

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 large-scale migration

[COVID-19 Sets off Mass Migration in India](#) by R. Mukhra, K. Krishan and T. Kanchan

[Migration and reverse migration: Gulf-Malayalees’ perceptions during the Covid-19 pandemic](#) by D. Vadakepat Menon and V. Menon Vadakepat

[COVID-19—the role of mass gatherings](#) by S.H. Ebrahim and Z.A. Memish

[How maps in the media make us more negative about migrants](#) by M. Vermeulen, L. de Korte and H. van Houtum

Large-scale migration events during a pandemic

Large gatherings of migrants, people-in-transit and displaced people have faced added risks during the COVID-19 pandemic. [WHO](#) and [many national guidelines](#) have recommended against mass gatherings in entertainment, religious, or transit locations. Despite these measures—and in some cases [because of](#)—large-scale migration events have emerged in many parts of the world. Large-scale migration events have a multi-faceted relationship with COVID-19 and the resulting public-health measures.

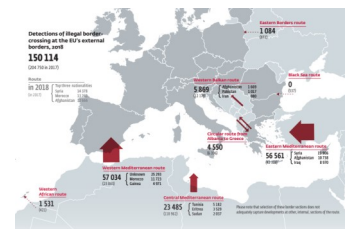
- ⇒ Large-scale movement of people during annual celebrations has resulted in viral super-spreading during [the initial dispersion](#) and also in [subsequent waves](#).
- ⇒ Border closures and [mobility restrictions](#) have created ad-hoc, camp-like settlements along some borders, some of which remain [vulnerable to outbreaks](#).
- ⇒ With the distribution of vaccines and the reopening of economies, large-scale migration could [increase](#), [decrease](#) or [even reverse](#) depending on the corridor.

What is large-scale migration?

Thresholds of what constitutes [large-scale migration](#) are hard to pin down and subject to interpretation. Generally, when large groups of people move in close proximity over a relatively short amount of time, this would constitute a large-scale migration event. A “crisis” has [a much narrower definition](#) relating to threats to life, safety and access to basic needs.

Sensationalism and migration movements

In a [long-documented](#) trend, many media and news outlets characterize large-scale migration in exaggerated and misleading terms. Examples include negative usage of the term “crisis” across headlines and poorly-designed [maps](#). [Scholars](#) have commented that the collective effect of alarmist words and [features](#), especially in the context of a pandemic, can quickly create misunderstandings at best and xenophobic beliefs at worst.



Source: Frontex. [Risk Analysis for 2019](#).

Transportation systems and large-scale migration

Planes



Even though [air travel frequency plummeted](#) in 2020, millions of passengers moved through airports, even at times in [situations](#) without social distancing. Air travel involves [large quantities of people congregated indoors](#) within airports, continues to be one mode of international mobility: the top 5 busiest airports in the world in 2019—Atlanta, Beijing, Los Angeles, Dubai and Tokyo—collectively moved over [470 million passengers](#).

Trains



Following a national lockdown, the mass urban-to-rural migration in India—much of it [facilitated by train](#)—amounted to the [second-largest movement](#) in the country's history, but may have inadvertently sped the spread of COVID. In Europe, some suggest that customers could begin shifting preference from [planes to trains](#) as a preferred means of transport.

Buses



The mixed use of buses and walking is a [primary method](#) of [movement](#) for Central American travelers moving North. Many migrants in Central America were [stranded](#) due to cross-border mobility restrictions.

Walking



Many migrants have [walked long distances](#) to cross international borders, many times in groups or caravans of people. As an example, [some Venezuelan migrants](#) residing in Colombia began returning to Venezuela by foot during the first months of the pandemic. The movement has since [reversed](#), with many migrants now re-entering Colombia from Venezuela.

Pandemics, environmental drivers and large-scale migration events

Even when global herd immunity against COVID-19 has been achieved, the [ever-increasing interaction between humans and the environment](#) will create the conditions for future environmental– or health-related migration.

A recent [blog post](#) on the Environmental Migration Portal explores how environmental and public health emergencies have unique interconnections with human mobility and explains how the rhetoric of “crisis” does not always help address the urgent policy issues at hand.

Data privacy implications

The [collection and analysis](#) of personal data on a mass scale has received increased attention during COVID19. The precision of mobility tracking data includes the ability to [monitor individuals in public spaces](#).

[Experts encourage](#) policy makers and tech companies to better protect mobility data, including the mobility data of migrants, a group which can include people who face increased risk of data privacy violations.

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

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