

Migration as Crisis: A Myth?

Migration is one of humanity's oldest practices, predating states and formal political institutions. People have historically moved in search of economic opportunities, safety, and better living conditions. Similarly, India and Africa have had a constant movement since ancient times. Africans from East Africa came to India as merchants, traders, and travelers, and vice versa. Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan traveler who came to India. He explored Indian society, and its culture, and even served as Qazi during the Tughlaq regime. Similarly, Indians from the present-day states of Gujarat, Karnataka, and Kerala visited the African coast for trade. Some permanently established themselves in Africa, while some visited at intervals.

Is migration a threat?

Migration is seen as an anthropogenic crisis, as portrayed by European and Western scholars. Africa is shown as the central originator of this crisis. But we need to understand that Africa is not the prime contributor as it contributes only about 14 percent of the global migrant population, with Asia contributing the highest of 49 percent and 24 percent from Europe. The report published by IOM in 2017, shows that there are people who are willing to migrate to European countries, but 80 percent of the African masses show no interest in leaving the continent. The migration pattern of Africa reflects that very few percent of Africans are migrating over the ocean and cross-border migration takes place (United Nation, 2020).

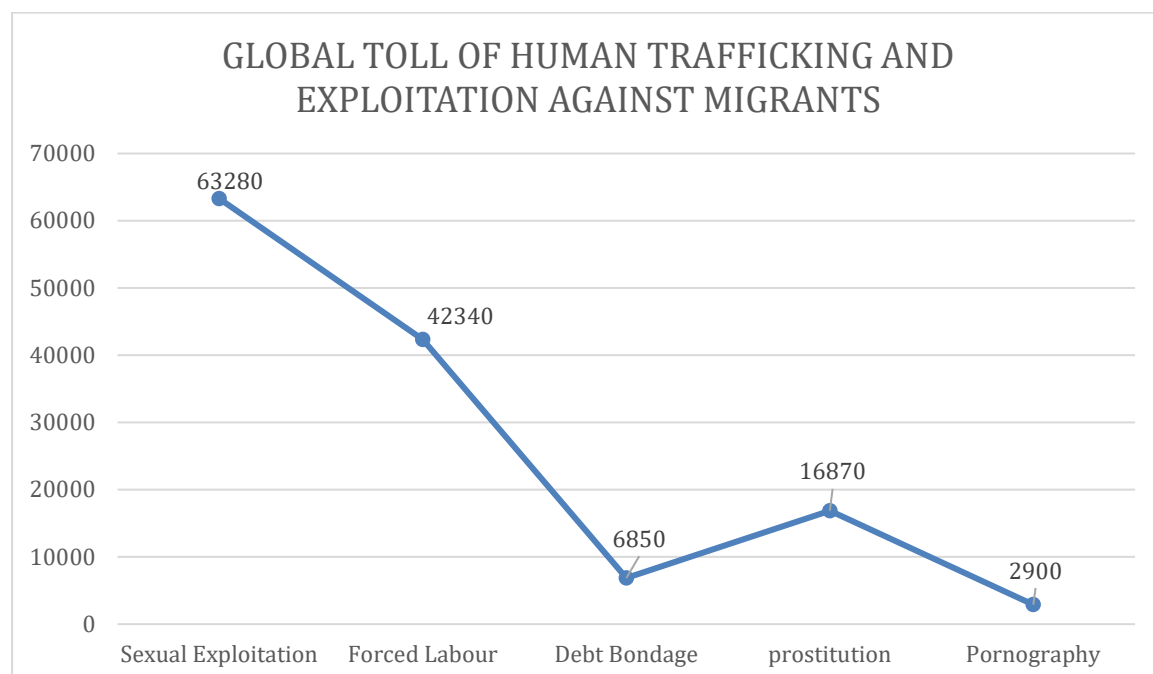
Africa was scrambled in the 1890s by European powers without any consideration of the conditions of the people living there, which resulted in the creation of political boundaries between the kins. As a result, the cross-border migration became part of African life. For better governance of inter-state migration, different organizations are working for the rehabilitation of refugees. There exists Treaties and protocols between states of Africa, for instance, the African Union- Horn of Africa Initiative on Human Trafficking and migrant smuggling; Migrant Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA); Khartoum Process; Rabat process, etc. some Regional consultative process on migration which focus on the development of coherent policy on migration, prevention of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, better border

management for systematic migration within the continent, and initiation of free movement of African people intra-continentially, with formation of proper data-base of the migrants.

The UN DESA reflects that Africa has been receiving approximately 7.3 million refugees which includes asylum seekers, a representative of 25 per cent of global refugee population that is, 28.7 million. However, it becomes difficult to understand the issues without proper data. There are more than 14 countries that have not updated their database of the international migrants since 2000. The data represents only the systematic migration of foreign-born person or children born to a foreign population. The recent data showcases that there has been a growth in migration in Africa between 2000 to 2019, from 15.1 million to 26.6 million (UN DESA, 2019).

According to the 2023 modified data of CTDC (Counter Traffic Data Collaborative), the migrants have been facing different sorts of trafficking, exploitation in all corners of world. According to its data, USA and Russia are the two top countries that have the highest number of exploitation and human trafficking taking place against the migrants. It also provides comprehensive data on different types of trafficking (See the figure:01 below).

