

2021 Annual International Migration and Forced Displacement Trends and Policies Report to the G20



Contents

- Executive summary 3
- Introduction..... 5
- 1. Recent trends in migration and refugee movements in G20 countries 5
 - Migration flows in 2020 5
 - The impact of the pandemic on international student migration 9
 - Refugee stocks, asylum applications, resettlement and complementary pathways for those in need of international protection 10
- 2. Managing migration in times of COVID-19 13
 - The key role of migrant workers in essential sectors 13
 - Addressing refugee and migrant vulnerabilities 16
 - Supporting stranded migrants and facilitating return migration 20
 - Analysing the short and medium term impact on remittances 22
- 3. Adapting migration management to the recovery challenge..... 23
 - Safely reopening borders and opportunities for regular mobility 23
 - Resuming resettlement and expanding complementary pathways..... 24
 - Making the most of equitable digitalisation advancements 26
 - Building new partnerships 27
- Conclusion 28
- Bibliography 30

Executive summary

- Latest available data indicate a significant decrease in overall migration flows to G20 countries in 2020. In total, 7 to 7.5 million new temporary and permanent migrants entered G20 countries in 2020, which represents about a 40% % decrease on average compared to 2019.
- Despite decreasing inflows, international migrant stocks may have actually increased in a number of G20 countries because emigration and return migration has also been restrained by the pandemic
- In 2020, international students were generally subject to the same travel restrictions and testing/quarantine requirements as all migrants. Some G20 countries reported sharp declines in inflows, while others prioritised processing of student visa applications to minimise the impact.
- By end 2020, G20 countries hosted 7.7 million refugees, representing some 37 per cent of all refugees under UNHCR’s mandate. About half of them were in Turkey.
- During 2020, 870 800 new claims for asylum were lodged in G20 countries in ‘first instance’ procedures, 23% less than in 2019.
- In 2020, refugee resettlement plummeted to its lowest level in almost two decades. Only 34 400 people were resettled to 21 countries. This is just one-third of the number resettled in 2019.
- Lockdowns and mobility restrictions caused global working hours to decline by 8.8 per cent in 2020 (relative to the fourth quarter of 2019). The G20 countries alone have lost equivalent to 195 million full-time jobs in 2020, which led to labour income loss of 8.1 per cent (US\$3.2 trillion).
- Migrant workers, who represent 4.9% of the global labour force, have contributed immensely to addressing the challenges and consequences of COVID-19 pandemic. Their contribution in essential sectors was visible across the full skill spectrum from medical occupations to agricultural seasonal workers as well as from security and cleaning industry to IT services.
- G20 countries have taken bold steps to mitigate the immediate impact of the crisis – including on migrants and refugees - but the full economic consequences of the pandemic are still unfolding.
- ILO’s rapid labour market assessments have exposed the vulnerability of migrant workers to the pandemic as they are often found in economic sectors that are characterized by high levels of temporary, informal or unprotected work with low wages and lack of social protection.
- UNHCR evidence shows that forcibly displaced and stateless people have been among the hardest hit groups of society, facing increased food and economic insecurity as well as challenges to access health and protection services.
- Millions of migrants have been stranded worldwide as a result of border closures due to the pandemic. The Indian evacuation and repatriation mission alone facilitated by November 2020 the return of over 3 million Indian nationals. To respond to the complex challenge of return during the pandemic, IOM has established COVID-19 Return Task Force, continued to provide return and reintegration programmes and the ILO has provided reintegration assistance across all regions facing return of their nationals.
- Remittance flows remained resilient in 2020, falling much less than initially projected. Officially recorded remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries reached USD 540 billion in 2020, just 1.6 percent below the 2019 total of USD 548 billion.
- Reopening safely borders, enabling people to travel internationally based on proof of a negative test for COVID-19 , will become both an economic imperative and a more realistic option as the global vaccination campaign gains speed.

- The WHO Interim guidance for developing a Smart Vaccination Certificate, the EU Digital COVID-19 Certificate and the OECD blueprint for safer international travel during the COVID-19 pandemic provide useful tools and frameworks for reopening borders safely.
- The pandemic has accelerated ongoing trends towards digitalization and automation. This applies to the development of online application systems for residence permits and long stay visas, the use of digital technologies in asylum procedures or for integration services etc. Migration and integration systems have much to gain from digitalisation, but new frontiers for technology are also new frontiers for governance.
- The changing skills needs in G20 countries may call for developing new and innovative partnerships with countries of origin. In this context skills mobility partnerships, as referenced in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, can contribute to more effective tapping of the potential of migrants. Some interesting developments are already taking place, notably in Africa.
- The G20 is well placed to move the migration agenda forward by identifying common challenges and opportunities, exchanging on good practices and joining forces to improve the availability and quality of international data and evidence on migration and forced displacement.

Introduction

The 2020 G20 leaders' declaration (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) “*emphasized the importance of shared actions to: mitigate the impact of the pandemic on those in vulnerable situations, which may include refugees, migrants and forcibly displaced people; respond to growing humanitarian needs; and address the root causes of displacement*”. G20 leaders noted “*the 2020 Annual International Migration and Forced Displacement Trends and Policies Report to the G20 prepared by the OECD in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)*” and indicated their willingness to “*continue the dialogue on the various dimensions of these issues in the G20*”.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted all facets of life, causing as the 1st of June 2021 over 3.5 million deaths around the world and leading to human suffering, loss of jobs and income generating activities, disruptions of the global supply chain, restrictions on human mobility and severe limitations on daily life. It had major implications for asylum and international migration policies, including labour migration, but also for migrants and forcibly displaced people throughout 2020. While immigrants played a key role in essential sectors in a number of G20 countries during the crisis, they were also at a higher risk of COVID-19 infection and hard hit by the economic crisis, together with mobility-specific vulnerabilities such as becoming stranded or deported. Backlogs in visa applications, resettlement have increased. Voluntary and forced returns declined, while repatriation of stranded migrants had to overcome significant operational challenges. In many ways, the pandemic has revealed and exacerbated underlying vulnerabilities in G20 countries and beyond, with migrants and refugees being among the most vulnerable groups on the labour market.

As G20 countries look towards economic recovery, COVID-19 will have long-term scarring effects on migrants, refugees and their families. Policies that support the protection and socio-economic inclusion of migrants and refugees need to be adapted to cope with these challenges. At the same time, the skills needed to support the recovery will be quite different from those previously targeted because of the acceleration of the digitalisation of the economy and changes in investment strategies. Labour migration governance will also have to adapt to this new reality, both to protect national labour markets and to respond efficiently to emerging skills needs, while ensuring the protection of all workers. Analysing these changes across G20 countries will be critical to design effective post-crisis policy responses.

The present 2021 edition of the joint OECD, ILO, IOM & UNHCR Annual *International Migration and Forced Displacement Trends and Policies Report* for the G20 is composed of three main parts. The first part of the report presents the latest figures on migration flows and stocks in G20 countries, including student migration and forced displacement. The second part analyses how G20 countries adjusted management of migration in reaction to the pandemic. It includes a contribution from WHO on its efforts to support migrants and refugees. The third part looks at the adaptation of migration governance to the recovery challenge. The report concludes noting shared upcoming challenges for the G20.

1. Recent trends in migration and refugee movements in G20 countries

Migration flows in 2020

After several years of continuous growth, the latest available data indicate a significant decrease in overall migration flows to G20 countries in 2020 (Table 1). In total, 7 to 7.5 million new temporary and permanent migrants entered G20 countries in 2020, which represents about a 40% decrease on average compared to 2019.

The United States remains the main G20 destination country in 2020, with more than 1 million new regular permanent migrants in FY 2020. For the first time, Germany places second, with almost one million new migrants, mostly temporary and from other EU Member States. Saudi Arabia ranks third with almost 800

thousand migrant workers in 2020 following a steep decline of inflows in 2020 (-50%). Significant declines were also registered notably in Brazil (-75%), Japan (-63%) and Korea (-44%).

Table 1. Migration flows to selected G20 countries 2010-2020

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	FY	Permanent	Temporary	Students	Definition	Source
Argentina	178	259	292	279	206	263	218	215	224	165			1	1	1		Ministry of Interior
Australia	580	608	698	768	773	765	756	770	751	764	584	Jul-Jun	1	1	1		Department of Immigration and Border Protection
Brazil	96	117	133	148	133	110	121	99	118	180	45		1	1	1		Ministry of Justice and Observatório das Migrações Internacionais
Canada	487	464	494	502	497	503	578	636	719	589	336		1	1	1		IRCC
China	635	693	715	765	796	764	815	827	895	911	632					Issuance of residence permits	
France	197	193	193	205	211	218	230	247	259	277	221		1	1	1	Non-EU citizens only	Ministry of Interior
Germany	684	842	966	1 108	1 343	2 016	1 720	1 412	1 382	1 341	996		1	1	1	Registration of foreigners intending to stay at least one week in the country	Destatis
India																	
Indonesia		56	61	70	74	77	80	86	95	99				1		Registered migrant worker	ILO
Italy	590	331	247	244	204	179	222	257	239	176	106		1	1	1	Non-EU citizens only	Istat
Japan	287	267	304	307	337	391	428	475	520	591	220		1	1	1	Foreigners who entered the country, excluding temporary visitors and re-entries	Ministry of Justice
Mexico	92	91	79	118	109	103	101	105	106	94	91		1	1	1	Permanent resident cards + temp	SEGOB - Unidad de política migratoria
Korea	293	307	300	360	407	373	402	453	495	438	246		1	1	1	Long-term inflows (more than 90 days)	Ministry of Justice
Russian Federation	192	206	283	346	439	421	384	391	375	500	350		1	1		long term and temporary residence permist	Federal Migration Service
Saudi Arabia	1 640	1 412	1 922	1 840	1 962	2 213	1 823	1 843	1 075	1 597	799			1		Residence permits	General Directorate of Passports, Ministry of Interior
South Africa		118	145	111	83	75		15	17	14			1	1	?		Department of Home Affairs
Spain	258	283	223	196	189	193	212	231	260	320	312		1	1	1	Non-EU citizens only	National Institute of Statistics
Turkey							274	365	467	578						Immigrants and emigrants by country of citizenship, 2016-2019	TurkStat, International Migration Statistics, 2016-2019
United Kingdom	603	572	517	543	556	548	572	607	656	756	492		1	1	1	Entry clearance plus international protection (Non-EU citizens only)	Office for National Statistics
United States	1 897	1 971	1 976	2 031	2 163	2 292	2 315	2 212	2 183	2 053	1 357	Sep-Oct	1	1	1		Department of Homeland Security/ Department of State
European Union 27	1 476	1 476	1 466	1 634	1 760	1 991	2 495	2 695	2 790	2 955	1 881		1	1	1	Non-EU citizens only	Eurostat - All first permits to TCN
Total							11280	11708	11390	12187	[7000-7500]						

