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**Diasporas at the forefront of
social protection; impacts,
dynamics, and future**

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Diasporas at the forefront of social protection; impacts, dynamics, and future

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Foreword

States are responsible for providing social protection to their citizens, and in a migratory context it is countries of destination which are principally responsible. Nevertheless, limitations in migrant coverage and access have given rise to a plethora of informal measures, including those provided by transnational communities and diasporas who support their families and communities through personal networks, granting access to healthcare, education, retirement, and social security. Social protection systems, comprising of a set of public and private policies and programmes aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities to poverty, deprivation and social exclusion¹ are vital for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, helping individuals and families cope with crises, find employment, invest in health and education, and support the elderly. This publication explores how diaspora leaders and organizations contribute to informal social protection measures in areas such as unemployment, pensions, family benefits, minimum resources, and health benefits.

Effective social protection policies and systems are the cornerstone of thriving societies. They play an instrumental role in accelerating inclusive growth and reducing inequalities. From ensuring access to healthcare and education to recovery after crises, social security is a necessity for communities on the move. In collaboration with iDiaspora, we are thrilled to present this special issue which explores how diasporas are at the forefront of social protection and are redefining traditional perspectives of development and humanitarianism in their communities and beyond.

Our readers have an opportunity to hear from diverse voices and examples of informal provision of social protection across the global community. We meet the Filipino diaspora at the frontlines of the pandemic and the unsung champions of promoting social protection to confront climate change-induced disasters. We gain a deeper understanding of the advantages of diaspora activism in Venezuela, the vital role of diasporas in social protection in Cameroon and youth diaspora initiatives for gender-sensitive social protection in migration contexts. We engage in discourse on perspectives on Afro-Belgians, socio-cultural norms against L.B.Q. women in Afghanistan and medical care for sub-Saharan women in Tunisia.

We delve into the accumulation of vulnerabilities in a case study of the migration transit through the Darién Gap and empowering the diaspora through solidarity and transnational social protection in the case of the Kerala Muslim Cultural Centre. Lastly, through an economic lens, we explore the impact of remittances on the social protection of the migrant family and fostering the social capital exchange pathways of the Bangladeshi Diaspora.

¹ IOM Standing Committee on Programmes and Finance 2023: Enhancing Social Protection for Migrants and Populations in Situations of Vulnerability, including Internally Displaced Persons. Thirty-second Session (S/32/8).

We thank our authors for their work, which informs and further contributes to shifts in traditional narratives of social protection. The examples of informal social protection presented in this number highlight the key role of diaspora members in providing health and social security to their families and communities. They also shed light on the predominant role and responsibility of governments in guaranteeing social protection to migrant workers and their own citizens. It is important to emphasize that social security is a fundamental human right firmly rooted in international law, enshrined in many universally negotiated and accepted human rights and labour law instruments.

We would like to thank iDiaspora for another enriching and rewarding partnership, and for the initiative and unwavering commitment of the Diaspora Team at the IOM Headquarters in Geneva. To our readers, thank you for taking the time to read our latest issue. We hope you enjoy it and that it inspires you to support the elevation of the voices of diaspora leaders worldwide for more favourable social protection outcomes in their communities.

Elizabeth Warn, Head, Labour Mobility and Social Inclusion Division, IOM HQ.

Youth-Led Diasporas for Gender Equality: Gender-sensitive social protection in migration contexts

Yasmina Benslimane

As someone who has lived in seven countries and completed my undergraduate and graduate studies in incredibly diverse environments, I have come to a resounding realisation: gender inequality knows no boundaries—it is universal. In the last decade alone, nearly 60 million more people became international migrants, seeking better opportunities and a brighter future outside their countries of origin, approximately 48.5% of whom are women. These women often face specific challenges such as gender-based violence (GBV), limited access to healthcare and education, and economic exploitation.

Addressing these challenges through gender-sensitive social protection is crucial to ensuring migrants' well-being and empowerment. It is also key to the empowerment of women and girls in their respective countries of origin. Gender-sensitive social protection means creating and implementing programmes and policies that consider the different needs and challenges faced by men, women, and gender-diverse individuals. This article will explore how these initiatives address the specific needs of migrant women and girls, leveraging their transnational networks, and advocating for social protection that focuses on their needs.

Youth diaspora initiatives as agents of change

Youth-led initiatives by the diaspora are effectively raising awareness, driving policy changes, and fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for women and girls in their countries of origin. They use their unique position at the intersection of multiple cultures and their firsthand experiences of migration to advocate for social protection. By leveraging their transnational networks, youth-led initiatives can connect with both origin and destination countries to influence policy and practice. They are actively engaged in addressing the gender-specific challenges faced by women and girls. Initiatives can take various forms, such as advocacy campaigns, community mobilisation, and service provision or mobilise communities to create safe spaces and support networks.



Author with members of one of the Women4Leadership project.

These initiatives provide training and educational opportunities to empower young people and enhance their resilience. By fostering solidarity and community engagement, youth diaspora organisations play a vital role in building a supportive environment for women and girls in migration.

Leveraging transnational networks and experiences

Morocco

Having settled abroad for the past ten years, I have witnessed firsthand how the Moroccan diaspora, even from afar, continues to organise and rally for women's rights back home. This collective effort exemplifies the strength and determination of individuals who refuse to be silenced by geographical distance. Motivated by these experiences, I founded [Politics4Her](#) in 2017 during my time in Costa Rica while studying at the UN Mandated University for Peace. Within Politics4Her, the Women4Leadership project has emerged as a vital initiative in Morocco, at the forefront of engaging young Moroccan women. W4L has equipped young women from diverse backgrounds, including refugees and migrants in Morocco, with the necessary knowledge and skills to become agents of change. By mobilising the diaspora and leveraging the digital space, W4L has ensured inclusivity and equitability in its approach, ultimately contributing to positive and sustainable change in Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) and gender-sensitive social protection. Collaborating with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), we organised a consultation focused on the lived experiences of gender-based violence (GBV) among refugees. The consultation provided refugees with a platform to express their GBV experiences, needs, and concerns. By engaging with their voices, the session aimed to inform and shape future interventions, policies, and programs to better support and protect them.

Afghanistan

Pashtana Zalmi Khan Dorani, a resilient leader I have met through our membership in the Transform Education Network hosted by [UNGEI](#), champions girls' access to education through her organisation, [LEARN Afghanistan](#). As a refugee herself, she deeply understands the transformative power of education and has dedicated her efforts to improving the lives of women and girls in Afghanistan. Pashtana founded LEARN Afghanistan in 2018 with the aim of expanding educational opportunities and empowering Afghan girls. The organisation focuses on digital education, offering free online courses and providing valuable resources, professional training, and mentorship to thousands of Afghan girls. Despite the challenges posed by the resurgence of the Taliban, Pashtana's leadership has been instrumental in keeping the mission alive by finding alternative ways to support education and empower Afghan girls. In the face of gender apartheid, Pashtana Zalmi Khan Dorani and LEARN Afghanistan play a pivotal role in breaking barriers and equipping girls with the knowledge and skills they need to shape their own futures and contribute to their communities. Through their unwavering dedication, Pashtana and her organisation are paving the way for a brighter future for women and girls in Afghanistan to thrive.

Palestine

The Palestinian diaspora, forced to flee their homes due to displacement and occupation, remains deeply connected to their roots, culture, and the Palestinian cause. Shaped by their experiences and rooted in their heritage, the new generation in the diaspora carries forward the struggle for justice and liberation. Their unwavering commitment ensures that the diaspora remains an integral part of the larger Palestinian community, working towards self-determination and equality for all Palestinians, regardless of their location. Within this vibrant diaspora, Palestinian feminist activists in my network have recommended the work of the [Palestinian Feminist Collective \(PFC\)](#), which stands as a powerful force. Comprised of Palestinian and Arab feminists primarily based in North America, the PFC engages in intersectional activism and organising to confront systemic gendered, sexual, and colonial violence. Grounded in an anti-colonial framework, the collective resists the normalisation of oppression, drawing inspiration from past and present feminist movements. Through their work, the PFC not only centres the urgency of the Palestinian struggle but also advances Palestinian feminism as a liberatory philosophy and practice. By fostering transformative justice, healing, and creation, the collective contributes to the creation of a more just and equitable world, amplifying the voices and experiences of Palestinian women and challenging oppressive structures at the intersections of gender, race, and colonialism.

