

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Global  
Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

Bangkok, 6-8 November 2017

Item 2 of the provisional agenda\*

**Review of migration policies and programmes and  
their impact on facilitating safe, orderly and regular  
migration and on supporting all dimensions of  
sustainable development**

**Trends and drivers of international migration in Asia  
and the Pacific**

**Note by the secretariat**

*Summary*

This document is intended to assist discussions in the Asia-Pacific region in preparation for the negotiations of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

International migration takes a number of forms in the Asia-Pacific region: it primarily comprises low-skilled labour migration, but also includes high-skilled labour migration, forced migration, migration of students and marriage migration. Driven by economic, political, social and other forces, it affects men, women and children, and requires comprehensive policy responses to ensure that it is safe, orderly and regular.

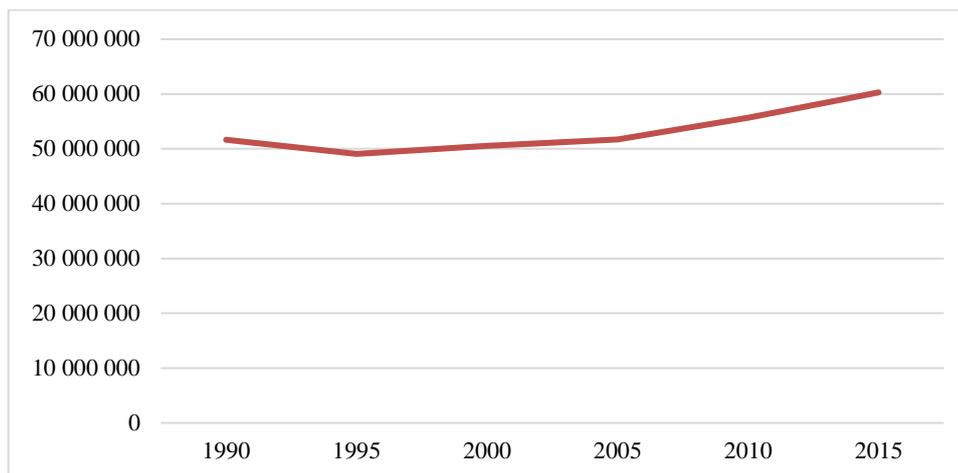
**I. Introduction**

1. International migration is one of the key factors shaping the Asia-Pacific region. The United Nations estimated that there were 59.3 million international migrants in the countries and areas of Asia and the Pacific in 2015 (figure I).<sup>1</sup>

\* E/ESCAP/GCM/PREP/L.1.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, "Trends in international migrant stock: migrants by destination and origin", International Migrant Stock 2015, updated December 2015. Available from [www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml).

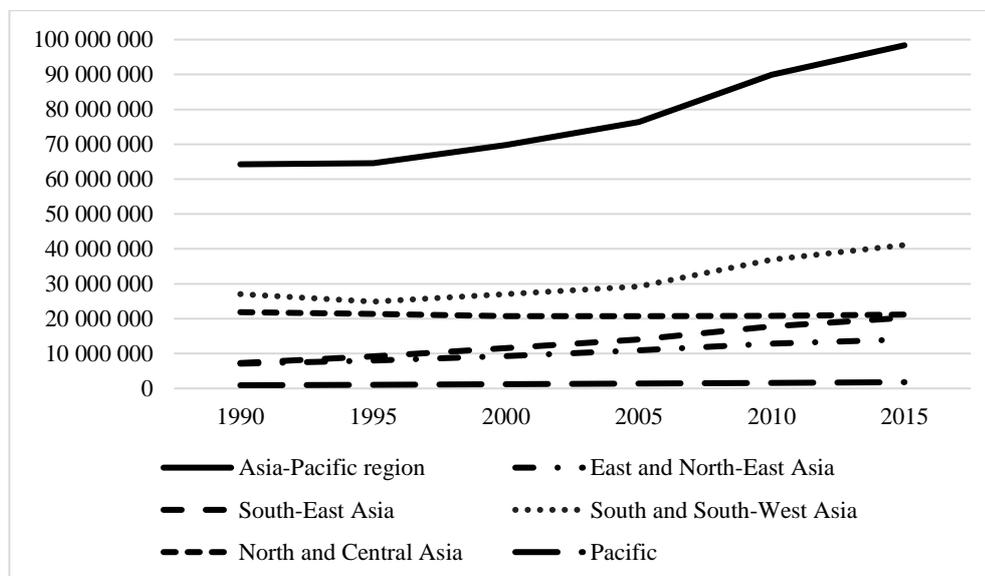
Figure I  
**Migrants in Asia-Pacific countries, 1990-2015**  
 (Number of migrants)



Source: United Nations, “Trends in international migrant stock: migrants by destination and origin”, International Migrant Stock 2015, updated December 2015. Available from [www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml).

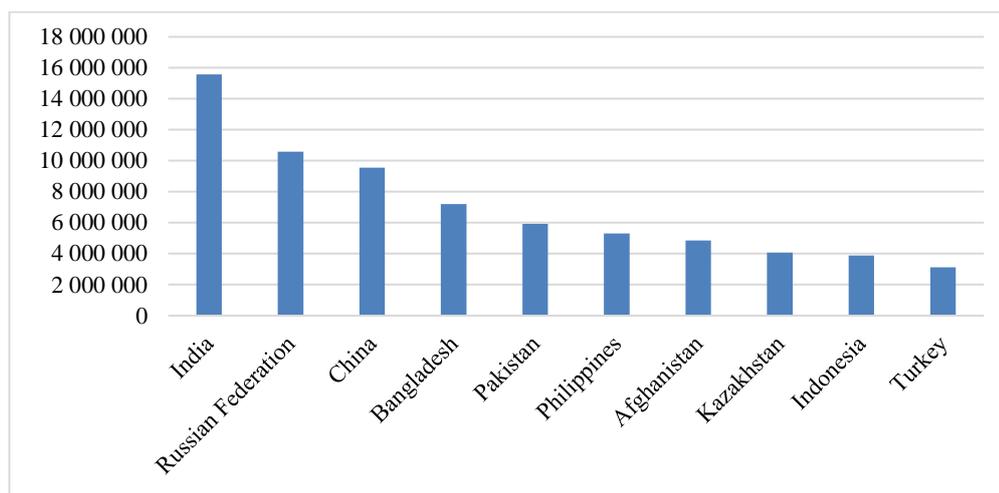
2. Meanwhile, over 98.4 million migrants worldwide originated from countries of the region (figures II and III).<sup>1</sup> Most migrants are South-South migrants, as they move to neighbouring countries or countries in the same subregion.

