

## World Migration Report 2020: Implications for India

In article 09:20 AM, Dec 03, 2019 Mukul Asher



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International Organization for Migration (IOM), a United Nations organization based in Geneva, has just published its World Migration Report 2020. ([https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr\\_2020.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2020.pdf)). This Report is being published since the year 2000 and is the 10<sup>th</sup> such Report.

At the international level, there is no universally accepted definition for "migrant". The IOM definition reflects the common sense 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. (<https://www.iom.int/who-is-a-migrant>)

This imprecision in definition, along with phenomenon of unrecorded illegal migrants does complicate data collection, and analysis.

The 447-page Report (with rather excessive 110 pages of References), is divided into two parts. The first part concerns data and information on migration and migrants. It comprises 45 percent of the report, excluding appendices and References.

The second part, comprising rest of the report, discusses complex and emerging migration issues such as, migration and health, migrant's contributions, and migration, inclusion and social protection.

The Report does note that issues surrounding migration, particularly international migration, have become more prominent in economic, political, and social debates in recent years, and deserve thoughtful and nuanced rigorous research and policy debates.

This column examines policy and other implications of the Report for India, largely drawing from the material in the first part of the Report.

### Level, Trends, and Composition of Global Migration

On a global basis, the number of international migrants were estimated by the Report to be 272 million (3.5 percent of global population) globally, with two-thirds being labour migrants. In 2000, the total number of international migrants was 150 million, with 2.8 percent of the global population. Thus, migration has continued to grow significantly in recent years.

The 2018 figures imply that globally 96.5 percent of the population reside in the country they were born. So domestic policies and internal conditions should be given the commensurate emphasis.

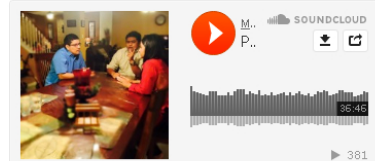
52 per cent of international migrants were male; 48 per cent were female. 74 per cent of all international migrants were of working age (20–64 years).

The Report finds that India continues to have the largest number of migrants living abroad (17.5 million), followed by Mexico and China (11.8 million and 10.7 million respectively). Globally, the top destination country remained the United States (50.7 million international migrants).

The Report notes that "the largest (migration) corridors tend to be from developing countries to larger economies such as those of the United States, France, the Russian Federation, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia". India has good presence of migrants in all these three corridors.

The Report foresees the above corridors to continue to be crucial for migrants, at least in the medium term. However, between 2013 and 2017, high-income countries experienced a slight drop in migrant workers (from 112.3 million to 111.2 million); and Upper middle-income countries observed the biggest increase (from 17.5 million to 30.5 million). The growth is therefore in upper-middle income countries, a group of countries where the sending countries will need to focus their policies and specific initiatives.

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
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
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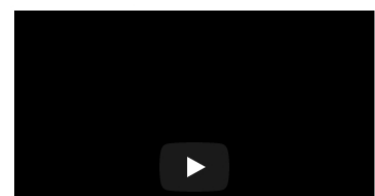
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sending countries will need to relax their policies and open industries.

India is ranked by the Report as the 13<sup>th</sup> largest recipient of migrants in the world. India thus plays a significant role both as a sender and as recipient of migrants.

Another finding of the Report that the number of stateless persons globally in 2018 was 3.9 million, with Bangladesh having the largest number of stateless persons (around 906,000), and Myanmar, 620,000, both India's immediate neighbours, has economic, political, and social implications for India. There are also citizens of other neighbouring states who are widely believed to be staying in India illegally.

Consistent with global practices, India is trying to establish NRC (National Register of Citizens) to bring clarity to the definition and count of citizens of India.

#### Inward Gross Remittances

The Report defines remittances as financial or in-kind transfers made by migrants directly to families or communities in their countries of origin.

