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LABOUR MIGRATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH: A PERSPECTIVE FROM ASIA PACIFIC REGION

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Abstract. Globalization has led to significant changes in economies and societies worldwide, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region where labor migration drives economic growth. Migrant workers, valued across various sectors, play a key role in regional development by sending remittances that support families' essential needs and entrepreneurial endeavors. Countries have simplified immigration procedures and enacted protective measures to attract and retain foreign labor, but challenges such as job displacement and balancing the rights of migrants with those of domestic workers persist. Research on the impact of labor migration on economic development in the Asia-Pacific region is crucial in addressing these complexities. Therefore, this article will focus on elucidating the theoretical foundations and practical aspects of labor migration while examining the correlation between labor migration and economic development in the countries within the Asia-Pacific region. The main purpose of the study is to elucidate the general migration context of the Asia-Pacific region and clarify it by conducting a deeper analysis of some representative countries in the region. Additionally, the study aims to elucidate the relationship between labor migration and economic development in this area. The results reveal that labor migration has a positive impact on economic growth through remittances.

Keywords: economic growth, immigration policy, labor, migration, remittances

Introduction

The vigorous process of globalization substantially fuels migration flows, particularly labor migration, exerting a profound impact on the economic growth of nations. The Asia-Pacific region accounts for nearly half of the global population, encompassing the two most populous countries in the world. This region consistently plays a significant role and remains a crucial topic of discussion in all trends related to population shifts, specifically

in the context of international labor migration [1]. The rapid increase in the number of migrating workers within this area has been, and continues to be, the focus of attention for numerous scientific researchers and policymakers.

Researchers have proposed various arguments to elucidate this increase, notably the “push-pull” theory. The “pull” factors refer to the attractions of the destination countries, which may include developed economies, advanced democracies, high social welfare, extensive human rights, among other positive aspects. Conversely, the “push” factors are the negative aspects of the origin countries that drive people to migrate, such as low income, limited employment opportunities, insurmountable social issues, unstable political environments, and other related problems. Numerous studies have utilized this theoretical framework to analyze factors influencing migration, such as the wage differentials between origin and destination nations [2] and five major groups of factors affecting labor migration, encompassing economic, social, environmental, political, and psychological factors [3]. Significant disparities in income among countries, transportation systems, policies attracting foreign labor, as well as alterations in the economic structures of nations have intensified labor migration flows [4]. This trend has led to noteworthy demographic changes in countries within the Asia-Pacific region, which, in turn, substantially impacts the economic development of the nations in this area.

Recent studies have indicated that the remarkable economic development in the Asia region is not a “miracle” but rather attributable to demographic shifts [5]. Additionally, remittances from migrant workers also contribute to establishing a stable economy in their home countries during initial stages of economic development [6]. However, without clear policies, and if these funds are not utilized for their intended purpose to mitigate the negative impacts of labor migration, the economy may easily become dependent on labor migration and remittances, and further raise concerns regarding the significant influence of remittances on economic growth. In this context, countries in the region need to thoroughly understand the impact of demographic changes, increased immigration, and policies attracting immigrant labor on economic development to formulate appropriate strategies.

Literature review

Drivers of immigration

The World Bank underscores that the main driver of migration continues to be employment related, with the underlying determinant being income disparities between nations [7]. Indeed, it is concurred that migration in some form or other is conceptually one of the most direct strategies that the poor can use to improve their living standards [8]. In addition, migration stemming from conflict-related circumstances is a prevalent phenomenon. While factors associated with social ties, transportation infrastructure, and emotional attachments may initially deter individuals in conflict-ridden areas from immediate migration, the majority ultimately opt for relocation in cases of turmoil [9]. Those compelled to leave their native regions due to perilous living conditions often seek asylum in their host countries for rightful support.

Concerning refugees, it is estimated that environmental refugees will soon become the largest group of involuntary migrants, especially those migrating due to climate change. Indeed, the majority of recent works and conferences on the topic focus on climate change, yet do not address other environmental changes as root causes of migration [10]. According to F. Gemenne [11] since the signature of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, a considerable number of climate policies, institutions

and instruments have emerged to tackle global warming after observing its impacts on the overall population flow. Besides, people also migrate with social and demographic incentives. According to Essentials of Migration Management – EMM¹, family acts as the main social drive behind migrating decisions, while concerning demographic factors, population structure and disease prevalence remains the most prominent.

Drivers operate across different scales and levels of social structure, influencing migration over different timeframes [12]. It is also important to highlight that particular migration drivers work in combination – forming what can be called ‘driver complexes’ – to shape the specific form and structure of population movements. In any migration flow, multiple ‘driver complexes’ may themselves interconnect in shaping the eventual direction and nature of a group’s movement [13].

Economic impacts of demographic change

D. S. Massey et al. [4] posited that while demographic factors do not generate migration, the trend of demographic changes significantly influences alterations in the flow of labor migration. Throughout the three decades prior to 2010, the high rate of labor migration in Southeast Asia paralleled impressive economic growth rates, especially in Singapore and Malaysia, where immigrants constituted a quarter of the total labor force [14]. This positive correlation has continued to unfold in the more than a decade since 2010. This highlights the importance of population structure to the developmental trajectory of a nation’s economy.

The relationship between population growth rates and the increase in the labor force varies by country, exerting distinct impacts on each nation’s economic development. According to G. Hugo [1], in less developed countries, the labor force’s growth rate is even higher than that of the population; conversely, in developed countries, the trend is the opposite. For developing nations in the Asia region, they are grappling with significant labor shortages. Countries like Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea have temporarily addressed this issue through industry and labor restructuring. However, this solution is short-term, and in the long run, these countries will inevitably need to import labor for small-scale manufacturing sectors and service industries with low added value [15].

