

ASIA–PACIFIC MIGRATION DATA REPORT 2020

IOM ASIA–PACIFIC REGIONAL DATA HUB



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, Itayi Viriri, Julia Black, Kate Dearden, Maria Moita, Maria Veger, Nikki Herwanger, Pablo Rojas Coppari, Patrick Duigan, Peppi Kiviniemi-Siddiq, Roberto Roca, Tomas Martin Ernst, Vivianne Van de Vorst and Yunxian 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 Sánchez, Emanuele Albarosa, Venkatesh Balaji, Bridgette Hogan and Zikria Takamul.

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



This publication has been issued without formal editing by IOM.

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](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/) (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

ASIA–PACIFIC MIGRATION DATA REPORT 2020

IOM ASIA–PACIFIC REGIONAL DATA HUB



Due to massive internal migration in Mongolia, almost half of the population lives in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, leaving rural Mongolia deserted | © IOM 2021/B. BYAMBAOCHIR

FOREWORD

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

ACRONYMS

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



A village girl poses in her traditional clothing in Killerton, Papua New Guinea | © IOM 2016/Muse MOHAMMED

TERMINOLOGY

Asia–Pacific / Asia and the Pacific	In this document, the referral of countries within the Asia–Pacific region follows IOM’s definition and includes the following countries: 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.
Asylum seeker	”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.” ¹
East Asia	The East Asia subregion under IOM definition includes China, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Japan and Republic of Korea.
Forced migration	Forced migration is “a migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion.” ¹ The definition includes a note that clarifies that, “(w)hile 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.” ¹
International migrant	“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.” ¹
Internally displaced persons (IDPs)	”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.” ¹
Irregular migration	”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.” ¹
Labour migrant / Migrant worker	”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.” ¹

1. International Organization for Migration, [Glossary on Migration \(2019\)](#).

Migrant smuggling	“The procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.” ²
Migrant stock	Migrant stock refers to, for statistical purposes, “the total number of international migrants present in a given country at a particular point in time who have ever changed their country of usual residence.” ²
Non-refoulement	The principle of non-refoulement refers to the “prohibition for States to extradite, deport, expel or otherwise return a person to a country where his or her life or freedom would be threatened, or where there are substantial grounds for believing that he or she would risk being subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, or would be in danger of being subjected to enforced disappearance, or of suffering another irreparable harm.” ²
Refugee	”A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (Art. 1(A)(2), Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Art. 1 A(2), 1951 as modified by the 1967 Protocol).” ²
Remittances	”Personal monetary transfers, cross border or within the same country, made by migrants to individuals or communities with whom the migrant has links.” ²
South Asia	The South Asia subregion under IOM definition includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.
South-East Asia	The South-East Asia subregion under IOM definition includes Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.
South-West Asia	The South-West Asia subregion under IOM definition includes Afghanistan, Pakistan and Islamic Republic of Iran.
The Pacific	The Pacific subregion under IOM definition includes Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.
Trafficking in persons / Human trafficking	Trafficking in persons refers to “(t)he recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.” ²

2. *Ibid.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Executive Summary	XVI
	Introduction	01
01	Migration Policy	05
	1.1 Policy and Governance	07
	1.1.1 Mobility Restrictions and Containment Measures in Response to COVID-19	07
	1.1.1.1 Border Management and Governance	08
	1.1.1.2 Internal Restrictions	11
	1.1.1.3 Discussion	17
02	Migration Statistics	21
	2.1 Migrant Stock	23
	2.1.1 Emigration	24
	2.1.2 Immigration	33
	2.1.3 Discussion	35
03	Types of Migration	39
	3.1 Labour Migration	41
	3.1.1 Regional Overview of International Labour Migration	43
	3.1.2 Specific Labour Migration Corridors	45
	3.1.3 Discussion	51
	3.2 Forced Migration	55
	3.2.1 Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Internally Displaced Persons	55
	3.2.1.1 Refugees and Asylum Seekers	56
	3.2.1.2 Internally Displaced Persons	59
	3.2.2 Refugee Resettlement	62
	3.2.3 Discussion	64
	3.3 Return Migration	67
	3.3.1 Stranded Migrants	68
	3.3.2 Voluntary Return	70
	3.3.2.1 Assisted Voluntary Return	70
	3.3.2.2 Voluntary Repatriation	73
	3.3.3 Forced Return	75
	3.3.4 The Link between COVID-19 and Return Migration	79
	3.3.5 Discussion	81

3.4 Irregular Migration	83
3.4.1 Document Falsification	83
3.4.2 Migrant Smuggling	84
3.4.3 Discussion	86

04	Migration and Vulnerability	89
	4.1 Emergencies	92
	4.1.1 Vulnerabilities Related to COVID-19	92
	4.1.1.1 Health	92
	4.1.1.2 Food Security	94
	4.1.1.3 Employment	95
	4.1.1.4 Social Impact	100
	4.1.1.5 Discussion	102
	4.1.2 Vulnerabilities Related to Forced Displacement	105
	4.1.2.1 Emergencies and Forced Displacement	105
	4.1.2.2 COVID-19, Climate Change and Internally Displaced Persons	110
	4.1.2.3 Discussion	111
	4.2 Trafficking in Persons	115
	4.2.1. Discussion	121
	4.3 Migrant Deaths and Disappearances	123
	4.3.1 Discussion	132

05	Migration and Development	135
	5.1 Remittances	137
	5.1.1 Discussion	145

Conclusion and Recommendations	149
Annex I: Sustainable Development Goals Indicators with Reference to Migration	157
Annex II: Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration Objectives	158
Annex III: Migration Governance Indicators	159

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)

Figure 35	Various types of return migration by location, nature and means of implementation
Figure 36	Number of IOM-assisted voluntary returns hosted in the Asia-Pacific region by type, gender and age (2020)
Figure 37	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)
Figure 38	COVID-19 related returns as a share of all IOM-assisted voluntary returns to Asia-Pacific countries (2020); (N=6,440)
Figure 39	Distribution of COVID-19 related voluntary returns to Asia-Pacific countries by type of returnees (2020); (N=309)
Figure 40	Top 5 Asia-Pacific countries of origin of IOM-assisted voluntary returns by type of returnees (2020)
Figure 41	Intraregional voluntary returns as a share of all IOM-assisted voluntary returns (2020)
Figure 42	Major host countries of intraregional voluntary assisted returns (2020); (N=621)
Figure 43	Country of previous residence prior to voluntary repatriation of registered Afghan refugees (2020); (N=2,147)
Figure 44	Monthly trends of voluntary repatriation of registered Afghan refugees by country of previous residence (2020)
Figure 45	Enforced returns originating from Asia-Pacific region from 14 European countries (2019 Q1–2020 Q3)
Figure 46	European host countries of enforced returns originating from Asia-Pacific countries (Q1–Q3 2020); (N=8,740)
Figure 47	Top 5 countries of citizenship of enforced returnees from 14 European countries (2019 Q1–2020 Q3)
Figure 48	Returnees from EU with Asia-Pacific countries as country of citizenship by type of return (2019)
Figure 49	Top 6 Asia-Pacific countries of citizenship for enforced return from EU (2019); (N=12,175)
Figure 50	Cumulative count of recorded inflow of deported Afghans by country or region of departure (Q1–Q4 2020)
Figure 51	Number of respondents and the share of female respondents by country
Figure 52	Main reasons for return in relation to COVID-19 (multiple answers possible except for Myanmar)
Figure 53	Intention to remigrate as soon as the COVID-19 pandemic or related travel restrictions end among interviewees
Figure 54	Number of passport checks from Verifier T&B system by result
Figure 55	Tier ranking in counter-trafficking efforts in the Asia-Pacific region (April 2019–March 2020)
Figure 56	Number of IOM-assisted human trafficking victims from and/or exploited in the Asia-Pacific region (2020)
Figure 57	Major countries of origin for IOM-assisted human trafficking victims from the Asia-Pacific region (2020); (N=409)
Figure 58	Type of exploitation for IOM-assisted human trafficking victims from the Asia-Pacific region (2020); (N=409)


Figure 59	Region of exploitation for IOM-assisted human trafficking victims in the Asia-Pacific region (2020); (N=409)
Figure 60	Major countries of exploitation for IOM-assisted human trafficking victims in the Asia-Pacific region (2020); (N=285)
Figure 61	Heat map of reported cases of migrant deaths and disappearances in the Asia-Pacific region (2020)
Figure 62	Number of reported cases of deaths and disappearances in the Asia-Pacific region (2020)
Figure 63	Sex and age composition of all reported cases of migrant deaths and disappearances in the Asia-Pacific region (2020)
Figure 64	Reported number of incidents related to natural disasters and conflict in Afghanistan by province (2020)
Figure 65	Reported number of fatalities related to natural disasters and conflict in Afghanistan by province (2020)
Figure 66	Reported number of natural disaster incidents at interviewed host settlements in Afghanistan (2020)
Figure 67	Reported number of security incidents at interviewed host settlements in Afghanistan (2020)
Figure 68	Estimated changes in global and subregional remittance flows (2019–2020) projected by World Bank and ADB
Figure 69	Remittance inflows to and outflows from the Asia-Pacific region in 2020
Figure 70	Top 7 Asia-Pacific countries receiving the largest remittance inflows in 2020
Figure 71	Top 7 Asia-Pacific countries with the largest remittance outflows in 2020
Figure 72	Top 7 Asia-Pacific countries with the highest remittance inflow as a share of GDP in 2020
Figure 73	Reported annual remittance inflows in 2020 from Central Banks and percentage changes from 2019
Figure 74	Annual remittance inflows as percentage of GDP and percentage point difference (2019–2020)
Figure 75	Quarterly remittance inflows in USD millions (Q1–Q4 2020)
Figure 76	Relative contribution by quarter to annual remittance inflows in USD millions (Q1–Q4 2020)
Figure 77	Average costs of remitting USD 200 as a share of total transfer sent by location of receipt (2018–2020)
Figure 78	Average costs of remitting USD 200 as a share of total transfer sent, by location of receipt and type of transfer (2020)



Navigating the report
In this report, two colors are used to highlight texts with different indications:



Reference to SDG, MGI or
Global Compact for Migration



Texts with external link to the source,
or link to another section in the report

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.

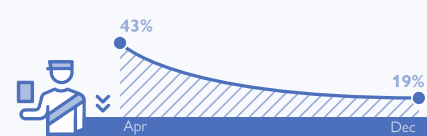
The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many drastic changes in our societies. However, only few of these changes have been as disruptive and far-reaching as the impact on migration. Extensive travel restrictions and stricter border control policies were among the first responses that governments took to slow down the spread of the virus. The profound economic crisis that followed left millions of people in great financial and social distress, especially groups that were already in vulnerable situations – 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:

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.



29/40
COUNTRIES

Internal movement restrictions were observed in 29 out of 40 countries, territories and areas from the Asia-Pacific region.



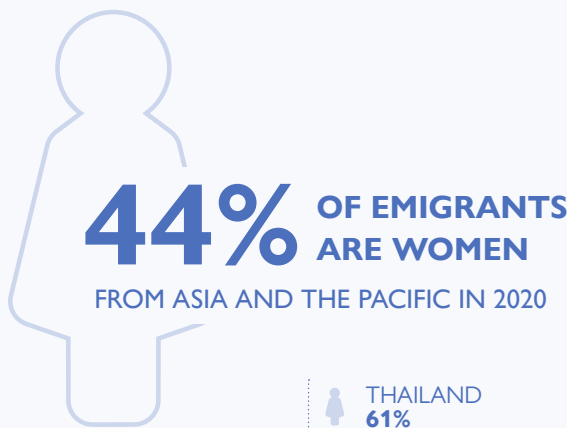
15/32
COUNTRIES

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.

MIGRATION STATISTICS

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.



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 Lao's People Democratic Republic (56%).

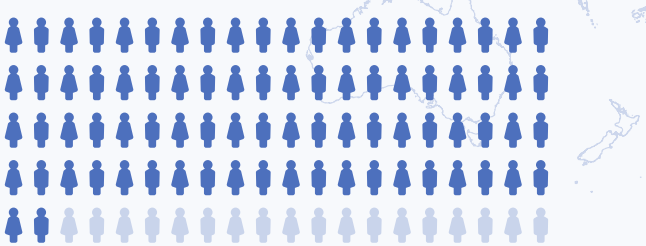
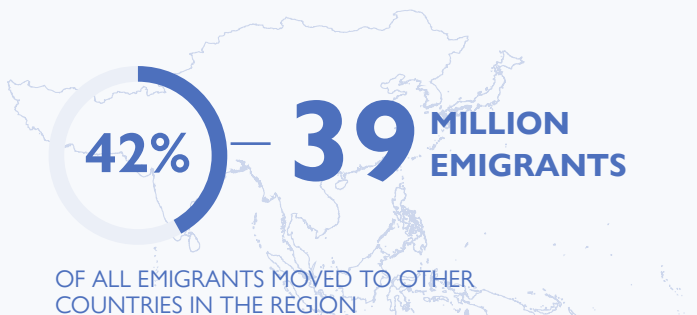
The region hosted 42.6 million immigrants from all around the world, representing 15 per cent of the global international migrant stock.

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

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.



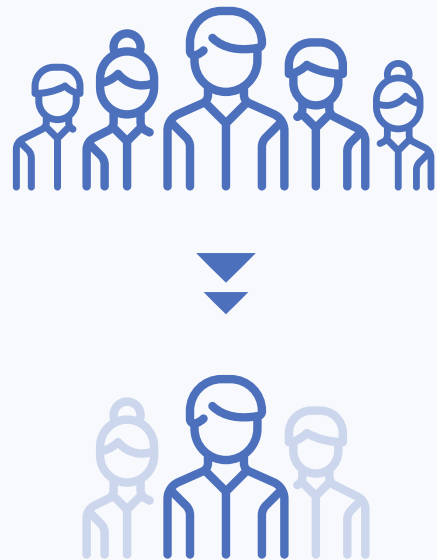
82% OF THE FOREIGN-BORN POPULATIONS CAME FROM WITHIN THE REGION.

The bulk of migration was intraregional. Almost 39 million emigrants from Asia-Pacific countries moved to other countries in the region (42% of all emigrants from the region) while 82 per cent of the foreign-born populations came from within the region.

TYPES OF MIGRATION

LABOUR MIGRATION

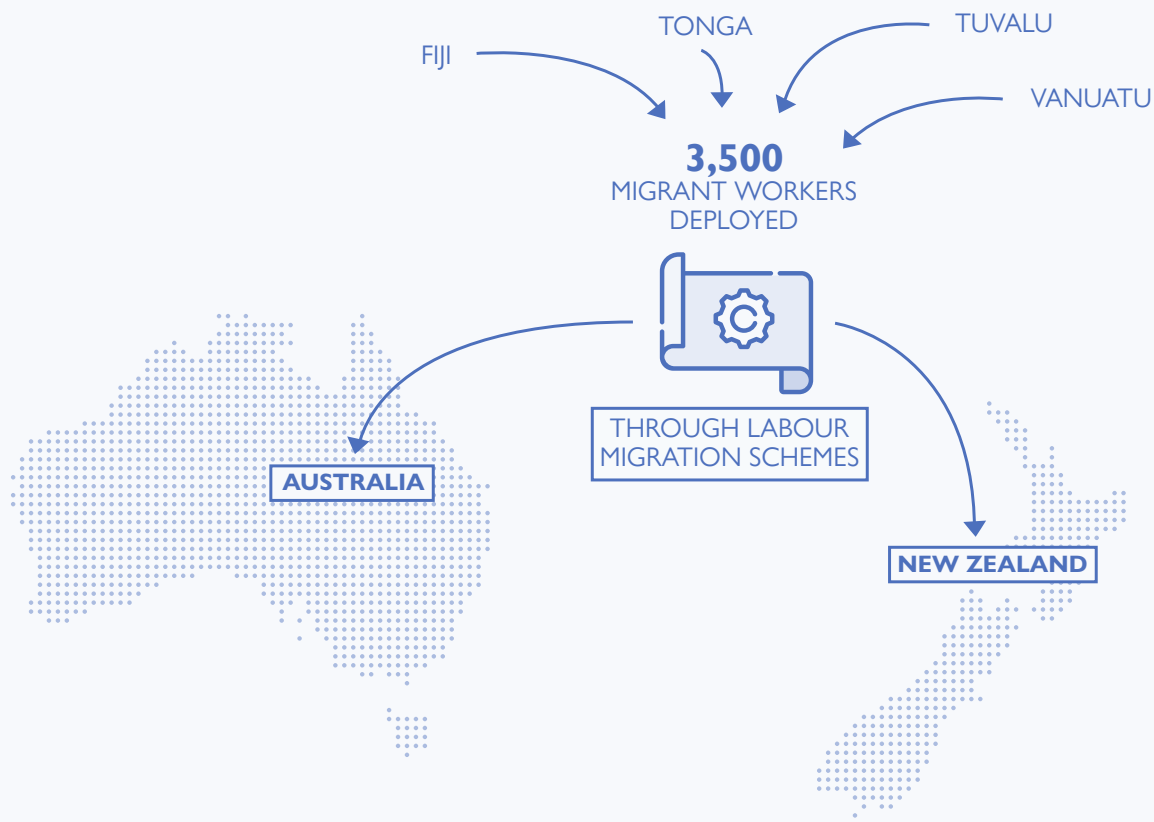
Available data on labour migration flows suggested the contraction of prominent labour migration corridors in the Asia-Pacific region.



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.



FORCED MIGRATION

By the end of 2020 about 4.7 million refugees and 742,469 asylums seekers from countries in the Asia-Pacific region were forcibly displaced. The majority (75%) were hosted within the region.



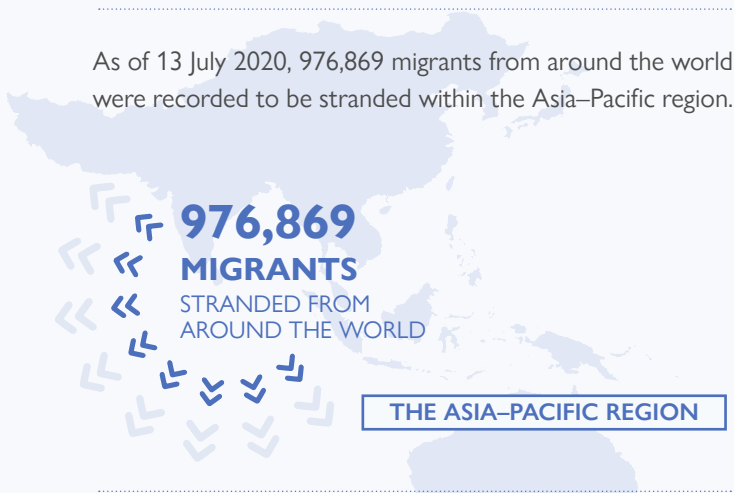
Around 55 per cent of refugees and 32 per cent of asylum seekers came from Afghanistan. This makes Afghanistan the country with the highest number of cross-border displacements due to conflict and violence.

Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Islamic Republic of Iran were the main countries of asylum for refugees from the region. On the other hand, Turkey and the Unites States of America received 41 per cent of asylum seekers from the region.

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.

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.



Cyclone Amphan, the largest natural hazard in the region in 2020, triggered around 5 million new displacements.

In 2020, international resettlement programmes around the world faced interruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the difficulties in achieving durable solutions, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) supported the resettlement of 11,963 individuals from 17 Asia-Pacific countries. Over half of these beneficiaries resettled in the United States of America, followed by Canada, Australia and Sweden.

IOM assisted a total of 1,217 voluntary returnees hosted in or returned from 22 Asia-Pacific countries. One third of the beneficiaries were female. Most cases were hosted in Australia, India and Indonesia. On the other hand, a total of 6,440 voluntary assisted returnees originating from 21 Asia-Pacific countries returned to their countries from abroad. Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan were the three major origin countries of these assisted voluntary returnees in the region.

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 returnees came from Pakistan and Afghanistan, collectively accounting for more than 60 per cent of all such cases.

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.

MIGRATION AND VULNERABILITIES

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.



RISK OF COVID-19 SPREAD
IN OVERCROWDED LIVING
CONDITIONS

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.

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.

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.



UNFOUNDED PUBLIC
PERCEPTIONS AND
MISINFORMATION ABOUT
MIGRANTS CARRYING
COVID-19



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.

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.



38 ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES,
TERRITORIES AND AREAS
ASSESSED AGAINST GOVERNMENT
EFFORTS IN COUNTER TRAFFICKING,

70% 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.

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.



- BANGLADESH
- INDONESIA
- MYANMAR
- PHILIPPINES
- SRI LANKA

86% OF HUMAN
TRAFFICKING
VICTIMS

MAINLY FORCED LABOUR
EXPLOITATION

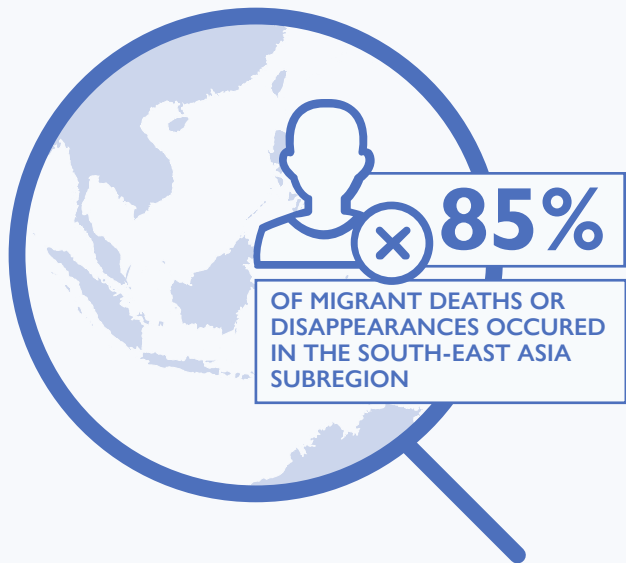
While 65 per cent of minors who were identified victims from the region were exploited for the purpose of forced labour, slightly below one-fifth were so for sexual exploitation.

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.

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%).



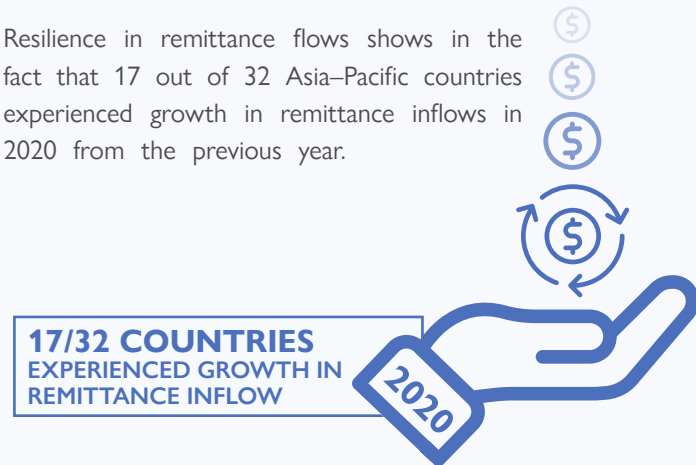
As for cases in the South Asia subregion, 38 per cent were reported deaths at the Iran-Afghanistan border.

| MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

REMITTANCES

World Bank data suggested that the volume of remittance inflows to the Asia–Pacific region decreased by 1.1 per cent from 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.



IOM staff members travel by boat between islands on the Carteret Islands, Papua New Guinea | © IOM 2016/Muse MOHAMMED

INTRODUCTION

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 global pandemic on 11 March 2020, which had repercussions at an unforeseen and unprecedented magnitude. COVID-19 is no longer only regarded as 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

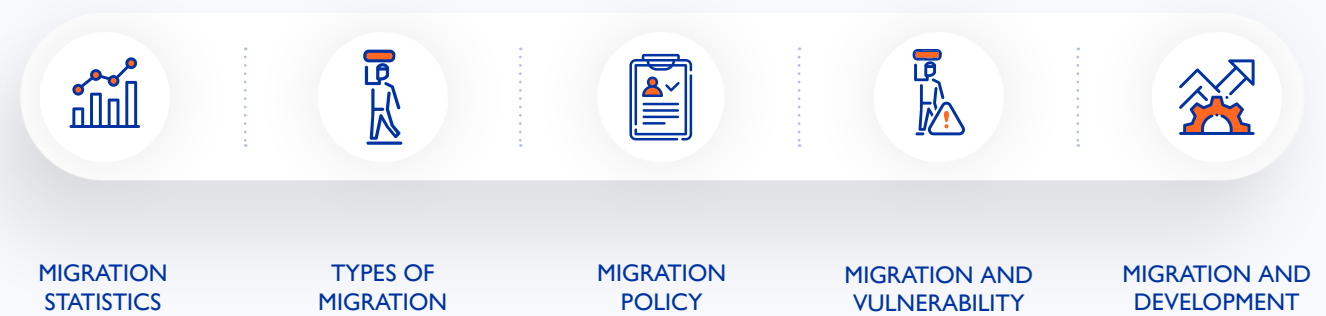
Target 17.18 of the SDG calling for increasing the availability of “high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity and migratory status”. In this spirit, the Asia-Pacific RDH seeks to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the migration landscape 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)

2020 [Asian Development Outlook 2020](#) – Online presentation. ADB, Manila.

2021 [Asian Economic Integration Report 2021: Making Digital Platforms Work](#). ADB, Manila

IOM Migration Data Portal

2021 [Are migrants left behind? How COVID-19 hinders better migration data](#).

United Nations (UN)

2020a [The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020](#). UN, New York.

2020b [UN Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery: Leveraging the Power of Science for a More Equitable, Resilient and Sustainable Future](#). UN, New York.

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

2021 [Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021](#). UN ESCAP, Bangkok.

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

2020 [International Migration Stock 2020](#). UN DESA, Population Division, New York. (accessed 1 March 2021).

World Bank

2020a [Global Economic Prospects, June 2020](#). World Bank, Washington D.C.

2020b [Survey of National Statistical Offices \(NSOs\) during COVID-19](#). Brief, World Bank.

2021 [Annual Remittances Data](#) (accessed 15 June 2021).

World Health Organization (WHO)

2021 [WHO Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Dashboard](#) (accessed 21 June 2021). WHO.



A woman walks past her makeshift shelter situated on an embankment in one of the Cyclone Aila hit areas in Dacope, Bangladesh | © IOM 2010/ Abir ABDULLAH

01

MIGRATION POLICY

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



SDG Target

10.7

Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.



Global Compact for Migration Objectives

5 and 11

Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration

Manage borders in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner



MGI Dimensions

3 and 6

Partnerships

Safe, orderly and dignified migration

1.1.1

Mobility Restrictions and Containment Measures in Response to COVID-19

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 5). 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.



Children and their parents are the sole family living on the tiny island of Huene, Papua New Guinea. Originally linked to a nearby island, the island has been slowly shrinking over the years | © IOM 2016/Muse MOHAMMED

1.1.1.1 BORDER MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

As of 29 December 2020, a total of 110,324 movement restrictions, including entry restrictions³, conditions for authorized entry,⁴ 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 bans, 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.

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).

FIGURE 2:
MOBILITY RESTRICTIONS AND CONDITIONS FOR AUTHORIZED ENTRY WORLDWIDE (10 MARCH–29 DECEMBER 2020)

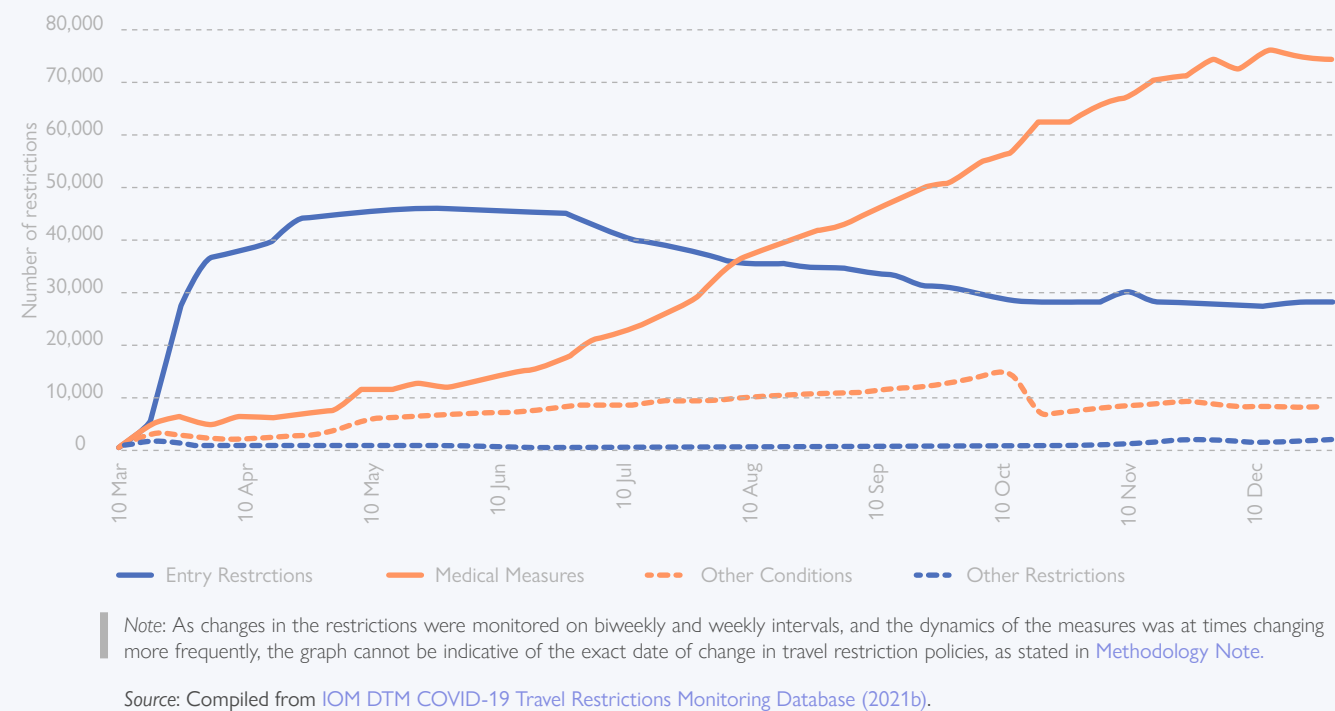
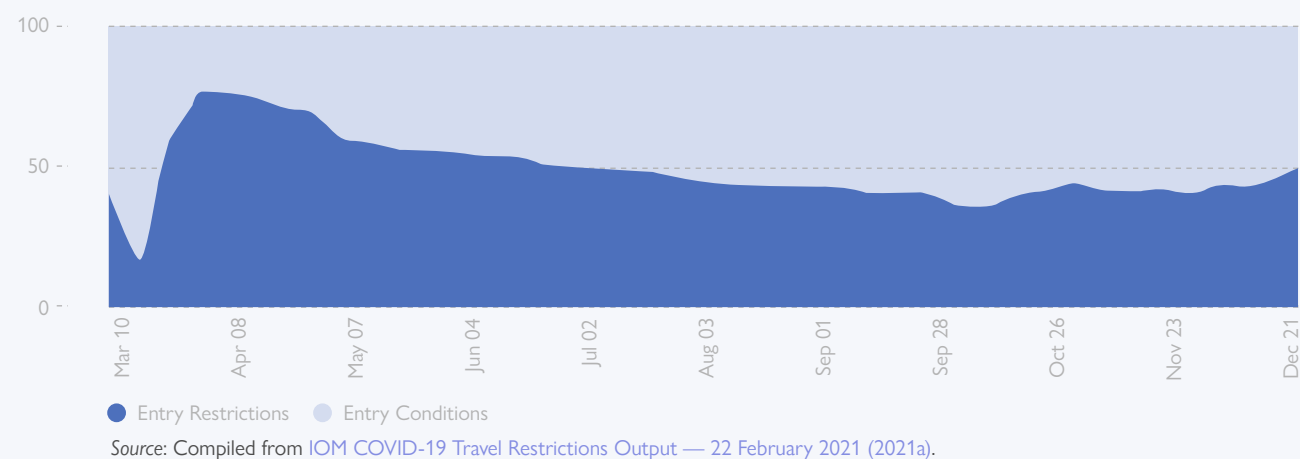


FIGURE 3:
ENTRY RESTRICTIONS VERSUS CONDITIONS FOR AUTHORIZED ENTRY – OVERVIEW FOR THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (MARCH–DECEMBER 2020)



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

FIGURE 4:
CHANGES IN OPERATIONAL STATUS OF POES IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (APRIL–DECEMBER 2020)

665

UNIQUE POINTS OF ENTRY MAPPED



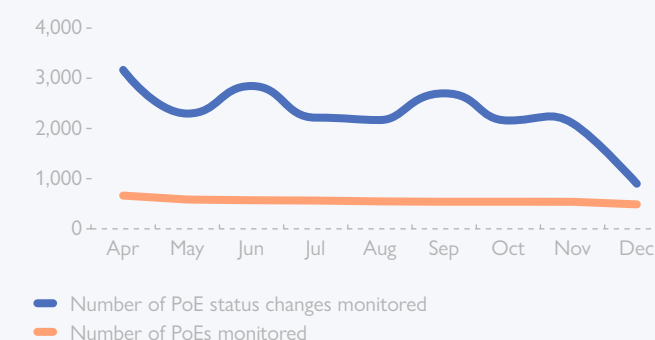
241
AIRPORTS



177
LAND BORDERS



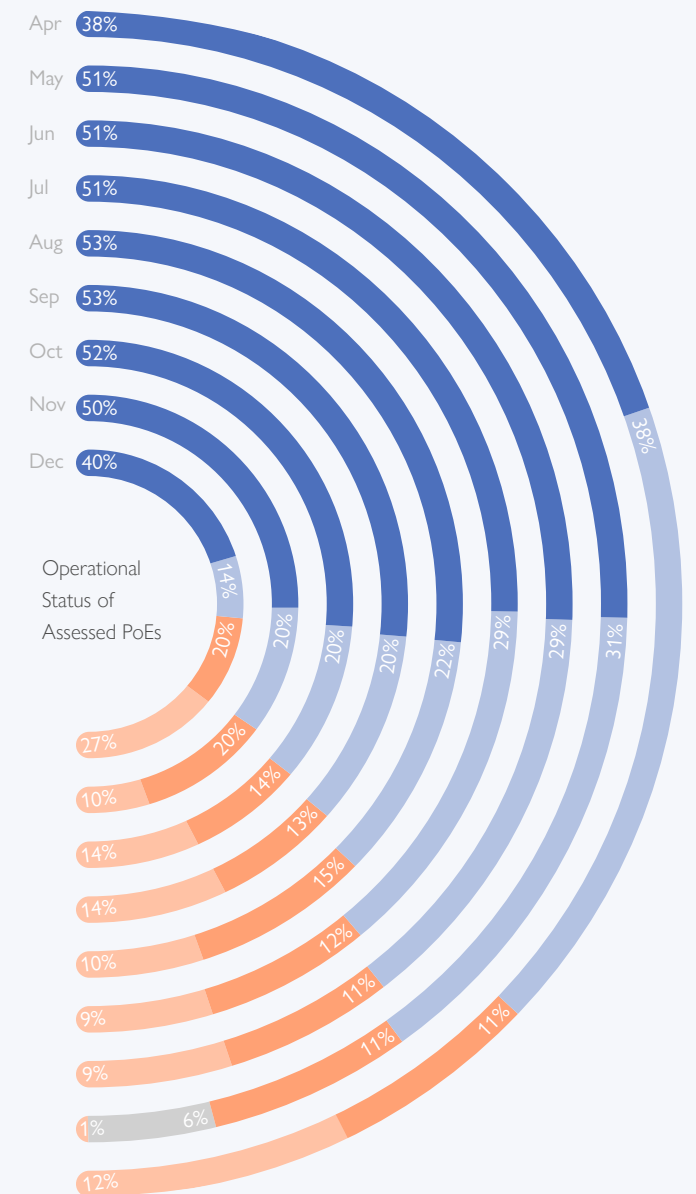
247
BLUE BORDERS



● Partially Operational ● Fully operational ● Other
● Fully Closed ● Unknown

Note: For more information about how the database was constructed, please refer to [Methodology Note](#).

Source: Compiled from IOM Points of Entry Global Reference Database (2021c).

