forcibly displaced persons was disrupted. The expected decline in the number of resettled refugees and complications to the integration of the displaced persons (UNHCR, 2020c, p.3) also increased the risk of protracted displacement.

The aim of this section is to provide an analysis on the most recent figures of forced migration in and from the region to identify the key trends and changes that occurred in 2020. This section will first present the trends in refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs displaced within and from the region, based on available statistical information. This section will then address the main resettlement solutions provided to refugees in countries in the region and abroad. The analysis of data on forced migration reinforces Objective 2 of Global Compact for Migration to minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin and highlights Dimension 6 of the MGI, that calls for a safe, orderly and dignified migration.

3.2.1 Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Internally Displaced Persons

Refugees and asylum seekers generally flee persecution and conflict across international borders, whereas IDPs are displaced within their own countries due to natural hazards or conflict. The following subsection will analyse the trends of these three groups of displaced populations from the Asia-Pacific region. The analysis on refugees and asylum seekers has been primarily based on the latest figures from the UNHCR’s Refugee Population Statistics Database. In discussing IDPs, the analysis considers the most recent data available at the IDMC Global Internal Displacement Database.

3.2.1.1 REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

By the end of 2020, over 5.4 million refugees and asylum seekers from countries in Asia and the Pacific region had been forcibly displaced – about 4.7 million of which were refugees and 742,469 asylum seekers, collectively accounting for 22 per cent of the global stock of refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2021). The majority (75%) of refugees and asylum seekers from the Asia-Pacific region were hosted within the region. There are similarities and differences in the composition and characteristics of refugees and asylum seekers originating from countries in the region. Therefore, data on refugees and asylum seekers from the region have been analysed separately to better appreciate the different trends and characteristics of these two groups.

Regarding the refugee population from the region, most (87%) had fled to and stayed in neighbouring countries within the region. Over half (55%) came from Afghanistan (2,59 million), the largest origin country of refugees in the region and the second largest origin country of refugees globally following the Syrian Arab Republic, South Sudan, Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Figure 26). Fifty-five per cent of refugees from Afghanistan fled to Pakistan and 30 per cent to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Afghan refugees hosted in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan are considered one of the largest protracted refugee populations in the world (UNHCR, 2020a).

The second major country of origin for refugees from the region was Myanmar, from which 1.1 million refugees fled, mostly to Bangladesh (79%). Overall, the main countries of asylum for refugees from the Asia-Pacific region were, in descending order, Pakistan (1.4 million or 30.7%), Bangladesh (866,518 or 18.5%), the Islamic Republic of Iran (780,010 or 16.6%), China (303,152 or 6.5%), Germany (210,889 or 4.5%), India (194,396 or 4.1%), Malaysia (126,531 or 2.7%), the United States (108,880 or 2.3%) and France (101,653 or 2%). Together, these countries received almost 88 per cent of refugees from the region (Figure 27).

FIGURE 26: MAIN REFUGEE POPULATIONS FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN 2020

Like the refugee population, the largest group of asylum seekers for international protection and waiting determination on their refugee status also came from Afghanistan (238,799 or 32%), followed by China (107,866 or 15%), the Islamic Republic of Iran (77,220 or 10%), India (69,950 or 9%), Bangladesh (64,624 or 9%) and Pakistan (61,396 or 8%). The United States (152,436) and Turkey (149,404) almost evenly shared the reception of 41 per cent of asylum seekers from the region. Another 19 per cent were hosted in countries within the region (77% of which hosted in Australia and Malaysia) and 8 per cent in Germany (Figure 28).

In the past five years, the number of asylum applications submitted by migrants from Asia and the Pacific has reduced by half. However, the sharpest decline was recorded between 2019 and 2020. The number of asylum applications decreased by 36 per cent (Figure 29). This can be explained by the measures imposed by countries around the world to contain the spread of COVID-19 (as mentioned in Section 1.1.1.3, 168 countries fully or partially closed their borders, with 90 countries making no exception for people seeking asylum). These measures disrupted the delivery of services and made it tougher for vulnerable asylum seekers to claim protection (UNHCR, 2020c).

15. Including new applications (N), repeat applications (R), appeal applications (A), applications made at the judiciary level (J) and new and repeat applications when data was provided together (NR).
3.2.1.2 INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Analysis of the situation of IDPs in the Asia–Pacific region in 2020 relies on inputs from stock and new displacement data reported by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), which draws extensively on IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix. Because of limited data availability to provide a regional overview of both IDP stocks and new displacements due to conflict and natural disaster, the following subsection will focus on displacements at the country and subregional level.

The number of people forcibly displaced within their own countries continued to increase despite the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of December 2020, the stock of conflict-induced IDPs reported in ten Asia–Pacific countries16 grew to an estimated 5.3 million, with almost 67 per cent (3.5 million) originating from Afghanistan alone (IDMC, 2021a). This latest figure is the highest reported in more than a decade in the country (Figure 30). Confrontations between the Taliban and the Afghan Armed Force accounted for the largest share of new internal displacements in the region (Figure 31). This event that took place on May 2020, triggered an estimated of 5 million new displacements mainly originating in Bangladesh (2.5 million) and India (2.4 million). From June onwards, monsoon rains and floods severely affected the subregion of South Asia, resulting in the displacement of around 3.2 million people by December 2020 (IDMC, 2021b, p.53). Moreover, nearly 5.1 million individuals from China were forcibly displaced due to rainy season floods, landslides and heavy storms accounting for the largest number of new displacements in on single country in the world (IDMC, 2021b, p.47). Seasonal rains and floods are common in China, usually between April and September, but in 2020 they were particularly intense. More than 440 rivers burst their banks, and 33 swelled to their highest level on record.17

Disasters have been, as in previous years, the major cause of new displacements in the region. According to IDMC (2021a), the number of new disaster-induced displacements in the Asia–Pacific region reached 31.3 million by the end of 2020. The largest share of this type of displacement occurred in South Asia, with 8.3 million or almost 40 per cent of new internal displacements in the region (Figure 31).

Cyclone Amphan was the largest natural hazard in the Asia–Pacific region (Table 3). This natural event that took place on May 2020, triggered an estimated of 5 million new displacements mainly originating in Bangladesh (2.5 million) and India (2.4 million). From June onwards, monsoon rains and floods severely affected the subregion of South Asia, resulting in the displacement of around 3.2 million people by December 2020 (IDMC, 2021b, p.53). Moreover, nearly 5.1 million individuals from China were forcibly displaced due to rainy season floods, landslides and heavy storms accounting for the largest number of new displacements in on single country in the world (IDMC, 2021b, p.47). Seasonal rains and floods are common in China, usually between April and September, but in 2020 they were particularly intense. More than 440 rivers burst their banks, and 33 swelled to their highest level on record.17

The Philippines was also widely affected by several natural disasters in 2020. The eruption of the Taal volcano on 12 January caused significant displacement in the country. By mid-February, DTM had recorded the displacement of almost 200,000 people, with the vast majority residing outside evacuation camps (IDMC, 2020, p.2). According to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) of the Philippines, by September 2020, it was estimated that the eruption had led to 506,000 displacements in total (DSWD, 2020). Furthermore, in May, Typhoon Vongfong made landfall as a result almost 300,000 people displaced (IDMC, 2020, p.26). Finally, in November 2020, the Philippines was hit by the Super Typhoon Goni, the world’s most powerful tropical cyclone of the year, and 10 days later, by the category-4 Typhoon Vamco (Ulysses). It was estimated that Typhoon Goni and Typhoon Vamco triggered the displacement of 3 million persons in total (IDMC, 2021b, p.49).

The Asia–Pacific region is characterized by vulnerability to and, as a result, displacement induced by natural disasters. Most IDPs whose homes have been destroyed by various natural hazards, are more likely to face protracted displacement. In addition, the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19 are likely to have increased the difficulty of recovery for those affected by floods, landslides, earthquakes and several other natural hazards.
3.2.2 Refugee Resettlement

Resettlement refers to the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them with permanent residence status, which ensures protection against refoulement and provides a settled refuge and his/her family or dependents with access to rights similar to those enjoyed by nationals (UNHCR, 2011). When other solutions such as voluntary repatriation and local integration are not attainable, resettlement serves as a key protection tool for refugees and other vulnerable populations of concern.

One of the four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees is to expand refugees’ access to third-country solutions as a means of achieving comprehensive refugee responses; to contribute towards this objective, UNHCR and other stakeholders launched the Three-Year Strategy (2019–2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways in June 2019. The goal is to support the resettlement of 3 million refugees in need to 50 countries and complementary pathways by the end of 2020. IOM Resettlement Programme has been providing resettlement assistance to protect refugees from refoulement and facilitate their safe and dignified resettlement and integration worldwide by working closely with governments, UNHCR, non-governmental organizations and other partners.

In 2020, IOM supported the resettlement of 11,963 individuals from 17 countries of departure in Asia and the Pacific region to 18 countries of destination across Asia, Oceania, North America, South America and Europe. Figures 32 and 33 showcase the sex and age group composition of these beneficiaries from the top 10 countries of departure in Asia and the Pacific region in 2020. However, data disaggregation by nationality is not available; therefore, the country of departure does not necessarily correspond to the individual’s country of origin. The relative proportion of male and female resettled persons is relatively even, and most resettled persons are adults. A clear exception is beneficiaries from Afghanistan, of which almost half (46%) are children and infants. Slightly over half of beneficiaries from Asia and the Pacific region resettled in the United States, followed by Canada, Australia and Sweden (Figure 34). Specifically, the United States received over 89 per cent of resettled refugees from Afghanistan and half of all resettled refugees from Asia–Pacific countries. The IOM resettlement data cited only refer to beneficiaries assisted by IOM departing from Asia–Pacific countries and do not represent all resettled refugees worldwide; however, the initial analysis could potentially help better understand some of the patterns and distribution of refugee resettlement from the region.

Although international resettlement for refugees carried out by IOM and UNHCR resumed on 18 June,\(^{18}\) the temporary suspension from 17 March\(^{19}\) to that date has led to the cancellation of departures of some 10,000 refugees waiting for resettlement (Red Cross, 2020) and a drop in resettlement to the European Economic Area by nearly 63 per cent from 2019 to 2020 (IOM, 2021b). However, even before the pandemic, UNHCR identified almost 1.45 million refugees in need of resettlement yet only 4.5 per cent of the global resettlement needs in 2019 were met – due to COVID-19, it is unlikely that the 2020 target of resettling 70,000 refugees was fulfilled (UNHCR, 2020b). The needs for global resettlement are projected to increase from 1,440,408 in 2020 to 1,445,383 persons in 2021, and the resettlement needs for Asia and the Pacific region from 98,281 in 2020 to 99,470 in 2021 (ibid.).

---


\(^{19}\) UNHCR, “IOM, UNHCR announce temporary suspension of resettlement travel for refugees”, 17 March 2020.
Data and evidence are indispensable to monitor forced displacement. The availability of reliable and timely data is the basis for assessing the impact of the pandemic on forced migration trends in the Asia–Pacific region. Despite mobility restrictions and border closures, forced displacement in and from the region was still ongoing. Between 2019 and 2020, estimated figures of refugees and asylum seekers from countries in the region showed a decrease of only 2 per cent. Similarly, the number of Afghan refugees – the largest group from the Asia–Pacific region – did not decrease in comparison with 2019. This finding indicates that the pandemic did not stop people from seeking protection. Data on forced migration show that most refugees from the region have fled to and remained in the neighbouring countries. In this context, states across the region continue their longstanding practice of hosting refugees although only 16 are signatory members of the 1951 Conventional Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Furthermore, data on internal displacement shows a concerning scenario. New disaster-induced internal displacements occurred in Bangladesh, China, India and the Philippines accounted for 58 per cent of the newly disaster-induced displaced around the world (IDMC, 2021a).

It is also important to consider that official figures do not represent the full picture of forced migration in the region as there are many undocumented refugees without recognition (UN ESCAP, 2020). Moreover, data collection about the forcibly displaced populations in the region is currently compiled and collected by various organizations, which could further complicate the analysis about current trends because different organizations have estimated different figures. Partnerships and collaborations among governments and organizations could mitigate the lack of standardization when collecting data about forced displacement and other types of migration.
While COVID-19 related effects on forced migration may not have manifested yet, long-term consequences on the asylum countries should be considered. New mobility restrictions and border governance policies could be imposed to avoid future propagations of the virus. As a result, the destinations of the forcibly displaced may change as refugees’ decision-making and migratory journeys could be affected by mobility regulations.

Furthermore, although the pandemic did not cease forced migration in the region, it has very likely impeded the asylum-seeking process, which might leave thousands of displaced persons without access to international protection. The goal of international resettlement of 3 million refugees in need by the end of 2028 has been disrupted; therefore, international cooperation remains the key to sustainable solutions to forced displacement as recognized in the Global Compact on Refugees.

REFERENCES

Department of Social Welfare and Development of the Philippines (DSWD)
2020 Report N.70 on the Taal Volcano. DROMIC.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)
2021b Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021. IDMC.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)
2021a Migration Data Portal: Forced migration or displacement.

UN News
2020 More uprooted, fewer return, pushing forcibly displaced above 80 million. UN News, 9 December.

United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
2020a Protracted Refugee Situations Explained. UNHCR.
2020b Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2021. UNHCR.
2020c Mid-Year Trends 2020. UNHCR.

United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)
2020 Philippines: Typhoon Vamco and Super Typhoon Goni Impact and Response. OCHA.

Red Cross EU Office
2020 Statement: Resettlement can’t wait. Red Cross EU Office, 21 September.

UN News

Glossary on Migration. International Migration Law No. 34. IOM, Geneva.

Migration Data Portal: Forced migration or displacement.

UNHCR.

Philippines: Typhoon Vamco and Super Typhoon Goni Impact and Response. OCHA.

Philippines: Typhoon Vamco and Super Typhoon Goni Impact and Response. OCHA.
3.3 RETURN MIGRATION

One of the most direct effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on international migration can be seen in return migration. The pandemic is perceived to act both as a catalyst of and a hindrance to return migration. The current public health emergency and many of its consequences such as lockdown, economic crisis and intensified discrimination, are seen to have encouraged or compelled migrants to return to their countries of origin. Meanwhile, the imposition of border closures and travel bans left many migrants who wished to return stranded abroad. According to IOM’s definition (2019), return is “the act or process of going back or being taken back to the point of departure” that could be “within the territorial boundaries of a country, as in the case of returning IDPs and demobilized combatants; or between a country of destination or transit and a country of origin, as in the case of migrant workers, refugees or asylum seekers.” As emphasized in Objective 21 of the Global Compact for Migration, it is important to ensure and facilitate safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration. This aim has also been emphasized in SDG Target 10.7 to facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

Various types of return can be distinguished by the location of movement, nature of return, and means of implementation (Figure 35). There is no comprehensive regional or international data covering all subcategories of return from, within and to the Asia-Pacific region. Information is either scattered across various types of data sources, incomplete or only partially publicly available (IOM, 2021a). Furthermore, the highly dynamic situation of return migration, especially during the pandemic, implies that it is almost impossible to quantify the aggregate scale of return. However, compilation of return data from diverse sources may help us better understand how various facets of return migration evolved throughout the crisis.

Based on data availability, three main types of return migration will be examined in the following section: (1) immobility prior to or en route of return, (2) voluntary return, and (3) forced return. In addition, the link between the COVID-19 pandemic and issue return migration will be explored. By synthesizing scattered information on return migration, we will examine how trends in these various types of return in Asia and the Pacific region have evolved during the pandemic as regards one key question: How has the pandemic amplified, curbed and/or complicated return migration from, to and within the region?

3.3.1 Stranded Migrants

Globally, as of 13 July 2020, at least 2.75 million migrants were stranded outside of their country of habitual residence wishing to return home but unable to do so, based on public and official sources and direct assistance requests to IOM (IOM, 2020b). There are various reasons why migrants could not return home or continue their journeys onward, including the imposition of border closures, lockdowns, travel restrictions, decline in international flights, loss of jobs and income, loss of residence permits, and lack of resources (ibid.). These affected seasonal workers, temporary residence holders, international students, migrants seeking medical treatment abroad, beneficiaries of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR), seafarers and many others.

Estimating the number of stranded migrants is challenging for various reasons. First, the situation of stranded migrants is highly dynamic – figures are often captured for specific periods, on specific migratory routes, and in some cases for specific groups. As such, the reported estimates are extremely time sensitive. Furthermore, underestimation might be a significant issue because of the presence of undocumented returns and returns made through unobserved routes or crossing points. Moreover, since available data are based on diverse and scattered official and unofficial sources, particularly media sources, verification is often needed to ensure the accuracy and avoid duplication of figures. Despite the many challenges faced to collect data on stranded migrants, such information is fundamental to develop better responses to this crisis.