Note: Sources, definitions and coverage of data used vary significantly across countries. This does not allow for aggregations and direct comparisons, but order of magnitude and trends can be described. Data are generally based on national sources, and most often include temporary workers and students. N/A means that information is not available. Inflows to Turkey are estimates based on Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Labour reports. Total covers available G20 countries including EU (non EU citizens only)

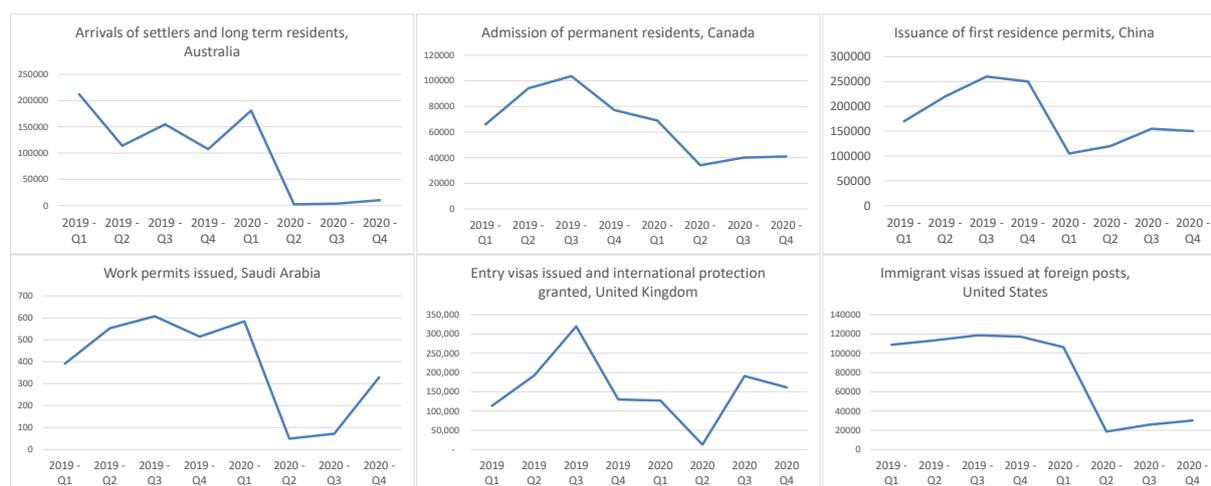
Source: OECD 2021 National sources; OECD International Migration Database, IADB/OECD (2021 forthcoming), ADBI/ILO/OECD (2021) Labor Migration in Asia: Impacts of the COVID-19 Crisis and the Post-Pandemic Future.

Despite pandemic-related declines, other G20 countries also reported a large number of new migrants in 2020, including China (530 000, -41%), the Russian Federation (350 000, -30%), France (221 000, -21%) and the United Kingdom (492 000, -30%). In the latter two countries the figures reflect a mitigating effect of an increase in in-country status change and a high number of incoming international students.

Total migration to the EU, excluding intra-EU movements, declined by 36 per cent at about 1.9 million in 2020 with the most important declines recorded in Poland, Czech Republic and Ireland. Furthermore, the composition of migration shifted towards an increasing share of family migrants and international students, and in most countries, a smaller share of migrant workers and refugees.

Annual data for 2020 do not however always portray the magnitude of pandemic-related declines, since effects in most countries were not visible until the second quarter. Indeed, the first quarter in many G20 countries was stable or even higher than the previous year. Figure 1 shows quarterly variations of issuance of permanent or work visas for the main G20 destination countries. After a sharp drop in admission in the second quarter of 2020, some G20 countries have witnessed a rapid rebound of migrant admission in the third or fourth quarter (e.g. Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom). Other countries however, maintained strict travel restrictions that kept numbers far below previous years (Australia, United States). Overall the effects of the pandemic are still felt in most G20 countries, as international travel currently remains heavily restricted and immigration services disrupted.

Fig 1. Quarterly migration trends in selected G20 countries 2019 2020



Note: National Data sources, OECD calculations

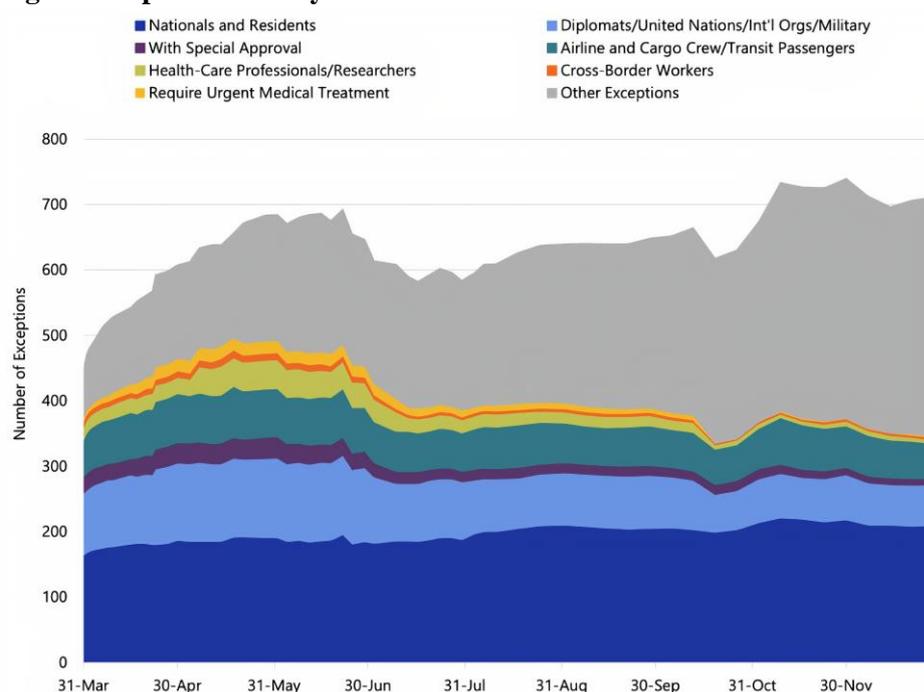
To prevent the spread of COVID-19, most G20 countries indeed imposed restrictions on international travel and on the admission of migrants. Nationals and permanent residents have, however, generally been able return to their country of residence, although in some cases with strict quarantine in state-monitored facilities for fixed periods upon arrival. Most G20 countries have also applied some exceptions to entry restrictions, for certain narrowly defined purposes.

As of early March 2020, the European Commission, for example, recommended to EU Member States not to apply travel restrictions to certain categories of travellers with an essential function or need (e.g. healthcare professionals, frontier workers; transport personnel, humanitarian aid workers, passengers travelling for imperative family reasons or persons in need of international protection). The category of seasonal workers in agriculture was subsequently added in recognition of the labour market demand requiring a supply of migrant workers. Similarly, in other G20 countries and globally, increasing flexibility has been applied to general rules throughout the year (Figure 2).

Despite decreasing inflows, international migrant stocks may have actually increased in a number of G20 countries because emigration and return migration has also been restrained by the pandemic.. In this context, most EU and other OECD countries used automatic extensions of residence permits, tolerated stays or non-execution of obligation to leave, and/ or the suspension/extension of procedural deadlines, to ensure that migrants did not fall into an irregular situation. Some facilitated status changes toward permanent residency (e.g. Canada) and a few undertook regularisation programmes (e.g. Italy)¹.

In the meantime, a still pressing issue relates to the significant number of migrants who continue to lose their lives trying to reach many G20 destinations. Since March 1st, 2020, the IOM Missing Migrants Project has recorded the deaths and disappearances of 4 630 migrants. The majority of these deaths and disappearances (2 900) were recorded along migratory routes across the Mediterranean and across the Atlantic Sea from West and North Africa to the Canary Islands.

Fig 2 Exemptions to entry restriction issued worldwide March December 2020



Source: IOM/MPI (2021) [COVID-19 and the State of Global Mobility in 2020](#)

The impact of the pandemic on international student migration

International students flows to and from G20 countries have increased significantly in recent years to reach almost 4.2 million in 2019. The main receiving countries were the United States, followed by Australia and the United Kingdom (Table 2). Canada and Turkey both saw sharp annual increases. In Europe, most international students are at master level or higher, while in Asia, Mexico or the Russian Federation a large share of international students are in undergraduate programmes.

In all G20 countries, Asian international students account for an important share. This exceeds 70 per cent in Japan, Korea but also in Australia, Canada, the United States, the Russian Federation and Turkey. Even in the European Union, on average more than one in four international students is from Asia.

¹ A more detailed analysis of the measures taken by EU and other OECD countries on migration management in response to the pandemic can be found here:

- OECD (2020) [Managing international migration under COVID-19](#), Policy Brief, June.

- EMN/OECD (2021) Umbrella Inform [The impact of COVID-19 in the migration area in EU and OECD countries](#), April.

In 2020, international students were generally subject to the same travel restrictions and testing/quarantine requirements as all migrants. Some G20 countries reported sharp declines in the number of new international students by the end of 2020, while many others - notably Canada and in Europe - prioritised processing of student visa applications to ensure entry. Migration authorities used online visa issuance or residence permit procedures, and some countries showed leniency or provided extended deadlines for the provision of documents needed for the application process. Many G20 countries increased the maximum working hours applicable to international students and/or granted access to national grants or other financial programmes².

Table 2. International students enrolled in G20 countries, 2019

	2019 (000s)	2018-19 %	MASTER	PHD	Africa	Oceania	Northern America	Latin America and the Caribbean	Asia	Europe
Argentina*	109									
Australia	509	15%	37%	4%	2%	1%	1%	4%	86%	3%
Brazil	22	3%	7%	12%	23%	0%	3%	49%	12%	11%
Canada	279	24%	14%	7%	9%	0%	3%	6%	70%	10%
China*	201									
EU (incl. UK)	1159	-10%	50%	10%	16%	0%	2%	7%	27%	42%
France	246	7%	52%	10%	50%	0%	2%	6%	22%	17%
Germany	333	7%	53%	7%	9%	0%	3%	5%	38%	37%
India*	47									
Indonesia*	8									
Italy	55	-49%	47%	8%	9%	0%	2%	6%	48%	32%
Japan	203	11%	17%	8%	1%	0%	1%	1%	94%	3%
Korea	99	17%	24%	11%	2%	0%	1%	1%	94%	1%
Mexico	33	361%	18%	11%	1%	0%	48%	45%	2%	4%
Russian Fed.	283	8%	30%	3%	5%	0%	0%	1%	77%	15%
Saudi Arabia*	73									
South Africa*	42									
Spain	77	9%	48%	21%	5%	0%	3%	45%	9%	38%
Turkey	155	23%	21%	5%	14%	0%	1%	0%	72%	13%
United Kingdom	489	8%	36%	9%	6%	1%	5%	2%	55%	31%
United States	977	-1%	44%		5%	1%	3%	8%	77%	7%
Total G20	4198									

Source: OECD Education database.

