

## THE GENEVA CHALLENGE 2025

### The International Contest for Graduate Students to Advance Development Goals

#### “The Challenges of Migration”

Last year, 222 teams composed of 853 graduate students from 94 different countries registered to partake in the 11th edition of the Geneva Challenge, tackling the challenges of youth empowerment. Building on this success, the Geneva Graduate Institute continues to encourage interdisciplinary problem-solving amongst graduate students from all around the world. Thanks to the vision and support of Ambassador Jenö Staehelin, a long-standing partner and friend of the Geneva Graduate Institute, we are now proud to launch

#### **the 12th edition of the Geneva Challenge – Advancing Development Goals Contest – to address “The Challenges of Migration”**

The world is currently experiencing one of the largest waves of migration in history. In 2020, 281 million individuals (or 3.6% of the world’s population) lived outside their country of birth.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, migration also occurs within a country’s borders.

The number of people forcibly displaced by conflict, persecution, and climate-related disasters has increased over the past decades, reaching 122.6 million in 2024.<sup>2</sup> Among them, 43.7 million are formally recognised as refugees.<sup>3</sup> The vast majority of refugees, around 71%,<sup>4</sup> is hosted by low- and middle-income countries that often face significant challenges in meeting the needs of their own populations. Just as voluntary migration occurs within a country’s borders, so does forced displacement, referred to as internal displacement. In 2024, the 72.1 million internally displaced people made up more than half<sup>5</sup> of all forcibly displaced people globally.<sup>6</sup>

Migration is an integral part of human history, shaping economies, cultures, and societies across the globe. However, migration also presents complex challenges. In addition to affecting the migrants

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<sup>1</sup> “Interactive World Migration Report 2024,” accessed February 6, 2025, <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/msite/wmr-2024-interactive/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Figures at a Glance | UNHCR,” accessed February 10, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/figures-glance>.

<sup>3</sup> “Figures at a Glance | UNHCR.”

<sup>4</sup> “Figures at a Glance | UNHCR.”

<sup>5</sup> 59%

<sup>6</sup> “Internally Displaced People,” UNHCR, accessed March 1, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/internally-displaced-people>.

themselves, it also affects the host countries that receive them and the sending countries they leave behind. Thus, the challenges of migration require innovative solutions that turn these challenges into opportunities.

As an aid to participants, we have described the main types of migration, followed by descriptions of some of the most pressing issues and challenges related to migration worldwide.

## **Main Types of Migration**

### ***Internal Migration***

- Internal migration refers to voluntary formal or informal migration within a state's borders. The term "internally displaced persons" (IDPs) refers to individuals who are forcibly displaced within the borders of a state (see section on forced displacement).<sup>7</sup> The economic transformation of societies is a common factor leading to internal migration, including large-scale rural-to-urban migration.<sup>8</sup> The rise of megacities, ie cities with more than 10 million inhabitants, especially in the developing world, is one notable example of this.<sup>9</sup>
- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) points out that it is difficult to measure the number of internal migrants, in part because it is unclear how far someone needs to migrate and how long they need to live in their new place of residence to be considered an internal migrant.<sup>10</sup> However, several international organisations (IOs) have nonetheless attempted to provide such estimates. Though the data on the total number of people migrating within the countries of origin is limited, the International Organization for Migration estimated in 2009 that around 740 million people migrated within their country's borders.<sup>11</sup>

### ***International Migration***

- According to the United Nations, the term "international migrant" encompasses anyone who has "changed [their] country of residence," "regardless of their legal status, or the nature, or motive of their movement."<sup>12</sup> Thus, there are many subtypes of international migrants, including labour migrants, such as highly skilled migrants and temporary labour migrants,

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<sup>7</sup> "What Do You Call a Person Who Moves within the Same Country? | ONU Migración Americas," accessed January 23, 2025, <https://lac.iom.int/en/blogs/what-do-you-call-person-who-moves-within-same-country>.

<sup>8</sup> Cecilia Tacoli, Gordon McGranahan, and David Satterthwaite, "World Migration Report 2015: Urbanization, Rural-Urban Migration and Urban Poverty" (International Organization for Migration (IOM), December 2014), <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl2616/files/2018-07/WMR-2015-Background-Paper-CTacoli-GMcGranahan-DSatterthwaite.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Saarah Ghazi, "Rise of New Megacities Will Drive Global Urban Growth," Oxford Economics, January 26, 2024, <https://www.oxfordeconomics.com/resource/rise-of-new-megacities-will-drive-global-urban-growth/>.

