



TOWARDS A CHANGING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY AGENDA

THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE



INDIAN COUNCIL OF WORLD AFFAIRS

SAPRU HOUSE, NEW DELHI

2025





Indian Council
of World Affairs

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ISBN : 978-93-83445-92-9

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CONTENTS

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Foreword	5
<i>Ms. Nutan Kapoor Mahawar</i>	
Rethinking the Age of International Migration and Mobility:	9
<i>Global Trends, Indian Futures</i>	
<i>Ms. Ambi</i>	
The Role of Youth Aspirations in Shaping India's Migration Policy	29
<i>Dr. Sugandha Nagpal</i>	
Female Migration from India: Trends and Continuing Challenges	47
<i>Dr. Amba Pande</i>	
Navigating the Tides: An Indian Perspective on Changing Migration Patterns - I	61
<i>Prof. S. Irudaya Rajan & Dr. Rakesh Ranjan</i>	
Navigating the Tides: An Indian Perspective on Changing Migration Patterns - II	79
<i>Dr. Rakesh Ranjan and Prof. S. Irudaya Rajan</i>	
Why Should India Bat for the “Whole-of-Migrants” in GCM:	97
Looking Back at the IMRF 2022 to Play a Determining Role in 2026	
<i>Prof. Binod Khadria</i>	
BIO-PROFILES	113



FOREWORD

Happening for millennia, migration is one of the oldest and defining human experiences. It is not just the story of border crossings or economic necessity, but a story of aspiration, learning, and exchange. In a globalised world, today migration and mobility represent a powerful cultural interface, especially when embedded in circular mobility frameworks. Migration and mobility allow for mutual growth, migrants gain exposure and experience abroad and bring back skills, capital, and reinvigorated ideas to their communities. In this sense, migrants are not just ‘workers’ or ‘students’, they are catalysts of innovation and social transformation at both the host and source countries.

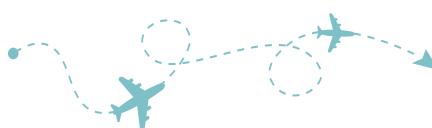
Yet today, the global migration debate is going through a churn, some of the very fundamentals are being questioned, and the popular narratives on migration and human mobility appear grim. In the wake of the geopolitical ferment that we witness today, with growing uncertainty in international relations, we find fear and suspicion towards migrants are becoming more widespread across the world, alongside the erosion of their well-being and dignity.

The dawn of the 21st century, with globalisation, promised interconnectedness and interdependence between countries and their economies, cultures, and populations. This involves the free flow of ideas, capital, goods, services, and people across borders. Ironically, as we enter the third decade of the century, we find that the very ethos of globalisation, i.e., towards openness, tolerance, and curiosity, has seen a dramatic shift. From rigid visa policies and securitised border controls to rising xenophobia, global migration governance today reflects a deep paradox: *migrants are needed, but are not always welcome*. These developments have created new layers of precarity for migrants, including students whose educational trajectories are disrupted, and professionals and the unskilled navigating unpredictable regulatory regimes.

Hence, the future of migration and mobility requires a fresh reimagination and reinterrogation of existing frameworks. Two major migrant destination regions draw our attention. Firstly, recent unsettling developments in the United States: the revocation of university rights to admit international students, premature visa

cancellations of students engaging in political protest, and recent deportations of Indian migrants. While such policy measures may appear sporadic or driven by President Trump's peculiar leadership, they may as well end up having long-term consequences on migration governance and larger narratives on migrants. These actions reflect a broader shift away from receptiveness and towards uncertainty and mistrust. On the other hand, even where migrants are seemingly welcomed, the motivations behind seeking them have changed. The current politics within the European Union illustrate this paradox sharply. Faced with shrinking populations and growing worker shortages, several EU Member States are actively seeking partnerships to recruit foreign workers including from India to sustain their key sectors. Yet, this clear economic need unfolds alongside the rise of far-right parties and anti-immigrant sentiment. The message is clear: *the EU does not want “migrants”, it is asking for “workers”. And the US is not even asking for workers.* This utilitarian framing is important to note because it devalues ‘migration’ and ‘migrants’, reducing them to a transactional category that serves immediate economic requirements without a commitment to long-term integration, rights, or belonging. The dichotomy between ‘migration’ and ‘mobility’, with ‘migration’ denoting a sense of permanency and ‘mobility’ more of short term movement, lacking long term commitments on the part of destination countries, couldn’t be starker as, for instance, in the case of EU.

Moving forward, the future of migration and mobility frameworks needs to disengage from a demand-supply lens and stop viewing people merely as ‘labour’. We must shift towards a more human-centred perspective on mobility that holds migrant well-being as key. This reinforces the idea that migration and mobility is fundamentally about people, their capabilities and their dignity, their aspirations and about cultural inter-face in a deeply inter-connected world. In this context, multilateral frameworks such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) are playing an important normative role. GCM is the first-ever UN-negotiated framework that offers governments a shared, non-binding roadmap, embedded in a human rights approach, with 23 objectives for governing migration cooperatively across the entire migration cycle. This includes origin, transit, destination, and return. The GCM provides a metric for benchmarking progress, notably through the International Migration Review Forum (with the



next scheduled for 2026), and mobilises technical and financial cooperation to strengthen migration infrastructures. Next editions of the Global Compact have to be more ambitious in line with changing realities to meet the requirements of stable and secure families especially across the developing world, focusing more on “mobility” than on “migration”.

Positioning India amidst the shifting global migration and mobility frameworks is both pertinent and timely. Taking charge of the emigration narrative, India’s focus must shift towards the model of “circular mobility”. For instance, an Indian may go abroad for two to three years to study or gain work experience. Once the purpose has been achieved, they return home to contribute locally and be with their family. After a few years, they might pursue another short-term opportunity overseas. This cycle repeats without requiring long-term emigration or permanent settlement. Such a model of “circular mobility” aligns with the broader vision of the “Global Workplace”, a framework endorsed by both Prime Minister Modi and External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar. In a globalised, interconnected world, circular mobility creates a balance between domestic needs and international requirements. It also strengthens open, pluralistic societies by promoting exchange, adaptability, and mutual understanding. As Chair of the Colombo Process (2024-2026), India has a unique opportunity to provide leadership from the Global South and place migrant well-being and equity at the centre of global dialogues.

Taking note of these trends and presenting an Indian voice in the international migration and mobility discourse, the Centre for Migration, Mobility and Diaspora Studies, the migration vertical of the Indian Council of World Affairs, is releasing this Special Publication entitled “Towards a Changing International Migration and Mobility Agenda in 2025: The Indian Perspective”. Through this volume, we aim to foreground a timely and unique Indian perspective on the evolving global discourse on migration and mobility.

The papers in this volume reflect the diversity and depth of international migration and mobility scholarship in India today. We bring together a range of migration experts who take the task of reimagining the international migration and mobility landscape in India. Ambi from ICWA provides an insight into the future of Indian migration and mobility trends by analysing whether India is undergoing a ‘mobility transition’. Dr. Sugandha Nagpal draws attention to youth aspirations, calling

for an ‘aspirational’ framework to address migrant needs in the pre- and post-migration phases. Prof. Amba Pande presents a gendered critique of international migration, voicing the lived realities of Indian women migrants, underscoring the need for greater visibility and protection of women migrants. Prof. S.I. Rajan and Dr. Rakesh Ranjan, in a two-part series, provide a long-range perspective on India’s international migration trajectories, from history to present, including a foresight for the future in the wake of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (the advent of Artificial Intelligence). Prof. Binod Khadria reflects on the Global Compact for Migration and the 2022 IMRF, presenting key areas for consideration for the upcoming IMRF Review next year. Taken together, these contributions enhance our understanding of migration and mobility as a dynamic and multifaceted process. The Special Publication also takes into account that the discourse on migration and mobility stands at a cusp today, with some issues covered in the Publication likely to gain ground in the near future with others simply fading away.

This Special Publication has been coordinated by Ambi, Consultant and Lead Researcher at the Centre for Migration, Mobility and Diaspora Studies, ICWA. It is our hope that this volume will support informed, forward-looking policy dialogue and inspire migration studies scholars in the country.

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July 2025



RETHINKING THE AGE OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

GLOBAL TRENDS,
INDIAN FUTURES

Ms. AMBI

The global landscape of international migration and mobility is undergoing a paradigmatic shift. Traditional frameworks, such as the push-pull theory, which once offered a direct explanation for why people move, now fall short in capturing the layered, often non-linear realities of contemporary mobility. Today, migration is shaped as much by structural inequalities and geopolitical churn as it is by pandemics, digital transformations, and the agency of migrants.



UNDERSTANDING THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

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This paper attempts to make sense of these overlapping changes through a critical, multi-scalar lens. Divided into three sections, it first examines the structural and discursive disruptions in global migration governance, paying particular attention to post-pandemic recovery, the digitalisation of work, and the rise of security-driven mobility regimes. The second section focuses on India, tracing how India's mobility governance is adapting to these shifts through the lens of circular migration, and possible projections on the so-called "migration hump." The

final section offers forward-looking reflections and policy suggestions rooted in dignity, intersectionality, and long-term thinking. The paper aims to initiate a deeper conversation on how migration can be understood and governed from an Indian perspective, with attention to both the migrant and the immobile, the aspirational and the ambivalent, the national and the transnational.

PART I THE WORLDLY VIEW

THE COVID-19: A STRESS TEST FOR GLOBAL MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

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Although already forgotten in key policy debates, the COVID-19 pandemic marked an unprecedented rupture in global migration and mobility, and we find that the world is still recovering from its long-term effects. During the pandemic, travel came to a halt, workspaces and universities shifted online, triggering reverse migration, borders closed abruptly, and the assumptions underpinning international migration were tested as never before. For the first time in decades, the global migrant stock stagnated: UN estimates suggest that

More than stagnation of migratory flows and disruption of the supply chains, the COVID-19 pandemic deeply intensified xenophobic sentiments and fear of the 'other'.

global migration growth slowed by around 2 million in 2020.¹ Temporary flows also plummeted: working holidaymaker entries fell by 58% and intra-company transfers by 53%. The exception was seasonal agricultural labour, which declined only by 9% and even increased in countries like the United States and Poland, underscoring its essential status.²

More than stagnation of migratory flows and disruption of the supply chains, the COVID-19 pandemic deeply intensified xenophobic sentiments and fear of the 'other'. The rise in racist attacks against Chinese students across the world stands as a stark reminder of this shift. The pandemic planted seeds of suspicion and self-doubt toward anything foreign or unfamiliar. It emboldened far-right, anti-immigrant narratives that portrayed migrants as carriers of fatal diseases, legitimizing

exclusionary rhetoric under the guise of public health. In this sense, the pandemic served as a stress test for the very idea of 'open borders'. Ironically, despite being among the most vulnerable to health risks, migrants were repeatedly scapegoated and marginalised.

Closer home, India, with one of the world's largest overseas diasporas, faced immense structural challenges. Yet, in a historic move, the Ministry of External Affairs successfully facilitated the movement of over 30 million citizens, including migrant workers and students, under emergency schemes of the Vande Bharat Mission and Air Bubble arrangements.³ However, the experience revealed that while facilitating return was an administrative and logistical triumph, the more enduring and complex challenge lay in planning

- 1 Nations, United. 2021. 'Growth of International Migration Slowed by 27%, or 2 Million Migrants, Due to COVID-19, Says UN'. United Nations. United Nations. 2021. <https://www.un.org/en/desa/growth-international-migration-slowed-27-or-2-million-migrants-due-covid-19-says-un>.
- 2 OECD. 2021. 'International Migration Outlook 2021'. OECD. 2021. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/international-migration-outlook-2021_29f23e9d-en.html.
- 3 Rajya, Sabha. n.d. 'Question No.1822 Indians Brought Back Under Vande Bharat Mission'. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Accessed 27 June 2025. https://mea.gov.in/rajyasabha.htm?dtl/34972/Question_No1822_Indians_Brought_Back_Under_Vande_Bharat_Mission.



COVID-19 pandemic served as an unprecedented stress test for global migration governance, exposing deep structural inequities, policy blind spots, and the fragility of mobility systems. From global stagnation in migrant flows to India's large-scale repatriation efforts, the crisis underscored the urgent need to build resilient, inclusive, and future-proof migration and reintegration frameworks.

for reintegration which includes addressing the economic, social, and psychological needs of returnees. In the absence of a pre-existing national strategy for return and reintegration, gaps became evident. For instance, many students repatriated from Ukraine and Central Asia eventually returned to these regions to complete their education, despite the escalation of the Ukraine-Russia war. When asked why, one final-year student noted, “I was expecting something like: we complete our degrees from our parent university, then appear for the FMGE examination in 2023, crack it, and start our medical career in a natural way.” Instead, students were given the option to invest four more years in the completion of their degree in India, which is almost equivalent to another MBBS degree.⁴

Hence, COVID-19 pandemic served as an unprecedented stress test for global migration governance, exposing deep structural inequities, policy blind spots, and the fragility of mobility systems. From global stagnation in migrant flows to India's large-scale repatriation efforts, the crisis underscored the urgent need to build resilient, inclusive, and future-proof migration and reintegration frameworks.

POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY AND HEIGHTENED DISPARITIES

During the pandemic, migration studies experts posed a provocative question: *has the ‘age of migration’ ended?*⁵ Some observers note that the post-WWII boom in human mobility had already plateaued by the 2010s,

⁴ April 2023, Shuriah Niazi 05. n.d. ‘Supreme Court Allows Medical Students a Second Chance.’ University World News. Accessed 27 June 2025. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20230405135220186>.

⁵ Gamlen, Alan. 2020. ‘COVID-19 and the Transformation of Migration and Mobility Globally – Migration and Mobility after the 2020 Pandemic: The End of an Age?’ IOM. <https://publications.iom.int/books/covid-19-and-transformation-migration-and-mobility-globally-migration-and-mobility-after-2020>.

During the pandemic, migration studies experts posed a provocative question: has the ‘age of migration’ ended? Some observers note that the post-WWII boom in human mobility had already plateaued by the 2010s, and the pandemic’s border closures further signalled that this era of expanding migration might be ending. It may be useful to note here that the number of international migrants still remains at 3.7 % a modest increase from 2.9% in 1990.

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It remains debatable whether we are witnessing a collapse of global mobility or a transformation. While international mobility has resumed since 2022, the post-pandemic recovery has been far from uniform and uneven across regions. Migration to high-income regions rebounded rapidly in high-demand sectors. Student mobility and digital work expanded, supported

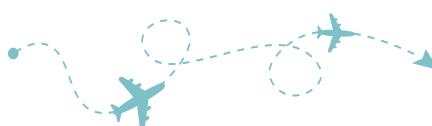
by visa flexibilities and growing global demand for talent. However, the resumption of mobility for lower- and semi-skilled workers from the Global South, including India, has been slower, constrained by persistent restrictions and the stratified nature of migration governance.⁷

Thus, instead of signalling the end of mobility, we observe that post-COVID period has ushered in new forms of circulation, adaptability, and strategic risk- diversification. Rather than an absolute end to voluntary migration, we may be seeing a reconfiguration of mobility, potentially smaller, more ‘selective flows’ instead of mass

Rather than an absolute end to voluntary migration, we may be seeing a reconfiguration of mobility, potentially smaller, more ‘selective flows’ instead of mass migration.

6 Nations, United. n.d. ‘International Migration’. United Nations. United Nations. Accessed 25 June 2025. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/migration>.

7 IOM. 2024. ‘Interactive World Migration Report 2024’. 2024. <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/msite/wmr-2024-interactive/> (Chapter 9).



As economist George Borjas once summarised this ‘selectivity’ mindset in his work, “We wanted workers, but we got people instead”, a statement that encapsulates how receiving countries seek to fill short-term labour shortages without the long-term social or political responsibility that comes with migration. This ‘selectivity’ reinforces unequal power relations and limits mobility to those deemed economically convenient.

migration.⁸ For instance, labour-dependent countries like the Gulf states, Europe, and Southeast Asian economies continue to rely structurally on foreign workers, an interdependence laid bare during COVID-19 when sectors like agriculture, construction, and care faced severe shortages. Yet, this reliance is not uniform or unconditional, it reflects the increasingly stratified nature of migration governance. Destination countries actively curate their labour markets based on skill levels, sectoral needs, or perceived social compatibility, welcoming some categories of migrants while excluding others through restrictive visa pathways, skill filters, or ambiguous security concerns. As economist George Borjas once summarised this

‘selectivity’ mindset in his work, “We wanted workers, but we got people instead”, a statement that encapsulates how receiving countries seek to fill short-term labour shortages without the long-term social or political responsibility that comes with migration.⁹ This ‘selectivity’ reinforces unequal power relations and limits mobility to those deemed economically convenient.

Yet this transition towards ‘selective flows’ presents strategic concerns for major sending countries like India. In an increasingly hierarchical global labour market, India must chart its own emigration strategy, one that builds dignified opportunities across all skill levels, negotiates equitable mobility partnerships, and ensures that outbound migration aligns

⁸ Sigona, Nando. 2020. ‘Migration after the Pandemic: Interview with Alan Gamlen’. Postcards From... (blog). 17 June 2020. <https://nandosigona.info/2020/06/17/migration-after-the-pandemic-interview-with-alan-gamlen/>.

⁹ Harvard Kennedy School. 2017. ‘We Wanted Workers: Unraveling the Immigration Narrative’. 9 January 2017. <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/faculty-research/policy-topics/globalization/we-wanted-workers-unraveling-immigration-narrative>.

With the Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024 currently in the pipeline, this is a critical moment to embed a forward-looking emigration strategy. The Bill must acknowledge that if destination countries refuse to ensure dignity, rights, and safety for our workers, then India must reassess its decision to send them.

with national interest and worker welfare. With the Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024 currently in the pipeline, this is a critical moment to embed a forward-looking emigration strategy. The Bill must acknowledge that if destination countries refuse to ensure dignity, rights, and safety for our workers, then India must reassess its decision to send them. This is not merely a matter of managing returns or reintegration, it is about asserting India's agency in defining the terms of worker mobility, setting ethical thresholds for migration partnerships, and refusing to be passive in a system increasingly

driven by selective flows and unequal bargaining power.

TOWARDS AN ERA OF NEW MOBILITY?

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Imagine a young mother who left a high-paying job 14 years ago and moved abroad with her husband to raise her child in a foreign land. Now she hopes to return to the workforce but faces a daunting gap: her skills feel outdated, and even entry-level jobs demand five years of recent experience. What can she do to make things work for her in a fast-changing labour market? In the post-pandemic world, one emerging answer that is gaining

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acceptance is remote work¹⁰. Remote work has opened new avenues for those traditionally sidelined from the labour market. Caregivers and stay-at-home parents like her, people with disabilities, and those experiencing economic strains can now access jobs from home that were previously out of reach. Working from ‘out of office’ is a flexible model that eliminates commutes and rigid 9 to 5 schedules, enabling many more to work than before. By removing geographic and physical barriers, the widespread shift to remote work has allowed talent to contribute regardless of location or life circumstances.

Remote work has also redefined mobility for high-skilled professionals. In the IT and corporate sectors, workers can take up jobs abroad without leaving their home country. A new generation of workers is thus being created, who blur the traditional categories of “high/semi-less” skilled and showcase a range of transferable skills. Remote work has also led to the popularity of new non-traditional occupations, such as freelance web developers, educators,

digital marketers, and content creators, reshaping the geography of labour without requiring relocation.

Global digital labour markets have surged, as companies in high-income countries outsource work to remote professionals in lower- and middle-income countries. According to the ILO, much of this digitally mediated labour is outsourced from high-income countries, such as the US, UK, Germany, and Australia, to lower- and middle-income countries, including India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and (pre-war) Ukraine.¹¹ The unmooring of skilled jobs from physical offices gives workers in emerging economies access to opportunities previously beyond reach, though often at lower pay and with fewer protections than their counterparts in rich countries. In effect, a borderless market for work is emerging, one where the geography of work is no longer defined solely by borders but by bandwidth and connectivity.

Interestingly, governments are also responding to this new era of ‘virtual mobility’. More than 50 countries have introduced remote work visas as a new

¹⁰ Remote work is an umbrella term, here it is used to refer to the practice of performing job responsibilities from a location outside a traditional office setting, often from home, using digital technologies to stay connected.

¹¹ ILO. 2022. ‘Digitalization and Employment, A Review | International Labour Organization’, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/digitalization-and-employment-review>.

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immigration category, inviting foreign remote workers to reside temporarily without local employment. From Estonia and Barbados to Thailand and the UAE, these visa programs seek to attract mobile professionals, boost local economies, and tap into the growing phenomenon of the “White Lotus” effect¹², i.e., a privileged cohort of people who work from anywhere. This is creating a new class of transnational workers who engage in global labour markets without long-term immigration.¹³

Yet, remote work is not a universal equaliser. It brings its own exclusions: who gets to be a ‘remote worker’ and who does not? Workers remain tied to platform algorithms, opaque rating systems, and employer’s demands across time zones. They face precarity, lack social protections, and often experience isolation. Hence, remote workers are not a monolithic category,

while promising flexibility, it comes with its own hidden hierarchies, barriers and uneven geographies of access and dignity.

FORTRESS THINKING AND THE NEW SECURITISATION OF MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

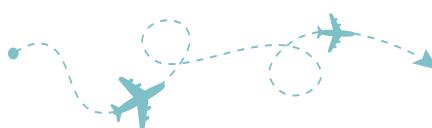
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Even as the world redefines mobility in the wake of the pandemic, another trend runs parallel: the hardening of migration governance. In several destination countries, migration is no longer managed solely through development or labour lenses, but rather it is increasingly governed through frameworks of national security, deterrence, and control. This shift reflects not just administrative tightening but a deeper ideological turn toward protectionism.

Two troubling patterns stand out. First, the increasing weaponisation

12 The “White Lotus” effect refers to the phenomenon where affluent remote workers relocate to lower-income countries, enjoying tourism and work by indulging in local luxuries at low costs while remaining economically and socially detached from the host society, as popularised by the recent show “The White Lotus”.

13 Snipes, Susan. 2024. ‘65 Countries Offering Digital Nomad Visas in 2025’. Remote People. 12 June 2024. <https://remotepeople.com/countries-with-digital-nomad-visas/>.



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of immigration law to discipline migrants and suppress dissent. In the United States, the “Catch and Revoke” programme reportedly used AI surveillance to track the political activity of visa holders. In recent months, over 300 international students have been issued deportation notices for participating in peaceful campus protests, signalling how dissent is being recast as a threat to national order, and migration status used as leverage to silence voices.¹⁴

Europe mirrors this pattern of securitised governance. Immigration raids targeting undocumented migrants are now routine across public spaces, from buses and parks to nail salons and factories.¹⁵ The 2023 EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, endorsed by a majority of Member States, grants sweeping powers to regulate internal mobility, expedite deportations, and fast-track asylum procedures, often at the cost of legal safeguards. The proposed Common European System for Returns includes the possibility

The 2023 EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, endorsed by a majority of Member States, grants sweeping powers to regulate internal mobility, expedite deportations, and fast-track asylum procedures, often at the cost of legal safeguards. The proposed Common European System for Returns includes the possibility of ‘return hubs’ located outside EU borders, raising serious questions about due process and extraterritorial accountability.

¹⁴ *The Economic Times*. 2025. ‘No Warning, Just an Email from Donald Trump: Hundreds of International Students Ordered to Leave the U.S over Campus Activism’, 29 March 2025. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/us/no-warning-just-an-email-from-donald-trump-hundreds-of-international-students-ordered-to-leave-the-u-s-over-campus-activism/articleshow/119715764.cms?from=mdr>

¹⁵ Platform for Undocumented Workers. June, 2025. ‘The Migration Papers’. Immigration Raids Are Happening in Europe Too (blog). Accessed 25 June 2025.

of ‘return hubs’ located outside EU borders, raising serious questions about due process and extraterritorial accountability. Critics argue these measures erode legal safeguards and bolster a fortress mentality in the face of global displacement and ongoing crises.

