



## MIGRATION DISPLACEMENT AND BRIEFING NOTE SERIES III

### STATE OF EVIDENCE MIGRATION: A POSITIVE DRIVER FOR DEVELOPMENT

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BORDER CROSSING  
**OBSERVATORY**  
BORDERS, CRIME, JUSTICE





Fulchuri Haat, Bangladesh  
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## Migration Displacement and Briefing Note - Series III

### State of Evidence Migration: A Positive Driver for Development

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#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the Oxfam-Monash Partnership, Oxfam commissioned a series of briefing notes on migration and displacement issues to identify and scope sources of data and information as a means to provide an evidence base around three key migration themes: Women and Irregular Migration; High Harm, High Volume Migration; and Migration: A positive driver for development?

This paper focuses on Migration: A positive driver for development?, with a particular focus on South East Asia. This 'State of Evidence' has been presented across the briefing note series as a platform from which Oxfam International and Oxfam Australia can best determine the policy, campaigning and advocacy work it can contribute in the area of migration and displacement.

This paper presents, in brief, the issues associated with migration and development in the Asia-Pacific region with a focus on labour migration, forced migration in situations of conflict and persecution and climate change induced migration. Migration and development are interlinked with economics, sustainability and human security. In relation to countries of origin, migration and development are usually linked to employment opportunities abroad and fleeing from conflict and increasingly, in response to the impacts of climate change. The opportunity for gaining employment abroad is attractive when it is difficult to find work at home with the benefit of potential remittances to sustain family left behind. Seeking out professional opportunities abroad is also a means to develop existing skills and learn others which can later be brought back home to contribute to economic growth. Situations of conflict and persecution as drivers for migration can impact on opportunities for development both in countries of origin and destination as migrants flee to places of safety. The impacts of climate change as a driver for migration also present challenges to human security and economic growth for affected countries within the region.

Migrants, both regular and irregular, can be contributors to development via Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, employment and wages in countries of destination whilst at the same time contributing to economic growth and sustainability in their countries of origin.

Accordingly, migration can present opportunities for sustaining development in countries of origin and accelerating development in countries of destination.

Positive development outcomes from migration can provide the opportunity for national and regional intergovernmental organisations to invest in decent work and social protections for labour migrants which recognise, support and encourage their contributions and commitments to protect migrant workers. However, these policy areas are underdeveloped in the region.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, particularly in the Asia-Pacific context, migration and development expose challenges and issues surrounding migration and labour regulation and the vulnerabilities of migrants.

Migration has been included in the global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) framework through the 2015 adoption of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. In support of migration regulation, 10.7 of the SDGs calls on countries to 'facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration'. Inclusion in the SDG framework positively recognises the integral role and fundamental contribution to sustainable development and poverty reduction that well-managed migration has the capacity to achieve.<sup>2</sup> With the adoption of this Agenda, the international community has recognised important linkages between migration and development for countries of origin and destination, and for migrants and their families.

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## BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE

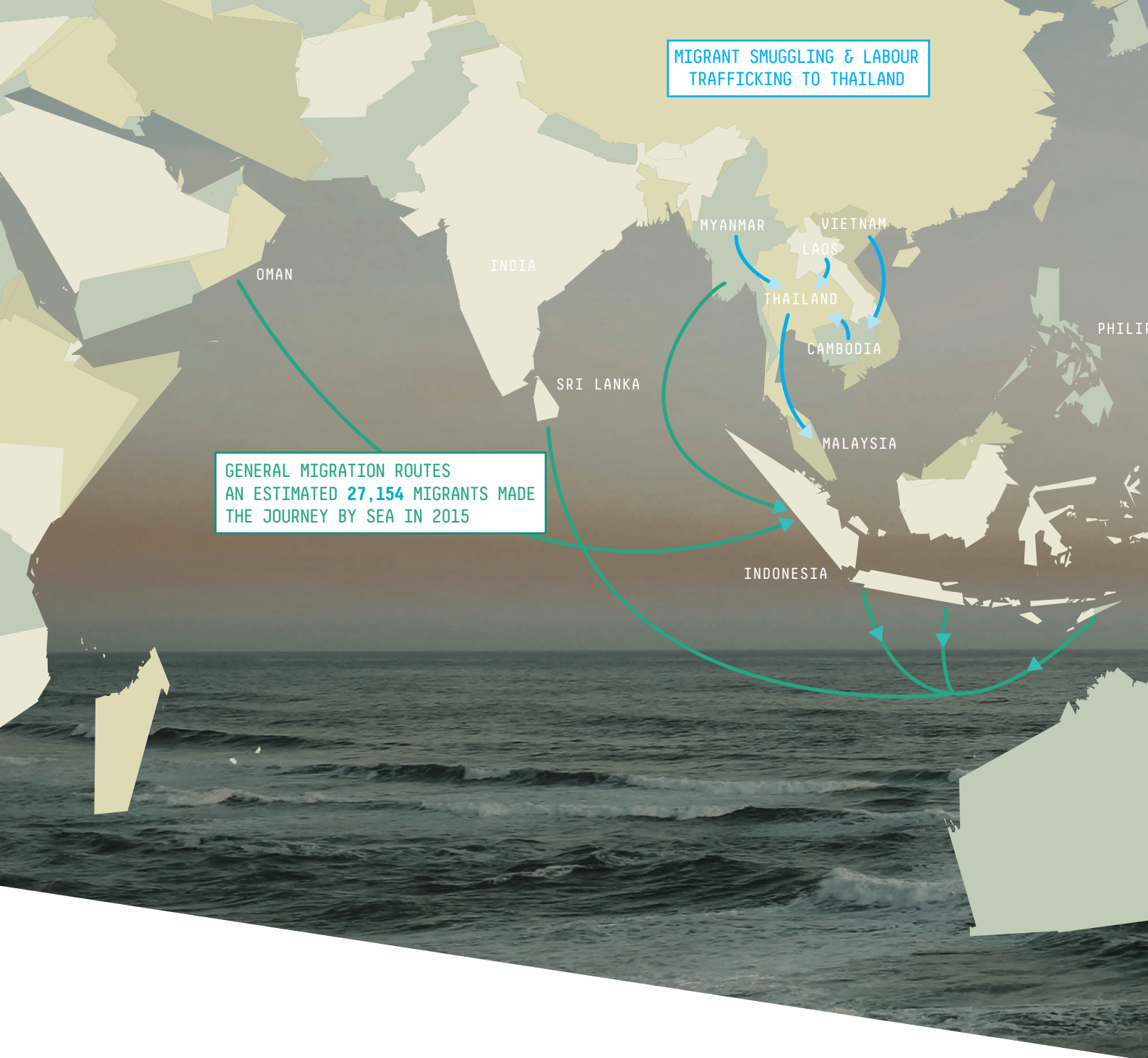
International migration is a major driver of social and economic change in the contemporary Asia-Pacific region.<sup>3</sup> Temporary labour migrants move within and from the region. Many of these migrants are driven by economic opportunity and the need to fill gaps in existing labour markets, both skilled and unskilled, in countries of destination. The supply of temporary migrants occurs through both regular and irregular migration channels. Irregular migration refers to forms of migration that do not conform to the regulations and laws of sending, transit or receiving countries. It includes migration for the purpose of seeking protection and safety, for work and in exploitative (including trafficking) situations.

