

Health of refugees and migrants

Regional situation analysis,
practices, experiences, lessons
learned and ways forward

WHO Western Pacific Region
2018



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS.....	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
I. INTRODUCTION	5
II. CURRENT SITUATION.....	5
2.1 Internal migration.....	5
2.2 International migration	6
2.3 Subregional and cross-border migration including casual migration	6
2.4 Environmental and climate-related migration.....	8
2.5 Refugees	8
III. HEALTH ISSUES AND OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH MIGRATION	8
3.1 Population risk factors.....	10
3.2 Material and working conditions	11
3.3 Broader social determinants	12
3.4 Access to health services.....	12
IV. CURRENT RESPONSES TO PROMOTE THE HEALTH OF MIGRANTS.....	14
4.1 National policy and legal frameworks on migration and health	14
4.2 Programmatic interventions to meet the health needs of migrants	16
4.3 Partnerships to promote the health of migrants	19
4.4 Collaboration on migration and health across borders.....	20
V. WAYS FORWARD AND CONCLUSION	21
5.1 Strengthening the evidence base on migration and health	21
5.2 Strengthening health systems responses to migration and health.....	21
5.3 Develop partnerships, networks and multi-country dialogue	22
5.4 Conclusion	22
VI. STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE REPORT	22
REFERENCES	24
ANNEXES.....	30
Annex 1: Additional examples submitted by Member States and partners.....	31
Annex 2: Additional information on Australia	45
Annex 3: Additional information on the Philippines	47
Annex 4: Additional information on the Republic of Korea.....	53

List of tables

Table 1: Overview of international migrants in Member States of the Western Pacific Region.....	6
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ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JUNIMA	Joint United Nations Initiative on Migration, Health and HIV in Asia
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
STI	sexually transmitted infection
TB	tuberculosis
UHC	universal health coverage
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The principle of leaving no one behind is central to the Sustainable Development Goals and universal health coverage. Attention to the health of migrants and refugees is timely as the Western Pacific Region advances this vision. In May 2017, resolution WHA 70.15 on 'Promoting the health of refugees and migrants' was endorsed at the 70th World Health Assembly. The resolution requests WHO to identify and collect information, practices, experiences and lessons learnt on the health of refugees and migrants, in order to contribute to the development of a draft global action plan on promoting the health of refugees and migrants, to be considered for adoption at the Seventy-second World Health Assembly in 2019, and to report back to the World Health Assembly in 2018. In line with this resolution, WHO has strengthened this area of work globally, regionally and in countries and collected information from Member States and partners. While this report does not aim to present a complete picture, it provides an overview of regional issues, primarily drawing on information shared by Member States and partners.

In the Western Pacific Region, the health of migrants is an issue of growing importance. The Region has many experiences, lessons and practices to share with and to inform global discussions. As this report describes, migration in the Region takes multiple and diverse forms, including internal migration, casual cross-border migration, international migration, climate-related migration as well as some refugees. The variability and dynamic nature of migration makes it difficult to estimate the impact on health. Broadly, health is influenced by the structural nature and experiences of the migration process, and the characteristics of the person or group, for example sex, age or socioeconomic status. Health risks and vulnerabilities exist for migrants with regards to population risk factors, material and working conditions and broader social determinants. Migrants may also face barriers in access to needed health services, including policy and legal, economic, geographical and physical, information and sociocultural barriers.

This report describes examples of responses to promote the health of migrants and refugees in the Region, including good practices and lessons learnt. Examples include increasing attention to migrants and refugees in a number of national policies and legal frameworks on health-related concerns. Substantial work is also ongoing through programmatic interventions, for example in communicable diseases. Given the complexity of migration, effective responses rely critically on collaboration, including collaboration across borders, sectors, regional and provincial governments and non-government stakeholders. The report concludes by highlighting three potential ways forward, including strengthening the evidence base, strengthening health systems responses, and developing partnerships, networks and multi-country dialogue. It is envisaged that the information contained in this report will help to inform ongoing dialogue about the health of migrants and refugees specifically and leaving no one behind more broadly.

