



International  
Labour  
Organization

# ▶ ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers

International migrants in the labour force

Fourth edition



Executive summary

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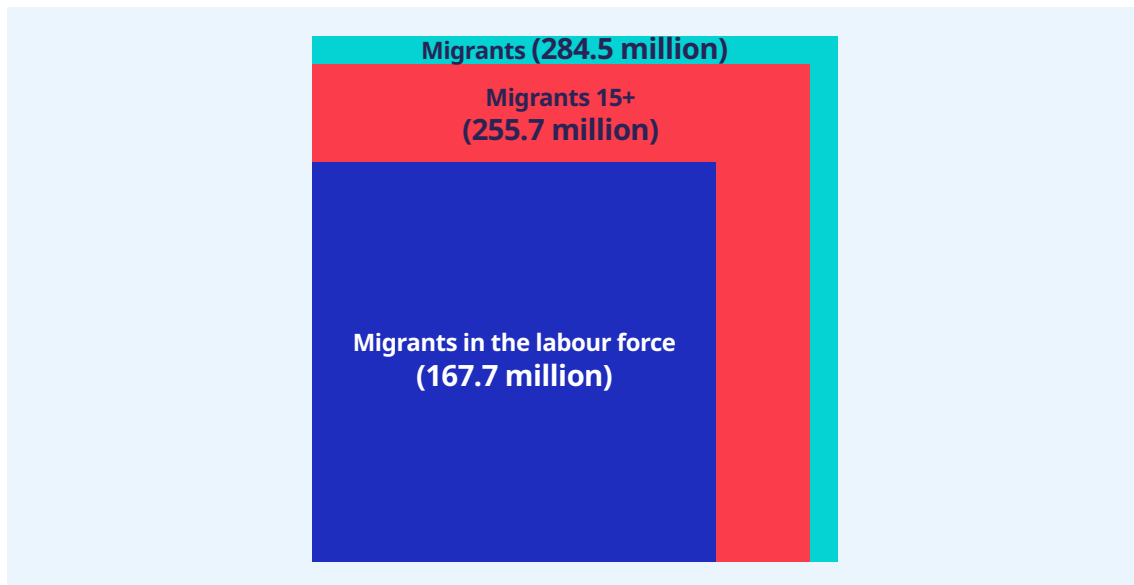
### In 2022, the ILO estimates that there were 167.7 million migrants in the global labour force

The global stock of international migrants reached 284.5 million in 2022, with 255.7 million of them of working age (15 and over) (see figure ES1). In the same year, the number of international migrants in the labour force, defined as international migrants who are employed or unemployed, was 167.7 million – over 30 million more people

than in 2013. Among those, 155.6 million were employed and 12.1 million were unemployed (see figure ES2).

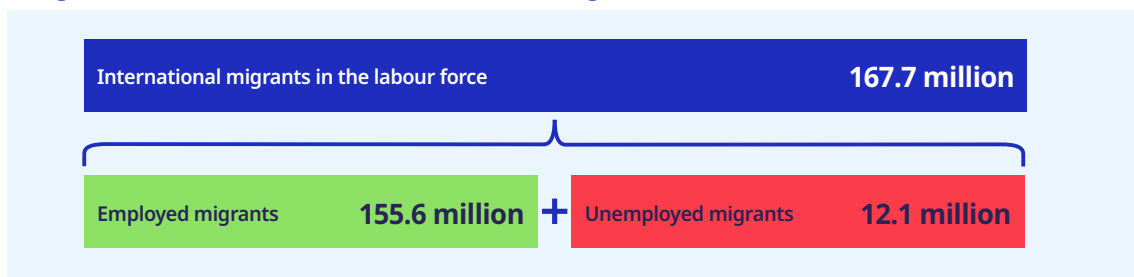
Growth was higher from 2013 to 2017 and from 2017 to 2019, when the number of international migrants in the labour force increased annually by an average of 3.5 per cent and 2.5 per cent, respectively. From 2019 to 2022, however, the rate of growth slowed down to less than 1 per cent annually, which could be attributed to a number of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

► Figure ES1. Global estimates of the stock of international migrants and international migrants in the labour force, 2022 (million)



Source: ILO estimates.

