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## FOCUS

# Migration

Millions of people leave their homes because of wars, natural disasters, poverty or a lack of prospects. They experience trauma and loss, but also hope and success. As global migration remains largely unmanaged, many embark on life-threatening journeys. Some countries of destination tend to close themselves off, not least because right-wing populists are gaining strength. In order to exploit the full potential of migration, there is no way around international cooperation.

**Title:** Migrants in Mexico heading to the border with the United States in January 2024.

**Photo:** picture-alliance/EPA/Carlos Lopez





Our Focus section on migration begins on page 20. It pertains to the UN's 10<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): Reduce inequality within and among countries. It also has a bearing on other SDGs.

## Abandoning our own values

Europe is a major destination for international migration. In 2023, over a million people applied for asylum in the European Union, and the numbers this year will likely be similar. In December, the EU decided to tighten its asylum rules. This is a catastrophic move for political, moral and economic reasons.

The EU actually has the economic and political means to grant many people asylum and integrate them into its democratic systems. It sees itself decidedly as a liberal power that demands peace, justice, democracy and human rights both from its member states and governments worldwide. Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, has repeatedly presented the EU – alongside the USA – as an advocate of a so-called rules-based world order.

The consequence is that people who are seeking protection from war or political persecution must receive it in Europe

**“Far-right and populist forces are de facto dragging Europe’s democratic parties along. Established parties believe that in order to win back votes, they have to shift to the right – at the expense of people seeking protection.”**

– quickly and under humane conditions. The EU bears particular responsibility for climate refugees. Its member states are among the leading contributors to global heating.

In the eyes of those wanting to flee poverty at home, strong EU economies present an opportunity. At the same time, the ageing societies of Europe are in desperate

need of skilled and unskilled labour, for instance in agriculture or the health sector. It is in their interest to quickly integrate people with a right to stay into the labour market.

Regarding migration, however, the EU is not living up to its high standards. Human rights have long been violated along its external borders. Aid organisations describe conditions in refugee camps as inhumane.

With the latest tightening of its asylum rules, the EU is once again moving further away from its own values. Asylum proceedings are now supposed to take place at external borders. Until a decision on an asylum application is reached, everyone – single travellers as well as families with children – can be placed in “reception camps” under detention-like conditions.

Far-right and populist forces are de facto dragging Europe’s democratic parties along. Established parties believe that in order to win back votes, they have to shift to the right – at the expense of people seeking protection. But they should take a close look at who they are aligning themselves with. At the end of 2023, representatives of the far-right party “Alternative for Germany” (AfD) met with other right-wing extremists to discuss expelling millions of people with migratory backgrounds from Germany.

The situation is serious. Although hundreds of thousands of people reacted by demonstrating for democracy in German cities, the AfD could still become the strongest force in multiple state elections this year. In other EU countries like France, Italy or Hungary, right-wing nationalist forces have either gained strength or have long since been in government. They often suggest that rich nations are being overrun by refugees. Yet according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), around 85% of refugees stay in their home regions. They are often taken in by neighbouring countries that are economically weak themselves.

Many of these countries could serve as an example to the EU. If it does not want to lose its credibility, the EU must uphold its professed values more consistently – especially when it comes to migration policy.



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WEST BENGAL

# Nursery schools in Adivasi villages

**A pre-primary school is the first stop for children who enter formal education. It is meant to help them build the foundation of a life-long search for education. Good pre-school education helps to prevent poor performance later and reduces dropout rates from primary and even secondary schools. Marginalised communities especially benefit from good pre-school facilities, as the example of two Adivasi villages in West Bengal show.**

By Boro Baski

Four decades ago, the children of our village Bishnubati typically dropped out of school early on. We belong to the Santals, an Adivasi tribe. The Adivasis are the indigenous people of India. We Santals speak our own language and have historically lived on the margins of society.

In the past, our villages lacked educational facilities, so our children had to attend primary schools in Hindu or Muslim villages, most of which were more than one kilometre away. In our region, most people speak Bengali, which is a foreign tongue to our children. The teachers, however, were not Santals and not familiar with our language.

Moreover, teachers and non-Santal students tended to look down on us. The method of teaching was harsh, and corporal

punishment was the unofficial norm. Santal children typically dropped out of primary school because the learning environment was very unfavourable. This dynamic cemented our community's marginalisation.

Today, the situation for boys and girls from Bishnubati and the neighbouring Santal village Ghosaldanga is still difficult, but not as dark anymore. We have managed to establish educational facilities of our own. All children from our two villages now learn to read and write, thanks to the two pre-schools and the primary school that our grassroots organisation Ghosaldanga Adibasi Seva Sanga (GASS) is running.

Our community-based schools use Santali as the main language. We gradually teach the children Bengali, because they will need it in life. At first, our educational efforts were supported by Ramakrishna Mission, a major Hindu charity. Ever since, we relied on private donations (including from abroad), small subscription fees paid by village families and payments delivered in kind (farm produce) by particularly poor families.

It all started in the mid-1980s, when Sona Murmu from Ghosaldanga and Martin Kämpchen, a German scholar (and D+C/E+Z author) who was then preparing his PhD thesis at Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan nearby, decided to coach school

dropouts and get them re-admitted to primary school. Back then, Sona was the only boy from his village attending high school. A bit later, I and others joined him in founding GASS.

Coaching youngsters every evening, Sona realised that we Santals have a traditional way of freely interacting and socialising. We do not apply the many “dos” and “don’ts”, which are common in government-run schools. Our children thus found school life strenuous, and the language barrier made things even worse. We also saw that it would be good to tutor children before they started going to school.

## CONVINCING THE PARENTS

With support from Ramakrishna Mission, GASS was able to set up a nursery school for children aged three to six in Ghosaldanga in 1989 and another one in Bishnubati two years later. Santal ladies were appointed to teach the children in their mother tongue. They visited every family to convince the parents of letting their sons and daughters attend.

Malnutrition was a severe problem in the village at the time. Children and mothers were the most affected. Providing nutritious food to the children and to pregnant mothers was made one of the main activities of the daycare centres. The diet included khichuri (a mixture of rice, pulses and potatoes), green vegetables (for instance beans) and fruits (like papaya). Moreover, everyone got their daily boiled egg.

Apart from feeding the children, the pre-school facilities focused on developing their cognitive and physical abilities. The teachers introduced the concepts of letters and numbers through songs, dances and music. To keep things simple for the children, we used the Bengali alphabet for our language. Games were also a major part of our activities.

We learned that parents' participation in the programme was essential. Therefore, GASS held weekly meetings and organised regular health check-ups, relying on the voluntary support of medical doctors, who came from both West Bengal and Germany. The health situation was indeed dire. A survey conducted in Ghosaldanga in the late 1980s showed that among the 48 families, some 40 persons were infected with tuberculosis.



**Providing nutritious food is still an important activity of the Santal pre-education centres of Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati.**

In the weekly meetings, the parents and guardians shared their opinions on how to run the school more effectively. Issues of health and hygiene were regularly on the agenda. Even alcoholism and superstition were discussed, along with how to address them. It was all part of addressing the children's situation in a holistic manner. After the meetings, soap and iron tablets were distributed to every family.

Relying on families' input, we introduced a kitchen garden and started a tree planting programme. In the summer, when there is less work in the field, villagers collected the seeds of different trees from nearby forests. They grew saplings and planted hundreds of trees along the roads to our villages and on barren land. All family members participated in this small-scale afforestation scheme. It strengthened the sense of community and ownership of our nursery schools.

The plantation efforts proved most valuable. Earlier, our women had to walk for miles to collect firewood. Now they gather dry leaves and branches from nearby trees.

To some extent, however, our pre-school programme was disrupted after the turn of the millennium. Government institutions for the same purpose were set up, but once more the teachers neither spoke our language nor understood our children's needs. The solution was to merge our institutions with the government schools.

Our experience was that children who had attended our nursery schools coped better in primary school and it was easier to tutor them. At the same time, we became convinced that it would be good to run our own school. We were able to start one thanks to a major donation from Rolf Schoembs, a German scientist. The GASS bought barren land and established the Rolf Schoembs Vidyashram, a full-fledged primary school. Santali songs, music, history, and folklore are included in the curriculum.

We ensure that the children learn what they need and become both literate and numerate. However, we do not follow a totally rigid curriculum. Our teachers have opportunities to improvise, introduce new topics or go on outings as suits the chil-

dren's interests. The method of teaching is often playful, but serious and effective, nonetheless.

Having worked with Adivasi children in pre-primary education for more than three decades, we know how to teach our children well. We are happy to teach several children from other Santal villages in our area too. But we are fully aware of the fact that most Adivasi children in India do not get the essential opportunity of being taught systematically in their own language early in life.



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## Adivasis and India's school system

Over 7 million people speak Santali in India, according to census data from 2011. The Santals are India's third most populous Adivasi tribe.

Indigenous people are often disadvantaged in Indian society. That tendency was confirmed by the 2011 Census. It showed that the literacy rate of Santals in the state of West Bengal was not quite 55%. The state figure was a bit over 76%, slightly above the national literacy rate of 73%.

Even after independence, Indian governments tended to neglect education for poor communities. In the 1990s, for example, experts reckoned that only about half of the young

generation that should be going to school was actually doing so.

Things have changed, however. Enrolment rates for

primary and secondary schools have improved, with both boys and girls benefiting.

In 2009, the national parliament passed the Right to Education Act (RTE). It is the most important law regarding education in India and focuses on universal schooling for the age group 6 to 14 years. Pre-primary school education,

however, still did not get the needed attention. In 2020, the National Education Policy acknowledged that good early childhood education (ECE) remained unavailable to masses of families, especially those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Adivasi communities speak languages of their own. Accordingly, they tend to be particularly disadvantaged when it comes to education. Motivated by the RTE, however, state governments have begun to set up schools that use Adivasi languages as the medium of instruction. There are therefore quite a few governmental schools that use Santali. They cater to students from classes 1 to 12. Educators point out that they are very important for promoting literacy and teaching youngsters the regional language properly. D+C



Maths lesson at a rural Santal pre-education centre.



Queue outside a polling station for the 2021 presidential election in Zambia, which was followed by a peaceful transfer of power that strengthened democracy.

#### DEMOCRACY PROTECTION

## A more strategic approach to counter autocratisation

Democracy support must change in response to the ongoing global wave of autocratisation. Protecting democratic achievements is becoming increasingly important. While development cooperation with autocracies can be necessary for the global common good, more must be done to counter autocratisation and avoid bolstering autocratic structures.

By Julia Leininger

In many democratic countries, including Germany, people have recently protested loudly because they are dissatisfied with

politics. More than a few are calling democracy itself into question. At the same time, 72% of humanity currently lives in countries with autocratic features, as V-Dem, a renowned institute for democracy research, stated in 2023. India, for example, is on paper the largest democracy in the world, yet the government curtails the basic freedoms of parts of the population. Last year's military coups in Niger and Gabon also point to a resurgence of autocratic rule.

