

FORCES UNDERLYING INTERSTATE MIGRATION IN INDIA: TRENDS AND POLICY RESPONSES

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ABSTRACT:

Interstate migration to and from India has been one of the major cross-cutting issues, especially due to the combination of economic, social, and environmental factors. Quite a few millions of workers have moved from rural to urban areas or from one state to another in search of better jobs, better education, and better standards of living. Migration is believed to boost growth and bring flexibility in labor markets, but at the same time exacerbates exploitation of workers, poor working conditions, absence of social security and cultural integration issues. This paper examines the economic, agrarian and demographic stresses that are the principal drivers of interstate migration in India. It points out the plight of migrant workers, wage inequity, inadequate housing, as well as other problems with access to basic services, including health care and education. Describes the effects of migration on the migrant's country of origin and destination state, including activities such as labor shortages, congestion in cities and overloading of public services. It further investigates the policy responses of the Indian government to mitigate the welfare and livelihood afflictions brought upon migrant workers by this pandemic in the form of acts such as the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, the One Nation One Ration Card scheme and other inter-state and state-specific welfare programs. Yet there remain gaps in both implementation and coverage. It concludes with beachheads for enhanced migrant welfare, broader labor rights, and improved policy frameworks conducive to an inclusive migration system.

Keywords: Interstate Migration, Labor Mobility, Economic Disparities, Policy Responses, Social Security.

INTRODUCTION:

Migration is one of the basic and essential characteristics of human civilization, influencing economies, communities, and societies. Migration in India happens in multiple ways—rural to urban, urban to rural, intra-state and interstate. Interstate migration is one of these, and it has attracted a good deal of consideration because of its consequences for economic growth, labor markets, and social policy. Every year millions of Indians migrate in the hope of better opportunities as per the Census of India (2011) and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Economic survey 2017 stated that over 9 million persons migrate interstate every year. They mostly migrate for the purpose of better job, education, marriage and standard of living. Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are the main destination states for industry, economic development and migration and the main source states are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Odisha.

Migration brings huge challenges, despite its economic benefits. Recommendations for more sustainable solutions to better cooperation between labour sending and receiving countries include the following: Despite the fact that labour migration is a huge boon for both host and home states, migrant workers find themselves in poorly acting working conditions, wage disparity, lack of social security, and, of course, they face identity issues in host states. The vulnerability of the migrant labourers was further exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic which created a crisis of gigantic proportion when millions of them had to return to their original states on foot due loss of livelihood and lack of support mechanisms.

This study entails the need for understanding the key drivers of interstate migration in India, and highlights the growing need to augment policies with a view to provide solutions for larger issues concerning migrants seeing the possible hurdles faced by migrants and state response as effective or ineffective.

FACTORS OF MIGRATION: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL:

We can classify the determinants of migration in India, as push and pull factors, and further on economic, social, and environmental nature of causes.

Economic Factors:

Work is one of the top reasons for interstate migration. In some of the less developed states of the country, where agriculture still remains the primary source of livelihood, rural unemployment and unremunerative agricultural wages are found to be quite widespread, as for example in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. More than 80 per cent of India's workforce is in the informal sector, which draws many rural migrants to the daily wage earners in construction, manufacturing, transport and domestic work. Higher wages and better working conditions make states with better industrial growth attractive destinations for migrants, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Delhi are areas with comparatively greater demand for labor. Roughly 42% of India's population relies on agriculture for their livelihoods; the vagaries of monsoon rains, rampant crop failures, and the burdens of debt, however push innumerable workers from rural India to migrate in search of other means of living. States dried up for distress migration due to agrarian crisis, such as Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan have also been in the news with images of people leaving their indigenous habitation areas in herds. With the rise in informal economy and lack of educational requirement for jobs in urban locations, migration has also been on the rise too. Out of a population of 1.4 billion people in India, a sizeable proportion of the population which consists of the migrant workers toil in poorly paid areas such as construction, textiles, brick kilns and home support, mostly in abusive situations with no labor rights.

Social Factors:

Urban areas are pulling places due to higher education and skills higher development opportunities Bangalore, Pune, Hyderabad, and Delhi have the best institutions and centers in the country and as such students and skilled workers from all parts of the country flock here. Another motivation for migration that is especially common for women is marriage. According to Census 2011 data, marriage was the main reason for migration for about 46% of female migrants in India, a cultural phenomenon that is particularly strong in most northern and eastern states. Lured by the promise of better healthcare infrastructure and sanitation and social infrastructure people migrate to the urban centers. The availability of better hospitals, specialist doctors, advanced medical facilities in metropolitan cities attracts people from rural and less-developed regions.