These examples highlight the various ways in which youth-led diaspora organisations actively address the gender-specific challenges faced by migrant women and girls. They engage in advocacy, community mobilisation, and service provision, making significant contributions to promoting gender-sensitive social protection in migration contexts. Collaboration with policymakers, civil society organisations, and international institutions drives positive change and fosters a supportive environment for women and girls globally. However, these youth diaspora initiatives encounter challenges such as limited financial resources, organisational capacity, and access to decision-making processes, which can hinder their effectiveness. To fully unlock their potential, sustained support from and strategic partnerships with governments, civil society, and international actors is necessary. By investing in youth-led diaspora initiatives and embracing their expertise, we can collectively work towards a more inclusive and equitable future, ensuring women and girls' access to their full rights.



Yasmina Benslimane has accumulated over six years of professional experience in the migration field with national human rights institutions, NGOs and UN agencies, in several countries, including IOM, UNHCR, UNDP, and the Migration Policy Institute. She is currently the Gender Specialist at the Migration Youth and Children Platform (MYCP) and the founder of [Politics4Her](#). You can find her on [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), or [Twitter](#).

Indian Emigration to GCC Countries: The impact of remittances on the social protection of the migrant family

Satish Kumar and Anjali Mehra

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states encircling the Persian Gulf are endowed with huge reservoirs of oil and natural gas. In the early seventies, the oil boom led to the formation of OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) which has resulted in the member countries becoming an attractive destination for work for low skilled workers from neighbouring Asian countries, particularly India. The practice of Indian migration to GCC nations is not new, but dates back to pre-partition days. This phenomenon has shown exponential growth since the 1970s. As per the latest data, there are estimates of about 10 million Indians living in six GCC countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates). Seventy percent of Indians work in the construction sector as cleaners, domestic servants and drivers. It has been observed that migration to these nations is temporary and lasts a relatively short period of time. Remittances sent by these emigrants to their families not only help them to escape from abject poverty but also fuel economic growth in the home states in India as well as the nation at a macro level. At the micro level, remittances help migrant families to secure social protection against unemployment, health hazards, education as well as providing other benefits.

The macro level impact of migration to GCC countries can easily be seen in the local and national economy of India as immigrants in Gulf countries send money back home. Most emigrants to the Gulf from India travel from rural rather than urban areas.

According to an estimate by the World Bank in 2022, India receives the highest amount of remittances from abroad (about \$100 billion), which has contributed approximately 3% of Indian GDP. Currently India receives one third of total remittances from Gulf countries. During the global economic crisis in 2008-09, Gulf countries accounted for nearly 35% of the total remittance inflows to India. In 2011-12, India's trade deficit increased to nearly \$120 billion. However, during the crisis, remittances played an important role for foreign currency, as well as helping in the balance of payment issues in India.



Courtesy: [Pixabay](#).

At the state level, this study reveals that approximately 65 % of total remittances are received by four states: Maharashtra (35.2 %), Kerala (10.2 %), Tamil Nadu (9.7 %) and Delhi (9.3 %). 31% of Indian remittances are channelled to Kerala. This is almost 10 times higher than the share of remittances received by the rest of India (3% of total GDP in 2020). According to NSDP data, Kerala's per capita income was Rs. 37,000/- in 2000. After two decades in 2020, per capita income of Kerala was Rs. 265,000. At the same time (2000-2020), the per capita net domestic product (NDP) at the national level was recorded from Rs. 35,000 to Rs. 150,000.

Remittances play a very significant role at the micro level, for instance at the village, household and family level. It has significant importance in the poorer households in Indian society, and plays a crucial role for reducing abject poverty in certain areas. In the case of the Indian diaspora in the Gulf, most migrants are unskilled and semi-skilled. They have no choice or any alternative jobs in India. They are marginalised in different ways, live in abject poverty, no regular job, housing, education, or savings. Job opportunities play a very significant role in their life when they come along. Once they get jobs abroad, their lives tend to improve by way of housing, sanitation, children's education, savings, purchasing power, paying debts, etc.

Remittances have a lasting impact on improving living standards when used not only to ensure food security for households, but also to improve the skills and productivity of recipients. It has been observed that the impact of remittances can be quite considerable at the family and village level (the micro level) but at the regional or national level (the macro level) their impact is less clear.



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The Bangladeshi Diaspora: Unsung champions of confronting climate change-induced disasters

Md Fazle Rabby

Bangladesh was the seventh most climate-affected country among 180 countries, according to the [Global Climate Risk Index](#) in 2021. People from different geographical parts of Bangladesh regularly encounter flooding, drought, cyclones, salinities, arsenic contamination, river erosion, landslides, and earthquakes. According to the [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies \(IFRC\)](#), in 2022, millions of Bangladeshis living in the north-eastern districts suffered the worst flooding in the history of Bangladesh. Climate change-induced disasters triggered humanitarian crises, including displacement (internal and external) and livelihood vulnerabilities. Historically, [environmental catastrophes are one of the factors for internal and external migration](#).

The [Bangladeshi diaspora](#) comprising people from different districts of Bangladesh, is one of the largest diaspora communities in the world. There are simple correlations between the Bangladeshi diaspora and the climate-change concerns of Bangladesh. Oral testimonies from different generations of Bangladeshi diaspora suggest climate change-induced disasters and thereby affected livelihood act as both push (migrating overseas documented and undocumented) and pull (bringing in peers from the homeland) factors. However, hardly any social-historical survey on overseas migration from Bangladesh is available. According to interviewed diaspora interlocutors and former diplomats, the Bangladeshi diaspora is socio-psychologically affected by the miseries of left-behind families in Bangladesh due to emotional ties. Different diaspora associations claimed that the social engagement of the diaspora with local community networks in Bangladesh also impacts them when their native people in Bangladesh suffer economic, health, livelihood and life security threats due to climate change-induced vulnerabilities. The Bangladeshi diaspora, driven by their social and humanitarian obligation, psychologically and financially supports their left-behind families and peers in Bangladesh during and after disasters.

The [Sylheti Londonis \(Bangladeshi British\)](#) mobilised their social and economic remittances to help the flood-hit people of Bangladesh's north-eastern districts; the most recent example of diaspora playing a significant role in addressing climate change-related disasters. Bangladeshi diaspora interlocutors of the United Kingdom and the United States of America confirmed that they mobilised philanthropic funds (formally and informally) and transferred them (through official and unofficial channels) for the humanitarian cause to support flood-affected peers and left-behind families in Bangladesh to restore their lives and livelihoods. An example of fund mobilisation is the [British High Commission and BRAC \(a Bangladeshi NGO\) partnership to invest £500,000 for post-flood recovery](#).

The rigorous lobbying by the Bangladeshi diaspora in their host countries helps Bangladesh to access humanitarian aid from development partners like the European Union, the Foreign Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for flood sufferers' recovery and restoration of local infrastructures in flood-hit areas. The next-generation Bangladeshi diaspora is also active with their social and economic capital to address the climate change-induced challenges for Bangladesh. The next-generation's role is crucial, considering they are gradually committed to helping Bangladesh due to their humanitarian commitment and descendent adherence despite having no direct attachment. The diaspora community helps their peer organisers in Bangladesh from different host countries organise small-to-large scale funds to help local communities resume the education of school and madrasa ("Muslim school") children. Diaspora community organisations also help the Government of Bangladesh with complementary support to arrange essential healthcare support through medical camps, especially for children and women of reproductive age (with the need for maternal healthcare). British-Bangladeshi businessmen and their associations informed that they are organising contributory funds for farmers to start production and for local entrepreneurs to restart businesses. They also supported people at high risk, including elderly people, women with vulnerabilities, and persons with disabilities. This enhanced the social protection of the most vulnerable people and contributed to GoB's agenda of restoring and strengthening social security in flood-affected regions.