Nevertheless, there are reasons to remain optimistic and support democracy as a political system – through both development and foreign policy – particularly in

response to rampant autocratisation. The democracy support of the past 20 years is outdated, however. A new approach is urgently needed.

On the one hand, the goals of democracy support have changed: they now increasingly include the protection of democ-

**“Research shows that democracy support works: on average, the funds used make a significant contribution to improving democratic institutions, procedures and behaviours.”**

racies from autocratisation. Achieving these goals will require different strategies, some of which will still need to be developed. On the other hand, sound knowledge now exists about the proper conditions for and the impact of democracy support, as well as the impact of development policy on democra-

cy. This knowledge should be used to craft a new approach.

Research shows that democracy support works: on average, the funds used make a significant contribution to improving democratic institutions, procedures and behaviours. Evaluations of individual projects in areas like election monitoring, promoting civil society and strengthening parliaments frequently show at least a partial impact.

### EXPECTATION MANAGEMENT

However, no state can – and should attempt to – democratise an entire political system from the outside if the local society and at least part of the government elite are not on board. This is illustrated, for example, by the international intervention in Afghanistan until 2022. Overly ambitious political goals and expectations are one of the main problems in democracy promotion.

Instead, promoting and protecting democracy “from the outside” means supporting democratic elements in a political system and society over the long term, as well as responding quickly at the right time, like during an upheaval such as the Arab Spring in 2011/2012. Managing expectations appropriately and establishing long-term relationships are therefore key.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CURRENT WAVE OF AUTOCRATISATION

The development of political regimes has no set outcome, as can be seen, for instance, in the current autocratic movements in democracies like the USA or India. Societies’ political values can change, and democratic institutions can be dismantled, even if they have formed over centuries. These fluctuations between autocracy and democracy have been occurring in waves since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the moment we are at the peak of an autocratisation wave. It has three characteristics:

First, autocratisation is now less likely to happen through an abrupt breakdown of democracy, like a military coup, but rather through a gradual process. Frequently it is democratically elected officials themselves who dismantle democracy. Insofar as these are partner governments for state development policy, countries must consider what this means for cooperation and whether consequences should follow.

Second, there are no simple classifications of political regime types. Autocratisation processes and autocracies that are currently emerging differ from each other. Whereas some states still hold elec-

“The development of political regimes has no set outcome, as can be seen, for instance, in the current autocratic movements in democracies like the USA or India.”

tions while restricting freedom of expression, elsewhere, those in power can govern without checks through the population or parliament and judiciary. This variance determines the choice of the right means of promoting and protecting democracy.

Third, democratic decline is a problem shared by societies in both the global north and global south. This process is often accompanied by polarisation. Divisions first appear among a country’s political elites,

then among its social forces. This trend makes it more difficult to reform the democratic order and bridge divides.

### CREATING MORE KNOWLEDGE

These characteristics of autocratisation present international democracy support with new challenges, which are nevertheless solvable. Democracy protection and autocratisation prevention are now central working fields. However, there are few generalisable findings on modes of action, instruments or the right moment for international intervention. The main task is to pool the evaluation findings to date, analyse past activities and, if necessary, modify and expand them. Suitable instruments are needed in order to appropriately analyse political contexts and recognise differences.

Last but not least, democracy protection is also a question of attitude. A country like Germany can hardly promote democracy in other countries without examining the underlying values and viability of its own democracy. The pivot in democracy support must therefore also lead to better



Cooperation on climate is indispensable: Special Envoys for Climate John Kerry (USA, left) and Xie Zhenhua (China) at the 2023 climate summit in Dubai.

understanding in Germany and Europe and with societies in the global south. Democracy support in this sense would be a mutual learning process.

### WHEN DEVELOPMENT POLICY STRENGTHENS AUTOCRACIES

Still more is required, however, to effectively protect democracy and prevent autocratisation. What is needed is a fundamental re-examination of the entire development policy – a mammoth, but unavoidable, undertaking.

Research shows that development policy support strengthens existing political dynamics. It can support democratisation, but also indirectly stabilise autocratic rule. An OECD study revealed that in 2019, 79% of all public development funds worldwide went to autocracies. These funds give those in power financial and therefore also political leeway to invest in areas that serve to expand or maintain their power (fungibility problem), for example in the military. Moreover, close cooperation with govern-

**“From a democratic perspective, there is reason for optimism: after all, autocratisation can be a reversible process. Zambia and South Korea have proven this recently, for example.”**

ment partners can legitimise the executive and, indirectly, the country’s elites.

So, if development policy contributes to autocratisation, the potential political consequences of development programmes must be given greater consideration in their objectives, planning and implementation. For example, large investments and infrastructure projects should be scrutinised to determine how they could impact local political dynamics. Feasibility and context analyses already often consider aspects like human rights, corruption or the potential for conflicts to escalate. Such questions must be directed even more specifically at political processes and power constellations: what benefit will ruling powers derive from a given investment? Answering such a question will also require discussion with dissident groups. During implementation, it must become easier to react to gradual changes, for instance through adaptive approaches.

### VALUE-BASED PRAGMATISM

Democracies cannot avoid pursuing development goals in cooperation with autocracies. When it comes to global climate and environmental protection, for example, countries like China or the Democratic Republic of the Congo play an important role. But does working with them betray democratic values? No, not if the purpose of cooperation is to promote the global common good and the role of democracy has been well considered.

Germany, which generates its common good through exports, is economically dependent on geostrategic cooperation with autocracies. Pragmatic relationships are a necessity, but democracy should not be sold out. It is important to openly declare support for democratic values and condemn their violation. Under value-based pragmatism, cooperation with strict autocracies without strategic relevance for Germany

would either become of secondary importance or expire.

### SOME AUTOCRACIES ARE CLOSED, OTHERS MORE OPEN

As mentioned above, autocracies are heterogeneous and offer different possibilities for cooperation. In more open autocracies that allow some degree of participation – like Burkina Faso, Ethiopia or the Philippines – there are starting points for measures that promote the common good and democracy. Opportunities are more limited in closed autocracies like Guinea, Myanmar or Turkmenistan.

From a democratic perspective, there is reason for optimism: after all, autocratisation can be a reversible process. Zambia and South Korea have proven this recently, for example. If democratic development policy wants to resist the trend towards autocratisation, however, it especially needs allies in partner countries. Seeking, finding and supporting democracy protectors therefore remains an important task for state development policy.

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## Why democracy?

Democracy is sometimes called into question as a goal of development policy. It is worthwhile, however, to consider democracy and sustainable development together:

- Cooperation: Sustainable development requires global cooperation. It is more likely that reliable and long-term cooperation will succeed under democracies.
- The common good: Studies show that democratic regimes are more oriented towards the common good in a variety of areas and achieve better development results than autocracies, for instance, when it comes to health, social security and prosperity.
- Human dignity: When one compares different political regimes, democracies are the ones that aim to protect the dignity of all people equally – and not just on paper. JL



## WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN ALGERIA

# Against discrimination and femicide

In Algeria, patriarchy is still deeply rooted. Women are legally and socially disadvantaged, and the number of femicides has been alarming for years. Many women stand up against violence and oppression.

By Khadija Kelalech

The 1984 Algerian Family Code governs crucial aspects of marriage, divorce and inheritance. Women's rights are restricted as most decisions require the consent of men. Despite amendments in 2005 and 2016 aimed at bolstering women's agency in matters of marriage and divorce, gender equality gaps persist. Notably, gender-based violence issues like domestic abuse and marital rape remain largely unaddressed.

In recent years, men have murdered numerous women because of their gender, referred to as femicides. Activists of the Féminicides Algérie platform are committed to documenting these crimes. Between 2019 and 2021, they registered 187 cases, two of which attracted significant attention.

In October 2020, the tragic story of Chaïma, a 19-year-old from Algiers' outskirts, shook the nation. She was lured to an abandoned petrol station by a man who sought revenge because she had sent him to prison for a previous rape. Chaïma faced horrifying brutality. The culprit raped and tortured her and ultimately set her on fire.

This crime prompted widespread protests across Algerian cities. Women demanded an end to gender-based violence and justice for Chaïma. Activists used hashtags like #JeSuisChaïma, #WeLostOneOfUs and #NousSommesToujoursLà to draw attention to the issue. Disappointingly, some parts of social media chose to blame the victim's style of dress rather than holding her rapist and killer accountable for the crime.

Another prominent case is that of 39-year-old journalist Tinhinane Laceb. The mother of two daughters hosted an environmental programme on Algerian television. On 26 January 2021, she was murdered by her husband who was very jealous and could not accept that she was having a ca-

reer. Algerian television initially reported this act as a mere "death" failing to specify it as a femicide or assassination.

Algerian women increasingly refuse to accept gender-specific violence. However, the prevailing culture of silence and stigmatisation makes it difficult for victims to seek justice. Although laws exist against gender-based violence in Algeria, they are often not sufficiently enforced.

## ADVOCACY AND RESISTANCE

23-year-old Dhoha vividly describes how Algerian women are facing gender-based violence as double victims, burdened not only by their attackers but also by societal scepticism: "You will be afraid of getting attacked and also afraid that people won't believe you. Afraid of the attacker and society. Who will believe me?"

Algerian women have actively embraced advocacy and resistance movements. Social media has emerged as a potent tool for amplifying their voices and spotlighting issues long shrouded in secrecy. For instance, in response to Chaïma's tragic murder, the Association des Actrices Algériennes (Association of Algerian Actresses) released a YouTube video featuring renowned Algerian actresses. This video is a satirical critique of patriarchal and misogynistic values, aimed to challenge the oppression of women. It met with backlash, accumulating numerous dislikes as many Algerians found it offensive to the country's religious and traditional values.

However, this has not stopped Algerian women from resisting and fighting for legislative reform and cultural change.

## LINKS

Féminicides Algérie:

<https://feminicides-dz.com/>

YouTube video against gender-based violence in Algeria by the Association des Actrices Algériennes:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAxLLmyYzMo&t=46s>



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Rally in Algiers in 2020 to denounce the brutal killing of 19-year-old Chaïma and other women.



The building known as Usindiso Shelter after the deadly fire in August.

#### URBAN HOUSING

## “A story of abandonment”

On 31 August 2023, a devastating fire broke out at Usindiso Shelter, an unlawfully occupied five-storey building in the inner-city of Johannesburg, South Africa, which had been home to more than 200 families. 77 persons were killed, many more seriously injured. All of them formed part of the poorest residents of the city, a sizeable number were migrants from other South African provinces or other African countries. The building, a property of the City, has since remained inhabitable. In this interview, human-rights expert Nomzamo Zondo talks about the political and social context of the catastrophe.

Nomzamo Zondo interviewed by Eva Dick

**What happened to the residents of Usindiso Shelter in the night of the fire? Where did they go?**

The City of Johannesburg immediately provided buses to put people in what they call

the shelter. In fact, it is a community hall in one of the suburbs of Johannesburg called Bezuidenhout Valley, which is about seven kilometres away from the Central Business District where Usindiso Shelter is located. People initially resisted to move there. Those whose rooms had not been burned down didn't know when they'd be able to access their belongings. Others wanted to see the full picture and find out who of the people they knew had been found and who had not.