Second is the shifting role of international organisations between facilitation and enforcement. In an unprecedented move earlier this May, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), announced its support for the U.S. government’s voluntary return programmes, raising questions about the neutrality of multilateral actors in an increasingly securitised policy environment.¹⁶

Yet despite these increasingly harsh regimes, irregular migration persists. People continue to move through dangerous journeys, not because they are reckless, but because the desire for dignity, safety, and opportunity remains powerful. These restrictive policies rest on a narrow definition of the “ideal migrant”, one who is skilled, compliant and practically invisible. In

doing so, states ignore the structural drivers of mobility and instead deepen hostility against those already on the margins. What we are witnessing is not merely border control, it is the slow erosion of international norms and the reframing of migration as a threat rather than a shared human condition.

PART II AN INDIAN VIEW

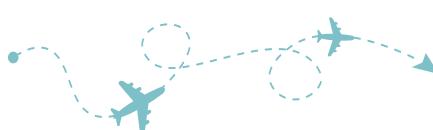
IS INDIA ON THE MIGRATION HUMP? BETWEEN THEORY AND REALITY¹⁷

Drawing our focus closer home, there is an urgent need to better understand the international migration and mobility trends emerging from India. Doing so is critical to developing evidence-based policies and building a stronger Indian voice in global migration governance. One useful framework to interpret India’s evolving position in the global mobility landscape is the *Mobility Transition Theory*, as originally proposed by Wilbur Zelinsky (1971)¹⁸, further

16 International Organisation for Migration. 2025. ‘IOM Spokesperson: Statement On Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) of Migrants in the United States | International Organization for Migration’. 5 December 2025. <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-spokesperson-statement-assisted-voluntary-return-avr-migrants-united-states>.

17 Note: This section offers metatheoretical reflections on India’s potential migration trajectories. These are not empirically modelled predictions, and a more data-driven assessment lies outside the scope of this paper.

18 Wilbur Zelinsky. 1971. ‘The Hypothesis of the Mobility Transition’. *Geographical Review* 61 (2): 219–49. <https://doi.org/10.2307/213996>.



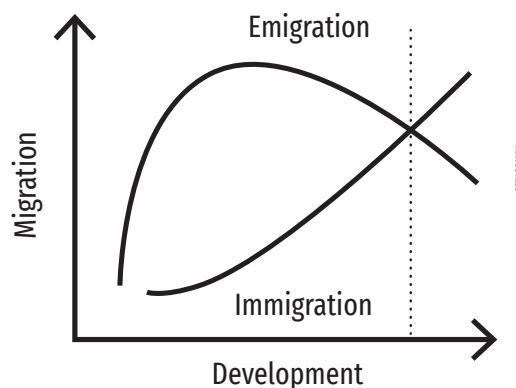
According to the Mobility Transition Theory framework, societies undergo predictable shifts in migration patterns as they experience broader economic and demographic transitions. In the early stages of this transition, countries typically see an overall rise and diversification in both internal and international migration. Over time, as development advances and the country reaches a certain income threshold (typically around USD 7,000-8,000 per capita GDP PPP), outward migration peaks and gradually declines, marking the so-called migration hump. Emigration tends to decline then and is gradually replaced by immigration, marking a shift toward becoming destination countries.



developed by Skeldon (1990)¹⁹, and recently by de Haas (2010)²⁰, Clemens (2014)²¹ and Schewel et. al (2025).

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of underdevelopment but rather a reflection of deeper structural changes in society, such as urbanisation, the spread of wage labour, and the concentration of economic growth in specific regions.²³



Graph 1: Migration Transition²⁴

India, with a GDP per capita (PPP) of USD 10,166 in 2023, finds itself at a complex juncture. Although it ranks among the world's largest economies by absolute GDP, its per capita income remains low by global standards, placing it within the

- 19 Ronald Skeldon, Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, and Scientific Council For Government Policy. 2009. 'Migration and Development: Contested Consequences'. In Doing Good or Doing Better, edited by Monique Kremer, Peter van Lieshout, and Robert Went, 321–40. Development Policies in a Globalising World. Amsterdam University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46n0g6.18>.
- 20 Hein de Haas: 227–64. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2009.00804.x>.
- 21 Michael A. Clemens, 2014. "Does development reduce migration?" Chapters, in: Robert E.B. Lucas (ed.), International Handbook on Migration and Economic Development, chapter 6, pages 152-185, Edward Elgar Publishing.
- 22 Michael Clemens. 2014. 'Does Development Reduce Migration? - Working Paper 359', March. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/does-development-reduce-migration-working-paper-359>.
- 23 Hein De Haas. 2020. 'Hein de Haas: Why Development Will Not Stop Migration'. Hein de Haas (blog). 7 February 2020. <https://heindehaas.blogspot.com/2020/02/why-development-will-not-stop-migration.html>.
- 24 Hein de Haas. 2010. 'Migration Transitions: A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry into the Developmental Drivers of International Migration'. Paper 24. DEMIG Project Paper No. 1. International Migration Institute, University of Oxford.



Under the *Viksit Bharat @2047* vision, the government has articulated a forward-looking agenda to position India as a “Global Workplace,” where Indians contribute to the global economy without necessarily settling abroad.

World Bank’s lower-middle-income category.²⁵ Growth projections under the government’s *Viksit Bharat @2047* agenda aim to significantly boost per capita income and global competitiveness, further raising questions and adding complexity about how India’s migration trajectory might evolve.

However, applying the ‘migration hump’ framework to India yields no simple answers. Unlike traditional transitions observed in the West, India’s trajectory is shaped by persistent internal inequalities, an expanding youth population, urban-rural divides, and state-led ambitions to move towards upward growth. The data suggests that emigration remains steady but modest, rising from 0.8% in 2000 to 1.2% in 2015, far from a dramatic peak. Moreover, the causal link that an income rise leads to reduced

emigration may not hold uniformly across contexts, such as India.

Hence, looking ahead, in the short term, India may likely to witness a continued rise in outward migration, particularly through circular, skill-based, and temporary labour flows. This pattern is not incidental but rather actively shaped by Indian’s strategic orientation in emigration policy. Under the *Viksit Bharat @2047* vision, the government has articulated a forward-looking agenda to position India as a “Global Workplace,” where Indians contribute to the global economy without necessarily settling abroad. This circular vision is backed by concrete efforts: investments in large-scale skilling programmes, and an emphasis on ‘mobility partnerships’ with countries. These flows are likely to concentrate in healthcare, IT, education, and construction sectors, where Indian workers have proven

²⁵ Note: The use of GDP per capita (PPP) to assess India’s position on the migration hump follows comparative migration studies by de Haas (2010) and Clemens (2014), who suggest that emigration declines above a USD 7,000–8,000 income threshold. These indicators are aggregate and heuristic—not predictive—especially given India’s internal disparities and complex mobility drivers.

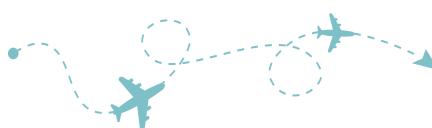
Differentiating voluntary immobility (choosing to stay) from involuntary immobility (being unable to leave) can help policymakers better assess aspirations across social groups and avoid projecting mobility as the sole path to empowerment. India's migration future, therefore, must be read not just through who moves but also who stays, and why.

competitiveness and sustained demand. Thereby, workers may contribute and upskill themselves in these key sectors and beyond and return to contribute towards 'Viksit Bharat'.

In the long term, India is unlikely to follow the classic migration transition trajectory of becoming a net immigration country, as seen in many high-income contexts in the West. However, rather than experiencing a sharp decline in outward migration, India is more likely to sustain high levels of strategic, circular emigration, where individuals go abroad temporarily for work or study, return home and go again, repeating the cycle. At the same time, India's ambitions under the *Viksit Bharat @2047* agenda to become a "Global Workplace" suggest a gradual opening to inbound mobility as well, particularly in niche sectors like higher education, digital innovation, and skill collaboration. Whether India ultimately transitions

into a destination country will depend not just on income growth, but on how equitably economic development translates into decent jobs, regional parity, and inclusive, gender-responsive opportunities. In this sense, the so-called migration hump may not manifest as a sharp turn, but as a negotiated, uneven curve shaped by deliberate domestic choices and India's evolving role in global migration governance.

At the same time, it is essential to guard against an overfixation on mobility itself, what scholars call the "mobility bias." Not all individuals aspire to move, and those who do may lack the means to do so. Recent research by Schewel and Fransen (2022), including fieldwork in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, underscores this complexity: many young people, especially women, rural youth, and those from poorer households cite family obligations, access to education, and attachment to land as reasons for



staying.²⁶ Differentiating voluntary immobility (choosing to stay) from involuntary immobility (being unable to leave) can help policymakers better assess aspirations across social groups and avoid projecting mobility as the sole path to empowerment. India's migration future, therefore, must be read not just through who moves but also who stays, and why.

PART III REFLECTIONS

RETHINKING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY GOVERNANCE FROM THE INDIAN LENS

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Currently, India stands at an inflection point. It is increasingly courted by destination countries for skilled labour, while also asserting itself as a key shaper of norms and narratives in regional and global migration dialogues. In this context, any forward-looking migration policy must steer away from reactive measures and instead invest in long-term thinking. Drawing from the themes discussed across the paper, this section offers

a set of reflections that can guide more inclusive and future-ready governance on international migration and mobility.

First, the dominant narratives around migration continue to oscillate between crisis and opportunity, often leaving little room to engage with the complexity of migrant experiences. As discussed earlier, global responses to migration have largely veered towards deterrence, control, and selective entry. Against this backdrop, it is crucial that regional and multilateral processes embed a more constructive conversation on mobility, one that recognises migration as a process linked not just to economic flows, but to dignity, aspiration, and belonging. India, is well-positioned to champion such a shift by placing migrant-centric perspectives and migrant well-being at the heart of negotiations in key forums like the International Migration Review Forum of the Global Compact for Migration.

Second, as India actively pursues labour mobility agreements and skill partnerships, it is essential to examine the type of circularity being

²⁶ Kerilyn Schewel, and Sonja Fransen. 'Who Prefers to Stay? Voluntary Immobility among Youth in Ethiopia, India, and Vietnam'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 19 (16 December 2022): 4457–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2092085>.

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As India actively pursues labour mobility agreements and skill partnerships, it is essential to examine the type of circularity being facilitated. If circular migration is to be a meaningful policy model, it must be ethically grounded, socially responsive and mutually respected. Pre-departure systems, social security portability, and reintegration plans must be embedded as core pillars in bilateral arrangements.

facilitated. If circular migration is to be a meaningful policy model, it must be ethically grounded, socially responsive and mutually respected. Pre-departure systems, social security portability, and reintegration plans must be embedded as core pillars in bilateral arrangements. This also requires greater attention to intra-country variations during implementation: What does circularity mean for a nurse from Kerala versus a construction worker from Bihar? Or for a young woman joining the care economy abroad? The state's role must extend to ensuring protection and dignity across the mobility cycle.

Third, not all mobility is inherently empowering. As explored in the Indian section, there is a need to resist the mobility bias, the idea that migration

is always aspirational or desirable. Several young people, especially women, rural youth, and those from poorer households, may wish to stay due to care obligations, attachment to land, or simply because they see no value in migrating under exploitative terms. Policy must do better in differentiating between voluntary and involuntary immobility and ensure that staying is seen as a valid choice, not a personal failure. Just as those on the move require support, so do those who choose to stay, the so-called 'left-behind', including caregivers, children, the elderly and communities who navigate the psycho-social consequences of migration. Ensuring access to social protection, education, and healthcare for these 'left-behind'

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Just as those on the move require support, so do those who choose to stay, the so-called 'left-behind', including caregivers, children, the elderly and communities who navigate the psycho-social consequences of migration. Ensuring access to social protection, education, and healthcare for these 'left-behind' families must be a central component of any responsive emigration policy.

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Fourth, much of our migration policymaking remains disconnected from evidence-based research. If India is to take charge of shaping global migration norms on its own terms, it must first invest in developing a robust intellectual ecosystem at home. This includes building more dedicated migration studies programmes, supporting interdisciplinary research centres, think-tanks and creating public data infrastructure to track changing trends and qualitative data. As the pace of mobility accelerates,

understanding who is moving, where, why and under what conditions becomes foundational.

Taken together, these reflections are not prescriptive roadmaps, but an invitation to reimagine how migration is understood and governed. By investing in long-term thinking, upholding migrant rights, and anchoring policy in ground realities, India can help chart a more humane and responsive global migration agenda. The road ahead is neither linear nor uncontested, but it is ours to shape.



THE ROLE OF YOUTH ASPIRATIONS IN SHAPING INDIA'S MIGRATION POLICY

Dr. SUGANDHA NAGPAL

There is a Western bias in the understanding of migration governance, as something that is located squarely in the developed world.

INTRODUCTION

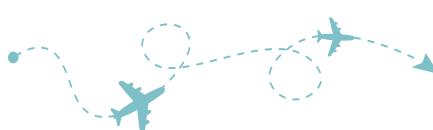
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The push for migration governance is typically situated in destination countries wherein the objective is to better manage migration to reduce irregular migration and ensure that migration is filling labour gaps and facilitating economic growth. This is also reflected in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) wherein 7 (objectives 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) of the 23 objectives focus on reducing different dimensions of irregular migration. In addition, there is a Western bias in the understanding of migration governance, as something that is located squarely in the developed world²⁷. Debates about the merits of multiculturalism, models of migrant integration and limits of

cultural freedoms dominate public discourses and policy discussions in traditional migrant receiving countries like UK, Canada, Australia and United States. These discussions preclude a transnational framework that would consider the lives and motivations of migrants in the pre-migration phase and the role of the sending countries in facilitating regular migration. However, if the objective of migration governance is to facilitate migration lead development and even reduce irregular migration, overlooking how migration is pursued and understood in the sending country is counterintuitive. In addition, in sending countries combatting irregular migration entails moving beyond a largely ineffective legalistic approach and engaging with the social and cultural reasons why people engage in irregular migration.

If the objective of migration governance is to facilitate migration lead development and even reduce irregular migration, overlooking how migration is pursued and understood in the sending country is counterintuitive.

²⁷ Anna Triandafyllidou. "Decentering the study of migration governance: A radical view." *Geopolitics* 27, no. 3 (2022): 811-825.



The narratives of young men who were recently deported from the US depicts the shame they feel on not fulfilling successful migration, a central rite of passage for young Punjabi men.

For instance, in rural Punjab young men often engage in risky forms of migration to demonstrate successful masculinity. The narratives of young men who were recently deported from the US depicts the shame they feel on not fulfilling successful migration, a central rite of passage for young Punjabi men²⁸. Since India is the prime migrant sending country, it is valuable to examine how India is engaging with migration governance and how do its migration policies compare with the experiences and concerns of migrating Indian youth.

It is only by understanding how migrants navigate the processes of migration in the pre and post migration phases that we can address the challenges of migration governance. The GCM advocates for a whole of

society approach and placing the voices and experiences of migrants at the centre of policy development. However, in its current framework, the GCM centralizes migrants through their protection from discrimination and right to “decent work”. While upholding the protection and rights of migrants is an important objective, this framework does not allow us to speak to the varied experiences and navigations of migrants, which often entails aspirations and strategies for class mobility. Thus, centralising the experiences of migrants entails expanding our framework in alignment with complex migrant realities. This is an important corrective, which will produce more responsive migration policies in the sending and receiving country. In this paper

The GCM advocates for a whole of society approach and placing the voices and experiences of migrants at the centre of policy development.

²⁸ Krishan Murari and Sagrika Kissu. “A hunt for dunki agents in Punjab, Haryana is on. FIRs, raids, demand for lost money” *The Print*, February 7 2025, <https://theprint.in/ground-reports/hunt-dunki-agents-punjab-haryana-firs-raids-demand-lost-money/2483785/>

As the country with the youngest population in the world, India is being actively courted by destination countries to fill their labour gaps and facilitate international student migration.

I decentre migration governance in two ways; by focusing on India, a prime migrant sending country and applying the migrant centred framework of aspirations. I argue, that as a prime sending country, India must supplement its migrant rights framework with an understanding of migrant aspirations for social inclusion and class mobility. This will allow India to set important global standards by engaging with the question of how migrant sending countries can facilitate their migrants' long term development and well-being.

MIGRATION POLICY IN INDIA

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India has had a long history of international migration. Indians have been moving abroad as labour migrants since the 1800s. The

pathways and destinations have evolved from indentured labourers to Europe, to construction workers in the Gulf and IT professionals to Silicon Valley²⁹. India has the world's largest diaspora with 15.85 million Indians living and working around the world³⁰. India also receives the highest remittances in the world. In recent times there has also been a surge of Indians migrating abroad as students. As of 2023 there were 13.2 lakh Indian students currently studying abroad. The top destination for student migrants are USA, Canada, Gulf countries, UK and Australia³¹. According to the Ministry of External Affairs of India, 2,500,000 students have moved out of the country for studies between 2016 and 2021³². In addition, as the country with the youngest population in the world, India is being actively

29 Ruchi Singh. "Origin of World's Largest Migrant Population, India Seeks to Leverage Immigration," *Migration Policy Institute*, March 9, 2022, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/india-migration-country-profile#:~:text=India%20has%20long%20been%20a,and%20their%20places%20of%20destination>.

30 Keshav Padmanabhan. "MEA working on new law to replace Emigration Act of 1983, says Parliamentary report" *The Print*, February 4, 2025, <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/mea-working-on-new-law-to-replace-emigration-act-of-1983-says-parliamentary-report/2479113/>

31 Irudaya Rajan and Rakesh Ranjan Kumar. "India's Great Student Out-Migration" World Bank Blogs, September 14, 2023, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/peoplemove/indiastudentoutmigration-0>

32 Nikhil Rampal and Reeti Agarwal. "Few jobs, bad pay, so why should we stay? Behind Punjab youngsters' rush for IELTS, migration" *The Print*, February 19, 2022, <https://theprint.in/india/few-jobs-bad-pay-so-why-should-we-stay-behind-punjab-youngsters-rush-for-ielts-migration/837041/>



As of 2022, more than 700,000 undocumented Indians were living in the United States, making them the third-largest group, behind Mexicans and Salvadorans.

courted by destination countries to fill their labour gaps and facilitate international student migration. Given India's history and unique positionality, Indian youth harbour strong aspirations to migrate. In many cases Indian youth's aspirations to migrate surpass their resources and ability to migrate leading to several negative outcomes such as withdrawal from the local economy, falling into substance abuse and opting for risky migration routes. Receiving countries like the US would like India to focus on quelling illegal migration. According to the Pew Research Centre, India is one of the top sources of illegal immigration to the United States. As of 2022, more than 700,000 undocumented Indians were living in the United States, making them the third-largest group, behind Mexicans and Salvadorans³³. However, as India sets its own agenda on migration, it need not prioritize the concerns of receiving countries.

But rather, reconstruct her migration policies based on domestic priorities and concerns. I argue that attending to how young people are navigating their aspirations for migration including the challenges they face, in India and in their initial settlement period abroad are a useful starting point for redefining India's migration policy.

India's approach to migration has fluctuated between ad hoc measures and an incremental approach that is focused on inter-governmental and bilateral relations. In India, the most important migration policy instrument is Emigration Act 1983, which seeks to regulate the emigration of Indian workers on a contractual basis and safeguard their interests³⁴. This Act is restricted to 18 countries and applies to emigrants that have less than class 10 education. This Act's provisions mainly pertain to ensuring the licensing of recruitment agencies

³³ Suhasini Raj. "India, a Big Source of Illegal Migration, Hopes to Navigate the Trump Storm" *The New York Times*, January 26, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/26/world/asia/india-illegal-immigration-trump.html>

³⁴ Meera Sethi, Debolina Kundu and Arvind Kumar Pandey. "India-EU Migration and Mobility: Flows and Patterns" (India-EU Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility, EU-India Cooperation and Dialogue on Migration and Mobility ICMPD, 2021).

The Indian government is also considering enacting a new law, the 'Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024. This proposed legislation seeks to facilitate the circular mobility of those migrating abroad for employment purposes.

to avoid unscrupulous activity, but it fails to address other problems encountered by migrants during the recruitment process like clarity over employment terms, over charging and cheating by sub agents and the lack of provisions for conducting due diligence of employers³⁵. The Indian government is currently working on new legislation that is better attuned to the contemporary reality of migration from India and addresses shortcomings of the previous Act³⁶. It has been suggested that the current version of the Act, Draft Emigration Bill 2021 currently being debated in parliament must fix recruitment services charges in line with market realities, aim at strengthening and welfare and protection of Indian migrants and develop responses to address the long-term needs of migrant workers and

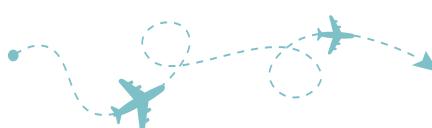
their families³⁷. The Indian government is also considering enacting a new law, the 'Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024. This proposed legislation seeks to facilitate the circular mobility of those migrating abroad for employment purposes³⁸. The available draft of Emigration Act 2021 currently being debated in parliament includes extensive provisions for preparing and safeguarding migrants. It emphasizes preparing migrants through upskilling, predeparture orientation programmes and provision of insurance., Predeparture orientation programs for emigrants is recognized as the most effective way to address the problems encountered by migrant workers in the post-migration phase. Currently, while not being mandated by the Emigration Act 1983, pre-departure orientations are conducted

35 Didar A. Singh, and S. Irudaya Rajan. Politics of migration: Indian emigration in a globalized world. (Routledge India, 2015).

36 Keshav Padmanbhan. "MEA working on new law to replace Emigration Act of 1983"

37 S.K. Sasikumar, and Z. Hussain. "Managing International Labour Migration from India: Policies and Perspectives" (ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series, 2008).

38 PTI. "New law in the works for safe, orderly migration". *The Print*, 6 February 2025, <https://theprint.in/india/new-law-in-the-works-for-safe-orderly-migration/2482212/>



The Draft Emigration Act 2021 also seeks to prevent illegal emigration, irregular recruitment procedures and misuse of visas. There is also a focus on return migrants and ways of harnessing their skills and integrating them into society.

by government recruitment agencies for certain pathways such as nursing. The Draft Emigration Act 2021 also seeks to prevent illegal emigration, irregular recruitment procedures and misuse of visas. There is also a focus on return migrants and ways of harnessing their skills and integrating them into society. The Bill recognizes the need to map labour skills at the State and Union Territory levels and establish nodal authorities such as an Emigrants Welfare Committee to oversee and address migrant grievances and a resource centre which offers a helpline, walk-in counters to receive grievances directly from Indian workers, provide counselling services and monitor grievance petitions. Moreover, the Draft Bill mentions and reaffirms India's impetus to establish bilateral agreements with destination countries.

These measures centre on the idea of protecting migrants through provision of information and creation of accessible support systems. This is an important step towards addressing information asymmetry and reducing migrant vulnerability. As migrants do encounter challenges at different stages of the migration journey that can be mitigated through protectionist policy. However, a purely protectionist approach fails to respond to the complexity of migrant lives. Specifically, such a formulation does not lend itself to engaging with migrant aspirations for class mobility and social integration in the destination country. I suggest that the formulation of migration policy in India can benefit from reimagining migrants as aspirational actors with diverse needs beyond protection from exploitation. This is a framework that needs to be especially incorporated

I suggest that the formulation of migration policy in India can benefit from reimagining migrants as aspirational actors with diverse needs beyond protection from exploitation.

