

# **Regulation through Responsibilization: Exit Policies and the Production of Precarious Migration from South Asia to the Gulf**

## **Abstract**

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This paper investigates the gendered governance of temporary labour migration through feminist political economy analysis of migrant precarity as produced and sustained by neoliberal ‘responsibilization’ (Lemke, 2001), entailing the outsourcing of state control over migrant im/mobility. In unpacking multiple expressions of regulation over migrant domestic worker (MDW) departure from India, Sri Lanka, and the Gulf States in which they are employed, it locates feminized migration in the South Asia-Gulf corridor along a continuum of ‘protracted precarity’ characterized by movements between economic exclusion at home and exploitation abroad (Piper et al, 2017). Domestic worker emigration from South Asia is framed by discriminatory restrictions on ‘the right to exit’ at individual and institutional levels. Indian and Sri Lankan state interventions are premised on paternalistic norms of protection-through-prohibition via minimum age requirements and other criteria that shift the responsibility of risk management on to migrants themselves. The emergence of new assemblages of migration governance – including Sri Lanka’s Family Background Report and centralized recruitment for Indian MDWs – limit formal pathways by imposing access and administrative barriers that push women to migrate irregularly while leaving them responsible for securing employment and care arrangements (Rajan and Joseph, 2015; Withers, 2019). Our paper suggests gendered exit policies in sending contexts regulate migrant compliance and commodification in place of increased resourcing or systemic reform. We provide an institutional analysis of the different ways responsabilization of domestic worker im/mobility has occurred within India and Sri Lanka to argue that not only has migration management been externalized via private actors, but the onus of development itself has been outsourced from the state to migrant workers recast as ‘agents of (their own) development’. With the retreat of the developmental state, evidenced through a lack of local employment and institutional support for safe migration, migrant workers internalize risk in pursuing the precarious livelihood choices available to them.

## **Authors’ Bios**

**Jolin Joseph** is a Doctoral Candidate and Vanier Scholar in Gender, Feminist and Women’s studies at York University, Canada. Joseph’s research considers the racialized, gendered, and classed implications of transnational care migration, precarious labour and migration policy in and from South Asia. With the Centre for Development Studies India, YWCA Canada and others, Joseph has collaborated on projects and published in the areas of feminist economic recovery, gendered livelihoods, temporary labour mobility and South-South migration.

**Matt Withers** is a research fellow within the Department of Sociology at Macquarie University. His research addresses the developmental implications of temporary labour migration and remittances throughout the Indo-Pacific region, with an emphasis on South Asia and Pacific Island Countries. His current project examines how temporary labour migration interfaces with the work and care arrangements of transnational migrant households, using the concepts of 'decent wages' and 'decent care' to frame the need for improved labour governance and gender-equitable policymaking in support of sustainable development outcomes.

**Sophie Henderson** is a migration policy researcher, having recently completed a PhD in international labour migration and human rights law at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

**Richa Shivakoti** is a Senior Research Associate with the Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Migration and Integration at Ryerson University. Her research interests include the different facets of the migration-development nexus including international labour migration, remittance, gender, forced migration, diaspora and Asian migration governance.