



Migration Profile

MONGOLIA

A. Executive Summary

Mongolia is a mountainous country located in Central Asia, considered one of the highest nations on earth. It is one of the least densely populated countries in the world (2 inh./sq. km). Its financial strength comes from the mining industry, and the country has significant coal and oil deposits. The British-Australian mining company, Rio Tinto, also owns the country's largest gold and copper mine, Oyu Tolgoi.ⁱ

Russia is Mongolia's main energy supplier, while China is its first export market.ⁱⁱ The main products exported are copper, coal, gold and cashmere. Although agriculture is the traditional sector and accounts for 12.2% of Mongolia's GDP, it remains vulnerable to harsh weather conditions and is unable to make the country self-sufficient in food production. Recently, the country has experienced a strong development of the tourism sector.

Mongolia is a Republic whose legislative power is entrusted to a unicameral parliament (the Great Khural), with 76 members elected every four yearsⁱⁱⁱ.

In Mongolia, the emigration percentage is higher than immigration. The international migrant stock at mid-year 2020 counted 21,345 people within the country (0.7% of the entire population), while emigrants were 82,098. Refugees were only 10 persons in 2020. Concerning human trafficking, Mongolia is on the "Tier 2 Watch list", meaning that the government could further implement measures to fully comply with the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act's minimum standard. Nevertheless, it is making efforts to do so. In 2020, 40 victims of human trafficking were identified, but no males were involved as for the past eight consecutive years. The 40 victims were all female, mostly of Mongolian and Burmese origin.^{iv}

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Mongolia is situated in northern Asia, landlocked between China and Russia. The country's territory extends for about 1.5 million sq. m. and has a population of over 3 million people, making it one of the least densely populated countries in the world (2 inh./sq. km).

Ulaan-Baatar is the capital. 3.4 million Mongolians live in China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and about half a million in Russia. The population in the country is predominantly urban (68.4%) and mostly Mongolian (90%), with the presence of Kazakh, Russian and Chinese minorities.^v The country is mainly Buddhist with a Catholic percentage estimated at less than 1% of the total population. The largest religious minority is represented by Sunni Muslim Kazakhs (about 4%).^{vi} Coherently with their mountainous landscapes, Mongolians are traditionally nomadic herders, with around one third of the population still maintaining this way of life. Herding has traditional, symbolic, and cultural importance for the whole country.

Because of its morphology, Mongolia is frequently affected by earthquakes. Winters are so cold that they are often the cause of death of a number of livestock. These cold winters are called *dzuds*. *Dzuds* together with the dry air determine extreme weather conditions causing also a massive influx of internal migration and problems with facilities, especially with electricity in certain periods of the year. In 2020, the World Bank estimated that about 18.2% of the population did not have access to electricity.^{vii}

One of the main issues in Mongolia appears to be climate change. It is necessary for the country surrounded by mountains and a desert to take specific measures and also deal with water pollution caused by the mining industry.

II. International and Internal Migrants

In Mongolia, at mid-year 2020 the international migrant stock counted 21,345 people, representing around 0.7% of the entire population and, according to UN data, 7,082 of them were female (33,2% of the international migrant stock). Most migrants were aged between 30 and 34 years old (2,517 people); the second largest group was between 45 and 49 years old (2,216), while a minority were aged 75+ (227).^{viii} According to IOM, most migrants come from China, North Korea, the Russian Federation and Central Asian countries.^{ix}

These migrants mainly moved to Mongolia for work related reasons. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990, there has been an increase in the number of migrants coming from China, and they keep coming even today in order to work, mostly in construction or in private businesses. South Koreans immigrate to Mongolia to operate small businesses, mainly running restaurants or karaoke bars. North Korean workers, instead, are particularly attracted by the prospect of working abroad; Ulaanbaatar and Pyongyang maintain a separate official guest worker programme, favouring North Koreans coming to work in Mongolia.