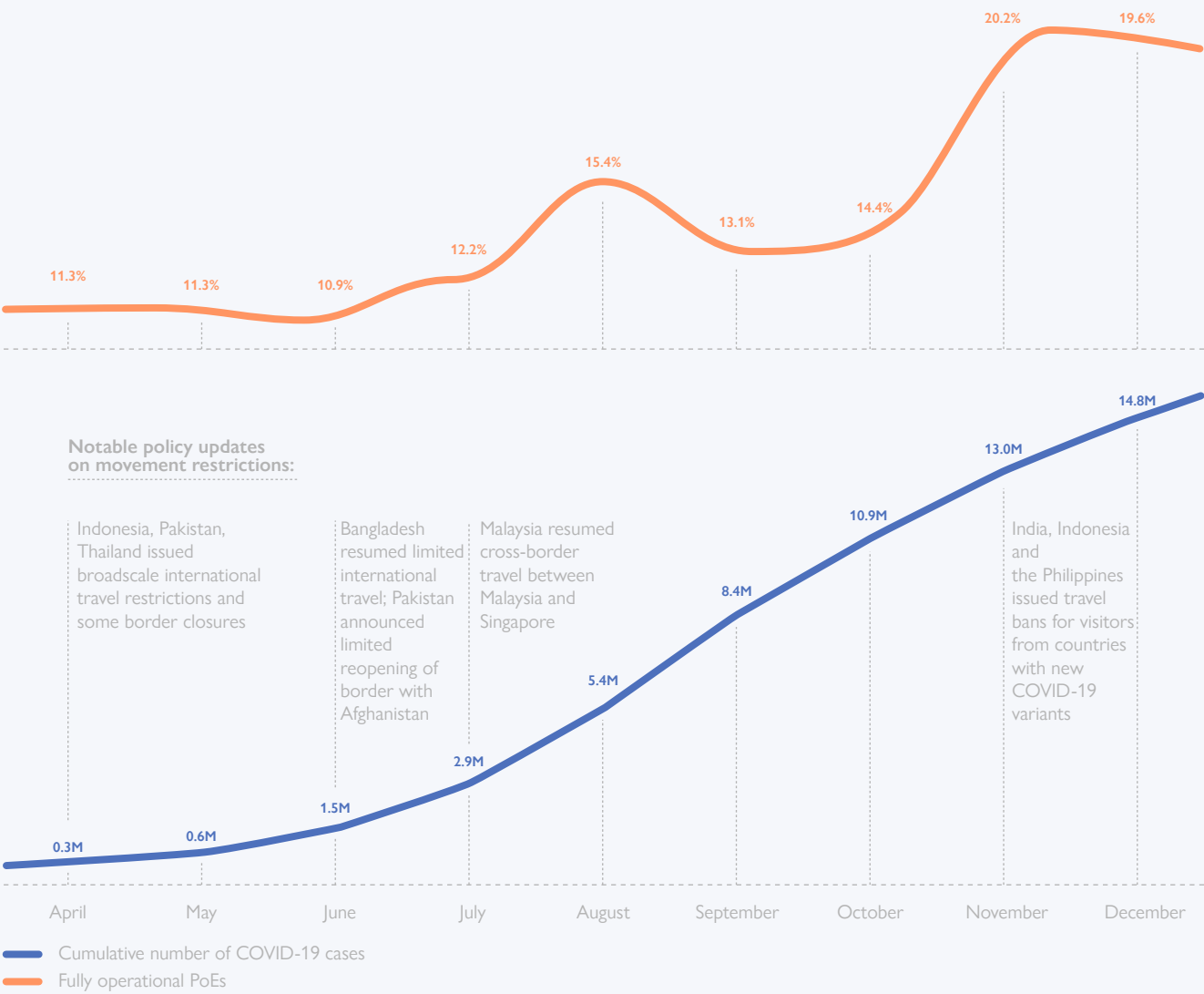


the region with the third highest numbers of PoE closures worldwide (*IOM, 2020*) – only 13 per cent of 428 assessed PoEs with known operational status were fully operational and 43 per cent were fully closed (*IOM, 2021c*).

However, by November 2020, only 22 per cent of 527 assessed PoEs with known operational status were fully closed. As well, 78 per cent of assessed PoEs were either partially (55%) or fully operational (22%) (*ibid.*). Despite a rise in the number of PoEs with unknown operational status in December, a consistent pattern was observed. These changes were in line

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.

FIGURE 5:
NOTABLE POLICY UPDATES ON MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (APRIL-DECEMBER 2020)



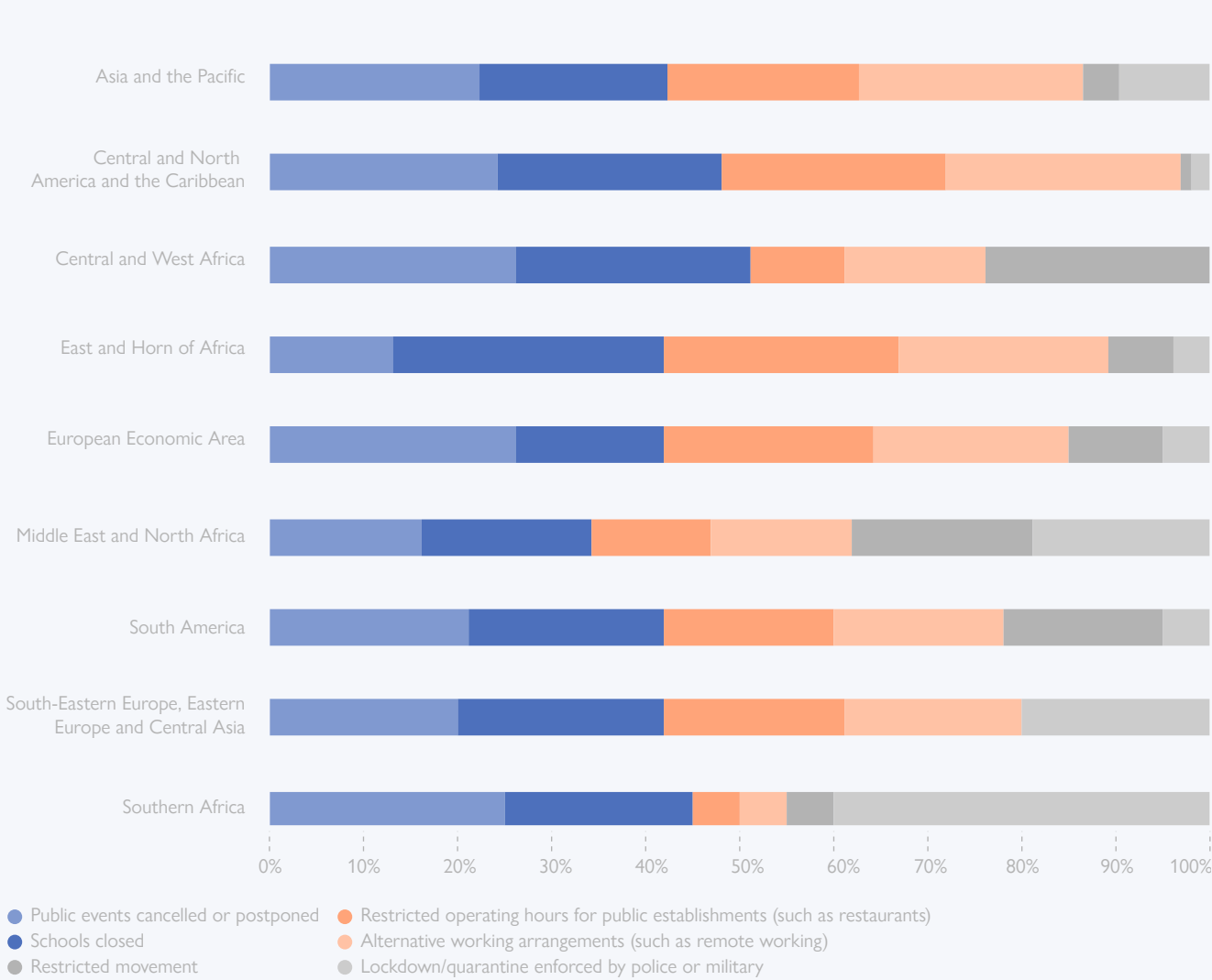
Source: Compiled from IOM Points of Entry Global Reference Database (2021c).

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

FIGURE 6:
NUMBER AND TYPE OF RESTRICTIONS IN AREAS OF INTEREST BY IOM REGION (MARCH 2020-JANUARY 2021)



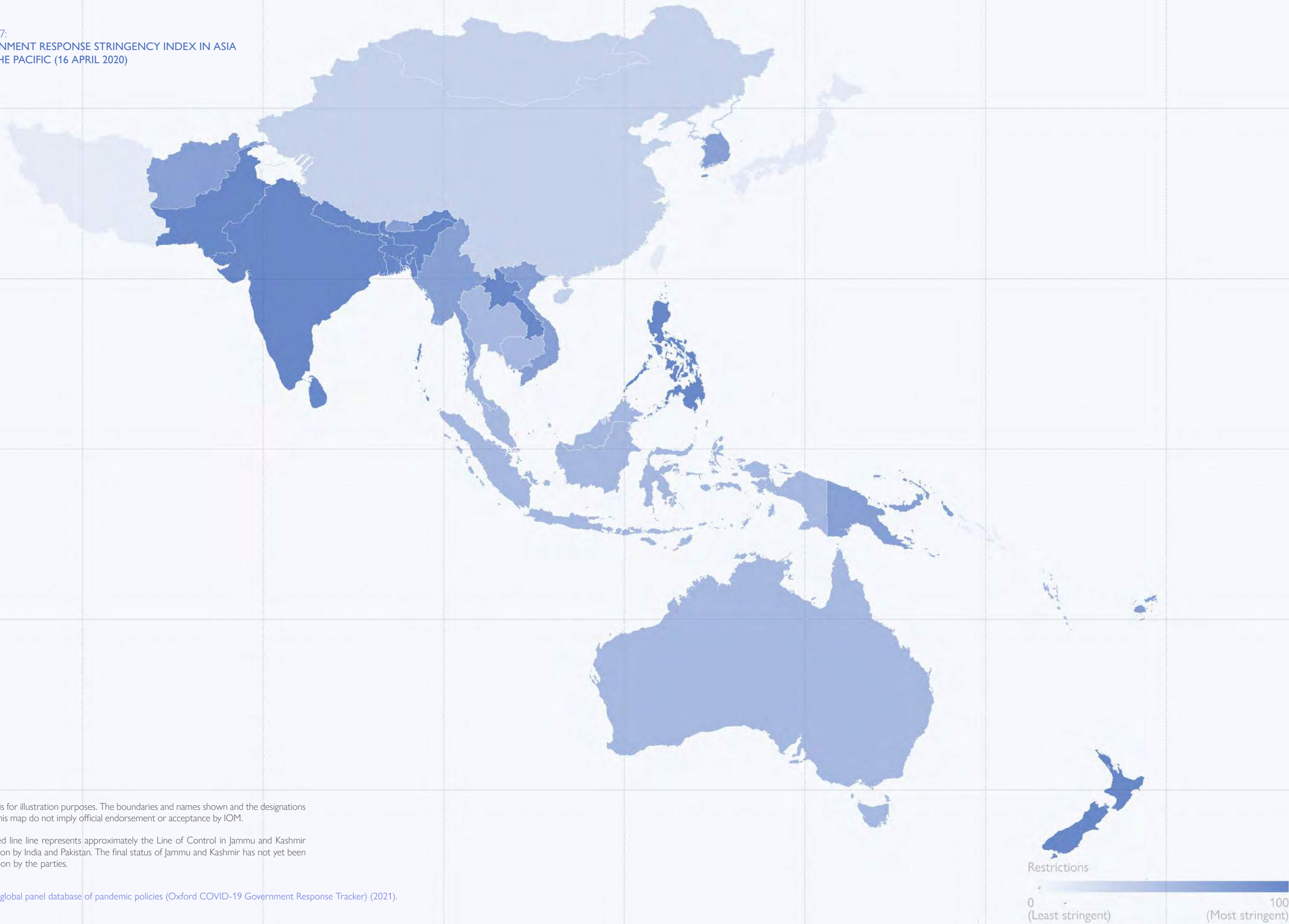
Source: Compiled from IOM COVID-19 Impact on Key Locations of Internal Monthly Analysis (2021d).

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.

FIGURE 7:
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STRINGENCY INDEX IN ASIA
AND THE PACIFIC (16 APRIL 2020)

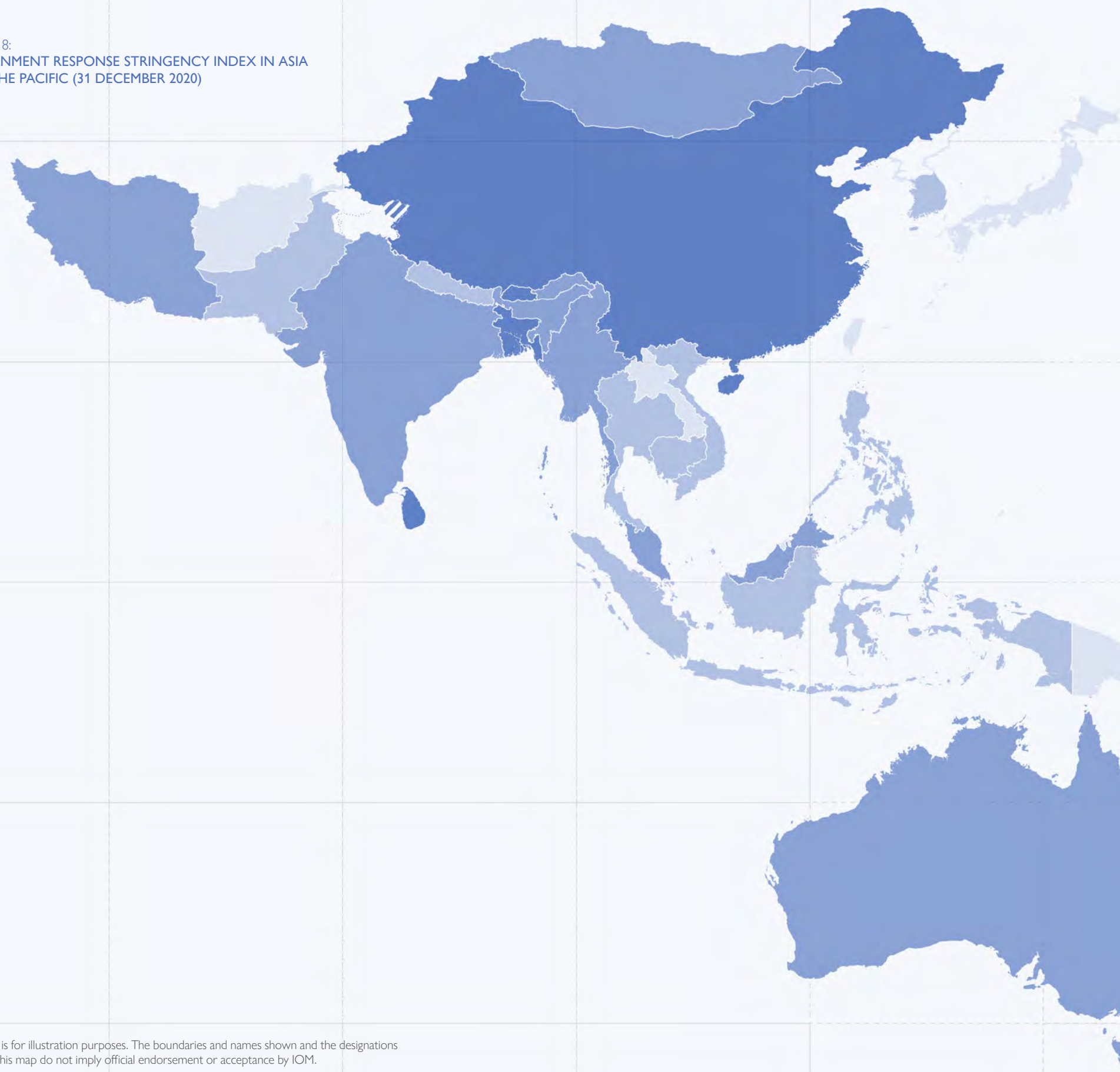


This map is for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

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.

Source: A global panel database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker) (2021).

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

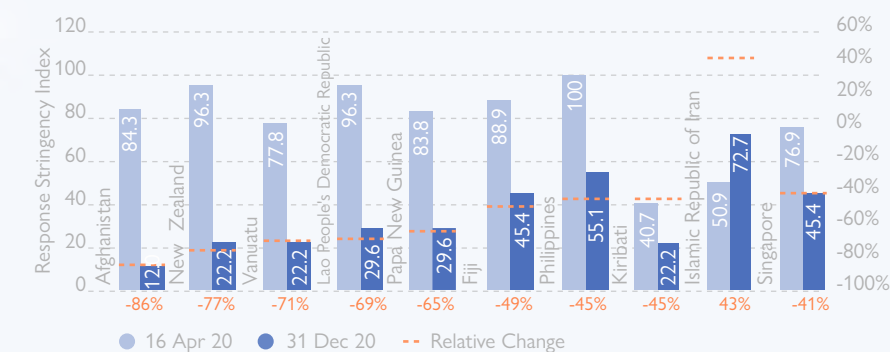


This map is for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

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.

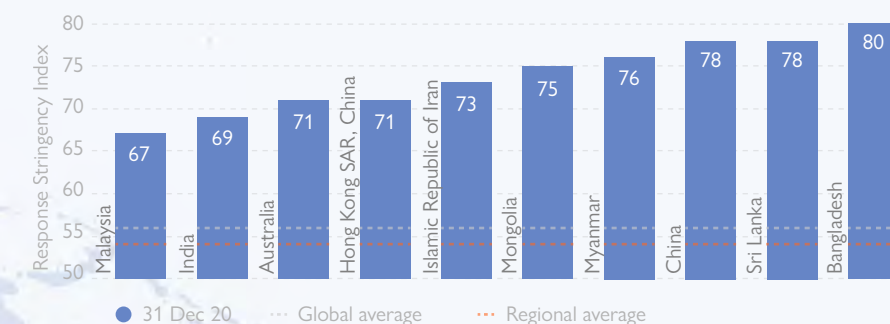
Source: A global panel database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker) (2021).

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



Source: Compiled from A global panel database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker) (2021).

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



Source: Compiled from A global panel database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker) (2021).

Restrictions

0 (Least stringent) 100 (Most stringent)

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 countries⁵ for which data is available closed their borders without exceptions for people

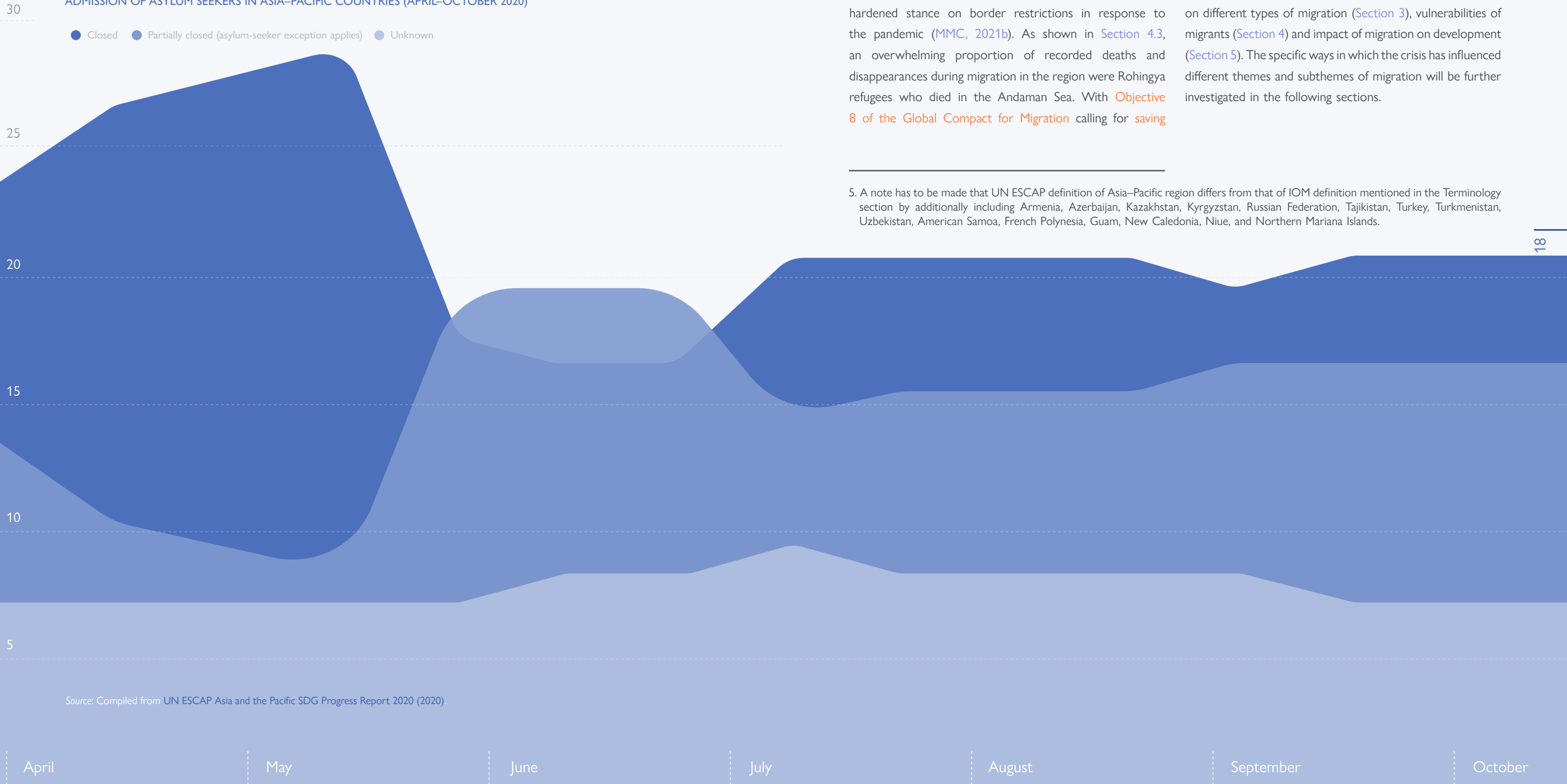
seeking asylum, with only some countries partially lifting restrictions in the remaining months of the year ([UN ESCAP, 2021, p.43](#)) (Figure 11).

An increase was also observed in refolement 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)



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.

2020 COVID-19 and Border Politics. Transnational Institute. Border Wars Briefing 1.

Connor, P.

2020 More than Nine-in-ten People Worldwide Live in Countries with Travel Restrictions amid COVID-19. Pew Research Center, 1 April.

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

2020 A Global Panel Database of Pandemic Policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker). Nature Human Behaviour, 5:529–538.

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.

2021b DTM COVID-19 Travel Restrictions Monitoring Database (accessed 11 June 2021).

2021c IOM Points of Entry Global Reference Database (accessed 11 June 2021).

2021d COVID-19 Impact on Key Locations of Internal Monthly Analysis. IOM.

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)

2021a 4mi Interactive Dashboard: Mixed Migration during the COVID-19 Crisis (accessed 9 June 2021).

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

World Health Organization (WHO)

2020a Apart Together Survey: Preliminary Overview of Refugees and Migrants Self-reported Impact of COVID-19. WHO.

2020b 6 Months Later: How Has COVID-19 Impacted the Life of the First Rohingya Patient? Feature story. WHO.



Members of a returnee community on Manem Island, Papua New Guinea | © IOM 2016/Muse MOHAMMED

02

MIGRATION

STATISTICS

A community leader for a women's group attending health education and COVID-19 screening sessions run by IOM's Rapid Response Team in Herat, Afghanistan | © IOM 2021/ Muse MOHAMMED

2.1 MIGRANT STOCK



SDG Target

17.18

By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.



Global Compact for Migration Objectives

1 and 3

Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies

Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration



MGI Dimensions

2 and 3

Whole-of-government approach

Partnerships

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.

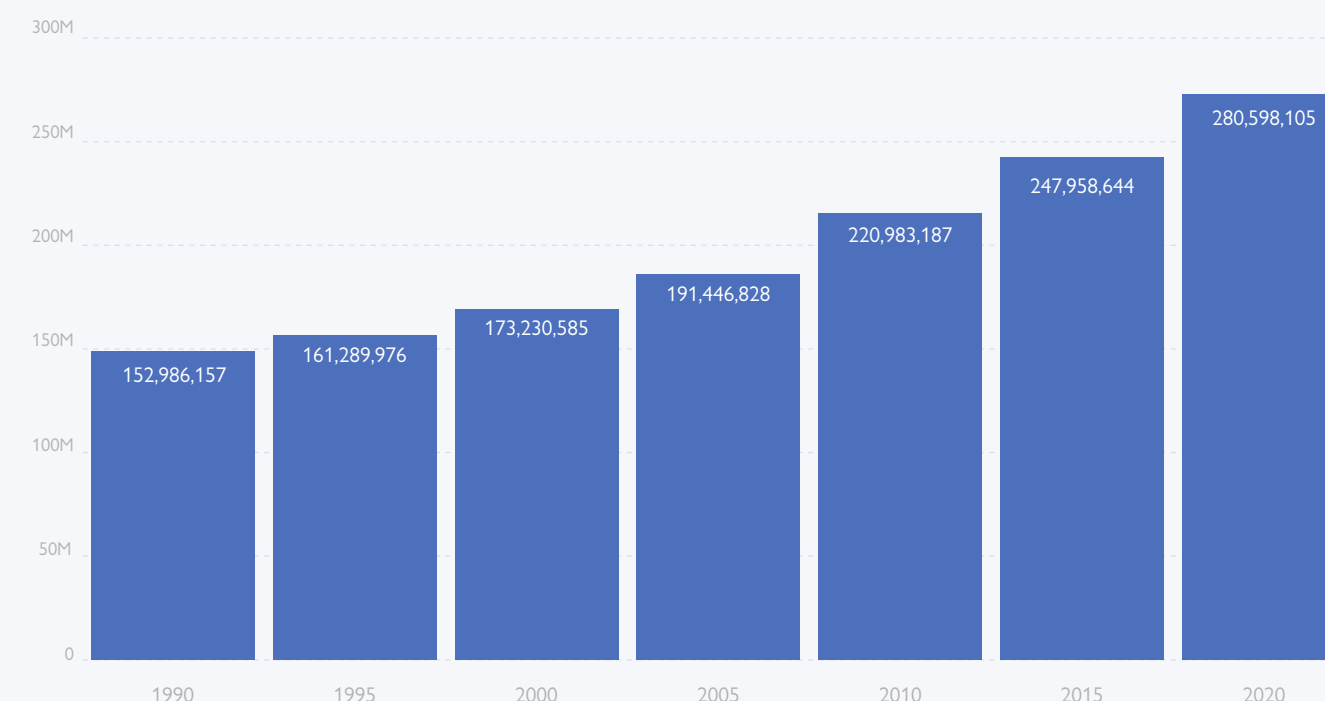
2.1.1 Emigration

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

FIGURE 12:
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION STOCK BETWEEN 1990 AND MID-2020



Source: Compiled from [UN DESA International Migrant Stock \(2020\)](#).

6. Asia and The Pacific Policy Society, "Papua New Guinea must control its borders", 7 April 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

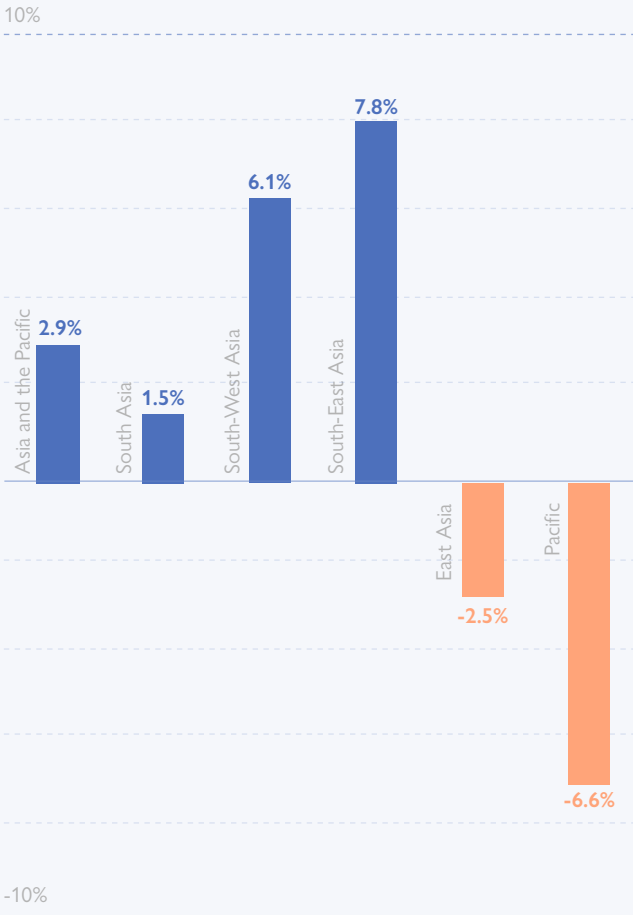
36%

SOUTH ASIA

2%

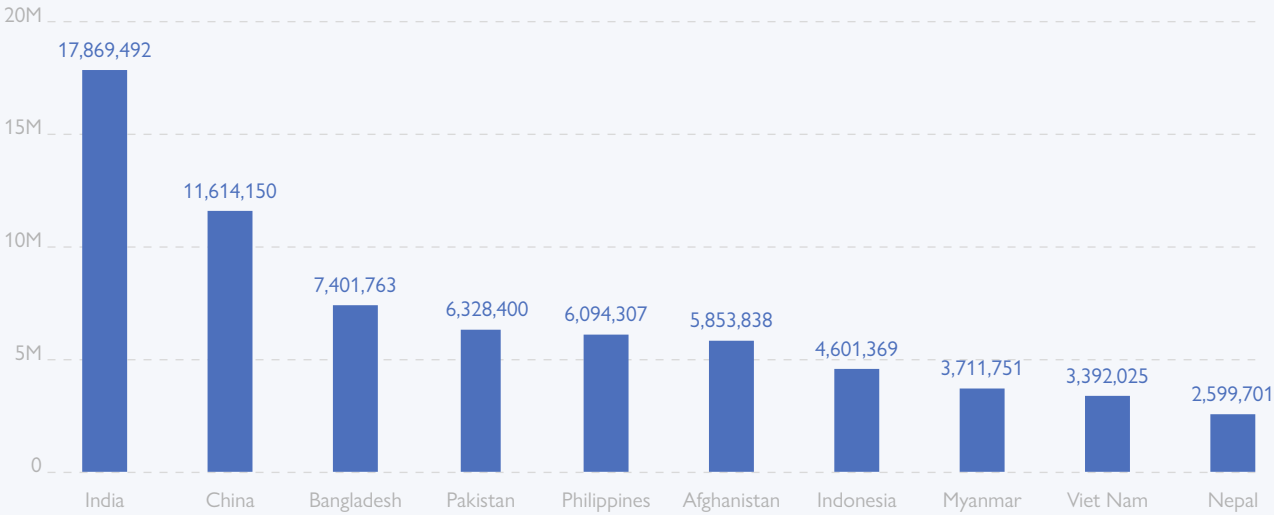
PACIFIC

FIGURE 14:
PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN EMIGRATION STOCK BETWEEN
2019 AND MID-2020 IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



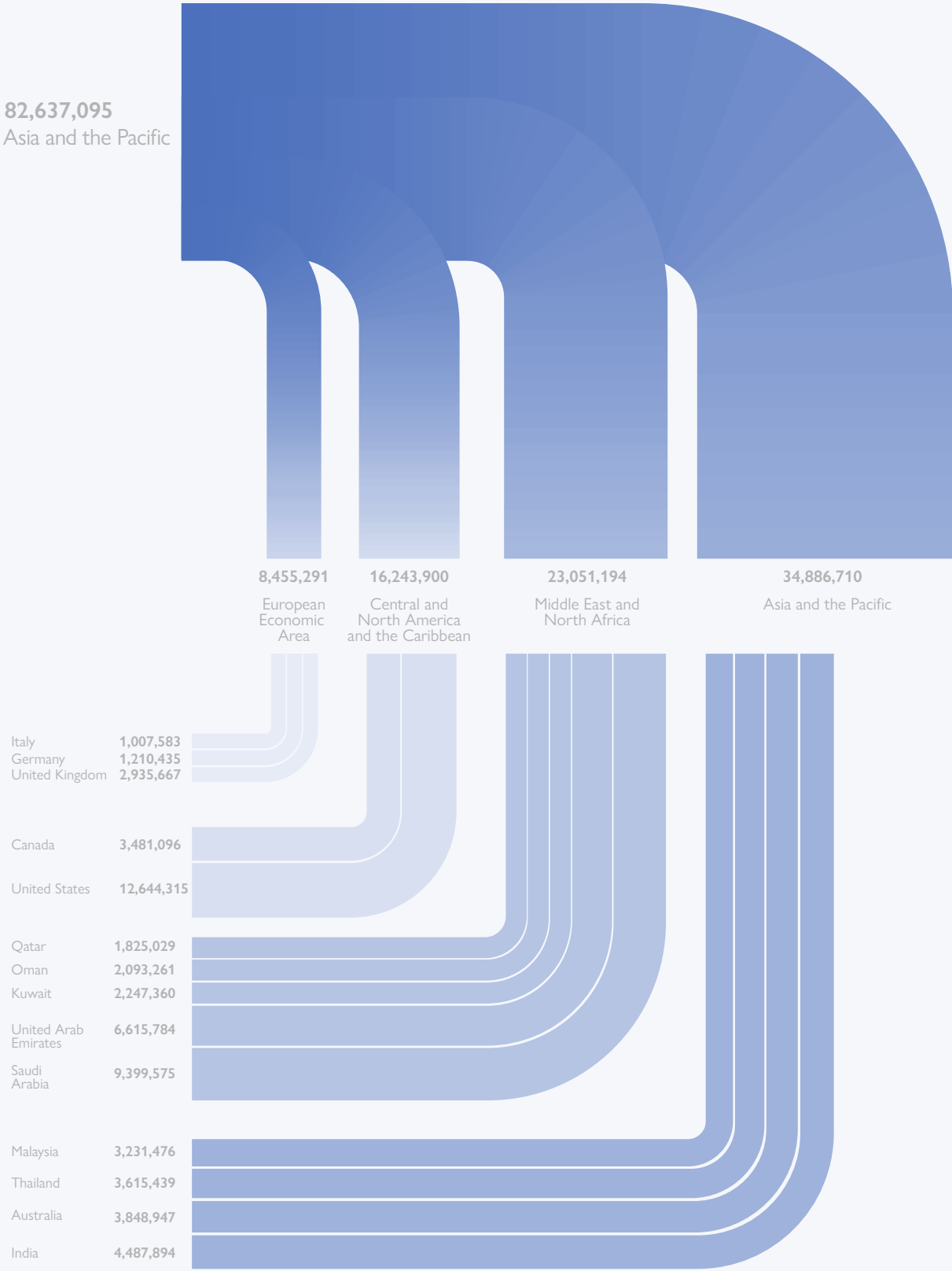
Source: Compiled from UN DESA International Migrant Stock (2020).

FIGURE 15:
TOP 10 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN FOR MIGRATION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC BY MID-2020



Source: Compiled from UN DESA International Migrant Stock (2020).

FIGURE 16:
MIGRATION FLOWS FROM ASIA AND THE PACIFIC BY MID-2020



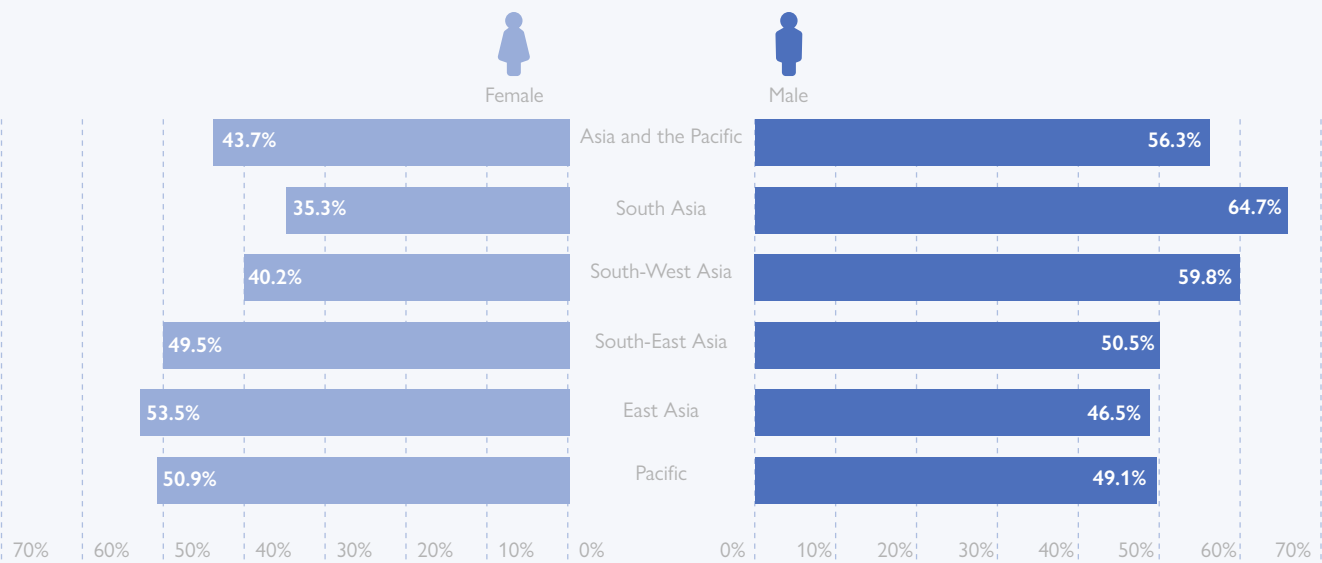
Source: Compiled from UN DESA International Migrant Stock (2020).

