

# Situation Report on International Migration 2021

## Policy brief



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



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## Introduction

The findings of the 2021 Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab Region reaffirm that migration and forced displacement are major areas of concern and policy interest in Arab countries. The report underlines the protracted challenges and vulnerabilities experienced by migrant and refugee populations, many of which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

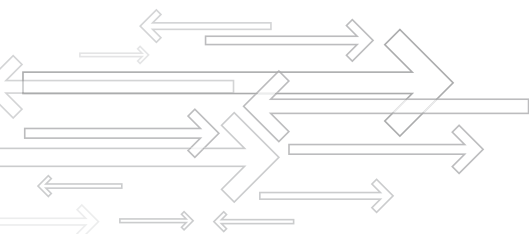
## Migration and forced displacement



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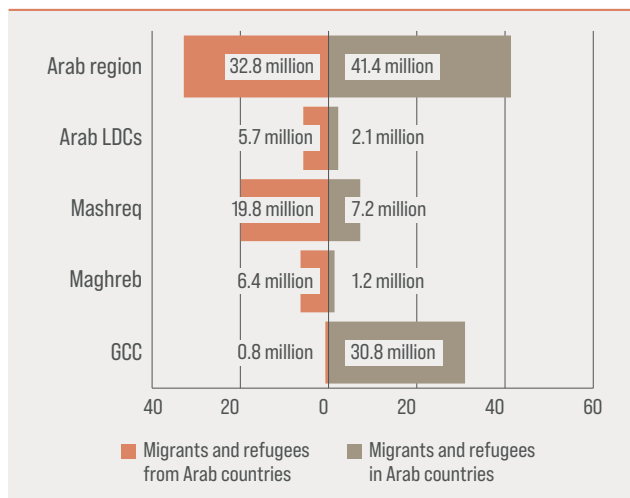
# 1. Key international migration and forced displacement data and trends

The Arab region remains a prominent region of origin and transit, and one of the top destinations for international migration and forced displacement.

In 2020, Arab countries hosted almost 15 per cent of migrants and refugees worldwide, with 12 of the

22 Arab countries hosting 14 per cent of migrant workers globally. Moreover, nearly 9.3 million refugees have sought protection in the region. In terms of outward migration, 32.8 million people migrated or were forcibly displaced from Arab countries, 44 per cent of whom remained within the region.

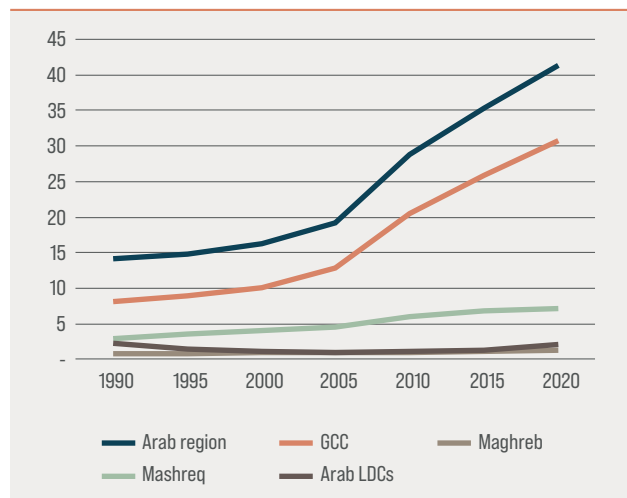
**Figure 1.** Number of migrants and refugees from and in Arab countries (Millions) by subregion, 2020



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), *International Migration Stock*, 2020.

Note: In reference to GCC, the data denoted mainly refers to migrants, given the migration trends to the GCC.

