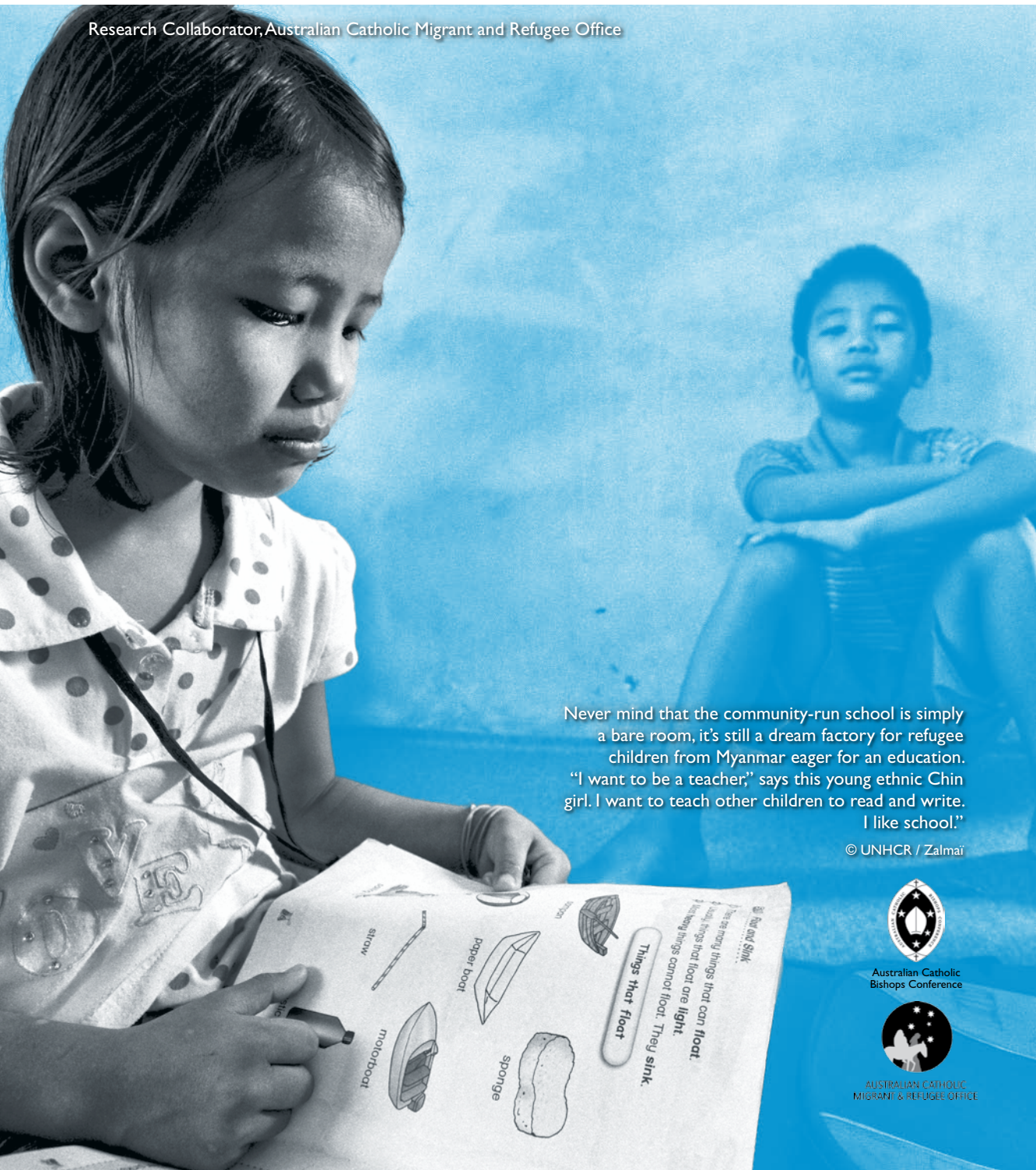


# VOLUNTARY AND COMPELLED MIGRATION IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

Elizabeth Beaumont

Research Collaborator, Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



Never mind that the community-run school is simply a bare room, it's still a dream factory for refugee children from Myanmar eager for an education. "I want to be a teacher," says this young ethnic Chin girl. I want to teach other children to read and write. I like school!"

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Australian Catholic  
Bishops Conference



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC  
MIGRANT & REFUGEE OFFICE

## Introduction

Global migration is well established as a significant manipulator of demographic, social, cultural and economic change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the fastest growing region, the Asia-Pacific is subject to extreme contrasts in economic wealth and development, hosting some of the richest nations in the world, as well as some of the poorest. However, while international migration may be structurally embedded within the region, there are still significant legal, economic and social restrictions on the movement of people. Regional cooperation and economic deregulation has expedited the exchange of goods and services within the region. Yet, there is well-founded concern that regional collaboration on migration is not keeping pace.

Individually, many Asia-Pacific nations display substantial regulation of structured and regular migration. This is most often seen in the legal mechanisms of labour and travel visas that permit entry into countries for specified purposes and periods of time. However, at a state level, irregular migration remains insufficiently regulated. While many countries in the region have set up procedures for managing the flow of irregular migrants, many have not. Consequently, migration policy in the region is manifestly incoherent.

It is common practice for nations to regulate migration in accordance with their own economic and political objectives. Thus, irregular migration, which is usually economically burdensome on receiving countries, is poorly managed. Instead, there is a great need for nations to work together in order to manage migration comprehensively and effectively. This cooperation is also fundamental for meaningful mitigation of migration pressures within the region.

