

**EXPERT SYMPOSIUM ON  
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

Population Division

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**CONTRIBUTION  
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<sup>1</sup>The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

## 1. Introduction

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).<sup>1</sup> Over half of all migrants from the region migrate to developing countries, either within or to neighbouring regions, especially the Middle East. Women migrants make up 51 per cent of the migrant stock, but only 46 per cent of migrants from the region.

Labour migration dominates the migration flows in the region. According to ILO estimates, there were about 33.5 million migrant workers in Asian and Pacific countries in 2017 (ILO, 2018).<sup>2</sup> This migration is driven by factors such as differential demographic trends, the search for better economic opportunities and demand for labour. It 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 those from Afghanistan to Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran and of Syrians refugees fleeing to Turkey. The ongoing crisis in Myanmar led to 647,000 refugees entering Bangladesh in 2017, where they remain to date (UNHCR, 2018).<sup>3</sup> 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 2.4 million in 2017, from 703,000 in 2000 (UNESCO, N.D.).<sup>4</sup>

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 often migrating as domestic workers, with over two million female migrant domestic workers living in South-East Asia and Pacific, compared to only 210,000 male migrant domestic workers (ILO, 2015).<sup>5</sup> 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 2018 are estimated to have reached almost US\$316 billion.<sup>6</sup> However, the protection of migrants remains challenging, particularly in the context of limited opportunities for regular low-skilled migration. Recruitment costs for migrant workers are highly variable, ranging from as low as \$182 on average for migrant workers in Malaysia to as high as \$803 for Asian workers in Saudi Arabia.<sup>7</sup> High recruitment costs can tie migrants into situations of debt bondage, further exposing them to forms of abuse and exploitation. Addressing this situation remains a key concern for the achievement of sustainable development for the region as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_652001.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_652001.pdf) Figure obtained by adding figures from ILO regions as follows: Central and Western Asia, Eastern Asia South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific and Southern Asia. Cyprus and Israel are included in the figure; the Russian Federation is not included.

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

<sup>4</sup> <http://data.uis.unesco.org>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_436343.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_436343.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> World Bank, December 2018. 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.

<sup>7</sup> Calculations based on Knomad-ILO 2015 and 2016 Migration Costs Surveys, available from <http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/2938> and <http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/2944>

## **2. Recent and future activities to support the implementation of the migration-related commitments of the 2030 Agenda**

Supporting safe, orderly and regular migration has been 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"<sup>8</sup> 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"<sup>9</sup> recognizes the importance of safe, orderly and regular migration and calls for enhanced regional dialogue to support the rights of migrants.

ESCAP is committed to taking forward the implementation of these frameworks including by working with member States in this regard. In this regard it has organised a number of side events related to the Marrakech Compact for Migration, including the side event on "Regional perspectives on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration" during the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in collaboration with the other regional commissions in Marrakesh on 9 December 2018. ESCAP is also planning to organize a side event on "Empowering migrants through safe, orderly and regular migration in Asia and the Pacific", to be held during the sixth session of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development in Bangkok in May 2019. This latter event will highlight the relevance and interlinkages between the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Midterm Review of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development, held from 28-30 November 2018, served as a forum to highlight the relevance of migration in the context of efforts to achieve the priorities of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and their interlinkages with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The resulting Chair's summary highlighted the importance of migration, including recognition of the contribution of migrants to sustainable development, and the need for improved migration data. The need for special efforts to ensure the sexual and reproductive health and rights of migrants was also emphasised. The outcomes of the meeting will inform the 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the Commission on Population and Development in April 2019.

ESCAP will also hold an Expert Group Meeting on "Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Asia-Pacific Region in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" in late 2019, in order to take stock of initiatives already undertaken by member States to implement the commitments of the Marrakech Compact for Migration and identify priority actions for the region.

Working with its partner agencies in the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group for Sustainable Societies, ESCAP will also produce a 2020 *Asia-Pacific Migration Report* to provide a solid substantive grounding for policymaking towards safe, orderly and regular migration in the Asia-Pacific region, and to provide a substantive basis for the Asia-Pacific regional review of implementation of the Marrakech Compact for Migration in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

## **3. Recent initiatives and research findings relevant to improving the collection and use of migration data in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration**

ESCAP has been supporting the implementation of the migration-related commitments of the 2030 Agenda. From 5 to 8 February 2019, ESCAP, in collaboration with the Statistics Division and Population Division of the Department of

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<sup>8</sup> Available at [http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/B1700338\\_Report%20No.%202\\_Rev.%201\\_E\\_replaced%2031%20Mar%2017.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/B1700338_Report%20No.%202_Rev.%201_E_replaced%2031%20Mar%2017.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Available at [http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/MCREI-2\\_L3\\_E.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/MCREI-2_L3_E.pdf)

Economic and Social Affairs 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, as well as the opportunities offered by big data platforms and methodologies for measuring the migration-related targets of the 2030 Agenda and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.<sup>10</sup>

#### **4. Conclusion**

Going forward, ESCAP will continue to support its member States in implementing the commitments of the Marrakech Compact for Migration, in the context of supporting sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. It will continue to conduct research and capacity development building on past experiences in this regard and support inter-agency partnership through the Regional Coordination Mechanism.

In particular, ESCAP is ready to play a crucial role in supporting its member States to undertake the regional reviews of implementation of the Marrakech Compact for Migration foreseen in paragraph 50 of the Compact. In this regard, ESCAP can offer its long experience of providing an intergovernmental platform for evidence-based, transparent, open and comprehensive outcome-oriented discussions of migration issues delivered through inter-agency partnership, which can feed directly into the global review and follow-up of the Marrakech Compact for Migration.

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<sup>10</sup> For more information see <https://www.unescap.org/events/regional-workshop-strengthening-collection-and-use-international-migration-data-context-0>