

# UN migration agency: COVID has 'radically altered' mobility

December 1 2021, by Jamey Keaten

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A migrants makeshift camp is set up in Calais, northern France, Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021. At the makeshift camps outside Calais, migrants are digging in, waiting for the chance to make a dash across the English Channel despite the news that at least 27 people died this week when their boat sank a few miles from the French coast. Credit: AP Photo/Rafael Yaghobzadeh

The U.N. migration agency says the coronavirus pandemic appears to have accelerated "hostile rhetoric" against migrants in the world and "radically altered" mobility, projecting in a new report that travel and other COVID-19-fighting restrictions could dampen migration worldwide as long as they remain.

The International Organization for Migration released Wednesday its [World Migration Report 2022](#), a vast compendium of the latest trends in human movement of all types—from people fleeing war to workers seeking jobs abroad—and a recap of the last two years of mobility. It cited the impact, for example, of a plunge in air travel last year as the pandemic was raging.

IOM pointed to a "dramatic increase" in internal displacement—movement within countries—caused by natural disasters, conflict and violence just as COVID-19 restrictions have sporadically shut borders across the globe since the pandemic emerged and spread over the last two years.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered immobility worldwide to an extent unseen in recent history, slowing the pace of human mobility and migration," said Ugochi Daniels, IOM's deputy director-general for operations, at a meeting of its member states. "The pandemic is estimated to have negatively impacted the total growth of international migrants by 2 million."

IOM Director-General Antonio Vitorino said "the pandemic also seems to have accelerated the hostile rhetoric toward migrants that has been growing in the last decade."

"So we have devoted, in this report, a chapter on disinformation about migration," he said. "Our research shows that debunking myth, as well as pre-bunking strategies, can help to mitigate or prevent harm caused by

nefarious actors, who seek to undermine balanced discussions on migration."

The report tallied about 281 million international migrants—not 283 million as initially expected—around the world by its latest complete count in 2020, amounting to just 3.6% of the global population. That was up from 272 million in 2019. About 60% of those migrants last year were migrant workers, it said.

IOM noted that migration is increasingly taking place between highly developed countries, not just from poorer countries to rich ones.

International remittances—people sending money back home—dropped to \$702 billion in 2020, compared to \$719 billion a year earlier, but marked a smaller decline than expected.

"The resilience of migrants' international remittances has defied predictions, remaining high in 2020, with just a 2.4% decline globally—and much less dire than the 20 % drop initially projected," Daniels said.

About 3,900 people died while on the move last year, down from 5,400 in 2019, IOM said.

The report highlighted "major migration and displacement events," including conflicts in places like Syria, Yemen, Congo, Central African Republic and South Sudan, as well as political and economic instability like Venezuela and Afghanistan in the period. It also cited climate and weather related displacement in places like China, the Philippines, Bangladesh, India, Haiti and the United States over the last two years.

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