



Diasporas Driving Impact: Advancing Health, Climate, and Empowerment

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Editors in Chief: Margaret Koudelkova (Routed Magazine), Larisa Lara Guerrero (IOM) and Annie Yunxian Jiang (IOM).

Publishers: Routed Magazine and iDiaspora

Websites: routedmagazine.com and idiaspora.org

Suggested citation: Routed Magazine and iDiaspora (2025) *Diasporas Driving Impact: Advancing Health, Climate, and Empowerment*.

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Acknowledgements

This publication was made possible thanks to the partnership between Routed Magazine and the iDiaspora platform. The editors in chief Larisa Lara Guerrero and Annie Yunxian Jiang at the IOM Headquarters in Geneva, and Margaret Koudelkova from Routed Magazine would like to thank all the authors who participated in this publication through a competitive call for papers launched in May 2025. The editors are particularly grateful to the authors who contributed to this number through their diverse backgrounds and experiences.

We wish to particularly thank the following people for their contributions as editors and coordinators to the publication: Shaddin Almasri, Fiona Buchanan, Lena Hartz, Chrysi Kyratsou, Woopi Takarasima, Sarah Etter, Charles Mbatsogo, Idil Asan, Ritwika Patgiri, Lilian Ebere Anazube, Isaac Burdett Brewer.

Foreword

Diasporas are powerful and agile partners driving transformative change. With their transnational expertise and extensive networks, they act as dynamic catalysts for economic growth, social progress, and resilience in humanitarian, peace, and development efforts.

This special issue celebrates how diasporas lead innovative and inclusive solutions in three vital areas: health and wellbeing, climate action, and the empowerment of women and youth. Across twelve stories, readers will encounter inspiring examples of how diasporas are translating knowledge into practice and solidarity into measurable impact.

From Somali health professionals restoring dignity to conflict survivors, to Filipino nurses strengthening care systems in the Nordic countries and Tunisian entrepreneurs expanding opportunities for women and youth, each narrative highlights how diasporas contribute to stronger, more resilient societies. In Colombia, climate innovators link renewable energy with gender equality, while Afghan, Egyptian, and Bangladeshi communities use film, research, and advocacy to promote hope, education, and inclusion. Across regions and disciplines, diaspora voices stand at the centre of transformation, demonstrating that belonging and leadership transcend borders.

This publication directly aligns with the vision of the Global Diaspora Policy Alliance (GDPA), established following the Dublin Declaration and officially launched at the International Conference on the Future Agenda of Action for Global Diaspora Engagement in Cabo Verde in 2024. The GDPA provides a shared platform where governments, international organisations, academia, private sector, and diaspora communities work together to advance engagement in three interconnected areas: health and wellbeing, gender and youth empowerment, and climate action and environment. It places diaspora voices at the centre of policy dialogue, ensuring that decisions are guided by the lived experience and expertise of transnational communities.

These stories are not just accounts of achievement but collective pathways toward stronger cooperation. They show how diasporas bring the principles of the Global Compact for Migration, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Global Diaspora Summit to life. They remind us that global commitments gain meaning only when they reflect the realities, creativity, and leadership of those who live between worlds.

As the GDPA continues to evolve, this special issue contributes to its growing body of shared knowledge, giving visibility to best practices and fostering collaboration across sectors and borders. By placing diaspora voices at the centre, we reaffirm that sustainable development and peace are built through inclusion, trust, and the power of human connection.

The Central American diaspora: Contributions to higher education, climate action, and social inclusion

1

Ana Huembes

Structural inequities, legal exclusion, and limited public awareness continue to obstruct access to higher education for many Central American youth and women. As members of the Central American diaspora, we created space for synergy within the Erasmus Mundus Association (EMA). By engaging in outreach, public engagement, and capacity-building, our goal is to widen access to higher education for excluded and low-income communities, including displaced, migrant, and exiled ones. Through our partnerships as EMA Central America, we have identified some of the barriers that these communities face and initiated a coordinated response. Our mission extends beyond improving scholarship success rates, focusing instead on increasing visibility of higher education opportunities and building readiness for academic mobility through sustained, contextually relevant support.

The Erasmus Mundus Association in Central America delivers application workshops – personalised mentoring at national and regional levels – publishes accessible guidance materials, and develops strategic partnerships with grassroots organisations, regional bodies, and global networks. These interventions have expanded stakeholder engagement and made previously inaccessible information available to our target communities across Central America.

As a network of country representatives and volunteer students and alumni, we collaborate across six Central American countries where Erasmus Mundus previously had limited visibility; we have established robust outreach infrastructure in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala. With the support of our country partners and the respective European Union delegations and higher education institutions in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama, we coordinated over thirty initiatives in 2024 alone. Our partnerships extend to supporting displaced, exiled, and asylum-seeking individuals in Central America aspiring to pursue higher education through outreach and public engagement. With these efforts, we hope to address a critical policy gap in academic recognition and qualification frameworks for these individuals. Fernando Castellanos from EMA El Salvador and I (EMA Nicaragua) have contributed to other initiatives that reimagine education systems from the margins outward at global spaces such as the Erasmus Mundus Association General Assembly in Türkiye (2024), and Paris, France (2025).



Ana Huembes, Fernando Castellanos, and EMA members at the 2025 General Assembly in Paris, promoting inclusive education and international mobility. Photo courtesy of Maria Reyes, EMA Programme Representative - EMMBIOME

Drawing on my Master's in adult education, which I completed in Scotland, I am currently developing a regional framework inspired by [the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework](#). This project aims to facilitate access to higher education and employment opportunities for individuals of mixed migration status in Central America (e.g. displaced, asylum-seeking, and refugee individuals). While the framework was designed for individuals in Scotland, its success in standardising qualifications can be a useful tool for a regional framework in our region. This project can be adapted to support these mixed migrants in getting their prior learning and qualifications recognised, even when they cannot access their records in their home country, making them eligible for study and scholarship opportunities.

Christopher Afú, country representative of EMA Costa Rica, and I represented the Erasmus Mundus Association at this year's Regional Erasmus+ Cluster Meeting and Contact-Making Seminar for Latin America and the Caribbean in Bogota, Colombia. [This event](#) was a key opportunity to advocate for this regional qualification framework project as part of our Central American diaspora efforts in creating a more inclusive and sustainable future through education. Although our work complements that of governments, universities, and embassies, it is often led by the diaspora and is regionally pioneering. We provide in-depth knowledge of scholarship programme structures, eligibility, and pedagogical aims. We recruit mentors from similar backgrounds to the mentees for [our national](#) and [regional](#) mentoring programmes. Mentors are current students or recent graduates who were once part of widening participation efforts themselves, thereby creating relatable role models and building trust among participants. Our Central American diaspora consists of experts in education, science, technology, engineering, and innovation. This expertise has informed resources, outreach strategies, and mentoring models, which are shared globally within the Erasmus Mundus Association through our monthly meetings.

Our targeted outreach includes underrepresented groups such as [women in STEM](#), rural youth, low-income students, and individuals with disabilities, addressing the stigma surrounding both visible and invisible impairments in Central America. We encourage aspirants to apply for scholarships that offer additional financial support, challenging entrenched biases that undervalue their potential. For example, for the 2025 national mentoring programme in Panama, one in every three applicants was a woman; of the 56 total applicants, 43 were women. In fact, most of our followers across social media channels are women. Carlota, a young woman from El Salvador, is an active follower of our social media channels and newsletter. Through her messages, she has highlighted key challenges faced by her peers (e.g. fear of rejection and the intimidation and financial barrier of English proficiency tests). Carlota is currently participating in our regional mentoring programme, and her feedback powerfully affirms our commitment to widening participation in higher education. She recently thanked us for our guidance, stating that our support has allowed her to assess and navigate highly competitive higher education scholarship options with more confidence.

Like Carlota, we have many followers that reach out to us to either seek guidance or thank us for the support we give them. This kind of feedback consistently affirms the impact of our context-aware approach. It helps us adapt our mentoring programmes, prioritising transferable skills, self-advocacy, and motivation.

We intentionally create accessible spaces for dialogue with potential applicants to the Erasmus Mundus scholarship programme. We have established drop-in sessions, a newsletter ('Rumbo a tu beca #ErasmusMundus'), and in-person engagements in collaboration with EU delegations, universities, and regional platforms (e.g. Furiaca, Impact Hub, Global Shapers). By working in partnership with these organisations, in alignment with local needs, we ensure the sustainability of our initiatives. Bridging the digital divide through online communities and resource-sharing is a priority to create access for diverse audiences. For instance, Erasmus Mundus Panama secured a grant from the Erasmus+ Students and Alumni Alliance to subsidise internet access for mentees, enabling participation from remote areas and reinforcing the role of digital connectivity in educational equity.

Our fellow diaspora members actively contribute to global efforts in climate action. Andrea Herrera, a marine scientist, is one of the country representatives of EMA El Salvador and the Capacity Development Coordinator for the Early Career Ocean Professionals Programme in the Central American node. Andrea mobilises regional and global networks to advance marine conservation, responsible fisheries, and ocean literacy, particularly among women and underrepresented youth in STEM. As a panellist at the 2025 UN Ocean Conference, she stressed the need for culturally tailored communication and inclusive capacity-building, demonstrating how Erasmus Mundus alums contribute to climate resilience through cross-disciplinary collaboration. She co-designed the first attempt of a photo-identification methodology for blue sharks in the mid-Atlantic.

