

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

REGIONAL FACT SHEET

Asia

A dynamic migration process is unfolding in Asia, as several countries in Eastern and South Eastern Asia are becoming, first, important sources of migration in the region and then are starting to also become destinations for migrants.

Countries becoming important hosts include Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, India and China/Hong Kong SAR, following the lead of Japan. In the meantime, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam remain important origins for migrants, both for the region and overseas. China, India and on a smaller scale Thailand are important as both host countries and major countries of origin. *See tables 1 and 2.*

The transformation of some nations from major countries of origin to receiving countries corresponds roughly with the take-off of economic development in the region. A similar process took place in the former countries of origin in Europe, such as Italy, Ireland, Spain and Portugal.

Of nearly 3 million Asian workers that left their home countries between 1995 and 2000, about 40 per cent stayed in the region, according to an August 2006 report by the International Labour Organization. The ILO gauges the total amount of money remitted home by Asian migrant workers at \$40 billion in 2003.

Table 1: Average annual number of migrants leaving for employment abroad and percentage female, selected countries in Asia

Country	Number of migrant workers departing (thousands)			Percentage female	
	1990–1994	1995–1999	2000–2003	1995–1999	2000–2003
Bangladesh	174	263	..	..	..
India	377	360	297	..	..
Indonesia	118	328	387	69.0	79.2
Pakistan	145	118	130	..	..
Philippines	489	746	867	..	..
Sri Lanka	52	165	195	70.4	66.1
Thailand	87	193	165	12.2	16.8
Viet Nam	..	13	47	..	..
Total	1 422	2 186	2 087		

Sources: International Labour Organization International Labour Migration database, accessed 10 January 2006; and World Population Monitoring, 1997 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XIII.4), table 25.

Note: Two dots (..) signify data unavailable.

Table 2: Number of foreign workers in selected countries of Eastern and South-eastern Asia, 1996-2002 (Thousands)

Country or area	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
China	80	82	83	85	..	60	..
Hong Kong SAR of China	164	171	181	194	213	235	..
Indonesia	49	35	33	21	15	20	..
Japan	610	630	660	670	710	740	..
Malaysia	745	1 472	1 128	819	800	806	..
Philippines	4	6	5	6	6	6	..
Republic of Korea	81	105	75	92	123	129	137
Singapore	..	..	..	530	612	590	590
Thailand	..	357	160	174	176	623	487
Total	1 733	1 386	1 197	2 591	2 655	3 209	..

Sources: Iguchi (2004) and country reports presented at the Workshop on International Migration and the Labour Market in Asia, organized by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, Tokyo, 5 and 6 February 2004.

Note: Data for Japan include overstayers, trainees and highly skilled migrants. Two dots (..) signify data unavailable.

Japan's migrant stock totaled a little over two million in 2005, constituting 1.6 per cent of its population; the Republic of Korea had roughly half a million, accounting for 1.2 per cent of its population. The two most prosperous countries in the region, they both have policies for either maintaining or increasing inflows of skilled and unskilled workers. Nevertheless, with declining fertility rates and rapidly increasing older populations they are facing demographic pressures and sectoral labour shortfalls similar to those found in Europe. According to the Wall Street Journal, Sony executives are calling for higher immigration levels in Japan, and Republic of Korea is attributing a decline in new manufacturers—there has been a 26 per cent plunge in manufacturing start-ups in the past year—to worker shortages.

In terms of emigration, seven countries in South and East Asia are now seeking to increase outflows as a matter of policy—Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, Vietnam. The major countries of origin of migrant workers, such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam, have established special units to manage worker migration and protect the rights and safety of their migrants abroad.

Women becoming a majority in migration

Women predominate by an unusually large margin among migrant workers departing from Sri Lanka and Indonesia. See Table 1 above. Overall, the proportion of women among total migrants living in the main receiving countries of East and Southeastern Asia increased from an estimated 47.6 per cent in 1990 to 51.5 per cent in 2005—surpassing such increases in other regions and sub-regions.