<sup>10</sup> "What Do You Call a Person Who Moves within the Same Country?"

<sup>11</sup> "Interactive World Migration Report 2024," accessed February 6, 2025, <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/msite/wmr-2024-interactive/>.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, "International Migration," United Nations (United Nations), accessed January 23, 2025, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/migration>.

irregular, illegal, or undocumented migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, and return migrants.<sup>13</sup> According to estimates by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), there were around 281 million international migrants in 2020, making up around 3.5% of the Earth’s population.<sup>14</sup> Over the past decades, this percentage has increased substantially, from around 2.3% of the global population in 1980 and around 2.8% in 2000.<sup>15</sup> Among international migrants, the majority migrates voluntarily.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Forced Displacement***

- **Forced displacement** refers to the involuntary or coerced internal or international displacement of persons resulting from “persecution, conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations or the adverse effects of climate change, environmental degradation, or disasters”<sup>17</sup> According to a 2023 estimate by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are more than 110 million forcibly displaced individuals globally. Internally displaced people can be *refugees*, *asylum-seekers*, or *internally displaced persons (IDPs)*.<sup>18</sup>
- The definition of a **refugee** is laid out in Article 1 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. It defines a refugee as someone who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”<sup>19</sup> For a displaced person to officially obtain refugee status, they first have to become an asylum-seeker by applying for asylum in the country they have fled to, and then have a refugee status conferred to them, either by this host country or an international organisation.<sup>20</sup> According to UNHCR data, there were 43.7 million refugees globally in 2024,<sup>21</sup> and 73% of refugees and “other people in need of international protection” originated from only five states.<sup>22</sup>
- The UNHCR defines *asylum-seekers* as individuals looking to obtain “international protection,” such as a refugee status or a similar status. Either, they plan to request asylum in

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<sup>13</sup> “International Migration,” in *Wikipedia*, November 18, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=International\\_migration&oldid=1258099845](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=International_migration&oldid=1258099845).

<sup>14</sup> Nations, “International Migration.”

<sup>15</sup> Nations.

<sup>16</sup> Nations.

<sup>17</sup> “Forced Displacement - European Commission,” accessed January 20, 2025, [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-forced-displacement/forced-displacement\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-forced-displacement/forced-displacement_en).

<sup>18</sup> “Forced Displacement - European Commission.”

<sup>19</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees,” 1951, <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/3b66c2aa10.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> “Forced Displacement - European Commission.”

<sup>21</sup> “Refugees,” UNHCR, accessed January 23, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugees>.

<sup>22</sup> “What Is a Refugee? Definition and Meaning | USA for UNHCR,” accessed January 23, 2025, <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>.

the country they have fled to but have not yet done so or they have requested said status and are waiting for a decision.<sup>23</sup> Being an asylum-seeker is necessary to become recognised as a refugee.<sup>24</sup> Seeking asylum is a human right and asylum-seekers are protected by the 1951 Refugee Convention, whose non-refoulement principle states that countries may not “expel or return” asylum-seekers to a place where they face threats of persecution, torture, or other serious harm.<sup>25</sup> According to the UNHCR, there were 8 million asylum-seekers globally in the summer of 2024.<sup>26</sup>

- Individuals who have been forcibly displaced within their countries of origin are referred to as **IDPs**.<sup>27</sup> Since IDPs remain under the jurisdiction and protection of their own government, they are not protected by international law or entitled to the same forms of assistance as refugees.<sup>28</sup>
- **Stateless people** are individuals who are denied the right to a nationality. Since no country recognises them as nationals, they are often unable to access essential services, such as medical care and education.<sup>29</sup> According to UNHCR data from 2024, 4.4 million people globally are stateless and among them, 1.4 million are forcibly displaced.<sup>30</sup>

## Key Aspects of the Challenges of Migration

### Employment

- Among the 255.7 million migrants of working age<sup>31</sup> globally, the majority (167.7 million) was in the labour force in 2022 and among those, 155.6 million were employed, whereas 12.1 million were unemployed.<sup>32</sup> The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) notes that its member states have seen record highs in migrant employment and

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<sup>23</sup> “Asylum-Seekers,” UNHCR, accessed January 23, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/asylum-seekers>.

<sup>24</sup> “Asylum-Seekers.”

<sup>25</sup> “Asylum-Seekers.”

<sup>26</sup> “Asylum-Seekers.”