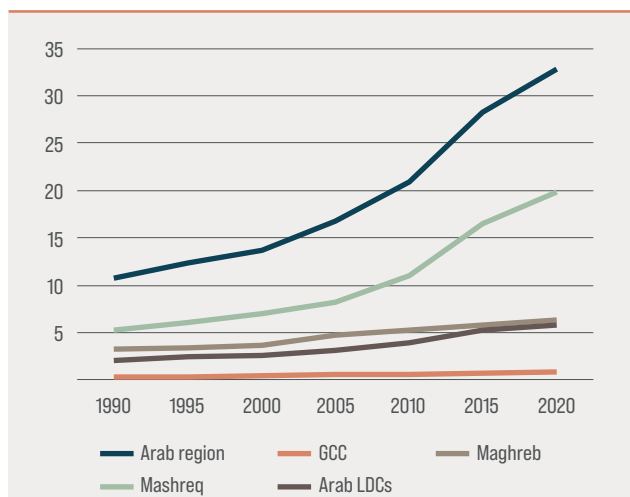
**Figure 2.** Number of migrants and refugees in Arab countries (Millions) by subregion, 1990-2020



Source: ESCWA calculations based on DESA, *International Migration Stock*, 2020.

Note: In reference to GCC, the data denoted mainly refers to migrants, given the migration trends to the GCC.

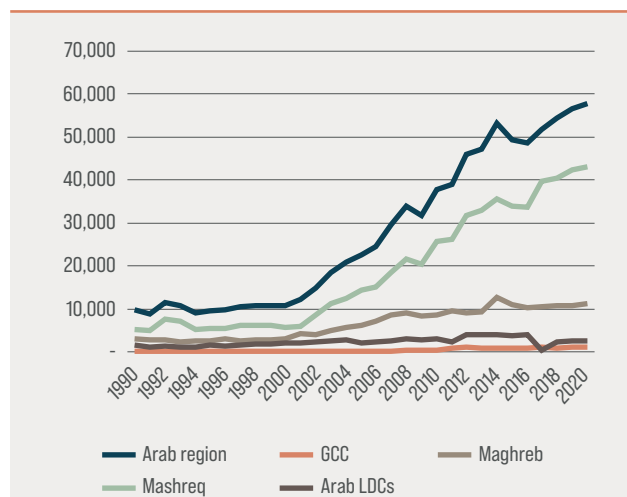
**Figure 3.** Number of migrants and refugees from Arab countries (Millions) by subregion, 1990-2020



Source: ESCWA calculations based on DESA, *International Migration Stock*, 2020.

Note: In reference to GCC, the data denoted mainly refers to migrants, given the migration trends to the GCC.

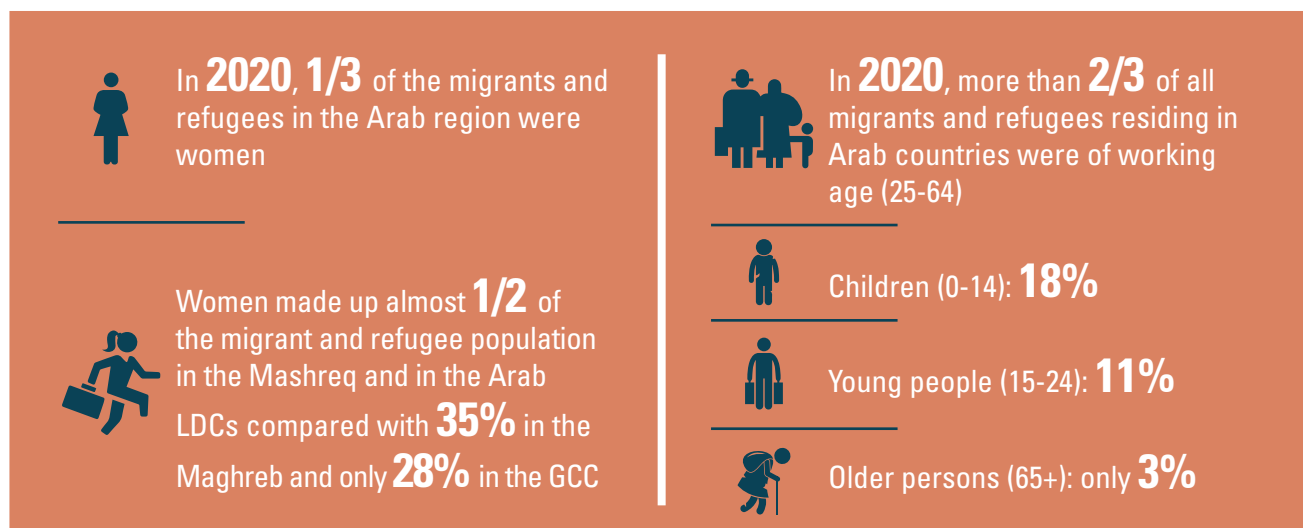
**Figure 4.** Remittance inflows to the Arab region (Millions of dollars) by subregion, 1990-2020



Source: World Bank, *Annual remittances data* (updated as of May 2021).