Several countries have introduced measures to promote the inflow of skilled migrants: Japan relaxed restrictions on the admission of engineers and other specialists; the Republic of Korea revised its immigration law to facilitate the entry of professionals and technicians; and Singapore modified its regulations to allow well-educated foreigners with good earning potential to apply for permanent residence. In Japan, the number of highly educated migrants remained at about 330,000 over the course of the last decade, and accounted for about a third of all migrants over age 24.

The case of China

With its immense population, dynamic economic growth and social and scientific advancement, but also the still very large numbers of people living in poverty within its borders, China is a growing source country for international migration—one whose significance may still rise in the coming years. China appears to have overtaken Mexico as the source of the major outflow of migrants in the world. Its emigrants go mainly to the non-European members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, according to OECD figures, and according to the International Organization for Migration it is the world's major country of origin.

An article in the Hong Kong Wenewiipo estimates that 560,000 Chinese are emigrating every year. This figure compares with statistics that show 256,000 emigrating to OECD countries in 2004. *See table 3 next page.* Although the annual number of Chinese migrating to OECD nations rose over the course of 1995–2004 by roughly 250 per cent, the peak came 2001 and 2002, when annual emigration to OECD members topped 300,000 twice in a row. Total Chinese emigration to the 30 economically advanced OECD nations surpassed two million over the course of 1995–2004.

The largest country of destination among OECD member States is Japan, receiving 90,000 Chinese migrants in 2004. Among the second tier are the United States, Canada, the Republic of Korea and EU member States.

Reports from China's Central News Agency on Chinese migrants in Canada give an indication of what the characteristics of Chinese migrants may be in developed countries overall. About 40 per cent have technology skills, and 80 per cent reside in the major cities of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Surveys find that 31 per cent are holding a professional position, while 41 per cent have part time work only, usually involving manual labour. Twenty-two per cent are unemployed, and 15 per cent returned to China within a year of arrival in Canada.

By 2003, nearly 260,000 Chinese students were taking classes in the developed world—of which 188,000 were in Europe and 70,000 in other OECD countries, mostly the United States. But the rate at which the US is issuing visas to Chinese students fell by 20 per cent after the events of 11 September 2001.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Thailand maintain policies to admit low-skilled migrants. The employment and stay of migrant workers in those countries are usually regulated through the issuance of work permits tied to a particular employer.

Although most students from the region who are studying abroad are doing so in developed countries, an increasing number are taking classes in developing countries. China and Singapore are establishing local campuses run in partnership with universities abroad, with the aim of both offering high-quality training to their citizens and becoming international educational centres in their own right. The consequences are likely to include more migration for education, and a greater diversification of destinations, particularly for students from developing countries. □

Table 3: Arrivals of Chinese migrants by country, for selected years (Thousands)

Country	1995	2000	2003	2004
Australia	3.7	9.5	11.1	13.6
Belgium	0.6	0.8	1.6	1.4
Canada	13.3	36.7	36.2	36.4
Denmark	..	0.6	1.5	1.3
Finland	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.4
France	0.8	1.8	2.3	2.8
Hungary	1.2	1.1	0.7	0.6
Italy	..	15.4	..	10.6
Japan	38.8	75.3	92.2	90.3
Republic of Korea	..	66.6	57.7	..
Netherlands	..	1.8	3.8	3
New Zealand	5.3	5	8.2	8.7
Norway	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.5
Poland	..	0.4	0.4	0.5
Portugal	..	0.4	0.2	0.3
Slovak Republic	..	..	0.2	0.2
Spain	..	4.8	7.3	14.4
Sweden	0.5	..	1.4	1.5
United Kingdom	1	1	18.6	18.5
United States	35.5	45.7	40.7	51.2
Total	101	267.4	285.1	256.2

Data collected from the OECD International Migration Outlook (2006)

Produced by the UN Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the Population Division
of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs