International drivers of migration in 2026:

Population Seminar Series

21 January 2026

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Political Science and International Relations Programme

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Outline

1. Overview of drivers of international migration

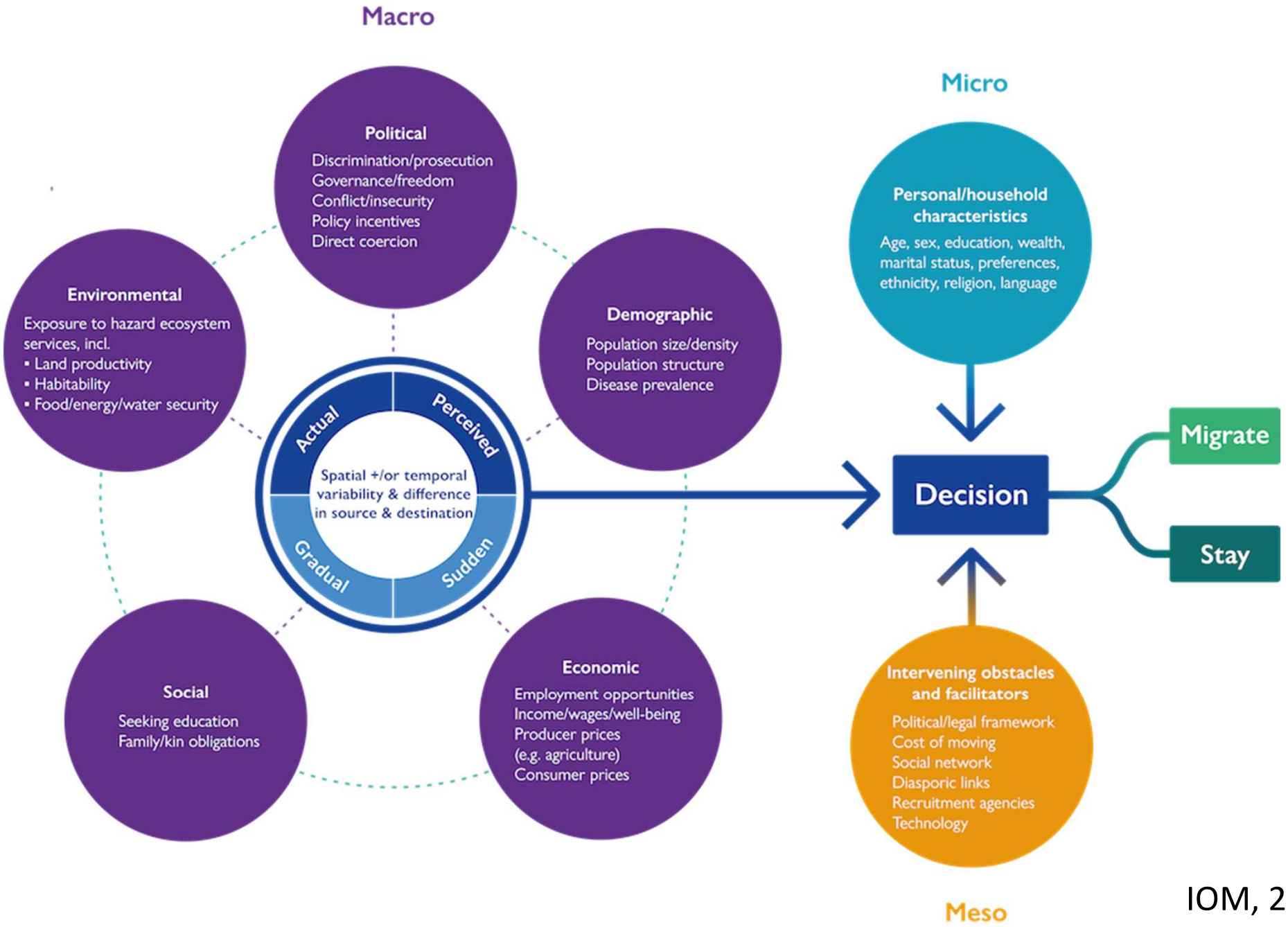
2. Two geo-political drivers in 2026:
   a. Challenges to the international liberal order
   b. The rise of migration policy as foreign policy

