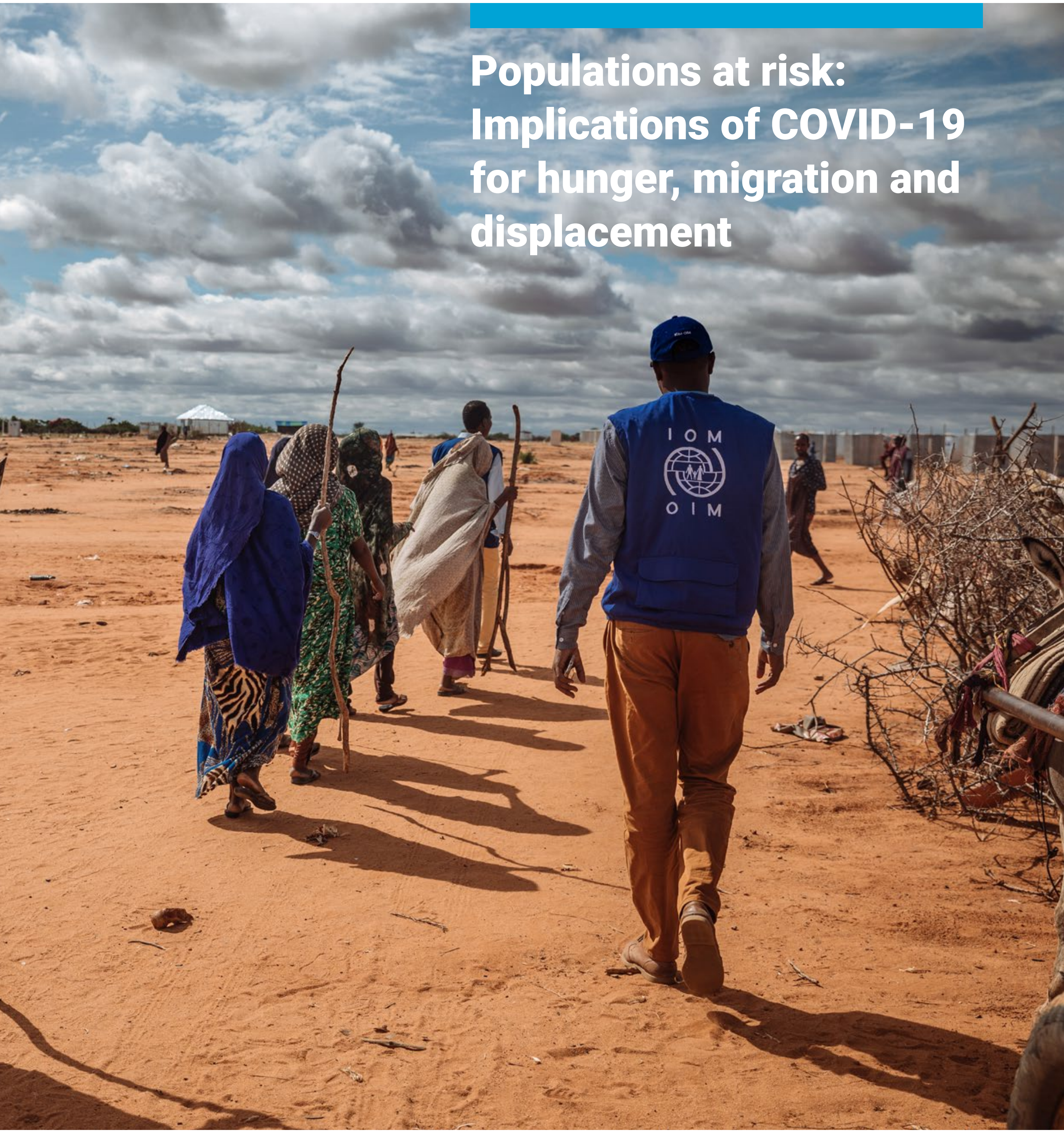
Populations at risk: Implications of COVID-19 for hunger, migration and displacement



AN ANALYSIS OF FOOD SECURITY TRENDS IN MAJOR MIGRATION HOTSPOTS

NOVEMBER 2020

Acknowledgements

This report is the first joint publication of its kind by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) at global level. Facilitated by WFP's Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division and IOM's Department of Operations and Emergencies, the report reflects multiple inputs from various teams in both organizations.

Both agencies would like to express gratitude and appreciation to the authors of the report including Claudia Ah Poe, Lisa Biederlack and Katrina Frappier (WFP); and Selma El Khawad, Rafaëlle Robelin and Muhammad Rizki (IOM). The report benefited from overall guidance and review by Yvonne Forsen (WFP), Tristan Burnett (IOM) and Nuno Nunes (IOM).

This report would not have been possible without the participation and contributions of colleagues in the field. The authors would particularly like to thank country and regional offices and missions from both organizations for their invaluable support and expertise, and the data and analysis provided for the case studies featured in this publication. Contributions by WFP's Emergency Operations Division and IOM's Department of Migration Management and Department of International Cooperation and Partnerships were also greatly appreciated.

Special thanks is extended to all those involved in the editing, design, proofreading, communications and dissemination of the report, particularly Barbara Pereira Mendes, James Belgrave, Ana Opris, Zoë Hallington (WFP) and Angela Wells (IOM).

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Foreword

The world is currently facing a crisis of unprecedented proportions. The COVID-19 pandemic and actions taken to contain its spread have had profound socioeconomic impacts on societies. No country has been spared, and unsurprisingly, the poorest populations are among those worst affected.

The pandemic has hit at a time when hunger has been on the rise over four consecutive years, mainly due to conflict, climate-related shocks and economic crises. At the same time, forced displacement has reached record highs.

The United Nations Security Council resolution 2417 on conflict and hunger recognizes the close connection between armed conflict, conflict induced food insecurity and the threat of famine. As the 2020 Nobel Prize Committee noted, the "link between hunger and armed conflict is a vicious circle: war and conflict can cause food insecurity and hunger, just as hunger and food insecurity can cause latent conflicts to flare up and trigger the use of violence." The goal of zero hunger will never be achieved unless war and armed conflict are ended.

Food insecurity – often combined with conflict, violence, disasters and poverty, among others – can be an adverse driver that compels people to leave their homes. At the same time, safe, orderly and regular migration can bring benefits to communities that receive migrants and those of origin, contributing significantly to sustainable development at the local, regional and global levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had deep implications for migration and hunger dynamics. While overall mobility is expected to decline in 2020 due to the pandemic, it may ultimately increase over time as more people will be compelled to move if they can no longer make ends meet in their current location. Thus, well-governed migration, as outlined by the United Nations Network on Migration, is an essential component of an effective response to COVID-19.

This unique joint analysis is a milestone for the World Food Programme and the International Organization for Migration. It is the first publication of its kind by the two organizations at global level highlighting the close interconnection between hunger, conflict, migration and displacement, which is now aggravated by COVID-19. The report is fully grounded in the vision of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which underscores that migration should never be an act of desperation.

At this time of immense global challenges, the international community must come together and redouble its efforts to ensure that the most vulnerable populations are not forgotten. Migrants and displaced populations facing acute hardship due to COVID-19 must be provided with support that enables them to meet their food and other essential needs. The World Food Programme and the International Organization for Migration stand firmly committed to working closely together with their partners to mitigate the immediate impacts on these vulnerable groups. In doing so, the agencies also call on governments and the entire international community to ensure that every effort is made to minimize negative consequences for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals while preparing the pathway to recovery.

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272 million

International migrants (including refugees) in 2019

95 million

Live in low and middle-income countries

2.75 million

Migrants stranded

COVID-19

Impacts on well being (including food security)

Changes in mobility & reduced remittances

Origin — Destination

33 million

People are at risk of facing hunger due to remittances losses

800 million

People depend on remittances

US$ 548 billion

Officially recorded remittances in low and middle-income countries

Main use of remittances

164 million

Migrant workers (2017)

5x

Internal migrant workers

In 2019

50.8 million

Internally Displaced Persons

26 million

Refugees

4.2 million

Asylum seekers

4/5

Displaced live in countries with high levels of acute food insecurity and malnutrition

9 in 10

Countries with the largest number of internally displaced persons experienced a major food crisis

Conflict and violence

45.7 million

Internally displaced persons

8 million

Average new internal displacement per year (2010-2019)

Disasters

5.1 million

Internally displaced persons

23 million

Average new internal displacement per year (2010-2019)

Summary

This joint study by the World Food Programme and the International Organization for Migration explores the impacts of COVID-19 and related containment measures on migrant workers, remittance-dependent households and the forcibly displaced. It assesses the implications of the pandemic for people's mobility, food security and other livelihood outcomes in major migration and hunger hotspots around the world.

There are important linkages between food security and mobility. Food insecurity, especially when combined with conflict, can be one of the main drivers for people to move. Migration, including through the generation of remittances, contributes to communities' resilience and development, and is also an important strategy used by households to cope with income uncertainty and food insecurity risks.

In 2019, the number of international migrants and refugees worldwide reached 272 million, up from 174 million in 2000. This is equivalent to 3.5 percent of the world's population. All re-gions have seen growth, albeit at different levels. The highest increases since 2000 have been seen in the Middle East and North Africa (58 percent), sub-Saharan Africa (44 percent) and Latin America (44 percent).

Changes in mobility

As of October 2020, 219 countries, territories and other areas had international entry restrictions or conditions for authorised entry in place. The containment measures put in place by governments since the start of the pandemic have caused migration trends worldwide to shift. While certain international flows have decreased significantly since March 2020 – for example, those to the Gulf Cooperation Council states, others, such as crossings of the Central Mediterranean have seen a relative increase. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic is not likely to impede migration altogether. In the longer-term, the impact of the crisis on food security and poverty could increase people's need to search for livelihoods elsewhere, leading to a potential rise in migration driven by necessity.

Income loss and unemployment have pushed many migrants to return home as they have become unable to support themselves and their families. Return journeys thwarted by COVID-19 related border closures and travel bans have left nearly 3 million migrants stranded, unable to return to their places of work, their communities or countries of origin.

Migrant workers

Most of the over 164 million international migrant workers generate their incomes in the informal sector, which has been worst hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is estimated that in low and middle-income countries, 75 percent of migrant women and 70 percent of migrant men work in the informal economy. They are often the first to be laid off and are usually excluded from social welfare systems. In addition, they often live in precarious and overcrowded conditions, which puts them at heightened risk of contracting and spreading the virus. Loss of income and unemployment have left many migrant workers unable to support themselves and their families, pushing them to return home.

Households receiving remittances

Remittances are a lifeline for around 800 million people in the world. In 2019, cross-border remittances, most of them sent by migrants back to their family members, officially amounted to USD 717 billion. Of this, 76 percent or USD 548 billion was sent to low- and middle-income countries. Remittances allow families on the receiving end to diversify their income sources, helping them to meet their immediate food needs and facilitate their access to better nutrition, education and healthcare services. Remittances also enable households to invest in their livelihoods and constitute an important insurance against income loss.

In October, the World Bank estimated that remittances to LMICs would drop by at least 14 percent by 2021 as a result of the pandemic. Based on this estimation, it was projected by the World Food Programme that remittance losses could leave an additional 33 million people at risk of facing hunger across the countries where it operates.

While remittances fell markedly in March/April, they recovered at least partially in several countries in May/June, when many governments started to lift some of their containment measures. On one hand, this could illustrate the resilience and determination of migrants and diaspora communities to support their families back home. On the other hand, the increased remittance flows recorded in some places could potentially indicate a more frequent usage of official banking and other digital channels in place of informal channels such as hand-carrying or private agents. Any trend data on remittances therefore needs to be interpreted with caution.

As employment opportunities continue to be constrained – with latest estimates showing that 495 million full-time jobs were lost during the second quarter of 2020 – it is likely that migrants are using their savings or compromising their own consumption in order to send remittances, which is not sustainable in the medium to long term.

Forcibly displaced

The number of people displaced due to conflict and violence has been growing consistently since 2011. It reached a record high of 79.5 million people at the end of 2019 – nearly double the 41 million in 2010.

By the end of 2019, the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) reached 50.8 million: 45.7 million displaced by conflict and 5.1 million who remained displaced due to disasters, weather-related and natural hazards.

It must be noted, however, that over the past ten years, disasters have caused over 23 million new displacements on average per year. In 2019, new internal displacements were mainly driven by disasters, which triggered 24.9 million new displacements compared with 8.5 million displacements due to conflict. The same trend was observed in the first half of 2020, with disasters driving 9.8 million displacements and conflict and violence accounting for 4.8 million.

The majority of the displaced live in urban areas, where the economic impact of COVID-19 has been most pronounced. Like migrant workers, they mainly work in the informal sector and are often the first to lose their jobs during times of crisis. Refugees and IDPs living in crowded environments are also at high risk. Physical distancing, masks and frequent handwashing are impossible measures to implement, making these groups highly susceptible to a rapid spread of the virus.

Food security and protection concerns

Even before COVID-19, IDPs and refugees were at high risk of food insecurity and malnutrition. It is estimated that 80 percent of people displaced by conflict live in countries with high levels of acute food insecurity and malnutrition. Nine out of the ten countries with the largest number of IDPs experienced a major food crisis in 2019. Displaced populations in these countries are largely dependent on external food assistance for their survival. Over the past year, food insecurity has been increasing among displaced populations in countries such as the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and Yemen. In addition, migrant workers dependent on daily labour are emerging as a new group at increased risk of food insecurity due to loss of income and lack of access to safety nets, which exacerbates their vulnerability to violence and exploitation. This is particularly the case for migrants who are stranded in precarious situations.

Protection risks for migrants and displaced populations such as evictions, exploitation, gender-based violence or child marriage have increased during the pandemic. COVID-19 has also pushed migrants in vulnerable situations into embarking on more dangerous migratory journeys. At the same time, discrimination and xenophobic attitudes have been spreading and consolidating. Misinformation is a serious concern and may further expose vulnerable, minority or marginalized populations to the transmission of the virus.

Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic and actions taken to contain its spread is not a temporary crisis but a profound disruption that is likely to change human mobility in the near and long term. People on the move are particularly susceptible to the health and socioeconomic impacts of the crisis – with knock-on effects on their families back home. The World Food Programme and the International Organization for Migration recommend eight priority actions to mitigate the immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on mobile and displaced populations and remittance-dependent households.

1. Ensure migrants facing acute hardship can access humanitarian assistance in order to meet their food and other essential needs.
2. Safeguard assistance provided to the displaced and their host communities, including refugees and asylum seekers, IDPs, as well as migrants in crisis situations and those in mixed flows.
3. Secure access to critical services and inclusive information for all mobile and displaced populations.
4. Recognize the positive contributions of migrants and diaspora and promote their inclusion in social protection systems.
5. Facilitate the flow of remittances as an essential financial service that supports the response to and recovery from the impact of COVID-19.
6. Promote necessary adjustments to national legal frameworks and ensure access to legal services.
7. Counter xenophobia, stigmatization and discrimination towards people on the move in the wake of COVID-19.
8. Improve data and analysis to better understand the impacts of COVID-19 on mobility, remittances and food security dynamics.

Introduction

The number of hungry and malnourished people has gradually been rising over recent years, mainly due to conflict, climate shocks and economic crises. Current estimates are that nearly 690 million people are undernourished, representing 8.9 percent of the world's population. This is an increase of 10 million people in one year and nearly 60 million in five years.[1] Almost 135 million people in 55 countries suffered from acute hunger in 2019.[2]

At the same time, conflict, violence and persecution had driven more than 79.5 million people away from their homes by the end of 2019, including 45.7 million conflict-affected internally displaced persons (IDPs), 26 million refugees and 4.2 million asylum seekers.[3] At the same time, conflict, violence and persecution had driven more than 79.5 million people away from their homes by the end of 2019, including 45.7 million conflict-affected internally displaced persons (IDPs), 26 million refugees and 4.2 million asylum seekers.[4] The number of people displaced due to conflict and violence has been growing consistently since 2011 – nearly double the figure in 2010 (see Figure 1). Climate shocks are also pushing people to move and represent the largest trigger for new internal displacements on a yearly basis: between 2010 and 2019, an average 23.3 million people were displaced every year because of weather-related events and natural disasters.[5] The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimates that in 2019, around 5.1 million of the global IDP population remained displaced as a result of disasters.[6]

FIGURE 1. GLOBAL TRENDS IN FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN MILLIONS (2010-2019)

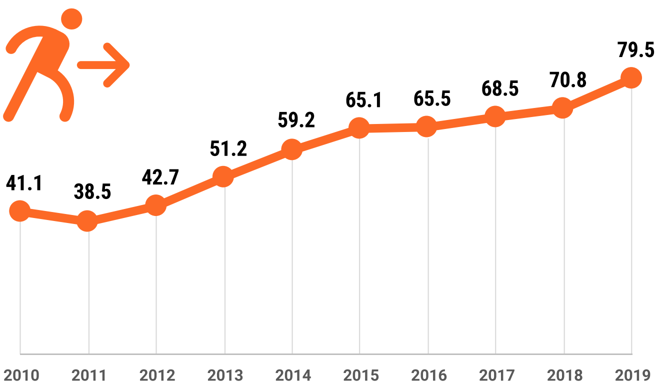
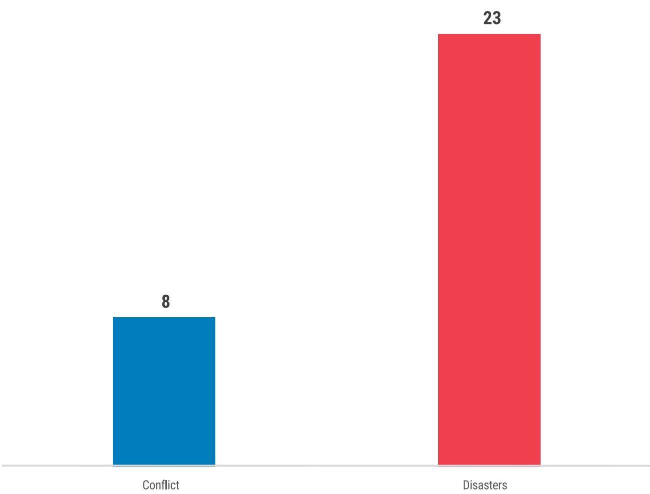


Figure 1 excludes displacement induced by disasters and does not cover all mixed migration. Sources: UNHCR (2020); UNRWA (2020); IDMC (2020) and R4V (2019)

Conflict, hunger, migration and displacements are closely intertwined. Although figures may be incomplete, it is estimated that 80 percent of populations displaced by conflict are in countries affected by acute food insecurity and malnutrition.[7] A study conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) concluded that food insecurity is a critical push factor driving international migration, along with limited economic opportunities, income inequality, population growth and the existence of established networks for migration. At the same time, food insecurity can be an outcome of migration, as significant numbers of migrants find themselves concerned about not being able to meet their food needs along their migration route, particularly when transiting or arriving in low or middle-income countries (LMICs). Moreover, countries that must contend with armed conflict and very high levels of food insecurity have the largest outflows of refugees.[8]

FIGURE 2: AVERAGE NEW DISPLACEMENTS PER YEAR DUE TO CONFLICT OR DISASTERS (2010–2019, IN MILLIONS)

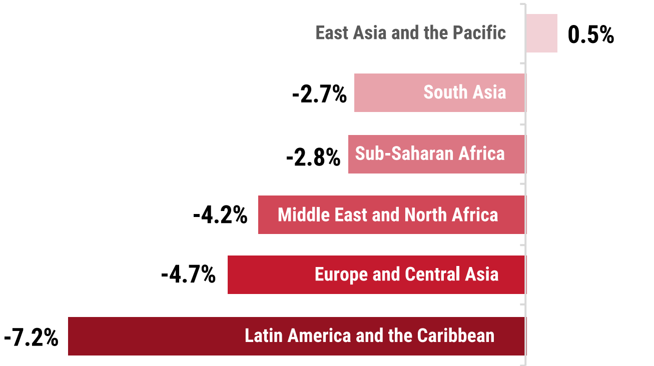


Source: Average based on IDMC global yearly figures of new internal displacement for the period 2010-2019.

Efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in unprecedented restrictions on mobility, trade and economic activity, triggering a global recession. According to recent estimates, the global economy is expected to contract by between 4.9 and 5.2 percent in 2020.[9] As a consequence, the World Bank projects that COVID-19 could push up to 150 million additional people into extreme poverty by 2021.[10] While COVID-19 presents significant health risks, the economic consequences of the pandemic are likely to be even more devastating than the disease itself, especially in LMICs that lack the capacities to respond to the crisis and protect vulnerable groups.[11]

Mobile and displaced population groups have been particularly hit hard by the unprecedented range of measures put in place to contain the spread of COVID-19. Lockdowns and movement restrictions have had dire economic consequences worldwide. For example, working hours in the second quarter of the year fell by 17.3 percent – equivalent to the loss of 495 million full-time jobs – with the informal sector disproportionately affected.[12]

FIGURE 3. ESTIMATES OF ECONOMIC CONTRACTION IN 2020 BY REGIONS



Source: World Bank Group. June 2020. Global Economic Prospects

Most international and internal migrant workers depend on informal work without any safety nets. They predominately work in sectors that have borne the brunt of the crisis such as transport, construction, food, tourism, seasonal agricultural labour, domestic work and other services.[13] The impact of income losses on these groups is likely to be devastating and will exacerbate the challenges many already faced in meeting their food and other essential needs.

As livelihood opportunities for migrants have become increasingly scarce, the remittances that support families in their home countries have fallen. Remittances help many households diversify their income and meet their food and other essential needs. Reduced flows in remittances due to the pandemic could hamper progress towards several Sustainable Development Goals. Poverty, food security, nutrition, health and educational attainment are all being directly impacted by mobility restrictions and the decline in remittances.[14]

By 2021, officially recorded remittances are expected to fall by at least 14 percent in LMICs; this would represent a major loss of a life-saving income source for many vulnerable households.[15] Coupled with the 32 percent drop projected for foreign direct investments (FDI) in 2020,[16] contractions in the prices of natural resources and a significant decrease in tourism revenues, the drop in remittances will likely impact the financial stability of numerous countries. The rapidly intensifying socioeconomic effects of the crisis are expected to be devastating for the local economies of countries and communities of origin and will possibly have lasting effects, as recovery is expected to be much slower than for the 2009 global financial crisis.

Mobile and displaced populations are not inherently more vulnerable or exposed to contracting infectious diseases. Rather, it is the conditions in which they migrate, live or work that influence or compound the health risks they face. Like migrants, displaced populations often rely on unstable, informal and temporary wage labour to survive, often providing the main source of income for their families. They are also more likely to reside in overcrowded households, informal dwellings, camps or camp-like settings and often lack access to the basic services that would help safeguard their health and wellbeing. The conditions in which they live make it difficult to apply measures such as physical distancing, making them more susceptible to the direct health impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Consequently, they are increasingly being rendered scapegoats and subjected to xenophobia and discrimination. They have also been precluded from receiving vital information on the pandemic due to language barriers.

Many communities that host displaced populations are often already poor and lack access to adequate health, water and sanitation facilities. As they are also harshly impacted by the direct and indirect effects of COVID-19, this increases the already complex barriers to integration for displaced populations and impedes efforts to find other durable solutions.