This report has two main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to provide some context to the voluntary and compelled movement of people in the Asia-Pacific region. Secondly, it outlines the current state of regional cooperation on migration in the Asia-Pacific. Given the vast differences between these nations, a regional overview is difficult, and some generalisations are necessary. It is nonetheless important to recognise the extreme diversity of the region and the impact this has on the issue of migration, particularly in consideration of any formal regional cooperation on managing migration flows.

The scope of this report will include the following nations:

- **Pacific:** Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island nations within the regions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia
- **East Asia:** China, Hong Kong, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea
- **South East Asia:** Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Burma (Myanmar), Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam;
- **South Asia:** Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka.

## A general regional overview: major differences between nations in the region

The Asia-Pacific region is renowned for its incredible diversity, exhibiting a rich mix of culture, language, religion and history. The region is also quite diverse in its governance, a factor that at times complicates regional consultation and agreement processes. Negotiations between nations are influenced by their respective populations, economic wealth, religions and models

of government, and thus their objectives are often highly varied. When considering the need for regional cooperation on migration, it is important to recognise the multiplicity within the region and the intrinsic complications this may give rise to.

Country	GDP per capita*	GDP (\$US millions)	Population (millions)
Singapore	62,100	222,699	5
Australia	41,000	1,235,539	22
Japan	34,000	5,458,872	127
Korea	30,000	1,007,084	49
New Zealand	27,700	140,434	4
Malaysia	14,700	237,959	28
Thailand	8,700	318,850	67
China	7,600	5,878,257	1330
Polynesia	a 7,386	7,304	7
Micronesia	a 7,357	4,164	6
Sri Lanka	5,000	48,241	22
Indonesia	4,200	706,735	243
Melanesia	a 3,725	14,204	8
India	3,500	1,733,412	1731
Philippines	3,500	188,719	100
Vietnam	3,100	103,574	90
Timor-Leste	2,600	616	1
Laos*	2,500	6,341	6
Pakistan	2,500	174,866	184
Cambodia	2,100	11,360	145
Bangladesh	1,700	104,919	156
Myanmar	1,400	35,646	53
Nepal	1,200	15,108	29

**Table I (Left):**  
Asia-Pacific GDP/  
Population (2010)

Source:  
World Bank 2010

(\*) CIA World Fact  
Book Estimate,  
2010

(a) Average GDP  
per capita of major  
island nations

## Population Wealth

Over half of the 6.9 billion people in the world live in the Asia-Pacific. Within the region itself, there is a vast contrast between population size, hosting some of the most populous nations in the world as well as some of the most microscopic. For example, India reached a population of 1.7 billion in 2010, a figure that dwarfs the 35 million people that currently inhabit the entire Pacific region.

There are also significant differences in economic wealth within the region. The Asia-Pacific is overwhelmed with emerging or developing economies. According to the IMF, the region has only 7 'advanced economies': Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South

Korea and Taiwan.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, the region hosts two of the top 3 wealthiest countries in the world (China and Japan). Some of the fastest growing economies in the world today are found in the Asia-Pacific, such as China and India.<sup>2</sup>

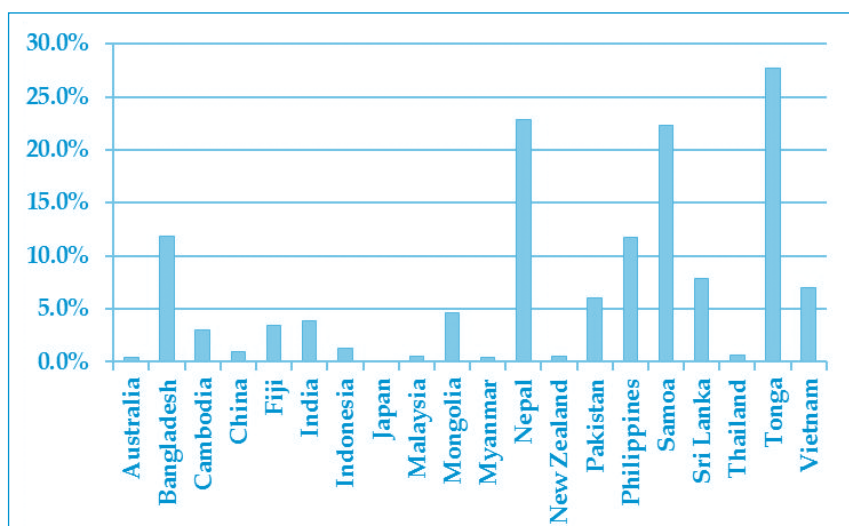
Per capita wealth has a correlated impact on net migration flows. Table I is ordered by GDP per capita; the first seven countries (highlighted in bold text) all have positive net migration flows. In contrast all other countries with lower GDP per capita are currently experiencing negative net migration outflows.

## Remittances

Remittance payments are the personal transfer of money by a foreign worker to their family and friends in their home country. They are the most quantifiable economic impact of migration.<sup>3</sup> In the last decade, remittance flows have significantly grown and overtaken the level of official development assistance to developing countries.<sup>4</sup> As a region, the Asia-Pacific receives around 42% of the world’s remittances,<sup>5</sup> and individual Asia-Pacific nations are highly represented in the top remittance recipients in the world. Particularly for Tonga, Samoa, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Philippines, the receiving of remittances makes a significant contribution to their economies and dominates financial inflow. Remittances have significant potential to address development needs, however, as private financial flows, they are vastly different to foreign aid and investment.

