

# Migrant Workers in the Tourism Industry: How Has COVID-19 Affected Them, and What Does the Future Hold?

**Helen Dempster and Cassandra Zimmer**

## Abstract

Governments around the world have closed borders and businesses to combat the spread of COVID-19. These measures have had a devastating effect on the tourism industry, cutting travel by 25 percent and costing more than 100 million jobs. These effects are magnified for the industry's millions of migrant workers. Many have been laid off or furloughed, forced to overstay visas, and asked to take leave or reduced salaries, affecting them, their families, and their home countries dependent on remittance flows. But prior to COVID-19, the industry was not without blemish, and poor working conditions were prevalent. This paper explores how governments and civil society should support migrant workers in the short-term. It also seeks to explore how the tourism industry could use this moment to 'build back better' in the long-term, improving both environmental sustainability and the conditions under which its key workers operate.

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## Introduction

On February 21, 2020, an elderly man left the *MV Grand Princess* cruise ship after a ten-day tour. Just 12 days later, he died of a novel coronavirus – COVID-19. The ship terminated its route, heading back to San Francisco for quarantine procedures. Meanwhile, debate raged as to whether to allow the more than 3,000 passengers and crew off the ship, fearing a disease outbreak. While the condition of the passengers was widely discussed, the crew’s situation was rarely in the media. The *MV Grand Princess* was overwhelmingly staffed by Filipino migrant workers – 518 to be exact. In the end, 13 were diagnosed with COVID-19, and one worker died.<sup>1</sup>

This example highlights the ubiquity of migrant workers within the tourism industry. Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world; it currently employs a tenth of all global workers. Yet roles within the tourism industry are often low-paid, low-status, seasonal or temporary, and in remote locations, meaning it is hard to find interested local workers. Hence the industry has looked elsewhere, attracting both internal and international migrants. For example, 16 percent of tourism workers in the European Union (EU)<sup>2</sup> and 20 percent in the United States (US) are foreign-born.<sup>3</sup> In Australia, the tourism and hospitality industry is one of the largest users of temporary work visas.<sup>4</sup> On average, migrant workers benefit from their employment in the tourism industry, increasing their earning potential, learning new skills, and sending home remittances.

The tourism industry is likely to suffer most from the COVID-19 lockdowns and ensuing economic recession. Tourism arrivals are predicted to decline by anywhere from 58 percent to 80 percent<sup>5</sup> in 2020, and cost about 100.8 million jobs, three quarters of which in G20 countries.<sup>6</sup> As of late April, The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) predicted a USD\$2.7 trillion loss in revenue directly resulting from the global lockdown.<sup>7</sup> Hotels, airlines, and cruise lines have already been devastated by the global lockdown. The European Commission has called for “A Marshall Plan for Tourism”.<sup>8</sup> It will take months for physical restrictions to be lifted and for potential tourists to have the financial ability to travel again.

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<sup>1</sup> Evan Webeck, “Coronavirus: Filipino worker becomes third to die from COVID-19 on stricken cruise ship,” *Mercury News*, April 3, 2020. <https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/04/03/coronavirus-grand-princess-crew-member-dies-in-san-francisco-hospital/>

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat, “Tourism industries - employment,” December 2018. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Tourism\\_industries\\_-\\_employment](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Tourism_industries_-_employment)

<sup>3</sup> New American Economy, “Hospitality & Tourism,” <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/issues/hospitality-tourism/>

<sup>4</sup> Restaurant and Catering Australia, “Reviewing the Skilled Migration and 400 Series Visa Programme: Tourism and Hospitality Industry Response,” September 2014. <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/carlita-warren.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, Antonia. “World Tourism Faces Worst Crisis since Records Began, Says UNWTO.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, May 7, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2020/may/07/world-tourism-faces-worst-crisis-since-records-began-says-unwto-report>.

<sup>6</sup> World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), “WTTC now estimates over 100 million jobs losses in the Travel & Tourism sector and alerts G20 countries to the scale of the crisis,” April 24, 2020. <https://wttc.org/News-Article/WTTC-now-estimates-over-100-million-jobs-losses-in-the-Tourism-&Travel-sector-and-alerts-G20-countries-to-the-scale-of-the-crisis>

<sup>7</sup> “WTTC now estimates over 100 million jobs losses in the Travel & Tourism sector and alerts G20 countries to the scale of the crisis,” April 24, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Commissioner Thierry Breton, “Speech by Commissioner Breton on ‘A Marshall Plan for European Tourism,’” *European Commission*, April 21, 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/breton/announcements/speech-commissioner-breton-marshall-plan-european-tourism\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/breton/announcements/speech-commissioner-breton-marshall-plan-european-tourism_en)

Experts predict that it could take anywhere from one<sup>9</sup> to five<sup>10</sup> years for the industry to recover.

This downturn is going to disproportionately affect the industry's international migrant workers, particularly those conducting low-skilled work in high-income countries (which have, to date, been the hardest hit by the health and economic impacts of the virus). Migrant workers are being laid off or furloughed en masse, asked to take leave, or reduced salaries, affecting not only them as individuals but also their families and countries dependent on remittance flows from abroad to sustain their livelihoods. Moreover, travel restrictions have forced many international migrant workers into limbo, either by causing visa overstays or by preventing migrants from returning to their host countries for work.

Once the immediate effects of COVID-19 have subsided, how should the tourism industry rebuild in a way that is more environmentally sustainable and improves the lives of its millions of migrant workers? Prior to the pandemic, the industry was not without blemish, and its rapid expansion threatened to increase the risk of work-related abuses. This shock provides an opportunity for the industry to reset, imposing a series of short- and long-term interventions to increase and improve the impact of the tourism industry, while reducing the vulnerability of its workers for years to come.

## **Migrant Workers in the Tourism Industry**

Today, at least one in every ten formally employed people work in the tourism industry globally (see box 1); an industry which is rapidly growing. Travel and tourism is an USD\$8 trillion<sup>11</sup> industry that accounts for 10 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP)<sup>12</sup> and 330 million jobs worldwide.<sup>13</sup> In 2019, the sector grew by 3.5 percent, outpacing the global economy for the ninth year in a row.<sup>14</sup> This growth is obvious from the year-on-year increase in the number of international tourism arrivals, exceeding 1.5 billion in 2019.<sup>15</sup> Growth is being seen in all regions of the world, particularly in Southeast Asia and other low-income country markets. For every directly created tourism job, nearly one and a half additional jobs

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<sup>9</sup> Joan Faus, "This is how coronavirus could affect the travel and tourism industry," *World Economic Forum (WEF) and Reuters*, March 17, 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/world-travel-coronavirus-covid19-jobs-pandemic-tourism-aviation/>

<sup>10</sup> "COVID-19 Outlook for Air Travel in the next 5 Years." IATA. International Air Transport Association, May 13, 2020. <https://www.iata.org/en/iata-repository/publications/economic-reports/covid-19-outlook-for-air-travel-in-the-next-5-years/>  
At the time of publishing, predictions for the recovery of the travel and tourism industry vary widely. Most experts agree that recovery will come in waves with certain sectors of the industry recovering faster than others. Demand for travel is expected to vary widely across countries and regions as restrictions loosen and consumers feel safe and economically able to travel.

According to the UNWTO Panel of Experts Survey, some recovery is expected in the final quarter of 2020 and into early 2021, while domestic tourism is expected to recover faster than the demand for international travel.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Becker, "How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?," *National Geographic*, April 2, 2020.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/2020/04/how-coronavirus-is-impacting-the-travel-industry/#close>

<sup>12</sup> Faus, "This is how coronavirus could affect the travel and tourism industry," March 17 2020.

<sup>13</sup> World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), "Economic Impact Report: Travel & Tourism Regional Performance, 2019," <https://wttc.org/Research/Economic-Impact>

<sup>14</sup> World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), "Economic Impact Report: Travel & Tourism Regional Performance, 2019," <https://wttc.org/Research/Economic-Impact>

<sup>15</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), "International Tourism Growth Continues to Outpace the Global Economy," January 20, 2020. <https://www.unwto.org/international-tourism-growth-continues-to-outpace-the-economy>

are created on an indirect or induced basis.<sup>16</sup> Before COVID-19, it was estimated that by 2027 the tourism industry would generate more than 11 percent of the world's GDP and employ a total of 380 million people.<sup>17</sup>

### **Box 1. What is the tourism industry?**

The tourism industry is wide, and hard to define. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines the 'tourism industry' as "all establishments for which the principal activity is a tourism characteristic activity".<sup>18</sup> This includes hotels, catering, restaurants, travel agencies, tourist guides, tourism information offices, conference and exhibition centers, cultural sites, zoos, and theme parks, as well as many others. Different organizations apply different definitions, which makes it hard to define how many jobs are included in the sector, and therefore how many of these jobs are occupied by migrants.<sup>19</sup> It is widely agreed however that the hospitality sector (so, accommodation and food services) accounts for the largest share: 50-75 percent of all jobs in the industry.<sup>20</sup>

Such growth has put pressure on the tourism industry to recruit migrant workers. Initially, as tourists flow into an area, recruitment takes place locally. Then, as development progresses, "the continuing growth in the demand for labor, particularly with certain specialized skills, is likely to outstrip local sources, which will create the need for labor migration."<sup>21</sup> (see box 2). International migrant workers in the tourism industry often enter on seasonal and other forms of temporary visas. Many are hired by placement agencies, subcontracted to work in large hotel chains and other tourism industry occupations. In the long-run, this movement can lead to more permanent forms of migration, as workers enter through new visa schemes, as well as secondary flows such as visiting friends and relatives (VFR) tourism.<sup>22</sup> While the relationship is not causal, in this way, the growth of the tourism industry does appear to track alongside the growth in migration (see figures 1 and 2).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), "COVID-19 and the tourism sector," April 9, 2020.

[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---sector/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_741468.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/briefingnote/wcms_741468.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), "Tourism supports 1 in 10 jobs, outpacing global economy for 6th consecutive year," March 20, 2017. <https://www.wttc.org/about/media-centre/press-releases/press-releases/2017/tourism-supports-1-in-10-jobs-outpacing-global-economy-for-6th-consecutive-year-wttc/>

<sup>18</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), "Glossary of Tourism Terms." <https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms>

<sup>19</sup> International Labor Organization (ILO), "Developments and challenges in the hospitality and tourism sector", Issue paper for discussion at the Global Dialogue Forum for the Hotels, Catering, Tourism Sector, November 23-24, 2010.

[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---sector/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_162202.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_162202.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Policy Approaches to Skills Development in Tourism." In *Tourism Trends and Policies 2012*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/tour-2012-5-en>

<sup>21</sup> C. Michael Hall, and Allan M. Williams, eds., *Tourism and Migration: New Relationships between Production and Consumption*. Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 2013.

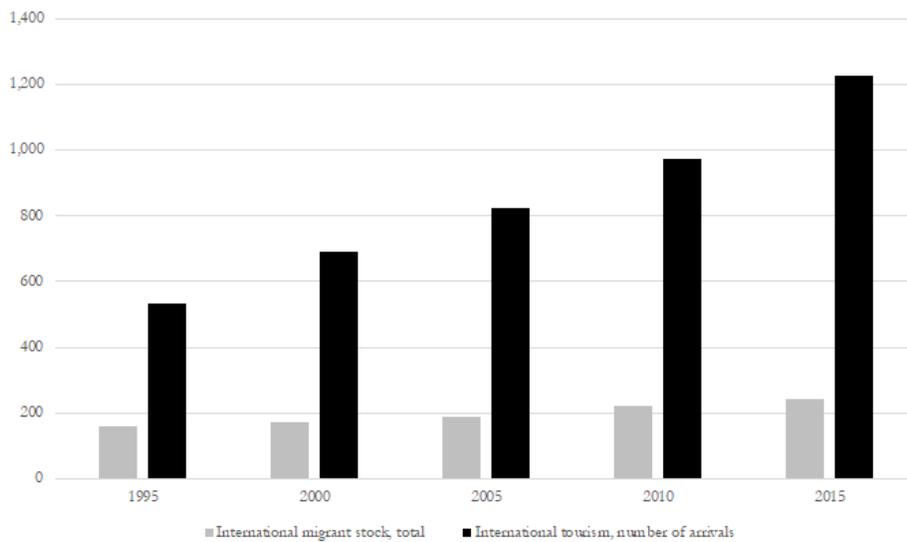
<sup>22</sup> Desiderio Juan Garcia-Almeida, and Esther Hormiga, "Immigration and the competitiveness of an island tourism destination: a knowledge-based reputation analysis of Lanzarote, Canary Islands," *Island Studies Journal* 12, no. 1 (2017): 207-222.