Overview of the paper

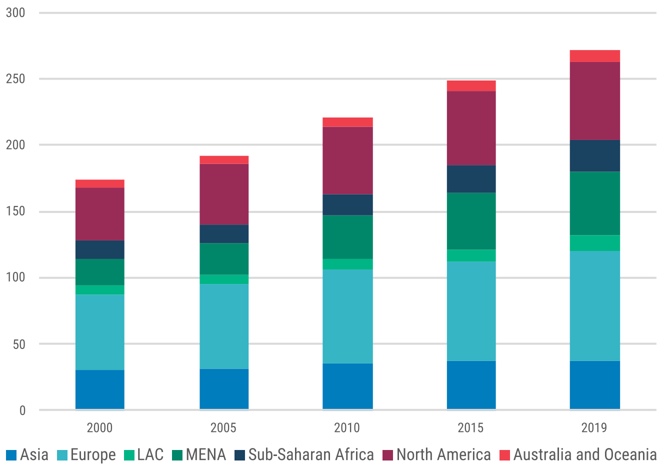
This paper constitutes an examination of the implications of COVID-19 for food security, migration and displacement. Section 2 provides an overview of migration trends. Section 3 explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant workers, remittance-dependent households and forcibly displaced persons, including its implications for their food security and other livelihood outcomes. Section 4 highlights the growing protection risks that mobile and displaced populations are facing in the light of COVID-19. Section 5 presents the food security trends in some of the biggest migration and hunger hotspots across eight regions. The paper concludes with eight recommended priority actions for key decision-makers within the international community.

Global migration landscape

In 2019, the worldwide number of international migrants, including refugees, reached 272 million, of whom 75 percent were of working age (20 to 64 years).[17] Women make up 48 percent of all international migrants, outnumbering male migrants on all continents except Africa and Asia.[18] Thirty million international migrants – 11 percent – are young people aged 15–24.[19]

The absolute number of migrants has been increasing since 2000 (see figure 4). Europe and North America have historically received the highest number of international migrants, hosting 141 million in 2019. These regions are followed by the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) with 49 million migrants; eastern and south-eastern Asia and Oceania (27 million); sub-Saharan Africa (24 million); central and southern Asia (20 million); and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) (12 million). However, the regional distribution of international migrants is changing, with migrant populations growing faster in MENA, sub-Saharan Africa and LAC than in other regions (see figure 4).

FIGURE 4: TOTAL NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES (IN MILLIONS) FROM 2000-2019 BY REGION OF DESTINATION



58% in Middle East and North Africa

44% in sub-Saharan Africa

18% in Asia (excluding the Middle East)

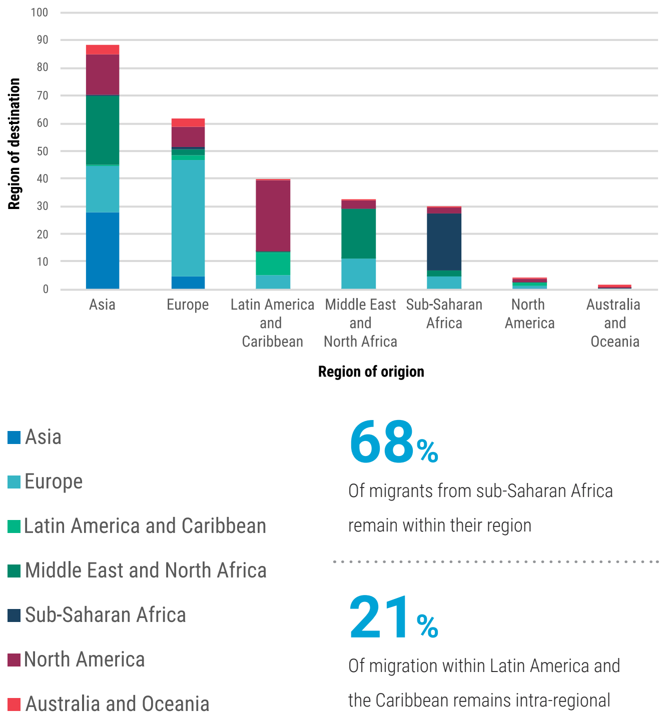
44% Latin America and the Caribbean

31% in Europe and North America

Source: UNDESA (2019): International migrant stocks

Figure 5 provides an overview of the number of international migrants and refugees by their regions of origin and destination.[20][21] The largest numbers of migrants are from Asia, Europe and Latin America. There are remarkable differences between regions in terms of intraregional and cross regional migration. For example, most migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and Europe stay within their own region, while migrants from Latin America migrate to North America. A notable proportion of Asians remain within Asia, except for those from the Middle East.

FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES BY REGION OF ORIGIN AND DESTINATION (IN MILLIONS)



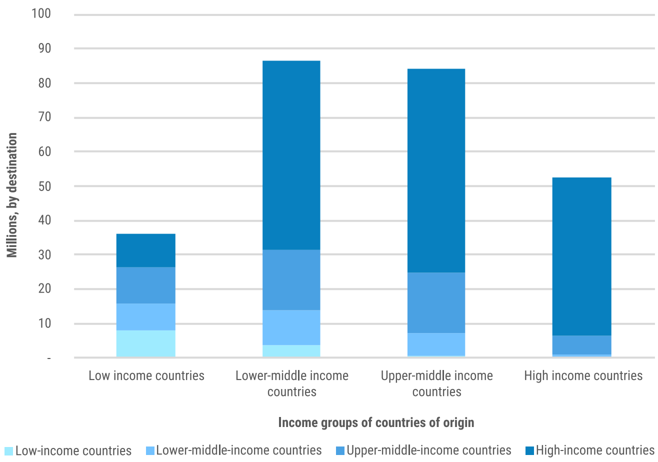
68% Of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa remain within their region

21% Of migration within Latin America and the Caribbean remains intra-regional

Source: UNDESA (2019): International migrant stocks

Most international migrants and refugees originate from middle-income countries and seek opportunities in high-income countries (see figure 6). Those from low-income countries are fewer and they tend to remain in LMICs (73 percent).[22]

FIGURE 6: NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES BY INCOME GROUP OF ORIGIN AND DESTINATION (IN MILLIONS)



MIGRATION TO HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES

27% of migrants from low-income countries move to high-income countries

64% Of migrants from lower-middle income move to high-income countries

70% From upper-middle income countries move to high-income countries

88% From high-income remain in high-income countries

Source: UNDESA (2019): International migrant stocks

More than one third of international migrants worldwide – around 95 million people – reside in LMICs.[23] Figures 7 and 8 rank low and lower-middle income countries as countries of origin and destination.[24] India dominates both categories due to its population size.

FIGURE 7: TOP 10 LOW AND LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES SENDING INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES (IN MILLIONS)

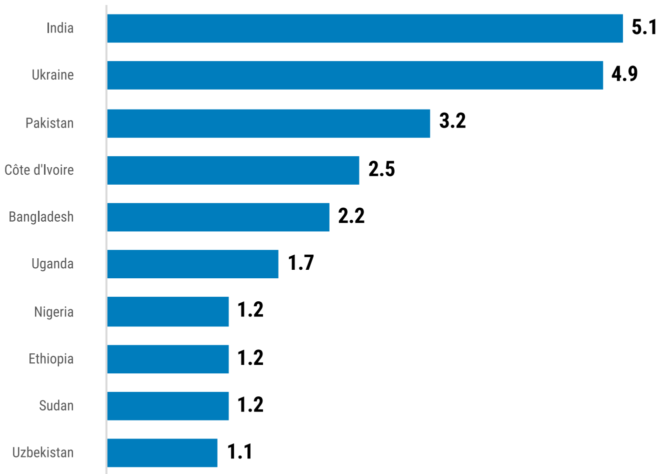
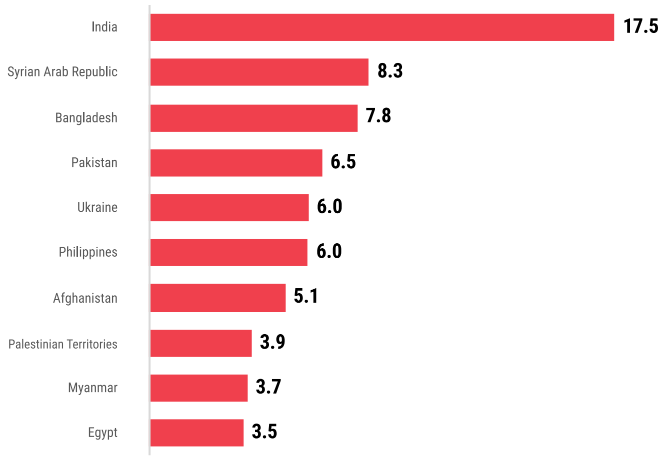


FIGURE 8: TOP 10 LOW AND LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES HOSTING INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES (IN MILLIONS)



Source: UNDESA (2019): International migrant stocks

Migration and Displacement

Definitions

The study uses the following International Organization for Migration (IOM) definitions.

International migration

The movement of persons away from their place of usual residence and across an international border to a country of which they are not nationals. It excludes movements that are due to recreation, holiday, visits to friends and relatives, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimages.

Internal migration

The movement of people within a State involving the establishment of a new temporary or permanent residence.

Irregular migration

Movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination. Although a universally accepted definition of irregular migration does not exist, the term is generally used to identify persons moving outside regular migration channels. The fact that they migrate irregularly does not relieve States from the obligation to protect their rights. Categories of migrants who may not have any other choice but to use irregular migration channels can also include refugees, victims of trafficking, or unaccompanied migrant children.

Mixed-migration flows

A movement in which several people are travelling together, generally in an irregular manner, using the same routes and means of transport, but for different reasons. People travelling as part of mixed movements have varying needs and profiles and may include asylum seekers, refugees, trafficked persons, unaccompanied/separated children, and migrants in an irregular situation.

Migrant

An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students.

Diaspora

Migrants or descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging, either real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background. They maintain links with their homelands, and to each other, based on a shared sense of history, identity, or mutual experiences in the destination country.

International migrant

Any person who is outside a State of which he or she is a citizen or national, or, in the case of a stateless person, his or her State of birth or habitual residence. The term includes migrants who intend to move permanently or temporarily, and those who move in a regular or documented manner as well as migrants in irregular situations.

Migrant worker

A person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.

Displacement

The movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee, or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

Refugee (1951 Convention)

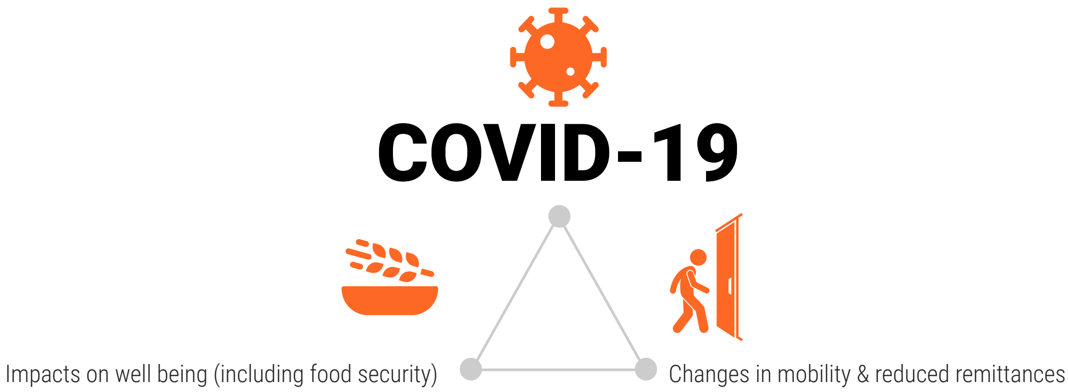
A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him or herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his or her former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Asylum seeker

An individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every recognized refugee is initially an asylum seeker.

Sources: IOM. 2019. Glossary on Migration and webpage on key migration terms

Implications of COVID-19 for people's mobility, food security and livelihoods



There are important linkages between food security and mobility. Food insecurity, especially when combined with conflict, can be a powerful driver for people to move.[25] At the same time migration can be an important strategy used by households to cope with income uncertainties and food insecurity risks, and contribute to the resilience and development of communities. For example, poor rural households often send one or more family members into cities to work in sectors other than agriculture in order to reduce their risk of hunger and extreme poverty and to cope with possible adverse shocks. Poor households also resort to seasonal migration to cope with seasonal hunger.[26] Generally, households who receive remittances tend to have better food security outcomes than those without this income source.[27] The global COVID-19 pandemic has most certainly had an impact on these established livelihoods and risk management mechanisms. While the pandemic mobility restriction measures have initially reduced international migration flows and caused mass returns in certain locations;[28] in the medium to longer term, reduced food security and wellbeing caused by COVID-19 could increase people's need to search for livelihoods elsewhere, eventually also increasing levels of migration out of necessity.

Governments across the world are continuing to implement a wide range of domestic and international measures in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. These measures range from the closure of schools and workplaces to restrictions on the size of gatherings, the cessation of public transport, home confinement orders and multiple travel restrictions and border closures. As of October, 96,202 international air travel restrictions or conditions for authorised entry were issued by 219 countries, territories or other areas. Most commonly, governments and authorities are employing a combination of medical requirements such as quarantine or mandatory testing (64 percent of all conditions for entry) and entry restrictions such as airport closures and flight suspensions (98 percent of all entry restrictions).[29]

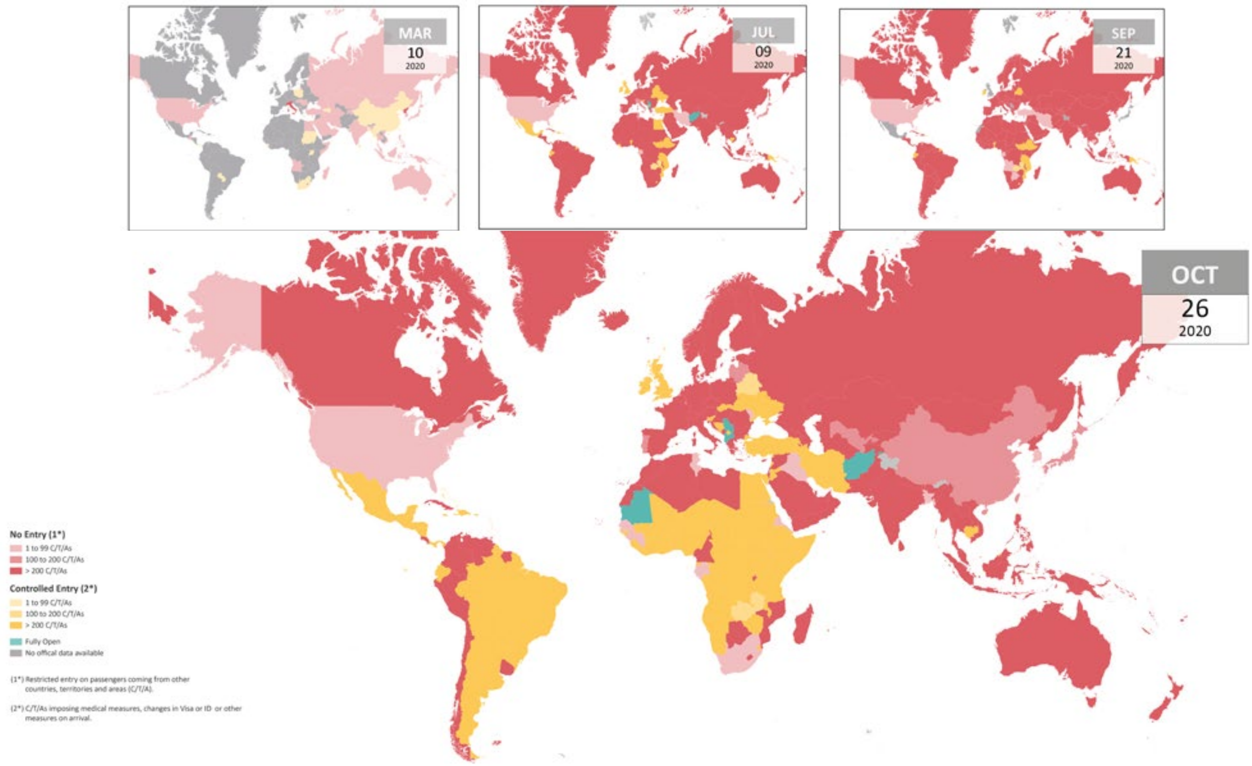
Map 1 indicates the evolution of COVID-19 related travel restrictions issued between March and October 2020. Red indicates those countries, territories or areas (C/T/As) that are completely closed for entry, i.e. that have a total passenger ban. Yellow represents those that are partially open, i.e. open to some nationalities, passengers or specific categories of individuals or groups; and finally, green represents those that are open to all passenger entry.[30]

Map 2 is based on IOM's Global Points of Entry Database. IOM has mapped and assessed 4,102 points of entry (airports, land border and blue border crossing points) covering 179 countries, territories and areas worldwide. As of 29 October 2020, 23 percent of all assessed points of entry were reported to be fully closed, 43 percent were fully operational, 28 percent were partially operational and the status of around 6 percent was unknown.[31]

Movement restrictions, both internationally and domestically, have severely impacted mobile and displaced populations. While numbers are highly fluid, based on different data collection exercises and secondary data reviews carried out by IOM, it is estimated that the intended movements of nearly 3 million migrants have been affected by COVID-19, leaving them stranded.[32]

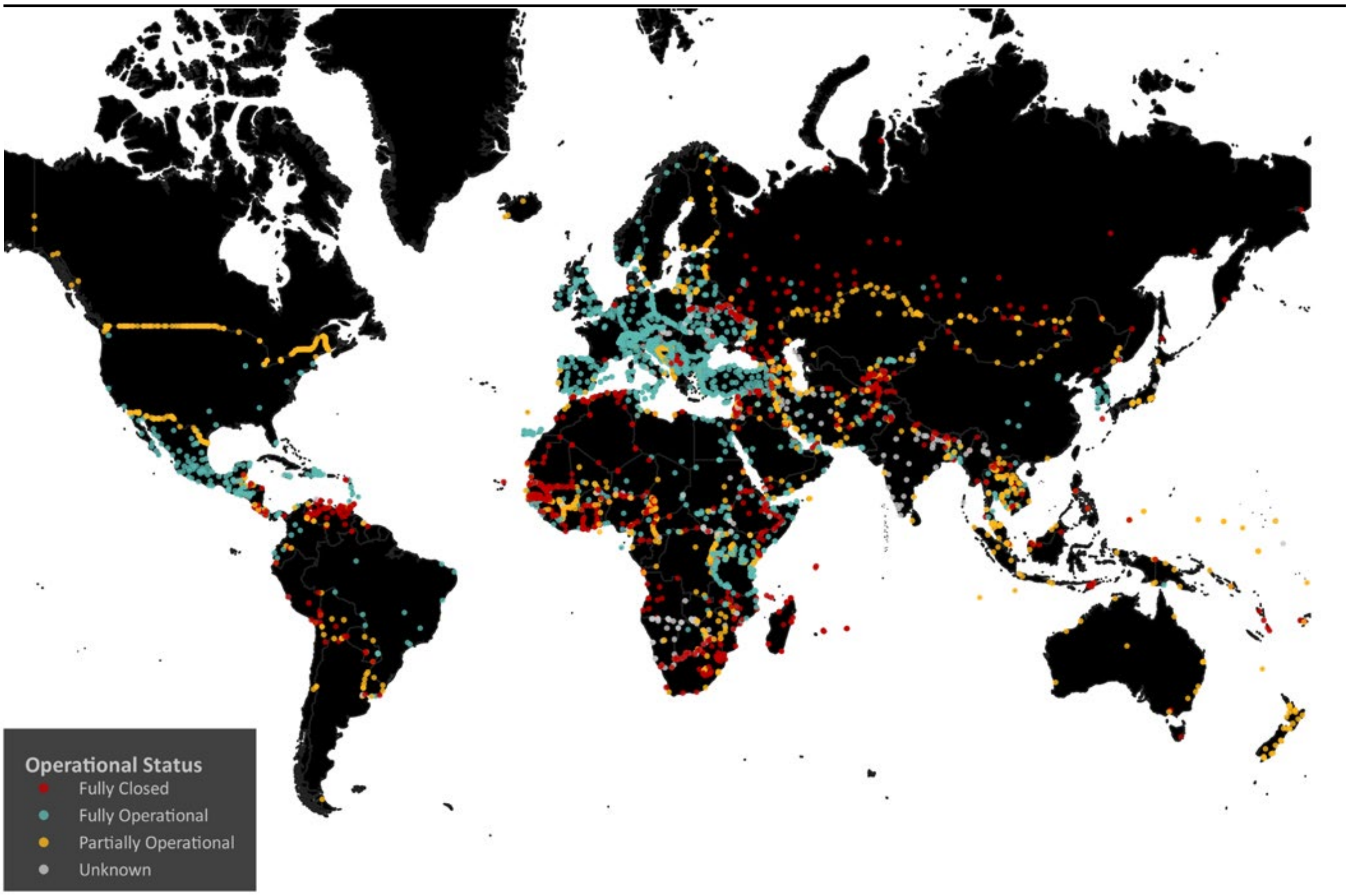
The sections below describe how COVID-19 has affected the livelihoods and food security of the following three groups: **international and internal migrant workers, households dependent on remittances**, and people who have been displaced.

MAP 1: STATUS OF ENTRY FOR INTERNATIONAL AIR TRAVEL IN COUNTRIES, TERRITORIES AND AREAS, MARCH–OCTOBER 2020



This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration. Source: IOM. 2020. Global Mobility Restriction Overview – update 26 October 2020

MAP 2: GLOBAL MAP OF ASSESSED POINTS OF ENTRY AND THEIR OPERATIONAL STATUS



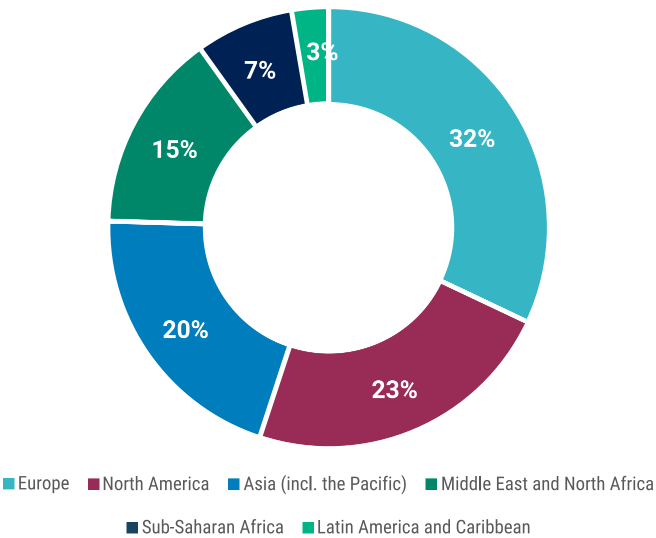
Source: IOM. 2020. IOM COVID-19 impact on points of entry bi-weekly analysis, 4 November 2020

3.1 International and internal migrant workers

In 2017, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that there were **164 million international migrant workers** worldwide, accounting for around 64 percent of the total number of international migrants of the same year (258 million).[33] Migrant workers represented nearly 4.7 percent of the global workforce. Around half of all migrant workers are women, and 8 percent are young people aged 15–24.

At the end of 2017, 111 million international migrant workers (68 percent) were hosted in high-income countries; 47 million (29 percent) were in middle-income countries and roughly 5.6 million (3.4 percent) were in low-income countries. While it is true that the majority of migrant workers still live in high-income countries, the distribution has shifted over the past years. Between 2013 and 2017, high-income countries experienced a slight drop in migrant workers from 112.3 million to 111.2 million people. At the same time, the number of migrant workers in upper-middle-income countries increased from 17.5 million to 30.5 million. These changes could be explained by economic growth in many middle-income countries and/or changes in labour migration regulations in high-income countries.[34] Figure 9 provides a regional breakdown.

