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# Internal and International Migration in South Asia: Drivers, Interlinkage and Policy Issues

## Discussion Paper

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2017

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**Proofreading:** James Baer

**Graphic design and page layout:** Colorcom Advertising

**ISBN:** 978-81-89218-60-7

This publication may be produced in any media appropriately acknowledging  
UNESCO

**Published by:**

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)  
1, San Martin Marg

Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110021, India

Tel: +91 11 2611 1873, 2611 1875

Email: [newdelhi@unesco.org](mailto:newdelhi@unesco.org)

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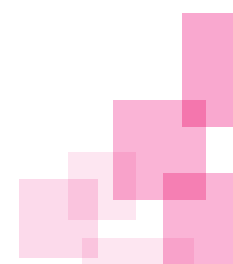
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ACILS	American Centre for International Labour Solidarity
AIF	American India Foundation
BMET	Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (Bangladesh)
BOMSA	Bangaldeshi Ovhibashi Mohila Sramik Association
BWI	Building and Wood Workers' International
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EU	European Union
FDI	foreign direct investment
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	gross domestic product
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IT	information technology
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSS	National Sample Survey (India)
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RMMRU	Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SALM	South Asia Labour Migration Governance Project
SARTUC	South Asian Regional Trade Union Council
SETU	Centre for Social Knowledge and Action
SLBFE	Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment
SSA	Social Security Agreement
UN	United Nations
UN DESA	United Nations Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

# Executive Summary

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## Introduction

Large numbers of migrants move within countries and across international borders. Such migration impacts not only the lives of migrants but also the development and growth prospects of the sending and receiving areas.

Both internal and international migrants differ in characteristics among themselves and between the two categories, but there are also significant overlaps between the two streams of migration. The drivers of both internal and international migration are similar – lack of adequate opportunities at source or availability of better opportunities at destination; in other cases, force of compulsion; or other factors.

International and internal migration are often distinguished from one another in terms of distance; financial costs; regulatory barriers such as immigration laws and restrictions on employment; information asymmetries; issues of integration, assimilation and alienation arising from socio-cultural and linguistic differences; and applicability of laws, including labour laws and social security provisions. However, the differences between international and internal migrants should not be overstated, and there are compelling arguments for why developing countries need to pay sufficient attention to both internal and international migrants.

This paper analyses the characteristics and drivers of international and internal migration in South Asia, as well as their inter-relationship. It argues for an integrated rights-based approach and policy framework for migration.

## International migration in South Asia

International migration from the countries of South Asia can be divided into migration to countries outside the region (inter-regional migration), and migration to other countries within the region (intra-regional migration).

## Inter-regional migration

Inter-regional migration has gained in importance and is now the dominant stream for all countries in the region, except Bhutan and Maldives. Inter-regional migration comprises both low-skilled migrants to the Middle East, South-East Asia and other regions, and a smaller proportion of high-skilled migrants, principally to North America, Europe and other countries of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). India and Pakistan are the largest labour-sending countries in the region. Labour migration from South Asian countries is male-dominated; Sri Lanka is the only country in South Asia which promotes female labour migration. But although the proportion of female migrant workers is low for the region, it has been increasing over the years.

The issues confronting workers migrating abroad fall into two categories: first, at the stage of recruitment, and second, in destination countries and workplaces. With respect to low-skilled workers, these issues relate to malpractices in the recruitment process; the high financial cost

of migration; job contracts and work specifications; working and living conditions abroad; and social security for migrants and returnees. Irregular and trafficked migrants face additional costs and vulnerabilities.

Nevertheless, migration from this populous region plays a major role in providing employment and remittances, which has important macroeconomic and developmental impacts. South Asia is the second-highest remittance-receiving region in the world. International remittances are a major source of foreign exchange, as they are larger than foreign direct investment (FDI), foreign aid and private flows in this region. The actual remittance inflow to the region is much higher than stated in official figures, as a major share takes place through informal channels. Remittances are known to have micro-economic (household-level), meso-level (regional) and macro-economic impacts in South Asian countries. The effect of international migration on the labour market of source countries depends on the size of the outflow and the skill composition of emigrants. For temporary outflows, the impact also has to take into account the size of return flows.

### **Intra-regional (cross-border) migration**

The countries of South Asia share a common history. Many of them emerged on the political map in the twentieth century, and through partition. Although history, proximity, and cultural and kinship ties were at least initially an important reason for irregular and undocumented cross-border migration, now economic reasons, conflicts and disasters are clearly very important factors. Such migration has also now become a source of concern for some of the region's countries, due to its socio-political, demographic, and economic impacts, and because of security concerns. The absence of an appropriate legal framework also makes a large part of this irregular movement illegal. Cross-border migration is, however, allowed legally between some countries in the region, such as India–Nepal, India–Bhutan, Bhutan–Nepal and Pakistan–Afghanistan, as a result of treaties and bilateral agreements. In such cases, the cross-border mobility of people between these countries assumes the character of internal migration.

Intra-regional migration comprises a major share of all migration in the region. The actual flows are likely to be even larger than the official figures due to the huge undocumented flows of both permanent and circular migration. Intra-regional migration in South Asia has shown a consistent decline since 1990. The major migration corridors in the region are Bangladesh–India, Afghanistan–Pakistan, India–Pakistan and Nepal–India. Studies of the profile of intra-regional migrants, such as Nepalese or Bangladeshi workers in India, show that they are employed primarily at the low end of the labour market, especially in the service sector. However, some migrants may acquire land or other assets over time. The major issues related to cross-border migration in South Asia are irregular migration and human trafficking. Irregular and undocumented migration, particularly that which is treated as “illegal”, is an important issue in South Asian countries. Brokers and middlemen play an important role in facilitating irregular migration. Female migrants suffer more than male ones in this process. Intra-regional migration circuits in South Asia lead to significant human trafficking, and countries in the region are zones of origin and transit, as well as the destination, of trafficked women and bonded labour.

Despite the importance and magnitude of intra-regional migration, very few studies have focused on its economic costs and benefits. It is viewed mainly through the lenses of national security, socio-political instability, and refugee rehabilitation. However, its impact on employment, on the workers and their families involved, and on the source and destination areas has been largely ignored in regional and bilateral discussions and policies. Human trafficking, which leads to the



violation of the basic human rights of the individuals involved, is also becoming a major issue in the region. Undocumented or illegal cross-border migration makes immigrants vulnerable at destination. They cannot avail themselves of workers' rights, basic services and social security benefits. If this migration is considered illegal, migrants face the threat of detention and deportation.

## Internal migration

Comparisons of internal migration in the countries of South Asia are confounded by the fact that countries use different definitions and jurisdictions to enumerate migrants. But according to available data, internal migration in South Asia is huge in terms of absolute numbers – much larger than international migration. Using districts as jurisdictions, the proportion of migrants in total population was as high as 32.2 per cent in Bhutan, 20.2 per cent in Sri Lanka and 14.4 per cent in Nepal in 2011. The stock of internal migrants in South Asia is mainly dominated by females, migrating primarily for reasons of marriage or association. However, autonomous female migration for employment is increasing in a number of countries. Among males, employment-related reasons predominate. For around 20 per cent of internal migrants in India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, employment was the main reason for migration. In Bhutan, 26.4 per cent of migrants in Bhutan stated this as the main reason for migration, and 31.7 per cent in Nepal.

Seasonal and circular migration comprises an important part of internal migration in South Asia. Unlike permanent migrants, seasonal migrants are much more likely to be from poorer, rural areas, the most deprived and vulnerable sections of society, and to have a low level of education. The increase in seasonal and circular migration is influenced by declining livelihoods in rural areas, growing disparities between rural and urban areas and between regions, and by changes in urban policies and labour markets (towards informalization). As a result of all these factors, seasonal and circular migration will continue to grow in most countries of the region.

In general, the direction of internal migration in South Asian countries is strongly influenced by the pattern of regional development, taking place mainly from economically poor areas to economically advanced or developed ones. Urban migration predominates in all countries of the region, except India and Nepal, where rural–rural migration is the norm for reasons of association and marriage.

Migration is a heterogeneous phenomenon, with significant variety among migrants in terms of initial levels of education, skills, and economic background. Internal migrants are from varying backgrounds. Evidence suggests that in India the better-off segment of the population is migrating more in the post-globalization period. But this is only part of the story. The movement of the poor and vulnerable segment is also increasing. Most of this group remains undocumented. Labour migrants and seasonal migrants generally occupy the lower end of the labour market. They are self-employed and regular wage workers, as well as casual workers.

Social networks play an important role in facilitating internal migration. But labour intermediaries also play a very significant role in mobilizing migrant workers for a number of industries.

Migration directly impacts employment and labour markets in the source areas, as well as the income, assets and expenditure of households. Internal migration also has significant links with development, both in source areas – through remittance inflows, increase in investment, knowledge flows and skill enhancement – and in destination areas, principally through labour market impacts. Migration is also a coping strategy for the poorest migrants. Out-migration reduces unemployment and underemployment. However, large-scale out-migration can affect

the women and elderly people who are left behind. In South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh and Nepal, domestic remittance inflows are an important source of income to migrant households. These inflows lead to a reduction in poverty. But there is an ongoing debate about whether they also contribute to growing inequality.

The impact of migrants on destination labour markets is very important. The migration of labourers eases the labour supply at destination and makes accumulation and growth possible. Employers prefer migrant labour because it is flexible, easy to control and cheaper. Migrants generally work in the informal sector, often in those sectors where local labourers are reluctant to work, and they have flexible hours. Sometimes, migration is the exit mechanism from the existing social hierarchy. However, migrant workers are denied basic rights and decent working conditions. Their wages are often below that of local labourers and lower than the legal minimum wage. In many places, migrant workers work in sub-human conditions, and in violation of labour laws. Poor migrant workers lack access to entitlements at destination. This has an effect on their living and health conditions. They lack proper housing and are concentrated in slum areas of urban centres. In the absence of proper urban planning and development, rural–urban migration creates pressure on facilities in destination areas. As a consequence, policy-makers view internal migration negatively. There is a tendency to restrict internal migration flows, especially to cities.

## Links between internal and international migration

The segmentation that is observed between internal and international migration appears to be a matter of degree. The main distinguishing features between internal and international migrants are the regulatory barriers they face, their skills, financial endowments, social networks and access to other recruitment channels. Migrants who have low skills and social networks suffer from lack of information about the labour markets, are engaged through intermediaries, employed at the lower end of the labour market, and are likely to suffer from a strikingly similar range of deprivations, both as internal and international migrants.

The decision to embark upon boils down first to whether potential migrants have access to networks and recruitment channels, and second, whether they can meet the higher costs of migration. Workers can use migration ladders – internal or intra-regional migration to acquire resources or networks, and then migrate abroad.

Skills demand and supply can also be a major issue in both international and internal migration. Migrants in both streams are predominantly low-skilled, but the national market and the international market both have a demand for skills, and individuals with skills can compete for the more attractive segment of the job markets in these professions. If training is provided at the lower skill levels also, it is very likely that it will have a favourable impact on job conditions.

Thus, despite the differences, there are obvious links between internal and international migration which can be configured into national policies.

## Existing policy framework

A perusal of the global framework relating to migration shows that a number of provisions are already in place which could protect the rights of international migrants. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations (UN) have adopted a number of conventions and recommendations to protect the rights of international migrant workers. These conventions protect migrant workers against exploitation and discriminatory treatment, protect their right to social

security, and so on. In addition to international labour standards, migrant workers and members of their families are protected by the nine UN core international human rights instruments, which apply to all persons irrespective of their nationality. One of these is the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1990 and entered into force in 2003. There are also other mechanisms within the UN system relevant to the protection of migrant workers, including the special procedures mandates of the UN Human Rights Council, and most notably the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants.

Migrant workers can claim their rights through these international legal instruments only if the country from which they have emigrated has ratified the conventions and protocols of the UN and ILO. ***No country in South Asia has ratified the ILO conventions on migrant workers.*** But the UN Convention was ratified by Sri Lanka in 1996, and signed by Bangladesh in 1998. International organizations such as United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Global Forum on Migration and Development, the World Bank and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) have been active on a number of fronts to ensure a better deal for migrants in and from the region.

At the Regional level, the Colombo Process and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have been engaging in a consultative process to protect the interests of international and internal migrants.

Countries in South Asia have also undertaken a number of policy measures to deal with international migration. Broadly, these comprise steps to reform the regulatory and institutional framework; tackling the recruitment process and the cost of international migration; measures to protect the conditions of work and the rights of migrant workers abroad, including bilateral agreements with destination countries; steps to ensure safe migration of women workers; active-labour policy measures, including promotion of awareness among potential migrants; labour market information systems, pre-departure training and skills promotion; promotion of formal financial intermediation; and steps to provide social security to migrant workers, their families and returnees.

In the case of cross-border migration, irregular migration and trafficking are seen as important concerns, and countries have taken steps to check irregular/illegal migration, but no comprehensive policy has been formulated by South Asian countries to curb illegal and undocumented cross-border migration. There is an urgent need to recognize and regulate cross-border illegal or undocumented migration, but the close cultural, social, historical and economic ties between countries in this region should also be taken into consideration before formulating any law.

In comparison to international migration, there is a dearth of policies related to internal migration in South Asian countries. Most have a range of policies related to emigration, but none has a comprehensive policy related to internal migration. Each country has labour laws covering a range of issues, from freedom of collective bargaining and formation of unions to provision of social security benefits (including maternity protection, occupational safety and health) to labourers working in different sectors, but other than in India there is no specific law focusing exclusively on migrant labour.

