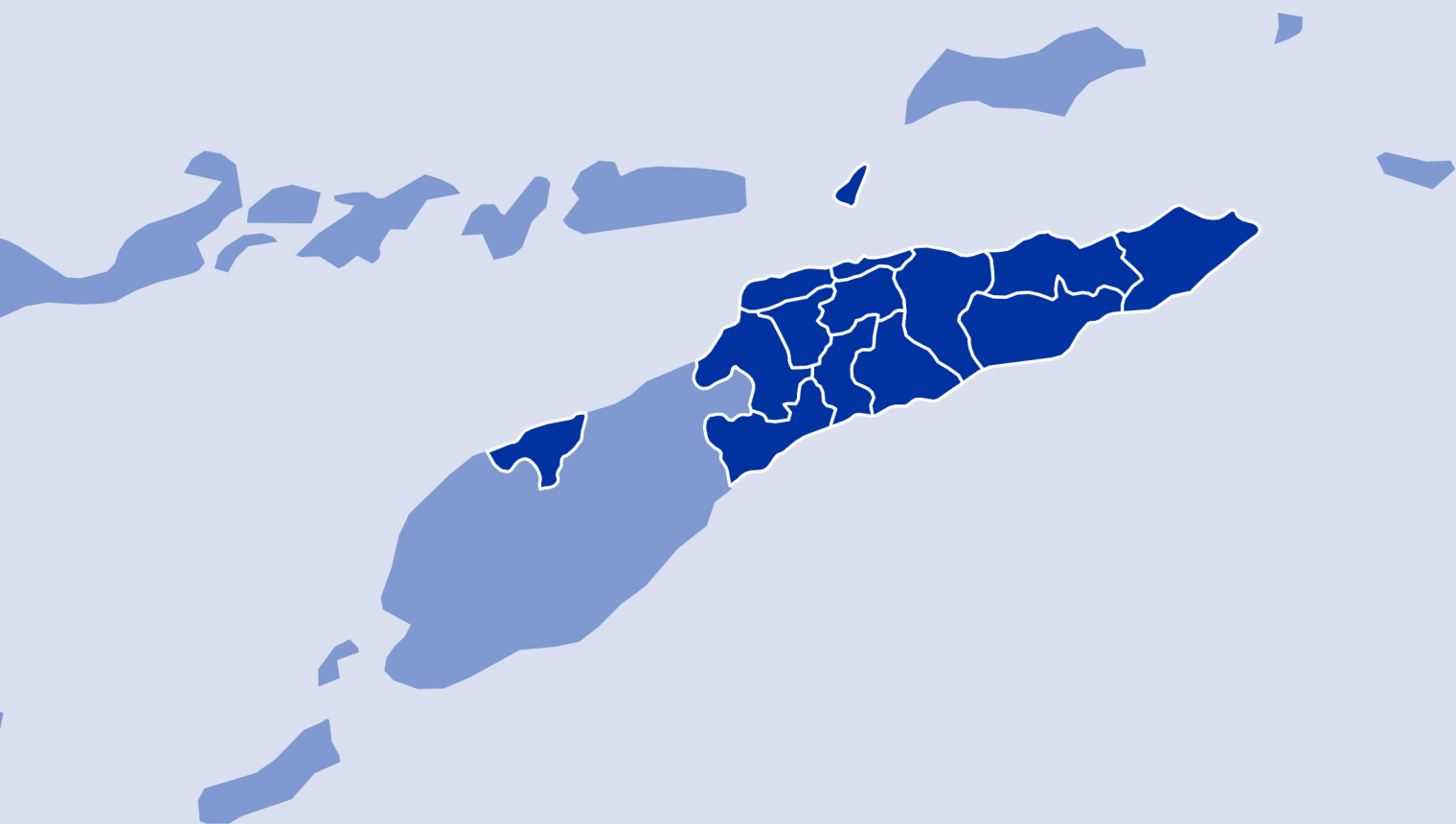


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MIGRATION PROFILE IN TIMOR-LESTE



IOM
UN MIGRATION

TIMOR-LESTE

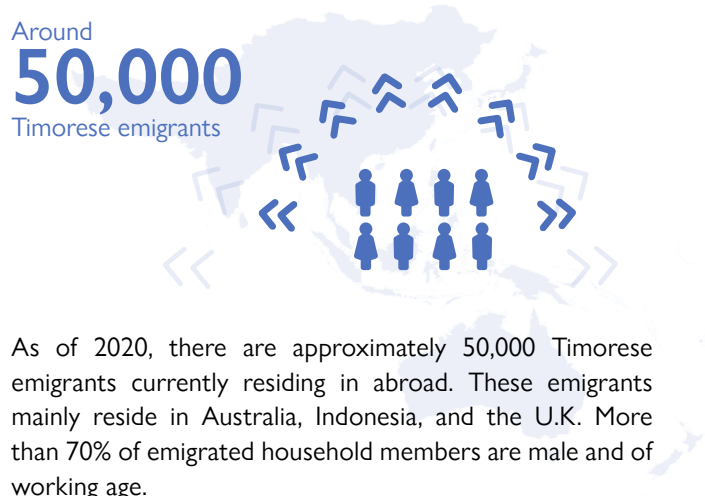
Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