FIGURE 9: DISTRIBUTION OF MIGRANT WORKERS BY SUB-REGION



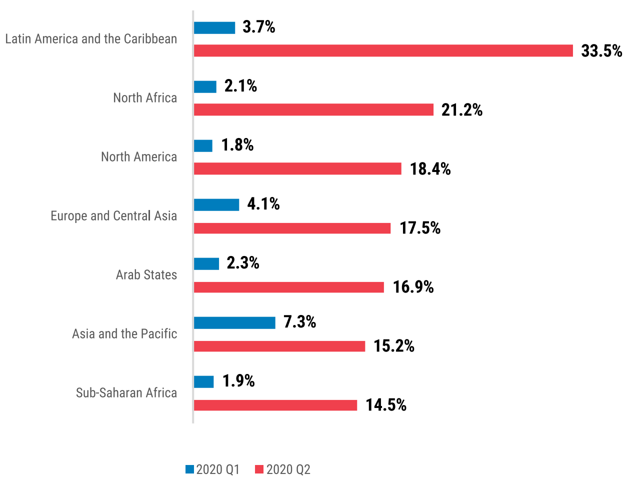
Source: ILO (2018) ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers in 2017

It is worth noting that the vast majority of migrant workers do not cross into other countries – much larger numbers migrate within their own borders. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimated that there were 740 million internal migrants in 2009.[35] Due to measurement difficulties, this number has not been updated in recent years but is likely to have risen further, in line with population growth and increased population pressure.

In many countries, both internal and international migrant workers represent a large share of the workforce and make important economic contributions, working in sectors including healthcare, transport, services, construction, agriculture and food processing, among others. However, many of these sectors are characterized by high levels of temporary, informal or unprotected work, as well as low wages and a lack of social protection. An ILO study on migrant pay gaps found that in LMICs, nearly 75 percent of international migrant worker women and 70 percent of migrant worker men work in the informal economy.[36]

COVID-19 and measures to contain the virus have caused significant income losses, particularly in the informal sector. An estimated 5.6 percent of global working hours (equivalent to 160 million full-time jobs) were lost in the first quarter of 2020; the situation worsened in the second quarter with working-hour losses reaching 17.3 percent worldwide (equivalent to 495 million full-time jobs) – a worst outcome than originally anticipated.[37] Lower-middle income countries were the hardest hit, with a 23.3 percent drop in working hours (240 million full-time jobs). Figure 10 illustrates working hour losses by sub-regions. Those most affected were Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by North Africa.[38]

FIGURE 10: WORKING-HOUR LOSSES (%) BY SUB-REGIONS



Source: ILO (September 2020). ILO Monitor. COVID-19 and the World of Work. Sixth Edition.

International migrant workers are particularly vulnerable during economic crises as they are often the first to be laid off.[39] In the face of a lack of income and reduced employment opportunities, it becomes increasing difficult to meet essential food and non-food needs. The additional imposition of quarantine and physical distancing requirements – unique to this crisis – has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, as the options for alternative livelihoods have become ever more limited. Even as restrictions have started to ease, migrants' capacity to engage in economic activity remains impaired due to widespread bankruptcy and increasing competition over low-skilled jobs. Migrant workers are also often excluded from welfare systems and stimulus packages in host countries. In addition, they often live and work in precarious and overcrowded conditions in many host countries, which puts them at heightened risk of contracting the virus.[40]

Women and young people are particularly affected as they are over-represented in the informal sector and have little protection against dismissal. It is likely that the crisis will reverse fragile gains made in migrant women's participation in the formal labour market, with knock-on effects on personal and family income, as well as gender equality.[41]

Given that migrants form an essential part of the global workforce, the economies of destination countries and areas have been severely impacted by migrants' reduced access to labour markets. This is particularly the case in key sectors such as health and agriculture. For instance, most of the top 15 countries worst affected by COVID-19 depend on foreign-born workers in their healthcare services.[42] Migrants also constitute a significant share of the workforce in the agricultural sector, often engaged in seasonal labour. Timely and agile recruitment procedures are especially important in this sector and sudden disruptions caused by a lack of seasonal agricultural workers can have ramifications on the production, processing and distribution of food, particularly if workers are not available when needed to harvest crops. Such shortfall in production could have an impact on local and regional agricultural value chains, with consequences on the availability and affordability of agricultural goods.[43] COVID-19 has therefore exacerbated the pre-existing global competition over much needed health workers and labour shortages in the agricultural sector.

Migrants in vulnerable situations often lack access to essential healthcare services, which include adequate and timely diagnostics, testing and treatment services for COVID-19 and other health conditions. Many migrants live and work in circumstances with inherent risks of exposure to the virus, such as in congested locations without access to personal protective equipment and where the possibility of practising physical distancing is limited. Yet they often have no choice and may have to take risks in order to earn an income and meet their basic needs. The inclusion of migrants in national social protection and health systems or health insurance schemes, including portable schemes, contributes to public health efforts to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 as well as to combat nutritional deficiencies, and is aligned with universal health coverage principles.

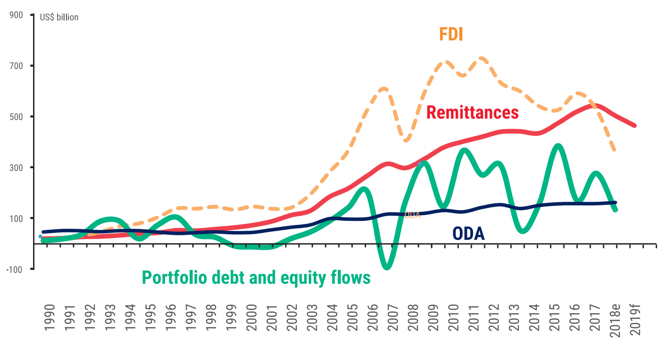
Massive job losses and lack of employment opportunities due to COVID-19 have forced large numbers of migrants to return home. However, strict lockdown and travel restrictions, paired with loss of income, residence permits and resources, have left many returning migrants stranded, unable to return to their places of work or their communities or countries of origin. While some countries have extended visas and work permits and implemented other types of temporary regularization measures for international migrants, this has not been the case for all. Working permissions have expired while international travel has been blocked, leaving many migrants with irregular immigration status. With limited options for returning home, this raises major protection concerns,[44] including limited access to healthcare and social support, stigmatization and xenophobia, risk of exploitation and abuse, detention and homelessness.[45] Unable to earn income while stranded, such migrants are struggling to meet their immediate food and other basic needs. Migrants who have been able to return to their place of origin are sometimes met with suspicion and the stigma of potentially carrying the disease.

Communities and families in areas of origin will be confronted with new challenges, such as the potential risk of a spread of the disease or of additional financial burdens as returning migrants may find it challenging to integrate into local labour markets. On the other hand, returning migrants may bring back special skills that could benefit local communities in the medium to long term.

3.2
Households receiving remittances

Remittances are a lifeline for around 800 million – or one in nine – people in the world.[46] Between 2009 and 2019, the value of international remittances increased by around 80 percent,[47] and the transfers play an important role in the economies of many LMICs. Prior to the pandemic, global remittances peaked at USD 717 billion in 2019.[48] Of this total, 76 percent or USD 548 billion was received by households living in LMICs.[49] For 66 countries, remittances represented more than 5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), often exceeding foreign direct investment (FDI) and official development assistance (ODA) flows. In fact, FDI have been on a downward trend in recent years, such that remittances matched the level of FDI flows in 2018 (see Figure 11). Excluding China, the value of remittances (USD 462 billion) was significantly larger than FDI flows (USD 344 billion), illustrating the importance of remittances as the largest source of foreign exchange earning in LMICs. As these figures only represent official remittances, the true size and social impact is even greater.[50]

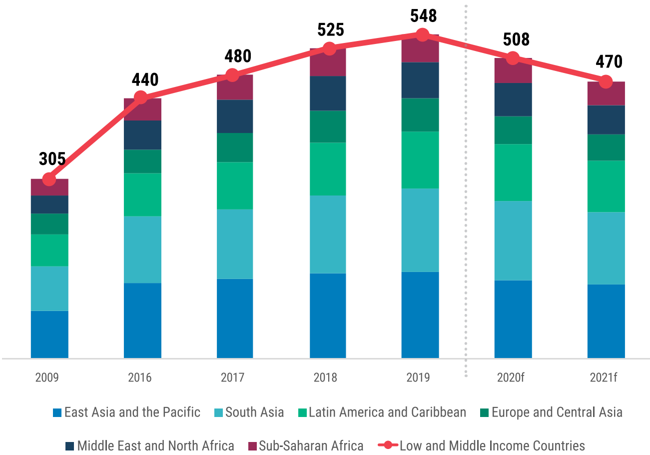
FIGURE 11: REMITTANCE FLOWS TO LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES, OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE, AND PRIVATE CAPITAL FLOWS, 1990–2021



Source: World Bank and KNOMAD. October 2020. [Phase II - COVID-19 Crisis through a migration lens]

Figure 12 illustrates the increase of officially recorded remittance flows towards LMIC regions up to 2019, and the distribution between different regions.

FIGURE 12: REMITTANCES INFLOWS TO LMICS (IN USD BILLION) FROM 2009 - 2021



Source: World Bank and KNOMAD. October 2020. [Phase II - COVID-19 Crisis through a migration lens]

Figures 13 and 14 illustrate the top low and lower-middle-income countries receiving officially recorded remittances in 2019 in terms of absolute value and share of GDP.[51] For many countries in Latin America and Central Asia, remittances account for more than 20 percent of GDP.

FIGURE 13: TOP 10 LOW AND LOWER MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES RECEIVING REMITTANCES (US$ BILLIONS)

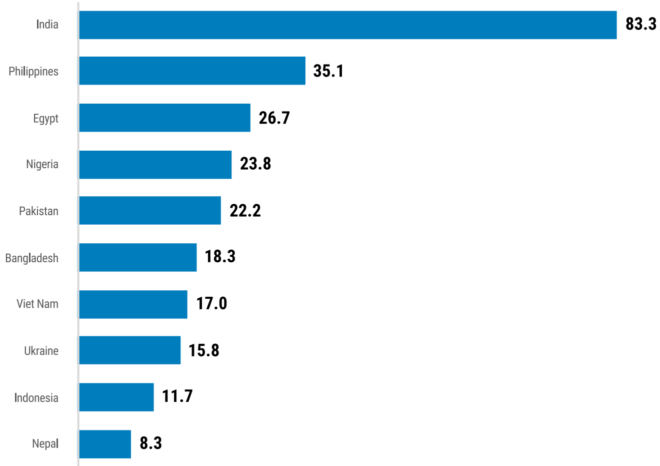
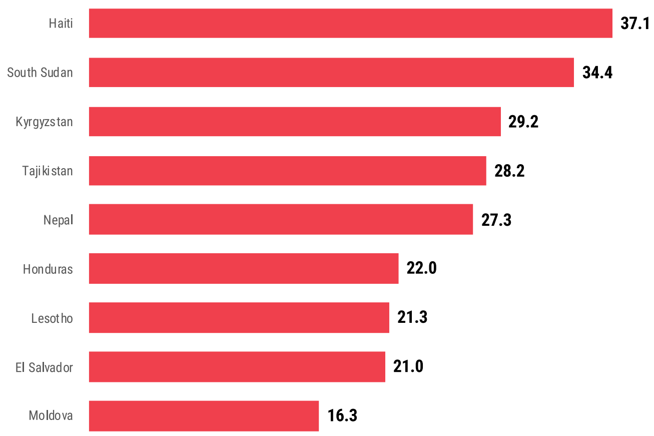


FIGURE 14: TOP 10 LOW AND LOWER MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES WITH HIGHEST REMITTANCES AS SHARE OF GDP(%)



Source: World Bank (April 2020). Inflows of remittances – 2019 Dataset from April 2020. Accessed in September 2020.

Remittances are a vital safety net for families left behind. Migration can reduce the pressure on households who have to provide for numerous family members, and remittances can finance food consumption and investments. Both seasonal and long-term migration have been found to help households support basic subsistence consumption, which in turn has resulted in improvements in food security and nutrition (see box 1).

Updated estimates from the World Bank in October point to a 7.2 percent fall in officially recorded remittances towards LMICs in 2020 resulting in a total of USD 508 billion (see figure 12) mainly due to widespread job losses, unemployment, returning migrant workers and logistical challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This drop is expected to be followed by a further decline of 7.5 percent in 2021 to USD 470 billion.[52] This represents the loss of a crucial financing lifeline for many vulnerable households. Figure 15 shows the estimates and projections of reduction in remittances to LMIC regions over the next two years.

BOX 1: ROLE OF REMITTANCES TO REDUCE FOOD INSECURITY AND POVERTY

In **Nigeria**, remittances play an important role in supporting families with international migrants. For one in five households, remittances are most frequently used to meet food needs. Households receiving remittances are less likely to feel worried about meeting their food needs (51 percent) than those who do not receive them (62 percent). Moreover, households receiving this additional income are less likely to resort to food-related negative coping strategies such as reducing meal sizes and skipping meals for entire days.

Source: WFP (2019): The Migration Pulse Nigeria.

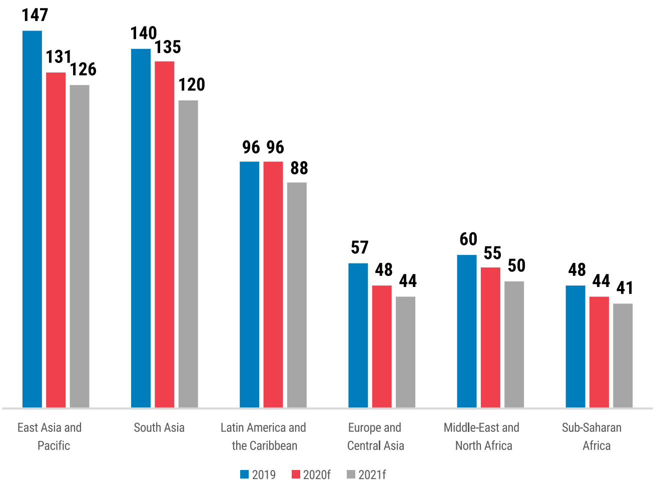
In **Kyrgyzstan**, remittances are credited with having reduced the national poverty rate by an estimated 6 to 7 percent between 2010 and 2014. A UNDP study showed that income poverty rates among households receiving remittances stood at 31 percent compared with 36 percent among households not receiving remittances.

Source: UNDP (2015): Labour Migration, Remittances and Human Development in Central Asia.

In **South-East Asia**, over the last two decades labour migration has emerged as a significant driver of economic growth and development in countries of origin and destination within the region. Migration has had a significant impact on poverty reduction, particularly in Viet Nam, where poverty among returned migrants dropped by 17 percent and in Myanmar, where it fell by 13 percent during the period of the research. For migrants and their families, remittances are used for a variety of purposes. It is estimated that on average over 70 percent of remittances go towards meeting essential needs, with the remainder contributing to a variety of longer-term objectives including responding to unexpected needs or servicing debts.[53 54]

Source: IOM and ILO. 2017. Risks and Rewards: Outcomes of labour migration in South-East Asia

FIGURE 15: ESTIMATES AND PROJECTIONS OF OFFICIALLY RECORDED REMITTANCE FLOWS TO LMIC REGIONS (IN USD BILLIONS) FOR 2019, 2020 AND 2021



Source: World Bank and KNOMAD. October 2020. [Phase II - COVID-19 Crisis through a migration lens]

Remittances dropped sharply in March and April 2020. However, since then, emerging data in selected countries, for example in Kyrgyzstan and El Salvador, indicates at least partial recovery starting in May/June following the easing of containment measures in many countries. This could be an indication that migrants have shifted from informal transfer channels such as hand-carrying or private agents to official channels including bank transfers. There is limited information on the amount of remittances sent through informal channels. Conservatively, it has been estimated that informal remittances are worth between 35 and 75 percent of total official remittances to developing countries, with highest rates observed in sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.[55] Any trend data should therefore take these dynamics into consideration.

The partial recovery in selected countries could also indicate the resilience of migrants and their determination to continue to support their families back home, which would mean that the countercyclical role of remittances may still hold true at this point in time.[56] However, there is a risk that migrants may be using their savings or compromising their consumption to support their families, which is not sustainable in the medium to long run. Should this be the case, future waves of the pandemic would further jeopardize remittance flows.[57]

Nonetheless, overall falling remittances in 2020 and the years to come are expected to severely aggravate household poverty and food insecurity. Based on the latest World Bank estimates,[58] WFP projects that in 79 countries where it operates, **at least 32.9 million people could be at risk of facing acute food insecurity due to the loss of remittances**. The figure could even be higher as the 7.2 percent decrease in 2020 may be underestimated as it does not consider the possible substitution effect of households moving from informal to formal challenges.

Rural areas – home to 80 percent of the world's poorest people[59] – will be confronted with a double burden as remittances from abroad and those from within the country are likely to dry up. About 40 percent of international remittances and most internal remittances support populations in rural locations.[60] For many poor rural households, migration to urban centres provides an escape from poverty and underemployment.[61] Movement restrictions have stripped rural households of an important coping strategy that used to help them diversify and stabilize their income. For example, recent research by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Egypt suggests that the fall in remittances caused by the pandemic could reduce the average monthly income of poor households by as much as 14 percent in rural areas and 12 percent in urban zones.[62]

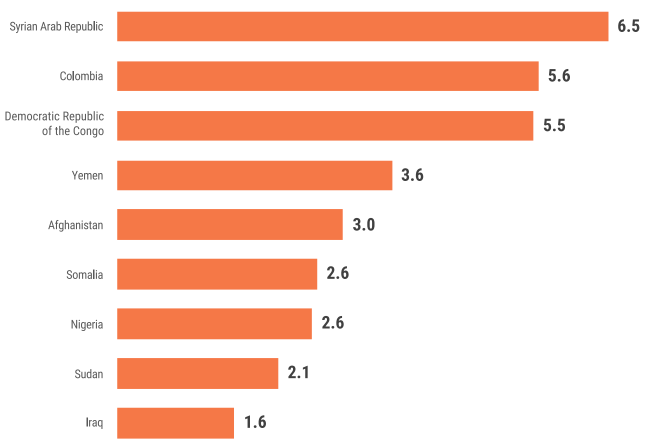
3.3

Forcibly displaced

More than 1 percent of the world's population is estimated to be displaced. At the end of 2019, there were 26 million refugees, 4.2 million asylum seekers and over 50.8 million IDPs worldwide.[63] There are also other groups of people who are forced to migrate, such as migrants in crisis situations and mixed flows of migrants and refugees. This is the case, for example, for the nearly 5.5 million Venezuelans who have left their country in recent years.[64] Developing countries host 85 percent of people displaced due to conflict, whether internally or internationally. Nine out of the ten countries with the largest numbers of IDPs experienced major food crises in 2019.[65] Most of those displaced abroad (73 percent) are hosted in countries adjacent to their countries of origin.[66]

By December 2019, the total number of IDPs had reached its highest ever point and included 45.7 million people displaced as a result of conflict and violence and 5.1 million who remained displaced as a result of disasters, due to weather-related and natural hazards. Almost all IDPs live in LMICs. Five countries – the Syrian Arab Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen and Afghanistan – account for more than half of the 45.7 million IDPs who have fled conflict and violence (see figure 17). The 5.1 million people who remained displaced due to disasters are distributed across 95 countries and territories; Afghanistan hosts the largest number, with 1.2 million IDPs who have fled drought and floods in recent years, followed by India (590,000) and Ethiopia (390,000).[67]

FIGURE 16: TOP 10 COUNTRIES WITH HIGHEST STOCKS OF IDPS (IN MILLIONS) DUE TO CONFLICT

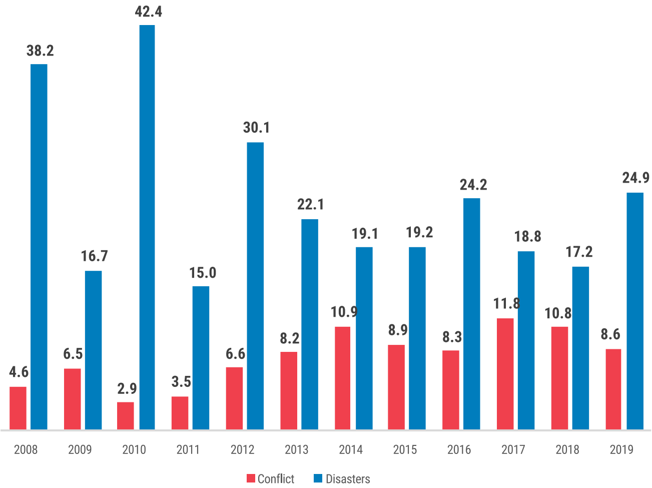


Source: IDMC (2020) *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020*

Conflict and disasters triggered 33.4 million new internal displacements in 145 countries and territories in 2019 – the highest number since 2012.

Around 8.5 million new displacements were driven by conflict and violence, mainly in Burkina Faso, Yemen and Libya. The number of people displaced due to disasters was almost triple, with 24.9 million new displacements in 2019. Of these, 23.9 million were displacements caused by weather-related events. Figure 18 illustrates the trends in new internal displacements between 2008 and 2019.

FIGURE 17: NEW INTERNAL DISPLACEMENTS (IN MILLIONS) FROM 2008-2019



Recently released figures estimate that there were 14.6 million new internal displacements in 127 countries between January and June 2020.[68] Conflict and violence triggered around 4.8 million, while disasters drove 9.8 million new displacements. Figures 19 and 20 indicate the countries with the highest numbers of new internal displacements in the first half of 2020.

The number of refugees, excluding Palestinian refugees, doubled from 10 million in 2010 to 20.4 million at the end of 2019. MENA and Europe have been significantly impacted by the war in the Syrian Arab Republic, which has displaced 6.7 million people abroad.[69]

International displacements in sub-Saharan Africa have mainly been driven by conflict and violence in Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and South Sudan. In Asia and the Pacific, the biggest share of refugees is attributable to the Rohingya refugee crisis, with 861,545 people fleeing Myanmar to Bangladesh;[70] the Afghan refugees who have been hosted in Pakistan and Iran for several decades also account for a significant number. Children under 18 make up around half of the global refugee population, and women and girls account for 49 percent.[71]

Currently, 68 percent of all internationally displaced people come from just five countries:[72] the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria), followed by Bolivian Republic of Venezuela (Venezuela),[73] Afghanistan, South

FIGURE 18: NEW INTERNAL DISPLACEMENTS BY CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE (IN MILLIONS) BY MID-YEAR 2020

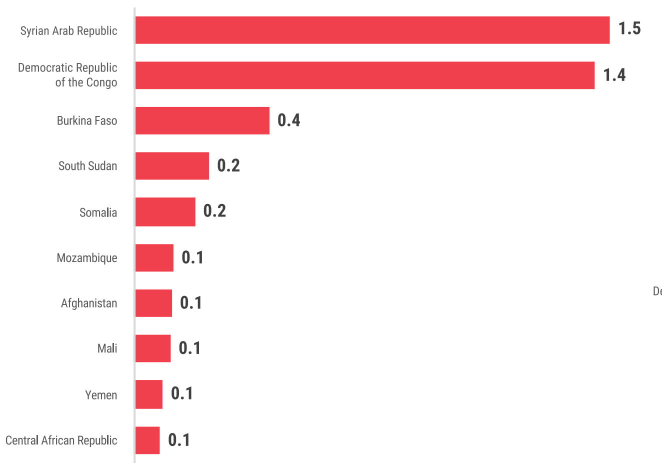
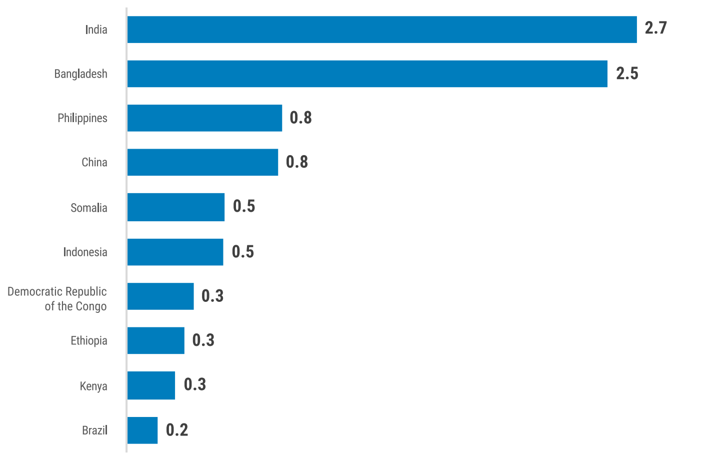


FIGURE 19: NEW INTERNAL DISPLACEMENTS BY DISASTERS (IN MILLIONS) BY MID-YEAR 2020



Source: IDMC. 2020. Internal Displacement 2020: Mid-year update

Sudan and Myanmar (see figure 21). Turkey hosted the highest number of internationally displaced people in 2019 – 3.9 million, most of whom were Syrian refugees (92 percent). Colombia was second, hosting nearly 1.8 million of the mixed migration flows from Venezuela, consisting of migrants and refugees. Germany hosted the third largest number, with almost 1.5 million refugees and asylum seekers, 42 percent of whom were Syrians.

