

# **Social Protection for Migrants during the COVID-19 crisis**

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**Mauro Testaverde, Senior Economist, Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice**

**3 reasons why migration matters  
for the COVID-19 response**



# Migrant health and livelihoods are at significant risk

Migrants tend to live and work in crowded conditions that do not permit social distancing, putting them at **increased risk of contracting the disease**

In **Singapore**, 40% of COVID-19 cases in mid-April were low-skilled foreign workers; in **Saudi Arabia** more than 50% cases were foreigners

Migrants are at **high risk of income loss** because they work in jobs affected by social distancing and stay-at-home orders

According to the UN, foreign workers are **30% of workforce** in highly affected sectors in OECD

**Effects** of job loss **particularly significant** for internal and international migrants

They often work in informal jobs and lack safety nets in case of job loss or illness

# Migrants' families and countries of origin face severe impact

Income losses will translate into **declines in remittances**

According to the WB, remittances to LMICs will drop by around **20 percent in 2020**, the sharpest decline in recent history

Remittances represent a **crucial source of income** for families' consumption and investments in human capital and businesses

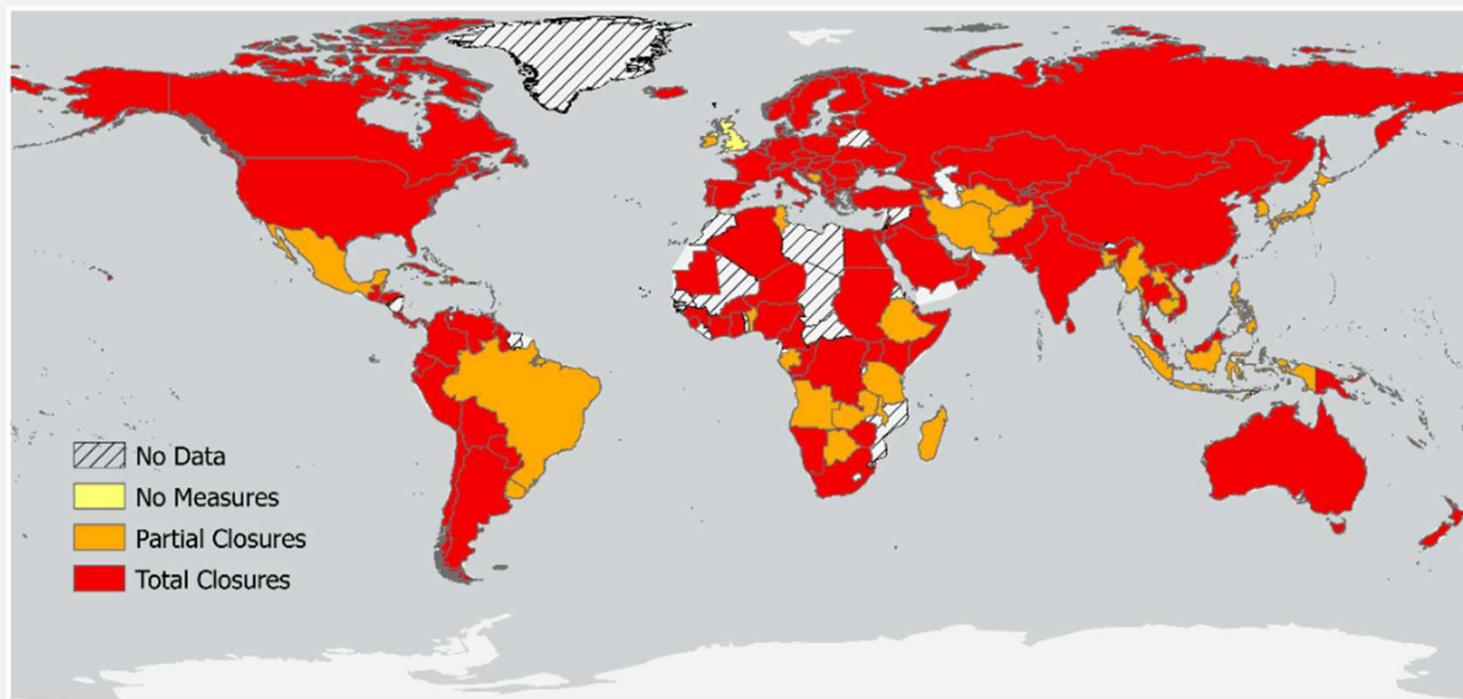
Remittances to GDP greater than 4% in **14 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa**, implying high vulnerability when migrants lose their jobs