## The Philippines

The Philippines has one of the highest levels of outward migration in the world. In 2009, the Government Commission on Filipinos Overseas reported 8,579,378 nationals were living abroad.<sup>6</sup> This has provided the Philippines with significant returns in the form of remittances. In 2010, The World Bank estimated that the Philippines was the third highest recipient of remittances in Asia, receiving \$US 21 billion in remittances. Filipino remittances are thus a significant source of revenue, representing more than 10% of GDP. Remittance payments in the Philippines are also a key factor of economic development.<sup>7</sup> While the Filipino diaspora has long been a concern to the Philippines, the government has acknowledged the benefits of remittances, providing incentives such as tax breaks and privileged investment options, to ‘maximise the income stream.’<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 1 (Left):** Remittances of selected Asia-Pacific Countries as a share of GDP (2009)

Source: World Bank Migration and Remittance Factbook 2010

■ Remittances as a share of GDP, 2009 (%)

## Samoa and Tonga

Remittances are especially important in smaller island nations, increasing the standards of living and development potential. Samoa and Tonga, with small economies and populations, rely on remittances heavily. Often, these payments are the dominant form of national income.<sup>9</sup> While the amount of remittances received from nationals abroad is relatively modest in comparison the amounts received by more populous nations such as China and India, annual remittance inflows represent a significant amount of GDP for these nations. This source of income also helps reduce dependence on the small economies.

## Bangladesh and Nepal

In 2010, Bangladesh and Nepal had an estimated 3.3 per cent of their respective populations living abroad, with around 5.3 million Bangladeshi and 900,000 Nepalese working in countries such as India, the United States, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom.<sup>10</sup> This relatively small percentage of the population in both Bangladesh and Nepal generates a significant flow of inward remittances. In 2010, Bangladesh received an estimated \$US 68 billion in remittance payments.<sup>11</sup> Nepal received an estimated \$US 3.5 billion in the same year.<sup>12</sup>

Country	Foreign Aid received (\$US millions)
Vietnam	3744.3
Pakistan	2780.6
India	2392.9
Bangladesh	1226.9
China	1131.7
Indonesia	1049.4
Nepal	854.6
Cambodia	722.2
Sri Lanka	703.7
Papua New Guinea	413.6
Mongolia	372.2
Myanmar	356.9
Philippines	310
Timor-Leste	216.7
Solomon Islands	205.9
Malaysia	143.5
Micronesia, Fed. Sts.	120.9
Samoa	77.4
Fiji	71.1

**Table 2 (Left):**  
Foreign Aid in Selective Asia-Pacific Countries, 2009

Source:  
World Bank



**Figure 2 (Top):**  
Models of governance in the Asia-Pacific

Source:  
The Association of Religion Data Archives 2011

## Foreign Aid

Dominated by developing and emerging economies, the Asia-Pacific region receives substantial amounts of aid assistance from developed nations. While much assistance is given from outside the region (such as from the United States and the UK), the region itself has a strong aid regime that sees aid been transferred between neighbours. Japan is the largest contributor of foreign aid in the Asia Pacific through direct financial grants, low interest loans and technical cooperation. For example, in the 2009 fiscal year, Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Viet Nam was over 2 billion USD.<sup>13</sup> Australia and New Zealand, with advanced aid programmes, spend most of their aid budgets within the Asia-Pacific region. A significant example is the Australia Indonesia Partnership aid program, which sees \$558.1 million transferred to Indonesia through partnership programs, as well as other government and regional programs.<sup>14</sup>

The Pacific is the core focus of New Zealand's aid program, with over 50% of its annual aid budget being spent on the region. In 2011, New Zealand will spend an estimated NZ\$23 Million to assist in joint projects with Samoa.<sup>15</sup>

## Government

While the region has traditionally been home to a broad range of governance models, democracy has been exported in various forms to the majority of nations. The democratic model takes on different forms within the region. For example, while there is a predominance of parliamentary systems as a form of democratic government, there are a proportion of presidential or semi-presidential systems.<sup>16</sup> Nations including Australia, New Zealand, India and East-Timor are part of the Commonwealth of Nations, sharing similar aspects of government with the Queen of England as head of state.

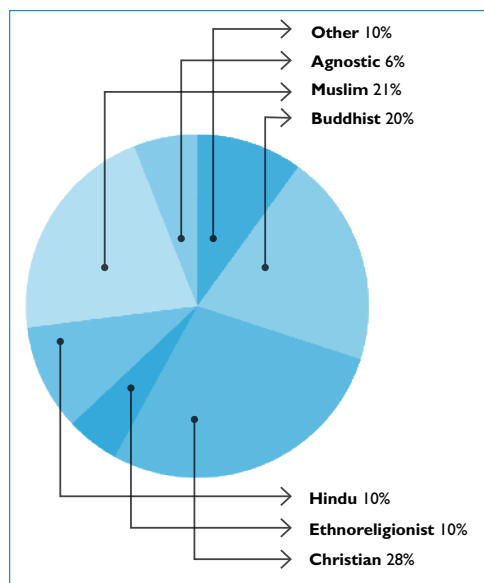
While the region hosts some of the most representative and respectable governments in the world, oppressive regimes are still present. Burma is a stark example of civilian oppression, where a despotic military rule has oppressed Burmese ethnic minorities since 1962. North Korea is equally as autocratic, with the nation almost completely ostracising itself within the region.

