



# Global Patterns and Dynamics of International Migrant Workers

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## To Cite this Article

S. N. Tripathy (2025). Global Patterns and Dynamics of International Migrant Workers. *South Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, 1: 1, pp. 21-46.

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the scale, structure, and dynamics of international labour migration using recent global estimates, primarily drawing on the ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers (2019, 2021, 2024) and the World Migration Report 2024. It highlights the growing contribution of migrant workers to key sectors such as services, industry, healthcare, construction, agriculture, and care work; while underscoring the vulnerabilities they face in informal, temporary, and unprotected employment. The analysis reveals strong regional and income-level concentration, with Europe, the Americas, and the Arab States hosting a substantial share of migrant labour, and high- and upper-middle-income countries emerging as principal destinations. Gendered and age-specific patterns indicate the dominance of prime-age adults and a persistent male bias, alongside the rising participation of women in services. The paper argues for stronger labour protections, gender-sensitive policies, and coordinated global governance to ensure safe, fair, and orderly labour migration.

**Keywords:** International migration; migrant workers; labour markets; gender and migration

## Backdrop

International migrant workers constitute a vital component of the global labour force, responding to uneven development, demographic transitions, and labour shortages across regions. Predominantly moving from low- and middle-income countries to high-income economies, migrants are concentrated in sectors such as construction, healthcare, domestic work, agriculture, and services. While migration contributes significantly to economic growth, remittances, and skills transfer, migrant

workers often face precarious employment, wage discrimination, limited social protection, and legal vulnerabilities. Gendered and skill-based segmentation shapes migration outcomes, with women and low-skilled workers particularly exposed to exploitation. Contemporary dynamics are increasingly influenced by globalisation, conflicts, climate change, and evolving migration governance frameworks. While highlighting the significant contributions that migrants make to critical sectors like healthcare, transportation, services, agriculture, and food processing, and the risks faced by migrant workers in temporary, informal, or unprotected jobs, the paper, based on the ILO Report 2024, provides a detailed breakdown of international migrant workers by the income level of countries.

### Objectives

- To analyse regional, gender, age, and sectoral patterns of international migrant workers using recent ILO global estimates.
- To assess the implications of migrant labour concentration across country income groups for labour markets, social protection, and migration policy.

### Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach based entirely on secondary sources, including ILO Global Estimates, World Migration Reports, UN and World Bank datasets, and relevant academic literature, using comparative tables and trend analysis to interpret global migration patterns.

**Table 1: Distribution of International Migrant Workers by Region (in millions, 2022)**

<i>Region</i>	<i>Migrant Workers (Million)</i>
Europe and Central Asia	57.8
Americas	45.8
Asia and the Pacific	27.2
Arab States	22.6
Africa	14.3
Total	167.7

Source: International Labour Organisation (ILO), ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: International Migrants in the Labour Force (Fourth edition, December 2024).

One interesting trend to note is the high concentration of migrant workers in the Gulf region of the Arab States, where many workers are employed in low-paying

jobs such as construction and domestic work. This has led to concerns about the working conditions and treatment of migrant workers in this region. It's also worth noting that the number of international migrant workers has steadily increased in recent years. This trend is likely to continue as globalisation and economic development increase labour demand across the world. Thus, the table highlights the significant role international migrant workers play in the global economy and the need for policies and protections to ensure they are treated fairly and afforded the same rights as domestic workers.

**Table 2: The global estimates of international migrant workers in 2019 in millions, categorised by gender and total**

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Men(million)</i>	<i>Women (Million)</i>	<i>Total (Million)</i>
Total	97.2	68.6	165.8
Developed countries	62.8	39.9	102.7
Developing countries	34.4	28.7	63.1

Source: International Labour Organisation (ILO)

Table 1 reveals an estimated 233.6 million international migrant workers worldwide in 2019. Most of these workers were in the Americas, Asia, and Europe, with each region accounting for roughly one-quarter of the total. The Arab States and Africa accounted for minor but significant portions of the total migrant workers. One interesting trend to note is the high concentration of migrant workers in the Gulf region of the Arab States, where many workers are employed in low-paying jobs such as construction and domestic work. This has led to concerns about the working conditions and treatment of migrant workers in this region. It is also worth noting that the number of international migrant workers has steadily increased in recent years. This trend is likely to continue as globalisation and economic development increase labour demand across the world.

Thus, the table highlights the significant role international migrant workers play in the global economy and the need for policies and protections to ensure they are treated fairly and afforded the same rights as domestic workers.

Table 3 shows that in 2019, there were 272 million international migrant workers, accounting for 3.5% of the global population of 7.8 billion. Of these, 164 million were male, and 108 million were female, indicating a gender imbalance in migration patterns. Moreover, 221 million migrant workers were age 15 or older, representing 81% of the total migrant population. Notably, most of the global population (7.5

**Table 3: The global estimates of international migrant workers, 2019 (millions) presented as percentages**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number of People (Million)</i>	<i>Percentage of Total Population</i>
Total Population	7,794	100%
Migrant Population	272	3.5%
Non-Migrant Population	7,522	96.5%
Male Migrant Workers	164	1.9 %
Female Migrant Workers	108	1.4 %

*Note:* These estimates are from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and may not include irregular migrants.

billion) were non-migrants, with 5.9 billion non-migrant workers aged 15 or older. This suggests that while migration is a significant phenomenon, most people still live and work in their country of birth.

