

Roots & Routes

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Photo credit Dr. K. Ranju Rangan

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Editor's Note



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Dear Readers,
Greetings!

I hope that you are doing well at your respective places. COVID-19 pandemic has indeed made our lives more difficult, posing several challenges in front of us. However, the pandemic has also reminded us to become more resilient by reducing the vulnerabilities of the common people. Specifically, the vulnerability of the poor migrant population has to be reduced at any cost to achieve sustainable development in all the countries. Walking on the same path, GRFDT brings to you its organizational newsletter- "Roots and Routes", for February 2021, thereby attempting to contribute positively towards the migration discourse. Newsletter has incorporated various write-ups, including the GCM webinar reports and movie reviews relating to the migratory theme, which have been published in the GRFDT's media outreach portal- [The Migration News: People on the Move](#).

The GCM webinar report titled "Migrants, Diasporas and Sustainable Development- An Intertwined Story" has been written by Ujjwala Lakhanpal covering the GCM Objective 19- "Create Conditions for Migrants and Diasporas to Fully Contribute to Sustainable Development in all Countries". Another GCM webinar on GCM Objective 20- "Promote Faster, Safer and Cheaper Transfer of Remittances and Foster Financial Inclusion of Migrants" has been reported by Inomusa Ndlovu in the report titled "Impact of COVID-19 on Global Remittance Trends". Besides GCM webinar reports, we have also included two film/documentary reviews. A film review titled "Golden Dreams: Lives of Undocumented Migrants" has been written by Snehal Mutha, depicting the plight of undocumented migrants. Moreover, one documentary series has been reviewed by Maria Grazia Cantarella titled "Living Undocumented: A Docuseries to Better Understand the Hidden Lives of Undocumented Migrants in the United States" to depict the existing migration and asylum laws in the United States.

I hope that you will find the content of our newsletter interesting, insightful and incisive. Looking forward to your observations and valuable suggestions. Feel free to reach us at editorinchief@grfdt.com.

Happy Reading!

Abhishek Yadav

Migrants, Diasporas and Sustainable Development – An Intertwined Story

Migrants, Diasporas and Sustainable Development – An Intertwined Story

A panel discussion on the Objective 19 of the [Global Compact for Migration \(GCM\)](#) was jointly organized by [Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism \(GRFDT\)](#), [Migrant Forum in Asia \(MFA\)](#), [Cross-Regional Center for Refugees and Migrants \(CCRM\)](#), and [Civil Society Action Committee \(CSAC\)](#), on 2nd February 2020, with the aim of enabling dialogue on ‘Create Conditions for Migrants and Diasporas to Fully Contribute to Sustainable Development in all Countries’, by bringing together various experts on labour migration and related issues.

Contributions of Diaspora Communities in the context of the Philippines

The first speaker, Ms. Usec. Astravel Pimentel-Naik, the Executive Director of the [Commission on Filipinos Overseas \(CFO\)](#), began the discussion by stressing the deep contribution of diasporas and migrants on home country’s development.

“Diasporas always play an incredible role in a country’s development. However, with the onset of COVID-19, we must further learn to maximise their potential as they can be instrumental in reviving our country’s economies.”: Ms.Usec. Astravel Pimentel-Naik.

She further compiled the best practices of the Philippine diaspora and highlighted their assistance in the Philippine crisis. The various programs initiated by the Philippine government were also underscored ranging from web portals designed specially to facilitate diaspora engagement to simplifying the channels through which their diasporas can make donations and investments in their home

country.

Ms. Pimentel-Naik pointed out that the Philippine diasporas are dependable partners of the CFO in all their philanthropic activities and help promote the rights and welfare of Philippine migrants. She also devoted a section of her talk to shed light on how the Philippines deal with undocumented migrants and how they plan to rope them in their efforts to enhance opportunities for migrants, thereby facilitating their contribution to the country.

Ms. Pimentel-Naik concluded by stating that we must remember the world diasporas have proved themselves to be the key humanitarian actors and stakeholders in a range of development schemes, and we must continue to reach out to them to sustainably develop our nations.

Gender Perspectives in Migration and Development

Ms.Jenna L. Hennebry, Associate professor at the Department of Communication Studies and School of International Policy and Governance, detailed the gender perspectives to migration that exist in the world today and explained how gender affects all aspects of migration.