Note: Data for 2020 are estimates.

## Demographic profile of migrants and refugees in the region



Source: ESCWA calculations based on DESA, *International Migration Stock*, 2020.

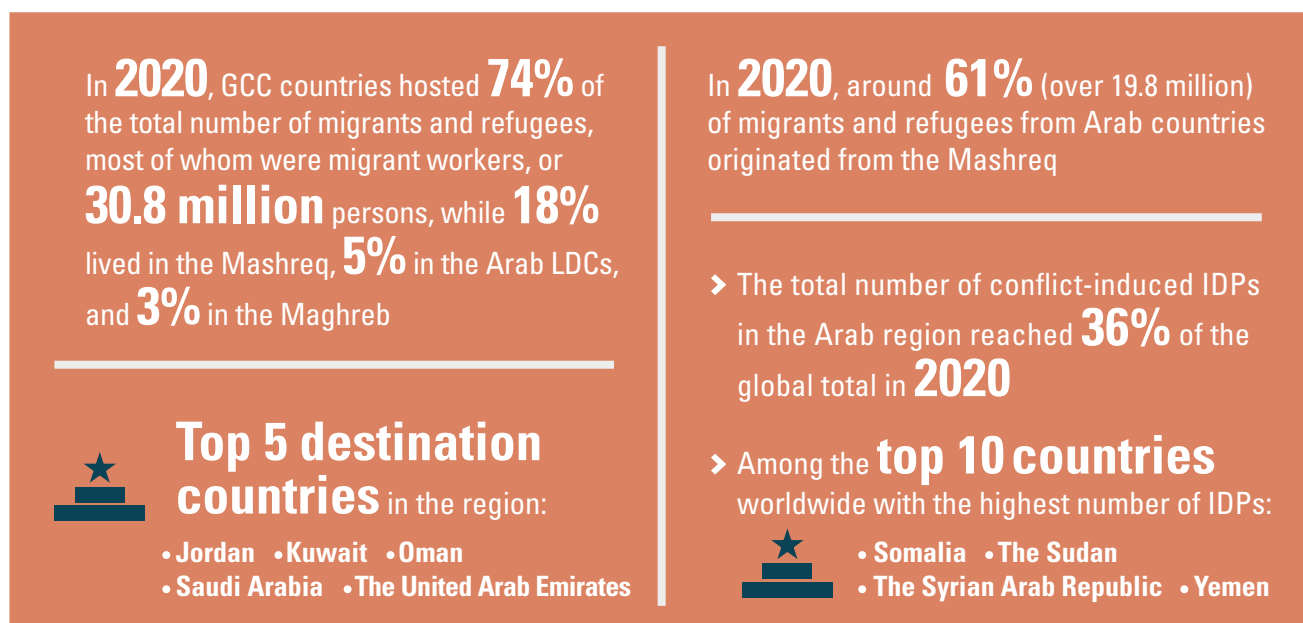
Note: Whenever data from DESA is referenced, the term migrants and refugees is used since the data include both populations. However, it is important to note the different realities and migration patterns in the region, with GCC subregion hosting mostly migrant workers, while refugees are mostly concentrated in the Mashreq.

## Remittances



Source: World Bank, *Annual remittances data* (updated as of May 2021).

## Sub-regional dynamics



Source: ESCWA calculations based on DESA, *International Migration Stock*, 2020; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Internal Displacement Database*, 2020.

Note: Whenever data from DESA is referenced, the term migrants and refugees is used since the data include both populations. However, it is important to note the different realities and migration patterns in the region, with GCC subregion hosting mostly migrant workers, while refugees are mostly concentrated in the Mashreq.



## 2. Policy developments

Between April 2019 and December 2020, Arab countries adopted an array of policies, regulations and measures related to migration, asylum and statelessness governance. They also engaged in various dialogues and cooperation processes at the regional, subregional and bilateral levels.

