



Source: Samuel Rodriguez, Unsplash

# Migration Foresight Lab

Imagining the  
Global Compact on Migration  
in (Post-) COVID-19 Worlds

**NOT FOR WIDER CIRCULATION,  
INTERNAL WORKSHOP MATERIAL**

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**G|M|F** The German Marshall Fund  
of the United States  
STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION

**BUREAU**  
FÜR  
ZEITGESCHEHEN

**Robert Bosch**  
Stiftung

# Why a Migration Foresight Lab and “What-if” Scenarios?

## COVID-19 as Game Changer in Migration and Mobility?

COVID-19 is the perfect Black Swan – a low probability/high impact event. Even though many would disagree with the Black Swan hypothesis (because we knew that a pandemic would become more likely in a hyper-connected world), all analysts and observers agree on the catalyst character of the disease.

On the one hand, COVID-19 is an **accelerator** of many already existing megatrends, such as social, demographic and economic inequalities; public health and other human security issues; technological change and hyper-connectivity; new work, education and learning. On the other hand, COVID-19 is a **decelerator** of existing megatrends, such as climate change; urbanization; tourism, transport, logistics and value chain management; productivity, economic growth and private consumption; and finally, migration and individual mobility.

In order to assess whether COVID-19 will influence migration and mobility for the long haul, whether other megatrends (such as digitalization, regionalization or geopolitical competition) will play out more strongly due to COVID-19, and whether new and emerging migration and mobility patterns are here to stay, we coordinated the **Migration Foresight Lab (MFL)**.

The MFL is a project by the German Marshall Fund of the United States in collaboration with and supported by the Robert Bosch Stiftung in coordination with the Bureau für Zeitgeschehen. The Bureau für Zeitgeschehen devised the overall scenario design process and co-facilitated workshop meetings with a select group of renowned migration experts. They created this “What-if” scenario reader based on survey results and discussions with group members and we used the “What-if” scenarios as the very starting point for the MFL deliberation process.

## Are we prepared?

The general goal of “What-if” scenarios is to analyze the degree of preparedness, to increase resilience of societies and to improve the robustness of policy responses. In one word: To be ahead of events and **improve anticipatory governance**. It is important to note that “What-if” scenarios depict future status-quo that are highly plausible and at the same time highly disruptive, but they are not indicating whether those futures are probable or desirable. Hence, the probability of the scenarios entailed in this reader will vary. All scenarios are written from a presumed end-state, not an assumed end-date such as 2025. All in all, fourteen “What-if” scenarios were developed based on a matrix in four general thematic clusters: Modes of Cooperation, Human Security, Social Cohesion, Economic Development.

## Overall Aims

The overall aim of the Migration Foresight Lab was **to detect and analyze emerging, accelerated or decelerated trends as well as upcoming challenges and opportunities for migration management due to COVID-19**. While the future role of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) was one focus, workshop deliberations using the “What-if” scenarios as starting point went beyond the GCM and touched upon overarching migration governance questions.

# What if : ... | Scenario Development Matrix



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- What were the rules of the migration and mobility “game” before COVID-19 struck?
- Which long-held convictions and key assumptions dominated pre-COVID-19 thinking in migration and mobility (management)?  
→ common wisdom, truisms
- Which actors and schools of thought dominated the topic?
- What fundamental factors of change, which weak signals looming at the horizon challenge our pre-COVID-19 assumptions and long-held convictions?
- How does COVID-19 accelerate existing trends or discontinue patterns of migration and mobility (management)?
- Which new actors can be detected?
- Given the factors of change and the weak signals looming at the horizon: How could they play out to form a completely new migration and mobility reality?
- How could the What if scenario become reality (interim goals; constellation of actors; change in values, interests, aims)?
- Which key drivers or actors force us into the scenario and why is business as usual no longer possible?
- How would migration and mobility be affected by the scenario?
- How would this new reality affect existing governance regimes?
- Which challenges, which opportunities and unintended consequences for migration and mobility management arise from this emerging new world?

# 14 “What-if” Scenarios

## A. Scenario Cluster Modes of Cooperation

1. What if the Global North focuses on its own COVID-19 recovery and cuts **foreign aid** drastically?
2. What if **regional integration** and mobility result in new growth centers in the Global South?
3. What if **vaccine distribution** between regions and within societies is highly uneven?
4. What if COVID-19 accelerates **tech coalitions** between the EU and AU member states?

## B. Scenario Cluster Human Security

1. What if **asylum processes** are **fully digitized**?
2. What if countries use COVID-19 as a pretext for **not reopening** their **borders to asylum seekers**?
3. What if digitalization leads to **more surveillance, less privacy and data ownership** as a prerequisite to move across borders?

## C. Scenario Cluster Social Cohesion

1. What if living in **urban areas** does not seem to promise a better life anymore?
2. What if **racism and xenophobia** become permanent fixtures in societies and close off certain countries from migration?
3. What if COVID-19 leads to an even greater **digital divide** within countries?

## D. Scenario Cluster Economic Development

1. What if migration predominantly takes place within **economic free trade areas**? (RCEP, EU, AU, MERCOSUR, USMCA)
2. What if **remote work** leads to less migration because people get jobs where they live?
3. What if countries invest massively in **digitalization and automation** to be self-reliant and less dependent on global regarding supply chains?
4. What if the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic changes the **modes of remittances** long-term?

# A. Scenario Cluster

## Modes of Cooperation





Source: Image by dusanpetkovic on iStock

## Vicious Cycle: Global Poly-Pandemics

The world's chances and opportunities are so unequally distributed that entire world regions can be categorized as "left behind". Past efforts that were made by the international community to solve problems like climate change, mitigate the consequences of violent conflict or assist with (humanitarian) aid were not enough to avoid famines and to end extreme poverty even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020. Let alone thereafter.

When COVID-19 hit the rich countries of the Global North – some already under populist siege – their governments focused on preserving social peace and economic wellbeing at home. The resulting lack of international cooperation exacerbated already existing inequalities. Borders remained closed for a long time, inhibiting work migration. Global value chains were rearranged to decrease dependencies, leading to regionalized markets and gradual de-globalization. Due to massive budget cuts, Official Development Aid programs were stretched or cut. While the enduring economic recession led to a lasting decline in remittances, the end of ODA as we knew it was just the logical consequence of increasingly politicized and conditionalized foreign aid that became a tool in the geopolitical power game.

