



IDEAS PROMOTING PEACE,  
DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN  
RIGHTS

NO. 2

# MOVING BEYOND CATEGORIES: MINORITY ROOT CAUSES AND LAYERED VULNERABILITIES IN LABOUR MIGRATION\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The recent thematic report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues clarifies that minority issues are not defined solely by formal status, but also by patterns of exclusion rooted in entrenched social hierarchies.<sup>1</sup> Building on this conceptual development, this paper examines how such hierarchies — particularly those linked to caste — may shape the lived realities of certain migrant workers beyond their country of origin. While migrant workers do not constitute minorities under international law, structural conditions identified as root causes of minority issues may intersect with migrant status in ways that generate layered and compounded forms of discrimination. These contemporary dynamics remain insufficiently captured within existing analytical frameworks.

Applying the Special Rapporteur's framework to the situation of Indian nationals in Gulf labour migration contexts, including Qatar, this paper sheds light on a cluster of vulnerabilities shaped by overlapping structural factors: social hierarchy, migrant status, occupational segregation, differential treatment between nationals and non-nationals, and, in some cases, gender. Recognising these interactions does not redefine categories; rather, it complements and refines existing lenses to better reflect lived realities. Enhanced conceptual integration is crucial to ensure that policy development, monitoring, and access to remedies adequately account for migrant workers experiencing minority-issue-type patterns of exclusion. Such analytical refinement is consistent with the mandate of Special Rapporteurs, which exists precisely to render visible social patterns and phenomena falling between established categories.<sup>2</sup>

## II. CONTEXT & CONSIDERATIONS

The protection of minorities and migrant workers has long been recognised under international law, yet these two regimes have historically developed along largely separate normative and institutional tracks. Minority protection, anchored in the ICCPR,<sup>3</sup> has been accompanied by debates regarding its definition and scope — a challenge acknowledged by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.<sup>4</sup> In parallel, the protection regime applicable to migrant workers has evolved with the elevation of labour standards through dedicated instruments and specialised institutions since the 1990 Migrant Workers Convention,<sup>5</sup> including specific developments concerning the situation of domestic workers. The recent report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues contributes to greater conceptual precision by identifying characteristic minority issues and their root causes, the latter including entrenched social hierarchies. This clarification provides a more structured analytical foundation to examine how such root causes operate across contexts.

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THE VIEWS EXPRESSED HEREIN REMAIN THOSE OF THE AUTHOR.

Central to this analysis, the structured identification and clarification of minority-root causes offered by the UN SR's report call for timely reconsideration of how these dynamics extend beyond traditionally defined minority contexts. The historical separation in treating minorities and migrant workers, although institutionally justified, can obscure situations where root causes identified in one framework directly shape realities addressed by the other. Where lived experiences are not fully reflected within existing categories, safeguards and policy responses risk remaining incomplete. This is particularly relevant in labour migration contexts where caste-based hierarchies continue to influence vulnerability beyond the country of origin.

Caste constitutes a historically entrenched social hierarchy within India that continues to shape the socio-economic positioning of Indian nationals.<sup>6</sup> Despite institutional and normative reforms prohibiting discrimination based on caste, robust evidence indicates that patterns of stratification and exclusion persist in practice.<sup>7</sup> As a system of inherited social status, caste can affect access to employment, remedies, and the enjoyment of rights. Similarly, caste-based or caste-inspired stratification may also influence occupational distribution and migration patterns, including the types of employment accessible to those seeking work abroad. As a result, such stratification can produce differentiated exposure to vulnerability, within and beyond national borders.

Individuals shaped by caste-based hierarchies who enter Gulf labour migration contexts may experience compounded vulnerabilities, resulting in heightened exposure to unequal treatment and abuse, as suggested by QCPD's internal documentation.<sup>8</sup> Pre-existing stratification can produce effects across all stages of the migration process, including influencing the very conditions that gave rise to migration itself. In the Qatari context, labour governance frameworks, notably sponsorship-related mechanisms and differential treatment between nationals and non-nationals, continue to structure access to mobility, employment conditions and remedies.<sup>9</sup> The specific situations of women and girls, including domestic workers, are further associated with distinct risks of exploitation and abuse, both structurally and normatively.<sup>10</sup> Social hierarchies may also reproduce within social and labour relations in the host country. The interaction of a minority-root cause, migrant status and in some cases, gender, can generate compounded forms of vulnerability and discrimination that are not necessarily visible when each element is assessed in isolation.