3. Characteristics of the international environment in 2026

4. Challenges for NZ
   a. Domestic
   b. International

5. Opportunities for NZ




Macro
Micro
Political
Discrimination/prosecution
Governance/freedom
Conflict/insecurity
Policy incentives
Direct coercion
Personal/household characteristics
Age, sex, education, wealth, marital status, preferences, ethnicity, religion, language
Environmental
Exposure to hazard ecosystem services, incl.
▪ Land productivity
▪ Habitability
▪ Food/energy/water security
Demographic
Population size/density
Population structure
Disease prevalence
Actual
Perceived
Spatial +/or temporal variability & difference in source & destination
Gradual
Sudden
Decision
Migrate
Stay
Social
Seeking education
Family/kin obligations
Economic
Employment opportunities
Income/wages/well-being
Producer prices
(e.g. agriculture)
Consumer prices
Intervening obstacles and facilitators
Political/legal framework
Cost of moving
Social network
Diasporic links
Recruitment agencies
Technology
Meso

IOM, 2026

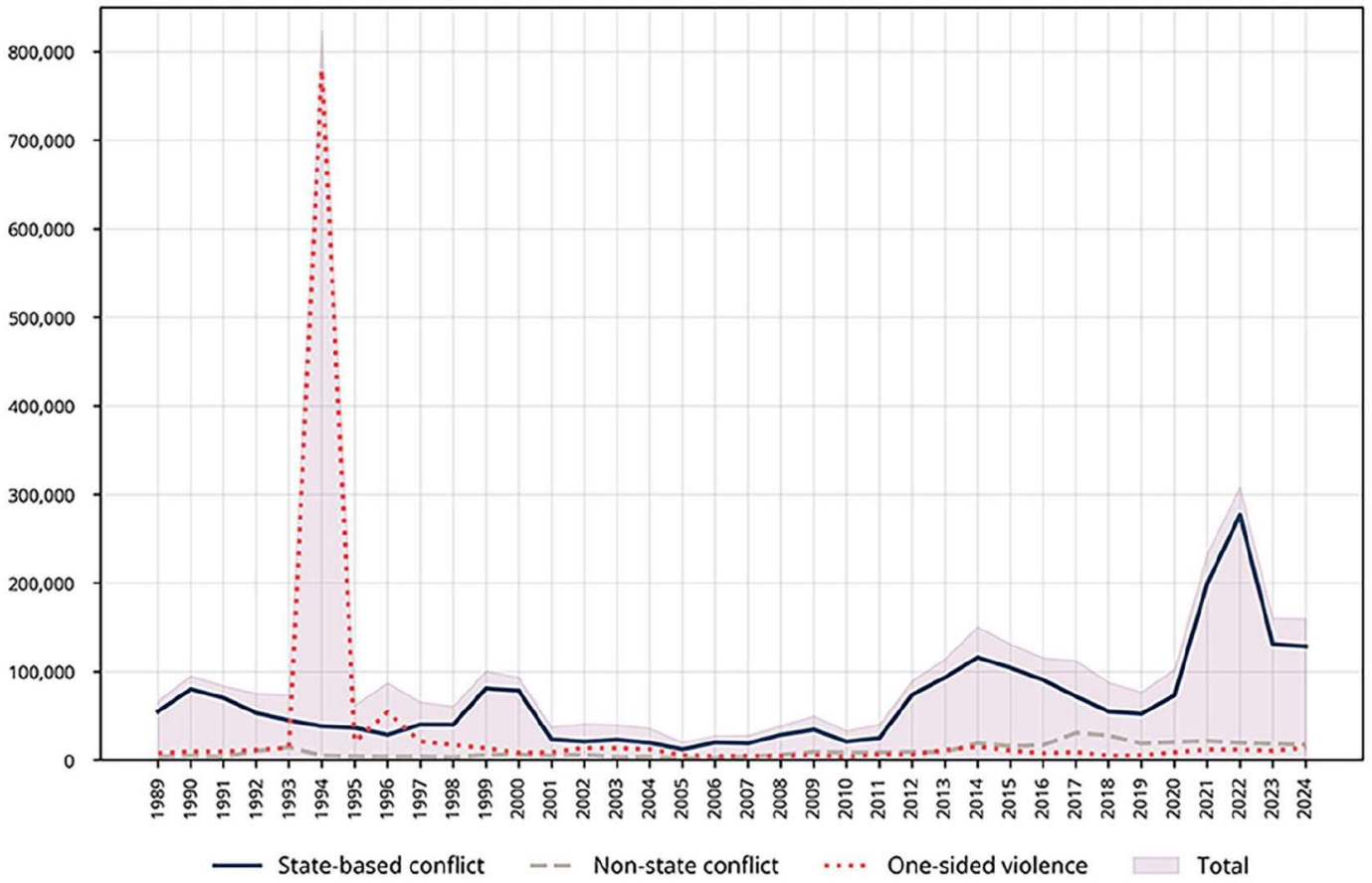
Sources on drivers of international migration

