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# **GRFDT Policy Brief 2**

## **Migrants and Immigrant During COVID-19: Country-Specific Cases**



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## GRFDT Policy Brief

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## MIGRANTS AND IMMIGRANT DURING COVID-19: COUNTRY-SPECIFIC CASES

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# Migrants and Immigrant During COVID-19: Country-Specific Cases

Abhishek Yadav\*

## Executive Summary

COVID-19 has posed a significant challenge to the human population across the world, surpassing all physical boundaries. However, the most vulnerable section of the society like migrants and immigrants have been suffering a lot due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As per the *International Migration 2019 Report*, there are about 272 million international migrants around the world, which accounts to the 3.5 per cent of the world's population (United Nations, 2019, p. 3). As per the *ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers 2018*, "the stock of migrant workers is estimated at 164 million" (ILO, 2018, p. 5). It is worth noting that as per the 2009 UNDP report, 740 million internal migrants were recorded, which shows that vast majority of people migrate within countries and "staying within one's country of birth overwhelmingly remains the norm" (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2020, p. 19). COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented situation resulting in a vast amount of problems for these migrants everywhere in the world. COVID-19 has exposed fault lines globally, including xenophobia, stigmatisation, racism, and socio-economic profiling, among others. Migrants are facing discriminations of various kind and are also coping with the problems relating to livelihood, layoffs, homelessness, hunger, healthcare, mobility, harassment, violence and apathy of governments.

For critically discussing all these issues relating to migrants and immigrants, Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism ([GRFDT](#)) organised a virtual panel discussion on May 10, 2020, where domain experts were requested to share their observations and viewpoints. This policy brief is based on the insightful inputs provided by the distinguished speakers during the panel discussion. It is an attempt to bridge the gap

between the research, relevant policies and their implementation to enable migrant rights in letter and spirit.

The policy brief suggests the following key recommendations for the attention of governments, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders: a). Migrant discourse needs to be given high consideration by academia as it is one of the most neglected areas; b). STEM researchers and experts can be declared as the sixth Global Commons by the world community so that these experts can become accessible to all countries without unnecessary restrictions; c). Technology should be harnessed to help migrants and immigrants for their better future; d). The process of 'localisation' is likely to emerge and hence needs to be managed accordingly by the governments and civil society; e). Regional integration can be a possible way out to cope up and overcome the adverse economic impact of COVID-19; f). Special efforts need to be made by developed countries to help tourism-dependent countries as they would be at a high loss due to restriction in the movement of tourists; g). Visible and invisible forms of discrimination have exposed the faultlines in the society and hence need to be tackled with full efforts by respective governments and civil society; h). The education system should be used to create awareness among the population about the difficulties faced by migrants; i). Undocumented migrants need to be helped by the countries in terms of healthcare, food, sustained employment and other necessary necessities; j). It is nearly impossible to sustain the economy without the presence of migrants, and therefore, there is an urgent need to prioritise policies for the welfare of migrants.

**Keywords: Brain-drain, COVID-19, Discrimination, Localisation, Migrants, Regional Integration, Technology**

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Note: Views expressed are of author(s).

## Introduction

The presence of the phenomenon of migration can be assumed since time immemorial. The reasons for migration may have changed with time, but the mobility has been the constant fact in the long history of humankind. As per the *World Migration Report 2020*, it is evident that “international migrant population globally has increased in size but remained relatively stable as a proportion of the world’s population” (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2020, p. 22):

Table 1: International Migrants from 1970- 2019

Year	Number of migrants	Migrants as a % of the world’s population
1970	84,460,125	2.3%
1975	90,368,010	2.2%
1980	101,983,149	2.3%
1985	113,206,691	2.3%
1990	153,011,473	2.9%
1995	161,316,895	2.8%
2000	173,588,441	2.8%
2005	191,615,574	2.9%
2010	220,781,909	3.2%
2015	248,861,296	3.4%
2019	271,642,105	3.5%

Source: (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2020, p. 21). *World Migration Report 2020*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration.; UN DESA, 2008, 2019a, 2019b.

The importance of migration can never be undermined as it paves the way for the progress of origin, transit and destination countries. As per the United Nations 2017 fact sheet, “without migration, the population of the developed regions would be smaller in 2050, while the population of the developing regions would be larger” (United Nations, 2017, p. 2). Fact sheet finds that “migration is expected to slow the ageing of populations in the developed regions” and argues that “immigration often has a rejuvenating effect on the population age structure of receiving countries” (United Nations, 2017, p. 3). These facts reveal the immense importance of immigrants across the globe ranging from Global North to Global South.

However, migrants and immigrants have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The vulnerability of these group varies globally from countries to countries and as per conditions prevalent across the globe. It has been observed that there is an absence of powerful constituency to raise the issues of migrants and immigrants, as they have relatively less unity, influence and resources to mobilise themselves. As the pandemic is continuing and there is no clear sign of the availability of vaccine till now, the situation has become more uncertain for migrants worldwide. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand the difficulties being faced by migrants in various countries so that necessary awareness can be created amongst the global community.

It cannot be denied that migrant workers are the active agent of global economic force. Although the importance of migrants in sustaining the economy of any country cannot be undermined, it has been observed that the societies and respective governments have deliberately neglected necessary steps for their welfare. During COVID-19 period, migrants are facing the deplorable scenario because of various reasons including inadequate preparedness by governments, the underdeveloped healthcare system in various countries, non-availability of sustained employment due to layoffs by employers and apathy by the civil society.