In a small country like **Tonga** remittances account for 20% of household income, implying potentially **significant increases in poverty**

# Severe disruptions in certain sectors in destination countries

Major migration destinations have **closed their borders** to international travelers. Limited availability of migrant workers is a concern for **employers in certain sectors in receiving countries**, e.g. agriculture, food processing, health and elderly care

Travel restrictions around the world as of early April 2020



**3 types of SPJ programs  
to address migration-related challenges  
as part of the COVID-19 response**



# Social Safety Net Programs

**Policy options** to include migrants in Social Safety Net Programs

**Expand eligibility** of existing safety net programs to include migrants

**Australia** expanded access to financial assistance for people in financial hardship to some categories of migrants

**Implement** newly created C-19 response programs **irrespective of migration status**

Residence permit holders in **Italy** can apply for subsidy under the C-19 *Cure Italy* stimulus

Migrants in **Ireland** have access to the €350 weekly Pandemic Unemployment Payment

**Provide specific services** to migrants to help them address their distinct challenges

Virus testing and treatment, i.e. **Kazakhstan, Korea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia**

Food and accommodations, i.e. **Panama**

Transportation, i.e. **Indonesia** for emigrants, **Kuwait** for repatriation, **China** for internal migrants

Cash grants, i.e. **Philippines** for emigrants, **State of California** for undocumented migrants

# Employment Retention Policies

Key options to apply Employment Retention Policies to migrants

## Wage subsidies

In **Korea**, migrants under the Employment Permit System are eligible for C-19 wage subsidies

In **New Zealand**, self-isolated seasonal workers due to C-19 case are eligible for wage subsidies

**China** provided wage subsidies to stabilize employment including for internal migrant workers

## Reductions in SI contributions

**China** introduced exemption and reduction of SI contributions including for internal migrants

**Singapore** and **Saudi Arabia** introduced cancellations and reductions of foreign workers' levies

## Changes to migration regulations in sectors facing shortages

Extensions to work permits introduced in several countries: **Australia, Bahrain, Hong Kong**

**Italy, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Poland, Spain, UK**, etc.

# Employment Promotion Policies

**Options** to apply Employment Promotion Policies to migrants

## **Job matching and job search programs**

**Australia** seeks to match some categories of temporary migrant workers with new employment where existing employment has ceased due to the crisis

**China** has developed an app and held online job fairs, interviews, and recruitment to help migrant workers, including internal migrants unable to travel to their workplaces, to jobs

## **Adjustments of rules regarding migration programs to facilitate employment**

**Germany** relaxed travel restrictions to allow seasonal agricultural workers to enter the country

**Spain** announced that work permits will be provided to young immigrants with residency but not work permits to fill shortages in the agriculture sector

**Canada** and **Vietnam** created exceptions to restrictions on international entry to allow foreign workers to enter the country to address current shortages

**3 main challenges and 2 opportunities  
for the design and implementation of these programs**



# Challenges for design and implementation

Migrants face **barriers to accessing social protection** including documentation requirements and language differences

**Identifying migrants** might be difficult, particularly where they have not used legal channels

Innovative approaches include **self-targeting, self-enrollment**, and **cooperation** with telecommunications companies and remittance services providers

**Service delivery** will need to consider public health practices and the migrants' circumstances

**Health screenings, guidelines** on how work should be undertaken, and **plans for response** if a migrant worker falls ill will be key

**Accommodations** will need to be provided in cases in which job losses also result in housing issues

**Distributing benefits** may require reliance on **digital and mobile transfers**, and on **alternative delivery means**

## Opportunities for design and implementation

**Mainstreaming** migrants into existing programs would have several advantages:

**All groups** are provided protections against getting and transmitting the disease

Less **administrative complexity**

Migrants can access benefits **more quickly**

**Local governments** could have an important role to fill emerging gaps:

These governments are well positioned to **understand the unique needs** of their residents and to **create programs** to address these needs when action is not taken at the national level

However, action at the local level should **not replace comprehensive responses** to the challenges faced by migrants by national governments

Examples include: City of **Chicago** and City of **Minneapolis** (USA), Regional Government of **Campania** (Italy), Regional Government of **Tasmania** (Australia)

**Thank you!**

**Mauro Testaverde**  
**Senior Economist, Social Protection and Jobs GP**

*More info available at:*

<https://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/428451587390154689/pdf/Potential-Responses-to-t-COVID-19-Outbreak-in-Support-of-Migrant-Workers-April-21-2020.pdf>