

# GOLD VI

**Case-Based Contribution  
to Chapter 5: Caring**  
*GOLD VI Report on Pathways  
to urban and territorial equality*

## Migration Experiences in China

## and other Asian countries

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# Migration Experiences in China and other Asian countries

**AUTHOR(S)**

Bethânia Boaventura and Rodrigo Iacovini

**ORGANISATION NAME**

Global Platform for the Right to the City, with the collaboration of ActionAid India, Caritas Asia, Participation Center, Public Works Studio and Cities Alliance

**CITIES/COUNTRIES IT COVERS**

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**CHAPTER**

5: Caring

## SUMMARY

Migration has always contributed significantly to the growth of cities and other human settlements. Nonetheless, the migrants' rights to access the urban resources and to participate effectively in political life have been neglected. Responding to these challenges, community-based and civil society organisations have developed several initiatives to foster migrants and urban refugees' rights, providing safety nets and solidarity bonds. In that sense, this paper brings some experiences that demonstrate these organisations' role in fostering migrants' rights, while also increasing their ability to access and trust public service providers. Focusing on the work of Caritas Asia, Participation Center, ActionAid, the Global Platform for the Right to the City, Public Works Studio and Cities Alliance, the examples presented demonstrate the importance of guaranteeing migrants' labour rights and access to public services, legal aid, skill training, etc. These experiences and their specific approach can be seen as important examples to inform Local Governments and guide the development of migrant-friendly services, policies, programmes and institutional arrangements.

## Migration Experiences in China and other Asian countries



Caritas Protecting Refugee Children in Thailand.  
Source: Caritas

Migration has always contributed significantly to the growth of cities and other human settlements, consequently contributing to reducing poverty and inequality. Taking this into account, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims the right to freedom of movement and residence within each state's borders and the right to leave any country. Also, it proclaims the migrants' right to private, individual and collective property, and the right to social security and other social and economic rights.

On the other hand, the New Urban Agenda,<sup>1</sup> that is also grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, reinforces that urban development should centre on promoting migrants' inclusion in cities and upholding their rights. Nonetheless, **migrants' rights to access the urban resources, and to participate effectively in political life are commonly neglected.** At the same time, worldwide the continuing increase in migration and displacement flows challenges the host communities.

Although migrants contribute significantly to cities' economic development, many remain socially and economically excluded from the benefits of this development, such as access to education, health, housing, labour rights, especially due to strict migration-control policies. For instance, with regards to accessing welfare and social services, it is well-known that the immigration status presents a significant barrier, since in many countries the majority of the benefits, public services, housing and political participation are only available to permanent visa holders. On the other hand, migrants who are entitled might face a lack of availability of public schools, language classes, social housing, etc. Broadly speaking, **the limited access to economic and social capital, the language barriers, the immigration status, discrimination, and the gender, ethnic and racial-based inequalities often present structural problems that frequently limit migrants' access to public services, welfare, employment opportunities, as well as adequate housing in their host communities.**

1. More information available at: <https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/>

Moreover, considering that migrants often lack literacy in the host countries' public system and are unaware of their rights or reluctant to claim them, it makes the access to the support-system difficult.

Responding particularly to the language, legal aid, social capital and cultural dimensions, community-based and civil society organisations play an important role in fostering migrants', urban refugees' and internally displaced people's rights, providing safety nets and solidarity bonds, while also increasing their ability to access and trust public service providers. Usually, these organisations provide advice, advocacy and casework support, also fostering their social and economic rights and helping them to navigate the public services in a culturally and linguistically-specific setting. Moreover, **as cities are the main destination for international and internal migrants, promoting and fulfilling migrants' rights entail a right to the city based-approach.** As the right to the city includes the recognition of all socio-cultural identities, their self-expression, their coexistence and the right to appropriate and access the cities' benefits and services, the experiences of these organisations promote the materialisation of the right to the city. Consequently, they offer examples of caring practices that can lead to urban equality.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs,<sup>2</sup> Asia hosts 53 million out of the world's 191 million migrants. Across Asia, the rapid economic growth and urban services has led to significant labour migration within the region,<sup>3</sup> thereby guaranteeing migrants' labour rights presents a major challenge, along with migrants and their families' access to education, skill training and healthcare. It is worth mentioning that labour migration presents