These factors have resulted in the immense suffering for migrants to fulfil even their basic survival needs. COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented crisis posing a tremendous set of challenges to the global community. There is a need to devise more humane policies providing some respite to the migrants not only during the pandemic but even in

the post-COVID-19 period. Hence, joint efforts by the Global North and Global South in the right direction are the need of the hour to face this unprecedented crisis. Therefore, this policy brief attempts to delve deeper into the intricacies involved in understanding the issues of migrants and immigrants across the globe, especially during the COVID-19. It unearths the harsh situations being faced by migrants in various countries and suggests possible ways to minimise the adverse impact resulting out from COVID-19.

## Key Considerations of the Discussion

### 1. Prioritising Migrant Discourse

According to Prof. Binod Khadria, the migrant discourse has been largely neglected in academia despite the fact that migrants are important stakeholders. It is imperative to understand that migrants are amongst the most marginalised community and hence, needs to be given due consideration. COVID-19 pandemic has increased the concerns for migrants in the countries of origin, countries of destination, and even in transit countries. There has been a very dim focus on migrant discourse. Collecting data for migrants has proved to be a challenging area. Only broad data is being used, and even on many occasions, vastly outdated data is being used of 2001 and 2011. UN data on international migrants shows 270 million international migrants in 2019, that makes it 3.5% of the world population. However, the fact which has not been cited for long is about the size of the immigrant population in India. The population size of immigrants in India is just 5 million, that makes only 0.4- 0.5%. The size of internal migrants in India is enormous, that is 139 million.

COVID-19 has brought new questions in front of us like who is a migrant? There are different available definitions. However, migrant origin also needs to be taken into account for formulating the more viable definition. For example, one has to take account of the previous three generations and future generation, including children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Seven generations are often referred to in Indian culture as well. If these aspects are taken into account, the numbers will rise.

**U**nlike earlier, COVID-19 has brought borders within the countries which can be seen in all the states, districts, and villages. Until the spread of COVID-19, only entry used to be controlled by all the countries, but now, even exit is being controlled. It has become a 'new normal' now. The internal migrant has barriers in going home and hence facing miseries.

- Prof. Binod Khadria”

It is a welcome step by the Indian government that it has amended the 123-year old Epidemic Diseases Act through Presidential Ordinance, which prescribes deterrent punishment to protect healthcare workers (COVID-19 warriors) from any harm. However, we need to widen our horizon and think about the concerns of other stakeholders as well who are involved in managing the crisis and hence are vulnerable.

For immigrants, due to the impact of COVID-19, the “great deal of selectivity” can become the order of the day as countries may begin formulating migration policies based on the specialisation of migrants. It is evident through the recent United States Presidential Order, which has suspended all green cards for 60 days except health-workers, who are considered extremely important. Now, this ‘new normal’ would have long term implications.

**T**here is a high possibility of re-emergence of brain-drain due to the high demand of STEM experts in the aftermath of COVID-19

-Prof. Binod Khadria

In addition to the demand of health workers, there is a high possibility of re-emergence of brain-drain debate due to the high-demand of STEM experts (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in Global North and South. In such context, it is suggested that STEM researchers and experts can be declared as “Sixth Global Commons” so that their expertise can be shared by the world community bypassing the borders of countries without any conflict as they are in short supply globally.

### 2. Harnessing Technology to Facilitate Migrants

**Macro Picture of the Economy-** Dr. Alwyn Didar Singh argued that the world economy in 2019 was \$85 trillion, and India’s GDP was around 4.5%. Because of the economic fallout of the COVID-19, the world GDP is at 1% or even lower while India is growing around at 0.2- 0.9%. This tremendous downfall is affecting migrants and mass movement of



people and taking away jobs. Such a scenario gets linked with the loss of employment and thereby affecting migrants adversely. The highest amount of COVID-19 affected patients have been found in one of the most developed cities. Therefore, a large number of migrant workers have lost their jobs even in highly developed cities like New York, London, and in parts of Northern Italy.

**Gulf Corridor, Technology, and Connectedness-** Every migrant has a mobile phone through which he associates himself connecting to the family, hosts, and the whole world. All migrants are linked to the internet in some manner. The information from where they start to where they end up is received and sent with the help of technology. Even the Indian Government has launched E-Migrate Project and Skills Centre for Workers among other initiatives.

*There is a high possibility of re-emergence of brain-drain due to the high demand of STEM experts in the aftermath of COVID-19*  
- Prof. Binod Khadria

*As technology is highly interlinked with the migration process, it can be used to help migrants. It takes us to the concept of connectedness, which is being achieved with the help of technology.*

- Dr. Alwyn Didar Singh

During these tough times, the vulnerabilities of internal and international migrants are being exposed. International Organisation for Migration (IOM) would consider it as a 'Return Migration', but such migration has always been voluntary in nature. The present condition can be categorised into 'Reverse Migration' as migrants are being compelled to go back to their home. The reality is that they have no future, no job, no food, and no place to stay now. Therefore, they are trying to find out new avenues, and they can get it only through the help of mobiles, technology, and the internet.

It also needs to be observed that how COVID-19 is going to impact the usage of technology. All the information from embassies, including flights details, reached to immigrants from gulf countries through the efficient usage of technology. Now the phenomena of 'localisation' would emerge and hence, needs to be addressed. There is a need to create and find local jobs and activities for returnee migrants to generate income.

### 3. Regional Integration: Key to Cope-Up the Challenge of COVID-19

Prof. Biman Chandra Prasad observed that the Fiji also closed down borders by the end of March like other Pacific island countries and therefore has lesser cases comparatively. Till May 10, 2020, Fiji has got only 18 cases of Corona Positive and right now only four active cases are there as other 14 patients have recovered. It shows that the Fiji Government has taken utmost care of the health sector on a priority level.