At least about 250 people were taken to the shelter – including families with small children. Some of them were distributed into other shelters from there. The circumstances were overcrowded from the beginning, people didn't feel comfortable. Some who had friends living in other unlawfully occupied buildings made plans to go there. I heard of one family that had gone to live under a bridge next to a taxi station outside Johannesburg.

#### How did the situation develop in the weeks and months after?

Two months later, about 70 people were still living at the Bezuidenhout Valley shelter. The rest had gone into other unlawfully occupied buildings. According to some of them, even after two months there hadn't really been a coordinated response from the City of Johannesburg, for example assisting those who had lost family members. However, Usindiso Shelter is owned by the City, so they are the ones who must answer to this.

There was an announcement that the City would engage with those who had been hospitalised. However, during their time in hospital, they didn't get any assistance. Also, there were issues with the victims' belongings. Some of them tried to get into the building but wouldn't be able to. When the building was being opened up, some found their belongings had been stolen.

Many people believe that the residents were treated in an inhumane way because there was an assumption that they are migrants (see the article by Audrey Simango on page 23 of this issue) – and therefore not worthy of a humane government response. At the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI), we tried to call this out

**“While I feel like Johannesburg’s municipality has behaved rather recalcitrant, both the national and the provincial government have not performed well either. They have been invisible.”**

both in the media and in our own engagements with the City.

**On the same day of the fire, SERI released a press statement asserting that Usindiso Shelter was an “example of how the City deals with its shelters”. What did you mean by this?**

The City, in all the buildings that it owns, likes to give the impression that they have lost control of these buildings. However, there is evidence that they didn’t lose control but rather deliberately abandoned them. Even though the City was requested to assist and had proposals of what should be done, they decided to do nothing. That’s why, in our view, Usindiso tells the story that we know – a story of abandonment. I find this very frustrating. When you look at the conditions at Usindiso, for example the accessibility of services, there was an opportunity for the City. They could have used that building to properly house inner-city residents who are in need of accommodation.

When the City decides that a certain building is unsafe, its position is that residents need to be evicted. However, they often don’t know where to go. People have a right to access adequate housing. If they cannot afford accommodation, the state has an obligation to provide it. That is drawn from South Africa’s Emergency Housing Programme which is a specific policy in the National Housing Code.

**What can the Emergency Housing Programme be used for and what has the City done so far?**

The City hasn’t fully utilised the Emergency Housing Programme yet. In my opinion, they are not acting according to the obligations that the courts have imposed on them when it comes to rehousing people. They only have provided accommodation in instances where courts have ordered them to and haven’t done anything to address un-

safe housing conditions, even though the Emergency Housing Programme allows to use its funds to make buildings and houses safer – for example, by making sure that escape ways are clear, and the firefighting equipment is available. The fire hydrant, for instance, must have the correct pressure and be connected to all the floors. Where the City renovates a building, it should ensure sufficient access to water and sanitary facilities so that the residents stay in healthy conditions. Only where conditions are unsafe and refurbishment is not a feasible solution should the City relocate people to another building.

**This sounds like larger investments are necessary. What about funding?**

Municipalities can apply to be granted means by the Emergency Housing Programme’s fund to respond to an emergency situation. The programme specifically records evictions as emergencies. However, municipalities have not utilised the programme for evictions arguing that they do not count as such. Their outlook is likely grounded in the fact that when you hear the word emergency, of course, you think of unexpected events like floods and fires. In contrast, the court process for forced eviction normally takes two years, in some cases up to 15 years. It can be a very long process.

**Urban housing crises cannot be solved by city governments and administrations alone. What kind of action is required from the South African national and provincial governments?**

The National Department of Human Settlements has the task of guiding municipalities and provinces in implementing the National Housing Code. While I feel like Johannesburg’s municipality has behaved rather recalcitrant, both the national and the provincial government have not performed well either. They have been invisible. They have

seen that the city has been failing and struggling with this issue but have continued to stand on the side-lines.

**Please specify.**

SERI has been calling on both the national and the provincial governments to bring their expertise and resources to the table to help Johannesburg resolve its housing crisis – for instance, address the problem that the City needs to relocate residents from buildings that are a risk to their lives but has problems to find buildings to accommodate them. In this case, the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure could be of help. It holds all the state-owned property, so it can explain how many of those properties are available and what would be needed to renovate them so that the City can make use of them.

**How can non-state actors such as SERI contribute to safe housing in inner-city Johannesburg?**

Immediately after the fire at Usindiso Shelter, we made use of our network and asked professionals like architects and others to assist with the redesign. There are several non-profit organisations willing to work with residents to make buildings safer. Such commitment could become more effective if the state provided more support. SERI has been working with inner-city residents for more than 10 years. We are available to help residents, civil-society organisations, the City and the state to join hands and tackle Johannesburg’s problems together.

**Can the catastrophe at Usindiso Shelter serve as a wake-up call?**

During apartheid, the Usindiso Shelter served as the pass office whose officials could decide whether “natives” were worthy of entering Johannesburg. The fire reminded us again that little progress has been made to move us away from that past. Perhaps this is a wake-up call to ensure that the inner-city poor are treated with the dignity that was so steadfastly pursued before the end of apartheid in 1994.



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## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

## Various potentials

**Early childhood is an important phase in human development in which a child rapidly develops new cognitive, social and emotional abilities. The range of skills young children acquire during this period in different cultural contexts is remarkable. However, the widespread international call for young children to “realise their full potential” needs to be tailored to the skills that are most relevant in their particular environment.**

By Sara Harkness and Charles M. Super

Early childhood development, particularly caregivers’ responses to its different stages, varies considerably around the world. During our research in a village in rural Kenya, we found two-year-old Kibet sitting alone on a tree stump, whimpering fiercely and kicking his feet; his face was a picture of rage and misery. His mother, who was busy chopping wood for the cooking fire in the house nearby, had a simple explanation for her child’s tantrum: “Kasinyin” – literally “his work”. She explained that he was just “doing his thing” and that he would soon get over it on his own. Such examples of self-assertion – whether charming or annoying to caregivers – mark the increasing autonomy and ability to think about oneself in relation to others that characterises early childhood development. However, how caregivers react to this varies from society to society (see the article by David Lancy in D+C/E+Z Digital Monthly 2024/01, page 26).

At the same time, a child’s evolving abilities give rise to new expectations and demands within their “developmental niche”, the culturally structured environment of daily life. These expectations, which often take the form of “developmental timetables”, reflect the beliefs held by parents and caregivers regarding the ages at which children should acquire specific developmental skills.

For example, a study of grandmothers’ developmental expectations for children aged three to five in Botswana by Marea Tsamaase looked at the skills required for self-care, communication, learning Setswana

customs and taking on household chores. Grandmothers expected three-year-old children to be able to dress themselves (without putting on clothes backwards), eat independently and, most importantly, follow simple commands. By the age of five, the grandmothers expected the children to be able to do some of their own laundry and help with the cooking. The word “clever” (“botlhale”) used by these grandmothers was closely related to social skills and reflected the child’s ability to carry out household tasks and oth-

In western societies too, culturally rooted developmental plans have a significant impact on the acquisition of different skills at certain ages and influence parents, teachers and policymakers. A collaborative study of parents and preschools in Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and the US found that while there are similar agendas for early childhood education, the underlying goals for children’s development vary.

In Italy, almost all children start preschool at the age of three and attend until the age of five. Children in preschool participate in planned activities such as games, expressive or motor activities, in addition to lunch, a nap and an afternoon snack. Pre-academic activities are introduced in the last year of preschool, but more emphasis is placed on respecting rules, such as raising



A mother and child workshop in Peru.

er valued skills, such as bringing a chair for a visitor.

The cultural model of intelligence as socially embedded has been identified in various sub-Saharan communities. Among the Kipsigis in western Kenya, for example, children’s “intelligence” was often judged by their ability to do housework without supervision. Similar observations have been made in Côte d’Ivoire, Zambia and Nigeria. The immediate goal is to have a child who can be relied upon from an early age to take on a variety of responsible household tasks, including caring for younger siblings.

the hand before speaking and staying seated during structured activities. Targeted pre-graphic exercises may be introduced for literacy acquisition, as well as phonological exercises to begin learning the alphabet and exercises on quantities to support the development of number learning.

Early childhood education in the Netherlands is structured somewhat differently, as general pre-school education begins at the child’s fourth birthday and is integrated into primary schools; however, the content of Dutch pre-school education is quite similar to the Italian system.

## SCHOOL-RELATED SKILLS PARAMOUNT

In contrast to early childhood education in western Europe, three- and four-year-old children in the US are cared for in a variety of ways, such as at home with family or a babysitter, or in a centre-based daycare or preschool. In recent years, there has been increasing pressure on educators and parents in the US to accelerate the acquisition of school-related skills. As one daycare teacher in Connecticut told us during our research, “we are now teaching preschoolers what used to be taught in second grade.” Accordingly, we found clear trends in parents’ perceptions of their own role in teaching school-related skills to young children before the children actually enter formal education: Nearly three-quarters of US parents indicated that they believe it is important to teach their children such skills.

Concern in the US about preparing children for school at an ever-younger age has been fueled in recent years by media attention to the importance of “brain de-

“Among the Kipsigis in western Kenya, for example, children’s ‘intelligence’ was often judged by their ability to do housework without supervision.”

velopment” in the first two or three years of life, which is said to require intensive educational intervention before a child’s chances of reaching its full potential are irretrievably lost.

Ironically, the goal of helping children “reach their full potential” emphasised in international publications such as “Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development” by UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the World Bank, neglects the wide range of skills necessary for successful development in different cultural contexts. Instead, it recommends that parents fol-

low current western middle-class practices aimed at early academic development and autonomy.

### LINK

Harkness, S., et al., 2020: Parents, preschools, and the developmental niches of young children: A study in four western cultures. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 170, 113-142. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/cad.20343>.



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## DEVELOPMENT POLICY

# Religion needs to be a part of the solution

The numbers of people leaving the churches in Germany are reaching record levels. In other parts of Europe too, as well as in North America, there is evidence of a strengthening secularisation trend. However, it would be a mistake to think this means religion is becoming less relevant for German development cooperation.

By Thomas Rachel

For four out of five people worldwide, religion plays an important role in their lives. In many of Germany’s development partner countries, the figure is even higher. Faith and religion are meaningful for them and provide guidance for their actions. So,

“Religious actors often enjoy much greater trust than government agencies, particularly in the so-called global south.”

regardless of personal views on religion, it should be clear that any value-based development policy that is supposed to take people seriously must also take their world view seriously. And that means that development policy needs to take systematic account of the realities of religious, normative and cultural life in partner countries.

Yet there is massive disregard for the relevance of religion in the foreign and development policy of the present German government. Around ten years ago, the then ministers for foreign affairs and development and economic cooperation, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Gerd Müller, recognised the strategic importance of religion in international politics. They provided key funding and established international structures. At the same time, Angela Merkel’s government created the office of the Federal Government Commissioner for Freedom of Religion. As a result, Germany assumed a pioneering role on the international stage – a role that is now being jeopardised, even abandoned, through woeful neglect.

