

ROOTS & ROUTES

Vol 10, No. 6, June, 2021

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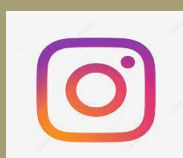
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Dear Readers,
Greetings!

History is testimony to the fact that civil society has played an incredible role in establishing the human rights regime at the local, national, regional and global level. Similarly, civil society across countries have constantly been advocating to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration, which ultimately and fortunately culminated into the Global Compact for Migration (GCM). As International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) meeting is expected in 2022 to assess the progress on GCM, prominent civil society groups, including Migrant Forum in Asia ([MFA](#)), Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism ([GRFDT](#)), Cross-Regional Center for Refugees and Migrants ([CCRM](#)), Civil Society Action Committee ([CSAC](#)), [Alianza Americas](#), Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants ([PICUM](#)), and Climate Migration & Displacement Platform ([CMDP](#)), organised civil society priority webinar series of five webinars. In such context, GRFDT brings to you its organisational newsletter- 'Roots and Routes' for June 2021 with a specific theme of civil society initiatives and their significance in the international migration regime.

The newsletter includes five reports published in [The Migration News: People on the Move](#) (GRFDT media portal), covering civil society priorities webinar series. The first report written by me covers the webinar titled "Migration, COVID-19 and a New Social Contract". The second report covers the webinar titled "Race and Ethnicity in Migration", written by Fabrizio Parrilli. The third report written by Felipe Honorato covers the webinar titled "Regular Pathways and Irregular Migration". The fourth report covers the webinar titled "Detention and Return", written by Mastewal Bitew. The fifth report written by Solomon Obanla covers the webinar titled "Climate Change and Migration". Eventually, our joint blog co-authored by Dr Feroz Khan and Dr Sadananda Sahoo titled "Pandemic, CSOs, and Collaboration- Perspectives from India", published by Global Policy Institute, Queen Mary University of London, has been placed at the end of the newsletter, explaining the significant initiatives taken by Indian Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) for migrant labourers during the pandemic and their collaborative potential.

Please feel free to let us know your views and suggestions on the content of our newsletter through email at editorinchief@grfdt.com.

Happy Reading!

Abhishek Yadav

Emerging Demand of a New Social Contract for Migrant Labourers: Civil Society Perspective

1 **MIGRATION, COVID-19 AND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT**

Tuesday, 13 April 2021, 3 PM CEST
Simultaneous interpretation in ARABIC, ENGLISH, FRENCH, SPANISH

REGISTER HERE for all webinars
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Speakers

					
Bariyah	Ryszard Cholewinski	Letícia Ishibashi	María Perales Sanchez	Ambet Yuson	William Gois
Field Organizer Persatuan Pekerja Rumah Tangga Indonesia Migran (PERTIMIG/IDWF)	Senior Migration Specialist ILO Regional Office for Arab States	Networks Officer Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)	Elizabeth Mauldin Memorial Advocate for Migrant Woman (EMMA) Centro de los Derechos del Migrante	General Secretary Building and Wood Workers (BWI)	Regional coordinator Migrant Forum in Asia

Moderator

William Gois
Regional coordinator
Migrant Forum in Asia

Logos: ALIANZAS, ILO, UNHCR, GRFDT, PICUM, CMDP, MFA

COVID-19 has affected millions of migrant labourers and their livelihoods adversely through its various repercussions. Its challenges are local as well as global demanding collective solidarity. To address these significant issues, seven global and regional civil society organisations, [GRFDT](#), [CCRM](#), [CSAC](#), [Alianza Americas](#), [PICUM](#), and [CMDP](#), have collaborated to conduct the series of five webinars. To provide the civil society perspectives and to bring forward the crucial agendas in the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF), that is scheduled in 2022 for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), an important webinar titled “Migration, COVID and a New Social Contract” was organised on April 13, 2021. This webinar called for a “New Social Contract with a floor of a Universal Labour Guarantee”, thereby attempting to ensure decent jobs for all workers with minimum living wages, universal social protection, access to justice/remedy, and social dialogues. The webinar was more inclusive because simultaneous translation was done in four languages, namely English, Arabic, French, and

Spanish. The webinar was moderated by William Gois from Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA).

William Gois, Migrant Forum in Asia

Emphasising the need for immediate attention to the burning and unresolved issues of migrant workers, William Gois called for a grassroots approach for its implementation. He asserted that the webinar series is meant to trigger conversation building into grassroots preparations and grassroots mobilisation to engage with the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) next year and engage with international forums where migration governance is discussed through the process of building and moving forward.

William argued that there is a need for data which can provide details about the countries which allow migrant workers to join union so that pressure can be asserted on those countries which have been neglecting it for so long. He stressed that domestic workers have played a key role in looking after families and communities in the destination countries. William posed the question

to the respective governments and international organisations- can domestic workers see that the world recognises them not only as essential workers but also as regular workers under full labour code of the country?

There is a need to recognise and bring migrant workers under the decent work agenda as vulnerabilities of migrant workers have been increasing over time.

William observed that there is a need to recognise that the present labour paradigm is systematically deficient of labour and human rights. Therefore, the whole kind of temporary labour migration programmes and guest worker programmes have largely exploited the labours of individuals that are brought across. Respective governments often forget that these individuals have been pulled out or have left homes and communities living in precarious conditions. On a positive note, William said that “we can shape the future of the society and become a part of his agenda of transformation and change”.

Albert “Ambet” Yuson- General Secretary, Building and Wood Workers (BWI)

Asserting the focus on migrant workers, Yuson argued that everybody has been talking about post-pandemic recovery, building back better, new normal- infrastructure, investment in green jobs, which will lead to economic recovery without prioritising the recovery of migrant workers. He highlighted that during ‘normal times’, migrants were left out and during the ‘new normal’ after the 2008 financial crisis, migrants were left behind again. In ‘building back better’, migrants were again left behind as migrant workers were not given equal respect and protection.

Yuson pointed out that there is a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), but specifically, there is no Global Compact with Migrant Workers as the issue of migrant workers is only being seen through a narrow nationalistic frame. There is a need to understand that migration is not an issue of one country! In times of crisis, migrants are left out, and hence he demanded four crucial policy changes globally. Firstly, “rights for all migrants workers” as they must be treated equally like every worker around the world with

the right to organise collectively or in the form of unions. Secondly, the issue of ‘wage-theft’, where respective governments should pay what is due to the migrants as it must be non-negotiable. It should not be even fought in Courts as it is a migrant’s fundamental right. Non-payment of wages is stealing from workers, and therefore governments must impose sanctions.

Governments should create a “Compensation Fund/Workers fund” and recruiting companies should provide a certain amount of fund if they want migrant workers.