*Deeper and meaningful regional integration is the possible way out to tackle the impact of COVID-19 on the economy of Island countries.*

—Prof. Biman Chandra Prasad

Therefore, it can be said that almost all Pacific countries have very few or no cases. Thus, the main issue for Pacific countries, including Fiji, for now, is about the economic fallout due to the impact of COVID-19. The economy of Fiji depends upon tourism and remittances from seasonal workers who go to Australia and New Zealand. It is noteworthy that 40% of Fijian GDP comes from the tourism sector. The compelling question is about the challenge of managing economic fallout. 60-65% tourists from Australia and New Zealand arrives in Fiji and hence contribute to boosting the Fijian economy.

*Most Pacific countries are tourism-dependent and therefore, are going to be affected adversely due to the COVID-19 and its subsequent economic fallout. Such a scenario will restrict the movement of people and thereby adversely affecting the tourism-dependent countries.*

- Professor Biman Chandra Prasad

Australia gets seasonal or guest workers from Europe and due to COVID-19, it is most likely that these workers would find difficulty in coming there to work. Therefore, in such a context, the government of Fiji is discussing with Australia and New Zealand, to be included in the 'travel bubble' to boost its economy. Discussions on the trans-Tasman bubble are going on in positive directions.

In addition to the tourism sector, a large amount of remittances also helps Fijian economy. The job loss of the Fijian diaspora in European countries would drastically decrease the flow of remittances usually received by Fiji. Movements to Australia and New Zealand under the 'Seasonal Workers Program' would also be adversely affected and could create immense pressure on the Fijian economy due to lack of remittances.

#### 4. Government's Duty to Ensure Social Security

According to Prof. Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, there is a 'Visibility of Crisis', which has created strong fault lines. There is still a hangover of imperialism, colonialism, and recent 2008 global economic crash and austerity response by Britain, which completely undermined the health and social services in the country. It has been found that there are deep historical misunderstandings of History in Britain, and therefore, it is difficult to find a good benchmark for its behaviour and policies.

*Decisions are being made by poor understanding at all levels, particularly at the current government level*  
- Prof. Stephanie Hemelryk Donald

It is being considered in Britain that COVID-19 is a European War. It is absolutely wrong as the whole world community is facing it. It needs to be accepted that COVID-19 is a pandemic. Britain thinks itself as a global force, but arguably it is not anymore. Britain is not looking at what is happening globally and that it will also impact this small island.

*There is a lack of care for migrants. Even those who have come many years back are also suffering due to the apathy by the society and the government.*  
- Professor Stephanie Hemelryk Donald

The Cardiologist Consultant Dr. Amitava Banerjee, who has been in frontline to tackle the pandemic, said that- we were not humble enough to look at the deteriorating conditions of other countries like Italy, China, and Spain. UK failed in shutting down early and in ensuring proper healthcare facilities. It shows a lack of humility in the human psyche. Another female doctor said that lack of testing, failure to shutdown society on time, and lack of care equipment are the reasons for such dismal condition of Britain. It has resulted because of the strategies of austerity over the last ten years.

On the issue of the definition of migrant, Prof. Donald observed that the host society decides whether someone is migrant or not. On a practical note, one is considered a migrant if the host society says so. Although, sometimes biases also come to the fore in giving the status of migrants. For example, just because of the colour of the skin and the tone of one's voice, one might not be considered migrant in Britain.

**Migrants in Detention or Foreign Overseas Nationals in Detention-** An issue has emerged due to thousands of people kept in detention and were forced to return. The judiciary believes that most people can be released to join the society. Even NGOs are also fighting against the Department of Home Affairs on this issue of detention and forced return. It shows the big gap between the government and the judiciary in this regard. It is beyond logic to keep migrants in detention and to think of deporting them. It reveals the anti-migrant mindset of the Home office.

**Case Study of British-Chinese Population-** The British government seems not to be thinking about British-Chinese researchers. It needs to be kept in mind that the young 30-40% of British-Chinese people, under the age of 25-35, with high skills can be welcomed anywhere in the world because of their expertise in particular fields. They are highly motivated and highly educated people. Although they are British, they have the required capacity to re-migrate and they can.

**Huge Invisibility of Migrants-** Migrants are being kept in detention centres, where they cannot be seen. Similarly, British -Chinese people are also being discriminated. People on the frontlines, including doctors, nurses, healthcare workers, and all sort of people of minority ethnic groups are being discriminated. Older people who are extremely vulnerable to infection are being allowed to die by the government and their policies. There is an impression that the Government policies are allowing to die. Such a dismal scenario has created deep fissures in society. As per one report, the probability of dying of black people from COVID-19 in the UK is four times more than white people partly because of socio-economic disadvantages. First-generation migrants have not been paid well as they are low-skilled. However, now even the government realises that they are key workers, who are extremely vulnerable to the COVID-19 situation.



There is something problematic in British society. It has created dark fissures in the way the British society thinks of itself. Decisions are being made by poor understanding at all levels, particularly at the current government level.

## 5. Countering Discriminations against Migrants and Immigrants

Prof. Luciana L. Contarino Sparta stated that Argentina has close links with migration since the nation-state appeared in 1853. In initial years of its existence, Argentina recognised its European origins only. Gradually people have started to accept its other origins from Asia, Africa, and Latin America as well. It has somehow helped in ending discrimination which was there for a long time. However, in practice, COVID-19 has increased discrimination.