In addition to travel and movement restrictions, 2020 was marked by new special practices to contain the spread of COVID-19, and mitigate its economic and social consequences on Arab countries and their populations.

The main policy developments during the reporting period addressed labour migration; irregular migration; admissions, visas and residency permits; access to services, including health services; trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants; forced displacement and refugee protection; expatriate and diaspora governance; and other measures affecting migrants and refugee rights. The table below sets out the main policy areas of intervention observed during the reporting period by country and thematic area, including the additional provisions resulting from the outbreak of COVID-19.

Policy developments by country and thematic area, April 2019 - December 2020

Country	Labour migration	Irregular migration	Trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants	Forced displacement and refugee protection	Admissions, visas, residency permits and naturalization	Expatriate and diaspora governance	Other measures and developments
Algeria		+	+			+	+
Bahrain	+	+	+		+		
Comoros			+		+		
Djibouti					+		+
Egypt		+	+		+	+	
Iraq			+	+			
Jordan	+			+			
Kuwait	+	+	+		+		+
Lebanon	+	+		+	+	+	
Libya		+					
Mauritania			+	+			
Morocco	+		+			+	+
Oman	+				+		+
Qatar	+			+			
Saudi Arabia	+		+		+		
Somalia	+			+			
State of Palestine							
Sudan			+	+	+		
Syrian Arab Republic				+		+	
Tunisia	+		+	+	+		+
United Arab Emirates	+	+			+		
Yemen					+		+

Source: Compiled by ESCWA.

Note: Red plus signs refer to the adoption of policies and measures related to COVID-19.



### 3. Impact of COVID-19 on migrants and refugees

Migrants and refugees are among the population groups most affected by the pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis has underscored the impact of long-standing structural barriers on migrants and refugees; has exacerbated their existing health vulnerabilities, food insecurity and unequal access to social services; and has left many stranded. Nonetheless, the pandemic also highlighted the essential role migrants and refugees play in

societies and communities in their countries of origin and destination. Against this backdrop, the report reflects on the diverse, often complicated, experiences of migrants and refugees in the region and the distinct challenges they face. The report offers recommendations to improve the situation of migrants and refugees and build their resilience during crises, in line with international human rights, as well as refugee and migration frameworks.



#### Essential role

Migrants and refugees provide essential services, including health, cleaning, domestic work, agriculture and food production

They help ensure the continuity of supply chains across the Arab region

Remittances to the region reached \$57.9 billion in 2020, a 2.5 per cent increase compared with the previous year



#### Extreme vulnerability

Income insecurity including losing source of income and salary reductions

Food insecurity and challenges in accessing water and sanitation

Challenges in accessing medical services

New learning modality posed challenges for students and their parents

Female migrants and refugees often face distinct disadvantages

Mobility restrictions have left many stranded in host countries

Limited connectivity and communication due to the digital divide



#### Recommendations

Facilitate regular migration

Address structural barriers

Provide migrants and refugees with access to COVID-19 vaccines without discrimination

Promote inclusion and tolerance

Include migrants and refugees in recovery plans



## 4. Way forward

In response to the current context and challenges, systematic changes to migration policies are needed to protect basic human rights and empower migrants and refugees, particularly in times of crises.

The recommendations below, which align with the objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and of the Global Compact on Refugees, offer a roadmap for action.

### A. Facilitate regular migration pathways, limit irregular migration, and protect migrants

1. Enable voluntary, safe and dignified return processes for stranded migrants, and guarantee their access to food and basic social services, including COVID-19 testing.
2. Invest in the digitization of migration processes, including simplification and clarification of visa procedures to avoid falling into situations of irregularity.
3. Strengthen initiatives that facilitate regularization of migrants in irregular situations.
4. Guarantee the rights of migrants to hold their passports, identification documents, and other personal paperwork necessary to facilitate travel.
5. Empower migrants with the ability to provide feedback on migration services; and ensure that such mechanisms, including hotlines, are accessible and promoted to migrant communities.
6. Strengthen migrant access to justice mechanisms, and endow law enforcement with the authority and resources to pursue existing and emerging human trafficking patterns.
7. Amend visa and permit requirements to ensure survivors of human trafficking do not fall into irregular status owing to temporary documentation.
8. Better integrate migrants and refugees in national and regional disaster preparedness plans, emergency procedures, and post emergency recovery.