For those irregular migrants who are fleeing persecution and seeking places of safety, engaging in (often unregulated) employment in countries of transit and destination is also a notable contribution to the development of these

countries. However, for irregular migrants, there will always be issues and concerns surrounding unregulated labour industries and vulnerabilities of migrant workers to exploitation.

Migration in the Asia-Pacific region is characterised by mixed flows and includes temporary labour migration, asylum seeker pathways, smuggling and trafficking in persons, economic migration and also environmental migration resulting from the impacts of climate change.<sup>4</sup> There are smaller migration streams in the region for permanent settlement, government regulated seasonal worker programs (in Australia and New Zealand), marriage, and international student migration all of which contribute in various ways to the development of host countries and countries of origin through remittances, and economic, professional and educational development opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

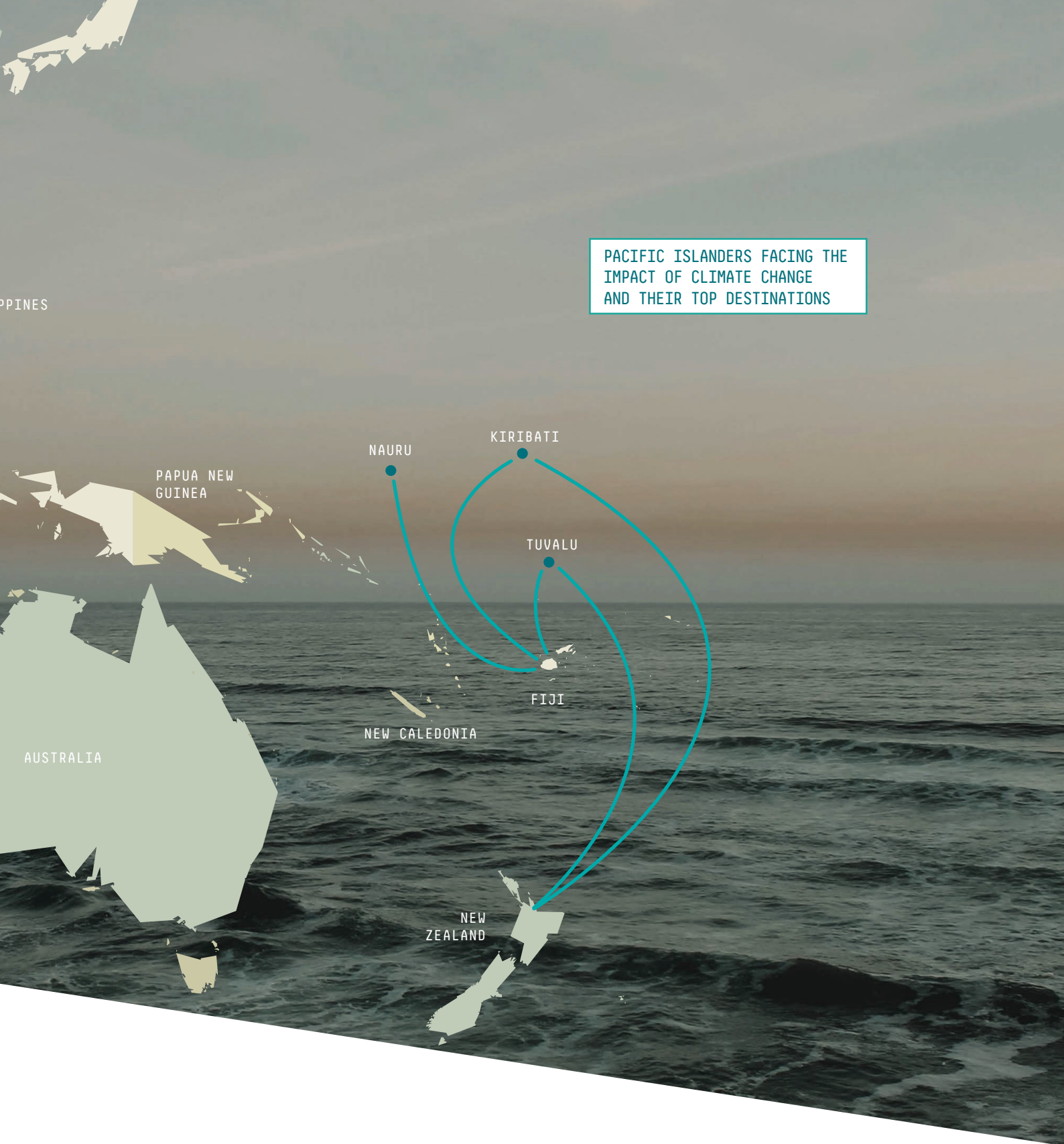




Labour migration is largely gendered, with men migrating into construction, agriculture and fishing industries for example, and women migrating for opportunities in domestic work, healthcare, garment and hospitality industries.<sup>6</sup> Trafficking in persons resulting in the exploitation of migrants has been reported in all of these sectors. There has been an increase in the number of women taking irregular migration journeys in the region where women now make up nearly half of all migrants in the region (48%) (see Briefing 1: 'Women and Irregular Migration').<sup>7</sup> Evidence from the impacts of climate change induced natural disasters show that women, and particularly poor women, are disproportionately affected. Climate change induced disasters are macro drivers for women's irregular migration and can lead to disproportionately higher number of fatalities women.<sup>8</sup>

Aside from economic opportunities abroad, migration from the Pacific region has been increasingly associated with the impacts of climate change for some Pacific Island nations. Increasing sea levels and subsequent flooding as well as an increase in other natural disasters such as cyclones and tsunamis can have an impact on local livelihoods and development opportunities and have given rise to this new migration phenomenon.<sup>9</sup>

In-flow migration is highest in destination countries such as Singapore, China, Australia and the Chinese Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong. There are established flows within the South East Asia region to destinations including Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.<sup>10</sup> Whilst there are a significant number of

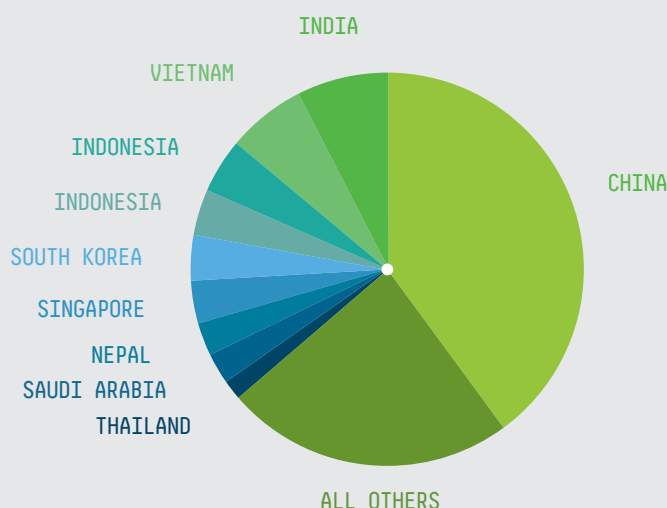


PACIFIC ISLANDERS FACING THE  
IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE  
AND THEIR TOP DESTINATIONS

migrants from the region seeking employment opportunities within the region, there are many who travel further afield to the Middle East and North America.<sup>11</sup> To illustrate migration levels from the region to the Middle East, the Arab States have the highest proportion of migrant workers to all workers (35.6%) and host 11.7% of migrant workers worldwide, most of them from Asia.<sup>12</sup> In the United Arab Emirates for

example, almost 90% of the population are foreign born. There are an estimated 750,000 foreign domestic workers employed by families in the UAE and these workers make up 20% of the total expatriate workforce. Domestic workers in the UAE are largely recruited from Indonesia and the Philippines as well as other countries in South Asia and Africa.<sup>13</sup>