Members of the Bangladeshi diaspora, individually and as a community through formal and informal associations, support Bangladesh during disasters. Alongside, the Bangladeshi youth diaspora started to mobilise and connect with global networks and social networks in Bangladesh to emerge as change-makers. Bangladesh Diaspora Climate Action (BDCA) is an example of such a youth-led initiative. BDCA, like the youth diaspora forum, helps develop youth champions who will act both globally and locally in Bangladesh to confront climate change-induced foreseen and unforeseen challenges at present and in the future. The first and next generations of the Bangladeshi diaspora aid their peers to regain and retain social protections to minimise the social and economic burdens of the Government of Bangladesh.

Not all Bangladeshi diaspora members from different host countries can support Bangladesh during crises, for various known and unknown reasons. Lack of authentic or conflicting information is a critical factor that deters the diaspora from being motivated to help Bangladesh and people residing in Bangladesh during calamities. Another concern is that there are no public appeal arrangements or communication from Bangladesh, including the Government of Bangladesh. Other concerns include the authenticity and accountability of financial channels for remitting and local recipients' trustworthiness in transferring funds. Not all diaspora members have solid social contacts with their compatriots in Bangladesh.

In many cases, the absence of acknowledgement of diaspora contribution from the government and the civil society of Bangladesh also plays a demoralising factor. Despite their immense contributions to remedy Bangladesh's cataphoric situations, they remain unsung champions. The first-generation Bangladeshi diaspora's contribution as champions to address the climate effects in Bangladesh is still unacknowledged. Concerned government agencies are yet to recognise the next-generation Bangladeshi diaspora contributions and potential.

Acknowledging diaspora contributions as climate champions by both public and private sectors in Bangladesh will enhance their physical and emotional momentum to work more diligently to counter climate change-induced challenges, including disasters. The Bangladeshi government still needs to revise more than fifty climate change-related strategies and plans and come up with possible policy adaptations and new policy documents to build the bridge between the Bangladeshi diaspora and the government's national plans, programmes, and actions to fight climate change-caused adversities. The active participation of the Bangladeshi diaspora in Bangladesh's global advocacy is crucial to strengthen Bangladesh's climate diplomacy on international platforms. The global knowledge, skills, and networks of the Bangladeshi diaspora are equally essential to support the local to national preparedness of Bangladesh to address climate change-induced vulnerabilities.



Courtesy of the author.



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Brown Skin in White Coats: The Filipino diaspora at the frontlines of the pandemic

Romina Eloisa M. Abuan, Elora Mae G. Atos, and Katrina R. Guanio

The Philippines has been one of the major migrant origin countries of human resources for health (HRH) to Western high-income and ageing countries since the last century, thereby forming a significant Filipino diaspora. The Filipino HRH diaspora played a substantial role in the provision of care, especially in the COVID-19 response of many destination countries. This article critically analyses the role of Filipino diasporas in the health sector and how diasporas facilitate cooperation, social protection and knowledge-sharing in healthcare. It provides policy recommendations for diaspora engagement, healthcare provision and sustainable development in both the countries of origin and destination.

In May, the Philippines unveiled its new brand, "We give the world our best", in an attempt to give tribute to Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). This branding was spotted in a UK advertisement featuring May Richell Cestina-Parsons, the Filipino nurse who administered the world's first approved COVID-19 vaccine. It came under scrutiny as it seemingly promotes the Philippines as a "labour exporter" despite grappling with labour shortages within its own health system. Globally, one out of every eight, or 3.7 million, nurses are foreign-born or foreign-trained. In a 2022 news report, the Filipino Nurses United (FNU) said 35% or four out of 10 registered nurses in the Philippines chose to work abroad.

Filipino HRH, including Filipino-born and Philippine-educated HRH and those with Filipino immigrant backgrounds, have been at the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic in many major destination countries. In 2021, Edmund Tabay became the first Filipino nurse to hold a top nursing directorship role at the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK. Charito Leonardo-Romano, a staff nurse at a private care home in Surrey, England, was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) for her service during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, migrant HRH proved to have significantly contributed to the labour supply and quality of care in destination countries. Meanwhile, origin countries like the Philippines had insufficient healthcare workforce leading to a burned-out HRH with an endless number of patients and generally, an overwhelmed healthcare system.

Migration of skilled workers such as HRH is attributed to 'brain drain' in origin countries. Healthcare workers who migrate internationally are often younger, skilled and economically active thus contributing to reducing dependency ratio, supplementing the stock of human capital and increasing gross domestic product (GDP) and overall economic productivity in destination countries, especially those with ageing populations. It is easy to haphazardly fault migration for the insufficient healthcare workforce in origin countries.

However, the migration-development nexus is complex for origin and destination countries alike. In origin countries, migration contributes to increased GDP and broader social and economic development through remittances. Similarly, migrants and diasporas contribute to origin countries through the flow of social remittances or the transfer of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and productivity.

Migrants and diasporas contribute to the flow of knowledge, ideas and social capital through civic engagements promoting poverty reduction and health in their home countries. For instance, the Filipino Nurses Diaspora Network (FIND) in Australia, Filipino Nurses Association UK (FNAUK), and Philippines Nurses Association UK contributed to supporting not only Filipinos nurses abroad but also communities and healthcare workers in the Philippines through fundraisers, capacity-building activities, inter-organisational collaborations, and social, economic and legal assistance.

The Philippines has strong networks of migration health practitioners, advocates and scholars. The Philippine Migrant Health Network (PMHN) is the country's leading network for the promotion and protection of the health of migrants and overseas Filipinos. Meanwhile, the Human Resources for Health (HRH) Network is responsible for the implementation of the 2020-2040 Human Resources for Health (HRH) Masterplan, and aims to enhance an "adequate, globally competent, and sustainable health workforce". These networks will play a critical role in creating spaces for empowerment and collaboration between the diaspora and the origin country towards quality care provision as aligned with universal health care.



Courtesy of the author.

As such, it is imperative to adopt migration health policy and partnerships that would:

- Foster brain circulation by strengthening health networks that create spaces for knowledge-sharing of best practices between the Philippines and Filipino diasporas;
- Engage Filipino HRH diaspora and other diasporas to lobby for improved working conditions, increased wages, comprehensive employee benefits and regular capacity development in destination countries;
- Forge a working relationship between the Filipino HRH diaspora and the local HRH to influence programme planning and policymaking in the country's healthcare system; and

- Harness return-of-talent programmes such as the [Balik Scientist Program](#) to ensure opportunities for growth and local employment for OFWs who intend to return and reintegrate into the country.

Ultimately, the Philippines can mobilise its HRH diaspora by starting with a [roadmap for diaspora engagement](#). This requires knowing the diaspora, their needs, their goals as well as their capacities and relationship with the countries of origin and destination. Similarly, the Philippines has to build trust and a mutualistic relationship with the diaspora through active consular networks, provision and promotion of services, interactions with host governments and privileges to expatriates and descendants among others.

“I have the best of both worlds as a British-Filipino,” Charito said in a [webinar about migrants as transnational actors](#). The Filipino HRH diaspora, with their brown skin in white coats, are the lifeline of health systems, the vehicle for brain circulation and the future of care. There is a need to harness the best of both worlds to create and give the best in those worlds.



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Decolonisation Discourse: Perspective on Afro-Belgians

Jimmy Hendry Nzally

Decolonisation discourse has resurfaced in contemporary debates. This is in light of the growing Afro-European presence and discrimination in Europe. The Afro-European population is estimated to be around 15 million. As of 2020, over 250,000 Congolese live in Belgium, the country I will focus on. Afro-Belgians are generally people of African descent, of the African diaspora and the people who were abducted by Belgium when they were children. Métis are mixed-race children (Belgian fathers and African mothers) who were abducted by Belgian colonisers and missionaries from the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi.

In 2019, the European Parliament voted to address structural racism faced by Afro-Europeans. As reported by Politico, 'it was backed by 535 votes to 80, with 44 abstentions'. This is why this article offers a critical perspective on Afro-Europeans in the context of decolonisation in Belgium. To what extent are the decolonised involved in the decolonisation discourse?

