Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020

Assessing Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration

Executive Summary

United Nations ESCAP — Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
International Labour Organization
IOM UN MIGRATION
UNAIDS
UNDP
UN environment programme
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
Sustainable Development Goals
UNFPA
UN-HABITAT FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE
UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency
United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner
unicef
UNODC United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UN WOMEN
WFP World Food Programme
United Nations Network on Migration — Working Better Together

The shaded areas of the map indicate ESCAP members and associate members.

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Marcel Crozet/ILO.
Visa applicant wishing to go abroad at a migrant center, Kathmandu, Nepal.

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Foreword

Countries in Asia and the Pacific have been places of origin, destination and transit for migrants and their families for centuries. Today, the number of international migrants, to, from and within the region, is at an all-time high. Motivated by new opportunities, enabled by innovative connections and technologies, driven by conflicts, emerging threats and the effects of unsustainable development, and responding to demand from abroad, large numbers of people of all ages and genders move to, from, within and beyond the region.

The complexity, linkages and impacts of this multidimensional reality are profound, creating opportunities and challenging actors within and outside the region. Every day, migrants reshape societies of origin, destination and transit, contribute to economic growth, innovation and sustainable development, and make the region more prosperous and liveable. However, the most positive impacts of migration are only possible when migration is safe, orderly and regular, and, above all, when the human rights of all migrants and their families are protected.

On 10 December 2018, United Nations Members States adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration at an intergovernmental conference in Marrakesh, Morocco, followed by the formal endorsement by the General Assembly on 19 December 2018. The Global Compact for Migration is a historic achievement: it is the first intergovernmentally-adopted framework for cooperation addressing all aspects of migration governance in a holistic and comprehensive manner.

The Global Compact for Migration rests on the core purposes and principles of the United Nations, including its Charter, international human rights law, international labour law and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, among others. Its cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles are: people-centeredness; international cooperation; national sovereignty; rule of law and due process; sustainable development; human rights; gender-responsiveness; child-sensitivity; whole-of-government approach; and whole-of-society approach.

To help ensure the success of the Global Compact for Migration, a mechanism exists for international follow-up and reviews of progress, including at local, national, regional and global levels. These reviews will take place in the framework of the United Nations, using a State-led approach, but also involving all relevant stakeholders.

At the regional level, member States invited relevant subregional, regional and cross-regional processes, platforms and organizations, including the United Nations Regional Commissions, to carry out reviews of implementation of the Global Compact for Migration within their respective regions, beginning in 2020. These reviews will feed into the International Migration Review Forums, at the global level, scheduled to take place every four years and beginning in 2022.

In Asia and the Pacific, the Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is being organized by ESCAP and the Regional United Nations Network on Migration for Asia and the Pacific, using the ESCAP platform. The Regional Review will take place in Bangkok and virtually from 10 to 12 March 2021.

In preparation for the first regional review, ESCAP and the Regional United Nations Network have authored the Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020, which takes stock of implementation of the Global Compact for Migration in ESCAP member States. In accordance with the indicative clustering of the Global Compact for Migration objectives set out in General Assembly resolution 73/326 on the organization of round tables for the International Migration Review Forums, and recognizing the cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles of the Global Compact for Migration, the main chapters focus on: (1) migration levels and trends in Asia and the Pacific; (2) ensuring that migration is voluntary, regular, safe and orderly; (3) protecting migrants through rights-based border governance and border management measures; (4) supporting migrants' protection, integration and contribution to development; and (5) strengthening evidence-based policymaking, public debate and cooperation for safe, orderly and regular migration. A separate chapter is devoted to the devastating short- and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and their families, as the

world nears the end of the first year of the pandemic, with a special focus on health-related, migration, economic and social impacts. The report concludes with a series of recommendations on the way forward towards a comprehensive approach to safe, orderly and regular migration in the Asia-Pacific region.

The analyses in the report are based on the latest publicly available evidence on international migration in Asia and the Pacific, desk research by members of the Regional United Nations Network, and information provided by country offices of Network members. The good practices described here were collected from States, international organizations and relevant stakeholders working in the region. While they address elements of the Global Compact for Migration, they have not been independently verified and are neither exhaustive nor always geographically balanced. The report authors also benefitted from knowledge, analysis and recommendations gathered at an expert group meeting on the draft report held at ESCAP on 29 and 30 July 2020.

COVID-19 has and will continue to have especially dire effects on people and communities on the move. At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted migrants' contributions to communities around the globe, including socioeconomic contributions. The Global Compact for Migration provides a blueprint for international cooperation on migration. Safe, orderly and regular migration can reduce the vulnerability of migrants and societies to the negative impacts of COVID-19 and future pandemics, and help in recovery and building back better, stronger, more inclusive and resilient communities that protect human rights, stimulate strong socioeconomic recovery and growth, and accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Greater regional and subregional cooperation on migration can contribute to a more effective COVID-19 response, and to maximizing the benefits of migration for all.

The conclusions and recommendations of this report are intended for consideration by ESCAP member States and associate members, in partnership with all relevant stakeholders to ensure a collaborative and comprehensive response to the call for action of the Global Compact for Migration.

In this spirit, we sincerely hope that the *Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020* will contribute to wider discussion and understanding of migration and development, to national policy formulation, and to greater regional cooperation in making migration safe, orderly and regular in Asia and the Pacific and beyond, now and in the future.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana

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

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Visa applicant wishing to go abroad at a migrant center, Kathmandu, Nepal. © Marcel Crozet/ILO.