Environmental Factors:

The influence of environmental conditions and climate-induced displacement on migration has been increasing. Shelters have become permanent as persistent events such as floods, droughts, cyclones, and increasing levels of the sea have displaced communities. West Bengal, Assam, Odisha and Kerala are among the several states that have suffered flooding-related displacement on a massive scale. States that experience desertification and acute water scarcity (think of parts of Rajasthan and Maharashtra) witness significant migration to cities or other states where water supply is better. The construction of dams, highways, industrial zones and so on which are usually large-scale projects, aids in forced displacement of people. Involuntary migration is also prevalent among many tribal and rural communities in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha that have been displaced due to mining projects, deforestation and expansion of industries.

DIFFICULTIES FACED BY MIGRANT WORKERS:

There are many issues affecting migrant workers in India which directly impact their livelihoods, well-being and quality of life. Many of the major problems are job insecurity and exploited working conditions. Many migrants work in the informal sector, where they are paid low wages, are subject to irregular employment, and work in unsafe workplaces with little or no social security benefits. Most work in dangerous fields, like construction and mining, where there are few safety standards and workers protections. Wage disparity is another ongoing issue and migrant workers are paid less than local workers for the same type of work.

Ensuring sufficient housing and basic services is another major challenge. Urban migration often results in the formation of slums or settlements, where migrants live in overcrowded and unsanitary housing, and do not have reliable access to clean drinking water, sanitation and healthcare. Without formal rental contracts and protection under law, these renters are at the mercy of landlords who can evict them and exploit them for money. Also, because of the lack of documentation, the permanent residency document, and the lengthy processes in the bureaucratic system, migrant workers are unable to avail of many government welfare schemes.

Another big problem is cultural and social integration. Most migrants suffer discrimination and social isolation in the countries that receive them, making them feel like second-class citizens. Inexperience in life, language barriers, cultural conflicts, and local prejudices complicate their integration into the urban community. They also get excluded from access to education themselves, as the frequent movements and the expense of schooling prevent many migrant children from attending school or continuing their education, which means more of them drop out as well.

EFFECTS OF MIGRATION ON BOTH SOURCE AND DESTINATION STATES:

Migration impacts for good and for bad the states of origin and arrival.

Impact on Source States:

In states that experience large-scale out migration, such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Odisha, migration causes labour shortages in agriculture and traditional sectors. The emigration of young, working-age people leads to a decline in productivity in rural areas that rely on labour-intensive sectors of the economy. Where there are people left the productivity of agriculture is falling because fewer people available plus growing reliance on remittances. But migrant workers sending remittances are changing this. The money received is used by families abandoned to invest in school, health, home, daily lives. Such remittances assist with poverty alleviation and social advancement for the sending states. At times return migrants return with fresh skills, experience, and capital to help spur on development and business activity in their home areas. But this benefit is frequently countered by social problems such as more work for women and the elderly who now have to manage households and agricultural work without males aged 18-65 years active in the workforce.

Impact on Destination States:

In industrialized states like Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, migration provides a steady supply of cheap labor, driving economic growth and urban expansion. Migrants contribute significantly to the construction, manufacturing, transportation, hospitality, and domestic service sectors, playing an essential role in keeping these industries functional. Their labor supports rapid urbanization and infrastructure development, which benefits businesses and the economy. However, the rapid influx of migrants also strains urban infrastructure and public services. Many destination cities face housing shortages, overcrowding, traffic congestion, and an increased burden on healthcare and sanitation systems. Migrants often reside in informal settlements or slums, where they have limited access to basic services. This creates health and sanitation concerns, leading to the spread of diseases and poor living conditions.

Socially, migration can lead to tensions between locals and migrant communities. Competition for jobs, resources, and government services often fuels resentment and conflict, with some political groups using anti-migrant sentiment for electoral gains. Migrants may also face exclusionary policies, restrictions on residence, or limited access to public benefits due to political pressures in the host state. Additionally, law enforcement and bureaucratic hurdles often create challenges for migrants in securing legal work permits, identity documents, and citizenship rights.

Despite these challenges, migrants contribute significantly to the urban economy, often taking up jobs that locals avoid. They work in physically demanding, low-paying sectors, ensuring the smooth functioning of industries. Their contributions to economic productivity make them indispensable to urban economies, even though they remain socially marginalized and politically under represented.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS:

In India, the government has enacted various policies and interventions to alleviate the challenges posed by migrant workers crises by improving their living conditions and working conditions. Yet, despite efforts, implementation gaps remain, and many migrants still face economic insecurity, social exclusion, and limited access to social benefits. Another effective measure is the *Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979* that is important in safeguarding the rights of Migrant Labourers by providing minimum wages, safe working conditions, and equal treatment. But the law has been little more than words on paper, hampered by poor enforcement and the indifference of many workers who simply do not know of their right to take time off. The other important initiative is the *One Nation One Ration Card* (ONORC) scheme, which allows migrants to access subsidized food grains under the Public Distribution System (PDS) in any state, thereby mitigating food security among mobile populations.

