



International Migration From, To and Within Asia

**Rainer Münz
Jemal Yaryyeva**

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Summary and main messages

- In 2020, there were 4.6 billion people living in Asia (58% of global population). In the same year there were an estimated 102 million international migrants with a birthplace in Asia (about 37% of all global migrants).
- An estimated 57 million Asian migrants were residing in another Asian country. 45 million had a place of residence outside Asia. At the same time some 13 million people born outside Asia had their place of residence in Asia.
- Since the 1960s, there has been a fourfold increase from 29 (1960) to 102 million Asian-born international migrants (2020). This increase took place at a faster pace than overall population growth on the continent.
- The most important sending countries of labour migrants, educational migrants and family migrants are India (2020: 17.7 million living abroad), China (8.6), Bangladesh (7.7), Pakistan (6.3) and the Philippines (6.1).
- Important destinations of labour migrants moving within Asia are the Gulf States, Malaysia, Singapore, India and China (Hong Kong in particular). In most cases these are temporary labour migrants.
- The Gulf States, a main destination for temporary Asian labour migrants, mainly recruit or admit workers from India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and the Philippines as well as from neighbouring Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria).
- Labour migration from neighbouring countries is relevant for India (5.0 million foreign-born), Thailand (3.6 million), Malaysia (3.2 million), Singapore (1.9 million), and South Korea (1.1 million).
- Main overseas destinations of regular South, South-East and East Asian migrants are Western Europe, North America, and Australia. Most of them are labour and family migrants moving to destination countries on a permanent basis.
- Emigration from Central Asia was partly the result of ethnic Germans, Russians and Ukrainians migrating to Germany, Russia and Ukraine since the 1990s and continues due to labour migration (mainly to Russia).
- The quantitatively most relevant source countries characterised by violent conflicts, civil wars were Syria (2020: 8.9 million persons living abroad), Afghanistan (5.8 million), Myanmar (3.8 million), Iraq (2.1 million) and Yemen (1.3 million). Not all of them were registered or recognised refugees, not least because many destination countries – namely Iran, Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Turkey – either do not register refugees or do recognise them particularly selectively (Turkey: Syrians only). Nevertheless, many of these people have left their country of birth because of political and security conditions.
- Syria and Afghanistan were the top origin countries of refugees in the world in 2020 with 6.7 million and 2.6 million registered or recognised refugees abroad, respectively. This was (and still is) a consequence of conflict and political instability in these two countries. The numbers of Afghan refugees increased in 2021 due to the Taliban taking over control of the country.
- Most Asian refugees have found protection in neighbouring countries: Syrians in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan; Afghans in Pakistan and Iran (not recognised); Rohingya from Myanmar in Bangladesh and Malaysia; Yemenis (usually not as recognised but de facto refugees) in the Gulf States and East Africa.
- Internal displacement as a result of conflict also plays a major role in Syria (2020: 6.6 million), Afghanistan (3.6 million), Yemen (3.6 million) and Myanmar (0.5 million).

- In addition, there were 4.3 million long-term or permanently displaced people after natural disasters in Asia: in Afghanistan (1.1 million), in South Asia (India: 0.9 million, Pakistan: 0.8 million, Bangladesh: 345,000), as well as in South-East Asia (Indonesia: 158,000, Vietnam: 162,000) and in Yemen (233,000).
- Main destinations of non-Asian migrants coming to Asia are the Gulf States (labour migrants from North Africa and East Africa, West Europe, East Europe, North America) and Israel (Jewish immigration mainly from Europe and North America).
- 22.4 million Asian-born migrants resided in wider Europe in 2020. Main destinations were the EU27 (9.5 million) + UK (3.1 million), Russia and Ukraine (2020: 5.6 million, mainly people from Central Asia), and Turkey (4.2 million, mainly refugees). Some had come as labour migrants or students, others through marriage; others have moved as privileged ethnic minorities. Certain EU countries (Germany, France, Sweden, Austria, and Greece) as well as Turkey also host considerable numbers of Asian refugees, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.
- The second most important overseas destination for Asians is North America. By 2020, that continent was home to 17 million Asian-born migrants (USA: 14 million; Canada: 3 million).
- Between 2008 and 2020, EU27 countries issued around 5 million residence permits to Asian-born nationals. Regular arrivals to Europe were decreasing between 2008 and 2012 but rose and peaked between 2016 and 2018 before dropping again.
- The main legal avenue of Asian migrants to the EU is transnational marriages with subsequent immigration of newlywed brides/grooms as well as traditional family reunion. Numbers dropped from 183,000 (2019) to 120,000 (2020), not least because of Covid-19 related restrictions. The main countries of origin of family migrants were India and Syria followed by China.
- The economic consequences of measures taken against the spread Covid-19 pandemic led to a considerable drop in demand for additional labour. The number of work permits issued in 2020 to labour migrants from Asia decreased from 120,000 to 80,000 (-65% compared to 2019). The most important sending countries of newly arriving labour migrants were India, China, and the Philippines.
- Covid-19 has also led to home-schooling and distance learning, allowing foreign students at European universities to stay in their country of origin. There was a 50% decrease in student visas issued in 2020 in comparison to the previous years. China, India, and Vietnam were the top countries of origin.
- Between 2008 and 2020, more than 3 million Asian citizens asked for (first) asylum in Europe. In the period from 2012 to 2016, the majority of them arrived as irregular migrants crossing European sea borders in the Mediterranean via Turkey or Libya. Since 2017, however, only a minority of all Asian asylum seekers have arrived via the Mediterranean. The most important country of origin was Syria, followed by Afghanistan and Iraq. Unsuccessful asylum claims also came from citizens of Bangladesh and Pakistan.
- By 2020, some **1.7 million Asians living in an EU Member State were people recognised as refugees, people granted humanitarian protection or asylum seekers with pending claims.** Germany (968,000) was the leading EU country in hosting Asian asylum seekers and refugees. Other major host countries of Asian refugees were Sweden (168,000), France (135,000) Austria (113,000), and Greece (79,000).

Data, definitions, and political circumstances

The analysis presented in this paper is mainly based on data collected and published by the UN Population Division (part of UN DESA), by UNHCR, by IDMC and by Eurostat (European Commission) based on information recorded by national authorities and international organisations. Some results are based on estimates. While the collected and published data are meant to show stocks and flows of international migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons, they also reflect political developments and administrative decisions that influence who is included or not included in the database. Making this transparent is important for the interpretation of the data.

China, Hong Kong, Macau

Until the 1990s, Hong Kong was a British colony and Macau a Portuguese colony. Over time, large numbers of citizens of (mainland) China had moved as political refugees and economic migrants to these territories under European control. As they were living on territory controlled by another sovereign state they were rightly counted as international migrants. When China regained control over Hong Kong (1997) and Macau (1999) under the formula “one country, two systems”, mainland Chinese living in these two former colonies were still counted as (international) migrants although this no longer fitted with the definition applied elsewhere (migrant = person living outside his/her country of birth). Today, one can hardly speak of “two systems” anymore. In this paper, the people born in mainland China and living in Hong Kong (2.3 million) and Macau (0.3 million) are not defined as international migrants and therefore not included in our analysis.

China, Taiwan

Officially most UN member states see Taiwan as a Chinese province not under control of the government in Beijing. The People’s Republic of China claims Taiwan as part of its territory. From an administrative position, Taiwan is a de facto self-ruled country that is not recognised by most sovereign countries. UN DESA neither publishes data for Taiwanese living abroad nor for migrants living in Taiwan. Taiwanese data indicate, however, that there are 0.8 million foreign-born people residing in Taiwan. We have included them in our analysis. Over 1 million Taiwanese-born people living in the People’s Republic of China are not included in the analysis as the precise number is unknown.

Vietnam

Until 1975, North Vietnam and South Vietnam were two sovereign countries with a considerable number of people who had moved from the communist North to the western-oriented South. With the military victory of the North and its South Vietnamese (Vietcong) allies and the subsequent unification of the country, these people no longer qualified as international migrants.

India, Pakistan, Bangladesh

The partition of British India when India and Pakistan (which initially comprised Bangladesh) became independent in 1947-48 and the first two subsequent wars between these two countries (1948-49 and 1963) led to a massive ‘population exchange’ involving, between 1946 and 1965, at least 9 million Hindus and Sikhs moving into India and approximately 5 million Muslims moving to both parts of Pakistan. Flows

between India and East Pakistan/Bangladesh continued after the 1960s, while migration between (West) Pakistan and India almost came to a standstill. UN DESA data show ethno-religious refugees as residents of India born in Pakistan/Bangladesh and residents of Pakistan and Bangladesh born in India (as reflected in Indian and Pakistani national data). Some of these ethno-religious migrants/refugees of the 1940s to 1960s are still alive, but this (in the case of India-Pakistan, declining) stock does not indicate any recent migration flow.

When Bangladesh became independent in 1971 as a result of both an internal uprising and the third Indo-Pakistani war, about 10 million East Bengalis temporarily entered India during the early months of the war, of whom 1.5 million may have stayed in place after Bangladesh became independent and were later joined by Bangladeshi citizens coming to India as migrant labour. Another 1.3 million Urdu-speaking people left Bangladesh in 1971-72 for (West) Pakistan. They are not shown in the database, but many of them might have been born in (the western part of) Pakistan before moving to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and back.

Palestine, Israel, Middle East

In 1947-48, the British Mandate (de facto colony) of Palestine was divided between Israel and a Palestinian territory administered by Jordan (West Bank) and Egypt (Gaza). This partition led to the first Arab Israeli war during which about 800,000 Palestinians living on territory that became part of Israel fled or were forced to leave. Most of them settled in the West Bank and Gaza as well as in neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. As a reaction, the UN established UNRWA, a specialised agency dealing with the Palestinian refugees of 1948 and their children. In 1967, the second Arab Israeli war ended with the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan (and temporarily also the Sinai Peninsula) by Israel. This resulted in a second outflow of Palestinian refugees to neighbouring countries.

In 2020, UNRWA counted 5.8 million Palestinians falling under its mandate while the UN DESA database on international migrants showed 4.0 million Palestinians for the same year (most of them in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria under UNRWA mandate). We have to assume that only a very small minority of them were born on today's territory of Israel and expelled in 1948 or born in the West Bank/Gaza fleeing in 1967. The vast majority are descendants of refugees who left in 1948 or 1967. For this reason, we do not consider Palestinians under UNRWA mandate living in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria as cross border migrants and have excluded them from data and figures showing Asia's international migration.

At the same time there are about 0.6 million Israeli citizens living in occupied Palestinian and Syrian territory. Some settlement areas have been unilaterally annexed by Israel (East Jerusalem, Golan; not recognised by most UN member states); other settlements are de facto under full Israeli control (settlements in the West Bank). In UN DESA data and in our analysis Israeli citizens who have moved to East Jerusalem, the Golan and the West Bank are not shown as migrants living outside their country of birth. It is also unclear how Palestinians and Druze (without Israeli citizenship) leaving annexed territory (East Jerusalem, Golan) are accounted for.

Soviet Union, post-Soviet successor states

Until the 1980s, people moving (or forced to move) between Soviet republics were internally mobile Soviet citizens. In 1991-92, these republics declared independence and many internally mobile persons became, by definition (and quasi-overnight), international migrants. Today's stock of European-born

people living in Central Asia are mainly persons who arrived prior to 1991-92. Time series based on UN DESA data on the stock of Asia's international migrants show a big increase between 1980 and 1990 (Fig. 1), which reflects this sudden change of status, but many of these 'new' migrants had already left their (now independent) country of origin beforehand.

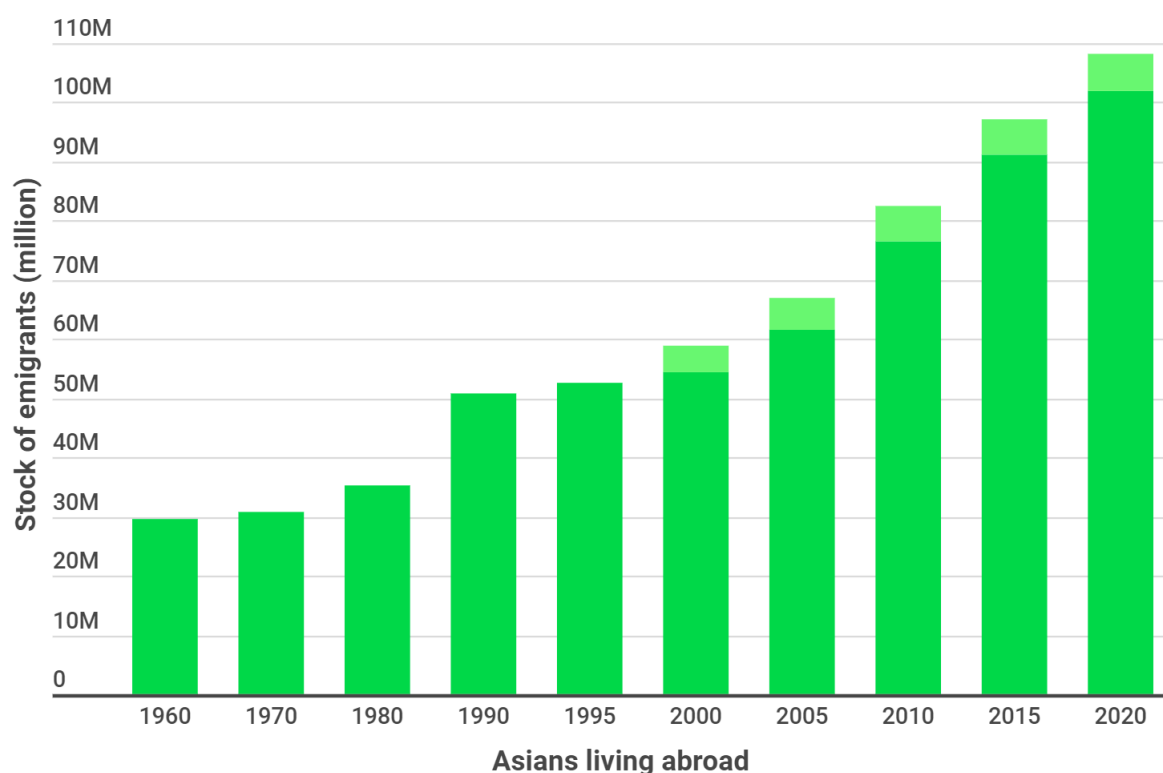
Foreign troops

Several Asian countries host or hosted foreign troops. Leading examples include: Afghanistan (Soviet troops 1980-1990, US and European NATO troops 2001-2021), Cambodia (Vietnamese troops 1978-1989), Bahrain (UK naval forces 1935-1971, US troops and naval forces since 1971), Japan (US troops since 1945), Iraq (US and European troops 2003-2021), Lebanon (Syrian troops 1976-2005, Israeli troops 1978-79 and 1982-2000), Qatar (US troops since 1990, Turkish troops since 2017), Syria (US troops since 2015, Russian troops since 2015), Vietnam (French troops until 1954, US troops 1965-1972). Available statistics do not count foreign soldiers stationed in Asian countries as migrants. Consequently, they are not included in our analysis.

I. Migration from and within Asia – overview of key trends

Since the early 1960s, **the absolute number of Asians¹ living outside their country of birth** (according to UN DESA) **has increased** from an estimated **29 million** (1960) through 50 million (1990) to an (overstating) estimate of **108 million in 2020** (Fig. 1).² When correcting for residents of Hong Kong and Macau born in mainland China as well as Hong Kong and Macau residents now living in mainland China (a total of 2.6 million now de facto living in the same country) and for Palestinians counted as refugees or stateless persons in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria (3.8 million) the more realistic number of Asian-born people living abroad is closer to **102 million people (2020)**. When comparing migrants by continent of origin these 102 million Asian-born migrants are – in absolute terms – a larger group than international migrants born in Africa, wider Europe, Latin America, or Oceania.

FIGURE 1: ASIANS LIVING ABROAD – ASIAN-BORN POPULATION (STOCK DATA) LIVING OUTSIDE THEIR COUNTRY OF BIRTH, 1960 – 2020, ABSOLUTE NUMBER, IN MILLIONS



Note: Chinese citizens born in mainland China and living in Hong Kong or Macau, Chinese born in Hong Kong or Macau and living in mainland China as well as Palestinians living in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria under the mandate of UNRWA are marked in a lighter green colour (period 2000-2020) as they do not live outside their country of birth.
Source: UN DESA

¹ Asians are defined as people born in the 43 countries covered by this report. Hong Kong and Macau are defined as part of China (People's Republic). The geographic scope is slightly smaller than the one used by UN DESA. Unlike UN DESA we do not count Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey as part of Asia, but as part of "other Europe" as these 4 countries are members of the Council of Europe and of the OSCE.