Apart from governmental action, a large number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are active in the South Asian region and working in specific areas to protect the interests of migrants, and these provide an interface between migrants and policy-makers.

## **Towards a more integrated policy framework for migrant workers**

This paper argues that national policies on labour migration need to be seen in the context of the goals of development and the perspectives of migrants. From the standpoint of migrants, development must also be able to institute the basic rights of migrant workers and their families.

Both internal and international migration lead to broadly similar consequences. Internal as well as international migrant workers, who are at lower end of the labour market, lack social security at the place of destination. They suffer from a range of vulnerabilities and deprivations. But both types of migration have positive consequences for unemployment, poverty and growth.

Most of the countries in this region have a range of policies to regulate and protect their international emigrants, with varying levels of coverage and degrees of effectiveness, but there is no comprehensive framework for cross-border migration, and there are very few policies which focus on internal migrants.

This paper argues that given the common drivers and consequences of migration, its link with national development, and the need to respect the human rights of migrants, South Asian countries need an integrated rights-based approach towards the different types of migration. It further argues that all countries in the region need to formulate an integrated, active labour-market policy focusing on education, skills development, labour-market information systems and other appropriate labour-market interventions which can prepare the young labour force to participate productively in the national and global labour market. Such a policy must also specifically address rampant gender and social discrimination. Inclusive urbanization should be a crucial plank of migration policy. Furthermore, policies should improve formal financial intermediation to lower the cost of migration and facilitate the transfer of remittances through formal channels.

# Internal and International Migration in South Asia: Drivers, Interlinkage and Policy Issues

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## 1. Introduction

Migration is once again at the centre of global policy focus as great numbers of migrants cross over to Europe, either to seek refuge from war and destruction in their own countries, or to seek a better future for themselves, triggering a humanitarian crisis and a huge response at all levels.

This paper approaches migration from the perspective of South Asian countries, which are aiming to fulfil certain development goals, such as those previously expressed in the Millennium Development Goals or represented now in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, or national goals. This paper also views migration from the perspective of workers who move from one place to another within their own countries, or cross international borders, and whose living and working conditions need to cohere with human rights, accepted by the national governments and/or by the international community.

Migrant workers have diverse characteristics. Many are poor and have few or no skills or assets, while others are economically secure and well-endowed with skills and assets. Poor migrants have limited bargaining power, are restricted to the lower end of the labour market at destination, and struggle to achieve basic rights. The diversity in characteristics is shared by migrants moving within and across national boundaries. The differences in issues facing internal and external migrants, as well as the overlaps and similarities between them, have not been subjected to in-depth study, which is what this paper proposes to do in the context of South Asia.

Globally, international migration is a greater focus of monitoring and policy attention, for various reasons discussed in the next section of this paper. The ILO and the UN have adopted a number of conventions and recommendations to protect the rights of international migrant workers. On the other hand, internal migrants and migrant workers are guaranteed their rights and protected against exploitation under the laws of the land and the general ILO conventions, which are deemed to be sufficient to protect their interests. The UN and the IOM routinely monitor trends in international migration, while the World Bank also monitors the flow of international remittances from the global migrant community. Internal migration, by contrast, is only sporadically the subject of reports. Yet governments also have the obligation to protect, fulfil and promote the rights of migrants. These obligations are laid down in national constitutions and international covenants, and are also a step towards fulfilment of countries' developmental objectives.

South Asia is the site of major internal as well as international migration. Both types of migration have grown significantly since the 1990s. Both have provided an impetus to employment, growth and development in the destination and source areas. However, poorer migrants face crucial vulnerabilities, and here, as this paper shows, policy focus is asymmetric and lacks integration. These are themes pursued in this paper.

## 2. General issues: internal and international migration

International and internal migration are both impelled by similar factors – in the case of economic migration, lack of adequate opportunities at source or availability of better opportunities at destination; in other cases, force of compulsion (as with refugee migration); or other factors. However, people who migrate must make a decision to move to other destinations within the country, or to move abroad. This depends upon the perceived attractiveness of the destinations and the feasibility of reaching them vis-à-vis the economic and non-economic costs associated with making the move (King et al., 2008).

International and internal migration are often distinguished from each other in terms of distance; financial costs; regulatory barriers such as immigration laws and restrictions on employment; information asymmetries; issues of integration, assimilation and alienation arising from socio-cultural and linguistic differences; and applicability of laws, including labour laws and social security provisions. Governments in destination countries generally treat their obligations towards their own citizens as primary, leading to differential treatment of non-citizens (migrants).

In general, barriers to migration and the associated financial costs are considered to be lower for internal migrants (Massey et al., 1993). There is also usually an assumption that internal migrants and non-migrants who are citizens are entitled to equal treatment under a country's laws, and thus that no special policies are needed for internal migrants.

Although international migration from low-income countries is considered to be costlier than internal migration, and is associated with entry restrictions and other difficulties, it carries the prospects of much higher-paying employment, given the higher wage/income differentials between origin and destination countries (ibid.).

International migration also acquires special significance for developing countries, as migrants' remittances supplement export earnings and are an important source of foreign exchange for countries (Ozaki, 2012; Hasan, 2006; Sasikumar, 2014).

However, the differences between international and internal migrants should not be overstated, for the following reasons:

- The extent of regulatory barriers on both internal and international migration may vary between countries. Some countries have strong regulatory barriers on internal migration (Li, 2004; Alexander and Chan, 2004; Sjöberg, 1994), whereas others have weak or non-existent barriers on international migration (from all, or specific, countries) (King and Skeldon, 2010; Steiner, 2014).
- Issues of distance and cultural or linguistic differences vary between countries, and may also be very significant in the case of internal migrants in some countries (King et al., 2008).
- There may be restrictions on employment and differences in labour laws and social security arrangements and entitlements across jurisdictions within a country (Li, 2004).
- Information asymmetry is usually a function of other attributes, such as migrants' education level or access to social networks at destination, and these issues may be common across international and internal destinations (King and Skeldon, 2010).
- The worker pool from which internal and international migrants are drawn can overlap quite significantly, at least in some sectors.

There are other reasons for which developing countries should pay sufficient attention to internal migrants:

- Key issues of growth, accumulation and urbanization of the national economy are linked to internal migration, which has been focused upon in development literature (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003; Kundu, 2007, 2009; Srivastava, 2011b).
- Internal migration involves a larger number of people than international migration in many countries, and has significant developmental impacts on source and destination areas.
- Internal migration involves a larger number of poorer people, whose migration is associated with exploitative and poor living and working conditions (Bhagat, 2012; Srivastava, 2011a, 2012a; Afsar, 2003; Acharya, 2010). Countries must focus on these conditions in order to attain proper development outcomes.
- Governments' national development and employment strategies cannot bank on international migration, since these flows are subject to regulatory policies of other countries, whereas much more can be done to strengthen the linkages between internal migration and development (noting that internal migration is closely linked to unequal development outcomes within a country).

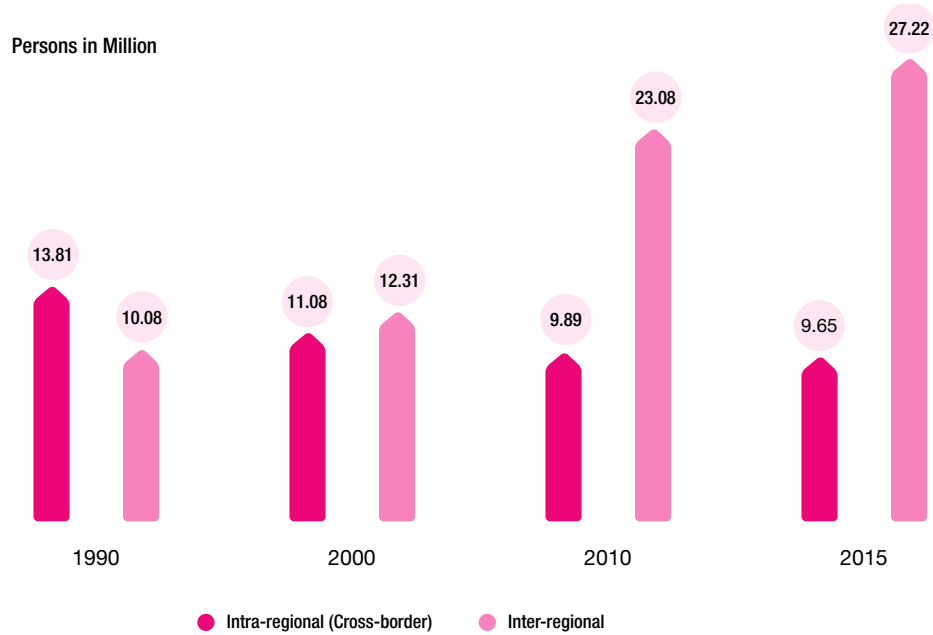
This paper argues that these similarities and differences can be addressed by a policy framework which addresses migration in a more integrated fashion. Sections 3 to 5 of this paper discuss the specific trends and patterns of international and internal migration in South Asia, to situate migrant workers and migration in the context of the characteristics of migration, and its problems and impacts. Sections 6 to 8 discuss the international and national institutional and policy frameworks within which international and internal migration is currently treated in South Asia. Section 9 discusses the main elements of an integrated policy framework towards migration, and Section 10 offers a conclusion.

### 3. International migration in South Asia

International migration from the countries of South Asia can be divided into migration to other countries within the region (intra-regional migration) and migration to other countries outside the region (inter-regional migration). Each type has distinct characteristics which should be analysed separately.

Trends in intra-regional and inter-regional migration for the region are shown in Figure 1. Intra-regional migration within South Asia was high in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Srivastava and Debnath, forthcoming) due to the impact of the drawing-up of national boundaries in the post-colonial period. But it has declined in recent decades. However, the numbers of inter-regional migrants have shown a significant increase in recent years. The Gulf countries are the main destination for migrant workers from South Asia. The migration of low-skilled blue-collar workers from South Asia increased after the rise in oil prices in Gulf countries in the early 1970s (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003; Khadria, 2005; Wickramasekara, 2010, 2011), and it further picked up pace after the 1990s.



**FIGURE 1: TRENDS IN INTER-REGIONAL AND INTRA-REGIONAL MIGRATION IN SOUTH ASIA (1990–2015)\***

\*In the International Migration Stock-2015, provided by United Nations Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the data for Iran are given in the South Asia Region. However, in the present analysis, these data are excluded from the South Asia region and presented as part of inter-regional migration.

Source: International Migration Stock-2015, United Nations Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

The estimated relative proportions of intra-regional and inter-regional migrants in 2015 from each of the countries in the region is shown in Table 1. The proportion of inter-regional migrants is highest for Sri Lanka, followed by India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, while the lowest proportion is for Bhutan.

**TABLE 1: COMPOSITION OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS FROM COUNTRIES OF THE SOUTH ASIA REGION, 2015**

	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Maldives	South Asia
Intra-regional (Cross-border)	33.59	44.77	80.59	16.43	35.79	24.55	10.10	54.96	26.18
Inter-regional	66.41	55.23	19.41	83.57	64.21	75.45	89.90	45.04	73.82
Total International Migration	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Calculated from International Migration Stock-2015, UN DESA.



### 3.1 Inter-regional migration

Emigration from South Asia has a long history, rooted in colonial expansion and labour requirements across the colonies and metropolises. However, it began to take a more contemporary shape in the post-Second World War growth of the developed countries, and the growth and expansion of the oil-rich Middle Eastern countries that took off in the 1970s. There have been two streams of migration: of skilled personnel to industrialized countries from the 1950s to the 1970s; and, since the 1970s, temporary migration of low-skilled workers to the Gulf countries (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003; ICMPD, 2013; Wickramasekara, 2010).

#### 3.1.1 Trends in inter-regional migration from South Asian countries

**TABLE 2: INTER-REGIONAL MIGRATION (MIGRATION STOCK) FROM SOUTH ASIA SINCE 1990**

(Persons in Millions)

Countries	1990	2000	2010	2015
Afghanistan	3.43	2.52	3.09	3.22
Bangladesh	1.07	1.55	3.42	3.98
Bhutan	0.0004	0.0007	0.005	0.009
India	3.36	5.15	10.70	13.02
Nepal	0.22	0.29	0.78	1.05
Pakistan	1.40	2.01	3.82	4.48
Sri Lanka	0.60	0.78	1.27	1.47
Maldives	0.0003	0.0006	0.0011	0.0013
South Asia	10.08	12.31	23.08	27.22

Source: Calculated from International Migration Stock-2015, UN DESA.

The total stock of inter-regional migrants from South Asia is estimated to have increased from 10.08 million in 1990 to 27.22 million in 2015 i.e. about 2.7 times. All countries in the region except Afghanistan show an increase in inter-regional migration between 1990 and 2015. The sharp increase in low-skilled labour migration, initially fuelled by the oil boom in Gulf countries in the 1970s, has been sustained by the creation of huge demand for low-skilled workers because of subsequent growth in the oil-rich economies (Khadria, 2005; Khatri, 2007; Wickramasekara, 2011). All South Asian countries experienced a sudden increase in the total volume of inter-regional emigration after 2000 due to high demand, with India and Pakistan showing the highest increment in the total volume of such emigration.

International migration is not only a result of economic factors, but also of conflict and natural disasters. Afghanistan is the highest sender of war refugees to the Islamic Republic of Iran (UNHCR, n.d. cited in UNESCAP, 2012).<sup>1</sup> Displacement, conflict and disasters have also led to migration from Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan.

<sup>1</sup> But according to Wickramasekara and Baruah (2013), Afghanistan also sends a significant number of labour to Gulf countries.

