## The Position of "the South" and "South-South Migration" in Policy and Programmatic Responses to Different Forms of Migration

An Interview with Francesco Carella

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh with Francesco Carella

- ABSTRACT: In this interview with Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Francesco Carella—Labour Migration and Mobility Specialist at the International Labour Organization (ILO) currently covering Central America, Mexico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, and previously covering North Africa—reflects on the position of "the South" and "South-South migration" in policy and programmatic responses to different forms of migration. He discusses how and to what effect terms such as "South" and "South-South migration" are used by different stakeholders in his professional field, and outlines contemporary challenges and opportunities to better understand the needs and rights of migrants, and to promote the rights of migrants and their families around the world.
- **KEYWORDS:** Global Compact on Migration, global South, ILO, labor migration, migrant rights, South-South migration

**Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh:** In this issue of *Migration and Society* we are interested in "Recentering the South in Studies of Migration," and also in examining the position of "the South" and "South-South migration" in policy and programmatic responses to different forms of migration. In your professional experience since 2005, you have worked on migration and development, forced migration and refugees issues, trafficking in human beings, migrants' rights, and local integration for IOM, the UN Secretariat, and UNHCR, and, since 2013, as Labour Migration and Mobility Specialist at the International Labour Organization in North Africa, Central America, Mexico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Given the heterogeneity of the countries you have worked in and covered, and the diverse forms of migration taking place within and across these countries, how useful, if at all, do you think that the term "South-South migration" is?

**Francesco Carella:** The expression "South-South migration" is useful insofar as it contributes to shifting migration discourse away from the repetitive assertions that migrants are "invading" countries of the global North, which have become particularly commonplace in recent years. It is a short but clear reminder that much migration occurs within and across the countries of the developing world. For instance, we know that, contrary to popular belief, most Africans migrate within Africa, rather than toward Europe or North America: in East, Central, and West Africa, more than 80 percent of international migrants come from a country in the same region.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, there is so much variety within the global South, and South-South migratory flows are so diverse, that one should be aware that these expressions are inevita-



bly oversimplifications at best, or sweeping generalizations at worst. When trying to analyze a migration/displacement situation, whether for academic or policy development objectives, one has to zoom in and examine the precise and often multifaceted type of South-South migration at hand. Countries in both Africa and Latin America can be *mostly* places of either destination for migrants (for example, Costa Rica or South Africa) or origin (for instance, Egypt or Honduras). However, most countries have acquired increasingly more complex migration profiles: it would be challenging to find a single country that was not simultaneously, to varying degrees, a country of origin, destination, transit, and return for migrants.

**EFQ:** To what extent, and how, are the terms "the global South" and "South-South migration" used by different stakeholders in your [professional] field?

FC: The expression "global South" is used to refer to developing countries. I find it curious that it stands in contrast to the "global North," but if I ask the user of the term to define "global North," the geographic area covered often overlaps with "the West" (it could be seen as a paradox that, whereas "the global North" is used by many as a synonym for "the West," "the global South" is not quite a synonym for "the East").

Generally speaking, I feel that the terms "the global South" and "developing countries" or "the developing world" have become the more widely accepted expressions to refer to what used to be called—very inappropriately, in my opinion—the "Third World." Although the latter term is still used in common parlance in some circles, it would be considered completely unacceptable for a professional in my field to use it. While I am writing these lines as a personal reflection, based on my experience of living and working in countries of both the "global North" and the "global South," I also believe that the most commonly used expression in the United Nations system is "the developing world." The "global South" is sometimes used in contrast with the "global North," whereas the expression "Third World" is not accepted in my field. In fact, every time I hear "Third World" used by a government official or another stakeholder with whom I interact in my job, I make a point of letting them know I disagree with the use of that expression, and I explain why. I argue that using the term "Third World" assumes that a First and a Second World also exist, which I do not think is the case nowadays. Additionally, even during the Cold War, when it was proffered by some that there were a First, a Second, and a Third World, the order of the three was arbitrarily—albeit unsurprisingly—established by someone in the so-called First World.