In the Asia–Pacific region, a record of 976,869 migrants – which should be seen as a minimum estimate – were stranded abroad as of 13 July 2020 (IOM, 2020a). Some stranded migrants who received assistance from IOM might also be reflected in data from the IOM assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) Programme in the following subsection. The IOM Points of Entry (PoE) Global Reference Database (2021c) had recorded the operational status of various types of PoEs worldwide since April 2020. During April to July 2020, the database reports a high number of PoE closures in the Asia–Pacific region – assessed PoEs that were fully closed in Asia–Pacific countries peaked at 38 per cent in April and slightly went down to 29 per cent in July, after which the proportion of fully closed PoEs had remained below 22 per cent until the end of 2020. During this peak period of border closure, the situation of stranded migrants in the region was widely reported by the media. For instance:

- On 29 June 2020, it was reported that approximately 250,000 Myanmar migrants were stranded in Malaysia because of COVID-19 lockdowns and crackdowns against illegal foreign workers according to Myanmar’s labour attaché in Kuala Lumpur. As well, around 800 Myanmar migrants were stranded in Jordan without work for months because of flight suspensions.

- On 17 April 2020 at least 20,000 Nepali migrant workers were reported to be stranded in various Indian states because of lockdowns. At least 800 of them were forced to stay on the Indian side of the Nepal–India border in Darchula without shelter or food due to the lockdown in both countries.

- Over 16,000 Cambodians in Japan had residential permits set to expire in March, April or May 2020, according to a Cambodian Embassy officer in Japan. The Japanese Immigration Office announced in early April that it would extend the validity of the permits of foreigners whose documentation would have expired between March and June, for an additional period of three months.

• In early April 2020, more than 5,000 Bangladeshi students and several hundred Bangladeshi visitors were reported to be stranded in Australia because of lockdowns. Several hundred Bangladeshi workers, who were either detainees or overstayed their visa, were stranded in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Kuwait.23
• Approximately 2,600 Zimbabwean nationals, mainly students, had remained stranded by 2 July 2020 because they were unable to afford the flight tickets back home, which costed USD 5,000 each.24
• According to a report on 24 July 2020, over 2,500 Indian citizens were stranded in Bangladesh awaiting repatriation because of land border closures in West Bengal in India. These migrants resorted to land border crossings likely because they could not afford paying for flights or quarantine.25

In addition to foreign nationals abroad, internal migrants were also reportedly stranded within their own countries in the Asia-Pacific region, because of the presence of internal mobility restrictions. The following examples illustrate some cases at the national and local levels:

• On 1 May 2020, Thai authorities allowed internal migrant workers stranded in Phuket to return to their home provinces after the island closed its borders for a month. About 40,000 people registered to leave.26
• Following the Indian Government’s ease of travel restrictions to allow interstate movement, on 5 May 2020 the Indian Railway reported that, since 1 May 2020, around 67,000 stranded internal migrants had returned home on 67 designated trains.27

• About 9,500 internal migrants stranded in Manila, Philippines, tried to take part in the government’s transportation programme in late July 2020. The programme aimed to help people stranded by COVID-19 lockdown measures and who lost their jobs to return to their home provinces.28
• On 14 December 2020 it was reported that over 150 internal migrant workers hired from Mandalay, Myanmar were denied entry in the country’s Warkawku checkpoint, at the entrance to Kayah State, because 17 migrant workers from other regions in Kayah State tested positive for COVID-19. Those stranded internal migrants, including persons aged 60 years and older, and more than 20 children, reportedly had no access to basic facilities, including washing and sanitation facilities.29

Stranded migrants are clearly exposed to several vulnerabilities and risks (Section 4), such as the risk of deportation when their visa or permit expires, limited or no access to health care and social support, stigmatization, discrimination, trafficking in persons and labour exploitation (IOM, 2021b). Due to border closure and mobility restrictions, some stranded migrants might resort to more dangerous routes to return, and/or the use of smugglers. Data remotely collected in July 2020 from 1,419 migrants and refugees in Asia, Africa and Latin America show that smugglers were making use of more dangerous routes to cross borders and charging higher fees, and were among the groups of perpetrators committing violent acts against migrants (MMC, 2020) – which will be discussed more in detail in Section 3.4.

3.3.2 Voluntary Return

Voluntary return could be assisted or independent – to the country of origin, transit or another country based on the voluntary decision of the returnee (IOM, 2019). Given the lack of specific data on voluntary spontaneous or independent return, in the following subsection, assisted voluntary return and voluntary repatriation in 2020 in the Asia and the Pacific region will be presented.

3.3.2.1 ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN

As the largest provider of assisted voluntary return (AVR) and assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes worldwide, IOM’s operational data (2021d) provide insights into cross-border assisted voluntary return as one specific type of voluntary return. Assistance is provided to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host or transit country and who decide to return to their country of origin. Such assistance includes pre-departure and post-arrival assistance, and the logistics process to return the migrant from the host country to the country of origin. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, humanitarian assistance kits such as pre-embarkation health checks, COVID-19 testing, supplies to comply with health protocols prevention measures, and protection against COVID-19 where required, are also provided.


It is recognized that selection bias is likely to exist among these returnees. On one hand, the AVR programme mainly reflects return from Europe, Libya and Turkey and the Bali Process return programme which operates within the region, making it difficult to draw lessons from the data for the other regions. On the other hand, the data only capture those stranded migrants in need of return assistance that IOM has supported. For these reasons, the data cannot be considered representative of all voluntary returnees worldwide or in the region. Nevertheless, the data could still help understand the patterns of voluntary return in the region, and the potential influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on voluntary return movements.

Asia-Pacific as the host or transit countries

In 2020, a total 1,217 voluntary returnees hosted in or departing from 22 Asia-Pacific countries were assisted by IOM. Figure 36 shows the gender and age group composition of these returnees by type of return, including specific types of returnees such as those with significant medical conditions, unaccompanied or separated children and victims of human trafficking. One third of these IOM-assisted voluntary returnees were female. While most of these returnees were adults, 15 per cent were children.

27. India Today, “67 Shramik Special trains run so far, 21 more to go today: Railways”, 5 May 2020.
Although an overwhelming majority were classified as general return cases, 47 of them were reported as victims of trafficking. While these return cases of victims of trafficking were scattered across host countries in the region, 12 cases returned from Japan to the Philippines, nine returned from Vanuatu to Bangladesh, and seven returned from Malaysia to Mongolia. Australia, India and Indonesia were the major host countries in the region, collectively hosting more than two-thirds of IOM-assisted voluntary returnees in the region (Figure 37).

From these host countries it is possible to identify the proportion of return cases that were directly attributed to COVID-19, which make up 31 per cent of the total return cases from this region. Almost all IOM-assisted returns hosted in India were classified as returns related to COVID-19. A closer look reveals that almost all cases were returning to the Sudan and Côte d’Ivoire (Figure 37). Although the reason why most return cases from India were classified as COVID-19 related is unknown, these figures should be interpreted with caution as the classification of COVID-19 related and other cases might be subject to the judgement of case workers, and in general, all return cases could potentially fall under the direct and/or indirect impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Slightly over half of all 1,217 IOM-assisted voluntary returnees hosted in the Asia–Pacific region were intraregional returns (Figure 41), meaning their countries of origin were within the Asia–Pacific region. Half of them were hosted in Australia, and another one fifth in Indonesia (Figure 42).

**FIGURE 41: INTRAREGIONAL VOLUNTARY RETURNS AS A SHARE OF ALL IOM-ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURNS (2020)**

Source: Compiled from IOM RMM AVRR data (2021d).

Intraregional Intraregional
9.6% 90.4%

Asia–Pacific as the origin region (N=6,440)

Intraregional Intraregional
51% 49%

Asia–Pacific as the host region (N=1,217)

Voluntary repatriation refers to voluntary return of a particular group, namely refugees, based on their free and informed decision, which may be spontaneous or organized under the auspices of the concerned governments and UNHCR (IOM, 2019). According to UNHCR (2020a), there were 2,147 voluntary repatriations of registered Afghan refugees between January and December 2020, as part of almost 5.3 million voluntary repatriations between March 2002 and December 2020. Against the backdrop of a continuous decrease in the number of voluntary repatriations of registered Afghan refugees in recent years since the peak of 372,577 in 2016, the number further dropped by 73 per cent compared with that of 2019. Most of those who voluntarily repatriated in 2020 returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Figure 43), the monthly number of voluntary repatriations in the early half of 2020 remained at a low level compared with the same period in 2019 – after which an upward trend was seen as of July 2020 (Figure 44).

**FIGURE 44: MONTHLY TRENDS OF VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION OF REGISTERED AFGHAN REFUGEES BY COUNTRY OF PREVIOUS RESIDENCE (2020)**

Source: Compiled from UNHCR Voluntary Repatriation Return Response (2020a).
IOM (2019) defines forced return as the act of returning an individual, against his or her will, to the country of origin, transit or to a third country that agrees to receive the person, generally carried out based on an administrative or judicial act or decision. Publicly accessible data on forced return, usually collected by national statistical offices, border protection and immigration law enforcement agencies, are scarce.

Several incidents of planned or implemented forced returns from India, Maldives, Malaysia and Thailand in 2020 despite the COVID-19 pandemic were recorded by the Global Detention Project COVID-19 Global Immigration Detention Platform (2020). In India, an estimated 170 Rohingya refugees were detained in the city of Jamnagar and informed of plans to deport them to Myanmar after police raids in camps in early March (ibid.). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Maldives confirmed returning 68 undocumented Bangladeshi migrants on 21 April 2020 (ibid.). Forced return of a boat carrying 94 Rohingya refugees stranded in waters near Aceh was conducted by Indonesian authorities in June 2020 (ibid.). Between 7 May and 1 June 2020, the Thai Government arrested 35 Rohingya and announced it would be deporting them (ibid.). On 12 May 2020, almost 400 Myanmar nationals were deported from Malaysia, against the background of continued arrests of large numbers of migrants and refugees and deportations throughout the pandemic (ibid.). In particular, the deportation of Rohingya refugees had raised widespread concerns over violation of the non-refoulement principle under international human rights law from international and regional actors (Global Detention Project, 2021). Overall, systematic reporting of the situation or the scale of forced return in the Asia–Pacific region remains lacking or hardly accessible.

FIGURE 45: ENFORCED RETURNS ORIGINATING FROM ASIA–PACIFIC REGION FROM 14 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES (2019 Q1–2020 Q3)

Source: Compiled from Eurostat Database (2020).

Among the 14 host countries, most forced return cases were concentrated in three countries – more than half were reported in Slovenia, followed by the United Kingdom (23.3%) and Sweden (16.7%) (Figure 46). Figure 47 shows the major countries of origin of returnees from the Asia–Pacific region – they are, in descending order, Pakistan (33.1%), Afghanistan (27.9%), Bangladesh (12%), India (8.8%), China (4.9%) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (4.6%). For most, a similar trend of decline was observed as of the second quarter of 2020. Afghanistan, as the country of citizenship, was the only exception, with an increase (by 32.3%) in the total number of enforced returns compared to 2019.

FIGURE 46: EUROPEAN HOST COUNTRIES OF ENFORCED RETURNS ORIGINATING FROM ASIA–PACIFIC COUNTRIES (Q1–Q3 2020); (N=8,740)

Source: Compiled from Eurostat Database (2020).

FIGURE 47: TOP 5 COUNTRIES OF CITIZENSHIP OF ENFORCED RETURNS FROM 14 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES (2019 Q1–2020 Q3)

Source: Compiled from Eurostat Database (2020).
Although 2020 data on enforced return to the Asia–Pacific region is only available for 14 European countries, the trends and patterns observed largely align with those reported in 2019 for a larger number of European countries. Annual data on third-country nationals who have left the territory from 24 European Union (EU) Member States31 by type of return and country of citizenship show that, in 2019, 12,175 returns of all categories from these EU Member States originated from Asia–Pacific countries, accounting for 12.5 per cent of the total stock of returns from all countries in the world – 9.7 per cent of all enforced returns originated from the Asia–Pacific region.

Out of all returns originating from the region, about one third were enforced returns (Figure 48). Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh remain the major countries of origin of enforced returns, with the addition of Viet Nam to the list (Figure 49).

### FIGURE 48: RETURNEES FROM EU WITH ASIA–PACIFIC COUNTRIES AS COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP BY TYPE OF RETURN (2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Return</th>
<th>Country of Citizenship</th>
<th>Number of Returnees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary return</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>3,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>China</td>
<td>2,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>India</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforced return</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>4,255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>China</td>
<td>3,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>India</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other return</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>4,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>China</td>
<td>2,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>India</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

31. EU countries covered by EUROSTAT return data (2019): Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

### FIGURE 49: TOP 6 ASIA–PACIFIC COUNTRIES OF CITIZENSHIP FOR ENFORCED RETURN FROM EU (2019) (N=12,175)

- Afghanistan: 3,285 returnees (27.1%)
- China: 2,561 returnees (21.1%)
- Pakistan: 702 returnees (5.7%)
- Viet Nam: 561 returnees (4.6%)
- India: 339 returnees (2.8%)
- Bangladesh: 285 returnees (2.3%)

Consistently highlighted as the main country of origin for forced return from Europe according to Eurostat data, the scale of forced return from Europe to Afghanistan is likely to be understated, as studies find the boundary between voluntary and forced return increasingly blurry (Kuschminder, 2017). Several factors and developments in recent years and in 2020 could potentially explain the mass forced return of Afghans. Afghans constituted the second largest group of asylum seekers arriving in Europe as of 2020 (Chatham House, 2020), who, should their asylum application be rejected, do not have the right to stay. Due to a lack of legal pathways to enter, migration to Europe is largely irregular (Samuel Hall, 2020). Another relevant development in recent years is the increasing EU policy focus on returns of Afghans. In 2016, the EU signed an agreement, known as the “Joint Way Forward on Migration Issues” (JWF), with Afghanistan’s National Unity Government (NUG). Although not considered a binding international agreement, the JWF aimed to facilitate the return of Afghans who are refused protection or settlement in the EU. With the initiative set to expire on 6 October 2020, a new agreement called the “Joint Declaration on Migration Cooperation between Afghanistan and the EU” (JDMC) was set to be approved (European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2021).

Besides continued deportation from Europe, rational data suggest that the scale of deportation to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries was even more sizeable (Figure 50). According to the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) of Afghanistan, among 865,793 undocumented returnees recorded between 1 January and 20 December 2020, 325,524 were undocumented Afghans deported from Iran and Pakistan, with over 99 per cent deported from Iran (IOM, 2020c).

Despite continued deportations, Afghanistan was again ranked as the most violent country in the world in 2020 by the Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020). Non-governmental and other refugee advocacy organizations have argued that deportation, including of vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors, could be dangerous given the current security situation in Afghanistan and the reintegration difficulty faced by many (e.g. Samuel Hall, 2020; Caritas Europa, 2020; Chatham House, 2020; MMC, 2019; European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2019; Kamminga and Zaki, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing challenges facing returnees, with further reduced access to work, reduced availability of basic goods, increased discrimination against returnees and reduced access to humanitarian assistance (MMC, 2020a), which will be discussed more in detail in Section 4.1.2.1. Concerted efforts to ensure safe and dignified return and readmission as well as sustainable reintegration as called for by Objective 21 of the Global Compact for Migration are required, and even more so in the case of forced return.
The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on various types of return migration has been shown indirectly in the above analyses. However, its direct influences are perhaps best reflected in surveys conducted with returnees. IOM conducted Returning Migrants Surveys in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and the Philippines in 2020, with a total of 13,973 respondents returning either from abroad or another district in the country (Figure 51). All respondents in Cambodia and Lao People’s Democratic Republic returned from Thailand. Among surveyed international returnees to Bangladesh, 30 per cent returned from India, 15 per cent from Saudi Arabia, 13 per cent from United Arab Emirates, 8 per cent from Italy and another 8 per cent from Oman. Among surveyed international returnees to Bangladesh, nearly half (42%) returned from Dhaka. Among surveyed international returnees to Myanmar, well over half (69%) returned from Thailand, 16 per cent from China and the rest from Malaysia, India, Singapore, Republic of Korea and other countries. Among surveyed returnees overseas Filipino workers, the majority (70%) returned from Middle East, 11 per cent from Asia and the Pacific, 9 per cent from the Americas, 8 per cent from Europe and the rest from Africa.