Since March 3, 2020, when the first case of COVID-19 arrived, people of Chinese and Korean origin were compelled to close their shops and supermarkets.

These people filed lots of complaints against discrimination, xenophobia, and racism. It raises profound questions about prejudices. However, now after the COVID-19, even Europeans are like a threat and many Italians, and Spanish have also suffered discriminations. The government reacted early to prohibit any flights from Europe. The government took decisions when Argentina just had only 130 cases. Flights from Italy and Spain were closed entirely by May 12, 2020. More than 300 Spanish and Italian people were deported. Since March 20, borders have been completely closed. Many tourists and migrants are being discriminated. They cannot go back to their countries due to various prohibitions and deteriorating conditions.

***D***iscrimination towards immigrants has increased in society due to the economic fallout of the COVID-19.

- Prof. Luciana L. Contarino Sparta

***I***mmigrants who came to Argentina from Venezuela in the last five years do not have resident rights like permanent citizens of the country. Therefore, government facilities cannot be availed by them. In fact, they were the first who suffered when shops and restaurants were closed. It is estimated that 58% of migrants had no income for the last two months.

- Professor L. Contarino Sparta

Argentina had to pay the debt to the IMF, but the government could not do it, so it shows the defaulter situation. For this reason, many people lost their jobs and left the country for better prospects in other countries. However, due to the COVID-19, the vast diasporic community of Argentina is facing the job loss crisis in other countries too. Therefore, even emigrants have a problem now in coming back as the

government of Argentina has shown its inability to help them.

Africans who have arrived here usually sell in the streets (majority Senegalese people). They cannot be in the streets after the lockdown and now cannot even return to their country due to many restrictions and deteriorating economic situation. Government is saying that it has no money. Even emigrants of Argentina are also not being allowed because of lack of finances with the government. Moreover, the incidents of discrimination to emigrants and immigrants have increased.

***I***t is most likely that many shops and restaurants would not open anymore because of low income or no income prospects. Therefore, such a situation would be very challenging to be faced and managed.

- Professor Luciana L. Contarino Sparta

Prof. Sparta argues that there is no possibility of going on without the migrants. Argentina needs migrants everywhere. We need migrants in shops, hotels, restaurants, and it cannot run without Australian, and Latin American. Australians arrived here just five years ago. Argentinians need them. Although we discriminate Non-European, we even need them as well. There are many issues which need to be managed. For instance, Senegalese people have reached here in Argentina through their own social network and contacts. There was a law seven years ago to regulate those who had arrived before 2013. Now, they have applied for legal residents and working a lot, but they have no contract with Argentinians or Senegalese government. Prof. Sparta argued that the government of Argentina is not interested in relations with African countries as it is only interested in European countries.

Regarding the healthcare facility to irregular migrants, Professor Sparta points out that the health system in Argentina is public and open to everyone at least on paper. However, there is a possibility that migrants would have to wait more in hospitals to get treatment. The government is claiming that everyone has similar access to healthcare. As everything is closed, migrants have become invisible in public spaces. However, it does not mean that they are not important. In fact, they are an essential part of society.

## Observations and Questions

**Q. Dr. Aditya Raj: Who can be called migrant in the post-COVID-19 scenario?**

On the definitional aspect of migrant, Professor Binod Khadria identifies that defining migrant is one of the most challenging questions to be answered. It is now being seen that a large number of irregular migrants are amongst the worst affected. Many international agencies, including IOM, are struggling to find the proper acceptable definition.

*There is a need to "make migration a choice, not a necessity or compulsion".*

*- Professor Binod Khadria*

Outlining the significance of Global Compact for Migration (GCM), Prof Khadria mentioned that GCM was finally signed in 2018 after the long struggle initiated by Kofi Annan.

*Technology will be used to identify people, connect with people, to make them aware and even to teach them new skills.*

*- Dr. Alwyn Didar Singh*

Sovereignty was a significant barrier in the signing of the agreement. Many countries, including the United States, withdrew from it. Even then, it is noteworthy that a large number of countries are still signatory to this agreement. There are overall 23 objectives of the GCM, which strives to make migration Safe, Orderly and Regular (SOR).

Regarding the relevance of definition of migrant, Dr. A. Didar Singh clarifies that during COVID-19 period, it is irrelevant to define migrants and non-migrants, as the most important thing now is the matter of human survival. All the informal workers are attempting to migrate and struggling for their day-to-day existence. Therefore, it is really a question of human survival as all informal workers are suffering a lot.

In such a context, Dr. Didar Singh argues that on a long-term basis, there is a need to completely redefine society to help these migrants through technology. Technology will also help eventually in localisation where people will be nearer to their home to work and to survive not only during COVID-19 but maybe even after that.

**Q. Mrs. Paddy Siyanga Knudsen: What is the usefulness of Regional Integration? As international finances would slow down, so what intra-regional trade sectors can be useful?**

On the significant importance of the regional integration process, Professor Biman Chandra Prasad advances the argument that regional integration is a way out for several countries to help each other in such challenging times. Australia and New Zealand is a part of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), and they are highly developed as well. Fiji has very close relations with these two countries in terms of movement of people. Seasonal Workers Program is going on successfully for many years. Such initiatives would become more effective now as Europeans might not be able to come easily in these countries. Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER Plus) is an opportunity which can be mutually beneficial and hence can be signed. The lesser barrier to trade and no unnecessary restrictions on the movement of people is highly needed. However, the traditional and rigid conception of sovereignty is becoming a hindrance to such initiatives. Prof. Prasad has been advocating deeper and meaningful regional integration for many years. He envisions broader Regional Pacific Community and unhindered movement of people, goods, services. However, the question remains on how Australia and New Zealand see possibilities with Pacific countries during and

*Deeper and meaningful regional integration of Pacific island nations with Australia and New Zealand will prove to be mutually beneficial.*

*- Professor Biman Chandra*

after the COVID-19.