## Religion

The distribution of religious values is an important element of cultural diversity within the region. Figure 3 shows religious adherence in the region can be broken down into 4 roughly equal groups, where Christianity is the most prevalent religion, followed by Islam and Buddhism. While the figures of the Pacific region (excluding Australia and New Zealand) are not represented in the table, they contribute to the slight predominance of Christianity within the Asia-Pacific.

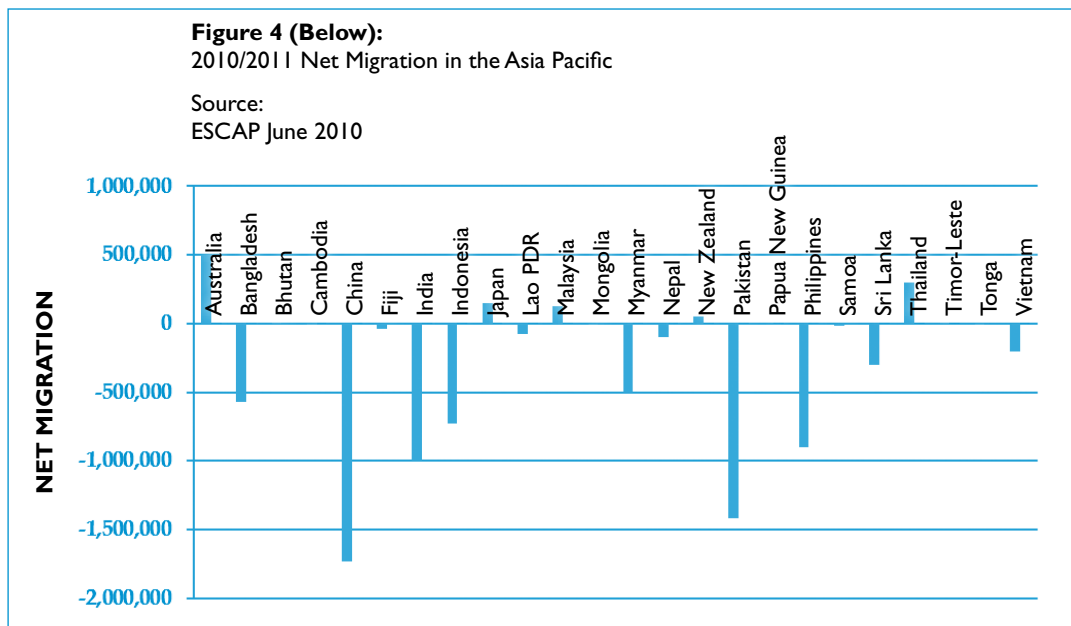
**Figure 3 (Right):**  
Religious adherents in selected Asia-Pacific nations

Source:  
The Association of religious Data Archives 2011



## Regional Migration flows

The stock of migrants in the Asia-Pacific region was expected to reach 27.5 million in 2010.<sup>17</sup> This figure represents largely migrants seeking employment, with the remainder migrating to study or reunite with family.<sup>18</sup> A portion of these are also refugees or asylum seekers. While some nations in the Asia-Pacific can be classified as either mainly sending or receiving countries, most nations are involved in a degree of both.<sup>19</sup> Australia, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand receive significantly more migrants than they send. China is a major sender of international migrants; however more significant is the volume of movements within China's borders, often associated with the rural-urban migration phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> Figure 4 indicates that Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and the Philippines are also ranked as states with some of the highest amounts of migrants leaving their shores.



## Voluntary Migration

Voluntary migration is an embedded structural feature of the Asia-Pacific region. The region is host to several large and historic migrant corridors which are still prevalent today. The primary force driving international migration is income differences between nations.<sup>21</sup>

There is a strong tradition of regional labour migration by low-skilled workers from low-income countries, to higher income countries with labour shortages. However, most developing countries now also export skilled workers. In the Philippines, for example, migrants in the 1970s were overwhelmingly low-skilled construction workers. Today, the migrant demographic is well-represented by higher skilled service workers and migrants with tertiary education.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, while South-North migration from low-income to higher-income countries is the dominant phenomenon of voluntary migration, there is a significant amount of South-South migration. This is often due to the geographical proximity of low-income countries to one another, which is perceived to be another central factor driving international migration.<sup>23</sup>

The migration of international students is also increasing in the region. Australia remains a favourable destination for students. In 2007, the greatest number of international student enrolments in Australia came from Asia including: China (107 071); India (63 604); Republic of Korea (34 674); Thailand (19 987); Malaysia (19 874); Hong Kong (19 742); Japan (16 077) and Indonesia (14 919).<sup>24</sup>

Migration for marriage is also increasing in the region. For example, there is demand for foreign brides in China, due to significant gender imbalances. The rural-urban movement of people (particularly women) in Japan and Taiwan has also created the need for foreign brides for rural farmers.<sup>25</sup>

## Compelled Migration

The Asia-Pacific has the largest stock of compelled migrants in the world. In 2009, the UNHCR recorded 36, 460, 806 people of concern worldwide-- refugees, asylum seekers, stateless people and others—in need of protection.<sup>26</sup> Over 13 million of these were reported to be in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>27</sup> Within the Asia-Pacific region, the primary countries generating refugee outflows are Burma (Myanmar) (406,669), Vietnam (339,289), China (180,558) Sri Lanka (145,721), Bhutan (89,070), Tibet (20,080), India (19,514), Indonesia (18,213) and Cambodia (17,025). Table 3 shows China, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Thailand and Malaysia to be the countries hosting the largest of these refugee populations. Pakistan is also a significant host country, with over 1,740, 711 refugees, mostly from Afghanistan.