The birth and death rates of a country’s population, which directly influence demographic fluctuations, have a tight correlation with the nation’s economy. D. de la Croix et al. [16] suggests that the key factor influencing long-term economic growth is the reduction in fertility rates, which leads to a decrease in the dependent population. This dynamic consequently increases the number of individuals within working age and decreases dependency ratios. The research by M. Cruz and S. A. Ahmed [17] also supports this viewpoint, demonstrating that in Bangladesh, lower child dependency ratios are associated with reduced poverty rates. Specifically, during childhood, individuals primarily act as consumers; however, upon entering the workforce, they transition from consumers to contributors to economic value, with the capacity to save and invest, thereby enhancing the economy. Hence, an increase in the proportion of the population within working age positively contributes to the growth of GDP per capita, which is a crucial indicator for evaluating economic development and quality of life within a country.

Migration and migration policy

According to G. P. Freeman [18], migration policy is determined by the content and relative power weighting of organized interests in a given society. Policymakers are conceptualized as brokers in charge of producing policies to ensure a balance of benefits for all

¹ Types of labour migration // EMM2.0 Handbook : [site]. URL: <https://emm.iom.int/handbooks/labour-migration/types-labour-migration> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

parties. Therefore, when the costs or benefits associated with migration are concentrated within specific interest groups, these groups are prone to exhibit enhanced organizational efficiency, consequently yielding greater influence on policy formulation.

The aforementioned theory finds relevance in explaining immigration policy within many industrialized countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Governments have recognized the potential of availing cost-effective labor from their migrant workforce which prompts them to make adjustments to entry visas [19]. As recorded in August 2021, the labour force participation rate of recent migrants in Australia was 72.4%, which was higher than the Australian-born population's participation rate of 66.3%², making migrants the highly potential labor force of this nation. In April 2022, through Australia - India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement, the Australian Government extended the stay period for international students from India and abolished the Labor Market Testing for temporary workers with 482 visas. Then in July 2023, the Australian Government officially approved a new visa called the Pacific Engagement Visa to grant residence permits to 3,000 qualified migrants from the Pacific region and Timor-Leste³.

Nonetheless, there exists notable divergence between political pronouncements and the actual content of legal instruments, commonly referred to as the “discursive gap” [20]. Accordingly, implemented policies can often represent significantly diluted iterations of the assertive rhetoric made by politicians, who pledge to curtail immigration, enhance border security, and combat unauthorized migration. Under this circumstance, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration was officially issued in 2018 as the first inter-governmental agreement to comprehensively cover all aspects of international migration. The Migration Governance Indicators (MGI) was also utilized to monitor the implementation of all 23 commitments in the Global Compact for Migration of member countries⁴. Policies to protect the rights of migrants are increasingly being improved, especially for low-skilled workers and refugees.

Theoretical basis

Labour migration

According to ILO Department of Statistics⁵, all international migrants who are currently employed or unemployed and seeking employment in their present country of residence are recognized as migrant workers. According to IOM⁶, labor migration refers to the movement of individuals from their country of origin to another country for work purposes. It can be seen that each organization has a different view on the definition of migrant workers, but in general they agree that migrant workers have two main characteristics: (1) residing in a country that is not their country of nationality and (2) for employment-related

² Australian Labour Market for Migrants – April 2023 // Jobs and Skills Australia : [site]. URL: <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/australian-labour-market-migrants-april-2023> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

³ A Pacific Mobility Index to strategically guide the Pacific Engagement Visa // Devpolicy Blog : [site]. URL: <https://devpolicy.org/pacific-mobility-index-to-guide-the-pacific-engagement-visa-20230703/> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

⁴ Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2022 / International Organization for Migration. Geneva : IOM, 2023. 200 p. ISBN 978-92-9268-646-8.

⁵ The Contribution of Labour Mobility to Economic Growth // International Labour Organization : [site]. URL: https://www.ilo.org/ankara/news/WCMS_398770/lang--en/index.htm (accessed on 19.11.2023).

⁶ International Migration Law No. 34 – Glossary on Migration / International Organization for Migration. Geneva : IOM, 2019. 248 p. ISSN 1813-2278.

purposes.

According to EMM⁷, workers can choose to pursue citizenship in the host country or opt for a temporary stay. Temporary laborers then fall into two distinct groups including seasonal migrant workers whose job is contingent upon seasonal demand and circular workers who are granted residency permits to work between two or more nations over multiple years. At the same time, migrant workers can be classified based on their working qualifications into high-skilled and low-skilled ones. Most nations aspire to attract highly proficient laborers to gain a competitive edge in the global marketplace, hence offering them competitive remuneration and the prospect of permanent residency or citizenship. In contrast, low-skilled laborers are sometimes ineligible for robust compensation, retirement benefits, or social security coverage, hence exposing themselves to the risk of labor exploitation.

Economic growth

Most authors share the same understanding regarding economic growth, yet explain differently in their works. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – OECD [21], economic growth can be defined as the increase or improvement in the inflation-adjusted market value of the goods and services produced by an economy in a financial year. J. L. Cornwall⁸, in his latest updated version, describes economic growth as the process by which a nation's wealth increases over an extended period.

Growth in an economy is measured by change in the volume of its output or in the real expenditure or income of its residents⁹. There exist many tools to accurately measure economic growth; however, the use of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Foreign Trade Index (FDI) remains the most popular [22]. This study will employ GDP and FDI as the main indicator of an economy's growth to assess the relationship between labor migration and economic growth.

The correlation between labor migration and economic growth

The interaction between labor migration and economic development is bidirectional. According to F. Docquier [23], causality between these variables runs in both directions, both positively and negatively and in both the short and long term.

It is undeniable that the development of strong economies contributes to promoting the trend of labor migration. The long-standing theoretical Neoclassical Economics model argues that migration results from differences in labor supply and demand between geographical areas. From the macroeconomic perspective, labor decreases and wages increase in low-resource areas, while labor supply increases and wages decrease in resource-rich areas. The microeconomic impact of economic development on labor migration is also demonstrated through the model of individual choice [24]. Within this framework, rational actors opt for migration based on a cost-benefit analysis, wherein they anticipate a favorable financial return as a consequence of their mobility.