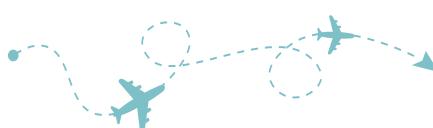
The migration policies of destination countries tend to fluctuate in response to domestic considerations. In contrast, the concern of sending countries is reduced to being able to send their workers.

in bilateral agreements between India and destination countries, as will be discussed below. In the last few years there has been a surge in the number of bilateral agreements on migration and mobility signed by the Indian government. These bilateral agreements take the form of Labour Manpower Agreements (LMAs) aimed at facilitating the migration of Indian workers or manpower. Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement (MMPAs) that entail different types of mobility such as short stay visa, mobility of students, researchers and professionals and preventing and combatting irregular migration. MMPAs are reciprocal and entail the mobility of citizens of both countries. There are also agreements pertaining to employment of Indian workers from specific skill categories to foreign companies. In addition to these agreements, India also signs Letter of Intents (LoI) or Declaration of Intent (DoI) aimed as fast-tracking negotiations on Migration and Mobility. Until 2014 only 5 agreements

had been signed primarily with GCC countries and between 2015 and 2023 17 more have been signed with a wider range of countries. These agreements signal the opening of bilateral negotiations around migration and increased opportunities for migration. An example of a migration pathway facilitated through such agreements is the Young Professional Scheme (YPS) between India and the UK. YPS allows young professionals from both countries (ages 18-30) to work in either country for a period of 24 months.³⁹

Typically, these bilateral agreements center on instrumentalist concerns with fulfilling the labour requirements of destination countries and facilitating the mobility of Indian migrants. Destination countries often cite concerns about irregular migration, repatriation of irregular migrants and standardizing procedures for the evaluation of migrant qualifications. In addition, the migration policies of destination countries tend to fluctuate in response to domestic considerations. In contrast, the concern of sending

³⁹ Surabhi Singh. 2023. "Expanding Horizons of Mobility- the New Age Migration Agreements of India". Indian Council of World Affairs, 2023, https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=9177&lid=5959



In failing to think of migration as more than the movement of labour, we fail to engage with migrant well-being and the social and cultural dynamics of migration.

countries is reduced to being able to send their workers. Evidently, these agreements belie an asymmetric understanding, in which the needs and challenges of the migrating population are overlooked. It is presumed that their mobility is sufficient for their well-being. But can we reduce migrant well-being to being able to migrate and work in a country? What about their need to experience social and cultural belonging? What about their aspirations and expectations of their post-migration life? In failing to think of migration as more than the movement of labour, we fail to engage with migrant well-being and the social and cultural dynamics of migration. But it is incumbent upon India as it rises economically and occupies the position of the prime migrant sending

country to develop a migration policy that is not satisfied with merely facilitating the movement of its population but demands their well-being and development.

There are some signs that India is already treading this path. Most recently, India has been successful in negotiating a Migration and Mobility partnership with Austria, which entails residence permits for family members. This is an important addition that recognizes and values migrant aspirations for family reunification.⁴⁰ Thus, while a migrant rights-based approach is essential to protect migrants from exploitation, migrant lives are not purely defined by systems of oppression and exploitation. A bottom-up understanding of their

India has been successful in negotiating a Migration and Mobility partnership with Austria, which entails residence permits for family members. This is an important addition that recognizes and values migrant aspirations for family reunification.

⁴⁰ Ministry of External Affairs. "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Austrian Federal Government on a Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Partnership" <https://www.meaindia.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/AU23B3979.pdf>

challenges, needs and aspirations is essential to formulate policies that can ensure their well-being in the destination country.

LIMITATIONS OF MIGRANT RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

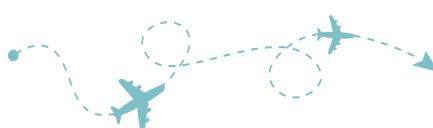
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Pre-empting and responding to migrant issues in the sending country is a paradigm shift because historically advocacy around migrant issues has been centred in migrant receiving countries and premised on the issue of migrant rights. Most recently, in Canada Indian international students have been protesting the denial of permanent residency in Canada owing to a change in visa regulations. The migrant rights framework is also enshrined in the GCM and emphasizes the right of migrants to “decent” work, health care, education, form and join trade unions and non-discrimination. In addition, migrant children must have access equivalent to national children for economic, social and cultural rights and basic services regardless of their or their parents’ residence status⁴¹. While a rights-based

framework is essential to address the vulnerabilities encountered by migrants, it is insufficient to address the multifaceted experiences and aspirations of migrants. Moreover, if we consider migration as a temporal experience, as migrants overcome initial hurdles of food and housing security, they begin to seek social integration and economic mobility. Many studies indicate that new migrants are not looking to engage in political advocacy and activism instead, they are interested in navigating class mobility⁴². Our research with Punjabi migrants demonstrates that new Punjabi immigrants to Canada, especially those initially migrating as international students acquiesce to low wages and precarious work. They do not question the structural basis of their precarious employment. Even if they highlight issues like working conditions it is seen as an individual problem rather than one linked to structural issues of racism. As early as the pre-migration phase, new immigrants are primed to reconcile with and adapt to devalued work for long-term gains. Moreover,

41 Pablo Ceriani Cernadas, Michele LeVoy and Lilana Keith. " Human Rights Indictors for Migrants and their Families." KNOMAD, KNOMAD Working Paper 5, April 2015.

42 Tania Das Gupta, Guida Man, Kiran Mirchandani, and Roxana Ng. "Class borders: Chinese and South Asian Canadian professional women navigating the labor market." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 23, no. 1 (2014): 55-83



As early as the pre-migration phase, new immigrants are primed to reconcile with and adapt to devalued work for long-term gains. Moreover, the idea of immigration as inherently accompanied by economic hardship is deeply internalized and romanticized, especially by male migrants.

the idea of immigration as inherently accompanied by economic hardship is deeply internalized and romanticized, especially by male migrants⁴³.

The navigation enacted by new immigrants is focused on a process of “reworking” where they use informal and incremental steps to claim a better position in the existing employment relations⁴⁴. This reworking can entail an active process of selecting jobs and working conditions that are acceptable to them for the time-being with the objective of securing more lucrative and stable employment in the future. In this framework of migrant aspirations for long-term class mobility, devalued labour may be more acceptable, often due to the dual frame of reference wherein devalued work in the destination country still allows one to exercise migrant status in the sending country. But being

denied access permanent status in country despite meeting requirements may be a riper issue for resistance. In 2023 a petition campaign was organized by the International Youth Student Organization (IYSO) and Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC), both based in Toronto, Canada, to stop the deportation of international students who had been defrauded by an immigration agent who had provided fake college admission letters at the point of entry into Canada several years back. When these international students applied for permanent residency, the Canadian government uncovered the fraud and ordered them to be deported.⁴⁵. Local organizations like Naujawan Network, a labour advocacy and migrant rights group based in Brampton, Ontario has been assisting international students and advocating for their rights with the

43 Tania Das Gupta, and Sugandha Nagpal. ““We Know We Have to Work Like a ‘Donkey’ in Canada”: Employment Expectations and Experiences of Young Punjabis Migrating to Canada.” In *India Migration Report 2024*, pp. 53-74. Routledge India, 2024.

44 Lisa Berntsen. “Reworking labour practices: on the agency of unorganized mobile migrant construction workers.” *Work, employment and society* 30, no. 3 (2016): 472-488.

45 Tania Das Gupta, and Sugandha Nagpal. ““We Know We Have to Work Like a ‘Donkey’ in Canada””

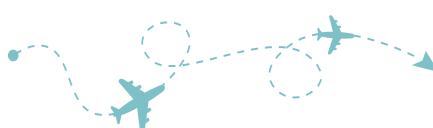
government. These advocacy measures are targeted at issues like housing, fair wages, decent employment and secure status in Canada.

Thus, the issue of migrant rights may become relevant at certain points in time when one is facing dire exploitation and one's status in a country is threatened or questioned. It can also provide a pathway for older migrants to engage in host country politics. But in itself migrant rights is not an effective framework for engaging new immigrants. Despite its mismatch with migrant lives, securing migrant rights continues to dominate conversations about migrant lives, especially in the pre-migration context. The evolution beyond the migrant rights framework entails seeing migrants beyond their role as labourers to how they interact socially and politically in the sending and receiving societies. This is also aided by a transnational framework, which traces how migrant aspirations and expectations in the pre-migration phase are negotiated and reformulated in the post-migration phase in interaction with shifting material conditions. To orient oneself to the complex negotiations enacted by migrants at different stages of the migration journey, it is particularly useful to draw on the

concept of aspirations. The pursuit and transformation of one's aspirations is linked to migrant priorities, perceived life standards and opportunities available in receiving and sending societies. An aspirations framework facilitates a) contextual and temporal understanding of migrant needs, expectations and challenges b) a transnational framing to understand how migrant expectations are set and realized in the pre and post migration phases. This framework will produce a dynamic and localized understanding of migrant needs and challenges.

MIGRANTS AS ASPIRATIONAL ACTORS

The focus on migrants as aspirational actors is not new. Researchers have been pointing out that seeing migrants purely as economic actors or labourers erodes their agency. Deshingkar (2022) says, "...migrants are not simply following the money; their decisions are entangled with multiple social, emotional and temporal considerations related to their personal aspirations, a sense of dignity, their natal families' desires and their plans for their children's future." Seeing the migrant actor as a socially, politically and economically complex actor that cannot be reduced to his/



The focus on migrants as aspirational actors is not new. Researchers have been pointing out that seeing migrants purely as economic actors or labourers erodes their agency.

her economic compulsions entails attending to migrant aspirations and decisions as embedded in social fields and are shaped and reshaped by new social and political configurations in the places that they move through⁴⁶. Here, it is useful to draw on migration studies literature, which examines how migrant aspirations are formed through an interplay between individual factors and the larger cultural and historical environment. De Haas (2021) defines aspirations as people's perception of the good life, which varies across social and cultural contexts and across one's life course. He distinguishes between instrumental and intrinsic migration aspirations. Instrumental aspirations entail seeing migration as means to an end such as higher income, social status, better health care or education. Intrinsic aspirations are the values which people attach to the migration experience in and of itself. This can include the joy of exploring new

cultures and societies or experiencing the social prestige attaching to or enduring the risks associated with migration. Haas (2021) points out that intrinsic aspirations are not only the prerogative of privileged migrants from Europe or North America but can also be common among other less privileged migrant groups⁴⁷. Evidently, there are different types of valuations and aspirations attached to migration, and this can change over time. In examining the aspirations of immigrant domestic workers in Italy over time Boccagni (2017) points out that the initial experience of migration is marked by "immigrant drive" and strong occupational aspirations wherein the view of the future is more open and accessible. A few years after migration, individual aspirations recede (aspirations for children become more important) and individual aspirations become more pragmatic and focused. In the initial and pre-migration stages migration works as

46 Priya Deshingkar. "Navigating hyper-precarity: Im (mobilities) during the COVID pandemic in India." *Social Change* 52, no. 2 (2022): 175-186.

47 Hein De Haas. "A theory of migration: the aspirations-capabilities framework." *Comparative migration studies* 9, no. 1 (2021): 8.

Engaging with how migrants aspire, plan for and strategize around their migration produces valuable information about their priorities and challenges at different stages of the migration process.

a multiplier of aspirations but over time it acts as an aspiration regulator⁴⁸. Taken together, engaging with how migrants aspire, plan for and strategize around their migration produces valuable information about their priorities and challenges at different stages of the migration process. For instance, prospective migrants versus new migrants (2-3 years in receiving society) versus established migrants (5-10 years in receiving society) will have different plans, needs and expectations. Thus, to better prepare migrants in the pre-migration stage it is important to examine how aspirations in the pre-migration stage change and are acted upon in the post-migration phase. It is not sufficient to merely look at aspiration narratives, one must also examine the outcomes associated with aspirations. This allows for an analysis

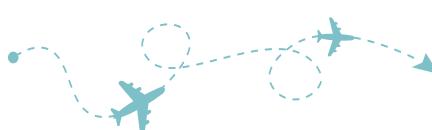
of which articulated aspirations are likely to be pursued and whether they lead to expected outcomes. This framework of aspirations facilitates a contextual, temporal and transnational understanding of evolving migrant aspirations and its related outcomes. The question remains; how do we apply this understanding of aspirations to migration policies in India?

TAILORING MIGRATION POLICIES TO MIGRANT ASPIRATIONS

My work with young Punjabis reveals that for prospective migrants' migration is inextricably linked with aspirations for class mobility, etching belonging to and developing fluency in global (read western) cultural

It is not sufficient to merely look at aspiration narratives, one must also examine the outcomes associated with aspirations. This allows for an analysis of which articulated aspirations are likely to be pursued and whether they lead to expected outcomes.

48 Paolo Boccagni. "Aspirations and the subjective future of migration: Comparing views and desires of the 'time ahead' through the narratives of immigrant domestic workers". Comparative Migration Studies, no. 5 (2017): 1-18.



registers and demonstrating urban consumption. They are often willing to deal with subpar employment conditions in the short-term for the promise of long-term economic stability and safety. For these prospective migrants pre and post migration programs that facilitate their economic mobility and cultural integration are crucial. Traditionally, pre-migration information sessions are in-person and provide basic information about applying to destination countries and what to expect upon migration. They can be tailored to the aspirations and strategies of young migrants. For instance, there is increasing reliance by young people on social media to gather information about destination countries in the pre-migration phase. These social media accounts relay first-hand information about everyday life, simplified explanations of policy changes and hacks for saving money. But influencer lead information is

unverified, biased and unreliable. Thus, sending countries can adopt social media as a platform to interface with prospective migrants and provide reliable and verified information. CSOs located in India can coordinate with CSOs in the destination country to co-create material that is accessible and useful for prospective migrants. This can entail capturing the experiences and challenges of new migrants. In using social media as a medium to relay information, state governments can create an ongoing relationship with prospective migrants. Migrant sending countries like the Philippines actively use social media to connect with migrants and provide information oriented at protecting migrants and safeguarding their interests⁴⁹. It is useful for India to learn from Philippines' best practices to create narrative form material that is personable and engaging for a young audience.

Migrant sending countries like the Philippines actively use social media to connect with migrants and provide information oriented at protecting migrants and safeguarding their interests.

⁴⁹ Katigbak, Jovito Jose P., and Ma Divina Gracia Z. Roldan. "Protecting Filipino migrant workers in distress through social media platforms." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 30, no. 3 (2021): 357-369.

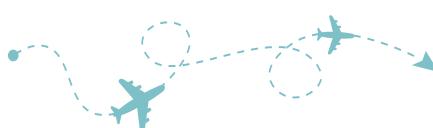
Migration of skilled professionals is often associated with devaluation of qualifications, deskilling and underemployment.

Given young people's concerns about class mobility, the Indian government can prioritize relaying information about occupational mobility trajectories of different jobs. This is especially important as migration of skilled professionals is often associated with devaluation of qualifications, deskilling and underemployment. This also entails India negotiating with destination countries beyond immediate jobs for pathways to occupational mobility. The domestic discourse on skilling must be adapted to aspirations for class mobility so that skilling is presented as a conduit to attaining high status jobs. This shift in discourse from talking about immediate employment to occupational trajectories and long-term aspirations also inculcates in young people a long-term vision of their migration journey. It encourages them to think of migration beyond

immediate gratification (access to a Western country) to building a life in a new country. Providing reliable, relevant and accessible information in the pre-migration stage is crucial, as this is the time prospective migrants interact with their social networks, define migration preferences, and make migration strategies and plans. Information provided at this stage can also have the positive effect of priming new migrants for integration and social cohesion.

The post-migration services and programs must similarly be well-informed and adaptive to the aspirations of new migrants. This is essential to ensure that migrants are economically and socially well-integrated in destination societies. Let's assume, a destination country offers the opportunity for a migrant to come and study in their country and then apply for a work permit. The

This shift in discourse from talking about immediate employment to occupational trajectories and long-term aspirations also inculcates in young people a long-term vision of their migration journey.



While destination countries are concerned with migrant integration outcomes, they rarely initiate institutional pre and post measures to facilitate the smooth integration of migrants. An exception to this trend is the German government, who through the Goethe Institute engages prospective highly skilled migrants in pre-migration cultural training. When they get to Germany, they are met by Welcome Coaches who help new migrants settle in, conduct monthly meetings and arrange for get togethers to allow people to integrate in German society.

migrant is using the study visa route to enter the country, but their long-term aspiration pertains to gaining permanent residency in the country and opening their own business. Being aware of this aspiration will enable the destination country to offer programs and services that will facilitate migrant entrepreneurship. In fact, the study programs that such migrants pursue can be tailored to offer real world experiences and applications. In the absence of this information there is a misalignment between the expectations of the destination country and the migrant.

Moreover, while destination countries are concerned with migrant integration outcomes, they rarely initiate institutional pre and post measures to facilitate the smooth integration of migrants. An exception to this trend

is the German government, who through the Goethe Institute engages prospective highly skilled migrants in pre-migration cultural training. When they get to Germany, they are met by Welcome Coaches who help new migrants settle in, conduct monthly meetings and arrange for get togethers to allow people to integrate in German society⁵⁰. The concern around migrant integration is crucial because it predicts migrants' long-term well-being in the host society. As India establishes itself as a prime migrant sending country, it must negotiate bilateral agreements with the intent to foster Indian migrants' long-term well-being and development. This entails transnational coordination stemming from migrants' needs, aspirations and challenges. Along with protecting migrants, it is essential to introduce

50 More information about Goethe Institute's program can be found here: <https://www.goethe.de/en/spr/mig/vuu/ueb/wic.html>

India's unique position as the country with the world's youngest population makes it imminent for it to develop a comprehensive policy response that aligns with the lived realities of youth migrating from India.

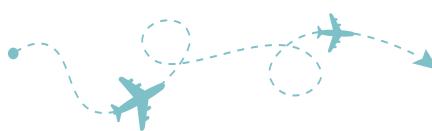
measures in the pre and post migration phases to foster occupation mobility and integration.

CONCLUSION

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Discussions and debates on migration governance have been primarily located in developed destination countries. This has meant that frameworks for linking migrant realities with migration policies have been disproportionately focused on the concerns of destination countries. This paper argues that it is important to decentre migration governance by focusing on migration policies in India, a prime migrant sending country and centralising migrant experiences and aspirations as a bedrock for policy formation. India's unique position as the country with the world's youngest population makes it imminent for it to develop a comprehensive policy response

that aligns with the lived realities of youth migrating from India. This is particularly pertinent as unmet youth aspirations for migration can lead to despondency or increasing reliance on irregular forms of migration. Thus, a comprehensive migration policy response in India will supplement the migrant rights framework, which does not sufficiently capture the temporal and contextual shifts in migrant realities, with the framework of aspirations. The aspirations framework entails tailoring policies to facilitate migrants' access to relevant information, class mobility and social and cultural integration. This involves pre and post migration measures that will require transnational coordination and support. This comprehensive and bottom-up approach is an important step towards investing in the long-term development and well-being of migrants and ensuring that migration promotes social cohesion in the sending and receiving societies.



FEMALE MIGRATION FROM INDIA

TRENDS AND
CONTINUING CHALLENGES

Dr. AMBA PANDE

Migration is a fundamental aspect of the economy, politics, society, and various other elements of today's world. It plays a crucial role in positively impacting the lives of ordinary people. At the macro level, migration also affects both receiving and sending countries as a whole. Every Indian citizen, regardless of caste, creed, or gender, has the right to travel, reside and pursue a livelihood of their choice within or outside the country. However, several conditions differ between genders (though many remain common), including those that influence the decision to migrate, working conditions, and ties to the home country. This paper will examine the changing patterns of female migration from India and the ongoing challenges and uncertainties faced by these women.

FEMALE MIGRATION IN DATA

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According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division Report 2024, the number of international migrants worldwide has reached

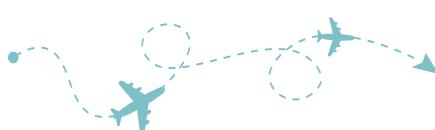
304 million, representing 3.7 % of the global population⁵¹. This marks a modest increase from 3.5 % in 2019. The report indicates that Europe experienced the most significant rise in international migrants, while the United States hosted the most, with 52.4 million international migrants in 2024. Germany was the second leading destination (16.8 million), followed by Saudi Arabia (13.7 million), the United Kingdom (11.8 million), France (9.2 million), Spain (8.9 million), Canada (8.8 million), the United Arab Emirates (8.2 million), Australia (8.1 million), the Russian Federation (7.6 million), Türkiye (7.1 million), and Italy (6.6 million).⁵²

In 2024, regarding gender-based disaggregation of international migrants worldwide, the number of women and girls reached 146 million, accounting for 48% of all international migrants. This marks a slight increase from 2020 when the percentage was 47.97%.⁵³ However, the share of female migrants varies by region. In 2024, the share of female migrants was 52% in Europe, 51% in North America, 51% in Oceania, 50% in Latin America

51 UNDESA. United Nations. International Migrant Stock 2024: Key facts and figures. 2024. UN DESA/POP/2024/DC/NO. 13. <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/international-migrant-stocks-overview> Last accessed 31/1/2025.

52 ibid

53 ibid



and the Caribbean, 47% in Africa, and 42% in Asia.⁵⁴ There is also a variation by country. The female share of international migrants has been increasing in low-income countries while decreasing in middle- and upper-middle-income countries since the early 2000s. According to World Bank data, a country's income level influences women's migration.⁵⁵

Another important aspect of the recent migration trend is that the number of male migrants has increased more rapidly than that of female migrants on a global scale. According to the UN report, this phenomenon is primarily driven by the preference of male workers to migrate to Northern Africa and Western Asia, where gendered work, such as construction, is prevalent. In Southern Asia, there are 5.7 million male migrant workers compared to 1.4 million female migrants, while in the Arab States, that division is even starker, with 19.9 million males compared to 4.2 million females.⁵⁶ In fact, female migration

has slowed in recent years, which, according to the IOM's 2022 World Migration Report, is due to the negative impacts of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly damaging for female migrant workers.⁵⁷

Regarding migration from India, the total number of Indian emigrants tripled from 6.5 million to 18.5 million between 1990 and 2024, increasing from 4% to 6% of the total international migrants. The leading countries for Indian migrant stock are the UAE (3.2 million), Saudi Arabia (2 million), the USA (3.2 million), Kuwait (1.2 million), the UK, and Canada (1 million each). This indicates that Indian migrants are concentrated largely in Asia, particularly in West Asia, where half of all Indian emigrants reside. They constitute nearly a third of the UAE's population and account for a quarter of the populations of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. One-quarter of Indian migrants live in North America, a share that has increased

54 ibid

55 World Bank. Women and migration: Exploring the data. 2018. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/women-and-migration-exploring-data> Last accessed 31/1/2025

56 UNDESA. United Nations. International Migrant Stock 2024: Key facts and figures. 2024. UN DESA/POP/2024/DC/NO. 13. <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/international-migrant-stocks-overview> Last accessed 31/1/2025

57 IOM. World Migration Report. 2024. <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-2/international-migrants-numbers-and-trends>. Last accessed 31/1/2025

Women migrants from India account for 57.1 % of all international migrants from the country.

over time, along with migration to Australia and New Zealand.⁵⁸

A remarkable feature of Indian emigration is the significant increase in the migration of women from India. According to UN DESA (2024) data, women migrants from India account for 57.1 % of all international migrants from the country. World Bank data from 2015 and 2017 indicate that the share of women migrants was 48.8% of the total Indian migrants.⁵⁹ In 2024, more than one in three migrants from India were women. Their numbers grew from 2.6 million in 1990 to 6.6 million in 2024 (UN DESA 2024). The IOM report shows India as one of the top sending countries of international migrants and female migrants (IOM

2024). This proportion is significantly higher than the share of women migrants in Asia, which stands at 41.9 % (a substantial increase since 2010), and in South Asia, where the female share of total international migrants is 52%. The only country sending a higher share of female migrants than India is Nepal (69.9 %), which has the highest percentage in the world according to the UN report.⁶⁰ Migration patterns from India also differ significantly by gender. While men primarily migrate to GCC countries, women are more likely to move to the USA. In 2024, nearly one-quarter of Indian migrant women lived in the USA, unlike in the GCC countries, where male Indian migrants far outnumber women. In terms of gender ratio, Indian-origin

Migration patterns from India also differ significantly by gender. While men primarily migrate to GCC countries, women are more likely to move to the USA.