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).

FIGURE 17:
GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF THE EMIGRANT POPULATION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC BY MID-2020

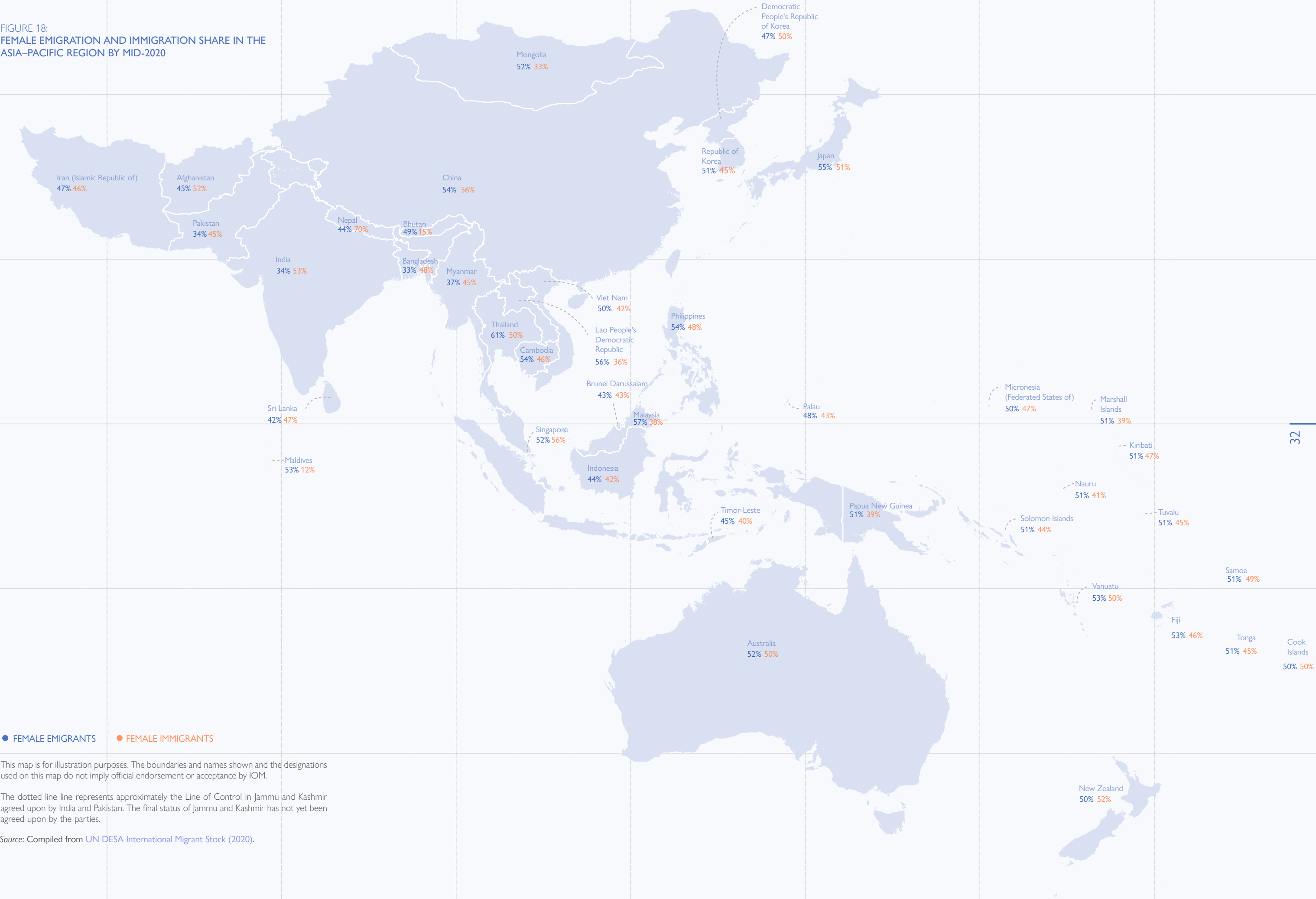


Source: Compiled from UN DESA International Migrant Stock (2020).



IOM arranged and facilitated the repatriation of mostly female Filipino migrant workers from Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic | © IOM 2012/Ray LEYESA

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.

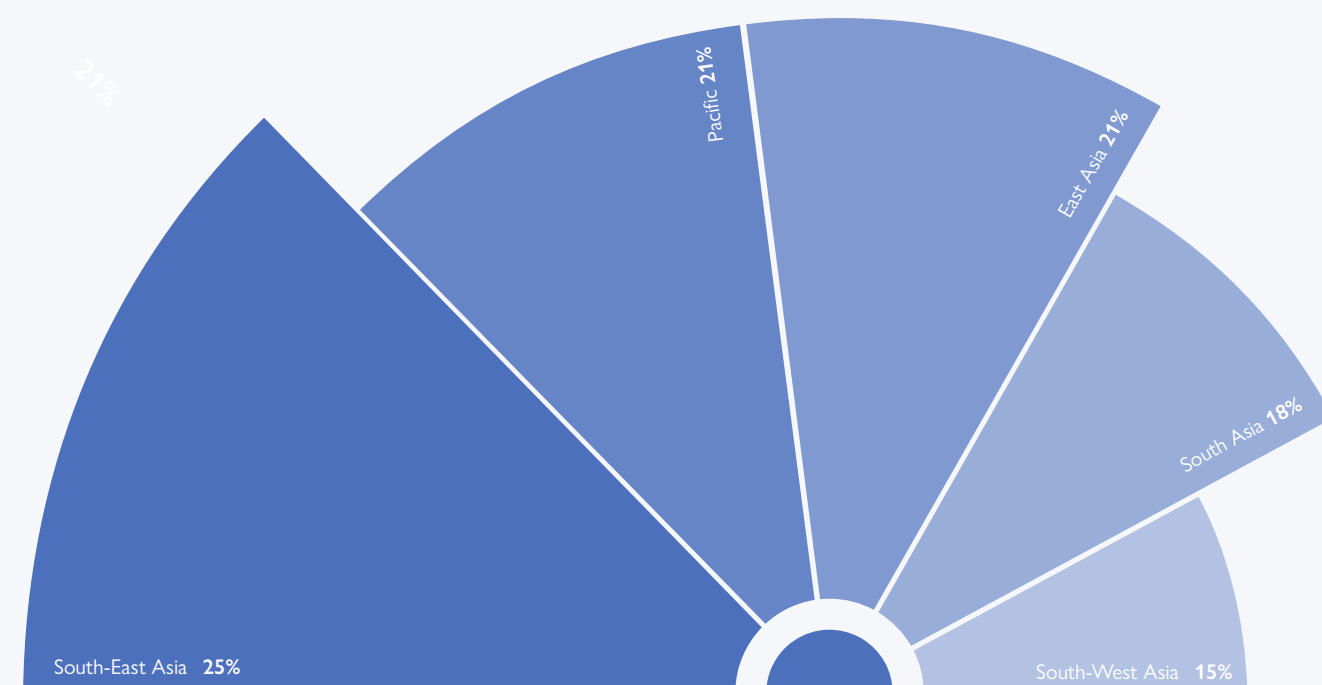
Source: Compiled from [UN DESA International Migrant Stock \(2020\)](#).

2.1.2 Immigration

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.

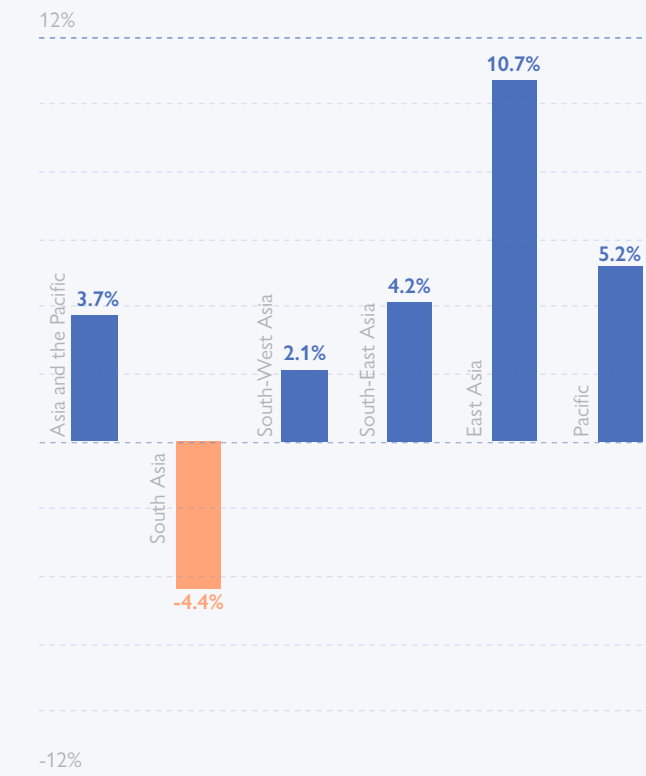
By mid-2020, the top destination countries in the region were, in descending order, Australia, India, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Singapore and Bangladesh (Figure 21). Around 82 per cent of the foreign-born population came from within the region, most notably China (16%), Afghanistan (10%) and India (8%). Therefore, most migration in Asia and the Pacific was intraregional. Immigrants from outside the region mostly came from the United Kingdom of Britain and Northern Ireland (1.7 million) and the United States (472,000). With almost 75 per cent of British immigrants residing in Australia, British immigration to Australia is mainly motivated by economic and family push factors (Department of Home Affairs of Australia, 2020). Considering immigrants as a proportion of the total population, the highest number was seen in Singapore at 43 per cent, followed by Australia and New Zealand where international immigrants comprised one third of the total populations.

FIGURE 19:
DISTRIBUTION OF IMMIGRATION STOCK IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC BY SUBREGION BY MID-2020



Source: Compiled from UN DESA International Migrant Stock (2020).

FIGURE 20:
PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN IMMIGRATION STOCK
BETWEEN 2019 AND MID-2020 IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



Source: Compiled from UN DESA International Migrant Stock (2020).

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

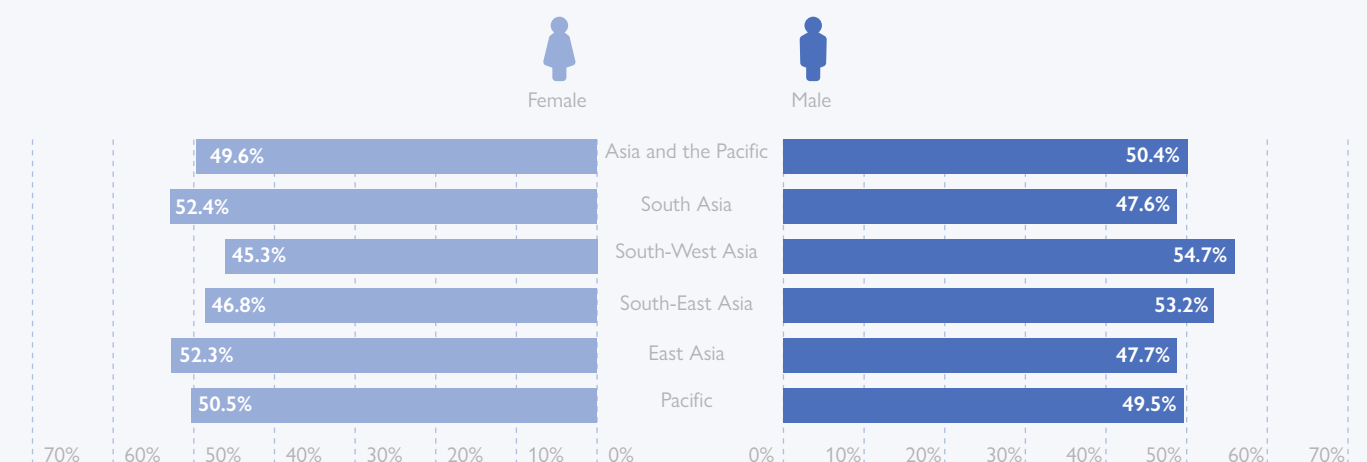
FIGURE 21:
TOP 10 COUNTRIES OF DESTINATION FOR MIGRANTS IN
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC BY MID-2020



Source: Compiled from UN DESA International Migrant Stock (2020).

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).

FIGURE 22:
GENDER COMPOSITION OF IMMIGRANTS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC BY MID-2020

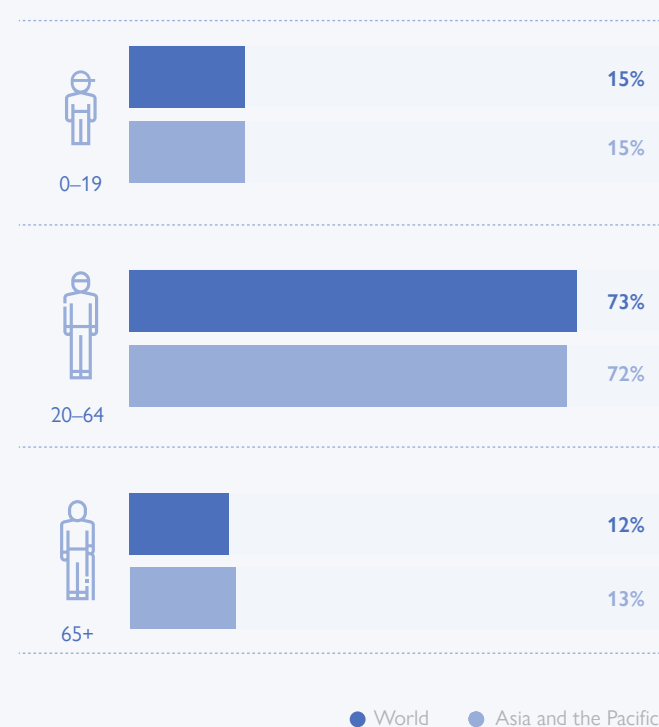


Source: Compiled from UN DESA International Migrant Stock (2020).

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 region, as resident population in some subregions (East Asia and the Pacific) are rapidly ageing (UN ESCAP, 2017, p.23; UNFPA, 2021).

By mid-2020, the Asia-Pacific region hosted 6.2 million child immigrants (aged 19 years or younger).⁷ 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 could have come from Afghanistan, as Afghan immigrants comprise 97 per cent of the total immigrant population in the Islamic Republic of Iran (UN DESA, 2020a). The 8th National Population and Housing Census of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2016 found that 46 per cent of Afghan migrants residing in the Islamic Republic of Iran were children. While the lack of available data on child migration trends and flows between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran has restricted in-depth analysis, Mousavi and Bozorgmehr's (2020) experience working with Afghan children in Tehran may shed light on the current situation of child emigration in Afghanistan. Their work indicates that labour opportunities previously constituted the main reason that Afghan children decided to migrate to the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, with the value of the Rial in Iran dropping drastically, employment no longer motivates Afghan children to migrate to the country. Currently, Afghan children migrate to the Islamic Republic of Iran mainly to seek education opportunities, as there are no schools in the settlements they come from in Afghanistan (ibid.). Mousavi and Bozorgmehr's research was conducted on a particular group of Afghan children. Their experience might not, therefore, capture the full spectrum of Afghan child migration experiences.

FIGURE 23:
PERCENTAGE OF THE INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION
STOCK IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC BY AGE GROUPS BY
MID-2020



Source: Compiled from UN DESA International Migrant Stock (2020).

2.1.3 Discussion

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.

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.

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). Therefore, Improving the accuracy and timeliness of data collection and estimates for irregular migration in the region is crucial to ensuring safe, orderly and regular migration management. Finally, although the lack of disaggregation of international migrant stock by reasons for migration makes it difficult to thoroughly analyse migration trends in the region, the following sections will complement this gap by exploring available data for certain types of migration.



A boy waits out the front of the IOM Transit Centre in Herat, Afghanistan | © IOM 2021/Angela WELLS

7. According to UN DESA, child immigrants are those aged 19 or under living in a country other than the one where they were born in.

REFERENCES

Australia Government, Department of Home Affairs

2020 [Country Profile – United Kingdom.](#)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

2011 [Asian Decent Work Decade resource kit: Protecting migrant workers.](#) ILO, Bangkok.

IOM Migration Data Portal

2021 [Migration data in Southern Asia.](#)

Kadria, B. and R. Mishra

2021 [Migration in Asia and its subregions: Data challenges and coping strategies for 2021.](#) *Migration Policy Practice*, 11(1):14–20

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

2020 [Children on the Move: An Account of Afghan Children Workers in the Bazaar area of Tehran.](#) *Border Criminologies*, University of Oxford, 18 December.

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

2020a [International Migration Stock 2020.](#) UN DESA, Population Division, New York. (accessed 1 March 2021).

2020b [International Migration 2020 Highlights.](#) UN DESA, Population Division, New York.

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

2017 [Handbook on Measuring International Migration through Population Censuses.](#) UN DESA Statistics Division, New York, p.9.

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.



A family travels to a safer location amid flood waters after Cyclone Aila hit south-west parts in Harinagar, Satkhira, Bangladesh |© IOM 2009/ Abir ABDULLAH

03

TYPES OF MIGRATION

03 TYPES OF MIGRATION



SDG Target

10.7

Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies



Global Compact for Migration Objectives

2

Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin



MGI Dimensions

5 and 6

Mobility dimensions of crises

Safe, orderly and dignified migration

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.

3.1 LABOUR MIGRATION

Labour migration generally distinguishes between international and internal labour migration. Destination, length and nature – that is, whether migration is temporary, seasonal, circular, long-term or permanent – are also defining characteristics of labour migration and may overlap and interchange. In the Asia–Pacific region, temporary labour migration is the dominant form of migration, with destinations either within the region or in the Middle East.

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



One of the beneficiaries of counselling services facilitated by IOM Afghanistan and its partners | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED

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 \(ADB\)](#), [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 ([ADB](#), [OECD](#) and [ILO, 2021](#)).

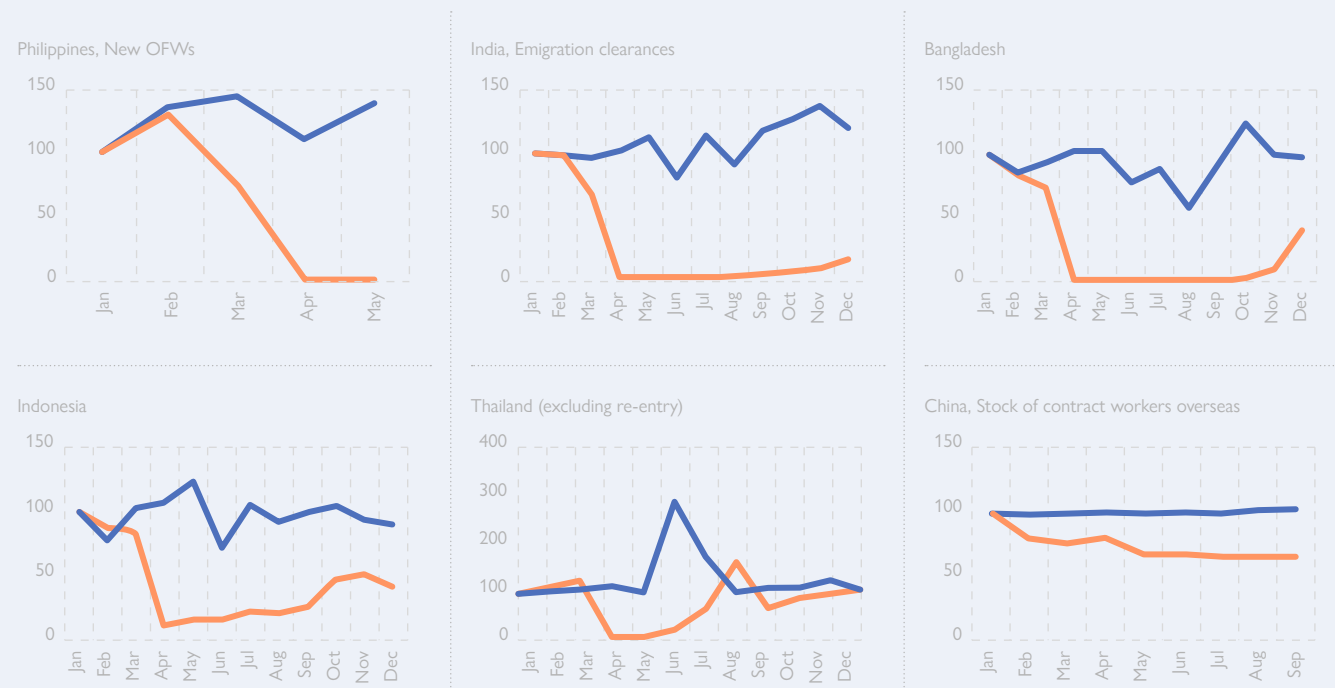
In 2019, 625,000 migrant workers from Pakistan were deployed abroad, but the total number dropped by 64 per cent in 2020 (*ibid.*). The Pakistan Overseas Employment Promoter Association estimated that the deployment of about 200,000 workers had been delayed between March and July 2020. In India, a sharp 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 [ADB](#), [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.

FIGURE 24:
RELATIVE CHANGE IN OUTFLOW OF WORKERS BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN (2019–2020); (JANUARY=100)



Note: OFW refers to overseas Filipino workers.

Source: Compiled from [ADB](#), [OECD](#) and [ILO](#), Labor Migration in Asia: Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis and the Post-Pandemic Future (2021).

FIGURE 25:
RELATIVE CHANGE IN INFLOW OF FOREIGN WORKERS BY COUNTRY/AREA OF DESTINATION (2019–2020); (JANUARY=100)



Source: Compiled from [ADB](#), [OECD](#) and [ILO](#), Labor Migration in Asia: Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis and the Post-Pandemic Future (2021).

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 (IFRC, 2020; IOM, 2020c). Based on a study conducted by ILO, the average cost for a migrant worker to come and work in Thailand was USD 461.⁸ Regular migrants paid on average USD 497 in recruitment costs, compared with irregular migrants who paid USD 474 (ILO, 2020a, p.40).

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 (389), the Lao People's Democratic Republic (302), and Myanmar (518).

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, 2020a).

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, 2020d). 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, 2020c, pp.2–4).⁹ 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, 2020c, 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, 2020c, p.3).¹⁰ With regards to re-migration plans, many Myanmar migrant workers expressed their wiliness to go back abroad and work as soon as travel is possible (TNI, 2020, p.35).

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).¹¹ Lao migrant workers are mostly employed in the domestic, construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and entertainment sectors.¹² 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 (Kuttappan, 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 (ADB, 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; ADB, 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 (ADB, OECD and ILO, 2021).

11. Estimates by mid-2020.

12. International Labour Organization, TRIANGLE in ASEAN – Lao People's Democratic Republic.

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

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

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

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.

TABLE 2:
PACIFIC WORKERS IN DESTINATION COUNTRIES BY MAY 2020

Country	Number of migrants under the Seasonal Workers Programme (SWP) unable to return home	Number of Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) migrant workers	Number of Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) migrant workers
Fiji	145	220	445
Kiribati	159	-	-
Papua New Guinea	84	-	-
Samoa	374	-	-
Solomon Islands	117	-	-
Timor-Leste	1,061	-	-
Tonga	1,662	64	1,474
Tuvalu	-	32	113
Vanuatu	3,336	144	3,297
Total	6,938	460	5,329
Number of employed / deployed workers	1,989	74	1,500
Number of renewed visas	2,000	-	3,329

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

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 corridors¹⁴ 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 origin 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 (ADB)

2013 [Facilitating safe labor migration in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Issues, challenges, and forward-looking interventions.](#) ADB, Mandaluyong City.

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)

2020 [Oil Market Report – October 2020.](#) IEA, Paris.

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

2020 [Eight hundred thousand masks to help protect migrant workers from COVID-19.](#) IFRC, Bangkok.

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.
- 2020b [Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook: Navigating the crisis towards a human-centred future of work.](#) ILO, Geneva.

- 2020c [COVID-19: Impact on migrant workers and country response in Myanmar.](#)
- 2020d [COVID-19: Impact on Cambodian migrant workers.](#)
- 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)

- 2020a [Lao People's Democratic Republic Flow Monitoring Report 2020.](#) IOM, Vientiane.
- 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.
- 2021a [Migration Data Portal: Migration data in Southern Asia.](#)
- 2021b [Migration Data Portal: Migration data in South-eastern Asia.](#)

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)

2020 [2020 Annual International Migration and Forced Displacement Trends and Policies Report to the G20.](#) OECD, ILO, UNHCR and 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)

2020 [Ministry of Labour Annual Performance Report.](#)

2021 [Ministry of Labour Annual Performance Report.](#)

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

2020 [International Migration Stock 2020.](#) UN DESA, Population Division, New York. Accessed 1 March 2021.

Weeraratne, B.

2020 [Repatriation and Replacement of Lost Foreign Jobs: Handling Labour Migration in Sri Lanka during COVID-19.](#) *Talking Economics*, 14 May.

World Bank

2020 [Pacific Island Countries in the Era of COVID-19: Macroeconomic Impacts and Job Prospects.](#) World Bank.



Thanks to the new staircase, community members are now able to safely access vital water points. Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh | © IOM 2021

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

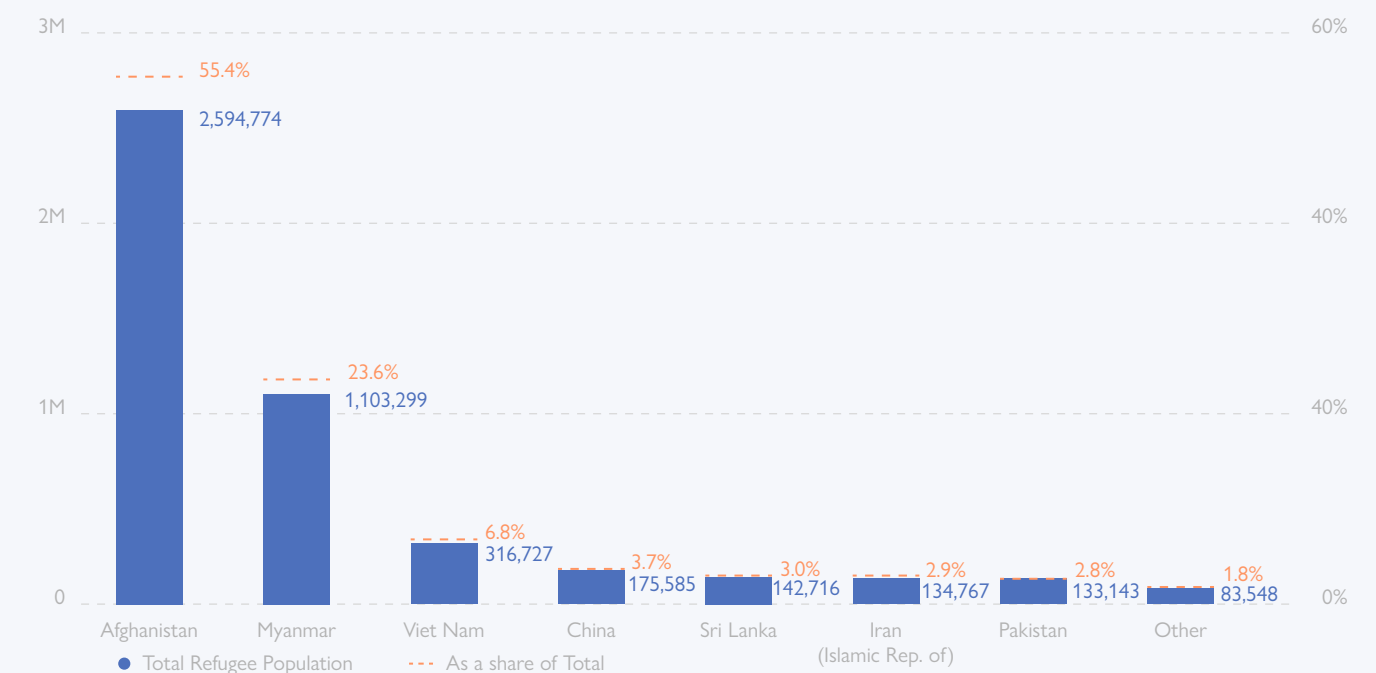
By the end of 2020, over 5.4 million refugees and asylum seekers from countries in Asia and the Pacific region had been forcibly displaced – about 4.7 million of which were refugees and 742,469 asylum seekers, collectively accounting for 22 per cent of the global stock of refugees and asylum seekers (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).

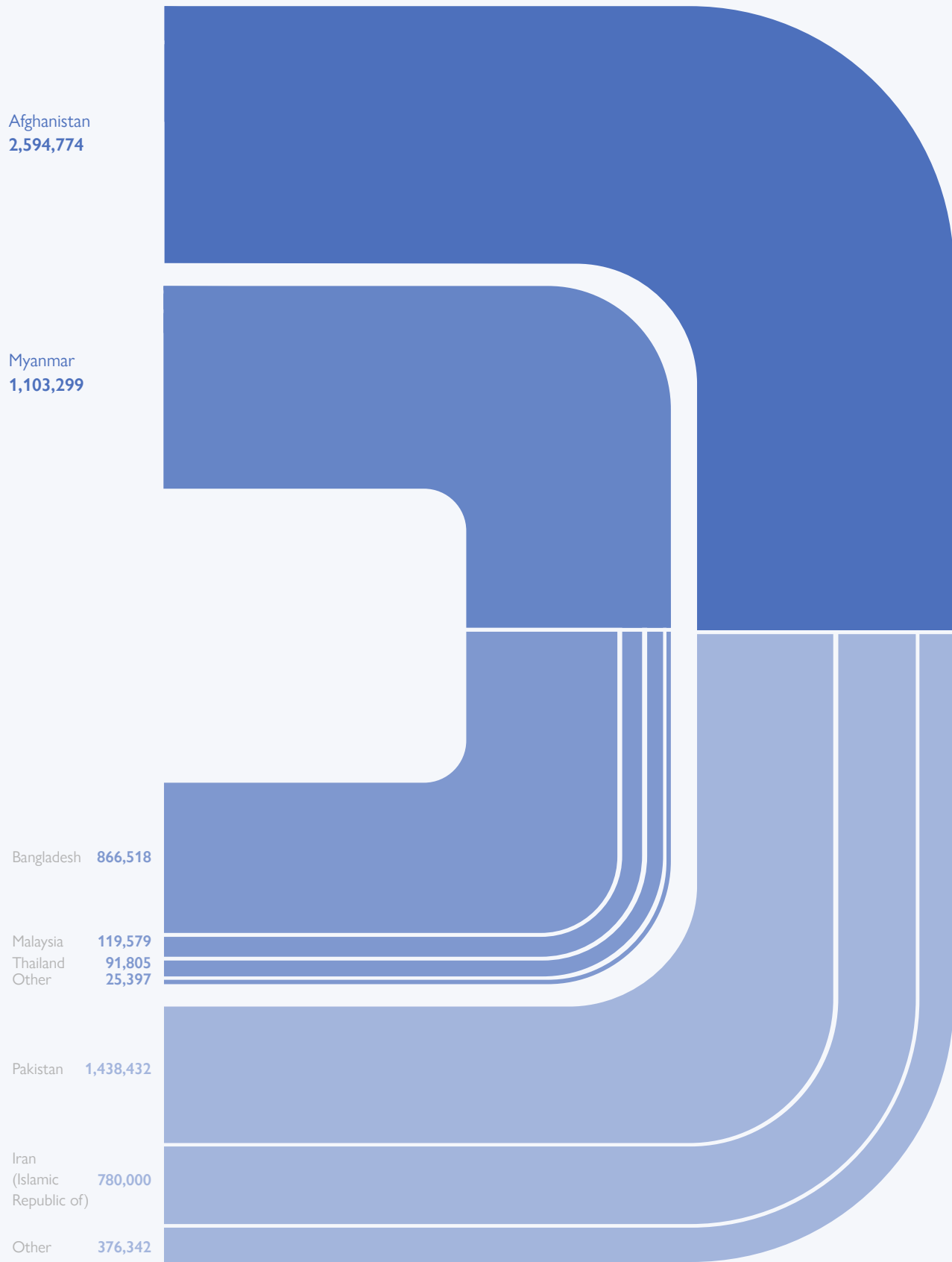
The second major country of origin for refugees from the region was Myanmar, from which 1.1 million refugees fled, mostly to Bangladesh (79%). Overall, the main countries of asylum for refugees from the Asia-Pacific region were, in descending order, Pakistan (1.4 million or 30.7%), Bangladesh (866,518 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



Source: Compiled from UNHCR Refugee Population Statistics Database (2020c).

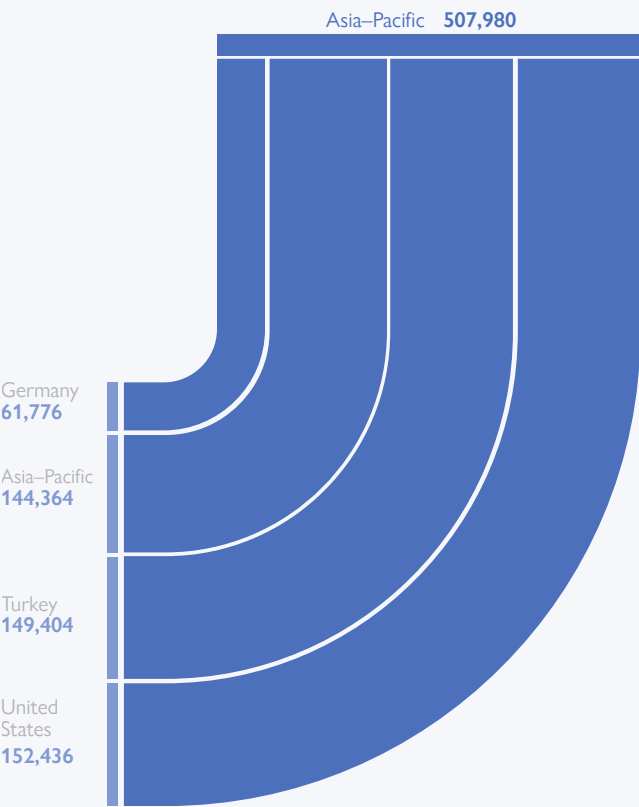
FIGURE 27:
MAIN DESTINATIONS OF REFUGEES FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN 2020



Source: Compiled from UNHCR Refugee Population Statistics Database (2020c).

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).

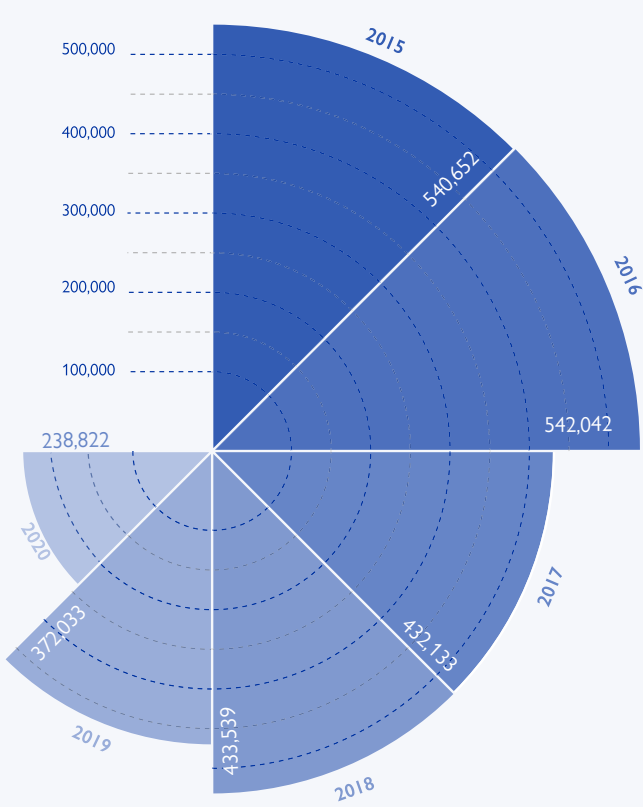
FIGURE 28:
MAIN HOST REGIONS OR COUNTRIES OF ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM ASIA AND THE PACIFIC IN 2020



Source: Compiled from UNHCR Refugee Population Statistics Database (2020c).