► Figure ES2. Global estimates of international migrants in the labour force, 2022 (million)



Source: ILO estimates.

## International migrants represented 4.7 per cent of the global labour force

International migrants represented 4.3 per cent of the global working-age population (aged 15 and over) in 2022 and accounted for 4.7 per cent of the global labour force. While the number of international migrants in the labour force increased over time, their share among migrants of working age remained stable, at around 66.1 per cent in 2013, 67.1 per cent in 2017, 66.8 per cent in 2019 and 65.6 per cent in 2022.

## At 102.7 million, the majority of international migrants in the labour force were men, compared to 64.9 million women

Women constituted 38.7 per cent of international migrants in the labour force, while 61.3 per cent were men (see figure ES3). Lower representation of women among international migrants in the labour force can be attributed to their slightly lower share among the total migrant population (48.2 per cent) and lower labour force participation rates.

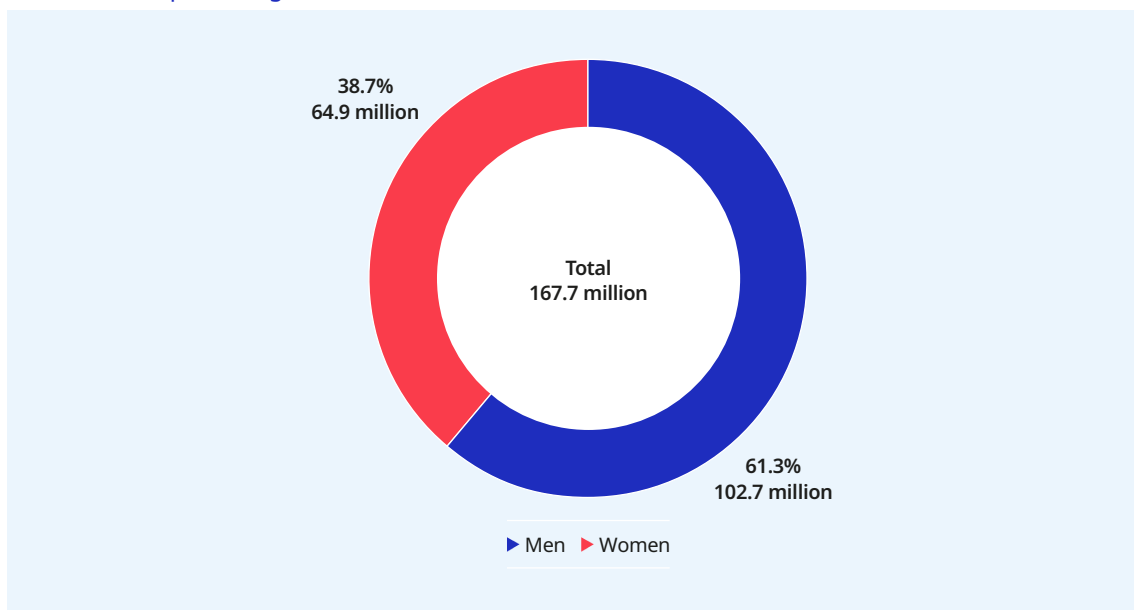
## Migrant men and women had higher labour force participation rates than non-migrants in 2022, but with significant variations across income groups and regions

Migrants had higher labour force participation rates than non-migrants globally, 65.8 per cent and 60.1 per cent, respectively (see figure ES4). Many migrants move primarily for economic reasons, seeking better job opportunities and higher wages. This strong economic drive often translates into higher labour force participation. In addition, some countries have immigration policies that favour skilled workers or those who already have job offers, which can lead to higher labour force participation among migrants. However, it should be noted that the labour force participation rate of migrant women (52.8 per cent) is lower than migrant men