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- 58 Nileena Suresh. International migration from India. 2025. <https://www.dataforindia.com/international-migration/> Last accessed 31/1/2025; UNDESA. United Nations. International Migrant Stock 2024: Key facts and figures. 2024. UN DESA/POP/2024/DC/NO. 13. <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/international-migrant-stocks-overview> Last accessed 31/1/2025
- 59 World Bank. Gender indicators report. 2019. https://databank.worldbank.org/id/2ddc971b?Code=SG.POP.MIGR.FE.ZS&report_name=Gender_Indicators_Report&populartype=series. Last accessed 31/1/2025
- 60 UNDESA. United Nations. International Migrant Stock 2024: Key facts and figures. 2024. UN DESA/POP/2024/DC/NO. 13. <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/international-migrant-stocks-overview> Last accessed 31/1/2025



A significant share of women migrants, particularly from India, is driven by marriage or family migrations.

men and women are almost equal in the US and the UK.

According to KNOMAD, female workers are primarily employed in gendered sectors, such as domestic and care work, which also serve as the most significant drivers of international female labour migration. These sectors often lack security standards, frequently leading to exploitation, abuse, and violations of human rights, including sexual and gender-based violence. Moreover, female migration is often obscured by marriage or family migrations. Overall, a significant share of women migrants, particularly from India, is driven by marriage or family migrations. This dynamic has long undermined the economic contributions of migrant women and their positive impact on sustainable development. A notable trend in recent

decades is the increasing number of women migrating independently as economic migrants. They are the sole breadwinners for their families and have significantly influenced migration patterns, prompting scholars to recognise a new trend toward the ‘feminisation’ of migration. Furthermore, women migrating with their families also enter the labour market, taking on jobs or starting businesses in various capacities. These important factors should be considered in discussions about female migration from India. Notably, the labour force participation rate of migrant women is partly higher than that of non-migrant women, depending on the income levels of their respective countries.⁶¹

With regard to female students, traditionally, there has been a greater number of male students studying

A notable trend in recent decades is the increasing number of women migrating independently as economic migrants.

⁶¹ Marie McAuliffe. Who will be our migrants of the future? Celebrating International Migrants' Day with a keen eye on the growing gender gap, December 16, 2022. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/peoplemove/who-will-be-our-migrants-future-celebrating-international-migrants-day-keen-eye-growing> Last accessed 31/1/2025

Of approximately 3 million international students, females accounted for 47% in 2021, while males represented 52%, totaling 3.4 million.

abroad than female students, although the proportion of female students has steadily risen over the years. Of approximately 3 million international students, females accounted for 47% in 2021, while males represented 52%, totaling 3.4 million. Nonetheless, similar to other female migrants, female students also experience regional disparities. In the U.S., which is the leading host country for international students, the share of female students is much higher than in regions such as the Middle East and North Africa.⁶²

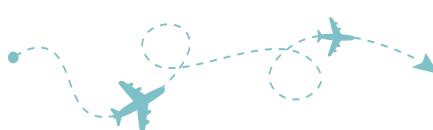
While it's true that women's involvement in migration and development has overall risen, with many migrating independently,

significant vulnerabilities still persist. It can be argued that female migrant workers encounter more challenges than their male counterparts. Gender biases manifest in various forms across all societies, creating obstacles in both structure and attitudes toward female migrants, particularly concerning socio-cultural, economic, and psychological matters. Although migration can enhance the lives of women, prevailing discriminatory frameworks in either the host or home countries subject them to numerous disadvantages, discrimination, and vulnerabilities. The challenges they encounter are complex, encompassing discrimination and isolation, stereotyping and negative labelling,

Although migration can enhance the lives of women, prevailing discriminatory frameworks in either the host or home countries subject them to numerous disadvantages, discrimination, and vulnerabilities.

The challenges they encounter are complex, encompassing discrimination and isolation, stereotyping and negative labelling, and most critically, the heightened risk of physical and sexual abuse.

62 United States Department of State. International Students in the USA - Master Data: Academic year, programme, and course-wise number of international students [Data set]. Dataful. <https://dataful.in/datasets/84>



and most critically, the heightened risk of physical and sexual abuse.⁶³

THE GCM AND THE FUTURE AHEAD FOR INDIA

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The discourse on female migration generally revolves around two distinct trajectories.⁶⁴ The first trajectory posits that migration leads to improvements for women in terms of better employment, increased agency, social standing, and other positive benefits for themselves and their families. The freedom, quality of life, economic independence, and wealth that women experience as a result of migration are often lacking in their countries of origin. Migration can provide women with a means of escape from abusive or repressive situations and can also help raise the living standards of their families back home. Conversely, the second trajectory emphasises the vulnerability of migrant women to

various forms of exploitation and abuse during migration and in destination countries. Throughout the migration process, migrant women workers encounter numerous challenges and are often at the mercy of unscrupulous middlemen, who are paid in advance by employers or recruitment agencies. They face various manipulations, such as providing false ages on passports and travelling on tourist visas that are converted to employment visas upon arrival, which places them at risk of becoming undocumented workers. Additionally, employers typically confiscate their passports for the duration of their “contracts,” binding them to their employers making them susceptible to exploitation in foreign land. Furthermore, contracts can sometimes be terminated at the employer’s discretion. These women receive limited protection under labour laws due to the nature of their employment, during which they

A UN report on women migrants estimates that migrant women were among the hardest hit by the pandemic, which affected 8.5 million migrant women.

63 Amba Pande. Feminisation of Indian Migration: Patterns and Prospects. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 2022, Vol. 57(6) 1249 –1266; Omotoyosi Oduwaye, Askin Kiraz, and Yasemin Sorakin. A Trend Analysis of the Challenges Faced by International Students Over 21 Years Volume 13, Issue 4, October 2023.

64 Amba Pande. Feminisation of Indian Migration: Patterns and Prospects. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 2022, Vol. 57(6) 1249 –1266

The caregiving sector is contentious, as it presents numerous drawbacks alongside its opportunities. These include emotional stress for female migrants, financial difficulties, and concerns arising from a lack of information. Most importantly, there is a detrimental psychological impact on the left-behind children and the elderly in the family in the source country.

remain isolated.⁶⁵ All these issues are also prevalent among Indian female migrants. A UN report on women migrants estimates that migrant women were among the hardest hit by the pandemic, which affected 8.5 million migrant women. However, the pandemic also demonstrated how vital female migrant workers are to society, as these women often serve as frontline workers in healthcare, nursing, cleaning, and the services industry.⁶⁶

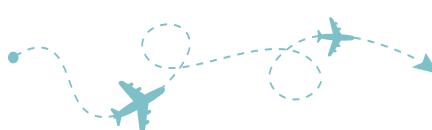
One essential feature for the welfare and empowerment of migrants, particularly women migrants, is the collaboration between sending and destination countries to develop suitable policies and incentives that enhance women's participation in the migrant workforce while ensuring

their protection and welfare. The economic, socio-cultural, and political landscapes of both host and source regions influence migrants. Global economic changes have opened new employment opportunities for women, particularly due to the rising demand for care sector workers and low-cost labour in certain industries. However, the caregiving sector is contentious, as it presents numerous drawbacks alongside its opportunities. These include emotional stress for female migrants, financial difficulties, and concerns arising from a lack of information. Most importantly, there is a detrimental psychological impact on the left-behind children and the elderly in the family in the source country.⁶⁷

65 Able Guy. KNOMAD. World Bank. A migration process with female faces: challenges and needs, 2024. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/video/2024/03/06/proceso-migratorio-femenino-centroamerica-desafios-y-necesidades>. Last accessed 31/1/2025

66 Marie McAuliffe. Who will be our migrants of the future? Celebrating International Migrants' Day with a keen eye on the growing gender gap, December 16, 2022. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/peoplemove/who-will-be-our-migrants-future-celebrating-international-migrants-day-keen-eye-growing> Last accessed 31/1/2025

67 Dana Al-Azzeh and Jasmin Lilian Diab. Psychological impacts of maternal migration on left-behind children: a cross-cultural review. Frontier. 15 January 2025. Chrome extension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11776297/pdf/fpsyg-15-1407733.pdf



Migrant women are increasingly sought after because they often command lower wages than local female workers and male migrants. This situation detracts from gender equality and equal pay for all.

Migrant women are increasingly sought after because they often command lower wages than local female workers and male migrants. This situation detracts from gender equality and equal pay for all. It is important to recognise that migration is a positive choice that improves people's lives, but it is also a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that requires a holistic approach to policymaking. Promoting gender equality across all sectors, challenging discrimination in employment practices, and empowering individuals to realise their potential while supporting sustainable development and protection throughout the migration process and in destination countries should be central to all migration policies concerning women. Such an approach could help level the playing field for women.

In addition to the sending and destination countries, international organisations play a significant role in

the migration process and the welfare of migrants. As the world witnesses what scholars call the "Globalization of Migration," where many countries are affected by migration simultaneously,⁶⁸ the involvement of supranational bodies and international organisations, such as the UN, IOM, and World Bank, becomes essential. The United Nations remains at the forefront in this regard through UNDESA and UNHCR, recognising the positive contributions of migrants in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and ensuring that no one is left behind, including migrants. Alongside the UN, IOM is another leading intergovernmental organisation in the field of migration, ensuring the orderly and humane management of migration, promoting international cooperation on migration issues, assisting in the search for practical solutions to the challenges of migration, and providing humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally

⁶⁸ S. Castles & M. J. Miller. *The Age of Migration*. Macmillan Education UK. 1998. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-26846-7>. Last accessed 31/1/2025

The GCM represents the first landmark intergovernmental framework on international migration and signifies a commitment to the multilateral management and governance of this issue.

displaced persons. The organisation's three main objectives for 2024-2028 are to save lives and protect people on the move, drive solutions to displacement, and facilitate pathways for regular migration. In 2016, IOM entered into an agreement with the United Nations, becoming a related organisation that serves as the coordinator of the United Nations network on migration, established in 2018 ⁶⁹. Currently, UN DESA, IOM, KNOMAD, and the World Bank serve as major data sources on migration worldwide, although there is inconsistency in standards and methods of data collection among these organisations⁷⁰.

India's association with the IOM began when it joined the organisation in 2008 as one of its 175 member states. Since then, the IOM has worked closely with the government, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), think tanks

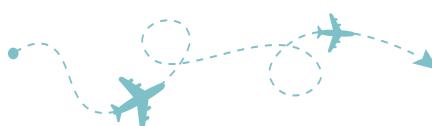
such as NITI Aayog, state governments, and other partners to enhance governance of migration, combat trafficking, provide pre-departure orientation training, and facilitate voluntary return, reintegration, and livelihood recovery. It advocates for safe, orderly, and regular migration for aspiring Indian migrant workers and students through policy recommendations. Its efforts support the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and align with the 2018 Global Compact for Safe and Orderly Migration (GCM). A standout initiative is PRAYAS (Promoting Regular and Assisted Migration for Youth and Skilled Professionals).⁷¹

In a significant advancement for collaboration on migration, UN Member States adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) in December 2018 at an intergovernmental conference

69 UN, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/migration> Last accessed 31/1/2025; IOM, International Organisation for Migration <https://www.iom.int> Last accessed 31/1/2025

70 Amba Pande. Feminisation of Indian Migration: Patterns and Prospects. Journal of Asian and African Studies 2022, Vol. 57(6) 1249 –1266

71 IOM, India. <https://india.iom.int/data-and-resources>. Last accessed 20/04/2025



on international migration held in Marrakesh, Morocco. The GCM represents the first landmark intergovernmental framework on international migration and signifies a commitment to the multilateral management and governance of this issue. It covers all aspects of international migration holistically and comprehensively. This non-binding document respects states' sovereign right to determine who enters and resides in their territory while affirming their commitment to international cooperation on migration. It aims to enhance migration governance, address the challenges of contemporary migration, and strengthen the role of migrants and migration in sustainable development.

In addition to the GCM, various regional and sub-regional processes have been established to ensure the safe, orderly, and dignified movement of workers, optimising the benefits of worker migration for sending and receiving countries, as well as for migrants and their families. These processes facilitate cooperation and collaboration for development between origin and

destination countries regarding temporary workers, information sharing, and policy development on irregular migration, among other issues. Some major initiatives in this regard include the Colombo Process, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, and the Bali Process. The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) serves as a global mechanism, providing a platform for dialogue on the contribution of migration to development.

India is a signatory to the GCM and actively participates in various multilateral migration governance mechanisms, including the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD), the Colombo Process (CP), and the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). The agenda for safe and regular migration has indeed been one of the Indian government's priorities, resulting in several measures initiated over the years to facilitate and protect out-migration from India. New Delhi cooperated closely during the development stages of both the GCM and the IMRF reviews.⁷² It has consistently advocated for recognising migration as a positive phenomenon and for protecting the rights of

⁷² ICWA National Level Consultation on 'India's Progress towards GCM Implementation'. 6 May 2022. extension://efaidnbmnnibpcapcglclefindmkaj/<https://www.icwa.in/WriteReadData/L45218/1665478682.pdf>. Last accessed 31/1/2025.

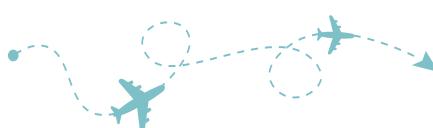
It is inappropriate to group all categories of illegal or undocumented migrants together as one. For example, entering the country illegally cannot be equated with migrant women who escape employer tyranny and whose documents have been confiscated.

migrants abroad. India has also called for a clear definition of migration, considering its multi-directional nature and related data. According to the ICWA paper, India's successful negotiations led to the inclusion of Objective 23, which focuses on Global Partnerships and International Cooperation. As a major origin, transit, and destination country for migrants, its commitment to the GCM will enhance India's position within the global migration framework.⁷³

Nevertheless, the GCM process has its limitations and shortcomings. It is a non-binding agreement that acknowledges the sovereign rights of states regarding who may enter and remain within their borders, which is understandable. Ultimately, it should be the sovereign right of states to decide whom they allow to enter and stay. However, this also means that the GCM lacks enforcement power. It is essential that once a migrant is granted entry and residency, states

are required to adhere to standards of safety, human rights protection, and equality concerning wages and other labour market standards. Without this, the rights of migrant workers cannot be safeguarded. A major hurdle in this regard, is the lack of a clear distinction between legal and illegal migrants. Many countries, including India, have insisted on a precise definition of a migrant. The absence of a clear categorisation may prove detrimental for regular migrants. Furthermore, it is inappropriate to group all categories of illegal or undocumented migrants together as one. For example, entering the country illegally cannot be equated with migrant women who escape employer tyranny and whose documents have been confiscated. They may be undocumented, but entered the country with a work visa. Therefore, we also need clear categories for undocumented migrants. Another gap of the GCM is its limited reference to women in certain

⁷³ Ambi. Global Compact for Migration: Positions and Progress and India's View | 30 November, 2023. https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=10216&lid=6515. Last accessed 31/1/2025



India submitted the Supporting Note: Asia Pacific Regional Review of the GCM, which presents numerous efforts to address migrant women's rights, enhance their employability in high-demand sectors, and promote their economic empowerment.

objectives, such as 7, 10, and 16, which primarily focus on protecting rights, reducing vulnerabilities, eradicating trafficking, and empowering migrants. This emphasis is entirely justified, as women need protective measures in destination countries and throughout the migration process. However, it is equally important to highlight the contributions of migrant women to sustainable development. Recognising these contributions can serve as a crucial mechanism for empowering migrant women, fostering respect, and reshaping societal perceptions toward them, which tend to be rather negative. India has implemented various measures to protect women migrants and combat trafficking, as detailed on the MEA website. India submitted

the Supporting Note: Asia Pacific Regional Review of the GCM, which presents numerous efforts to address migrant women's rights, enhance their employability in high-demand sectors, and promote their economic empowerment⁷⁴. Nonetheless, there is a need to emphasise return and dignified reintegration, provide some form of medical insurance prior to departure from India, and place greater focus on pre-departure training, including digital skills. Additionally, it is essential to strengthen online networking and upskill women workers in line with market demands.

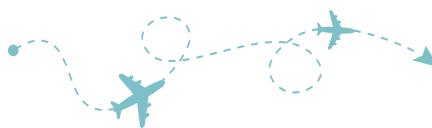
Globally, there is a shift in women's migration patterns, with India emerging as one of the beneficiaries. The traditional role of women as family

The feminisation debate has brought women's issues from the margins to the centre of migration discourse, yet much remains to be accomplished regarding their protection and empowerment.

⁷⁴ ESCAP, The Second Asia-Pacific Regional Review of Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, 4-6 Feb 2025. <https://www.unescap.org/events/2025/second-asia-pacific-regional-review-implementation-global-compact-safe-orderly-and>. Last accessed 20/4/2025.

migrants has evolved into a scenario where they migrate independently as the primary breadwinners for their families. Their earning capacity and contribution to sustainable development have increased; however, it would be premature to view this

as securing their position in the migration process. The feminisation debate has brought women's issues from the margins to the centre of migration discourse, yet much remains to be accomplished regarding their protection and empowerment.



NAVIGATING THE TIDES

AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE
ON CHANGING MIGRATION
PATTERNS - I

Prof. S. IRUDAYA RAJAN &
Dr. RAKESH RANJAN

INTRODUCTION: MIGRATION IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

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Globalisation has transformed migration into a complex interplay of economic, demographic, political, and social factors, driving people across borders for better opportunities. Economic disparities and demographic shifts, like ageing populations in developed countries, create demand for younger labour from nations such as India. Political changes and international relations also significantly shape migration flows, with social networks aiding migrants in integrating into new environments. Technological advancements in communication and transportation have further facilitated migration, enabling individuals to maintain connections with their home countries

while exploring opportunities abroad (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2019).^{75 76 77}

For India, migration is woven into the fabric of its historical and contemporary narrative. Indian migration roots trace back to the colonial era when the British Empire mobilised Indian labour to various colonies under the indentured labour system. This system forged significant Indian communities in regions such as Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago, Kenya, and Malaysia. These communities have preserved cultural and familial ties with India, contributing to a rich and diverse diaspora that spans the globe (Tinker, 1974; Rajan, 2010).^{78 79} In the post-independence period, India's migration dynamics evolved, influenced by economic liberalisation, globalisation, and demographic trends. The economic reforms of the 1990s marked a pivotal shift, opening up the economy and increasing the mobility

For India, migration is woven into the fabric of its historical and contemporary narrative.

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- 75 Singh, A.D and S I Rajan (2015). Politics of Migration: Indian Emigration in a Globalized World. Routledge.
- 76 Kumar, S. K and S I Rajan. (2014) Emigration in 21st-Century India: Governance, Legislation, Institutions. New Delhi: Routledge India.
- 77 De Haas, H., Castles, S., & Miller, M. J. (2019). The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- 78 Tinker, H. (1974). A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920. Oxford University Press.
- 79 Rajan, S.I (2010). India Migration Report 2010: Governance and Labour Migration. Routledge.

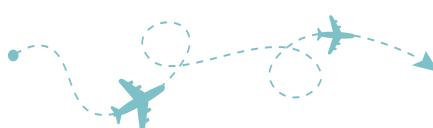
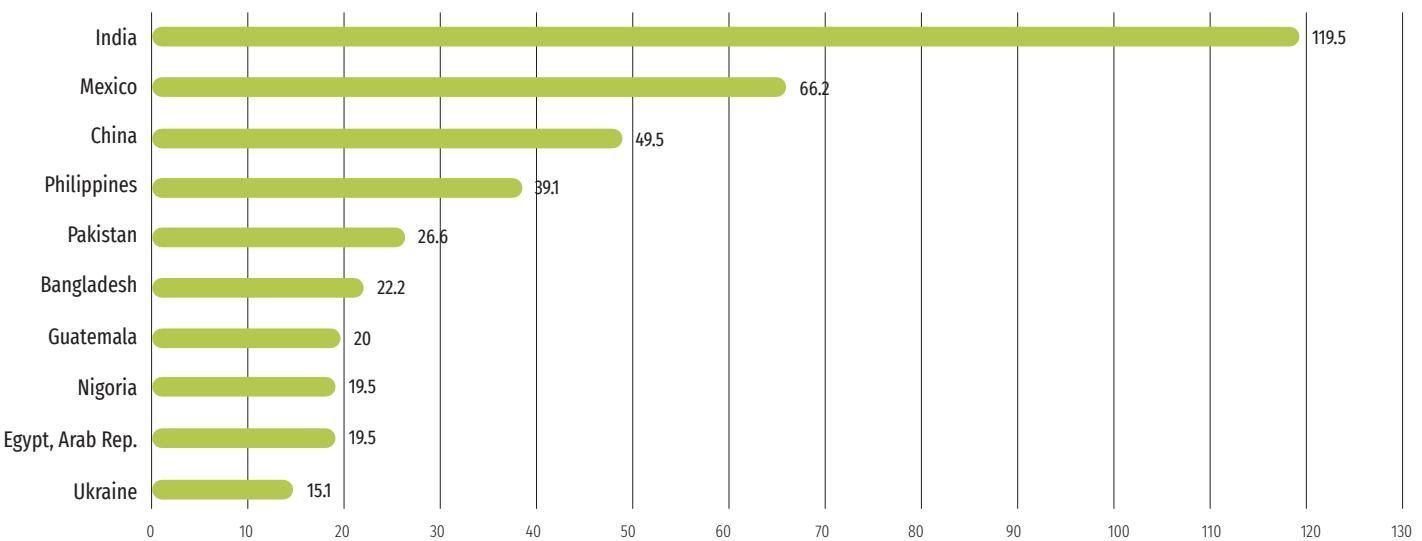


Fig.1: Top 10 remittances receiving countries (US \$billion)



of skilled professionals seeking better prospects in developed countries. This outward migration has been propelled by the demand for skilled labour in countries like the United States, Canada, Australia, and the Gulf States, where Indians have become integral to sectors such as information technology, healthcare, and engineering (Khadria, 2004; Rajan, 2017).^{80 81}

Today, India is one of the largest sources of international migrants, with an estimated 35 million Indians living abroad as of 2024 (Ministry of External Affairs, n.d.)⁸². This expansive diaspora plays a crucial role in the global economy, with remittances from Indian migrants reaching an astounding \$120 billion in 2024, making India

Today, India is one of the largest sources of international migrants, with an estimated 35 million Indians living abroad as of 2024. This expansive diaspora plays a crucial role in the global economy, with remittances from Indian migrants reaching an astounding \$120 billion in 2024, making India the largest recipient of remittances worldwide.

80 Khadria, B. (2004). Migration of Highly Skilled Indians: Case Studies of IT and the Health Professionals. In OECD Science, Technology and Industry Working Papers. <https://doi.org/10.1787/381236020703>

81 Rajan, S.I (2017). India Migration Report 2016: Gulf Migration. Routledge.

82 Ministry of External Affairs. (n.d.). Population of Overseas Indians. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Retrieved August 22, 2024, from <https://www.meaindia.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm>

the largest recipient of remittances worldwide (World Bank, 2022)⁸³.

These remittances significantly contribute to India's economy by supporting household incomes, alleviating poverty, and facilitating investments in education and healthcare thus leading to achieve sustainable development goals (Rajan, 2015a; Sivakumar and Rajan, 2022).^{84 85} The financial inflows from the diaspora also support India's balance of payments and help stabilise the national currency (Rajan, 2012; 2015).^{86 87} Moreover, the Indian migrants fuel economic growth in their host countries by filling critical labour shortages, fostering innovation, and promoting entrepreneurship. The economic ties facilitated by migration have strengthened India's bilateral relations with many countries, encouraging trade, investment, and

technological collaboration (Quak, 2019; Rajan, 2024a).^{88 89} However, this extensive migration also poses challenges, including brain drain and the need to protect migrant rights and welfare abroad.

