

ASIA-PACIFIC MIGRATION DATA REPORT 2021

IOM ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL DATA HUB



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RDH team: Chandan Nayak, Anny Yip-Ching Yu, Gabriela Alvarez Sánchez, Emanuele Albarosa, Josamine Ruth Bronnvik, Ashok Rai, and Mohammad Saleem Kashaf.

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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: roasiapacific.iom.int

REGIONAL DATA HUB

Email: rdhroap@iom.int
twitter: <https://twitter.com/RDHAsiaPacific>
Web: www.iom.int/asia-and-pacific

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ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ACAPS	Assessment Capacities Project
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CDR	Call Detail Records
CTDC	Counter-trafficking Data Collaborative
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations
EU	European Union
EUDiF	EU Global Diaspora Facility
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MGI	Migration Governance Indicators
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OFW	Overseas Filipino Workers
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PoE	Points of Entry
PLS	Pacific Labour Scheme
RSE	Recognized Seasonal Employment

ROAP	Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SWP	Seasonal Worker Program
TD&B	Travel Document and Bearer
TVPA	Trafficking Victims Protect Act
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WHO	World Health Organization

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, the 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, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Viet Nam and Vanuatu.

see [Asia-Pacific map](#)

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, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia and the 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.” ¹
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.” ¹
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).” ¹
Remittances	“Personal monetary transfers, cross border or within the same country, made by migrants to individuals or communities with whom the migrant has links.” ¹
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, the 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 the 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.” ¹

2. UNSD, *Handbook on Measuring International Migration through Population Censuses* (2017: 9).



IOM health staff pictured outside of a repurposed health facility in Cox's Bazar, that will serve as an Isolation and Treatment Centre during the COVID-19 pandemic | © IOM 2021/Nate WEBB

FOREWORD

The outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in early 2020 and its far-reaching consequences changed the drivers of migration and migratory movements around the world drastically. The pandemic's unprecedented effects continue to evolve and present both challenges and opportunities to building back better.

The much-anticipated socioeconomic recovery in 2021 was disrupted by the surge of new coronavirus variants that triggered new waves of outbreaks in many parts of the Asia–Pacific region. Although border closures and movement restrictions reduced in number, they remained an important feature across the region, affecting migrants' paths, ease of travel and way of life.

As humanitarian crises worsened, threats to the safety and well-being of people multiplied, particularly threats to migrants in vulnerable situations and their families, and added to pre-existing challenges including climate change, natural disasters and economic downturn. The same crises also escalated disruptions to data collection activities that could have informed the mitigation of pre-existing challenges.

Nevertheless, the resilience of migrants and their contributions to societies across the region and the world resonated throughout the year, as they responded to complex challenges and had an essential role in supporting the global recovery from the pandemic.

Changes in our societies such as the proliferation of innovative data sources and tools, increasing digitalization of remittance sending channels and the emerging role of diasporas in development create opportunities to unleash and optimize the developmental effects of migration.

Data provide critical tools for monitoring national and regional progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Migration Governance Indicators (MGI). As such, data create the potential to change development outcomes while ensuring that no one is left behind. This rationale is embedded in Objective 1 of the Global Compact for Migration, which emphasizes that improving the collection, quality, use and analysis of disaggregated data is the foundation of evidence-based policies.

To contribute to these objectives, the Regional Data Hub for Asia and the Pacific has launched the Asia–Pacific Migration Data Report 2021, in extension of the 2020 report. The report seeks to consolidate the latest available migration data in the Asia–Pacific region and discuss observed trends in 2021, especially through the lens of the ongoing recovery from the pandemic.

The report also identifies data gaps in a call for action to strengthen the regional evidence base for migration and ensure more evidence-based IOM, United Nations and Government engagement on migration issues.

We hope that the Asia–Pacific Migration Data Report 2021 will make meaningful contributions to national policymaking processes throughout Asia and the Pacific.

Dr. Maria Nnette Motus

Regional Director,

IOM Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific



IOM Afghanistan's five COVID-19 Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) in Herat province offer COVID-19 awareness sessions and screening to thousands of underserved people | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, the coronavirus disease 2019 outbreak (COVID-19) continued to disrupt the migration dynamics from, within and to the Asia–Pacific region. However, the same year also saw the beginning of recovery. Vaccine rollout programmes were one of the significant steps towards such recovery, allowing governments to ease containment and mobility restrictions. In line with monitoring the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Global Compact for Migration objectives and the Migration Governance Indicators (MGI), this second edition of the Asia–Pacific Migration Data Report aims to consolidate the latest evidence on the migration landscape in the region in 2021, mainly through the lenses of recovery from the pandemic.

While the Asia–Pacific region has shown economic recovery and improvement in mobility, various countries in the region faced multiple COVID-19 waves, triggered by new variants of the virus in 2021. These surges led governments across the region to impose strict lockdowns to contain the spread of the new variants. Like in 2020, these measures affected migration, particularly labour and internal migration. The pandemic also left many individuals exposed to trafficking and exploitation and exacerbated the already vulnerable health, living and socioeconomic situation of millions of migrants who, in many cases, are not included in national recovery plans.

Migration dynamics in the Asia–Pacific region were not only influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple migration drivers also characterize the region. For example, in 2021, conflict triggered the forced migration of nearly 2 million individuals within and out of Afghanistan following the de facto Government takeover. Similarly, internal conflict in Myanmar displaced thousands of people from their homes. Moreover, the region was hit by various disasters resulting from hazards. Floods, severe droughts and cyclones induced the displacement of millions of individuals across the region.

The Asia–Pacific Migration Data Report 2021 outlines the situation of migrants in the region by assessing major types of migration – labour migration corridors, conflict- and disaster-related displacements, and return migration flows. It also provides key findings on migrants' access to national COVID-19 recovery plans and challenges faced by migrants – from socioeconomic risks to smuggling, trafficking and the dangers experienced along migration routes. Additionally, the report showcases the role of migration in the region's development and innovations in migration data and research.

While considering the existing data gaps, the available information allowed the development of this yearly study on the migration landscape in the region, resulting in key findings covering multiple core migration themes:



MIGRATION POLICY

MOBILITY RESTRICTIONS AND CONTAINMENT MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19



The Asia-Pacific region was among the top three regions in the world with the highest number of imposed entry restrictions in 2021.



30/40
COUNTRIES

Internal movement restrictions were observed in 30 out of 40 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.



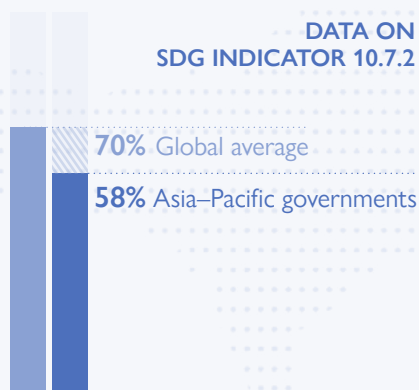
By the end of 2021, 40 per cent of assessed Points of Entry (PoEs) in the Asia-Pacific region were reported as fully operational and only 11 per cent as fully closed.



Between March 2020 and December 2021, South Asia showed the highest level of stringency regarding internal containment measures. By contrast, the Pacific observed the lowest government response stringency level.

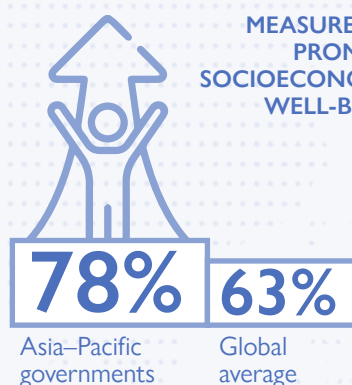
PROGRESS TOWARDS AN ORDERLY, SAFE, REGULAR AND RESPONSIBLE MIGRATION AND MOBILITY OF PEOPLE

DATA ON SDG INDICATOR 10.7.2

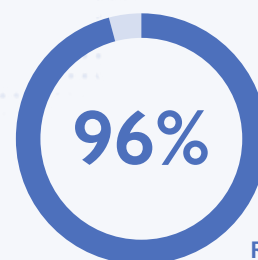


As of November 2021, 58 per cent of Asia-Pacific governments reported data on SDG indicator 10.7.2, which is lower than the global average (70%).

MEASURES TO PROMOTE SOCIOECONOMIC WELL-BEING



Seventy-eight per cent of Asia-Pacific governments reported measures to promote socioeconomic well-being – a proportion higher than the global average of 63 per cent.



FAIR AND ETHICAL RECRUITMENT OF MIGRANT WORKERS

Ninety-six per cent of governments in the Asia-Pacific region reported policies that promote the fair and ethical recruitment of migrant workers.



Essential access to health care is widely predominant amongst migrants regardless of their immigration status in the region.



In line with promoting policies for safe, orderly and regular migration, nine out of ten governments in the region reported having formal strategies to address trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling.



MIGRATION STATISTICS

MIGRANT STOCK

Individuals migrating from Asia–Pacific countries almost doubled over the last 20 years, driven by impressive growth rates observed among emigrants from South and South-East Asia.



The number of individuals who migrated to countries in the region grew by 40 per cent between 2000 and 2020.

The migration links between Asia–Pacific and African countries tightened fast over the last two decades, reflecting deepening economic and cultural relations between the two regions.



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 Asia–Pacific region is expected to send out more migrants to countries outside the region than those it would receive, between 2020 and 2050.





TYPES OF MIGRATION

LABOUR MIGRATION

14.2%
24 MILLION

INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT
WORKERS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC
REGION



39%
9.1 MILLION

OF MIGRANT WORKERS
WERE WOMEN



The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that 14.2 per cent (or 24 million) international migrant workers were hosted in the Asia-Pacific region; of these, 39 per cent (9.1 million) were female.

The country-level analysis indicates that stagnation largely characterized the inflow and stock of migrant workers in main destinations in the region.

Gradual resumption was seen in the deployment of workers overseas from main Asia-Pacific origin countries in 2021, though still distant from pre-pandemic levels.

Fluctuations in labour migration flows remained closely tied to the direct and indirect COVID-19 effects, mainly travel bans amid new waves of outbreaks.

FORCED MIGRATION



5.49 MILLION

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM
ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES

A total of 5.49 million refugees and asylum seekers from Asia-Pacific countries were forcibly displaced due to conflict or violence as of mid-2021.



1,358,770
INDIVIDUALS

AFGHANISTAN



The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that 1,358,770 individuals – including refugees, displaced people and migrant workers – left Afghanistan between January and December 2021. This number is 122 per cent higher than the 2020 figure.



Most conflict-induced displacement in the region was concentrated in Afghanistan and Myanmar – with further increases due to the upscaling of the Afghanistan and Myanmar crises.

IOM also identified 988,817 people in Afghanistan to be newly internally displaced after the political changes in August 2021 and remained in displacement until the end of 2021.



MYANMAR



1.2 MILLION INDIVIDUALS

UNHCR estimated that, as of 1 December 2021, the stock of refugees and asylum seekers in Myanmar rose to 1.2 million in total, whereas the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has reached 776,000, meaning double the 2020 figure.



4.22 MILLION REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

17% OF THE GLOBAL STOCK

As of mid-2021, Asia and the Pacific hosted 4.22 million refugees and asylum seekers, accounting for 17 per cent of the global stock.

Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Islamic Republic of Iran were among the top nine largest countries of asylum in the world, as well as the largest countries of asylum in the region, accounting for 75 per cent of all refugees and asylum seekers hosted in the Asia–Pacific region.

- PAKISTAN
- BANGLADESH
- ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

75% OF ALL REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS HOSTED IN THE ASIA–PACIFIC REGION

ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION

In 2021, the Asia–Pacific region was hit by seasonal floods followed by tropical storms, cyclones and droughts.



Afghanistan was hit by a particularly severe drought affecting nearly 80 per cent of the country.



557,000 NEW DISASTER DISPLACEMENTS WERE RECORDED IN INDONESIA BY MID-2021

Nearly 557,000 new disaster displacements were recorded in Indonesia by mid-2021 – floods accounted for most of the displacements. This figure represents an increase of around 50,000 new displacements compared with the same period in 2020.



3,914,823 DISPLACED PEOPLE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Super Typhoon Rai brought torrential rains, violent winds, landslides and storm surges in the Philippines, displacing 3,914,823 people between 16 and 21 December 2021.

The displacement risk due to sudden-onset events is predicted to increase in South Asia by 3.7 per cent and in South-East Asia by 2.4 per cent.

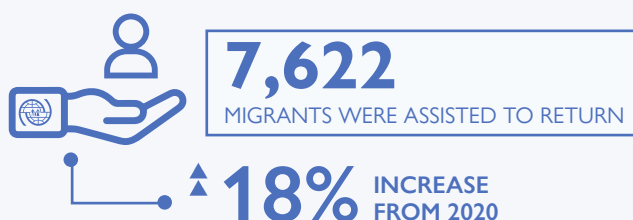


- 37 MILLION EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
- 36 MILLION SOUTH ASIA
- 6.3 MILLION LOWER MEKONG REGION

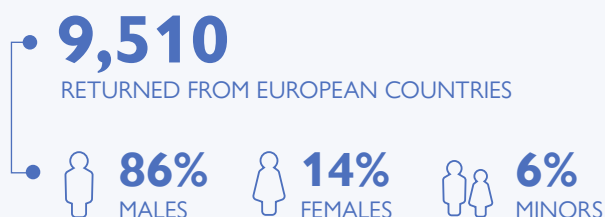
By 2050, without concrete climate and development action, climate change could force nearly 37 million people in East Asia and the Pacific, 36 million in South Asia and 6.3 million in the Lower Mekong region to migrate within their countries.

RETURN MIGRATION

In 2021, IOM assisted 7,622 migrants to return voluntarily to their countries of origin in Asia and the Pacific, an 18 per cent increase from 2020.



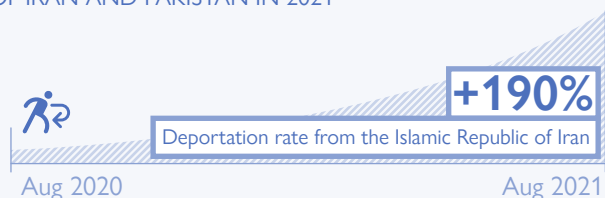
The top five countries of origin in Asia and the Pacific for IOM-assisted voluntary returnees were Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Mongolia (in decreasing order).



Between the first and the third quarter of 2021, 9,510 nationals of Asia-Pacific countries returned following an order to leave the territories of European countries. The majority were male; 14 per cent were women and 6 per cent were minors younger than 18 years.

1 MILLION AFGHANS

RETURNED FROM THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN AND PAKISTAN IN 2021



More than 1 million Afghans returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in 2021 as of November, the majority of whom were deported. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) observed an increase of 190 per cent in the deportation rate from the Islamic Republic of Iran in August 2021 compared to the same period in August 2020.

Systemic differences in the reintegration outcomes between forced and voluntary returnees are observed, especially when such returns are made in a fragile context.

INTERNAL MIGRATION AND URBANIZATION

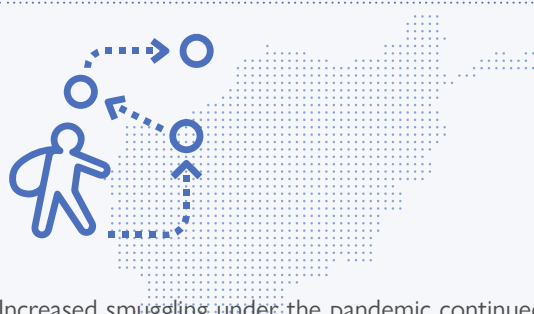


Despite large data gaps in internal migration, the latest available data from a diverse set of countries point to one emerging trend propelled or reinforced by the pandemic – that the most urbanized cities were seeing a decline in net internal migration in 2021.

IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Pandemic-related travel restrictions, including proof of vaccination or negative COVID-19 test results, added to the difficulties of migration in 2021.

During the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, fewer document frauds were detected at airports in the Asia-Pacific region than in previous years. Despite a slight increase in fraudulent document usage over 2020, it did not reach pre-pandemic levels.



Increased smuggling under the pandemic continued in 2021. This increase can be attributed in part to pandemic-related travel restrictions, which left fewer routes open for regular migration. Smuggling was also linked to crises in the region, namely in Afghanistan, which saw more dangerous irregular exit routes increase in popularity as borders were closed in response to the political changes in August 2021.



MIGRATION AND VULNERABILITIES

EMERGENCIES

Migrants are overrepresented in the groups that are hardest hit by the pandemic. However, they are often excluded from the policies meant to ameliorate their already vulnerable condition, including vaccination programmes and social safety nets. The year 2021 saw more inclusion of migrants in relief programmes and noted improvements over 2020, but the efforts were sporadic and uneven across the region.



The pandemic was linked to heightened violence against women and girls, increased poverty rates, and loss of access to education – meaning that the COVID-19 pandemic continued to create new challenges for migrants in vulnerable situations and intensify old ones.

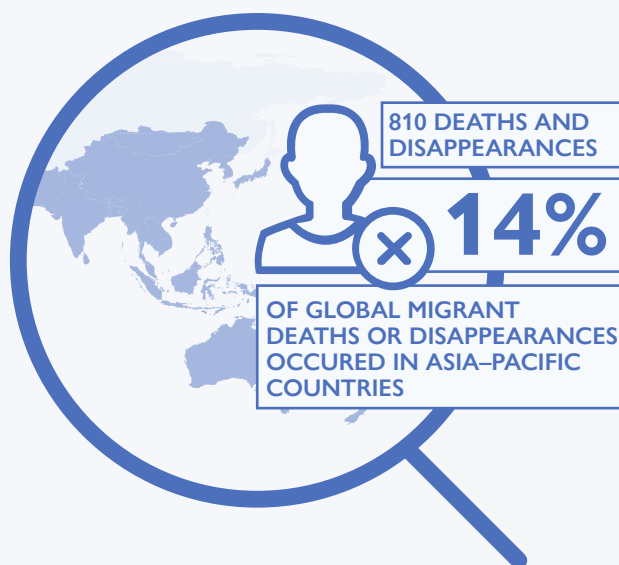
Myanmar experienced a military takeover in February 2021 that saw increased violence across the country and forced thousands to migrate in search of safety. In addition, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees already in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, were left with less hope of returning home to Myanmar.



Afghanistan experienced increasing violence leading up to the withdrawal of international troops and political changes. A drought, ongoing conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic, and increasing poverty have led 18 million people to need humanitarian assistance in 2021.

MIGRANT DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES

As of February 2022, the IOM Missing Migrants Project reported 5,795 migrant deaths and disappearances in 2021 worldwide. Reported deaths and disappearances in Asia–Pacific countries amounted to 810 individuals, or around 14 per cent of the global figures.



Reported deaths and disappearances in Asia–Pacific have increased substantially for both 2019 and 2020.

Most deaths and disappearance incidents in Asia–Pacific are reported to occur in Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.



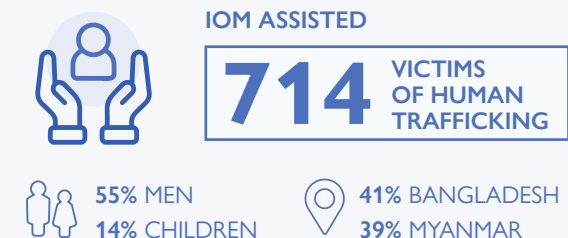
In 2021, 525 reported migration incidents occurred worldwide that led to the death or disappearance of migrants originally from Asia–Pacific. A total of 921 victims were originally from the region, 61 of whom were from unknown countries – most of these deaths concerned migrants from Afghanistan, who represented 72 per cent of the total.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Twenty-seven countries, territories and areas in the Asia-Pacific region were assessed by the United States Department of State against government efforts in counter trafficking ranked under Tier 2 and Tier 2 Watch List.

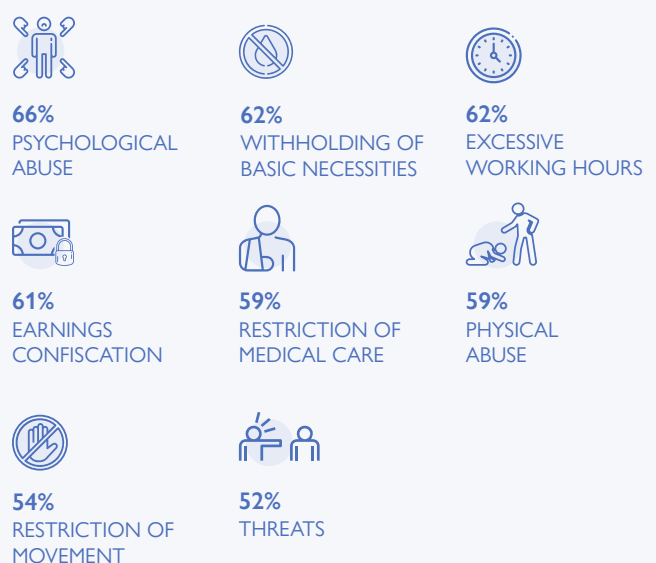


In 2021, IOM assisted a total of 714 victims of human trafficking originating from the Asia-Pacific region; 55 per cent were men, and 14 per cent of the identified victims were children, mainly from Bangladesh (41%) and Myanmar (39%).



Forced labour constituted the primary type of exploitation in 2021, with 92 per cent of the IOM-assisted victims of human trafficking with available data from the region reportedly subjected to this type of exploitation, particularly in the domestic, construction and fishing sector.

As to the means of control, IOM-assisted victims from the region were exposed simultaneously to various methods. Over half of the identified victims were subjected to psychological abuse (66%), withholding of basic necessities (62%), excessive working hours (62%), earnings confiscation (61%), restriction of medical care (59%), physical abuse (59%), restriction of movement (54%) and threats (52%).



In 2021, 70 per cent of IOM-assisted human trafficking victims from the Asia-Pacific countries were exploited within the region, making intraregional human trafficking predominant in Asia and the Pacific.





MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

REMITTANCES AND DIASPORAS

In 2021, the region received nearly USD 306 billion of remittance inflows – a 2 per cent increase from 2020.

Resilience in remittance flows was seen in 17 of 36 countries and areas from the Asia–Pacific region. Findings indicated an increasing trend in remittance inflows from these countries between 2020 and 2021.

**INCREASING TREND IN REMITTANCES
INFLOWS IN 17 OUT OF 36
COUNTRIES IN THE REGION**



Latest migration stock figures show that most of the top destinations for Pakistani, Filipino and Bangladeshi emigrants were also among the major source countries of remittance inflows, stressing the link between the diaspora concentration and the source of remittance inflows.

Twenty-five governments from the Asia–Pacific region have of diaspora engagement policies, institutions and practices.

TRADE

The empirical evidence from the Asia–Pacific region supports the hypothesis of a positive relationship between migration and international trade in the region. Asia–Pacific countries linked by tighter commercial relations tend to have stronger migration linkages.

Restrictions implemented following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic affected cross-border trade substantially, increasing traders' vulnerability and limiting their capacity to contribute to economic recovery.



MIGRATION AND INNOVATION

INNOVATIVE DATA SOURCES

Innovative data sources represent an essential complement to traditional data for the analysis of migration trends. In many contexts, they can provide timely information and comprehensive coverage and representativeness, as well as levels of geographical resolution often unmatched by other types of data.

Technical challenges are hindering the effective use of innovative data sources. Accessibility of private data repositories and lack of technical capabilities to analyse the data are main obstacles.

Significant efforts are needed to exploit the potential of the immense quantity of data already being collected.

SUPPORTING HUMANITARIAN AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES



New research methods and data solutions can substantially benefit public migration policies and humanitarian operations.

Innovative data methods and tools heavily depend on readily available, comprehensive quality migration information.

INTRODUCTION

Two years after the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), the largest and deadliest pandemic of the past century, human mobility and migration have been significantly curtailed. Despite initial hopes that by the end of 2020, COVID-19 would be contained, the year 2021 saw many surges in COVID-19 cases and new health measures and restrictions to socioeconomic activities.

While COVID-19 recovery plans are being implemented in Asia and the Pacific, promoting both internal and international mobility, the overall level of stringency of restrictive measures in the region remained similar to 2020 (see [Section 1.1](#)). Between 2020 and 2021, several countries in the region faced multiple COVID-19 waves ([UNODC, 2021](#)), and by the end of 2021, the Asia–Pacific region was struggling to contain the omicron variant of the virus. The pandemic and subsequent health containment measures are still affecting migration and mobility. Labour migration flows remain far from pre-pandemic levels (see [Section 3.1](#)), internal migration to urban areas has substantially decreased in some countries (see [Section 3.5](#)), and many irregular migration routes are becoming increasingly dangerous ([IOM, 2021a](#)); (see [Section 3.6](#)). The pandemic has left many individuals exposed to trafficking and exploitation in various forms and made reporting suspect cases more difficult (see [Section 4.2](#) and [4.3](#)). Moreover, physical and psychological well-being, living and employment conditions, food insecurity and access to social programmes are increasingly worrying for migrants in many contexts (see [Section 4.1](#)).

Despite the severe long-lasting challenges of the pandemic, 2021 saw the beginning of the global recovery from this crisis. Vaccine rollouts sustain the collective efforts toward recovery, allowing governments to ease the restrictions on economic and social activities and to have more breathing room when new surges occur. By the beginning of 2022, 5.6 billion vaccine doses had been administered in Asia and the Pacific, or 65 per cent of those administered globally ([WHO, 2022](#)). Vaccination rollouts are predicted to speed up the economic and labour market recovery throughout

2023 ([ILO, 2022](#)) and have likely played a role in the gradual resumption of labour migration flows observed in the region (see [Section 3.1](#)). Many border crossing points have reopened (see [Section 1.1](#)), and international trade flows quickly went back to pre-pandemic levels (see [Section 5.2](#)). While many migrants and other populations in vulnerable situations are still not included in vaccination programmes, some necessary steps have been taken in this direction in many countries in the Asia–Pacific region. (see [Section 4.1](#)).

However, migration in the Asia–Pacific region evolves in a complex environment, and its main drivers span well beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Conflict continues to displace millions of people in the region. The conflict and political turmoil in Afghanistan since the summer of 2021 dramatically worsened the pre-existing humanitarian crisis in the country and led to sustained displacement both in and out of the country (see [Section 3.2](#)). Similarly, the internal conflict in Myanmar continues to force thousands of people away from their homes and often out of the country. New disaster-induced displacements reached 21.3 million individuals in 2020 alone ([IOM, 2021a](#)), with forecasts suggesting that sudden-onset environmental events potentially leading to further displacement will become more frequent in the future (see [Section 3.3](#)). Moreover, estimates indicate that environmental migration caused by slow-onset event changes might affect 28–53 million individuals in the Asia–Pacific region by 2050, depending on the scenario considered. Finally, technological progress and transformation are gaining an unprecedented role in the migration process as well as in migration research and policy design ([IOM, 2021b](#)); (see [Section 6](#)). Mobile phone apps are increasingly being used to share information and connect geographically dispersed groups, which can offer substantial support to migrants before, during and after their journeys. Remittance payments are progressively moving toward mobile banking systems, which tends to reduce transaction fees and overcome several other practical obstacles faced by migrants (see [Section 5.1](#)). Finally, innovative data sources and new research methods

are increasingly being used to study migration and to design, adapt and implement migration policies and programmes.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); (see [Annex I](#)), the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (see [Annex II](#)) and the Migration Governance Indicators (MGIs); (see [Annex III](#)) guide the analysis and insights presented in this report. These insights aim at supporting international efforts **to increase the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity and migratory status (SDG Target 17.18) and towards the collection and utilization of accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies (Objective 1 of the Global Compact for Migration).**

The Asia–Pacific Migration Data Report 2021 summarizes the existing publicly available information on migration in the region. The report analyses and discusses ongoing migration dynamics, as well as how these are shaped by the pandemic and the global recovery. Moreover, progress towards the global goals set by the international community through the SDGs, the Global Compact for Migration and the MGI is reviewed. Finally, the report provides policy and data recommendations to international organizations and governments to expand the much-needed evidence base on migration trends in the region.

The perspective adopted throughout this study focuses on the availability of timely, comprehensive and quality information on migration in Asia and the Pacific. Several sources are considered, including publicly available national and regional datasets and reports, information from IOM programmes, and media sources. The themes and topics highlighted in this report were mainly based on data availability,³ which is extensively discussed and whose limits are highlighted. When possible, the analysis investigates the wide-reaching

consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration dynamics in the region and whether the observed changes appear to be structural or transitory. Various national and local cases are presented throughout the report whenever regional information is unavailable or when specific contexts call for a dedicated discussion. In many cases, the complexity of migration dynamics in the region is highlighted through discussions of the connections between the different themes analysed in the study.

This report is structured around the Thematic Pillars of IOM Asia–Pacific Regional Data Hub. [Section 1](#) presents a comprehensive outline of the restrictive policies implemented in response to COVID-19 in the Asia–Pacific region throughout 2021, including travel and mobility bans as well as lockdowns and other economic measures. [Section 2](#) investigates how migration trends in the region have evolved over the last two decades and outlines how they are projected to evolve if recent dynamics continue. [Section 3](#) delves into the multifaceted reality of migration in Asia and the Pacific, examining various types of migration linked by complex relations and often overlapping with each other – including labour and forced migration, environmental migrants and returnees, and internal and irregular migration. Several categories of vulnerabilities that affect migrants in the region are discussed in [Section 4](#), starting from those caused by the pandemic to trafficking in persons and the severe dangers faced by migrants along migration routes. [Section 5](#) tackles the issue of how migrants foster development, particularly by sending remittances to their countries of origin and fostering tighter trade relations. Finally, [Section 6](#) discusses how data innovations are revolutionizing migration research and policy by offering new information sources and insights and supporting governmental and humanitarian programmes.

FIGURE 1:
RDH THEMATIC PILLARS



3. The review period of this report closes on 11 May 2021 – and hence also the last date of update to all data presented in the report.

NAVIGATING THE REPORT



In this report, two colours 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

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01



MIGRATION POLICY



More than 25,000 people cross back and forth between Afghanistan and Pakistan every day at the Spin Boldak border crossing | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED

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

6

Safe, orderly and regular migration

1.1.1 MOBILITY RESTRICTIONS AND CONTAINMENT MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The year 2020 was a landmark for human mobility, with its dramatic reduction of cross-border movements of all kinds. In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to disrupt global mobility both in terms of international and internal movements. According to interviews conducted by the Mixed Migration Centre (2021) between April 2020 and February 2021, about 43 per cent of 23,374 respondents reported that the pandemic had made it difficult to cross borders, and 41 per cent said that it had affected internal mobility. The emergence of new COVID-19 variants resulted in a variety of restrictive policy measures issued in different parts of the world, at different times in 2020 and 2021, with varying degrees of strictness and with some countries experiencing multiple COVID-19 waves that each altered policy (UNODC, 2021). By the end of 2021, some countries in the Asia–Pacific region were going through the fifth wave of COVID-19.

However, 2021 also saw various recovery initiatives to overcome the pandemic. The introduction of vaccination programmes around the world marked an important step on the path to recovery. The World Health Organization

(WHO) reported that more than 8.6 billion doses of the vaccine had been administered globally as of 3 January 2022, with the Asia–Pacific region receiving approximately 5.6 billion doses (WHO, 2022). The vaccine rollouts not only sustained economic and social activities around the world, but also allowed countries to relax their mobility and containment policy measures gradually.

In line with Objective 11 of the Global Compact for Migration that calls for border management in an integrated, secure and coordinate manner, and SDG Target 10.7 that aims to facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies, the following section reviews the changes in international and internal mobility policy restrictions in the Asia–Pacific region during 2021, to elucidate the influence of these policies on the migration landscape. The following analysis also provides the basis of an understanding of how internal and cross-border mobility policies are closely linked to other aspects and forms of migration.



The Thailand-Myanmar friendship bridge in Mae Sot, Thailand was built in 1996 to connect with Myawaddy in Myanmar. Since then, the bridge become the main crossing point between the two countries | © IOM 2018/Visarut SANKHAM

1.1.1.1 BORDER MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

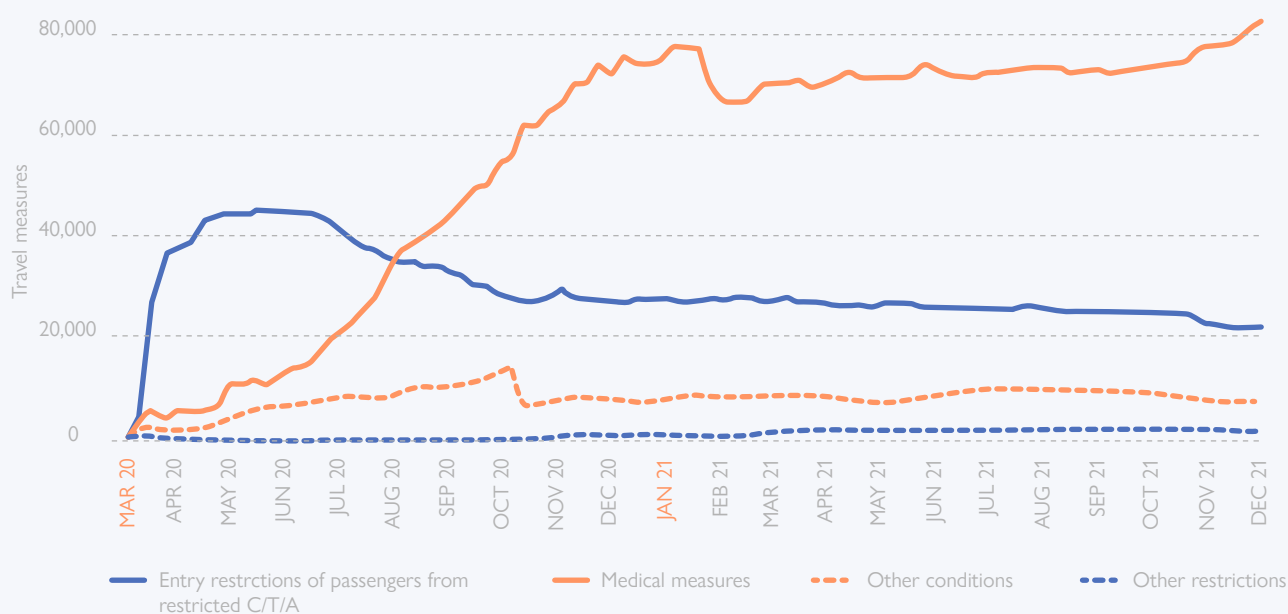
As of 29 December 2021, a total of 228 countries, territories or areas worldwide had imposed 115,275 travel related measures – an increase of nearly 5,000 measures over the same period in 2020 (IOM, 2021c, 2022a). Such measures included entry restrictions⁴ and conditions for authorized entry.⁵ Entry restrictions for passengers from restricted countries, territories or areas represented 20 per cent of all restrictions and conditions as of December 2021, with medical measures being the most common condition for authorized entry – 72 per cent of the total number of conditions and restrictions (IOM, 2021e), (Figure 1).

At the global level, the imposition of entry restrictions has gradually decreased over time, but the Asia-Pacific region

saw less change than others. In other regions of the world, entry restrictions as a share of all types of movement restrictions sharply reduced since their peak level – from almost 100 per cent of the total number of travel-related measures in the first months of the pandemic, to less than 5 per cent by December 2021 in Central and West Africa and East and Horn of Africa. In the Asia-Pacific region, even after the peaks in April 2020 and May 2021, the imposition of entry restrictions represented over 50 per cent of the total travel-related measures (Figure 2) (*ibid.*). Thus, the Asia-Pacific region was among the top three regions in the world with the highest number of entry restrictions alongside the European Economic Area and South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia in 2021.

-
4. These are total restrictions which do not allow the entry of passengers of a given country, territory or area. These include a complete border closure, nationality ban, suspension of visa issuances, and suspension of flights, etc.
 5. These are 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.

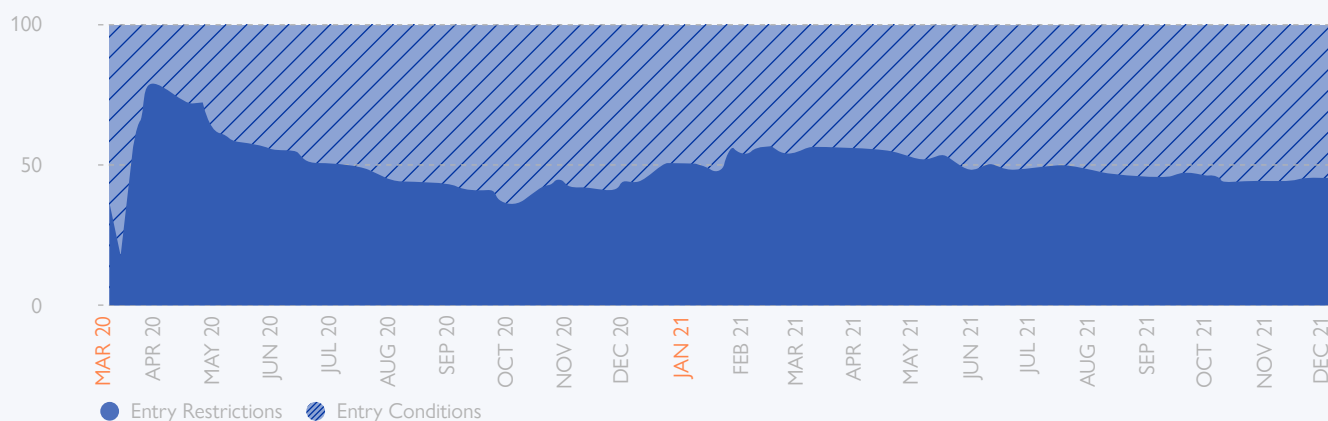
FIGURE 1: CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF TRAVEL MEASURES OVER TIME BY TYPE



Note: As changes in the restrictions were monitored on biweekly and weekly intervals, and the dynamics of the measures was at times changing more frequently, the graph cannot be indicative of the exact date of change in travel restriction policies, as stated in [Methodology Note](#).

Source: Global Mobility Restriction Overview – Weekly Update – 13 December 2021.

FIGURE 2: ENTRY RESTRICTIONS VERSUS CONDITIONS FOR AUTHORIZED ENTRY IN THE ASIA–PACIFIC REGION (MARCH 2020 – DECEMBER 2021)



Source: Global Mobility Restriction Overview – Weekly Update – 13 December 2021.

To improve understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic affected global mobility since March 2020, IOM developed a global database to track, map and analyse the evolution of national border management policies on the status of restrictions at different Points of Entry (PoE) – airports, blue border crossing points on sea, river or lake, and land border crossing points, including rail entries (IOM, 2021f). As of 16 December 2021, a total of 4,568 PoEs were assessed in 186 countries, territories and areas worldwide. Of all assessed PoEs, 10 per cent were reported as fully

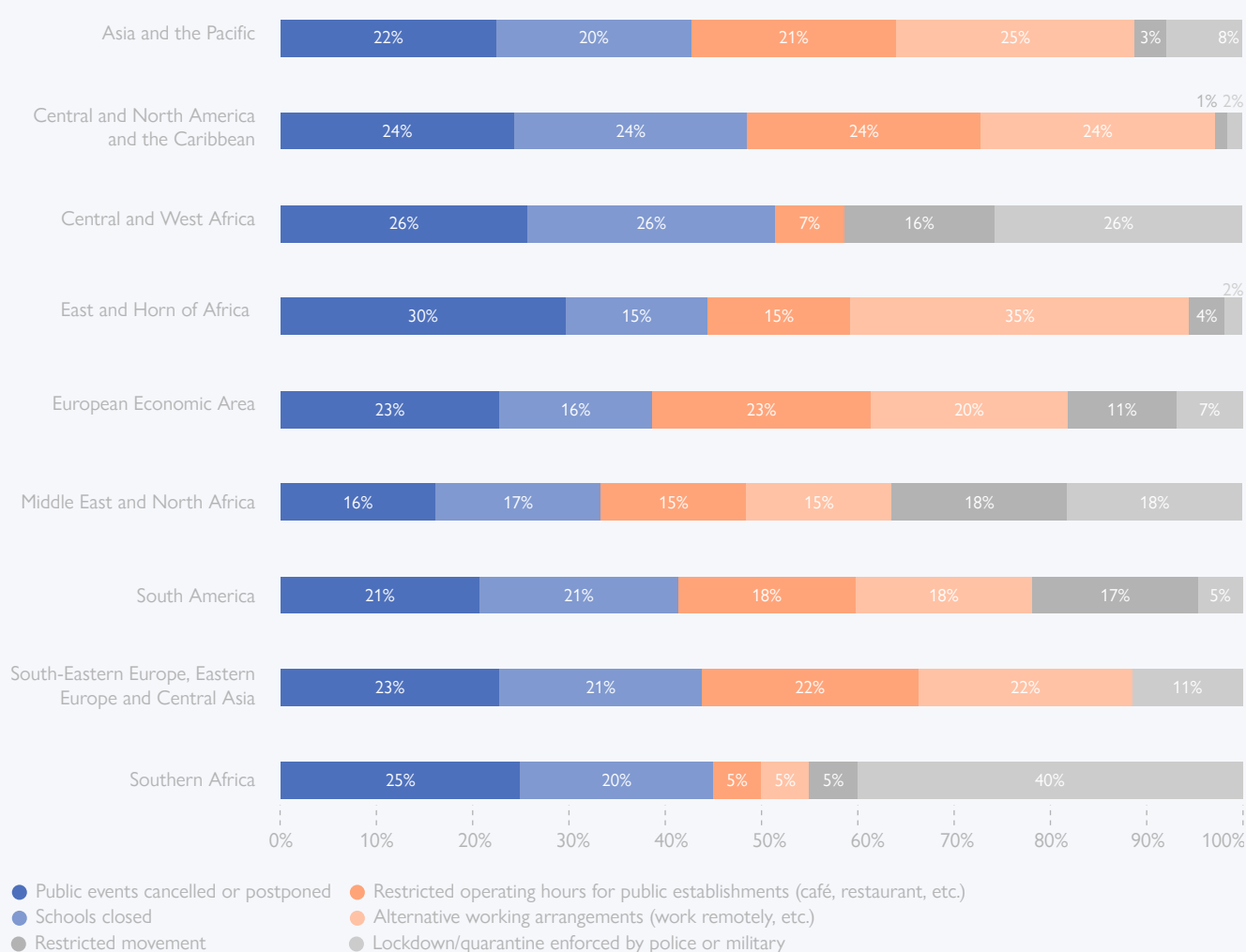
closed and 60 per cent as fully operational. The Asia–Pacific region showed a similar trend with 40 per cent of assessed PoEs reported as fully operational and only 11 per cent as fully closed – a significant shift compared to the same period in 2020, wherein only 13 per cent of PoEs were fully operational and 43 per cent reported as fully closed (IOM, 2021c). This trend could be attributed to the relaxation of mobility restrictions in various countries in the region as vaccination programmes started to roll out from the beginning of 2021 and international travel resumed gradually.

1.1.1.2 INTERNAL MOBILITY

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect internal mobility through internal travel disruptions and restrictions. According to the latest IOM report on the COVID-19 Impact on Key Locations of Internal Mobility, as of August 2021, 34 per cent of countries, territories and areas assessed by IOM, had declared a national emergency and 77 per cent introduced some sort of internal mobility restrictions (IOM, 2021d). The assessment, conducted between March 2020

and August 2021, observed that 30 out of 40 Asia-Pacific countries imposed significant mobility restrictions. Similar to the findings of previous assessments conducted in early 2021, the type of restrictions varied among the assessed areas (Figure 3). School closures cancelled or postponed public events, alternative working arrangements and restricted operating hours for public establishments were the primary measures enforced both globally and in the region.

FIGURE 3: NUMBER AND TYPE OF RESTRICTIONS IN AREAS OF INTEREST BY IOM REGION

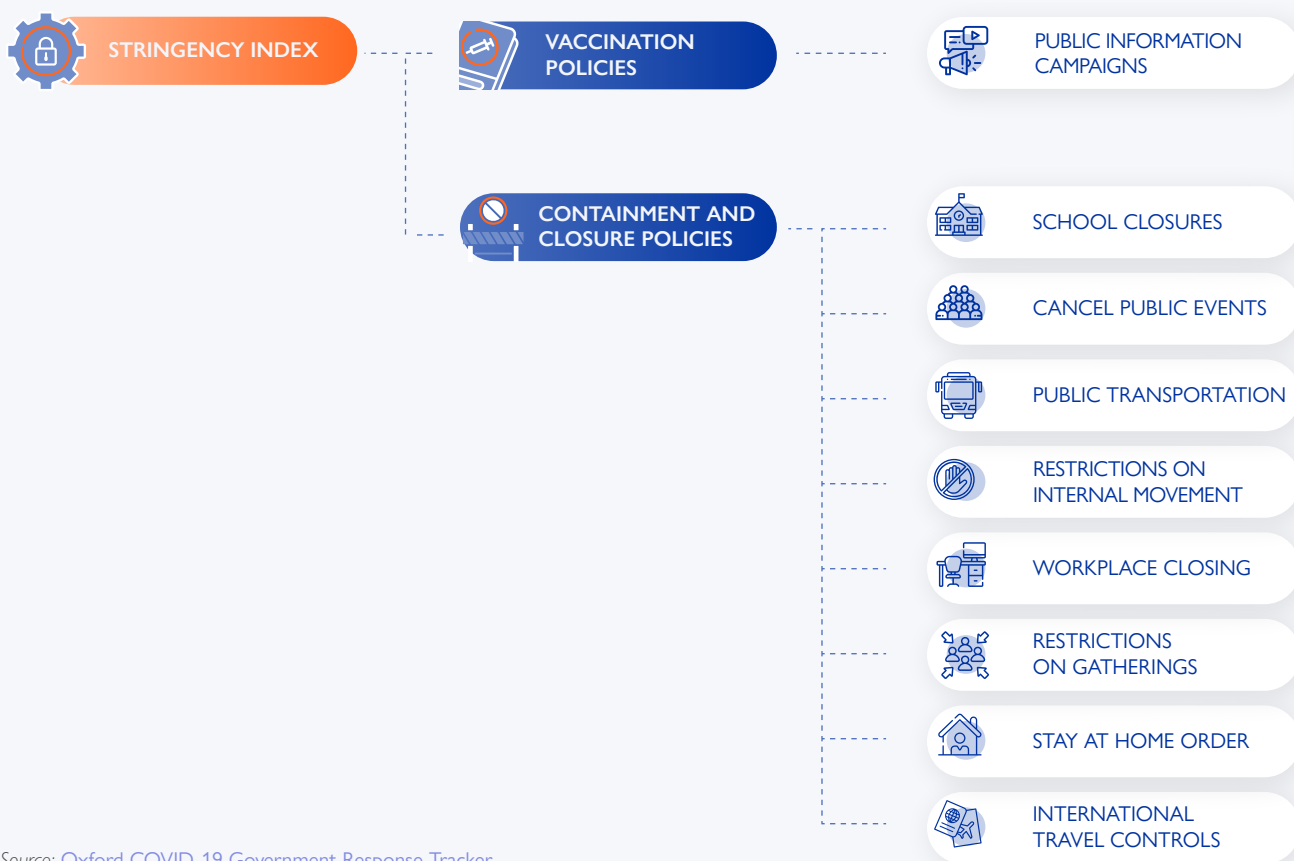


Source: IOM COVID-19 Impact on Key Locations of Internal – Mobility Analysis – 18 August 2021.

The level of stringency of internal restrictions is measured by the Government Response Stringency Index, which records the strictness of “lockdown style” policies that primarily restrict people’s behaviour. The index has been developed by the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker, which collects systematic information on policy measures

that governments have taken to tackle the pandemic. The index is composed of eight containment and closure policy response indicators, and one vaccination policy indicator. It measures the level of stringency on a scale between 0 and 100, where 100 represents the highest level of stringency (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STRINGENCY INDEX COMPOSITION



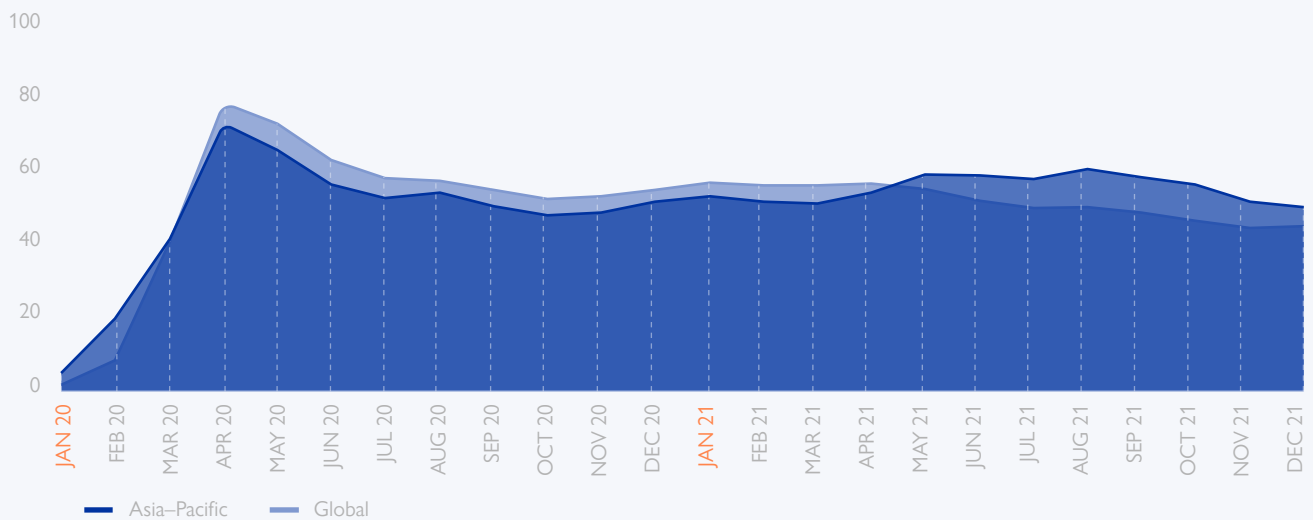
Source: Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker.

Information is collected and updated regularly, showing the change in the level of stringency from the start of the pandemic until the end of 2021. For this report, data has been analysed by calculating the monthly average level of stringency index at the global, regional, subregional and national levels.

Figure 5 shows the global and regional changes in the Government Response Stringency Index from January 2020 until December 2021. The largest variation in the level of stringency occurred between March and April 2020 – just as the WHO declared the novel coronavirus a pandemic, and large-scale containment measures were put in place around the world. The stringency index increased from 42 to 73 points in the Asia–Pacific region, and from 41 to almost 80 points globally. Between the end of 2020 and April 2021, the level of stringency in the region was slightly lower than the global average, but while the global level of government response stringency showed a declining trend, the level of stringency increased in the Asia–Pacific region. By August 2021, the region was 10 points ahead of the global average.

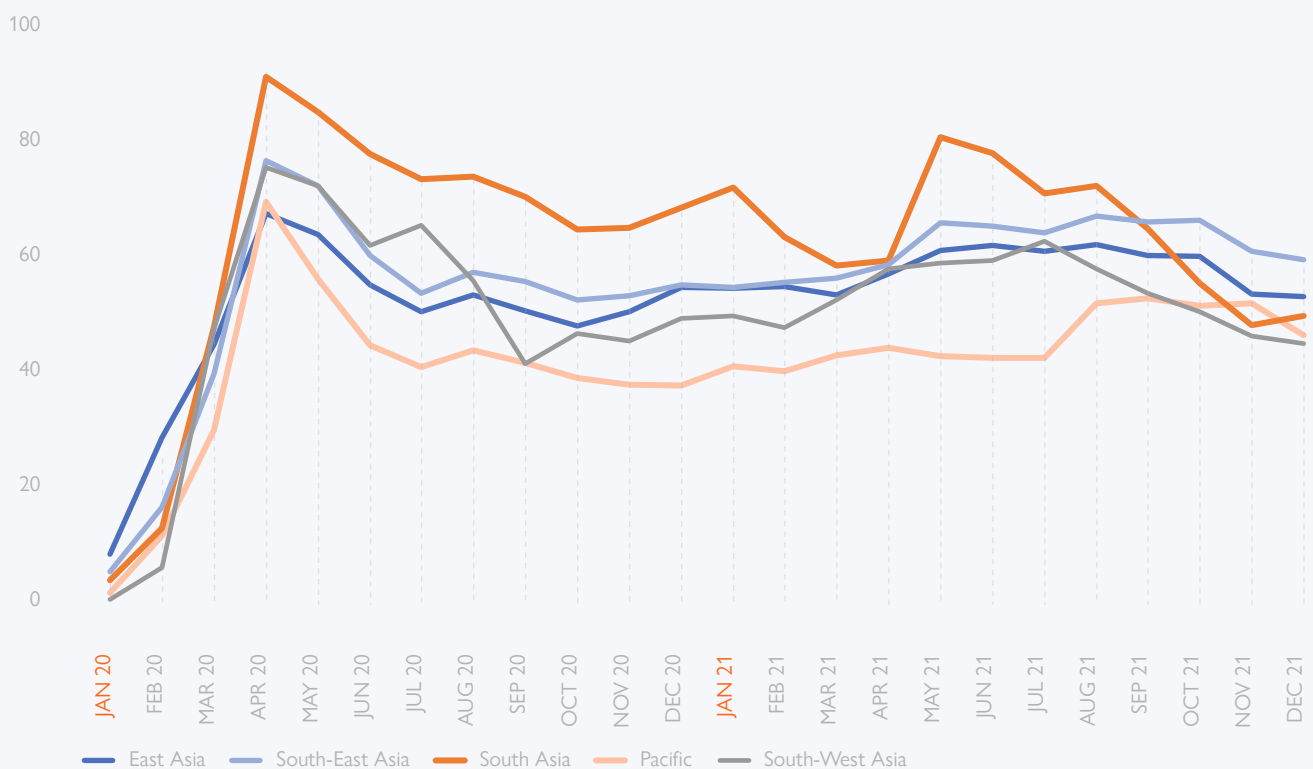
According to the latest IOM report on internal mobility, 30 out of 40 countries in the region imposed significant restrictions, which could be attributed to the surge of new COVID-19 variants and waves across the region, particularly in South Asia. This subregion had the highest level of government stringency response almost throughout the pandemic period (Figure 6). In April 2020, South Asia scored 92 points, and when other subregions later showed a decreasing trend, in May 2021, the South Asian subregion experienced another major increase in response stringency – from 60 to 82 points. The emergence of the Delta variant of COVID-19 significantly affected the subregion badly, especially India, before expanding to neighbouring countries. In May 2021, the variant was identified officially as the most transmissible of the variants, and by August 2021, it had spread to 142 countries, becoming the dominant strain globally (UNICEF, n.d.). By contrast, the Pacific subregion observed the lowest government response stringency. Between June 2020 and July 2021, the monthly average level of stringency was below 50 points and only increased slightly in late 2021.

FIGURE 5: GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STRINGENCY INDEX FOR THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION AND WORLDWIDE (JANUARY 2020–DECEMBER 2021)



Source: Compiled from the [COVID-19 Government Response Tracker Database \(2022\)](#).

FIGURE 6: GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STRINGENCY INDEX BY SUBREGION (JANUARY 2020–DECEMBER 2021)

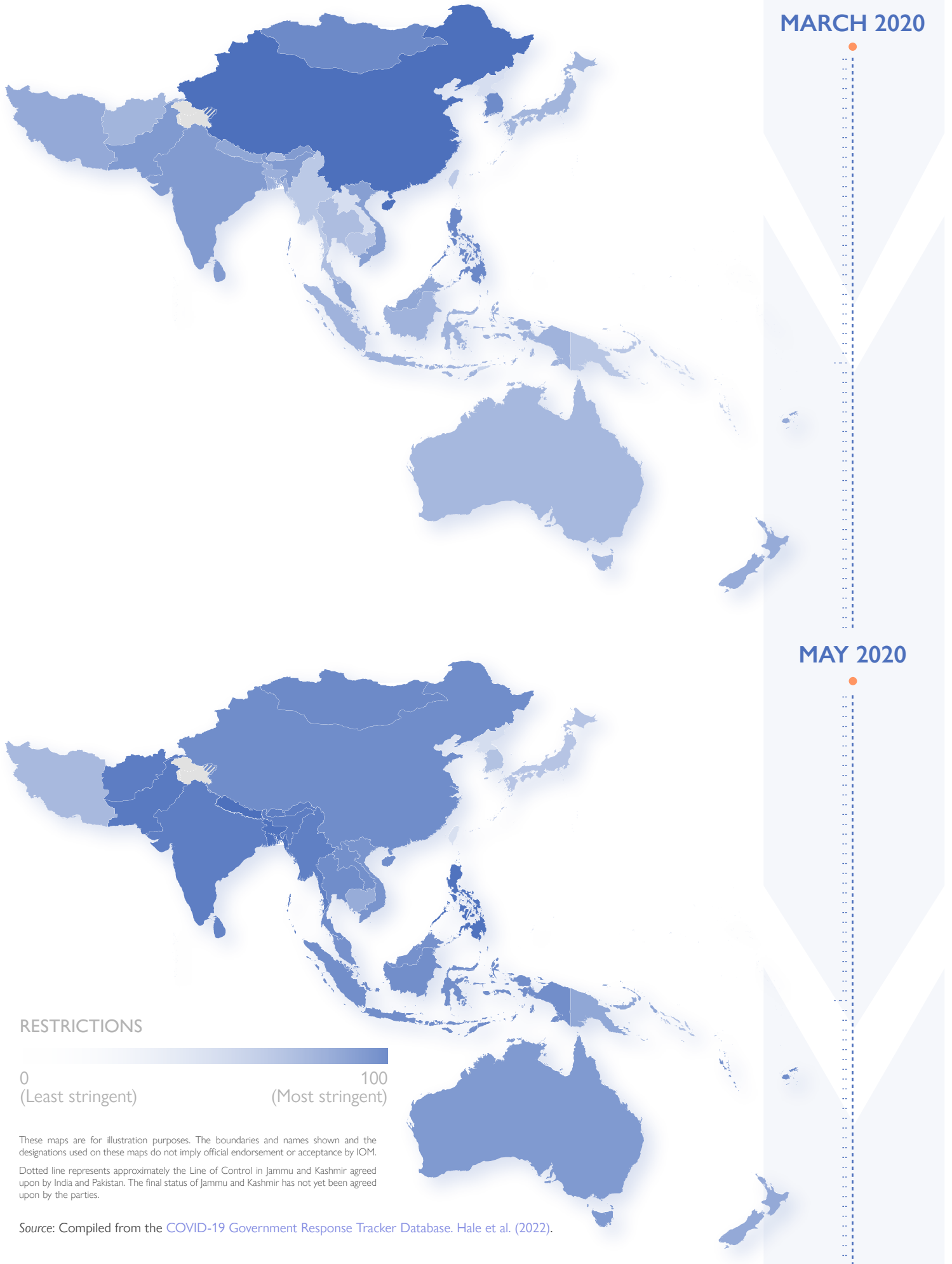


Source: Compiled from the [COVID-19 Government Response Tracker Database \(2022\)](#).

At the country level, a polarizing trend was observed in the region from the start of the pandemic through December 2021. Figure 7 shows the changes in the Government Response Stringency Index across different periods of time. While the emergence of new variants continued to spread

globally, several countries began vaccination programmes to inoculate their populations. Thus, the stringency response changed as countries relaxed and strengthened their containment measures.

FIGURE 7: GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STRINGENCY INDEX IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION



RESTRICTIONS

0 (Least stringent) 100 (Most stringent)

These maps are for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

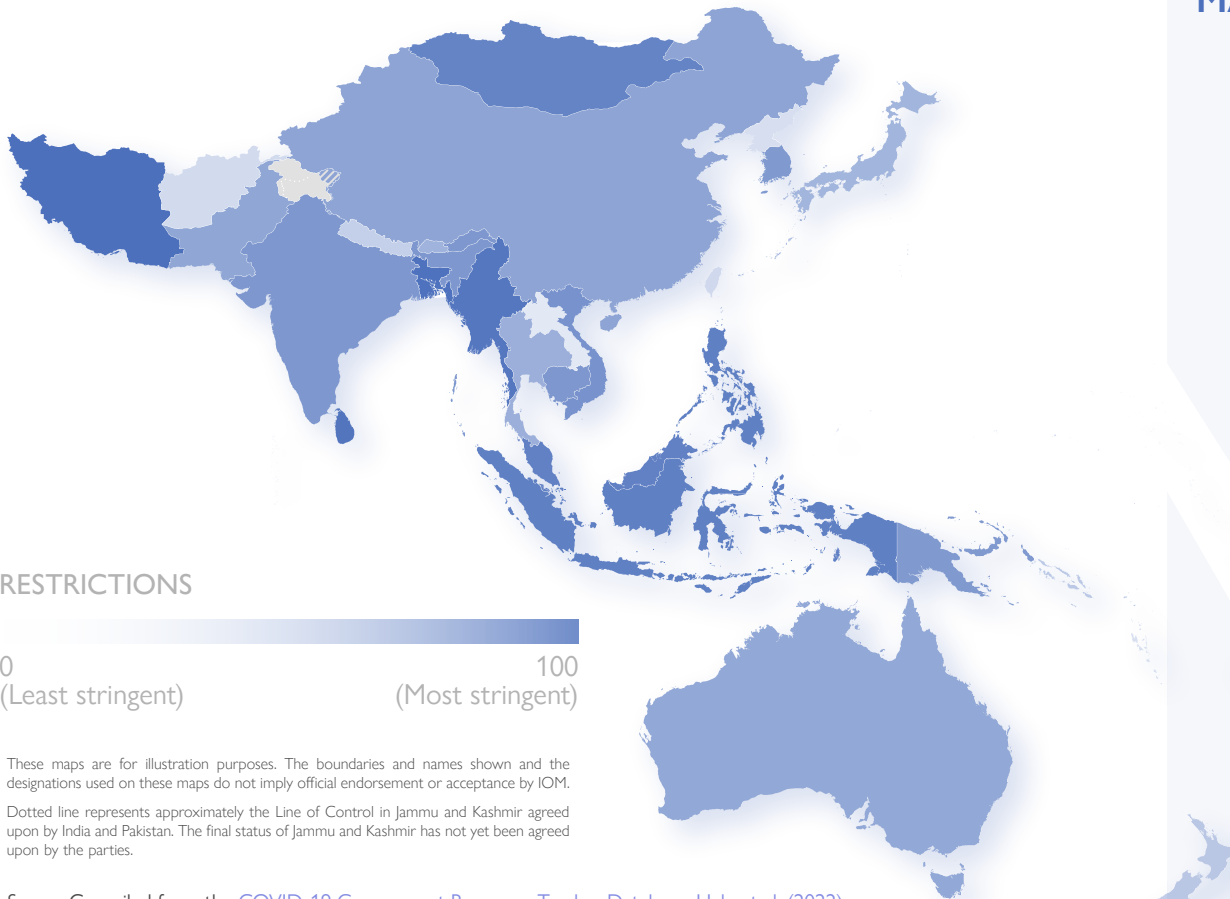
Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

Source: Compiled from the COVID-19 Government Response Tracker Database. Hale et al. (2022).

DECEMBER 2020



MARCH 2021



RESTRICTIONS

0 (Least stringent) 100 (Most stringent)

These maps are for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

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

Source: Compiled from the COVID-19 Government Response Tracker Database. Hale et al. (2022).

DECEMBER 2021

RESTRICTIONS

0 (Least stringent) 100 (Most stringent)

These maps are for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

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

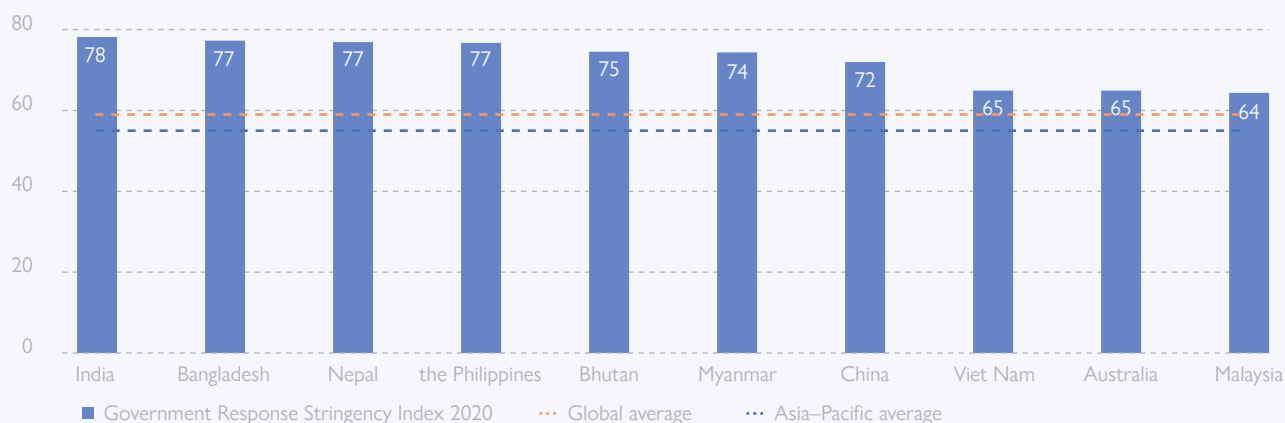
Source: Compiled from the [COVID-19 Government Response Tracker Database](#). Hale et al. (2022).

In both 2020 and 2021, Bangladesh, China, Malaysia, Myanmar and the Philippines were among the top ten countries with the highest average stringency level (Figure 8 and Figure 9).⁶ In 2020, 13 out of 34 countries and areas in the Asia–Pacific region scored higher than the global average (59) in the stringency level of government response. In 2021, although the global average of stringency index decreased by 7 points (to 52), the number of countries and areas in the region with higher scores than the global average increased to 23. By the end of 2021, the countries and areas with the lowest level of stringency response in the region were Vanuatu; Kiribati; Afghanistan; Solomon Islands; Macao, SAR China; Taiwan

Province of People’s Republic of China; New Zealand; Tonga; Japan and Singapore (in ascending order). The stringency of containment measures reflects the gravity of the pandemic in certain countries or areas. Areas with the lowest stringency levels also recorded either lower numbers of COVID-19 cases or higher number of vaccination doses per 100 persons than areas with higher stringency levels. By the end of December 2021, Singapore recorded the largest number of vaccination doses per 100 persons – 214 vaccination doses (WHO, 2022). Tonga, Kiribati and Vanuatu were the countries with the lowest number of cumulative cases of COVID-19, not only in the region but also globally (Dong et al., 2022).

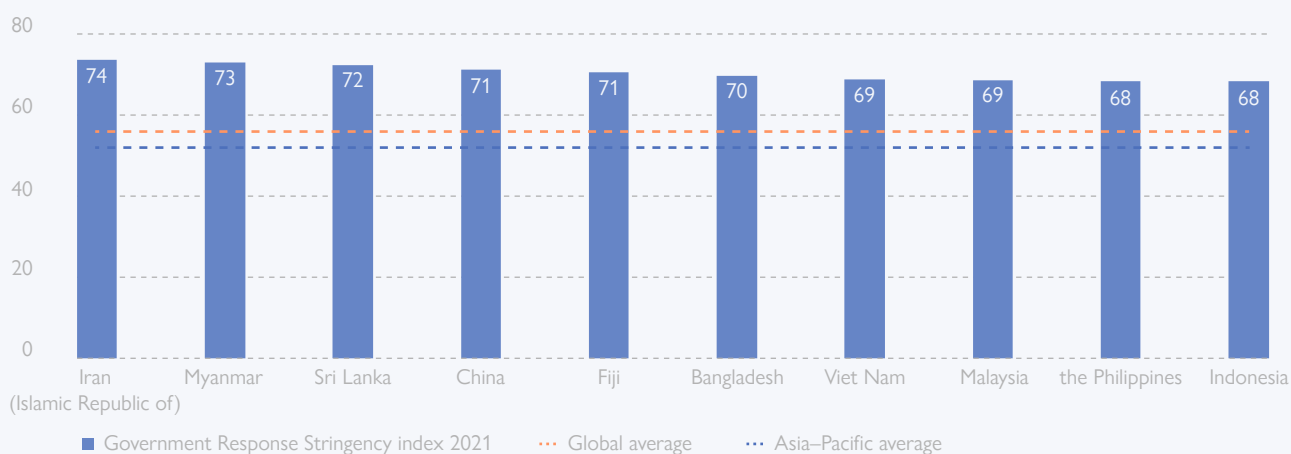
6. It is important to consider that stringency measures do not reflect international travel restrictions. While some countries in the region may have experienced tougher travel restrictions, their internal mobility measures may have been less restricted.

FIGURE 8: ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST STRINGENT GOVERNMENT RESPONSE MEASURES IN 2020



Source: Compiled from the [COVID-19 Government Response Tracker Database \(2022\)](#).

FIGURE 9: ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST STRINGENT GOVERNMENT RESPONSE MEASURES IN 2021



Source: Compiled from the [COVID-19 Government Response Tracker Database \(2022\)](#).

1.1.1.3 DISCUSSION

The year 2021 saw a significant change in containment and mobility policy measures. Globally, governments have focused their efforts on implementing COVID-19 recovery plans that promoted both internal and international mobility. Vaccination rollout programmes signified a step towards recovery. By the end of 2021, a mere 11 per cent of points of entry in the Asia-Pacific region were reported to be fully closed – a substantial shift compared to the same period in 2020 when that figure reached 43 per cent. However, the level of the

stringency of internal mobility measures in 2021 remained similar to that in 2020. The average Government Response Stringency Index in the region increased slightly from 55 to 56 from 2020 to 2021. This increase can be attributed to the numerous containment measures governments imposed as the emergence of new COVID-19 variants caused new waves of infections in the region, particularly in South Asia.

IOM's database to map, track and analyse the evolution of national border management policies and internal containment restrictions has served as a crucial tool to assess the extent of the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on the mobility landscape in the region. IOM's database has filled a knowledge gap, as it is one of the most comprehensive and global datasets on international travel restrictions gathered since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. The database contributes to the monitoring of [SDG Target 10.7](#) which calls for the [facilitation of orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies](#) and [Objective 1 and 11 of the Global Compact for Migration](#). However, information is lacking in certain mobility policy areas such as COVID-19-related data on internal transit points, which is currently only available up to August 2021, and data disaggregated by population of interest (that is, stranded foreigners or migrants and/or internally displaced persons whose mobility was affected by pandemic control measures) which was not available in 2021 as it had been in 2020.

Migration is considered one of the most challenging issues facing policymakers around the world (IOM, 2018). The growing complexity of internal and cross-border mobility has emphasized the need for reliable and timely data to inform migration policy development and humanitarian assistance – a need that traditional statistical systems (such as sample

surveys and administrative sources) are not well-equipped to meet (*ibid.*). The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the migration landscape not only in the region of Asia and the Pacific but also around the world (IOM, 2021c). The pandemic has affected all forms of migration (see [Section 3](#)) and the livelihoods of migrants, and forcibly displaced populations in countries of origin, transit and destination (see [Section 4.1](#)), making the need for reliable and timely data even more pressing. Additionally, the outbreak of COVID-19, ensuing mobility restrictions and change in resource prioritization have aggravated the existing challenge of data collection (Black, 2021). Statistics on regular and irregular migration have been affected as measures in response to the pandemic in many cases delayed, interrupted or cancelled data collection activities such as census and surveys (*ibid.*).

Therefore, more focus is needed on improving data availability. One method is to incorporate innovative systems of data collection. The combination of technological innovations with the use of “big data” has the potential to offer important insight into mobility patterns (IOM, 2021b). Data generated by users of mobile devices and internet-based platforms, or by digital sensors and meters such as satellite imagery, represent an opportunity to complement traditional sources of migration data and to provide better information to policymakers in support of safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people.



At the Spin Boldak border crossing point, IOM Afghanistan supports health screening for all travellers entering Afghanistan from Pakistan for symptoms of COVID-19 | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED

1.1.2 PROGRESS TOWARDS ORDERLY, SAFE, REGULAR AND RESPONSIBLE MIGRATION AND MOBILITY OF PEOPLE

The adoption of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* signified an important milestone, as the Agenda recognizes for the first time the integral role of migration in contributing to the global sustainable development. The Agenda also recognizes international migration as a “multi-dimensional reality of major relevance for the development of countries of origin, transit and destination” (IOM, 2017, p.24).

At least ten out of 17 goals contain targets and indicators that are directly relevant to migration or mobility (See Annex I). The most explicit target is *SDG target 10.7, which calls on countries to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.*

With the aim of monitoring *SDG Target 10.7*, the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic

and Social Affairs (DESA) and IOM developed the SDG indicator 10.7.2 database, which measures *the number of countries with migration policies to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people.* The indicator is comprised of six policy domains, in line with the principles and objectives identified in IOM’s Migration Governance Framework. To assess national frameworks and operationalize the framework, the Migration Governance Indicators (MGI) were developed as a tool based on policy inputs offering insights on policy levers that countries can use to develop their migration governance (IOM, 2019). The MGI aims to promote discussions on migration governance by clarifying what “well-governed migration” might look like in the context of SDG Target 10.7. The six dimensions of migration governance included in the MGI and by default in SDG indicator 10.7.2 are:



Data for the measurement of SDG indicator 10.7.2 were gathered through two successive rounds: the Twelfth Inquiry, conducted between September 2018 and October 2019, and the Thirteenth Inquiry, conducted between November 2020 and October 2021. (DESA, IOM and OECD, 2021). For both rounds, the Inquiry was sent to 197 countries, including the 40 countries of the Asia-Pacific region (ibid.).

The following section aims to analyse the extent to which countries in Asia-Pacific are progressing towards an orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people. Data in this analysis are based on a combination of the Inquiry’s two rounds. Where governments replied to both rounds of the Inquiry, data from the Thirteenth Inquiry were used.

1.1.2.1 GLOBAL COVERAGE FOR SDG INDICATOR 10.7.2

Global coverage of SDG indicator 10.7.2 improved thanks to the latest round of data collection. As of November 2021, the number of countries reporting data on the indicator increased from 111 to 138 countries – that is, 70 per cent of all countries (*ibid.*). However, at the regional level, data coverage remains uneven. For three regions (South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia; Central and West Africa, and South America), data on the indicator was available for 90 per cent or more of the countries. While data coverage was lower for other regions, eight out of nine regions reported data for more than 50 per cent of countries (Figure 10).

Among the 138 countries that reported data on SDG indicator 10.7.2, only 4 per cent stated having policy measures to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people for all 30 items under the six domains of the indicator. In other words, these countries **fully met**

the criteria for SDG indicator 10.7.2 (Figure 11). Roughly 60 per cent **met** the criteria for SDG indicator 10.7.2, and one out of three reported having measures that **partially met** the criteria. Finally, 4 per cent of countries indicated that they **required further progress** in adopting planned and well-managed migration policies to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration (*DESA and IOM, 2021*).

The regions with the highest shares of governments reporting that they have policies that met or fully met the criteria for SDG indicator 10.7.2 were South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia (83%), South America (78%) and the European Economic Area (76%). The Asia–Pacific region (48%), Central and West Africa (48%) and the Middle East and North Africa region (31%) are among the regions with the lowest coverage of countries that met or fully met the criteria for SDG indicator 10.7.2 (*ibid.*).

FIGURE 10: PERCENTAGE OF IOM REGIONS REPORTING DATA ON SDG INDICATOR 10.7.2

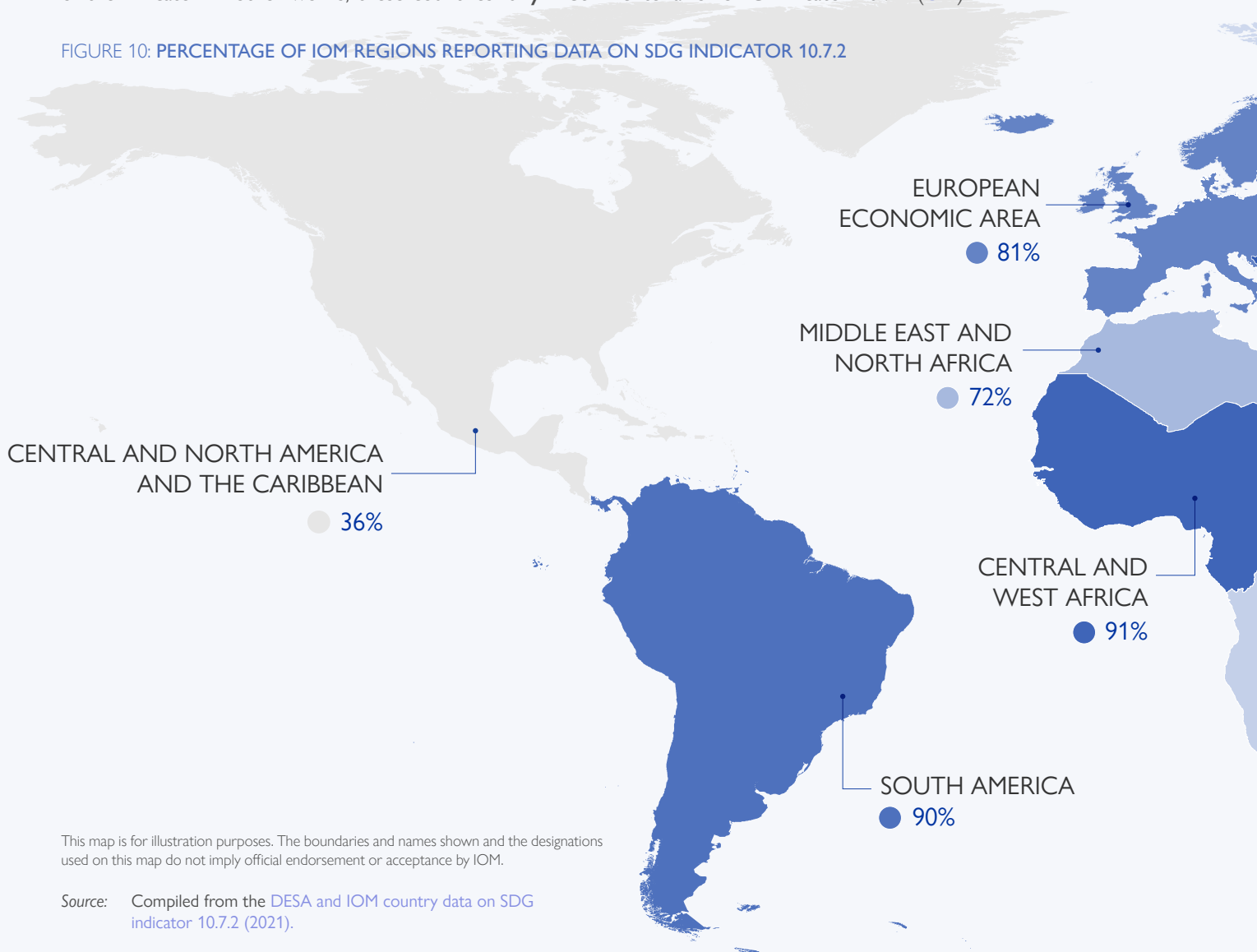
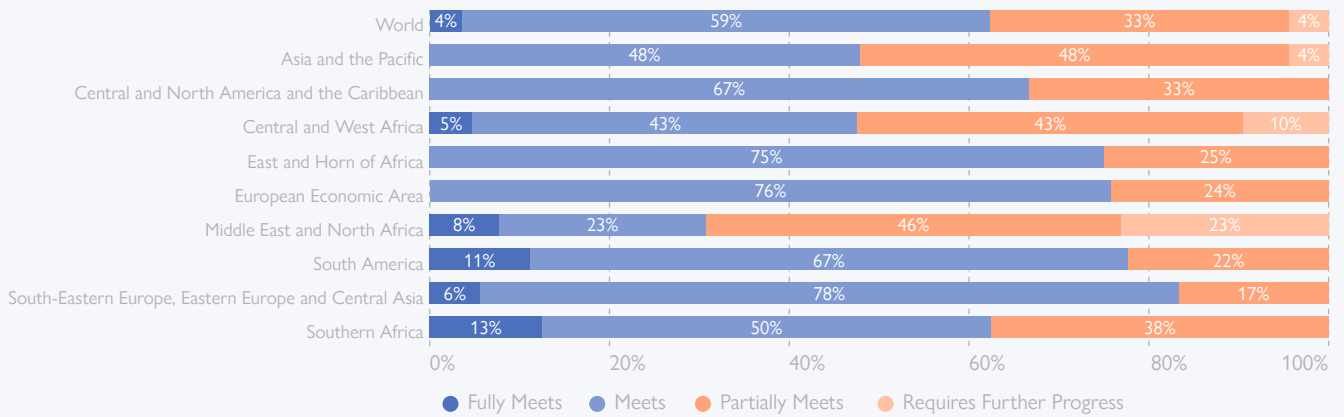
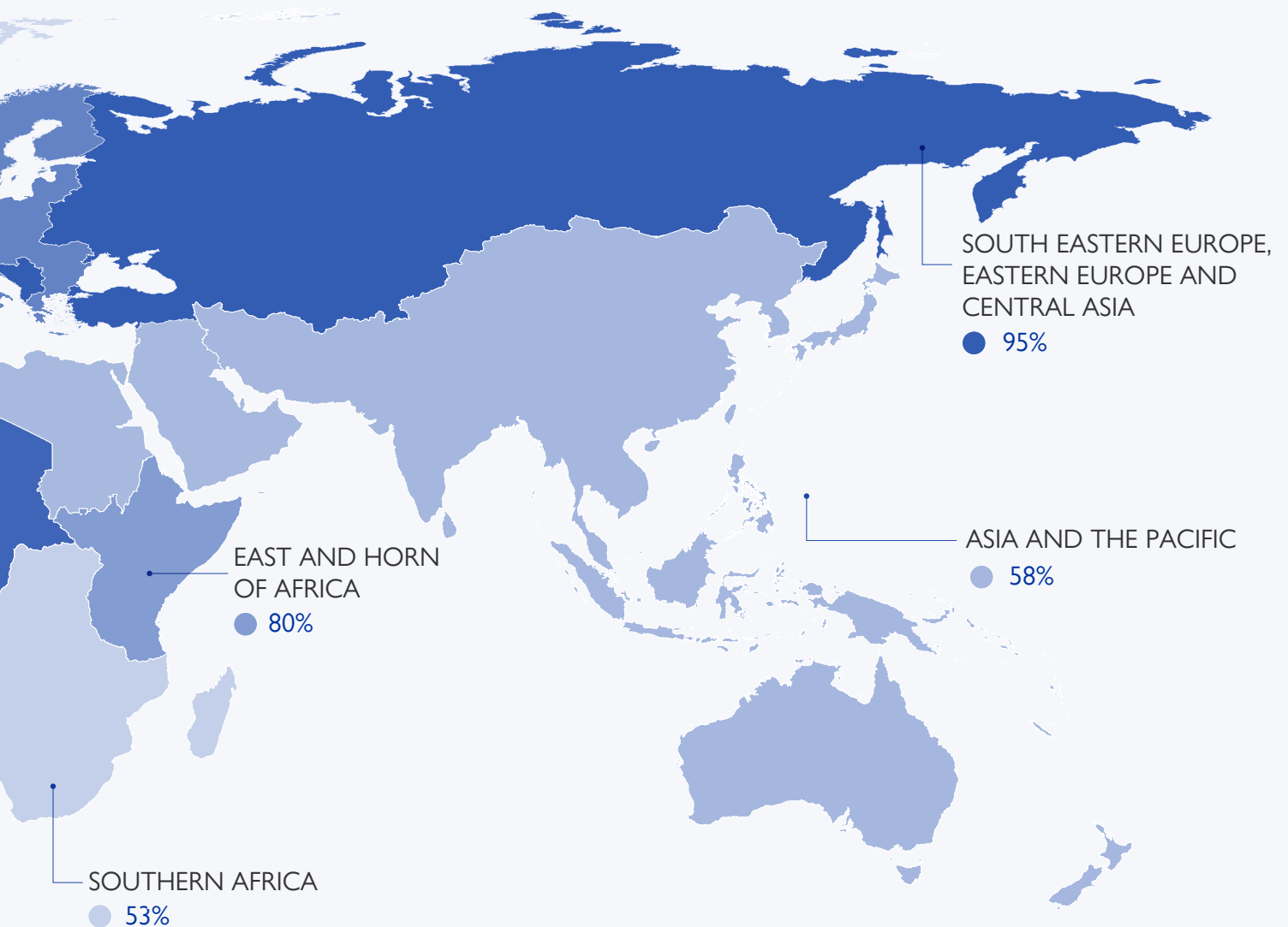


FIGURE 11: PERCENTAGE OF GOVERNMENTS REPORTING POLICY MEASURES THAT MEET THE CRITERIA FOR SDG INDICATOR 10.7.2 IN THE WORLD AND BY IOM REGION IN 2021



Note: Percentages do not necessarily add to 100 because of rounding.

