Transnational Migrants amid COVID-19 – Potential Changes in Trends and Patterns of Connectivity

Transnationalism is a unique and emerging phenomenon in migration studies that offers hope for sustainable development. It is the ability of a migrant to perform different social, economic, cultural and political activities through an array of physical and digital connectivity mechanisms across areas of origin and destination. Traditionally, transnational activities were generally limited to socio-cultural or religious realms, and were carried out at the family or community level. Later, such activities intensified due to globalisation and then, shifted from sending remittances and investing in social and economic sectors to sending or bringing back new ideas of business, skills and innovations from host countries.

COVID-19 pandemic has paused such transnational activities due to travel restrictions and lockdown situations. As such, the pandemic has limited the scale of migrants’ connections, actively engaged in socio-cultural and political roles in host and sending regions. The concern is what would transnational activities look like now? Does COVID-19 spread weaken avenues of cooperation of transnational migrants’ social, economic, cultural and political networks within developed and developing regions? Or it may offer transformation in lifestyles, socio-cultural values, political involvement, professional and skill development and joint business ventures.

The debate in migration studies about the transformative role of transnational migration has developed along different dimensions. Some scholars describe the change in social processes as a ‘cultural turn’; disappearing of national boundaries as ‘denationalisation’; frequent travelling back and forth for different reasons such as tourism, education, health, etc., as ‘mobility turn’ and so on (Nedelcu 2012). Therefore, looking into the ways how COVID-19 can bring forth changes in the public and political landscape of a country, public institutions, individual and community level opportunities by the involvement of transnational migrants is crucial. The proposed panel will explore the following questions related to transnational migrants in Pakistan:

- How will COVID-19’s spread shape social and economic remittance flows in the context of limited mobility of transnational migrants?
- What will be the long-term effect of transnational migration, particularly in terms of social, economic, cultural and political participation amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, in origin and destination societies?

Reference

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