As a former classroom teacher, I am also committed to global efforts in climate action through STEAM communication and public engagement. I leverage transnational networks, linking scientists, policymakers, and civil society actors in Europe and Central America to enable cross-border knowledge and best practices exchange to coordinate initiatives responding to the interconnected challenges of environmental change and migration through education. I recently participated in the Languages-in-(Higher)-Education for Sustainable Development Symposium, where we discussed the role of higher education in sustainable development. I also engage with scientists and educators in forums and informal learning spaces for the promotion of STEAM education and inclusive pedagogical practices.

In the context of public health, Yaneris Velásquez, Country Representative for Panama and student of the Master in Membrane Engineering for Sustainable Development, focuses on sustainability challenges in food, bio, and health. She has represented Panama in international forums such as the “Food Safety for Tomorrow” event, where she models the role of women from low-income countries who have overcome systemic barriers. Her membership in the Latin American Association of Chemical Engineering and Related Students reflects her commitment to research dissemination, scientific exchange, and long-term transformation in her field.

Our approach aims to foster brain circulation rather than brain drain, with alumni contributing to their home countries through public engagement beyond the Erasmus Mundus Association as it is the case of workshops, guest lectures, collaborative research, and policy advocacy. Mentors with shared lived experience offer aspirants from marginalised backgrounds a sense of belonging and guidance in navigating higher education systems. This combination of cultural proximity, technical expertise, and strategic vision positions the Central American Erasmus Mundus diaspora as a key driver of regional transformation.



Ana is a leading Central American inclusive educator and human rights advocate with 13 years of experience creating equitable learning ecosystems. Her work focuses on bridging policy and practice to expand higher education access for marginalised communities, including migrants, refugees, and displaced individuals. Serving as Nicaragua's Country Representative for the Erasmus Mundus Association (2023 - 2025), she uses international partnerships and diaspora networks to build rights-affirming, context-responsive education systems that directly advance the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4. She was appointed as the 2025 EMA Ambassador of the Year and is also a HundrED Ambassador. Connect with her on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#).

Diaspora women driving youth leadership: The Sisters Keepers story

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Anita Nma

Diaspora communities have long bridged worlds: connecting lived experience, global networks, and deep cultural understanding to create lasting social change. Sisters Keepers is one such force, harnessing the power of African and Diaspora women to equip Black girls aged 12–18 with the skills, confidence, and opportunities to lead.

Founded in 2022 by 26 women from across Africa and the Diaspora, Sisters Keepers emerged from the Moremi Initiative for Women's Leadership in Africa. The organisation was born from a shared recognition of the intersecting barriers young Black girls face: gender discrimination, limited educational access, minimal leadership pathways, and economic hardship — often compounded in rural and under-resourced communities.

Youth empowerment across borders

At the heart of Sisters Keepers is B-GiLD (Black Girls in Leadership Development), a hybrid leadership accelerator that blends six weeks of online training with an immersive Summer Institute in Ghana. Participants gain practical skills in leadership, advocacy, communication, financial literacy, and project management.

Each girl is paired with a high-achieving Black woman mentor from the Diaspora — leaders in law, technology, healthcare, education, and entrepreneurship — who offers guidance, inspiration, and access to networks. This transnational exchange fosters both personal capacity and a sense of belonging to a global sisterhood.



Impact in action

The B-GiLD programme has demonstrated transformative impact across multiple communities, with participants tackling pressing local challenges while achieving academic excellence. In Ghana's Shama District, participants have created measurable change: one 14-year-old mobilised over 200 community members for environmental action, converting plastic waste into 15 community dustbins while inspiring lasting behavioural change around sanitation practices. A 12-year-old leader challenged cultural norms by engaging 30 families in conversations about girls' education, preventing 4 girls from dropping out and securing commitments from 15 parents to support their daughters through senior high school. Another participant addressed menstrual health barriers by training 25 peers in sustainable sanitary pad production, significantly reducing school absenteeism.

These leadership initiatives have produced exceptional academic outcomes alongside community impact. Participants achieved an average 2-point improvement in Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) aggregate scores, with three elected to prefectural leadership positions: representing a 300% increase in girls' student government representation. Their projects have directly benefited over 500 community members while establishing peer initiatives that now engage youths in ongoing sustainability initiatives.

Building on this success, B-GiLD expanded significantly in 2025, launching programmes across Jamaica, Burundi, Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana. Over 130 girls enrolled in the comprehensive leadership training programme, participating in confidence-building workshops, advocacy skill development, and project management training. This expansion demonstrates the programme's scalability and relevance across diverse African and Caribbean contexts, with participants from urban centres to rural communities gaining practical leadership tools.



The programme's multiplier effect continues to grow as these young leaders create pathways for others to follow. Many participants come from families where no woman had previously completed secondary education, yet they're breaking generational cycles and establishing new possibilities for their communities. Their sustained impact – from environmental stewardship to educational advocacy, proves that investing in young Black female leaders creates lasting transformation that extends far beyond individual programme participation.

Advancing health and wellbeing: The BLOOM model

Beyond leadership skills, Sisters Keepers recognises that empowerment must address mental health. BLOOM, currently being developed in partnership with [Mentoring.org](https://mentoring.org) and a mental health organisation in Ghana, integrates trauma-informed mental health literacy into leadership training. It equips girls with resilience strategies, enabling them to thrive academically, socially, and professionally – despite systemic and personal challenges.

Promoting inclusion and addressing inequality

B-GiLD actively bridges the gap between rural communities and global resources. Many participants come from contexts where girls are less likely to finish secondary education. Sisters Keepers removes barriers through scholarships, technology access, and mentorship, ensuring that leadership opportunities reach those most excluded.

Graduates have launched community projects addressing water pollution, waste management, reproductive health education, and school retention for girls. These are not externally imposed initiatives – they are grassroots solutions born from the participants' own lived experiences.

Impact on development and peacebuilding

While Sisters Keepers' mission is centred on empowerment, its ripple effects contribute to broader [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), including Quality Education, Gender Equality, and Decent Work & Economic Growth. Youth-led service projects strengthen civic responsibility, promote social cohesion, and address urgent needs in education, sanitation, and gender-based violence prevention.

The cross-border nature of the organisation also positions it as a bridge between the diaspora and home countries, building cultural ties and fostering collective responsibility for social change.



© B-GiLD (Black Girls in Leadership Development)

Leveraging the next generation of the diaspora

Second- and third-generation diaspora members bring unique strengths – bicultural fluency, global education, and digital innovation – that enrich programme design and delivery. Engaging them as mentors, trainers, and advocates ensures Sisters Keepers remains globally connected while grounded in local realities.

Sisters Keepers proves that when diaspora women unite to empower the next generation, the impact is transformative: reshaping systems, strengthening communities, and creating an enduring legacy of intergenerational leadership.



Anita is the Programs and Partnerships Director at Sisters Keepers, where she leads initiatives that empower Black girls aged 12–18 through mentorship, leadership development, and global collaboration. With a background in communications and change management, Anita specialises in building strategic partnerships and designing programmes that bridge the gap between local communities and the Diaspora. At Sisters Keepers, she drives the B-GiLD (Black Girls in Leadership Development) programme and the BLOOM mental health initiative, ensuring that young Black girls gain not only leadership skills but also the confidence and resilience to thrive. Passionate about equity, education, and youth empowerment, Anita works to amplify girls' voices and connect them with networks and opportunities that create lasting impact.

Growing roots in a changing climate

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Amira AwadAllah

Climate change through my eyes

I grew up in a small rural community where life always felt connected to the seasons. The rain — or the lack of it — shaped our days. When the fields were green, people were smiling. When the soil cracked under the heat, the mood of the whole place shifted. For us, weather was not just background noise. It was the centre of our lives.

That childhood made me see climate change differently. For me, it is not just something on the news or a graph in a report. It is memories of my neighbours worrying about their crops. It is the conversations I overheard about whether the harvest would be enough. It is the small fear in people's eyes when the rain did not come. Climate change, for me, has always been personal.

From rural roots to global action

When I moved to the city for my studies, I realised that what I saw growing up was part of a bigger story. All around the world, rural communities are living with the same reality. Farmers lose their crops to droughts or floods, and families migrate because the land cannot support them anymore.

It made me think: if climate change is already here for so many of us, why are we still talking about it as something far away?

My rural roots gave me a sense of responsibility. They pushed me into climate action, and today I work with GreenCheck, an initiative focused on climate justice. Through that I learnt that the climate fight is not only about cutting emissions. It is about fairness. It is about making sure the people who did the least to cause this crisis are not the ones paying the highest price.



'Where my story began — my little brother smiling by the water, surrounded by the life we hope to protect.' (photo courtesy of the author)

Bridging two worlds

I also started to see myself as part of a diaspora. I carry the memory of my rural upbringing, but now I sit in classrooms and meetings in the city, sometimes even speaking to people from across the world. That makes me a kind of bridge. I tell the stories of where I come from in spaces that often forget about them. When people see numbers, I see faces. When I read about statistics, I remember the people behind them.

One of my roles at [GreenCheck](#) has been helping to collect local climate stories from youth in different regions. Many of these stories sound like mine — shaped by small farms, shifting weather patterns and the constant balancing act between hope and fear. Listening to them reminded me that while climate data is vital, human voices are just as powerful.

