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## *Remittances, COVID-19 and Wage Theft: The Impact on Migrant Workers*

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### *Introduction*

Halima, a woman and mother of three, was once a migrant domestic worker. Hoping to make a living and be able to support her family, through a local recruitment agency, Halima moved from the Philippines to Lebanon, where she worked for one family as a housemaid. She spent 10 years there, during which time she experienced continuous violence and abuses, was denied contact with her own family and had almost all payments withheld. In 10 years, Halima “was only able to wire money home once at the beginning and once at the end. So essentially, [...] she worked as a slave.”<sup>1</sup> With her hopes shattered and empty-handed, thanks to the protests of a freeing campaign, Halima at least managed to return home alive. However, up until today, she has been unable to claim justice and take her former employer to court. Her young children, in the meantime, have been deprived of their mother for 10 years.

Unfortunately, this is only one of the many stories of exploitation and abuses suffered by migrant workers across the world, and left unaddressed by justice systems.<sup>2</sup> In an insightful article published on Human-Rights.org, in describing the plight of migrant domestic workers, Saraswathi tells us that “[i]n the best of times they are overworked – upwards of 65 hours a week; underpaid – between USD150 and 400 a month, sometimes unpaid; often without a weekly off; and no freedom to leave their workplace and spend their free time as they please.”<sup>3</sup> In worst-case scenarios, they are violated, prevented from having contact with the external world, or killed. Abuses, however, are not exclusive to the domestic sector.<sup>4</sup>

Health expert Marc Schenker suggests that being exposed to risky jobs, which often lead to injury or death, is common among migrant workers.<sup>5</sup> The 2018 Annual Review of Public Health also affirms that migrant workers “are often engaged in what are known as 3-D jobs—dirty, dangerous, and demanding (sometimes degrading or demeaning) [...] They work for less pay, for longer hours, and in worse conditions than do nonmigrants and are often subject to human rights violations, abuse, human trafficking, and violence. Most importantly, these precarious workers may take greater risks on the job, do work without adequate training or protective equipment, and do not

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<sup>1</sup> Wallis, E., Slavery and suicide: Plight of migrant maids in Lebanon made more stark by pandemic (Info Migrants 06 June 2020) <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/25140/slavery-and-suicide-plight-of-migrant-maids-in-lebanon-made-more-stark-by-pandemic>

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Azhari, T., and Mbah F., Lebanon employer investigated over Nigeria domestic worker abuse, (Aljazeera 30 April 2020) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/lebanon-employer-investigated-nigeria-domestic-worker-abuse-200430105813526.html>

<sup>3</sup> Saraswathi, V., Domestic Workers: Bearing the Brunt of Invisibility, Isolation and Inequality (Info Migrants 29 April 2020) <https://www.migrant-rights.org/2020/04/domestic-workers-bearing-the-brunt-of-invisibility-isolation-and-inequality/>

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence, F., Spain's salad growers are modern-day slaves, say charities (The Guardian 07 February 2011) <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/feb/07/spain-salad-growers-slaves-charities>

<sup>5</sup> Underwood, E., Unhealthy work: Why migrants are especially vulnerable to injury and death on the job, (Knowable Magazine 18 July 2018) <https://www.knowablemagazine.org/article/society/2018/unhealthy-work-why-migrants-are-especially-vulnerable-injury-and-death-job>

complain about unsafe working conditions.” In many cases, complaining about their work conditions and claiming justice would only result in their immediate deportation.

The COVID-19 pandemic compounds this already exploitative reality. An article<sup>6</sup> published in June this year, denounced new forms of abuses experienced by migrant workers in the agriculture sector: increased pressure on daily outputs, inadequate conditions to allow for the respect of workers’ safety, no equipment distributed for protection against contagion as well as inadequate sanitary facilities to guarantee basic hygiene in accommodation structures. A video released by Reuters<sup>7</sup> tells the story of Ethiopian women, migrant domestic workers, suddenly dismissed by their employers and left on their own without any shelter, documentation and, in some instances, without due payment for the services rendered. An equally recent podcast on data collection on COVID-19,<sup>8</sup> denounces the segregation of non-key migrant workers in guarded, densely populated dormitories in Asia. Physically separated from the rest of society and forced to remain in the same space, migrant workers are left effectively unable to protect themselves against the risk of contagion.

A 2017 Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD) report, looks into the costs borne by migrant workers. Whilst, up until now, the main discourse on migration costs, has been mostly revolving around monetary aspects (e.g. recruitment fees<sup>9</sup>, relocation costs, costs of remittances), KNOMAD discusses the problem of the non-monetary price that migrant workers pay, as a result of abysmal working conditions at their employment destination. Non-monetary costs include denied access to health and social protection systems, poor work-life balance, work-related injuries (including stress and fatigue), long-term illnesses,<sup>10</sup> and the psychological impact of the migration experience. Despite being largely disregarded in the general assessment of the costs of migration, these elements represent a fundamental component in the overall return on the migration investment<sup>11</sup> and influence the success of the relationship between migration and development,<sup>12</sup> along with implications for the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As the KNOMAD report suggests “much of these [non-monetary] costs are unknown in advance, and revealed only at destination [...] and that failure to account for the costs of migration linked to the conditions of work raises issues of accuracy of migration decisions, false hopes, and efficiency losses in general.”<sup>13</sup> These costs may lead to earlier dismissals or physical incapacity to continue to perform employment services, with consequent inability to earn enough to support oneself and send remittances back home to support one’s family: “[h]igher costs due to poor conditions of work are strongly and significantly negatively correlated with the amount of remittances, in absolute and relative terms, as well as the duration of migration.”<sup>14</sup> This also means missed opportunities for further

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<sup>6</sup> Grant, H., Women picking fruit for UK supermarkets 'facing new forms of exploitation' (The Guardian, 03 June 2020) <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jun/03/women-picking-fruit-for-uk-supermarkets-facing-new-forms-of-exploitation>

<sup>7</sup> <https://uk.reuters.com/video/watch/i-am-not-garbage-ethiopian-workers-left-idOVCHNNG4Z> See also <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-lebanon-workers-tr/lebanons-coronavirus-lockdown-leaves-migrant-women-penniless-and-stranded-idUSKBN21Y2Q2>

<sup>8</sup> <https://megdavisconsulting.com/2020/06/14/right-on-4-uncounted-in-covid19-data/>

<sup>9</sup> Migration Data Portal, Migrant recruitment costs, (9 June 2020) <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/migrant-recruitment-costs>

<sup>10</sup> See for instance Underwood, E., Unhealthy work: Why migrants are especially vulnerable to injury and death on the job, (Knowable Magazine 18 July 2018) <https://www.knowablemagazine.org/article/society/2018/unhealthy-work-why-migrants-are-especially-vulnerable-injury-and-death-job>

<sup>11</sup> The decision to migrate is often the result of a household investment decision that sees employment abroad as a survival strategy and a strategy for risk diversification.

<sup>12</sup> International Organisation for Migration, Migration and Sustainable Development, <https://www.iom.int/migration-and-development>; and International Organisation for Migration, Migration and the 2030 Agenda. A guide for practitioners (2018), [http://migration4development.org/sites/default/files/en\\_sdg\\_web.pdf](http://migration4development.org/sites/default/files/en_sdg_web.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Aleksynska M., et al., Deficiencies in Conditions of Work as a Cost to Labor Migration: Concepts, Extent, and Implications (Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development August 2017) Working paper, no. 28 [https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2017-08/WP\\_Deficiencies%20in%20Conditions%20of%20Work%20%2015-2017.pdf](https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2017-08/WP_Deficiencies%20in%20Conditions%20of%20Work%20%2015-2017.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

investment at the community level that, in turn, would have contributed to an overall improvement of living conditions in the home society.

In an attempt to quantify the non-monetary costs in financial terms, KNOMAD reports that “aggregate losses due to deficiencies in the conditions of work abroad represent at least 30 percent of total promised wages or 27 percent of total actual wages, and are twice as high as the recruitment and travel costs incurred to effectuate the migration.”<sup>15</sup> The costs for undocumented workers are likely to be even higher. The implications of these losses, however, go beyond numbers: the migration experience is a crucial opportunity for millions of migrant workers to improve their circumstances and their household’s well-being. Enduring inhumane working conditions that hamper the possibility of migrant workers to thrive and the migration experience to last, results in an improper denial of survival prospects, of life opportunities for the workers themselves and for the future generations. Being deprived of one’s own money through withheld or reduced payments is not only theft and a breach of the right to live in dignity with sufficient means, but also a significant obstacle to human development. Ignoring the brunt borne by migrant workers beyond the monetary losses means continuing to undermine the efforts of many to alleviate suffering in the world and to deny the respect of fundamental rights. This cannot be ignored if we are now to build back better.