As for "South-South," I believe it has become a very popular approach, which applies to both academic analysis and policy work, whether in reference to "South-South migration," "South-South cooperation," or others. There is more and more "South-South" going on at the ILO and in the United Nations system in general,² possibly due to the emergence of some G20 countries such as Brazil and the other BRICS,³ which have invested in extending their influence over developing countries by different means, including the establishment or strengthening of national development aid agencies that focus on South-South cooperation.⁴ The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)⁵ was established in 1974 by the UN General Assembly to promote, coordinate, and support South-South and triangular cooperation globally and within the United Nations system. In 2012, the ILO's Governing Body endorsed the paper "South-South and Triangular Cooperation: The Way Forward," making the ILO the first UN agency with a dedicated strategy on this.⁶ Since then, a series of initiatives have been promoted by the ILO in the lead-up to its centenary, which was celebrated throughout 2019. For instance, a panel discussion on "The Future of Work, Youth Employment and South-South Cooperation" was held in Buenos Aires in March 2019.

## EFQ: What are the advantages and disadvantages of using these terms?

FC: The terms are handy shortcuts to convey complex concepts, as long as one is aware that these shortcuts inevitably constitute oversimplifications and that, strictly speaking, they are semantically inaccurate: North and South should be determined by the hand of a compass, not by a country's GDP or external influence. Technicalities aside, from a developing country's perspective, the rising influence of "the South" is a question of empowerment, which is particularly crucial to the many developing countries with a colonial history. Think of countries whose independence from a Northern power was acquired more or less recently (Brazil, Morocco, South Africa, Tunisia, etc.) and which now get proudly to share their savoir faire with other countries. While it could be argued that at least part of that know-how was acquired during or through the colonial experience, it is by now part of their national identity and body of competency and knowledge. A striking example of this is ATCT, Tunisia's Technical Cooperation Agency, which promotes the placement of Tunisian (health care, teaching, and other) professionals—most of them civil servants—in other countries. Popular destinations tend to be the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.

Regarding "South-South migration," the use of the expression is helpful not just as a conceptual tool to analyze and better understand migration flows that have traditionally drawn less attention—possibly because academic research on migration and the development of migration studies as a discipline have mostly originated in countries of the "global North"; it also has powerful political implications, in that it helps counteract the rhetoric that would see migrants "invading" the "global North."

In line with a point made earlier, I think one key disadvantage is that the expression "South-South migration" tells more about what a migratory flow is not (i.e., not going toward "developed countries") rather than what it is, given the diversity of migration flows within the "global South."

**EFQ:** As you have noted elsewhere, migrant workers, especially those who work in the informal economy, often face multiple violations of their labor rights (Carella, quoted in IOM 2018b). What, if anything, is particular about migrant rights in regions of the "global South," such as North Africa, Central America, and the Caribbean?

**FC:** The fulfillment and protection of migrant workers' human rights (labor rights being part of these) is a challenge worldwide. However, some aggravating circumstances contribute to an increase in violations of these rights: these include an irregular status (i.e., being an *irregular* or *undocumented* migrant) and working in the informal economy—or more accurately, being in informal employment.

The existence and growth of informal employment, both in origin and destination countries, is closely related to irregular labor migration flows. Vibrant "underground economies" characterize many countries of the "global South," and these are attractive for different reasons for undocumented migrant workers, while often increasing profits for employers and reducing costs for consumers. This is particularly common in countries that do not have functioning labor market and migration policies, which are supposed to match the needs of the labor market (job opportunities) with the workers (job seekers) available not only nationally, but also internationally.