Executive summary

International migration is a defining and expanding global reality. Its levels, complexity and impacts have increased over time. Migrants have been recognized as key accelerators of sustainable development, yet they face challenges in countries of origin, destination and transit. Migrants and their families everywhere face risks to their safety, dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms, regardless of their migratory status.

Recognizing these facts, and determined to improve cooperation on international migration, United Nations Member States adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in 2018. Based upon the core purposes and principles of the United Nations, including its Charter, international human rights law, international labour law and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, among others, the Global Compact for Migration is the first intergovernmentally-adopted framework, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, covering all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Its cross-cutting, interdependent guiding principles and its 23 objectives and associated concrete actions provide a framework and roadmap for international coordination and cooperation on migration, which is critical to address the challenges and opportunities of migration now and in the future.

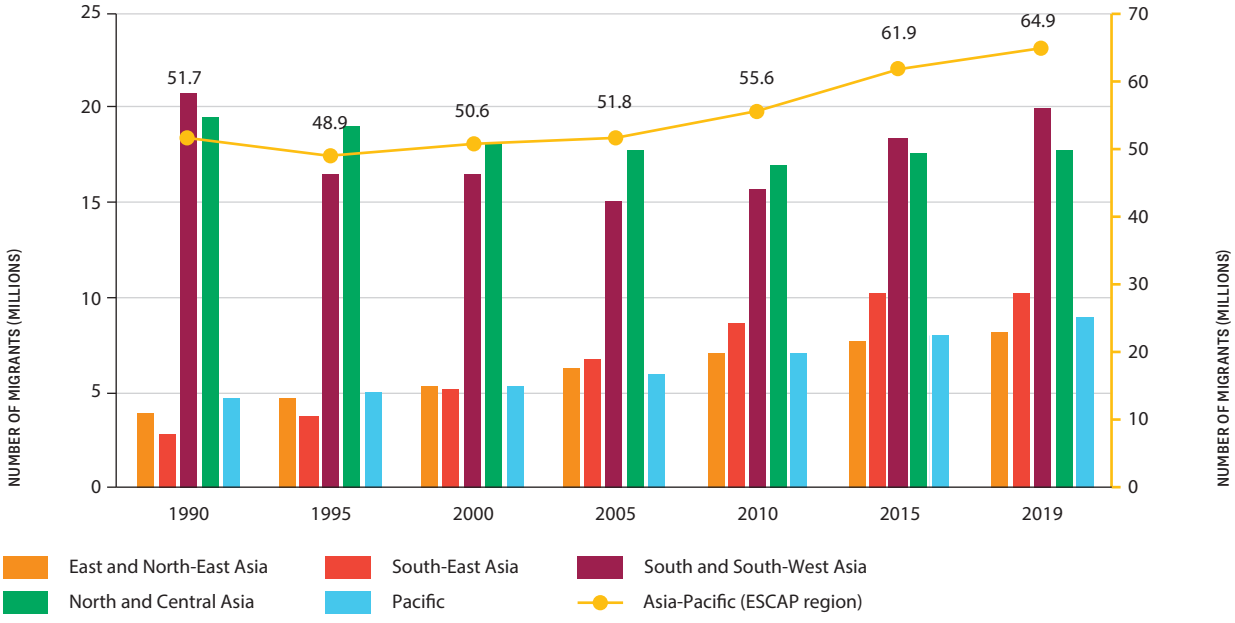
The years 2020 and 2021 mark the first time that regional commissions, in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 73/195 and 73/326, and in collaboration with regional partners, are reviewing the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration within their respective regions. These regional reviews will contribute to the work of the International Migration Review Forums, the first of which will take place in 2022. ESCAP and the Regional United Nations Network on Migration for Asia and the Pacific are organizing the Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration from 10 to 12 March 2021, using the ESCAP platform. The present report presents a baseline of Global Compact for Migration implementation by ESCAP member States according to the indicative clusters of the Global Compact for Migration objectives presented in General Assembly resolution 73/326. It discusses short- and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and their families, and it recommends future collaborative action by governments and relevant stakeholders in order to achieve safe, orderly and regular migration in Asia and the Pacific.

Overview of migration in Asia and the Pacific

The Asian and Pacific region[1] is home to over 4.6 billion people, about 60 per cent of the world's population in 2020. It includes countries with some of the largest and fastest ageing populations, countries that are highly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters, and countries that are experiencing the highest levels of wealth inequality in the world, as well as persistently high levels of income inequality and inequality of opportunity. In addition, the region is home to both rising economic and political powers, and countries remaining among the group of those that are least developed. The number of international migrants in the region has grown within this context from almost 52 million in 1990, to 65 million in 2019, representing a quarter of the global international migrant stock of 272 million in 2019. The percentage of male and female migrants in the region is roughly balanced at 51 and 49 per cent, respectively. Migrants are concentrated in prime working ages, with over 78.0 per cent (almost 51 million migrants) being 15 to 64 years old in 2019, compared to 67.7 per cent for the general population. Almost 107 million people from Asia-Pacific countries lived outside their countries of birth in 2019, representing almost 40 per cent of the world's migrants, and equivalent to 2.2 per cent of the region's total population of 4.6 billion in 2019. The bulk of migration is intra-regional. In 2019, almost 46 million migrants from Asia-Pacific countries moved to other countries in the region (43 per cent of all emigrants from Asia-Pacific countries), while 70 per cent of the foreign-born stock in Asia and the Pacific came from within the region. Often migration is concentrated within the same subregion. Almost 61.0 million migrants from the region had moved outside the region in 2019, compared to only 26.7 million migrants in 1990. The main destinations outside the region were in North America, Europe and the Middle East. Irregular migration in the region occurs alongside regular migration. Although no overall data exist, it is likely that irregular migration is significant, given large-scale migration trends in Asia and the Pacific and the widespread desire to migrate, the often high costs of regular migration and restrictive and complex migration policies. Smuggling of migrants represents a subset of irregular migration and, along with trafficking in persons, is significant in the region.