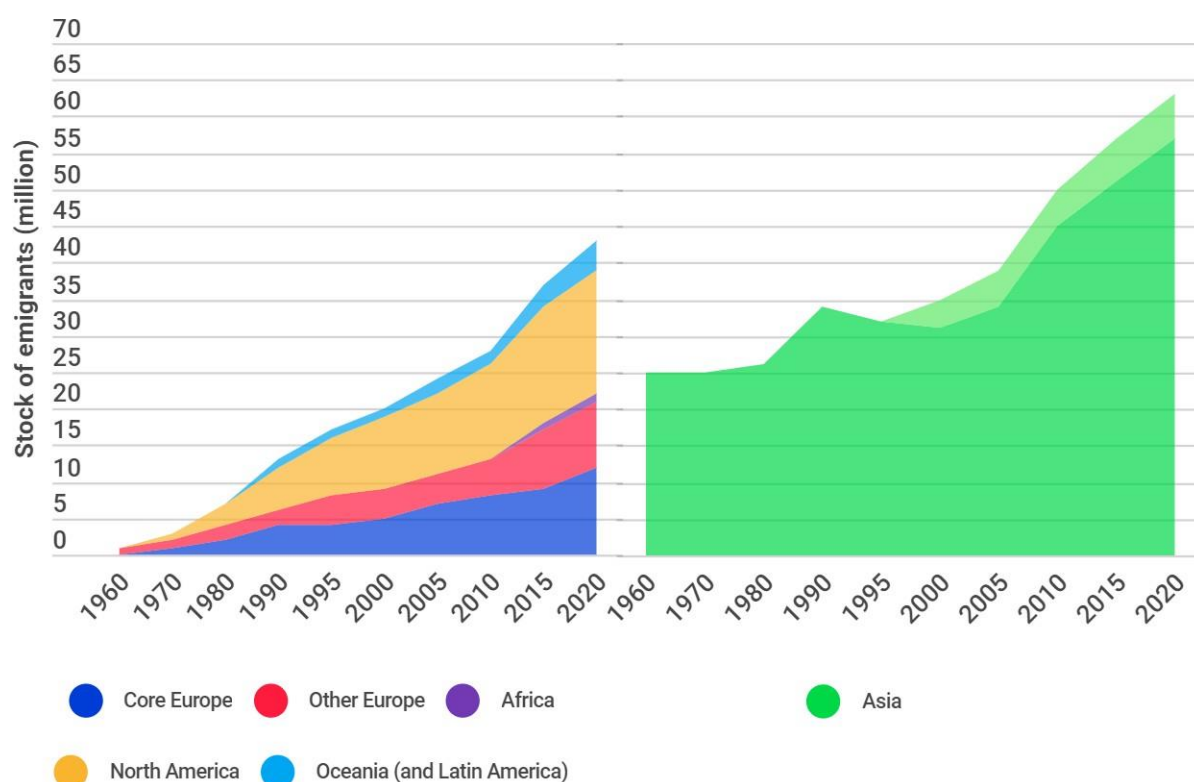
² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020). International Migrant Stock 2020. Data for 1960 and 1990 are based on re-calculations that categorise migrants born in Central Asia (then still part of the Soviet Union) as if their homelands had already been independent countries. For reasons based on definitions the data include people who – in a strict sense – do not qualify as migrants.

The fourfold increase from 29 to 102 million Asian-born international migrants took place at a faster pace than overall population growth on the continent. As a result, over the past 60 years, the share of Asians living abroad compared to Asia's total population has increased from 1.7% to 2.4% in 2020 (Figure 3). This rate is below the global average of 3.6% of the world population living outside their country of birth. This indicates that in relative terms Asians are less mobile across international borders than people born in Europe, Africa, or Latin America. This, however, is not caused by immobility, but rather has to do with the fact that large and population-rich countries like China, India and Indonesia offer domestic mobility alternatives that substitute for emigration.

Two out of three Asian migrants live in another Asian country

In the early 1960s, less than 4 million (= 13%) of the estimated 29 million Asian-born migrants lived outside of their native continent. A quarter of them (0.9 million) were residing in Europe. It might, however, be likely this was an undercount as some Asian-born people with European ancestry immigrating from former colonies when they became independent between the 1940s and 1960s may not be included in these figures. The other 25 million migrants of Asian origin counted in the early 1960s had moved to another Asian country (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: ASIANS LIVING ABROAD – ASIAN-BORN POPULATION (STOCK DATA) BY CONTINENT OF DESTINATION, 1960-2020, ABSOLUTE NUMBER, IN MILLIONS



Note: Europe: Core Europe includes the EU27, EFTA, the Western Balkans, Belarus, Moldova, and the UK. Other Europe includes Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Turkey, and the Southern Caucasus countries. Chinese citizens born in mainland China and living in Hong Kong or Macau, Chinese born in Hong Kong or Macau and living in mainland China as well as Palestinians living in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria under the mandate of UNRWA are marked in a lighter green colour as they do not live outside their country of birth.

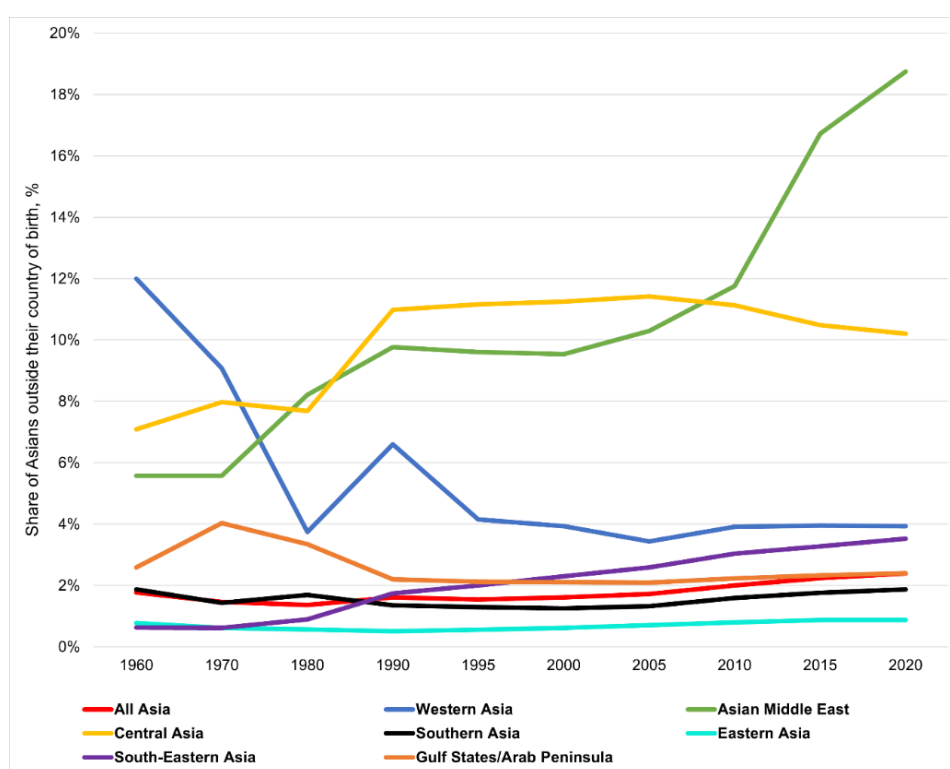
Source: UN DESA

By 2020, an estimated 45 million of the 102 million Asians residing outside their country had a place of residence outside Asia (= 44 % of all Asian-born people living abroad). 22 million of them resided in wider Europe.³

Relative to population size, Central Asia has also a high share of its population living abroad. Initially this was driven by internal mobility within the Soviet Union, but increased after Central Asia's former Soviet republics became independent. This was caused both by ethnic Russians moving to Russia as well as by labour migration towards Russia. The share of migrants had been growing steadily until 2010 but has been declining slightly since then. **In 2020, around 10% of Central Asia's population lived abroad:** predominantly in Russia, but also in Germany (Figure 3).

In the rest of Asia, the share of migrants living abroad varies between 1 and 4% with **Western Asian** (3.9%)⁴ and **South-East Asian** migrants (3.5%) leading, followed by migrants from the **Arab Peninsula** (2.4%) and from **South Asia** (1.8%). The least internationally mobile group are **East Asians** where the share of people living abroad has remained low fluctuating between 0.5% and 0.8% (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: ASIANS LIVING OUTSIDE THEIR COUNTRY OF BIRTH RELATIVE TO ASIA'S TOTAL POPULATION – SHARE OF EMIGRANTS (STOCK DATA), 1960-2020, IN % OF TOTAL POPULATION OF REGION OF ORIGIN



Source: UN DESA

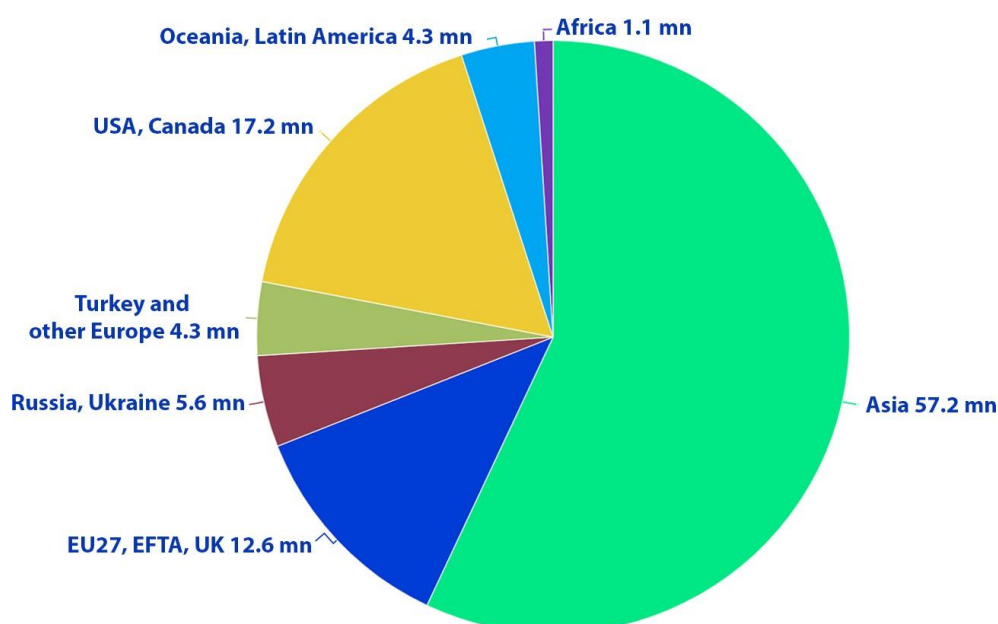
³ Wider Europe includes all EU + EFTA countries, the Western Balkans, Russia, Turkey, the UK and Ukraine.

⁴ The high share of emigrated Western Asians during the 1960s and 1970s is due to non-Muslim people born in the Western part of British India (that became Pakistan in 1948) moving to India in the 1940s and 1950s. In our classification, Pakistan is part of Western Asia while India is part of South Asia.

Asian-born people in Europe, North America, and Oceania

In 2020, some 22 million Asians were living in wider Europe, most of them in Russia, the EU27 and the UK (Figure 4). Some had come as labour migrants or students, others through marriage; many had moved as privileged ethnic minorities (ethnic Russians to Russia, ethnic Germans to Germany, etc.). Since the early 2000s, Western Europe has also hosted considerable numbers of Asian refugees (namely from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria) as well as asylum seekers whose claims have not been recognised (in particular from Bangladesh and Pakistan).

FIGURE 4: ASIANS ABROAD: WHERE DO THEY LIVE? ASIAN-BORN PEOPLE LIVING OUTSIDE THEIR COUNTRY OF BIRTH (STOCK DATA) BY CONTINENT, ABSOLUTE NUMBER, IN MILLIONS



Note: Chinese citizens born in mainland China and living in Hong Kong or Macau, Chinese born in Hong Kong or Macau and living in mainland China as well as Palestinians living in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria are not included as they do not live outside their country of birth

Source: UN DESA

North America is the second most important overseas destination, hosting 17.2 million Asian-born migrants (Figure 4). The vast majority of these are people who have come as labour migrants or students from India, China, Vietnam, and the Philippines, or as family members sponsored by Asian-born naturalised US/Canadian citizens. Today, the US is home to 14 million migrants with their birthplace in Asia while Canada is home to more than 3 million.

Central Asian-born migrants are much more likely to live outside of Asia

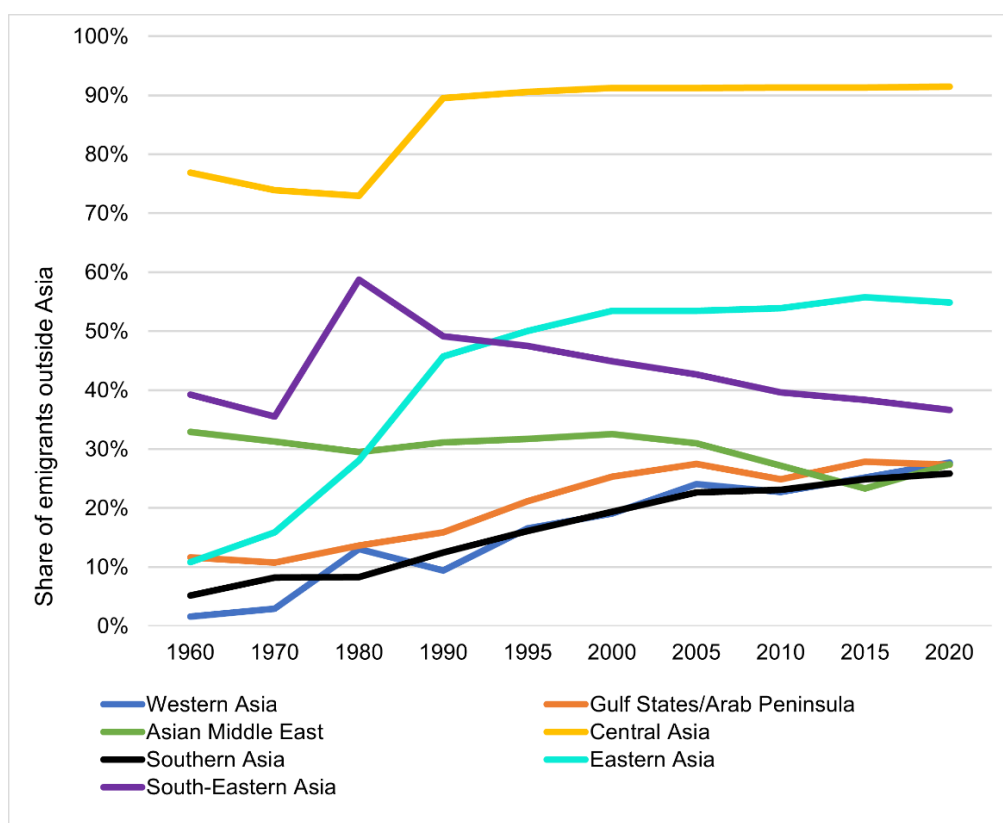
In most parts of Asia, the destinations of migrants have become more diversified. The share of Central Asian migrants living outside of Asia (in relation to all Central Asian emigrants) is the highest as their main destination is Russia. This share has increased with the dissolution of the Soviet Union when most of the countries in the region gained their independence. It has remained above 90% since the 1990s (Figure 5).

The share of South-East Asian emigrants living outside Asia peaked at around 60% in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a result of Vietnamese reunification, which led to a massive flight and emigration of both pro-Western (South) Vietnamese and Vietnamese of ethnic Chinese origin. Ethnic Chinese also tried to leave Cambodia during the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime. Many refugees were admitted by the US and some western European countries. Today the share of South-East Asian migrants residing outside Asia stands at 37% (Figure 5).

The slightly decreasing share of Middle Eastern emigrants living outside Asia is a statistical side effect of an increasing number of Syrian refugees living in neighbouring Middle Eastern countries (Jordan, Lebanon; to a smaller extent Iraq, Egypt). Today the share stands at 29% (Figure 5).

In the rest of Asia, the share of emigrants living outside Asia has increased since the 1960s (between 1% and 10%) to levels between 25% and 55%. The strongest increase happened in East Asia because of growing numbers of Chinese and Koreans living in North America, Australia and (in smaller numbers) also in Europe.

FIGURE 5: ASIAN MIGRANTS LIVING OUTSIDE ASIA COMPARED TO TOTAL MIGRANT POPULATION BY REGION OF ORIGIN, 1960-2020, IN %



Source: UN DESA

Asian-born people in Europe

The majority of Asian-born people who have left their native continent on a more or less permanent basis now live in wider Europe. **In 2020, some 22 million Asian-born people were living in wider Europe**; more than a third of them in **the EU 27 countries** which were **hosting 7.6 million Asian-born immigrants (2020)**, of whom, 2.0 million were from Western Asia (Afghans and Pakistanis in particular), 2.3 million from the Middle East (Syrians and Iraqis in particular) and 0.4 million from South Asia (Indians in particular).

The second magnet is Russia. **In 2020, Russia and Ukraine were home or host to around 5.6 million Asian-born residents**, of which 5.5 million were from Central Asian countries.

At the same time **Turkey hosted over 4 million refugees and regular as well as irregular economic migrants** mainly from Syria (3.6 million), Afghanistan and Iraq, but also from Central Asia.

In 2020, **the UK was home and host to 3.1 million Asian-born people**, of which 0.9 million were from India and 0.6 million from Pakistan.

Asians in Europe have come through very different 'gates of entry'.