Today we see more violent conflicts and crisis, soaring inequalities and more refugees and IDPs than ever before but only a few coordinated efforts to contain the poly-pandemics that have swiped away the progress being made on wellbeing, the improvement of quality of life and livelihoods as well as human security since the early 1990s. Thus, while migration pressures are increasing in many parts of the world, people on the move are more vulnerable and less protected than ever.

## What if...

the Global North focuses on its own COVID-19 recovery and cuts foreign aid drastically?



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- Insufficient measures and ambitions by Global North for global security, development and wellbeing
- Global humanitarian initiatives underfunded
- legally non-binding international agreements (Paris Climate Agreement, SDGs, GCM) don't change trajectories
- Decline of multilateralism
- Great power competition within multilateral institutions
- Nationalism, populism and protectionism on the rise
- Protectionist measures in the field of medical care and protective equipment
- Physicians: 29 per 10,000 in OECD countries vs. 3 per 10,000 people in LDCs
- Acute food insecurity: +100% more people affected in 2020
- Extreme poverty: 88-115 million additional people in 2020
- 20% less remittances to LDCs and MDCs in 2020;
- Job-Loss: Approx. half a bn. jobs in 2020
- School Closures: 91% of all pupils affected
- Geopolitical fragmentation
- Lack of global solidarity and cooperative problem solving
- Global North uses ODA for geopolitical power games
- Increase of smuggling services and exploitation
- Violent actors abuse crises to increase their influence
- Rising inequality and vulnerability
- Income gaps in and between countries rise
- Millions of people fall into poverty; famines
- Migration pressure rises but many people are too poor to migrate
- More violent conflicts and crises lead to more displacement and refugees
- No protection for people on the move
- Protection crisis getting worse: migrants and refugees suffer disproportionately from consequences of the COVID-19 induced-crises

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- Sector-specific need of migrant labor for economic recovery could be a chance to implement (at least) some objectives of the GCM (facilitating work migration)

### Challenges

- Fencing off national economies: Lack of global solidarity; no agreement on global migration
- Agenda 2030 endangered
- Humanitarian crises



Source: Image by [Thomas Tucker](#) on [Unsplash](#)

## Self-empowered South

The COVID-19-induced economic crises had cut off the Global South from global supply chains and ODA. De-globalization and regionalization were the buzzwords of the immediate post-COVID-19 recovery. First, the realignment of global supply chains and the end of ODA led to social and economic hardships; but soon, developing countries started to develop domestically grown solutions and engaged in deeper South-South cooperation.

Massive governmental investments into infrastructure such as roads, ports and railways, but also into widespread access to high-speed internet boosted regional integration, trade and connectivity. Due to widespread internet access, many people learned and worked remotely, leading to a massive increase in the exchange of information, know-how, and the rise of digital services. Also, free movement of goods and people drove economic growth. Deepened political, economic and social cooperation in and between countries of the Global South also paved the way for democratization and civil society engagement. Free movement, modern infrastructure and better opportunities within regions have lessened the desire to migrate to countries of the Global North. Instead, people rather migrate and circulate within their socio-political and cultural regions.

The emerging new growth centers in the South even lead to the remigration of foreign-born or foreign-trained talents from those regions to their countries of origin. Even though crisis and conflicts persist in some regions, widespread digital solutions guarantee better protection of people on the move (i.e., through improved predictability of humanitarian crises such as droughts and extreme weather events etc.).

## What if...

regional integration and mobility result in new growth centers in the Global South?



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- Trade barriers between world regions hamper regional growth
- Limited free movement within regions
- Lack of infrastructure in remote areas (roads, railways, ports and internet access)
- Corruption, money laundering and a lack of democratic principles in many developing countries
- Rising inequalities (gender, urban-rural etc.)
- Massive decrease in FDI in Global South
- Nearshoring of critical supply chains to Global North
- Regionalization through regional trade agreements (RCEP, AfCFTA etc.)
- Joint African strategy on the coronavirus; continental COVID-19 taskforce
- AU Africa COVID-19 Response Fund; Africa Medical Supplies Platform
- Global North focused on own recovery / ODA cuts
- Countries of Global South push for own solutions
- New opportunities emerge through cooperation and technology-driven leapfrogging
- Free Movement & Trade Protocols drive regional economic growth; trade barriers within regions are removed but remain with "West"
- Democratization and wealth distribution hinder corruption and money laundering
- High-speed internet eases co-laboration, education, trade, information and knowledge flows
- Advances in gender equality; narrowing of urban-rural divide
- Regional opportunities and improved intra-regional mobility reduce desire / need to migrate to Global North
- New opportunities, high quality of life with low living costs attract foreign-born and foreign-trained talents
- Data-driven migration policies advance benefits of migration for all
- Digital services help to better predict and respond to humanitarian crisis

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- Regional agreements on migration management
- Facilitated migration within regions offers opportunities and legal pathways for migration

### Challenges

- Least Developed Countries, failed states and corrupt elites will be a hinderance for intra-regional agreements on mobility and migration



Source: Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash

## Antibody Elite

Throughout 2021, COVID-19 vaccines were in short supply. To enable societies to return to business as usual, industrialized countries started to copy the Chinese Health Code App – a tool which they had criticized earlier as being an autocratic surveillance system. First, a vaccination certification scheme comparable to the one already in use for yellow fever was introduced to permit international travel and tourism. Then, the scheme was adopted for intra-state travel and daily mobility, for example for entering busses or subways, festivals, theaters, concerts or night clubs. This led to a massive increase in daily testing – a costly endeavor for people who have not yet been inoculated and wanted back their former lives.

To bring economies back on track fast, the UK, the EU and the US agreed on a joint approach and used their combined economic and political power to set a new global standard. Hence, a verified proof of immunity became a prerequisite for international travel. This created a deep divide between (wealthy) highly mobile people and the ones that couldn't afford daily testing making travel and migration for work, training or studying impossible for many. Workers without immunity proof are discriminated everywhere, creating a new underclass. It has even led to the obscure situation that some people without access to vaccination or the possibility of remote work are getting infected on purpose to regain the possibility to earn a living.

Due to the lack of international cooperation, developed countries bought all available vaccines and reached herd immunity in 2022. They then issued immunity passports to their citizens creating an "antibody elite" for which everything is open and accessible, leaving the ones that are not inoculated behind, bringing legal South-North migration to a near standstill.

## What if...

vaccine distribution between regions and within societies is highly uneven?