- Migration Data Portal,2021, https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/migration-drivers
- IOM, *Essentials of Migration Management* 2.0, 2026, https://emm.iom.int/handbooks/global-context-international-migration/drivers-international-migration
- *Drivers of migration – Dimensions and indicators – A policy-oriented literature review*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, **https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/5771973**

2. Geo-politics in 2026:
a. Challenges to the 'Liberal International Order'

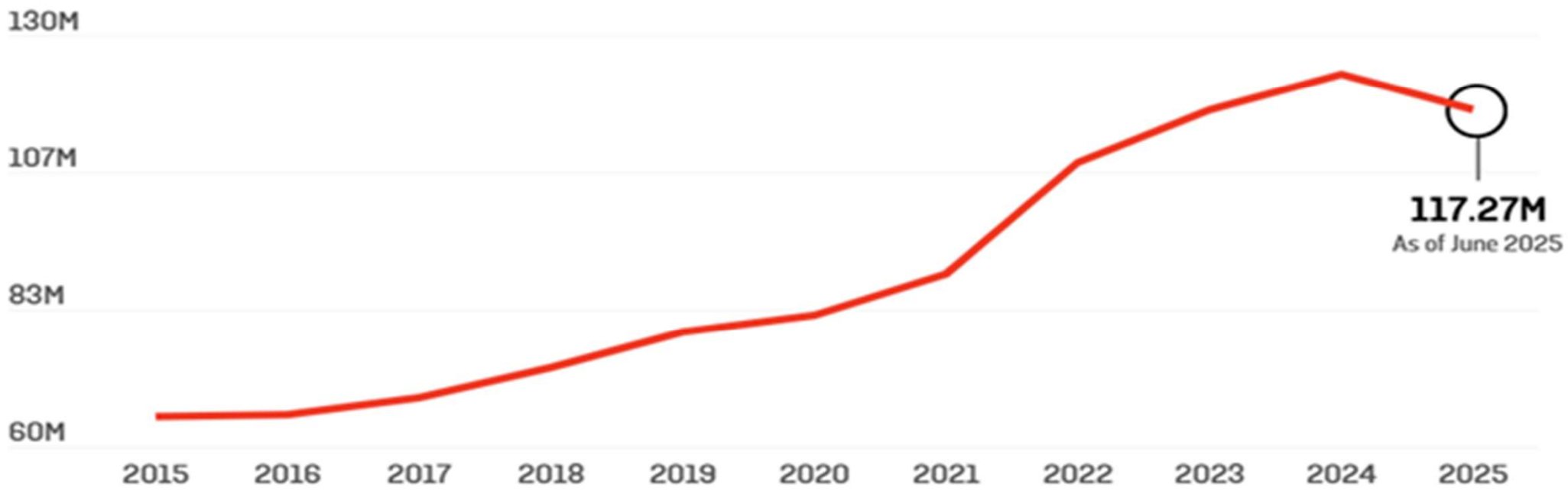
- Trump Administration's withdrawal from the economic, social and military foundations of the LIO
- Transition to a bipolar (U.S.-China) or multi-polar world order?
- Increase in conflict internationally
- Increase in forced migration

Fatalities in organized violence by type of violence, 1989–2024.

