Priorities in research on international migration and mobilities: Implications of the COVID pandemic and its legacies

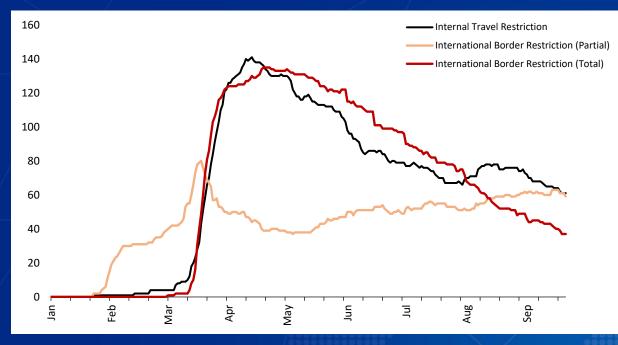
> Dr. Marie McAuliffe Head, Migration Research Division Editor, World Migration Report International Organization for Migration 5 November 2020



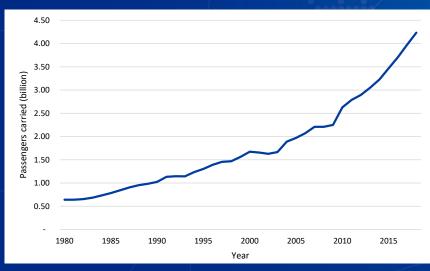
Disclaimer: Views expressed are the presenter's and do not necessarily reflect those of IOM or its member states

# Commentary outline

- 1. COVID19, (im)mobility and migration globally: brief recap
- 2. Emerging research priorities
- 3. Challenges and opportunities ahead



#### Total air passengers carried, 1980 to 2018



### Immediate impacts

By 3 November, there were over 47.5 million confirmed COVID-19 cases in the world. Deaths surpass 1.2 million.

#### Immobility restrictions

97,000+ specific restrictions globally

#### Migrants on the frontline

- health care workers
- aged/child care workers
- domestic workers
- transportation workers
- Seasonal agriculture workers

Migrants make up almost 20% of all domestic workers globally. Three-quarters of migrant domestic workers were female, with most in high income countries. Female migrant workers Low income also feature in care sectors, making them more likely to be exposed to COVID-19.

In many countries, migrant workers perform the socalled '3D' jobs essential to society; the dirty, dangerous and demeaning jobs. Often more at risk of infection.



Gender-related impacts of covid are linked to existing gendered migrant worker populations

High income

Male Female

Source: IOM World Migration Report 2018, using ILO data

Lower-middle income Upper-middle income

# Immobility: the ultimate international migration disrupter

As a result of COVID19 movement and border restrictions, migration systems are being disrupted right along the migration cycle, with significant implications for human rights.

#### Return to origin

- Mass panic return
- Some citizens (migrants/travellers) unable to return to home country due to border closures
- Returnees face unemployment, poverty
- Reduced household income (remittance drops)

#### Stay in transit/destination

- Stranded migrants and travellers across a wide spectrum
- Many migrants 'frontline' workers at heightened risk of infection
- Some migrants have lost jobs and have no access to social protection
- Intensified xenophobic racism
- Displaced persons in camps, detainees, and (irregular) migrants workers in poor housing at heightened risk of infection

#### Departure from origin

- Migrants and other travellers unable to depart origin countries as borders closed
- Asylum seekers unable to cross borders: major protection consequences

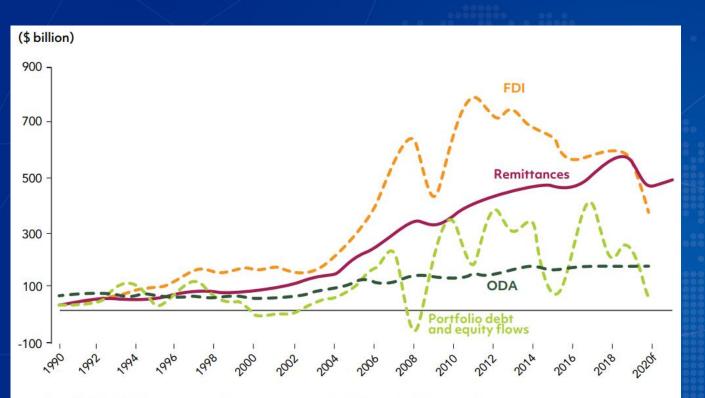


#### Entry to transit/destination

- Migrants unable to enter due to closures/restrictions
- Irregular migration pressures and movements (+ new corridors)
- Reduced/limited economic opportunities