Figure II  
**Migrants from Asia-Pacific countries 1990-2015**  
 (Number of migrants)



Source: United Nations, “Trends in international migrant stock”.

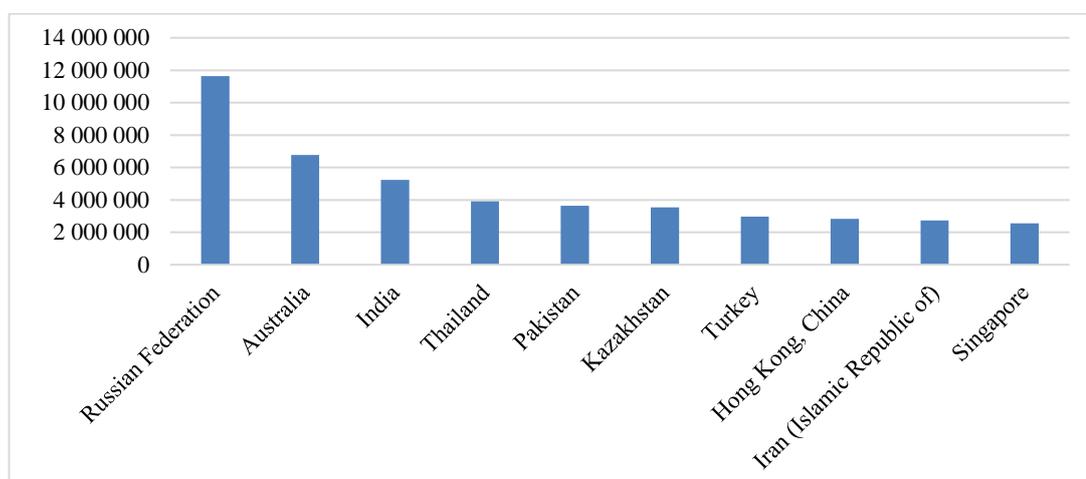
Figure III  
**Top 10 countries of origin in Asia and the Pacific, 2015**  
 (Number of migrants)



Source: United Nations, "Trends in international migrant stock".

3. Of the top 10 countries of destination (figure IV) in the region, it is only in Australia that most of the migrant stock comprises permanent residents. In Brunei Darussalam, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Singapore and Thailand, migrants are mostly low-skilled temporary labour migrants from neighbouring countries or countries in the same region. Lastly, the large migrant populations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and Turkey are largely composed of refugees.<sup>2</sup>

Figure IV  
**Top 10 countries of destination in Asia and the Pacific, 2015**  
 (Number of migrants)



Source: United Nations, "Trends in international migrant stock".

<sup>2</sup> In preparing estimates of the migrant stock, the United Nations considers those who were born in a country other than where they are residing ("foreign born") to be international migrants. As many of the 11 million migrants in the Russian Federation were born in countries that were part of the former republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, they would not have been considered internal migrants prior to the Union's dissolution in 1991. Similarly, the large numbers of migrants in India and Pakistan are also partially explained by the partition of the subcontinent at the time of their independence in 1947.

4. Temporary labour migration, regulated and processed by Governments, dominates migration in Asia and the Pacific. However, flows of irregular migration in many cases occur in parallel with regular migration. Some of the pathways of international migration in the region also carry refugees and asylum seekers. Many streams of migration are therefore considered to be mixed flows, involving regular migrants, irregular migrants, smuggled migrants, trafficked persons, refugees and asylum seekers. It is also important to note that migrants may meet the criteria of more than one of the mentioned categories or transition between them.

5. In addition, several other forms of migration are significant. These include migration for permanent settlement, seasonal employment, marriage and study. While the volume of these streams is smaller than for temporary labour migration, their social impacts may be considerable. Children may also be affected by international migration. Future challenges such as climate change may lead to new forms of migration, both as a positive adaptation strategy and in response to disasters (see E/ESCAP/GCM/PREP/5).

6. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the importance of ensuring orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in September 2016, the General Assembly convened a high-level plenary meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants, and adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants.<sup>4</sup> In this Declaration, it was indicated that States would launch a process of intergovernmental negotiations leading to the adoption of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration at an intergovernmental conference to be held in 2018.

7. In the present document, the different forms of migration in Asia and the Pacific are reviewed, and some of the economic, political, demographic, social and environmental drivers of international migration in the region are considered.

## **II. Temporary labour migration**

8. The predominant flows of international migration in Asia and the Pacific are made up of single workers undertaking temporary labour migration, generally in low-skill or low-status jobs, facilitated and regulated by Governments but carried out by private recruitment and employment agencies. Labour migration involves both men and women, with strong division of labour by gender. Several of the main sectors that employ migrant workers are heavily masculinized, such as construction. However, women make up a significant proportion of migrant workers, in particular in sectors such as services and health work. Women also make up the majority of workers in domestic work.

9. These migration flows are the largest in the region. More than 1.8 million departures from the Philippines to work abroad were counted annually in 2012, 2013 and 2014. In a typical year, more than half a million people leave Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal and Pakistan to work abroad, while Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam deploy well over 100,000 migrant workers per year.

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<sup>3</sup> General Assembly resolution 70/1.

<sup>4</sup> General Assembly resolution 71/1.

10. The main countries of origin vary greatly in terms of the proportion of women among migrant workers. Some major countries of origin in Asia place restrictions on the migration of women, limiting their presence among official flows.