Learning from my community

But this is not only a sad story. My community also taught me hope. People supported each other when times were hard. If one family had more, they shared. We learnt to be careful with what we had: no drop of water wasted, no resource taken for granted.

These lessons stay with me. They are values the world badly needs now. In fact, they are closely linked to what experts call [sustainable living](#): using resources wisely so that future generations can also meet their needs.

Connecting knowledge and innovation

These roots also inspire me to think of solutions. I work on projects like Green Loop, an initiative that brings together sustainability, waste management, and creating job opportunities for uneducated women.

Through Green Loop, I try to connect traditional knowledge — the resourcefulness I grew up with — with modern tools and innovations. For example, we explore ways to transform local waste materials into useful products, while training and employing women from vulnerable communities. I believe young people from rural and diaspora backgrounds can help bring these two worlds together.



*Carrying hope and responsibility*

Still, there are moments when I think about the future with a heavy heart. Will my village look the same in 20 years? Will children still play under the trees I remember, or will the landscape change beyond recognition?

These questions make climate action deeply personal for me. It is not just about data or theories. It is about love for a place and the wish that it can still be home for generations to come.

For diasporas, climate is more than policy. It is about memory and belonging. We carry the landscapes of our childhoods inside us. And when those landscapes change, something inside us changes, too. That is why I believe diaspora youth have an important role. We can connect the local to the global, making sure the human side of the climate crisis is never forgotten.

My story began in a rural Egyptian village, but it is also connected to millions of other stories around the world. Together they show resilience, creativity, and solidarity. These are the qualities we need if we want to face the climate crisis with hope instead of despair.

Author

Amira is a third-year student at the French University in Egypt, majoring in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Data Science. She is passionate about sustainability and building a greener future, and she aims to connect technology with real-world projects that tackle climate challenges. Amira hopes to use her skills to guide technological innovation towards climate action and sustainable development, creating solutions that protect both people and the planet. She is currently an intern with [GreenCheck](#) and is developing Green Loop, an initiative that combines sustainability, waste management, and creating job opportunities for uneducated women.



Dismantling climate coloniality: Reflections from a Bangladeshi diaspora researcher in the United States

Azmal Hossan

“কী এই ভারীতা, যে আমি অনুভব করি, যেটা আমাদের ভারাক্রান্ত করে, যেখানে অনেক শব্দ ছুটে আসে কিন্তু আমি স্পষ্টতার সাথে প্রকাশ করতে পারি না? [What is this heaviness I feel that weighs us down, where many words rush in that I can't quite articulate into sentences with any clarity]..... মনে হয় সারাক্ষণ প্রতিরোধ করি আমরা, লড়াই করে যাচ্ছি কত কাল [It feels like we are constantly resisting, having to battle for so long].....আমরা কি দুঃখ, স্নিগ্ধতা, দুর্বলতা, ক্লান্তি, আতঙ্ক প্রকাশ করতে পারি যাতে করুণা, পরিত্যাগ, ভয়, অবহেলা, বিচ্ছিন্নতা পাশ কাটা যায়? [Can we be sad, soft, weak, weary, and terrified, without being pitied, discarded, feared, ignored, sidelined, alienated]আমি চেষ্টা চালিয়ে যাবো, শিখতে থাকবো, আর কাজ করবো; কোন শেষ নেই, এটি একটি অবিরাম কাজ [I will continue to put effort into this, learn more, I must do better. There is no conclusion; this is endless work].....লড়াই চলবে [The struggle continues].”

([Farhana Sultana, The unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality](#))

[Farhana Sultana](#), a professor of Geography and the Environment at Syracuse University and an internationally recognised, award-winning interdisciplinary scholar, reflects on her own lived experiences in developing the theory of [climate coloniality](#), a critical framework for understanding the contemporary climate crisis. Sultana is a middle-class, educated woman with Indigenous roots in the marshes of the Bengal Delta, a postcolonial territory known as the [epicentre of climate change](#), [climate heterodystopia](#), [climate dystopia](#), and [adaptation regime](#). It is also the place of [climate reductive translation](#), and [metacode of climate change](#), and where [critical analysis and knowledge production](#) are reserved for Western Scholars.



The author (fifth from the right) is with the leadership team and staff of the Great Plains Tribal Water Alliance, and Tribal elders and leaders in the Northern Great Plains. Photo courtesy of <https://www.tribalwateralliance.org/>

Sultana is academically trained and settled in the United States, one of the major contributors to the global climate crisis and a poster child of settler colonialism. In developing the theory, she intertwines theory, empirics, emotions, and storytelling, and navigates her emotional atmosphere of rage, resolve, frustration, and desire. Methodologically, she relies on an autoethnography that she created based on her situated knowledge and standpoint. Drawing on her critical climate justice praxis, Sultana argued that the burdens of climate change are unequally and unevenly distributed across different places and among different groups where those [i.e. poor developing countries in the Global South, Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) communities in the Global North] contributing the least to climate change suffer the most. It is therefore urgent to establish scalar and contextual climate justice. This is because “context matters in understanding coloniality”. For Sultana, one of the central ways to confront climate coloniality is to decolonise it, both epistemologically and materially. This is because decolonisation is not a metaphor, as climate colonialism is more than a metaphor.

Sultana’s theory of climate coloniality deeply resonates with me. Despite distinctive gender and generational identity, I share the same situated knowledge and standpoint with her. I am also from the Bengal Delta and academically trained and settled in the United States. I argue that Sultana’s theoretical and methodological approach is important because climate, like a physical idea, can be an imaginative idea – an idea constructed and endowed with meaning and value through cultural practice – which is always situated in a time and a place. Memory, behaviour, text, and identity, along with meteorology, can be used to read the registers of climate. According to Sultana, although scholars in recent times have become interested in the connection between colonialism and climate change, the issue is yet to be theorised, discussed, and confronted. I designed my Ph.D. dissertation project on decolonising Indigenous climate change adaptation in the settler colonial context to address this knowledge gap.

The project is also inspired by the two most authentic scientific reports on climate change. For the first time, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its Sixth Assessment Report, acknowledges that colonialism exacerbated Indigenous climate change vulnerability. This understanding also resonated in the Fifth National Climate Assessment Report published by the United States Global Change Research Program (USGCRP). The report argued that Indigenous peoples’ well-being, including their livelihoods, health, nutrition, and cultural practices, as well as the ecological resilience of their territories, are negatively affected by climate change. The U.S. Northern Great Plains region has been the home of many Indigenous Nations for time immemorial.

The area is experiencing unprecedented climate change-induced extreme events, including severe droughts, increased hail frequency and size, floods, and wildfires. Given their close relationship with the natural world, rooted in their deep spiritual and cultural connections and traditional lifeways, Indigenous Nations are the hardest hit by and least adaptable to climate change. The right to self-determination can help Indigenous Nations respond to climate change in ways that meet the needs and aspirations of their communities.

For my Ph.D. dissertation, I am conducting community-engaged participatory action research on how the revitalisation of Indigenous self-determination capacity, rooted in the practice of traditional ecological knowledge, can help them adapt to the changing climate. Partnering with the Great Plains Tribal Water Alliance (GPTWA), a South Dakota-based Indigenous grassroots organisation working for Indigenous climate change resilience through treaty-mandated water sovereignty in the Missouri River Basin, I am using a decolonising approach. Over the past two and a half years, I have established this partnership and trust relationship through my student internship with GPTWA. During this period, I have contributed to various actionable Indigenous climate change resilience projects, such as assessing Indigenous climate change adaptation water needs, developing drought adaptation plans, and drafting grant proposals.

Although I am neither an Indigenous member nor a United States citizen yet, my lived experiences as a formerly colonised individual are commensurable with the lived experiences of the Indigenous communities in the United States. I understand that decolonisation of Indigenous climate change adaptation in the (settler) colonial context cannot be achieved overnight, rather, it is a continuous process. This is because (settler) colonialism is not an event; it is an ongoing process and structure generating multilayered and multigenerational trauma among the Indigenous Peoples. In doing so, we need to unlearn and relearn this trauma intensified by climate coloniality. This is more crucial for a diaspora early-career researcher like me.



Azmal is a Bangladeshi Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at Colorado State University. Azmal's research interests are Indigenous climate change adaptation, food-energy-water nexus, environmental justice, decolonisation, and science communication. His research is supported by Interdisciplinary Training, Education, and Research in Food-Energy-Water Systems at Colorado State University. He can be reached at azmal.hossan@colostate.edu.

Healing in exile: Diaspora, dignity, and the unspoken cost of being seen

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DEL De Silva

In predominantly white institutions (PWIs) that pride themselves on equity, women of colour from collectivist cultures often endure a quieter violence – one of emotional erasure masked as professionalism. Behl's (2016) self-critical autoethnography challenges mainstream positivist discussions on gender equality through personal experience as a woman of colour in Western academia.

In this narrative, I recognise the relatability of my subjective reality to Behl's (2016) reflections. I contend that diasporic identity, gender, and cultural background shape one's experiences of vulnerability and resilience within PWIs. This article offers a critical autoethnographic reflection on how diasporic identity, gender, and cultural background shaped my experience of emotional vulnerability, cultural displacement, and professional ambiguity within a Western academic institution.

Recently, I relocated to a world-recognised Western university to complete my higher studies. My professional identity, as a senior leader in an international organisation with transferable skills I cultivated and mastered over the years, provided me with what I thought would be a stable foundation as I navigated the transition and sought to establish networks in the new setting.