## ORIGIN OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN AUSTRALIA



### NATURE AND SCALE OF THE ISSUE – WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY ABOUT THE ISSUE?

Recent data shows that globally there were an estimated 244 million international migrants in the world in 2015.<sup>14</sup> The Asia-Pacific Migration Report estimated that over 59 million migrants were found in countries in the Asia-Pacific region in 2013<sup>15</sup> while the number of international migrants reported in Oceania in 2015 was 8.1 million.<sup>16</sup> Regional migration trends to and from the region are increasing over time. In 2013, large numbers of migrants from the Asia-Pacific region travelled across the world to countries in the Middle East, North America, Europe and elsewhere in search of economic opportunity with over 95 million of the global international migrant population originating from the region, an almost 50% increase since 1990. International migration to countries of the Asia-Pacific region has increased from 52 million in 1990 to 59 million reported in 2013. Across the same time period, in 2013, over 95 million international migrants came from countries in Asia or the Pacific, an almost 50% increase compared to 1990.<sup>17</sup>

Urbanisation is a key driver for rural to urban migration both within countries and also across countries in the region. Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand have experienced a rapid urbanisation. The development of urban areas and supporting infrastructure in parts of the Asia-Pacific has resulted in a transition from predominantly rural to urban societies and increasing vulnerable migrant populations moving in to urban centres.<sup>18</sup> Urbanisation has been a phenomenon throughout the region with a large increase in people moving to and living in urban areas. Reporting from 2014 indicated that the number of people in Asia living in urban areas was over 50 per cent of the population with 55 percent of the worldwide

urban population living in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>19</sup> China has the highest level of urbanisation in the region with Singapore, Hong Kong and Macau following. Looking to the Pacific, Micronesia has an urban population of 68.1% of the total population whereas in Polynesia and Melanesia, the urban population is 42.4% and 18.4% respectively.<sup>20</sup> In 2014, Hugo argued that urbanisation is increasing in the Pacific with a projection of 5.5 million of the total population (around 9.9 million in 2014<sup>21</sup> with a population growth rate of 0.96% per annum<sup>22</sup>) projected to live in urban locations in the region by 2050.<sup>23</sup>

Most labour migration within the region is temporary, based on supply and demand for migrant labour. Migration and labour opportunities can be organised amongst migrant social networks and via information provided by family and friends who have migrated themselves.<sup>24</sup> In the context of labour migration, recruitment agents and agencies, both regulated and unregulated, are also active facilitators of migration and employment opportunities in the Asia-Pacific and beyond.<sup>25</sup> Most migrant workers are younger in age, with the largest age group being between 20-39 years (see Youth section below).<sup>26</sup>

Whilst migration is a key factor in development of the region, it is not always voluntary. Trafficking for labour, sexual exploitation and domestic servitude has been linked to many of the migrant worker industries that contribute to development in destination countries (for example, construction and manufacturing) or linked to economic opportunity abroad (for example, domestic servitude in the Middle East<sup>27</sup>) as a means for migrants to earn money and remit home.<sup>28</sup> The United Nations Office on



A circular pie chart with a dark blue background. A single wedge is highlighted in a lighter shade of blue, representing 56% of the total.

