Abstracts and Bios

Panel I: Migration Diplomacy: Conceptual and Policy Developments

Migration diplomacy in Geneva? Changing geopolitics in the global refugee regime | James Milner, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada | Hannah Murray, Carleton University

ABSTRACT

While regimes, in principle, are created by states to facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit, regimes more often become forums for contestation where states and other actors pursue their interests, often in conflict with the regime's stated goals. In the context of the global refugee regime, this has traditionally been understood to result in two "blocks" within the decision-making bodies of the regime: "Donor" states in the Global North, motivated to contain refugees within their region of origin, and "host" states in the Global South, motivated to pursue policies that would result in various forms of support from external actors. This binary, however, appears to be shifting as a result of fragmentation among the position of states in the context of significant declines in humanitarian budgets, challenges to the core principles of the regime, a retreat from multilateralism, and the decline of consensus decision-making. Focusing on the practice of states in multilateral settings, specifically UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom), this paper examines how the conventional North/South binary is being replaced by new groupings of states. This raises critical questions about what motivates this shifting behavior and if the positions being adopted in Geneva are part of a broader strategy by states in the practice of migration diplomacy. The paper presents a new methodology for tracking the emerging new alignments of states through an analysis of the statements of states during ExCom, which sheds new light on the shifting geopolitics of the global refugee regime itself.

James Milner is a Professor of Political Science at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. He is currently Project Director of LERRN: The Local Engagement Refugee Research Network, a 6-year, SSHRC-funded partnership between researchers, displaced-led organizations and other civil society. He is also Director of the Migration and Diaspora Studies program at Carleton University, Co-Chair of the Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network, and Canada's first De Mello Chair. He has been a researcher, practitioner and policy advisor on issues relating to the global refugee regime, global refugee policy, meaningful refugee participation and the politics of asylum in the global South.

Hannah Murray is an MA student in Migration and Diaspora Studies at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, where her research examines the shifting geopolitics of the global refugee regime. She has experience working with the Refugee Law Project in Uganda and UNHCR Canada's durable solutions team. She is also a member of the Secretariate for LERRN: The Local Engagement Refugee Research Network.

The End of Performative Migration Diplomacy? Positive, Negative, and the Limits of Staging Migration Governance | Juliette Tolay, Penn State Harrisburg

ABSTRACT
Recent scholarship increasingly frames migration diplomacy not only as a transactional practice of bargaining and cooperation, but also as a form of performance directed at international audiences (Stel 2025, Tsourapas 2025). Building on this nascent literature, this article examines how states stage migration policies and diplomatic postures to seek legitimacy and strategic positioning within global migration governance. It identifies two ideal-typical types of performative migration diplomacy. A positive form emphasizes protection, hospitality, and administrative capacity, enabling states to cultivate reputational capital as responsible and norm-compliant actors (across hegemonic and counter-hegemonic contexts). A negative form relies on the performative staging of "control," encompassing deterrence as well as threats to communicate sovereignty, leverage, and indispensability vis-à-vis external actors. Empirically, the analysis draws on scholarship on migration governance and diplomacy across multiple regions (Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Australia). This article argues that both positive and negative forms of performative migration diplomacy presuppose the diplomatic salience of migrants' rights as a shared normative reference point, even when those rights are unevenly implemented in practice. As dominant discourses increasingly normalize exclusion, securitization, and rights erosion, the article questions whether we are witnessing not merely a transformation, but a potential decline of migration diplomacy as performance.

Juliette Tolay is Associate Professor of Political Science at Penn State Harrisburg and, since 2025, Assistant Dean for Global Engagement. Her research examines migration, forced displacement, and foreign policy, focusing on Europe, Turkey, and the Middle East. She studies migration diplomacy, Eurocentrism in migration governance, Syrian and Venezuelan displacement, imperial legacies, media narratives of "crises," and power dynamics. She has published in leading journals and co-authored Turkey and Its Neighbors (Lynne Rienner, 2012). She is active in international research networks and has conducted fieldwork across Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, and Central Asia.

James Hollifield and Hiroki Takeuchi, Southern Methodist University
The Future of Migration Diplomacy in an Era of National Populism

ABSTRACT
The movement of people across borders poses a challenge to states and to the international community. This article explores the dynamics of migration diplomacy, taking a 'rationalist' approach, emphasizing 'two-level' games that are governed by a Prisoner's Dilemma at the international level and a Stag Hunt at the domestic level. What is the future of migration diplomacy in an era of national populism? What happens when the most powerful state in the international political economy (the USA) defects from global governance regimes? We argue that US defection fundamentally alters the rules of the game, leading to illiberal, beggar-thy-neighbor outcomes. To illustrate and test the argument, we examine changes in migration diplomacy (processes of negotiation to manage migration) in the North American context with comparisons to Europe (the EU), and East and Southeast Asia.