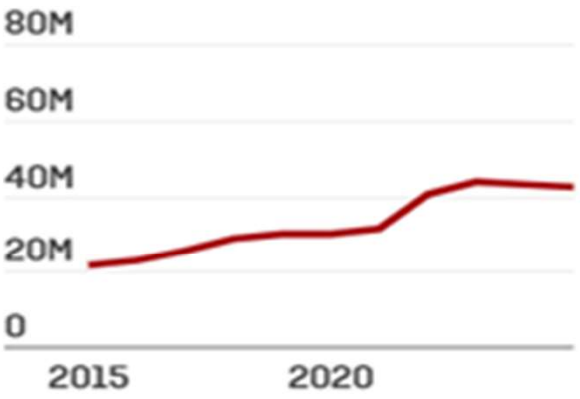


J Peace Res, Volume 62, Issue 4, July 2025, Pages 1223–1240, https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433251345636

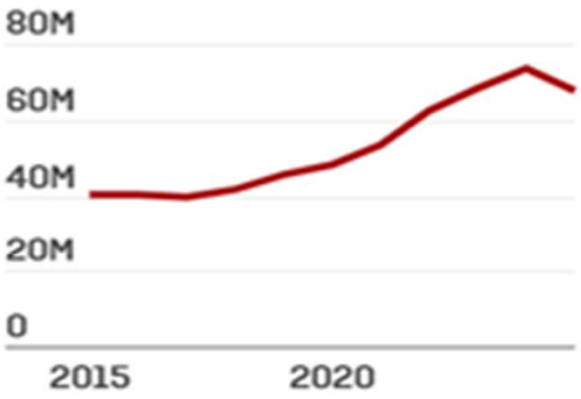
| Millions of People Were Forcibly Displaced Worldwide



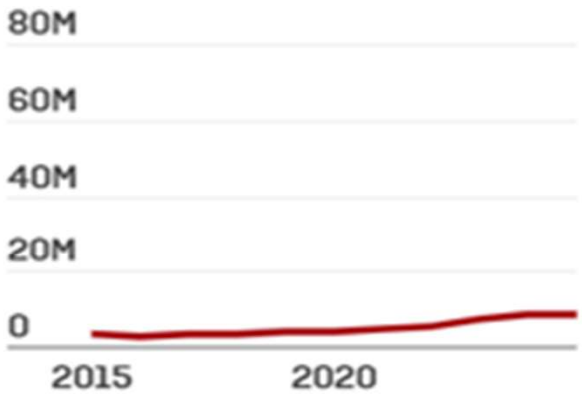
Refugees



Internal displacement



Asylum-seekers



SOURCE: UNHCR; NUMBERS ARE AS OF JUNE 2025

2. Geo-politics in 2026:
b. Migration policy as foreign policy

- 2015-2016 EU refugee ‘crisis’ and challenge to EU solidarity
- President Trump’s slew of immigration policies
- VP Vance’s 2025 Munich speech: ‘mass migration’ as a ‘civilisational challenge’
- U.S.’ National Security Strategy: ‘mass migration the No. 1 challenge



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Migration Crisis Tests European Consensus and Governance

DECEMBER 18, 2015 TOP TEN | By Demetrios G. Papademetriou

Asylum seekers and migrants arrive on the Greek island of Lesvos. (Photo: Ben White/Catholic Agency for Overseas Development)

Europe’s 2015 started and ended with terrorist attacks in Paris, which had spillover effects in Belgium and several other European Union (EU) Member States. But terrorism, and the public anxiety and sense of insecurity it generates, may not prove to be the year’s defining issue for Europe, even as it has exacerbated mistrust between Muslim and majority communities in many places, and tipped the equilibrium point toward security and away from privacy for the foreseeable future.

