

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.

Key Research and analysis on Cross-border workers

[Essential but Unprotected: Highly Mobile Workers in the EU during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

by Zane Rasnaca

[“Disposable” and “essential”: Changes in the global hierarchies of migrant workers after COVID-19](#)

by Anna Triandafyllidou and Lucia Nalbandian

[Why helping cross-border commuters is key to fighting COVID-19](#)

by Sandra Caballero and Mouchka Heller

[Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 for Africa’s women traders : What more can we do?](#)

by Asmita Parshotam

[When Emergency Measures Become the Norm: Post-Coronavirus Prospects for the Schengen Zone](#)

by Hanne Beirens, Susan Fratzke, and Lena Kainz

[The Economics of Migration: Labour Market Impacts and Migration Policies](#)

by Francesco Fasani, Joan Lull, Cristina Tealdi

Who are cross-border workers?

[Cross-border workers](#) live in one country but work in another. Mobility may be daily or weekly, but short-term and routine. For many cross-border workers, this kind of regularity in cross-border mobility has been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also sometimes referred to as “frontier” workers, cross-border workers [commute across national boundaries](#) for purposes related to wages, taxes, education, health care, employment opportunities and/or access to markets.

[Even during a pandemic](#), the rights of cross-border workers are protected under [international law](#).

More than [332,000](#) cross-border workers living in France, Italy, Germany and Austria are employed in Switzerland.

Did you know?

The San Ysidro port of entry, located in San Diego, USA and Tijuana, México, is one of the busiest land-border crossings in the world. Due to a combination of mobility restrictions related to COVID-19 and other migration policies, entries have dropped [by around 50%](#).

- ⇒ 2019: 26 million vehicle passenger and 10 million pedestrian entries into the US.
- ⇒ 2020: 13 million vehicle Passenger and 4 million pedestrian entries into the US (as of October).



Photo: San Ysidro Border Crossing by [Phil Konstantin](#).

Disproportionate impact on some industries and some kinds of laborers

In the [absence](#) of an internationally accepted and relevant definition for essential workers, policies have not been [consistent](#) across countries and sectors. Overall, these measures have led to a disproportionate impact on cross-border workers who face a [social protection gap](#) not faced by longer-term migrant workers. Unlike workers in other sectors who can [telework](#), cross-border workers in the [manufacturing](#) and the [agriculture sectors](#) rely on in-person labour employment opportunities.

Data on cross-border worker flows

International statistics on the flows of cross-border workers, at least using government reported data, [has not been standardized across the world](#). Some countries report [entries and exits](#), others report [just entries](#), and others [infer mobility from other sources](#). Notably, due to the short-term nature of the mobility, cross-border workers are excluded from international migrant stock data sets. ([UN DESA, 1998, para. 42](#)). Increasingly, cross-border labour travel has been measured using [cell-phone location data](#) or [web-based](#), instantaneous data collection tools. For some observers, [privacy is a concern](#).

Critical cross-border workers in healthcare

According to Swiss professional associations, without cross-border workers Switzerland's [hospitals](#) would not function. Over 60% of nurses working at the main Geneva hospital live in nearby France, making COVID-19 mobility restrictions involving border closures very problematic. Swiss coronavirus cases have [surged](#) in recent days and hospital admissions are critically high, causing a 'catch-22' for officials.

Selected regional examples of mobility restrictions impeding cross-border work

⇒ The pandemic has interrupted cross-border movement, an [integral feature of food systems](#) in West Africa. Discussions continue toward a free movement scheme for citizens of [ECOWAS countries](#).



⇒ In August, a causeway linking Malaysia and Singapore—one of the [busiest border crossing locations](#) in the world—was [reopened](#) after several months of closure.



⇒ COVID-19 outbreaks in the [“Triple Frontier”](#) of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay brought mobility to a halt. In mid-October, authorities reopened the main bridge used for crossing the border.



In late July 2020, IOM issued a policy paper which covered many of the topics highlighted in this snapshot. Entitled “Cross-border human mobility amid and after COVID-19,” the policy paper can be found [here](#).

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

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