Migration between countries in Asia and the Pacific and to other regions of the world is driven by a variety of causes, both voluntary and involuntary, but the dominant form is temporary labour migration. Most

FIGURE 1 Growth in the international migrant stock by subregion in Asia and the Pacific, 1990–2019



SOURCE: ESCAP calculations based on United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2019). International Migrant Stock 2019 Database. Available at https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/index.asp.

1 This report considers the region as that covered by ESCAP. For further information, see https://www.unescap.org/about/member-states, accessed 25 November 2020.

labour migration from Asia-Pacific countries is South-South, with destinations either within the region or in the Middle East. People in the region also migrate for education, family formation, permanent settlement and retirement, as well as due to political and armed conflicts, food insecurity, and environmental change and disasters. Return and circular migration are likewise common. Irregular migration takes place across the region, while smuggling and trafficking in persons also occur. In addition, the number of refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons and internally-displaced persons in and from the region remains high. At the end of 2019, there were over 7.8 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations in Asia-Pacific countries, representing 38 per cent of the global refugee population, and the largest regional refugee population in the world.

Much of this vast movement of people in Asia and the Pacific and beyond has been facilitated by advances in communications, transportation, technology, and both established and emerging networks. The socioeconomic and political situation in countries of origin and destination, including demographic factors, has framed migration across borders in the region.

Ensuring voluntary, regular, safe and orderly migration (Global Compact for Migration Objectives: 2, 5, 6, 12, 18)

Most of the region's migrants are temporary workers in elementary and middle skilled occupations migrating from lower to higher income countries. In several parts of the region, there are pathways for regular labour migration across different skill levels, but those for workers in elementary occupations are often costly and cumbersome. Women migrants, especially domestic workers, are particularly at risk of discrimination, violence, abuse and exploitation. Recruitment process malpractices, such as excessive fees, erode the benefits of migration for migrant workers and their families.

Good practices in the region show that measures such as the prohibition of recruitment fees, wage protection, adherence to occupational safety and health standards, decent work promotion, the introduction of complaint mechanisms, skills development and qualifications recognition, and provisions for worker mobility, can lead to improvements in the situations of migrant workers. Some regional frameworks foster mobility in education for academics and students.

For migrants moving on humanitarian grounds, child protection and family unity, the lack of access to regular migration pathways is one factor creating or exacerbating situations of vulnerability. Migrants in vulnerable situations in the region have many needs that cut across sectors and providers, and fragmentation and overlap occur in protection pathways among multiple organizations delivering services. Existing procedures for screening, assessment and referral of migrants in vulnerable situations, including victims of trafficking in persons, are often slow and inadequate, although some good practices are found in the region, especially related to children.

The Global Compact for Migration is firmly rooted in the 2030 Agenda. The region, however, has fallen behind in achieving almost all of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Thus, a large proportion of the region's population remains susceptible to poverty, precarious working conditions, vulnerable employment and a lack of access to social protection, as well as being at risk of disasters and political conflict. As such, many people will continue to see migration as a way to reduce their vulnerability and save themselves and their families from being left behind.

Protecting migrants through rights-based border governance and border management measures (Global Compact for Migration Objectives: 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 21)

Border governance and border management are central to achieving safe, orderly and regular migration. What migrants experience (and expect to experience) at the border informs their decisions throughout the migration cycle: the routes they take, how they live and work in transit and when they reach their destination, and their options for return.

The right to a nationality is a fundamental human right connected to all other human rights, as well as being necessary to access regular migration pathways. Being able to prove nationality affects every aspect of the migration experience and is essential to the orderly administration of migration and prevention of statelessness. All countries in Asia and the Pacific are States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which addresses the right to birth registration and to acquire a nationality. However, very few have acceded to conventions that address statelessness, and in practice birth registration remains complicated,

especially for migrants in an irregular situation. In this context, civil registration and vital statistics can play a critical role in achieving inclusive, equitable and people-centred development. Countries in the region have agreed to a Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (2014) and proclaimed 2015–2024 as the Asia and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade.

Search and rescue is a vital element of border management and of ensuring safe migration. States are obligated under international law to make every effort to protect the right to life, whenever a person is at risk on water or on land and regardless of their nationality or status or the circumstances in which they are found. Numerous migrants have died or gone missing in mixed movements along their migration routes within and outside the region, and many deaths and disappearances go unreported and unrecorded. There are, to date, no regional mechanisms ensuring safe, equitable and predictable disembarkation of people in distress at sea.

Smuggling of migrants is prevalent in the region. Migrants often resort to smugglers due to the costs and other barriers associated with regular migration, and smugglers exploit and profit from the need of people to migrate. Thus, migrant smuggling is deeply embedded in the socioeconomic dynamics of the region. The lack of accessible, safe and legal pathways for migration fuels this activity, exposing migrants to human rights violations and legal jeopardy. In addition, migrants are often criminalized for having been smuggled. States are called upon to cooperate in addressing these crimes, beyond efforts on intercepting irregular movements. Many States in the Asia-Pacific region have criminalized migrant smuggling in some form, and some have introduced related legislation to protect migrants who have been smuggled. Notwithstanding such developments, incorporating measures to prevent migrant smuggling into national law has been uneven.

