

**FIFTEENTH COORDINATION MEETING ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Population Division
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
United Nations Secretariat
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**CONTRIBUTION
TO THE FIFTEENTH COORDINATION MEETING ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION¹**

Inputs from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

¹ The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

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1. Introduction

International migration in Asia and the Pacific continues to grow as a key trend affecting all countries of the region. Over 98 million people from Asian and Pacific countries lived outside their countries of birth, making up a population larger than that of Viet Nam, the eighth-largest country in the region. Meanwhile, the countries of the region hosted over 60 million migrants, more than the population of Myanmar and representing an increase of almost 17 per cent since 1990 (UNPD, 2015).

Labour migration remains the predominant driver of international migration flows in Asia and the Pacific. Driven by factors such as differential demographic trends, the search for better economic opportunities among potential migrants and demand for labour, and facilitated by official and unofficial recruitment agencies and social networks, increased connectivity, as well as shared linguistic and historic ties between countries, labour migration remains a durable trend in the contemporary Asia-Pacific region, including both migration between countries of the Asia-Pacific region and countries beyond the region.

Other migration trends remain important, including those related to the forced migration of refugees from Afghanistan into Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and of Syrian refugees into Turkey. The movement of people across the Andaman Sea reduced in 2016, with no large-scale movements of people in the first of the year; however, the root causes underlying these movements have not changed, risking a recurrence of the humanitarian crisis of 2015 (UNHCR, 2016).² Indeed, since October 2016, 65,000 people have fled from Rakhine State in Myanmar to Bangladesh, suggesting a new direction of displacement (OCHA, 2017).³ Another emerging trend relates to the link between climate change and migration, especially with regards to the low-lying Pacific Island States, which are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and for whom forms of short-term labour migration may form part of adaptation strategies. Migration for education has also increased significantly, with UNESCO data showing over 2 million internationally-mobile students from ESCAP member States abroad, more than double the almost 710,000 in 1999 (UNESCO, ND).

Men and women are engaged in all forms of migration, although their destinations, occupations and numbers vary, reflecting the highly-gendered nature of migration. For example, women are particularly involved in migration as domestic workers, with over 2 million female migrant domestic workers being found in South-East Asia and Pacific, compared to only 210,000 male migrant domestic workers (ILO, 2015).⁴ As a result, migration policies must be tailored to respond to the specific concerns of female and male migrants.

² <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20-%20Mixed%20Movements%20Update%20for%20South-East%20Asia%20-%20Jan-Jun%202016.pdf>

³ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ROAP_Snapshot_170109.pdf

⁴ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_436343.pdf

The size of these flows means that migration has major development implications for Asian and Pacific countries, with migrants contributing to countries of destination and to countries of origin. However, the protection of migrants remains challenging, particularly in the context of limited opportunities for regular low-skilled migration. To take up such work in response to employer demand, migrants often enter or remain in countries in irregular situations, facilitating exploitation and abuse of their human rights. Addressing this situation remains a key concern for the region as a whole.

2. Activities undertaken during 2016 to support the implementation of the migration-related commitments of the 2030 Agenda

In light of these trends, the commitment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ensuring “orderly, safe, regular and responsible” migration is a priority for the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, and ESCAP has been working throughout 2016 to support member States to achieve this goal.

ESCAP, along with its partners in the Regional Coordination Mechanism supported the Government of Bangladesh to hold a thematic workshop on “Migration for Connectivity and Business” in Bangkok on 29 March 2016. This workshop engaged member States in a substantive discussion and an exchange of best practice on issues linking migration and different forms of connectivity, as well as the role of the private sector in migration processes, which fed into the discussions of the GFMD under roundtable 2 (“Connectivity and migration”).

ESCAP also concluded its project on “Facilitating Migration Management in North and Central Asia”, funded by the Russian Federation. The project aims at building knowledge on international migration in this subregion, and promoting cooperation and partnerships between countries of origin and destination in North and Central Asia. The project closed with an Advocacy Forum on “Facilitating Migration Management in North and Central Asia” in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from 28-29 June 2016, which brought together representatives from the Governments of the subregion to discuss the conclusions of the studies produced under the project, and to identify priority areas for reform of migration management systems. The Forum focused on key issues related to migration in North and Central Asia, notably the legal framework governing migration in North and Central Asia, the contributions of migrant workers to the economies of countries of destination, the skill level of migrant workers and skill needs in countries of destination, and sources of migration data. These recommendations aim to ensure that migration takes place in a safe, orderly and regular fashion.

Following this project, a second project on “Enhancing Economic and Social Benefits of International Migration in North and Central Asia” has commenced, further aimed at providing evidence to support reforms which make migration safer and more regular, and enhancing its development benefits. The studies being prepared under the project address issues such as increasing the positive impacts of remittances in countries of origin and understanding their effects in countries of destination; assessing the impact of policy reforms in countries of destination on migration intentions; and considering how to integrate migrants into tax systems. These studies will be reviewed at an Expert Group Meeting tentatively scheduled for April 2017.

ESCAP has also worked in the Pacific region to build the evidence base on the relationship between international migration and climate change. From 7-9 December 2016 it held a Regional Meeting on Climate Change and Migration in the Pacific in collaboration with the Pacific Islands

forum Secretariat as part of its European Union-funded “Pacific Climate Change and Migration” project. The meeting served as a forum for Pacific countries to develop an action plan on climate change and migration, addressing issues such as the need for regional mechanisms to address the needs of migrants and displaced persons; linking migration, displacement and the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage; building resilience through labour mobility; and considering the development-migration nexus in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

To further strengthen the evidence base on international migration in the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP has published and continues to update an online database on international migrant worker outflows from select countries of origin in the ESCAP region. The database can be accessed at: <http://sitreport.unescapsdd.org/labour-migration-outflow>.

3. Initiatives that will be undertaken during 2017 to support the implementation of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.

In line with the mandate outlined in A/RES/71/1 for “the regional commissions and their sub-regional offices, in collaboration with other relevant entities of the United Nations system, to organize discussions to examine regional aspects of international migration and to provide inputs, in accordance with their respective mandates, to the preparatory process of the global compact”, ESCAP is committed to organizing an Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in order to provide its member States with a regional forum to provide input to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

The objective of the Regional Preparatory Meeting is to provide a forum to identify key migration issues, challenges and priorities for the Asia-Pacific region and to arrive at a consensus on a practical set of recommendations that can serve as a regional input into the negotiations on the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, to ensure that the final document addresses the situations faced by Governments of the Asia-Pacific region, and migrants from, to and between countries of the Asia-Pacific.

The Regional Preparatory Meeting is expected to adopt an outcome document and final report which will provide a summary of the key issues and recommendations from its sessions, to be transmitted as the Asia-Pacific input into the negotiations of the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

In organizing this Preparatory Meeting, ESCAP will work closely with its partners through the Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group on Sustainable Societies, which comprises key migration-related agencies such as IOM, ILO, UNFPA and UN-Women, among others.

In addition to this activity, ESCAP will serve as the regional commissions coordinator for the Global Migration Group, representing the other regional commissions and participating in the meetings at Working and Principal level, as well as in the working groups as required to ensure that all regional commissions are kept up-to-date on, and are engaged in, relevant information and activities; and to solicit and coordinate inputs requested from the regional commissions.

Given the likely focus of the GMG on the preparations for the global compact, ESCAP will play a key role in communicating progress towards the development of regional inputs to the negotiation process.

Finally, ESCAP will continue to work on improving the knowledge base on international migration issues, including through the finalisation and publication of studies produced under the project on “Enhancing Economic and Social Benefits of International Migration in North and Central Asia”.