



Task Force 7
Towards Reformed Multilateralism: Transforming Global
Institutions and Frameworks

EQUITABLE GROWTH IN THE 21ST CENTURY: ADDRESSING MIGRATION CHALLENGES THROUGH G20 MULTILATERALISM

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Abstract




In recent years, a few G20 countries have witnessed some of the largest inflows of migrants globally. While migration has enabled millions to seek employment in different countries, this has typically been characterised by inequality. Given that the G20 agenda seeks to ensure just and equitable growth for all, this policy brief identifies three dilemmas the group must address to


achieve this goal: forced migration, inhumane working conditions, and the lack of social integration of migrants. To tackle these issues, the brief recommends reforming global bodies such as the International Labour Organization, integrating international frameworks in domestic policies, encouraging multilateral cooperation in managing migration, and capacity building through civil society.



The Challenge



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Migration is a key geopolitical, economic, and social issue that impacts domestic policy frameworks in several G20 countries, such as the US (through the Immigration Bill), Germany (through the Skilled Immigration Act), and Saudi Arabia (through the Labour Reform Initiative).¹ It is crucial, therefore, to maintain a streamlined process of migration management that ensures an equitable and just development for all. The G20 countries constitute the biggest economies in the world, and labour migration is a crucial cog in the supply chain in these countries. However, certain areas of policy implementation create impediments to achieving equal growth opportunities. This brief identifies three major problems:


- **Lack of recourse for forced migration**

The G20 countries that regularly deal with an influx of forced migration from neighbouring states (such as Saudi Arabia) often consider displacement as an event characterised by temporality, thereby viewing migrants as residing in their country merely for a transit period.² This perspective is echoed in

the domestic policies, or the ‘policy of no policy’ where migrants exist within a framework of invisibility with no access to employment opportunities, healthcare, or social services.³ International policies are also built on the foundation that individuals can return to their country of origin eventually as conditions improve.⁴ But it is crucial to recognise that a significant proportion of this displacement will become permanent due to the exacerbation of conflicts, climate change, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is, therefore, important to devise and implement policies that enhance the resettlement and integration of migrants in the receiving countries by generating employment opportunities and protecting migrant families.

- **Working conditions of migrants**

Migrants are often compelled to seek employment in unregulated sectors that thrive on a framework of subordination. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), migrants and refugees are exposed to a higher level of vulnerability characterised by temporality, and informal and unprotected work with low wages.⁵ In many countries, these individuals



do not receive social protection, health coverage, or a minimum-wage guarantee. The ILO has emphasised the need to provide comprehensive, just, and adequate social protection to all refugees and migrant workers,⁶ but there is much to be done on this front. While many G20 economies are heavily dependent on contributions from their migrant communities, their mistreatment continues, and the scope of opportunities provided to them remains unequal.⁷

- **Lack of social integration**

In many G20 countries, the local population resist attempts to socially integrate migrants into the community. As global economic insecurity worsens,

domestic opinions on immigration and refugee settlement have largely turned negative in many countries.⁸ Such an atmosphere of hostility is characterised by increased support for anti-immigration laws, also echoed in government policies propounding the arbitrary detention and rampant unemployment of migrant workers. To ensure sound and equitable development, this perspective must be changed by transcending beyond viewing migration simply as a legal phenomenon and involving the civil society and NGOs in capacity-building work.



The G20's Role

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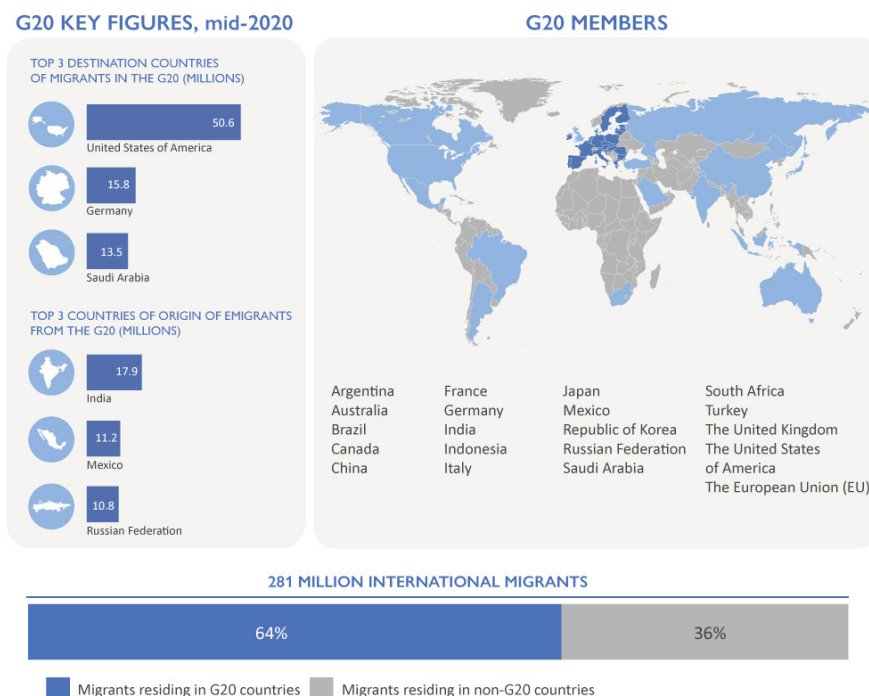