Trafficking in persons in the Asia-Pacific region is a significant problem. It is a crime as well as a human rights violation and has also been recognized as a development issue, intersecting with challenges such as decent work deficits and violence against women. Several Asia-Pacific States have taken steps to ensure that trafficked persons are not prosecuted for violations of immigration laws, and most have ratified the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2000). Despite action at national and subregional levels and in multi- and bilateral cooperation, the challenges presented by trafficking in persons require a more comprehensive approach that centres on the human rights of trafficked persons and ensures increased access to safe migration and decent work.

Secure borders are essential elements of a comprehensive and holistic approach to migration governance, enabling States to ensure the security of all those within their jurisdiction. In exercising this prerogative, States need to fulfil their obligations relating to protection of the rights of people on the move, including those arriving at borders with varying needs. Multi-agency coordination at the national level, along with international cooperation across borders, is an essential components of effective border management.

Cross-border movements in the Asia-Pacific region are vast, varied and complex. Borders across the region are also increasingly digital, raising new concerns for data protection and privacy risks for migrants. There have been several initiatives focused on rights-based training of border officials in the region, including with a focus on gender-responsive law enforcement. However, enhanced capacity-building is needed, in particular with regard to gender-responsive, disability-inclusive and child-sensitive law enforcement cooperation and responses at international borders.

Detention is a frequent response to irregular migration in Asia and the Pacific, and in many cases is *de facto* and open-ended, constituting arbitrary detention. The right to personal liberty is an essential component of legal systems, and benefit of the rule of law is guaranteed under the international human rights framework. Therefore, migrants should not be detained solely on the basis of their irregular entry or residence, and detention, including for children, on grounds of their or their parents' migration status, should only be used as a measure of last resort. Although some States and subregional actors are seeking to limit the use of immigration detention and explore non-custodial alternatives, especially for children, there is room for improvement in reducing or eliminating the practice of immigration detention, and in the implementation of alternative measures, favouring non-custodial community-based care arrangements.

According to the Global Compact for Migration, States have the sovereign right to determine who may enter and remain on their territory, subject to their obligations under international law. In Asia and the Pacific, many migrants return to their origin country without assistance, and most return movement within the region is intraregional. Voluntary return should always be promoted in preference to forced or coerced return. However, several States do not fully comply with their non-refoulement obligation not to expel, return or extradite persons to another State, even when substantial evidence indicates they would be in danger of torture or other serious human rights violations. In some countries in the region, migrants also often face situations amounting to collective expulsion. Support for reintegration of returned migrants should be strengthened, with a view to more rights-based, gender-responsive, child-sensitive and disability-inclusive programmes.

Supporting migrants' protection, integration and contribution to development (Global Compact for Migration Objectives: 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22)

All migrants have rights, and the degree to which and the way their rights are respected, protected and fulfilled in destination countries affects their contributions to development. In Asia and the Pacific, some origin countries have strengthened consular and other services to assist migrants in destination countries. They also support migrant workers, often through memoranda of understanding and bilateral agreements between countries. However, since most migrant workers from South and South-West Asia and many from Indonesia and the Philippines move to Western Asia for employment, the policies of Gulf Cooperation Council countries are critical to their protection and well-being.

Migrant access to basic services is often constrained by laws, fees, language barriers, and restrictions related to residency and migration status. Despite widespread recognition of health as a basic human right, it has proven challenging to ensure health care for all migrants, particularly for women, children, persons with disabilities and irregular migrants in areas where health services are not fully developed. In several countries in the region, there are comprehensive health-care schemes that cover migrant workers, but this is limited mostly to those with long-term contracts, and seasonal migrant workers are rarely covered.

Although the right to education for all, regardless of nationality, is well-established in international human rights instruments, many migrants in the region, in particular migrant children, lack access to education. It is challenging to provide education to large groups of migrant children in the face of language barriers and when many children have experienced trauma or are accustomed to different educational systems in countries of origin. Yet, there are positive examples in the region, such as subregional frameworks permitting access to education, and bilateral dialogues between countries in the region on educating migrant children. Access to other basic services (including housing, clean water and sanitation), especially for migrants in irregular status and in the informal sector of the economy, is often limited and further constrained by overall inadequate living and working conditions.

International migrants bring change to countries of destination. Achieving social cohesion requires some degree of mutual adaptation by all involved. Given the temporary and employment related nature of much migration in the Asia-Pacific region, migrant integration is often not the primary goal of countries of destination and origin, and migrants themselves. Yet, even with a narrow labour market focus, matching occupational skills of migrant workers with host country demand is important, and it remains challenging, due to barriers of language, certification and skills transfer. Other challenges to effective integration in the labour market include ensuring fundamental principles and rights at work, decent working conditions, protection from labour market discrimination and addressing negative public perceptions of migrant workers. As with other aspects of migration, the integration of migrant workers into the labour force is highly gendered. Overall, women and men have different opportunities and pathways for integration into society.