Source: Compiled from the DESA and IOM country data on SDG indicator 10.7.2 (2021).

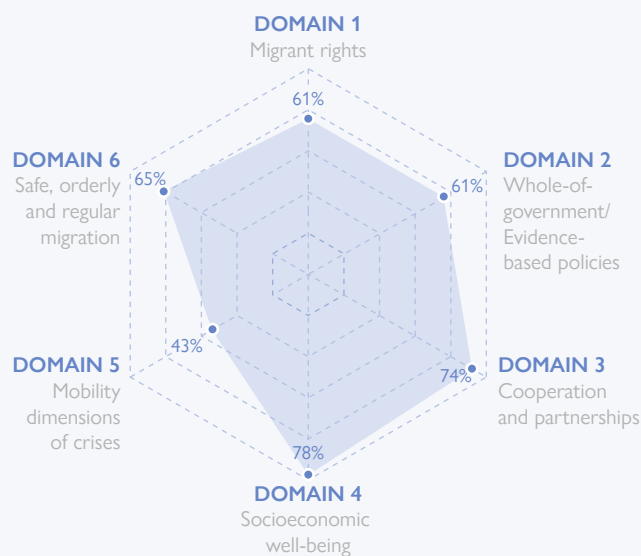


1.1.2.2 PROGRESS TOWARDS SDG INDICATOR 10.7.2 IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Only 58 per cent of Asia–Pacific governments reported data on SDG indicator 10.7.2 – lower than the global average (70%); (Figure 10). However, regional coverage improved from 18 to 23 countries out of the 40 Asia–Pacific countries between the two rounds of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Inquiry (IOM, 2021a; DESA and IOM, 2021). While no government in the region reported that it fully met the criteria for SDG indicator 10.7.2, nearly one in two countries stated that they **meet** the criteria, and another half stated that they **partially meet** the criteria for indicator 10.7.2 (Figure 12).

Figure 13 shows the percentage of Asia–Pacific countries reporting policy measures by the six domains. Seventy-eight per cent (78%) of Asia–Pacific countries fully met or met the criteria for Domain 4 which aims for socioeconomic well-being – a proportion higher than the global average of 63 per cent (DESA and IOM, 2021). Also, almost three-quarters of countries fully met or met the criteria for Domain 3 that refers to cooperation and partnership. At the regional level, however, Domain 5, which stands for mobility dimension of crisis, had the lowest share of countries reporting policy measures (43%); (ibid.).

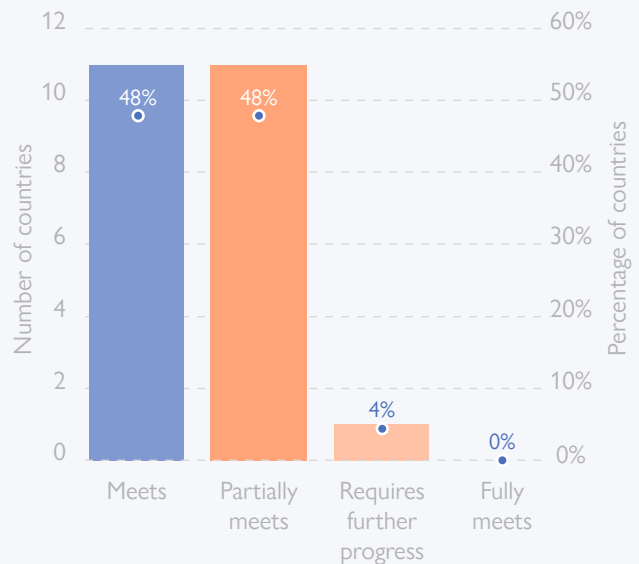
FIGURE 13: PERCENTAGE OF ASIA–PACIFIC GOVERNMENTS REPORTING POLICY MEASURES TO FACILITATE ORDERLY, SAFE, REGULAR AND RESPONSIBLE MIGRATION AND MOBILITY OF PEOPLE BY DOMAIN IN 2021



Note: Based on the 23 Asia–Pacific countries with available data as of 31 October 2021. Data refers to countries that meet or fully meet the criteria for indicator 10.7.2.

Source: Compiled from the DESA and IOM country data on SDG indicator 10.7.2 (2021).

FIGURE 12: PERCENTAGE OF ASIA–PACIFIC GOVERNMENTS REPORTING POLICY MEASURES TO FACILITATE ORDERLY, SAFE, REGULAR AND RESPONSIBLE MIGRATION AND MOBILITY OF PEOPLE FOR THE REGION IN 2021



Note: Based on the 23 Asia–Pacific countries with available data as of 31 October 2021.

Source: Compiled from the DESA and IOM country data on SDG indicator 10.7.2 (2021).

Data on policy measures to protect migrants' access to welfare benefits and rights differs (Figure 14). At the regional level, 83 per cent of Asia–Pacific countries reported having policies to provide non-nationals equal access to essential or emergency health care. All of them also indicated offering such services to all non-nationals regardless of their immigration status. Similarly, equal access to public education, including primary and secondary school, was reported by 83 per cent of countries in the region. Fifty-seven per cent of countries reported offering the same level of access to public education for all migrants and 26 per cent, only for migrants with legal immigration status (DESA and IOM, 2021).

Equal pay to all people in the same workplace doing similar work was reported by 74 per cent of countries in the region. Of these, only 39 per cent ensure equal pay to equal work regardless of legal immigration status. Another 35 per cent of countries stated that they provided equal pay only to non-nationals with legal immigration status. Policy measures to ensure equal access to social protection programmes for migrants⁷ and basic social assistance on an equal level with nationals, were less frequent

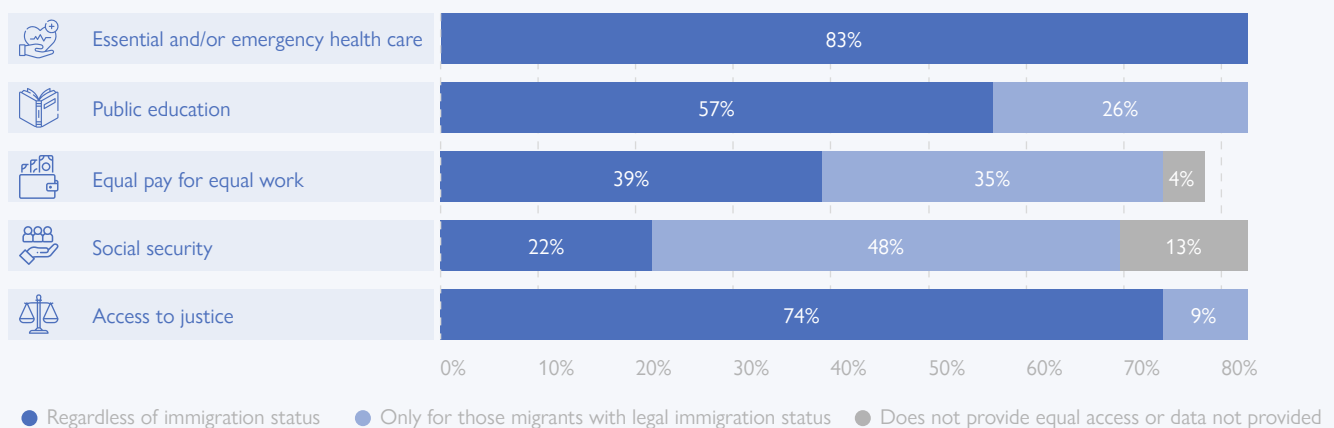
7. Programmes include contributory and non-contributory pension schemes (old age, survivor, disability), unemployment insurance, health insurance, workers' compensation, sickness benefits and basic social assistance.

(70%). Only 22 per cent of countries in the region offer equal access to social protection for migrants regardless of immigration status, while 48 per cent only provide these benefits for non-nationals with legal immigration status (*ibid.*).

Finally, regarding equal access to justice, 83 per cent of countries in the region reported providing policies that ensure this right. Of these countries, 74 per cent reported providing equal access to all migrants regardless of their immigration status and 9 per cent for those with legal immigrant status (*ibid.*).

Asia-Pacific countries had the lowest response level (61%) regarding the existence of institutions, frameworks or strategies to govern migration, formal mechanisms to ensure that migration policies are gender responsive,⁸ and national policies that promote the inclusion of immigrants. In other words, few countries in the region report having migration policies that are gender oriented and promote the inclusion of all non-nationals (Figure 15).

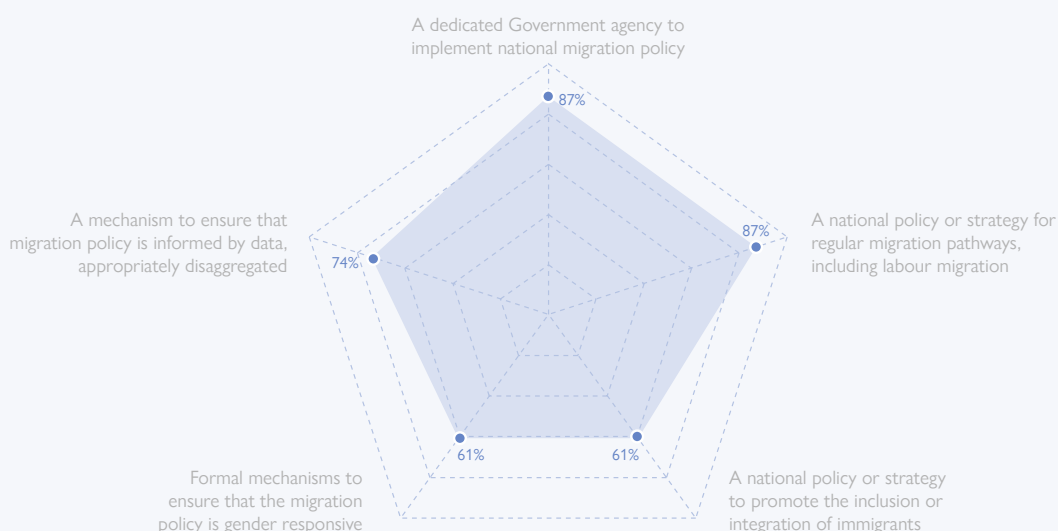
FIGURE 14: PERCENTAGE OF GOVERNMENTS THAT REPORT PROVIDING NON-NATIONALS WITH EQUAL ACCESS TO SERVICES, WELFARE BENEFITS AND RIGHTS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION, BY LEGAL IMMIGRATION STATUS IN 2021



Note: Based on the 23 Asia-Pacific countries with available data as of 31 October 2021.

Source: Compiled from the DESA and IOM country data on SDG indicator 10.7.2 (2021).

FIGURE 15: PERCENTAGE OF ASIA-PACIFIC GOVERNMENTS THAT REPORT HAVING INSTITUTIONS, POLICIES AND STRATEGIES TO GOVERN MIGRATION IN 2021



Note: Based on the 23 Asia-Pacific countries with available data as of 31 October 2021.

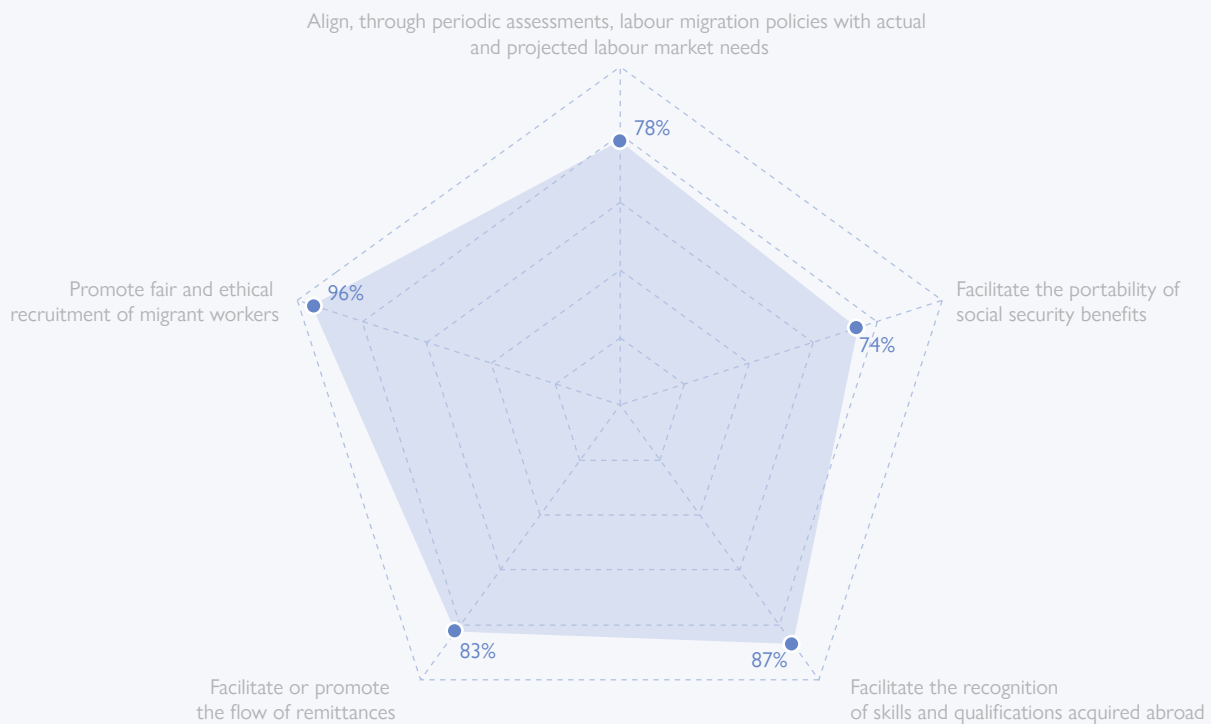
Source: Compiled from the DESA and IOM country data on SDG indicator 10.7.2 (2021).

8. Gender-responsive policies ensure that the human rights of women, men, girls and boys are respected at all stages of migration, their specific needs are properly understood and addressed, and they are empowered as agents of change.

Concerning measures to promote the socioeconomic well-being of migrants, 96 per cent of governments in the Asia–Pacific region who reported data on SDG Indicator 10.7.2 informed having policies to promote fair and ethical recruitment of migrant workers – with the region leading at the

global level in this category (Figure 16). As well, 87 per cent of governments indicated data on policy measures to facilitate the recognition of skills and qualifications acquired abroad, and 83 per cent, on measures to promote the flow of remittances.

FIGURE 16: PERCENTAGE OF GOVERNMENTS IN THE ASIA–PACIFIC REGION THAT REPORTED HAVING MEASURES TO PROMOTE THE SOCIOECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF MIGRANTS



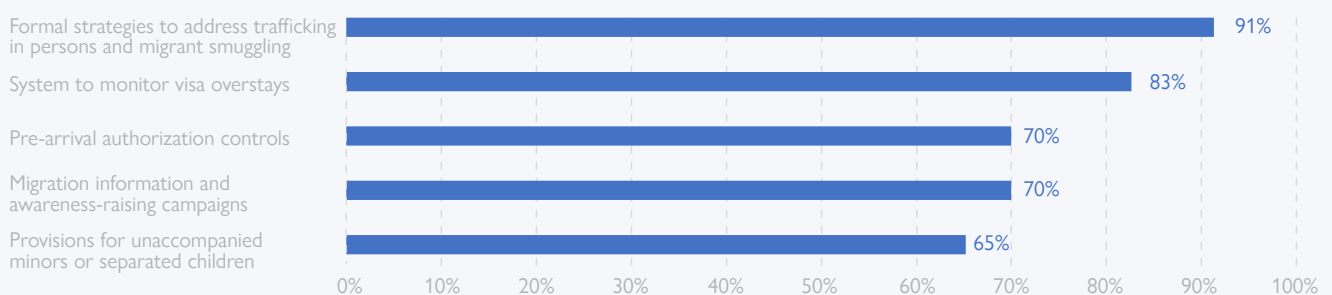
Note: Based on the 23 Asia–Pacific countries with available data as of 31 October 2021.

Source: Compiled from the [DESA and IOM country data on SDG indicator 10.7.2 \(2021\)](#).

Finally, regarding policies for safe, orderly and regular migration, 91 per cent of governments in the region reported having formal strategies to address trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling and 83 per cent of governments indicated data on having systems to monitor visa overstays (Figure 17). Contrarily,

the region lags on having provisions for unaccompanied minors or separated children with only 65 per cent of governments reporting data on policies to support this vulnerable group of migrants.

FIGURE 17: PERCENTAGE OF GOVERNMENTS IN THE ASIA–PACIFIC REGION REPORTING HAVING POLICIES FOR SAFE, ORDERLY AND REGULAR MIGRATION



Note: Based on the 23 Asia–Pacific countries with available data as of 31 October 2021.

Source: Compiled from the [DESA and IOM country data on SDG indicator 10.7.2 \(2021\)](#).

1.1.2.3 DISCUSSION

As international migration gains increasing attention in policy debates, understanding key trends in migration policies is crucial. DESA and IOM's efforts on collecting data on SDG indicator 10.7.2 represent an important milestone for ensuring that the indicator provides the evidence base for monitoring the steps taken by governments to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people.

The Asia–Pacific region has shown an increase regarding the coverage of governments reporting data on SDG indicator 10.7.2. The results obtained from the combination of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Inquiry improved the regional coverage from 18 to 23 countries out of the 40 members in the region. Furthermore, when looking into policy domains, nearly eight out of 10 governments in the region fully met or met the criteria for Domain 4, which aims for the socioeconomic well-being of migrants. Regarding policies to protect migrants' access to welfare benefits and rights, essential access to health care is widely predominant amongst migrants regardless of their immigration status in the region. In line with the promotion of policies for safe, orderly and regular migration, nine out of 10 governments in the region reported having formal strategies to address trafficking in persons and migrants smuggling.

While the region has shown positive migration governance achievements in line with SDG indicator 10.7.2, data gaps in several policy areas need further attention. First, despite improvements, data coverage in the region needs to be improved, as 42 per cent of Asia–Pacific governments did not

provide data on SDG indicator 10.7.2. In addition, more efforts are required in policies regarding Domain 5, which stands for mobility dimension of crisis, as the region lags in this policy domain than in other regions. Moreover, the analysis of SDG indicator 10.7.2 data showed that few countries in the region report having formal mechanisms to ensure that migration policies are gender responsive. The region also shows a low proportion of governments reporting having provisions for unaccompanied minors or separated children. Formulating policies to support migrant children is crucial, particularly at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has already exacerbated the vulnerabilities of thousands of migrant children in the region (see [Section 4](#)).

Addressing data gaps on migration policy governance is key not only for facilitating an orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration, but also to enhance migrants' role in sustainable development through, among others, remittances (see [Section 5.1](#)). Addressing data gaps also represents an opportunity to improve policy data on specific types of migration such as labour migration – which covers migrant workers' fair treatment and ethical recruitment (see [Section 3.1](#)). Efforts must also focus on generating data SDG indicators disaggregated by migration status given that without a better understanding of migrants' characteristics and outcomes, assessing how migrants support development efforts is difficult (IOM, 2022b). More action is needed to translate SDG data frameworks into results and thus improve migration data realities on the ground.

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Dozens of Cambodians commute through the Thai border in Poipet | © IOM 2016/Muse MOHAMMED

A close-up, artistic photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her eyes and the top of her head. She is wearing a vibrant, multi-colored headscarf with shades of blue, red, and white. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on her forehead and nose, and deep shadows on the left side of her face. The background is dark and out of focus.

02

MIGRATION STATISTICS



Afghan boys at the Maslakh camp, outside Herat | © IOM 2007/Daniel PEPPER



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

Quality and reliable information on migration trends, stocks and flows are essential to design and manage well-informed and effective public policies. International migration forms part of sustainable development, as recognized in the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). National censuses and administrative data sources need to provide a wider range of data disaggregated by migratory status to ensure that the principles agreed upon in the SDG Agenda are respected (IOM, 2021a). In the Asia-Pacific region, SDG-related information disaggregated by migratory status is particularly scarce (IOM, 2022).

Migration dynamics in Asia and the Pacific have changed dramatically in the last two decades. Rapid economic development, tighter international trade relations, new and intensified conflicts, and environmental change have profoundly changed the social and migration landscape (UNESCAP, 2020). Both the numbers of emigrants from, and immigrants to countries in the region have increased by tens of millions, although emigration grew much more rapidly than immigration. Regional migration to and from Africa, in particular, has increased manifold in the last 20 years, especially due to tighter relations with China (Cissé, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the international response to contain the virus have deeply altered migration trends and policies. Border restrictions and travel bans – still in place in around half of the countries in the region (see [Section 1.1.1](#)) – have left millions of people stranded in 2020, reduced labour migration and changed smuggling dynamics (IOM, 2021b, p.68). Whether and to what extent migration trends have returned to pre-pandemic conditions is unclear, just as how migrants will structurally adapt their choices to the post-COVID-19 environment. Unfortunately, comprehensive data on migration stocks and flows after mid-2020 are not yet available, limiting the understanding of how the pandemic affected migration from a regional perspective. In this context, understanding how the migration landscape changed before the pandemic and what trends were observed in the region becomes fundamental to grasp what changes can be expected.

The following section will review the long-term trends in migration dynamics in Asia and the Pacific. First, the section outlines how in and outbound migration to and from the region changed, based on [International Migrant Stock](#) data from the Population Division of the United Nations

Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). The overview shows which countries of origin and destination grew more relevant over time, and which ones saw their role decline. Future migration projections are then reported

based on DESA's [World Population Prospects](#) data. These projections allow to estimate how net migration changes in the region are likely to evolve between 2020 and 2050 if the trends observed over the last years were to be sustained.

2.1 MIGRATION STOCK

2.1.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS IN EMIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION

2.1.1.1 EMIGRATION

The number of migrants originally from the Asia-Pacific region has almost doubled over the last 20 years. While Asian and Pacific emigrants were around 46.3 million in 2000, that number reached 82.6 million in 2020.⁹ The largest increase occurred between 2005 and 2010, when the migration stock rose by 25 per cent in only five years. The bulk of the growth observed in the last decades is attributable to South and South-East Asia, where the number of emigrants grew by 93 and 94 per cent between 2000 and 2020, respectively. While the emigration stock increased rapidly across the rest of the region, growth rates were more moderate at around 50–60 per cent.

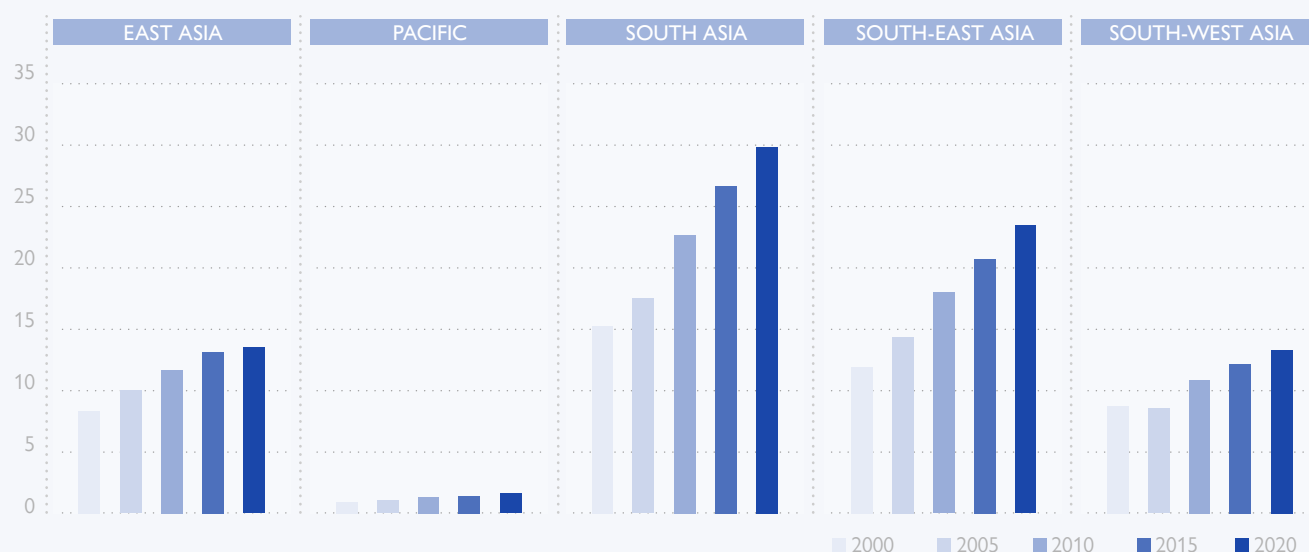
In 2020, a large share of emigration from Asia-Pacific countries was intraregional – as it has been in the last decades (IOM, 2021b, p.28) More than 34 million out of around 82.6 million emigrants from Asia-Pacific migrated to other countries in the

region, in particular to India, Australia, Thailand and Malaysia (in descending order). Outside the region, the largest stocks of migrants from the Asia-Pacific region were found in the Middle East and North Africa region, Central and North America and the Caribbean, as well as in the European Economic Area (*ibid.*).

Over the last 20 years, the fastest growing area of destination – both inside and outside of the region – for migrants from Asia-Pacific were the GCC countries. Emigrants from Asia-Pacific to this region grew by over 15.6 million individuals over the last 20 years. Other rapidly growing areas of destination for migrants from Asia-Pacific were North America (+6.3 million migrants), South-East Asia (+5.1 million), the European Economic Area (+4.2 million) and East Asia (+3 million). On the contrary, a few areas globally exhibited decreased migration from the Asia-Pacific region, including the Middle East, South-West Asia and South Asia.

9. DESA migrant stock figures refer to mid-year estimates.

FIGURE 18: EMIGRANTS FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION BY SUBREGION OF ORIGIN (2000–2020) (IN MILLIONS)



Source: DESA International Migrant Stock.

TABLE 1: ABSOLUTE CHANGE IN MIGRATION FROM ASIA-PACIFIC BY SUBREGION OF DESTINATION (2000–2020)

Top five	Absolute change 2000–2020
GCC countries	15,658,246
North America	6,358,715
South-East Asia	5,186,291
European Economic Area	4,201,216
East Asia	3,079,606
Bottom five	Absolute change 2000–2020
Central Africa	798
Horn of Africa	52
Middle East	-22,494
South-West Asia	-425,162
South Asia	-1,099,666

Source: DESA International Migrant Stock.

2.1.1.2 IMMIGRATION

The number of international migrants hosted in the Asia-Pacific region has also been growing over the last two decades, although it remains substantially lower than the number of emigrants from the region. In 2000, migrants in Asia-Pacific countries amounted to around 30 million individuals. In 2020, that figure increased to 42 million (IOM, 2021b, p.24) – around

40 per cent more than in 2000.¹⁰ Contrary to emigration, a growth in immigration was not observed across the region. South Asia and South-West Asia both exhibited a decrease of around 7–8 per cent in their immigrant stock over the period. Immigrants in South-East Asia, instead, more than doubled in the last two decades, reaching more than 10

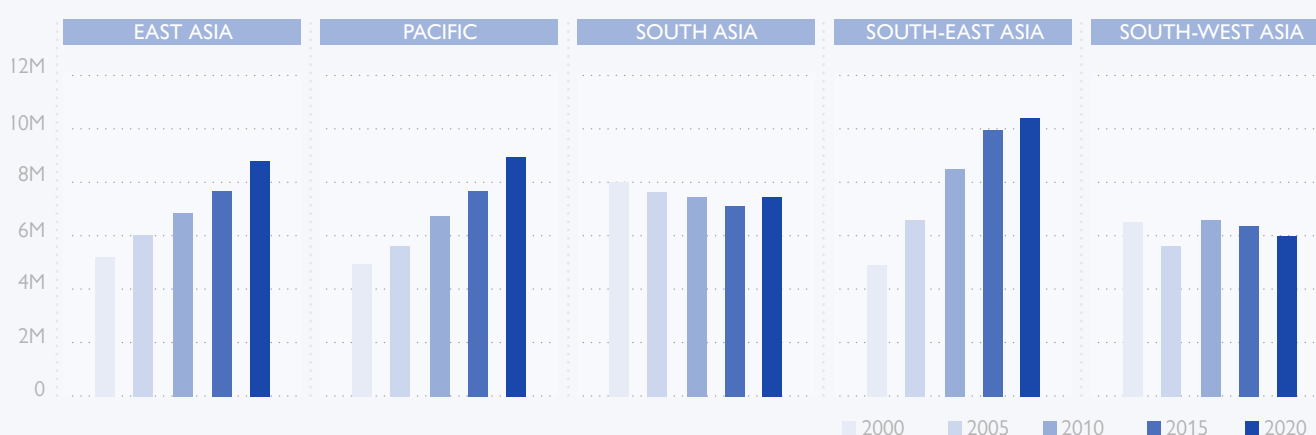
10. These figures include migrants from other countries in Asia-Pacific.

million individuals by mid-2020. This increase was driven by migrants hosted in Thailand (+2.4 million), Malaysia (+2 million) and Singapore (+1 million).

The three areas of origin whose migration stocks in Asia and the Pacific grew the most – in absolute terms – between 2000 and 2020 are all in the Asia-Pacific region. In particular, the number of immigrants in Asia and the Pacific originally from South-East Asia, East Asia and the Pacific grew by around 6.2 million, 2.7 million and 400,000 individuals, respectively. Rapidly growing areas of origin outside of Asia-Pacific are the European Economic Area (+379,425 individuals) and North America (+288,192).

While the number of migrants in Asia-Pacific who are originally from Africa tends to be low in absolute terms, migration from the African continent has grown substantially when considering percentage changes since 2000. In fact, migrants from Eastern and Central Africa grew more than five and sixfold, respectively. Moreover, the five fastest growing areas of origin among migrants to Asia-Pacific between 2000 and 2020, in percentage terms, were all African. This considerable growth in migration links between the two areas reflects how quickly African-Asian relationships are tightening, especially due to China's economic activity in the African continent (Cissé, 2021).

FIGURE 19: IMMIGRANTS TO ASIA-PACIFIC BY SUBREGION OF DESTINATION (2000–2020)



Source: DESA International Migrant Stock.

TABLE 2: ABSOLUTE CHANGE IN MIGRATION TO ASIA-PACIFIC BY SUBREGION OF ORIGIN (2000–2020)

Top five	Absolute change 2000–2020
South-East Asia	6,248,198
East Asia	2,785,273
Pacific	443,137
European Economic Area	379,425
North America	288,192
Bottom five	Absolute change 2000–2020
Central America	11,365
Central Africa	7,606
Northern Africa	1,942
Middle East	-5,253
South-West Asia	-63,940

Source: DESA International Migrant Stock.

2.1.2 MIGRATION PROJECTIONS

In the World Population Prospects, DESA provided projections of net migration rates and flows from 2020 to 2050 (DESA, 2019a). For each quinquennium (5 years) during the reference period, the estimates indicate the projected difference between the change in the number of inbound and outbound migrants. Their methodology leverages assumptions about trends in several demographic variables such as population growth, natality, mortality and migration rates. As noted by the authors, however, the accuracy of the assumptions – especially those about future migration trends – depends on a variety of complex factors. These projections, therefore, should be understood as likely outcome if net migration flows in each country were to continue the trends exhibited in the few years before 2019. In addition, the analysis considers refugee return flows and information relative to specific labour migration corridors or migration policies (DESA, 2019b).

According to DESA's projections, net migration in the Asia–Pacific region should be expected to be negative between 2020 and 2050, meaning more individuals are forecast to migrate from the Asia–Pacific region to other regions than those who will migrate to Asia–Pacific countries. Specifically, the projections indicate that the difference between outbound and inbound

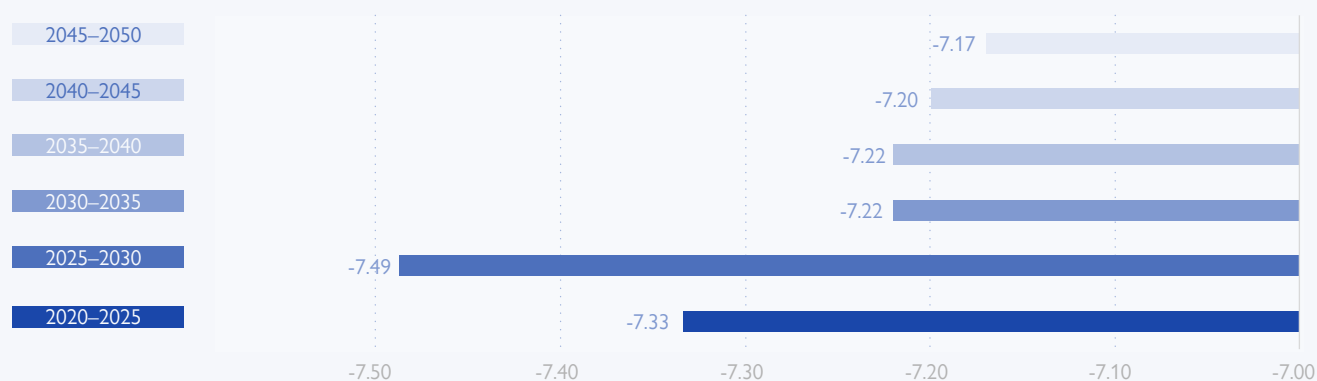
migrants should stay well beyond 7 million individuals in each five year period. The years between 2025 and 2030 should exhibit the most negative net migration flows, while the gap between emigration and immigration will slowly decline in the following years. Overall, between 2020 and 2050, the individuals projected to migrate from the Asia–Pacific region are 43 millions more than those projected to migrate to the region.

Only the Pacific subregion is projected to exhibit positive net migration trends between 2020 and 2050 among Asia–Pacific subregions, although this trend is driven uniquely by Australia. On average, inbound migrants to the subregion should surpass outbound migrants by more than 700,000 individuals every five years. At the same time, however, most small Pacific island countries are projected to observe negative net migration trends throughout the period. At the other end of the spectrum, the bulk of the region's projected gap between outbound and inbound migrants is driven by South Asia. In fact, emigration from South Asia is projected to top immigration to the subregion by over 25 million individuals by 2050. Finally, East, South-East and South-West Asia exhibit similar projections: net migration flows will average between -1.1 million and -1.3 million individuals in each subregion every five years.



IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix team surveys travellers in key locations frequented by returnees, internally displaced persons and other people on the move, such as the bus terminal in Herat city | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED

FIGURE 20: PROJECTED NET MIGRATION IN ASIA-PACIFIC (MILLION INDIVIDUALS); (2020-2050)



Source: World Population Prospects (DESA).

FIGURE 21: PROJECTED NET MIGRATION IN ASIA-PACIFIC BY SUBREGION (MILLION INDIVIDUALS); (2020-2050)



Source: World Population Prospects (DESA).

Legend: 2020-2025, 2025-2030, 2030-2035, 2035-2040, 2040-2045, 2045-2050

2.1.3 DISCUSSION

This section provided an overview of the long-term changes in migration stocks observed in the Asia–Pacific region between 2000 and 2020. The analysis portrays a region that underwent major transformations in its migration dynamics. Individuals emigrating from Asian and Pacific countries almost doubled over the last 20 years, with the fastest growth observed among migrants from South and South-East Asia. Similarly, the number of individuals who immigrated to countries in the region grew by 40 per cent. Once again, South-East Asia was among the main drivers of the observed increase. The migration links between Asia–Pacific and African countries tightened at a fast pace over the last two decades, reflecting deepening economic and cultural relations between the two regions. The Gulf States, North American and European Economic Area figure among the fastest growing regions of destination for Asian and Pacific migrants, in absolute terms.

Considering these trends and country-specific contexts and migration policies, DESA published projections of net migration trends in the region between 2020 and 2050. Assuming that the overarching trends observed in the last years were to remain stable, the Asia–Pacific region should be expected to send out substantially more migrants to countries outside the region than those it would receive from 2020 to 2050. Specifically, the number of emigrants from Asia–Pacific countries should surpass immigrants to the region by more than 7 million individuals every five years. While these figures are based on strong assumptions about the continuity of past migration trends, they provide interesting insights that confirm that Asia–Pacific remains a region of emigration rather than immigration. However, the COVID-19 pandemic might alter past trends. While some

migration dynamics observed in the last two years are likely to subside once restrictions are completely lifted, the recent economic and social trends could have long-lasting effects and bring substantial changes to the migration outlook in the region. Various types of migration have been affected by the international response to the COVID-19, making the pre-pandemic projections somehow outdated (IOM, 2021b).

Many challenges related to data availability remain in the region. SDG indicators disaggregated by migratory status are rarely available and, when they are, typically only concern some of the SDG goals (mostly related to [SDG 4: Quality Education](#) and [SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth](#)); (IOM, 2022). Secondly, data on international migrant stocks are only available up to mid-2020, which limits the possibility of gaining insight into how the COVID-19 pandemic is changing the migration scenario in the region. Moreover, comprehensive regional data on migration flows is lacking (IOM, 2021b). Finally, the relevant role of irregular migration in the region makes a comprehensive understanding of migration trends in the region challenging (*ibid.*). Improving the regional evidence base on migration remains crucial to advance [SDG Goal 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](#) – as well as [Objective 1 and 3 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#).

11. These projections do not include the expected impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as they were published in 2019.

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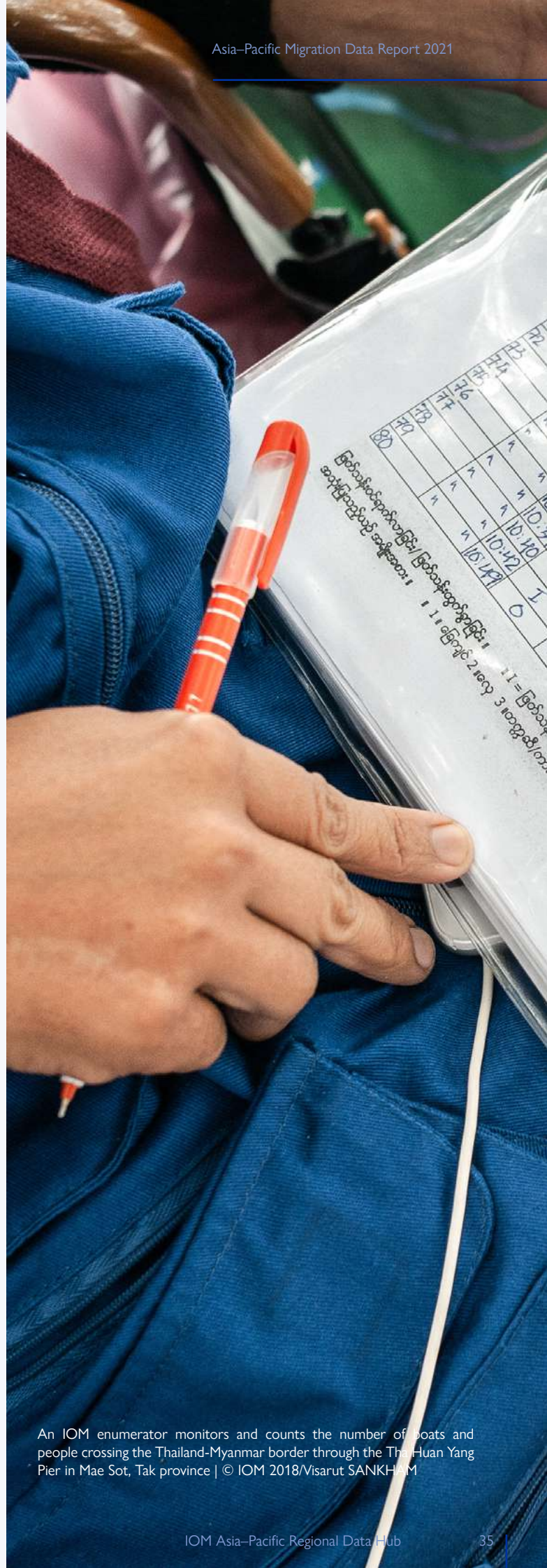
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An IOM enumerator monitors and counts the number of boats and people crossing the Thailand-Myanmar border through the Thai Huan Yang Pier in Mae Sot, Tak province | © IOM 2018/Visarut SANKHAM

03



TYPES OF MIGRATION



Fisherfolk from Bantayan Island off the western coast of mainland Cebu, whose livelihood is dependent on natural resources, feel the effects of climate change more than others | © IOM 2021/Andrea EMPAMANO



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 regular migration

3.1 LABOUR MIGRATION

Labour migration has proven essential not only for migrants but for the economies of origin and destination countries in Asia and the Pacific. Migrant workers make immense contributions to vital sectors in countries of destination and remittance flows have become economic lifelines for a number of South and South-East Asian economies (IOM, 2021a, p.4). International migrant workers account for 69 per cent of all working-age international migrants globally (ILO, 2021a, p.32). In the Asia–Pacific region, labour migration is the dominant form of international migration – 63 per cent of working-age international migrants are labour migrants and migrant workers make up a significant share of labour force (*ibid.*). While labour migration in this region primarily takes place under temporary migration regimes (Pipper, 2022) and supplies medium-skilled work, Asia–Pacific countries are also an important source of skilled migrant workers such as from China, India and the Philippines (ILO, n.d.).

While labour migration has often been driven by income differentials across regions and countries, the COVID-19 pandemic and several emerging trends are bound to shift the context for labour mobility around the globe and in the Asia–Pacific region. IOM Asia–Pacific Migration Data Report 2020 (2021b, p.51) identified a contraction of major labour migration corridors in the region in 2020, mainly driven by the severity

of the pandemic and its negative effects on international travel and the economies of destination countries. In 2021, the pace of economic recovery in the region did not catch up with initial forecasts. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2021) projected an average gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 6.5 per cent in Asia and the Pacific in 2021. Despite some improvement from -1.3 per cent in 2020, the estimate was revised downward by 1 per cent in October from the June version, mainly due to the heavy toll of new variants of the coronavirus in 2021 combined with slow vaccine roll-out. ILO estimated labour market recovery to be slow and work hour loss to continue, albeit at a lower rate than that observed in 2020. Although annual work hour loss relative to the fourth quarter of 2019 was expected to improve in 2021 (compared to 2020), fluctuations in the second and third quarters of 2021 reversed the slight progress achieved in the fourth quarter of 2020 (ILO, 2021b, p.20). Labour force participation rate and employment-to-population ratios in the region are expected to remain below their pre-crisis levels through 2023 (ILO, 2022a).

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market in 2021 are also expected to vary across countries – depending on a range of factors such as the composition of outputs, exports and employment, the stringency of



Burmese migrant worker in Bangkok | © IOM 2022/Benjamin SUOMELA

containment measures (*ibid.*), the severity of the pandemic and the vaccination rate (IMF, 2021).

This section analyses how these factors and shocks have affected the dynamics of labour mobility in the Asia-Pacific region; whether contraction in major labour migration corridors continued or reversed in 2021; and whether these effects are different across subregions and countries of origin and destination and types of labour migration. These questions can only be addressed with the availability of quality and up-to-date data. However, data gaps on labour migration

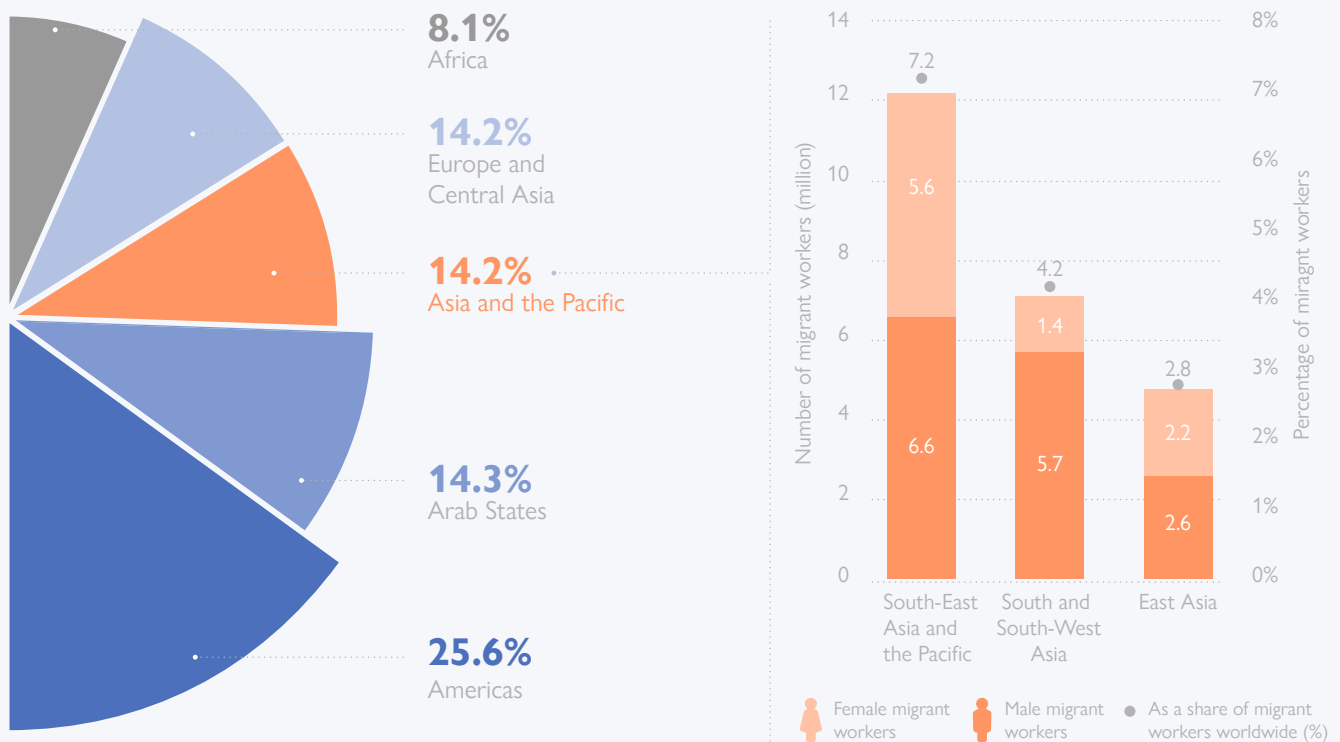
in the Asia-Pacific region are many, both on international labour migration in the region, and to a greater extent, on internal labour migration, which could be far greater in scale. Furthermore, data to identify those in irregular status or who participate in informal sectors are lacking, as neither are reflected by official statistics. The following section will focus on international labour migration using the latest available data from both a broad regional overview and a more detailed examination of the major labour migration corridors in the region, concluding with a discussion of data gaps and outlook.

3.1.1 REGIONAL AND SUBREGIONAL OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL LABOUR MIGRATION

A recent ILO (2021a, p.5–11) report estimated that there were 169 million international migrant workers globally, comprising nearly 5 per cent of the global workforce, based on 2019 figures. Migrant workers represented 62 per cent of all international migrants worldwide; 41.5 per cent of migrant

workers were female. Out of this global estimate, **14.2 per cent of, or 24 million international migrant workers were hosted in the Asia–Pacific region**¹² (Figure 22). **Thirty-nine per cent (9.1 million) were female.**

FIGURE 22: ILO ESTIMATE OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



Source: ILO Global Estimate of International Migrant Workers (2021a).

Disaggregating the data by subregion and sex can provide more nuanced information. South-East Asia and the Pacific jointly hosted 12.1 million migrant workers – about 7.2 per cent of all migrant workers globally (ILO, 2021a, p.32). Respectively, 7.1 million and 4.8 million migrant workers were hosted in South and South-West Asia and East Asia, that is, 4.2 per cent and 2.8 per cent of the global total of migrant workers. While South-East Asia and the Pacific as well as East Asia showed a relatively even sex distribution of migrant workers (with 46% being female migrant workers), an overwhelming 80 per cent of migrant workers in South

and South-West Asia were men. This figure can largely be explained by the fact that migration corridors and sectors of employment are highly gendered in the region. South-East Asia and East Asia have an increasing demand for workers in highly feminized sectors such as domestic work, health care, entertainment, manufacturing and textiles (UN-WOMEN, n.d.). Social norms in South Asia could partially relate to stigmatization of female migrant workers and legal and policy restrictions on women's mobility (South Asia Women's Fund, 2016).

12. The ILO definition of Asia and the Pacific (2021a, p.66) varies from the IOM definition – French Polynesia, Guam and New Caledonia are included in the Pacific, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Federated States of Micronesia and Nauru are not considered in the regional definition.

Migrant workers as a share of the total labour force in the Asia-Pacific region were below the global average, as migrant workers only represented 3.4 per cent in South-East Asia and the Pacific, 1 per cent in South and South-West Asia and 0.5 per cent in East Asia (ILO, 2021a, p.35). These relatively low averages could in part relate to the size of labour force, as the Asia-Pacific region has one of the world's largest workforces – 1.989 billion workers in total, representing 57.1 per cent of the global workforce (ILO, 2021a, p.32) – and a large part of labour migration in the region is of irregular nature.

These figures, representative of pre-pandemic levels, are the latest regional data available to reflect the aggregate scale of labour migration in Asia and the Pacific as the region of destination.¹³ To obtain a better understanding of the latest labour mobility trends in the region in 2021, the following

paragraphs will present the analysis of country-level labour migration statistics, where publicly available, collected from national authorities.¹⁴ With this information, this section sheds light on changes in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in some of the main destination countries for and origin countries of migrant workers in the Asia-Pacific region. **Results from the country-level analysis show that, stagnation largely characterized the inflow and stock of migrant workers in main destinations in the region (Figure 23). As well, gradual resumption was seen in the deployment of workers overseas from Asia-Pacific countries in 2021, though still distant from pre-pandemic levels (Figure 24). Fluctuations in labour migration flows remained closely tied to the direct and indirect COVID-19 effects, particularly travel bans amid new waves of outbreaks.**

DEFINITION OF MIGRANT WORKERS AND CROSS-COUNTRY DATA COMPARABILITY

No internationally accepted definition of labour migration exists. The definition and count of migrant workers as the main actors in labour migration may thus vary across countries. ILO (2015) defines migrant workers as “all international migrants who are currently employed or unemployed and seeking employment in their present country of residence”. DESA (2017) provided a statistical definition of a foreign migrant worker: “Foreigners admitted by the receiving State for the specific purpose of exercising an economic activity remunerated from within the receiving country. Their length of stay is usually restricted as is the type of employment they can hold. Their dependents, if admitted, are also included in this category.”

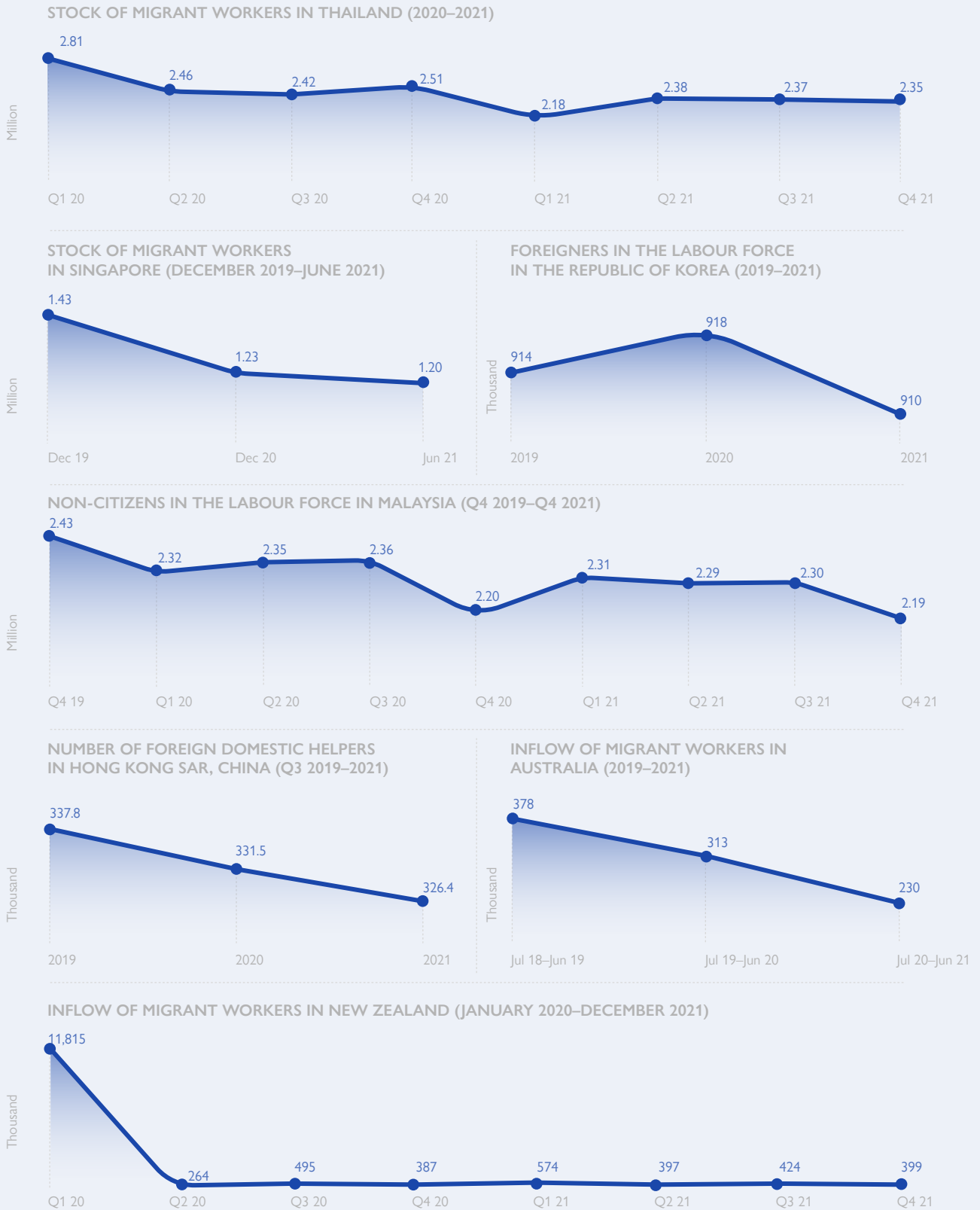
National statistics on migrant workers shown in the following section are used to reflect country-level changes over time for a specific type of migrant and may not be directly comparable across countries due to variations in nature and availability of data. For some countries, only the stock of international migrants who are in the labour force, regardless of their visa type, is publicly available – this definition is in line with the measurement used in the estimation of international migrant workers by ILO (2021a, p.40). For others, inflow data either reflect the number of migrants arriving in the destination country with work visa or granted admission to certain work visa schemes (without the indication of actual arrival) in a given year. A caveat is that these figures from national government institutions generally do not capture migrant workers in irregular status, and thus underestimate the full scale of labour migration.

-
13. Labour migration is one of the areas with large data gaps in the region, because labour migration statistics are generally scattered across national institutions with limited open access and regularity in update, if not insufficiently collected, which makes such regional review challenging. Although the ILOSTAT has greatly contributed to compiling such statistics from national authorities, data availability is confined to a limited number of countries in the region and the update of labour statistics with disaggregation by migratory status is often a lengthier process than for other general statistics.
14. Data might not be directly comparable across countries because the definition of migrant workers might differ and in some countries the data capture specific types of work visas.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AS THE DESTINATION

STAGNATION IN THE STOCK AND INFLOW OF MIGRANT WORKERS WERE SIGNIFICANT IN SOME OF THE MAIN DESTINATIONS IN THE REGION IN 2021.

FIGURE 23: STOCK AND INFLOW OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN MAIN DESTINATIONS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

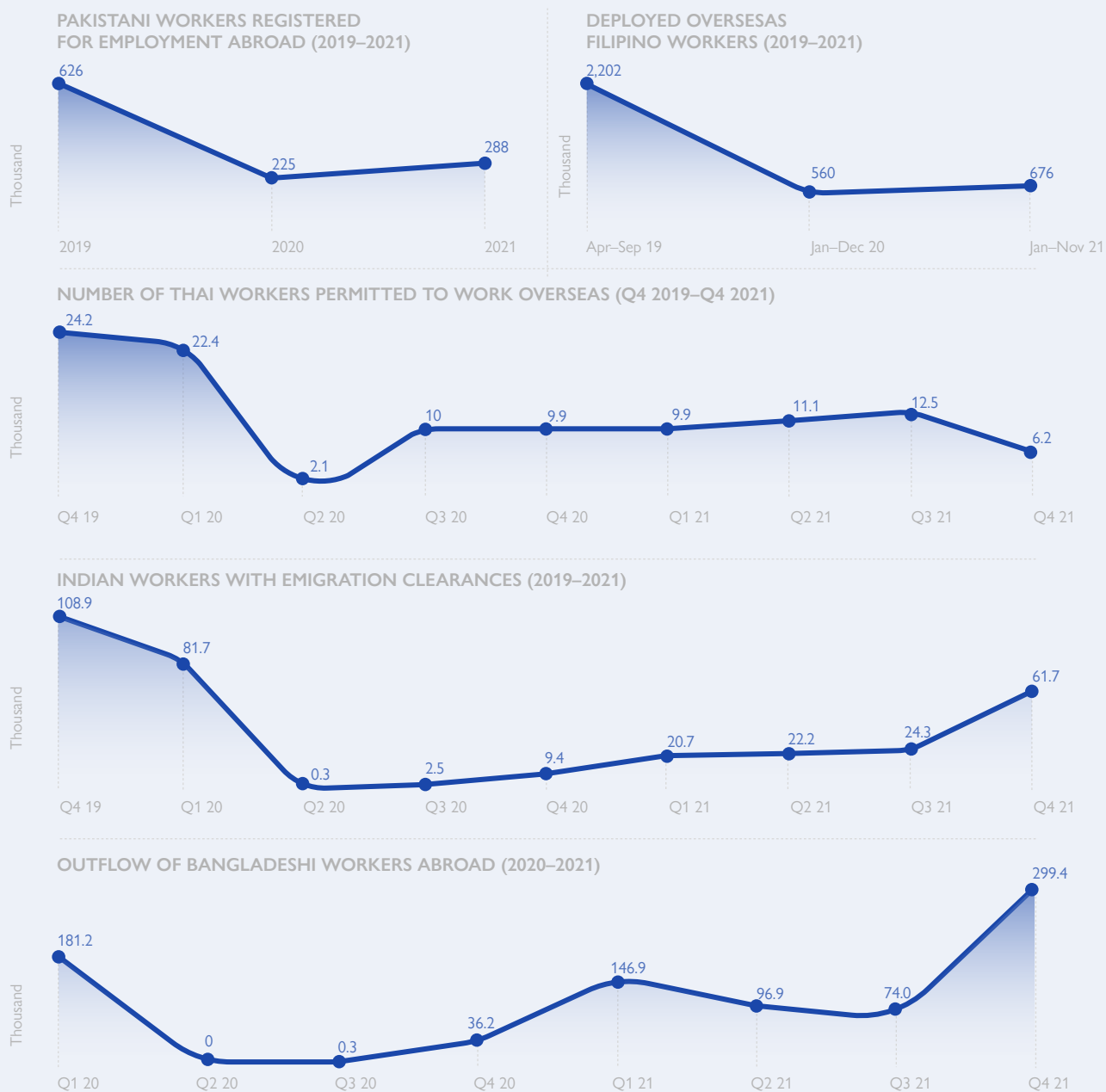


Source: Statistics for these figures were accessed on 22 February 2022 and compiled from Government sources specified in the following analysis.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AS THE ORIGIN

GRADUAL RESUMPTION IS OBSERVED IN THE OUTFLOW OF NATIONALS FOR EMPLOYMENT ABROAD IN 2021, THOUGH STILL DISTANT FROM PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS.

FIGURE 24: OUTFLOW OF NATIONALS FROM ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES FOR EMPLOYMENT ABROAD



Source: Statistics for these figures were accessed on 22 February 2022 and compiled from Government sources specified in the following analysis.

3.1.1.1 SOUTH-EAST ASIA

South-East Asia is an important subregion of destination as well as origin of labour migration. Intraregional migration is also a prominent characteristic, with 7.1 million intra-ASEAN migrants accounting for two-thirds of the subregion's total international migrant stock (ILO, 2022b). An estimated 10 million migrant workers live in major destinations across the ASEAN Member States (Institute for Human Rights and Business, 2020). Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam are net-destination countries for international migration (DESA, 2020).¹⁵ In decreasing order of importance, the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, Viet Nam, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia and

Timor-Leste are net origin countries (*ibid.*). As the subregion became one of the global epicentres of the pandemic and reached its highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the course of 2021, ILO (2021c) estimated that 9.3 million fewer workers are projected to be employed in the region in 2021 than expected in the absence of the pandemic, compared to 10.6 million fewer workers in 2020. The following subregional analysis will focus on the changes in labour mobilities in Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Viet Nam during the COVID-19 pandemic with available data.

THAILAND AS THE DESTINATION AND ORIGIN COUNTRY

Thailand is one of the major hubs for labour migration in South-East Asia, especially for workers within the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). In Thailand, in the first quarter of 2020 – before the pandemic's effects became noticeable – there were 2.81 million documented international migrant workers according to statistics published by the Ministry of Labour (MoL) of Thailand (MoL, 2020a, p.56). The number initially dropped to 2.45 million in the second quarter and further to 2.42 million in the third quarter of 2020 (MoL, 2020b, p.61; 2020c, p.56). Although the last quarter of 2020 saw a slight bounce-back in the stock of registered migrant workers, a sharp contraction to an even lower level than at the start of the global pandemic occurred in the first quarter of 2021 (MoL, 2020d, p.17; 2021a, p.56) – a drop of 13 per cent compared to the fourth quarter of 2020, and 22 per cent compared to the first quarter of 2020. While the quarterly number gradually increased over the course of 2021, it remained below the 2020 level (MoL, 2021b, p.59; 2021c, p.45; 2021d, p.47); (Figure 23).

Trends in the stock of migrant workers in Thailand have remained consistent with the changes in national employment-to-population ratio and unemployment rate since 2020 (MoL, 2021d, p.4, p.9), which were all closely linked to COVID-19 outbreaks. Having one of the steepest contractions in the economy among ASEAN countries, the Thai economy underwent a 6.1 per cent decline in GDP in 2020 and a further decline by 2.6 per cent in the first quarter of 2021 (World Bank, 2021), which saw the second

wave of COVID-19 infections ending by the end of March 2021. A third wave in late June 2021 led to stricter mobility containment measures. The GDP growth forecast for Thailand in 2021 has been accordingly revised downwards by the Asian Development Bank (2021) from 1.1 to 0.8 per cent. The decline in the stock of migrant workers can be explained by several factors. On the one hand, labour migration was under the cumulative protracted effect of pandemic-related restrictions on incomes, job loss, working hours and productivity (ILO, 2021d). On the other hand, a large-scale return of migrant workers to their countries of origin and a suspension of the regular migration channel in March 2020, which only gradually reopened (initially for Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic towards the end of 2021 and still under negotiation for Myanmar) contributed to lowering the stock of migrant workers in Thailand.

Migrant workers in Thailand mainly come from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar both documented and undocumented. As of December 2021, slightly more than 90 per cent (2.13 million) of all documented migrant workers in Thailand were from these three countries (MoL, 2022). One fourth (594,281) were workers from these three countries (and another 137 from Viet Nam) who arrived through the Labour Employment Memorandum of Understanding (MoU); (*ibid.*). While the borders for regular migrant workers were closed since March 2020 and many migrant workers had returned, the Government implemented several rounds of visa extensions for documented migrants

15. Net migration refers to the net number of migrants in a given period, that is, the number of immigrants minus the number of emigrants (IOM, 2019). In this context, a country with more immigrants than emigrants in a given year is considered a net immigration country and vice versa.

and regularizations for undocumented migrant workers, whose visa has expired and/or entered irregular status to allow them to stay longer and support the economy during the pandemic. Another 188,908 migrant workers in Thailand (8%) were workers from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar, who came via MoU but whose contracts have been terminated, leaving them to seek another job following a Cabinet Resolution on 4 August 2020 (re-registered through the Cabinet Resolution on 4 August 2020 after the pandemic); (*ibid.*). As well, 1,348,435 workers from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar (representing 57% of all migrant workers), were granted extended stay in the country in consideration of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic under Cabinet Resolutions on 20 August 2019 and 29 December 2020 (*ibid.*). The total number of workers from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar in Thailand including irregular migrant workers is likely much higher.

Thailand remains a country of origin for Thai workers who

seek employment abroad. The deployment of Thai workers overseas gradually resumed after their numbers plummeted from the quarterly outflow of 22,400 in the first quarter of 2020 to 2,100 in the second quarter of 2020 (MoL, 2020a, p.59; 2020b, p.64); (Figure 24). As of the third quarter of 2021, the total number of deployed Thai workers overseas was 33,470, which was still 62 per cent lower than before the pandemic compared to the same period in 2019 (89,618); (MoL, 2019a, p.63). However, the gradual resumption was countered by yet another drop in the fourth quarter of 2021 amid continued COVID-19 infections. Despite a drop in outflow, the main destination countries for Thai workers before and during the COVID-19 pandemic remained consistent except for a significantly lower number of outflows to Japan due to COVID-19-related policy restrictions (namely, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Israel, Singapore and Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China); (MoL, 2019b, p.57; 2021b, p.62; 2021d, p.50).

SNAPSHOT:

ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON MIGRANT WORKERS FROM CAMBODIA, THE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC, AND MYANMAR IN THAILAND

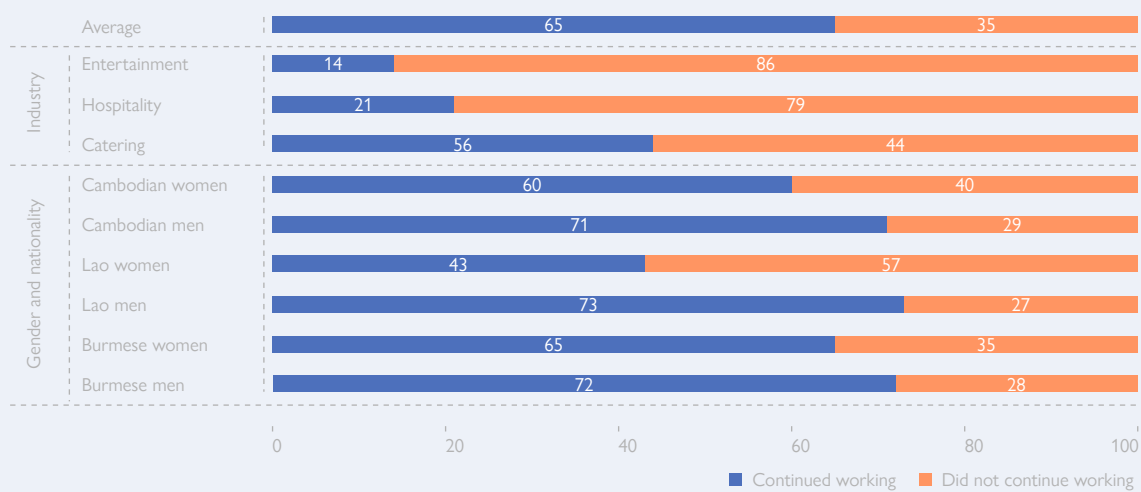
IOM (2021c) assessed the socioeconomic consequences of COVID-19 felt by migrant workers in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand, particularly regarding the direct effect of the lockdown during March–June 2020. **The overall finding is that the economic situation of many responding migrant workers had worsened during lockdown and did not return to pre-pandemic levels even after the lockdown ended in 2021. COVID-19 was also shown to have negatively affected certain migrant groups more severely, such as workers employed in certain service industries, women and people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).**

Between March and May 2021, 1,369 phone and in-person surveys were conducted with migrant workers from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar who were staying in Thailand during the interview period and were employed in Thailand during the three months prior to March 2020. Migrant workers from Myanmar represented the largest group (75%) among interviewees, and on average about half of the sample were female respondents. The sample also included 38 respondents with diverse SOGIESC.

Employment status

During the lockdown, 65 per cent of the respondents continued working in their main job, although around one in five were asked to take time off and one in ten were let go (Figure 25). The percentage of respondents reportedly keeping their jobs are however considerably lower among those working in certain industries, namely, entertainment (14%), hospitality (21%) and catering (44%), and among women consistently across nationalities – 60 per cent among Cambodian women versus 71 per cent for men, 43 per cent among Lao women versus 73 per cent for men, and 65 per cent among Burmese women versus 72 per cent for men. This rate is also typically lower among people with diverse SOGIESC.

FIGURE 25: CHANGES TO EMPLOYMENT STATUS DURING LOCKDOWN AMONG INTERVIEWED MIGRANT WORKERS IN THAILAND



Income

The average income among respondents as of March 2021 – when lockdown ended – was 10 per cent higher than that during lockdown, though only equivalent to 91 per cent of the average income before lockdown. Moreover, more migrants were paid below the minimum wage – the share of surveyed migrants being paid less than the minimum wage of 313 Thai baht (THB) per day rose from 31 per cent before COVID-19 to 42 per cent as of March 2021. Women migrant workers were found to be more prone to receiving an income below the minimum wage before, during and after the lockdown – almost double the shares among men.

Debt

While 30 per cent of respondents had debt before the COVID-19 pandemic, about 17 per cent of respondents reported an increase in debt compared to before the pandemic. Household expenses (63%), job hour or wage reduction due to COVID-19 (42%) and job loss due to COVID-19 (41%) were the most cited primary reasons for debt increase.

Remittance sending

While 55 per cent of respondents were sending remittances prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, only about 37 per cent were sending remittances as of March 2021. One third of respondents reported that their family back home were receiving less money sent by them by the time of the survey. The average amount of remittances sent at the time of the survey, compared to before the pandemic, declined by 25 per cent. This reduction was sharpest among Lao respondents (58%). The most reported coping mechanisms their families used back home in response to the reduction in remittances were reducing spending on non-essential items (56%), reducing spending on non-food essentials (32%) and reducing food intake (30%) – the latter worryingly reported by around half of Lao (52%) and Cambodian (42%) respondents. Reduced spending on health was also reported by around one fifth of Lao (23%) and Cambodian (17%) respondents.

Source: Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant Workers in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand. IOM (2021c).

MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE AS DESTINATIONS

Malaysia hosted an estimated 2.7 million migrants¹⁶ in 2021 – who accounted for 8 per cent of the population; 61 per cent were men (Department of Statistics of Malaysia, 2021). Compared to the fourth quarter of 2019, the stock of migrants in labour force as well as in employment have been on decline from the first quarter of 2020 to the fourth quarter of 2021 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022, p.A1-A2). The sharpest contractions were seen in the fourth quarter of 2020 and the fourth quarter of 2021 – respectively by 9 and 10 per cent in the number of migrants in the labour force, and by 10 and 12 per cent in the number of non-citizens in employment (Figure 23). The drop in these figures occurred despite a reduction in unemployment of non-citizens since the second quarter of 2021 and an overall labour market recovery in 2021 stimulated by the revival of more economic and social activities – employment continued to increase amid surging demand for labour, contributing to the lowest unemployment rate since the COVID-19 pandemic, and total work hours rose by 2.3 per cent compared to 2020 (*ibid.*, p.2).

Another popular destination for migrant workers in the region is Singapore, as slightly more than one third (36%) of Singapore's population were migrants, including 1.47 million migrants and 490,000 permanent residents, as of June 2021 (National Population and Talent Division of Singapore 2021, p.5); (Figure 23). The stock of foreign workforce¹⁷ contracted following the start of the pandemic from 1.43 million in December 2019 to 1.23 million December 2020, and further to 1.2 million as of June 2021 (Ministry of Manpower of Singapore, 2021a) – a decline of 16 per cent compared to pre-pandemic level. Around half of these migrant workers were employed in construction or marine shipyard and process sectors or as domestic workers (*ibid.*). The continuous

decrease in the stock of migrant labour could be related to the travel ban imposed on entry from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka from the beginning of May 2021 following concerns over the spread of the Delta variant.¹⁸ This has reportedly induced labour shortages, which led to project delays and firm closures, especially for companies that have traditionally relied on migrant workers.¹⁸

While the labour market of Singapore saw an encouraging rebound in 2021 after a sharp contraction in 2020, recovery to the pre-COVID-19 level was yet to be reached and remained uneven among the labour force. Although the unemployment situation has improved for both migrants and permanent residents, the overall employment growth of 40,800 individuals in 2021 was driven by residents, offsetting a small decline among migrants (Ministry of Manpower of Singapore, 2021b). In 2018–2019, employment grew by 24,000, but declined by 47,000 during 2019–2020 and by 147,000 during 2020–2021 (*ibid.*, p.7). According to the Ministry of Manpower of Singapore, lay-offs of migrants concentrated in unskilled sectors such as construction and manufacturing.¹⁹ Quarterly figures further show that, despite a small decline in annual employment figures, employment of migrants saw an increase in the last quarter of 2021 for the first time in two years (*ibid.*, p.2). In addition to the direct effect of COVID-19 on border control and economic activities, the reduction in foreign employment and labour force is also related to the restriction on migrant worker inflow, through tightening work pass requirements and cutting quotas for migrant workers (Ministry of Manpower of Singapore, 2020) to preserve jobs for the locals in view of economic recession.

16. Data for 'migrants' from the Governments of Malaysia and Singapore presented was referred to as 'non-citizens' in the original source.

17. This figure considers foreign workforce under work passes, namely, Employment Pass, S Pass, work permit and other work passes.

18. Channel News Asia, "Companies seek alternatives as workers from India, Bangladesh dwindle", 7 May 2021.

19. Channel News Asia, "Foreign workers may not return to Singapore in same numbers as before, say economists", 23 March 2021.

SNAPSHOT:

WORKING CONDITIONS OF BANGLADESHI AND INDIAN WORKERS IN SINGAPORE

A local non-governmental organization conducted a survey on employment situations with 509 male Bangladeshi and Indian work permit holders in the construction, marine shipyard or process sector in Singapore between April and May 2021 (TWC2, 2021). Bangladeshi respondents reported a lower mean salary compared to Indian respondents, which was plausibly related to the fact that Bangladeshi respondents changed job more frequently than their Indian counterparts and have stayed in Singapore for a shorter period. The mean salary increments from the starting salary for both groups in the 2021 survey grew slightly from that of the 2016 survey. In terms of recruitment fees, Bangladeshi respondents reported higher median recruitment fees at USD 6,000 compared to Indian respondents, who paid a median recruitment fee of USD 2,000 in 2021. Recruitment fees paid were shown to be rising over the years, as respondents with a shorter duration of stay in Singapore reported the highest recruitment fees. The recovery period for the recruitment fee rose from 6.5 times their monthly basic salary for the 2000–2005 cohort to the current 11 times for the 2016–2020 cohort. The number of Bangladeshi respondents who reported facing salary or injury issues in their workplace doubled the number of Indian respondents. Job scarcity and the preference of employers for hiring existing workers in Singapore are driving the increase in recruitment fees, which in turn might lead to higher financial stress and vulnerability of workers to the demands of employers.

Source: [A study on migrant workers of Singapore, Mar–Sep 2021](#). TWC2 (2021).



A farmer carries a bale during a harvest of rice funded by IOM in Matang Pase, Indonesia | © IOM 2005

THE PHILIPPINES AS AN ORIGIN COUNTRY

The Philippines has been a major origin country of migrant workforce, especially to the GCC and East Asian countries. The share of households with overseas Filipino workers (OFW) covered in the Consumer Expectations Survey conducted by the Central Bank of the Philippines (2021, p.18) was 6.4 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2021 – which saw a slight increase compared to the third quarter of 2020 (6.0%) yet still below the pre-pandemic level at 9.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2020. According to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, 675,567 Filipino workers were deployed between January and November 2021, that is, 20 per cent higher than the 560,300 overseas Filipino workers deployed in 2020 (Philippine News Agency, 2022); (Figure 24). Despite

improvement, this figure still fell short of the pre-pandemic level at 2.2 million recorded between April and September 2019 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020).

The deployment of Filipino workers overseas has been affected by the pandemic in both positive and negative ways. On one hand, deployment of health-care workers was facilitated by surging demands in destination countries especially during the pandemic; on the other hand, the surge of COVID-19 variants created numerous repercussions in deployment, as destination countries introduced stricter protocols and travel restrictions such as the requirement of vaccination (Philippine News Agency, 2022).

VIET NAM AS AN ORIGIN COUNTRY

The current number of Vietnamese workers abroad is estimated to be about 580,000, including 230,000 in Taiwan Province of People's Republic of China, 250,000 in Japan, 50,000 in the Republic of Korea and the rest in the Middle East, Africa, South-East Asia and Europe. The COVID-19 pandemic has strongly disrupted the deployment of Vietnamese workers abroad. The outflow of Vietnamese workers abroad has dropped continuously, from 152,000 in 2019 to 78,000 in 2020 and further to 45,000 in 2021²⁰ – a decline of 70 per cent compared to the pre-pandemic level.

The outflow of Vietnamese workers abroad was curbed on one hand due to the negative effects of the pandemic on the aviation and tourism sectors, and on the other hand due to travel restriction measures introduced in major destination countries. For example, after more than a year of closure, Japan only resumed the reception of Vietnamese workers from late January 2021, whereas Taiwan Province of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea only resumed the activity from May 2021.²⁰

20. NDO, "More attention needed to ensure rights of Vietnamese workers abroad", 5 January 2022.

3.1.1.2 SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA

Within South Asia, India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka (in descending order of importance) are net origin countries, whereas Maldives and Bhutan are net destination countries for international migration (DESA, 2020). Within South-West Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan are net origin countries, whereas the Islamic Republic of Iran is a net destination country for international migration (*ibid.*). Hosting 14.3 per cent of migrant workers worldwide (ILO, 2021a, p.32), migration to the GCC countries from South and South-West Asia, especially India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, is one of the main labour migration corridors in Asia and the Pacific.

The spike of COVID-19 cases in the subregion in the early half of 2021 with the emergence of the Delta variant was followed by widespread travel bans, preventing nationals of these countries from entering major labour receiving countries, such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates (Mixed Migration Centre, 2021, p.5). Travel restrictions have halted the remigration plan of many migrant workers who were forced to return to their countries of origin due to the pandemic, and negatively affected the economic stability of labour-exporting South and South-West Asian countries such as India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (*ibid.*).

INDIA, BANGLADESH AND PAKISTAN AS COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

India was the largest origin country of international migrants in the world by mid-2020 (DESA, 2020). Two thirds of Indian migrants living abroad (Khan and Arokkiaraj, 2021) and an estimated 8.4 million Indian workers were in GCC countries (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2021a). **Labour migration outflow from India has slowly resumed to three quarters of the pre-pandemic level as of the fourth quarter of 2021.** Following a drastic decline from 81,700 in the first quarter to only 300 in the second quarter of 2020, the number of Indians with emigration clearances obtained through recruiting agents, project exporters or through direct recruitment by foreign employers has since steadily increased through the rest of 2020 and 2021 (Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2021b), (Figure 24). The annual total has increased by 37 per cent from 2020 to 2021. Although partial recovery from the blow of COVID-19 is observed, fundamental changes have been noted in the overall trend of labour migration outflows in recent years. Even prior to the pandemic, the migration of low-wage workers to GCC countries from India has been on decline over the past decade – which was seen to arise from a combination of factors such as nationalization policies that reduced job opportunities in destination countries, higher fees for work permits and higher taxes in destination countries, and India's strict regulation of its citizens' overseas employment (Global Alliance against Traffic in Women, 2021, p.63).

According to statistics from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) of Bangladesh, a **similar trend of gradual resumption, though more discontinuous than in India, was seen for Bangladesh in 2021.** Since the drop to zero in the second quarter of 2020

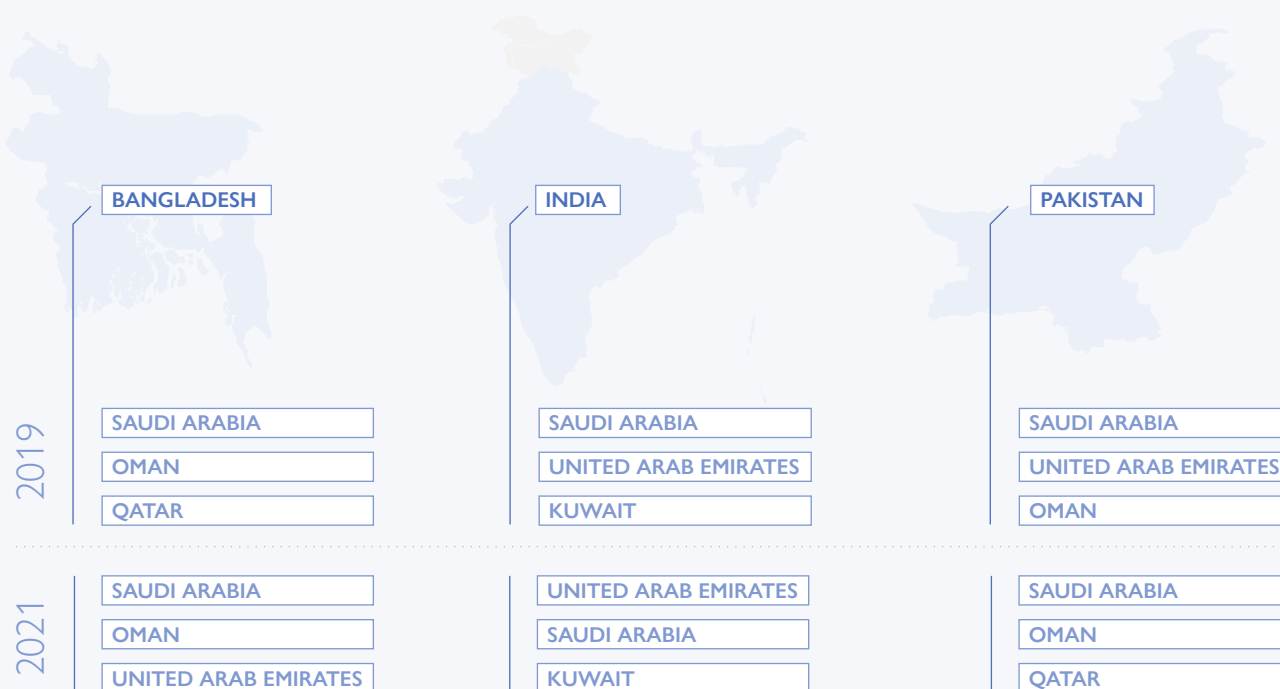
that lasted for another quarter, the number of Bangladeshi workers going abroad slowly increased from the fourth quarter of 2020 to the first quarter of 2021. However, this number was struck by another two drops from April to May (by 50%) and from June to July (by 75%) which were likely related to the surge of COVID-19 caused by the Delta variant across South Asia (BMET, 2020a, 2021a; Mixed Migration Centre, 2021). The fourth quarter of 2021 saw a rapid resumption in labour migration outflow, with an annual total of 617,000 in 2021, which is about three times higher than the annual total in 2020 and 88 per cent of the annual total in 2019 (BMET, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a); (Figure 24). The share of women among the Bangladeshi migrant workforce did not show a significant change, with only a slight decrease from 15 to 13 per cent from 2019 to 2021 (BMET, 2021b). In terms of destination, nearly 90 per cent of Bangladeshi workers went to GCC countries (74% to Saudi Arabia, 9% to Oman and 5% to the United Arab Emirates), and another 5 per cent to Singapore (BMET, 2022); (Figure 26). The level of concentration of Bangladeshi workers in GCC countries was slightly lower before the COVID-19 pandemic (77% in 2019), with a larger share of outflow to other countries, particularly Jordan and Singapore (*ibid.*). Almost half of the Bangladeshi workers abroad were engaged in less skilled or semi-skilled professions (BMET, 2019).