**Table 3 (Below):**

UNHCR populations of concern by country of asylum (2010)

**Source:**

UNHCR 2010

(a: this figure represents returned refugees)

Country/ territory of asylum	Refugees	People in refugee-like situations	Asylum- seekers (pending cases)	Internally Displaced People	Stateless persons	Total population of concern
Australia	21,805	-	3,760	-	-	25,565
Bangladesh	29,253	200,000	-	-	-	229,253
China	300,986	-	122	-	-	301,108
India	184,821	-	3,746	-	-	188,567
Indonesia	811	-	2,071	-	-	2,882
Japan	2,586	-	3,078	-	1,397	7,061
Malaysia	80,651	865	11,339	-	40,001	212,856
Burma (Myanmar)	-	-	-	62,015	797,388	859,403
Nepal	87,514	2,294	938	-	800,000	891,319
New Zealand	2,307	-	216	-	-	2,523
Pakistan	1,900,621	-	2,095	2,138,924	-	4,041,642
Papua New Guinea	4,698	5,000	1	-	-	9,699
Philippines	243	-	73	139,509	-	139,893
Sri Lanka	223	a 5,062	138	434,900	-	440,323
Thailand	96,675	-	10,250	-	542,505	649,430

## Current factors and emerging issues in Asia-Pacific migration

In 2005, the Global Commission on International Migration noted that 'in the contemporary world, the principle forces that are driving international migration [both voluntary and compelled] are due to the '3Ds': differences in development, demography and democracy.'<sup>28</sup> Emerging issues within the region, including changing economic, social and environmental climates are also likely to carve the future flows of migrants within the region.

### Globalisation

One of the main factors shaping the flow of voluntary migrants in the region is globalisation and its effect on rapid economic development. The interdependent industries that have been created throughout the region have stimulated the constant need for low-cost labour.<sup>29</sup> In the context of globalization, there has also been 'increased levels of education, proliferation of international media, improved transport systems and the internationalisation of business and labour markets.'<sup>30</sup> These elements have assisted the increased flow of migrants. Voluntary migration has also been facilitated by a developing migration industry, with migration agents and formal immigration channels linking potential migrants to host countries.<sup>31</sup>

### Female migration

There has been an increase in the number of female migrants in the Asia-Pacific region. The UN reported that almost half (48%) of migrants in 2009 were female.<sup>32</sup> Sri Lanka has undergone a noteworthy feminisation of its outgoing migrant labour force. In 2009, women made up 54% of the annual 200,000 Sri Lankan migrant workers leaving the country.<sup>33</sup> Increased female migration has provided more and broader employment opportunities for women. It also increases the ability for migrant families to improve their living standards.<sup>34</sup>

### Global economy

With a highly interdependent global economy, the stability of neighbouring regions is intrinsic to the stability of the Asia Pacific. In 2009, both sending and receiving countries felt the effect of the Global Financial Crisis. In Bangladesh, the number of migrants going abroad halved, and South Korea experienced a severely weakened demand for labour, resulting in less inward migration.<sup>35</sup> Many countries responded to the economic downturn by adjusting their migration policies. Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand ceased to issue or renew work permits.<sup>36</sup> The Philippines sought to assist its returning migrants with reintegration programs and skills training.<sup>37</sup> The economic conditions in other markets will continue to have significant and sometimes immediate effects on the collective global economy.

### Tourism

Tourism remains a significant factor accounting for massive flows of international migrants on a short term basis. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation report over 181 million international tourists visited the Asia-Pacific region in 2009. The majority of tourist visit North East Asia (98 million) and South East-Asia (62 million) while Oceania and South Asia received 11 and 10 million respectively.<sup>38</sup>

As living standards continue to increase in China and India the number of tourists in Asia-Pacific is expected to rise substantially. For example, estimates for Australia alone predict an increase of over 2 million international tourists will arrive over the next decade. Of these, Asia represents 55% predominately from China (42%) and India (7.3%).<sup>39</sup>

## Political and social (in)stability

The instability in the Middle East and North Africa over the past 6 months has impacted upon the flows of migrants from the Asia Pacific. The regions facing political and social instability and in some case violence—for example in Libya and Syria—are destination countries for a large amount of Asia-Pacific migrants.<sup>40</sup> It is expected that some Asia-Pacific nations that rely heavily on remittances to maintain economic stability (e.g Nepal Bangladesh and the Philippines) will suffer from a weakening overseas demand for their workers. There is concern that this could stall growth and contribute to economic, and potentially social instability within these Asia-Pacific nations.<sup>41</sup>

## Protracted refugee situations

Protracted refugee situations occur when refugee populations of over 25,000 people have been displaced for more than 5 years.<sup>42</sup> These long-running situations have seen little overall improvement. The UNHCR record more than half of the world's refugees are currently in protracted situations. This is especially so in the Asia-Pacific region, where there has only been minor reductions in the amount of refugees in protracted situations. Without major improvements in the countries of origin, these refugees rely on resolutions by the UNHCR and their country of asylum.