<sup>27</sup> “Forced Displacement - European Commission.”

<sup>28</sup> “What Is a Refugee?”

<sup>29</sup> “Stateless People,” UNHCR, accessed January 23, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/stateless-people>.

<sup>30</sup> “Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Population Categories,” UNHCR Refugee Statistics, accessed January 23, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/insights/explainers/forcibly-displaced-pocs.html>.

<sup>31</sup> according to the ILO, this is anyone aged 15 and above

<sup>32</sup> International Labour Organization, “ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: International Migrants in the Labour Force – Fourth Edition,” December 16, 2024, [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/MIGRANT%20%E2%80%93%20ILO%20Global%20Estimates%20on%20International%20Migrant%20Workers\\_WEB\\_0.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/MIGRANT%20%E2%80%93%20ILO%20Global%20Estimates%20on%20International%20Migrant%20Workers_WEB_0.pdf).

record lows in migrant unemployment following the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, gaps persist in the integration of migrant workers into the workforce.<sup>34</sup>

- Migrant workers are needed in many host countries, including in the OECD member states, to address labour shortages resulting from ageing populations and demographic changes.<sup>35</sup> Many high-income countries, particularly in Europe, are experiencing persistently low birth rates that fall below replacement levels, leading to a shrinking workforce and a growing dependency ratio.<sup>36</sup> These demographic trends lead to an increase in the demand for labour in specific sectors of the economy.<sup>37</sup> This is also reflected in the share of migrants in occupations affected by labour shortages. According to data by the European Commission, between 2017 and 2021, the migrant employment rate in sectors and occupations affected by labour shortages was higher than in occupations and sectors unaffected by labour shortages.<sup>38</sup>
- Nonetheless, migrants, especially asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, continue to face numerous barriers to accessing the labour market. According to the European Commission, asylum seekers in the EU have limited to no access to employment because of their legal status, depending on their host country.<sup>39</sup> Even those whose host countries allow them access to employment may face delays in said access because of administrative challenges, creating a gap in their employment history, which can lower their chances of finding employment later on.<sup>40</sup> The European Commission further ascertains that the administrative burdens related to refugee employment may also discourage some employers from hiring refugees.<sup>41</sup> Other factors that limit migrants' access to their host country's labour market include limited proficiency in the host country's language and challenges related to the recognition of their existing skills and qualifications.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, segregation by skill level and occupation areas exists between migrant and native workers.<sup>43</sup> In many cases, migrants also lack the professional networks that native-born populations do and have less insight into

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<sup>33</sup> "International Migration Outlook 2024," OECD, November 14, 2024,

[https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/international-migration-outlook-2024\\_50b0353e-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/international-migration-outlook-2024_50b0353e-en.html).

<sup>34</sup> Bureau international du travail, ed., *ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology*, 3rd ed (Geneva: International labour organization, 2021).

<sup>35</sup> "Migration," OECD, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/migration.html>.

<sup>36</sup> "Low Fertility in the EU: A Review of Trends and Drivers | Knowledge for Policy," accessed March 1, 2025, [https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/news/low-fertility-eu-review-trends-drivers\\_en?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/news/low-fertility-eu-review-trends-drivers_en?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>37</sup> "Migration," OECD, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/migration.html>.

<sup>38</sup> European Commission, "Employment and Social Developments in Europe (ESDE) 2023," 2023, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/esde-2023/chapters/chapter-2-6.html>.

<sup>39</sup> "Challenges in the Labour Market Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees | European Website on Integration," accessed February 12, 2025, [https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/challenges-labour-market-integration-asylum-seekers-and-refugees\\_en](https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/challenges-labour-market-integration-asylum-seekers-and-refugees_en).

<sup>40</sup> "Challenges in the Labour Market Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees | European Website on Integration."

<sup>41</sup> "Challenges in the Labour Market Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees | European Website on Integration."

<sup>42</sup> "Challenges in the Labour Market Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees | European Website on Integration."

