

**SIXTEENTH COORDINATION MEETING ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Population Division

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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**INPUTS TO UNDESA LED UN COORDINATION MEETING ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION ¹**

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)

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

Migration in Asia and the Pacific

International migration in Asia and the Pacific affects all countries of the region. Almost 102 million people from the region lived outside their countries of birth in 2017. Meanwhile, countries in Asia-Pacific hosted over 62 million migrants, representing an increase of more than 20 per cent since 1990 (UNPD, 2017).² Over half of all migrants from the region go to developing countries, either within the region or to neighbouring regions, especially the Middle East. Women migrants make up 50.6 per cent of the migrant stock, but only 46 per cent of migrants from the region.

Labour migration remains the predominant driver of international migration flows in the region. This migration is driven by factors such as differential demographic trends, the search for better economic opportunities and demand for labour, and is facilitated by policies, official and unofficial recruitment agencies and social networks, increased connectivity, as well as shared linguistic and historic ties between countries. Labour migration includes both migration between countries of the Asia-Pacific region and migration to the oil-producing countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Other migration trends remain important, including those related to the forced migration of refugees, such as the flows from Afghanistan to Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran and of Syrian refugees fleeing to Turkey. The ongoing crisis in Myanmar led to 647,000 refugees entering Bangladesh in 2017 (UNHCR, 2018).³ Another emerging trend relates to the link between climate change and migration, especially with regards to the low-lying Pacific Island States. Migration for education has also increased significantly, with the number of internationally-mobile students from the region living abroad reaching 2 million in 2016, from 703,000 in 2000 (UNESCO, N.D.).⁴

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 living in South-East Asia and Pacific, compared to only 210,000 male migrant domestic workers (ILO, 2015).⁵ As a result, migration policies must be tailored to respond to the specific concerns of female and male migrants.

Migration has major development implications for Asian and Pacific countries, with migrants contributing to countries of destination and to countries of origin. The remittances sent by Asian and Pacific migrants in 2017 are estimated to have reached almost US\$276 billion.⁶ However, the protection of migrants remains challenging, particularly in the context of limited opportunities for regular low-skilled migration. 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.

1. Recent data initiatives and research findings relevant to the implementation of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (A/71/1)

ESCAP has continued to improve the knowledge base for evidence-based policy-making and regional cooperation to ensure safe, orderly, and regular migration. In preparation for the Asia-Pacific regional preparatory meeting for the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, ESCAP produced a report *“Towards Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region: Challenges and*

² <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.shtml>

³ <http://www.unhcr.org/rohingya-emergency.html>

⁴ <http://data.uis.unesco.org>

⁵ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_436343.pdf

⁶ World Bank, October 2017. World Bank staff calculation based on data from IMF Balance of Payments Statistics database and data releases from central banks, national statistical agencies, and World Bank country desks.

Opportunities".⁷ Drawing from background papers produced under the project as well as data from the "Trends in International Migrant Stock: the 2017 Revision", produced by the Population Division of DESA, the report highlighted trends and trajectories of migration, main pathways and impacts, and efforts towards regional cooperation.

The Report notes the increase in international migration to and from the region, and the underlying economic, political and environmental factors which help promote migration. The Report further shows the impact of migration, notably the high levels of remittances and their contributions to economic growth. It also highlights the risks many migrants face, which make them vulnerable to human rights abuses, especially for women migrants. The report then reviews multiple means of managing migration, such as national policies to bilateral agreements.

The Report concludes with recommendations for regional priority-setting for the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.:

1. Creating more and simpler regular pathways for labour migration of low-skilled migrant workers, in line with countries' identified needs and development strategies and international human rights norms;
2. Ensuring the fair treatment of migrant workers in line with existing national labour regulations and human rights standards, including in informal sectors, such as domestic work;
3. Ensuring ethical recruitment with fair and transparent costs to avoid exposing migrants to situations of additional vulnerability;
4. Reducing remittance transaction costs and creating more regular remittance channels with low costs;
5. Creating opportunities for regular migration for those choosing to migrate as a climate change adaptation strategy or those who are forced to migrate as a result of natural disasters;
6. Combatting trafficking and smuggling of migrant workers through information campaigns, better law enforcement, regional and subregional cooperation, creating more opportunities for safe and regular migration, as well as through protection of victims of trafficking and smuggling;
7. Increasing multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation on international migration to ensure policy coherence to address international migration in a comprehensive and balanced fashion

In recognition of the gaps with relation to research and information on international migration in North and Central Asia, as well as the importance of the subregion as a migration system, ESCAP, with the support of the Russian Federation, has undertaken a research project on "Enhancing Economic and Social Benefits of Migration in North and Central Asia". Building on previous research undertaken by ESCAP, the project focuses on understanding the impacts of international migration in both countries of origin and destination in North and Central Asia.

Four papers were produced under the project, focusing on enhancing the development potential of remittances in countries of origin; assessing the impact of remittance outflows on the economy of the Russian Federation; understanding the gender dimensions of migration in the subregion; and understanding how migrants could be integrated into tax systems in the Russian Federation. The results of the projects have been published in the *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, volume 32, issue 2.⁸

2. Recent and future activities to support the implementation of the migration-related commitments of the 2030 Agenda (A/70/1).

