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# International Migration and Sustainable Development

December 2024 . <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/> . #UNPopulation

*Over the past six decades, the number of international migrants worldwide increased nearly fourfold, reaching 281 million in 2020. The present wave of globalization—the emergence and strengthening of transnational social networks, as well as the rapid diffusion and accelerating pace of technological innovations in communications and transportation—has made it easier and more affordable for people to move across borders.*

*The following key findings are based on the report *International Migration and Sustainable Development*, prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).*

## Ten key messages

### 1. International migration is one of the most pressing issues of our time.

The relevance of international migration is likely to continue to increase, tied in part to other critical trends including climate change, population ageing, urbanization and conflict. However, in many parts of the world, international migration remains an extremely polarizing and divisive issue.

### 2. International migration can support the achievement of many Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

However, the extent to which international migration benefits countries of origin, transit and destination depends on a multitude of interrelated factors, including the characteristics of the migrants themselves; the extent to which migration occurs in a safe, orderly, regular and responsible manner; the level of protection accorded to migrant rights; and the degree of migrant integration into host societies.

### 3. The inability to build sustainable livelihoods at home remains one of the dominant drivers of migration.

However, the poorest of the poor usually lack the means, information and access to networks necessary to migrate. As the number of people living in the poorest regions of the world continues to grow, creating more opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income is critical for addressing some of the adverse drivers and structural factors that motivate or compel people to migrate.

### 4. Enhancing the availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration is critical.

This will not only help to protect the human rights of all migrants but also to promote security and prosperity at the place of origin, along transit routes and in the final destination. Irregular migration can be accompanied by a flourishing of criminal activity centered around the smuggling of migrants. International migrants who are smuggled can fall victim to human traffickers, with women and children—particularly those who are unaccompanied or have become separated from family members—being especially vulnerable.

## **5. Many high-income and upper-middle-income countries rely heavily on migrant workers.**

In host societies, international migrants fill critical gaps in the labour market and enhance productivity by promoting technological innovation and the transmission of ideas. Reducing the vulnerability of migrants in the workplace, protecting the rights of migrant workers, facilitating fair and ethical recruitment, and recognizing the skills, qualifications and competences possessed by migrants are key steps that countries of destination should take to maximize the beneficial impacts of labour migration.

## **6. The remittances that migrants send home benefit the households, communities and economies that receive them.**

However, remittances can also create dependencies that stifle growth and lead to cycles of emigration and economic stagnation or decline. To optimize the transformative impact of remittances and fully harness the contributions of migrants and diasporas, countries of origin should enact policies to enhance economic competitiveness, strengthen governance and social institutions, and facilitate migrant and diaspora investments and entrepreneurship. Promoting faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances and ensuring the financial inclusion of migrants are also critical.

## **7. Migration can deprive countries of the skilled labour force needed for achieving the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.**

Complying with ethical recruitment practices and actively investing in the development and training of skilled labour can help ensure that the emigration of highly educated individuals does not stifle sustainable development in home communities. Partnerships to foster skills development, including vocational training, are a promising way to respond to the changing demographic realities and labour market needs of both origin and destination countries.

## **8. Migration can increase women's status, power and decision-making and help to reduce gender inequality.**

However, migrant women can also face barriers that prevent their full and equal participation in the social, political and economic life of host societies. Gender-responsive migration policies can address the specific needs of migrant women, reducing their vulnerability and enhancing their empowerment and inclusion.

## **9. Building adaptive capacity and achieving the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda can reduce future risks of climate-related displacement.**

Extreme weather events and slow-onset natural disasters are expected to become increasingly important drivers of migration and displacement, particularly in areas with high exposure to climate risks and with low levels of adaptive capacity. However, the most vulnerable members of society, including persons living in extreme poverty, older persons, children and persons with disabilities, may not have access to the resources needed to migrate in a safe, orderly and regular fashion even if desired. Anticipating and planning for climate-related migration is imperative, in particular for vulnerable countries such as small island developing States.

## **10. Reliable data are crucial for dispelling misleading perceptions of migrants and migration.**

Many countries lack up-to-date information on migration patterns and trends, on migrants and their basic characteristics and on the contributions of migrants and migration to sustainable development. Strengthening the evidence base on the positive contributions of safe, orderly and regular migration, while highlighting the risks associated with irregular and unsafe migration, can help to promote more informed policymaking and to address harmful and misleading narratives on migrants and migration in communities of origin, transit and destination.



Prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). These key messages are based on a new report *International Migration and Sustainable Development*. More work of the Population Division is available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/>.