Note : note: * latest available year

Refugee stocks, asylum applications, resettlement and complementary pathways for those in need of international protection

While the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on wider cross-border migration and displacement globally is not yet clear, Provisional data indicates that by the end of 2020, the number of people forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order is very likely to have exceeded 80 million, which is about double the level of a decade ago (41 million in 2010). As a result, above one percent of the world's population – or 1 in 95 people – is now forcibly displaced. This compares with 1 in 159 in 2010. International protection, addressing the root causes of forced displacement and access to asylum, therefore, continue to be life-saving for many.

By end-2020, the global refugee population exceeded 26 million,³ including 5.7 million Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate. G20 countries hosted 7.7 million refugees, representing some 37 per cent of all refugees under UNHCR's mandate. About half of them were in Turkey. This proves that large movements of refugees are a global concern with humanitarian, political, social and economic consequences.

² For more information see EMN/OECD (2020) Inform #2 [Impact of COVID-19 on international students in EU and OECD member states](#).

³ End-year statistics are still being compiled for a number of countries, including some G20 countries. All data should therefore be considered provisional and subject to change. UNHCR's [2020 Mid-Year Trends report, December 2020](#)

Table 3. Stock of refugees in G20 countries

Country	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Argentina	3187	3267	3332	3442	3857	4045
Australia	36917	42187	48480	56934	58529	57451
Brazil	8703	9674	10260	11304	32844	59147
Canada	135890	97322	104768	114101	101757	109264
China	301044	317254	321714	321758	303379	303410
France	273117	304527	337158	368345	407915	436100
United Kingdom	123051	118973	121821	126708	133083	132349
Germany	316098	669468	970357	1063835	1146682	1210636
India	201379	197848	197142	195887	195103	195403
Indonesia	5954	7824	9782	10786	10287	10134
Italy	118036	147362	167330	189227	207602	128033
Japan	2479	2512	2189	1893	1463	1137
Rep. of Korea	1455	1798	2238	2890	3196	3498
Mexico	2904	6178	8993	16530	28517	45469
Other European Union countries	503478	648388	692293	741432	829150	882430
South Africa	121635	91018	88694	89285	78395	76754
Russian Federation	314498	228981	126021	77382	42413	20325
Saudi Arabia	122	136	153	263	315	340
Turkey	2541348	2869419	3480350	3681688	3579531	3652362
United States of America	273198	272963	287135	313242	341715	340881
	5284493	6037099	6980210	7386932	7505733	7669168

Source: UNHCR

People were forced to flee their homes throughout the year despite an urgent appeal from the UN Secretary-General on 23 March 2020 calling for a global ceasefire to enable a concerted response to the pandemic.⁴ Several crises – some new, some resurfacing after years – forced people to flee within or beyond the borders of their country. Afghanistan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya and Yemen continued to be hotspots with acute protection and assistance needs, while the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) stretched into its tenth year. In the Sahel region of Africa, nearly three-quarters of a million people were newly displaced in what is perhaps the most complex regional crisis worldwide.

For four decades, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran have hosted millions of Afghan refugees. A further 3.5 million people remain displaced by violence within the country – an increase of more than half a million since the start of this year. Most have no regular channels through which to seek safety, and with millions in dire need of help, the humanitarian response inside Afghanistan is still desperately underfunded.

In Ethiopia, more than one million people were displaced within the country during the year, while more than 54 000 fled the Tigray region into eastern Sudan. In northern Mozambique, hundreds of thousands escaped deadly violence. The outbreak of hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan left a devastating impact on civilians in both countries and displaced tens of thousands of people. In addition, more than 140 000 Venezuelans lodged new asylum applications in 2020 with 4 out of 5 registered in countries in the Americas (Box 1).

⁴ See [Global Ceasefire | United Nations](#)

Box 1 Outflows from Venezuela and international protection requirements

People continue to leave the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela due to the complex socio-economic, human rights and political situation. By December 2020, some 5.4 million Venezuelans have left, mainly to neighbouring countries, with limited prospects of return in the short to medium term. The region of Latin America and the Caribbean hosts 4.5 million people, around 80% of the total outflow. Venezuelans' primary destinations were Colombia, Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Spain, the United States of America, Brazil, Argentina, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Mexico. According to figures provided by host governments, more than 1.1 million Venezuelans lodged new asylum claims since the beginning of 2014, with 40% of them in 2019 alone. The number of new applications by Venezuelans fell sharply to 147,100 in 2020. This dramatic decrease in asylum applications is largely related to travel restrictions, and the closure of borders and asylum institutions, in the face of the COVID-19 public health emergency. Three quarters of asylum applications by Venezuelans were registered in Latin America or the Caribbean with the rest in North America and some European countries.

By December 2020, host countries had granted some 2.5 million residence permits and other forms of regular status to Venezuelans. However, the majority remains in an irregular situation. Without access to a legal status, they are at a higher risk of violence, exploitation, sexual abuse, forced labour, trafficking, and discrimination. While the responses of States are generous, host communities receiving Venezuelans are under increasing strain as they extend assistance, such as food and shelter, and services, including access to health and education systems, to those arriving. More support by the international community is needed to complement their efforts.

Source: All figures are available at the regional inter-agency coordination platform : r4v.info

Climate change is also driving displacement and increasing the vulnerability of those already forced to flee.⁵ Forcibly displaced and stateless people are on the front lines of the climate emergency. Many are living in climate “hotspots” where they typically lack the resources to adapt to an increasingly inhospitable environment. The dynamics of poverty, food insecurity, climate change, conflict and displacement are increasingly interconnected and mutually reinforcing, driving more and more people to search for safety and security as illustrated in the Sahel region.

During 2020, 870 800 new claims for asylum were lodged in G20 countries in ‘first instance’ procedures, 23 per cent less than in 2019. These constituted three-quarters of all new asylum applications globally.

Achieving durable solutions for forcibly displaced populations was already challenging, as conflicts go unresolved and insecurity remains widespread in many countries of origin. With many governments closing borders for extended periods of time and restricting internal mobility, only a limited number of refugees and internally displaced people were able to avail themselves of solutions such as voluntary return or resettlement to a third country. At the same time, resettlement countries are accepting smaller numbers of refugees, and host countries are struggling to integrate displaced populations. Restrictions on movement and concerns about transmission of the virus resulted in resettlement and other third country solution being put on hold for several months.

In 2020, refugee resettlement plummeted to its lowest level in almost two decades. Only 34 400 people were resettled to 21 countries, according to government statistics, two-thirds of them with UNHCR and IOM's assistance. This is just one-third of the number resettled in 2019 (107 700) and 2018 (92 400).

As a result, the gap between global resettlement needs and the number of places offered by States continues to widen. More than 1.4 million refugees were estimated to be in need of resettlement in 2020,⁶ but barely 2.4 per cent of them actually arrived. More positively, some countries became more flexible in the way they process resettlement cases and took steps to safely manage resettlement travel with recommended protocols in place.

⁵ See UNHCR's [Displaced on the frontlines of the climate emergency](#).

⁶ See UNHCR (2021) [Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2021](#).

2. Managing migration in times of COVID-19

The key role of migrant workers in essential sectors

Migrant workers make up a significant share of the labour force in many countries (Box 2). They are key in several essential economic sectors and have contributed immensely to addressing the challenges and consequences of COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns and mobility restrictions caused global working hours to decline by 8.8 per cent in 2020 (relative to the fourth quarter of 2019), equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs⁷. The G20 countries have lost 8.5 per cent, which is equivalent to 195 million full-time jobs (assuming a 40-hour working week) in 2020, which led to labour income loss of 8.1 per cent (US\$3.2 trillion). The estimates for 2021 also show the decline in working hours and labour income, though not at the same rate (Tables 4 and 5). In this context, the demand for labour has remained strong or increased in essential sectors.

Table 4. Working hour losses in G20 countries, 2020 and 2021 estimates (full-time equivalent jobs and percentage)

	Full-time equivalent (40 hours per week) in millions	Full-time equivalent (48 hours per week) in millions	Hours lost (percentage)
2020	195	163	8.5
2021	68	57	3.0

Table 5. Share and amount of labour income lost due to working-hour losses in G20 countries

	Labour income loss (trillions \$US)	Labour income loss (per cent of total)
2020	3.2	8.1
2021 (first half)	1.1	5.0

Note: Labour incomes have been aggregated using purchasing power parity exchange rates. Any income support measures (such as transfers and benefits) have not been taken into account.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, April 2021.

Box 2. ILO global estimates on the stock of international migrant workers in 2019

In 2019, the number of international migrant workers in the world is estimated at 169 million. It increased by 5 million, which is a 3 per cent increase from 2017. They constitute 4.9 per cent of the global labour force.

The majority of international migrant workers are men (58.5 per cent), while women represent 41.5 per cent. The large majority of international migrant workers (86.5 per cent) consists of prime-age adults (aged 25-64).

The results show that most of migrants are concentrated in services (66.2 per cent). The rest are in industry (26.7 per cent) and 7.1 per cent are in agriculture. However, the gender distribution shows that four fifths of women migrant workers are concentrated in services compared to 56.4 per cent of men. A higher representation of women migrant workers in services may, in part, be explained by a growing labour demand in the care economy, including health and domestic work. These sub-sectors have a predominantly female labour force and rely heavily on women migrant workers. Men migrant workers are more present in industry, finding work in the manufacturing and construction sub-sectors.

More than two-thirds (67.4 per cent) of international migrant workers are concentrated in high-income countries. However, the share of migrant workers in these countries has fallen from 74.7 per cent in 2013 to 67.4 per cent in 2019, while the respective share in upper-middle-income countries increased from 11.7 per cent in 2013 to 19.5 per cent in 2019. This may have to do with the rising employment opportunities in upper-middle-income countries, demographic changes, as well as evolving migration policies.

Source: ILO, 2021. ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology, 3rd ed.