Among respondents who returned in 2020, a vast majority attributed their return either directly or indirectly to the COVID-19 pandemic. In all cases, reasons directly related to COVID-19 contributed to at least 35 per cent of the cited reasons for return (Figure 52), and accounted for 89 per cent, 80 per cent and 67 per cent in the case of returned internal Myanmar migrants, overseas Myanmar migrants and overseas Filipino workers respectively. Personal and family concerns over COVID-19 and employment-related problems were often cited as the main reasons for returning. Among Lao and Myanmar returnees – mainly from Thailand – many said quarantine conditions could be improved. Most migrants stayed in mixed gender rooms in both provincial and community facilities – 14 per cent of those who stayed in provincial facilities reported that they felt uncomfortable. While most who stayed in community quarantine centres had access to water and sanitation facilities, 6 per cent of those who stayed in provincial quarantine centres did not have access to water and sanitation facilities. Among Myanmar returnees, 29 per cent indicated additional needs for personal protective items, 11 per cent food supplies, and 14 per cent space for quarantine facilities. Many of these returnees indicated the intention to re-migrate internationally or internally as soon as the pandemic or related travel restrictions end, especially among Cambodian and Bangladeshi returnees (Figure 53). The percentages shown are out of all respondents who said they wanted to re-migrate in the future; all returnees to Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 71 per cent of returnees to Cambodia, 76 per cent of international returnees to Bangladesh, 89 per cent of international returnees to Myanmar, and 60 per cent of internal returnees to Bangladesh, 89 per cent of international returnees to the Philippines from Thailand, 16 per cent from China and the rest from Malaysia, India, Singapore, Republic of Korea and other countries. Among surveyed returnees overseas Filipino workers, the majority (70%) returned from Middle East, 11 per cent from Asia and the Pacific, 9 per cent from the Americas, 8 per cent from Europe and the rest from Africa.

32. Departure country or district reported by respondents in these surveys does not represent the actual distribution among all returnees to these countries. For example, IOM (2021) reported that almost 75 per cent of 408,408 returnees to Bangladesh had returned from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman between 1 April and 31 December 2020.
3.3.5 Discussion

The challenges in facilitating safe return migration because of COVID-19 faced by governments worldwide are embedded in Dimension 5 of the MGI which measures the type and level of preparedness of countries when they are faced with mobility dimensions of crisis. The findings presented in this section have highlighted the increasingly blurry boundaries between voluntary and forced return in times of crisis, when mixed motives, sometimes involving a certain degree of coercion, underly migrants’ decision to return. As underlined in Dimension 4 of the MGI, the safety and well-being of migrants is of top priority. While facilitating safe return is essential, the observations point to a gap in current responses in relation to the principle of non-refoulement when no safer alternatives exist. With evidence of how the pandemic has posed challenges to different phases of return migration – first regarding stranded migrants in the host countries and secondly regarding the reintegration process upon return – the vulnerabilities of stranded migrants, return migrants and especially the forcibly displaced populations upon return will need to be further discussed in Section 4.1.1 and Section 4.1.2. The question of how to ensure sustainable reintegration, when the public health and economic crises as well as the effects of large-scale return were affecting both the countries of destination and origin, remains highly relevant; collection of data is needed to monitor such progress and develop better responses.

This review also uncovers gaps in data for understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on returns of internal migrants, on future migration plans of return migrants, and on irregular migrants, whose transition to irregular migration might have been triggered indirectly by the pandemic. These migration dynamics are likely to affect the landscape of international migration (Section 2.1) and internal migration, especially regarding labour migration (Section 3.1), and remittances (Section 3.1), in the post-pandemic phase. Existing data on stranded migrants and returns are far from exhaustive because of the nature of media reporting and case management data. While national institutions are better positioned to collect data on return, these statistics are seldom fully publicly disclosed.

REFERENCES

Chatham House

European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)
2021 New EU Agreement with Afghanistan Amid Deteriorating Security Situation. ECRE, 5 February.

Eurostat
2020 Eurostat Database (accessed 1 April 2021).

Global Detention Project

Institute for Economics and Peace

International Organization for Migration (IOM)
2020a Return Task Force: COVID-19 Impact on Stranded Migrants. IOM.


2020e Cambodia: Returning Migrants Survey. IOM, Phnom Penh.

2020f Lao PDR: Returning Migrants Survey #2. IOM, Vientiane.

2020g Understanding Experiences of Returning Migrants Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic in Myanmar (forthcoming).

2021a Migration Data Portal: Return Migration.

2021b Migrant Protection and Assistance during COVID-19: Promising Practices. IOM.


2021e COVID-19 Impact Assessment on Returned Overseas Filipino Workers. IOM, Makati City.

Kamminga, J. and A. Zaki
2018 Returning to Fragility: Exploring the Link between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan. Oxfam International.

Kuschminder, K.

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)
2019 Distant Dreams: Understanding the Aspirations of Afghan Returnees. MMC.

2020a Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant Smuggling. MMC.

2020b Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Afghan Returnees. MMC.

Quie, M. and H. Hakimi

Samuel Hall

United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)
2020a Afghanistan: Voluntary Repatriation Snapshot – December 2020. UNHCR.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in heightened travel restrictions across the Asia–Pacific region as governments tried to curb the spread of infections. Unfortunately, some of the new travel restrictions and border control measures created unprecedented risks for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. By not considering the multidisciplinary aspects of border management during a pandemic, these policies might trigger unforeseen effects on the dynamics of irregular migration.

While a universally accepted definition of irregular migration is not available, IOM defines it as any “movement of person that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination.” (IOM, 2019, p.116). Regularity is defined by the characteristics of the migration movement and can coexist with several migration types. Situations of irregularity can apply to migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers, deported or voluntary returnees, and overlap with other sources of vulnerability, such as trafficking in persons or migrant smuggling. Moreover, migrants’ irregularity can change over time (Duvell, 2006). This is the case when undocumented individuals who are forced to migrate abroad apply for international protection, or when migrants regularly entering a country remain there when their permit of stay expires.

Based on the above definition, it is no surprise that data on irregular migrants are scarce. The irregular nature of migrants’ status is the main obstacle to data collection on this type of migration. Moreover, the fluidity of migrants’ irregularity status over time further complicates data gathering. While estimates of the stock of irregular migrants exist for some Asian countries, they are outdated and often based on partial and indirect measures (IOM, 2016). Because of this lack of information, this section focuses on specific aspects of irregular migration that have evolved substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely falsification of travel and health documents and migrant smuggling.

3.4.1 Document falsification

As a result of border closures and travel restrictions introduced during the pandemic, criminal networks, especially those involved in migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons, adapted their tactics and methods. These include frauds involving the falsification of travel documents or the use of official documents by imposters. Since the start of the pandemic, national police and border authorities observed that fake health certificates – such as COVID-19 tests or vaccination documents – were used to cross borders illegally.

The data collected from the Document Examination Support Center (DESC) Initiative\(^33\) show a dramatic decrease in the number of secondary inspections of passport travel documents in the Asia and Pacific region between 2019 and 2020. The DESC Initiative collects data on passport inspections carried out through the IOM Verifier TDB&B from 41 workstations installed in 18 Asian and Pacific countries. Because of the reduction of non-essential travel worldwide due to the pandemic, the number of recorded inspections fell from 5,132 in 2019 to 1,022 in 2020. However, the share of observed frauds among total inspections remained approximately constant at around 10 per cent (Figure 54). This stable trend highlights that criminal networks involved in the facilitation of irregular migration were still operating regardless of the new restriction measures.\(^34\)

Even though migrant smuggling is largely undocumented phenomenon due to its clandestine nature, some evidence of its dynamics and recent developments in Asia and the Pacific exists. IOM produced a comprehensive survey of 19,605 potential migrants in Afghanistan between the end of 2020 and the start of 2021, most of whom were planning to leave the country before the end of the month in which they were interviewed. As the data show, migration on the main routes from Afghanistan – to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and Europe – is often facilitated by migrant smugglers, which makes this survey an invaluable tool to study this phenomenon (IOM, 2021). Most migrants interviewed by IOM (83%) had already found a smuggler or facilitator to help them when the interview was conducted. Moreover, around three quarters of migrants who had not found facilitators were planning on contacting with smugglers by family or friends in Afghanistan – to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and Europe. Furthermore, border crossing points without passport examination and biometric verification systems may be vulnerable to fraudulent health certificates and other COVID-19 required documentation for travel. Throughout 2020 and the first months of 2021, fraudulent COVID-19 tests and vaccination documentation have emerged as a new trend reported by many national and international police authorities (EUROPOL, 2021). Although most of the available information on the falsification of health certificates concerns travelers trying to enter Europe, the United States or Canada, the risks associated with this new criminal strategy are potentially a matter of concern worldwide.

![Figure 54: Number of passport checks from Verifier TDB&B system by result](image)

33. Data from the DESC regional initiative are collected and reported by respective immigration authorities.
34. Verifier TD&B Newsletter #34, March 2021.
35. Ibid.
have encountered en route. Substantial shares of migrants expected to face deportation (88%), hunger or thirst (80%), detention (78%), car crashes (64%), robbery (62%), and even death (60%).

As Afghanistan’s case shows, migrant smuggling can be pervasive along some routes and expose migrants to serious and numerous risks. In addition, as many other aspects of migration, smuggling is likely to have rapidly evolved in response to the pandemic. Two surveys produced by the Mixed Migration Centre also shed light on the repercussions of COVID-19 on migrant smuggling, through interviews of migrants in India, Indonesia and Malaysia36 (MMC, 2020a), and returnees in Afghanistan (MMC, 2020b). The interviews took place in July 2020 for the first survey, and between July and August 2020 for the second.

In some cases, the closure of legal pathways to migration and the economic and social downturns observed worldwide have pushed individuals to resort to services offered by smugglers. This is evident in Afghanistan, where interviewed refugees and returnees reported that their need for smugglers has increased in over 40 per cent of the cases (ibid.), highlighting a growing desire to remigrate. This increased need for smugglers is likely to be connected to the substantial loss of income and economic security experienced by most Afghan interviewees since the start of the pandemic (ibid.). Conversely, most migrants in India, Indonesia and Malaysia – who are more likely to have reached their country of destination – reported that the need for smuggling services has either decreased or stayed the same (MMC, 2020a). The demand for services provided by migrant smugglers likely increased because of a combination of factors. First, access to legal migration channels became more difficult. Second, layoffs drive some migrants into irregular statuses or to return to their home countries as their immigration status is usually linked to their employer. Finally, the lack of access to health services and to food and economic security, as well as rising anti-immigrant sentiments, might have driven some migrants to return to their countries of origin, as described in more detail in Section 4.1.1. Border restrictions seem to have impacted the supply of smuggling services as well. In fact, most migrants interviewed reported that access to smugglers has become more difficult (53% in Afghanistan and 43% in the other Asian countries). Smuggling routes have moved to more perilous areas, where access to humanitarian help is limited or non-existent, most likely due to stricter border control enforcement. Overall, the increased demand for smuggling services and the new challenges faced by smugglers have led to a rise in the price paid by migrants, both monetarily and in terms of the severity of their journey. The risks associated with irregular migration routes can be extreme, and hundreds of migrants – at the very least – lose their lives every year while trying to cross borders, as described in Section 4.3. Smuggling routes across the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea offer a dreadful but clear example of the risks taken by irregular migrants. These areas were estimated to be up to three times deadlier than the Mediterranean Sea in the past years (UNHCR, 2016).

As migrants’ need for smuggling services increased, so did their dependency on smugglers. These dynamics pose additional challenges. Interviewed migrants reported that smugglers are amongst the most likely groups to commit violent acts against migrants, alongside government officials, criminal gangs and armed militias (MMC, 2020a; 2020b).

While all these surveys are not designed to be representative of the experience of all migrants in the region, they do offer insight into how migrant smuggling evolved during the pandemic. Faced with new conditions, smuggling facilitators have adapted their modus operandi to respond to countries’ enforcement restrictions. Migrants, having even less access than before to channels of legal migration, have become increasingly reliant on the services provided by smugglers. Moreover, the economic, social and health crises experienced worldwide have likely exacerbated these needs. Such increased demand has led migrants to accept higher smuggling fees and more dangerous journeys into perilous landscapes. Furthermore, migrants’ strong dependency on smugglers produces a risk of greater exposure to violent acts and threats.

36. In this survey, 60 per cent of the respondents were Afghans, 28 per cent were from Myanmar and 12 per cent from Bangladesh.
37. The first survey was conducted in July 2020, while the second survey’s interviews lasted between July and August of the same year.
REFERENCES

Düvell, F.
2006 Crossing the fringes of Europe: transit migration the EU’s neighborhood. Centre of Migration, Policy and Society, 33.

European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL)

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)
2020a Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant Smuggling. MMC.
2020b Impact of COVID-19 on the Smuggling of Refugees and Migrants from Afghanistan. MMC.

United Nations (UN)

United Nations, Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
2016 Mixed Maritime Movements in South-East Asia in 2015. UNHCR.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

A woman stands at the edge of her eroded land in Hashai, Munshiganj district of Bangladesh © IOM 2007/ Abir Abdullah
An elderly Karenni refugee with distinctive earrings living in Thailand. © IOM 2009/ Pindie STEPHEN
Migrants’ ability to access health care and cope with the economic, social and psychological outcomes amid the pandemic could be affected by several factors. Many migrants live in overcrowded dormitories due to policies that restrict their access to proper housing, which may increase risks of COVID-19 transmission and make it more difficult, or in some cases impossible, to follow recommended public health and social measures such as physical distancing. Migrants may also be less likely to receive medical treatment because of limited or no access to health-care services, or other barriers including financial, language and employment barriers as well as stigma and discrimination (Küge et al., 2020; UN ESCAP, 2020). Furthermore, migrants in destination countries have faced significant economic challenges, as many lost their jobs and were left without income and, in many instances, forced to return to their home countries – which were already facing economic hardships (Ivakhnyuk, 2020). Furthermore, stigma and xenophobic attitudes towards migrants have affected their social inclusion in their host communities as many have been victims of misinformation and biases (Guadagno, 2020). Migrants’ heightened vulnerabilities underline the importance of ensuring Objectives 7 and 15 of the Global Compact for Migration to address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration and provide access to basic services for migrants. In the context of a global pandemic, the achievement of SDG 3 – ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all – is crucial, as global health-care disruptions could reverse decades of improvements, preventing the right to well-being of millions of people including migrants.

The following section will address the ways COVID-19 has affected migrants’ vulnerabilities in four areas. The first and second parts of the discussion focus on health-related impacts and the negative effects on food security faced by migrants. The section will then address the economic impact of COVID-19 among migrants, and finally discuss the ways migrants have been affected in terms of social cohesion in their host communities. This section considers the effects of COVID-19 on the experiences and vulnerabilities of foreign nationals in their destination countries, return migrants in their countries of origin, and internal migrants within their countries. The analysis of this section was based on both qualitative and quantitative data from several case studies, assessments, surveys and reports produced by different organizations including government departments and media outlets.

4.1.1 HEALTH

Migrants – especially those with irregular status – often do not have equal access to health care and treatment for COVID-19 might not be available for many. Even when they are allowed to access such services, language and cultural barriers, out-of-pocket expenditures and limited knowledge of how to navigate health services further limit migrants’ ability to receive healthcare services. Many migrants also live and work in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions where the virus can spread easily, and where it may be difficult or even impossible to follow recommended public health and social measures such as physical distancing. Other barriers such as lack of access to clean water and sanitation and personal protective equipment, as well as overreliance on informal communication channels, put migrants at a heightened risk of contracting COVID-19. Furthermore, migrants with irregular status might fear being arrested and deported by local authorities if they seek assistance. This may also limit the disposition of migrants to present oneself for testing, contact tracing and proper treatment (United Nations, 2020; Guadagno, 2020, p.5).
This combination of factors and constraints has led to multiple significant outbreaks among migrants from the Asia-Pacific region who were living either in the region or abroad. Various assessments, surveys and news from media outlets have displayed the overwhelming impact of COVID-19 among migrants, especially those in vulnerable situations including irregular migrant workers, return migrants and their families. The following cases are examples of the severe health risks that migrants have endured since the outbreak of COVID-19:

- The GCC countries host a large number of emigrants (23.8 million by mid-2020) from the Asia-Pacific region (UN DESA, 2020). There were multiple reports of crowded migrant worker camps being sealed once the host countries went into lockdown (ACAPS, 2020, p.4). This situation put migrants living in unhygienic rooms with scarce access to sanitation at risk of contracting the disease. In Saudi Arabia, where migrants from the Asia Pacific region constituted 70 per cent of the migrant population (UN DESA, 2020), 75 per cent of the new confirmed cases in May came from foreigners alone (IOM, 2021b).

- In Singapore, where non-nationals represented 43 per cent of the total population, 93 per cent of all cases in the country came from migrants only; COVID-19 spread rapidly in Singapore's migrant workers accommodation in April 2020 (UN DESA, 2020; ADBI, OECD and ILO, 2021). By December 2020, the Government reported that of the 320,000 migrant workers in dormitory facilities, more than 54,000 had at some point tested positive for COVID-19. An additional 100,000 had tested positive in serology testing, indicating a COVID-19 prevalence rate of 47 per cent among all migrants' dormitories (Singapore, Ministry of Health, 2020).