In the past five years, the number of asylum applications¹⁵ 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).

FIGURE 29:
NUMBER OF ASYLUM APPLICATIONS MADE BY MIGRANTS FROM ASIA AND THE PACIFIC FROM 2015 TO 2020



Source: Compiled from UNHCR Asylum Application Statistics Database (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 bulk of conflict-induced displacements. From 2019 to 2020, about 404,000 people had been newly displaced by conflict and violence in Afghanistan. Therefore, regardless of all the

efforts to cease armed conflict, forced displacement figures within the country remained high.

Myanmar is another country that has witnessed large-scale internal displacement due to conflict, with a stock of 505,000 IDPs as of December 2020 and 70,000 new displacements ([ibid.](#)). Conflict and violence triggered 58,000 new displacements, mostly caused by confrontations between Myanmar's military and the Arakan Army. Furthermore, clashes between military and armed groups with ethnic affiliations in Shan and Karen states and the Mandalay region caused the displacement of 12,000 persons ([IDMC, 2021b, p.48](#)).

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 21.3 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)

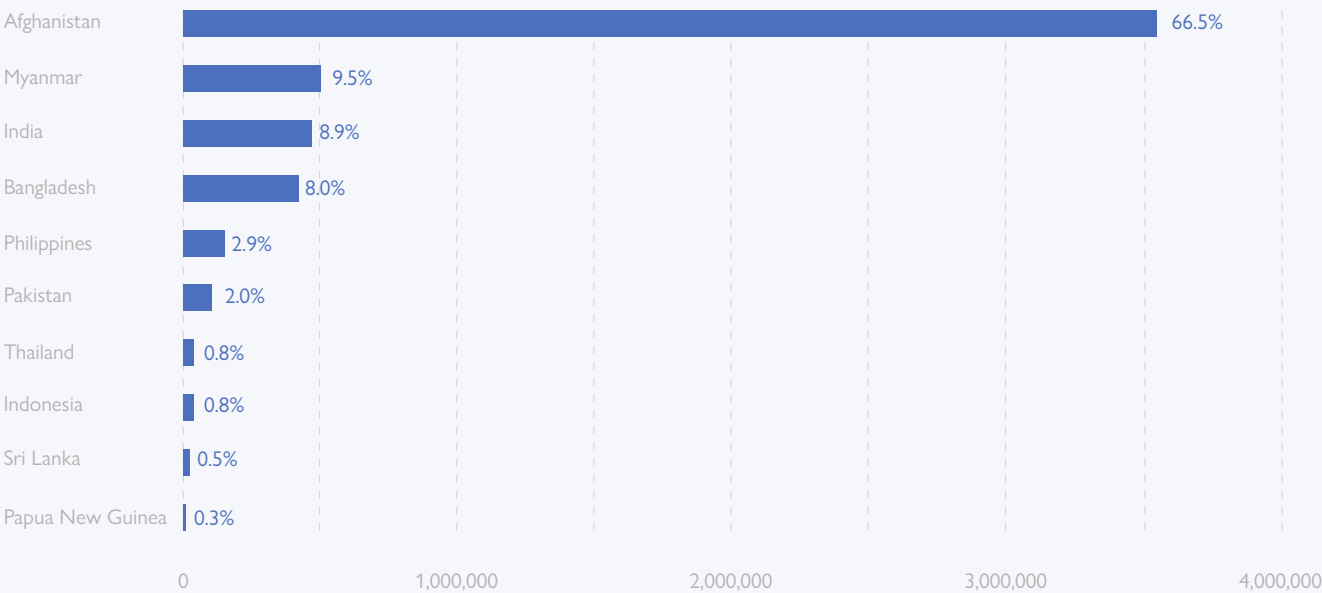
Cyclone Amphan was the largest natural hazard in the Asia-Pacific region (Table 3). This natural event that took place on May 2020, triggered an estimated of 5 million new displacements mainly originating in Bangladesh (2.5 million) and India (2.4 million). From June onwards, monsoon rains and floods 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 ([IOM, 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 first by the Super Typhoon Goni, the world's most powerful tropical cyclone of the year, and 10 days later, by the caterogy-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.

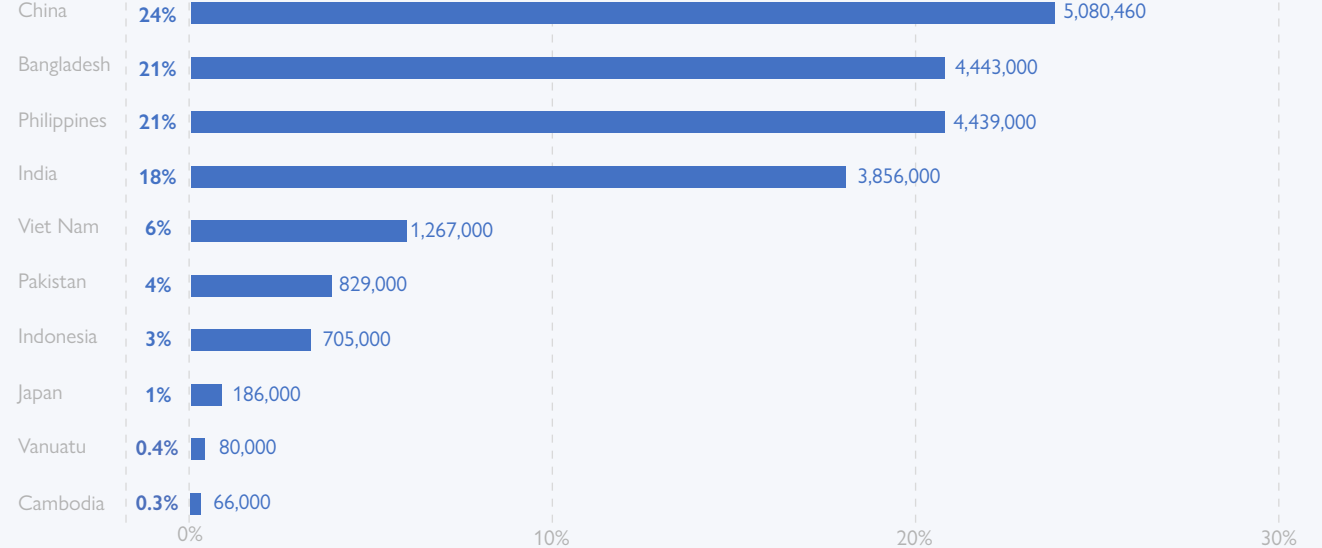
FIGURE 30:
STOCK OF CONFLICT-INDUCED IDPS AS OF DECEMBER 2020



Source: Compiled from IDMC Global Internal Displacement Database (2021a).

16. IDMC stock figures on conflict-induced internal displacement is currently available for Afghanistan, Myanmar, India, Bangladesh, Philippines, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Papua New Guinea.

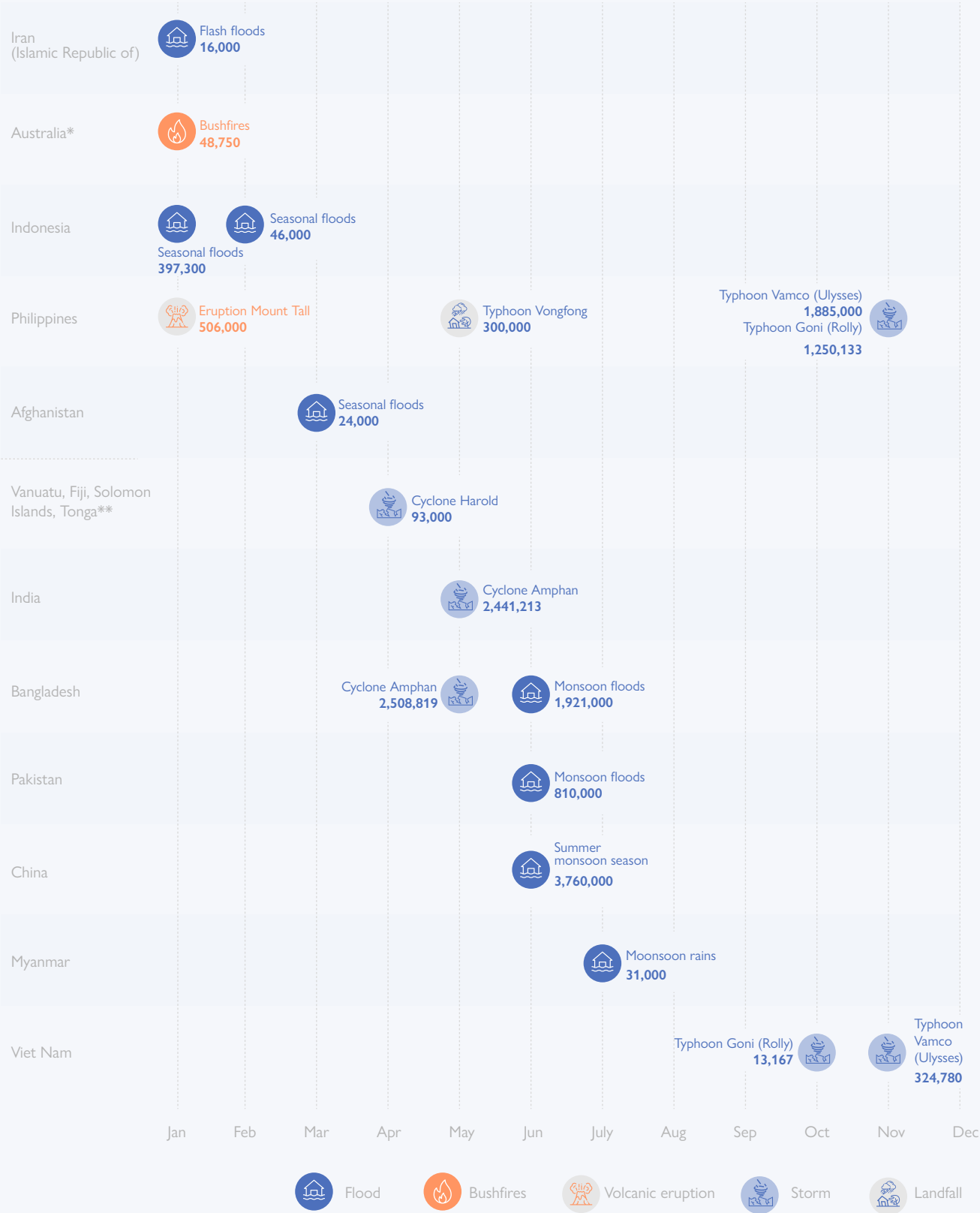
FIGURE 31:
NEW DISPLACEMENTS OF IDPS AS OF DECEMBER 2020



Source: Compiled from IDMC Global Internal Displacement Database (2021a).

17. Xinhua Net, "China battles unprecedented floods around its largest freshwater lake", 14 July 2020.

TABLE 3:
LARGEST DISASTER DISPLACEMENT EVENTS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN 2020



Note: * Bushfires in Australia caused the displacement of 65,000 people from July 2019 to March 2020. Three-quarters of these displacements happened in the first two months of 2020.
** Vanuatu was the hardest hit with 80,000 displacements.

Source: Compiled from IDMC Internal Displacement report: Mid-year 2020 and IDMC GRID 2021.

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 refugee 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 2028. [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.

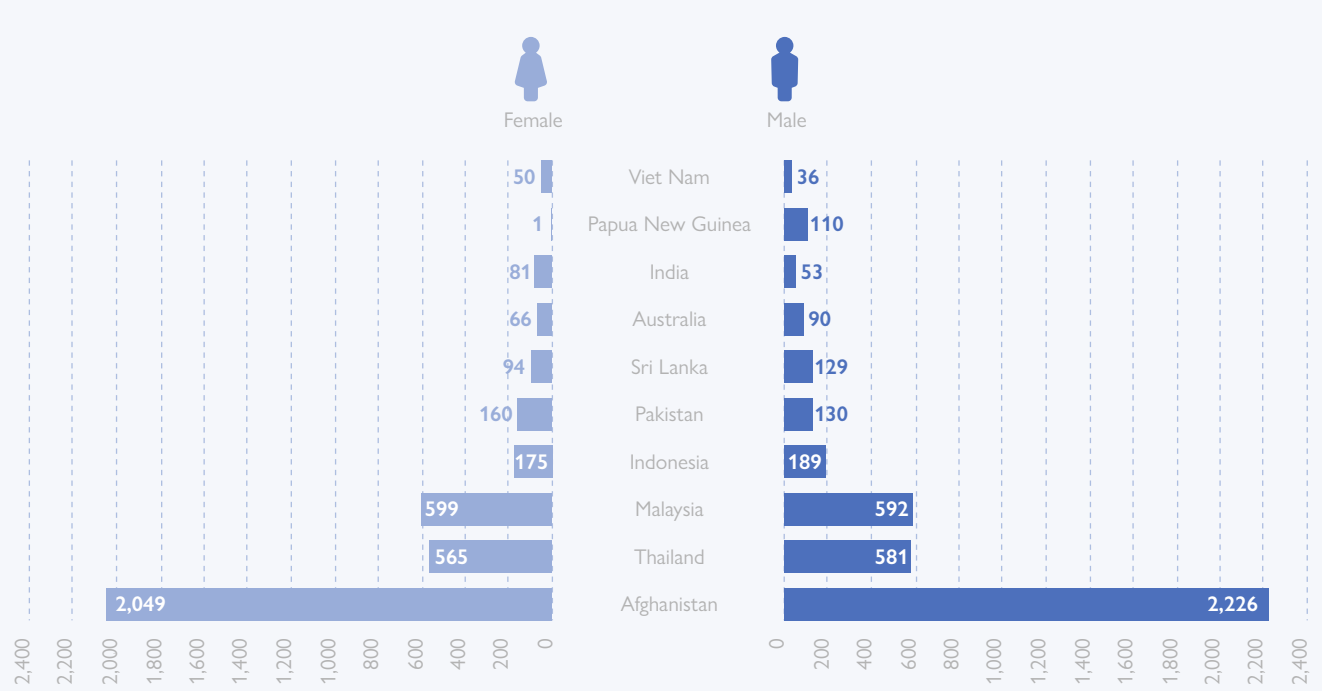
In 2020, IOM supported the resettlement of 11,963 individuals from 17 countries of departure in Asia and the Pacific region to 18 countries of destination across East Asia, Oceania, North America, South America and Europe. Figures 32 and 33 showcase the sex and age group composition of these beneficiaries 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 March¹⁹ 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.).

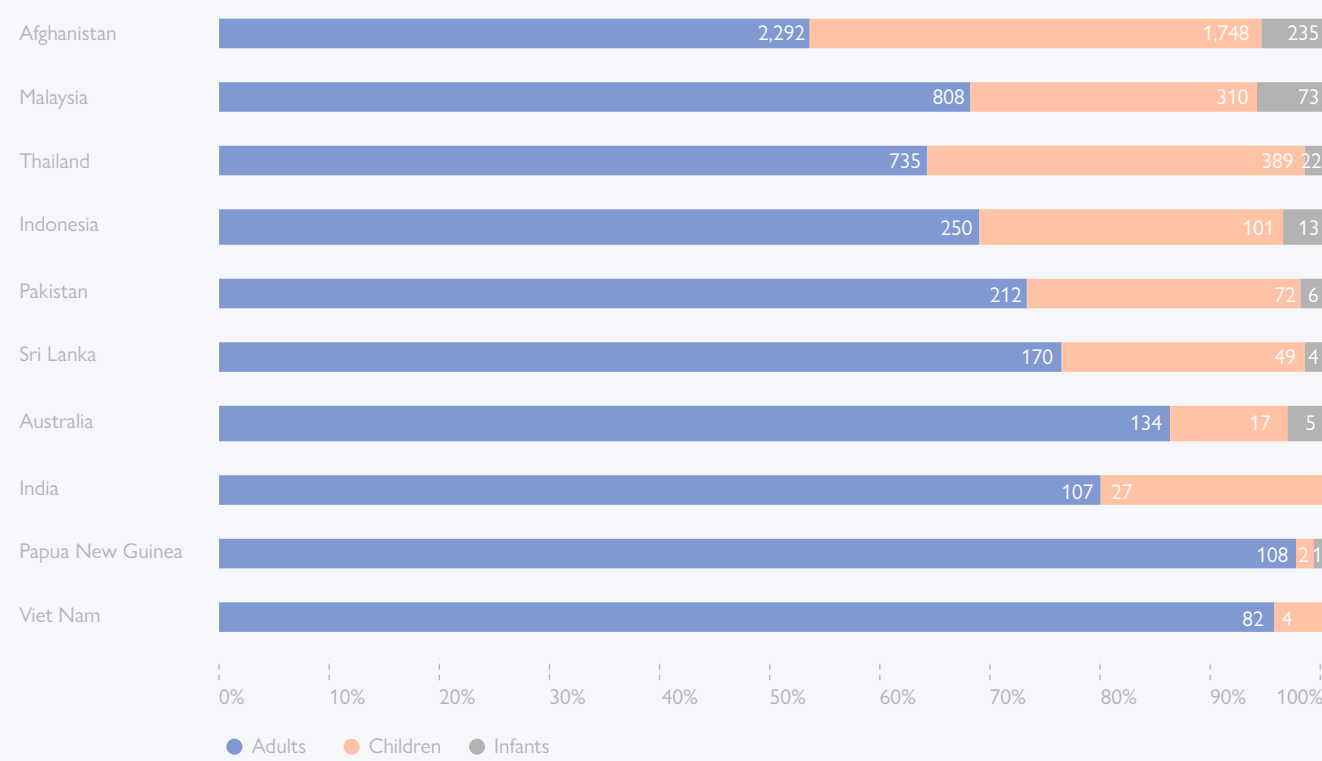
18. UNHCR, "Joint Statement: UN refugee chief Grandi and IOM's Vitorino announce resumption of resettlement travel for refugees", 18 June 2020.
19. UNHCR, "IOM, UNHCR announce temporary suspension of resettlement travel for refugees", 17 March 2020.

FIGURE 32:
TOP 10 ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES OF DEPARTURE FOR IOM-ASSISTED RESETTLEMENT BY SEX OF RESETTLED PERSONS (2020)



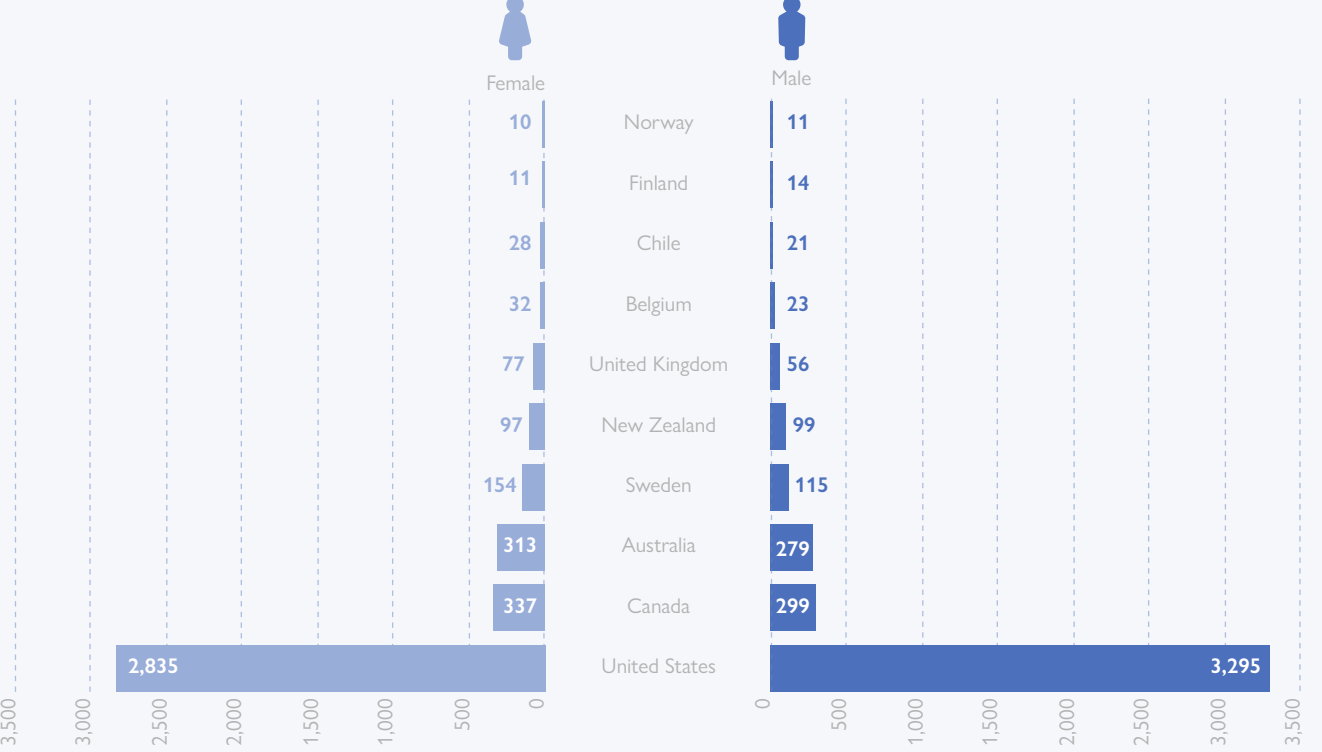
Source: Compiled from IOM Resettlement Data (2021).

FIGURE 33:
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF IOM-ASSISTED RESETTLED PERSONS FROM TOP 10 ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES OF DEPARTURE (2020)



Source: Compiled from IOM Resettlement Data (2021).

FIGURE 34:
TOP 10 DESTINATION COUNTRIES OF IOM-ASSISTED RESETTLEMENT FROM ASIA AND THE PACIFIC BY SEX OF RESETTLED PERSONS (2020)



Source: Compiled from IOM Resettlement Data (2021).

3.2.3 Discussion

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 long-standing 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)

2020 [Internal displacement 2020: Mid-year update](#). IDMC, Geneva.

2021a [Global Internal Displacement Database](#) (accessed 26 May 2021).

2021b [Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021](#). IDMC.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

2019 [Glossary on Migration](#). International Migration Law No. 34. IOM, Geneva.

2020 [Philippines, Taal Volcano Eruption](#). Report No. 2. IOM DTM, 17 February.

2021a Migration Data Portal: [Forced migration or displacement](#).

2021b [IOM Resettlement Support in 2020: European Economic Area](#). IOM, Brussels.

Red Cross EU Office

2020 [Statement: Resettlement can't wait](#). Red Cross EU Office, 21 September.

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)

2020 [Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020: Assessing Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration](#). UN ESCAP, Bangkok.

United National High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

2011 [Resettlement Handbook](#). UNHCR, Geneva.

2020a [Protracted Refugee Situations Explained](#). UNHCR.

2020b [Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2021](#). UNHCR.

2020c [Mid-Year Trends 2020](#). UNHCR.

2021 [Refugee Data Finder](#) (accessed 21 June 2021).

United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)

2020 [Philippines: Typhoon Vamco and Super Typhoon Goni Impact and Response](#). OCHA.



Children of the Carteret Islands, Papua New Guinea | © IOM 2016/Muse MOHAMMED

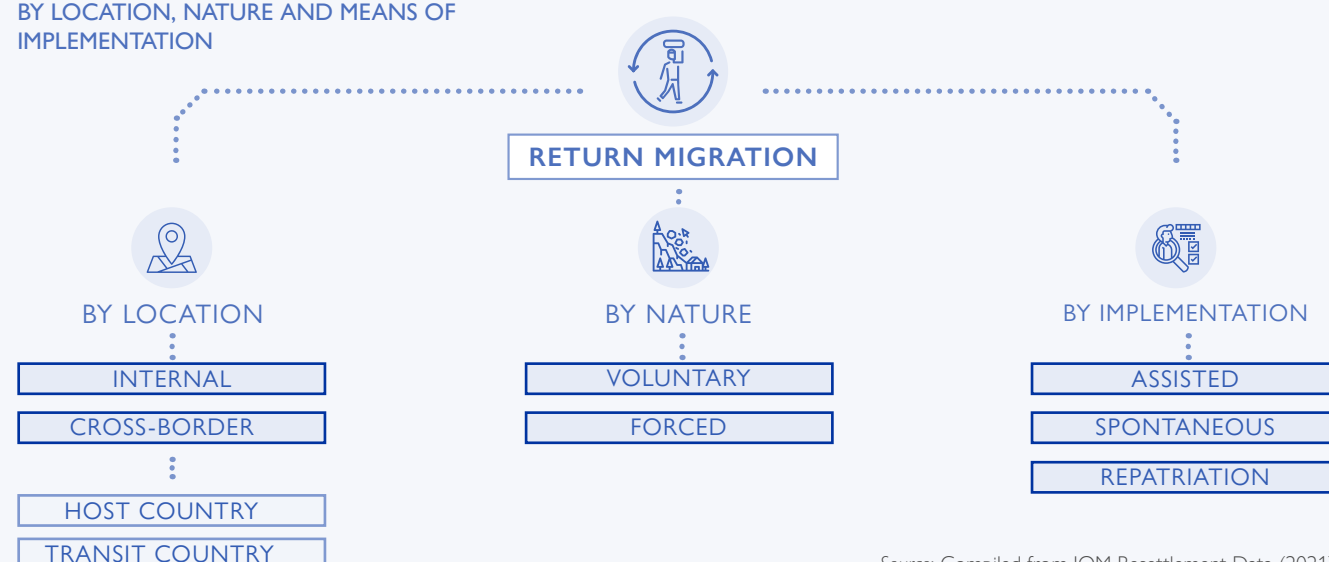
3.3 RETURN MIGRATION

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 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?

FIGURE 35:
VARIOUS TYPES OF RETURN MIGRATION
BY LOCATION, NATURE AND MEANS OF
IMPLEMENTATION



Source: Compiled from IOM Resettlement Data (2021).

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, 2020a). 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.²⁰
- 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.²¹
- 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.²²

20. The Irrawaddy, "Around 800 Myanmar Migrants Stranded in Jordan Without Work Amid COVID-19 Lockdown", 29 June 2020.

21. The Kathmandu Post, "Court issues interim order to rescue workers stranded abroad", 17 April 2020.

22. The Phnom Penh Post, "Japan grants visa extensions to stranded foreign residents", 6 April 2020.

- 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
- 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 Warikawku 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

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

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.

23. Newage Bangladesh, "Lockdown leaves many Bangladesh nationals stranded abroad", 4 April 2020.

24. All Africa, "Thousands Students On State Scholarship Stranded in China as Govt Fails to Pay Airfares", 2 July 2020.

25. The Economic Times, "West Bengal government refuses to allow Indian citizens to re-enter via land border with Bangladesh", 24 July 2020.

26. Bangkok Post, "People leaving Phuket need certificates", 2 May 2020.

27. India Today, "67 Shramik Special trains run so far, 21 more to go today: Railways", 5 May 2020.

28. Reuters, "Thousands of stranded Filipinos crammed into baseball stadium amid coronavirus risks", 25 July 2020.

29. Eleven Myanmar, "Over 150 workers stranded as Kayah State denies entry", 14 December 2020.

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

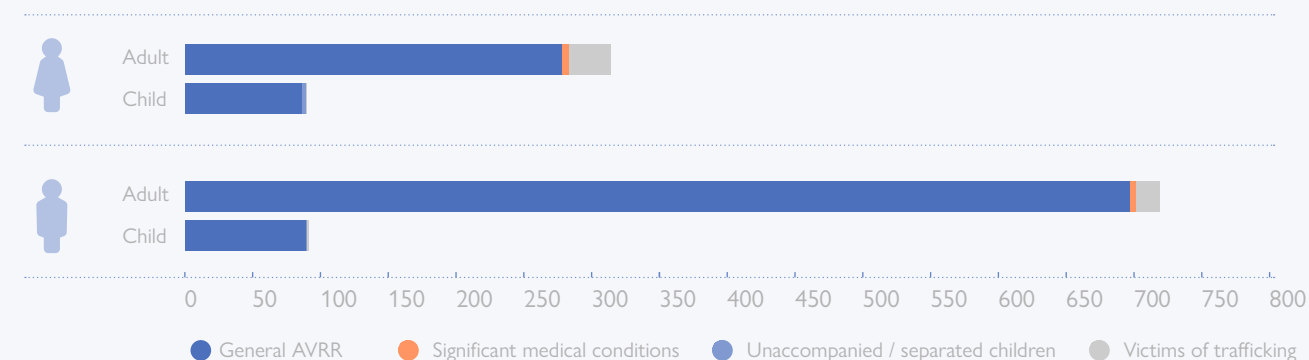
As the largest provider of assisted voluntary return (AVR) and assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes worldwide, IOM's operational data (2021d) provide insights into cross-border assisted voluntary return as one specific type of voluntary return. Assistance is provided to migrants 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 AVRR 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.

FIGURE 36:
NUMBER OF IOM-ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURNS HOSTED IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION BY TYPE, GENDER AND AGE (2020)

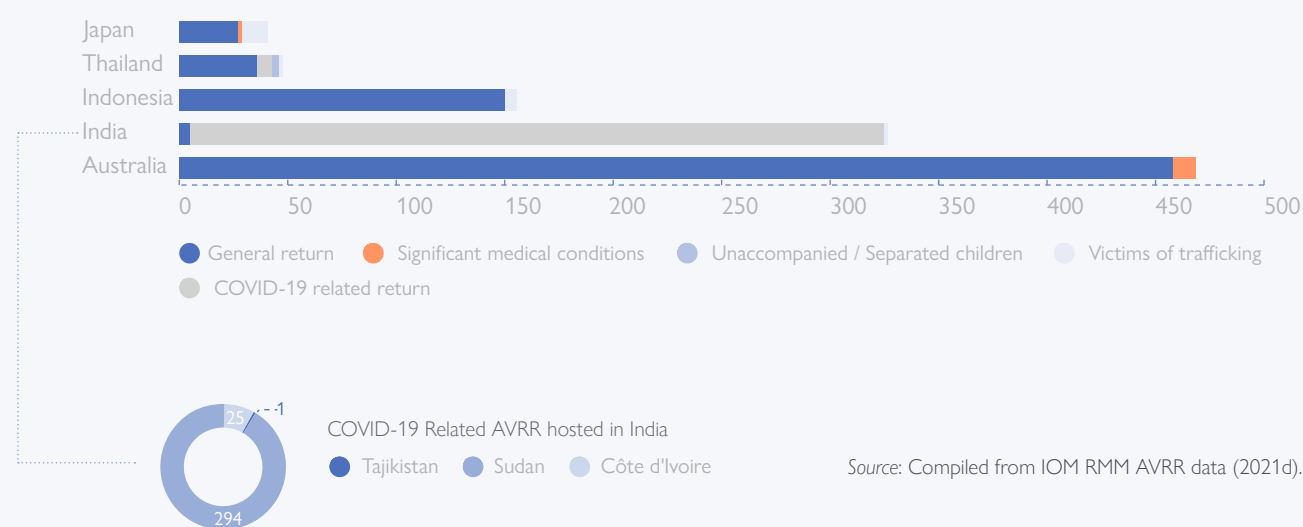


Source: Compiled from IOM RMM AVRR data (2021d).

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.

FIGURE 37:
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)

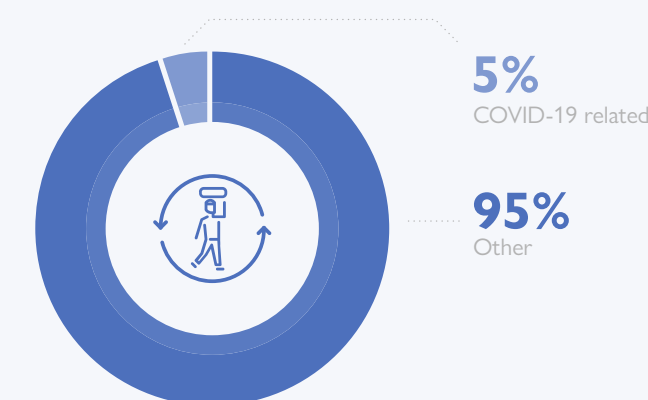


Asia-Pacific as countries of origin

The number of assisted voluntary returnees originating from Asia and the Pacific was five times higher than those departing from it – a total 6,440 voluntary returnees assisted by IOM worldwide in 2020 originated from and returned to 21 Asia-Pacific countries. The relative proportion of females is smaller (18% in relation to 33% hosted in the region). While the majority were adults, children represented 11 per cent of these returnees. Five per cent of all cases were classified as COVID-19 related returns (Figure 38). Furthermore, 209 return cases were directly associated with significant medical conditions, about 10 per cent of which were attributed to COVID-19 (Figure 39). Only 10 cases were assisted returns of unaccompanied or separated children.

IOM Asia-Pacific Regional Data Hub

FIGURE 38:
COVID-19 RELATED RETURNS AS A SHARE OF ALL IOM-ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURNS TO ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES (2020); (N=6,440)



Bangladesh (22.9%), Pakistan (21.8%), Afghanistan (13.8%), the Islamic Republic of Iran (10%) and Mongolia (8.2%) were the major origin countries of these assisted voluntary returnees in the region, collectively accounting for over 76 per cent of assisted voluntary returns originating from the region. Out of the 75 returns of victims of trafficking, 21 originated from Bangladesh (Figure 40) and 18 from the Philippines.