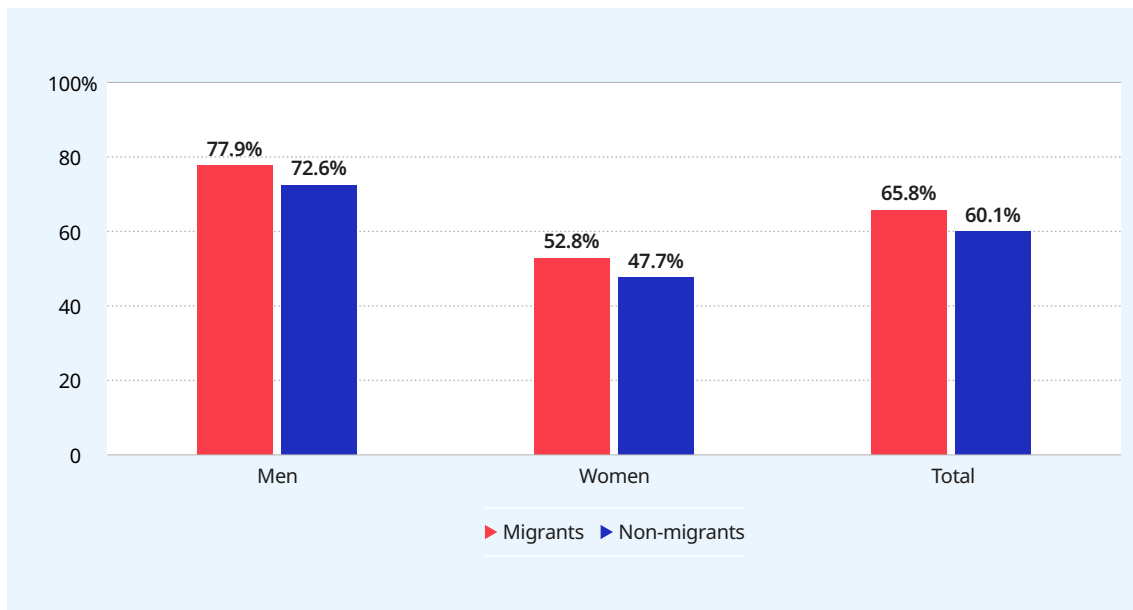
Women constituted 38.7 per cent of international migrants in the labour force, while 61.3 per cent were men.

► **Figure ES3. Global distribution of international migrants in the labour force by sex, 2022** (million and percentage)



Source: ILO estimates.

► **Figure ES4. Global labour force participation rate of international migrants and non-migrants by sex, 2022 (percentage)**



Source: ILO estimates.

(77.9 per cent). Structural barriers, socio-cultural factors and discriminatory practices in labour markets hinder the employment opportunities of migrant women to a greater extent compared to men. Moreover, labour force participation of migrant women was below non-migrant women in low-income and upper-middle-income countries as well as in the regions Eastern Europe, Northern America and sub-Saharan Africa.

### Most international migrants in the labour force were prime-age adults, and age distribution remained consistent over time

At 125.6 million in 2022, prime-age adults (aged 25–54) constituted the vast majority of international migrants in the labour force for both men and women. There were 15.5 million young international migrants in the labour force (aged 15–24), 20.9 million aged 55–64 and 5.7 million aged 65 and over.

Youth accounted for 9.3 per cent, prime-age adults for 74.9 per cent, people aged 55–64 for 12.5 per cent and people 65 and older for 3.4 per cent of the global stock of international migrants in the labour force (see figure ES5). The high representation of prime-age individuals