- In Lao People’s Democratic Republic, 38 per cent of interviewed representatives from local administrations, migrant community leaders and humanitarian and social organizations indicated that access to hygiene items, such as soap, hand sanitizer and masks, was the main challenge faced by migrants from ASEAN countries (IOM, 2020a, p.4).

- The cost of personal protective equipment (PPE), lack of understanding of hygiene and sanitation practices and lack of adherence to measures to mitigate the spread of the virus were perceived as the main challenges faced by migrants in Thailand during the pandemic (IOM, 2020b, p.5).

- According to a survey, Pakistani irregular migrants in Europe rated access to healthcare between “fair” and “good” during COVID-19 (IOM, 2021a, p.11). However, those who reported health access as “poor” mentioned their legal status, the lack of necessary treatment and discrimination as the main obstacles and reasons why they perceived access to health care as precarious.41

- Thousands of Nepali migrants were stranded at the border on their way home from India. Unable to cross the border, migrants were forced to stay in improvised quarantine centres with inadequate sanitation measures, food and water. Once borders reopened, local authorities were faced with the impossibility of handling the surge of persons crossing the border. Quarantine conditions did not improve for migrants, with a persistent lack of safe water, food and hygienic facilities (ACAPS, 2020, p.4).

- An IOM assessment reported the existence of myths and misconceptions of COVID-19 among migrant populations. In Thailand, some migrant communities believed that COVID-19 can be avoided or cured by taking antivirus drugs, using herbal remedies or consuming particular food or drinks (IOM, 2020b, p.11).

- In some cases, return migrants have been excluded from their countries’ health system. An IOM assessment of COVID-19 protection in Afghanistan reported that undocumented Afghans who returned from Iran and Pakistan were unable to access national health-care services because such facilities were available for Afghan citizens only.42 As well, 94 per cent of all the participants said should they contract COVID-19, they had nowhere to go for self-isolation, increasing overcrowded conditions in the household, as most returnees stayed with relatives (IOM, 2021c, p.5).

4.1.1.2 FOOD SECURITY

COVID-19 has not only had an immediate impact on migrants’ health, but also reduced their capacity to afford and access food supplies. It is highly likely that food insecurity has increased due to COVID-19 containment measures, unemployment, loss of remittances, high debt levels, rising prices of essential foods, decreased agricultural activity and lower purchasing power following the economic crisis (United Nations, 2020; IOM and WFP, 2020). For example, an IOM assessment in Lao People’s Democratic Republic reported that more than half of the key informants surveyed reported migrants’ concerns about not having enough food to eat – some families even went without eating for a whole day because of the consequences of COVID-19 (IOM, 2020a, p.7).

The large influx of return migrants from abroad or from the cities could increase domestic food demand, triggering an increase in food spending and/or reduction of individual food intake at the household level (ACAPS, 2020, p.7). For instance:

- In India, a rapid assessment reported that 1,352 internal migrant workers said they do not have any ration left for the day, let alone for the next few days (Jan Sahas, 2020, p.18).

- Returned Nepali migrants residing in poor communities have turned to bartering as a coping mechanism to fill the lack of food and other basic items (The Kathmandu Post, 2020).

---

39. Assessment on perceived vulnerabilities of non-Lao population groups carried on from July to September 2020 in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. IOM selected and contacted 140 key informants of which 56 responded and participated in the survey.

40. IOM’s assessment on COVID-19 related vulnerabilities and perceptions of non-Thai population in Thailand. 75 key informants that work with migrant communities (mainly from Myanmar) were surveyed between 2 and 20 October 2020.

41. The Survey on Drivers of Migration 2 was conducted between September and November 2020. A total of 160 migrants were identified and surveyed in eight European countries. The majority of the participants were from the Punjab province.

42. IOM in coordination with the Afghanistan Protection Cluster (APC) conducted a total of 1,845 household surveys with undocumented returnees between 1 November and 31 January to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the protection environment across 11 provinces.

43. The assessment was carried early on the pandemic and surveyed 3,192 migrant families from the construction sector.
4.1.1.3 EMPLOYMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has arguably triggered the worst economic recession in decades – the World Bank (2021) estimated that a severe economic contraction will be experienced in various emerging and low-income Asia-Pacific countries. Severe domestic lockdowns have slowed or in some cases, ceased economic activities. Similarly, the labour market in host economies of migrant workers from the Asia-Pacific region significantly declined. According to ILO, in the second and third quarter of 2020, the region recorded an estimated loss of the equivalent of 265 and 185 million full time jobs, respectively. The Arab States experienced an estimated decline of 10 and 8 million jobs for the second and third quarter of 2020 (ILO, 2020c, p.6), a region hosting around 36 million migrants from Asia and the Pacific (UN DESA, 2020).

In this context, migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic and the measures taken to curb its spread. Migrants tend to be low-skilled and employed in the informal market; they are not protected by a formal contract and labour laws and depend on daily wages for their survival (World Bank, 2020). Reliance on the informal market is not only predominant among migrant workers but among the overall population in the region. According to an ILO study, more than 68 per cent of the population in the Asia and Pacific region earn their livelihoods through the informal sector (ILO, 2018). Workers who rely on the informal market are particularly affected by the containment measures (United Nations, 2020). Migrant workers are usually the first to be laid off and often are not covered by the governments’ support packages in response to COVID-19 (ILO, 2020b, p.2). Layoffs have not only led to income losses but also driven some into irregular statuses or to return to their home countries as their immigration status is usually linked to their employer (ILO, 2020c, p.9). Irregularity, in turn, makes access to assistance more difficult and increases the risks related to not to COVID-19 (Nyiri, 2020).

TABLE 5: INCOME AND LIVELIHOOD RELATED VULNERABILITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase of income insecurity</th>
<th>Exacerbation of livelihoods and well-being conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliance on the informal market</td>
<td>Inability to keep regular migrant status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of jobs due to COVID-19 economic recession in host countries</td>
<td>Inability to return home, being stranded without income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unprotected jobs, not covered by formal contracts</td>
<td>Limited or no access to social support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion from COVID-19 income support programmes</td>
<td>Exploitative work conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrants’ wages not fully paid</td>
<td>Increase of abuse in the workplace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The combination of all these barriers has made migrant workers among the most vulnerable groups. There were reportedly migrants forced to work despite the growing risk of being infected by the virus, or being trapped in their work locations without access to income and assistance (Ratha et al., 2020). The following examples describe the concerning situation of thousands of migrant workers from the region:

- An assessment conducted in Lao People’s Democratic Republic reported unemployment and insufficient income to be the two main challenges faced by migrants (mainly from ASEAN countries) residing in the country since the outbreak of the pandemic. It was perceived that the vast majority have lost their jobs and only one in five migrants was able to cope financially, whereas the rest were facing serious financial problems due to the economic consequences of the national lockdowns (IOM, 2020a, pp.8-10).

- Reports show that migrants workers were the first to be affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, as many lost their jobs. The Migrants Working Group estimated that around 700,000 migrants in Thailand lost their jobs following the national lockdowns in late March. Many of them were employed in the service, tourism and manufacturing sectors (ILO, 2020c, p.6).

- Thousands of Myanmar migrant workers tried to return to their country following the outbreak of COVID-19. Due to their irregular status in the destination countries, it is impossible to know how many stayed in the destination countries and continued working, how many stayed but lost their jobs, and how many went back to Myanmar. However, according to a survey conducted by the Migrants Working Group in Thailand, around 300,000 Myanmar workers were jobless but remained in Thailand.

- Access to social security is often one of the main challenges that migrants face even in non-crisis times. ILO estimates that most ASEAN migrant workers do not have any access to social support (ILO, 2020c, p.9). The Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME) conducted a survey in April 2020 among migrants in Singapore. The study shows that not only access to social security was difficult but also access to knowledge about relief packages available for migrants (HOME, 2020). Only 37 per cent of those who participated in the study reported having some sort of understanding of COVID-19 support payments for migrant workers provided by the Government.

- Myanmar migrants were also found to be struggling in other Asian countries. A study on Myanmar cross border migrant workers during COVID-19 revealed that nearly all migrants who participated in the study and worked in China were paid only one third of the wages for the days they worked (TNI, 2020). Most participants decided to go home during the pandemic and were not paid full wages they have worked for.

Migrant workers in this situation were probably among the worst affected during the pandemic – losing their jobs and earnings, being exposed to the risk of contracting COVID-19 on their way back home and relying on the little income they had to pay for the trip back home. The following case summarizes the hardships that many migrant workers have endured:

---

45. 12 per cent “somewhat agreed,” 22 per cent “agreed,” and 3 per cent “strongly agreed” that they were aware of the payment.
46. 120 Myanmar migrant workers were interviewed between May and July 2020.
04: MIGRATION AND VULNERABILITIES

CASE OF A 28-YEAR-OLD FEMALE MIGRANT WORKER AND HER HUSBAND FROM SAGAING REGION (MYANMAR) WHO WERE RESIDING IN CHINA

“My husband and I were supposed to be paid in lumpsum for all our combined work since January but we did not get our full wages because we went home before the end of the cutting season. We were supposed to get around 10,000 Yuan (USD 1,513) for our combined work, but only got about 3,500 Yuan (USD 530). That was the rule: we were to be paid in full only if we stayed up to the end of the sugarcane cutting season in May. If we went home before that, we would only get one third of our wages. To return to Myanmar, we first went from the village where we worked to the Chinshwehaw border [Kokang region] by car. We were in two cars carrying around 18 people. We had to pay 100 Yuan (USD 15) per person. At Chinshwehaw, we were told to stay in the nearby storage facility for two nights and three days. We were crammed inside with around 1,000 people. We were told that it was an order from above. We were provided with rice but could not go outside to buy curries. There were only two toilets, which made things really hard. Drinking water was not enough. Then we had to spend one night in Kyaukmee [Northern Shan State]. The 12-wheel truck we were riding carried over 70 people. We had to stay in the school classroom, like 30 people per room. Some slept on the desks and some on the concrete floor. We were fed breakfast, but no dinner was provided. People had to eat whatever they brought along. On the next day, I bought bread from the nearby shop. Then we were offered a lunch box and drinking water. We were then taken to Mandalay on the same truck with 90 people, including 20 additional people they had to bring on board. There was no space to move around. When we reached Mandalay, our temperature was taken and we were told to stay some feet apart. We had to stay at a mechanical training school. There were so many people. No dinner and not even drinking water was provided. From the Chinshwehaw gate to Mandalay, we paid 15,000 Kyats (USD 12) per person. When we reached Pyin Oo Lwin, our fate improved. There were many people who wanted to help and who gave us a lot of food, snacks and water. At the later gates, only our NRC [National Registration Card] cards were checked. We joked that maybe only the NRC cards can carry the disease, not the people. From Mandalay to [close to their home place], we paid 10,000 Kyats (8 USD) per person."

Her financial worries are common among migrant workers who returned to Myanmar because of the pandemic.

She explained: “My husband and I brought with us 500,000 Kyats [USD 350] when we went to China. Of these, 100,000 Kyats were used to pay for our labour contractor who is a notebook on daily sugarcane cutting output per worker, recorded by labour contractor Shan – Chinese from Myanmar, at 50,000 Kyats for each of us. Now, we did not make much money because we were not paid in full for the wages we earned, and because we had to pay for the cost of our going home. We are now in debt, and we have to pay that money back. But we have no jobs. We will wait for the next sugarcane cutting season (that is, November 2020) and go back to China, and we will bring with us our two-year-old daughter.”

The pandemic has also had a devastating impact on domestic labour markets, wherein thousands of internal migrant workers were left under precarious situations amidst the COVID-19 containment measures. Most internal migrants – like overseas workers – rely on the informal sector and lack formal contracts and benefits such as food and accommodation. National lockdowns triggered the mass exodus of thousands of internal migrant workers from the cities trying to return to their home villages:

• India experienced the exodus of over 2 million internal migrant workers who were forced to return from cities to their home villages (ACAPS, 2020, p.4). When the lockdown was first announced in the evening of 24 March, migrants were told at a few hours’ notice that they were not able to work and most likely not able to access government support schemes. Unable to survive without income, migrants had to walk or cycle up to 900 km to reach their homes. Some of them were stopped and sent to shelters, others suffered hunger, thirst and heat exhaustion or were stranded in their work locations in precarious conditions.

• It is estimated that 200,000 internal “daily paid workers” in Nepal left Kathmandu and other work locations and returned home (most on foot). Migrants faced food shortages, lack of potable water, police harassment and stigma from communities along the way (Prasai, 2020).

Migrants who already faced exploitative working conditions before the pandemic might not be able to find other job opportunities or have limited ability to move internally and across borders as their passports are withheld by employers (McCormak et al., 2015; ILO, 2020a). Reports have described abuses related to forced labour and migrants being unable to refuse to work, coerced and being threatened with retrenchment or violence by their employers:

• ILO’s survey on ASEAN migrant workers’ experiences during COVID-19 shows that 32 per cent of the respondents who were employed at the time of the study faced employment challenges or abuses related to the pandemic (ILO, 2020c, p.5). Migrants reported cases of violence, harassment and abuses related to forced labour as the primary difficulties they faced in the workplace.07

• In Thailand, migrant domestic workers have been sacked by their employers due to fears that they may be carrying the virus into the household; those who have continued working said they were exposed to exploitative practices, such as long working hours without extra pay or rest (ILO, 2020d, p.7).

• Migrant workers in ASEAN countries also have described being coerced and unable to refuse to work. Employers have threatened migrants with violence and withholding their passports. An ILO study shows concerning statements of migrants describing the abuses they have experienced (ILO, 2020c, p.11):

“I could not refuse to work during lockdown because my passport and other legal documents were kept by my employer.”

– Indonesian woman migrant domestic worker in Malaysia.

47. 309 ASEAN migrant workers were surveyed from March to April 2020. 179 resided in countries of origin (Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam) and 131 were in countries of destination (Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong SAR, China, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and others).
The severe economic and labour repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis have put women migrant workers at high risk. In non-crisis times, women migrant workers are at risk of various intersections of violence and discrimination based on their race, nationality, ethnicity, status and other sex and gender characteristics (ILO and UN Women, 2020). Women migrant workers are often employed with insecure contracts and likely to be involved in short-term and part-time work, and excluded from social protection schemes with limited or no access to economic support packages, health care and maternity protection (ibid.). Women migrant workers who manage to keep their jobs may be subject to violence, abuse and exploitation in the workplace; they might be overloaded with extra duties and not paid overtime, and lockdown measures have made it even harder for women migrant workers to leave situations of violence and abuse (ibid.).

### CASE STUDY: VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

“One survey respondent, a Filipina domestic worker in Kuwait, reported experiencing threats of harassment and violence. She chose to end her employment to return home. One rights violation can be experienced together with many others, and in this case the Filipina domestic worker had also experienced violations indicative of forced labour, including being compelled to work against her will, being threatened with contract termination, having her passport and other documents withheld, and not being able to refuse work during lockdown.”


When containment measures were first announced, thousands of migrant workers in the region – the majority in ASEAN countries – crossed borders to return to their homes. Government-monitored border crossing points in some countries in the region reported a high proportion of men returning, while there have also been anecdotal reports of women crossing the borders irregularly outside official checkpoint locations (UN Myanmar, 2020). Women migrants tend to live and work under an irregular status more often than men; therefore, their migration experiences tend to be more precarious (ILO and UN Women, 2017; IOM and ILO, 2017). Return women migrant workers are also vulnerable to harassment on their journeys back home or in quarantine centres. As well, some experience discrimination and negative attitudes in several host countries. According to a Safe and Fair study, attitudes towards women migrant workers in ASEAN countries were generally not positive even prior the outbreak of the pandemic (ILO, 2019).

### TABLE 6: FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS’ VULNERABILITIES AND RISKS

| Gender violence and discrimination based on their race, nationality, ethnicity and immigration status | Reliance on informal, short-term and part-time jobs |
| Higher exposure to violence and exploitative conditions in the workplace, especially those employed in the domestic sector | Risk of harassment and discrimination throughout their migration journeys |

Social stigma against returning migrants has also increased in the context of the pandemic. Return migrants have experienced discrimination in their home settlements, being seen as transporters of the virus from abroad, even if they have tested negative for COVID-19 (Lopez-Pera et al., 2020). The following examples show some of the social challenges migrants have experienced both in the host and origin countries or regions:

- A survey conducted by an independent think tank, Emir Research, reported that eight out ten Malaysian respondents have negative views towards undocumented migrants as they were perceived to be a source of COVID-19 infection. Some media reports documented foreign migrant workers in Malaysia wearing wristbands, as a measure enforced by their employers to identify them in public. These actions have led to further stigmatization of migrants in the country.