According to statistics from the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BE&OE) of Pakistan (2022a), the outflow of Pakistani workers registered for employment abroad has slowly and partially resumed over the course of the pandemic. This number increased to 288,280 (by 28%) from 2020 to 2021, although the outflow recorded

in 2021 still lagged behind the pre-pandemic level by half (*ibid.*); (Figure 24). As many as 95 per cent of these Pakistani workers were going to GCC countries – this percentage barely changed compared to that of 2019 (*ibid.*). While the most popular destinations in 2021 were Saudi Arabia (54%), Oman (13%) and Qatar (13%); (Figure 26), in 2019 the United Arab Emirates were the second most popular

destination, following Saudi Arabia (53%) and accounted for 30% of Pakistani workers registered for employment abroad. The majority of Pakistani workers were moving abroad for either skilled (46%) or unskilled (40%) occupations – most commonly labourers (39%) or drivers (30%) – with no marked change from the distribution in 2019 (BE&OE, 2022b; 2022c).

FIGURE 26: TOP THREE DESTINATIONS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS FROM BANGLADESH, INDIA AND PAKISTAN IN 2019 AND 2021



Source: Data for Bangladesh retrieved from [BMET \(2022\)](#). Data for India retrieved from [Ministry of External Affairs \(2021a\)](#) and [Middle East Institute \(2020\)](#). Data for Pakistan retrieved from [BE&OE \(2022a\)](#).

3.1.1.3 THE PACIFIC

International migration in the Pacific takes a variety of forms. Circular seasonal labour migration flows from Pacific islands to Australia and New Zealand prominently characterize labour mobility within this subregion. Such temporary migration is typically channelled through government-organized programmes in Australia and New Zealand. Other forms of migration include temporary skilled migration for working in labour-scarce professions such as nurses,

accountants and teachers, as well as permanent migration schemes. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Australia and New Zealand have been in relative isolation, each having some of the world's toughest border restrictions²¹ in an attempt to slow surging COVID-19 cases. At the same time, both countries were speeding up vaccination coverage and aimed for reopening in late 2021, which did not fully materialize until early 2022.^{22, 23}

21. The Diplomat, "Australia and New Zealand Prepare to Reopen", 26 October 2021.

22. BBC, "Covid: Australia's border reopens to international visitors", 21 February 2022.

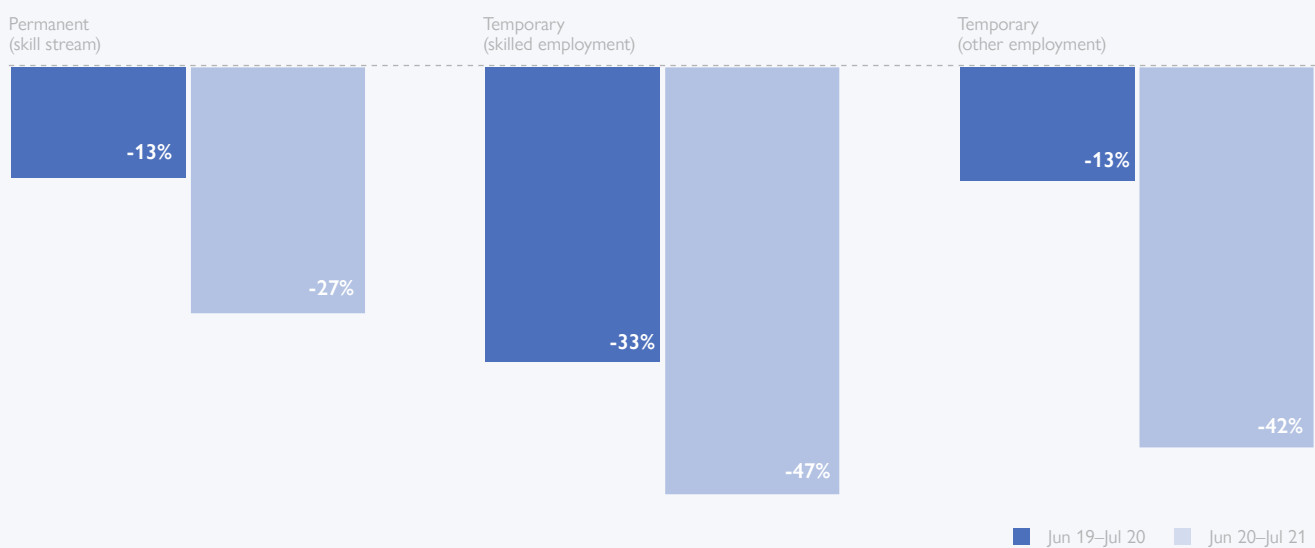
23. VOA, "New Zealand to Bring Forward COVID-19 Border Reopening", 16 March 2022.

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND AS DESTINATIONS

Overall, the inflow of migrant workers has been declining since the start of the pandemic in Australia and New Zealand. In Australia, the number of migrant workers granted permanent visas for skill stream and temporary visas for skilled or other employment²⁴ dropped from 378,000 between June 2018 and July 2019 to 313,000 between June 2019 and July 2020, and further to 230,000 between June 2020 and July 2021 (Department of Home Affairs of Australia, 2021) (Figure 23) – a decline of almost 40 per cent compared to pre-pandemic levels.²⁵ Figure 27 shows that admission figures across these three visa categories further declined between June 2020 and July 2021 from the same period in 2019–2020 and 2018–2019, with the sharpest decline in temporary visas granted for either skilled or other employment. The top three nationalities accounting for 40 per cent of all permanent skill stream places in the 2020–2021 round were India (19.4%), China (14.4%) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (7.1%); (ibid.).

Among temporary visas for other employment, the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS), two streams under Australia's Pacific worker programmes for temporary migrants from the following participating countries to work in rural and regional Australia: Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. While the SWP enables employers to recruit for the agricultural and accommodation sectors, the PLS targets low and semi-skilled workers for any sector, mostly in meat processing, agriculture, elderly care, accommodation, fisheries and forestry (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia, n.d.). Compared to the period between June 2018 and July 2019, the number of workers admitted to the SLP was almost halved as of July 2021 – such reduction has been continuous throughout the pandemic. The number of workers admitted through the PLS, however, has been increasing (Table 3).

FIGURE 27: REDUCTION IN MIGRANT WORKER INFLOW TO AUSTRALIA BY VISA TYPE (JUNE 2018–JULY 2021)



Source: Compiled from [Australian Migration Statistics, 2020–21](#) (accessed on 22 February 2022). Department of Home Affairs of Australia.

24. Figures include permanent visas granted for skill stream and temporary visas granted for temporary resident (other employment) and temporary resident (skilled employment) categories.
25. This number should be seen as a minimum estimate considering visa routes most directly related to labour migration for migrant workers could be encompassed in other schemes, such as working holiday maker and New Zealand citizen special category visas.

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF PACIFIC WORKERS UNDER SEASONAL WORKER SCHEMES

Period	Australia		New Zealand
	Seasonal Worker Program (SWP)	Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS)	Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme
Jun 17–Jul 18	8,459	n/a	11,078
Jun 18–Jul 19	12,202	160	12,581
Jun 19–Jul 20	9,823	1,029	11,152
Jun 20–Jul 21	6,266	2,295	2,017

Note: The Pacific Labour Scheme commenced in July 2018.

Source: Data for Australia compiled from [Australian Migration Statistics, 2020–21](#) (accessed on 22 February 2022). Department of Home Affairs of Australia (2021). Data for New Zealand retrieved from [Bedford \(2021\)](#).

As for New Zealand, the number of work visas issued plummeted from the first quarter to the second quarter of 2020, and the quarterly figure remained below 600 work visas throughout 2021 ([Statistics New Zealand, 2022](#)); (Figure 23). The annual estimated drop from 2020 to 2021 is of 86 per cent. The massive collapse in net international migration, which might be taking away a key driver of growth for some areas, has been attributed to closed borders ([Infometrics, 2021](#)). Table 3 shows that the number of Pacific workers arriving on Recognized Seasonal Employment (RSE) fell from 12,581 between June 2018 and July 2019 to 11,152 during the same period in 2019–2020 and dropped to 2,017 during the same period in 2020–2021 – a reduction of 84 per cent compared to the pre-pandemic level during 2018–2019.

New Zealand closed its borders in late March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with only a small number of border exceptions to allow the re-entry of skilled and critical workers into the country ([Bedford, 2021](#)). Two border

exceptions were made to fill horticulture and viticulture jobs for peak harvest and pruning periods – the first one allowed the entry of 2,011 experienced RSE workers from Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu between January and April 2021 (58% from Vanuatu), and the second one was announced in May 2021 for an additional 2,400 RSE workers from Samoa, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands to enter before March 2022 ([ibid.](#)). In August 2021, one-way quarantine-free travel was introduced to replace the border exception for RSE workers from Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu, and removes the costs for RSE employers of arranging managed isolation and quarantine for workers ([ibid.](#)), facilitating especially smaller RSE employers in recruiting Pacific workers. While both New Zealand and Australia introduced policies to resume the recruitment of seasonal workers from Pacific islands, it was foreseen that COVID-19 related travel restrictions and other policies would continue to make labour mobility for Pacific seasonal workers difficult ([ibid.](#)).

3.1.1.4 EAST ASIA

Hong Kong SAR, China; Japan and the Republic of Korea were the top three destinations accounting for 83 per cent of 8.97 million international migrants hosted in this subregion by mid-2020; at the same time, China alone sent 9.42 million migrants overseas ([DESA, 2020](#)). According to the ILO, within the Asia–Pacific region, East Asian economies have

shown the strongest level of resilience in 2020 and had the most dynamic rebound in 2021 ([ILO, 2022a, p.60](#)). Based on publicly accessible data, this subregional analysis will focus on changes in the Republic of Korea and Hong Kong SAR, China as the main destinations of labour migration in East Asia as of 2021.

REPUBLIC OF KOREA AND HONG KONG SAR, CHINA AS DESTINATIONS

Among the main labour migration destinations in East Asia, the Republic of Korea and Hong Kong SAR, China saw a limited extent of resumption in the employment and inflow of migrant workers. As of the end of 2021, 1.96 million foreign nationals were living in the Republic of Korea²⁶ (Figure 23). Overall, 68 per cent of the foreign population were in the labour force and 64 per cent were employed in the Republic of Korea in 2021 (Statistics Korea, 2021, p.1). Ninety per cent of foreign nationals in the country were Asians in 2020, in particular Korean-Chinese (37%), Vietnamese (13%) and Chinese (10%); (Statistics Korea, 2020, p.2). Between 2019 and 2021, fluctuations occurred in the total number of foreign nationals in the Korean labour force. Despite a slight increase in this number from 2019 to 2020, the number of unemployed foreign nationals had in fact risen by 38 per cent to 70,000 and the unemployment rate of foreigners rose by 2.1 per cent from 2019 to 7.6 per cent in 2020 (*ibid.*, p.3). From 2020 to 2021, while the number of foreign nationals in the labour force decreased by 8,000, the number of unemployed foreign nationals decreased by 22 per cent and their unemployment rate dropped to 6 per cent in 2021 (Statistics Korea, 2021, p.2). Although the stock and rate of unemployed migrant workforce in the Republic of Korea has reduced in 2021, pre-pandemic levels – namely, 50,000 unemployed foreign nationals, 5.5 per cent unemployment rate among foreign nationals in 2019 (Statistics Korea, 2019, p.3) – have not been regained. Regarding changes in remittance sending, 35.4 per cent of

foreigners in the country wired money overseas in 2021 (Statistics Korea, 2021, p.3), compared to 38.3 per cent in 2019 (Statistics Korea, 2019, p.3).

In Hong Kong SAR, China, foreign domestic helpers, mainly coming from the Philippines and Indonesia, account for nearly 9 per cent of labour force according to the [Census and Statistics Department \(CS&D\); \(2021a, p.10\)](#). The number of foreign domestic helpers continued to decrease from 337,800 in the third quarter of 2019 to 331,500 in the third quarter of 2020, and further to 326,400 in the third quarter of 2021 (*ibid.*); (Figure 23), which has been attributed to the city having some of the world's harshest COVID-19 containment measures.²⁷ The Secretary of Labour and Welfare warned that the domestic worker shortage could hurt the city's economic recovery by reducing labour force participation of the local population²⁸ given that one in every eight households relied on domestic helpers ([CS&D, 2021b, p.42](#)). The inflow of skilled migrants, however, saw a modest increase from 2020 to 2021. Among admissions under several work related visa schemes²⁹ mainly targeting global and Chinese talents, the largest increase was seen in the admission under the General Employment Policy (excluding foreign domestic workers or from mainland China), despite decreases in admissions under the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals and Quality Migrant Admission Scheme ([Immigration Department of Hong Kong SAR, China, 2021](#)).

3.1.2 DISCUSSION

The analysis of the latest available 2021 data for several countries in Asia and the Pacific finds a gradual resumption in the outflow of nationals for employment abroad, although the levels were still distant from pre-pandemic levels. Stagnation characterizes the inflow as well as the stock of migrant workers in many major destination countries.

Variations across migration corridors and subregions were notable, in large part due to differential stringency levels in containment measurements in response to new variants of the virus, and differential levels of economic recovery and labour demands. The increasing vaccination rate and reopening of borders might hasten labour market recovery in

26. The Korea Herald, "Number of foreigners staying in S. Korea decreased 3.9% in 2021 amid pandemic", 26 January 2022.

27. Bloomberg, "Hong Kong Faces Domestic Worker Shortage in Push for Covid Zero", 25 January 2022.

28. The Standard, "Increase of foreign domestic helpers necessary for economic recovery: Law Chi-kwong", 2 January 2022.

29. Visa schemes considered include the General Employment Policy, the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals, the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme and the Technology Talent Admission Scheme.

terms of labour force participation rate and employment-to-population ratio, which was projected to be slow and remain below the pre-pandemic level through 2023 (ILO, 2022a). Meanwhile, a range of other evolving factors will continue to change and shape the landscape of labour migration in the Asia-Pacific region in the medium to long run. These factors include demographic shifts, income differentials between countries, technological change, economic transformation and infrastructural development and climate change (IOM, 2021a). Monitoring how these factors would interact with the direct and indirect effects of COVID-19 is vital, and might have a differential effect on separate groups of migrant workers.

Data on regional estimates of migrant workers hosted in the Asia-Pacific region also highlight the fact that many subregions are hubs for labour migration. On one hand, the existence of these hubs points to the immense potential to enhance the developmental effects of migration in the region, such as through reducing the costs of remittances and promoting digitalization of remittance sending channels (see Section 5.1). On the other hand, it points to the importance of good migration governance in the area of migrant worker rights protection, as well as stepping up the engagement with businesses, especially in low-wage worker protection (IOM, 2021a). These two observations are in line with **SDG Target 8.8**, which aims to **protect labour 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**.

Substantial efforts are still needed to close the data gap in labour migration to achieve a better understanding of labour migration in the region. While the ILO estimate provides a regional overview of immigration of workers, no recent

regional estimate is available to depict the scale of emigration of workers from Asia and the Pacific. Up-to-date data on the inflow, outflow and stock of migrant workers are not publicly accessible or available for many countries in the region. The scale of labour migration to and from the region is to a large extent underestimated because irregular migrant workers, despite their widespread presence in many Asia-Pacific countries, are not well captured in official statistics. The scale of discrepancy might be in part reflected in the case of Nepal, where some estimates suggest that 90 per cent of female Nepali migrant workers are undocumented (Simkhada et al., 2018). This example also points to another data challenge: that deficiencies in data coverage and quality prevail among certain migrant groups. The prevalence of irregular migration among women migrant workers and unreliability of data for this group in Nepal and some other countries in South Asia have been attributed to stringent policy restrictions limiting the migration of women workers (Global Alliance against Traffic in Women, 2021, p.14). Disaggregated data by types of labour migration are generally lacking, particularly on temporary, circular or seasonal movements. Data on internal migrants disaggregated by reason for migration and employment status for the identification of internal migrant workers are also seldom up-to-date or available. Finally, data scarcity exists in terms of recruitment cost, inhibiting effective monitoring of **SDG indicator 10.7.1 – recruitment cost borne by employee as a proportion of monthly income earned in country of destination** – as existing evidence remains anecdotal. Conducting recruitment fee surveys on a timelier and more regular basis is important to allow for systematic assessment of the real costs of recruitment. Data collection on recruitment and work conditions especially in the context of the pandemic – crucial for the monitoring of **SDG Target 8.8** and **Global Compact for Migration Objective 6** – also needs to be continued.

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A working mother in Afghanistan making pottery | © IOM 2021



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

3.2 FORCED MIGRATION

The year 2021 marks the 70th year of the Refugee Convention, yet immense challenges still lie ahead. Conflict-induced humanitarian crises and displacements in Afghanistan and Myanmar grew to an unprecedented, catastrophic level (United Nations, 2021a, 2021b), while pushbacks, arrests and detention of refugees and asylum seekers saw no pause – not even during the pandemic. Instead, the pandemic seems to have made more difficult and at times impeded the asylum-seeking process, which left thousands of displaced people without access to international protection (IOM, 2021a, p.58, p.65). The three traditional durable solutions to refugees' protection needs – local integration, resettlement and repatriation – are complicated by the pandemic in various ways and already faced obstacles prior to the pandemic.

This section will present data on international and internal displacements induced by conflict and violence in the Asia-Pacific region – both as a region of origin and host of international refugees and asylum seekers – to update the trends and patterns of forced displacement in 2021. The section will also discuss how the viability of the three durable solutions for refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs have been affected, as the humanitarian crises evolved and as COVID-19 related border control measures continued to be implemented across countries in the region. The section concludes with a discussion of possible ways forward.

3.2.1 INTERNATIONAL AND INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT DUE TO CONFLICT OR VIOLENCE

3.2.1.1 ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AS THE REGION OF ORIGIN

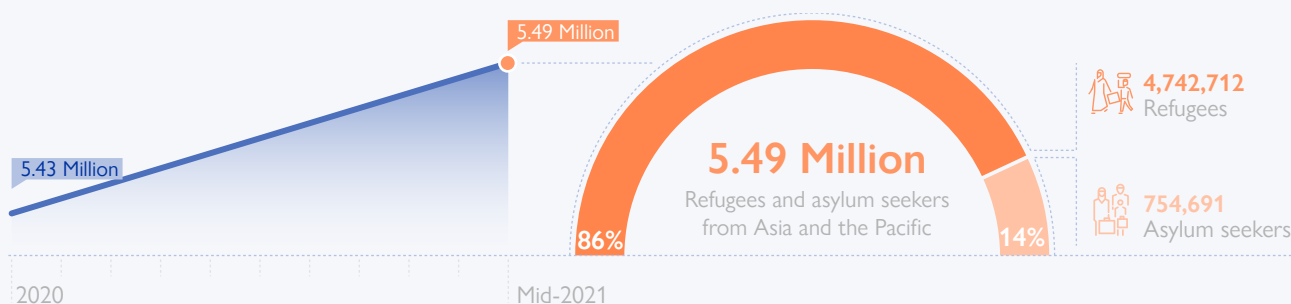
Out of 85.8 million people who were forcibly displaced due to conflict or violence worldwide,³⁰ a total of 9.5 million people were from Asia-Pacific countries as of mid-2021 (UNHCR, 2021a). Despite large-scale disruptions to mobilities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the stock of refugees and asylum seekers due to conflict or violence from Asia and the Pacific continued to rise from 5.43 million in 2020 to nearly 5.5 million as of mid-2021 (Figure 28), with the full-year figure expected to show a further increase.³¹

As in 2020, most of the conflict-induced displacement in the region was concentrated in Afghanistan and Myanmar as of mid-2021 (IOM, 2021a; UNHCR, 2021a) – with further increases due to the upscaling of the Afghanistan and Myanmar crises. The largest sources of forced displacement across borders induced by conflict or violence in the region were, in descending order, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Viet Nam, China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India (Figure 29).

30. This figure includes refugees under UNHCR's mandate, Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate, asylum seekers, Venezuelans displaced abroad and IDPs – in line with the illustration of UNHCR (n.d.).

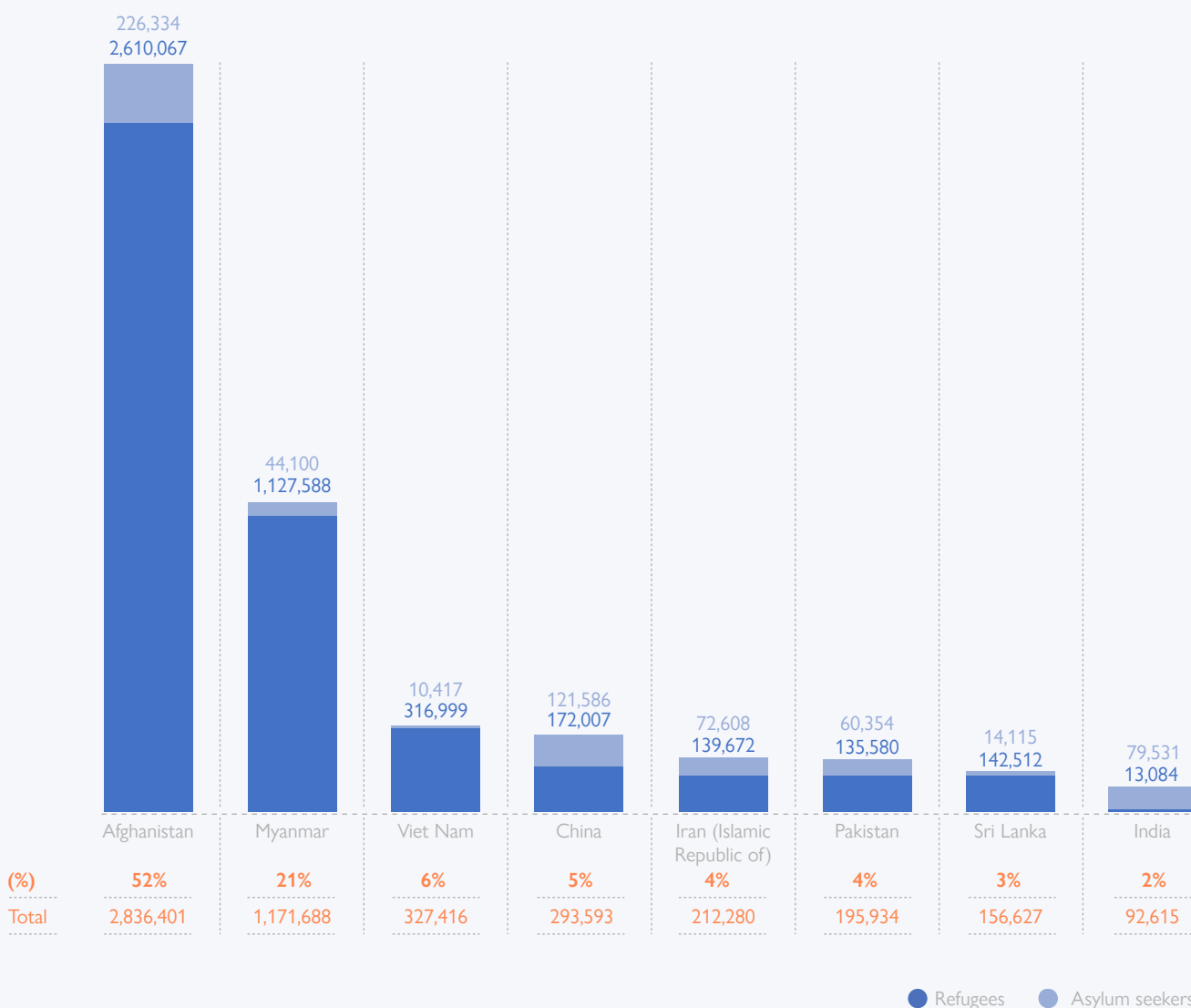
31. UNHCR forced displacement data for 2021 is available up until the mid-year. IDMC data on IDPs and the demographic data for the population and solutions datasets are not collected at mid-year and therefore only available up until year-end in the previous year (2020).

FIGURE 28: STOCK OF CONFLICT-INDUCED REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AS OF MID-2021



Source: Compiled from UNHCR Refugee Data Finder (2021a); (accessed on 10 February 2022).

FIGURE 29: MAIN ORIGIN COUNTRIES OF CONFLICT-INDUCED CROSS-BORDER DISPLACEMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AS OF MID-2021



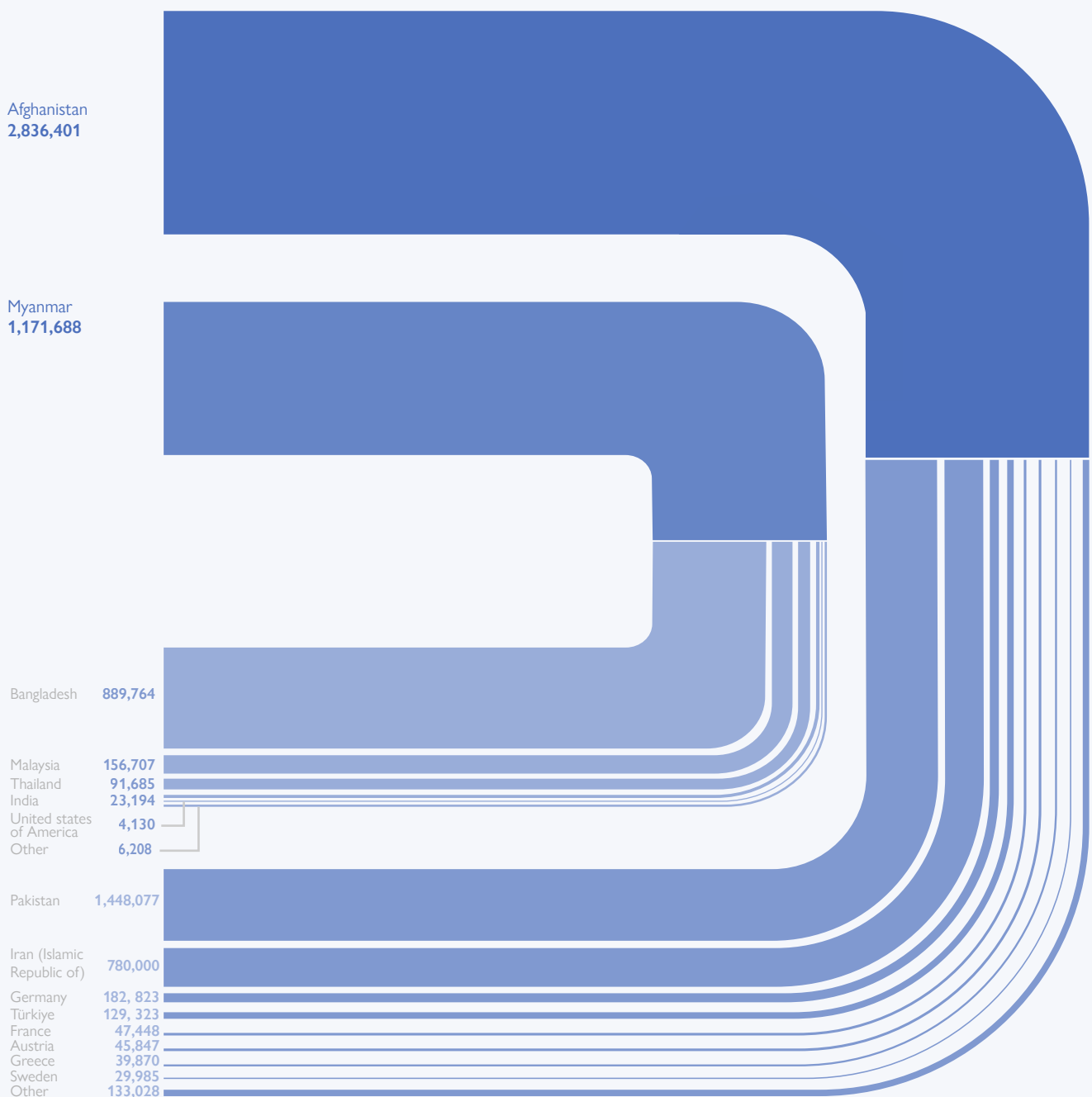
Source: Compiled from UNHCR Refugee Data Finder (2021a); (accessed on 10 February 2022).

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is the world's second largest origin country of conflict-induced international displacement following the Syrian Arab Republic, and the sixth largest origin country of conflict-induced internal displacement following Colombia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen and Ethiopia (UNHCR, 2021a). Burdened by decades of conflict, Afghanistan was the origin of 2.6 million refugees, 226,334 asylum seekers as of mid-2021 (ibid.).

Most Afghan refugees and asylum seekers sought refuge in neighbouring countries: 51 per cent were reportedly hosted by Pakistan and 27 per cent by the Islamic Republic of Iran, followed by Türkiye (6%) and Germany (nearly 5%); (Figure 30). Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran not only host over 2.2 million registered Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, but also 4 million Afghans with diverse statuses, including undocumented persons (IOM, 2022a, p.5).

FIGURE 30:
MAIN COUNTRIES OF ASYLUM FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM AFGHANISTAN AND MYANMAR
AS OF MID-2021



Source: Compiled from UNHCR Refugee Data Finder (2021a); (accessed on 10 February 2022).

In response to the withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan and political changes in August 2021, the enduring humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan was predicted to escalate to an unprecedented level – which cannot be reflected by these mid-year figures. Shortly after these political changes, intensified needs displaced more Afghans from their homes, yet this new scenario under restrictive border policies likely caused disruptions to outflow. In August 2021, UNHCR (2021b) issued an early warning that the “worst-case scenario” for 2021 would be an additional 500,000 IDPs in Afghanistan and 515,000 Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries, including 300,000 in Pakistan, 150,000 in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and 65,000 in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. As of 5 March 2022, UNHCR reported pre-screening 174,460 newly arrived Afghans in need of international protection to neighbouring countries since 1 January 2021 (UNHCR, 2022a), most of whom reportedly left Afghanistan for security-related reasons (UNHCR, 2022b, p.5). The overall number is likely to be much higher since undocumented Afghans may resort to irregularly cross land borders (*ibid.*). IOM reported that 1,358,770 individuals – including refugees, displaced and uprooted people and economic migrants – left Afghanistan in 2021, mostly arriving in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan (IOM, 2021b, p.8). This number is 122 per cent higher than the number of individuals who moved abroad in 2020, which was already 46 per cent higher than the 2019 recorded level. The significant increase was attributed to the withdrawal of international troops and the change of government that occurred in the summer of 2021 (*ibid.*). UNOCHA (2022) also estimated that Afghanistan would see a rise in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance from 9.4 million in 2020 to 24.4 million in 2022, that is, staggering 59 per cent of the population. Among those in need, 12.9 million would be

children (UNICEF, 2022). Several factors could complicate the delivery of aid, including the political situation, winterization and the COVID-19-related economic downturn (UNHCR, 2021b).

Regarding internal displacement, based on three rounds of the Emergency Event Tracking (EET) assessments done by IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) conducted between August and December 2021,³² IOM (2021b, p.3) identified that 988,817 were newly internally displaced after the political changes in August 2021 and remained in displacement until the end of 2021. These new internal displacements were due to conflict but also to other conditions such as the economic situation and drought that fed into fear, insecurity and a growing humanitarian crisis. About one fourth of all new IDPs in 2021 were displaced before August and three fourths displaced after August 2021, according to Round 14 of IOM DTM’s Baseline Mobility Assessment³³ and Emergency Event Tracking (Round 3); (Figure 31) – which saw an increase of 33 per cent compared to the 2020 figure and doubled the 2019 figure (*ibid.*, p.5). Sixty-two per cent of the 1.3 million new IDPs in 2021 were displaced due to conflict (*ibid.*). New IDPs originated mostly from rural areas (77%) and the main provinces from which people fled (provinces of origin) were Nangarhar, Balkh and Baghlan; the main origin districts were Kabul district, Kunduz and Taloqan (IOM, 2021c, p.2). More than half of the new IDPs arrived in rural communities (57%), while the remaining were displaced in peri-urban (21%) and urban (22%) communities throughout the country – Nangarhar, Balkh and Kabul received the largest proportion of IDPs compared to all other provinces (*ibid.*, p.1), (Figure 32). IOM estimated that the stock number of conflict-induced internal displacement within Afghanistan totalled 4.44 million as of December 2021 (IOM, 2021b, p.5).

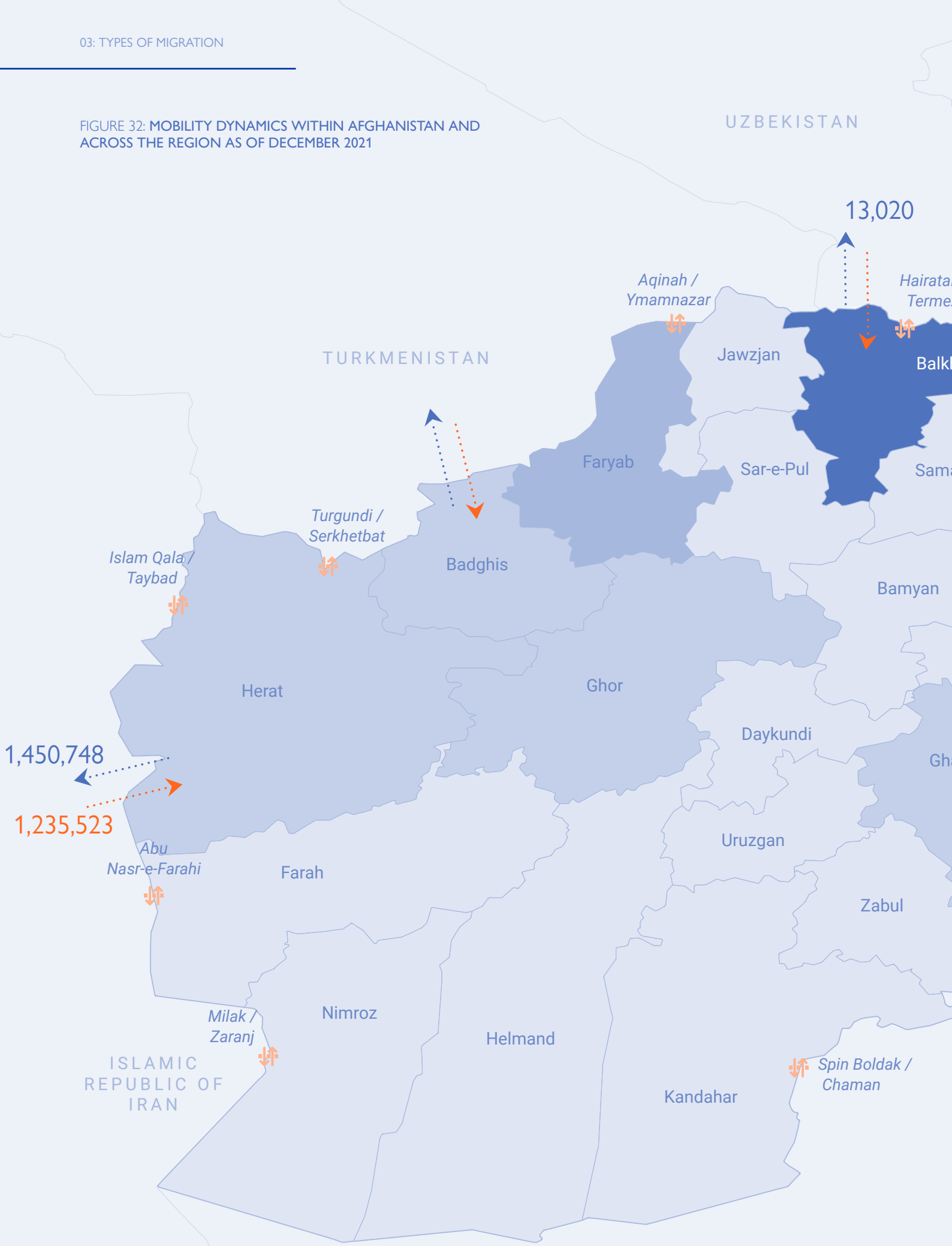
FIGURE 31: NEW INTERNAL DISPLACEMENTS IDENTIFIED BY IOM DTM ASSESSMENTS IN 2021



Source: IOM DTM Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 14 (Nov–Dec 2021), p.5.

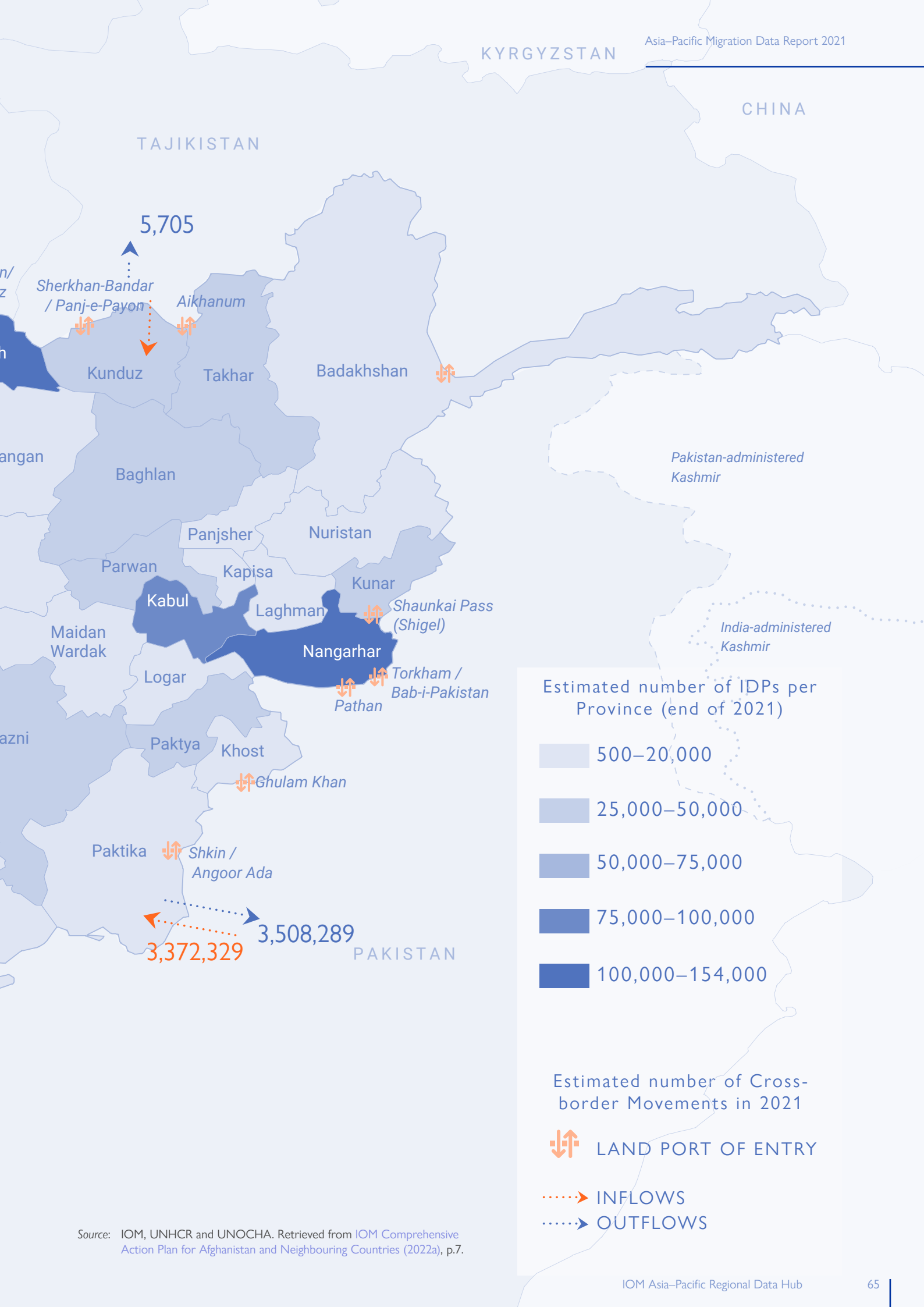
32. The IOM DTM Emergency Event Tracking assessments covered 10,129 communities in 368 districts across all 34 provinces in the country.
33. The IOM DTM Baseline Mobility Assessments covered 12,882 settlements between January and March, 12,969 settlements between April and June, and 13,187 settlements between November and December in 401 districts across all 34 provinces in the country.

FIGURE 32: MOBILITY DYNAMICS WITHIN AFGHANISTAN AND ACROSS THE REGION AS OF DECEMBER 2021



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.

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, UNHCR and UNOCHA. Retrieved from IOM Comprehensive Action Plan for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries (2022a), p.7.

SNAPSHOT:

CHANGES IN AFGHAN ASYLUM APPLICATIONS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The [European Union Agency for Asylum's](#) update in November 2021 on the latest asylum trends in the European Union (EU) reflected an increase in asylum applications since August 2021 and some positive changes in the processing of asylum applications for Afghans. In November 2021, 13,040 asylum applications were filed by Afghans in the EU, up by 15 per cent from October but down by a quarter from the peak in September. Meanwhile, November and September 2021 saw the two highest numbers of asylum applications by Afghans since 2016. Afghans remained the largest group of applicants in the EU, accounting for almost one fifth of applicants by all nationalities in November.

Prior to the political changes in the last few months of 2021, on average only about half of the Afghans who applied for asylum in the EU were successful.³⁴ Then in November 2021, the recognition rate for Afghan asylum applications in the EU reached the highest on record (92%) for the second successive month, with nine in 10 being granted refugee status and the remainder being granted subsidiary protection. According to the European Union Agency for Asylum, this unusually high recognition rate for Afghan asylum applications was partially due to changes in decision-making on Afghan cases in many EU countries since the government transition in Afghanistan. Afghans and Syrians accounted for most of the positive, first-instance decisions in the EU in November 2021.

Afghan asylum seekers who were unaccompanied minors in the EU rose from under 700 in May 2021 to 1,600 in October 2021. Afghans accounted for around half of all unaccompanied minors applicants, followed by a large distance by Syrians, Somalis, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis. Despite an increasing number of first-instance decisions issued to Afghans since August 2021, the number of decisions was still well below the number of applications lodged, with about three decisions pending for every five applications lodged.

Source: [Latest Asylum Trends November 2021](#). European Union Agency for Asylum.

MYANMAR

Following the military takeover on 1 February 2021, Myanmar has experienced escalating and intensifying conflict across the country, increased resistance through public protests, the establishment of a civil disobedience movement, as well as the formation of local Peoples Defence Forces. In addition, conflicts between the Myanmar military and Ethnic Armed Organizations have also continued and in some cases intensified. The resulting instability and violence have dramatically changed the scale and pattern of displacement seen in recent years ([IDMC, 2021a](#)). As of mid-2021,

UNHCR figures suggest that Myanmar, as the fourth largest origin country of international forced displacement, was the origin of 1.1 million refugees, 44,100 asylum seekers as of mid-2021 ([UNHCR, 2021a](#)) and 569,591 IDPs as of 2020 ([IDMC, 2021b](#)). Most refugees and asylum seekers from Myanmar are Rohingyas from Rakhine state, and 2021 marks the fourth year since their mass displacement from Myanmar. Most refugees and asylum seekers from Myanmar have sought refuge in neighbouring countries within the region, as many were hosted in Bangladesh (76%), followed by Malaysia

34. The New York Times, "Afghan Refugees Face Two-Tier System in Europe", 5 February 2022.

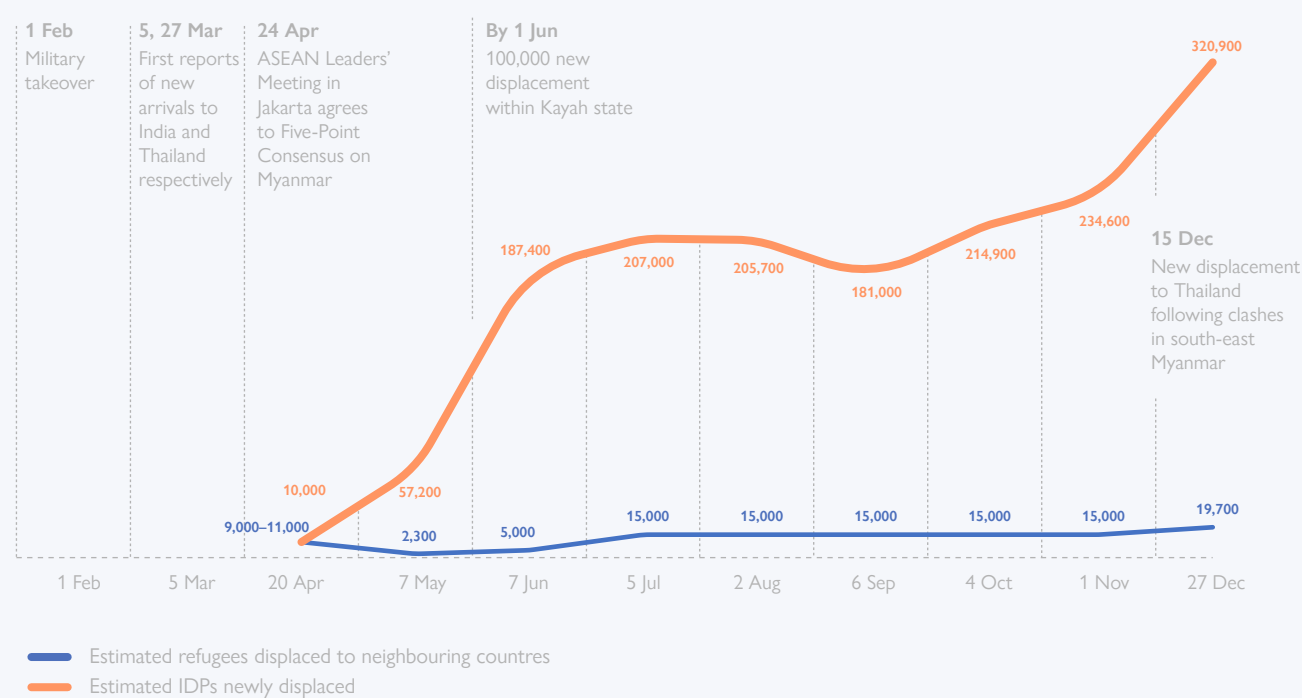
(13%), Thailand (8%) and India (2%) as the main countries of asylum as of mid-2021 (Figure 30). Compared to the year-end figure of 2020, the stock of the forcibly displaced population increased by 15 per cent, and the stock of IDPs increased by 50 per cent (UNHCR, 2021a). Furthermore, the number of new internal displacements due to conflict reached 239,000 in just the first half of 2021, three times higher than the figure reported for the whole of the year 2020 (IDMC, 2021a).

Violence against civilians and armed conflict continued to intensify across the country in the second half of 2021. An escalation of conflict since May 2021 between the Myanmar Armed Forces, the Chinland Defence Force in Chin State and the local People's Defence Forces in the north-west of the country displaced at least 37,000 people and pushed 15,000 to seek temporary shelter in India as of 3 November 2021 (UNOCHA, 2021). Clashes between the Myanmar Armed Forces / Border Guard Force and Karen National Defence Organization and Democratic Karen Benevolent Army erupted on 15 December 2021 in the south-east of the country, displacing at least an estimated 10,000 people within the Kayin State, including over 3,000 that reported having crossed the border to Thailand as of 20 December 2021 (UNHCR, 2021c). While some 103,000 Rohingya in Malaysia and 20,000 in India have no legal status and face increasing socioeconomic challenges and fear of arrest and deportation,

148,000 out of 600,000 stateless persons in Rakhine were displaced (UNHCR, 2022c). UNHCR estimated that, as of 1 December 2021, the stock of refugees and asylum seekers rose to 1.2 million in total, among whom 26 per cent are women and 47 per cent children (*ibid.*). The stock of IDPs has reached 776,000 – this implies that the number has come to double the 2020 figure (UNHCR, 2022d, p.1). New displacements have generated 19,700 more refugees and 320,900 more IDPs between 1 February 2021 and 27 December 2021 (*ibid.*, p.5); (Figure 33).

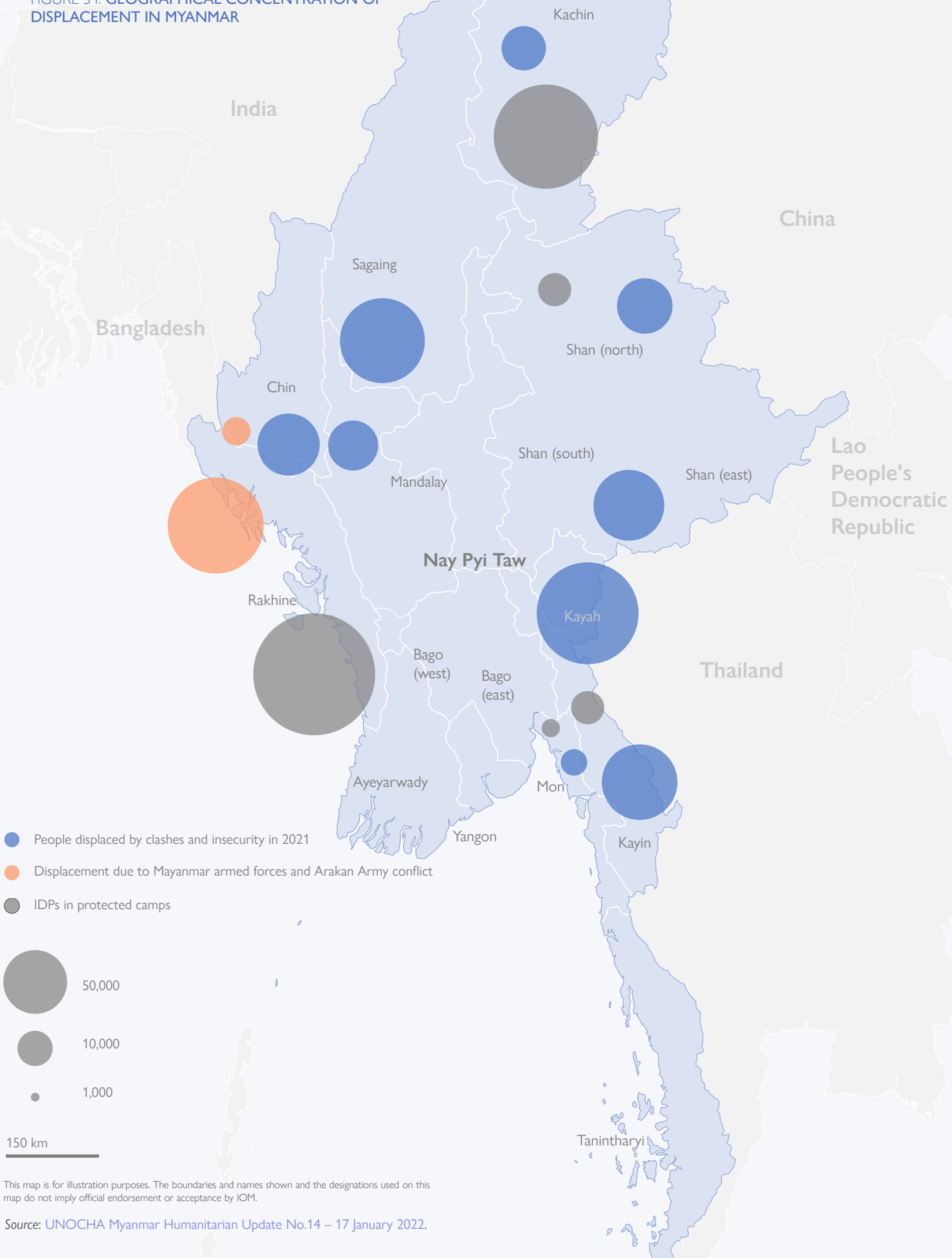
Figure 34 shows that the risk of displacement spilled to previously unaffected regions and urban and peri-urban areas, all of which were out of reach to international organizations (IDMC, 2021c). Between August 2020 and May 2021, humanitarian presence in Myanmar has declined by 27 per cent (Myanmar Information Management Unit, 2021a). Despite slow resumption observed by October 2021 (Myanmar Information Management Unit, 2021b), the limited humanitarian access, complicated by restrictions on press and growing insecurity, have likely hampered data collection (IDMC, 2021c) that would have informed the true scale and severity of the crisis. For example, some groups might be left out in the overall displacement figures, such as temporary and repeated displacements, which are common in Myanmar (*ibid.*).

FIGURE 33: ESTIMATED REFUGEES AND IDPS DISPLACED SINCE 1 FEBRUARY 2021 AS OF 27 DECEMBER 2021



Source: Compiled from UNHCR Myanmar Emergency Update as of 17 January 2022.

FIGURE 34: GEOGRAPHICAL CONCENTRATION OF DISPLACEMENT IN MYANMAR



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.

Source: UNOCHA Myanmar Humanitarian Update No.14 – 17 January 2022.

OTHER NEW DISPLACEMENTS DUE TO CONFLICT OR VIOLENCE IN 2021

In addition to protracted crises in the region, 2021 saw the outbreak of new internal displacements due to conflict or violence. In Papua New Guinea, it was reported that clan violence broke out in the Tari-Pori district on 28 January 2021. This resulted in the internal displacement of 2,924 individuals and 430 households as observed in IOM DTM assessments as of 11 February 2021 (IOM, 2021d). One third of new IDPs were women and a high share (40%) were children.

In the Philippines, armed conflict erupted on 18 March 2021 between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters. IOM's DTM assessment reported that the firefighting and mortar shelling displaced an estimated 12,732 households from 12 municipalities in Maguindanao and one municipality in North Cotabato, including indigenous people of the Teduray and Maguindanaon groups (IOM, 2021e).

3.2.1.2 ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AS THE REGION OF ASYLUM

As of mid-2021, Asia and the Pacific received 4.22 million refugees and asylum seekers, accounting for 17 per cent of the global stock (UNHCR, 2021a). The number increased slightly from the 4.19 million recorded at end of 2020 but remained below the 2019 level (Figure 35). Moreover, the number of refugees and asylum seekers received in the region was about 23 per cent lower than the number originating from the region. Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Islamic Republic of Iran were among the top nine largest asylum countries in the

world, as well as the largest asylum countries in the region, accounting for 75 per cent of all refugees and asylum seekers living in the Asia-Pacific region (Figure 36). The other top asylum countries in the region include China, India, Malaysia, Australia and Thailand (in descending order). It is to be noted that many of these main countries of destination for refugees and asylum seekers in the region are not signatory of the Refugee Convention, namely, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Thailand, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.

FIGURE 35: STOCK OF CONFLICT-INDUCED REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS HOSTED IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AS OF MID-2021



Source: Compiled from UNHCR Refugee Data Finder (2021a); (accessed on 10 February 2022).

FIGURE 36:
 MAIN ASYLUM COUNTRIES FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS
 IN THE WORLD AND ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AS OF MID-2021
 (IN MILLIONS)

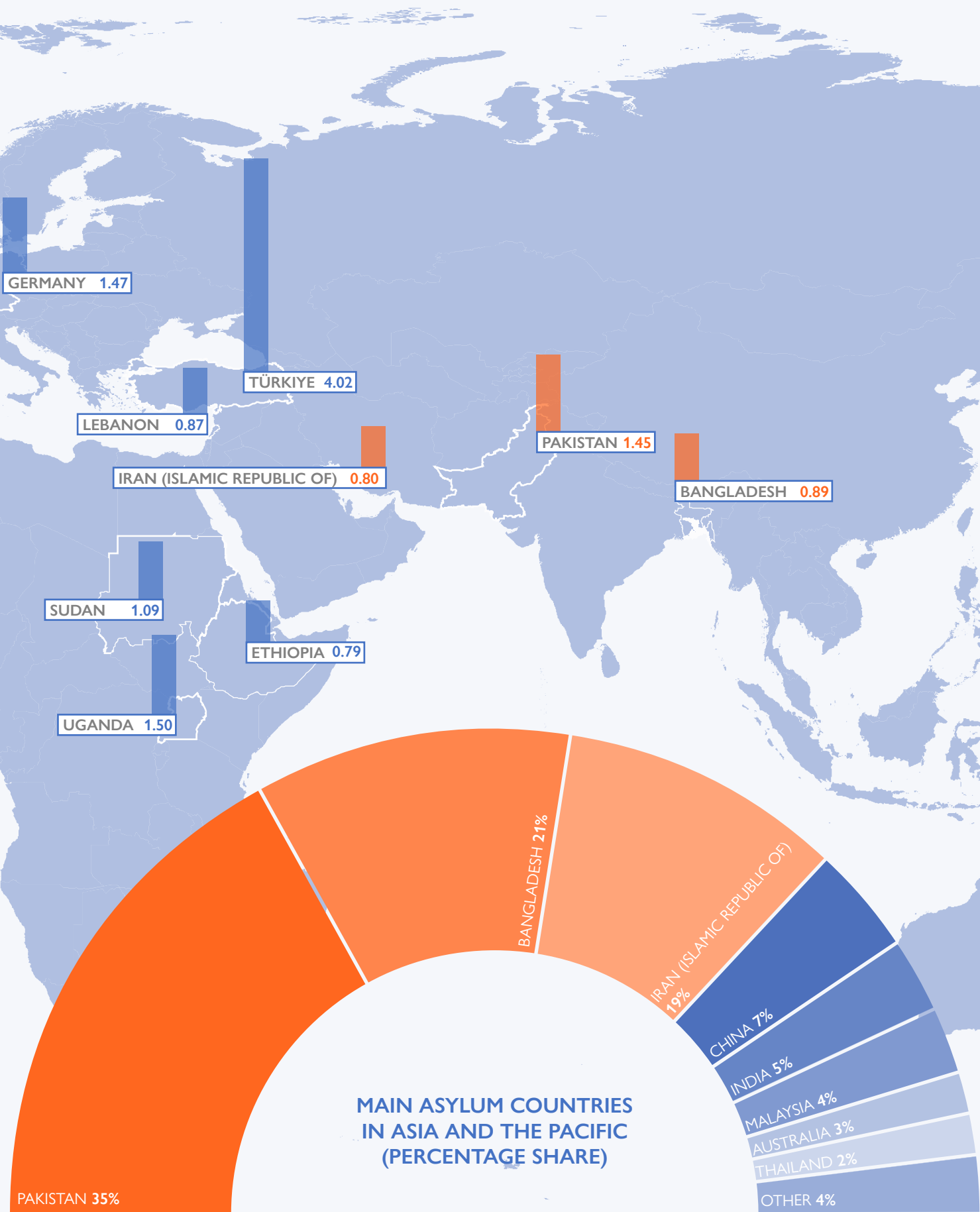


There are positive signs regarding the admission of asylum seekers in the region from the previous year. Out of 28 Asia–Pacific countries with information, only Sri Lanka imposed no COVID-19 restrictions and 13 countries, despite restrictions, granted exemptions to asylum seekers to access the territory as of 7 January 2022 (Figure 37). Fourteen countries denied access to the territory, with no exemption for asylum seekers

(UNHCR, 2022c). This figure points to a slight improvement from the situation in 2020, when 63 per cent of countries in the region were recorded granting no entry exemptions for asylum seekers between mid-March and May 2020³⁵ (UNESCAP, 2021, p.43). However, the data suggest that **the principle of non-refoulement still has not been fully respected in half of the countries in the region as of early 2022.**

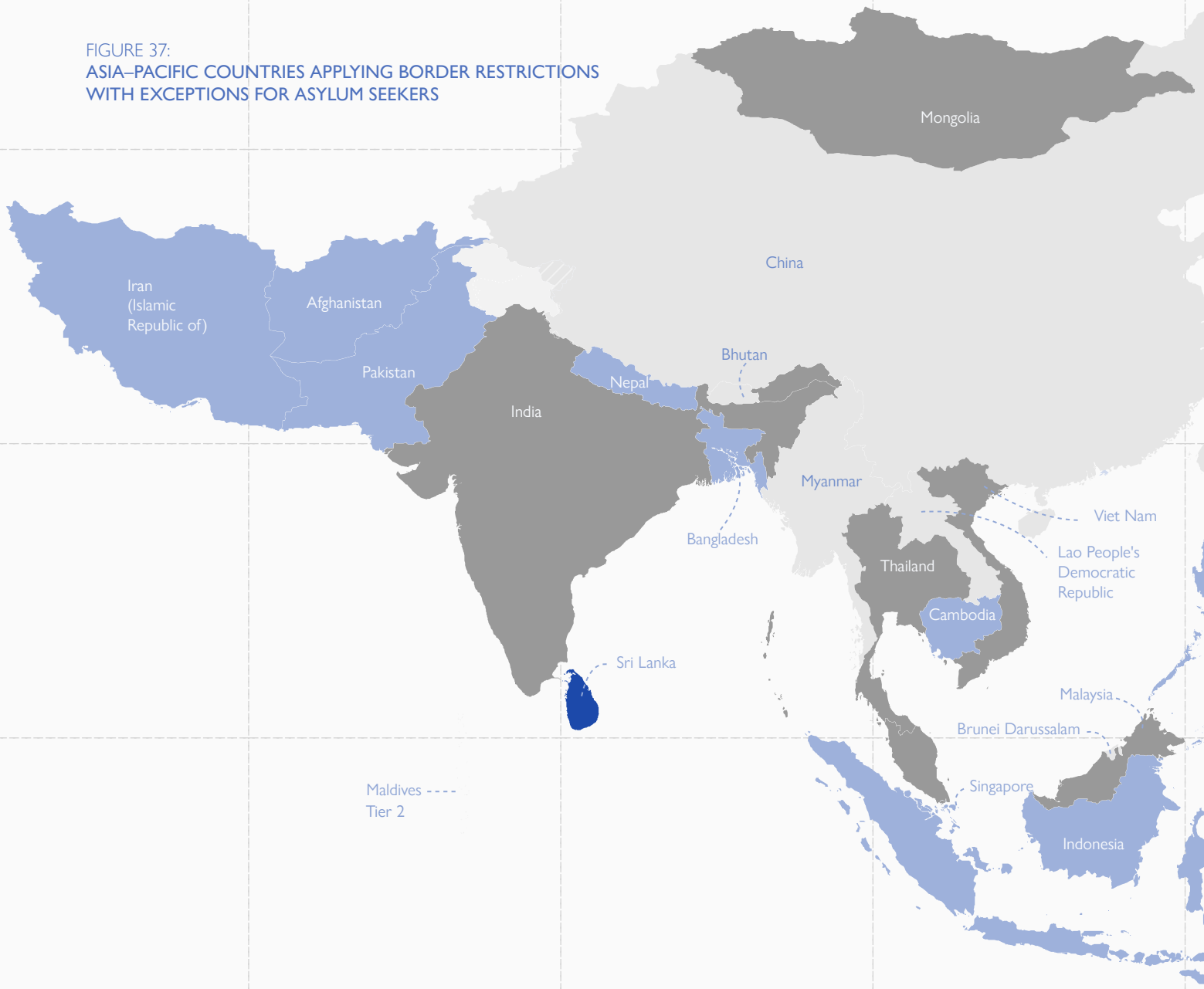
This map is for illustration purposes. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

35. The figure from UNESCAP is not directly comparable to the cited UNHCR figure in this paragraph (RDH has adapted the analysis of the UNHCR data to IOM's definition of Asia–Pacific region). The UNESCAP definition of Asia–Pacific region differs from IOM's mentioned in the Terminology section by adding Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, American Samoa, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Niue and Northern Mariana Islands.



Source: Compiled from UNHCR Refugee Data Finder (2021a); (accessed on 10 February 2022).

FIGURE 37:
ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES APPLYING BORDER RESTRICTIONS
WITH EXCEPTIONS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS



ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES BORDER RESTRICTIONS

- No COVID-related restrictions imposed
- Restrictions apply with exceptions for asylum seekers
- Access denied
- Pending data

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.

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

Source: Compiled from UNHCR Covid-19 Platform – Temporary Measures and Impact on Protection (2022e).



3.2.2 REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

The resettlement of refugees is a lifeline for those who need international protection and are unable to return to their country of origin for fear of continued persecution, and are unable to stay in the first country of asylum due to a lack of local integration opportunities (IOM, n.d.). Resettlement is a collaborative venture of many actors. UNHCR and IOM have been working closely with States, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society, receiving communities and refugees to expand refugees' access to third-country solutions, which is one of the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. IOM's Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2020 noted a sizeable drop in resettlements in the full year of 2020, as a result of temporary suspension of resettlement programmes in the second quarter of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (IOM, 2021a). As such, progress towards the goal of supporting the resettlement of 3 million refugees in need by the end of 2028 has been disrupted.

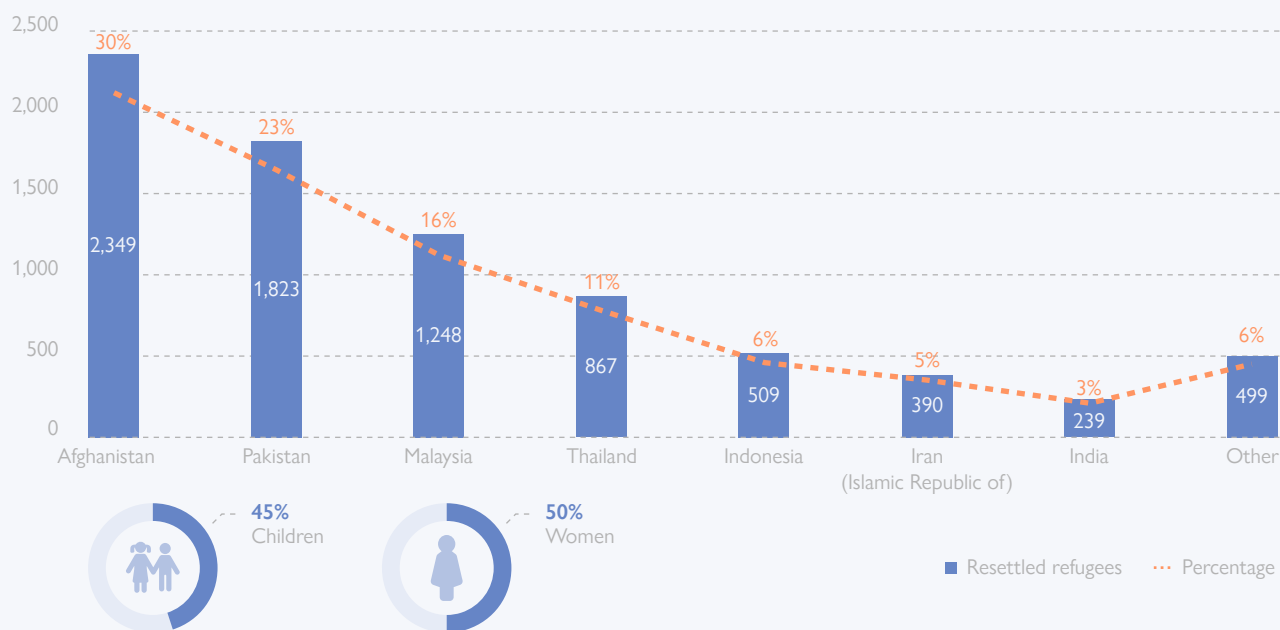
In 2021, IOM assisted the resettlement of 7,924 refugees departing from 23 Asia-Pacific countries (IOM, 2022b); (Figure 38). Half of the resettled refugees assisted by IOM were female and 45 per cent were minors younger than 18 years. The number of refugees departing from Asia-Pacific countries has continued to drop from 2020 to 2021 (IOM, 2021a), despite signs of recovery in resettlement or humanitarian admission facilitated by IOM to European countries (IOM, 2022c). This drop could be mainly a result of COVID-19 related travel restrictions and temporary suspension of resettlement programmes in some Asia-Pacific countries. For example, in Thailand camps were inaccessible for resettlement activities for most of 2021 due to lockdowns, which caused delay in processing of cases; Australia was also under lockdown until mid-2021 and resettlement movements resumed on a case-by-case basis using repatriation flights that have limited seats capacity.

The main countries of departure for IOM-resettled refugees were Afghanistan (30%), Pakistan (23%), Malaysia (16%), Thailand (11%), Indonesia (6%), the Islamic Republic of Iran (5%) and India (3%). These refugees were resettled to 16 countries in Asia and the Pacific, Europe, North America and South America. Many of these IOM-assisted refugees were resettled in the United States of America (40%), Canada (34%) and Australia (12%). New Zealand and the Philippines were also resettlement countries in the region (Figure 39).

The number of the IOM-resettled refugees is to be added to the number of refugees resettled by UNHCR in 2021 to have a better understanding of the overall situation. UNHCR aided 4,564 refugees originating from two Asia-Pacific countries, namely Afghanistan and Myanmar, respectively accounting for 48 and 52 per cent of the share (UNHCR, 2022f). The number of UNHCR-assisted resettlement of refugees from these two countries have increased from 2,007 in 2020. The United States of America was the main country of resettlement. While most of UNHCR-assisted refugees from Myanmar have resettled to the United States of America (77%), followed by Canada (10%) and Norway (8%), Afghan refugees resettled more evenly between the United States of America (41%), Australia (25%), Canada (18%), Switzerland (12%) and other European countries. Japan and the Republic of Korea also received 3.4 per cent of refugees resettled from Myanmar. It important to note that the figures of resettlement from IOM and UNHCR are not directly comparable, since IOM's resettlement programme also includes individuals participating in humanitarian admission schemes.

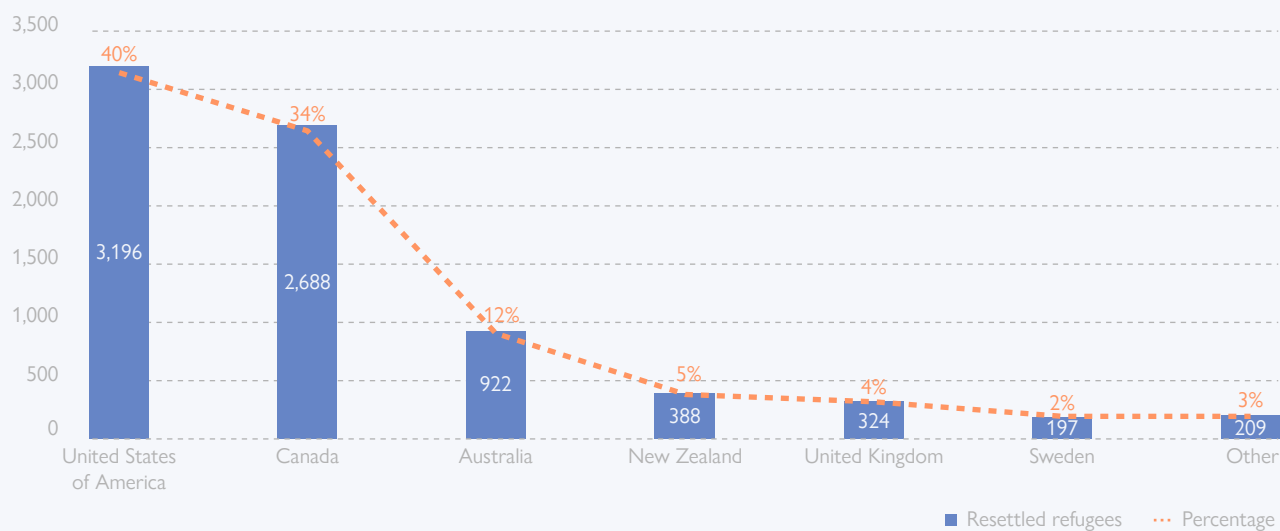


FIGURE 38: COUNTRY OF DEPARTURE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC FOR IOM RESETTLEMENT (2021)

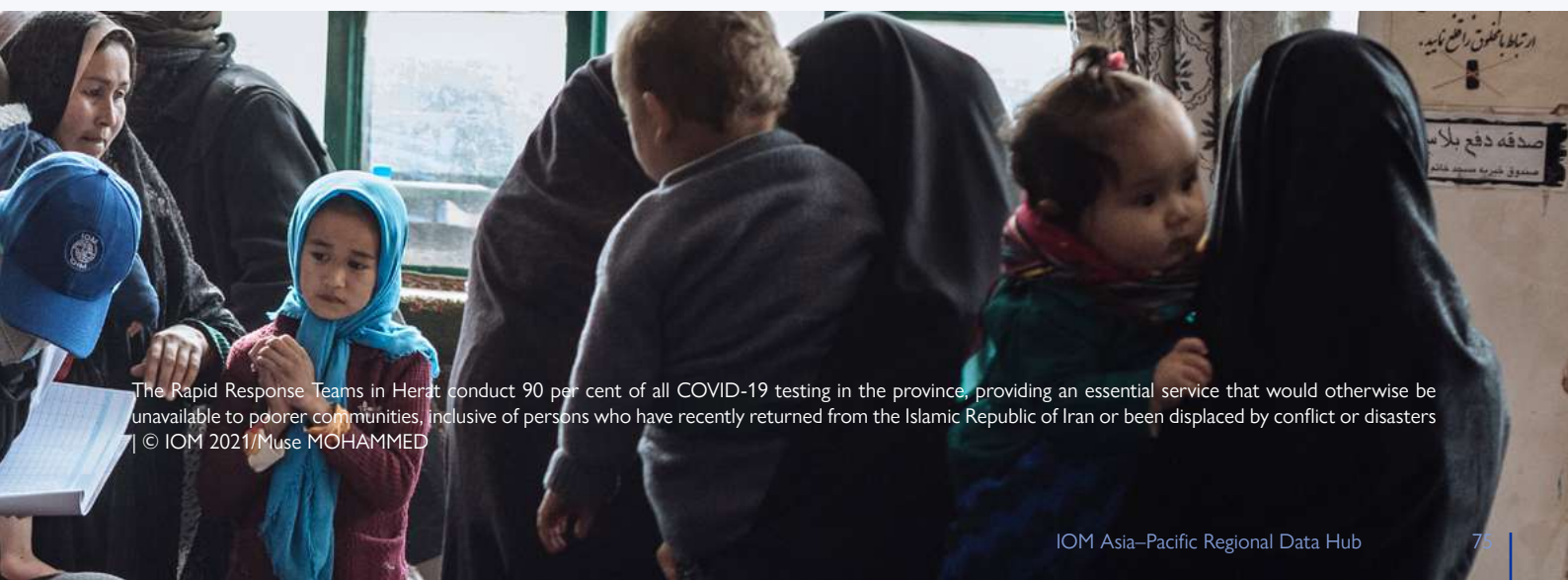


Source: Compiled from IOM Resettlement and Movement Management Database (2022b); (unpublished).

FIGURE 39: DESTINATIONS FOR IOM RESETTLEMENT DEPARTING FROM ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES (2021)



Source: Compiled from IOM Resettlement and Movement Management Database (2022b); (unpublished).



The Rapid Response Teams in Herat conduct 90 per cent of all COVID-19 testing in the province, providing an essential service that would otherwise be unavailable to poorer communities, inclusive of persons who have recently returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran or been displaced by conflict or disasters
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3.2.3 VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

Seen as the durable solution of choice for the largest number of refugees (UNHCR, n.d.), voluntary repatriation to the country of origin based on refugees' free and informed decisions in safety and dignity has become a less viable option for many, especially for Afghans in 2021. While the voluntary return of some refugees is spontaneous and independent without assistance, data on UNHCR-assisted voluntary repatriation are publicly available. With nearly 5.3 million voluntary repatriations to Afghanistan since 2002, the number of voluntary repatriations of Afghan refugees assisted by UNHCR reached the lowest point on record in 2021 – with a drop by almost 37 per cent from 2,147 in 2020 to 1,363 in 2021 (UNHCR, 2021d, p.1, 2022g, p.1); (Figure 40). Around half (51%) of them were women, and the majority (75%) returned to Herat (32%), Kabul (18%), Sar-e-Pul (10%), Kunduz (8%), and Balkh (6%) provinces (UNHCR, 2022h).

Most Afghan refugees repatriated in 2021 (90%) had returned prior to the resurgence of conflict August (UNHCR, 2022g, p.1). The number of returnees increased in the first half of 2021 compared to the same period in 2020, despite a drop compared to the same period in 2019 –mainly attributed to the resumption of UNHCR's facilitated voluntary repatriation programme, which was suspended between March and August 2020 because of COVID-19 restrictions (UNHCR, 2021e). Voluntary repatriation has stalled at a historically low monthly level of below 40 and a total of 135 between August and December following the political changes in August 2021 (Figure 41). Some of the contributing factors include the temporary closure of border crossing points linked to COVID-19 and the political changes in August 2021, the overall political context, and worsening economic situation in Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2022g, p.1).

FIGURE 40: VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION OF AFGHAN REFUGEES (3 MARCH 2002–31 DECEMBER 2021)

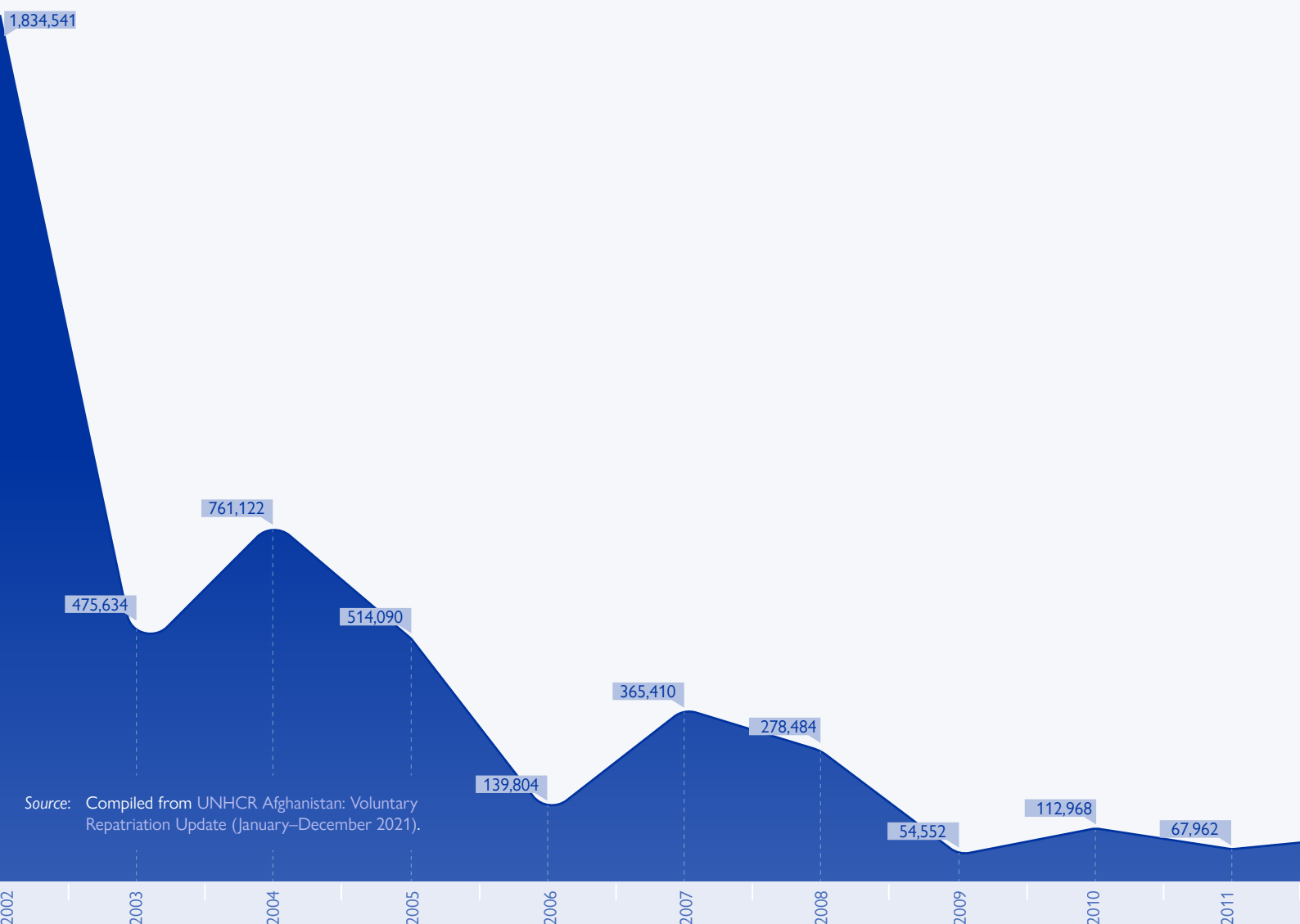
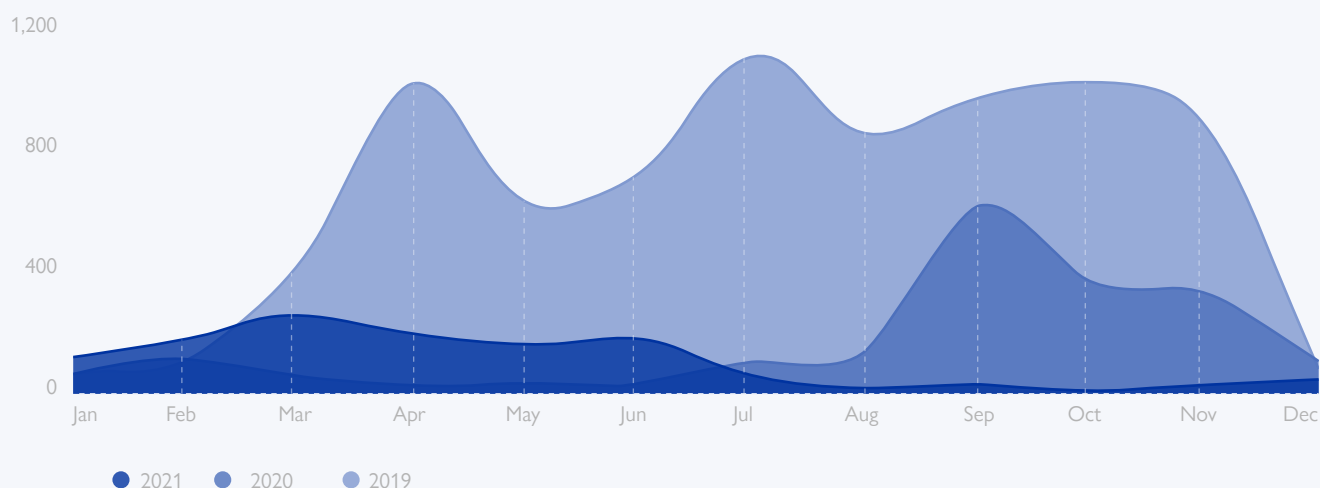


FIGURE 41: MONTHLY VOLUNTARY REPATRIATIONS OF AFGHAN REFUGEES FROM PAKISTAN AND THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BETWEEN 2019 AND 2021

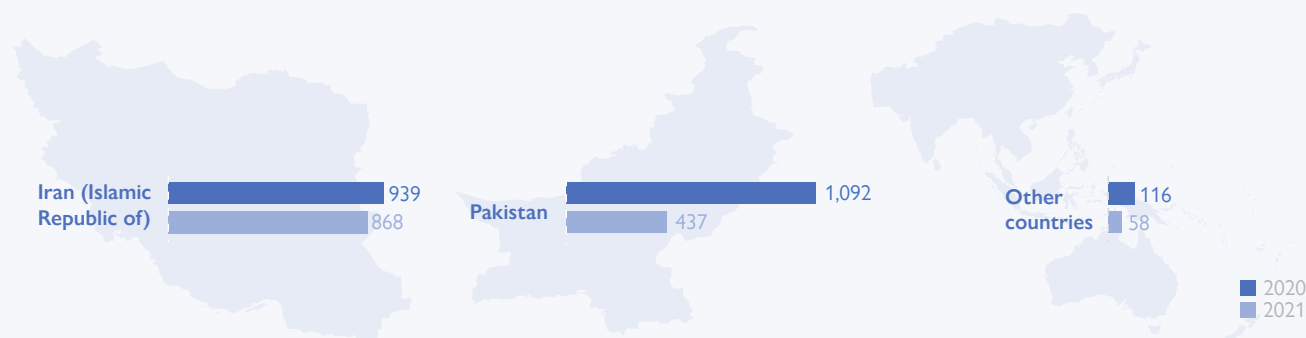


Source: UNHCR Afghanistan: Voluntary Repatriation Update (January–December 2021).