The massive growth in migrant and refugee flows entering European space has been Europe’s defining challenge in 2015. More than twice as many asylum seekers and migrants—

2b. Migration policy as foreign policy (cont.)

- ‘Migration Management’ in the form of bilateral agreements between rich receiving countries and poor sending/receiving countries: Aid for border control.



A member of the Moroccan security forces stands near the border fence separating Morocco from Spain's North African Melilla enclave, near Nador in Morocco, June 26, 2022. (AFP)

https://thearabweekly.com/eu-finalises-aid-package-support-morocco-countering-illegal-migration

3. Four features of the international migration environment 2026:

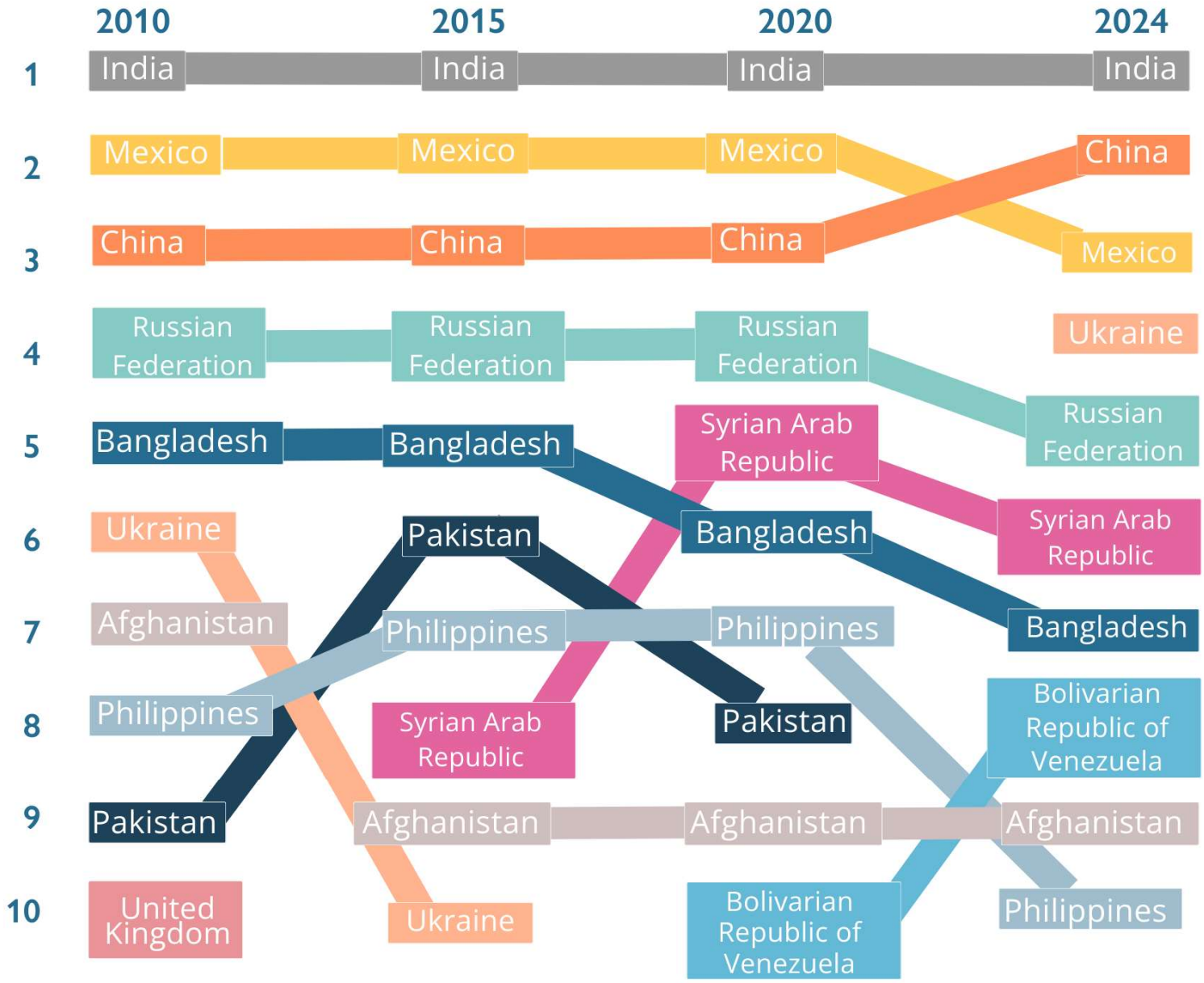
1. More forced migration and less funding for refugee and asylum support