The number of international migrant workers in 2019 was estimated to be 272 million, representing 3.5% of the global population. This suggests that while migration is a significant phenomenon, most people still live and work in their country of birth. Most of the global population, 7.5 billion people, were non-migrants. This indicates that while migration is an important issue, most people continue to live and work in their country of origin.

Of the 272 million international migrant workers in 2019, 164 million were male. This represents 1.9% of the global population and 60.3% of the total migrant population. The high number of male migrant workers reflects migration patterns often driven by labour demand in sectors such as construction and agriculture. Of the 272 million international migrant workers in 2019, 108 were female. This represents 1.4% of the global population and 39.7% of the total migrant population. The gender imbalance in international migration is not just a statistic but a significant issue that demands our attention. Female migrants may face additional challenges, such as discrimination, exploitation, and limited access to social protections, underscoring the urgency of addressing this imbalance.

In 2019, there were 272 million international migrant workers, of whom 221 million were aged 15 or above, representing 2.8% of the global population and 81% of the total migrant population. This significant statistic of migrant workers aged 15 or older reflects migration patterns fueled by the increasing demand for labour in manufacturing, domestic work, and care work, highlighting the issue's magnitude. In contrast, most of the global population, which amounts to a colossal 5.9 billion people, consists of non-migrant workers aged 15 or older, representing 75.5% of

the worldwide population. This salient disparity demonstrates that most people continue to reside and work in their country of origin.

These estimations highlight the importance of understanding the complex dynamics of migration patterns and their impact on economies and societies. While international migration is significant, most of the population operates within their homeland. It is, therefore, crucial for policymakers and stakeholders not only to acknowledge but also to actively address the gender and age imbalances in international migration. This requires proactive measures to tackle the challenges faced by migrant workers, emphasising the importance of your role in this process.

**Table 4: Total workers, migrant workers, non-migrant workers**

<i>Sex Composition of International Migrant Worker Population (2019)</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Male	58.7%
Female	41.3%
<b>Total</b>	100%

*Source:* International Labour Organization (ILO), *Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers*, 2019.

In 2019, the global landscape was significantly shaped by the international migrant worker population, composed of 58.7% male and 41.3% female workers. The International Labour Organisation estimates that of 3.5 billion workers worldwide, approximately 164 million are international migrants. This staggering figure underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of migration trends and for policies that promote safe and fair labour migration.

It's crucial to recognise that the migrant population is not a monolithic group solely comprised of labourers. Many migrants are driven by diverse motivations, including education, seeking refuge, or reuniting with family in foreign lands. Moreover, some migrant workers may be engaged in the shadow economy or unregulated labour markets, which can complicate their inclusion in official statistical records.

The estimates of the international migrant worker population in 2019 highlight their dual role as contributors to their countries of origin and destination. These workers, through their labour and remittances, significantly bolster the economies they are a part of. However, they also face numerous challenges, including discrimination, exploitation, and limited access to social protections. These figures provide a comprehensive snapshot of the scale and characteristics of international

migration in 2019, underscoring the urgent need for policies and practices that ensure safe and fair labour migration.

### **Global age composition of international migrant workers, 2019**

Most international migrant workers consist of prime-age adults, but the youth share is increasing. Prime-age adults (aged 25–64) constitute 86.5 per cent of migrant workers. The shares of youth (aged 15–24) and older workers (aged 65 and over) among migrant workers are lower, at 10.0 per cent and 3.6 per cent, respectively. It should be noted that youth constitute 12.9 per cent of the working-age migrant population, prime-age adults 74.7 per cent, and older workers 12.4 per cent.

The youth share among international migrant workers has increased from 8.3 per cent in 2017 to 10.0 per cent in 2019. In contrast, the share of older workers (65+) decreased from 5.2 per cent to 3.6 per cent over the same period, leaving the share of prime-age adults constant. The heavy representation of prime-age adults can be explained by this age group's better ability to migrate to a foreign country (in terms of financial means and social networks) and their higher potential gains than younger migrants with fewer years of experience, or older migrants with fewer remaining economically active years. The increase in youth migration will likely result from high youth unemployment rates in many developing countries and the “youth bulge” phenomenon.

### **Most international migrant workers are concentrated in the services sector**

Sector figures show that 66.2 per cent of migrant workers are in services, 26.7 per cent are in industry, and 7.1 per cent are in agriculture. However, substantial gender differences exist within the sectors. Regarding women, 79.9 per cent are in services, 14.2 per cent are in industry, and 5.9 per cent are in agriculture. Compared with women, the distribution of male migrant workers between industry and services is relatively balanced, with 35.6 per cent employed in industry and 56.4 per cent in services. The remaining 7.9 per cent of male migrant workers are in agriculture. A higher representation of women migrant workers in services may partly be explained by a growing labour demand in the care economy, including health and domestic work. These sub-sectors have predominantly female labour forces and rely heavily on migrant women workers. Men migrant workers are more prevalent in the industry, working in the manufacturing and construction sub-sectors.

A comparison of 2013 and 2019 estimates suggest different patterns of change for men and women migrant workers across economic activity categories. Among women, there has been a sharp drop in agriculture (from 11.1 per cent to 5.9 per cent) and a nearly commensurate rise in services (from 73.7 per cent to 79.9 per cent). Among men, declines are observed in agriculture (from 11.2 per cent to 7.9 per cent) and services (from 69.1 per cent to 56.4 per cent), while their engagement in industry rose from 19.8 per cent in 2013 to 35.6 per cent in 2019.