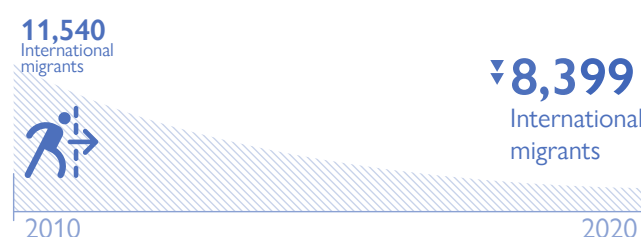
Migration is not a new phenomenon for Timor-Leste. The country experienced migration in the past, particularly in 1975 and 1999 when thousands of Timorese were displaced and/or emigrated to mainly Portugal and Australia. During the unrest in the wake of the 1999 referendum for independence, many residents of Timor-Leste fled to neighbouring Indonesia.

Timor-Leste is both a sender and recipient of migrant workers, and the Government of Timor-Leste (GoTL) recognizes the need to have solid policies to protect them, both within Timor-Leste and Timorese migrants abroad.

Key issues and potential future priorities of the GoTL include, but are not limited to: labour migration (mainly emigration but also in terms of attracting skilled migrant workers to Timor-Leste to fill skills gaps and transfer skills and knowledge to the domestic labour force), “brain drain” (loss of skilled Timorese workers who emigrate), diaspora engagement and economic development (including facilitating improved channels for transfer of remittances and ensure financial inclusion of migrants), counter-trafficking in persons (TIP) through regional and domestic coordination, and assistance to Timorese nationals abroad (including consular protection, migrant worker rights, diaspora social protection, and cooperation with foreign counterparts).









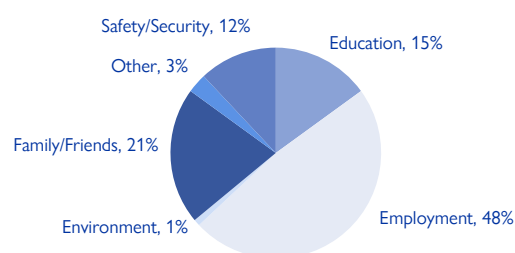
As of 2020, there are approximately 50,000 Timorese emigrants currently residing in abroad. These emigrants mainly reside in Australia, Indonesia, and the U.K. More than 70% of emigrated household members are male and of working age.



Over 8,300 international migrants, the majority of which originating from Indonesia, China and the Philippines and Pakistan, reside in Timor-Leste in 2020 (around 0.63% of the total population), compared to 11,540 in 2010 (or around 2% of the total population).

DRIVERS OF MIGRATION

-  Lack of job and study opportunities
-  Declining agricultural and fishing livelihoods
-  Poor infrastructure
-  Underdevelopment
-  Crime and violence
-  Family reasons



Around 48 per cent of migration taking place within and/or from Timor-Leste is motivated by employment purposes, followed by family and education.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Since independence, Timor-Leste has experienced increased urbanization within the municipalities, as well as migration to Dili and abroad. Drivers include lack of job and study opportunities, declining agricultural and fishing livelihoods, poor infrastructure, underdevelopment, crime and violence, and family reasons (marriage and property/land entitlement issues), with potential for more job and study opportunities, as well as better healthcare, social services, connectivity, and infrastructure in urban areas abroad.

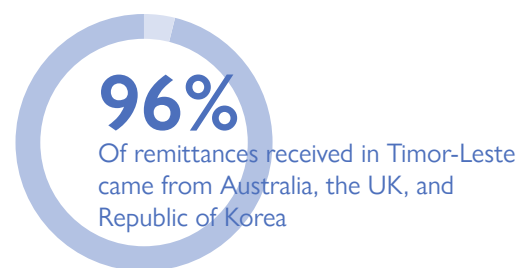
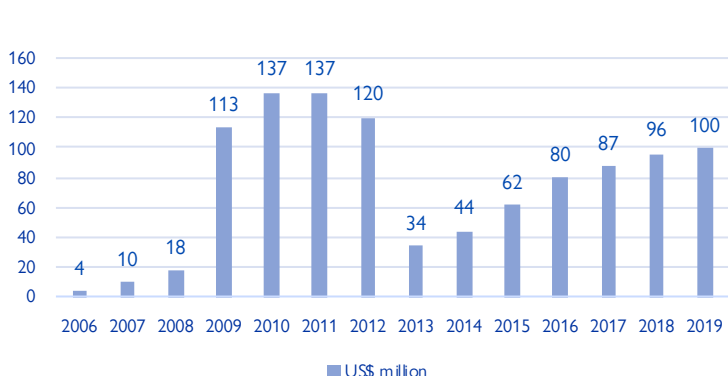
Population growth in cities often outpaces urban development, which has resulted in overcrowding, shortage of affordable housing, illegal and/or unsustainable residential construction, increased crime and violence, water and firewood scarcity, as well as environmental degradation.