Otherwise, migration flow influences the well-being of the family, the kin community and ultimately the entire economy in many different ways [23] and among those, remittances appear to be their most visible contribution [7]. As a stable source of foreign exchange, remittances aid the homeland's economy by promoting consumption, savings and invest-

⁷ Types of labour migration // EMM2.0 Handbook : [site]. URL: <https://emm.iom.int/handbooks/labour-migration/types-labour-migration> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

⁸ Cornwall, J. L. Economic growth // Encyclopædia Britannica : [site]. URL: <https://www.britannica.com/money/economic-growth> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

⁹ World Development Indicators // The World Bank : [site]. URL: <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=NY.GDP.MKTP.CD> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

ment [25]. In the long term, future remittances can be used by governments and private organizations in developing economies to mobilize capital in the international market [26]. Just as international trade, migration of people benefits not only labor-sending countries but also labor-receiving ones [23]. Immigrant labor increases the supply of labor in the receiving countries, thereby creating more jobs, increasing production and ultimately improving Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [22]. According to M. Kremer and S. Watt [27], the availability of migrant workers in the early childhood education sector has also helped reduce childcare costs, allowing many local women to return to work and participate in the economic development process. Also, immigrant workers are willing to take jobs that native ones often avoid and the less-educated workforce often adapts more easily to specialized tasks in productive complementary jobs, thus making an important contribution to improving labor productivity [28].

Methodology

This study employs quantitative research methods, an approach geared toward providing an objective and numerical depiction of a specific situation. This method involves the systematic collection, interpretation, and presentation of data. Descriptive quantitative research seeks to present a comprehensive and accurate portrayal of the subject under investigation using numerical data, enabling researchers to draw meaningful insights and conclusions.

In this study, the data collection process included sourcing secondary data from reputable organizations such as World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and the United Nations (UN). This diverse array of sources ensured the reliability and credibility of the data. Additionally, various written sources, including statistical data, research journals by previous scholars, and reference books related to the study, were consulted.

By integrating secondary data from these diverse sources, this study gained access to a wealth of information, thereby enhancing the depth and breadth of the study. World Bank data provided valuable insights into the research topic, providing a comprehensive perspective. Official statistics from the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have reinforced the reliability of the study, especially regarding migration data up to 2022. Furthermore, the incorporation of research journals and reference books by previous scholars added an academic dimension to the study. By synthesizing findings and theories from existing research, this study positioned itself within the broader academic discourse, capitalizing on the collective knowledge and understanding of previous researchers. This approach enriches the theoretical framework and analytical depth of the study.

The careful selection of secondary data sources played a pivotal role in this research methodology. Each data source was meticulously evaluated for relevance, accuracy, and reliability to ensure that the research findings were grounded in trustworthy information. By compiling data from a variety of reputable sources, this study bolstered the robustness of its analysis and fortified the validity of its conclusions. Adhering to rigorous research standards and drawing from a diverse range of sources, this study aimed to contribute valuable insights to the academic community and inform macro-executive decision-making processes related to current accounts.

Findings and discussion

Total number of migrants to and from Asia-Pacific region

According to Fig. 1, by mid-2020, statistics revealed that the total number of migrants departing from the Asia-Pacific region was nearly twice the number of immigrants arriving in the area. Approximately 83 million residents of this region resided in other countries, accounting for 30% of the total global migrant population. South Asia and Southeast Asia were identified as the principal sub-regions contributing the highest number of migrants within the entire area. In terms of immigrant intake, Southeast Asia, the Pacific, and East Asia were predominant, attracting a substantial number of immigrants, totaling 42.6 million individuals, which represented 15% of the global migrant population. These impressive figures underscore the potential of this region as it continues to expand and attract a significant labor force of migrants from around the world.



Fig. 1. Total number of migrants to and from Asia-Pacific region by subregion as of mid-2020 (million people)

Source: Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2022¹⁰

Migration, and more specifically labor migration, plays a crucial role and acts as a driving force behind the robust economic development observed in the Asia-Pacific region. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand heavily relied on foreign workers due to labor shortages in various sectors like construction, manufacturing, and services. However, the pandemic exerted a negative impact on labor migration trends, resulting in a substantial reduction in the number of immigrant workers entering these countries. Post-pandemic, the immigrant intake in these nations is only witnessing a modest recovery, with numbers still remaining relatively low (Fig. 2). Conversely, there is a strong resurgence in the outward flow of labor, especially from South Asian countries (Fig. 3).

¹⁰ Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2022 / International Organization for Migration. Geneva : IOM, 2023. 200 p. ISBN 978-92-9268-646-8.

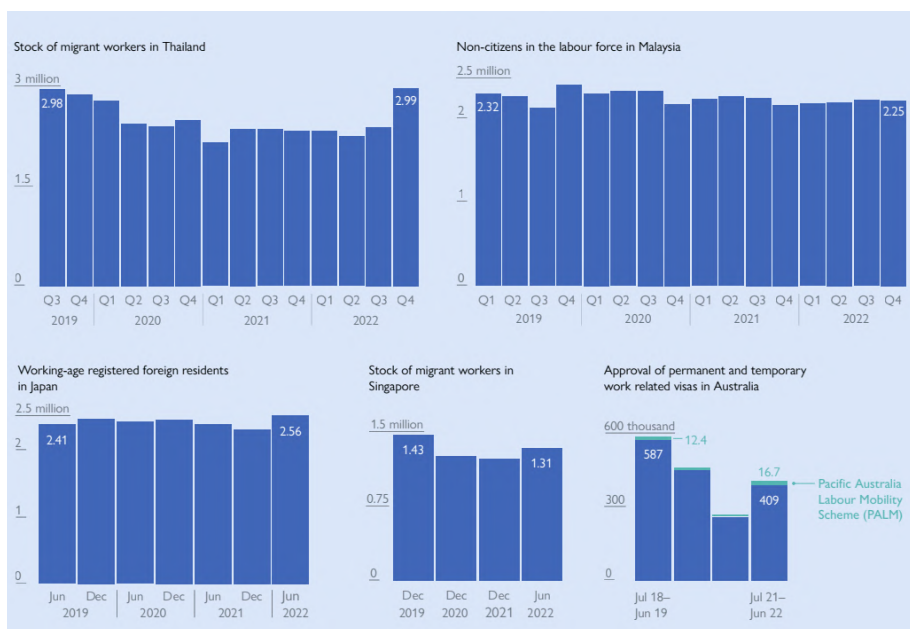


Fig. 2. Stock and inflow of migrant workers in main destinations in Asia-Pacific region between 2019 and 2022