“Gender responsiveness is a key guiding principle in the Global Compact for Migration and essential in achieving sustainable development. “: Ms. Jenna L. Hennebry.

Ms. Hennebry highlighted the main challenge of GCM-19 to be the lack of direct connection to gender, making the effective realisation of the GCM difficult. Ms. Hennebry stressed that no key body has been identified internationally to work around gender perspectives of migration and development and this is one arena we must look into if we want

to harness diaspora contribution to development. She thus called for re-evaluating how traditional methods of governance could be contributing to enhancing the inequalities surrounding gender as compared to disrupting them. In our efforts to achieve sustainable development, we must not let our focus and emphasis dwindle from gender perspectives and make it a key point in analysing problems and strategies used to combat gaps in migration.

Ground Impact of GCM-19 with a special focus on the UK

According to Ms. Ndidi Njoku, Chair for the [African Foundation of Development](#),

“Numerous studies showcase that well-managed migration offers significant development opportunities for both origin and receiving societies as well as migrants themselves.”: Ms. Ndidi Njoku.

Therefore, for a win-win situation to occur, all actors need to be involved, work together, and be guided by fair and mutual consideration of interests.

Ms. Njoku stated that while the GCM-19 has enabled migrants and diasporas to facilitate global support to contribute to domestic development, it does not necessarily incentivize countries of origin, transit, or destination to engage with migrants and diasporas. Hence, in this regard, GCM-19 can do more, the foremost being including migrants and diasporas more in policy engagement while also supporting their development activities.

“An inclusion of diasporas and migrants in global needs is needed.”: Ms. Ndidi Njoku.

Ms. Njoku thus highlighted various initiatives of the UK that attempt to accelerate this global need and facilitate discussions to voice migrant and diaspora perspectives from the UK on GCM-19.

She concluded by reminding that in a post-COVID-19 world, we must not only continue our

efforts but also attempt to enhance them to further optimize the role of migrants and diaspora in both the home and destination country’s development.

Numerous Contributions of Diasporas to Development

Being a proud part of a diaspora community himself, Mr. Oleg Chirita, Head of Programme at the [International Centre for Migration Policy Development \(ICMPD\)](#), elaborated the numerous contributions of diaspora to the development of host countries.

***“Diasporas have come through in even contributing to the development of vaccines and other COVID-19 responses”:* Mr. Oleg Chirita.**

Mr. Chirita then highlighted the various initiatives of ICMPD and how they are intertwined with the GCM-19 objectives. He stressed the importance of diaspora engagement institutions and how they have rapidly come up in the last decade. Referring to a global mapping exercise that the ICMPD conducted in 2020, he stated that governments in a few countries have even created specialised institutions, networks, and policies to engage with diasporas.

The efforts made by countries across the world for their respective diasporas and the concrete activities they would like to proceed with in the future were detailed by Mr. Chirita by giving suitable examples of countries like the Philippines and Morocco who have built robust mechanisms and specialised ministries to expand diaspora engagement.

***“Diaspora engagement has become a very rich area of intervention indeed. Especially in terms of institutional and policy framework as well as concrete programs that attempt to bring diaspora closer to their homelands”:* Mr. Oleg Chirita.**

However, despite diaspora engagement expanding, the issues surrounding the inefficient enabling

environment that demotivates diasporas to donate and contribute to their homelands is a serious issue. Consequently, due to these invisible barriers, there are severe gaps in what the diaspora wishes to do and what it can actually do that must be tackled in the years to come.

Thus, the weak confidence between governments and diasporas needs to be looked into, and especially during COVID-19, it is imperative that governments address these concerns in order to facilitate a faster contribution of diasporas to sustainable development and beneficial investments in home countries.

Breaking Down Development Policies Concerning Migration

Talking about how governments of origin need to be more responsible in terms of development policies, Ms. Camelia Nicoleta Tigau, Coordinator, Area of Integration Studies, Centre for Research on North America, National Autonomous University of Mexico, says-

“We need to understand that diasporas contribute with or without governments. Hence, governments of origin need to get involved in the networking of diasporas.”: Ms. Camelia Nicoleta Tigau.

There is a need to recognise the innumerable benefits diasporas bring to one’s country, reach out to them effectively, address the issues that plague them while migrating, and build a durable symbiotic relationship with the community.

While stating that home countries are equally responsible as destination countries for citizens to migrate abroad, Ms. Tigau says that we must investigate and resolve the very reasons why people feel the need to migrate.