<sup>23</sup> Allan M. Williams, and C. Michael Hall, "Guest Editorial: tourism and migration," *Tourism Geographies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 2-4.

### Box 2. Internal and International Migration

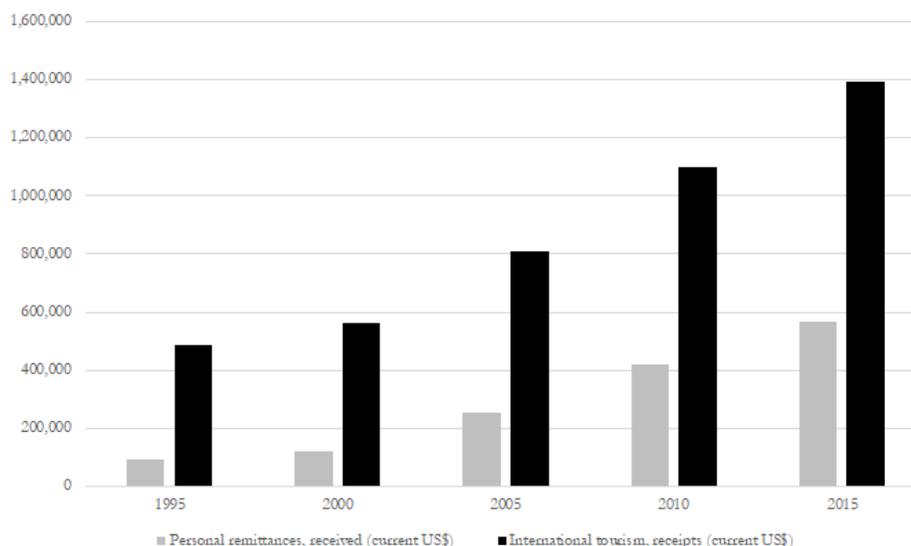
The demand for labor within the tourism industry will attract both internal and international migrants. On the first, people are likely to move from rural to urban areas, or to tourism ‘hotspots’, to fill skill gaps. On the second, people are also likely to move across borders (if they are able) to take up roles within the tourism industry. In this paper, we will predominately focus on international migrants, and often on people moving from low-income to high-income countries. While both internal and international migrants suffer from the same issues inherent within the working practices of the tourism industry, they have different access to government support and social safety nets due to their visa status. Hence, any issues for internal migrant workers are magnified for those moving overseas.

**Figure 1. International migrant stock, and international tourism arrivals, 1995-2015 (million)**



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, retrieved April 7, 2020.

**Figure 2. Personal remittances and international tourism receipts, 1995-2015 (US\$, million)**



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, retrieved April 7, 2020.

Measuring the number of migrants employed in the tourism industry is a difficult task. The size of the industry is huge<sup>24</sup>, and there are many factors inherent in the nature of the work which makes measuring the number of roles difficult; work is often seasonal, part-time or with excessive hours of work, involving unpaid family labor or irregular / informal labor. Roles often see high turnover. In addition, many countries do not collect reliable data that properly and separately identifies tourism work, or the data collected is not useful. Some do, however. In 2016, the European Union (EU) identified 13 million people working in the tourism industry, of which 16 percent were migrants (9 percent from within the EU and 7 percent from outside).<sup>25</sup> In the United States (US), the New American Economy estimates that foreign-born workers constitute one in five of their over 15 million strong tourism workforces.<sup>26</sup> And in Australia, the tourism and hospitality industry is one of the largest users of temporary work visas.<sup>27</sup> Solely in hospitality (a subsection of the tourism industry, see box 1), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that 10 percent of the workforce are migrants.<sup>28</sup>

There are four main reasons why the tourism industry has such a large reliance on migrant labor:

- 1) **Job characteristics.** The tourism industry, more so than any other, relies on a flexible workforce that is based on roles which are part-time, fixed-term, temporary,

<sup>24</sup> Adele Ladkin, "Exploring Tourism Labor," *Annals of Tourism Research* 38, no. 3 (2011): 1135-1155.

<sup>25</sup> Eurostat, "Tourism industries - employment," December 2018. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Tourism\\_industries\\_-\\_employment](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Tourism_industries_-_employment)

<sup>26</sup> New American Economy, "Hospitality & Tourism," <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/issues/hospitality-tourism/>

<sup>27</sup> Restaurant and Catering Australia, "Reviewing the Skilled Migration and 400 Series Visa Programme: Tourism and Hospitality Industry Response," September 2014. <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/carlita-warren.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> OECD, "Policy Approaches to Skills Development in Tourism." <https://doi.org/10.1787/tour-2012-5-en>

and subject to high turnover.<sup>29</sup> These roles are also often low-paid and of low-status. These working conditions, combined with weak regulation, enforcement, and labor organization, lead to a high incidence of informal / irregular working arrangements. These characteristics make it hard for the industry to appeal to and recruit local workers, hence the heavy reliance on migrant workers. However, much evidence shows that migrants can triple their incomes by taking work overseas, and these gains could outweigh the downsides of poor working conditions.<sup>30</sup>

- 2) **Location.** Many jobs are in low-density areas (such as ski resorts). The tourism industry therefore has both a small number of locals to recruit from, and difficulty in attracting talent to move there.
- 3) **Needed skills.** As Aitken and Hall point out, the “increasing diversity of both tourists and workers in the tourism industry mean there is a greater need for those people in the tourism industry to possess skills to manage this diversity.” These skills include languages, cultural knowledge, foreign business ethics and practices, and existing relationships.<sup>31</sup> As an example, local Pacific Islanders often cannot progress to senior levels within the hotel industry without having migration experience.<sup>32</sup>
- 4) **Cost.** It is often cheaper to hire migrant workers rather than locals, either because they are willing to accept lower wages<sup>33</sup> or work for less than the minimum wage.<sup>34</sup> All things being equal (in terms of skill, language, educational background), many employers would therefore choose the cheaper option.

The types of roles migrants are employed in vary hugely throughout the world, particularly between low- and high-income countries. In 1995, King identified three categories of roles within the tourism industry which were occupied by migrant workers, within a hierarchy. In the first, highest, category were skilled managerial posts, typically found in the upper enclaves of major international hotels, and local branches of leading airlines. Migrants may be more needed in these roles in low-income countries with a shortage of available human capital, or where locals are unwilling to take on these roles if better opportunities exist elsewhere. In the second category were intermediate posts like tour guides and agency reps. Here, the ability to speak the language of international tourists and even to share their nationality is considered critical. In the third category was unskilled labor, a large portion given the low entry thresholds.<sup>35</sup> While migrants can be found throughout the categories, the

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<sup>29</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and International Labor Organization (ILO), “Measuring Employment in the Tourism Industries: Guide with Best Practices,” Madrid: UNWTO, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Clemens, “Economics and Emigration: Trillion-Dollar Bills on the Sidewalk?,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 83-106.

<sup>31</sup> Carmen Aitken, and C. Michael Hall, “Migrant and foreign skills and their relevance to the tourism industry,” *Tourism Geographies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 66-86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/146166800363457>

<sup>32</sup> Russell King, “Tourism, labor and international migration”. In *European Tourism: Regions, Spaces and Restructuring*, ed. A. Montanari and A.M. Williams, (1995): 177–190. Chichester: Wiley.

<sup>33</sup> Annemarie Piso, “Migrant Labor in Rural Tourism: Continuity and Change,” *International Journal of Tourism Research* 18, no. 1 (2014): 10-18. <https://doi.org/10.1002/itr.2020>

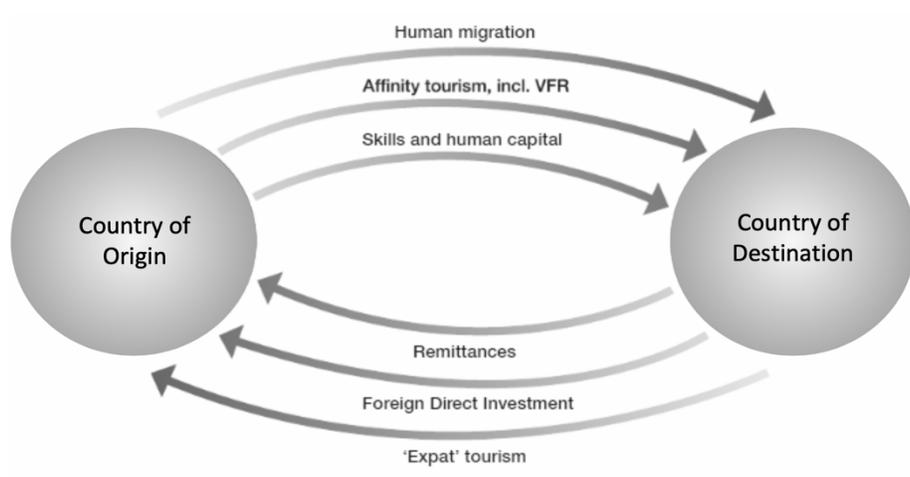
<sup>34</sup> Melissa Davey, “A third of Australia’s foreign workers paid less than half minimum wage – study,” *The Guardian*, October 28, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/29/a-third-of-australias-foreign-workers-paid-less-than-half-minimum-wage-study>

<sup>35</sup> King, “Tourism, labor and international migration”.

largest concentration is in the third category, with many working informally.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the type of migrants employed within the industry varies hugely – from permanent residents, to temporary workers, to family members – all of whom interact with the tourism industry in different ways.<sup>37</sup>

This variance in migrant type and role makes it difficult to generalize about the impact of working in the industry. Most migrant workers do not see the tourism industry as a long-term career option. Many want to move to another sector or return home. In the meantime, they can earn substantially more than they would at home<sup>38</sup> and acquire new skills which they can use in new roles whether in the destination or origin country.<sup>39</sup> These increased earnings are often channeled home in the form of remittances and diaspora investment. The UNWTO identifies six ‘flows’ between a country of origin and a country of destination, which all come with benefits and drawbacks (see figure 3).

**Figure 3. The relationship between tourism and migration, between countries of migrant origin and destination**



Source: United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)<sup>40</sup>

The impacts of these flows are briefly summarized below:

- Country of Origin.** The origin country usually economically benefits through increased remittances and diaspora investment (see figure 2). It has been estimated that “tourism (receipts) and migration (remittances) together contribute as much as 70 percent of the foreign exchange earnings of the world’s poorest countries.”<sup>41</sup> They also receive knowledge, cultural, and language skill transfers, and a reduction

<sup>36</sup> C. Michael Hall, and Allan M. Williams, eds., *Tourism and Migration: New Relationships between Production and Consumption*. Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), “Tourism and Migration: Exploring the Relationship between Two Global Phenomena,” World Tourism Organization: Spain, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Clemens, “Economics and Emigration: Trillion-Dollar Bills on the Sidewalk?”

<sup>39</sup> International Labor Organization (ILO), “Migrant workers are essential to hotel industry,” July 25 2012.

<sup>40</sup> UNWTO, “Tourism and Migration: Exploring the Relationship between Two Global Phenomena”.

<sup>41</sup> UNWTO, “Tourism and Migration: Exploring the Relationship between Two Global Phenomena”.

in pressure to absorb new labor market entrants. Here, there can be downsides, including ‘brain drain’, and a reduction in tax revenues.