The Report estimates that gross global remittances were USD 689 Billion in 2018, of which India received USD 79 Billion (11.5 percent of the total). This is much lower than India's share of 17.7 percent in global population as of November 2019 (<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/india-population/>)... Accessed on December 1, 2019

India had ranked third (with USD 22 Billion) in remittances in 2005. But since 2010, it has retained the first rank.

Reaching share of global remittances equivalent to share in global population could be a benchmark against which India's performance could be measured.

In 2018, the United States remained the top remittance-sending country (USD 68.0 billion), followed by the United Arab Emirates (USD 44.4 billion), and Saudi Arabia (USD 36.1 billion). India has strong presence in these three countries.

India however appears to have weak presence in South Korea (USD 13 Billion in Remittances), and in Russian Federation (USD 21 Billion).

In addition to increasing its migrant stock, India needs to find ways to improve skill levels, and incomes of its migrants in these countries, as well as to roll over migrants from different states to particularly to the countries in the Gulf region. This will enable greater diversity in sharing of receipts of migrants from different parts of the country.

The aim of India's and the State-level specific initiatives should be to increase representation of migrants from Bihar, UP, and the Eastern part, particularly the Northeast, in the Gulf and other regions.

In designing and implementing these initiatives, transaction costs of recruitment of migrants, and the integrity of the processes need to be given deserved priority. It would be desirable if a revolving pool of migrants, where old migrants bring new skills, resources, and work attitudes back to their regions, even as new migrants make progress in these areas, is evolved.

The IOM's data are consistent with the World Bank's data on remittances. The World Bank has estimated that in 2019, in current USD, the top five remittance recipient countries are projected to be India (82.2 billion), China (70.3 billion), Mexico (38.7 billion), the Philippines (35.1 billion), and the Arab Republic of Egypt (26.4 billion) (<https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/remittances>) . Accessed on December 1, 2019

Against the target of 3 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goal 10c.1, as cost of sending remittances, the World Bank estimates global cost of sending USD 200/ in remittances at 6.9 percent in the first quarter of 2019, while the corresponding cost for sending to the South Asia Region was the lowest at 5 percent. <https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/Migrationanddevelopmentbrief31.pdf>. Accessed on December 1 2019.

This is another area where India, as the largest recipient, has particular interest in tapping financial technologies to find ways to lower remittance costs for itself. Further, Researchers, in particular, need to focus on this aspect.

The gross remittance data of the IOM have three limitations from India's perspective, limitations which it needs to address by its own efforts.

First, gross inward remittances should be netted out from gross outward remittances from India.

Second, gross inward remittances are likely to be higher if un-recorded remittances are included. These are difficult to estimate, but research efforts should nevertheless be made to estimate them, just as unrecorded income and assets are researched.

Third, the gross remittances would be lower if Indian migrants sell their existing financial and physical assets (such as real estate) in India, and remit the money abroad. These transactions appear not to be tracked. I

India's foreign exchange reserves however were at a comfortable level of USD 449 Billion as on November 22, 2019, exhibiting an upward trend. <https://m.fbi.org.in/Scripts/WSSViewDetail.aspx?TYPE=Section&PARAM1=2> Accessed on December 1, 2019. So, this is not an immediate policy issue in terms of flows. Nevertheless, it is important to have Indian diaspora engaged with India in terms investing in not just financial, but also physical assets, and in business start-ups.



As we approach Elections 2019- Vivek Singh discusses the NOTA option. Is it a Game Changer? Will it impact 2019 and how useful has it been?

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## Concluding Remarks

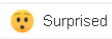
The most important policy implication from this Report is that India must give high priority in its economic diplomacy to diversifying the location, occupations, and avenues, particularly for students, skilled workers, and business people. Indeed, Management of Indian migrant stock and flow in their respective regions and countries should be among the criteria for assessing India's diplomatic missions. The State-level initiatives are also needed, in conjunction with those of the Union Government in the spirit of Co-operative Federalism.

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