This can be seen, for example, looking at the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), a network initiated by Germany in 2016. It plays a crucial role by bringing together over 150 international and religious organisations and a number of governments to share experiences and work together to develop solutions. PaRD is a vitally important instrument for promoting religious competence



Members of the Libyan Red Crescent are working to open roads after the devastating floods in September 2023.

among representatives of German foreign and development policy and for ensuring a professional approach to religions in general. But despite its successful performance and track record, the international network faces an uncertain future. Under Federal Development Minister Svenja Schulze, funding has been cut. Even worse: the current funding could expire at the beginning of 2025.

### LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

Failure to appreciate the influence of religious actors is also apparent in the German development ministry's Africa strategy and feminist development policy strategy. Despite being a major factor, religion receives only marginal consideration in each case.

A development policy that ignores the religious context in partner countries for ideological reasons and pushes its own ideas instead, is perceived by many as a neo-colonial policy. Sustainable development and peaceful coexistence can be achieved only by harnessing diverse societal forces – including religious ones.

Religious communities have the power to shape society and can therefore contribute to the acceptance, effectiveness and sustainability of development cooperation projects. Many of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as gender equality, climate action and inclusive and equitable education, can only be achieved with the support of religious actors – not

without them and certainly not against them.

Religious actors often enjoy much greater trust than government agencies, particularly in the so-called global south. In countries where state development cooperation is limited by war or conflict or where state structures no longer exist, religious actors continue to be active and carry out important work for and with the people affected, even in remote regions.

### AMBIVALENT ROLE

They play a key role in grassroots awareness campaigns. One example of this is the fight against female genital mutilation in Mali. In 2020, a hundred religious authorities there helped to save 400 girls from genital mutilation in just one year.

The UN and the World Bank estimate that, in parts of Africa, religious organisations are responsible for nearly half of all the social, educational and health services delivered. In many countries, a healthcare or education system would be unthinkable without the contribution of religious communities.

At the same time, the ambivalence of religions and religious communities must not be ignored. Religious authorities can unleash or resolve conflicts. Religious communities can be perpetrators as well as victims of discrimination and persecution. Religions are sometimes misused to prevent

democratic reform or to secure power. So, where religions are part of the problem, it is important to make them part of the solution.

Particularly in view of the decline in religiosity in Germany and the continuing high level of religiosity worldwide, priorities need to be set to increase religious competence in the foreign and development ministries as well as in governmental implementing organisations and to provide sustainable financial security for established networks such as PaRD. If religious context is not taken into account, the German government's self-declared feminist development policy will also be doomed to failure.

This may seem strange in secularised Europe, where churches face dwindling memberships and mounting criticism, but development cooperation without a religious component will always remain patchy. Regardless of any ideological bias, the German government should recognise this.



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## How Podor eats

When visitors are expected, every guest is welcome at the dining table in northern Senegal. Meals are healthy and home cooked.

The guests from Germany have had an almost eleven-hour car journey from Dakar to the city of Podor. When the group finally arrives, everyone is very hungry. The visitors gather on the open first-floor terrace of the house on the outskirts of town. A hot desert wind is blowing and the temperature stays above 30°C.

Everyone sits on mats on the floor in a circle. Stomachs rumble. Then a member of the family brings in a large round lidded silver tray. The atmosphere is electric – what might be there to eat? The tray is placed in the centre of the circle and the lid is removed: *thiéboudienne*, Senegal's national dish. In the local Wolof language, it is called *ceebu jen*: *ceebu* means "rice with" and *jen* means "fish".

The base is a bed of spiced, seasoned rice and is topped in the centre with fried or dried fish and a variety of cooked vegetables such as cabbage, aubergine, okra, pumpkin, carrot, sweet potato or yam. Each guest is given a spoon and eats from his or her own segment of the large tray. A spicy green paste made from hibiscus leaves and a dark tamarind sauce are served as accompaniments and used according to taste. The Senegalese hostess eats African-style, with her right hand, forming rice, fish and vegetables into bite-sized balls. She also distributes even helpings of fish and vegetables to each guest. The food is spicy and very tasty.

Fish bones or tamarind stones from the sauce can simply be placed on the floor next to the tray. Before the meal, a large washable cover was spread over the seating mat. It can later be removed and cleaned – very practical.

The meals that follow are served in a similar way. Rice or couscous is spread over the large serving tray and topped in the centre with vegetables, fish or meat. Senegal is a Muslim country, so no pork is eaten, but chicken, beef and mutton are very popular.

Most animals in Podor lead a happy life before they end up in the cooking pot. Fish come straight from the Senegal River, which flows through the town. During the day, goats and sheep are allowed to range freely and roam the streets. In the evening, they return to their homes on their own, the locals explain.

For German visitors, breakfast takes some getting used to. Fresh baguettes from the local baker are served with the leftovers from the previous day's evening meal. Coffee is rarely drunk. Green tea – very strong and sweet – is the beverage of choice in Senegal.

When guests from Germany arrive, family and friends come to visit in large numbers. Anyone who wishes to stay for dinner is very welcome. The large dining trays are always fully laden, and diners simply move closer together if more guests arrive. No one goes home hungry.

Of course, there is a lot of unseen logistics behind the scenes, the hostess explains. Her sister and other relatives spend several hours a day cooking kilos of rice, vegetables, fish and meat. But the guests see little sign of that. For practical reasons, the cooking is done in another house nearby.

The difference between tourist catering and home cooking becomes very clear to guests when they visit the capital Dakar. Traditional dishes such as *thiéboudienne* can also be ordered in restaurants there but they are served on a separate plate for each guest.



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## REGIONAL INTEGRATION

# Why Zambia needs the AfCFTA

**Trade is an important factor for the economic development of a country. It is the driving force for sustained economic prosperity that trickles down to generate jobs, reduce poverty and improve living standards. Therefore, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is of strategic relevance for a country like Zambia.**

By Beulah N. Chombo

Though Zambia has made progress in diversifying its export sector, it is still dependent on its copper exports. The implication is that Zambia's economy only does well when the copper price is high and can become sluggish when it drops. Thus, it was bad news when the world market price started to slide fast last summer. It did not recover fully, so this autumn, the Ministry of Finance expected gross domestic product to grow by a mere 2.7% in 2023 after 4.7% in 2022.

This trend shows that Zambia's trade needs to shift its focus away from mining. It must generate more foreign-exchange revenues from other industries, including manufacturing, agriculture, information and communication technology (ICT), energy and tourism. Achieving that will require policies to open the economy to more international trade.

In this context, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) should prove most helpful. The AfCFTA is set to become the world's largest free trade area, covering all members of the AU. The mandate is to boost intra-African trade by eliminating barriers and encouraging African businesses to pay much more attention to their own continent. A better investment climate will then drive industrialisation. Moreover, the intra-African market can also drive the development of a strong service sector, including in fields like the financial industry or education.

It is important to understand that stronger intra-African trade relations will not only serve large corporations. The opportunities for micro, small and mid-sized

enterprises will improve too. They can become integrated into supply chains, with positive impacts on productivity and value generation. Foreign trade can thus also contribute to formalising the informal sector which hardly pays taxes, provides very little social protection and keeps masses of people stuck in poverty.

Zambia's lingering debt crisis makes the increased generation of foreign-exchange revenues even more important. As the economy depends on copper exports, the exchange rate of the nation's currency responds to changing copper prices. It becomes less valuable as copper becomes cheaper. Accordingly, the servicing of debt which is denominated in foreign currencies becomes more expensive precisely when copper-export revenues decline.

Unfortunately, foreign debt can even prove excessive when copper prices are rising as was the case three years ago. In late 2020, Zambia's government went into sovereign default. Negotiations on an IMF bailout proved very difficult, particularly because China was unwilling to agree to debt restructuring. This summer, a comprehensive bailout worth \$6.3 billion finally came about but it only included rather limited debt relief and demands strict budget

discipline. Zambia did not get a clean slate, but will have to start servicing outstanding debts as soon as the economy recovers enough for doing so.

The AfCFTA can positively contribute to the responding to Zambia's debt problems by triggering international investment and economic expansion throughout the region. Zambia ratified the AfCFTA Agreement in early 2021 and is now implementing the agreement. Economic theory and historical evidence show that small nations with comparatively small markets benefit from open trade in particular. According to worldometer, only seven of 55 AU members have populations of more than 50 million. Given that purchasing power tends to be low in Africa, the continent's markets are comparatively tiny.

Zambia has long been a member of both SADC (Southern African Development Community) and COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa). Sadly, Zambia's overlapping membership has made things more complicated. It is therefore good news that AfCFTA is being built on the foundations of all existing regional communities in Africa – and not only for Zambia. All African countries will benefit from stimulating production through the development of regional value chains.



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The debt has become unsustainable: President Hakainde Hichilema (3<sup>rd</sup> from right) visits Chinese-financed water infrastructure in Lusaka Province in July 2022.



## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

# A tool to be handled with care

**Artificial Intelligence (AI) holds the potential to act as a facilitator in achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Africa. At the same time, there is a risk that AI will exacerbate inequalities and tensions on the continent in environmental, social and economic areas, not least through data exploitation.**

By Azza Mustafa Babikir Ahmed and Fabio Andrés Díaz Pabón

For a start, we should avoid thinking of AI as either a kind of golden calf or a demonic entity to be despised and feared. The reality is that AI is a specific type of technology. It shouldn't come as a surprise that technologies have certain impacts. The development landscape has faced technological influences before and will continue to do so.

The outcomes of technological advances, such as AI, depend on whether their benefits do not lead to exploitation. Governmental and non-governmental institutions must quickly learn about the potentially harmful effects of such technologies and promote dynamics in which technology advances the development of society as a whole.

Equitable development enabled by technology depends on institutions effectively promoting its role in society. The crucial question is whose interests these institutions serve. Not least, we need an ex-

amination of our existing institutional capacities and deficits.

In Africa, technology such as AI is being hailed as the path to sustainable development. However, this only represents the best possible scenario for the continent. Development tends to lead to different outcomes depending on various factors. For this reason, it is important to ask ourselves what we really know about AI in Africa.

It is essential to recognise that AI cannot have the same impact and consequences in Africa as in other regions. Africa faces challenges such as widespread illiteracy and limited internet access. It is therefore especially important to think about ways in which disadvantaged people can benefit from technological advantages.

## MINING DATA

Development will depend on how technology ownership, regulation and benefit sharing affect livelihoods across the continent. African countries need laws on data ownership and data protection. This is the only way that states can protect their citizens from a new form of exploitative mining, which will be all about their data instead of mineral resources.

AI certainly has the potential to reduce inequality by improving agriculture, financial inclusion, access to education,

healthcare, job creation, language translation and data analysis. However, this will only be possible if it is implemented according to ethical guidelines tailored to Africa. The examples set by the Rwandan government and UNESCO here are noteworthy.