11. Demand for workers in the Middle East drives much of the migration from South-East Asia and from South and South-West Asia. More than 95 per cent of migrant workers from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are found in West Asia (table 1), along with about two thirds of migrant workers from Bangladesh and the Philippines. Deployments to South and West Asia constitute 58 per cent of the total from Nepal and 48 per cent of that from Indonesia. Economic trends also affect demand for migrant workers. The number of migrants leaving Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Pakistan fell in 2009 and 2010, reflecting the economic slowdown in the oil-producing countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

12. The major countries of origin of temporary labour migration vary in the skill composition of the migrant workers. Some countries, such as Bangladesh and the Philippines, have notable proportions of skilled workers among their migrants abroad. Some 12 per cent of newly hired, land-based workers from the Philippines in 2013 were professional, technical or related workers, and another 54 per cent were clerical, sales and service workers (table 2), while one third of the workers from Bangladesh are considered to be skilled workers (table 3). Gender differentials are evident in the skill levels of male and female migrants. For example, among male migrants from Sri Lanka, 58 per cent are considered skilled, clerical or middle-level workers; however, 86 per cent of Sri Lankan female migrants are domestic workers, while another 7 per cent are considered unskilled (table 4). By contrast, nurses constitute the largest professional occupation among migrants from the Philippines, most of whom are female.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Scalabrini Migration Centre, *Country Migration Report: The Philippines 2013* (Makati City and Quezon City, 2013).

Table 1  
**Migrant workers deployed from selected countries by destination, latest year available**

<i>Country (latest year available)</i>	<i>Total number of migrant workers deployed</i>	<i>East and South-East Asia</i>	<i>Percentage of total</i>	<i>West Asia<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Percentage of total</i>	<i>Other areas</i>	<i>Percentage of total</i>
Bangladesh (2008)	875 109	163 344	19	571 737	65	140 028	16
India (2012)	747 041	21 261	3	725 288	97	492	<0.5
Indonesia (2007)	696 746	350 255	50	335 935	48	10 556	2
Nepal (2009/10)	298 094	114 083	38	172 407	58	11 604	4
Pakistan (2009)	403 528	3 913	1	389 809	97	9 806	2
Philippines (2013) <sup>b</sup>	1 225 410	379 585	31	826 269	67	19 556	2
Sri Lanka (2012)	281 906	9 883	4	267 811	95	4 212	1
Thailand (2013)	130 511	80 314	62	25 715	20	24 482	19
Viet Nam (2010)	85 546	53 781	63	10 888	13	20 877	24

*Sources:* Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Labour Migration Outflow database (available from <http://sitreport.unescapsdd.org/labour-migration-outflow>; accessed 30 August 2017); and Philippine Overseas Employment Administration data (available from [www.poea.gov.ph/ofwstat/compendium/2013.pdf](http://www.poea.gov.ph/ofwstat/compendium/2013.pdf); accessed 30 August 2017).

<sup>a</sup> West Asia includes countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf as well as Jordan, Lebanon and Libya.

<sup>b</sup> Top 10 destinations only.

Table 2  
**Newly hired, land-based migrant workers from the Philippines, by major occupational group, 2013**

<i>Occupational group</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>464 888</b>	<b>100</b>
Professional, technical and related workers	53 840	12
Administrative and managerial workers	1 947	<0.5
Clerical workers	12 893	3
Sales workers	9 220	2
Service workers	230 030	49
Agricultural workers	2 233	<0.5
Production workers	147 776	32
Others	6 949	1

*Source:* Philippine Overseas Employment Administration data.

Table 3  
**Migrant workers from Bangladesh, by skill level, 2013**

<i>Skill level</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>409 253</b>	<b>100</b>
Professional	689	<0.5
Skilled	133 754	33
Semi-skilled	62 528	15
Unskilled	212 282	52

*Source:* ESCAP, Labour Migration Outflow database.

Table 4  
**Migrant workers from Sri Lanka, by skill level and sex, 2012**

<i>Skill level</i>	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>143 784</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>138 547</b>	<b>100</b>
Professional	4 018	3	427	<0.5
Middle-level	8 724	6	554	<0.5
Clerical	14 976	10	1 190	1
Skilled	59 781	42	7 297	5
Semi-skilled	3 008	2	457	<0.5
Unskilled	53 277	37	9 570	7
Domestic work	..	..	119 052	86

*Source:* ESCAP, Labour Migration Outflow database.

13. The countries of North and Central Asia constitute a particular labour migration system. The Russian Federation, as the most economically advanced country in the subregion and with a declining working-age population, attracts large numbers of migrants from other countries where wages are lower. Kazakhstan is an increasingly important destination for migrant workers in the subregion, owing to a growing economy bolstered by petroleum and natural gas reserves.

14. This movement is facilitated by visa-free travel regimes between the Russian Federation and most other countries of the subregion, numerous transport links and a common Russian language ability. Following their accession to the Eurasian Economic Union, citizens of Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are furthermore not required to have a work permit to be employed in the Russian Federation. Citizens of countries not requiring a travel visa may apply directly to the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation for a “patent” allowing them to work for individuals or legal entities.

15. In 2014, the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation issued documents permitting employment to 3.7 million people, including 1.3 million work permits and 2.4 million patents. It is estimated that about 30 per cent of recipients are women.<sup>6</sup>

### **High-skilled migration**

16. The number of highly skilled migrants is substantial in some migration flows. In 2010-2011, there were 25 million migrants from Asia in the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Among those migrants, 44.7 per cent were educated to tertiary level. Two million highly educated migrants moved from Asia to OECD countries during the five years prior to 2010-2011, more than from any other region of the world. Migrants from India and China comprise the largest shares of highly educated Asian migrants in OECD countries.<sup>7</sup>

17. The migratory paths of highly skilled migrants are distinct from low-skilled migrants in terms of destinations, processes and living and working conditions. While Governments usually play a much smaller part in the migration of professional and highly skilled workers than in that of low-skilled workers, several Governments in countries of origin take steps to promote more skilled migration. For example, the Overseas Employment Corporation in Pakistan promotes the overseas employment of professionals and highly skilled workers. The Overseas Indian Affairs Division of the Ministry of External Affairs of India conducts skills assessments of the labour markets in several European countries in order to identify areas in which India has a competitive advantage. Viet Nam also encourages the migration of skilled workers, sending engineers and skilled construction workers to the Middle East, Japan and the Republic of Korea.<sup>8</sup>

18. Because of the contribution that highly skilled migrants can make to economies, many countries, in particular high-income countries, have developed policies to attract and retain such migrants. Governments of the region use student mobility programmes and points systems to select, attract and facilitate the settlement of highly skilled migrants.

19. Such professional migration is often characterized by two-way flows of migrants, with migrants maintaining frequent personal and professional contacts with their home countries, running seminars or engaging in collaborative research while abroad. This suggests that a diaspora of academics, scientists, researchers and other highly skilled migrants can have a brain-gain effect even if those professionals remain abroad.