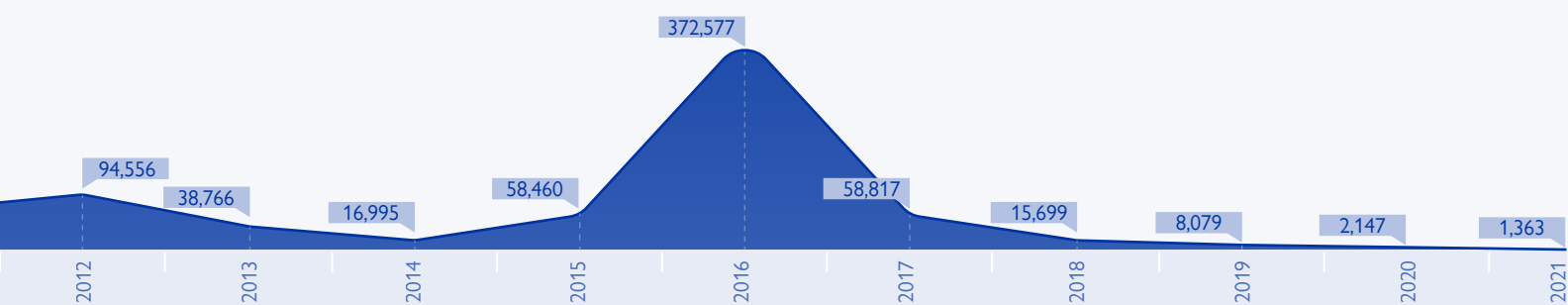
Given the sizeable presence of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, 94 per cent of voluntary repatriations to Afghanistan returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran (64%) and Pakistan (32%); (UNHCR, 2021d, p.1, 2022g, p.1). Notably, the number of voluntary repatriations to Afghanistan from Pakistan was higher in both absolute and relative terms in 2020 than in 2021 (Figure 42). Voluntary repatriation movements through the Torkham crossing point have been suspended as a result of restrictive custom formalities imposed by the Pakistani authorities since November 2020 (*ibid.*). The gender and age composition of repatriated Afghan refugees from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran show some variations that reflect

the differences in their profiles and reasons for return. Among those returning from Pakistan, 54 per cent were women and 58 per cent were children younger than 18 years, and 71 per cent cited loss of livelihoods or socioeconomic challenges in the country where they lived as the primary reason for return (UNHCR, 2022i, p.1). As for those returning from the Islamic Republic of Iran in the first half of the year, many (64%) were students trying to obtain student visas to pursue their studies in the Islamic Republic of Iran (UNHCR, 2022j, p.1). These numbers can be understood in the context that most voluntary repatriations of Afghan refugees occurred in the first half of the year and thus portray the situation and motives prior to the intensification of the Afghanistan crisis.

FIGURE 42: VOLUNTARY REPATRIATED AFGHAN REFUGEES BY COUNTRY OF ASYLUM IN 2020 AND 2021



Source: Compiled from UNHCR Afghanistan: Voluntary Repatriation Update (January–December 2021).



3.2.4 DISCUSSION

Objective 2 of the Global Compact for Migration highlights the importance of minimizing the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin, and Dimension 5 and 6 of the MGI closely monitor the mobility dimensions of crises as well as safe, dignified and orderly migration. The observed challenges to refugee protection, which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, have intensified with mass displacements triggered by the Afghanistan and Myanmar crises in 2021. The new waves of COVID-19 sweeping across the region and the world continued to disrupt the main pathways to refugee protection. While positive signs have been seen in the partial easing of border restrictions to asylum seekers in the region, the prospect for achieving comprehensive, durable solutions for refugees' protection needs heavily rely on continued concerted efforts of multilevel international, regional, national and local stakeholders.

The close linkage between the power of a national passport, as defined by the Henley Passport Index,³⁶ and the level of development and fragility of the issuing country remains a major obstacle for people wishing to escape from conflict in their country of origin to accessing international protection (IOM, 2017, p.173). Access to international protection is often reliant on having a regular entry visa. Analysis of the Visa Restrictions Index shows that the visa restrictions in place for fragile countries with relatively low level of development indicates that regular migration pathways are problematic for citizens, and that irregular pathways are likely to be the most feasible if not the only option open (*ibid.*). This points to the importance of creating and implementing more protection-sensitive entry systems.

The room for voluntary repatriation, once seen as the main solution for most displaced people, has considerably narrowed with worsening humanitarian situations in the countries of origin, and with the likelihood of repeated displacement. The challenges to reintegrating into the local communities of those who returned to a fragile context could also be daunting (see Section 3.4.3).

When the above two options are exhausted, refugee resettlement remains a vital protection tool. However, IOM (2021f, p.5) noted that there is a widening gap between the number of refugees in need of a third-country solution and the number of resettlement places available, which is insufficient. This gap is confirmed by UNHCR global data on resettlement since 2018, when 2020 and 2021 figures reached much lower levels than the pre-pandemic levels (UNHCR, 2022f).

IOM (2021f, p.5) and UNHCR (2016) have been promoting the development of complementary pathways for the admission of refugees as important avenues to help increase the range of safe and legal means to achieving a third-country solution for those in need of international protection. Such examples include humanitarian admission programmes, humanitarian visas, community-based private sponsorship, academic scholarships, family reunification and labour mobility schemes.

While existing data on refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs could enhance our understanding of forced displacement, recognizing that more people with protection needs are not necessarily captured in these figures due to the intertwined, multifaceted drivers of movements is important. As IOM (2022d) puts forward:

“The mixed migration lens helps to enlarge the protection space for people on the move who may not qualify for refugee status, or may not have left their countries for reasons laid out in the 1951 Refugee Convention, or regional refugee instruments, but who still might have felt compelled to leave for a combination of interrelated factors, including economic, political, social and religious or ethnic ones. Such individuals often face the same risks, have similar needs along the journey and travel along the same routes. However, they may fall through the protection safety net, safeguarding of rights, and assistance, because current international legal frameworks reinforce only two concepts: the migrant and refugee.”

36. The Henley Passport Index is a global ranking of countries according to the travel freedom enjoyed by holders of that country's ordinary passport for its citizens.

Conflict-induced displacement might be coupled with disaster-induced displacement and environmental migration (see [Section 3.3](#)). Many displaced people might be invisible in these forced displacement figures due to their undocumented status (see [Section 3.6](#)). Even regular migrants on work, student or family visas might have migrated in part because of security concerns in the first place. The vulnerabilities faced by forcibly displaced people (see [Section 4.1](#)) could

be further complicated by the interlinkages of this mix of drivers and means of migration. The collection and analysis of accurate and up-to-date data that considers not only a rigid definition of the forcibly displaced but also its multifaceted nature is fundamental to understanding the full complexity of mixed movements. Monitoring and understanding the nature, scale and trends within such mixed movements, and informing appropriate policies and responses, remains vital.



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A road through Balukhali Rohingya refugee settlement | © IOM 2018/Olivia HEADON



Due to sedimentation in Nepal's Udaipur region intensified by the heavy rains and deforestation rivers are becoming shallower and broader contributing to floods during monsoon | © IOM 2022

3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION

Over the last decade, the relationship between climate change and migration has been the focus of increasing attention on the policy agenda, particularly as an issue of sustainable development. The establishment of global principles has reinforced this increasing political attention, such as those under the Global Compact for Migration (IOM, 2021d) that seek to address the adverse impacts of climate and environmental change as drivers of human mobility. The progress made in including migration dimensions within the climate change negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is noteworthy. In 2015, the Paris Climate Change Agreement mandated the creation of the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement within the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, an expert body that has, amongst other things, developed recommendations on how to address displacement in the context of climate change.

By mid-2020, the number of international migrants worldwide stalled at 281 million – 83 million originating from the Asia–Pacific region; and as seen in Section 2.1 this number is on the rise. Most migrants do not cross borders, they rather they move within their own countries. Internal migration is widespread in many regions, migrants move in search of employment, often from rural to urban areas (Clement et al., 2021). However, climate change impacts are changing patterns of mobility; these changes are expected to last and grow over time (Rigaud et al., 2018). By the end of 2020, there were a total of 40.5 million new displacements of which 30 million were the result of weather-related hazards such as storms and floods (IDMC, 2021b). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people stayed in their exposed homes during disasters despite early warnings because of fear of infection. Disaster displacement figures were the highest in a decade

(ibid.) The Asia–Pacific region accounted for over half of the total number of new disaster-induced displacements and is the most prone region to disasters (IOM, 2021b).

Much knowledge has been produced on environmental and climate change migration in the last decade (IOM, 2021d), which has led to a better understanding of how both slow- and sudden-onset events influence migration patterns around the world. However, while data on sudden-onset events displacement are available, specific data on slow-onset events remain limited; most existing data is qualitative and based on country case studies (IOM, 2021c).

As mentioned in *IOM World Migration Report 2022* (2021d, p.237), “defining what climate migration shapes what kind of data are collected and analysed” and due to the lack of a universal definition, there is no unique dataset entirely applicable to climate migration as defined by IOM (ibid.). Additionally, measuring environmental migration is challenging due to the multiple drivers of such movements, methodological issues and the lack of data collection standards (ibid.).

The following section aims to provide a general picture of how climate change has influenced migration trends in the Asia–Pacific region based on existing data on people moving in the context of adverse climate and environmental impacts. The section will particularly focus on available sudden-onset disaster-induced displacement figures for 2021 in four Asia–Pacific countries: Afghanistan, Indonesia, the Philippines and Bangladesh. Additionally, by looking at projections on climate change migration, this section also aims to showcase estimates on the number of people from the region potentially migrating in the future due to slow-onset events.

3.3.1 ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION AND DATA CHALLENGES

3.3.1.1 DATA ON DISASTER-INDUCED DISPLACEMENTS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

According to the Internal Displacement Migration Centre (IDMC) database – one of the most-cited and widely recognized data sources on migration – in 2020, the number of new disaster-induced displacements in the region reached 21.3 million (IDMC, 2021a). Disasters resulting from hazards have been the primary cause of displacement to date. Although official data for 2021 has not been published yet,³⁷ it is expected that disasters would remain the leading cause of new displacement in the region. Recent meta-analyses and studies on available literature have concluded that slow-onset climate changes – anomalies in rainfall, extreme precipitation, temperature changes and extremes, and droughts – are more likely to increase migration than sudden-onset events (storms, floods, hurricanes cyclones); (Šedová et al., 2021). Migrants moving to adapt to the effects of slow-onset events might have more time to gather the resources needed to migrate, whereas sudden-onset events impede people's ability to move by reducing their resources (ibid.).

While IDMC data primarily focus on new internal displacements due to sudden-onset disasters, it also releases some data related to slow-onset disasters. Over the period 2008–2020, around 1.5 million new displacements were caused by extreme weather (70%) and droughts (30%); (IDMC, 2021a.). However, it is important to note that these figures only show a partial picture. While small-scale events that lead to displacement occur more often than larger-

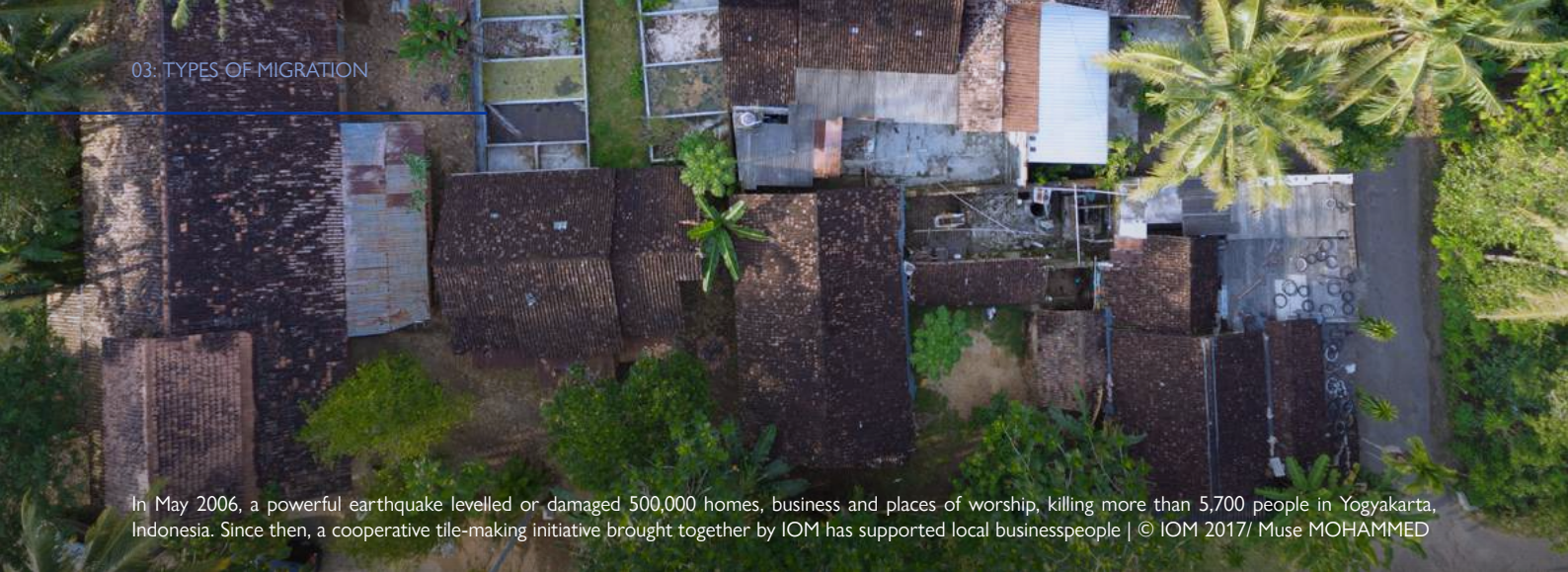
scale disasters, these are usually underreported and not all countries record displacements caused by slow-onset events (IDMC, 2019). Regardless of the scarcity of data on slow-onset events, data on sudden-onset disasters are considered significantly helpful when assessing the link between the impact of slow-onset events and migration, particularly to identify “hotspots” where repeated disaster displacements occur (IOM, 2021d). Slow-onset events can lead to sudden-onset disasters; for instance when sea-level rise suddenly turns into flooding, when desertification turns into wild fires or when temperature increase turns into heatwaves (IDMC, 2018).

Operational data on climate-related displacements are also an essential source of information – notably to inform policymakers who need to understand how and where current climate impacts mobility (IOM, 2021d.). In 2021, the Asia-Pacific region experienced unpredictable and persistent climate-related disasters, affecting more than 57 million people (IFRC, 2021c). Various countries in the region were severely hit by multiple hazards which led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Table 4 highlights the major displacement events triggered by disasters in the region throughout 2021. The Asia-Pacific region was particularly hit by seasonal floods followed by tropical storms, cyclones and droughts.

An IDP camp in the outskirts of Herat City in Afghanistan, where people from drought-affected provinces sought refuge | © IOM 2018/Amanda NERO

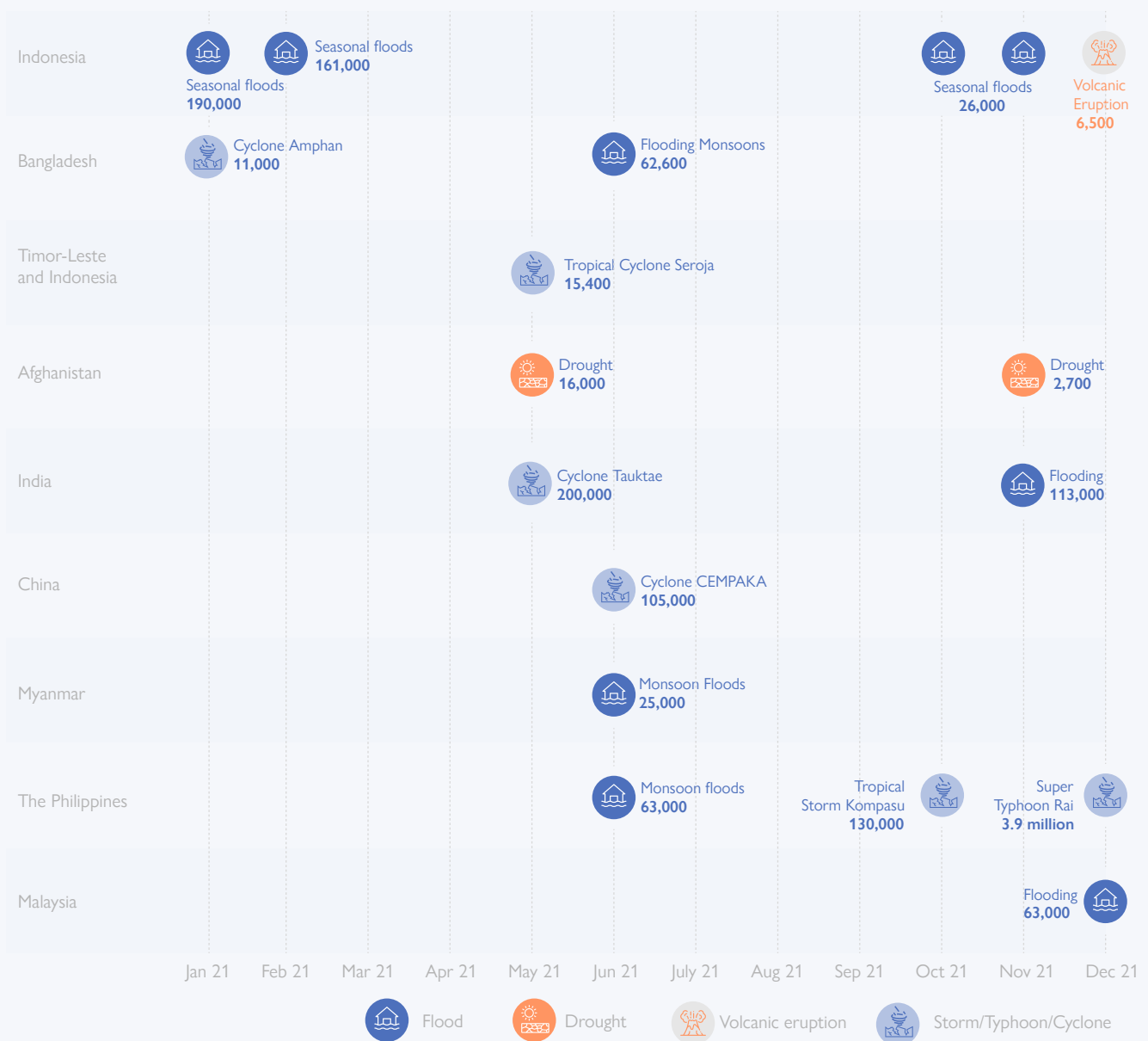


37. As of March 2022.



In May 2006, a powerful earthquake levelled or damaged 500,000 homes, business and places of worship, killing more than 5,700 people in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Since then, a cooperative tile-making initiative brought together by IOM has supported local businesspeople | © IOM 2017/ Muse MOHAMMED

TABLE 4: MAJOR DISASTER DISPLACEMENT EVENTS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN 2021



Source: Compiled from AHA, 2021a; AHA, 2021b; AHA, 2021c; BNPB, 2021; DROMIC, 2021; DROMIC, 2022; ECHO, 2021a; ECHO, 2021b; IDMC, 2021c; IOM, 2021a; IOM, 2022c; UNOCHA, 2021b; UNOCHA, 2021c; NERC, 2021; UNICEF, 2022.

3.3.1.2 COUNTRY CASES

Based on operational data from national institutes and international organizations, the following section will focus on four countries where disaster-induced displacements took place at a sizeable scale in 2021, namely, Afghanistan, Indonesia, the Philippines and Bangladesh.

AFGHANISTAN

While conflict and insecurity were the major drivers of cross-border and internal displacement in 2021, disasters and environmental risks have increasingly triggered the displacement of a significant number of Afghans throughout the last decade. According to IOM DTM's Baseline Mobility Assessment Round 14,³⁸ between 2012 and 2021 disasters accounted for the displacement of 1,389,521 persons – one-quarter of the total arrival IDPs³⁹ in the country (IOM, 2022b). Between January and June 2021, 22,500 new disaster displacements were recorded, linked mainly to floods (IDMC, 2021c). Moreover, heavy rains and floods triggered around 16,000 displacements across 14 provinces in May 2021 (ibid.).

The natural phenomenon *La Niña* hit various parts of the world between the second half of 2020 and the first half 2021, changing temperatures, precipitation, and storm patterns (IRC, 2021). In Afghanistan, *La Niña* typically results in below-average rainfall and snowfall across the country. However, the effect of *La Niña* was worse than expected. From October 2020 to February 2021, significantly less precipitation and higher-than-normal temperatures were reported, creating the driest winter in 40 years in the central and western regions of Afghanistan (ibid.). The conditions affected winter season snow accumulation, which is critical for water access during the agricultural months. Consequently, a severe drought was experienced in 2021 that affected both rain-fed and irrigated agricultural crop production, especially during the main cereal growing and cultivation season (May to September); (ACTED, 2021). The drought also had adverse effects on pasture conditions and livestock health (ibid.). The 2021 drought came when the country was still recovering from another severe drought in 2018, which displaced nearly a quarter of a million people (DRC, 2021). This second drought in 2021 compounded the significant damage done to a large part of the country in just four years. In June 2021, the

Government of Afghanistan declared a state of emergency due to the drought (IFRC, 2021a), with 80 per cent of the country classified under either severe or serious drought status (DRC, 2021). Consultations among humanitarian and government actors have predicted the high probability of drought-induced displacement of families, particularly those relying on agriculture for food (ibid.).

Throughout 2021, a limited number of assessments were carried out in the country to understand the impact of the drought on population movements in the country. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) conducted a drought needs assessment⁴⁰ in the provinces of Herat, Badghis, Pakiya, Helmand and Khost to understand the impact of the extreme weather conditions caused by the drought on the livelihoods of the people in its target locations (IRC, 2021). Among the main findings, the assessment showed that population movements out of the communities in Herat and Badghis had reportedly been rising. Lack of food (34%), loss of livelihoods (29%) and water sources drying out (10%) were the major reasons for movement to other communities. When asked if the population movements will increase when drought hits hard, 82 per cent of the respondents confirmed that people would move to other places when this happens (ibid.). In line with this finding, according to the UNOCHA, during 8–14 November 2021, at least 980 people were displaced due to the drought. IDPs left Badghis – and Ghor for Herat Province (UNOCHA, 2021b). In addition, on 26 November 2021, IOM reported that at least 1,739 displacements in Helmand Province were due to the severe drought conditions (IOM, n.d.). However, the extent of this latest drought in terms of displacement figures is not yet clear as its impact on displacement has been coupled with the effect of the government transition.

38. Data collected in November and December 2021.

39. Arrival IDPs are those who were displaced and remain in displacement at the time of data collection.

40. The assessment was carried out between 4 May and 12 May 2021. A sample of 484 community members was selected for this survey. In each of the five provinces, the assessment was conducted in three districts hence covering 15 districts and 158 villages. All the respondents were community members older than 18 years in the target areas.

INDONESIA

The Indonesian archipelago is highly prone to volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and landslides. Rapid urbanization is also contributing to increasing population exposure and vulnerability to disasters that trigger a large number of new displacements every year (IDMC, n.d.b). The Indonesia National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) reported that between January and December 2021, the country was hit by 5,402 disaster events (BNPB, 2022). The most prominent types of disasters were floods (1,791), events of extreme weather (1,157) and landslides (1,321).

According to IDMC's 2021 *Mid-Year Update*, 557,000 new disaster displacements were recorded in Indonesia, and floods accounted for most displacement (IDMC, 2021c). This figure represents an increase of around 50,000 new displacements compared with the same period in 2020. In the first half of 2021, two flood events were mainly notable. The first one hit the country in January 2021, triggering an estimated 190,000 new displacements in 11 regencies or cities in South Kalimantan Province (*ibid.*) This flood event was considered the first major flood in the province in the past 50 years.⁴¹ The second significant event occurred on the island of Java. In

February 2021, a series of floods triggered the displacement of 161,000 persons (*ibid.*). Around 88 per cent happened in West Java after the Citarum River embankment broke.⁴²

In the second half of 2021, several floods were reported by the National Disaster Mitigation Agency (IDMC, n.d.b). However, the most prominent were recorded between October and November 2021. The West Kalimantan Province was heavily affected by floods over that period. Floods hit two regencies: Sintang Regency and Melawi Regency (Caritas, 2021). Based on data compiled by the BNPB, in Sintang Regency, there were almost 26,000 people displaced in 32 evacuation centres, and in Melawi Regency, around 750 people were displaced (BNPB, 2021).

By the end of the year, another major disaster hit the country. The eruption of Mount Semeru volcano in East Java Province had its largest eruption in recent history in December 2021. The explosion produced a hot cloud avalanche with volcanic materials and heavy ashfall, which triggered the displacement of nearly 6,586 persons across 125 evacuation centres (UNOCHA, 2021c).

THE PHILIPPINES

Due to its geographical location on the Pacific Ring of Fire and near the Pacific typhoon belt, the Philippines is highly prone to disasters resulting from hazards. Some estimations place 60 per cent of its land area and 74 per cent of its population as exposed to numerous hazards, including floods, cyclones, droughts, earthquakes, tsunamis and landslides (World Bank and ADB, 2021). The country has been heavily affected by climate change, to the extent of being considered the fourth most affected by climate change in the world over the past two decades (Eckstein et al., 2021, p.11).

Displacement due to disasters is often temporary, with most people sheltering with family and relatives and a minority in evacuation centres until the hazard has passed (CFE-DM, 2021). About 4.4 million new disaster-induced displacements were recorded in the Philippines in 2020, the second highest figure after China (IDMC, 2021b).⁴³ Although the total displacement figures in the Philippines in 2021 are not yet available, governmental reports present a clear picture of the extent of displacement in the country.

41. CNBC Indonesia, "Jokowi: Ini Kali Pertama dalam 50 Tahun Kalsel Banjir Besar", 18 January 2021.

42. FloodList, "(Updated) Indonesia – 1,300 Evacuate Jakarta Floods", 21 February 2021.

43. In the context of disaster-induced displacement, it is important to distinguish between the number of individuals displaced only for a very short time (e.g. those who stay temporarily in evacuation centres) and those who are not able to return to their homes and remain displaced after the event. These two categories of displaced individuals are different and should not necessarily be combined when analysing disaster displacement.

In July 2021, the country experienced heavy monsoon rains, fuelled by moisture brought by Typhoon In-fa (local name Fabian), which caused severe flooding and landslides in various areas of Luzon Island (UNOCHA, 2021a). According to the Disaster Response Operations Monitoring and Information Center (DROMIC), the typhoon displaced nearly 63,000 persons in around 605 evacuation centres (DROMIC, 2021). Moreover, in October 2021, Tropical Storm Kompas caused 235 flooded areas and 31 incidents of rain-induced landslides in various country regions (IFRC, 2021b), which led to 130,000 displacements (AHA, 2021b). Finally, in late 2021, Super Typhoon Rai (locally named Odette) made landfall on 16 December in Surigao del Norte Province before crossing the central-southern Philippines. The typhoon

brought torrential rains, violent winds, landslides and storm surges, making nine landfalls in seven provinces (GSC, 2021). According to local disaster management authorities, a total of 3,914,823 people were displaced in 9 regions in the Philippines between 16 and 21 December (DROMIC, 2022; IDMC, n.d.c). As of 14 January 2022, 195,330 persons were in a situation of displacement (IOM, 2022a). According to the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM), Typhoon Rai was the last – and by far the strongest – of 15 typhoons to hit the Philippines in 2021 (OXFAM, 2022). Climate change is affecting the country on unprecedented levels; OXFAM has stated that “extreme weather events like Typhoon Rai are a warning of worse to come” (ibid.).

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is one of the world’s most disaster-prone countries ranked 27th out of 191 countries by the 2022 Inform Risk Index (European Commission, 2022). Its geographical location, land characteristics, the multiplicity of rivers and the monsoon climate made the country highly vulnerable to disasters, which triggered hundreds of thousands of displacements each year (IDMC, n.d.a). In 2020, Bangladesh ranked third among the countries with the highest number of displacements due to disasters resulting from hazards – 4.4 million new displacements (IDMC, 2021b).

The aftermath of Cyclone Amphan, which hit Bangladesh in May 2020 and displaced 2.5 million persons (IOM, 2021b), caused large-scale protracted displacement. In early 2021, according to an assessment carried out by IOM’s DTM, around 11,323 individuals were reported to remain

displaced in Satkhira District (IOM, 2021a).⁴⁴ The prolonged displacement was mainly due to damaged river embankments, which had resulted in flooding and salinity intrusion that had destroyed shelters and rendered previously cultivable land infertile, resulting in loss of livelihoods (ibid.).

One major disaster occurred in the Cox’s Bazar District, where 918,000 Rohingya refugees are currently hosted (UNHCR, 2022). In July 2021, heavy monsoon rains in Cox’s Bazar led to slope failures and severe flooding in the Rohingya refugee camps. By August 2021, 400 incidences, including heavy rains, landslides, windstorms, lightning and flooding, displaced 62,600 refugees in the Rohingya camps (UNICEF, 2022).

44. The assessment was conducted between 20 December and 6 January 2021 and covered 158 villages/locations. Data was collected from direct site visits, 511 key informant interviews with community representatives, local authorities and humanitarian partners, and 81 focus group discussions with both host communities and displaced communities.

3.3.2 FUTURE PROJECTIONS ON CLIMATE MIGRATION

Future projections of the number of climate migrants can bring attention to the potential scale of future issues and encourage policymakers to develop mitigating strategies (IOM, 2021d). However, interpreting projections needs to be done carefully, particularly on a polarizing topic such as migration (Gemenne, 2011). According to the latest *IOM World Migration Report 2022*, “simplistic analyses of big numbers can trigger a fearmongering narrative that could negatively influence public perceptions and policymaking choices” (IOM, 2021d, p.238). Projected data on climate change and migration showcase what could happen if national and international policy actors do nothing or too little to reduce the impact of climate change.

Most forecasts have looked at climate migration related to slow-onset events. However, considering projections of displacement resulting from sudden-onset events is also important. Most such events, and the displacement they cause, are weather-related events such as floods and storms (Flavell et al., 2020). Climate change has been extensively

predicted to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events (IPCC, 2021, p.10–13). Thus, displacements due to sudden-onset events may become increasingly significant in the future. According to the last report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least mid-century. Global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades (ibid., p.14).

Hence, when it comes to displacement caused by sudden-onset disaster, IDMC has established a Disaster Displacement Risk Index (DDRI), which projects expected average annual displacement per country and per hazard type. Using IDMC data and modelling disaster displacement from 1970 to 2013, IDMC’s projections show an increasing trend (Ginnetti, 2015).⁴⁵ Based on historical data, the displacement risk will continue to increase, particularly in the Asia–Pacific region (Table 5).

TABLE 5: IDMC’S DISASTER DISPLACEMENT RISK INDEX (10-YEAR PROJECTION)

FOCUS REGION	POPULATION	AVERAGE ANNUAL DISPLACEMENT RISK	RELATIVE ANNUAL DISPLACEMENT (PER 1 MILLION PEOPLE)	ANNUAL CHANGE IN DISPLACEMENT RISK
South Asia	1,730,000,000	9,200,000	5,300	3.7%
South-East Asia	1,990,000,000	30,000,000	15,100	2.4%
Pacific	10,800,000	45,600	4,200	2.4%
Latin America and the Caribbean	186,000,000	809,000	4,300	2.5%

Note: IDMC definition of the subregions outlined in this analysis varies from the IOM definition.

Source: Compiled from [the Disaster-related displacement risk: Measuring the risk and addressing its drivers report \(2015\)](#).

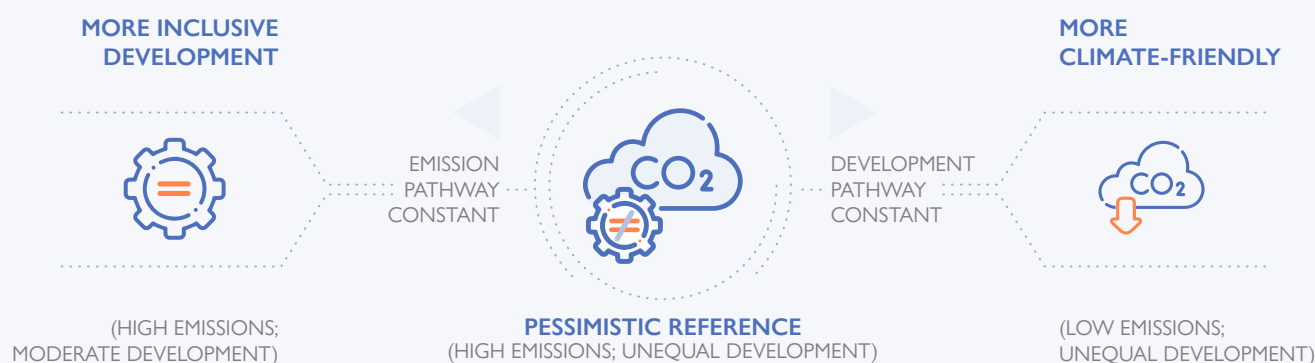
45. Projections are also available by country within these regions, and by hazard type. For more information refer to [Ginnetti, 2015, p.39](#).

According to the projected data, the displacement risk will continue to increase in countries in South Asia by 3.7 per cent and South-East Asia by 2.4 per cent. As well, after accounting for population, people in South-East Asia are nearly three times more likely to be displaced than people in South Asia and almost four times more likely to be displaced than people living in Latin America and the Caribbean (Ginnetti, 2015).

It is important to note that this projection assumes a “business as usual” scenario in which hazards occur with the same frequency and intensity as in previous years. The projections also assume that population growth and changes in exposure and vulnerability occur at the current rate (*ibid.*). However, according to some studies, as climate change is expected to increase the frequency and intensity of sudden-onset events, these projected figures may be underestimated (Flavell et al., 2020).

In terms of projections on displacement due to slow-onset events, the latest World Bank 2021 Groundswell report has estimated that as many as 216 million people could be moving within their own countries by 2050 because of adverse climate impacts across the six World Bank regions,⁴⁶ unless concerted action is taken at the national and global levels (Clement et al., 2021). This report builds on the *Groundswell : Preparing for Internal Climate Migration* report published in 2018 and applies a robust modelling approach to help understand the scale, trajectory, and spatial patterns of future climate migration within countries (Rigaud et al., 2018; *ibid.*).

FIGURE 43: VOLUNTARY REPATRIATED AFGHAN REFUGEES BY COUNTRY OF ASYLUM IN 2020 AND 2021



- Notes: 1. The scenarios are based on combinations of two Shared Socioeconomic Pathways – SSP2 (moderate development) and SSP4 (unequal development)—and two Representative Concentration Pathways – RCP 2.6 (low emissions) and RCP 8.5 (high emissions).
2. Estimates of climate migrants are derived by comparing these plausible climate migration (RCP-SSP) scenarios with development only (SSP) or the “no climate impact” scenarios.

Source: Compiled from the *Groundswell Report – Action on Internal Climate Migration (2021)*.

Future migration trends will be driven by numerous factors with varying degrees of uncertainty, from changes in local climate conditions to evolving social, cultural, political and technological changes. Therefore, to manage this uncertainty, the report uses a scenario-based approach, which helps to explore potential future scenarios and plan for different possible outcomes (Clement et al., 2021). Figure 43 shows three internal climate migration scenarios— pessimistic reference, more inclusive development and more climate-friendly—with different combinations of development (Shared Socioeconomic Pathways) and emissions (Representative Concentration Pathways); (*ibid.*). Four categories⁴⁷ of results are presented for each subregion. For this report, only the total number of climate migrants in each scenario and in three Asia-Pacific subregions and areas – Lower Mekong, South Asia, and East Asia and the Pacific – will be presented in this section.

While the methodology employed in the 2021 Groundswell report is innovative and technically sound, it is important to consider a few points when looking into the projected data. First, the modelling only focuses on internal climate migration – given that most migrants do not cross borders but rather move within their own countries; however, people may also cross borders, a scenario that the 2021 Groundswell report does not consider. In addition, the modelling captures people who move at spatial scales of over 14 kilometres and on a ten-year temporal scale. Shorter distance or shorter-term mobility – such as seasonal or cyclical migration – is not captured (*ibid.*). Moreover, while the model captures all six World Bank regions, it does not cover most high-income countries, including Europe and North America.

46. The six World Bank regions considered in the report are: Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia, North Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

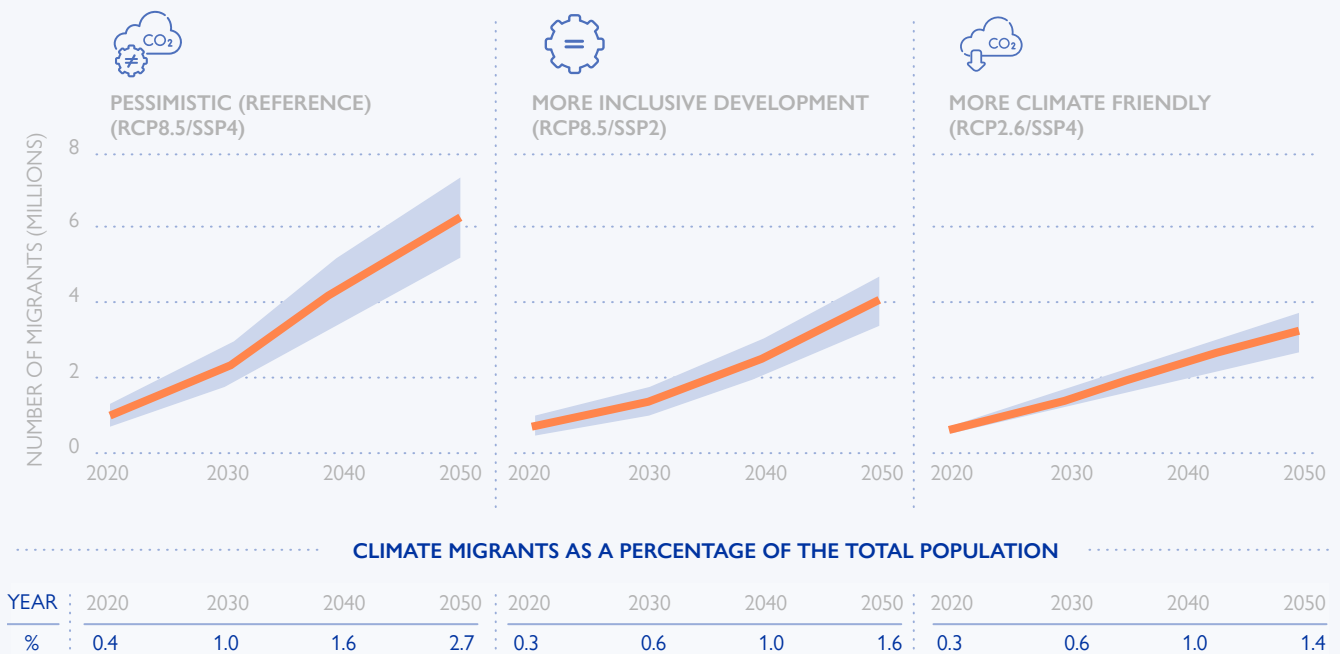
47. Other categories include the number of climate migrants as a share of the total number of internal migrants; maps of hotspots of climate in- and out-migration; and net in- and out-migration in rural livelihood zones, coastal zones, and urban areas within subregions, under the different scenarios.

3.3.2.1 PROJECTIONS OF CLIMATE MIGRATION IN THE LOWER MEKONG

The Lower Mekong subregion comprises Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. Climate risks are significant stressors across the subregion that influence mobility patterns (Clement et al., 2021). Myanmar and Thailand ranked among the top 10 countries for climate-related loss events between 2000 and 2019 (Eckstein et al., 2021). Cambodia and Viet Nam were in the top 20, and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic was the only country in the subregion that had a lower ranking (below 50th); (ibid.). Climate information shows that average temperatures have risen across the subregion (Evers and Pathirana, 2018). Future projections suggest that under RCP4.5 and RCP8.5 scenarios,⁴⁸ annual average maximum temperatures could increase by 1.5°C and 3°C, respectively, by 2060 (Trisurat et al., 2018). Moreover, sea-level rise and increasing average flood volumes are projected to increase extreme floods’ depth and duration, particularly in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta (Dang et al., 2018).

According to the latest projections estimated by the World Bank’s 2021 Groundswell, the number of environmental migrants in the Lower Mekong is projected to increase by 2050 (Clement et al., 2021). Figure 44 shows that under a pessimistic reference scenario, the number would reach 6.3 million migrants (2.7% of the total population). In a more inclusive development scenario, the number of climate change migrants would reach 4.1 million (1.6% of the total population); and under a more climate-friendly scenario, 3.3 million migrants (1.4% of the total population). Climate migration accelerates faster under the pessimist reference scenario and tends to slow down in the more climate-friendly scenario. Therefore, lowering global greenhouse gas emissions would reduce the magnitude and rates of climate migration in the Lower Mekong by mitigating impacts on water availability, crop productivity and sea-level rise. The lower number of climate migrants in the inclusive development scenario also shows the benefits of more equal development efforts. However, intensified climate change impacts could accelerate climate migration in the second half of the century (Clement et al., 2021, p.51).

FIGURE 44: PROJECTED NUMBER OF CLIMATE MIGRANTS IN THE LOWER MEKONG IN THREE SCENARIOS, 2020–2050



Note: Orange represent the average runs for each scenario. The shaded areas around the central trend line represent the confidence intervals, which reflect the degree of agreement among four model runs used to provide estimates for each scenario. Narrower confidence intervals indicate greater agreement among the model runs for each scenario. The confidence intervals get larger with each successive time interval, due both to momentum that builds over time for each model run, and to increasing divergence among models as the climate change signal increases.

Source: Compiled from Groundswell – Acting on Internal Climate Migration Part II Report (2021).

48. RCP4.5 future climate projection produces decreases of air temperature and increases of precipitation while RCP8.5 tends to reduce the precipitation and to increase the temperature.

3.3.2.2 PROJECTIONS OF CLIMATE MIGRATION IN SOUTH ASIA

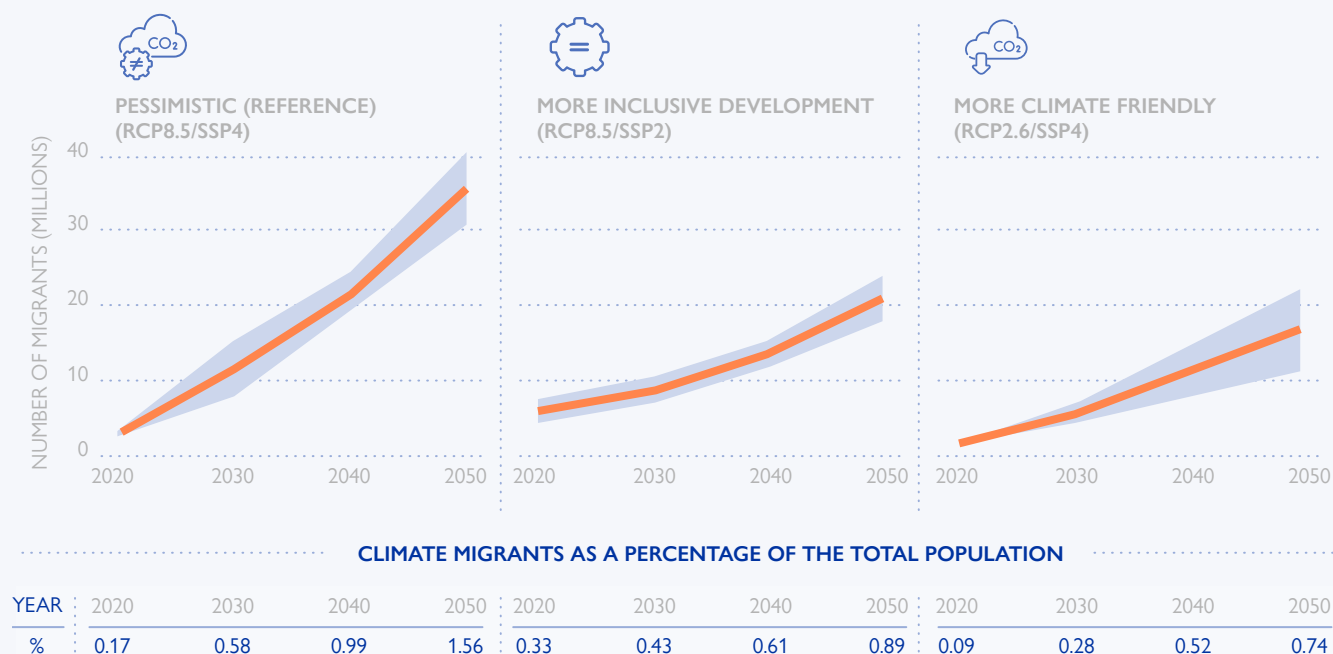
The South Asian region encompasses Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In the 2000–2019 period, Bangladesh and Nepal ranked among the 10 countries with the higher Climate Risk Index; India and Sri Lanka were among the top 30, and the Maldives ranked below 100th (Eckstein et al., 2021). The summer monsoon is the main feature of the climate system in the subregion. The monsoon extends from April through December (Rigaud et al., 2018). The South Asian region experienced increasing annual mean temperature trends during the 20th century (IPCC, 2014) and the proportion of rainfall coming in heavy rainfall events is currently increasing (Rigaud et al., 2018). Projections show that more rainfall will be more likely at higher latitudes of the subregion by 2050 under the RCP8.5 scenario.⁴⁹

The South Asian region is often hit by disasters such as glacial-lake outburst floods, storm surges, droughts, cyclones and

heavy precipitation (IOM, 2017a). In 2020, these disasters displaced hundreds of thousands of people, with India and Bangladesh considered among the top five countries with the most significant number of people displaced due to disasters (IDMC, 2021b).

By 2050, the number of climate migrants is projected to increase in South Asia (Rigaud et al., 2018). The subregion could see an average of 35.7 million climate migrants by 2050 under the pessimistic reference scenario. Around one third of this migrating population is expected to be in Bangladesh. The share of climate migrants in the population is projected to rise by 2050 from about 1 per cent in 2020 to 1.6 per cent under this scenario. Contrarily, predictions under the more climate-friendly scenario show the lowest numbers of climate migrants, ranging from 11.4 million to 22.4 million people, or 0.5 per cent to 1 per cent of the total population (Figure 45).

FIGURE 45: PROJECTED NUMBER OF INTERNAL CLIMATE MIGRANTS IN SOUTH ASIA UNDER THREE SCENARIOS, 2020–2050



Note: Orange lines represent the average runs for each scenario. shaded areas represent the 95th percentile confidence intervals. the intervals are in part a reflection of the fact that climate and sectoral models were selected to represent the widest possible range of outcomes.

Source: Compiled from Groundswell – Preparing for Internal Climate Migration Report (2018).

49. RCP8.5 future climate projection tends to reduce the precipitation and to increase the temperature.

3.3.2.3 PROJECTIONS OF CLIMATE MIGRATION IN OTHER ASIA–PACIFIC SUBREGIONS

Available data on future climate migration trends show that under the pessimist reference scenario, East–Asia and the Pacific regions are projected to have 36.2 million climate migrants by 2050 – 1.9 per cent of the total population (Table 6). Under a more inclusive development scenario, the average of climate migrants drops by almost a quarter (27.3 million migrants), while in the more climate-friendly scenario, the number of projected climate migrants is 20.2 million (Eckstein et al., 2021). China is projected to be a significant contributor to regional climate migration across all scenarios, mainly due to the size of the country’s population.

There is consensus in the literature that climate change has important implications for Pacific Island populations, many of whom reside in coastal areas and rely on natural resources for livelihoods and well-being. Climate change can cause “a

reduction in land, livelihood or habitat security for some Pacific communities” (Campbell and Warrick, 2014, p.2).

Nauru is particularly vulnerable to climate change. In the last decade, about 74 per cent of the population has experienced one or more environmental change, particularly droughts, which have affected around 61 per cent of the total population (World Bank, 2021). The majority of Nauruans live on the coast due to the lack of inhabitable land in the island’s interior – due to extensive phosphate mining. For this reason, most residents are highly exposed to sea-level rise and coastal erosion. Questions have been raised regarding the long-term viability of residence in the region (ibid.). One study found that more than one third of households reported they would most likely migrate in the event of worsening droughts, sea-level rises or flooding (Dannenber et al., 2019).

TABLE 6: PROJECTED NUMBERS AND SHARES OF INTERNAL CLIMATE MIGRANTS BY 2050 IN EAST–ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

EAST–ASIA AND THE PACIFIC	SCENARIOS					
	PESSIMISTIC REFERENCE		MORE INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT		MORE CLIMATE-FRIENDLY	
Average number of internal climate migrants by 2050 (million)	36.2		53.4		28.3	
Minimum (left) and Maximum (right) million	24.1	48.4	18.1	36.5	8.5	31.8
Internal climate migrants as percentage of the population	1.89		1.36		1.06	
Minimum (left) and Maximum (right) million	1.26	2.53	0.9	1.81	0.45	1.67

Note: Based on World Bank subregional definition.

Source: Compiled from Groundswell – Acting on Internal Climate migration Part II Report (2021).



Sirajganj, a Bangladesh community affected by river erosion. Many people were displaced several times due to the river erosion | © IOM 2016/Amanda NERO

3.3.3 DISCUSSION

Environmental impacts have reshaped human mobility over the time. The year 2020 recorded the highest number of weather-related displacements (IDMC, 2021b), and was also one of the three warmest on record; 2011–2020 was the warmest ever (WMO, 2021). The rising global temperatures have triggered more frequent and severe extreme weather events globally (ibid.). Migration is for many the only practicable adaptation mechanism to the unprecedented impacts on the well-being of those relying on natural resources (IOM, 2017b). Climate change disrupts people's livelihoods, health and safety; and it shapes people's decision of migrate.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the negative effects of climate change on many populations. In places highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, the pandemic has limited humanitarian responses to extreme weather and disasters. As well, measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 have affected emergency evacuations, as shelters hosting large groups of people could act as spreading grounds for the virus (Guadagno, 2020; IOM, 2021b). People were not able to leave at-risk areas due to pandemic mobility restrictions. As outlined in the *Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2020*, evacuation plans in response to Cyclone Amphan, which affected India and Bangladesh in May 2020, and Cyclone Harold, which affected the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and

Tonga in April 2020, were complicated by the need to follow strict precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (ibid.).

Moving forward, quantifying the impacts of climate change on the migration landscape is crucial. Understanding the environment factors that reshape human mobility will lead to the development of appropriate migration management policies and practices to enhance the protection of people migrating because of climate. With the aim of monitoring **SDG Target 1.5 – By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters** – and **SDG Target 13b – promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management** – more efforts should focus on strengthening data collection activities, particularly on slow-onset events and the effects on migration. Furthermore, most available data only cover internal displacement; data collection on cross-border movements is limited. Moreover, current figures on disaster-induced displacement only reflect the flows of people in the course of one year and do not capture the duration of people's displacement, their return home or relocation, or those populations in protracted situations.



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Climate change affects the Philippines disproportionately, resulting in the displacement of hundreds of thousands over recent years | © IOM 2021/Andrea EMPAMANO



Located 120 kilometres from the border of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan, the IOM Transit Centre in Herat serves hundreds of Afghan migrants each week who have recently returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED

3.4 RETURN MIGRATION

Migration is increasingly multidirectional, often involving return to countries of origin for short or long periods of stay followed by circular migration between countries or onward migration to new destinations (IOM, 2021a, p.1). Return migration has taken an unprecedented scale and form since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, with millions of migrants returning or becoming stranded abroad while trying to return home (IOM, 2021b, p.68). In 2021, new waves of COVID-19 led to lockdown measures and border restrictions that continued to affect the region. The much-anticipated economic recovery was slowly taking place, and countries have yet to extricate themselves completely from the crisis. Migrants continued to return spontaneously or with the support of governmental or other actors. For instance, the official statistics from the Immigration Bureau of Thailand show that 183,375 Myanmar nationals, 71,292 Cambodian nationals and 294,180 Laotian nationals departed Thailand between March 2020 and April 2021 – the actual figures are likely higher given the prevalence of irregular migration channels (IOM, 2022a, p.2).

In the aftermath of large-scale returns, the impact of return on migrants, their families and communities has received growing

attention, as migrants often face obstacles to reintegration upon return. In the meantime, the potentially temporary nature of return migration remains a relevant factor. Migrants might plan to remigrate as the forces triggering their return, such as border closures and restrictions and joblessness due to lockdown ease or wane, or as reintegration shows to be infeasible. In addition, worrying deportations of Afghans were observed in 2020 (IOM, 2021b, p.78). With abrupt political changes and rapid deterioration in humanitarian conditions in Afghanistan and Myanmar in 2021, the return, especially forced return, to these fragile contexts is another issue that warrants close monitoring.

With scattered, incomplete or partially available information on return migration across various types of data sources, comprehensive regional or international data coverage of all subcategories of return from, within and to the Asia–Pacific region is still a major data gap (IOM, 2021b, p.67). This section compiles and analyses available data on return migration, delving into how the trends and patterns in these various types of return in Asia and the Pacific region have evolved with the pandemic moving into 2021, with a new focus on the evidence of reintegration.

VOLUNTARY OR FORCED? THE INCREASINGLY BLURRY BOUNDARY OF THE NATURE OF RETURN

One of the impacts of COVID-19 on return migration as noted in the *IOM Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2020* is the increasingly blurry boundary between voluntary and forced return. What is classified as voluntary return, especially in the COVID-19 context, often involves varying degrees of involuntariness or coercion. For example, job loss, border closures, and fear of COVID-19 are some of the forces compelling migrants to leave the destination countries and return. There can be notable differences in what is counted as voluntary return across definitions or methodologies used – varying across administrative definition, self-reported nature and actual reasons for return. It is thus important to note the potentially diverse definitions of voluntary return across data sources and studies. The level of preparedness and willingness could be the lowest when the migration cycle is interrupted ([Cassarino, 2014](#)), which is likely to affect the process and outcome of reintegration.

3.4.1 VOLUNTARY RETURN

As mass returns of migrants to their origin countries were simultaneously sparked and halted by lockdown measures and border closures due to COVID-19, assistance of voluntary return has been provided either by the Government of migrants' origin or destination country. For instance, the Government of the Philippines has assisted over 600,000 repatriated and returning OFWs who were displaced by the pandemic, with an additional 70,000–130,000 more OFWs expected to return.⁵⁰ Assisted returns could also be

facilitated by other actors such as international organizations. As the largest global provider of assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes, IOM collects voluntary return data under its various programmes regularly. IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programmes provide a dignified return and foster the sustainable reintegration of migrants who are unable or unwilling to remain in host countries and wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin.

3.4.1.1 IOM ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AS THE ORIGIN

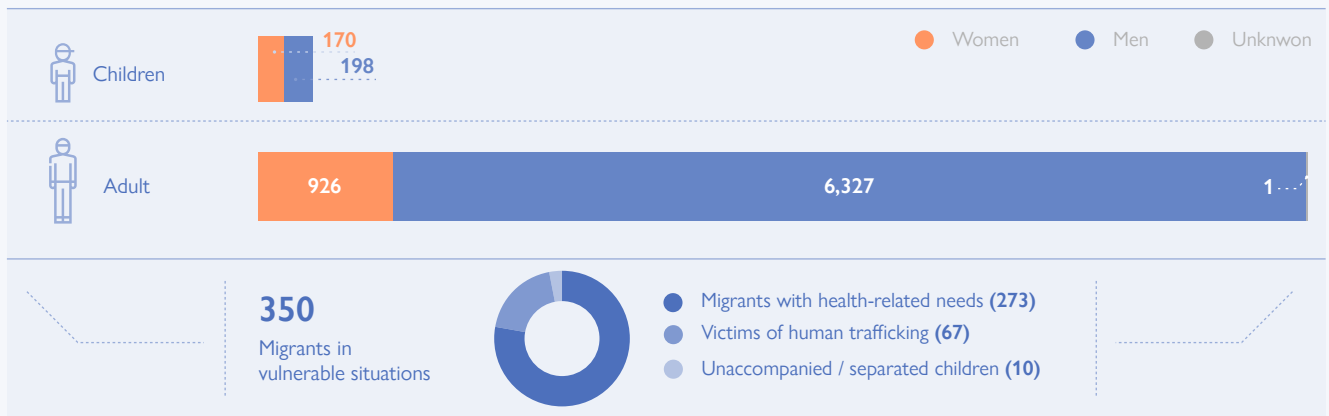
In 2021, IOM assisted 7,622 migrants to return voluntarily to their countries of origin in Asia and the Pacific (IOM, 2022b), an 18 per cent increase from 2020 (IOM, 2021b, p.71). While most assisted cases were male adults, 12 per cent were female adults and 5 per cent were children (Figure 46). Similar to 2020, the top five countries of origin in Asia and the Pacific for IOM assisted voluntary returnees were Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Mongolia, although there were fewer Bangladeshi and more Afghan assisted returnees in 2021 (Figure 47). Greece, Türkiye and Germany were the main host countries for

Pakistani assisted returnees, whereas Türkiye and Libya were the main host countries for Afghan and Bangladeshi assisted returnees respectively.

In addition to general cases of assisted voluntary returns, 350 cases were humanitarian return of migrants in vulnerable situations, including migrants with health-related needs (78%), victims of human trafficking (19%) and unaccompanied or separated children (3%). About 66 per cent of assisted migrants with health-related needs were male, whereas 60 per cent of human trafficking victims assisted were female adults.

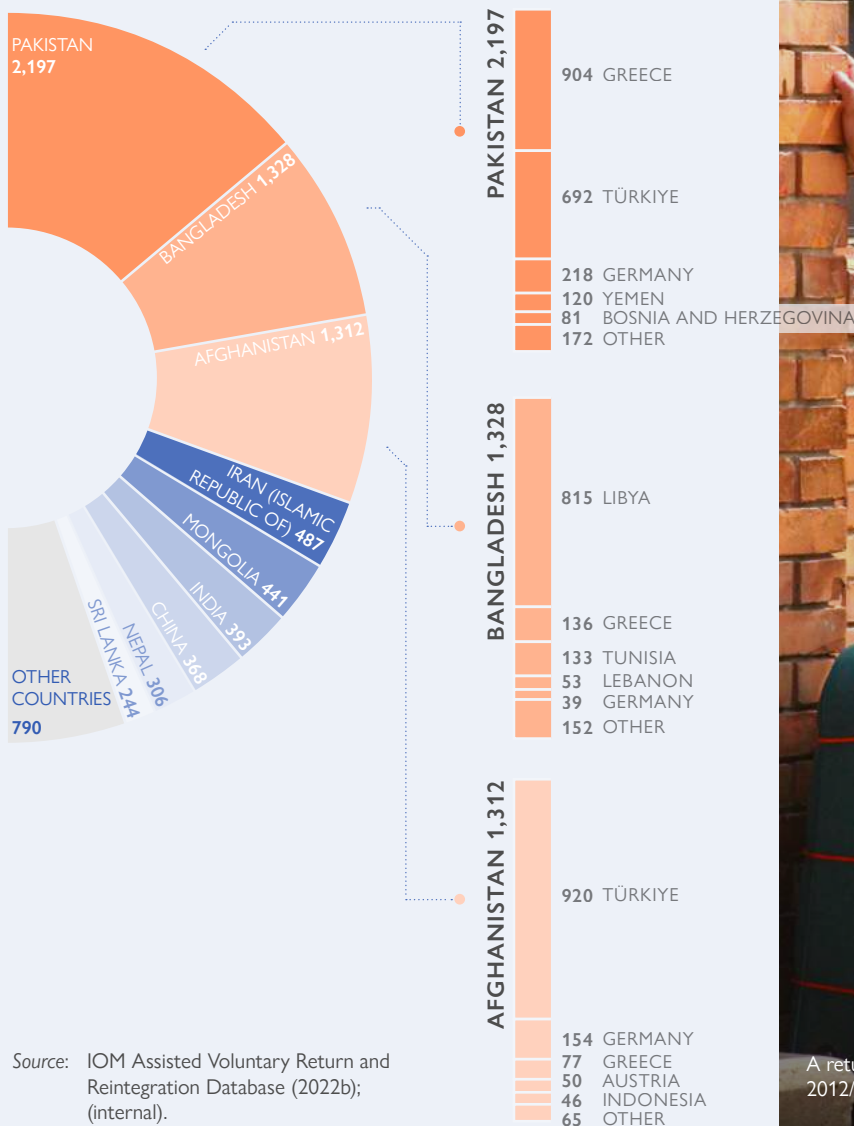
50. The Philippines News Agency, "600K pandemic-affected OFWs repatriated in 12 months", 12 July 2021.

FIGURE 46: IOM ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURNEES ORIGINATING FROM ASIA AND THE PACIFIC IN 2021

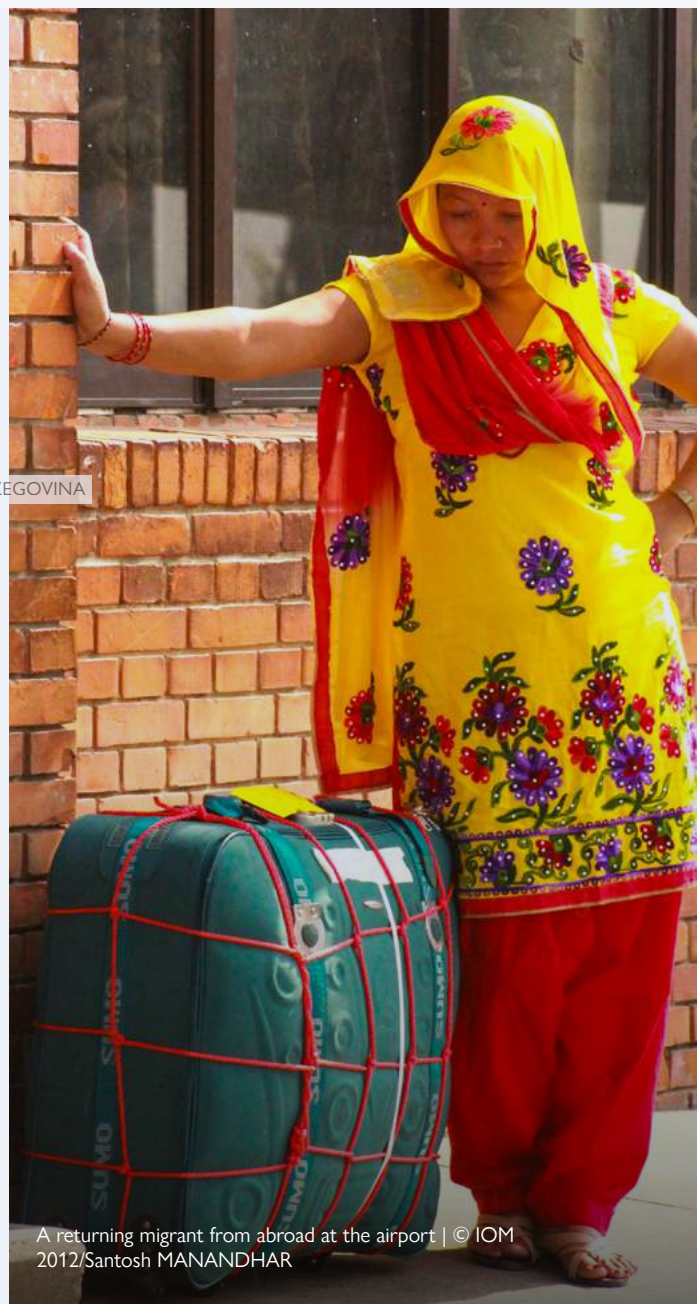


Source: IOM Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Database (2022b); (internal).

FIGURE 47: MAIN ORIGIN COUNTRIES IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC OF IOM ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURNS IN 2021



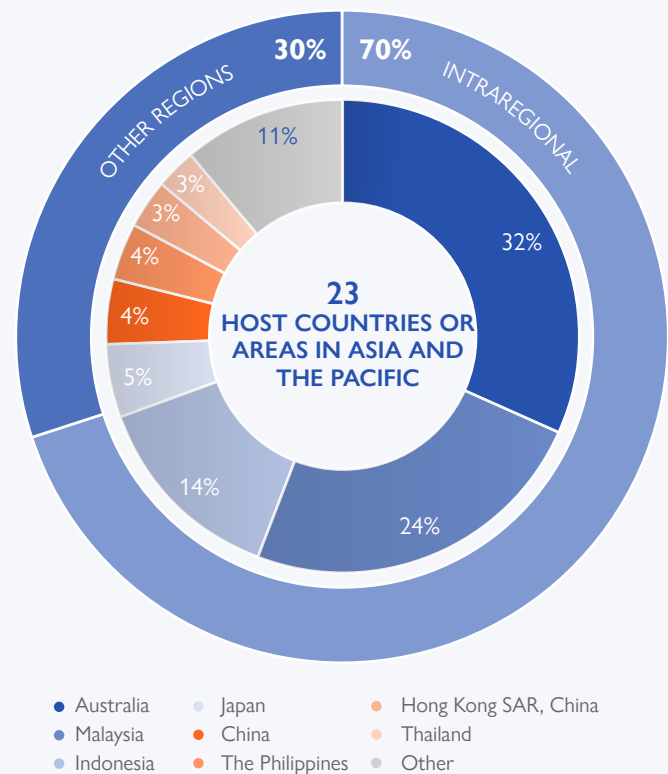
Source: IOM Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Database (2022b); (internal).



ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AS THE HOST REGION

In 2021, IOM assisted 782 migrants hosted in Asia-Pacific countries to voluntarily return to their origin countries worldwide – 16 per cent of these cases were directly related to COVID-19 (IOM, 2022b). Nearly 30 per cent were women, and 17 per cent of all cases were children. The majority (70%) of IOM-assisted voluntary returns hosted in Asia-Pacific countries were intraregional (Figure 48) – a trend that was noted from 2018 onwards (IOM, 2021b, p.73, 2022c). As in the previous year (IOM, 2021b, p.71), Australia was the largest host country in the region in 2021. Australia hosted returnees from 36 countries worldwide, with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Pakistan being the main countries of origin. Slightly more than half of the returns from Malaysia, the second largest host country in the region, came from Nepal. In addition to general cases of assisted voluntary return, 44 were humanitarian returns of migrants in vulnerable situations from Asia-Pacific countries, including 38 victims of human trafficking, 17 migrants with health-related needs and six unaccompanied or separated children.

FIGURE 48: MAIN HOST COUNTRIES OR AREAS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC OF IOM ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURNS IN 2021



Source: IOM Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Database (2022b); (unpublished).

3.4.2 FORCED RETURN

Generally carried out on the basis of an administrative or judicial act or decision, individuals are forcibly returned against their will to either the country of origin, transit country or a third country (IOM, 2019). The following subsection will examine three cases for which data are

available encompassing various types and routes of forced return in the region in 2021 – the forced return of nationals of Asia-Pacific countries from Europe, forced return from Australia, and deportation of Afghans and Rohingya refugees into fragile contexts.

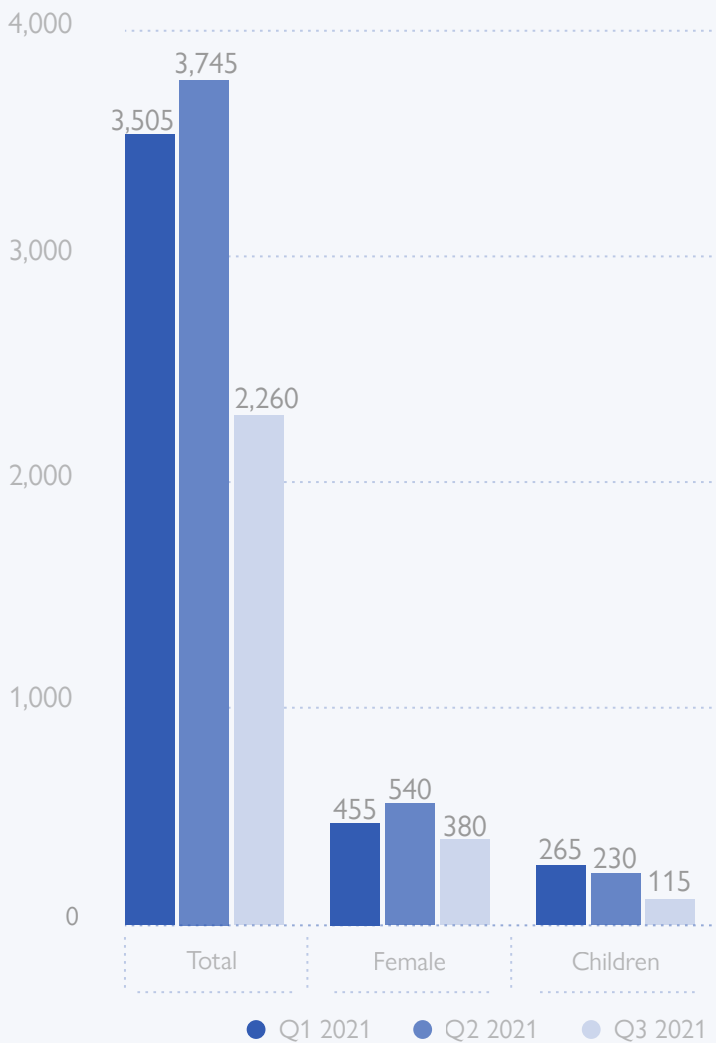
FORCED RETURN OF NATIONALS OF ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES FROM EUROPE

Between the first and the third quarter of 2021, 244,945 third-country nationals from around the world found to be in an irregular status were ordered to leave the territories of European countries,⁵¹ and 54,390 returns have been carried out because of such situation by the third quarter of 2021 (EUROSTAT, 2022). Among those who returned following

an order to leave, 9,510 cases (17%) of such returns were of nationals of Asia-Pacific countries. Stark gender imbalance is seen among this group where male adults dominated, with 14 per cent being women and 6 per cent being minors younger than 18 years (Figure 49) – and only 16 per cent of minors were female.

51. The number of European countries with available data was 29 in the first quarter, 28 in the second quarter, and 22 in the third quarter of 2021.

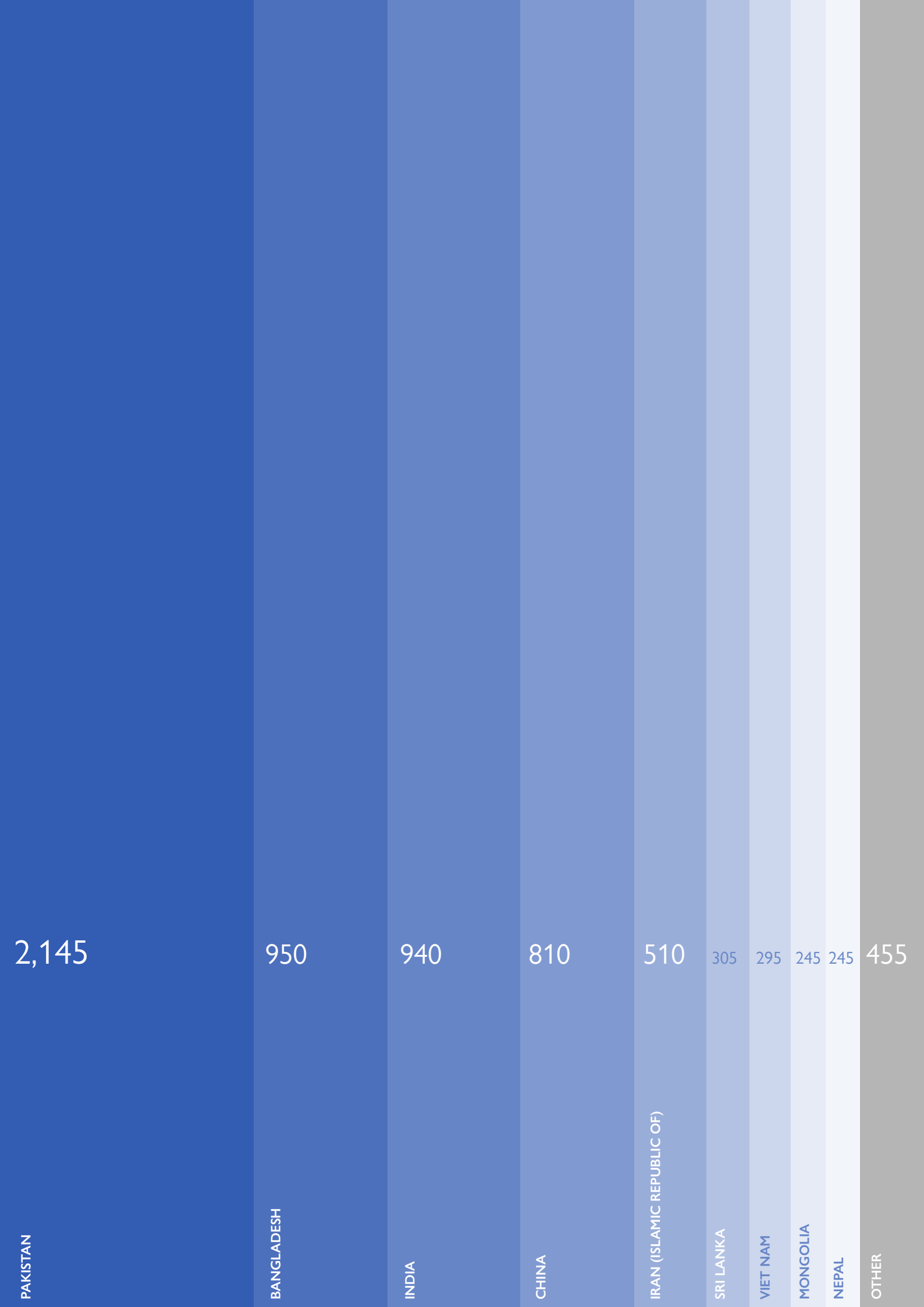
FIGURE 49: FORCED RETURN OF NATIONALS FROM ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES FROM 29 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES (Q1-Q3 2021)



Source: Compiled from EUROSTAT (2022).

2,610

AFGHANISTAN



PAKISTAN

2,145

BANGLADESH

950

INDIA

940

CHINA

810

IRAN (ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF)

510

SRI LANKA

305

VIET NAM

295

MONGOLIA

245

NEPAL

245

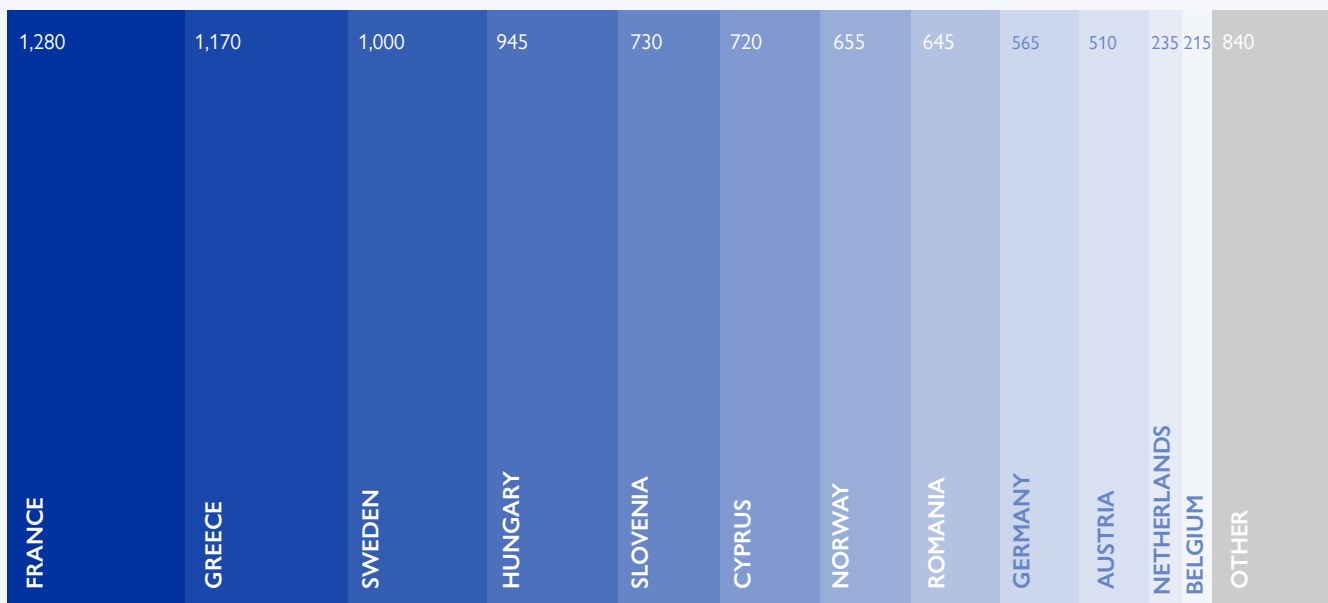
OTHER

455

The main Asia–Pacific countries of origin of individuals who returned following an order to leave from Europe were Afghanistan (27%), Pakistan (23%), Bangladesh (10%), India (10%), China (9%) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (5%), which remained similar to that in 2019 and 2020.⁵² It is worth noting that deportation of Afghans has sharply reduced, from 1,070 in the second quarter to 440 in the third quarter of 2021 – 83 per cent of Afghans returning following an order to leave occurred before the third quarter. These figures are

in line with the positive changes in the processing of asylum applications from Afghans in the EU mentioned in [Section 3.2.1.1](#), following the worsening humanitarian situation in the country since the political changes in the summer. France (13%), Greece (12%), Sweden (11%) and Hungary (10%), Slovenia (8%), Cyprus (8%), Norway (7%) and Romania (7%) were the main European countries from which these returns were made (Figure 50).

FIGURE 50: EUROPEAN COUNTRIES FROM WHICH NATIONALS OF ASIA–PACIFIC COUNTRIES RETURNED FOLLOWING AN ORDER TO LEAVE (Q1–Q3 2021)



Source: Compiled from EUROSTAT (2022).

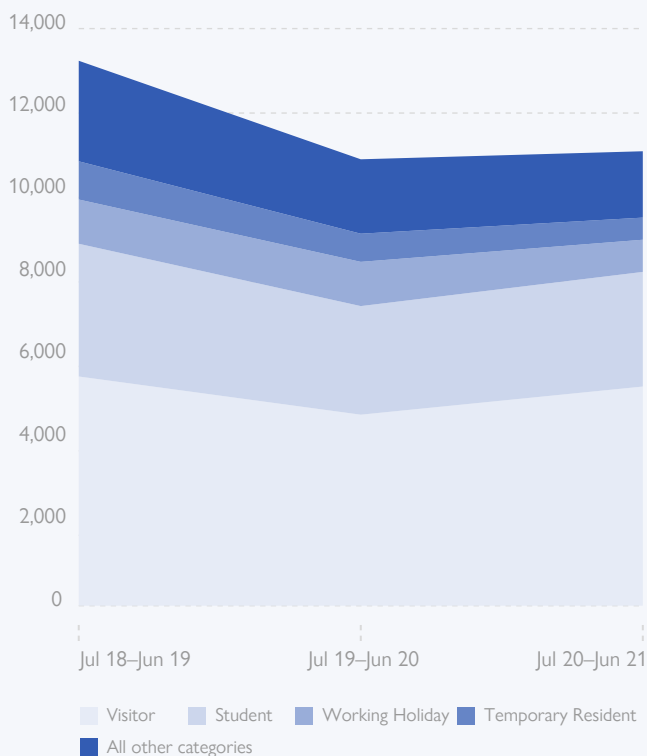
FORCED RETURN OF NATIONALS OF ASIA–PACIFIC COUNTRIES FROM AUSTRALIA

Between July 2020 and June 2021, 10,841 individuals were removed from Australia due to visa non-compliance – the number has slightly increased from the same period in 2019–2020 but gone down by 17 per cent from the same period in 2018–2019 ([Department of Home Affairs of Australia, 2021](#)). Almost half of removed individuals arrived on a visitor visa, and one fourth were on a student visa (Figure 51). The

distribution remained similar to the main visa categories these removed individuals held during the same period in 2018–2019. The main countries of origin were China (12%), India (12%), the United Kingdom (6%), Malaysia (5%), Colombia (5%), the Philippines (3%) and Viet Nam (3%), in descending order (Figure 52).

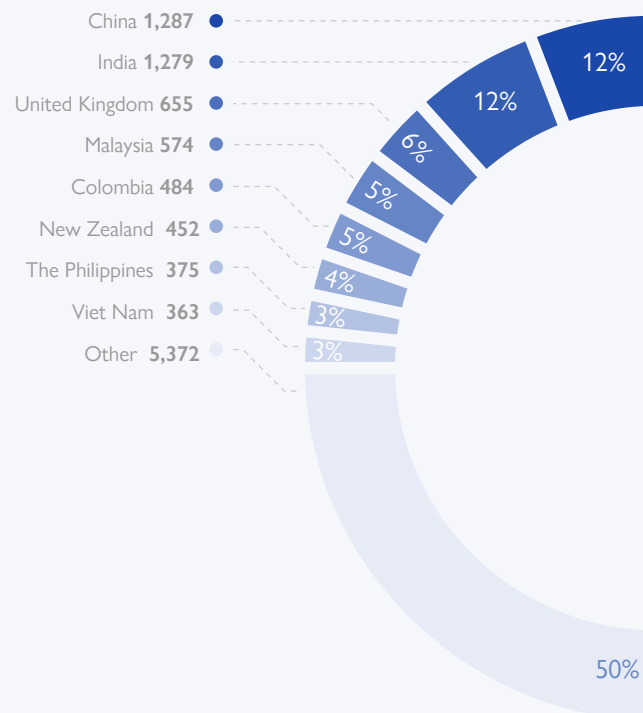
52. The figures of 2019 and 2020 consider only 27 current EU Member States.

FIGURE 51: REMOVAL FROM AUSTRALIA BY VISA CATEGORY (JULY 2018–JUNE 2021)



Source: Compiled from *Australian Migration Statistics, 2020–21* (accessed on 22 February 2022). Department of Home Affairs of Australia.

FIGURE 52: MAIN ORIGIN COUNTRIES OF INDIVIDUALS REMOVED FROM AUSTRALIA (JULY 2020–JUNE 2021)



Source: Compiled from *Australian Migration Statistics, 2020–21* (accessed on 22 February 2022). Department of Home Affairs of Australia.