International migrants generally contribute to economic and social development in both origin and host countries when there is a conducive policy environment. The key to creating conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries is to mainstream migration into development planning, human resource development strategies, labour migration policies and cooperation agreements with international organizations. Some countries in the region promote diaspora development overseas or support existing diasporas so as to contribute to national development initiatives. Most migrants

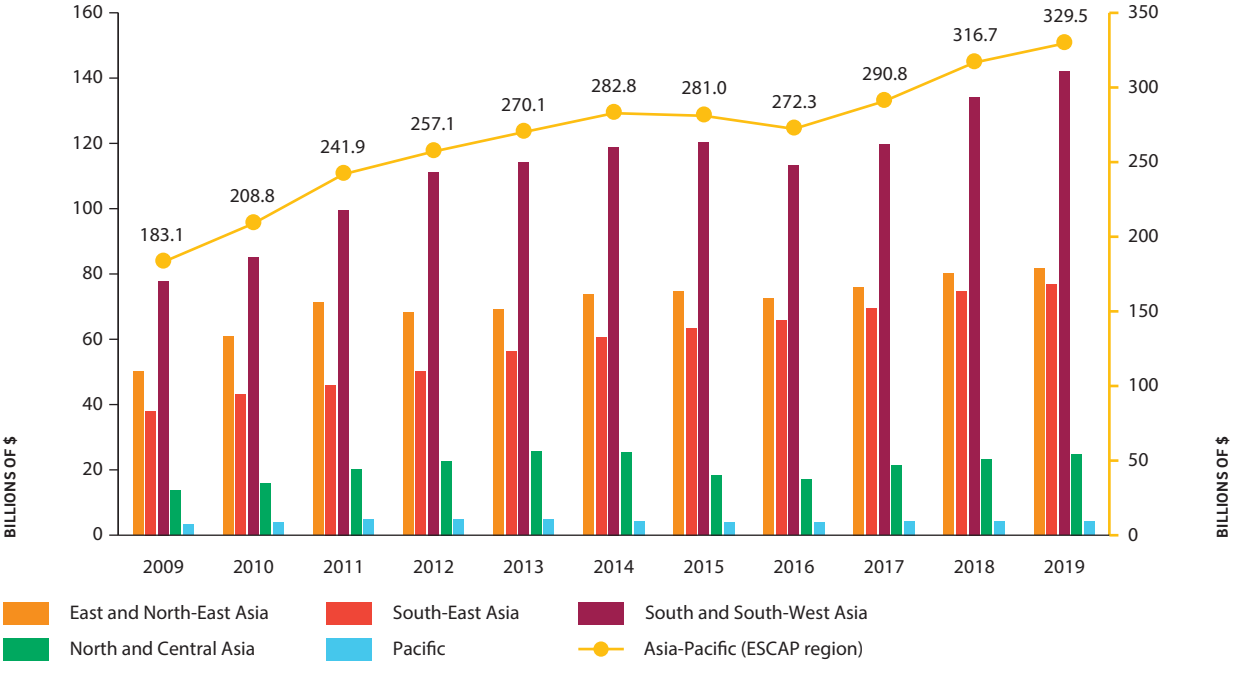
from the region send remittances to families and others in their origin countries, which supports household consumption and contributes to poverty reduction. Between 2009 and 2019, remittances to the region rose from $183 billion to $330 billion, nearly half of the 2019 global total of $717 billion. India and China are the world's largest remittance recipients, with the Philippines, Pakistan and Bangladesh also among the top ten countries at the global level. Remittances are not just important in absolute value; in some countries of the region they are a significant part of GDP. Remittance growth accelerated over 2016–2019; however, remittances are expected to decline significantly over 2019–2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The region was the source of about $110 billion in remittances in 2019, up from $62 billion in 2009. The largest source country was the Russian Federation, followed by China, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea and Thailand. The median cost of sending $200 in remittances to Asia-Pacific countries in the first quarter of 2020 was at a low of 2.7 per cent; however, such costs vary considerably across subregions, with countries in the Pacific experiencing much higher costs.

Migrants are often excluded from social protection systems in both origin and destination countries. Even when they can access social protection systems, the benefits may not be portable between countries. In Asia and the Pacific, portability of social security between countries of origin and destination is limited. Some innovative approaches in the region exist at subregional levels. In addition, bilateral agreements on social security have been signed between countries in and outside the region, and several countries of origin have adopted unilateral approaches that extend a certain amount of social security coverage to citizens abroad. In general, however, social protection coverage for migrants is patchy and uncoordinated rather than rights-based and consistent.