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<sup>6</sup> Sergey V. Ryazantsev, "The role of labour migration in the development of the economy of the Russian Federation", *Facilitating Migration Management in North and Central Asia*, Working Paper No. 1 (Bangkok, ESCAP, 2016). Available from [www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/1%20Role%20of%20Labour%20Eng%20report%20v3-2-E.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/1%20Role%20of%20Labour%20Eng%20report%20v3-2-E.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Asian Development Bank Institute, International Labour Organization (ILO) and OECD, *Building Human Capital through Labor Migration in Asia* (Tokyo, Bangkok and Paris, 2015), pp. 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> Asian Development Bank Institute, *Labor Migration, Skills and Student Mobility in Asia* (Tokyo, 2014).

### III. Drivers of migration

20. Drivers of migration can be divided into factors that drive the desire to migrate and factors that actually lead to the inception of migration. In many cases, migration is driven by the sheer need, such as humanitarian crises and threatened livelihoods, but also by financial needs. However, people can migrate only when there are opportunities to migrate, such as job opportunities, and ways to migrate, whether through regular and official, informal or illegal channels, such as through migrant smugglers.

#### A. Economic, demographic and political drivers

21. There have been many discussions in literature on the extent to which poverty is a driver of migration. It is often not the poorest of the poor who migrate, because migration requires significant resources. However, the reality in the Asia-Pacific region, where migrants often accept precarious working conditions in the destination country, shows that the expectation of gaining relatively higher wages drives the desire to migrate. Studies also show that migration of a family member lifted many households out of poverty, which does imply that households had lived in relative poverty before.

22. Indeed, migration in Asia and the Pacific is primarily from economies with low per capita income to richer countries with economies offering the opportunity to earn higher wages. Several studies highlight that households benefit economically from migration through remittances, which then contribute to better health and education outcomes.<sup>9</sup> Thus, migration is sometimes considered a livelihood strategy.

23. Demographic factors also drive migration flows in Asia and the Pacific, especially in countries with a sizeable proportion of young people lacking decent work opportunities. Most migrants are of a younger working age, so economies in which that segment of the population is contracting attract migrants, whereas countries in which the number of young workers is growing rapidly experience net out-migration. Thus, migration can be a way to help reduce youth unemployment.

24. Many people are forced to move because of conflict, political persecution, human rights violations or statelessness, which force them to seek refuge abroad. Even in those cases, income status and opportunity determine to where people migrate. In case of conflict, people often migrate to neighbouring countries first, while other factors determine their ability to move to other countries.

#### B. Environmental drivers

25. As the natural environment becomes more stressed, some environmental changes – for example, sea-level rise, deforestation and land degradation – are likely to prompt increased cross-border migration. There is particularly acute concern for the potential impact of environmental change in the Pacific, as sea-level rise can inundate small islands and low-lying atolls,

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Ducanes, “The welfare impact of overseas migration on Philippine households: analysis using panel data”, *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, vol. 24, No. 1 (March 2015), pp. 79-106; and Md. Nurul Islam, “Migration from Bangladesh and overseas employment policy” (Dhaka, Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, n.d.) (available from [www.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/resources/Static%20PDF%20and%20DOC/publication/Migration-BOEP.pdf](http://www.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/resources/Static%20PDF%20and%20DOC/publication/Migration-BOEP.pdf)).

potentially affecting entire populations. The impacts of more frequent droughts and tropical cyclones of greater magnitude are likely to be felt sooner than those attributable to rising sea level.

26. Voluntary migration has the potential to be a climate change adaptation strategy. It can reduce population pressure in areas under environmental stress, provide a means of diversifying income for families vulnerable to climate change and offset the risk that would be associated with environmental displacement. For example, Kiribati is threatened by expected rises in the sea level. The Government has developed a number of concepts to reduce the country's vulnerability to climate change, including migration with dignity, which aims to forge expatriate communities in such countries as Australia and New Zealand, and to improve the level of educational and vocational skills of its nationals so that they will have opportunities for migration.<sup>10</sup>

### **C. Factors facilitating migration**

27. Migrants will be able to migrate only when there are actual opportunities to do so. It is often stated that large-scale temporary labour migration from the Philippines, and later from other countries, was driven by the rise in oil prices in the 1970s and large demand for labour from the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf. Labour shortages in countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, but also emerging labour shortages in other Asian countries, also created opportunities for – often temporary – labour migration.

28. The mechanisms established by Governments to organize, facilitate and regulate the migration of (temporary) workers, including bilateral memorandums of understanding and regional and international agreements, constitute another factor creating opportunities to migrate. These mechanisms shape the size, direction and composition of migrant flows by determining the criteria as to who can migrate and under what conditions.

29. In the Asia-Pacific region, recruitment is mainly handled by private recruitment agencies, which earn money from fees charged to employers and migrants (although the latter is prohibited under ILO Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181)). Recruitment has become a multibillion-dollar industry in the region. Thus, recruitment agents have incentives to convince workers to migrate abroad and have become very proactive in this regard, actively promoting a culture of migration. Migrants, in turn, often would not be able to migrate without the availability of private recruitment agents, who assist them in handling the often complex administrative procedures required to migrate. They may also provide other services which further facilitate the migration process, legally or otherwise, such as loaning the money required to pay upfront fees or helping migrants to travel.

30. Social networks also play an important role in facilitating migration. Early migrants can encourage their acquaintances at their places of origin to migrate, and provide them with information and assistance to do so, directing them towards specific countries and places of destination. This is referred to as chain migration, and it lowers the costs and risks of international migration and increases the expected returns. Chain migration can lead eventually to large-scale migration and to the establishment of transnational communities with strong ties to both the country of origin and the country of destination.

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<sup>10</sup> Karen E. McNamara, "Cross-border migration with dignity in Kiribati", *Forced Migration Review*, No. 49 (May 2015), p. 62.

31. Information sent from the destination to the area of origin may encourage other migrants in chain migration. Information may be sent by previous migrants or by recruitment agents and brokers at the destination who encourage the friends and relatives of current migrants to come to the same destination. Thus, recruitment agents and social networks at the destination may also overlap. The ability to speak a common language between the country of origin and country of destination can also promote social networks and international migration, such as that between several origin countries and the Russian Federation.

