

Growth of international migration slowed by 27%, or 2 million migrants, due to COVID-19, says UN

The number of international migrants worldwide reaches 281 million

New York, 15 January– COVID-19 has disrupted all forms of human mobility through the closing of national borders and halting of travel worldwide. Preliminary estimates suggest that the pandemic may have slowed the growth in the stock of international migrants by around two million by mid-2020, 27 per cent less than the growth expected since mid-2019, according to a report by the United Nations released today.

Growth in the number of international migrants has been robust over the last two decades, reaching 281 million people living outside their country of origin in 2020, up from 173 million in 2000 and 221 million in 2010. Currently, international migrants represent about 3.6 per cent of the world's population.

The report, *International Migration 2020 Highlights*, by the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), provides the latest estimates of the number of international migrants by country of destination, origin, age and sex for all countries and areas of the world.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, said “The report affirms that migration is a part of today's globalized world and shows how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the livelihoods of millions of migrants and their families and undermined progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.”

The report found that two thirds of all international migrants live in just 20 countries. The United States of America remained the largest destination, hosting 51 million international migrants in 2020, equal to 18 per cent of the world's total. Germany hosted the second largest number of migrants worldwide, at around 16 million, followed by Saudi Arabia (13 million), the Russian Federation (12 million) and the United Kingdom (9 million).

India topped the list of countries with the largest diasporas in 2020, with 18 million persons from India living outside of their country of birth. Other countries with a large transnational community included Mexico and the Russian Federation (11 million each), China (10 million) and Syria (8 million).

Diasporas contribute to the development of their countries of origin through the promotion of foreign investment, trade, access to technology and financial inclusion. However, according to projections by the World Bank, the COVID-19 pandemic may reduce the volume of remittances

sent to low-and middle-income countries from USD 548 billion in 2019 to USD 470 billion in 2021, a decline of USD 78 billion or 14 per cent. The loss has affected the livelihoods of millions of migrants and their families, stalling progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. National strategies and international cooperation will be needed to mitigate the effects of this loss.

Among the major regions of the world, the largest number of international migrants in 2020 resided in Europe, with a total of 87 million. Northern America hosted the second largest number of migrants, with almost 59 million. Northern Africa and Western Asia followed with a total of nearly 50 million.

In 2020, nearly half of all international migrants resided in the region from which they originated, with Europe accounting for the largest share of intra-regional migration: 70 per cent of migrants born in Europe reside in another European country. The share of intra-regional migration among migrants originating in sub-Saharan Africa was 63 per cent. At the other end of the spectrum, Central and South Asia had the largest share of its diaspora residing *outside* the region, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean, and Northern America.

Nearly two thirds of all international migrants live in high-income countries, in contrast with just 31 per cent in middle-income countries and around 4 per cent in low-income countries. On the other hand, low- and middle-income countries hosted 80 per cent of the world's refugees in 2020. Refugees comprise around three per cent of all international migrants in high-income countries, compared to 25 per cent in middle-income countries and 50 per cent in low-income countries.

In 2020, refugees accounted for 12 per cent of all international migrants, up from 9.5 per cent in 2000, as forced displacements across national borders continued to rise faster than voluntary migration. Between 2000 and 2020, the number that had fled conflict, crises, persecution, violence or human rights violations doubled from 17 to 34 million.

Migrant women are catalysts of change, promoting positive social, cultural and political norms within their homes and throughout their communities. Nearly half of all international migrants worldwide were women or girls. In 2020, the number of female migrants slightly exceeded male migrants in Europe, Northern America and Oceania, partially due to a higher life expectancy of women over men. In sub-Saharan Africa and Western Asia, males tend to significantly exceed the number of females, which is attributed to temporary labour migration.

International migrants often make up a larger proportion of working-age persons compared to the national population. In 2020, 73 per cent of all international migrants were between the ages of 20 and 64 years, compared to 57 per cent for the total population. In the absence of international migrants, the ratio of persons aged 65 years or above per 100 persons aged 20 to 64 years, or old-age dependency ratio, in high-income countries would have been nearly 3 percentage points higher in 2020.

With the adoption of landmark agreements by the General Assembly, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, countries have begun to adopt measures to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration. Globally, 54 per cent of the 111 Governments that responded to a recent survey reported having such policies.

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