I. INTRODUCTION

Attention to the health of migrants^a is timely as the Western Pacific Region advances universal health coverage (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (1,2). World Health Assembly resolution WHA70.15 of 2017 requests WHO to identify and collect evidence-based information, best practices, experiences and lessons learnt on addressing the health needs of refugees and migrants, to inform the development of a draft global action plan by 2019 (3).

In line with this request, this report discusses migration and health in the Western Pacific Region, including (i) current situation and migration trends, (ii) health issues, status and outcomes of migrants, (iii) health risks and exposures including social determinants of health, (iv) access barriers to health services experienced by migrants, (v) responses to migrants' health including good practice examples and lessons learnt, and (vi) suggested ways forward.

The report is not a comprehensive review and draws on (i) inputs by Member States and partners received through the WHO online invitation to submit evidence-based information, best practices, experiences and lessons learnt on addressing the health needs of refugees and migrants, (ii) information collected through small stakeholder consultations via video and teleconferencing and (iii) selected peer-reviewed academic literature and grey literature. Inputs received by Member States and partners are gratefully acknowledged.^b

II. CURRENT SITUATION

Population mobility is on the rise both within and across countries in the Western Pacific Region, with migration taking diverse forms including internal, subregional and cross-border, international, and climate-related migration (4,5). This is not an exhaustive list, and patterns overlap in practice.

2.1 Internal migration

Internal migration refers to the movement of people within the same country. Internal migration is common within the Western Pacific Region with many countries transitioning from rural to urban living, and with economic development a key driver of urban growth (6). For example, China has the world's largest migrant population with the number of domestic migrants increasing from more than 6 million in the early 1980s to 245 million in 2016 (7). During a consultation in Viet Nam, participants mentioned that special economic zones attract internal migrants (8).

^a The terms "migrant" and "migration" are used as a generic umbrella term in this report. It can refer to both emigration and immigration, internal as well as external migrants and refugees. There are varied definitions and uses across countries and literatures in the Region.

^b The report draws on inputs received through the WHO online invitation to submit evidence-based information, best practices, experiences and lessons learnt on addressing the health needs of refugees and migrants. Inputs were received from Governments in Australia, China, the Marshall Islands (in coordination with IOM), the Federated States of Micronesia, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Philippines. Other respondents included Access Australia, Brunei Darussalam Red Crescent Society, Korean Red Cross, International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Monash University (Australia), Mongolian Red Cross Society, New Zealand Red Cross and Philippine Red Cross. In addition, small stakeholder consultations with national counterparts, United Nations (UN) and development partners and WHO country offices took place with Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Tuvalu and Viet Nam.

In the Western Pacific Region, 54% of the population lives in urban areas (6). A feature of urbanization in Asia is the emergence of megacities with 10 million or more inhabitants (9), a number of which will be in the Western Pacific Region. Rural-to-urban migration plays a significant role in the above-mentioned statistics. In China, for example, rural–urban migration constitutes the most common form of internal migration, often for business or labour (10,11). Internal migration was also mentioned during consultations in Viet Nam and Cambodia (8,12). Mongolia is experiencing high rates of rural–urban migration (13), with more than 70% of the country’s population now living in urban areas (14). The transition from rural to urban living may occur over an extended period, including due to difficulties securing stable full-time work or integrating into urban society (7). While economic growth and opportunity is a key driver of internal migration, there are other reasons such as seeking educational opportunities for children (for example, in the Pacific) (15,16).