56%

OF THE GLOBAL  
TOTAL OF FORCED  
LABOURERS IN  
THE WORLD ARE  
FROM THE ASIA  
PACIFIC

A circular pie chart with a teal background. A single wedge is highlighted in a lighter shade of teal, representing 64% of the total.

64%

OF VICTIMS OF  
TRAFFICKING  
IN EAST ASIA,  
SOUTH ASIA AND  
THE PACIFIC  
WERE IN  
SITUATIONS OF  
FORCED LABOUR

A circular pie chart with a light green background. A single wedge is highlighted in a slightly darker shade of green, representing 55% of the total.

55%

MORE WOMEN AND  
GIRLS THAN MEN  
ARE REPORTED  
TO BE IN  
SITUATIONS OF  
FORCED LABOUR

Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that more than 85% of trafficked persons detected in East Asia and the Pacific were trafficked from within the region. China, Malaysia and Thailand are the main destinations for trafficking. In Thailand, for example, victims have been detected by authorities from neighbouring countries such as Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar. Internal trafficking within Thailand is also an issue. People from Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam are trafficked to Malaysia. Repatriation data from China shows that persons from Cambodia, Indonesia, Mongolia and Vietnam have been trafficked into the country while, victims from Indonesia, the Philippines and other countries in South East Asia have been identified in Taiwan Province of China. Data from the Pacific

is limited, however, Chinese victims of trafficking have been identified in the Pacific Islands.<sup>29</sup>

Trafficking flows from the region include from South East Asia to Europe and to Australia, the United States and the Middle East.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) reported in 2012 that the Asia-Pacific region hosts the largest number of forced labourers in the world with 56% of the global total in the region.<sup>30</sup> In 2014, UNODC reported that in East Asia, South Asia and the Pacific, 64% of victims of trafficking were in situations of forced labour compared with 40% at the global level.<sup>31</sup> At the global level, more women than men are reported to be in situations of forced labour.<sup>32</sup>