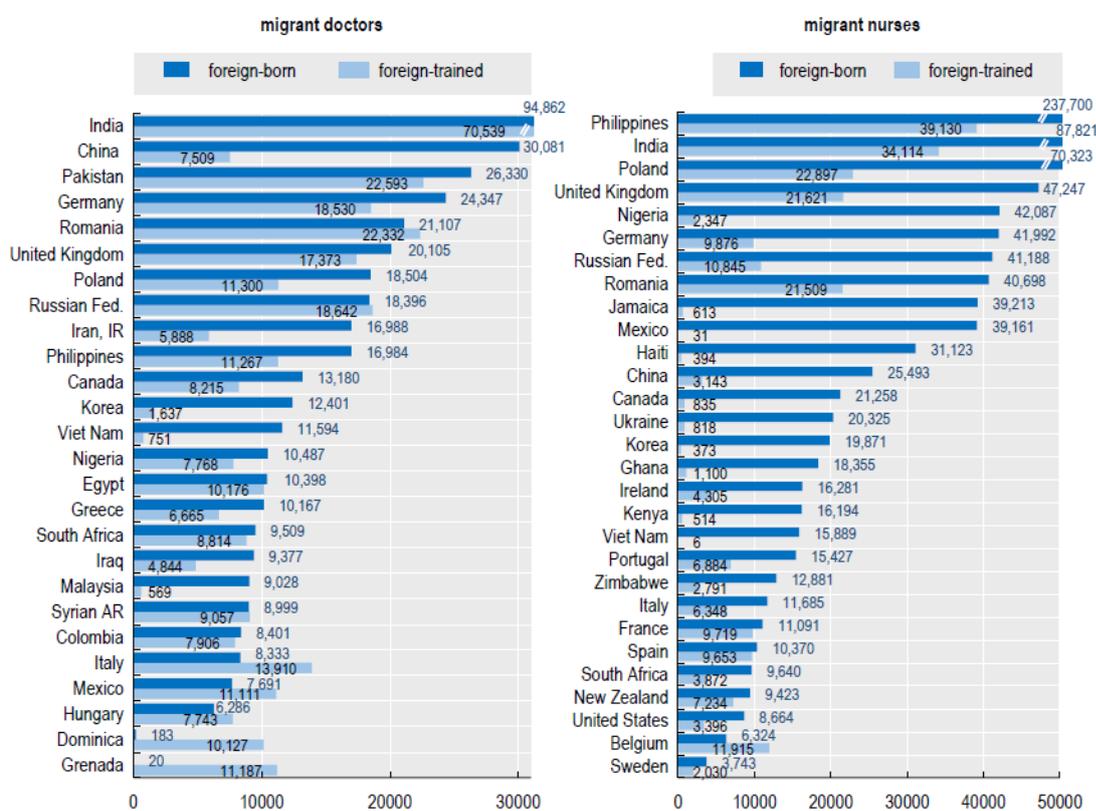
⁷ ILO (2021) [ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. 7th edition.](#)

The contribution of migrant workers in the essential sectors was high even before the COVID-19 pandemic and is visible across the full skill spectrum from medical occupations to agricultural seasonal workers as well as from security and cleaning industry to IT services.

While the number of medical and nursing graduates has increased significantly in the majority of the G20 countries over the past two decades, the shares of foreign-trained or foreign-born doctors and nurses have also continued to rise. As a result, across the OECD countries, nearly one-quarter of all doctors are born abroad and close to one-fifth are trained abroad. Among nurses, nearly 16 per cent are foreign-born and more than 7 per cent are foreign-trained. Their enormous contribution during the pandemic has been recognized in several G20 countries with fast-track access to permanent residency, citizenship or indefinite visa extension (e.g. Canada, France, United Kingdom).⁸

Non-OECD G20 countries make a large contribution to the health workforce in OECD countries, notably India, China and the Russian Federation, and to a lesser extent South Africa notably for migrant doctors (Figure 3).

Fig 3. Top 20 countries of origin for foreign-trained and foreign-born doctors and nurses in the OECD



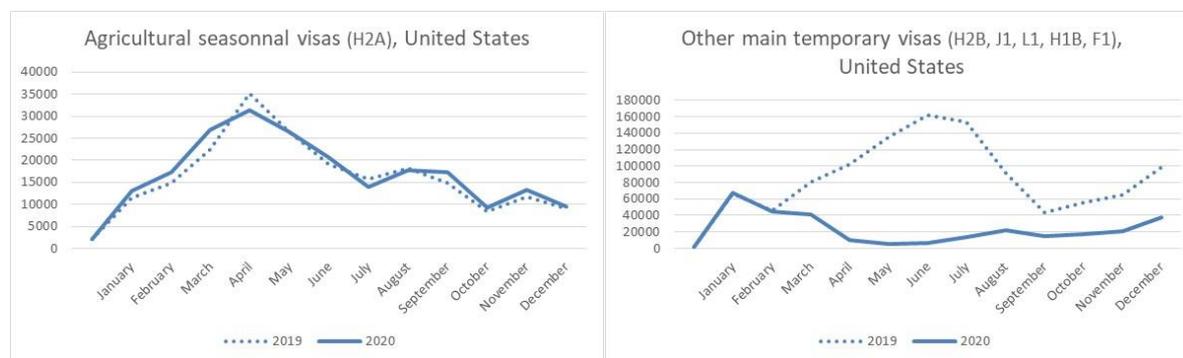
Source: OECD (2020) [Contribution of migrant doctors and nurses to tackling COVID-19 crisis in OECD countries](#).

Similarly, migrant workers make an important share of the workforce in agriculture and other essential sectors. Italy relies on about 370 000 foreign seasonal workers⁹, while 80 per cent of the seasonal workforce force in French agriculture is foreign.¹⁰ Migrants accounted for 12 per cent of the labour force in retail trade in the EU, 15 per cent in the US and 28 per cent in Canada, while in health sector 11, 15 and 27 per cent respectively.¹¹ Reportedly, 50 to 80 per cent of Germany’s meat processing

⁸ OECD (2020) [Contribution of migrant doctors and nurses to tackling COVID-19 crisis in OECD countries](#), Policy Brief, May.
⁹ ILO (2020) [COVID-19 and the impact on agriculture and food security](#), Sectoral Brief, April.
¹⁰ ILO (2020) [Seasonal Migrant Workers’ Schemes: Rethinking Fundamental Principles and Mechanisms in light of COVID-19](#), Brief, May.
¹¹ OECD (2020) [What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants and their children?](#), Policy Brief, October.

workforce is migrant labour.¹² The pandemic has somehow revealed this situation as countries could not afford to do without the foreign workforce despite travel bans and border closures. Exemptions have been applied in most countries to enable notably seasonal agricultural workers to enter as illustrated in Figure 4 for the United States¹³.

Fig 4. Monthly visa issuance to temporary foreign workers in the United States (seasonal agricultural work and other types of entry categories), 2019-2020.



Source: US State Department data, OECD calculations

At the same time, work in essential sectors during the pandemic has made migrant workers even more vulnerable to risks, particularly health-related ones. Many essential jobs cannot be conducted remotely, and migrant workers were thus more likely to be required to report to work during lockdowns and less likely to be able to work remotely. The proportion of migrant workers who could work from home is at least 5 percentage points below that of the native population in three-quarters of OECD countries¹⁴. In-person work heightens health-related risks, including daily exposure to COVID-19 while commuting to work and carrying out their tasks. Migrants are also exposed during travel and upon arrival in countries of destination and origin. They may lack access to personal protective equipment, and have difficulties in keeping physical distancing, or facilities for washing their hands¹⁵. The risk of infection is also high among migrant workers due to inadequate living conditions. Many live in crowded accommodation, or are kept in quarantine camps upon arrival or immigration detention facilities, where social distancing has been difficult to ensure.^{16 17 18}

Concerns have also been raised regarding violations of labour rights of migrant workers. Some migrant workers reported deferment, reduction or non-payment of wages, while others were required to take unpaid leave or sick leave.¹⁹ Further, the rules regarding physical distancing and other occupational safety and health measures have not been applied, and restrictions on working hours and basic standards on accommodation have not been respected.²⁰ At the same time, there have been significant concerns about some COVID-19 related items, being the product of forced labour as well as overall concerns regarding an increase in trafficking in persons. To ensure that national COVID-19 policies are effective and cover migrant workers too, employers' and workers' organizations through social dialogue should be fully involved in their design and implementation. International labour

¹² ILO (2021) [Impact of COVID-19 in the meat processing sector](#), Sectoral Brief, February.

¹³ For more information on the policy response in OECD countries to maintain labour migration in essential sectors in times of pandemic see EMN-OECD (2020) Inform #3 [Maintaining labour migration in essential sectors in times of pandemic](#). Specifically on seasonal agriculture see IOM (2020) [COVID-19: Policies and Impact on Seasonal Agricultural Workers](#).

¹⁴ ADBI, OECD and ILO (2021) [Labor migration in Asia: Impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the post-pandemic future](#).

¹⁵ ILO (2020) [Protecting migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic: Recommendations for Policy-makers and Constituents](#), Policy Brief, April.

¹⁶ ILO (2020) [Ensuring fair recruitment during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), Brief, May.

¹⁷ ADBI, OECD and ILO (2021) [Labor migration in Asia: Impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the post-pandemic future](#).

¹⁸ ILO (2021) [Impact of COVID-19 in the meat processing sector](#), Sectoral Brief, February.

¹⁹ ILO (2020) [Experiences of ASEAN migrant workers during COVID-19: Rights at work, migration and quarantine during the pandemic, and re-migration plans](#), Brief, June.

²⁰ ADBI, OECD and ILO (2021) [Labor migration in Asia: Impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the post-pandemic future](#).

standards provide a foundation for the formulation of inclusive and sustainable responses to COVID-19 pandemic, and to recovery measures that leave no one behind.²¹

Addressing refugee and migrant vulnerabilities

While most G20 countries are gradually reopening their economy after strict confinement phases at the peaks of the COVID-19 crisis, labour market impact is likely to extend well into the future.

Changes in unemployment rates since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis have varied widely across countries, reflecting fundamental differences in policy responses but also the complexity of collecting and comparing labour market statistics in times of a pandemic. In a number of advanced economies the impact of the crisis has been until now tempered by generous job retention schemes and other support measures that have benefited both native-born and foreign-born in a regular situation. The full economic impact of the pandemic on business and employment remains to be seen and there are many reasons to believe that migrants may be on the frontline of exposure to job loss²².

The ILO has carried out a series of rapid assessments in various countries and regions in order to assess the impact of COVID-19 on labour migration governance, recruitment practices, and migrant and refugee workers. These rapid assessments have exposed the vulnerability of migrant workers²³ to the pandemic as they are often found in economic sectors that are characterized by high levels of temporary, informal or unprotected work with low wages and lack of social protection.²⁴ Further, they were often the first to experience layoff during the pandemic, further reducing or eliminating already low incomes; migrant workers reported they were dismissed ahead of nationals in some regions. An estimated 700 000 migrant workers lost their jobs in Thailand since the outbreak of COVID-19²⁵, a development also observed in Mexico and Guatemala by the ILO rapid assessment.²⁶

In many mid- and lower income countries, because of their over-representation in temporary and informal work, migrant workers are often excluded from social protection coverage, including to access health care and benefit from a minimum level of income security, which has made them more vulnerable to the health and socio-economic impacts caused by the current pandemic.²⁷ But even when eligible for cash support measures, administrative barriers or lack of information prevented migrants in some countries from actually accessing such support measures. Medical care or adequate health testing may also be inaccessible.

In June 2021, ILO constituents adopted two documents²⁸ that underline the urgency to extend coverage and to guarantee universal access to comprehensive, adequate and sustainable social protection for all, including migrant workers, refugees and their families.

