

*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](mailto:research@iom.int).*



### New research and analysis on internal movements and COVID-19

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

[Should internal migrants be held accountable for spreading COVID-19?](#), by Qijie Shi and Tao Liu.

[COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens](#), by the World Bank.

[COVID-19 is reducing domestic remittances in Africa: what does it mean for poor households?](#), by Samik Adhikari

[The Schengen Area and the Coronavirus Pandemic](#) by Jolanta Szymańska

[Lockdown Strategies, Mobility Patterns and COVID-19](#) by Nikos Askitas, Konstantinos Tatsiramos and Bertrand Verheyden



### Internal mass movement

In the days following the country's lockdown in March, India witnessed the largest internal mass movement since partition in 1947, with [7.5 million](#) moving from urban centres to rural areas by 23 May. According to the [World Bank](#), the lockdown has impacted the livelihood of a large proportion of India's internal migrants, who often work in the [informal sector](#) without social protection.

The government [responded](#) by setting up camps with basic provisions to provide shelter, however, many opted to return home—some travelling over [1,000](#) kilometres. Upon reaching their home villages, some returning migrants have been subject to [stigma](#) as villagers fear that they are carriers of the virus, even after quarantining for 14 days.

### COVID-19 and domestic remittances

While the importance of international remittances in supporting the human development is widely [documented](#), less attention is given to the crucial role that domestic remittances play. [Research](#) indicates that internal remittances reach more African households, including more of the very poorest, likely because the number of people who migrate within countries is far [higher](#) than those who move across borders and, due to the high upfront costs of migrating abroad, involves [poorer](#) individuals. As a result, the decline in domestic remittances induced by the pandemic may leave [rural households](#) without a key source of supplementary income which, in turn, may result in increased poverty.

## Why internal migrants aren't to blame for the spread of COVID-19

When COVID-19 initially swept through China, some pointed to mass internal migration during the Chinese Spring Festival as the key driver. However, in a recent analysis [Shi and Liu](#) dispute this, instead finding that those cities which were first affected were megacities that connect with Wuhan through business and tourism as opposed to internal migration. They also note that the spread of COVID-19 in Europe, despite the region being out of holiday season, highlights that no one or no group should be blamed for the spread of the virus—mobility has become increasingly the norm, they argue.



### Closing internal borders

In April, as the COVID-19 pandemic began to intensify in [Australia](#), several states opted to erect water barriers and road checkpoints to prevent all but essential travel to and from neighboring territories, the first time such measures have been taken since the Spanish flu 100 years ago.

In mid-June, these internal borders began to [reopen](#), with South Australia relaxing its border controls for most states, although they remain in place for the two most populous states—New South Wales and Victoria—where most COVID-19 cases were reported. These borders are expected to be opened in late July.

### Halting of free movement of people

Under the [Schengen Agreement](#), any person is permitted to cross the internal borders of the Schengen Area—which encompasses most EU states—without being subject to border checks. However, the onset of the pandemic saw many states unilaterally reintroduce [border controls](#) in an attempt to slow the spread of the virus. As cases in Europe begin to [fall](#), states have begun to lift these [restrictions](#). Slovenia opened its borders on [May 15](#), while the majority of Schengen countries – from France and Italy to Poland and Greece – lifted restrictions in [mid-June](#). Sweden, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, [meanwhile](#), did not close their borders at any point. The EU has launched the web platform [Re-open EU](#), which provides real-time information on borders and available means of transport in member states.

ECOWAS, Africa's largest free-movement area, imposed border restrictions in [mid-March](#), leaving those on the move in the region [stranded](#) without access to the labour market or social protection. Government ministers have since proposed to reopen internal land, air and maritime borders in July as part of a [three-phase plan](#). Similarly, [Kenya](#) closed its borders to fellow East Africa Community members in May, and nine [mobile laboratories](#) have been deployed to provide systematic testing at the EAC's internal borders, particularly along the border between Kenya and Uganda.

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

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