## KEY ISSUES

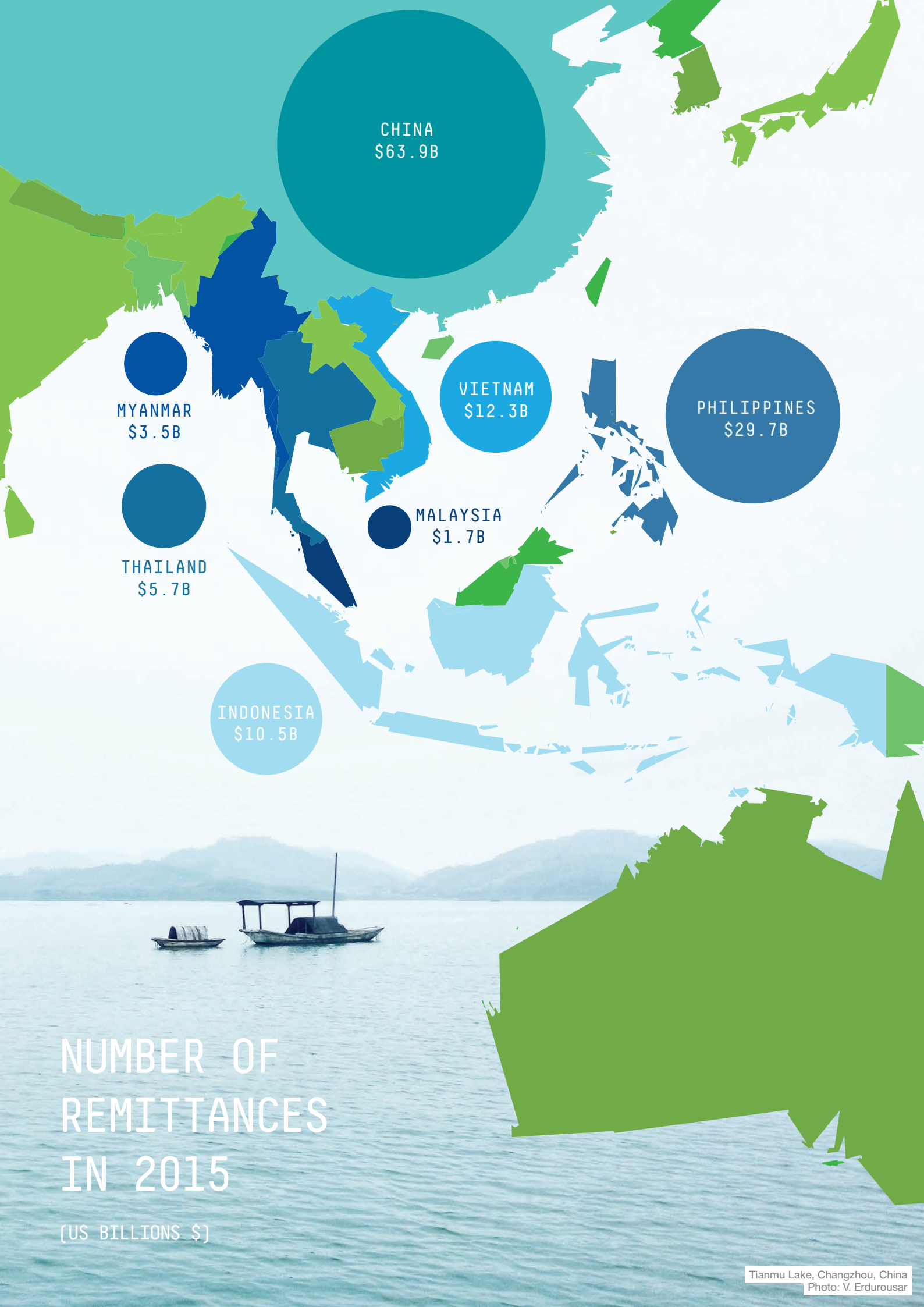
### LABOUR MOBILITY

For most of the Pacific Island countries, slower economic growth and development as well as the worsening impacts of climate change have provided a new imperative for opening labour markets to Pacific Islanders in the wider Asia-Pacific region<sup>33</sup>. The regular employment opportunities in the formal labour market in the Pacific can absorb only a small portion of the rapidly growing working-age populations. Increasing education and growth in urban populations have meant that Pacific Islanders look for jobs abroad and in the labour market gaps of Australia, New Zealand and the United States, while their home countries suffer from the shortage of skilled workers in such sectors as health care and education.<sup>34</sup>

Labour mobility therefore provides positive opportunities for Pacific Island nations that experience high unemployment due to limited job opportunities. Migrating for work into sectors of demand such as seasonal agricultural work and aged care in destination countries provides migrants with remittance, income and mobility opportunities. There is an emerging literature on how labour mobility can increase resilience to climate change as it has the capacity to provide households in vulnerable communities with diversified sources of income (including remittances) as well as decreasing the strain on resources in developing countries of origin through a more mobile population.<sup>35</sup>

Labour mobility can therefore be driven by migrants as they seek out economic opportunities abroad. At the same time, labour mobility can be driven by labour recruitment agents and agencies, both regulated and unregulated.<sup>36</sup> Drivers of labour migration have also been linked to other factors outside of economics including seeking asylum and safety by fleeing persecution, for marriage, to join diaspora communities abroad, and environmental changes from climate change. It is not known what proportion labour migration is from these other migrant groups, however the available data shows that there are 3.5 million refugees in the Asia-Pacific region, 1.9 million internally displaced persons and 1.4 million stateless people. Regional data on migration for the purpose of marriage is not available, although it is reportedly increasing. This includes forced marriages as well as consensual marriages.<sup>37</sup> Available data shows that in Vietnam for example, in a five year period from 2005-2010, 133,000 women registered to marry or married a foreigner. Many live with their husbands in Taiwan, South Korea or China. Migration for the purposes of marriage is also a driver for Rohingya irregular migrant women traveling to Malaysia. These marriages are usually arranged by family members already living in the Rohingya diaspora community in Malaysia.<sup>38</sup> In 2010 the Asia Development Bank reported that there were over 30 million people displaced within the region from environmental disasters.<sup>39</sup>





# NUMBER OF REMITTANCES IN 2015

[US BILLIONS \$]



## REMITTANCES AND POVERTY REDUCTION

Labour migration provides migrants with an opportunity to earn money and remit a portion of it home to support their families via formal channels such as banking institutions or informal channels including through family members or friends. This is a known driver for economic migration, particularly in countries where there is low demand for unskilled or low skill workers and where high unemployment levels create a push factor for lower skilled migrants to seek out opportunities outside of their home country.<sup>40</sup> Further, low paid work opportunities and underemployment in countries of origin can provide a driver for migration, where wage differentials for similar jobs abroad may earn a worker a higher rate of pay than for the same kind of job in their home country. Earning a higher wage abroad improves a migrant worker's capacity to remit home. For example, Myanmar domestic workers migrate to Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, and Filipino domestic workers migrate to Singapore, Hong Kong and the Middle East for more lucrative domestic service jobs than those available to them at home.<sup>41</sup>

Remittances can feed into poverty reduction<sup>42</sup> and also link to faster development and recovery from natural disasters. In countries of origin, remittances are relied upon as a source of income to maintain and sustain livelihoods back home which service local economies. From a study conducted by The UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in 2013 on the social benefits and costs of international migration in three countries in South East Asia,<sup>43</sup> results showed

that family wellbeing increased when a member migrated for employment, sending remittances home to use for daily necessity expenses. However, remittances can sometimes come at the cost of worker exploitation (see, Protection needs for labour migrants below).<sup>44</sup>

An identified challenge to facilitating remittances is de-risking initiatives by major international banks. De-risking is where financial institutions exit relationships with, and close the accounts of, clients perceived to be "high risk" who may be associated with money laundering and other financial crime, which has at times had impacts on entire sectors. Banks have therefore been closing down their money transfer operators. The World Bank reports that as a result of these closures, there has been widespread adverse impacts on remittance costs and access to remittance services for migrants and their families.<sup>45</sup> High transaction fees to send and receive remittances also present a frustrating challenge to many migrants.