Most migrants are youth and working-age adults. Generally, men are more likely to immigrate and emigrate compared with women. Women are the least likely to migrate, unless they are migrating together with other household members. Women often stay in Timor-Leste to care for children, elderly and people with disabilities.

Urban areas have a surplus of labour while rural areas have experienced a declining labour force (especially of skilled workers). The high rate of labour migration has resulted in an overall population decline in rural areas, and reduced interest in rural development. Jobs, education, roads/infrastructure, markets, and basic services are centralized in urban areas, which further fuels urbanization and emigration.

Families remaining in their place of origin benefit from remittances migrants send home, as it enables them to improve their standard of living, businesses, education, etc. However, many families become completely dependent on the remittances as they have no other source of income. Furthermore, families who have remained in their place of origin may be more vulnerable to domestic violence (intimate partner violence – IPV) and/or gender-based violence (GBV) as well as divorce and spouse/child abandonment.

Annual Remittance Inflows (2006 - 2019) Timor-Leste



Children and youth migrate to Dili to study and reside with relatives or friends of the family. Many migrant students pay for their housing in kind, either through unpaid domestic labour or with agricultural products grown by their family. However, the higher cost of living, inability to keep up with both school and housework, the possible financial strain on the families back home, combined with high unemployment rates among graduates, are believed to be the major causes behind students either dropping out or failing to graduate, and often opting to search for employment opportunities instead.

In 2022, Timor-Leste developed the Timor-Leste National Diaspora Policy 2023-2027 and its associated action plan, and the Timor-Leste Remittance Mobilization Strategy. As the Government has greater awareness of economic diversification opportunities, it is committed to engaging diaspora communities abroad and has established a specific secretariat for diaspora engagement.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MNEC) and the Secretariat of State for Vocational Training, Policy and Employment (SEPFOPE) have departments tasked with assisting Timorese citizens abroad. Their coverage, coordination, and resources are controlled by SEPFOPE. MNEC, through its diplomatic missions updates the registration of Timorese citizens abroad, while many Timorese emigrants may not be able, interested, and/or aware of how to register/vote from abroad. Many Timorese citizens hold dual citizenship and emigrated on Portuguese passports, which makes it difficult to record accurate statistics of Timorese diaspora, such as within the European Union (EU). SEPFOPE, in contrast, only assists Timorese seasonal migrant workers through appointed labour attaches in Australia and the Republic of Korea.

Most emigrants experienced an overall increase in educational level after they emigrated. The number of university and vocational training graduates has increased, while the number of respondents who had only completed secondary school or lower has decreased. Most respondents also gained some form of employment or other income by emigrating, compared to their employment status in Timor-Leste.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS



Develop an inter-ministerial migration policy for Timor-Leste at national level with emphasis on law enforcement, sustainable development, human capital/capacity building, migrant protection and human rights, strengthening migration institutions and border management, fulfilling international and regional commitments, as well as address a possible accession to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its implications.



Develop a clear, inter-ministerial diaspora policy with emphasis on informing and protecting the rights of Timorese citizens overseas as well as engaging the diaspora to accelerate sustainable development in Timor-Leste by boosting migrant remittances flows, and facilitating skills transfers and exchanges, and encouraging entrepreneurship in Timor-Leste among returning migrants, etc.



Increase investments in job creation, support entrepreneurship/small businesses, develop/expand partnerships with private sector, facilitate and increase the flow of migrant workers' remittances to and within Timor-Leste, improve and expand seasonal work programs, as well as ensure the protection and assistance of migrant workers, in the next National Action Plan for Labour Migration.



Strengthen institutions that directly or indirectly manage migration, reinforce border management system, and allocate adequate resources to relevant agencies tasked with migration governance and enforcing migration laws. Socialize migration laws through all media platforms at all levels of GoTL and society and in all areas of the country.



Building on the momentum gained by the promulgation of the anti-human trafficking law, establish the Anti-Trafficking Commission (KLATU) to coordinate inter-agency counter-trafficking efforts. Additionally, consider putting in place an overall institutional framework that can assume the key coordinating role in migration management in Timor-Leste.



Expand migration data collection efforts and improve coordination and information-sharing among GoTL institutions that collect migration data, as well as support the development of a population/identification data management system to monitor and regulate migration within, to, and from Timor-Leste.