Source: Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2022¹¹

In the Asia-Pacific region, the year 2020 witnessed Australia, Thailand, Japan, and Singapore emerging as the predominant destinations for the majority of migrating laborers. Thailand, a Southeast Asian nation, accommodates a significant portion of the region's immigrant labor. Due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, Thailand experienced a 6.1% economic contraction in 2020, as per the International Monetary Fund data¹². This downturn was the most severe witnessed since the Southeast Asian financial crisis, primarily due to the detrimental effects of the pandemic on the manufacturing sector and the number of immigrant workers in Thailand. A clear decline in immigration flow to the country is observable in Figure 2, with no significant recovery in sight, fluctuating between 2.4 to 2.6 million individuals up until the third quarter of 2022. By the fourth quarter of 2022, the nation's economy began showing signs of recovery, with immigrant labor numbers rising back to pre-pandemic levels. World Bank¹³ indicates that the GDP growth rate of Thailand for the entire year of 2022 reached 2.6%. While this is a sign of economic recovery for Thailand, the growth rate is still comparatively lower than other countries in the region.

According to Figure 2, post-pandemic, in Malaysia, the number of foreign workers reached 2.25 million in 2022, with the majority originating from Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Japan. Meanwhile, in Singapore, this figure was 1.31 million as of June 2022, according

¹¹ Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2022 / International Organization for Migration. Geneva : IOM, 2023. 200 p. ISBN 978-92-9268-646-8.

¹² Five Things to Know About Thailand's Economy and COVID-19 // International Monetary Fund : [site]. URL: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2021/06/21/nao62121-5-things-to-know-about-thailands-economy-and-covid-19> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

¹³ Thailand Economic Monitor December 2023: Thailand's Path to Carbon Neutrality – The Role of Carbon Pricing // The World Bank : [site]. URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/thailand/publication/temdec2023> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

to data from the Ministry of Manpower (MOM)¹⁴. Both countries exhibit significant reliance on foreign labor in the construction and manufacturing sectors. Part of this recovery can be attributed to these nations gradually reopening their borders and reviving their economies. However, in Japan, the reduction trend of migrant labor is not as substantial as in the aforementioned countries. The number of foreign workers in Japan increased from 2.35 million in December 2021 to 2.56 million in June 2022 (Fig. 2). While the policy of border reopening partly contributes to the growth in labor migration, the primary driving factors are the labor shortages in sectors such as nursing care, agriculture, fishing, and construction, particularly in rural areas. These sectors are grappling with severe labor shortages, necessitating an influx of foreign workers to meet the demand.

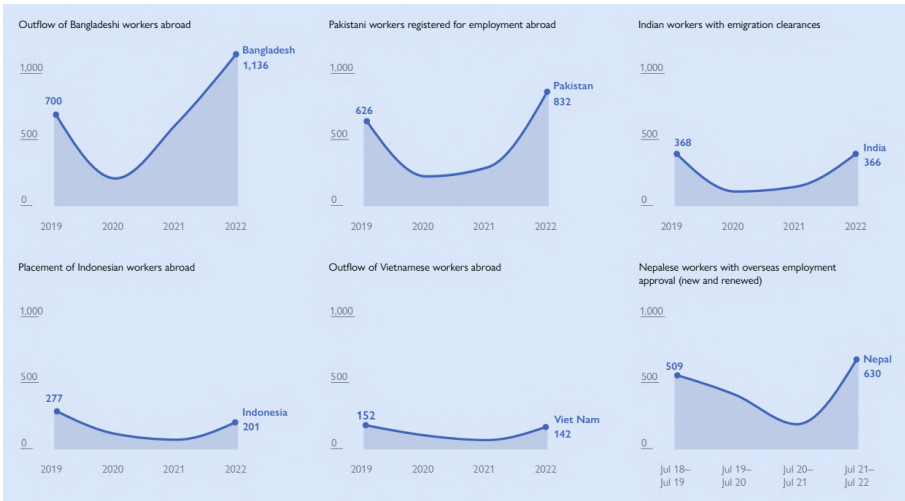


Fig. 3. Outflow of nationals from Asia-Pacific countries for employment abroad in 2022 (thousand people)

Source: Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2022¹⁵

According to IOM, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Nepal were among the top ten countries with the highest number of emigrants in the Asia-Pacific region as of mid-2020. Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India exhibited similar trends in outward labor flows. These three nations, all located in South Asia, collectively received remittances amounting to USD 147 billion in 2020, despite falling short of initial projections due to the impact of Covid-19¹⁶. The Covid-19 pandemic significantly affected the number of workers registering to work abroad from these three countries. As seen in Figure 3, between 2019 and 2020, there was a sharp decline in migrant labor from these countries, with Bangladesh experiencing the most substantial impact as the number of its overseas workers more than tripled compared to 2020, corresponding to approximately 500,000 workers. Both Pakistan

¹⁴ Foreign workforce numbers // Singapore Ministry of Manpower of Japan : [site]. URL: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/documents-and-publications/foreign-workforce-numbers> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

¹⁵ Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2022 / International Organization for Migration. Geneva : IOM, 2023. 200 p. ISBN 978-92-9268-646-8.

¹⁶ Bangladesh có mức tăng kiều hối cao nhất Nam Á [Bangladesh has the highest increase in remittances in South Asia] // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam : [site]. URL: <https://ngkt.mofa.gov.vn/bangladesh-co-muc-tang-kieu-hoi-cao-nhat-nam-a/> (accessed on 19.11.2023). (In Viet.).

and India also experienced significant declines. Figure 3 shows a rapid recovery in migrant labor flows from these countries in 2022, with Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal exceeding pre-pandemic levels, even reaching record highs since 1971.