While it is a reality that many diaspora communities do not wish to get involved with the mechanisms of diaspora engagement set up by the governments of countries of origin, it is true that they still want to contribute to their home countries.

Hence, countries must bring alternative mechanisms that their diasporas trust as opposed to traditional government routes, engage with their diasporas constructively, and ‘focus not on how migrants are contributing but where they are contributing.’

GCM 19: Legal Perspectives on Policy Frameworks

Simplifying the intertwined relations between poverty and migration, Mr. Madhavan Kallath, Managing Partner at [Kallath and DBI WLL](#) explained that governments must build and enforce active mechanisms to eradicate poverty.

“Charity is only an ineffective short-term solution to poverty. Instead, there is an urgent need to develop income-generating opportunities for people in all countries.”: Mr. Madhavan Kallath.

This is important because the Annual review of SDGs 2020 has shown progress in multiple fields except for poverty reduction. In fact, according to Mr. Kallath, migrants are stuck in a vicious cycle of poverty and the pandemic has only exacerbated their situation. While diasporas have helped migrants get food, basic necessities and in some cases even aided in repatriation, the governments of countries of origin need to put in place effective mechanisms for migrant rehabilitation. Alternative mechanisms to enable migrants to laud their claims in destination countries before they return to their home countries is also an important task that needs attention.

Pulling the audience’s attention to the debt trap migrants often get stuck in, Mr. Kallath called for better awareness-raising programs both in home and host countries so that migrants are prepared for what they are entering into and can prevent being tricked by cons. In his presentation, Mr. Kallath simplified the law, highlighted the basic rights of migrants abroad, and explained how diasporas and migrants can effectively contribute to sustainable development.

Parting Remarks

The enriching talk by the panellists invited a diverse range of questions related to GCM-19 and the urgent need to create various conditions for migrants and diasporas to fully contribute to sustainable development in all countries. It was strongly emphasized by the panellists that though the Objective 19 has empowered migrants and diasporas, it does not cover all the issues. They agreed that greater stress on gender responsiveness and outreach with diaspora communities is needed. Furthermore, we need to empower and recognise the development contributions of diaspora communities and thereby encourage better government

structures and mechanisms to facilitate diaspora engagements across the globe. Finally, Ms. Paddy Siyanga Knudsen, who was the chair of the entire session, provided valuable inputs and insights to the presenters and made the session even more outstanding.

Ujjwala Lakhanpal is a final year student of International Relations and Economics at Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University, Gandhinagar. Her areas of interest include Middle Eastern Politics, Conflict Studies, Asian geopolitics and International Migrations. Twitter Id- Ujjwala Lakhanpal @UjjwalaLp

Date: 02 February 2021
Time: 05:30 PM Indian Time (GMT + 05:30)

**GCM OBJECTIVE 19: CREATE CONDITIONS FOR MIGRANTS AND
DIASPORAS TO FULLY CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT IN ALL COUNTRIES**

 <p>Paddy Siyanga Knudsen Migration Governance Analyst (Moderator)</p>	 <p>Usec. Astravel Pimentel-Naik Executive Director, Commission on Filipinos Overseas</p>	 <p>Madhavan Kallath Managing Partner, Kallath and DBI WLL</p>	 <p>Camelia Tigau Coordinator, Area of Integration Studies, Center for Research on North America, National Autonomous University of Mexico</p>
 <p>Oleg Chirita Head of Programme, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)</p>	 <p>Ndidi Njoku Chair, African Foundation for Development (AFFORD)</p>	 <p>Jenna L. Hennebry Associate Professor, Department of Communication Studies and School of International Policy and Governance</p>	

All are Welcome. The event will be organized using 'Zoom' App. Send an email to convenor@grfdt.com in case of any difficulty in registration. Livestreaming: www.grfdt.com.