Thirdly, there is a need for “Global Social Protection for Migrants” as ILO, World Bank, and UN agencies are talking about social protection, but specifically, migrant workers are not being mentioned that they will also be part of the social protection schemes. Fourthly, the “narrative of inclusion” needs to be prioritised where issues like low wage leading to social tensions where migrants are accused of stealing jobs need to be resolved. The pandemic has clarified that migrant workers are essential workers- health workers, drivers, grocery workers, taxi drivers, construction workers etc.

Yuson pressed on the need for a multilateral approach with the help of multilateral agencies to resolve the issues of migrant workers. He also asserted that migrant workers are being seen as beneficiaries and not as actors with immense power. Hence, there is a need for migrant workers to organise and build power globally so that a new global migrant movement can be built up.

Bariyah- Field Organizer, Persatuan Pekerja Rumah Tangga Indonesia Migran (PERTIMIG)

Bariyah mentioned that Malaysia is a living country for around 400,000 domestic workers, including many undocumented workers. They have been facing lots of pressure as their members have either lost jobs or are facing COVID-19. Additionally, a lot of exploitation is taking place in terms of unpaid salaries, and they are also facing discrimination as they cannot go to legal offices because they are undocumented.

The right to freedom of association for migrant

domestic workers is being violated over the years. The policy gap also exists because of the non-recognition of migrant domestic workers in Malaysia. They lack the freedom of joining associations and they do not have any union which they can join.

Give migrant domestic workers the rights to association and freedom to speak.

She highlighted that the domestic migrant workers data is not available in Malaysia. Bariyah urged that all countries should ratify the [Domestic Workers Convention \(C189\)](#) and argued that “IDWF is representing over 500,000 domestic workers around the world and hence they need to be given a place in the policymaking”.

Ryszard Cholewinski- Senior Migration Specialist in the ILO Regional Office for Arab States

Ryszard mentioned pertinent policy inputs by referring to the article written by Vani Saraswathi titled “[Protecting migrant workers in the Gulf: don’t build back better over a poor foundation](#)” for the OECD to ensure the protection of the migrant workers in the Gulf.

Ryszard raises doubt over the existence of social contract ever in history for migrants because social contract implies the agreement between the ruler and the ruled or the government and the governed. In the Gulf context, he stated that a quintessential temporary migration regime exists, and there is a high need to make it fairer by rethinking the paradigm on temporary labour migration. There has been this paradigm for the last two decades, and it is linked to systemic issues and decent work that have been magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

He highlighted some of the shortcomings which need to be overcome. Firstly, excessive dependence of migrant workers on their employers. For example, kafala system in the Gulf and other restrictive sponsorship exist in other regions of the world. Secondly, there is a mismatch between regulation in place and actual demand for migrant workers in the labour market, specifically in Europe. In the EU, effective facilitation for admission of highly skilled migrants is done, while

very restrictive rules are imposed for low-skilled or low-income workers. Regulations around these admissions are very complex and increase the risk of irregularity. He admired and recommended the PICUM report “[Designing Labour Migration Policies to Promote Decent Work](#)” and the MFA report “[Crying Out For Justice: Wage Theft Against Migrant Workers during COVID-19](#)”.

There are other abuses in the temporary labour migration agenda- temporary labour migrant workers are particularly prone to not have social protection, particularly in the event of unemployment, occupational injury, pension provision, very little or no opportunities for a family reunion. There has also been the issue of limited voice, limitation on freedom of association, right to organise and collective bargaining.

As there is an absence of social dialogue, there is a need for a ‘social contract’ not only involving governments and employers but also including migrant organisations and CSOs in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the migration programmes, thereby involving these stakeholders in shaping these policies.

In terms of institutional perspective, deep inequality at work is being discussed by ILO, and the pandemic has highlighted it. There is a need of reassessing temporary labour migration as these programs are prone to being fundamentally flawed in terms of protection of rights, and hence there is a need for stocktaking of temporary labour migration programmes. There are lots of solutions in international labour standards, human rights standards which are already existing for workers. Some good solutions are there in GCM, particularly Objective 5 and 6. However, there is a need for political will for the implementation.

Leticia Ishibashi- Networks Officer at Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)

Leticia described that after Brexit, one of the key challenges had been the increased risks of irregularity. In the new immigration system, generally, what is lacking is a general immigration policy for the low paid work. She highlighted that the only way of showing that we value essential

workers is to recognise them under the Decent Work Agenda. According to her, moving out and the free movement has been one of the things that have been lacking US federal immigration.

She described a need to have some threshold of how much one earns, which is above the minimum wage, to understand that people are low paid workers, so they can first have a pathway to migrate in the UK. There are sectors that are heavily reliant on European and non-European migrants for social care, and sectors that are heavily affected by the pandemic like hospitality because they are heavily dependent on migrant labour. The only alternative visa pathway for low paid migrant workers is temporary migration schemes. So, currently, the UK has one scheme in agriculture that is six months long and domestic workers visa regime that is also six months long. She believes that the post-Brexit immigration system is not what the country needs – facing labour shortages – to but rather, it has been done in a way that is counterproductive to that. The demand for low paid work is a lot while there are no avenues for people to come in and fill in these labour shortages.

Leticia pointed out that irregularity does not just come from people that have come into the country that are not regular, but sometimes people also come into the country with a visa, and they might have some issues with visas that make them irregular. If they go beyond the working conditions that are defined, they also become vulnerable. For example, students who come into the UK can work up to 20 hours; if they work for 21 hours, they are already becoming irregular. It has been observed that employers push students to work for longer hours, especially during the COVID-19 when former do not have access to people who can work for longer hours. Therefore, students become an extension for longer hours. Additionally, people are coming into the country with tourist visas and then start working through that because that is the only way to come into the country and employers ask the same labour to fill in shortages.

When it comes to migrant workers' vulnerability, both irregularity and exploitation are not intrinsic for being a migrant; however, it is constructed. It is a political choice to design and limit

the people's rights, making it harder for them to report the violation of rights.

She reported that increasing exploitation is one of the major issues. Employers start exploiting migrant workers once they come to know of their undocumented status, or they know that workers can not easily switch to other sectors rendering them more vulnerable. It is important to note that before Brexit, in the UK, there was an immigrant system that was hostile towards migrants. Essentially, the key feature is to make the pay hard and say for those that are not complying with immigration policy.

The introduction of illegal working offence in 2017 in the UK started to criminalise those who are in the UK without proper documentation or if one is working or doing what one is not allowed to. It has resulted in the scenario where even documented workers are so scared of potential immigration consequences like arrest, potential removal from the country. As such, they feel unable to provide the record of the place and exploitation network. The police and other family services including healthcare, and local authorities, can help immigration authorities, identify people that have immigration offences creating an environment where there is no trust in the authorities that are supposed to protect and support migrant workers.