- **Country of Destination.** Migrants working in the tourism industry are a driver of economic and cultural development. Destination countries receive the benefit of increased tax revenues, increased consumer spending, and can counteract population decline. They are also able to keep the tourism industry financially viable, due to the low wages of migrants. Migrants also lend their knowledge, cultural, and language skills, to the benefit of the host population.<sup>42</sup> But such movement also can bring social tension and deflate wages in the short-term, if not properly regulated.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, while a number of benefits accrue to migrants working within the tourism industry, poor working conditions are also prevalent. Many migrant workers are concentrated in sectors of the economy characterized by poor working conditions<sup>44</sup>, and many of the abuses exerted upon workers in the tourism industry are also exerted upon migrant workers more generally. Issues such as being made to work overtime, for less than the minimum wage<sup>45</sup> without extra pay, under demanding conditions<sup>46</sup> without being offered leave<sup>47</sup>, are prevalent among migrant workers more generally. Many migrant workers are recruited through labor recruiters, some of whom promise exaggerated salaries or different job descriptions, and charge illegal recruitment fees and related costs.<sup>48</sup> Addressing these issues is difficult, especially given the power dynamics and the complexity of some recruitment chains across borders. Those who work in the formal sector may be tied to a specific employer, not know how to access redress services, or may be concerned about retaliation such as termination of employment or deportation. Those in the informal sector often do not have recourse to redress services through usual channels. Migrants in both camps often do not have access to a trade union, or may have had their passport confiscated.<sup>49</sup> The nature of work within the tourism industry – existing irregular hours, remote locations, and overwhelming demand, to name just a few – means these issues are particularly pertinent. In addition, some parts of the industry (e.g. hospitality) rely heavily on agency workers, placed in hotels by subcontracted

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<sup>42</sup> Ladkin, “Exploring Tourism Labor”.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Clemens, Cindy Huang, Jimmy Graham, and Kate Gough, “Migration Is What You Make It: Seven Policy Decisions that Turned Challenges into Opportunities,” Washington DC: Center for Global Development (CGD), May 30 2018.

<sup>44</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), “Protecting migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic,” ILO Policy Brief, April 30, 2020. [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS\\_743268/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_743268/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>45</sup> Workers could be paid under the minimum wage because the law allows this, or because employers are illegally paying below the mandated minimum wage. For example, a study in Australia found that almost a third of all international students, backpackers, and other temporary migrants were being paid half the minimum wage. While respondents were often aware that the legal minimum wage was higher, they felt that people on their visa category were often paid less than the minimum wage. See Davey, “A third of Australia’s foreign workers paid less than half minimum wage – study”.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/29/a-third-of-australias-foreign-workers-paid-less-than-half-minimum-wage-study>

<sup>46</sup> Swedwatch, “Poor working conditions for hotel workers in Dubai,” <https://www.business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Dubai%20PM%20EN%20151013.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> Reuters, “Thai hotels accused of poor pay, ill-treatment of migrant staff,” December 9 2015. <https://www.reuters.com/article/thailand-tourism-exploitation/thai-hotels-accused-of-poor-pay-ill-treatment-of-migrant-staff-idUSL8N13Y3H620151209>

<sup>48</sup> Harrison Jacobs, “Commentary: Migrant labour abuse makes Dubai a questionable tourist destination,” *Business Insider*, January 7 2019. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/commentary-migrant-labour-abuse-makes-dubai-a-questionable-tourist-destination>

<sup>49</sup> Swedwatch, “Poor working conditions for hotel workers in Dubai”.

placement agencies. This chain can make it more difficult to ensure abuses within recruitment and in the workplace are addressed.

## The Impact of COVID-19

At the end of December 2019, authorities in the Chinese city of Wuhan began reporting several cases of a new strain of coronavirus, soon to be called COVID-19. The initial outbreak spread quickly and widely; by the middle of May 2020, the number of cases worldwide had exceeded 4.4 million.<sup>50</sup> The virus is highly infectious, but has a low hospitalization and death rate. On average, every infected person will infect between two and three people. 20-30 percent of cases will lead to hospitalization, with one to two percent dying.<sup>51</sup> The latter mostly occurs with the elderly, or those with previous underlying diseases that have compromised their immune system.<sup>52</sup>

Cases have now been reported throughout Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Australasia, and the Americas, with high-income countries (so far) the hardest hit. The virus is putting immense pressure on already strained health systems. Hospitals are running out of physical space and vital equipment. Doctors and nurses are faced with a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and are having to make decisions as to which patients use scarce resources. Governments are having to forgive debt and pour money into health responses. And this is occurring in high-income countries. As the impact of the virus spreads to lower-income settings, health experts have grave concerns about their ability to be able to protect their workers and prevent the spread.<sup>53</sup>

Governments have responded with a quickly escalating range of policies.<sup>54</sup> Countries began to close their borders, imposing bans on entrants from some countries, and mandatory self-isolation periods for others. Public spaces were increasingly shut to enforce social distancing, from schools to workplaces, gyms to restaurants. Public transport was reduced, and internal travel was restricted. In the middle of April, one third of people were living in countries under full lockdown, where they were essentially forbidden from leaving their homes apart from essential outings.<sup>55</sup> Enforcement of these measures has varied across the world; France required mandatory passes to leave the home<sup>56</sup>, and police in Uganda were clearing the

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<sup>50</sup> European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, "COVID-19 situation update worldwide, as of 15 May 2020" <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases>

<sup>51</sup> The Guardian, "What happens to people's lungs when they get coronavirus?," April 15, 2020.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/01/what-happens-to-peoples-lungs-when-they-get-coronavirus-acute-respiratory-covid-19>

<sup>52</sup> European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, "Q&A on COVID-19," <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/questions-answers>

<sup>53</sup> Anne Gage and Sebastian Bauhoff, "Health Systems in Low-Income Countries Will Struggle to Protect Health Workers from COVID-19," Washington DC: Center for Global Development (CGD), March 31, 2020. <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/health-systems-low-income-countries-will-struggle-protect-health-workers-covid-19>

<sup>54</sup> Anne Petherick, Thomas Hale, Toby Phillips, and Samuel Webster, "Variation in government responses to COVID-19," Oxford: Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, April 7, 2020. <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/variation-government-responses-covid-19>

<sup>55</sup> Juliana Kaplan, Lauren Frias, and Morgan McFall-Johnsen, "A third of the global population is on coronavirus lockdown — here's our constantly updated list of countries and restrictions," *Business Insider*, April 16, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/countries-on-lockdown-coronavirus-italy-2020-3?r=US&IR=T>

<sup>56</sup> The Local, "This is how France's new coronavirus lockdown permission form works," March 31, 2020. <https://www.thelocal.fr/20200325/lockdown-permission-form-what-is-it-and-where-do-you-find-it>

streets through force.<sup>57</sup> These measures may be having the desired health effect; researchers predict that in the absence of interventions, COVID-19 could have killed 40 million people.<sup>58</sup>

However, the economic consequences have been dire. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has estimated a global contraction of 3 percent in 2020, with bigger losses in high-income countries.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, the 2008 recession, the most serious of the postwar era, saw global activity shrink by 0.1 percent. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is predicting that almost 100 million jobs could be lost worldwide as a result.<sup>60</sup> While the IMF predicts a partial economic recovery by 2021, GDP will remain at lower levels, heralding a “crisis like no other”. This makes it more difficult to learn from the experiences of other large shocks – such as the 2008 recession and the aftermath of 9/11. COVID-19 and its impacts are unprecedented; we are likely to see impacts that are both different and more magnified than other shocks.

## On the Tourism Industry

Predictably, the tourism industry has been particularly badly hit by the economic impacts of the aforementioned policies.<sup>61</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic is predicted to cut travel by anywhere from 58 to 80 percent in 2020<sup>62</sup> and cost more than 100 million jobs, three quarters of which in G20 countries.<sup>63</sup> As of early April, The WTTC predicted a USD\$2.7 trillion loss in revenue directly resulting from the global lockdown.<sup>64</sup> The UNWTO is predicting a 45 – 70 percent decline in the international tourism economy, depending on the duration of the crisis and the speed of the sector’s recovery.<sup>65</sup> Major annual events drawing large crowds such as the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, Cannes Film Festival, the Tony Awards, Coachella Music Festival, and countless other festivals, concerts, sporting events, and conferences have all been canceled or postponed.<sup>66</sup> Hotels, airlines, and cruise lines have

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<sup>57</sup> The Daily Monitor, “Boda boda rider shot for violating curfew,” April 1, 2020. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/COVID-19-Boda-boda-rider-shot-violating-curfew/688334-5510776-pt06ynz/index.html>

<sup>58</sup> Patrick G T Walker, et al, “The Global Impact of COVID-19 and Strategies for Mitigation and Suppression,” London, UK: Imperial College London, March 26, 2020. <https://www.preventionweb.net/publications/view/71077>

<sup>59</sup> Larry Elliot, “‘Great Lockdown’ to rival Great Depression with 3% hit to global economy, says IMF,” *The Guardian*, April 14, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/apr/14/great-lockdown-coronavirus-to-rival-great-depression-with-3-hit-to-global-economy-says-imf>

<sup>60</sup> World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), “WTTC now estimates over 100 million jobs losses in the Travel & Tourism sector and alerts G20 countries to the scale of the crisis,” April 24, 2020. <https://wtcc.org/News-Article/WTTC-now-estimates-over-100-million-jobs-losses-in-the-Travel-&-Tourism-sector-and-alerts-G20-countries-to-the-scale-of-the-crisis>

<sup>61</sup> Annemarie Wilder-Smith, “The severe acute respiratory syndrome: impact on travel and tourism,” *Travel Medicine and Infectious Diseases* 4, no. 2 (March 2006) 53:60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmaid.2005.04.004>

<sup>62</sup> Wilson, Antonia. “World Tourism Faces Worst Crisis since Records Began, Says UNWTO.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, May 7, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2020/may/07/world-tourism-faces-worst-crisis-since-records-began-says-unwto-report>.

<sup>63</sup> “WTTC now estimates over 100 million jobs losses in the Travel & Tourism sector and alerts G20 countries to the scale of the crisis,” April 24, 2020.

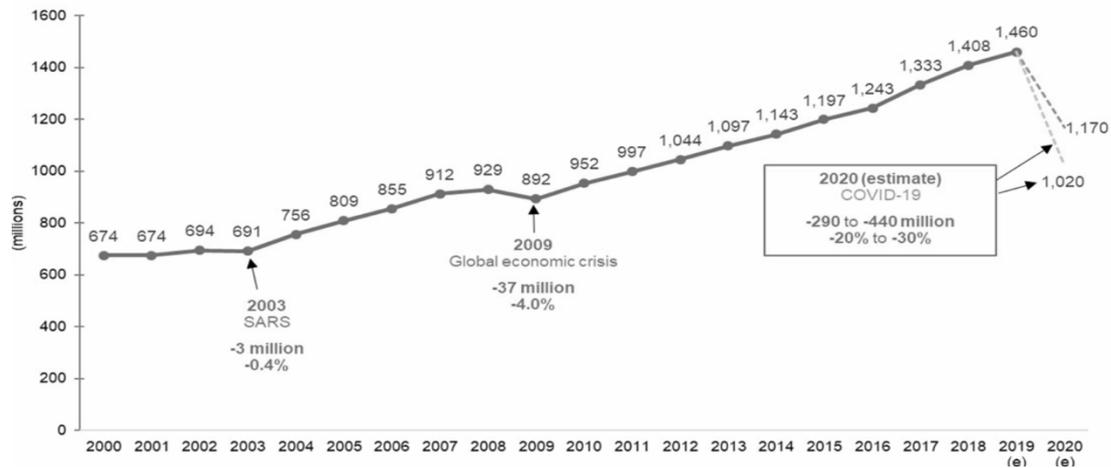
<sup>64</sup> “WTTC now estimates over 100 million jobs losses in the Travel & Tourism sector and alerts G20 countries to the scale of the crisis,” April 24, 2020.