One should not expect progress in science and technology, including AI, to lead to achieving goals on its own. The availability of vaccines during the pandemic, for example, has shown how technology ownership, patents and intellectual property rights affect a country's ability to benefit from scientific achievements. The lack of vaccines and the inability of many Africans to obtain them are a sobering reminder that sovereignty over technological and scientific accomplishments is, in practice, only possible for those with power and resources. Such inequalities may mean that the right of African governments to champion their vision of development with the help of AI depends on the willingness of companies and richer states to allow such visions to be realised.

We should also not expect technology to do the work that governments and societies should do. Technology remains a tool. Communities and the state must know what model of society they aspire to and what role technologies such as AI should play in this. Only then can technology help to identify sources of poverty, reduce inequality and help us to overcome barriers in income, education, healthcare and infrastructure. But for this to happen, societies not only need to know what they want to achieve with AI, they also need capable governments who are able to understand the benefits and blind spots of such technologies.



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A Nigerian artist creates hyper-realistic pictures using artificial intelligence.



“Against”: Protests on the day of the referendum on a new Chilean constitution in Santiago, Chile, in December 2023.

## GOVERNANCE

## A second “No”

Chileans have rejected a second proposed new constitution. The divide between society and the political class is growing.

By **Javier A. Cisterna Figueroa**

So now what? That is the question the Chilean people are pondering after the results of the referendum on 17 December 2023. In less than a year and a half, the South American country has rejected two different proposals for a new constitution. On 4 September 2022, 63% of the electorate voted against a constitution proposed by progressives. Now 56% have rejected the conservatives’ proposal.

Neither of the two options could fulfil the hopes of a now-tired electorate. Discussions about the constitution failed to respond to the social demands of the mass demonstrations of 2019, the so-called Chilean social outburst (“Estallido Social”).

Four years and two referenda later, there is a prevailing impression of an incomplete uprising and an out-of-touch political

“The citizens’ decisions can be explained by the fact that both the left and the right made similar mistakes. Proposals from both camps resembled government programmes, including a distinctly ideological wording.”

class, as well as deep regret about the missed opportunity. Therefore, it’s no surprise that, after the results were announced, one of the most repeated phrases by analysts and political actors was “no one has won here”.

The citizens’ decisions can be explained by the fact that both the left and the right made similar mistakes. Proposals from both camps resembled government programmes, including a distinctly ideological wording. During the referenda, however, the extremes on both sides were neutralised, and the Chilean electorate, known for

its pragmatism and centrist tendencies, reacted as expected (and as polling predicted): faced with uncertainty, it chose to strengthen the status quo.

“The constitutional process is closed,” Chile’s president, Gabriel Boric, commented in response to the latest referendum. The 37-year-old social democrat heads a coalition that unites the traditional centre-left and more recent groups. Boric was once the driving force behind efforts to pass a new constitution. Now he must attempt to advance at least part of his government programme during his two remaining years in office.

It will not be easy. The legislative debate did not exactly benefit the executive. And the opposition holds a majority in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. There seems to be no political will to promote major changes in social policy. With regard to tax reform, the opposition has declared that an increase in tax revenue should be achieved through an economic upturn – and not by raising taxes, as intended by the government. There is no consensus on pension policy, either.

### SENSE OF SECURITY HAS DETERIORATED

Meanwhile, Chileans’ greatest concerns are security, health and the economy, as a poll by the think tank Centro de Estudios Públicos showed. In the past year, Chile’s GDP has not grown. Citizens’ sense of security has declined, in part because international gangs have become involved in local organised crime. Against this backdrop, the president’s comment was seen as a good first step, indicating that he will not insist on a third referendum, but instead focus entirely on reforms and citizens’ priorities.

It is unclear what will actually happen. One thing is certain, however: in 2024, Chileans will return to the polls again, this time to elect mayors and regional governors. The next presidential election is scheduled for the end of 2025. In the meantime, Chile’s current constitution, a legacy of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, will remain in force.



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Refugees face the Italian police on the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa.



Photo: picture-alliance/ZUMA/PRESS.com/Cecilia Fabiano

FOCUS

## Migration

**Supporting girls' education in Kakuma, one of the world's largest refugee camps**

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Children study in front of a classroom at Al Nuur Primary School in Kakuma.

#### REFUGEE-CAMP LIFE

## School education for refugee girls

**In Kakuma, Kenya, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is promoting education for South-Sudanese girls, breaking traditional barriers. Efforts have increased school attendance. Examples of young women, some of whom are now studying abroad, show the transformative power of education.**

By Alba Nakuwa

Education is a fundamental human right. However, it is not respected by all traditional communities. Where school capacities are very poor, moreover, the right to education is often effectively denied. Indeed, South-Sudanese girls in Kakuma, a refugee camp in Kenya, have educational opportunities they would not have enjoyed in the rural regions they had to flee from because of civil war.

Traditionally, South-Sudanese women viewed education as a luxury rather than a priority for themselves and their daugh-

ters. They grew up not being allowed an opinion. Many believed they could only do household chores. Conventional thinking hindered them from attempting to get a formal education and having careers like men.

Things are different in Kakuma. Many girls are keen on attending school and bettering their lives. Data from the UNHCR, which runs the camp, show that in 2015, a mere two percent of girls there went to school. The share has increased to 30%. The improvement is striking, though more remains to be done.

The UNHCR has been adamant in promoting the education of girls. It wants to ensure that the female gender is included in education, including in sports and music activities in schools. In the past, the agency not only attributed the low enrolment of girls to parents' typical preference for boys, but also to teen pregnancies and early marriages. The UNHCR now ensures that no girl drops

out for these reasons in Kakuma. Schools offer counselling services accordingly. Girls with babies, moreover, get special breaks so they can go home and breastfeed. Pregnant girls and young mothers are provided with healthcare, even though healthcare in Kakuma is generally not sufficient for the number of people living in the camp (see box).

The UNHCR approach is particularly helpful for young girls who find themselves in the camp on their own, without support or guidance from an adult. The UNHCR encourages them to set themselves educational goals. Its resources are limited, however, so charities promote the cause too.

### CHARITABLE BOARDING SCHOOLS

Two examples are the Angelina Jolie Academy and Morneau Shepell Secondary. These boarding schools only accept girls. They are run by different non-profit organisations and provide quality education.

Among other things, they offer remedial classes on weekends and holidays, ensuring that all students can cover the syllabus on time and are kept busy during holiday breaks. Best performing students often get a scholarship from Canada's World Uni-

versity Service and can then pursue further studies in the country.

Sunday Keji is an orphan refugee who got this opportunity. She completed Morneau Shepell Secondary and is now living in Vancouver to study nursing. She plans to return to her home country South Sudan in order to help educate people there.

Keji says that a lot of girls in the camp lack proper supervision from a guardian. In her life, teachers were very important. Their role in encouraging and motivating students is indispensable.

Austin Baboya works for the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Kakuma.

He reports that until recently, only three out of 10 girls made it to high school, but he sees gradual improvement: “More girls are going to school and are becoming academic giants.” In his eyes, they deserve applause.

According to Baboya, the IRC and other charities are organising seminars and mentorship programmes to boost girls’ education. The goal is to reduce the drop-out numbers, which still are quite high.

An important issue, moreover, is employment. Women need jobs. The UN has played a role in adjusting the conventional thinking where young girls were brought to

believe it was solely a man’s responsibility to provide for the family.

According to Baboya, the inclusion of the female gender in the workspace is leading to results. He points out that girls in Kakuma are increasingly interested in college courses and vocational training. Many want to acquire skills in fields such as hairdressing, tailoring, photography or electricals.



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## Too little for too many

Healthcare in Kenya’s Kakuma refugee camp and in the Kalobeyei resettlement area has been a major problem for decades. Too many people have to share too few resources.

The refugee camp is located in the Kenyan desert and is one of the largest in the world. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), it was home to at least 270,135 refugees in 2023. They mainly come from South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Despite the overpopulation, the UNHCR and numerous civil-society organisations are working relentlessly to provide the refugees with medical care.

The UNHCR has set up several health facilities over the years, including smaller health centres and two hospitals. The latter are run by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and provide all types of medical assistance free of charge to all refugees in possession of legal documents and ID. In addition, the Kakuma Mission Hospital, which serves the host community in the Kakuma area, acts

as a referral centre in situations where there are difficulties in providing adequate medical assistance. These services are usually paid for by the UNHCR.

Rose Namoi Wolde lives and works in the camp as a laboratory technician in the main hospital. The South Sudanese explains that she is happy to be able to give something back to her fellow refugees by offering them medical help amidst the various challenges in the camp.

According to Wolde, the health facilities are able to provide basic medical care, which includes treatment for common and recurring diseases, vaccinations and maternal care. “However, life in the camp is anything but easy, and sometimes it is even difficult to meet patients’ basic needs such as food and water.” The high population density also affects the spread of infectious diseases such as cholera and tuberculosis. Dust-related eye problems are another concern.

Wolde adds that the two main hospitals prioritise children, as they are most affected by the living conditions in the

camp. Many suffer from illnesses caused by poor nutrition, while others are neglected by their parents. A lot of children in the camp are pale and suffer from underweight or kwashiorkor, a type of malnutrition caused by eating too little protein. Although there are nutrition programmes in the camp, they are not sufficient for all the children in need.

As Wode explains, resources are very limited in all areas due to the large number of people. Finances are tight and there is often a lack of medical equipment and well-trained medical professionals. Despite these challenges, the hospitals usually organise medical workshops to educate the refugees about important health issues and safety measures to prevent the outbreak of diseases in the camp.

Physical illnesses are not the only health problem that

refugees face. The wars and conflicts from which they have fled lead to psychological problems such as trauma or post-traumatic stress for many. But experiences of conflict are not the only psychological burden: it is often overlooked that the sudden change of familiar surroundings and culture and the subsequent culture shock or adjustment difficulties can be an additional cause of mental health problems.

Lynaah Totome is a counsellor and works at the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). The South Sudanese explains that the DRC supports people who have fled conflict, violence and persecution. They offer counselling and support and give refugees a platform to talk about their traumatic experiences. “Mental health problems are often attributed to experiences of conflict. But sometimes they also arise due to frustration. Many people are simply exhausted by camp life – the years of harsh living conditions, isolation in the desert and overcrowding,” says Totome. But despite the need, psychosocial services are limited and have not been fully integrated into the camp’s health system.

AN





Zimbabweans wait to cross into South Africa on the dry bed of the Limpopo River.

#### INTRA-AFRICAN MIGRATION

## Unwelcome neighbours

**South Africa has seen several waves of migration from Zimbabwe, prompted by political upheaval and economic downturns. After apartheid, Zimbabweans were particularly welcome in the public sector, where skilled labour was scarce. But with South Africa's own economic problems and an increasingly educated population entering the labour market, they have been met with growing hostility over the past years.**

**By Audrey Simango**

When the militant government of Robert Mugabe began seizing white-owned farms in Zimbabwe without compensation in 2000, it triggered a profound collapse of the

national currency, food shortages and hyperinflation. This turbulent period marked the beginning of mass migration to South Africa, with skilled workers, especially teachers, being attracted by the neighbouring country's recruitment efforts.