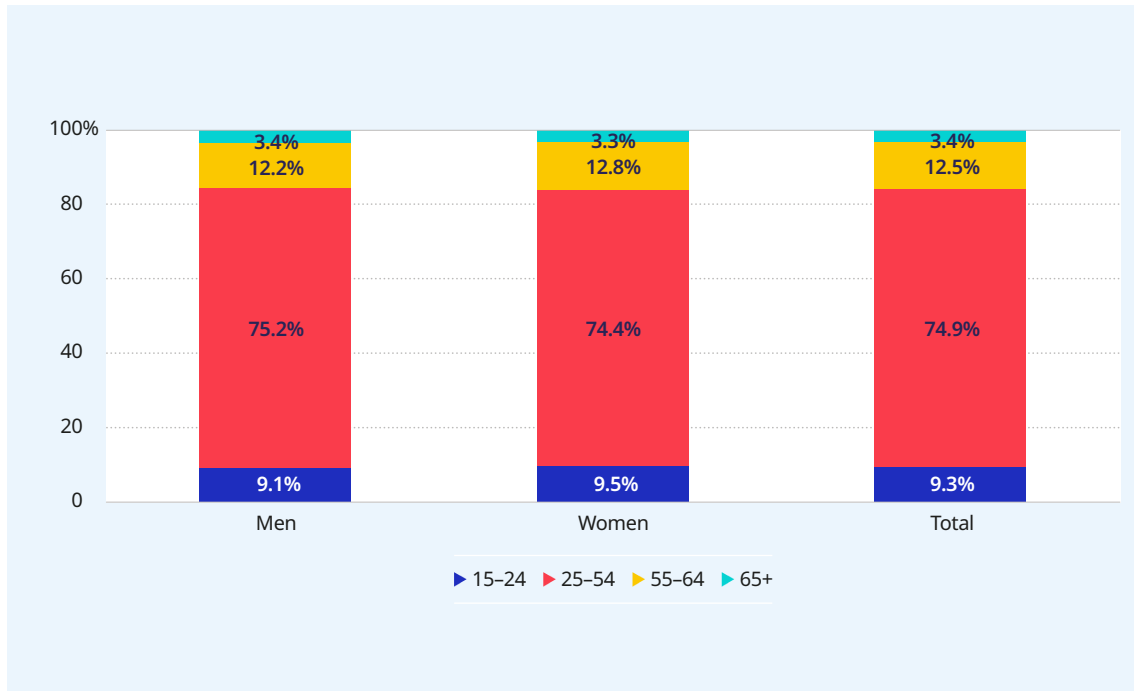
among international migrants in the labour force is consistent with global trends and may be attributed to migration policies favouring skilled and experienced workers.

Over time, the proportion of young people among international migrants in the labour force fluctuated, falling from 10.2 per cent in 2013 to 8.7 per cent in 2017, and increasing to 9.3 per cent in 2022. Regionally, young men international migrants in the labour force had higher representation in South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa. The same held true for young women international migrants in the labour force.



Prime-age adults (aged 25–54) constituted the vast majority of international migrants in the labour force, at 74.9 per cent in 2022.

► **Figure ES5. Global age composition of international migrants in the labour force by sex, 2022** (percentage)



Source: ILO estimates.

### The majority of international migrants in the labour force were concentrated in high-income countries

The significant majority of international migrants in the labour force were concentrated in high-income countries, which accounted for 68.4 per cent (114.7 million), followed by upper-middle-income countries at 17.4 per cent (29.2 million) (see figure ES6). The higher living standards and labour market opportunities in these countries offered strong incentives for migrants to relocate there. In contrast, 10.9 per cent (18.2 million) and 3.3 per cent (5.5 million) of international migrants are in lower-middle-income and low-income countries, respectively. Between 2013 and 2022, high-income