James F. Hollifield is Ora Nixon Arnold Professor of International Political Economy, Director of the Tower Center, and Acting Director of the Texas-México Center at SMU. He has written widely on issues of political and economic development with a focus on migration. In addition to many scientific articles, his major works include Immigrants, Markets and States (Harvard UP 1992), L'Immigration et l'Etat Nation (L'Harmattan 1997), Herausforderung Migration— Perspektiven der vergleichenden Politikwissenschaft (Lit Verlag 2006) with Uwe Hunger. Recent books are Understanding Global Migration (Stanford UP 2022) with Neil Foley, Controlling Immigration 4th edition (Stanford UP 2022) with Philip L. Martin, Pia Orrenius, and François Héran, Migration Theory 4th edition (Routledge 2023) with Caroline Brettell, and Migration and Human Rights (Wiley, forthcoming) with Yves Charbit and Sascha Krannich. Hollifield has served as an advisor for governments around the world and for international organizations on matters of migration and human and economic development.

Richa Shivakoti, Global Migration Institute, Toronto Metropolitan University, and Anurag Devkota
Migration Diplomacy, Power Imbalance and Bilateral Labour Agreements

ABSTRACT
Among the various migration governance mechanisms used to manage circular temporary labour migration within Asia, Bilateral Labour Agreements (BLAs) and Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) are increasingly used and even preferred by some labour receiving states as they can leverage their power imbalance with the sending states for their benefit. Despite the power imbalance, Asian labour sending states are investing considerable time and political capital towards migration diplomacy and negotiations while attempting to improve work conditions and protection measures for their migrant workers.

This article uses the case of Nepal to explore how as a 'weaker state', it is navigating the power imbalance and interdependence through migration diplomacy while trying to diversify and increase its bilateral labor agreements over the years. Nepal has seen a significant rise in labour migration in the last few decades and has opened foreign employment opportunities in 149 countries. It has however, only entered into thirteen labour agreements with key receiving countries including Qatar (2005, 2008-MOU), United Arab Emirates (2007, 2019-MOU), South Korea (2007-MOU), Bahrain (2008-MOU), Jordan (2017-BLA), Malaysia (2018-MOU), Japan (2019-MOC), Mauritius (2019-MOU) and Israel (2015, 2020-BLA), the United Kingdom (2022-MOU), Romania (2023), Germany (2023-JDOI) and most recently with Saudi Arabia (2026-BLA).

The more recent agreements signed by the Government (post-2016), mark a paradigm shift towards pursuing new BLAs with a focus on migrant rights protection and stronger language on fair recruitment. This article explores the paradigm shift and its outcomes by taking an in-depth look at how the government is trying to strengthen and diversify its agreements. Some notable changes include, how it was able to take a stronger stance with Malaysia after a corruption scandal broke in the media regarding excessive recruitment fees in Malysia, its recent BLA with Saudi Arabia after many unsuccessful attempts over a decade and how the government recently sent draft labour proposals to 16 European countries.

Richa Shivakoti is the Research Lead on Migration Governance at the Global Migration Institute and a Researcher with the Bridging Divides program at Toronto Metropolitan University. Her research examines multinational migration, emigration from Canada, gendered migration policies and labour migration in Asia. Her research is interdisciplinary, attracting diverse research collaborators for research conducted in Canada, Nepal, the Philippines, the UAE and Ghana. Richa holds a PhD in Public Policy from the National University of Singapore and a dual Masters in Public Affairs and Political Science from Indiana University, Bloomington. She is an Associate Editor for Comparative Migration Studies and on the advisory board for the Public Administration and Development journal. At the Global Migration Institute, she co-organizes the Migration Winter School on Qualitative Research Methods and serves as the managing Editor for the Global Migration Institute's working paper series.

Anurag Devkota is a human rights lawyer at Law and Policy Forum for Social Justice (LAPSOJ). He holds a Master of Laws degree on Rule of Law for Development from Loyola University Chicago as a Gates scholar. Anurag has been continuously litigating and representing Nepalese migrant workers on the supreme court of Nepal. Through successful strategic litigations, from ensuring voting rights of migrant workers to establishing the due diligence obligation of the government on the death of workers, Anurag has been pioneering progressive changes in the overall migration governance of Nepal. He has also been writing columns on the contemporary issues of labour migration and is teaching law as a faculty member at Purbanchal University, Chakrawarti HaBi Academy, College of Law.