**TABLE 3: TRENDS IN ANNUAL LABOUR OUTFLOW FROM SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES, 1990–2015<sup>2</sup>**

Years	Bangladesh	India	Nepal*	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
1990	103 814	139 861	83 020	115 520	42 625
2000	222 686	243 182	35 543	110 136	182 188
2005	252 702	548 853	183 682	143 329	231 290
2010	383 150	641 356	294 094	364 685	267 507
2014	425 684	804 878	519 638	752 466	300 413*
2015	555 881	781 000**	499 620***	946 571	

\*Provisional

\*\*Round figure

\*\*\*Does not include Nepali migrant workers who migrated to Korea through government-to-government employment permit system, and workers who migrate to India.

\*Figures for Nepal are reported for 12 months running from July of one year to June of the following year. For example, data for 2013 refers to the period from July 2012 to June 2013.

Sources: Bangladesh: Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET); Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE); Pakistan: Pakistan Bureau of Overseas Employment; Nepal: *Labour Migration for Employment: A Status Report for Nepal-2014/15*. Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of Nepal; India: *Annual Report 2014-15 and Annual Report 2015-16*.

India has been the largest labour-sending country in the region, at least until 2015, when figures show that Pakistan emerged as the largest labour-sending country, followed by India, Bangladesh and Nepal (Table 3). Afghanistan has no legal framework for enumeration of migration, but according to estimates<sup>3</sup>, there are more than 100,000 Afghan workers working in Gulf countries.

### 3.1.2 Destinations of labour migration from South Asia

There are two major destinations for migrant workers from South Asia: permanent migration of skilled/professional emigrants to Europe, Australia and North America, and migration of contract labour to Gulf countries and South-East Asia (Khadria, 2007; Khatri, 2007; Wickramasekara, 2011).

In 2015, 66 per cent of inter-regional migrants from South Asia were in West Asian countries, including Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. North America accounted for 13.7 per cent of total inter-regional migrants, and Europe for 12.1 per cent (Table 4). South-East Asia and Oceania accounted for 4.5 per cent and 2.8 per cent of the total, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Generally the figures capture the emigrants with job contracts. High skilled migration without job contracts is not well captured in these databases, especially for India.

<sup>3</sup> Estimates provided by Overfeld and Zumot, 2010, cited in Wickramasekara and Baruah, 2013

**TABLE 4: DESTINATION-WISE INTER-REGIONAL MIGRATION FROM SOUTH ASIA, 2015**

(Figures in Percentages)

Destination Regions		Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Maldives	South Asia
Asia	West Asia*	85.31	70.98	0.00	63.09	57.63	63.13	46.30	0.00	65.73
	South Eastern Asia	0.05	11.32	0.00	2.65	21.12	3.83	1.66	0.00	4.46
	Central Asia	0.24	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03
	Eastern Asia	0.00	0.68	0.00	0.44	2.19	0.79	2.80	0.00	0.68
Europe		9.74	9.70	25.78	9.46	7.63	19.55	27.31	47.07	12.09
Northern America		3.39	5.96	29.37	19.91	8.10	11.18	13.25	0.00	13.67
Oceania		1.24	1.01	44.65	3.55	3.29	1.09	8.31	42.00	2.76
Africa		0.02	0.33	0.00	0.80	0.03	0.40	0.36	9.84	0.52
Latin America and the Caribbean		0.01	0.01	0.20	0.11	0.01	0.03	0.01	1.09	0.06
Total Inter-regional Emigrants from South Asia		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

\*In UN DESA data Iran is included in South Asia; however, in the present study it is included in West Asia.

Source: Calculated from International Migration Stock-2015, UN DESA.

*West Asian countries, particularly the GCC countries, are the major recipient of migrants from all South Asian countries except from Bhutan and Maldives. The South Asia–Gulf corridor is characterized by unskilled temporary contract workers in construction and domestic and care work (Khadria, 2005; Wickramasekara, 2011). Some migrants in this corridor, especially from India, are high-skilled, but they are a small proportion. India is the largest sender of labour to GCC countries, followed by Pakistan and Bangladesh. Migration from Nepal to Gulf countries is comparatively recent. Nepal is also becoming an important sender of low-skilled workers to GCC countries (Timothy and Sasikumar, 2012). In the last two decades, migration of female workers to the region has increased considerably, especially to service-related sectors like domestic work and health care. Sri Lanka is the main sender of female migrants to GCC countries. In the 1990s, the share of housemaid migration to Gulf countries increased, before slowing down in the first decade of this century (Wickramasekara, 2010; Sasikumar, 2014). Compared to migration of professionals and high-skilled workers, migration of unskilled workers and housemaids has increased over the time period from Sri Lanka (SLBFE, 2014).*

*Industrialized Europe and North America were the traditional destinations for inter-regional migration from South Asia until the 1950s. These regions received skilled workers. The major destinations now are North America, Europe and Australia. Nearly a quarter of Indian migrants are in North America, whereas Europe is a more important destination for all other South Asian countries. India sends large numbers of highly skilled information technology (IT) professionals to the USA every year (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003; Khadria, 2005). But migration of low-skilled workers from India to European Union (EU) countries, especially the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany and Spain, has also increased in recent years as a result of labour shortages in these countries. It has been estimated that around 93,000 Indian migrants were present in EU countries in 2008 (Timothy and Sasikumar, 2012). Oceania is also an important destination for South*

Asian migrants. Australia is a major recipient of inter-regional migrants from South Asia, especially from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka.

*South-East Asia and East Asia* are becoming important recipients of South Asian migrants. Since the 1990s, migration of workers has increased to East and South-East Asian industrialized countries such as Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan send the largest proportion of their inter-regional migrants to this region. There are a large number of workers in various blue-collar jobs in countries of these regions: Bangladeshi, Indian and Nepalese workers in the plantation and other sectors in Malaysia; Sri Lankan women domestic workers in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore; and Nepalese construction workers in Malaysia and the Republic of Korea (Khadria, 2005; UN DESA, 2016).

### 3.1.3 Skill level of migrants

As noted earlier, there are two different streams of migration from South Asia. The majority of migrants to the Middle East and other Asian countries are young, unskilled and semi-skilled, with few years of schooling (Wickramasekara, 2011; Ozaki, 2012). South Asian international migration is generally bottom-heavy (Khadria, 2005), i.e. dominated by blue-collar workers in construction, factory work, and the service sector, and only a small proportion of skilled workers migrate internationally for professional and skilled work.

**TABLE 5: SKILL LEVEL OF EMIGRATING LABOUR FROM SOUTH ASIA (LATEST DATA AVAILABLE)**

Bangladesh	(%)	Pakistan	(%)	Nepal	(%)	Sri Lanka	(%)
2015		2016*		2013-14		2014 (provisional)	
Professional	0.33	Highly Qualified	1.82	Professional	<1	Professional	1.78
Skilled	38.56	Highly Skilled	0.89	Highly Skilled	<1	Middle Level	6.91
Semi-skilled	16.39	Skilled	40.24	Skilled	14	Clerical	9.73
Unskilled	43.88	Semi-skilled	18.31	Semi-skilled	12	Skilled	24.31
Others	0.84	Unskilled	38.75	Unskilled	74	Semi-skilled	1.32
						Unskilled	26.44
						Housemaids	29.51

\*Figure for Pakistan is up to September 2016.

Sources: Bangladesh: BMET; Sri Lanka: SLBFE; Pakistan: Pakistan Bureau of Overseas Employment; Nepal: cited in Table 3, GIZ and ILO, 2015.

Table 5 shows the skill composition of international labour migration from four South Asian countries. The proportion of highly skilled and highly qualified migrant workers is very low, and there is a preponderance of low, semi-skilled and unskilled migrants from these countries. Bangladesh and Pakistan have a higher proportion of skilled migrant workers than Nepal and Sri Lanka. In the case of Sri Lanka, most low-skilled migrants are housemaids, and the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) therefore gives separate data for this category of workers (Wickramasekara, 2010). India (not included in Table 5) is a major sending country of high-skilled IT professionals to Canada, Germany and the USA. But the share of high-skilled migration among total migration from India is not very significant (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003).

**FIGURE 2: MIGRATION OF TERTIARY-EDUCATED EMIGRANTS FROM SOUTH ASIA, 1990–2000**

Sources: World Bank Development Indicators, World Bank data, 1990, 2000.

The proportion of educated emigrants among all migrants from South Asian countries is also low (Figure 2). According to the World Bank (2000), Sri Lanka (28.17 per cent) and Afghanistan (22.61 per cent) were the two countries sending the highest share of tertiary-educated migrants, but this share was very low in other countries, especially India (4.34 per cent) and Bangladesh (4.44 per cent). It is evident from Figure 2 that although the percentage share of tertiary-educated emigrants is low in South Asian countries, it had increased by 2000 compared to 1990 (except in Nepal).

### 3.1.4 Return migration

Most migration of labour from South Asia to the Middle East and South-East Asia is contractual. Hence return migration is an important part of inter-regional migration from South Asia, and the re-integration of returning migrants into the national economy raises a number of specific challenges.

According to the Kerala Migration Surveys of 2008 and 2011, there were an estimated 1.16 million return emigrants in the Indian state of Kerala in 2008, and 1.15 million return emigrants in 2011 (Zachariah and Rajan, 2012).

Return migration is a concern in Bangladesh, with such migrants facing difficulty in getting jobs after return (GIZ and ILO, 2015).

### 3.1.5 International migration and gender

Labour migration from South Asian countries is largely male-dominated. Until the 1990s, only a small number of females migrated to overseas destinations, as doctors, nurses and teachers. Later, due to changes in the structure of the labour market, more women started to migrate, and this trend has increased over time. An increasing number of female migrants from South Asian

countries are getting jobs in the newly emerging manufacturing sector, and as domestic workers in Gulf countries (Siddiqui, 2008).

However, most South Asian countries have imposed bans and age restrictions on female labour migration in order to protect female workers, particularly those working in households, from harassment and sexual exploitation. Such bans and restrictions have been imposed by the governments of Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. However, the ban on female workers is thought to promote the illegal migration of women through informal channels (Ozaki, 2012). Sri Lanka is the only country in South Asia which promotes female labour migration.

**TABLE 6: PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN EMIGRANTS\* FROM SOUTH ASIA (ACCORDING TO AVAILABLE OFFICIAL STATISTICS), 2010–15**

Years	Bangladesh		Sri Lanka		Nepal	
	Female	Percentage of Female in Total Migrants	Female	Percentage of Female in Total Migrants	Female	Percentage of Female in Total Migrants
2010	27 706	7.09	130 657	48.84	10 056	3.42
2011	30 579	5.38	126 654	48.16	10 416	2.93
2012	37 304	6.14	138 312	48.97	22 958	5.96
2013	56 400	13.78	118 033	40.25	27 767	6.16
2014	76 007	17.86	110 489	36.78	29 121	5.60
2015	103 718	18.66	110 344	36.76	21 421	4.29

\*The gender disaggregation of emigration from India and Pakistan is not provided by their respective official sources (Ministry of External Affairs, Department of Overseas Indian Affairs, and Pakistan Bureau of Overseas Employment).

Sources: Bangladesh: BMET; Sri Lanka: SLBFE; Nepal: *Labour Migration for Employment: A Status Report for Nepal-2014/15*. Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of Nepal.

Gender-disaggregated data on female migrants are available for only a few countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. These data and other studies suggest that the proportion of female labour migrants from the region remains low, but there is increasing feminization of labour migration from South Asia, largely associated with the migration of female workers from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, as well as some undocumented migration from other countries. Female migrant labour in Sri Lanka represents almost half of the total migration abroad for employment, and it exceeded male labour migration in the 1990s and until recently (Wickramasekara, 2010). The main destinations for female migrants from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are Gulf countries and South-East Asian Countries, principally Malaysia and Singapore (ibid). Sri Lanka is the main sender of housemaids to Gulf countries and South-East Asian countries. Established social networks – friends, relatives and extended family members – have been found to play a major role in the increasing female migration from South Asian countries to these regions (Kabeer, 2007; Khatri, 2007; Oishi, 2005).

Female migration in Nepal before the 1990s mainly took the form of associational migration, in which women accompanied their spouses, parents or relatives. The patriarchal culture, lack of reliable networks and unavailability of funds needed for female migration abroad hindered the emigration of independent women migrant workers for employment (Adhikari, 2006). Political changes in Nepal during the 1990s, in which Nepal shifted from monarchy to democracy, had a great impact on the process of migration, both internal as well as international. During this period, failure of the agricultural economy and the resultant poverty forced many Nepalese women

to migrate to India and other countries for employment (Bohra and Massey, 2009). In spite of restrictions on women's migration to Gulf countries for work in the unorganized sector, large numbers of women workers from Nepal emigrate abroad through illegal channels, using border countries like India or Bangladesh as routes (NIDS, 2010).

### 3.1.6 International migration – some issues

The issues confronting workers migrating abroad fall into two categories: first at the stage of recruitment, and second in destination countries and workplaces (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003). We focus below on the migration of low-skilled workers. The steps taken to deal with these issues are discussed in Sections 6 to 8 of this paper.

**Process of recruitment:** Labour migration generally takes place through recruiting agencies using contracts. Delayed deployment, non-deployment and overcharging are the main problems faced by migrants (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003). Overcharging is a common practice of recruiting agencies and increases the cost of migration. Agencies charge higher commission and often exploit innocent migrants (The Asia Foundation, 2013). There are cases of fraud by unauthorized or unregistered recruiting agencies. Aspirants also end up getting lower wages than what is written in their contracts. Nepali workers often face fraudulent actions from agencies in the case of Gulf countries and Malaysia (NIDS, 2010).

