Internal Migration and the Right to the City

Key Message

Internal migration is an integral part of development, contributing to the dynamics of urban growth and economic and cultural vibrancy of cities. The right to the city, which encompasses rights and access to food, housing, education, health, work, and local democracy, should also apply to migrants.

Challenges

- Migrants are looked upon as 'outsiders' by the local administration, and as a burden on systems and resources at the destination.
- In India, migrants' right to the city is denied because of political support for the 'sons of the soil' ideology, with the aim to create vote banks along ethnic, linguistic and religious lines.
- Exclusion and discrimination against migrants take place through political and administrative processes, market mechanisms and socioeconomic processes, besides their negative portrayal in the media, which create a gulf between migrants and locals.
- This leads to marginalization of migrants in the decision-making processes of the city, and exacerbates their vulnerabilities to vagaries of the labour market, risks of discrimination and violence. Migrants provide a low-cost flexible workforce for the urban informal economy, but they often work in poor conditions, devoid of social security and legal protection.
- Migrants are forced to live in unauthorized slums, shanties, makeshift shelters, facing constant threats of displacement and eviction from government authorities.
- Most migrants suffer political exclusion and are unable to exercise voting rights, being away at the destination when elections are held at the place of origin.
- Migrants face several other difficulties in Indian cities: denial of basic entitlements including access to subsidized food, drinking water, sanitation and public health facilities, education and banking services.
- There is a need to ensure that all migrants and their families have access to services and entitlements as enshrined in policies and law, while ensuring urban settlements become inclusive spaces as they expand in size and diversity.

Facts and Figures

- India's urban population has increased from about 286 million in 2001 to 377 million in 2011, and is expected to increase to 600 million by 2030 (Census of India 2011 and Government of India 2011).
- For the first time since independence, urban population growth (91 million) has exceeded rural population growth (90.5 million) (Census of India 2011).
- Migrants constitute about one third of India's urban population and the share has been increasing. The share of migrants in the urban

population has increased from 31.6 per cent in 1983 to 33 per cent in 1999–2000 and to 35 per cent in 2007–2008 (NSSO 2007–2008).

- Yet, most of the million-plus cities have recorded significant declines in their population growth, suggesting that they may have become less welcoming to migrants and indicating an exclusionary urban growth (Kundu 2012).
- Internal migrants are indispensable for a city to be prosperous, boosting economic activity and contributing to economic growth.
- Inclusion of migrants in cities is necessary for a sustainable urban development based on cultural diversity, social cohesion and human rights.

Policy Recommendations

Sensitize Urban Local Bodies to include migrants in city development and municipal management

- Mainstream migrants' needs and concerns in policy documents such as the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and City Development Plans.
- Develop national, city and municipal charters articulating citizens' rights and promoting the right to the city (for example, Citizen's Charters declared by Municipal Corporations in New Delhi, Vishakhapatnam and Coimbatore).
- Democratize the processes of city governance by promoting representation of migrants in the city and by including migrants in decision-making processes and urban planning, such as development of master plans.
- Educate, train and sensitize municipal corporations, civic bodies, organs of government, political and community leaders, state bureaucracy, urban planners and other stakeholders, including the media, on the need for inclusion of migrants in urban management and planning.

Ensure migrants' right to access basic services and entitlements in the city

- Encourage municipal bodies and NGOs to verify and certify the residential status of migrants through introductions, referrals, and/or registration and issuance of photo identity cards for establishing proof of identity.
- Design targeted components and special outreach strategies for migrants within public services and government programmes, besides developing customized social security products for migrants.[1]
- Undertake in situ development of slum areas and experiment with dormitory accommodation to be provided by employers for migrants, with an eventual policy shift towards provision of de facto residential rights to migrant workers, including affordable rental housing and ultimately affordable housing.
- Reform design of urban policies and programmes that are discriminatory for migrants (for example, delink eligibility for slum rehabilitation schemes from length of tenure in the city).

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1 For a detailed discussion, refer to Internal Migration and Social Protection: The Missing Link policy brief in this series.