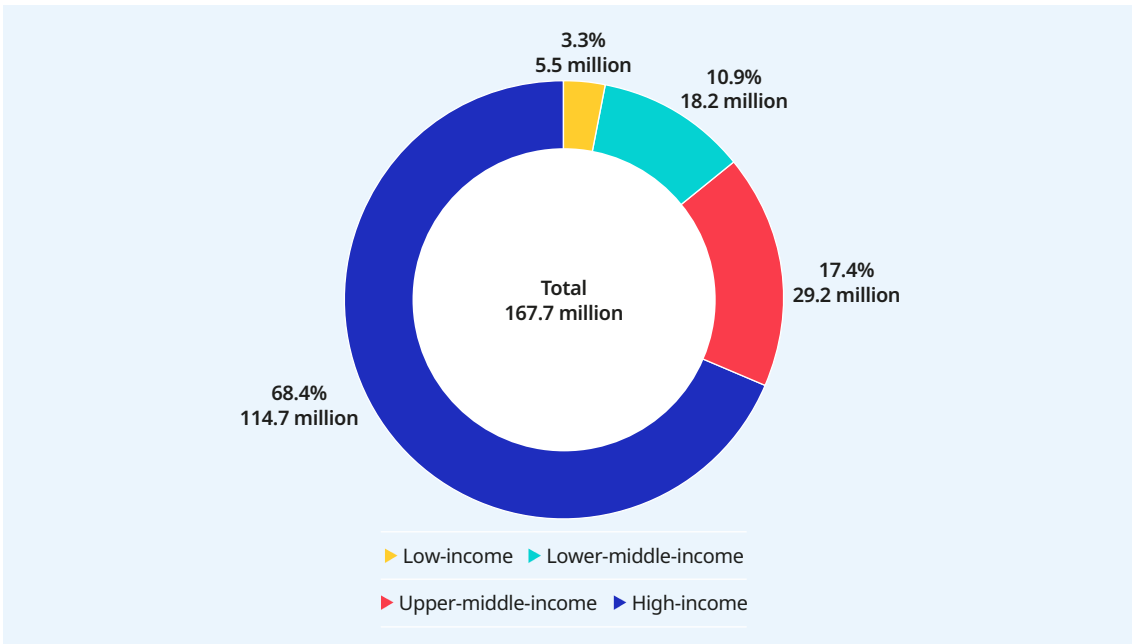
High-income and upper-middle-income countries remained the primary destinations for international migrants in the labour force.

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### Three subregions continued to host the majority of international migrants in the labour force in 2022: Northern, Southern and Western Europe, Northern America and the Arab States

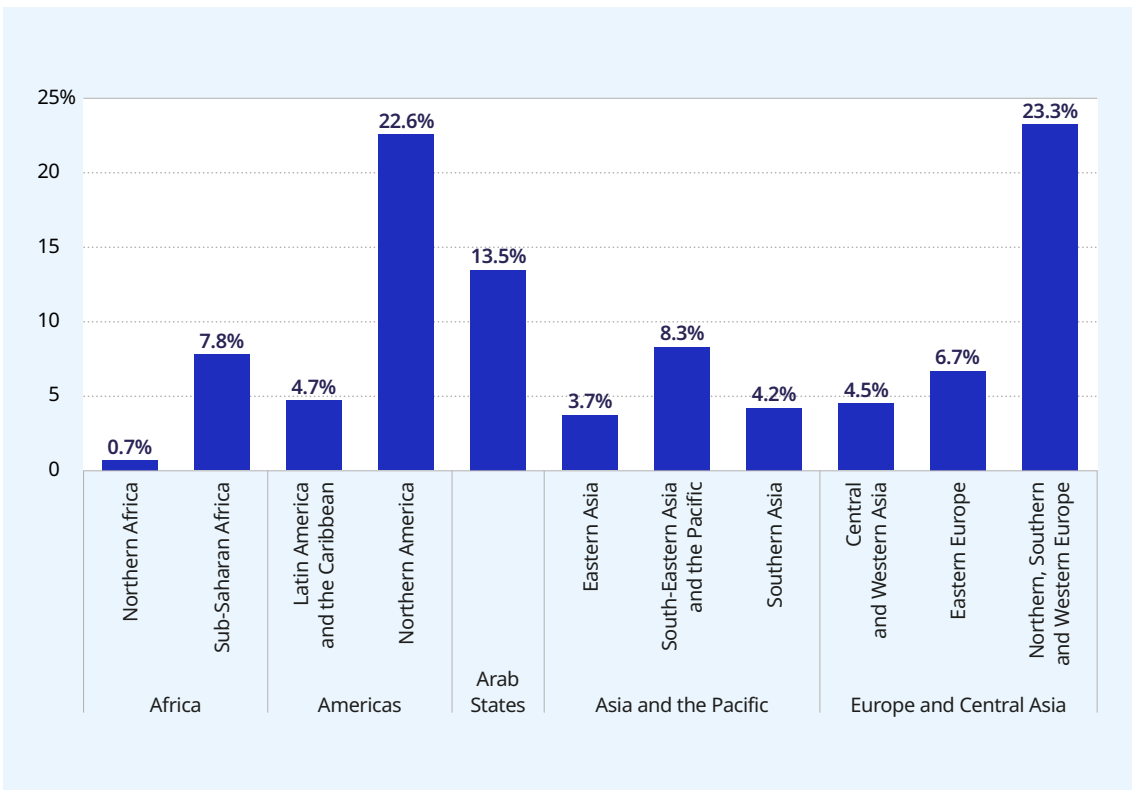
The share of international migrants in the labour force in Northern, Southern and Western Europe increased slightly between 2013 (22.5 per cent) and 2022 (23.3 per cent), which could partly be due to changes in migration policies to accommodate labour market demands (see figure ES7). In Northern America, the proportion of international migrants in the labour force decreased over time from 23.8 per cent in 2013 to 22.6 per cent in 2022, which could be the outcome of the nature of immigration policies over the years. In the Arab States, there was a slight decrease in the percentage of international migrants in the labour force from 13.8 per cent in 2013 to 13.5 per cent in 2022.