An assessment conducted in Indonesia, Pakistan, Myanmar and Malaysia found that around one third of respondents have blamed specific groups for spreading COVID-19, including foreign migrants and returnees (FRC, UN OCHA and WHO, 2020, p.12).

In India, video footage emerged of internal migrants who returned to the city of Bareilly, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, being sprayed with chemicals solutions to “disinfect” them.

Dalits returning migrants in Nepal faced discrimination in quarantine centres, being asked to eat separately from other castes. If tested positive for COVID-19, Dalit returnees reported experiencing discrimination within their communities, even after they had recovered. Being tested positive or having a family member infected with COVID-19 could prevent Dalits from job opportunities because of the social stigma currently prevalent in their communities.

Racial discrimination and physical attacks on Asian migrants and people of Asian descent globally spread with the outbreak of COVID-19. In the United States, 125 incidents targeting Asians and Asian-Americans were reported. Similarly, at least 267 anti-Asian hate crimes were recorded across the United Kingdom between January and March 2020 (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

A study conducted among Afghan migrants in Turkey showed the existence of xenophobic attitudes towards Afghans and foreigners in general (Verduijn, 2020, p.6). Afghans who had just arrived from Iran were accused of causing the outbreak of the virus in Turkey leading to incidents of racism and xenophobia.

Another key aspect of the social effects related to COVID-19 is that of the impact on children, particularly their education and learning. The pandemic forced the closure of schools in 188 countries, disturbing the education of 1.7 billion children around the world, including migrant children (OECD, 2020, p.2). For children on the move, these closures intensified pre-existing barriers to accessing education including language barriers and admission complications (You et al., 2020). For example, an IOM assessment on the vulnerabilities of migrants in Thailand reported no or limited access to education and no access to internet/resources for home schooling as the main challenge for migrant children in Thailand (IOM, 2020b, p.8).

Returning migrant children may even face additional constraints in re-starting their education due to school closures and inability to participate in online learning due to the lack of access to internet. Children who have been out of school for a long period are more likely to be at risk of never returning. This is the reality that migrant workers’ children in some Asia–Pacific countries could face (UNICEF, 2021, p.29).

Economic recessions often lead to the increase of informal employment wherein the prevalence of child labour is well documented, “pushing many children out of school into the labour market” (ILO and UNICEF, 2020, p.11). In South Asia, many internal migrant workers are also children actively engaged in the informal sector, where companies operate without regulations against child labour. Children are exposed to exploitative and dangerous working conditions, and events like the pandemic could increase the risk of many more children being engaged in these abusive practices (UNICEF, 2021).

4.1.1.5 DISCUSSION

The challenges faced by migrants due to changes in policies, labour market and social practices because of the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to erode their human rights and labour rights. Dimensions 1 and 4 of MGI address migrants’ rights and well-being. Re-designing policies and correcting longstanding exclusionary systems that restrict migrants’ access to economic, social, civil and political rights are key (UN ESCAP, 2020, p.182). Successful pandemic responses should align with the SDGs and Global Compact for Migration, including Target 1.3 of SDG which calls for implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable, and Objective 17 of the Global Compact for Migration which calls for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against migrants.

Past and current experiences have demonstrated that effective emergency responses can only be achieved when the vulnerabilities of migrants related to documentation status, immigration policies, their socioeconomic conditions and xenophobia are addressed (Gaudiano, 2020, p.13). Furthermore, the pandemic has revealed the importance of adopting migrant-inclusive risk management approaches. Migrants should be included if not targeted in COVID-19 responses including health and social protection measures, the notion of which should ultimately be incorporated in national systems. All stages of COVID-19 measures, from awareness and prevention activities to screening, testing, treatment and follow-up programmes, should be migrant-inclusive and migrant-friendly to reduce mistrust and fears of deportation and arrest among irregular migrants in host countries. For women migrant workers, the pandemic has exacerbated their pre-existing vulnerabilities. National recovery programmes should ensure universal access to gender-responsive social protection measures. Universal access to social protection systems and relief measures would allow women migrant workers who lose their jobs during the pandemic to be protected from economic subsistence, which is a risk factor of multiple forms of vulnerabilities and exploitations.

Migrants in many countries have played an important role in the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis by making vital contributions throughout the pandemic. Their contributions as health workers and other essential workers have helped their host communities endure and recover from the economic and social ruptures caused by the pandemic (UN ESCAP, 2020). With such extraordinary contributions, migrants should be able to enjoy full labour rights free from abuse, discrimination and exploitation in both their host and origin countries and communities. The recovery from the effects of COVID-19 will require developing inclusive approaches to leave no one behind. Recognizing migrants’ contributions as well as their human rights and labour rights is fundamental to enhancing the effectiveness of response to the crisis, and of risk resilience in the long term.
REFERENCES


The Assessment Capacity Project (ACAPS) 2020 Migrant vulnerability in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal: Covid-19 and Labour Migration. ACAPS.


International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) 2020 Covid-19: Community insights from the Asia Pacific region. IFRC, WHO and UN OCHA.


2020b ILO Brief: Protecting Migrant Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Recommendations for Policy-makers and Constituents. ILO.

2020c ILO Brief: Experiences of ASEAN migrant workers during Covid-19: Rights at work, migration and quarantine during the pandemic, and re-migration plans. ILO.


International Labour Organization (ILO) and UN WOMEN 2017 Protected or Put in Harm’s Way? Bans and Restrictions on Women’s Labour Migration in ASEAN Countries. ILO and UN-WOMEN, Bangkok.


2020b Rapid assessment Round 3: COVID-19 related vulnerabilities and perceptions of non-Thai populations in Thailand. IOM.


Prasai, S. 2020 The day the workers started walking home. The Asia Foundation, 13 May


Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) 2020 Quarterly Mixed Migration Update – Quarter 1 2020. MMC.


Prasai, S. 2020 The day the workers started walking home. The Asia Foundation, 13 May


Transnational Institute (TNI) 2020 Myanmar’s cross-border migrant workers and the Covid-19 pandemic: Their life stories and the social structures shaping them. TNI.


UN-WOMEN 2020 Addressing the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on women migrant workers. UN-WOMEN.


IOM Asia–Pacific Regional Data Hub
4.1.2 Vulnerabilities Related to Forced Displacement

On its 70th anniversary, UNHCR (2020c) stated that it was “in no mood to celebrate” given that conditions for forcibly displaced people have worsened, rather than improved in all aspects concerning their livelihoods, security and rights. As aforementioned in Section 3.1, almost 5.4 million refugees and asylum seekers, and 5.3 million IDPs fled their homes in Asia-Pacific in 2020 (UNHCR, 2021a; IDMC, 2021a). The Asia-Pacific region is one of the most vulnerable to natural disasters, with millions of displacements recorded every year (Du, 2020). In the context of the ongoing pandemic, the forcibly displaced populations might be disproportionally affected due to various factors.

First, the COVID-19 crisis has caused secondary displacements of populations that have already been forced to move. Limited access to resources and loss of jobs and incomes have forced refugees and IDPs to be on the move to seek other means of survival (Sengupta, 2020). Second, displaced populations often encounter barriers to accessing health care. The provision of essential health is an international human right regardless of citizenship status (WHR, 2017). However, according to UNHCR, three quarters of refugees lack access to adequate healthcare and sanitation (UNHCR, 2020a). This situation has been recorded in some Asia-Pacific countries. As well, most IDPs, not only in the region but worldwide, are currently living in low- and middle-income countries that often have weak and precarious health systems (IDMC, 2020, p.43). Third, mobility restrictions and border closures may deny people seeking international protection the right to asylum, forcing people to return to situations of danger. Mobility restrictions could also lead to an increase in irregular movements across the borders, placing refugees in riskier and more insecure conditions (OECD, 2020). Mobility restrictions might also hinder the distribution of humanitarian supplies to thousands of displaced people who rely on these supplies for survival, such as IDPs in situations of emergency due to natural disasters (Sengupta, 2020; IDMC, 2020).

Furthermore, displaced populations are often sheltered in overcrowded camps or settlements without the adequate hygiene facilities or water supplies, a situation that could place them at risk of contracting the disease (NRC, 2020). The following section summarizes the main challenges that forcibly displaced populations from the Asia-Pacific region faced during 2020. It considers relevant economic and social issues that have affected the lives of refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs, worsening their already vulnerable condition. Forcibly displaced populations from the region come from different backgrounds and have fled their home due to various events; this section will focus on the experiences and vulnerabilities of three main groups: Afghan refugees, Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar camps and internally displaced persons due to climate change.

4.1.2.1 EMERGENCIES AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Over 4.7 million refugees from the Asia-Pacific region were forcibly displaced, having fled conflict and persecution from their home countries in 2020 (UNHCR, 2021a). The most predominant refugee populations in the region are Afghan refugees (2.59 million), mostly residing in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Rohingya refugees from Myanmar (1.1 million), the majority of whom have fled to Bangladesh. Both Afghan and Rohingya refugees have long been struggling with a myriad of hardships even before the outbreak of the pandemic. COVID-19 is one more challenge added to the list.

**Afghan Refugees**

For the past forty years, Afghanistan has experienced the displacement of millions of civilians, who have become one of the largest protracted refugee populations in the world. By the end of 2020, around 2.6 million Afghan refugees had fled the country with the majority residing in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran (UNHCR, 2021b). COVID-19 has increased the socioeconomic uncertainty in both countries, creating unsustainable conditions for Afghan refugees and blurring the distinction between ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ return (Que and Hakimi, 2020, p.36). There are also Afghan refugees currently hosted in Europe, Turkey, India, Indonesia and Australia (UNHCR, 2021a). Many have been in exile for generations; refugee children have even grown up abroad without having ever lived in Afghanistan (Farr, 2020). The pandemic has put Afghan refugees under pressure and in need of greater assistance, worsening their livelihoods and access to protection measures, both in their host countries and in Afghanistan. Many had no option but to return to the place and circumstances that had forced them to flee in the first place.

The Islamic Republic of Iran was one of the ten countries hosting the largest number of refugees in the world. Afghan refugees were the predominant group with around 780,000 refugees residing in the country by the end of 2020 (UNHCR, 2021b). Since the early days of the outbreak, the country reported a concerning number of total COVID-19 cases – 1,194,963 by December 2020 (WHO, 2020). Due to the economic recession in the country and the spread of the virus, it was reported that Afghan refugees were being expelled to the border, sometimes forcefully (Farr, 2020). As mentioned in Section 3.2.3, returns or deported Afghans faced multiple challenges in their homeland – protracted conflict, violence, insecurity and an economy shattered by COVID-19. The combination of these challenges could place returnees or deportees in a situation of internal displacement. Due to the lack of opportunities and security, many Afghan returnees have tried to make the reverse journey back to Iran (Simpson, 2020). Such journey often involves relying on smugglers who might consider taking more dangerous routes (Section 4.3), as border closures and halted visas grants have hindered mobility. According to a survey conducted by MMC, the need for smugglers has increased among refugees and returning Afghans. It has also been reported that government officials are the main perpetrators of protection incidents during migration journeys (MMC, 2020a).

Around 97 per cent of Afghan refugees are settled in urban areas, working as day labourers or domestic helpers in Iran. Only 3 per cent of the total number of refugees reside in camps provided by local authorities (Sengupta, 2020, p.9). Consequently, most refugees might have lost their income due to the economic recession in the country. Other challenges faced by Afghan refugees are related to the low literacy rates and a lack of awareness of COVID-19. Refugees have always been reluctant to be treated in medical centres even in cases of serious illness. The Iranian Government provides free primary health care for its population and for refugees in the settlements (Abolfazli et al., 2019). However, cultural beliefs and misconceptions stop refugees from attending medical centres and getting treatment for their health conditions. This problem is mostly observed in the illiterate, the middle-aged and above, and undocumented refugees (Salmani et al., 2020).

In Turkey, Afghan refugees have also faced constraints and difficulties in accessing health-care support. An assessment conducted by MMC showed confusion about eligibly for health insurance among Afghan refugees (Verduijn, 2020). In December 2019 modified the Law on Foreigner and International Protection (LFIP), including limiting the coverage of general health insurance of international protection applicants to one year after registration, except to those with special needs. However, some surveyed participants said that refugees are excluded from health insurance even when they provide the correct documentation and are proven to have special needs. Most Afghans who have been forcibly displaced are not granted international protection and hence lack health care.
Furthermore, Afghan refugees in some European countries are at increased risk of arbitrary arrest, detention and deportation since the outbreak of COVID-19 (MMC, 2020b, p.2).60 In October 2020, EU member States renegotiated a two-year extension to the Joint Way Forward (JWF) agreement, which was due to expire that month,61 as mentioned in Section 3.3.3. This deal facilitates the deportation of Afghans who have been refused protection or settlement in the EU (EEAS, 2016). Following this event, the deportation of Afghans from Europe re-started immediately after a nine-month suspension due to the pandemic, with the first flight carrying 11 deportees from Austria and Bulgaria landing in Kabul on 16 December 2020.62 One day later, another flight landed in Kabul with 40 Afghan asylum seekers deported from Germany. Sweden and Hungary have also been reported to be taking steps to re-start the deportation of Afghans who have had their asylum claims rejected.63 While JWF presents a straightforward solution to addressing the “issue” of irregular migration of Afghans to Europe, it ignores two fundamental factors: the impact of violence and war, and the unequal burden Afghanistan’s neighbours have shoulderred for years. Most concerning is the lack of recognition to this day of the fact that Afghanistan is still mired in ongoing conflicts and severe social and economic challenges.

Rohingya Refugee Camps in Cox’s Bazar

The Rohingya refugee crisis has been one the major concerns in the region since 2017. The latest outbreak of violence in Rakhine State in Myanmar forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas to flee their homes. According to UNHCR, around 1.1 million Rohingya refugees have displaced worldwide (UNHCR, 2021b). Nearly 900,000 of these are hosted in Cox’s Bazar District in Bangladesh – the world’s largest refugees camp (UNHCR, 2021a). The outbreak of COVID-19 is the latest addition to a long list of challenges facing the Rohingyas.

The average population density in the camp is almost 40,000 people per square kilometre – 40 times more than the average density of Bangladesh.64 The population has been growing at an average of 1,000 refugees per day since the outbreak of COVID-19. The average population density in the camp is increasing at a rate of 20,000 people per square kilometre (ACAPS, 2020, p.3). Thus, physical distancing, self-isolation and adequate hygiene are not viable options for refugees, a situation that could increase their risk of being contracting COVID-19. Most live in overcrowded shelters covered with tarpaulin, and access to food, water and hygiene facilities is limited, as this requires daily walks and long queues (Gordon and Lee-Koo, 2020). According to UNHCR, more than 31,500 refugees aged 60 years or older in the camps are particularly at risk of COVID-19 related mortality (UNHCR, 2021a). In addition, other chronic illnesses including cholera, chicken pox and diphtheria have broken out in the camp, together with a high number of respiratory infections – (174,000 since January 2020).65 According to WHO, nearly one in (17.9%) people being treated for medical conditions and experienced some form of lung disease when COVID-19 was spreading in the area (WHO, 2020).

Health-care access is limited for Rohingya refugees in the camps. Health infrastructure is already overstretched and under-resourced, with insufficient equipment and staff needed to treat acute cases of COVID-19 (ACAPS, 2020, p.2). Furthermore, misinformation and confusion about the virus was circulating throughout the camps. According to initial focus group discussions (FGDs), COVID-19 was referred to as “moronavirus” (dying-virus in Rohingya), a perception which increased panic and stress among the refugee population. The virus was perceived as deadlier and more dangerous than the virus’ actual mortality rate. There was limited evidence of accurate and consistent information about the treatment and transmission of the virus (ACAPS and IOM, 2020).66

60. Survey conducted between 15 and 31 August 2020, based on 207 surveys with Afghan refugees and migrants.

61. The New Humanitarian, “There’s a better way forward than sending Afghans home to conflict”, 30 September 2020.


66. Nine initial focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted among Rohingya refugees residing in the camps to understand their perceptions about COVID-19. The information was mostly captured by IOM Communicating with Communities (CwC) and, to a lesser extent, Site Management (SM) Staff.
Other reports described Rohingya refugees as believing that the virus is a tool designed to “abduct” and “kill” refugees in the hospitals (Engupta, 2020, p.11). Misconceptions about the virus are extremely dangerous in the context of forcibly displaced populations. In this case, such misinformation could jeopardise Rohingyas’ willingness to learn about coping mechanisms and undermine their ability to protect themselves and their families. It also hinders any effort to test and track the virus in area.