During my early days of transition, professional isolation felt like a second skin. The informal networks, cultural references, and unspoken codes of Western academia remained largely inaccessible, even with a supportive supervisory team. When a senior colleague, with whom I did not have direct interaction, extended what appeared to be a genuine interest in my work and background, the relief overwhelmed me.



The tunnel speaks to the struggle of moving through silence and imbalance, toward a horizon of dignity and collective presence. It reminds us that resilience becomes possible when isolation is transformed into shared visibility. Photo courtesy of the author, 2023

In an otherwise isolating environment where I often felt rendered invisible or tokenised as an “exotic other”, being seen as a “whole person” by a senior colleague’s apparent appreciation for my academic performance and professional integrity created a space for mutual respect, understanding and genuine friendship.

As it slowly became clear that I had been drawn into a subtle, subconscious pattern of emotional manipulation, I resorted to a familiar coping mechanism inherited from my cultural upbringing: silence. In collectivist traditions, maintaining harmony often requires absorbing conflict rather than confronting it directly, as in individualist societies.

The silence I adopted was not passive but strategic: a form of emotional self-preservation that women of colour often deploy when the institutional power favours hierarchy. The power and hierarchy held by white scholars in PWIs presented an environment where I could not turn to seek counsel, speak my truth, and find ways to manage and navigate through the emotional tapestry, while having to balance my academic progress, mental health, professional relations, and fear of facing the uncertainty of retaliation or long-term professional repercussions.

Grounded in my epistemological position in understanding my lived experience, I critique how my cultural background shaped my response to the situation and how I withstood the existing structural power asymmetries and isolation, using several theoretical concepts central to understanding diasporic academic life. For instance, [Hochschild \(2003\)](#), argues women often renounce their own emotional well-being to focus on and attend to those who are around them. She critiques how women in hierarchical Western institutions are expected to manage not only their own emotional responses, but also the comfort and cultural education of colleagues who benefit from their presence while remaining unaccountable for the impact of their actions.

Applying [Hochschild’s \(2003\)](#), concept of emotional labour reveals how I performed unacknowledged emotional work: maintaining professional communications while constantly navigating cultural differences, all while the colleague maintained emotional ambiguity – never fully present, never fully absent – keeping the connection ambiguously open, sowing confusion. The emotional labour I invested in this connection was not merely exhausting – it directly impacted my mental and psychosocial well-being. Furthermore, much like [Behl \(2016\)](#), I found that my emotional truth was inconvenient in a setting that prioritised performance over presence. As [Ahmed \(2012\)](#),

posits, the 'stranger' in academic institutions often performs additional labour to belong, a process that extracts significant psychological costs. My experience shows how cultural displacement can deepen vulnerability to relationships marked by unacknowledged power imbalances, where newcomer status and being othered leave the ground unguarded against exploitation. For instance, I found myself in a precarious situation where genuine sharing of personal struggles in balancing academic and personal life, coupled with isolation in a diasporic academic setting, was not met with the professional respect I had assumed it would invite. In that moment, I became the institutional stranger: welcome only so far as I performed gratitude, yet suspect the moment I voiced genuine questions.

I also reflect on my experience against [Bourdieu's \(1986\)](#) concept of cultural capital versus social capital. In the social capitalist setting of PWI, I encountered dissonance with my embedded cultural capital, where my professional credentials and international experience were simultaneously valued and undermined. The power imbalance, initially obscured by apparent collegiality, became undeniable. The qualities that made me value this connection – my openness, willingness to contribute to wider academic discourse with my professional experience, and the gratitude for being included – were weaponised against my emotional clarity and professional well-being.

I sustain that women of colour, particularly those from collectivist traditions, often bear unspoken costs when navigating PWIs that fail to recognise their emotional complexity. However, diasporic identity can also serve as a site of empowerment through storytelling, boundary setting, and resilience building. My narrative demonstrates how storytelling is not merely therapeutic but politically necessary, contributing to broader conversations on gender, race, inclusion and institutional responsibility.

Through my subjective reality, I aim to advocate for other women of colour who may feel unseen or emotionally exposed in similar contexts. The PWIs must establish support systems specifically designed for international scholars, for example, structured peer-mentoring programmes that pair incoming academics with culturally aware senior scholars, women-of-colour affinity groups that provide confidential space for sharing and strategising, and targeted induction sessions that address cultural communication norms and power dynamics. Institutions should also implement clear guidelines on ethical professional boundaries, recognising how altered interpretations of cultural tolerance and silence may lead to submission and unconsented emotional access, erasing voice, especially in women from diverse cultural backgrounds in Western academia.

As diasporic women scholars, our healing begins when we transform our exile from a space of isolation into one of collective resistance and dignified visibility. I have seen this take shape in transnational feminist alliances, collaborative storytelling projects such as [#CiteBlackWomen](#) and [FirstGen Scholars](#), where women of colour jointly resist exploitative subversion by raising their concerns as a group. These moves, whether formal or grassroots, create a shared shield against erasure, enabling us to reclaim not only our voices but also our right to define the terms of our academic belonging on our cultural terms. This is a value that a true egalitarian academic society must advocate for – not just in principle, but in lived practice.

Author

The author DEL De Silva is a development practitioner turned development academic researcher currently reading for her doctoral degree in Humanities and Social Sciences at an esteemed Western academic institution. Her professional, academic, and research interests are to explore how various facets of gender dimensions intersect development discourses in the context of adverse climate change impacts.

Sanctuary-making through the body: A community-based model for healing and resistance

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Fiore Bran-Aragón and Alejandra Cruz-Blanco

In times of displacement and exclusion, the body can become a site of struggle and liberation. This essay explores a trauma-informed and decolonial approach to yoga for BIPOC immigrants and refugees as an act of sanctuary-making. Rooted in our experiences as immigrant yoga teachers, we co-founded Kula Yoga ABQ in 2022 as a collective offering accessible yoga and meditation in the US Southwest.

We understand sanctuary-making as both a metaphor and a movement practice – one that honours the right to choose movement/migrating or stillness/staying and recognises the body as a sacred site for sovereignty. In this way, sanctuary-making becomes a radical act of reclaiming what dominant narratives seek to erase: an immigrant’s humanity and power. Through three interrelated practices – appropriating spaces, mindful body movement, and community-building – we strive to offer practices that centre BIPOC immigrants not as passive recipients of care, but as active co-creators and healers.



Photo by [Global Refuge](#), in partnership with Kula Yoga ABQ: one of our yoga sessions for refugee women

Our approach: Reclaiming the sacred

Today, dominant political and media narratives often reduce immigrants and refugees to criminalised, racialised, faceless others. We are framed as “homo sacer” ([Agamben, 1998](#)), a person who exists in a state of exception – stripped of rights, and expendable. We reframe this designation by reclaiming the word “sacer” – the sacred. Instead of viewing our bodies through the lens of exclusion and disposability, we reframe them as sovereign. We believe in our right to rest, move, and resist.

Informed by the practice of a trauma-sensitive and decolonial approach, we view yoga not as a commercialised fitness trend, but as an ancestral way of living for liberation today. We draw inspiration from the words of Akomolafe: ‘the times are urgent; let us slow down’. Through slowing down, we reconnect with the breath, our bodies, and with one another. In that stillness, we co-create sanctuary to heal from the trauma of forced migration.

Spaces as sanctuary

Creating sanctuary begins with challenging dominant ideas about where yoga should happen, and for whom. Many Western yoga studios are inaccessible to BIPOC and immigrant communities. They are often expensive, physically and culturally exclusive, and uphold ideals rooted in fatphobia and visual perfectionism. Some of our students told us they felt out of place, afraid they didn’t “look like” someone who practises yoga.

So, we moved with the community. Our offerings are held in community centres, parks, prisons, and online settings. We strip away mirrors and rigid instructions, and instead offer props, chairs, and variations. There is no pressure to perform or imitate. We also emphasise consent and safety: exits are marked and visible, water and gender-neutral bathrooms are prioritised, and tools like music and essential oils are used only with group agreement. Our classes often include trauma-informed teaching materials – cards, pillows, drawings – that the students can take with them to continue their practice at home.

This approach allows us to bring yoga to unexpected places and engage diverse students. Whether someone comes for physical wellness, emotional healing, or simply to be in community, they are welcomed with care and dignity. Their yoga is beautiful because it is theirs.

Bodies as sanctuary

Beyond the physical space, sanctuary-making is also about the practice itself. We invite students to engage with their bodies as wise teachers. Our language is invitational. Participants are reminded that they can adapt or skip any practice that doesn’t feel right. We encourage them to listen to their breath, their bodies, to their needs today – and to accept that those needs may evolve. Because of this focus on listening to the body, and due to trauma considerations, we do not offer physical assistance.

Since many of our students are English learners, we demonstrate physical cues and keep our instructions simple and visual. We often teach in multilingual formats, incorporating Spanish and Sanskrit to honour both the linguistic roots of yoga and the languages spoken by our communities. This creates a sense of cultural belonging, and curiosity about the cultures in the room.

Through this gentle, inclusive approach, we've seen participants surprise themselves. Many who initially doubted their ability to engage in yoga began to learn postures and breathing techniques they now practice at home, or simply familiarised themselves with a sensation of rest long gone. We do not teach one right way to do yoga. Instead, we invite people to explore what healing looks and feels like for them.