Mixed migration flows and migration in crisis and vulnerable situations are seen in many parts of the world, including in the eastern routes of the Horn of Africa and Yemen,[74] western[75] and northern Africa, Asia, Europe[76] and the Americas.[77] However, there is no aggregated data at the global level on these flows at the time of writing this report. One of the **largest mixed migration flows in the world is related to the situation in Venezuela,** which has triggered the exodus of nearly 5.5 million people as of September 2020[78] mainly due to economic collapse and the spiralling political crisis, food shortages and deteriorating basic services.

Refugees and IDPs residing in large camps or informal settlements are highly susceptible to the health risks associated with the pandemic. About 40 percent of the world's refugee population (2.6 million people) live in camps or settlements.[79] The world's largest refugee camps are in Bangladesh, Uganda, Kenya, Jordan, United Republic of Tanzania, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Pakistan.[80] An estimated 20 percent of IDP populations live in camps or camp-like settings,[81] and in some cases in dense and congested living environments, for example in parts of north-east Nigeria, South Sudan and Iraq. Camps and informal settlements often have insufficient basic sanitation and running water, limited shelter options and inadequate medical services.

FIGURE 20: TOP 10 INTERNATIONALLY DISPLACED SENDING COUNTRIES (IN MILLIONS) IN 2019

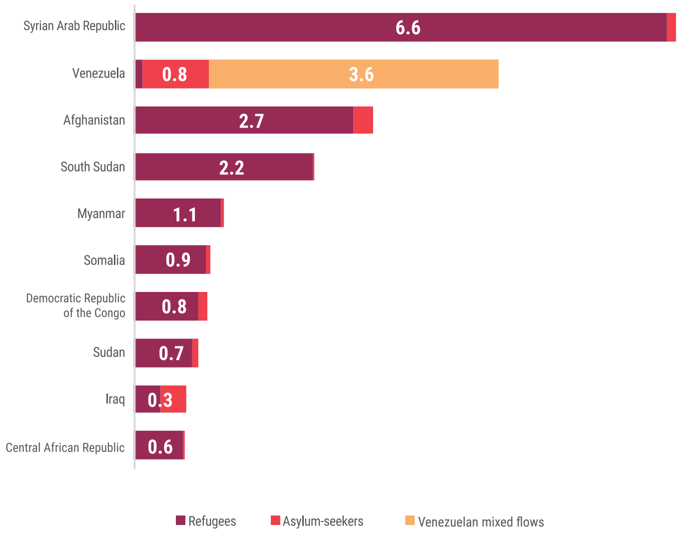
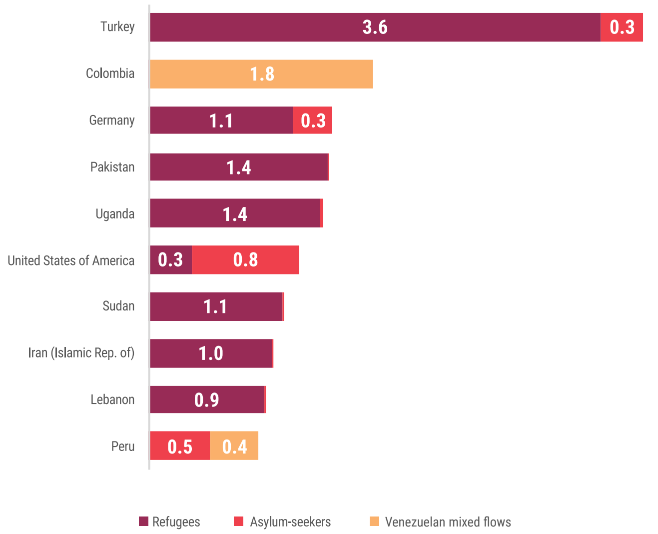


FIGURE 21: TOP 10 INTERNATIONALLY DISPLACED HOSTING COUNTRIES (IN MILLIONS) IN 2019



Source: Adapted from UNHCR (2020); UNRWA (2020); IDMC (2020); R4V (2019)

**Figures exclude the 5.6 million refugees under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*

The absorption capacities of host communities are often overstretched and access to basic services, when available, remains limited. Physical distancing, masks and frequent handwashing are difficult measures to implement in such conditions, making these settings highly susceptible to a rapid spread of the virus.

The large majority of the world's refugees[82] **and half of the world's IDP population reside in urban areas**[83] **and are greatly exposed to the implications of limited and informal income opportunities.** Refugees and IDPs fleeing conflict, natural disasters, violence or persecution at home are most likely to take refuge in towns and cities for economic reasons and access to services. Yet they often find themselves enduring extreme poverty and scarce economic opportunities. They often have limited access to information and services and face discrimination, exploitation and severe deprivation, which increases their vulnerability.

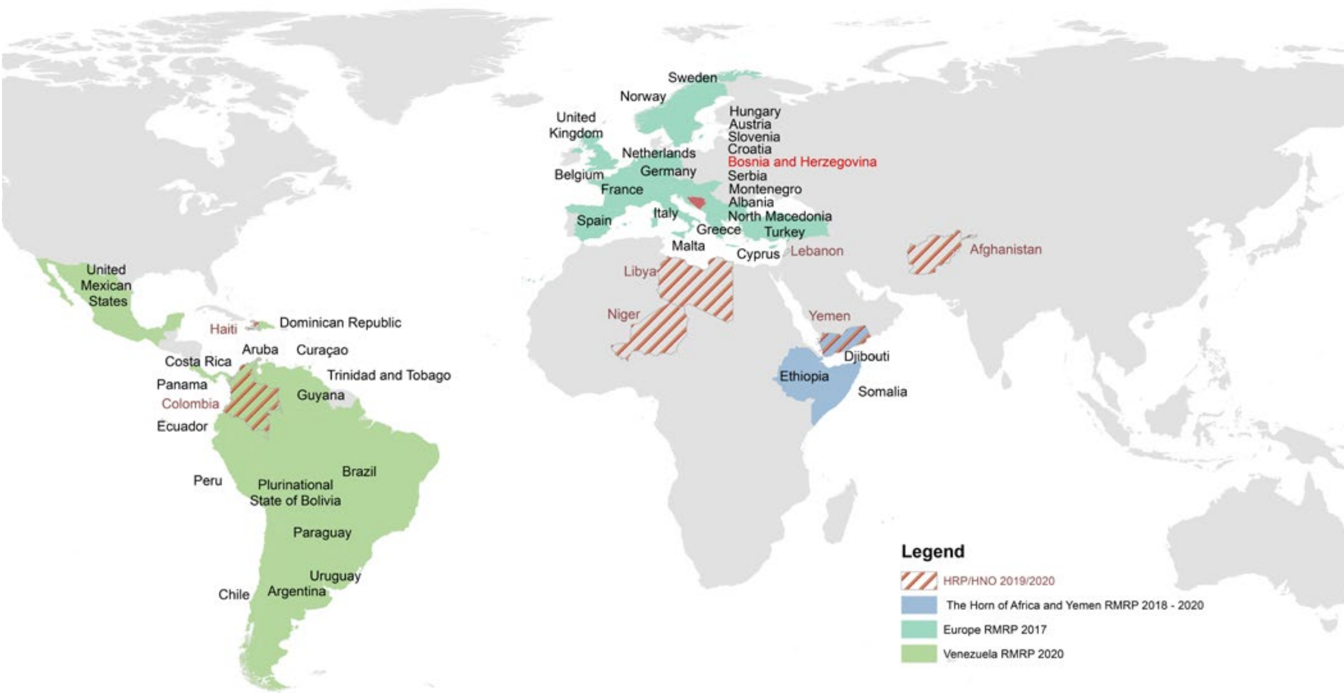
Many of them are forced to look for work in the informal economy because they lack the necessary documents, visas and work permits; this in turn exposes them to unfair wages and unsafe and uncertain working conditions. Like migrant workers, they have been the first to risk losing their jobs since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Even before COVID-19, IDPs and refugees were at high risk of food insecurity and malnutrition, compounded by co-morbidities such as measles or other respiratory tract infections and diarrheal diseases, which occur frequently in displacement sites. In 2019, more than half of all refugees were hosted in countries with high numbers of acutely food insecure people. In countries where funding constraints have reduced assistance in refugee camps, the food security of refugees has been severely threatened.[84] Moreover, nine out of the ten countries with the largest numbers of IDPs have experienced major food crises in 2019.[85]

BOX 2: IMPACT OF MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES FOR IDPS

Measures implemented by governments to limit the spread of COVID-19 have had a direct impact on the movements of IDPs in and out of sites. Lockdowns and restricted access to camps has reduced the provision of goods and services to IDP populations, such as in Uganda and Iraq. In some countries, including Nigeria, Sudan and Iraq, specific camp measures have been implemented restricting potential returns and curbing people's access to livelihood activities. Certain countries, such as Nigeria, are slowly lifting mobility restrictions, restoring access to services in camps. Despite the easing of movement restrictions in Iraq, service delivery remains a challenge in 9 out of the 62 IDP sites, in which humanitarian actors have reported partial or no access to camps.[86]

MAP 3: GEOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF MIXED FLOW CRISIS SITUATIONS AND RESPONSE PLANNING



Source: IOM

This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

Migrant protection concerns during COVID-19

In all times, migration carries inherent risks whether it is regular, irregular or forced; this has motivated the development of international frameworks and initiatives.

While migration may occur for a multitude of reasons, migrants are almost invariably impacted by language barriers; distance or disconnection from community and social supports; unfamiliarity with local laws and customs; and in international migration, by immigration policies and restrictions. These experiences are compounded by factors related to gender, age, social class, affiliation to religious or ethnic groups, sexual orientation, literacy, ability or disability and physical and mental health at the start of migration journeys. All these circumstances can be hugely exacerbated by conflict, insecurity, economic burdens, resource scarcity, separation from family, discrimination, deceit and various forms of exploitation. Protection and assistance needs also change over the course of a displacement.

The moment a person's migratory status becomes invalid or questionable, their decisions will be conditioned by the potential threat of detention, separation or deportation. This impacts their ability to safely seek out appropriate assistance and basic necessities, leaving migrants more vulnerable to poor physical health, violence, exploitation and abuse. Migrants, including stranded migrants and those in irregular situations, may be fearful of reporting health conditions and accessing needed treatments.

These protection risks are likely to be further aggravated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mobile and displaced populations face new challenges on top of their pre-existing vulnerabilities such as increased exposure to work-related abuse and exploitation, the risk of losing residence status, the lack of funds to buy hygiene items and difficulties accessing COVID-19 tests as well as restrictions on their general freedom to travel back and forth to their country or area of origin.

There is serious concern that COVID-19 has increased the risks associated with migratory journeys by pushing people into more perilous and deadly situations where humanitarian support and rescue is increasingly unavailable. Despite the mobility restrictions put in place in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, IOM's Missing Migrants Project recorded over 2,439 people who lost their lives while migrating through irregular channels between 1 January and 4 November 2020.[87] As data collection on deaths and disappearances during migration is increasingly difficult amid the pandemic, this figure is likely to be an underestimation. Travel restrictions have also hampered resettlement programmes early in the year, although resettlement activities have resumed.

In the midst of the pandemic, migrants increasingly find themselves exposed to xenophobia, discrimination and stigmatization due to the proliferation of misconceptions that migrants are carriers and spreaders of the virus. In some incidents, migrants have been denied entry to hotels, supermarkets and restaurants or have been evicted from their hotels/apartments as they have been stigmatized as potential spreaders of the virus. Incidents of discrimination are frequent where migrants are believed to be carriers of the virus. This is also the case for migrants who have returned to their countries of origin and experienced stigma, as they are viewed as having brought the virus back with them.

COVID-19 has been shown to have severe negative impacts on women and children. Gender-based violence (GBV) tends to increase in all types of emergencies as inequalities, risks of violence and discrimination are often exacerbated by crises. In the context of COVID-19, the loss of livelihood opportunities, food insecurity and other economic stressors are leading migrants and family's dependent on remittances to adopt negative coping mechanisms, including child marriage and transactional sex. The restrictions on movement to limit transmission of the virus also increase the risk of exposure to various forms of domestic violence, including GBV and child abuse. In fact, there has been a dramatic rise in reports of GBV.[88] Migrant women who work in the health sector may be at heightened risk of disease-related stigma, as they are often at the frontline of healthcare provision. Migrant children are at increased risk of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation when schools are closed. School closures have also impacted access to food and social services for an estimated 11 million children.[89]

The pandemic has curtailed access to health, social and protection services. In particular, the suspension or limited availability of critical social protection services may be isolating those most in need of life-saving interventions – such as survivors of GBV, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied or separated children or other persons in need of protection, leaving them without support and with no escape from recurring threats. COVID-19 adapted service delivery modalities may have consequences for all mobile and displaced groups. In particular the elderly, persons with disabilities and those with chronic illness among mobile and displaced populations may be excluded or de-prioritized if they do not have a caregiver to assist them with communication and procedures and ensure their access to COVID-19 treatment or other healthcare.

More generally, the spread of COVID-19 is putting additional strain on national resources and capacities, which could lead governments to de-prioritize mobile and displaced populations, in both conflict and disaster contexts. At the same time, there is a risk of a decrease in humanitarian funding to support displaced and mobile populations, including migrants caught in crisis situations, given the growing needs and competing priorities that governments around the globe are facing.

BOX 3: MISINFORMATION AND STIGMATIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

Similar to other epidemics and pandemics, COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing grievances, stigmas and community divisions, resulting in increased discrimination against mobile and displaced populations, who may be perceived as “foreigners” and thus “disease carriers”.[90]

Such dynamics not only have an impact on the identification of COVID-19 cases but can also lead to discriminatory service provision, growing intercommunal distrust, political violence or arbitrary measures, as well as rendering migrants afraid to access services.[91] In Yemen, at least 14,500 migrants are stranded and over 4,100 migrants have been forcibly transferred between governorates since March 2020.[92] Migrants are used as scapegoats as carriers of the virus and as a result, suffer exclusion and violence. In addition to the forced removals, fears about COVID-19 have led to migrants in Yemen experiencing verbal and physical harassment, increased detention and movement restrictions. In India, the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on the right to housing and on extreme poverty have highlighted the stigmatization as “virus carriers” of the more than 100 million internal migrant workers in the country.

Likewise, the spread of rumours and disbelief in some communities about the pandemic, coupled with weak or non-existent inclusive and accessible information on COVID-19 transmission, may further expose vulnerable, minority and marginalized populations to the transmission of the virus.

Food security situation and trends in major migration hotspots

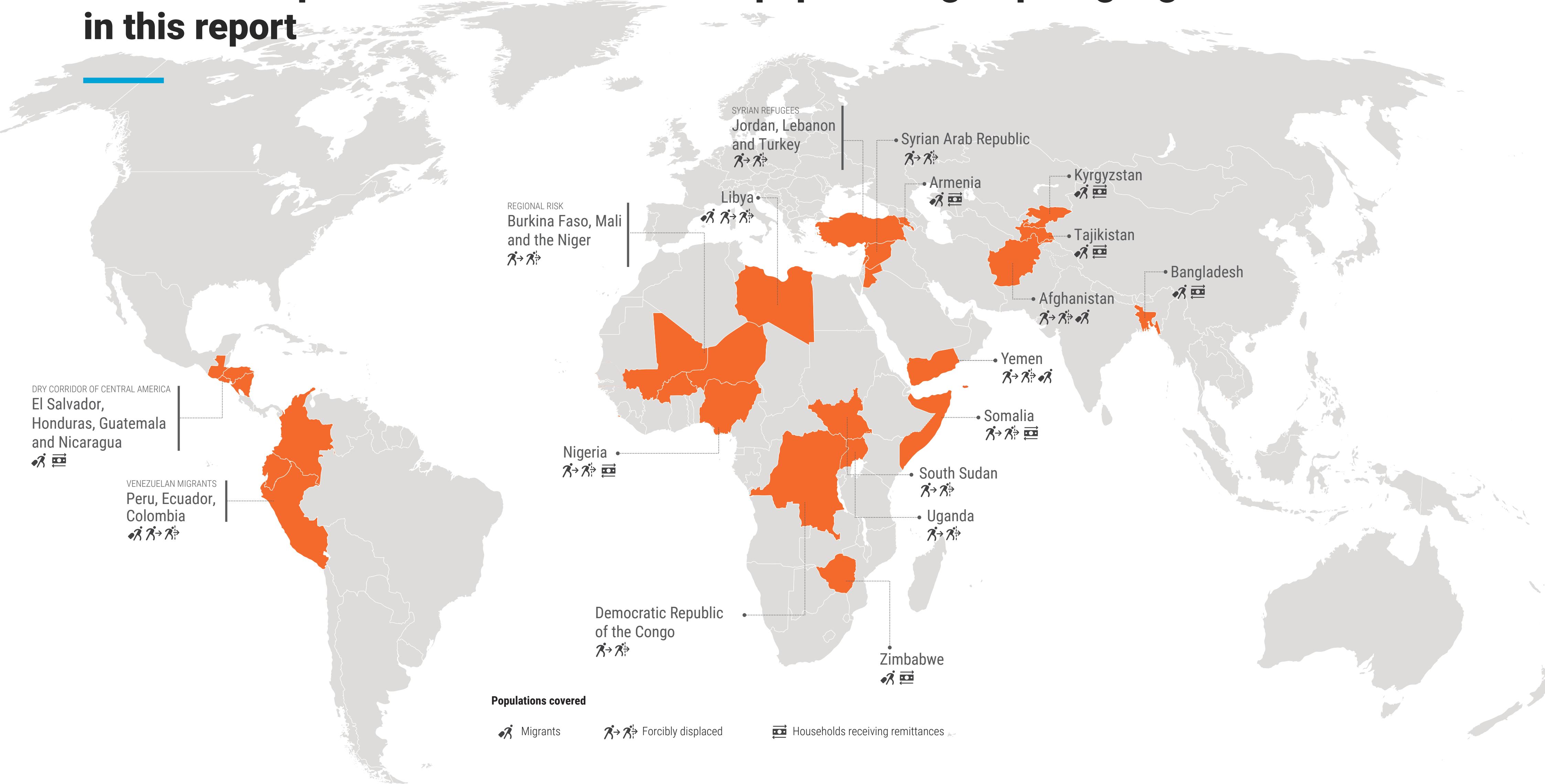
There is growing evidence that reduced income is hitting mobile and displaced populations and their families particularly hard.

This section highlights migration hotspots where migrants, refugees, IDPs and/or families left behind are at risk of a significant deterioration in their food security. The analysis takes into account all major drivers of food insecurity, with a particular focus on the secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Countries have been selected based on a combination of the following criteria:

- High dependency on remittances in absolute terms or as share of GDP
- Presence of displaced and mobile populations (IDPs, refugees, asylum seekers, mixed migration flows)
- Presence of international migrants or large numbers of populations migrating abroad
- Presence of compounding shocks (for example, economic or climate shocks)
- Population facing food crisis prior to COVID-19

Overview map of countries featured and population groups highlighted in this report



Source: IOM and WFP, October 2020. Map conforms to United Nations World map, October 2020.

Food security situation and trends in migration hotspots

North Africa

Historically, North Africa has been a major migration hub for the African continent. Favourable labour migration policies have attracted migrant workers from within the region and from sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Asia. At the same time, North Africa is a critical transit region at the crossroads of the central and western Mediterranean routes to the south of Europe.

At the end of 2019, five countries – Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya – hosted 1.5 million international migrants and refugees.[93] Most of them are located in Libya (584,509)[94] and Egypt (504,053),[95] with others in Algeria (249,075), Morocco (98,574) and Tunisia (57,455).[96]

In March 2020, several North African countries introduced restrictions in an attempt to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Economies in the region have been hit hard by the consequent drop in remittances and tourism revenues. These changes have been very apparent in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco, resulting in high levels of unemployment and income loss, especially for poorer households and those working in the informal sector. The economic losses have aggravated existing socioeconomic grievances that could fuel political instability and unrest, which may also increase the pressure on people to leave the region.[97]

In fact, typical migration patterns across the Mediterranean Sea have changed considerably since the beginning of 2020. Arrivals to Italy through the Central Mediterranean route from North Africa more than tripled, reaching 23,726 within the first nine months of 2020 compared with 7,633 in the same period in 2019. Meanwhile, arrivals to Greece through the Eastern Mediterranean route have fallen markedly since April 2020 onwards.

Between July and September 2020 (Q3), the Western Mediterranean route saw a 9 percent increase in registered arrivals in Spain compared with the same period in 2019 and more than 3 times more arrivals than the previous quarter.[98] Meanwhile, between 1 January and 12 August 2020, 8,403 migrants arrived in Greece, a 59 percent decrease from the same period in 2019.[99]

Libya

While most countries in the region have experienced relative stability since the Arab Spring, Libya has been plagued by an extremely volatile security situation and economic crises, which continue to present a serious risk for the country and beyond. The COVID-19 crisis has worsened the already fragile political and economic situation, with migrants and refugees among the most vulnerable groups.

The biggest migration flows within the North African region are to Libya. According to IOM estimates from August 2020, the country hosts 584,509 migrants most of whom come from Niger, Egypt, Chad or Sudan.[100] This illustrates that geographical proximity and diasporic ties are important factors shaping migration dynamics to Libya and interregional migration flows. Of the migrants interviewed by IOM in 2019, 81 percent identified Libya as their intended country of destination at the time of departure from their country of origin.[101] For others, Libya is an important transit country and a point of departure towards Europe.

Libya is also facing a serious internal displacement crisis due to ongoing conflict and violence. Latest IOM figures from August 2020 indicate that there are 392,241 IDPs, 92 percent of whom are displaced within Libya due to insecurity.[102]

The number of COVID-19 cases has been increasing exponentially since June 2020, reaching 62,045 positive cases in November. At the same time, the security situation has been deteriorating as the conflict continues to escalate. Earlier this year, increased conflict within and around the capital city and central areas affected more and more civilians and public infrastructure including healthcare facilities, damaging the country's already weakened ability to cope with the pandemic.[103] [104] There has also been a rise in protests and demonstrations across the country, as Libyans demand better basic services.

COVID-19 mitigation measures and policies have severely restricted mobility. While international airports have remained open to allow stranded Libyans to return from aboard, national airports and points of entry along land borders have been partially operational. A few exceptions have been made for migrants from neighbouring countries to allow them to return home.[105]

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the number of migrants identified by IOM as present in Libya has fallen by 7 percent, from 625,638 (March–April 2020) to 584,509 individuals (July–August 2020).[106] This decline is likely to be the result of a combination of factors including limited livelihood opportunities for migrant workers and tightened security controls and mobility restrictions due to COVID-19.[107] Between January and September 2020, Italy and Malta recorded 25,888 arrivals from Libya and Tunisia, more than double the number of arrivals registered from these countries during the same period in 2019.[108]

While some migrants arrived at their destination, 7,981 were intercepted at sea between January and the end of August and were returned to Libya by the Libyan coastguard.[109] Many have been forced to endure substandard living conditions.[110] Detention centres have reportedly been unprepared to accommodate newcomers and unable to implement the physical distancing measures needed to contain the spread of the virus.[111]

The living conditions of migrants in Libya were concerning even before COVID-19. In 2019, a WFP web survey found that 13 percent of migrants were living in informal settings including makeshift shelters, squatting in unfinished buildings or living in the streets in tents or caravans.[112] A more recent IOM study found that 43 percent of migrants shared accommodation with as many as five to ten other people.[113]

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, movement restrictions have been particularly harsh for migrants crossing Libya. Algatroun in southern Libya saw extended lockdown measures coupled with an increase in food prices. These obstacles have affected transiting migrants who had not intended to stay in Algatroun,[114] with some reportedly resorting to spending their savings during the lockdown period. There have been increasing requests for food assistance as a result.[115]

Income-generating opportunities across the country have plummeted, particularly in the informal sector, which employs most migrants. A 2019 WFP study found that more than two thirds of migrants in Libya rely on casual or daily work as their main income source.[116] The percentage of migrants who have reported being unemployed through IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) rose substantially from 17 percent in February (before the pandemic) to 27 percent by the end of August.[117] Similarly, there has been a significant fall in casual labour opportunities available to migrants in nearly all municipalities compared to pre-crisis levels.[118] Unemployment is one of the biggest risk factors that can exacerbate vulnerabilities and humanitarian needs, such as food insecurity.

