

## **Abstracts**

### **Smuggled 'Boat' Migrants: Irregularities, Inhumanness and Susceptibilities of Maritime Migration across the Bay of Bengal and Beyond**

**Niloy Ranjan Biswas**

How safe has migration across the maritime routes ever been as a livelihood or life-saving strategy for people in the coastal belts of the Bay of Bengal? It is perhaps a tricky question to offer an easy answer at this moment when the movements in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea had become "three times more deadly" than in the Mediterranean in 2015. It continued to be deadlier in the following years due mainly to severe exploitation by spoilers, such as smugglers and others on the boats. Migrants (forced or voluntary) often employ a particular route, transport, and social networks that create a sense of opportunity in their lives and ensure a safe livelihood. Many people have started their voyage in this relatively new maritime 'space' despite life risks. Across the region, an estimated 32600 refugees and migrants of various nationalities have taken to smugglers' boats in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea in the last ten years. Most of them were Rohingyas of Myanmar and Bangladeshis. This space apparently had provided hopes for destitute people that ended in despair. The network of smugglers and spoilers existed to maltreat the governance, arguably lowly addressed by some governments across the region. Irregularities in the migration governance and inhumaneness in migrants' experience have made them more susceptible to the threats of complex vulnerabilities. Securitizing the maritime space should not be the framework of protectionism to address the crisis. The paper aims to (a) unpack how to de-securitize the maritime migration space in the Bay of Bengal and (b) understand the challenges of the humane protection mechanism evolved from national, regional and global norms and practices.

## **Labour migration and land use in agricultural Indramayu, West Java, Indonesia**

**Rhino Ariefiansyah**

This paper analyses the narrative break from dominant understandings of global labour reconfiguration (Azis, Ariefiansyah & Utami, 2020). It emphasises locally-specific accounts of migration anchored on the reorganisation of agricultural production in Indramayu, West Java, Indonesia. While it is the largest rice producer on the most industrialised island of Java, Indonesia, Indramayu sends 1,726 migrant workers worldwide. At least since 2017, this regency—located on the eastern end of the coast of West Java—has been recorded as the district sending the most Indonesian migrant workers abroad. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Indonesian migrant workers dispatched abroad decreased, but the number of migrant workers from Indramayu remained higher than in other regions. This condition shows how agricultural centres have become and remained suppliers for migrant workers. This paper examines how ecological vulnerability and economic uncertainty affect tendencies for population movement. Despite being a strategic food commodity producer, economic uncertainty from farming activities due to structural inequalities and extreme climate-related events (i.e. prolonged droughts and pest explosions in 2015, 2017, and 2019 also increased the risk of losses due to crop failure) make farming less desirable as a source of livelihood. This article argues that ecological vulnerabilities, shaped by the long history of colonialism, the green revolution, and unanticipated climate change, exacerbate employment precarity for the people of Indramayu. This situation makes it impossible for rural workers, as in the case of Indramayu, to make a living from the agricultural sector, pushing them to migrate into domestic and informal sectors abroad (e.g. household assistants, housekeepers). The paper intimately discusses how labour migration alters land use and vice versa, providing a space for mainstreaming local accounts that suspend neoliberal optimism about migration and development.

## **Challenges facing Indian migrant workers in the Gulf during the Covid-19 pandemic**

**S. Irudaya Rajan and H. Arokkiaraj**

In India, Southern states dominated the flow of migrant workers to Gulf region, in recent years, Northern states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar tops the list. However, the available data shows, due to pandemic, a large number of non-resident Keralites returned from the Gulf, for example, United Arab Emirates. With this background, this short note examines two key research questions 1) how Indian migrant workers in Gulf countries are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and 2) what challenges Indian migrant workers returned from the Gulf countries face due to pandemic? The findings of this article were generated by conducting interviews with returned migration in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh (UP). The preliminary findings indicate that returnees faced wage theft, financial cost of migration has increased, jobs offers are less. It also shows that while the returnees from the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu (Southern states) are keener to return to Gulf or other countries as compared with returnees from UP. Further, workers returned to UP have established livelihood in their place but returnees from the Southern states are waiting for the borders to reopen. Therefore, there is a variation between migrants on how they are adapting their lives and future plans to cope with the pandemic.