**Q. Mrs. Paddy Siyanga Knudsen: Please give your views on Gulf Situation.**

Regarding the situation of migrants in the Gulf, Dr. A. Didar Singh identifies the oil price as one of the most significant issues, which has not been addressed fully. Price of oil has come down from over \$100 to the \$20. It means jobs and work in the Gulf is going to be impacted severely. Therefore, it is hardly the appropriate time to have negotiations with Gulf countries to re-do the migration process. United Arab Emirates has offered to host the next Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), which seems difficult now because of COVID-19 situation. The fall of oil price is going to affect the globe more than COVID-19 if it would be seen on a long-term basis.

**Q. Mrs. Paddy Siyanga Knudsen: What are your views on fast-tracking the implementation for the welfare of migrants?**

For addressing the implementation of welfare policies, Prof. Binod Khadria appraises that the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) is doing good work, and shows the world community a ray of hope. However, it needs to be understood that multilateral frameworks are usually pretensions, and therefore they are often downplayed during negotiations. Thus, during these times, multilateralism can set the tone or philosophy of cooperation, but actual steps and implementation would lie with individual countries. Therefore, benevolent unilateralism would effectively work in the implementation of policies.

*Countries like India, Fiji, South Africa and probably all of them in Global South can take a leadership role as this time Global North has suffered comparatively more due to COVID-19.*

*- Prof. Binod Khadria*

Prof. Khadria suggests that mutual recognition of skills and investment in training can be taken up by countries. In the context of India, its demographic dividend is not going to last forever. India will have to face the challenge of the ageing population once its demographic dividend gets over after 25-30 years. Therefore, there is a need to make hay while the sun shines. Therefore, youth from developing countries should harness their leadership in migration governance.

**Q. Ambassador Manju Seth: Are there any suggestions regarding a large number of evacuees who are coming back home from the Gulf and other countries?**

Regarding the returnee migrant workers, Dr. A. Didar Singh argues that the combination of both state governments and the private sector is needed to tackle the COVID-19 impact on migrant workers. State governments will have to take more responsibility. In fact, Kerala has proved to be a role model in terms of taking care of migrants. Kerala is doing a tremendous job as it has launched a website where migrants are being given jobs as per their skills.

During Gold Rush phenomena, Dr. Didar Singh stated that people rushed to American West Coast, and in a few years, the gold eventually ran out. However, after their return, people had already acquired many skills which were used to generate employment. Therefore, the way Gold Rush Phenomena helped workers in the United States, can be harnessed even now in the home countries with the help of skills gained by migrants from their respective places. Technology can be utilised to redefine society in better terms to help migrants as they are battling for survival.

**Q. Dr. Om Prakash Manjhi: There is a significant problem in collecting migrant data in states like Bihar, and therefore it is not available to be analysed. Could you provide any observations on it?**

On the issue of lack of availability of reliable data, Prof. Binod Khadria suggested that one should not make policies which are driven by data only. Instead, data should be driven by policies as sometimes data can be cooked up also. Data is sometimes used for long-term reasons and the statistics are created from data. Therefore,

*There is no migration as we come to know it earlier as localisation issue of policies and planning would emerge, and countries would have to grapple with it*

*- Mr. Ashook K. Ramsaran*

Prof. Khadria is of the view that one should not put all his eggs in one basket of data. One needs to do micro-planning, go to villages, look around the real picture and then decide the future course of direction.

Mr. Ashook K. Ramsaran envisioned a new world order, which takes into account the reduction in GDP globally, especially in destination countries for migrants- Europe, North America and Oceania countries. For that reason, he argued that the reduction in migration would increase localisation and would take into account policies and planning how to utilise the returning migrants as well as their domestically produced labour efficiently.

According to Mr. Ramsaran, COVID-19 is going to affect policies and planning. The reduction in the prices of oil will reduce the available capital and will affect the workers in the Gulf States. All returned migrants will affect all countries, whether it is Western Hemisphere or Asia, which needs to be addressed by each country to manage and sustain the population.

**Q. Ambassador Manju Seth: How can these so deeply ingrained discriminations be countered?**

On a positive note, Professor Stephanie Hemelryk Donald contends that discrimination can surely be countered. However, she further argues that there is a need to understand that discrimination is also a class issue at a deeper level. Even the UK has many poor regions where homelessness and poverty are rampant, maybe because of bias towards particular regions or for particular leaderships in History. She is residing in Liverpool and has seen how many people are very closely tipping to poverty and homelessness.

*Lots of NGOs are working to address the issue of anti-migrant biases. There are lots of really committed people who understand the problem of discrimination.*  
*- Professor Stephanie Hemelryk Donald*

Therefore, she suggests that there is a need for a rethinking in the society, whether reparation needs to be paid to countries, who were colonised, and what about those people whose ancestors were enslaved? Invisibility issue exists here.

As a History faculty, she observes that the country is getting better gradually. There was a time when students were not taught about the whole Atlantic slavery system. Children were taught about it 2005 onwards. People were so ignorant about the History. Till the age of 16, she learnt History, but was not told about the Empire, and for instance, students were not told about the Amritsar massacre.

Regarding discrimination in Argentina, Professor Luciana L. Contarino Sparta argues that discrimination is increasing, and it seems that solidarity has been completely forgotten since COVID-19 began. Some builders and neighbours have asked the doctors and nurses to leave the place as they felt that healthcare personnel are endangering their lives. The reality is that these healthcare workers are risking their lives. The situation has worsened now.