<sup>65</sup> OECD, “Tourism Policy Responses,” April 15, 2020. [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=124\\_124984-7uf8nm95se&title=Covid-19\\_Tourism\\_Policy\\_Responses](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=124_124984-7uf8nm95se&title=Covid-19_Tourism_Policy_Responses)

<sup>66</sup> Joey Hadden and Laura Casado. “Here are the latest major events that have been canceled or postponed because of the coronavirus outbreak, including the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, Burning Man, and the 74th Annual Tony Awards,” *Business Insider*, April 11, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/major-events-cancelled-or-postponed-due-to-the-coronavirus-2020>

been devastated by the global lockdown; the European Commission has estimated revenue losses at 50 percent for hotels and restaurants, 70 percent for tour operators and travel agencies, and 90 percent for cruises and airlines.<sup>67</sup> Experts predict that it could take years for the industry to recover.<sup>68</sup>

**Figure 4. Forecasting the impact of COVID-19 on international tourist arrivals in 2020**



Source: United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)<sup>69</sup>

## Aviation

Travel is an industry that often defies the ups and downs of the market.<sup>70</sup> It bases its financial strategy around the presumption of consistent high-demand, open borders, and a general lack of catastrophe – be that from terrorism, natural disasters, or even pandemics.<sup>71</sup> Airlines in particular adhere to this type of financial planning, and according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), international carriers like Delta and United had on average less than two months of cash on hand to cover expenses before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.<sup>72</sup> With fleets grounded and thousands of employees being laid off, airlines have begun requesting bailouts from governments to stay afloat.<sup>73</sup> As of mid- May, air travel fell by over 93 percent.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Breton, “Speech by Commissioner Breton on ‘A Marshall Plan for European Tourism’”.

<sup>68</sup> Faus, “This is how coronavirus could affect the travel and tourism industry,” March 17, 2020.

<sup>69</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), “Impact Assessment of the COVID-19 Outbreak on International Tourism,” March 27, 2020. <https://www.unwto.org/impact-assessment-of-the-covid-19-outbreak-on-international-tourism>

<sup>70</sup> Becker, “How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?,” April 2, 2020.

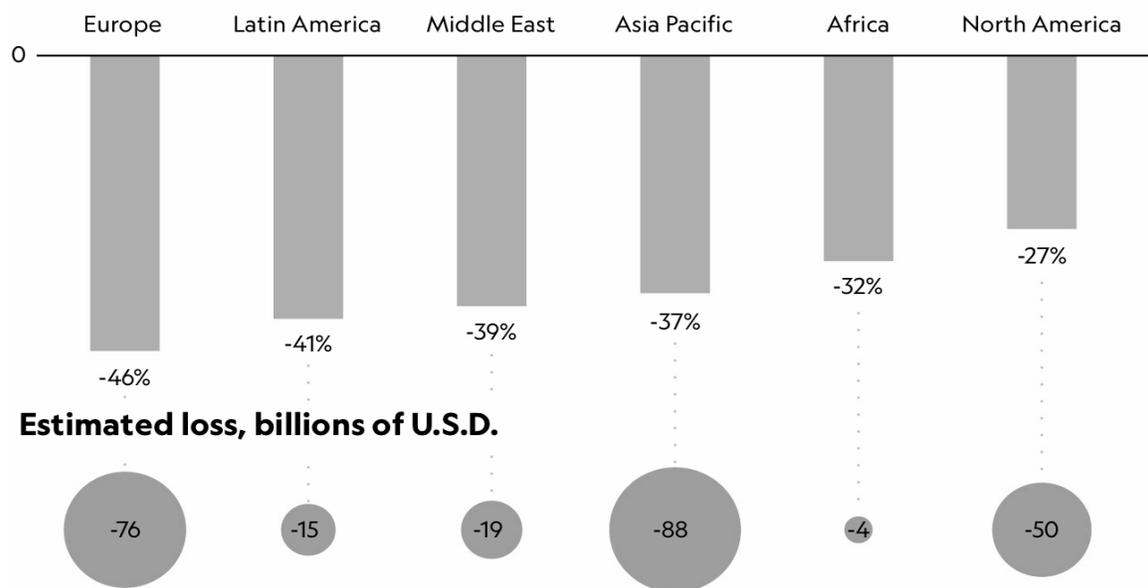
<sup>71</sup> Becker, “How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?,” April 2, 2020.

<sup>72</sup> Becker, “How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?,” April 2, 2020.

<sup>73</sup> Dominic Rushe, “US government agrees on \$25bn bailout for airlines as pandemic halts travel,” *The Guardian*, April 14, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/apr/14/us-government-coronavirus-bailout-airlines-industry>

<sup>74</sup> “Impact of COVID-19: Data Updates.” Airlines For America. Airlines for America. Accessed May 18, 2020. <https://www.airlines.org/dataset/impact-of-covid19-data-updates/#>

**Figure 5. Change in global air transport revenue, 2019-2020 (per passenger and km)**



Source: International Air Transport Association (IATA) and Monica Serrano<sup>75</sup>

### Hospitality

Hotels and restaurants have also suffered huge losses because of COVID-19. In the accommodation and food services sub-sectors, 51 million businesses are facing a difficult business environment with major impacts on employment opportunities.<sup>76</sup> Nearly 60 percent of all accommodation and food services operators are own-account workers and micro-enterprises, reflecting their extreme vulnerability to the crisis.<sup>77</sup> Many have now been forced to shut, being ‘non-essential’ businesses, and have little or no access to government support. In addition, lodging in urban centers and at large, upscale hotels and resorts have been disproportionately affected, losing revenue from canceled conferences and large meetings.<sup>78</sup> Major corporations like Marriott have reported losing up to 75 percent in revenue so far, and have also looked to borrow in order to stay afloat.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, hotels across the globe have made workers take unpaid leave, reduced salaries and benefits, and even laid-off or furloughed workers en masse. In the US alone, 70 percent of direct hotel employees have been put out of a job.<sup>80</sup> Hotels are projecting occupancy rates below 20 percent for the upcoming summer months,<sup>81</sup> leaving small and family-run accommodations at risk of closing

<sup>75</sup> Becker, “How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?,” April 2, 2020

<sup>76</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), “ILO: As job losses escalate, nearly half of global workforce at risk of losing livelihoods,” April 29, 2020. [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_743036/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_743036/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>77</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), “ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Third edition,” April 29, 2020. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_743146.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743146.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> Becker, “How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?,” April 2, 2020.

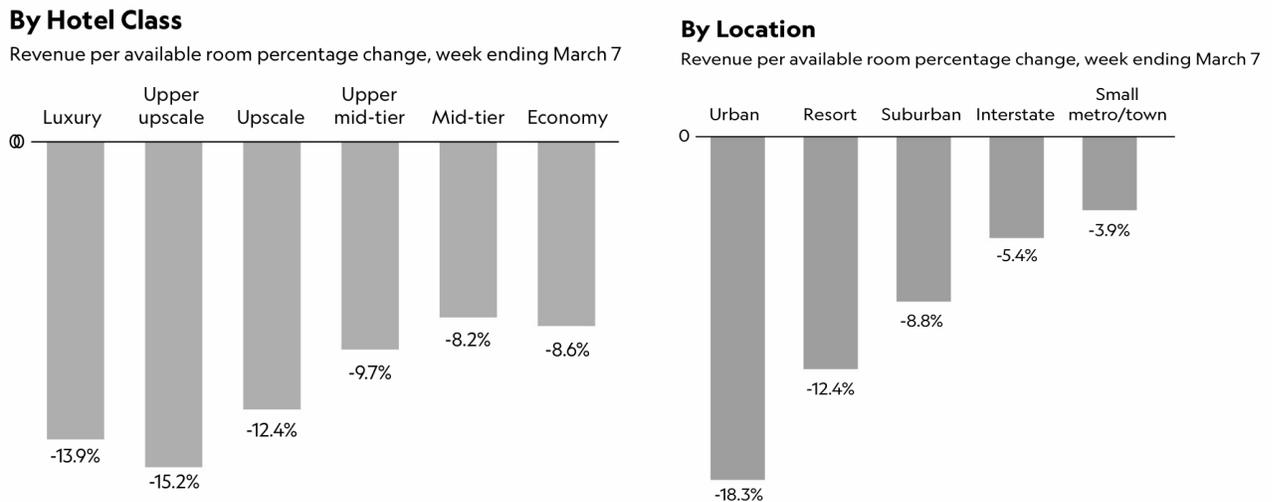
<sup>79</sup> Becker, “How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?,” April 2, 2020.

<sup>80</sup> American Hotel and Lodging Association, “COVID-19’s impact on the hotel industry,” <https://www.ahla.com/covid-19s-impact-hotel-industry>

<sup>81</sup> American Hotel and Lodging Association, “COVID-19’s impact on the hotel industry,” <https://www.ahla.com/covid-19s-impact-hotel-industry>

for good. Similarly, restaurants in tourist areas and generally around the world have been forced to shut, leaving staff without work and the future of many family owned and non-chain restaurants hanging in the balance.<sup>82</sup>

**Figure 6. Impact of COVID-19 on the US hotel industry**



Source: STR, Inc. and Monica Serrano<sup>83</sup>

### Cruising

One of the earliest impacted and most widely discussed sectors of the tourism industry affected by the COVID-19 pandemic is the USD\$45 billion cruise sector.<sup>84</sup> Stories of ships stranded at sea or stuck at ports full with infected passengers on board<sup>85</sup> have been all over the media and in early March the Center for Disease Control and the US Department of State ordered Americans to stop taking cruises all together.<sup>86</sup> Since January, cruise lines have lost USD\$750 million in revenue; major companies like Royal Caribbean, Carnival, and Norwegian have reported that their shares have dropped between 60 and 70 percent.<sup>87</sup> Cruising in particular may face additional challenges post-pandemic as governments and travelers may push for increased regulations regarding illness reporting and sanitation inspections.<sup>88</sup> It is estimated that some 250,000 crew members are employed on cruise ships and all could be vulnerable to layoffs or a loss of income.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Vince Dixon, "By the Numbers: COVID-19's Devastating Effect on the Restaurant Industry," *Eater*, March 24, 2020. <https://www.eater.com/2020/3/24/21184301/restaurant-industry-data-impact-covid-19-coronavirus>

<sup>83</sup> Becker, "How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?," April 2, 2020

<sup>84</sup> Leticia Miranda, "Coronavirus challenges \$45 billion cruise industry," *NBC News*, March 23, 2020.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/business/travel/coronavirus-challenges-45-billion-cruise-industry-n1140711>

<sup>85</sup> Ray Sanchez, Rosa Flores and Sara Weisfeldt, "Cruise ships with hundreds of sick passengers to arrive off Florida coast early Thursday," *CNN*, April 2, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/01/us/holland-america-zaandam-cruise-ship-florida/index.html>

<sup>86</sup> Becker, "How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?," April 2, 2020.

<sup>87</sup> Becker, "How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?," April 2, 2020.

<sup>88</sup> Becker, "How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?," April 2, 2020.

<sup>89</sup> ILO, "COVID-19 and the tourism sector".

## On the Ground

As numerous museums, attractions, and monuments closed, individuals and small businesses that make their living as tour guides in popular destinations have also been affected. Oftentimes, tour guides are freelancers or hourly workers who depend on regular work and tips.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, tour guides are unlikely to have benefits such as paid sick leave or unemployment insurance, leaving them particularly vulnerable in the current situation.<sup>91</sup> The companies employing these workers are also struggling to survive as they face weeks or months without bookings and multitudinous cancellations.<sup>92</sup> In addition to guides, other hourly workers dependent on tourist dollars such as drivers, and gift shop employees, also face mass lay-offs.<sup>93</sup>

## On Migrant Workers

Migrant workers are especially vulnerable to the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>94</sup> In the short-term, the crisis has left many migrant workers both unable to access their workplaces (placed under lockdown) in countries of destination and unable to return to their countries of origin because of travel bans. The pandemic has also exacerbated pressures in the densely populated low-wage worker accommodations in the Gulf countries and other Asian countries.<sup>95</sup> Many migrant workers are stuck in their country of destination, unable to access their workplaces and overstaying temporary visas. Those who are on employer-tied visas may have lost their right to stay in the country. Without visa extensions and the loosening of restrictions, many of these people risk becoming irregular migrants. New, and existing, irregular migrants are often uninsured and may be reluctant to seek medical care out of fear that their status will be revealed to authorities.<sup>96</sup> Most are now unable to return to their countries of origin due to border closures. If they are able, some have expressed fear that returned migrant workers will place strains on already struggling economies and healthcare systems.<sup>97</sup>

The crisis goes beyond the individual worker; families and entire nations depend on remittances to sustain themselves. COVID-19 has greatly impacted remittance flows from migrants laid-off from tourism industry jobs, and the economies dependent on this revenue are at risk for severe recession. Globally, the World Bank predicts that remittances will

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<sup>90</sup> Irene S. Levine, "Supporting Tour Guides During The COVID-19 Pandemic," *Forbes*, March 16, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/irenelevine/2020/03/16/supporting-tour-guides-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/#e132b127bce0>

<sup>91</sup> Levine, "Supporting Tour Guides During The COVID-19 Pandemic."