### III. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The layered dynamics outlined above bear direct relevance for United Nations mechanisms as well as affiliated institutions, including the International Labour Organization, engaged in reporting and normative development concerning migrant workers. Insofar as frameworks primarily assess migrant status, minority issues and gendered experiences through separate lenses, critical compounded realities remain only partially addressed. Integrating a minority-root cause perspective into labour migration discourse would strengthen ongoing efforts under the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (2030 Agenda) to effectively advance equality, dignity and decent work for all.<sup>11</sup> For Special Procedures and treaty bodies in particular, this analysis underscores the importance of cross-mandate dialogue and coordinated guidance, including in their engagement with civil society and in the handling of communications, country visits, and monitoring processes involving intersecting forms of discrimination. The need to uphold and sustain the incorporation of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (MIFD) in multilateral fora was reaffirmed most recently at the sixty-fourth session of the Commission for Social Development.<sup>12</sup>

In view of the above, the following targeted and actionable recommendations are proposed:

**1° Integrate minority-root cause analysis into United Nations reporting and monitoring frameworks on labour migration, including thematic reports, country visits and communications procedures;**

**2° Establish enhanced, and, where feasible, structured cross-mandate coordination between relevant Special Procedures and treaty bodies, complemented by periodic and targeted multi-stakeholder consultations addressing intersecting forms of discrimination;**

**3° Develop new approaches to disaggregated data collection, including through indicators capturing socio-economic origin, occupational segmentation and migration pathways, where appropriate.**

## IV. CONCLUSION

The clarification of minority-root causes offers an opportunity to refine how entrenched hierarchies are understood beyond traditionally bounded legal categories. As demonstrated, social stratification systems such as caste can extend their effects across migration processes and interact with labour governance in ways that existing analytical and normative silos do not fully capture. Integrating a minority-root cause perspective into labour migration discourse does not require altering mandates; rather, it enhances conceptual coherence, continuity, and operational effectiveness. In doing so, it also illuminates how issues identified in minority contexts – “invisibilisation”, marginalisation, exclusion, and unequal access to services – may manifest in migration settings through intersecting structural dynamics.<sup>13</sup>

This reflection is timely. It follows the most recent thematic developments under the Special Rapporteur’s mandate, coincides with continued reporting on the situation of migrant workers, and unfolds in the final stretch toward the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, at a moment when multilateral order and normative assumptions are themselves shifting, maintaining analytical clarity in the identification of vulnerability is essential.<sup>14</sup> Comprehending how such hierarchies travel and interact across borders strengthens the capacity of human rights mechanisms and institutions to respond appropriately to complex realities. By approaching minority-based experiences and migrant status not as binary categories but as intersecting dynamics, the United Nations and policy makers can reinforce their commitment to equality, dignity and universal rights in a changing global context.

## ENDNOTES

- [1] United Nations Human Rights Council. (2026). *Addressing minority issues through their root causes: Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues*. A/HRC/61/41. Available [here](#).
- [2] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. *Special Rapporteur on minority issues – About the mandate*. Available [here](#); See also United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. *Making a difference: Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council*. Available [here](#).
- [3] United Nations. (1966). *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 999 UNTS 171. Available [here](#).
- [4] See United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. *About minorities and human rights: Special Rapporteur on minority issues*. Available [here](#).
- [5] United Nations. (1990). *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families*, 2220 UNTS 3. Available [here](#).
- [6] Ale A. & Vinjamuri L. P. (2025). Caste system: its Roots and Impact on Social Wellbeing and Overall Growth of India. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 6 (5), pp. 13751-13755. Available [here](#); Wankhede A. & Al. (2024). *Caste in Australia: A Phenomenology of Casteism*, p. 6. SGRS & AIM. Available [here](#); Goghari V. M. & Kusi M. (2023). An introduction to the basic elements of the caste system of India. *Frontiers Psychology*. Available [here](#).
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- [8] QCPD. (2025). *Confidential interviews with migrant workers (anonymised case references on file)*.
- [9] Human Rights Watch. (2026). *World Report 2026: Events of 2025*, pp. 50; 279; 323-324; 365-369. Available [here](#); Business and Human Rights Centre (2025). *India: Migrant workers’ systemic exploitation, including lack of social security, forced labour & discrimination, is worsened by conflict and crisis*. Available [here](#). See also Bloomberg. (2026). *Everyone Gets a Cut, and Migrant Workers Pay the Price*. Available [here](#).
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- [11] And is further reaffirmed through the Doha Political Declaration of the Second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD2). See United Nations. (2025). *Doha Political Declaration: Agreed text*. Second World Summit for Social Development, Doha. Available [here](#); United Nations General Assembly. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. A/RES/70/1. Available [here](#).
- [12] Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office in Geneva. (2026). *Joint Explanation of Position regarding the CSocD64 Priority Theme Resolution “Advancing Social Development and Social Justice through Coordinated, Equitable, and Inclusive Policies”*. Available [here](#).
- [13] United Nations Human Rights Council. (2026). *Addressing minority issues through their root causes: Report of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues*. A/HRC/61/41, para. 52. Available [here](#).
- [14] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. (2026). *High Commissioner Türk opens the Human Rights Council: People’s pursuit of dignity, equality, and justice is unshakeable*. Available [here](#).