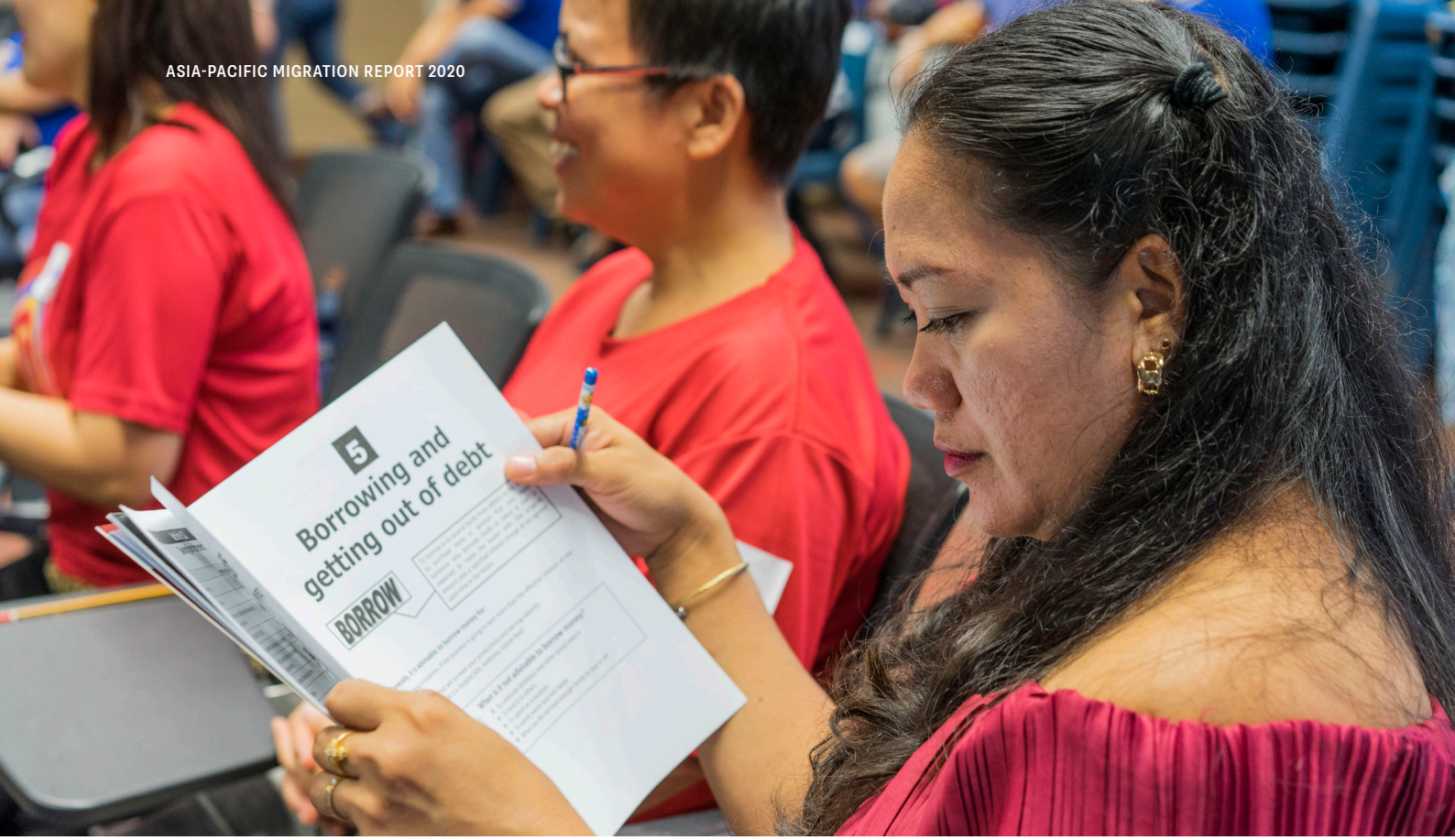
Strengthening evidence-based policymaking, public debate and cooperation for safe, orderly and regular migration (Global Compact for Migration Objectives: 1, 3, 7, 17, 23)

Policymakers need accurate, reliable and timely migration data, disaggregated by sex, age, disability, migration status and other characteristics. It is a crucial element in evidence-based, gender-responsive, child-sensitive and disability-inclusive policymaking and public discourse. Countries in Asia and the Pacific generally collect data on migrant stock, in-flows, work permits issued to foreigners, and foreign students, but these data

FIGURE 2 Remittance inflows to the Asia-Pacific region and subregions, 2009–2019, billions of $



SOURCE: ESCAP calculations based on World Bank (2020). Migration and remittances data. Available at https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data.



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Domestic and health care workers from the Philippines, working in Singapore.

are usually not further disaggregated by age, sex, migration status, disability and other crucial criteria. In addition, entities collecting the data often do not share their information or collection practices, and some national statistical offices lack the capacity to collect, tabulate and disseminate the data regularly according to national and international standards. Data and information can also give migrants knowledge that allows them to migrate safely. Examples from countries in the region show that, among others, pre-departure training contributes to more informed decision-making over the migration cycle.

Particular migrant groups, such as women, children, persons with disabilities and members of ethnic or religious minorities, face increased risk of rights violations while on the move. Data and research from Asia and the Pacific confirm that these vulnerabilities are often associated with the high proportion of temporary migrants in the region, and with migrants who work in the informal sector, particularly those without proper documentation.

Over the past two decades, countries in Asia and the Pacific have made progress in reducing systematic discrimination against migrants. However, public perceptions of migrants, their families, and their contribution to economies and societies in destination, origin and transit countries, are often negative, according to various surveys and polls conducted in the region. To respond, it is necessary to conduct more in-depth and high-quality research on this topic, challenge assumptions, test different approaches, be evidence-based in evaluating impact, build professional networks and create centres of expertise bringing together different disciplines to build the requisite evidence and communicate it to a wider audience.

International migration has been rising on the global, regional, national and subnational agendas, within and outside the United Nations, building on cooperation and partnerships among governments and relevant stakeholders. Most member States in Asia and the Pacific voted to affirm the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees. Member States from the region have taken part in the regular reviews of the 2030 Agenda through the voluntary national review process at the high-level political forum on sustainable development and have also discussed migration in that context. In addition, a number of regional formal and informal bodies and processes exist in Asia and the Pacific that address migration. Moreover, there are regional consultative processes which are State-led, informal, regional and non-binding, and they allow for information-sharing and policy dialogues dedicated to migration-issues in a cooperative manner. Bilateral, national and subnational activities complement the global and regional cooperation and partnership activities, including the involvement of relevant stakeholders. Since 2019, the Regional United Nations Network on Migration for Asia and

the Pacific has been in place, bringing together the expertise and experience of United Nations entities in the region to support member States implement the Global Compact for Migration. Country-level networks have also been founded and are being established. With regional reviews of the Global Compact for Migration being conducted in 2020 and 2021, and the global review to take place in 2022 and every four years from there on, future reviews of the Global Compact for Migration are forthcoming.

COVID-19 and international migration in Asia and the Pacific

COVID-19 has affected all countries in Asia and the Pacific, with particularly severe implications for the most marginalized people. Migrants in the region have been especially affected by the pandemic. The impacts of the pandemic on migrants result from personal, social, situational and structural factors, extending beyond their health to further affect their socioeconomic situation and protection in complex, interconnected ways. They are exacerbated by interactions with other factors that cause vulnerability to infection, including migrants' sex, age and disabilities.