**Cost of migration:** The financial cost of overseas migration is quite high. It has been found to be lowest for Sri Lanka (US\$689) and highest for Bangladesh (\$1,700), followed by Nepal (\$1,500) and Pakistan (\$1,300) (Khatri, 2007). The cost of migration often becomes much higher than what aspirants can afford (Wickramasekara, 2011). This is often a result of malpractices of private recruiting agencies and failure of governments to regulate them (ibid.). Nepali migrants often take informal loans or sell land to raise sufficient funds for migration. The situation is similar in Bangladesh (Khatri, 2007).

**Problems faced by migrants at destination:** The main problems faced by migrant workers abroad are: 1) premature termination of job contract; 2) changes in the clauses of the work contract; 3) delayed payment; 4) payment lower than the legal minimum wage; 5) working overtime without leave; 6) retention of passport and other documents by employers (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003). Domestic workers are highly vulnerable and face the risk of sexual harassment at their workplaces (Khatri, 2007).

Violations of workers' rights start with the *kafala* or sponsorship system of recruitment in Gulf countries. Most Gulf countries have initiated changes in the *kafala* system (GIZ and ILO, 2015). In Saudi Arabia, it is now illegal to retain an employee's document.

Migrants' living conditions can be very poor. In Malaysia, Nepali migrants reportedly live in subhuman conditions to save money (NIDS, 2010). While incidents of suicide among Nepali migrants in Malaysia have increased over time, the accidental death of migrant workers at their workplace is also a major concern.

**Irregular migration and human trafficking:** Irregular migration is an increasing phenomenon in South Asia. The restriction of emigration at source, and restrictions on immigration at destination, result in irregular migration flows (Wickramasekara, 2002). Labour migrants from Nepal and Bangladesh, especially women workers, migrate through irregular channels (Wickramasekara, 2011). In India, around 20,000 migrants every year use irregular channels to migrate. The major destinations are the Middle East and Asia (especially from Tamil Nadu), Europe, especially the



United Kingdom (from Punjab), the USA, Canada, Australia, Malaysia, etc. In Pakistan, there is temporary irregular migration to Gulf countries for work. Other destinations include the United Kingdom and other EU countries. Major destinations for irregular migrants from Afghanistan are the Middle East and Asia, Europe, North America and Australia. Major destinations for Sri Lankan irregular migrants are Greece, France, Italy, the United Kingdom and Canada (UNODC, 2012). The situation of illegal migrants makes them more vulnerable as they do not fall under any protective net. Often, if detected they face deportation from destination countries.

Illegal migration is linked to human trafficking, slavery and sexual exploitation. Human trafficking is a major concern in South Asia. There is trafficking of Bangladeshi and Pakistani boys as camel operators in Gulf countries (Gazdar, 2003; UNICEF, 2006). Women are still more vulnerable to trafficking. There are cases of women trafficked for prostitution, slavery and forced labour from Pakistan and Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries (ICMPD, 2013).

### 3.1.7 Impact on source countries

Migration from this populous region plays a major role in providing employment and remittances, which has important macroeconomic and developmental impacts.

#### Remittance and its impact

South Asia is the second-highest remittance-receiving region (Ozaki, 2012). International remittances are a major source of foreign exchange, as they are larger than FDI, foreign aid and private flows in the region (World Bank, 2004, cited in Sasikumar, 2014). The actual remittance inflow is much higher than the official remittance figures suggest, since a major share occurs through informal channels (Ozaki, 2012).

**FIGURE 3: TRENDS IN REMITTANCE INFLOWS IN SOUTH ASIA, 1990–2016**



Note: The figure includes major remittance-receiving countries only. For 2016, the data is available up to October 2016. Afghanistan is excluded because of lack of data.

Source: World Bank calculation based on data from IMF Balance of Payments Statistics database and data releases from central banks, national statistical agencies, and World Bank country desks.



The remittance flow to the region has been increasing, especially after 2000. India receives the largest amount of remittances, totalling US\$65.45 billion in 2016. Until 1990, the annual remittance inflow in India was less than \$3 billion (see Srivastava and Debnath, forthcoming) but after 2005, it increased suddenly. The other South Asian countries which received a significant amount of remittances in 2016 are Pakistan (\$20.30 billion), Bangladesh (\$14.85 billion), Sri Lanka (\$7.11 billion) and Nepal (\$6.92 billion).

Nepal's economy is largely dependent on remittance inflows, which amount to more than one-third of its GDP. Similarly, according to estimates by the World Bank (2016), remittances constitute a large share of GDP in Sri Lanka (8.5 per cent) and Bangladesh (7.9 per cent). Even for a large country like India, almost 3.3 per cent of GDP comes from international remittance flows. India also receives the largest amount of remittances globally. Remittance flows to Afghanistan are mostly through informal channels which are hard to track, and remittances are much higher than recorded. Four countries in the Gulf – Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates – are the main sources of remittance outflows to South Asia (Ozaki, 2012).

Remittances are known to have microeconomic (household-level), meso-level (regional) and macro-economic impacts in South Asian countries. At the household level, remittances improve the quality of life and household consumption through the purchase of consumer goods, repayment of debt, and investment in housing, land and consumer durables. (Zachariah and Rajan, 2015; Sasikumar, 2014; Ozaki, 2012, Hasan, 2006; Pant, 2011). Several studies have concluded that remittances play a positive role in reducing poverty in these countries (Sasikumar, 2014; Tumbé, 2011; Khatri, 2007; Siddiqui and Kemal, 2006).

In the case of Bangladesh, the remittance inflow has been shown to have direct macroeconomic impacts, as well as microeconomic impacts on poverty reduction through increases in household income. Remittances in Bangladesh are equivalent to more than half of the gross export value of the country, and larger than the trade deficit of the country (Islam, n.d.,a). In Nepal, remittance inflows have also reduced poverty and increased the income of migrants' households (Khatri, 2007).

**TABLE 7: REMITTANCE INFLOWS AS PERCENTAGE SHARE OF GDP IN SOUTH ASIA, 1995–2016**

Countries	1995	2000	2005	2012	2016*
Afghanistan	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9	1.6
Bangladesh	3.2	4.2	7.2	12.2	7.9
Bhutan	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.0
India	1.7	2.7	2.7	3.7	3.3
Maldives	0.6	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.1
Nepal	1.3	2	14.9	25	32.2
Pakistan	2.8	1.5	3.9	6.2	7.2
Sri Lanka	6.2	7.1	8.1	10.1	8.5

\*The figures for 2016 are estimates by the World Bank based on data from IMF Balance of Payments Statistics database and data releases from central banks, national statistical agencies and World Bank country desks.

Source: Sasikumar, 2014 (based on World Bank data).

The main problem with remittances is that a sizeable proportion occurs through informal channels. This hinders financial development and the proper channelling of these remittances. The informal

transfer of money is known as *hundi* in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and *hawala* in the Middle East and India. Remittance flows through informal sources in South Asian countries make up around 42 per cent of the total remittances received by these countries (Page and Plaza, 2005, cited in Ozaki, 2012). According to a survey by the Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Unit (RMMRU), only 40 per cent of the remittances received in South Asian countries comes through formal channels such as banks, Western Union or other sources, with another 40 per cent coming via *hundi/hawala*, followed by the handcarrying of remittances by workers themselves (8 per cent) and remittances brought by friends and relatives (4 per cent) (Khatri, 2007). The main reason behind informal remittance flows is the high transaction cost of formal transfers (*ibid.*).

### **Impact on labour market at source**

The effect of international migration on the labour market of source countries depends on the size of the outflow and the skill composition of migrants. For temporary outflow, impact measurement must also take into account the size of the return flow (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003). For India, migration of skilled migrants to industrialized countries, as well as semi-skilled migrants to the Middle East, comprises an insignificant portion of its national labour market, but there are significant regional impacts upon sending states such as Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Punjab and Tamil Nadu. Although India focuses on skilled migration, the total emigration towards four industrialised countries (Australia, Canada, UK and USA) constituted a mere 0.13 per cent of the population of graduates in 1991. Nevertheless, this has a positive effect on reducing unemployment among skilled workers (*ibid.*).

In Sri Lanka (Wickramasekara, 2010) and Pakistan (Ahmad et al., 2008), the unemployment rate is influenced by international migration. International migration has a positive impact, in particular, on unemployment among educated youth in Sri Lanka (Wickramasekara, 2010).

International migration increases the human capital in the source labour market. Return migration can provide a 'brain-gain effect'. In a study of migrant workers in Pakistan it was found that the skilled returnee migrant workers had new knowledge about handling advanced tools. However, huge out-migration can also have some negative impacts. In Nepal, its impact on gender relations at source has been seen to be negative (Khatri, 2007).

## **3.2 Intra-regional (cross-border) migration**

South Asia's countries share a common history. Many of them emerged on the political map in the twentieth century, through partition. Borders were delineated by the colonial rulers and in some places, these were demarcated so carelessly that people from the same village ended up in different countries after partition. Although proximity, cultural and kinship ties were an important reason, at least initially, for irregular and undocumented cross-border migration, such migration has also now become a source of concern for some countries due to its socio-political, demographic, and economic impact, and security concerns. The absence of appropriate frameworks also makes a large part of this irregular movement illegal, for example between Bangladesh and India, or between India and Pakistan. Cross-border migration is, however, allowed legally between some South Asian countries, such as India–Nepal, India–Bhutan, Bhutan–Nepal and Pakistan–Afghanistan, as a result of various treaties and bilateral agreements. The Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 between India and Nepal is an example. Migration between India and Nepal, India and Bhutan or Bhutan and Nepal does not require passports or visas (Khadria, 2005). Because of these agreements, the cross-border mobility of people between these countries assumes the character of internal migration.

### 3.2.1 Nature and magnitude of cross-border flows across the region

**TABLE 8: TEMPORAL TRENDS OF INTRA-REGIONAL MIGRATION IN SOUTH ASIA (FIGURES BASED ON ORIGIN COUNTRIES), 1990–2015**

(Persons in Millions)

Countries	1990	2000	2010	2015
Afghanistan	3.29	2.02	1.92	1.63
Bangladesh	4.38	3.89	3.33	3.23
Bhutan	0.028	0.119	0.081	0.036
India	3.36	2.80	2.59	2.56
Nepal	0.53	0.68	0.60	0.58
Pakistan	1.93	1.38	1.20	1.46
Sri Lanka	0.29	0.20	0.17	0.17
Maldives	0.0018	0.0006	0.0017	0.0016
South Asia	13.81	11.08	9.89	9.65

Source: Calculated from International Migration Stock-2015, UN DESA.

Intra-regional migration in South Asia shows a consistent decline after 1990 (Table 8). Most origin countries, except Nepal, which has a long history of sending migrants to India, show a decline in cross-border emigration after 1990. Further, as shown in Table 1, the share of intra-regional migration in total international migration is also declining. Within South Asia, Bangladesh, India, Afghanistan and Pakistan are high sending countries, while India and Pakistan are the main receiving countries (Table 9).

**TABLE 9: SENDING AND DESTINATION COUNTRIES AND CORRIDOR-WISE PATTERN OF CROSS-BORDER (INTRA-REGIONAL) MIGRATION, 2015**

Countries	Persons	Percentage share of total intra-regional migration
<b>Sending Countries</b>		
Afghanistan	1 626 901	16.85
Bangladesh	3 225 525	33.41
Bhutan	35 614	0.37
India	2 559 142	26.51
Nepal	583 057	6.04
Pakistan	1 456 841	15.09
Sri Lanka	165 300	1.71
Maldives	1 563	0.02
<b>Destination Countries</b>		
Afghanistan	348 369	3.61
Bangladesh	73 490	0.76
Bhutan	45 556	0.47
India	4 990 308	51.69

Countries	Persons	Percentage share of total intra-regional migration
Nepal	476 778	4.94
Pakistan	3 620 173	37.50
Sri Lanka	13 969	0.14
Maldives	85 300	0.88
<b>Cross-border Migration</b>		
Afghanistan – Pakistan	1 618 687	16.77
Afghanistan – India	8 086	0.08
Bangladesh – India	3 171 022	32.85
Bhutan – Nepal	28 740	0.30
Bhutan – India	6 647	0.07
India – Nepal	446 491	4.62
India – Pakistan	2 000 908	20.73
India – Sri Lanka	10 460	0.11
India – Bangladesh	34 431	0.36
India – Bhutan	44 732	0.46
Nepal – India	542 947	5.62
Pakistan – India	1 106 212	11.46
Pakistan – Afghanistan	348 369	3.61
Sri Lanka – India	155 195	1.61
<b>Other corridors</b>		
Nepal – Bangladesh	39 059	0.40
Bangladesh – Maldives	53 565	0.55
India – Maldives	22 120	0.23
Sri Lanka – Maldives	9 448	0.10

Source: Calculated from International Migration Stock-2015, UN DESA.

The major migration corridors in the region are Bangladesh–India, Afghanistan–Pakistan, India–Pakistan and Nepal–India. It is estimated that approximately 3 million Bangladeshi migrant workers are present in India. They generally work in the informal sector, in the construction industry, as domestic workers, rickshaw pullers and rag pickers (Samuels et al., 2011). Until the 1970s, political instability in Bangladesh and the insecurity of its Hindu minority were the main reasons for migration from Bangladesh to India, but over time the reasons for migration have changed. Since the 1990s, the nature of migration of Bangladeshis towards India has been more economic. Frequent natural disasters such as riverbank erosion, cyclones accompanied by storm surges, droughts and floods affect much of Bangladesh (Alam, 2003). This forces poor Bangladeshis from border districts to migrate towards India. Because of a porous border, large-scale migration is undocumented and its size is difficult to estimate. The Afghanistan–Pakistan migration corridor is a consequence of social and economic factors, as well as the conflict in Afghanistan.