⁷ Available at <http://www.unescap.org/publications/towards-safe-orderly-and-regular-migration-asia-pacific-region>

⁸ Available at <http://www.unescap.org/publications/asia-pacific-population-journal-volume-32-no-2-december-2017>

ESCAP has been working actively to support the implementation of the migration-related commitments of the 2030 Agenda. From 31 January-3 February 2017, ESCAP, in collaboration with the Statistics Division of DESA held a Regional Workshop on Strengthening the Collection and Use of International Migration Data in the Context of the 2030 Agenda. The workshop trained officials from national statistical offices and relevant ministries in the region. The focus was on providing capacity-building training on best practice to measure migration from census and administrative data, and means to meet the migration data-related targets of the 2030 Agenda.⁹

ESCAP has also supported dialogue on safe, orderly and regular migration. On 22 September 2017, ESCAP as the coordinator of regional commissions in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh, organized a High-Level Side Event at the UN General Assembly on Regional Perspectives on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration. The side event followed a roundtable discussion format comprising various high-level speakers, including the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Ministers or high officials of several countries, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for international migration, a co-facilitator of the Global Compact, the Executive Secretaries of regional commissions and the GMG chair. This event enabled participants to exchange views and regional perspectives on global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

In support of the stocktaking phase of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, ESCAP, with the support of IOM, ILO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNODC, and UN-Women, organized the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in Bangkok from 6-8 November 2017. The Meeting brought together over 280 participants from 35 member States and associate members, as well as participation by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration and the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration and a strong civil society presence. The Meeting was chaired by H.E. Ms. Sarah Lou Arriola, Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs, the Philippines. The Meeting was structured around a plenary session and four roundtable discussions, focusing on:

- (a) Legal and orderly labour migration as a contribution towards all dimensions of sustainable development, including decent work, labour mobility, recognition of skills and qualifications and other relevant measures
- (b) Addressing the drivers of migration, including adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters and human-made crises, through protection and assistance, sustainable development, poverty eradication, and conflict prevention and resolution
- (c) Smuggling of migrants, trafficking in persons and contemporary forms of slavery, and issues of appropriate identification and protection and assistance to migrants and trafficking victims
- (d) Regional cooperation and governance with regard to migration in all its dimensions, including at borders and during transit, entry, return, readmission, integration and reintegration

The Meeting resulted in a Chair's Summary,¹⁰ which addressed the following points:

- (a) States reiterated their support for the global compact process as a means to ensure that migration works for all in a practical, realistic and comprehensive manner
- (b) The value of inter-State cooperation and cooperation with non-governmental stakeholders such as CSOs, trade unions and private sector actors was emphasised
- (c) Participants recognised and reaffirmed that the compact should be centred around the rights of all migrants, regardless of status, and be gender-sensitive
- (d) The importance of migration and the role of migrants as agents of development was recognised
- (e) Labour-related issues such as providing regular pathways for low-skilled labour migration, addressing abuses in recruitment, using decent work standards as a baseline for treatment of migrant

⁹ For more information see <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/meetings/2017/bangkok--international-migration-data/>

¹⁰ Available at http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/CompactChairSummaryfinal_0.pdf

workers, and ensuring the safety of migrant domestic workers (including through inclusion of domestic work in labour laws) were discussed

- (f) Good practices such as engagement of the private sector, ensuring skill development, certification and recognition and orientation of migrants, and addressing international migration through regional forums and processes, were highlighted
- (g) The factors inducing unsafe, disorderly and irregular migration were highlighted, with participants noting the importance of addressing conflict, insecurity and climate change to ensure that migration is a choice
- (h) Existing regional intergovernmental processes should be used for follow-up and review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, including through the regional economic commissions of the United Nations

ESCAP furthermore served in 2017 as regional commissions' coordinator for the Global Migration Group, ensuring that the work of the Group, especially as it related to supporting the preparations for the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration incorporated appropriate regional perspectives on migration.

Supporting safe, orderly and regular migration has been further embedded into multiple areas of ESCAP's work related to regional cooperation. The "Regional Road Map for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Asia-Pacific Region"¹¹ contains commitments to promote data disaggregation and enhance linkages between international migration and development. The "Ministerial Declaration on Enhancing Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration to support the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific"¹² recognizes the importance of safe, orderly and regular migration and calls for enhanced regional dialogue to support the rights of migrants.

Going forward, ESCAP will remain engaged in supporting its member States to ensure that they are well-prepared to integrate the Asia-Pacific regional perspectives on international migration into the final global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, and to implement and follow-up on its outcomes. Regional commissions will play a crucial role in implementation and follow-up to the global compact and their intergovernmental bodies should be used to ensure that implementation and follow-up are taken forward by Member States and other stakeholders on the ground.

Working with its partner agencies in the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group for Sustainable Societies, ESCAP will also aim to develop more knowledge products to provide a solid substantive grounding for policymaking towards safe, orderly and regular migration in the Asia-Pacific region in the future.

¹¹ Available at http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/B1700338_Report%20No.%20Rev.%201_E_replaced%2031%20Mar%2017.pdf

¹² Available at http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/MCREI-2_L3_E.pdf