Internal migration has increased dramatically, especially from rural to urban centres, threatening the traditional herding lifestyle. Unemployment, loss of livestock and herd due to climate change (harsh winters and dry summers) in rural areas, and the establishment of mining centres are the main driving forces for the increase of internal migration. Unbalanced social development is a natural consequence of internal migration, such as the lack of suitable structures to protect migrant rights.^x It is reported that roughly 47% of the country's population is currently situated in the overpopulated Ulaanbaatar, resulting in rural-urban

inequalities. Other major factors for moving into urban centres are jobs, education or other family related reasons.^{xi}

Rural-to-urban migration, particularly to Ulaanbaatar, is by far the most common direction of movement. However, urban-to-rural migration also takes place and seems to be considerable in the Selenge and Dornogovi provinces. Economic concerns, relocation for the sake of family welfare, and a desire for better living conditions are the key factors for migrant households to leave their hometowns. Non-economic factors, such as joining one's family or having greater access to social services, also play a substantial role in deciding which place to visit. Women usually play an important part in the migration decision-making process, whether as the head of the home or as a spouse.^{xii}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

According to the UN International Migrant Stock, the total number of emigrants at mid-year 2020 was 82,098 and among them 42,732 were females, meaning a little more than the majority. Emigration is a larger phenomenon than immigration; in fact, according to IOM, there is an estimated one in eleven Mongolians living abroad.^{xiii}

Mongolians migrating to other countries are mostly educated and young skilled people, looking for better wages and a better quality of life, both for their families and for themselves. These migrants are usually heading to other Asian nations (mainly China, Russia, Korea, and Japan), as well as to several European countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland), Australia and the United States.^{xiv} Problems in domestic higher education trigger young students to leave. In 2017, for instance, more than 15,000 Mongolians were abroad for study, a rather elevated number for a country counting only 3 million people.^{xv} Rural students appear to be more disadvantaged and have less access to information concerning international study opportunities, compared to the ones coming from Ulaanbaatar. As a consequence, they move less than their peers living in urban centres.

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)

By the end of 2020, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) listed 3,500 Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs). 4,200 new displacements were registered in 2020: floods that occurred in June 2020 in twelve provinces produced 2,200 IDPs, and additional flash floods happened on July 11, 2020 affecting 2,000 more IDPs.^{xvi}

Concerning refugees, according to the UN International Migrants Stock, in 2020 their total estimated number was 10 persons.^{xvii} This rather low number of refugees does not take into account an influx of refugees who transit through Mongolia, such as North Koreans who pass through Mongolia seeking asylum in the United States of America or booking a flight from Ulaanbaatar to South Korea. Mongolia seems an important transit country for these refugees and asylum seekers, even though official statistics are hardly retrievable. However, in order to reach Mongolia, North Korean refugees need to go through China, and that route has often been very dangerous for them.^{xviii}

Concerning asylum seekers, Mongolia does not seem a primary country to apply for asylum, probably due to its poor legal framework; as a matter of fact, Mongolia did not sign the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. According to UNHCR, in 2019 there were 21 asylum applications filed in Mongolia, and they were all coming from Turkey^{xix}. In 2017, there were 5 asylum applications, all arriving from Afghanistan.

Regarding forced migrants in Mongolia, many of them are internally displaced persons, affected by climate change or economic reasons. The most common environmental reasons to move to the capital city are the *dzuds* and harsh winters. During this period of the year, much of the livestock gets lost, like in 2010 or more recently in January 2021, when FAO played a key role in assisting these people.^{xx} However, according to IOM, still the majority of internal movements within the country are not triggered by a specific event such as an environmental disaster, but rather for economic concerns and other non-economic factors.^{xxi}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

According to the US Department, in 2020 40 victims of human trafficking were identified. The government did not register any male victims in 2020, and the same result was given over the past eight consecutive years. Among the 40 victims, 24 were young girls, and most of them were of Mongolian and Burmese origin.^{xxii}