"The hype started in the early 2000s. Many Zimbabweans absolutely wanted to go to South Africa because the lucrative jobs were there. First the teachers went, then the tradespeople, then the nurses," remembers Pious Soko, who came to South Africa in 2007. The pharmacist lives in Johannesburg and now has permanent residence.

But the 2000s were actually not the first time Zimbabweans left in droves for South Africa. "When the colonial bush war

in Zimbabwe – then Rhodesia – ended in 1980, thousands of white Zimbabweans rushed to settle in Cape Town. Mugabe won the following elections, and they didn't want to be ruled by a black president," says Kudakwashe Magezi, a Zimbabwean political analyst. However, the South African apartheid regime had to fall before the critical mass migration of black Zimbabweans to South Africa began.

Sulla Badza describes her arrival in South Africa in 2002 as a "sweet landing". The physics teacher, who migrated from Harare, was attracted by many available high-school jobs. "The country was still reeling in the euphoria of the post-Mandela era. But the local black population hardly had any university degrees, and teachers were so rare that even an English teacher was sometimes allowed to teach accounting. We were welcome," she recalls. "The South African rand was worth almost the same as the US dollar, the electricity and water supply was reliable and streetlamps

were not stolen by scrap metal thieves,” Badza remembers.

Between 2000 and 2005, thousands of Zimbabweans seamlessly transitioned into becoming permanent residents and, in some cases, citizens. At the same time, many forged IDs and passports were circulating, sometimes with the complicity of corrupt South African state officials.

## HYPERINFLATION-INDUCED MIGRATION

From 2007 onwards, Zimbabwe was hit by hyperinflation of historic dimensions, and what was left of the country’s functioning industries was destroyed. By 2008, the Zimbabwe dollar was virtually worthless, and it would take a wheelbarrow full of banknotes to buy a loaf of bread. By the time elections were due in 2008, it seemed as if the opposition in Zimbabwe would replace the ruling party that had governed the country since 1980. The state-sponsored violence against the political opposition took on horrific proportions. This is when the next wave of mass migration to South Africa began.

But South Africa’s economy was no longer the same. Jacob Zuma became presi-



dent in 2009 and corruption gripped South Africa on a grand scale. The rand lost value against the US dollar. Youth unemployment skyrocketed.

Pedzisayi is an undocumented migrant who runs a mechanic’s workshop in a Pretoria township. He does not want to reveal his surname. “Hostility towards migrants from Zimbabwe began to build up from 2008. We sensed growing anger – thefts, robberies, rapes and littering of the streets were blamed on migrants from Zim-

babwe,” Pedzisayi recalls. “If beggars stood at traffic lights, they were labelled as Zimbabweans. If a supermarket was burgled, Zimbabweans were blamed. Landlords were put under pressure to refuse to let rooms to Zimbabweans. South Africans thought we were taking their jobs.”

The first wave of immigration brought white-collar workers who settled in South Africa’s universities, colleges, government offices and laboratories. Now came thousands of low-skilled labourers, often undocumented, earning a living as miners, as vegetable and chicken vendors on the streets of Johannesburg, or as domestic helps in predominantly white households in Cape Town. “The public perception was that these low-skilled migrants were displacing poor South Africans and overburdening social services,” says Zimbabwean economist Carter Mavhiza.

## A DECADE OF HOSTILITY

The widespread internet coverage that emerged in South Africa at the time further fuelled resentment against migrants because the hatred also spread online. Harrowing scenes finally erupted in May 2008 when a mob of locals from Alexandria Township in Johannesburg began to riot against migrants from Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique.

Dozens of migrants were hunted down in their homes, lynched, robbed and killed. The most striking scenes of xenophobic atrocities were the images of Ernesto Nhamuave, a Mozambican, who was burnt to death in Alexandria in front of television cameras.

“We started registering with fake, South African-sounding names to avoid the risk of being identified as Zimbabweans. For restaurant jobs, we practised speaking with a South African accent,” says Gadzi, a Zimbabwean vegetable seller who does not want to share her surname.

The ruling African National Congress (ANC) party in South Africa tightened immigration laws from 2010, and more and more Zimbabwean academics and teachers were removed from their jobs to make room for black South African citizens, who graduated from universities in large numbers. The new laws began a decade of intense hostility against all parts of the Zimbabwean population that continues to this day.

South African law grants immigrants, with or without papers, free access to public hospitals and schools. In reality, however, hostility permeates many areas of public life. Sibongile Jongwe is a Zimbabwean mother of three who earns her living by sweeping houses in Sandton, Johannesburg’s wealthiest suburb. She reports: “I

“The new laws began a decade of intense hostility against all parts of the Zimbabwean population that continues to this day.”

was told to pay a bribe of 4000 rand (200 dollars) to the theatre nurses or I would not get a place to give birth in a public hospital. A dozen other pregnant migrant women I know were asked to do the same”.

## OPERATION “FORCE OUT”

New political parties in South Africa, sensing that resentment towards migrants could pay off at the polls, have entered the fray over the past five years. A key figure is Herman Mashaba, a former mayor of Johannesburg and now leader of the Action South Africa party. Its main aim is to deport all undocumented foreigners. Such anti-immigration parties have found a large audience in all South African provinces. The increasingly impoverished population sees migrants as a cause of its problems. Some xenophobic groups have expanded into movements such as Operation Dudula (“Operation Force Out”), which targets both legal and illegal migrants.

Hostility now transcends the boundaries between generations. Pharmacist Pious Soko has experienced it after more than 15 years in South Africa: “A Zimbabwean child born in South Africa who has never set foot in Zimbabwe gets to hear from his classmates every day: You’re not truly South African.”



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View from the Paréa Lesvos community centre over Camp Mavrovouni to Turkey.

#### MEDITERRANEAN MIGRATION ROUTE

## Alleviating the suffering on Lesbos

**Thousands of refugees continue to live on the Greek island in unacceptable conditions. They are supported there by a number of civil-society organisations. Europe Cares is one of them.**

By Natascha Kittler

A blurred mobile-phone video published by the non-governmental organisation Aegean Boat Report shows the kind of events still happening on Europe's Mediterranean borders: People are sitting in a rubber dinghy at sea, with the Greek coast in sight. A ship flying the Greek flag approaches. Four men in dark uniforms and black balaclavas are standing at the railing. One of them strikes out at the boat with a long boat hook. The occupants scream hysterically. The video stream ends.

According to Aegean Boat Report (ABR), the footage was taken in November 2023 off the north coast of the Greek island of Lesbos. The inflatable had 23 people on board, including children. It came from Turkey, just a few kilometres away, and was already well inside Greek waters when the local coastguard appeared. A textbook push-

back ensued: first the boat hook was used to wreck the dinghy's outboard motor. Then, helplessly adrift, the people were taken back to Turkish waters and abandoned to their fate. The group was rescued after dialling the international emergency number 112.

This was not an isolated incident. Aegean Boat Report documents more than 900 boats illegally stopped by the Greek coastguard in this or similar ways in 2023, and more than 25,800 people taken back to Turkey.

Those who make it to Lesbos are confronted with the inhumane reality of the Mavrovouni refugee camp, the successor to Moria, which burned down in 2020. Around 4000 people live in the camp, in cramped conditions. Guards are on duty day and night, the site is fenced and secured with Nato barbed wire and entrance is strictly controlled. The camp is located directly by the sea and exposed to wind and bad weather. The accommodations have no heating, even though winter temperatures in Greece drop to freezing point. The sanitary facilities are inadequate.

"The camp is dehumanising," says Italian field worker Silvia Lucibello. "The peo-

ple are treated like criminals." She worked for some time inside the camp for a non-governmental organisation (NGO). Now, she is a coordinator at Paréa Lesbos, one of the last remaining community centres on the island. It is located on a hill within walking distance of the camp. Under the direction of the German humanitarian aid organisation Europe Cares, ten NGOs have come together to offer residents a respite from the misery of daily camp life.

At Paréa, visitors can eat, have their clothes washed, learn English and receive psychological or legal counselling. There is a retreat for women, a small vegetable garden, various sports activities and workshops. The walls of the buildings are painted in bright colours. Music plays in the community centre grounds. There is no place like it anywhere else on the island.

"Paréa is the complete opposite of the camp," Lucibello says. "In the camp, people feel they are neither seen nor welcome. We want to show them that not everyone dismisses them as criminals. We educate them about their rights and give them a place where they can be themselves, with their interests and talents."

### THE CRISIS IS WORSENING

In the summer, an unprecedented number of refugees arrived on Lesbos and the number of visitors to Paréa also shot up – to as many as 700 a day. "In September, we re-

corded the highest number of arrivals on the island for a long time, more than 3000 people,” says Lucibello. Over the year as a whole, according to ABR, the number of incoming refugees exceeded 13,000 – eight times more than in 2021.

Lucibello points out that there were many reasons for this. After the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, more opportunities for refugees opened up again. In addition, there were significantly fewer pushbacks because of the international attention that focused on the Greek coastguard after the New York Times published videos of a pushback in May. However, the blurred video that made public in November shows that the practice has been resumed. The number of arrivals is falling accordingly.

The images and figures are reminiscent of 2015 and 2016, when Lesbos came to epitomise the chaos at Europe’s borders. The Moria camp clearly demonstrated the failure of European migration policy. Today, there are fewer refugees living in Ma-

provouni than there were in Moria. But the drop in numbers comes at the expense of the human rights that are so solemnly proclaimed in the European Charter of Human Rights. Illegal pushbacks are just one of the tools of Greek and European deterrence policy.

However, there is no public outcry. The island has almost completely slipped off the radar. Media attention has shifted, and Lesbos is now one of the world’s many forgotten crisis hotspots.

**LESS ATTENTION, LOWER DONATIONS**

This is a problem for NGOs like Europe Cares (EC) because donation flows often ebb when media attention wanes. If donations dry up, the NGOs reach their limits. “It’s a constant sprint, almost a marathon now,” says Lennard Everwien, Co-Director of EC. “We struggle along from month to month. But we are determined to preserve this special place of community and soli-

arity.” He does not believe that the asylum system can be humanised overnight, but he sees a possibility to make daily life easier for migrants.

There is a pinboard in Paréa where visitors leave messages on colourful slips of paper. One reads: “You are like stars shining for us all day! When we come here, we really enjoy. Your smiles are so welcoming. One day we will go but take with us the best memories!”

Such appreciation helps strengthen Silvia Lucibello’s commitment. “We cannot undo what people have experienced back in their home countries and on their journeys,” she says, “but we can give them a safe space, even if it’s just a small sticking plaster on a large wound.”



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## LATIN AMERICAN MIGRATION

# Seeking greener pastures

**The Mexican diaspora is the second largest in the world after the Indian one. Poverty, increasing crime and a lack of opportunities for social mobility are prompting Mexicans to leave their country. At the same time, ever more people are coming to Mexico, because the situation in their countries is even worse.**

By Pamela Cruz

An estimated 38 million people of Mexican origin live abroad, 98% of them in the United States. Of all Hispanics living in the USA, 61.5% (37.2 million) identify as being of Mexican origin, according to the Pew Research Center and the US Census Bureau. Approximately 12 million of them were born in Mexico and 26 million are of first, second or subsequent generation Mexican descent.