Beyond economic contributions, the Indian diaspora significantly enhances India's soft power on the global stage. Culturally, Indian communities abroad serve as ambassadors of Indian traditions, values, and cuisine, promoting a positive image of India worldwide (Newland, 2010; Rajan, 2015).^{90 91} Indian festivals, music, and movies have gained international popularity, driven in part by diaspora communities that maintain cultural practices and introduce them to broader audiences. Politically, the diaspora acts as a bridge between India and host countries, influencing bilateral relations and advocating

83 KNOMAD/World Bank Bilateral Remittance Matrix (2021), Bilateral Remittances Matrix. KNOMAD - Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development. Retrieved August 22, 2024, from <https://www.knomad.org/> data/remittances December 2022

84 Rajan, R. (2015a). Indian professional immigrants and the healthcare sector in India. In Rahman, M., & Yong, T.T. (Eds.). International migration and development in South Asia (pp. 84-100). Routledge.

85 Sivakumar, P and S I Rajan (2022) Sustainable Development Goals and Migration. Routledge.

86 Rajan, S.I. (Ed.). (2012). India Migration Report 2012: Global Financial Crisis, Migration and Remittances (1st ed.). Routledge India. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315816180>

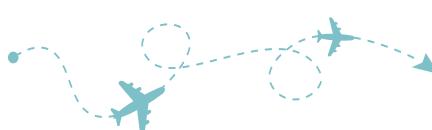
87 Rajan, S.I (2015). India Migration Report 2014: Diaspora and Development. Routledge.

88 Quak, E.-J. (2019). The effects economic integration of migrants have on the economy of host countries(Report). Institute of Development Studies and partner organisations. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12413/14594>

89 Rajan, S.I (2024a). India Migration Report 2024: Indians in Canada. Routledge.

90 Newland, Kathleen. 2010. Voice After Exit: Diaspora Advocacy. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

91 Rajan, S.I (2015). India Migration Report 2014: Diaspora and Development. Routledge.



for issues pertinent to the Indian subcontinent. The success of Indians in various fields, such as technology, academia, and politics, in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, has helped elevate India's global standing and fostered goodwill (Singh and Singh, 2014; Rajan et.al, 2016).^{92 93}

Understanding the changing patterns and trends in international migration from an Indian perspective is crucial for policymakers and researchers, as it provides insights into the challenges and opportunities that migration presents for both India and

the global community. This article delves deeper into India's migration dynamics by examining historical, economic, and policy contexts, offering a comprehensive analysis of how India navigates its role in global migration.

HISTORICAL LEGACY: TRACING INDIAN MIGRATION THROUGH TIME

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India's migration history is deeply intertwined with its colonial past, characterised by significant population movements orchestrated by the British Empire. During the colonial period,

Table 1: Top ten countries of destinations

Country	Non-Resident Indians (NRIs)	Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs)	Total Population
United States	1,201,169	3,228,350	4,429,519
United Arab Emirates	3,419,000	344,000	3,763,000
Saudi Arabia	2,594,947	270,000	2,864,947
Malaysia	150,000	2,011,440	2,161,440
Canada	1,016,274	1,859,680	2,875,954
United Kingdom	859,609	1,986,600	2,846,209
Kuwait	993,528	2,244	995,528
Oman	664,387	10,000	674,387
Australia	350,000	626,000	976,000
Qatar	750,000	119,000	869,000

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, n.d.

92 Singh, M., & Singh, A. (2014). Diaspora, political action, and identity: A case study of Canada's Indian diaspora. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 17(2), 149-171.

93 Rajan, S.I, V J Varghese and A K Nanda (2016). Migration, Mobility and Multiple Affiliations. Cambridge University Press.

the British used the indentured labor system to replace the transatlantic slave trade. Millions of Indians were transported to the Caribbean, Africa, and Southeast Asia, where they worked on plantations, railways, and infrastructure projects (Tinker, 1974; Zachariah et.al, 2003).^{94 95} These early migrations laid the groundwork for substantial Indian diaspora communities that persist today.

Despite facing harsh conditions and exploitation, the indentured labourers established thriving communities abroad, maintaining cultural ties with India while adapting to their new environments. The legacy of this migration is evident in the cultural and economic contributions of the Indian diaspora in these regions, which continue to influence India's global relations (Hazareesingh, 1966; Singh and Rajan, 2015).^{96 97}

In the post-independence era, India's migration patterns underwent

significant changes as the country focused on nation-building and economic development. The partition in 1947 resulted in massive internal displacement and migration across the newly formed borders of India and Pakistan. As India settled into its new geopolitical reality, it emphasised economic self-reliance and industrialization. However, economic opportunities abroad continued to attract Indian migrants. The 1970s oil boom in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries marked a pivotal phase in India's migration history, as the demand for labour in the Gulf region's construction and service sectors skyrocketed (Rajan, 2004; Rajan and Saxena, 2019).^{98 99} This led to large-scale migration of Indian workers, primarily on temporary contractual arrangements, which fundamentally shaped the nature of Indian migration to these countries. These workers played a crucial role in building the modern infrastructure of the Gulf

94 Tinker, H. (1974). *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920*. Oxford University Press.

95 Zachariah, K.C, E.T. Mathew, and S.I. Rajan (2003) *Dynamics of Migration in Kerala: Dimensions, Differentials, and Consequences*. Orient Blackswan, Delhi.

96 Hazareesingh, K. (1966). The religion and culture of Indian immigrants in Mauritius and the effect of social change. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 8(2), 241-257.

97 Singh, A.D and S I Rajan (2015). *Politics of Migration: Indian Emigration in a Globalized World*. Routledge.

98 Rajan, S. I. (2004). From Kerala to the Gulf: Impacts of labor migration. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 13(4), 497-509.

99 Rajan, S.I and P Saxena (2019). *India's Low Skilled Migration to the Middle East: Policies, Politics and Challenges*. Palgrave Macmillan. Singapore.



Despite the economic benefits, the temporary nature of employment and the lack of labour rights protection in the Gulf present challenges, as workers often face harsh working conditions and limited mobility.

States and contributed significantly to India's economy through remittances (Rajan, 2018; Rajan, 2024b).^{100 101}

The migration of Indian workers to the Gulf has profoundly impacted India economically and socially.

Economically, remittances from Indian workers in the Gulf have become a vital source of foreign exchange for India. In 2023, India received \$120 billion in remittances, making it the largest recipient globally (World Bank, 2024).¹⁰² These remittances have not only supported household incomes but also contributed to poverty alleviation, education, and healthcare in India, and increasingly serve as a source of direct investments in small businesses, housing, and community

infrastructure, offering cues for more strategic house-hold level engagement in regional development (Chowdhury & Rajan, 2018).¹⁰³ Socially, the migration to the Gulf has affected family structures and social dynamics, as many workers leave their families behind in India for extended periods (Rajan, 2015a; Rajan, 2013).^{104 105}

Despite the economic benefits, the temporary nature of employment and the lack of labour rights protection in the Gulf present challenges, as workers often face harsh working conditions and limited mobility (Rajan, 2017).¹⁰⁶

Beyond the Gulf, skilled migration from India has increased significantly over the past few decades. The liberalisation of India's economy in the 1990s and the

100 Rajan, S.I. (2018). Demography of the Gulf Region. In: Chowdhury, M., Irudaya Rajan, S. (eds) South Asian Migration in the Gulf. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71821-3>

101 Hazareesingh, K. (1966). The religion and culture of Indian immigrants in Mauritius and the effect of social change. Comparative Studies in Society and History, 8(2), 241-257.

102 World Bank. (2023, June). Migration and development brief 40: Remittances brave global headwinds, special focus: Climate migration. KNOMAD. Retrieved from https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/publication-doc/migration-and-development-brief-40_2.pdf

103 Chowdhury, M., & Rajan, S. I. (Eds.). (2018). South Asian Migration in the Gulf: Causes and Consequences. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71821-7>

104 Ranjan, R. (2015a). Indian professional immigrants and the healthcare sector in India. In Rahman, M., & Yong, T.T. (Eds.). International migration and development in South Asia (pp. 84-100). Routledge.

105 Rajan, S.I (2013: India Migration Report 2013: Social Costs of Migration. Routledge.

106 Rajan, S.I (2017). India Migration Report 2016: Gulf Migration. Routledge.

However, seen through the lens of circular mobility, skilled migration also offers opportunities for knowledge transfer, investment, and innovation when migrants return or engage with their home country from abroad.

growth of the information technology (IT) sector fuelled the migration of skilled professionals to countries like the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom (Ranjan, 2015b)¹⁰⁷. Indian IT professionals and engineers have become integral to the technology and innovation sectors in these countries, contributing to both India and their host countries' economic growth. The H-1B visa program in the United States, for instance, has facilitated the entry of thousands of Indian IT professionals, although recent policy changes and visa restrictions have created uncertainties (Chanda & Sreenivasan, 2006; Hoffman & Batalova, 2022).¹⁰⁸ This skilled migration has also led to a 'brain drain' effect, where the emigration of highly educated individuals poses challenges for India's

domestic workforce development (Bhagwati, 1976).¹⁰⁹ However, seen through the lens of circular mobility, skilled migration also offers opportunities for knowledge transfer, investment, and innovation when migrants return or engage with their home country from abroad.

Building on its estimated 35 million-strong diaspora (Parekh et al., 2003)¹¹⁰, India leverages this transnational community to enhance global influence and soft power. Compared to other large diasporas, such as China's or Mexico's, the Indian diaspora has played a particularly prominent role in technology, politics, and academia, amplifying India's international standing. This diaspora plays a crucial role in enhancing India's global influence and soft power. Through cultural exchanges, business networks,

107 Ranjan, R. (2015b). Remittance and development: A study of selected villages of Mithilanchal region of Bihar. GRFDT Research Monograph Series. Retrieved from https://grfdt.com/Upload/Publication/4038_GRFDT%20Research%20Paper%205.pdf

108 Chanda, R., & Sreenivasan, N. (2006). India's experience with skilled migration. In ILO (Ed.) Competing for global talent, 215-256.

109 Hoffman, A., & Batalova, J. (2022, December 7). Indian Immigrants in the United States. Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved August 22, 2024, from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/indian-immigrants-united-states-2021>

110 Bhagwati, J. N. (1976). Taxing the Brain Drain. *Challenge*, 19(3), 34-38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/05775132.1976.11470220>

111 Parekh, B., Singh, G., & Vertovec, S. (Eds.). (2003). Culture and economy in the Indian diaspora. Routledge.



and advocacy, the Indian diaspora contributes to India's international image and fosters bilateral relations with host countries. Politically, diaspora communities act as bridges between India and their countries of residence, influencing foreign policy and bilateral cooperation (Agarwala, 2015).¹¹² As India continues to navigate the complexities of global migration, understanding these patterns and their impacts is crucial for leveraging the diaspora's potential and addressing the challenges posed by migration.

SHIFTING SANDS: CURRENT TRENDS IN INDIAN MIGRATION

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The Gulf region remains a pivotal destination for Indian migrants, primarily driven by economic opportunities and high labour demand. Countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are top choices for Indian

Table 2: Remittance from GCC Countries (2021, \$billion)

Source Country	Amount
United Arab Emirates	19.8
Saudi Arabia	13.0
Oman	6.4
Kuwait	6.3
Qatar	4.4
Bahrain	1.8
Total	51.9

Source: KNOMAD/World Bank Bilateral Remittance Matrix 2021, December 2022

workers due to their robust economies and extensive development projects.

These remittances are a vital part of the Indian economy, supporting millions of families and contributing to national development. While economic opportunities in the Gulf are substantial, they come with challenges. Migrants often face exploitative working conditions, limited legal protections, and cultural adjustments (Rajan & Oommen, 2020)¹¹³. The lack of

Migrants often face exploitative working conditions, limited legal protections, and cultural adjustments. The lack of labour rights and the temporary nature of their employment contracts expose many workers to vulnerabilities, particularly during economic downturns or crises.

112 Agarwala, R. (2015). Tapping the Indian diaspora for Indian development. In A. Portes & P. Fernández-Kelly (Eds.), *The state and the grassroots: Immigrant transnational organizations in four continents* (pp. 84-110). Berghahn Books.

113 Rajan, S.I., Oommen, G.Z. (2020). Asianization in the Gulf: A Fresh Outlook. In: Rajan, S.I., Oommen, G.Z. (eds) *Asianization of Migrant Workers in the Gulf Countries*. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9287-1_1

However, recent policy changes and visa restrictions in the US have introduced uncertainties for potential migrants.

labour rights and the temporary nature of their employment contracts expose many workers to vulnerabilities, particularly during economic downturns or crises. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted these issues as many migrants lost their jobs and faced repatriation without adequate support (Ranjan and Bisht, 2020; Rajan and Akhil, 2022; Rajan and Batra, 2022).¹¹⁴

^{115 116} Despite these challenges, the Gulf remains an attractive destination for Indian workers due to the higher wages and better job opportunities compared to what is available in India.

In addition to labour migration to the Gulf, there is a significant trend of skilled migration from India to Western countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. This migration is largely driven by opportunities for education, career advancement, and

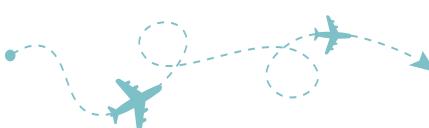
improved living standards. The Indian IT sector plays a pivotal role in this trend, as many professionals seek employment in Silicon Valley and other technology hubs worldwide. The H-1B visa program in the United States has been a major pathway for Indian skilled workers, allowing thousands of IT professionals to work in American tech companies (Hoffman & Batalova, 2022).¹¹⁷ However, recent policy changes and visa restrictions in the US have introduced uncertainties for potential migrants. Similarly, Canada's Express Entry system and the UK's points-based immigration system are popular routes for Indian professionals seeking permanent residency and stable careers abroad. These migration pathways not only benefit individual migrants and their families but also contribute to the economies of host countries by

¹¹⁴ Ranjan, R and Bisht, M. (2020). Novel Coronavirus and Indian Overseas Labour Migrants: Updates from Gulf Cooperation Council Countries. Roots and Routes, 9(1-4).

¹¹⁵ Rajan, S.I., and C.S. Akhil. 2022. Non-payment of wages among gulf returnees in the first wave of COVID 19. Chapter 13, Pp. 244-263, In India migration report 2022: Health professionals migration, ed. S. Irudaya Rajan. New Delhi: Routledge.

¹¹⁶ Rajan, S.I., and P. Batra. 2022. Return Migrants and the first wave of COVID 19: Results from the Vande Bharat returnees. Chapter 6. In India Migration Report 2021: Migrant's Health, 6th ed.,ed. S. Irudaya Rajan. New Delhi: Routledge.

¹¹⁷ Hoffman, A., & Batalova, J. (2022, December 7). Indian Immigrants in the United States. Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved August 22, 2024, from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/indian-immigrants-united-states-2021>



Additionally, African countries, particularly in East and Southern Africa, are experiencing increased Indian migration. Indian businesses are actively investing in infrastructure, agriculture, and retail sectors in Africa, creating employment opportunities for Indian migrants. This trend underscores the diversification of Indian migration patterns and the strategic importance of emerging markets for India's global economic engagements.

filling critical skill gaps and fostering innovation (Rajan, 2024c)¹¹⁸.

Beyond the traditional Western destinations, there has been a growing trend of Indian migration to other parts of Asia and Africa. Countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan have become attractive destinations for Indian professionals in sectors such as IT, finance, and healthcare. This shift is partly due to the saturation of traditional Western markets and the rapid economic growth of Asia as a global economic center (Sandhu & Mani, 2006; Rajan, 2023; 2025).^{119 120 121} Singapore and Japan offer attractive opportunities for skilled workers with competitive salaries and advanced work environments, while Malaysia is popular for its cultural similarities

and easier integration for Indian migrants. Additionally, African countries, particularly in East and Southern Africa, are experiencing increased Indian migration. Indian businesses are actively investing in infrastructure, agriculture, and retail sectors in Africa, creating employment opportunities for Indian migrants. This trend underscores the diversification of Indian migration patterns and the strategic importance of emerging markets for India's global economic engagements (Naujoks, 2013)¹²².

Despite the opportunities and benefits that migration offers, it also presents significant challenges requiring coordinated attention. For India's labour migrants, particularly in the Gulf, issues such as worker

118 Rajan, S.I (2025). The Palgrave Handbook of Indian Migrants in to South East Asia. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore.

119 Sandhu, K. S., & Mani, A. (Eds.). (2006). Indian Communities in Southeast Asia (First Reprint 2006). Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

120 Rajan, S.I (ed) 2023. Migration in South Asia: IMISCOE Regional Reader. Springer

121 Rajan, S.I (2025). The Palgrave Handbook of Indian Migrants in to South East Asia. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore.

122 Naujoks, D. (2013). Migration, Citizenship, and Development: Diasporic Membership Policies and Overseas Indians in the United States. Oxford University Press.

To move beyond short-term fixes, it is crucial for both sending and receiving countries to develop coordinated strategies that facilitate smoother transitions, improve integration, and protect migrant welfare across the migration cycle.

exploitation, job insecurity, and limited legal protections remain persistent concerns. Addressing these requires stronger collaboration between the Indian government and host countries to safeguard workers' rights, ensure fair treatment, and establish robust support systems during crises.

For skilled migrants heading to Western countries, the challenges are often tied to restrictive immigration policies, complex visa processes, and difficulties integrating into unfamiliar cultural and professional environments.

Successfully navigating these hurdles is essential not only for individual migrants but also for maximizing their contributions to both host and origin countries (Rajan, 2020)¹²³.

To move beyond short-term fixes, it is crucial for both sending and receiving countries to develop coordinated strategies that facilitate smoother transitions, improve integration, and protect migrant welfare across the

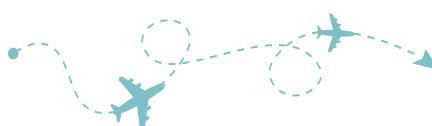
migration cycle. This includes revisiting existing migration frameworks, strengthening diplomatic engagement, and creating proactive policies that recognize the interconnected nature of labor markets, remittance flows, and diaspora networks. By addressing these challenges holistically, India can better leverage the full potential of migration for national and global benefit.

NAVIGATING NEW FRONTIERS: POLICY RESPONSES AND CHALLENGES

India's future in international migration is shaped by a dynamic interplay of demographic, technological, environmental, and geopolitical factors. Developed countries are experiencing demographic shifts characterised by ageing populations and declining birth rates, creating opportunities for Indian migrants in sectors like healthcare and skilled trades (Fingerman et al., 2020)¹²⁴. The International Labour

123 Rajan, S.I (ed) (2020) India Migration Report 2019: Diaspora in Europe

124 Fingerman, K. L., Huo, M., & Birditt, K. S. (2020). A decade of research on intergenerational ties: Technological, economic, political, and demographic changes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(1), 383-403.



Organization (2016)¹²⁵ highlights that developed countries will increasingly rely on immigrant labour to fill skill gaps in critical sectors. This demographic trend underscores the need for India to invest heavily in education and skill development tailored to these international labour markets. The Indian government has made strides through initiatives like “Skill India,” aiming to equip millions of young people with relevant vocational skills. However, there is a pressing need to enhance the quality of vocational training and align educational curricula with global standards, ensuring that the workforce is prepared for overseas opportunities.

The demand for healthcare professionals is particularly acute in countries like Germany, Japan, and Canada, where the ageing population requires a growing number of caregivers. India, with its vast pool of trained healthcare professionals, can fill this gap. However, this requires not only training healthcare workers in medical skills but also preparing them for cultural and language differences they might encounter abroad. India can create specialised

training programs focused on cultural competence and language proficiency to ensure that healthcare workers can integrate smoothly into foreign healthcare systems. Additionally, mutual recognition agreements with destination countries can simplify the process for Indian healthcare professionals to work abroad, benefiting both sending and receiving countries.

Technological advancements, including automation and artificial intelligence, are reshaping labour markets by creating new opportunities in data science, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence. While some traditional roles may become obsolete, new job opportunities are emerging in these fields. India must prepare its workforce for these changes by fostering digital literacy and encouraging innovation. Initiatives like “Digital India” aim to make technology accessible to all citizens, but their success depends on reaching diverse population segments, including women and marginalised communities. According to NITI Aayog (2018)¹²⁶, expanding these programs could position India favourably in the

125 International Labour Organization. (2016). No. 2 Future labour supply: Demographics, migration and unpaid work. Retrieved August 22, 2024, from <https://www.ilo.org/publications/no2-future-labour-supply-demographics-migration-unpaid-work>

126 NITI Aayog. (2018). Strategy for New India @ 75. NITI Aayog, Government of India. Available at <https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-03/Strategy-for-NewIndia.pdf>

India can play a leading role by sharing its experiences and strategies in managing climate-induced migration, particularly in regions like the Sundarbans and coastal areas.

global digital economy. This involves not only equipping the youth with digital skills but also creating an environment conducive to innovation and entrepreneurship. The government can partner with tech companies and educational institutions to develop curriculum and training programs that align with global technological trends.

Climate change is increasingly influencing migration patterns. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation are leading to internal displacement and have implications for international migration (Huang, 2023; Rajan and Bhagat, 2018)^{127 128}. While India is primarily affected by

internal displacement, it must also address the challenges of climate-induced migration. Collaborating with global partners to develop adaptation strategies, enhance disaster preparedness, and promote sustainable development is crucial. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2019)¹²⁹ emphasises the need for international cooperation to address the multifaceted impacts of climate change on migration. India can play a leading role by sharing its experiences and strategies in managing climate-induced migration, particularly in regions like the Sundarbans and coastal areas. Domestically, integrating climate resilience into urban planning and infrastructure development can

Geopolitical shifts, including changes in trade policies and immigration laws, also affect migration flows. India's foreign policy must focus on, engaging in dialogue with destination countries for the welfare of migrants and for promoting mobility.

127 Huang, L. (2023, November 16). Climate migration 101: Explainer. Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved August 22, 2024, from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/climate-migration-101-explainer>

128 Rajan, S.I and R B Bhagat (2018). Climate Change, Vulnerability and Migration. Routledge.

129 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2019). Special Report on Climate Change and Land. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.



Partnerships with destination countries for secure data exchange, periodic surveys on migrant experiences, and public reporting of anonymized insights would make data-driven policymaking more robust and transparent.

mitigate the impact of environmental changes on migration patterns (Rajan and Baral, 2020)¹³⁰.

Geopolitical shifts, including changes in trade policies and immigration laws, also affect migration flows. India's foreign policy must focus on, engaging in dialogue with destination countries for the welfare of migrants and for promoting mobility. The importance of such diplomatic efforts cannot be overstated. The recent geopolitical tensions and shifts in immigration policies in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom pose challenges and opportunities for Indian migrants.

Effective migration governance is crucial. India requires a comprehensive approach to migration management, encompassing policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring. Updating migration laws and enhancing data collection are crucial for informed policymaking. This

includes modernising the Emigration Act, 1983 to protect migrant rights and collaborating internationally to ensure safe, orderly migration. Establishing a National Migration and Mobility Policy could provide a holistic framework for managing migration and mobility, incorporating economic, social, and human rights dimensions. Agunias and Newland (2012)¹³¹ underscore the need for updated legal frameworks to address contemporary migration and mobility challenges effectively. Such a policy could also facilitate the collection of reliable data on migration flows, enabling evidence-based decision-making.

Accurate and timely data on migration and mobility are essential for informed policymaking. India should invest in building robust data collection systems to capture migration and mobility flows and socio-economic impacts. Collaborating with international organisations, research institutions,

130 Rajan, S.I and D Baral (2020). Development, Environment and Migration: Lessons for Sustainability. Routledge.

131 Agunias, D. R., & Newland, K. (2012). Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for Policymakers and Practitioners in Home and Host Countries. International Organization for Migration (IOM).

and the private sector can enhance data quality and facilitate evidence-based decision-making. According to the International Organization for Migration (2019)¹³², improved data collection and analysis are critical for developing effective migration policies. While India's e-Migrate portal has improved tracking of overseas workers, its scope could be broadened to include a wider range of migrants, such as students, professionals, and irregular migrants. Integrating real-time data sharing between ministries, embedding feedback mechanisms from migrants and employers, and using advanced analytics like AI and big data can strengthen the platform. Additionally, partnerships with destination countries for secure data exchange, periodic surveys on migrant experiences, and public reporting of anonymized insights would make data-driven policymaking more robust and transparent.