### *Remittance flows and the impact of COVID-19*

The Migration Data Portal defines remittances as private “money or goods [i.e. cash or noncash items] that migrants send back to families and friends in origin countries.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the 2009 Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual suggests that “remittances represent household income from foreign economies arising mainly from the temporary or permanent movement of people to those economies.”<sup>17</sup> KNOMAD data<sup>18</sup> shows that in 2019 the estimate of recorded remittance inflows worldwide amounted to 714 Billion US Dollars, 77.60% of which were sent to low- and middle-income countries, i.e. 554 Billion US Dollars.<sup>19</sup> In 2019, India was the largest recipient of remittances by total received, followed by China, Mexico and the Philippines. For countries such as Tonga, Haiti and South Sudan, remittances represent more than 30% of their Gross Domestic Product.

Over time, remittance flows have consistently grown and today are considerably larger than Official Development Assistance. Since last year, remittance flows have surpassed the total Foreign Direct Investments as well. As Ratha puts it, in the recent panel discussion “*Transitional Justice: Towards “Building Back Better”*”, this is a quite remarkable milestone. It means that the money sent back home by migrant workers through small transactions adds up to become larger than the entirety of the money flowing through all the multinational companies in the world. Data from the International Labour Organisation (ILO),<sup>20</sup> indicates that migrant workers represent around 4.7% of the global workforce, i.e. roughly 164 million workers, almost half of which are women. Asia (13.3%) and the Arab States (13.9%) combined are second only to Europe (32%) by presence of migrant workers.<sup>21</sup> A report by the World Bank (WB) and KNOMAD suggests that migrant workers are especially vulnerable to the effects of economic downturns<sup>22</sup> and vulnerable categories are those most likely to be hit by the effects of the current pandemic.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Migration Data Portal, Migration & Development. Remittances (last updated 10 June 2020) <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/remittances>

<sup>17</sup> International Monetary Fund, Balance of payments and international investment position manual (2009) Sixth Edition, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/bop/2007/bopman6.htm>

<sup>18</sup> To download data sets, please visit Knomad, Remittances Data <https://www.knomad.org/data/remittances> (last accessed 01/08/2020)

<sup>19</sup> In reality, remittance flows are bigger than the calculated data. Limitations to a precise calculation are due to informal transfers, mis-categorisation of expenditures, and possibilities of unreported formal amounts by banks. For a more comprehensive discussion see, for example, Migration Data Portal, Talking Migration Data: Remittances and the G20, <https://migrationdataportal.org/blog/talking-migration-data-remittances-and-g20>

<sup>20</sup> International Labour Organisation, ‘ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers Labour Migration Branch Conditions of Work and Equality Department, Department of Statistics. Results and Methodology’ (ILO Labour Migration Branch & ILO Department of Statistics, 2018) [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_652001.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_652001.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Migration Data Portal, Labour Migration (last updated 09 June 2020) <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/labour-migration>

<sup>22</sup> Ratha, D., et al., Migration and Development Brief 32: COVID-19 Crisis through a Migration Lens (KNOMAD and World Bank 2020) [https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/R8\\_Migration%26Remittances\\_brief32.pdf](https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/R8_Migration%26Remittances_brief32.pdf)

Supporting this, the United Nations (UN) include migrants and people in extreme poverty or facing insecure and informal work and incomes, among those who are at risk of experiencing the highest degree of socio-economic marginalisation and requiring specific attention in COVID-19 policy responses.<sup>23</sup>

An analysis by Hu on the impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in the UK,<sup>24</sup> for example, shows that migrant workers, especially from BAME background, have been disproportionately hit by the economic effects of lockdown measures compared to white, non-migrants workers.<sup>25</sup> Reduced or absent income for migrant workers inevitably translates to no or little availability of resources to send back home.<sup>26</sup> Economic projections for 2020 and 2021 estimate that global financial recovery will be uneven, uncertain, slow and subdued, with high risks of increased inequality and poverty.<sup>27</sup> The prospect of a speedy return to employment thus does not look realistic for many migrant workers.