DEPORTATION OF AFGHANS AND ROHINGYA REFUGEES

Although the deportation of Afghans from the EU has been halted as of the third quarter of 2021, there has been an increasing number of reports concerning deportations of Afghans from neighbouring countries. According to [IOM \(2021c\)](#), more than 1 million Afghans have returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in 2021 as of November, the majority of whom were deported. UNHCR observed an increase of 190 per cent in the deportation rate from the Islamic Republic of Iran in August 2021 compared to the same period in August 2020 ([UNHCR, 2021a, p.3](#)), despite their non-return advisory calling for a bar on forced returns of Afghan nationals, including asylum seekers who have had their claims rejected, given the rapid deterioration in the security and human rights situation in the Afghanistan ([UNHCR, 2021b](#)).

Despite escalation of the Myanmar crisis since the military takeover in February 2021, there were reports that India continued plans to detain and deport Rohingya refugees. In

April 2021, India's Supreme Court rejected a plea to stop the Indian Government from deporting some 170 Rohingya refugees detained in Kashmir's Jammu area to Myanmar, despite the genocidal threats in Myanmar.⁵³ Throughout 2021, it was reported that at least 414 refugees mainly from Myanmar – about 354 Rohingyas and 60 Chins and other ethnic Burmese nationals were arrested by police in India ([Rights and Risks Analysis Group, 2021, p.7](#)). While Chin refugees from Myanmar received some protection including non-refoulement, at least 1,177 Rohingya immigrants were arrested, detained or rescued from trafficking by police during 2017–2021 ([ibid., p.9](#)). The situation was attributed to India not being a signatory to the Refugee Convention, absence of a refugee law in India, and lack of uniformity in treatment of refugees in the country ([ibid., p.8](#)). Therefore, geopolitical interest and vote bank politics tend to guide treatment of refugees in India ([ibid.](#)), rather than the core non-refoulement principle underpinning the Refugee Convention and customary international law.

53. Al Jazeera Media Network, "Supreme Court has signed our death warrant: Rohingya in India", 9 April 2021.

3.4.3 RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Largely triggered by the direct and indirect consequences of COVID-19, millions of international and internal migrants tried or had to return home over the course of 2020 and into 2021. Returnees often face a multitude of economic, social, health and psychological challenges upon return. Although the provision of support services to facilitate the reintegration of returnees into the labour market and society is key, it remains insufficient in many countries.

At the same time, differential reintegration outcomes are foreseen for returns under different situations, as the impact of return on migrants, their families and communities could be influenced by many factors, from individual characteristics such as gender, the nature of return, reason for migration and duration of migration, to the community or country level, such as the availability and accessibility of assistance and the

socioeconomic conditions of the community. Reintegration challenges could be significantly compounded especially when returns occur on a large scale and to fragile societies, not only for the returnees but also potentially for the stability and development prospective of the community of return (IOM, 2021a, p.1). As both the economies of the origin and destination countries were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, migrants might not be met with better prospects for employment or better social protection upon return. In turn, reintegration outcomes could affect the length of return and returnees' plan of remigration. Although post-return data are scarce, a few studies conducted across subregions of Asia and the Pacific in 2021 could potentially shed light on these interlinkages as well as on the importance of comprehensive and well-designed policy response on return, readmission and reintegration.

HETEROGENEITIES IN REINTEGRATION OUTCOMES: CASES FROM SOUTH ASIA, SOUTH-EAST ASIA AND EAST ASIA

In the case of Mongolia, returnees faced substantial economic challenges which showed to influence their remigration plan. IOM (2022d) conducted a survey on the employment status of 1,112 return migrants in Mongolia, most of whom emigrated for economic and financial reasons, between November 2021 and February 2022. The nature of return was largely mixed, with about 42 per cent of respondents attributing their return to COVID-19 and 30 per cent to visa expiry. Most returnees did not receive any government support after return. By the time of the interview, 23 per cent of respondents were still unemployed and 8 per cent were out of the labour force. Current household income of returnees in their home country was slightly lower than national average. Most returnees (78% of paid employees and 76% of self-employed by the time of the interview) reported that their household income after return had decreased by roughly 50 per cent. The main post-return challenges were described to be low income (48%), lack of access to government support (36%) and unemployment (34%). While one in two respondents planned to remigrate, the rate is the highest among those unemployed (53%), compared to 47 per cent among those in paid employment and 50 per cent among those self-employed. Lower household post-return income is also shown to correlate with a higher chance to remigrate. Despite reported financial needs, only a

minority (3.6%) of respondents received assistance from the government including social assistance, financial support for business expansion, government support for job search, and health-care support.

The cases of South-East Asian returnees show gender disparities in economic reintegration outcomes and coping strategies. An IOM (2022a) survey was conducted between March and May 2021 on 818 Cambodian and Lao returning migrant workers from Thailand. The findings suggest that, while the main reintegration challenges were consistently reported to be economic for both men and women returnees, employment prospects and coping mechanisms vary across gender. Reduced or no income (68% for both women and men) and finding a job (65% for women and 64% for men) were described by a similar share of men and women returnees to be the main challenges upon return. Reported average income drop from pre-lockdown in Thailand and upon return by the time of the survey was more significant for women (43%) than for men (39%). While Lao respondents were mostly recent returnees and thus most of them were unemployed, 10 per cent fewer Cambodian women returnees were in employment (self-employment or paid employment) and 13 per cent more were participating in unpaid work for family than their male counterparts by the

time of the interview. In the face of unemployment, the main coping mechanisms reported by Cambodian women returnees were reducing expenditures on health and other essentials (52%) and reducing food intake (27%), whereas the main coping mechanism reported by Cambodian men returnees were applying for jobs (61%) and performing temporary or irregular work (54%). The economic challenges faced by Cambodian women returnees is confirmed by another IOM (2022e) study which survey was conducted in October 2021, and finds that women face various challenges related to their job search, including lack of knowledge of where to find a job, lack of available jobs to meet their skillsets, and fear that available jobs do not have adequate COVID-19 prevention measures in place. The heavy indebtedness of many women returnees to meet daily subsistence needs compounded these difficulties. Even though there was a strong appetite amongst recently returned Cambodian women to start their own businesses, women lack access to the necessary capital, as well, access to banking services was extremely low, with only 8 per cent of respondents banked.

In addition to economic challenges, **the case of South Asian women returnees further highlights gender-specific social challenges to reintegration, especially those in vulnerable situations.** Between July 2020 and

March 2021, the [Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women \(2022\)](#) interviewed 486 women migrant workers returning to Bangladesh, India, Nepal or Sri Lanka from the Middle East. Mostly working as domestic workers abroad, all reportedly returned voluntarily. A significant number of respondents migrated irregularly, except among returning women migrant workers in Sri Lanka. The high levels of irregular migration suggests that many returnees are unable to access existing social security provisions. In terms of economic reintegration, more than 70 per cent of respondents were unemployed upon return and their families were struggling to make ends meet. In terms of social reintegration, many returnees described their experience of return as potentially worse than their experience in their destination countries, largely because of social disapproval, aggressive stigma and public harassment due to the lack of social acceptance of women's independent migration overseas. Many expressed that overseas migration also had damaging effects on their marriage because of similar reasons. The corrosive effect of social stigma was, however, reported to be more limited in Sri Lanka. Another IOM study further highlights the social stigma faced by returning Bangladeshi women who were victims of human trafficking. Among all types of returnees, they faced the highest likelihood of social exclusion and family rejection, with reports of verbal and physical abuse ([IOM, 2021d, p.70](#)).

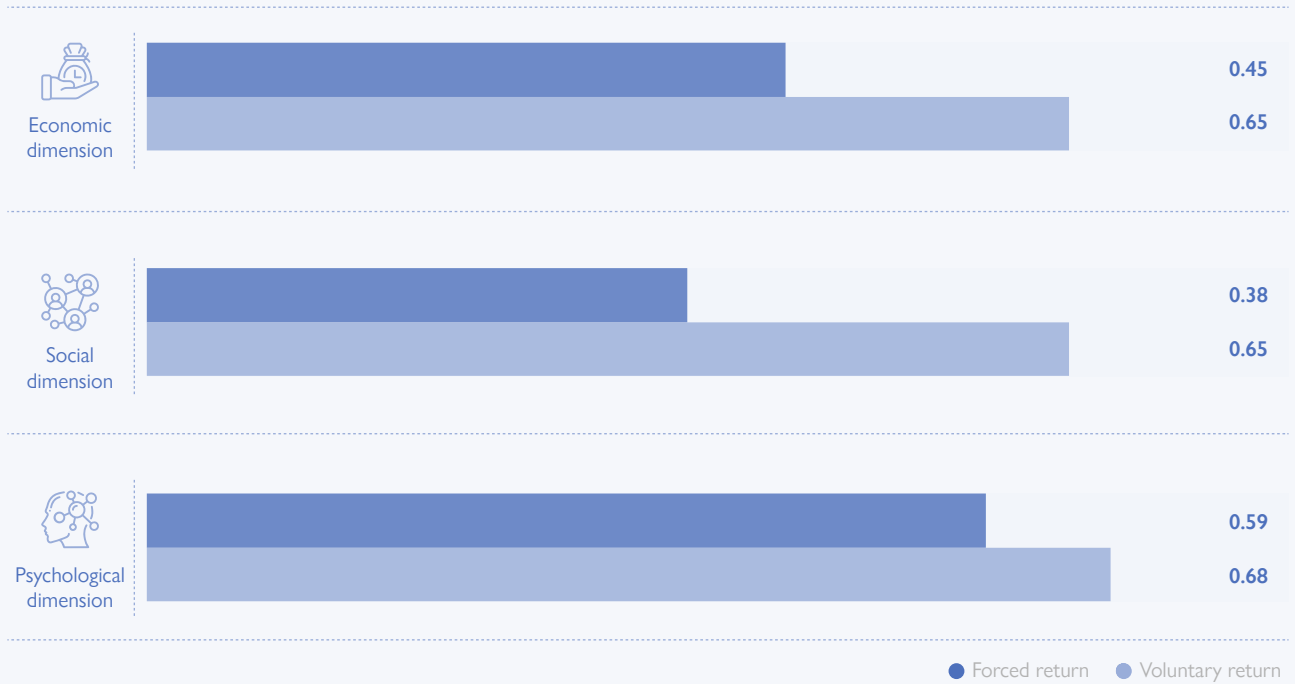
RETURN AND REINTEGRATION IN A FRAGILE CONTEXT: THE CASE OF AFGHANISTAN

Systematic differences in the reintegration outcomes between forced and voluntary returnees are observed in the case of Afghanistan, especially when such returns are made to a fragile context. An IOM reintegration sustainability survey was conducted in six countries between March and June 2021, including 808 Afghan returnees who received a mix of cash and in-kind assistance. Most returns (80%) in this study were classified as voluntary ([IOM, 2021d](#)).⁵⁴ Afghans who returned voluntarily scored consistently higher in the reintegration scores across economic, social and psychological dimensions compared to their counterparts

who returned involuntarily (Figure 53). This finding echoes the results of phone interviews conducted by the Mixed Migration Centre between March 2020 and July 2021 with a total of 2,046 returning Afghan migrants and refugees – 60 per cent of whom were deportees ([Mixed Migration Centre, 2021](#)). More Afghan deportees reportedly disagreed (at varying degrees) that they were socially or economically integrated into the local community or that they were feeling safe and secure, and they were more likely to have decided to remigrate within 12 months by the time of the interview (Figure 54).

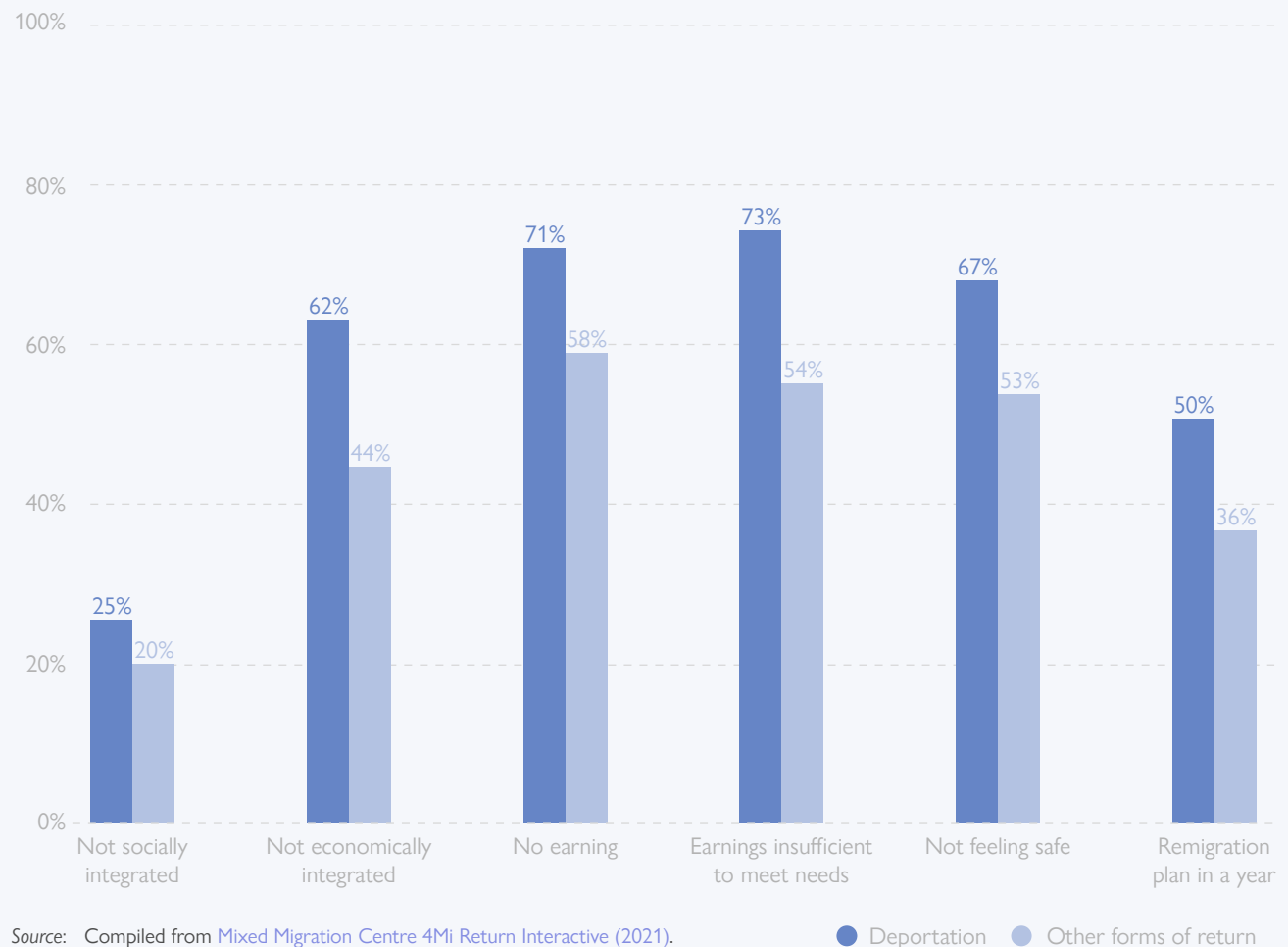
54. In this study, voluntary returns refer to migrants actively looking for opportunities to return voluntarily and those who enrol in return assistance programmes in situations where they are unable to remain in host countries, such as withdrawn or rejected asylum applicants. Therefore, voluntary returnees may have faced varying degrees of constraints in their options to return.

FIGURE 53: REINTEGRATION OUTCOME SCORES OF AFGHAN RETURNEES INTERVIEWED BY IOM BY TYPE OF RETURN (N=808)



Source: Compiled from IOM Comparative Reintegration Outcomes between Forced and Voluntary Return and Through a Gender Perspective (2021d).

FIGURE 54: REINTEGRATION OUTCOMES AND REMIGRATION PLAN OF AFGHAN RETURNEES INTERVIEWED BY THE MIXED MIGRATION CENTRE BY TYPE OF RETURN (N=2,046)



Source: Compiled from Mixed Migration Centre 4Mi Return Interactive (2021).

3.4.4 DISCUSSION

The [Global Compact for Migration](#) recognizes return and reintegration as integral components of migration governance, as [Objective 21](#) calls for ensuring and facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration. This aim has also been echoed by [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. Alongside efforts to facilitate the safe return and readmission of migrants, IOM promotes the concept of sustainable reintegration. IOM maintains that reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers – having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than a necessity (IOM, 2021e).

Sustainable reintegration can have positive impacts on individual migrants, their families, as well as the communities and societies to which they return – but without comprehensive reintegration framework and policy, such potential might be forsaken. To date, more concerted efforts in this area are needed in the Asia-Pacific region. Evidence on the differential reintegration outcomes and challenges faced by different groups of return migrants shows the complexity of the return and reintegration process, and sheds light on the importance of gender-responsive and vulnerability- and child-sensitive perspectives to reintegration as [IOM \(2021a\)](#) advocates. Economic empowerment and other support measures and assistance for return migrants, such as in the health and psychological dimensions, are shown to be vital in facilitating a smooth transition into their local settings and enabling them to exercise their agency and explore economic opportunities in a sustainable manner.

The systematic differences in reintegration outcomes and experiences observed among individuals who were forcibly returned to a fragile context underline the needs for additional assistance such as increased outreach, referral mechanisms and post-arrival counselling for forced returnees (IOM, 2021d, p.97), as well as respect for the non-refoulement principle. The non-refoulement principle is an essential protection for refugees and some migrants under international human rights, refugee, humanitarian and customary law; it constitutes an integral component of the protection against torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or arbitrary deprivation of life (United Nations Human Rights Committee, 2004) – which shall not be compromised.

The analysis in this section also highlights the need for improving and expanding data collection on return migration to provide reliable evidence for monitoring [Objective 6 of the Global Compact for Migration](#) and informed policy making. [IOM \(2022c\)](#) has identified several data gaps in this area: data on forced return and voluntary return are scattered across different data sources and are often incomplete or only partially publicly available, and there are large data gaps on post-return data.

The gaps on post-return data can be attributed to several reasons, such as the lack of definitions and established indicators for measuring reintegration, and a conventional focus on monitoring outputs rather than outcomes and on economic reintegration rather than other similarly important areas like social and psychological reintegration (IOM, 2018). Data collection to profile the demographics of returned international and internal migrants needs to be improved to facilitate the design of better policy and programmatic interventions.



Through IOM Afghanistan's Reintegration and Development Assistance (RADA) and Connecting Return with Development (CRD) programmes, Afghan returnees are supported to attend a tailoring school in Herat | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED

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A returnee from Libya to Bangladesh in 2019 who benefited from IOM Libya's reintegration program to start up his own project | © IOM 2020/Moayad ZAGHDANI



A community leader in an informal settlement hosting internally displaced persons and Afghan returnees, which has seen significant destruction over the years due to heavy rains and flooding | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED

3.5 INTERNAL MIGRATION AND URBANIZATION

Population movements take multiple forms, and the attention garnered by internal migration has long been disproportionate to its scale. This is particularly true in Asia and the Pacific, a region marked by geographic extension and large population size where some of the world's most significant internal movements take place. Although more recent estimates are lacking, 2005 estimates of lifetime internal migrants at the global level already reached 763 million and recent internal migrants at 229 million (DESA, 2013, p.15). Moreover, those estimates were only based on a limited number of countries with available data.⁵⁵ Relative to its population size, the Asia–Pacific region has a lower share of immigrants (1%) than the global average (IOM, 2021a, p.33). However, estimates based on 2005 data suggest that there were at least 291 million lifetime internal migrants (including China and India), and 111 million recent internal migrants (based on data for 10 countries including China but not India) in the region – the largest numbers across all regions in the world (DESA, 2013, p.21).⁵⁶

The lack of data worldwide and in the region constitutes a major constraint to better understanding of internal migration and urbanization. Recent regional estimate of internal migration is currently lacking, and up-to-date country-level data on internal migration are often difficult to find. Internal migrants are often highly mobile, characterized by temporary movements especially in low-income countries (Banerjee and Duflo, 2007). Data on internal migration traditionally rely on

three main sources, namely, censuses, population registers and administrative data, and national surveys – of which censuses represent the primary data source used (Bell and Charles-Edwards, 2014). While census data capture only longer-term residences (Skeldon, 2018), the interval between each census means internal migration data based on censuses are not frequently updated. Population registers, which should capture more short-term than long-term movements (ibid.), are found in relatively few countries and usually in the more developed parts of the world (IOM, 2021b). Compared to censuses and register data, surveys can better capture undercounted migrants, such as irregular migrants, and facilitate identifying migrant groups such as women, children and refugees (ibid.). At the same time, in some cases, such as China (Chan, 2021a) and Mongolia (IOM, 2021c), the use of surveys in estimating the number of internal migrants is found to undercount migrant populations who are much more mobile than the general population. In addition to the challenges to data collection associated with each of these instruments, a consistent definition of internal migrants in terms of spatial and temporal units across countries is yet to be developed (Skeldon, 2018) and thus international comparison of internal migration figures can be challenging. Despite large data gaps in the area of internal migration, the following section will use available data to understand the latest trends in internal migration two years into the pandemic and to examine the data challenges in this area using country case study.

55. The recent internal migrant figure was based on available data from 39 countries and the lifetime internal migrant figure based on available data from 66 countries worldwide.

56. Fourteen countries are covered in Asia including Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Krygyzstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam, Türkiye – among which Iraq, Krygyzstan and Türkiye are not included in IOM's definition. Oceania covers Australia, New Zealand and Vanuatu.

3.5.1 DATA ON INTERNAL MIGRATION IN 2021: A SLOWDOWN OR A PARADIGM SHIFT FROM THE CITIES?

Up-to-date data on internal migration at the country level are often not available or publicly accessible. Several high-income and highly urbanized countries in the Asia-Pacific region, namely, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the Republic of Korea publish yearly, quarterly or monthly updates on internal migration within the country. Information on internal migration from China and India, the world's two countries with the largest scale of internal migration, rely on census data, which is less frequently updated than other data sources measuring internal migration. That said, China published its latest 2020 census data in 2021 and estimates of internal migration in 2021 have been provided for India. Despite varying degrees of urbanization and development and varying scale of internal migration, **the latest available data from this diverse set of countries point to one emerging trend that has been driven by the pandemic – that the most urbanized cities were seeing a decline in net internal migration⁵⁷ in 2021.**

In Australia, a large quantity of internal migration has shifted away from greater capital cities.⁵⁸ Official estimates based on Medicare address data show that 104,100 people made interstate moves in the first three months of 2021, a near 19 per cent increase compared with the first quarter of 2020 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). An opposite trend was however seen in the greater capital cities of Australia, with a net loss of 11,845 people through internal migration – the largest quarterly net loss on record since the Australian Bureau of Statistics started measuring internal migration in 2001, surpassing the previous record net loss seen in the third quarter of 2020 (*ibid.*). Out of this total net loss, Sydney (8,169) and Melbourne (8,273) – Australia's two most populous cities – saw the largest loss of residents to regional areas, with the highest outflow of people aged between 45 and 64 years (*ibid.*). This outflow from greater capital cities was likely triggered in part by long lockdowns imposed in cities and the increase of teleworking. The pattern observed, however, might be more than a new phenomenon. According to an official from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, more

people have been departing from capital cities than entering them for decades, but what was out of the ordinary was that since the start of the pandemic, the outflow from the regional areas has slowed down.⁵⁹ Some suggest that the exodus from cities might signal a permanent change in population patterns.⁶⁰

A similar trend was observed in New Zealand. As of June 2021, Auckland, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Lower Hutt, Wellington, Nelson and Christchurch cities all saw a net outflow of people through internal migration (Infometrics, 2021). For example, Auckland saw a net loss of 13,500 residents through internal migration (McIndoe, 2021). The decrease was not a one-off in 2021, as negative net internal migration in these cities was close to outweighing the natural increase⁶¹ of the cities in 2019 and 2020 (*ibid.*). Auckland's population has shrunk, mainly affected by an extremely low inflow of international migrants, coupled with this observed outflow of internal migrants – although only marginally, for the first time in a quarter-century, according to published subnational population estimates. These trends were seen to be driving stronger population growth in provincial centres around the country (Infometrics, 2021).

In Japan, the historical concentration of internal migrants in urban centres appears to have been weakened by the pandemic. Estimates in August 2021 suggested that Japan had a population of 125 million (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2022a). The Statistics Bureau of Japan (2022b) reported that there were 2.77 million intra-prefectural and city migrants and 2.47 million inter-prefectural migrants (up 0.5 per cent from the previous year) – women comprised 49 per cent and 44 per cent of these numbers respectively. The monthly report published in May 2021 shows that the number of inter-prefectural migrants had increased by 17.6 per cent from the previous year, with an increase in both intra-prefectural and inter-prefectural migrants – considering both Japanese and foreign nationals as well as Japanese alone. Drawing on 2019 and 2020 data, Fielding and Ishikawa (2021) suggested

57. Net internal migration is calculated as in-migration minus out-migration. Positive net migration means there are more in-migrants than out-migrants and vice versa.

58. Greater capital cities in Australia include Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart, Darwin and Canberra.

59. ABC News, "Net migration to Australia's regions highest on record, Queensland among the most popular migration destinations", 5 May 2021.

60. Pedestrian Group, "The pandemic has changed Australian migration patterns for good, as capital cities see the largest population losses on record", 4 August 2021.

61. Natural increase refers to excess of births over deaths.

that Japan’s “one-point concentration” of economic and social dynamism in the capital city was weakened by the pandemic; the largest metropolitan city lost residents, and the emptier parts of Japan, famous for their depopulation over the last 70 years, gained in net migration. The 2021 national data seem to confirm this finding – the number of positive net-migration for the Tokyo area, which had positive net-migration for the 26th consecutive year, decreased from 99,243 in 2020 to 81,699 in 2021 (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2022a) – the lowest since 2014 following a low record in 2020. The total net migration in 21 major cities of Japan has seen a decrease by more than half, from 83,500 in 2020 to 36,667 in 2021 (*ibid.*). While this has been in part attributed to the spread of teleworking due to the pandemic,⁶² whether this shift represents an emerging trend in Japan is yet to be confirmed.

With a general decrease in internal migration, the Republic of Korea observed a similar net migration loss in its traditional metropolitan cities in 2021. In 2021, the total number of internal migrants in the Republic of Korea amounted to around 7.21 million. The number saw a slight decrease from 7.74 million in the previous year yet an increase from 7.104 million in 2019 (Statistics Korea, 2020). Between January and December 2021, 14.1 per cent of the population had moved internally – a decrease of 1 percentage point from

2020 (Statistics Korea, 2021). Seoul, the country’s Special City, saw the biggest outflow of 9,229 across provinces in 2021, followed by other metropolitan cities that had some of the biggest net migration losses in the country except for Incheon (Statistics Korea, 2022), (Figure 55). The sharpest increase was seen in Sejong, the country’s new administrative capital that was established in 2012 as a plan to shift official functions out of Seoul. The main reason for internal migration was housing, followed by family and employment concerns – although the distribution remains similar to that of the previous year, there were more internal migration movements due to housing reasons than in the previous year (*ibid.*). Scholars have observed the diffusion of internal migration in the Republic of Korea since 2011, with migrants moving to a greater variety of regions (Abel and Heo, 2018). While the population concentration in the Capital Region has been largely induced by job opportunities, the Government has been assuming an active role in directing internal migration toward the non-capital regions through the decentralization of government services and infrastructure, promotion of economic development in small and medium cities and development of transport infrastructure (Choi, 2009), (Figure 55).

FIGURE 55: NET INTERNAL MIGRATION RATE ACROSS PROVINCES IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA IN 2021



Note: * refers to metropolitan cities in the Republic of Korea.

Source: Internal Migration in December 2021. Statistics Korea (2022).

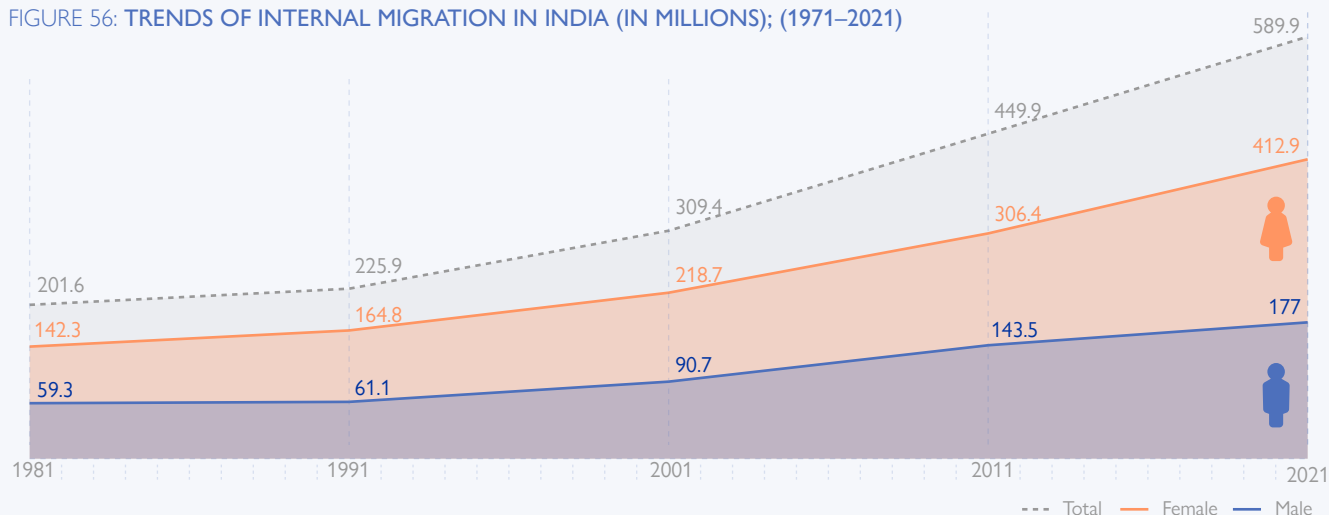
62. The Japan Times, “Net population influx into Tokyo hits lowest point in 2021 amid pandemic”, 28 January 2021.

India, alongside China, has the world's largest population of internal migrants – with a size exceeding the third most populous country in the world, namely, the United States. Internal migration has been a prevalent phenomenon throughout the history of India (Tumbe, 2018). The latest official figure of internal migration in India came from the 2011 census, which counted 450 million Indian internal migrants – a number that represented 37 per cent of the total population (Government of India, 2011). On that basis, Rajan and Bhagat (2022) estimated that the internal migrant population in India rose to 600 million in 2021, with women accounting for nearly 70 per cent of internal migrants (Figure 56). In the 2011 census, around one third of all internal migrants were interstate and inter-district migrants and two thirds were workers (Government of India, 2011). Based on these shares, it was estimated that 140 million were internal migrant workers as of June 2020 and the number could

increase to 200 million (excluding temporary and circular migrants) if intra-district migrant workers are included in the count (Rajan and Bhagat, 2022).

The actual size of internal migrant workers is likely higher, as temporary and circular migration within India is not negligible – it was estimated that 21 out of every 1,000 persons in India is a temporary or seasonal migrant (Keshri and Bhagat, 2013). The heavy dependence on agriculture determines the predominantly temporary or seasonal nature of internal migration within the rural–urban migration stream (Rajan and Bhagat, 2022). These internal migrant workers represent a range of occupations in both urban and rural destinations, but mainly concentrated in temporary, informal and casual employment (*ibid.*). As well, the dominant form of migration is from rural to other rural areas, with only 20 per cent rural-to-urban migration and another 20 per cent urban-to-urban migration.

FIGURE 56: TRENDS OF INTERNAL MIGRATION IN INDIA (IN MILLIONS); (1971–2021)



Source: 1981–2011 figures from Censuses of India and 2021 estimates from (Rajan and Bhagat, 2022).

In the wake of India's decision to impose a national lockdown in March 2020, internal migrants took desperate measures to return home amid the pandemic – described by some observers as “the largest movement of migrants since the partition”.⁶³ Scholarly estimate suggests that close to 60 million Indians returned to their rural areas of origin since the start of the pandemic – roughly six times the official estimates.^{64,65} According to the chief labour commissioner of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2021 saw a considerable drop in the amount of internal migration, with 8 to 9 per cent fewer people moving to larger metropolitan areas for work.⁶⁶ This decrease can be attributed to a combination of factors

including fears surrounding COVID-19, uncertainty about the job situation in cities, the availability of jobs from the Government's rural employment schemes and increasing investments on rural development projects, as well as the assistance available from government subsidies and benefits until Diwali. While these factors might have quelled the need for internal migrant workers to move back to cities immediately in 2021, whether migrant workers will remigrate to cities as the pandemic eases or whether reverse migration will carry on as a trend guiding internal migration in the country in the future is in question.

63. The Guardian, “India racked by greatest exodus since partition due to coronavirus”, 30 March 2020.

64. The Indian Express, “Explainspeaking: What 2020 taught us about India's internal migration”, 18 February 2021.

65. Srivastava (2020) suggests that the discrepancy might be explained by the fact that the Government's figures provide an accurate enumeration of stable populations but miss out on those who live on the fringes or those who migrate temporarily.

66. The Economic Times, “They have not returned: How Covid-19 has impacted labour migration in the country”, 25 September 2021.

COUNTRY SNAPSHOT:

CHINA'S LATEST TRENDS IN INTERNAL MIGRATION AND PROGRESS IN HUKOU⁶⁷ REFORM

According to the 2020 census published in 2021, the “floating population” in China – those living outside of their hukou residencies in another city or county – has expanded to 376 million from 155 million in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). This means that approximately one in four were internal migrants and this staggering number has continued to grow significantly over the past three decades (*ibid.*). China’s urbanization rate has reached nearly 64 per cent (*ibid.*), and it has been estimated that about half of the Chinese population in the four first-tier megacities (Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen) were migrants in 2020 (Chan, 2021b). At the same time, many believe that migration in China has become more diverse (Tan and Zhu, 2021). With 73 per cent of internal migration being intra-provincial between 2010 and 2015 based on the 2015 pre-census (*ibid.*), some leveling of long-distance migration flows was observed in the 2000–2015 period (Chan and Yang, 2020).

The hukou system determines Chinese citizens’ access to housing, education and public services. Without being registered at a local (urban) hukou, China’s large rural migrant population working and living in cities cannot access most basic public services. The Chinese Government began to initiate hukou reform in 2014, aiming to close the urban social benefits gap incrementally with an initial goal of narrowing the percentage of the floating population without local registration from 17.2 per cent in 2012 to 15 per cent in 2020. The 2020 census and regular annual hukou registration data show that the Chinese Government has fulfilled some of the goals, such as achieving the 100 million urban hukou conversion target by 2020 (Chan, 2021a), but the progress was offset by faster growth in migration, which instead widened the social benefits gap in cities and towns (Chan, 2021b). That gap was likely compounded by the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on unemployment due to stringent lockdown policies on mobility and work, which disproportionately affected migrant workers (Che et al., 2020). Continued efforts to reform the hukou system are needed to foster a more integrated society.

Source: Internal Migration in China: Integrating Migration with Urbanization Policies and Hukou Reform. Chan (2021b).

COUNTRY SNAPSHOT:

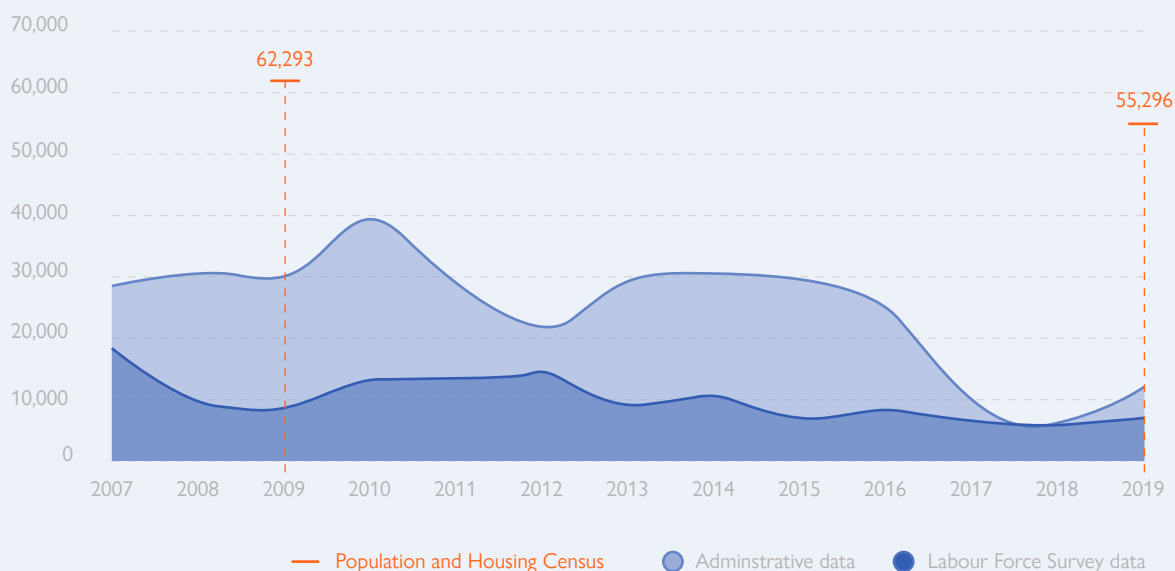
CHALLENGES TO MEASURING INTERNAL MIGRATION IN MONGOLIA

Despite efforts to improve measurements of internal migration, an IOM (2021c) report shows that Mongolia is facing obstacles in closing the gap in national internal migration statistics collected through various instruments. The first notable gap was between the estimated number of all new migrants from the Labour Force Survey and the administrative records of new registered migrants in Ulaanbaatar (Figure 57) – the former number turned out to be much lower than the latter, although they would be expected to be the opposite. This gap could be attributed to the large body of unregistered migrants who were not captured in official statistics or included in the Labour Force Survey (*ibid.*). Unregistered migrants are essentially “hidden populations” who are either difficult to observe or, once observed, are difficult to identify as belonging to that population (Kraler and Vogel, 2008). Another reason is that the Labour Force Survey, as a nationally representative survey, might under-sample new migrants that have arrived in Ulaanbaatar within the past year (IOM, 2021c).

67. Hukou is a household registration system used in China, which officially identifies a person as a permanent resident of an area.

The second gap was found between these two figures collected from the registration system and the census. The 2019 Population and Housing Census data reported that 55,296 internal migrants newly moved to Ulaanbaatar from other regions within the past year. Comparing this figure to the administrative records of 12,300 new migrants registered in Ulaanbaatar, the difference could imply that the remaining 44,000 migrants (80% of the census estimate) might be unregistered irregular new migrants (*ibid.*).

FIGURE 57: RECORDED NUMBERS OF MIGRANTS IN ULAANBAATAR BY TYPE OF DATA SOURCE



Source: Research Study on Assessing the Effectiveness of Migration Restrictions in Ulaanbaatar City and Migrants' Vulnerability. IOM (2021c).

The Government of the Republic of Korea has taken an active role in diffusion of internal migration in the country to reduce concentration in cities like Seoul | © IOM 2017/Muse MOHAMMED

3.5.2 DISCUSSION

Internal migration is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. Available data from several high-income, highly urbanized countries in the Pacific and East Asia as well as India, with potentially the world's second highest number of internal migrants, have reflected an intriguing trend – that these countries' most urbanized cities were losing out in terms of net internal migration in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic is undoubtedly one trigger of this phenomenon, including its effects on unemployment, teleworking as a rising mode of work, and mobility restrictions with the aim to contain the spread of the virus – which have been particularly stringent in many cities with large population concentrations. However, the pandemic might be only one of the causes and disruptors in these trends, bringing attention to an ongoing paradigm shift driven by underlying factors such as changing demographics, the degree of urbanization and saturation in urban agglomerations, national development and economic diversification policies, and the trend and scale of international migration. Whether the current situation signals just a temporary phenomenon or a more permanent trend still needs to be confirmed in the coming years, particularly with post-COVID-19 evidence.

Because of the deficit of timely and readily available information, a better understanding of the trends, patterns and drivers of internal migration will facilitate developing policies to promote the welfare of internal migrants as well as national development. Obtaining such understanding will heavily depend on the strengthening of national statistical systems for the collection, harmonization, analysis and dissemination of these data, including improvements in measuring unregistered, seasonal and/or circular internal migrants. Meanwhile, given rising interest in newer types of data to measure migration, such as “digital trace” data (for example from mobile phones or credit card data); (see [Section 6.1](#)), new avenues of measuring internal migration can be explored. Last greater harmonization of national practices in the collection of internal migration data is needed, so that meaningful cross-national comparisons can be made ([Bell and Charles-Edwards, 2014](#)). These efforts to improve data collection on internal migration and urbanization are fundamental to enable better monitoring of countries' progress in [SDG Target 11.3 – By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.](#)



Seoul, officially the Seoul Special Metropolitan City, is the capital and largest metropolis of the Republic of Korea | © IOM 2017/Muse MOHAMMED

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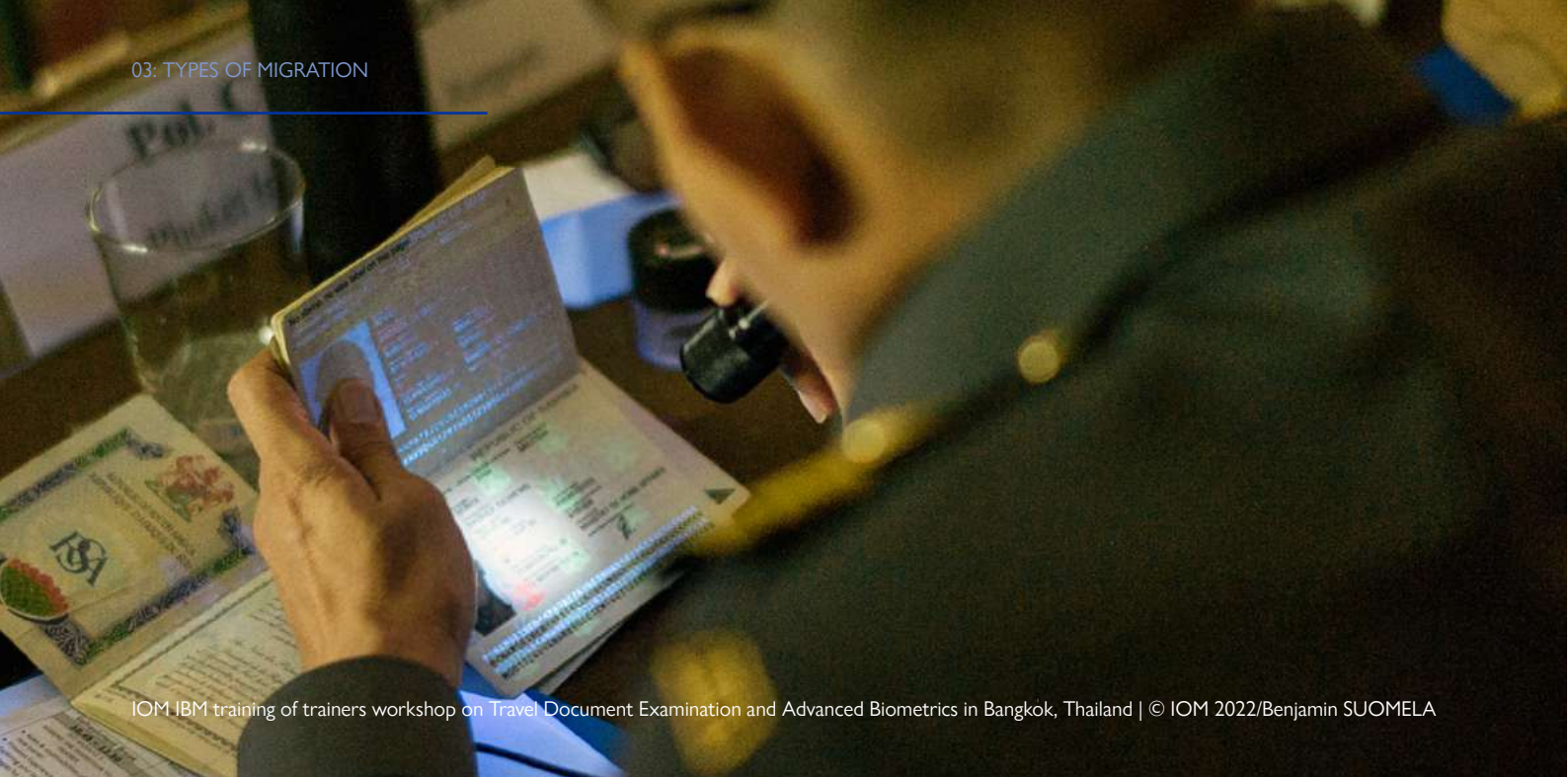
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Due to internal migration, almost half of the population of Mongolia lives in Ulaanbaatar, leading to many challenges in the city and leaving rural Mongolia deserted | © IOM 2021/B. BYAMBAOCHIR



IOM-IBM training of trainers workshop on Travel Document Examination and Advanced Biometrics in Bangkok, Thailand | © IOM 2022/Benjamin SUOMELA

3.6 IRREGULAR MIGRATION

IOM defines irregular migration as any “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” (IOM, 2019, p.116). Following that definition, a migrant in an irregular situation is any person who “moves or has moved across an international border and is not authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party” (*ibid.*).

As the COVID-19 pandemic lengthened into 2021, movement restrictions lengthened as well. Policy responses often intended to limit the effects of the pandemic continued to have multiple effects on migration in the Asia–Pacific region in 2021. For example, medical paperwork relating to COVID-19 was increasingly required for regular travel, a sign of opening borders that nevertheless introduced new restrictions. New restrictions of these and other kinds shaped migration as people sought paths through and around them. In addition, crises other than the pandemic striking the region in 2021 created desperation that, coupled with restrictions on regular migration, led many to choose irregular routes out of their home countries.

Irregular status is fluid and complex. A migrant can enter a country irregularly and become regularized or have regular status and lose it. Irregular status is driven by circumstances that vary widely from gaps in asylum law that leave asylum seekers without documentation to the complexity and high cost of obtaining documentation allowing regular labour mobility. Irregular migrants face a unique set of challenges. Irregular status is also particularly difficult to report on, particularly given its fluidity, clandestine nature and complexity. Indirect estimates of the number of migrants in irregular situations in the Asia–Pacific region are scattered and inaccurate, revealing a limitation in available data. Irregular migration is discussed elsewhere in this report, given its variable and diverse nature. For example, labour migration and its complicated bureaucratic hurdles can leave migrants confused and unable to find a path to regularization as mentioned in [Section 3.1](#). This section focuses on areas of irregular migration for which there are reports available: the falsification of travel documents and migrant smuggling. It also includes an indicative sample of stories of migrant arrest and detention in the Asia–Pacific region, as a response to irregular migration patterns.

3.6.1 DOCUMENT FALSIFICATION

IOM's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific's Verifier Travel Document and Bearer (TD&B) monitored travel document falsification in airports and land border crossing points spanning 19 countries in 2021 throughout fluctuating travel restrictions at workstations. The TD&B is an automated stand-alone system that aims to detect fraudulent travel documents and imposters and to collect disaggregated data for national and regional trends analysis (IOM, 2021d).

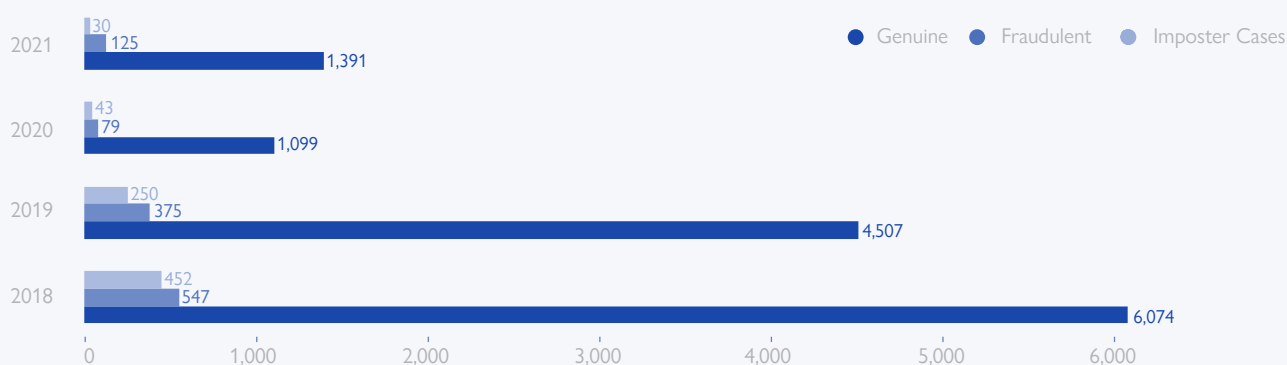
Data from IOM TD&B verifying stations show an emerging trend of falsifying health documents in early 2021, as health passes showing negative COVID-19 test results or vaccination information were required for entry into several countries (IOM, 2021b, p.3), (Figure 58). Between January and October 2021, 229 medical documentation fraud cases were reported to the Document Examination Support Centre (IOM, 2022,

p.6) – 169 of the reported cases involved fraudulent travel documents and 60 cases involved fraudulent identities (ibid.).

Regarding customary travel documents, TD&B data revealed a downward trend in imposter cases and upward trend in fraudulent document usage, including forged passports and residence cards (ibid., p.8). Both trends were continuing from 2018, before the pandemic, creating a gap that widened through 2020 and 2021 (ibid.).

The year 2021 saw a slight increase over 2020 in total passport checks that were recorded in IOM's TD&B. There was an increase in cases of attempted misuse of travel documents recorded in the border crossing points of the 19 countries in the Asia-Pacific region using TD&B verifier systems, up to 155 (ibid., p.7). Of those 155, 125 were cases of fraudulent documents and 30 were imposter cases (ibid.).

FIGURE 58: NUMBER OF PASSPORT CHECKS FROM VERIFIER AND TD&B BY RESULT



Source: Verifier TD&B Newsletter January 2022. IOM Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

3.6.2 MIGRANT SMUGGLING

3.6.2.1 DRIVERS OF USE

Worries in 2020 that the COVID-19 pandemic would cut off regular means of migration were borne out in 2021. The pandemic restrictions sometimes left risky mobility options, including those offered by migrant smugglers or human traffickers, as the only way in or out of countries in the Asia-Pacific region (McAdam, 2020, p.10). The

pandemic also increased poverty in the Asia-Pacific region, generally increasing the economic difficulties of many people in their home countries.⁶⁸ Those who were prone to seek opportunities abroad were faced with added need to do so but were blocked from travelling by new difficulties in regular migration routes.

68. World Economic Forum, "Has COVID-19 stopped Asia-Pacific from reaching its global development goals? Experts explain", 25 August 2021.

Conflict provided another driver that had substantial consequences in 2021. Myanmar underwent a military takeover in February and saw continued violence throughout the year. Afghanistan's complex humanitarian crisis was compounded by a government transition in August that worsened an earlier spike in violence. These and other crises in the region created strong drivers to migrate despite the risk of detention or dangers *en route* that irregular status might entail. In the case of Afghanistan, the *de facto* government that took power in August 2021 tried to keep migrants from leaving by stopping evacuations and not issuing travel documents (Loft, 2021, p.6).⁶⁹ With strong drivers to migrate, such as conflict, coupled with government restrictions on departure from the country, irregularity along some part of the exit route is much more likely to occur.

3.6.2.2 COSTS AND RISKS

Migrants resort to smuggling when the costs of and barriers to other forms of migration are higher in comparison – meaning that smuggling is tied closely to the socioeconomic situation of the region under consideration (UNESCAP, 2020, p.9). Due to the pandemic's restrictions, migrant smuggling became more difficult in some areas in the Asia–Pacific region, and in response the price charged by smugglers of migrants increased (IOM, 2021a). In an ordinary year, paying a smuggler can be less expensive than paying the cost of visas and regularly documented travel (UNESCAP, 2020, p.53) and also offer the only possibility to travel when chances to obtain a visa or official travel document are low. During pandemic, although smuggling might be more expensive, the alternative might no longer exist.

Global border restrictions and closures in 2020 and 2021 reduced opportunities for irregular migration through official border crossings such as international airports. Transnational criminal organizations that profited from irregular migration – including smuggling networks and document forgery rings – operated in a passive manner, taking advantage of migrant vulnerabilities (IOM, 2021a). As countries started resuming border operations in the beginning of 2021, smugglers and facilitators of irregular migration began to promote their services more actively (*ibid.*).

Complicit authorities added to the issue of smuggling in the Asia–Pacific region. Smuggling networks into Thailand were possibly supported by complicit police, military and other local authorities (US Department of State, 2021). For example, corrupt immigration officials have allegedly been shown accepting bribes from smugglers at Thai borders (*ibid.*).

The risks increased as well, with records showing higher rates of coercion into payment schemes, sexual and labour exploitation and heightened risk of pressure to engage in human and drug smuggling (IOM, 2021a). Although the dangers encountered during smuggling are different in every case, their risk is shared by migrants across the region. Cases in 2021 highlighted high costs and significant danger, sometimes exacerbated by pandemic conditions. A November 2021 case in Thailand resulted in the deaths of three migrants after the smuggling truck carrying them overturned and the driver left them in a plantation without calling an ambulance to treat the injured.⁷⁰ The three deceased were part of a larger group of 23 from Myanmar who had paid to be smuggled into Thailand, where they hoped to find work.⁷¹ Migrant workers regularly pay high fees to brokers and smugglers before and after they arrive in Thailand, which can result in coercion, debt and lasting harms (US Department of State, 2021).

69. Forbes, "Taliban Tells Afghans: You Can't Leave Anymore", 24 August 2021.

70. The Bangkok Post, "Three dead migrants dumped in plantation after accident", 6 November 2021.

71. *Ibid.*

COUNTRY SNAPSHOT: AFGHANISTAN

Irregular migration status is fluid and can change for individual migrants and for migrant groups. One group that is uniquely affected by fluid migration status is that of refugees and asylum seekers. Migrants in need of asylum might leave their countries of origin through irregular corridors and enter neighbouring and third countries without regular documentation. Depending on the context, these migrants might be regularized quickly as refugees or live for extended periods in an irregular status, awaiting case-by-case decisions.

Given the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and political turmoil surrounding a change in government in the country (see [Section 4.1.2.1](#)), many Afghan migrants in 2021 found themselves in this dichotomous situation. The use of irregular routes of migration from the country continued, and in some cases increased, but that did not mean that migrants who took these routes were considered irregular in their host countries. This snapshot discusses irregular migration methods including smuggling.

In August 2021, as international troops withdrew from Afghanistan, the country underwent a violent transition of power. UNHCR reported that most Afghans could not leave the country through regular channels ([UNHCR, 2021b](#)). The Islamic Republic of Iran closed all but three of its border crossings with Afghanistan ([UNHCR, 2021a, p.2](#)). Pakistan closed one of its largest border crossings for three weeks following the take-over and restricted entry at others ([Loft, 2021, p.6](#)). In addition to border controls, between August and October 2021 the de facto government did not issue passports to Afghan citizens, complicating their ability to migrate regularly (*ibid.*). The de facto government also asked the United States of America to halt the evacuation of Afghans and barred Afghans from reaching Kabul's airport.⁷²

Lack of access to regular migration routes combined with heightened displacement led to an increased reliance on smugglers, which in turn increased the cost of smuggling and the number of protection risks that Afghan migrants were exposed to.⁷³ Reports of the use of smugglers to cross Pakistan's borders emerged within weeks of the government transition.⁷⁴ Although no complete data exists on the number of irregular migrants from Afghanistan, there are some hints as to its frequency. For example, the Mixed Migration Centre found in one survey covering 2019 to 2021 that 55 per cent of Afghan migrants in Türkiye lacked documentation ([Mixed Migration Centre, 2021, p.1](#)).⁷⁵

Irregular migrants from Afghanistan largely travelled through two routes: the "Raja/ Mashkil route" that crosses into Pakistan and the "Zabul route" that links the border of Nimruz Province with the Islamic Republic of Iran (*ibid.*, [2021, p.2](#)). Among irregular routes chosen over the past two years, a shifting tendency has been noted toward the shorter Zabul route and away from established smuggling paths including the Mashkil and Raja routes through Pakistan and into the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁷⁶ Although it is shorter, the newly favoured Zabul route

72. *Ibid.*

73. Mixed Migration Centre, "The Impact of the Afghanistan Crisis on Migration", 18 October 2021.

74. The Guardian, "Unprecedented' numbers crossing from Afghanistan to Pakistan", 27 August 2021.

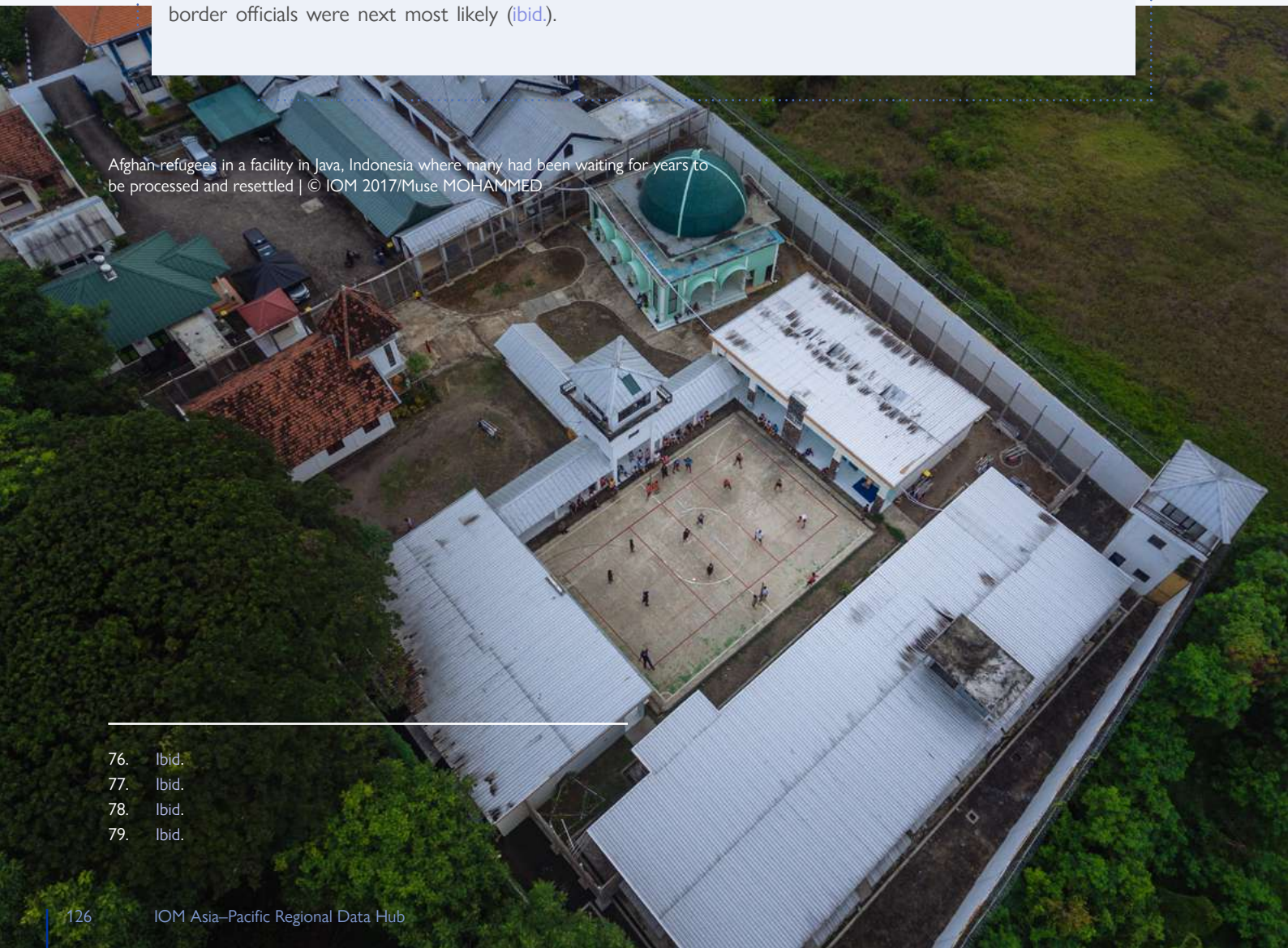
75. The Mixed Migration Centre interviewed Afghan migrants in Türkiye between 19 August 19 and 31 September 2021 on their migration experiences over the preceding two years.

is more difficult and dangerous for migrants as it requires climbing or tunnelling under border walls.⁷⁷ Therefore, smuggling routes out of Afghanistan have come to prefer speed over safety – demanding greater risk.

The risks incurred from irregular migration were clear to migrants. One Afghan migrant interviewed by the Mixed Migration Centre shared his perception that the route to Türkiye via the Islamic Republic of Iran could result in death by freezing if would-be migrants travelled in winter (*ibid.*, 2021, p.3). Many deaths of Afghan migrants were recorded in transit, as discussed in [Section 4.2](#).

Nevertheless, hazardous conditions was only the fifth most cited risk of migration according to the late-2021 Mixed Migration Centre survey (*ibid.*). The three risks faced *en route* that were most cited by Afghan migrants in Türkiye were physical violence, detention and death (*ibid.*). Women were more likely than men to reference kidnapping and sexual violence as potential risks and they cited careful planning, including research and stopping in places with trusted contacts as protective measures to avoid those risks while travelling (*ibid.*).

In addition, Afghan migrants experienced heightened and sometimes violent xenophobia and anti-refugee sentiments in neighbouring countries following the government transition in Afghanistan in August 2021.⁷⁸ Other increased protection risks as they travelled included extortion at border crossings, as some sought to take advantage of migrants in desperate situations.⁷⁹ According to migrants, smugglers were the most common perpetrators of violence, robbery, extortion and other protection incidents *en route*, while immigration and border officials were next most likely (*ibid.*).



Afghan-refugees in a facility in Java, Indonesia where many had been waiting for years to be processed and resettled | © IOM 2017/Muse MOHAMMED

76. *Ibid.*

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*

3.6.3 ARREST AND DETENTION OF MIGRANTS

The most challenging aspect of gathering information on irregular migration is that by nature it is not meant to be detected, measured and recorded. If successful, falsifying documents, smuggling or simply slipping across a border will not be found out and reported. Therefore, reports of irregular migration often come in the form of numbers on arrests and detention. Those reports are scattered and incomplete, but they serve as an illustration of some methods of irregular migration in the Asia-Pacific region, and reveal the treatment that migrants receive when they are detained. For example, migrants who were forced to leave their countries of origin such as refugees and asylum seekers might be considered irregular migrants by the courts or policing procedures of their host countries, leaving them open to detention and deportation despite their status as protected persons internationally. The following are only a few examples of hundreds of cases of migrant arrest and detention in the region in 2021:

- Nearly 400 Rohingya refugees were sent to a refugee camp in Lhokseumawe, Indonesia between June and September 2020.⁸⁰ Only 112 remained on 30 January, 2021, when it was reported that the other approximately 300 refugees were missing.⁸¹ Authorities believed them to have been *en route* to Malaysia after having engaged the help of smugglers to leave the camp.⁸²
- Malaysia intercepted a boat carrying 30 Rohingya and Indonesian migrants – 17 Rohingya women, seven men and seven children and five Indonesian women – in February 2021 that had left a refugee camp in Indonesia (possibly Lhokseumawe) in January.⁸³ Twenty-one of the migrants were arrested for entering Malaysia without valid documents and two others were arrested on charges related to trafficking.⁸⁴
- In March 2021, 155 Rohingya refugees living in Jammu and Kashmir, India were sent to a detention centre due to their lack of official visas and documentation.⁸⁵ Officials planned to document the detained Rohingya's biometrics and nationalities before deporting them for illegal entry.⁸⁶
- In March 2021, the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) in Thailand reported that 297 migrants detained in Suan Phlu and Bang Khen detention centres tested positive for COVID-19.⁸⁷ The two centres held 1,615 migrants, many from Myanmar, Viet Nam and Cambodia.⁸⁸ The Immigration Bureau Commissioner acknowledged that crowded conditions in the centres contributed to rising infections among the migrants held there.⁸⁹ Thai authorities also reported an increase in COVID-19 cases in immigration detention centres to IOM on 22 September 2021 (IOM, 2021c, p.4).
- On 12 September 2021, six migrants were detained after crossing the border into Thailand without documentation. The migrants, five men and one woman, had paid upwards of 18,000 baht (550 USD) to brokers to secure employment in Thailand.⁹⁰

80. The Star, "Hundreds of Rohingya missing from Indonesian refugee camp", 30 January 2021.

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*

83. Reuters, "Over 30 Rohingya caught arriving in Malaysia by boat in January: police", 7 February 2021.

84. *Ibid.*

85. Hindustan Times, "155 Rohingyas sent to 'holding' centre in Jammu as admin starts verification", 7 March, 2021.

86. *Ibid.*

87. The Bangkok Post, "297 migrant detainees test positive for Covid", 23 March 2021.

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*

90. UCA News, "No let up in Thai crackdown on Myanmar migrants", 13 September 2021.

- News outlets in Thailand reported a surge in migrants arriving without documents in November 2021 – stating that 2,800 migrants were found crossing Thai borders irregularly in the week following their 1 November re-opening.⁹¹ A government spokesman said that the Prime Minister was “highly concerned” by the attempts of migrants without documents to access the labour market in Thailand.⁹²
- Officials in Thailand were reported to have increased border control operations as higher numbers of undocumented migrant workers entered the country from Myanmar in November 2021.⁹³ On 6 November, 62 migrants from Myanmar who had paid smugglers to help them enter the country and find work were arrested in the Sai Yok and Muang districts of Kanchanaburi, Thailand.⁹⁴
- In February 2021, the Kuala Lumpur High Court granted nearly 1,200 detained migrants from Myanmar an extension on their deportation, given concerns over their treatment should they return to their country of origin.⁹⁵ The day that the stay ran out, 23 February, 1,086 migrants were deported.⁹⁶ The Director General of Malaysia’s immigration department, Kairul Dzamee Daud, said that the return was voluntary.⁹⁷ At least 12 of the returned migrants were children.⁹⁸
- Indonesia prepared to receive some 7,200 migrants deported from Malaysia in June 2021.⁹⁹ The Indonesian returnees were among thousands of others detained as Malaysia increased the number of arrests of migrants living and working in the country without regular documents.¹⁰⁰

COUNTRY SNAPSHOT: DETENTION IN AUSTRALIA

There were 1,489 migrants in Australian onshore detention as of 31 December 2021 – including Alternative Places of Detention, Immigration Detention Centres and Immigration Transit Accommodation ([Department of Home Affairs of Australia, 2021, p.4](#)). Of these 1,200, some having been detained for several years, having arrived in Australia regularly but their visas had expired or were revoked ([ibid., p.7](#)).

Fewer than five children were reported in all forms of onshore detention ([ibid., p.10](#)). Among detained migrants, the three most common countries of origin were New Zealand (275), the Islamic Republic of Iran (142) and Viet Nam (132); ([ibid., p.9](#)).

A further 563 migrants who had entered the country irregularly were living in the community while awaiting residence determination ([ibid.](#)). Of those waiting, 28.6 per cent had been under residence determination for five years or more – leaving migrants uncertain of their status for an extended period of time ([ibid., p.12](#)).

91. The Bangkok Post, “Govt weighs migrant entry dilemma”, 9 November 2021.

92. [Ibid.](#)

93. [Ibid.](#)

94. [Ibid.](#)

95. Al Jazeera Media Network, “Malaysia deports 1,086 Myanmar nationals despite court order”, 23 February 2021.

96. [Ibid.](#)

97. [Ibid.](#)

98. [Ibid.](#)

99. [Ibid.](#)

100. [Ibid.](#)

By December 2021, the Australian Department of Home Affairs classified a total of 11,279 migrants holding bridging visas as having entered the country via “illegal marine arrival” (*ibid.*). Marine arrivals continued to be a driving concern in detention policy in Australia following a July 2013 decision by then-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd not to allow any asylum seekers arriving by boat to settle in Australia permanently.¹⁰¹ Rather than detaining higher numbers of migrants onshore, and in the face of obstacles to forcible return, Australia determined to send migrants offshore to regional processing arrangements in Papua New Guinea.¹⁰²

Some detained migrants were moved from offshore detention to hotels on the mainland for medical reasons, including psychological health concerns. In January 2021, 45 men were released from detention in hotels in Melbourne, Australia.¹⁰³ Some of the men had made their way to Australia seeking refugee status but were detained because they did not have visas.¹⁰⁴ Their detention lasted as many as eight years in one man’s case, first in offshore detention and then in the migrant hotels on the mainland where they were brought for medical care.¹⁰⁵ Advocates stated that there were 140 more medical evacuees from offshore migrant detention facilities held in Australia in January 2021.¹⁰⁶

According to 2021 data from the Department of Home Affairs, as of 31 August there were 228 detained migrants remaining in a regional processing country: 121 in Papua New Guinea and 107 in Nauru (*LCAC, 2021, p.2*). On 6 October 2021, Australia announced that it would process asylum seekers on the island of Nauru instead of Papua New Guinea, beginning in 2022. The Australian Minister for Home Affairs announced in a press release that “(a)nyone who attempts to enter Australia illegally by boat will be returned or sent to Nauru.”¹⁰⁷ Rather than ending the practice of offshore detention, Australia shifted the location of detention sites.

This closed informal border point in Poitpet used to be a common crossing point for Cambodians into Thailand by using a nearby boat to cross the small river into Thailand | © IOM 2016/Muse MOHAMMED

101. The Guardian, “Kevin Rudd’s statement on sending all boat asylum seekers to PNG – full text”, 19 July 2013.

102. The New York Times, “Australia to Shift All Offshore Processing of Migrants to Island Nation of Nauru”, 6 October 2021.

103. The Brisbane Times, “‘We are out now’: More refugees released from hotel detention in Melbourne”, 21 January 2021.

104. *Ibid.*

105. *Ibid.*

106. *Ibid.*

107. Hon. Karen Andrews MP, Joint media release with the Hon. Westly Nukundj MP – Finalisation of the Regional Resettlement Arrangement, *Ministers, Home Affairs*, 6 October 2021.

3.6.4 DISCUSSION

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to shape irregular migration in 2021. Borders started being gradually or partially opened as the year went on, but not evenly and often with restrictions. Economic needs and crises continued to act as migration drivers, but as regular routes were made more difficult to travel, there was added impetus to migrate irregularly. Given the lack of complete and reliable data on the subject, whether there was an increase in irregular migration in 2021 in the Asia–Pacific region is unclear. However, irregular routes and migration behaviours clearly shifted through the year in response to a changing context, whether by way of smugglers working less passively or by Afghan migrants travelling more dangerous routes.

That lack of reliable data is of serious concern in any attempt to provide informed humanitarian aid or to create well-informed policies in the region of Asia and the Pacific. There is currently no centralized data source to provide information on irregular migration, whether on irregular entry, irregular residence, or irregular employment. Improved national data collection is an important step in closing the information gap on irregular 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, intergovernmental data sharing and cooperation is essential to a region-wide understanding of the issue. Improved cooperation on information exchange would aid risk assessment and border control, with the possibility to rely on initiatives such as support in countering document and identity fraud offered by the Document Examination Support Centre run by IOM's Immigration and Border Management Unit in the Asia–Pacific Regional Office, as well as on second-line border control performed by Verifier TD&B. Similar and more widespread programmes in information-sharing and regional trend analysis related to document and identity fraud are necessary to curb irregular migration. Improved coordination among and between governments and the international community would also 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**.

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04

A young child with dark skin and hair, wearing a yellow and white patterned tank top and yellow shorts, is sitting on the ground in front of a makeshift shelter. The shelter is constructed from a complex lattice of bamboo poles and is partially covered with a white plastic sheet. The ground is sandy and uneven. The overall scene suggests a temporary or informal living arrangement.

MIGRATION AND VULNERABILITIES



As a community advocate in Cox's Bazar, this man is seen as a well-respected community member who disseminates valuable information to his neighbours | © IOM 2021



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

4.1 EMERGENCIES

4.1.1 VULNERABILITIES RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

More than 100 million cases of COVID-19 have been recorded in the Asia–Pacific region since the beginning of the pandemic. As a result, at least one million deaths were recorded during 2020 and 2021 (WHO, 2022). Two years after the novel coronavirus began to spread, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to shape migration and migrant lives.

Migrants around the globe face increased humanitarian challenges due to barriers erected in response to COVID-19 and those in the Asia–Pacific region are no exception. The pandemic exacerbates existing inequalities and creates new challenges for migrants already in difficult circumstances. Many were already vulnerable to shocks because of limited resources or unstable conditions and face greater vulnerability because of limited knowledge, a lack of access to health care including vaccines, social stigma, or simply a loss of access

to the mobility that sustains them. Migrants in irregular situations also face the threat of being deported if they access health-care from facilities that are required to disclose their status to authorities.

COVID-19 damages physical health first and most obviously, but the pandemic's detrimental effects spread into mental health, social cohesion, long-term economic well-being and beyond. The following section will discuss the consequences that the pandemic has had on migrants' lives. It will begin with health and well-being – which are clearly threatened by the pandemic. This section will discuss food insecurity and access to support programmes, before providing an overview of migrants' employment under the pandemic; it will conclude with a note on the social repercussions of COVID-19 among migrants in the region.



4.1.1.1 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

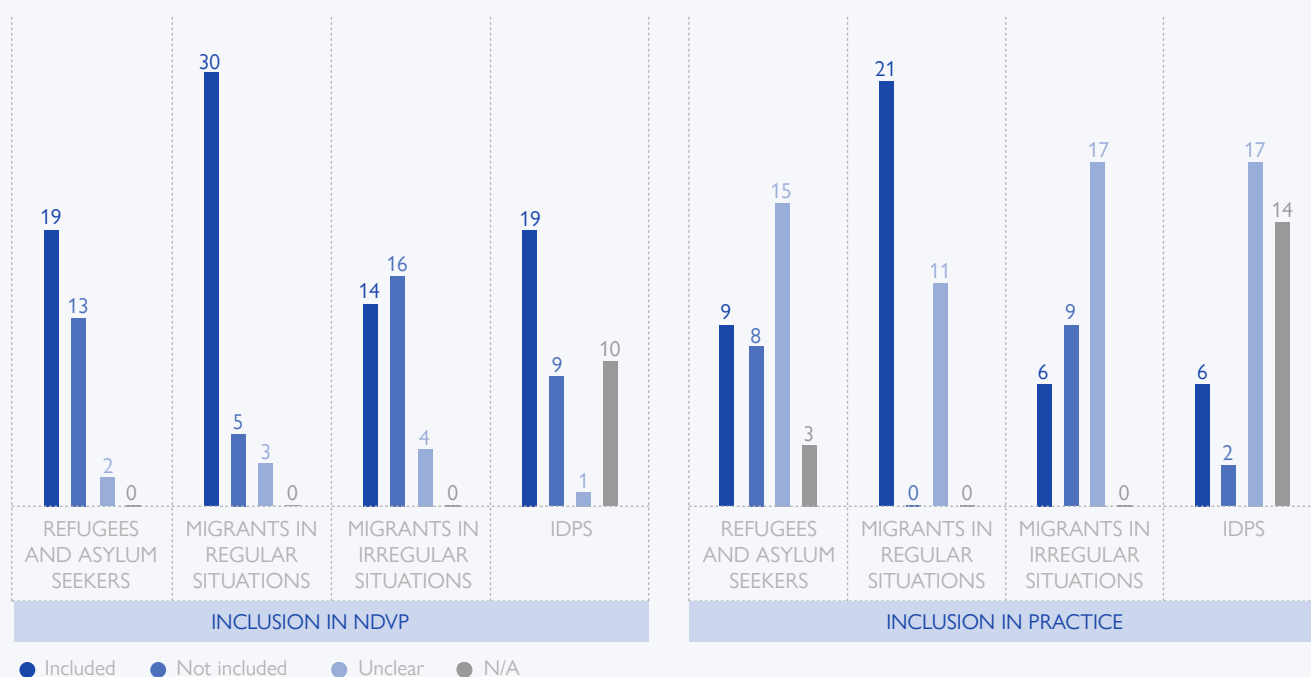
MIGRANT INCLUSION IN VACCINATION PROGRAMMES

Worldwide, in May 2021, IOM identified 53 countries where either regulation or the reality of conditions on the ground deny the most vulnerable populations access to the vaccine (IOM, 2021g). The most basic requirement that barred migrants, particularly migrants without documents and refugees, from accessing the vaccine was any regulation that demanded a national ID, residence permit, or national health scheme before the vaccine could be administered. This sort of regulation was noted in 40 countries across the globe (ibid.).

Migrant inclusion in COVID-19 vaccination programmes in Asia and the Pacific varied considerably from country to

country and were contingent upon categories of migrants. A gap formed between official policy positions and realities for migrants in de facto access to COVID-19 vaccines. As of May 2021, IOM reported that across the Asia–Pacific region between 14 and 30 (depending on migrant category) out of 36 countries had included migrants in their national deployment and vaccination plans. However, in practice in almost half (11–17 out of 36 countries, depending on migrant category) of these countries migrants were not yet reached with COVID-19 vaccines (ibid.).

FIGURE 59: PLAN VERSUS PRACTICE IN VACCINE ACCESS FOR MIGRANTS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



Note: The graph compares vaccine access for migrants as stated on National Deployment and Vaccination Plans – based on WHO analysis, where available or IOM analysis – against observations made by IOM regarding access in practice. The analysis includes 36 countries and lacks information on three countries.

Source: *Migrant Inclusion in COVID-19 Vaccination Campaigns as of May 2021*. (IOM, 2021k).

In June 2021, UNHCR noted with concern that there was a shortage of vaccines available in the Asia–Pacific region as a whole, while in April and May alone 38 million cases of COVID-19 were recorded in the region, with half a million deaths in only two months (UNHCR, 2021b). Moreover, asylum seekers and refugees in the region faced barriers in accessing available vaccines (ibid.).

In particular, refugees, migrants confined to their workplaces, and migrants without legal documentation were vulnerable to gaps in the vaccination programmes of their host countries

(Mixed Migration Centre, 2021a, p.8). By April, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, the Maldives, Singapore and Thailand, had each announced that they would vaccinate foreign workers. The Islamic Republic of Iran promised to vaccinate migrants, largely from Afghanistan (ibid.). According to IOM Country Office Review, even five months later in September 2021, only 22 monitored nations in the Asia–Pacific region had included refugees and asylum seekers in their vaccination programmes and only 17 had included internally displaced persons.¹⁰⁸

108. IOM Country Office Review, “Migrant Inclusion in COVID-19 Vaccination Programmes”, 10 September 2021.

Some programmes in the region were more successful as the year went on:

- The first refugees to receive COVID-19 vaccinations in the region were in Nepal, where some 72 refugees received their first doses under the COVAX Facility scheme in March 2021 (UNHCR, 2021a).
- Australia extended its free COVID-19 vaccination programme to all migrants in detention, asylum seekers and refugees who held a visa on 4 February 2021 (Hunt, 2021).
- In a June 2021 IOM DTM survey using information from key informants, migrants living in construction camps in Bangkok's Metropolitan Area were shown to be overwhelmingly willing to take the vaccine. Only 12 per cent were likely to turn it down if it were available to them (IOM, 2021h, p.7). Concerns surrounding the vaccine remained, but were slight, including fear of side effects or adverse drug interactions, belief that it simply was not necessary and lack of information (ibid.).
- India's Kerala State vaccinated 34,000 of 300,000 registered migrant workers by August 2021.¹⁰⁹ The vaccination campaign is a step forward for the inclusion of migrant workers in health schemes in the country. The campaign also provides migrants with an opportunity to continue working and move between states – something that had previously required prohibitively expensive COVID-19 testing.¹¹⁰
- In Afghanistan, a quarter of refugees received two vaccine doses by November 2021, although there were not enough vaccines available to begin vaccinating the remaining refugee population (UNHCR, 2021e, p.1).
- Migrants and refugees in all states in Malaysia were given access to vaccination partway through the year (ibid.).
- Indonesia allowed refugees with UNHCR-issued identity documents to access vaccination from September 2021, so long as 70 per cent of the citizen population of their areas had been vaccinated already. The plan was not implemented equally, with UNHCR reporting several areas where the vaccination rate passed the 70 per cent threshold but refugees were still not approved for vaccination. (ibid., p.2).
- In Bangladesh, 33,386 refugees older than 55 years received vaccines by November, but the roll-out was postponed due to conflicts with the Oral Cholera Vaccine drive (ibid., p.1).
- In refugee camps in Thailand, 12,628 refugees had received at least their first vaccine by November 2021, including 2,495 who were fully vaccinated (ibid.).

Throughout the year, although significant challenges remained, improvement was seen in migrants' inclusion in vaccination programmes and access to COVID-19 vaccines. IOM monitoring reported that by December 2021, only four to 11 of 39 countries in Asia and the Pacific were not yet including certain categories of migrants in vaccination roll out.

IOM Bangladesh's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support unit is delivering key messages in Rohingya camps using cyclists to reach all refugees during increased restrictions on movement during COVID-19 | © IOM 2021/Abdullah AL MASHRIF

109. Al Jazeera, "Indian state brings COVID vaccines to migrant workers' doorstep", 16 August 2021.

110. Ibid.



LIVING CONDITIONS

Given the unique challenges they face, migrants take on risks of contracting the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Migrants are more likely than others to struggle with language barriers in accessing information on protection from the virus. Migrants also face crowded or risky working conditions in sectors in which they are over-represented including factory work, domestic and care work and construction. Another risk unique to migrants is migrant accommodation and detention.

Of prime concern in 2021 were overcrowded migrant detention centres in the region, for example:

- Holding centres at airports in the Philippines caused significant risk to returned migrants through overcrowding that denied them the ability to practise safe distancing measures effectively (IFRC, 2021, p.23).
- Conditions in a migrant detention facility in Tokyo highlighted the risk of enclosed environments for migrants in detention when 39 detained migrants and five staff members tested positive for COVID-19 in February 2021.¹¹¹
- In Thailand, 77 detained migrants tested positive in facilities in Bangkok's Bang Khen and Lak Si districts (Mixed Migration Centre, 2021a, p.6).¹¹²
- In March 2021, it was reported that 13 refugees and asylum seekers tested positive for COVID-19 at Australia's offshore detention facilities in Papua New Guinea. Those who tested positive could not distance from those who tested negative, nor did they receive adequate health care (ASRC, 2021).

The pattern of overcrowding at migrant detention centres in the region is a clear impediment to migrant health and has created conditions in which the virus spreads easily.

The close living quarters and working conditions common among migrant workers are sometimes as risky as detention. In 2020, medical glove manufacturers in Malaysia reported

crowded housing and working conditions that made physical distancing impossible. Similarly, migrant workers in Singapore reported that they were unlikely to be able to maintain a 1-metre distance from others in their worker-provided dormitories (ILO, 2020a, p.9). In addition, 33 per cent of respondents to an ILO survey of ASEAN workers said that they were not provided personal protective equipment (PPE) or hand sanitizer by their employers in their countries of destination (*ibid.*, p.10).

Conditions improved in 2021, when ILO reported that 78.5 per cent of respondents in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand could practice social distancing at work, and about 50 per cent could do so in their housing (*ibid.*, p.3). Nevertheless, the same ILO survey showed that 60 per cent of respondents slept in rooms of less than five square metres and that others lived with as many as ten people in one room, with women almost twice as likely to experience overcrowding (*ibid.*).