While Southeast Asian countries, especially Malaysia, have traditionally been destinations for migrant labor from South Asia, labor flows to these nations were not significant compared to those to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. In Bangladesh, migrant workers heading to GCC countries constituted about 83% of the total migrant labor flow in 2022, while in Nepal, up to 87% of approved labor permits were designated for GCC countries, with another 6% for Malaysia in the same year¹⁷. Both Vietnam and India witnessed a recovery, with the placement of Indonesian migrant workers in 2022 increasing to over 70% compared to 2019 figures, according to the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Board¹⁸. Regarding Vietnam, the outflow of migrant labor to foreign countries exceeded the target of 90,000 as reported by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs, which stood at 142,000 in 2022 (Fig. 3).

In conclusion, the examination of migration trends in the Asia-Pacific region underscores the integral connection between labor migration and robust economic development. The data depicted in Figures 1, 2, and 3 not only reveal the intricate dynamics of global movement but also emphasize the pivotal role played by labor migration in fostering economic growth within the region. South Asia and Southeast Asia, as major sources of migrants, significantly contribute to the global migrant population, and their migration patterns are closely intertwined with economic trends. In essence, the Asia-Pacific region continues to serve as a key player in shaping global migration patterns, with labor migration acting as a driving force behind its economic development.

The impact of remittances on the economic development of Asia-Pacific region

International remittance flows have increased significantly over the years and have brought many positive impacts on economic development [23]. For many developing countries in the region, this is the largest source of foreign exchange earnings, even surpassing export revenue, Foreign Direct Investment - FDI, aid and other private capital flows [29].

According to the Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development – KNOMAD, the total amount of remittances worldwide in 2022 reached 794.06 billion USD, in which the Asia-Pacific region accounted for 310.74 billion USD, which was 39%. Based on chart Figure 4, the South Asia region accounts for the largest proportion with 43% of the region's total remittances, followed by Southeast Asia (26%) and East Asia (21%). Meanwhile, countries in the Pacific region have the lowest total remittances in the region, catering for the modest 1% of the regional remittances. The main hindrance appears to be high costs; specifically, the cost to send money to this region accounts for 10% of transaction value, much higher than the world average of 6.5%¹⁹.

¹⁷ Asia-Pacific Migration Data Report 2022 / International Organization for Migration. Geneva : IOM, 2023. 200 p. ISBN 978-92-9268-646-8.

¹⁸ Statistik Perlindungan dan Penempatan [Protection and Deployment Statistics] // BP2MI : [site]. URL: <https://www.bp2mi.go.id/statistik-penempatan> (accessed on 19.11.2023). (In Indonesian).

¹⁹ Annual Report 2021 // Market Development Facility : [site]. URL: <https://marketdevelopmentfacility.org/2021-annual-report/> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

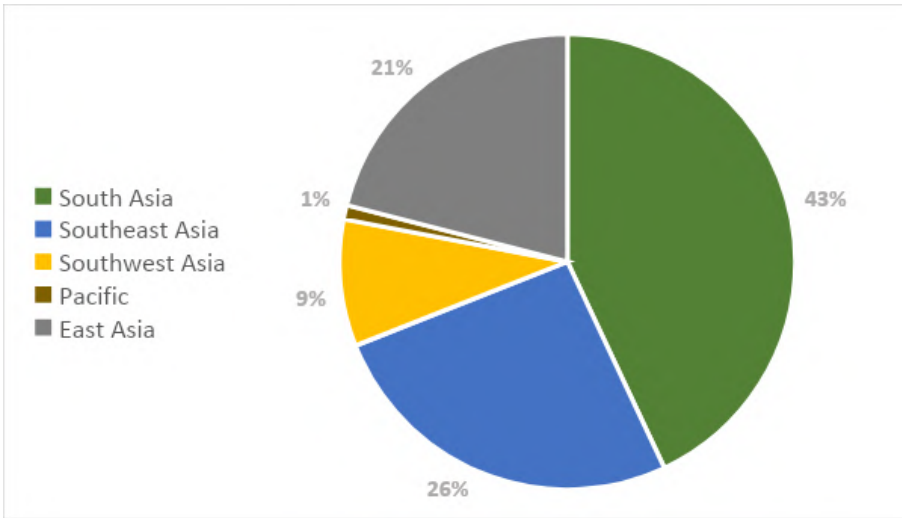


Fig. 4. Remittance flows to Asia-Pacific divided by region in 2022

Source: KNOMAD²⁰

According to IOM, although the economy is showing signs of stagnation, remittances flowing into the region still increased by 2.1%, higher than the global average increase of 1.7%. There are many reasons for this upward trend, notably the increase in oil prices in countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council – GCC and the growing labor market in economies belonging to the OECD. However, as suggested by Fig. 5, remittances in individual member regions differ in trends, in which remittances in South Asia and Southeast Asia, two sub-regions with the largest proportion, both increased, while other areas with low proportions decreased. Specifically, remittances in South Asia and Southeast Asia increase by 6% and 4%, respectively, while the Pacific region, Southwest Asia and East Asia decrease by 12%, 7% and 3%, correspondingly.

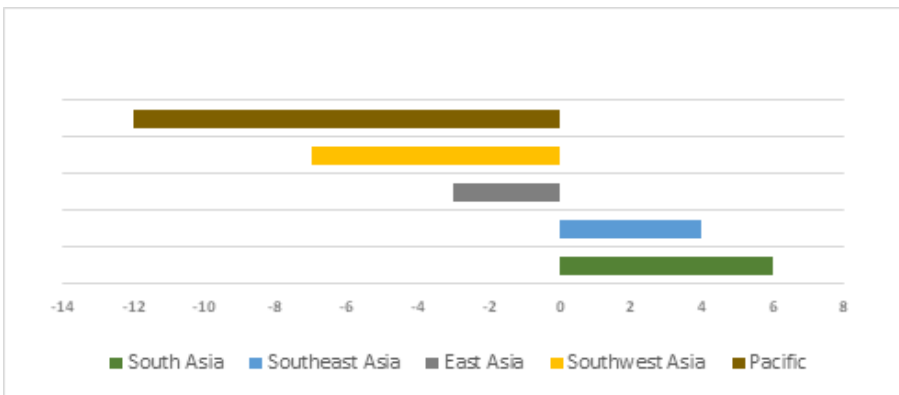


Fig. 5. Change in the proportion of remittance flows transferred to Asia-Pacific Region in 2021–2022

Source: KNOMAD²¹

²⁰ Remittances // KNOMAD : [site]. URL: <https://www.knomad.org/data/remittances> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

²¹ Ibidem.