32. Availability of job opportunities in countries with geographic and cultural proximity or even common language can further facilitate migration. Although economic factors drive migration, migrants typically do not move to the countries with the highest wages, but prefer places with relative proximity and where networks already exist.

## IV. Complexities of migration flows

### A. Irregular migration

33. Data on irregular migration are inherently limited. However, it is clear that a considerable proportion of the international migration within and from the Asia-Pacific region is irregular. Country-level data give an indication of the scale of this migration. For example, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that there are approximately 30,000 irregular migrants in Maldives, constituting more than one third of all migrant workers. Estimates of the number of irregular migrants in Malaysia range from 600,000 to 1.9 million.<sup>11</sup> The number of irregular migrants in Thailand fluctuates because of periodic changes in policies and regularization programmes; in 2013, almost 900,000 migrants from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar regularized their status.<sup>12</sup>

34. The number of Afghan citizens in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan is likely to be significantly higher than the number of those who are officially registered with either the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or Governments, as some refugees do not seek registration.<sup>13</sup>

35. According to estimations, there were 3 million to 4 million migrants working without authorization in the Russian Federation, increasing to 5 million to 7 million during spring and summer when there are more seasonal migrants.<sup>14</sup> This number is likely to have been reduced because of easier access

<sup>11</sup> UNODC, *Migrant Smuggling in Asia: A Thematic Review of Literature* (Bangkok, 2012). Available from [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/publications-by-date.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/publications-by-date.html).

<sup>12</sup> Jerrold W. Huguet, ed., *Thailand Migration Report 2014* (Bangkok, United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Saher Baloch, "Not every Afghan living in Pakistan is a refugee, says UNHCR", *Dawn*, 30 December 2014. Available from [www.dawn.com/news/1153911](http://www.dawn.com/news/1153911).

<sup>14</sup> Vladimir Iontsev and Irina Ivakhnyuk, "Role of international labour migration in Russian economic development", CARIM-East Research Report 2012/04, (Fiesole, European University Institute, 2012), p. 23. Available from [www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/publications](http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/publications).

to regular migration channels in the Russian Federation. In Kazakhstan, large numbers of labour migrants are working in an irregular status.<sup>15</sup>

36. The Commission on Filipinos Overseas estimated that of the almost 10.5 million Filipinos who were overseas in December 2012, over 1.3 million were in an irregular situation.<sup>16</sup> There are approximately 150,000 irregular migrants from Viet Nam in Europe, including 50,000 in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and some 10,000 in the Republic of Korea.<sup>11</sup>

37. Women often face more restrictions on their migration than men, resulting in them using irregular migration channels. For example, some countries of origin in the region impose restrictions on female migration, such as setting minimum ages for female migrants, to protect them from abuse; however, this often results in irregular migration, as women still wish to access the opportunities afforded by migration (see also discussion on women migrants below). Meanwhile, the gendered segmentation of work in countries of destination often downplays the importance of women's work, so many so-called "feminine" roles, such as domestic work, are not considered formal sectors of the labour market, reducing opportunities for women to use legal channels to migrate.

## **B. Mixed flows**

38. In several cases across the region, large numbers of migrants cross borders in an irregular fashion, often aided by smugglers. Within these flows, there may well be different categories of migrants, including victims of human trafficking, asylum seekers, refugees, unaccompanied migrant children and labour migrants. For that reason, those movements are referred to as mixed migration. Status identification of regular migrants, smuggled migrants, victims of trafficking and refugees is challenging in these circumstances (see E/ESCAP/GCM/PREP/4).

39. IOM offers assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes to aid migrants – many of whom are in an irregular situation, including victims of trafficking – to return home and reintegrate in a humane and dignified manner. In 2012, IOM assisted 92,905 such migrants to return, to countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Russian Federation and Sri Lanka.<sup>17</sup>

## **C. Smuggling of migrants**

40. The smuggling of migrants is a subset of irregular migration. Many migrants who wish to migrate irregularly rely on the assistance of others, who may include friends or relatives, small-scale brokers or groups associated with transnational organized crime.

41. UNODC attempted to estimate the number of persons smuggled through key streams in East and South-East Asia and the total amount of money earned from such smuggling. UNODC estimates that just over half a million

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<sup>15</sup> Kazakhstan, Human Rights Commission under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, *Special Report: Migrants' Rights in the Republic of Kazakhstan* (Astana, 2013). Available from [www.iom.kz/en/publications](http://www.iom.kz/en/publications).

<sup>16</sup> Philippines, Commission on Filipinos Overseas, "Stock estimate of overseas Filipinos: as of December 2012" (Manila, 2012). Available from [www.cfo.gov.ph/images/statistics/stock\\_estimate/StockEstimate2012.pdf](http://www.cfo.gov.ph/images/statistics/stock_estimate/StockEstimate2012.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> IOM, *Counter Trafficking and Assistance to Vulnerable Migrants: Annual Report of Activities 2011* (Geneva, 2012), p. 10.

migrants are smuggled into Thailand each year, mostly from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar, generating \$192 million annually for smugglers.<sup>18</sup> Malaysia is also a popular destination for migrants smuggled from Indonesia and from countries in the Mekong River subregion.<sup>19</sup>

42. Approximately 12,000 irregular migrants from China are smuggled into the United States of America annually, paying an average of \$50,000 each and generating up to \$600 million for the smugglers.<sup>18</sup> UNODC also estimates that approximately 36,000 Chinese migrants are smuggled into the European Union annually, paying an average of \$17,000 each and generating over \$600 million in smuggling fees. Migrants are also smuggled from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to China and the Republic of Korea. Japan, the Republic of Korea and Hong Kong, China, are the main destinations for migrants smuggled within East Asia.<sup>19</sup>

43. Smuggling networks from Viet Nam are also active, smuggling approximately 18,000 persons a year to Europe but fewer than 1,000 a year to the United States. If it is assumed that Vietnamese migrants pay the same level of fees as those from China along these routes, they generate approximately \$300 million for smugglers taking them to Europe and perhaps \$50 million for smugglers taking them to the United States.<sup>18</sup>