**Table 4 (Below):**

UNHCR list of protracted refugee populations in 2009 (changes from 2008 figures)

Source:

UNHCR 2010

Country of Origin	Country of Asylum	Number of Refugees in 2009	Change on 2008 figures
Bhutan	Nepal	88,200	-16,400
Burma (Myanmar)	Bangladesh	228,600	New*
Burma (Myanmar)	Thailand	104,100	New*
China	India	100,000	-
Sri Lanka	India	72,900	- 400
Vietnam	China	300,900	-
Afghanistan	Pakistan	1,739,900	- 40,300

\* Despite being long-running, the displacement of Burmese in Bangladesh and Thailand was only added to the UNHCR list in 2009.

## Documentation

The majority of migration flows in the Asia-Pacific involve well-documented and regulated labour migrants. In contrast, the relatively smaller movements of many asylum seekers and internally displaced persons are regarded as irregular as these movements often endure despite the lack of identity and visa documents.<sup>43</sup> Undocumented migration is increasingly becoming an issue within the region, making it difficult for national or regional processes to build the capacity to manage migration flows.

## Statelessness

A person is stateless when they are not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law. Statelessness is largely the result of exclusionary policies discriminating against minority groups, not recognising certain groups upon becoming an independent state, or due to incongruity of laws between nations. Over 2 million people are currently stateless in the Asia-Pacific region. While stateless persons overlap with refugees and IDPs, they commonly receive less attention, and are poorly understood and assisted by the international community.<sup>44</sup> The majority of stateless persons in the Asia-Pacific are hosted by Thailand, with the UNHCR recording 542,505 persons in 2010.<sup>45</sup> Thailand's large stock of stateless persons is largely a product of continued undocumented migration of Burmese ethnic minorities who are not recognised with citizenship in Burma (Myanmar).<sup>46</sup> Nepal and Burma (Myanmar) also host significant numbers of stateless people. Since gaining independence Burma (Myanmar) has not recognised Muslim residents of the northern Rakhine State as nationals.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, statelessness in Nepal is primarily due to a long standing lack of citizenship registration.<sup>48</sup> In addition, insufficient birth registration processes result in a substantial number of stateless children. In 2007, UNICEF estimated over 5 million births per year were unregistered in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>49</sup>

## Legal status

Recognition of the status of refugees is limited within the Asia-Pacific region, with most nations not bound by the 1951 Refugee Convention or its protocol. Refugees often encounter the same treatment as illegal migrants, and are therefore vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and forcible return to their country of origin. This leads to a significant amount of undocumented migration. Many countries in the Asia Pacific are unwilling to give formal recognition to refugees, as there is concern that to do so would generate an influx of refugees. This concern is also reflected in the unwillingness of many nations to improve their standards of refugee protection, in the form of living conditions and access to the community.<sup>50</sup>

## Climate Change

It is expected that the Asia Pacific region will be extremely vulnerable to the predicted effects of climate change in the next century. With rising sea levels, natural subsistence of land and more intense weather patterns, it is anticipated that millions of people within the region will be affected.

## Extreme weather and environmental disasters

Whether or not the direct result of climate change, recent weather patterns including prolonged flooding and drought have been significant in shaping the movement of people. For example, in 2008, 20 million people worldwide were forced to migrate due to extreme climate-related weather events.<sup>51</sup> This number is substantially higher than the 4.6 million that were internally displaced in the same year due to conflict and violence. However, as of yet, environmental migration has been mostly internal, with short-term displacement, and a limited capacity for internally displaced persons (IDPs) to migrate abroad.

**Rising Sea levels** Low-lying Pacific Island nations are at the greatest risk of being inundated by rising sea levels. Kiribati and Tuvalu are especially vulnerable, facing the prospect of their entire Islands being inundated due to rising sea levels.<sup>52</sup> The salinization of freshwater in Pacific atolls is also a real threat to local populations. As both archipelagic nations, Indonesia and the Philippines are exceptionally vulnerable to the effects of climate change, in particular the expected rise in global sea levels. Modest estimates suggest that a rise in sea levels

would affect around 700,000 Indonesians and 169,000 Filipinos.<sup>53</sup> These figures dramatically increase when the potential effect of enhanced weather patterns and natural subsistence of land is considered.<sup>54</sup>

China, with a high-density coastal population, currently has 10 million people vulnerable to flooding following a rise in sea levels. It is also expected that hundreds of millions of people will suffer from the expected reductions of glacial melt waters.<sup>55</sup>

Figure 5 combines country factors as well as predicted environmental changes to predict the countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Of the top 16, 9 were in the Asia-Pacific region. This included Bangladesh as the most vulnerable nation to the effects of climate change, with India and Nepal also within the top 5 nations. As this particular climate change index ranks vulnerability with respect to population, many Pacific islands are absent from figure 5, despite the fact that rising sea levels make these island nations extremely vulnerable. Beyond extreme weather patterns, incremental changes in climate is predicted to be another emerging issue for the region, and with potentially greater impact on future migration.