an important route out of poverty for many people, having significant impacts on migrants' livelihoods and living conditions. In that sense, the Caritas Asia<sup>4</sup> regional office has promoted diverse caring practices that support vulnerable groups, such as migrants and urban refugees. In Taipei,<sup>5</sup> Caritas has worked with overseas contract workers from Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines and Thailand, conducting right to education, repatriation assistance, casework, and counselling. The organisation also provides visits to support those migrants in detention centres.

**Another major challenge is the feminization of migration in Asia, which is mainly characterised by the demand for female domestic workers.** Regarding this aspect, as part of the Migrant Empowerment Network in Taiwan (MENT), Caritas also has advanced the advocacy of migrant labour rights by fostering dialogue with the local government agencies, especially to protect the caregivers/domestic workers' rights. At the same time, in Hong Kong, Caritas has put its main efforts to support foreign domestic workers by developing employment supportive services, counselling, legal advice, language programmes, health care services, etc. in order to ensure migrants workers' social protection rights, political participation and well-being. Besides that, as stated in its website, the organisation offers a hotline service and self-help groups to cultivate mutual and collective support for particular needs.

In Thailand, Caritas along with the Catholic Office for Emergency Relief & Refugees, has supported about 10,000 urban refugees from 9 camps, as well as children in vulnerable situations through a refugee children protection programme.<sup>6</sup> Also supporting migrant children, the Participation Center<sup>7</sup> has researched the quality of

2. More information available at: [https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesd\\_pd\\_2020\\_international\\_migration\\_highlights.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesd_pd_2020_international_migration_highlights.pdf)

3. More information available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/migration-asia-pacific-region>

4. More information available at: <https://www.caritas.org/where-caritas-work/asia/>

5. More information available at: <https://www.caritas.org/where-caritas-work/asia/taiwan/>

6. More information available at: <https://www.caritas.org/2014/11/protecting-child-refugees-thailand/>

7. More information available at: <http://www.participation.cn/>

education for the children of migrant workers, producing evidence-based data and policy-recommendation to improve children of migrant workers access to adequate education in Chengdu, China. As argued by Participation Center report, called Right to Education for *Migrant Children in China*<sup>8</sup>, the immigration status of children excluded them from accessing public schools. In that framework, the Participation Center work aims to **address the social inequalities faced by migrant children through helping them to exercise their right to education**. For instance, the organisation claims for a set of changes in public budgeting to address migrant children's education, and for the improvement of migrant care centers and its education quality. As migrant women and their children are more vulnerable to abuse, violence, exploitation, and discrimination, support to protect and enforce the rights of these specific groups is essential to tackle gender and age-based urban inequalities in migration processes.

Additional actions that promote care through human-rights based approach are being led by ActionAid India.<sup>9</sup> The policy analysis documented in the report *Building*

*Collectives to Secure Rights & Access Entitlements: A review of Engagement with Construction Workers Across Six States in India*<sup>10</sup> (2019) reports the work of the urban team, Citizens' Rights Collective of ActionAid, also to **address the challenges faced by migrant workers engaged with informal activities, through encouraging the collectivisation of the workers, promoting skills training and policy advocacy**. These actions intend to foster their political recognition and access to basic amenities and social life.

Lastly, the research conducted with the support of the Global Platform for the Right to the City, as part of the Asia research project,<sup>11</sup> explores the migrants' service access in the city Gwangju, Republic of Korea, and reports that even though migrants are satisfied with their access to public services, the majority of migrants never accessed welfare and social services, due their visa status or lack of information about the system. Regarding this, the research argues **the importance of civil society organisations to provide information and assistance, the need for professional interpreting services (e.g.: placing facilitators in government offices and public**



Housing Monitor: Migrant Workers and Refugees Eviction Dilemma in Lebanon. Source: Public Works Studio.