The World Bank estimated that remittances to developing countries were \$432 billion in 2015 with Asia-Pacific countries receiving the highest amounts amongst all regions of the world.<sup>46</sup> Remittances to East Asia and the Pacific were projected at \$131 billion in 2016, up from \$127 billion in 2015. China received the largest remittances in the region with USD 63.9 billion, followed by the Philippines at USD 28.5 billion and Vietnam USD 13.2 billion.<sup>47</sup>

## BRAIN DRAIN/BRAIN GAIN FOR RECEIVING COUNTRY

The brain drain/brain gain phenomenon associated with migration and development has been well documented<sup>48</sup> and is largely associated with skilled migrants travelling from poorer to richer countries in search of greater professional opportunities and development than what may be available to them at home. It is argued that brain drain can affect development of poorer countries that then suffer disproportionately in critical sectors such as health, education and engineering<sup>49</sup> because they do not have the

capacity to support sustainable and secure employment causing their nationals to look internationally for other, more secure work opportunities. However, where skilled migrants relocate only temporarily for professional opportunities, the brain drain can be flipped to a brain gain on return where they may contribute to the development of their home countries following their professional development and experience abroad.<sup>50</sup>

## PROTECTION NEEDS FOR LABOUR MIGRANTS

With a high demand for unskilled or low skilled labour supply in a number of destination countries in the region including Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, and beyond the region in the Middle East, Russia and the United Arab Emirates, regulated migration and recruitment pathways cannot necessarily keep up with the supply and demand of labour. Migration for work via formal and informal channels within and from the region puts migrant workers at risk of exploitation in the workplace at the destination country because of a lack of migrant labour protection laws. This has been reported for the migrant domestic worker examples above.<sup>51</sup>

According to the ILO and the Asia Pacific Migration Report in 2015, only 17% of all workers in the Asia-Pacific region have unemployment protection.<sup>52</sup> Where the migration-development nexus exists<sup>53</sup> regulation of labour migration flows is needed to provide protections to temporary migrant workers as well as to control migration and access to employment opportunities. However, labour migration management policies tend to be restrictive in their human rights considerations. As Piper argues, current migration management policies are “not accompanied by the management of working conditions and labour relations” creating a “decent work deficit”.<sup>54</sup> This deficit then impacts on migrant workers’ abilities to act as agents of development because they are given limited opportunities to thrive in the destination country temporary workplace<sup>55</sup> where protections and support for migrant workers that could be offered through migration regulation instruments are often underdeveloped.

## IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Flows of irregular migration often occur in parallel with flows of labour migration. In the Asia-Pacific region there is a large supply of low skilled workers who are willing and able to migrate in search of demand driven job sectors in other countries.<sup>59</sup> The supply of labour in countries of origin in the region often exceeds the volumes officially permitted by governments in destination countries which then creates drivers for irregular migration and unregulated employment practices. The lack of regulated migration and labour opportunities in destination countries puts irregular migrants in a precarious position with regard to their migration status and vulnerability to exploitation.

Irregular migration in the region is also characterised by those fleeing conflict and

There are a number of regional trade agreements in operation in the Asia-Pacific, all of which provide an avenue for the establishment of migrant labour protection measures. Many of these have labour mobility clauses that include protection measures for migrant workers. However, different agreements have incorporated different levels of protection measures. For example, the Australian Government’s Seasonal Workers Program for temporary Pacific Islander and Timor-Leste seasonal migrant workers in the agriculture, accommodation and tourism sectors has a strong foundation of migrant worker protection measures built into the scheme<sup>56</sup>. The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) agreement has not traditionally contained any specific labour mobility clauses despite the fact that APEC helps to facilitate labour mobility through capacity building of temporary business migration opportunities in the region. However, there has been some momentum in 2017 to establish a common framework amongst APEC members to manage the issue of labour mobility in the region.<sup>57</sup> The Asia Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) from 1993 does not contain any labour mobility clauses. The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), an economic and trade agreement between 12 Pacific Rim nations, addresses labour mobility through the promotion of the ILO’s labour rights framework which includes ending of all forms of forced labour, the establishment of a minimum wage and health and safety standards, and the right to allow workers to unionise. However, all of these measures are left open for participating states to uphold and are not enforced.<sup>58</sup>

persecution and at times, natural disasters from the impacts of climate change. The humanitarian and economic costs of this migration has impacts on development potential, both for the countries experiencing conflict and the countries receiving those who have fled. Apart from the dangers that arise from conflict, conflict will push development potential aside, stall or inflate local markets and result in a decline in consumer and investor confidence. For countries hosting refugees, they will likely experience an economic burden as they work towards ensuring the human security of the refugee population which has the potential to put major pressure on budgets, public infrastructure, and labour and housing markets.<sup>60</sup> These same outcomes can result from climate change induced natural disasters as populations become displaced and seek to flee to places of safety.

## INTEGRATION

Most labour contracts in the region for migrant workers are temporary with opportunities for longer term or permanent employment hard to come by. For those in the unregulated labour sectors who are irregular migrants, employment is precarious from day to day because of their migration and employment status. Temporary work has an impact on opportunities for integration in destination countries. For those irregular migrants without official authorisation to work, restrictions on social and economic protections further limit migrants' capacities to access health, education, welfare and legal services in the host country. Whilst migrants can assume some protection of their human and employment rights from the international human rights regime, for example the International

Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families, the reality is that few countries in the region have ratified or acceded to this Convention, none of those which have are the major receiving countries of migrant workers,<sup>61</sup> and ratification without domestic protections in law is insufficient. Without such protection policies in place, it is difficult for governments to promote the social integration of migrants in host countries. Therefore, there is often an imbalance between the efforts by migrant workers who contribute to the economic development of their host country and the lack of state protection from exploitation and other substandard workplace and community practices such as racism and xenophobia.<sup>62</sup>

## RETURN OF MIGRANT WORKERS

As stated above, most labour migration within and from the Asia-Pacific region is temporary in nature which means that many migrants will return home at some point. Some may also choose to travel to a number of destinations away from home where there is demand for labour.

Skilled migrants returning home can bring new energy, ideas and entrepreneurial drive to start or expand businesses from skills learnt and acquired whilst working away from home. This can then lead to a rise in productivity and job creation within the home economy which is a part of the brain gain concept as a contribution to development.<sup>63</sup>

Migration for labour opportunities does not always work out, particularly for those workers who experience workplace exploitation. In such situations, wages may not have been paid, or workers may have been underpaid. Their abilities to remit may then be hampered, which impacts on development opportunities for their families back home. They may also have experienced traumatic situations if they were subject to physical or psychological abuse at the hands of their employers. On return, it may be difficult for them to reintegrate into life back home after such experiences. There is limited data and information on the magnitude of this problem which provides opportunities for future research.