- Some were once or more recently recruited as labour migrants (in the case of Western Europe, for example, nurses from the Philippines, IT specialists from India; in the case of Russia, for example, construction workers from Central Asia).
- Others followed as dependent family members or came through marriage migration facilitated by ethnic diasporas that have established themselves in Europe.
- Ethnicity was a key criterion based on which ethnic Germans born in Central Asia migrated to Germany while ethnic Russians and Ukrainians born in Central Asia moved to Russia and Ukraine.
- A considerable number came as students and a proportion of them remained after graduation or are still enrolled in higher education.
- Large numbers came as asylum seekers. They are now either recognised refugees and persons granted humanitarian protection (mainly from Syria and Afghanistan; to a smaller degree from Iraq and Iran) or non-deportable aliens whose asylum claims have been rejected (mostly from Pakistan, Bangladesh), but who managed not to be sent back home. Some of these non-deportable persons have meanwhile managed to change their status into temporary protection.

In 2020, some **1.7 million Asians living in an EU Member State were people recognised as refugees, people granted humanitarian protection or asylum seekers with pending claims**. Germany (968,000) was the leading EU country hosting Asian asylum seekers and refugees. Other major host countries of Asian refugees were Sweden (168,000), France (135,000) Austria (113,000), and Greece (79,000); UNHCR 2020). As there have been 3.1 million first asylum claims of Asian citizens in the EU since the early 2000s, the stock of Asian citizens recognised as refugees or granted humanitarian protection is larger as many of those who came before 2010 have become regular long-term residents or citizens of EU Member States (which changes their status in official statistics).

II. Key migration corridors: inter-continental migration from and intra-regional migration within Asia

Western Asia

In 2020, just over **one in eight Asians living abroad was from Western Asia** (13.4 million migrants). The majority of them were residing within Asia, but Western Asians have also moved to Europe and North America (Fig. 6).

Different migration patterns can be identified:

- **The most important sending country is Pakistan (6.3 million abroad). Low skilled Pakistanis are working as temporary labour on a revolving basis in the Gulf States**, with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UA Emirates as main destinations. Pakistanis residing in Europe (mainly UK) as well as in the US, Canada and Australia are either better qualified or have come through marriage migration or as sponsored family members.⁵
- **The number of Afghan-born people living abroad is almost as large (5.8 million).** Most Afghan refugees, irregular labour migrants and dependent family members were living in neighbouring Pakistan, Iran and Turkey: some of them already for many years or even decades, while others were more recently displaced. Only a minority has succeeded in coming to Western Europe or being resettled in North America. In recent years (before the 2021 Taliban takeover) Afghans in Iran, Pakistan and Turkey have been sent back to their home country in large numbers: about 5,3 million people altogether between 2015 and 2021. At the same time most Afghans residing in Europe have either been granted refugee status/humanitarian protection or are rejected asylum seekers who are not being repatriated.
- Iran has a considerably smaller number of people living abroad (1.3 million). Most of them left the country after the Iranian Revolution (1979) and establishment of the Mullah regime (1981). The majority of them is well qualified. Unlike Afghans and Pakistanis, the Iranian migrants mainly reside overseas. Most important destination countries are the USA and Canada. Within Europe, the UK, Germany, Turkey, Sweden and France were the main destinations. Unlike citizens of many other predominantly Muslim countries of Asia Iranians are not working in the Gulf States. This mainly has to do with the political tensions between Iran and the Gulf States.

Top Western Asian-born diasporas by corridor

Only two corridors are linked to Europe (Pakistanis in the UK; Afghans in Germany). Other corridors are established within Western Asia and with the Gulf States.

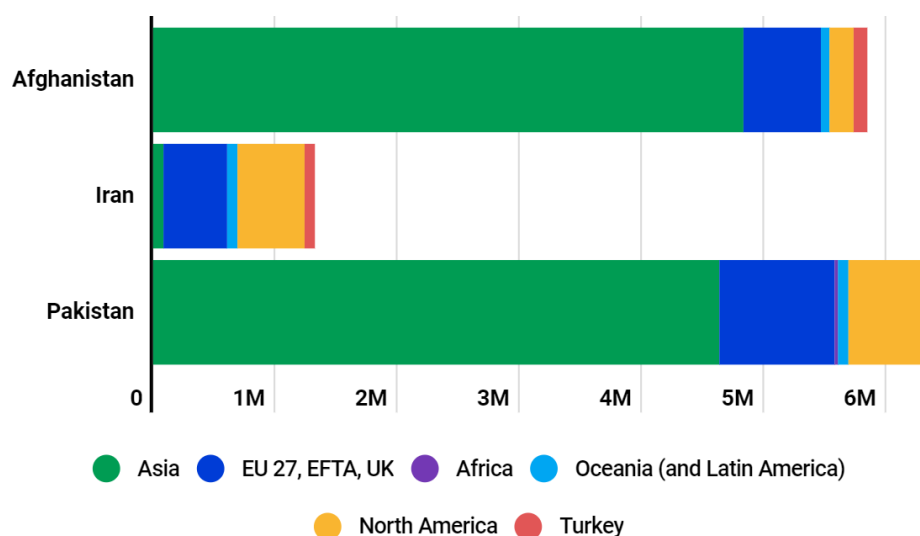
Top Diaspora corridors (2020 – stock data, UNDESA):

- Afghanistan – Iran (2.7 million)
- Afghanistan – Pakistan (1.5 million)
- Afghanistan – Saudi Arabia (0.4 million)
- Afghanistan – Germany (0.2)

⁵ In Europe this form of family migration is restricted to spouses and dependent children below age 18. In the USA, Canada and Australia naturalised immigrants can also sponsor their parents, siblings, and adult offspring (children above age 18).

- Iran – USA (0.4 million)
- Pakistan – Saudi Arabia (1.1 million), UAE (0.9 million)
- Pakistan – UK (0.5 million)
- Pakistan – USA (0.3 million), Canada (0.2 million)

FIGURE 6: ASIA’S MIGRANTS AND DIASPORAS – WESTERN ASIANS LIVING ABROAD BY CONTINENT OF DESTINATION (STOCK DATA), MID-2020, ABSOLUTE NUMBERS, IN MILLIONS



Source: UN DESA 2020

Arab Peninsula/Gulf States

With the exception of Yemen, the Arab Peninsula is not a significant region of origin. In 2020, just 2% of all Asians living abroad were from this part of Asia (2.1 million migrants). The majority of them (1.3 million) were Yemen-born people residing in the Gulf States as de facto refugees and (partly regular, partly irregular) labour migrants (Fig. 7).

Two different migration patterns can be identified:

- **On the one hand, 1.2 million Yemenis have moved to neighbouring Gulf States** (mainly to Saudi Arabia, but also to the UA Emirates and Oman) while only 134,000 have managed to move outside the region (East Africa, Europe, Australia, USA). This migration is mainly driven by the ongoing civil and faith-based (Sunni vs. Shia Muslim) war in the country. People try to escape destruction and political violence as well as the risk of being drafted into one of the fighting factions/militias. They also react to widespread poverty and food insecurity.
- **On the other hand, citizens of the Gulf States move within the region as well as to (western) Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia.** In 2020, about 0.7 million Gulf State-born people were living outside their country of birth.

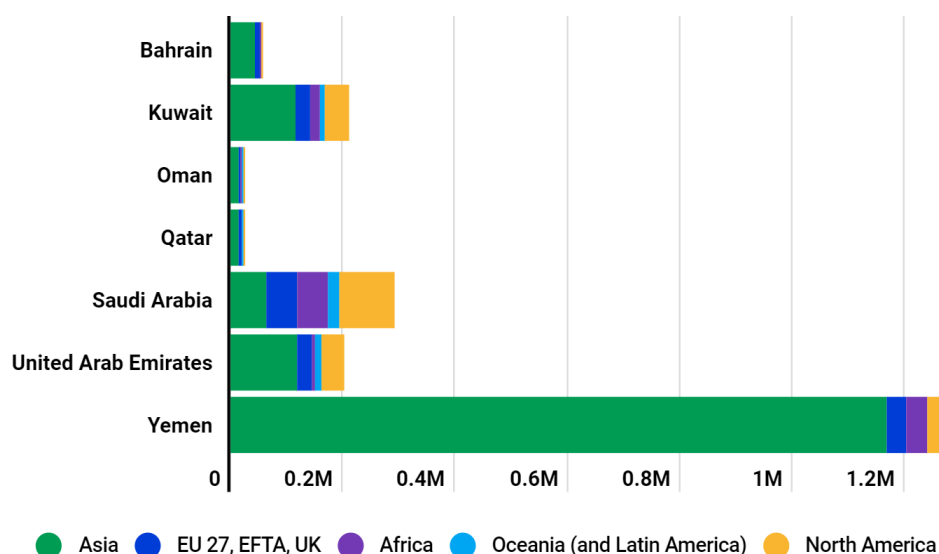
Top Arab Peninsula-born diasporas by corridor

Only three main corridors can be identified. None of them is linked to Europe. Two corridors have established themselves within the Arab Peninsula.

Top diaspora corridors (2020 – stock data, UNDESA):

- Yemen – Saudi Arabia (0.7 million)
- Yemen – UAE (0.2 million)
- Saudi Arabia – USA (less than 0.1 million)

FIGURE 7: ASIA’S MIGRANTS AND DIASPORAS – ARAB PENINSULA MIGRANTS LIVING ABROAD BY CONTINENT OF DESTINATION (STOCK DATA), MID-2020, ABSOLUTE NUMBERS, IN MILLIONS



Source: UN DESA 2020

Asian Middle East

In 2020, about one in eight Asians living abroad was from the Asian Middle East (13.1 million migrants). A third of them were residing within Asia and another third in Turkey (Fig. 8).

The following migration patterns can be identified:

- **By far the most important sending country is Syria with 8.5 million members of its original population living abroad.** Almost all of them have moved out of their country of origin since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011. Main receiving countries were first and foremost neighbouring Turkey (3.8 million) as well as neighbouring Middle Eastern countries (Lebanon: 852,000, Jordan: 668,000, Iraq: 246,000). In 2020, 1.3 million Syrians were residing in Europe; more than half of them in Germany (0.7 million). Sweden and Austria also host considerable Syrian refugee populations. In 2020, about 1 million Syrians (without refugee status) were living in the Gulf States; most of them in Saudi Arabia (0.8 million).
- **Iraq is a distant second with 2.0 million people living abroad.** Emigration started already during the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein in the 1980s and 1990s but increased considerably after the Western military invasion of 2003 led by the US and a few EU Member States contributed to sectarian

violence and civil war. Today many Iraqis reside in the neighbourhood of their home country: in the Gulf States (Saudi Arabia: 0.8 million), in Jordan (0.2 million) and in Turkey (0.2 million). A few Iraqi refugees from the early 2000s still reside in Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. Western Europe, in 2020, also hosted some 648,000 people born in Iraq – with Germany and Sweden hosting the largest groups. Most of them were either recognised refugees and people benefiting from humanitarian protection or followed as dependent spouses and children profiting from family reunion. Another 330,000 had moved to the USA and Canada; some of them through refugee resettlement, but many also based on skills.

- **Emigration from Lebanon (0.8 million people living abroad in 2020)** took place to a diverse range of destinations: in 2020, the EU, EFTA + UK were home and host to 250,000 people born in Lebanon; most of them residing in France. The Gulf States hosted 240,000 Lebanese citizens. The USA, Canada and Australia were home and host to 330,000 people born in Lebanon.
- **Emigrants from Jordan (0.8 million people living abroad in 2020)** are mainly people working in the Gulf States on a temporary basis.
- **Emigration from Israel (officially 0.4 million Israel-born people abroad in 2020)** is most likely not fully documented and therefore underestimated as a considerable share of Israeli citizens (including many dual citizens) leaving (predominantly for the USA and for Western Europe) are maintaining some form of residence in Israel. It is also unclear how Palestinians and Druze (without Israeli citizenship) leaving annexed territory (East Jerusalem, Golan) are accounted for.
- Most of the **4.1 million Palestinians** included in the migrants' stock data of UN DESA⁶ are (when taking their place of birth as criterion) neither international migrants nor refugees (as defined by the Geneva Convention), but persons registered and supported by UNRWA living in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The vast majority of them are descendants of Palestinians who fled or were expelled from Israel in 1948 or left the West Bank and Gaza in 1967.⁷ Beyond that there are 0.5 million Palestinians who have migrated to the Gulf States, North Africa and other destinations.

Top Middle East Asian-born diasporas by corridor

Only two main corridors are linked to Europe (Syrian-born and Iraq-born people in Germany). Other corridors have established themselves within Western Asia and with Turkey.

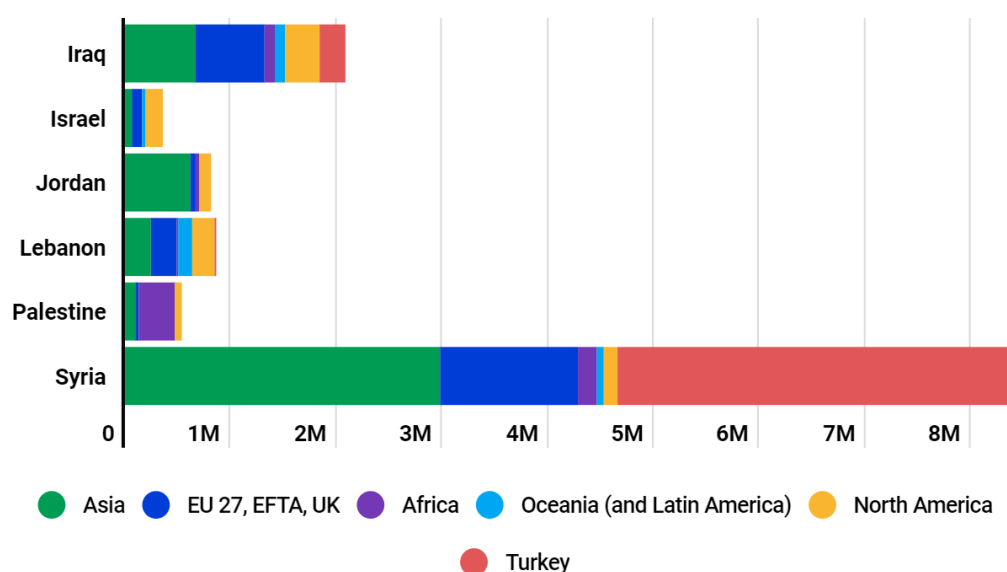
Top diaspora corridors (2020 – stock data, UNDESA):

- Syria – Turkey (3.8 million)
- Syria – Lebanon (0.9 million)
- Syria – Saudi Arabia (0.8 million)
- Syria – Jordan (0.7 million)
- Syria – Germany (0.7 million)
- Iraq – Germany (0.2 million)
- Iraq – USA (0.2 million)
- Iraq – Turkey (0.2 million)
- Iraq – Jordan (0.2 million)

⁶ Estimates based on UNRWA and national statistics.

⁷ UNRWA counts another 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank (occupied territories) with ancestors expelled or displaced in 1948 from Israel.

FIGURE 8: ASIA'S MIGRANTS AND DIASPORAS – MIDDLE EASTERN ASIANS LIVING ABROAD BY CONTINENT OF DESTINATION (STOCK DATA), MID-2020, ABSOLUTE NUMBERS, IN MILLIONS



Source: UN DESA 2020

Central Asia

In 2020, about **one in twelve Asians living abroad was from Central Asia** (8.0 million migrants). Two thirds of them were residing in Russia (Fig. 9).