Food insecurity was also of concern for migrants in Libya before COVID-19. The 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview reported that an estimated 336,000 people in Libya – including 117,000 migrants and refugees – were severely food insecure.[119] A joint WFP/IOM study conducted between January and May 2019 across the entire country found that over half of migrant respondents were worried about not having enough food to eat;[120] 30 percent had poor or borderline food consumption. Food-related coping strategies were being used by 57 percent of migrants due to a lack of food or means to buy food.

In April 2020, IOM conducted a second round of interviews with migrants in Libya and found that 32 percent of migrants had poor or borderline food consumption, a slight increase compared to the previous study.[121] Migrants who are unemployed or rely on daily labour; those who have been in Libya less than a year; and those who live in urban centres in western Libya or along the main migratory routes are more likely to suffer from high levels of inadequate food consumption. The interviews also revealed that over 70 percent of migrants living in informal settings had inadequate levels of food consumption and that the use of negative food-based coping mechanisms had risen significantly from 2019, with 63 percent of migrants adopting such strategies. Food security is expected to have worsened since the IOM study, given the impact of COVID-19 and related containment measures.

Migrants also face significant obstacles when seeking to access healthcare in Libya, which is particularly concerning during a global pandemic. In July-August 2020, IOM reported that 69 percent of migrants had either limited or no access to health services.[122]

Food security situation and trends in migration hotspots

The Middle East

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Middle East[123] was afflicted by multiple crises stemming from extensive and protracted conflict and violence. The ongoing civil conflicts in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen have resulted in millions of IDPs and refugees, as well as dramatic levels of food insecurity. Lebanon's economic and political crisis – which started at the end of 2019 – has added to the region's growing socio-political instability, which has been gravely exacerbated by the pandemic and by the explosion at the Port of Beirut on 4 August 2020. The COVID-19 infection rate has been steadily increasing in Lebanon and the region.

Prices have been rising, driven by COVID-19 related lockdowns and movement restrictions, local currency devaluation, sharply shrinking foreign currency reserves, decreasing liquidity, trade barriers and unusual consumer behaviour including panic purchasing. Price increases combined with loss of income is reducing household purchasing power, curbing access to adequate diets. The pandemic and its secondary impacts are threatening food security in all countries in the Middle East and are of particular concern in Lebanon, Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, which host vast populations of refugees and IDPs.

Even before COVID-19, levels of acute food insecurity in the Middle East were among the highest in the world, with close to 34 million acutely food insecure people in the worst affected countries. WFP estimates that this number could reach 38 million by the end of the year due to the impact of the pandemic. [124]

In 2019, there were 22 million international migrants originating from the Middle East: 46 percent had migrated within the subregion, 13 percent had migrated to the Gulf states – mainly from Yemen, Lebanon and Jordan; and the remainder had migrated to other regions. Many migrants, however, are caught in conflict-affected areas and live in dire situations, for example in Yemen.

Since the Syrian crisis began in 2011, the conflict has caused the internal displacement of 6.6 million people.[125] An additional 6.7 million Syrians have fled the country and sought refuge abroad;[126] 5.6 million of this number are hosted in just five countries – Turkey (3.62 million), Lebanon (879,529), Jordan (659,673), Iraq (242,704) and Egypt (130,085)[127] – where they have joined refugees already hosted in the region as a result of past conflicts. Significant numbers of Palestinian refugees are present in Jordan (2.2 million)[128] and Lebanon (475,075)[129] together with smaller numbers of Iraqi refugees, mostly located in Jordan (67,225).

The protracted conflict in Yemen has led to the internal displacement of over 3.6 million people.[130] Yemen also hosts 268,511 refugees from the Horn of Africa[131] and is a transit country for migrants between the Horn of Africa and the Arab Peninsula through the so-called Eastern Route.[132] The Islamic Republic of Iran has been hosting one of the world's largest and most protracted refugee populations for over four decades; more than 951,000 Afghan refugees and 28,000 Iraqi refugees reside in the country according to the latest official statistics[133] (see also Afghanistan in the section on West and Central Asia).

Remittances are an important source of revenue in the Middle East. In 2019, remittances to Lebanon amounted to USD 7.4 billion, representing 12.7 percent of GDP; in Jordan, they reached USD 4.5 billion, or 10.2 percent of GDP and in Yemen, they were worth USD 3.7 billion, or 12.6 percent of GDP.[134]

The non-oil producing Arab countries (NOPACs) such as Lebanon and Jordan are facing sharp decreases in remittances, which are usually sent by labour migrants working in the oil-rich countries. Before COVID-19, Gulf countries were the preferred destination for job-seeking young people, relieving the burden on local labour markets characterized by high unemployment rates. However, the dramatic drop in oil prices and recent measures introduced by several Gulf governments to limit the access of foreigners to local jobs have had a significant impact on the socioeconomic stability of the NOPACs. Remittances to Yemen, mainly from Saudi Arabia, dropped by as much as 80 percent between January and April 2020 alone.[135] As incomes fall and purchasing power deteriorates due to the depreciation of the Yemeni Rial, the number of people dependent on humanitarian assistance for survival is likely to continue to grow.

Syrian Arab Republic

COVID-19 continues to affect people's mobility in many ways in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) and its neighbouring countries. War-torn and fragile livelihoods are being undermined by containment measures. The spill over effects from the pre-COVID-19 economic collapse in neighbouring Lebanon has also had dire consequences for the Syrian population, both residents and the displaced.

The financial crisis caused banks in Lebanon to limit the release of funds. Many Syrians rely on the Lebanese bank systems so the financial crisis has left them unable to access their savings,[136] which are estimated at USD 45 billion.[137] As the availability of US dollars declined on the Lebanese market, demand for dollars grew in Syria and the Syrian currency began to devalue against the US dollar, pushing up commodity prices.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the closure of multiple ports of entry in the country. Thirteen of the 29 land border crossings are fully closed and since July 2020, there is just one operational border crossing for humanitarian aid from Turkey into northwest Syria (into opposition-held areas).[138] Although some of Syria's sea ports are operational, trade in and out of the ports is subject to wide-ranging international restrictions. The impact on cross-border movements has been significant, with just over 900 people fleeing Syria between March and August 2020, compared to almost 6,800 during the same period in 2019. The decrease is mainly attributed to COVID-19 related measures.

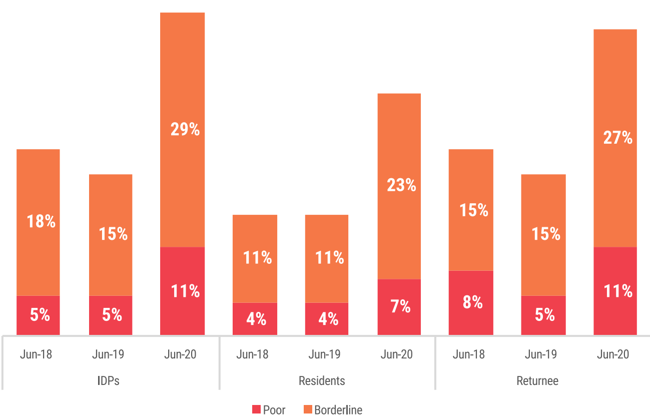
The 6.6 million Syrian IDPs are especially vulnerable to the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. IDPs across the country continue to live in overcrowded areas and destroyed shelters, leaving them highly at risk of contagion. Populations displaced around Idlib in the northwest are particularly vulnerable due to the ongoing conflict and more recently, diminishing humanitarian access.

Between January and June 2020, there were nearly 1.5 million new internal displacements in Syria,[139] mainly within the northwest region, which already hosts over 2.5 million IDPs.[140] Displacement was largely related to conflict and clashes between the military and opposition groups in Idlib governorate; and fires that had burnt down people's shelters, triggering further displacement. The first case of COVID-19 in the northwest was recorded in early July and the virus is likely to spread among the most vulnerable displaced populations in the region.

Food security in Syria has been deteriorating over the past year. In September 2019, WFP and the Food Security Sector estimated that 7.9 million Syrians – 39 percent of the population – were food insecure inside Syria; of this number, 0.5 million people were estimated to be severely food insecure. [141] By the end of April 2020, a review of the data using food price increments projected a total of 9.3 million food insecure people in Syria, around 46 percent of the population and an increase of 1.4 million people. The number of severely food insecure people in Syria has now doubled to 1 million people. [142]

Figure 23 illustrates poor and borderline food consumption by residence status. Unacceptable food consumption (the poor and borderline categories combined) has more than doubled among IDPs; a similar trend is observed for recent returnees. Food consumption is also deteriorating for resident households, albeit less than among displaced households.

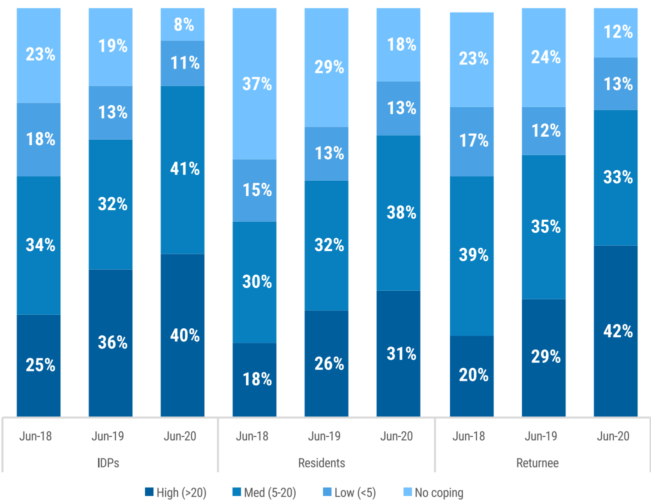
FIGURE 22: SHARE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH POOR/BORDERLINE FOOD CONSUMPTION IN SYRIA BY RESIDENCE STATUS IN 2018, 2019 AND 2020



Source: WFP. 2020. The socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Similarly, all groups showed increasing trends in the adoption of food consumption-based negative coping strategies, including reducing the number of meals and meal sizes, and prioritizing children over adults for meals; IDPs and returnees are using these strategies at a higher rate than resident households (see figure 24).

FIGURE 23: SHARE OF HOUSEHOLDS USING FOOD COPING STRATEGIES BY HOUSEHOLD RESIDENCE STATUS: JUNE 2018, 2019 AND 2020



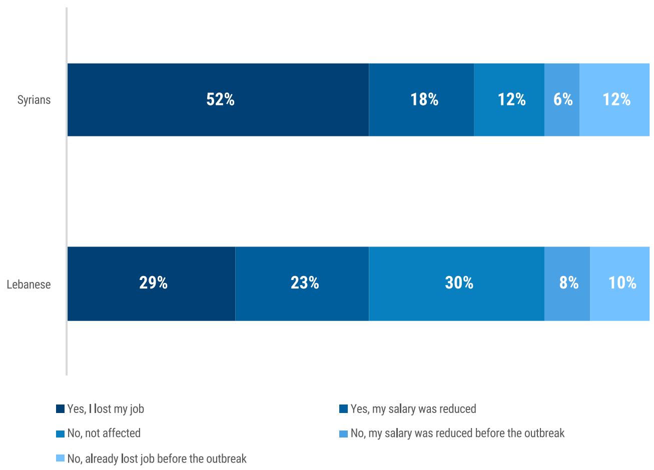
Source: WFP. 2020. The socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries

Around 5.6 million Syrians are registered refugees in five neighbouring countries: Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Iraq.[143] Lack of access to income-generating activities and sustainable livelihoods continues to hamper the efforts of Syrian refugees to meet their basic needs. Many Syrian refugees work informally in the agricultural, construction and waste management sectors, often receiving less than the minimum wage and at times, under exploitative conditions. These circumstances make them particularly vulnerable to job losses created by the pandemic. In Jordan, for example, an ILO study found that since the outbreak of COVID-19, twice as many employed Syrian refugees had reported losing their jobs (35 percent) than Jordanians (17 percent).[144] According to UNHCR, the economic downturn provoked by COVID-19 has pushed hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in the Middle East into a deepening sense of despair. Many refugees have lost what were already meagre incomes in host countries, forcing them to cut down on the most basic needs, including food and medication.[145]

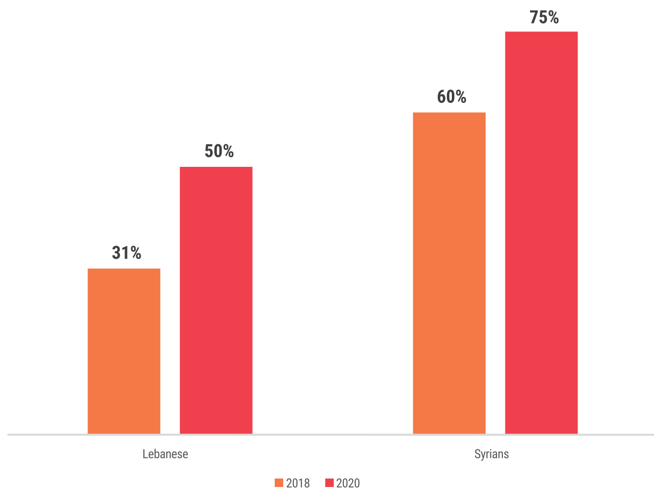
In a WFP survey conducted in Lebanon in April 2020, more than half of Syrian refugee respondents reported having lost their jobs since the outbreak of COVID-19 (see figure 25). Syrian women had been disproportionately affected: 61 percent had lost their jobs since the outbreak, compared with 46 percent of men. Income losses have exacerbated food insecurity for many families; 75 percent reported not having enough food to eat, a 15-percentage point increase compared to 2018 and 25 percentage points higher than the Lebanese population (figure 26). In order to bridge food gaps, 95 percent of Syrian refugees reported having used food-based negative coping strategies in the month before the survey; 21 percent had skipped meals and 11 percent had gone a whole day without eating.[146]

FIGURE 24: CHANGE IN RESPONDENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS SINCE COVID-19 IN LEBANON



Sources WFP. 2020. Assessing the Impact of the Economic and COVID-19 Crises in Lebanon.

FIGURE 25: PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION WORRIED ABOUT FOOD IN THE LAST MONTH IN LEBANON



Sources WFP. 2020. Assessing the Impact of the Economic and COVID-19 Crises in Lebanon.

Despite this dire situation, returning to Syria does not appear to be an option for most Syrian refugees. Instead, the survey in Lebanon found an increase in those wanting to move to another country, from 29 percent in 2018 to 43 percent in 2020.

The main reasons for wanting to leave were related to the lack of work opportunities (37 percent), followed by the lack of means to purchase food (18 percent), highlighting food security as one of the main drivers of migration.

The August explosion in Beirut exacerbated the challenges in Lebanon. Following the event, there was a record jump in new COVID-19 cases, which led to a new partial lockdown. Refugees and migrant workers based in Beirut and surroundings are of particular concern: it is estimated that 24,600 (8 percent) of the 300,000 people most heavily affected by the explosion are migrant workers, mainly from Ethiopia, Bangladesh and the Philippines.[147]

Iraq

In addition to hosting 242,704 Syrian refugees,[148] Iraq is home to 1.29 million IDPs.[149] It is also a destination country for 368,000 international migrants,[150] mainly from South and Southeast Asia and Africa. These migrant workers are generally employed in the domestic, construction and service sectors. As the COVID-19 outbreak has slowed economic activities, the concurrent decline in the global oil price has impacted workforces across Iraq. Migrants and displaced populations are finding themselves in increasingly precarious situations, with employers laying them off or withholding their pay, leaving them unable to meet their basic needs, including food and rent, and putting them at heightened risk of exploitation. A vulnerability assessment carried out by IOM in May 2020 found that the primary concern for 80 percent of surveyed migrant workers was the inability to pay rent, while over half of the respondents reported having skipped meals (sometimes on a daily basis) as they were unable to afford food.[151]

Iraq is one of the country's worst hit by COVID-19 in the Middle East, with 475,000 cases registered since the start of the pandemic and an average of more than 3,100 cases per day in the last seven days by mid-October.[152] The upsurge is partially attributed to the country's limited response capacity and challenges in enforcing public health measures such as physical distancing, movement restrictions and the use of masks.

Starting in early April 2020, IOM conducted a key informant study through its DTM, analysing healthcare services, public awareness levels, access to services, movement restrictions and the overall economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 401 subdistricts across Iraq's 18 governorates. During the first round in May 2020, respondents were mainly concerned by delays in the school year (reported by 86 percent) and the loss of livelihoods (81 percent). By June, the concerns had shifted, with almost all respondents (96 percent) found to be anxious about the financial impact of the pandemic.[153]

At national level, the consequences on employment have been severe. In a DTM impact survey conducted in June, 59 percent of key informants reported that most people in their areas had lost their jobs and face financial difficulty. The populations in the conflict-stricken governorates of Anbar, Basrah and Dahuk have suffered substantial job losses. Overall, daily labourers and IDPs were the two population groups most affected.[154]

WFP's remote monitoring indicates between 5.1 and 9.4 percent of households had insufficient food consumption between April and August 2020. These figures are much higher than the rates observed in 2016, when insufficient food consumption affected only 1.5 percent of households in April and May.[155]

Yemen

COVID-19 presents a particularly grave risk for Yemen, as the country continues to struggle in the face of almost six years of ongoing conflict, which has led to a near collapse of essential public health services, severe economic decline and widespread displacement. The health emergency has increased levels of vulnerability and insecurity for all, including migrants and displaced populations.

Many migrants from the Horn of Africa transit through Yemen to reach Saudi Arabia in search of economic opportunities in the Gulf states. The outbreak of COVID-19 has impacted arrivals to Yemen from the Horn of Africa which have decreased by over 69 percent, numbering 33,122 between January and September 2020 compared with 107,781 in the same period in 2019. Based on data from the end of September 2020, IOM estimates that 14,500 migrants are stranded in the country, with no options to continue their journey or return to their countries of origin as borders have become increasingly difficult to cross; assisted voluntary return and voluntary humanitarian return programmes have also been temporarily suspended due to COVID-19 global mobility restrictions. The number of migrants in detention is on the rise and since March 2020, over 4,100 migrants have been forcibly transferred from the northern to the southern governorates.[156]

At the same time, the number of internal displacements has grown since the beginning of the year. Between January and October 2020, 158,256 new displacements were recorded, mainly triggered by conflict and violence.[157]

IDPs living in 1,700 settlements across Yemen have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 outbreak due to restricted access to medical facilities as well as limited employment and livelihood opportunities, which have greatly undermined their ability to meet basic needs. Flooding in June and July worsened conditions in displacement sites in several governorates and increased the risk of rapid transmission of the virus. Between 30 March and 19 September 2020, IOM recorded over 10,300 people who cited COVID-19 as a reason for their displacement due to fear of contagion, limited access to services and the worsening economic crisis.[158] For many, this is their second or third displacement within the country.

Although outbreaks of COVID-19 among displaced communities have been underreported due to lack of testing kits, there have been reports of increasing illness and deaths. Lack of access to healthcare facilities and the stigma associated with seeking treatment for COVID-19 also masks the true impact and spread of the virus. The narrative that migrants and displaced populations are carriers of COVID-19 is increasingly blocking access to essential services – particularly healthcare – for these groups.[159]

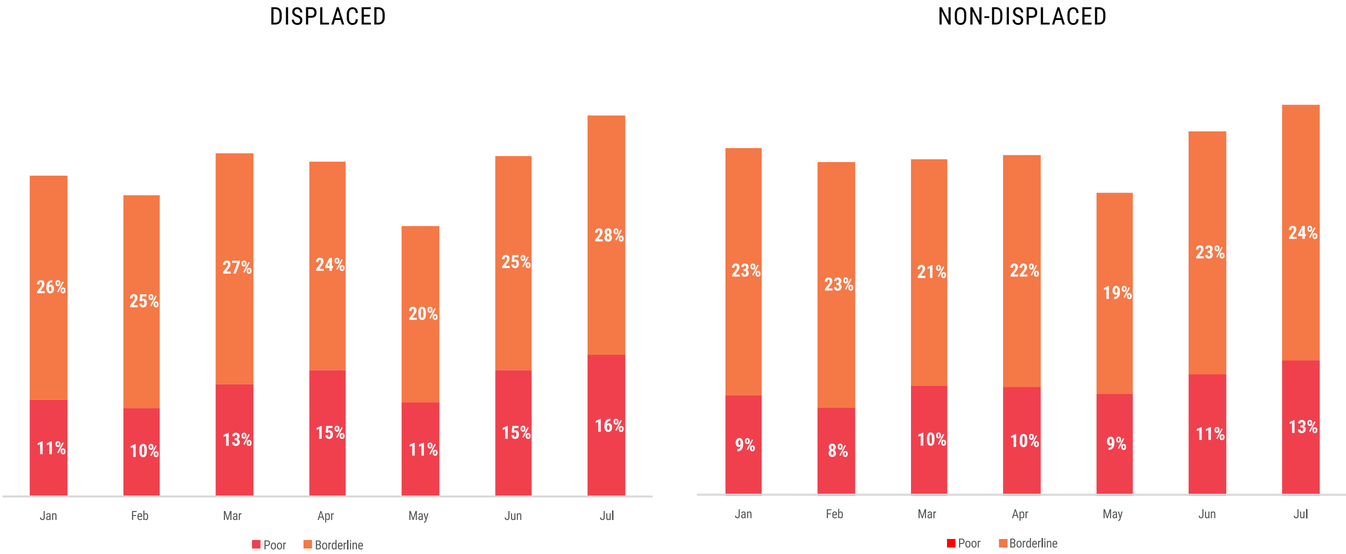
The most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) conducted in 2020 was partial, targeting 133 out of 333 districts. Of the 7.9 million people assessed, 2 million were acutely food insecure (in IPC Phase 3 or above) between February and April 2020. The same analysis projected that between July and December 2020, an additional 1.2 million people could face acute food insecurity if humanitarian food assistance was kept at current levels.[160] Combining these results with previous analysis carried out for the northern districts, it was estimated that the number of acutely food insecure could exceed 17 million in 2020.[161]

Telephone surveys conducted by WFP to assess food security were adapted to capture the impacts of COVID-19. By mid-July 2020, 46 percent of households reported experiencing increasing difficulty in accessing medical care, 31 percent reported challenges in accessing markets and nearly 27 percent had members who had lost part or all of their salary due to impact of the pandemic. The proportion of households unable to maintain adequate food consumption was found to have increased from 33 percent in February to 35 percent in March and April and then to 38.5 percent in mid-July, following a brief improvement at Ramadan.

Food insecurity is mainly being driven by rising food prices, a deterioration in incomes and livelihoods and increasing conflict as well as a reduction in humanitarian assistance, which started in April in areas under the control of the Sana'a-based authorities.

Since June 2020, food consumption has deteriorated among resident households and IDPs (see figure 27). The latter are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, which is even more pronounced among IDPs who are not assisted (17 percent with poor or borderline food consumption) than those in receipt of assistance (12 percent poor or borderline food consumption).