Because of the impact of COVID-19 on the global economy and on migrant workers specifically,<sup>28</sup> remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries are projected to fall in 2020 by almost 20%, which translates to a reduction of ca. 110 Billion US Dollars. The decrease is expected to be even larger for fragile and conflict countries. Besides unemployment, renegotiation of salaries and additional wage theft largely contribute to remittances' decline.<sup>29</sup>

### *The impact of remittances on receiving households*

The role played by remittances in the improvement of people's lives is being increasingly recognised.<sup>30</sup> According to a 2018 report co-authored by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the WB, research demonstrates that "remittance receiving households spend more on housing, health, and education than those with no remittances."<sup>31</sup> Research also shows that remittances have a positive impact on children's literacy rates and reduced child labour, as greater income allows otherwise credit-constrained households to invest more in children's school attendance.<sup>32</sup> Importantly, remittances make a positive difference to the improvement of living conditions and contribute to development opportunities of a larger number of individuals than just the direct recipients as "income gains are shared with family members and friends back home."<sup>33</sup>

Besides the purchase of food, the payment of costs for education, healthcare and housing expenses, the earnings derived from remittances may also be invested in new income-generating activities. Research suggests that, whilst

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<sup>23</sup> United Nations, A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 (April 2020) <https://www.icvanetwork.org/system/files/versions/UN-Framework-for-the-immediate-socio-economic-response-to-COVID-19-2.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Hu, Y., Intersecting ethnic and native-migrant inequalities in the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK (Science Direct, July 2020) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0276562420300640?via%3Dihub>

<sup>25</sup> The research shows that migrant workers from BAME communities have lost their job in significantly higher percentages than white non-migrant workers. Migrant workers, either white or from BAME background, have also experienced greater income loss during lockdown than white-non migrant workers.

<sup>26</sup> Sayeh, A., and Chami, R., Lifelines in Danger. The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to dry up a vital source of income for poor and fragile countries (International Monetary Fund, June 2020) <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2020/06/COVID19-pandemic-impact-on-remittance-flows-sayeh.htm>

<sup>27</sup> Gopinath, G., Reopening from the Great Lockdown: Uneven and Uncertain Recovery (24 June 2020) <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/06/24/reopening-from-the-great-lockdown-uneven-and-uncertain-recovery/>

<sup>28</sup> International Labour Organisation, ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Fifth edition Updated estimates and analysis (30 June 2020) [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_749399.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_749399.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Subramaniam, G., Losing More Than Their Health – COVID-19 and Migrant Worker Wage Theft (Pt 4) (Institute for Human Rights and Business 31 July 2020) <https://www.ihrb.org/focus-areas/migrant-workers/covid19-migrant-workers-wagetheft>

<sup>30</sup> Cornish, L., Data shows remittances and development are increasingly linked (22 June 2020) <https://www.devex.com/news/data-shows-remittances-and-development-are-increasingly-linked-92988>

<sup>31</sup> Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, Migration and Remittances for Development in Asia (May 2018) <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/419611/migration-remittances-development-asia.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> See for example, Schapiro, K.A., Migration and Educational Outcomes of Children Human Development, UNDP (Research Paper 2009) No. 57. It is important to bear in mind that effects are always context dependent and other factors affect the decision of parents to send their children to school.

<sup>33</sup> Ratha, D., Leveraging Migration and Remittances for Development, (n.d.) UN Chronicle <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/leveraging-migration-and-remittances-development>

mothers tend to spend for human capital, “fathers seemly prefer to invest in physical assets and the expansion of family farming and business activities.”<sup>34</sup> Consequently, remittances contribute to a general increase in the welfare at the community level, as money is invested in new businesses as well as new technologies. In enabling households to rely on a stable income, remittances may even result in greater access to loans.<sup>35</sup> Importantly, research conducted by Ratha shows that a “10 percent increase in per capita official remittances may lead to a 3.5 percent decline in the share of poor people.”<sup>36</sup> Inevitably, however, the extent to which remittances contribute to a general improvement in individuals’ conditions is dependent on the context in which people live as well, as the effects of remittances are still subject to the constraints (e.g. red tape, lack of needed public policies, lack of market reforms) of the home country, which affect how the money is managed.<sup>37</sup>