<sup>92</sup> Levine, "Supporting Tour Guides During The COVID-19 Pandemic."

<sup>93</sup> Riza Roidila Mufti, "Tour guides hit hard as COVID-19 strangles tourist destinations," *The Jakarta Post*, March 18, 2020.

<https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/03/18/tour-guides-hard-hit-as-covid-19-strangles-tourist-destinations.html>

<sup>94</sup> International Labor Organization (ILO), "COVID-19 and the world of work: Impact and policy responses," ILO Monitor 1st Edition, March 18 2020. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_738753.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_738753.pdf)

<sup>95</sup> Marie McAuliffe, "The coronavirus pandemic could be devastating for the world's migrants," *World Economic Forum*, April 6 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/the-coronavirus-pandemic-could-be-devastating-for-the-worlds-refugees/>

<sup>96</sup> McAuliffe, "The coronavirus pandemic could be devastating for the world's migrants."

<sup>97</sup> Dinesh Narayanan, "Coronavirus may have long lasting impact on inter-state migration," *The Economic Times*, March 23 2020. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/coronavirus-may-have-long-lasting-impact-on-inter-state-migration/articleshow/74768291.cms?from=mdr>

decline by 20 percent in 2020, the sharpest decline in recent history.<sup>98</sup> The figures vary across regions, with Europe and Central Asia seeing the greatest decline, and East Asia and Pacific the lowest. Remittances to low- and middle-income countries are expected to drop by around 20 percent to USD\$445 billion (from USD\$554 billion in 2019).<sup>99</sup> The effects of this will be compounded by even greater drops in foreign direct investment (FDI) and private portfolio flows. This drop is caused by two main factors. Firstly, migrant workers are in industries that have now completely shut down, the tourism industry being a prime example. Due to their status, they are often ineligible for unemployment benefits or other social safety nets. As a result, many migrants are left with smaller or non-existent paychecks, reducing their ability to send money home. This effect is compounded by the lack of available services to send money home (80 percent of remittances are cash sent via physical shops) and the increased cost of doing so.<sup>100</sup>

The following section collates examples of the impact of COVID-19 on both internal and international migrant workers in the tourism industry in different regions across the world. The ultimate impact of COVID-19 will of course be further reaching than these examples, but they provide a good overview of the types of issues being faced by the millions of migrant workers in the tourism industry.

## India

A large section of India's international and domestic workforce is engaged in the tourism industry. On the former, India exports more international migrants than any other country in the world, receiving remittances worth around 3 percent of India's GDP.<sup>101</sup> Additionally, India holds the title for the largest diaspora on the planet, with a population of 18 million.<sup>102</sup> While Indian migrants work across a variety of sectors, they can often be found within the tourism industry, working both formally and informally. As an example, famously, Indian immigrants built up the American hospitality industry, with nearly half of all motels in the US now owned by Indian migrants and their families.<sup>103</sup> The impact of COVID-19 on India's migrant workers has been both far reaching and difficult to quantify. Of note is that nearly 40,000 Indian cruise and cargo ship workers are stranded at sea and unable to return home due to India's travel restrictions.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> World Bank, "World Bank Predicts Sharpest Decline of Remittances in Recent History," April 22, 2020.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/22/world-bank-predicts-sharpest-decline-of-remittances-in-recent-history>

<sup>99</sup> KNOMAD, "COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens," *World Bank*, April 2, 2020.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33634>

<sup>100</sup> Kinley Salmon, "A Cash Cow: Covid Stops Many Migrants Sending Money Home," *The Economist*, April 16, 2020.

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/04/16/covid-stops-many-migrants-sending-money-home>

<sup>101</sup> Phillip Connor, "India is a top source and destination for world's migrants," *Pew Research Center*, March 3, 2017.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/03/india-is-a-top-source-and-destination-for-worlds-migrants/>

<sup>102</sup> Katharine Rooney, "India's record-breaking diaspora in numbers," *World Economic Forum*, September 30, 2019.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/09/india-has-the-world-s-biggest-diaspora-here-s-where-its-emigrants-live/>

<sup>103</sup> Yudhijit Bhattacharjee, and Ismail Ferdous, "How Indian Americans Came to Run Half of All U.S. Motels," *National Geographic*, September 4, 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/2018/09/south-asia-america-motels-immigration/>

<sup>104</sup> Sania Farooqui, "Thousands of Indian seafarers stranded due to coronavirus curbs," *Al Jazeera*, April 13, 2020.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/coronavirus-lockdown-strands-thousands-indian-seafarers-200412093941314.html>

On the latter, 12.75 percent of India’s workforce works in the tourism industry, accounting for more than 5 percent of the nation’s GDP.<sup>105</sup> With the nationwide lockdown, 70 percent – or about 38 million – of these jobs are at risk.<sup>106</sup> The industry in India has been impacted at all levels, from major corporations to freelancers, and recovery is expected to be slow, especially for international arrivals.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, India’s major urban centers host some 9 million internal migrants from rural areas who have now been left laid off and unable to return home.<sup>108</sup>

## The Gulf States

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries<sup>109</sup> host some 35 million migrants, the majority of which are from Asia and East Africa.<sup>110</sup> The proportion of non-nationals within the employed population in GCC countries is the highest in the world, ranging from 56 to 93 percent for the individual nations.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, migrants working in GCC countries remitted over USD\$124 billion in 2017 and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar all rank in the top ten countries for remittance outflow.<sup>112</sup> Migrant workers in all of the GCC states are beholden to some version of the *kafala* system which binds migrants to their employers from the moment they enter the country and throughout their term of employment.<sup>113</sup> This system gives employers or “sponsors” a large amount of control over migrant workers, facilitates forced labor, and can leave workers vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>114</sup> The confiscation of passports is common under this system and in many cases workers need permission to change employers or even leave their country of employment.<sup>115</sup>

Predictably, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues. With the exception of Kuwait – where the government has allowed amnesty for migrants who have overstayed their visas and offered to pay for their repatriation – migrant workers in GCC countries are largely left without work, pay, or a way to return to their home countries.<sup>116</sup> Many migrant workers live in extremely close quarters or even labor camps where social distancing

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<sup>105</sup> Chaitanya Mallapur, “India’s Covid-19 lockdown may cause 38 million job losses in the travel and tourism industry,” *Scroll.in*, April 14, 2020. <https://scroll.in/article/959045/indias-covid-19-lockdown-may-cause-38-million-job-losses-in-the-travel-and-tourism-industry>

<sup>106</sup> Mallapur, “India’s Covid-19 lockdown may cause 38 million job losses in the travel and tourism industry.”

<sup>107</sup> Mallapur, “India’s Covid-19 lockdown may cause 38 million job losses in the travel and tourism industry.”

<sup>108</sup> Priyali Sur, and Ben Westcott, “Desperate to go home, Indian migrant workers face tough choice amid world’s largest lockdown,” *CNN*, March 28, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/27/india/coronavirus-covid-19-india-2703-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>109</sup> Saudi Arabia, The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar

<sup>110</sup> International Labor Organization (ILO), “Labour Migration (Arab States).” *Labour Migration (Arab States)*, 2017. <https://www.ilo.org/beirut/areasofwork/labour-migration/lang-en/index.htm>

<sup>111</sup> “Labour Migration (Arab States).”

<sup>112</sup> “Labour Migration (Arab States).”

<sup>113</sup> Rebekah Smith, “Saudi Arabia Could Rewrite Its Record on Labor Mobility by Ending Kafala,” *Center for Global Development (CGD)*, March 3, 2020. <https://www.cgdev.org/end-of-kafala-labor-mobility>

<sup>114</sup> Amnesty International, “Migration: to / from / In.” *Migration: to / from / in* | Amnesty International. Amnesty International. Accessed May 5, 2020. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2018/12/migration-to-from-in-middle-east-north-africa/>

<sup>115</sup> Amnesty International, “Migration: to / from / In.”

<sup>116</sup> Amnesty International, “COVID-19 makes Gulf countries’ abuse of migrant workers impossible to ignore,” April 30, 2020. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2020/04/covid19-makes-gulf-countries-abuse-of-migrant-workers-impossible-to-ignore/>

measures are impossible and health risks are high.<sup>117</sup> Migrants in Qatar’s World Cup 2022 labor camps continue to work on the construction of sports facilities while living eight-to-ten people per room with little running water or sanitizing products.<sup>118</sup> Thankfully, some countries, such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, have made welcome strides to offer free healthcare services to all migrant workers irrespective of their legal status.<sup>119</sup>

The economies of GCC countries rely on tourism and migrant labor. By 2030, GCC nations were expected to bring 195 million visitors<sup>120</sup> and USD\$133.6 billion per annum<sup>121</sup> in large part thanks to so-called “mega events” like World Cup 2022 in Qatar and the 2020 Dubai Expo. With the average GCC nation’s workforce made up of at least 70.4 percent foreign-born workers,<sup>122</sup> these massive tourist-drawing events are only made possible by the labor of migrant workers.

### **The US and Mexico**

It is well known that the US and Mexico share a long history of migration. When it comes to tourism, this relationship is circular. Mexico sends migrants to the US to work in the tourism industry and the US sends tens of millions of American tourists to Mexico.<sup>123</sup> Mexico has the second largest diaspora population in the world, with 11.8 million individuals living and working abroad.<sup>124</sup> The vast majority of Mexican migrant workers are in the US;<sup>125</sup> many of them work in the tourism sector and have been drastically affected by the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Mexican migrant workers in the US, particularly those in the hospitality, restaurant, and leisure sectors of the tourism industry have had their livelihoods put at a standstill as social distancing measures remain in effect. Furthermore, remittances from Mexican migrant workers account for nearly 3 percent of Mexican GDP and rose to USD\$36 billion in 2019.<sup>126</sup> As discussed, limited remittance flows pose a huge risk for the economy but also for individuals dependent on the income for survival. Domestically, 1.7 million jobs in Mexico’s travel and tourism industry are at risk as a result

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<sup>117</sup> Allinson, Tom, and Lewis Sanders IV, “Coronavirus Deepens Risks for Migrant Workers in the Gulf: DW: 01.05.2020.” DW.COM., May 1, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-deepens-risks-for-migrant-workers-in-the-gulf/a-53297391>

<sup>118</sup> “Coronavirus Deepens Risks for Migrant Workers in the Gulf: DW: 01.05.2020.”

<sup>119</sup> Amnesty International, “COVID-19 makes Gulf countries’ abuse of migrant workers impossible to ignore”.

<sup>120</sup> GlobalData. “GCC Tourism: Region Poised to Attract 195 Million Visitors by 2030 Says UN.” Design Build Network . Design Build Network, September 3, 2019. <https://www.designbuild-network.com/comment/gcc-tourism-2019/>.

<sup>121</sup> Sam Bridge. “Why Mega Events Are Key to Drive \$133bn MidEast Tourism Ambition.” ArabianBusiness.com. September 22, 2019. <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/travel-hospitality/428140-why-mega-events-are-key-to-drive-133bn-mideast-tourism-ambition>

<sup>122</sup> International Labor Organization (ILO). “Labour Migration (Arab States).” Labour Migration (Arab States), 2017. <https://www.ilo.org/beirut/areasofwork/labour-migration/lang-en/index.htm>

<sup>123</sup> S Lock. “Travel: US Tourism to Mexico 2019.” Statista, February 24, 2020.

