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## BRICS civil society drafts goals for leaders summit

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Under the aegis of the BRICS civil society forum, there were working groups meet that discussed access to healthcare, education, sustainable development, “harmonization of inter-

ethnic affairs” in the five emerging economies on Monday [Image: brics2015.ru]

One hundred participants from the five countries are attending the Civil BRICS Forum in Moscow from 29 June – July 1.

Civil society stakeholders from Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa are aiming to get diverse perspectives included in the draft goals of the bloc ahead of the BRICS Summit that will take place next week.

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One of the biggest complaints levelled at the bloc is that they were an inter-governmental creation, aimed at increasing and focusing trade flows, and produced without public consultation or ownership.

In a message to the civil society forum that opened in Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin noted that many issues in international relations today cannot be resolved effectively without civil society’s active participation.

“The role of people’s diplomacy in building trust and understanding between countries and searching for peaceful solutions to conflicts and crises is especially important,” [a Kremlin statement](#) quoted Putin on Monday.

“Your forum opens a new dimension in the BRICS group’s activity by involving in our joint work representatives of diverse nongovernmental organisations and public groups in our countries,” the Russian President added.

Governments in Russia, China and [India have in recent years seen an uneasy relationship with civil society](#) and advocacy groups, especially overseas NGOs.

China and Russia’s [state security apparatus has turned its sights on foreign NGOs and their domestic partners](#), which are bracing for a crackdown. In India too civil society groups are increasingly at odds with the government.

On Tuesday, the BRICS forum is slated to discuss “building racial, ethnic and religious tolerance” as well as “integration of migrants”.

While India and China both struggle with migrants from poorer Asian nations, according to UN Population Division estimates, as of 2013, [the Russian Federation was second only to the United States in the sheer number of immigrants](#).

[Another BRICS member South Africa was recently in the eye of the storm as it saw a surge in xenophobic violence](#). Since the end of apartheid, South Africa has attracted millions of migrants, mostly Africans, fleeing political and economic turmoil in their own countries.

Rampant unemployment and poverty are seen as an underlying cause of the violence by South Africans who have accused migrants of stealing their jobs.

[The European Union is also in the midst of a massive migration crisis](#) as it struggles to come to an agreement over what the EU should do to handle the many thousands who have crossed the Mediterranean from Africa and the Middle East and arrived via Italy and the western Balkans over recent months.

The issue became a significant bone of contention between EU leaders following the deaths of 1,800 men, women and children who had drowned as they made the perilous trek across the Mediterranean in often overcrowded and unsafe vehicles.

More than 120,000 boat migrants landed in Greece and Italy in the past six months, the UN says. More than 150,000 landed in Italy last year.