44. Within South and South-West Asia, Afghanistan is a major source country for smuggled migrants. Most irregular migrants go to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, but some also move to the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Europe, Australia, China and India. Many irregular migrants from Pakistan move to the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Europe and, until recently, Australia, with most of those in the latter streams aided by smugglers. Irregular migration from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, mostly facilitated by smugglers, to Europe, Gulf States, Northern America, the Pacific and South-East Asia is also significant. Within the subregion, most irregular migration is to India.<sup>19</sup>

45. Given the history of open borders in North and Central Asia, smuggling of migrants to the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan from countries of the subregion is limited. However, the subregion serves as a transit point for the smuggling of migrants from South and South-West Asia and South-East Asia to Europe.<sup>20</sup>

#### **D. Trafficking in persons**

46. Trafficking is distinct from smuggling of migrants as it involves the exploitation of migrants. The *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* reported that trafficking trends varied widely across the region, with most victims from South Asia having been trafficked for forced labour, whereas victims from East Asia and the Pacific were primarily trafficked for sexual exploitation.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in East Asia and the Pacific: A Threat Assessment* (Bangkok, 2013). Available from [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/publications.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/publications.html).

<sup>19</sup> UNODC, *Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trends and Related Challenges* (Bangkok, 2015). Available from [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/publications.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/publications.html).

<sup>20</sup> IOM, *Baseline Research on Smuggling of Migrants in, from and through Central Asia* (Vienna, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2016* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.16.IV.6).

It is further estimated that approximately 1.6 million people in North and Central Asia are trafficked for forced labour every year. Three quarters of those are women, and most are trafficked for sexual exploitation.<sup>22</sup>

47. Victims of trafficking are forced to work in a number of sectors. In a study of women and men who were receiving post-trafficking assistance services in Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam, respondents reported having been trafficked into 15 different labour sectors. The three main forms of forced work, accounting for two thirds (67.2 per cent) of respondents, were sex work (29.9 per cent), fishing (25 per cent) and factory work (12.3 per cent); among respondents under the age of 18, over half had been trafficked for sexual exploitation. Respondents also highlighted the violence that accompanies trafficking, with nearly half of adult men (49.3 per cent) and most adult women (60 per cent) reporting sexual and/or physical violence at the destination. These findings highlight the fact that trafficking represents a violation of the human rights of migrants.<sup>23</sup>

48. IOM reported that it assisted a total of 6,290 victims of trafficking in 2014, 3,000 of whom were women and more than 1,000 of whom were children. Most victims of trafficking were exploited for labour (70 per cent), while 17 per cent were victims of sexual exploitation. Since 1997, it has assisted over 75,000 victims of trafficking.<sup>24</sup>

49. These broad global statistics highlight the fact that only a small fraction of the number of persons estimated to be victims of trafficking are officially identified as such.

## E. Refugees

50. In 2016, the Asia-Pacific region hosted over 6.5 million refugees and persons in refugee-like situations, almost 40 per cent of the 17.2 million refugees in the world. Three countries host almost three quarters of the refugees in the Asia-Pacific region, namely Turkey (approximately 2.9 million), Pakistan (approximately 1.4 million) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (nearly 1 million). Turkey and Pakistan are currently hosting the largest number of refugees in the world, with the Islamic Republic of Iran ranking fourth.<sup>25</sup>

51. Most refugees hosted in the Asia-Pacific region originated from Afghanistan (approximately 2.3 million) and the Syrian Arab Republic (approximately 2.8 million). In 2016, in terms of number of refugees, Afghanistan was the second largest source country in the world, with more than 2.5 million Afghans living as refugees abroad. Although there are return programmes from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, Afghans continue to leave their country, and the situation of Afghan refugees remains one of the

<sup>22</sup> Sergey Ryazantsev, *Trafficking in Human Beings for Labour Exploitation and Irregular Labour Migration in the Russian Federation: Forms, Trends and Countermeasures* (Moscow, The Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Cathy Zimmerman and others, *Health and Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Findings from a Survey of Men, Women and Children in Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam* (Geneva, IOM; London, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> IOM, "Report of the Director General on the work of the Organization for the year 2014", document C/106/3. Available from <https://governingbodies.iom.int/system/files/en/council/106/C106-3-DGReportfor2014.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016* (Geneva, 2017). Available from [www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34](http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34).

most protracted in the world. Turkey has become a large-scale recipient of refugees since 2012 only, with the arrival of large numbers of refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic.

## V. Specific types of migration

### A. Permanent settlement

52. Three countries in the region have policies to accept significant numbers of migrants for permanent settlement: Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. Brief descriptions of those policies follow.

#### 1. Australia

53. Australia implements three main programmes to allow the permanent settlement of migrants: the migration programme, the humanitarian programme and the business innovation and investment programme. In addition, the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement allows New Zealand citizens to live and work in Australia.

54. The migration programme admitted 189,770 migrants for permanent settlement in Australia during the fiscal year 2015/16. Among those, more than two thirds, or 128,550, were admitted through the “skill stream” for skilled migrants, 57,400 came through the “family stream” for non-Australian family members of citizens and permanent residents, and 308 entered under “special eligibility”. In 2015/16, the greatest number of immigration visas were given to persons from India (40,145), China (29,008) and the United Kingdom (18,951).<sup>26</sup>

55. The largest number of new migrants comes from New Zealand, however. In 2012/13, 52,012 people entered Australia under the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement for free movement.<sup>27</sup>

56. The business innovation and investment programme was introduced in July 2012 and provides for a significant-investor visa for persons willing to invest at least 5 million Australian dollars in the country. The humanitarian programme issued 17,555 visas in 2015/16, with almost half being issued to persons from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.<sup>28</sup>

#### 2. New Zealand

57. Through the Immigration Amendment Act of 1991, a medium-term human capital model of skilled migration was adopted and a points system for admission established. Points are awarded for, inter alia, educational qualifications, employment experience, English language ability and age.

<sup>26</sup> Australia, Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *2015-16 Migration Programme Report* (Canberra, 2016). Available from [www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/2015-16-migration-programme-report.pdf](http://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/2015-16-migration-programme-report.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Australia, Department of Immigration and Border Protection, “Fact sheet – New Zealanders in Australia”. Available from [www.border.gov.au/about/corporate/information/fact-sheets/17nz](http://www.border.gov.au/about/corporate/information/fact-sheets/17nz) (accessed 30 August 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Australia, Department of Immigration and Border Protection, “Fact sheet – Australia’s refugee and humanitarian programme”. Available from [www.border.gov.au/about/corporate/information/fact-sheets/60refugee#d](http://www.border.gov.au/about/corporate/information/fact-sheets/60refugee#d) (accessed 30 August 2017).