The Developmental State in Migration Diplomacy: Insights from Japan | Yunchen Tian, Kyoto University

ABSTRACT

Recently, populist actors in Japan have politicized immigration and foreign migrants for electoral gain, raising the salience of the issue to unprecedented levels by pushing sensationalized and often derogatory sentiments. According to the *developmental migration state* (*DMS*) framework, this can be interpreted as an intensification of the four-way tension between security, social stability, the social contract, and market demands. However, the February 2026 landslide victory of Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae and her coalition government, major beneficiaries of this strategy, has not meaningfully impacted plans to increase labor migration quotas.

Drawing on policy and discourse analysis of official documents and interviews conducted in 2025-2026, I use a multilevel lens to argue that state resilience against restrictionist pressures is characterized by two shifts within the Japanese developmental migration state: a security-minded *outwards* expansion characterized by deepening cooperation with existing partners and aggressive development of new bilateral migration pathways is coupled with a *downwards* push to involve a broader set of subnational actors. After a brief discussion of changes in Japan's state-level labor migration diplomacy, the paper will examine the growth of subnational migration diplomacy in the form of initiatives conducted between Japanese local governments, private firms, industry associations, and counterpart ministries, local governments, universities, and private brokers in sending countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia. I conclude with a discussion of the theoretical implications of seriously engaging with migration diplomacy for the DMS framework.

Yunchen Tian is Program-Specific Associate Professor at the Kyoto University Faculty of Law. Their primary research interests include migration governance and politics, the political economy of migration, and theories of the state. Tian's work has been supported by grants from American Councils and the Japan Foundation. Their work has been published in *the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Social Science Japan Journal, Territory, Politics, Governance, International Relations of the Asia-Pacific,* and *Citizenship Studies*. They were recently awarded the 2023 ISS/OUP Prize in Modern Japanese Studies for their article "Workers, Neighbours, or Something Else? Local Policies and Policy Narratives of Technical Intern Training Program Participants". Outside of academic journals, they have been published in *Foreign Affairs* and *East Asia Forum* and have spoken on immigration issues in Japan with both foreign and Japanese media sources. They hold a PhD in Political Science from Johns Hopkins University.

Panel II: Migration Diplomacy and Interdependence in a Multi-Polar World

Selective Multilateralism in Migration Diplomacy: How Dual-Position States Reshape Global Migration Governance | Aeneas Zi Wang, Nanjing University

ABSTRACT

Why would states whose diasporas depend on international migrant protections limit the binding force of those protections in multilateral fora? This article contends that when a state occupies a dual-positionality of both a major sending and receiving country, it develops cross-cutting normative interests that neither socialisation theory nor contestation literatures can adequately explain. As a protective sending state, a restrictive receiving state, and an entrepreneurial multilateral actor, China is a paradigmatic case which this study uses to develop the concept of selective multilateralism: a three-stage strategy of defensive norm-blocking, adaptive norm modification, and entrepreneurial norm projection. Drawing on systematic framing analysis of official documents across three multilateral fora and structured focused comparison of three within-case episodes, results reveal China's sovereignty-centred framing is consistent across all fora and temporal phases, that welfare and protection language appears selectively for overseas Chinese citizens while remaining structurally absent for inbound migrants, and that China's textual interventions in the Global Compact for Migration and its construction of parallel regional governance architecture constitute measurable entrepreneurial norm projection rather than passive institutional participation. The findings advance migration diplomacy theory beyond bilateral frameworks and contribute to debates on norm contestation and normative change in global migration governance.

Aeneas Zi Wang holds the Jiangsu Province Specially-Appointed Professorship and is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Nanjing University. His research interests lie in international migration and Global China studies. Prior to his current position in Nanjing, Aeneas Zi Wang was an EU Horizon 2020 Marie Sklodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at INALCO in Paris. He also holds a Visiting Associate Professorship at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Malaya for the 2025-26 academic year, and was a Visiting Scholar at the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore, and at the Centre for Advanced Studies, LMU Munich. He serves as an Associate Editor for Migration Studies (OUP) since 2024.