Sanctuary in community

Since 2022, we have offered classes to more than 120 people from over 20 countries. Our collective has collaborated with nonprofits, churches, schools, and advocates. Despite financial constraints, our work has been sustained by the generosity of allies and our communities.

In 2024, we conducted a survey with 15 refugee women participants in our programme to understand how yoga served as a complimentary practice for trauma recovery and mental health (Turner 2020, Flynn 2024). We learned that 80% strongly agreed that their energy level has improved because of yoga, 60% said their sense of wellbeing and sleep routine improved, and 80% agreed that they are happier after yoga. For some, the most relevant part of practice was coming together in community to play, rest, and spend time outdoors, breaking the isolation that characterises the refugee experience.

These experiences led us to understand that spaces like Kula are not a luxury, but a necessity. Our communities cannot thrive, and advocate for justice and rights while exhausted and disconnected. We must encourage our institutions, policymakers, and allies to promote initiatives that facilitate safety, trauma-informed care, and conditions for collective care and thriving. This is what we look to achieve at Kula with sanctuary-making through yoga: it is about reclaiming the sacred within us and with each other to build movements rooted in embodiment, consent, and care for liberation.

We share our story not as a conclusion, but as an invitation. May these words inspire you to create sanctuary in your own context – in a living room, a classroom, or a garden. Wherever you are, you can help co-create a sanctuary today.

Learn about us at <https://www.kulayogaabq.com/>

Author

Fiore Bran-Aragón

Fiore (she/ella), M.A, Registered Yoga Teacher, is an educator, advocate and trauma-informed yoga practitioner. She is the co-founder and co-director of Kula Yoga ABQ and works as an immigration advisor for international university students and scholars. Her research interest focuses on policies and practices for refugee integration, health and wellbeing in the USA southern border and Central America.

Alejandra Cruz Blanco

Alejandra (she/ella), Registered Yoga Teacher, is a cultural worker, mindfulness instructor, and trauma-informed yoga practitioner. Co-founder and co-director of Kula Yoga ABQ. She is interested in making yoga and mindfulness accessible for BIPOC, immigrants and refugees historically excluded from yoga and wellness spaces.

Driving local change from afar: How Tunisia's diaspora is empowering women and youth through enterprise

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Firas Oueslati and Sarah Baba

In Kairouan, a Tunisian region known for its rich cultural heritage yet often overlooked in national development plans, an olive oil brand is reshaping the future of rural entrepreneurship. At the centre of this transformation is Oléa Amiri, led by entrepreneur Sonia Amiri, who is not only reviving a long-standing oil mill in her hometown of Oueslatia, but also positioning Tunisian olive oil on the international stage. Nestled in the heart of Tunisia's interior, Oueslatia is part of the Regional Development Zones (RDZ), identified areas facing structural socio-economic challenges, including high unemployment, underinvestment, and youth migration. Despite these challenges, the region holds remarkable potential in agriculture and agro-processing, particularly in olive cultivation. The Oléa Amiri initiative exemplifies how diaspora-driven investments can harness this potential to stimulate local value chains and empower rural communities. For Sonia, launching an olive oil business in Oueslatia was not just about starting a company, it was about investing in her hometown's future and helping shape its economic trajectory. This revival has been made possible through the deep-rooted commitment of the Tunisian diaspora and the catalytic support of the Mobi-TRE project, which is demonstrating how transnational engagement can serve as a lever for inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Tunisia with funding from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAECI) through the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), the Mobi-TRE project Phase II 'Migration as a Resource: Mobilizing the Tunisian Diaspora and Stabilizing Disadvantaged Communities in Tunisia' is rooted in a powerful vision: to turn transnational links into local prosperity. Indeed, the project supports the creation and consolidation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) nationwide with a strong focus on RDZs characterised by high migration potential. Through diaspora engagement and innovative co-financing mechanisms, Mobi-TRE channels both financial and human capital from Tunisians abroad into viable,



Sonia Amiri with her Femmes Entrepreneures de Tunisie 2025 award, honoring her premium olive oil and entrepreneurial journey rooted in Oueslatia. All photos courtesy of Oléa Amiri, 2025

local businesses that respond to local needs, promote job creation, and foster social inclusion. In its current phase (2023–2026), the Project is supporting small businesses across 18 regions in Tunisia, and investing in regions like Oueslatia, it is not only stimulating entrepreneurship but also delivering on its vision to support regional development and strengthen the resilience of marginalised communities.

Sonia's business journey offers a striking illustration of this approach. With an initial €8,500 investment from a family member living in France, she began renovating the old mill that would become Oléa Amiri. This private diaspora contribution was then matched by IOM through a €17,000 in-kind grant for a high-quality olive oil extraction machine. The results have been truly transformational. Sonia now exports her premium olive oil to Germany, Italy, United Arab Emirates, and Côte d'Ivoire, turning a local initiative into a global enterprise, while reinforcing the economic prosperity of her community. With the support of Mobi-TRE, Sonia also received legal assistance through a specialised expert and accounting firm, along with one-on-one coaching and a comprehensive 12-month training programme that included business planning, marketing strategies, digital promotion, and product photography. These tools have helped Oléa Amiri grow into an award-winning brand and an emerging destination for olive oil tourism in the Kairouan region.



As the harvest season begins, Sonia Amiri gently reaches for ripe olives.

Reflecting on her experience, Sonia Amiri shared:

'With Mobi-TRE, I gained financing, visibility and personalised coaching that made a real difference. The support helped me accelerate my exports and secure new orders. I started from nothing, but thanks to the trust and co-financing of my relatives abroad and the guidance I received, I've built something strong. Patience led me, and hard work grounded me. As a woman entrepreneur in Tunisia, I know what it means to rise from zero. Today, I want to go even further: expand production and keep showing what's possible when local ambition meets the right support.'

Mobi-TRE's model places women and youth at the centre. Of the enterprises supported so far, 35 percent are women-led, resulting in the creation and maintenance of 227 formal jobs for women, including 144 for youth. In fact, Sonia's business alone employs six seasonal workers, five of them women between the ages of 30 and 45. These are not just jobs, they are pathways to economic participation, empowerment, and resilience in communities that have often been on the periphery of Tunisia's development. Her story is one of 30 success cases for the Mobi-TRE project, which is continuing to support 37 businesses from its first phase and is expected to create hundreds of additional jobs.



In Oueslatia, two women carefully gather olives.

From revitalising old mills in Kairouan to launching high-potential businesses in underserved regions, Mobi-TRE exemplifies how diaspora investment and local ambition can come together to generate enterprise growth, community revitalisation, and economic empowerment. As a scalable and inclusive development model, it shows how engaged diasporas can be powerful agents of systemic and sustainable change. It also reflects how remittances, when invested strategically, can evolve from household support into drivers of regional development and long-term economic transformation.

For women like Sonia Amiri and countless other youth and entrepreneurs, it also proves that home is not only where one starts; it's where futures can be rebuilt.

About the project

Since its launch in 2017, Mobi-TRE has become a transformative initiative harnessing the Tunisian diaspora to drive inclusive local economic development. Across two phases, it supported over 80 small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in 13 regions and sectors like agriculture, industry, services, and handicrafts. It mobilised over €600,000 in diaspora investment and created or sustained at least 500 jobs, emphasising youth and women's employment, while boosting entrepreneurship and regional innovation.

Through a co-financing grant mechanism, Mobi-TRE incentivises diaspora investment and provides a 12-month business development program offering tailored guidance in enterprise structuring, financial management, marketing, digitalisation, and export readiness. Entrepreneurs also access national and international fairs to build sustainable businesses.

More than a funding initiative, Mobi-TRE adopts a people-centered approach, positioning the diaspora as strategic development partners. It redefines migration as a valuable resource, aligning with Tunisia's priorities and global frameworks like Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Compact for Migration, translating transnational cooperation into tangible local impact.

You can read more about the project [here](#).



Firas has worked on a range of migration-focused initiatives, notably as a Project Assistant with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Tunisia on Mobi-TRE Phase II, a diaspora-oriented project. He has a background in International Relations as well as migration, cooperation, and development from the University of Tunis El-Manar and the University of Palermo. You can connect with him on [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).



Sarah is a Project Manager with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), specialising in diaspora engagement, strategic partnerships, and sustainable reintegration. With over a decade of experience across the Middle East and Africa, she has led complex programmes in conflict-affected and post-crisis contexts, working closely with governments, UN agencies, and civil society to advance inclusive development through migration. You can find her on [LinkedIn](#).



Dynamo projects: A transnational diaspora idea. Promoting climate action and gender empowerment through sustainable energy access in Colombia

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Héctor Peñaranda Carrillo

An embracing opportunity for sustainable local development offered by any just energy transition scenarios will inherently transform the labour system and the way human capacities are constructed and developed. Studies estimate that a decarbonised economy will create 22.5 million jobs, far outweighing the 7.5 million positions that would be lost. Regarding this, the diaspora, as a "bridge-builder", plays an outstanding role in the oncoming disruptive change for collective construction, which goes beyond a mere technological change, offering socio-political resilience strategies in times of dehumanisation, climate change and global chaos. This text describes briefly how my experience as a member of the Colombian diaspora in Germany has paved the path to develop a social intervention model to foster and accelerate an inclusive energy transition in rural and suburban areas of Colombia.