<https://forms.gle/GpZ4WJkhqGXxuM2BA>

Impact of COVID-19 on Global Remittance Trends

On the 9th of February 2021, [Global Research Forum on Diaspora Transnationalism \[GRFDT\]](#), [Cross-Regional Center for Refugees and Migrants \[CCRM\]](#), [Migrant Forum in Asia \[MFA\]](#), and the [Civil Society Action Committee \[CSAC\]](#) jointly organized a virtual panel discussion on the GCM Objective 20: Promote faster, safer and cheaper transfer of remittances and foster financial inclusion of migrants. Mr. Jeevan Baniya, Assistant Director of [Social Science Baha](#), Ms. Sonia Plaza, Senior Economist, [World Bank](#), Ms. Nathania Aritao, Entrepreneur, Artist, and Social Justice Advocate, Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui, Professor of Political Science, University of Dhaka, and Mr. Alvin Ang, Professor at the Department of Economics, Ateneo de Manila University, were the panelists who led the discussion on various aspects of remittance and development. The webinar was moderated by Mr. William Gois, Regional Coordinator, Migrant Forum in Asia. Mr. Gois began by asking the panelists if remittances are all about money and if they are always a one-way flow?

Effects of COVID-19 on Remittance Flows

Mr. Jeevan Baniya began by highlighting the statistics related to remittances, stating that approximately 80% of the world depend on remittances for their livelihood, while in Nepal remittances contribute about 20-30% of the Gross Domestic Product. COVID-19 has resulted in the reduction of migration flows as people are forced to pay a higher amount of recruitment fees and relative fees, which has an adverse impact on migrants. Some migrants are taking irregular routes due to COVID-19 restrictions, thus, exposing them to risks of smuggling and trafficking. The restrictions on mobility have also left migrants in financial uncertainty.

“Some are indebted and trapped in the cycle of debt, especially those who had to return soon after migrating due to loss of

jobs and income. They are not in the condition to repay their loan, so they have to undergo some type of forced migration”:
Mr. Jeevan Baniya

Mr. Baniya acknowledged the efforts of the Nepali government in coming up with policies and incentives for returning migrant workers to facilitate their integration into the labour market in Nepal. The matching of the skills of return migrants with the job market in the country is particularly important for the economic development of any country, including Nepal. He concluded his presentation by stating that with the recent change in governmental setup, initiatives may be derailed and there is the risk of funds being redistributed from the planned initiatives.

Need for Migrant Financial Literacy

Ms. Nathania Aritao’s presentation focused on financial literacy and inclusion. The purpose of [TAYO International](#) is to support migrants to break cycles of poverty, debt, and financial vulnerability. There are four foundations of financial literacy that the organization focuses on—accessibility, reliability, sustainability, and scalability. The organization works primarily with Filipino migrants in the United Kingdom to teach them on finding ways for mobilizing resources and save money for retirement or when they go back to their home countries, without going broke.

“(We are) making sure that they can go home but not go home broke; a sad reality is that a lot of migrants end up retiring in poverty or not being able to retire at all”:
Ms. Nathania Aritao

Ms. Aritao concluded her presentation by remarking that it is important to build confidence in migrant workers, and ensure their accessibility to information and knowledge as those are very em-

powering strategies in helping migrants.

Importance of Remittances

Ms. Sonia Plaza began her presentation by noting that remittances are the key for a country in terms of foreign exchange, maintaining the balance of payment, ensuring sustainability, and getting good credit ratings for a country. Ms. Plaza further emphasized that remittances reduce poverty and help families of migrants have access to important services such as health and education.

***“Remittances help both sending and receiving countries, families back home send help to migrants, (thereby) reverse remittance system exists”*: Ms. Sonia Plaza**

The lowest skilled migrants transfer a lot of knowledge in both the host and sending states. There is, however, very little progress on GCM 20. Of all the objectives of GCM, Objective 20 is the most tangible but no progress has been done, observed Ms. Plaza. In her concluding remarks, Ms. Sonia Plaza emphasized the fact that the World Bank not only provides loans to national governments but also facilitates a lot of development programs.

Increase in Remittance During the Pandemic

Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui discussed how migrant remittances were expected to decline in Bangladesh, which was the case in the first few months of COVID-19, but then steadily increased starting in June. In Bangladesh, 70% of women migrants continued to remit during the pandemic while only 30% of males remitted.

Dr. Siddiqui stated that approximately US\$5000 is paid by workers of Bangladesh for purchasing a visa to go to the United Arab Emirates. Historically this has been facilitated through the informal channel, hence remittances flowed back through the informal channel to pay back the loans. However, COVID-19 has forced remittances and visa purchases to be facilitated through a formal chan-

nel. Demand for informal channels reduced due to COVID restrictions leading to increased remittance through formal channels.

