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International Migration 2020 Highlights

January 2021 · www.un.org/development/desa/pd/ · #UNPopulation

Migration has major impacts on people and places. Well-managed migration can contribute to inclusive and sustainable development in countries of both origin and destination. The General Assembly has acknowledged the crucial linkages between international migration and development in a series of recent landmark agreements, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

*These messages are based on a new report, **International Migration 2020 Highlights**, presenting the main results from the 2020 revision of estimates of the international migrant stock and related materials prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).*

Ten key messages

1. The number of international migrants worldwide reached 281 million in 2020

The number of persons living outside their country of birth or citizenship reached 281 million in 2020, up from 173 million in 2000 and 221 million in 2010. Because the number of international migrants grew faster than the global population, the share of international migrants in the total population rose from 2.8 per cent in 2000 to 3.2 per cent in 2010 and further to 3.6 per cent in 2020.

2. COVID-19 has curbed the number of international migrants and reduced remittance flows

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted all forms of human mobility, including international migration. Preliminary estimates suggest that by mid-2020 the pandemic may have reduced the growth in the stock of international migrants by around two million. The pandemic is projected to cause a decline of 14 per cent in remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries by 2021 compared to pre-COVID-19 levels.¹

3. Forced displacements across national borders have continued to rise

Between 2000 and 2020, the number of persons displaced across international borders while fleeing conflict, persecution, violence or human rights violations doubled from 17 to 34 million, accounting for about 16 per cent of the total increase in the number of international migrants worldwide during this period. In 2020, refugees and asylum seekers² accounted for 12 per cent of the global migrant stock, compared to 9.5 per cent two decades earlier.

4. Most of the world's refugees are hosted by low- and middle-income countries

In 2020, low- and middle-income countries hosted over 80 per cent of the world's refugees and asylum seekers. Refugees and asylum seekers comprised around 3 per cent of all international migrants in high-income countries compared to 25 per cent in middle-income countries and 50 per cent in low-income countries.

¹ See: [World Bank \(2020\). COVID-19: Remittance flows to shrink 14% by 2021. Migration and Development Brief 33.](#)

² Including persons in refugee-like situations and Venezuelans displaced abroad. See: [UNHCR Global Trends 2019.](#)

5. Nearly two thirds of all international migrants live in high-income countries

Middle-income countries were the destination of 31 per cent of all international migrants, whereas relatively few international migrants resided in low-income countries (4 per cent). In 2020, international migrants comprised nearly 15 per cent of the total population in high-income countries, compared to less than 2 per cent in middle- and low-income countries.

6. Most of the world's international migrants live in a small number of countries

In 2020, two thirds of all international migrants were living in just 20 countries. The United States of America remained the largest destination of international migrants with 51 million migrants in 2020, equal to 18 per cent of the world's total. Germany hosted the second largest number of migrants worldwide (around 16 million), followed by Saudi Arabia (13 million), the Russian Federation (12 million) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (9 million).

7. International migration often takes place within regions

In 2020, nearly half of all international migrants resided in the region from which they originated. Europe had the largest share of intra-regional migration, with 70 per cent of all migrants born in Europe residing in another European country. Sub-Saharan Africa had the second largest share of intra-regional migration (63 per cent). By contrast, Central and Southern Asia had the largest share of its diaspora residing outside the region (78 per cent), followed by Northern America (75 per cent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (74 per cent).

8. Women and girls comprise 48 per cent of all international migrants

In 2020, the number of female migrants slightly exceeded that of male migrants in Europe, Northern America and Oceania due in part to the higher life expectancy of women among long-term migrants and to the increasing demand for female migrants for care-related work. By contrast, in Northern Africa and Western Asia as well as in sub-Saharan Africa, the number of male migrants significantly exceeded that of female migrants due to a greater demand from male-dominated industries and to the preponderance of temporary work visa and labour contracts targeting male workers.

9. International migrants tend to be concentrated in working ages

In 2020, 73 per cent of international migrants worldwide were between the ages of 20 and 64 years, compared to 57 per cent for the total population. The share of the working-age population comprised of international migrants was much greater in high-income countries (around 19 per cent) than in middle- and low-income countries (around 2 per cent). Excluding international migrants, the old-age dependency ratio³ in high-income countries would have been higher by nearly 3 percentage points in 2020.

10. Most countries have policies to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration

Globally, 54 per cent of the 111 Governments that responded to a recent survey⁴ reported having policies to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration (SDG indicator 10.7.2). The policy domains with the highest levels of adherence were "cooperation and partnerships" and "safe, orderly and regular migration" for which more than three quarters of Governments reported meeting or fully meeting the criteria for indicator 10.7.2. By contrast, the domains covering "migrant rights" and "socioeconomic well-being" had the lowest proportions reporting a wide range of policy measures: 55 per cent and 59 per cent, respectively.

³ The ratio of persons aged 65 years or above per 100 persons aged 20 to 64 years. In general, a higher ratio implies that each person in the working ages needs to support more older persons.

⁴ See: [SDG Indicator 10.7.2 on Migration Policies](#).



Prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. These key messages are based on *International Migration 2020 Highlights*, examining levels and trends in international migration and the contribution of international migration to sustainable development. More work of the Population Division is available at www.un.org/development/desa/pd/.