<sup>43</sup> "Challenges in the Labour Market Integration of Asylum Seekers and Refugees | European Website on Integration."

their host country's labour market than native-born populations, which can also be a hindrance in finding employment.<sup>44</sup> Overall, migrants in the EU have been found to be less likely to find employment than native-born populations and more likely to work under precarious conditions, such as in informal employment, as well as suffer from discrimination in the workplace.<sup>45</sup>

- The millions of temporary labour migrants who leave their countries of origin annually<sup>46</sup> often face significant challenges due to their precarious legal status and dependence on employers. While some members of the ILO have noted the importance of temporary labour migration for ensuring labour supply, several workers' organisations within the ILO have noted that the poor working conditions many temporary migrant workers are subjected to can put pressure on the overall wages and working conditions in the host country's labour market, potentially worsening conditions for all workers.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has noted that in many contexts, temporary migrant workers face human rights restrictions.<sup>48</sup> Many temporary labour migrants face dehumanisation, overcrowded housing, separation from their families, and limited access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), nutritious food, and healthcare.<sup>49</sup> The OHCHR further reports that in some contexts, temporary labour migrants are hindered from practising their religion, either because their employers prohibit them from praying or fasting at work or because they are expected to work on weekends, leaving them unable to attend religious services.<sup>50</sup>

### **Education and Training**

- The pursuit of higher-quality education, whether it be primary, secondary, or tertiary education, is a factor motivating many people to migrate.<sup>51</sup>
- According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), over 6.4 million individuals were enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of origin in 2023.<sup>52</sup> Migration in pursuit of tertiary education brings with it the

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<sup>44</sup> Tommaso Colussi, "Migrant Networks and Job Search Outcomes: Evidence from Displaced Workers," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2663769>.

<sup>45</sup> European Commission, "Employment and Social Developments in Europe (ESDE) 2023."

<sup>46</sup> "UN Human Rights Report Urges Re-Think of Temporary Labour Migration Programmes," OHCHR, accessed February 23, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/12/un-human-rights-report-urges-re-think-temporary-labour-migration-programmes>.

<sup>47</sup> International Labour Organization, "Temporary Labour Migration -- Governing Body 346th Session, Geneva, October-November 2022," n.d., file:///Users/claralindemann/Downloads/wcms\_858179.pdf.

<sup>48</sup> "UN Human Rights Report Urges Re-Think of Temporary Labour Migration Programmes."

<sup>49</sup> "UN Human Rights Report Urges Re-Think of Temporary Labour Migration Programmes."

<sup>50</sup> "UN Human Rights Report Urges Re-Think of Temporary Labour Migration Programmes."

<sup>51</sup> UNICEF, "UNICEF Working Paper: Education Solutions for Migrant and Displaced Children and Their Host Communities," n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/media/83561/file/Education-solutions-for-migrant-and-displaced-children-and-their-host-communities.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> "What You Need to Know about Higher Education | UNESCO," accessed February 23, 2025, <https://www.unesco.org/en/higher-education/need-know>.

potential for advantages for international students, their countries of origin, and their host countries. Host countries may experience increased diversity and students may benefit from higher-quality education, improved career prospects, and experiences they would not have had in their country of origin.<sup>53</sup> However, international students may face unique challenges that national students do not, including financial difficulties, discrimination and a variety of sociocultural issues, including language barriers, loneliness, and homesickness.<sup>54</sup> Several studies show that foreign-born students in tertiary education are more likely to experience academic challenges.<sup>55</sup> In some cases, the aforementioned difficulties even lead international students to drop out of higher education.<sup>56</sup>

- Many children and youth face barriers to quality primary and secondary education, including lacking infrastructure and resources, limited prior education, and discrimination.<sup>57</sup> According to data by the UNHCR, among the approximately 15 million refugees aged 18 and below,<sup>58</sup> around half lack access to education, with post-primary level education<sup>59</sup> especially impacted.<sup>60</sup> Enrollment rates are even lower for refugee girls and young refugee women, partly as a result of cultural gender norms,<sup>61</sup> safety concerns,<sup>62</sup> and because families with limited resources are more likely to prioritise their sons' than their daughters' education.<sup>63</sup> The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that even fewer refugee children have access to education in low-income countries and that the situation is even more dire for many IDP children in conflict zones and fragile settings.<sup>64</sup>
- Even many migrant children who have access to education face numerous challenges. Among them is that limited proficiency in the host country's language can hinder academic performance and social integration among migrant students.<sup>65</sup> Living with an undocumented status or having undocumented family members can create anxiety among migrant children,

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<sup>53</sup> Omotoyosi Oduwaye, Askin Kiraz, and Yasemin Sorakin, "A Trend Analysis of the Challenges of International Students Over 21 Years," *Sage Open* 13, no. 4 (October 1, 2023): 21582440231210387, <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231210387>.

<sup>54</sup> Oduwaye, Kiraz, and Sorakin.

