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Overview of Internal Migration in India

Key Message

Migration of persons within national borders is far greater in magnitude than migration across international borders and has enormous potential to contribute to economic prosperity, social cohesion and urban diversity. Internal migration is an essential and inevitable component of the economic and social life of the country, given regional imbalances and labour shortages, and safe migration should be promoted to maximize its benefits. However, in the absence of a coherent policy framework and strategy, migration imposes heavy costs on human development through poor labour arrangements and working conditions of migrants, and obstacles in their access to shelter, education, healthcare and food.

Challenges

Migrants constitute a 'floating' and invisible population, alternating between source and destination areas and remaining on the periphery of society. In India, internal migration has been accorded very low priority by the government, and policies of the Indian state have largely failed in providing any form of legal or social protection to this vulnerable group.

- There exists a serious data gap on the extent, nature and magnitude of internal migration. Macro databases such as the Census fail to adequately capture flows of short-term migrants and do not record secondary reasons for migration. Owing to lack of analytical refinement in the way migration is defined, design and delivery of services for migrants are hampered.
- Regulations and administrative procedures exclude migrants from access to legal rights, public services and social protection programmes accorded to residents, because of which they are often treated as second-class citizens. Internal migrants face numerous constraints, including lack of political representation; inadequate housing and lack of formal residency rights; low-paid, insecure or hazardous work; limited access to state-provided services such as health and education; and discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, class or gender.
- Since migrants are heterogeneous and migration has cross-cutting sectoral impacts, multiple and complementary interventions by different ministries and departments are

needed, to facilitate migration and ensure integration of migrants into the economic, social, political and cultural life of the country.

Facts and Figures

- The Constitution of India (Article 19) gives the right to all citizens to “to move freely throughout the territory of India; to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India”.
- India’s total population, as recorded in Census 2011, stands at 1.21 billion.
- Internal migrants in India constitute a large population: 309 million internal migrants or 30 per cent of the population (Census of India 2001), and by more recent estimates 326 million or 28.5 per cent of the population (NSSO 2007–2008).
- This far exceeds the estimates of Indian emigrants (11.4 million) (The World Bank 2011).
- Migration in India is primarily of two types:
 - i. Long-term migration, resulting in the relocation of an individual or household;
 - ii. Short-term¹ or seasonal/ circular migration, involving back and forth movement between a source and destination. Estimates of short-term migrants vary from 15 million (NSSO 2007–2008) to 100 million (Deshingkar and Akter 2009). Most short-term migrants belong to socioeconomically deprived groups, such as Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes, having negligible educational attainment, limited assets and resource deficits;
- Out of the total internal migrants, 70.7 per cent are women (Census of India 2001). Marriage is given as the prominent reason for female migration in both the rural and urban areas – 91 per cent of rural female migrants and 61 per cent of the urban female migrants (NSSO 2007–2008).
- Migration for employment-related reasons is given as the prominent reason for male migration in both rural and urban areas – 29 per cent rural male migrants and 56 per cent of urban male migrants (NSSO 2007–2008).
- Although no clear data are available, there are about 15 million child migrants in India (Daniel 2011; Smita 2011).
- Lead source states: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttarakhand and Tamil Nadu.
- Key destination states: Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab and Karnataka.
- Migrants are mostly employed in the following subsectors: construction, domestic work, textile, brick-kilns, transportation, mines, quarries and agriculture (Deshingkar and Akter 2009).
- Migrants face denial of basic entitlements including access to subsidized food, housing, drinking water, sanitation and public health facilities, education and banking services and often work in poor conditions devoid of social security and legal protection.
- Positive impacts of migration remain unrecognized:

Table 1: Seasonal Out-Migrants and Long-Term Out-Migrants: A Comparative Profile, 2007–2008 (in per cent)

Social Group	Short-Term Out-Migrants			Long-Term Out-Migrants		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
ST	20.1	3.5	18.6	6.8	2.2	6.0
SC	23.7	17.5	23.1	19.2	11.8	17.9
OBC	39.5	43.6	39.9	44.5	37.9	43.3
Others	16.7	35.4	18.4	29.5	48.0	32.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

(NSSO 2007–2008)

¹ Short-term migrants are defined as those migrants who stayed away from their Usual Place of Residence for work / seeking work for a period between 1 and 6 months during the last one year preceding the survey.