The G20 countries account for over 80 percent of global GDP and house roughly 60 percent of the world's population, with migration inflows making up a considerable share of the labour force.⁹ In 2020, of the estimated 281 million migrants worldwide, 64 percent resided in G20 countries, mainly the US, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the UK (see Figure 1).¹⁰

The G20 countries are also home to over 70 percent of the world's older

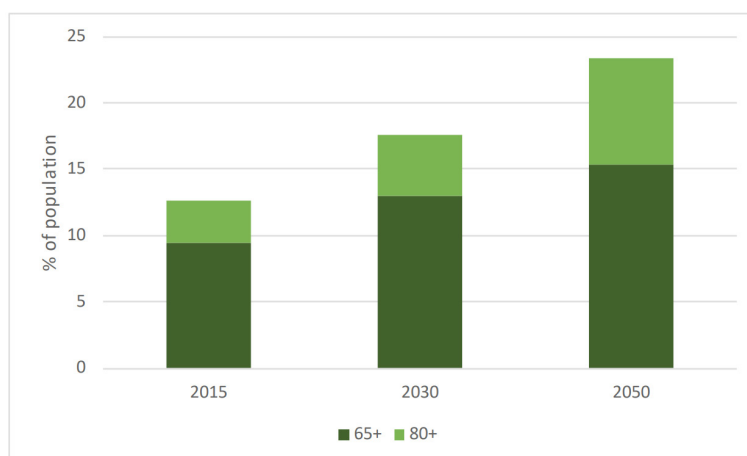
population (individuals aged 65 and above).¹² The global geriatric population is projected to grow to 1 billion by 2050, amounting to 21 percent of the global population and a corresponding rise in the G20 countries (see Figure 2).¹³ Additionally, fertility rates in the G20 countries are declining, from 4.9 in 1955 to a projected 2.3 by 2050.¹⁴ As a result, migration inflows to the G20 countries are seen as crucial for their economic growth and development since about 86 percent of the migrants are said to be in the working age group (25-64 years).¹⁵

Figure 1: Migrants residing in G20 countries:



Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs¹¹

Figure 2: Population share of individuals aged 65 years and above in the G20 countries



Source: OECD analysis based on data from UN World Population Prospects¹⁶

Hiring such migrants reduces labour costs and creates opportunities for increased investments, thereby positively contributing towards the fiscal balance or the difference between the government's revenue and expenditure in the long term.¹⁷ Migration is a critical factor for enhanced growth in the G20 countries. However, the treatment, resettlement, and perception of migrants in these countries continue to create obstacles to equitable growth and development. Although the ILO has established mechanisms to overcome these obstacles, their implementation across the G20 countries is still lacking. The G20 must address the following dilemmas:

- **Increased forced migration**

Forced migration and displacement are an outcome of, among other things, widespread global inequality, food insecurity, conflicts, and climate-induced catastrophes. The exacerbation of such pressures has resulted in widespread displacement. In 2020, the number of displaced persons was estimated at over 80 million, a substantial rise from 41 million in 2010.¹⁸ This means that one in 95 people, or one percent of the global population, has been forcibly displaced. Of this displaced population, the G20 countries host about 7.7 million, or 37 percent of all refugees (see Table 1) that are provided protection under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.¹⁹