According to Figure 4, the three subregions South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia already cater for 90% of total remittances in the Asia – Pacific region. Therefore, in order to accurately reflect the impact of remittances on the regional economic growth, it is necessary to assess their impact on each subregion's main determinants of rapid economic growth including total investment, which is mainly measured through FDI inflow, consumption and domestic production [22]. M. Coon and R. Neumann [30] also point out that a rise of 10% in FDI results in a corresponding 3.6% growth in remittance inflows. As depicted in Fig. 6, South Asia and Southeast Asia witness an increase in FDI flows from 2021 to 2022, respectively 9% and 5% while the FDI flow in East Asia declines slightly by 3%. Considering that remittances in South Asia and Southeast augment in the same order while that of East Asia decreases, it can be stated that remittances have a positive impact on the pattern of the investment flow. In addition, remittances are widely known to exert a positive impact on GDP, although its range of influence has not been proven [31; 32; 33].

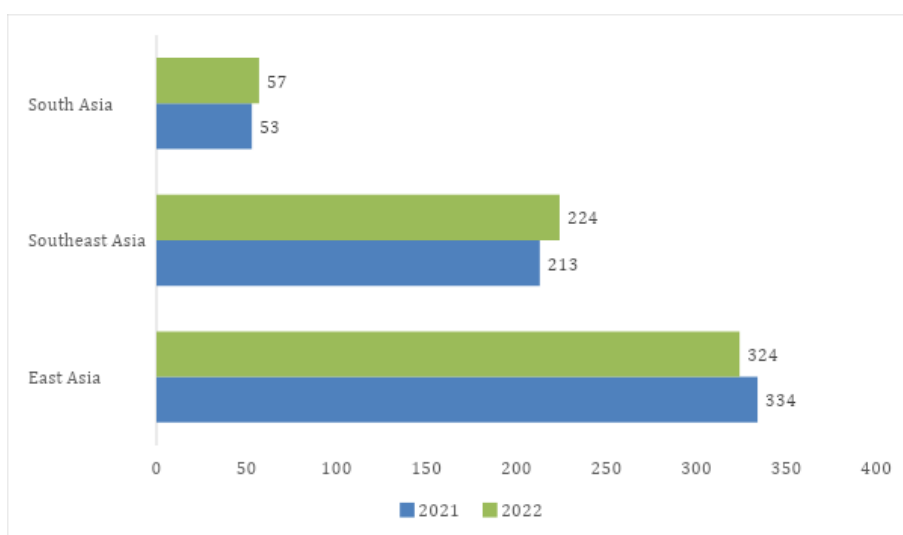


Fig. 6. FDI inflows by selected subregion in the Asia Pacific Region in 2021–2022 (billion dollars)

Source: UNCTAD²²

In addition, many countries in the Asia-Pacific region rely heavily on remittances for economic development, as clearly seen in Table 1. Remarkably, Tonga, a country in the Pacific with GDP in 2022 ranking 204 out of 213 countries in the world, ranked first in the proportion of remittances in GDP in 2022 with 49.9%. It is then followed by Samoa (34%), Nepal (22%) and Marshall Islands (11%)²³. Most of the countries in the top 10 in terms of remittances share in GDP are developing countries with low-income levels, mainly concentrated in the East Asia-Pacific region. Such dependence was mainly due to the nations' inability to provide sufficient income for residents, leading to remittances being the only means of income for low-income families [34].

²² A Special ASEAN Investment Report 2023. International Investment Trends: Key Issues and Policy Options / The ASEAN Secretariat ; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Jakarta : ASEAN, 2023. 107 p. ISSN 2963-279X.

²³ Ibidem.

Table 1

**Top 10 countries with the largest proportion of remittances
in GDP in Asia-Pacific region in 2022**

Country	The proportion of remittances in GDP (%)
Tonga	49.9
Samoa	33.7
Nepal	21.8
Marshall Island	11.1
Philippines	9.5
Fiji	9.3
Pakistan	7.7
Vanuatu	7.6
Timor-Leste	7.5
Kiribati	7.2

Source: KNOMAD²⁴

Remittances are the most obvious and visible bridge between migration and development, especially in developing countries whose development is sustainable economic development through education, health and poverty reduction [7]. Personal remittances are channeled directly to end users, which are the laborers themselves and their families [26]. Hence, they directly augment income, mitigate income disparities, foster human capital formation [35] and facilitate the construction of schools and clinics [36] and thus, promote economic growth [25] in developing countries of the region. Personal remittances also contribute to increased consumption by low-income households and reduce poverty, therefore enhancing the living standard and promoting sustainable economic development. It is evident that remittances not only impact domestic consumption but also bring long-term positive impacts to countries [23].

In summary, remittance flows have a demonstrably positive influence on regional economic growth. Moreover, their impact extends beyond mere economic enhancement, encompassing the promotion of sustainable development in various facets of life such as education, healthcare, and overall lifestyle.

Policies for attracting immigrant workers in Asian-Pacific region

“Remittances are highly complementary to government cash transfers and essential to households during times of need”²⁵. According to J. N. Francois et al.²⁶, in general, every 10% increase in remittances will bring about a 0.66% long-term increase in GDP. Because of this, increasing remittances, with a focus on attracting quality migrant human resources, has become extremely urgent for economies in the region.

In strongly developed countries in the region, the population tends to age. In fact, many mighty economies such as Korea, China or Japan face seriously low fertility rates (Fig. 7), even the fertility rate in Korea has just hit a record bottom of 0.84, which means that for every 100 women in her reproductive years, only 84 children are born. Therefore,

²⁴ Remittances // KNOMAD : [site]. URL: <https://www.knomad.org/data/remittances> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

²⁵ Remittances Remain Resilient but Likely to Slow // The World Bank : [site]. URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/06/13/remittances-remain-resilient-likely-to-slow> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

²⁶ J. N. Francois, N. Ahmad, A. Keinsley and A. Nti-Addae. Remittances Increase GDP with Potential Differential Impacts Across Countries // World Bank blogs : [site]. URL: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/peoplemove/remittances-increase-gdp-potential-differential-impacts-across-countries> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

countries with aging populations increase investment and production in younger economies such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and Bangladesh, where provide many skilled workers at affordable prices²⁷.

