

Forum: HRC2

Issue: Measures to manage migratory flows in the Asia-Pacific region

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Introduction

Asia and the Pacific are the world's most populous regions and a major origin, transit, and destination for human mobility. Migration brings development dividends through skills circulation, remittances, and trade links, yet the region also faces irregular movements, disasters, and climate impacts, recruitment abuses, and protection gaps along mixed routes that include refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless persons. The Human Rights Council has repeatedly affirmed that migration governance must protect the human rights of all migrants while enabling states to manage borders and labour markets. This report maps recent trends and frameworks and proposes practical measures that HRC2 delegates can advance to manage migratory flows safely, orderly, and regularly, in line with international standards and regional realities.¹

Definition of Key Terms

Migratory Flows

Patterns of movement of people across borders over time, including regular and irregular migration, labour mobility, family migration, student flows, and movements mixed with protection needs.²

Regular Migration

Cross-border movement through authorized pathways that comply with both origin and destination laws (e.g., work visas, student visas, family reunification, humanitarian admission).

Irregular Migration

Movement that occurs outside the regulatory norms of sending, transit, or receiving countries (e.g., unauthorized entry, overstay, or unauthorized work).

Mixed movements

Complex flows that include refugees and asylum-seekers, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied

children, and other migrants traveling the same routes with diverse needs.²

Migrant worker

A person who is to be engaged, is engaged, or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a state of which they are not a national.

Trafficking in persons vs. smuggling of migrants

Trafficking is exploitation through coercion, deception, or abuse of vulnerability. Smuggling is the paid facilitation of irregular entry without necessarily involving exploitation, though risks overlap.

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)

A non-binding cooperative framework adopted in 2018 that sets 23 objectives to govern migration holistically, centred on human rights and international cooperation.

Background Information

Regional overview and recent trends

Asia remains the origin of more than two-fifths of the world's international migrants while also hosting tens of millions of migrants, refugees, and stateless persons. In 2024, UNHCR reported record global displacement, with Asia-Pacific hosting over 17 million people protected or assisted by UNHCR, including refugees and asylum-seekers. In parallel, the Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2024 highlights the strong role of intra-regional labour mobility and remittances, alongside governance challenges in recruitment, data comparability, and access to services for migrants.³

Drivers shaping flows

Key drivers include wage and demographic differentials (ageing in some destinations; youthful populations in origins), demand for essential workers, disasters and climate change, conflict and persecution, education and skills acquisition, and network effects. Pacific Island countries face climate-related mobility pressures, leading to new regional frameworks to ensure rights-based movement options (staying, relocating, or migrating).

Governance architecture

States manage migration primarily through domestic laws and bilateral agreements, complemented by regional cooperation. ASEAN instruments (including the 2017 ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers) guide labour migration governance. The Bali Process fosters cooperation against people smuggling and trafficking across the wider region. The UN system supports implementation of the GCM through the Regional UN Network on Migration; IOM and ILO provide data, policy support, and fair recruitment standards, while UNHCR leads on refugee protection and solutions.⁴

Recent developments (2023–2025)¹³

The landscape of human mobility across the Asia-Pacific region is being actively shaped by new policy frameworks and the continued evolution of labour migration programs. A significant development is the endorsement of the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility (2023–2024) by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders, which establishes a rights-based approach to movement in the context of climate change. Alongside this, established labour mobility programmes are adapting to current needs; Australia's PALM scheme has expanded its guidance for both short- and long-term options, while pathways through New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) and Pacific Access Category (PAC) continue to operate. Furthermore, systems like Japan's Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) and the Republic of Korea's Employment Permit System (EPS) facilitate regulated labour migration to fill shortage sectors. Reflecting these trends, the second Asia-Pacific regional review of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) implementation in 2025 has spotlighted key regional priorities, emphasizing the need for better data, skills partnerships, the creation of regular pathways, and enhanced protection in mixed movements.¹²

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) & IOM

Co-produce regional migration analyses (e.g., Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2024) and convene GCM regional reviews, promoting coherent, development-focused governance.⁹

International Labour Organization (ILO)⁸

Sets labour standards and guidance, including the General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment, and supports ASEAN labour migration governance and statistics.

UNHCR

Monitors and supports refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, and IDPs; issues annual Global Trends and regional reports; promotes protection-sensitive border management and solutions.

ASEAN and Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)

ASEAN advances migrant worker protection and dialogue; PIF leads on climate mobility, including a regional framework to guide planned relocation and migration options.

Bali Process (and RSO)⁸

Regional platform to cooperate on people smuggling, trafficking in persons, and related transnational crime, including information-sharing and practical tools.

National governments and social partners

Run labour-migration pathways (PALM, RSE, SSW, EPS), negotiate bilateral agreements, regulate recruiters and employers, and work with worker and employer organisations.¹⁸³

Viable Solutions

Expansion of safe and regular pathways linked to labour-market needs² Scale up and diversify regional labour-mobility schemes (PALM, RSE, SSW, EPS) with transparent selection, skills partnerships, recognition of prior learning, and anti-discrimination safeguards. Pilot circular and youth mobility visas and targeted scholarships in shortage sectors.

Recruitment is made fair and fee-free for workers

Implement ILO fair recruitment principles: ban worker-paid fees and related costs; license and monitor recruiters; publish recruiter/employer compliance records; ensure joint liability and accessible grievance mechanisms in origin and destination.

Protection of people in mixed movements while managing borders

Adopt protection-sensitive border procedures, uphold non-refoulement, expand humanitarian admission and family reunion, and strengthen alternatives to detention for children and vulnerable persons.

Operationalisation of climate mobility in the Pacific

Translate the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility into national action: community-led planning, planned relocation protocols, portability of social protection, and labour-mobility bridges that include training and remittance facilitation.

Tackling smuggling and trafficking with rights-based cooperation

Use Bali Process tools for information-sharing, joint investigations, and victim-centred anti-trafficking responses; address drivers by expanding regular channels and cracking down on abusive recruiters.⁵

Improvements in data, portability, and whole-of-government coordination

Invest in interoperable migration data (ILMS/ESCAP/IOM platforms), ethical digital identity and social-protection portability; coordinate across labour, education, interior, foreign affairs and local authorities; engage employers and worker organisations.³

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