The changes observed in the sectoral distribution of women migrant workers parallel the general trend of women's worldwide employment in agriculture and industry declining, and in services rising. In the case of men, the global trends point to declining employment in agriculture, stagnant employment in industry and increasing employment in services. A plausible explanation for the rise in industrial jobs for migrant men is the growing labour demand in this sector in lower- and upper-middle-income countries. The increase in the share of migrant workers in upper-middle-income countries and the drop-in high-income countries support this conjecture.

**Table 5: Showing the distribution of international migrant workers by income level of countries according to the ILO's Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers, 2019 (in millions)**

<i>Income Level</i>	<i>Number of Migrant Workers (Million)</i>
Low-income countries	28.6
Lower-middle-income countries	64.1
Upper-middle-income countries	51.6
High-income countries	69.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>213.5</b>

*Note:* The above figures are estimates and may not reflect the actual numbers accurately. Also, the income classification is based on the World Bank's classification of countries by income level.

Table 5 shows the distribution of international migrant workers by country income level in 2019, as estimated by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). According to the table, there were 213.5 million international migrant workers in 2019. Of these, the majority (69.2 million) worked in high-income countries, which are typically more developed and have higher wages. Lower-middle-income countries had the second-highest number of international migrant workers, with 64.1 million. These countries are typically still developing but have recently seen

some economic growth and improved living standards. Upper-middle-income countries had the third-highest number of international migrant workers, with 51.6 million. These countries are typically more developed than lower-middle-income countries but less developed than high-income countries. Finally, low-income countries had the fewest international migrant workers, with 28.6 million. These countries are typically the least developed, with lower wages and poorer living standards. Thus, the data show that many international migrant workers are employed in high-income countries, suggesting that workers often seek better-paying job opportunities and a higher standard of living. However, significant numbers of international migrant workers remain in lower- and middle-income countries, highlighting the global nature of migration and the importance of international labour markets.

### **Estimates by country income group**

Countries are divided into four income groups according to the World Bank's classification: low-income, lower-middle-income, upper-middle-income, and high-income. More than two-thirds of international migrant workers are concentrated in high-income countries. Of the estimated 169 million international migrant workers, 113.9 million (67.4 per cent) are in high-income countries, and 33 million (19.5 per cent) are in upper-middle-income countries, so 86.9 per cent of international migrant workers are in either of these income groups. The rest are in lower-middle-income (9.5 per cent) and low-income countries (3.6 per cent). Migrant workers make up a substantial proportion of the labour force in high-income countries, with migrant men constituting 18.7 per cent of the male labour force, while migrant women constitute 17.6 per cent of the female labour force. In contrast, in low-income, lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income countries, the share of migrant workers does not exceed 2.5 per cent.

Most migrant workers are found in high-income and upper-middle-income countries, a regularity observed in previous editions of this report and, among other reasons, explained by the better employment opportunities in these countries. However, it is interesting to note that the share of migrant workers in high-income 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 be due to rising employment opportunities in upper-middle-income countries, demographic changes, and evolving migration

policies. Three subregions host most international migrant workers: Northern, Southern and Western Europe, Northern America, and the Arab States.

The world's 169 million migrant workers are distributed amongst the major regions as follows: Europe and Central Asia, 37.7 per cent; Americas, 25.6 per cent; Arab States, 14.3 per cent; Asia and the Pacific, 14.2 per cent; and Africa, with only 8.1 per cent. As regards the origin of international migrants, the Asia-Pacific region ranks first (the region of origin for one-third of international migrants), followed by Europe and Central Asia, the Americas, Africa, and the Arab States. Most migrant workers are found in three subregions: 24.2 per cent are in Northern, Southern, and Western Europe, 22.1 per cent are in Northern America, and 14.3 per cent are in the Arab States. Collectively, these three regions hosted 60.6 per cent of migrant workers in 2019.

In Northern, Southern, and Western Europe, migrant workers comprise 18.4 per cent of the labour force. In North America, their share increased to 20.0 per cent. The highest share is observed in the Arab States at 41.4 per cent, due to the relatively small population of this subregion and the substantially higher labour force participation of migrants compared to non-migrants. Within these three subregions, male migrant workers are evenly distributed. Still, women migrant workers are more heavily concentrated in Northern America (24.9 per cent) and Northern, Southern, and Western Europe (29.4 per cent). Only 6.0 per cent of women migrant workers are in the Arab States, which may be partially attributed

**Table 6: Shows the distribution of international migrant workers by income level of countries and their ratios in 2013, 2017, and 2019 (percentage)**

<i>Column 1</i>	<i>Column 2</i>	<i>Column 3</i>	<i>Column 4</i>
Income Level	2013 (%)	2017 (%)	2019 (%)
Low-income countries	11.3	10.2	13.4
Lower-middle-income countries	46.5	45.5	30.0
Upper-middle-income countries	28.1	29.7	24.2
High-income countries	14.1	14.6	32.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Note:* The above figures are estimates and may not reflect the actual percentages accurately. Also, the income classification is based on the World Bank's classification of countries by income level. Table 6 presents the distribution of international migrant workers by country income level and their ratios in 2013, 2017, and 2019. Notably, the percentage of international migrant workers in high-income countries increased significantly from 14.1% in 2013 to 32.4% in 2019, while the rate in lower-middle-income countries decreased from 46.5% in 2013 to 30.0% in 2019.

to the limited employment opportunities this region offers them outside the care economy (including domestic work).