To that end, short-term measures include ensuring access to healthcare and benefits such as paid sick leave, providing income support, and information on protection, prevention and treatment of COVID-19 and on migrants and refugees' right to social protection. In addition, medium- to long-term policy

²¹ ILO (2020) [ILO Standards and COVID-19 \(coronavirus\): FAQ](#).

²² See OECD (2020) for an initial assessment of the impact of the crisis on migrants and their children in OECD countries [What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants and their children?](#)

²³ ILO (2021) Locked down and in limbo: The global impact of COVID-19 on migrant worker rights and recruitment, Forthcoming.

²⁴ ILO (2020) [Protecting migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic: Recommendations for Policy-makers and Constituents](#), Policy Brief, April.

²⁵ ILO (2021) Locked down and in limbo: The global impact of COVID-19 on migrant worker rights and recruitment, Forthcoming.

²⁶ ILO (2020) [Evaluación preliminar sobre el impacto de la pandemia de COVID-19 en la migración laboral y las prácticas de contratación: corredor migratorio Guatemala – México](#). The evaluation is based on the results and findings obtained through 79 questionnaires, responded by different stakeholders, among them 21 migrant workers.

²⁷ ILO (2020) [Social protection for migrant workers: A necessary response to the COVID-19 crisis](#), Brief, June.

²⁸ The [Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient](#) and the [Resolution concerning the second recurrent discussion on social protection \(social security\)](#).

responses include the ratification and implementation of international standards; the development of inclusive national social protection strategies and legal frameworks, including social protection floors, and the conclusion of bilateral/multilateral social security or labour agreements.

Some countries, however, have implemented measures to extend social protection to vulnerable populations, including migrant workers and refugees. For instance, the Republic of Korea extended sickness benefits to migrant workers who had to be quarantined²⁹; Saudi Arabia extended access to free emergency services and to COVID-19 testing and treatment for migrant workers in an irregular situation.³⁰ France and Spain extended the residence permits of migrant workers for three additional months in 2020 to ensure broad access to health care, while Portugal temporarily regularized the status of non-nationals, including asylum-seekers with pending applications, giving them certain rights and support, including health care, social support, employment and housing.³¹ Brazil introduced a monthly emergency basic income to be paid for up to three months, including for migrant workers with irregular status.³²

An ILO global guide on Extending Social Protection to Migrant Workers, Refugees and their families will be launched in 2021 to provide policymakers, practitioners, migration specialists, social protection specialists and other stakeholders with practical guidance on addressing the many barriers that impede migrant workers' full access to social protection. This Guide provides a variety of policy and administrative options for consideration and adaptation to specific groups and situations, taking the complexity of current migratory movements into account and the current COVID-19 pandemic. The policy measures presented are accompanied by selected country and regional practices.

Inadequate housing facilities, where many migrant workers often live, make it difficult to ensure physical distancing, increasing the risk of COVID-19 infection. Outside of the G20, in Singapore for example, 93 per cent of all cases in December 2020 were migrant workers living in dormitory facilities.³³ More generally, there is clear evidence that migrants and refugees have been at higher risk of COVID-19 infection and in many countries require specific support in terms of accessing health care services (Box 3).

Box 3. WHO support to migrants and refugees

In 2020, WHO's ApartTogether survey³⁴ captured self-reported impact of COVID-19 on 30 000 refugees and migrants living in 170 countries and originating from 159 countries or territories. The respondents indicated that since the start of the pandemic they were feeling significantly more depressed, worried, anxious, lonely, angry, stressed, irritated, and hopeless, were having more sleep-related problems and used more drugs and alcohol (Fig. 5).

The survey also showed that refugees and migrants experienced significant discrimination. Respondents living on the streets and in other precarious conditions, such as those on unpaid work or sent home without pay, were more likely to feel discriminated.

In addition to the survey findings, a recent WHO report 'Refugees and migrants in times of COVID-19: mapping trends of public health and migration policies and practices' investigated a broad variety of national adaptation policies adopted during the pandemic namely border policies, migration policy responses to COVID-19 for foreigners within national borders, and policies on access to health care for migrants and refugees and identified a significant range of practices in line with international conventions protecting the rights of refugees and migrants. The report found that such population groups have been disproportionately affected by both the direct effects of the pandemic and indirect effects. The latter refer, for example, to border closures, suspension of resettlement programs and processing of asylum applications as well as social and economic consequences of the pandemic. The report shows that countries' responses varied considerably across the globe. Many countries

²⁹ UN ESCAP and ILO (2021) [The Protection We Want: Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific](#).

³⁰ UN ESCWA, UNHCR, ILO (2020) [Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Refugees in the Arab Region](#), Technical Paper.

³¹ ILO (2021) [Social Protection Spotlight: Towards solid social protection floors? The role of non-contributory provision during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond](#), Brief, January.

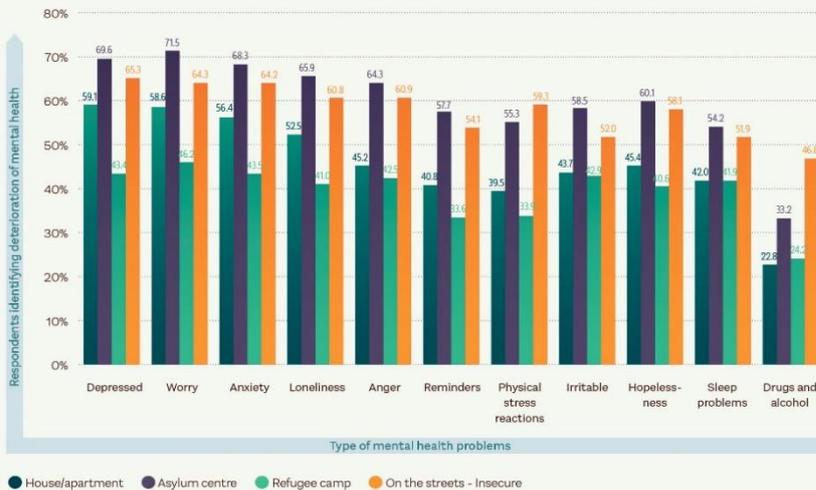
³² ILO (2020) [Social protection for migrant workers: A necessary response to the COVID-19 crisis](#), Brief, June.

³³ ADBI, OECD and ILO (2021) [Labor migration in Asia: Impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the post-pandemic future](#).

³⁴ WHO (2020) [Apart Together survey: preliminary overview of refugees and migrants self-reported impact of COVID-19](#).

ensured access to health care for refugees and migrants regardless of their migration status. Suspension of forced returns and prioritizing alternatives to immigration detention have also been widespread.

Fig 5. Respondents identifying deterioration of mental health since the COVID-19 pandemic according to their housing condition



Note: number of respondents for each issue: 15 272 depressed, 15 475 worry, 15 279 anxiety, 14 731 loneliness, 13 324 anger, 13 463 reminders, 12 350 physical stress reactions, 13 349 irritable, 13 314 hopelessness, 13 231 sleep problems, 8914 drugs and alcohol (survey question used this term); number of participants differed by housing situation, e.g. for safety the numbers responding were 17 736 for house/apartment, 409 for asylum centre, 1392 for refugee camp, 220 for on the streets or in insecure accommodation.

The inequity in the global vaccine supplies and distribution in low to middle-income countries, and barriers to access to vaccination services, particularly for migrants in irregular situation, are nonetheless of concern. To support the global response and recovery from the pandemic, WHO joined the efforts to contain and respond to the pandemic through high-level advocacy for the inclusion of refugees and migrants in the global, regional and national COVID-19 response plans including vaccination.

WHO reviewed all 104 national vaccine deployment and vaccination plans (NDVPs) submitted to the

COVAX Facility and led the global advocacy efforts with partners such as IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, Gavi, and the UN Network on Migration for the equitable access to COVID-19 vaccination programmes. The majority of countries participating in the COVAX Facility at present reported to include refugees and more countries have included migrants in their national vaccination programmes. A platform for real time vaccination monitoring has been established through joint work with IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF.

Finally, WHO has adapted the Global Competency Framework for Universal Health Coverage to define the competency standards in providing health services to refugees and migrants. It specifically informs the development of adapted curricula to support mobile and refugee populations' health needs, specifies the range of services to be provided, and defines occupational scopes of practice. The competency standard is very relevant to strengthen health care workforce, during the pandemic and beyond for better preparedness and building back better.

Source: WHO

Evidence shows that forcibly displaced and stateless people have been among the hardest hit groups of society, facing increased food and economic insecurity as well as challenges to access health and protection services³⁵. Measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 have directly impacted the functioning of asylum systems all over the world. The closure of borders and movement limitations have affected individuals' ability to seek protection and safety in the face of war and human rights violations. This scenario has led many countries to adapt their asylum procedures, shifting to remote registration and adopting medical screenings at borders and quarantine measures.

Besides obstacles to seeking protection, forcibly displaced and stateless persons have increasingly encountered difficulties in accessing essential services and goods during the pandemic. More than 85 per cent of refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries, where, prior to the pandemic, health systems were already overburdened and services limited outside urban areas, including refugee hosting sites. Inadequate living conditions and limited access to health services, water and sanitation put forcibly displaced and stateless persons among the hardest groups to reach during the pandemic.

³⁵ IOM (2020) [Populations at risk: Implications of COVID-19 for hunger, migration and displacement](#)

School closure has dramatically impacted access to education by forcibly displaced children, leading to learning losses and increased risk of school dropout. In 2020, 1.6 billion students in over 190 countries were affected by the full or partial closure of schools and universities.³⁶ Refugee children have most likely been disproportionately affected, as they were already in a situation of disadvantage prior to the pandemic. For example, refugee children tend to be twice as likely to be out of education than other children³⁷, and forcibly displaced children face greater challenges to access care and protection services with the disruption of services provided by governments and civil society organizations³⁸. These are coupled with the negative socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, which may increase protection risks to children and may prompt families to adopt negative coping mechanisms, such as child labour. As such, the negative economic impact brought by the pandemic risks fuelling future conflicts as livelihood and food insecurity increase in many countries.

To address all these challenges, communication with the general public and with migrants has been key during the pandemic (see Boxes 4 & 5). Firstly, in order to limit the spread of the virus, it was important to provide all parts of the population, including migrants and refugees, with timely and accurate information on the pandemic, public health measures taken in a language that they understand, as well as ensuring their inclusion in national COVID-19 policy responses and social protection³⁹, including access to medical services. Second, it was essential to ensure the continuation of migration and integration processes, including through skills development and providing access to skill recognition processes, where available. Last but not least, it proved to be necessary to counter prejudice against migrants and refugees in relation to the spread of the virus.