Leticia described that many people lost their job or are in higher need of employment-related support. They are not under any type of social safety net, and therefore they have become heavily reliant on their jobs, and they become more vulnerable to exploitation because of it. It seems that “vulnerability is constructed to limit people's choices”. There is a need to recognise the power structure and where migrant workers sit in it. Governments need to deviate from the immigration control system.

Maria (“Mari”) Perales Sanchez- Elizabeth Mauldin Advocate for Migrant Women (EMMA), Centro De Los Derechos Del Migrante, Inc. (CDM)

Maria conveyed that they work primarily with low wage migrant workers, those who work under temporary visas and guest worker programmes. Many migrant workers are commonly recruited

by a recruiter or a third-party agent hired by the employer in their home communities and Mexico and migrate to work in the US in the season time. Though workers visa and immigration are the toughest that is being conditional on the employment to a single employer, their immigration status depends on that job and on that employer, and these programmes have expanded tremendously in the last decade. It is also seen in the US context, but protections have not been extended.

She argued that even before the pandemic, migrant workers already faced grave vulnerability and abuse in these programmes, which are largely unregulated and privatised in their structure in ways that lead themselves to systemic worker abuse. For years they have documented violations and occupational health and safety, forced labour, trafficking, wage theft, recruitment fraud and abuse, discrimination, and retaliation. All of these were already being considered for migrant workers prior to the pandemic, and, something we see across our guest worker programmes, class definitely poses further susceptibility for each of us.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the CDM team have urged local and state officials and the Federal US government to implement emergency measures such as a temporary emergency standard to put in place for protection for workers during the pandemic. It included COVID-19 preparedness plans at the workplace, access to PPE, vaccination, treatment, paid sick leave, stronger protections against retaliation.

Maria mentioned that essential workers and migrant workers served in essential industries such as agriculture, seafood, poultry, healthcare, and others. However, certain issues reflect a bigger structural problem, and those require a complete overhaul. For that, they have advocated and continue to advocate for a labour migration model based on a value system that prioritises experiences, the voices, and the dignity of migrant workers. With the coalition of workers' rights organisations, academics, and unions, they

have been pressuring the government officials to advance labour migration systems that reflect the humanity of migrant workers that we call the alternative labour migration model, which we will examine till we have more extensive protections finding value such as freedom of movement, family reunification, access to justice, self-determination.

There is a need to affirm our commitment to the social contract that ensures workers access to benefits and permanent residency, rather than the more temporary labour programmes that have been our solution to a lot of the migration issues we face today.

According to her, the introduction of the US Citizenship Act provides citizen a pathway to citizenship for all undocumented people. It also includes certain workers in temporary programmes such as those that are agricultural workers in nature to a programme in the US. The position has always been to really make sure that these programmes are structured in ways that reflect the dignity of migrant workers and families. Maria hoped that with the current administration, there needs to have more discussions to advance certain changes and policies.

The webinar involved eminent speakers providing action-oriented policy recommendations to fill the policy gaps, thereby envisioning a better and humane world acknowledging and appreciating the valuable role of migrant workers across the globe. When the entire humanity is grappling with the current pandemic, such webinar becomes highly relevant. It has presented comprehensive migratory discourse advocating a new social contract based on mutual recognition and respect, acknowledging the immense contribution of migrant labourers.

Abhishek Yadav, PhD Candidate and Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Contextualising Race and Ethnicity in Migration

2 RACE AND ETHNICITY IN MIGRATION

Tuesday, 20 April 2021, 3 PM CEST
Simultaneous interpretation in ARABIC, ENGLISH, FRENCH, SPANISH

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Speakers

				
Anastasia Crickley	Praveena Kodoth	Adla Shashati	Nana Gyamfi	Silvia Verónica Raquec Cum
Former Chair UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)	Professor Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum, India	Director Greek Forum of Migrants Equinox Racial justice initiative	Executive Director Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)	Coordinator of the Migration Axis Pop No'j Association

Moderator


Stella Opoku-Owusu
Deputy Director African Foundation for Development (AFFORD)



The online panel discussion held on 20th April 2021 focused on the complex concepts of race and ethnicity within the issue of migration, and its main aim was to give a broader understanding of the topics discussed from both a global perspective as well as a regional perspective.

The event was jointly organized by the following organisations: Migrant Forum in Asia ([MFA](#)), the Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism ([GRFDT](#)), the Cross Regional Centre for Refugees and Migrants ([CCRM](#)), the Civil Society Action Committee (CSAC); [Alianza Americas](#); the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants ([PICUM](#)), and the Climate Migration and Displacement Platforms (CMDP).

The participants to the webinar included five women from all over the world who have great experience with the topics of migration and racism and who are involved in different initiatives and

part of international networks. They made the session even more outstanding and provided valuable inputs and insights to the questions raised in the course of the discussion.

Growing Interest in Race and Ethnicity

The moderator of the webinar was **Stella Opoku-Owusu**, who is the Deputy Director of Africa Foundation for Development (AFFORD) in the United Kingdom. She began the discussion by claiming that:

“This specific webinar is meant to trigger these conversations on race, and we’re hoping of course to be able to identify some strategies to feed into the international migration review forum in 2022”.

Opoku-Owusu has asserted that the turning point in the growing interest in race and ethnicity has

been the demonstrations of the movement “Black Lives Matter”, started in June 2020 in the USA in response to police brutality and racially motivated violence against black people. Since then, it spread in all the corners of the globe and the link between race and discrimination gained greater attention. This event also marked the beginning of “the globalization of the sentiments”, as Opoku-Owusu pointed out, which means that the issue has been embraced not just by people of African descent, but also by other races and especially by the younger generation.

Global Overview of Racism and Migration

Professor **Anastasia Crickley**, former Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the first woman Chairperson of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, has a long experience in the areas of discrimination, racism and intolerance, particularly in Ireland and Great Britain.

She pointed out that we must consider the structural roots of racism and the way in which those have continued from the centuries of slavery and colonization and became institutionalised in our societies. Moreover, she also highlighted the fact that the link between migration and racism has been ignored until recently for three main reasons: first of all, because for the receiving countries of migrants ***“it makes economic sense [to] have an army of underpaid labour who can be sort of relied on to do”***; secondly, because the receiving countries are ***“able to deny them [migrants] the sort of citizenship or full rights that might make them full participants in the countries where they have migrated to”***, and thirdly in order ***“to keep them in that sort of middle sort of position of being a migrant rather than being a full citizen”***.

“Of the key things that black lives matter has done in the past year in particular is to again facilitate the naming of racism as a key toxic discourse, as a key toxic phenomenon globally which has existed for a very long time but which needs to be named in order to address it”, concluded

Professor Crickley.

Black Lives Matter

Professor **Nana Syamfi** is the Executive Director of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), former Professor in the Pan-African Studies Department at California State University (USA), and a sought-after voice for legal and political insights into issues affecting black communities.