**Q. Dr. Rekha Sapra: Can deep-rooted problem in the psyche of people be considered as one of the reasons for not strictly following the lockdown rules? Any comments on it?**

On the issue of strict compliance of the lockdown, Professor Stephanie Hemelryk Donald asserts that psyche and non-compliance are not entirely connected. When the lockdown was announced, most people obeyed. It is also true that some people did not or could not obey. Young guys can be seen still hanging out together. Some cases do exist in cities like London, where twenty people will go out, and it will seem like they are breaking social distancing, but it is not. There is a need to see the psyche problem by seeing a big picture. According to her, Prof. Donald considers herself privileged while living in Liverpool as everything is being managed effectively there. Therefore, it becomes a matter of class, as well. There are many obstacles for poor people in strictly complying to the lockdown procedure.

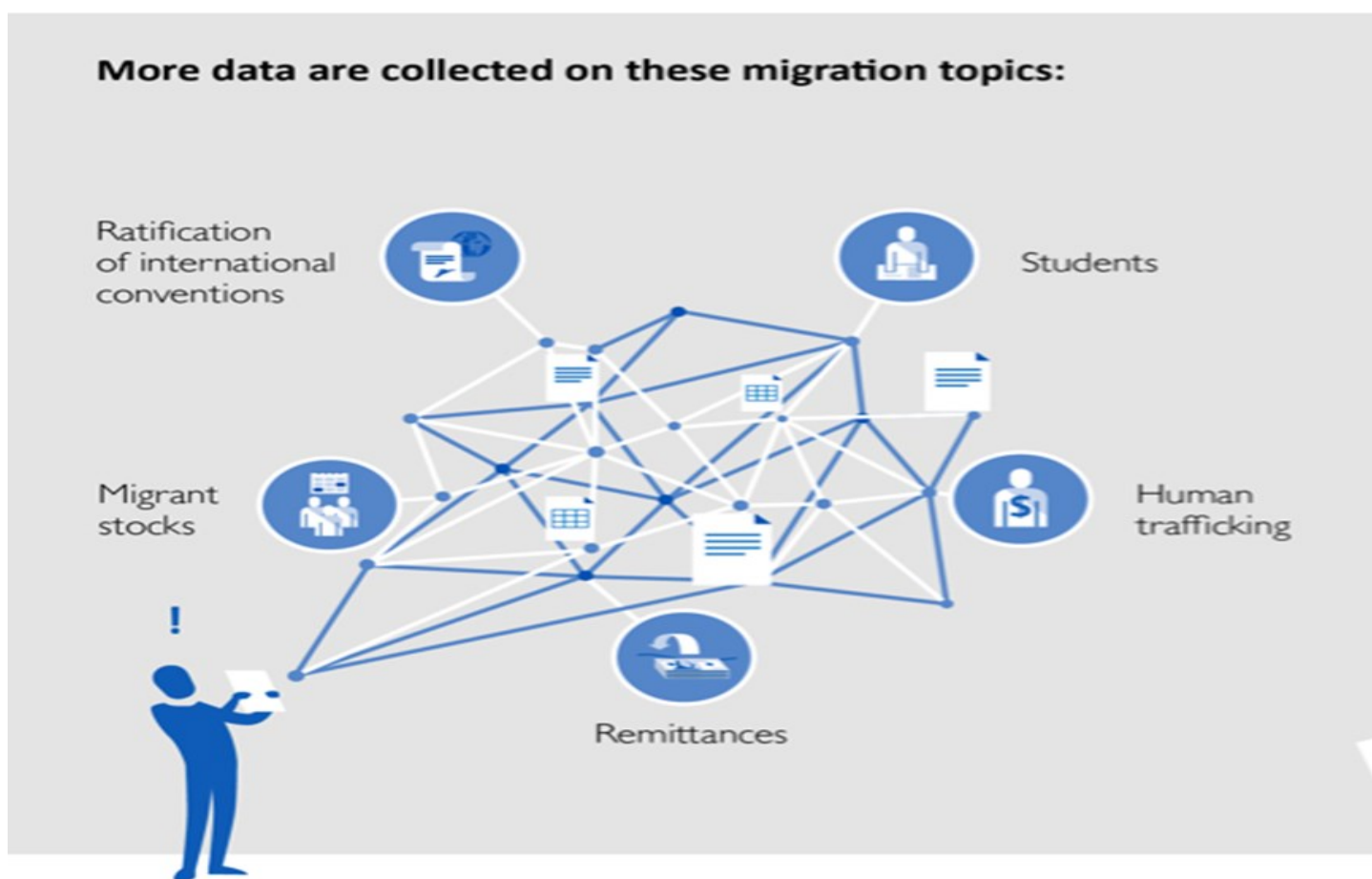
## Policy Challenges and Recommendations

Insightful discussion by the distinguished speakers and participants produced valuable policy recommendations which can be implemented by the policymakers, governments, academic institutions, private sector, skill providers, industries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other stakeholders. Some of the key recommendations are as follows:

### 1. Migrant Discourse Needs to be Prioritised in Academia and Policy-circles.

There is a widely prevalent issue of data gaps in migration globally. Collecting data of migrants has proved to be a challenging task, which needs to be taken into account. Globally, there is broad data availability on the “stock of migrants and the level of remittances” (Lackzo, 2017, p. 19).

