



## GDI ISSUE PERSPECTIVE: MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS

### WHY IT MATTERS:

In the past 25 years, the world has seen 1 billion people exit poverty, achieving the lowest poverty rate in history.<sup>1</sup> A concerted effort to address root causes has paid great dividends to many people. However, millions of people have nonetheless been left behind because of global instability and persistent, pernicious inequality. These marginalized groups are often unaddressed or even vilified because of circumstance and characteristics. And, considering their numbers, these populations should not be overlooked: international migrants number over 250M<sup>2</sup>; forcibly displaced people exceed 70M<sup>3</sup>, those in modern-day slavery are estimated at 40M<sup>4</sup> and 470M people have disabilities that affect their ability to work<sup>5</sup>. Whether structural or sudden, extreme disadvantage creates compounding barriers to independence for marginalized populations. Limited access to economic opportunity, mobility, or legal recourse multiply the risks and restrictions of living in poverty or with disabilities.

In order to address these populations, we must understand the complex and difficult situations that have left them behind; the challenge of solving these issues is not as simple as getting a vaccine in people's hands. While short-term alleviation of suffering or making the rules of how and when to engage are essential practices, they are not sufficient to altering the core reasons that drive inequality. To achieve wholesale system change, we need to rethink the humanitarian and legal paradigms that currently exist.

We recognize that many of these populations are overlapping and the complex situations that create or keep their circumstances may not ever be sustainably disrupted without bringing in another angle: an economic lever. Trying to address population needs with siloed agencies that utilize single intervention solutions simply won't ever get at root causes or unleash the massive potential these populations hold.

### THE CURRENT STATE / THE OPPORTUNITY:

Disrupting systems that produce or avoid marginalized populations is a tricky business: addressing underlying causes requires challenging the status quo of systems that have benefited many. There is an opportunity to leverage resources and players in the existing system as partners, not adversaries. With them, if we focus on economic opportunities, we may be able to make sustainable and disruptive change.

For example, global procurement spending is measured in the trillions of dollars. This is the same system that includes large numbers of forced labor in supply chains. Any systems that have growth often have exploitation. The opportunity, then, lies in changing purchasing and production practices by introducing tools to predict risks of forced labor and demonstrating alternative practices to disrupt entrenched ones. It's a question of building evidence to show that ethical production is possible with the very players who dominate the system; success is showing that those who don't adapt will go out of business. Or, take the exclusion of persons with disabilities from employment: an estimated \$1.5-2T in annual GDP is lost.<sup>6</sup> If

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<sup>1</sup> [Decline of Global Extreme Poverty Continues but Has Slowed: World Bank](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/international-migrant-stock-2019.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-48682783>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_575479.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> ILO, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Metts, 2000.

access to rehabilitation and specialized services were integrated rather than siloed, driven by human needs rather than products, the status quo—disabled person as unemployable—would be proven naïve.

Seeing opportunities among marginalized populations requires a new frame: refugees as underutilized human capital, migrants as solving a critical need for jobs that otherwise would go unfilled, disabled people as simply under-trained personnel. Addressing system-driven poverty imposed on people who could otherwise prosper requires a cross-sectoral approach, an openness to innovation, and a willingness to look beyond politics and policies to drive systems change.

### **GDI's WORK:**

GDI aims to empower marginalized populations over the long-term: leveraging partners and ideas across multiple disciplines and beyond the humanitarian sector; taking a transnational scope; and equipping individuals and communities with new skills, networks, and sources of capital. This approach can unlock unseen potential for long-term systems change. Efforts to support marginalized communities include:

- **Ending Modern Slavery.** The Global Fund to End Modern Slavery ([GFEMS](#)) was created to render forced labor economically unprofitable by aligning private sector development, criminal justice reform, and social protection efforts to dismantle systems of slavery in specific sectors and geographies. GFEMS assembles and funds holistic interventions that undermine the economic drivers of modern slavery by reducing the supply of vulnerable individuals, demand for exploitation, and the permissive environment. GDI also believes there are opportunities to design and launch dedicated investment funds that would direct equity and debt capital at enterprises that can transform industries for the good of marginalized populations through ethical production models and disruptive technologies.
- **Economic opportunities for refugees.** Humanitarian responses to the current refugee crises will only be meaningful if anchored on the promotion of opportunities for self-reliance and self-determination. The [Refugee Investment Network](#) works to bridge the gap between an increasing number of investors interested in refugee investments and the growing ecosystem of refugee entrepreneurs and ventures. More broadly, its mission is to shift the political and social dialogue about the value of refugees and unlock investments that create new jobs and measurably improve the livelihood opportunities for refugees and their host communities.
- **Temporary labor mobility.** Studies show that migration from low-income to higher-income countries for temporary labor opportunities provides one of the greatest returns on global development, in terms of income and skill development. The economic benefits to low- and middle-skilled workers in poor countries are orders of magnitude higher than the next most effective anti-poverty intervention, with added benefits—and no aid costs—to the host country. GDI is exploring new opportunities to facilitate increased temporary labor mobility globally, recognizing significant political and social barriers that may need to be addressed.
- **Employing and enabling disabled populations.** Without a scaled and integrated approach, solutions for employing or training persons with disabilities will remain the work of single NGOs or social enterprises with limited geographic and industry reach. GDI is currently incubating the [Disability Impact Fund](#) to support a portfolio of organizations and companies who address the various layers of support in order to maximize scale and success of all interventions: from vocational trainers in schools to identification of suitable roles, technology that matches people with jobs at scale and trainers to integrate workers into positions. GDI is also developing new efforts for horizontal integration of assistive technology (AT) within health systems. Almost 2.5bn people would benefit from physical rehabilitation services, including access to appropriate AT, however, access remains a great challenge. GDI sees an opportunity for a multi-stakeholder initiative to connect upstream and downstream efforts.