She declared that in the USA black migrants are disproportionately in the position of the least privileged and marginalized, and routinely racially discriminated. That this is due to the over 500 years of western imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism which have increased the perception of “blackness” as an inferior human being, as a sub-human. According to her, since the years of transatlantic enslavement, an entire system that still exists today was created, in which whiteness equals humanity, freedom, human rights, dignity, the standard, the one that should lead the exploiter.

“To be migrant is to be foreign which is to be other, which is to be enslaved. In other words, as Anastasia just talked about, exploited for profit to be criminalized. Therefore, to be subhuman and not worthy of human rights or dignity”, powerfully stressed Professor Syamfi.

The European Union’s Action Plan

Adla Shashati, Director of the Greek Forum of Migrants and member of the Committee of Equinox Racial Justice Initiative, has more than 20 years of experience in issues of migration and the fight against racism and xenophobia, at national and European level.

With regard to the problem of migration, she stated that it is a global phenomenon and it should be treated as such. In the case of the European Union, some of its member states have put in place legal measures to promote migrant’s rights such as freedom of expression, freedom to form organizations and acquire citizenship. Nonetheless, the set of common basic principles issued by the EU has only been partially implemented. Shashati claimed that in Europe there is the need of a strong commitment to racial justice, an institutional change, cohesive

legislation and policy on structural races, and a new relationship with the civil society.

“The black lives matter movement set a light on the deep and widening nature of structural races also in the European Union”, argued Shashati.

International Mobility in India

Simplifying the intertwined relations between race, ethnicity and migration, **Praveena Kodoth**, Professor at the Centre for Development Studies (Trivandrum, India), has presented a significant perspective about the caste system in India.

She explained that ***“the caste system is a form of stratification with hierarchy built into”***, with a clear distinction between people and groups positioned at the higher end of the hierarchy and those at the lower end of the hierarchy who are marked by ***“their history, their experience of oppression and of exclusion, they have far less ownership of property, they have far less education”***. Furthermore, she made a research about why the oppressed caste from India has not been able to access international mobility because of a variety of reasons: repressive state’s immigration policy, lack of network and capital, and professional skills.

Finally, she concludes with a reference to child migration and the issue of trafficking, labour, and gender violence. In this case, she declares that most of the time children migrate with their families, but that when they migrate alone, independently, they “are sent by their parents who are very poor”.

Indigenous Migration and Racism in Latin America

Silvia Veronica Raquéc Cum, Coordinator of the Migration Axis (Pop No’j Association), who is a defender of children and women’s rights, of the indigenous community of the Maya, and more specifically in the process of return and reintegration of young migrants in Guatemala.

Within the context of Latin America, she said the racism and discrimination is a historical phenomenon. She also recalled Syamfi’s discourse on the sub-humanity of the black people, and made a comparison between the use of determined, sometimes derogative, terms such as “*negro*” for slaves of African descent, and “*indios*” the native communities of the Americas. Hence, both groups have been and are victims of structural racism and discrimination, oppression, systematic inequalities, and denial of basic rights.

In addition, she accused the countries in Latin America for having enslaved the indigenous communities and deprived them of their lands and resources, and for not having coped with the problems of migration, especially child and indigenous migration, who most of the time take try to reach the USA through Mexico.

Conclusive remarks

The enriching talk by the panelists raised different questions related to migration and racism that need the urgent need to be addressed by countries and by the international community. It is remarkable to recognize that the international and multicultural perspectives presented by the guests have given birth to an insightful session that is worth to be watched.

To conclude, our countries need to take the lead in condemning racism and violence, and to really start to acknowledge how the migratory flows have left a legacy that has transpired into the institutional racism and the inequalities as we see all over the world.

Fabrizio Parrilli, 24, Master’s degree Student of International Cooperation on Human Rights at the University of Bologna, Italy. My areas of interest are mainly focused on international issues, contemporary history, protection of human rights, political and cultural dynamics, youth work and education. I love travelling, discovering new cultures and having fun. My motto is live, love, laugh. E-mail: parrillifabrizio@gmail.com

Analysing the Aspects of Irregular Migration to Envision Regular Pathways

REGULAR PATHWAYS AND IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Tuesday, 4 May 2021, 3 PM CEST
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Speakers

- Joel Odigie**
Deputy General Secretary
African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC Africa)
- Michele LeVoy**
Director
Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)
- Oscar A. Chacón**
Executive Director
Alianza Americas
- Patrick Taran**
President
Global Migration Policy Associates
- Rima Kalush**
Program Director
Migrant-Rights.org

Moderator

- William Gois**
Regional Coordinator
Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)

Logos: ALIANZA AMERICAS, CSAC, CLIMATE MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT PLATFORM, CCAM, GRFDT, MFA, PICUM

On May 4th, 2021, the webinar “Regular pathways and irregular migration” was organised jointly by **Migrant Forum Asia (MFA)**, **Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT)**, **Civil Society Action Committee (CSAC)**, **Alianza Americas**, the **Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)** and the **Climate Migration and Displacement Platforms (CMDP)**. Speakers for the webinar included: Michele LeVoy, director of the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM); Oscar A. Chacón, executive director of Alianza Americas; Patrick Taran, president of Global Migration Associates; and Rima Kalush, program director at Migrants-rights.org. The mediator was William Gois, regional coordinator at Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA).

Patrick Taran

Patrick highlighted the fact that 80 to 90% of the movements today happen through regular channels, but the regular migratory status of these persons depends on some very volatile factors like depending on keeping on a job for maintaining a work visa. So, for him, the greatest challenge nowadays is not irregular migration, but protecting people who fall into irregular status in their destination country and regularization.

Taran also talked about the need to have a more plural discussion about migration, not involving only policy makers, and how, in a globalized world as we live in, migration should be seen as something part of our global routine, granted by defined mechanisms to protect human rights.

“The point I want to underline, when We talk about pathways, pathways somehow limits, I think, the discussion at looking at bilateral arrangements, when really the challenge We have today

is because of protection's pressures, because of security approach, even some of those free circulation regimes are under pressure [...]" – Patrick Taran

Michele Levoy

Michele LeVoy, looking specifically at the situation inside the European Union (EU) borders, said that since 1999, there is a common migration and asylum policy for the region. As she had said, in the early years – from 1999 until a decade afterwards – the language used in this document was “combating illegal migration”; the language itself has changed now: the EU talks about “preventing irregular migration” – it seems to be a change of times. Michele mentions that, despite it, what we still see is a predominance of return and deportation: regularization is a taboo. To illustrate this situation, she showed, for example, some data that confirm the increase of power and budget of Frontex, the European border agency, in the past years. On the other hand, Michele LeVoy showed how different stakeholders in diverse instances are doing a great work to assist and try to integrate irregular migrants in the European society.