The Indo-Nepal migration corridor has been in existence since the British period. Short-term labour migration from Nepal to India is an important characteristic of this corridor. Under the Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950, no document is required for migration between these

countries. Hence there is no solid database for Nepali migrants in India, or Indian workers in Nepal. The Government of India estimates that approximately 1 million Nepalese workers are present in India (Samuels et al., 2011), but other estimates put this figure at 2 million to 3 million. Estimating the number of Indian workers in Nepal is also very tricky. There are many migrant workers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh working in the country (NIDS, 2010). After the internal Maoist insurgency that began in 1996, a large number of Nepalese migrated to India (ILO and DFID, 2002, cited in Bhattarai, 2005). Since the 1990s, the Gulf countries and Malaysia have emerged as the other prime destinations for Nepalese workers, and India acts as a transit zone for many Nepalese workers.

### 3.2.2 Issues related to irregular cross-border migration and human trafficking

The major issues related to cross-border migration in South Asia are irregular migration and human trafficking. The incidence of irregular and undocumented migration, particularly that which is treated as 'illegal', is a major issue in South Asian countries. Irregular migration is very high between India and Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Pakistan and India. In addition, there is large-scale trafficking of women and children across borders from Bangladesh and Nepal into India (Wickramasekara, 2011). Continuous irregular migration from Bangladesh into India, and the presence of a large number of Bangladeshi illegal/undocumented migrants in the border states of India such as West Bengal, Assam and Tripura, creates social and political tension in the region, and is one of the major current security concerns for India. For a long time, the porous and un-demarcated border at many places between India and Bangladesh facilitated easy cross-border movement. The political and economic crisis in Bangladesh pushes people near the border to move towards neighbouring areas of India (Bhardwaj, 2014). Brokers and middlemen play an important role in this process. Irregular migrants often negotiate with multiple middlemen, including border officials. Female migrants suffer more in this process compared to male migrants, and sometimes they end up in the circuit of trafficking and sex work (Samuels et al., 2011). According to the Asian Development Bank, around 300,000 Bangladeshi women were trafficked to India, and another 200,000 to Pakistan via India, during an unspecified period (Agriteam Canada Consulting Ltd, 2002).

Cross-border migration from Nepal to India cannot be considered as irregular or illegal migration because of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 between the two countries, but it is one of the main routes of trafficking in South Asia. Maiti Nepal, an NGO working in the field of women trafficking in Nepal, estimated that about 150,000 to 300,000 Nepalese females are working as sex workers in different brothels of Indian cities (Gartaula, 2009). The Nepal–India route is also one of the transit routes for sex trafficking of Nepalese women towards Gulf countries and South-East Asia (Wickramasekara, 2011).

India and Pakistan are zones of origin, transit and destination of trafficked women and bonded labour. Women and children from Bangladesh and Nepal are trafficked through well-established networks in India and Pakistan. Most of the trafficked women work as sex workers in India and Pakistan and some of them are again transported to Gulf countries and South-East Asian countries (Agriteam Canada Consulting Ltd., 2002).

Pakistan is the main destination country for irregular migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. As has been discussed already, large numbers of Afghans migrated to Pakistan during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and during the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. A majority of these migrants are undocumented and irregular. Many may not even be aware that they are engaging in irregular or illegal migration because of ethnic similarities between people in the

border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan (Wickramasekara and Baruah, 2013).

### 3.2.3 Major policy gaps

Intra-regional migration comprises a major share of migration in South Asia. The actual flows are likely to be even larger than the official figures due to the huge undocumented flows of both permanent and circular migration.

Despite its importance and magnitude, very few studies have focused on intra-regional migration and its economic costs and benefits. This migration is mainly viewed through the lenses of national security, socio-political instability and refugee rehabilitation. However, the impact of intra-regional migration on employment, on the workers and their families involved, and on the source and destination has been largely ignored in regional and bilateral discussions and policies. Human trafficking, which leads to the violation of the basic human rights of the individuals involved, is also becoming a major issue in the region.

Undocumented or illegal cross-border migration makes the immigrant's situation vulnerable at destination. They cannot avail themselves of workers' rights, basic services and social security benefits. If migration is illegal, migrants face the threat of deportation if detected. Sexual exploitation of women when crossing borders is a violation of their basic rights. These issues concern nations and affect millions of people, and they urgently need to be addressed.

## 4. Internal migration

### 4.1 Trends and patterns in internal migration across countries in the region

Internal migration consists of permanent, semi-permanent and temporary/seasonal migration flows. Overall, internal migration in South Asia is more important than international migration in terms of volume as well as flow of remittances (Deshingkar and Grimm, 2005). However, the picture varies from country to country and detailed data for comparison are not available for all countries in the region. Employment is one of the most important reasons given for internal migration. Urban migration for economic reasons is increasing in most South Asian countries, especially India and Bangladesh (Srivastava, 2011a, Rashid, 2013).

#### 4.1.1 Magnitude of internal migration in South Asia

Comparison of internal migration across the countries in South Asia is confounded by the fact that countries use different definitions and jurisdictions to enumerate migrants. But according to available data, internal migration in South Asia is huge in terms of absolute numbers. The volume and rate of internal migrants are compared in Table 10 according to the latest available census data. The volume of internal migration in India was 301 million in 2001.<sup>4</sup> If only inter-district migration is considered, the volume was 119 million in India, followed by Pakistan (8.6 million) and Sri Lanka (4.1 million). Inter-district internal migration rates vary from 32.5 per cent in Bhutan, 20.2 per cent in Sri Lanka, 14.4 per cent in Nepal and 11.6 per cent in India to 6.5 per cent in Pakistan.

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<sup>4</sup> According to the preliminary migration data released from the 2011 Census, total internal migration in India has risen to 453.64 million, from 314.54 million in 2001.

**TABLE 10: VOLUME AND RATE (PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION) OF INTERNAL MIGRATION IN SOUTH ASIA, 1998–2011**

(Absolute Figures in Millions)

Country	Recent Census	Census based migration stock			
		Village/Urban		Inter-district	
		Total	Migration Rate (%)	Total	Migration Rate (%)
India	2001	300.98	29.26	119.18	11.59
Pakistan	1998			8.61	6.51
Bangladesh	2011	13.68	9.82		
Nepal	2011			3.79	14.43
Sri Lanka	2011			4.12	20.21
Bhutan	2005			0.21	32.51

Sources: India: Census of India 2001; Pakistan: Census of Pakistan 1998; Bangladesh: National Report, Population and Housing Census 2011; Nepal: National Population and Housing Census 2011; Sri Lanka: Census of Population and Housing 2011; Bhutan: Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2005.

#### 4.1.2 Labour migration

Labour migration can be generally defined as migration for work-related or economic reasons. Economic factors are the most important reason for migration, after migration due to marriage and associational migration. In South Asian countries, internal migration for employment-related reasons is generally important for males, whereas except for Sri Lanka, female migration is mainly marriage-related and associational.<sup>5</sup>

Due to definitional differences among these countries, reasons for migration are not exactly comparable. They can be broadly divided into employment, marriage, movement with family, education, displacement and other issues. For around 20 per cent of internal migrants in India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, employment was the main reason for migration, whereas 26.4 per cent of migrants in Bhutan and 31.7 per cent in Nepal stated this as the main reason for migration (Table 11).

**TABLE 11: REASON FOR MIGRATION, SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES**

(Figures in Percentages)

Country	Year	Definition	Employment	Education	Marriage	Associational	Others
India*	2001	Place of last	19.37	1.45	39.71	24.76	14.71
Sri Lanka	2011	Lifetime	20.43	5.39	31.7	18.83	23.65
Pakistan	1998	Lifetime	20.83	1.17	17.1	42.78	18.12
Nepal	2011	Lifetime	31.7	13.38	23.59	20.36	10.97
Bhutan	2005	Lifetime	26.4	14.6	10.5	31.5	17

Only inter-district migrants are considered for the present analysis to maintain comparability.

\*The Census of India takes village/urban units as the boundary for defining migration. Among all internal migrants (including intra-district), 10.4 per cent were employment-related, 1 per cent education-related, 50.3 per cent marriage-related, 18.3 per cent associational or family migrants, and the rest (19.9 per cent) migrated for other reasons.

Sources: India: Census of India 2001; Sri Lanka: Census of Population and Housing 2011; Pakistan: Census of Pakistan 1998; Nepal: National Population and Housing Census 2011; Bhutan: Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2005.

<sup>5</sup> In Sri Lanka, employment-related migration is also female-dominated (Ranathunga, 2011).



According to the Census of India, employment-related migration has increased from 19.85 million in 1991 to 28.9 million in 2001.<sup>6</sup> National Sample Survey estimations show that migration for employment-related reasons has been gaining in importance since 1983. Such migration is more important in inter-state and long-distance migration streams (Srivastava, 2011a).

Employment was cited as the reason for migration by 10.5 per cent of rural internal migrants and 17.8 per cent of urban migrants in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The increasing employment opportunities in urban centres after liberalization is the main cause for urban-ward labour migration (Afsar, 2003).

In Sri Lanka (2011 Census), employment-related migration accounts for 20.4 per cent of total internal migration, followed by marriage and family migration. Displacement is also an important reason for internal migration in Sri Lanka. Apart from displacement, high unemployment in rural areas leads to migration of females to urban export-processing zones (Ranathunga, 2011).

In Pakistan (1998 Census), employment-related migration accounts for 20.8 per cent of migration. Associational migration (42.8 per cent) is the main reason for migration here. Internal displacement is another reason: according to Pakistan Migration Report, Pakistan has a large number of internally displaced persons due to political instability, sectoral violence and natural disasters. Five million people have been displaced by conflict and sectoral violence since 2004. Another 15 million were displaced due to natural disasters across the country (ICMPD, 2013).

Employment-related migration accounts for 31.7 per cent of migration in Nepal (2011 Census), and is divided between agriculture, employment and business. Working in agricultural fields is an important reason for migration and partly explains high rural-rural migration in Nepal (Table 12). Employment-related migration occurs mainly from agriculturally poor hill regions to the agriculturally developed Tarai region.

In Bhutan (2005 Census), employment-related migration is significant (26.4 per cent), after associational migration or family migration.

Internal migration for economic purposes has increased recently in Afghanistan. In a survey, 22 per cent of rural households had at least one member who migrated (Ghobadi et al., 2005).

**TABLE 12: PERCENTAGE COMPOSITION OF INTERNAL MIGRATION BY DIRECTION OF MIGRATION**

Country	Year	Definition	All		Inter-district	
			Rural In-migrant	Urban In-migrant	Rural In-migrant	Urban In-migrant
Pakistan	1998	Lifetime			34.82	65.18
India	2001	Place of last residence	67.16	32.84	45.65	54.35
Bangladesh	2011	Lifetime	47.06	52.27		
Nepal	2011	Lifetime			62.26	37.74

Sources: Pakistan: Census of Pakistan 1998; India: Census of India 2001; Bangladesh: Population and Housing Census of Bangladesh 2011; Nepal: National Population and Housing Census 2011.

<sup>6</sup> According to the 2011 provisional figures, 11.2 per cent of migrants migrate for reasons of employment, 1.8 per cent for education, 49.3 per cent for marriage, 26.0 per cent for associational reasons and 11.7 per cent for other reasons.



### 4.1.3 Direction of internal migration

Due to non-availability of data, a comparison of the direction of migration is not possible for all South Asian countries. For a few countries like India, Bangladesh and Nepal, the streams of migration can be separated. For other countries like Pakistan, rural in-migration and urban in-migration can be separated. But for Bhutan and Sri Lanka no data are available for the direction of internal migration.

In general, the direction of internal migration in South Asian countries is strongly influenced by the pattern of regional development. It takes place mainly from economically poor areas to economically advanced or developed ones. Urban migration predominates in all countries of the region, except India and Nepal, where rural–rural migration predominates for associational and marriage-related reasons. Rural–urban migration in India is mainly for employment, and migration for work, especially in urban areas, is becoming more important (Srivastava, 2011a). Rural–urban migrant workers mainly work in urban informal sectors like manufacturing, construction and services (Deshingkar, 2006).

In Bangladesh, urban–ward migration forms a considerable portion of internal migration, within which rural–urban migration is an important stream. The rate of urban migration was much higher than rural migration in the last half of the 1980s (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Rural–urban migration contributes two-third of the growth of the urban population. Creation of new employment opportunities in urban centres is the main reason behind urban–ward migration (Afsar, 2003). Dhaka is the most important destination for the flow of poor migrants, and this adds to pressure on the city infrastructure. Other major cities, especially Chittagong, are destinations for rural–urban migrants. Bangladesh is now experiencing increasing female autonomous migration to urban areas for work. Most of these females work in informal-sector activities like readymade garment factories, brick kilns, construction, *chatal* (rice mills), etc. (Rashid, 2013). Studies have also mentioned circular migration to district centres and major urban centres for employment during the lean season.

