

Key Findings

- The number of international migrants has grown from 84 million globally in 1970 to 281 million in 2020, although when global population growth is factored in, the proportion of international migrants has only inched up from 2.3 to 3.6 per cent of the world's population. The overwhelming majority of people stay in the country of their birth.
- Most international migrants (around 78%) are of working age (between 15 and 64 years of age), and there are more male than female international migrants, with the gap increasing in the last 20 years. In 2000, the male to female split was 50.6 to 49.4 per cent, while in 2020 the split was 51.9 to 48.0 per cent.
- Migrant workers account for 62 per cent (169 million) of the total number of international migrants. While most reside in high-income nations (67%), there has been a shift to upper-middle-income nations, likely because of economic growth in middle-income countries and changes to immigration rules in high-income countries.
- COVID-19-related travel restrictions had enormous impacts, resulting in unprecedented forced immobility around the world. In 2020, total air passengers carried globally dropped by 60 per cent from around 4.5 billion in 2019 to 1.8 billion in 2020.
- Around 3,900 migrants died during their journey in 2020, down from almost 5,400 a year earlier, and the lowest number in six years of data collection. This is largely due to reduced migration because of the COVID-19 restrictions.
- International remittances are financial or in-kind transfers made by migrants and diaspora directly to families or communities in their countries of origin, and in 2020 remittances totalled USD 702 billion globally, a marked increase since 2000, when they totalled USD 126 billion. The figure was slightly down from 2019 due to COVID, but the decrease was far less than expected.
- Refugee numbers continue to climb and reach record levels, with 26.4 million refugees globally in 2020. There are also 4.1 million asylum seekers in the world, although the number of first-time asylum applications lodged in 2020 (1.1 million) was down 45 per cent on the previous year due to COVID-19 mobility restrictions.

- More than 80 per cent of the world's refugee population come from the top 10 asylum-producing nations, which is topped by the Syrian Arab Republic, the origin country of 6.7 million refugees. Afghanistan is the second, followed by South Sudan. The top host country is Turkey, and 73 per cent of all refugees live in nations neighbouring their country of origin.
- The number of refugees in need of resettlement has risen from 805,000 in 2011 to 1.4 million today, but the number of refugees resettled saw a huge decline in 2020, falling from almost 108,000 in 2019 to just over 34,000. It is the lowest figure since 2005. This is in part due to COVID-19, but policy changes and more stringent security checks also had an impact.
- The number of internally displaced people (IDPs) is also rising to record levels, with an estimated 48 million people internally displaced by conflict and violence in 59 countries and territories. This number is almost double the figure from 2000. Around 7 million people were also displaced by disasters in 2020.
- There is a stark difference between the geographic locations of internal displacement events due to conflict and violence compared to disaster (such as floods, hurricanes and wildfires). In 2020, displacement due to conflict and violence occurred in 42 countries while displacement due to disaster occurred in 144 countries.

Takeaway for Policy

Human migration is an age-old activity touching almost every society around the world, and its variances over decades are shaped by socioeconomic, geopolitical and global events. International remittances growth demonstrates the centrality of migrant and diaspora communities as human development actors as well as front-line economic responders to COVID-19 globally. The issues are very different for the most vulnerable populations, and a critical point of concern is the growth in internal and cross-border displacement and the decline in State support of displaced populations around the world.



The full chapter is available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022-chapter-2>.



The WMR interactive platform can be accessed at <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/>.

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