“ [...] I think Oscar referred to four decades of dehumanization basically of migrants in the US context. And actually, after listening to two hours of colleagues from around the world, I think we can easily talk about four hundred years plus of dehumanization of peoples” – Michele LeVoy

Oscar Chacón

Having as reference his experience with migratory flows in the so called Meso-American corridor, that links Central America, Mexico and the United States of America (USA or just US), Oscar Chacón discussed the major trends that led the political and public debate upon migrants arriving in the US to what we see today. He identified white supremacy as the first major trend in the debate: since the 1970's, when Caribbeans and Latins migrants substituted European migrants as the biggest flows arriving in the country, it has been a discourse trying to demonize these migrants,

seeing them as a disease that must be defeated. The demonization of these migrants works as a “permission” to take away their rights and, in some cases, to explore their vulnerability – Oscar Chacón indicates that there's a very profitable “industry of detention and deportations”, feeded by private detention centers and charter flights that take these irregular migrants back to their countries of origin. The second major trend mentioned by Chacón is the asymmetry that exists in the freedom of movement given to money and rich people, and the freedom of movement given to poor people and persons from the global south: money and rich people circulate almost freely around the globe, while poor people and persons from the global south have their mobility very controlled.

For Oscar Chacón, it's important to bring the discourse about how beneficial immigration is for both the countries of origin and the countries of destination.

“ [...] If you are, you know, a corporate actor, and you want to move anywhere you want, in order to maximize your profits, you are very much encouraged to do that, even supported, you know, to do that, by way of taxes rebates to you. But if you are an individual seeking a better possibility for you to sell the only thing you have, and that's your ability to work, then you don't have the same rights.” – Oscar Chacón Rima Kalush

In Rima's opinion, the migratory panorama in the Persian Gulf is very similar to what the other presenters have said to their specific contexts: the vast majority of the migration to and within the countries of the region is made through regular channels, once some significant share of these nations workforce is composed by foreign citizens, but many of them become irregular by motivations that go beyond their capability of action or control. Kalush cited criminal charges that are charged against migrant workers as, perhaps, the greatest of these problems – suddenly, these charges turn them into irregular migrants. Another important issue in the Persian Gulf, as described by Rima

Kalush, is human trafficking: some people enter nations such as Saudi Arabia and Oman as agricultural or domestic workers and end up in an abusive situation.

“The most of the workers who, you know, who become irregular [in the Persian Gulf region], become so because, you know, employers are in charge of their residency permit” – Rima Kalush

The webinar brought so many insightful perspectives thereby creating a positive migration discourse. The need of surpassing racism and discrimination, and also the need of elaborating decolonial migratory policies, at the end, was a consensus among the panelists.

Felipe Honorato lives in Valinhos, Brazil. Currently he is a student of the PhD programme in Social Change and Political Participation at the University of São Paulo / Brazil and young professor at IESCAMP College in Campinas – SP / Brazil. He is also a researcher in the Study Group on Research and Oral History (GEPHOM / EACH – USP) and at the Laboratory of Media and Public Sphere Studies (LEMEP / IESP – UERJ), collaborating with the “Manchetômetro” website. ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Felipe_Honorato. Academia: <https://usp-br.academia.edu/FelipeHonorato>. LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/felipe-honorato-428880a1/>



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Detention and Return: Civil Society Perspective

DETENTION AND RETURN

Tuesday, 11 May 2021, 3 PM CEST

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Speakers

- Marta Gionco**
Advocacy Officer
Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)
- Michael Flynn**
Executive Director
Global Detention Project
- Pablo Ceriani Cernadas**
Coordinator
Migration & Asylum Program, Institute for Justice and Human Rights, National University of Lanús (UNLA, Argentina)
- Sumitha Shaanthinni Kishna**
Director
Our Journey
- Wayne Ncube**
National Director
Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR)

Moderator

- Helena Olea**
Associate Director for Programs
Alianza Americas

Logos at the bottom: ALIANZA AMERICAS, Our Journey, CLIMATE MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT PLATFORM, CMDP, GRFDT, Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), PICUM

This brief report compiles insights from webinar on Migrant Detention and Return, that was jointly organized by Global and Regional Civil Society Network. It was specifically organized by [Migrant Forum in Asia \(MFA\)](#), the [Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism \(GRFDT\)](#), the [Cross Regional Center for Refugees and Migrants \(CCRM\)](#), the [Civil Society Action Committee \(CSAC\)](#), [Alianza Americas](#), the [Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants \(PICUM\)](#) and the Climate Migration and Displacement Platforms (CMDP).

The panel was moderated by Helena Olea, Associate Director for Programs, Alianza Americas. The panels were Marta Gionco, Advocacy Officer, Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), Michael Flynn, Executive Director, Global Stention Project, Pablo Ceriani Cernadas, Coordinator, Migration and Asylum Program, Institute for Justice and Human Rights, National University of Lanús (UNLA, Argentina), Sumitha Shaanthinni Kishna,

Directorm our Journey, Wayne Ncube, National Director, Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR).

Helena highlighted that the normalization of detention and extradition of immigrants are taken as a standard policy solution of deterring the inflow of immigrants in the host countries. Thereby the host countries have deprived the liberty of immigrants irrespective of the immigrant's social category as it is defining the current migration securitizations regimes. This time detention and extradition have been taken as a prior immigration deterrence strategy as well as a form of punishment to discourage irregular immigrants. In most countries, migrants in detention centres do not have the right to look for the attorney nor do they are claiming to be seen by the judges. Deportation has been also taken as a standard policy option taken by the host countries to deter the entrance of irregular immigrants to their legal territory. As a result, the deportees are experiencing psychological trauma and family separation as well as deprived the right of children

to grow up with their biological families.

Having said that the moderator asked the panelists to share their experiences, facts on the ground and the way forward regarding to the status of detention and deportation of irregular migrants and migrants in general. Then, the first question went to Michael Flynn who is an Executive Director of Global Stention Project. He was asked about the possibilities and the strategies of global civil society advocacy against detention of migrants. Michael on his part acknowledged the existence of good things with regard to addressing immigration detention as well as the protection of human rights. He rightly said that **“addressing immigration detention is a direct move towards a particular campaign which is about alternatives to detention”**. He appreciated the fact that one side solution to the existent problem is not always effective given the complexity of the problem.

Michael also emphasized that “immigration detention is not merely an administrative procedure” as the case in Zambia where migrants are subjected to ill-treatments and other human violations when they are crossing the country’s territory. He also added that **“the right of liberty as an inherent human right should be a global strategy that could potentially complement the detention of immigrants”**. He recognized the importance of looking at the right of liberty in the context of each legal regime because there seems to be a handful of global approach to address the problems associated to immigration detention.

Michael proposed alternative frameworks in order to decide the best approach to address immigration detention. For that, he listed the specific questions that would suggest alternative frameworks for the management of immigrants in the host countries. The first question is that “does the country apply immigration detention measures? If it does, how does the country is taking the measures?” The second question is “does the country have the laws that prohibit to detain any specific group? Thirdly, he asked that “is the country emigration, transit or destination country?” Fourth, “does the country have time limit for immigration detention procedures? So that we could have a broader context about what we meant by immigration

detention at a global level.