***“The remittance system was an underground market, but it all came into light due to COVID-19. This has led to the visibility of remittance flow, making it seem like there is an increase in the remittance flows”*: Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui**

Dr. Siddiqui concluded the presentation by stating that development comes in different ways as a result of the remittance system, for instance, when migrants send money to educate their children; that is development.

Change in Remittance Patterns

Mr. Alvin Ang spoke about the Filipino migration trends, pointing out that the attraction for migration in the Philippines is the wage gap. Since the 1970s, the Filipino government had a labour export policy that saw Filipino workers move to places like Dubai for labour. Mr. Ang emphasized that this labour export policy has since been revoked on paper, but the practice has continued. The magnitude of the Filipino workers in the diaspora has contributed to the Philippines ranking 3rd as the largest remittance-receiving country. Remittances are crucial for the economy and development of the Philippines if managed properly.

***“There is need to create a conducive environment for the sustainability of remittances in the development of the Philippines”*: Mr. Alvin Ang**

Mr. Ang wrapped up his presentation by acknowledging that reverse remittance happened during the 2009 Global Financial Crisis and it is currently happening with families sending money to relatives in Dubai for repatriation or to sustain them during a crisis.

The panel discussion ended with the recognition that remittances are not a one-way flow. The pan-

demographic has led to an increase in what is termed “reverse remittance”, with migrants receiving financial assistance from back home to assist in sustaining their livelihood during the pandemic. The panelists also concluded that contrary to the early projections which forecasted a negative flow of remittance due to COVID-19, in most countries that trend only lasted for a few months before the remittance flows stabilized and then eventually in-

creased.

Inomusa Ndlovu – Student of M.A. in Political Science at Lucknow University, India. A feminist and creative writer, with a focus on activism. Her academic and professional interests are in Migration and International Relations. She can be reached on Twitter @InomusaCN

Date: 09 February 2021
Time: 05:30 PM Indian Time (GMT + 05:30)

GCM OBJECTIVE 20: PROMOTE FASTER, SAFER AND CHEAPER TRANSFER OF REMITTANCES AND FOSTER FINANCIAL INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

			
			
William Gois Regional coordinator, Migrant Forum in Asia (Moderator)	Jeevan Baniya Assistant Director of Social Science Baha	Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui Professor of Political Science at the University of Dhaka	
			
Sonia Plaza Senior Economist, World Bank	Nathania (Tanya) Aritao Entrepreneur, Artist and Social Justice Advocate.	Alvin Ang Professor at the Department of Economics of Ateneo de Manila University	

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Register: <https://forms.gle/S1ndpZpnWhxAKPrCA>

Golden Dream- ‘Lives of Undocumented Migrants’

The originally titled movie *La Jaula de Oro* popularly known as *Golden Dream* explains the dreams of millions who cross the border in hope of living a better life. The director Diego Quemada-Díez through his piece of art tries to carve stories of immigrants from Latin America. The film shows the journey of young irregular migrants and the trouble it takes to reach the country of destination. In this case travelling up through Mexico and illegally crossing the border into the US. *Golden Dream* successfully aces that a person could go to any end to change its living conditions. Diego's film isn't just realistic, it is an overlap of truth and make-believe that is a resemblance to what is happening in our times. The movie symbolizes the snow as hope and key to new life. The movie evinced the usual mixture of empathy and reality.

The opening scene itself establishes poverty and violence, which is one of the major drivers of the migration. The movie in the opening shorts exhibits slums, small tin houses, tiny lanes, men in military uniform, and children playing with guns. The movie takes you to different locations from Guatemala to the wilderness of Mexico. It greets viaduct-spanned green mountains of Guatemala and southern Mexico. The movie basically reflects the journey of the three youngsters migrating from the origin country to the country of destination. The journey is a new life itself before starting one after reaching the destination country. Director has rightly emplaced the rawness of relationships through the emotions such as aggression, little laughs and jealousy.

The plot starts with the lead character aggressively walking through lanes of slums and ends up looking at the snowfall. The movie over the time tweaks the feeling of helplessness, sadness and loneliness. The film revolves around Juan (Brandon López),

Chauk (Rodolfo Domínguez), Samuel (Carlos Chajon) and Sara (Karen Pineda). Juan and Samuel are rag pickers. Juan is smart and also a self-proclaimed leader of his fellow migrants, whereas his friend Samuel is a fainthearted lad. Sara, the only female migrant, accompanies them as a male so that she is not exploited over the journey for being a woman. The three decide to go north to live a new life. Chauk, an Indiana boy, joins them halfway to Mexico. The conflict arises on their journey when they are detained by border police. They all face different hurdles to cross the border. The migrants losing their lives during transition have always made it to the news, the movie rightly analyzes this at individual level.