In the region, migrants are at a heightened risk of contracting the disease, due to barriers to lack of access to basic health services, unsanitary and overcrowded living conditions, obstacles to undertaking health-seeking behaviours, and increased exposure to infected people given their role as essential workers. Additional negative effects result from disruption or discontinuity of essential health services, including, sexual and reproductive health services, and nutrition. Lack of income has led to decreased affordability of healthy diets and overall access to food. This is of particular concern for migrants, who often reside in urban areas, and where food prices can be higher and more volatile than rural areas due to ongoing lockdowns, travel restrictions and dependence on retail markets. Such a heightened level of food insecurity is having detrimental impacts on the health of children of migrants.

Given their concentration in care, domestic work and nursing, women migrants workers face higher risk of exposure to COVID-19, greater difficulty accessing health services and gender-based violence support services, due to cultural barriers and migrant status, and often being unable to take care of themselves while coping with the demands of caring for more family members at home. Despite the numerous challenges facing migrants across the region, migrants in some countries, including those in irregular situations, have been allowed to enrol in national health insurance schemes and access free COVID-19 testing and treatment. In providing these services, certain countries have erected firewalls between health centres and immigration authorities. In many countries, migrants play important roles in the COVID-19 response, serving as essential workers including in health care, transportation, or the food and agricultural sector.

As the virus moves with people, governments in almost all countries of the region have imposed widespread, often *ad hoc*, restrictions on international and internal movements. The measures used include suspending international travel, closing borders, tightening visa and/or entry requirements, and mandatory internal lockdowns. In some cases, such restrictions have led to increased movement, as people attempt to go home or rejoin family members. In others, migrants have been stranded in origin, destination or transit countries, often ineligible for government support and without resources to sustain themselves. With borders closed, some migrants have resorted to dangerous ways to migrate or return home, including with the help of smugglers. With large numbers of returning migrants, countries in the region are working to ensure that the returnees are safe, and that quarantine and reintegration measures are in place and followed.

Countries in the region are suffering from economic slowdowns and even standstills, due to the combined impacts of domestic virus outbreaks, severe lockdown measures and the broader pandemic-induced global recession. With most migrants in the region being temporary migrant workers, loss of jobs and wages among them have been particularly severe. It has also resulted in large scale returns of migrant workers, including those organized by governments in South Asia. Remittances have declined drastically. Remittances to Eastern Europe and Central Asia are expected to decline 16.1 per cent from $57 billion in 2019 to $48 billion in 2020. Remittances in East Asia and the Pacific are estimated to fall 10.5 per cent over the same period, from $147 billion to $131 billion. Some countries in the region have tried to shield certain migrant workers from the economic impacts of the pandemic by including them in economic stimulus packages or income support programmes; however, very few migrants have been able to access such support, and significant numbers remain excluded.

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A 15-year-old boy left behind by migrating parents and living alone in south Kyrgyzstan.

While lockdowns have reduced social interaction for all groups in society, migrants have been particularly isolated. Lockdown measures exacerbate the isolation of live-in migrant domestic workers, increasing risks of abuse or discrimination. Social marginalization and xenophobia experienced by migrants is on the rise, feeding public perceptions of migrants as carriers and spreaders of COVID-19. Lockdowns have had major impacts on children's learning and education. They have disrupted counselling and meals offered at schools, and child protection services have been further restricted. Lockdowns and closed borders have also meant separation of many migrant children from parents and other family members.

In spite of the above, migrants play a critical role as essential workers, particularly in the health sector, the formal and informal care economy, and along food supply chains. Therefore, their contributions should be recognized and valued, and they should be a fundamental element of countries' long-term recovery.

According to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the post-COVID-19 response should be guided by four basic tenets: (a) exclusion is costly in the long-run, whereas inclusion pays off for everyone; (b) an effective response to COVID-19 and protecting the human rights of people on the move are not mutually exclusive; (c) "No-one is safe until everyone is safe"; and (d) people on the move are part of the solution. In this context, the Global Compact for Migration is a critical tool in Asia and the Pacific and around the world. It provides guidance in overcoming the COVID-19 challenges and developing and implementing post-COVID-19 recovery policies and plans. If such policies and plans address all 23 objectives of the Global Compact for Migration and embody its cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles, their benefits will be felt by all — migrants and non-migrants alike.

Moving forward: Recommendations towards a comprehensive approach to safe, orderly and regular migration in the Asia-Pacific region

Migration is shaping all countries in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. The number of people moving from, to and between Asian and Pacific countries has grown over recent decades, driven by many factors and with profound consequences for all countries, as well as for migrants and their families. Migration in the region is highly complex, due to: the various actors involved and their respective interactions with one another and the rest of the world; disparate demographic, political, social, economic and environmental contexts in the region and beyond; the influence of geography in a region, in which small island states and city-states coexist with countries of large geographical extent; and a high

level of uncertainty regarding the future and how it will affect opportunities and challenges of people crossing borders.

Overall, the effects of international migration in the region have been largely positive for countries of origin and destination, and for migrants themselves. However, the obstacles and risks to safe, orderly and regular migration in the region are significant. The manifold impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants highlight the extent to which they are forced into vulnerable situations and unable to protect themselves, despite often being essential to the pandemic's response and to the long-term recovery of countries in the region and abroad.

The Global Compact for Migration offers a unique opportunity for the Asia-Pacific region to align migration with sustainable development and respect for human and labour rights. Achieving the 23 objectives of the Global Compact for Migration requires a vision of safe, orderly and regular migration that comprehends the interlinkages and synergies between the objectives, no one of which stands alone.