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- Passports are a prerequisite for M&M
- Tourism sector creates one in ten jobs world-wide
- Vaccine routines and orderly processes wide-spread; herd immunity even in least developed countries (e.g., Polio)
- Some countries require Yellow Card / Carte Jaune issued by WHO for entrance (or to work in certain professions) documenting vaccination against diseases like yellow fever, TBC, cholera, rubella, measles
- Around one bn. unregistered people worldwide, having no access to public services
- Until 2022, COVID-19 vaccines are in short supply
- China's mass surveillance system proves remarkably effective in managing COVID-19
- Governments of richer nations pre-order billions of vaccine doses from different suppliers
- Vaccine nationalism
- Immunity passports seen as a potential lifeline for international (leisure) travel
- While governments might refrain from immunity passports, private companies are free to introduce such safety measures
- Corruption, black markets and queue jumping for money, counterfeit vaccines and certificates and private market for vaccines (India)
- Highly uneven mobility corridors
- Immunity passports create an "antibody elite" and new forms of discrimination
- Some people get infected with COVID-19 on purpose to gain immunity
- Governments combine biometric and health data and build up highly detailed, intrusive and intimate records of people
- Regular and irregular migration for labor or asylum to developed countries even more attractive
- Verified proof of immunity as a prerequisite for international mobility results in immobilization for many
- M&M experience more surveillance and data collection
- M&M (to health-safe regions) only accessible for "antibody elite"
- Abuse of strict M&M policies to hinder "unwanted" immigrants
- Reallocation of migration benefits

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- Tourism could experience fast(er) recovery in some areas requesting migrant work and facilitating migrant workers to move there and get inoculated
- Boost in registration: Formerly unregistered gain access to basic services, visa processes and a political voice (voting) while providing more data for migration management

### Challenges

- Immunity passports could create a health surveillance infrastructure that discriminates and endangers privacy rights
- Governments could use immunity passports to restrict freedom of movement under the pretext of fighting the pandemic





Source: Image by Pete Linforth on Pixabay

## Human Security and Social Innovation without Surveillance

The COVID-19 pandemic and its global knock-on effects on trade, tourism and travel made the interdependence of societies and economies more than obvious – and that national strategies would not be sufficient to cope with “Problems without Passports” such as germs (Kofi Annan). Since the decline of multilateralism was irreversible, new topic-based coalitions between world regions arose. This also emphasized that the rapid pace of global digital transformation is leading to an increased need for collaboration and common approaches.

One of them was the tech coalition between the EU and African countries to facilitate development and counter China's intrusive big data approach. Under the 2020 German presidency - in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis - great stride were made toward a cross-thematic technology coalition, including the launch of the “digital for development” (D4D) strategy. The joint approach for digital transformation included an overall improvement of digital skills, safe data storage and affordability of connections. It also facilitated increased and new mobility opportunities – especially for employees in the tech sector, students and researchers. Through this close tech exchange between the continents, new economic digital hubs emerged on both continents!

This coalition spilled over to migration management as it became obvious that the gained data helps to predict and monitor movements. EU-AU-wide non-discrimination laws and the political will of all actors involved to comply with the standards resulted in a better protection of people on the move.

## What if...

### COVID-19 accelerates tech coalitions between EU and AU member states?



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- No shared tech standards between European and African Countries
- RSA 2013: POPIA (Protection of Personal Information Act 4)
- EU 2018: General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- China's surveillance system based on mass data collection and AI
- EU-AU Partnership on Digital Transformation and EU D4D-Strategy
- Number of African countries (24) adopting laws and regulations to protect personal data is slowly rising with the GDPR being the blueprint for many
- People accept a certain level of government surveillance or data sharing to combat COVID-19
- Africa: No clear standards or regulation guidelines on the implementation of new technologies, limited regulation of actors: testing ground for technologies produced elsewhere in the world
- But Africa also has become a digital innovation hub itself
- Europe and Africa both profit from a productive and beneficial digital economy while protecting personal data rights of their inhabitants
- The coalition on shared tech standards spilled over to other policy areas, such as: Crime prevention, migration and international mobility
- Personal Data of people on the move in EU and Africa protected by law
- Data is used to gain more information about movement without discriminating certain groups
- Data is used to observe and to cooperate better on migration and mobility
- Personal data could be used to provide basic services such as health care but also to raise taxes or to pay social benefits
- Humanitarian and migration forecasting

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- Joint standards for private rights and data collection could provide data to predict and manage migration movements
- A tech coalition could spill over to a joint approach in migration management

### Challenges

- Who sets the standards?
- Who finances the tech coalitions?
- Data collection could be misused to restrict migration

## B. Scenario Cluster

### Human Security

ASYLUM

Source: Image by Gerd Altmann on Pixabay

## Complete Digitalization of Asylum Processes

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 countries in the European Union had good experiences with the digitalization of some parts of asylum processes like online hearings. Only two years later the EU finally agreed on a common and fully digitized asylum process for all member countries to increase efficiency. The agreement looked like a dream come true for people fleeing from war, conflict and persecution. Finally, a safe way to seek protection was possible. And asylum seekers within EU territory could count on receiving their residence and work permits faster with more freedom of movement for them during the process.

Just one year later the EU made it mandatory to start asylum procedures digitally in the country of origin or as close as possible to there. The whole digitized process is controlled and executed by the domestic authorities in the destination countries. Irregular migrants without digital registration are pushed back at the external borders of the EU legally (land or sea).

The result is ambivalent: On the one hand, people who are granted asylum are transferred quickly and safely to the destination country since governments committed to a speedy "asylum-resettlement" once the process has been concluded successfully. On the other hand, the promising digital processing of asylum also became a repressive mechanism to prevent migration: Only a limited numbers of asylum seekers get accepted, and most are denied within hours, not speaking of the exclusion of the many that do not have access to digital tools at all. The much-hyped digitalization boost that was accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis in this sense has led to an increase in forced immobilization almost to the same extent as during the pandemic in 2020. Asylum has become a "contingent" universal right, decoupled for access to territory, but rather based on increasingly selective and political considerations.