Human trafficking in Mongolia occurs across and within national borders. In fact, it is both an origin and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. The main victims of human trafficking are Mongolian girls, trafficked for sexual exploitation or commercially brokered marriages, happening in South Korea, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Turkey, and the United States. Additionally, there are numerous cases of Mongolian men, women, and children who have been subjected to forced labour in Turkey, Kazakhstan, Norway, Sweden, and the United Arab Emirates. Women and young girls who have been trafficked into Mongolia for sexual purposes often end up in massage parlors, hotels, bars or clubs. Many Mongolian girls who have been trafficked are employed as contortionists, and often under contracts signed by their parents. They are subjected to forced labour in Mongolia and Turkey, as well as in Hong Kong and Singapore. Women are subjected to domestic service or forced prostitution after entering into commercially brokered marriages to Chinese men and, with less frequency, to South Korean men. Traffickers sometimes use drugs, English language programs, as well as other approaches to push Mongolian victims into sex trafficking. A significant number of them coming from rural and poor economic areas are subjected to sex trafficking in Ulaanbaatar and border areas. There have also been recorded cases of sex tourism in Mongolia, where tourists engage in underage sex with children.^{xxiii}

The on-going development of the mining industry in southern Mongolia has led to an increase in internal and international migration, as well as human trafficking particularly along the Chinese-Mongolian border. Some Mongolian children are forced to beg, steal, or work in the informal sectors of the economy, such as horse racing, mining, herding, and construction, and are sometimes subjected to sex trafficking, with their family's consent. Chinese workers employed in Mongolia are also vulnerable to trafficking as contract labourers in agriculture,

construction, forestry, hunting, mining, automobile maintenance, and others. Cross-border challenges include unsafe migration, fraud and increase incidence of human trafficking.

The government, together with some NGOs, has established a hotline system. Thanks to it, 5 victims were identified in 2020. The government also provides funding to social workers and officials for education on human trafficking, as well as legal and psychological assistance and, in smaller numbers, shelters.

VI. National Legal Framework

Although Mongolia has not ratified the international conventions addressing the rights of refugees, its Constitution, promulgated in 1992, addresses foreigners' rights and restrictions (Art. 18). In 1994 the Law on the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens became effective, regulating the entry, transit, exit and residence of foreign citizens in Mongolia and defining their legal status.

In 2001 the Law on Sending Labour Force Abroad and Receiving Labour Force and Specialists from Abroad was enacted, in order to set up the conditions for the implementation of rights of both Mongolian citizens migrating abroad in search of better job opportunities and foreign citizens arriving to Mongolia to work. This law supplemented the provisions of the Constitution of Mongolia, Labour Law, Law on Legal Status of Foreign Citizens and the Law on Social Insurance in regulating outbound migration.

Concerning human trafficking, Mongolia is on the "Tier 2 Watch list", meaning that the government could further implement measures to fully comply with the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act's minimum standard. Nevertheless, it is making efforts to do so.

The Mongolian Criminal Code also became effective in 2002. Article 113 forbids all forms of human trafficking, defines a fine for it and prescribes penalties of up to 15 years imprisonment. Article 126 instead addresses the issue of rape.

In addition, because of the widespread belief in the country that only females can be victims of sex trafficking, authorities rarely used articles 113 (sale and purchase of humans) or 124 (inducing others to engage in prostitution and organising prostitution) to pursue cases involving male victims, using instead measures with less binding penalties.

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Mongolia's Immigration Agency is the one issuing visas, both for stateless persons and for foreign nationals. It registers temporary residents, aliens and stateless persons residing in Mongolia and controls the implementation of the Law on Legal Status of Foreign Nationals and Law on Citizenship. This agency also promotes cooperation with international immigration organisations.^{xxiv}

The Mongolian Ministry of Justice has recently established a National Sub-Council on Combating Trafficking in Persons. Also the General Authority for Border Protection (GABP) and the Consular Department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) work together to handle cases involving Mongolian victims of human trafficking outside the borders. For the assistance of Mongolian victims, the Consular Department has a special fund that is available only in cases involving *grave harm*.^{xxv}

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) also plays a specific role helping migrants and Mongolian nationals and closely cooperates with IOM. In 2020, for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it ensured the safe return of 174 vulnerable foreign migrants who were stranded in Mongolia due to the pandemic. Returns were organised by the Mongolian government. The MFA with the help of IOM Mongolia since 2011 has even made possible the return of Mongolian nationals from abroad.