For its part, after a year-long review of migrant housing, the Government of Singapore announced a new set of standards for housing, starting in 2022, aiming to improve conditions and reduce the likelihood of residents contracting the virus.¹¹³ The standards include a maximum of 12 people to a dormitory and six people to a shared bathroom – as opposed to the previous 12 to 16 workers per dormitory and no maximum limit on room capacity – as well as a minimum of 4.2 square metres living space per person.¹¹⁴ Singapore also set aside 5,000 beds in centralized facilities to hold migrants recovering from COVID-19, with an additional 6,000 isolation beds in migrant dormitories.¹¹⁵

Meanwhile, refugees face among the most crowded living arrangements in the region, with little choice to self-distance or quarantine. UNHCR noted that the Rohingya at Cox's Bazar reside in the "single largest and most densely populated cluster of refugee camps in the world," which led to 1,188 cases of COVID-19 by May 2021 alone (UNHCR, 2021b). Even in camps smaller than those of Cox's Bazar, camp conditions make effective distancing impossible and the spread of the virus easy.

111. US News, "Japan Finds New COVID-19 Strain, While Immigration Centre Reports Infections", 18 February 2021.

112. Global Detention Project. Thailand Immigration Detention (3 December 2021).

113. The Straits Times, "Larger living spaces, better ventilation among improved standards for new migrant worker dorms", 17 September 2021.

114. *Ibid.*

115. The Straits Times, "Beds set aside for foreign workers with Covid-19, over 97% of dormitory residents fully vaccinated", 21 October 2021.

PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

Beyond any physical health effects, migrants suffered the mental health consequences of the pandemic. The most common in the Asia-Pacific region were an increase in depression, anxiety and stress (Samy et al., 2021, pp. 840–841). The region has a deficit in available mental health services to cope with psychological strain resulting from COVID-19 or stave off a long-term mental health crisis (Mia and Griffiths, 2021). In Bangladesh for example, there are 1.3 psychiatrists for every one million individuals and only two mental health hospitals for its population of over 170 million. Although these numbers are extreme, they are echoed throughout South Asia where the number of mental health facilities do not reach WHO standards (ibid.).

Moreover, migrants suffer additional mental health strains stemming from the combination of their migration status and the pandemic. They might be barred from returning home to see loved ones, fear for their loved ones' health in home

countries with high infection rates, face deportation, or face increased xenophobia and discrimination (Mia and Griffiths, 2020).

During the pandemic, 83 per cent of migrant workers surveyed by ILO in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand reported severe worry, stress, or sadness most often because of worries for their families, their finances and their abilities to return home (ILO, 2021a, p.8). In Australia, 42 per cent of migrant respondents to an International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) survey reported negative mental health impacts (IFRC, 2021, p.24).¹¹⁶ Service providers also noted a spike in suicidal ideation among migrants in 2020 (ibid.). Migrant women were more likely to suffer severe stress or worry (ibid., p.11). These strains began as early news of the virus spread and the first lockdowns and restrictions were put in place and continued into 2021.

4.1.1.2 FOOD INSECURITY

The pandemic deepened poverty in the Asia-Pacific region – through both rises in unemployment and the loss of 8 per cent of work hours – thrusting an estimated 80 million people in the region into extreme poverty.¹¹⁷ Therefore, although access to enough food to sustain a person is a basic right acknowledged in *SDG Goal 2*, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, migrants have had increasing trouble accessing the right to access sufficient food.

An illustrative example from the region is the Mahachai subdistrict of Samut Sakhon, just outside Bangkok, Thailand, which was the epicentre of a COVID-19 outbreak in late 2020 and faced a lockdown in December of that year (IOM, 2021a, p.1). According to IOM DTM data, drawn from interviews with eight key informants representing the migrant community in Mahachai, some 25 per cent of the migrant population were out of work in January 2021 (ibid., p.4). An estimated 7 per cent of migrants living in the subdistrict were believed by key informants to need food assistance in January 2021 (ibid.). The top concern listed for migrants living in Mahachai in January was insufficient access to food and water (ibid., p.5). Although by February, the proportion

of migrants out of work had decreased to only 7 per cent, the proportion who needed food assistance rose to 12 per cent of the total migrant population in the subdistrict (IOM, 2021b, p.4). The estimated proportion of migrants in the Mahachai subdistrict who could not fulfil their basic needs rose from 4 per cent in January to 12 per cent in February 2021 (ibid.). The most cited topics of concern for migrants were economic and financial problems such as insufficient income, unemployment, debt, or worries over job security (ibid., p.5).

Other cases of food insecurity were seen across the region:

- A lockdown on 28 June left an estimated 92 per cent of migrant construction workers living in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area out of work in July 2021 (IOM, 2021h, p.5). Key informants interviewed by IOM DTM also estimated that 55 per cent of migrant workers living in construction camps in the area could not meet their basic needs (ibid.).

116. Between July and December 2020, IFRC undertook surveys of migrants online, by phone, or in person in eight countries globally including two in Asia-Pacific – the Philippines and Australia. These were combined with information from key stakeholders. A total of 405 migrants were surveyed in the Philippines with 24 key informant interviews. A total of 1,949 migrants were surveyed in Australia with 22 key informant interviews.

117. World Economic Forum, “Has COVID-19 stopped Asia-Pacific from reaching its global development goals? Experts explain”, 25 August 2021.

- In Australia, half of migrants surveyed by IFRC reported difficulties obtaining enough food or maintaining housing (IFRC, 2021, p.26). In the Philippines, 9 per cent reported only eating once per day (ibid.).
- In camps in Bangladesh, female-headed households without a male of working age, and households headed by older people or people with disabilities had fewer savings and resources to survive the shocks that COVID-19 delivered the system (ACAPS, 2021, p.4).
- Migrants in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 reported that they had no savings and could not afford basic needs including food (67%), health care (79%), housing (77%) and personal needs (69%); (ILO, 2021a, p.3).
- Only 64 per cent of returnees to Myanmar and the Philippines had enough savings to cover their immediate need for food, only 43 per cent for health care and only 42 per cent for housing (ibid., p.4).
- Online search behaviour in India showed a spike in worries surrounding shelter, food, and employment in 2020 (UN-WOMEN et al., 2021, p.20).

4.1.1.3 ACCESS TO SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

When basic necessities such as food are in short supply, aid is needed – whether in the form of emergency support or access to social security schemes. In 2020, 97 per cent of ASEAN migrant workers who found themselves unemployed in their countries of destination following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic did not have access to social security support (ILO, 2020a, p.1).

Access to social security schemes is often limited or non-existent for migrants regardless of the pandemic; however, a lack of knowledge of what sources of aid were available compounded the problem under COVID-19. For example, in Singapore only 37 per cent of those surveyed by the Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME) had some awareness of the government's COVID-19 support payments for migrant workers (ibid., p.9).

Half of key informants surveyed in IOM's DTM reported that information, education and communication materials on the coronavirus and COVID-19 were being distributed in their camps in June 2021 (IOM, 2021h, p.8). The other half of the migrant construction worker community were therefore left without sufficient information (ibid.). The most needed information was on the vaccine and financial compensation during lockdown (ibid.).

Governments in the region worked to improve access to social security and healthcare support in 2021, for example:

- Migrant workers in Singapore were entitled to government-funded testing and treatment for COVID-19. In Thailand, foreign residents were given protection for health expenses but still faced challenges on the ground, including hospital overcrowding and trouble receiving reimbursements for tests that in turn

led to employers avoiding paying for tests for fear of losing money. Indonesia provided COVID-19-related medical treatment to migrants. In Malaysia, regular migrant workers who paid into social security received tests at no additional cost (ILO, 2021b, p.17).

- Forty-three per cent of migrants surveyed by ILO received some form of government aid in their countries of destination (ibid.).
- IOM's DTM in Thailand surveyed key informants who have knowledge of migrant workers in construction camps in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area in June 2021. Medicines and medical care were of serious concern to the migrants represented – an estimated 52 per cent were in need of medical items and 11 per cent were unable to access medical care (IOM, 2021h, p.6). Barriers to treatment included lack of knowledge of how to obtain care, movement restrictions and a fear of deportation or discrimination (ibid.).

Where medical services were already provided, pandemic-related disruptions to normal care still caused difficulties. A clear example is the camps at Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, where funding was rerouted from regular health care to COVID-related care. The resulting dip in regular health services resulted in a loss of trust among refugees in their medical providers when they could no longer access services that they expected to receive (ACAPS, 2021, p.3). Even when regular medical care provision was restored, many saw virus tracking mechanisms and reporting links between their doctors and authorities as troubling (ibid.).

4.1.1.4 EMPLOYMENT

Travel restrictions in the top labour receiving countries in the Asia-Pacific region continued to limit migrant workers in 2021. As a consequence, remittances to labour exporting countries were threatened and labour shortages spread through sectors that rely on migrant workers in labour receiving countries (Mixed Migration Centre, 2021b, p.5). A case in point is Bangladesh, one of the top exporters of labour in the region, with 8 million of its people living abroad.¹¹⁸ However, since the pandemic, the ability to move and the availability of jobs dependent on such movement have been curtailed. Concurrently, Bangladesh has seen a rise in poverty since the outbreak of COVID-19.¹¹⁹

A rise in poverty among migrants and migrant-reliant groups was seen across the Asia-Pacific region in 2020.¹²⁰ In Australia, in the second half of 2020, 87.5 per cent of migrants surveyed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies reported that they had worsened financial circumstances due to the pandemic (IFRC, 2021, p.25). Similar effects were seen in the Philippines, where 33 per cent of respondents reported losing jobs or businesses as a consequence of the pandemic (*ibid.*). While this figure shows that as many as 67 per cent of migrants could retain work under the pandemic, those who did often saw their hours or wages dip. Half of migrant workers in Thailand and Malaysia received reduced wages in 2021 (ILO, 2021a, p.11).

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment were gendered, affecting men and women differently. Men working in construction and factories in Thailand lost five hours of work per week on average while men in the same fields in Malaysia lost four and in Singapore three (*ibid.*, p.12). By virtue of their overrepresentation in domestic and informal work – sectors that lack robust legal protections – women were more likely than their male counterparts to lose wages even where they maintained their employment and did not lose working hours (*ibid.*, p.11). Women in Malaysia and Thailand lost an hour of work per week on average, while women in Singapore saw their work hours increase although they suffered a concurrent loss of overtime pay (*ibid.*).

ASEAN migrant workers also reported labour abuses related to COVID-19 including terminated contracts, forced labour during lockdown and reduced working days or pay (ILO, 2020a, p.2). The percentage of migrants reporting abuse to ILO doubled from 32 per cent in 2020 to 64 per cent in 2021 (ILO, 2021a, p.4).

- From the beginning of the pandemic into 2021, Nepali migrants' employment declined in the United Arab Emirates and Malaysia by 30 per cent and in Qatar and Saudi Arabia by 20 per cent.¹²¹ Recruitment agencies in Nepal estimated in May 2021 that half a million workers would choose to return home.¹²² Women workers were at a greater risk of abuse (ILO, 2020b).
- As of December 2020, only 42 per cent of returning migrant workers in the Philippines and 19 per cent in Myanmar had found paid work in their home countries (ILO, 2021b, p.11). Economic downturns resulting from COVID-19 continued into 2021, making employment upon return equally unlikely. The Government of Malaysia reported that by September 2021, almost 75,000 migrants returned from China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand during the a wave of COVID-19 that hit between June and September 2021 (ILO, 2021c, p.3). Many returnees could not maintain regular remittances due to economic uncertainty in their countries of destination and returned home to equally difficult conditions. Similarly, the majority of returnees to the Philippines in 2021 were left without regular employment (Kang and Latoja, 2022, p.18).
- Migrant construction workers in Thailand reported being barred from leaving their camps while their building sites were shut down. They were left without sufficient supplies and without financial aid

118. Migration Policy Institute, "COVID-19 Pandemic Profoundly Affects Bangladeshi Workers Abroad with Consequences for Origin Communities", 9 July 2020.

119. Thomson Reuters Foundation, "For Bangladesh's climate migrants, pandemic job cuts fuel 'multiple crises'", 2 October 2021.

120. "Has COVID-19 stopped Asia-Pacific from reaching its global development goals? Experts explain," World Economic Forum, 25 August 2021.

121. The Asia Foundation, "Pandemic Dramatically Alters Path of Migrant Workers", 12 May 2021.

122. *Ibid.*

123. UN Myanmar, "The International Organization for Migration continues to provide essential humanitarian and livelihoods assistance to migrants and migrant communities in need", 1 October 2021.

for two months, during which food became scarce. Additionally, medical treatment provided to stranded workers who were infected with COVID-19 was inadequate.¹²⁴

- Across the Asia–Pacific region, women migrants were more likely than their male counterparts to be employed in caregiving, domestic labour and health care, where they were at heightened risk of contracting COVID-19 (ILO, 2021b, p.16). In general, migrants engaged in gigging work, including restaurant

work and delivery services, were deemed essential workers. They were unable to isolate given the nature of the jobs they performed (*ibid.*).

- News media in the Philippines discussed an increase in abuse of workers overseas and there was a corresponding increase in those workers' internet search queries showing help-seeking behaviours in their host countries (UN-WOMEN et al., 2021, p.21).

4.1.1.5 SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented conditions for migrants such as lockdowns and isolation measures. Migrants lost the ability to travel in many cases, sometimes cutting off their ability to find employment abroad and sometimes their ability to return home to see loved ones. Migrants were also faced with significant triggers of anxiety and stress. They faced new challenges accessing cultural sites and rituals as there were orders to stay home and caps on the number of people allowed in gatherings. All these and other conditions lasted intermittently from 2020 into 2021 and caused ramifications on social life and well-being.

For example, during the pandemic, 30 per cent of stakeholders in Australia reported an increase in domestic violence against migrants accessing services (IFRC, 2021, p.28). Violence against women and girls (VAWG) increased during the pandemic (UNESCAP, 2021, p.11). VAWG is often aggravated by close-living conditions and household insecurity, which have both been common outcomes of the lengthening pandemic (Banerjee, 2021). Lockdowns kept women and girls in close quarters with their family abusers; school closures left girls more vulnerable to child marriages; increases in care work pressured women into unhealthy environments for longer hours; and more time online and in virtual spaces exposed them to cyber-harassment (UNESCAP, 2021). Violence against women also increased due to added stress on perpetrators that caused shifting power balances at home such as loss of employment or wages, as well as negative coping mechanisms among abusers that make their situation more volatile (*ibid.*, p.13).

Abuse against women and girls was not confined to the home during the pandemic. A study conducted by UN-WOMEN et al. (2021) analysed big data of internet browsing and posts on

the topic of violence against women and girls coming from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore. The report found a rise in chatter on the subject under COVID-19, although migrants' specific vulnerabilities were not afforded much attention (UN-WOMEN et al., 2021, p.5, p.20).

In the specific case of migrants, ACAPS reported increased gender-based violence and child protection issues as humanitarian workers and protection systems withdrew from migrant camps. In Cox's Bazar, Rohingya community members' trust in humanitarian systems, much of which was lost in the perceived abandonment of 2020, was risked again in 2021 as services were lost with little explanation of why (ACAPS, 2021, p.2). The loss of trust reflects a persistent rumour in the camps in 2020 that said that any person who entered a clinic and tested positive for the virus would be killed to stop its spread (IOM, 2020, p.1).

Children, especially female children, also saw heightened vulnerability due to the pandemic in the form of educational losses. For example, during Bangladesh's second lockdown in May 2021, Temporary Learning Centres and Madrasas in refugee camps were closed, cutting off refugee children's access to education. The loss of education was not reflected in the host community, whose schools adapted and continued to provide learning opportunities (REACH, 2021). That disparity magnified educational inequalities both between the general population and the populations of the camps, and between communities within the camps. Male students from high-insecurity households and female students were less likely to consider returning to the learning centres when they opened (ACAPS, 2021, p.4).

124. The Bangkok Post, "Migrant workers 'left high and dry'", 30 August 2021.

4.1.1.6 DISCUSSION

Migrants are overrepresented in the groups that are hit hardest by the pandemic but are often excluded from policies intended to ameliorate the situation (IFRC, 2021, p.32). That fact runs counter to international guidelines including the Global Compact for Migration and the Sustainable Development Goals. Noting that among migrants, some groups were more affected than others, is equally important. Men, women, children, people in challenging socioeconomic situations and persons with disabilities were confronted with their own sets of difficulties and had differential access to relief.

In 2021, the pandemic lingered in the Asia-Pacific region, which meant that recovery efforts were happening even as the crisis continued. Some areas experienced improvement since 2020, such as inclusion of migrants in social security schemes following [Target 1.3 of the SDG](#), which is a call to [implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and to achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable \(including migrants\) by 2030](#). Some areas remained stagnant, including conditions in detention

centres and access to mental health services. Still other areas worsened as the duration of the pandemic compounded problems such as poverty and violence against women.

Increasing and systematic inclusion of migrants in all areas of COVID-19 response and recovery will be essential not only for their health and well-being, but also for the recovery of the region. Migrants' essential labour, including their important part in the care sector, are key to economic and health recovery. Equally, the remittances that migrants send are crucial to their communities and home countries – meaning that as migrants are included in health and support schemes and allowed to work in ethical conditions, economic and social recovery will gain speed.

Upheaval marked 2021 in the Asia-Pacific region. Regardless, the rights of migrants deserve protection and require improvement both in law and in practice. Finally, it is important to note that the human rights and inherent rights of migrants cannot be allowed to be curtailed, regardless of pandemic conditions.



IOM's Migration Health unit has served over 700,000 Afghans since the beginning of 2020 with basic health services | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED

4.1.2 VULNERABILITIES RELATED TO FORCED DISPLACEMENT

4.1.2.1 AFGHANISTAN'S HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

In 2021, conflict, drought, economic decline and the COVID-19 pandemic converged and deepened existing insecurities in Afghanistan for the population. The complex humanitarian crisis that the country faced evolved over the year to become more severe, affect more people and worsen related issues including displacement, health and the status of women and girls.

The INFORM Severity Index – built by partners including the European Commission, UNOCHA, ACAPS and others – combines indicators to measure the severity of humanitarian crises against a common scale. INFORM counted 6.41 million people in need in Afghanistan's complex crisis in January 2020 (DRMKC, 2022). Over the span of a year, the number of people in need nearly tripled to 18.4 million in January 2021 (*ibid.*). While 2021 began with grave challenges, further difficulties brought the tally to 24.4 million people in need as of January 2022 (*ibid.*).

The complex humanitarian crisis was deepened by many challenges that affected more than population movements. Education is one of the most affected areas by these multi-layered crises. For one year between June 2020 and July 2021, prolonged school closures led to learning losses for millions of children (UNICEF, 2021b, pp.5–6). The third and most severe wave of COVID-19 infections took place between May and July 2021, during which cases peaked at 2,000 in one day. During this third wave, schools closed and other movement restrictions were put in place in Afghanistan (*ibid.*, p.2). Another area severely affected by the complex crisis was health. Many health-care facilities were only partly operational or could not function at all, medicines were in short supply and many health-care workers had not been paid for months; the health-care system remained severely under-resourced even as waterborne diseases rose and COVID-19 continued to spread (IOM, 2022, p.5). Private wealth and income were also affected whereby at the end of 2021, 72 per cent of the population of Afghanistan was living in poverty and the country was at risk of developmental collapse that could plunge its population into universal poverty in 2022 (UNHCR, 2022a, p.6).

One of the most significant events that compounded the existing crisis was the government transition in August 2021, which took place two weeks before international troops were fully withdrawn from Afghanistan.¹²⁵ Thousands flooded the Kabul airport on 16 August 2021, desperate to leave the country, while at least seven people died from the chaos of attempting to flee.¹²⁶ An additional 183 people, including migrants and their families, as well as soldiers, were killed in an Islamic State – Khorasan Province – bombing outside the Kabul airport on 27 August 2021, when a suicide bomber detonated an explosive device in a crowd of travellers.¹²⁷

Between 21 and 31 August 2021, UNICEF identified 163 children in the Kabul airport who were unaccompanied or separated, and assisted them in evacuation or reunification with their families (UNICEF, 2021a, p.3). Additional unaccompanied Afghan minors were assisted by UNICEF in German and Qatari airports (*ibid.*, p.3). These numbers showed both the early stages of a country-wide spike in out-migration and internal displacement, as well as the effect the spike had on the most vulnerable groups.

Conflict was already on the rise prior to the August take-over, with UNHCR reporting that the highest number of conflict-related casualties ever recorded was reached in 2021 before August (UNHCR, 2022a, p.5). The government transition caused a deterioration in the human rights situation in Afghanistan, which was already precarious (HRW, 2022).

Women's movement and ability to participate in social or political life were curtailed immediately following the government transition in August 2021 (UNICEF, 2021b, p.6). The de facto government banned female humanitarian workers in parts of Afghanistan, which is likely to impair health care and aid efforts in the long term (HRW, 2022). By December 2021, only nine provinces allowed female humanitarian staff to work in the fields of health and education and even the female beneficiaries of aid were often required to be accompanied by a male chaperone (UNHCR, 2022b, p.8). Afghan women therefore faced difficulty in accessing numerous services where male humanitarian workers were

125. AP News, "Taliban take over Afghanistan: What we know and what's next", 17 August 2021.

126. AP News, "Kabul airport plunges into chaos as Taliban patrol capital", 17 August 2021.

127. Deutsche Welle, "Single bomber responsible for 2021 Kabul airport blast", 4 February 2022.

not allowed to communicate or interact with them. In instances where women were able to access services, they were unlikely to be able to report any abuse by male family members because those men might be chaperoning them.

Afghanistan's GDP contracted by an estimated 40 per cent following the government transition, something that compounded the humanitarian crises already ravaging the country (UNICEF, 2021b, p.2). Afghanistan was facing the consequences of decades of conflict, a severe drought, the COVID-19 pandemic and civil unrest throughout the year. When the de facto government was established, the nation also faced a pause in aid supplies.¹²⁸ That pause in aid damaged not only the economy, but also added difficulty to individual access to necessary goods, including food supplies.

Food supplies and security were a significant challenge throughout 2021. As the year began, lack of snowfall set the stage for a drought that would eventually encompass two thirds of the country – with 46 per cent of rural households in the Whole-of-Afghanistan Assessment reporting that their communities were affected by drought conditions (UNICEF, 2021b, p.2). By April 2021, some 666,833 IDPs and returnees lacked access to safe drinking water (IOM, 2021c, p.9). The worst drought in 30 years was confirmed in June 2021, during which 80 per cent of the country faced serious or severe water scarcity; some provinces lost 50 per cent of their water points (IOM, 2022, p.5). One in three Afghans faced acute food insecurity as aid narrowed and the drought threatened wheat supplies.¹²⁹

In addition to drought, agriculture was hindered by crop pests, lack of access to seeds and irrigation systems that were poorly maintained or damaged by conflict (IPC, 2021, p.2). Animal raising suffered in response to lack of pasture and low water supplies, with 46 per cent of livestock owners

reporting that they owned fewer animals in 2021 than they had done in 2020 (*ibid.*). Food reserves dipped in response to the difficult conditions; the number of households reporting cereal stocks of less than three months doubled from 28 per cent in 2020 to 57 per cent in 2021 (*ibid.*). Food insecurity rose because of lost income, cash shortages and rising food costs (HRW, 2022).

The crisis in access to food led to a sweeping rise in malnutrition across Afghanistan. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) determined that 3.9 million people were in need of acute malnutrition treatment services in 2021, a number that included 1 million children under five with severe acute malnutrition, 2.2 million children under five with moderate acute malnutrition and 700,000 pregnant and lactating women with acute malnutrition (IPC, 2021, p.3). UNICEF reported that cases of severe acute malnutrition between August and December 2021 were 3 per cent higher among children in some areas than they had been during the same period in 2020 (UNICEF, 2021b, p.2). As many as 42 per cent of children in the south of the country were reported to show signs of malnutrition following the disruption of humanitarian services in August (*ibid.*, p.4). IDPs show worse food security scores than any other population in Afghanistan as measured by IPC – 42 per cent of IDPs have poor food consumption scores and 36 per cent have a borderline food consumption score, placing a combined 78 per cent of IDPs in danger (IPC, 2021, p.9).

According to IOM's DTM Baseline Mobility Assessment (Round 14), over 1.3 million Afghans fled their homes as IDPs by the end of the year (IOM, 2021j, p.5). A 62 per cent majority of those displaced in 2021 left their homes due to conflict, particularly during and after international troop withdrawal and ensuing escalation of violence (*ibid.*, p.5).

A week after a massive fire tore through several camps in Cox's Bazar, refugees, host communities and the humanitarian community are making efforts to recover | © IOM 2021

128. Lindsay Maizland, "Backgrounder: The Taliban in Afghanistan," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 15 September 2022.

129. United Nations, "UN warns of 'urgent imperative' to avoid acute Afghan food insecurity", 7 September 2021.

Women and children accounted for 80 per cent of those displaced internally in Afghanistan in 2021 (UNHCR, 2022a, p.7). UNHCR estimates that 19 per cent of displaced Afghan women and girls are living with a disability and therefore face compound vulnerabilities (*ibid.*). For more in-depth analysis, see Section 3.2.1.

From 2012 to 2019, while the number of IDPs was gradually increasing, there was a steady decline in out-migration as the Afghan economy declined and protection space shrank in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran (IOM, 2021i, p.8). This trend began to reverse in 2020, when the number of out-migrants increased by 46 per cent compared to the previous year. In 2021, out-migration continued to grow, increasing by 122 per cent compared to 2020's already increased numbers (IOM, 2021j, p.8). Among Afghans living in both Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2021, the majority cited violence and insecurity as the main reasons for fleeing Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2022b, p.5). Those who intended to flee from or return to Afghanistan following the government transition faced significant challenges. All border crossings between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran were closed on 16 August 2021, save three that remained open for commercial reasons (UNHCR, 2021d, p.2). Most likely, the closure of official border crossing points contributed to low documented numbers of Afghans as entering the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is plausible that, in the absence of an official route, many would have opted for unofficial routes into the country and avoided monitoring (*ibid.*). Although Pakistan never completely closed its border, the two largest crossings between Afghanistan and Pakistan were either temporarily

closed or restricted. The first, Chaman-Spin Boldak, was closed for three weeks following the government transition and the second, Torkham-Bab i Pakistan, saw restrictions from both countries' sides (Loft, 2021, p.6). In addition to border closures, travel was complicated for Afghans because between August and October 2021, the de facto government did not issue passports – this left anyone who did not have documentation before the take-over without the ability to migrate regularly (*ibid.*).

Gender was a determining component in the experience of fleeing to neighbouring countries. For example, single women were more likely to bring dependents with them to Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran: 68 per cent of women who fled without partners brought children with them compared to only 7 per cent of men (UNHCR, 2022b, p.3). Meanwhile, single men arriving in the Islamic Republic of Iran were at heightened risk of deportation (UNHCR, 2022a, p.19). Therefore, one way that gendered dynamics of out-migration were evident was in the way that women shouldered the additional burden of care for others while men faced greater personal risks. Another way was in the risk of violence: Afghan women and girls risked heightened violence based on their gender during the journey away from Afghanistan and in host countries including Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran (*ibid.*, p.7). Furthermore, as borders closed, increased reliance on unofficial border crossings often required the use of a smuggler, which put women and children at increased risk of violence or abuse as compared to regular migration (UNHCR, 2022b, p.5).



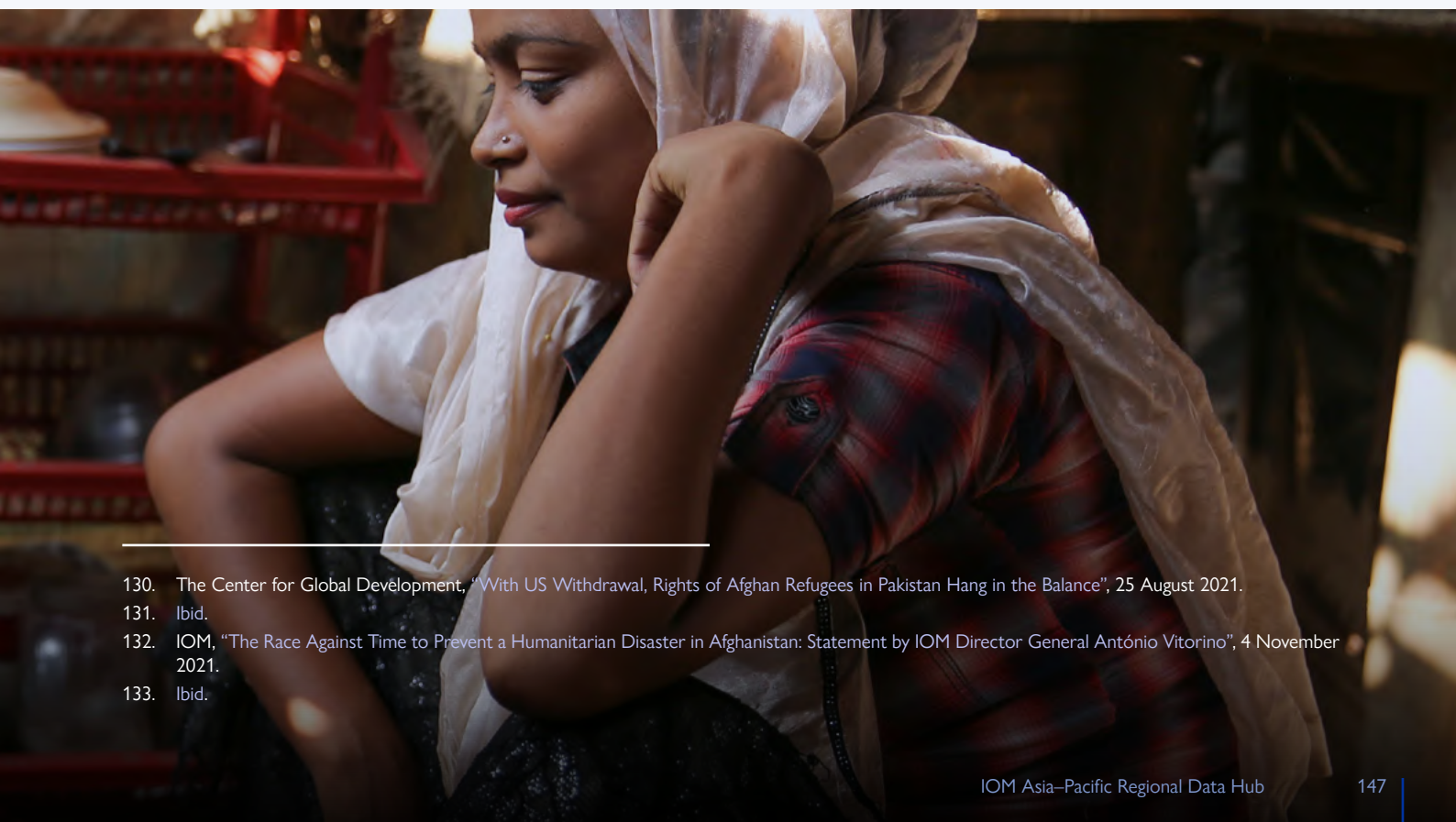
A young woman cooks food inside a makeshift shelter in Balukhali Rohingya refugee settlement | © IOM 2018/Olivia HEADON

Moreover, protection space in neighbouring countries was diminishing. By 2020, neighbouring countries were already hosting an estimated 2.2 million Afghan refugees and 4 million undocumented Afghan nationals, both of which were expected to grow in 2021 (IOM, 2022, p.8). With at least 1.4 million registered refugees from Afghanistan and many more unregistered, Pakistan is the world's third largest host of refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2022c).¹³⁰ Yet refugees in Pakistan hold no official status and cannot work legally without additional documentation.¹³¹ Programmes providing for Afghan refugees in host countries have been critically underfunded for years and were diminished further by the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (UNHCR, 2022a, p.8). The deepening complex crisis in Afghanistan led more people to flee to neighbouring countries in 2021, in turn contributing to increased stress on systems built to host refugees (*ibid.*, p.16).

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the cost of documentation to regularize refugee status amounts to 8 per cent of a refugee's income on average – is it an expense that might be sacrificed for more immediate needs in challenging times (*ibid.*, p.18). Moreover, women and girls are given lower priority in obtaining documentation because men are assumed to be breadwinners, therefore leaving women and girls more economically vulnerable and dependent on others compared to their male counterparts (*ibid.*). Lack of documentation leads to a variety of vulnerabilities: children without documents are at heightened risk of trafficking, access to justice systems is limited for undocumented women and girls experiencing violence and all groups face heightened risk of arrest and detention (*ibid.*, p.29).

Of the 6,362 heads of household surveyed by UNHCR in the Islamic Republic of Iran in December 2021, 100 per cent cited security as their motivation for leaving Afghanistan and their top concerns were refoulement and detention (UNHCR, 2021f). UNHCR called on all countries not to forcibly return Afghan nationals and to allow entry to those fleeing the country (UNHCR, 2021d, p.1). Nevertheless, the Islamic Republic of Iran announced its intention to return Afghans once conflict conditions improved and UNHCR reports that an average of 3,000 people per day were returned between August and November 2021 (Loft, 2021, p.8). More than one million Afghans had returned from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran by October 2021.¹³² However, they faced enormous burdens reintegrating into their communities and building sustainable livelihoods for themselves.¹³³ Those who began reintegration early in the year after return might have fled back across the borders when conflict intensified by the middle of the year, showing a cyclical challenge of return and reintegration.

UNHCR screened 2,195 heads of households representing 8,326 people who left Afghanistan for the Islamic Republic of Iran between August and December 2021. Of the group, 45 per cent were minors, 58 per cent were women and 23 per cent of households were female headed; these types of individuals face multiple vulnerabilities due to their demographics. Additionally, these groups constituted smaller proportions of the Afghan migrants before the August crisis (UNHCR, 2022a, p.18).



130. The Center for Global Development, "With US Withdrawal, Rights of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan Hang in the Balance", 25 August 2021.

131. *Ibid.*

132. IOM, "The Race Against Time to Prevent a Humanitarian Disaster in Afghanistan: Statement by IOM Director General António Vitorino", 4 November 2021.

133. *Ibid.*

4.1.2.2 FORCED MIGRATION FROM MYANMAR

On 1 February 2021, the military took over Myanmar, arresting civilian leaders and placing the Government under a military regime.¹³⁴ The military had previously accused Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy of election tampering when it won control in a landslide victory in 2020, challenging the country's new democracy.¹³⁵ The crisis left 1,384 people dead and led to the arrests of over 11,000 people by the end of 2021.¹³⁶ It also caused significant damage to the economy and public health system, which added to the already immense challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹³⁷

Within two months of the military takeover, 1,000 people fled to India's Mizoram state and 3,000 more fled to Thailand, but those who fled faced forcible returns from both countries (Mixed Migration Centre, 2021a, p.5). Unrest risked the lives and well-being of those displaced and threatened to displace more people and to push some to flee abroad. In 2021, between February and the end of the year, some 440,000 additional people were displaced in Myanmar, more than doubling the 370,000 who had fled their homes even before the military take-over, meaning there were nearly 800,000 IDPs in the country.¹³⁸

Many people have left Myanmar due to displacement, including a high number of the Rohingya ethnic minority. More than 769,000 Rohingya refugees have arrived in Bangladesh since August 2017, when violence in their place of origin, Myanmar's Rakhine state, forced them to flee (UNHCR, 2022c). For five years, Bangladesh has adhered to the international principle of non-refoulement by not returning Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. After the military takeover, the possibility of voluntary return seemed more distant (HRW, 2021, p.4). Without return and few alternative places to go, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya found themselves stranded just across the border from Myanmar in Bangladesh's increasingly crowded refugee camps at Cox's Bazar.

The February 2021 crisis in Myanmar was widely discussed in the camps. The vast majority of Rohingya consulted by IOM reported wanting to return to Myanmar. Although recent events seemed to delay that goal, there was still "hopeful desperation" that it could lead to positive change (IOM, 2021d, pp.3–4).

FIRES IN COX'S BAZAR

In Cox's Bazar, 2021 began with a large fire on 14 January that damaged or destroyed 550 shelters that had been home to 3,500 people.¹³⁹ Aid was quick to arrive, and refugees were sheltered elsewhere in the camps, but many had lost their belongings and the fire created an atmosphere of worry.¹⁴⁰

Shortly afterward, on 22 March a second fire killed 11 people in Camps 8E, 8W and 9 and injured hundreds; it affected 48,300 people directly and left 10,100 households without

shelter (*ibid.*, p.2). The fire demolished Camp 9 and 1,600 facilities, including the largest health centre in the camp (IOM, 2021e, p.1).¹⁴¹ The affected areas were settled early in refugee response at Cox's Bazar, some even before the 2017 influx of refugees, which meant that they were less structurally sound and more crowded than more recently built areas.¹⁴² Overcrowding means that even a small fire can displace a significant number of people: the massive 22 March fire displaced 45,000 people in the space of hours.¹⁴³

134. Foreign Policy, "5 Top Reads: Myanmar's Tumultuous Year", 25 December 2021.

135. United Nations, "Security Council unity 'crucial' to support democracy in Myanmar", 2 February 2021.

136. Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, "What's Happening in Myanmar" (accessed 13 March 2022).

137. Brookings, "Myanmar's crisis tests ASEAN", 27 August 2021.

138. United Nations, "Number of internally displaced in Myanmar doubles, to 800,000", 11 February 2021.

139. Reuters, "Fire destroys homes of thousands in Rohingya refugee camps – UNHCR", 14 February 2021.

140. *Ibid.*

141. IOM, "Massive Fire Devastates Rohingya Refugee Camps in Cox's Bazar", 24 March 2021.

142. IOM, "One Week After the Fire, Rohingya Refugee Camps in Cox's Bazar Rise from the Ashes", 9 March 2022.

143. *Ibid.*

Rohingya volunteers were essential in responding to the fire – they acted as firefighters initially and worked to remove debris in the aftermath.¹⁴⁴ Showing a quick recovery, the first refugee families moved into newly constructed shelters in the fire-affected camps in April 2021 (IOM, 2021f, p.2).

Nevertheless, an increase in the number and frequency of fires in Cox’s Bazar in the first quarter of 2021 – which was double the number over the same period in 2020 – was a source of growing stress in the refugee community housed there (IOM, 2021d, p.1). Many residents of the camps shared a rumour that several small fires resulted from arson, possibly

at the hands of members of the host community trying to drive refugees away (*ibid.*, p.2). The fear that a fire could start or be set near their households kept some refugees from engaging in their community – staying home from the mosque or losing sleep to keep a watchful eye on their belongings and family members (*ibid.*).

Rumours that the host community might be to blame for the fires were reported among Rohingya refugees. They also expressed that they were increasingly unwelcome and that humanitarian actors and the government were not doing enough to protect them (*ibid.*, p.3).

BHASAN CHAR

Between December 2020 and June 2021, the Government of Bangladesh moved approximately 20,000 refugees to Bhasan Char Island in the Bay of Bengal.¹⁴⁵ The island, which formed in the last 20 years, is three to five hours from the mainland and composed of silt – lacking water sources or even permanent shorelines (HRW, 2021, p.1). According to some reports, it previously held a military establishment that lacked the infrastructure to sustain large numbers of people for an extended period (*ibid.*).

Adding to the difficult living conditions, Bhasan Char is subject to cyclones and has limited capacity for evacuation in the event of a weather-induced crisis. Storm surges in the Bay of Bengal have reached five metres at least 27 times in the past 60 years, so although the Government of Bangladesh insisted that by 2021 Bhasan Char was well-protected by embankments and cyclone shelters, it was still at severe risk from climate events (*ibid.*, p.2,33).

Given the remote position and lack of resources on Bhasan Char, the island did not offer employment opportunities to refugees. Nor was it clear that refugees would be able to travel to the mainland to support themselves or engage in Bangladesh’s economy, meaning that the inhabitants of Bhasan Char were left dependent on aid.¹⁴⁶ From 30 May to 2 June, UNHCR Assistant High Commissioners for Protection and

Operations visited Cox’s Bazar and Bhasan Char (UNHCR, 2021c). UNHCR remarked that the 18,000 refugees on Bhasan Char in June 2021 had “protection and assistance needs. That is, access to meaningful livelihoods opportunities, skills development, education, health and access to cash to facilitate their daily lives” and that refugees should be allowed to stay or leave at their own volition (*ibid.*).

The relocation of refugees from Cox’s Bazar, some of whom felt coerced to move and received little information in advance, falls under the description of refugee warehousing – keeping refugees in confined conditions apart from the host community indefinitely.¹⁴⁷ Human smugglers operate to help some refugees leave the island illegally, although 200 people have been arrested attempting to leave in that way.¹⁴⁸

In October 2021, the Government of Bangladesh still planned to relocate a further 80,000 people to the island and had completed the construction of dormitories on the island to house 100,000 refugees.¹⁴⁹ After consulting the inhabitants of Bhasan Char and in response to humanitarian support needs and partnership goals, UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Bangladesh to provide support on the island.¹⁵⁰ United Nations support will cover areas of protection, education, skills-training, livelihoods and health care and extend until the refugee community can have a safe, voluntary and dignified return home.¹⁵¹

144. *Ibid.*

145. The Diplomat, “Bhasan Char and Refugee ‘Warehousing’”, 8 February 2022.

146. *Ibid.*

147. *Ibid.*

148. The New York Times, “They Were Promised a New Home. Then They Tried to Escape It”, 10 October 2021.

149. *Ibid.*

150. United Nations Bangladesh, “UN and Government of Bangladesh sign Memorandum of Understanding for Rohingya humanitarian response on Bhasan Char”, 9 October 2021.

151. *Ibid.*

4.1.2.3 DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic altered the way of life of millions of migrants. Sometimes changes were subtle, such as stay-at-home orders keeping women together with their abusers for longer. Some changes were more obvious, such as high numbers of returnees and losses of employment across the region. The pandemic had serious effects on the region, as did responses to it. Policy regarding the pandemic included changing migrant accommodations, closing and opening borders, adding new document requirements and including migrants in social programmes. The COVID-19 vaccine was developed in 2021, marking the beginning of programmes to include migrants, asylum seekers and internally displaced people in the vaccine rollout. **Dimension 1 of the MGI addresses migrants' right to employment and social protection**, which have both been unevenly improved over 2021. Compared to 2020, there have been more travel opportunities for workers in the form of opened borders and available COVID-19 testing or vaccination. Additionally, there have been attempts by governments to improve social inclusion of migrants. These are not universally applied, even in those countries where improvements have been made, and there is need for greater attention paid to migrants in both employment and social protection. Further policy and

governance responses to the pandemic must also 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 achieving substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable by 2030; and **Objective 17 of the Global Compact for Migration**, which calls for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against migrants.

The crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic was a powerful force operating on migration in the region in 2021, but it was far from the only one. Conflict created significant crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar and compounded existing drivers of forced migration. In the case of Afghanistan, a drought and series of vulnerabilities worsened over the course of the year. These crises not only touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who were displaced internally and across borders in 2021; they will certainly also have long-term effects that could last generations. To alleviate both short- and long-term ill-effects of COVID-19 and other crises on migration, policies should address the vulnerabilities of migrants that render them especially vulnerable.



IOM continues its relief operations across Afghanistan in response to mounting, complex humanitarian needs | © IOM 2022

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In Dand IDP settlement, women on IOM's mobile health team provide maternal and child health care, mental health and psychosocial support and health education to displaced women | © IOM 2021



A vigil held by IOM and locals in Indonesia in honour of migrants and refugees who lost their lives | © IOM 2016

4.2 MIGRANT DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES

Thousands of individuals lose their lives during their migration journeys. The risks for many migrants – especially if moving irregularly or subject to external factors such as conflict – can be extremely high and diverse. Monitoring deaths and disappearances occurring while migrating is among the objectives of the international community, as explicitly stated by [SDG Target 10.7](#) and [Objective 8 of the Global Compact for Migration](#). Due to the irregular nature of many migration routes, however, this endeavour is inherently challenging. Substantial efforts are needed from national governments and humanitarian organizations to widen the coverage and enhance timeliness and comprehensiveness of monitoring and data collection activities. Only then can the international community build mechanisms and policies to ensure the protection of migrants' fundamental human rights.

IOM maintains a global database documenting incidents that led to the death or disappearance of people during their migratory transit. The information covers migrants who died or disappeared at the external border of states or in the process of migration towards an international destination. Unidentified persons are also included when the location where decedents are found is on a known migration route or the cause of death suggests that the individual was migrating. The project's sources are official records, social and traditional media, NGO reports, as well as surveys of

migrants themselves – all verified by IOM staff whenever possible (see [IOM Missing Migrants Project](#)).

Globally, more than 48,000 individuals were reported to have died on migration journeys since 2014 ([ibid.](#)).¹⁵² However, due to data collection challenges, this figure is most probably an underestimate. Of these deaths and disappearances, nearly 4,700 were reported in Asia–Pacific countries. The migration routes where most incidents occurred are between Myanmar and Bangladesh ([IOM, 2021a](#)) and between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the latter becoming increasingly relevant in the last few years.

While international comparison of Missing Migrants Project's figures can be usually challenging, the comparability of the available information has been further worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Mobility restrictions and containment measures have likely increased migration risks on many routes ([IOM, 2021b](#)) and may have affected the extension and effectiveness of information collection and reporting on migration-related deaths as well. In what follows, a regional overview of deaths and disappearances during migration within the Asia–Pacific region and of migrants from the Asia–Pacific region is provided. However, due to the nature of the data collection and the impact of the pandemic, comparisons across countries and time should be interpreted carefully.

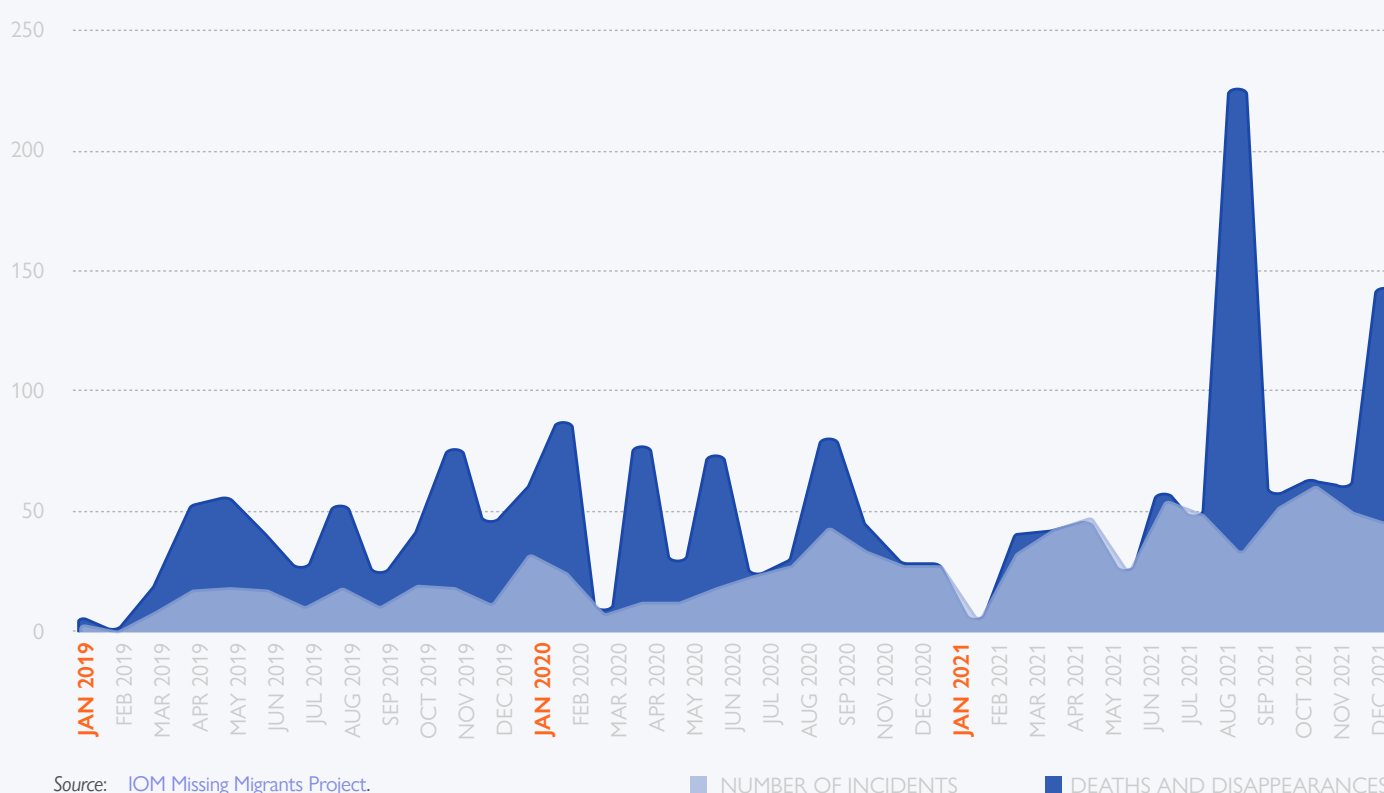
152. Data accessed on 15 April 2022.

4.2.1 REGIONAL OVERVIEW

As of February 2022, the Missing Migrants Project reported that worldwide, in 2021 there were 5,795 deaths and disappearances during migration. Reported deaths and disappearances in countries in the Asia-Pacific region amounted to 810 individuals, or around 14 per cent of the global figures. The number of reported incidents that led to these deaths and disappearances stands at 487, with most incidents leading to isolated (one or few) disappearances. Reported deaths and disappearances in the Asia-Pacific region in 2021 are substantially higher compared to both 2019 and 2020, when these figures reached 417 and 569 individuals. While the differences observed over time may

also reflect different monitoring and reporting capabilities – which were deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (IOM, 2021b) – this sudden increase is worrying. Most deaths and disappearances reported in 2021 happened because of incidents in August and December (Figure 60), mostly on the route from Afghanistan to the Islamic Republic of Iran and likely related to violent events during the takeover of Afghanistan. The worst incident was undoubtedly the suicide bombing at Hamid Karzai International Airport on 26 August 2021, when suicide bombers killed 167 Afghan civilians trying to flee the country, as well as 13 members of the United States army.¹⁵³

FIGURE 60: MIGRANT DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCE INCIDENTS IN ASIA-PACIFIC (2019–2021)



Most deaths and disappearance incidents are reported to have occurred in Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Figure 61), though this is likely linked to the fact that more data (from IOM Afghanistan's repatriation of migrant remains) are available in this region than in the rest of the

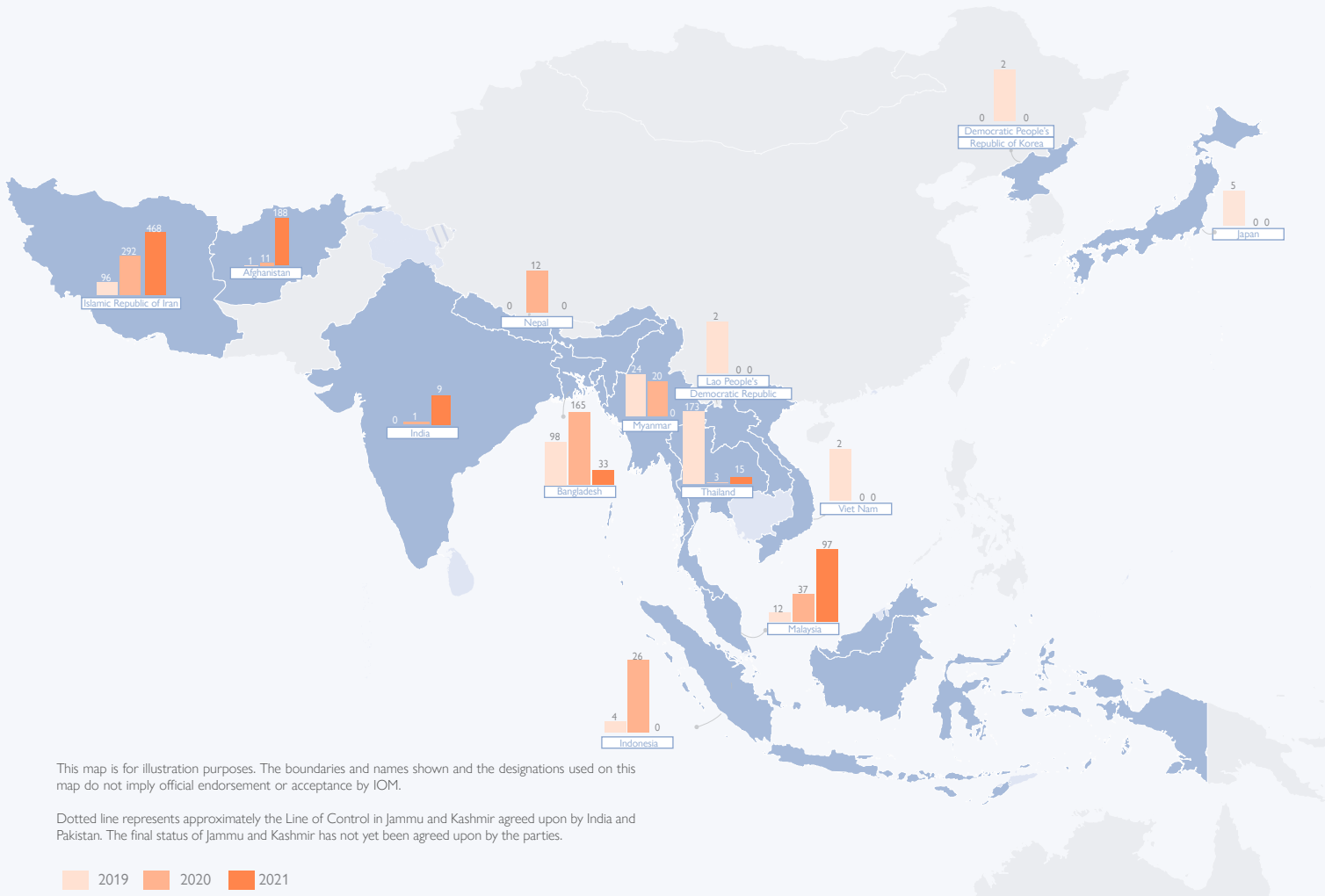
Asia-Pacific region. These two countries alone account for 188 and 468 reported deaths and disappearances, respectively. The share of the Islamic Republic of Iran among total reported deaths and disappearances is up by 24 percentage points compared to 2019 and by 6 percentage

153. The victims among the United States army members are not included in the Missing Migrants Project figures.

points compared to 2020, highlighting the growing relevance and danger of the migration routes from Afghanistan. Almost all reported incidents leading to deaths or disappearances during migration in 2021 occurred in the Islamic Republic of

Iran. Other countries where deaths were reported in 2021 are Malaysia, Bangladesh and Thailand. In most cases, the victims of these incidents were either Rohingya or Indonesian.

FIGURE 61: REPORTED DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES BY COUNTRY OF INCIDENT (2019–2021)



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.

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.

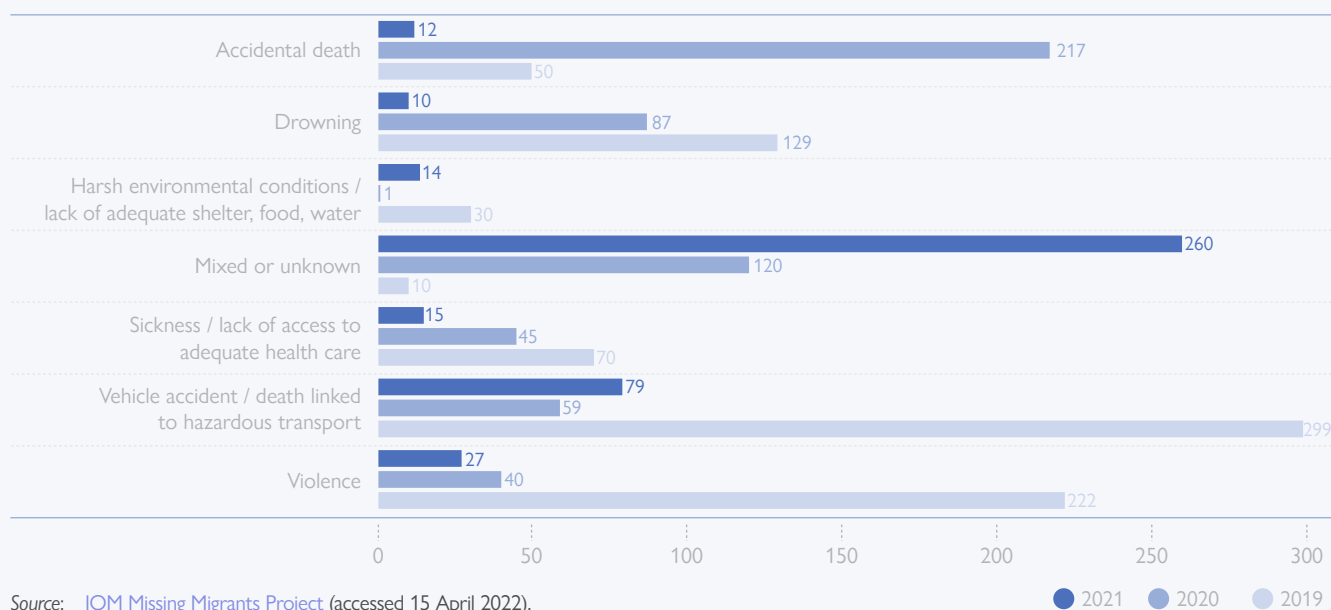
Legend: 2019 (light orange), 2020 (medium orange), 2021 (dark orange)

Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project (accessed 15 April 2022).

Most deaths and disappearances reported during migration in the Asia-Pacific region in 2021 were caused either by violence (Figure 62) – many of which linked to the suicide bombing in Kabul on 26 August – or due to vehicle accidents and other hazardous transports. The high share of deaths linked to hazardous transport reflects the growing relevance

of land routes – especially that between Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. At the same time, however, reported deaths by drowning also increased in 2021, once again mostly of Rohingya and Indonesians. The deadliest incident of this type occurred off the coast of Malaysia on 15 December, when 37 Indonesian migrants lost their lives.

FIGURE 62: MIGRANT DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES BY MAIN CAUSE OF DEATH (2019–2021)

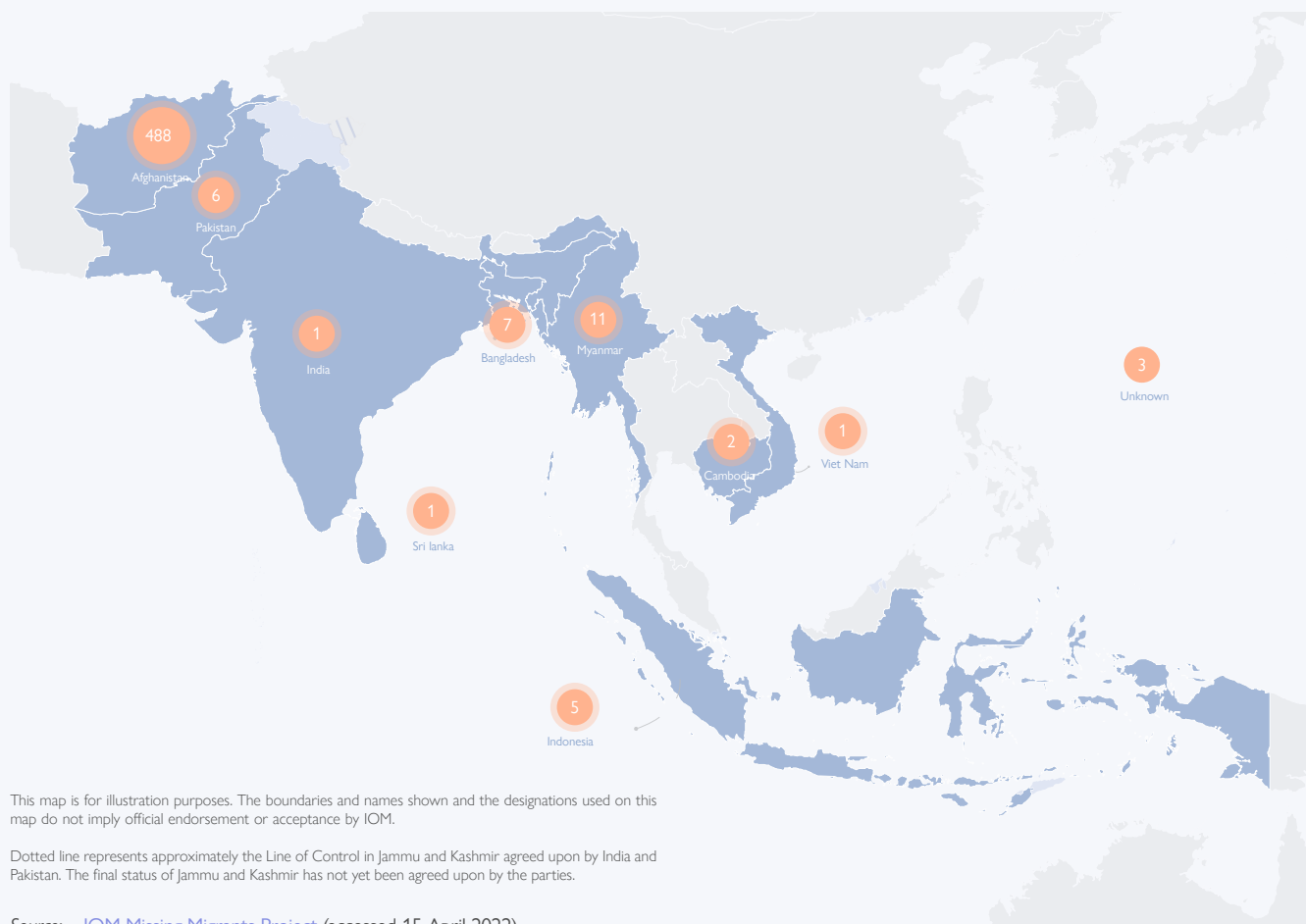


Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project (accessed 15 April 2022).

Worldwide, the deaths of 921 people from Asia-Pacific were recorded in 525 different incidents on migration routes in 2021. Most of these deaths concerned migrants from Afghanistan, who accounted for 690 of these lost lives. Afghans' share among deaths from the region has grown rapidly since 2019,

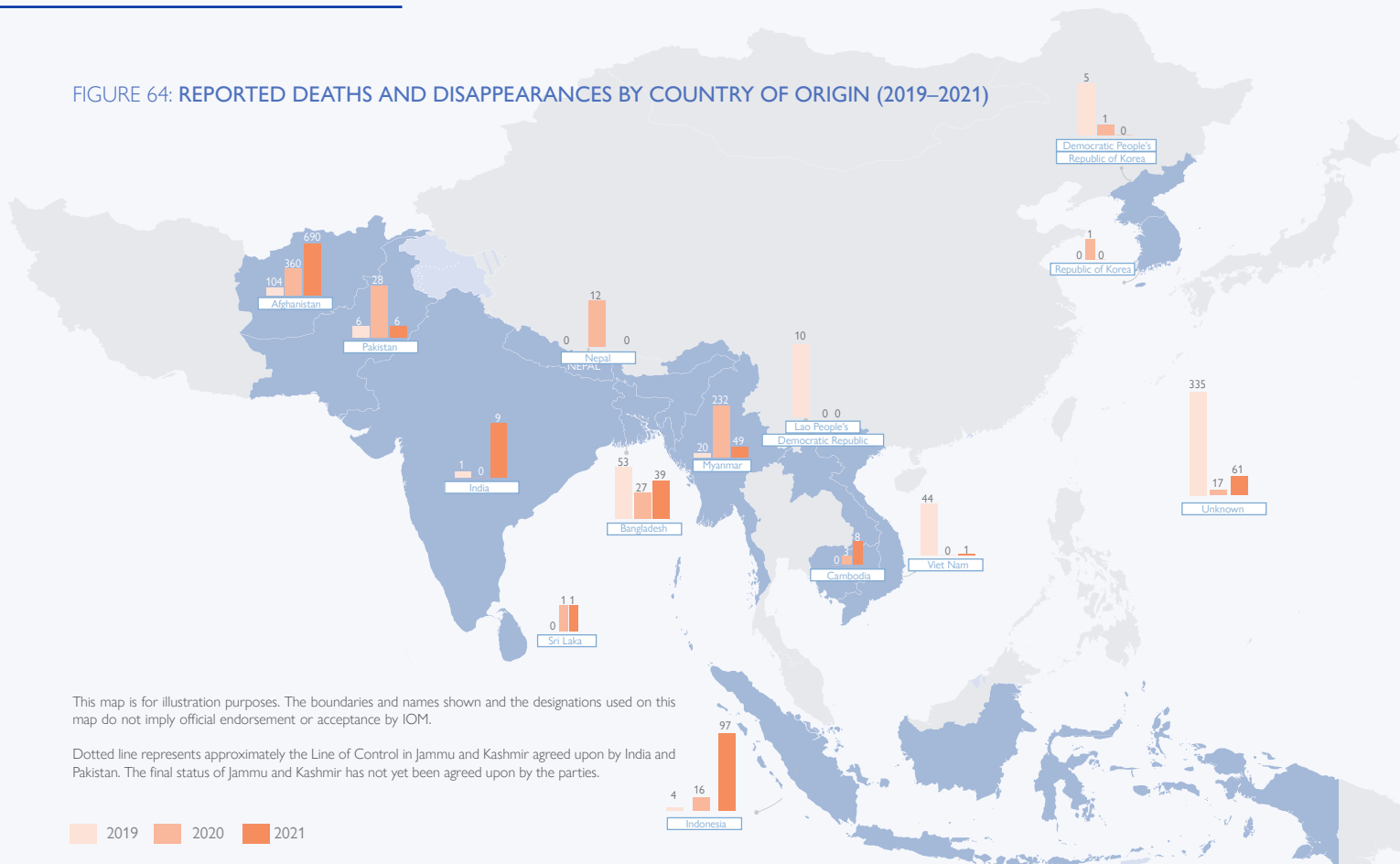
when they accounted for less than one in five total victims. The second most represented country of origin in the region was Indonesia, with 97 deaths and disappearances in 2021. The number of deaths from Myanmar and Bangladesh was also high, reaching 49 and 39 individuals, respectively.

FIGURE 63: REPORTED INCIDENTS BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN (2021)



Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project (accessed 15 April 2022).

FIGURE 64: REPORTED DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN (2019–2021)



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.

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.

Legend: 2019 (light orange), 2020 (medium orange), 2021 (dark orange)

Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project (accessed 15 April 2022).

4.2.2 DISCUSSION

The substantial risks faced by migrants on irregular routes and the high human cost of the securitization¹⁵⁵ of migration in many contexts call for much wider and sustained efforts to collect data on this topic and fulfil the objectives set by **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** – and **Objective 8 of the Global Compact for Migration – saving lives and establishing coordinated international efforts on missing migrants**. The general lack of official data collection activities by national governments and the consequent reliance on indirect sources such as social and traditional media constitutes an important limitation for the existing available information on the matter. Underestimation of migrant deaths and disappearances, narratives that portray migration flows as “crises” and therefore affect reporting of migrant deaths – both heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic – make comprehensive analysis of the risks of migration challenging. Consequently, the design and implementation of effective policies to protect basic human rights is severely limited.

Better data on missing and deceased migrants would be beneficial for public policy in many ways (Viales, 2022). First, comprehensive and timely information would allow national governments and international organizations to offer to the families searching for loved ones lost during migration an effective tool to search for their relatives. Second, the identification of more dangerous areas along migratory routes would allow for collective action by the international community to reduce deaths during migration as well as reduce other risks. In particular, the harmonization and publication of anonymized versions of the data are fundamental to allow international organizations, NGOs, and civil society actors to plan and implement response activities. Comprehensive and harmonized data on migrant deaths and disappearances would also inform governments where safe migration options need most urgently to be implemented. Finally, the availability of quality and reliable information on disappearances during migration would strongly support political advocacy movements supporting the rights of migrants and their families.

155. The securitization of migration refers to the tendency to treat migration flows as a security issue threatening public order.

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Sampan boats at Cox's Bazar. Rohingya migrants represent a significant portion of deaths by drowning in the region of Asia and the Pacific | © IOM 2016/Amanda NERO



A group of 270 potential trafficking victims who were sheltering in the compound of the Philippines embassy in the Syrian capital Damascus return to the Philippines with the assistance of the IOM in 2012 | © IOM 2012/Ray LEYESA

4.3 TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

In 2021, COVID-19 continued to have significant repercussions for human rights and human trafficking. The pandemic led to an increase in the number of people vulnerable to human trafficking and interrupted existing and planned anti-trafficking interventions (US Department of State, 2021).

However, the impact of COVID-19 on the scale of trafficking in persons is difficult to quantify due to the challenges the pandemic has posed on law enforcement (UNODC, 2021). Activities such as investigations, labour inspections and border monitoring – which are already challenging in “normal” times – have stalled for several periods due to measures of confinement to curb the spread of the pandemic. This means that traffickers have continued with their activities, but law enforcement have not been warned by the public

to the crimes (IOM, 2021c). According to a UNODC study¹⁵⁶ conducted in various regions, including South-East Asia and South Asia, stakeholders reported greater difficulty for first responders in detecting victims of trafficking during the pandemic (Figure 65); (UNODC, 2021, p. 26). The same study also reported women, children and migrants – particularly, migrant domestic workers – as the groups most affected by trafficking in persons during the pandemic (*ibid.*). In the Asia-Pacific region, female migrants have long been vulnerable to forced labour and physical, mental and sexual abuse (ILO, 2015). Since 2002, more than 85 per cent of trafficking victims from Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic and the Philippines identified are women (IOM, 2020).

FIGURE 65: STAKEHOLDERS SURVEY RESPONSES ON THE EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS



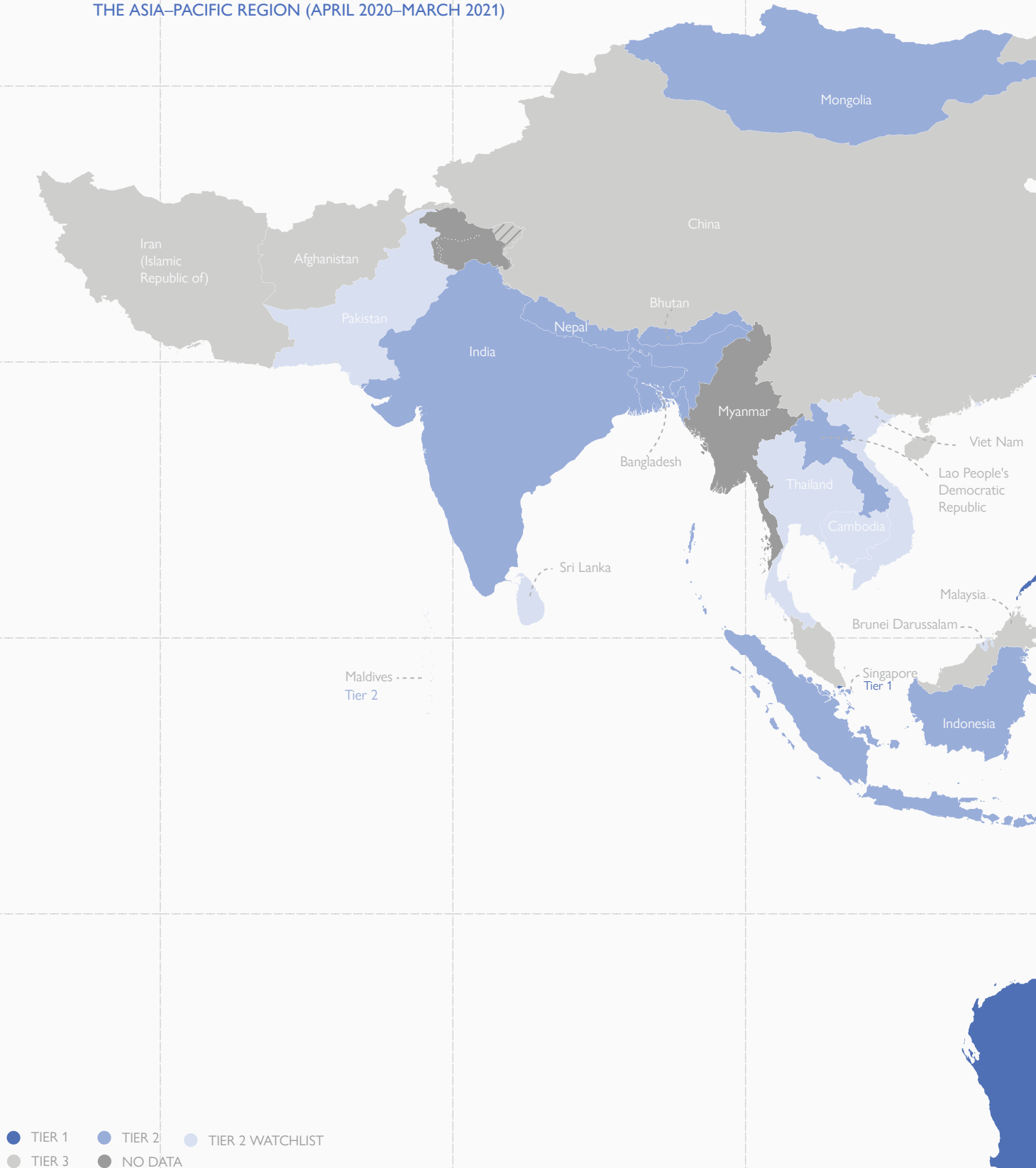
Source: Compiled from *The Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons and responses to the challenges report* conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2021).

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 its latest *Trafficking in Persons Report (2021, p.67)* conducted between April 2020 and March 2021, only five countries and areas from the region – Australia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Taiwan Province of the People’s Republic of China – were categorized as Tier 1, indicating that governments fully meet the Trafficking Victims Protect Act (TVPA) of 2000 minimum standards for the

elimination of trafficking in persons. Twenty-seven countries, territories and areas in the Asia-Pacific region ranked under Tier 2 and Tier 2 Watch List, meaning that governments do not fully meet the TVPA’s minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards. Finally, five countries and areas from the region ranked under Tier 3, which indicates that governments do not fully meet the TVPA’s minimum standards and are not actively making efforts to do so.

156. The aim of this study was to understand and document the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons on trafficking victims and on front-line organizations. Two online surveys were conducted. An online survey was sent to UNODC field offices in January 2021 receiving 12 responses. Another survey was sent to approximately 450 stakeholders who participated in UNODC activities in 2019 and 2020. This second survey received 120 responses from stakeholders in 16 regions and 46 countries.

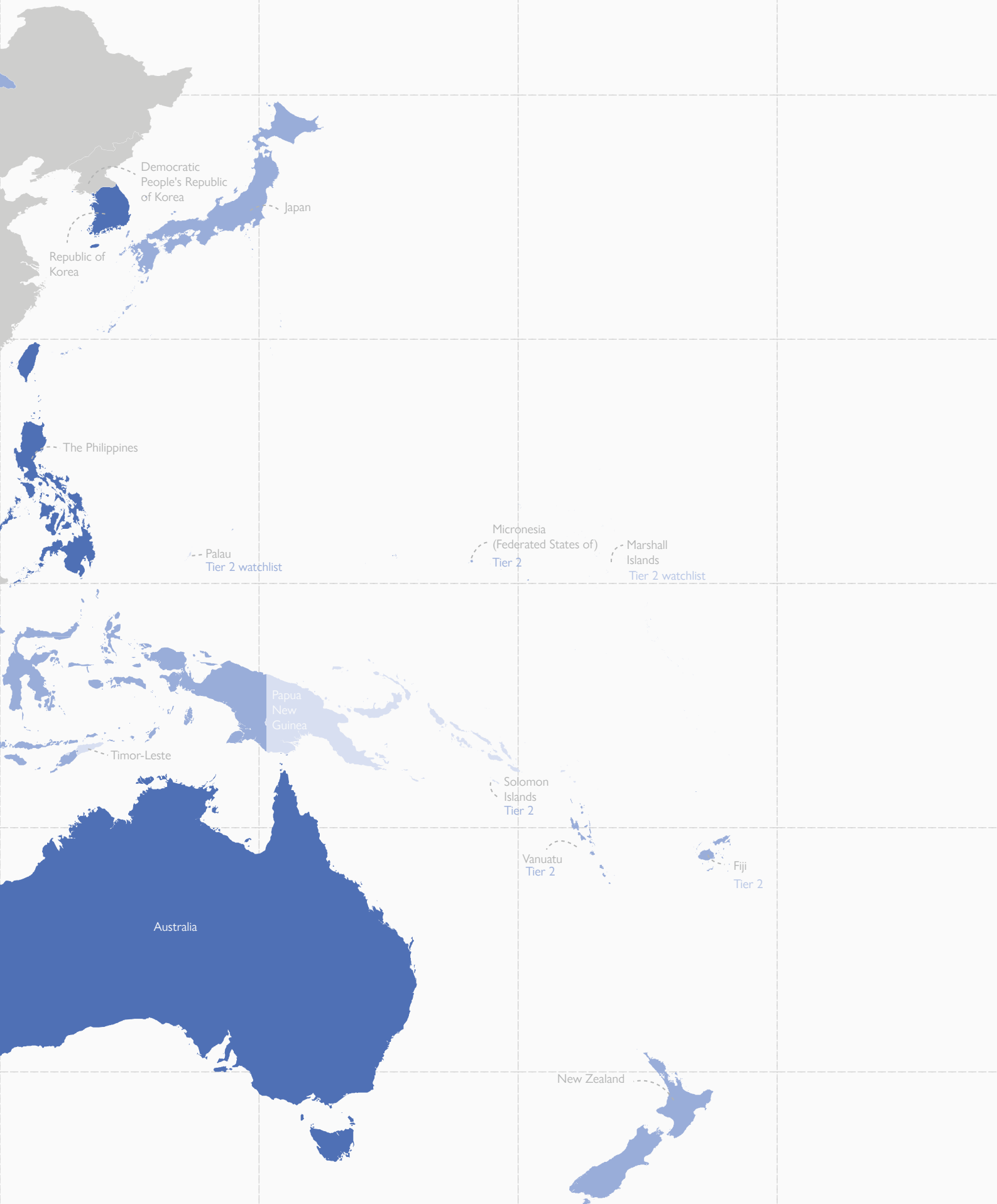
FIGURE 66: TIER RANKING IN COUNTER-TRAFFICKING EFFORT IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION (APRIL 2020–MARCH 2021)



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.

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

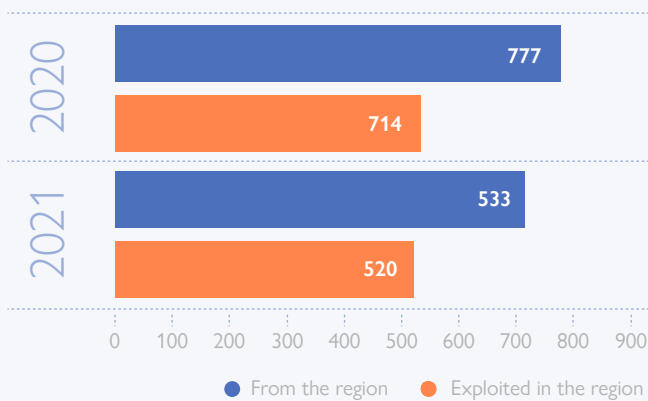
Source: Compiled from the US Department of State – Trafficking in Persons Report 2021.



Human trafficking is explicitly recognized as a development challenge in the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), which refers to the [eradication of forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking in its Target 8.7](#). Eradicating human trafficking is also addressed in [Target 16.2, which calls for the ending of abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture of children](#). Moreover, in line with [indicator 16.2.2 that measures the number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation](#), several UN agencies and NGOs have collaborated to produce both administrative and operational data sources on the profiles and experiences of the victims, the forms of human trafficking and information on perpetrators (IOM, 2021a). One of the main data hubs is the [Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative \(CTDC\)](#), the first inter-agency global data hub on human trafficking, led by IOM. The clandestine nature of human trafficking is one of the major impediments for collecting accurate data on the scope of trafficking at the global, regional and national level (IOM, 2021c). However, CTDC case management data collected from IOM and its partners' operations still provides an invaluable window into the regional trends, in this context of data scarcity.¹⁵⁷

In 2021, there was a total of 714 IOM-recorded cases of human trafficking victims originated from the Asia-Pacific region, and 520 assisted victims exploited in the region.¹⁵⁸ The number for IOM-recorded cases originating from and exploited in the region presented a similar trend in comparison with figures recorded in 2020 – slightly decreasing by eight and two per cent, respectively (Figure 67).

FIGURE 67: NUMBER OF IOM-ASSISTED VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING ORIGINATING AND EXPLOITED IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN 2020 AND 2021

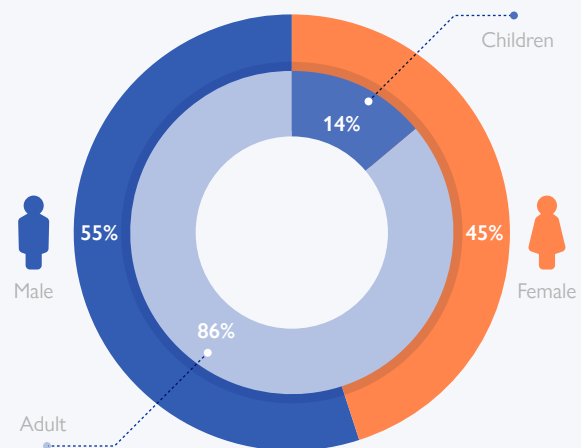


Source: Compiled from IOM Case Management Data (2022).

Among IOM-assisted victims originating from the region in 2021, the majority were male (55%) and 14 per cent of the identified victims were children, mainly from Bangladesh (41%) and Myanmar (39%). In 2021, one out of five of the identified children's victims of trafficking globally were from the Asia-Pacific region (Figure 68).

The primary countries of citizenship among IOM-assisted victims from the region were Bangladesh, Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines (in descending order), collectively accounting for 93 per cent of total recorded cases coming from the region (Figure 69). IOM's case management dataset on victims of trafficking also provides information on the type of exploitation – also referred to as the purpose – and means of exploitation or the method used to compel the victim. As in 2020, forced labour constituted the main type of exploitation in 2021, with 92 per cent of the identified victims of human trafficking from the region reportedly subjected to this type of exploitation, particularly in the domestic, construction and fishing sector (Figure 70). As to the means of control, IOM-assisted victims from the region were exposed simultaneously to various methods. Over half of the identified victims were subjected to psychological abuse (66%), withholding of basic necessities (62%), excessive working hours (62%), earnings confiscation (61%), restriction of medical care (59%), physical abuse (59%), restriction of movement (54%) and threats (52%); (Figure 71).

FIGURE 68: DISTRIBUTION OF IOM-ASSISTED VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING ORIGINATING FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION BY SEX AND AGE (2021)

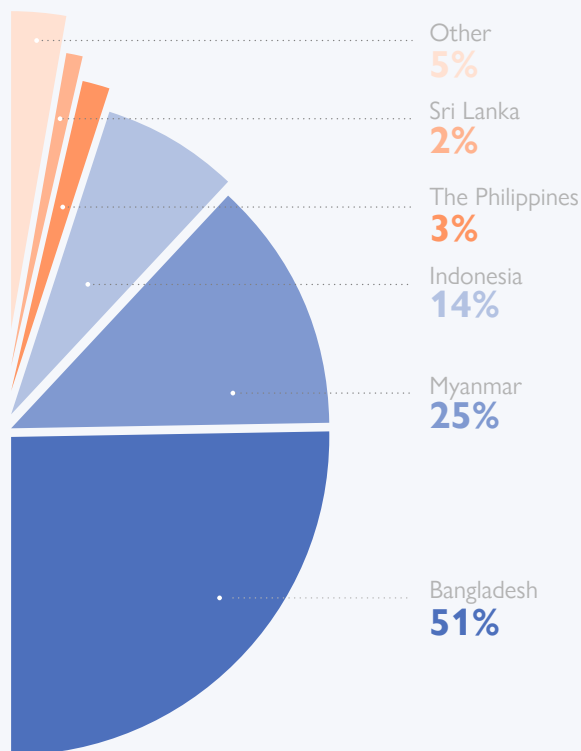


Source: Compiled from IOM Case Management Data (2022).