## What if... asylum processes are fully digitized?



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- Challenging to reach EU territory to seek asylum
- The scope of the Asylum Procedures Directive in the EU is limited to applications for international protection made in the territory of EU-MS, including at the border, in the territorial waters or transit zones; thus, many embark on dangerous escape routes while smugglers and human trafficker profit
- USA started contested "remain in Mexico" program to file asylum cases in Mexico (Migration Protection Protocol)
- EU Member states reference to external processing when numbers are high, but forget about it as soon as numbers decrease
- Closed borders and forced immobilization during the COVID-19 pandemic
- COVID-19 has digitized parts of the asylum process; asylum administrations begin to trust virtual and digital applications and hearings
- Digital IDs and technology tools for surveillance purposes increasingly used in border crossings
- "Camps" at borders (Greek Island, Canary Island, U.S. Mexico border) even in violation of human rights not cleared even during COVID-19
- EU member states being criticized for having too little impact on global resettlement
- Asylum processes are fully digitized
- EU and other countries agree: Asylum procedures must get started digitally **before** entering EU territory
- Irregular migrants are pushed back at borders (land & sea), on new legal basis
- Digital processes are misused to undermine asylum law: protection guaranteed only to very few people
- Many asylum seekers have no access to the digital means to start process digitally; International Organizations are unable to provide assistance to all; NGOs not allowed to help with digital processing
- Digital processing localizes protection and eliminates the need for (few) asylum seekers to go on dangerous journeys in order to reach safety
- Expanded resettlement options for accepted asylum seekers
- But digital processing became a repressive mechanism to prevent migration
- Less migration
- Highly uneven "asylum corridors" depending on asylum policies of destination countries
- An increasing number of people are stranded and stuck in their countries and in transit because they are unable to leave or to access asylum procedures

→ Immobilization

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- EU-"Digital-Asylum-Resettlement" programs for the few people who successfully file for asylum
- Asylees can get asylum without embarking on dangerous routes

### Challenges

- Very few get access to safe migration based on highly selective criteria
- More people stuck at borders, in their countries or in transit etc.
- Role of International Organizations and NGOs in assisting asylum seekers



Source: [https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2016/02/14/09/30/refugees-1199172\\_1280.jpg](https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2016/02/14/09/30/refugees-1199172_1280.jpg)

## Protection Crises

The world has never been as ignorant towards human rights and the protection of people on the move as today. One-third of all countries closed their borders for asylum seekers during the COVID-19 pandemic back in 2020. Some countries that used to receive mayor contingents of migrants never opened them again. Others used it to even limit migration pathways for family reunification of accepted asylum seekers. The main driver for these policies were increasing nationalism and xenophobic resentments towards migrants in these countries.

When some receiving countries kept their borders closed permanently, the protection crises soared. Especially in areas of crisis and conflict, violence, persecution and poverty forced millions to flee. Others sought relief from droughts, heatwaves and natural disasters caused by climate change. This resulted in mayor mixed migrations streams around conflict areas looking for safe-heavens; many more people embarking on dangerous routes to perceived safer countries via irregular means and with help of smuggling networks.

Meanwhile, the international community committed only half-heartedly to help people on the move and to avoid humanitarian crises. Transit centers and "temporary camps" at borders are now permanent and growing fixtures of the global migration landscape. Instead, countries focused on their own economic recovery played each other out in cynical geopolitical games. Taking up the cudgels for human rights in distant regions is not a priority on their agendas.

## What if...

countries use COVID-19 as a pretext for not reopening their borders to asylum seekers?



### Pre-COVID-19 wisdom

- Generally, states have the right to decide who may enter their territory and under what terms, but the sovereignty of states with regards to asylum policies is limited by international law (Geneva Convention, UN Declaration on HRs)
- The international community does not recognize every type of involuntary migration as relevant in terms of humanitarian protection (e.g., poverty, climate change)
- The interpretation of the Geneva Refugee Convention has undergone changes. Its scope has been widened, and now includes persecution by non-state actors and gender-specific persecution



### Weak Signals

- One-third of all countries closed their borders to asylum seekers during the COVID-19 pandemic
- The EU is incapable of agreeing on a policy that balances values and interests in compliance with the rule of law regarding irregular border crossings
- Camps and centers at borders or in transit regions are not cleared, even during pandemic
- Increasing nationalism and xenophobic resentments
- Global 'learning poverty' crisis: COVID-19 exacerbates existing learning gaps with 1.6 bn students out of school at its peak
- Additional 135 million people starving  
→ We are at the edge of a major humanitarian crisis



### Post-COVID-19 world

- Some mayor receiving countries have not reopened their borders to asylums seekers
- More violence, persecution and poverty in areas of crisis and conflict (in countries of origin and neighboring states)
- More vulnerable and increasing number of people on the move
- In the multipolar world with delineated zones of influence countries hesitate to intervene in conflicts and crises to avoid humanitarian crises
- Collapse of multilateral institutions, political frameworks, conventions and compacts handling asylum, humanitarian aid, refuge and flight



### Impact on Migration

- People continue to flee from violent crisis and conflict but are expelled everywhere
- No international attempt to manage migration, flight and refuge
- Mayor mixed migration movements around conflict areas
- Increasing number of IDP's because people are unable to leave their countries to seek protection
- People on the move are stranded and stuck  
→ Protection Crises

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- Bi- and multilateral resettlement programs could be a solution to help people who are stuck "between the devil and the deep blue sea"

### Challenges

- No international attempt to manage migration
- Ongoing violations of human rights
- Massive protection crisis





Source: Image by Pete Linforth on Pixabay

## Global Panopticon

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic gave the enduring megatrend of digitalization an enormous boost. In some areas, the emergence of digital solutions saved many from social and economic disruption; but in other regions – particularly in autocratic and/or corrupt regimes – the grey zones were used by state- and non-state actors to collect mass data for surveillance, repression or fraud.

On the one hand, the world is safe now from pandemics, terrorism and crime. But on the other hand, people are now unable to make a move without being observed. This leaves no room for democratic innovation, civic engagement or opposition movements. Border crossing to flee from such repressive systems are now almost impossible without being detected.

Mobility has become a privilege for just a few wealthy citizens who pass “digital scrutiny” tests while the rest of the world has become immobilized. Moreover, mobility across borders now has a hefty price tag: giving up all rights on digital data collected over a lifetime. Only completely “transparent” people can actually move (or those with the means to fake their digital identities). There is much less mobility and migration, especially trans-continently. This has led to deep cuts in remittances, soaring numbers of people affected by extreme poverty or people who are now stuck in their home countries. Those that are allowed to migrate and travel for work are subject to digital surveillance and strict social control, and potential abuse, to varying degrees, depending on their destination.

## What if...

digitalization leads to more surveillance, less privacy and data ownership as a prerequisite to move across borders?