The importance of the top three regions in terms of the number of international migrant workers they host has not diminished over time. In 2013 and 2017, they were home to 60.2 per cent and 60.8 per cent of migrant workers, respectively.

Low-income countries saw a gradual increase in the percentage of international migrant workers from 11.3% in 2013 to 13.4% in 2019, while upper-middle-income countries also experienced a slight decrease from 28.1% in 2013 to 24.2% in 2019. The increase in the percentage of international migrant workers in high-income countries indicates a growing trend. Workers are increasingly drawn to these countries by the promise of better-paying job opportunities and a higher standard of living. This shift could be attributed to globalisation, which has led to increasing demand for labour in high-skill sectors and the desire for better working conditions and social protection.

The decrease in the percentage of international migrant workers in lower-middle-income countries could be attributed to factors such as economic growth and living standards, which may reduce the incentive for workers to migrate to other countries in search of better opportunities. Moreover, some lower-middle-income countries may implement policies to promote domestic employment and reduce the reliance on migrant labour. In summary, the data shows a shift in the distribution of international migrant workers towards high-income countries over the past decade, highlighting the importance of global labour markets and the need for policies to address labour migration and its impacts.

The concentration of international migrant workers in upper-middle-income and high-income countries has remained stable at 86.4 per cent in 2013, 86.5 per cent in 2017 and 86.9 per cent in 2019. More substantial changes are observed within these two groups over time, with the share of international migrant workers in high-income countries falling from 74.7 per cent in 2013 to 67.4 per cent in 2019, while that of upper-middle-income countries rising from 11.7 per cent in 2013 to 19.5 per cent in 2019.<sup>23</sup> The higher share of migrant workers in upper-middle-income countries may be partially related to the higher demand for migrant labour in countries that make up this group and is consistent with the rising share of industrial employment that is observed among migrant men.

High-income countries hosted an absolute number of more migrant workers in 2019 than in 2013. Furthermore, the proportion of workers (migrant and non-

migrant) in high-income countries fell over time, partly due to the reclassification of countries by income and, therefore, the changing population size of this group, and partly because of the declining labour force participation of migrants and non-migrants. In high-income countries, the slight increase in migrant workers and the decline in total workers led to a rising share of migrant workers as a proportion of all workers, from 16.3 per cent in 2013 to 18.2 per cent in 2019.

**Table 7: Shows the distribution of international migrant workers by sex and income level of countries in 2019:**

<i>Column 1</i>	<i>Column 2</i>	<i>Column 3</i>	<i>Column 4</i>
Income Level	Male(%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Low-income countries	51.6	48.4	100.00
Lower-middle-income countries	52.6	47.4	100.00
Upper-middle-income countries	52.7	47.3	100.00
High-income countries	51.7	48.3	100.00
Total	52.0	48.0	100.0

*Note:* The above figures are estimates and may not reflect the actual percentages accurately.

The income classification is based on the World Bank's classification of countries by income level.

The income classification is based on the World Bank's classification of countries by income level. Table 7 shows the gender-wise distribution of international migrant workers by country, sex, and income level in 2019. The percentage of male international migrant workers was slightly higher than that of female international migrant workers, at 52:48.

Regarding income level, there was no significant difference in the gender distribution of international migrant workers across different income levels. In low-income countries, female international migrant workers accounted for 48.4% of the total, while in high-income countries, they accounted for 48.3%. In lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income countries, the percentage of female international migrant workers was slightly lower, at 47.4% and 47.3%, respectively. In high-income countries, male migrant workers make up 18.7 per cent of the male labour force, and female migrant workers make up 17.6 per cent of the female labour force. In low-income, lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income countries, the shares of men and women migrant workers in the labour force do not exceed 2.5 per cent. (Table 2.7 of ILO, 2021, p.29)

This suggests that gender is not a significant factor in determining the destination of international migrant workers. However, it is worth noting that the percentage of female international migrant workers remains substantial, and there may be gender-specific challenges that need to be addressed in the context of global labour migration. The data show a relatively even gender distribution among international migrant workers across income levels in 2019. This highlights the importance of addressing the needs and challenges of both male and female international migrant workers and promoting gender equality in the context of global labour migration.

In all four income groups, the labour force participation rate of male migrants was higher than that of non-migrants in 2019, with the largest participation gap estimated at 10.3 percentage points in high-income countries. In the case of women migrants, the participation gap between migrants and non-migrants was again largest in high-income countries at 11.8 percentage points. Women migrants have higher labour force participation than non-migrants in all income groups except in low-income countries. This could be attributed to limited job availability and opportunities for family reunification (ILO, 2021, p. 29). Another contributing factor could be the high prevalence of informal employment, which the data may need to capture fully.

The World Migration Report 2024 demystifies the complexity of human mobility through evidence-based data and analysis, emphasising the importance of understanding migration dynamics in a world grappling with uncertainty for informed decision-making and effective policy responses. The report highlights that international migration remains a driver of human development and economic growth, evidenced by a more than 650 per cent increase in international remittances from 2000 to 2022, rising from USD 128 billion to USD 831 billion. This growth continued despite predictions from many analysts that remittances would decrease substantially due to COVID-19.