Urban migration is also more important in Pakistan. Most internal migration is urban–urban, followed by rural–urban. The trend is often seen as a result of urban bias in development policies (Ahmad et al., 2013; Khan and Shehnaz, 2000). According to the Labour Force Survey, Pakistan 1996–97, 43 per cent of internal migration is urban–urban and 30 per cent is rural–urban (Khan and Shehnaz, 2000). Literature on temporal trends in the direction of labour migration is lacking for Pakistan. Large cities and metropolitan areas are the main receiving areas. Karachi is the main receiving city for rural–urban migrants, while Peshawar is the destination for urban–urban migrants. Though clear-cut empirical evidence is not available for Sri Lanka, there is some indication in the literature that rural–urban migration comprises an important component of migration. Generally, young people from rural areas migrate to cities and work in the informal sector and in free-trade zones (Wickramasekara, 2010; Ranathunga, 2011). Contrary to other countries of South Asia, rural–urban migration is dominated by females seeking employment in cities (Ranathunga, 2011).

Nepalese internal migration is still dominated by rural–rural migration, which constitutes two-thirds of migration from poor hill areas to developed Tarai. But according to the Nepal Migration Survey, rural–urban migration is increasing. Employment is the main driving force behind migration to urban areas. The main receiving centres of rural–urban migrants are Kathmandu and Pokhara. The urban informal sector, especially carpet factories and the readymade garment sector, attracts workers from low-income rural households. In the 1990s, 0.2 million workers were engaged in carpet factories and 0.1 million were working in readymade garment factories (Adhikari, 2013).

Rural–urban migration is very important for Bhutan. Thimpu and Phuentsholing are the two urban centres receiving most rural–urban migrants. The development differential between rural and urban areas results in huge inflow to urban areas (Sharma et al., 2013).

The regional pattern of migration in India shows that, in general, it is the poorer and more populous states in the East and North-East, and the lagging areas within each state, that are the sources of out-migration, whereas developed states in the North, West and South, and areas within each state, are the main recipients of migration (Srivastava, 2011a).

#### 4.1.4 Seasonal and circular migration

Seasonal and circular migration comprises an important part of internal migration in South Asia. Unlike permanent migrants, seasonal migrants are much more likely to be from poorer, rural areas, the most deprived and vulnerable sections of society, and to have a low level of education (Srivastava, 2011a, 2012a; Bhagat, 2012). There is debate on the extent to which such migration is distress-induced or accumulative (Deshingkar, 2006). The majority of seasonal migrants (in rural areas) work as casual wage labourers in the agricultural sector. Otherwise they work in various non-farm sectors such as quarries, mines and other rural industries, or brick kilns, the construction sector, rice mills, manufacturing industries, transport, head loading, etc. Seasonal/circular migrants are often preferred by employers as they provide flexible labour and work for long hours (Srivastava, 2011a).

The Indian National Sample Survey (NSS) provides information on seasonal and circular migration (migrants who are out for work or seek work for a period of more than one month and less than six months). According to NSS 64<sup>th</sup> round data (2007–08) there are 15.2 million short-term out-migrants in India, of which 12.9 million (85.1 per cent) were male and 13.9 million (71 per cent) from rural areas (Srivastava, 2012a). This represents an increase in seasonal labour circulation since the NSS 55<sup>th</sup> round (1999–2000), when there were an estimated 12.2 million short-term out-migrants (Srivastava, 2011a).

Apart from national-level data sources, there is a large number of studies of seasonal labour migration in various parts of India. It appears that seasonal/circular migration is on the increase, with a larger share being absorbed in the non-farm sector (*ibid*). Seasonal labour for the construction sector constitutes a high proportion of all seasonal migrants.

Seasonal migration is also a very important survival strategy in Bangladesh, especially during the agricultural lean season known as the *monga*. The north-west part of the country is affected by employment shortages and hunger during the *monga*. At least 100,000 people migrate seasonally from the *monga*-affected greater Rangpur region (Khandker et al., 2012). Workers migrate mainly to urban centres for non-farm activities, with the main destinations being district headquarters and big cities. Employment for seasonal migrants is informal (Khandker et al., 2012; Shonchoy, 2011).

Seasonal migration is the oldest form of survival strategy in Nepal. Rural–rural seasonal migration takes place from the hill areas towards the more agriculturally productive areas of Tarai and agriculturally productive parts of India. Seasonal migration flow in Nepal is very complex and includes cross-border migration flows. A high proportion of migrants go to India seasonally, with Punjab as the major rural destination and Delhi as the major urban destination (Gill, 2003).

Seasonal and circular migration is an important survival strategy for the poor in Afghanistan. As with Nepal, seasonal migration from Afghanistan includes cross-border migration, in this case to Pakistan (Wickramasekara and Barua, 2013).

The increase in seasonal and circular migration is affected by declining livelihoods in rural areas, growing disparities between rural and urban areas and between regions, and by changes in urban policies and labour markets (towards informalization). It can be hypothesized that as a result of all these factors, seasonal and circular migration will continue to grow in most countries of the region.

#### 4.1.5 Gender and migration

**TABLE 13: GENDER AND MIGRATION PATTERN IN SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES**

(Absolute Figures in Millions)

Country	Total (Persons in Millions)		Employment Related Migrants			
	Men	Women	Men		Women	
			Number	(%)	Number	(%)
India*, 2001	44.45	74.73	18.59	42.90	2.15	2.96
Nepal, 2011	1.61	2.18	0.80	49.74	0.40	18.32
Sri Lanka, 2011	1.77	2.18	0.55	31.14	0.26	11.72
Bhutan, 2005	1.02	0.09		39.28		10.02

\*Figures include inter-district migrants only, to make figures comparable with other countries. The share of economic migrants is 31.06 per cent for men and 1.86 per cent for women, if intra-district migration is included.

Sources: India: Census of India 2001; Nepal: National Population and Housing Census 2011; Sri Lanka: Census of Population and Housing 2011; Bhutan: Population and Housing Census of Bhutan, 2005.

The stock of internal migrants in South Asia is dominated by females, migrating mainly for marriage or for associational reasons. However, a significant proportion join the labour force at destination. Only in Bhutan is internal migration male-dominated (Table 13). Analysis of the reasons for migration indicates that exogamous-marriage migration leads to the female-dominated migration pattern in these countries. But it has been argued that autonomous female migration for employment is also increasing in the region. This pattern is seen in India (Shanthi, 2006) and Bangladesh (Rashid, 2013). In Bangladesh, autonomous female migration to the urban informal sector, especially the readymade garment industry, has increased (Rashid, 2013). By contrast, internal employment-related migration in Pakistan is male-dominated. But in central Punjab, autonomous female migration for employment has increased recently (Hamid, 2010).

#### 4.2 Characteristics of internal labour migration and its impact

Migration is a heterogeneous phenomenon, with significant variety among migrants in terms of initial levels of education, skills, and economic background. Internal migrants come from different backgrounds. Evidence suggests that in India the better-off segment of the population is migrating more in the post-globalization period (Srivastava and Bhattacharya, 2003; Kundu and Sarangi, 2007). But Srivastava (2011a) mentions that this is only part of the story. The movement of the poor and vulnerable segment is also increasing. Most of this remains undocumented. Labour migrants and seasonal migrants mostly occupy the lower end of the labour market, generally working as self-employed and regular wage workers, as well as casual workers.

Rural–rural migrant workers generally work as agricultural labour. In India, those from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal migrate to Punjab and work as agricultural labour. In India, seasonal migrant workers are mostly concentrated in activities like brick kilns, construction, rickshaw-pulling, etc. Younger and male workers have a higher propensity to migrate (ibid.).

Migrants in urban areas join informal-sector activities. In Bangladesh, migrants in the city join informal sectors such as the readymade garment sector, rickshaw-pulling, etc. (Rashid, 2013). In Sri Lanka, migrant female workers join the export-processing industries (Ranathunga, 2011). In Nepal, migrant workers in the city mainly work in carpet factories and readymade garment factories (Adhikari, 2013).

Migrants from rural areas have lower skill and educational levels compared to urban–urban migrants. The urban–ward migrants in Pakistan, especially urban–urban migrants, are highly educated, and the NSS shows that urban–urban migrants in India are better educated. Rural–urban migration in Bangladesh and India is more from the less educated societal groups. They generally occupy the lower segment of the labour market.

In India, work participation among migrants is comparatively higher than among non-migrants. The participation of females in the labour market is also higher among migrants (Srivastava, 2012a).

According to the Bangladesh Census 2011, a majority of migrant workers are engaged in the non-agricultural sector. There is evidence of migration for work in various sectors and industries in the city. Surplus labour from rural areas migrates to cities to work in the readymade garment sector, rickshaw-pulling or construction (Afsar, 2003; Rashid, 2013). In Nepal, rural to rural migration is mainly dominated by the flow of agricultural labour. Migrants to cities are engaged with work in various informal sectors.

Social networks play an important role in facilitating internal migration. But labour intermediaries also play a very significant role in mobilizing migrant workers for a number of industries. These brokers (labour contractors) facilitate migration by offering advances to the workers and arranging for their transportation. In many cases, they are also responsible for supervising the workers at the workplaces and making payments to them. Such arrangements are very common in India in brick kilns, construction, quarries, mining, garments and textiles, salt pans and a host of other industries (Srivastava, 2005).

Migration directly impacts employment and labour markets in the source areas and impacts the income, assets, and expenditure of households (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003). Internal migration also has significant links with development, both in source areas – through remittance inflows, increase in investment, knowledge flows and skill enhancement – and in destination areas, principally through labour market impacts (Srivastava, 2011a). Migration is also a coping strategy for the poorest migrants. In India, people from the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh and the lowest caste, *Musahar*, of Bihar, use seasonal migration as an important coping strategy (Deshingkar and Akter, 2009). Seasonal migrants in the severely *monga*-affected region of north-west Bangladesh migrate to survive during the lean season (Khandker, et al., 2012).

Out-migration reduces unemployment and underemployment. This is because it takes place from areas with labour surpluses (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003). This is the case for Sri Lankan rural–urban migration to export-processing zones. The migration of female workers to cities also reduces unemployment in rural areas (Ranathunga, 2011). As a result of out-migration, some labour tightening may take place. This can have an impact on wages and participation of women. It may also improve the decision-making roles of women. Sometimes, however, these impacts can be negative. Large scale out-migration can affect the women and elderly left behind. In Nepal, for example, the workload of women left behind has increased (Maharjan et al., 2012). In Bhutan, due to large scale out-migration from rural areas, there are reports of shortages of farm labour (Sharma et al., 2013). There is some evidence of children being drawn into work in the absence of male workers, and also when entire households migrate (Srivastava, 2011a).

Migrant households and source areas benefit from remittance inflows. A very large proportion of internal migrants send remittances to their family members. The remittances are generally used for household consumption, improvement in housing, education of children, and farm expenditure (Srivastava et al., 2014). In countries like India, Bangladesh and Nepal, domestic remittance inflows are an important source of income to migrant households. In the case of India, a considerable portion<sup>7</sup> of rural households receive remittances, and estimated total internal remittance is higher than international remittances (Srivastava, 2011a). These remittance inflows lead to a reduction in poverty (Deshingkar and Akter, 2009; Srivastava et al., 2014). But there is debate about whether they also cause growing inequality between migrant and non-migrant households (Deshingkar, 2006). In Bangladesh, remittances constitute a considerable share of income in rural areas, but this sometimes results in higher intra-village inequality (Afsar, 2003).

The impact of migrants on the destination labour market is very important. The migration of labourers eases the labour supply at destination and makes accumulation and growth possible. Employers prefer migrant labour which is flexible, easy to control, and cheaper. Migrants generally work in the informal sector, often in jobs which local labourers are reluctant to take. Sometimes, migration is the exit mechanism from the existing social hierarchy.

However, migrant workers are denied basic rights and decent working conditions. Their wages are often below those of local labourers and lower than the legal minimum wage (Srivastava, 2011a, 2012a; Deshingkar and Akter, 2009). In many places, migrant workers work in subhuman conditions and in violation of labour laws (Srivastava, 2011a). In urban Bangladesh, women workers in the readymade garment industry are forced to work for long hours. There are often no hygienic toilet facilities for them (Rashid, 2013). Working conditions in the construction sector – the other sector where Bangladeshi rural–urban female migrants work – are similar.

Poor migrant workers lack access to entitlements at destination. This has an effect on their living conditions and their health. They lack proper housing and are concentrated in slum areas of urban centres in India (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003; Srivastava, 2011a, 2012a) and Bangladesh (Rashid, 2013). They face many health issues due to unsafe and unhygienic conditions at work and in living areas. Their children also face serious health problems from unhygienic slum areas and are deprived of basic educational facilities (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003; Srivastava, 2012b).

In the absence of proper urban planning and development, rural–urban migration creates pressure on facilities in destination areas. In Bangladesh, poor rural–urban migrants are forced to live in unhygienic slum clusters and deprived of basic facilities (Rashid, 2013; Bhagat, 2012; Marshall and Rahman, 2013). India's urbanization is also thought to be exclusionary towards poor migrants. Large urban centres deny the basic rights of poor migrants (Kundu, 2009; Bhagat, 2012). Policy-makers view internal migration negatively. There is a tendency to restrict internal migration flows, especially to cities. India has no direct restrictions on migration like China's *hukou*<sup>8</sup> system, but there are indirect measures. Poor migrants deprived of residential proof at destination cannot use facilities available to Below Poverty Line (BPL) families (Deshingkar, 2006; Srivastava, 2012b).

<sup>7</sup> According to NSS 55<sup>th</sup> round (1999–2000) estimates, 89 per cent of households with an out-migrant member received remittances. According to estimates from the NSS 64<sup>th</sup> round (2007–08), 33.9 per cent did so (Srivastava, 2011a).

<sup>8</sup> *Hukou* is a residential permit system in China which is linked to the different entitlements (including social security benefits) provided by urban local bodies.