<sup>55</sup> Oduwaye, Kiraz, and Sorakin.

<sup>56</sup> Oduwaye, Kiraz, and Sorakin.

<sup>57</sup> UNICEF, "UNICEF Working Paper: Education Solutions for Migrant and Displaced Children and Their Host Communities."

<sup>58</sup> "What to Know about Refugee Education and Why It Matters," accessed February 10, 2025, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/what-to-know-about-refugee-education-and-why-it-matters/>.

<sup>59</sup> According to the UNHCR, in 2018, more than 35% of refugee children were unable to attend primary school and 75% were unable to attend secondary school.

<sup>60</sup> "Education," UNHCR, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/education>.

<sup>61</sup> e.g. they are expected to care for family members, get married, or have children of their own

<sup>62</sup> "Gender Equality in Education and Emergencies," *Forced Migration Review* (blog), accessed February 26, 2025, <https://www.fmreview.org/education-displacement/iversen-oestergaard/>.

<sup>63</sup> "What to Know about Refugee Education and Why It Matters."

<sup>64</sup> "Education, Children on the Move and Inclusion in Education | UNICEF," February 12, 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/education-children-move-and-inclusion-education>.

<sup>65</sup> "K-12 Education," [migrationpolicy.org](https://www.migrationpolicy.org), accessed February 10, 2025, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/topics/k-12-education>.

leading to increased absenteeism and disengagement from school.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the National Immigration Law Center reports that undocumented graduates from US secondary schools in many cases face restrictions in their access to higher education because of their status as undocumented migrants.<sup>67</sup>

## Gender Inequalities

- In 2020, there were 135 million female migrants, making up 48.1% of the migrant population globally.<sup>68</sup> An increasing share of women is migrating independently for work or education and heading their own households.<sup>69</sup> Despite this, data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) shows that in 2019, male migrant workers still outnumbered female migrant workers globally (99 million vs. 70 million), partly because fewer women of working age migrate and their labour force participation rate is lower.<sup>70</sup>
- Female migrants' labour force participation varies significantly by region—over half of migrant workers in the North, South, and West of Europe were women in 2019, while in Arab states, fewer than one in five were female.<sup>71</sup> Female migrants are over-represented in low-skilled sectors, compared to male migrant workers.<sup>72</sup> Most working migrant women (about 80.7% in 2022) are in the service sector, often filling care work roles driven by ageing populations and rising female workforce participation in destination countries.<sup>73</sup> The ILO notes that recruitment agencies and social networks play a key role in channeling female migrants into service jobs.<sup>74</sup>
- Widespread gender-based violence (GBV) can drive women and girls to leave their home countries, particularly when they lack adequate protection.<sup>75</sup> However, migration itself can expose individuals—especially women, girls, and LGBTIQI+ people—to further GBV.<sup>76</sup> Those travelling through unsafe or irregular migration routes face heightened risks of GBV and human trafficking. In destination countries, factors such as financial stability, awareness of rights, and language proficiency influence migrants' vulnerability to GBV.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> “The Education of Immigrant Children | Harvard Graduate School of Education,” December 11, 2014, <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/14/12/education-immigrant-children>.

<sup>67</sup> “Education - National Immigration Law Center,” NILC, November 2, 2015, <https://www.nilc.org/work/education/>.

<sup>68</sup> “Interactive World Migration Report 2024.”

<sup>69</sup> “Gender and Migration.”

<sup>70</sup> Bureau international du travail, ed., *ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology*, 3rd ed (Geneva: International labour organization, 2021).

<sup>71</sup> Bureau international du travail, ed., *ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology*, 3rd ed (Geneva: International labour organization, 2021).

<sup>72</sup> International Labour Organization, “ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: International Migrants in the Labour Force – Fourth Edition.”

<sup>73</sup> International Labour Organization, “ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: International Migrants in the Labour Force – Fourth Edition.”

<sup>74</sup> International Labour Organization.

<sup>75</sup> “What Makes Migrants Vulnerable to Gender-Based Violence? | ONU Migración Americas,” accessed January 30, 2025, <https://lac.iom.int/en/blogs/what-makes-migrants-vulnerable-gender-based-violence>.

<sup>76</sup> “What Makes Migrants Vulnerable to Gender-Based Violence?”

<sup>77</sup> “What Makes Migrants Vulnerable to Gender-Based Violence?”



- Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ+) individuals face discrimination, persecution, and violence in their home countries, with some even at risk of the death penalty due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, prompting them to seek refuge abroad.<sup>78</sup> The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) identifies LGBTIQ+ migrants as among the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, noting that many live in host countries that fail to protect their rights or actively discriminate against them.<sup>79</sup> These individuals often experience multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination—not only based on their LGBTIQ+ status and migrant identity but also on factors such as ethnicity, religion, or political beliefs.<sup>80</sup>

### Integration and Social Inclusion

- The European Union (EU) defines migrant integration as “a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of [states].”<sup>81</sup> However, in many host countries, residents' willingness to accommodate migrants is limited.<sup>82</sup> This is evident in the growing support for political parties promoting anti-immigrant agendas, making migration an increasingly central issue in elections worldwide.<sup>83</sup> Such opposition suggests a decline in public acceptance of migrants, further hindering their integration.<sup>84</sup>
- Migrants frequently struggle to build relationships with host-country insiders—acquaintances, friends, and mentors who could help them navigate their new environment.<sup>85</sup> Without these connections, they face greater difficulties learning the host country’s language, understanding cultural norms, and accessing essential services.<sup>86</sup> Community-based institutions can play a critical role in bridging this gap.<sup>87</sup> Civil society organisations, religious groups, cultural centres, and grassroots initiatives provide migrants with social spaces, guidance on legal and bureaucratic processes, and opportunities to participate in local life.<sup>88</sup> A 2023 study highlights that such engagement is key to overcoming isolation, supporting language acquisition, and fostering a sense of belonging.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, much of the literature on migrant social

<sup>78</sup> “LGBTIQ+ Persons,” UNHCR, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/safeguarding-individuals/lgbtiq-persons>.

<sup>79</sup> “LGBTI and Gender-Diverse Persons in Forced Displacement,” OHCHR, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity/lgbti-and-gender-diverse-persons-forced-displacement>.

<sup>80</sup> “LGBTI and Gender-Diverse Persons in Forced Displacement,” OHCHR, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity/lgbti-and-gender-diverse-persons-forced-displacement>.

<sup>81</sup> “Integration - European Commission,” accessed February 9, 2025, [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/integration\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/integration_en).

<sup>82</sup> Zsolt Kapelner, “Anti-Immigrant Backlash: The Democratic Dilemma for Immigration Policy,” *Comparative Migration Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 1, 2024): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-024-00370-7>.

<sup>83</sup> Zsolt Kapelner, “Anti-Immigrant Backlash: The Democratic Dilemma for Immigration Policy,” *Comparative Migration Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 1, 2024): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-024-00370-7>.

<sup>84</sup> Kapelner.

<sup>85</sup> Sofia Nyström, Andreas Fejes, and Nedžad Mešić, “Social Inclusion Beyond Education and Work: Migrants Meaning-Making Towards Social Inclusion,” *Social Inclusion* 11, no. 4 (October 24, 2023): 5–12, <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v11i4.6984>.

<sup>86</sup> Nyström, Fejes, and Mešić.

<sup>87</sup> Nyström, Fejes, and Mešić.

<sup>88</sup> Nyström, Fejes, and Mešić.

<sup>89</sup> Nyström, Fejes, and Mešić.

inclusion highlights the importance of integration into education and the labour market, emphasising the need for migrants to learn the host country's language and adapt to its cultural norms.<sup>90</sup> The challenges migrants face in integrating into the host society can vary significantly depending on factors such as their background, migration status, and personal circumstances.

### High-Skilled Migration

- In most regions of the world, a larger share of “high-skilled” than “low-skilled” individuals emigrates.<sup>91</sup> This trend is particularly pronounced in low-income countries.<sup>92</sup> Approximately 20% of individuals originating from a low-income country who hold a bachelor's degree or equivalent live in a more highly developed country.<sup>93</sup> High-skilled migration can offer significant benefits to host countries by addressing labour shortages, driving innovation, and boosting economic growth.<sup>94</sup> Skilled migrants enhance productivity in key industries such as healthcare, technology, and engineering, contributing to scientific advancements and entrepreneurship.<sup>95</sup> Their presence fosters cultural diversity and strengthens global knowledge exchange, allowing host countries to remain competitive in an increasingly interconnected world.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, high-skilled migrants expand the tax base and contribute to public services, further supporting economic stability.<sup>97</sup>
- For sending countries, the effects of high-skilled emigration are more complex and depend on various factors. The departure of educated individuals can lead to "brain drain," or human capital flight, which weakens local economies by reducing innovation, slowing economic growth, and creating skill shortages in critical sectors.<sup>98</sup> This can be particularly damaging in low-income countries where skilled professionals are already scarce. However, under certain conditions, high-skilled emigration can result in "brain gain."<sup>99</sup> This can for instance occur when migrants acquire new skills and knowledge abroad and later return to their home countries, bringing valuable expertise and investment.<sup>100</sup> Even when migrants do not return, they often send remittances, which can help support families, fund education, and stimulate

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<sup>90</sup> Nyström, Fejes, and Mešić, “Social Inclusion Beyond Education and Work.”