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- Mobility digitalization processes: still being tested (use of biometrics, facial recognition by airlines)
- Some countries (US) already use biometrics/ social media screening as precondition for entry
- Widespread push for interoperability of databases already underway (EU-LISA etc.)
- Health status is not tested before traveling, but for some countries/ visas certain vaccines are required (Yellow Fever)
- Data collections and sharing on (mobile) individuals not transparent, varying between countries and actors
- COVID-19 creates digitalization push: More digital solutions are employed; people get used to them; Governments digitize services at record speed
- People accept certain level of government surveillance and data sharing to combat COVID-19
- Negative COVID-19 test required to enter airplanes or some countries
- Some airlines already demand proof of immunity (digital wallets on smart phones)
- 2019: London police makes first arrest based on facial recognition by cross-referencing photos of pedestrians in hot spots with a database of known felons
- Governments use digital data and compatibility as geopolitical pressure point (USA-CHAD)
- Surveillance has become an everyday part of life in most developed societies, aided by an explosion in AI-powered facial recognition technology
- Governments accumulate mass data on non-nationals
- Digital profiles on individual travelers and migrants are standard (governments and private entities)
- All-seeing digital system of social control, patrolled by precog algorithms that identify potential dissenters in real time
- Mobility becomes a privilege
- More people become immobile (unclear consequences on poverty, development or circular migration)
- Less remittances
- Booming underground market for irregular travel and migration, which has become more expensive and more dangerous
- Decisions in digital processes lack transparency (hiding decisions)

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- Migration and Mobility processes could be accelerated
- Data availability could facilitate migration management

### Challenges

- Collected data could be “misused” to oppress citizens
- Immobility could lead to more misery in some countries and labor shortages in others

# C. Scenario Cluster

## Social Cohesion



Source: <https://unsplash.com/photos/ntBPYGZCMWg>

## De-Urbanization / Population Dispersal

Until 2020, urbanization was one of the megatrends everybody talked and was absolutely certain about – politicians, the private sector, civil society.

But COVID-19 changed all that completely. During the pandemic, back-to-the-land movements in India and the US became widespread. While in India domestic work migrants had to return to the villages to survive and decided to stay there for good, in New York the back-to-the-land movement was mostly a phenomenon of the wealthy. Nevertheless, these tendencies persisted and grew over the years.

So, today small towns and suburbs offer a higher quality of life than big cities. This is also possible, because basically all office-jobs can be done remotely. Hence, people became more “locally” involved. Even though they continue to travel, they prefer to stay in their neighborhoods. There is less work migration, but some people migrate to look for better living conditions. For example, Latvia has become a destination for people looking for “greener” places. People try to keep life simple and do not rush as much through their lives anymore as they did before COVID-19. The downside of all this is that innovation has slowed down because people, businesses and civic movements do not conglomerate as much as before.

## What if...

living in urban areas does not seem to promise a better life anymore?



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- Urbanization is a mega-trend; experts estimate that 85% of the world's population will live in cities by 2100 (today: 55%)
- Quality of life and job opportunities are better in cities
- Infrastructure development more resource efficient and less costly in urban centers and metropolitan conglomerates than in rural areas
- Cities are the hubs of the globalized economy
- Real estate markets change: Flats and houses in cities start to lose value, prices for houses in sub- and peri-urban settlements are rising
- Devaluation of money (€) leads to massive capital flight into new investment opportunities (rural housing)
- Digitalization makes rural living easier and more attractive (remote work, healthier lives etc.)
- Due to public health issues, cities are perceived as less desirable
- Small towns have a quality-of-life advantage
- Population dispersal
- Remote working becomes a necessary condition
- In highly urbanized societies: Less innovation, because people live more dispersed
- Dispersion of wealth and status
- More travel, but less migration
- More even development across spaces
- Countries with well connected rural areas will become more attractive

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- Suburbs, small town and villages become more important actors in integration and are not as overwhelmed by this task than mega-cities with big slums

### Challenges

- Focus on immigration management might shift towards high-skilled legal migration instead of protecting refugees, DPs and asylum seekers



Source: Image by Gerd Altmann on Pixabay

### Mistrust Everywhere (family reunification cut-off)!

Today's world is fractured: there are deep fissures within societies and widening geopolitical trenches between countries. Neither people trust each other nor governments. The lockdowns due to the spread of COVID-19 in 2020 have exacerbated anti-elitism, anti-government and conspiracy theories, coupled with anti-Semitism, xenophobia and racism. At the same time, poor education outcomes have led to less integration, and increased inequality and social tensions. These movements and drivers, adding to the economic crisis in the aftermath of the pandemic, have further increased political instability, mistrust and hatred vis-a-vis foreigners and minorities in many countries.

Instead of realizing how dependent we are in an interconnected world, right-wing politicians were elected to office, driving protectionism and nationalism. Some countries even closed their external borders completely, others increased border controls, raised visa conditions and introduced personal controls, especially for vaccine and health certificates. Legal migration pathways have been reduced in recent years, family reunification options cut drastically, while irregular migration has become less and less attractive due to xenophobia, racist resentments and violence against migrants.

In international relations, widespread mistrust and geopolitical competition resulted in almost no international cooperation, especially regarding migration management. Other actors from the private sector and civil society organizations, trying to fill this void, were unsuccessful. In the end, the only beneficiaries were smugglers, traffickers, war lords, organized crime and corrupt politicians.

## What if...

the impact of racism and xenophobia increases in societies and close off certain countries from migration?



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- Legal protection against racism and anti-Semitism
- Digital registration is the future but in compliance with protection of privacy (through international laws etc.)
- Right-wing parties gain ground throughout Europe
- Terrorist attacks by all forms of extremism
- COVID-19 increases xenophobia (e.g. anti-Asian sentiments in Europe at beginning of COVID-19)
- Anti-media attitudes → more disinformation /misinformation, conspiracy theories
- Extremists steer anti-government, anti-vaccine attitudes
- Civic movements (such as Black Lives Matter) despite pandemic
- Governments are made responsible for economic situation
- Push in digitalization will soon lead to digital registration globally
- Increased border controls and controls within countries, minorities particularly victimized
- Closure of some borders
- Human rights violations by governmental agencies
- More oppressive states/ regimes
- Increased racism and xenophobia
- Governments distrust each other
- Poor education outcomes lead to less integration, increased inequality and social tensions within societies
- Massive controls, especially for vaccine and health certificates
- Limiting of visa conditions
- End of liberalization of migration
- Acceptance of migrants along selective cultural or religious criteria
- Less family migration
- Less low(er) paid migrants
- Limited regularization of irregular migrants
- Few countries with less racism and xenophobia become far more attractive for potential migrants
- Distrust between governments → disruption of global cooperation: GCM & GCR no priority

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- Industrialized countries will soon value the contribution of low-paid migrant workers in many parts of their economies (health and care, construction, food industry, agriculture etc.)