Measures to transition from the informal to the formal economy (which, incidentally, are the subject of a dedicated international labor standard: ILO Recommendation 204 from 2015)<sup>9</sup> can be implemented, including in countries of the global South, and should take account of

gender-specific challenges to formalization, while also ensuring equality of treatment for all workers, regardless of nationality, as a means of preventing a "race to the bottom" in wages and working conditions, also known as *social dumping*. The opening of more regular migration channels can also be beneficial: there is an urgent need to address the disconnect between existing labor market needs and the willingness of governments to open up more regular permanent or temporary migration channels to meet these needs, especially in low-wage sectors. We can see this not only in the "global North," but also in several countries of Latin America (e.g., the agriculture and construction sectors of Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Panama require migrant workers to function adequately), and increasingly so in some parts of North Africa (for instance, with Morocco gradually opening its labor market to West Africans).

**EFQ:** Do you think that it is helpful or dangerous to think about migrant rights through the lens of "South-South migration"?

**FC:** Rights are rights. One key principle about human rights is their universality: they should apply indifferently and equally to any human being, in any region of the world. Granted, this principle is often not reflected in reality.

Labor rights are part of human rights. I make specific reference to labor rights because, crucially, the three existing, legally binding, human rights standards on migration (ILO Conventions 97 and 143 and the 1990 International Convention on Migrant Workers' Rights)<sup>10</sup> refer and apply to migrant *workers* specifically, as well as their family members. To this day there is no legally binding international instrument that grants specific rights to migrants as such (in contrast to the case of refugees, who do have specific rights, first and foremost the right to *non-refoulement*, by virtue of their status).<sup>11</sup> Of course, migrants enjoy fundamental human rights, by virtue of being human beings, and may enjoy labor rights, if they are *workers*. They do not enjoy any specific rights for being *migrants*.

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that the recently adopted Global Compact on a Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration (GCM) was born as a nonbinding instrument, not an international treaty. At a time of widespread anti-immigrant sentiments and political rhetoric in so many countries, it seems very unlikely that any government would suggest the development of a legally binding instrument on migrant rights in the near future.

While labor migration can bring benefits to migrant workers and their families, and to countries of origin and destination, it also entails costs for migrant workers, including the denial of fundamental principles and rights at work, high recruitment fees and related costs, wage penalties, poor working and employment conditions, mismatch of migrant skills to available jobs, family separation, and lack of social protection. These costs are not felt evenly among migrant workers: they are often intensified by intersecting factors such as gender, age, race, migration status, and geographic location, which is where the South-South dimension comes into play.

In a South-South migration context, I have often found that countries that see themselves as (exclusively or mostly) countries of origin will promptly go ahead and ratify binding international treaties, with the key objective of ensuring protection for the rights of their own nationals abroad. Nevertheless, as they start transitioning toward becoming countries of transit and destination of migration, they will probably be much less forthcoming in advocating for the application of those treaties for the benefit of migrants on their own soil.

**EFQ:** You have also noted that, while they are important in different ways, international conventions are insufficient to protect migrant workers' rights (Carella, quoted in IOM 2018a). What role, if any, do you think that South-South cooperation can play in promoting migrant rights?

FC: Please allow me to qualify that statement! I truly believe that international standards, including the ILO labor standards on migrant workers (Convention 97 and Recommendation 86 from 1949; Convention 143 and Recommendation 151 from 1975) as well as the more recent International Convention on Migrant Workers' Rights (1990) are key instruments for the protection of migrant workers and the governance of labor migration and mobility.<sup>12</sup>

While ratification of these three legally binding instruments individually is relatively low, taken together around 90 countries have ratified one or more of them, demonstrating their acceptance that the governance of labor migration/mobility and protection of migrant workers need to be subject to minimum standards rooted in a rule of law framework. Additionally, all (non-migration-specific) international human rights and labor standards that have been widely ratified (e.g., ILO's eight fundamental conventions) apply to all workers, including migrant workers. These standards set minimum benchmarks for the treatment of migrant workers across all regions.

What I truly meant to say is that the mere formal act of ratifying a convention is not sufficient per se in ensuring the protection of migrant workers' rights. Conventions need to be implemented, national legislation needs to be adjusted and then enforced. Complaint and redress systems must be in place and access to justice must be guaranteed for everybody, regardless of nationality or migration status.

