

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 analysis develops. If you have an item to include, please email us at research@iom.int.



New research & analysis on returning migrants & COVID

[Transnational mobilities of COVID discourse: The Question of Return](#), by Laavanya Kathi-ravelu and Arok-kiaraj Heller

[COVID-19 forces migrants and refugees back to crisis-ridden Venezuela](#), by the Norwegian Refugee Council

[India's coronavirus mass migration: how we've misunderstood the Indian migrant labourer](#), by Suganda Nagpal and Vatsalya Srivastava



Returning home in a pandemic

Although the [lockdowns and travel restrictions](#) enacted in an attempt to reduce the spread of COVID-19 have curbed the majority of mobility, they also triggered large flows of return migration, with migrants returning home in response to the adverse impact of the virus on [economic activity](#) and to avoid being [stranded](#) overseas. This has been witnessed all over the world, but has particular ramifications for migrants living in countries with limited social protection, or in countries in which migrants may be ineligible for social protection, making them especially vulnerable and at risk of starvation and homelessness in a lockdown. More on the social protection of migrants can be found in snapshot [38](#).

The fastest million

Hastened by COVID-19, New Zealand's population has reached 5 million. According to [Statistics New Zealand](#), the 'fastest million' in the country's history was aided by 'unusual international travel and [migration](#) patterns', with New Zealand citizens returning home after living overseas while those already residing in the country were 'unable or reluctant' to travel.

The world's largest repatriation

[Many](#) countries have [repatriated](#) citizens stranded overseas due to the pandemic, but none of these operations are bigger than India's repatriation exercise. In the first phase of the world's [largest ever](#) peacetime repatriation, [India](#) is deploying commercial jets, military aircraft and naval warships to bring up to 1.8 million migrant workers, international students and vulnerable citizens back to the country. Those [returning home](#) are required to pay for their journey and are screened for COVID-19 symptoms before departure, with only asymptomatic Indians permitted to board. In the [United Arab Emirates](#) alone, where an estimated 3 million Indians live, almost 200,000 have applied for repatriation.



The return of stranded Nepali workers

Officials in Nepal, which left many migrant workers [stranded](#) after placing a ban on most citizens returning home, are expecting up to 400,000 migrants to [return](#) following the anticipated relaxation of the country's lockdown on June 2—100,000 of them immediately.

Malaysia and four Gulf states alone [accommodate](#) 1.5 million Nepalis, where many are [out of work](#) due to COVID-19 induced lockdowns.

The stigmatization of return migrants

The fear that returning migrants bring the virus [with them](#) has meant that many migrants have faced stigmatization upon their return.

When the pandemic began to unfold in Europe, for example, many [Senegalese](#) migrants opted to return, paying fishermen to bring them across the (by then closed) border. However, some boats were prevented from docking by residents, while [newspapers](#) portrayed the returnees as sneaking into the country. [Guatemalan](#) returnees have been subject to similar stigmatization.

You can find out more about the stigmatization of migrants during the pandemic in snapshots [6](#) and [29](#). Combating xenophobia and racism is in snapshot [33](#).

COVID-19 and the return of Venezuelan migrants

Over 4.5 million Venezuelans have fled the country's economic and political [crisis](#) in recent years, with over a third fleeing to neighbouring Colombia. Many of those residing in Colombia do not have [regular status](#), and work in the [informal economy](#) without social protection or access to the country's health system. The lockdowns imposed due to the pandemic have halted this informal work and in turn forced [hundreds](#) of Venezuelans—facing [eviction](#) with no access to water in their adopted countries—to return home where they know they will have a [roof](#) over their heads.

With flights grounded and no public transport, some are organising private [buses](#). However for others—such as those making the journey [on foot](#)—the return journey is fraught with [risks](#): migrants have been threatened by armed groups and irregular movements may play into human traffickers' hands. Those who do return are required to quarantine for two weeks, but some have voiced [concerns](#) that these quarantine facilities are dirty and overcrowded, often without the provision of food and water.

This COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot has been produced by [IOM Research](#) (research@iom.int).

Important disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IOM. The inclusion or presentation of material does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM, or of any of its members or partners.