Limited access to accurate information about the virus was compounded by the Bangladesh Government’s ban on mobile phone SIM cards and internet connection imposed in September 2019.67 Such ban generated widespread misinformation and a lack of understanding about COVID-19, leading 26 international humanitarian agencies to call on both the Bangladesh and Myanmar governments to stop the ban on telecommunications and support the “humanitarian efforts to save lives and protect vulnerable communities against the potentially catastrophic impact of COVID-19” (UN OCHA, 2020b). The ban also prevented Rohingyas from reaching their families or networks in Myanmar and elsewhere, particularly during the pandemic. The children population of the camps were particularly affected, as protection services including child protection and psychosocial support were withdrawn (ESCG, 2020). Education programmes were put on hold and child-friendly spaces were closed, hindering children’s access to what may be their only safe spaces and support mechanisms, at a time when they are needed most (Gordon and Lee-Koo, 2020).

Other challenges for Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar camps have emerged. Since early December 2020, Bangladesh has started its plan to relocated Rohingya refugees from Cox’s Bazar to the island of Bhasan Char (MMC, 2021). More than 3,000 Rohingya refugees were transferred – 1,600 refugees on 4 December68 and 1,804 on 29 December.69 Bangladesh justified this action by stating that the overcrowded conditions in the camps in Cox’s Bazar were leading to crime.70

The relocations of Rohingya refugees took place in the context of increasing violence in Cox’s Bazar camps and exacerbated discrimination towards Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Clashes among gangs in Cox’s Bazar led to the death of eight people, while hundreds of other refugees were injured.71 Furthermore, during the same time, the Government of Bangladesh had nearly completed its 28-kilometer barbed-wire fencing surrounding at least 25 of 34 refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar.72 This has further limited Rohingya’s freedom of movement, not only in the district but in the whole country. COVID-19, however, has not been the only crisis IDPs in the region face. The outbreak of the pandemic has not stopped disasters from displacing people; rather, it has challenged governments and international organizations to adapt their response in the face of simultaneous crises. Access to safe shelters has been hindered by social distancing restrictions to avoid infections among the evacuees. Furthermore, the delivery of aid to displaced populations affected by disasters has declined due to the introduction of lockdowns and travel bans (Du Parc, 2020). At the time of the pandemic, the category-5 Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold struck the South Pacific region, triggering more than 89,000 displacements in Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga and the Solomon Islands (Du Parc and Boko Speth, 2020). Although these countries have experience in managing disasters of this kind, COVID-19 made it difficult for local authorities to implement swift and efficient recovery responses. In Vanuatu, the hardest hit of the islands, displaced populations affected by TC Harold faced constraints when accessing primary services. According to a study conducted by IOM, up to 53 per cent of the interviewed households reported not having access to safe drinking water (IOM, 2020).73 Access to food was noted as an important primary need among the displaced populations, with up to 37 per cent reporting a lack of access to food. The same study reported displaced children as one of the most vulnerable populations groups. Around 43 per cent of children in evacuation centres and 67 per cent in host families were recorded as not having access to education. There was also evidence of child abuse in 22 per cent of evacuation centres and 16 per cent of host due to citizenship issues (Janee et al., 2021). Sometimes IDPs lose their identity documents and are not able to register in the host community (IFRC, 2018). All these factors, in the context of COVID-19, can worsen IDPs’ livelihoods and security as an already vulnerable group who is often “ignored, invisible and excluded” (Orendain and Djallante, 2021). Other factors that can exacerbate IDPs’ vulnerable condition include indigenous and ethnic discrimination, language barriers and racism.
COVID-19 has caused disruption on a global scale, but it has also highlighted where and how change may be possible. Many refugees and IDPs have gone through many highly stressful events. The pandemic represents an opportunity to encourage collective and inclusive action to address all the systemic issues that have long affected forcibly displaced populations worldwide.

4.1.2.3 DISCUSSION

Forced displacement is not a recent phenomenon. Millions of people have had to leave their homes. In the wake of 2020, COVID-19 has reinforced long-standing structural weaknesses in the global refugee responses – the lack of a reliable international cooperation system, an unequal funding structure that gives more authority to donor States than States hosting refugees, and the growing privileging of state interests over the needs and vulnerabilities of forcibly displaced people (Milner, 2021).

COVID-19 observes no borders, does not choose, nor discriminates. Hence, states must consider non-discriminatory responses and equally consider all members of society. Many governments have failed to protect and assist refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs, despite their pressing needs. In the context of protection, seeking durable solutions has become more challenging, as conflicts go unresolved and insecurity remains widespread in many countries (UNHCR, 2020b).

The outbreak of the pandemic, however, should be regarded as an opportunity to address the underlying structural issues that have long affected the life of the forcibly displaced populations. First, an appropriate approach to tackling the current situation lies in the development of long-term processes and goals tailored to protect and efficiently assist these already vulnerable groups from future crises. In this regard, local authorities’ policies to curb the pandemic should address the basic humanitarian needs of vulnerable refugees and IDP groups. Second, the management of border restrictions must respect international human rights and refugee law, as well as the principle of non-refoulement. It is also crucial to build the resilience of health systems, focusing on fragile contexts (OECD, 2020). Doing so would ensure that urgent support is allocated to those with weaker health systems.

Displaced populations face a double challenge. While trying to recover from the impact of the many natural events that hit the region, they will also have to deal with the economic recession caused by COVID-19. Many will be able to return to their homes; however, recovery will be a long-term process, requiring a solution that tackles both crises.

REFERENCES

Abolfazli, S., S. Emamgholipour, M. Yaseri and M. Arab

The Assessment Capacity Project (ACAPS)
2020 Covid-19: Rohingya Response. ACAPS.

The Assessment Capacity Project (ACAPS) and International Organization for Migration (IOM)
2020 Flying News about Corona Virus. ACAPS and IOM.

Bamforth, T.

Dissanayake, P., S. Hetziarachchi and C. Siriwardana

Du Parc, E.
2020 Covid-19 and Internal Displacement in Asia–Pacific: Towards Local, Rapid and Inclusive Disaster Response. IOM.

Du Parc, E. and N.B. Spieth
2020 Tropical Cyclone Harold and Covid-19: A Double Blow to the Pacific Islands. IDMC.

European Union External Action (EEAS)
2020 Displacement Report – June 2020

Farr, G.
2020 Afghan Refugees and the Coronavirus Pandemic. E-International Relations, 26 May.

Gordon, E. and K. Lee-Doo
2020 The danger of disease in the world’s largest refugee camp. The Interpreter, 24 April.

Human Rights Watch

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)

Kishore, K.

Milner, J.
2021 Is COVID-19 an opportunity to achieve the rights of refugees? Open Democracy, 9 February

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)
2020a The Impact of COVID-19 on the Smuggling of Refugees and Migrants from Afghanistan. MMC.

2020b The impact of Covid-19 on protection among Afghan refugees and migrants in Greece. MMC.

2021 Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia – Quarter 4 2020. MMC.


Asia and the Pacific Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot. 07–13 April 2020. OCHA.

COVID-19: Access to full mobile data and telecommunications in Myanmar and Bangladesh is essential to save lives, say 26 major aid groups. OCHA Services, 15 April.


Joint Rapid Need Assessment (JRNA) on Cyclone Amphan. State Inter Agency Group, West Bengal.

The impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on forcibly displaced persons in developing countries. OECD.


Joint Rapid Need Assessment (JRNA) on Cyclone Amphan. State Inter Agency Group, West Bengal.

The impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on forcibly displaced persons in developing countries. OECD.


Joint Rapid Need Assessment (JRNA) on Cyclone Amphan. State Inter Agency Group, West Bengal.
Temporary closures of service businesses reduced the opportunities for sex and labour trafficking, and international travel restrictions increased the difficulty for transnational organized crime groups to commit human trafficking (Thailand National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee, 2020). However, concerns over the pandemic’s effects on the situation of trafficking in persons largely hinge on exacerbated exploitation risks of individuals and communities by criminal trafficking and smuggling networks (IOM, 2021a; IFRC, 2020). As well, identification and assistance provided by state authorities and non-governmental organizations to victims of human trafficking have been disrupted (IOM, 2021a; UNODC, 2020a). Migrants are known to be prone to exploitative conditions – 55 per cent of detected victims in Asia and the Pacific region in 2018 were migrants. In some cases, this is due to fears that their irregular status for working or staying in the host country could be exposed (UNODC, 2020a). The subsistence conditions caused by reduced wages and job losses that millions of migrants face have created a fertile recruitment ground for traffickers, and deepened pre-existing structural socioeconomic inequalities that constitute the root causes of human trafficking (UNODC, 2020a). Moreover, recruitment has been facilitated, as criminals adjusted their business models via abuse of modern communication technologies during the pandemic (ibid.).

Women and children are recognized as vulnerable groups to trafficking in persons. In 2020, anti-trafficking organizations reported that the pandemic has fuelled a spike in human trafficking for forced marriage in Cambodia, with on average one new reported case every three days (MMC, 2021). In India, the number of trafficked children reportedly increased, with 1,675 children rescued from exploitations between April and November (ibid.). In addition, Thailand identified an increase in online child exploitation, which was attributed to increased time spent online during school closures (Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children Taskforce, 2020). Over 43 children were rescued and 97 offenders were arrested in 2020, despite an overall decrease in prosecution statistics from 2019. According to the Royal Thai Government’s Country Report on Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts (2020), the number of human trafficking cases decreased from 288 to 131, the number of offenders decreased from 555 to 179, and the number of victims decreased from 1,821 to 229.

Based on assessments of government efforts in counter-trafficking, the US Department of State provides an annual update of tier ranking for governments worldwide. According to the US Department of State 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report (2020, p.55) undertaken from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, Australia, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore and Taiwan Province of the People’s Republic of China were the only countries or areas in Asia and the Pacific region in Tier 1, meaning that these governments have fully met the minimum standards set in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 for the elimination of trafficking. Twenty-six countries, territories and areas were ranked under Tier 2 or Tier 2 watch list and six under Tier 3, the latter of which indicates a lack of fulfilment of the TVPA’s minimum standards and significant efforts to do so according to the US Department of State. Therefore, strengthening counter-trafficking efforts in the region is needed.
In the spirit of the SDG Indicator 16.2.2 – which monitors the number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation – IOM Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) serves as the world’s largest data repository of human trafficking case data. Since human trafficking is a crime intended to be undetected, disparities between estimates of scale and identified cases are likely to exist because “numerous trafficked persons in the region are neither identified nor receive support” (UN ESCAP, 2020, p.55). It is thus challenging to infer the extent to which trends within identified victim populations are representative of the total victim population as these identified cases are not random samples of the population (IOM, 2021b). Even though the regional scale of trafficking in persons cannot be directly obtained, it is still possible to get a glimpse of at least part of the regional trends through the case management data collected from IOM operations for the years 2019 and 2020.

In 2020, there was a total of 793 IOM-recorded cases of human trafficking victims originating from or exploited in Asia and the Pacific region – a 2 per cent decrease from the previous year. Most of these victims were from the region, which highlights the prevalence of intraregional trafficking (Figure 56). Men represented slightly more than half of the cases. Notably, 13 per cent of these identified victims exploited in this region were minors, which was marginally higher than the share among victims who came from this region.

Among IOM-assisted victims originating from Asia–Pacific countries, the major countries of citizenship were Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, collectively accounting for 86 per cent of total cases recorded as coming from the region (Figure 57). Forced labour was the main type of exploitation, with almost half of these identified human trafficking victims from the region reportedly subject to either one form or a combination of exploitation related to forced labour (Figure 58). While the type of exploitation for the rest was largely unknown, it is worth noting that 7 per cent were subject to either one form or a combination of exploitation related to sexual exploitation, all of whom female. Another alarming fact is that, while 65 per cent of minors who were identified victims from the region were exploited for the purpose of forced labour, slightly below one fifth were for sexual exploitation and one case for forced marriage.

Concerning the place of exploitation of IOM-assisted human trafficking victims originating from Asia–Pacific countries, 66 per cent were exploited within the region, whereas 29 per cent were exploited in Middle East and North Africa (Figure 59). The main countries where these identified victims from the Asia–Pacific region were exploited were Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Considering the main countries of exploitation within the region, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and China together accounted for 87 per cent of all cases identified to be exploited in the region (Figure 60).
Several areas are to be strengthened to monitor progress towards the SDG Indicator 16.2.2: the number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation, and Objective 10 of the Global Compact for Migration; preventing, combating and eradicating trafficking in persons in the context of international migration. From a statistical perspective, the assessment of the US Department of State 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report reveals that data gaps remain concerning trafficking trends and anti-trafficking responses worldwide and in Asia-Pacific countries. For instance, the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases and the total number of victims identified and assisted were identified as data gaps for quite a few Asia-Pacific countries assessed (IOM, 2021d). Disaggregation by sex, age and form of exploitation is seldom comprehensive. Moreover, IOM CTDC data, as case management data, by nature do not exhaustively cover the full scale nor are necessarily representative of all cases of human trafficking in the region, as reporting is subject to the operational capacity across countries. Given the limitations in existing national data and global case management data, an exhaustive regional overview for the year 2020 of the situation of human trafficking is not yet available. The statistics provided in this report shall serve as a starting point of systematic data collection and analysis on the impact of the COVID-19 on trafficking in persons which should be carried forward.

4.2.1 Discussion

REFERENCES

Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW)

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)
2020 COVID-19 Impact on Trafficking in Persons – A Protection, Gender & Inclusion (PGI) Technical Guidance Note. IFRC.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)
2021b Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative: FAQs.

La Strada International

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)
2021 Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia – Quarter 4 2020. MMC.

Thailand National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee.

Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children Taskforce

United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
2020a Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trafficking in Persons: Preliminary Findings and Messaging based on Rapid Stocktaking. UNODC.

US Department of State

A doctor of IOM’s Rapid Response Team which offer services and education to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Herat, Afghanistan | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED
4.3 MIGRANT DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES

The process of migration can pose significant risks to those on the move, especially for those whose journey is irregular (Section 3.4) and/or forced (Section 3.2). The multitude of external factors that could potentially expose migrants to vulnerabilities and dangers in countries of origin, transit and destination well justify the need to monitor Objective 8 of the Global Compact for Migration – saving lives and establishing coordinated international efforts on missing migrants – to protect fundamental human rights. In this subsection, a regional overview of the migrant deaths and disappearances will be presented, followed by a country snapshot on the particular nature of fatalities and vulnerabilities in the case of Afghanistan.

From January to December 2020, worldwide a total of 3,894 deaths and disappearances during migration were documented by the IOM Missing Migrants Project (2021a) as of 1 June 2021. Of these, 298 missing migrants were recorded in the Asia–Pacific region. Such data are based on diverse sources, including official records, media reports, non-governmental organization reports, and surveys and interviews of migrants, and verified by local IOM staff whenever possible. Given the report-based nature of the data, the records are best seen as a minimum estimate of all such cases. Nevertheless, such data glean valuable insights into major incidents of migrant vulnerabilities worldwide and in the Asia–Pacific region, especially during the COVID-19 emergency when migrant vulnerabilities and monitoring difficulties had only worsened.

The Missing Migrants Project recorded 27 per cent fewer deaths globally and 21 per cent fewer in the Asia–Pacific region in 2020 compared to 2019. According to IOM (2020a), the decrease is not necessarily an indication of a reduction in actual occurrence of such cases, but likely related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection and availability, and on the ability to monitor specific routes – this stance is supported by the reporting of UNHCR (2020), which observed a twofold increase in Rohingya maritime movements, which are linked to many known migrant deaths compared to 2019. Figure 61 shows an overview of recorded cases that occurred in the Asia–Pacific region by geographical location. While the total reported cases of migrant deaths and disappearances in the Asia–Pacific region make for 10 per cent of total reported cases worldwide in 2020, 61 per cent of cases within this region occurred in the South-East Asia subregion (Figure 62).

Regional Snapshot

From January to December 2020, worldwide a total of 3,894 deaths and disappearances during migration were documented by the IOM Missing Migrants Project (2021a) as of 1 June 2021. Of these, 298 missing migrants were recorded in the Asia–Pacific region. Such data are based on diverse sources, including official records, media reports, non-governmental organization reports, and surveys and interviews of migrants, and verified by local IOM staff whenever possible. Given the report-based nature of the data, the records are best seen as a minimum estimate of all such cases. Nevertheless, such data glean valuable insights into major incidents of migrant vulnerabilities worldwide and in the Asia–Pacific region, especially during the COVID-19 emergency when migrant vulnerabilities and monitoring difficulties had only worsened.