The director is depicting the story of four teenagers but representing the plight of millions of undocumented migrants. Some among them lose their lives and few make it to the other side. There are shots where faces of people travelling along with lead characters are captured on a train. Along with direction, cinematography is to be appreciated as shots have spoken well where dialogues couldn't. There is a scene which captures a tunnel becoming smaller and smaller, then vanishes and the next minute flash light of the train appears. It seems the director has used this as an analogy to the concept of darkness and hope.



Photo credit: The Guardian

The movie in between shows the mutual companionship developed among the teenage migrants. Movie is relatively slow but it hooks you up with the journey and the hurdles faced by these teenagers. The movie is suspense driven and lined-up with unexpected events that makes the viewer sit on edge. The actors have rightly captured the seriousness of the subject which is reflected through their performances.



The last scene might make viewers shed tears as it leaves some kind of sadness. The golden dream has come true but yet something is missing. Juan, who migrates to end his tiresome life of rag picker, lands up with a job of collecting leftover meat in a factory. “Golden dream” ends up devastated, obliterated and worthless.

Snehal Mutha is a Pune based journalist doing her little and loves to read books, finds her peace in food. Her areas of interest are gender studies, international migration and social issues. She wants to be a pantomath who loves to explore and travel the world. She loves to express herself in the form of creative writing and digital art. <https://twitter.com/SnehalMutha?s=08>

Photo credit: movie screenshot

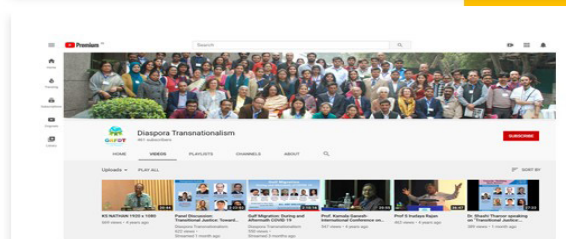
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INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION REVIEW FORUM (IMRF) 2022 CIVIL SOCIETY PRIORITIES WEBINAR SERIES

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Organizers:

This is a collective civil society process by regional and global civil society networks including:



1 Migration, COVID-19 and a New Social Contract

13 April

2 Race and Discrimination

20 April

8 AM Mexico City

9 AM New York

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3 PM CEST

4 PM Beirut

8 PM Bangkok

3 4 May

3 Regular Pathways and Irregular Migration

11 May

4 Detention and Return

This four-part webinar series will be the beginning of an extensive civil society mobilization in the lead-up to the IMRF in May 2022.

More details to follow, incl. Zoom link

Simultaneous interpretation in ARABIC, ENGLISH, FRENCH, SPANISH

“Living Undocumented”: A docuseries to better understand the hidden lives of undocumented migrants in the United States

“[...] I want you to imagine trying to sleep every night, only to find yourself lying awake for hours because you can't sleep. That worry will end you, and it will try to break you. You can watch a documentary, you can say 'well this is too bad', but at the end of the day it's just something that you're watching on TV. And you can turn that off, you can go on about your life". This is how “Living undocumented”, a documentary series produced by Netflix and released on the platform on October 2, 2019, begins. It is the voice of Awa, a United States citizen with Mauritanian origins whose father is being detained because he was not able to get asylum and subsequently was given a deportation order by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE). It is a powerful introduction to an even more powerful documentary that describes the lives of eight different families or individuals who have been living in the United States without legal documents or status, some of them for as long as 30 years. It is a good way to start the series because it summarizes how most people feel about migrants and refugees.