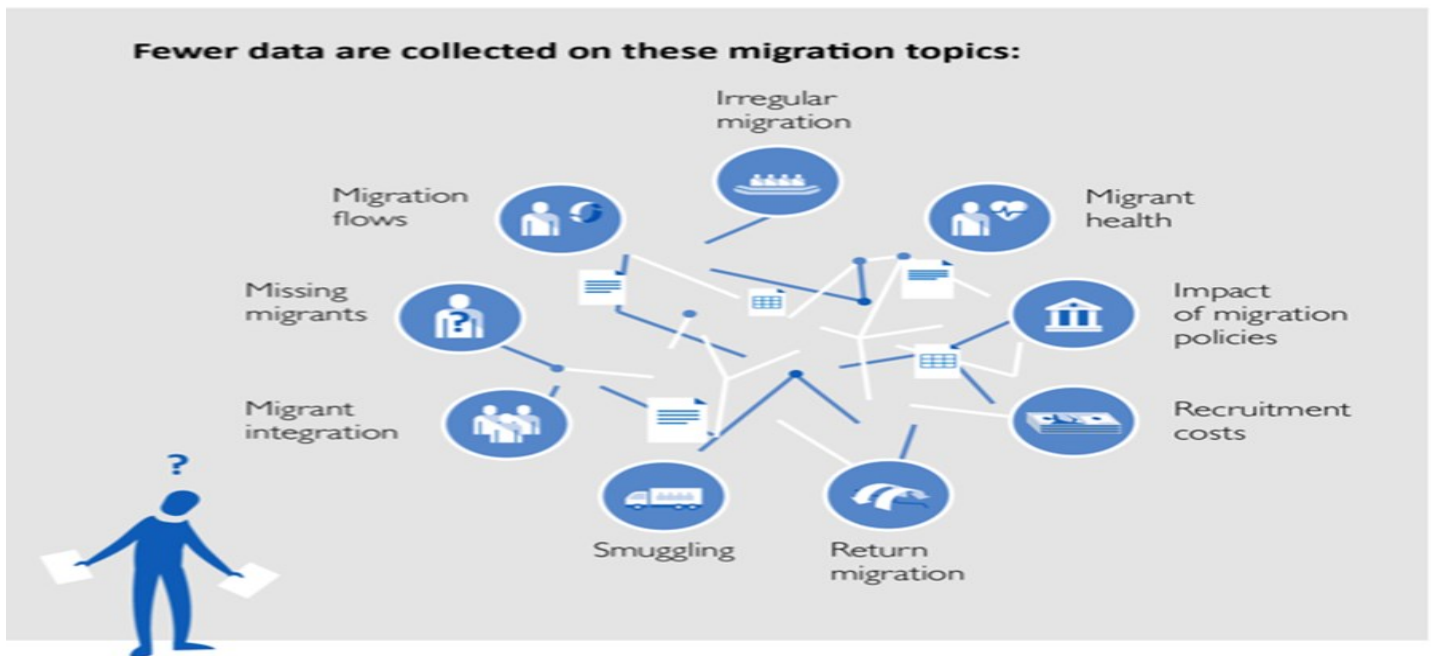
However, there is a little data and knowledge availability “about the well-being of migrants, the reasons for migration, the skills of migrants, or the impact of migration policies and programmes” (Lackzo, 2017, p. 19). It is also pertinent to mention that “large number of migrants remain invisible, as there is relatively little reliable data on undocumented or irregular migrants who can represent a significant share of the migrant population in many countries” (ibid.), which is evident in the below infographics:



Source: (Migration Data Portal, 2020) - Migration Data Portal. (2020, June 10). Migration Data Sources. Retrieved from Migration Data Portal: <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/migration-data-sources>.

As migrants and their families are indispensable stakeholders in the economic and intellectual development of the home country and host country, the migrant discourse must be prioritised in academic and policy circles. The migrant discourse will be able to provide an active voice to the identity of migrants and their families, where the migrant identity must be considered fluid rather than static. Strong emphasis on migrant discourse will help to raise awareness about the difficulties being faced by migrants during the entire migration journey starting from the country of origin to country of transit and eventually reaching till the country of destination.





Source: (Migration Data Portal, 2020)- Migration Data Portal. (2020, June 10). *Migration Data Sources*. Retrieved from Migration Data Portal: <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/migration-data-sources>

## 2. Declare STEM Researchers and Experts as the Sixth “Global Commons”.

The impact of COVID-19 is likely to result in the re-emergence of the brain-drain debate. Therefore, the demand for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) researchers and experts is likely to increase during and post-COVID-19 era. Hence, adding highly-skilled STEM experts into the “Global Commons<sup>1</sup>” can solve the enormous problems of humanity. Such an initiative would prohibit any unjustified restriction on mobility of STEM. The impact of COVID-19 is likely to result in the re-emergence of the brain-drain debate. Therefore, the demand for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) researchers and experts is likely to increase during and post-COVID-19 era. Hence, adding highly-skilled STEM experts into the “Global Commons” can solve the enormous problems of humanity. Such an initiative would prohibit any unjustified restriction on mobility of STEM experts from one country to another. This resource sharing strategy to declare international students in STEM fields as the sixth 'global common' will help both source and recipient countries and would pave the way for global solidarity. It will also help in fulfilling the Objective 18 of the Global Compact for Migration, which states that- Invest in skills development and facilitate mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competencies (Khadria, 2020).