FIGURE 39:
DISTRIBUTION OF COVID-19 RELATED VOLUNTARY RETURNS TO ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES BY TYPE OF RETURNEES (2020); (N=309)

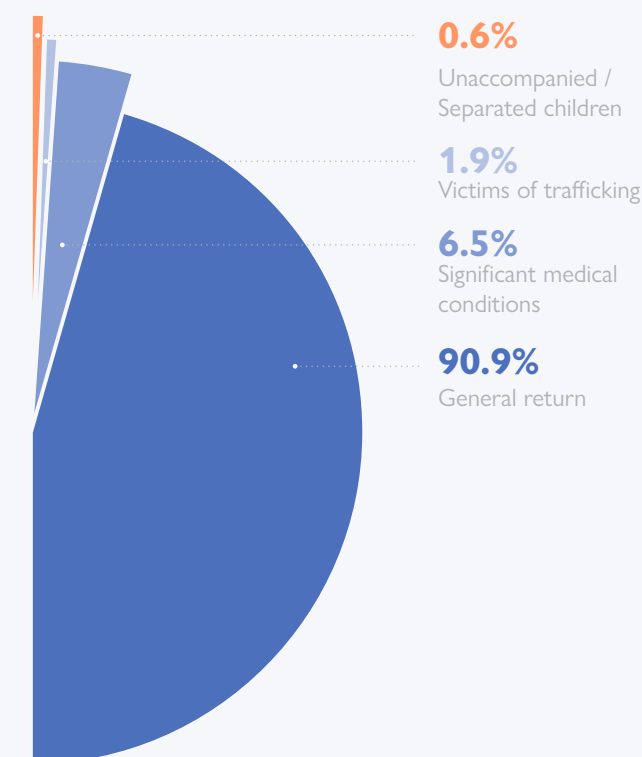
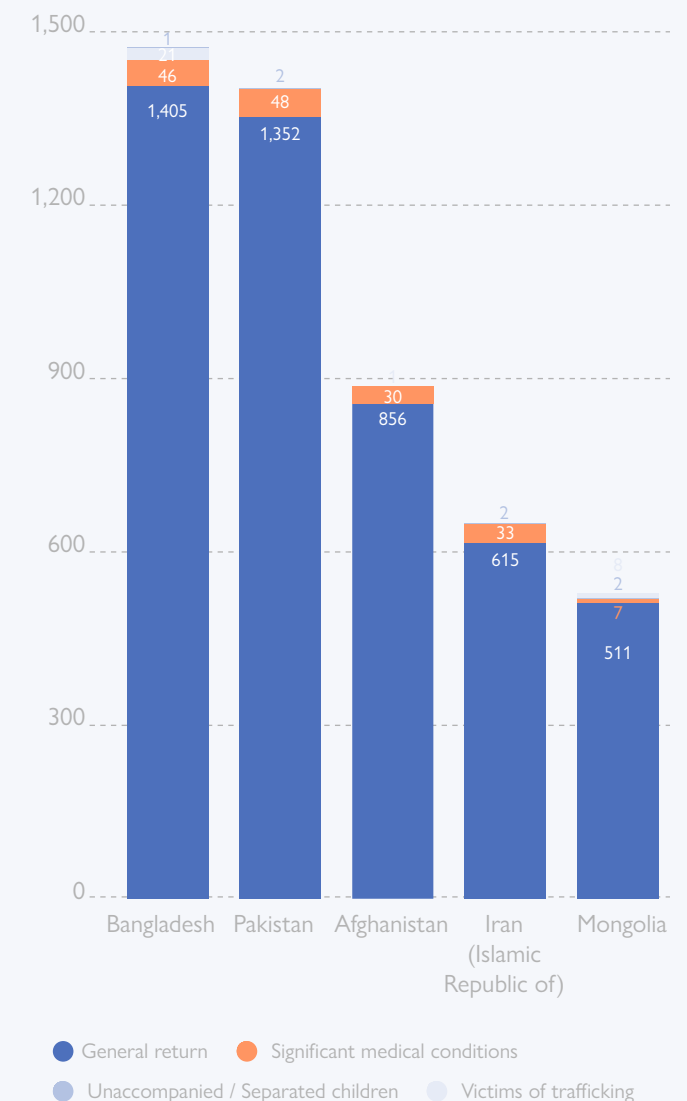


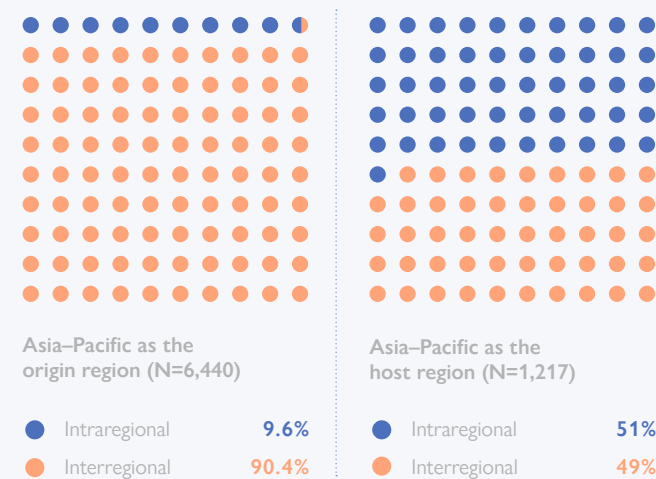
FIGURE 40:
TOP 5 ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF IOM-ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURNS BY TYPE OF RETURNEES (2020)



Intraregional return

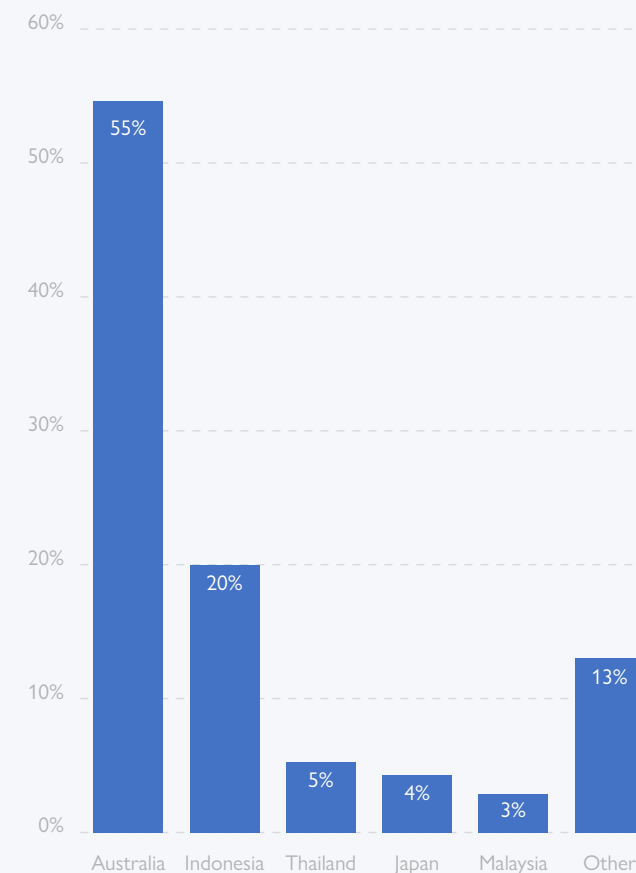
Slightly over half of all 1,217 IOM-assisted voluntary returnees hosted in the Asia-Pacific region were intraregional returns (Figure 41), meaning their countries of origin were within the Asia-Pacific region. Half of them were hosted in Australia, and another one fifth in Indonesia (Figure 42).

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



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

FIGURE 42:
MAJOR HOST COUNTRIES OF INTRAREGIONAL
VOLUNTARY ASSISTED RETURNS (2020); (N=621)



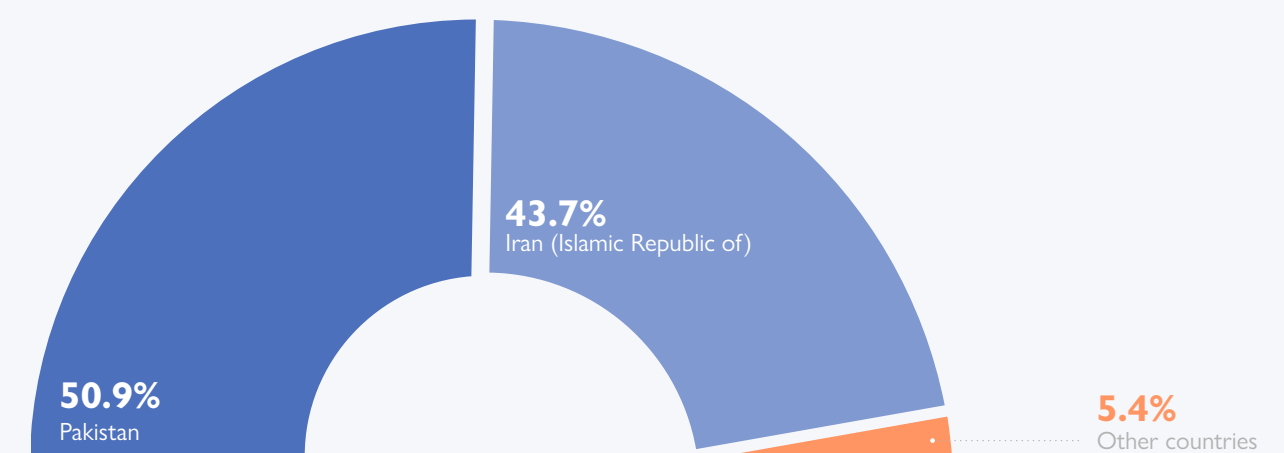
Source: Compiled from IOM RMM AVRR data (2021d).

3.3.2.2 VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

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

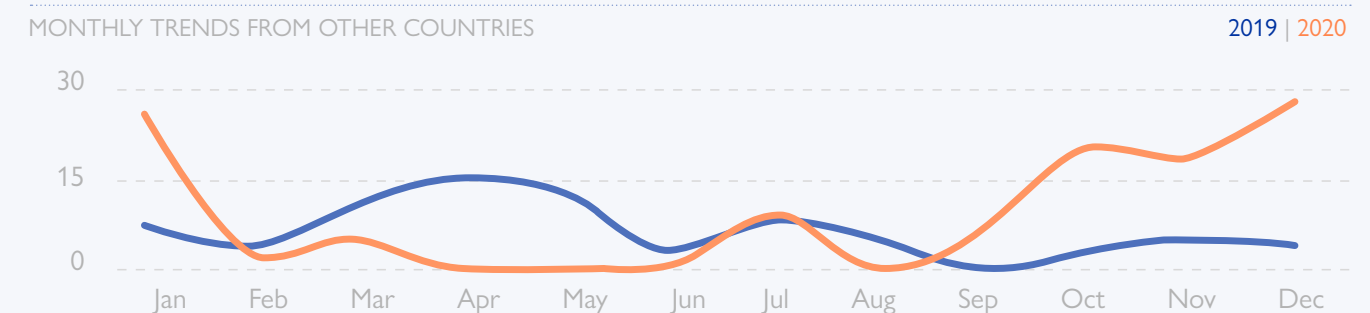
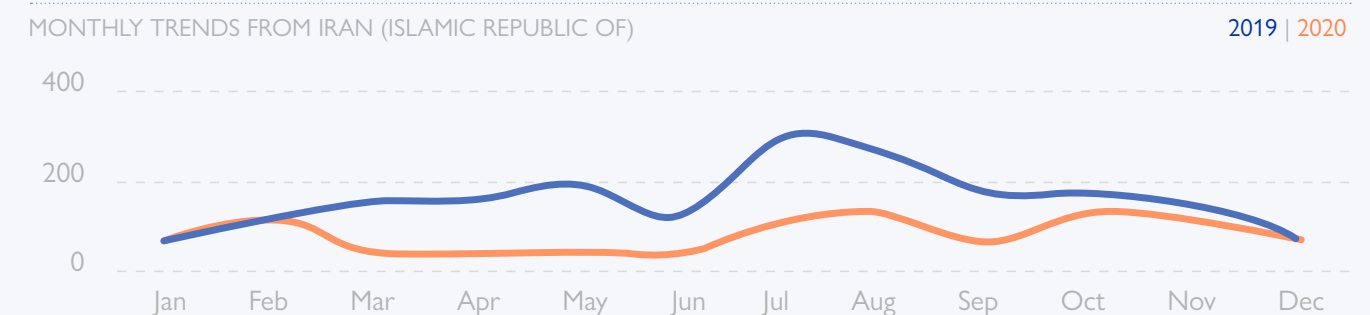
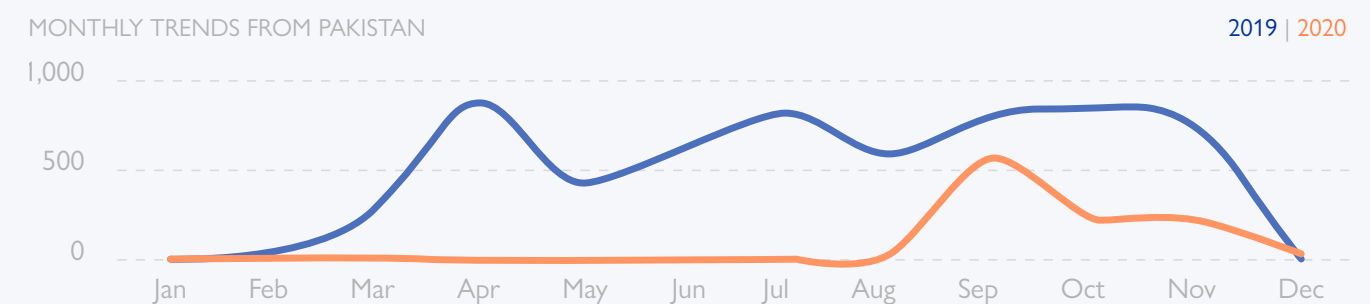
compared with that of 2019. Most of those who voluntarily repatriated in 2020 returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Figure 43). the monthly number of voluntary repatriations in the early half of 2020 remained at a low level compared with the same period in 2019 – after which an upward trend was seen as of July 2020 (Figure 44).

FIGURE 43:
COUNTRY OF PREVIOUS RESIDENCE PRIOR TO VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION OF REGISTERED AFGHAN REFUGEES (2020); (N=2,147)



Source: Compiled from UNHCR Voluntary Repatriation Return Response (2020a).

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).

3.3.3 Forced Return

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 Jammu and informed of plans to deport them to Myanmar after police raids in camps in early March 2020 (*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

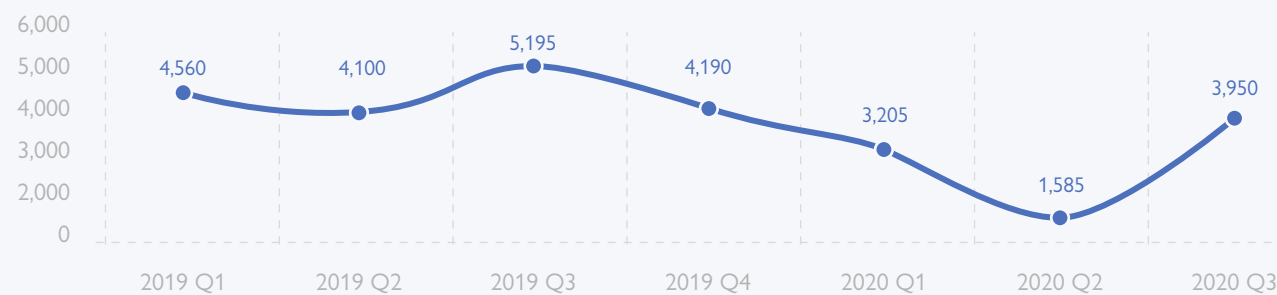
law from international and regional actors ([Global Detention Project, 2021](#)). Overall, systematic reporting of the situation or the scale of forced return in the Asia-Pacific region remains lacking or hardly accessible.

Regional snapshot:
Europe as the host region

Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, provides regular updates on return from European countries, allowing us to probe into the trends of forced return from Europe (as the host region) to Asia and the Pacific (as the region of origin).

Quarterly data from 14 European countries³⁰ suggest that a total of 8,740 nationals of Asia-Pacific countries returned following an order to leave between the first and third quarter of 2020. Comparing the same period (Q1–Q3) in 2019 and 2020, a drop of 36.9 per cent was observed. A closer look at the trend from the first quarter of 2019 up to the third quarter of 2020 (Figure 45) reveals an even sharper decline of almost 70 per cent between the peak in the third quarter of 2019 and the second quarter of 2020, after which a catch-up towards the level in the second quarter of 2019 emerged in the third quarter of 2020. To a certain extent, this trend might reflect the influence of the COVID-19 emergency on the enforcement of returns of foreign nationals, especially when many parts of Europe were hit by COVID-19 in the first and second quarter of 2020.

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



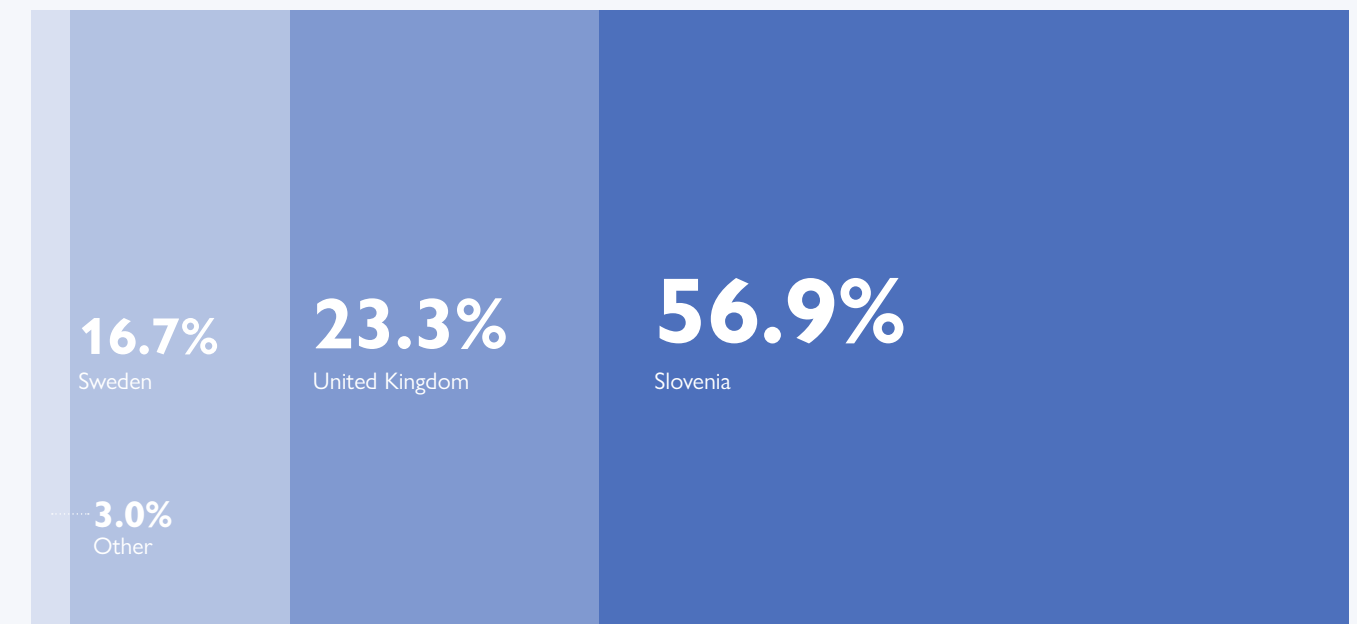
Source: Compiled from Eurostat (2020).

30. Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, United Kingdom.

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

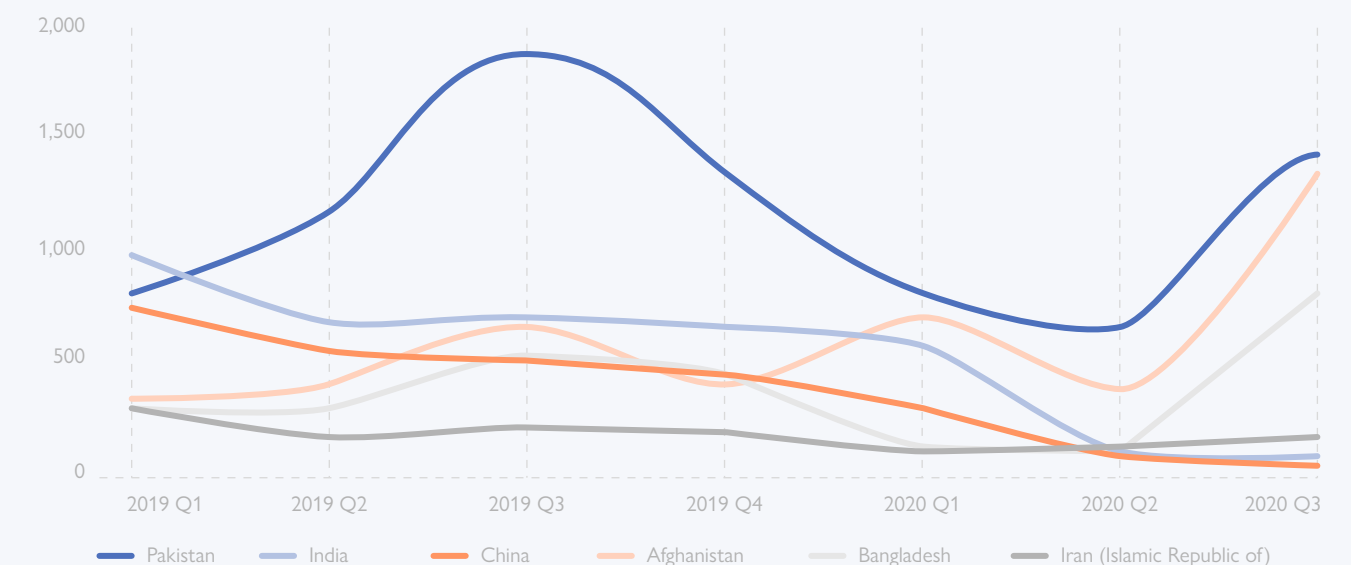
(27.9%), Bangladesh (12%), India (8.8%), China (4.9%) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (4.6%). For most, a similar trend of decline was observed as of the second quarter of 2020. Afghanistan, as the country of citizenship, was the only exception, with an increase (by 32.3%) in the total number of enforced 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).

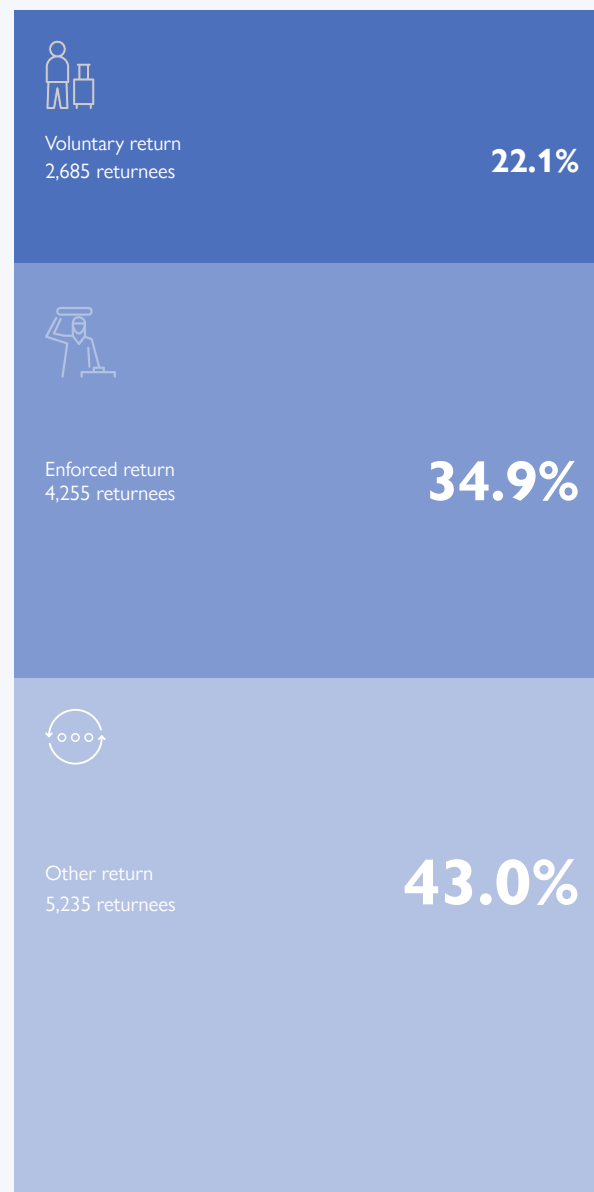
FIGURE 47:
TOP 5 COUNTRIES OF CITIZENSHIP OF ENFORCED RETURNS FROM 14 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES (2019 Q1–2020 Q3)



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

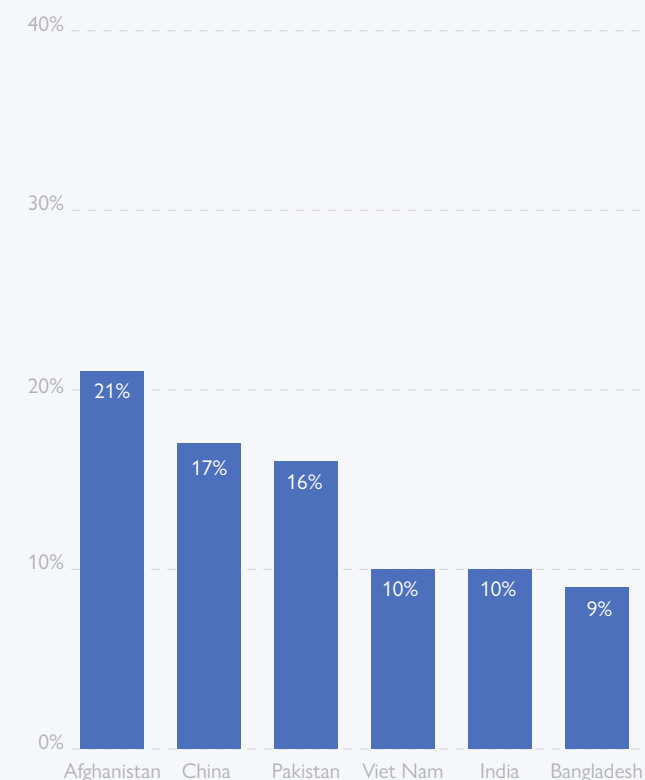
FIGURE 48:
RETURNEES FROM EU WITH ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES AS
COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP BY TYPE OF RETURN (2019)



Source: Compiled from Eurostat Database (2020).

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



Source: Compiled from Eurostat Database (2020).

Country snapshot: Afghanistan

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,

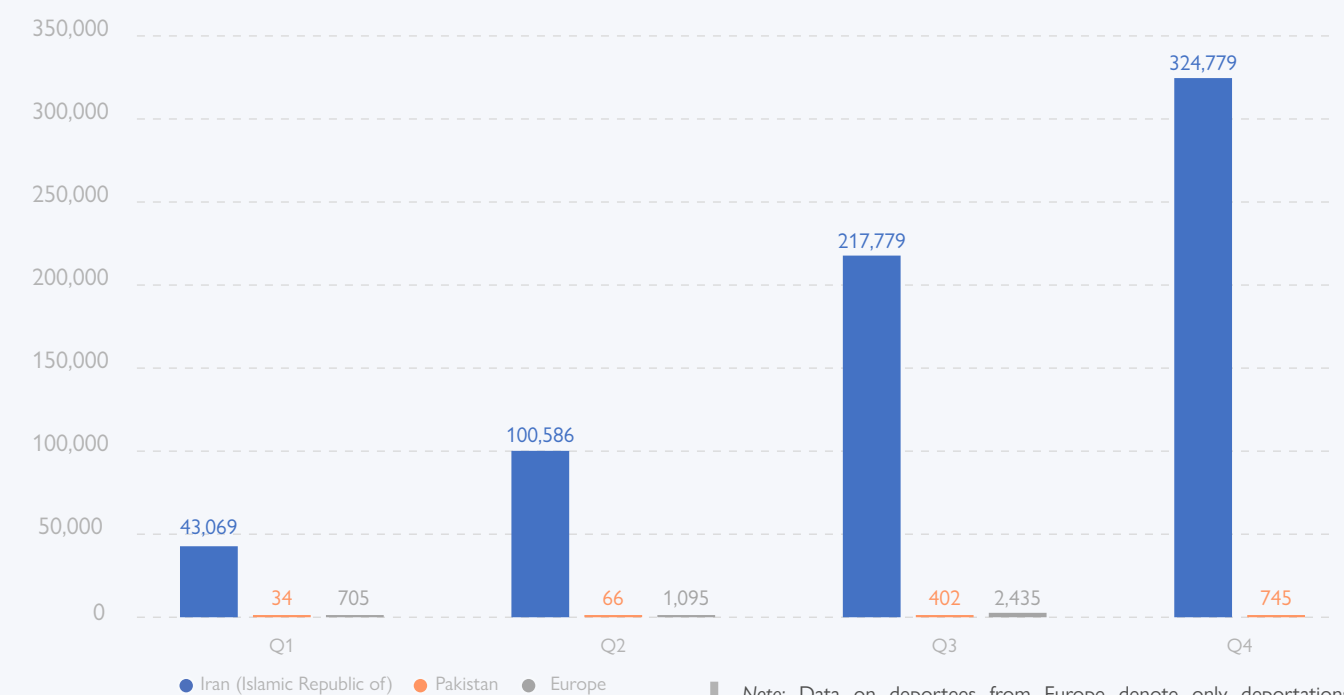
2017). Several factors and developments in recent years and in 2020 could potentially explain the mass forced return of Afghans. Afghans constituted the second largest group of asylum seekers arriving in Europe as of 2020 (Chatham House, 2020), who, should their asylum application be rejected, do not 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, national 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, 2020b), 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.

FIGURE 50:
CUMULATIVE COUNT OF RECORDED INFLOW OF DEPORTED AFGHANS BY COUNTRY OR REGION OF DEPARTURE
(Q1–Q4 2020)



Note: Data on deportees from Europe denote only deportations implemented in Europe without direct indication of arrival in Afghanistan.
Source: Compiled from IOM (2020c) and Eurostat (2020).

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.

3.3.4

The Link Between COVID-19 and Return Migration

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).³² 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 internal 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 returned 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.

FIGURE 51:
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS AND THE SHARE OF FEMALE RESPONDENTS BY COUNTRY



Source: IOM Returning Migrants Survey (2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g, 2021e).

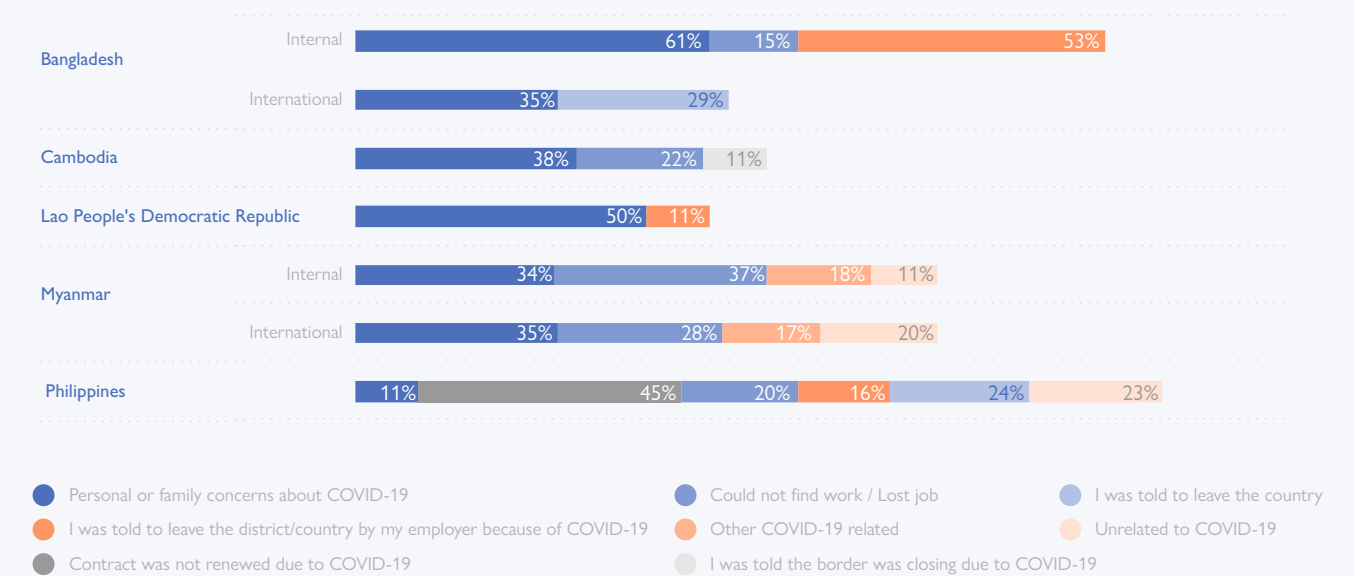
Among respondents who returned in 2020, a vast majority attributed their return either directly or indirectly to the COVID-19 pandemic. In all cases, reasons directly related to COVID-19 contributed to at least 35 per cent of the cited reasons for return (Figure 52), and accounted for 89 per cent, 80 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 internal returnees to Bangladesh, 52 per cent of international returnees to Myanmar, and 60 per cent of internal returnees

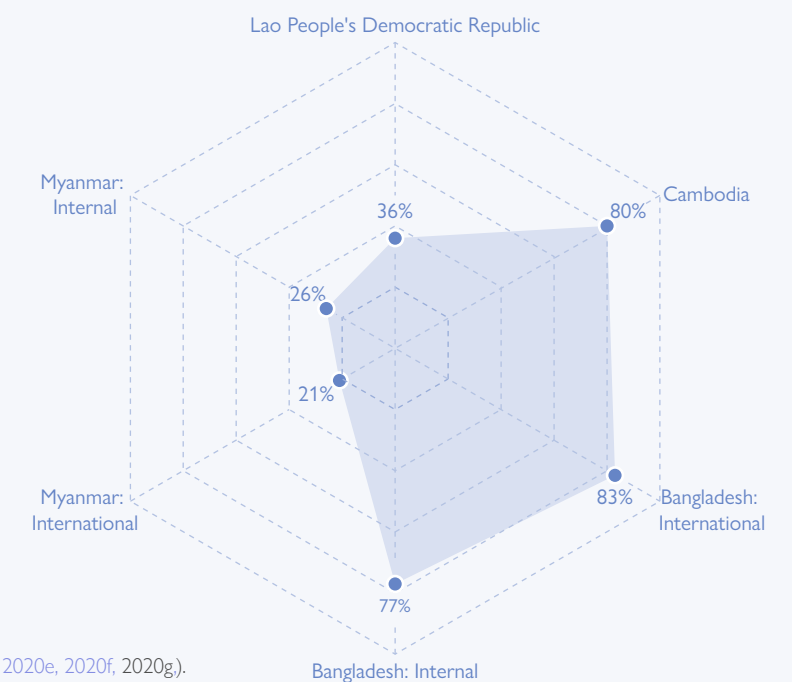
to Myanmar. Overseas Filipino workers were not asked whether remigration plans were directly affected by the pandemic; however, 48 per cent of them indicated their plan to re-migrate in the future. These findings further reflect the influence of the pandemic not only as a trigger of the decision to return, but also as a condition on current mobilities and future migration plan.

FIGURE 52:
MAIN REASONS FOR RETURN IN RELATION TO COVID-19 (MULTIPLE ANSWERS POSSIBLE EXCEPT FOR MYANMAR)



Source: Compiled from IOM Returning Migrants Survey (2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g, 2021e).

FIGURE 53:
INTENTION TO REMIGRATE AS SOON AS THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC OR RELATED TRAVEL
RESTRICTIONS END AMONG INTERVIEWEES



Source: Calculated from IOM Returning Migrants Survey (2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2020g).

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 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 5.1](#)), 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

- 2020 [The EU and the politics of migration management in Afghanistan](#). Asia-Pacific Programme and Europe Programme Research Paper.

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

- 2021 [Global Detention Project Annual Report 2020](#). Global Detention Project, Geneva.
- 2020 [COVID-19 Global Immigration Detention Platform](#). Global Detention Project, Geneva.

Institute for Economics and Peace

- 2020 [Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World](#). IEP, Sydney.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

- 2019 [Glossary on Migration](#). International Migration Law No. 34. IOM, Geneva.
- 2020a [Return Task Force: COVID-19 Impact on Stranded Migrants](#). IOM.
- 2020b [Methodological Framework used in Displacement Tracking Matrix Operations for reporting Stranded Vulnerable Population Caseloads in Response to COVID-19](#). IOM.
- 2020c [Return of Undocumented Afghans: Weekly Situation Report 20-31 December 2020](#). (accessed 21 June 2021).
- 2020d [Bangladesh – Rapid Assessment: Needs and Vulnerabilities of International Return Migrants in Brahmanbaria \(May-June 2020\)](#). IOM, Bangkok.
- 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.
- 2021c [IOM Points of Entry Global Reference Database](#) (accessed 11 June 2021). Unpublished data.
- 2021d [Resettlement and Movement Management Division \(RMM\) Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration \(AVRR\) Data](#) (accessed 1 April 2021). Unpublished data.
- 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.

- 2017 [Taking Stock of Assisted Voluntary Return from Europe: Decision Making, Reintegration and Sustainable Return – Time for a Paradigm Shift](#). Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Research, RSCAS 2017/31.

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

- 2020 [The EU and the politics of migration management in Afghanistan](#). Asia-Pacific Programme and Europe Programme. Research Paper. Chatham House.

Samuel Hall

- 2020 [Coming back to Afghanistan: Deported Minors' Needs at a Time of COVID-19](#). Samuel Hall.

United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

- 2020a [Afghanistan: Voluntary Repatriation Snapshot – December 2020](#). UNHCR.
- 2020b [UNHCR Afghanistan: Border Monitoring Update – 13 December–19 December 2020](#). UNHCR.



The intensity and pattern of rainfalls has affected the cultivation of rice, the main product in the Udaipur area of Nepal, forcing thousands of families to migrate abroad to work in other sectors | © IOM 2016/Amanda NERO

3.4 IRREGULAR MIGRATION

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.

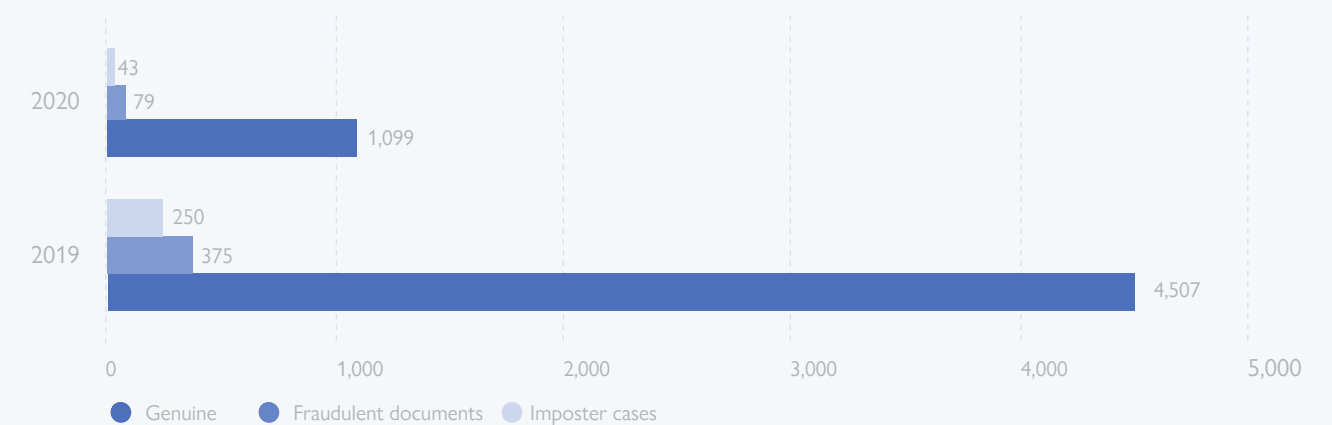
The data collected from the Document Examination Support Center (DESC) Initiative³³ show a dramatic decrease in the number of secondary inspections of passport travel documents in the Asia and Pacific region between 2019 and 2020. The DESC Initiative collects data on passport inspections carried out through the IOM Verifier TD&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 A recent notable case happened in June 2020, when a couple was arrested for visa forgery and in possession of 55 rubber stamps with sigils of different Thai Government departments.³⁵

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 T&B SYSTEM BY RESULT



Source: Verifier TD&B Newsletter 034/March 2021, IOM Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

3.4.2 Migrant Smuggling

Migrant smuggling is defined as the act of enabling the irregular entry of another person for financial or material gain (UN, 2000). Irregular migration is deeply intertwined with the smuggling of migrants, since, for instance, certain migration routes (such as those requiring a sea crossing) may be more difficult to travel without the assistance of smugglers.