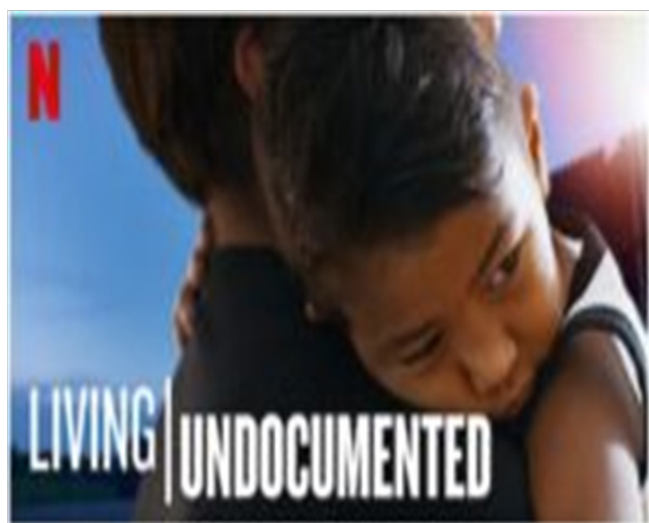


Photo credit: Netflix

The docuseries, directed by Aaron Said and Anna Chai, is a very useful tool to try to understand the difficulties and challenges that these families in particular (and all irregular migrants in general) face in the United States. The different episodes focus on different issues both from a general perspective and from a particularistic one. The first one is given by experts such as immigration attorneys and journalists, who provide a broader background of each issue, putting it in a historical context and giving more detailed information on current policies, laws, and practices related to the problem in question. At the same time, practical examples are provided by the stories of the different families, each of them dealing with a different kind of problem that is ultimately threatening their life in the US and facing them with the possibility of deportation or temporary detention by the ICE. There is a family from Israel, that arrived in the US in December 2001, and because of the circumstances at the time could not get a work permit. Nonetheless, they stayed and managed to create a business and quite normal life in the US, even while living undocumented. Then, there is the story of a young man from Honduras who entered without documentation in the US and whose girlfriend was being detained in an ICE facility waiting to be deported. He tried everything, with the help of an immigration attorney, to avoid her deportation but could not prevent it. Another story is of a Colombian family that arrived in the US in 2002 seeking asylum after being threatened by narco-gang members in their hometown but could not obtain it and were served a deportation order. This situation pushed two sons from the family to seek solidarity and help from the local community by creating videos on social media to recount their story. In another episode, it is told the story of the separation of a young girl from her aunt and uncle, who were her legal guardians. This story is emblematic of all the pain and suffering that the

policy of separation created in the US and of all the problems that are still present because of all the children that remain detained and separated from their parents, who, in some cases, have been deported to their home country.

The main themes observed in the documentary are essentially related to the change in policy and enforcement of laws that took place during the Trump administration. In fact, the experts who talk in the documentary tend to highlight the worsening of the conditions for irregular immigrants during the years 2016-2020. It is stressed how during this administration immigrants started to be considered as “bad people” or “criminals” even when many of them had been living in the US for many years without creating any kind of problems or committing any crime, and in many cases paying taxes and providing a contribution to the local economy. Throughout the documentary, the stress is put on the decisions of the Trump administration and on the fact that immediately after his election, migrants living undocumented started to fear being deported or detained by the ICE. It could be argued that the creators of the documentary have tried to be impartial by citing controversial measures of previous administrations, for instance, the so-called “permanent ban” which was adopted by the Clinton administration in 1996 and entered into force in April 2017, (with this law people who were removed from the US and then reentered without proper documents were barred from ever lawfully becoming US residents). However, in the end, the main goal of their work was to highlight the brutality and the indifference that the Trump administration has shown in dealing with the issue of migrants and refugees.



Photo credit: Netflix

“Living undocumented” is a reminder that all migrants and refugees have compelling reasons that push them to leave their country and to seek a fortune in another one. This documentary is very enlightening because it paints a clear picture of how things really are in the United States when it comes to migration and asylum laws. One may think that going to the US to seek a better life is as easy as it was fifty or sixty years ago, when in fact, things are getting more and more complicated, and people who try to get there anyway, do it because they do not have any other possibilities. For this reason, watching this documentary can help people to open their eyes and reflect on these issues, and maybe can even help to wonder what the situation is in one’s country and how one sees migrants and refugees. This documentary raises questions and creates a lot of mixed emotions in the eyes of the audience: it is very emotional yet at the same time it is a good way to reflect and introspect on important issues; it creates a lot of empathy towards the protagonists who are undoubtedly living a hard life, but on the other hand, it compels the audience to think about the causes and the consequences of every decision taken by the families and by the individual migrants. The final scenes of the documentary may leave the audience powerless and saddened by how the stories of some of the families end. Nonetheless, the viewer may also find hope in the words of the protagonists, who, despite everything, are still optimistic about their future and are still grateful for being in the United States.

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