Overall, remittances can represent a reliable source of income, which goes directly into the pockets of families, empowering individuals through greater spending capacity and the ability to decide autonomously how to allocate resources in the best interests of the household. Remittances are also a flexible resource, whose amounts can vary based on the needs of recipients: for instance, more remittances tend to be sent when a crisis (e.g. environmental, economic, political) affects the home country. Despite not being a substitute for other development mechanisms, remittances thus act as a powerful tool to support receiving households in times of hardship and to escape poverty. Nonetheless, remittances are dependent on migration opportunities and subject to the effects of shocks in destination countries. This means that if there is no possibility for a person to migrate elsewhere to gain employment and, in turn, earn enough resources to send back home; or if the destination country experiences an economic downturn that negatively affects the employment conditions of a migrant worker, their ability to send remittances back home will be reduced as well. Consequently, living conditions of remittance-receiving households will be impacted, in a downturn spiral. The COVID-19 pandemic shows this pattern clearly: as migrants’ destination countries experience negative economic effects, migrant workers are dismissed and, in many cases, forced back home. This leaves them with no resources to support their families, which translates to a significant reduction of remittance flows, with projected negative outcomes for the well-being of millions. A worsening of already precarious household living standards is, in fact, what the projected sharp decline in remittances is likely to translate to.

### *Wage theft and the burnt borne by migrant workers*

The 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>38</sup> recognises the ability to work as a fundamental right. Such entitlement must be exercised under just and favourable conditions, including fair remuneration. The 1949 ILO Wage Protection Convention<sup>39</sup> also affirms that wages should be paid in full and regularly. Partial payments in the form of allowances in kind or deductions are possible only in specific circumstances, in line with legislative provisions and the convention itself. More specifically, article 12 affirms that the payment of wages should take place at regular intervals and all wages should be settled upon termination of the employment contract. Nonetheless, this is not upheld everywhere yet and little is of avail to migrant workers when they experience employment abuses. Because of the countless lay-offs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many

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<sup>34</sup> Rossi A., The Impact of Migration on Children Left Behind in Developing Countries: Outcomes Analysis and Data Requirements, (2009) SSRN Electronic Journal, DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.2490380

<sup>35</sup> Ghosh, B., Migrants’ Remittances and Development. Myths, Rhetoric and Realities (International Organization for Migration, and The Hague Process on Refugees and Migration 2006) [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/migrants\\_remittances.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/migrants_remittances.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Ratha, D., Leveraging Remittances for Development, (Migration Policy Institute 2007) <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/leveraging-remittances-development>

<sup>37</sup> Rannveig Mendoza, D., Remittances and Development: Trends, Impacts, and Policy Options, A Review of the Literature (Migration Policy Institute 2006) <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/remittances-and-development-trends-impacts-and-policy-options-review-literature>

<sup>38</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>

<sup>39</sup> International Labour Organisation, Protection of Wages Convention (1949) No. 95 [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C095](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C095); the Convention has been ratified by 98 states only.

migrant workers are returning home empty-handed, with unpaid dues and unable to address the unbalanced power their employers hold.

Even though total numbers are not available yet,<sup>40</sup> the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a great increase in cases of wage theft, amplifying a problem so widespread that had become normalised. Wage theft is an intentional subtraction by the employer of resources that legitimately belong to migrant workers. Whatever the reason for this subtraction, in times of crisis such as the current ones, perpetuating the practice of wage theft, or even enabling it through inaction, means actively contributing to the undoing of the relative improvement of living standards that have been achieved so far, for so many. It means being compliant with the return of humanitarian crises (e.g. higher rates of food insecurity)<sup>41</sup> that we thought were being increasingly solved, also thanks to the positive effects of remittances.

Wage theft and the inability to support their families as hoped puts an incredible strain on the mental well-being of migrant workers, a pressure that in some cases leads to the decision to take one's own life.<sup>42</sup> In times of extreme stress, as that triggered by the current pandemic, migrant workers are more likely to suffer from trauma. Among the many reasons are the concern of being infected or of infecting others, the inability to meet their basic needs, their loss of income as well as worries about the well-being of their families at home. A recent study conducted by Kumar et al., assesses the psychological impact of COVID-19 on 98 migrant workers in North India. The study finds that around "half (51%) of participants screened positive for both anxiety and depression. Overall, about three-fourth (73.5%) screened positive for at least one psychiatric morbidity."<sup>43</sup> Among the feelings that emerged from a questionnaire submitted to research participants, more than half of migrant workers in the study group were experiencing loneliness, an increase in tension, frustration, low mood, irritability and fear of death. The study suggests that these feelings may be resulting from financial insecurity, stress about the future and worry about their health and that of those back at home, together with the awareness that "they are alone and possibly will not be able to support their family soon."<sup>44</sup>