FIGURE 26: PROPORTION OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH INADEQUATE FOOD CONSUMPTION BY DISPLACEMENT STATUS



Source: WFP. 2020. Yemen Food Security and Price Monitoring (01-14 July 2020).

Food security situation and trends in migration hotspots

West and Central Asia

The global COVID-19 pandemic is causing major economic damage in West and Central Asia.[162] Trade has been severely disrupted, healthcare systems are coming under strain, and consumption and investments are plummeting. Population movements across the region are also being severely hampered by travel restrictions and lockdown measures.

The Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan – major destinations for labour migrants and refugees in the region – are grappling with very high infection rates and are deeply affected by the global recession. In the Russian Federation, the main destination country for labour migrants from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), GDP growth is projected to contract by 6 percent,[163] an eleven-year low. The Islamic Republic of Iran, the main destination and a transit country for migrants and refugees from Afghanistan, has already seen its economy contract since 2019 largely due to the tightening of sanctions, which has triggered a 37 percent decline in the oil sector.[164] The outlook for 2020 continues to be bleak as foreign exchange reserves shrink, budget deficits increase and unemployment rates rise steeply due to the economic impacts of the pandemic. In Pakistan – which hosts large numbers of labour migrants from countries such as Afghanistan and Bangladesh – the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to reverse some of the gains the country has made in poverty reduction over the last two decades. Current estimates by the International Monetary Fund suggest a sharp rise in poverty rates of up to 40 percent.[165]

The poor economic situation will have major repercussions for migrant and refugee populations, who largely depend on employment in the informal sector.

Remittance-dependent households across the region are likely to be extremely affected by the loss of income. Massive returns of migrants to countries of origin have been reported within the region; meanwhile, strict travel restrictions have left many migrants stranded in transit with limited ability to support themselves.

Afghanistan

For more than four decades, Afghanistan has been affected by conflict and insecurity, which has caused major economic stagnation, the deterioration of public infrastructure, widespread poverty and food insecurity. Combined with recurrent natural disasters including drought and floods, this has led to protracted and multiple displacements within the country and across its borders.

As of August 2020, there were 2.37 million Afghan refugees, mainly hosted in the Islamic Republic of Iran (951,142) and Pakistan (1,422,588).[166] By mid-2020, there were also 4.7 million IDPs in the country, more than 1.2 million of whom had been displaced due to climate shocks alone.[167]

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020, major spikes in returning migrant populations were observed in a relatively short period of time – for instance in March and April, with over 160,000 undocumented Afghan nationals crossing in a matter of weeks. High numbers of COVID-19 cases in the Islamic Republic of Iran had contributed to push more than 695,677 undocumented Afghans back to Afghanistan by 31 October 2020.[168] Even prior to the pandemic, the reasons behind the decision to return include the loss of work or reduced wages, discrimination or stigmatization, lack of access to markets, pressure by foreign authorities to return, movement restrictions and lack of access to medical services.[169] Afghani returnees face additional hardships linked to travel restrictions in Afghanistan due to ongoing insecurity, as well as economic conditions. They are likely to become internally displaced and face significant financial hardship with very limited job opportunities.

At the same time, an escalation in violence between the Taliban and Afghan National Security Forces, combined with an increase in high profile attacks by other militant groups following the US–Taliban peace deal and the uncertain outcome of planned intra-Afghan talks, is contributing to growing numbers of internally displaced people. Between 1 January and 13 October 2020, 259,539 individuals fled their homes due to conflict.[170]

Even before COVID-19, Afghanistan faced one of the most severe food crises in the world, with 10.9 million people estimated to be acutely food insecure between April and May 2020.[171] Food insecurity is expected to increase because of COVID-19 and related containment measures, as the widespread loss of income sources coincides with rising food prices. Food prices are estimated to have increased by 17 percent in April 2020 compared to the previous year following the imposition of border controls and lockdown measures in major urban centres.[172] Urban areas have been particularly hard hit: casual or daily work opportunities remain below average and considerably lower compared to the same period in 2019.[173] COVID-19 mitigation measures have had a range of cascading effects, mainly disrupting domestic economic activity, regional trade and remittance flows. As a result, the World Bank estimates that the poverty rate in Afghanistan will rise to 72 percent in 2020, up from 55 percent in 2016.[174] The unemployment rate is expected to reach 12.5 percent by the end of 2020, up from 11.1 percent in 2019.[175] During a recent assessment conducted by World Vision in Afghanistan, 47.7 percent of respondents reported having lost their jobs or income due to the pandemic. [176]

Average debt levels as measured by the IOM DTM community-based needs assessment (CBNA) – currently more than seven times higher than average monthly income (USD 520 compared with USD 69) – are likely to increase further as a result of the pandemic.[177] CBNA results show that one in five Afghan families depends on borrowing from relatives or from the market in order to obtain wheat, flour and bread, the main staple foods in Afghanistan.

Given the impacts of COVID-19 on economies and income opportunities labour availability abroad, remittances from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan are significantly below average, reducing income for poor Afghan households in both urban and rural areas.[178] Worsening poverty rates, unemployment, loss of remittances and debt levels will magnify economic and food insecurity pressures on families, and are expected to force young, often male family members to migrate using precarious irregular migration pathways in order to seize job opportunities elsewhere.

Commonwealth of Independent States

In 2019, there were over 5.3 million migrants of Central Asian origin in the Russian Federation, including from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.[179] An additional over 2.7 million migrated from other countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and the Republic of Moldovia as well as from Ukraine. Most labour migration is seasonal, with many migrants travelling to work in the construction sector for a short period of time in order to bring or send remittances back home to support their families.

Several countries[180] have poor economies that suffer from long-standing structural problems and vulnerabilities, as well as minimal safety nets to support vulnerable populations. Countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are highly dependent on remittances from migrant workers in the Russian Federation, which represent an important source of income and insurance for many households. In 2019, remittances to Kyrgyzstan reached USD 2.4 billion and those to Tajikistan totalled USD 2.3 billion. For both countries, remittances represented nearly 30 percent of GDP.[181] Armenia also remains heavily dependent on the economies of the Russian Federation and the European Union for remittances and foreign investments. Remittances to Armenia reached USD 1.5 billion at the end of 2019, representing 11.4 percent of GDP.[182]

Travel restrictions put in place by the Russian Federation and Central Asian countries have had a devastating impact on migrants within the region. In fact, they are considered to be among those most severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.[183]

Already at the end of April 2020, IOM estimated that 10,000 Kyrgyz migrants in and around Moscow had lost their jobs and exhausted all means to support themselves.[184] Some were forced to leave their apartments or rented rooms and had no option but to live in the streets. As migrants are faced with increasing income losses, their ability to send or bring remittances back home has plummeted. Remittances are expected to fall by 15 percent in 2020 as a result of COVID-19; this translates into a loss of USD 361 million, almost 5 percent of the GDP of Kyrgyzstan.[185]

In Armenia, out of a population of nearly 3 million, almost 261,500 people rely on remittances sent by family members working abroad and on income from the circular or seasonal migration of one or several of their household members.[186] Nearly 98 percent of all remittances are spent on routine consumption expenses, including food. The deteriorating economic situation in the Russian Federation – the country of destination for nine out of ten Armenian migrant workers – has greatly compromised the volume of remittances they have been able to send home. In the first quarter of 2020, remittances from the Russian Federation fell by almost 17 percent.[187] Further decreases throughout the year are expected due to the continued closure of borders and the global economic recession.

The local labour market in Armenia, also affected by COVID-19 measures, has not been able to absorb the number of people who usually depend on migration or remittances.

Returning migrant workers have intensified the competition in the local labour market to a certain degree, adding an additional challenge. In a household survey implemented by United Nations agencies,[188] more than one third of respondents reported having either lost their job or experienced a significant cut in working hours or volume.

In Tajikistan, a joint crop and food security mission conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WFP in August 2020[189] found that the movement restrictions imposed between March and May 2020 had reduced opportunities for seasonal workers and delayed salary payments for public employees and pensioners. The average income of the population has fallen by over half compared with 2019 because of movement restrictions; the ban on food exports to neighbouring countries, which has impacted farmers' incomes; and the collapse of the tourism industry.

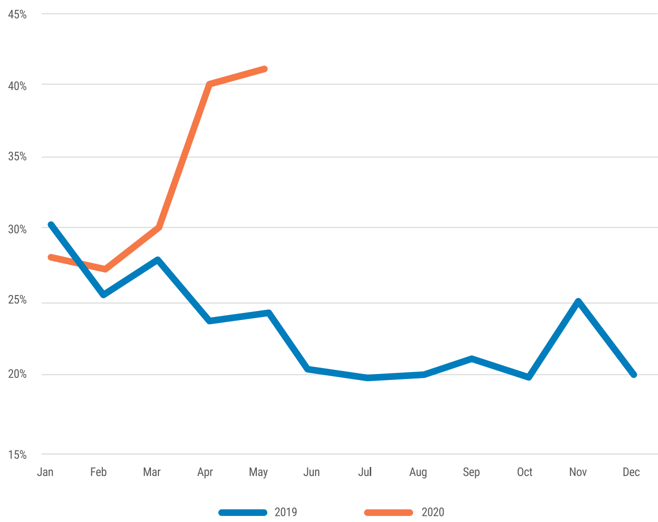
The general lockdown in the Russian Federation implemented at the start of the second quarter of 2020 resulted in a drastic decline in remittances from abroad, severely curtailing income for the Tajik population. Key informant interviews with government personnel confirmed that transfers had fallen by more than 50 percent from April to June 2020.[190] With the easing of movement restrictions in the Russian Federation and Tajikistan in June, the situation started to improve, and some migrant workers were able to send remittances, albeit in much smaller amounts than before the pandemic. Despite difficulties in finding work in the Russian Federation, most migrants are not willing to return home as the prospects of finding well-paid jobs in Tajikistan are very low.[191]

A telephone survey conducted by the World Bank in Tajikistan confirmed these findings.[192] Over 61 percent of respondent households receiving remittances reported a decline in transfers in April 2020, an increase of 39 percentage points compared with April 2019. For those respondents still receiving remittances, the average value of the transfers fell by more than 37 percent between January and May 2020, after adjusting for inflation and exchange rate fluctuations. More than 80 percent of households who receive remittances use this income mainly for food and other essential needs.

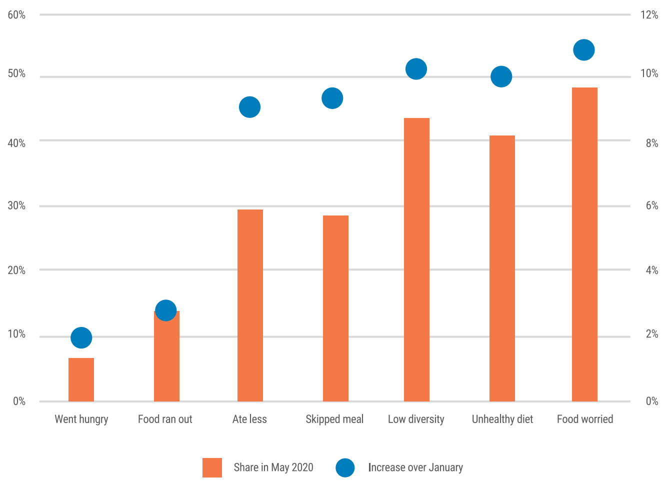
The combination of national job losses and reduced remittances from abroad is leaving families struggling to meet their food needs. In fact, nearly 41 percent of the population reduced their food consumption in May 2020, compared with 24 percent in May 2019. Similar increases were found in the use of livelihood-based negative coping mechanisms such as selling assets and cutting spending on medical care (see figure 28); a growing proportion reported being unable to pay for household utilities.[193]

FIGURE 27: TRENDS IN FOOD CONSUMPTION AND MEASURES OF FOOD INSECURITY, JULY 2020

REDUCED FOOD CONSUMED



MEASURES OF FOOD INSECURITY



Source: World Bank. July 2020. [Economic and Social Impacts of COVID-19: Updates from the Listening to Tajikistan Survey].

Food security situation and trends in migration hotspots

South and Southeast Asia

The economies in South and Southeast Asia[194] are characterized by high levels of informal labour, export-orientation and dependence on remittances. This leaves them extremely exposed to the global economic shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is translating into significant loss of income especially among households dependent on informal jobs and remittances. Key sectors such as the textile industry have been heavily disrupted by the crisis, and countries with widespread informal employment have been struggling to provide residents with social protection during lockdowns. Migrant workers in particular are often excluded from income security programmes such as unemployment benefits and other forms of social protection.

The annual outflow of migrants from South and Southeast Asian countries stood at 58.4 million at the end of 2019.[195] Around 21.8 million (37 percent) migrated towards the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Member States,[196] while 17.1 million (29 percent) migrated within the region; the remainder went to other regions.[197] The countries of origin of the biggest numbers of migrants in 2019 were India (17.5 million), Bangladesh (7.8 million) and Pakistan (6.5 million).

While for countries such as India and Bangladesh, reliance on remittances has fallen steadily over the past two decades along with their rapid economic growth, the region continues to receive substantial remittance inflows. Nepal was among the countries most reliant on receiving remittances in 2019, with an inflow of USD 8 billion, representing 27 percent of GDP. Remittances sent to India (USD 83 billion), the Philippines (USD 35 billion), Pakistan (USD 22 billion) and Bangladesh (USD 18 billion) also made a significant contribution to their national economies, even though they represented a smaller share of GDP.[198]

In several countries, remittances make up a far larger proportion of GDP than foreign direct investment (FDI) and official development assistance (ODA) – making this region particularly vulnerable to the economic impacts of COVID-19.[199] In 2017, remittances dropped for the first time due to the economic slowdown in the Gulf countries. The global recession this year is also expected to hit expatriate labour in the GCC countries particularly hard.[200] According to the World Bank, remittances are forecast to decline by 3.6 percent in South Asia in 2020, followed by a further drop of 10.9 percent in 2021. In East Asia and the Pacific, remittances are expected to decline by 10.5 percent in 2020, and by a further 4.2 percent in 2021 due to the impact of COVID-19.[201]

A large number of South and Southeast Asian migrants have been forced to return to their countries of origin because of prolonged unemployment and ad hoc measures introduced by host countries. When borders were closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, India and Pakistan organized the repatriation of their citizens from the region in response to pressure from the GCC countries. In the United Arab Emirates alone, more than 200,000 Indian and 60,000 Pakistani nationals registered for repatriation.[202] In the Greater Mekong subregion, following the announcement of lockdown measures in Thailand, over 170,000 cross-border migrants from neighbouring countries almost immediately returned to their home provinces or countries, including Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar, in April 2020. Such migration movements may have had the unintended effect of driving transmission in areas with less capacity to provide testing, isolation and treatment, as well as increasing vulnerability for migrants during their journey and in their home communities.[203]

Tens of thousands of migrants continue to return to their countries of origin - more than 116,000 Nepalis have been repatriated from 32 different countries while more than 473,000 Filipinos have returned to the Philippines since February - and many others remain stranded abroad.[204]

As a result of income losses caused by reduced labour opportunities and lower remittances, poverty rates are forecast to increase in South and Southeast Asia, pushing thousands of households into food insecurity. In its worst-case scenario, the World Bank estimates that by the end of 2020, an additional 150 million people will fall into extreme poverty; up to 57 million of these people are expected to be in South Asia.[205]

Over the last decades, food crises in South and Southeast Asia have mainly been caused by temporary and localized shocks such as bad harvests and adverse weather conditions. Local conflicts and security crises such as in Myanmar have created food insecurity hotspots where displaced populations have taken refuge from ongoing clashes in neighbouring countries. The Rohingya refugee situation is the most acute and remains one of the most complex refugee crises in the world. An estimated 861,545 Rohingya are currently in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. More than 1.3 million people in the district – including the refugees - are in need of humanitarian assistance.[206]

Food security in the region has been badly affected by COVID-19. A recent telephone survey in Nepal revealed that food insecurity across the country had increased slightly compared to estimates made three or four years previously. The survey found that 23 percent of households had inadequate food consumption and 7 percent had poor dietary diversity.[207] In Lao People's Democratic Republic, the latest crop and food security assessment mission estimated that 67,800 people were food insecure in March 2020.[208] High numbers of returning migrants from Thailand – 78,322 between 11 March and 15 April – as well as reductions in remittances are likely to aggravate the situation. Around 83 percent of Lao households who receive remittances from abroad reported a decrease in transfers since the pandemic.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh's economy is particularly vulnerable to the economic repercussions of COVID-19 due to its high reliance on exports and remittances and the informality of its labour market.

More than 10 million labour migrants from Bangladesh sent close to USD 18 billion in remittances in 2019.[209] Remittances constitute an important source of income for poor households, accounting for 85 percent of daily expenditures for families with migrants overseas.[210] Sixty percent of these families are totally dependent on remittances for their daily expenses.[211] According to original estimates, remittances were expected to fall to USD 14 billion in 2020 – a 25 percent decrease from 2019.[212] However, Bangladesh is one of the countries where emerging evidence is showing that officially recorded remittances have rebounded and even exceeded pre-COVID levels – possibly reaching USD 20 billion in 2020. It is assumed that many Bangladeshi migrant workers may have switched from formal to informal channels to send remittances back home.[213]

Between the outbreak of the pandemic and the end of June, thousands of Bangladeshi migrant workers reportedly returned to Bangladesh, most notably from the Gulf Cooperation Council Member States[214]. The number of returning Bangladeshis put pressure on the authorities, who have been struggling to put in place special measures to reintegrate them into the local economy.[215] According to recent estimates, Bangladeshis forced to return to their place of origin during the pandemic constitute 73 percent of all international returnees to the country.[216] Furthermore, an IOM study on return migrants in 12 districts in Bangladesh found that 70 percent of respondents who had returned from abroad between February and June 2020 were unemployed. [217]

Lockdowns and circulation restrictions have also disrupted the trade of various goods throughout the country, including food, causing temporary and localized supply-side shocks and food price increases. Such spikes have been contained, mainly because of the diminishing purchasing power of local households, which was further undermined by floods during the summer.[218]

Local authorities have calculated that since the beginning of the pandemic, extreme poverty levels in the country have risen from 10.5 to 20.5 percent, while the share of people under the national poverty line has increased from 20.5 to 29.4 percent.[219] Loss of income, growing poverty and rising food prices have had serious implications for the food security of Bangladeshi households and may have driven recent migration movements from urban to rural areas.[220]

A rapid assessment conducted by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee in April 2020 using telephone surveys in eight divisions in Bangladesh has shown that the pandemic has had a very serious impact on livelihoods and food security.[221] Income changes have affected around 72 percent of respondents who reported job loss or reduced work opportunities. In turn, people are losing their ability to meet their most basic food needs. Around 29 percent of respondents said they only had enough food to eat for the next one to three days, while 14 percent said they had no food at all at the time of the survey.

Before the pandemic, a large proportion of humanitarian interventions in the country were mainly directed towards the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar and the most vulnerable members of host communities in and around the camps in Cox's Bazar. [222] Poverty levels in the district were above the national average even before the 2017 Rohingya influx. The arrival of the refugees has added further strain to the already limited resources available, stretching the capacities of the host communities, local government institutions and civil servants.

As a result of the pandemic and government restrictions put in place to curb the spread of COVID 19, the Bangladeshi host community in Cox's Bazar has become even more vulnerable, faced with lost livelihoods and reduced access to local markets. The local administration estimates that more than 700,000 host community members in Cox's Bazar may have lost their jobs.[223] There are also concerns that the breakdown of food production and market systems during the crisis could lead to years of decreased agricultural productivity and worsening food and nutrition outcomes.[224]

Food security situation and trends in migration hotspots

West and Central Africa

Conflict, climate change and weather-related events are the three main causes of food insecurity and displacement in West and Central Africa.[225] In 2019, there were two major food insecurity hotspots in the region: the Lake Chad Basin – which consists of subnational areas in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria – and the central Sahel (Liptako-Gourma region[226]), composed of Burkina Faso, Mali and western Niger.[227] In both areas, conflict and intercommunal tensions have led to massive population displacements, political turmoil, the destruction or closure of basic services and the disruption of productive activities, markets and trade flows.

The Lake Chad Basin humanitarian crisis is among the most severe in the world. A combination of climate-related shocks and environmental degradation, intercommunal conflict, and violence and conflict perpetuated by Boko Haram has seriously eroded people's livelihoods and uprooted 2.87 million people. One of the worst-hit areas is north-eastern Nigeria, the origin of 299,618 Nigerians who have fled to Niger (168,081), Cameroon (116,409) and Chad (15,621).[228] Violence and insecurity has also caused massive internal displacements. In Nigeria in August 2020, there were over 2.6 million IDPs – 2.1 million of whom were located in the northeast of the country.[229] Cameroon is also severely affected by Boko Haram and is simultaneously facing the Anglophone crisis in its North and Far North regions. According to data from September 2020, this dual crisis has triggered the internal displacement of over 1 million people. In Chad, in October 2020, there were 393,483 IDPs, compared with 204,000 at the end of 2019.[230]

In parallel, the crisis in the central Sahel has been one of the world's fastest growing, with the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of civilians disrupted by insecurity and violence.

In Burkina Faso, new internal displacements due to conflict reached a record high of over 500,000 people in 2019; displacements have continued to rise in 2020, with the number of IDPs now surpassing 1 million by August 2020.[231] The crisis in the central Sahel has also generated 287,496 IDPs in Mali, while in Niger, 265,505 people have been internally displaced due to escalating violence and climatic shocks.[232]

In 2019, the total number of international migrants and refugees originating from West Africa reached 11.4 million, representing 38 percent of all migrants from sub-Saharan Africa (30.2 million).[233] While many migrants move in search of better economic opportunities, conflicts and climate shocks are also major drivers of migration.[234] Food insecurity has also been found to be an immediate trigger behind people's decision to leave.[235]

Migrant remittance inflows to West Africa amounted to more than USD 34.1 billion in 2019.[236] Remittance inflows are expected to fall as migrants find it increasingly difficult to secure employment amidst the pandemic. In sub-Saharan African countries, remittances are expected to drop by 8.8 percent in 2020, followed by a further decline of 5.8 percent in 2021.[237] The impact on remittance-dependent households is likely to be severe, forcing them to find alternative ways to meet their basic food and other essential needs, including negative coping mechanisms.

COVID-19 has had serious implications for both migrants and displaced populations in West and Central Africa, a region where IDPs are already vulnerable due to their displacement status and tend to live in overcrowded environments, where they may face stigmatization and lack access to reliable information and basic services such as safe hygiene and sanitation facilities and healthcare.

Containment measures have limited movements in and out of internal displacement camp sites, interrupting livelihoods and access to services.

The impact of the pandemic is also being felt in resource-poor host communities, who are often already overstretched and lack adequate services to meet the needs of residents and the displaced. Food insecurity in many countries was alarming even before COVID-19, when an estimated 24.5 million people across the region were acutely food insecure (in Cadre Harmonisé (CH)/IPC Phase 3 or worse). According to WFP projections, this number could reach 57.6 million before the end of the year due to the impact of the pandemic on livelihoods.[238]

Restrictions on cross-border mobility and reduced travel linked to truncated business and economic opportunities and fear of the virus have heavily impacted international mobility throughout the region. Through flow monitoring[239] activities conducted at key transit points across the region, IOM observed a striking drop in the number of migrants passing through up until April 2020, coinciding with COVID-19 related containment measures. At the height of the crisis, there were 70 percent fewer migrants on the move than during the same period in 2019, while regional transboundary migration flows in June 2020 were only 6 percent lower than those observed in June 2019.[240]

By 2 September, at least 30,000 migrants were estimated to have been stranded throughout the region as a consequence of movement restrictions, unable to continue their journeys or return home.[241] Migrants found themselves in precarious living conditions, without proper housing or access to basic services. Seasonal workers, representing 66 percent of West and Central Africa intraregional migrants,[242] could no longer pursue their seasonal livelihood activities (mining, fishing, transhumant herding and other agricultural activities such as picking fruits and nuts) because of border closures.