## 5. Links between internal and international migration

The relationship between the different categories of migrants has not been systematically studied in the past due to lack of data. The broad conclusion that follows from the evidence examined in the previous sections is the following: if individuals have the propensity to move because of their personal characteristics or circumstances, if the advantages that they foresee in moving to specific destinations exist, and if labour demand in destination areas also views migrant workers as an advantage, the type of segmentation that is observed between internal and international migration due to cost, regulatory or institutional barriers may become only a matter of degree. The main distinguishing features between internal and international migrants are regulatory barriers, skills, financial endowments, social networks and access to other recruitment channels. Migrants who have low skills and limited social networks, who suffer from lack of information about the labour markets, who are engaged through intermediaries and employed at the lower end of the labour market are likely to suffer from a strikingly similar range of deprivations, whether they migrate internally or internationally.

Almost all international migration is subject to regulatory barriers in the form of immigration controls. However, as long as such migration is attractive it will attract a premium and will spawn an industry (recruiters, traffickers) that will facilitate legal or illegal migration. In the case of internal migration, although regulatory barriers exist only in a few countries, migrants may still have to pay (bear a cost) to acquire entitlements to basic services which are available to non-migrants. However, these costs are incurred post-migration. The issue of international migration may therefore boil down to first, whether potential migrants have access to networks and recruitment channels, and second, whether they can meet the higher costs of migration.

International and internal migration take place through a variety of channels: organized contractor mediation/recruitment; social networks; firm-based networks; direct recruitment/personal knowledge. The relative importance of these channels varies across industries, destinations, and worker characteristics.

In the low-skill segment, workers may first use social networks to migrate internally or across borders (if such migration is affordable), gain experience and skills and accumulate savings, and then use organized labour mediation or social networks to migrate inter-regionally. Workers may also be recruited directly from their home areas by organized recruiters and their sub-agents, with whom they make contact. Quite often workers in the sub-continent migrate to metropolitan cities where they work for a period of time, acquire savings, confidence and skills and then use social networks to contact recruiters. Because of internal restrictions, particularly on female migration, it is not unusual for Nepalese female workers to migrate to India and then contact organized recruiters to migrate to other countries.

Both social networks and organized recruitment create (spatially) segmented networks, and they are not equally accessible to a set of workers wishing to make a choice between internal and international migration. Organized recruitment networks are spatially concentrated and information spillovers are also spatial in character. Over time, these can reinforce each other, resulting in an increase in international migration from a given area. But depending on the characteristics of demand and supply, organized recruiters and workers may seek each other out, creating new segments. This can be seen from the trends in regional migration in India, where over time migration from eastern states (Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) has overtaken the early prominent starters (Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu) (Srivastava and Debnath, forthcoming).



Issues of channels of migration and their regulation figure prominently in the policy agenda of South Asian countries in their bid to prevent exploitation of workers and to promote safe migration. These steps are reviewed in Section 8.1.1.

At the high-skill end, the modes of recruitment and migration patterns of workers are quite different. Recruitment and hiring of such workers may take place through recruitments firms or directly by the employing firms, and workers may be recruited by firms within the country and then firms abroad; or they may be recruited by domestic or foreign firms with global labour requirements and then placed abroad, either immediately or after some time. Workers' and firms' concerns at the higher skill end are more congruous and relate to how they can navigate immigration quotas, rather than costs or access to recruitment channels.

The second major element which distinguishes internal and international migration is the element of cost. The cost of migration for highly skilled migrants is generally small in relation to their current or expected earnings, or is borne by employers. By contrast, the cost of migration is large for low-skilled migrants from South Asia, particularly those migrating to the Middle East. Some recruiters adopt unscrupulous practices and charge inordinately high fees under one head or another, due to the high premium that workers place on such migration. International migrants raise these amounts from savings and/or by borrowing. Several governments in South Asia have now set up financial organizations which provide loans to migrants to meet the (legal) costs of migration (see Section 8.1.2).

Costs are comparatively small for internal migrants, and in the case of organized recruitment they are met by the recruiters and deducted from wages (in India, the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act ordains that the transport costs of interstate migrants be met by recruiters/employers and are in addition to wages).

As mentioned earlier, skills demand and supply can also be a major issue in migration. The skill requirements of workers varies between sectors/industries and destinations. From the empirical evidence discussed earlier, it can be seen that the skilled component of South Asian labour export within the region, as well as to the Middle East and South-East Asia is small, whereas it is larger for other countries in the OECD. These countries are able to tap into the skilled-worker pool in South Asia, either by drawing a student population to their countries or by importing workers who have received education and training in their home countries. The recruitment process is required to match the supply/skill characteristics with the demand. This is less of a problem at low skill levels, but is a greater barrier to migration when higher skill levels are required. The greater entry of Indian emigrants into the technical workforce in OECD countries is due to the higher skill training levels provided in India. This can also be seen at middle skill levels, in professions such as nursing and para-medical support. The national and international markets both have a demand for such skills, and individuals can compete for the more attractive segment of the job markets in these professions. If training is provided at the lower skill levels also, it is very likely that it will impact favourably on job conditions.

Thus, despite the differences there are obvious links between internal and international migration which can be configured into national policies.

## 6. Internal and international migration – global framework

The ILO and the UN have adopted a number of conventions and recommendations to protect international migrant workers against exploitation and discriminatory treatment, and protect their right to social security, etc. In addition to international labour standards, migrant workers and members of their families are protected by the nine UN core international human-rights instruments, which apply to all persons irrespective of their nationality. One of these is the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1990 and entered into force in 2003.

There are other mechanisms within the UN system relevant to the protection of migrant workers, including the special procedures mandates of the UN Human Rights Council, and most notably the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants.

The major conventions and protocols of ILO and UN on migrant workers are listed in Box 1.

### BOX 1: MAJOR CONVENTIONS AND PROTOCOLS OF ILO AND UN ON MIGRANTS

ILO Conventions	UN Conventions	UN Protocols
<b>Convention 97</b> Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, 1990  (adopted by UN General Assembly Resolution 45/158 of 18 December 1990)	Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000
<b>Convention 143</b> Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975		Protocol against the smuggling of the Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational crime.
<b>Convention 181</b> Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997		
<b>Convention 189</b> Domestic Workers Convention, 2011		

Source: Timothy and Sasikumar, 2012.

The UN and ILO have additionally tried to provide the following rights to migrant workers in a foreign country through their conventions and protocols:

- Right to Migrate and Right to information on Safe Migration [UN Convention, 1990 and Convention 97 convention of ILO, 1949 (Article 1(a) and Article 9(b))]
- Right against Exploitation by Private Employment Agencies [Convention 181 of ILO, 1997]
- Right to Social Security of Migrants [Convention 97 of ILO, 1949]
- Right to Privacy of Migrants [Convention 181 of ILO, 1949 (Article 4)]
- Right against Trafficking, Smuggling and Illegal Migration by two UN Protocols
- Right to Decent Work of Domestic Workers [Convention 189 of ILO, 2011 (Article, 5)]
- Right to Unionize and Collective Bargaining [Convention 87 of ILO – Freedom of Association]



and Protection of Right to Organize, 1948; Convention 97 of ILO, 1949 (Article 6:1(b) – Right of Migrants to Unionize and Join Trade Unions]

- Right against Abusive Conditions [Convention 143 of ILO, 1975]

The main aim of these conventions and protocols is to provide freedom, dignity and protection to all migrants in their destination countries.

Migrant workers can claim their rights through these international legal instruments only if the respective country from which they have emigrated has ratified the conventions and protocols of UN and ILO. *No country in South Asia has ratified the ILO conventions on migrant workers.* However, the UN Convention was ratified by Sri Lanka in 1996, and was signed by Bangladesh in 1998. In South Asia, the two UN Protocols have been ratified only by India (in 2011), and were signed by Sri Lanka (in 2000). The lack of awareness of the value of conventions, the misconception that the UN Convention of 1990 accords too many rights to migrants, and fear of losing labour markets in destination countries are the main reasons for the reluctance of many South Asian countries to ratify the ILO and UN conventions and protocols (Wickramasekara, 2011).

Nevertheless, international multilateral organizations have been active on a number of fronts to ensure a better deal for migrants in and from the region. UN Women is playing an important role in South Asian countries in ensuring the rights of international female migrants from the region. It has helped the Government of Nepal to formulate the Foreign Employment Regulation, 2008, in which there are several provisions for ensuring the rights of female labourers migrating abroad for employment. In collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh, it is playing an important role by providing skills-upgrade training to Bangladeshi women seeking employment in foreign countries (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012).

The IOM, established as an inter-governmental organization in 1951, also plays an important role for migrants by assisting them with secure, reliable and cost-effective international migration. Except for Bhutan, which is an observer country, all other South Asian countries are members of the IOM. It has managed to organize a regional consultative process on management of overseas employment and contractual labour from Asian countries, known as the Colombo Process (see Section 7).

UNESCO, in collaboration with a large range of partners, including intergovernmental organizations, civil-society groups and universities, addresses the implications of the movement of people within its fields of competence and contributes to a policy environment conducive to the social integration and inclusion of migrants, drawing on relevant human rights principles and standards.

The Global Forum on Migration and Development, the World Bank and DFID have also played a significant role in highlighting issues related to migrants in South Asian countries.

## 7. Regional cooperation for policies related to migrants in South Asia

The main objective of the Colombo Process, a ministerial-level consultative forum initiated by the IOM in 2003, is to share experiences and promote dialogue with destination countries (Wickramasekara, 2011). The forum involves Asia's top migrant-sending countries, such as Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam. It has met five times: in Colombo in 2003, Manila in 2004, Bali in 2005, Dhaka in 2011 and Colombo in 2016. In the first three meetings, the main concerns were irregular migration and its consequences of vulnerable and abusive conditions for irregular migrants and exploitation and harassment of women migrants in low-skilled and low-wage sectors of work. The forum has made many recommendations to ensure the human rights of migrant labour. However, its achievements have so far been modest. In the Dhaka declaration of the Colombo Process (2011) it was recommended that the specific needs and concerns of vulnerable groups of migrant workers, especially women domestic workers, low-skilled and low-wage workers, be addressed effectively (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012).

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is another platform which focuses on migration and labour issues. It adopted a Social Charter in 2004 that emphasizes enhancing cooperation in the social development and well-being of the people of Asia, and managing carefully, diligently and effectively the process of internal migration and issues of homelessness, poverty, unemployment, etc. However, Khatri (2007) has argued that the charter is not very effective in solving the problems related to migrants because it does not include commitments from SAARC countries to respect the ILO core labour standards.

The South Asia Labour Migration Governance Project (SALM), a three-year project funded by the ILO and EU, was launched in 2013 to manage migration from India, Nepal and Pakistan to three Gulf countries – Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. SALM provides reliable information to prospective migrant workers on job opportunities, pre-departure training, portability of skills, better recruitment services and knowledge of protections during employment (ILO, 2014).

## 8. Existing policy approach towards internal and international migration in South Asia

Although an integrated approach towards migration (both internal and international) has begun to develop in some South Asian countries, international migration has received much greater attention and visibility in the region, and has been addressed through a range of policy measures. We deal here with the existing policy framework on the three types of migration streams (international or inter-regional, intra-regional or cross-border, and internal), and begin by focusing on international migration.

### 8.1 Policy approaches towards international migration

#### 8.1.1 Evolution of institutional and regulatory frameworks

Most South Asian countries framed their existing legislation related to international migration after repealing the Emigration Act, 1922, which they were following due to their colonial heritage until the 1980s (Wickramasekara, 2011). Following the oil price boom in the Gulf countries and subsequent demand for labour in the early 1970s, the migration of labour from South Asian countries to the Gulf increased sharply. Therefore, every South Asian country started to frame

regulations related to international migration. Most formulated legislation on migration in the 1980s, and laws have since been amended from time to time to close loopholes.

Some South Asian countries have framed fairly comprehensive policies addressing several aspects of international migration. Others are still evolving the appropriate institutional, regulatory and promotional framework for such migration.

Sri Lanka enacted a National Labour Migration Policy in 2008. This policy focuses on enhancing the benefits of labour migration for migrant workers and their families, and working towards the fulfilment and protection of human and labour rights of all migrant workers. Apart from its National Labour Migration Policy, Sri Lanka has several other policies to promote and protect migrant workers, such as the Migration Health Policy, Technical and Vocational Training Policy for Migrant Workers, National Decent Work Policy, etc. (IPSS, 2013). Pakistan introduced a National Emigration Policy in 2009 which acknowledges the lack of an information base on different aspects of emigration from Pakistan, such as the high cost involved in emigration, the need for upgrading skills and language proficiency to meet foreign demand, effective use of remittances, irregular emigration, protection of the rights of emigrants, lack of proper access to health and preventive services for HIV, and information before departure and after arrival of emigrants (Jan, 2010).

In India, all matters related to migration and welfare of migrants are based on the Emigration Act, 1983, which replaced the earlier act of 1922 (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003; Timothy and Sasikumar, 2012). In Bangladesh, the Overseas Employment Act, 2011 follows all rights-based conventions of ILO and UN (Timothy and Sasikumar, 2012). The Ministry of Expatriates and Overseas Employment promotes overseas employment and the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) protects the interest of emigrants and provides guidance and vocational skill training (Islam, n.d.,b). The Bangladesh Overseas Employment and Service Ltd. (BOESL) provides consulting services and recruiting agencies for overseas-employment seekers (Khatri, 2007).

In Sri Lanka, matters relating to migration and remittances are looked after by Ministry of Employment and Labour. It is supported by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), which regulates overseas migration (Wickramasekara, 2010; Khatri, 2007). The SLBFE Act No. 21, 1985, amended by Act No. 4, 1994, is applicable to all migrant workers (Timothy and Sasikumar, 2012).