### *Concluding remarks*

As set forth in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),<sup>45</sup> everyone has a right to work, under just and favourable conditions, and a right to protection against unemployment. Individuals also have an inherent, implicit right to justice and a right to an effective remedy. Not just that, the UDHR recognises working peoples' right to just and favourable remuneration, which enables a dignified life for themselves and their families. This means being able to rely on social protection measures, if necessary. More broadly, people have a right to a standard of living that ensures health and well-being for themselves and their families, including the right to security in case of unemployment.

Nonetheless, migrant workers have been prevented from enjoying these fundamental rights for a long time. Despite the existence of overarching international conventions and guiding principles, in fact, they have been continuously experiencing violence, abuses and been deprived of their own legitimate possessions (e.g. documents but also

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<sup>40</sup> As part of the new [appeal](#) for the creation of a transnational justice mechanism a coalition of Civil Society Organisations are collecting data on wage theft experienced by repatriated migrant workers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>41</sup> Anthem, P., Risk of hunger pandemic as coronavirus set to almost double acute hunger by end of 2020 (World Food Programme Insight 16 April 2020)

<https://insight.wfp.org/covid-19-will-almost-double-people-in-acute-hunger-by-end-of-2020-59df0c4a8072>

<sup>42</sup> Battacharya, DP., Covid-19 lockdown: Migrant worker in Gujarat commits suicide (Economic Times May 2020) <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/covid-19-lockdown-migrant-worker-in-gujarat-commits-suicide/articleshow/75610073.cms>; Pal, S., Unable to return home, migrant worker from Bengal allegedly commits suicide in Kerala (Hindustan Time May 2020) <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/unable-to-return-home-migrant-worker-from-bengal-ends-life-in-kerala/story-u9HY5rNtYtlEpexnzkr18L.html>

<sup>43</sup> Kumar, K., et al., The psychological impact of COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown on the migrant workers: A cross-sectional survey (National Centre for Biotechnology Information 20 June 2020) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7305726/>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) UN G.A. Res. 217A <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>

remuneration). They have long been bearing the brunt of merciless working conditions, and most often than not, unable to claim justice. Regrettably, the costs paid by migrant workers to further their living conditions have been amplified by the economic effects deriving from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Combined with unemployment and salaries' renegotiation as part of employers' coping strategies, wage theft contributed to a significant reduction in income and financial security for both migrant workers and their families at home. Migrant workers' inability to send money back home, also led to increased psychological pressure and a source of risk for the development of mental illnesses: the projected significant reduction in remittance flows as a result of the economic effects of this pandemic is going to have a marked effect on the ability of many households to survive. The perpetration of wage theft is thus a fundamental component that needs to be addressed in moving forwards, to reverse the worsening of migrant workers' plight.

Up until now, migrant workers have been failed by a world built around values that have not been translated into practice. As Nadimpally says in an interview for the *New Internationalist*, "the vulnerabilities that have emerged require a political, social and economic solution that is structural. These are not new issues [...but w]e need to think in a different way now."<sup>46</sup> We need to concretely build back better<sup>47</sup> on those often disregarded ideals that were meant to pave the way for greater human development in the aftermath of a global catastrophe. As advocated by Haque in the panel discussion on transitional justice,<sup>48</sup> migrants' rights matter and cannot be disregarded. It is fundamental to reconsider the role that migrant workers play in our societies, in the global economy, and the importance that their ability to work has on millions of lives - not only for those who migrate but also for those that, as a result, receive the remittances and invest them back at home. It is paramount to create societies that respond to the specific needs of migrant workers and that support them in times of hardship, through improved and extended social protection measures but also through ensuring that justice is realised for them as well.

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<sup>46</sup> The *New Internationalist*, *Sarojini Nadimpally* (July/August 2020) N. 526

<sup>47</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Building Back Better: A Sustainable, Resilient Recovery after COVID-19*, (5 June 2020) <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/building-back-better-a-sustainable-resilient-recovery-after-covid-19-52b869f5/>

<sup>48</sup> Youtube, Panel Discussion: Transitional Justice: Towards "Building Back Better" (Diaspora Transnationalism, 21 June 2020) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-QeiVUAQNY&t=7180s>