In fact, ratifying and effectively implementing ILO Conventions 97 and 143 on migrant workers is crucial for countries in the global South, as it constitutes a key to fulfilling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (it is no coincidence that SDG target 8.8 calls for the protection of all workers, including migrant workers and particularly women). Migrant workers make valuable contributions to their countries of origin and destination that are often overlooked, especially in a South-South migration context. Not only do they supply needed labor and skills (think, for example, of Tunisians and Egyptians working in Libya until the so-called Arab Spring; Nicaraguans in Costa Rica and Haitians in the Dominican Republic), but as consumers of goods and services. They also create jobs, develop markets, contribute to social security systems, and act as mediators between countries of origin and destination. By developing and returning with new skills, they can also transfer much-needed knowledge acquired abroad.

Unfortunately, migrant workers do not always find jobs matching their skills. Some of the problems start during the recruitment process. Unscrupulous recruiters may be interested in moving large numbers of migrants and forcing them to pay up to a year's salary (this occurs quite frequently in the migration corridor from South Asia to the GCC countries). To cover these fees, many migrant workers have to borrow from their families, which puts them into heavy debt burden, or from money lenders, who put them at risk of trafficking or debt bondage until the debts are paid off. When these migrant workers are exploited, they often have no recourse but to leave their employer, or to shut up and continue suffering more abuse. South-South cooperation can be a powerful tool to prevent and redress abuses through, for instance, the negotiation and implementation of bilateral labor agreements (BLAs) between countries of origin and destination. These, in turn, should be based on the aforementioned international legal instruments.<sup>14</sup>

**EFQ:** You mentioned earlier that "There is more and more 'South-South' going on at the ILO and in the United Nations system in general." One critique of institutionalized policy engagement with "the global South" is that it risks "instrumentalising and co-opting [South-South cooperation] and hence depoliticising potential sources of resistance to the North's neoliberal hegemony" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley 2018: 2). Indeed, it has been argued that policy makers are strategically embracing "South-South migration" and "South-South cooperation" in order "to enhance development outcomes" and "keep 'Southerners' in the South," in ways that

particularly benefit the global North (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley 2018: 19). What, if any, are the dangers of enhancing "policy engagement" with "the South"? To what extent, and how, do you think that processes of instrumentalization and co-optation can be avoided?

FC: Policy engagement with "the South" is officially promoted by "the North" through "triangular cooperation," which is a form of South-South cooperation supported by a Northern partner. Additionally, if we see regional integration as a form of enhanced cooperation, then I think there is a tendency to promote "Northern" models of regional cooperation, such as the European Union, in the "global South." This can be seen clearly with Mercosur in South America, CARICOM in the Caribbean, ECOWAS in West Africa, and at an earlier stage with the African Union itself.

It could be argued that at least some policy makers see the promotion of this type of South-South cooperation as an opportunity to foster South-South migration, thereby preventing "Southerners" from "moving North"; but I would not say it is its main driver. It is usually the case that, if socioeconomic opportunities are available locally, most people will prefer to either stay where they are, or move within the same region if need be, rather than move far away to a different continent, where migration will be more costly and adaptation may be less straightforward.

Overall, a recent trend can be identified, in both academia and practice, whereby the "global South" has been developing its own understanding (or rather, multiple understandings) and critical analysis of migration, <sup>15</sup> rather than having South-South migration concepts and models imposed from the "global North." In the current decade Brazil, as an emerging economy, has funded a South-South Cooperation Project for the Protection of Rights of Migrant Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean Region, implemented by ILO and involving Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Mexico, and Trinidad and Tobago. The project had the objective of promoting the exchange of information on current labor migration trends in the region, collection and analysis of migration statistics, gaps and challenges concerning working conditions, and existing good practices concerning labor migration and protection of migrant workers' rights.

Nevertheless, given the close historical (as well as economic, political, and cultural) links between some Southern countries and countries in the North, it may well prove ultimately impossible to avoid co-optation completely.