### Challenges

- Lack of international migration management leaves vacuum that other actors will fill (organized crime, smugglers, traffickers)
- Migration policies could become highly restrictive





Source: Photo by CDC on Unsplash

## Digital Divide Deepens Social Divide

During the 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns, millions of students had no internet access at all and hence were unable to continue schooling. Due to the ensuing economic crisis and the restructuring of global value chains, many students did not return to school at all; they had to work to make a living instead. COVID-19 – as the financial crisis in 2008/09 – produced a lost generation, raising the risk for social, economic and political stability.

The 'learning poverty' crisis induced by the COVID-19 pandemic has another dimension as well: For many institutional education was missing, but they could connect to the internet to educate themselves, but they had not learned how to distinguish valid sources from fake news and conspiracy theories.

At the same time within the receiving societies the integration programs for migrants – that deeply rely on physical interaction – could not take place because of social distancing and contact restriction measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Poorer educational outcomes and socio-economic disparities for underprivileged groups, including second and third generation immigrants, were cemented (rather than overcome), leading to more polarization, segmentation, and even radicalization among different groups in societies.

These three impacts have permanently weakened social cohesion. Receiving societies are increasingly hostile toward migrants perceiving them as health hazards and burdens. The digital divide between and within countries persists and is still based on income, gender, locations, skills and education. COVID-19 did not boost digitalization for everyone. Instead, the digital divide deepened social and economic inequalities.

## What if...

### COVID-19 leads to an even greater digital divide within countries?



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- 2019: Countries with highest percentage of people not using the internet are in Africa and South Asia, while in developed countries it is below 25%
- Even among the connected there is a wide disparity in the quality of internet access
- Income, gender, location, skills and education are highly predictive of whether an individual can make use of the internet
- Integration of migrants into receiving societies through physical attention of courses, classes, projects and meetings
- Persistent educational and socio-economic disadvantages even for second and third generation migrants
- Global 'learning poverty' crisis: COVID-19 intensify existing learning gaps with 1.6 bn students out of school at its peak
- Many families and students do not have digital tools to participate learning gaps for underprivileged groups exacerbate
- Contact restriction and social distancing measures
- Increased data and broadband speed requirements for digital economies (e.g., IoT, autonomous driving, cloud computing, AI)
- Internet speed in remote areas not sufficient for a wide range of services / appliances
- Poor education outcomes in disconnected regions due to COVID-19 induced school closures: a whole generation is left behind
- Digital divide persists: No universal, affordable internet access for all
- Poorer integration of migrants in receiving societies
- Cementing of inequalities and blocking of upward mobility for even second and third generation migrants lead to further segmentation, polarization, and even radicalization among certain groups
- Digital divide spilled over to social divide
- Questions on integration lead to even more contentious debates on migration in general
- "Success" and integration becomes more differentiated between those migrant groups that possess digital access and skills, and those that do not.
- People in "disconnected regions" are less mobile
- Meanwhile, the use of digital tools, smart phones, social media etc. continues to increase, leading to risk of further fragmentation (filter bubbles etc.)

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

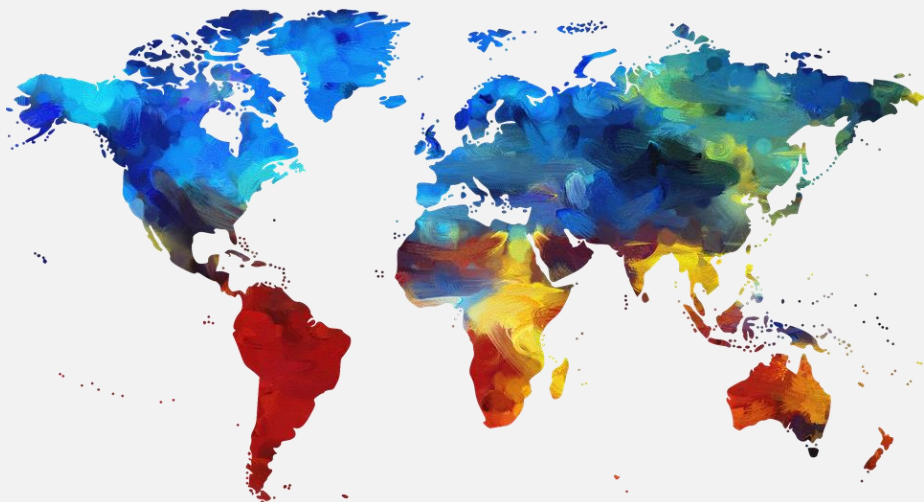
- Less intents of irregular migration, because of hostility and therefore less opportunities in potential destination countries

### Challenges

- Hostility toward migrants and racism within societies polarize debates around migration

# D. Scenario Cluster

## Economic Development



Source: [https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2017/01/12/13/23/colorful-1974699\\_1280.png](https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2017/01/12/13/23/colorful-1974699_1280.png)

## Towards a Regionalized World

Regionalization is the megatrend today. Even before COVID-19 it was obvious that the hegemony of the West led by the US was over. Donald Trump's trade wars, digitalization and COVID-19 accelerated these developments, leading to gradual de-globalization and a realignment of regional centers into economic free trade zones. Hence, today's world is truly multi-polar.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed how fragile international supply chains can be. Therefore, governments sought to regionalize supply chains (near-shoring), resulting in further regional social and economic integration. The logic of economic integration spilled over to the political realm. For example, the regionalization of supply chains created the need to regularize regional work migration. Today, migration takes place mostly within economic free trade areas making socio-economic harmonization, if not integration a necessity – i.e., to provide for intra-regional health care services, social security, and other public services.

Even though unemployment soared in the aftermath of COVID-19, local/regional workers were unwilling to do the poorly paid, exhausting jobs. Hence, particularly in the aging Global North, labor demand in key sectors such as health, construction or agriculture couldn't be met locally or even regionally.

This resulted in an ambiguous situation: Even though regions are fencing themselves off against each other, irregular immigrants that manage to cross borders to another free trade area are likely to receive a work and residence permit.