What then is decolonisation? Simply put, it is 'delinking' from colonialism. For Jan Jansen and Jurgen Osterhammel, decolonisation brought an end to empire rule instituted by the colonisers and thus gave birth to independent states, put an end to the use of racial hierarchy as an accepted political ideology, and in turn gave birth to a new world order. Decolonisation is therefore meant to mark a new era for non-racial rule. As viewed by Achille Mbembe, it entails the experiences of the colonised countries. What is missing in much of the decolonial discourse, however, are the Afro-European voices.

There are notable attempts by Belgium to reconcile with its colonial past. The visit of the King of Belgium in 2022 to the Congo is a good example, in which he was widely quoted expressing his 'deepest regrets' (in a letter to Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi from 2020). His visit was followed in the same year by the return of the tooth of the slain Pan-Africanist leader Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the Congo. His dead body was dissolved in acid, and one of his teeth was kept as a trophy by a Belgian police officer. A square has been named in his honour in Brussels at the Porte de Namur next to Mantonge, known as the "African neighbourhood".

Afro-Belgians, although in small strides, are getting recognition. Some notable examples included Pierre Kompany in 2009, the first elected black mayor in Belgium; Wouter Van Bellingen, a Belgian with a Rwandan background, who became in 2007 the first black alderman in Flanders; and in 2009, Assita Kanko, a Belgian-Burkinabe, was elected as a Member of the European Party. Yet still, as the 2022 Inter-Federal Equal Opportunities Centre Unia report underscores, Afro-Belgians suffer from the effects of colonial and postcolonial racism.

This is because 'skin colour is still all too often an issue in Belgian society'. Recently, after two years of work, the Belgium Parliamentary Committee on Belgium's colonial past failed to reach any conclusion, not even a recommendation for an apology or reparations.

There is undeniably evidence therefore that more needs to be done. Notably, there is a need to tackle the negative imagery about Africa as well as the lack of representation of Afro-Belgians. A salient point is the representation of Africans in the state-owned Royal Museum of Central Africa, which still perpetuates colonial stereotypes. The location of the museum itself is problematic. It is located in Tervuren, formerly where African villages were recreated for show as part of King Leopold II's brutal and inhumane colonial project.

The fact that there is no depiction of the horrors of King Leopold's and Belgium's colonialism in the museum and Afro-Belgian's lack of access hamper Belgium's full decolonisation. An activist underlined that 'there are many art collections the Belgian state is keeping away from black people by restricting access'. Even the métis people have no access to the colonial archives and are thus prevented from knowing about their families and ancestries despite the passing of a legislative proposal from the Francophone Socialist Party.

When the museum was under renovation in 2013 and was expected to reopen in 2017, a committee was established, and some Afro-Belgian scholars were appointed, but they had to sign non-disclosure agreements. The committee later stopped meeting because their voices were not heard. If indeed this museum should speak to Afro-Belgians, how come they are denied access to their archival history? Decolonisation cannot happen until and unless the colonised share their own stories.

The museum holds 'one of the world's largest collections of African art'. It is documented that 80 percent of Africa's heritage has been taken to Europe. Evidently, these artefacts and others were acquired largely due to the use of force in periods of colonisation and even in postcolonial times.



Courtesy of the author.

Decolonisation amplifies calls for justice and equality in Europe, America, and elsewhere. This is what gave prominence to the #BlackLivesMatter protest as a political and social movement that seeks to highlight subjugation. In Belgium, the #BLM protest brought to light Belgium's colonial past, and started a strong and open discussion about racism against Afro-Belgians, and calls for Afro-Belgian voices to be heard and represented. Afro-Belgians continue to face discrimination, a lack of job opportunities, and a lack of recognition in Belgium.

The #BLM protest was an important avenue for Afro-Belgians to speak up and be heard. As viewed by a policymaker (23 May 2023), 'this protest highlighted our pain and sufferings and awakened the entire country of Belgium'. The protest in Brussels reportedly attracted 10,000 people. Concretely, it calls for the statues of King Leopold II to be brought down. These statues had already been the target of protests since 2004, but it was not until June 2020 that any were vandalised with red paint to symbolise blood on his hands.

This all demonstrates that there is a need for Afro-Belgian voices to be heard and amplified at the policy, political, and economic levels. The failure of Afro-Belgian representation in the curating of the museum is a good example. Afro-Belgians should be front and centre in narrating their own history. The museum must represent the oppressed, especially the Congolese people, who suffered at the hands of King Leopold II and Belgium. For meaningful progress to take place and to avoid any further #BLM escalation, issues of racism, discrimination, and even the statue of King Leopold II must be addressed. Afro-Belgians should be seen as an integral part of Belgian society and their history be taught. There should be more history lessons to teach about the role of colonisation in building Belgium as a country. Simply put, Belgium and Europe must not ignore their colonial past and legacies, as well as their ripple effects in contemporary western societies.



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Empowering the Diaspora through Solidarity and Transnational Social Protection: The Case of The Kerala Muslim Cultural Centre

Farseen Ali Puthanveetil

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a time of revelation, exposing the vulnerabilities inherent within seemingly formidable establishments, particularly in the global South. It uncovered the unevenness in society, and people from the lowest strata of society were often left behind. Inter-state migrants and international migrants of Indian origin were the ones who were hit hardest by the pandemic. Where state actors miserably failed to cater to the needs of these migrants, it was the non-state actors who helped these people in their time of distress. One notable example is the Kerala Muslim Cultural Centre (KMCC), an Indian diaspora organisation, which played a remarkable role in taking charge of the situation and supporting Indian migrants abroad. This organisation has undertaken a significant array of initiatives, encompassing: the chartering of flights to facilitate the repatriation of individuals facing stranded conditions; the establishment and operation of isolation centres; provision of quarantine assistance; delivery of medical aid, facilitation of post-mortem care for COVID-19 infected individuals; establishment of help desk services; distribution of food kits and grocery packages; as well as the dispensation of financial aid to individuals adversely impacted by the pandemic. This diasporic organisation has proven itself as a reliable partner for several governmental departments in host nations within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, frequently being sought after to provide assistance in dealing with challenging situations among the migrant population in these countries.

GCC countries have been a major destination for migrants from Kerala seeking better economic opportunities. The diaspora from Kerala has established a strong sense of social cohesion, which has led to the formation of several diasporic organisations. Indian diasporic organisations in the Middle East are diverse and multifaceted, formed of a variety of foundations that represent the various facets of their members' identities and interests. These organisations often revolve around faith, hometown, politics, profession, and more. KMCC is one such voluntary organisation of the Indian diaspora from Kerala. They maintain a network of country units spanning approximately 70 nations across Europe, North America, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Australia. However, the organisation boasts a particularly influential foothold in the GCC countries. Although the country units operate independently, they maintain affiliation with the Kerala State Committee of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), an Indian political party. According to their latest membership records, KMCC claims to have around 194,000 active members in the Middle East region alone.

KMCC emerged as an informal forum in the early 1970s, initiated by the initial wave of labour migrants in the Middle East, with a focus on literary and cultural pursuits. Over time, it underwent a transformation into a formal and structured entity.

The organisation takes a dual approach by intervening in both the migrant-related issues within the host countries and simultaneously supporting welfare activities back in Kerala. As it evolved further, they adopted a more organised approach, establishing subcommittees at the provincial and city levels under the umbrella of country committees. Additionally, hometown committees were also established within these countries. In recent decades, KMCC has undergone a significant shift from an organisation primarily focused on charity, education, and cultural activities into a prominent diasporic organisation that provides comprehensive social protection measures in both their host countries and their home state. The KMCC national committees in different countries oversee a diverse array of initiatives, including employment support, social care programmes, healthcare provisions, family assistance, insurance coverage, pension schemes, and socio-cultural engagements. While services like relief activities, emergency response, and legal aid are accessible to all individuals, social security benefits are only available to KMCC members and their dependents.

The security scheme initiatives within each GCC country are designed and implemented by their respective national committees. Individuals who hold legal residency in these countries have the option to become members of the social security scheme by paying a nominal membership fee and regular monthly/annual contributions. Enrolled members and their dependents gain access to various social protection provisions. These provisions include death insurance, medical assistance for illnesses, support in cases of sudden job loss, relief for accidents, and assistance for specific medical conditions such as cancer, kidney failure, heart open surgery, and angioplasty. Additionally, the schemes subsidise regular medical treatments and medical check-ups, providing vital support for the well-being of the beneficiaries.