## 3. Harness Technology Efficiently to Facilitate migrants.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the forced migration of migrants all over the world. It is going to intensify the localisation process as many people would prefer to work near their home, especially after the odds faced by them in the host countries. It is likely to initiate the localisation process all over the world. Therefore, the localisation process needs to be managed with the efficient usage of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Technology can be used for skill recognition, upskilling, and to disseminate the relevant information to migrants, including the government initiatives for financial incentives, healthcare services, and relevant job training. Online portals can be developed to connect job seekers to employers. “The integration of Artificial Intelligence and all other technologies into the field of work, ensuring that people remain in control and central to industry, services and agriculture” (Singh, 2018, p. 18) will ensure both employment and growth. Technology can empower migrant workers to find desired jobs in local areas, especially during and in the aftermath of COVID-19.

## 4. Regional Integration can Help in Minimising the Impact of COVID-19.

COVID-19 pandemic has restricted the mobility of goods, services, technology, and people across the globe. It has resulted in a decrease in overall global trade. Therefore, more rooted and meaningful regional integration can prove to be the possible way out to minimise the adverse repercussions of COVID-19 on the economy of the countries. For instance,



New Zealand and Australia can help Pacific Island countries in reviving and sustaining their economy. About regional integration, Prof. Biman Chand Prasad argues that “if we are bold and imaginative enough to let go of historical doubts and suspicions, we can work towards a brighter and stronger future with renewed zeal” (Prasad, 2020). Deeper and meaningful regional integration would be a win-win situation for all countries irrespective of their economic status.

#### **5. Governments must take Strict Actions in Cases of Discrimination against Migrants.**

It is the prime responsibility of the respective governments to take care of migrants. Migrants have become more vulnerable during COVID-19 as discrimination against them have increased due to stigmatisation and xenophobic politics. Legal mechanisms must be accessible to the migrants so that they can report their grievances related to job loss, unfair treatment by employers, and issues relating to harassment and violence in the society. Prompt response and action by the government officials in cases of discrimination would send a positive message in the society and would prove to be an effective deterrent against such crimes. Diplomatic missions of receiving countries also need to act decisively and negotiate with the local governments for safeguarding the rights of the migrants. Racism, stigmatisation, discrimination, and xenophobia need to be countered with a pro-active approach.

#### **6. Use Education as a Means to Enhance Employability and to Create Sensibility towards Migrants.**

Education should be imparted to develop creativity and entrepreneurship among students so that the massive problem of lack of employability can be resolved. “Education and training targeted to labour market needs at home and abroad can be usefully supported by development partners” (Khadria, 2017, p. 4). Digital literacy needs to be emphasised by academic institutions to reduce the digital divide. The college curriculum needs to create sensibility among the population towards migrants. Awareness needs to be created amongst students, and the global community that migration plays a significant role in the development of the economies and migrants play a defining role in driving and sustaining it with their skills. Education can play a useful role in imparting awareness to make migration safe, orderly and regular as per the Global Compact for Migration (GCM). For instance, the term like 'undocumented' or 'irregular' should be used instead of 'illegal' to prevent the stigmatisation of migrants.

#### **7. Welfare of Documented and Undocumented Migrants need to be on the Highest Priority.**

During COVID-19 phase, migrants are unable and sometimes reluctant to leave their host country due to various reasons, including strict restrictions on movement, the constant fear of infection, and lack of reliable information. Therefore, social protection schemes need to be provided to documented and undocumented migrant workers. Documented migrants can claim their rights from the host country. However, undocumented or irregular migrant workers find it difficult even to claim legal rights from the governments and can be considered amongst the most vulnerable sections of society. Respective governments and civil society should help the undocumented migrants in terms of providing healthcare, food, sustained employment, and other essential requirements on the humanitarian grounds by implementing migrant-centric policies in letter and spirit.

## **Conclusion**

COVID-19 pandemic poses unprecedented risks to the rights and safety of the migrants and immigrants across the globe. It has amplified the already existing vulnerabilities of migrants and their families. There is a need for deep introspection from various stakeholders, who want to ensure peace and stability in the world. It is the appropriate time to unite ourselves to tackle this unprecedented threat of the pandemic and its adverse repercussions being felt by the migrant workers across countries. The pandemic has affected all the economies differently, and hence combined efforts are highly needed for economic revival. The downfall in GDP, rising unemployment, and a drastic decrease in trade are some of the indications of challenging times ahead for all the countries.

Therefore, the motto- “united we stand, divided we fall” should be followed by all countries irrespective of their present economic conditions to overcome the insurmountable challenges posed to the entire world community. All governments, transnational corporations, non-governmental organisations, diaspora organisations, international organisations, civil society organisations, academia and other stakeholders need to collaborate to envision a better world, with more safeguards for the vulnerable groups, including migrants and immigrants. There is a need for all countries of the Global North and the Global South to strive together in achieving the most significant target of GCM- Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which will ensure a win-win outcome for developed and developing countries. It will also pave the way towards fulfilling “target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in which Member States have committed to cooperate internationally to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration” (IOM, 2019).

## Brief Profile of the Speakers

### *Dr. Alwyn Didar Singh*

Former Indian civil servant, and former Secretary General of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).

### *Professor Biman Chand Prasad*

Former Professor of Economics at the University of South Pacific. He is also a member of Fiji Parliament.

### *Professor Binod Khadria*

Former Professor of Economics and Education, and Chairperson of the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies within the School of Social Sciences at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

### *Professor Luciana L. Contarino Sparta*

Professor at the University of Buenos Aires in Argentina, where she teaches History of colonisation and decolonisation and contemporary History of independent countries in Africa and Asia.

### *Professor Stephanie (Stephi) Hemelryk Donald*

Distinguished Professor of Film in the College of Arts. She leads research and impact activities and is Lead of the international Justice, Arts, and Migration Network.

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