► **Figure ES6. International migrants in the labour force by income level of destination country, 2022 (million and percentage)**



Source: ILO estimates.

► **Figure ES7. Distribution of international migrants in the labour force by broad subregion, 2022 (percentage)**



Source: ILO estimates.

## 155.6 million international migrants were employed in 2022

In 2022, 155.6 million international migrants, which represented 60.9 per cent of all international migrants of working age, were employed in 2022 (see figure ES8). Migrants exhibited higher employment-to-population ratios for both sexes, compared to non-migrants, meaning that a larger share of the migrant population aged 15 and over was employed, compared to non-migrants. This ratio increased until 2019 and slightly decreased in 2022.

The overall rise in the number of employed migrants and increasing employment-to-population ratios from 2013 to 2019 indicate that more migrants were able to find jobs abroad. One factor contributing to this trend could be the impact of ageing populations in high-income countries. Migrants frequently fill labour market shortages in destination countries, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, care and construction. The decrease in employment observed in 2022 could be partially attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The proportion of employed international migrants in the population evolved differently across ILO regions between 2017 and 2022. It slightly decreased from 62.7 per cent to 59.9 per cent in Africa, and this could be attributed to challenges destination countries in this region face

absorbing migrants into their labour markets. The employment-to-population ratio remained relatively stable in the Americas. It fluctuated in Asia and the Pacific and Europe and Central Asia with an initial increase in 2019, and a subsequent decrease in 2022. In the Arab States, the ratio increased from 64.2 per cent to 67.3 per cent between 2019 and 2022. This may be attributed, among other factors, to an increased demand for migrant workers in certain sectors of the region, particularly in the context of post-COVID economic recovery.

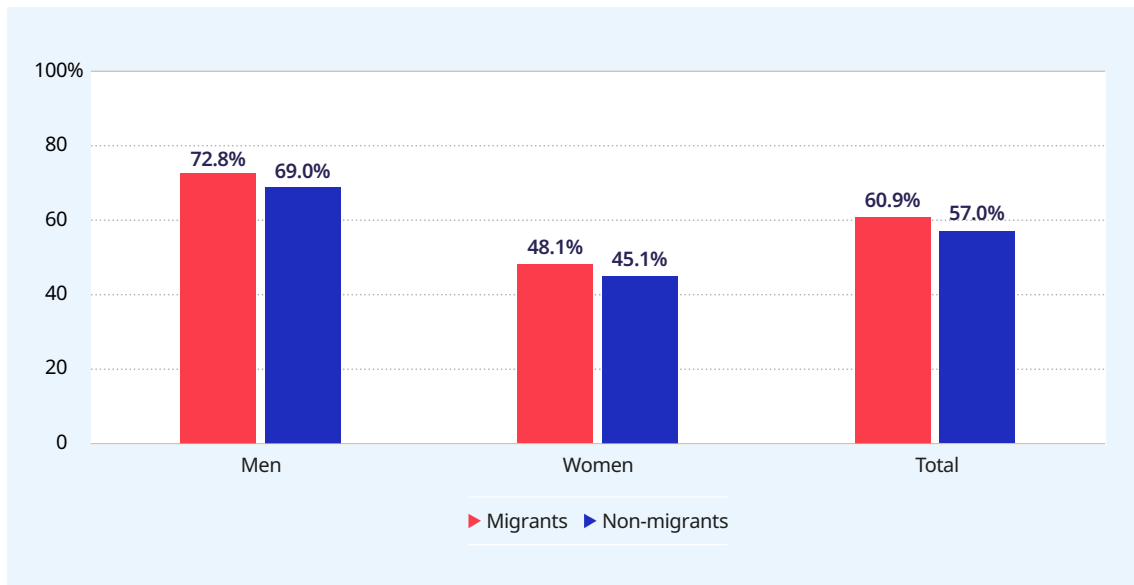
## Most employed international migrants were concentrated in the services sector