Of the USD 831 billion in remittances, USD 647 billion were sent by migrants to low- and middle-income countries. These remittances often constitute a significant share of these countries' GDPs and surpass global foreign direct investment. Migration, an intrinsic part of human history, is often overshadowed by sensationalised narratives; in reality, it is far more nuanced than headlines suggest. Most migration is regular, safe, regionally focused, and directly linked to opportunities and livelihoods. Misinformation and politicisation cloud public discourse, necessitating a clear and accurate portrayal of migration dynamics.

As a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration Champion country, Bangladesh has firmly committed to addressing migration issues and implementing policies safeguarding migrants' rights. This aligns with IOM's strategic objectives and makes Bangladesh an ideal location to launch the 2024 World Migration Report. With its innovative digital tools and comprehensive analysis, IOM's World Migration Report aims to dispel myths, provide critical insights, and inspire meaningful action in addressing the challenges and opportunities of human mobility.

**Table 8 presents the gender-wise distribution of international migrant workers by region in millions as of 2019**

<i>Column 1</i>	<i>Column 2</i>	<i>Column 3</i>	<i>Column 4</i>
Region	Male (millions)	Female (millions)	Total (millions)
Africa	10.5	5.7	16.2
Arab States	11.9	5.1	17.0
Asia	60.2	39.9	100.1
Europe	39.3	22.8	62.1
Latin America	14.8	8.7	23.5
North America	5.7	3.5	9.2
Oceania	0.5	0.5	1.0
Total	143.9	86.2	230.1

*Source:* ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers – Results and Methodology – Third edition, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2021

Migrant Workers – Results and Methodology – Third edition, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2021

Table 8 reveals that most international migrant workers are male, totalling 143.9 million males compared to 86.2 million females. The region with the highest number of international migrant workers is Asia, with 60.2 million male workers and 39.9 million female workers. Europe has the second-highest number of international migrant workers, with 39.3 million males and 22.8 million females. It is also worth noting that, in every region except Oceania, the number of male international migrant workers exceeds that of female international migrant workers. The most significant gender gap is in the Arab States, where there are 11.9 million male international migrant workers and 5.1 million female international migrant workers.

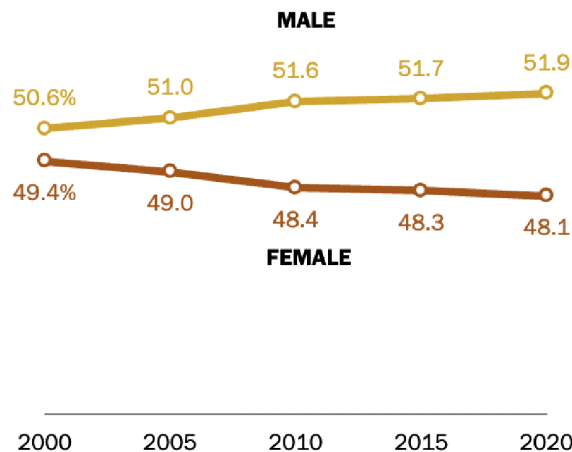
**Table 9: Distribution of households with international migrant workers by broad subregion as of 2019**

Broad Subregion	Number of households (in millions)	Percentage of households
More Developed Regions	44.5	5.5%
Northern America	10.3	9.8%
Europe	61.5	10.9%
Other non-specified subregions*	0.2	2.1%
Less Developed Regions	150.2	9.1%
Africa	34.1	4.4%
Asia	99.4	10.4%
Latin America and the Caribbean	16.7	2.4%
Oceania	0.1	1.3%

\*Other non-specified subregions refer to areas where data is not available or subregions that are not covered by the United Nations classification.

## Gender gap has widened among international migrants since 2000

*% of international migrants globally, 2000-2020*

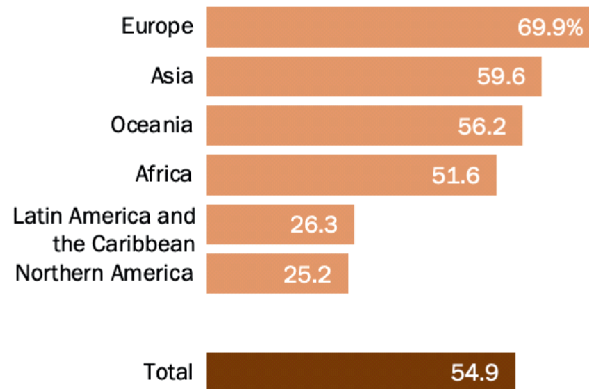


Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2020 International Migrant Stock data.

Over recent decades, there has been a slight increase in the share of international migrants who are men; in 2000, 50.6% of international migrants were men compared to 49.4% who were women, but by 2020, men constituted 51.9% of global migrants, leaving women at 48.1%, according to estimates by the United Nations. Moreover, in 2020, a significant majority of the world's international migrants resided in their region of origin, with 54.9% living in their birth region, despite the overall tendency for some individuals to migrate to entirely new regions. This pattern of regional migration, however, varies considerably across different areas. For instance, in Europe, 69.9% of the continent's international migrants in 2020 lived in another European country, underscoring the migration dynamics from Eastern European countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and Romania to Western European destinations.

### Most European international migrants live in other European countries

*% of international migrants from \_\_\_ who live within their region of origin, 2020*



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2020 International Migrant Stock data.