2.2 International migration

International migration involves people moving from one country to another to establish themselves either permanently or temporarily, often for employment purposes (17). Table 1 provides an overview of international migrants in Member States of the Western Pacific Region (4). In 2017, international migration from Asia to Asia was particularly common (4), with large contributions from countries within the Western Pacific Region. With almost 10% of its population living and/or working overseas (18), the Philippines had the seventh highest level of net emigration in the world between 2010 and 2015 (5). There are currently just over 9 million Filipinos living and/or working overseas in 200 countries, mostly residing in the United States of America, Saudi Arabia and Canada (4,18). Although the Philippines is primarily considered a migrant sending country, there are refugees and migrants residing in the country (see Annex 1.7 and 3). Another country with a high proportion of out-migration is the Marshall Islands, with approximately 40% of Marshallese living in the United States (19). In 2015–2016, the total permanent migration programme outcome for Australia was 189 770 places (20), with four of the top 10 source countries being from within the Region (China, Malaysia, the Philippines and Viet Nam) (20).

Member States in the Western Pacific Region have established different schemes to facilitate and manage immigration, including labour mobility schemes in New Zealand or Australia (16). In some countries, immigration is not a significant issue, such as in the Federated States of Micronesia where there are only occasional arrivals by fishers who drift ashore and are provided with medical care and other services until they can be repatriated (21).

2.3 Subregional and cross-border migration including casual migration

Subregional migration is another important trend (22). Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are considered regional migration hubs with 6.5 million migrants accounting for 96% of migrant workers in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region (23). In the Greater Mekong Subregion, there are approximately 3–5 million labour migrants (24), with participants of consultations giving examples of Chinese migrants in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (25) or of Cambodian and Lao migrants in Thailand (12,25). In the Greater Mekong Subregion,^c cross-border migration is shaped by a long history related to contested frontiers, mobility linked to family and ethnic ties, civil conflict, and changing economic opportunities (24). Migrant

^c The Greater Mekong Subregion includes Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, as well as Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in China.

patterns in the Greater Mekong Subregion include casual cross-border migrants who cross country borders formally or informally to access employment, resources and services (17).

Table 1: Overview of international migrants in Member States of the Western Pacific Region

Major area, region or country of destination	Number of international migrants (thousands)		International migrants as percentage of total population		Females among international migrants (percentage)		Median age of international migrants (years)	
	2000	2017	2000	2017	2000	2017	2000	2017
American Samoa	24.9	23.6	43.3	42.3	48.2	49.0	32.0	39.1
Australia	4386.3	7036.6	23.0	28.8	50.1	51.1	45.8	44.4
Brunei Darussalam	96.3	108.6	28.9	25.3	44.1	43.4	33.7	35.8
Cambodia	146.1	76.3	1.2	0.5	51.0	46.1	17.9	34.9
China	508.0	999.5	0	0.1	50.0	38.6	34.8	36.8
Hong Kong SAR (China)	2669.1	2883.1	40.1	39.1	54.1	60.5	47.9	46.1
Macao SAR (China)	240.8	353.7	56.3	56.8	54.6	54.6	40.6	43.9
Cook Islands	2.8	4.2	15.4	24.2	44.3	49.9	20.6	28.3
Fiji	12.7	13.9	1.6	1.5	48.1	46.0	34.9	35.8
French Polynesia	30.3	30.7	12.8	10.8	4.0	43.0	36.5	42.1
Guam (USA)	74.1	78.0	47.7	47.5	48.3	48.4	34.9	36.7
Japan	1686.6	2321.5	1.3	1.8	52.7	55.0	33.1	34.3
Kiribati	2.3	3.0	2.7	2.6	48	47.3	23.7	30.9
Lao People's Democratic Republic	21.9	45.5	0.4	0.7	47.3	46.3	29.5	36.8
Malaysia	1277.2	2703.6	5.5	8.5	44.2	39.6	27.6	33.0
Marshall Islands	1.9	3.3	3.6	6.2	38.4	38.8	32.8	33.2
Micronesia, Federated States of	3.1	2.8	2.9	2.6	44.8	46.5	32.1	37.3
Mongolia	8.2	18.2	0.3	0.6	44.4	27.0	36.9	38.8
Nauru	2.4	3.7	23.9	32.7	46.4	37.5	33.9	35.1
New Caledonia (France)	49.7	66	23.3	23.9	45.8	46.1	39.8	44.5
New Zealand	678.8	1067.4	17.6	22.7	51.4	51.6	41.1	42.8
Niue	0.5	0.6	26.2	34.2	46.2	45.8	21.0	22.5
Northern Mariana Islands, Commonwealth of the (USA)	40.1	21.8	58.1	39.5	56.7	58.0	34.5	38.5
Palau	6.3	5.0	32.9	23.0	38.1	43.2	33.0	38.7
Papua New Guinea	25.1	32.4	0.5	0.4	37.8	36.5	33.8	31.6
Philippines	318.1	218.5	0.4	0.2	49.1	48.2	31.0	34.0
Pitcairn Islands (UK)	not available							
Republic of Korea	244.2	1151.9	0.5	2.3	41.4	43.9	30.3	35.4
Samoa	6.0	4.9	3.4	2.5	48.3	49.9	18.0	22.5
Singapore	1351.7	2623.4	34.5	46.0	55.5	55.9	37.0	39.4
Solomon Islands	4.0	2.5	1.0	0.4	44.1	43.9	33.0	38.5
Tokelau	0.3	0.5	16.9	38.8	45.0	52.0	16.6	20.2
Tonga	3.7	5.0	3.8	4.6	46.2	45.7	25.9	31.6
Tuvalu	0.2	0.1	2.3	1.3	44.2	44.8	34.4	37.0
Vanuatu	2.6	3.2	1.4	1.2	49.7	50.3	33.8	35.2
Viet Nam	56.8	76.1	0.1	0.1	42.2	42.1	27.2	36.5
Wallis and Futuna (France)	2.0	2.8	13.9	23.6	49.5	49.5	25.4	32.5

Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision. New York: UN; 2017 (<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/index.shtml>, accessed 15 January 2018).

2.4 Environmental and climate-related migration

Environmental migrants leave their habitual homes either temporarily or permanently, moving within their country or across borders because of a sudden or progressive change in the environment (17). Broadly, climate change impacts are anticipated to shape and increase migration and displacement through: an increase in the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events and climate-related disasters; loss of arable and inhabitable land, including through sea-level rise and flooding; and adverse impacts on ecosystems. The Western Pacific Region is highly prone to extreme weather events, with floods, droughts, rising sea levels and storm surges including cyclones and typhoons expected to become more frequent and more severe due to the impacts of climate change. Climate change can also affect human displacement (26). In 2015, approximately 85% or 16.2 million of the world's internally displaced population was caused by natural disasters in Asia and the Pacific (10). For example, in Fiji in 2016, Cyclone Winston affected 40% of the population, increasing existing vulnerabilities, with young children and pregnant and lactating women particularly vulnerable to malnutrition (27). In the same period, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu all experienced drought periods, which led to food and water insecurities (27). In Mongolia, changes in climate and weather, most notably droughts and *dzud* (severe winter following a summer drought), have affected traditional livelihood systems, impacting particularly those who rely on livestock as their main source of food and cash (13,14,27,28). Rural-urban migration in Mongolia is also influenced by mining and related loss of fertile pastoral lands and freshwater sources to owners of mining licenses and contamination of soil and water (13).

2.5 Refugees

Refugee and asylum seekers within the Western Pacific Region include people from inside and outside the Region seeking refuge in a country within the Region. In the Republic of Korea, for example, 2266 refugees came under refugee protection in 2017, primarily from China, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Nigeria and Pakistan (29). In 2015–2016, Australia's Humanitarian Programme comprised 17 555 places, reducing to 13 750 places (including 1200 places for vulnerable women and children) in 2016–2017, with progressive increases scheduled to reach a minimum of 18 750 places in 2018–2019 (20, 30). There are 451 refugees and 214 asylum seekers in the Philippines from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iran and Pakistan (18).

III. HEALTH ISSUES AND OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH MIGRATION

Migration and health intersect in multiple ways in the Western Pacific Region. The variability

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