## WOMEN

The region is experiencing an increase in the numbers of women migrating both for economic reasons and also fleeing situations of violence and persecution (see Briefing Note 1: Women and irregular migration). In 2013, the UN reported that women account for nearly 48% of all migrants (both labour and non-labour) in the ASEAN region. However, there is a lack of data on the percentage of women who migrate for the purpose of seeking labour opportunities. Although there is a lack of data here, the UN estimates that female migration for the purpose of work is estimated at a similar level.<sup>64</sup> This 'feminisation' of migration has arisen in the face of rising male unemployment and underemployment which has led to women seeking opportunities for work in

different kinds of occupations including domestic, hospitality and entertainment industries in foreign countries.<sup>65</sup> There is room for more research on the gendered aspects of labour migration and on the contributions gender based employment opportunities make to development.

Reflecting an increase in the number of women fleeing situations of conflict, statistics recorded by UNHCR from the Andaman Sea crisis from 2014-2015 show a 50% increase within this one year period in the numbers of women and girls making the irregular migration journey from the Bay of Bengal, through the Andaman Sea to safety in Malaysia and Thailand.<sup>66</sup>



## YOUTH

In 2013, the UN World Youth Report on migration reported that there were 35 million international migrants under the age of 20, up from 31 million in 2000. Within the next age bracket, from 20-29 years of age, the UN reported 40 million migrants. Together, these two groups account for more than 30% of all migrants globally.<sup>67</sup> The report suggests that youth migrants are more inclined to take up temporary and internal (usually rural to urban) migration opportunities including for work, study and skill development, using migration as a means to improve their own and their family's

livelihood. Young migrants therefore have the capacity to contribute to the development of their home country through remittances or through the development of their skills and education in the destination country, while at the same time contributing to the development of their host country whilst they are abroad. The issues presented in this briefing note are relevant for youth migration and development including labour protection needs, brain drain/gain, rural to urban migration trends and remittances for example.<sup>68</sup>

## THE ROLE OF AID REGARDING MIGRATION

There is a growing body of evidence that shows that development aid from donor countries can encourage emigration. Whilst aid packages are typically given to support development, including to ease migration pressures, research shows that as developing countries grow economically, emigration pressure rises. Development efforts to address the drivers of migration including civil unrest or armed conflict, poverty and gender

based violence for example, are often slow and therefore will not have an immediate impact on preventing or slowing migration. Migration pressure will only fall once the country receiving aid grows past an upper-middle-income status. Given this phenomenon, as the research argues, development policies should include policies concerning the management of mobility.<sup>69</sup>

## REGIONAL COOPERATION ON DETERRENCE MEASURES

Turning to the example of asylum seeking and deterrent based border control policies in the Australian and regional context, Australian development assistance to Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia all contribute to its border control measures to prevent irregular migrants from entering Australia. Research shows that despite this aid assistance, irregular migration does not stop. People continue to move irregularly to and through the region to flee conflict and violence and to seek better economic and educational opportunities. For example, in the face of strengthened Australian border controls against irregular maritime arrivals,<sup>70</sup> migration pathways change. Irregular migrants who planned to travel from the Middle East, through South East Asia and onwards to Australia are experiencing

longer transit periods in Indonesia because their route to Australia has been closed. As a result, whilst in transit, they now await lengthy UNHCR processing timeframes on their asylum applications or work to revise their irregular migration journey plans to other destinations of safety and opportunity.<sup>71</sup>

In South East Asia, regional and national border control policies do not stop irregular migration flows; in fact, as the Andaman Sea crisis showed, maritime and overland irregular migration in the region increased dramatically in this period.<sup>72</sup> With renewed conflict in Myanmar, there is a risk of future increases in irregular maritime and overland journeys through the region for those fleeing to places of safety.



## RURAL TO URBAN MIGRATION

Although there has been an increasing rural to urban migration trend both internally and across countries in the region, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) has reported that when considering urbanisation, rural to urban migration is diminishing in importance next to other emerging factors driving urbanisation. These factors include natural growth and increasing reclassification of rural into urban areas (in-situ urbanisation). For example, many Pacific Island cities and towns have developed around or alongside traditional villages.<sup>73</sup>

Whilst urbanisation has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty across the region, it has also resulted in particular vulnerabilities for migrants in urban centres. The Asia-Pacific has the world's largest urban slum populations and the largest concentrations of people living below the poverty line in urban centres. Further, cities of the Asia-Pacific are among the world's most polluted and unhealthy and many are prone to natural disasters and the projected impacts of climate change with almost three quarters of worldwide natural disaster fatalities from 1970-2011 occurring in the region.<sup>74</sup>

## IMPACTS OF CONFLICT ON DEVELOPMENT

Conflict is a driver for migration, including forced migration and displacement of populations. The continual flares of state and ethnic based violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar is one example of conflict in the region that has resulted in large scale forced migration and displacement of Rohingya migrants who are stateless. Conflict has the capacity to reverse developmental progress and to impact on national security. In 2016, it was reported that over the last 20 years, half of the countries in South East Asia have experienced armed conflict between the state and insurgents over parts of their territory which has affected an

estimated 131 million people.<sup>75</sup> Countries that are affected by violent conflict tend to develop at a slower pace in part because of the financial drain conflict has on national economies and because it is often unsafe and politically difficult for development projects to be implemented in areas of conflict.<sup>76</sup>

Development assistance has a role to play in easing situations of conflict and building resilience in communities to ease possible tensions associated with livelihoods and conflict such as access to resources, economic opportunities and education.





## 4

## RECENT TRENDS

Migration to and from the Asia-Pacific region is increasing over time with high volumes of labour migrants seeking economic opportunities to then remit back home and also to seek further development of professional skill and expertise aboard.