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In Asia and Oceania, a significant majority of international migrants, precisely 59.6% and 56.2%, respectively, tend to reside within their region of origin, reflecting

strong regional retention of migrant populations; conversely, African migrants demonstrate a nearly even split in their migration patterns, with 51.6% remaining on the continent and 48.4% living outside of it in the year 2020. On the other hand, migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as those from Northern America, display the lowest propensity to remain within their regions of origin, with a mere 26.3% of Latin American and Caribbean migrants and an even lower 25.2% of Northern American migrants choosing to stay within their respective regions, highlighting a more pronounced inclination towards international relocation beyond their home regions in the year 2020.

Table 9 shows that, as of 2019, there were 254.7 million households worldwide with international migrant workers. Most of these households (59%) were in the Less Developed Regions, with Asia having the highest percentage (10.4%) of households with international migrant workers. Meanwhile, the More Developed Regions had the lowest rate of households with international migrant workers (5.5%).

**Table 10: Shows the data on the ratios of international migrant workers by broad subregion for the years 2013, 2017, and 2019**

<i>Broad Subregion</i>	<i>Ratio of international migrant workers (%)</i>
More Developed Regions	
2013	9.0
2017	8.5
2019	8.5
Northern America	
2013	15.2
2017	15.7
2019	15.8
Europe	
2013	8.6
2017	9.0
2019	9.3
Other non-specified subregions*	
2013	4.4
2017	4.4
2019	4.4
Less Developed Regions	
2013	3.3
2017	3.3
2019	3.3

<i>Broad Subregion</i>	<i>Ratio of international migrant workers (%)</i>
Africa	
2013	1.5
2017	1.5
2019	1.5
Asia	
2013	4.6
2017	4.6
2019	4.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	
2013	1.7
2017	1.7
2019	1.8
Oceania	
2013	17.2
2017	17.1
2019	17.2

\*Other non-specified subregions refer to areas where data is unavailable, or subregions not covered by the United Nations classification.

Table 10 shows the percentage of international migrant workers in total employment for each broad subregion in 2013, 2017, and 2019. The data is taken from the International Labour Organization's (ILO) 2021 report.

The ratios of international migrant workers remained relatively stable across all broad subregions between 2013 and 2019, with a slight increase in some subregions. Oceania had the highest ratio of international migrant workers across all three years, while Africa had the lowest. The More Developed Regions had the second-lowest ratio, followed by Europe. North America had the highest ratio of international migrant workers in all three years.

It's important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions may have impacted the ratios of international migrant workers in 2020 and beyond, which is not reflected in this table. The table above provides a detailed analysis of the ratio of international migrant workers to total employment in each broad subregion for 2013, 2017, and 2019. The data is taken from the International Labour Organization's (ILO) 2021 report.

The ratios of international migrant workers remained relatively stable across all broad subregions between 2013 and 2019, with a slight increase in some subregions.

Oceania had the highest ratio of international migrant workers across all three years, while Africa had the lowest. In 2019, the ratio of international migrant workers in Oceania was 17.2%, a slight increase from 17.1% in 2017 and 17.2% in 2013. This is likely due to the high demand for foreign workers in Australia and New Zealand's agricultural and mining industries, as well as their ageing populations.

In contrast, the ratio of international migrant workers in Africa remained the lowest across all subregions, at 1.5% in all three years. This is likely due to the lack of demand for foreign workers and restrictive immigration policies in many African countries.

The More Developed Regions had the second-lowest ratio of international migrant workers, at 8.5% in 2019. This is likely because these regions already have relatively high levels of economic development and a highly skilled workforce, reducing the need for foreign workers. In addition, these regions often have stricter immigration policies that limit the number of foreign workers. Europe had a slightly higher ratio of international migrant workers than the More Developed Regions, at 9.3% in 2019. This is likely due to the arrival of several refugees and asylum seekers in Europe in recent years, as well as the demand for foreign workers in some European countries with ageing populations.

North America had the highest ratio of international migrant workers in 2017 and 2019, at 15.7% and 15.8%, respectively. This is likely due to the high demand for foreign workers in agriculture, construction, and healthcare, and to the relatively open immigration policies in Canada and the United States. Oceania had the highest ratio in 2013 and 2019 at 17.2%, while Europe had the highest ratio in 2017 at 9.0%.

Asia had an international migrant worker ratio of 4.6% across all three years, higher than Africa but lower than the More Developed Regions, Europe, and North America. While Latin America and the Caribbean remained the second-lowest subregion at 1.7% in 2013 and 2017, and 1.8% in 2019, other non-specified subregions maintained a constant ratio of 4.4% across all three years. This was likely due to the demand for foreign workers in some Asian countries with rapidly growing economies and the lower barriers to immigration compared to the More Developed Regions and Europe. Latin America and the Caribbean had the lowest ratio of international migrant workers after Africa, at 1.8% in 2019. This was likely due to the relatively closed immigration policies in many Latin American and Caribbean countries and the lack of demand for foreign workers in some industries.

The More Developed Regions had the highest ratio of international migrant workers across all three years, decreasing slightly from 9.0% in 2013 to 8.5% in 2017 and 2019. In contrast, Africa had the lowest ratio of international migrant workers in all three years, remaining at 1.5%. Overall, the data shows a slight variation in the ratio of international migrant workers across all broad subregions between 2013 and 2019. However, some subregions showed slight changes, suggesting fluctuating demand for foreign workers across different parts of the world.