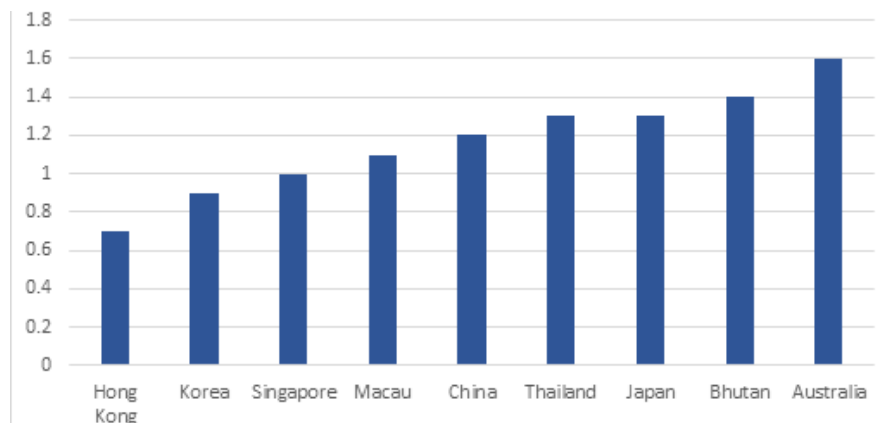


Fig. 7. 10 countries with the lowest fertility rates in the Asia-Pacific region in 2022

Source: Statista²⁸

Globalization and the liberalization of opportunities in newly developing countries has encouraged temporary or permanent skilled movements from developed to developing regions. The migrant labor market of the twenty-first century extends to many occupations and under the influence of the growing demand for human resources in high-tech occupations many countries have sought to attract highly qualified resources [37]. Thanks to the growing demand for highly qualified labor, the concept of “battle for talent” between countries was born. According to D. Kapur and J. McHale [24], technological progress, the aging of populations in rich countries and the globalization of production are three long-term trends considered to be the strongest drivers of international competition. talent economics. Public policy has the ability to influence international migration flows through the control and selective admission of migrant workers who meet certain policy objectives. The study will focus on the cases in Japan and Australia whose policies’ effectiveness has been well proven.

Japan is one of the leading countries in the region in terms of talent attracting policies. As a country with the highest proportion of people over 65 years old in the world, the country’s labor market seriously lacks skilled workers in the agricultural industry. According to Margolis, Japan needs additional 6.7 million workers to reach the set GDP level by 2040²⁹. Therefore, since 1993, Japan has conducted the Technical Intern Training Program to attract young workers to experience and work in this country. This program is built based on employee training courses held since the 1960s. In 2019, the Government of this country

²⁷ Asia’s demographic growing pains // East Asia Forum : [site]. URL: <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/06/25/asias-demographic-growing-pains/> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

²⁸ Total fertility rates in the Asia-Pacific region in 2021, by country or territory // Statista : [site]. URL: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1171367/apac-total-fertility-rates-by-country-or-region/> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

²⁹ Japan’s foreign workers face a new post-COVID landscape // The Japan Times : [site]. URL: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/09/05/national/social-issues/foreign-workers-japan-covid19/> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

established a new status of residence called Specified Skills Worker for foreign workers. to supplement some professions. Accordingly, workers in nine sectors, typically health care, construction and agriculture and fishery, will be granted residence permits for up to 5 years for type (i) visas and indefinitely for visa type (ii). In 2022, Japan also increased cooperation with many young economies and signed Memoranda of Cooperation with 14 countries³⁰ on the issue of protecting the rights of workers coming to work under this new visa. As a result, there are now 1.8 million foreign workers in Japan, which is over twice as many as 10 years ago³¹. According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare – MHLW³², foreign workers in Japan mainly work in the manufacturing, construction, and sales industries, as suggested in Table 2.

Table 2

Structure of foreign workers by occupation in Japan in 2022

Fields	Number of foreign workers (persons)	Ratio (%)
Manufacturing	485,128	26.6
Wholesale/ Retail	237,928	13.1
Accommodation/ Food & Drink	208,981	11.5
Construction	116,789	6.4
Education/ Learning Support	76,854	4.2
Information & Communications	75,954	4.2
Medical Care/ Welfare	74,339	4.1
Academic Research & Specialized/ Technical services	64,261	3.5
Agriculture/ Forestry/ Fisheries	48,233	2.6
Others	409,904	23.8

Source: MHLW³³

Australia is among the top 10 destinations for international migrant workers, according to IOM. The Australian Government³⁴ declared that the number of migrant workers coming to this country has increased by 51% compared to last year, mainly thanks to flexible changes in policy. From April 2022, two temporary worker programs in the Asia-Pacific region, the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) and the Pacific Labor Scheme (PLS) have been merged into the Pacific Australia Labor Mobility program (PALM). According to the Australian Government information site, with the goal of filling the labor gap in the agricultural sector, the PALM program allows Australian businesses to qualify to recruit foreign workers from 9 Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste comes to work for up to 4 years for medium and low-skilled workers. In just 7 months, the total number of PALM workers in Australia increased from more than 24,400 in May 2022 to more than 35,100 in December 2022, an

³⁰ Japan // OECD iLibrary : [site]. URL: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/cf203c31-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/cf203c31-en> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

³¹ Record 1.8 Million Foreign Workers in Japan as of 2022 // Nippon.com : [site]. URL: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/ho1612/> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

³² Provisional Report of Monthly Labour Survey // Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan : [site]. URL: <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/database/db-l/ro5/2310pe/2310pe.html> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Australian Labour Market for Migrants – April 2023 // Jobs and Skills Australia : [site]. URL: <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/australian-labour-market-migrants-april-2023> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

increase of 44%³⁵.