### B. Ensure the protection of refugees and asylum seekers

1. Make use of screening arrangements at borders, and of testing, quarantine and other measures to enable authorities to manage the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees, including stateless refugees, in a safe manner, while respecting international refugee protection standards during the pandemic.
2. Where asylum procedures have been temporarily suspended on account of the pandemic, restart such procedures as soon as safe to do so with all the necessary health considerations in place.
3. Enhance communication with refugee communities to improve information on changes to services and assistance that they are entitled to, and on how to access them.

4. Further efforts to strengthen inclusion of refugees, including by providing national documents for various services such as, but not limited to, health care and education, and by providing their right to work.
5. Support refugees and Arab countries hosting large numbers of refugees by increasing solidarity efforts, including resettlement quotas, enhancing access to family reunification and other complementary pathways, and resuming resettlement processing as soon as it is safe to do so.

## C. Promote fair and safe employment and income security

1. Complete a comprehensive reform of the *kafala* system to address areas that put migrants in situations of vulnerability and forced labour; and recognize and enforce existing international human rights and labour laws and conventions that guarantee the protection of migrant workers' rights and welfare.
2. Engage directly with migrants, refugees and international organizations to identify creative ways to reduce the risks migrant and refugee workers face during crises.
3. Guarantee proper access to personal protective equipment (PPE) in areas with high migrant or refugee density, including workplaces, labour camps, and migrant or refugee accommodation.
4. Develop confidential mechanisms for oversight and to report violations of health and other workplace guidelines that protect the privacy and job security of migrants and refugees.
5. Guarantee migrant workers and refugees access to legal recourse for unfair or exploitative treatment and other forms of abuse, especially female migrant workers and refugees.
6. Promote social justice for migrant and refugee workers in terms of labour protections, equal pay for equal work, and organizing and forming unions and bargaining collectively; and ensure that domestic work is included in labour laws.
7. Develop a rights-based approach to employment law and practices that includes the needs of migrant and refugee communities, by engaging directly with migrant and refugee populations and local and international organizations that serve their interests.
8. Offer paid sick leave to disincentivize working while sick, particularly during the pandemic, to safeguard public health.
9. Ensure that national and local development policies and extra economic stimulus and support measures are inclusive of migrant and refugee populations.
10. Provide economic relief to guarantee that migrants and refugees have access to basic services, including adequate housing, clean drinking water and food.
11. Include migrants and refugees in national and local job skills training programmes to qualify them for a wider range of jobs; and ensure that these programmes are accessible by offering them in different languages, and waive restrictions/quotas based on migration status, gender, ethnicity or religion.
12. Allow migrants and refugees to enrol in national and private banking systems by partnering with banks to offer competitive banking services, particularly services that reduce remittance transaction costs for low-income migrants and refugees.

13. Offer financial literacy trainings and workshops to migrants and refugees to empower them with information that allows them to make informed financial decisions.
14. Strengthen State cooperation and collaboration with different stakeholders, including international and local non-governmental organizations that serve migrant and refugee communities, to provide better access to services.

## D. Increase access to quality health services

1. Engage with migrants, refugees, their host communities, and the organizations that serve them to ensure that the most up-to-date health guidelines, including sexual and reproductive health and other pertinent information, are shared regularly and are accessible in languages that meet the needs of the community.
2. Ensure universal access to health-care services regardless of migration status, race, ethnicity, gender or nationality.
3. Develop strategies to combat COVID-19 at all levels of government planning (including testing, treatment and vaccine distribution) that meet the needs of migrant and refugee populations, with particular attention to underserved individuals such as women and migrants in irregular situations.
4. Engage with migrant and refugee communities and the organizations that serve them to increase awareness of available channels to seek medical treatment, and encourage individuals to seek health care when needed.
5. Safeguard access to female health-care practitioners and quality female health services, including obstetrics and gynaecology.
6. Ensure that migrants and refugees have access to interpreters when needed, including sign language interpreters, for all interactions with medical professionals.
7. Expand the availability and accessibility of telehealth services, including virtual counselling, to migrant and refugee groups, particularly high-risk populations, and to groups with longer-term limited access to nearby quality health-care services.
8. Guarantee access to and coverage of mental health and psychosocial support for all migrant and refugee populations through and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, and actively encourage engagement that destigmatizes mental illness and seeking support by working directly with migrant and refugee groups and organizations that serve their interests.
9. Ensure all service providers are trained to respond to the physical and mental health and psychological support needs of all survivors of gender-based violence in safe and confidential environments.