<sup>91</sup> Narcisse Cha'ngom et al., “Migration of Talent: Implications for Countries of Origin,” JRC Publications Repository, 2024, <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC137104>.

<sup>92</sup> Cha'ngom et al.

<sup>93</sup> Cha'ngom et al.

<sup>94</sup> David M. Hart, “From Brain Drain to Mutual Gain: Sharing the Benefits of High-Skill Migration,” *Issues in Science and Technology* (blog), October 1, 2006, [https://issues.org/d\\_hart/](https://issues.org/d_hart/).

<sup>95</sup> Hart.

<sup>96</sup> Hart.

<sup>97</sup> Abdurrahman B. Aydemir, “Skill-Based Immigration, Economic Integration, and Economic Performance,” *IZA World of Labor*, June 24, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.15185/izawol.41>.

<sup>98</sup> “Brain Drain vs Brain Gain – Assembly of European Regions,” accessed January 23, 2025, <https://aer.eu/brain-drain/>; Cha'ngom et al., “Migration of Talent.”

<sup>99</sup> Hart, “From Brain Drain to Mutual Gain.”

<sup>100</sup> Rana Mohamed, “Brain Gain from Return Migration: Evidence from Egypt,” *Economic Research Forum (ERF)*, December 18, 2017, <https://theforum.erf.org.eg/2017/12/18/brain-gain-return-migration-evidence-egypt/>.

local economies.<sup>101</sup> According to World Bank data, global remittances reached USD 656 billion in 2023, making them a crucial financial resource for many low- and middle-income countries.<sup>102</sup> Whether high-skilled migration results in brain drain or brain gain depends on factors such as return migration rates, the ability of returning migrants to reintegrate into the workforce, and whether emigration incentivises further investment in education and training within the country of origin.<sup>103</sup>

- For the highly skilled migrants themselves, migration entails the risk of “brain waste,” a scenario in which they immigrate to regions they consider to have better working or living conditions but do not.<sup>104</sup> As a result, they end up unemployed or employed in a position for which they are overqualified in their host country when their skills could have been of use in their country of origin.<sup>105</sup> Thus, their skills and training go to waste, as they are used in neither their country of origin nor their host country and the workers do not benefit from the increase in living standards they had expected.

### **Health and Wellbeing<sup>106</sup>**

- Many migrants face limited access to healthcare, with barriers especially severe for those in irregular situations, people with disabilities, women, and unaccompanied children.<sup>107</sup> In humanitarian settings, access to health services is further strained by shortages of medicine and healthcare facilities, leaving many without essential care.<sup>108</sup>
- Migrants often face significant health challenges due to poor living conditions, limited access to healthcare, and the hardships of their migration journey.<sup>109</sup> Due to inadequate sanitation and overcrowding, they are at increased risk of communicable diseases such as measles and food- and waterborne illnesses.<sup>110</sup> Many also suffer from noncommunicable diseases that go untreated during migration, leading to complications upon arrival in host countries.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, migrant women may face risks related to maternity care, while injuries, malnutrition, and exposure to harsh environments further impact their physical well-being.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> “Remittances,” World Bank, accessed January 23, 2025, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migration/brief/remittances-knomad>.

<sup>102</sup> “Remittances.”

<sup>103</sup> Hart, “From Brain Drain to Mutual Gain.”

<sup>104</sup> “Brain Drain vs Brain Gain – Assembly of European Regions.”

<sup>105</sup> “Brain Drain vs Brain Gain – Assembly of European Regions.”

<sup>106</sup> in line with SDG 3 “Good health and well-being”

<sup>107</sup> “Refugee and Migrant Health,” accessed February 7, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-health>.

<sup>108</sup> “Refugee and Migrant Health,” accessed February 7, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-health>.

<sup>109</sup> “Refugee and Migrant Health,” accessed February 7, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-health>.

