The numbers

Understanding who moves, where to, and why

Key messages

- Migration is a mechanism used by people in responding to long-term global imbalances, such as differences in welfare, and in adapting to shocks, such as conflicts.
- Some 184 million people live outside of their country of nationality, about 20 percent of whom are refugees. Patterns of movement differ based on migrants’ motives (figure 2.1).
- Migrants and refugees live in countries in all income groups—43 percent in low- and middle-income countries; 40 percent in high-income member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); and 17 percent in member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
- There is no simple dichotomy between migrants’ countries of origin and countries of destination. Many countries at all levels of income are both, at the same time.

Figure 2.1 Patterns of movements reflect distinct matches and motives

Source: WDR 2023 team.

Note: Match refers to the degree to which a migrant’s skills and related attributes meet the demand in the destination country. Motive refers to the circumstances under which a person moves—whether in search of opportunity or because of a “well-founded fear” of persecution, armed conflict, or violence in their origin country.