157. While CTDC database is the largest of its kind globally, data are collected for administrative purposes rather than for statistical analysis or research. CTDC dataset provides unique standardized micro-data on victims of trafficking.

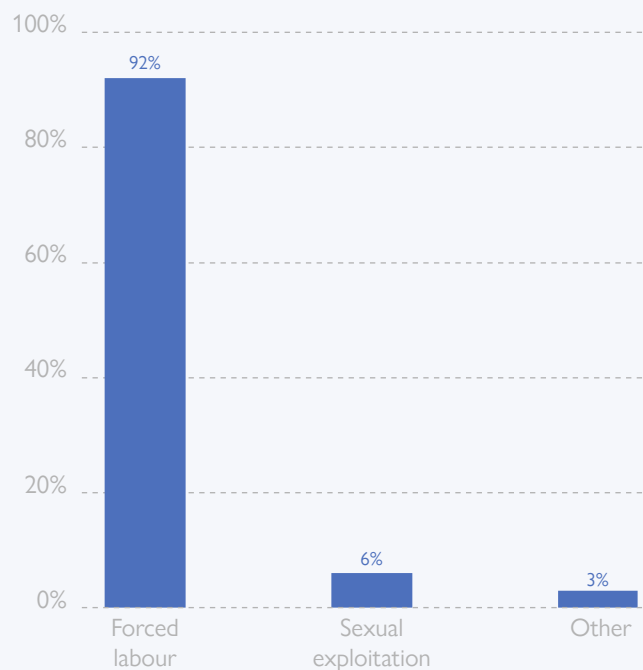
158. While CTDC collects data from IOM and its partners, this analysis is restricted to cases assisted by IOM only. Results may be biased by IOM's counter-trafficking operational presence.

FIGURE 69: MAJOR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN FOR IOM-ASSISTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN 2021



Source: Compiled from IOM Case Management Data (2022).

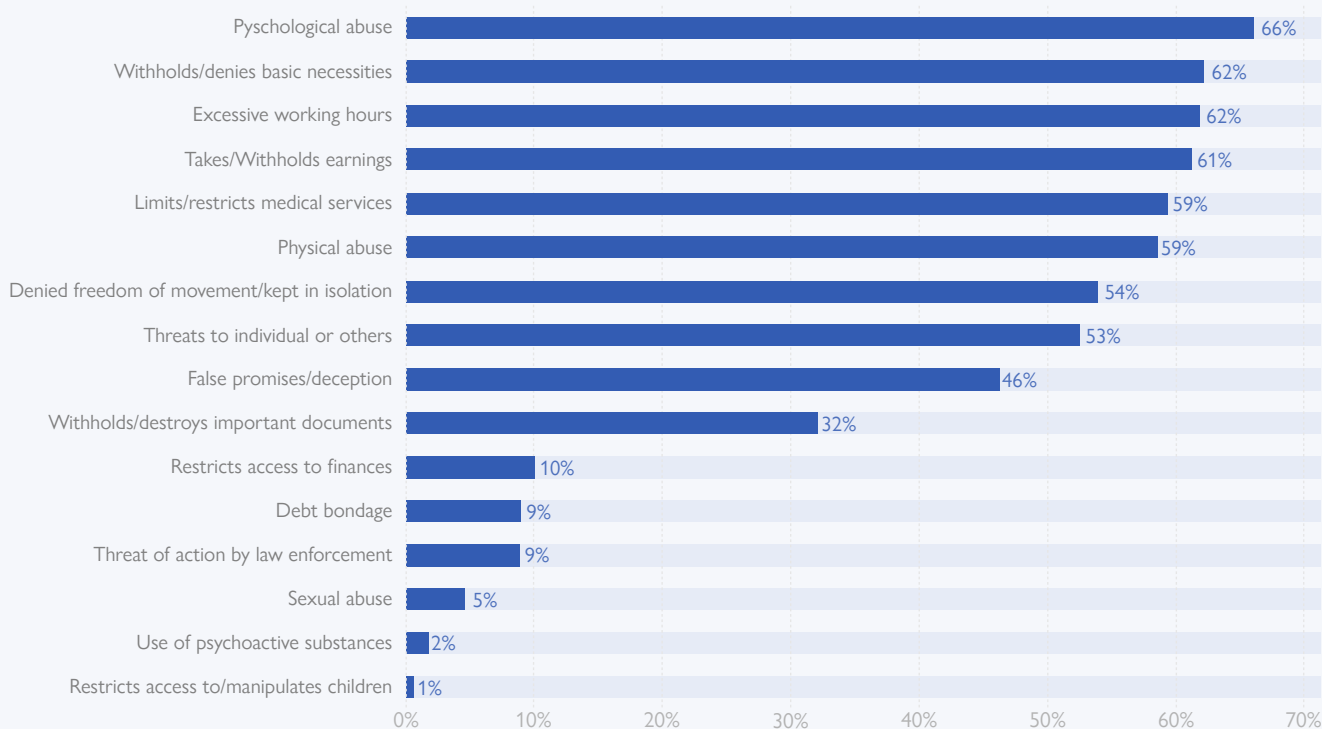
FIGURE 70: TYPE OF EXPLOITATION FOR IOM-ASSISTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN 2021



Note: Percentages do not necessarily add to 100 as victims can be subjected to one or more types of exploitation. Other types of exploitation include forced marriage and organ removal.

Source: Compiled from IOM Case Management Data (2022).

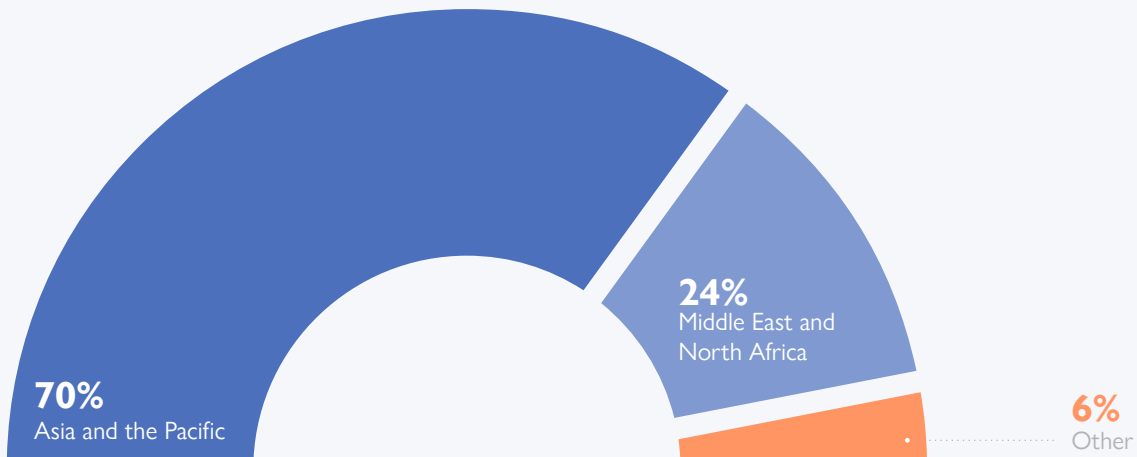
FIGURE 71: MEANS OF CONTROL FOR IOM-ASSISTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN 2021



Note: Percentages do not necessarily add to 100 as victims can be subjected to one or more means of control.

Source: Compiled from IOM Case Management Data (2022).

FIGURE 72: REGIONS OF EXPLOITATION FOR IOM-ASSISTED VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN 2021

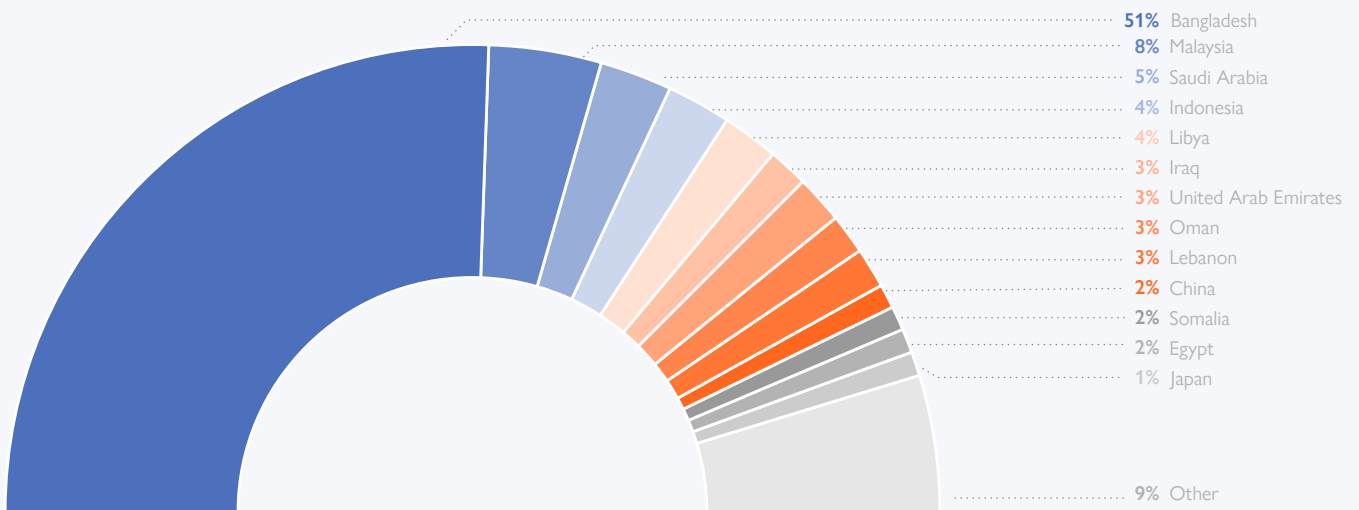


Source: Compiled from IOM Case Management Data (2022).

Regarding the region of exploitation of IOM-assisted human trafficking victims from the Asia-Pacific countries, intraregional trafficking is predominant in the Asia-Pacific region as 70 per cent were exploited within the region (Figure 72). Almost one quarter of the victims reported to be exploited in the Middle East and North Africa.

As for the countries of exploitation for victims from the Asia-Pacific region, Bangladesh accounted for more than half of all cases of exploitation from the region, followed by Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Libya, in descending order (Figure 73).

FIGURE 73: COUNTRIES OF EXPLOITATION FOR IOM-ASSISTED VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN 2021



Source: Compiled from IOM Case Management Data (2022).

4.3.1 DISCUSSION

In line with the [Global Compact for Migration Objective 10](#) that aims to [prevent, combat and eradicate trafficking in persons in the context of international migration](#), strengthening capacities and international cooperation to assess the scope of trafficking in persons is crucial for improving the international response to address and eradicate human trafficking. However, one of the greatest challenges in developing targeted counter-trafficking responses is the lack of “reliable, high-quality data related to the scale of human trafficking and the profile of victims” (IOM, 2021a). COVID-19 has further exacerbated these data challenges.

Looking back at the last two years, there is clear evidence that the pandemic has negatively affected victims of human trafficking in the region (IOM, 2021b; UNODC, 2021, p.73). First, the negative effect of COVID-19 on the socioeconomic situation of vulnerable groups is expected to lead to an increase in the number of individuals exposed to trafficking and exploitation in many forms (IOM, 2021c). Second, countries around the region have indicated shifts in the *modi operandi* of human traffickers (*ibid.*). Traffickers are apparently adopting different strategies to take advantage and to adapt to the changes brought about by COVID-19. Since the start of the pandemic, traffickers have moved recruitment of adult and child victims to online methods. Aware of the increased amount of time that people, especially children, spent on the Internet, traffickers have advertised false jobs on social media (UNODC, 2021). It is also believed that traffickers had been taking advantage of individuals in despair in very poor communities – mainly characterized to have fragile institutions and little or no state support grant loans – who will then become tied to their exploiters via debt bondage (IOM, 2021c). Third, survivors of human trafficking will be at higher risk of being re-trafficked due to lack of potential employment options and a decrease in critical services (Tech Against Trafficking, 2020). Human trafficking will remain a major risk after COVID-19 is contained, which merits high levels of policy attention and resources (IOM and World Bank, 2022). The statistics provided in this report can serve as a starting point for systematic data collection and analysis on the impact of the COVID-19 on trafficking in persons which should be carried forward.

The 2021 IOM case management data analysed in this section show similar figures to the equivalent 2020 data, on IOM-assisted cases of victims of human trafficking from and exploited in the Asia–Pacific region. However, these results could be possibly distorting the perception on trafficking in persons during the pandemic. The scale of trafficking may have increased, but the inability of the public to report suspected cases and the additional difficulties law enforcement has faced in investigating trafficking cases, may be temporarily concealing the magnitude of the situation (UNODC, 2021; US Department of State, 2021). In some countries, a decrease in trafficking cases has been reported, largely due to the closures of national borders and the imposition of mobility restrictions (see [Section 1.1.1](#)) for certain periods (UNODC, 2021). Additionally, it is important to consider that while the analysis in this section has indicated a significant number of victims of human trafficking exploited in certain countries, the finding does not mean that more trafficking takes place in these countries. The data only concern victims assisted by IOM, and not victims assisted by other counter-trafficking actors.

In this regard, several areas are to be strengthened to monitor progress toward the [SDG Indicator 16.2.2: the number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation](#). The assessment of the [US Department of State 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report](#) shows that data gaps remained regarding trafficking trends and anti-trafficking tactics in the Asia–Pacific region and globally. Also, disaggregation by sex, age, types of exploitation and mean of control is rarely comprehensive or available. Additionally, IOM’s case management dataset does not exhaustively cover the full scale nor is necessarily representative of all cases of human trafficking in the region. The dataset rather represents a sample of the global population of identified victims of trafficking; hence, the dataset cannot be considered a random sample of identified victims. Estimating how representative the sample is of the unidentified segment of the victim population remains complex (IOM, 2021a).

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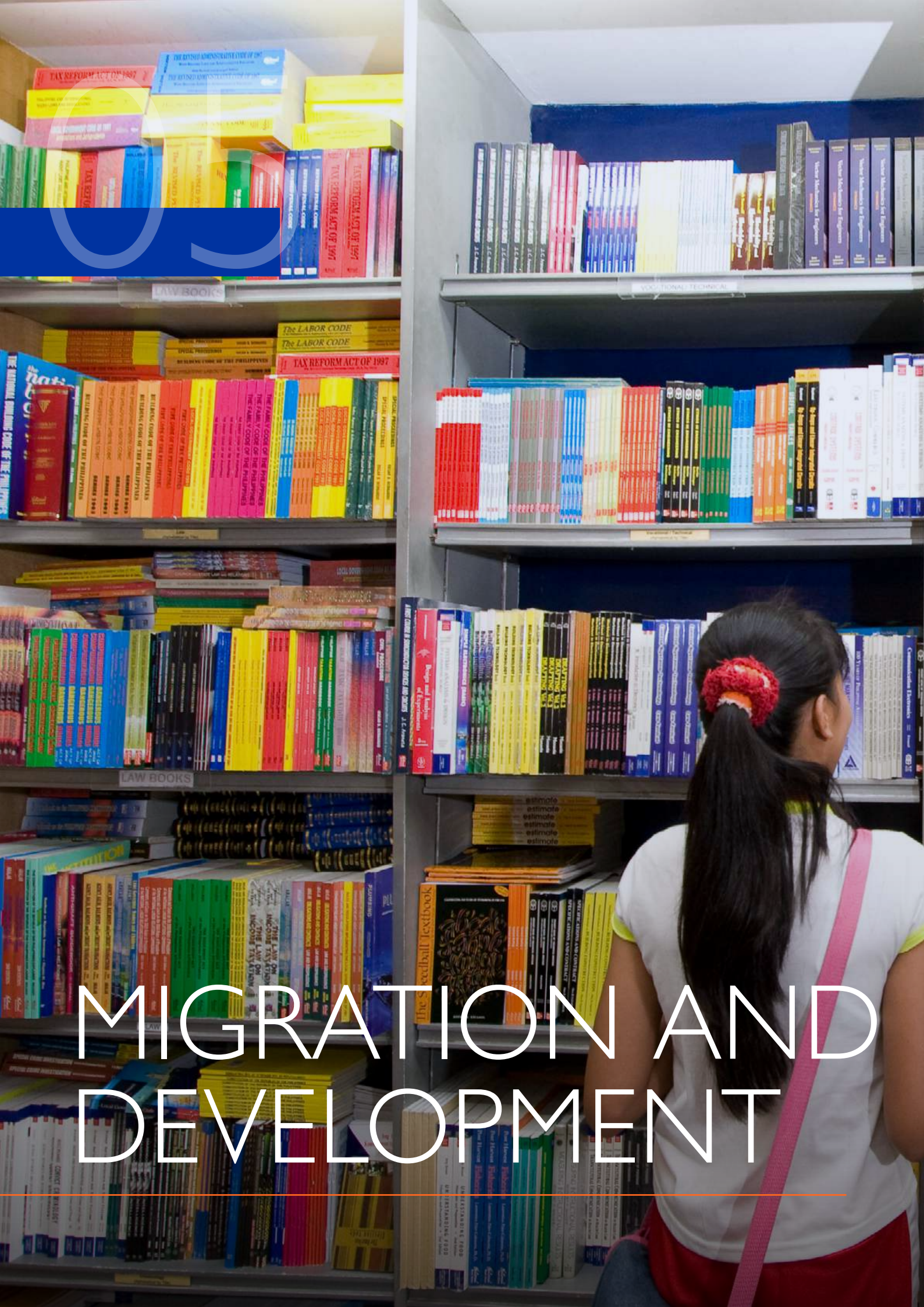
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IOM Safe Migration Outreach and Victim Screening at the Myawaddee border in Mae Sot, Thailand | © IOM 2017/Benjamin SUOMELA



MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT



A significant portion of migrants' remittances are spent on education of their children and young dependents. Children perceive that education is the most important reward from the hard work of their parents | © IOM 2008/Angelo JACINTO



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 and 20

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

Promote faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances and foster financial inclusion of migrants.



MGI Dimensions

4

Well-being of migrants

5.1 REMITTANCES AND DIASPORAS

Remittances, understood as money or goods migrants send to families or friends in origin countries, are among the most direct links between migration and development (IOM, 2021a). Remittances to low-and middle-income countries are currently valued at three times the amount of official development assistance (ODA) and more than 50 per cent higher than foreign direct investment (FDI), excepting China (Ratha et al., 2021b). Such rates indicate the power remittance flows command in smoothing consumption in origin countries in periods of financial hardships (*ibid.*, p.11).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to severe economic downturns in both remitting and receiving countries. Initial predictions estimated 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 the Asia–Pacific region (Ratha et al., 2020a, 2020b). However, remittances proved to be resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic, defying all predictions. By the end of 2020, the volume of remittance flows worldwide only declined by 2 per cent between 2019 and 2020, whereas the volume of remittance inflows to the Asia and the Pacific region decreased by 1.1 per cent (IOM, 2021b).

In 2021, while the COVID-19 pandemic dominated the socioeconomic landscape, economic recovery was the main priority worldwide, with governments in countries of origin and destination running several recovery plans, which led to the lifting of mobility restrictions and the reactivation of the economy. Did remittance flows continue to exhibit the same level of resilience in 2021 as in 2020? The following section analyses the changes of remittances inflows and with the goal of assessing the extent of such resilience in the Asia–Pacific region.

The section also explores the transaction costs of remittances in the region with the goal of monitoring **SDG Target 10.c (to reduce to less than 3 per cent that transaction cost of migrant remittances)** and **Global Compact for Migration Objective 20 that promotes faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances and foster financial inclusion of migrants**. Given the lack of remittance outflows data for 2021 during the review period of this report, this section will focus on remittance inflows to and remittance prices in Asia and the Pacific in 2021.

Finally, in line with **Global Compact for Migration Objective 19 – create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully**

contribute to sustainable development in all countries – the section also highlights the importance of the diaspora community in the development of the region by exploring the relationship between remittance inflows and diaspora populations. It also provides an overview of

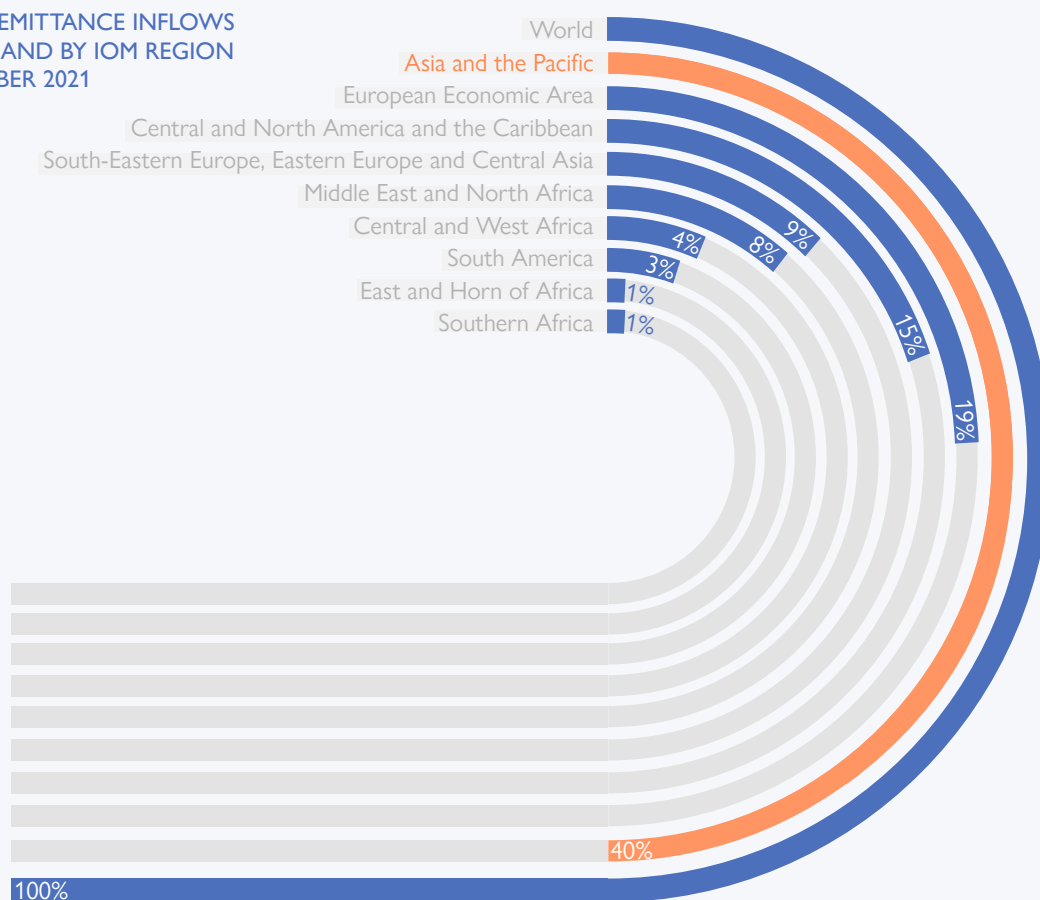
how governments have encouraged the diaspora in the economic development in the region, not only through remittances but also through a range of channels including investments, trade, tourism and skill and knowledge transfer.

5.1.1 REMITTANCE INFLOWS

In 2021, global remittance inflows were projected to reach a total of USD 773 billion – a growth of eight per cent compared to the previous year – according to the latest KNOMAD/World Bank (2022) estimates. At the regional level, resurgence in remittance inflows to Asia and the Pacific was also expected. The region¹⁵⁹ received nearly USD 306 billion of remittance inflows with a 2 per cent increase from 2020 to 2021 (*ibid.*), surpassing 2019 levels (USD 302 billion); (Figure 74). The Asia-Pacific region also accounted for the largest proportion of global remittance flows (40%). These figures demonstrate once again the resilience of remittance flows to the region, following the same trend as in 2020

2020 (IOM, 2021b). This resilience can be largely linked to, on one hand, a greater altruistic reaction from overseas migrants given the higher COVID-19 related risks in the region, that is, higher COVID-19 cases and lower vaccination rates (ADB, 2021b, p.7). On the other hand, higher-than-expected remittance receipts especially from migrants in advanced economies were enabled by partial resumption in economic activity and employment in major destination countries grounded in exceptional COVID-19 emergency fiscal stimulus and accommodative monetary policy (Ratha et al., 2021b, p.15).

FIGURE 74: VOLUME OF REMITTANCE INFLOWS WORLDWIDE AND BY IOM REGION AS OF DECEMBER 2021



Source: Compiled from Remittance Inflows Data. KNOMAD/World Bank (2022).

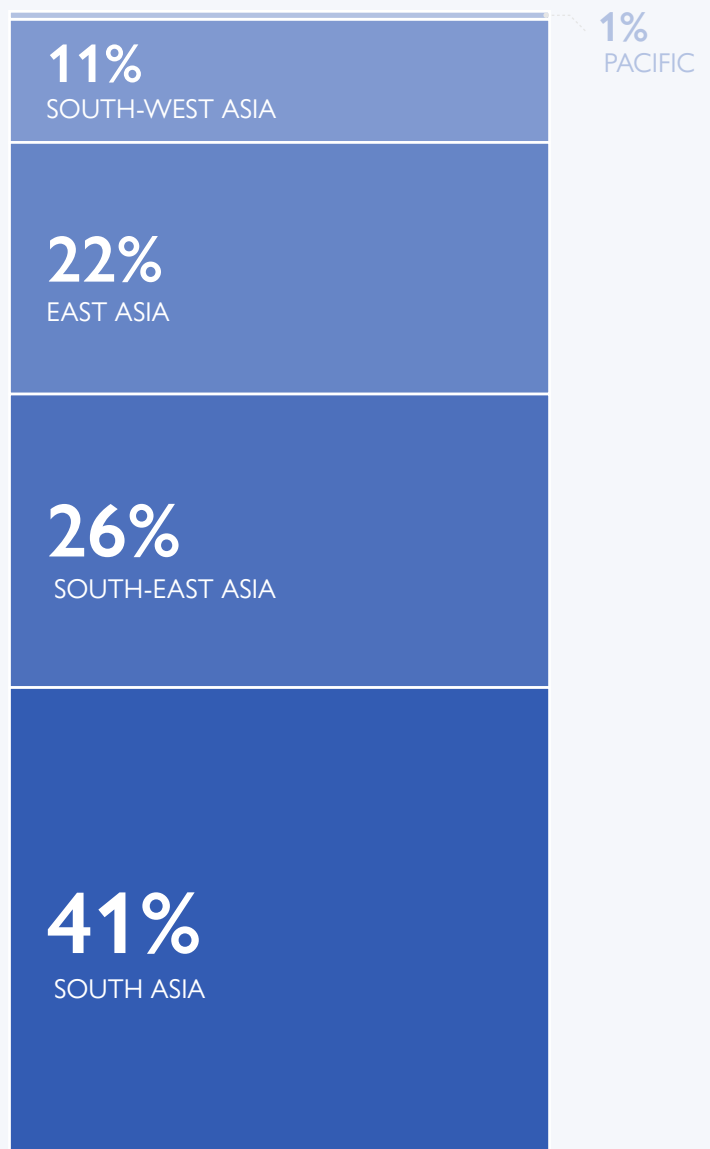
159. Based on 36 Asia-Pacific countries, areas and territories with available data as of November 2021. Data on remittance inflows have not yet covered the following Asia-Pacific countries as of November 2021: Brunei Darussalam, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Singapore and Tuvalu.

At the subregional level, South Asia accounted for almost 41 per cent of the total volume of remittances in the region in 2021 (KNOMAD/World Bank, 2022), (Figure 75). Remittances are the dominant source of foreign exchange for the subregion and are almost three times as large as foreign direct investment (Ratha et al., 2021b, p.56). In terms of absolute change between 2020 and 2021, the subregion experienced a surge of 4 per cent. The growth in remittance inflows to South Asia could be attributed to changes in the main destination countries hosting most the subregion's migrant workers. Economic recovery, fiscal stimulus and higher oil prices positively affected remittance flows in all regions. Specifically, increased remittance flows to South, Central and Southeast Asia were driven by higher oil prices

and stronger economic activity in the Russia Federation and the GCC countries, which employ more than half of South Asia's migrants (ibid., p.16).

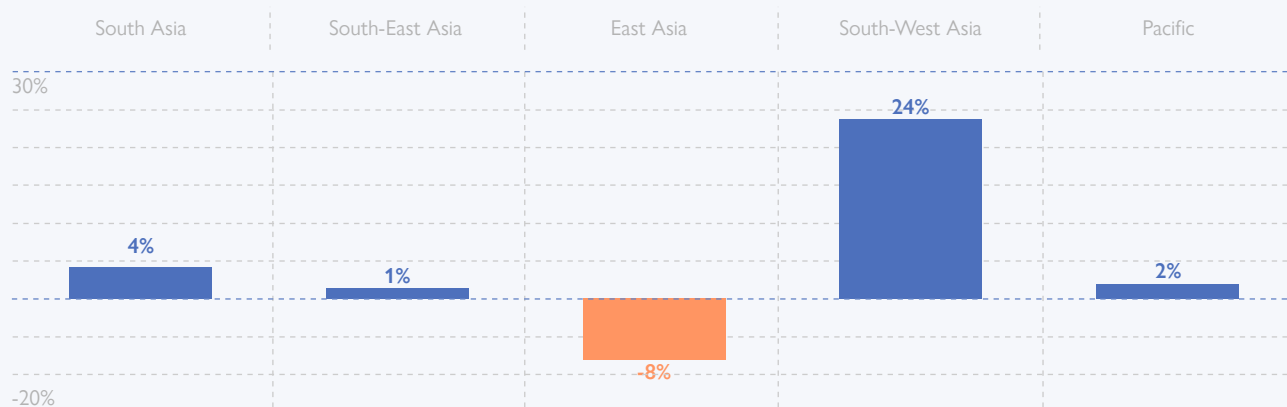
Furthermore, while South-West Asia only accounted for 11.4 per cent of the total inflow of remittances in the region, the subregion saw the largest increase between 2020 and 2021 – a growth of 24 per cent (Figure 76). This could be attributed to the boost of remittance inflows to Pakistan due to the Afghanistan crisis. Afghanistan's fragile economic and political situation gave a special impetus to remittance inflows in Pakistan. Following the breakdown of official channels of money transfers to Afghanistan, remittances intended for Afghan refugees in Pakistan, as well as for families in dire stress in Afghanistan, flowed into Pakistan (ibid.).

FIGURE 75: DISTRIBUTION OF REMITTANCE INFLOWS IN THE ASIA–PACIFIC BY SUBREGIONS



Source: Compiled from Remittance Inflows Data. KNOMAD/World Bank (2022).

FIGURE 76: PERCENTAGE CHANGE OF REMITTANCE INFLOWS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION BY SUBREGION BETWEEN 2020 AND 2021

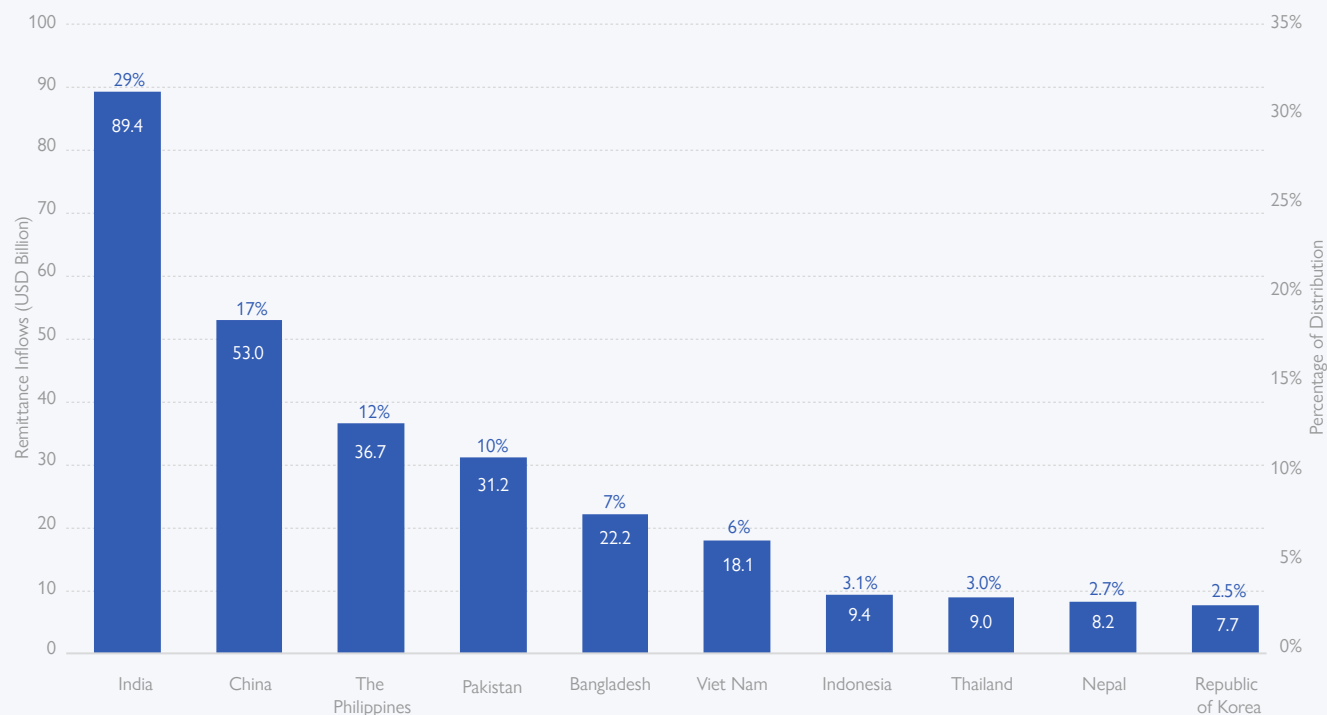


Source: Compiled from [Remittance Inflows Data](#). KNOMAD/World Bank (2022).

At the country level, the largest remittance recipients in the region in 2021 remained approximately the same as in 2020. India, China, the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Viet Nam and Indonesia (in descending order) were once again the largest

recipients of remittances in the region ([KNOMAD/World Bank, 2022](#)), (Figure 77). As well, five of the top ten largest remittance recipients worldwide came from the Asia and the Pacific region, with India and China ranking first and third.

FIGURE 77: TOP 10 ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES RECEIVING THE LARGEST REMITTANCE INFLOWS IN 2021



Source: Compiled from [Remittance Inflows Data](#). KNOMAD/World Bank (2022).

Country-level remittance inflows to several Asia-Pacific countries have proved to be more stable and resilient than previously forecast, with consistent recovering patterns following modest declines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2020 and 2021, 17 of 36 Asia-Pacific countries and areas with available data saw an increase in the absolute amount of remittance inflows (KNOMAD/World Bank, 2022). The

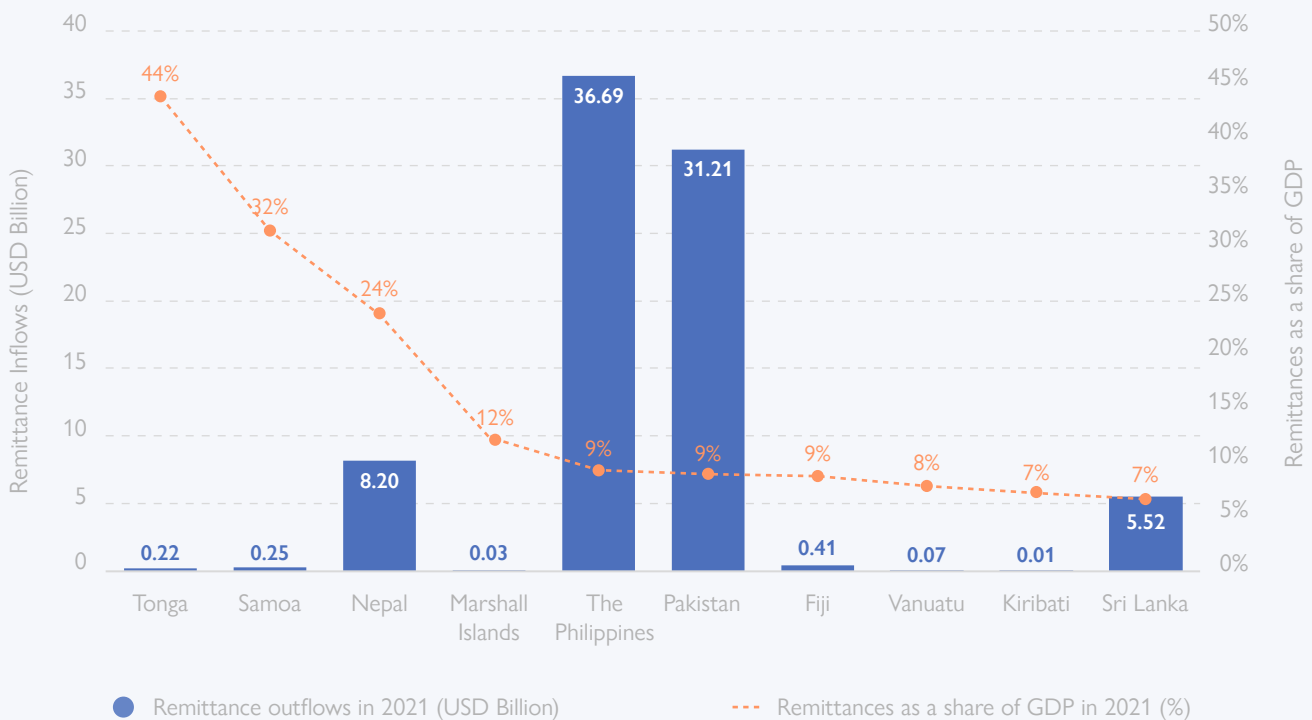
largest absolute increase as the receiving countries was seen in the Marshall Islands (33%), followed by Samoa (22%), Pakistan (20%), Fiji (16%) and Tonga (15%). Instead, the countries that saw a decline in remittance inflows were, in descending order, Afghanistan (-62%), Australia (-47%), Bhutan (-33%), Myanmar (-25%) and Sri Lanka (-23%), (*ibid.*).

REMITTANCES AS A SHARE OF GDP

Remittance inflows stand at remarkably large shares of GDP among several economies. As in 2020, six out of the top 10 countries with the highest inflows of remittances as a share of GDP in the region in 2021 were from the Pacific (KNOMAD/World Bank, 2022). Specifically, Pacific economies, such as Tonga, Samoa and Marshall Islands are the most remittance

dependent in the region in 2021, with remittance flows accounting for 12 to 44 per cent of GDP (Figure 78), (*ibid.*). In Tonga, remittance inflows account for nearly 44 per cent of GDP, making its economy once again the world's most dependent on inflows from diaspora in 2021 (*ibid.*).

FIGURE 78: TOP 10 ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST REMITTANCE INFLOW AS A SHARE OF GDP IN 2021



Source: Compiled from Remittance Inflows Data. KNOMAD/World Bank (2022).

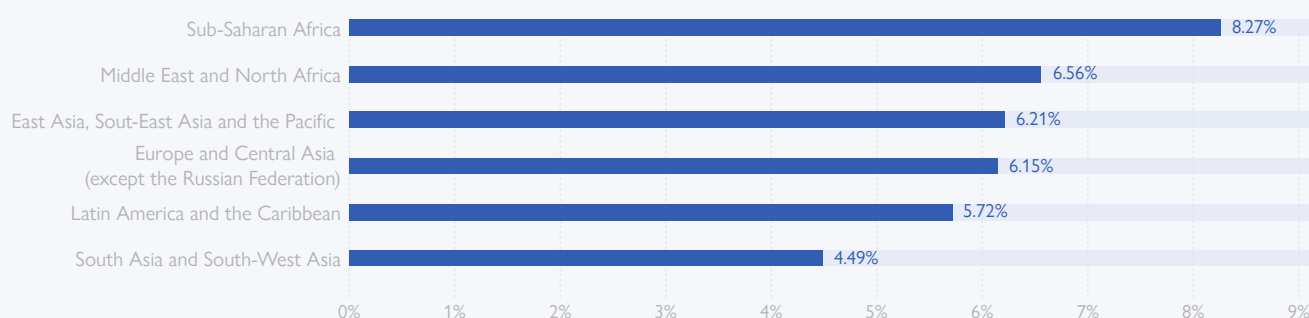
5.1.2 REMITTANCE COSTS

The cost of sending remittances varies across the Asia-Pacific region; however, no subregion reaches the [SDG Target 10.c](#) that aims 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. Factors such as lack of competition in the remittance market, operational costs, burdensome regulatory and compliance requirements, de-risking¹⁶⁰ and deficiency in access to technology supporting payment and settlement systems, all contribute to the high price of remittances (ADB, 2021a, p.7). Given that sending money through formal channels is expensive – bank transfers are particularly costly due to bank fees and the interbank exchange rate – informal remittances that flow through *hawala* or *hundi* schemes are still dominant. Both schemes are informal methods of transferring money without any currency moving cross-border as it works through a trust system between dealers (*ibid.*, p.1). Lower prices are one of several reasons that informal channels are preferred. Many individuals prefer informal remittance channels because no formal identification is required, close relatives recommend it, they trust the agent conducting the transaction, and they lack financial education. Cash flows are hard to quantify and can add as much as 50 per cent to recorded flows (Kakhkharov and Ahunov, 2021). According to the World

Bank group, the global average cost for sending remittances was 6.30 per cent in Q3 2021 compared to 6.51 per cent in Q4 2020, with most regions having recorded a decrease in average total cost (Figure 79). However, these values vary depending on the region the money is sent to. In East Asia and the Pacific, remittance costs decreased from 8 per cent in 2017 to 6.21 per cent in Q3 2021. South Asia experienced a wider decrease in costs from 7.9 per cent in 2017 to 4.49 per cent in Q3 2021 (World Bank, 2021, n.d.).

In East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific,¹⁶¹ remittance fees to the Philippines are among the lowest in the subregion, whereas money transfer costs from Thailand to bordering countries in the region persisted as the highest, with an average of 13.8 per cent in Q1 2021 (Ratha et al., 2021b, p.34). Still, sending remittances to Pacific countries is made expensive across Asia because of the low number of migration corridors, leading to an absence of competition. On the other hand, the South and South-West Asian subregions¹⁶² maintain the lowest average remittance costs worldwide, yet transactions through official channels remain high and informal remittances are popular (*ibid.*). In 2021, most countries in the region experienced an unjustified increase in the costs of sending money (*ibid.*).

FIGURE 79: AVERAGE COST OF SENDING USD 200 BY REGION OF THE WORLD IN 2021 (%)



Source: World Bank Remittance Prices Worldwide Quarterly Issue 39, September 2021.

160. De-risking refers to financial institutions closing the accounts of clients perceived as high-risk for money laundering or terrorist financing abuse, namely money service businesses, non-profit organizations, correspondent banks and foreign embassies (Durner and Shetret, 2015).

161. Including American Samoa, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia and Northern Mariana Islands as per World Bank regional definition.

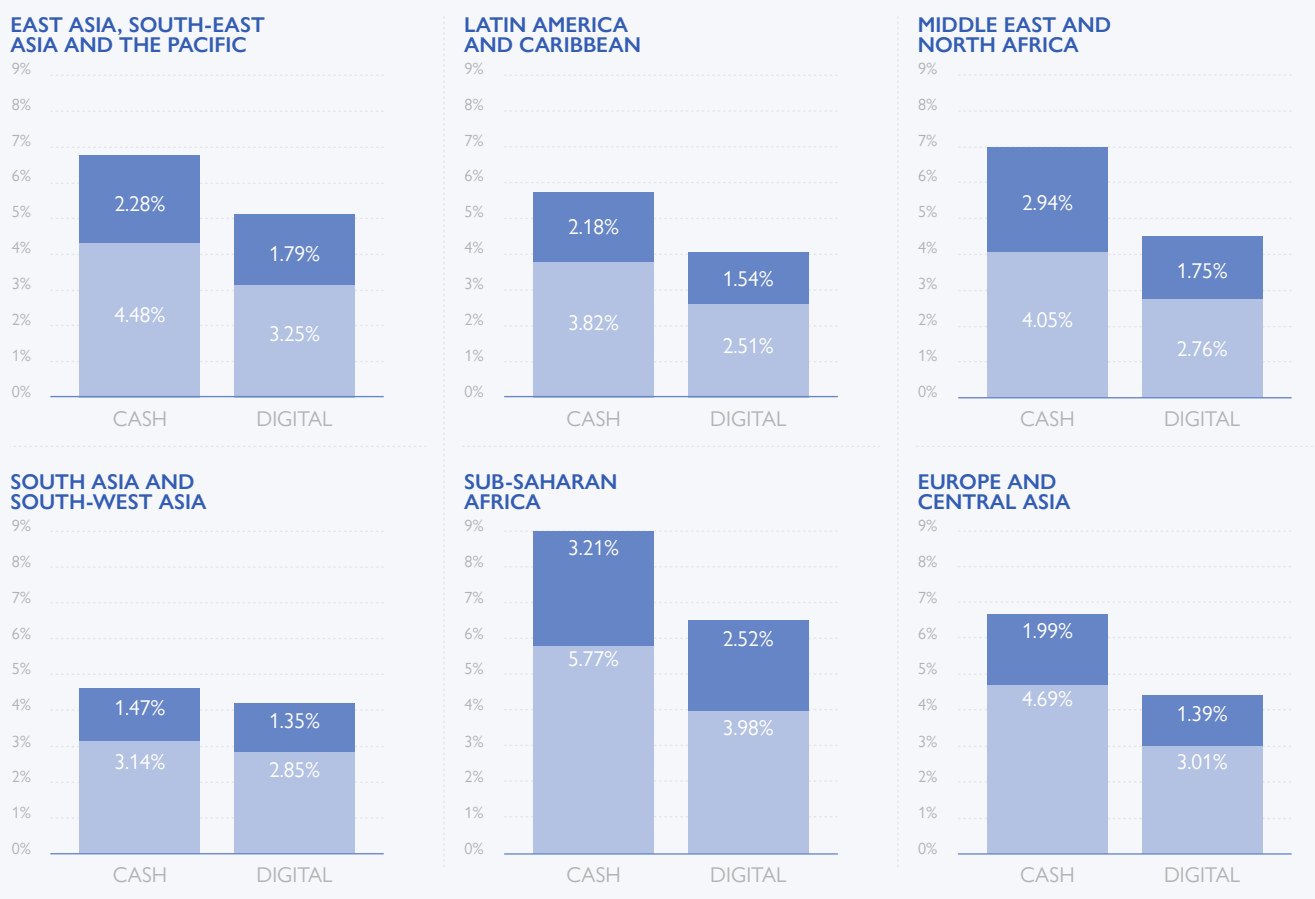
162. Without including the Islamic Republic of Iran as per World Bank regional definition.

DIGITAL SERVICES

Looking more closely at remittance services, costs consist of fees and foreign exchange margin, and fees account for a large portion of the costs. The World Bank Group records state that in all regions, costs for non-digital services, which hold higher transaction fees, are greater than those for digital services¹⁶³ (World Bank, 2021, p.15), (Figure 80). In Q3 2021, the global average cost of sending USD 200 in digital remittances was recorded at 4.99 per cent in contrast with 6.77 per cent for non-digital remittances, and digital services

accounted for 27 per cent of all services Remittances Prices Worldwide collected (that is, banks, mobile operators, money transfer operators¹⁶⁴ and post offices); (ibid., p.6). In the Asia–Pacific region, digital costs for sending USD 200 were at 5.04 per cent for East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific and 4.2 per cent for South and South-West Asia in Q3 2021 (ibid., p.15). Fees covered 1.79 per cent of the total cost in the former subregion and 1.35 per cent in the latter.

FIGURE 80: AVERAGE COST BY REGION: CASH VERSUS DIGITAL SERVICES



Source: World Bank Remittance Prices Worldwide Quarterly Issue 39, September 2021.

● Fx margin ● Fees

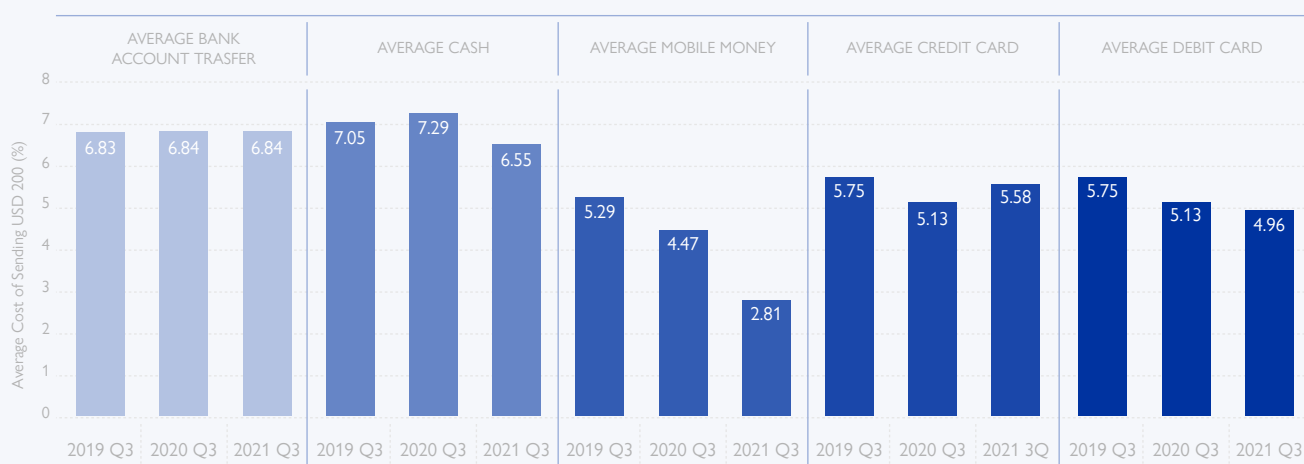
163. Digital remittances are remittances sent via a payment instrument in an online or self-assisted manner and received into a transaction account maintained at a bank or non-bank deposit taking institution (say a post office), mobile money or e-money account.

164. Money transfer operators include both traditional providers and innovative/fintech players.

In the same quarter of 2021, Mobile Money was recorded as the cheapest method for funding a remittance transaction, at an average cost of 2.81 per cent compared to 6.55 per cent for cash and 6.84 per cent using a bank account transfer (Figure 81), (*ibid.*, p.17). Thus, digital channels, with lower transfer prices and improved transparency, efficiency, convenience and access, have become the cheapest and most efficient method to send remittances, allowing for smaller

and more frequent remittance transactions. Despite the advantages of using digital channels, numerous remittance transactions continue to involve cash because the former is only accessible via bank accounts. Many migrants do not have bank accounts in their countries of destination or lack banking coverage in remote areas of their countries of origin (Ratha et al., 2021b).

FIGURE 81: AVERAGE COST BY INSTRUMENT USED TO FUND THE TRANSACTION IN 2021



Source: World Bank Remittance Prices Worldwide Quarterly Issue 39, September 2021.



An Afghan worker in a training programme learning the art of shoemaking at his new job | © IOM 2021

5.1.3 DIASPORAS

While there is no universally agreed on definition of the term “diaspora”, IOM defines diaspora as “migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background” (IOM, 2019). The term diasporas is currently used to describe those who identify with a “homeland”, but live outside it (IOM, 2020a). Definitions not only include first-generation emigrants, but also foreign-born children of these individuals, as long as they maintain some sort of link (cultural, linguistic, historical, religious or affective) to their parent’s home country (ibid.). As a result of globalization, diasporas have now the possibility to live a transnational community life, socially interacting simultaneously with their countries of origin or heritage and countries of residence if they are willing to do so (IOM, 2017).

The diasporas’ vast transnational networks, as well as their ability to pull together significant financial resources, enable them to make positive impacts on the development of their countries of origin (Osman, 2008). However, data collection on diaspora population is complex. First-, second- and third-generation of migrants’ descendants may consider themselves, or not, as part of diaspora communities. Additionally, emigrants are not automatically member of diasporas (IOM, 2020a). In general terms, there is more information rather than data on diasporas; however, other data sources – not directly measuring diaspora population – can provide key

insights and trends on how the diasporas maintain links to a certain country of origin (ibid.).

Data on migrant stocks and remittances can act as a proxy for the link between the geographical concentration of diasporas and the financial contributions of diasporas in their home countries. As seen in Section 5.1.1, in 2021, the total volume of remittances inflows was USD 773 billion globally. Remittances sent by diaspora groups are regarded as a major source of external financing, particularly for lower and middle-income economies (Ratha et al., 2021b). The Asia–Pacific region accounted for the 40 per cent of the global volume of remittances inflows – nearly USD 306 billion. According to the latest figures on migration stocks, by mid-2020, emigrants originating from Asia and the Pacific region accounted for almost 30 per cent of the world’s international migration stock (DESA, 2020).

The following subsection has two parts. The first part focuses on the diaspora’s financial contributions through remittances in the cases of three major receiving countries in the region: Pakistan, the Philippines and Bangladesh. The second part will provide an overview of diaspora engagement policies and practices, with the aim of highlighting the various ways on how governments in the region have promoted the contribution of the diaspora into development, not only by facilitating remittances, but also through a wide range of other channels.

5.1.3.1 LINKS BETWEEN DIASPORAS AND REMITTANCE INFLOWS

In line with the proven resilience on remittance inflows during COVID-19, the aim of this section is to assess the extent of how the diaspora community supported such resilience. Based on national institutions data on remittance inflows, and latest migration stock figures as of mid-2020 from the Population Division of the United Nations Department of

Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the section will explore main remittance-receiving countries and major destinations for emigrants to better understand the link between remittances and the diaspora of the three aforementioned countries during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan is among the top recipients of remittances globally (Ratha et al., 2021a). According to the latest figures of the State Bank of Pakistan (2022a) the country’s remittance inflows rose by 40 per cent from USD 22 billion in 2019 to almost USD 31 billion in 2021. Remittances are the second

source of foreign exchange in the country, making Pakistani emigrants key actors in the balance of payment deficit (Khan et al., 2021). In 2021, Pakistan ranked sixth in the top ten Asia–Pacific economies dependent on remittances, with inflows accounting to 9 per cent of GDP in 2021

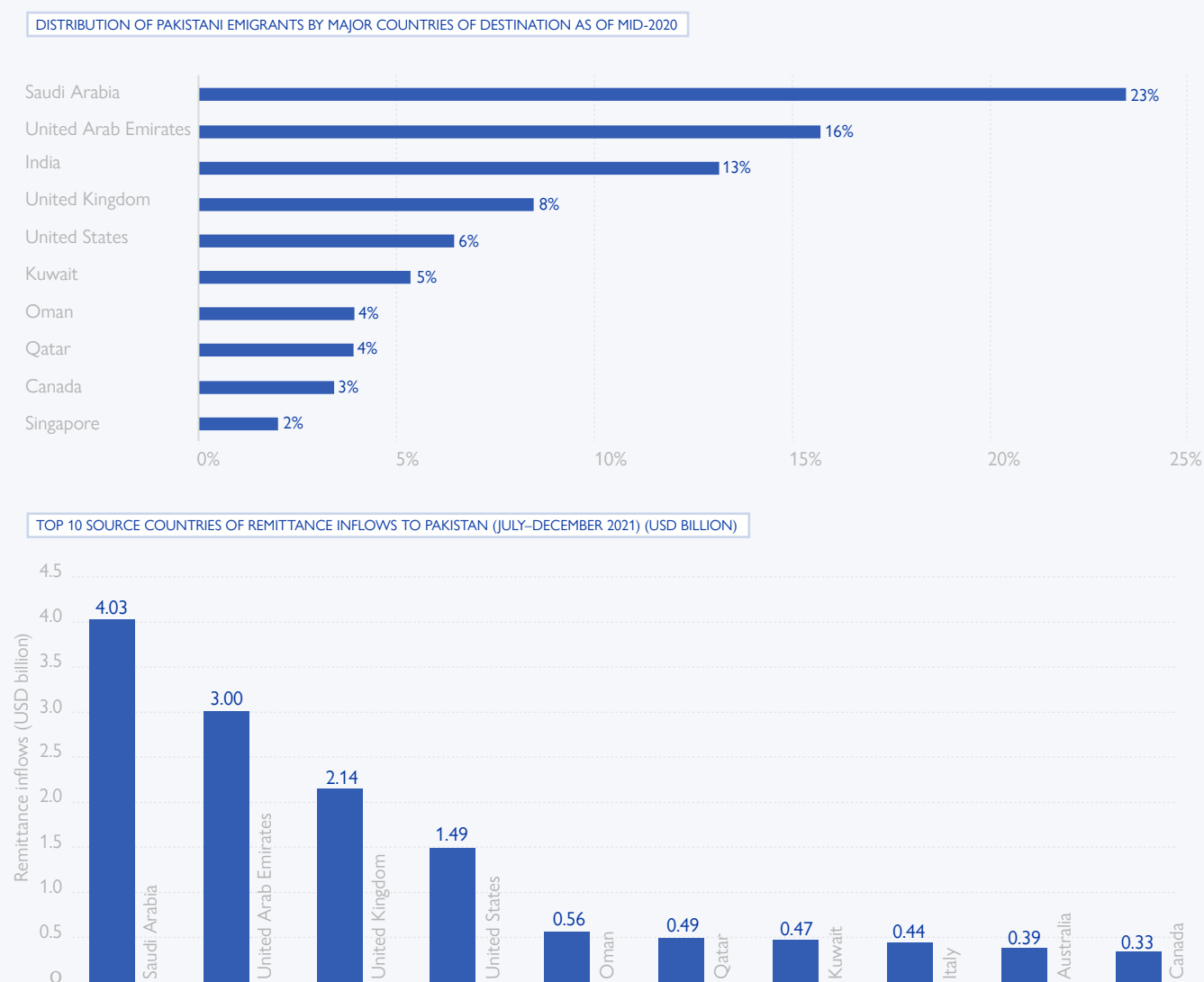
(KNOMAD/World Bank, 2022). In line with the regional trend, in 2021 remittance inflows to Pakistan have thus proved resilient during COVID-19 outbreak, registering a steady growth over the past two years.

Pakistani migrants and diasporas hold a key role in the country's economic development given that remittances are a major source of income for the country. According to the latest data from the State Bank of Pakistan (2022b), remittance inflows to Pakistan came mainly from the Gulf region and Europe throughout the second half of 2021. At the country level, Saudi Arabia has remained the primary source of remittance inflows sending around USD 4 billion – more than a quarter of the total volume of remittances (26%) – between July and December 2021. The United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom ranked second and third, respectively, remitting USD 3 billion and USD 2.1 billion to Pakistan (*ibid.*). Interestingly, as seen in Figure 82, eight out of the top 10 major countries of destination

for Pakistani emigrants were also among the top 10 major source countries of remittance inflows. This correlation emphasizes the link between the source of remittance inflows and the size of diaspora.

The rise of remittances has been sustained by Pakistani diaspora communities worldwide, demonstrating the resilient nature of remittances even during financial, health and economic crises as was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government, however, also contributed during the COVID-19 pandemic to supporting the diasporas to remit money to families through initiatives that allowed to remove barriers to remittance inflows. Notwithstanding, the impact of the diaspora on the country's development is multifaceted, as Pakistanis abroad promote trade and foreign investment, foster businesses, enable skills and knowledge transfers, and send remittances (Newland and Plaza, 2013).

FIGURE 82: MAJOR SOURCE COUNTRIES OF REMITTANCE INFLOWS TO PAKISTAN VERSUS MAJOR DESTINATION COUNTRIES FOR PAKISTAN EMIGRANTS



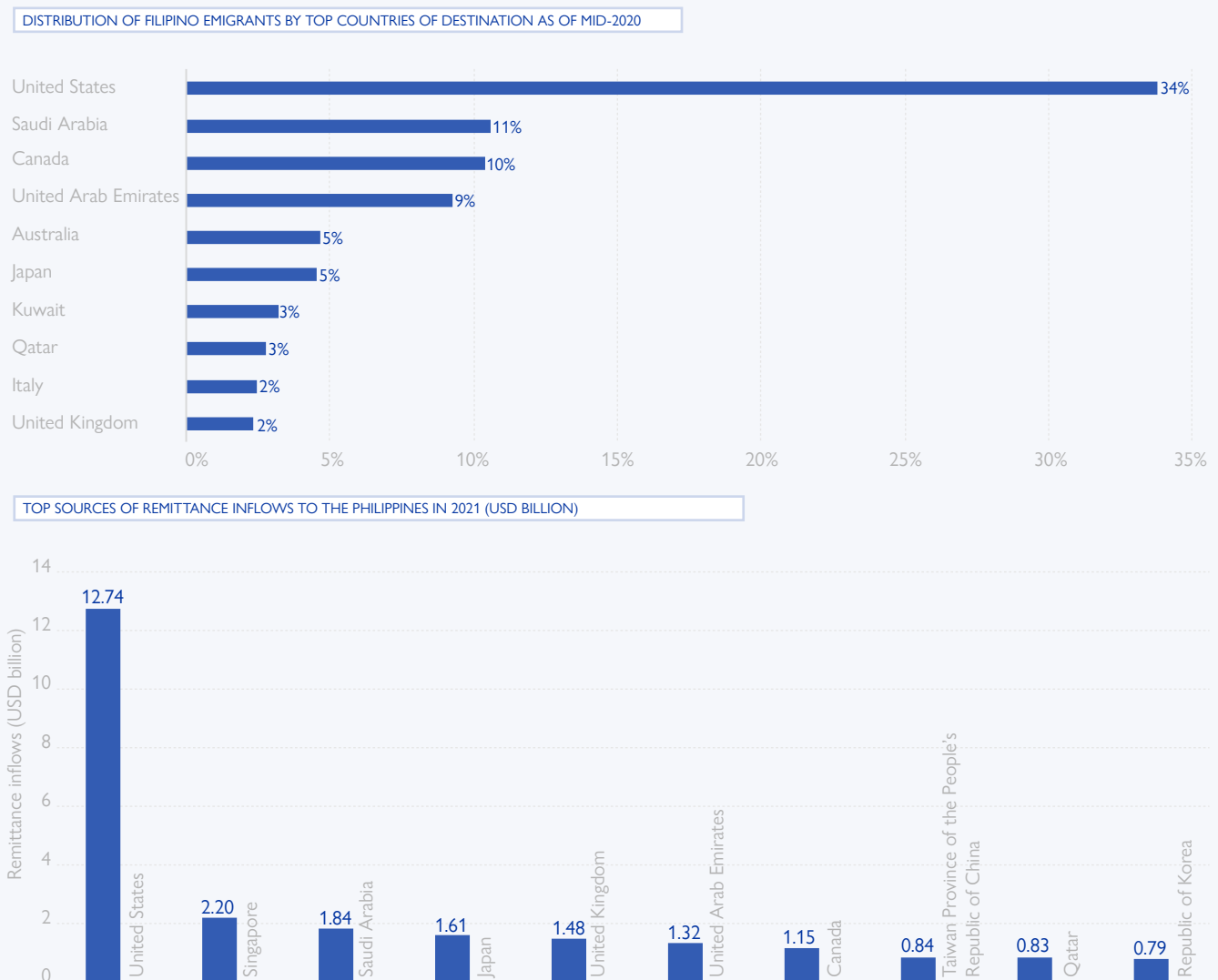
Source: Compiled from the State of Pakistan Statistics and DWH Department – Country Wise Worker's Remittances Database (2022) and DESA International Migrant Stock (2020).

THE PHILIPPINES

In 2021, the Philippines ranked fourth among the top five recipient countries for remittances globally. Cash remittances sent by OFW via banks increase from nearly USD 29.9 billion in 2020 to USD 31.4 billion in 2021, exceeding the pre-pandemic 2019 levels of remittance inflow, which had a volume of USD 30.1 billion ([Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, 2022](#)). Following the same trend as Pakistan, remittance influges to the country throughout the COVID-19 pandemic proved resilient, registering growth over the past two years ([KNOMAD/World Bank, 2022](#)). Remittances made up to 9.3 per cent of the country's GDP in 2021, ranking fifth in the top ten Asia–Pacific economies dependent on remittances (*ibid.*).

OFW inflows arrived mainly from the United States, being once again the major source of remittances, recording around 40 per cent in 2021. The United States are followed by Singapore (7%), Saudi Arabia (5.8%), Japan (5.1%) and the United Kingdom (4.7%), (*ibid.*). Moreover, migration stock figures show that 34 per cent of all Filipino emigrants were hosted also in the United States ([DESA, 2020](#)) by mid-2020. There is a clear link between the size of the Filipino diaspora and the volume of remittances sent from countries of destination. The link between the source of remittance inflows and the size of the diaspora is even more evident: among the top 10 countries of destination for Filipino emigrants, six were also within the top 10 major source countries of remittances inflows (Figure 83). These countries accounted for 63 per cent of both Filipino emigrants and remittance inflows.

FIGURE 83: MAJOR SOURCE COUNTRIES OF REMITTANCE INFLOWS TO THE PHILIPPINES VERSUS MAJOR DESTINATION COUNTRIES FOR FILIPINO EMIGRANTS



Source: Compiled from [Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas \(2022\)](#) and [DESA International Migrant Stock \(2020\)](#).

The Filipino migrant community has influenced the country's economic development as remittances from Filipino emigrants are a key element of the Philippines' development strategy (Government of the Philippines, n.d.). One of the reasons why remittance inflows proved resilient throughout and in the aftermath of the pandemic could be because OFWs secured jobs in essential sectors such as health, construction and shared services (Kang and Latoja, 2022, p.5; Philippines States Authority, 2022)

The Filipino diaspora, either as permanent residents of another country or as labour migrants, plays a key role

in the development of the country through remittances (Magpantay, 2020, p.53). Remittances support families but are also used in a broad range of investments, specifically property investments, which have expanded the real estate sector of the country. The growth of the real estate sector together with increasing strategic investments for livelihood and the provision of social insurance to maintain security intact during crisis have fueled economic growth in the Philippines (ibid.). Moreover, inflow of remittances offsets the decline in domestic wages and income in households, allowing additional spending on food, education, property and health care (ibid., p.54).



The border point between Cambodia and Thailand, host to a wide variety of small-scale cross-border trade networks | © IOM 2016/Muse MOHAMMED

BANGLADESH

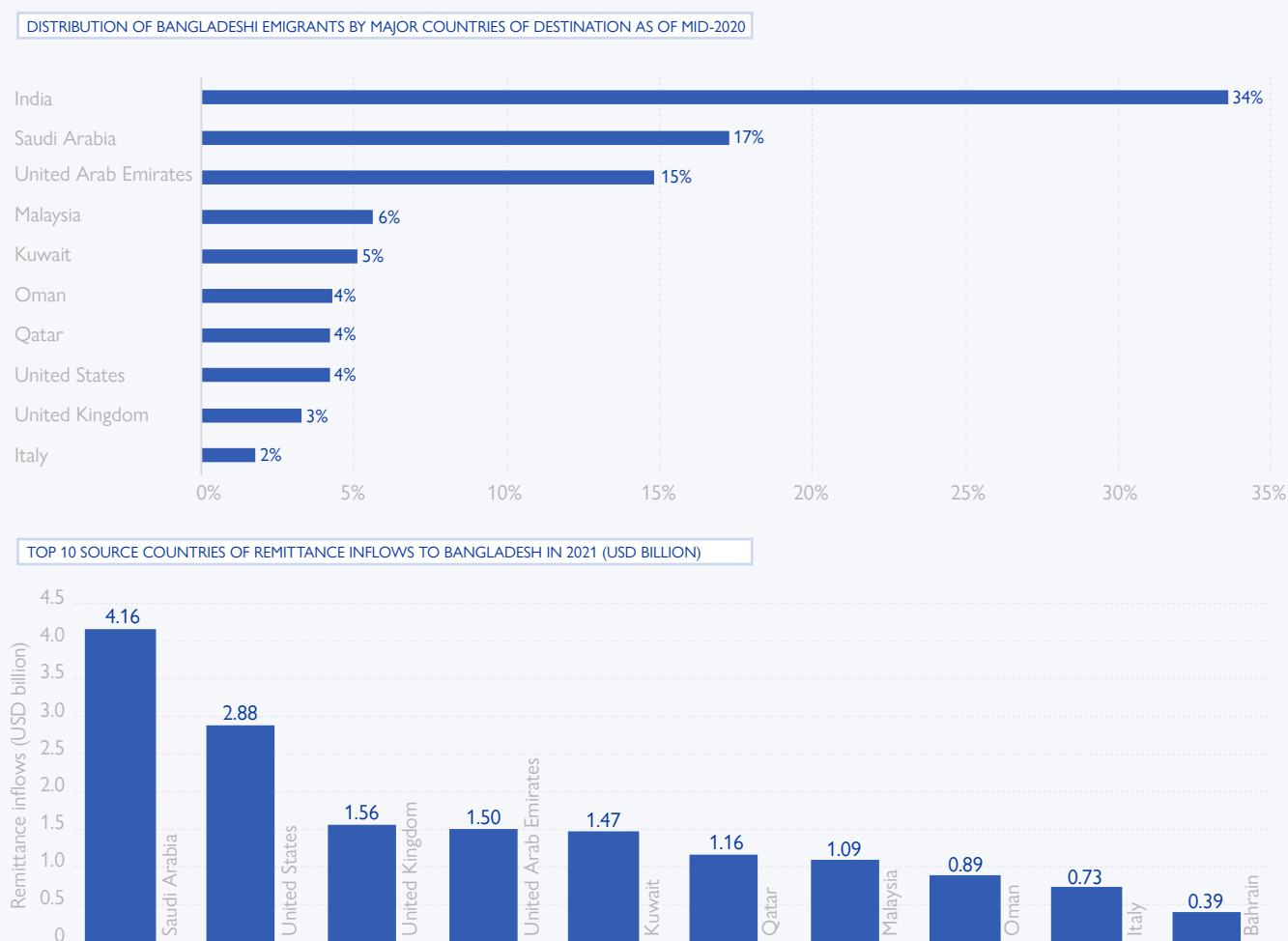
The World Bank estimates that the Bangladeshi population sent home over USD 23 billion in 2021, putting Bangladesh among the top recipients of remittances globally and fifth in the Asia–Pacific region (KNOMAD/World Bank, 2022). These remittances account for 6.22 per cent of the country's GDP, representing the second largest source of foreign income (Ratha et al., 2021b). Inflows increased by 2.2 per cent between 2020 and 2021; such growth is representative of the resilience of remittances during COVID-19.

As is the case with Pakistan, remittance inflows arrived predominantly from the Gulf region. Saudi Arabia was the primary source of remittance inflows to the country, remitting 23 per cent of the total volume of remittance inflows in 2021 (BMET, 2022). The United States and United Kingdom ranked second and third, with 18 and 10 per cent of remittances respectively (ibid.); (Figure 84). Diaspora in the United Kingdom dates to World War II when the country faced labour shortages and families

from Bangladesh and India initiated migration. Migration expanded when immigration laws were relaxed, leading to close transnational connections between Bangladesh and the United Kingdom today. Additionally, the latest migration stock figures show that eight out of the top 10 destinations for Bangladeshi emigrants were also among the top 10 major source countries of remittance inflows, stressing the link between the size of the diaspora and the source of remittance inflows.

According to the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, the Bangladeshi Government has promoted the deployment of workers abroad since the 1970s. Currently there are 13 million Bangladeshis working abroad, which is translated into USD 15 billion remittances sent to the country's economy (ILO, 2021). Migrant workers have also become fundamental in the development and economic growth of the country.

FIGURE 84: MAJOR SOURCE COUNTRIES OF REMITTANCE INFLOWS TO BANGLADESH VERSUS MAJOR DESTINATION COUNTRIES FOR BANGLADESHI EMIGRANTS



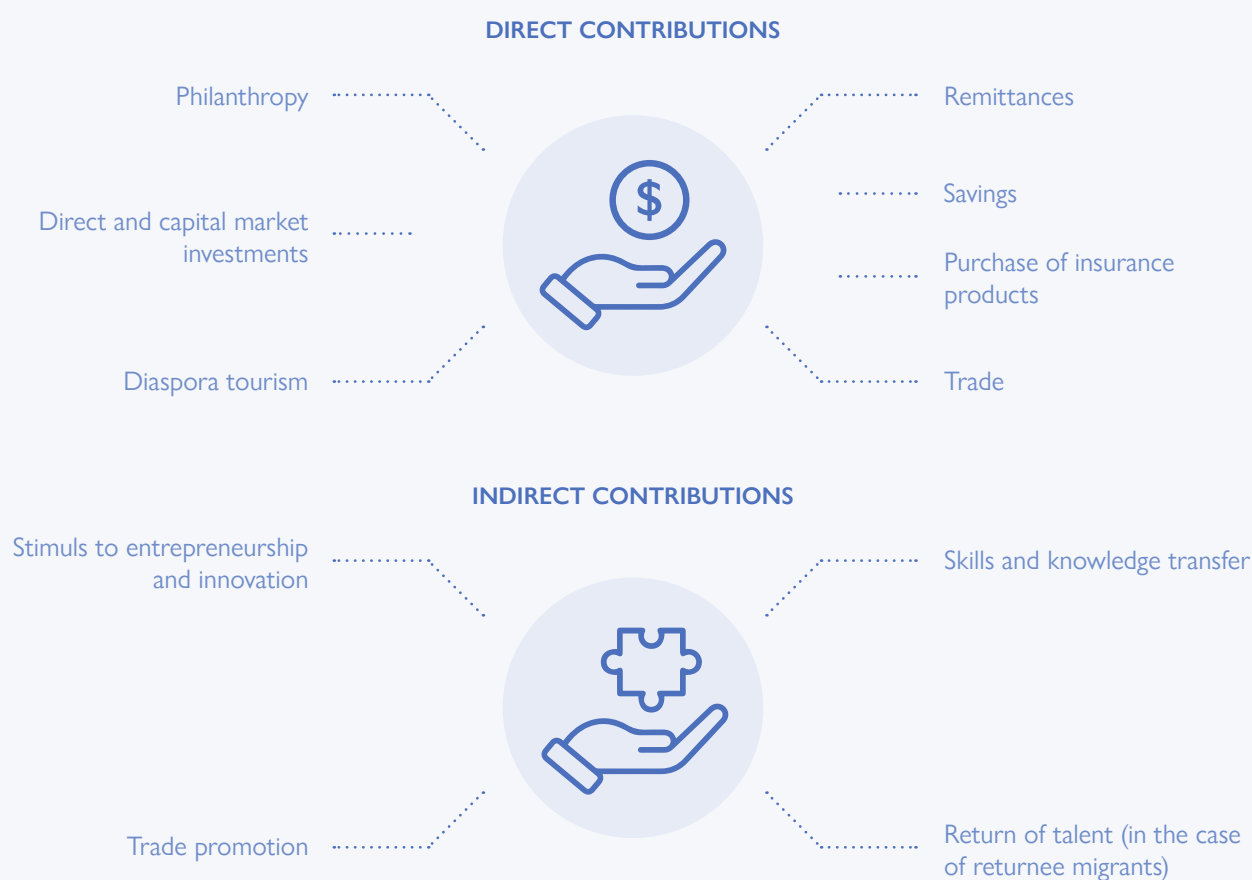
Source: Compiled from BMET Remittance Inflows: Country Wise (Monthly) in 2022 and DESA International Migrant Stock (2020).

5.1.3.2 DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Policymakers in the Asia-Pacific region have increasingly recognized the value that diaspora populations bring to development efforts at home, not just as senders of remittances but also as sources of human capital and direct and indirect (capital market) investments (Agunias and Newland, 2012; ADB and World Bank, 2018).

Diasporans possess endowments of human, financial and social capital in countries of residence, sometimes in excess of average individual endowments of those who reside in the

country of origin/heritage (IOM, 2017). Global actors including governments, private companies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations have sought to engage diasporic communities to transfer these benefits to support the human, social and economic development of their countries of origin/heritage (*ibid.*). Diasporas can engage with the economic development of their countries of origin – or heritage – in many ways. These contributions can be grouped into two broad groups:



Source: Compiled from *Contributions and Counting: Guidance on Measuring the Economic Impact of your Diaspora beyond Remittances* (IOM, 2020b).

This section provides an overview of the diaspora's engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. It draws on knowledge gathered by the EU Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF) global mapping exercise of diaspora engagement across six regions conducted in 2020. The aim of the mapping exercise was to provide evidence on diaspora engagement policies, institutions and practices. The global mapping generated 107 individual country factsheets, including 25 from the Asia-

Pacific region, which are available via an [interactive map](#) on the EUDiF website.

Information was collected on 16 countries from Asia mainland¹⁶⁵ and 11 countries in the Pacific subregion. The following analysis will summarize the main findings of the EUDiF mapping exercise into two groups: diaspora engagement in Asia and diaspora engagement in the Pacific.

165. East Asia, South Asia, South-East Asia and South-West Asia.

5.1.3.2.1 DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN ASIA

A regional framework on diaspora engagement in Asia does not exist. However, at the subregional level, frameworks have been developed to facilitate safe and orderly labour migration and protect workers' rights (EUDiF, 2021a). These include the [Association of Southeast Nations \(ASEAN\)](#) and the [South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation \(SAARC\)](#).

At the national level, while most countries initially approached diaspora engagement through labour migration policies and laws, diaspora engagement for development is gradually emerging as a national interest across Asia. Based on the regional EUDiF mapping exercise, only eight countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – have a dedicated institution

that promotes the diaspora's engagement with the country's development; however, they have no policy framework. Only Nepal has both a dedicated policy and institution, which was created 11 years after the adoption of the policy (EUDiF, 2021a). Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Nepal have started developing their diaspora engagement around safe migration, labour laws, and later linked labour migration to development (*ibid.*).

The EUDiF regional mapping on diaspora engagement has also shown that national and regional efforts in Asia mainly revolve around three main categories: (1) creating an enabling environment, (2) attracting remittances and foreign investments and (3) attracting skills. Table 7 summarizes key trends and practices on these three categories:

TABLE 7: KEY TRENDS AND PRACTICES ON DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN ASIA

CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT	(QUASI) CITIZENSHIP	Thailand, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan Cambodia and the Philippines allow dual citizenship, which has proven to be a point of contention towards further diaspora engagement. India, Indonesia, Nepal and China have approached diaspora engagement by promoting quasi-citizenship rights and laws allowing their diaspora to access a broader set of rights, without allowing dual citizenship.
	RETURN AND REINTEGRATION	Permanent return and reintegration are considered as a potential path for resolving skills mismatches faced by most Asian countries. Sri Lanka is the only country to emphasize on the reintegration of returnees. The country's Sub-policy and National Action Plan on Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers is recognized as a model plan. It covers social and economic reintegration, physical and psychological well-being of returnees and their families, mobilization and empowerment of migrant returnees.
ATTRACTING REMITTANCES AND FOREIGN INVESTMENT	REMITTANCES	Remittances represent an important source of foreign investments, but the cost is still very high across the region. With the aim of attracting remittances, governments have promoted initiatives to reduce the cost of remitting by introducing programmes explicitly aiming at the diaspora as a development actor. Indonesia, the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal are among the countries whose initiatives range from diaspora as the economic go-between trade deals to collective remittance funds to support business.
	FOREIGN INVESTMENTS	Initiatives on financial literacy, diaspora bonds and preferential interest rates and tax incentives demonstrate an interest in attempting to channel remittances for national interests. However, the impact of such initiatives is slow to materialize. The 2018 Migration and Remittances for Development in Asia identifies a need for greater financial literacy among migrant populations, citing examples set by the Philippines, Indonesia and India.
ATTRACTING SKILLS	BRAIN GAIN	Two main approaches have been taken in Asia to attract the skills of the diaspora: short term brain gain programmes developed by countries of origin (and sometimes by civil society in the host country), and permanent return and reintegration programmes. Brain drain is an issue across Asia. However, most countries do not have an active policy towards outward migration of skilled workers nor defined policies to attract talents back. Malaysia is an exception, having introduced 'reverse brain drain' policies in 2011. The 10th Malaysia Plan emphasized the importance of nurturing, attracting and retaining top talent to develop actively the economy.

Source: Compiled from the [European Union Global Diaspora Facility \(EUDiF\) Diaspora Engagement – Regional Overview: Asia](#).

5.1.3.2.2 DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN THE PACIFIC

Policy frameworks on diaspora engagement have started to be more prominent in the Pacific subregion. However, the only organization addressing diaspora engagement in the Pacific is the [Melanesian Spearhead Group](#), an intergovernmental organization composed of four countries namely Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu (EUDiF, 2021b).

At the country level, policy and institutional frameworks on diaspora engagement are lacking in most Pacific countries, despite many having a significant diaspora abroad (*ibid.*). Recent estimates show that over half of Tongans (71%) and Samoans (68%), and more than a quarter of Fijians (26%) live and work overseas (DESA, 2020). Moreover, as seen in

Section 5.1.1, the Pacific subregion is characterised by the presence of several remittance-dependent economies, such as Tonga, Samoa and the Marshall Islands. None of the 11 countries mapped have indicated to have an official policy for diaspora engagement. Only Samoa has put in place an institution dedicated to diaspora issues (EUDiF, 2021b).

The EUDiF mapping on diaspora engagement showed that in the 11 countries mapped in the Pacific, the focus is on seasonal migration programmes, channelling remittances and attracting diaspora investments and visitors, as well as humanitarian aid and cultural preservation. The following trends and practices were highlighted in the diaspora engagement mapping in the Pacific:

TABLE 8: KEY TRENDS AND PRACTICES ON DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN THE PACIFIC

SEASONAL LABOUR MIGRATION	<p>Nine out of the 11 countries mapped are actively involved in seasonal labour schemes with neighbouring OECD countries.</p> <p>The main frameworks include the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) in Australia or the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (RSE) in New Zealand.</p> <p>Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Samoa, and Fiji have been the most represented nationalities among workers taking part in the schemes</p>
CHANNELING REMITTANCES	<p>Various Pacific countries have implemented initiatives to encourage the flow of remittances into their economies.</p> <p>Kiribati and the Federate States of Micronesia have recognized the importance of channelling remittances into their national development plans.</p> <p>Tonga has effectively encouraged the flow of remittances into the economy by reducing remittance costs through the development of the 'Ave Pa' Pau' remittance voucher.</p>
HUMANITARIAN AID	<p>Over the past few years, the Pacific diaspora has also emerged as a powerful humanitarian actor able to support disaster relief and recovery when Pacific countries are hit by disasters such as the tropical cyclones that are becoming increasingly frequent in the region because of climate change.</p>
SUPPORTING CULTURAL PRESERVATION	<p>Cultural preservation is an important aspect of diaspora engagement in the region, as Pacific diasporas actively engage in the promotion and preservation of their cultural heritage and identity in the host countries in which they live.</p> <p>In New Zealand, diaspora communities from Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu collaborate with the New Zealand Ministry for Pacific Peoples in the framework of Pacific Language Weeks. The Language Weeks include the organization of various cultural events, as well as the publication of Pacific language cards, animated videos and bilingual children's books.</p>
ATTRACTING DIASPORA INVESTMENTS AND VISITORS	<p>Four of the mapped countries are actively engaged in attracting diaspora investments and visitors.</p> <p>Fiji has made it a priority to improve the attractiveness of the country as an investment destination for Fijians overseas.</p> <p>Tonga is also working to increase trade in services channeled through Tongan visitors and investors in the country. Also, attracting diaspora visitors is also a priority for Tonga as most visitors are diaspora Tongans visiting friend or relatives.</p>

Source: Compiled from the European Union Global Diaspora Facility (EUDiF) [Diaspora Engagement – Regional Overview: Pacific](#).