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/214780/number-of-us-tourists-visiting-mexico>

<sup>124</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), “International Migrant Stock 2019,” September 2019. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationStock2019-TenKeyFindings.pdf>

<sup>125</sup> Migration Policy Institute (MPI), “Immigrant and Emigrant Populations by Country of Origin and Destination,” 2017. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrant-and-emigrant-populations-country-origin-and-destination?width=1000&height=850&iframe=true>

<sup>126</sup> BBVA Research, “Mexico: Yearbook of Migration and Remittances 2019,” September 23, 2019. <https://www.bbva.com/en/publicaciones/mexico-yearbook-of-migration-and-remittances-2019/>

of the pandemic.<sup>127</sup> The crisis hit during the peak tourism “spring break” season in the country and the lack of visitors is predicted to create a loss of tens of millions of dollars in revenue.<sup>128</sup> Some experts at Mexico City’s Anaáhuac University have predicted that the pandemic will be the “biggest challenge to tourism since World War II” and that it will cost between 1 and 5 percent of tourism GDP.<sup>129</sup>

### **Stranded at Sea: Migrant Workers in the Cruise Industry**

As discussed, the cruise industry is dependent on migrant workers to function. While cruise ship passengers have been at the heart of the media’s discussion on the pandemic’s impact on the tourism industry, it has been the ship’s crews that have been impacted the most.<sup>130</sup> As of April 30, there are more than 100,000 crew workers trapped on cruise ships around the world, many of whom are international migrants. At least 50 crew members have confirmed COVID-19 infections and 17 have died. Many cruise workers are quarantined in small cabins and some have had their pay cut off.<sup>131</sup> Workers are stuck on board with limited contact with the outside world and seemingly little information how or when they will be able to disembark. While at least one company – MSC Cruises – has said they are “working to identify and pay for flight tickets for [crew members] to safely return home for the duration of the temporary suspension of ships’ operations,” the majority of crew members are stuck at sea awaiting word from their employers.

The issue is intensified by the intricacies of maritime law which leaves crew members without the rights guaranteed by their nations of citizenship and outside of the jurisdiction of the countries where their ships were sailing.<sup>132</sup> More than half of all merchant ships around the world fly “flags of convenience,” meaning that they are registered in a country different than the one in which they are owned. Ships are registered in low-tax, low-regulation nations such as Liberia, The Bahamas, or Panama and beholden by the flag state’s rules and regulations rather than where the corporation is headquartered.<sup>133</sup> While cruise corporations receive enormous financial gains from flying flags of convenience, workers are left to bare the negative impacts. Crew members deal with low standards for working and living conditions, are denied the right to form or join trade unions, paid low salaries while working up to seven days a week, and forced to work in dangerous conditions with

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<sup>127</sup> Statista, “Number of jobs at risk in the tourism sector in selected Latin American countries due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020,” March 2020. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1107431/jobs-at-risk-tourism-sector-latin-america-countries-coronavirus/>

<sup>128</sup> Diego Oré, “Coronavirus cancels Spring Break in Mexico, tourist economy sickens,” *Reuters*, March 23, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-mexico-tourism/coronavirus-cancels-spring-break-in-mexico-tourist-economy-sickens-idUSKBN21A23A>

<sup>129</sup> Mexico News Daily, “Coronavirus is the ‘biggest challenge to tourism since World War II,’” *Business Insider*, March 17, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/coronavirus-is-biggest-challenge-to-tourism-since-world-war-ii-2020-3>

<sup>130</sup> Leah F Moriarty, Mateusz M. Plucinski, Barbara J. Marston, Ekaterina V. Kurbatova, Barbara Knust, Erin L. Murray, and Nicki Pesik et al. “Public Health Responses To COVID-19 Outbreaks On Cruise Ships — Worldwide, February–March 2020.” <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/sr/mm6912e3.htm>

<sup>131</sup> Erin McCormick, and Patrick Greenfield. “Revealed: 100,000 Crew Never Made It Off Cruise Ships Amid Coronavirus Crisis”. *The Guardian*, April 30, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/30/no-end-in-sight-100000-crew-on-cruise-ships-stranded-at-sea-coronavirus>.

<sup>132</sup> McCormick, and Greenfield. “Revealed: 100,000 Crew Never Made It Off Cruise Ships Amid Coronavirus Crisis”.

<sup>133</sup> Chavdar Chanev, “Cruise Ship Registry, Flags Of Convenience, Flag State Control | Cruisemapper”. *Cruisemapper.Com*. <https://www.cruisemapper.com/wiki/758-cruise-ship-registry-flags-of-convenience-flag-state-control>

insufficient or no compensation for onboard accidents.<sup>134</sup> The countries in which many of these stranded ships are registered are not prepared to care for thousands of infected crew members and this combined with the fact that ports around the world have refused to let ships dock, air travel has been severely limited, and borders have been shut is what has left more than 100,000 workers stranded at sea, some of them for months.<sup>135</sup>

A prime example is that of the Philippines. Approximately 10 to 12 million Filipinos work overseas, and last year, they sent home between USD\$33.5 to USD\$35.1 billion in remittances, 10 percent of the nation's GDP.<sup>136</sup> More than 120,000 Filipinos work in the cruising industry alone and these workers have been particularly stricken by the onslaught of quarantined cruise ships around the world.<sup>137</sup> At least 80 Filipino workers aboard the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship quarantined in Yokohama, Japan were diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus<sup>138</sup> and of the 518 Filipino staff quarantined aboard the *MV Grand Princess* stranded off the California coast, 13<sup>139</sup> were diagnosed and one worker died.<sup>140</sup>

## **Recommendations to Support Migrant Workers, During COVID-19 and Beyond**

It is estimated that the tourism industry could take several years to fully recover, once the health impacts of COVID-19 have subsided, and travel restrictions are eased.<sup>141</sup> <sup>142</sup> During this time, it will be imperative for actors to support businesses operating within the tourism industry and the migrants who staff it. To that end, below we have provided several short-term recommendations that should be undertaken throughout 2020 to ensure the economic stability of those in the industry.

Long-term (that is, from 2021 onwards), it will be important to use this opportunity to rethink the way that the tourism industry operates – both in terms of its sustainability, and the conditions under which its key staff work. As stated above, the tourism industry and migration flows are closely linked; the re-ignition of both will be key for the recovery of the global economy. But we should not miss this opportunity to reshape both industries in a way that improves economic impact, reduces vulnerability, and contributes to environmental sustainability. To that end, this note also provides several long-term recommendations that key actors should undertake.

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<sup>134</sup> Chaney, "Cruise Ship Registry, Flags Of Convenience, Flag State Control | Cruisemapper"

<sup>135</sup> Chaney, "Cruise Ship Registry, Flags Of Convenience, Flag State Control | Cruisemapper"

<sup>136</sup> Nick Aspinwall, "Left high and dry Virus ban hits millions of Philippine workers," *Al Jazeera*, March 12 2020.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/philippines-legion-overseas-workers-pay-price-virus-bans-200312021938306.html>

<sup>137</sup> Aspinwall, "Left high and dry Virus ban hits millions of Philippine workers."

<sup>138</sup> Aspinwall, "Left high and dry Virus ban hits millions of Philippine workers."

<sup>139</sup> Clark Freeport, "DFA brings home 444 Filipino crew members and passengers aboard MV Grant Princess from San Francisco, USA," *Department of Foreign Affairs*, March 16, 2020. <https://www.dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/dfa-releasesupdate/26324-dfa-brings-home-444-filipino-crew-members-and-passengers-aboard-mv-grand-princess-from-san-francisco-usa>

<sup>140</sup> Webeck, "Coronavirus: Filipino worker becomes third to die from COVID-19 on stricken cruise ship."

<sup>141</sup> "COVID-19 Outlook for Air Travel in the next 5 Years."

<sup>142</sup> Faus, "This is how coronavirus could affect the travel and tourism industry," March 17, 2020.

These actions cannot be undertaken by one player in isolation. They will require the involvement of international bodies (including the UNWTO, ILO, and WTTC), national bodies (including governments, especially Ministries of Tourism and Labor), non-governmental organizations (including migrant rights' associations and diaspora groups), and the private sector (particularly airlines, cruise ship operators, hoteliers, restaurateurs, and others who hire migrant labor). Yet these actors have known about both the environmental and exploitative practice issues within the sector for decades, and many have already been trying to redress these wrongs, sometimes unsuccessfully. So why should these actors use COVID-19 as an opportunity to 'build back better'? Firstly, the tourism industry depends on migrant labor, and the working pattern is unlikely to alter. It is in everyone's interest to make the sector as attractive to migrants as possible to encourage them to re-enter the sector post-COVID. Secondly, the tourism industry will be worse hit than others. The issues outlined indeed apply to low-paid, temporary, and cyclical migrant labor outside of the tourism industry, but no other industry will be hit as hard by the impacts of COVID-19, and therefore no other group of workers is as large, or as disadvantaged. It makes sense to start with redressing these issues within tourism and build out from there. Thirdly, the tourism industry responds to consumer demand, and currently that demand is for a more ethical and environmentally sustainable industry. For these three reasons, now is the time for actors to come together and build a better industry, to improve its economic, environmental, and ethical performance for decades to come.

## **Short-Term**

### **Provide all migrants with access to healthcare and social safety nets, regardless of their immigration status**

Before COVID-19, only Thailand<sup>143</sup> and Spain offered full healthcare and social safety nets to all migrants (included those who are undocumented), despite compelling rights-based and costs-based arguments for their inclusion.<sup>144</sup> Instead, governments devote significant resources to interior enforcement, exercising raids that traumatize communities, further discourage service utilization, and reduce wages for migrants.<sup>145</sup> Excluding migrants from health care and social protection during the pandemic is even more self-defeating. In particular, discouraging people from seeking healthcare undermines efforts to reduce the spread of the disease. Governments should extend healthcare and social safety nets to all migrants, regardless of immigration status, while permanently separating health data from immigration agencies using firewalls. Qatar and Saudi Arabia have made welcome strides in

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<sup>143</sup> Wudan Yan, "Only One Country Offers Universal Health Care To All Migrants," *NPR Goats and Soda*, March 31, 2016. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/03/31/469608931/only-one-country-offers-universal-health-care-to-undocumented-migrants>

<sup>144</sup> Helena Legido-Quigley, et al., "Healthcare is not universal if undocumented immigrants are excluded," *The BMJ* 2019: 366. <https://www.bmj.com/content/366/bmj.l4160>

<sup>145</sup> Hemanth C. Gundavaram, "The ICE raids aren't just wrong - they're expensive," *Politico*, August 9, 2019. <https://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2019/08/09/immigration-customs-enforcement-raids-000941/>

this direction.<sup>146</sup> To communicate this shift, governments should use trusted messengers from within the migrant community to engender trust.<sup>147</sup>

### **Tackle xenophobia and discrimination against migrants**

Disease and racism have long gone hand-in-hand, with people seeking someone to blame for their predicament.<sup>148</sup> While COVID-19 originated in China, officials have been quick to avoid placing blame. “Stigma”, the World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus recently said, “is more dangerous than the virus itself.”<sup>149</sup> However, predictably, many governments have blamed migrants and migration for the spread of disease, and are using this opportunity to stem migration flows.<sup>150</sup> Many are worried that the current border restrictions will not be eased (or at least not eased for some groups). Despite the overwhelming evidence that we need *more* migration in future<sup>151</sup>, many governments will use this crisis to argue for less.<sup>152</sup> Governments must avoid placing blame for the crisis, whether on a particular migrant group or on migration in general, and instead promote the benefits of migrants to our societies. Efforts to show the contributions of migrant workers seem particularly impactful.<sup>153</sup> NGOs should use this opportunity to promote migrant voices as “key workers” and promote more pro-migration sentiment.<sup>154</sup>

### **Avoid forced expulsions or returns of migrant workers**

The closure of non-essential businesses around the world has meant millions of migrant workers have been left without an income, and by proxy, a way to provide for themselves. It is therefore natural that many would seek to return home. Nowhere has this trend been more evident than in India. The Indian government has estimated that around 10 million internal migrants have been stranded by the shutdown. Some are being provided with food and shelter by the government, NGOs, or their employers. But hundreds of thousands have attempted to walk home, in the face of regional transport closures. This has spread the disease to rural areas, and created widespread instability, a trend evident in other countries.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Amnesty International, “COVID-19 makes Gulf countries’ abuse of migrant workers impossible to ignore.”