In general, the Asia-Pacific has long been an ideal destination for migrant workers, and is also a place that produces many highly qualified workers. The positive impact of this human resource is demonstrated through remittance flows, knowledge transfer as well as the ability to meet market needs. There is every indication that international population movements in to, out of and within Asia will continue to increase in scale and significance.

Conclusion

In summary, labor migration is not only a societal phenomenon but also a vital force contributing to the economic structure of countries within the region. A distinctive feature of labor migration in this region is its interplay with demography, as well as the increase in remittances - a crucial financial resource for the economies of countries that send labor migrants to other nations. From this study, a clear understanding of the barriers and opportunities presented by labor migration can be perceived. One of the greatest challenges is not only managing and controlling the flow of migrant labor but also creating a conducive and sustainable environment for migrant workers. This necessitates improvements in policies and the education and training system, as well as enhanced regional and international cooperation. To maximize the economic benefits of labor migration, countries need to implement integrated strategies, emphasizing skills development, improvement of working conditions, and protection of the rights and benefits of migrant laborers.

Policy implications

Labor migration in the Asia-Pacific region significantly contributes to economic growth, underscoring the urgent need for more clear and comprehensive policy measures. The reciprocal relationship between labor migration and economic development can be further optimized through effective management and regulation of labor migration. Based on the analyses in this study, we propose the following policy implications.

Firstly, favorable conditions should be created for workers from one's own country who wish to work abroad. This includes ensuring workers' rights in the countries they migrate to and signing bilateral agreements between governments to promote labor migration flows. Countries in the Asia-Pacific region should consider establishing bilateral partnerships and agreements related to labor migration. These agreements should aim to protect the rights of migrant workers and facilitate legal migration. This approach could encourage more organized and stable labor migration flows, protect workers from exploitation, and meet the labor market demands of host countries. This win-win approach benefits both labor-sending and labor-receiving countries without compromising the rights and benefits of the migrant workers themselves.

Secondly, a crucial policy to consider is relaxing immigration policies. Countries with low birth rates, such as Japan and South Korea, may face potential future labor shortages. The governments of these two countries could address this issue by raising the retirement age, but they should also consider another potentially effective policy: easing immigration restrictions. As there is an increasing number of people migrating out of East and Southeast Asian countries (excluding Japan, Singapore, and Malaysia), nations that are likely to experience future labor shortages should proactively and flexibly adjust their immigration policies to attract workers. These relaxed policies will play a vital role in drawing workers from abroad, thereby addressing labor market needs effectively.

³⁵ Foreign workforce numbers // Singapore Ministry of Manpower of Japan : [site]. URL: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/documents-and-publications/foreign-workforce-numbers> (accessed on 19.11.2023).

Thirdly, another policy that should be developed and improved for countries in need of immigrant and migrant labor is creating a more favorable environment for these workers. This can be achieved by effectively managing labor flows, improving education systems to enhance skills development for both migrant and immigrant labor, and protecting the rights of workers from these countries. A stable and sustainable economic, political, and legal environment will attract a plentiful labor force. Alongside, both countries that receive migrant labor and those that export labor abroad need to focus on improving the skill levels of their workforce. This approach will not only boost their confidence but also increase the efficiency of local vocational training, as they invest significant time, money, and effort without any guaranteed employment in the future.

Research gaps and future research directions

A significant limitation of this study is that the reported data in this particular study, and data sources in general, might not accurately and clearly cover the number of low-skilled immigrant workers or distinguish legal immigrant workers from refugees. Therefore, over-relying on numerical data to evaluate the impact of immigration on economic development is not advisable. The reliability of these results, along with estimates of the number of informal immigrant workers, needs further careful consideration. Certainly, in the future, with more accurate confirmation of the above results, our study can achieve greater objectivity and accuracy regarding the impact of both informal and formal immigrant workers on regional economic growth.

Moreover, our study has touched upon the influence of remittances on countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Essentially, our findings affirm the positive impact of remittances on the economic development of these countries. However, to date, there hasn't been a unanimous conclusion among scholars regarding whether the relationship between remittances and economic development is positive or negative. Some conclusions on the positive impact of remittances on economic development include the beneficial effects of remittances on the economies of developing countries. Meanwhile, others suggest that the aforementioned relationship is either negative or has very little impact on the economy. The discrepancy between the conclusions of these studies can be attributed to various factors, possibly including different research methods or subjects. Therefore, in the future, as more data becomes available, we will reconsider and thoroughly examine these results.

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ТРУДОВАЯ МИГРАЦИЯ И ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИЙ РОСТ: ВЗГЛЯД ИЗ АЗИАТСКО-ТИХООКЕАНСКОГО РЕГИОНА

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Аннотация. Глобализация привела к значительным изменениям в экономике и обществе во всем мире, особенно в Азиатско-Тихоокеанском регионе, где трудовая миграция является движущей силой экономического роста. Рабочие-мигранты востребованы в различных секторах и играют ключевую роль в региональном развитии. Страны упростили иммиграционные процедуры и приняли специальные меры для привлечения и удержания иностранной рабочей силы, но такие проблемы, как перемещение рабочих мест, баланс прав мигрантов и прав домашних работников, сохраняются. Исследования влияния трудовой миграции на экономическое развитие в Азиатско-Тихоокеанском регионе имеют огромное значение для решения этих вопросов. И потому настоящая статья посвящена анализу теоретических основ и практических аспектов трудовой миграции при изучении взаимосвязи между трудовой миграцией и экономическим развитием в странах Азиатско-Тихоокеанского региона. Основная цель исследования – определить общий контекст миграционных процессов в Азиатско-Тихоокеанском регионе и уточнить его особенности путем проведения более глубокого анализа ситуации в некоторых репрезентативных странах региона. Кроме того, исследование направлено на выяснение взаимосвязи между трудовой миграцией и экономическим развитием в рассматриваемом регионе. Результаты показывают, что трудовая миграция оказывает положительное влияние на экономический рост посредством денежных переводов, которые поддерживают основные потребности семей и предпринимательскую деятельность.

Ключевые слова: экономический рост, миграционная политика, рабочая сила, миграция, денежные переводы мигрантов

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