

Rural Migration News

Blog 233

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ILO: 169 Million Migrant Workers in 2019

The UN estimated 272 million international migrants in 2019, including 245 million who were 15 and older. The ILO estimated that 169 million of the 15+ migrants, 69 percent, were in the labor force of the countries to which they moved, up from 150 million migrant workers in 2013, suggesting an average increase of three million migrant workers a year.

Almost five percent of the world's 3.5 billion workers are international migrants. Men were 58 percent of migrant workers and 61 percent of non-migrant workers in 2019.

Most migrants cross international borders to work, and they have a higher labor force participation rate than native workers in destination countries. The share of men 15 and older who were in the labor force was 77 percent for migrant men and 74 percent for native men, and the share of migrant women in the labor force, 60 percent, was higher than for native women, 47 percent.

The migrant share of the workers varies by sector. About six percent of migrants were in agriculture in 2019, 14 percent were in construction and industry, and 80 percent were in services. The share of migrant men in agriculture and in

goods-producing sectors, 44 percent, is more than double the share of migrant women in these sectors, only 20 percent.

Some 114 million migrant workers, 67 percent, were in the high-income countries that had 625 million or 18 percent of the world's 3.5 billion workers. Migrants were 18 percent of all workers in high-income countries, but less than five percent of the labor force in low-income countries. Two thirds of migrant workers were in high-income countries in 2017.

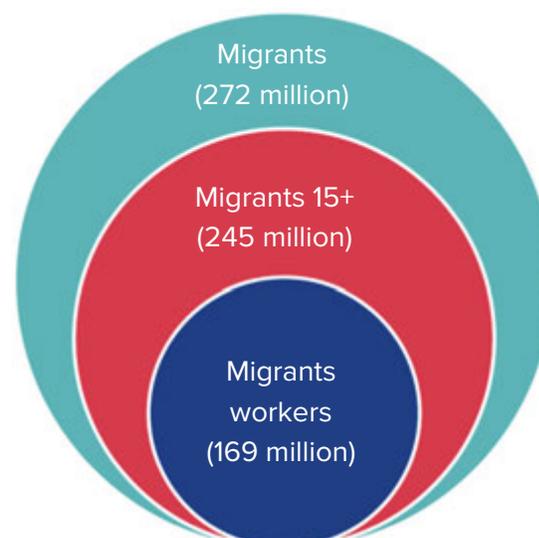
Europe and Central Asia had the most migrant workers in 2019, 64 million, followed by the Americas with 43 million and the Arab states and Asia with 24 million each.

A further regional breakdown finds that Western Europe and North America had almost half of the world's migrant workers, followed by a seventh in the Arab states. The migrant share of all workers is highest in the Arab states at 41 percent, followed by North America, where migrants are 20 percent of all workers, and Western Europe, where migrants are 18 percent of all workers.

Covid

The ILO migrant worker data are for 2019. Covid in 2020 affected stocks and flows of migrant workers. Some migrant workers returned to their countries of origin when they lost jobs in destination countries, as with Eastern Europeans who left the UK, while seasonal worker programs in other countries expanded to bring more migrant workers, as with the US H-2A guest worker program that admits foreign farm workers.

70 Percent of International Migrants Who are 15+ Were in the Labor Force of Host Countries in 2019



Covid is likely to alter the trajectory of international labor migration in at least three major ways. First, covid accelerated trends already underway such as remote work. Many professionals found that they could do their jobs from home offices, which could reduce the demand for migrant workers in the service industries that support office workers in central business districts. The outsourcing of work to lower wage countries could accelerate, as with call centers that provide customer assistance.

Second, automation may substitute machines for workers in warehouses, hotels, and restaurants, eliminating many of the in-person jobs often filled by migrants. Many ex-hospitality employees were re-evaluating their willingness to work evenings and weekends in summer 2021, leaving jobs unfilled as hospitality reopened. Some employers responded by replacing workers with machines or self- or less-service, such as cleaning hotel rooms only between guests.

Third, governments demonstrated an ability to control mobility by closing consulates and borders. Experience suggests that, when governments assert more authority during crises, they retain and use their additional powers after the crisis ends. Instead of reopening broadly to migrant workers, governments may resume guest worker migration only for particular sectors such as health care and agriculture.

The demographic and economic inequalities that motivate international labor migration are widening as high-income countries recover faster than lower-income countries. The communications revolution that allows workers in lower-wage countries to learn about opportunities abroad is more robust than ever, but some of the transportation links that facilitated travel from poorer