While a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of COVID-19 on migrant smuggling is still not feasible, the available information suggests that the repercussions of the pandemic are complex and far-reaching. First, mobility restrictions have been an integral part of migration enforcement regulations since the start of the pandemic. Measures have included closures and restrictions at land, sea and air borders, which have influenced the modus operandi of organized crime groups involved in migrant smuggling. This situation has increased the challenges and risks associated to irregular migration. Rising unemployment in host countries has left migrants vulnerable – as their status often depends on their employment – and possibly driven them to resort to smuggling services.

Even though migrant smuggling is a 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 using them to migrate. In most cases, migrants were put in contact with smugglers by family or friends in Afghanistan (76%) or were approached by smugglers themselves (11%). The dangerous nature of migration in such context is reflected in migrants’ expectations about problems they would

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%) (*ibid.*).

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 returnee migrants in Afghanistan (MMC, 2020b).³⁷ 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,³⁸ 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.

3.4.3 Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the context in which migrants, smuggling networks and law enforcement authorities operate, leading to unforeseen developments for irregular migration. New border control policies and travel restrictions must consider the fact that any systematic closure of avenues for safe and regular migration will likely increase the demand for smuggling services. Furthermore, criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling adapt their behaviors and strategies in response to specific measures. To effectively contribute to migrants' safety, border control policies must consider the complexity and multidisciplinary aspects of securing borders during a pandemic. Policy and operational decisions to counter irregular migration and smuggling channels need to ensure migrants' well-being and human rights, and to avoid generating unnecessary risks for individuals who decide or are forced to migrate despite the restrictions.

Available evidence suggests that law enforcement authorities would greatly benefit from a deeper transnational coordination designed to collect and share information about potential cases of falsification of travel and health documents. Coordinated actions, such as the introduction of standardized templates for health-related documents, could substantially improve the ability of border control authorities to identify potential fraud cases.

Moreover, intergovernmental cooperation and information sharing are fundamental to extend the data collection capability on irregular migration and migrant smuggling. As of time of writing, data on irregular migration in and from the Asian and Pacific region are scarce and typically outdated, and information on migrant smuggling is even more limited

(UNODC, 2018). Partial systematic information on irregular residence is available for EU countries, but only one of the available indicators – the number of third-country nationals who were ordered to leave – is disaggregated by citizenship, which makes the reconstruction of the origin of irregular migration flows a challenging task. In addition, no centralized data source offers information on irregular migration in the Asia and Pacific region as of today. While some estimates of the stock of irregular migrants have been put forward for some specific countries in given years (UN ESCAP, 2015; IOM, 2016), no information on irregular residence or employment, nor on irregular entry attempts at external borders, is generally available. Despite the lack of data, the available literature suggests that a substantial share of the migration flows in Asia and the Pacific is irregular, which makes the accessibility of information on the topic a requirement for well-informed policies.

The recommendations outlined above are crucial to progress in terms of the international community's objectives for sustainable development and governance of migration. Gathering information and knowledge about irregular migration and about the drivers, methods and consequences of migrant smuggling seems fundamental to develop policies that “facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people”, as stated in SDG Target 10.7. Moreover, better coordination among governments and with the international community would allow to strengthen transnational efforts against migrant smuggling, as called for by the Objective 9 of the Global Compact for Migration and the Dimension 6 of the MGI.

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.

38. Verifier TD&B Newsletter #30, March 2020.

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)

2021 [Early Warning Notification – The illicit sales of false negative COVID-19 test certificates.](#) EUROPOL, The Hague.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

2016 [Migrant Smuggling Data and Research: A global review of the emerging evidence Base.](#) IOM, Geneva.

2019 [Glossary on Migration.](#) *International Migration Law No. 34.* IOM, Geneva.

2021 [Afghanistan: Survey on the Drivers of Migration \(SDM\) Round 2](#) (forthcoming).

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)

2000 [Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Conventions against Transnational Organized Crime.](#) UN.

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

2015 [Asia–Pacific Migration Report 2015: Migrants' Contribution to Development.](#) UN ESCAP, Bangkok.

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)

2018 [Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trend and Challenges, Vol 2.](#) UNODC, Bangkok.



A woman stands at the edge of her eroded land in Hashail, Munshiganj district of Bangladesh |© IOM 2007/ Abir ABDULLAH



MIGRATION AND VULNERABILITIES

An elderly Karenni refugee with distinctive earrings
living in Thailand. |© IQM 2009/ Pindie STEPHEN



**SDG
Target**

10.7

Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies



**Global Compact for Migration
Objectives**

7

Address and reduce vulnerabilities in migration



**MGI
Dimensions**

1 and 4

Migrants' rights

Well-being of migrants

COVID-19 has profoundly impacted countries worldwide and in the Asia-Pacific region as a risk multiplier, disproportionately affecting groups in vulnerable situations. Migrants and their families may be particularly prone to the direct and indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Guadagno, 2020), as they often live in more precarious circumstances and are particularly affected by social and economic disruptions (IOM, 2021b). Its impact on migrants is often compounded by the combination of other conditions which confer vulnerability including the situations in which migrants travel or face in countries of origin, transit and destination (UN ESCAP, 2020, p.170).

Interacting with personal, social, situational and structural factors (UN ESCAP, 2020, p.13), migrant's pre-existing socioeconomic situation and protection environment could worsen making them further exposed to the risk of infection and many other vulnerabilities. These effects are likely to vary according to the characteristics of migrants and the stage of migration they are in. In the following section, various types of vulnerabilities encountered by migrants will be discussed, from the direct effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on health, food security, labour market and social conditions of migrants (Section 4.1.1), to the socioeconomic and protection needs of the forcibly displaced populations (Section 4.1.2), trafficking in persons (Section 4.2) and migrant fatalities and disappearances (Section 4.3).

Seasonal internal migration from rural to urban areas in Mongolia | © IOM 2021/B. BYAMBAOCHIR



4.1 EMERGENCIES

4.1.1 Vulnerabilities Related to COVID-19

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 (Kluge 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.

4.1.1.1 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).

TABLE 4:
SUMMARY OF HEALTH-RELATED VULNERABILITIES

Unavailability of accessing appropriate care	Risk of contracting COVID-19
Lack of entitlement to health care	Inadequate sanitation conditions
Language barriers	Overcrowded living conditions
Limited knowledge of options to access health-care treatment	Overreliance on informal communication channels
Reluctance to come forward due to fear of arrest and/or deportation	Lack of personal protective equipment

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 (22.8 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 immigrant population (UN DESA, 2020), 75 per cent of the new confirmed cases in May came from foreigners alone (IOM, 2021d).
- 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 test, 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 organizations³⁹ indicated that access to hygienic 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 hygienic 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).⁴⁰

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.

- 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).

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.

4.1.1.2 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).⁴³
- Returned Nepali migrants residing in poor communities have turned to bartering as a copy mechanism to fill the lack of food and other basic items (The Kathmandu Post, 2020).

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, 2020e, 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 (VWorld 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 (UN ESCAP, 2020, p.175). Irregularity, in turn, makes access to assistance more difficult and increases the risks related a not to COVID-19 (Nyein, 2020).

- 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.⁴⁴
- 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.⁴⁵

- 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).⁴⁶ 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:

TABLE 5:
INCOME AND LIVELIHOOD RELATED VULNERABILITIES

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

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 by 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, 2020d, p.6).

44. Business Inquired, "300,00 Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand jobless due to COVID-19 pandemic", 28 May 2020.

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.



A health worker in front of a medical clinic in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. | © IOM 2020/Monica CHIRIAC

SNAPSHOT:

**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 cramped 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 Kyaukme [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.”

Source: TNI report on Myanmar's cross-border migrant workers and the Covid-19 pandemic (2020).

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 migrants 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 (McCormack et al., 2015; ILO, 2020e). 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.⁴⁷
- 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 employer has cut our wage when [we are] on leave, but will provide us 100 baht (USD 3) a day. While we normally get paid every three months, the employer won’t tell us the exact date [now for our payments]. All our ID and personal documents are with the employer. [We] have only the copies. No one dares to tell the officials”.

– Myanmar man working in fishing in Thailand.

Source: ILO Brief: Experiences of ASEAN Migrant Workers During Covid-19 (2020).

Female migrants constitute a significant proportion of essential and front-line workers during the pandemic, ensuring that people’s basic needs are met. They are often employed in ‘essential’ but low-paid jobs. Women constitute 70 per cent of the 136 million migrant workers globally employed in health and social work jobs – including nurses, doctors and workers in residential care facilities, and support workers such as laundry and cleaning staff, who are exposed daily to the risks of contracting COVID-19 (ILO, 2020a, p.4).

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 (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

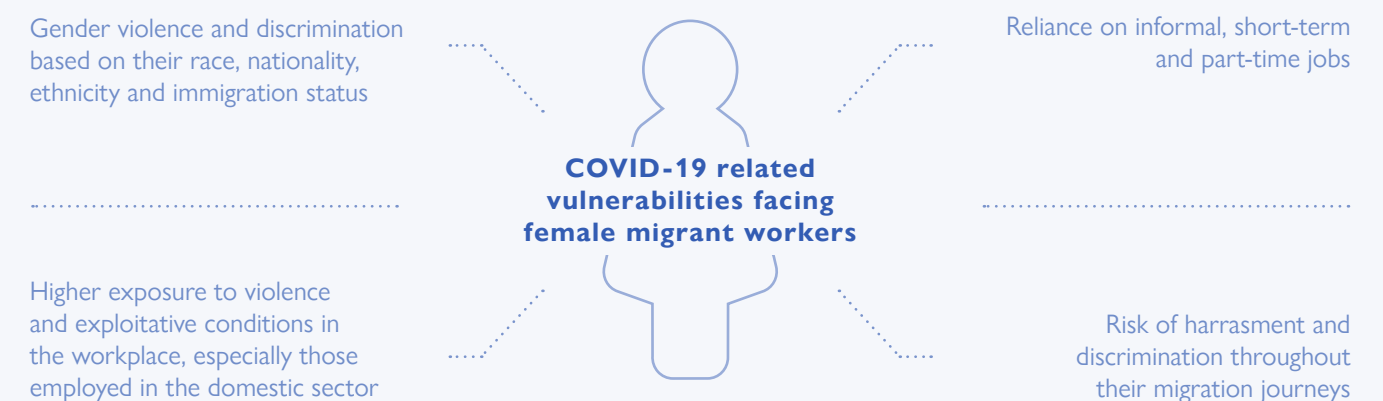
“One survey respondent, a Filipina domestic worker in Kuwait, reported experiencing threats of harassment and violence. She chose to end her employment to return home. One rights violation can be experienced together with many others, and in this case the Filipina domestic worker had also experienced 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.”

Source: ILO Brief: Experiences of ASEAN Migrant Workers During Covid-19 (2020).

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



4.1.1.4 SOCIAL IMPACT

Throughout the course of the pandemic, lockdowns have been imposed (Section 1.1.1) around the world to stop the spread of the virus. Physical distancing measures have isolated migrants as their families and friends often reside in different countries. This situation has also complicated access to cultural, religious and social touchstones. Migrants have found themselves marginalized not only from health and economic assistance but also from social support from their host communities. Negative views and xenophobic attitudes toward migrants, combined with various vulnerabilities and barriers, are likely to be further aggravated by COVID-19 (UN ESCAP, 2020). Inaccurate public perceptions and misinformation about migrants being carriers of the virus have been wrongly disseminated across the region.

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-Pena 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

48. Malay Mail, “Most Malaysian view migrants as Covid-19 infection threat, survey shows”, 16 November 2020.

49. Free Malaysia Today, “Wristbands will just further stigmatise migrant workers, say activist”, 19 November 2020.

- 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 (IFRC, UN OCHA and WHO, 2020, p.12).⁵⁰
- 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.⁵¹
- Dalit⁵² returning migrants in Nepal faced discrimination⁵³ in quarantine centres, being asked to eat separately from other castes.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵
- 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.⁵⁶

CASE STUDY: AFGHAN VOICES FROM TURKEY

“My neighbour is pregnant and needs an ultrasound and other tests. Today, I took her to a hospital for some tests and they treated us in a very bad way, doing nothing for us. So, to find another hospital, I asked a Turkish woman to give us an address, but she told us: Foreigner, corona! Foreigner, corona! And start following us and trying to stone us. It is really difficult here.”

— 35-year-old Afghan woman, Van

Source: MMC briefing paper: Concerns and Confusion: Afghan refugees and migrants in Turkey face Covid-related challenges every day (2020).

50. Survey conducted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to understand the knowledge and perceptions of communities around COVID-19. A total of 4,993 participants were reached through the perception survey.

51. BBC, “Coronavirus: Anger as migrants sprayed with disinfectant in India”, 31 March 2020.

52. Dalits, formerly known as untouchables—are at the bottom of the ancient caste hierarchy linked to the Hindu faith and form more than 13 per cent of Nepal’s population. Dalits have been subject to discrimination and exclusion historically and placed on the bottom of the social system.

53. Discrimination based on caste and religion in South Asia have been always widespread. It is likely that a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, will worsen existing community tensions (ACAPS, 2020, p.7)

54. Nepal Monitor, “Dalits face discrimination in quarantine in Gulmi”, 1 June 2020.

55. Nepali Times, “COVID-19 sharpens caste discrimination in Nepal”, 11 August 2020.

56. Between 14 April and 19 May 2020, MMC conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with Afghan migrants, refugees, community leaders and representatives of NGOs.

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 (OEDC, 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 schools’ 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, wherein 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 (Guadagno, 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 lost 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

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.

The Assessment Capacity Project (ACAPS)

2020 Migrant vulnerability in Bangladesh, India, and
Nepal. Covid-19 and Labour Migration. ACAPS.

Government of Singapore, Ministry of Health

2020 Measures to Contain the Covid-19 Outbreak in
Migrant Worker Dormitories – 14 December.

Guadagno, L.

2020 Migrants and the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Initial
Analysis. Migration Research Series N° 60. IOM,
Geneva.

Human Rights Watch

2020 Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and
Xenophobia Worldwide. *Human Rights Watch*, 12
May.

Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics

2020 Covid-19: Study Shows Workers Worried About
Accommodation, Access to Sanitation, and
Wages. HOME.

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.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

2018 Women and men in the informal economy: A
statistical picture. ILO, Geneva.

2019 Public attitudes towards migrant workers in
Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. ILO,
Bangkok.

2020a ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work.
Second edition. Updated Estimates and Analysis.
ILO.

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.

2020d Covid-19: Impact on Migrant Workers and
Country Response in Thailand. ILO.

2020e COVID-19 and the World of Work. Sixth
Edition. Updates Estimates and Analysis. ILO.

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 Labour Organization (ILO) and United
Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

2020 COVID-19 and Child Labour: A time of crisis, a
time to act. ILO and UNICEF, New York.

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.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

2020a COVID-19 Related Vulnerabilities and
Perceptions of Non-Lao Populations in the Lao
People’s Democratic Republic. IOM, Vientiane.

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

2021a Pakistan: Survey on drivers of migration -
migrants in Europe during Covid-19. IOM,
Bangkok.

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

2021c Covid-19 Protection Monitoring. November
2020–January 2021. IOM.

2021d Migration Data Portal: Migration data relevant for
the COVID-19 pandemic.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) and
World Food Programme (WFP)

2020 Population at Risk: Implications of COVID-19 for
Hunger, Migration and Displacement. IOM and
WFP.

Ivakhnyuk, I.

2020 Coronavirus pandemic challenges migrants
worldwide and in Russia. *Population and
Economics*, 4(2):49–55.

Jan Sahas

2020 Voices of the invisible citizens. A rapid assessment
on the impact of Covid-19 lockdown on internal
migrant workers. Recommendations for the
state, industry & philanthropies. Jan Sahas, New
Delhi.

Kluge, H.H.P., Z. Jakab, J. Bartovic, V. D’Anna and S.
Severoni

2020 Refugee and migrant health in the COVID-19
response. *The Lancet*, 395:1237–1239.

Lopez-Pena, P., C. A. Davis, A.M. Mobarak and S.
Raihan

2020 Prevalence of COVID-19 symptoms, risk factors,
and health behaviours in host and refugee
communities in Cox’s Bazar: a representative
panel study. *Bulletin of World Health Organization*,
11 May.

McComarck, S., J.J. Larsen and H. Abul Husn

2015 The other migrant crisis. Protecting migrant
workers against exploitation in the Middle East
and North Africa. IOM, Geneva.

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)

2020 Quarterly Mixed Migration Update – Quarter 1
2020. MMC.

Nyein, N.

2020 Thai border closures over Covid-19 spark
Myanmar migrants return, health concerns. *The
Irrawaddy*, 23 March.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and
Development (OECD)

2020 Education and Covid-19: Focusing on the Long-
Term Impact of School closures. OECD.

Prasai, S.

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

Ratha, D., S. De, E. Ju Kim, S. Plaza, G. Seshan and N.
D. Yameogo

2020 Migration and Development Brief 33: Phase
II: COVID-19 Crisis through a Migration Lens.
KNOMAD and World Bank, Washington.

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

2020 International Migration Stock 2020. UN DESA,
Population Division, New York. (accessed 1
March 2021).

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

2020 Asia–Pacific Migration Report 2020: Assessing
Implementation of the Global Compact for
Migration. UN ESCAP, Bangkok.

United Nations

2020 Policy Brief: COVID-19 and People on the Move.
UN.

United Nations Myanmar

2020 United Nations Myanmar. (2020). UN supports
Myanmar nationals returning from abroad. *UN
Myanmar Press Releases*, 14 April.

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

2021 Covid-19 and Migration for Work in South
Asia: Private Sector Responsibilities. UNICEF,
Kathmandu.

UN-WOMEN

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

Verduijn, S.H.

2021 Concerns and Confusion: Afghan Refugees
and Migrants in Turkey Face COVID-related
Challenges Every Day. *Mixed Migration Centre*.

World Bank

2020 COVID-19 and the Urban Poor Addressing those
in slums. World Bank.

2021 Global Economic Prospect. January 2021. World
Bank.

You, D., N. Lindt, R. Allen, C. Hanses, J. Beise and S.
Blume

2020 Migrant and displaced children in the age of
COVID-19: How the pandemic is impacting them
and what can we do to help. *Migration Policy
Practice*, 2:32–39.

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 million⁵⁷ IDPs fled their homes in Asia-Pacific in 2020 ([UNHCR, 2021b](#); [IDMC, 2021a](#)). The Asia-Pacific region is one of the most vulnerable to natural disasters, with millions of displacements recorded every year ([Du Parc, 2020](#)). In the context of the ongoing pandemic, the forcibly displaced populations might be disproportionately 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 ([WHO, 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.42](#)). 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, 2021b](#)). 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 ([Quie and Hakimi, 2020, p.36](#)). There are also Afghan refugees currently hosted in Europe, Turkey, India, Indonesia and Australia ([UNHCR, 2021b](#)). 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](#), returnees 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.⁵⁸ 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 domestics 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 ([Abolfazl 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 eligibility for health insurance among Afghan refugees ([Verduijn, 2020](#)).⁵⁹ A law passed in December 2019 modified the [Law on Foreigner and International Protection \(LFIP\)](#), including limiting the coverage of general health insurance of internal 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

57. Conflict and natural disaster stock figures.

58. MMC conducted a 450 phone interviews between 2 July and 30 August 2020 in seven provinces of Afghanistan. The majority of the participants were men.

59. Between 14 April and 19 May 2020, MMC conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with migrants, refugees, community leaders and representatives of NGOs.

insurance. Therefore, a significant number of Afghans are unlikely to benefit from the one-year health insurance. Those who have been under international protection for more than one year had their health insurances revoked (Verduijn, 2020, p.4). The assessment also found that the amendments in the LFIP caused confusion among Afghans concerning access to health care. Refugees, who applied for international protection and are currently without insurance, fear they

won't be treated if they go to a hospital. The Government has insisted that everyone who has been infected will receive treatment. However, refugees often do not know or ignore this information, for two reasons. First, for fear of being charged for medical costs, particularly if they test negative for the virus, and are not able to cover such costs. Second, for fear of being put in isolation in a detention centre and being deported (Verduijn, 2020, p.5).

“Insurances of refugees are cancelled and closed and even those who have severe conditions or are physically disabled, cannot access free medical services. Even if Afghan refugees submit the necessary documents, DGMM [Directorate General of Migration Management] has not opened these insurances yet while they have to activate insurances legally.”

– 45-year-old Afghan man, Yalova

“The majority do not have insurance and access to [health] services. In addition, there is a rumour that if we go to hospitals, the government will quarantine us for 14 days and then will deport us back to Afghanistan. So, many Afghans do not go to hospitals because of these rumours and false information”.

– 58-year-old Afghan man, Konya

Source: MMC briefing paper: Concerns and Confusion: Afghan refugees and migrants in Turkey face Covid-related challenges every day (2020).

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 shouldered 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 In some sections in the camp, the average density population reaches over 70,000 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 five (17,9%) people were 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 Afghans refugees and migrants.

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

62. Info Migrants, “European countries resume deportation flights to Afghanistan after 9-month coronavirus break”, 16 December 2020.

63. Deutsche Welle, “Afghan deportation continue despite security threats”, 17 December 2020.

64. AP News, “Crowded in camps, Rohingya refugees vulnerable to virus”, 2 April 2020.

65. Concern, “Vast Rohingya Refugee camp under threat from COVID-19”, 1 June 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 capture by IOM Communicating with Communities (CwC) and, to a lesser extent, Site Management (SM) Staff.

“If anyone is infected then he/she will bite or scratch others like a dog and because of severe bleeding or biting this disease will spread more.”

“We heard that the infected persons are dying within 2 or 3 minutes and if you give us proper information then we will try to stay safely.”

“If anyone gets infected, the authority has to kill him/her. Because if he stays alive, his virus will transfer to another person’s body.”

Source: Flying News about the Corona Virus. ACAPS and IOM (2020).

Other reports described Rohingya refugees as believing that the virus is a tool designed to “abduct” and “kill” refugees in the hospitals (Sengupta, 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’ wiliness 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 Bangladeshi 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 (ISCG, 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’ 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.

4.1.2.2 COVID-19, CLIMATE CHANGE AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Internal displacement is regarded as one of the most adversely impactful human mobility issues (Orendain and Djalante, 2021, p.37). This form of displacement, however, remains underrepresented in international discourse, advocacy and research (UN OCHA, 2018, p.46), and even within the framework of the SDGs (Zeender, 2018). Although internal displacement is a global phenomenon affecting millions of people, extensive systemic research into this displaced populations is still lacking. IDPs lack assistance and support, as most national and local policies do not reflect international guidelines on protection in the context of internal displacement (Orendain and Djalante, 2021).

The annual number of IDPs is staggering. By the end of 2020, conflict and disasters had triggered 40.5 million new displacements in 149 countries and territories, the highest figure in a decade (IDMC, 2021b). From 2008 to 2020, the Asia-Pacific region accounted for 80 per cent of the total global new displacements related to disasters, becoming the world’s most climate-vulnerable region in both slow-onset and sudden-onset events (Du Parc, 2020; IDMC, 2021a; MMC, 2021). Since March 2020, the region has also had to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, vulnerable groups in the region such as urban IDPs are more prone to experiencing inequalities and discrimination when accessing available support resources. Settlements are commonly overcrowded and lack the support systems to promote a secure and healthy life (Dissanayake et al., 2018). Furthermore, IDPs often face systemic and structural barriers when accessing social services, health care and relief packages

due to citizenship issues (Jezreel 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 IDP’s livelihoods and security as an already vulnerable group who is often “ignored, invisible and excluded” (Orendain and Djalante, 2021). Other factors that can exacerbate IDP’s vulnerable condition include indigenous and ethnic discrimination, language barriers and racism.

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 Bolo Spieth, 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 population 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

67. The Humanitarian, “For Rohingya refugees, internet ban severs ties to the outside world”, 10 March 2020.

68. India Today, “Bangladesh relocates over 1,600 Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char island”, 4 December 2020.

69. New Age Bangladesh, “1084 more Rohingyas people relocated to Bhasan Char island”, 29 December 2020.

70. Reuters, “Bangladesh to move 2,000 to 3,000 more Rohingya Muslims to remote island despite criticism”, 27 January 2021.

71. Reuters, “Gang war erupts in Rohingya refugee camps, at least eight killed, thousands flee”, 8 October 2020.

72. Fortify Rights, “Bangladesh: Remove fencing that confines Rohingya to refugee camps”, 9 October 2020.

73. Study conducted in response to TC Harold in Vanuatu by the National Disaster management Office (NDMO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) between 26 May to 6 June. The report presents data on a total of 6,218 individuals reported as displaced by 325 key informants and on data collected from 1,724 registered households

families (*ibid.*). Despite having recorded no COVID-19 cases, government officials in Vanuatu had to ask humanitarian aid workers to leave the island to avoid the spread of COVID-19 (*Bamforth, 2020*). Strict protocols in Vanuatu led to significant delays that affected the delivery of emergency items to thousands of displaced people including medication, personal protective gear (PPE) and food supplies.⁷⁴ It was estimated that in some parts of the country, 80 to 90 per cent of the population could have lost their homes (*UN OCHA, 2020a*).

A similar scenario, took place in India and Bangladesh when the Tropical Cyclone Amphan hit both countries in May 2020 (*IDMC, 2020, p.30–31*). Local authorities in India can normally rely on nearby towns to assist affected populations. However, due to the nation-wide lockdown, people were not allowed to leave their homes during the disaster. Physical distancing measures reduced the capacity of shelters to 40 per cent (*Kishore, 2020*). Evacuees were forced to decide between being caught in the storm’s path, or the risk of contracting the disease in the crowded shelters.⁷⁵ However, despite these challenges, around 2.5 million people were evacuated in Bangladesh and 818,00 in the Indian states of West Bengal and Odisha. The cyclone left an estimated 1.7 million people displaced outside shelters (*IDMC, 2020, p.33*). Many had no option but to find refuge in tents and on embankments where the risk of flooding associated with the monsoon could potentially trigger a second displacement (*State Inter Agency Group, 2020; IFRC, 2020*).

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 tackled both crises.

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, focussing on fragile contexts (*OECD, 2020*). Doing so would ensure that urgent support is allocated to those with weaker health systems.

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.

REFERENCES

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

2019 Comparison of Refugees Inpatient Costs Before and After Implementation of Basic Health Insurance in University Hospitals of Tehran Province during 2013-2017. *Iran Health Insurance Organization*, 2(3):142–150.

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.

2020 Uninvited guests: the evolving practice of international humanitarian response to cyclones in the Pacific. *Development Policy Centre Blog*, 15 May.

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

2018 Increase in Disaster Risk due to inefficient Environmental Management, Land use policies and Relocation Policies. Case studies from Sri Lanka. *Procedia Engineering*, 212:1326–1333.

Du Parc, E.

2020 Covid-19 and Internal Displacement in Asia-Pacific: Towards Local, Rapid and Inclusive Disaster Response. IDMC.

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)

2016 Joint Way Forward on migration issues between Afghanistan and the EU. EEAS.

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

2020 Greece/EU: Allow New Arrivals to Claim Asylum. *Human Rights Watch*, 10 March.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)

2020 Internal displacement 2020: Mid-year update. IDMC, Geneva.

2021a Global Internal Displacement Database (accessed 26 May 2021).

2021b Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021. IDMC.

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

2018 World Disasters Report 2018 leaving no one behind, executive summary. The international humanitarian sector must do more to respond to the needs of the world’s most vulnerable people. IFRC, Geneva.

2020 Operation Update Report. Bangladesh: Cyclone Amphan. IFRC.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

2020 Vanuatu — Tropical Cyclone Harold Displacement Report – June 2020

Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG)

2020 COVID-19: Preparedness and response for the Rohingya refugee camps and host communities in Cox’s Bazar District Update #4. ISCG.

Kishore, K.

2020 Managing Tropical Storms During COVID-19: Early Lessons Learned and Reflections from India. *World Bank Blogs*, 27 July.

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.

74. Radio New Zealand, “Cargo restrictions hamper Vanuatu cyclone recovery”, 29 April 2020.

75. The New Humanitarian, “Coronavirus forces disaster planning rethink as storm threats rise”, 16 June 2020.

Nassar, D. M. and H.G. Elsayed

2018 From Informal Settlements to sustainable communities. *Alexandria Engineering Journal*, 57(4):2367–2376.

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

2020 79.5 million people displaced in the age of Covid-19. A global overview of displacement crises in 2019.

Orendain, D.J.A and R. Djalante

2021 Ignored and invisible: internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the face of COVID-19 pandemic. *Sustainability Science* (16):337–340.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

2020 The impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on forcibly displaced persons in developing countries. *OECD*

Quie, M. and H. Hakimi

2020 The EU and the politics of migration management in Afghanistan. *Asia-Pacific Programme and Europe Programme*. Chatham House, 13 November.

Salmani, I., H. Seddighi and M. Nikfard

2020 Access to Health Care Services for Afghan Refugees in Iran in the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Disaster Med Public Health Prep*: 1–2.

Sengupta, A.

2020 An impending crisis-analysing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on refugees and internally displaced people. *Asia Institute of Diplomacy and International Affaires*, 11 November.

Simpson, S.

2020 Covid-19 Creates New Challenges for Migrants in Afghanistan and Abroad. *International Organization for Migration*.

State Inter Agency Group

2020 Joint Rapid Need Assessment (JRNA) on Cyclone Amphan. State Inter Agency Group, West Bengal.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

2019 Rohingya emergency. UNHCR, 31 July.

2020a The COVID-19 Crisis: Key Protection Messages. UNHCR.

2020b Mid-Year Trends 2020. UNHCR.

2020c UNHCR at 70: proud of our work but in no mood to celebrate. *UNHCR News*, 14 December.

2021a UNHCR Bangladesh - Operational Dashboard: 2020 Indicators Monitoring (As of December 2020). UNHCR.

2021b Refugee Data Finder (accessed 21 June 2021).

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)

2018 Staying the Course. Delivering on the ambition of the World Humanitarian Summit. *Agenda for Humanity Annual Synthesis Report 2018*. OCHA.

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

2020b 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.

Verduijn, S.H.

2020 Concerns and Confusion: Afghan Refugees and Migrants in Turkey Face COVID-related Challenges Every Day. *Mixed Migration Centre*.

World Health Organization (WHO)

2017 Health is a fundamental human right. WHO.

2020 Epidemiological Highlights Week 30 (20-26 July 2020).

Zeender, G.

2018 Twenty Years of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. *The Sustainable Development Goals and IDPs. Forced Migration Review*, 52:24–26.



Afghan refugees face off against Indonesian immigration officers in a friendly volleyball match in Java, Indonesia | © IOM 2017/Mase MOHAMMED

4.2 TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

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, 2020b). 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

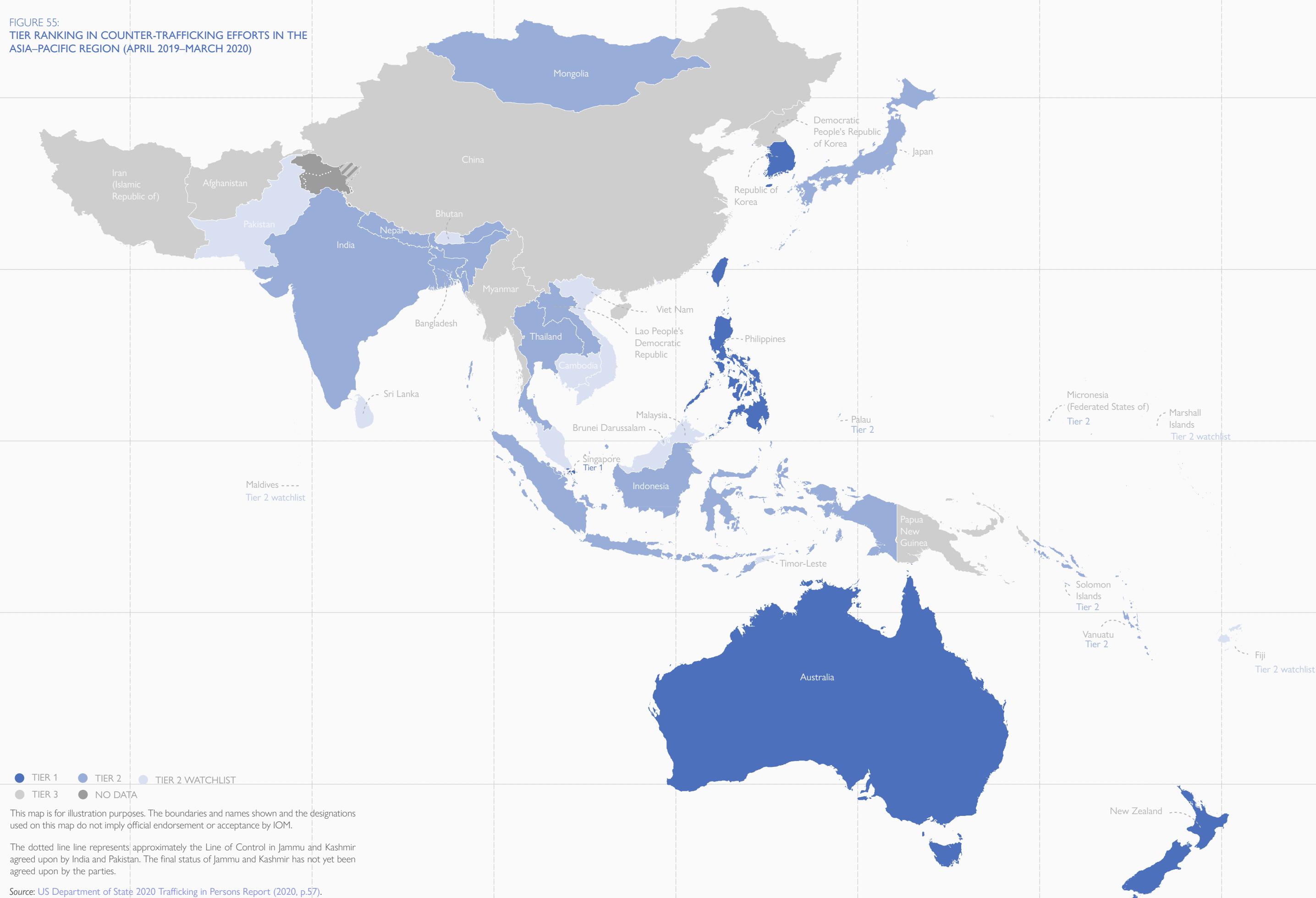
India, the number of trafficked children reportedly increased, with 1,675 children rescued from exploitations between April and November (ibid.). In addition, Thailand identified an increase in online child exploitation, which was attributed to increased time spent online during school closures (Thailand 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 TPVA'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.



IOM volunteers work to construct Isolation and Treatment Centers in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh | © IOM 2020/Abdullah AL MASHRIF

FIGURE 55:
TIER RANKING IN COUNTER-TRAFFICKING EFFORTS IN THE
ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (APRIL 2019–MARCH 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.

Source: US Department of State 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report (2020, p.57).