<sup>147</sup> Nellie Peyton, “Using lessons from Ebola, West Africa prepares remote villages for coronavirus,” *Reuters*, March 25, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-africa-ebola/using-lessons-from-ebola-west-africa-prepares-remote-villages-for-coronavirus-idUSKBN21C38B>

<sup>148</sup> Yasmeen Serhan, and Timothy McLaughlin, “The Other Problematic Outbreak,” *The Atlantic*, March 13, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/coronavirus-covid19-xenophobia-racism/607816/>

<sup>149</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), Twitter thread: <https://twitter.com/WHO/status/1234597035275362309>

<sup>150</sup> Lorenzo Tondo, “Salvini attacks Italy PM over coronavirus and links to rescue ship,” *The Guardian*, February 24, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/24/salvini-attacks-italy-pm-over-coronavirus-and-links-to-rescue-ship>

<sup>151</sup> Dany Bahar, “Suspending immigration would only hurt America’s post-coronavirus recovery,” *The Washington Post*, April 21, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/04/21/suspending-immigration-would-only-hurt-americas-post-coronavirus-recovery/>

<sup>152</sup> David Smith, “Trump says he will impose immigration ban in bid to tackle coronavirus,” *The Guardian*, April 21, 2020. [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/21/trump-says-he-will-impose-immigration-ban-in-bid-to-tackle-coronavirus?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Tweet](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/21/trump-says-he-will-impose-immigration-ban-in-bid-to-tackle-coronavirus?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Tweet)

<sup>153</sup> Tez, Twitter thread: <https://twitter.com/tezilyas/status/1250145012840628224>

<sup>154</sup> Overseas Development Institute (ODI), “Key Workers: Migrants’ contribution to the COVID-19 response,” *Overseas Development Institute (ODI)*. <https://www.odi.org/migrant-key-workers-covid-19/>

<sup>155</sup> PTI, “Migrant workers returning home could spread coronavirus in sub-continent: World Bank,” *The Economic Times*, April 12, 2020. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/migrant-workers-returning-home-could-spread-coronavirus-in-sub-continent-world-bank/articleshow/75104522.cms>

Governments should cancel deportations<sup>156</sup>, and limit migrant worker returns, providing social safety nets to allow people to find alternate jobs high-employment areas. One way to do this is by extending temporary visas, like has been done in New Zealand<sup>157</sup> and Kuwait.<sup>158</sup> Automatic visa renewals could be provided for furloughed workers, providing they return to the same employer. If this is not possible, governments and NGOs should make sure they are testing returnees before they leave and supporting them with food and shelter throughout the journey.

### **Support low-income countries to deal with returnees**

Migrant workers often leave their low-income countries of origin due to poor economic prospects, inadequate public services, and a lack of security and stability. As detailed above, these three factors are likely to be compounded by the COVID-19 crisis. Some migrant workers will be returning (whether voluntarily or otherwise) to countries already suffering massive economic or security threats; most notable are those migrants returning from Colombia to Venezuela.<sup>159</sup> All returning migrant workers will put pressure on already suffering health systems, and will increase the ranks of the unemployed in need of social assistance. This instability, coupled with a reduction in remittances and future earning potential, is problematic. The international community needs to provide support to these countries, encouraging cash transfers<sup>160</sup> and debt relief<sup>161</sup>, to enable them to support their returning migrant workers.

### **Reduce barriers to movement as soon as safe**

Reducing barriers to travel as soon as public health authorities deem it safe is key to reigniting the tourism industry. China, where the COVID-19 pandemic began, has slowly begun lifting restrictions. Within the first week, hotel booking rose 40 percent and peak daily flights rose 230 percent as compared with the previous month.<sup>162</sup> China's tourism market expects to recover by about 70 percent over the next six months (but that recovery will largely be based on the revival of domestic tourism as the nation has largely limited foreign arrivals to prevent further outbreaks of the virus).<sup>163</sup> If China is any indicator of what recovery in the tourism industry could look like, it appears that reducing barriers to movement as soon as possible is key, even if that means starting with encouraging domestic

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<sup>156</sup> LAWG, et al., "U.S. deportations during global pandemic risk spreading COVID-19, returning migrants and asylum seekers to danger and instability," April 8, 2020. <https://www.lawg.org/wp-content/uploads/NGO-Statement-U.S.-deportations-during-global-pandemic-risk-spreading-COVID-19-returning-migrants-and-asylum-seekers-to-danger-and-instability-1.pdf>

<sup>157</sup> Siobhán McArthur, "Covid-19: Immigration update for visa holders," *Human Resources Director*, April 9, 2020. <https://www.hcamag.com/nz/specialisation/employment-law/covid-19-immigration-update-for-visa-holders/219270>

<sup>158</sup> Mathrubhumi, "COVID-19: Kuwait grants temporary residence for expiring visas for 3 months," April 18, 2020. <https://english.mathrubhumi.com/news/nri/covid-19-kuwait-grants-temporary-residence-for-expiring-visas-for-3-months-1.4698216>

<sup>159</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council, "Covid-19 forces migrants and refugees back to crisis-ridden Venezuela," April 7, 2020. <https://www.nrc.no/news/2020/april/colombia-venezuela-press-release/>

<sup>160</sup> Alan Gelb, and Anit Mukherjee, "COVID-19: How Countries Can Use Digital Payments for Better, Quicker Cash Transfers," Center for Global Development (CGD), April 6, 2020. <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/covid-19-how-countries-can-use-digital-payments-better-quicker-cash-transfers>

<sup>161</sup> Gokhan Ergocun, "COVID-19: IMF approves debt relief for 25 countries," *AA*, April 14, 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/covid-19-imf-approves-debt-relief-for-25-countries/1803855>

<sup>162</sup> Becker, "How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?," April 2, 2020.

<sup>163</sup> Becker, "How hard will the coronavirus hit the travel industry?," April 2, 2020.

travel as the world re-opens in waves as countries fight off the virus. Experts note that domestic travel and “road trip” or driving travel will most likely be more popular initially as travelers will stick close to home before venturing on journeys requiring air travel or cruising.<sup>164</sup>

### **Create travel “bubbles”**

While globe-crossing travel as we knew it may be limited until a COVID-19 vaccine is made available,<sup>165</sup> there have been discussions of opening up travel within designated “bubbles” or specifically designated safe travel zones. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Arden and Australia’s Prime Minister Scott Morrison have reached a formal agreement to establish a trans-Tasman travel bubble that would allow for quarantine-free travel between the two nations as soon as it is safe to allow flights between the two countries.<sup>166 167</sup> Tourism Studies experts Freya Higgins-Desbiolles and James Higham note that Australia and New Zealand are in a unique position to pilot a travel bubble as they are geographically isolated and both have had success in containing and even eliminating COVID-19 cases within their countries.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, there have been calls to expand the trans-Tasman bubble to tourism-dependent island nations in the South Pacific.<sup>169</sup> Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the region have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic as revenue from tourists – particularly those from Australia and New Zealand – has all but dried up.<sup>170</sup> Expanding the travel bubble to include SIDS like Fiji, the Cook Islands, and Vanuatu, not only has the potential to bolster the tourism sectors of these vulnerable nations as but also act as a means of strengthening Australia and New Zealand’s strategic influence in the region at a time when China has been growing its diplomatic and humanitarian presence in the region.<sup>171</sup>

## **Long-Term**

### **Introduce travel incentives**

In the long-term, increasing global tourism and travel to levels akin or better than the pre-pandemic numbers is the simplest way to positively impact migrant workers in the industry. Experts at the University of Florida’s Tourism Crisis Management Initiative have noted that the tourism industry is very resilient and rebounds after crises relatively quickly.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Elaine Glusac, “How Will Covid-19 Affect Future Travel Behavior? A Travel Crisis Expert Explains,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/15/travel/q-and-a-coronavirus-travel.html>

<sup>165</sup> Freya Higgins-Desbiolles, and James Higham, “Why a Trans-Tasman Travel Bubble Makes a Lot of Sense for Australia and New Zealand.” *The Conversation*, May 5, 2020. <https://theconversation.com/why-a-trans-tasman-travel-bubble-makes-a-lot-of-sense-for-australia-and-new-zealand-137878>

<sup>166</sup> Katharine Murphy. “Morrison and Arden Agree on Travel 'Bubble' between New Zealand and Australia.” *The Guardian*, May 5, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/05/trans-tasman-travel-bubble-to-allow-flights-as-soon-as-lockdowns-ease-morrison-and-arden-agree>

<sup>167</sup> Higgins-Desbiolles, “Why a Trans-Tasman Travel Bubble Makes a Lot of Sense for Australia and New Zealand.”

<sup>168</sup> Higgins-Desbiolles, “Why a Trans-Tasman Travel Bubble Makes a Lot of Sense for Australia and New Zealand.”

<sup>169</sup> Anthony Dennis, “Call to Include Pacific Islands in 'Trans-Tasman Bubble' for Travel.” *Traveller*, April 28, 2020.

<sup>170</sup> Anthony Dennis, “Call to Include Pacific Islands in 'Trans-Tasman Bubble' for Travel.” *Traveller*, April 28, 2020.

<sup>171</sup> Dennis, “Call to Include Pacific Islands in 'Trans-Tasman Bubble' for Travel.”

<sup>172</sup> Dennis, “Call to Include Pacific Islands in 'Trans-Tasman Bubble' for Travel.”

<sup>172</sup> Elaine Glusac, “How Will Covid-19 Affect Future Travel Behavior? A Travel Crisis Expert Explains,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/15/travel/q-and-a-coronavirus-travel.html>

Additionally, there exists a “pent-up demand” for travel after periods that limit movement, and the Tourism Crisis Management Initiative notes that while initial travel post-pandemic will likely be domestic or closer to home, there will be a segment of the population willing to travel abroad via air as soon as conditions allow.<sup>173</sup> Below we provide three ways to incentivize future travel:

1. **Introducing incentives.** Travelers in the near future will presumably be working with tighter budgets as they plan trips. Cutting taxes and travel fees are two ways to appeal to tourists' budgets as they select where to spend their money.
2. **Inspire the desire for future travel.** Encouraging people to book a trip well in advance maintains bookings and ensures a level of demand before the crisis ends. Chile has already launched a campaign to do just this.<sup>174</sup>
3. **Remove or simplify visa requirements.** Tourist visas can be cumbersome to obtain and costly at times. A simple incentive to encourage more travel would be to eliminate tourist visas or simplify the process to obtain one. For example, Brazil's 2019 elimination of the visa requirement for American, Japanese, Canadian, and Australian tourists and subsequent creation of a quick electronic visa process for nation's still requiring a visa was very popular and resulted in a 35 percent increase in overall visa applications.<sup>175</sup> The UNWTO states that measures such as this have the potential to increase travel by 25 percent.<sup>176</sup>

Of course, this scale-up must be done in a way that enhances the environmental sustainability of the industry and redresses many of the abusive conditions outlined above. Below, we have recommended some ways in which the industry can ‘build back better’.

### **Promote travel to low-income countries**

With a potential rise in the demand for sustainable tourism, promoting travel to low-income nations could not only benefit their recovering economies but also satisfy the world's newfound appetite for meaningful, “bucket list” travel. The post-COVID-19 climate may actually be the perfect time to bolster travel to low-income nations in an ethical manner that takes the time to account for environmental, cultural, and socio-economic considerations that have often gone overlooked in the past. This could be promoted by the governments of the low-income countries themselves, international bodies, travel corporations and diaspora populations.

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<sup>173</sup> Glusac, “How Will Covid-19 Affect Future Travel Behavior? A Travel Crisis Expert Explains.”