In 2022, 80.7 per cent of employed migrant women were in services, compared to 60.8 per cent for employed migrant men (see figure ES9). The corresponding figures for non-migrant women and men were 59.4 per cent and 46.3 per



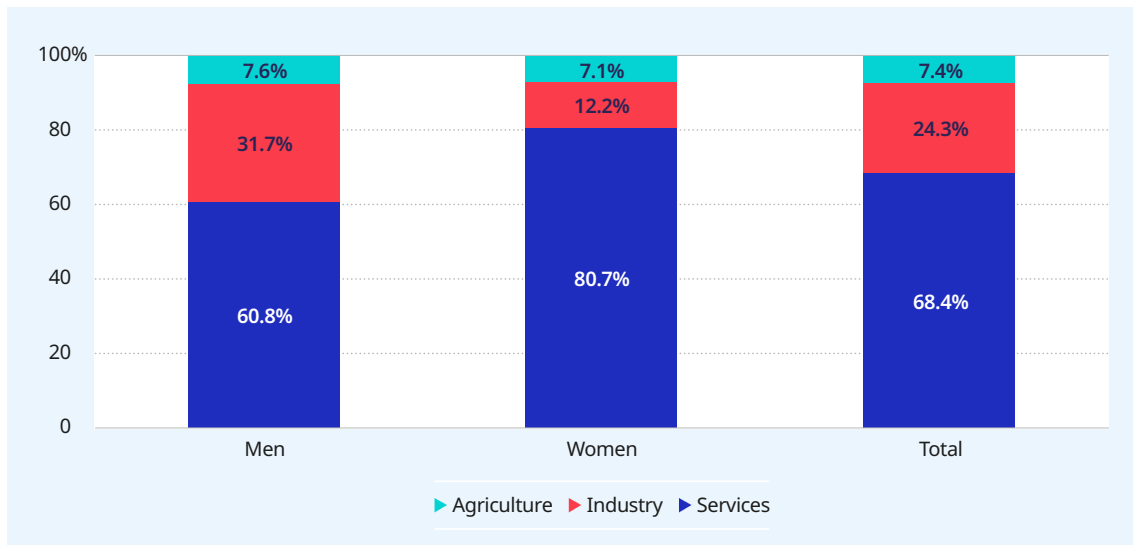
The high concentration of employed international migrants, especially women, in services could be due to the important global demand for care and domestic work.

► **Figure ES8. Employment-to-population ratio of international migrants by sex, 2022 (percentage)**



Source: ILO estimates.

► **Figure ES9. Distribution of employed international migrants by sex and broad category of economic activity, 2022 (percentage)**



Source: ILO estimates.

cent, respectively. Over time, the dominance of the services sector remained relatively stable, with the share of migrants employed in services at 68.9 per cent in 2013, 68.4 per cent in 2018, 67.0 per cent in 2019 and 68.4 per cent in 2022. The high concentration of employed international migrants, especially women, in services could be due to the significant global demand for care and domestic work. Many destination countries face ageing populations, fuelling the demand for healthcare and domestic services. The share of men and women migrants, employed in the care economy in 2022 was estimated at 12.4 per cent and 28.8 per cent, respectively, compared to 6.2 per cent of non-migrant men and 19.2 per cent of non-migrant women.