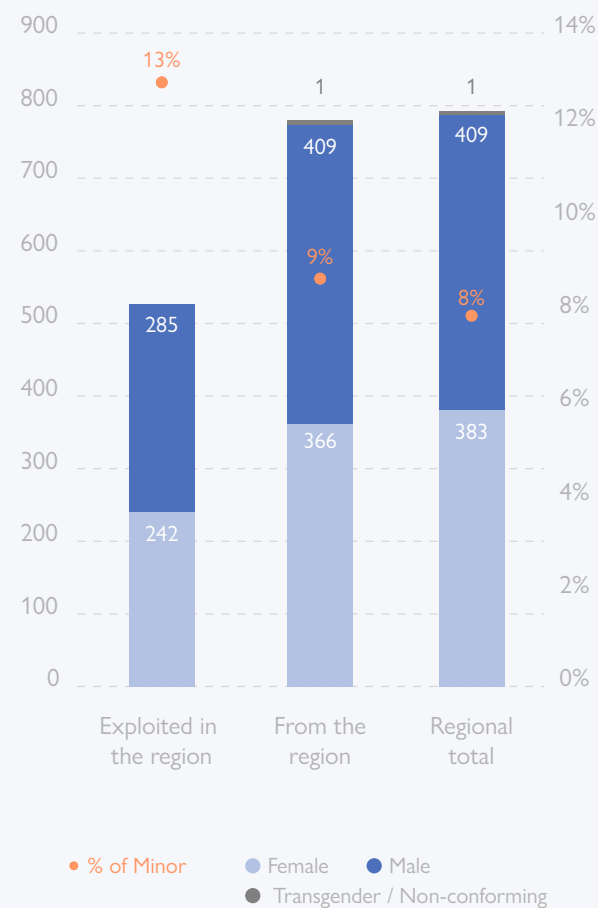
In the spirit of the **SDG Indicator 16.2.2** – which monitors the **number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation** – **IOM Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC)** serves as the world's largest data repository of human trafficking case data. 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.

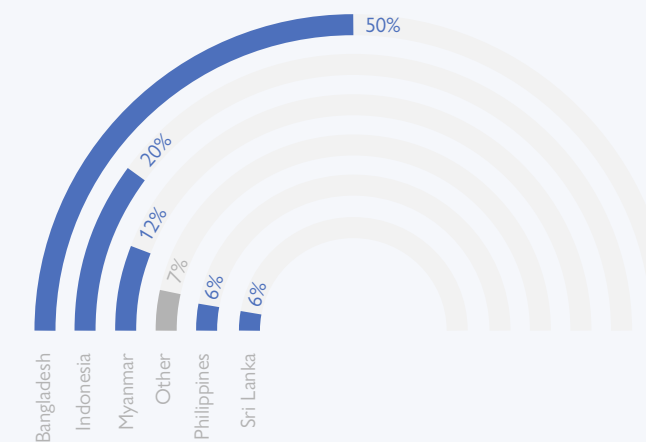
Among IOM-assisted victims originating from Asia-Pacific countries, the major countries of citizenship were Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, collectively accounting for 86 per cent of total cases recorded as coming from the region (Figure 57). Forced labour was the main 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.

FIGURE 56:
NUMBER OF IOM-ASSISTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS FROM AND/OR EXPLOITED IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (2020)



Source: Compiled from IOM CTDC Data (2021c).

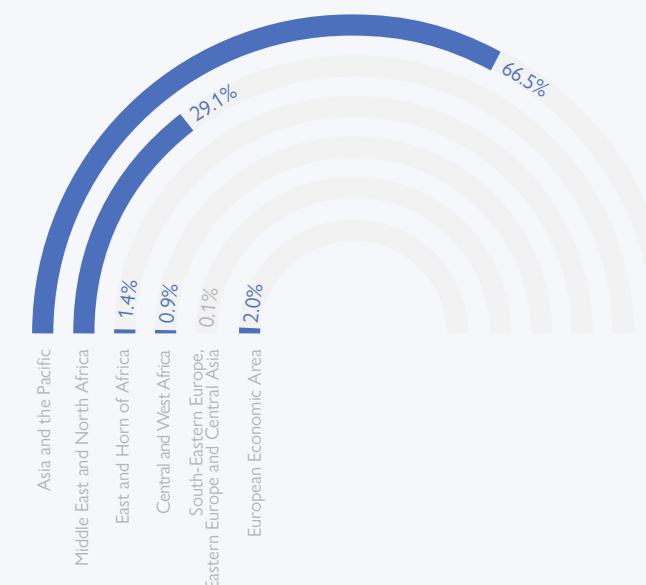
FIGURE 57:
MAJOR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN FOR IOM-ASSISTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (2020); (N=409)



Source: Compiled from IOM CTDC Data (2021c).

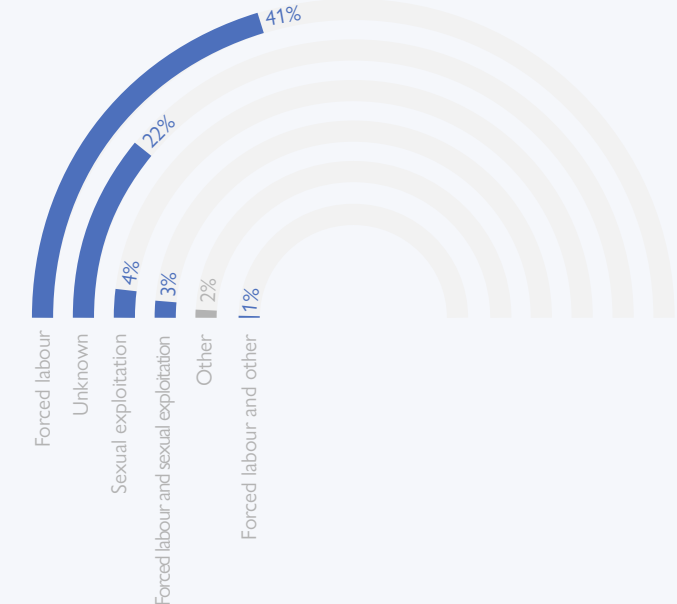
Concerning the place of exploitation of IOM-assisted human trafficking victims originating from Asia-Pacific countries, 66 per cent were exploited within the region, whereas 29 per cent were exploited in Middle East and North Africa (Figure 59). The main countries where these identified victims from the Asia-Pacific region were exploited were Bangladesh,

FIGURE 59:
REGION OF EXPLOITATION FOR IOM-ASSISTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (2020); (N=409)



Source: Compiled from IOM CTDC Data (2021c).

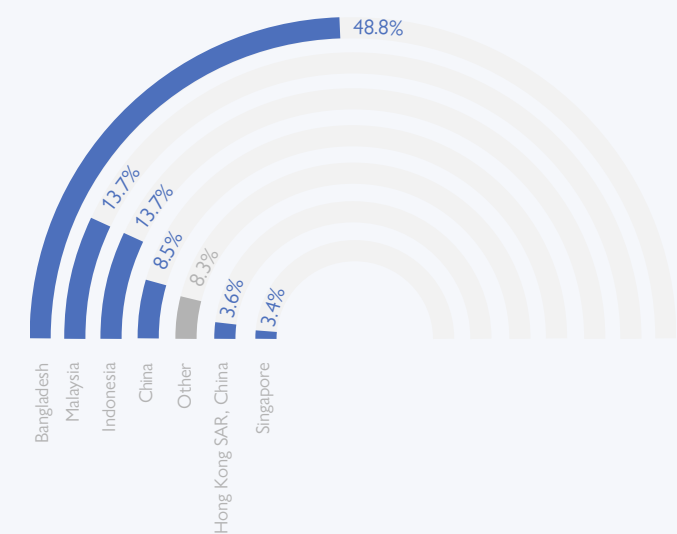
FIGURE 58:
TYPE OF EXPLOITATION FOR IOM-ASSISTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (2020); (N=409)



Source: Compiled from IOM CTDC Data (2021c).

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).

FIGURE 60:
MAJOR COUNTRIES/AREAS OF EXPLOITATION FOR IOM-ASSISTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (2020); (N=285)



Source: Compiled from IOM CTDC Data (2021c).

4.2.1
Discussion

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, combatting 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.



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

REFERENCES

Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW)

2020 [A Feast in Time of COVID-19: The Anti-trafficking Movement Needs to Take a Step Back](#). GAATW News, 31 March.

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)

2021a [Migrant Protection and Assistance during COVID-19: Promising Practices](#). IOM, Geneva.

2021b [Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative: FAQs](#).

2021c [IOM Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative: IOM Sources for 2019–2020](#) (accessed 15 April 2021) (forthcoming).

2021d [The impact of COVID-19 on trafficking in persons trends and inter-institutional response in Asia and the Pacific](#) (forthcoming).

La Strada International

2020 [The impact of COVID-19 on the protection of rights of trafficked and exploited persons](#). La Strada International, 28 April.

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)

2021 [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia – Quarter 4 2020](#). MMC.

Thailand National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee.

2020 [Royal Thai Government's Country Report on Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts \(1 January–31 December 2020\)](#).

Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children Taskforce

2020 [53 Online Child Predator Cases Arrested Nationwide](#), Press Release, 18 June.

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

2020 [Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020: Assessing Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration](#). UN ESCAP, Bangkok.

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.

2020b [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#). UNODC, Vienna.

US Department of State

2020 [Trafficking in Persons Report – 20th Edition](#).

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.

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

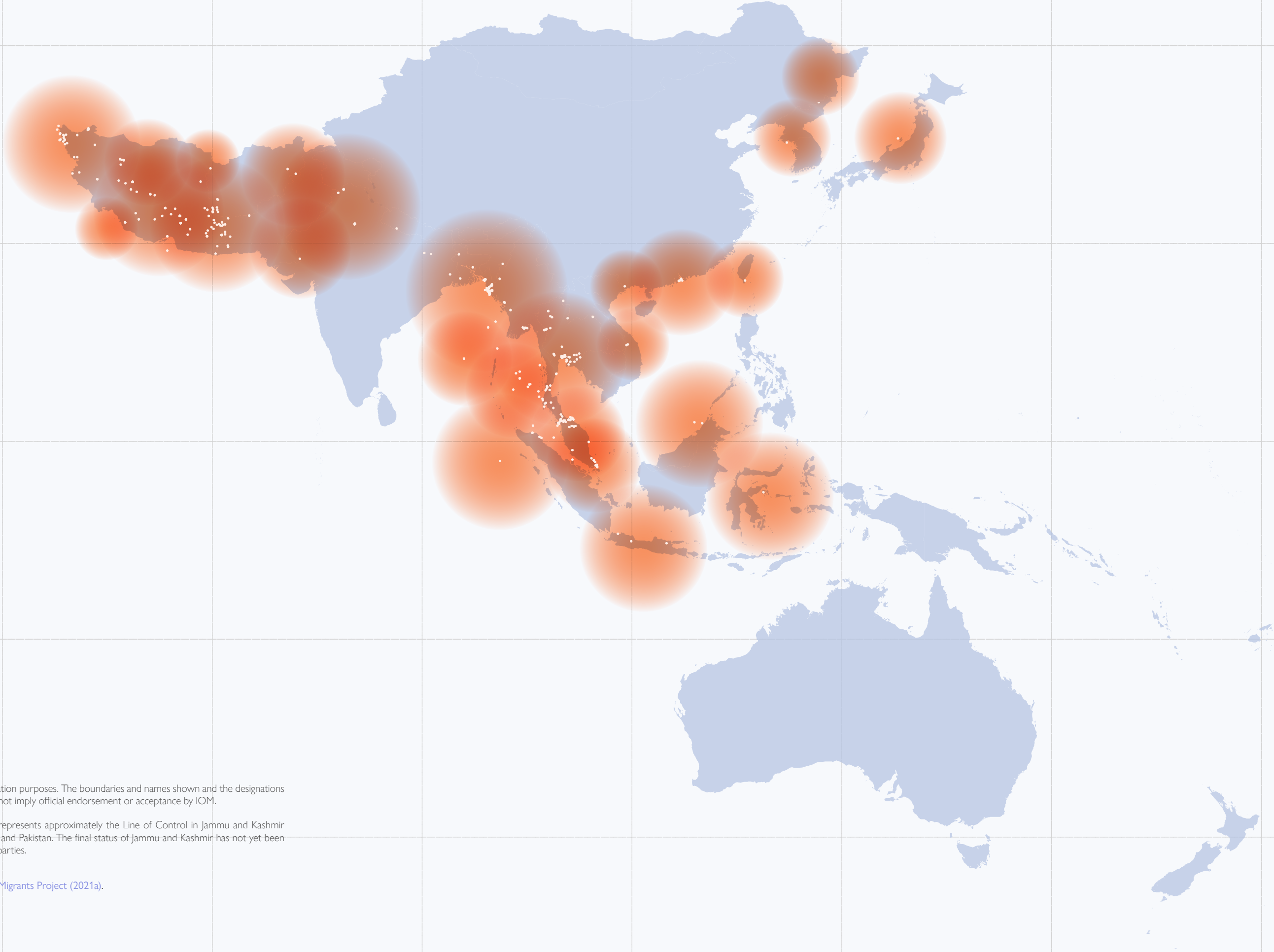
report-based nature of the data, the records are best seen as a minimum estimate of all such cases. Nevertheless, such data glean valuable insights into major incidents of migrant vulnerabilities worldwide and in the Asia-Pacific region, especially during the COVID-19 emergency when migrant vulnerabilities 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).



A survivor of trafficking learns weaving at a shelter run by a national NGO in Bogra District, Bangladesh. | © IOM 2007/Bashir Ahmed SUJAN

FIGURE 61:
HEAT MAP OF REPORTED CASES OF MIGRANT DEATHS AND
DISAPPEARANCES IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (2020)

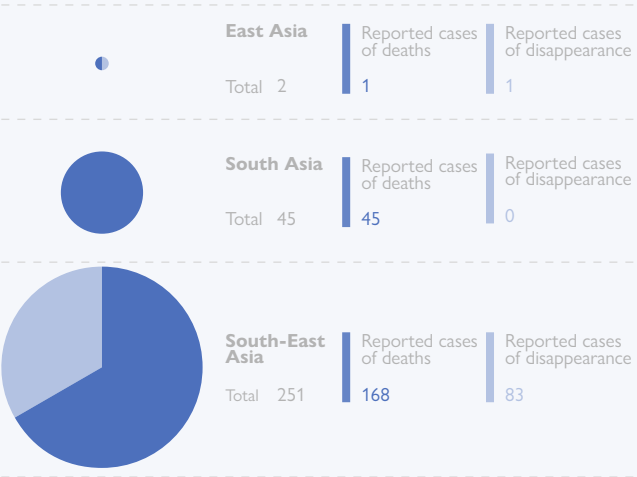


This map is for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

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.

Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project (2021a).

FIGURE 62:
NUMBER OF REPORTED CASES OF DEATHS AND
DISAPPEARANCES IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (2020)



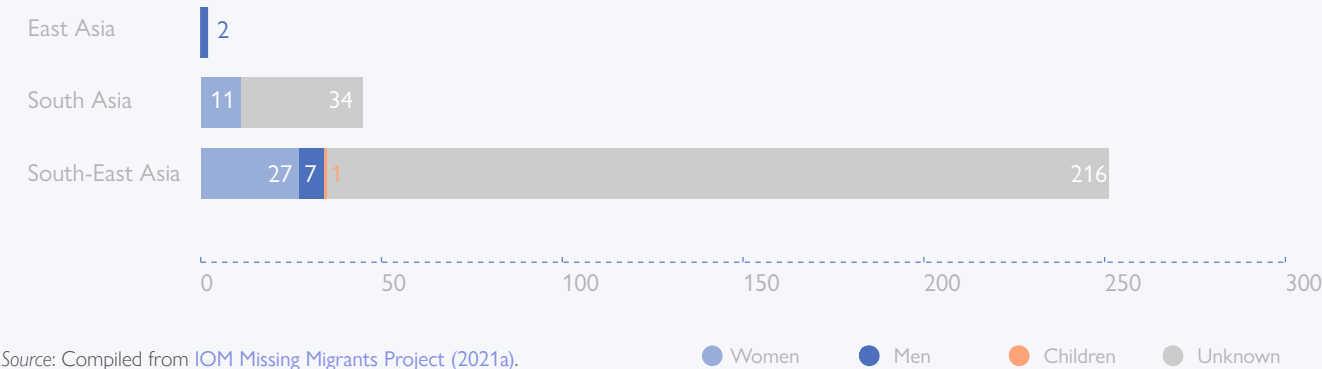
Source: Compiled from IOM Missing Migrants Project (2021a).

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

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 UNHCR (2020), which 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 63:
SEX AND AGE COMPOSITION OF ALL REPORTED CASES OF MIGRANT DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (2020)



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

Country Snapshot: Afghanistan

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 12,292 targeted settlements in June (2020b) and with 72,289 community leaders in 12,596 settlements in December 2020 (2021c), 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.

It was estimated that, in all 34 provinces from January to December 2020, there were 54,102 incidents of natural disaster and 106,012 conflict-related incidents (Figure 64), with a total of 35,944 incidents of fatalities registered (Figure 65). 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, Bāghlan, Kapisa, Takhar, Helmand, Parwan, 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.



A community leader in Shahrak Razi, Afghanistan. He advocates to the Government and agencies to uphold the rights of and bring services to his people. | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED

FIGURE 64:
REPORTED NUMBER OF INCIDENTS RELATED TO NATURAL DISASTERS
AND CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN BY PROVINCE (2020)

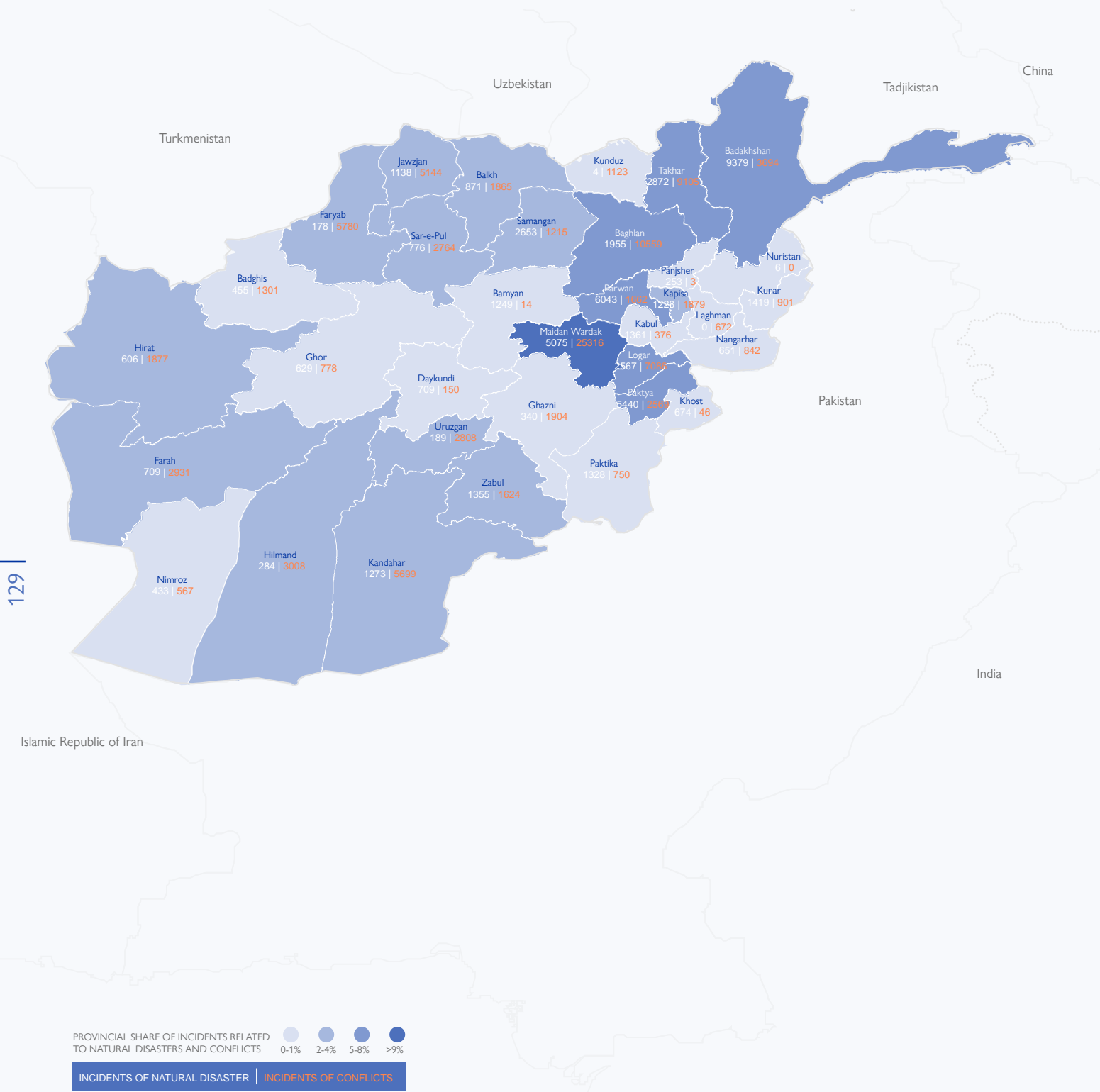


FIGURE 66:
REPORTED NUMBER OF NATURAL DISASTER INCIDENTS AT INTERVIEWED HOST SETTLEMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN (2020)

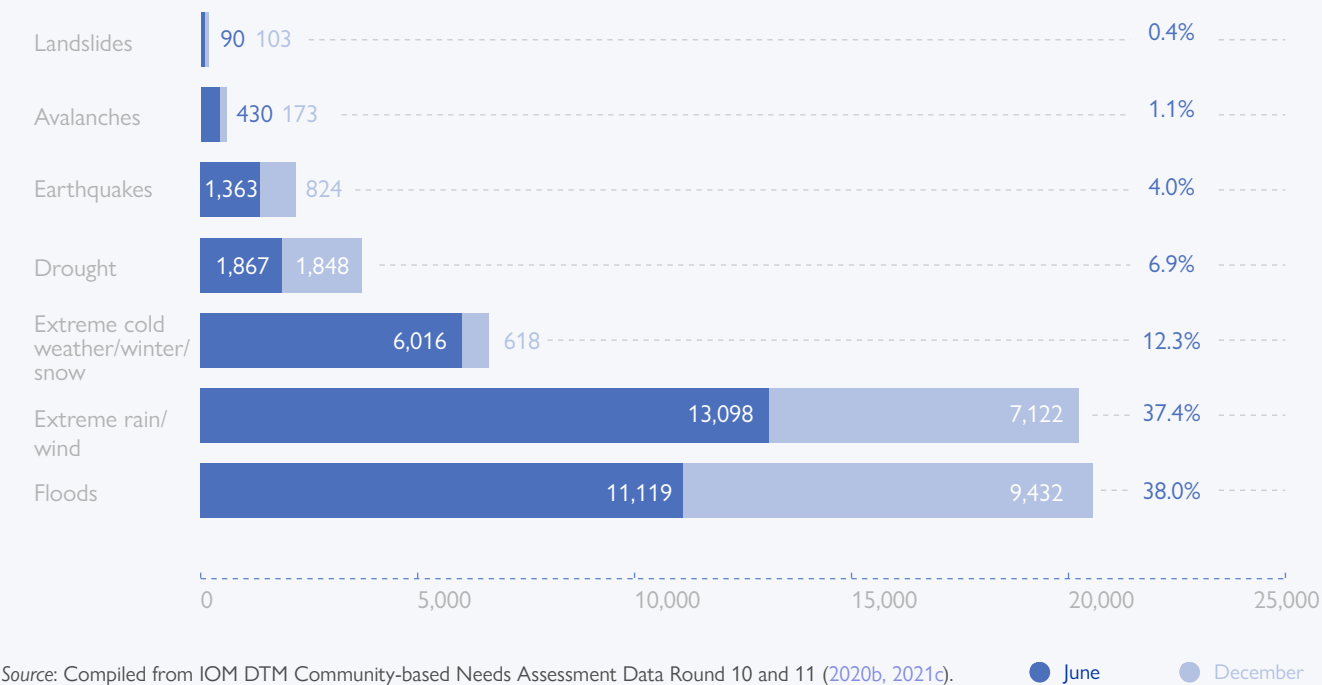
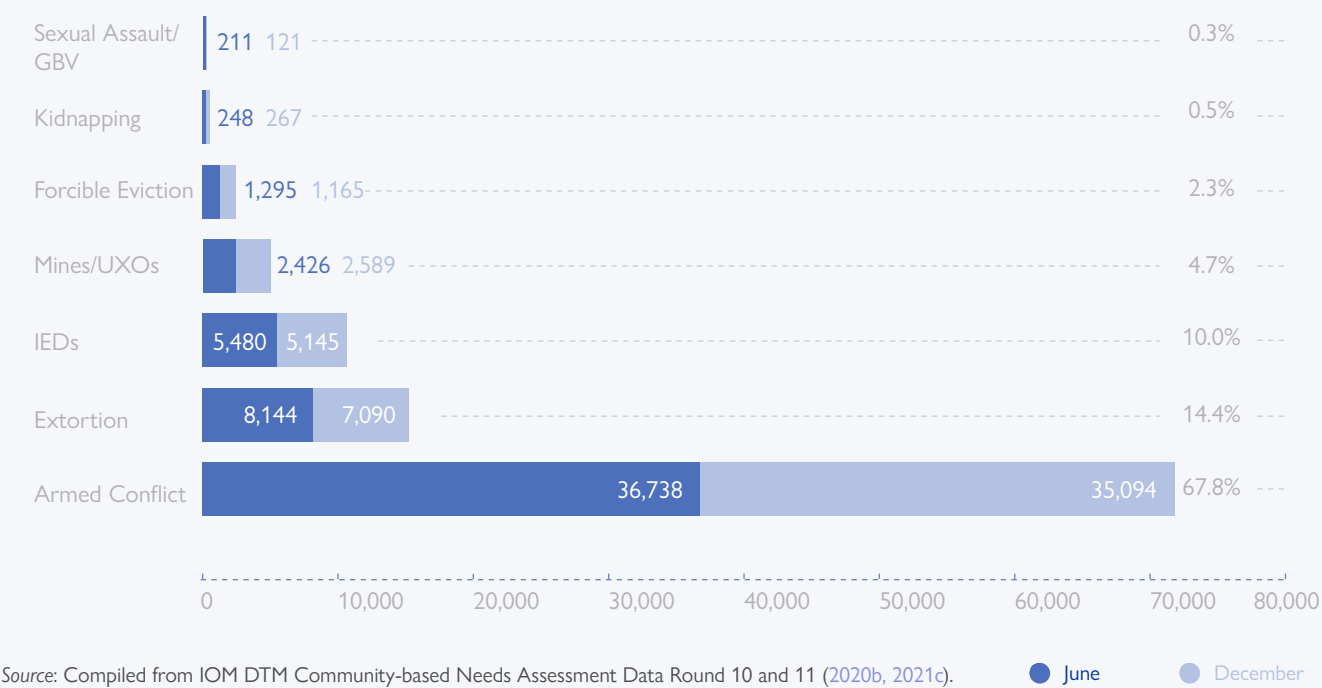


FIGURE 67:
REPORTED NUMBER OF SECURITY INCIDENTS AT INTERVIEWED HOST SETTLEMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN (2020)



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; combatting 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)

2020 [Afghanistan Security Situation: Country of Origin Information Report](#). 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).

2021b [Searching for Closure: New Study Examines Challenges Facing Families of Missing Migrants in the UK](#). *IOM Press Releases*, 30 April.

2021c [Afghanistan — Community-Based Needs Assessment: Summary Results, Round 11 \(July–December 2020\)](#). IOM.

Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)

2021 [Mixed Migration Review 2020. Highlights, Interviews, Essays, Data](#). MMC, Geneva.

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](#). *Kontinentalist*, 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 Connecting Return with Development (CRD) programmes, Afghan returnees are supported to attend a shoe making training school in Herat. | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED



MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

People of Udayapur, Nepal has 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



SDG Target

17.16

Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries.



Global Compact for Migration Objectives

19

Create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries



MGI Dimensions

4

Well-being of migrants

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,

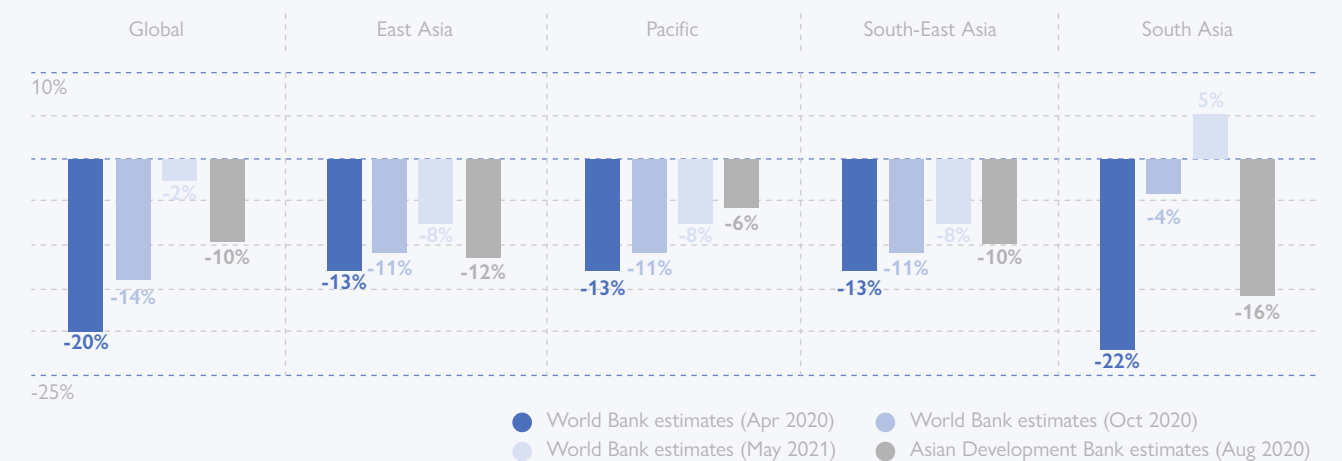
and South-East Asian countries, such as Nepal and the Philippines, were the most remittance-dependent economies in the region in 2019, with remittance inflows accounting for 10 up to 40 per cent of GDP (ADB, 2020). Compiling household surveys conducted before the pandemic for several Asia-Pacific countries, 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) respectively⁷⁶ (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).

FIGURE 68:
ESTIMATED CHANGES IN GLOBAL AND SUBREGIONAL REMITTANCE FLOWS (2019–2020) PROJECTED BY WORLD BANK AND ADB

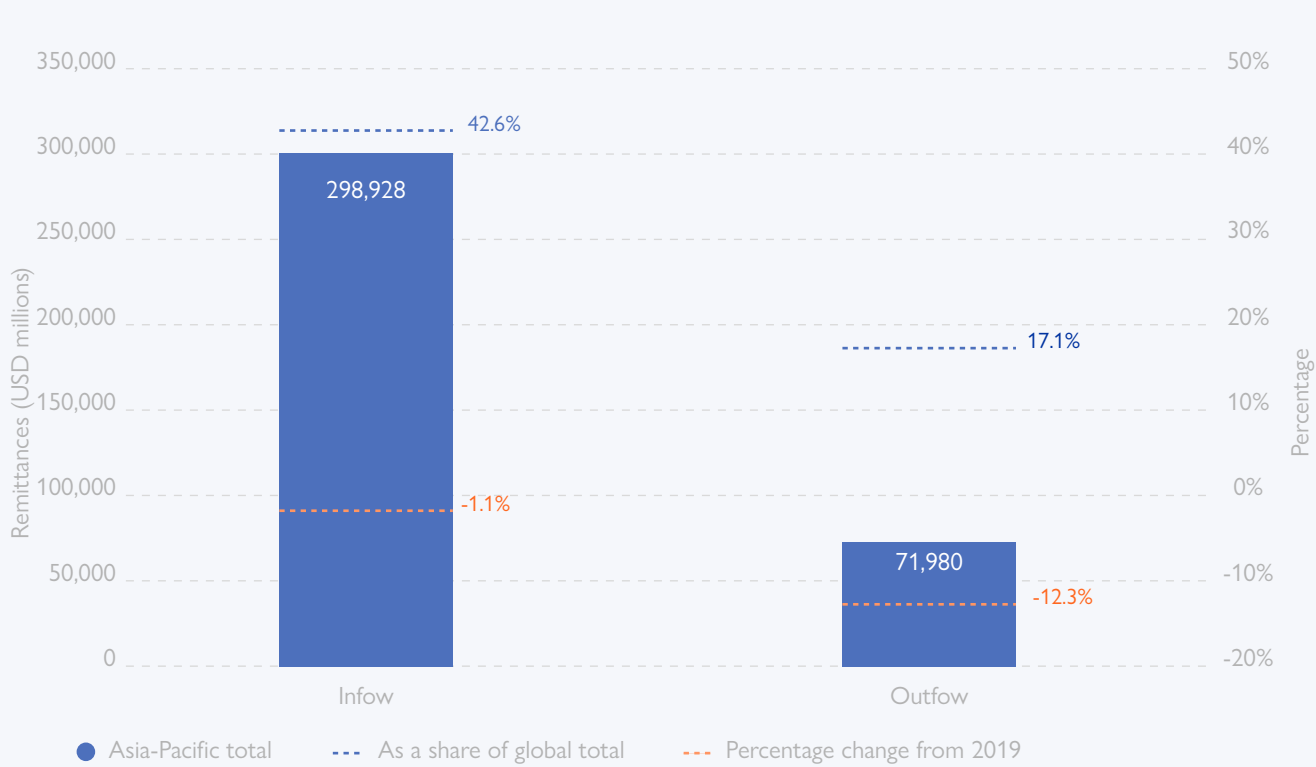


Note: Estimates shown follow the definition of subregion in the corresponding institution. East Asia, the Pacific and South-East Asia in ADB's definition are grouped as one subregion in World Bank's definition in the sources cited.

Source: Compiled from World Bank Migration and Development Brief 32 and 33 (2020b, 2020c), World Bank Annual Remittances Data (2021a) and Asian Development Bank COVID-19 Impact on International Migration, Remittances, and Recipient Households in Developing Asia (2020).

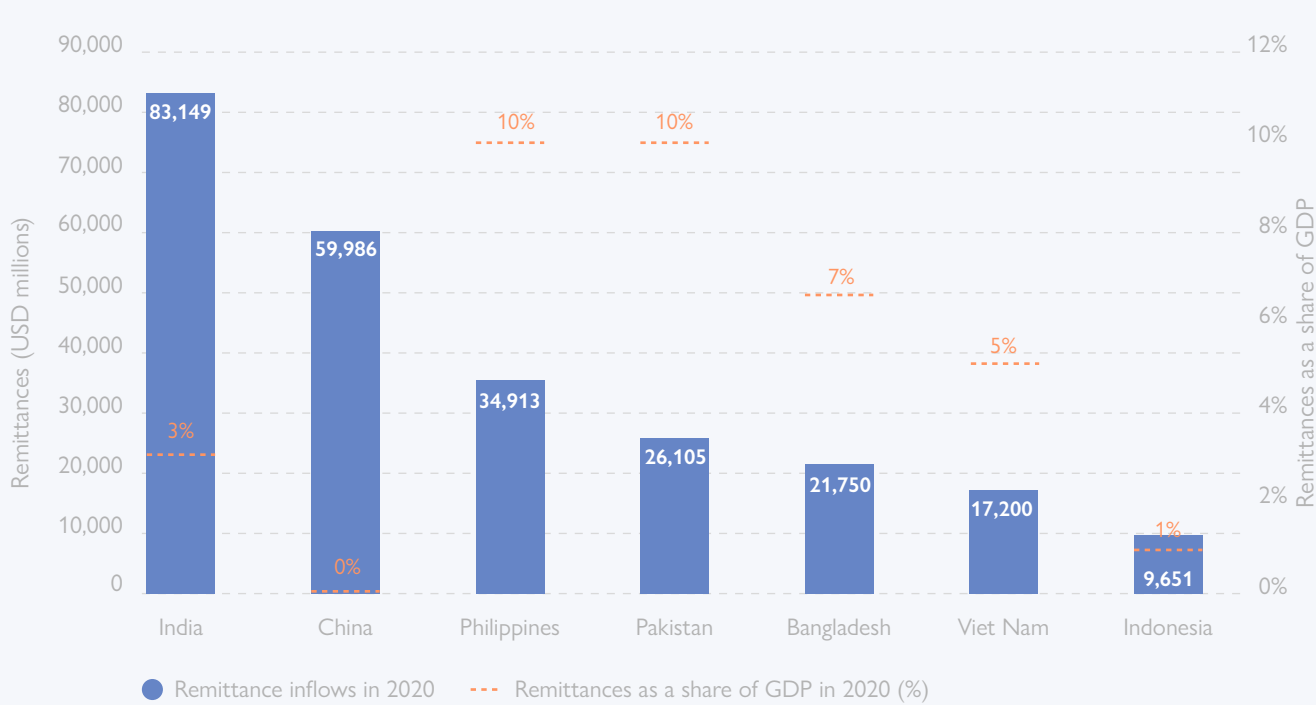
76. The latter is in part due to a drop in the number of Asia-Pacific countries with available data from 38 in 2019 to 21 in 2020.