Grounded in a voluntary migration to Germany in 2011 and a Master's degree in Intercultural Conflict Management by 2014, my journey has driven a focus on global impact and human development. I've since specialised in renewable energies and international development cooperation, actively developing humanitarian aid and climate change projects and alliances across Europe and Colombia. My close support for unaccompanied refugee minors in Berlin starkly demonstrates the universal human cost of displacement, drawing powerful parallels with the compelling, often involuntary, migration stories stemming from Colombia's protracted armed conflict.

MEG: A gateway to diaspora collaboration

A catalyst in my active role as a diaspora member is the MEG: Development-Oriented Migration Policy (German acronym), an outstanding programme of the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), which through its various components strengthens the role of the diasporas in Germany and enhances their capacities for local sustainable development. Components materialised in programmes are designed to maximise the impact of bilateral migratory and development cooperation, promoting a broader participation of migrants and diaspora-led organisations.

In 2017-2018, I was a beneficiary of the Business Ideas for Development programme, part of the MEG-Entrepreneurship Component, from which emerged my transnational business idea: Dynamo Projects SAS. Within the Diaspora Experts component of MEG, I served in different cooperation missions in Colombia, as a technical advisor on Renewable Energies and Development. Moreover, within the Diaspora Organisations component, the MEG programme has funded Kunstrial e.V* to implement two of DynamoLAB intervention projects: DynamoLAB: Energy and Knowledge (2020-2021) and DynamoLAB: EcoNashira Women and Energy (2024-2025).



Nowadays my active role in the field of migration and development led to my appointment as a member of the Diaspora Advisory Board (DAB) (2024-2026) of the MEG programme for the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Dynamo projects: An initiative for peace and development

In 2018, Dynamo Projects rose as a social enterprise empowering my personal holistic vision of transitions, which involves: justice, diversity, autonomy, technology, and mobility. Dynamo established a business model in Colombia focused on developing solar and agrivoltaic projects, building capacities for the transition, developing circular rural electrification concepts and energy communities.

Dynamo's work is grounded under the principle of humanising energy and our mission encompasses a cross-cutting focus of action on gender and access. Currently, we have a solid team emerging from our interventions, a network of relevant partners and clients, and gained some recognition.

DynamoLAB: An intervention model for accelerating a just energy transition

DynamoLAB is conceived as a methodological product that aims to create women-led knowledge networks, enabling the implementation of local initiatives for sustainable development and energy transition. The model envisions mainly projects to build women-led teams of knowledge multipliers, to implement local energy solutions collaboratively and to raise awareness by means of evidence based- experiences among stakeholders.

DynamoLAB: Energy and Knowledge (Cundinamarca, 2020-2021): Benefiting the Arpayove rural aqueduct and surrounding communities, we trained a group of 10 multipliers. We built a solar laboratory (4 Kwp) and installed photovoltaic solutions for a community centre (2 kwp) and a rural school (2 kwp). We multiplied knowledge among stakeholders, reaching over 200 people, and built a women-led solar installation team.



Photographs related to the Dynamo LAB project in Cundinamarca, Colombia. These collaborative spaces are used for training and capacity building for different stakeholders during the knowledge multiplication phase at the solar laboratory, Aula DynamoLAB, in Facatativá.

DynamoLAB: Circular Agrivoltaic Rural Electrification (Cesar, 2024): We developed a circular electrification concept by recovering remnants from solar parks and disused electric car batteries. We delivered six rural electrification systems with agrivoltaic structures, which provide electricity and food security. We installed 6 kWh storage systems and 3 kWp solar systems in each home and donated refrigerators. We also provided insights and tools for the creation of agrivoltaic gardens.



Photos of the circular rural electrification project in San Ángel, Cesar, Colombia. Beneficiaries and project team implementing agrivoltaic solutions built using construction remnants from commercial solar parks of ENEL.

DynamoLAB: ECO-Nashira, Women and Energy (Valle del Cauca, 2024-2025): In Nashira, a matriarchal eco-village, we built a team of 14 women multipliers. We electrified two communal cooking facilities, a local rural school, and built a solar laboratory with an agrivoltaic greenhouse and a biodigester prototype. We reached over 200 people in knowledge-multiplication sessions and created a local solar installation team. We are now jointly building the first women-led energy community in Colombia.

EcoNashira Women and Energy project highlights: Knowledge Multipliers team, knowledge transfer sessions, solar installation at the community center, and the construction of an agrivoltaic solar greenhouse. Training and practice at the Nashira Eco-Village in Palmira, Valle del Cauca, Colombia.



DynamoLAB: A2T Access to Training Colombia (2025-2026): We aim to reach six schools in three regions of Colombia with a complementary 110 hours training programme. Students will design and implement photovoltaic solutions for each of the facilities. The programme is certified and can be accredited as a technical vocational programme. We aim to directly impact more than 400 persons and indirectly at least 3000.**



School interventions aimed at creating new perspectives and narratives around energy and sustainability. Sensitization and preparation with students in Cundinamarca, Valle del Cauca, and Cesar, Colombia, for the DynamoLAB A2T project.

The power of the diaspora

Driving climate action through renewable energy technologies and fostering comprehensive capacities with an unwavering focus on equality are at the heart of our mission. From my unique position within the diaspora, Dynamo Projects has solidified its autonomy and forged an identity rooted in collaborative, human, and socio-environmental values that transcend geographical borders. In times marked by the unjust criminalisation of migration, decentralised knowledge networks become powerful conduits, enabling ideas, resources, and interests to flourish across boundaries. The diaspora's pivotal role lies in energising collective narratives that inspire transformation and reconciliation, unlocking supportive and collaborative exchanges that move decisively from discourse to tangible implementation.



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* Kunstrial e.V is a diverse diaspora-led-non-profit-organisation based in Berlin, working to facilitate decolonized cultural and knowledge exchange between EU and LATAM.

** A2T is a project implemented mainly with the financial support of: EUDiF, a facility programme of the International Center of Migration and Policy Development (ICMPD); Dynamo Projects and private sector partners such as: Volvo-ASTARA-ENEL-WEC-Schneider Electrics.

From loss to lifeline: How a diaspora-led, women-run charity brings hope to Somalia's conflict survivors

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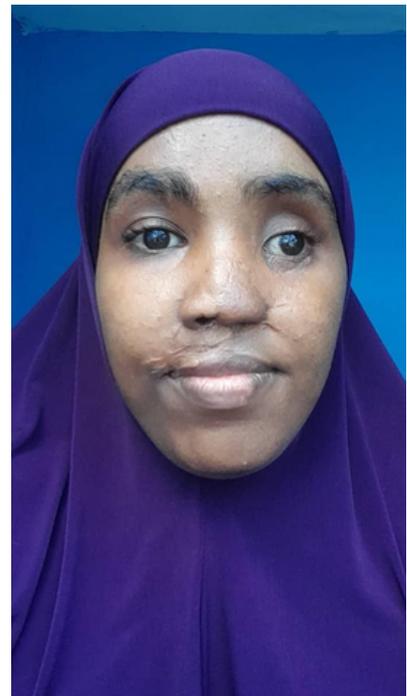
In Somalia, decades of conflict and fragile medical infrastructure have left millions without access to even basic healthcare. For many, treatable injuries often become lifelong disabilities or result in premature death. Somali Medical Aid Group (SMAG) was founded to offer hope and healing where healthcare is most out of reach.

SMAG was founded in 2023, during one of the worst conflicts in North Somalia's history. My family was displaced by conflict that uprooted over 200,000 people after their homes, schools, hospitals and mosques were shelled. Amid the violence, my uncle was fatally shot. With no hospital nearby or access to basic medical supplies, he died. In those desperate moments, opportunists profited from families in crisis compounding the suffering and pain. I was unable to help my uncle but felt compelled to act and SMAG was created to respond with compassion and care.

Our mission is simple: to improve health outcomes in Somali communities often neglected, through sustainable medical interventions. We believe healthcare is a fundamental human right. Our work focuses on leveraging technology to advocate for individuals, build medical capacity in underserved areas and address health factors such as poverty and education, with a focus on women, children, and survivors of conflict.

Restore Hope, our flagship initiative, has become a lifeline for survivors of conflict. In partnership with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the programme carves a medical corridor for Somali war victims to receive free, lifesaving and life changing reconstructive surgery in Jordan. The programme covers flights, visas and all medical treatment costs, and SMAG manages all in-country logistics including patient identification, assessments, referrals, travel coordination, physiotherapy and long-term follow-up. The programme has been extended for another two years, accepting 3 patients and their carers every month.

Our impact is best illustrated through individual stories.



Shadia smiles again after 11 surgeries through Restore Hope — pain-free and full of strength. Photo courtesy of SMAG

Shadia, at 17, survived a devastating gunshot wound that entered behind her ear and exited through her face, shattering her jaw and leaving a gaping hole in her face. Without pain relief available and her body shaking from agony, she was driven 132 kilometres over rough roads for five hours to a major hospital in northern Somalia only to be turned away. She was then placed on a cargo plane to Mogadishu and taken to the city's largest hospital. The staff instructed her family not to bring her out of the vehicle as nothing could be done for her. Bedridden, in pain and weighing just 40 kilograms, eating through a straw, she was referred to SMAG in 2023. We endlessly advocated for Shadia, contacting over 60 charities; only MSF generously offered to help. Since then, Shadia has undergone 11 complex surgeries, with a total stay of 10 months during her two trips to Jordan. Today, Shadia is, free from pain, able to eat, healthier, stronger and preparing for her final trip in September 2025, when surgeons will graft bone from her hip to restore her teeth and give her a new smile. She doesn't cover her face anymore. This case was the catalyst of Restore Hope.