The following migration patterns can be identified:

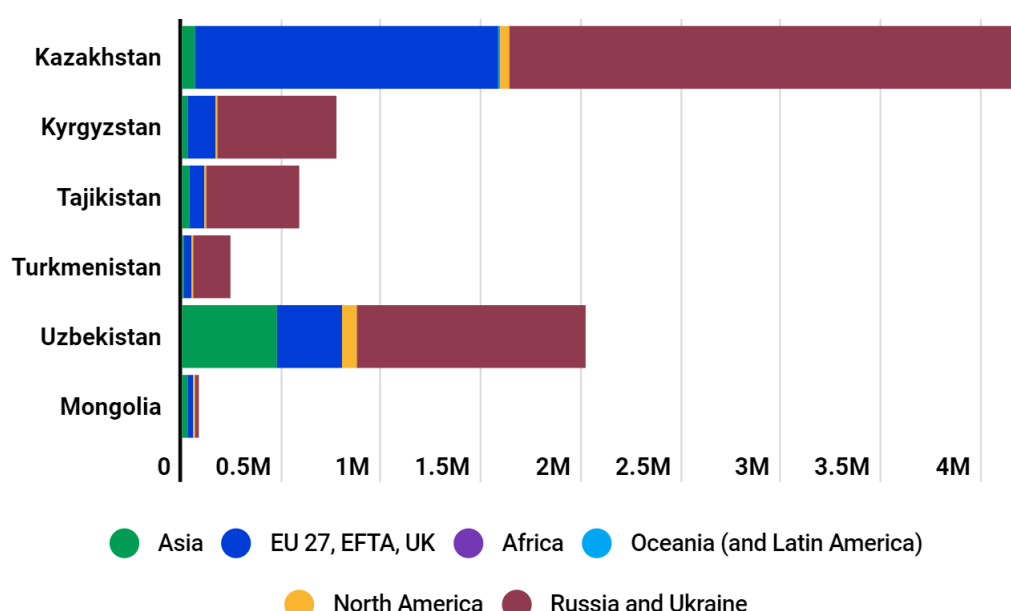
- **By far the most important sending country is Kazakhstan with 4.3 million members of its original population living abroad in 2020.** The majority of them moved out of their country of origin following the dissolution of the former Soviet Union in 1991/92. The main receiving country was first and foremost neighbouring Russia (2.6 million) followed by Germany (1.1 million) and Ukraine (0.2 million).
- The second **most important sending country is Uzbekistan** (2.0 million) with Russia being the most important destination (1.1 million) followed by neighbouring Kazakhstan (0.3 million), Germany (0.3 million) and Ukraine (0.2 million).
- **Kyrgyzstan (0.7 million people living abroad in 2020) and Tajikistan (0.6 million people)** have similar migration patterns with Russia and Germany being the main destinations.
- **Two main groups have moved to Russia and Ukraine:** On the one hand, **ethnic Russians and Ukrainians born during Soviet times in Central Asia**, many of whom did not want to live as members of an ethnic minority in the region or who followed their Russian-born/Ukrainian-born parents when they returned after Central Asian countries became independent; on the other hand, **temporary labour migrants and educational migrants**. The number of the latter might be underestimated in our analysis due to the fact that many Central Asians hold Russian citizenship and might not be represented in Russia's migration statistics. Migration to Russia is encouraged by the Russian state resettlement programmes for

compatriots and the Federal Laws on a simplified procedure for obtaining residence and citizenship for persons who have at least one parent in the Russian Federation, as well as stateless persons born in the USSR and who had USSR citizenship in the past.⁸ Despite the general hostility towards non-Russian migrants among the Russian population, the country has been increasingly reliant on Central Asian migrant workers and the State Migration Policy Concept 2019–2025 aims at using migration to partially compensate for the decline in the country's working population.⁹

- **Those who have moved to Germany were either people of ethnic German origin or family members of ethnic Germans** who had been admitted by Germany since the 1970s (1.4 million in total from Central Asia).¹⁰ This flow has meanwhile come to an end. Between 2010 and 2020 only 52,000 ethnic Germans and family members were admitted.¹¹

Top Central Asian-born diasporas by corridor

FIGURE 9: ASIA'S MIGRANTS AND DIASPORAS – CENTRAL ASIANS LIVING ABROAD BY CONTINENT OF DESTINATION (STOCK DATA), MID-2020, ABSOLUTE NUMBERS, IN MILLIONS



Source: UN DESA 2020

Only two main corridors are linked to Western Europe (Kazakh-born and Uzbek-born people in Germany). And they reflect an ethnic German migration pattern that is no longer relevant. Other corridors have established themselves between Central Asia and Russia.

Top corridors:

- Kazakhstan – Russia (2.5 million)
- Kazakhstan – Germany (1.1 million)

⁸ Part 1, Article 14 of the Federal Law “On Citizenship of the Russian Federation”.

⁹ Russia’s State Migration Policy Concept 2019–2025 <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/columns/asian-kaleidoscope/russia-s-state-migration-policy-concept-2019-2025/>

¹⁰ Another 1.0 million had come from Russia.

¹¹ <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/zahlen-und-fakten/soziale-situation-in-deutschland/61643/spaet-aussiedler/>

- Uzbekistan – Russia (1.1 million)
- Uzbekistan – Kazakhstan (0.3 million)
- Uzbekistan – Germany (0.3 million)
- Uzbekistan – Ukraine (0.2 million)
- Kyrgyzstan – Russia (0.6 million)
- Tajikistan – Russia (0.5 million)

Southern Asia

In 2020, more than **one in four Asians living abroad was from Southern Asia** (28.9 million migrants). The large majority of them were residing within Asia and a smaller part in North America and Western Europe (Fig. 6).

The following migration patterns can be identified:

- **By far the most important sending country is India with 17.7 million Indian-born people living abroad (2020).** The majority of them (12.2 mn) is living and working in other Asian countries, namely in the Gulf States (about 8 million) and in USA (2.7 million), Canada (0.7 million), the UK (0.8 million) and Australia (0.5 million). Most of these people are skilled migrants working abroad on a temporary basis. One fifth of all Indian-born emigrants reside in North America (3.4 million). Some 1.4 million India-born emigrants live in Western Europe. Most of them in the UK. Australia also is an important destination (0.7 million). The majority of those, who have moved to Europe, The USA, Canada and Australia live there on a permanent basis.
- **Bangladesh is a distant second with 7.4 million people living abroad (2020).** Most of them are working on a temporary basis in the Gulf States (2.4 million) and in India (2.5 million). Less than 0.5 million Bangladesh-born people reside in Europe. Most of them in the UK.
- Nepal is an important sending country with 2.5 million people living abroad (2020). Most of them work on a temporary basis in Malaysia, the Gulf States (namely Qatar and the UA Emirates), and in India. The USA and Canada are home to about 0.2 million (mostly permanent) immigrants from Nepal.
- Sri Lanka, in 2020, had about 2.0 million migrants living abroad. A relative majority were residing as temporary workers in the Gulf States (mainly Saudi Arabia, the UA Emirates and Qatar) and in Lebanon. About 0.4 million Sri Lanka-born emigrants are living in Europe (mainly in the UK, Italy and France). Sri Lankans have also moved to North America (0.2 million) and to Australia. Part of the Sri Lankan Diaspora living in India, Europe, North America and Australia came as Tamil refugees during the Sri Lankan civil war (1983-2009).
- Compared to its small population size the Maldives have a considerable part of its population living in Australia (80,000).

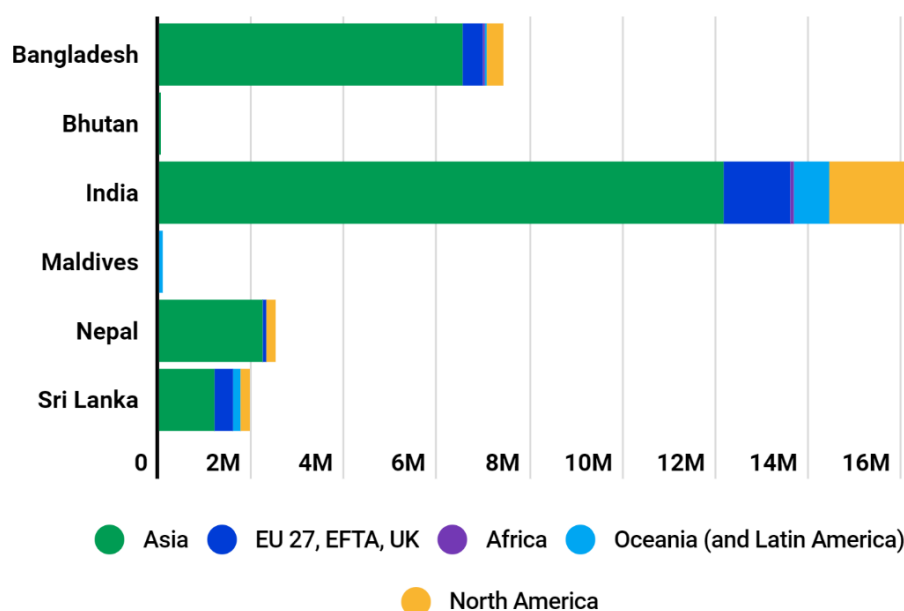
Top Southern Asian-born diasporas by corridor

Only two main corridors are linked to Europe (Indian-born and Bangladesh-born people in the UK). Other corridors have established themselves within Asia as well as with traditional immigration countries (USA, Canada, Australia).

Top corridors:

- Bangladesh – India (2.5 million)
- Bangladesh – Saudi Arabia (1.2 million), UAE (1.0 million)
- Bangladesh – UK (0.2 million)
- Sri Lanka – Saudi Arabia (0.5 million)
- India – UAE (3.5 million), Kuwait (1.1 million), Oman (1.4 million), Qatar (0.7 million)
- India – USA (2.7 million), Canada (0.7 million)
- India – UK (0.8 million)
- India – Australia (0.5 million)

FIGURE 10: ASIA'S MIGRANTS AND DIASPORAS – EAST ASIANS LIVING ABROAD BY CONTINENT OF DESTINATION
(STOCK DATA), MID-2020, ABSOLUTE NUMBERS, IN MILLIONS



Source: UN DESA 2020

East Asia

In 2020, about **one in seven Asians living abroad were from East Asia (14.7 million migrants)**. Less than half of them were residing within Asia and a third in North America (Fig. 10).

The following migration patterns can be identified:

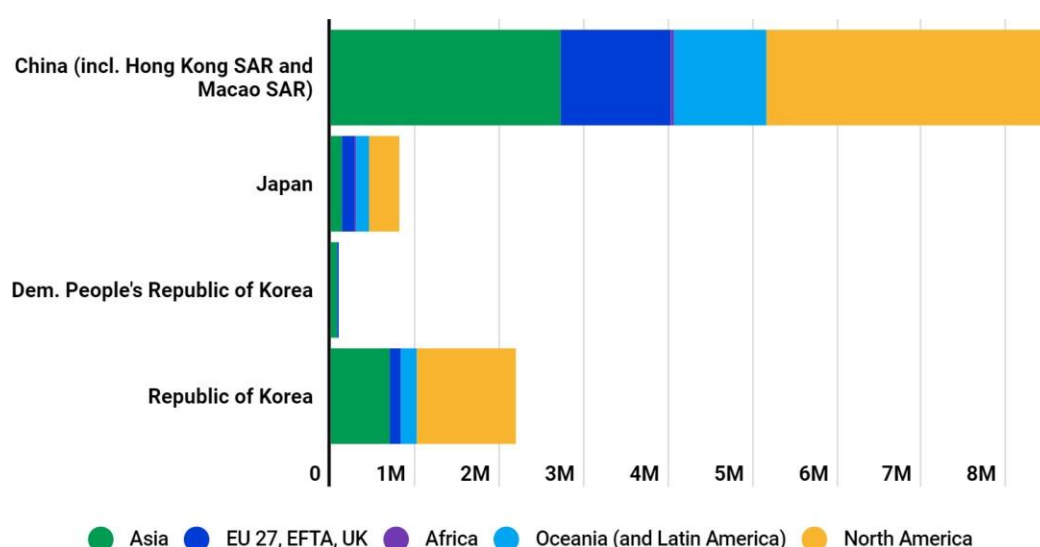
- **By far the most important sending country is China with 8.6 million Chinese born living abroad (2020).**¹² Half of them had moved to another Asian country, namely to Japan (0.8 million), South Korea (0.8

¹² Mainland Chinese living in Hong Kong/Macau and people born in Hong Kong/Macau living in mainland China not included (see box on data).

million), and Singapore (0.4 million). A third resided in North America (USA: 2.1 million, Canada: 0.7 million). Among them were both skilled workers and landed immigrants, but also Chinese students. In 2020, about 1.3 million Chinese born resided in Europe; in Italy (233,000), Germany 140,000) and UK (208,000) in particular.

- **East Asia's other main sending country is the Republic of Korea (South Korea) with 2.2 million people residing abroad.** Half of them live in the US and Canada (1.1 million) and a third in another Asian country, mostly in Japan (0.5 million). Australia also is an important destination for Koreans. Migratory ties between Korea and the USA go back to the Korean War (1950-1953) when large numbers of GIs were stationed in South Korea.
- **Emigration from Japan has not reached significant numbers.** About **0.8 million people** were living abroad in 2020; almost half of them in the US and Canada.
- Data for emigration from Taiwan are not available,¹³ but there are over 1 million Taiwanese-born people living in mainland China.

FIGURE 10: ASIA'S MIGRANTS AND DIASPORAS – EAST ASIANS LIVING ABROAD BY CONTINENT OF DESTINATION (STOCK DATA), MID-2020, ABSOLUTE NUMBERS, IN MILLIONS



Source: UN DESA 2020

Top Eastern Asian-born diasporas by corridor

None of the main corridors is linked to Europe. Most corridors have established themselves between East Asia and traditional immigration countries.

Top corridors:

- China – USA (2.1 million), Canada (0.7 million)

¹³ Taiwan is not an internationally recognised country and not member of the UN. For this reason, UN DESA does not collect and publish population and migration data. Results for Taiwan are also not included in the results for PR China (mainland). The Taiwanese government publishes data on their diaspora, but this includes estimates for all people with Taiwanese ancestry including those born abroad.

- China – Republic of Korea (0.8 million)
- China – Japan (0.8 million)
- China – Australia (0.6 million)
- Republic of Korea – USA (1.0 million)

South-East Asia

In 2020, almost **one in four Asians living abroad was from South-East Asia** (22.3 million migrants). More than half of them were residing within Asia and less than a quarter in North America (Fig. 11).

The following migration patterns can be identified:

- **The most important sending country are the Philippines with 6.1 million emigrants living abroad (2020).** Almost half of them resided in North America (2.7 million) and about 40% (2.4 million) mostly as temporary labour in other Asian countries; in the Gulf States in particular (Saudi Arabia: 0.6 million, UA Emirates 0.5 million). About 0.6 million have moved to Europe on a more or less permanent basis. They are mainly living in Italy (2020: 151,000), the UK (142,000), Germany (62,000) and Spain (51,000).
- **Indonesia ranked second with 4.6 million people living abroad (2020).** Almost all of them had moved temporarily as skilled or unskilled workers to another **Asian country**. The Gulf States (namely Saudi Arabia: 1.7 million), neighbouring Malaysia (1.2 million), United Arab Emirates (318,000), China (171,000) predominantly in Hong Kong SAR, Singapore (160,000), Bangladesh (150,000), are the most important destinations. Other destinations including Europe (180,000), North America (120,000) and Australia (110,000) only play a minor role.
- **For various reasons Myanmar is an important sending country. In 2020, there were 3.8 million people living abroad;** almost all of them in other Asian countries. On the one hand, there was temporary labour working in other South-East Asian countries. On the other hand, there are members of ethnic or religious minorities (namely Rohingya) who fled to neighbouring countries or were forced to leave. As a result, Bangladesh (0.9 million), Thailand (0.8 million) and Malaysia (0.3 million) in 2020 were hosting larger numbers of people born in Myanmar.
- **Malaysia, in 2020, had 1.8 million people living abroad.** The large majority of them (1.4 million) were temporary labour migrants working in the Gulf States and in Singapore. The only important destination outside Asia is Australia (0.2 million).
- **Compared to its population size Laos has a sizeable number of people living abroad (2020: 1.3 million).** The majority of them are living in neighbouring Thailand (0.9 million). The only important destination outside Asia is the USA (0.2 million).
- **Cambodia, in 2020, had 1.1 million people living abroad.** The majority of them were living in Asia (0.7 million); mostly in neighbouring Thailand (691,000). Less than 0.2 million had moved to North America, mostly to the USA.
- **Thailand has the geographically most diversified migration pattern. In 2020, some 1.1 million Thai-born people were living abroad.** About a third of them had moved to other Asian countries (0.4 million), predominantly to the Republic of Korea (160,000) and to neighbouring South-East Asian countries

(123,000). A quarter was living in Europe (0.3 million); and a fifth in North America, most of them in the USA (0.2 million).

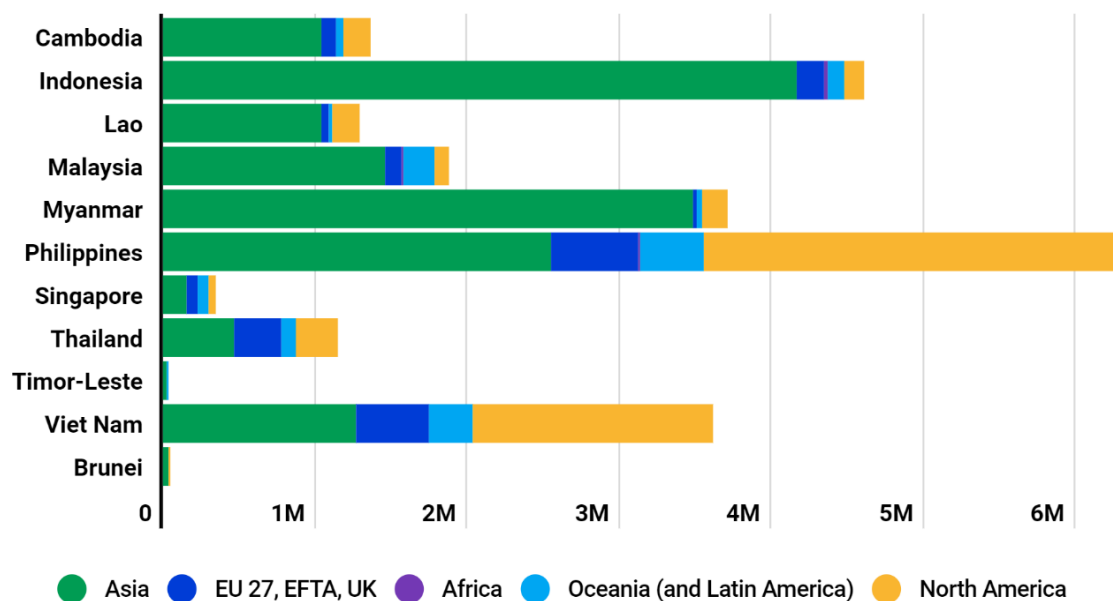
Top South-East Asian-born diasporas by corridor

None of the main corridors is linked to Europe. Most corridors have established themselves within South-East Asia as well as with the Gulf States.

