COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot 51: Travel restrictions and mobility UPDATE

Understanding the migration & mobility implications of COVID-19

These COVID-19 Analytical Snapshots are designed to capture the latest research, information and analysis in a fast-moving environment. Topics will be repeated from time to time as research and analysis develops. If you have an item to include, please email us at research@iom.int.

New research & analysis on travel restrictions & COVID

Tourism restarts: 40% of destinations have now eased travel restrictions by the UN World Tourism Organization

Migrant smugglers are profiting from travel restrictions by A. Mbiyozo

Migration and mobility after the 2020 pandemic: The end of an age? by Alan Gamlen

Shifting forms of mobility related to COVID19 by Susan Martin and Jonas Bergmann

Rethinking the need for legal pathways to mobility: Taking human security seriously by Luisa Feline Freier

Stranded irregular migrant workers during COVID-19 Crisis: The question of repatriation by Ahmet İçduygu

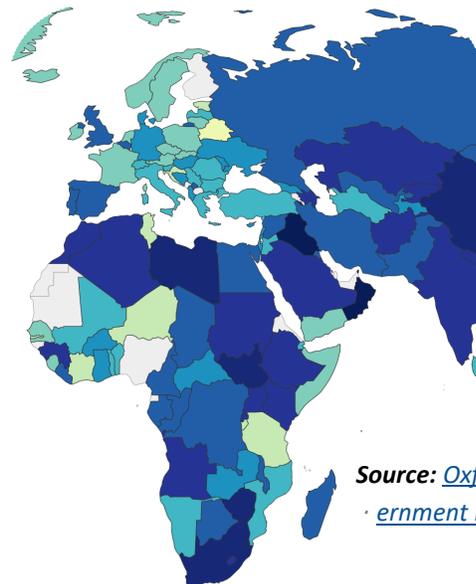COVID-19 and human rights of migrants: More protection for the benefit of all by Vincent Chetail

Immobility as the ultimate "migration disrupter" by Marie McAuliffe

80,884 restrictions have been adopted by 219 countries, territories or areas (as of 7 August 2020).

Divergence in easing of restrictions

As time has passed, the severity of the health crisis has subsided in some countries but grown in others. In turn, this has led to a divergence in the stringency of internal movement restrictions imposed by governments.

Source: Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker

The severity of these restrictions has been mapped by Oxford University who have developed a "Government Response Stringency Index", based upon nine response indicators—including school and workplace closures and travel bans—which ranks the stringency of mobility restrictions in force. The index is updated daily and so allows the development of these restrictions to be seen.

Also available on the site is an interactive tool to visually analyze the relationship between recorded COVID-19 cases and stringency levels across countries, as well as regional reports which summarize recent changes in government responses.

Migrant smugglers profiting from travel restrictions

According to the Institute for Security Studies, COVID-19 mobility restrictions have not deterred people fleeing conflict, violence and dangerous and inhumane conditions, but have driven more people to irregular means of travel. This is benefitting smugglers, who are adapting to meet changing needs. The increase in demand is raising prices, making those unable to afford the higher costs vulnerable to traffickers posing as smugglers, and with access to desired destinations increasingly difficult, more dangerous routes are being explored. In some cases smuggling is still not possible—IOM assisted stranded migrants left in Zimbabwe after smugglers were unable to circumvent South Africa's tightened borer controls.

Aviation and international tourism

Since April, UNWTO reported that 100% of global destinations had imposed travel restrictions, international tourism has seen a modest return, with 40% of destinations easing restrictions, although only four destinations have lifted restrictions completely. This partial recovery has been aided by the formation of travel bubbles that allow mobility across borders without on-arrival quarantine.

After previously falling by 68.6% in May, there were 47.9% fewer scheduled global flights in the first two weeks of August compared to 2019. For more information about aviation restrictions across the world, see IATA's Travel Regulations Map.

IOM supporting safe mobility

Across the world, IOM is mobilizing its expertise in migration management and emergency operations to strengthen public health capacities at points of entry (PoEs) and ensure safe mobility. This support includes:

⇒ Distributing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as well as medical equipment;
⇒ Establishing screening spaces at PoEs;
⇒ Developing and implementing training curricula, and delivering training sessions, including on the use of PPE and PoE operating procedures; and
⇒ Training border agents on infection prevention and screening/referral of suspect COVID-19 cases at PoEs.