The *Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Act of 1996*, and the *Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act of 2008* create the legal framework for provisions on providing insurance, pensions, maternity benefits, and health schemes for migrant laborers and unorganized workers respectively. Yet, despite these being open to more workers, many remain unregistered and blocked by bureaucracy. In line, the *PM Awas Yojana (PMAY)* plans to provide affordable housing for urban poor, which also involves a large population of migrant workers, but their unavailability of documents and seasonal incomes stop them from being beneficiaries of these housing schemes. The government started *Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan (GKRA)* in 2020 to provide short-term employment in rural areas to those migrants returning home due to the COVID-19 crisis. In 2021, the e-Shram portal was launched in the country to compile a national database of unorganised workers, including the migrants to ease policy planning and distribution of welfare. Yet awareness of and registration under these schemes is low; this affects their overall utility. The *Skill India Mission*, *Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana* (DDU-GKY), and *National Urban Livelihoods Mission* (NULM) offer programs that train individuals and assist with job placements to promote skill development and employment. But it often does not reflect actual labor market needs, rendering lots of trained workers unemployed or underemployed. Although this policy is a step in the right direction, they fall short of successful implementation of these concepts because of a lack of coordination between states, weak enforcement mechanisms, and an overall lack of infrastructure. Inter-state coordination, greater awareness among workers and reduction in paper work is essential for the government measures to reach the target population.

CONCLUSION :

India needs an inclusive migration policy framework for a sustainable and just migration framework. The State should be dedicated to the improvement of labor rights, living standards, and security system, and economic inclusion of migrants. The first involves greater legal protections for migrant workers. Amend and expand the long-overdue *Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979* to ensure equal pay for equal work, non-exploitative contracts, safe workplaces, and guaranteed social protection through trade unionisation. Furthermore, the *Code on Social Security, 2020* can effective migrant inclusion in insurance, pension and health schemes thus contributing to their economic security. You are responsible for paying fair wages, providing decent working conditions, and treating migrants without discrimination. Secondly, access to affordable housing and services needs to be addressed, so that migrant workers can rejoin their families from a position of dignity. Thus, urban planning should include double take in designing schemes for migrant-friendly policies such as rental housing schemes, creates low-cost hostels and improves the sanitation facilities in a dense concentration of migrant population. Further extending the coverage of *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)* and setting accommodating migration-based eligibility criteria will ensure sustainable housing solutions. It is important to ease access to welfare schemes.

Third, The One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme should be promoted more widely, so that food supplies may be accessed without ease in all states. Also, the Aadhaar and the e-Shram portal should be linked to make a portable social security system that will enable them to access healthcare, pensions and childcare services (among others), wherever they are. Also, governments should overcome bureaucratic hurdles keeping migrants from signing up for welfare.

Fourth, by strengthening skill accumulation and occupational mobility, migrants can access higher-occupational and wage jobs. The Skill India Mission and DDU-GKY needs to be customized as per the local labor market requirement and so as to guarantee employment-linked apprenticeship. Fostering entrepreneurship via microfinance initiatives, financial literacy programs, and small business support can enable migrants to create viable livelihoods. *Special economic zones* (SEZs) and industrial training centres could be established in high-migration areas to create jobs and reduce distress migration.

Fifth, social discrimination, coupled with inadequate political integration, will hinder the integration of migrant workers into the economic and social fabric of the destination states. We need awareness campaigns to sensitive local populations, employers and authorities on the contributions migrant workers make. Addressing exploitation and discrimination at the workplace can be combated through strengthened legal aid services, grievance redressal mechanisms and migrant support centres. Finally, granting migrants the right to vote in their states of residence enables them to attain better representation in local governance mechanisms.

Finally, encourage coordination between the states and use data driven processes in designing policies to build a sustainable migration framework. Instead, a National Migration Policy must be formulated by both the central and state governments, which must ensure harmonisation of labour laws, coordination among the states and bring out a unified response to the welfare of migrants. For better evidence-based policy design and service delivery, policymakers can develop a real-time migration tracking system using the e-Shram portal. This will help achieve better outcomes for migrant populations, another element is to strengthen role of urban local bodies, NGOs and private sector stakeholders in implementing the policies around migration.

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