



MIGRATION GOVERNANCE INSIGHTS ON REGULAR PATHWAYS

Delivering on the Promise of Migration

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Regular pathways are essential to realizing the promise of migration and addressing global challenges. These pathways are the legal and policy frameworks that enable people to move to, enter, stay in, exit or re-enter States along their migration journey in an authorized manner. The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) recognize that well-managed migration benefits migrants and societies. The impacts of migration depend on where and how people migrate, which in turn depend largely on the options available to them. More and better opportunities for people to move in a regular way are key to unlocking migration as an opportunity for a better future.

This publication, based on the Migration Governance Indicators (MGI) data from 100 national and 69 local-level assessments conducted between 2016 and 2023,* provides insights into what pathways for regular migration look like around the world. It showcases examples of relevant policies at different stages of the migration continuum and across a range of contexts. The report also explores how different enabling factors can support effective and impactful pathways, and which scaling mechanisms can expand existing pathways, and assesses the potential benefits of regular pathways for migrants and countries of origin and destination.

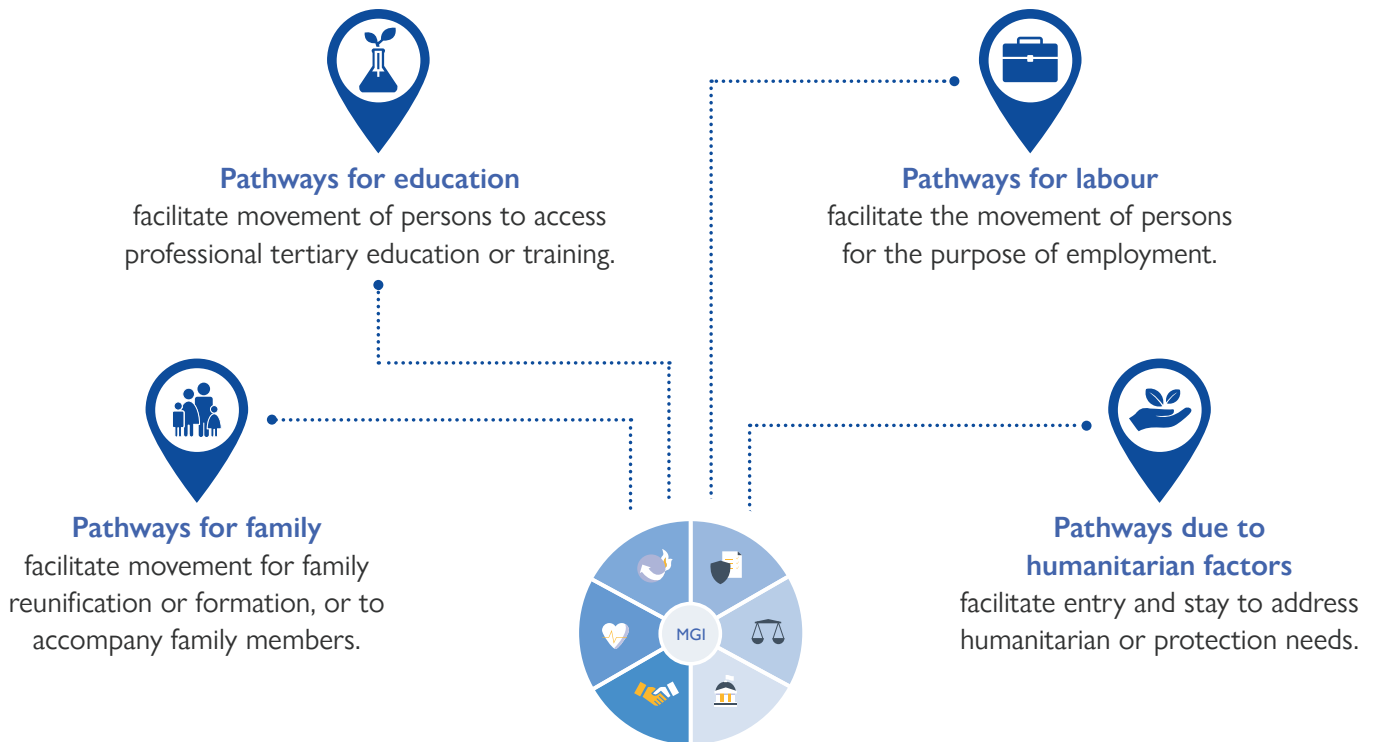
Regular pathways are highly diverse and can be characterized in different ways. In this publication, the focus is on the purpose of migration facilitated by a given pathway. Four main reasons for migration are analysed, recognizing that these are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive, as individuals' profiles and motivations to migrate often overlap. Key findings highlight the necessity of coordinated action at various levels and robust stakeholder engagement, as well as the importance of flexibility and adaptability in pathway design.