Helena also forwarded a question regarding to the situation and strategies of immigration detention in Malaysia to Sumitha. The panelist acknowledged the fact that detention of migrants started with the criminalization of labour migrations. Sumitha claimed that the advocacy which currently in use is not enough to challenge the government to decriminalization of migration in general. For this, she proposed that there must be a strategy to use the judiciary to challenge detention procedures by focusing on the bail remedies to unlock unlawful detention and challenge the obstacles that hinder the migrants to work in the country of destination. She exemplified her argument with the case of Nigerian migrant who married a Malaysian woman has been sentenced with death penalty who found to be drunk driving on March 15, 2021. However, with the help of Family Frontiers’ advocacy and assistance, his detention found to be unlawful.

Sumitha is of the view that numbers of migrants are unlawfully detained without seeing the judiciary for several months. Worrisomely, migrants spent longer time in jail because of the COVID-19 pandemic without appearing to the court. However, given the existent problems the migrants are facing, the case of the Nigerian national and other efforts paves the way forward to challenge the unlawful detentions.

Sumitha was also asked about how she is challenging the unlawful detention of labour migrants in Malaysia. She confirmed that foreign nationals in Malaysia is seen as a threat to national security regardless of the legal status of migrants. So, any measures taken by the government is considered as saving the country from foreign threats. In an attempt to convince the common people and the state apparatus, she said that **“we have been working to ensure that all migrants are not a national threat”**. She also added that **“despite the immigration policy is so securitized, we are using available means to challenge the policy which is enforced against migrant workers”**.

The same question also forwarded to Marta, Advocacy Officer, at PICUM. She was asked to elaborate the context of Europe regarding to returning migrants with regard to the no policy

of return. Marta started her talk by mentioning the three draft proposals regarding to return directives at the EU level. The first return directive is being enforced since 2008 and it is recast in 2018 and given that issue is controversial, the parliament considers more than 700 amendments. The second reform is on the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) and the reform is being done by increasing power and the numbers of tasks to be accomplished by the agency. The agency considers hiring more than 100, 000 staffs in 2027 and it is empowered to work on the voluntary returns as well as returnee counseling. The third reform is on EU asylum and migration which is VISA proposal that is published on September 2020 which is being discussed by the parliament and the council of the EU.

Marta said that **the measures taken by FRONTEX found to be violating the fundamental human rights of the immigrants**. The status of migrants is not also clearly known once they are returned to their country of origin as well as little research is conducted to know their situation. So, the return of migrants and asylum seekers is interpreted as the violation of fundamental human rights, no matter the return is voluntary or forced. The major challenge of the EU migration policy is that the increasing return is taken as part of the migration policy at the EU level as well. The EU migration policy problem is also relied into the two binary migratory policy options. Migrants are forced to put into two categories whether their case is admissible for further admission procedures (deserving category) or subjected to deportation under the securitization of migration policy (underserving category).

Helena also asked Wayne, Director of LHR about the extent and status of detention in the South Africa context. He said that **some of immigrants are detained for several days or months even without appearing them to the court which is against the legal procedures and principles of the country**. Wayne said that one of the major activities they are doing is that challenging the systemic issues that the law is

not enforced in light with the domestic legal rights which is enshrined in the document. As a result, it is confirmed that there is a significant reduction in terms of migrant detention and deportation and the incidence of the detention of vulnerable people is also significantly dropped since a couple of years. He said that due to the advocacy of the ministry of justice and other stake holders, the numbers of detained individuals are able to move to low-risk police centres and the numbers of unlawful detentions are also reduced significantly. However, it seems that the strategy created numbers of backlashes when it comes to undocumented migrants.

Wayne was also asked to share the strategies they are employing towards family unification and the impact of the returnees they are facing in their country of origin in the case of South Africa. He underlined that **despite the decrease in the numbers of deportation cases in the last three years, there has been 1300 deportation cases since the outbreak of the pandemic**. As a result, deportees are faced with persecution in countries like DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo) in last three years. There also some reports that indicates over 13,000 migrants and potential asylum seekers are subjected to deportation onboard in the beginning of this year.

***Mastewal Bitew** is currently studying Joint Master program in 'Transnational Migration' in the Erasmus Mundus scholarship program in three European Universities since September 2019. He studied 'migration and cultural diversity' at Free Brussels University from the beginning of September 2019 to the end of January 2020. Given also that it is a joint master's degree, He moved to the University of Wroclaw, Poland to specialize in 'intercultural communication and mediation' from mid of February 2020 to the end of June 2020. He also studied 'International relations' at the University of Szeged, Hungary beginning of September 2020 to the 20th January 2021. He is currently back in the University of Brussels to finish his internship obligation and writing thesis work. Twitter ID: @mastiman1abawa*

Climate Change and Migration: Civil Society Perspective

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Speakers

Tasneem Siddiqui	Pefi Kingi	Lucy Daxbacher	Jean D'Cunha	Iliana Monterroso
Political Science Professor, University of Dhaka	Migration Focal Point for Pacific Civil Society	Project Officer Free Movement Protocol, IGAD	Senior Global Advisor on International Migration UN Women	Scientist Center for International Forestry Research
Founding Chair, Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU)	Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organisations (PIANGO)			

Moderator

Evalyn Tennant
Associate GMPA and CMDP Steering Group

PICUM UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS

ALIANZA AMERICAS

CLIMATE MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT PLATFORMS

CCRM

GRFDT

MIGRANT FORUM IN ASIA

The global and regional civil society networks including **Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT)**, **Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA)**, the **Cross Regional Center for Refugees and Migrants (CCRM)**, the **Civil Society Action Committee (CSAC)**, **Alianza Americas**, the **Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)** and the **Climate Migration and Displacement Platforms (CMDP)** organized an online webinar on Tuesday 18th of May 2021 which started at 3pm CEST and lasted for two hours. The webinar was titled “**Climate Change and Migration**”.

Evalyn Tennant was the moderator. She is an associate of Global Migration Policy Associates (GMPA) and one of the founder and Steering Group member of the Climate Migration and Displacement Platforms. She mentioned in her

introduction speech that the webinar series hope to mobilize civil society in the year between now and the first International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) which will be the first time at the global level that the **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration** is reviewed. The webinar also hopes that civil society will reflect on and mobilize around the real priorities for migrants agenda at this time, during the pandemic, coming out of the pandemic; and mobilizing in difficult circumstances when borders have been closed, when access to social services has been curtailed, and when migrants have been suffering particularly due to loss of work, discrimination, impossible to move around and take up jobs; and others discussed in the previous webinars.