Focused on the cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles of the Global Compact for Migration, the following recommendations are proposed for consideration by Asian and Pacific Governments, in partnership with all relevant stakeholders to make migration in the region, and beyond, safe, orderly and regular:

People-centredness: Asia and the Pacific is a region with some of the largest, smallest and fastest ageing populations; a region particularly afflicted by disasters and climate change, which hit the poorest communities and countries hardest; a region with high and increasing inequality; and a region with countries that are considered economic and political powerhouses on the global stage, while others remain developing countries, some of which landlocked. In such a region, the special circumstances of the people, their contributions, challenges, vulnerabilities and needs must be recognized when formulating policies that affect the lives and well-being of migrants and their families. Migration policies must respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all migrants and those affected by migration; reduce the situations of vulnerability they face; and integrate them into sustainable development as both agents and beneficiaries. Also, the great complexity and diversity of the region must be considered and taken adequate account of when formulating and implementing migration policies in Asia and the Pacific.

International cooperation: Migration is inherently international, and no country can address it alone. Furthermore, given the importance of intra-regional, and intra-subregional migration in Asia and the Pacific, and the number and diversity of countries in the region, governments should collaborate through policy coordination, norm-setting and cooperation across all 23 objectives of the Global Compact for Migration. This can be achieved at the bilateral, subregional, regional and cross regional levels, in particular given the large extent of migration between Asia-Pacific countries and major countries of destination in the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab States (including Jordan and Lebanon).

National sovereignty: According to the Global Compact for Migration, every country has a sovereign right to determine national migration policies and govern migration within their jurisdiction, in conformity with international law. States should take fully into account the legitimate concern of countries of origin to protect the rights and interests of their citizens abroad. States should cooperate with one another on a basis of sovereign equality, seeking mutually beneficial solutions in accord with international law, including international human rights law, labour law and the law of the sea.

Rule of law and due process: International migration should not be governed by exception. All procedures relating to international migrants and migration, including those related to irregular migration, must be based on laws promulgated through regular processes, subject to judicial review and appeal; implemented equally, without discrimination; and explicitly aligned with principles of due process.

Sustainable development: Migration is a multi-dimensional reality of major relevance to sustainable development. Since significant acceleration is needed across the region to achieve the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, governments should intensify efforts to attain sustainable development. Further commitment and work toward achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda will support implementation of the objectives of the Global Compact for Migration, and vice versa.

Human rights: Countries in the region have ratified core international human rights treaties, as well as relevant international labour, criminal and humanitarian law standards, and the law of the sea. However, States in the region that have not yet done so should ratify or accede to the international instruments and apply them to international migration. Given the importance of migration for work in the region, there should be a renewed commitment to respect, promote, ratify and implement all such treaties and conventions, in particular the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990) and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Migration-related policies and laws of countries in the region should be consistent with these obligations.

Gender-responsiveness: All policies related to migration should recognize and build upon the independence, agency and leadership of migrant women and girls, and empower and protect the rights of all migrants, regardless of sex or gender identity. Although countries in the region have advanced gender equality and the empowerment of women, women and girl migrants in the region still face limited opportunities and significant risk of discrimination, exploitation and abuse.

Child-sensitivity: Migration-related child protection risks and restricted access to basic services are of significant concern for the large number of child migrants and children of migrants in the region, including those children who have been "left behind" by one or both parents migrating. The best interests of the child must at all times be a primary consideration in all policies and practices in the context of migration, including for unaccompanied and separated children, and regardless of the child's migration status. Migration policies should seek to ensure access for children affected by migration to national systems, including protection, education, health, justice and social protection systems, and should respect and promote the right to family life and family unity.

Whole-of-government approach: Given the extent of Asia and the Pacific, and the complex inter-regional and cross-regional character of migration in the region, Governments should ensure that all government entities address migrant concerns when formulating, implementing, reviewing and revising policies, with a focus on achieving sustainable development for all. Working together creates synergies, bridges gaps and ensures coherence and accountability.

Whole-of-society approach: The number, kind and level of engagement on migration issues of relevant non-state actors (relevant stakeholders) in the region is significant and growing. Governments should recognize the advantage of working with the growing group of stakeholders at the regional, subregional, national and subnational levels, and include them when formulating, implementing, monitoring and adjusting migration policies. Given the level of expertise and engagement of United Nations entities on migration issues in Asia and the Pacific, the Regional United Nations Network on Migration for Asia and the Pacific and the respective country-level networks should continue to actively engage with relevant and diverse stakeholders in a transparent, inclusive and meaningful way. This will facilitate effective, timely and coordinated United Nations system-wide support to member States on implementing the Global Compact for Migration.

The adoption of the Global Compact for Migration has created an opening for profound changes to ensure rights-based migration governance, grounded in evidence, norms and a shared understanding, benefiting migrants and communities of origin and destination alike. In many ways, the region has been pioneering on migration issues. However, the region still has a considerable way to go in meeting all objectives of the Global Compact for Migration and adhering to its cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles.

The coming years offer a crucial window of opportunity in which to achieve safe, orderly and regular migration in Asia and the Pacific. This will be vital in helping the region achieve sustainable development and respect for human rights, and it is made all the more urgent by the imperative to "build back better" from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Global Compact for Migration is a framework, roadmap and call for action for international and regional coordination and cooperation on international migration. It is critically important to addressing the challenges and opportunities of migration for all, both now and in the future.

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The full report is available at:
https://www.unescap.org/resources/asia-pacific-migration-report-2020