## **MIGRATION IN THE IMMOBILE STATE: INDONESIA'S RELUCTANCE TO PROTECT THE RIGHT OF THE REFUGEES AND ITS MIGRANT WORKER**

**DR. Robertus Robet**

Indonesia is one of the largest refugee transit countries in Asia and at the same time one of the biggest senders of migrant workers in the region. In that sense, Indonesia has double responsibilities to protect both its citizens and refugees. However, due to its position as a transit country, Indonesia plays an immobile role in taking responsibility to provide wider basic rights of the refugee. Parallel with that, although glorifying its migrant workers abroad as economic heroes, Indonesia makes insufficient efforts to protect the rights of migrant workers both at home and at foreign countries. In dealing with the refugee, the leading political language exercised by Indonesia's authority is "We never invite you to come here". This discourse represents the basic attitude of the Indonesian government as well as underscores a firm nationalistic exclusivism rooted in Indonesia's authoritarian past history. The state's hesitancy to protect refugees and its migrant workers is a reflection of Indonesia's reluctance to the idea of universal and human rights values.

## **Sea, refugees & stateless migrants on the Bay: The Rohingya**

**Sucharita Sengupta**

This research will explore some of the key concerns surrounding stateless people stuck in the sea in a bid to escape, through the prism of a million plus Rohingya refugees stuck in one of the biggest refugee camps of the world, in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Between February to June 2020, especially amidst the corona virus lockdown in Bangladesh, number of refugees trying to cross the Bay in dire precarity had swelled.

Much as the fate of the Rohingya as the new boat people reminds one of the troubled histories of flight of that of the Vietnamese boat people, likewise, the strategy of relocating them to Bhasan char (flood prone floating island) bears resemblance to the Andaman Islands that served as 'penal colonies' during the British rule in the Indian subcontinent. In such contexts of protracted 'migration crisis' akin to the Rohingya situation, when all states including Myanmar where they claim to belong, deny them basic civilian and citizenship rights, what then are the avenues of protection for stateless people taking to the sea, and how far can they be implemented to save them from double marginalization as stateless refugees stranded between camps to sea, and prison-like islands, where they are further disowned and dispossessed?

## **Bangladesh-Gulf Labour Migration Corridor: Challenges and Prospects**

**Syeda Rozana Rashid**

Labour migration from Bangladesh to the Gulf can be traced back to the 1970s. The flow which started from individual pursuit, now over the decades, has become a national source of economy and well-being. Every year 300,000 to 500,000 Bangladeshi migrate to different countries of the Gulf to join in skilled and semiskilled work, whereas women comprise less than 15% of the total flow. Important policies, rules, and acts have been enacted in the country to ensure safe and orderly migration as well as to ensure migrants' rights. Bangladesh is a pioneer among the signatories of the 1990 Migrant Workers' Convention. It is also playing an active role in the global and regional processes i.e. the Global Compact on Migration (GCM), Abu Dhabi Dialogue, and Colombo Process. Domestically, the Government of Bangladesh and NGOs are providing migrants with information, training, and support services before migration, at destinations, and upon return.

Various studies however indicate that the migrants are yet to harness the full potential of the corridor due to many challenges including the high cost, fraudulence, hazardous working conditions, and low pay. The gendered nature of the jobs and treatment leave many women migrants in precarious situations. Given the high dependence on foreign remittances, the left-behind families suffer when the migrants fail in migration. The protection gap was further evident during the pandemic as migrants in large numbers were forced to return home and faced difficulties to survive.

Against the above backdrop, I intend to write a paper on the Gulf-Bangladesh labour migration corridor with emphasis on the challenges and prospects using lenses such as gender and protection.