58. New Zealand currently employs a three-year target for admissions. The target for the period from 2011/12 to 2013/14 was between 135,000 and 150,000 admissions of skilled migrants. Because points are awarded for current employment or a job offer, with bonus points for having studied in New Zealand, most applicants are already residing in the country, having entered as students or temporary workers.<sup>29</sup> New Zealand also issues smaller numbers of long-term business visas and entrepreneur and investor visas.

### 3. Singapore

59. Highly skilled migrants in Singapore fall into four tiers of workers with employment passes. After those with employment passes have worked in Singapore for two years, they may apply to become permanent residents. Those who have been permanent residents for two to six years and meet other requirements may apply for citizenship (table 5). Since 2007, employment pass holders who have worked in Singapore for two to five years and earn an annual salary of at least \$27,000 benefit from the Personalized Employment Pass. Overseas professionals who want to migrate to Singapore may also apply for the new pass if their most recent monthly salary was at least \$6,100.

Table 5  
**Population of Singapore by residence status, 2010**

<i>Residence status</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Citizens	3 230 719	66.5
Permanent residents	541 002	11.1
Foreign workers	1 088 600	22.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 860 321</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source:* Brenda Yeoh and Weiqiang Lin, “Rapid growth in Singapore’s immigrant population brings policy challenges”, 3 April 2012. Available from [www.migrationpolicy.org/print/4265](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/print/4265).

### B. Seasonal employment programmes

60. Australia and New Zealand implement seasonal migrant worker programmes. They were formed with an explicit intention of promoting development in the areas of origin and have been studied to assess their development impact.

61. New Zealand launched the Recognized Seasonal Employer programme in 2007 to fill labour shortages in the horticulture and viticulture industries. Given the special nature of the Pacific – including isolation, high transport costs and small population size, which limit local options for development – as well as the need to build resilience to adapt to climate change, priority is given to migrants from the Pacific island countries, with people from Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu having participated. Some workers are also taken from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, based on existing contacts.

<sup>29</sup> OECD, *Recruiting Immigrant Workers: New Zealand 2014* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2014).

62. In the areas of origin, ministries of labour and district and community leaders are involved in the selection of potential migrants, although in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands private recruitment agencies select migrants. Migrants are usually restricted to a specific location, type of work and employer, and must return home at the end of the contract. Employers must pay half of the travel costs, pay market wages, guarantee payment for at least 240 hours of work, ensure that hours of work equal at least 30 per week and provide health care and accommodation.

63. The programme began with an initial annual cap of 5,000 workers, but this was raised to 9,000 by 2015. During the first six years of the programme, 39,079 visas were issued, with 78.7 per cent of those going to migrants from the Pacific.<sup>30</sup>

64. Australia launched the Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme in August 2008. It allows Australian employers in the horticulture industry to employ workers from eight Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste. As for the New Zealand programme, the scheme is intended to benefit employers, the migrant workers themselves and the countries of origin. The scheme has subsequently been replaced by the broader Seasonal Workers' Programme.

### **C. Marriage migration**

65. The incidence of international marriage in Asia is significant, especially in East Asia and South-East Asia (table 6).

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<sup>30</sup> John Gibson and David McKenzie, "Development through seasonal worker programs: the case of New Zealand's RSE program", Policy Research Working Paper, No. 6762 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2014). Available from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/18356/WPS6762.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

Table 6  
**International marriages, selected countries**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Approximate year</i>	<i>All international marriages (percentage of all marriages)</i>
Singapore <sup>a</sup>	2008	39
Republic of Korea	2005	14
	2010	11
Japan	2005	5
	2010	5
Philippines <sup>b</sup>	2009	4
Viet Nam <sup>c</sup>	2005	3
Indonesia <sup>c</sup>	2005	1
China <sup>c</sup>	2005	0.7

*Source:* Gavin W. Jones, “International marriage in Asia: what do we know, and what do we need to know?”, Asia Research Institute Working Paper, No. 174 (Singapore, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 2012). Available from [www.ari.nus.edu.sg/wps/wps12\\_174.pdf](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/wps/wps12_174.pdf).

<sup>a</sup> Marriages of citizens to non-citizens, including permanent residents of Singapore.

<sup>b</sup> The values for the Philippines have been increased by 30 per cent to take account of marriages of Filipinos overseas that are not registered with the Commission on Filipinos Overseas.

<sup>c</sup> Very rough estimate.

66. While the patterns that gained the most academic and policy attention involve women from South-East Asia marrying men from East Asia, other, more traditional, patterns remain intact. India and Nepal maintain an open border between their countries, and marriage across the border is common. In the 2001 Nepal population census, 66 per cent of the female foreign-born population reported that they had migrated for marriage, whereas no foreign-born men reported such a motivation for migration.<sup>31</sup>

67. The recent increases in the pattern of international marriage between wives from South-East Asia and husbands from East Asia can be attributed to the larger number of males than females of marriageable age in some South-East Asian countries, and the increased education, urbanization and employment of women in East Asian countries, which make them less likely to want to marry men residing in rural areas.

68. Marriage migration can bring major challenges for spouses. Acculturation and adaptation can be difficult for foreign wives in the country of destination, particularly for spouses who do not share a common language and who did not know each other before marriage. Power imbalances between husbands and wives may be encoded in laws and commercialized processes around marriage migration, disempowering women and leaving them vulnerable to domestic violence. Where there are several foreign wives in an area, however, they tend to form social networks that allow them to assist each

<sup>31</sup> Bal Kumar, “Nepal”, *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, vol. 17, No. 3-4 (September 2008), pp. 287-309. Available from <http://journals.sagepub.com/toc/amja/17/3-4>.

other and to create transnational communities. Some husbands and wives set up businesses involving trade between their two countries.

#### **D. International students**

69. International migration to study abroad from and within the Asia-Pacific region is increasing. With the knowledge that international students gain abroad, they have the potential to make much greater contributions in the future to their own country and/or the one in which they studied. The number of tertiary students from Asia and the Pacific studying abroad almost tripled from 701,000 in 2000 to over 2 million in 2016.