Beyond geographical proximity, the USA and Mexico share a long history of migratory exchange, marked by the formation of networks that have woven individuals and families together. Legally, Mexico stands as the primary recipient of H-2A and H-2B visas from the US, primarily for temporary agricultural and other services. At the same time, in 2022, 82.8% of the Mexican-born population in the USA obtained legal permanent residency through family

connections, while six percent secured it through employment.

Mexican consular and diplomatic missions estimate that almost 400,000 Mexicans are living in countries other than the US, including Canada, Spain, Brazil, the United Kingdom and Germany.

The National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía – INEGI) reports that reasons for Mexicans to emigrate in 2020 included family reunification (36.5%), looking for work (16.4%), accepting a job opportunity (12.4%), marriage (9.2%), studying (6.7%) and criminal insecurity or violence (four percent). The average age of the migrating population is between 18 and 29, followed by people between 30 and 40.

Studying abroad is the fifth most important reason for migrating from Mexico. The motivations for going to foreign universities range from seeking a higher quality education to being mentored by a specialised professor.

## JOB MARKET CHANGES

Having studied abroad can make it easier to enter the job market. According to OECD estimates, employability rates increase with higher education levels, reaching 81%

at the undergraduate level and 85% at the postgraduate level in Mexico. Moreover, data from the Mexican Institute of Competitiveness (IMCO) show that the salaries of Mexican university graduates can increase between 30% and 70% depending on the degree, specialisation – and location. For example, a Mexican with a Bachelor's degree earns on average 8.5 times more in the USA than in Mexico.

Unsurprisingly, the USA remains the top choice for studying abroad, according to the Yearbook of Migration and Remittances 2023 published by Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA) Research, the BBVA Foundation and the National Population Council. In 2020, 41.6% of Mexican international students studied in the USA, followed by Spain (10.1%), Germany (9.9%), Canada (7.9%), France (6.5%) and the United Kingdom (5.4%). The yearbook data show that around 100,000 Mexicans went abroad for educational purposes between 2015 and 2020.

In 2022, Germany replaced the USA as the primary destination for Master's programmes, while the United Kingdom takes first place for doctoral studies. Factors influencing these choices include opportunities for obtaining student and work visas, internships, scholarships covering the study period and university rankings (see box).

At home in Mexico, the situation in the education sector is discouraging. In 2024, the federal government cut the budget for science, technology and innovation, with a 14.6% reduction in investment in higher and postgraduate education. The academic community is facing great uncertainty. Only



**Migrants in Mexico on their way to the northern border with the USA on 26 December 2023.**

few people have access to scholarships to study abroad.

## SURGING CRIME RATES

The spiral of violence in Mexico is driving people out of the country, too. The number of murders, femicides and disappearances is shooting up. According to the Mexican Institute for Human Rights and Democracy, the states Jalisco, Tamaulipas, Estado de Mexico, Veracruz and Nuevo León account for 50% of missing persons. Especially young people are affected by crimes.

Compounding these challenges is the impact of organised crime. Young people become victims of forced labour or turn into criminals themselves. In 2021, a study by the

Children's Rights Network (REDIM) and the National Citizen Observatory for Security, Justice and Legality estimated that between 145,000 and 250,000 children and teenagers in Mexico are at risk of being recruited by criminal groups. Given these facts, it is not surprising that the number of children and young people who are leaving Mexico is currently the highest in more than a decade. Their destination is usually the USA and relatives who already live there.

However, Mexico's role in the global migration landscape nowadays extends beyond being a country of origin; it also functions as a transit and destination country. It is part of the world's largest migration corridor, through which thousands of migrants pass every month on their way to the US.

Furthermore, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of immigrants in Mexico jumped by 123% between 2000 and 2020. In the past ten years, the number of asylum seekers has increased in particular. The IOM also estimates that of 118,478 refugee applications in 2022, five out of ten were made by people from Honduras (26.2%), Cuba (15.3%) or Haiti (14.4%).



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## A privileged migration story

Migration is difficult. The process of adaptation and the anxiety that comes with migration are complex and unique to each person and context (see main text). It means leaving the familiar behind and facing a new world that needs to be learnt about and embraced.

From a privileged position, people decide to migrate in search of adventure, knowledge and new experiences to broaden their horizon and view of the world. This was the case for me. Since the USA is not far from Mexico, and I had the support of my family who could afford it, I had the opportunity to participate in an exchange programme in Florida during my last year of high school. This experience expanded my perspective on the world and gave me the opportunity to improve my second language, English. As a teenager, I was lucky enough to be able to explore a different culture in a controlled and caring environment.

After this experience, one of my personal goals was to do

a Master's degree abroad. Initially, I thought of the USA and the United Kingdom as options to reduce the language restrictions. Eventually, I applied for a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to study in Germany as friends of mine were already studying there and encouraged

me to give it a try. After looking at various options for scholarships, academic programmes and financial support, I sent my application to Ruhr-Universität Bochum and was given the chance to study abroad fully funded.

With many difficulties amidst the uncertainty the Covid-19 pandemic brought, I moved to Bochum, a city in western Germany, in September 2020. During the lock-

down, I built a strong support network with my flatmates and fellow Master's students. I think it was a good idea for the university to accommodate all the students in one building: the Papageienhaus ("Parrot house"). We spent our days with distance learning via Zoom and shared meals.

When the restrictions were eased, I took the opportunity to visit friends in other cities. By getting to know and explore Germany, I fell in love with the country, its culture and people. I didn't plan to stay from the beginning, but in the end a part of me will always hold a special place for Germany. One month before completing my Master's degree, I got a job in Mexico. The decision to return home was not easy, but it was the right one.

Despite the challenges, I know that my experience of migrating and returning to my home country have been quite privileged. I am grateful for that. But I keep thinking that many don't have the same luck I had. I wish more people all over the world were given the same opportunities. PC



The author at the graduation ceremony in Bochum with fellow Latin American students in February 2022.

## BRAIN DRAIN

# Why Bangladesh's best minds are moving abroad

**Frustrated by a lack of opportunities at home, many educated and highly skilled Bangladeshis seek work abroad. While the money they send home is bolstering Bangladesh's economy, the country is missing out on the expertise of its most brilliant minds.**

By Ridwanul Hoque and Sharawat Shamin

Migration from Bangladesh has been changing over the past decades. While Bangladeshis initially migrated first and foremost to Middle Eastern or other rich Asian countries, nowadays they are moving to western countries, too. Even though most migrants from Bangladesh are unskilled or under-educated, more and more of them are also skilled professionals.

Bangladesh's first wave of 'brain drain' started in 1982, following the country's second military coup since achieving independence in 1971. Some of the first casualties of the upheaval were political and

academic freedom. Consequently, skilled individuals and recent graduates began migrating to major resource-rich countries. This trend has returned, partly driven by the political instability that has afflicted the country since 2014.

However, many other factors contribute to the exodus of educated people and professionals from Bangladesh. Chief among them are the unemployment rate among university graduates, which was 12% in 2022, compared to the national unemployment rate of 4.7%, and the general lack of opportunities for highly skilled workers.

Lacking better prospects, many university graduates end up taking low-ranked public service positions, which make them feel undervalued. Nevertheless, recent studies show that the country's most lucrative and secure jobs are in government civil service, which recruits thousands annually through a highly competitive public exam.

On the other hand, the private sector lacks strict monitoring and regulation, making it insecure regarding job tenure, pensions and other employee benefits. As a result, highly skilled graduates tend to leave the country. Many get excellent research training and degrees abroad, which, coupled with the lack of opportunities at home, leads them to permanently settle there (see box).

Other reasons for migration include:

1. An inadequate social-safety net and social-security benefits. Until recently, private-sector employees could not expect to receive a pension, for example. Many highly skilled and educated workers can find better benefits elsewhere.

2. A severe decline in democracy. Political instability, democratic backsliding and attacks on freedom of expression have soared in recent decades. The killing and persecution of progressive youths and free thinkers by religious extremists from 2013 to 2015 and the state's failure to ensure justice led to a surge in migration to liberal democracies.

3. Gender-based violence. Incidents of public harassment and sexual abuse of women are escalating. Socio-religious disapproval and moral policing of women are common. As more women complete higher education and achieve financial independence, many choose to migrate with or without their families.

4. Environmental concerns. Employment opportunities are largely restricted to the two excessively densely populated cities of Dhaka and Chattogram. Major infrastructure development, transportation fuel, heavy industrial waste and poor environmental management contribute to air, water and noise pollution as well as biodiversity loss, severely affecting people's lives in these cities.

## SKILLED INDIAN IMMIGRANTS

Despite such problems, Bangladesh has recently achieved tremendous economic growth, even during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has impressed outside observers. The country's GDP growth rate was 7.25% in the last quarter of 2022.

However, Bangladesh's impressive figures in different development indexes do not reflect its underlying social, cultural and political inequalities and insecurities.



A man from Bangladesh takes part in a naturalisation ceremony in Oklahoma in 2018.

The ongoing development programme is superficial and fails to retain highly skilled workers. The government seems to be either unwilling or unable to keep talented people at home. Instead, most major development projects hire international consultants at very high salaries. As educated Bangladeshis emigrate, skilled Indian immigrants, in particular, are coming to work in Bangladesh.

Successive governments have not taken the issue of brain drain seriously. Rather, they seem content that migrant professionals are sending foreign remittances back home. According to World Bank forecasts, Bangladesh will be the seventh largest remittance-receiving country worldwide in 2023 with remittances making up 5.2% of the country's GDP. This makes them a major pillar of Bangladesh's economy, though often at the expense of the exploitation of workers abroad.

Historically, Arab nations hosting millions of Bangladeshi migrant workers have been the main source of remittances. In the

**“Successive governments have not taken the issue of brain drain seriously. Rather, they seem content that migrant professionals are sending foreign remittances back home.”**

financial year 2022-2023, however, migrants in the USA were the top contributors. There are concerns that a portion of these funds may have been money that was laundered to the USA by some businessmen, bureaucrats and politicians. Moreover, in 2023, Bangladesh experienced an unprecedented deficit in forex reserves and the government increased cash incentives on foreign remittances. These factors are estimated to be behind the rise in remittances from the USA.

As a matter of fact, the financial contribution of educated Bangladeshi migrants is undeniable. This may explain why the

country lacks the aspiration to keep educated brains at home.

The more human capital goes abroad, the more it is missing at home. Because of both globalisation and various forms of inequality and insecurity, brain drain out of Bangladesh is inevitable. Nonetheless, in order to foster sustainable development and achieve lasting improvements in living standards, the government must have a clear vision for retaining as many skilled and educated individuals as possible.



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## From students to immigrants

During the 2022/2023 academic year, over 13,000 Bangladeshis were studying at universities in the United States, a 300% increase compared to 2011/2012, according to the US Embassy in Bangladesh. UNESCO statistics show that in 2021, other top destinations for Bangladeshi students included the United Kingdom, Canada, Malaysia and Germany. The shortcomings of both public and private Bangladeshi universities, the difficult job market and the lure of better prospects abroad lead students to settle in their host countries.