Abdiqani walks tall after years of trauma — restored mobility and renewed hope. Photo courtesy of SMAG

At just 13 years old, Abdiqani rural village in south Somalia, was overrun by armed gunmen. During the violence, he was severely beaten, sustaining hip trauma that went untreated for nearly four years. The injury led to chronic pain, limited mobility and a worsening infection that eventually destroyed part of his femur, leaving his leg shortened, his hip joint deformed and unable to walk. At 17, Abdiqani was referred to SMAG and accepted into the Restore Hope programme. Accompanied by a caretaker, he travelled to Jordan, where surgeons removed the infected bone and administered intensive antibiotic treatment, not available in Somalia. Now fitted with a custom brace, he has returned home to continue his recovery, supported by his family, pain-free, mobile and looking ahead to his future.

Despite the programme's enormous success, delivering in Somalia presents unexpected challenges that erode the integrity of our humanitarian efforts and tragically denies life-saving treatment to individuals with severe injuries. Free medical intervention abroad is rare and often met with suspicion. Fear and concerns of exploitation and organ trafficking has led some families to discourage eligible patients from accepting much needed care. Local gatekeepers further complicate access, where self-appointed intermediaries demand payment for referrals to those unaware of the programme, exploiting and placing an additional burden on families already in crisis.

We have and continue to work hard to overcome these problems. Our local team has built and is working closely with community leaders, we've obtained certification from the Ministry and created patient peer groups to build confidence and trust. We also drive targeted social media campaigns to communicate that our programme is 100% free and invite direct applications through our website.

However, financial sustainability is a critical challenge we have not overcome. As a newly established organisation managing a transnational medical initiative, we face significant difficulty securing funding. At present our operations are fully self-financed, a model that, while effective in the short term, cannot support long-term growth or scale.

Looking ahead, we plan to launch a voice-enabled application process to reach low-literacy patients in rural areas. To address Somalia's gap in professional physiotherapists, we aim to establish a local training centre and place graduates in at least 5 general hospitals. Through our Somali Digital Futures Programme, we work to support conflict survivors to rebuild their lives, offering digital skills training and employment pathways.

I'm very proud to be part of SMAG and what we have achieved. With sincerity, determination, and the tenacity to push forward despite challenges, Restore Hope continues to change lives. SMAG was forged in loss, but today it stands as a lifeline. With the right support and partnership, we can reach those still unseen and untreated. The need is urgent, the path is clear, and the opportunity to make a lasting difference is within reach.

Author

Insaf is the founder of Somali Medical Aid Group (SMAG), a UK-registered, diaspora-led, women-run charity working to connect Somali patients with lifesaving medical interventions. SMAG partners with Médecins Sans Frontières to provide free reconstructive surgery to war victims and looks to expand access to healthcare through innovation and community trust. Website: www.smagroup.org | [Facebook](#)

‘Somalia needs me, and I need Somalia too’: The impactful return of a diaspora specialist medicine nurse and ward leader

International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Somalia

When Mulki Diriye stepped off the plane in Somalia, she was responding to a strong pull to reconnect with her roots and support the development of her homeland. After years of building a life and career in the United Kingdom (UK), she returned through IOM’s [Migration for Development in Africa](#) (MIDA) programme, bringing with her not only expertise but also a powerful sense of purpose. As she reflects, ‘Migration gave me new skills, experiences, and a wider view of the world. It helped me grow and made me want to give back to my country.’ Today, Mulki is a transformative force at Garowe General Hospital in Puntland, where she serves as a specialist medicine nurse, mentor, and advocate for maternal health and gender-based violence (GBV) survivors. Her story is one of resilience, innovation, and the power of diaspora engagement in rebuilding fragile health systems.



Mulki Diriye and her colleagues at Garowe General Hospital in Puntland. © IOM Somalia 2025

A return rooted in purpose

Mulki’s decision to come back wasn’t spontaneous. ‘Returning to Somalia was always in my heart,’ she shares. ‘Even while living in the UK with my family, I longed to return. I was simply waiting for the right opportunity – and when it came, I was ready to embrace it wholeheartedly.’

That opportunity came through MIDA, a programme that bridges the gap between skilled diaspora professionals and institutions in their countries of origin or heritage. For Mulki, it was more than a job placement: it was a chance to make a tangible difference in the healthcare system and people in need of support.

*Rebuilding services and restoring dignity*

One of Mulki's most impactful contributions has been the revitalisation of GBV services at Garowe General Hospital. When funding cuts jeopardised crucial support for survivors, Mulki stepped up establishing a new GBV office and becoming the hospital's primary focal point for survivor care. 'Survivors often face stigma, silence, and traditional norms that make it hard to seek help', she explains. 'I navigate this by building trust and engaging the community.' Despite limited resources, she has successfully created a safe, confidential space for survivors – many of whom come from internally displaced persons camps where girls and women face heightened risks of sexual violence, early marriage, and domestic abuse. The impact of her work is evident, but she stresses the urgent need for more trained staff, better referral systems, and steady funding to keep the service strong and reach more people.

Leading by example and teaching the next generation

Mulki's influence extends well beyond the GBV office. In the maternity ward, she is known for her hands-on mentorship and unwavering commitment to compassionate patient-centred care. She trains nurses, midwives, and interns in safe delivery practices, neonatal care, and ethical conduct. Her holistic approach even includes tasks like ward sanitation, demonstrating her commitment to upholding high hygiene standards.

Jamila Abukar Heydan, a senior midwife mentored by Mulki, praises her impact: 'Mulki has instilled values of professionalism, ethics, and respect for patients' rights. She introduced patient cards to track mothers and newborns, ensuring accuracy and follow-up.'

Hospital Director Dr Hodan Ali Shire echoes this sentiment: 'Mulki's placement through IOM has brought transformative changes. Her on-the-job training has enhanced the capacity of our nurses, midwives and interns, improved patient communication, and strengthened medical reporting.' Word of Mulki's impactful work has spread with other departments now seeking her guidance.

Beyond the hospital, Mulki also lectures at Puntland State University, where she equips the next generation of nurses and midwives, providing them with the skills and confidence to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality. In an ever-evolving healthcare landscape, continuous learning and teamwork are essential. 'Empowering women and girls through training is vital because it builds confidence, knowledge, and leadership', she asserts. 'When young women see what's possible, they're more likely to pursue education.'



To other healthcare workers, she kindly advises: ‘Start with small changes, lead with kindness, and always listen to the people you serve. Your actions can inspire others and help build a stronger, healthier community.’

Her students and colleagues describe her as humble, supportive, proactive and deeply committed. As one trainee put it: ‘Whenever I work with Mulki, I feel confident and motivated.’ Yet Mulki sees it as a mutual learning experience: ‘It’s truly about knowledge exchange, sharing experiences, and bridging two worlds. Change takes teamwork.’

Innovation in the face of scarcity

Despite challenges including limited infrastructure and capacity, funding gaps, and social stigma – Mulki has become adept at finding simple, low-cost solutions that yield significant results. From utilising mobile phones to remind patients about immunisation for infants to integrating family planning services and GBV support into routine midwifery care, she champions a holistic and accessible approach to healthcare delivery. She also advocates for the use of digital tools for documentation and management, helping the hospital transition to more efficient, reliable and accountable systems. ‘Accurate data improves decision-making and patient outcomes’, she explains.

A call to her fellow diaspora members

Mulki’s message is clear: rebuilding Somalia is a collective responsibility. To the diaspora community, she offers heartfelt encouragement: ‘Do not underestimate the value of [your] skills, ideas, and voices. Somalia needs all of us, and meaningful change starts when we choose to show up. Even small contributions can make a lasting impact. Don’t wait or overthink it. Just come.’



Mulki spent her early years in Somalia before moving to the United Kingdom, where she built a career in healthcare and raised a family. Driven by a deep desire to contribute to her homeland, she returned to Somalia to strengthen its healthcare system. She is a dedicated specialist medicine nurse and ward leader who champions women’s health with tireless passion and purpose. The placement of Mulki was possible thanks to the contribution of the Government of Finland to the IOM MIDA FINNSOM programme. For more information, please visit <https://somalia.iom.int/mida-programme> or reach out to somaliacomms@iom.int.

Sisters: From Kabul to California – film, family and resilience in the face of displacement

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Isabel Rose Soloaga

At just nine and seven years old, Zahra and Masoma Mohammady stood before U.S. Marines at Kabul's airport, clutching their little brother's U.S. passport. Amid gunfire and the crush at the gates on 15 August 2021, their words became the lifeline that saved their family. Their insistence opened a pathway onto an evacuation flight and out of Taliban-controlled Afghanistan — back to their home in Sacramento, California.

That moment of agency stands starkly against the Taliban's continuing campaign to erase girls' futures: since their return to power, Taliban authorities have barred girls from secondary and higher education, leaving more than two million girls without the opportunity to study beyond primary school. The Mohammady family also belong to the Shia Hazara minority, historically targeted for violence. And, as daughters of a U.S. military translator, they were direct targets for Taliban retaliation. One second of hesitation could have been fatal.