### International Remittances: What is happening?



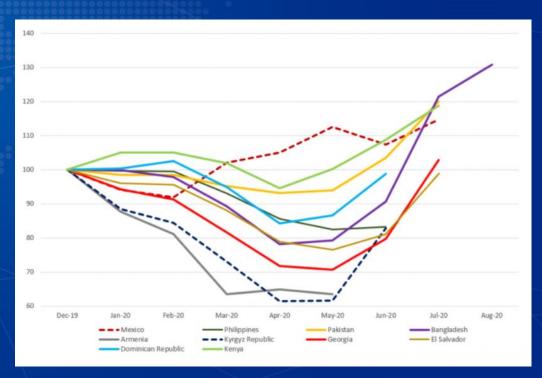
Sources: World Bank staff estimates, World Development Indicators, and IMF Balance of Payments statistics. Note: See appendix A in World Bank (2017) for data and forecast methods. FDI = foreign direct investment; ODA = official development assistance.

International remittances were projected to fall by 20% in 2020. But will this happen?

In April, the World Bank predicted int'l remittances to decline by 20% in 2020 due to COVID-19, with serious consequences for receiving countries.

• Revised down to 14% decline

- Migrants are responding to COVID19 by sending more money home
- Increases in inflows are being reported in Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Nepal, Philippines, Kenya, Zimbabwe; this likely to be occurring elsewhere too
- Increased inflows to origin occurred in previous pandemics (Source: Kalantaryan and McMahon, 2020)
- Shifts from *informal* remittances to *formal* channels likely to mask overall declines
- COVID19 recovery will depend on increasing remittances flows: whether internal/international, by supporting economic recovery and expanding access to remittance tools



## Top 3 COVID-19 migration research priorities for 2-5 years

### **1.** Mobility restriction impacts

- Beyond acute health crisis
- Stranded migrants
- New mobility regimes? Intensifying inequality?

### 2. Protections / vulnerabilities

- Trafficking/smuggling
- Displaced persons (IDPs, refugees)
- 'Essential' migrant workers
- Social protection
- Alternatives to immigration detention
- Demographics (e.g. sex/gender, ethnicity)
- Xenophobic racism and stigmatization

### 3. International remittances

- Improving analysis of remittances data
- Behavioural aspects in crises
- Tech dimensions

Cross-cutting issues of human rights of migrants and migrants' contributions to socio-economic recovery and

global inequalities



## Challenges? Opportunities? for migration & mobility research

### **Opportunities**

- Re-conceptualization of migration and mobility
- Methodological innovations
- Inclusive collaboration: bridging geographic & disciplinary divides through tech
- Improved virtual learning
- More data than ever before!

**Recommended**: Ron Skeldon's 2018 paper "International migration, internal migration, mobility and urbanization: Towards more integrated approaches"

### Challenges

- Conceptual issues: who and what is in scope? Any why?
- Migration 'basics' more distance
- Dataset/methodological limitations: do no harm?
- 'Datafication' reduces overall quality of research and knowledge?
- Social sciences (again)
- Warp speed...

## UN Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery

"COVID-19 has served as a grand revealer for the depth of consequences caused by the structural problems we have long known we need to address. Indeed, many of the priorities emerging from this UN Research Roadmap process are not actually new; however, COVID-19 makes some priorities **newly essential**..."

Research Roadmap Lead: Steven J. Hoffman JD PhD LLD Scientific Director, CIHR Institute of Population & Public Health

Five steering groups chaired by:

Pillar 1 - Health Systems - Jeremy Farrar, UK, and Glenda Grey, South Africa
Pillar 2 - Social Protection - Angela Liberatore, EU, and Bhushan Patwardhan, India
Pillar 3 - Economic Recovery - Ted Hewitt, Canada, and Nísia Trindade Lima, Brazil
Pillar 4 - Multilateral Collaboration - Thilinakumari Kandanamulla, Sri Lanka, & John-Arne Røttingen, Norway
Pillar 5 - Social Cohesion - Kellina Craig-Henderson, USA, and Aisen Etcheverry, Chile