The report is structured around three objectives to facilitate regular migration and enhance its positive impacts:



Note: For more information, see IOM's *Migration Governance Insights: Informing People-centred Migration Policies* (2024).

Regular pathways according to purpose for migration



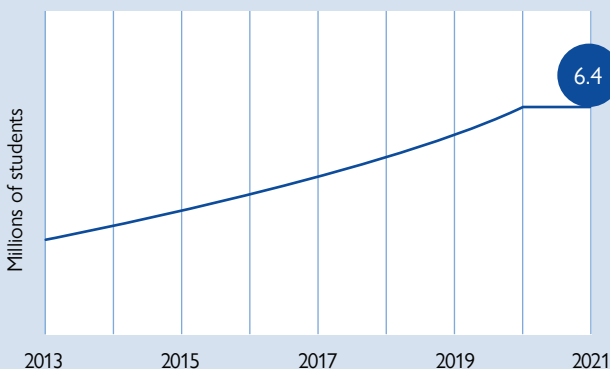
1. ESTABLISH REGULAR PATHWAYS FOR MIGRATION

To facilitate regular migration, countries must first establish pathways for mobility. Pathways are often based on migration purpose, and countries take diverse policy approaches to their creation.



Education pathways

Figure 1. Number of internationally mobile students globally (2013–2021)



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2023.

In 2021, there were over 6 million internationally mobile tertiary students around the world.

24%

of MGI countries have measures to facilitate education mobility.

Measures to facilitate the transition of international students into the labour market are more often found in countries that regularly monitor the labour market demand for migrant workers (33% versus 9%).

Selected measures:

- Enact dedicated legislation on tertiary education.
- Guarantee equal fees for international students.
- Avoid foreign student quotas.
- Ensure transparent visa regulations.
- Increase clarity of application procedures.
- Formalize accreditation criteria.



Labour pathways

Figure 2. Number of migrant workers worldwide (2013–2019)

Year	Migrant workers (millions)	Migrant workers as a share of all workers
2013	150	4.4%
2019	169	4.9%

Source: ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers (2021).

In 2019, there were approximately 169 million migrant workers around the world.

39%

of MGI countries have measures to facilitate labour mobility.

Defined programmes for managing labour migration are more often found in countries that formally engage with the private sector in agenda-setting and policy implementation in relation to migration issues (32% versus 13%).

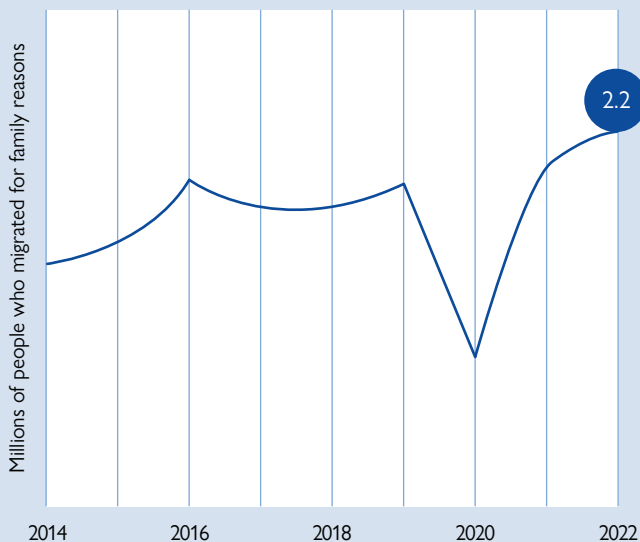
Selected measures:

- Develop sector- or skill-specific initiatives.
- Facilitate job applications from abroad.
- Avoid minimum income thresholds.
- Participate in regional agreements on labour mobility.
- Negotiate bilateral labour agreements.



Family pathways

Figure 3. Family-related migration to OECD countries (2014–2022)



Source: OECD's International Migration Outlook 2023.

In 2022, around 2.2 million people who migrated for family reasons – including accompanying family members – arrived in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

42%

of MGI countries have measures to facilitate mobility for family reasons.

Such measures are more often found in countries that have international agreements on the portability of social security entitlements (49% versus 27%).

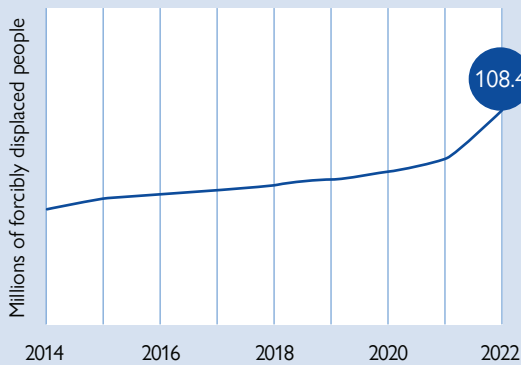
Selected measures:

- Address barriers related to the migration status of the primary migrant.
- Expand coverage pathways to more family members.
- Avoid stringent income thresholds.
- Provide language support services, exemptions or other integration support initiatives for family members.
- Increase clarity of application procedures.