Top corridors:

- Philippines – USA (2.0 million)
- Philippines – Saudi Arabia (0.6 million), UAE (0.5 million)
- Philippines – Australia (0.3 million)
- Indonesia – Saudi Arabia (1.7 million)
- Indonesia – Malaysia (1.2 million)
- Myanmar – Thailand (1.8 million)
- Myanmar – Bangladesh (0.9 million)
- Myanmar – Malaysia (0.3 million)
- Laos – Thailand (0.9 million)
- Vietnam – USA (1.4 million)
- Malaysia – Singapore (1.1 million)

FIGURE 11: ASIA'S MIGRANTS AND DIASPORAS – SOUTH-EAST ASIANS LIVING ABROAD BY CONTINENT OF DESTINATION (STOCK DATA), MID-2020, ABSOLUTE NUMBERS, IN MILLIONS



Source: UN DESA 2020

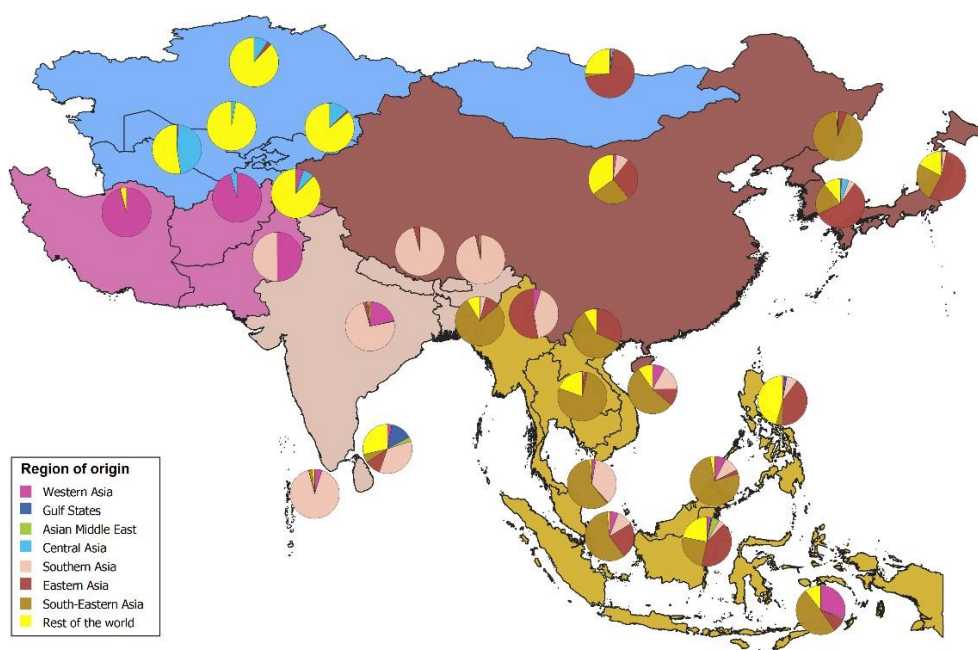
III. Asia as a destination for migrants: migration to and within Asia

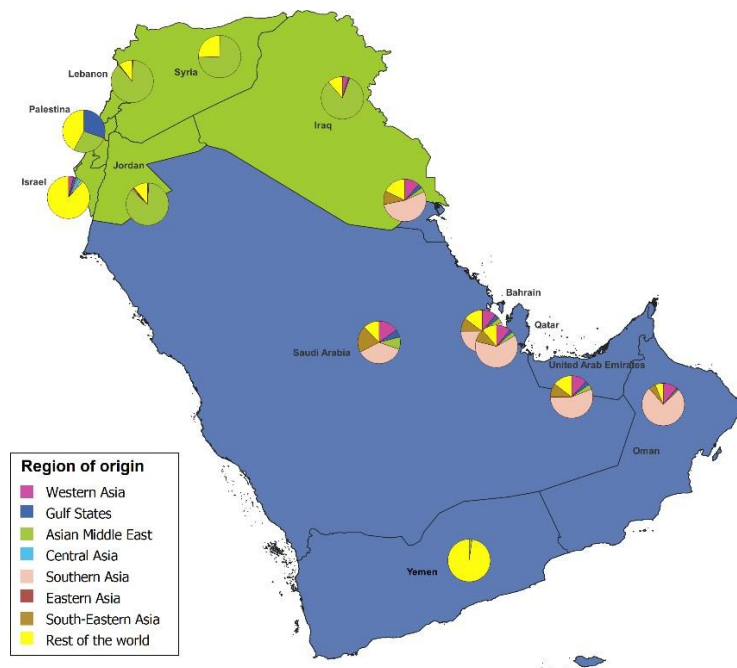
Asia, in 2020, was home and host to 70 million international migrants. Most of these migrants living in Asia (57 million) were of Asian origin. Numbers of people born in other continents were comparably small or their migration occurred on a regional basis within the Arab world (2020: 12.8 million non-Asian migrants).

The majority of the non-Asian-born migrants living in Asia were Europeans both from Western Europe and from Russia. The second largest group included Africans both from Egypt and from the Horn of Africa.

Until the 1980s, most non-Asian migrants living in Asia were ethnic Russians and Ukrainians who had moved to Central Asia (internal mobility within the Soviet Union) as well as people with ethnic minority background (ethnic Germans, Crimean Tatars, etc.) deported and forcibly resettled in Central Asia during World War II by the Stalin regime. Since the 1990s, immigration from Europe and North America to Asia is mainly driven by skilled labour migrants recruited by the Gulf States, Singapore, and Hong Kong.

FIGURE 12: MIGRATION TOWARDS AND WITHIN ASIA
FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION IN ASIA (STOCK DATA), 2020





Note: Chinese citizens born in mainland China and living in Hong Kong or Macau, Chinese born in Hong Kong or Macau and living in mainland China as well as Palestinians living in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria under the mandate of UNRWA are not included as they do not live outside their country of birth.

Source: UN DESA

Labour migration

The **most important destinations** for both skilled and unskilled labour migrants (and their dependent family members) in Asia are **Saudi Arabia (2020: 13.4 million foreign-born residents) and the UA Emirates (8.7 million foreign-born residents)**. Kuwait (2.9 million), Oman (2.2 million) and Qatar (2.1 million) also have large numbers of foreign-born residents, most of them migrant labour.

Most **unskilled migrants working in the Gulf States** are recruited on a strictly rotational basis **from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, South-East Asia** and, to a smaller extent, from East Africa. **Qualified migrants usually come from neighbouring Arab countries (Egypt, Gulf States, and Iraq), from Europe and North America, but also from India.** The Gulf States also host globalised expat communities and members of political and economic elites. Their status is less much less precarious than that of unskilled labour migrants and domestic workers, but they usually also do not have a pathway to permanent residence permits.

The Gulf States do not grant humanitarian protection, but they host migrants from refugee-producing countries: namely from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. Part of that migrant population has either no legal status or a temporary workers' permit, but would qualify for humanitarian protection if European standards were applied.

The Gulf States do not only host a very large migrant population, but the migrants also represent a large share of their total population. In Bahrain (52%), Kuwait (62%), Qatar (85%) and the UA Emirates (89%) the migrants represent a demographic majority. As the large majority of these immigrants has no pathway to permanent residence status there is also no emergence of settled diasporas.

Other labour importing countries of Asia are: India (2020: 5.0 million foreign-born), Thailand (3.6 million), Malaysia (3.2 million), Singapore (1.9 million), South Korea (1.1 million). In these countries the geographic range of origins is narrower. The majority of immigrants has come from neighbouring countries.

- India mainly attracts migrants from Bangladesh (2.5 million) and Nepal (734,000).
- Thailand mainly receives migrants from Myanmar (1.8 million), Laos (941,000), Cambodia (692,000).
- Immigration to Malaysia originates from Indonesia (1.2 million), Myanmar (350,000) and Nepal (585,000), but also from Bangladesh (415,000).
- Singapore receives migrants from neighbouring Indonesia (160,000) and Malaysia (1.1 million), but also from China (514,000) and India (145,000). In 2021, foreign-born residents represented a third of Singapore's total population. Among them were 0.5 million permanent residents and 1.4 million people admitted on temporary work and residence permits.
- South Korea mainly has immigrants from China (803,000) and from the South-East Asia: Vietnam (177,000) and Thailand (159,000).

Refugees

Several Asian countries host large numbers of refugees from their neighbourhood. The main destination countries are

- **Pakistan and Iran (for Afghan refugees)**
- **Bangladesh and Malaysia (for Rohingya from Myanmar)**
- **Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq (for Syrian refugees)**

Lebanon, Jordan and Syria also host Palestinians (under the UNRWA mandate). Data from UN DESA and UNHCR categorise them as migrants and refugees, but almost all of them are born in one of these three countries (see box on data). Even though they are permanent residents most of them have no pathway to full integration and citizenship.

Soviet legacy

Some **Central Asian countries** have considerable numbers of **foreign-born citizens** and residents. This is particularly true **for Kazakhstan (3.4 million) and Uzbekistan (1.1 million) and Tajikistan (0.3 million).** Part of this is due to the legacy. Prior to 1989-90, many Russians and Ukrainians settled in the Central Asian part of the USSR. Members of some ethnic minorities (for example ethnic Germans and Crimean Tatars) were forcibly resettled. Technically they all became international migrants when the Soviet successor states declared independence in 1991.

Subsequent ethnic conflicts (in particular in the Fergana valley) have led to refugee flows between Central Asian countries. In recent years, ethnic immigration has declined and Kazakhstan also started to host labour migrants. The number of migrant workers receiving work permits or patents – predominantly from Uzbekistan – grew remarkably from 141,000 in 2015 to 531,000 in 2019.¹⁴ Among others, the country is

¹⁴ Kazakhstan Country Profile. <https://www.pragueprocess.eu/en/countries/419-republic-of-kazakhstan#:~:text=Since%202005%2C%20international%20migration%20to,to%2045%2C225%20people%20in%202019.>

an increasingly attractive destination for students, the number of whom increased from a little over 9,000 in 2014 to nearly 40,000 in 2019. Most students originate from other Central Asian countries and Russia.

Special cases

China (PR)

Compared to its total population size **the number of documented long-term immigrants living in China is fairly small: 1.4 million in 2020**. Three groups are of relevance: (a) highly skilled foreign workers, academics, and expats, (b) foreign students, and (c) brides imported from neighbouring countries to bridge the gender imbalance. The latter is a result of the selective abortion pattern emerging during the one-child policy of the past decades. That practice led to a quantitative excess of male over female newborns and subsequently to an excess of young males over young females.

Taiwan

According to the Taiwanese government, **797,122 foreigners were living in Taiwan at the end of 2020**; about 3.4% of Taiwan's resident population. Their primary countries of origin were Indonesia (32%), Vietnam (30%), and the Philippines (19%), followed by Thailand (8%) and Malaysia (3%).¹⁵ Indonesian labourers are predominantly working in the service sector, especially as domestic servants, caregivers, and nurses, while the Vietnamese and Filipino are increasingly employed in the fishing and traditional manufacturing industries.

Israel

Post-war immigration started with Jewish European holocaust survivors arriving in British governed Palestine and (after independence) in Israel. But the Israeli-Arab conflict starting in 1947-48 and the flight and expulsion of 0.8 million Palestinians soon led to massive antisemitism, discrimination and mistreatment of Jews living in North Africa and the Middle East. The consequence was large-scale immigration of people of Sephardic Jewish origin from North Africa and the Middle East to Israel (in its pre-1967 borders). This population movement has long come to an end, with people from the Falasha community airlifted from the Horn of Africa (mainly Ethiopia) to Israel.

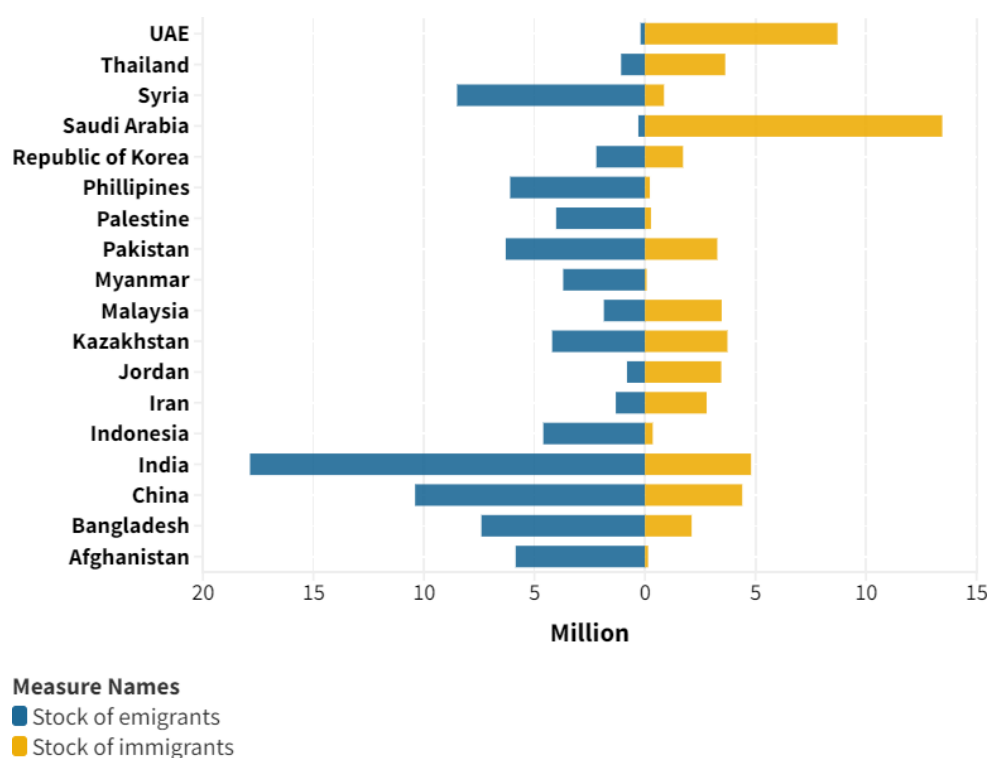
The majority of the **1.3 million permanent foreign-born citizens¹⁶ (2020) living in Israel** today were born in Russia, Ukraine, and other Soviet successor states. Most of them came in the 1990s and early 2000s as the dissolution of the Soviet Union suddenly made travel and emigration possible. Smaller numbers have come from North America (mainly USA) and Europe.

At the same time Israel hosts temporary foreign workers from non-Muslim countries in Asia, Africa, and eastern Europe. Asian countries of origin include the Philippines, Thailand, China and Nepal.

¹⁵ Taiwan. Country Profile <https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/taiwan/>

¹⁶ Jewish immigrants receive Israeli citizenship immediately after arrival.

FIGURE 13: MIGRATION ON BALANCE – ASIA’S TOP COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN AND DESTINATION (STOCK DATA), 2020, ABSOLUTE NUMBERS, IN MILLIONS



Migration on balance

Asia, like other world regions, has migrant sending and receiving countries. Some countries are both – sending and receiving – at the same time.

The most significant destinations are labour importing countries located in the Gulf States, namely Saudi Arabia and the UA Emirates. Other notable destination countries for labour migrants are India, Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand, and Singapore.

Asia’s other most significant destination countries are hosting refugees from neighbouring conflict zones: Iran and Pakistan (from Afghanistan); Jordan and Lebanon (from Syria); Bangladesh (from Myanmar).

The leading country of origin is India, due to emigration of labour and skills, educational as well as marriage migration. Number two is China. Other countries with larger numbers of migrant workers, students and family migrants abroad are Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, Indonesia and South Korea.

Several countries – especially China, India, (South) Korea and Malaysia – have a sizeable number of citizens living and working or studying abroad as well as labour (and other) migrants on their territory.

IV. Stock of refugees and internally displaced persons in Asia

Refugees and persons displaced by conflict

International refugee flows within and from Asia as well as internal displacement are major feature of the region. **Syria and Afghanistan were the top origin countries of refugees in the world in 2020 with 6.7 million Syrian and 2.6 million Afghan refugees abroad respectively.**¹⁷ This was (and still is) a consequence of conflict and political instability in these two countries. Currently, Syria is the country (not just in Asia, but globally) with the largest number of refugees and asylum seekers living abroad; followed by Afghanistan.

In 2020, the vast majority of refugees from Asian countries lived in neighbouring countries. **Refugees from Syria (6.7 million globally) were predominantly hosted by Turkey (more than 3.6 million), Lebanon (around 0.9 million) and Jordan (nearly 0.7 million), while around 1 million were living in EU Member States.** In 2020, the number of Syrian first-time asylum applicants in the EU fell to 63,500 from 74,900 in 2019, while the share of Syrians among total EU first-time applicants increased from 11.9% to 15.2%.¹⁸ At the same time, some 5.6 million people were displaced inside Syria (with a large concentration in the north-western province of Idlib: over 2 million in 2021).

Following a peak at the beginning of the 21st century, **numbers of registered Afghan refugees started to decline from 2002 reaching 2.7 million in 2019 and 2.6 million in 2020.** They were predominantly hosted by Pakistan and Iran. The return migration was partly voluntary, but often enforced as countries like Pakistan and Iran, but to a smaller extent also EU countries were sending Afghans back to their home country. Between 2015 and 2021, Iran and Pakistan alone sent back almost 5.3 million Afghan citizens. Forced repatriation of Afghans who had been denied refugee status in the EU never exceeded a few thousand per year.