- Migration may provide an opportunity to escape caste divisions and restrictive social norms and to work with dignity and freedom at the destination (Deshingkar and Akter 2009).
 - Left-behind women enjoy empowerment effects, with increased interaction in society, including their participation as workers and decision makers of households.
 - Migrants bring back to the source areas a variety of skills, innovations and knowledge, known as ‘social remittances’, including change in tastes, perceptions and attitudes (for example, non-acceptance of poor employment conditions, low wages and semi-feudal labour relationships and improved knowledge and awareness about workers’ rights) (UNESCO -UNICEF 2012b).
 - Estimates of the domestic remittance market were roughly \$10 billion in 2007–2008 (Tumbe 2011). Evidence reveals that with rising incomes, migrant remittances can encourage investment in human capital formation, particularly increased expenditure on health, and also to some extent education (UNESCO-UNICEF 2012b).
- resources, social and physical infrastructure and governance institutions in sending areas and strengthening programmes such as MGNREGA, food security programmes and creating opportunities for access to credit.
- Revise the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act (1979) including the following gaps:
 - The Act applies to only migrants crossing state boundaries and, therefore, a large section of migrants are excluded from its ambit.
 - It does not monitor unregistered contractors and establishments.
 - It remains silent on provision for crèches, education centres for children or mobile medical units for the labourers.
 - It articulates no guidelines for inter-state cooperation.
 - It covers only regulation of employment and conditions of service of migrants and does not address access to social protection of migrants, their right to the city and the special vulnerabilities of children and women migrants.
 - Important provisions of the Act such as minimum wages, displacement allowance, medical facilities and protective clothing remain unenforced.

Policy Recommendations

Develop a coherent legal and policy framework on migration

- Mainstream migration in a comprehensive and focused manner in policy documents and national development plans (Five Year Plans, Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission and City Development Plans).
- Develop a universal national minimum social security package covering minimum wages and labour standards and incorporating portability of benefits in all government social protection schemes and public services.
- Design targeted components and special outreach strategies for migrants within public services and government programmes.
- Minimize the distress nature of migration by adopting pro-poor development strategies in backward areas, including providing sustainable livelihood opportunities, increased access to land, common property

Fill knowledge and research gaps to enable evidence-based policy making

- Revise design of Census and surveys on migration to adequately capture sex-disaggregated and age-disaggregated data on short-term migration and multiple reasons for migration.
- Conduct detailed countrywide mapping of internal migration (at panchayat level with the support of civil society organizations and labour departments).
- Encourage state-level research institutions to develop state migration profiles, including state-wise mapping of nature, timing, duration and magnitude of migration cycles.
- Increase research on sector-wise contribution of migrants in different industries of the economy, including their contribution to GDP and domestic remittances.

Improve institutional preparedness and build capacity for facilitating and promoting migration

- Create inter-district and inter-state coordination committees to jointly plan institutional arrangements between administrative jurisdictions of sending and receiving areas to ensure service delivery.
- Build capacity of panchayats to maintain a database of migrant workers (with details of numbers of migrants and recruitment by contractors) and establish vigilant committees

to identify entry of new migrants at the local level.

- Establish migrant labour cells in each state labour department with the support of the Labour Ministry.
- Increase financial and human resources in migration-prone areas.
- Promote public-private partnerships (PPP) for the promotion of safe internal migration.
- Ensure access to formal banking facilities for migrants to enable safe and secure transfer of remittances.



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