By extending beyond the borders of a single nation, KMCC's social security initiatives are available to diasporans and their dependents in both the host and home countries. This distinctive approach is rooted in a self-help model that emphasises social cohesion and trust within their community. By fostering a sense of solidarity and unity, it creates a framework where diasporans actively contribute to the well-being of their fellow community members. In addition to facilitating the provision of social security measures, this self-help approach additionally strengthens the ties and mutual support among the diaspora. The activities of KMCC highlight the importance of a community-centred approach in effectively meeting the welfare requirements of the diaspora community.

The social security measures by KMCC serve as an exemplary case of transnational social protection measures carried out by a diasporic organisation. It exemplifies the dedication and commitment of diaspora communities to ensuring the welfare and protection of their fellow diaspora members through a sense of solidarity and social cohesion. These measures become particularly crucial due to the limitations faced by governments in delivering comprehensive social protection to diasporic populations.

In this context, such transnational schemes play a vital role in supporting migrants and their dependents during challenging times. They fill the gaps left by traditional government-provided social protection and address the unique needs and circumstances faced by diasporic communities. By offering essential support and assistance, these initiatives contribute significantly to enhancing the overall well-being and security of diasporans.



Credit: Musthujab Makkolath/ KMCC Athijeevanam.

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Empowering Communities: The vital role of diasporas in social protection in Cameroon

Charles Simplicie Mbatsogo Mebo

Introduction

Diasporas have emerged as significant actors in shaping the social, economic, and political landscapes of their countries of origin. In the case of Cameroon, the Cameroonian diaspora has been instrumental in providing social protection to their families and communities back home. This article explores the impacts, dynamics, and future opportunities of diasporas in the context of social protection in Cameroon, shedding light on the transformative potential they possess and the purposes for further enhancement.

Impacts of diasporic contributions

The Cameroonian diaspora consists of diverse individuals and groups spread across the globe, actively contributing to the development of Cameroon in various forms: remittances, knowledge transfer, philanthropic activities, investments and entrepreneurship, advocacy and policy engagement, cultural preservation and promotion, academic and research collaboration. Although the Cameroonian diaspora is not a homogeneous group, and the forms of engagement may vary among individuals and communities (based on their location, resources, and interests), the collective contributions of the diaspora in all its forms play a vital role in the development of Cameroon. The impact of Cameroonian diaspora contributions on social protection is profound and multifaceted. One key channel through which diasporas support their communities is remittances. According to the World Bank, Cameroon received approximately \$299 million in remittances in 2020, with a significant portion coming from the diaspora. These financial inflows help families meet basic needs, such as healthcare, education, and housing, thereby bolstering social protection at the household level.

Beyond remittances, diasporas also engage in philanthropic activities that address broader community needs. For instance, the Cameroon Solidarity in the United Kingdom (CAS-UK) launched the "Education for All" initiative. This project provides scholarships to underprivileged children in Cameroon. Such initiatives directly contribute to enhancing access to education and empowering vulnerable segments of society.

In addition, diaspora members bring valuable skills, knowledge, and expertise back to Cameroon. They transfer their experiences gained abroad to their home communities, fostering capacity building and human capital development.

This knowledge transfer is particularly evident in sectors such as healthcare, where diaspora medical professionals collaborate with local practitioners to improve healthcare services and infrastructure.

Dynamics and challenges

While the contributions of the Cameroonian diaspora are undeniable, several dynamics and challenges must be addressed to maximise their impact on social protection. One key challenge is the lack of coordination between diaspora actors and government institutions. Without effective collaboration, the potential transformative power of diaspora contributions remains untapped. Establishing platforms for dialogue and cooperation between diaspora organisations and relevant government agencies is crucial to ensure a more coordinated approach to social protection.

Another dynamic to consider is the diversity within the diaspora. Different diaspora communities have varying levels of resources, networks, and opportunities. Recognizing this diversity and leveraging it effectively can lead to targeted interventions that address specific social protection needs. As an illustration, the Cameroon Professional Society (CPS), a diaspora organisation in the United States, focuses on empowering Cameroonian professionals abroad and fostering partnerships to promote entrepreneurship and job creation in Cameroon.

Future opportunities

The future holds tremendous potential for enhancing the impact of diaspora contributions on social protection in Cameroon. One opportunity lies in strengthening the role of diaspora actors as advocates for policy change. Through their experiences abroad, diaspora members possess unique insights into best practices in social protection from other countries. By actively engaging in policy dialogue and sharing their expertise, they can influence the development and implementation of more effective social protection programs.

Moreover, technology offers new avenues for diaspora engagement. Online platforms and digital tools enable diaspora members to connect, collaborate, and contribute more efficiently. For example, the "DiasporaEngager" platform facilitates matchmaking between diaspora members and local organisations, fostering partnerships that promote social development projects in Cameroon. Embracing digital innovation can help overcome geographic barriers and strengthen diaspora engagement in social protection efforts.

Conclusion

The Cameroonian diaspora plays a vital role in providing social protection to their families and communities. Through remittances, philanthropic activities, and knowledge transfer, diaspora members serve as catalysts for positive change.

However, to fully harness their potential, collaboration and coordination between diaspora actors and government institutions are essential. By recognizing the expertise and experiences of diaspora members and involving them in policy dialogue, Cameroon can create a more inclusive and effective approach to social protection. With the right policies and mechanisms in place, the impact of diaspora contributions on social protection in Cameroon can be significantly enhanced.

Thus, it is crucial to prioritise financial literacy and entrepreneurship training among diaspora members. By equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge, they can make informed investment decisions that generate sustainable returns for their communities. Additionally, establishing diaspora investment funds or platforms can streamline the process of directing resources towards targeted projects, ensuring that social protection initiatives are impactful and well-supported.

Furthermore, embracing digital advancements can revolutionise diaspora engagement. Accessible and secure digital platforms can facilitate convenient remittance transfers, provide information about social protection programs, and enable collaboration between diaspora members and local organisations. By leveraging technology, the barriers of distance and time can be overcome, allowing for more efficient and impactful diaspora contributions to social protection.



Credit: Charles Mbatsogo, 2023.

The Cameroonian diaspora holds immense potential in bolstering social protection within their home country. Through financial remittances, philanthropic activities, and knowledge transfer, diaspora members make a substantial difference in improving the lives of their families and communities. However, to fully capitalise on their contributions, it is essential to foster collaboration, coordination, and dialogue between diaspora actors and government institutions. By leveraging the expertise, experiences, and resources of the diaspora, Cameroon can create a more coordinated, inclusive, and sustainable approach to social protection, ensuring the well-being and prosperity of its citizens. By addressing challenges related to coordination, recognizing diversity, and embracing digital innovation, the Cameroonian government can unlock greater opportunities for diaspora engagement and maximise their contributions to building robust social protection systems.



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Dark Hollows which Swallow my Dreams: Socio-cultural norms against LBQ women in Afghanistan

Basira Paigham



Afghan queer woman in Dublin pride (courtesy of the author)

Conservative social and cultural norms that are prevalent in Afghanistan mean that LBQ (lesbian, bisexual, and queer) women are invisible. While women in Afghanistan face discrimination and social isolation, LBQ individuals face significant challenges and intersectional discrimination in Afghan society, where homosexuality is deeply stigmatised and penalised according to Article 427 of the Afghanistan Penal Code. LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer) people have faced death, torture and forced marriage.

This article provides an analysis of the situation faced by LBQ women in Afghanistan following the resurgence of Taliban rule. Drawing upon available reports and research, we can see the specific challenges and experiences of LBQ women within the context of the Taliban's conservative interpretation of Sharia law. While there is a need for updated, on-the-ground research, this article aims to shed light on the increased risks, persecution, and marginalisation faced by LBQ women today.

After two decades, the Taliban returned to Afghanistan in August 2021. Since returning to power, the Taliban has made notional claims in support of human rights, but has explicitly remarked that this respect does not include LGBT rights.