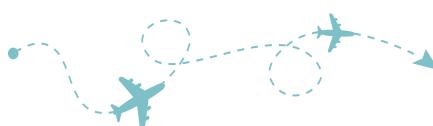
Protecting the rights and welfare of Indian migrants remains a priority. Ensuring access to legal assistance, healthcare, and social security benefits are essential. The government should strengthen its diplomatic missions

to support migrants in distress and enhance coordination with civil society organisations working in this field. Public awareness campaigns can educate potential migrants about their rights and the risks of irregular migration (Nanda et.al, 2022)¹³³. Strengthening these support systems will build trust among migrant communities and reinforce India's commitment to their welfare.

Despite the opportunities and benefits that migration offers, it also presents significant challenges requiring coordinated attention. For India's labor migrants, particularly in the Gulf, issues such as worker exploitation, job insecurity, and limited legal protections remain persistent concerns. Addressing these requires stronger collaboration between the Indian government and host countries to safeguard workers' rights, ensure fair treatment, and establish robust support systems during crises. For skilled migrants heading to Western countries, the challenges are often tied to restrictive immigration policies, complex visa processes, and difficulties integrating into unfamiliar cultural and professional environments.

132 International Organization for Migration. (2021). World Migration Report 2020. International Organization for Migration.

133 Nanda, A.K, J Veron and S I Rajan (2022). Passages of Fortune: Exploring Dynamics of International Migration from Punjab. Routledge.



Successfully navigating these hurdles is essential not only for individual migrants but also for maximizing their contributions to both host and origin countries.

To move beyond short-term fixes, it is crucial for both sending and receiving countries to develop coordinated strategies that facilitate smoother transitions, improve integration, and protect migrant welfare across the migration cycle. India can strengthen pre-departure training, improve regulation of recruitment agencies, negotiate robust bilateral agreements, and expand welfare services through its diplomatic missions. Equally, destination countries have a critical role to play. They can strengthen labor rights enforcement, ensure decent working conditions, offer accessible language and reskilling programs, create clearer pathways to permanent residency, and actively combat discrimination and xenophobia.

Promoting inclusive policies and intercultural dialogue in destination countries can help migrants integrate more fully, benefiting both migrant communities and host societies.

By addressing these challenges holistically, India and its partners can better leverage the full potential of migration as a driver of economic growth, innovation, and cross-cultural

exchange, creating a win-win outcome for all stakeholders.

CONCLUSION: CHARTING A COURSE FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH

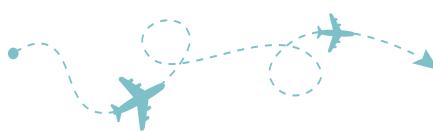
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In conclusion, India's migration patterns are integral to its socio-economic landscape and hold significant implications for its future development. The historical roots of Indian migration, from the colonial era's indentured labour system to the modern outflow of skilled professionals, highlight a complex narrative of adaptation and resilience. Migration has become a crucial component of India's economic framework, with remittances playing a vital role in supporting households, reducing poverty, and contributing to national development. However, while the economic benefits of migration are evident, the challenges it poses cannot be overlooked. Issues such as the exploitation of migrant workers in the Gulf, the brain drain of skilled professionals to Western countries, and the socio-cultural impacts of family separation underscore the need for a more strategic and humane approach to migration management. By enhancing skill development,

improving migration governance, and leveraging its diaspora, India can optimise the benefits of migration while addressing its inherent challenges.

Looking ahead, India stands at a pivotal juncture where global trends such as demographic shifts, technological advancements, and geopolitical changes offer both opportunities and challenges. By aligning its education and skill development initiatives with global needs, India can position its workforce competitively on the international stage. Additionally, the dynamic

nature of global migration requires robust governance frameworks that protect migrant rights and promote safe, orderly migration. Collaborative efforts with destination countries and international organisations can enhance the well-being of Indian migrants and strengthen bilateral relations. Moreover, the Indian diaspora, as a strategic asset, can be mobilised to contribute to national development through investments, cultural exchange, and innovation. By fostering deeper engagement with its diaspora, India can amplify its global influence and drive progress across multiple domains.



NAVIGATING THE TIDES

AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE
ON CHANGING MIGRATION
PATTERNS - II

Dr. RAKESH RANJAN &
Prof. S. IRUDAYA RAJAN

INTRODUCTION

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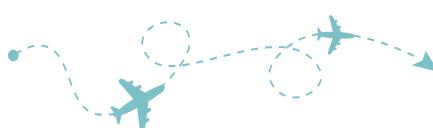
India stands at the forefront of significant transformations in global migration dynamics. As the origin of the world's largest diaspora, with approximately 35 million Indians¹³⁴ residing abroad in 2025, these migration trends have profound domestic and international implications. In recent years, a convergence of forces – demographic transitions, technological disruptions, evolving labour market needs, new migration corridors, and the spectre of climate change – are reshaping whether, how and where Indians migrate¹³⁵. These “tides” of change present India with a strategic opportunity to leverage its strengths, but also compel a rethinking of policy to ensure safe, orderly, and beneficial migration.

Five interrelated themes are explored: (1) how automation and robotics are transforming the demand for Indian migrant workers in key sectors like construction, caregiving, hospitality, and transportation; (2) the rise of telemigration and remote work opportunities for Indians – especially the highly skilled – as technology enables virtual cross-border labour; (3) the growing importance of online labour platforms and what this means for policy and labour protections for India's freelancers serving global clients; (4) the resilience of demand for tactile, interpersonal, and care-intensive jobs abroad, which are less susceptible to automation in the medium term; and (5) policy recommendations for India to anticipate and navigate these trends – including investments in skills, regulation of digital work, promotion of “virtual migration,” and enforcement of labour rights. The goal

In recent years, a convergence of forces – demographic transitions, technological disruptions, evolving labour market needs, new migration corridors, and the spectre of climate change – are reshaping whether, how and where Indians migrate .

134 Ministry of External Affairs. 2025. "Population of Overseas Indians." Government of India. Accessed June 3, 2025. <https://www.meaindia.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm>.

135 Bloom, David E., David Canning, and Jaypee Sevilla. 2003. The Demographic Dividend: A New Perspective on the Economic Consequences of Population Change. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.



is to illuminate how India can navigate these shifting tides of migration through informed policy measures that maximize developmental gains while safeguarding migrants' rights and welfare.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND INDIA'S MIGRATION DYNAMICS

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The scale of India's global migration footprint is already evident. India has the largest number of emigrants of any country, and slightly more than half of India's 17.9 million emigrants in 2020 resided in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries alone (with about 3.5 million in the United Arab Emirates)¹³⁶. The Indian diaspora's economic contributions are substantial: India has consistently been the leading recipient of global remittances. In 2022, it became the first country to receive over \$100 billion in remittances in a single year¹³⁷, with inflows increasing to an estimated \$125 billion in 2023. These

remittances – equivalent to roughly 3.4% of India's GDP – have bolstered household incomes and foreign exchange reserves, underscoring how emigration can yield broad developmental dividends¹³⁸.

India's manpower can contribute to worldwide labour shortages provided the requirements of the left-behind families are also taken care of. Projections indicate that by 2030, there could be a global shortage of approximately 50 million workers in major economies, including Germany, Japan, South Korea, Canada, the UK, and the US¹³⁹. India can contribute to meet this demand, provided the workforce is equipped with the right skills.

A critical challenge lies in skill development. Despite producing millions of graduates annually, only about 20% of India's 600-million strong labour force is considered formally skilled, compared to 80% in

¹³⁶ Ministry of External Affairs. 2025. "Population of Overseas Indians." Government of India. Accessed June 3, 2025. <https://www.meaindia.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm>.

¹³⁷ Broom, Douglas. 2023. "Migrant Workers Sent Home Almost \$800 Billion in 2022. Which Countries Are the Biggest Recipients?" World Economic Forum, February 2, 2023. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/02/remittances-money-world-bank/>.

¹³⁸ Press Information Bureau. 2023. "Annual Remittances to India Reach \$125 Billion." Government of India. December 19, 2023. <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2023/dec/doc20231219290501.pdf>.

¹³⁹ Singh, Surbhi Gloria. 2025. "Global Job Crunch of 50 Million by 2030: India May Supply Migrant Workforce." Business Standard, May 9, 2025. https://www.business-standard.com/immigration/global-job-crunch-of-50-million-by-2030-india-may-supply-migrant-workforce-125050901066_1.html.

There is immense scope in cooperating with destination countries on skill upgradation.

many developed countries¹⁴⁰. Without targeted investments in human capital, India risks a situation where its youth bulge becomes a liability rather than an asset. Recognizing the need for skill development, the Indian government launched the Skill India initiative¹⁴¹ to train and certify workers across various trades, aligning with both domestic and international labour market demands. Specialized programs under Skill India, such as the *Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana* (skill development for emigrant workers)¹⁴² and the India International Skill Centre (IISC) network¹⁴³, have been launched to equip workers with internationally relevant skills and even language training for countries like Japan or Germany. The IISC network, for instance, aims to place 100,000 skilled Indian candidates in overseas jobs

and provide pre-departure training to a quarter million workers¹⁴⁴. These efforts align with the evidence that well-trained migrants command better jobs and wages, benefiting both the migrants and the home economy via higher remittances. There is also immense scope in cooperating with destination countries on skill upgradation.

FUTURE OF WORK, AUTOMATION, AND DIGITAL MIGRATION TRENDS

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Global labour markets are being transformed by automation, artificial intelligence, and the digitization of work. These trends – often referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution – have complex implications for migration. On one hand, increased

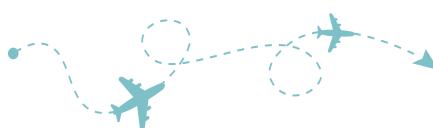
140 Pande, Aparna. 2025. "India's Demographic Dividend: Potential or Pitfall?" GIS Reports. May 21, 2025. <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/indias-demographic-dividend/>

141 Skill India Digital Hub. 2025. "Skill India Digital Hub." National Skill Development Corporation. Accessed June 3, 2025. <https://www.skillindiadigital.gov.in>.

142 Ministry of External Affairs. 2016. "Launching of Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana." Government of India. Accessed June 3, 2025. <https://www.meaweb.nic.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/28038/>.

143 National Skill Development Corporation. 2018. "India International Skill Centre (IISC) Network." Accessed June 3, 2025. <https://nsdcindia.org/archive-iisc-network>.

144 Press Trust of India. 2024. "India Poised to Fill Global Demand-Supply Gap of Skilled Workers." The Economic Times, April 1, 2024. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nri/work/india-poised-to-fill-global-demand-supply-gap-of-skilled-workers/articleshow/108943496.cms>.



The task composition of migrant jobs will shift, requiring higher competencies in using or complementing technology.

automation and robotics could reduce demand for migrant workers in certain routine, low-skilled jobs; on the other hand, technology is creating new opportunities for remote work and virtual migration, potentially enabling Indian workers to contribute to foreign labour markets without leaving home.

Many traditional destination countries for Indian workers (including the GCC states and industrialized economies) are investing in automation to boost productivity and address domestic labour shortages. For example, service kiosks, robotic cleaners, or AI-driven processes can displace some roles historically filled by migrant labour (such as clerical work, retail cashiers, or routine manufacturing). It is often

presumed that low-skilled migrant workers are most at risk, since they tend to occupy jobs that could be automated¹⁴⁵. Sectors like construction, caregiving, and hospitality – which employ large numbers of Indian migrants – are less amenable to full automation in the near term due to the tactile and interpersonal skills they require. Indeed, an analysis by the International Organization for Migration concluded that while growing automation may alter the skills demanded, it “may not significantly lessen the migration of lower-skilled workers” in the coming decades¹⁴⁶. In other words, the overall volume of migration for work may not decline sharply; rather, the task composition of migrant jobs will shift,

Indian workers are among the top participants in online freelancing markets globally, offering services from software development to graphic design . This gig economy enables workers to live in India but “export” their work virtually.

¹⁴⁵ Mann, Katja, and Dario Pozzoli. 2022. "Automation and Low-Skill Labor." IZA Discussion Paper No. 15791. Bonn: Institute of Labor Economics (IZA). <https://docs.iza.org/dp15791.pdf>.

¹⁴⁶ International Organization for Migration. 2023. Labour Migration in Asia: What Does the Future Hold? Bangkok: IOM Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. https://roasiapacific.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl671/files/documents/2023-07/iom_labour-migration-in-asia_what-does-the-future-hold.pdf.

requiring higher competencies in using or complementing technology.

The rise of online labour platforms (such as Upwork, Freelancer, and other gig marketplaces) is another facet of digital migration trends. Indian workers are among the top participants in online freelancing markets globally, offering services from software development to graphic design¹⁴⁷.

This *gig economy* enables workers to live in India but “export” their work virtually. While typically not captured in migration statistics, it effectively constitutes a form of international labour flow. For policy, this blurs the line between domestic and overseas employment – calling for new thinking on how to extend protections or benefits to those who work for foreign clients while remaining in India.

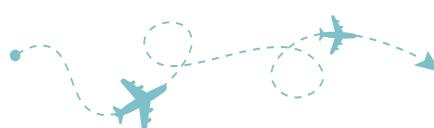
For the large number of Indian migrants who take up manual or low-skilled jobs abroad (e.g. construction

workers in the Gulf, farm workers or truck drivers in other Asian and European countries), automation could eventually reduce some opportunities – for instance, self-driving vehicle technology might one day shrink demand for expatriate drivers. Yet in the medium term (the next 10–15 years), demographic forces appear to outweigh automation in shaping labour demand. High-income countries are facing such acute shortages in sectors like elderly care, healthcare, and agriculture that even significant productivity gains from technology will not fully bridge the gap¹⁴⁸. Notably, the care economy (nurses, elder caregivers, child care) is projected to grow substantially in aging societies and is difficult to automate due to the empathy and complex human interaction involved. This bodes for continued or even increased demand for migrant workers from countries like India in these roles, provided Indians

If robots and algorithms can perform an increasing array of tasks, will destination countries need fewer migrant workers? Or will technology create new opportunities even as it displaces old ones?

¹⁴⁷ Modi, Priyanka. 2023. "The Freelance Wave: Riding the New Work Trend in India." Education Next, August 30, 2023. <https://www.educationnext.in/posts/the-freelance-wave-riding-the-new-work-trend-in-india>.

¹⁴⁸ Singh, Surbhi Gloria. 2025. "Global Job Crunch of 50 Million by 2030: India May Supply Migrant Workforce." Business Standard, May 9, 2025. https://www.business-standard.com/immigration/global-job-crunch-of-50-million-by-2030-india-may-supply-migrant-workforce-125050901066_1.html.



have the necessary training (including language and cultural skills) which could perhaps be facilitated by the destination countries especially in the context of circular migration models.

AUTOMATION, AI AND CHANGING DEMAND IN KEY MIGRANT SECTORS

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The Fourth Industrial Revolution is characterized by rapid advances in automation, robotics and AI that are transforming industries worldwide¹⁴⁹.

A key question for migration is how these technologies will affect jobs traditionally filled by migrant workers. If robots and algorithms can perform an increasing array of tasks, will destination countries need fewer migrant workers? Or will technology create new opportunities even as it displaces old ones? The evidence so far suggests a nuanced sector-by-sector impact, rather than a wholesale elimination of migrant jobs. In several sectors critical to Indian overseas employment – construction,

transportation, hospitality, and caregiving – automation is making inroads, yet the outcomes for labour demand vary.

The construction industry, a major employer of Indian and South Asian migrant labour in the Gulf and other regions, is on the cusp of technological transformation. Robotics and AI are being deployed to automate repetitive and labour-intensive tasks on construction sites¹⁵⁰. For example, semi-automated bricklaying robots can lay hundreds of bricks per hour with precision, and specialized robots like “TyBot” can tie rebar in bridge construction without human aid. In the Middle East – home to millions of Indian construction workers – massive investment projects such as Saudi Arabia’s NEOM are embracing construction robotics to improve efficiency and reduce reliance on manual labour¹⁵¹. These technologies promise to ease chronic labour shortages and improve safety on work sites, but they also mean that

149 Mixed Migration Centre. 2020. "Artificial Intelligence and Radical Technical Innovation: The Impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on Mixed Migration." February 18, 2020. <https://mixedmigration.org/artificial-intelligence-and-radical-technical-innovation-the-impact-of-the-fourth-industrial-revolution-on-mixed-migration/>.

150 Pérez, Telmo. 2025. "Region Could Lead Robotics Revolution." Gulf Construction, May 1, 2025. https://www.gulfconstructiononline.com/Article/1629005/Region_could_lead_robots_revolution.

151 NEOM. 2024. "NEOM Investment Fund Ventures into Automated Robotic Technology for Its Construction Projects." December 12, 2024. <https://www.neom.com/en-us/newsroom/neom-investment-fund-ventures-into-automated-robotic-technology>.

The Gulf region's interest in automation is partly driven by its heavy dependence on migrant workers for construction; leveraging robots can lower the need to import as many workers.

fewer low-skilled labourers may be required. The Gulf region's interest in automation is partly driven by its heavy dependence on migrant workers for construction; leveraging robots can lower the need to import as many workers. Nevertheless, in the medium term, automation is likely to transform construction jobs rather than completely eliminate the need for human labour. Skilled operators and maintenance technicians for construction robots may be in demand, and complex tasks or finishing work often still require human judgement. Indian workers with construction skills or the ability to work with new technologies could therefore retain an edge. Still, the nature of construction migration may shift: a smaller number of more skilled Indian technicians might replace large crews of manual

labourers if automation gains significant ground.

Similar dynamics are at play in transportation, where many Indian migrants work as drivers of taxis, trucks, and delivery vehicles in destinations from the Middle East to North America. Rapid advances in autonomous vehicles and drone delivery systems now threaten to disrupt this sector. Several Gulf countries have announced ambitious targets to introduce self-driving vehicles, explicitly to mitigate reliance on migrant drivers. Dubai, for instance, has set a goal that 25% of all daily trips should be handled by smart driverless vehicles by 2030¹⁵². Abu Dhabi aims for 25% by 2040, and Saudi Arabia is targeting 15% of trips to be autonomous by 2030. The motivation is clear – officials are

Several Gulf countries have announced ambitious targets to introduce self-driving vehicles, explicitly to mitigate reliance on migrant drivers.

¹⁵² Reuters. 2025. "Chinese Robotaxi Makers Head to a Welcoming Gulf as Overseas Ambitions Grow." Reuters, May 28, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/chinese-robotaxi-makers-head-welcoming-gulf-overseas-ambitions-grow-2025-05-28/>.



concerned about future shortages or rising costs of human drivers (most of whom are foreign workers in the Gulf) and see automation as a solution. Chinese companies have seized this opening, piloting robo-taxis in UAE cities and planning commercial deployments within a few years. If these initiatives scale up, demand for migrant drivers (for example, Indian taxi drivers in Dubai or truck drivers in Gulf logistics) could plateau or decline in the long run. However, much like construction, the near-term impact may be limited; autonomous vehicle technology is still maturing and human drivers remain crucial for many tasks and in less controlled environments. In the interim, Indian migrants in transport might see their roles evolve (e.g. managing fleets of autonomous vehicles or operating in more supervisory capacities), but the outright displacement is expected to be gradual.

The hospitality sector – hotels, restaurants, and related services – traditionally employs many migrant workers in roles like housekeeping, cleaning, food service, and customer care. Automation here has taken

the form of self-service kiosks (for check-in or ordering), robotic vacuum cleaners or even robot bartenders and receptionists in experimental cases. These technologies can handle routine tasks and reduce labour costs. Yet, interestingly, the sector continues to affirm the value of human workers. An ILO study of Southeast Asian economies found that while hotels and restaurants had high *technical* potential for automation, industry leaders reported that demand for *human* services was actually rising and that “the sector still emphasizes the human touch”¹⁵³. In other words, despite robotic possibilities, direct person-to-person interaction remains critical for customer satisfaction and brand differentiation in hospitality. Thus, for Indian migrants working in hotels or facilities management abroad, the near-term risk of replacement may be lower than often assumed. Automation is more likely to augment their work (through better tools, etc.) than to render hospitality workers redundant. Indeed, some repetitive back-of-house jobs (dishwashing, basic food prep) might be automated, but front-of-house roles requiring

¹⁵³ Chang, Jae-Hee, and Phu Huynh. 2016. The Future of Jobs at Risk of Automation. Bureau for Employers' Activities Working Paper No. 9. Geneva: International Labour Office. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_dialogue/@act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_579554.pdf.

The overall effect is that migrant jobs in hospitality may evolve toward higher-skilled and more guest-oriented roles, while simpler tasks are automated.

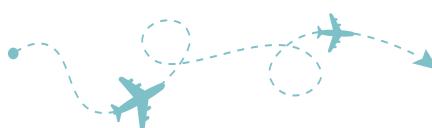
interpersonal skills, cultural understanding, and adaptability will continue to need real people. The overall effect is that migrant jobs in hospitality may evolve toward higher-skilled and more guest-oriented roles, while simpler tasks are automated.

Care work – including elder care, nursing, childcare, and personal caregiving – is another crucial area where many Indian migrants (especially women) are employed worldwide. This spans Indian nurses in Gulf hospitals and Western nursing homes, to Indian women working as elder caregivers or domestic helpers in various countries. The care sector is facing soaring demand globally due to aging populations in much of the developed world. While robotics and AI are being tried in care (such as companion robots for the elderly or AI-assisted health monitoring), the consensus is that care jobs are

comparatively insulated from full automation in the medium term. The ILO's report on the care economy emphasizes that care work's "relational nature" – the need for empathy, human contact, and emotional intelligence – "limits the potential substitution of robots and other technologies for human labour"¹⁵⁴. Most paid care workers globally are women and frequently migrants, and the sector is expected to remain a major source of employment growth, not decline. Recent trends bear this out: developed countries are actively recruiting foreign nurses and care workers to fill labour shortages. For example, over 640,000 Indian nurses are now working abroad, including tens of thousands in the UK, North America and increasingly in continental Europe and East Asia¹⁵⁵. Countries like Germany, Japan and Italy – facing acute nursing shortfalls – have launched dedicated programs to hire

¹⁵⁴ International Labour Organization. 2018. Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work. Geneva: ILO. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_633166.pdf.

¹⁵⁵ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nri/work/global-shortage-higher-pay-better-perks-lure-indian-nurses-abroad/articleshow/121397185.cms?from=mdr>



These patterns suggest that migrant-sending countries like India will see declining demand for workers abroad in some routine, physically intensive jobs (e.g. assembly-line manufacturing or basic construction labour), while demand could continue in occupations that require complex human skills or a physical human presence (care work, medical services, creative and culinary fields, etc.).

Indian nurses in large numbers. These are precisely the kind of “tactile” and interpersonal jobs for which robots, at least for now, are a poor substitute. While technology (like tele-health or assistive devices) will undoubtedly change *how* care is delivered, it is unlikely to diminish the *need* for compassionate human caregivers in the foreseeable future. In fact, technology might enable Indian care professionals to deliver some services remotely (e.g. telemedicine), but that likely *complements* rather than replaces physical migration – a point we turn to in the next section.