Table 1: Population of refugees in G20 countries

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Argentina	3187	3267	3332	3442	3857	4045
Australia	36917	42 187	48 480	56 934	58 529	57 451
Brazil	8703	9674	10 260	11 304	32 844	59 147
Canada	135 890	97 322	104 768	114 101	101 757	109 264
China	301 044	317 254	321 714	321 758	303 379	303 410
France	273 117	304 527	337 158	368 345	407 915	436 100
UK	123 051	118 973	121 821	126 708	133 083	132 349
Germany	316 098	669 468	970 357	1 063 835	1 146 682	1 210 636
India	201 379	197 848	197 142	195 887	195 103	195 403
Indonesia	5954	7 824	9782	10 786	10 287	10 134
Italy	118 036	147 362	167 330	189 227	207 602	128 033
Japan	2479	2512	2189	1893	1463	1137
Korea	1455	1798	2238	2890	3196	3498
Mexico	2904	6178	8993	16 530	28 517	45 469
Other European Union Countries	503 478	648 388	692 293	741 432	829 150	882 430
South Africa	121 635	91 018	88 694	89 285	78 395	76 754
Russian Federation	314 498	228 981	126 021	77 382	42 413	20 325
Saudi Arabia	122	136	153	263	315	340
Turkey	2541 348	2 869 419	3 480 350	3 681 688	3 579 531	3 652 362
US	273 198	272 963	287 135	313 242	341 715	340 881
Total	5284 493	6 037 099	6 980 210	7 386 932	7 505 733	7 669 168

- **Inhumane working conditions**

Migrant workers are said to be about three times more likely to be vulnerable to forced labour, mainly

characterised by long working hours, unequal and inconsistent pay, and economic and sexual exploitation.²¹ During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, many G20 countries shuttered their

borders and firms laid off a significant number of migrant workers, leaving them in a highly precarious situation with no social protection. The G20 countries are expected to implement international standards of dignified labour, including the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, that propound measures against trafficking and forced labour, while emphasising the importance of enforcing the enhancement of migrants' socioeconomic conditions.²² However, the G20 countries have been criticised for focusing more on the stability of supply chains to ensure the efficient provision of goods and services required by their economies. Since the grouping includes the biggest economies in the world, a streamlined means of upholding labour rights must be applied for equitable development.

- **Persistent social discrimination**

Anti-migrant sentiments are on the rise in the G20 countries as around the world. For instance, there has been increased violence against


Sub-Saharan migrants in Egypt; arbitrary detention of migrants in Saudi Arabia; and racial abuse of migrants in Canada, France, and the UK.²³ This is characterised by a strong political movement favouring anti-immigration laws that reinforce the notion of the temporality of migrants, and the offshoring of migrants to underdeveloped countries (such as the UK sending asylum seekers to Rwanda²⁴). Local populations typically have negative perception of migrants—a 2015 study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on the perceptions of migrants in the G20 countries found that about 52 percent of the European population viewed migration negatively and agreed that the immigration levels in their country should be decreased.²⁵ Since migrants play a significant role in the global supply chain within the G20 countries, their rightful integration is crucial to ensure peaceful and long-lasting growth.



Recommendations to the G20

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The policy dilemmas continue to impede the achievement of the G20 agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Still, just labour practices and sustainable migration networks can be encouraged by positioning economic development at the centre of cooperation among the G20 countries. This can act as the basis for the creation of common foundational ideals and practices that can improve the future of migration. To pioneer reform, the G20 countries must undertake alterations in policy in the following ways:

- **Spearheading reform of international organisations**

While international organisations such as the ILO have mechanisms that regulate wages and occupational safety, and provide protections for families of migrant workers, these were built based on historical migration patterns. As such, the measures are inadequate to tackle the current crisis of forced and voluntary migration. The ILO currently confronts the challenge of balancing global economic growth and globalisation alongside ensuring just and equitable growth for all.²⁶ The G20 is the ideal platform to help achieve

this balance in the ILO's ambitions not only because it constitutes some of the largest economies, but also because labour and migrant flows significantly impact these countries' economic development. The G20 can consider establishing a group along the lines of the UN's 'Lessons Learned Unit' to assess past decisions and learn from those experiences. Establishing such a body will enable a critical analysis of migration laws and encourage greater reform of measures dealing with the treatment of migrants in host countries. These measures provide greater transparency and accountability, while also establishing a platform to create policies that are in keeping with the global dynamics. The COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent impact on migrants have highlighted the array of circumstances international organisations must prepare for. The UN Secretary-General's Global Accelerator Initiative in collaboration with the ILO is one such crucial step to combat unemployment through just mechanisms. It is supported by numerous countries including Germany, Belgium, India, and Japan, and has the potential for creating more opportunities.²⁷ Additionally, forced migration must not be viewed simply through a unifocal lens of temporality




but instead as a means of a long-term transnational movement benefitting the host country and the country of origin. As a result, reforming ILO mechanisms to integrate such planning through initiatives such as the Global Accelerator can position migration as a mutually beneficial network.