It's important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions may have impacted the ratios of international migrant workers in 2020 and beyond, which is not reflected in this table. However, this data provides a valuable snapshot of the distribution of international migrant workers by broad subregion in the years leading up to the pandemic.

**Table 11: International migrant workers by sex and broad subregion, 2019 (percentage), ILO, 2021**

<i>Broad Subregion</i>	<i>Male (%)</i>	<i>Female (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
More Developed Regions	50.6	49.4	100.0
Northern America	52.5	47.5	100.0
Europe	50.2	49.8	100.0
Other non-specified subregions*	53.9	46.1	100.0
Less Developed Regions	51.8	48.2	100.0
Africa	53.1	46.9	100.0
Asia	51.9	48.1	100.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	50.2	49.8	100.0
Oceania	51.4	48.6	100.0

Table 11 shows the percentage of international migrant workers by sex and broad subregion in 2019, as reported by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The subregions are arranged in the first column, with male, female, and total percentages shown in the subsequent columns.

Male international migrant workers were more prevalent than females, with a male percentage of 51.5% compared to a female percentage of 48.5%. Among the broad subregions, Other non-specified subregions had the highest percentage of male international migrant workers at 53.9%, while Africa had the highest rate of female international migrant workers at 46.9%. In More Developed Regions, North America, Europe, and Oceania, male international migrant workers accounted for over 50% of the total international migrant workers. In contrast, Asia and Africa

had slightly higher percentages of female international migrant workers than males, though the difference was insignificant. The data in the table suggest that gender plays a minor role in the distribution of international migrant workers across broad subregions. However, further analysis at a more granular level may reveal gender disparities in specific sectors or occupations.

### **Migration in the Age of Globalisation**

The global estimate of international migrants stood at around 286 million in 2022, including 32.5 million refugees (World Bank, 2022). The estimated number of international migrants has increased over the past five decades. According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 191 million people, or 3 per cent of the world's population, lived outside their country of birth in 2005. The equivalent figure in 1960 was 75 million people, or 2.5 per cent of the world's population. Almost one in every ten people living in more developed regions is a migrant. The total estimated 281 million people living in countries other than their countries of birth in 2020 was 128 million more than in 1990 and over three times the estimated number in 1970 (IOM, 2022). China accounts for the highest number of internal migrants in the world. According to the 2020 census, the floating, or migrant, population—those without local household registration (*hukou*)—has increased to 376 million, up from 155 million in 2010 (Chan, 2021). Uneven industrialisation is the cause of both internal and international migration. In China, internal migration has health impacts, especially on young migrants aged 16–35 (Lu et al., 2020). What is unique about migration in the age of globalisation is that more people are moving to and from more countries, and their movements are closely documented and monitored. Controversies over the undocumented movement of people affirm the importance of documentation and surveillance—migration results from complex social, economic, political, and cultural processes. There are several types of migration: voluntary, involuntary, or forced, and economic or political. Often, a combination of factors drives people to migrate. While migrants exercise their volition in choosing to move, for refugees and internally displaced people, such choices do not exist. COVID-19 restricted the number of people on the move but did not fully restrict mobility. Displacement continued to occur and grow, with 1 in 95 people displaced at the end of 2020, up from 1 in 159 in 2010 (UNHCR, 2022).

The famous English economist John Maynard Keynes said, “Migration is the first act against poverty.” According to a United Nations report, the three D's account

for most migration today: demography, development, and democracy. People tend to move out of so-called overpopulated countries to less populated countries, from less developed to more developed countries, and from authoritarian to democratic countries. Less populated but prosperous countries such as Canada and Australia remain popular destinations for migrants. While some migrants move permanently, the oil-rich Gulf countries remain destinations for temporary migrant workers. The United Arab Emirates has the highest proportion of temporary migrants, constituting over 88 per cent of the population. According to Adam

Adam McKeown (2004) observes that world migration reached unprecedented heights in the 1920s, a period during which the implementation of immigration restrictions marked a significant chapter in a much longer historical trend characterised by increasing regulation, border control, and rising nationalism, phenomena that had been evolving in tandem with the patterns of migration since the mid-nineteenth century.

From 1846 to 1940, there were three primary circuits of long-distance migration. During this century of migration, 55–58 million Europeans and 2.5 million from India, China, Japan, and Africa migrated or were taken to the Americas. During the same period, the other main destinations were Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean Rim, and the South Pacific, where 48–52 million Chinese from China and Indians moved. In the twentieth century, voluntary migration grew enormously alongside forced involuntary migration caused by war. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, owing to a combination of factors such as relatively cheaper air travel, expanding job opportunities, falling birth rates in some countries, and the availability of surplus populations in others, more people were becoming increasingly mobile. There are international migrants and refugees, as well as internally displaced persons. The latter group is often a product of civil war or social unrest.