## What if....

migration predominantly takes place within economic free trade areas? (RCEP, EU, AU, MERCOSUR, USMCA)



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- Migration occurs globally
- International work migration streams are directed towards industrialized countries
- Most migration happens within countries (urbanization) or broadly defined world regions (e.g., Europe, Central Asia), but also over long distances
- In developed countries, work migration is needed to sustain productivity and wealth levels (health, care, agriculture, construction)
- During COVID-19, EU restricts free movement of people; exceptions for seasonal workers while local workers have no work
- New regional trade agreements (RCEP, AfCFTA)
- Regionalization and near-shoring of supply chains
- Regularization of undocumented migrants during COVID-19 crises in system-relevant sectors
- Multi-polar world leads to further regionalization ("Together we stand, divided we fall"-thinking)
- Deterioration in health and care provision in industrialized countries
- Processing procedures for work permits of irregular immigrants significantly accelerated. Overall, more people get residence permit
- Labor shortages in key industries despite rising unemployment;
  - wages need to be raised,
  - impact on global competitiveness
- Migration streams shift
- Regional work migration within economic free trade areas regularized
- Migration occurs particularly within trading blocks
- Irregular migration to other free trade areas becomes more attractive, because it is more likely to result in a residence and work permit

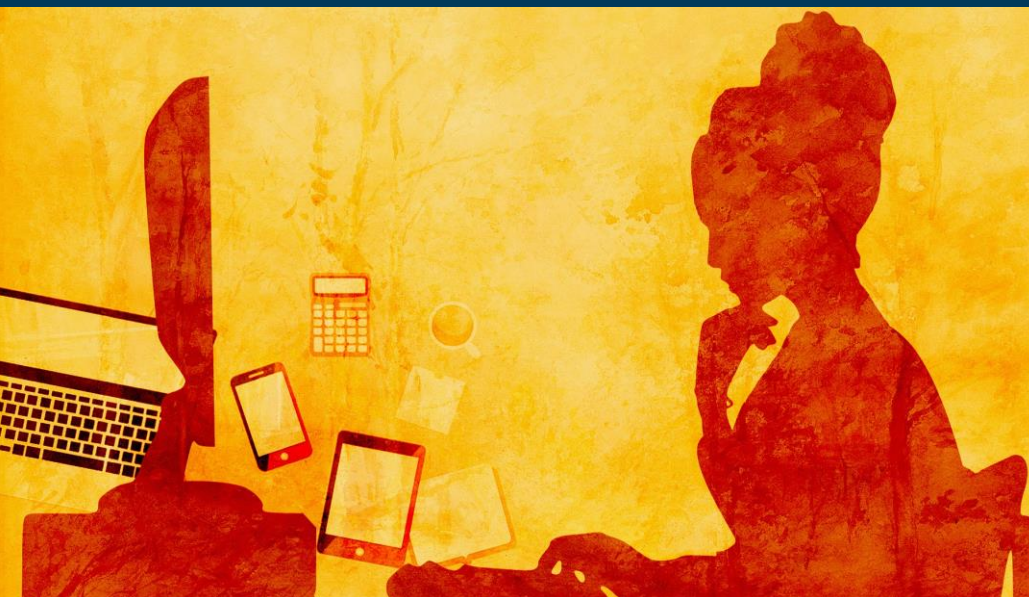
## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- Need for regional migration managements
- Labor shortages could result in bilateral agreements between countries of different regions and keep people from embarking onto dangerous migration routes
- Irregular migrants more likely to be regularized in destination countries

### Challenges

- Low probability for multilateral cooperation in migration management
- High incentives for irregular migration



Source: Image by chenspec on Pixabay

### “Wherever I lay my hat...” – Virtual Migration leads to Hybrid Lives

When the COVID-19 pandemic infected hundreds of millions of people around the globe, leaving more than 5 millions dead, offices, universities and workplaces were shut down. To ensure the safety of their workers, companies were forced to shift from in-situ to remote work. Working from home kitchen tables and apartment sofas became mainstream, changing business and private lives considerably – surprisingly successful and with less difficulties than expected.

Now most white-collar employees are technically well equipped and experienced in organizing location independent workstreams. In 2021, when the pandemic was under control, people started again to travel in large numbers. But instead of moving where their workplace was, they moved to places they wanted to spend their leisure time. Today, many have left their former home countries and live semi-permanently in places with lower living costs, better living standards and more stable weather conditions. This, in turn, helped economically underdeveloped regions to flourish.

On the other hand, digitally high-skilled people don't have to move to economic hotspots any longer to find decent, well-paid, socially secure jobs. Whether they live in Mumbai, Mombasa or Montevideo – the new class of virtual migrants simply plug-in any time during the day to become an integral part of a thriving digital global economy. And they can rely on internationally agreed minimum standards for social security, health care and unemployment schemes.

In sum: While many people are highly mobile and flexible today, others find themselves immobilized due to job loss and a lack of opportunities, leading to social tensions and discontent.

## What if....

remote work leads to less migration because people get jobs where they live?



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- Industrialized countries depend on work migrants for physically exhausting and poorly paid jobs in mayor industries (care, construction, agriculture)
- Within multinational corporations, institutions and organizations high-skilled work migration is seen as necessary, comes with financial benefits and prestige
- In developed countries, work migration is needed to sustain productivity and wealth levels
- In developing countries, migration often is the only way to escape poverty
- Digitalization, IoT, AI/ Machine Learning
- Widespread remote work and education; digitalization of communication, meetings and processes
- Work migrations restricted due to social tensions within modernizing societies
- De-globalization, regionalization, near-shoring of supply chains
- Re-migration to roots/family
- Employment opportunities for (foreign) high-skilled workers without the need to migrate (tele)
- Low-skilled jobs supporting office life such as delivery, cafeterias or cleaning services vanished
- Massive decrease in work migration for low-skilled jobs; restrictive migration laws to protect social freedom “at home”
- Small towns and suburbs grow as people move there for better living conditions
- Tech-firms lower their costs by directly hiring workers from Global South
- Work migration is possible without moving physically.
- Need for new international work regulations on social security, taxes, labor protection, insurances etc.
- Some physical migration is still needed, but only for very high-skilled (tech) and high-touch (health, care) personnel
- People relocate semi-permanently to places with lower living costs and better quality of life

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- Better access to high-skilled tech labor market without migrating
- Enhanced social cohesion within societies and better integration of foreigners, because less people migrate and stay longer in one place

### Challenges

- Need for new international work regulations, social security, taxes, labor protection, insurances etc.