Zahra and Masoma Mohammady with their little brother, Ali Taha

Sisters: From Kabul to California follows Zahra and Masoma as they translate their family's journey from Kabul to California. The film was conceived and produced as a collaboration with the family and co-directed with their uncle, Najaf Ali Mohammady. It builds from the girls' own contributions: they helped shape scenes, used cameras themselves, and narrated portions of their experience. This is not a film about refugees; it is a film made with two brilliant young women and their family, centering their voices, creativity, and leadership from a young age.

I first met the family while working with the International Rescue Committee at Fort Bliss during the 2021 evacuations. Lunchtime conversations with the girls' uncle, then 21, quickly evolved into a co-creative project. This reflexive approach seeks to disrupt the common dynamics of migration storytelling by shifting power, providing tools to those whose lives we seek to represent, and foregrounding youth agency as a form of resistance and contribution to social change.

The political context for their story is urgent. Afghanistan's economy has been severely reconfigured since August 2021: the sudden cutoff of official foreign reserves, banking restrictions, and the collapse of much international aid have driven poverty, food insecurity, and economic precarity for millions. These structural shocks compound the human cost of Taliban policies targeting women and girls. Scholars warn that the prohibition on girls' schooling, and the broader rollback of women's rights, represents not only moral crimes but long-term threats to health, social cohesion, and development.

Legal and policy developments in the United States continue to have a significant impact on the lives of Afghan evacuees and diaspora families. In January 2025, the Department of Homeland Security announced the indefinite suspension of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, followed by the termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Afghanistan in July. This status had provided eligible individuals with work authorisation and protection from deportation. While ongoing litigation has resulted in temporary administrative stays, the policy changes have introduced uncertainty for many Afghan families, raising concerns about legal stability, family reunification, and continued participation in community life.

These policy shifts intersect with the Mohammady family's lived experience: in the scramble to reach Kabul airport, they made the agonising decision to leave elderly parents behind. After months of advocacy, they were evacuated to a U.S. base in Qatar, only to wait years for reunification decisions and legal certainty. The girls still hope to reunite with their grandparents. Their story captures a larger pattern: arrival in a safe country does not end vulnerability when legal pathways and protections are fragile.

Yet the film insists on hope, resilience, and possibility. In Sacramento, Zahra and Masoma attend school, draw futures for themselves, and practice the everyday rituals of childhood. Zahra dreams of becoming an airline pilot, experiencing her first flight as a student pilot in the film. Masoma hopes to become a doctor, giving back to the community she has built in Sacramento.

Their laughter, creativity, and forward-looking plans are acts of survival and civic contribution, demonstrating how girls and youth can be active agents in shaping communities, contributing to humanitarian and development goals, and advancing social inclusion. By centering their voices, *Sisters* reframes the refugee child as a complex actor capable of bearing trauma, exercising leadership, and driving transformative impact.

Ultimately, *Sisters: From Kabul to California* asks us to recognise how global politics — from schooling bans in Kabul to U.S. immigration policy — are woven through individual lives. When two girls convinced U.S. Marines at the gates of Kabul airport that they belonged in California, they exercised decisive agency. In telling their story themselves, Zahra and Masoma invite viewers to consider not only the cost of displacement, but also the critical role of women and youth in peacebuilding, humanitarian efforts, and development initiatives. Their example underscores the responsibilities of host societies to protect education, preserve family unity, and maintain pathways to safety that empower young people to contribute meaningfully to their communities and the broader world.



Check out Isabel's newly released [documentary film](#)
“*Sisters, From Kabul to California: One Family's Journey to Safety*”



Isabel is a documentary filmmaker and Research Fellow in Law at the University of Sussex. Her work explores the intersections of human rights, climate migration, and gender, bridging scholarship with powerful storytelling to amplify the voices of people on the move. A UC Berkeley alumna with an MA in Migration and Global Development from the University of Sussex, she has published peer-reviewed research in *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*, is co-author of *Decolonising Queer Migration: Perspectives of Iranians in Exile* (Bristol University Press), and her award-winning films have screened internationally. She has presented her research and films at the University of Oxford, the American University of Kabul, the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs and other institutions. Her debut poetry collection, *Home is Where* (Finishing Line Press), is forthcoming.

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Filipino health workers: Partners for health care in the Nordic countries

Veronica Esposito Ramirez

Many Filipino health workers are making their home in Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, contributing to the local economy while experiencing the benefits of Nordic social transformation. In these countries, health workers constitute the biggest bulk of the migrant workers, as they do across the world. In Norway, for example, since the arrival of the first nurse hired in Rikshospitalet, Norway in early 1970s, Filipino nurses have become the largest professional group in the country. They work in a variety of fields, from orthopedics to elder care, geriatrics and specialties, making a significant impact to the world of global healthcare through their knowledge, skills, technology know-how, and language.

In 2023, I conducted research* in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden to understand the international labour market, effective migrant worker recruitment, and the experience of workers in Nordic countries. Conducting interviews, small group discussions and surveys with workers in various fields, the study found a positive assessment of employment conditions amongst migrant workers, coupled with obstacles to recruitment and placement, and a variety of push and pull factors. Those who work in the health sector are required to learn a Nordic language at a level that will allow them to pass government examination. In Year 1, the employment conditions and occupational experiences that have the highest satisfaction are work-life balance (3.56%), social security (3.51%) and economic conditions (3.42%) in the Nordic countries. In Year 3, work-life balance (3.52%), fitness for work (3.49%), and salary and benefits (3.45%) have the highest satisfaction in their employment conditions and occupational experiences. As they stayed longer in the Nordic country, by Year 8, most of them already acquired citizenship and have been promoted in their work, they have savings and investments and now have long-term perspectives. It is no wonder that social security, salary and benefits, and work-life balance have the highest satisfaction in their employment conditions and occupational experiences.



Personal photograph of author

The research shows that 'liveability' is a primary reason cited by Filipino migrant workers to describe the excellent work-life balance implemented in their workplaces, alongside the cleanliness, safety and low crime rate across Nordic countries. Compared with their home countries where the benefits of tax are not evident, the welfare system is a great novelty for Filipinos. Their taxes are happily paid and contribute to benefits in health, education, paid vacation, bonuses, retirement, financial support in case of unemployment, parental leave when a child is born and many others.

Beyond compensation, migrant workers enjoy benefits that make life more meaningful. The work-life balance, the concept of *hygge* at work, is one principle best applied in Nordic countries to ensure the employees/workers' wellbeing. Embracing the concept of *hygge* draws one to a slower pace of life. Work-life balance gives workers time and opportunity to engage in various sports activities, outdoor recreations and pursuits, travel ventures, and restful vacations. Even children in school are not given homework to lessen the stress of learning.

In Denmark, those eligible to take master's level courses may enroll for free and get a stipend, which is adequate enough to sustain a student. At the doctoral level, the stipend is higher. Besides this, taking a master's degree requires a 50-50% mixed use of the local Nordic language and English.

The comfort level in life attained by Filipinos in host Nordic countries draws them to stay in Nordic countries. It is difficult to let go of a place that provides a migrant worker and his/her family with a comfortable, not lavish, life in a less stressful environment. Filipinos are also accustomed to observing equality and simple lifestyles. It is not uncommon, across Nordic countries, to see the head of a company, for example, eating in the office canteen, or the Mayor of a city walking down the street, or the Prime Minister with only a bodyguard accompanying him to a speaking engagement.

Other factors that attract Filipinos relate to stability and professional growth. Once a foreigner becomes a permanent resident in Finland and starts a family in the country, the government takes care of the family regardless if the partner is a Finn or not. Having post-graduate studies gives one an edge in landing a job with higher pay.

Migrant workers in global healthcare, when properly supported, can create social transformation. Greater support from governments would improve the flow of workers' migration into the Nordic countries. Institutional channels to recruit migrant workers from third countries could help respond to an ageing population and labour shortage in Nordic countries, which is not diminishing but increasing, where medical professionals will continue to be in high demand.

Government-to-government agreements will be necessary to accelerate recruitment and employment to fill labour shortages. Should a government-to-government agreement be reached, then recruitment agencies from the Nordic countries are issued the license to recruit directly. Based on my 2023 research, the following may be instructive:

- Follow the Finnish lead and experience in giving initial courses for language and culture in the source country; we treat this as a prolonged orientation about the country of prospect. For Sweden, Denmark and Norway, a formal system of recruitment and employment of workers from the Philippines can be formulated to facilitate systematic labour migration.
- As an approach to materialising this, recruitment agencies from the host countries may begin to enter into partnership with tertiary educational institutions that have an excellent track record in producing professionals in the desired fields. Consider this as a pre-deployment investment.

Migrant work, as a global phenomenon, does not only consist of recruiting and hiring. The whole process, when seriously designed to uplift the human worker, should lead to social transformation. The drivers and internal dynamics of migration processes between the Philippines and Nordic countries are a perfect match in the sense that Nordic countries are characterised by high-income and slow population growth, and therefore needing migrant labour to sustain national development, while the Philippines has low-income and fast population growth with educated and qualified people who opt for overseas labour placement to sustain their family and to contribute to national economy.



Veronica is a Professor at the University of Asia and the Pacific, Philippines. She conducts research on migrant health, work and life and has completed research studies funded by the International Labor Organization, Sumitomo Foundation, Inc. Department of Health and Department of Science and technology. In 2019, she won First Prize at the APEC Inaugural Healthy Women, Healthy Economies Research Prize for her research study, Common health problems of Women Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), awarded in La Serena, Chile.