Despite the scale and complexity of migration in the Asia-Pacific region, few countries in the region have adopted comprehensive migration policies and governance that explicitly links migration with broader national development strategies and policies for labour mobility, protections and regulation. Such policies need to work to secure the rights of migrant workers at national and regional level and incorporate the protection of migrant workers, migration governance and more efficient and sustainable avenues for sending remittances home.<sup>77</sup> National labour mobility policies developed by the governments of Kiribati and Tuvalu provide two examples of such policies that recognise the importance of labour migration in addressing the lack of employment opportunities, promoting economic and social development, alleviating poverty, and adapting to climate change<sup>78</sup>.

Protections afforded to migrant workers will depend on the ratification and commitment individual countries have made to international and regional human rights instruments and treaties, including those that specifically relate to migrant workers. In this regard, the Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant workers was agreed to by ASEAN member states in January 2007, however negotiations surrounding the drafting of an ASEAN instrument to protect migrant workers on the basis of this agreement continue to stall.<sup>79</sup> The agreement of ASEAN member states on this Declaration signals a desire and commitment to develop regional safeguards to protect migrant workers. However, governments of the region continue to view and respond to irregular labour migration as an immigration issue and not as a human rights issue.<sup>80</sup> The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990) has only been ratified by one country in the region- Indonesia (2012). The Philippines (1995), and Cambodia are signatories (2004). No other countries in the region have made a commitment to this international treaty that can work to provide protections to migrant workers.<sup>81</sup>



Development focused on reducing conflict and assisting post conflict efforts can redress conflict induced migration. This is most likely to have greatest effect for those groups traditionally disenfranchised in peace and security efforts such as women, children and minority groups.

Outside of a few country specific studies,<sup>82</sup> little is known about return migration to countries of origin in situations where migrants may have returned early because economic opportunities that drove their migration did not work out as expected as a result of issues associated with labour exploitation and regulation.<sup>83</sup>

Sub-regional intergovernmental organisations have the potential to assist countries to develop efficient migration systems that benefit migrant workers by harmonising immigration, visa and work permit regulations and procedures in the interest of promoting more efficient migration management that includes the protection of migrant workers.

There is currently no process of cooperation on international migration that incorporates all countries in the region. While sub-regional initiatives and mechanisms exist including ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and regional consultative processes on migration,<sup>84</sup> they are focused on specific aspects of migration and their outcomes are non-binding. They do however assist in the improvement of understanding key migration trends and issues in the region, identify common policy concerns surrounding regional migration and provide platforms to promote action that will encourage and facilitate safer migration pathways in the region.

Development focused on poverty reduction, especially for young people, needs to remain a core consideration for both country specific and regional migration governance programs. The identification of new and emerging economic opportunities in countries of origin will be central to managing generational change and retaining viable populations.

Future approaches to development need to better understand both the positive and negative impacts of temporary labour migration, its organisation and regulation. Improving the regulation for temporary migration with attention to work conditions and labour relations is likely to have significant impact on the capacity for

migrants to generate income while retaining relationships in their country of origin. Given the increase in labour migration within and from the region creating more opportunities for migrants to remit portions of their income back home, there is scope for research on understanding the impact of regional remittances on development in countries of origin and how this income is spent. There is a strong body of research and literature on why migrants remit, but research is more limited on the contribution of remittances to development.

More can be done to strengthen migrants' roles as agents for development. This can be achieved by strengthening the regulation of migrant labour industries, providing decent work opportunities to migrant workers and offering them social protections in destination countries.<sup>85</sup> There is a growing body of literature on this area<sup>86</sup> as well as calls from IOM to drive the role of migrants as agents of development forward because they are largely 'young, dynamic... They bring new impulses, new ideas. They are motivated to succeed'.<sup>87</sup>

There is a need for more research on the links between climate change and the impacts it has on migration and development, particularly for those in countries of origin impacted by climate change, and therefore the impact of climate change on migration and economic livelihoods both in the country of origin and abroad. There is an opportunity to increase understanding and awareness of the role remittances play in the region – especially across the Pacific – and how they will need to remain central to future-proofing Pacific economies experiencing climate change. In the region, the emerging body of research has a focus on the impacts of climate change on developing countries of the Pacific that are countries of origin for climate change migration as well as on the positive impacts of labour mobility as means of increasing resilience to climate change.

Current and relatively recent research and development work on climate change and migration in the region is more focused on the Pacific and less so on Asia. It includes, but is not limited to, the connection between climate change and displacement whilst also considering how environmental events affect migration and the need to consider development needs in response to climate-induced migration.<sup>88</sup> Other research looks at the migration implications for

Australia as a result of environmental change in the Pacific<sup>89</sup>. UNESCAP has research focused on enhancing the capacities of Pacific countries to address the impacts of climate change.<sup>90</sup> Importantly, UNESCAP has attempted to expose the gaps in the knowledge on climate change and migration in the region which include: the integration of climate change and migration policy; costs of climate change related migration on sending and receiving communities; gendered implications of voluntary and forced climate change-related migration; and the role of remittances in adaptive capacity.<sup>91</sup> UN Women has also conducted research on gender based responses to climate change and migration in the Pacific.<sup>92</sup> Labour mobility and its contribution

to climate change resilience in the Pacific is also an emerging area of literature.<sup>93</sup> There is an opportunity for this work on the Pacific to be better integrated with South East Asia with a specific focus on governance and attention to key groups.

Across the many and varied regional and sub regional fora concerned with migration there is no clear voice focused on the impacts of migration on development. There is an opportunity for stronger development focused interventions into policy discussions and governance arrangements.

## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Address the root causes of conflict and provide assistance post conflict to redress conflict induced migration
- Focus development efforts on poverty reduction targeting young people
- Advance understandings of the role remittances play in regional development with a particular focus on Pacific economies experiencing the impacts of climate change
- Advance research on the developing understandings of both positive and negative impacts of temporary migration

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