It is important to stress that automation’s impact on migration will not be uniform. A 2016 World Bank analysis warned that as many as 69% of jobs in India were technically susceptible to automation (based on task composition), creating

understandable anxiety¹⁵⁶. However, history shows that not all technically automatable jobs are immediately automated in practice – economic, social and regulatory factors mediate the process. In the ASEAN region, about 56% of employment in five major countries was estimated to be at high risk of automation in the next decade, especially in industries like manufacturing, retail, construction, and hospitality. Yet sectors like education, health, and social work had low automation risk¹⁵⁷. These patterns suggest that migrant-sending countries like India will see declining demand for workers abroad in some routine, physically intensive jobs (e.g. assembly-line manufacturing or basic construction labour), while demand could continue in occupations that require complex human skills or a physical human presence (care work,

¹⁵⁶ The Hindu. 2016. "Automation Threatens 69% Jobs in India: World Bank." The Hindu, October 3, 2016. <https://www.thehindu.com/business/Industry/Automation-threatens-69-jobs-in-India-World-Bank/article15427005.ece>.

¹⁵⁷ Chang, Jae-Hee, and Phu Huynh. 2016. ASEAN in Transformation: The Future of Jobs at Risk of Automation. Bureau for Employers' Activities Working Paper No. 9. Geneva: International Labour Office. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_dialogue/@act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_579554.pdf.

medical services, creative and culinary fields, etc.). Automation may also raise the skill threshold for migrant workers: destination countries might increasingly only seek migrants for jobs that cannot be done by machines, implying a premium on skilled trades, technical ability, and social skills. Indian policy must therefore anticipate a future where *fewer low-skilled workers go abroad for routine jobs*, even as opportunities grow for those with the right skills to complement or supervise automated systems.

THE EMERGENCE OF TELEMIGRATION AND REMOTE WORK

One of the most significant ways the Fourth Industrial Revolution is affecting migration is by decoupling work from geography. High-speed internet, cloud computing, telepresence, and collaboration platforms now allow many jobs to be performed remotely from anywhere in the world. This has given rise to

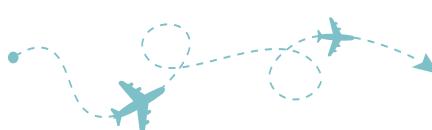
what economist Richard Baldwin calls “telemigration” – workers living in one country but working remotely for employers in another country¹⁵⁸. In essence, people can migrate virtually, by exporting their labour services abroad without leaving home. For India, with its large pool of educated, English-speaking professionals and lower labour costs, telemigration offers a significant opportunity. It enables Indian talent to join the global workforce *virtually*, overcoming immigration barriers and reducing the need for physical relocation.

Telemigration is not just a theoretical concept; it has accelerated rapidly, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic normalized remote work. The World Bank’s World Development Report 2023¹⁵⁹ notes that by mid-2022, roughly 80% of workers in the United States were working remotely at least part-time¹⁶⁰. This dramatic shift in work culture means companies in high-income countries are now far more open to hiring staff who are not physically present. The World Bank

158 Baldwin, Richard. 2019. *The Globotics Upheaval: Globalization, Robotics, and the Future of Work*. New York: Oxford University Press.

159 World Bank. 2023. *World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2023>.

160 Kapoor, Medha. 2023. "Telemigration: Exploring the Links Between Technology, Work, and Migration Patterns." Medium, August 7, 2023. <https://medium.com/@indiamigration/telemigration-exploring-the-links-between-technology-work-and-migration-patterns-673ec2c162dd>.



For India, with its large pool of educated, English-speaking professionals and lower labour costs, telemigration offers a significant opportunity. It enables Indian talent to join the global workforce virtually, overcoming immigration barriers and reducing the need for physical relocation.

report suggests that as technological barriers to remote collaboration fall, firms may increasingly hire “tele-migrants” from lower-wage countries in roles that previously would have required moving people across borders.

India is exceptionally well-positioned to benefit from this trend. Even before the pandemic, Indian professionals were deeply integrated in global outsourcing through the IT and business process outsourcing (BPO) industry. What’s new is the broadening scope of remote work to *individual* professionals and new sectors via digital platforms. Surveys of employers reflect this openness: in one global survey, 95% of senior executives said they were keen to embrace “globally diverse” remote teams¹⁶¹. Platforms facilitating such matches have proliferated, from general freelance marketplaces (Upwork, Freelancer.com) to specialized remote hiring services for

tech talent (e.g. Turing, Topcoder). This phenomenon has been turbocharged by cost considerations; as Baldwin notes, if the wage gap is larger than the “telepresence cost” of working across borders, firms have a strong incentive to offshore the job electronically.

Hand-in-hand with telemigration is the rise of online labour platforms – digital marketplaces that connect workers and clients across borders for freelance or gig work. These include well-known global platforms like Upwork, Fiverr, Freelancer, Guru, and specialized gig platforms (for tasks such as coding, graphic design, writing, digital marketing, virtual assistance, and more). For Indian workers, such platforms have opened up a vast new avenue to participate in the international economy without formal migration. India has been quick to emerge as a leading hub in the online gig economy. According to the Online Labour Index (OLI) – a project by

¹⁶¹ ibid

From a migration perspective, online platforms represent a form of "virtual migration" or exchange that complicates traditional notions. Indian workers on these sites are effectively exporting their labour services (and often earning in foreign currency), yet they are not counted in any migration statistics since they have not moved.

Oxford University tracking online freelancing – Indian workers now make up an astonishing one-third of all freelancers offering services on online platforms worldwide¹⁶². India's share of the global online workforce grew from about 25% in 2017 to 33% by 2021, the largest of any country. This dominance is driven by India's deep talent pool in IT and technology jobs, strong English proficiency, and cost-competitiveness. Other South Asian countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan also increased their share, but India remains the single biggest source of online labour supply on these platforms¹⁶³.

The types of work Indians do on these platforms are diverse, though a significant portion is in software development and technology. An ILO–Oxford study found that software

development and tech tasks constitute the largest category of online gig work globally, and their share rose from 39% to 45% of all tasks between 2018 and 2020¹⁶⁴. Indian freelancers have been central to this growth. Not only are Indians supplying labour, but the demand side is global – with most clients coming from North America, Europe, and high-income Asia.

From a migration perspective, online platforms represent a form of "virtual migration" or exchange that complicates traditional notions. Indian workers on these sites are effectively exporting their labour services (and often earning in foreign currency), yet they are not counted in any migration statistics since they have not moved. In economic terms, it blurs the line between trade and migration – these

162 Stephany, Fabian, Otto Kässi, Uma Rani, and Vili Lehdonvirta. 2021. "Online Labour Index 2020: New Ways to Measure the World's Remote Freelancing Market." *Big Data & Society* 8 (2): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517211043240>.

163 ibid.

164 International Labour Organization. 2021. *The Role of Digital Labour Platforms in Transforming the World of Work*. Geneva: International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/flagship-reports/role-digital-labour-platforms-transforming-world-work>.



are cross-border services transactions enabled by digital technology. The World Bank's *WDR 2023* highlights that such digital labour exchanges can benefit origin countries by generating income and upskilling workers, but they also raise new challenges around labour standards and inclusion¹⁶⁵.

POLICY PERSPECTIVES

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One major policy challenge is the lack of labour protections and regulations in the online gig economy. Traditional migrant workers are at least theoretically protected by labour laws either of the host country or through bilateral agreements. But Indian freelancers working for overseas clients through a platform often operate in a legal grey zone. They are typically self-employed contractors, not covered by labour laws in the client's country, and until recently were not recognized under Indian labour law either. This means no guaranteed minimum wage, no social security or health benefits, no job security, and difficulties in dispute resolution if, say, a client refuses to pay. Additionally, while these platforms provide job opportunities, they can

also engender a "race to the bottom" on wages, as workers from multiple countries bid for gigs, sometimes driving prices extremely low for certain services.

For the large segment of Indian migrants who will continue to physically move for work – especially in sectors like construction, domestic work, caregiving, and hospitality – the Fourth Industrial Revolution does not remove traditional concerns about their welfare. In fact, new tech can introduce new vulnerabilities (e.g. surveillance of workers, algorithmic management of their productivity, etc.). The Government of India needs to continuously update its toolkit for migrant protection. This includes robust pre-departure orientation (through schemes like PDOT under PKVY) to educate workers about their rights, contract terms, and the reality of working with new technologies abroad (for example, a domestic worker might now have to manage app-based schedules or deal with smart appliances). It also involves enhancing the e-Migrate recruitment portal to ensure transparency and clamp down on unregistered agents who might mislead workers about

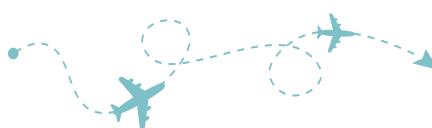
¹⁶⁵ World Bank. 2023. *World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2023>.

Bilateral labour agreements with destination countries should be revisited to incorporate provisions around technology – for instance, if a Gulf country drastically automates a sector and plans layoffs, there should be consultation or support for the affected foreign workers.

job security in an automated future. Bilateral labour agreements with destination countries should be revisited to incorporate provisions around technology – for instance, if a Gulf country drastically automates a sector and plans layoffs, there should be consultation or support for the affected foreign workers. Indian missions abroad must be proactive in assisting workers who may lose jobs due to economic changes (including tech-driven layoffs); this could mean helping them find new opportunities or facilitating retraining. The Social Security agreements that India has signed with some countries (to port pension benefits) might need expansion to cover new categories of workers and new forms of work.

A broader recommendation – which underpins all the above – is cultivating an ethos of adaptability in the workforce. Migrants especially have always had to be adaptable, but the coming decades will demand even more agility. Government programs and educational curricula should emphasize lifelong learning, critical

thinking, and flexibility, so that Indian workers can shift roles or sectors as needed in response to technological change as also shift between home and destination countries. This might involve scaling up online education platforms in India (many of which, incidentally, have global reach) to allow mid-career workers to gain new qualifications or micro-credentials relevant to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, from coding to digital marketing to AI literacy. Public employment services could be upgraded with units focused on international jobs and remote work, guiding aspirants on how to prepare for those. State governments of origin states (like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, which send many migrants) can also integrate tech-focused training in their migrant support programmes. By fostering a versatile and tech-aware work force, India can ensure that even if some doors close (due to robots replacing certain jobs abroad), other doors will open (new jobs or alternative pathways like remote work), and Indian workers



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CONCLUSION

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The Fourth Industrial Revolution is poised to reshape global labour mobility as profoundly as earlier industrial revolutions did. For India – historically one of the largest suppliers of migrant labour across skill levels – this transformation presents both significant challenges and novel opportunities. Automation and AI will likely reduce the future demand for low-skilled migrant workers in some sectors, calling for a recalibration of skills and expectations and shifts in models of migration and mobility. At

the same time, digital technologies enable new forms of virtual migration and create greater demand for high-skilled roles that Indians are well-equipped to fill. The net effect on Indian migration patterns will not be dictated by technology alone, but by how India prepares and responds.

From policy perspectives, the task is to navigate these changing tides thoughtfully. India's migration narrative in the 21st century may no longer be just about people sailing to distant shores, but also about broadband cables carrying their work abroad. In crafting policies, a holistic approach is needed – one that spans education, labour, foreign affairs, and technology domains.

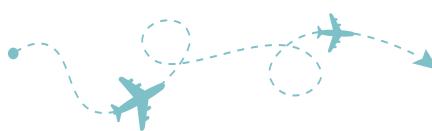
Automation and AI will likely reduce the future demand for low-skilled migrant workers in some sectors, calling for a recalibration of skills and expectations and shifts in models of migration and mobility. At the same time, digital technologies enable new forms of virtual migration and create greater demand for high-skilled roles that Indians are well-equipped to fill.

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International cooperation will be crucial as well, since the issues of digital labour governance and migrant rights in an automated world cross national boundaries.

Ultimately, the goal should be to maximize the benefits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution for India's migrants while minimizing the disruption. If done right, India can transform what might be seen as a threat – "machines taking jobs" – into an opportunity to upgrade

its workforce and find new niches for its immense human talent. This calls for agility and foresight from all stakeholders: government, industry, educators, and the migrant communities themselves. In the face of unprecedented technological change, the Indian perspective on migration and mobility must likewise evolve – rooted in resilience and migrant well-being, guided by data, and open to innovation – to successfully navigate the tides of our changing world.



WHY SHOULD INDIA BAT FOR THE "WHOLE-OF- MIGRANTS" IN GCM

LOOKING BACK AT THE IMRF
2022 TO PLAY A DETERMINING
ROLE IN 2026

Prof. BINOD KHADRIA

INTRODUCTION

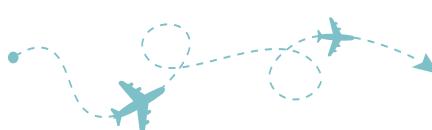
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The Global Compact for Migration (GCM)'s so-called "Progress Document" for International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) 2022, finalized through four townhall meetings comprising the non-state stakeholders convened by the UN's International Network on Migration and conducted by the UN's two co-facilitators, Bangladesh and Luxembourg, included a number of catchy slogans and innumerable commitments.¹⁶⁶ These appeared in the vocabulary of discourse leading to the IMRF that took place in a hybrid mode of in-person and online participation on May 17-20, 2022 at the UN Headquarter in New York, the first four-yearly review of the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) by the UN member states. A few of these holistic slogans are "no one to be left behind", "a 360 degree view", etc., but also the new

ones making a mark like the "whole-of-government" approach and the "whole-of -society" approach, Barring the Multistakeholders' Panel that took place on 16th May 2022 (preceding the IMRF and in fact not a part of the IMRF per se) comprising 13 non-state speakers on different pre-allocated subjects, and two moderators, mainly Civil Society Organisation (CSO) representatives from across the world, the four roundtables, each covering five or six of the twenty-three GCM objectives, and the policy debate sessions were focused on future commitments, often mentioning the approaches to be followed by the Member States in implementing the targets to fulfill the twenty-three objectives *in future*. Perhaps the veiled question one could reflect upon was whether the member states were not fully satisfied with implementing effective strategies to achieve the objectives substantially. For example, it was accepted that the "Whole-of-

The IMRF took place on May 17-20, 2022 at the UN Headquarters in New York, the first four-yearly review of the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) by the UN member states.

¹⁶⁶ United Nations (2022) Progress Declaration of the International Migration Review Forum, General Assembly Resolution 76/266.



The promised “360 degree view” was missing as no migrants and/or their families were invited to participate in the IMRF, giving the prime stakeholder of the story, viz., the migrant, a short shrift.

Government” approach requiring the various departments of each member-state governments to harmonize their policies and work in tandem with each other in dealing with one or the other issues related to migration – whether immigration or emigration was far from realised. It was understood that harmonization was wanting over the last three and a half years, and starkly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, the focus of “Whole of Society” approach was apparently on future inclusion of the of civil society organisations dealing with the migrants’ labour rights, child rights, gender rights, civil rights, human rights, academia, media and so on as *equally empowered decision-makers in the review process as the member states and other international organisations*. Ironically, their effective participation in the IMRF was minimal in the sense that those allowed to register (up to three members per CSO) were slighted on a number of counts as voiced by some of the multistakeholder panellists at the 16th May 2022 session as well as in a parallel event put together

by the People’s Migration Challenge (PMC) – a group of CSO partners. Notable concerns were the delayed funding for travel and accommodation for in-person participation (limited to only one of the three registered representatives per CSO), and only last-minute facilitation of the US visa for their entry into the United States, if at all. The other two registered representatives of each CSO, whether attending in-person or virtually online, were granted only the link to view and listen to the UN’s Web-TV, just like any of the public at large across the world without links to facilitate submission of written comments in the chat box.

The promised “360 degree view” was missing as no migrants and/or their families were invited to participate in the IMRF, giving the prime stakeholder of the story, viz., the migrant, a short shrift. Despite the fact that the migrant is a generic agency at the centre of the GCM, and despite many CSOs requesting the visible inclusion of specific migrant categories like the refugees (otherwise segregated from the GCM just because there was a

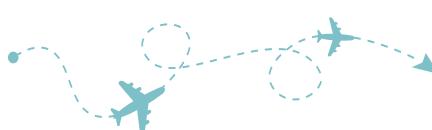
separate GCR), international students, and the diaspora, “migrants” were left undefined and without the diversity of their voices in the IMRF. As a participant in one of the pre-IMRF townhall roundtables, this author had suggested, both through verbal intervention and written submission, that spelling out the third stakeholder in a generic term, viz., the “whole-of-migrants” alongside the “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” approach would complete the trinity of stakeholders of the GCM. It seems the persistency of this omission was left unnoticed because the admitted CSOs were allowed to talk on the migrants’ behalf, narrating how the whole-of-government/s and the whole-of-society/ies failed them through the COVID-19 miseries, and continued to fail them in one refugee crisis after another, be it due to economic collapse in Venezuela or political turmoil in Afghanistan and the war in Ukraine.

The member states have been seemingly confident that the CSOs’ narratives would be countered by projecting the so-called “good practice guidelines” proudly glorified by one state after another. Using more innovative and more effective tools like what I have often called

elsewhere the “bad practice guidelines” would have helped to phase out the ineffective, failed and regressive policies. These could have been used to highlight where they met with inadequate success. Citing the missed opportunities of optimizing the GCM objective 19: “Create conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries”, this paper attempts to elaborate how the GCM and the IMRF have so far been off the mark in implementation of its objectives. It talks about value-erosion in the productivity of the migrants as workers and their families due to faulty priorities on migration (brain drain) of health workers (the highly-skilled) and the health of international migrants (the low-skilled), which could have otherwise helped achieve Objective 7 as well: “Address and Reduce Vulnerabilities in Migration”.

THE BACKDROP OF TWO GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS: MDG AND SDG

The UN’s 2000-2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were a subtle testimony to the divide between the Global North and the Global South



International migration as a subject of multilateral negotiations has been shunned historically by countries considering it as their internal matter of sovereignty.

because its eight goals were primarily the responsibility of the developing countries of the Global South; the Global North developed countries were mere observers. This discrepancy was removed in the subsequent global development agenda of the United Nations' 2015-2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Thus, the Global North developed countries were equal partners of the Global South developing countries in bearing the responsibility for implementation and achievement of the seventeen goals. However, the new 17 goals were by and large old wine in a set of new bottles in the sense that they were a reiteration of the 8 MDGs, further elaborated.

They had one more common feature: *they both did not confer international migration the status of a goal*. International migration as a subject of multilateral negotiations has been shunned historically by the countries considering it as their internal matter of sovereignty. There have been apologetic attempts to

rationalize this exclusion in SDGs by arguing that international migration was intrinsic in goal 10.7 and many of the 169 targets. Following some isolated civil society outcry, which included this author's spontaneous reaction in the plenary address at the Metropolis International Conference at Mexico City in September 2015 that "first time it is tragedy; second time it's a farce"¹⁶⁷, there were murmurs that snowballed in the wake of the Syrian Refugee crisis engulfing Europe. The UN eventually took notice of this disenchantment and organized a High-Level Dialogue on large movement of people. Overcoming the ups and downs posing hindrances to global fusion of interests, it took the efforts of three-year-long multilateral negotiations among the UN Member States to be adopted as an addendum to the 2015-2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It was a breakthrough achieved by UN's New York Declaration finally signed in Marrakesh, Morocco in mid-December, 2018, to commemorate the

¹⁶⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_IUhT4x0ek (from 0:55:25 hrs till 1:38:00).

For the first time ever, GCM had brought all the 193 Member States together on the table to debate, agree and even disagree.

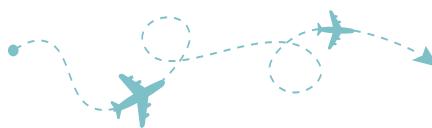
International Migrants Day. Not many knew that it was marred by a split into two compacts, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), though everyone knew about the withdrawal and non-commitment by a number of countries from the latter.¹⁶⁸

For the first time ever, GCM had brought all the 193 Member States together on the table to debate, agree and even disagree. However, a few countries followed the United States in opting out under the first presidency of Donald Trump even before it was signed. *It was clarified from the beginning itself that just like the SDGs, the GCM*

was not a binding agreement. Also, there were numerous conflicts of interest among the diverse member states. Nevertheless, most countries agreed to take a break from the overemphasized reasoning that unlike cross-border movement of capital, goods and services, that of labour and people was a subject to be kept at bay as it interfered with the so-called individual sovereignty of nations. India took a different position of its own, but did not press it further to be adopted by others as a norm.¹⁶⁹ India did not press further perhaps because there were other roadblocks. In 2015-16, Europe got divided over the Syrian Refugee Crisis. In 2016, Brexit, Scotland

168 Khadria, B. (2017). Statement by Professor Binod Khadria, Thematic Expert of the Second Informal Thematic Session Global Compact for Migration (GCM) for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Overview Remarks on the discussion following Panel 1: Sustainable development and poverty eradication Panel 2: Human-made crises as drivers of migration Panel 3: Adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters as drivers of migration ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations Headquarters, New York 22-23 May 2017. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnibpcapcglclefindmkaj/https://refugeesmigrants.un.org

169 India made two statements at Marakkech, Morocco: Statement 1 (2018): “[The GCM] recognizes the sovereign right of each state in determining its migration policy. Individual states can distinguish between regular and irregular migrants and determine the conditions of entry and stay of non-nationals in their jurisdiction and need not follow a prescriptive approach.” Statement 2 (2017): “[India] may like to flag that in certain cases stringent and lop-sided policies of the receiving States makes the migrants vulnerable, makes it difficult for the migrants to comply with obligations of retaining legal migratory status and in quite a number of cases migrants were forced to face criminal proceedings even for minor violations.” (PMI, 2017). In Statement 1, given at the GCM meeting in Morocco, India thus asserted that the definition of illegal or irregular immigration or “non-nationals” in India is its sovereign jurisdiction not necessarily following a prescription by the GCM. On the other hand, as in Statement 2, India raised concerns at the vulnerability of Indian migrants overseas to the discretion of destination countries and employers even for minor violations of legality, especially in the GCC countries. <https://www.un.org/en/conf/migration/statements.shtml> visited on 05 November 2024.



Perhaps it is time now for India to review the situation afresh and being the largest origin country of migrants in the world gear up to play a deterministic role in the next Review of the GCM in 2026.

Referendum, Catalonia Referendum, and Australia’s “Operation Sovereign Borders” followed.¹⁷⁰ In 2017, the Mexico Wall, US Travel Ban from 7 Islamic countries became the issues. Myanmar’s Rohingya Expulsion followed where India’s name was dragged and then in 2018-19 presence of irregular Bangladeshis in India led to the National Register of Citizens (NRC)¹⁷¹, followed by 2019-20 Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)¹⁷² in India. Perhaps it is time now for India to review the situation afresh and being the largest origin country of migrants in the world gear up to play a deterministic role in the next Review of the GCM in 2026. For this India can learn from what had happened in the past and particularly through the COVID-19 disruptions as well as the deportations of illegal Indians from

the US under the second Presidency of Donald Trump in 2025.¹⁷³

THE COVID-19 DISRUPTION AND SELECTIVITY IN IMMIGRATION

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Most unexpectedly, as the process of launching the 23 objectives of GCM fully began, within less than a year, in November 2019, the world was struck by the coronavirus pandemic COVID-19. This shifted the focus on enforcing social distancing guided by the WHO advisories, and travel bans halting the movements of all travellers and migrants under lockdowns imposed unilaterally by major countries. Was COVID-19 an excuse to revert back to the pre-GCM reluctance of Member States in opening up the borders? Perhaps not, but then a variety of lockdowns galore, visas were suspended, inadmissibility on grounds

170 These are well-known developments accessible through online search.

171 https://www.nrcassam.nic.in/wha_nrc.html (accessed on 13 May 2025)

172 chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/2024-09/CitizenshipAmendment2019_10092024.pdf; chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/2024-09/CitizenshipAmendment2019_10092024.pdf (accessed on 13 May 2025)

173 <https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/39173/QUESTION+NO+155+DEPORTATION+OF+INDIAN+CITIZENS+FROM+UNITED+STATES+OF+AMERICA> (accessed on 13 May 2025)

It is the selectivity of age-wage-and-vintage in immigration policies of receiving countries, which allows only those qualified in skills relevant to the host-country natives to get priority in entry.