8. More information available at: [https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1f6K1z0M6Buabw\\_y-ljY7I7Fh9WH8SrK](https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1f6K1z0M6Buabw_y-ljY7I7Fh9WH8SrK)

9. More information available at: <https://www.actionaidindia.org>

10. More information available at: [https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1f6K1z0M6Buabw\\_y-ljY7I7Fh9WH8SrK](https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1f6K1z0M6Buabw_y-ljY7I7Fh9WH8SrK)

11. More information available at: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tFRB\\_lxgWdCfkX38WwwN4-gZoEckx6-\\_/\\_edit?rtfpof=true](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tFRB_lxgWdCfkX38WwwN4-gZoEckx6-_/_edit?rtfpof=true)

**services), mechanisms to improve migrants' access to information and tools to navigate the host country's public systems.**

Finally, outside Asia, Public Works Studio<sup>12</sup> reports the **migrant workers and urban refugees' current challenges to assert their right to housing, due the economic and social crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic** in Lebanon. As part of the Housing Monitor, the organisation has partnered with the Anti-Racism Movement in Beirut, documenting 145 cases of threats of eviction of refugees and migrant workers in order to protect their rights.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, as migration has become a major social issue in Latin America, particularly considering the crisis-driven from Venezuela to other countries, Cities Alliance<sup>14</sup> has undertaken research on migration through case studies to better comprehend the migrants' access to housing rights and has convened a Joint Work Programme for Cities and Migration<sup>15</sup> to bring members together around the issue.

The close relationship of these organisations with the service users allows them to better articulate their needs and to focus on addressing the social, economic and political exclusion that migrants face every day, thus addressing part of the existing urban inequalities. These experiences and their specific

approach can be seen as important examples to inform Local Governments and to guide the development of migrant-friendly services, policies, programmes and institutional arrangements. That is, these experiences demonstrate that **it is essential to develop policies, institutional arrangements and public services that take into account cultural, linguistic, gender and age differences; the migrants' aspirations, as well as properly training and sensitising service providers to identify and address these particular needs.**

In conclusion, it can be said that the caring experiences explored in this contribution demonstrate possibilities to recognise the needs and aspirations of migrants and displaced people in human settlements in order to fulfil their right to equally access the cities' resources, services and opportunities, building pathways to the implementation of migrants and displaced people right to the city. **As the right to the city fosters the inclusion and active participation of all inhabitants and communities in urban life, the access to basic education, livelihood opportunities, labour rights, health care, housing, etc., is a fundamental element to assert migrants and displaced people's right to access the benefits of urban life, consequently advancing urban equality.**

12. More information available at: <https://publicworksstudio.com/en>

13. More information available at: <https://housingmonitor.org/en/content/migrant-workers-and-refugees-are-facing-dilemma-specter-eviction-hovers-economic-crisis>

14. More information available at: <https://www.citiesalliance.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Migration-Cities-in-LAC-HousingLAV.pdf>

15. More information available at: <https://www.citiesalliance.org/sites/default/files/Cities%20and%20Migration%20JWP%20Newsletter%20March%202018.pdf>

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## CARING

This paper has been produced as a Case-Based Contribution to the sixth Global Report on Local Democracy and Decentralization (GOLD VI): the flagship publication of the organized constituency of local and regional governments represented in United Cities and Local Governments. The GOLD VI report has been produced in partnership with the Development Planning Unit (University College London), through the programme Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW). GOLD VI focuses on how local and regional governments can address the local manifestations of growing inequalities and contribute to create “Pathways to urban and territorial equality”. The GOLD VI report has been produced through a large-scale international co-production process, bringing together over a hundred representatives of local and regional governments, academics and civil society organizations. This paper is an outcome of this process and is part of the *Pathways to Equality Cases Repository*, which collects the over 60 Case-Based Contributions produced as part of the GOLD VI report.

In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 5 on “Caring”, which focuses on the multiple actions that promote the care of diverse groups within society through safety nets and solidarity bonds, and the ways in which local and regional governments can promote caring practices that support structurally discriminated and/or vulnerable groups, as well as those that have historically “taken care” of others.

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