Box 4. Countering xenophobia and racial discrimination against migrants and refugees during the pandemic

Hate and discrimination against migrants in many countries globally is currently exacerbated due to misinformation and fears associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the pandemic numerous xenophobic incidents, hate speeches and crimes against persons, on the basis of their real or perceived national origin, have been reported. On 8 May 2020, the Secretary General of the UN referred to “a tsunami of hate and xenophobia”. The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance expressed concern about these acts and underlined that they are inconsistent with States’ international human rights law obligations.

Solutions to xenophobic attacks and hate speeches in the context of a pandemic should develop along two main lines of interventions: the adoption of solid legal and policy frameworks aimed at preventing xenophobia and hate crimes against migrants and at sanctioning those responsible, while promoting peaceful living in our societies (a); and community-based approaches to reduce prejudice and facilitate social cohesion (b).

For more information and good practice example see IOM (2021) [Countering xenophobia and stigma to foster social cohesion in the COVID-19 response and recovery](#)

Box 5. Communicating with migrants and refugees during the pandemic

Due to confinement measures and temporary breaks in public services - including integration programmes for migrants and refugees - many governments have adapted their communication strategies towards immigrants in order to help limit the spread of the virus, while at the same time mitigating the negative impact of the health crisis on immigrant integration.

The implementation of extensive online campaigns, new increased efforts to provide official information in multiple languages and the co-operation between national governments, local actors and communities themselves in the context of COVID-19 may have a long-lasting impact on the ways in which governments will communicate about migration and integration even beyond the current crisis.

³⁶ UNESCO (2021) [On International Day of Education, UNESCO promotes learning recovery for students affected by COVID-19](#), Article, January.

³⁷ UNICEF (2020) [Migrant and displaced children in the age of COVID-19: How the pandemic is impacting them and what can we do to help](#). Migration Policy Practice. April - June.

³⁸ IOM (2020) [Time for a reset: Implications for child migration policies arising from COVID-19](#), August.

³⁹ ILO (2020) [A policy framework for responding to the COVID-19 crisis](#). Policy Brief, May.

While the use of digital media has been an important component of these communication efforts, common communication challenges remain, such as limited internet access of certain groups of immigrants, as well as limited knowledge and data regarding the media usage, information needs and communication preferences of migrants.

For more information and good practice example see OECD (2021) [How best to communicate on migration and integration in the context of COVID-19](#)

Supporting stranded migrants and facilitating return migration

Border closures and travel restrictions created new vulnerabilities for migrants, many of whom found themselves stranded. IOM [Report on COVID-19's Impact on Migrants](#), detailed the plight of at least nearly three million migrants stranded worldwide by mid-July. Many more migrants are believed to have been stranded in the subsequent months.

The issue of return took first and foremost the form of stranded migrant workers unable to work at destination and to go back to their country of origin. Some countries in the Gulf region, and particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), addressed the situation of stranded migrants by embarking on IOM's assisted voluntary return (AVR) programmes for the first time. This has allowed the development of systems that are set to assist migrants beyond the pandemic. The visibility of AVR programmes, in countries that have not traditionally engaged in this return mechanism, has allowed for discussions and burgeoning cooperation through the United Nations Network on Migration (UNNM) between destination and origin countries (especially KSA and Ethiopia).

Meanwhile, countries of origin had to face a significant number of returns and repatriations of migrant workers, to an economic situation no better than before departure with limited employment prospects. The Indian evacuation and repatriation mission by November 2020 facilitated the return of over 3 million Indian nationals.⁴⁰ Migrant workers quite often left their countries of destination without having received all or part of the wages and benefits that were due to them, and in most cases they lack access to redress mechanisms.⁴¹ Returnees in several countries experienced difficulty finding jobs due to a lack of demand and businesses closures; women reported more difficulties finding employment than men.⁴²

Countries of destination had to face also the question of processing forced and voluntary returns. In May 2020, the [United Nations Network on Migration \(UNNM\)](#) called on States to suspend forced returns during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to protect the health of migrants and communities, and uphold the human rights of all migrants, regardless of their status. In most cases, forced returns plummeted during the early months of the pandemic and escorted forced returns almost completely ceased. Voluntary return continued to some extent, despite pandemic-related difficulty in providing post-return support in origin countries. The European Commission for example adopted guidance on implementation of the Return Directive under COVID-19 in April 2020, which was followed by several Member States as a tool to manage different aspects of return during the pandemic⁴³.

Border closures, besides resulting in increase of the number of stranded migrant workers, have made them more vulnerable to the risks associated with smuggling routes, including being exploited by traffickers. The loss of income prompted some migrant workers to have recourse to smugglers in order to return home, exposing them to hazardous routes and to being exploited by traffickers.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ ADBI, OECD and ILO (2021) [Labor migration in Asia: Impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the post-pandemic future](#).

⁴¹ ILO (2021) [World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021](#).

⁴² ILO (2021) Locked down and in limbo: The global impact of COVID-19 on migrant worker rights and recruitment, forthcoming.

⁴³ See OECD/EMN (2021) for more information on the policy responses in EU and non-EU OECD countries regarding return and reintegration during the pandemic [Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on voluntary and forced return procedures and policy responses](#).

⁴⁴ ILO (2021) [World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2021](#).

IOM is an important partner for G20 countries in the field of return and reintegration. To respond to the complex challenge of organizing returns during the pandemic, IOM has established a COVID-19 Return Task Force.

Up to 2 677⁴⁵ stranded migrants were supported worldwide by the Return Task Force to return home in a safe and dignified manner, through both commercial and charter flights. IOM closely coordinated with the governments of both host and origin countries, which opened borders on an exceptional basis when commercial flights were not possible. As part of a comprehensive support package, a total of 107 212 individuals received some sort of return-related assistance in 2020. In addition to return support, IOM has been providing assistance to meet stranded migrants' needs, such as food and shelter, childcare, and health assistance including psychosocial counselling, risk communication, and COVID-19 preventative measures. Globally in 2020, a total of 73 869 vulnerable or stranded migrants were assisted with case management services in light of COVID-19.

IOM's Global Assistance Fund, which provides protection and assistance services to migrants vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse, provided comprehensive protection and assistance services to 229 highly vulnerable migrants (15 boys, 1 girl, 104 men and 109 women) between April and December 2020.

In addition to the return and reintegration activities in the context of COVID-19, in 2020, IOM assisted a total of 42 181⁴⁶ migrants in their safe and dignified return home through AVRR programmes. The trend of decreasing returns from the European Economic Area (EEA) and an increase from other regions, particularly West and Central Africa, continues. However, in 2020, the EEA continued to be the main host region for beneficiaries of AVR (39.4 per cent of the total). In 2020 IOM provided 106°230 reintegration services to returnees in 121 country worldwide. Reintegration assistance encompassed counselling, social, psychosocial and economic support at the pre-departure and post-arrival stages.⁴⁷

The ILO has also provided reintegration assistance to countries across all regions facing return of their nationals. For example, in Ethiopia the ILO has been supporting the development of reintegration guidelines for returnees and has implemented a project that provided technical and financial support for improved reintegration assistance to Ethiopian returnees through a holistic and coherent economic and social empowerment approach. It focused on individualised and rights based reintegration assistance to returnees.⁴⁸ During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ILO among others, provided emergency response and reintegration services to returned migrant workers through Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) across several ASEAN countries.⁴⁹ In 2020, the ILO and UNHCR began the implementation of a regional project to promote the socio-economic integration of refugees and forcibly displaced persons in Mexico, Costa Rica and Honduras. The project seeks to strengthen public employment services, enhance technical and professional training and facilitate financial inclusion and access to social protection for the tens of thousands of people who have been forced to flee in the region.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Task Force funding supported 1 100 beneficiaries for return, with IOM missions assisting an additional 1 577 beneficiaries in coordination with the Task Force.

⁴⁶ Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme (37,043 migrants), Voluntary Humanitarian Returns (4,038) and returns organized with the funding support of the COVID-19 Return Task Force (1,100).

⁴⁷ [Return and Reintegration Key Highlights 2020 | IOM Publications Platform](#)

⁴⁸ ILO (2020) [An assessment of labour migration and mobility governance in the IGAD region: Country report for Ethiopia](#); ILO (n.d.) [Support to the Reintegration of Returnees in Ethiopia](#).

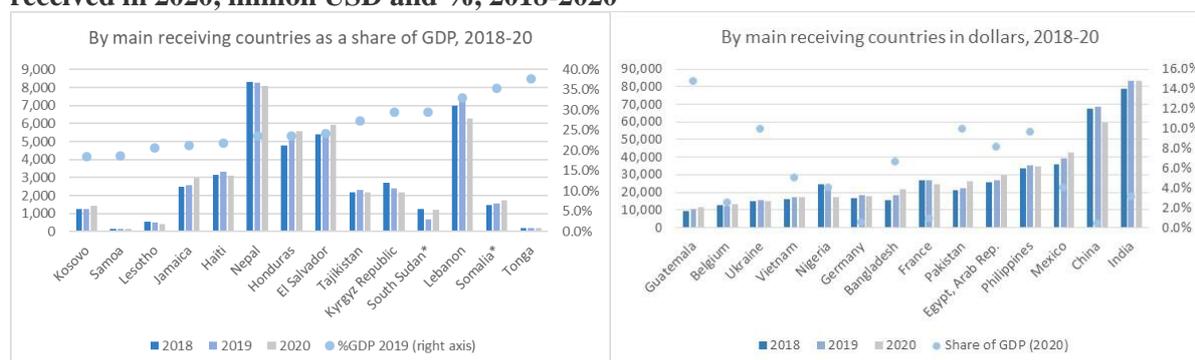
⁴⁹ See, for example, ILO TRIANGLE in ASEAN Programme Quarterly Briefing Notes: [Myanmar](#), [Cambodia](#).

⁵⁰ ILO (2020) [Employment and decent work in refugee and other forced displacement contexts: Compendium of ILO's lessons learned, emerging good practices and policy guidance](#).

Analysing the short and medium term impact on remittances

Despite the COVID-19 driven global economic slowdown, remittance flows remained resilient in 2020, falling much less than initially projected. Officially recorded remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) reached USD 540 billion in 2020, just 1.6 percent below the 2019 total of USD 548 billion. The decline in recorded remittance flows in 2020 was smaller than the decline during the 2009 global financial crisis (4.8 percent). Further remittance flows to LMICs surpassed foreign direct investment (USD 259 billion) and ODI (USD 179 billion) in 2020⁵¹, providing important external finance during the COVID-19 pandemic⁵². In 2020, the short to medium term trends in remittance flows were varied by region and country, due to a complex mix of economic, financial, health and job market related factors (Fig 6).

Fig 6 Evolution of remittances to main recipient countries by share of GDP or absolute amount received in 2020, million USD and %, 2018-2020



Source: World Bank, Secretariat calculations

On the one hand, flows dropped for Europe and Central Asia (9.7 per cent), East Asia and the Pacific (7.9 per cent), and sub-Saharan Africa (12.5 per cent)⁵³ owing to differing factors including a concentration of migrant communities in the destination countries most affected by lockdowns or economic slowdown, or concentrated in sectors deeply affected by the pandemic such as transport and tourism.