## E. Increase access to quality education

1. Promote the equal and continuous participation of girls in online learning, and the return of girls to in-person learning at school when possible, including at the secondary level; address the needs of girls who have dropped out of school; and consider support classes specifically for girls.



2. Reduce barriers to entering public education systems, particularly restrictions based on migration status, which prevent migrant and refugee children from entering public schools, while actively encouraging the inclusion of these students in formal education.
3. Work with local organizations and communities to identify solutions to improve school access, and encourage the enrolment of migrant and refugee students.
4. Ensure migrant and refugee children have access to the Internet and devices compatible with online learning by offering Internet subsidies to families with children, instituting device loan programmes, and partnering with private technology companies to expand access to educational technology to all school age children regardless of status.
5. Guarantee that local and national programmes implemented to alleviate the costs of remote learning and tutoring include migrant and refugee children and families.
6. Provide free or subsidized school supplies, child meal plans during in-person learning, and other support.
7. Ensure that programming and policy development meet the needs of migrant and refugee children and their families.
8. Provide opportunities and offer programmes for migrant and refugee teachers and tutors to gain necessary training or accreditation to enter public school systems that offer better job security and higher wages.
9. Expand and develop the mental health support available to students by training teachers to identify signs of mental illness, and connect students with online counselling services and peer support groups.
10. Incorporate migrant and refugee experiences in national education curriculums.
11. Create accelerated language and educational programmes for children who were prevented from attending online and in-person schooling to ensure that they are not left behind.
12. Offer skill-based learning and recognition opportunities, such as free courses, for migrants and refugees; and ensure that these opportunities can accommodate adult working schedules.
13. Require teacher diversity and cultural sensitivity trainings to guarantee that teachers are equipped to engage and meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

## F. Promote gender sensitive policies for migrants and refugees

1. Guarantee that national and local social protection efforts and benefits reach migrant and refugee women and girls.
2. Ensure that female migrants and refugees are aware of and can access protection services and benefits that apply to them by offering services in different languages, creating clear and simple benefit redemption plans, and advertising programming on both digital and non-digital spaces in places with high concentrations of migrants and refugees.
3. Establish new or guarantee access to existing safe houses and other spaces where women and girls facing sexual or domestic abuse, including intimate partner violence, can access shelter, food, housing,

medical assistance and other necessities; and ensure that these spaces are secure and equipped to meet the childcare, mental health and psychosocial support needs of female migrants and refugees.

4. Develop and conduct information campaigns to raise the awareness of migrant and refugee women and girls of their rights, and offer confidential channels to provide assistance and counselling for women when these rights are violated.
5. Safeguard women's access to necessary PPE and other health equipment by offering free products, such as masks and sanitizers, in areas with high female migrant and refugee concentrations.
6. Ensure women are included in COVID-19 and other critical decision-making efforts by offering childcare services during meetings, creating environments that do not dismiss the voices of women, hosting women-only meetings to discuss and identify key issues on the ground, and working with local and international organizations to keep migrant and refugee women informed of the results achieved owing to their cooperation.
7. Engage men and boys to prevent violence and to encourage healthy ways of coping with stressful situations associated with crisis.