Political and military events in Afghanistan in mid-2021 during the withdrawal of allied troops and the speedy resurgence of the Taliban retaking power from the Western-backed government lead to a resurgence of refugee numbers including both Afghans leaving their country (some with the help of EU and NATO countries)¹⁹ and Afghans already living abroad and asking for asylum. Higher numbers of refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan are expected in the years to come. At the same time large numbers of Afghans were (and still are) living as irregular migrants in Iran and Turkey.

Afghanistan, in 2020, also had some 4.6 million internally displaced people; of them: 3.5 million due to political violence and 1.1 million due to extreme weather conditions and climate change.

Due to violence against and persecution of ethno-religions minorities in general and Muslim Rohingya in particular. **With 1.1 million (2020) refugees Myanmar was the country of origin of the third largest refugee population in Asia and the fifth largest globally.** Most of these refugees were (and still are) hosted in Bangladesh with little prospect of return. Smaller numbers moved to Thailand and Malaysia.

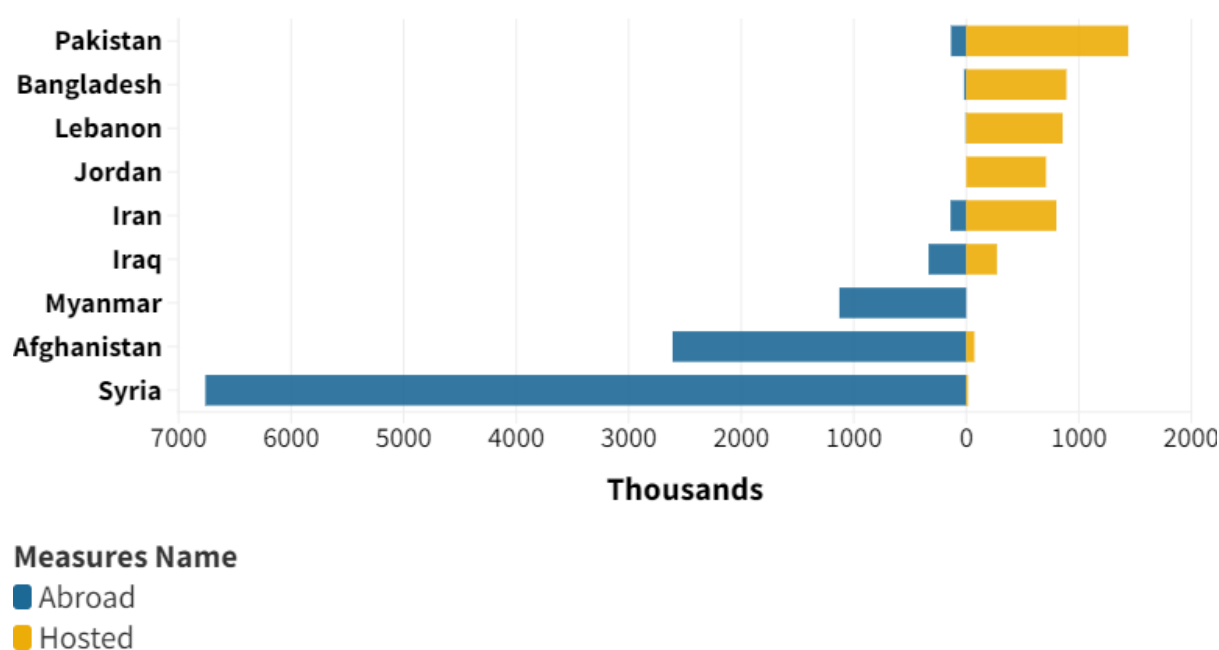
¹⁷ Meanwhile the refugee flow from Ukraine to the EU, Moldova and the UK has resulted in a comparable number of Ukrainians living abroad under temporary protected status while the number of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers has increased since the Taliban takeover.

¹⁸ Eurostat, 2020

¹⁹ EU Member States evacuated 22,000 Afghans in August-September 2021 from Kabul. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698776/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)698776_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698776/EPRS_BRI(2021)698776_EN.pdf)

Another 0.5 million people (2020) were internally displaced inside Myanmar as a result of political conflict and government repression.

FIGURE 14: ASIA'S MAIN REFUGEE-PRODUCING AND REFUGEE-RECEIVING COUNTRIES
STOCK OF REFUGEES, MID-2021 ABSOLUTE NUMBERS, IN THOUSANDS



Source: UNHCR, 2021

Countries producing refugees and asylum seekers such as Iraq and Iran are themselves also hosting refugees. In the case of Iran, the number of hosted de facto refugees by far exceeds the number of Iranian refugees and asylum seekers abroad.

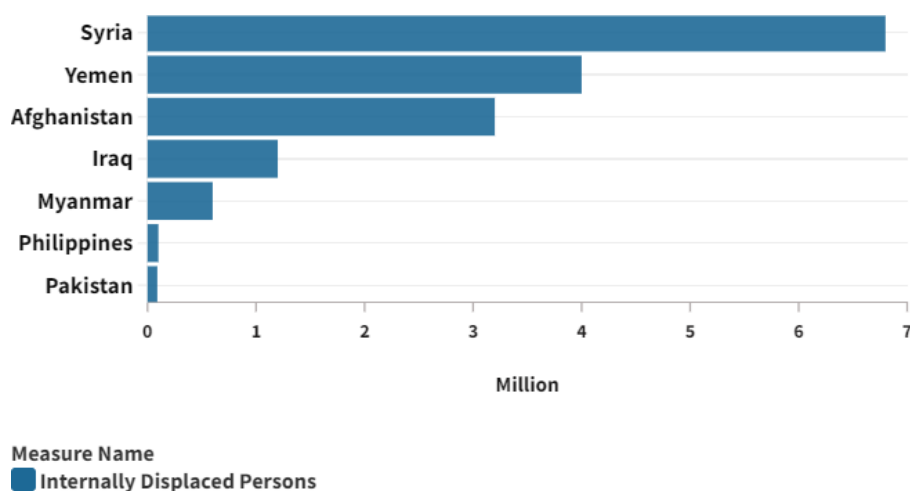
In contrast to other refugee-producing countries in Asia, Yemen and Iraq had more internally displaced people (due to violence) on their territory (Yemen: 4 million, Iraq: 1.2 million in 2020) than refugees and asylum seekers living abroad (Yemen: 177,500, Iraq: 283,000 in 2020).²⁰

In sum there were about 16 million (2020) Asian citizens internally displaced in their country of birth as a result of political violence or ongoing civil war (Fig. 15).

In 2020, UNRWA counted 5.8 million Palestinians falling under its mandate while the UN DESA database on international migrants showed 4.0 million Palestinians for the same year (the majority of them under UNRWA mandate in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria). We have to assume that only a very small minority of them were born on today's territory of Israel and expelled in 1948 or on Palestinian territory (West Bank, Gaza) fleeing in 1967 or emigrating at a later moment in time. The vast majority are descendants of refugees who left in 1948 or 1967. For this reason, most Palestinians under UNRWA mandate living in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria cannot be considered as international migrants.

²⁰ UNHCR, 2020 <https://reporting.unhcr.org/yemen?year=2020>; UNHCR <https://reporting.unhcr.org/iraq?year=2020>

FIGURE 15: INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs) RELATED TO POLITICAL VIOLENCE
STOCK OF IDPs IN ASIA, MID-2021 ABSOLUTE NUMBERS, IN MILLIONS



Source: UNHCR 2021, IDMC 2021

Persons displaced by natural disasters and extreme weather conditions

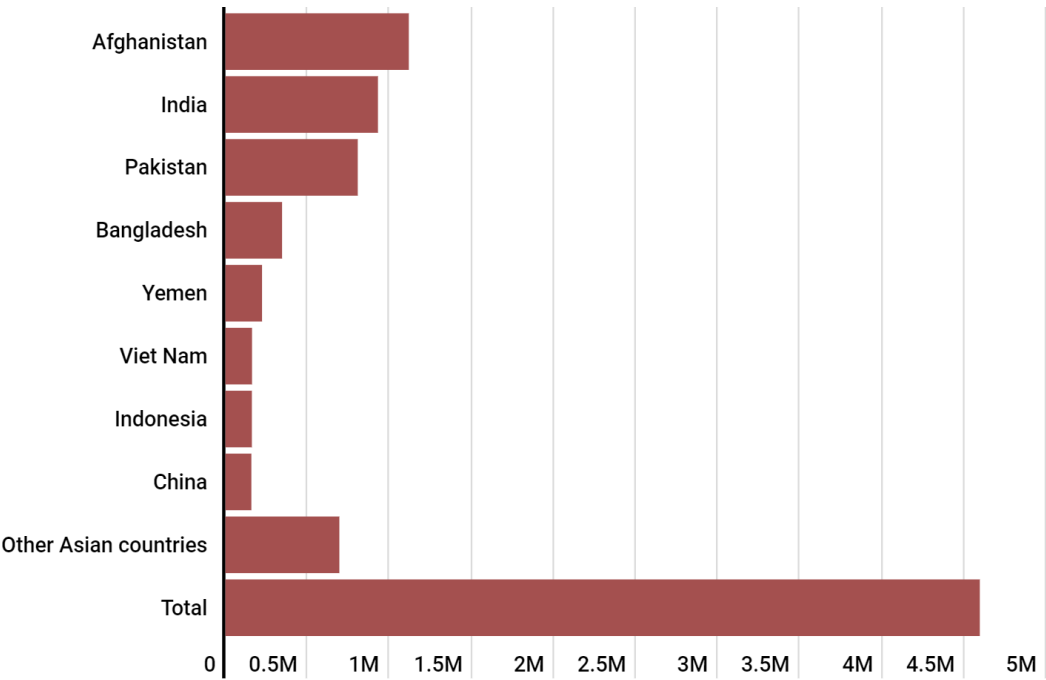
During any particular year the number of people who become newly displaced by natural disasters and extreme weather conditions (2020: 21.6 million in Asia) is much higher than the number of people newly displaced because of armed conflict and political violence (2020: 2.1 million in Asia). The consequences are, however, quite different. In most countries displaced victims of floods, storms, wildfires, tsunamis, etc. usually receive material support allowing them to return to the place they had to leave.

As a result, the number of people who remain long-term or permanently displaced after natural disasters is fairly small: 4.6 million in Asia altogether (2020). Of them, the largest groups were living in Afghanistan (1.1 million), in South Asia (0.9 million in India, 0.8 million in Pakistan, 345,000 in Bangladesh), as well as in South-East Asia (Indonesia: 158,000, Vietnam: 162,000) and on the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen: 233,000; Fig. 16).

Part of the protractedness of displacement following natural disasters can be explained by civil wars (Afghanistan until 2021, Yemen ongoing) or dysfunctional central governments (Afghanistan, Yemen) hampering return and reconstruction efforts or rendering them impossible – particularly in remote rural areas.

In Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Vietnam, however, permanent displacement can be linked to a permanent loss of livelihoods in coastal and river delta areas. Similar developments are affecting people living on small islands with low elevation as well as settlements along exposed shorelines and river deltas.

FIGURE 16: INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs) RELATED TO NATURAL DISASTERS
STOCK OF IDPS IN ASIA, 2020 ABSOLUTE NUMBERS, IN MILLIONS



Source: IDMC 2021

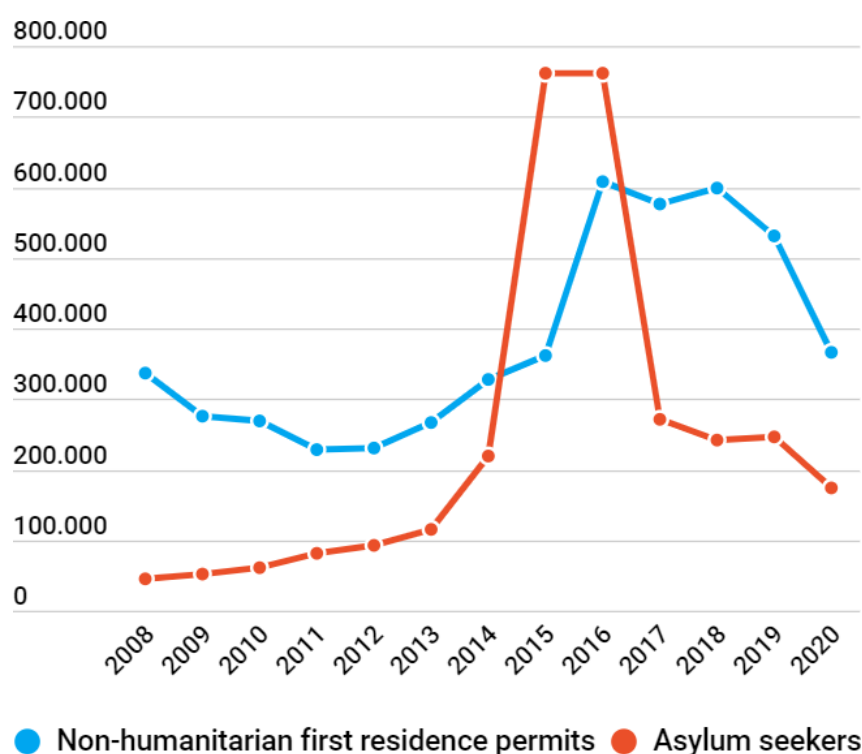
V. Flows of Asian migrants to Europe

During the years 2008-2020 More than 8 million Asians migrated to one of today's 27 EU Member States. Among them were 5 million Asians arriving in a regular manner who received regular residence permits²¹ (employment, education, marriage/family reunion) in the EU 27 (Figures 17, 18). During the same period, about 3.1 million Asian citizens asked for asylum in an EU Member State (Figure 21).

The annual number of asylum requests was low until 2013, then peaked in 2015-2016 and dropped after 2016. In contrast, the issuance of first residence permits increased after 2015 (Figure 21).

In the case of Western Asia (Afghanistan) and the Middle East (Iraq, Syria) the increase in regular permits was related to previous asylum requests opening the legal immigration avenue for dependent family members to join recognised refugees. Regular arrivals from South Asia, East Asia, South-East Asia and Central Asia were mostly not related to asylum flows (Figure 18).

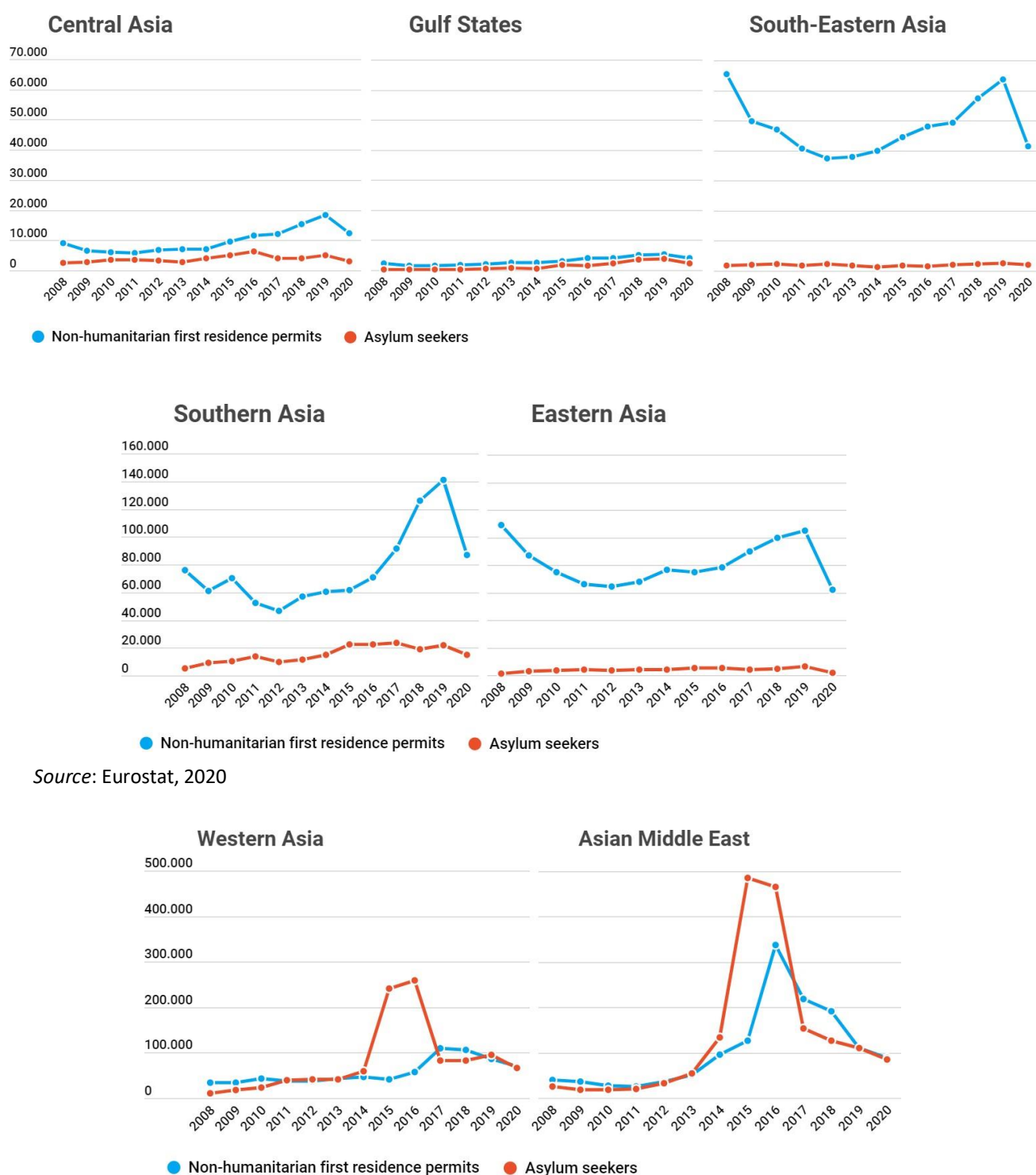
FIGURE 17: FLOW OF REGULAR ASIAN MIGRANTS AND ASIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS TO EU27, 2008-2020



Source: Eurostat, 2020

²¹ Only residence permits issued for a period of 12+ months are taken into consideration.