On the other hand, COVID-19 pandemic underscored the counter-cyclical nature of remittances. Migrants indeed tend to remit more in times of crisis to support their family and communities back home, notably to mitigate the impact on living conditions, education, nutrition, and health. South Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East and North Africa saw increases in remittance flows of 5.2 per cent, 6.5 per cent, and 2.3 per cent, respectively. Notable country examples include Mexico, Bangladesh, Pakistan.

A combination of factors are behind this rise in reported remittances: a move from informal channels (e.g. carrying cash across borders) towards more formal channels; an increase in the digitalization of financial transfers; relatively stable economic conditions in some destination countries due to strong fiscal stimulus packages or softer lockdown measures/early elimination of COVID-19 restrictions; and cyclical movements in oil prices or currency exchange rates.⁵⁴ However, while there has been an increase in the use of digital transfers, access to digital platforms such as mobile wallets remain uneven and an important focus of expansion.

⁵¹ World Bank (2021) [Resilience COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens](#). Migration and Development Brief 34. May.

⁵² For a detailed discussion on the effects of the pandemic on remittances from the EU and other OECD non-EU countries see OECD/EMN (2020) [The impact of COVID-19 on remittances in EU and OECD countries](#), December.

⁵³ According to the World Bank, the decline in remittance flows to Sub-Saharan Africa, was almost entirely due to a 27.7 percent decline in remittance flows to Nigeria, which alone accounted for over 40 percent of remittance flows to the region. Excluding Nigeria, remittance flows to Sub-Saharan African increased by 2.3 percent.

⁵⁴ World Bank (2021) [Resilience COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens](#). Migration and Development Brief 34. May

Several positive policy and market developments also contributed to softening the potentially negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on remittances. The international community worked intensively to assess the development and economic impacts of remittances and formulate responses for governments, the private sector and diaspora associations including through [the Swiss-UK Call to Action](#), the [IFAD Remittance Community Task Force](#), the [UN's Financing for Development process](#) and the UN Migration Network. Governments took active measures to attract these essentially private monetary transfers, with several top 10 recipient countries embarking on major remittance inducement policies to support and expand remittance inflows. Greater digitalization in the financial sector may cut the cost of remittance transfers bringing it closer to the UN SDG target of 3 per cent, potentially formalizing remittance flows and enhancing financial inclusion and financial literacy.

Going forward some of the main remittance issues are the economic, fiscal and labour market impact of the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, the digitization of financial markets (e.g. use of cryptocurrencies), the impact of changing remittance flows on existing migrant debt⁵⁵ and the contributions of returnees.

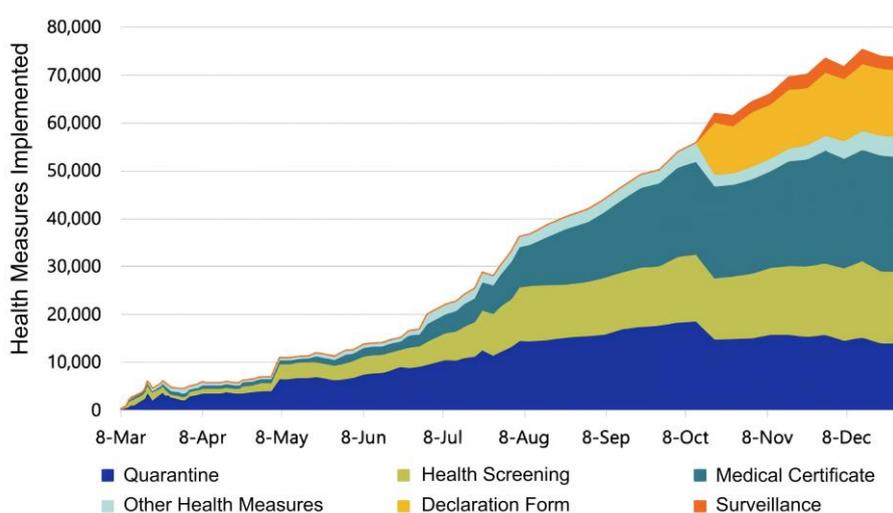
3. Adapting migration management to the recovery challenge

Safely reopening borders and opportunities for regular mobility

Before the COVID-19 crisis health examinations were a standard and longstanding practice for temporary or permanent migrants in a number of G20 countries. A few countries had long required a medical check, administered by the authorities, as part of their permit issuance procedure. Others excluded persons with certain chronic conditions from access to permanent residence. Health assessments are also common for resettled refugees and for asylum seekers. Tourists and other short-term visitors (including business visitors, students, transporters etc.) were usually exempted from health screening but in some countries may have to prove they have been vaccinated for a range of infectious diseases, or that they have health insurance coverage.

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the situation and brought this question to the forefront of public debate. During the first phase of the pandemic in 2020, countries took a number of (often non-coordinated) actions to limit the spread of the virus (Fig 7).⁵⁶

Fig 7 Health requirements implemented worldwide by type, March December 2020



Source: IOM/MPI (2021) <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/covid-19-and-the-state-of-global.pdf>

⁵⁵ IOM (2019) [Debt and the Migration Experience: Insights from Southeast Asia](#), Author Dr. Maryann Bylander.

⁵⁶ See also IOM publications on this topic here: [Cross-border human mobility amid and after COVID-19](#)

Leverage mobility as a means to achieve effective COVID-19 socio-economic recovery and build back better. The crisis has highlighted the importance of international mobility, as well as of migrant workers as an essential part of the work force and contributors to economic development. The halt in travel and tourism has far-reaching impact, given the interlinked nature of the global economy. The OECD estimates, for example, that more than a third of the value added generated by tourism in the domestic economy comes from indirect impacts. In this context, reopening safely borders, enabling people to travel internationally based on proof of a negative COVID test, will become both an economic imperative and a more realistic option as the global vaccination campaign gains speed.

On 17 March 2021, the European Union published a legislative proposal establishing a common framework for a Digital COVID-19 Certificate covering vaccination, testing and recovery. This will put in place an EU level approach to issuing, verifying and accepting such certificates, to help holders to exercise their right to free movement within the EU, as well as making it easier to wind down COVID-19 restrictions put in place in compliance with EU law⁵⁷. The proposal is open to global initiatives and takes into account ongoing efforts of specialised agencies of the United Nations such as the WHO and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), to establish specifications and guidance for using digital technologies for documenting vaccination status.

The WHO also issued “Interim guidance for developing a Smart Vaccination Certificate” (19 March 2021)⁵⁷. The “approach is focused on establishing key specifications, standards and a trust framework for a digital vaccination certificate to facilitate implementation of effective and interoperable digital solutions that support COVID-19 vaccine delivery and monitoring, with intended applicability to other vaccines.” This is not, at present, intended to be used for travel purposes, but rather for informing vaccination rollout and policies. However, in principle, it could also be used by authorities wishing to take vaccination status into account in their travel policies.

In May 2021, the OECD adopted a blueprint for safer international travel during the COVID-19 pandemic⁵⁸. The OECD safe travel blueprint is designed to provide a temporary framework in the context of the situation where testing certificates will continue to be necessary until the vaccination becomes universal. It is to be implemented on a voluntary basis, to promote greater certainty, safety and security in travel as reopening takes place and consistent (and complementary) with the most recent certificate initiatives. The OECD blueprint specifies various travel protocols to be considered by countries subject to their own considerations of risk associated with importation of cases of COVID-19, local rates of vaccination, and other elements of national context.

Resuming resettlement and expanding complementary pathways

The year 2020 was a particularly challenging year for refugee resettlement departures. Instead of the 70 000 departures target planned for 2020 according to the *Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways*,⁵⁹ only 22 800⁶⁰ refugees departed with UNHCR and IOM’s assistance, a 64 per cent drop compared to 2019. Resettlement places allocated by countries already started at a relatively low 57 000 at the beginning of 2020, but further dropped to 48 500 places by December. Low departures were due largely to COVID-19, but also to unexpectedly fewer resettlement places allocated by countries. Timelines for implementing EU pledges, originally set for 2020, were eventually extended to the end of 2021, effectively halving the resettlement quotas allocated for 2020.

By mid-March 2020, international air travel came to an unprecedented near standstill and resettlement departures were limited to a small number of urgent and emergency cases prioritized by UNHCR, IOM,

⁵⁷ WHO (2021) [Interim guidance for developing a Smart Vaccination Certificate](#), Technical document, March.

⁵⁸ OECD (2021) [OECD initiative for safe international mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

⁵⁹ UNHCR (2019) [Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways](#).

⁶⁰ See UNHCR’s [Resettlement Data Finder](#)

and resettlement countries. It was not until approximately July/August 2020 that resettlement departures resumed in significant numbers.

With challenges also came opportunities. As resettlement countries and UNHCR saw their processing capacity of resettlement cases dwindle as the dependence on face to face interviews became a liability under COVID-19, new mechanisms were required to keep operations moving forward. UNHCR reconfigured its resettlement processing modalities to facilitate remote interviews and processing, keeping in mind procedural integrity and safety of refugees, UNHCR staff and receiving communities.

Many resettlement states, among them several G20 countries, similarly stepped up to shift to more flexible processing through remote virtual interviews and/or expanded dossier consideration of refugee cases. These new tools created safer alternatives to ensure the continuance of resettlement activities and sent an important signal to host governments and refugees that the pursuit of durable solutions remained a priority throughout the pandemic. These innovative processing modalities have their limitations but have proven crucial to maintain resettlement activities under COVID-19. Although UNHCR submissions of refugees dropped by 52 per cent in 2020 and resettlement arrivals fell, without these innovations the impact would have been even more severe. Moreover, these new tools are an added resource for the future resettlement processing of refugees in risky or complex situations where face to face interviews may not be practical or possible. IOM has also worked closely with resettlement countries to put in place critical COVID-19 travel protocols to allow refugees to safely depart on resettlement.

The second edition of a joint OECD-UNHCR study on the use of safe admission pathways by seven populations with a refugee background in OECD countries and Brazil has demonstrated that this avenue continues to be significant in scope with substantial potential for expansion.⁶¹ The study has shown that almost 1.5 million residence permits were granted to these seven population groups⁶² for family, work or study purposes between 2010 and 2019. While family reunification continues to account for almost 69 per cent of permits issued, the report's findings point to the need to lift barriers to accessing family reunification by ensuring the procedures take into consideration the refugee character or international protection needs of the reunifying family members.

Similarly, barriers to access the labour market such as existing costs and documentation requirements continue to prevent talented and skilled refugees from accessing these opportunities. States, employers, academic institutions and society at large should strive to harness refugees' existing capacities and skills and expand opportunities for them to acquire new skills, knowledge and qualifications. Doing so will not only benefit the individuals but will also strategically contribute to the development of the receiving countries and communities and can support post-conflict stabilization.