## G. Strengthen the connectivity and communication of migrant and refugee populations

1. Develop community loan programmes for electronic devices equipped with Internet in areas with high migrant and refugee density to provide access to digital platforms, and ensure these programmes are accessible to all regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or nationality.
2. Develop community centres and enclaves, in line with health guidelines and regulations, where individuals can access devices and the Internet; and guarantee that these spaces are accessible to women and young people. In areas where free public centres already exist, ensure the number of available digital devices meet the needs of the community and are inclusive of migrant and refugee communities.
3. Offer digital literacy courses and workshops in migrant and refugee dense communities.
4. Create and share a list of reliable online and offline information sources, especially during crisis, in areas with high migrant and refugee density; and ensure that these sources are offered in languages that meet the needs of the migrant and refugee populations, including up-to-date safety precautions and regulations.
5. Expose sources of misinformation and falsehoods, and create a channel for people to report misinformation or disinformation when they encounter it in various languages.
6. Open a dialogue between leaders in the migrant, refugee and local community to identify the source of hostilities, and create a space that allows these groups to work together and create solutions that meet the needs of their communities.
7. Ensure that there are confidential reporting mechanisms for hate speech and discrimination available and accessible to the migrant and refugee population, and work with national and regional social media managers to remove groups that spread hate speech and violate online community guidelines.

8. Provide mental health services for migrants and refugees who experience hate speech and hostility; create spaces that allow for reflective open dialogue between migrants or refugees on their shared experiences; and use these discussions to help inform local organizational priorities and solutions that can help migrants and refugees feel more comfortable and protected.
9. Protect against hate crime by formulating relevant policies and by training police and prosecutors to uphold migrant and refugee rights.

## H. Expand transnational legal accountability



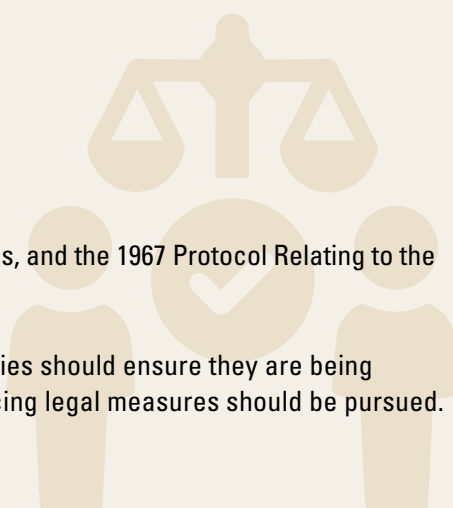
### a. For migrants

1. Ratify the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and the ILO conventions relevant to migrant workers, in particular the Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), the Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181), the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), the 2014 Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), and the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).
2. Launch campaigns that increase migrants' awareness of their legal rights under binding regional and international agreements; and offer legal counsel and advice, with translation services when needed, to migrants seeking to pursue legal action.
3. Establish regional and subregional standards relating to the *kafala* system that respect and promote human rights and dignity.
4. Expand the legal basis for pursuing action against human trafficking and smuggling by ratifying and enforcing the 2000 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its two supplementary protocols: the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air.



### b. For refugees

1. Ratify the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.
2. Where Conventions have been ratified, government agencies should ensure they are being followed. When abuses are found, action, including enforcing legal measures should be pursued.



## I. Build data collection capacity

1. Invest in regional data collection efforts, with a particular emphasis on collecting disaggregated data, which may include information such as migration status, age, gender, ethnicity, disability status, occupation, sector of employment, country of origin, number of children per household, and level of education.
2. Ensure that anonymized data is made public and translated into different languages.
3. Collate existing data collected by States and non-governmental organizations into a single database, accounting for differences in collection methods and terminology where possible.
4. Move towards the standardization of common migration- and displacement-related terms by Governments at the subregional and regional levels to ease the process of identifying common regional trends.
5. Standardize migration- and displacement-related terms in data collected by international organizations.
6. Invest in the collection of qualitative data, and qualitative longitudinal studies where possible, to collect information that highlights the migratory and displacement experience and can expand knowledge on the direct needs of migrants and refugees.
7. Prioritize data collection in the period before, during and after new programming and policies are launched to track their impact on migrant and refugee populations; and share evidence-driven successful policies and programming on a platform available to policymakers, international organizations, and other relevant bodies to encourage best practices.
8. Improve data collection and analysis on migration and refugee movements during sudden- or slow-onset crises, and facilitate real-time data sharing.

E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2021/2/POLICY BRIEF



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