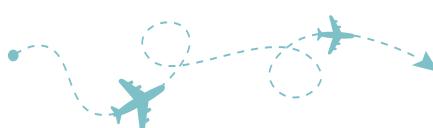
of ‘public charge’ and borders were introduced, only to be opened partially when travel protocols including health-checks, testing, vaccine certification bearing passport numbers, quarantine and so on were brought in by a large number of member states, again unilaterally. Return migration of foreign workers, many subjected to the treachery of “wage-theft” by the employers, e.g., from the Gulf countries also multiplied, and evacuation flights, notable under the “Vande Bharat” mission by India were introduced. When the bilateral “travel bubbles” with skyrocketing airfares increased the plight of international passengers stuck in various countries, India put in the services of Air India at comparably lower costs.

The COVID-19 has also led to a rush among developed countries of the Global North to offer exemptions to overseas recruitment (entry and retention) for accumulation of ‘knowledge workers’ in the health sector. Among those given

preferential entry were doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and other health-sector workers from developing countries of the South. STEM professionals incorporating scientists, IT professionals, biotechnologists, engineers and mathematicians including AI specialists necessary for innovations in the production and accumulation of ‘knowledge goods’ like oxygen kits, masks, gloves, vaccine research and production of medical equipment and gadgets that could be sold on the global market were exempted from travel restrictions. So were international students as future health-sector knowledge workers and STEM professionals with high ratio of non-return to home countries.

It is the selectivity of age-wage-and-vintage in immigration policies of receiving countries, which allows only those qualified in skills relevant to the host-country natives to get priority in entry.¹⁷⁴ For example, it has been the generic skills like those of doctors

¹⁷⁴ Binod Khadria, “Adversary Analysis and the Quest for Global Development: Optimizing the Dynamic Conflict of Interest in Transnational Migration,” Social Analysis 53, no. 3 (2009): 106–122.



and nurses, which are usable across diverse areas of applications in health and medicine that are given priority for immigration.¹⁷⁵ This is paradoxical in terms of the development values inherent in the welfare economic principles involved in the theory of international trade: Knowledge or human capital in health services is recognized as a tradable service - through the four Modes of Trade in Services under the WTO-GATS negotiations- for maximising global gains for people of both countries engaging in trade and exchange based on the differentials of their endowments in migrant sending (origin) and receiving (destination) countries.¹⁷⁶ On the other hand, utilization of that knowledge or human capital has remained concentrated to preservation and enhancement of health in the migrant receiving destination countries.¹⁷⁷ Couldn't this anomaly be corrected by the member states through the implementation of the GCM for safe orderly and regular migration?

OBJECTIVE 19: THE AGENCY OF THE DIASPORA AS PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE "WHOLE OF SOCIETY"¹⁷⁸

.....

Among the 23 objectives of the GCM aimed at making migration “safe, orderly and regular” worldwide, Objective No. 19 is specifically to “create conditions for migrants and *diasporas* to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries” (emphases added). In fact, this is the only objective, which puts the onus on non-state actors viz., migrants and diasporas, the remaining twenty-two objectives being the responsibilities of member states and/or international organisations. This is also an objective where India is in the prime position of being the origin country of the world’s largest diaspora, numbering 36 million Indian migrants living abroad permanently or as citizens of other countries.¹⁷⁸

In the prevailing context of origin countries’ obsession with “Diaspora for

¹⁷⁵ Binod Khadria, “Shifting Paradigms of Globalization: The Twenty-first Century Transition towards Generics in Skilled Migration from India,” International Migration 39, no. 5, special issue 1 (2001): 45–72.

¹⁷⁶ Binod Khadria, “Advantage In-bound Trade in Higher Education, or Advantage Human Capital in Out-bound Trade: Are We Going Wrong on the Right Choice?” Social Scientist 38, no. 9/12 (September–December 2010): 128–142.

¹⁷⁷ Bertil Soderstan, International Economics (Berkeley: Harper & Row, 1970).

¹⁷⁸ The Indian diaspora, the largest in the world, encompasses approximately 35.42 million people living overseas. This includes non-resident Indians (NRIs) and people of Indian origin (PIOs). A significant portion of the diaspora, about 15.85 million, are NRIs, while around 19.57 million are PIOs. <https://www.meia.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm>

As a tool for actualising what I often proposed as the Inter-Diaspora Cooperation (IDC) for sustainable development beyond “homeland development” - a Third-Country Development (TCD) Model through South-South Cooperation.

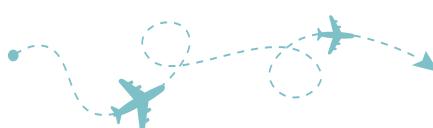
“Homeland Development” on the one hand and the ever-tightening border controls of the exclusionist polities of destination countries against the migrants (not diasporas, because they are already naturalized citizens), it is important to address the question whether a country like India can look forward to engagement of its diasporas beyond the “motherlands”. Elsewhere, I have conceptualized this as a tool for actualising what I often proposed as the Inter-Diaspora Cooperation (IDC) for sustainable development beyond “homeland development” - a Third-Country Development (TCD) Model through South-South Cooperation.¹⁷⁹ What I had neither introspected enough nor made an attempt to define in this context until now is what the agency of the diasporas imply more than just being naturalized citizens of the destination countries. For the purpose of their role in fulfilling objective 19 of the GCM, I would

differentiate them from migrants and emphasize that the diasporas should be considered to have constituted a part of the agency of the Private Sector. The examples of the roles various diaspora organisations and their members played in ameliorating the COVID-19 miseries in different countries would consolidate this conviction about the proposition.

To theorize on the dynamics of diaspora contributions in their origin or home countries, the diasporas could have been seen in terms of making three kinds of transfers – of Money (primarily non-remitance transfers as remittances are primarily the domain of migrants as different from diasporas), Merchandise (meals, food items, shelter for treatment, the COVID-kits and a variety of medical equipments, etc), and Man-hours (field-level participation in rescue, relief, funeral etc.).¹⁸⁰ Existing theoretical discourses deal with them

179 Binod Khadria, “COVID-19 and the GCM Objective-19: Trans-South Asian Diaspora Philanthropy for Internal and International Migrants in a Crisis,” Labour & Development 28, no. 2 (December 2021): 25–41.

180 The expression “man-hour” comes from “mankind” which refers to human species and includes all sexes, which may be contested by some.



as Remittances of money, Transfer of embodied technology, and Return or visits back home of the migrants with value-added human-capital through experience gained abroad.¹⁸¹

^{182 183} Notwithstanding the fact that empirical data on remittances are available systematically but not so much on non-remittance transfers, the IMRF could have acknowledged and recognized the implementation of GCM objective-19 by the non-states actors, the diaspora members in different professions and occupations. These contributions are not dependent on multilateral negotiations or agreements but unilateral decisions of what is called “the law of giving”¹⁸⁴ by diaspora organisations as non-state actors, and sometimes also through bilateral tie ups as inter-diaspora cooperation (IDC).

181 Amartya Sen, “Brain Drain: Causes and Effects,” in B. R. Williams, ed., *Science and Technology in Economic Growth* (London: Macmillan, 1973).

182 Jagdish Bhagwati and M. Partington, eds., *Taxing the Brain Drain: A Proposal* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1976).

183 Binod Khadria, *The Migration of Knowledge Workers: Second-Generation Effects of India’s Brain Drain* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999).

184 The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes giving as a virtuous act, particularly when it's done without expectation of return, with a sense of gratitude, and for the benefit of others: dātavyam iti yad dānāṁ diyate ‘nupakārīne deśhe kāle cha pātre cha tad dānāṁ sāttvikām smṛitam (Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 17, Verse 20).

185 Ibid.

186 Binod Khadria, “Paradigm Shifts in India’s Migration Policy in Gulf,” Middle East Institute (February 2010): 67–69. <http://www.mei.edu/content/paradigm-shifts-indias-migration-policy-toward-gulf>.

187 Binod Khadria, “Trans-South Asian Diaspora Philanthropy: A Driver for GCM?” *Geography & You* 19, no. 27 (December 2019): 36–41. <https://www.geographyandyou.com/shop/product/detail/MTkw>.

188 Binod Khadria, “COVID-19 and the GCM Objective-19: Trans-South Asian Diaspora Philanthropy for Internal and International Migrants in a Crisis,” *Labour & Development* 28, no. 2 (December 2021): 25–41.

189 Binod Khadria, “International Migration from India and the GCM: Inclusion and Exclusion in South Asia?” in P. Awaya and K. Tomozawa, eds., *Inclusive Development in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2022).

THE DIASPORA DISCOURSE COULD HAVE GONE BEYOND "HOMELAND DEVELOPMENT"

.....

The unilateral initiative by the diaspora is what I have proposed elsewhere as the dynamics of a fourth interest beyond the age-wage-vintage framework.^{185 186} (This fourth interest is not of conflict or competition between the origin and destination countries, but of mutual bonding – that of Humanitarian Philanthropy by the diaspora – individuals as well as groups or associations, i.e., one-way giving without any *quid pro quo* or without expecting anything in return.^{187 188 189}

Return migration which is not an instrument of the diasporas but of migrants was originally projected to benefit source countries. However,

the dominant driver of such return unfortunately has been the destination countries' intent to send them back and replace older migrant workers with younger generations of workers and students educated in newer vintages of knowledge and skills, a majority of whom would end up becoming, first permanent residents and then naturalized citizens to form part of a diaspora. Very soon, it would be logical to expect that young professionals in the entire domain of STEM-fields (now STEAM-fields) will be in higher demand across the borders, particularly those connected with preventive medical research and contributing to building health infrastructure as new transnational ventures by the diasporas. Ironically, because STEM (or no STEAM) professionals require the longest duration of time to be educated and trained, the numbers of international students in these fields would also swell.^{190 191} In addition, such demand would pose acute challenges for gaps in the health sector and care systems of countries of origin when

they need them the most. (Khadria 2009, 2012). One vital question to be asked here would be: Can this brain drain be offset through sharing of STEM professionals and students among countries through the diaspora?

STEM MIGRANTS COULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED THE SIXTH "GLOBAL COMMON" UNDER OBJECTIVE 18

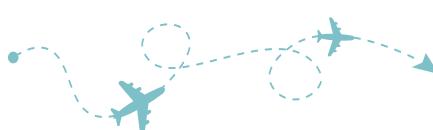
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Competition to recruit international students in STEM¹⁹² fields has led to a talent war among the destination countries e.g. through the "education fairs", which will undoubtedly cause long-term brain drain of future workers. One resource-sharing strategy could be to declare them the sixth "global common" (others being the High Oceans, Atmosphere, Outer Space, Antarctica and the Internet) that all countries have equal rights to use through the policies of circulatory migration. This would eventually replace the trinity of conflicts between countries – that of "age, wage and

190 Binod Khadria, "Between the 'Hubs' and 'Hinterlands' of Migration in South Asia: The Bangladesh-India Corridor," International Journal of South Asian Studies 10 (2020 a): 1-10. https://jasas.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Article-1_Binod_vol-10_2020.pdf

191 Binod Khadria, "STEMmining Brain Drain in Post-COVID-19 Era," Down to Earth, May 4, 2020. <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/economy/stemming-brain-drain-in-covid-19-era-70873>

192 STEM refers to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Now, the term has been modified as STEAM to include Arts.



Operationalising this through circularity between a destination and an origin country would lie in joint and collaborative education and training programmes while furthering the true spirit of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM).

vintage” – i.e. to acquire migrants who possess the advantages of younger age, lower wages bill (pay, perks, pension) and latest vintage of knowledge, turning them into tools of global complementarities, cooperation and partnership for global welfare.^{193 194}

The specific issue of mutual understanding for operationalising this through circularity between a destination and an origin country would lie in joint and collaborative education and training programmes while furthering the true spirit of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM). Its Objective 18 states: “Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competencies”. Here the focus therefore should have been on joint investment in education and training of STEM workers and students, their quantum and scale being decided

through analysis of demand and supply between the destination and origin countries.

I have elsewhere vouched for innovative models of dual, multiple and global citizenship for the diaspora health professionals (doctors and nurses) and entrepreneurs (medical equipment manufacturers) to create a pool of “Global Health-keeping Force”.¹⁹⁵ This could be conceptualized along the lines of the “UN Peace-keeping Force” - readily accessible by a crisis-hit country, for example, during the not so old Ebola outbreak in Africa (Khadria 2012) and presently the COVID-struck countries, or even other hotspots relating to the recent and ongoing crises of migration in Myanmaar, Venezuela, Afghanistan and Ukraine.¹⁹⁶ This would be a far more effective strategy by the private

193 Ibid. (12)

194 Ibid.

195 Ibid. (11)

196 During the first three months since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24th 2022, over 6.7 million people left the country. Polish cities, NGOs and ordinary residents faced an unprecedented challenge in Europe's post-war history to address their needs. Large cities, and increasingly also small towns learn how to respond to the needs of a growing population of 3.5 million forced migrants who crossed Polish borders, providing them with shelter, education, employment, healthcare system and social services.

sector industry or associations-owned or led by the diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs to combat the brain drain of human resources in health (HRH) than the often-circumvented pleas of international organisations like the WHO and the HRH-deficient member states in Africa, Asia and the South Pacific to destination countries for practicing “ethical recruitment”.

Elsewhere, I have argued for creating a “smart engagement” of not only HRH but a wider range of high-skilled STEM youth in global migration governance.¹⁹⁷

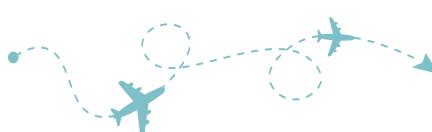
The global governance of migration by the UN Network on Migration needed to prioritize stability in educational, career and migration choices of the youth, often distorted by the necessities of coping with the high volatility and selectivity of immigration and visa regimes in destination countries. These were areas not touched upon in the IMRF progress document despite the fact that these choices are now precariously threatened at high frequency by the challenges added by the current pandemic COVID-19 and other crises.

DIASPORA PHILANTHROPY BY THE PRIVATE SECTOR COULD HAVE BEEN INSTITUTIONALISED UNDER OBJECTIVE 19

.....

My proposition is that a humanitarian philanthropy by the diasporas in a destination country like the US or Canada or UK and others could be institutionalised as an independent or determining variable that could catalyze the GCM’s Objective No. 19. What is important here for the origin countries of migration in the emerging international relations paradigm of citizenship then is to study and judge where the loyalty of their respective diasporas would lie – with the origin “hinterland”, the destination “hub”, or the humanity at large. The question is whether the humanitarian philanthropy by the diasporas, the age-old philosophy and practice of “giving” voluntarily without anyone seeking, would be really considered a great boon – both by their developed host countries of the Global North and the origin countries in the Global South? For example, as a “hinterland” of highly skilled emigrants, India has gone through a paradigm shift in its

¹⁹⁷ IOM’s Red Book 2020, The International Dialogue on Migration (IOM, 2020)



stance towards its own diaspora, and come up with a number of diaspora and emigrant friendly policies since the turn of the century, e.g., a life-long visa along with the OCI, low-cost insurance, repatriation of body in case of death, etc. to make the life of emigrants easier in the “hubs”).^{198 199} Could not have these diaspora-enabling policies be taken up for discussion (and emulation) for implementation under Objective 19 and be part IMRF’s progress document?

The GCM and the IMRF could have addressed the diasporas’ diversities to be integrated for humanitarian philanthropy towards marginalized migrants through a “bottom up” approach for enhancement of sustainable productivities of labour through development of education and health. Such bottom-up approach towards protection and empowerment of these migrants has been suddenly jacked up on the agenda of diaspora philanthropy with a jolt by the miseries inflicted on them by the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of the specific forms, mechanisms and dynamics of those humanitarian philanthropies covering immediate provisions

of medical services and supplies, cremation services, offering prepared food and shelter in the immediate run, and scholarships to students orphaned because of death of parents and a host of other philanthropic services in short and medium run, promoting the migrants among the poor and deprived sections of society galore, but neither counted as implementation nor for furthering of the GCM Objective 19.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

.....

Most analyses of the implementation of GCM through the Progress Document at the IMRF remained focused on home and host countries of migrants. Many member states could have asked: To what end? The reason behind their silence is that the well-being of the migrants and their families has never been at the centre-stage of the migration policy discourse; the focus had remained on the development of the source, transit and destination countries in general. Strictly speaking, even Objective-19 of the GCM would be found wanting on this in the sense that it did not articulate migrants’

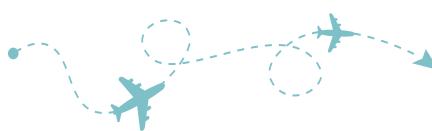
198 Ibid. (13)

199 Binod Khadria and R. Mishra, “Migration and Development in Asia: A View through the Lens of ‘Hubs and Hinterlands’,” in Anna Triandafyllidou, ed., Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies, rev. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), chap. 31.

The well-being of the migrants and their families has never been at the centre-stage of the migration policy discourse.

welfare *per se* but of the countries involved when it called out for the member states' commitment: "We commit to empower migrants and *diasporas* to catalyze their development contributions, and to harness the benefits of migration as a source of sustainable development, reaffirming that migration is a multidimensional reality of major relevance *for the sustainable development of countries of origin, transit and destination*" (emphasis added). As this could not be modified at the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) of the GCM 2022, India

can and should perhaps take the opportunity and play a determining role in the next review in 2026. The precondition for that would be that India starts preparing for them right now without waiting for others to take the lead. India's aspiration to become a fully developed country, the "Vikasit Bharat", by 2047, i.e., at one hundred years after gaining Independence, could be considered as one of the critical and decisive long-term perspective plan to keep in view while working towards full implementation of the GCM objectives globally.



BIO-PROFILES

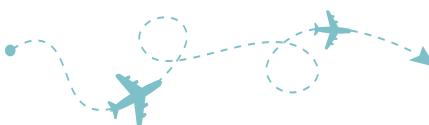


Ms. Ambi

Ambi is a Consultant & Research Lead at the Centre for Migration, Mobility and Diaspora Studies (CMMDS) under the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) in New Delhi. In her role, she oversees the research and growth strategy of the Centre. She delves into international migration and mobility research, contributes to preparation of pre-departure training materials for aspiring Indian migrants, and spearheads key partnership programmes such as Project PRAYAS and India-EU CAMM Phase II, including collaborations with ICMPD, IOM, and ILO India.

With over half a decade of experience in migration space in India, Ambi combines academic training with valuable field insights. She holds a double Master's degree, including Migration Studies from the University of Oxford. She was selected as one of the fifteen early-career researchers for the South Asian Futures Fellowship where she published commentaries on climate migration. She has presented her research at key international conferences. Her recent publication on South Asian Migration to Jordan featured in peer reviewed book publication (SpringerNature). Her analysis and perspectives have been featured in prominent national outlets, including *The Indian Express*.

Beyond academia, Ambi has served as a development practitioner in Gujarat and engaged in research at the Ministry of External Affairs, India. She is interested in various facets of migrant decision-making and believes that migration is not just a policy issue, but a deeply human one that is rooted in aspirations, dignity, agency and belonging. Her work seeks to amplify migrant voices often excluded from the mainstream: women, informal workers, climate-displaced, and those navigating the uncertain terrain of the “gig” platform economy.





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Dr. Amba Pande

Dr. Amba Pande is affiliated with the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She earned her M.Phil. and Ph.D. in International Studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Her research interests include the Indian Diaspora, international migration, transnationalism, and gender/women's studies. She has served as a visiting faculty and scholar at the University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands), the University of the South Pacific (Fiji), and Otago University (New Zealand).

Dr. Pande is a prolific writer with numerous publications to her credit in national and international journals and books. She has authored a book on regional security in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Her edited volumes include "Migration and the Rise of the United States: The Role of Old and New Diasporas" (co-edited) (Edinburgh University Press, 2024); "Women in the Indian Diaspora: Historical Narratives and Contemporary Challenges" (Springer, Singapore, 2018); "Indentured and Post-Indentured Experiences of the Women in Indian Diaspora" (Springer, Singapore, 2020); and co-edited "Women, Gender, and the Legacy of Slavery and Indenture" (Routledge UK). Dr. Pande has conducted major projects on the Indian Diaspora in Fiji, Myanmar, and Southeast Asia, which the ICSSR and UGC have sponsored. She has presented papers at many international conferences, including the IOM and UN GCM Review Meeting. She has also been invited to give independent lectures and chair sessions. Dr. Pande served on the editorial board of several journals. She is the founder and editor of "Migration and Diaspora: An Interdisciplinary Journal."





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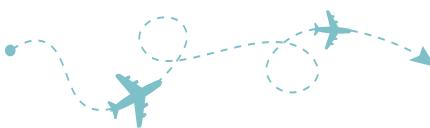
Prof. S. Irudaya Rajan is Chair of the International Institute of Migration and Development, Kerala. He is a former Professor at the Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Kerala (close 40 years of post-graduate experience). Currently, he is the chair of the KNOMAD (The Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development,)World Bank working group on internal migration and urbanization. He is one of the expert committee members to advise the Government of Kerala on Covid-19. He has coordinated nine large-scale migration surveys in Kerala since 1998 (with K.C. Zachariah) and replicated the Kerala model of migration surveys in other states, including Goa (2008), Punjab (2009), Tamil Nadu (2015), and Odisha (2023) and has been instrumental in similar surveys in Gujarat (2011), and Jharkhand (2023).

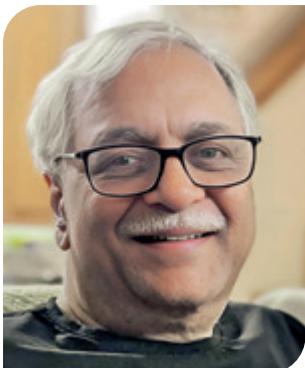
He has published in international journals on social, economic, demographic, psychological and political implications of migration on individuals, community, economy and society. He is the Founder Editor in Chief of Migration and Development (Sage) and the editor of two Routledge series - India Migration Report and South Asia Migration Report, and lead editor of Springer Series – South-South Migration.



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Binod Khadria is a retired Professor of Economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi where he was also Chairperson of Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, School of Social Sciences. Among many universities and institutions in various countries that he served as a visiting professor, Dr. Khadria was Visiting Fellow at IDS, University of Sussex, Times Fellow at Teen Murti House, Fulbright Scholar at Boston University, and Senior Fellow at National University of Singapore. In 2017-18, he was Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Chair at Rutgers University, USA. His publications include *The Migration of Knowledge Workers* (Sage, 1999), *India Migration Report 2009 and 2012* (Cambridge University Press), and *Indian Skilled Migration and Development: To Europe and Back* (Springer 2014). Apart from publishing in *Harvard International Review*, *Encyclopedia of Indian Diaspora* (Didier Millet), and *Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration* (Wiley), he was a consultant to ILO, IOM, OECD, World Bank, WHO, GCIM, IRD-France, IDE-Japan and Government of India. He co-edited *World Migration Report 2020* (IOM), *Sage Handbook of International Migration* (2019), and special issues of *International Migration*, *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* and *Asian Population Studies*. He is on the International Steering Committee of Metropolis International and IOM's Migration Research Leaders Syndicate, and served as Thematic Expert at UN General Assembly debate on GCM 2018. Presently, Professor Khadria is President of think-tank Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT). He is also Affiliated Scholar at ISIM at Georgetown University, Washington DC and a Scholar of Excellence at CERC in Migration at Toronto Metropolitan University. In 2023, he delivered the prestigious inaugural address at IMISCOE 2023 at Warsaw. The same year, his former students and colleagues brought out a festschrift in his honour, titled "Development Outlook of Education and Migration – An Indian Experience (Springer).

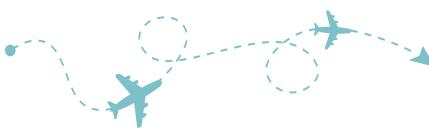
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