In 2021, the impact of COVID-19 remains significant as resettlement actors struggle to regain their previous capacity. Although resettlement innovations have allowed activities to continue, they are more resource intensive and slower than pre-pandemic. In some resettlement countries, subsequent COVID-19 waves continue to impact communities that receive refugees, while some States continue to restrict arrivals for only the most urgent cases or have yet to fully adopt mechanisms that allow for the complete processing of cases. Nevertheless, the United States has raised its admission ceiling to 62 500 arrivals for FY2021, and several countries displayed exemplary leadership and demonstrated exceptional commitment to not only complete their 2020 targets, even if belatedly, but also set new resettlement targets for 2021. It is hoped that the European Union will also come back in 2022 with strong and increased multiyear commitments to not only resettlement, but also complementary pathways and as such further expand access of refugees to solutions and help meet the goals of the *Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways*.

⁶¹ See OECD-UNHCR (2021) [Safe Pathways II](#), April

⁶² Refers to Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Islamic Republic of Iran, Somalia, Syria and Venezuela.

Making the most of equitable digitalization advancements

The pandemic has accelerated ongoing trends towards digitalization and automation. Digitalization affects all parts of our lives. The expansion of telework, distance learning, online shopping and services is likely irreversible. Digitalization has also been critical to cope with the impacts of the pandemic and has pushed governments to review their internal processes. Migration and integration are not immune to this transformation - and the potential is enormous.

Pre-pandemic, some countries already offered online application for residence permits and long stay visas, but the health crisis has created a new impetus to develop such platforms. In 2020, several OECD countries including Chile, Greece or France have moved towards web-based applications. More generally, while several G20 countries had e-visas (e.g. Australia, Canada, United States, Turkey, India, South Africa) many other countries are now considering introducing this in the very short term.

“Digital identities” are becoming more and more entrenched in daily life via social media profiles, search histories, GPS location and online purchasing preferences, providing a wealth of data. National governments are starting to rely on these sources in migration management, for instance by monitoring Internet and social media searches to anticipate migratory movements and for risk assessment in visa applications.

Digital technologies in asylum procedures are already well integrated in some countries including in ID management (biometric and alphanumeric identification), speech and dialect recognition, the analysis of mobile data media to help determine identity and origin on the basis of metadata stored on the mobile phone (including geodata). While some countries use the analysis of facial expressions during asylum hearings to determine honesty and truthfulness, others, such as Australia, have chosen not to and have put in place protections such as ensuring that adverse decisions such as refusing a visa can only be made by humans, not by automated systems. During the lockdown remote interviews with asylum seekers have been used to avoid disruptions in the analysis of asylum claims; in many countries, they will be maintained in routine operations. Similarly, digitalization is being more commonly used in return operations - notably through remote counselling to help people organise the journey home.

Digital technologies can also enable migrants to exercise their rights by widening access to services, such as those dedicated to integration, naturalisation, and public health. Online language and orientation courses have been made more easily accessible with greater flexibility of use. The pandemic has also prompted the use of online platforms to disseminate COVID-19 related information among migrant communities.

Digitalization can also improve access to opportunity. With teleworking, some (high-skilled) migrants might not even have to go through the migration procedure to work in another country. In some cases, indeed, work becomes increasingly detached from place of residence and “Digital nomads” may emerge as a new migrant category. That said, access to technology and digitization must be equitable and not further perpetuate socio-economic disadvantages.

Migration and integration systems have much to gain from digitalisation, but new frontiers for technology are also new frontiers for governance. It requires robust legislation, monitoring, infrastructure, and training for those who are in charge. It also requires that the wealth of available data collected about migrants is used responsibly and not to cause harm, for instance through systemic biases and unfair processes.

Careful consideration should be given to the protection of personal data and privacy issues, including for people residing abroad who are expressing an interest in migrating and obviously for vulnerable people on the move and in need of international protection. Finally, one cannot be assumed that everyone has equal access to connected devices. The digitalization of migration and integration services

should therefore make sure that it leaves no one behind because of a lack of digital skills or barriers to access to technology⁶³.

Building new partnerships

International cooperation is key to address the challenges associated with international migration and instrumental to seize its potential benefits as indicated notably in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). In this context, the idea of skills mobility partnerships has emerged as a way to associate migration and skills development, recognition and matching for the mutual benefit of origin and destination countries, as well as migrants themselves.

Skills partnerships can contribute to more effective tapping of the potential of migrants. Migrant workers at low- and medium-skill levels are in a particularly vulnerable situation, when it comes to labour exploitation and lack of social protection. Skills provide an important avenue to promote migrant workers' labour market and social integration. Upskilling of the workforce in countries of origin is also a powerful tool to promote economic development. Lastly, skills needs in destination are often very specific and cannot always be easily matched with the workforce abroad. The concept of skills mobility partnership is not new and builds on a variety of bilateral agreements already piloted and tested by some G20 countries. However, these programmes have generally remained limited in scope and the exception rather than the rule⁶⁴.

To address this question, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) forged the Global Skills Partnership on Migration (GSPM) to join forces and mobilise expertise for the development and recognition of skills of migrant workers. It aims to support governments, employers and workers as well as their organisations, educational institutions and training providers, and other stakeholders to develop and recognize the skills of migrant workers with a particular focus on women and youth.⁶⁵ To leverage skills mobility to benefit all stakeholders involved, IOM has, moreover, formulated in 2019 an approach to effective and sustainable cooperation on skills-based mobility, captured in the concept of Skills Mobility Partnerships (SMPs).⁶⁶

Africa offers great potential for skills mobility partnerships. In this regard, the ILO conducted 13 country studies and two sub-regional studies identifying the potential for skills partnerships on migration between different countries and skills institutions.⁶⁷ These studies provided inputs for two tripartite workshops, which resulted in the development of partnership opportunities to promote skills training and recognition for migrant workers.⁶⁸ The ILO is already supporting the countries in implementation of partnerships and is currently piloting skills training and recognition for migrant workers and refugees in Central Africa to promote skills partnership on migration within the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). In West Africa, the ILO is supporting Nigeria, Ghana, and Togo in strengthening mutual recognition of each other's skills and qualifications in key sectors/occupations that are most strongly affected by migration between the three countries.⁶⁹ The ILO is also helping Senegal and Mauritania develop their skills partnership around the recognition of prior

⁶³ ILO (2021) [Digital Refugee Livelihoods and Decent Work - Towards inclusion in a fairer digital economy](#)

⁶⁴ See for example OECD (2018) for an in-depth discussion on the concept of [Skills Mobility Partnerships](#).

⁶⁵ ILO, IOM, UNESCO, IOE and ITUC (2018) [Global Skills Partnership on Migration: Key messages from partners](#), Information Note.

⁶⁶ IOM (2019) [Skills-based migration and partnerships: elements and essential prerequisites](#) and IOM (2020) [Skills mobility partnerships \(SMPs\). Towards a global approach to skills development and labour mobility](#).

⁶⁷ See: IOM (2020) [Skills partnerships on migration](#).

⁶⁸ See ILO (2019) [Tripartite consultations on skills partnerships on migration: ECOWAS and the Sahel](#), Workshop Report; and ILO (2019) [Consultations sous régionales tripartites pour la formulation de partenariats pour les compétences et la migration : CEEAC](#), Rapport d'Atelier.

⁶⁹ ILO (2021) [Ghana, Nigeria and Togo: Towards mutual recognition of skills in the agriculture and construction sectors](#).

learning for both locals and migrant workers. Beyond, IOM piloted a skills mobility partnership between Belgium and Tunisia that offered Tunisian graduates six-month internships in Belgian companies and labour market integration support upon return to Tunisia.⁷⁰ IOM is also providing support to private sector companies in Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Italy to recruit highly skilled ICT graduates from Senegal and Nigeria, based on the Skills Mobility Partnership model.⁷¹ To ensure that international mobility of health workers is based on ethical norms and standards and to mitigate the adverse effects, the GSPM also provides technical expertise in a research study on the mobility of health workers in Africa.

To support these policy developments it is important however to improve migration and skills information system. In the African context, the African Union Commission's Institute of Statistics (STATAFRIC) and IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC), Statistics Sweden and the OECD recently launched the Africa Migration Data Network (Box 6) to address this gap.

Box 6. The Africa Migration Data Network (AMDN)

On 28 April 2021, the first-ever Africa Migration Data Network (AMDN) was launched by the African Union Commission's Institute of Statistics (STATAFRIC) and IOM's GMDAC, in close collaboration with Statistics Sweden and the OECD.

The AMDN seeks to a) provide an opportunity to better identify and respond to capacity-development needs on the continent, b) promote the sharing of data across countries, and (c) contribute to efforts to harmonize migration concepts, definitions and data methods, and to improve the evidence base on migration in Africa – in line with IOM's Continental Strategy for Africa and IOM's Migration Data Strategy.

Members of the AMDN include officials from National Statistical Offices and key migration-relevant ministries from 53 African Union Member States, as well as representatives from 8 Regional Economic Communities (AMU, ECOWAS, EAC, IGAD, SADC, COMESA, ECCAS and CEN-SAD) and 4 African development institutions (AfDB, UNECA, AFRISTAT and ACBF).

The AMDN is currently managed by a Steering Group (SG), which includes representatives from the AU, IOM, Statistics Sweden and OECD. The SG meets on a regular basis to discuss strategic issues and main activities of the Network. The establishment of a technical secretariat will be needed for effective coordination and for the sustainability of the Network.

Conclusion

2020 was in many ways an *Annus Horribilis* that has marked our economies and societies. Migrants and refugees have been in the forefront to ensure the continuity of essential services during the pandemic but have also been overexposed to the health and economic consequences of the COVID-19.

G20 countries have, however, taken bold steps to mitigate the immediate impact of the crisis – including on migrants and refugees - but the full economic consequences of the pandemic are still unfolding and uncertainties remain about the conditions under which borders can be safely reopened and migration and resettlement operations resumed, not only to meet protection needs but equally to meet labour market demands through safe and legal labour mobility

In the meantime, the crisis may also open the door for systemic transformation and building back better. The use of technology and digitalisation contain the promise of more efficient and fair migration and integration systems. The changing skills needs in G20 countries may call for developing new and innovative mobility partnerships with countries of origin. These opportunities will require interoperability, coordination and international cooperation. The G20 is well placed to move this agenda forward by identifying common challenges and opportunities, exchanging on good practices and joining

⁷⁰ See IOM (2020) [Paving the way for future labour migration: A Belgian-Tunisian Skills Mobility Partnership](#).

⁷¹ See IOM (2020) [MATCH: Hiring African Talents](#)

forces to improve the availability and quality of international data and evidence on migration and forced displacement.

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