



Towards Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region

Challenges and Opportunities



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Foreword BY SHAMSHAD AKHTAR



The Asia-Pacific region is a fulcrum for international migration — home to the world's largest and most important countries of origin, and destination. The region has welcomed migrants, whether for economic benefits or to accommodate those displaced. It has been responsive to changing circumstances, and its dynamism has driven countries of origin to also serve as countries of destination. If all the over 62 million international migrants in the Asia-Pacific region were considered together they would make up the thirteenth-largest population in the region, just behind the population of Thailand, and constituting more than the population of Myanmar. If the over 101 million migrants who have left their countries of origin in Asia and the Pacific were considered together, they would be the ninth-largest population, almost equivalent to the population of the Philippines.

Migrants form a distinct group and exhibit enormous potential, but are also exposed to a range of vulnerabilities. They are poorly paid, concentrated in low skill jobs and in the informal sector requiring difficult and sometimes dangerous physical labour. Female labour migrants are often employed as domestic workers, exposed to risks of exploitation and abuse at the hands of their employers.

Yet, despite the challenges many migrants face, they make invaluable contributions to both their countries of origin and destination. Wage disparity between domestic and overseas workers is significant and most migrants, given their family compulsion, end up remitting the bulk of their earnings to their countries of origin and hence live in distressful conditions.

The Asia-Pacific region benefits from high levels of remittances that have reached close to US\$276 billion in 2017. In countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Nepal remittances made up the equivalent of over a quarter of GDP in 2015. Besides for balance of payments, households have been able to use these funds to finance housing, education and livelihoods of their families. The countries of destination benefit too in terms of meeting skill shortages, higher productivity and returns on their investment.

As this report argues, migrants serve as agents of sustainable development: factoring in how they boost financing, consumption and investment, and contribute to growth. In addition to reducing the poverty rate, migration creates new connections whose benefits transcend localities and borders. As the climate changes, people face new pressures to migrate. Migration must be recognized as a means of building resilience against climate shocks. Given the economic dynamism of the region and ageing of the population in many countries, migrants can play an even bigger role in filling labour force gaps until host countries resolve the fundamental issues of ageing.

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Countries of origin, such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, have developed extensive infrastructure to protect migrants throughout the migration process — from pre-departure to return. Countries receiving large volumes of migrants, such as Kazakhstan, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation have taken pragmatic measures to open regular paths to labour migration with protections for migrants and their populations. Thailand has cooperated with countries of origin, introduced laws to address abuses against migrants, and promoted the inclusion of migrants in the national health system. Across the region, under the aegis of the United Nations along with all stakeholders including civil society, there has been advocacy to prevent unilateral measures that might aggravate migrants' vulnerabilities.

The 2030 Agenda has led the way, with many of its targets focusing specifically on migrants: ensuring their labour rights, especially those of migrant women; protecting them against trafficking in persons; reducing the costs of sending remittances; and ensuring that migration takes place in an orderly, safe, regular and responsible fashion.

The September 2016 High-level Summit on Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants marked a watershed, with Member States setting forth a bold commitment to negotiate and agree a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration within two years in order to comprehensively address international migration in all its dimensions and at all stages, on a basis of cooperation and protection of migrants' human rights.

As the United Nations' intergovernmental forum covering the whole Asia-Pacific region and with a mandate to promote regional cooperation, ESCAP, working with its partners, has a key role to play in assisting members and associate members in responding to this bold agenda. By promoting dialogue, and producing analytical reports such as this one, ESCAP provides its members with an unparalleled platform for identification of the regional priorities for the Asia-Pacific region with regard to international migration, and can help ensure that these priorities are heard at the global level. And once the compact has been adopted, ESCAP will always be ready to support countries of the Asia-Pacific region to implement their commitments for the benefit of countries of origin, destination — and migrants themselves.

I commend this report to a global audience for its insights on a topic that affects us all.



SHAMSHAD AKHTAR

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and
Executive Secretary of ESCAP

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Executive Summary

International migration is a structural feature of an interconnected Asia-Pacific region, and is one of the key factors shaping the region with profound social and economic impacts. Migratory movements change the composition of the population, labour force and society.

In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring that migration takes place in a safe, orderly, and regular fashion will be a key priority for countries of Asia and the Pacific. As such, migrants are both agents of sustainable development, and its beneficiaries.

In the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, adopted in September 2016, Member States set themselves the goal of adopting a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration by 2018. This report aims to support that process by providing an analysis of trends and patterns on migration in the Asia-Pacific region, its impacts and policy responses, as well as providing recommendations for the global compact to serve as a background document for the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Its layout is as follows: Chapter 1 provides an analysis of trends and trajectories based on the latest estimates of migration stocks from and in Asia and the Pacific; Chapter 2 overviews the drivers and key pathways of migration; and Chapter 3, the impacts of migration. Chapter 4 summarizes the policy responses at national and multilateral level. Chapter 5 concludes with recommendations for consideration as part of the process of developing the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

TRENDS AND TRAJECTORIES

Migrant women face particular challenges related to gender-related discrimination which results in irregular forms of migration and work that is often not covered by labour law.

PATHWAYS OF MIGRATION

The diversity in migrant populations reflects the different drivers and facilitating factors that underlie and guide migration flows. The majority of migrants to and from Asia-Pacific countries are labour migrants, moving from countries with lower per capita GDP to ones with higher per capita GDP. Migration is also driven by political factors, notably conflict and instability; countries of the region host almost 40 per cent of the world's refugees. The pressures created by a changing climate are also driving migration, with people moving not only as an emergency but also proactively as an adaptation strategy.

In addition to the drivers, both regular and irregular migration are determined by facilitating facts, notably policy factors which may permit or constrain migration; the role played by recruitment agencies, who facilitate migration through legal and illegal methods; social networks, through which information flows, and cultures of migration are developed and sustained; and porous borders which allow people to enter, with or without authorization.

These factors result in migration taking multiple forms including permanent settlement in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Singapore; temporary labour migration of low-skilled and low-status migrants within the region and beyond; seasonal employment of workers from the Pacific Island countries; and high-skilled migration. People, especially women, also migrate for marriage, and for study.

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