Evalyn introduced all the panelists and move to the first speaker, **Professor Tasneem Siddiqui**, Political Science Professor at University of Dhaka, Bangladesh and also the Founding Chair,

Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) for her speech.

Climate Change is the Cause of Migration

Evalyn Tennant asked Professor Siddiqui whether climate change is the cause or a cause of migration. She also asked her the future of what climate related migration looks like and how the COVID-19 pandemic may have altered it. According to Professor Siddiqui:

“Earlier we use to think that climate change automatically affects migration but over the years we have learnt that it is multi causal. There are many other issues that interact with each other’s and produce migration in a climate change scenario.”

She explains further that climate change will not directly affect or cause migration in many cases but it does exacerbate the pre-existing socio-economic inequalities which then compel migration. She also pointed out that many of the migrants use climate change migration as one of the adaptation tools whereas National and State level policies would like to see migration as a failure to adaptation. She said if the right measures and policies around gender, ethnicity and race are put in place, much climate change related migration will be reduced to a great extent.

On the question of how the COVID-19 pandemic may alter the future of what climate related migration looks like, she explained that COVID-19 affect migrants differently in destination countries. Most climate related migrants come back to their State of origin without jobs and other way of adapting. They are back to square one. She emphasizes that COVID-19 has put migrants into more stressful situation. Nobody is looking into their issues and letting them handle those issues on their own.

Gender dimension of migration in the context of climate change

The moderator, **Evalyn Tennant**, also asked **Jean D’Cunha** her perspective on some of the challenges of migrants and their family member, emphasizing on the gender dimension of

those issues. The moderator requests her to state the issues they are facing primarily in the Middle East context that we should be paying particular attention to when we are flagging on actionable agenda to address the section of climate change and adaptability.

Jean D’Cunha is a Senior Global Advisor on International Migration with UN Women. She said Arab region is really seeing the high level of drought and inter regional migration.

“In the last 15 years, there has been clear connect established between climate change, migration and displacement because of lack of investment in sustainable development. For example, in 2020, there are 631 people displaced as a result of stream, climate disasters and these are conflict induce displacement that has added up to 9.6% of the global total, so huge movement resulting from drought of Somalia, Syria, Iraq, in the cities across nation boundaries with huge movement because of tropical storms from Yemen, Somalia, etc.”

Jean explains further that most of the affected are poor, particularly women who are overwhelmingly employed in agricultural sector which expose them heavily to climate change. Women come to build much than men, to ecosystem, greenhouse gas emission, to human created disasters because of the social and immediate domestic roles as nurturers and small scale traders; low subsistence farmers or small scale livestock raisers or providers, managers of foods or natural resources, or consumers of low intensive goods and services. But women are relegated to the low means of value chains, in agriculture, manufacture sectors and this proportionate marginalize them from productive access to all material resources of all kinds, and this diminishes their migration resilience much more than men.

She rounds up saying, in all of these, it is important to not just address women with the most vulnerable of women but other women, women with disability and the likes. She wants us to focus on women not just as victims but also as agents, as subjects that bring local knowledge of equal systems, with their

attributes, skills, leadership, network; to bear on the situation of stress and to transcend it to build their capacities.

Challenges of migrants in IGAD region

The moderator move on to the third speaker, **Lucy Daxbacher**, Project Officer, Free Movement Protocol, IGAD. The moderator requests her to tell us a little bit more about the situation in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region, one of the East African countries and touch on some of the conditions in Somalia. The moderator also asked her to say more about the challenges in the region and how the free movement protocols are going to be useful in the region and its communities.

Lucy explains that IGAD region is 70% hybrid and semi hybrid, that gives an indication that the issue of climate change is very important to the core of the survival, adaptation mechanism, resilient of 270 million citizens of IGAD region. “IGAD region has migration policy framework which put migration at the heart of our work because we realized that IGAD region is a region on the move.”

“Challenges of migrants in IGAD region range from legislative vacuums, policy challenges, institutional weaknesses, governance challenges or limitation because the region has experience a lot of climate change effects, severe heat, landslides, drought and therefore we realize that you can actually observe that climate change and migration are very close actively link, and citizens exhibit that behavior in which climate change is seen as one of the drivers of migration in IGAD region”.

Lucy explained further that citizens grease the desert to move from their country of origin through desert and the red sea trying to make it up to those countries they feel have better economy opportunities, especially the gulf countries. Another challenge she mentioned has to do with the protection of migrants’ population. There are conflicts across the region which includes but not limited to civil and pastoralist conflicts. The conflicts has created more advance vulnerability which compel people to move but at the same time

climate change has also been a contributing factor especially among the pastoralist communities where access to water and pasture is basically determined by amount of rain or no rain, therefore the struggle for resources is also evident in the region.

What natural resources, governance can do in addressing the issues around displacement, human mobility and migration

Ilina Monterroso is a Scientist at the Center for International Forestry Research. She explains the role and what natural resources, governance can do in addressing the issues around displacement, human mobility and migration and how they relate to climate change agenda in terms of mitigation and adaptation, referring specifically to the north and triangle countries in central America; and this includes Honduras, Salvador and Guatemala comprising of over 130 million people who are lances cape forest dependent communities. She explains that the region is also known for the corridors for trafficking of people and drugs, that is pushing people away from the territories.

She also mentioned that the environmental degradation of the region is tied to socio political situations which include poverty, inequality, food insecurity, governance corruption and violence. These are interlinked issues and should be addressed as such in the climate change agenda according to her.

Challenges that Women Groups Face in Pacific Region

PefiKingi is a migration Focal Point for Pacific Civil Society, Pacific Islands Association of Non-Government Organizations (PIANGO).

“You may or may not know that the Pacific is indeed a region that has long been characterized by substantial migration flows. And so in recent years, it has seen in it increased diversification of this migration which includes temporary and seasonal labor migration but especially climate change migration”.

Pefi says some of the challenges women groups face in the Pacific region are: they are experiencing the famine in districts, villages and others; language and communication barriers, racism and discrimination, affordable housing problems, finding a decent job, problem of getting a decent rate paid job, community attitudes, impact of disrupt education on schooling, learning English, distance and lack of communication with their own family in their country and countries of asylum where they are indeed seeking refuge, especially those who have suffered conflicts and domestic violence.

Opportunities and the Connect to Governance

After the last speaker, the webinar moved into the second round where panelists were asked to briefly share solutions around their topics, opportunities and their connection to governance. They were told to give examples of government practices where gender, climate change and migration have

actually been addressed together. All the speakers gave importance insights around possible ways to women and migrants in resolving climate change migration and adaptation, and government policies.

Moderator read comments and questions on the message box. She also allowed **Helena Olea, Rani Mehta, Laura Morel, Serge Hounton, Patrick Taran** and **Marvie Misolas**, all asked questions and made comments. Panelists made final remarks and the webinar came to a close.