In practice, they are imposing strict gender norms and excluding women from education, work, entertainment and other social, political and economic activities. While women face severe violence, isolation and discrimination, LBQ women experience a double exclusion and discrimination due to the country's conservative and patriarchal society and homophobic socio-cultural norms.

Testimonies in a report by Outright International reflect the conditions on the ground. Fatima, a 26-year-old lesbian, says that, from the moment the Taliban returned to power, 'the world changed to a dark hollow that is trying to swallow all of my dreams, my happiness, my peace, my achievements, my education, my job.' Her uncle, a well-known leader and a Taliban ally, arrived at her family's house with eight Taliban soldiers, in August 2021 following the Taliban's return to power. Fatima had been working at a local university but she was forced to leave her job and was replaced by a man who is a Taliban loyalist.

Women in Afghanistan are also at risk of forced marriage, which is prevalent across the country. Forced marriages often result in women being trapped in abusive relationships and denied any agency or autonomy over their lives. LBQ women are particularly vulnerable to forced marriages, as their sexual orientation is often seen as a threat to the patriarchal norms of Afghan society. For example, Najwa is a 31-year-old lesbian who is facing the threat of forced marriage by her uncle and relatives who are Taliban supporters. She fled her home town to seek safety but has struggled to find a safe place in Afghanistan to hide as Taliban are imposing new limitations day by day.

The situation for LBQ women in Afghanistan is further complicated by the lack of support and resources available to them. LBQ individuals in Afghanistan are forced to remain hidden and are unable to access any support or resources that might be available to them in other countries. This discrimination extends to transgender individuals in Afghanistan, who are also unable to access any medical or mental health services that are tailored to their specific needs. Nasira, a 25-year-old trans man who, with his mother, was beaten by his uncle and relatives, says, 'My injuries are fresh and deep. I can't walk, stand, or move'. His mother and cousin tried to take him to the doctor, but the doctor rejected treatment because of his gender identity.

It is almost impossible for LBQ to escape to other countries to seek asylum; the Taliban do not allow women to travel without being accompanied by a man. Marwa, a lesbian and women's rights activist, was trapped in Afghanistan unable to cross the border because she did not have a male family member. However, in 2021 she managed to cross the border by preparing a marriage document with her best friend, who was gay. In an interview with Human Rights Watch, she says, 'I was alone. If I continued to stay alone or stay with my friend (my husband now), the Taliban might arrest us. That is why I asked him to prepare a marriage document.'

Despite these challenges, these case studies demonstrate a resilient and courageous LBQ community in Afghanistan. Through underground networks and online platforms, LBQ women find solace in connecting with others who share similar experiences. These spaces offer a sense of belonging, validation, and support, allowing LBQ women to express their identities in a more accepting environment. However, these spaces still carry significant risks due to the conservative nature of Afghan society and the potential for persecution by the Taliban.

Despite this, LBQ movements and advocacy networks of Afghan LBQ women human rights defenders—both in Afghanistan and in the diaspora abroad—are trying to advocate for LBQ women rights, visibility and freedom. On Lesbian Day of Visibility this year, Afghan LGBT, one of the first advocacy organisations for LGBTQIA+ rights in Afghanistan, publicly called for international humanitarian organisations and media to stand with Afghanistan LBQ women.

To support and protect Afghanistan LBQ women in this tough situation, awareness-raising about the challenges faced by LBQ women in Afghanistan is crucial. Many people are unaware of the discrimination, violence, and harassment that these women experience on a daily basis. By highlighting these issues through mainstream media, social media campaigns, and public advocacy, we can build greater public support for the protection of LBQ women's rights.

In conclusion, LBQ women and transgender people in Afghanistan face significant challenges, including discrimination, violence, and a lack of support and resources. While the Taliban's recent takeover of the country has worsened the situation for LBQ women, Afghan LBQ human rights defenders advocate for LBQ women who are at risk under the regime. There is an urgent and essential need for the international community to listen and take action to support LBQ individuals in Afghanistan, to ensure that their human rights are protected—and their voices heard.



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Where to Nudge? Fostering the social capital exchange pathways of the Bangladeshi diaspora

Asmar Osman

More than 12 million Bangladeshis live across the world, of which around 2.4 million reside in the host countries permanently, and whom—despite many academic and policy debates—we can identify as the Bangladeshi diaspora. The sheer size of this community, along with its potential for engagement and development, is remarkable.

Why should we pay attention to their social capital in particular? The answer lies in the opportunities for knowledge-sharing and networking, particularly in education, skills, science, and technology. These collaborations could play a pivotal role in driving sustainable development in Bangladesh. Moreover, by tapping into the human resource potential of the diaspora, we can alleviate the government's burden of investing in long-term social protection schemes. This prospect may spur policymakers to embrace affirmative decisions prioritising diaspora engagement in the country's development trajectory.

Bangladesh, as a country, has its interests. But what will be the stake of the diaspora? The reasons behind their involvement are two-fold: finding solace in doing something good and seizing the opportunity to expand their networks and pursue personal goals. The development and migration nexus offers diaspora communities a chance to contribute to their home country's sustainable development while advancing their interests and aspirations abroad. In essence, this becomes an alternative social protection plan, fostering the growth of human resources among relevant stakeholders. Key informant interviews with researchers and diaspora members revealed that various incentives drive their engagement. Older-aged diaspora groups seek recognition and respect, middle-aged members value acknowledgement and some financial benefits, and new immigrants facing challenging times prioritise economic advantages. These incentives may act as magnets, attracting diaspora members to continue supporting and contributing to their country of origin.



Graphic art: Debashis Kumar Day.

Bangladesh has been fortunate to get continuous support from the diaspora communities since the country's liberation war. The [financial remittance](#) they sent significantly impacted the country's economic development. Meanwhile, their role in knowledge transfer has played a critical role in Bangladesh's development. For example, an [American-Bangladeshi scientist Dr Hussam invented a filter](#) that has saved thousands of lives from Arsenic contamination. The [American-Bangladeshi scientists Rubab Khan, Dipanker Talukdara, and Selim Shariar](#)—among many others, have built a firm footing in the scientific arena. American Bangladeshi [Iqbal Quadir founded the Grameen Phone](#), transforming the country's digital communication scenario. British Bangladeshi [Nadia Samdani continues art philanthropy](#) endeavours in Bangladesh and beyond, for which she received the honour of Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. American-Bangladeshi [Rudmeela Nawsheen flourishes in Silicon Valley](#) with IT endeavours and transferring technologies to Bangladesh. Also, inventions of the Bangladeshi diaspora have a global impact, which includes [Jawed Karim \(co-founder of YouTube\)](#), [Salman Khan \(founder of Khan Academy\)](#), and many more.

The Bangladeshi diaspora's emerging position in the host countries widens the opportunity for their engagement with the origin country. For example, in the UK election, [four British-Bangladeshi won](#). Similarly, [four Bangladeshi-origin candidates won](#) in the American midterm election in 2022. Foyso Chowdhury, the [first-ever Bangladeshi-born member of the Scottish Parliament](#), has raised a strong voice against racism. According to a [report from The Economist](#), the new generation of British Bangladeshis is doing excellent at school. A recent mapping exercise estimates that many [Bangladeshi diaspora members are well-positioned](#) in the host countries and have the willingness to contribute to Bangladesh through their knowledge and skills.

There are [challenges](#). Bangladesh [still lacks a diaspora-centric policy and institutional mechanism](#) to nourish the endeavours backed by a rights-based approach of acknowledging the diaspora's contribution and assisting them in their needs. The Bangladeshi policy measures often [fail to effectively recognise and utilise the diaspora's social attribution](#)—in a mutually beneficial manner. In general, the local education and skills development institutes are yet to facilitate an institutional exchange and transmission of knowledge mechanism between the diaspora and local communities. Moreover, the review of policies and discussion with the stakeholders reveal that the [Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment \(MoEWOE\)](#) and the [Ministry of Education \(MoE\)](#) lack a robust joint action plan with a dynamic coordination mechanism.