- **Integration of international frameworks in domestic policies**

Another crucial means of ensuring equitable and just growth is through a process of homogeneity that ensures dignified mechanisms of recourse for migrants. However, the biggest challenge faced by the G20 countries is the differing policies that regulate migrant inflows into their respective jurisdictions. This can be altered by the integration of international mechanisms into domestic policies. Most often, these international frameworks are constrained in their influence if the host countries fail to sign or ratify them. Under such circumstances, there is no one regulatory body that can enforce legal accountability. Therefore, the creation of accountability frameworks that are embedded in international customary law may compel states to undertake actions to protect migrants.

Since international mechanisms provide a legal foundation based on principles of fundamental human rights, enforcing such a mechanism within the domestic decision-making of each G20 country will provide a robust transnational migration network.

The ILO, IOM, and several UN bodies are the major international organisations that establish principles that impact the global migration regime. Countries can adopt ILO conventions 100, 111, 182, and 190, which focus on equal remuneration, measures against discrimination and forced labour.²⁸ The upliftment of migrants can also be ensured by adopting principles proposed by the UN International Convention on Migrant Workers along with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Such an initiative was recently undertaken at the 2022 G20 Bali summit, where countries signed a declaration to reinforce commitments to social justice and decent work in collaboration with the ILO.²⁹ These principles can be adopted by ratifying and integrating their ethos within domestic policies. This will ensure a multifaceted response to the existing policy dilemmas since they will provide a holistic solution to labour migration



management and the resettlement and integration of forced migrants into their countries.


- **Multilateral cooperation in migration management**

Transnational migration networks continue to flourish throughout the G20 countries, but it is crucial to view them as a multilateral reality. The G20 countries must work together to reap benefits from such labour inflows and to ensure a just system of repatriation. Such intra-G20 streamlining can be implemented by establishing an international regulatory body, with agreed-upon administrative responsibilities. This cooperation framework will also provide a strong foundation for combating labour exploitation while encouraging a migration network within the member countries, and will create more opportunities for labour exchange within the G20. To solidify cooperation among the G20 countries on an ideological level, it is imperative to introduce a ‘core value’ system of a common consensus on basic humanitarian values and ideals that the G20 countries should agree upon and implement. These ideals should complement the global principles to

create an easier avenue for cooperation among these countries. Since most international agreements often lack enforceability, such an agreement of the core values will lead to the creation of a sustainable migration regime. Additionally, the G20 must work on establishing a well-defined framework for the resettlement of forced migrants that primarily focuses on long-term measures of integration. This can be done by the G20 countries adopting regulatory reforms that ensure dignified social security and employment programmes for refugees. Such a network among the G20 community can reinforce the global migration regime while also equitably regulating the burden of refugee management.

- **Capacity building through civil society**

While legal mechanisms are crucial to providing a foundation for enforceable regulatory frameworks, they are constrained by the will and agency of the states. As in the case of the ILO, IOM, and UN frameworks and policies, unless a member state signs and ratifies the mechanisms, there is little legal avenue to ensure their enforcement. To establish a global migration regime, it is crucial to move beyond viewing



migration management simply as a legal reality. Such change can be achieved by undertaking actions in addition and complementary to the legal enforcement mechanisms, particularly by capacity building of the civil society. These reforms can be materialised only if the domestic environment within countries is conducive to integrating migrants and refugees. As countries continue to become more inward-looking, migration will be viewed in a negative light. While governments can choose to implement domestic policies that support migration, the on-ground situation is an extremely hostile environment characterised by discrimination, racism, and acts of violence. As a result, it is imperative

that countries focus on undertaking extensive capacity-building measures to ensure that the local population are sensitised and educated to accept such an inflow. This can be done by involving local government bodies and NGOs on a two-fold engagement: by educational programmes and sensitivity training towards the local population; and by empowering migrants through capacity building training modules to enhance their skills, demystify the language of law, and actively engage in rights awareness.

Attribution: Nidhi Piplani Kapur, Mrunal Sule, and Vidhi Thakker, "Equitable Growth in the 21st Century: Addressing Migration Challenges through G20 Multilateralism," *T20 Policy Brief*, May 2023.

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