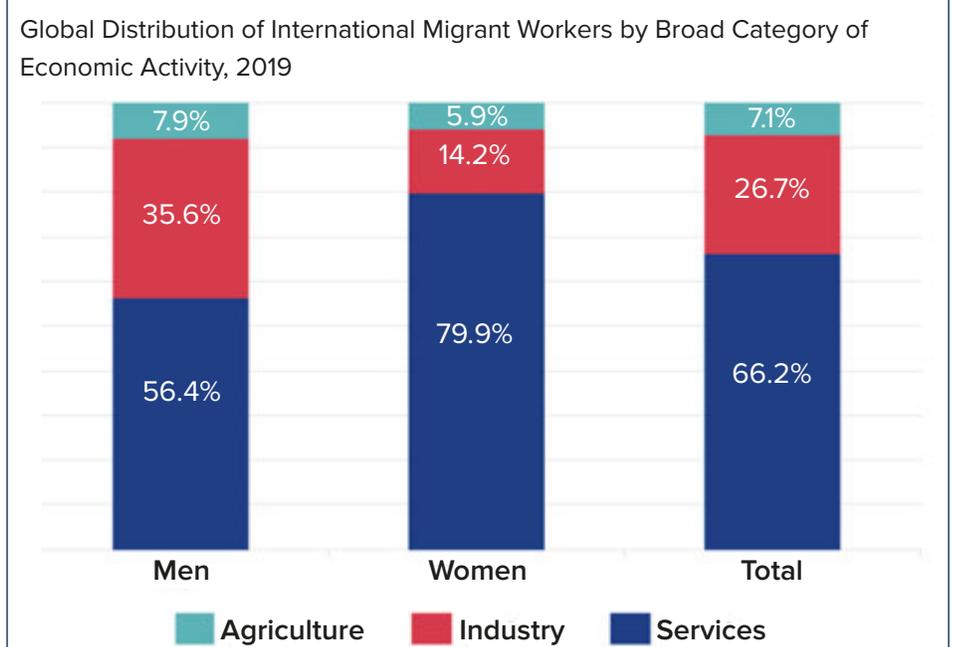
Migrant Workers Were Almost 5% of the World's 3.5 Billion Workers in 2019

	Men	Women	Total
Total population aged 15+	2,868	2,867	5,735
Migrant population aged 15+	128	117	245
Non-migrant population aged 15+	2,740	2,750	5,490
Total workers	2,128	1,354	3,482
Migrant workers	99	70	169
Non-migrant workers	2,029	1,284	3,313

Migrant Men and Women have Higher LFPRs than Native Workers

	Men	Women	Total
Migrants as a proportion of population aged 15+	4.5	4.1	4.3
Migrant workers as a proportion of all workers	4.6	5.2	4.9
Labour force participation rate of total population	74.2	47.2	60.7
Labour force participation rate of migrant population	77.5	59.8	69.0
Labour force participation rate of non-migrant population	74.1	46.7	60.4

56% of Male Migrants, and 80% of Female Migrants, were in Services in 2019



to richer places were stretched or broken at least temporarily. The most significant change affecting international migration may involve rights. Governments locked down residents and restricted international travel, restricting individual rights to prevent the spread

of covid. With covid likely to persist and new pandemics on the horizon, governments may try to block the entry of migrants despite pleas from local employers or appeals from human rights organizations.

Two-thirds of International Migrant Workers Were in High-Income Countries in 2019

	Low-income	Lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income	High-income	Total
Total workers (millions)	261.1	1,111.6	1,484.3	625.2	3,482.2
Distribution of workers (%)	7.5	31.9	42.6	18.0	100
Migrant population aged 15+ (millions)	8.9	25.6	48.6	161.7	244.8
Distribution of migrant population aged 15+ (%)	3.6	10.5	19.9	66.1	100
Migrants as a proportion of populations aged 15+ (%)	2.3	1.3	2.1	15.7	4.3
Migrant workers (millions)	6.1	16.0	33.0	113.9	169.0
Distribution of migrant workers (%)	3.6	9.5	19.5	67.4	100
Migrant workers as a proportion of all workers (%)	2.3	1.4	2.2	18.2	4.9

Europe had 38% of Migrant Workers in 2019, Followed by 26% in the Americas

	Men	Women	Total
Africa	8.8	4.9	13.7
Americas	23.5	19.9	43.3
Arab States	19.9	4.2	24.1
Asia and the Pacific	14.9	9.1	24.0
Europe and Central Asia	31.8	32.0	63.8
Total	98.9	70.1	169.0

Migrants Were 5% of All Workers in 2019, But Their Share Ranged From 2% to 41% Across Regions

International Migrant Workers by Subregion, 2019

	Northern Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	Latin America and the Caribbean	Northern America	Arab States	Eastern Asia	South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	Southern Asia	Northern, Southern and Western Europe	Eastern Europe	Central and Western Asia	Total
Total workers (millions)	74.3	415.4	313.4	186.8	58.3	932.2	353.8	703.1	222.9	143.6	78.6	3,482.4
Distribution of workers (%)	2.1	11.9	9.0	5.4	1.7	26.8	10.2	20.2	6.4	4.1	2.3	100
Migrant population aged 15+ (millions)	2.3	18.6	9.3	55.8	30.7	7.6	17.5	12.7	58.4	19.2	12.6	244.8
Distribution of migrant population aged 15+ (%)	0.9	7.6	3.8	22.8	12.6	3.1	7.2	5.2	23.9	7.8	5.2	100
Migrants as a proportion of populations aged 15+ (%)	1.4	3.0	1.9	18.6	27.0	0.5	3.3	0.9	15.3	7.9	9.4	4.3
Migrant workers (millions)	1.2	12.6	5.9	37.4	24.1	4.8	12.1	7.1	40.9	13.4	9.4	169.0
Distribution of migrant workers (%)	0.7	7.4	3.5	22.1	14.3	2.8	7.2	4.2	24.2	8.0	5.6	100
Migrant workers as a proportion of all workers (%)	1.6	3.0	1.9	20.0	41.4	0.5	3.4	1.0	18.4	9.4	12.0	4.9

References

ILO. 2021. Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers.
https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_808935/lang--en/index.htm

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