[States have the ability to actively engage, enable and empower diaspora communities](#) by implementing policies and taking actions that prioritise communication, outreach, and collaboration. By fostering effective communication channels, the Bangladeshi government can ensure that diasporas are engaged, and their voices are heard. Outreach efforts can bridge the gap between the state and the diaspora, fostering a sense of connection and shared purpose. In addition, it can leverage the diaspora's collective strengths and resources to drive development initiatives through partnerships with diaspora organisations and individuals.

These proactive measures by the government enable them to harness the potential of diaspora communities and create a conducive environment for their active participation in development endeavours.

The good thing is that Bangladesh already has a dedicated Ministry (i.e., MoEWOE) and a full-fledged policy to cater to the Bangladeshi expatriates' needs. Still, the policy primarily focuses on short-term migrant workers. A visionary policy supported by a time-bound action plan is a mandatory stepping stone. But initially, long-term policy measures may not seem lucrative for the diaspora. On the other hand, some quick and respectful actions may help to rebuild their bonding with the origin and their willingness to participate in the development journey of the origin country.

What are those immediate plausible actions? The first and foremost task is to define the Bangladeshi diaspora through a flexible operational definition, including the new generation diaspora, by providing a diaspora card or something similar to them to create their respectful engagement base. As two-thirds of the total Bangladeshi diaspora population resides in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, the area-centric all-out diplomatic endeavours—engaging the diaspora spokespersons as public diplomats—could bring visible changes quickly. To utilise the potential, the MoE, in collaboration with the MoEWOE, must initiate a formal partnership between the two countries' skills accreditation agencies and educational institutes. As long as coordination remains a crucial challenge in the active engagement of the diaspora members in Bangladesh's development, a specialised wing in the MoEWOE aided by an Advisory Group including diaspora members requires formation with a clear road map and specific business rules. So that's all to start with!



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SOSOrinoco: the advantage of diaspora activism in Venezuela

Ángeles Zúñiga and Abigail Edwards

Instability, a protracted displacement crisis, and hyperinflation have become omnipresent in discussions about the Venezuelan political landscape. Yet, a hidden crisis threatens the country – from its cultural heritage to its fragile biosphere. In 2016, the Nicolas Maduro regime created the Orinoco Mining Arc, an open-cut mine stretching across southern Venezuela, equivalent to 12% of the country's territory. An extractivist "strategic development zone," created without impact studies nor the National Assembly approval required by law, the Orinoco Mining Arc has had consequences stretching across the environmental, public health and human rights spheres.

As far-reaching as this environmental tragedy is, for years the situation was severely understudied. When SOSOrinoco, the diaspora-founded advocacy group, was founded in 2018, few Venezuelans outside of its southern region were aware of the mining arc's existence; fewer were willing to speak out about its extractive policies. In an interview with the authors, SOSOrinoco founder Cristina Burelli shared that after enquiring with several academics and activists, they expressed awareness of a serious situation in the area. Yet, people were afraid to denounce it due to the repressive nature of the Maduro regime. This has caused many atrocities to go unreported.

Today, SOSOrinoco is responsible for the most detailed reports on the threats the mining arc represents, including environmental degradation, human rights violations such as forced sex work and labor trafficking, proliferation of gang activity and threats to the region's cultural landscape. For example, reports have shown that mining activities threaten Canaima National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Combining a team of local researchers with efforts from diaspora leaders, SOSOrinoco is able to operate anonymously on the ground, denouncing the ecocide that many were afraid to report. The project's model provides a framework for how meaningful advocacy work can be achieved under authoritarian and repressive regimes, thanks to combined efforts between local expertise and members of the diaspora.

The Venezuelan diaspora: An ever-growing phenomenon

Critical to the success of SOSOrinoco is its integration of diaspora into an issue that was previously largely localised. Currently, there are 7.2 million Venezuelans living abroad, many of whom are displaced by a severe humanitarian crisis. Most of the diaspora is concentrated in Latin America, with Colombia and Peru hosting the highest numbers—2.5 million and 1.5 million respectively.

Outside of Latin America, the largest Venezuelan diaspora populations are found in the United States and Spain. The diaspora now represents nearly 24% of the global population of Venezuelans, and a significant human capital drain on Venezuela itself.

Despite having fled a repressive regime themselves, Venezuelans abroad have largely engaged with events back home through remittances rather than activism and fundraising for local Venezuelan organisations. An estimated 29 percent of families in Venezuela depend on remittances for survival. In 2022, total remittances in Venezuela were estimated to reach US \$4.2 billion. The Venezuelan diaspora also provides essential food and medical supplies, so much so that several businesses have emerged dedicated to shipping goods from diaspora hubs.

While these supplies as well as remittances have been critical to the resilience of a small number of beneficiaries, there remains a significant disconnect between the needs of local grassroots organisations in Venezuela and diaspora response and actions. With a small group of Venezuelan diaspora leaders amplifying the work of a large grassroots network, SOSOrinoco serves as an example of innovative ways diaspora can engage with those at home beyond remittances. Still, while Venezuelans within and outside of the country have been quick to share the work of SOSOrinoco over social media, the organisation still struggles to engage the diaspora in fundraising for its efforts.

Representation equals protection

Efforts such as aid delivery are one-way and relatively straightforward. But more complex processes—such as publishing, advocating, and raising awareness on sensitive topics—require a different modality of engagement, given that the safety of those involved inside the country can be compromised. With documented attacks from both state officials and armed groups against environmental defenders in Venezuela, SOSOrinoco's model of having a diaspora leader such as Cristina Burelli serve as a public representative—who can safely share the core team's findings—guarantees the safety of the organisation's local network and on-the-ground team, while facilitating engagement with diaspora groups.

Combining diaspora efforts with on-the-ground networks

While SOSOrinoco's three team members outside of Venezuela use their safe positions abroad to publicly represent the organisation, lead fundraising, and coordinate research efforts, SOSOrinoco still remains rooted in on-the-ground engagement and networks. SOSOrinoco has worked to formalise a network of local journalists, indigenous defenders, and activists who provide the organisation's diaspora activists with live updates and contribute to publications, while working to promote SOSOrinoco's work in local news outlets.

This work of the diaspora is increasingly relevant as it amplifies the dangers the Orinoco Mining Arc poses to the region as a whole, which threatens the Amazonian ecosystem and is also a haven for international gang activity. While Burelli remains the face of the organisation, providing SOSOrinoco credibility abroad, the approach of publishing reports collectively and anonymously ensures that local actors can safely contribute. The combined efforts of the diaspora with locals on the ground helps to ensure that the focus of SOSOrinoco's work remains centred on the populations in the Venezuelan Amazon who are directly affected by the impacts of the Orinoco Mining Arc.



Illegal mine by the Caroni, Venezuela's second most important river. Courtesy of Rodolfo Gerstl and SOSOrinoco.



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The Health Protection of Irregular Migrants at the Borders: The Case of the Darién Gap

Andrea Jaramillo Contreras



Figure 1. Photo taken by Andrea Jaramillo in July 2022.

Between 2021 and 2022, more than 350,000 migrants from 53 different countries crossed one of the world's most dangerous migration routes between Panama and Colombia, called the Darién Gap, with the aim of reaching the United States. Between 1,200 and 1,300 irregular migrants cross this border every day, and some 300 are stranded on the Colombian side of the border, in Necoclí, waiting for economic support or migration alternatives.

The Darién Gap is sixty miles of dense rainforest, steep mountains, and extensive swamps. During 5 to 11 days, migrants have to cross inhospitable routes, rivers and long stretches of land that require a high level of physical strength. According to reports by ACNUR, R4V and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), human trafficking, assaults, sexual violence, killings, disappearances and deaths are some of the risks that migrants face along this route.

After crossing the Darién Gap, migrants continue their journey by road, passing through Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Mexico until they reach the United States. This route can last weeks, months or even years, depending on the origin of the migrants, the restrictions at the borders and their economic resources. During their journey, they face lack of access to health care, food supplies, potable water and housing. On top of that, the control of smugglers, traffickers and criminal groups at these borders put the migrants in a situation of extreme vulnerability. From 2016, 221 irregular migrants have died trying to cross this border.