### The unemployment rate for international migrants in 2022 was higher than for non-migrants

In 2022, the unemployment rate for international migrants was 7.2 per cent, compared to 5.2 per cent for non-migrants (see figure ES10). Possible factors contributing to higher unemployment among migrants include language barriers, the lack of recognition of foreign qualifications and the presence of discrimination. Furthermore, the unemployment rate for migrant women (8.7 per cent) was higher than for migrant men

(6.2 per cent), reflecting gender-specific challenges, such as more limited labour market opportunities, the lack of childcare facilities and greater responsibility for unpaid care work, which may hinder their employment prospects. In addition, the influence of socio-cultural norms and gender expectations, both in their origin and destination countries, can further exacerbate the employment limitations faced by migrant women.

Africa experienced a decline in migrant unemployment rates between 2017 and 2022 from 12.3 per cent to 11.4 per cent. Over the same period, Europe and Central Asia experienced a decline from 11.2 per cent to 6.2 per cent. In the Arab States, the same pattern was observed between 2019 and 2022, when migrant unemployment rates fell from 13.6 per cent to 8.2 per cent.

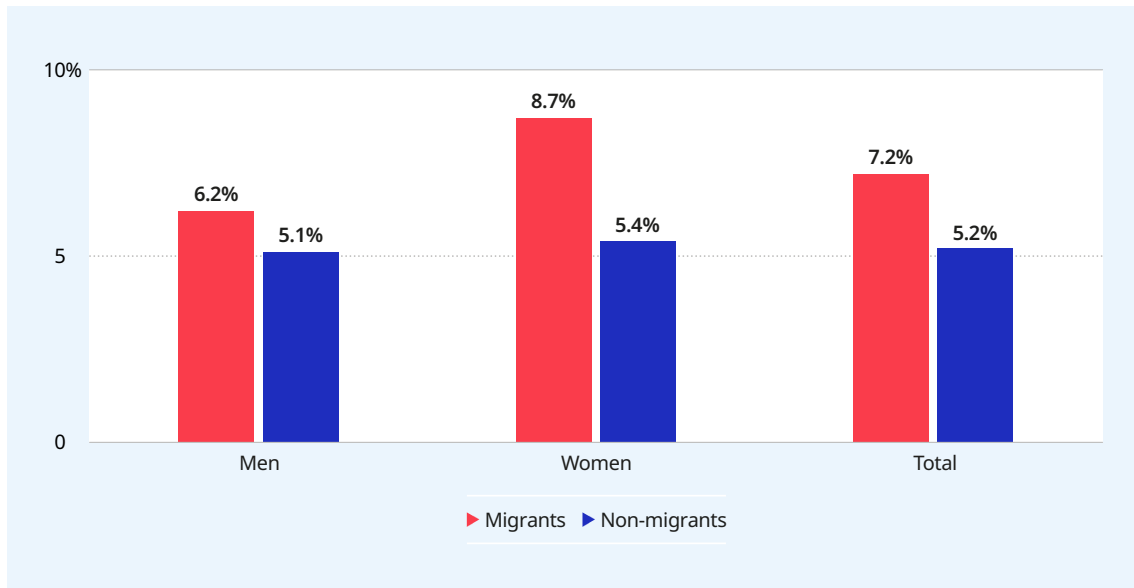
In the Americas, the unemployment rate of migrants remained stable. In the region, employment growth was quite robust, keeping the unemployment rates low in general. In Asia and the Pacific, a notable fluctuation in migrant unemployment rates was



In 2022, the unemployment rate for international migrants was 7.2 per cent, compared to 5.2 per cent for non-migrants.



► **Figure ES10. Unemployment rate of international migrants and non-migrants by sex, 2022**  
(percentage)



Source: ILO estimates.

observed, with a sharp decrease between 2017 and 2019 followed by a significant increase in 2022. The unemployment rate of international migrants in this region can be partially attributed to the COVID-19 crisis and associated job losses in sectors

such as tourism that were hit hard. These sectors predominantly employ international migrants, and it has been estimated that job losses in tourism-related sectors were four times greater than in non-tourism sectors.



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