<sup>174</sup> Chile.travel, “I Dream of Chile,” <http://www.chile.travel/en>

<sup>175</sup> Catharine Hamm, “Brazil dropping its visa requirement for U.S. citizens,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/travel/la-tr-brazil-drops-visa-requirement-for-american-citizens-20190321-story.html>

<sup>176</sup> Andrea Romano, “U.S. Citizens Will Soon Be Able to Visit Brazil Without a Visa,” *Travel + Leisure*, March 19, 2019. <https://www.travelandleisure.com/travel-news/brazil-ends-visa-requirements-us-canada-australia-japan>

## **Increase health screening and security precautions**

It is likely that health will be a huge factor when it comes to travel decision-making in the future.<sup>177</sup> As individuals become more health-conscious, the tourism industry also needs to make a pivot to focus on sanitation and hygiene. Airports, cruise ships, and hotels will need to increase cleanings as well as the reporting of health safety records in order to quell fears from a weary public. Most importantly, after global crises, there is an uptick of risk-adversity in travel<sup>178</sup> that leaves travelers demanding health and safety guarantees before booking trips. Airlines may even begin health testing of passengers, creating social distance onboard flights, or mandating face masks.<sup>179</sup> This should be done in a way that safeguards the rights of migrants, providing accessible information to all.

## **Consider the climate impact of the tourism industry, and take steps to make it more sustainable**

Before COVID-19 began, the most discussed issues in travel and tourism were those of over-tourism, environmental impacts, and ethical tourism. The near-complete halt in travel provides much-needed time to reshape the industry in a more responsible and ethical way.<sup>180</sup> Experts predict that people will be making different choices when it comes to travel after the pandemic and that there will be a higher threshold as to whether people will choose to make the trip, than there has been in the past.<sup>181</sup> Most notably, micro-trips – when people flew to far-off locations for a relatively short amount of time simply because cheap airfare and “sharing-industry” giants AirBnB made it possible – may give way to fewer, longer, and more meaningful trips.<sup>182</sup> If this prediction holds true, travelers will be more discerning with where they choose to go, allowing for a more concerted push for sustainable tourism. This will allow the industry to grow, and therefore continue to employ millions of migrant workers, but in a way that doesn’t extend environmental capacity. Some are already calling for these changes – the European Commission has called for tourism to be at the “heart of the European Green Deal... finding a balance between the preservation of tourist ecosystems and economic realities.”<sup>183</sup> This is an excellent example of how such an initiative can be driven at the regional level.

## **Support and extend labor inspection capacity, to reduce exploitation**

As discussed above, the tourism industry is ripe for labor exploitation. Workers often do not have any recourse to collective bargaining or labor unions and may be concerned about turning to the courts due to fear of deportation or cost. Instead, states should take all

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<sup>177</sup> Sophie-Claire Hoeller, “Cheaper flights and flexible cancellation fees might be here for a while. Here’s what air travel may look like after the pandemic,” *Insider*, April 7, 2020. <https://www.insider.com/how-coronavirus-will-affect-travel-future-2020-4>

<sup>178</sup> Marion Karl, “Risk and Uncertainty in Travel Decision-Making: Tourist and Destination Perspective,” *Journal of Travel Research* 57, no. 1 (2018): 129-146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287516678337>

<sup>179</sup> Hoeller, “Cheaper flights and flexible cancellation fees might be here for a while. Here’s what air travel may look like after the pandemic.”

<sup>180</sup> Marnie Hunter, “What will travel look like after coronavirus?,” *CNN Travel*, March 30, 2020.

<https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/coronavirus-travel-industry-changes/index.html>

<sup>181</sup> Hoeller, “Cheaper flights and flexible cancellation fees might be here for a while. Here’s what air travel may look like after the pandemic.”

<sup>182</sup> Hoeller, “Cheaper flights and flexible cancellation fees might be here for a while. Here’s what air travel may look like after the pandemic.”

<sup>183</sup> Breton, “Speech by Commissioner Breton on ‘A Marshall Plan for European Tourism’”.

possible steps to enact labor legislation and uphold labor standards. One way to do this is by empowering labor inspectors to examine workplaces and to advise employers as to how to improve working conditions. These functions are often underfunded; the ILO estimates that less than one percent of the national budget in low-income countries is allocated to labor administration.<sup>184</sup> States should fund and empower such agencies to inspect workplaces and recruitment agencies, particularly those involved in different forms of abuse and labor exploitation, and enforce sanctions when needed.<sup>185</sup> This extension of capacity should be coupled with an exploration of the underlying incentives encouraging exploitation, such as the tied-visa issue discussed above, and steps to remove these structures.

### **Remove barriers to remittance flows**

Migrant remittances are a tool for development and poverty reduction. Prior to COVID-19, migrant remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries were worth over USD\$500 billion, exceeding aid flows by a factor of three, and on track to outstrip FDI.<sup>186</sup> Many regions around the world are already seeing a decline in remittance flows, and this trend is set to continue as the health crisis affects more middle-income countries. Once economic activity begins to resume, it will be imperative to remove any barriers to increasing remittance flows. Making remittances cheaper, faster, and safer has long been an agenda pushed by the migration industry; it is included as objective 20 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), and target 10.C of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>187</sup> Meeting the targets set by these two documents will be more important than ever post-crisis.

### **Provide workers within the tourism industry with access to internationally recognized training and skills certification schemes**

Given the demands of the tourism industry, in terms of skill level and sheer size, employers will need to develop strategies to make the sector more attractive to migrant workers.<sup>188</sup> Such strategies will become even more important after COVID-19, the economic impacts of which will undoubtedly reduce the attractiveness of the sector to potential migrant workers. The OECD has developed a range of education and training policies and programs to increase the general skill level of the tourism workforce, efforts that will make the sector more attractive.<sup>189</sup> Such efforts include providing internationally recognized training and

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<sup>184</sup> International Labor Organization (ILO), “International Labor Standards on Labor inspection,” <https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labor-standards/labor-inspection/lang-en/index.htm>

<sup>185</sup> Devi Sacchetto, Carlotta Benvegnù, Francesco Iannuzzi, and Francesca Alice Vianello, “Exploitation and Migrant Workers’ Struggles in the Italian Logistics and Tourism Sectors,” Università Degli Studi Di Padova. [https://migrationonline.cz/italy\\_country\\_report.pdf](https://migrationonline.cz/italy_country_report.pdf)

<sup>186</sup> Dilip Ratha, Supriyo De, Eung Ju Kim, Sonia Plaza, Ganesh Seshan, and Nadege Desiree Yameogo, “Data release: Remittances to low- and middle-income countries on track to reach \$551 billion in 2019 and \$597 billion by 2021,” *World Bank Blog*, October 16, 2019. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove/data-release-remittances-low-and-middle-income-countries-track-reach-551-billion-2019>

<sup>187</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), “At UN Headquarters, IOM hails the contributions of migrants to sustainable development through remittances,” June 14, 2019. <https://www.iom.int/news/un-headquarters-iom-hails-contributions-migrants-sustainable-development-through-remittances>

<sup>188</sup> Olga Strietska-Ilina, and Manfred Tessaring (eds), “Trends and skill needs in tourism,” Cedefop Panorama Series 115, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2005. [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5161\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5161_en.pdf)

<sup>189</sup> OECD, “Policy Approaches to Skills Development in Tourism.” <https://doi.org/10.1787/tour-2012-5-en>

certification schemes, perhaps through accredited Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) providers. Governments should invest in such strategies and promote them widely through recruitment agencies and trusted migrant intermediaries.

### **Increase the number of temporary / seasonal visas available to migrant workers**

Many countries rely on temporary and seasonal migrant workers for a variety of industries, including the tourism industry. Yet the increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric in the past few years has decreased support for such ‘low-skilled’ immigration, despite their acknowledged status as ‘key workers’ to the running of the economy. COVID-19 is exposing the necessity of such schemes, especially with such decentralized and vulnerable supply chains.<sup>190</sup> To support the efficiency of the tourism industry post COVID-19, and to entice migrant workers to seek out such opportunities, it will be imperative to increase the number of temporary and seasonal work visas available to migrants. This may entitle revising points-based immigration systems to give preference to workers in the tourism industry. Such a move would ensure international migrants in the tourism industry are employed on a formal basis, rather than slipping into informal / irregular work, where abusive working conditions are rife. Governments should target those from countries under demographic pressure to absorb new labor entrants and take steps to reduce the labor exploitation that often accompanies visas of this type.<sup>191</sup>

### **Create Global Skill Partnerships to increase the global stock of tourism workers**

Long-term, it is unclear what impact this crisis will have on the tourism industry. Whether we will see (or should see) rapid year-on-year growth, similar to pre COVID-19 levels, is uncertain. However, it is likely that the world will still need a global increase in the number of qualified tourism workers, to staff sectors in high-, medium-, and low-income countries. To do this, countries could develop bilateral labor migration agreements to train people in tourism skills, half of which could be employed in their country of origin, with the other half travelling to a country of destination. This agreement, known as a Global Skill Partnership, has been trialed in hospitality and tourism-adjacent industries in the Pacific Islands for decades.<sup>192</sup> This is due to the need for trained tourism workers in both the Pacific Islands and Australia. Much could be learned from this experience, and the partnership replicated across the world, particularly between groups of countries which rely on tourism receipts, regardless of their level of development.

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<sup>190</sup> Mike Dorning, Edwards Ludlow, and Ainslie Chandler, “Global Harvests at Risk With Travel Limits Squeezing Labor,” *Bloomberg Politics*, March 17, 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-17/u-s-growers-hit-by-visa-halt-for-mexico-seasonal-workers>

<sup>191</sup> Michael Clemens, Helen Dempster, and Kate Gough, “Promoting New Kinds of Legal Labor Migration Pathways Between Europe and Africa,” Washington DC: Center for Global Development (CGD), October 24, 2019.

<https://www.cgdev.org/publication/promoting-new-kinds-legal-labor-migration-pathways-between-europe-and-africa>

<sup>192</sup> Satish Chand, and Helen Dempster, “A Pacific Skills Partnership: Improving the APTC to Meet Skills Needed in the Region,” Center for Global Development (CGD), August 2, 2019. <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/pacific-skills-partnership-improving-aptc-meet-skills-needed-in-region>

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic, and associated border and business closures, has had a devastating impact on the tourism industry. Estimates project a anywhere from a 58 – 80 percent drop in travel in 2020, causing the loss of more than 100 million jobs and USD\$2.7 trillion in revenue. These impacts will be felt across the sector – from air travel, to hotels, to cruising – and in all regions of the world. And it is the industry’s millions of migrant workers who will be hardest hit. Already working in roles characterized by low-wages, temporality, and high turnover, many are now out of work and unable to find new roles in traditional countries of destination. Remittance rates have hit record lows, causing ripple effects on economic development in countries of origin. This crisis is likely to last for the rest of 2020, and beyond, causing huge uncertainty for the lives of these migrants.

Yet this is also an opportunity. In the short-term, governments and civil society should focus on providing all migrants with access to healthcare and social safety nets, repressing xenophobia, facilitating returns, and reducing barriers to movement. But long-term, it will be important to use this time to rethink the way that the tourism industry operates, both in terms of its sustainability and the conditions under which its key staff work. Attention should be paid to increasing tourism flows, particularly to low-income countries, but in a way which is sustainable and includes increased health screening and security precautions. In addition, the industry should work to improve working and living condition of its migrant workforce, identify and remediate cases of labor exploitation, and implement fair recruitment practices. Finally, the industry should increase the number of temporary and seasonal visas available for tourism industry workers, the training of whom could be facilitated through a Global Skill Partnership model.

This is an evolving situation, and it is difficult to predict the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on migrant workers in the tourism industry. The structure of the industry and the work within it makes it difficult to understand which migrants work in the industry – their countries of origin, skill profiles, countries of destination, role type, and ultimate ambitions. Therefore it is almost impossible to know how soon migrants will seek to re-enter the shattered industry post-crisis. The lack of research in general focusing on the role of migrant workers in the tourism industry complicates the picture. This note has attempted to provide an overview of the current situation and provide some tentative ways forward. But it will require all parties – governments in both countries of origin and destination, international organizations, and local NGOs – to work together to safeguard migrant populations and rebuild such a crucial industry to the world economy.