The Missing Migrants Project recorded 27 per cent fewer deaths globally and 21 per cent fewer in the Asia–Pacific region in 2020 compared to 2019. According to IOM (2020a), the decrease is not necessarily an indication of a reduction in actual occurrence of such cases, but likely related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection and availability, and on the ability to monitor specific routes – this stance is supported by the reporting of UNHCR (2020), which observed a twofold increase in Rohingya maritime movements, which are linked to many known migrant deaths compared to 2019. Figure 61 shows an overview of recorded cases that occurred in the Asia–Pacific region by geographical location. While the total reported cases of migrant deaths and disappearances in the Asia–Pacific region make for 10 per cent of total reported cases worldwide in 2020, 61 per cent of cases within this region occurred in the South-East Asia subregion (Figure 62).
FIGURE 61: HEAT MAP OF REPORTED CASES OF MIGRANT DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (2020)

Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project (2021a).

This map is for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project (2021a).
Afghans in transit in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Although disaggregation of these cases by sex and age is underreported, women comprise most cases with sex disclosed in South Asia and South-East Asia (Figure 63), which is in line with the reporting of IOM Asia–Pacific (2021). These estimates that 63 per cent of Rohingya rescued at sea in 2020 were women and children.

These numbers highlight the effects of the protracted humanitarian crises facing Rohingya and Afghans, whose journeys overland or by boat with no safer options were partially due to statelessness (ibid.). Another reason for their exposure to risks is the prevalence of secondary migration among these groups often via risky routes due to discrimination and insecurity upon arrival in the host countries, such as sea crossings of Rohingya from Myanmar and Bangladesh towards Malaysia and Thailand, and the journeys of Afghans from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Turkey en route to Europe (MMC, 2021). In 2015, the migration route across the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea was estimated to be three times deadlier than that of the Mediterranean (UNHCR, 2015). In part, this is related to the prevalence of reliance on smugglers among undocumented migrants in South-East Asia (UNODC, 2015), and the common unsafe if not abusive and violent smuggling practices in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea (Moran, 2016).

FIGURE 62:
NUMBER OF REPORTED CAS ES OF DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES IN THE ASIA–PACIFIC REGION (2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Reported cases</th>
<th>Reported cases of deaths</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from IOM Missing Migrants Project (2021a).

At least 211 (84%) reported cases of migrant deaths and disappearances in South-East Asia in 2020 are explicitly related to the Rohingya refugees – either identified at various locations of the Andaman Sea or identified as part of the Rohingya group in Indonesia sent to hospital, and for whom the main reported causes of death are drowning, dehydration, starvation and violence. As for the 45 known deaths in the South Asia subregion, 38 per cent were reported deaths of women.

FIGURE 63:
SEX AND AGE COMPOSITION OF ALL REPORTED CASES OF MIGRANT DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES IN THE ASIA–PACIFIC REGION (2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from IOM Missing Migrants Project (2021a).

The nature of migrant fatalities in Afghanistan is peculiar due to the profound influence of the 19-year-long enduring armed conflict in the country. Despite a short “reduction in violence” (RIV) from 22 to 28 February 2020, when the United States and the Taliban signed the Doha agreement after a series of peace talks, violence resurfaced as soon as the Taliban declared that the fight would continue. Diverging from the approach of the IOM Missing Migrant Project, assessing migrant fatalities within the country may complement our understanding of migrant fatalities given the large presence of IDPs.

Community-based Needs Assessment (CBNA) were conducted in the framework of DTM at the settlement level in coordination with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations (MoRR) and the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) of Afghanistan. Through community focus group discussions with 62,097 community leaders in 12,596 settlements in Afghanistan (ibid.), these assessment sheds light on the situation of hosted IDPs and returnees, the majority of whom arrived at the host settlements because of conflict, lack of access to housing and natural disasters.

An overwhelming majority of all these incidents (66%) and fatalities (91%) were related to conflict. Considering all incidents, armed conflict (45%), floods (13%), extreme rain or wind (13%) and extortion (10%) constituted the major causes (Figure 66-67), indicating the high degree of vulnerabilities of IDPs in Afghanistan to both natural and man-made disasters. As for geographical location, nearly one-third of reported fatalities related to natural disaster and conflict were recorded in Balkh province, one of the four most active areas of conflict in the first months of 2020 (European Asylum Support Office, 2020). Following Balkh, Kandahar, Wardak, Baghlan, Kapisa, Takhar, Helmand, Badakhshan and Sar-e-Pul were the other top nine provinces with the highest number of registered fatalities – together with Balkh, they accounted for over 77 per cent of all conflict-related fatalities and 70 per cent of total fatalities.

These reported cases documented by the IOM DTM CBNA assessment are certainly not an exhaustive representation of all deaths and security incidents that took place in Afghanistan in 2020, given the potential influences of reporting bias and uneven settlement coverage due to the ongoing conflict. However, these cases highlight the extremity of vulnerabilities borne by the forcibly displaced populations in the conflict-scarred country.
This map is for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

Source: Compiled from IOM DTM Community-based Needs Assessment Data Round 10 and 11 (2020b, 2021c).
### FIGURE 66: REPORTED NUMBER OF NATURAL DISASTER INCIDENTS AT INTERVIEWED HOST SETTLEMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN (2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural Disaster Type</th>
<th>June 2020</th>
<th>December 2020</th>
<th>June 2021</th>
<th>December 2021</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landslides</td>
<td>90,103</td>
<td>90,103</td>
<td>430,173</td>
<td>430,173</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avalanches</td>
<td>1,361</td>
<td>1,361</td>
<td>1,849</td>
<td>1,849</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquakes</td>
<td>1,867</td>
<td>1,867</td>
<td>11,119</td>
<td>11,119</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drought</td>
<td>6,016</td>
<td>6,016</td>
<td>12,3%</td>
<td>12,3%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme cold/weather/winter/snow</td>
<td>13,098</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,848</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floods</td>
<td>11,119</td>
<td></td>
<td>9,432</td>
<td></td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from IOM DTM Community-based Needs Assessment Data Round 10 and 11 (2020b, 2021c).

### FIGURE 67: REPORTED NUMBER OF SECURITY INCIDENTS AT INTERVIEWED HOST SETTLEMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN (2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Security Incident Type</th>
<th>June 2020</th>
<th>December 2020</th>
<th>June 2021</th>
<th>December 2021</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Assault/GBV</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>1,295</td>
<td>1,295</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidnapping</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcible Eviction</td>
<td>2,426</td>
<td>2,426</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mines/UXOs</td>
<td>5,480</td>
<td>5,480</td>
<td>2,589</td>
<td>2,589</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEDs</td>
<td>5,145</td>
<td>5,145</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extortion</td>
<td>8,144</td>
<td>8,144</td>
<td>7,090</td>
<td>7,090</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Conflict</td>
<td>36,738</td>
<td></td>
<td>35,094</td>
<td></td>
<td>67.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from IOM DTM Community-based Needs Assessment Data Round 10 and 11 (2020b, 2021c).

### 4.3.1 Discussion

To monitor progress towards the SDG Indicator 10.7.3 monitoring the number of people who died or disappeared in the process of migration towards an international destination and Global Compact for Migration Objective 8 calling for saving lives and establishing coordinated international efforts on missing migrants, this review points to pre-existing data collection challenges that have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of official data on migrant deaths and the ensuing reliance on unofficial sources, including media reporting is subject to biases which cannot guarantee representative coverage of all such incidents in the region or the world. This is linked to the gap in existing data collection methods and coverage of migrant deaths and disappearances. In addition to the likely undercounting of migrant deaths and disappearances, the data available often do not contain the demographic data needed to identify the deceased person, as shown by the large proportion of “unknown” in Figure 63. This has profound effects on the countless families left behind, as without better identifying data they are forced to rely on informal channels and networks, members of the diaspora, and community-based associations (IOM, 2021b).

In addition to innovating data collection practices, since the IOM Missing Migrants Project currently only covers incidents involving a death or presumed death of migrants en route, data collection on incidents that occur during other phases of migration can be complemented, such as deaths of IDPs, deaths that occur in refugee camps, after deportation to migrants’ homeland, in immigration detention facilities and deaths more loosely connected with migrants’ irregular status. The true number of migrants who are reported missing by their families is also unknown, though it is likely that their number is far larger than the deaths documented by the IOM Missing Migrants Project. Whether and the extent to which travel restrictions (Section 1.1.1) and forced return (Section 3.3.3) have prompted irregular migration (Section 3.4) and related vulnerabilities and fatalities remains unclear.

Observations based on existing data also point to gaps in current responses, such as providing legal alternatives to protect migrants from taking risky routes; combating migrant smuggling; promoting security and inclusiveness in the host society to prevent risky secondary migration, especially for vulnerable groups such as children; and addressing the adverse drivers of migration that compel people to leave their country of origin, particularly prolonged humanitarian crises such as those facing the Rohingya and Afghan populations.
REFERENCES

European Asylum Support Office (EASO)

International Organization for Migration (IOM)
2020a Over 3,000 people die during migration journeys in 2020 despite COVID-19 pandemic. IOM Press Releases, 18 December.
2020b Afghanistan — Community-Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results, Round 10 (January–June 2020). IOM.
2021a Missing Migrants Project (accessed 1 June 2021).
2021c Afghanistan — Community-Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results, Round 11 (July–December 2020). IOM.

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)

Moran, T.
2016 The deadliest passage for migrants? The Mediterranean isn’t even close”. Ozy, 30 May.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
2015 Mixed Maritime Movements in South-East Asia in 2015. UNHCR.
2020 Abandoned at Sea: The Desperate Journeys of Rohingya Refugees. Kontinentlist, 8 December.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
2015 Regional Strategy and Programmes – Smuggling of Migrants. UNODC.

Through IOM Afghanistan’s Reintegration and Development Assistance (RADA) and Connectivity Return with Development (CRD) programmes, Afghan returnees are supported to attend a shoe making training school in Herat. © IOM 2021/Mohammadreza Ashori
People of Udayapur, Nepal, have been displaced several times due to floods. Udayapur is one of the regions of Nepal most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. © IOM 2016/AMANDA NERO
5.1 REMITTANCES

Remittances represent one of the most tangible channels through which migration has an impact on development. Remittances serve as a major source of external development finance. Remittances were its largest source in 2019, overtaking foreign direct investment in low- and middle-income countries excluding China (World Bank, 2019), and are an economic lifeline to many households, especially the poor, in Asia and the Pacific region. According to the World Bank Annual Remittances Data (2020a), in 2019, 6 of the top 10 largest remittance recipients worldwide came from Asia and the Pacific region; and 42 per cent of global remittances inflows were received by the region (IOM, 2021a). Pacific countries, such as Tonga, Samoa, Marshall Islands and Kiribati, and South-East Asian countries, such as Nepal and the Philippines, were the most remittance-dependent economies in the region in 2019, with remittance inflows accounting for 10 up to 40 per cent of GDP (ADB, 2020). Compiling household surveys conducted before the pandemic for several Asia-Pacific countries, ADB also finds that the share of households receiving international remittances was substantial in many countries, especially in Tonga (89.6%), Samoa (77.9%), Fiji (42.8%) and Nepal (24%) (ibid.).

Remittances are generally considered stable and counter-cyclical, more stable than foreign direct investment, private debt and equity flows, and counter-cyclical in the sense that migrants tend to send more money back home in times of economic shocks such as natural disasters (Halliday, 2006; Yang, 2008). However, the extent to which this statement holds true throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, when both the destination and origin countries of international migrants suffered from severe economic downturns, could only be speculated by economic projections until very recently. By the end of 2020, the main global, regional and subregional estimates for the year 2020 were provided by the World Bank (2020b, 2020c) and Asian Development Bank (2020). These institutions projected a worldwide decline of remittance flows between 9.7 and 20 per cent in 2020 with respect to 2019, and between 4 to 22.1 per cent in Asia and the Pacific region (Figure 68). However, the latest updates from the World Bank (2021a) suggest that the volume of remittance flows worldwide declined by just 2 per cent between 2019 and 2020, whereas the volume of remittance inflows and outflows to the Asia and the Pacific regions decreased by 1.1 per cent (from USD 302,273 to USD 298,928 million) and 12.3 per cent (from USD 82,102 million to USD 71,980 million) respectively (Figure 69). The largest remittance recipients and senders in 2020 remained approximately the same as in 2019 (Figure 70 and 71). India, China, the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Viet Nam and Indonesia (in descending order) were the largest recipients of remittances in the region, whereas China, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Japan, Thailand, India and Indonesia were the largest senders of remittances in the region. An exception is that of Australia, which fell out of the top five in 2019, down to becoming the eighth largest sender in the region in 2020. Six out of the top seven countries with the highest inflows of remittances as a share of GDP in the region in 2020 were from the Pacific and South-East Asian subregions—a pattern rather consistent with that in the previous year (Figure 72).

76. The latter is in part due to a drop in the number of Asia-Pacific countries with available data from 38 in 2019 to 21 in 2020.
Country-level analysis in the region aligns with the pattern identified from the latest World Bank data – remittance flows to several Asia-Pacific countries during the COVID-19 pandemic have shown to be more resilient than previously forecast. Out of 32 Asia-Pacific countries with available data, 17 countries saw a positive change in remittance inflows in 2020 from the previous year (World Bank, 2021a). Using data collected from Central Banks from Quarter 1–4 of 2020, a recent IOM study (2021b) observes positive changes in well over half of the 12 countries studied either in terms of the absolute amount of remittance receipt or in the amount of remittance inflows as a share of GDP.

Regarding the absolute amount of remittance inflows (Figure 73), 6 out of 10 countries studied with available data for both years saw an increase between 2019 and 2020. The

Source: Compiled from World Bank Annual Remittances Data (2021a).
The changes in the absolute and relative numbers of remittances between 2019 and 2020 are attributable to changes in several factors varying largely across country contexts – which may as well help explain why the expected devastating effect of the pandemic did not fully materialize in most of the Asia-Pacific countries covered in the study. One of the strongest assumptions behind the estimated decline in remittances is that the economic downturn would lead to mass job losses among migrant workers in host countries. Another assumption is that COVID-19 related lockdowns and mobility restrictions would curb labour migration. While these predictions were observed in some cases, such as that of Myanmar workers in Thailand, and Filipino, Mongolian and Indonesian workers in the major host countries, the foreseen negative impacts of the pandemic on labour migrants did not affect the region equally (IOM, 2021b). For Pakistan, remittance inflows from all major host countries, including GCC countries, the United States, the United Kingdom, European Union countries grew in 2020 (ibid.).

The largest absolute increase was seen in Bangladesh (18.6%) and Pakistan (17.4%) as the receiving countries, followed by Fiji (10.9%) and Samoa (10.5%). Among countries that saw a decline in remittance inflows, namely Nepal, Mongolia, the Philippines and Indonesia, the magnitude of decline was lower than any forecasts except for Indonesia, which experienced a drop of 17.6 per cent. As regards remittance inflows as a share of GDP (Figure 74), an increase was seen in 8 out of the 10 countries studied with available data for both years. While remittance flows to this selection of Asia-Pacific countries have shown to be rather resilient, quarterly trends (Figure 75 and Figure 76) show that a drop or stagnation was seen in many countries until the third quarter of 2020. This could at least partially be attributed to the lifting of lockdowns in host countries that allowed migrants to remit over the counter and to the introduction of policy measures that incentivized transfer by reducing transaction costs and restrictions (ADB, 2020).
cyclical growth of remittance inflows observed in many countries and 105 receiving countries as of January 2021. Insights can be gleaned from a recent World Bank report (2020d) based on the World Bank Remittance Prices Worldwide Database, which covers 367 country corridors worldwide, 48 remittance sending and receiving countries as of January 2021. Comparing the remittance costs in the fourth quarter of 2019 and 2020, there was a common downward trend worldwide and at the subregional level of Asia and the Pacific (Figure 77). Despite this favourable change, gaps remain from the SDG Target 10c that the remittance cost should not exceed 3 per cent of the total amount of transfer. The global gap between the target and actual cost of remittances decreased from 3.8 per cent in 2019 to 3.5 per cent in 2020. For East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific, the gap was reduced from about 4.1 per cent to 3.9 per cent. The smallest reduction was seen for South Asia and South-West Asia which had a much lower initial level – the gap marginally reduced from 1.90 in 2019 per cent to 1.88 per cent in 2020.

The second question of interest concerns the extent to which digitalization of remittance transfers could bring down the cost further. Figure 78 shows the remittance cost by means of non-digital and digital transfer to various subregions of Asia and the Pacific in 2020. Considering both the fees and foreign exchange margin, the cost of remitting to East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific in 2020 was 1.9 percentage points when digital transfer was used instead of non-digital transfer. As for South Asia and West Asia, the difference was about 1.3 percentage points. For instance, in the case of remitting from Thailand to Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao Democratic People’s Republic, Viet Nam and Indonesia in the fourth quarter of 2020, transfer services with the highest fees observed were uniformly non-digital ones (Table 7).
5.1.1 Discussion

These findings suggest that, while South Asia and West Asia were ahead of the rest of the Asia–Pacific region in closing the gap from the SDG Target 10.1c (to reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent), transaction costs of migrant remittances stayed above the target of 3 per cent; remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent were also still widespread.