Up to the higher secondary level (forms 11 and 12), Bangladesh's education system is split into four different curricula: national, international (English-medium), re-

ligious (madrasah) and vocational streams. Most students pursuing tertiary education at state-funded institutions emerge from the national and madrasah curricula. Bangladesh has 53 public universities and 37 public medical colleges, with tuition paid for by the state. These institutions can take in around a million undergraduates each year. The capacity is bigger than the number of students passing the higher secondary level annually.

There are over 100 private universities; however, only a handful have a good repute. They charge high tuition fees, and top private universities typically draw students from English-medium schools. Many of these students are

comparatively wealthy and prefer to travel abroad.

Reasons for student emigration include:

1. The shortcomings of tertiary education at home. Bangladeshi universities score poorly in global rankings. Public universities in Bangladesh have also struggled with overcrowding and expert lecturer shortages. Moreover, Bangladeshi universities could do a better job of giving their students the skills they need to succeed in the job market.

2. Lack of opportunities in the domestic job market (see

main text). University graduates face a lack of research and career prospects along with low pay and few benefits. Most outgoing educated minds aim for postgraduate studies, including engineers, physicians and other highly skilled professionals.

3. Growth of the middle class. Bangladesh's growing middle class is able to spend significant amounts of money on higher education abroad. Many explore every opportunity to settle in the global north, either through higher education or skilled work visas.

After studying abroad, some students return home but end up emigrating again to seek a better future for their families. Some do not return at all. In both cases Bangladesh loses some of its most brilliant minds – as well as the investment it has made in these people.

RH, SS





Woman who fled the Congo in Pretoria, South Africa.

#### WOMEN'S MIGRATION

## Better jobs for migrant women

**Migrating can be an empowering experience for women, but it also involves considerable hardship. Migrant women are less likely to be employed than migrant men or native-born women, they earn less and often find themselves overqualified for the jobs they do. Policy action is needed to improve their opportunities.**

By **Purti Sadhwani and Sundus Saleemi**

Globally, the divide between men's and women's participation in paid work varies significantly. Female labour force participation (FLFP) refers to the percentage of women aged 15 and above engaging in economic activities. Even in countries boasting high FLFP levels, men tend to outnumber women in the labour market. In Germany, for example, the FLFP rate was 56.4% compared to 66.9% for men in 2022, according to the World Bank's Gender Data Portal. In addition, differences in the earnings of men and women with the same skills and experience persist all over the world – a phenomenon known as the “gender wage gap”.

However, gender is not the only factor that affects people's ability to access

employment and its benefits. Research has shown that race, religion and sexual orientation, for example, also have an impact. These factors interact with gender in complex ways to shape an individual's position in the labour market. For women across the globe, being a migrant appears to be a notable factor impacting their status in the labour markets of host economies.

The UN defines a migrant as a person who has lived in a foreign country for over three months. Women migrants constituted 48% of all international migrants in the year 2020. In recent decades, there has been an increase in the number of women migrating for employment rather than family reunifications.

Migration can be empowering for women who emigrate from countries with conservative gender norms, limited employment opportunities and low wages. It can offer access to employment and thus increase women's independence. However, data on the employment and wages of migrant women suggest that they face huge challenges in their host countries and are disadvantaged vis-a-vis immigrant men as well as native women.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Migration Observatory Report “Immigrant Integration in Europe” funded by the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo documents that while women have a lower probability of employment compared to men in general, this gap is larger between immigrant men and women. Moreover, while the gender gap in employment of the native population has been decreasing across Europe from 16 to 11 percentage points between 2005 and 2020, it has remained steady at around 18 percentage points among immigrants for a decade. Immigrant women are 19% less likely than native women to have a job, while immigrant men are 7% less likely than native men to have a job.

In addition, immigrant women are disproportionately more likely than both immigrant men and native women to earn very little money. Across Europe, 49% of immigrant women are in the three lowest income deciles, with a large majority in elementary occupations such as cleaning jobs (see box).

Income gaps between migrant men and women persist within the same occupations too. Individual characteristics, such as education, skills and experience account for only a portion of this disparity. According to the Migration Observatory Report, a third of the difference in these outcomes remains unexplained, indicating a specific immigrant-women labour market penalty.

Foreign-born women are also more likely to be overqualified for their jobs than men, and highly skilled jobs tend to be reserved for men only. Research by the International Labour Organization (ILO) suggests that men are overrepresented in skilled work such as engineering or information and communication technologies.

International migration has also been shown to damage the careers of skilled migrant women, for example, if they only find work in professions different from those they trained for. Among the reasons for their downward occupational mobility are:

- a lack of recognition of foreign credentials,
- a lack of work experience in the host country,
- gender-specific social responsibilities,
- an absence of social support and
- time spent in resettlement activities.

Migration can be an opportunity as well as a hazard for women migrants. Understand-

ing the intricacies of gender and migration can result in better programmes and policies that enhance the benefits and decrease the costs for women migrants. Governments of host countries can take several steps to provide decent employment opportunities for migrant women.

Foremost among these is ensuring that transparent data on employment in less-visible sectors of the economy, such as formal and informal care, agriculture, sex work and the entertainment industry, is regularly gathered. Moreover, governments can also regularly commission reports on the status of migrant women in each of these sectors

to ensure that relevant policy actions are being taken.

Last but not least, all migrants – and women in particular – must have proper access to employment agencies and state programmes which support them. Increased transparency and reduced bureaucracy are essential for optimal outcomes for both migrants and host countries, particularly as the latter often require additional workers.

#### LINK

**World Bank Gender Data Portal:**

<https://genderdata.worldbank.org/indicators/sl-tlf-acti-zs/?gender=gender-gap>



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## Poor working conditions

Migrant women often take up low-skilled positions in service and agriculture industries. For example, those from South and Southeast Asia often work in the Gulf and East Asian states within these sectors. Similarly, men and women from Eastern Europe and North Africa seasonally migrate to Western and Southern Europe to work in agriculture. Moreover, high-income countries with ageing populations or rising rates of female labour force participation

(FLFP) seek domestic and care workers. Countries that have seen a rapid rise in their per capita income are experiencing this demand too.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), about 73% – approximately 8.5 million – of all migrant domestic workers are women. The largest portion of female migrant domestic workers, comprising 24% of the total, live in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Northern, southern

and western Europe host 22%, followed by the Arab States with 19%.

Working conditions in these jobs are frequently poor. In a number of Asian countries, foreigners employed as domestic helpers are often not allowed to change jobs within two years of signing an employment contract. Some migrant women workers are prohibited from marrying local citizens and are not allowed to become pregnant. For migrant women working as domestic maids, permission to stay in the host country is often tied to their employment. If they leave their employer, they could be deported.

Moreover, some women are undocumented, which makes them even more vulnerable to exploitation. Lack of formal regulation and personal rights deprives them of any way to counter potential abuse. They may become trapped in dangerous dependencies on the families that employ them. For example, a 2018 report for the European Parliament on women migrant workers in the EU has highlighted instances of severe abuse and exploitation.

According to the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), a non-profit organisa-

tion, migrant women also constitute a large part of the sex-worker community across the globe. The trafficking of women in the sex industry is largely undocumented. Sex work is also sometimes hidden in the entertainment industry. When women enter countries legally, they may be documented as cabaret artists, dancers, musicians or masseuses. Many of these women are promised jobs in clubs and other leisure establishments but are forced into prostitution on arrival.

When women enter countries illegally, any attempt to avoid prostitution can lead to deportation. According to NSWP, migrant sex workers frequently describe negative interactions with justice systems and law enforcement, especially the police. The combination of the criminalisation of sex work and the persecution of migrants creates challenges for undocumented migrants in particular. PS, SUS

#### LINK

**Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), 2022: Briefing paper: Migration and sex work.** <https://www.nswp.org/resource/nswp-briefing-papers/briefing-paper-migration-and-sex-work>



A migrant worker at an annual Workers' Day rally in Beirut, Lebanon.



WORLD BANK STUDY

## “Migration can increase prosperity”

**Migration has proven to be a powerful force for development. It has improved the lives of millions of migrants and the societies in which they live. These are the findings of the World Bank in its World Development Report 2023. It presents policymakers with recommendations for managing global migration.**

By Sabine Balk

According to the World Bank, around 2.3% of the world’s population live outside their home country. That is 184 million people, including 37 million refugees. There are many reasons why people decide to move across borders. The World Bank finds that most are driven by economic aspirations or the hope of escaping conflicts or other forms of violence. One factor that intensifies all drivers of mobility is climate change.

The World Development Report notes that the migration landscape is changing significantly. Migration is coming to be seen as a necessity by all countries, regardless of income level, because populations are ageing rapidly and competition for labour and talent is becoming global.

The World Bank authors call for all migration flows to be managed in a way that maximises development benefits. They warn that “current approaches often fail both migrants and nationals. They create large inefficiencies and missed opportunities in both destination and origin countries”. This, the experts say, currently results in a great deal of human suffering; anti-migrant movements have emerged in many countries.

Migration should be viewed objectively. It entails both benefits and costs – for the migrants, their countries of origin and their destinations. According to the World Bank, destination countries are in the best position to make migration a success. The policies that they implement define and regulate who crosses their borders, who is legally allowed to stay and what rights they have. “If managed well, migration can continue to increase prosperity and help to achieve the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals”, the authors write.

One of the central messages of the World Bank report is that origin and destination countries need to ensure better strategic management of all types of migration. The authors make a distinction between migrants and refugees who offer skills that are needed in destination labour markets and those who do not.

Regardless of whether they are high- or low-skilled, economic migrants and refugees can both be a strong match for the needs of a destination country. Their movement results in considerable development benefits for the migrants themselves, the destination country and the country of origin. The costs are generally smaller than the benefits.

The World Development Report states that the primary policy goal should be to further increase the benefits of migration and reduce the costs. This can be achieved, it says, by a combination of policy actions in origin countries – facilitation of remittances, for example, and mitigation of brain drain effects. In host countries, migrants and refugees should receive targeted support and be granted rights and access to labour markets. Measures should also be taken to facilitate their social integration.

Refugees who cannot be integrated into the labour market of the destination country must be accepted, regardless of the cost, in accordance with international law. The report emphasises that point, adding that the international community needs to reduce and share the resulting costs for destination countries.

Migrants who do not have refugee status and have no chance of employment in a destination country pose considerable challenges for that country. However, as the authors explain, the overall number of such migrants is comparatively small. Their involuntary repatriation needs to be carried out in a humane manner. The aim must be to create incentives and employment in home countries so that such people do not feel the need to emigrate. International cooperation has a role to play here in supporting development in countries of origin.

### LINK

**World Bank: World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies.**

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2023>



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Act of remembrance in Barcelona, Spain, for around 2600 refugees who died in the Mediterranean in 2023.

Women in Algeria demonstrate against femicide, violence and oppression.

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Photo: picture-alliance/abaca/Ammi Louiza/ABACA