2. Increasingly hostile and securitised domestic and international politics of migration

3. More bilateral and regional efforts to ‘manage’ migration

4. The two largest sending countries are also increasingly powerful: migration rule makers rather than rule takers?

Top 10 countries of origin of international migrants, 2010 - 2024



Source: UN DESA, 2025.

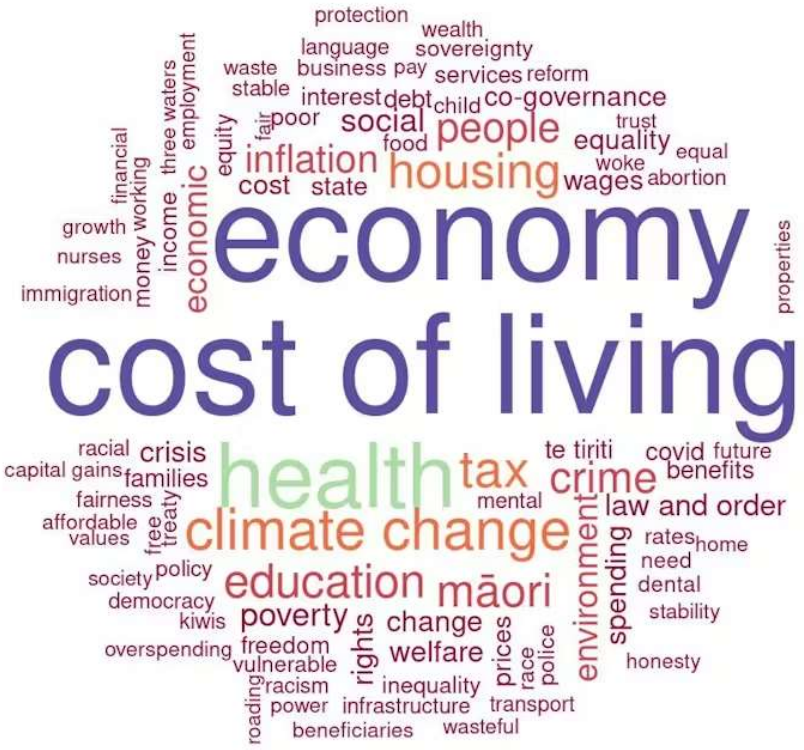
© IOM GMDAC 2025
www.migrationdataportal.org

4. Challenges for NZ:

a. Domestic challenges

- Retain popular support for immigration

"Most important issue", NZ Election 2023.



Vowles, J. *et al*, https://theconversation.com/2023-election-study-what-voters-really-wanted-and-why-the-coalitions-mandate-could-be-fragile-242179

4. Challenges for NZ:
b. International challenges

- Maintain support for refugees and asylum seekers during entrenchment of the ILO and its institutions

- Continue to pursue cooperation with immigration partners that may be less open to immigration than NZ

5. Opportunities for NZ

- NZ's political and social environment may be appealing to migrants who would otherwise have gone to the U.S.

- As a small player, can look to shape new institutions, norms and rules in changing international order – e.g. NZ and Jamaica's role in leading the UN80 Ad Hoc Working Group on the Mandate Implementation Review (https://www.un.org/un80-initiative/en/informal-ad-hoc-working-group-mandate-implementation-review)