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

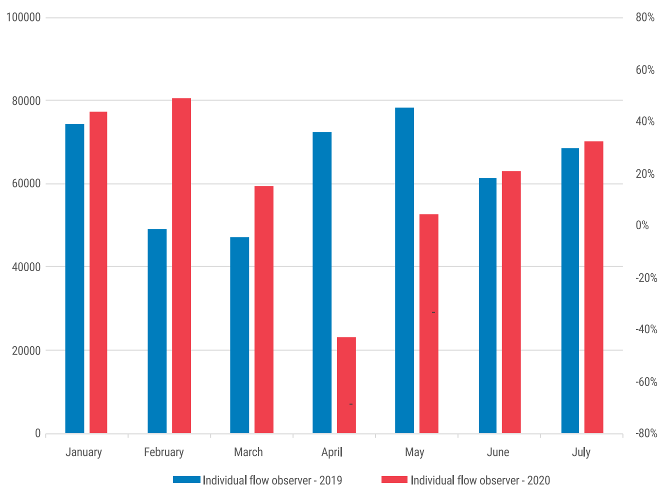
Contributing to the complex conflict in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger – particularly in the Liptako-Gourma region – is an intricate set of underlying vulnerabilities including recurrent climatic shocks that have weakened the main livelihoods related to agriculture and livestock and undermined people's resilience. The fragile situation in these countries has been exacerbated by COVID-19, which has impacted livelihoods and people's mobility.

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are located along one of the main routes taken by migrants in West and Central Africa due to the existence of well-developed smuggling networks. Despite mobility restrictions and border closures, flows continue to be observed along this route, although at a reduced rate. Migration flows fell markedly in Mali[243] and Niger[244] between February and April 2020 before picking up again between May and July, albeit without returning to pre-pandemic levels.[245]

The socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic have increased the prevalence of acute food insecurity in all three countries.

In Burkina Faso, before COVID-19, 1.2 million people were acutely

FIGURE 28: INDIVIDUAL MIGRATION FLOWS RECORDED IN MALI AND NIGER IN 2019 AND 2020



Source: IOM. 2020. Flow Monitoring Registry – COVID-19 Mobility Trends (January – June 2020)

food insecure (in IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) between October and December 2019. Revised projections taking COVID-19 into account indicated nearly triple the number of acutely food insecure people between June and August 2020.[246] In Niger, the revised IPC projections for the same period indicate an estimated 2.7 million acutely food insecure people in Niger[247] and 1.3 million in Mali.[248]

The Liptako-Gourma region extends across the three countries and continues to be faced with a combination of climate shocks and escalating conflict. Nearly 10,000 people have been killed since 2014 and despite political efforts, the situation continues to deteriorate, with more than 3,400 people killed in armed attacks in the first half of 2020 alone.[249] The combination of targeted assassinations, intercommunal clashes, criminal activities and military operations continues to force many people to leave their homes. Populations living in these areas are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19. A WFP study conducted in February 2020 showed that 46 percent of households had poor or borderline food consumption.[250] The share of IDP households with poor food consumption was almost twice as high as that of host communities. Moreover, dwindling stocks and loss of income had forced almost a third of households to adopt livelihood-based negative coping strategies in order to meet their most pressing needs.

Nigeria

The decade-long Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria continues to cause widespread insecurity and displacement throughout the Lake Chad Basin and has severely affected the northern states of the country. The situation appears to be getting worse as non-state armed groups grow stronger across the region. While humanitarian access is improving, most displaced families still rely on vulnerable host communities for their basic needs, including food. This has put already impoverished host communities under extreme pressure, increasing their exposure to food insecurity and malnutrition.

Climate change and population growth are fuelling land disputes and increasing tensions and violence between pastoralists and farmers, causing the loss of harvests and productive assets. Large pockets of the Nigerian population, particularly in the north, still live below the poverty line.[251]

The number of people in need of urgent assistance in northeast Nigeria rose from 7.7 million at the beginning of 2020 to 10.6 million after the outbreak of COVID-19.[252] Between June and August 2020, 8.7 million people were acutely food insecure (in IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) in 16 northern states and the Federal Capital Territory; half of this number were in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states.[253] By contrast, 5 million people were acutely food insecure in the same areas and during the same period in 2019, revealing the deep socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 in the country.[254]

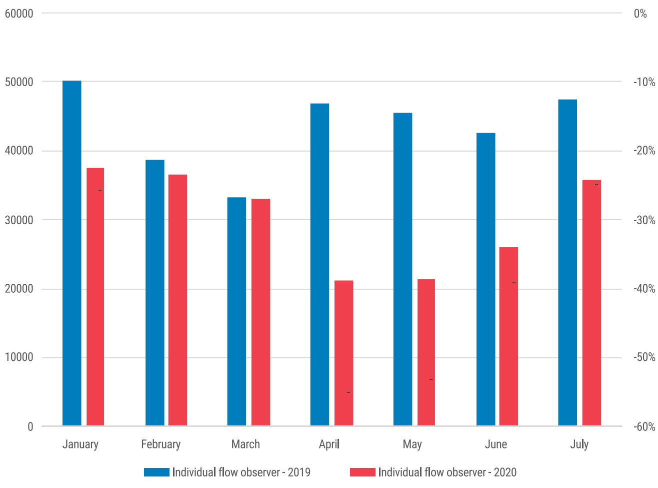
As COVID-19 has begun to spread in conflict-affected Borno state, IDPs and host communities are in a particularly dire situation. Coupled with the lockdown measures, recent escalations in the conflict associated with non-state armed groups have placed an increased strain on livelihoods and curtailed humanitarian access. Measures implemented specifically for settlements are also affecting IDP movements, disrupting self-employment and access to work in the informal sector.

IOM estimates that 80 percent of the 907,434 IDPs in Borno in camp and camp-like settings live in overcrowded conditions where physical distancing is nearly impossible.[255] Access to healthcare, water and sanitation facilities is scarce, as host communities are increasingly feeling the weight of the conflict and the pandemic. An assessment of COVID-19 knowledge, attitudes and practices among IDPs conducted by IOM in early August 2020 shows that a large majority of IDPs are aware of the disease, but 74 percent of respondents said they were not taking any measures to prevent infection. Fifty-two percent said that COVID-19 had disrupted services such as food distribution; markets; water, sanitation and hygiene; health; and education.[256]

Similar to Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, migration flows through Nigeria fell dramatically in April 2020, compared with 2019. Figures have steadily increased again but in July 2020 they remained 25 percent below the same period of the previous year.

Remittance-dependent households are likely to experience secondary impacts of the pandemic. In 2019, a WFP study in Nigeria found that nearly two thirds of families with international migrants among their immediate members reported receiving remittances; even those without migrants (10 percent of respondents) benefited from remittances from other sources.[257] The study also found that one in four respondents used remittances to meet educational needs, while one in five reported using them to meet food needs. This highlights the importance of this additional source of income for households in countries of origin. While 62 percent of households without remittances worry about where their next meal will come from, the share is 51 percent among those receiving remittances. The latter also tend to compromise their food consumption less than others.

FIGURE 29: INDIVIDUAL FLOWS RECORDED IN NIGERIA FROM JAN–JULY 2020



Source: IOM (2020) DTM Flow Monitoring Registry West and Central Africa – (January – July 2020)

Losses in remittances linked to COVID-19 are likely to severely undermine the ability of these households to meet their most essential needs. The situation should be closely monitored to understand the extent of remittance losses and how households are coping.

Food security situation and trends in migration hotspots

East Africa

COVID-19 comes at a time when East Africa[258] is already considered the epicentre of several emergencies caused by consecutive droughts and floods; conflicts and insecurity; protracted refugee and internal displacement crises; and the worst desert locust outbreak in decades. These shocks have damaged the livelihoods of affected populations and continue to increase vulnerabilities and weaken resilience, particularly in the face of the current pandemic.

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, 24 million people were acutely food insecure (in IPC Phase 3 or worse) across the region. According to WFP projections, this number could reach 41.6 million before the end of the year due to the impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods.[259]

Around 30.2 million international migrants originated from sub-Saharan Africa in 2019; 29 percent of them – 8.7 million people – came from East African countries.[260] Of these East African migrants, 46 percent migrated within the East African region, while 54 percent crossed into other regions.[261] Migrants leave for a variety of reasons, most often in search of better economic opportunities – travelling east towards the Arab Peninsula and north towards North Africa and Europe[262] – but also to escape conflicts, insecurity and climate shocks. Most of the international migrants from the region originate from South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Data from the end of October 2020 indicates that the region hosts 3.5 million refugees and asylum seekers, mainly in Uganda (1.4 million), Ethiopia (796,591), Kenya (499,219) and South Sudan (309,198).[263] There are also 6.3 million IDPs in the region.[264] The largest internal displacement crises are in Somalia (2.6 million IDPs), South Sudan (1.6 million) and Ethiopia (1.8 million).[265]

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the number of people leaving the region has fallen steeply following the enforcement of internal and cross-border (formal and informal) movement restrictions.[266] For example, recent reports show that migrant arrivals from the Horn of Africa to Yemen decreased by 69 percent between January and September 2020 compared with the same period in 2019.[267] Spontaneous return movements of migrants have been observed from Yemen towards Djibouti since May 2020. As of September, 3,120 migrants have been accounted for.[268]

Remittances are an important source of income for many families in countries of origin. In 2019, Kenya received USD 2.8 billion, followed by Somalia, estimated to have received between USD 1.3 billion and USD 2 billion. In Uganda, remittances reached USD 1.29 billion and in South Sudan, USD 1.26 billion.[269] Most direct recipients are based in urban areas where money transfer facilities are available; from there, remittances flow on into rural areas.[270] Remittance flows in sub-Saharan Africa are expected to decrease by 8.8 percent in 2020, followed by a further drop of 5.8 percent in 2021[271] as a result of the impact of COVID-19, affecting families across the subregion who will be forced to reduce their consumption or find alternative livelihood strategies.

Somalia

Somalia has been greatly affected by three decades of protracted conflict and political instability, coupled with climate-related shocks, which together have resulted in widespread displacement, poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition. Before COVID-19, 1.3 million people were forecast to be acutely food insecure between April and June

2020. The latest IPC report estimated that 2.1 million people will be acutely food insecure between October and December 2020, an increase largely driven by the impacts of the pandemic.[272] In addition, nearly 963,000 children under 5 are likely to be acutely malnourished through December 2020.[273]

On 17 June 2020, the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs of South West State announced a looming humanitarian crisis following forecasts of a very poor Gu harvest, expected to be 20–30 percent below the 1995–2019 average due to the desert locust infestation, and a below-average Deyr rainy season in southern and central Somalia.[274] [275] The triple shock of seasonal flooding, poor harvests and COVID-19 related measures has led the Federal Government of Somalia to predict an 11 percent decline in nominal GDP in 2020.[276]

Somalia is a major source, transit and destination country for migratory flows. The country continues to receive an influx of migrants from neighbouring countries through irregular migration routes, especially from Ethiopia towards the GCC countries.[277] Movement restrictions imposed in July left land borders closed except for commercial trade. Airports remained open for local travel, except from Mogadishu and Hargeisa, and all sea ports were operational. As a result, cross-border movements have fallen dramatically and in September 2020, 16,598 movements were observed at IOM Flow Monitoring Points. This represents a drop of 46 percent in comparison with September 2019.[278]

Remittances represent a crucial safety net for many Somali families. It is estimated that more than 40 percent normally benefit from money transfers sent by family members living abroad.[279] Remittances are primarily used to cover food and other essential needs, including education and healthcare. They make an important contribution to household income, allowing the repayment of debts as well as access to credit and investments.[280]

Estimated to number between 1 and 1.5 million people, the Somali diaspora has traditionally increased transfers to their home country during times of crisis.[281] For example, remittances played a vital role during the 2011 famine and 2017 cholera outbreak. However, given that COVID-19 has also affected the diaspora, their ability to financially support their families at home has been dramatically compromised. Even when people are in a position to send money, transfers are hampered by lockdown measures and other financial barriers. For example, many money transfer businesses have been forced to close due to containment measures, while their clients have been discouraged from leaving their homes to avoid infections. The same issues have curbed access to remittances for those receiving them. And while some have been able to find alternatives through online systems, not all have the opportunity or willingness to utilize such services.[282]

Nationally, remittances were already estimated to have declined by as much as 50 percent by June 2020.[283] The loss of this income is likely to have a profound impact on Somali families, particularly on farming and agro-pastoral families living in the south of the country, who belong to some of the most marginalized population groups. They make up the majority of IDPs in Somalia, are already affected by recurrent droughts and the locust infestation[284] and could, as income and remittances dry up, be at heightened risk of further displacement, poverty and food insecurity.

Currently, 2.6 million IDPs in Somalia live in 2,344 IDP sites.[285] Even before COVID-19, IDP sites faced acute challenges that hampered efforts to raise living standards. Recurrent displacement due to conflict and environmental factors have put a strain on already limited resources in urban and peri-urban IDP sites. Meanwhile, new arrivals of displaced populations tend to move into spontaneously created settlements that are precariously settled on public or private land.

Many IDPs – including the newly displaced – are living in overcrowded makeshift shelters and struggle to access sufficient food.[286] The underlying health conditions in poor urban settings and IDP camps are extremely worrying.[287] While there has been no reported major COVID-19 outbreak, testing is extremely limited, making it almost impossible to assess whether COVID-19 cases are on the rise in these areas. In response to the threat of outbreaks, government departments and humanitarian and development partners have implemented comprehensive messaging campaigns aimed at instilling behavioural change related to COVID-19 and equipping communities with the resources needed to prevent the spread of the virus and to respond appropriately during times of community transmission.

The pandemic and its effects have greatly exacerbated socioeconomic vulnerabilities. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), IDPs have felt the impact on their livelihoods, such as domestic workers for households in host communities who can no longer access work. Moreover, with schools closed, there are reports that a growing number of children are being employed in casual work.[288]

South Sudan

South Sudan remains in the grip of a serious humanitarian crisis due to the cumulative effects of years of conflict, which has destroyed people's livelihoods and assets. Disruption to economic and social services has led to alarmingly high levels of acute food insecurity and malnutrition. Even before the pandemic, 7 million people were estimated to be food insecure (in IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) between May and July 2019. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) estimated that between February and August 2020, 7–8 million people were acutely food insecure, an increase of up to 1 million in absolute terms compared to the 2019 IPC.[289] Food insecurity is most severe in the flood and conflict-affected areas of Jonglei, with pockets of emergency food insecurity (IPC 4) in Lakes, Upper Nile, Northern Bahr el-Ghazal and Eastern Equatoria.[290]

The South Sudanese economy has been severely disrupted since the outbreak of COVID-19.[291] Food prices in the main markets soared between March and June 2020, reaching their highest levels in the last ten years mainly due to a combination of macroeconomic factors and supply disruptions. Transportation costs also increased significantly. Agro-pastoralists, the urban poor and food-deficit populations who depend on markets are among the worst affected.

The fragile healthcare system has been put under great strain, barely able to provide even routine treatments.[292] While official supply routes benefited from an exemption from border closures, informal trade – essential for the livelihoods of cross-border communities – did not. This particularly affected women, who resorted to passing through irregular border crossings, thereby exposing themselves to heightened protection risks.

There are 1.6 million IDPs across the country, the majority of whom were displaced due to conflict and violence.[293] Localized violence continues to be a major challenge, triggering new displacements and limiting the possibilities for sustainable returns. Despite the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan, ongoing subnational conflict and localized violence throughout different parts of the country are likely to continue, displacing many more people in the coming months. Between January and June 2020, there were an estimated 255,000 new displacements. Tens of thousands of people were displaced in Jonglei between July and August alone due to an upsurge in violence; this could exacerbate food insecurity in an area where emergency levels have already been reported.[294] Further displacements are also expected as a result of recurring floods.

Displaced populations, especially those hosted in camps and camp-like settings, are likely to be at much higher risk of contagious diseases, including COVID-19, because of overcrowding, intense social mixing between the young and the elderly, and poor water and sanitation capacity within camps. Returning IDPs and refugees are also at risk, with an estimated 337,000 individuals living in severely damaged or makeshift shelters often in crowded and unsanitary conditions.

Delays in the release of test results is a major challenge, creating mistrust in communities and resentment towards contact tracers. Delays have also resulted in protracted home isolation for asymptomatic cases, which has been undermining household livelihoods. Additionally, COVID-19 has had major implications for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, affecting procurement, funding availability and mobility. Meanwhile, the need for sustained, large-scale humanitarian food assistance remains high across the country.

Uganda

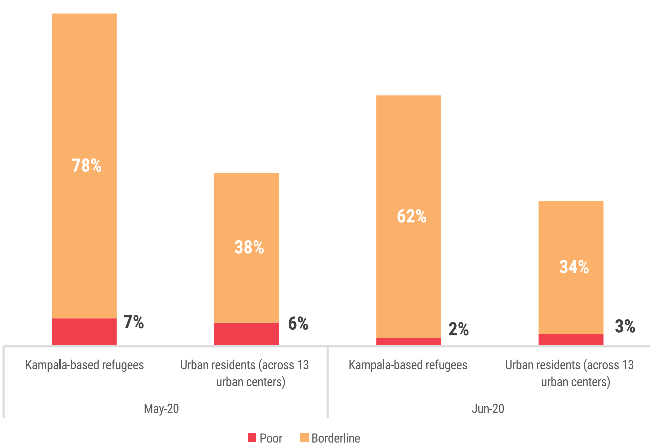
Uganda hosts the highest number of refugees on the African continent in what is the fifth largest refugee crisis in the world.[295] The country has been suffering the consequences of armed conflict and inter-ethnic violence in the region, which drove an additional 190,000 people to seek refuge in Uganda in 2019, bringing the total number of refugees to 1.4 million. Refugees are mainly from Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and South Sudan; the latter comprise the largest refugee group in the country. In addition to the refugee crisis, the north-eastern Karamoja region cutting across Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda continues to be fragile.

In an attempt to minimize the spread of COVID-19, movement restrictions have been established across all border points in the country. Restrictions are also enforced at the subnational level to and from border districts, especially those that border countries with high numbers of registered cases. Only cargo trucks can move across the borders as long as drivers test negative for COVID-19, but limitations in testing capacity are causing long lines at points of entry. Refugees intending to leave Uganda can cross the border upon receiving a clearance letter from the camp commandant representing the Office of the Prime Minister.

By June 2020, the Government of Uganda had already started to ease several COVID-19 movement restrictions. Mobility and economic activity have increased, improving poor households' access to livelihoods and thus their food consumption. According to WFP, the proportion of households in refugee settlements with inadequate food consumption fell from 54 percent in June to 44 percent in July, but remains high.

Although the resumption of economic activities is expected to reduce the use of food-based negative coping mechanisms, strategies to meet food needs such as spending savings and reducing non-essential expenditures are still widespread and particularly high among the urban refugee population. The proportion of urban refugee households employing medium or high food-based coping strategies dropped from 85 percent in May to 64 percent in June. Still, these figures are significantly higher than those for non-refugee urban residents (see figure 31). It was also found that 28 percent of urban refugees had inadequate food consumption in July, compared with 17 percent of urban residents, indicating the higher prevalence of food insecurity among mobile populations.

FIGURE 30: SHARE OF THE POPULATION USING MEDIUM AND HIGH FOOD-BASED COPING STRATEGIES IN UGANDA, MAY AND JUNE 2020



Source: WFP Uganda

Food security situation and trends in migration hotspots

Southern Africa

The southern African[296] region is characterized by complex migration and displacement patterns, internally and across international borders. Movements are driven by a combination of positive and negative triggers such as economic opportunities, poverty and hunger. Influencing factors are conflict and insecurity, political and economic instability, environmental degradation and climate shocks, including droughts and floods that cause regular largescale emergencies within the region.

Migration is hugely important to the livelihoods of the population and by 2019, the region hosted an estimated population of 8.1 million international migrants, 44 percent of whom originated from within the region.[297] Migrants arriving from outside the region came mainly from other sub-Saharan countries such as Burundi (385,000), the Central African Republic (361,000) and Rwanda (307,000). Southern African countries were the origin of 7.2 million international migrants in 2019.[298]

A handful of countries serve as the economic pillars of the region. Given its advanced economy and relative political stability, South Africa is an important migration hub for migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees from within and outside the region. Intra-regional labour migration is well established and large numbers of people have traditionally migrated to South Africa from countries such as Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia and Zimbabwe. The number of international migrants in South Africa reached over 4.2 million in 2019.[299]

The region also hosts almost 1 million refugees and over 335,000 asylum seekers.[300]

At the end of 2019, more than 6.2 million people were internally displaced; escalating conflicts, especially in northern Mozambique, suggest this number is set to rise.[301] Disasters, conflicts and insecurity led to more than 2.2 million newly displaced people in 2019 alone. The growing figures are linked to the unprecedented nature of extreme climate events such as tropical cyclones Idai and Kenneth, which caused widespread devastation in the Comoros, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in March and April 2019.

The lockdown in South Africa in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major job and income losses, and as a result remittance flows across the region are expected to fall by 8.8 percent in 2020, followed by a further decline of 5.8 percent in 2021.[302] As many migrants have opted to return to their country of origin, they are not only exposed to higher risk of COVID-19 infection during travel but are also increasing the risks of community transmission in areas of return. Between 21 March and 26 October, IOM recorded the highest number of returnees in Zimbabwe (24,640), Lesotho (21,580) and Mozambique (15,341).[303] Fears of returnees transmitting COVID-19 in their home communities are high and may contribute to tensions with local populations and increased discrimination and hardship for those returning. Border closures have also led to increased irregular travel across porous borders, which heightens exposure and complicates health screenings and contact tracing.

Containment measures have left many migrants stranded. Between March and August 2020, Zimbabwe recorded the highest number of stranded migrants (15,542), followed by South Africa (11,629) and Angola (7,147).[304]

Stranded migrants often struggle to access sufficient food and encounter health risks during their journeys home. In addition, lack of documentation and fear of authorities may prevent them from accessing health services even when they are available.

Movement restriction measures, not only across borders but also internally, have a major impact on agricultural supply chains within the region. Labour shortages could disrupt the production, processing and distribution of food, in which migrant workers play a vital role.

School closures and disruption in school feeding programmes have had a heavy impact on children in migrant families, leaving them at higher risk of malnutrition and child labour exploitation. Even before COVID-19, food insecurity was particularly concerning as 27.6 million people were acutely food insecure across the region. Under a worst-case scenario, WFP has estimated that this number could reach 52.4 million by the end of the year, particularly because of lost remittances.[305]

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has suffered a complex emergency stretching over the past two decades. At the end of 2019, the country had the world's third largest internally displaced population (after Syria and Colombia), with over 5.5 million people having fled violence and an additional 168,000 displaced by disasters.[306] In 2019 alone, armed clashes and intercommunal violence led to the internal displacement of close to 1.7 million people. Combined with the 233,000 displaced due to natural disasters, the Democratic Republic of the Congo had the highest recorded total number of new displacements globally in 2019.[307] In the first six months of 2020, conflict and violence led to over 1.4 million new displacements, while disasters and weather-related events displaced 349,000 people.[308]

The Democratic Republic of the Congo hosts over half a million refugees, mainly from Rwanda, Burundi, the Central African Republic and South Sudan.[309] At the same time, it is also the country of origin of 927,585 refugees,[310] who have sought refuge mainly in neighbouring Uganda, South Africa, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Burundi.[311] Furthermore, IOM has recorded over 3 million returnees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) since 2018, in the four provinces where the DTM has been active.[312]

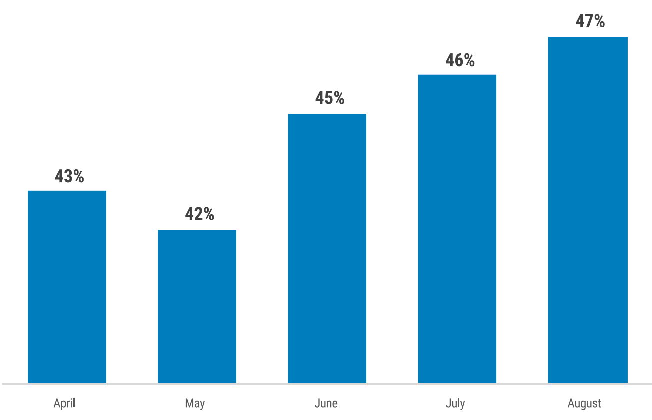
The DRC represents the largest food crisis in the world in terms of number of people affected, which is projected to reach 21.8 million (33 percent of the population) between July and December 2020 according to the latest IPC. Food security has worsened since 2019, when 26 percent of the population assessed were in IPC Phase 3 or above.[313] The factors behind this deterioration include the economic consequences of COVID-19, persistent insecurity leading to new displacements and natural hazards such as flooding and agricultural pests.