Figure: 01 Patterns of human trafficking and exploitation



Source: CTDC, 2023

Recent Cases of Internal and External Migration in Africa

South Africa hosts more than 2,860,495 immigrant populations (UN DESA, 2019), has suffered from Internal displacement of 520 people due to conflicts and violence in the year 2012, and more than 62,000 people were internally displaced due to natural disasters in the year 2023 (IDMC, 2023).

Democratic Republic of Congo, according to the UN DESA, 2022, hosts 952,871 migrants. But presently, it has been facing long-standing violence, armed conflict, and human rights violations. The problem accelerated with the advent of COVID-19, Ebola, and measles. As a result, Congolese people were forced to migrate more than 6.2 million were internally displaced and more than 1 million people sought refuge in neighboring countries such as Uganda, South Africa, Burundi, Tanzania, Angola, etc. from the Easter provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu (UNHCR, 2023). 33,000 refugees and asylum seekers and more than 830,000 IDP

Mozambique is an East African coastal country, that hosts asylum to 33,000 refugees and 8,30,000 internally displaced people (UNHCR, 2023a). The country is prone to natural disasters such as cyclones, and floods. Additionally, the ongoing violent conflict due to the recent revival of extremist groups in Northern Mozambique has also resulted in mass migration of citizens. The Horn of Africa, which consists of three countries Ethiopia Kenya, and Somalia, is facing severe drought which has made life miserable and has forced 2.7 million people to be displaced intra-continently, as drought has killed more than 13 million livestock, which has made survival even more difficult, Additionally, the rain that could give relief turned out to be another catastrophe, because of heavy rainfall the region has been flooded.

From the above, we get to see a common phenomenon that gives rise to the refugee crisis and internal displacement of people. The emergence of extremist groups, lack of political instability, and lack of economic opportunities are some common causes. But natural disasters such as cyclones, extreme drought, and flood have a crucial role too, which is often left unrecognized.

Recommendations:

There is a need to establish migrant research centers to fight against the narratives of the Western world. These research centers will help in the development of more inclusive understanding and unbiased narratives that represent all shades of the migrants, refugees, and their challenges. Additionally, we need to develop real-time data collection centers for an

accurate representation and benefit dispersal for migrants in different parts of the world. The creation of a migrant profile can help in saving the migrants from human trafficking and develop evidence-based migration policies.

The role of the media both electronic and print, in influencing public opinion and policy dialogues, politics of migration policy formation, and the implementation next growth of far right-wing influence and migration discuss public opinion and politics and the production and use of migration statistics will help us to form real discourse and response to the identified misgiving and ensure proper framing of migration and its management as an inherent integral component of diverse dimensions development process. We need to challenge the monolithic idea of migration that is framed by the European or Western notions of dominant scholars. We need to oppose the dominant ideas that Africa or the Indian subcontinent is the major contributor to the migrant or refugee crisis.

We need to systematize the migration patterns and rehabilitation, to fight against human trafficking and smuggling of migrants. To oppose this one-sided view proposed by Western scholars we need to develop transparency, in information and data sharing between African states on migration and an openness to engage with the full range of stakeholders that play significant roles in migration knowledge production.

The European approach towards migration or the refugee crisis reflect negative connotation however the applicant context reflects a more positive view towards migration where we see the example of Rusizi and Goma women who used to cross the border for our economic purposes policy of the state reflex ingenuity resilience and sound domestic policy an approach that promises the lack of development and peace for the region.

In conclusion, the African experience of mutual cross-border migration underscores the constructive dimensions of mobility, wherein the movement of people across state boundaries is conceptualized not as a challenge but as a catalyst for collective economic growth and regional integration. Such practices demonstrate how migration, when grounded in cooperation and negotiation, can operate as a tangible mechanism of democracy and interdependence rather than conflict.

However, the dominant narratives about Africa continue to be shaped largely through a Western epistemological lens, which frequently represents the continent as inherently problematic. These representations, often produced through superficial and insufficiently researched accounts, perpetuate reductive stereotypes and reinforce asymmetrical global

discourses. It is therefore essential to challenge this epistemic hegemony and to recognize that the so-called “problems” of the West cannot be uncritically imposed as the problems of the world. Understanding Africa on its own terms requires a shift away from externally constructed narratives towards frameworks that acknowledge the continent’s agency, resilience, and capacity for innovation.

***Views are personal**

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About SoAf:

The Department of African Studies has launched an initiative called "Scholars on Africa" with the primary objective of promoting the research ideas of scholars and faculty members on current happenings and contemporary issues related to the African continent. This initiative serves a dual purpose, as it not only facilitates academic exploration but also provides valuable insights to the policymakers of India on matters concerning Africa. By actively engaging with scholars and faculty members, the initiative aims to foster a better understanding and relationship between India and Africa, bridging the gap between the two worlds.

Under the "Scholars on Africa" initiative, Scholars of the Department of African Studies are encouraged to contribute write-ups on various African issues, not exceeding 300 words in length. It is noteworthy that these write-ups will be forwarded by any faculty members of the Department. These write-ups serve as a platform for scholars to express their personal views and insights on a diverse range of topics, including History, Politics, economics, culture, and social issues prevalent in Africa.

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