FIGURE 69:
REMITTANCE INFLOWS TO AND OUTFLOWS FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN 2020



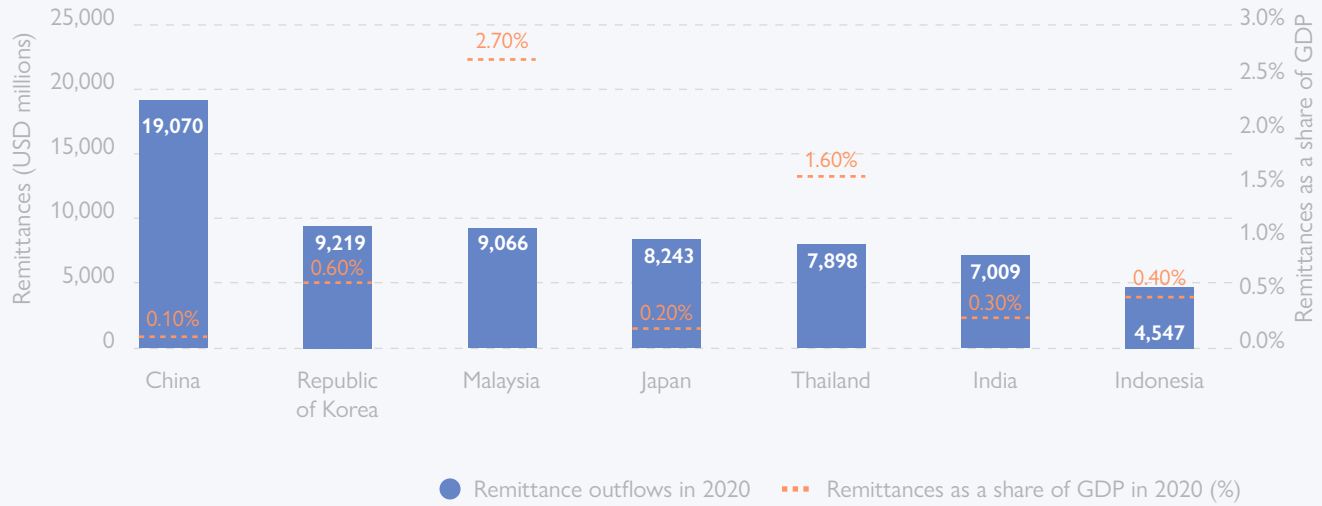
Source: Compiled from World Bank Annual Remittances Data (2021a).

FIGURE 70:
TOP 7 ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES RECEIVING THE LARGEST REMITTANCE INFLOWS IN 2020



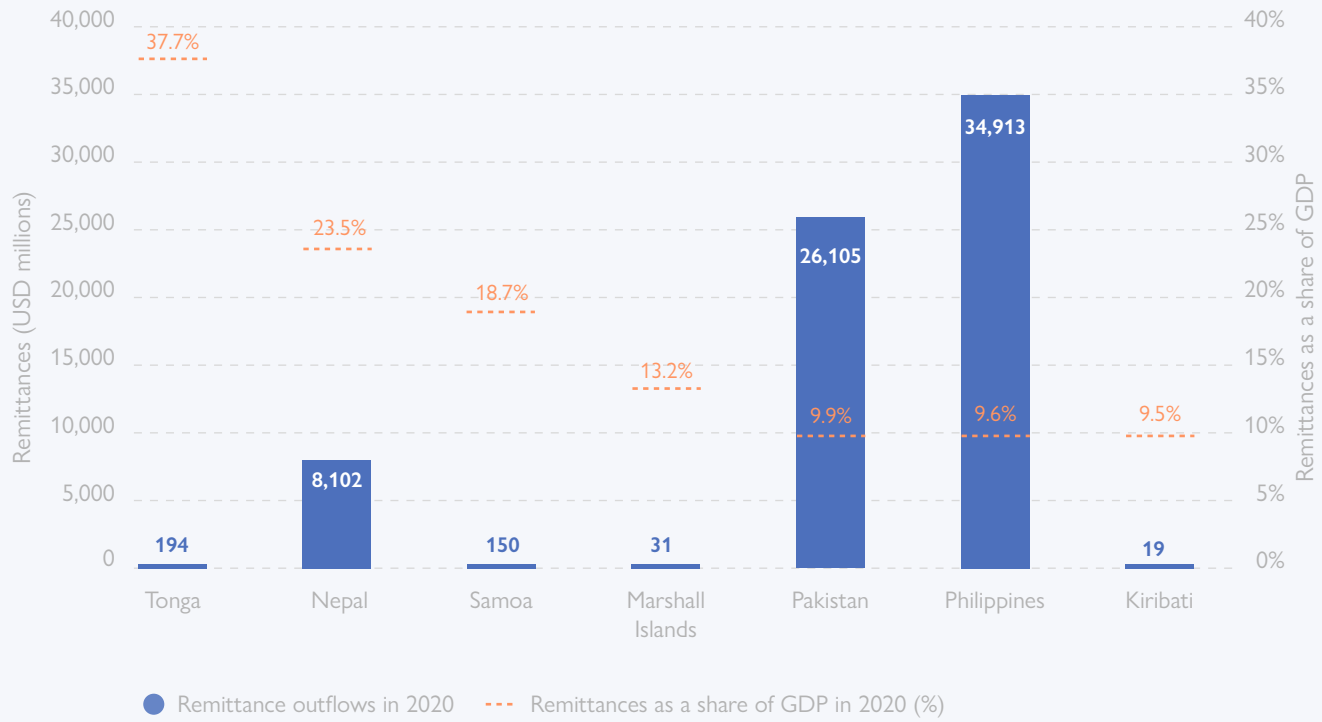
Source: Compiled from World Bank Annual Remittances Data (2021a).

FIGURE 71:
TOP 7 ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES WITH THE LARGEST REMITTANCE OUTFLOWS IN 2020



Source: Compiled from World Bank Annual Remittances Data (2021a).

FIGURE 72:
TOP 7 ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST REMITTANCE INFLOW AS A SHARE OF GDP IN 2020



Source: Compiled from World Bank Annual Remittances Data (2021a).

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

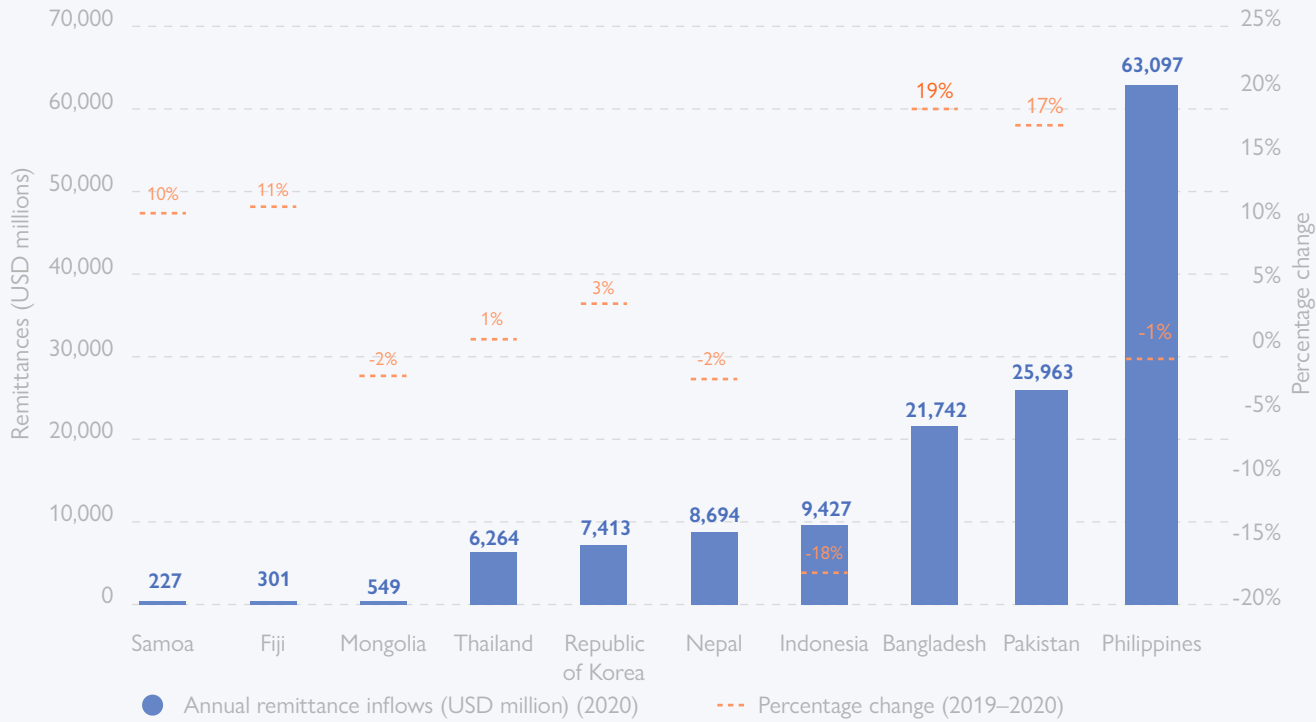
recent IOM study (2021b) observes positive changes in well over half of the 12 countries studied either in terms of the absolute amount of remittance receipt or in the amount of remittance inflows as a share of GDP.

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

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).

FIGURE 73:
REPORTED ANNUAL REMITTANCE INFLOWS IN 2020 FROM CENTRAL BANKS AND PERCENTAGE CHANGES FROM 2019



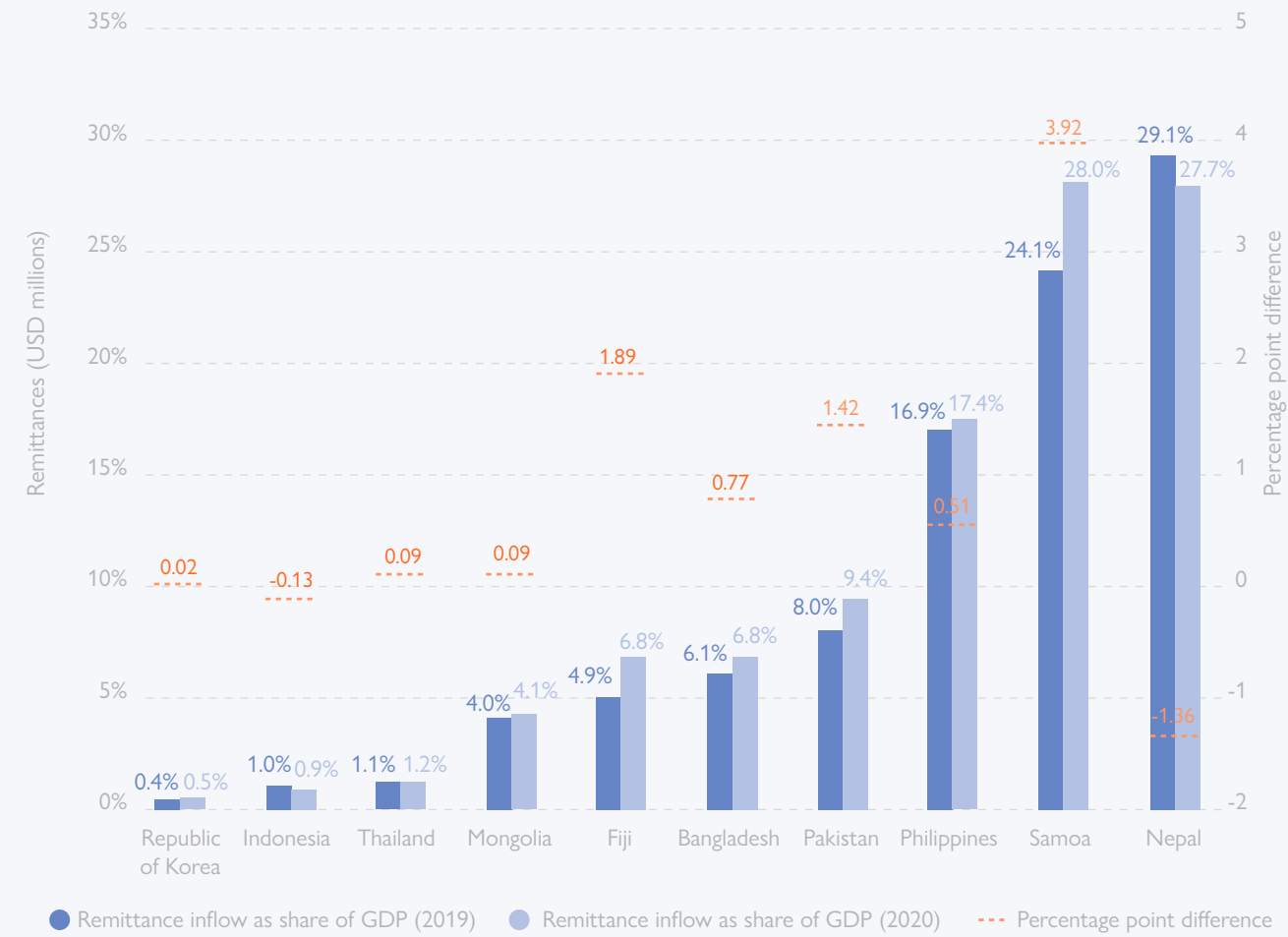
Source: Compiled from IOM Impact of COVID-19 on Remittances Report (2021b).

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

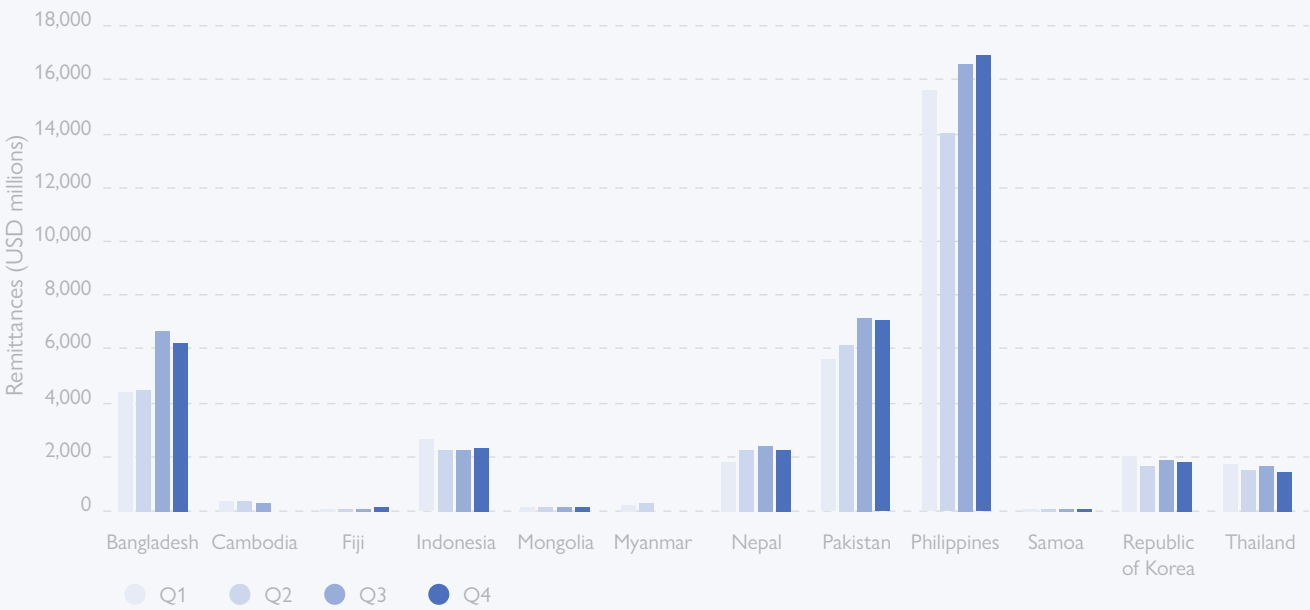
lockdowns and mobility restrictions would curb labour migration. While these predictions were observed in some cases, such as that of Myanmar workers in Thailand, and Filipino, Mongolian and Indonesian workers in the major host countries, the foreseen negative impacts of the pandemic on labour migrants 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.).

FIGURE 74:
ANNUAL REMITTANCE INFLOWS AS PERCENTAGE OF GDP AND PERCENTAGE POINT DIFFERENCE (2019–2020)



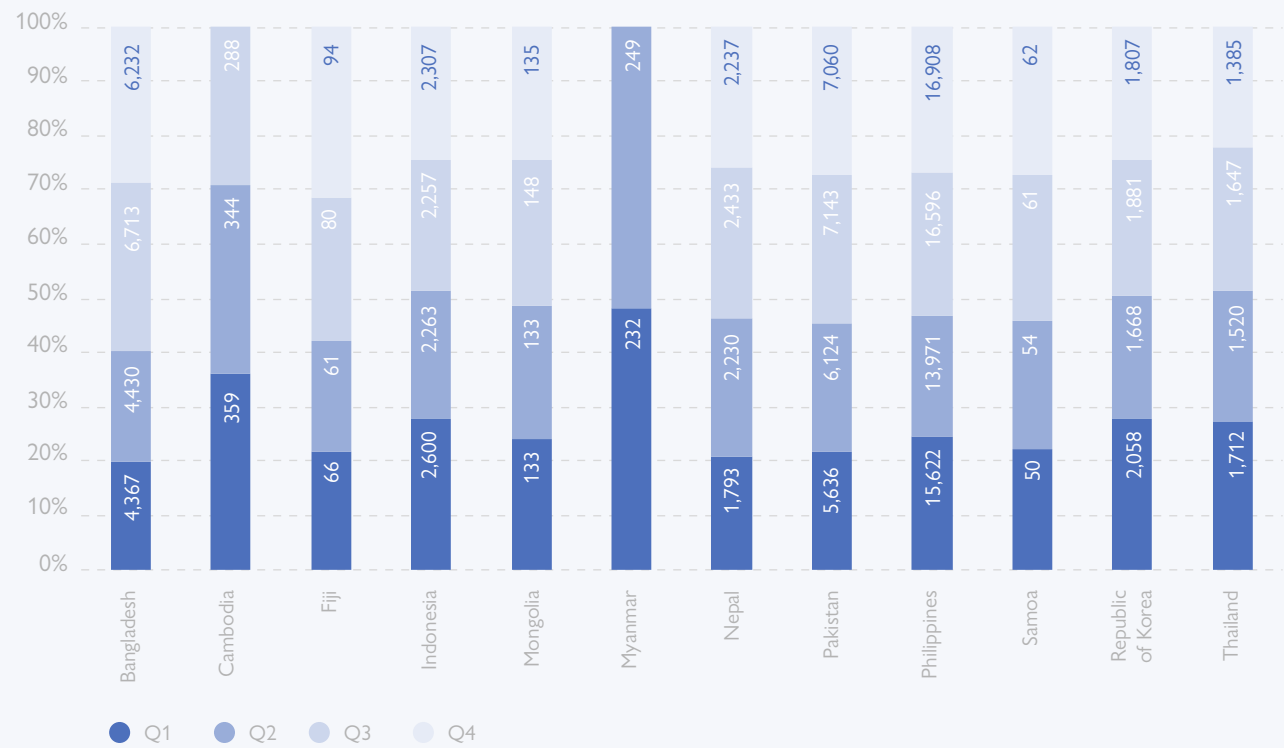
Source: Compiled from IOM Impact of COVID-19 on Remittances Report (2021b).

FIGURE 75:
QUARTERLY REMITTANCE INFLOWS IN USD MILLIONS (Q1–Q4 2020)



Source: Compiled from IOM Impact of COVID-19 on Remittances Report (2021b).

FIGURE 76:
RELATIVE CONTRIBUTION BY QUARTER TO ANNUAL REMITTANCE INFLOWS IN USD MILLIONS (Q1–Q4 2020)



Source: Compiled from IOM Impact of COVID-19 on Remittances Report (2021b).

For Nepal, labour migration to GCC countries was not curbed due to stabilization of employment and perceptions of safety in those countries – in fact, total emigration from Nepal experienced a 14 per cent increase between 2019 and mid-2020 (UN DESA, 2020). For Fiji and Samoa, a drop in remittance inflows in the first few months of the pandemic was soon reversed, plausibly because of the recovery of Australia’s and New Zealand’s economies (IOM, 2021b). While the depreciation of local currencies resulted in a reduction of remittance inflows to Indonesia, Mongolia and Samoa, the opposite occurred in the case of Pakistan. In fact, the appreciation of the US dollar against the Pakistan rupee allowed migrant workers in GCC countries to change currencies into Pakistani rupee for higher returns and thus led to higher remittance inflows (ibid.).

A perhaps unexpected positive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is the rapid conversion to formal and digital channels of remittance sending due to the paralysis of informal corridors, which is a major reason for the counter-cyclical growth of remittance inflows observed in many Asia-Pacific countries (ibid.). The increase in Bangladesh and

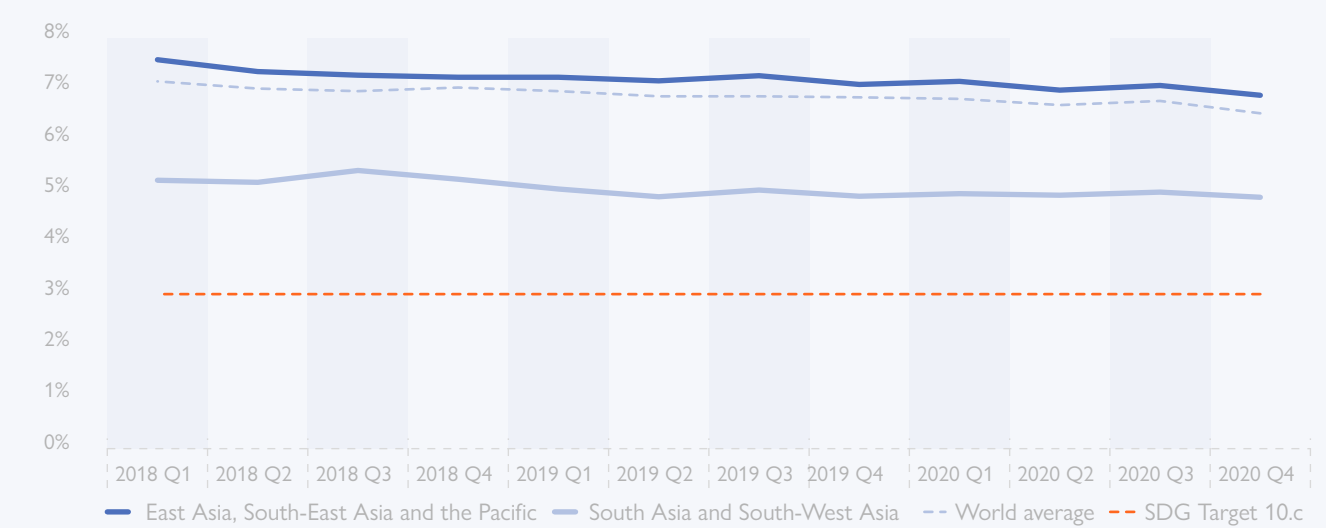
Pakistan, the countries the largest growth rates in remittance inflows among those observed, were mainly attributed to strengthened formal remitting channels and digital transfers. Digitization of remittances was also among the main reasons for the relatively small decline – and sometimes increases – of the inflows in Nepal, Republic of Korea, Fiji, Thailand, and Indonesia. In the case of Samoa, the reduction of remittance costs at the onset of the pandemic was also cited as one of the main reasons for the annual increase observed in 2020.

A question of great interest concerns the change of the remittance cost in 2020, as this was deemed the main cause of resilience in remittance flows observed in many of these Asia-Pacific countries (ibid.). 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 countries and 105 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 10.c** that the **remittance cost should stand at less than 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.

FIGURE 77:
AVERAGE COSTS OF REMITTING USD 200 AS A SHARE OF TOTAL TRANSFER SENT BY LOCATION OF RECEIPT (2018–2020)

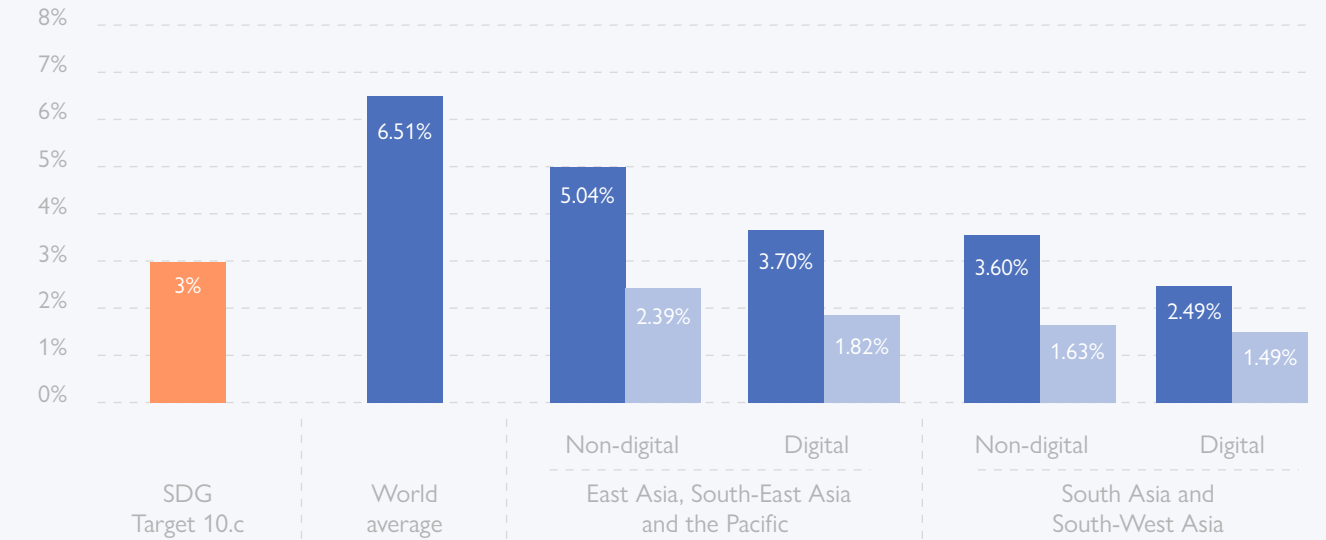


Source: Compiled from World Bank, An Analysis of Trends in Cost of Remittance Services: Remittance Prices Worldwide Quarterly (2020d).

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

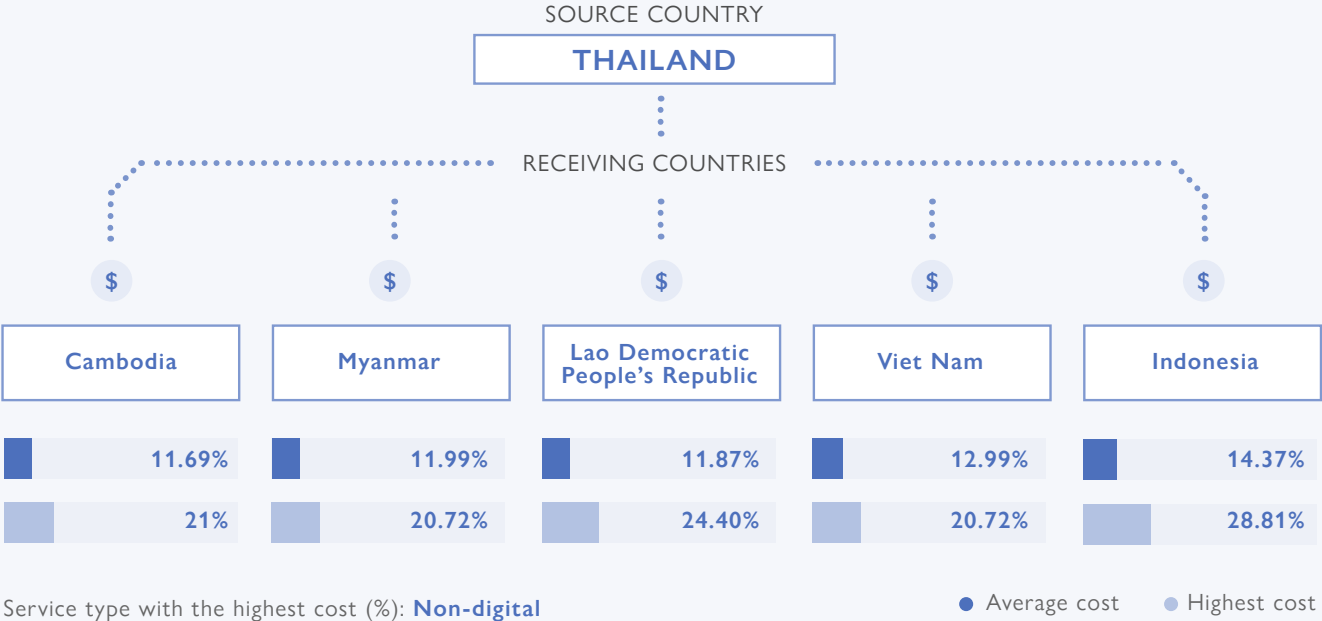
points when digital transfer was used instead of non-digital transfer. As for South Asia and West Asia, the difference was of about 1.3 percentage points. For instance, in the case of remitting from Thailand to Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao Democratic People’s Republic, Viet Nam and Indonesia in the fourth quarter of 2020, transfer services with the highest fees observed were uniformly non-digital ones (Table 7).

FIGURE 78:
AVERAGE COSTS OF REMITTING USD 200 AS A SHARE OF TOTAL TRANSFER SENT, BY LOCATION OF RECEIPT AND TYPE OF TRANSFER (2020)



Source: Compiled from World Bank, An Analysis of Trends in Cost of Remittance Services: Remittance Prices Worldwide Quarterly (2020d).

TABLE 7:
AVERAGE COSTS OF REMITTING USD 200 AS A SHARE OF TOTAL TRANSFER SENT FROM THAILAND (Q4 2020)



Source: Compiled from World Bank Remittance Prices Worldwide (2021b).

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.c (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 resilience of countries that have policies in place to encourage and facilitate digital transfer and at the cost differential of remittances by digital and non-digital means. These findings show the benefits of **promoting faster, safer and cheaper transfer and promoting financial inclusion of migrants** in

terms of 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 4.2).

In moving forward, addressing existing data gaps on remittances would help to monitor the progress towards **SDG Target 10.c** 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**.



A Sri Lankan returnee from Benin engaged in a livelihood activity under a reintegration support programme. I © IOM 2017.

REFERENCES

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

- 2020 [COVID-19 Impact on International Migration, Remittances, and Recipient Households in Developing Asia](#). *ADB Briefs*, 148.

Halliday, T.

- 2006 [Migration, Risk, and Liquidity Constraints in El Salvador](#). *Economic Development and Cultural Change*. 54(4):893–925.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

- 2021a [Regional Secondary Data Review – Asia–Pacific Regional Data Hub \(RDH\)](#). IOM, Bangkok.
- 2021b [Remittance Inflow Trends Snapshots – Asia–Pacific Regional Data Hub \(RDH\)](#). IOM, Bangkok.

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

- 2020 [International Migration Stock 2020](#). UN DESA, Population Division, New York. (accessed 1 April 2021).

World Bank

- 2019 [Migration and Remittances. Recent Developments and Outlook](#). *Migration and Development Brief 31*. World Bank, Washington D.C.
- 2020a [Annual Remittances Data 2019](#).
- 2020b [COVID-19 Crisis through a Migration Lens](#). *Migration and Development Brief 32*. World Bank, Washington D.C.
- 2020c [Phase II: COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens](#). *Migration and Development Brief 33*. World Bank, Washington D.C.
- 2020d [An Analysis of Trends in Cost of Remittance Services: Remittance Prices Worldwide – Quarterly](#). Issue 36. World Bank.
- 2021a [Annual Remittances Data 2020](#) (accessed 1 April 2021).
- 2021b [Remittance Prices Worldwide](#). World Bank.

Yang, D.

- 2008 [Coping with Disaster: The Impact of Hurricanes on International Financial Flows, 1970–2002](#). *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis and Policy*. 8(1):1–45.



A man washes at one of IOM's handwashing points, set up throughout the Rohingya settlements of Cox's Bazar | © IOM 2020/ Abdullah AL MASHRIF



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/Muse MOHAMMED



People from Thailand and Myanmar cross the border from Thailand's Mae Sot to Myanmar's Myawaddy by boats at Tha Huan Yang pier in Tak province. | © IOM 2021

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](#)).

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 vulnerability. In the context of COVID-19, the pandemic has compounded pre-existing needs and vulnerabilities –

lack of access to health care, employment, social support and discrimination – of particular migrant groups, including migrant workers (especially those in irregular situations) and the forcibly displaced populations. Many have been pushed to more perilous routes and exposed to additional hazards such as trafficking in persons.

Moreover, COVID-19 intensified pre-existing challenges to migration data collection activities, both in the region and globally ([Adepoju et.al., 2021](#)). The pandemic, however, could represent an opportunity to invest in more data innovations. According to a recent global survey of National Statistical Offices, the impact of COVID-19 could be better understood by using non-traditional data sources ([UN DESA, 2020](#)).⁷⁸ For example, the use of geospatial information and technologies could improve COVID-19-related data collection. As well, working closely with the private sector to leverage several forms of mobility data might become more popular. Designing and conducting new surveys via phone and developing new written fieldwork protocols for face-to-face data collection could also bridge the data gap created by the pandemic ([ibid.](#)). COVID-19 vaccination programmes could also represent a unique opportunity for data collection in the context of migration. In particular, these programmes could help complementing the data on irregular migration, as the entire population is supposed to be covered by vaccination campaigns, regardless of their migration status ([Kadria and Mishra, 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	Types of Migration	Migration Policy	Migration and Vulnerabilities	Migration and Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Migration flows	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Labour migration• Internal migration• Irregular migration• Family migration• Student migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Migrant rights• Implementation of international human rights instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gender-based violence• Children and youth• Older persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health• Urbanization• Trade



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.



Migration and Vulnerabilities

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.

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.



Migration Policy

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.



Migration and Development

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

Adepoju, A.

- 2021 [Mobility and migration data in 2021: Perspectives from Africa](#). Migration Policy Practice, 11(1):10–13.

Kadria, B. and R. Mishra

- 2021 [Migration in Asia and its subregions: Data challenges and coping strategies for 2021](#). Migration Policy Practice, 11(1):14–20.

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

- 2020 [Monitoring the State of Statistical Operations under the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). UN DESA Statistics Division, New York.

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

- 2020 [Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020: Assessing Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration](#). UN ESCAP, Bangkok.

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

SDG indicators in relation to types of migration	
SDG 8.8.1	Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries, by sex and migrant status
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
SDG 10.c.1	Remittance costs as a proportion of the amount remitted
SDG 10.7.1	Recruitment cost borne by employee as a proportion of early income earned in country of destination
SDG 17.3.2	Volume of remittances in GDP
SDG 3.c.1	Health worker density and distribution
SDG 4.b.1	Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships by sector and type of study
SDG indicators in relation to migration and vulnerabilities	
SDG 11.5.1	Number of deaths, missing and persons affected by disaster
SDG 16.2.2	Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation
SDG indicators in relation to migration policy	
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
SDG 10.7.2	Number of countries with migration policies that facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people
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

Note: For more information, see [IOM Migration Data Portal thematic page](#).

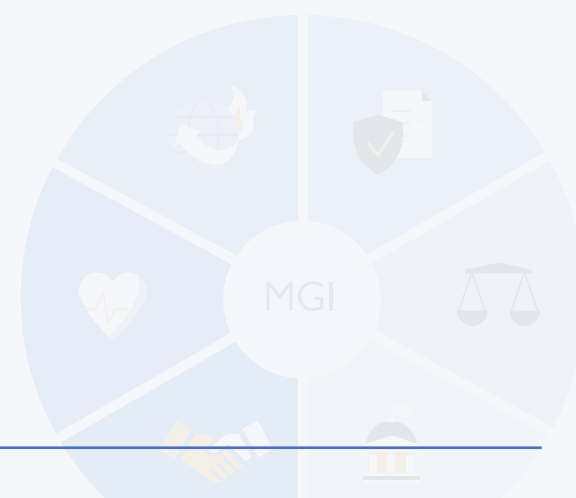
ANNEX II

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

ANNEX III

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.

An Isolation and Treatment Centre under construction in Camp 20 Extension of the Rohingya settlements | © IOM 2020/ Abdullah AL MASHRIF





ASIA-PACIFIC MIGRATION DATA REPORT 2020

IOM ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL DATA HUB