Source: Scharfsinn86 on Istock photos

## Robotic Workforce

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020/21, industrialized countries experienced how dependent they were on migrant labor for their economies and societies to function. To lower the risk of labor force shortages, governments in highly advanced economies invested heavily in robotics with the aim to stabilize production processes and to replace seasonal workers – mainly in agriculture and construction but also in elderly care. Hence, COVID-19 led to a massive acceleration in automation and the so-called Internet of Things.

Now repetitive labor in agriculture and construction is mainly done by robots, offsetting millions of low-skilled migrant workers forcing them to return to their home countries with their families no longer receiving remittances. To compensate for the loss in income tax due to job automation, industrialized countries introduced a tax on automated labor so that societies can benefit from its produced value. Meanwhile, inequalities between highly advanced and poorer economies soared.

Nevertheless, work migration remains, but it has shifted. Nowadays it is high-skilled tech personnel that migrates for work, but also employees in high-touch labor such as health and care. But digitalization and widespread remote work has also resulted in “virtual” work migration which has been a great chance for many but also came with downsides: Some people got hired by big international companies receiving a decent salary while profiting from low living costs in their home countries whereas others struggle with exploitation and dumped wages.

## What if...

**countries invest massively in digitalization and automation to be self-reliant and less dependent on global supply chains?**



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- Developed countries experience labor shortages due to demographic change and poorly paid working arrangements in some sectors; they therefore depend on migrant labor in mayor industries, such as construction, hospitality, agriculture, care)
- Advances in digitalization, automation, IoT, and AI but no systemic use yet
- Massive funding of digital innovation / automation by governments (e.g., GBR)
- Speedy automation of Jobs
- Advances in AI/ Machine Learning
- Disrupted supply chains and labor shortages during COVID-19 crises
- Work migration restricted due to social tensions within modernizing societies
- Re-migration of jobless migrant workers
- Mass unemployment due to automation
- Income taxation on robotics replacing workers to guarantee basic income in developed countries
- Massive decrease in work migration for low-skilled jobs; restrictive migration laws to protect social freedom “at home”
- Possibility of “virtual” work migration led to exploitation and dumped wages
- Need for new international regulations on taxes, social security, labor protection, insurances etc.
- Physical migration is still needed in high-skilled (tech) jobs and high-touch work (health, care)
- Rising inequality in both, sending and receiving countries; rising social tensions and discontent

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- Better access to high-skilled tech labor markets without physically migrating
- Enhanced social cohesion within societies and better integration of foreigners (since less people migrate)

### Challenges

- Need for new international regulations on taxes, social security, labor protection, insurances etc.
- High unemployment rates of migrant workers and less remittances



Source: Photo by Alistair MacRobert on Unsplash

## Changed Role of Remittances

During the COVID-19 pandemic, migrant workers were the first to lose their job – either because they worked in sectors that were hit hardest or because employers discharged them first. This abruptly led to a sharp decline in remittances overall (but with exceptions where remittances initially went up, before drying up). But when large-scale vaccination campaigns allowed a “back to normal”, remittances soon reached pre-COVID-19 levels.

What we need to learn, though, is that remittances are transmitted differently today, and that dynamics have changed in different migration corridors. Before COVID-19, money was transferred either through financial agencies that demanded high transfer fees; alternatively, cash was carried personally to the countries of origin or through messengers and intermediaries. COVID-19 cut off the latter two options. Short-term economic hardships in developing countries with the immediate consequence. But money streams soon found their way.

Even though work migrants still travel home to see their beloved, they cannot rely on unrestricted travel any longer. Instead, most people sending remittances profit from the digital boost that COVID-19 accelerated. They now send their money via online services that charge only a small fee and they increasingly use crypto currencies, particularly for larger amounts. This unforeseen competition led to a sharp decline in fees of traditional transfer banks, complying with the SDG target of “max.-3-percent-fee” now. Nevertheless, the direction of remittance flows shifted for good – while some got cut off completely others found surprising new (and often triangular) paths.

So, while many governments of the global North due to the post-COVID-19 economic crisis cut ODA drastically, Reinvented Remittance Regimes (3R) successfully compensated for those losses. But a downside of this surprising shift was also the opening-up of new financial streams for organized crime, for financing wars and for providing autocratic regimes with fresh financial resources...

## What if...

the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic changes the modes of remittances long-term?



Pre-COVID-19 wisdom



Weak Signals



Post-COVID-19 world



Impact on Migration

- 2019: Remittances higher than Western FDI and ODA combined
- 2019: Average cost of remittances is nearly 7%, while SDG target is 3%.
- An estimated 2 billion people worldwide depend on remittances
- Remittance-system relies on massive global inequalities and exploitation of migrants
- Triangular Flows: Remittances can be a lifeline for a household that employs someone sending remittances home as well
- Remittances are transferred via agencies, personally or through intermediaries
- 2020: Drop in work migration; World Bank estimates 20% less remittances than in 2019 because of employment and wage loss of migrant workers; but as borders re-open remittances rise in some countries due to re-migration with savings (e.g., Romania)
- Closed borders and travel restrictions inhibit personal transfer of remittances in many cases
- Unstable currencies, inflation
- New trend for larger amounts: Crypto-currencies are used for remittances (no fees)
- Less personal transfer of remittances
- Changes in foreign aid: without ODA → (geo-) politicization of remittances
- Unintended consequences of promoting remittances for development: financing of conflict and wars
- Remittances loss is felt unevenly depending on proportion of GDP; Development impact differs in regions
- Some remittance flows have changed directions, been cut or increased
- Work migrants can better sustain their families
- Money laundering is hard to track (in dark net channels)
- Due to new financial resource autocratic regimes can consolidate their grip on power  
→ increased migration / asylum pressure

## Opportunities and Challenges for Migration and Mobility Management

### Opportunities

- Possibility for a joint approach to lower remittances fees and reach the SDGs 3 % through international regularization, because they are seen as a substitute for ODA

### Challenges

- Rising poverty in areas depending on remittances could lead to social unrest, conflict and humanitarian crises
- Opacity of remittance-flows rises

**NOT FOR WIDER CIRCULATION, INTERNAL  
WORKSHOP MATERIAL**

## Migration Foresight Lab

The Migration Foresight Lab was a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States in collaboration with and supported by the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

Methodological conceptualization and facilitation was provided by the Bureau für Zeitgeschichte.