Although the well-known limitation of tracking remittance flows through Central Bank data is the under-observation of informal remittance flows, since informal channels have largely shrunk during the COVID-19 pandemic due to border closure, lockdowns and mobility restrictions, it is likely that the increase in the volume of remittances we are observing reflected at least part of the formerly informal flows. Whether and by how much the total volume of formal and informal remittance has changed compared to before the pandemic, and the magnitude of the economic impact on households formerly dependent on informal remittances remain unknown. Nevertheless, the observed changes in formal remittance flows in 2020 serve to illustrate the impacts of converting at least partial remittance flows back to formal channels. Such conversion can be at least in part encouraged by reducing transaction fee and improving access to the financial system for migrants and their families (World Bank, 2006).

High transaction fees are maintained by and attributable to weak competitive environment in the remittance market, lack of access to technology supporting payment and settlement systems, and burdensome regulatory and compliance requirements (ibid.). As shown in the data, one way to reduce the cost of remitting is through digitalization. The benefits of this strategy become evident when looking at the potential development impact of remittances, as emphasized in Objective 10 of the Global Compact for Migration. Remittances represent an important economic lifeline for many poor households, especially in low-income countries in the region. Therefore, the increase in household income from remittance inflows during the recession caused by the pandemic is likely to be negatively linked to economic subsistence, which is one of the underlying drivers of various kinds of vulnerabilities, such as vulnerabilities related to health (Section 4.1.1.1) and food security (Section 4.1.1.2), child labour (Section 4.1.1.3) and trafficking in persons (Section 4.3).

In moving forward, addressing existing data gaps on remittances would help to monitor the progress towards SDG Target 10c and Objective 10 of Global Compact for Migration. In the World Bank Remittance Prices Worldwide Database, data on remittance prices had not yet covered the following Asia-Pacific countries as of January 2021: Brunei Darussalam, Bhutan, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Nauru, Palau, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and Timor-Leste. Furthermore, there was a limited number of country corridors observed for each country covered. These limitations were largely attributable to the data collection method.77 In addition, updating the remittance flow data based on Central Bank data is still a priority as data collected directly by Central Banks for IOM research only covered some countries in the region. Despite these challenges, expanding the geographical coverage and enhancing timeliness and accuracy of data is important for contributing to more accurate and comprehensive data as a prerequisite to monitoring progress towards the SDGs and Global Compact for Migration in Asia–Pacific countries and worldwide.

---

77. As discussed in the World Bank Remittance Prices Worldwide methodology.
REFERENCES

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Halliday, T.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)
2021a Regional Secondary Data Review – Asia-Pacific Regional Data Hub (RDH). IOM, Bangkok.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), Population Division

World Bank
2021a Annual Remittances Data 2020 (accessed 1 April 2021).

Yang, D.
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Dozens of Cambodians commute through the Thai border at Poipet. Many work in nearby border towns while others venture further afield to work for short to long term periods. © IOM 2016/Mohammed
The Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2020 has outlined the initial findings on the migration dynamics in the region, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This report has consolidated the available international, regional and national data on migration in Asia and the Pacific, while identifying data gaps and limitations with the objective of monitoring the regional progress in 2020 towards the achievement of the SDGs, Global Compact for Migration and MGI.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced all types of migration in most if not all migration corridors. Early forecasts on the impact of the pandemic were pessimistic. On one hand, the analysis based on the latest figures for 2020 confirms the exacerbation of certain pre-existing vulnerabilities related to migration, in line with many of such forecasts. On the other, this study demonstrates the resilience of certain patterns and trends of migration in the region.

This report has also underlined the importance of understanding the interconnectedness between various migration themes and sub-themes. For example, while migration and remittances were forecast to fall dramatically in mid-2020, the most recent data indicates that they only decreased slightly by 1.6 per cent worldwide (World Bank, 2021).

However, COVID-19 made the correlation between mobility policies and return migration more apparent. On one hand, the economic recessions caused by lockdown measures compelled a myriad of migrants to return to their home countries because of the lack of employment and, to a lesser extent, health concerns. On the other, mobility policies such as border closures and travel bans left millions of migrants stranded abroad. The report also emphasized that some types of migration are strongly related to elements of health and remittances.

The Asia–Pacific Migration Data Report 2020 has outlined the initial findings on the migration dynamics in the region, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This report has consolidated the available international, regional and national data on migration in Asia and the Pacific, while identifying data gaps and limitations with the objective of monitoring the regional progress in 2020 towards the achievement of the SDGs, Global Compact for Migration and MGI.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced all types of migration in most if not all migration corridors. Early forecasts on the impact of the pandemic were pessimistic. On one hand, the analysis based on the latest figures for 2020 confirms the exacerbation of certain pre-existing vulnerabilities related to migration, in line with many of such forecasts. On the other, this study demonstrates the resilience of certain patterns and trends of migration in the region.

This report has also underlined the importance of understanding the interconnectedness between various migration themes and sub-themes. For example, while COVID-19 related mobility policies and restrictions may directly affect conventional patterns of global migration and cross-borders movements, they did not stop international migration. On the contrary, the latest figures show that the number of migrants in the region grew slightly during the pandemic. Similarly, conflict and natural disasters continued to force millions of people to leave their homes and countries. In this regard, changes in migration policies in response to COVID-19 did not drastically alter the trends in international and forced migration in the region. The analysis of migrant stock, labour migration and remittances have underlined the connection between these three subthemes. Data on immigration and emigration in the region could to a large extent portray the dynamics of labour migration and mobilities, as migration between countries in Asia and the Pacific and to other regions in the world is mainly characterized by temporary labour migration (UN ESCAP, 2020). Consequently, such patterns are linked to the magnitude of remittances flows in the region – though remittances were forecast to fall dramatically in mid-2020, the most recent data indicates that they only decreased slightly by 1.6 per cent worldwide (World Bank, 2021).

Looking ahead, the effects of COVID-19 will continue to act as yet another driver of migration. As seen in this report, the pandemic is already playing an important role in migrants’ decision to leave or re-migrate. Furthermore, as some popular destination countries within the region and abroad are starting to recover and vaccination programmes are underway in many countries, people might be once more motivated and able to migrate.

Finally, as the migration landscape in the region has undergone an unprecedented change, monitoring the achievement of the SDGs, Global Compact for Migration and MGI is important, to place the region at the heart of the economic progress, development and human rights. In this regard, following Objective 1 of the Global Compact for Migration, which calls for collection and utilization of accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies, and SDG Target 10.7, which calls for facilitating orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies, a set of recommendations have been made considering the general and specific data gaps identified in each theme and sub-theme.

78. A total of 149 National Statistical Offices (NSOs) were invited to participate in the third round of UN DESA survey about the state of statistical operations under the COVID-19 pandemic including 7 NSOs in Southern Asia, 11 in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, 18 in Western Asia and 5 in Oceania.
### General
- Improve the collection and harmonization of migration data by promoting data sharing among agencies.
- Continue data collection and monitoring of thematic areas where data on the effects of COVID-19 is lacking, to provide and strengthen the evidence base for developing better COVID-19 responses.

### Migration Statistics
- Strengthen the capacity of data collection and analysis on international migration, emphasizing on COVID-19 related effects on mobility.
- Provide migration statistics disaggregated by migratory status to have a better and more realistic picture of migratory movements.
- Improve the participation of migration statistics in policy decision-making.

### Types of Migration
#### Labour migration
- Strengthen data collection on labour migration in the region, particularly data regarding the impact of COVID-19 on working migrant’s main corridors.
- Provide labour migration estimates figures regularly – monthly or semi-annually.
- Make available updated data on migrant workers outflows and migrant workers characteristics including sex, age, occupation, wages recruitment processes, skill level and migration status.
- Promote partnerships with data collection and immigration agencies in countries of destination to bridge gaps in knowledge.
- Enhance data on female migrant workers to inform policies on women’s safe, orderly and regular migration.

#### Forced migration
- Reinforce the monitoring of forced migration data in the context of COVID-19.
- Improve and innovate data collection channels on forcibly displaced people that lack official recognition as refugees or asylum seekers.
- Promote the data collection and analysis collaboration and partnership among different actors.

### Return migration
- Continue data collection on the impact of COVID-19 on the return of internal migrants, on future migration plans of return migrants, and on irregular migrants whose transition to an irregular status might have been indirectly triggered by the pandemic.
- Existing data on stranded migrants and returns are far from exhaustive, because of the nature of media reporting and case management data. Data collection and accessibility of such information is to be enhanced.
- Collect data on the reintegration of returning migrants, including the forcibly displaced population who returned.
- Existing data point to the gap in the current response with respect to the principle of non-refoulement.

### Irregular migration
- Strengthen transnational cooperation between law enforcement agencies with respect to information-sharing on potential frauds related to travel and COVID-19 related certificates, as well as on migrant smuggling networks.
- Collect data on irregular migration in Asia and the Pacific, including the number of migrants found to be illegally residing and working, the number of irregular entry attempts at external borders and of third-country nationals ordered to leave the country.

### Emergencies: Vulnerabilities related to COVID-19
- Strengthen the integration of migration health data into national health information systems to support the inclusion of migrants in preparedness, response and recovery projects, particularly in upcoming vaccinations plans in the region.
- Provide health and socioeconomic data disaggregated by migratory status to implement relief projects focusing on specific needs and vulnerabilities for each migrant group. The inclusion of core variables into national health and economic systems could facilitate the disaggregation of health and socioeconomic data by migratory status. These variables include country of birth, county of citizenship, year and month of arrival and country of birth of both parents (WHO, 2020). This set of core variables could further support the understanding of the reasons for migration, knowledge of the official language of the host country, whether migrants have ever resided in the host country before and about their legal status.
- Address existing gaps on migrant labour vulnerabilities by reinforcing data collection methods. This could be done through the integration of indicators to obtain information on migrant’s living and working conditions.
- Reinforce data collection on the psychological repercussions experienced by migrants because of the pandemic and the discrimination and stigma they face.
- Improve data collection on female migrants’ health, labour and social conditions to better understand how gender-based barriers and risks have multiplied migrant women’s vulnerabilities during the pandemic.
- Regularly monitor and assess data related to COVID-19 effects on migrants.
- Incorporate more qualitative data sources within data collection systems to support the exploration of migrant’s vulnerabilities.
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Emergencies: Vulnerabilities related to forced displacement

- Improve health data collection on forcibly displaced populations and promote the integration of such data on national health programmes.
- Enhance data collection on the refugees’ and IDPs settlements conditions to plan efficient programmes to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and other diseases.
- Refugees and IDPs or their representatives should be involved in both the structuring and the integration of forced displacement vulnerabilities data into the formulation of post-pandemic recovery programmes.
- Continue data collection on the impact of COVID-19 on smuggling of refugees with a focus on protection risks.

Trafficking in persons

- Complement the existing data gap through continued efforts on data collection and analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 on trafficking in persons.
- Address existing gaps in data on trafficking trends and anti-trafficking response across countries in the region, such as the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases and the total number of victims identified and assisted by governments and other actors.

Migrant deaths and disappearances

- Address pre-existing challenges in data collection on migrant deaths and disappearances by improving official data collection and, in the interim, innovating data collection methods to reduce reliance on or improve comprehensiveness and accuracy of non-governmental and media reporting.
- Complement existing data collection focused on migrant deaths and disappearances that occur en route by expanding coverage of incidents at other phases of migration, such as deaths of IDPs, deaths that occur in refugee camps, after deportation to migrants’ homeland, in immigration detention facilities and deaths more loosely connected with migrants’ irregular status.
- Collect data on the influence of travel restrictions and forced return on irregular migration and related vulnerabilities and fatalities.
- Observations based on existing data also point to gaps in current responses, such as the provision of legal alternatives to protect migrants from taking risky routes, combatting migrant smuggling, ensuring security and inclusiveness in the host society to prevent risky secondary migration, and addressing the adverse drivers of migration.

Policy and governance: COVID-19 related mobility restrictions and containment measures

- Data gaps are present in monitoring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on certain aspects of migration policy, such as migrant rights and migration policy.
- Existing data suggest a gap in COVID-19 response with regards to upholding the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, especially amid heightened humanitarian needs caused by the pandemic and related travel restrictions, suspension of resettlement travel, last-minute deportation and containment measures.

Remittances

- Enhance geographical coverage, timeliness and accuracy of existing data on remittance costs and remittance flows.
- Promote digitalization and reduce transaction costs of migrant remittances have shown to be positively linked to increasing formal remittances.

REFERENCES


World Health Organization (WHO) 2020 Collection and integration of data on refugee and migrant health in the WHO European Region. WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen.
ANNEX I

TABLE 8: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS INDICATORS WITH EXPLICIT REFERENCE TO MIGRATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDG indicators in relation to types of migration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SDG 8.8.1 Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries, by sex and migrant status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 8.8.2 Level of national compliance of labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on International Labour Organization (ILO) textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 10.c.1 Remittance costs as a proportion of the amount remitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 10.7.1 Recruitment cost borne by employee as a proportion of early income earned in country of destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 17.3.2 Volume of remittances in GDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 3.c.1 Health worker density and distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG indicators in relation to migration and vulnerabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 11.5.1 Number of deaths, missing and persons affected by disaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 16.2.2 Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG indicators in relation to migration policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 8.8.2 Level of national compliance of labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on International Labour Organization (ILO) textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 10.7.2 Number of countries with migration policies that facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 17.18.1 Proportion of sustainable development indicators produced at the national level with full disaggregation when relevant to the target, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For more information, see IOM Migration Data Portal thematic page.

ANNEX II

TABLE 9: GLOBAL COMPACT FOR MIGRATION OBJECTIVES

(1) Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies
(2) Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin
(3) Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration
(4) Ensure that all migrants have proof of legal identity and adequate documentation
(5) Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration
(6) Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work
(7) Address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration
(8) Save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants
(9) Strengthen the transnational response to smuggling of migrants
(10) Prevent, combat and eradicate trafficking in persons in the context of international migration
(11) Manage borders in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner
(12) Strengthen certainty and predictability in migration procedures for appropriate screening, assessment and referral
(13) Use migration detention only as a measure of last resort and work towards alternatives
(14) Enhance consular protection, assistance and cooperation throughout the migration cycle
(15) Provide access to basic services for migrants
(16) Empower migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion
(17) Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration
(18) Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences
(19) Create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries
(20) Promote faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances and foster financial inclusion of migrants
(21) Cooperate in facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration
(22) Establish mechanisms for the portability of social security entitlements and earned benefits
(23) Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration
### TABLE 10: MIGRATION GOVERNANCE INDICATORS

| Migrants’ rights | **1** Indicators in this domain assess the extent to which migrants have the same status as citizens in terms of access to basic social services such as health, education, and social security. It also describes the rights of migrants to family reunification, to work, and to residency and citizenship. The ratification of the main international conventions is also included within this domain. |
| Whole-of-government approach | **2** Indicators in this domain assess countries’ institutional, legal, and regulatory frameworks related to migration policies. Domain 2 also reviews the existence of national migration strategies that are in-line with development, as well as institutional transparency and coherence in relation to migration management. This domain also investigates the extent to which governments collect and use migration data. |
| Partnerships | **3** This domain focuses on countries’ efforts to cooperate on migration-related issues with other states and with relevant non-governmental actors, including civil society organizations and the private sector. Cooperation can lead to improvements in governance by aligning and raising standards, increasing dialogue and providing structures to overcome challenges. |
| Well-being of migrants | **4** This domain includes indicators on countries’ policies for managing the socioeconomic well-being of migrants, through aspects such as the recognition of migrants’ educational and professional qualifications, provisions regulating student migration and the existence of bilateral labour agreements between countries. Indicators equally focus on policies and strategies related to diaspora engagement and migrant remittances. |
| Mobility dimensions of crises | **5** This domain studies the type and level of preparedness of countries when they are faced with mobility dimensions of crises, linked to either disasters, the environment and/or conflict. The questions are used to identify the processes in place for nationals and non-nationals both during and after disasters, including whether humanitarian assistance is equally available to migrants as it is to citizens. |
| Safe, orderly and dignified migration | **6** This domain analyses countries’ approach to migration management in terms of border control and enforcement policies, admission criteria for migrants, preparedness and resilience in the case of significant and unexpected migration flows, as well as the fight against trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants. It also assesses efforts and incentives to help integrate returning citizens. |

**Source:** IOM Global Migration Data Analysis Centre: Migration Governance Indicators.