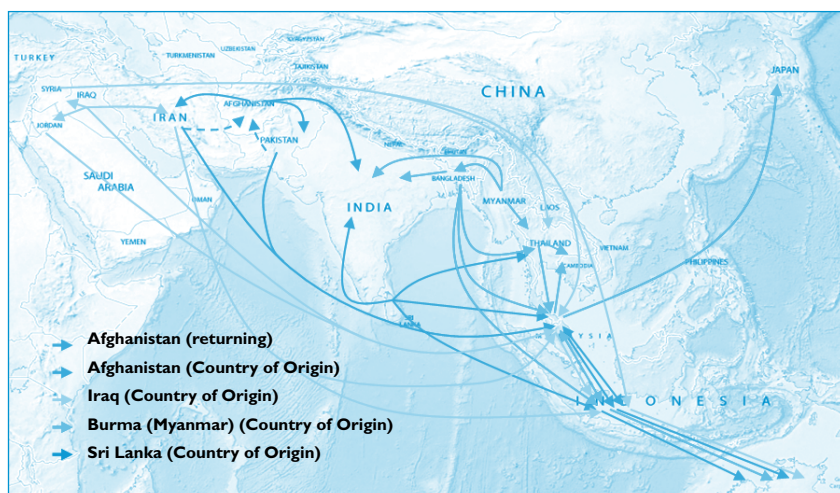


**Figure 5 (Top):**  
Global Vulnerability to Climate Change Index

Source:  
Maplecroft 2011

**Figure 6 (Right):**  
Conflict-induced movement in the Asia-Pacific

Source:  
UNHCR 2011



## **Conflict**

Conflict both within the Asia Pacific region and on its fringes significantly orchestrates the flow of migrants through the region. Notable conflicts that have created large flows of migrants in the region include the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, internal military conflict in Myanmar and ethnic fighting in Sri Lanka (now ended). Figure 6 shows the distances these compelled migrants travel, and their effect on many Asia-pacific nations, especially India, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia.

## **Pakistan**

Pakistan hosts roughly two thirds of refugees from Afghanistan, the largest refugee source in the world. The UNHCR estimates that conflict in Afghanistan has generated over 2,800,000 refugees, with 1.7 million crossing the border into Pakistan. Afghanistan continues to be plagued with ongoing insecurity and human rights violations at the hands of insurgent forces. Insurgent groups continue to carry out frequent attacks on citizens, with car-bombings and targeted killings common within some areas of the country. Religious minorities are especially persecuted, either by harassment or physical violence.

While this unrest persists, Pakistan will continue to receive thousands of Afghani refugees. A small handful of these refugees will eventually move through to India, Indonesia and Australia.

## **Burma (Myanmar)**

The continued control of the Military regime in Myanmar continues to compel hundreds of thousands of Burmese across the border to Thailand, as well as Bangladesh, Malaysia, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Indonesia. The majority of unregulated Burmese who have fled the military regime live and work as illegal migrants.

Since independence in 1948 from British colonial rule, Burma has been plagued with ethnic conflict as ethnic minorities clash with each other and the military regime in power. The military government is notorious for gross human rights abuses, suppressing its dissidents, and depriving its population of basic human rights. Ethnic groups have been forcibly displaced, forced into labour and economically burdened by arbitrary taxation.<sup>56</sup> Many citizens rely on bribes to access basic health and education facilities, and in some cases people have been forced to clear landmines by the government. Despite more transparent elections and the release of politician and human rights advocate Aung San Suu Kyi, there is little optimism that these practices will change in the near future. This being the case, the flows of migrants from Burma to receiving countries in the Asia-Pacific will remain a major migration issue for the region.

With pockets of political and ethnic tensions common within the region, there is always the possibility that new conflicts may lead to future displacement of populations within the Asia-Pacific region.

## **Trafficking**

The trafficking of people for sexual exploitation and forced labour is a major area of transnational crime in the Asia-Pacific region. The lucrative industry generates US \$9.7 billion a year for traffickers in the region. While trafficking is generally considered as the movement of people across borders, it is increasingly common to have organised trafficking of persons within national borders. This trafficking is difficult to monitor and is perhaps more prevalent than the transnational movement of people.<sup>57</sup> Trafficking of persons re-directs the benefits

of migration from the migrant and their family, as well as their community and government, to the trafficker. Significantly, it deprives a country of its human capital and reduces potential remittance payments.<sup>58</sup>

It is estimated that out of the 2,450,000 forced labour victims of trafficking in the world, 1,360,000 are from the Asia Pacific region.<sup>59</sup> These men and women (and often children) are forced to work in commercial agriculture, fishing industries, mines, sweatshops and sex work.<sup>60</sup>

Thailand has been described as a regional ‘hub’<sup>61</sup> of trafficking, especially of women for work in sex industries, as shown in Figure 7. Girls and young women from Burma (Myanmar), Laos, Cambodia and China are lured to work illegally in Thailand’s sex industry, often under false pretences of legitimate work. Thai women are also vulnerable to being trafficked to nations within the region such as Australia, Japan, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan.



**Figure 7 (Left):**  
Main flows of sex and entertainment workers in Asia

Source:  
GCIM, 2006

## Regional frameworks for governing migration

Migration is manifestly a trans-boundary issue. As the above section highlights, the management of migrant flows is needed at both the sending and receiving ends. This occurs to a degree in the inter-dependent migration policies between Asia-Pacific nations; however the region lacks a formal institutional framework sufficient to regulate migration. In its place, there are many forms of multi-level migration governance, which states selectively engage in.<sup>62</sup> Table 5 provides an overview of the main regional processes that cover selective migration issues. The table highlights that while some meaningful dialogue and regulation on migration occurs, it is highly fragmented. There remains a narrow focus on specific issues—such as transnational crime or economic development—and no attempt to comprehensively regulate the multifaceted area of migration.