Political-economic globalisation can be traced back to the slave trade in the sixteenth century, with the forced movement of African slave labour to the Caribbean and North American plantations. Such forced and exploitative labour transfers are still practised in various parts of the world. Colonialism and the European land grab marginalised people with low incomes in many colonies, who were eventually driven by economic necessity to become indentured labourers. In the nineteenth century, European migration to various parts of the world created white-settler societies such as Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Here, the migration issue is related to racism and the marginalisation of various Indigenous

communities. Many of those problems remain, especially around the status of Aboriginal people and their relationship to the land (Turner & Khondker, 2010, p. 107). Mobile people are highly heterogeneous. They can be migrant workers, tourists, international students, or refugees. In addition to migrants and refugees, there were 48 million internally displaced persons in 2020 (UNHCR, 2021). One of the critical trends in migration is an increase in South-South migration (Hujo & Piper, 2010; IOM, 2020). About 60 per cent of all migrants are now found in the world's most prosperous countries and around 40 per cent in developing regions (GCIM, 2005). Migrants to industrially developed countries often seek permanent status and citizenship. Because of the high mobility of people across nations, many countries now accept dual citizenship. Professionals in specific fields are in demand, and some countries offer incentives to attract these specialists. Indian software engineers can be seen in many different countries. Some countries, such as the Philippines, have adopted a proactive approach to labour export or an out-migration strategy since the mid-1970s under President Ferdinand Marcos. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Filipina women were employed as domestic workers in over 130 countries in the world (Parrenas, 2001: 1). It is estimated that there are eight million workers—both as domestic workers and in other trades who are known as “overseas foreign workers” (OFW) from the Philippines who play a vital role in the economy of the country. Their overseas income helps sustain their families left behind in their homeland.

## Conclusion

A comprehensive examination reveals that, when strategically and equitably managed, global labour migration offers substantial benefits to both countries of origin and destination. As individuals embark on journeys to foreign lands in pursuit of employment opportunities, they become active contributors to the economic prosperity of the host nations (Khadria, 2016). These migrant labourers are frequently absorbed into industries characterised by labour-intensive tasks, such as agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and care services, where demand for labour remains consistently high (UN DESA, 2021).

In regions wrestling with ageing demographics, migrant workers are vital to addressing labour shortages, infusing the workforce with new dynamism, and supporting social welfare systems (ILO, 2021). A compelling illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in Japan, where a rapidly ageing populace has made

migrant labour indispensable for sustaining the nation's economic growth (OECD, 2019). Similarly, the United States bears witness to the significant contributions of immigrants and their offspring to economic growth and innovative advancements (NBER, 2021).

Beyond the immediate advantages for destination nations, labour migration can also yield favourable impacts on the economies of the countries of origin. Remittances, the financial resources sent back home by migrant workers, can play a pivotal role in augmenting national savings, encouraging investments, and elevating overall economic prosperity (World Bank, 2021). For instance, in 2020, remittances to low- and middle-income countries surged to an unprecedented \$540 billion, eclipsing the combined inflow from foreign direct investment and official development assistance (World Bank, 2021). Remittances also have the potential to alleviate poverty and enhance access to critical services, such as education and healthcare, for families left behind (Ratha, 2021).

At the individual level, labour migration extends a lifeline to workers striving to achieve a higher standard of living and to improve the well-being of their families through financial transfers. In many countries of origin, job opportunities may be scarce, and wages may need to be increased to fulfil fundamental needs such as nourishment, shelter, and education. Migration offers individuals the opportunity to earn higher incomes, raise their living standards, and bolster their capacity to provide for their families (Khadria, 2016).

Another facet of labour migration's positive influence is the cross-border exchange of knowledge and skills. The diaspora and return migrants play pivotal roles in transferring ideas and expertise across nations, thereby contributing to enhanced global productivity and output (IOM, 2019). For example, Indian migrants who ventured to Silicon Valley in the United States have made monumental contributions to the evolution of the technology industry, solidifying India's position as a global leader in software development and IT services (Chellaraj et al., 2018).

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that labour migration entails its fair share of challenges and risks, which require astute management to maximise benefits while mitigating costs. One notable concern pertains to the vulnerability of migrant workers, who are often exposed to exploitation, discrimination, and abuse in their host countries (ILO, 2021). Moreover, migration can trigger "brain drain," in which highly skilled professionals and workers depart their countries of origin, thereby losing talent and human capital (Docquier et al., 2018).

To conclude, labour migration holds immense potential to yield substantial advantages for both the countries of origin and destination through enhanced economic growth, elevated living standards, and the transfer of knowledge and skills. The efficient management of migration processes is imperative to maximise benefits while effectively addressing the associated risks and challenges. With equitable and well-organised migration systems, labour migration can emerge as a catalyst for sustainable economic development and contribute significantly to attaining the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The realisation of these goals hinges on our ability to harness the opportunities offered by labour migration while safeguarding the rights and well-being of those who embark on this transformative journey.

### **Recommendations**

The “ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers - Results and Methodology - Third Edition” report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) makes several recommendations to promote the rights and decent work of international migrant workers. Some of the key recommendations are:

The ILO report emphasises the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the multidimensional aspects of labour migration and promotes the human rights and dignity of international migrant workers. This approach includes ratifying and implementing international labour standards that protect the rights of migrant workers, such as the ILO Migration for Employment Convention (No. 97) and the ILO Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention (No. 143). It also calls for establishing effective mechanisms to protect migrant workers, including access to justice, social protection, and healthcare.

Furthermore, the report recommends promoting fair recruitment practices, eliminating recruitment fees, and protecting workers from fraud. It highlights the importance of improving working conditions for migrant workers by ensuring equal treatment and opportunities and preventing discrimination and exploitation. Furthermore, the report stresses the need to strengthen cooperation between countries of origin, transit, and destination to improve labour migration management and address the root causes of forced migration. Lastly, it recognises the positive contributions of migrant workers to the economy and society and promotes their social inclusion.

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