FIGURE 18: FLOW OF REGULAR ASIAN MIGRANTS AND ASIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS TO EU27 BY REGION OF ORIGIN, 2008-2020



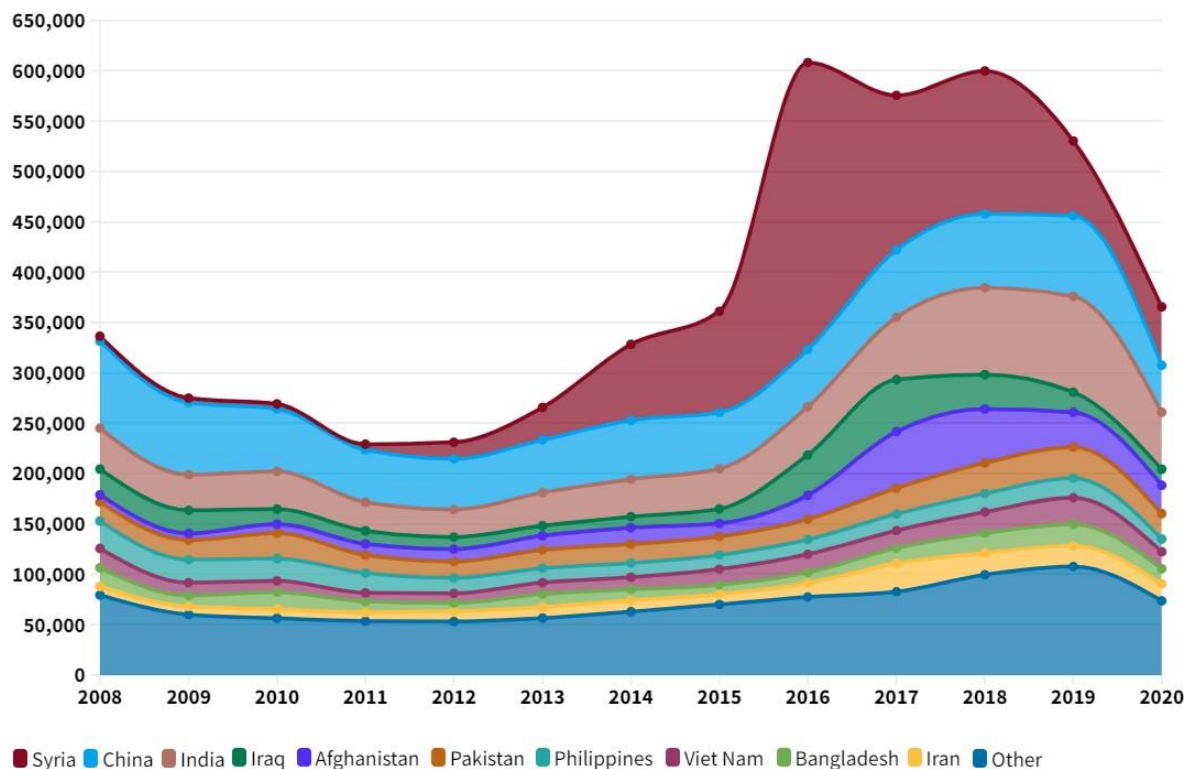
Source: Eurostat, 2020

Regular migration

Between 2008 and 2020, the most significant sending countries of regular migrants were on the one hand Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (due to regular arrivals of dependent family members uniting with recognised refugees who arrived between 6 months and 2 years earlier); and on the other hand, China, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Vietnam (due to arriving labour migrants, foreign students as well as marriage migration and fewer cases of family reunion; Figure 19).

FIGURE 19: FIRST RESIDENCE PERMITS ISSUED BY EU 27 MEMBER STATES, 2008-2020, IN THOUSANDS, TOP-10 COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

Source: Eurostat, 2020



Source: Eurostat

During the first years of the period analysed (2008-2020), **the number of regular migrants of Asian origin moving to the EU dropped from 340,000 in 2008 to 230,000 in 2011 and 2012** (Figure 19). This was mainly due to a sharp reduction in the admission/recruitment of labour from Asian countries that was cut in half during this period (2008: 100,000, 2012: 51,000; Figure 20). The main reasons for this were:

- (a) a drop in labour demand during the economic recession following the financial crisis of 2007-2010;
- (b) EU enlargement that gave citizens of central and south-eastern Europe access to labour markets of north-western as well as southern Europe. As a result, workers from non-EU countries were displaced by EU workers from countries that had joined the EU since 2004.

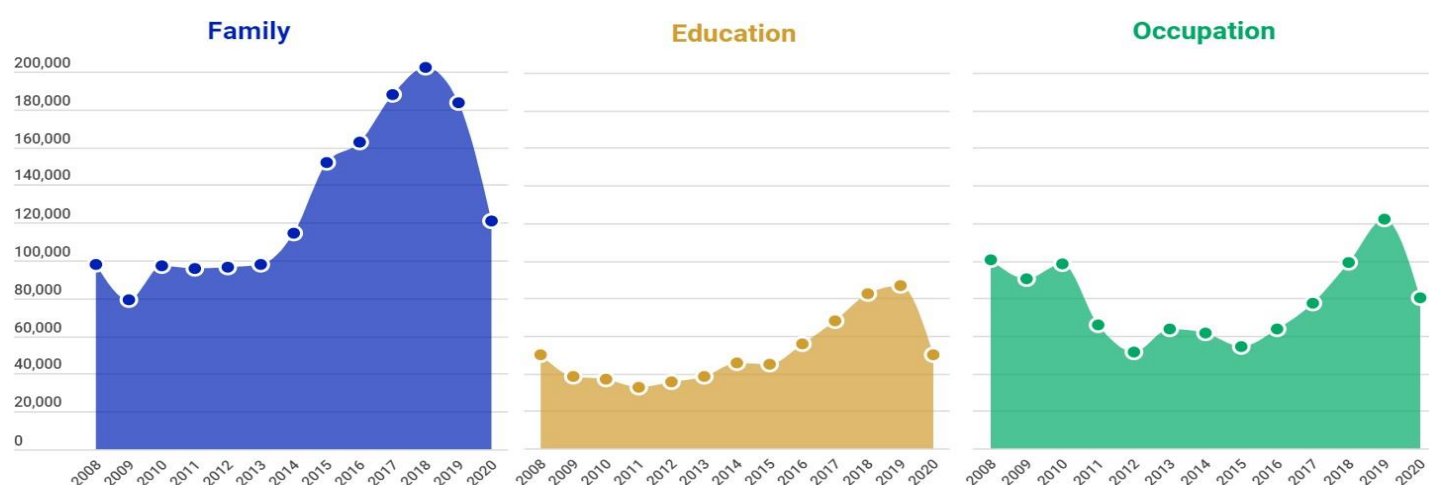
Regular migration from Asia then started to rise in 2013 peaking at just over 600,000 in 2016 and 2018 (Figure 19). This increase was driven by a substantial increase in permits issued for family reasons (both classical family reunion and marriage migration 2013: 98,000, 2018: 200,000) and by an increase in new work permits issued by EU Member States (2012: 51,000, 2019: 120,000; Figure 20).

The number of Asian students coming to the EU also increased visibly (2012: 35,000, 2019: 86,000; Figure 20).

After a peak in 2018 (600,000), regular migration from Asia to the EU dropped in 2019 (530,000) and again in 2020 (360,000; Figure 19). Between 2019 and 2020, first residence permits in all categories dropped considerably (marriage/family reunion: 120,000; students: 50,000; work permits: 80,000 in 2020; Figure 20). Measures taken against the Covid-19 pandemic were the main reason for this:

- Lockdowns and reduced supply chains caused an economic recession and a subsequent drop in demand for additional labour.
- Travel restrictions and a temporary interruption of air and sea links reduced the number of transnational marriages with subsequent migration of newlywed brides/grooms as well as classical family reunion.
- Home-schooling and distant learning allowed foreign students at European universities to stay in their country of origin.

FIGURE 20: RESIDENCE PERMITS ISSUED BY EU 27 MEMBER STATES, 2008-2020, IN THOUSANDS, BY 'GATE OF ENTRY'



Source: Eurostat

- **In 2019 and 2020 the most important sending country of newly arriving labour migrants was India** (2019: 37,000, 2020: 23,000). China (2019: 16,000, 2020: 9,000) and the Philippines (2019: 10,000, 2020: 6,000) were a distant second and third.
- **Migrants admitted for family reasons (marriage, classical family reunion) came in larger numbers from India** (2019: 33,000, 2020: 20,000), **China** (2019: 26,000, 2020: 13,000) and **Syria** (2019: 22,000, 2020: 16,000).
- The most important countries of origin of newly arriving foreign students were also China (2019: 25,000, 2020: 15,000) and India (2019: 21,000, 2020: 10,000) followed by Vietnam (2019: 4,600, 2020: 2,100) as a distant third.

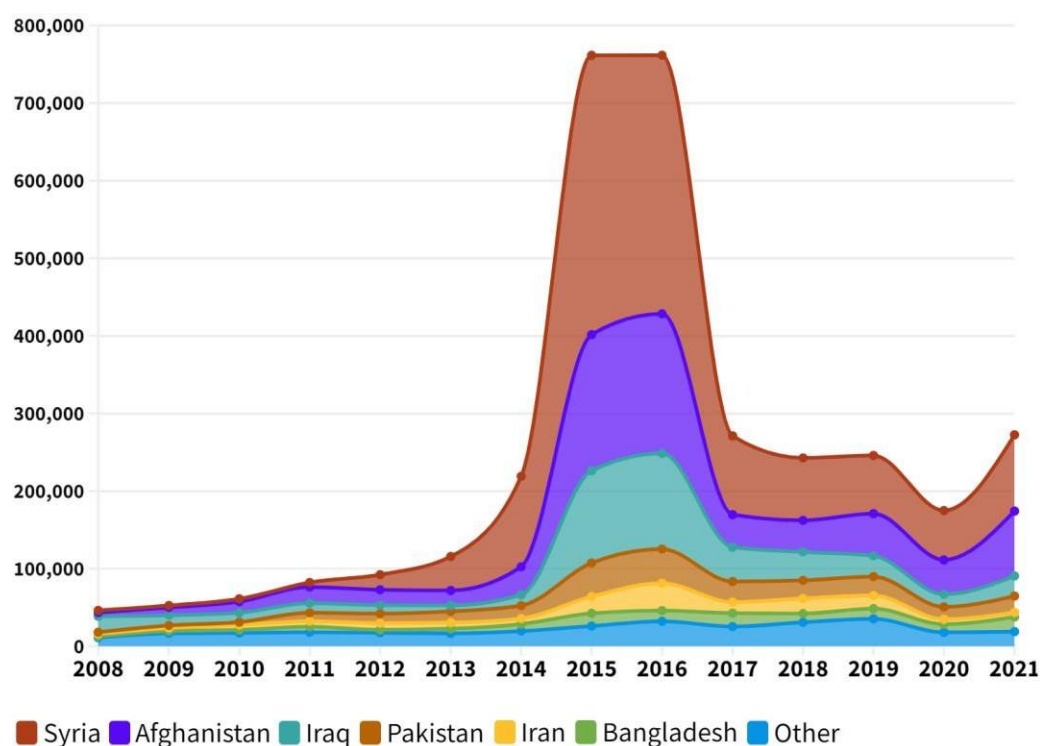
In the case of India, Pakistan, China and a few other countries past migration flows led to the emergence of established diasporas that facilitate subsequent migration flows through ethnic and extended family networks. One consequence of well-established Indian, Pakistani and Chinese diasporas in Europe is

marriage migration. It is the EU-born children and grandchildren of immigrants who are marrying distant relatives and members of local communities living in the ancestral land of their parents or grand-parents. In many cases these marriages are arranged by relatives, and the subsequent family reunion almost always takes place in Europe.

The arrival of large numbers of refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria since 2014 will have the same effect. This is already visible in the evolution of Syrians admitted for family reasons (2009: 2,300, 2019: 21,600).

Irregular arrivals and first asylum applications

FIGURE 21: FIRST ASYLUM APPLICATIONS IN EU27, 2008-2021



Source: Eurostat

Between 2008 and 2020 about 3.1 million Asian citizens asked for asylum in Europe (Figure 21). Between 2012 and 2016, the majority of them arrived as irregular migrants crossing European sea borders in the Mediterranean via Turkey or Libya. Since 2017, however, only a minority of all Asian asylum seekers has arrived via the Mediterranean.

The leading Asian countries of origin were Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Figure 21).

Until 2010 the annual number of irregular arrivals and asylum requests of Asians in EU 27 was below 100,000 per year until 2010 but started to rise significantly after 2012 reaching 760,000 in 2015 and 2016. After that peak, numbers dropped significantly below 300,000 per year (2017-19) to close to 180,000 in 2020 and then rose again to 272,000 in 2021. That most recent drop was mainly caused by travel restrictions and lack of available means of transportation – cancelled flights in particular.

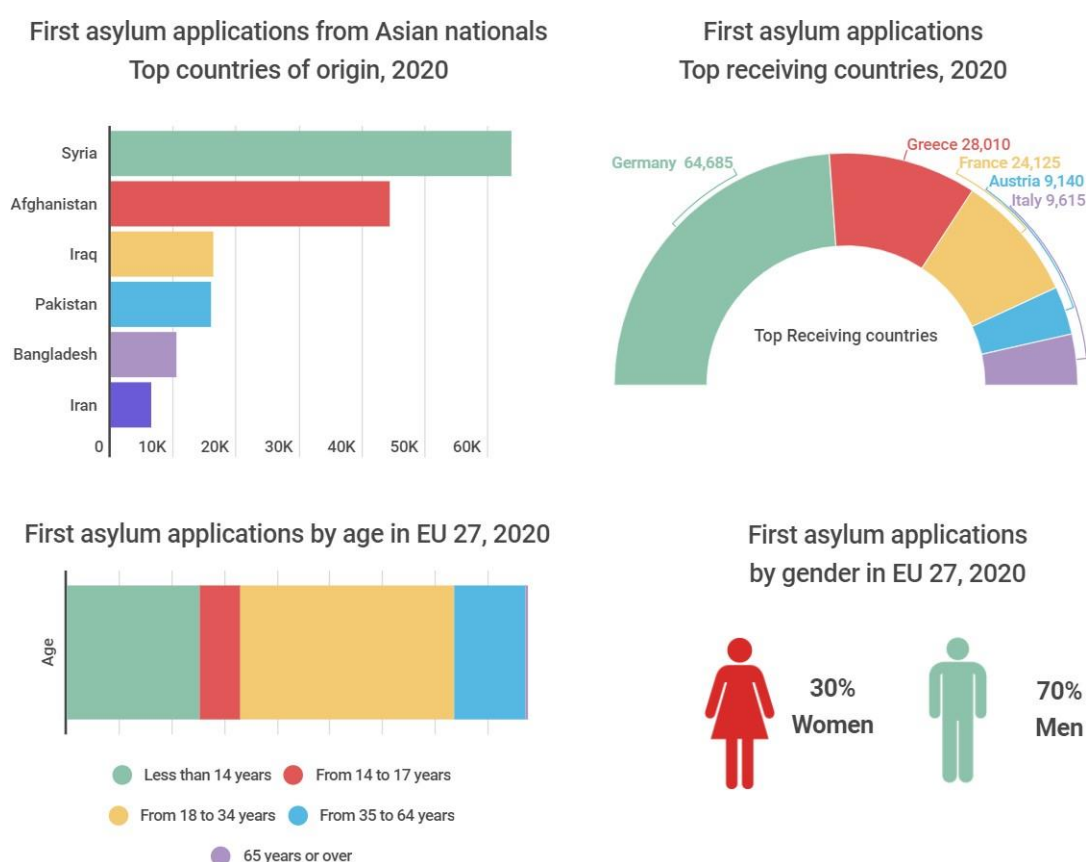
Since 2013, Syrians have been the largest group of people asking for asylum in an EU Member State (2019: 75,000, 2020: 63,000, 2021: 98,000). Asylum seekers from Afghanistan (2019: 54,000, 2020: 44,000, 2021: 83,510) and Iraq (2019: 27,000, 2020: 16,000, 2021: 26,000) came second and third among Asians asking. Prior to 2013, in relative terms, Iraqis and Afghans were the largest groups while absolute numbers were much smaller.

During the last 10 years there were also significant numbers of asylum seekers from Pakistan (2019: 24,000, 2020: 16,000, 2021: 21,000) and Bangladesh (2019: 13,000, 2020: 10,000, 2021: 19,000) despite the fact that these are democratic countries. Most of them were not recognised as refugees but remained in Europe as voluntary or enforced repatriation to those two countries tends to be the exception.

For Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis, the number of asylum applications during the year 2021 was the highest since 2016. At the same time, a number of EU Member States receiving Asian asylum seekers (Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) reported the largest numbers of asylum applications on record.

Recent arrivals of Asian asylum seekers in EU27 countries (2019: 245,000; 2020: 174,000; 2021: 272,000) were dominated by men (2020: 70 %). More than a third of all Asian asylum seekers were below age 18 (2020: 66,000); many of them unattended minors. Almost half were young adults below age 35 (2020: 81,000; 46%). Asylum requests by Asian citizens older than 35 were rather an exception (Figure 22).

FIGURE 22: AGE, GENDER AND GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF ASIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS IN EU 27, 2020



Source: Eurostat, UNHCR

In recent years the most important European destination country of asylum seekers in general and of Asian asylum seekers in particular was Germany (2019: 79,000; 2020: 65,000; 2021: 102,000) followed by Greece (2019: 55,000; 2020: 28,000; 2021: 15,000) and France (2019: 36,000; 2020: 24,000; and 2021: 31,500).

FIGURE 23: ASYLUM APPLICATIONS IN EU 27, 2019, 2020, 2021

Citizenship of asylum seekers	2019	2020	2021
Syria	74,915	63,600	98,315
Afghanistan	54,300	44,285	83,510
Iraq	26,850	16,275	25,965
Pakistan	24,345	15,910	21,020
Bangladesh	13,190	10,420	18,825
Iran	16,930	6,415	5,970
Palestine	6,150	2,650	3,130
India	4,705	2,490	3,595
Sri Lanka	3,400	1,680	1,470
China	6,475	1,690	1,630
Yemen	3,325	1,840	2,865
Vietnam	1,725	1,460	1,295
Lebanon	1,500	1,150	1,380
Uzbekistan	1,215	870	280
Other	6,800	4,110	3,210
Total Asians	245,825	174,845	272,460

Note: China including Hong Kong, Macau

Source: Eurostat

Irregular arrivals

Irregular arrivals of Asians across the Mediterranean and via the Balkans have increased considerably between 2013 and 2016 but became smaller after the informal EU-Turkey agreement of 2016. Initially journeys were mainly targeting Greece as first EU country of arrival, but the majority of irregular migrants and asylum seekers continued their journey via the Balkans to the main EU destination countries: Germany, France, Austria and Sweden. In recent years, there have been direct crossings of irregular migrants of Asian origin to Italy (via Turkey) and to Cyprus (both via Turkey and directly via airplane). Small numbers of irregular migrants and refugees of Asian origin arrive via Libya, Tunisia and Morocco in Italy, Malta and even Spain. In 2021 and early 2022 there have also been irregular border crossings from Belarus into Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. In 2022 the Russian war against Ukraine forced some Asian (and other foreign) residents of Ukraine to leave for neighbouring EU countries as well as for Turkey.

In 2021, the total number of irregular border crossings and asylum requests at Europe's south-eastern and eastern borders reached about 105,000 compared to 84,000 in 2020 (+24%). Most irregular migrants and asylum seekers registered along these routes were Asian citizens.

FIGURE 24: ARRIVALS THROUGH THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN, BALKAN AND EASTERN EU BORDER ROUTES TO CROATIA, CYPRUS, HUNGARY, ITALY, GREECE, LATVIA, LITHUANIA AND POLAND; FIRST ASYLUM REQUESTS IN BULGARIA, CROATIA, ROMANIA, 2020-2021

Country	2020	2021	Change 2021 compared to 2020
Arrivals in Greece from Turkey	13,979	7,443	-47%
Arrivals in Italy from Turkey	4,191	12,916	+208%
Arrivals in Cyprus (government-controlled part of the island)	6,301	11,685	+92%
Arrivals to the Western Balkans	44,982	37,187	-17%
Asylum requests in Bulgaria	3 463	11 049	+219%
Asylum requests in Romania	6 007	9 467	+57%
Asylum requests in Croatia	1 412	2 081	+47%
Asylum requests in Slovenia	3,539	5,266	+48%
Arrivals in Latvia, Lithuania, Poland from Belarus	677	7,515	+1069%
Total	84,551	104,609	+24%

Note: Data may include irregular migrants and asylum seekers registered by more than one country

Source: National MoI data, DG HOME, UNHCR, Frontex

Turkey – Greece – Italy

Based on the informal agreement between the EU and Turkey, **the number of irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Greece via Turkey has decreased sharply since mid-2016**. This trend continued between 2019 and 2020 in the wake of Covid-19 and even led to a further decrease in 2021 (7,443 arrivals in 2021; -47% compared to 2020). **In 2021 irregular arrivals decreased by both sea (-61%) and by land (-20%)**. The top nationalities arriving at the Aegean Islands were Afghans (25% of the total), Somalis (18%) and Palestinians (12%). Among those arriving by land in Western Thrace, Turkish nationals continued to be the largest nationality group (2021: 62% of the total) followed by Afghans (5%) and Iraqis (2%).

In turn, **there was a clear increase in direct arrivals from Turkey to Italy (2021: 12,916, +208%)**. As a result, in 2021 more people arrived from Turkey to Italy than to Greece.

In response to the small number of new arrivals from Turkey by sea, the Greek government used the opportunity to take most of the asylum seekers previously confined to camps on these islands to the Greek mainland. **The number of refugees and migrants still on the Greek islands in the Aegean has sharply decreased toward the end of the year 2021**. The conditions for the remaining migrants however remain precarious, according to various aid organisations.

At the end of 2021, according to the Greek refugee agency only 3,503 people were still obliged to live in camps on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos (compared to 17,000 in December 2020 and more than 20,000 in 2019).

Cyprus

In the case of **Cyprus, 11,685 arrivals were reported in the government-controlled areas of the country in 2021, a 92% increase compared to 2020.** 10,918 irregular migrants crossed the land border from the northern part of the island (controlled by a government backed by Turkey, but not internationally recognised) into the southern part of the island controlled by the Cypriot government. These irregular migrants had reached the Northern part of Cyprus either via Turkey or directly by airplane ²² or ship. Another 767 irregular migrants arrived by boat. The top 4 countries of origin were Syria (24%), DR Congo (19%), Nigeria (16%) and Pakistan (9%).

The escalating situation in Cyprus can be partly explained by the fact that the Cypriot authorities have only recently started to enforce stricter border controls along the UN controlled buffer (“Green line”) separating the government-controlled southern from the northern part of the island. The Cypriot authorities have long argued that stricter border controls along the “Green line” would recognise the de facto partition of the island. As a consequence, this legal point of view created an open external de facto EU border.

Balkans and south-eastern Europe

Arrivals in the **Western Balkans dropped to 37,189 in 2021, a 17% decrease of reported cases** compared to 2020. Not all of the mainly Asian migrants involved in irregular border crossings had come to Europe during the same year. Many border crossings can be traced back to people who have been in the region for some time trying to reach their target country in the EU. The most important country of origin was Afghanistan, followed by Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey and Iran.

At the same time the number of asylum seekers increased considerably in Bulgaria (2021: 11,049; +219% compared to 2020), Croatia (2021: 2,081; +47% compared to 2020), Romania (2021: 9,467; +57% compared to 2020) and Slovenia (2021: 5,266; +48% compared to 2020).

Belarus – Latvia – Lithuania – Poland

On the **eastern land borders of the EU with Belarus**, a sharp increase in irregular border crossings was registered in 2021. Arrivals from Belarus peaked in the second half of 2021: at first in Lithuania, later in Latvia and finally in Poland. The three countries reported a total of 8,267 successful irregular border crossings during the year (4,326 in Lithuania, 3,495 in Poland and 446 in Latvia), a more than tenfold increase in comparison to 2020 (677 from Belarus). Most of the persons who arrived irregularly in 2021 were nationals of Iraq (64%), followed by Afghans (7%) and Syrians (7%).

Furthermore, 48,241 attempts to cross the border were either prevented through swiftly erected fences and other measures keeping migrants and refugees at distance from EU borders or ended in a push back into Belarus. The number of unsuccessful attempts and push backs involved fewer Asian citizens as many of them tried to cross external EU borders several times leading to consecutive push backs.

²² Using Ercan airport, not controlled by the Cypriot government but by the Turkish side.

VI. Outlook: future migration flows within, from and to Asia

Future migration from, within and maybe also to Asia will depend on the following factors and developments, that can already be identified today, but are hard to predict and underpinned with a quantifiable projection of migration flows.

Political instability, violence, and civil wars

Civil wars and violent conflicts have been a major driver of forced migration, refugee flows and internal displacement. Many of these conflicts were coupled with external military interventions (Afghanistan 1980-1991: Soviet Army; 2001-2021: US + European NATO troops; Iraq 2003-2021: US-led forces with participation of European NATO troops; Syria ongoing: Russian, Turkish and US troops; Yemen ongoing: Saudi Arabia and UA Emirates with own military and through proxies). Experience from the listed conflicts shows that both external civilian and military engagement creates personal relations, social ties and language skills that make subsequent migration towards intervening countries more likely (in particular, if they are within geographic reach).

Current and future conflicts in Asia will continue to be a factor determining migration flows within as well as from Asia. For example:

- Additional flows of refugees could come from **Syria** if the Assad regime manages to regain control over the Idlib province controlled by Turkey (3.4 million inhabitants, including 2 million Syrian IDPs, many of them militants who have been fighting against the Syrian Army for more than a decade) or over the Syrian North-East controlled by Kurdish defence forces supported by US military (1.6 million inhabitants).
- A further deterioration of the economic situation in **Lebanon** (2022: 6.8 million inhabitants, including more than 1.2 million Syrian and Palestinian refugees from Syria without formal status and 480,000 Lebanese-born stateless Palestinians) could also trigger different types of refugee flows.
- The civil war and ecological conditions in **Yemen** (2021: 29.8 million inhabitants) have already led to 3.6 million people being internally displaced by the conflict and 223,000 displaced by environmental change. At the same time Yemen is hosting 223,000 registered refugees from Somalia and Eritrea. An escalation of the war between different factions (Militias backing the recognised government, Huthi militias, Southern Alliance) combined with a humanitarian crisis (food shortage, lack of basic health care and education) and additional adverse effects of climate change (protracted droughts and prolonged heat waves) could trigger both further internal displacement and refugees seeking protection in neighbouring countries (Gulf States, East Africa) and beyond.

Secondary effects in transit countries

Flows of refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants from conflict zones are not only determined by the situation in the countries of origin, but also influenced by conditions in transit and host countries.

A political change in Turkey, for example, could bring a government into power that – backed by public sentiment and a new parliamentary majority – tries to reduce the number of refugees and irregular migrants living in the country. A new political era could start with a political decision to revoke temporary humanitarian protection from Syrian refugees putting them on an equal footing with irregular Afghan, Iraqi and Iranian migrants (among them many de facto refugees) living and working in Turkey. Such a move would – most likely – incentivise large numbers of affected migrants and refugees to seek to reach EU territory.

Demographic and labour market developments in East Asia

Several countries in Asia are confronted with ageing and (actually or potentially) shrinking populations and work forces. This is particularly true for East Asia (China, North and South Korea, Japan) where the total population is projected to shrink from 1.7 billion (2021) to 1.2 billion (2100). The question is, to what extent this gap might be filled with migrants from other parts of Asia or even from other parts of the world (with Africa being the only continent with growing numbers of inhabitants).

While some Asian societies have already accepted (mostly temporary, but even some permanent) labour migrants in the past (Gulf States, India, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore) such immigration is still an exception in China (except Hong Kong, Macau) and Japan. While South Korea seems ready to open its labour market for additional migrants, there is no indication that this might be the case on a larger scale in China and Japan. On the contrary: there is political consensus in both countries to keep the society as ethnically homogenous as possible. It is also historically untested if a decline of several hundred million native workers could ever be replaced by immigrants over a period of 70-80 years.

China faces an additional problem. Gender selective abortion during the 43 years of imposed one-child policy has led to a **considerable gender imbalance among younger Chinese age cohorts**. In certain provinces there are 125 boys and young men per 100 girls and young women. This has already led to some bridal migration mainly from neighbouring countries (Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar), partly based on voluntary arrangements, but also including human trafficking and abduction. It is very likely that this type of marriage migration will continue.

Labour recruitment policies of EU Member States

There are clear indications that (at least some) EU Member States are switching from a restrictive to a more proactive migration policy targeting migrant labour and skills. This is also in line with parts of the proposed pact on asylum and migration that the European Commission has already published.²³ If this materialises at a larger scale it is likely that countries like India, Iran and the Philippines will not only continue to be recruiting areas but might become more important. It is likely that migration flows from these parts of Asia to Europe will increase. It is, however, clear that global competition for mobile talent and skills already exists and will continue. The position of Europe in this competition might become more difficult as China and Japan might decide to enter the global race for skilled migrants.

At the same time, any change in the recruitment policies of the Gulf States would also have direct implications for labour migration flows within Asia and to the Gulf region.

²³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1706

Russia waging war against Ukraine

The Russian invasion of and ongoing military conflict in Ukraine will inevitably reduce the ability of these two countries to produce and to export grain and other food products. The blockade of Ukraine's sea ports has a similar effect as Ukraine exports 95% of its grain through the Black Sea. In normal years an estimated 12% of the total global grain trade passes through the Black Sea and the Bosphorus every year, with many of these shipments heading to nearby MENA countries. More than 50% of these wheat exports went to the MENA region in 2020. In 2021, half of Lebanon's wheat imports came from Ukraine. Supply for Palestinians organised by UNRWA also heavily relied on supply from Ukraine. The same is true for food aid for Yemen organised by international organisations. Almost 50% of wheat imported to Yemen came from Russia and Ukraine. In 2021, dependence on wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine was 92% in Pakistan and 58% in Bangladesh. A regional food crisis or the already visible steep increase in food prices could either incite riots and additional political violence or directly lead to more emigration from the MENA region. Indirect effects caused by quickly rising food prices could have a similar effect leading to migration flows.

Another impact of the Russian war in Ukraine on labour migration has to do with the expected contraction of the Russian economy as a result of the Western political economic sanctions that have targeted many sectors. This will lead to a lower demand for labour migrants from Central Asia, reduce inflows while resulting in more return migration and force Central Asians to search for alternative destinations, such as South Korea, China, Turkey and maybe the Gulf States.

Authors

Rainer Muenz

Rainer Münz is an expert in Demography and international migration. He currently teaches as visiting professor at the Central European University (Department of Public Policy) and at the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna.

Between 2015 and 2019 he was Adviser on Migration and Demography at the European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC), the in-house think tank advising European Commission President J.C. Juncker during his time in office. In 2020 he worked at the Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography (JRC-KCMD) of the European Commission in Ispra, Italy.

Prior to joining the European Commission, Rainer Münz was – between 2005 and 2015 – Head of Research and Development at Erste Group, a Central European retail bank headquartered in Vienna. He also worked as Senior Fellow at the European macro-economic think tank Bruegel (Brussels), the Hamburg Institute of International Economics (HWWI) and at the Migration Policy Institute (MPI, Washington DC).

Until 2004, Rainer Münz had an academic career as researcher at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, 1980-1992, and at the Department of Mathematics of Finance/ TU Vienna, 2002-2004, as well as a tenured university professor at Humboldt University, Berlin, 1993-2003. He also was visiting professor at the Universities of Bamberg, UC Berkeley, AU Cairo, Frankfurt/M., HU Jerusalem, Klagenfurt, St. Gallen (HSG), Vienna and Zurich.

In 2000-01, Rainer Münz was member of the German commission on immigration reform (Suessmuth commission). Between 2008 and 2010, he was a member of the high level 'Reflection Group Horizon 2020-2030' of the European Council (Gonzales commission). Between 2015 and 2019, he was chair of Migration Advisory Board of the UN Organisation on International Migration (IOM). Currently he is one of the working group chairs of the World Bank's Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development trust fund (KNOMAD). He also is member of the Experts Council on Integration advising the Austrian government.

Jemal Yaryyeva

Jemal Yaryyeva is a Junior Researcher for the Data and Demographics working group of the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) brain trust for the global migration community. She specialises in migration data collection, analysis and visualization and has worked as a consultant in multiple migration-related projects for the World Bank and ECORYS. Jemal holds a MA in International Sociology from Saint Petersburg State University in Russia and a MA degree in Ethnic and Minority Policy from Central European University in Vienna, Austria.

Annex: Regional Division of Asia for the purpose of this paper

Western Asia
Afghanistan
Iran
Pakistan
Gulf States/Arab Peninsula
Bahrain
Kuwait
Oman
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
United Arab Emirates (UAE)
Yemen
Asian Middle East
Iraq
Israel
Jordan
Lebanon
State of Palestine (West Bank, Gaza)
Syrian Arab Republic
Central Asia
Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan
Mongolia
South Asia
Bangladesh
Bhutan
India
Maldives
Nepal
Sri Lanka
East Asia
China (incl. Hong Kong SAR and Macao SAR)
Japan

Dem. People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
Taiwan (officially Province of China)
Republic of Korea (South Korea)

South-East Asia
Brunei Darussalam
Cambodia
Indonesia
Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos)
Malaysia
Myanmar
Philippines
Singapore
Thailand
Timor-Leste
Vietnam