**EFQ:** How can responses to migration within, across, and between the countries of the "global South" more meaningfully respond to the needs and rights of different people, including migrants and their families?

FC: Recent examples of massive forced displacement within, between, and across countries in the global South are teaching the entire international community lessons on how better to respond to the needs and rights of migrants, refugees, and their families, in often creative or even innovative manners. Facing the Syrian crisis since 2011, neighboring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey have had to grapple with hosting overwhelmingly high numbers of refugees, sometimes reaching over one-quarter of the population of the country, as in the case of Lebanon. Although the latter, as well as Jordan, already hosted Palestinian refugees, the sheer magnitude of the Syrian refugee crisis has been considered a game changer in the level of challenges faced by developing countries in responding to migrant/refugee flows. (Incidentally, one could argue that the support provided by Northern actors such as the European Union, to countries like Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, could be considered a form of "co-optation.")

In the Americas, the Venezuelan crisis, which has become particularly grievous in the latter half of the 2010s, has caused the unprecedented movement of Venezuelans into neighboring

countries—in this case with a less clear-cut legal status than with Syrians: most countries do not recognize the majority of Venezuelans as refugees, but as migrants, although it is widely acknowledged that most are involved in some form of forced displacement. This acknowledgment has enabled the adoption of flexible requirements for the regularization of Venezuelan migrants in countries such as neighboring Colombia.

Colombia has a long tradition of emigration (particularly of large numbers of refugees due to the bloody conflict that affected the country until the 2016 peace accord), and limited experience with the reintegration of returnees and with the management of temporary flows of transit migrants trying to reach the United States. However, its immigration-management and migrant-integration experience was close to zero until Venezuelans started crossing the border en masse. At the time of writing this piece (November 2019), it is estimated that Colombia is hosting more than 1.4 million Venezuelans:¹6 over one-third of the total number of Venezuelans who have left their country of origin in recent years. The principles of solidarity and brotherhood between the peoples of Colombia and Venezuela have been called upon in the response to the crisis. Contributing factors to the success of this response have been the recent memories of Colombians seeking asylum in Venezuela for decades during the Colombian conflict, and the proximity in the culture and customs of the two countries, which facilitates social cohesion.

Both the Colombian state apparatus and civil society have had to adjust and adapt, through innovative policy and legislative instruments, as well as practical field initiatives, in order to tackle the challenge at hand. At the local level, major cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, and Barranquilla have led in piloting innovative integration measures, while border towns and cities such as Cúcuta and Maicao have had to adapt their provision of services and public programs, which focused on traditional border flows (trade and family-supply related), by reorienting it toward humanitarian assistance for and integration of incoming migrants.

Migration is typically associated with the national/central level of governance because immigration policies are usually determined at, and immigration laws usually apply to, the national level. However, once migrants have entered a country's territory, regardless of their migration status, their social and economic integration has to be fostered, or at least dealt with, at the local level.

The local level is a crucial layer of activity, and should accordingly be a key level of analysis when thinking about South-South cooperation. There are multiple facets to be examined in this regard, not least the development level of public institutions at the town/city level, and their capacity to respond to migration flows; or the need to develop national migration policies that include guidelines for local authorities, according to the latter's competencies and capacities.

Similarly, one should not think of South-South cooperation as restricted to the state or central level: city-to-city cooperation is an area with huge potential for development in the near future, especially in reference to migration.<sup>17</sup> Latin America as a region seems to be a laboratory for innovative practices: in addition to the examples of Colombian cities facing the Venezuela refugee/migrant crisis, other cities can pride themselves on implementing creative local governance measures aiming at fostering the integration of migrants. The two continental megalopolises of São Paulo, Brazil, and Mexico City, Mexico, are prime examples of this.<sup>18</sup>

**EFQ:** What do you see as the key challenges and opportunities in this field over the coming years?

FC: Governments face significant challenges in addressing the policy implications of the changing patterns of migration, which is increasingly driven by conflicts and violence, by climate change, and by the lack of employment opportunities (which in turn disproportionately affect

women, youth, and vulnerable groups of the population). Mixed flows of people in need of international protection (such as refugees) and migrant workers will be increasingly common; and the complexity of drivers of mobility will often make it difficult to distinguish between the two categories.