International organisations

The Mongolian Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) operate in Mongolia. In January 2021 a *dzud* occurred, and the Red Cross provided relief with the support of the IFRC's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund, allowing the Mongolian Red Cross to help 2,000 herder families by preventing a major financial loss thanks to the distribution of cash grants and animal care kits.^{xxvi}

IOM became involved in Mongolia in 2008 and opened its office in the capital in 2011. Since then, it has collaborated with the government to manage migration more effectively and counteract trafficking, through several projects.^{xxvii} In the 2017 summer, for instance, IOM Mongolia launched a one-and-a-half year project aimed at improving internal migration management, enhancing data collection.^{xxviii}

Mercy Corps has worked in Mongolia since 1999, but recently closed its activity.^{xxix} It used to collaborate with the government in order to respond and reduce the effects of natural disasters, especially by helping herders who lost their livestock.

Mongolia is also supported by a UNHCR office, the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, which is located in Thailand.^{xxx} Even though it does not have a specific bureau in the country, the organisation still produces research and collects data for the country.

NGOs and Other organisations

Regarding the issue of human trafficking, the government decreased its efforts to protect victims. Thus, some NGOs in Mongolia are providing many protection services for the victims, either with no support from the government or just receiving very little help. There are no economic or social programs to help migrants to adapt to urban life, by making the life-change for these IDPs much easier. Migrants who are not registered as residents with the local authorities do not have access to primary medical care. Most of them end up working for low skilled jobs and have very poor living conditions. Therefore, the involvement of NGOs is crucial, because they provide basic training for migrants newly arrived in urban centres.

The National Centre against Violence (NCAV) is another non-profit organisation, established in 1995. It works for combating domestic and sexual abuse against women and children, and promotes human rights and judicial reforms^{xxx}.

The Catholic Church

In Mongolia, the Episcopal Conference of Mongolia holds the Apostolic Prefecture of Ulaanbaatar,^{xxxii} covering the entire territory of the country. Different missionaries with specific charisms enrich the Church in Mongolia and form the local Catholic community.

Salesians play a major role within the local Catholic community. They are present in Ulaanbaatar, Darkhan and Shuwuu. In Ulaanbaatar, the Salesians provide homes for children in need, education programmes and food help for the poorest.^{xxxiii}

Caritas is also very active in Mongolia, mainly in the capital city. It helps *dzud*-affected herders as soon as the event occurs, like for example when the *dzud* took place between 1999 and 2000 hitting 450,000 herders and killing about 3 million animals.^{xxxiv} Caritas helped throughout this crisis providing food and medical assistance, as well as infrastructure support for people living in rural areas. Caritas continues to help not only in the case of a *dzud*, but also in the educational and social field. It also tries to rebuild livelihoods and alleviate the impact of natural catastrophes in Mongolia.^{xxxv} Outside Mongolia, in the Czech Republic, Caritas Czech Republic has set up a hotline in Mongolian language in order to help these migrants living in their country, by providing this service 8 hours per week. The initiative aims at supporting the integration process of Mongolian speaking migrants legally residing in the Czech Republic.^{xxxvi}

The Institute of the Consolata Missionaries (IMC) has been active in Mongolia since 2003, in Ulaanbaatar and Arvaikheer.^{xxxvii} The actual Apostolic Prefecture of Ulaanbaatar is overseen by an IMC missionary apostolic Prefect.^{xxxviii} Among other activities, the IMC is involved in pastoral care and education, provides school supplies, food for the poorest families, and basic social and financial support for families in need.^{xxxix}

The Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM Missionaries) is one of the milestones of the Church in Mongolia because it is directly linked to its birth.^{xl} The former bishop prefect was himself a CICM missionary. In 2004, CICM released the first modern edition of a Catholic catechism in Mongolian language.

Another active community is the Saint Vincent de Paul Society,^{xli} established in 2005. The central office is located in Ulaanbaatar, in the Han-uul District.^{xlii} Among other activities, they provide meals for needy students, visit families and prisons.

As of today, three Korean sisters are involved in the *Congregatio Jesu* (CJ) Mission in Ulaanbaatar.^{xliii} They run the *Mary Ward Centre*, a house for young girls studying at the university.^{xliv}

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