Humanitarian pathways

Figure 4. Number of forcibly displaced people in millions globally (2014–2022)



Source: UNHCR's *Figures at a glance* (2023); and IDMC, 2023.

By the end of 2022, there were around 108.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide.

39%

of MGI countries have measures to facilitate mobility for humanitarian reasons.

Such measures are more often found in countries that make formal efforts to **enhance the vertical coherence of their migration policies** (52% versus 31%).

Selected measures:

- Enhance flexibility in immigration procedures for humanitarian reasons.
- Develop humanitarian admission and protection programmes.
- Provide proper documentation and legal identity services.
- Establish special residence categories for those who are forcibly displaced.
- Increase the clarity and broaden the scope of formal regulations.

2. EXPAND AND IMPLEMENT EXISTING REGULAR MIGRATION PATHWAYS

To maintain the integrity of pathways, countries can strengthen the capacities of institutions that are developing, monitoring and implementing migration policies, and make information clearer and more accessible on how prospective migrants can utilize existing pathways.

Strengthen the institutional capacity of migration governance

64%

of MGI countries have dedicated institutions coordinating the design and implementation of migration policy.

- Bilateral labour agreements are more often found in countries with **institutions that coordinate the design and implementation of migration policy** (88% versus 72%).
- While most (87%) countries have dedicated **institutions tasked with integrated border control** and security, only 42 per cent regularly train their border staff.
- Strengthening institutional and human capacities across different aspects of migration management, including through regular and targeted training of border staff, can play a pivotal role in ensuring safe and orderly migration.

Promote clear and transparent rules and regulations

54%

of MGI countries provide clear and regularly updated information about migration rules and regulations.

- Most countries have official **websites outlining visa or residence options**, yet information is often not user-friendly and offered in a limited number of languages.
- Most countries use a mixed online and paper visa application process, and only 16 per cent have fully online processes.
- Digitalization can expedite admission and stay processes by enhancing the efficiency of visa application systems – for instance, by streamlining and automating many of the administrative tasks involved.

3. ENHANCE REGULAR PATHWAYS FOR BETTER IMPACT

To amplify the benefits of migration, policies in destination countries can address labour shortages and focus on regional collaboration to help tackle demographic shifts. Origin countries' policies can facilitate diaspora contributions and, where relevant, support the sustainable reintegration of returned nationals.

Amplify the benefits of labour mobility in destination countries

Dedicated labour migration policies help address labour supply shortages

Countries that have established dedicated programmes to manage labour migration exhibit having, on average, higher shares of regular foreign-born workers (10.3% versus 3.9%).

High-income countries with labour migration policies may attract higher numbers of regular migrant workers

The positive association between labour migration programmes and higher shares of regular migrant workers remains significant even among countries with similar economic characteristics.

Measures to facilitate regional mobility can be useful to face demographic change in the long run

Among primarily destination countries, those engaging in regional agreements to promote labour mobility tend to have lower average age dependency ratios (48.8% versus 53.3%).

Facilitate diaspora contributions to countries of origin

Strong policy frameworks amplify development outcomes

Countries with specific national policies and strategies on emigration have, on average, higher levels of remittance inflows compared to countries without such policies (8.8% versus 4.1%).

Engaging with nationals abroad promotes remittance flows

On average, higher levels of remittance inflows are observed in countries that formally engage members of their diaspora in agenda-setting and policy implementation, compared to those lacking engagement mechanisms (8.9% versus 5.1%).

Dedicated policies and engagement mechanisms are complementary

Countries that combine dedicated policies on emigration with formal diaspora engagement received, on average, three times more remittances (equivalent to 12.9% of their GDP in 2022) than countries lacking both measures.

Support the reintegration of returned nationals

While many countries focus on return policies, reintegration is often forgotten

Only 22 per cent of countries have measures to facilitate the reintegration of returning nationals. Also, only 12 per cent have measures promoting the sustainable reintegration of migrants who fled the country during crises.

Reintegration programmes can boost local economies

These can address labour shortages, leverage migrants' skills and financial capital, and employ community members. Yet data gaps make it difficult to understand the impact of policies and programmes.

Reintegration and development efforts can be blended for greater impact

Interventions that use a whole-of-government approach, engage migrant communities, bring origin and destination countries together, and include capacity-building are more sustainable.

Conclusions and next steps

Countries around the world have developed and refined a wide variety of regular migration pathways, as analysed in this report. Their experiences offer valuable examples and lessons learned to build on going forward. Moreover, several additional steps support the development and implementation of regular pathways. These include improving migration data quality and use, enhancing policy coordination structures, and increasing public consultation around pathway design and adoption.