The protection of the right to health without distinguishing people's legal status, origin or social condition follows the United Nations principle of "Leave No One Behind" of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, claims for equity and non-discrimination to the most disadvantaged and poor in the world. The recognition of the special vulnerability of migrants in terms of social exclusion and discrimination along their migratory route put them as priority actors in accessing a competent health service adaptable to their needs. However, at the borders of Colombia and Panama, the lack of regulations that protect migrants in transit, the financial and local capacities at the borders, the restrictive policies at the borders, and the misunderstanding of what the right to health means for migrants in transit are one of the main aspects that influence the access to health of irregular migrants in the Darién Gap.



Figure 2. Photo taken by Andrea Jaramillo in July 2022.

1.Lack of regulations that protect the right to health of irregular migrants in transit: A legal instrument in Colombia that protects the right to health of migrants in transit is absent. According to the “health sector response plan to the migratory phenomenon”, irregular migrants only have the right to access the initial medical emergency, which does not respond to the multiple needs that migrants in transit face on their journey. In Colombia, the right to health is tied to the legal status of migrants and their desire to remain in the territory, but not to the essence of their human condition, disregarding the universality and inalienability of this human right. It seems that Colombia is not responding to the commitments in international conventions such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the New York Declaration for Migrants and Refugees and the Declaration of the Sixty-first World Health Assembly.

2.Financial resources and local capacities at the borders: The migration crisis together with the poverty levels in the region of Necoclí — which exceed 50% —, the levels of conflict, and the lack of technical and financial resources of this region have exceeded the capacities of this municipal government to deal with the needs of migrants in transit. So far, the central government has not played a leading role in the protection of these migrants, leaving this responsibility in the hands of international organisations. According to the migration office in Colombia, these people are migrants in transit and therefore it is not their responsibility to protect them.

3.International border order and restrictive migration policies: The significant lack of cooperation with neighbouring countries and the limited institutional capacity of the authorities in Latin American countries have produced the intensification of vulnerabilities at the borders. Despite the different meetings held between the governments of Colombia, Panama, and the United States to give solutions to the increase of migration flow of irregular migrants at this border, there is not yet a solution that puts the human dignity of these migrants over border restrictions and securitization. Most of the agreements respond to US intentions to exert control over drug and human trafficking networks, rather than to address the needs and vulnerabilities of migrants in transit.

4.The misunderstanding of the right to health: Migrants in transit are not only exposed to emergency care during their journey, but to multiple socio-economic and structural dimensions that intersect with the social determinants of health, such as housing, water, food, security, among others. The right to health demands a holistic perspective that requires an articulated work between different sectors of society such as governments, international organisations and civil society, in which migrants can be beneficiaries of healthy living conditions throughout their migratory journey and not only humanitarian attention at the borders.

The case of irregular migrants in transit through the Darién Gap shows the absence of national and transnational policies that protect their right to health. It seems that the connotation of “transit” reinforces principles of inequality and discrimination, violating the universality and inalienability of human rights. Additionally, the creation of border security policies by governments further complicates the situation of migrants, placing them in a continuous level of uncertainty and vulnerability that profoundly affects their health condition, especially at borders where legal restrictions interact with the lack of responsibility of governments towards these migrants.



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Sub-Saharan Women in Tunisia between Fear of Rejection and Adequate Medical Care

Amal Hlioui

The latest statements of Tunisian President Saïed who warned against sub-Saharan women's presence in Tunisia as a 'change of the demographic composition', have been deemed xenophobic. During the outbreak of the Libyan Civil War in 2011, thousands of sub-Saharan women fled to Tunisia. Ever since, a sub-Saharan diaspora was formed, yet the numbers, origins and social issues have long been neglected and "unknown". Hiding in the shadows, sub-Saharan women's social vulnerability is accentuated by a general atmosphere of rejection and mistrust towards them in Tunisia.

Female sub-Saharan women have precarious work and life conditions. Furthermore, they suffer from a double vulnerability as they have the burden to attend to their reproductive health, as well as that of their children and partners. In this article, I explore the treatment of sub-Saharan women by the Tunisian healthcare systems by interviewing two different stakeholders: a doctor, and a sub-Saharan migrant in first-line and third-line healthcare facilities.

Reproductive health: a satisfied need?

Officially referred to as 'foreign residents in Tunisia', sub-Saharan women account for 21,466 immigrants, i.e. 36.4% of the total number, according to the National Survey on International Migration. This survey puts the total number of female immigrants at 7351, between 2020 and 2021, which is likely an underestimate of the total numbers. Dr. Syrine Trabelsi, a young Obstetrics and Gynecology resident at the University Hospital Mogi Slim in La Marsa, a region where the concentration of sub-Saharan migrants is high, believes that she has been seeing an increasing number of sub-Saharan women in the last two years.

At the Ariana Maternal and Infant Protection Center, the medical staff see sub-Saharan women every day for different purposes: family planning, contraception, STDs, pregnancy tests, and interruption of pregnancy. Indeed, medication abortion is available for free in all these centres. Tunisia is the only Arab country where abortion for non-medical reasons has been legal for all women since 1973, medication abortion has been available since the early 2000s. On average, 20 sub-Saharan women are taken in by the Youth Space, within the Centre, for this pharmacological protocol every day. However, this number has fallen after the last controversial statement of the President as they are afraid of arrest, deportation or even attacks.

Contrary to the negative stereotypes that many Tunisians have about immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa, Dr. Trabelsi describes patients from sub-Saharan Africa as respectful and knowledgeable about their healthcare needs.

For example, women from sub-Saharan Africa are more likely to develop uterine myomas than women from other populations. Dr. Trabelsi has found that most of the women she treats for this condition have a good understanding of their medical history and about care requirements for uterine myomas. Additionally, many of these women are proactive and knowledgeable about their reproductive health. For example, less than 2% of women who use contraception in sub-Saharan Africa use intrauterine devices (IUDs). However, Dr. Trabelsi noted that many of her patients from sub-Saharan Africa use the devices and come to her clinic to have them removed or for other purposes.

At public hospitals, sub-Saharan women are also taken in for pregnancy monitoring and childbirth. As any female citizen, they come into labour and are directly seen by midwives and doctors. They are treated with the same care as a Tunisian citizen would receive. Some of them, however, come with complications due to non-monitored pregnancies, which begs the question of whether or not they are able to access reproductive health structures.

Challenges: information, distance, money and fear

Luna, an undocumented Malian young woman, was sitting next to the Raoued community clinic, waiting in line. At first, she was reluctant to talk. Then, she expanded on the difficulty of going to the Ariana protection centre to access care or to take contraceptives. She ended up relying on non-medical methods for contraception and 'hoping the worst does not happen'. For Luna, distance is the first challenge to easy access to reproductive health as state facilities are centralised and usually far away from neighbourhoods where she and other sub-Saharan immigrants live.

The second challenge, according to Dr. Trabelsi, is the lack of information. Most sub-Saharan women do not know how the Tunisian medical system works, legally or financially. They do not know that if they are not covered by state or private insurance, they must pay full fees. Some patients have even run away from healthcare facilities when confronted with the healthcare bill.



Courtesy: [Pexels](#).

The “lucky” ones are paradoxically the very few sub-Saharanans who were granted refugee status, in the absence thereof an immigrant cannot get reimbursement or coverage. In Tunisia, the UNHCR is in charge of the process of helping refugees to access healthcare. Dr. Trabelsi recalls the story of a refugee who could benefit from medical coverage for her breast cancer after a long process involving the patient, UNHCR and the hospital staff. She is, fortunately, undergoing chemotherapy after a delayed diagnosis because of the rare form of cancer and the slow response to her condition.

In addition to these issues, Dr. Trabelsi stated that the most challenging issue for sub-Saharan women is building rapport. Many sub-Saharan Africans have been poorly treated in the past by healthcare systems and other authority structures in Tunisia. This makes them reluctant to turn to health structures for help because they are afraid of rejection and/ or discrimination. When they receive adequate medical care, they seem puzzled and grateful at the hospital staff’s “nice” and professional treatment. ‘It seems that they do not receive such “normal” treatment elsewhere’, said Dr. Trabelsi. To mend the gap, she and her co-workers ‘have to listen to them, and get rid of prejudice’.



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