Solomon Obanla is a trained diplomat, migration consultant, social researcher, gender and peacebuilding analyst, peer educator, facilitator and community mobilizer. He obtained a Master's degree in Gender and Peacebuilding at Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal and a Bachelor's degree in International Relations at Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. Twitter @obanla_oluwafe

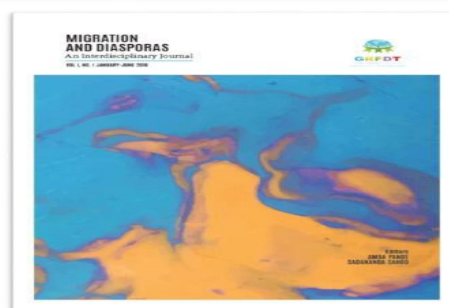


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Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism

Pandemic, CSOs, and Collaboration - Perspectives from India

Dr. Feroz Khan, Abhishek Yadav, Dr. Sadananda Sahoo explore some of the key collaborations that CSOs in India have established during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The nationwide lockdown in India announced on 23 March 2020 has reinforced the importance of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in governance. While the nation was under lockdown, it was the third sector that played a critical role in minimising adverse impacts of COVID-19. The third sector's role is immense in this respect and this blog aims to give an overview of the sector's vital functions during the lockdown.

Let us first define CSOs. As per the Asian Development Bank, CSOs can be defined as "non-state actors whose aims are neither to generate profits nor to seek governing power," but have a presence in the public domain and strive to unite people for advancing shared goals and interests. The extraordinary strength of CSO is to unite like-minded people to work towards certain goals which they consider important. Globally, CSOs have assisted local, state and national governments in the past in eradicating diseases, such as polio, SARS, measles-rubella and smallpox through community mobilisation initiatives, thereby filling the void where the government finds it challenging to act in a timely fashion.

The same happened during the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in India where CSO played a very crucial role in tackling the challenges emerging out of the health crisis, as we discuss in our research project. The relevance of CSO during such an unprecedented crisis becomes more important as they are simultaneously representative of grassroot societies, first responders to any adverse challenge, and watchdogs of democracy to keep a vigil on government directives.

Collaborative Potential of CSOs in India

While the nationwide lockdown variably affected different sections of society, 'invisible workers' (informal workers) were disproportionately more affected than formal workers. Informal workers account for a large section of India's workforce involved in every kind of occupation – from daily earners; domestic helpers to casual workers. The halt in work and temporary closure of markets left many of these workers jobless and without any social securities. Only people from a few sectors and skills managed to work online, while most workers were left with confusion and insecurities. Many of these informal workers encountered issues with regard to securing food, medicines, and room rent. Unhygienic living conditions increased the risk of infection. Moreover, the lack of access to technology pushed children out of school.

The role of CSOs became more significant due to their widespread presence and diffused social networks in the affected regions. The work of CSOs In India can be seen at four levels in collaboration with - other local organisations; government agencies formally or informally; local people; and transnational actors.

Collaboration with Government Agencies

Recognising the strength of the CSO, National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), Policy Think Tank of Government of India, has partnered with around 92,000 CSOs/NGOs to "harness their strengths and resources, expertise in key social sectors- nutrition, health, sanitation, education, and extensive reach in the community", in order to face the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally many CSOs collaborated with various governmental agencies, including disaster task forces, officials assigned

to distribute food, law enforcement authorities, transport department officials and many more, which mutually benefited both parties in providing relief to migrants.

Collaboration with Local Organisations

The multiple challenges thrown up by the lockdown meant no CSO had the capacity to tackle the adversity of the situation single handedly, and collaboration with local organisations became the need of the hour, as discussed by the representatives interviewed for this study. The pandemic has created the space for many new alliances between civil society groups, humanitarian organisations, religious communities, and faith-based organisations. Such collaborations helped in efficient functioning and organisation of relief work and have the potential to develop the sector in terms of capacity building, mentoring and advocating effective mechanisms resulting from their efforts to counter the impact of the pandemic.

Collaboration with Local People

CSOs also collaborated with local people and many youth self-help groups. This helped CSOs in timely delivery of humanitarian assistance but also channelised the energy and potential of youth towards positive impact. In the long-term, collaborations with future leaders and locals can help in building public trust with communities, which is essential for CSO work.

Transnational Collaborations

Migrant and diaspora organisations became prominent transnational actors by collaborating with Indian and foreign governments in managing the impact of COVID-19 on migrant populations. Several diaspora organisations played an important role in information management, resource mobilisation, and providing other necessary logistics to facilitate the 10 phases of the [Vande Bharat Mission \(VBM\)](#) billed as one of the [largest civilian evacuations](#) of its kind during the pandemic.

Our report indicates how across these four types of collaborations, CSOs effectively helped migrant communities. They also helped in providing information related to quarantining and public

awareness of COVID-19. In the initial days of lockdown, they provided food, medical facilities, money for room rents and hygiene kits and later on organised transport and resting stops for returning migrants. There are numerous challenges migrant labours faced due to language, food, resources, networks and so on during the pandemic. The dynamism of CSOs in responding to these challenges indicate how they work in the social gaps created by national governments and multilateral agencies. The relief provided by CSOs was also immeasurable in providing psychological comfort when the air was rife with fear and insecurity to those affected.

Envisioning A Better Future

In terms of challenges, the closing of civic spaces and restrictions on movement hampered the potential of collaborations. A stagnant economy created a situation for many CSOs whose funding sources were either substantially depleted or stopped completely. Severe financial constraints can trigger a collapse of the third sector unless the underlying issues are addressed through institutional policy measures.

Through our research we observed many CSOs diversifying their areas of work so as to help a larger number of migrants through collaborative efforts. The crucial understanding that the pandemic is all about the “human versus virus” battle and the threat is common to all of us provided the moral premise for collaboration. Going forward, government efforts to strengthen CSO must look at how by the sheer force of collaborations we can create a more humane society.

[Migration, Pandemic and Responses from Civil Society Organisations: Lessons from Brazil and India](#), is a collaborative project that explores the role and work of civil society organisations working with migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil and India. Funded through Queen Mary's Global Policy Institute's Research England QR Strategic Research Priorities Fund, the project is led by [Professor Parvati Nair](#) from Queen Mary's School of Languages, Linguistics and Film and [Dr Marcia Vera Espinoza](#) from Queen Mary's School of Geography. The [project's report](#) will be launched on April 21st 2021.

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www.qmul.ac.uk/gpi/projects/migpanbrin/blog/items/pandemic-csos-and-collaboration---perspectives-from-india.html

The blog article has previously been published by Global Policy Institute of Queen Mary University of London on April 26, 2021. URL: [https://](https://www.qmul.ac.uk/gpi/projects/migpanbrin/blog/items/pandemic-csos-and-collaboration---perspectives-from-india.html)

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