Food insecure people are particularly vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic and related containment measures. Many of them have fled violence and lost their main livelihoods while continuing to survive in a climate of insecurity, which is causing repeated waves of displacement. The situation in the eastern provinces remains particularly volatile and humanitarian needs have increased since January 2020, as local populations, IDPs and returnees have been confronted with violence, food insecurity, floods and diseases, including regular outbreaks of Ebola. COVID-19 prevention measures, including border closures and the prohibition of movement between provinces and cities, have made it more challenging to reach displaced populations in need of humanitarian assistance.

While cargo has been exempt, COVID-19 related movement restrictions have had a significant impact on the livelihoods of small traders on the eastern borders with Uganda and Rwanda. Uncertainties related to COVID-19 and its effects have fuelled temporary price hikes for food and other items. While trade resumed in mid-August and price levels have stabilized since, a significant depreciation of the Congolese franc is putting additional strain on traders and consumers who rely on cross-border trade.[314] Liquidity issues among commercial banks have affected the distribution of humanitarian assistance, as cash-based transfers have been delayed. These trends are particularly concerning in a country that largely depends on its informal economy and requires a high turnover of and access to cash resources.

Monthly monitoring of food insecurity across the country through WFP telephone surveys has revealed a growing trend of poor and borderline food consumption over the past months (see figure 32). Although information is not disaggregated by displacement status, food insecurity levels are expected to be worse among displaced populations and returnees compared to the local population. While overall food consumption is expected to improve as restrictions are gradually lifted, certain populations are likely to continue to face challenges in accessing adequate amounts and quality of food – especially those in areas that rely on cross-border trade.

FIGURE 31: AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WITH POOR OR BORDERLINE FOOD CONSUMPTION IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO FROM APRIL TO AUGUST 2020



Source: WFP DRC

Zimbabwe

The enduring economic crisis in Zimbabwe, marked by staggering hyperinflation, is the main driver of acute food insecurity in the country. In August 2020, the cost of food increased by 865 percent compared to the same month in 2019.[315] Extreme poverty was estimated to have risen from 29 percent in 2018 to 34 percent in 2019, affecting an additional 5.7 million people.[316] Since 2018, Zimbabwe has been experiencing recurrent drought, which is exacerbating the economic situation and creating shortages of essential foods. As a result, 4.3 million people – close to 45 percent of the population – were acutely food insecure between February and June 2020, according to IPC analysis.[317] FEWS NET estimates that between October and December 2020, up to 6 million could become acutely food insecure.

Zimbabwe relies heavily on labour migration flows, particularly towards South Africa. In 2019, South Africa officially hosted 377,000 Zimbabwean migrants,[318] although the actual numbers are believed to be multiple times higher. Migrants work mainly under informal or casual arrangements, which leaves them unprotected and vulnerable to exploitation, poverty and food insecurity. When the lockdown in South Africa was imposed in late March, many Zimbabweans who lost their jobs abroad instantly became vulnerable not only due to income loss and subsequent difficulty in meeting basic needs, but also because of challenges in accessing health systems, forcing many to return to Zimbabwe as a last resort. Women migrant workers have been disproportionally affected because of pre-existing gender discrimination and widespread lack of decent work, vulnerability and exploitation as well as gender-based abuse and violence at home. Young migrants, who are likely to hold informal jobs, were particularly affected by the rising unemployment rates.

The impact of COVID-19 is expected to curtail remittances, an essential source of economic support. Zimbabweans depend heavily on remittances to cushion the impacts of the dire economic situation in the country. In 2019, Zimbabweans abroad transferred remittances amounting to USD 1.7 billion, representing 13.5 percent of the country's GDP.[319] An abrupt drop in remittances is expected to directly impact most of the households who use these funds to meet their basic needs including food, education, rent and healthcare and consider them a safety net for coping with unexpected financial shocks. Remittances are expected to remain below average given the bleak economic outlook in South Africa. According to a recent report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), GDP will decline by between 5.1 and 7.9 percent as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and it is likely to take at least five years for the economy to return to pre-pandemic levels.[320]

Food security situation and trends in migration hotspots

Latin America and the Caribbean

Over recent months, Latin America and the Caribbean has become a hotspot for the COVID-19 pandemic; 43 percent of all cases worldwide had been recorded in the region by October 2020.[321 322] The intense spread of the virus – outstripping the capacity of health systems – has been met with sustained containment measures that have severely impacted people's mobility, food security and livelihoods. Especially vulnerable are those who rely on daily wage labour, informal business, petty trade or remittances. Many daily workers in rural areas and smallholder farmers have not yet recovered from cyclical droughts in the Dry Corridor of Central America, thus their level of resistance is low. Rural households in Haiti have faced difficulties selling their produce due to movement restrictions. In Venezuela, the impact of COVID-19 and related containment measures could be devastating as the country has already been suffering socioeconomic pressures for several years.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) projects an average 9.1 percent fall in GDP across the region in 2020.[323] Plummeting international commodity prices will damage terms of trade and as the region is specialized in the production and export of natural resource-based goods, it is likely to suffer the harsh economic consequences of the pandemic more than any other region in the world. The crisis is causing an unprecedented reduction in economic activity and working time. The biggest impact is being felt in services such as tourism, aviation, accommodation, restaurants, entertainment and commerce. General activity indicators show a strong contraction in several countries. For example, total economic activity (year-on-year in April) is expected to fall by more than 40 percent in Peru, 26 percent in Argentina and 20 percent in Colombia.[324]

Extreme poverty rates are forecast to increase significantly in Ecuador (from 7.6 percent in 2019 to 12.7 percent in 2020), Brazil (from 5.5 percent in 2019 to 9.8 percent in 2020) and Colombia (from 10.3 percent in 2019 to 14.3 percent in 2020).[325] Before COVID-19, acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) affected 4.3 million people in the region (excluding Venezuela). WFP projects that this number could soar to 16 million by the end of the year, fuelled by income losses and lower remittances stemming from the impacts of the pandemic.[326]

Migration from and within Latin America and the Caribbean is not a new phenomenon and the region has traditionally been characterized by mixed migration flows. There are over 11 million international migrants living in Latin America and the Caribbean. Seventy-five percent are intra-regional migrants, of whom the largest proportion originate from Venezuela.[327] In fact, political and economic turmoil in Venezuela has uprooted more than 5.4 million Venezuelans between 2015 and 2020. Most of them are hosted in neighbouring countries including Colombia (1.8 million), Peru (1,043,460), Brazil (262,475) and Ecuador (417,199).[328]

In 2019, remittances reached nearly USD 100 billion in the region.[329] The countries receiving the greatest volume of remittances include Haiti, which received around USD 3.3 billion in 2019, representing 37 percent of its GDP. Honduras received nearly USD 5.4 billion (22 percent of GDP) and El Salvador received USD 5.6 billion (21 percent of GDP).[330] However, COVID-19 has curbed people's mobility and remittances are expected to fall by 0.2 percent in the region in 2020, and further drop by 8.1 percent in 2021.[331]

Migrant populations in Central America are already experiencing the severe economic impact of COVID-19, as shown in a recent IOM survey. More than half of the migrants who participated in the survey said they had lost their jobs due to the pandemic.[332] Around 59 percent of the respondents who had economic dependents in other countries were continuing to send remittances; however, 82 percent of them had reduced the amount they send because they do not have sufficient income.

Specific regional factors exacerbate the vulnerability of migrants in the context of COVID-19, including high rates of urbanization and densely populated cities, which often lead to crowded living and working conditions. The conditions in urban spaces are fragile due to problems such as deficits in healthcare services and the concentration of informal settlements. Despite these issues, cities host the vast majority of migrants.

Socio-political crises and gang violence as well as weather extremes, high food prices and lack of employment have exacerbated displacement in countries such as Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.[333] By the end of 2019, the total IDP population in Colombia had risen to 5.6 million due to conflict and violence, with 139,000 new displacements recorded over the course of the year. Guatemala had 242,000 IDPs due to conflict by the end of 2019, while disasters triggered 454,000 new internal displacements in El Salvador and 247,000 in Honduras during the same year.[334]

Newly displaced populations are often highly vulnerable to contracting infectious diseases, as they live in conditions where viruses can spread more easily. Others living in areas affected by violence may be ill-equipped to protect themselves against infection and have poor access to healthcare. A new pattern of internal migration has emerged from this crisis, with a significant number of internal migrants moving from the big urban centres to smaller cities and rural towns in the provinces, driven by job losses especially in the informal sector.[335]

Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are among those hit hardest by border closures, curtailed economic activity, overwhelmed health systems and strained social safety nets. Venezuelan migrants and refugees in neighbouring countries are highly dependent on the informal sector.[336] They are therefore largely excluded from national social protection and health systems. The ongoing economic decline in host countries is severely undermining their livelihoods and access to services.[337]

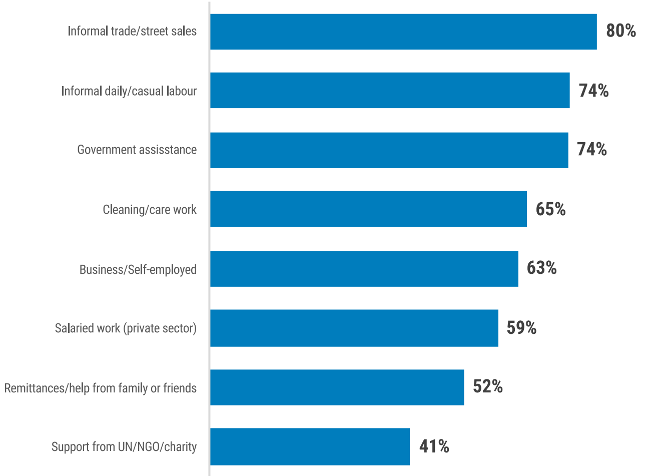
With the spread of COVID-19 and its dire consequences for migrants and refugees, Venezuelans started to return home, despite the hardship in their country. Within three days of Colombia´s border closures, 27,000 Venezuelans had reportedly returned to their home country and by the end October 2020 that figure had reached more than 120,000.[338] Many have remained stranded at the borders as the Venezuelan authorities are reported to have been pushing back returnees.

Xenophobia and discrimination against Venezuelan migrants and refugees have been on the rise, including in Ecuador where this was already an issue before COVID-19. A study published in July 2019 found that more than one in five displaced Venezuelans experienced discrimination and exploitation.[339] Refugees in Ecuador report that the pandemic has exposed them to increased discrimination from employers, landlords and even health service providers.[340]

Before COVID-19, 9.3 million people were estimated to be acutely food insecure (in IPC Phase 3 or above) in Venezuela, and another 1.2 million Venezuelan migrants were acutely food insecure in Colombia and Ecuador.[341]

A WFP remote assessment conducted in August 2020[342] found that 70 percent of Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru had seen a substantial decrease in income due to COVID-19 and 29 percent were unemployed at the time of the survey. Similar findings were also observed for the resident population, indicating that COVID-19 has damaged the economy as a whole. More migrants and refugees rely on unsustainable income sources such as informal activities and assistance (48 percent) than residents (34 percent). As shown in figure 33, informal livelihoods have been the most disrupted since COVID-19.

FIGURE 32: SHARE OF VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES REPORTING A FALL IN INCOME BY MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME IN AUGUST 2020

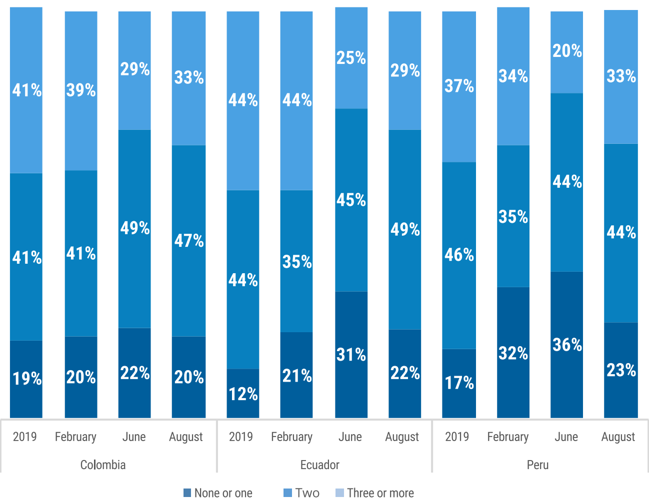


Source: WFP. Forthcoming. Remote Assessment COVID-19: Venezuelan migrants in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

Food insecurity has therefore increased among Venezuelan migrants. In the WFP remote assessment from August, concerns over having enough food to eat were reported by 72 percent of respondents, a 10-percentage point increase compared with pre-COVID times. Moreover, food consumption patterns show that the share of migrants who had consumed just one meal the previous day rose from 12 to 30 percent compared to the pre-COVID-19 period. Figure 30 illustrates how trends in food consumption have evolved among migrants in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru since 2019.

While slight improvements were observed in August 2020 compared to June, the proportion of households consuming fewer than three meals a day has increased across all three countries (by between 4 and 15 percentage points) compared to the 2019 baseline.

FIGURE 33: SHARE OF VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES REPORTING A FALL IN INCOME BY MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME IN AUGUST 2020



Source: WFP. Forthcoming. Remote Assessment COVID-19: Venezuelan migrants in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

To bridge food gaps, nearly 72 percent of respondents adopted food-based negative coping strategies including eating less food or less preferred food, skipping meals or going a whole day without eating – the latter two strategies being the most severe. Before the pandemic, 67 percent of migrants and refugees were resorting to at least one of these strategies.

Dry Corridor of Central America: El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua

The Dry Corridor is one of the most vulnerable areas in the region to weather-related and natural disasters due to its geographical location, highly unpredictable climate and political instability. The agricultural sector has been hampered by recurrent droughts and prolonged dry spells since 2013, impacting the socioeconomic situation of millions of people. Climate variability in combination with gang violence, inequality of income and poverty have increased the levels of migration within Central America and towards the United States of America. Despite COVID-19, evictions, deportation and forced returns continue in the region.

In 2019, the number of international migrants originating from these countries was substantial. In 2019, there were 1.6 million migrants from El Salvador, 1.2 million from Guatemala, 800,707 from Honduras and 682,865 from Nicaragua around the world, mostly in the United States of America.[343] In a recent IOM DTM survey among migrants from northern Central America transiting through Guatemala, most migrants from Honduras (67 percent) and El Salvador (58 percent) responded that they were headed to the United States, while the remainder were going to Mexico. Nine out of ten Guatemalan respondents reported heading to Mexico.

Eighty-five percent of migrants interviewed said they were leaving their home countries in the hope of finding better life conditions elsewhere, including better economic opportunities. Conflict and violence were reported as a driver of migration by 32 percent of respondents. Only 5 percent had left for family reunification reasons.[344]

Since COVID-19, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador have been heavily impacted by movement restrictions, lower remittances and loss of income from tourism. A WFP study conducted in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras found that remittances play a crucial role for households in these countries.[345] The study found that monthly remittances are received by 78 percent of households who have at least one family member who has migrated and works abroad or within the region. For more than 40 percent of these households, this is their only source of income. Families mainly use remittances to buy food and invest in agriculture or other small businesses. A portion of remittances is spent on education and healthcare.

The expected drop in remittances towards the region and subsequent income loss for remittance-dependent households is likely to severely undermine food security. Over 60 percent of respondents surveyed in these four countries in August 2020 expressed concern over having enough food to eat, particularly in Honduras (68 percent).[346]

Conclusions and recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic and actions taken to contain its spread is not a temporary crisis but a profound disruption that is likely to change human mobility patterns for months and years to come.

The pandemic has shed light on the importance of migration by demonstrating the impact of restricted human mobility on people's wellbeing and long-term development prospects. People on the move are particularly susceptible to the health and socioeconomic impacts of the crisis – with knock-on effects on their families back home that may be dependent on remittances from abroad. The fall in remittances will have severe effects on peoples' food security, health and education outcomes as well as their capacity to invest in their future. Given the central role of remittances, migrants and diaspora have an important role to play in mitigating the economic backlash and supporting recovery efforts.

The pandemic will have implications on migration and hunger dynamics, with broader consequences for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Initially, COVID-19 reduces mobility, which is likely to increase the food insecurity of those who depend on mobility for their livelihoods. In a second phase, when mobility restrictions are partially or fully lifted, more people may be compelled to leave their home areas if they can no longer make a living in their current location. Well-governed migration, as outlined by the United Nations Network on Migration, will be an essential element of an effective response to COVID-19.[347] Based on the joint analysis presented in this paper and to ensure that the links between food security and migration are duly considered throughout the COVID-19 response and recovery, WFP and IOM propose the following eight priority actions.

1: Ensure migrants facing acute hardship can access humanitarian assistance in order to meet their food and other essential needs

In times of unprecedented movement restrictions and economic downturns, mobile populations constitute important groups that require the attention of the international community. Migrants often face a heavier burden than their local counterparts as they lack access to formal and informal safety nets or stimulus packages. This is particularly the case for migrants who are stranded in precarious situations, lacking the capacity to support themselves. Any assistance provided should be needs-based regardless of nationality and migratory status. It should also be time-bound with the objective of identifying lasting solutions, including the option of safe and voluntary return to countries and areas of origin.

2: Safeguard assistance provided to the displaced and their host communities, including refugees and asylum seekers, IDPs, as well as migrants in crisis situations and those in mixed flows

Among the groups emerging as particularly vulnerable in the wake of the pandemic are the displaced, including refugees and IDPs, as well as migrants in crisis situations and migrants in mixed migration flows. Humanitarian and development actors should ensure that the particular vulnerabilities and needs of these populations are incorporated into all COVID-19 related responses. These groups should also continue to receive the required protection and assistance despite competing priorities from the ever-growing number of people in need in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

3: Secure access to critical services and inclusive information for all mobile and displaced populations

Governments and the global community must take steps to ensure continuity of access to critical services and healthcare, including COVID-19 testing and treatment (when available), immunization services for preventable diseases, and mental health and psychosocial support services for all migrants, in particular for the most vulnerable such as victims of trafficking, GBV survivors, unaccompanied or separated children, and persons with disabilities. Specific actions include supporting and strengthening fragile national health and social systems to ensure the inclusion of all mobile and displaced populations while also enhancing services for host communities. Information sharing can be strengthened through alternative and accessible tools such as hotlines and mobile phone applications or other online solutions for virtual counselling, while upholding the right to privacy and ensuring the protection of personal data. Providing inclusive information on service availability and public health information related to the pandemic is paramount in both areas of destination and communities of return. All information should be available in relevant languages.

4: Recognize the positive contributions of migrants and diaspora, and promote their inclusion in social protection systems

Mobile populations are among the most excluded from even basic coverage by social protection instruments and schemes, especially undocumented migrants; COVID-19 sheds even more light on this shortcoming. For countries to "recover better", it will be important for governments to recognize the critical role that migrants play in their societies and facilitate their access to national social protection schemes and inclusion in national and local COVID-19 public health and recovery plans. Simultaneously, governments in countries of origin should be supported to establish or strengthen national safety nets and facilitate access for families who have become vulnerable due to the loss of remittances.

5: Facilitate the flow of remittances as an essential financial service that will support the response to and recovery from the impact of COVID-19

Remittances play a critical role in LMICs, with direct impact on people's ability to meet their food and other essential needs. Governments and central banks, for instance, are encouraged to declare remittance transfer services as an essential service, to establish economic support measures that benefit migrants and remittance service providers, to support greater access to and use of digital technologies, and to facilitate implementation of financial regulations linked to remittances.[348] Remittance service providers should be incentivized to reduce transaction costs and enable easier access to remittance transfer channels.

6: Promote necessary adjustments to national legal frameworks and ensure access to legal services

The necessary adjustments to be made to national legal frameworks to enable migrants to remain in compliance with immigration rules, to be able to access or continue to have access to legal services and to safeguard the right to safely return to areas of origin. Policy measures should include the extension of expiring visas and renewed work and residence permits, which in turn can be an effective means of filling in critical workforce gaps in high priority sectors, including agricultural production. Special attention should also be given to undocumented migrants.

7: Counter xenophobia, stigmatization and discrimination towards people on the move in the wake of COVID-19

The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing xenophobia and discrimination. In addition to growing economic hardship, mobile and displaced populations are also faced with increasing levels of xenophobia, stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion. Steps to address these issues will require sensitization of the general public. All efforts should be made to counter public disinformation, fear and prejudice against people on the move.

8: Improve data and analysis to better understand the impacts of COVID-19 on mobility, remittances and food security dynamics

Collecting information from mobile and displaced populations is a challenge that has become even more pronounced during COVID-19 as face-to-face data collection (e.g. needs assessments, household surveys and flow monitoring surveys) has been disrupted in many places. Investing in innovative remote monitoring and assessment tools is therefore critical. Where already in place, monitoring and assessment activities should be expanded to cover mobile and displaced populations.

Trend data will allow a more comprehensive understanding of the medium and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on mobility and food security and the links between the two. This is crucial to the design of effective programmatic and policy responses during the crisis and recovery phases. Given the centrality of remittances and the yet unanswered question of whether their countercyclical role still applies, it is vital to develop more robust methodologies for measuring and monitoring remittances and migrant contributions to development over the coming months and in the aftermath of the crisis.

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Caption: Internally displaced persons arrive at a displacement site in Doloow, Somalia. Droughts in recent years have led to increased displacement and food shortages.

Page 11:
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Caption: A humanitarian team member distributes essential non-food items to internally displaced persons in Jonglei, South Sudan.

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Caption: An IOM staff member distributes household cooking items to internally displaced persons in a camp in Maiduguri, Nigeria.

North Africa (p.27)
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Caption: A young internally displaced boy in Al Fallah Camp.

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Caption: An IOM staff member speaks to a young beneficiary during an NFI distribution in Lahij Governorate, Yemen.

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Caption: Kakoli is helping her mother Golapi to prepare vegetables for cooking. Their family and 6000 others are being assisted by the WFP by providing them with mobile cash transfers.

West and Central Africa (p.39)
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Caption: Zore Yusef shares a meal with one of his children. They're having tô de petit mil, a local delicacy made with cooked millet flour. Born in 1958, Yusef is married to four wives. Armed conflict forced him and his family to flee the northern region of Burkina Faso. Yusef narrated his journey from danger to safety, saying that one of his brothers was killed. Yusef however, escaped narrowly and came to the camp with nothing but the clothes on his back and his family. He explained that for him, the number one priority is having food to feed his children and wives.

East Africa (p.42)
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Caption: An Ethiopian migrant and her son await return assistance to Ethiopia at a reception centre in Bossaso, Somalia.

Southern Africa (p.45)
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Caption: At the food market in Kalemie, DRC.

Latin America and the Caribbean (p.48)
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Caption: One year ago, Dayana and her family migrated from Venezuela to Colombia, where she found work and was able to settle down. Now she has lost her job due to COVID19. WFP with the support of World Vision is distributing food baskets to help those in need like Dayana.

Back cover:
© IOM
Caption: IOM and WFP staff members work hand in hand in distributing aids in Libya.

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