Performative Compliance: How Transit States Navigate U.S. Externalization | Katrina Burgess, Fletcher School at Tufts University

ABSTRACT
This paper interrogates the response of transit states in the Americas – particularly Mexico and Panama – to coercive migration diplomacy by the United States. Over the last decade, the U.S. government has put intense pressure on these states to contain irregular migrants before they reach the U.S. border. In contrast to their counterparts in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, transit states in the Americas are democratic (with the exception of Nicaragua) and highly dependent on a single powerful country – the United States. As a result, they are caught between domestic pressures to resist US hegemony and very little room to bargain for concessions. They also have limited capacity to control their borders as relative newcomers to transit migration. These constraints have produced a response of “performative compliance” whereby transit states appear to cooperate with U.S. demands without fully enforcing them. The paper will provide a preliminary analysis of how performative compliance works, including its manipulation by corrupt immigration oNicials to generate profits. It will close with a discussion of the implications for human security in the region.

Dr. Katrina Burgess is Professor of Political Economy and Director of the Henry J. Leir Institute for Migration and Human Security at the Fletcher School at Tufts University. She is the author of two award-winning books and is working on a third tentatively entitled *Betting on Hope: What Americans Don’t Understand about the Border Crisis*. In addition to publishing widely on labor politics, Latin American political economy, remittances, migration, and diasporas, she wrote and produced a 2020 documentary, Waylaid in Tijuana, about Haitian and Central American migrants whose journeys to the United States were disrupted by shifts in U.S. policy. She is currently co-leading a three-year project, funded by the Carnegie Corporation, on how the securitization of migration by the United States and Europe is affecting global peace and security.

Kamal Sadiq, University of California at Irvine
When Migration Stops: The Conditionality of Remittances and Return

ABSTRACT

TBC

Kamal Sadiq is an associate professor of political science and Director of the Center for Global Peace and Conflict Studies (CGPACS) at the University of California, Irvine. He researches migration, citizenship, and security processes, institutions, and policies across the Global South, specifically in South Asia (India, Bangladesh, and Nepal) and South-East Asia (Malaysia and Indonesia). He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago. Kamal is the author of Paper Citizens: How Illegal Immigrants Acquire Citizenship in Developing Countries (Oxford, 2009), co-editor of Interpreting Politics: Situated Knowledge, India, and the Rudolph Legacy (Oxford, 2020) and his articles appear in the European Journal of International Relations, International Studies Quarterly, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, PS: Political Science & Politics, the Oxford Handbook of Citizenship, and select edited books. Kamal has chaired the Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Migration Studies (ENMISA) section of the International Studies Association (ISA) and the Migration and Citizenship section of the American Political Science Association (APSA). Kamal serves on the editorial board of the journal Citizenship Studies, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, Migration Studies and the advisory board of the journal Migration Politics.

Transnational Repression and Migration Diplomacy in Latin America: Collusion, Returns, and Coercion against Diasporas | Elena Sánchez-Montijano, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE)

ABSTRACT

Transnational repression, understood as the set of practices through which a state intimidates, silences, or punishes its nationals outside its territory, has direct implications for migration diplomacy, insofar as it can become entangled with interstate negotiations over mobility, returns, and control. This paper argues that this intersection is visible, at minimum, through two phenomena. First, collusive migration diplomacy: agreements and forms of coordination through which origin states negotiate with destination or transit countries to enable surveillance, detention, deportation/transfer, or other restrictions on migrants, particularly those with political profiles. Second, return diplomacy: readmission and deportation arrangements (including operational coordination) that can function as an enabling condition for coercion or criminalization upon arrival in the country of origin.

The analysis adopts a comparative design drawing on Latin American cases, primarily El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, a region still insufficiently explored and it considers destination and transit countries across a range of contexts in the Americas. The study relies on in-depth interviews with key informants and documentary analysis (agreements, legal frameworks, diplomatic communications, and public statements). Its theoretical contribution is to delineate the scope conditions and mechanisms under which transnational repression should be understood as part of, or an effect of, migration diplomacy. Empirically, it will provide original, systematic evidence on how these arrangements are negotiated and implemented (actors, instruments, and sequences) and how they vary across cases and destinations.

Elena Sánchez-Montijano is a tenured Research Professor at the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE, Mexico) and General Coordinator of the Interdisciplinary Program on Migration Studies (CIDE-MIG). She is co-chair of the Migration and Mobility Section of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) and holds a PhD in Political and Social Sciences from Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona). Her research focuses on migrant integration policies, migration regimes, transnational ties, and public opinion toward migrants.

She has led and contributed to international and national research projects funded by the European Commission, USAID, UNHCR, and UNDP. She has published widely in journals such as *Journal of Migration and Human Security*, *International Migration*, *Globalizations*, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, and *Politics and Governance*, and with publishers including Rowman & Littlefield, Routledge, and Springer. She has been a visiting researcher at COMPAS (University of Oxford), CEDEM (Université de Liège), and RECSM (Universitat Pompeu Fabra).