5.1.4 DISCUSSION

Remittance flows have proven once again their stable, countercyclical nature with a lower-than-expected decline following the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 and the beginnings of recovery in 2021. The resilience verified in remittances during the pandemic is a recurrent factor. In 1997, for instance, during the Asian financial crisis, remittances to low- and middle- income countries continued to rise while private capital flows and foreign direct investment declined drastically between 1998 and 2001 (World Bank, 2005). Resilience is therefore an intrinsic long-lasting characteristic of the countercyclical kin-based nature of remittances, which have the tendency to increase in times of recession to support relatives at home, contrary to foreign direct investment and official development assistance.

According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the countercyclical nature of remittances is one of several reasons that their decline was not drastic in 2020 and that resilience proved feasible in 2021 (ADB, 2021b, p.4). Factors such as the reallocation of money due to lockdowns limited regular consumption patterns, which meant that more money could be saved and migrant workers could remit more (Jones, 2020). Host countries' support schemes and stimulus packages allowed migrants to continue providing financial support to their families by sending home even higher amounts than before. Additionally, the closure of borders during COVID-19 made informal cash transfers more difficult. Migrants were forced to accept sending money via formal channels. Last, lockdowns encouraged an increasing number of migrants to use e-transfers and cashless digital solutions over cash-based exchanges. Digital money-transfer smartphone applications have become popular across the Asia-Pacific during the pandemic, allowing users to send and receive money at low cost per transaction (Mercer-Blackman and Li, 2021).

As the world slowly recovers from the pandemic, whether the factors that sustained resilience in remittances during COVID-19 will have more long-lasting impacts remains to be seen. With the reopening of borders (see Section 1.1.1), robust vaccination plans and the remittance costs still above 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), the extent to which individuals might return to informal

remittance channels will depend on the efforts invested today to lower transaction costs of the formal and digital channels, to expand people's digital capacity, and on the facilitation of converting to and using digital channels. After all, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a unique opportunity to step up digitalization in many countries, which will be one key factor that could continue to affect future remittance trends.

As emphasized in Objective 20 of the Global Compact for Migration, the international community recognizes the importance and potential development outcomes of remittances, especially in low-income countries in the region. The increase in household income from remittance inflows – even under the economic recession due to COVID-19 – contributed to support families' livelihoods, particularly those from vulnerable groups and in situations of unemployment. The lack of funds is a driver of vulnerabilities, including those related to health (see Section 4.1.1.1), food security (see Section 4.1.1.2) and trafficking in persons (see Section 4.3). Highlighting the importance of migrant workers (see Section 3.1) and diaspora communities abroad (See Section 5.1.3) is important, as they have shown resilience in supporting their families out of vulnerability during times of economic crisis.

Moving forward, addressing existing data gaps on remittances can improve progress towards SDG Target 10.c and Objective 20 of Global Compact for Migration. For example, data on remittance costs in bilateral corridors are available for a limited number of countries – this limitation is mostly attributable to the data collection method. Despite these challenges, expanding the geographical coverage and improving accuracy of data are crucial prerequisites to a more comprehensive data that thoroughly monitors progress towards the SDGs and Global Compact for Migration in the Asia-Pacific region and globally.

Finally, measuring diasporas' influence on the economic development directly contributes to SDG Target 10.7, which aims to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies and Global Compact for migration Objective 19, as the diaspora engagement is key element of migration policy (See Section 1.1.2). Strengthening data collection methodologies to capture all the types of diaspora economic contributions in the region is important.

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Migrant workers contribute to projects in their host countries and remit money that is channelled into stocks and money market instruments, and speculative real estate acquisitions | © IOM 2008/Angelo JACINTO



A fisherman from Bantayan Island | © IOM 2021/Andrea EMPAMANO

5.2 MIGRATION AND TRADE

The extraordinary measures taken by governments worldwide to address the numerous challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic had vast repercussions on trade relations from March 2020 onward. Travel restrictions, border closures, lockdowns and the suspension of certain economic activities led to one of the largest reductions in trade and output volumes since World War II (OECD, 2022). The reduction in goods trade was like that observed following the global financial crisis in 2008. The recovery of trade flows, however, was strong and materialized quickly – leading to a substantial growth of international trade in 2021 (ibid.).

Trade and migration are deeply connected social phenomena. Various perspectives have emerged over time, highlighting the many positive linkages between trade relations and migrant communities (Hatzigeorgiu and Lodefalk, 2021). Despite the progressive reduction of barriers caused by liberalization and the internationalization of supply chains, global trade flows still entail considerable costs. Migrant communities, in this context, represent fundamental sources of information in partner countries and constitute networks that facilitate the development of trusting commercial relations. Firms need specific information about their target markets to engage in international trade, and migrant communities and diasporas abroad can provide them. Moreover, migrant communities represent important sources of demand for goods typically produced in their country of origin (ibid.). Overall, this two-

way relation between trade and migration is an important driver of development, building and sustaining economic linkages that can contribute to economic progress in both countries of origin and destination.

Migrants contribute substantially to cross-border trade in informal economic contexts. Mobility and travel restrictions, increased checks and requirements at border control points as well as the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic created important challenges for small-scale traders and the border communities dependent on them. Shortages in essential goods, disruptions in local supply chains, loss of capital and increased debt among traders were only a few of the consequences of the pandemic.

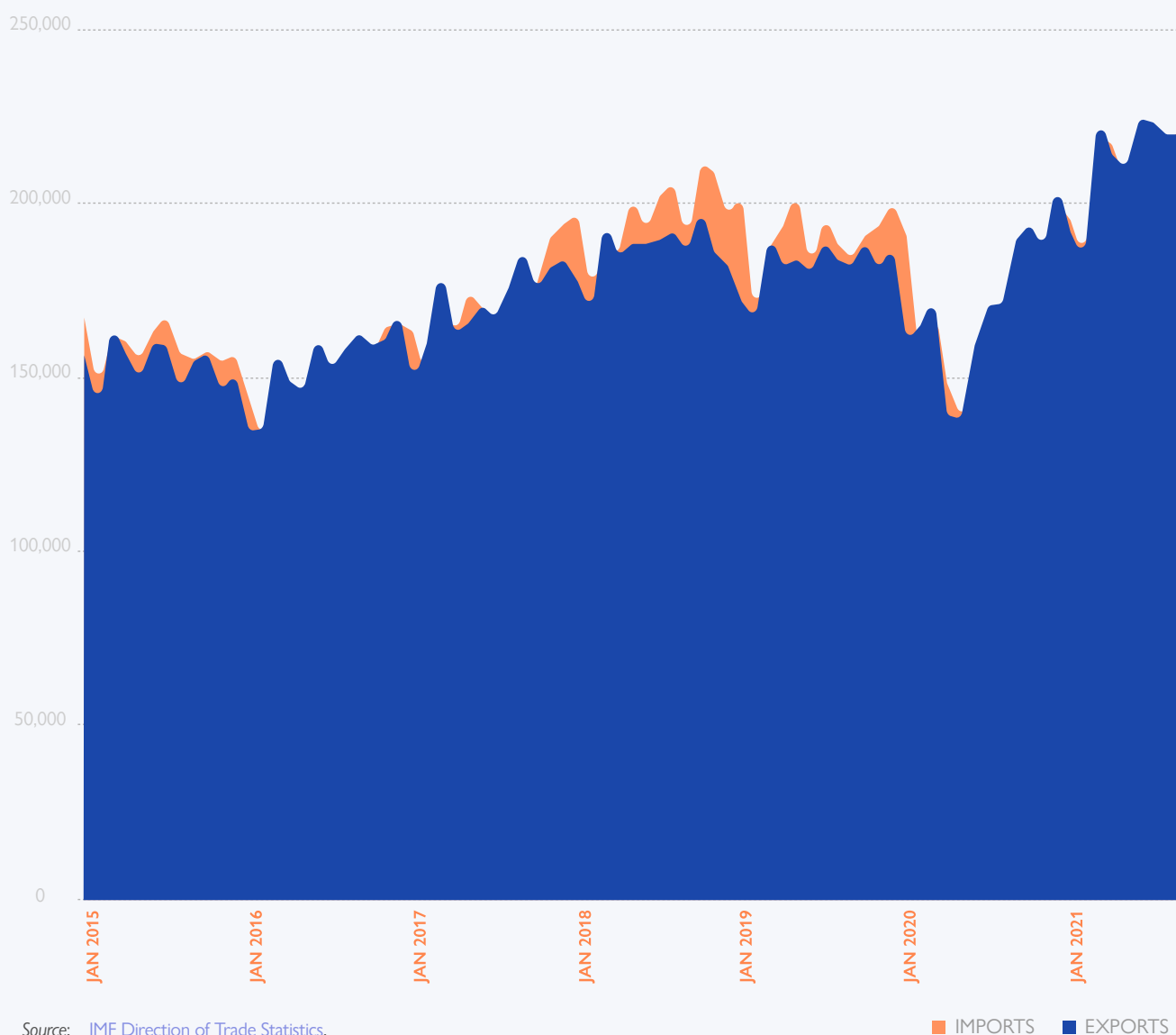
This section explores the relation between migration and international trade in Asia and the Pacific, as shown by empirical evidence, and discusses the consequences of the pandemic on cross-border trade, with a particular focus on the Greater Mekong Subregion. Finally, it proposes recommendations to improve the availability of relevant information and the understanding of how migrants contribute to trade relations in the region. Insights on the role of migrants in facilitating trade flows will also complement efforts towards **SDG Target 17.11**, which aims to significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020.

5.2.1 TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

International trade to and from Asia and the Pacific has grown steadily over recent years. While both exports from and imports to the region stood at around USD 150 billion at the start of 2016, these figures grew to above USD 220 billion by September 2021.¹⁶⁶ However, the COVID-19 pandemic briefly halted this fast-moving trend. The average monthly growth of both exports and imports between January 2015 and December 2019 reached around USD 540 million. Starting with 2020, a sharp – although short-

lived – decrease is evident. During the first six months of 2020, imports to Asia and the Pacific dropped by 28 per cent. Similarly, exports from the region decreased by 16 per cent. As sharp as the drop in international trade was, its recovery following the first months of the pandemic was swift. From July 2020 to September 2021, exports from and import to Asia and the Pacific grew by over USD 3 billion and USD 4 billion each month, respectively.

FIGURE 85: EXPORTS AND IMPORTS FROM AND TO ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (USD MILLIONS)



Source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics.

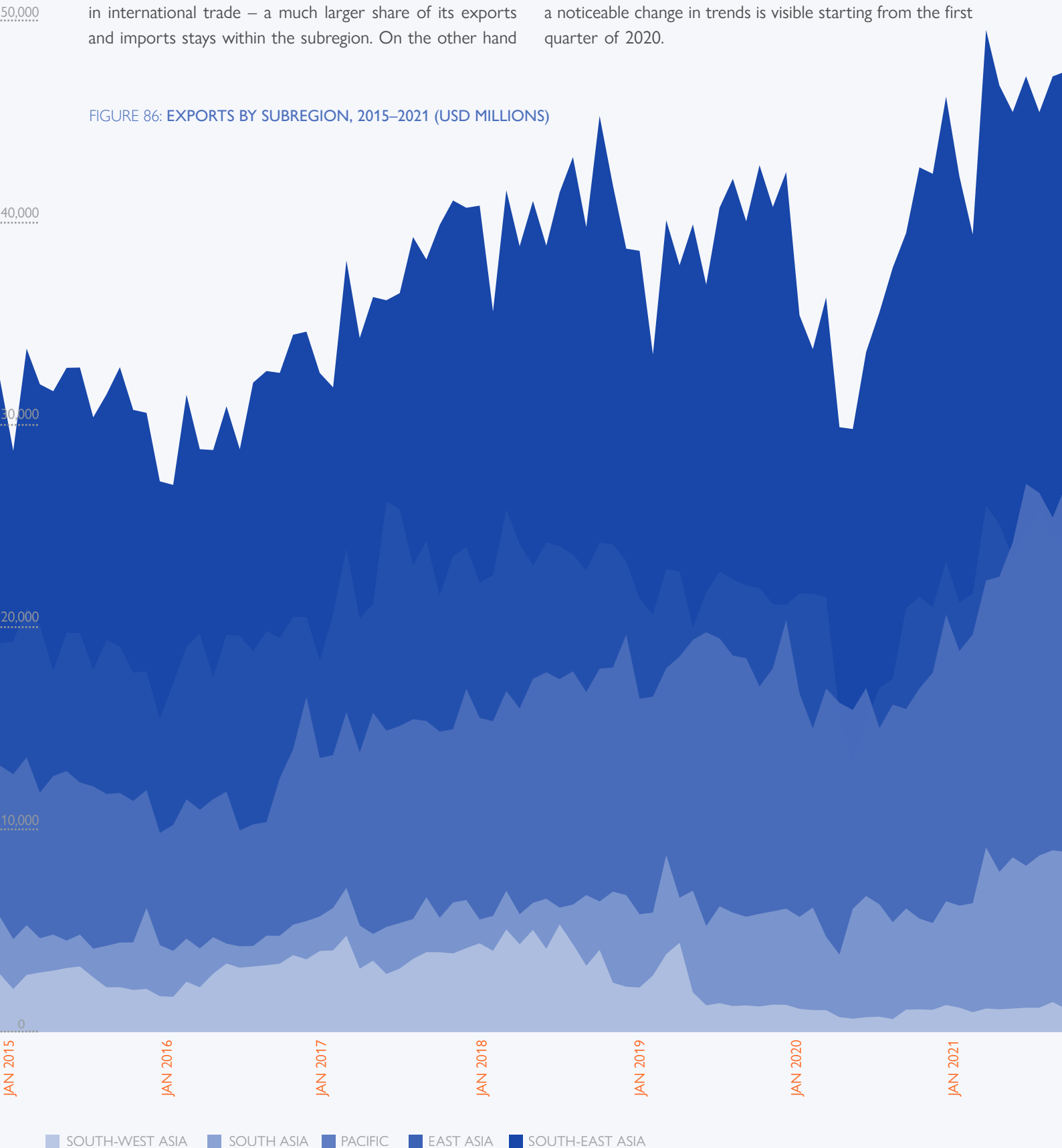
■ IMPORTS ■ EXPORTS

166. Figures do not include intraregional trade.

South-East Asia exhibits the highest export and import figures in the region, as well as the sharpest fall and subsequent recovery of trade flows after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. While East Asia exhibits similar trade levels in absolute terms – especially due to the sizeable role of China in international trade – a much larger share of its exports and imports stays within the subregion. On the other hand

of the spectrum, the decrease in trade in South Asia during the two quarters of 2020 was rather limited, relative to the region. Finally, the effect of the pandemic in South-West Asia is less noticeable than average. Both exports and imports were on a declining trend at least since the start of 2019, and a noticeable change in trends is visible starting from the first quarter of 2020.

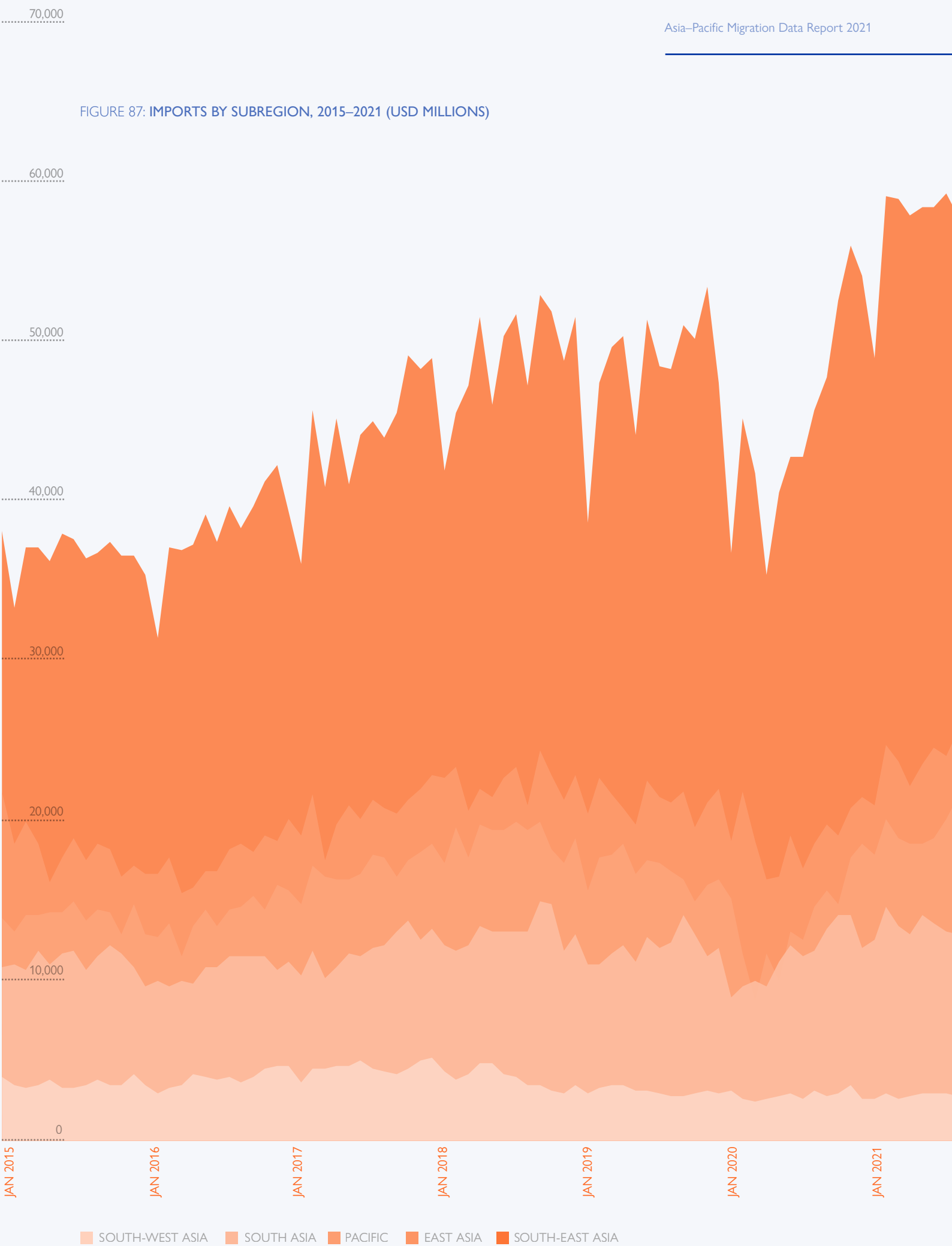
FIGURE 86: EXPORTS BY SUBREGION, 2015–2021 (USD MILLIONS)



Source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics.¹⁶⁷

167. The figures exclude trade flows within each subregion.

FIGURE 87: IMPORTS BY SUBREGION, 2015–2021 (USD MILLIONS)



Source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics.

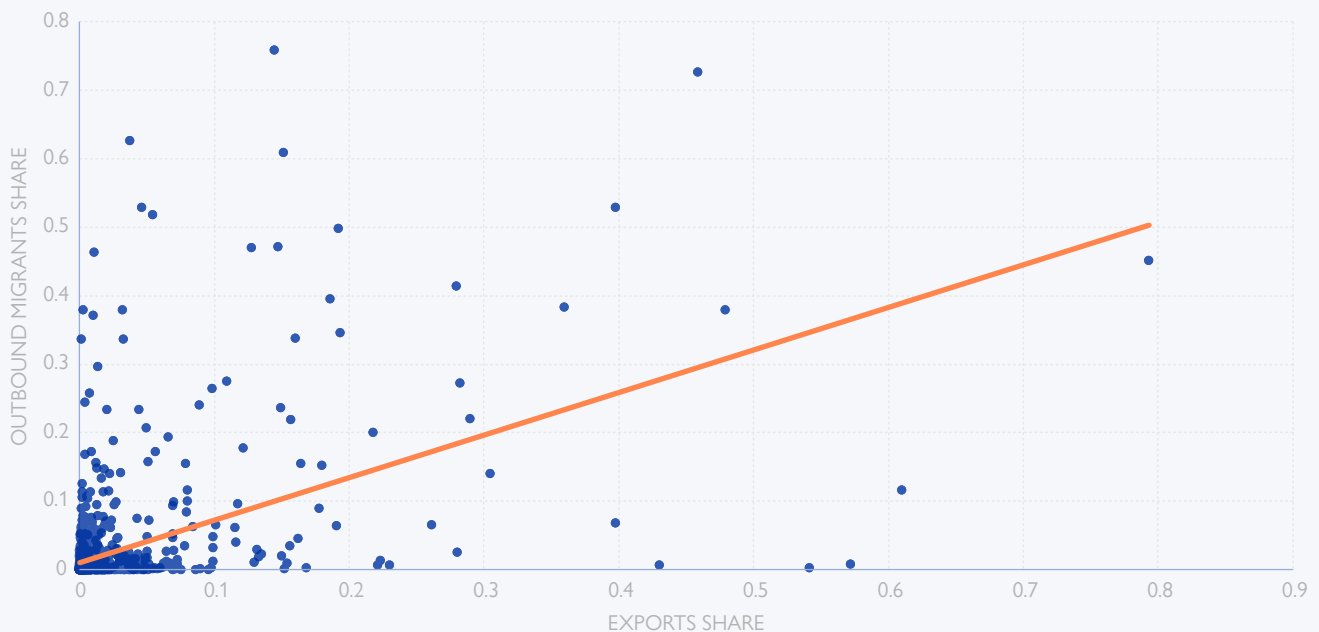
5.2.2 BILATERAL TRADE AND MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

The empirical evidence from Asia–Pacific countries supports the hypothesis of a positive relation between migration and international trade in the region. While the picture that emerges is complex and multifaceted, countries tied by tighter commercial relations tend to have stronger migration linkages as well, and vice versa.

Asia–Pacific countries tend to export relatively more to countries that host larger shares of their emigrant population. For each country in Asia and the Pacific, first the share that each commercial partner country represents in terms of total

exports is computed. Then, the share of outbound migrants to each partner country among total outbound migration is computed. As Figure 87 shows, export outbound migration shares are positively related.¹⁶⁸ The correlation coefficient across the region reaches 0.49.¹⁶⁹ Exports and outbound migration shares are similarly correlated across subregions. The only exception is South-West Asia, where the correlation coefficient only reaches 0.22. On the other hand, South-East Asia – where the correlation coefficient is 0.58 – exhibits the highest value in the region.¹⁷⁰

FIGURE 88: CORRELATION BETWEEN EXPORT AND OUTBOUND MIGRANT SHARES BY COUNTRY (2020)



Source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics and DESA International Migrant Stock.

Similarly, the relation between the share of imports from each commercial partner country is positively related to the share of outbound migration to that country. For Asia–Pacific countries, the correlation coefficient representing this

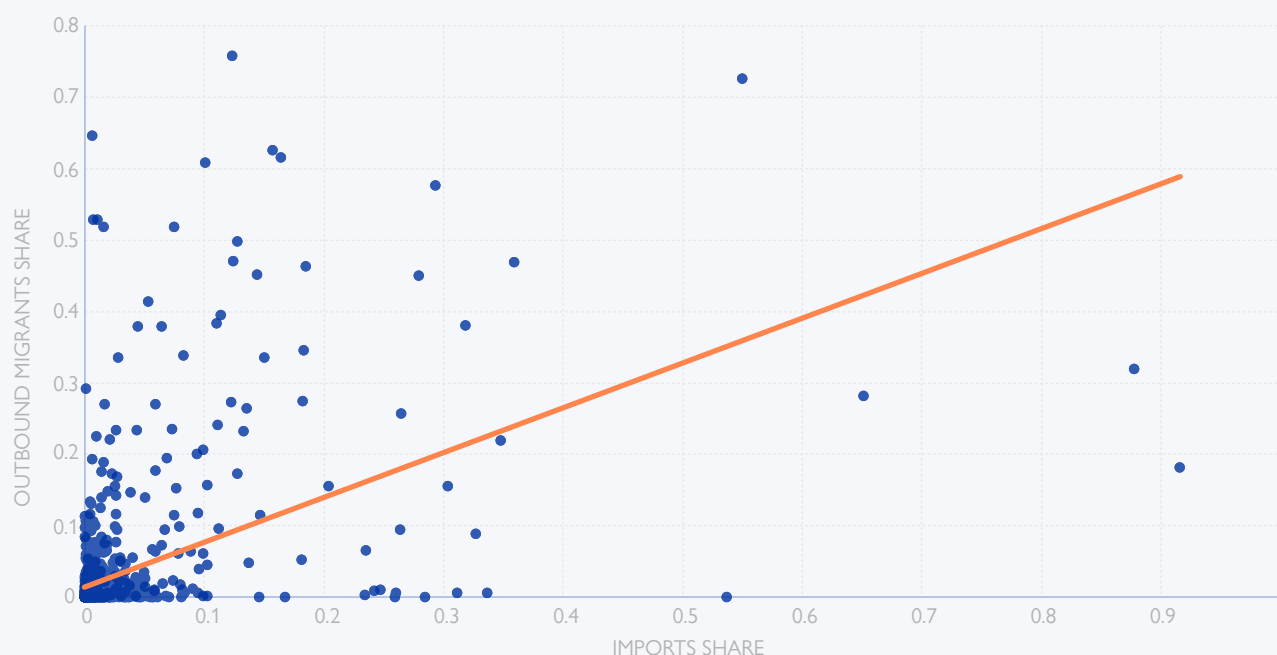
relation reaches 0.47. Once again, the strength of this relation is relatively stable across the region. Subregional correlation coefficients range from 0.38 in South Asia to 0.55 in East Asia.

168. Only country pairs for which both trade and migration figures are available are included in the computation.

169. The Pearson correlation coefficient ranges between -1 (perfect negative correlation) and 1 (perfect positive correlation). A value of 0 indicates no correlation at all.

170. All the correlations shown here reflect statistically significant relations when tested through linear regression.

FIGURE 89: CORRELATION BETWEEN IMPORT AND OUTBOUND MIGRANT SHARES BY COUNTRY (2020)



Source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics and DESA International Migrant Stock.

5.2.3 SMALL-SCALE CROSS-BORDER TRADE

Small-scale cross-border trade represents an important element of migration in certain areas of the Asia-Pacific region. Migrant traders fill important gaps in local economies of border areas, ensuring the supply of food and other essential goods – especially for low-income households. The role of small-scale cross-border traders becomes even more evident when formal trade relations and infrastructure is limited, especially in isolated communities far from urban centres. Moreover, cross-border trade can often serve as an important livelihood and economic empowerment strategy (IOM, 2021).

Restrictions implemented when the pandemic broke out affected cross-border trade substantially. Small-scale traders often work in informal settings, either individually or employing a small number of workers only. Their enterprises are characterized by low levels of capitalization and generally deal in low-volume, low-value essential goods. Due to these characteristics and the inherent need to frequently move across borders, the pandemic response increased traders' vulnerability and limited their capacity to contribute to economic recovery.

The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) is an example of an areas that exhibits a wide variety of small-scale cross-border trade networks. Trade activities vary in their local context, relation with local and regional supply chains, as well as in the border management policies that regulate them (*ibid.*). The governments of GMS countries have established a variety of institutions and policy instruments to manage these trade relations, such as the [GMS Transport and Trade Facilitation Action Programme](#).

As GMS countries closed their land borders in early 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic security and livelihoods of small cross-border traders – as well as those of dependent local communities – were put at risk. IOM (2021) identifies several areas where emergency public policies could have been improved to better support traders in this challenging phase. First, the facilitation of cross-border mobility was limited due to long delays at border control points, often caused by the lack of coordination among border agencies – both within and across bordering countries – as well as by the frequent change of quarantine and health documents requirements. Increased controls and

requirements worsened issues related to the power differential between traders and border officials. In this respect, the complexity of official requirements to cross borders and the inability of traders to access information about them played an important role in causing delays at border crossing points. Moreover, the general lack of digital and financial literacy

among traders hinders their capability to adapt their business models to the new pandemic environment. Finally, the limits of digital infrastructure in GMS countries and of digitization and automation at border control points currently represent an important challenge for the future development of small-scale cross-border trade dynamics.

5.2.4 DISCUSSION

The role of migrant communities in promoting international trade relations is not yet fully understood. While several theoretical frameworks have been proposed to analyse the different channels through which migration and trade influence each other, the lack of detailed data on specific topics such as cross-border small-scale and informal trade, diaspora networks and migrant-owned firms, make the search for deeper insights challenging. The COVID-19 pandemic response highlighted how preserving and developing trade channels – both formal and informal ones – is fundamental to support the financial stability of many communities, especially rural ones, as well the livelihoods of traders, many of whom are migrants.

Data collection efforts on this topic should be substantially expanded. Information on diaspora networks as well as their interaction with origin countries would prove fundamental to better understand which diaspora characteristics and dynamics lead to stronger trade exchanges. Digitization and automation processed at border checkpoints, moreover, could support the gathering of information on cross-border traders – although strong data protection rules are needed to implement such programmes (IOM, 2021). Censuses and dedicated surveys could explore the nature and frequency of recurrent relations between immigrants and their communities of origin more thoroughly, as well as their active engagement in promoting commercial enterprises in their countries of destination and origin.



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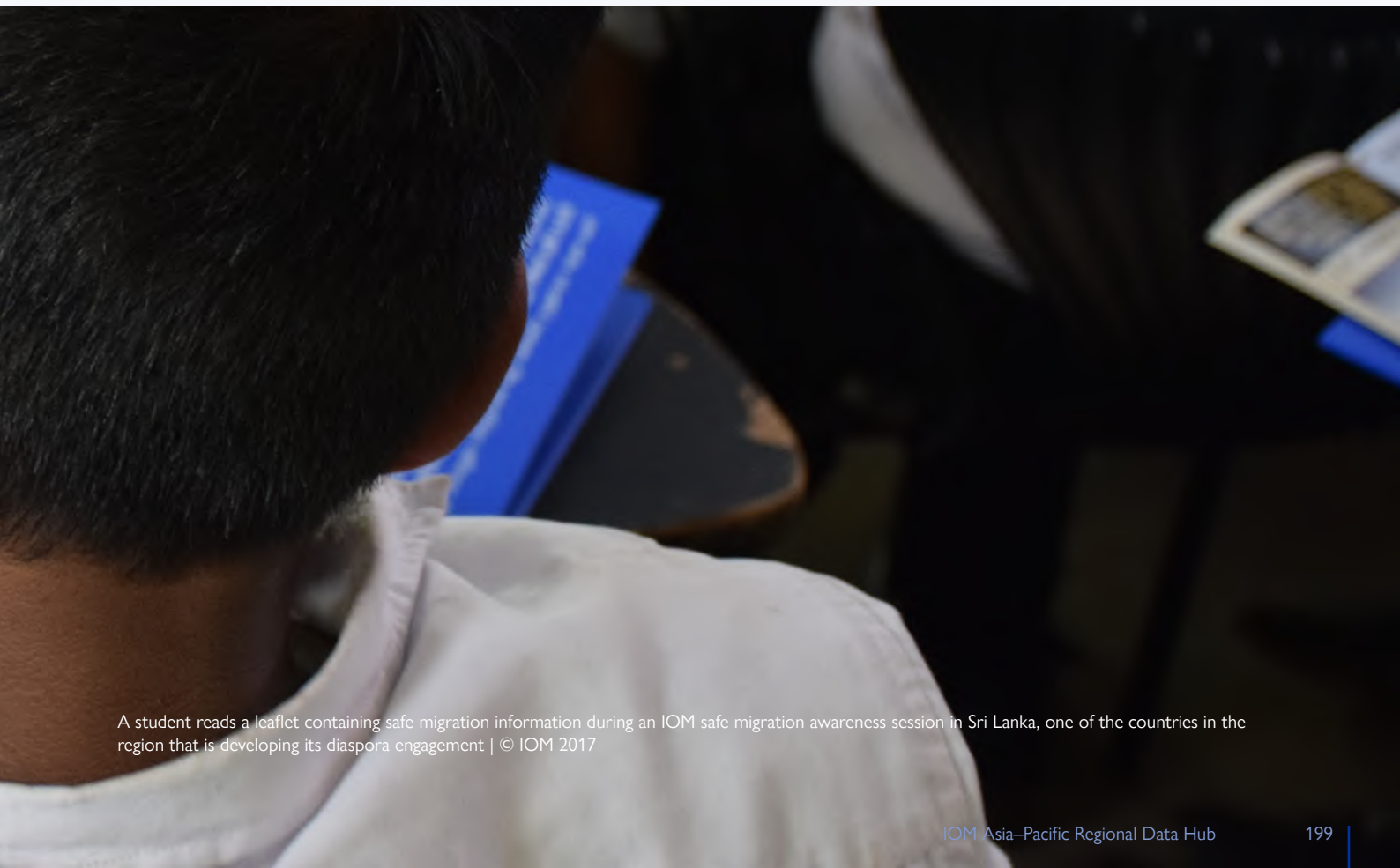
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A student reads a leaflet containing safe migration information during an IOM safe migration awareness session in Sri Lanka, one of the countries in the region that is developing its diaspora engagement | © IOM 2017



MIGRATION AND INNOVATION



Thousands of returnees arrive at IOM's Islam Qala Reception Centre every month to receive services. Forecasting and predictive tools can help humanitarian services foresee when and where surges of protective needs will hit | © IOM 2021



SDG Target

17.16 and 17.19

Encourage and promote effective public, public–private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.

By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries.



Global Compact for Migration Objectives

3

Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration.



MGI Dimensions

3

Partnerships

6.1 INNOVATIVE DATA SOURCES

While national institutions and international organizations collect and disseminate migration data often of considerable quality, extension and comprehensiveness, traditional data sources can have inherent limitations. Given the high cost of population censuses, along with the specific issues of sampling migrants, logistic and practical barriers often make it difficult to produce ideal migration data from traditional sources. The low frequency and limited representativeness and geographic coverage are typical shortcomings of traditional migration data sources. In this context, new types of data sources can be a valuable complementary tool to strengthen the existing evidence base on migration (Global Migration Group, 2017).

Innovative data sources are often discussed and analysed within the larger framework of Big Data. While a universally

accepted definition of the concept does not exist yet, Big Data is generally characterized by high *volume*, *velocity* at which the data is generated as well as a high *variety* of the information it encompasses.¹⁷¹ However, these sources of information differ from traditional ones in many other aspects. Data owners are often large private companies that sometimes make the information available to researchers – and in rarer cases to the general public. Users often need to apply specific methods and use specific online platforms to extract and process the data to transform them into information of meaningful value (De Mauro et al., 2016). Finally, the timeliness, frequency, wide coverage and level of precision achievable through Big Data sources is unmatched by traditional sources in many contexts.

171. Sometimes other characteristics are considered, such as the data *veracity* and *value*.



A displaced man and his son on a laptop in an unfinished building | © IOM 2015/Nassar MUBARAK

When examining the existing applications of Big Data sources to migration contexts, three categories of data stand out. Mobile-phone-based data, typically coming from call and text records as well as mobile money transfers, can represent an important source of information due to the large-scale adoption of mobile phones around the world. Internet-based data is also increasingly used in migration studies, which often take advantage of information from social media or online search engines. Finally, remote sensing data – especially satellite imagery – can offer researchers and analysts timely information, high spatial resolution and extensive coverage that can complement studies focusing on a wide variety of migration aspects.

Innovative data sources have been used – both autonomously and complementing traditional data – to study migration dynamics such as temporary or circular migration, public perception of and public discourse around migrants, environmental- and disaster-induced migration, segregation among urban migrants as well as integration patterns. In all these fields and others, the inherent features of these new information sources can support and integrate the existing information gathered from traditional data. Below, we provide an overview of how researchers have capitalized on these complementarities in the context of Asia and the Pacific.

6.1.1 MOBILE PHONE DATA

Data collected through mobile phone activity typically takes the form of call detail records (CDRs). This kind of information is passively collected by mobile network operators whenever one of their subscribers makes a call, and includes metadata such as the location of the calling and receiving end, the precise time and duration of the call, as well as the subscriber identity module (SIM) of the caller (Global Migration Group, 2017). Moreover, mobile money transfer systems can also provide important information on migration patterns. This type of mobile banking usage has risen considerably over the last years – especially in Asia and the Pacific – and is likely to continue in the future.¹⁷² If this increase does happen, it will represent an important source of insight into the contribution of migrants to local economies, the role of diasporas in countries of origin and destination, and other aspects of migration.¹⁷³

The far-reaching, global adoption of mobile phones makes the type of information they provide extremely relevant for migration analysis. In 2021, the International Telecommunication Union estimated around 8.3 billion existing mobile subscriptions around the world, 58 per cent of which in Asia and the Pacific.

CDRs can be a fundamental tool for displacement tracking, both in cases of disasters and slow-onset environmental changes. Climate-related mobility is the focus of a Bangladesh study that analyses migration patterns based on a large CDR-based dataset (Lu et al., 2016). The authors used individual trajectories of over 6 million anonymized mobile users who were tracked for more than two years. As argued in the study, using CDR data overcomes some of the main limitations of household surveys – the main traditional source used to analyse climate-induced migration. First, CDRs follow most kinds of complex and dynamic mobility trajectories typical of climate-related migration, including repeated and frequent short-term movements across short distances. Second, mobile phone records overcome the issue of attrition and recall bias caused by some individuals and households dropping out of the sample over time. Finally, the continuous collection of CDR information solves logistical problems arising from the sudden and unexpected nature of many natural events leading to migration. By avoiding the need to quickly set up ad hoc data collection activities, often on a large scale, mobile phone data allow to quickly gather information on population movements in the aftermath of unpredicted events.

The CDR data used in the study was provided by one of the major mobile network operators in Bangladesh, Grameenphone, which anonymized the data before sharing it with the researchers. The authors were provided both with complete subregional data covering the period immediately before and after a specific natural event (Cyclone Mahasen in 2013) as well as a nation-wide sample spanning over almost two continuous years between 2012 and 2013 (*ibid.*). The results of the study highlight that mobile phone data can represent a valuable tool to gather information on several aspects of environmental migration. These include incidence, direction and duration of migration events as well as seasonal dynamics, both at the local and national scale. Even though CDR data are certainly limited – especially in that it overlooks any socioeconomic information that could be useful to explain migration patterns – the value of this type of information is substantial when considering its vast spatial, temporal and population coverage.

The valuable contribution of mobile phone-based data to disaster response operations and to research on disaster-induced migration is further shown by a study conducted in the immediate aftermaths of the Gorkha earthquake that hit Nepal in 2015 (Wilson et al., 2016). Thanks to a previous collaboration with a large mobile network operator, the authors were able to release mobility information based on data from 12 million mobile phones within nine days of the earthquake. The authors first created a transition matrix by recording each mobile-phone user's location at two specific points in time – before and after the earthquake – and computing movement flows between each pair of areas. Then, by exploiting long-term location data prior to the earthquake, each user was assigned a “home location”, and post-disaster returnee flows were estimated. To isolate disaster-induced mobility from typical mobility patterns, migration flows were scaled using prior levels of mobility for each location.

The above Nepal study was conducted by the [FlowMinder Foundation](#), a non-profit organization with a long-standing experience in fostering and facilitating collaborations between governments, humanitarian organizations and mobile network operators. The foundation has published the [FlowKit](#), a series of open-source tools designed to support humanitarian actors in accessing, managing and analysing mobile-phone data. These tools facilitate the integration of mobile phone data into humanitarian programmes and operations, while ensuring secure data access in compliance with privacy requirements.

172. [Mobile Finance Report 2021](#), Liftoff and App Annie.

173. [International Telecommunication Union Statistics](#).

6.1.2 INTERNET-BASED DATA

An estimated 4.9 billion individuals were active and regular internet users in 2021 – over half of whom were in Asia and the Pacific.¹⁷⁴ Estimates of social media users worldwide reached around 4.55 billion in 2021 and have been rapidly growing over the last years.¹⁷⁵ China accounts for the most substantial share of internet and social media usage. In 2021 only, 70 million new internet users were reported in China, accounting for almost one third of the worldwide growth.¹⁷⁶ These figures show how leveraging the potential of internet-based information – in its many forms – can potentially open new avenues and opportunities for migration research, as it already has in many other fields.

Social media data have been shown to be a rich source of information for migration studies. Their widespread and frequent usage, as well as the geolocation of certain user activities, make social media records a useful tool to analyse various aspects of human mobility. [Spyratos et al. \(2019\)](#) published an exploratory study where anonymous data provided by Meta’s advertising platform¹⁷⁷ was used to estimate international mobility patterns. Using the users’ geolocation history, the researchers identify individuals who could be considered potential migrants and show that such estimates strongly correlate with official migration statistics from the International Migrant Stock ([DESA, 2020](#)). Meta data has also been used to analyse post-disaster displacement ([Maas et al., 2019](#)). Several types of “Disaster Maps” are produced by the company using aggregated information about users’ past and current location, cell site connectivity and battery charge. The maps produced allow studying several aspects of disaster-induced mobility. Population maps display pre- and

post-disaster population estimates, while movement maps show population flows between specific pairs of locations. Based on the patterns of battery recharging and device connectivity, power and network availability estimates are also provided. Finally, displacement visualizations can also be produced using social media usage data during the weeks and months following a crisis event. Finally, social media usage data is the basis of several applications that provide population [maps](#) around the world.¹⁷⁸

Researchers can also leverage online search services to study migration trends. Specific search queries can be compared to official migration statistics to gain insight into how online user activity can be used to estimate actual human mobility. Using Australia as a case study, UN Global Pulse researchers showed Google Trends data can accurately predict migration dynamics, especially in urban areas exhibiting substantial employment opportunities ([UN Global Pulse, 2014](#)). This suggests that online search tools can be a useful complement to traditional labour migration data – which can often be lacking. Moreover, as [Bohme et al. \(2020\)](#) show, Google Trends data can provide meaningful insights about individuals’ migration intentions worldwide.¹⁷⁹

Email services have been used to extract insights on migration trends as well. [Zagheni and Weber \(2012\)](#) use the geolocation from the IP addresses of over 100 million Yahoo! Email service users between 2009 and 2011 to estimate age and gender specific migration rates worldwide, showing that their estimates were consistent with traditional migration data sources.

174. [International Telecommunication Union Statistics](#).

175. [Digital 2021: October Global Statshot report](#).

176. [Ibid.](#)

177. The data came from different Meta apps, such as Facebook, Messenger and Instagram.

178. See for instance [MapBox](#) and [Patel et al. \(2016\)](#).

179. The authors obtain worldwide measure of migration intentions– which they compare to their online search indices – from the Gallup World Poll.

6.1.3 REMOTE SENSING DATA

In its broadest sense, remote sensing indicates any information collection activity carried out without making physical contact with the “object” that is measured. Remote sensing is widely used in Earth science disciplines such as geography, meteorology, oceanography and others. Most applications involve the use of satellite or aircraft-based sensor technologies that can scan specific areas and record emissions of specific radiations (the most common of which is visible light). Such technologies are increasingly used to measure and monitor human activities such as urban changes, tourism and commerce (Tjaden, 2021).

Following substantial advances in remote-sensing technologies, researchers can now access a wide and diverse array of earth observation systems. These provide information on a range of geophysical parameters measured, in most cases, with high frequency, wide coverage and high geographical resolution. While the data owners and providers are diverse – ranging from private companies to public institutions – many remote sensing datasets are publicly and freely accessible through platforms such as [USGS Global Visualization Viewer](#), [NASA Earth Observation](#), the [Copernicus Open Access Hub](#) and many others. Moreover, the management, processing and analysis of remote sensing data – which can represent a great challenge – is substantially facilitated by cloud computing platforms such as [Google Earth Engine](#).

Remote sensing data can be used to analyse human mobility in certain settings, especially through satellite imagery. Visible changes in human activity – such as settlements or refugee camps growth, as well as night light emissions – can be leveraged to gain insight into local migration trends.

Settlement population size, for instance, can be estimated based on visible rooftops and buildings in satellite images. Changes in settlement size over time, moreover, can represent indirect information on migration to and from specific locations (Tjaden, 2021).

Within the field of migration, remote sensing data have been most useful in informing humanitarian operations, especially in post-disaster contexts or to monitor settlements. Satellite imagery is increasingly used to monitor and guide humanitarian responses to crises caused by conflict or natural events. The [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre](#), for instance, regularly uses satellite imagery to complement traditional data sources and produce internal displacement figures worldwide. UN Global Pulse and UNOSAT implemented [PulseSatellite](#), a web-based toolkit to automate and facilitate the analysis of satellite imagery in humanitarian contexts through machine learning algorithms. Its use cases include population displacement, settlement mapping, as well as damage assessment following disaster events. While automating repetitive tasks associated with the analysis of satellite images, PulseSatellite offers a human-in-the-loop approach by ensuring that expert knowledge be used to fine-tune the prediction models (Logar et al., 2020). Automated tools such as PulseSatellite can greatly reduce the time needed to obtain high accuracy predictions based on remote sensing data. However, given the substantial complexity and variability of the humanitarian context, PulseSatellite is used as an augmentation of human analysts (*ibid.*).



6.1.4 DISCUSSION

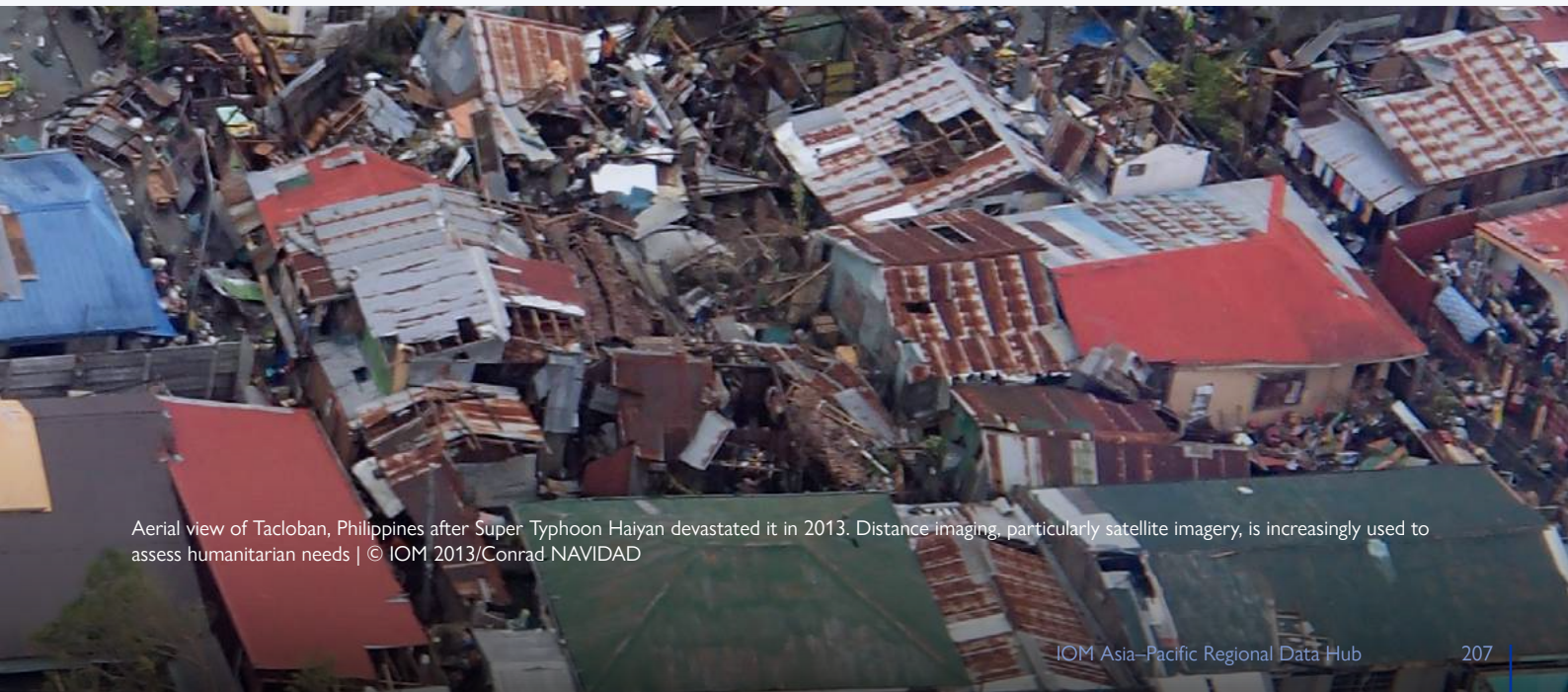
Innovative data sources represent an important complement to traditional data for the analysis of migration trends. In many contexts, they can provide timely information and wide coverage and representativeness, as well as levels of geographical resolution often unmatched by other types of data. Big Data are thought to represent a true data revolution, which has the potential to create many new opportunities for the field of migration studies and for humanitarian organizations.

However, these new data sources come with specific obstacles and limitations. Privacy considerations are paramount, as often Big Data are generated without the users' explicit knowledge, consent or full understanding. Important privacy-related risks exist within the migration context. Migrants might face important risks of public agencies monitoring social media and mobile-phone data to identify individuals irregularly residing in a country or trying to cross international borders. As for remote-sensing data, potential concerns arise mainly from high-resolution satellite imagery and drone images – through which individuals could be identified. Use of such information for the purposes of research and policy creation therefore needs to be matched by guarantees of confidentiality and respect for individual privacy. Companies and organizations producing and managing mobile-phone, internet and remote sensing-based data should ensure that such information can only be accessed in anonymized form and that indirect identification of specific individuals is not possible. Policymakers, data owners and researchers should jointly establish methods to meet international standards

within an adequate regulatory and legislative framework to collect, analyse and share data, specifically designed for innovative sources. Such guiding standards could be based on and expand existing initiatives such as the [Global Data Access Framework](#), a multi-stakeholder initiative co-led by [UN Global Pulse](#).

Moreover, there are technical challenges hindering the effective use of innovative data sources. Accessibility of private data repositories and the lack of technical capabilities to analyse the data are important obstacles. Quality can often be a challenge for Big Data, and data cleaning and processing operations can be complex. Depending on the application, the potential biases of Big Datasets may lead to worrying unintended consequences and harmful policies ([Cristianini, 2021](#)).

Finally, important efforts must be made to exploit the potential of the immense quantity of data that is already being collected. Information gathered, stored and analysed for commercial purposes is mostly not used for public policy purposes – even when it could prove fundamental for better policy design. Access to these data is not the only obstacle to their use – public actors need to understand the potential applications of these data sources better, develop the capacity to analyse and interpret them, and adapt their policy design methods to integrate new information sources.



Aerial view of Tacloban, Philippines after Super Typhoon Haiyan devastated it in 2013. Distance imaging, particularly satellite imagery, is increasingly used to assess humanitarian needs | © IOM 2013/Conrad NAVIDAD

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Children at an elementary school on Chuuk have access to a laptop to learn how to use programs like Word and Excel thanks to the school's solar panel which was provided by IOM | © IOM 2017/Muse MOHAMMED



Community recharge cell phones and electronic devices for 5 taka with solar panel provided by IOM | © IOM 2016/Amanda NERO

6.2 SUPPORTING HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES

International organizations, national governments and civil society actors involved in migration management and governance are increasingly making use of innovative data solutions and analysis techniques to improve their operational and planning capabilities. These new migration insights have the potential to be extremely beneficial not only for research but also for government policy design and for humanitarian and development organizations. A wide range of migration-related processes and policies could potentially improve thanks to these novel data solutions and tools. [Visa applications](#), [asylum decisions](#) and [resettlement allocations and integration policies](#), as well as [border management](#) are all fields where Big Data and unconventional methods are showing promising results. Predictive tools and models, scenario analysis and programme optimization are growing increasingly relevant for migration policies and could provide

substantial support to the operations of international humanitarian organizations ([Altay and Narayanan, 2020](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic spurred many private and public initiatives to leverage existing data sources, especially non-traditional ones, in new ways to monitor and respond to the ongoing health and social crisis better.

New research and policy initiatives represent an important tool to progress on the path to the Sustainable Development Goals. Multi-stakeholder partnerships aimed at mobilizing and sharing knowledge and expertise and involving public, private and civil society actors are at the heart of [SDG Goals 17.16](#) and [17.17](#). The next paragraphs will review some of the innovative migration data solutions and tools that have been implemented in the context of Asia and the Pacific during the last few years.

6.2.1 COVID-19 RESPONSE

Innovative technological solutions supported and informed government policies worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic. The most evident example, which was [adopted widely](#) from the very start of the pandemic, is [contact tracing apps](#). While different solutions were implemented, these data-driven tools monitor contacts by individuals who tested

positive to the coronavirus by continuously exchanging information with other users' phones nearby. In Asia, one of the most prominent examples of such applications is [TraceTogether](#), adopted by Singapore – where a [substantial share](#) of the population downloaded the app immediately after its launch. The main issue with the use of these tools

is privacy concerns – which were particularly prominent in the early phase of the pandemic – due to the potential risks of monitoring individual movements (Hatamian et al., 2021). However, while a trade-off between privacy measures and the apps' effectiveness exists, these tools certainly allow for technological solutions that preserve the user's privacy rights.

Data-driven tools were also widely adopted to inform public policies in the field of human mobility and migration. At the start of the pandemic, large technological firms such as Google and Apple began publishing regular reports on mobility trends worldwide – based on the geolocation functionalities of their widely used devices and applications. Like contact tracing apps, these types of mobility data collection could lead to potentially serious privacy concerns. However, the information provided was fundamental to monitoring the impact of public policies on countries' mobility trends and to informing policymakers about the frequency, duration and types of movements made by the population starting from January 2020. Similar to Apple and Google's mobility reports, other data sources were leveraged to study different types of human mobility likely to be heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic response – such as air traffic (Lacus et al., 2020). Moreover, location and mobility data has also been used to model the potential impact of different public policy interventions – such as in this study, where location data from the Chinese search engine Baidu was used to

predict the most effective non-pharmaceutical interventions to decrease the number of COVID-19 cases in China during the early stages of the pandemic (Lai et al., 2020).

Amidst all measures proposed and adopted to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the implications of the specific conditions faced by migrants and displaced people – along with other minorities – have often been overlooked. In the contexts in which migrants find themselves such as refugee camps, measures and policies designed for the general population are at times extremely challenging to implement. To support policymaking in such specific conditions, professionals from several international and non-profit organizations developed mathematical simulations able to model the spread of COVID-19 in Cox-Bazar's refugee camps under different policy interventions (Bullock et al., 2021). The models are based on the JUNE open-source framework for epidemiological modelling (Bullock et al., 2020) and consider scenarios such as home isolation versus treatment in dedicated centres, mask-wearing versus no mask-wearing, as well as the reopening of learning structures. The simulations are based on data on geography, demographics, comorbidities and physical infrastructure, among others. While the study was developed and the models tested based on the Cox-Bazar's context, the results and methodology are generalizable to other similar settings.

6.2.2 FORECASTING AND PREDICTIVE TOOLS

An innovative migration research area that has witnessed substantial development in the last years is that of migration forecasts. While the concept of estimating future migration trends under different scenarios is not recent, the availability and wider application of new research methods have created renewed interest in the field (IOM, 2020). New applications shifted from population projections (Muttarak, 2021) and econometrics analysis based on push and pull factors to more data-driven methods – typically based on the analysis of migration time series.

Forecasting is becoming increasingly important for humanitarian operations (Altay and Narayanan, 2020). International organizations and NGOs face rapidly growing and ever-changing social, economic and humanitarian needs that must be met timely and readily. Forecasts allow

humanitarian organizations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations by informing decisions on the allocation of funds, human resources, supplies and general capacity. Forecasting future needs can also allow organizations to move from crisis response to preparation and long-term planning, as well as to improve strategic decision-making.

IOM (2020) identifies four classes of migration forecasts. First, econometric models allow to quantify the impact of specific covariates that researchers believe to explain migration flows – such as income differentials, labour market conditions and conflict. While the main application of such models is to test theoretical models of migration, the same method can be leveraged to produce forecasts. Migration intentions, typically estimated through specific surveys, can also provide a solid base for prediction under

certain circumstances. However, the factors leading from intentions to migrate to actual migration are complex and challenging to identify. Argument-based forecasts, on the other hand, provide researchers with the possibility of integrating qualitative information and assumptions into their predictions better. Finally, time series extrapolation extracts information on time dependencies between past and future migration flows, as well as between migration and other factors. Several approaches exist, including classical time series analysis and machine learning methods. Their strong theoretical foundations and data-driven approach make these methods particularly attractive to researchers. However, extrapolating information from past data invariably implies assuming that relations and dependencies between variables remain, to some degree, stable over time. Given the quality and availability limits of migration data, as well as the complexity of the drivers behind migration flows, this assumption can represent an important obstacle.

Among the main examples of forecasting tools applied to migration contexts, Danish Refugee Council's [Foresight](#) model stands out for its wide geographical coverage and its continuous application. This machine learning tool is the result of a collaboration with public and private actors with the objective of supporting strategic planning for disaster prevention and response, as well as for the protection of displaced individuals. As of 2022, the model covers 26 countries worldwide and around 87 per cent of global displacement. Foresight uses more than 120 indicators related to conflict, governance, economy, environment and population to forecast the number of forcibly displaced individuals over the next one to three years. As reported by the Danish Refugee Council, the overall margin of error of the model is around 19 per cent, with a median error of 10 per cent. Across the 26 countries covered, Foresight predicts the global displacement figures to increase by 2.9 million individuals in 2022 and by an additional 3.9 million in 2023. Most of these displacements are predicted to be in sub-Saharan Africa,¹⁸⁰ while growth in other regions is predicted to be more moderate. However, displaced individuals in

Afghanistan are forecast to increase by 330,000 and 375,000 in 2022 and 2023 respectively, accounting for more than 10 per cent of the global increase over the period. The forecast for Myanmar, on the other hand, points to an increase in displacement figures by more than 120,000 individuals over the period.

Other projects have explored different ways of predicting migration and displacement figures. UNHCR's [Demographic Projection Tool](#) uses demographic techniques to provide estimates of future displacement figures by sex, age category, origin and displacement type over a three-year horizon (UNHCR, [The UNHCR Demographic Projection Tool: estimating the future size and composition of forcibly displaced populations, 2018](#)). Their methodology differs substantially from the Danish Refugee Council's [Foresight](#) model ([Danish Refugee Council, 2022](#)), as their displacement projections are based on a series of assumptions about demographic behaviour combined with past data on fertility, mortality and migration rates. IDMC's [#IDTECT](#) tool, instead, focuses on migration *nowcasting* and takes another approach yet. By mining Big Data sources covering news and social media information and analysing them through machine learning algorithms, IDMC identifies sets of displacement events that assist analysts in determining current displacement numbers worldwide. Finally, ([De Lellis et al., 2021](#)) propose a mathematical model to study migration trends due to environmental change. Using demographic and geographic information from Bangladesh, the authors consider the network of locations where links between nodes represent internal migration flows. Once the model is calibrated using empirically observed data, the authors study the displacement effect of environmental shocks at given locations on connected nodes and identify areas more likely to be subject to environmental migration. While modelling migration networks is not free of limitations and entails several types of theoretical assumptions, this method can offer the possibility of studying complex migration dynamics beyond the facts already highlighted by the migration literature.

180. This fact also reflects the country coverage of the model, which focuses particularly on this region.

SNAPSHOT:

MIGRANT EMPOWERMENT THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Technology is not only improving humanitarian and policy responses – it is reshaping migration. Migrants increasingly resort to mobile phones and applications to guide and facilitate migration journeys, maintain contact with their countries of origin and improve their integration prospects in destination countries. Web platforms are being [developed](#) and [adapted](#) to support refugees and asylum seekers. [Technological competitions](#) – a common practice in tech communities worldwide – are being organized involving migrants and with the aim of supporting them in their integration journeys.

The role played by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in migration dynamics is a topic of growing interest for researchers ([United Nations University](#)), who are starting to explore this wide and fascinating topic. Mobile-phone use among migrants, specifically, has been the focus of several case studies.

For instance, the use of apps such as WeChat among mainland Chinese migrants in Macao SAR, China, has been identified as one of the main means to bond and build social capital, access labour market information and in many cases bear with conditions of social isolation ([Ju et al., 2019](#)). Mobile phones, on the other hand, are crucial for many migrants escaping from the People's Democratic Republic of Korea and crossing to the Republic of Korea. There, studies have highlighted how migrant women use mobile phones to avoid direct interaction with locals and to hide their identity behind online accounts ([Kang et al., 2017](#)). ICT skills, moreover, are the focus of programmes looking to empower survivors of sexual exploitation and prevent re-trafficking ([Poveda et al., 2019](#)).

Technologies developed by migrants, for migrants, is an emerging trend. Mobile-phone apps such as [Arriving in Berlin](#), for instance, provide interesting examples of how technological solutions can be tailored specifically around the needs of refugees by involving them directly into the search for better integration programmes. [Techfugees](#) is a global organization that develops innovative solutions supporting the integration of displaced people. Among their main activities, their Hackathons bring migrants at the centre of tech development processes. These events bring together software developers, graphic designers, project managers and refugees – even those without previous programming experience. The aim is to build innovative applications that can directly improve refugees' condition in their host country and empower them to build a better future. Moreover, this initiative allows refugees and migrants to get basic coding experience and potentially reinforce existing ones, which could increase their employment chances.

The possibility of connecting to society through modern communication and engagement channels is [fundamental](#) to allow better integration chances to displaced people. Internet and mobile connectivity can be [perceived](#) as being as essential as more traditional basic needs among refugees. Being connected helps them accessing information, services and support – such as cash transfers, digital education and job opportunities. Moreover, it provides a means to maintain contacts with their family and networks. For these reasons, expanding access to reliable connections and technology among refugees and internally displaced people is increasingly recognized as a fundamental step towards the 2030 Agenda's commitment to Leave No One Behind ([UNHCR, n.d.](#)).

6.2.3 DISCUSSION

New research methods and data solutions can bring substantial benefits to public migration policies and humanitarian operations. However, the innovative and cutting-edge nature of these tools poses some obstacles to their widespread adoption. To fully leverage the potential of these new analytical methods, migration researchers need to possess the necessary knowledge in specific fields such as machine learning, data mining and partial and general equilibrium modelling. Moreover, using Big Data for research increasingly requires technical skills related to programming and cloud computing, as well as familiarity with application and software development – as the growing implementation of [Machine Learning Operations](#) shows. Migration-focused organizations and governments also need to build specific capacity to effectively integrate innovative data tools in the design, planning and management of their programmes.

The development of this capacity can take many forms, such as the institution of [innovative research and data hubs](#), partnerships involving both research and humanitarian actors, awareness initiatives targeted at humanitarian practitioners, among others. Finally, innovative data methods and tools are heavily dependent on readily available, comprehensive quality migration information. Timely and frequent data collection, as well as wide population and geographic coverage, are essential to make full use of these analytical innovations' potential. While good complementary data sources, especially those falling under the category of Big Data, are often readily available to research and development practitioners, in most contexts they cannot fully replace direct migration-specific information.



Afghan refugees arrive on a flight from Tajikistan at Toronto's Pearson International Airport, on 30 March 2022 | © IOM 2022/Chris YOUNG

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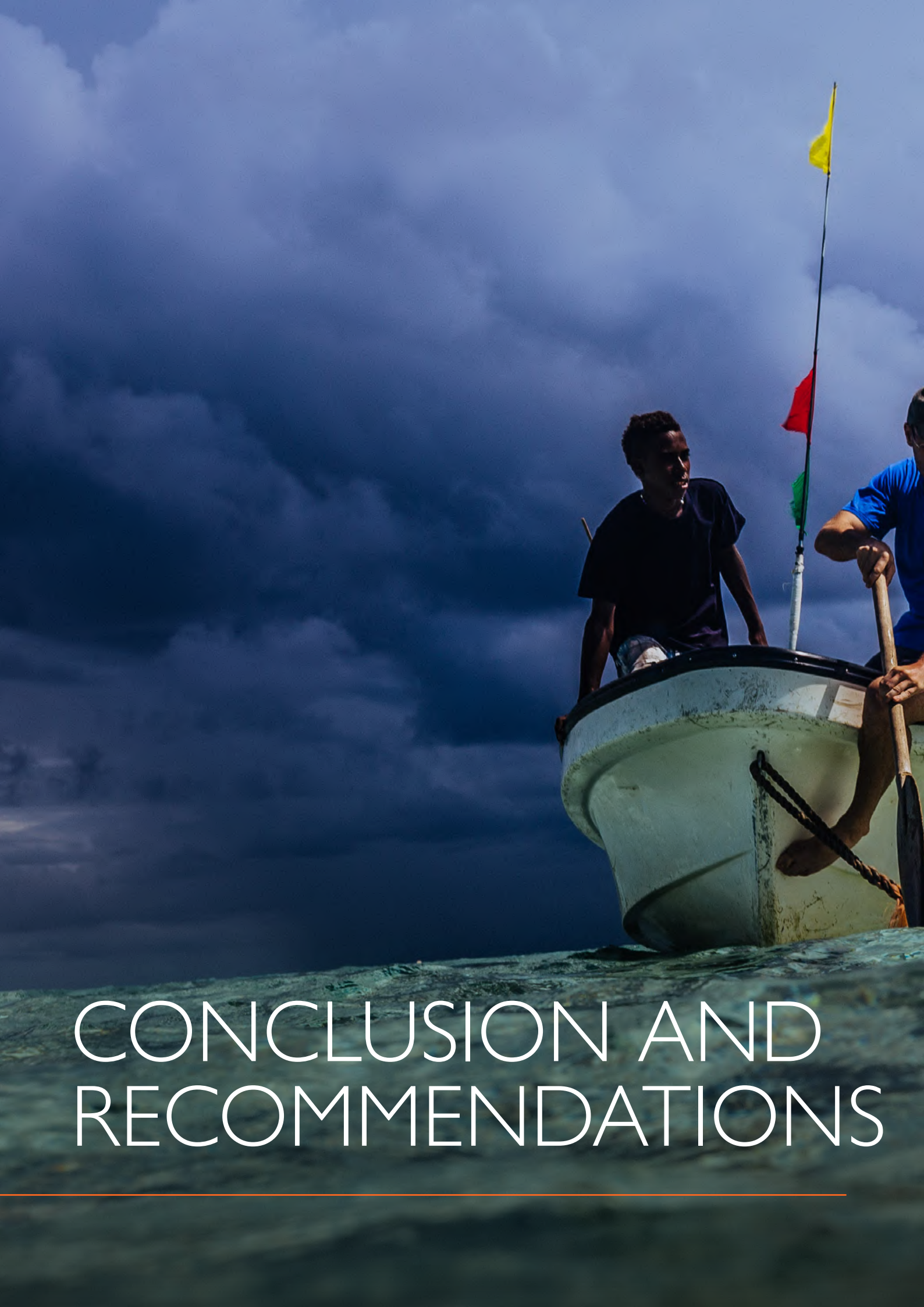
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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



IOM staff members travel by boat between islands on the Carteret islands, Papua New Guinea in an assessment of how the communities were being affected by climate change | © IOM 2016/Muse MOHAMMED



This Asia–Pacific Migration Data Report 2021 has covered multiple migration issues in the region. Addressing the topic of migrant lives and migration patterns is complex. This report provided a thorough compilation of available international, regional and national data on migration in Asia and the Pacific. Furthermore, the quality, comprehensiveness and representativeness of existing information do not allow full understanding of the situation, and more data are not available. Therefore, this report examined gaps in, and limitations on, migration-related data in the region. The information compiled supports the monitoring of progress toward the SDGs, Global Compact for Migration and MGI.

Throughout the report, particular focus has been given to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration in the Asia–Pacific region. At the end of 2021, nearly two years of pandemic conditions had altered many existing patterns of migration and affected billions of people’s lives. This report covers a period of overlap between the pandemic and the first attempts at recovery from it – including opening borders and beginning to recruit foreign workers in an attempt to re-establish pre-pandemic life.

When pieced together, the themes and subthemes presented here provide a revealing view of the year’s migration trends and how they were affected by the pandemic. The many returned migrants from the preceding year faced the challenge of reintegration into their communities in 2021, even as the economies of their home countries shrank. As the pandemic continued spreading, attempts to return to pre-pandemic normalcy began in earnest. Data show a resumption of labour

migration, although not to the extent before the pandemic. At the same time, the longer the pandemic lasted, the more desperate some migrants became as restrictions at borders continued, leading to altered paths and methods of irregular migration. Restrictions continued affecting internal migration as well – 2021 data show a significant number of countries in the region were still under national emergency regulations that included controls on internal mobility. Asia–Pacific countries had more internal COVID-19 related restrictions in 2021 than the rest of the world.

COVID-19 also posed an additional burden on migrants already struggling with vulnerabilities, including external factors such as forced displacement and identity factors such as gender, age and ability. The pandemic added complexity to the crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar and ongoing natural hazards that affected the region in 2021, as would be expected. The downturn in trade and damage to economic activities was also expected. Still, 2021 saw the beginning of economic recovery and boasted higher growth than 2020, which was supported by migrant workers and benefited them as well.

This report showed how these and many other elements of migration in the region were interconnected. No one sub-theme investigated here can stand on its own. Moreover, this report describes the period linking 2020, with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a post-pandemic future. Looking ahead, the lives of migrants in the Asia–Pacific region will doubtlessly continue being affected by pandemic conditions for years or decades to come. So too must the



The Shahrak Sabz IDP settlement was established in 2018 by IDPs fleeing drought. Upwards of 30,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) lived in the area as of February 2021 | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED

methods of migration research and policymaking be prepared for innovations as they seek to support migrants through the pandemic and recovery. This report introduces a new thematic pillar in Migration and Innovation, which serves to highlight new methods of data collection and analysis in the pursuit of *orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people*, as called for in *SDG 10.7*. Harnessing new technologies and expanded sources of information is essential to the future of migration in the region – whether in the form of migrants using innovative money transfer systems to remit or in the form of international organizations using enhanced satellite imagery to locate migrants in dangerous areas.

Improved data gathering and analysis are called for in *Objective 1 of the Global Compact for Migration*, which calls for *the collection and utilization of accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies*. There are significant data gaps in the region that must be addressed to fulfil not only that objective but also the *SDGs* and *MGI*. Important indicators discussed in this report include *SDG Target 8.8*, which aims to *protect labour 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*. Safety and security in working environments are challenged in new ways by the pandemic, which has also

changed the precarity of employment in important ways. Data are needed to inform policy makers, employers and migrants themselves on best practices and policies. Another exemplar goal is from the *Global Compact for Migration* in its recognition of return and reintegration in *Objective 21 calling for ensuring and facilitating safe and dignified return and readmission, as well as sustainable reintegration*. In a year that saw crises in Myanmar and Afghanistan, a region-wide pandemic, the continuing effects of climate change and the fitful responses each, information on the safe and dignified return of migrants to their countries of origin was needed as a guide. It is needed to inform future policy and help long-term reintegration.

It is true that closing data gaps is essential to upholding the Global Compact for Migration, *SDGs* and *MGI*. It is also true that in the absence of reliable information, when the gaps persist, misinformation can take its place. Without strong data to inform policy and serve as a benchmark guide in the work toward orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people, not only is there a risk of confusion but also of false understandings. To avoid both, timely, disaggregated and representative data that can be compared across countries and areas in the region are fundamental to humanitarian and government work. Despite any gaps, knowledge can be gained by investigating currently available data, which this report has done.



General

- Improve the collection and harmonization of migration data by promoting data sharing among agencies.
- Increase the availability of SDG data disaggregated by migratory status.
- Provide disaggregation of migration data by key variables such as sex, gender and age.
- Continue data collection and monitoring of thematic areas where data are lacking, to provide and strengthen the evidence base for promoting inclusive recovery:

Migration Policy	Migration Statistics	Types of Migration	Migration and Vulnerabilities	Migration and Development	Migration and Innovation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizenship • Migrant Rights • Implementation of international human rights instruments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration flows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour migration • Environmental migration • Internal migration • Irregular migration • Family migration • Student migration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-based violence • Children and youth • Older persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diaspora • Health • Urbanization • Trade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration, innovation and social change



Migration Policy

- Enhance data collection on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in certain mobility policy areas such as internal transit points, which is currently available up to August 2021.
- Existing data suggest a disconnect between the COVID-19 response thus far and work to uphold the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, particularly amid heightened humanitarian needs caused by the pandemic and related travel restrictions, suspension of resettlement travel, last-minute deportation and containment measures.
- Improve data disaggregation by population of interest – such as stranded foreigners or migrants and/or internally displaced persons whose mobility was affected by the COVID-19 control measures.
- Improve data coverage on the number of countries in the region that facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.
- More initiatives are required on data collection and government reporting with provisions for unaccompanied minors or separated children.



Migration Statistics

- Provide disaggregated migration statistics by sex, age and types of migration.
- Increase the frequency of updates of data on international migrant stocks, to improve understanding of the effects of structural changes – such as the COVID-19 pandemic – on migration dynamics worldwide.
- Make data on international migration flows in the region available.



Types of Migration

Labour migration

- Increase availability of updated data on the inflow, outflow and stock of migrant workers and collect data to monitor the effects of COVID-19 on labour migration and its drivers in the region.
- Improve data coverage and quality for certain migrant worker groups, including women, temporary, circular or seasonal workers and internal migrant workers.
- Enhance migration governance around migrant worker's rights and increase engagement with businesses on low-wage and other workers' protection.

Forced migration

- The collection and analysis of accurate and up-to-date data that goes beyond a rigid definition of the forcibly displaced and considers its multifaceted nature is fundamental to understanding the full complexity of mixed movements.
- Continue monitoring and collecting data on the nature, scale and trends of such mixed movements in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to inform appropriate policies and responses, including displaced persons in irregular status.
- The high level of visa restrictions in place for fragile countries with relatively low levels of development reveals the importance of creating and implementing more protection-sensitive entry systems.
- Closely monitor the feasibility and safety of voluntary repatriation and develop complementary pathways for the admission of refugees, which serve as important avenues to help increase the range of safe and legal means to achieving a third-country solution for those in need of international protection.

Environmental migration

- Strengthen data collection activities on slow-onset events and their effects on human mobility.
- Improve data collection on cross-border movements due to environmental impacts, not only on internal migration. Further research on cross-border disaster displacement is crucial for the development of policy measures to protect those who left their countries because of environmental concerns.
- Improve environmental migration data on populations caught in long-term displacement. Disaggregate data by sex and age to improve understanding of how environmental migration affects migration groups differentially.
- Increase evidence on the duration of displacement. Current figures only reflect the flow of people during a year or stock by the end of the year.
- Enhance data collection activities on displacement as adaptation to environmental and climate change.

Return migration

- Improve and expand the collection of data on return migration to provide reliable evidence for informed policymaking. Data on forced and voluntary return are scattered across different data sources and are often incomplete or only partially publicly available and there are large data gaps in post-return data. Furthermore, return and reintegration of internal migrants is another area where data gaps appear. Data on demographics of returned international and internal migrants needs to be improved to design better policy and programmatic interventions.
- Facilitate the safe return and readmission of migrants as well as sustainable reintegration that enables returnees to reach acceptable levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities and psychosocial well-being to allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Evidence on differential reintegration outcomes and challenges faced by different groups of return migrants shows the complexity of the return and reintegration process, and sheds light on the importance of gender-responsive and vulnerability- and child-sensitive perspectives to reintegration. More concerted efforts in developing comprehensive reintegration framework and policy is needed in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The systematic differences in reintegration outcomes and experiences observed among individuals who were forcibly returned to a fragile context underline the needs for additional assistance such as increased outreach, referral mechanism and post-arrival counselling for forced returnees, as well as respect for the non-refoulement principle.

Internal migration and urbanization

- The lack of data remains a major constraint to understanding internal migration and urbanization in the region. Better understanding of the trends, patterns and drivers of internal migration will facilitate the development of policies to promote the welfare of internal migrants as well as national development. The ability to obtain such understanding depends on the strengthening of national statistical systems in the collection, harmonization, analysis and dissemination of these data, including improvements in measuring unregistered, seasonal and/or circular internal migrants, as well as the exploration of newer types of data sources such as digital trace data.
- A need exists for greater harmonization of national practices in the collection of internal migration data so that meaningful cross-national comparisons can be made.

Irregular migration

- An internationally accepted definition of irregular migration is needed to clarify the status of migrants and avoid arrest, detention and deportation of asylum seekers, refugees and others.
- 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 residing and working irregularly, 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 and forced displacement

- 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.
- Reinforce data collection on the psychological repercussions of the pandemic on migrants, recognizing that these effects might be long-term and depend on individual characteristics of migrants.
- Improve data collection disaggregated by gender to elucidate how barriers and risks have multiplied migrant women and men's vulnerabilities differentially under the pandemic.
- Incorporate more qualitative data sources within data collection systems to support the exploration of migrant's vulnerabilities.
- Increase the capacity of law enforcement authorities to profile and detect vulnerable smuggled migrants including asylum seekers, people in need of international protection and prospective exploited migrants in order to uphold their human rights and avoid criminalization.
- Promote the collection of data describing the unique challenges faced by forcibly displaced persons with disabilities.
- Improve health and disability data collection on forcibly displaced populations and promote the integration of such data into national health programmes including those of host governments.
- Include refugees and IDPs or their representatives in both the structuring and the integration of forced displacement vulnerabilities data into the formulation of pandemic recovery programmes.

Trafficking in persons

- Bridge the existing data gap through continued efforts on data collection and analysis of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic 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

- Integrate the collection of data on deaths and disappearances during migration into governmental data collection activities and make it accessible to the families of victims.
- Make harmonized and anonymized versions of such data publicly available to researchers and international organizations to better design and plan response activities.



Migration and Development

Remittances and diasporas

- Enhance geographical coverage, timeliness and accuracy of existing data on remittance costs and remittance flows.
- Promote digitalization and reduce transaction costs of migrant remittances, which have shown to be positively linked to increasing formal remittances.
- Develop standardized methodologies and guidelines for the collection of national data on diasporas.
- Enhance comparative analysis and quantitative research particularly on the various contributions of diaspora, not only as senders of remittances but also in other areas such as investments, trade, diaspora tourism, skills and knowledge transfer.

Migration and trade

- Increase the available information on diaspora networks and their interactions with countries of origin.
- Develop more integrated and comprehensive automatic data collection methods at official border crossing points, while ensuring that privacy rights are respected.
- Integrate information on the role of migrants in fostering international trade links with their countries of origin in censuses and surveys.



Migration and Innovation

Innovative data sources

- Companies and private organizations producing Big Data should ensure strict adherence to well-defined privacy laws and considerations to ensure anonymization of any shared information.
- Policymakers, data owners and researchers should develop internationally recognized standards setting adequate regulatory frameworks for the collection, analysis and sharing that are specifically designed for innovative data sources.
- Important investments in capacity-building within governments and international organizations are required to make full use of the potential of innovative data sources.

Supporting humanitarian operations and government policies

- Expand knowledge and use of machine learning, data mining and other more recent research methods within humanitarian and public organizations.
- Better integrate research, data management, software development and IT skills within government and humanitarian organizations.
- Develop innovative research initiatives and partnerships and integrate them with humanitarian operations and public policies.

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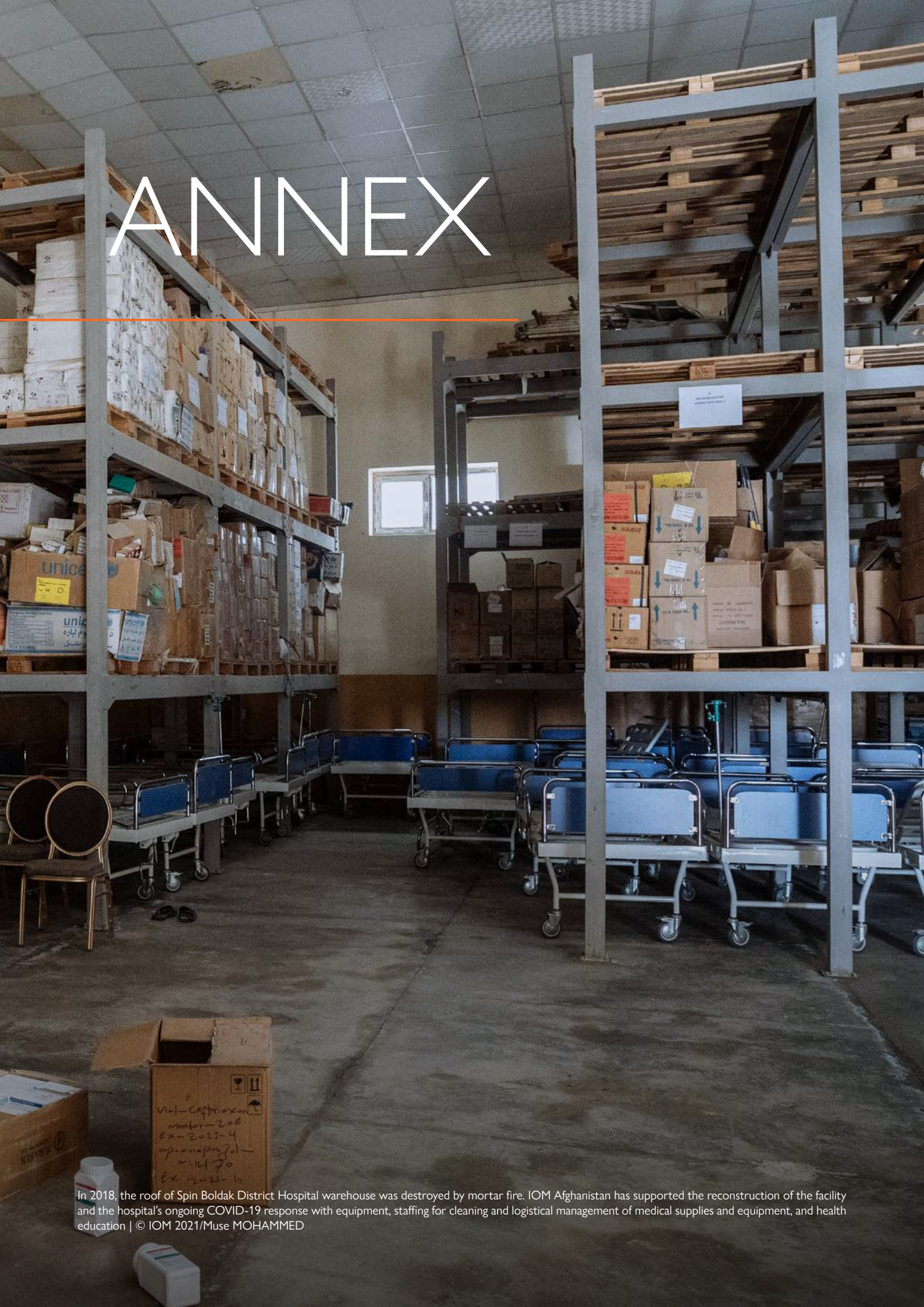
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ANNEX



In 2018, the roof of Spin Boldak District Hospital warehouse was destroyed by mortar fire. IOM Afghanistan has supported the reconstruction of the facility and the hospital's ongoing COVID-19 response with equipment, staffing for cleaning and logistical management of medical supplies and equipment, and health education | © IOM 2021/Muse MOHAMMED

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS INDICATORS WITH EXPLICIT REFERENCE TO MIGRATION



TABLE 9:
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](#).



TABLE 10:
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

Source: IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre: Global Compact for Migration development process.



TABLE 11:
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's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre: Migration Governance Indicators.



Emergency shelter kit and core relief item distribution following the fires that swept through parts of Cox's Bazar in the first months of 2021 | © IOM 2021



ASIA-PACIFIC MIGRATION DATA REPORT 2021

IOM ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL DATA HUB