<sup>110</sup> “Refugee and Migrant Health,” accessed February 7, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-health>.

<sup>111</sup> “Refugee and Migrant Health,” accessed February 7, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-health>.

<sup>112</sup> “Refugee and Migrant Health,” accessed February 7, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-health>.

- For those in temporary or unstable living conditions—such as refugees moving from camp to camp—health risks are even greater. The constant displacement disrupts medical treatment, including vaccinations, prenatal care, and management of chronic illnesses.<sup>113</sup> Poor nutrition, lack of clean water, and exposure to extreme weather conditions in temporary shelters further weaken migrants’ health, making them more vulnerable to infections and long-term health complications.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, in situations where their basic needs are unmet, many refugees prioritise meeting their basic needs for shelter, nutrition, and water over seeking medical care.<sup>115</sup>
- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), stressors before, during, and after migration render “common” mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) more prevalent among refugees and migrants who have experienced significant hardship than among other populations.<sup>116</sup> Asylum seekers, in particular, face a heightened risk of suicide.<sup>117</sup> Discrimination, poor living conditions, barriers to employment, and difficulties integrating into host countries further increase the risk of mental health issues.<sup>118</sup> Additionally, many migrants struggle to access mental health care, and even those who do, may experience disruptions, especially when their stay in a host country is temporary.<sup>119</sup>

### Human Rights Protection

- There are several international treaties and conventions protecting migrants’ rights. Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) guarantees everyone’s right “to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.”<sup>120</sup> The 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol substantiate this right by stating that refugees shall not have to return to countries where they are at risk of persecution.<sup>121</sup>
- However, in practice, some migrants face violations of their rights, including their civil and political rights and their economic, social and cultural rights.<sup>122</sup> In some cases, migrants are

<sup>113</sup> Leigh Daynes, “The Health Impacts of the Refugee Crisis: A Medical Charity Perspective,” *Clinical Medicine* 16, no. 5 (October 2016): 437–40, <https://doi.org/10.7861/clinmedicine.16-5-437>.

<sup>114</sup> “Refugee and Migrant Health,” accessed February 7, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-health>.

<sup>115</sup> Daynes, “The Health Impacts of the Refugee Crisis.”

<sup>116</sup> “Mental Health and Forced Displacement,” accessed February 7, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/mental-health-and-forced-displacement>.

<sup>117</sup> “Mental Health and Forced Displacement,” accessed February 7, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/mental-health-and-forced-displacement>.

<sup>118</sup> “Mental Health and Forced Displacement,” accessed February 7, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/mental-health-and-forced-displacement>.

<sup>119</sup> “Mental Health and Forced Displacement,” accessed February 7, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/mental-health-and-forced-displacement>.

<sup>120</sup> United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” United Nations (United Nations), accessed February 12, 2025, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

<sup>121</sup> “Who Is a Refugee, a Migrant or an Asylum Seeker?,” Amnesty International, accessed February 12, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/>.

<sup>122</sup> “About Migration and Human Rights,” OHCHR, accessed February 12, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/migration/about-migration-and-human-rights>.

unlawfully subjected to “profiling, torture and ill-treatment, gender-based violence, dangerous interception practices, and prolonged or arbitrary detention.”<sup>123</sup> The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) links such violations to discriminatory legislation and deep-rooted xenophobia and prejudice against migrants in host countries.<sup>124</sup> It furthermore clarifies that migrants in “irregular situations” are among the most likely to experience such violations.<sup>125</sup> Forcibly displaced individuals are also especially vulnerable while in transit, with female migrants and children facing additional risks.<sup>126</sup>

### *A Call to Action*

**There is a pivotal need for an interdisciplinary approach in confronting these pressing global challenges. Solutions should come from a broad scope of participation in various fields including (but not limited to) anthropology, business administration, development studies, economics, engineering, geography, history, international affairs, international development, international relations, law, management, political science, public policy, psychology and behavioural science, social policy, sociology, medical and health studies.**

**We hope that graduate students from around the globe will embrace these challenges as opportunities, and will devise innovative solutions to tackle the pressing issues related to migration and advance the development goals.**

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<sup>123</sup> “Human Rights in Transit and at International Borders,” OHCHR, accessed February 12, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/migration/human-rights-transit-and-international-borders>.

<sup>124</sup> “About Migration and Human Rights.”

<sup>125</sup> “About Migration and Human Rights.”

<sup>126</sup> “Human Rights in Transit and at International Borders.”

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