These challenges extend to the governance of labor migration and mobility across regions and migration corridors, but also within regions, as tends to be the case with South-South migration; they are exacerbated by a disconnect, in government, between migration and other policy areas, including development and employment, and a lack of coordination between different levels of governance (local, national, bilateral, regional, etc.). Cities will inevitably play a crucial role in the implementation of the Global Compact on Migration. <sup>19</sup> Enhancing international cooperation specifically at the South-South level—through, among others, bilateral labor migration agreements; regional consultative processes such as the Regional Conference on Migration (Puebla Process), the South American Conference on Migration, the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, the Colombo Process, etc.; and regional and bilateral agreements on social security—can equip countries of the "global South" with more appropriate tools to rise to the challenges at hand.

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This article expresses the views of the author and does not reflect the official views of the ILO.

## NOTES

- 1. https://unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationWebflyer.aspx?publicationid=2118.
- 2. For instance, see Ngombu (2018) and ILO (2019).
- 3. BRICS is the acronym coined for an association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
- 4. South-South cooperation (SSC) is defined by the UN as "a process whereby two or more developing countries pursue their individual and/or shared national capacity development objectives through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how, and through regional and

- inter-regional collective actions, including partnerships involving governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector, for their individual and/or mutual benefit within and across regions."
- 5. The UNOSSC was established by the UN General Assembly: https://www.unsouthsouth.org/about/about-unossc/.
- For the strategy, please see: https://www.ilo.org/gb/GBSessions/previous-sessions/GB313/pol/WC MS\_172577/lang—en/index.htm?ssSourceSiteId=pardev
- 7. For further details please see: https://www.ilo.org/pardev/events/WCMS\_672356/lang—en/index htm
- 8. Please see ATCT's website: https://www.atct.tn/en.
- 9. R204—Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), available online on NORMLEX: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0:: NO::P12100\_ILO\_CODE:R204.
- See https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/migr ant-workers/lang—en/index.htm and https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CMW .aspx.
- 11. See the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol: https://www.unhcr.org/about-us/background/4ec262df9/1951-convention-relating-status-refugees-its-1967-protocol.html.
- So are other relevant international standards, such as ILO's Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189): https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\_ILO\_CODE:C189.
- 13. SDG target 8.8: "protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments of all workers, including migrant workers, particularly women migrants, and those in precarious employment."
- 14. The aforementioned ILO Recommendation 86 annexes a "Model Agreement on Temporary and Permanent Migration for Employment, including Migration of Refugees and Displaced Persons," which states can use as a basis for developing their own agreement: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100 INSTRUMENT ID:312424:NO.
- 15. As regards academia, see, for example, the Southern African Migration Programme (SAMP): https://scholars.wlu.ca/samp/.
- 16. As per the UN Response for Venezuelans (R4V) Platform, consulted on 4 November 2019: https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform.
- 17. For an example in the European/Mediterranean context, see: https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/alcaldessa/en/noticia/alliance-with-italian-cities-to-continue-rescuing-people-in-the-mediterra nean\_770422. At the international level, see: https://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/.
- 18. For further details, please see, on Mexico City: ILO and STyFE, "Programas sociales para población migrante en la Ciudad de México," https://www.trabajo.cdmx.gob.mx/storage/app/uploads/public/5bc/619/621/5bc6196218328636139953.pdf. On São Paulo: ECLAC, "Políticas migratórias em nível local: Análise sobre a institucionalização da política municipal para a população imigrante de São Paulo," https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/44491/4/S1900310\_pt.pdf.
- See, for example, "The 5th Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and Development: City Leadership in Implementing the UN Global Compacts": https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/ 2018-12/Programme percent20- percent202018 percent20Mayoral percent20Forum\_25November20 18.pdf.

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