In addition to the multilateral processes in the region, there are a significant number of bilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries that collectively provide broader regulation of migration. Table 6 sets out a selection of these agreements.

**Table 5 (Below):** Multilateral Processes in the Asia Pacific

Sources: IOM, ASEAN, and APEC and PIF.<sup>63</sup>

Multilateral process	Asia-Pacific Membership	Focus Area/Migration initiatives
Abu-Dhabi Dialogue	Bangladesh, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour mobility and its development potential including data sharing, capacity-building, and preventing illegal immigration</li> <li>• Notion of shared responsibility and mutual interest between origin and destination countries</li> </ul>
The Inter-governmental Asia-Pacific Consultation on Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants (APC)	All 34 Members from the Asia-Pacific region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature, causes and consequences of population movements; facilitating data collection and information sharing; prevention and preparedness of movement; durable solutions to refugee situations</li> <li>• The APC is observed by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the UNHCR.</li> </ul>
Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has introduced a number of measures aimed at facilitating the mobility of professional and business people<sup>64</sup></li> </ul>

Multilateral process	Asia-Pacific Membership	Focus Area/Migration initiatives
Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Burma (Myanmar), Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation within ASEAN is mainly focused on the core issues of recruitment, rights protection, facilitating remittances and information collection. The ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers includes commitments to share data; promote 'decent, human, productive, dignified and remunerative employment for migrant workers'; control the trafficking of people; and provide assistance to migrant workers in situations of conflict.<sup>65</sup></li> </ul>
Bali Process	Well represented by Asia-Pacific nations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on transnational crime, including people smuggling and trafficking</li> <li>• Dialogue promotes greater intelligence sharing between nations and cooperation among regional law enforcement agencies.</li> </ul>

Multilateral process	Asia-Pacific Membership	Focus Area/Migration initiatives
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process looks at prevention of transnational crime, and attempts to tackle the root causes of illegal migration, by increasing the opportunities for legal migration, and promoting good practices on the management of asylum seekers.</li> </ul>
Colombo Process	Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Colombo process is a forum for Asian labour sending countries.</li> <li>• The forum facilitates dialogue on best practices for overseas employment, emerging issues in overseas labour for both labour sending and receiving states, and practical solutions for current issues.</li> <li>• The process currently focuses on protecting migrant workers from abusive practices and enhancing labour migration benefits. The dialogue also focus' on capacity building, with the collection and sharing of data and country cooperation key tenets of this.</li> </ul>

Multilateral process	Asia-Pacific Membership	Focus Area/Migration initiatives
Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)	Only Pacific nations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The forum has a broad mandate to address the issues facing the Pacific region, and particularly provide support to the most vulnerable of its members</li> <li>The dialogue does not focus on migration, however it is somewhat discussed within the Forum's key areas of focus: economic governance, political governance and security, and strategic partnerships and coordination.</li> </ul>

**Table 6 (Below):** Selected examples of bilateral agreements covering migration

Bilateral Agreements	Focus
Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 between India and Nepal	Article 7 of the treaty states that ‘the governments of India and Nepal agree to grant, on a reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership and property, participation in trade and commerce, movement that privileges of a similar nature.’ <sup>66</sup>
Recognized Seasonal Employment Scheme (NZ-Pacific Islands) and Pilot Seasonal Labour Scheme (AUS-Pacific Islands)	Scheme to bring Pacific Islanders to NZ/ Australia for seasonal agricultural work. Targets the perceived labour shortages in NZ/Australia, whilst also facilitating development in sending countries.
Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement	Broadens access for personal contract suppliers, as well as nurses and caregivers. A stated number of Filipino nurses and caregivers can enter Japan in order to obtain qualifications and personal training in nursing, and also language training.

## Conclusion

Migration is embedded within the social, economic and environmental character of the Asia-Pacific. Equally, the diversity displayed between nations in this region has a significant impact on shaping migration within the region. With both developed and developing countries (and with them both economically poor and wealthy economies) existing as geographical neighbours, migration is frequent within the region. Prompting people to seek out and enhance their quality of life through greater living conditions and employment.

In this context, many issues have, and will continue to emerge that impact upon migration flows within the Asia-Pacific region. Climate change, and its expected impacts, will be a significant and largely unpredictable force on the flow of people within the region. With pockets of political and ethnic tensions common within the region, there is always the possibility that new conflicts may lead to future displacement of population within the Asia-Pacific region. The global economy will also have important ramifications within the Asia-Pacific, and economic instability, as seen in the 2009 Global Financial Crisis, may alter the movement of people who seek to improve their economic conditions.

It is therefore somewhat counter-intuitive that such a pervading issue in the region lacks a formal institution to regulate it. The regional processes described in this report present a fragmented approach to managing the broad issues associated with migration, with key migration issues, and members of the Asia-Pacific overlooked. Developing a regional framework to address the issues associated with migration is fundamental to providing nations with the capacity to manage the movement of people, and for allowing consistent and comprehensive migration policies across the region. With this cooperation, the full benefits of migration can be realised, and emerging issues within the region can be anticipated and collectively managed.

For the Catholic Church, regional cooperation on migration is of paramount importance. The Catholic Church aims to provide pastoral care to all people, regardless of their legal status as they move through different nations. Regional cooperation on this issue is therefore fundamental in facilitating the effective assistance of the Catholic Church and other organisations.