70. While there were more than 800,000 international students from China in 2016, 255,000 from India and 108,000 from the Republic of Korea, the highest outbound mobility ratios have occurred in smaller countries. More than 30 per cent of tertiary students from Brunei Darussalam were studying abroad in 2015, and almost 20 per cent of students from Azerbaijan.

71. Countries in the region also host large numbers of international students. The number of international tertiary students studying in the region almost quadrupled from nearly 268,000 in 2000 to more than 1 million in 2015. Australia and the Russian Federation together host more than half a million of these students, while China hosts more than 120,000. International students comprise 19.2 per cent of the tertiary students in Singapore, 18.3 per cent of those in Australia and 21.1 per cent of those in New Zealand, according to the latest figures.<sup>32</sup> International students may also come at lower levels of education. For example, most international students in New Zealand attend private training establishments, most of which are English language schools.<sup>33</sup>

72. Most of these students stay within the Asia-Pacific region. The top ten countries or areas of origin of international tertiary students in Australia were in Asia, alone accounting for more than 10 per cent of the total number of internationally mobile students from the region. Furthermore, 85,000 of the more than 800,000 internationally mobile students from China are found in Japan, and the Russian Federation hosts approximately 150,000 students from Asian countries.<sup>32</sup>

73. These international tertiary students in the region are not only a symbol of rapid advances in understanding between countries but a portent for strengthened future cooperation between them. Because of the languages learned and the contacts established, international students are likely to promote long-term cooperation between countries.

#### **E. Women and migration**

74. The migration patterns of women often differ from those of men, resulting in different migration experiences and outcomes. Understanding of the gender dimensions of international migration is often hampered by the lack of data disaggregated by sex. Even when the percentage of women among all migrants is known, tabulations of migrants by country of destination or by occupation may not present the information by sex. When a significant share of migration is undocumented, the perception of migration patterns gained

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Global Flow of Tertiary-level Students database, UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Available from <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow> (accessed 1 August 2017).

<sup>33</sup> OECD, *Recruiting Immigrant Workers: New Zealand 2014* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2014).

from official data might be distorted. This is especially relevant where restrictions on female migration lead them to resort disproportionately to irregular migration channels.

75. The proportion of women among all international migrants in the Asia-Pacific region is 49.4 per cent, but there are often significant differences between countries. Women constitute about half of all migrants in Australia and New Zealand, where most migrants are permanent settlers. Women also comprise high percentages of migrants in countries such as Hong Kong, China (61 per cent), and Singapore (56 per cent).<sup>34</sup>

76. Gender differences are much greater with regard to temporary migrant workers. In many countries, women make up low proportions of workers migrating through official channels. The proportion of women formally deployed from Bangladesh in 2016 was almost 25 per cent, although this represented a rapid increase from only 4 per cent in 2007.<sup>35</sup>

77. Because of the demand in destination countries – such as Hong Kong, China; Singapore; and the countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf – very high proportions of women migrants are employed as domestic workers (over 80 per cent of those from Sri Lanka, for example).<sup>36</sup> Even when poorly paid, domestic workers may have a significant impact on their families' welfare through remittances. Research consistently shows that women tend to remit on a more regular basis and a higher proportion of their earnings than men. It has been estimated that women migrants are providing support to about 20 per cent of the population of Sri Lanka.<sup>37</sup>

78. Despite the gains achieved by low-skilled women migrants, they are particularly vulnerable because of their status as women, often coming from poor families and with low levels of education and skills, and, for domestic workers, because they are employed in isolated workplaces in a sector not usually covered by labour regulations in countries of destination. In recognition of the specific vulnerabilities of domestic workers, ILO adopted the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), which calls for domestic workers to be covered by international labour standards and receive fair wages and other benefits.

79. This focus on the protection of low-skilled female workers should not obscure the fact that highly skilled women are also involved in migration. Data from OECD countries in 2010/11 suggest that of around 16 million women born in the Asia-Pacific region and living in OECD countries, over 6 million (38 per cent) had a tertiary degree or higher, a similar proportion to male migrants in OECD countries.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *International Migration 2015* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.16.XIII.12).

<sup>35</sup> Bangladesh, Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, "Overseas employment of female Workers from 1991 to 2017 (up to July)". Available from [www.bmet.org.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction#](http://www.bmet.org.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction#).

<sup>36</sup> See [www.slbfe.lk/file.php?FID=254](http://www.slbfe.lk/file.php?FID=254).

<sup>37</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, *Contributions of migrant domestic workers to sustainable development* (Bangkok, 2013), p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> OECD, reference years 2010/11, database on immigrants in OECD and non-OECD countries. Available from [www.oecd.org/els/mig/dioc.htm%20](http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/dioc.htm%20) (accessed 1 August 2017).

## F. Child migrants

80. Child migrants may be grouped into three categories: (a) those who migrated with family members; (b) those born at the destination to migrant parents; and (c) those who migrated alone or with persons other than family members. Technically, children born to migrant parents at the destination are not international migrants, but the law and authorities in many countries treat them as such.

81. In most countries of destination in Asia and the Pacific, low-skilled migrants are not permitted to bring dependents with them. Thus, children who accompany or are born to low-skilled migrants are in an irregular status. Children may also migrate independently. The numbers of child migrants can be quite significant: for example, during a regularization exercise for migrants in Thailand in 2004, more than 93,000 people who registered were under the age of 15 years.<sup>39</sup>

82. An immediate impact of being in an irregular status is that the children may not be able to attend formal education. Even if the host country provides for universal education, as is the case in Thailand, family, economic and community barriers result in only a small fraction of migrant children enrolling in formal education. They may further be vulnerable to the worst forms of child labour, as well as detention as irregular migrants.

## VI. Conclusion

83. Given the dominance of temporary labour migration in the flows of international migration in Asia and the Pacific, it is appropriate that government policies and the interests of researchers have focused on that form of migration. However, outside these regular flows, large streams of labour migrants are often commingled with migrants who are smuggled or are victims of trafficking, or with refugees and asylum seekers. Other flows of migration are for permanent settlement, seasonal employment, marriage and study. Thus, international migration in the region is marked by complexity, requiring comprehensive policy responses to ensure that it is safe, orderly and regular.

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<sup>39</sup> Andy West, *Children on the Move in South-East Asia: Why Child Protection Systems are Needed* (London, Save the Children, 2008).