In Pakistan, the Emigration Ordinance, 1979 and the Emigration Rules, 1979 regulate emigration, overseas employment and recruiting agencies. Section 8 of the Emigration Ordinance manages the recruitment agencies and processes and protects workers' interests. The National Emigration Policy 2009 now protects overseas workers' interests (ibid). The Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment manages migration of private-sector workers, while the Overseas Employment Corporation manages public-sector migration (Khatri, 2007).

Nepal's Foreign Employment Regulation 2068 (2008) takes a rights-based approach to migration. It opposes all gender discrimination and promotes women's migration (Timothy and Sasikumar, 2012). Afghanistan has no strong legislative framework to regulate labour migration. Regulations for Sending Afghan Workers Abroad (2005) deal more with obligations and less with workers' rights.

The current status with respect to regulatory institutions and laws is summarized in Box 2.

**BOX 2: RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES AND RELEVANT LEGISLATION/REGULATIONS RELATED TO EMIGRATION\***

Country	Responsible Agencies	Relevant Legislation/Regulations
Bangladesh	Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE), The Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET)	Overseas Employment and Migration Act, 2013 (Replacing Emigration Ordinance, 1982)
Sri Lanka	Ministry of Foreign Employment (MoFE), Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Agency (SLFEA)	SLBFE Act no.4, 1994 (amended in 2009) (amended from SLBFE Act no.21, 1985)
Pakistan	Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE)	Emigration Ordinance, 1979 (amended in 1994 and 2009) and Emigration Rules, 1979
Nepal	Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE) Foreign Employment Promotion Board (FEPB) Foreign Employment Tribunal (FET)	Foreign Employment Regulation, 2064, 2007 (Replacing Foreign Employment Act, 2042, 1985) Foreign Employment Regulation, 2008
India	Ministry of External Affairs, Department of Overseas Indian Affairs, Protectorate of Emigrants	The Emigration Act, 1983

\*Compiled from the websites of the ministries of the respective countries, [www.colomboprocess.org](http://www.colomboprocess.org), and Wickramasekara (2011).

Despite the improvements in institutional structure and legislation related to emigration, initiatives relating to migrant workers from this region suffer from a lack of integration between the different ministries and departments which deal with the issues of migrant workers working abroad (Wickramasekara, 2011).

### 8.1.2 Tackling the recruitment process and the cost of international migration

Measures to regulate recruiting agencies and reduce the cost of migration have been adopted by most of the sending countries in South Asia (Wickramasekara, 2011). Given the importance of inter-regional migration, especially low-skilled migration to GCC countries, governments have taken measures to reduce the hardship of potential migrants in seeking initial resources to cover costs. Sri Lanka provides loan for overseas migrants (Wickramasekara, 2010). Bangladesh has set up the Expatriates' Welfare Bank (*Probashi Kallyan Bank*) to promote easy loans for overseas migration (Islam, n.d.,a). The government of Nepal has started a 'Free Visa Free Ticket' policy (zeroing the cost of migration) for Gulf countries and Malaysia, which came into effect from July 8, 2016. This policy obligates employers from labour-receiving countries to bear the costs of visa processing and the air ticket of migrant workers. The government of Nepal has established a Labour Bank to provide subsidized loans to potential migrants, covering the departure cost and a remittance account (see Country Profile on [www.colomboprocess.org](http://www.colomboprocess.org)).

### 8.1.3 Protection of conditions of work and rights of migrant workers abroad

Most of the countries in South Asia have taken measures to protect labour migrants overseas. The focus is on international migration, especially migrant labour in Gulf countries.

Sri Lanka and India have negotiated with destination countries to increase the wages of migrant labourers. Sri Lanka has raised the minimum wages for housemaids emigrating to United Arab Emirates. India is also pushing for higher minimum wages for its workers in Gulf countries (Wickramasekara, 2011). Sri Lanka has taken many steps to promote and protect emigrants, including setting up a parliamentary committee to look into the complaints and grievances of migrant workers. The Indian government has taken several policy measures for protection and welfare of Indian workers working abroad. Since 2007, foreign employers must deposit US\$2,500 as a bank guarantee when hiring a female domestic worker for Gulf countries. The government has started the Overseas Workers Resource Centre, which operates a 24-hours/7-days-a-week helpline in vernacular languages. An emergency mobile app known as 'MigCall' has also been launched for Gulf migrants in distress.

### 8.1.4 Safe migration of female workers

Protection of female domestic workers is also a common concern for all South Asian countries. As discussed earlier, countries like India, Bangladesh and Nepal have imposed bans on emigration of female domestic workers many times in the past, but these were later lifted. The age restriction on female domestic workers still prevails in most South Asian countries to protect them from exploitation in destination countries. Sri Lanka is the only country in the region which promotes female migration to Gulf countries as domestic workers.

The restriction on female migrants in South Asian countries migrating abroad before reaching a certain age can also promote female migration through illegal channels (Agriteam Canada Consulting Ltd, 2002). The SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking of Women and Children for Prostitution, signed in 2002, is a welcome step to control illegal and undocumented migration in South Asia through trafficking (Khatari, 2007).

### 8.1.5 Bilateral agreements with destination countries

South Asian countries have signed several bilateral agreements with destination countries to protect the rights of their migrant citizens working in the respective countries. Bilateral agreements include labour agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) signed between origin and destination countries. India has signed MoUs with United Arab Emirates (2006), Kuwait and Qatar (2007), Oman (2008), Bahrain and Malaysia (2009) and Saudi Arabia (2014).<sup>9</sup> Sri Lanka has signed MoUs on labour migration with Jordan (2006), United Arab Emirates (2007), Qatar, Libya and Bahrain (2008), Republic of Korea (2004, 2010); Italy (2011), Oman (2012, 2014), Kuwait and Seychelles (2012) and Saudi Arabia (2014).<sup>10</sup> Pakistan has signed MoUs on overseas employment with Qatar (1978, 2008), Kuwait (1995), Jordan (2006), Malaysia (2006), United Arab Emirates (2006), Republic of Korea (2008) and Bahrain (2014).<sup>11</sup> Nepal has signed MoUs with Qatar (2005, 2009), Republic of Korea and United Arab Emirates (2007), Bahrain (2008), Japan

<sup>9</sup> Available at [http://www.colomboprocess.org/about-the-colombo-process/members#ChildverticalTab\\_17|ChildverticalTab\\_15](http://www.colomboprocess.org/about-the-colombo-process/members#ChildverticalTab_17|ChildverticalTab_15), accessed 8 April 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Available at [http://www.colomboprocess.org/about-the-colombo-process/members#ChildverticalTab\\_17|ChildverticalTab\\_110](http://www.colomboprocess.org/about-the-colombo-process/members#ChildverticalTab_17|ChildverticalTab_110), accessed 8 April 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Available at [http://www.colomboprocess.org/about-the-colombo-process/members#ChildverticalTab\\_17|ChildverticalTab\\_18](http://www.colomboprocess.org/about-the-colombo-process/members#ChildverticalTab_17|ChildverticalTab_18), accessed 8 April 2017.

(2009). The government of Nepal is also in the process of signing labour agreements with Oman, Lebanon and Malaysia.<sup>12</sup>

### **8.1.6 Active labour-market policies: labour-market information systems, pre-departure training and skill promotion**

Many countries in the region have adopted active policy initiatives to promote awareness among aspirants (Sri Lanka and Bangladesh), provide pre-departure training (Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), and set up agencies in the major destination countries for workers' safety (Khatri, 2007; Wickramasekara, 2010, 2011).

Skill development and setting up labour-market information systems to help employers and potential job seekers has also been undertaken in some countries.

Bangladesh has formulated a National Skill Development Policy to improve the skill composition of migrant workers seeking overseas employment. It now promotes online registration of migrant workers and has created a data bank of registered job seekers. It has also issued a smart card to all migrant workers stores their personal and job-related information.

The Government of India issues smart cards to first-time migrants, containing details of the passport, work-contract data, insurance, etc. (Timothy and Sasikumar, 2012). It has also started an 'e-migrate' system, an online portal for emigration clearance for ECR (Emigration Check Required) countries. India has also launched a Skill India Mission and is setting up a Labour Market Information System which caters to both internal and potential international migrants and aims to provide job seekers with certified and marketable skills which meet international standards.

### **8.1.7 Social security: migrant workers, families of migrants and returnees**

The ILO Social Security Convention, 1952<sup>13</sup> (No. 102) and the Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118) identify various social security measures and provide for equal treatment for foreign migrant workers. Most labour-sending countries in the region are considering initiatives for social security measures for emigrants. In general, two kinds of initiatives have been taken. The first are bilateral, multilateral or regional Social Security Agreements (SSAs) with destinations. Bilateral SSAs protect workers by exempting them from making double contributions to social security by providing them with a portability option for social security benefits to which they have contributed at their place of origin. India has signed bilateral SSAs with Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Republic of Korea, etc. The other kind of initiatives are unilateral measures taken by origin or destination countries. In the absence of bilateral and multilateral or regional SSAs, labour-sending and receiving countries take unilateral measures to enhance migrant workers' access to social security. For example, many countries in South Asia have introduced insurance schemes to protect migrant workers working overseas (Timothy, 2013). The Indian government has introduced two insurance schemes for ECR category, i.e. *Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana* (PBBY) and *Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Suraksha Yojana* (MGPSY). The government of Pakistan has had a compulsory insurance scheme for emigrant workers since

<sup>12</sup> Available at [http://www.colomboprocess.org/about-the-colombo-process/members#ChildverticalTab\\_17|ChildverticalTab\\_17](http://www.colomboprocess.org/about-the-colombo-process/members#ChildverticalTab_17|ChildverticalTab_17), accessed 8 April 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Nine kinds of social security are identified in the ILO Social Security Convention, 1952 (No. 102): medical care; sickness benefit; unemployment benefit; old-age benefit; employment injury benefit; family benefit; maternity benefit; invalidity benefit; and survivors' benefit (Timothy, 2013).



1982. In Sri Lanka, every emigrant who is registered with the SLBFE has insurance coverage for illness, accident, injury or death which ranges from Sri Lankan Rupees 50,000 to 200,000 (US\$330–1,300). The Foreign Employment Promotion Board of Nepal provides life insurance and access to medical facilities for migrant workers and their families. It also provides financial support and compensation in case of the death or physical disability of migrant workers. (See country profile on [www.colomboprocess.org](http://www.colomboprocess.org) and websites of respective Board/ bureau).

### 8.1.8 Promoting formal financial intermediation

As mentioned earlier, a large proportion of remittances from overseas migrants comes to South Asian countries through informal networks known as *hawala* or *hundi* transactions, which have close links with illegal cross-border transactions and raise security concerns for South Asian countries. Migrants from South Asian countries use these informal remittance transfer networks because of the lack of proper institutional frameworks for banking and investment, especially in rural areas, as well as the high transfer costs. To address this issue, countries in South Asia such as Nepal, India and Sri Lanka have promoted nationalized and legal transfer and banking systems.

Some countries also promote financial institutions or schemes which cater to migrants' need for financial intermediation. The Expatriates Welfare Bank (*Probashi Kallyan Bank*) established in 2010 by the Bangladeshi government, apart from providing low-interest loans to aspirant workers for migrating as mentioned earlier, also provides financial assistance to returning migrants to invest in productive activities (Islam, n.d.,a).

## 8.2 Policies related to cross-border migration in South Asia

A large volume of cross-border migration in South Asian countries is 'illegal', 'undocumented' or 'clandestine' migration, which is a major concern in this region. The national agencies in South Asian countries do not have proper estimates related to cross-border migration, which can range from simple border crossings to organized trafficking and smuggling of people (Wickramasekara, 2011). Cross-border clandestine migration leads to exploitation (including sexual exploitation) and the violation of migrants' human rights. Although it is one of the agenda items discussed regularly by regional platforms such as SAARC, no comprehensive policy has been formulated by South Asian countries to curb illegal and undocumented cross-border migration.

There is an urgent need to recognize and regulate cross-border illegal/undocumented migration, but the close cultural, social, historical and economic ties between countries in the region should also be taken into consideration before formulating any law.

## 8.3 Policies on internal migration in South Asian countries

As discussed, internal migration in South Asian countries is a survival strategy for poor migrants. The volume of internal migration in this region is very large and provides a development impetus to rural areas through remittance flows and knowledge transfers; and to urban areas by providing labour for industries and other informal sectors.

In comparison to international migration, there is a dearth of policies related to internal migration in South Asian countries. Most countries have a range of policies related to emigration, but not a single one has a comprehensive policy on internal migration. The lack of policy measures in this region for internal migrants, especially seasonal migrants, has been recognized by different scholars (Gill, 2003; Srivastava, 2012a; Srivastava, et al., 2014).



Each country has labour laws covering a range of subjects, from freedom of collective bargaining and formation of unions to provision of social security benefits (including maternity protection, occupational safety and health) to labourers working in different sectors, but there is no specific law which focuses exclusively on migrant labour.

Migrant workers face movement-specific problems due to patterns of recruitment, labour-market segmentation, lack of social protection at destination place, and the absence of migrant-specific policies in most South Asian countries, which make their lives more difficult.

Rural–urban migration has its roots in lack of livelihood opportunities in rural areas and in rural–urban disparities. Although it is largely an unplanned process not linked to planned urbanization, it is also true that planners and policy-makers do not recognize the contribution of these migrants to growth and urban development, and do not prioritize inclusionary urban development. Poor migrant workers are forced to live in slums and squatter settlements without proper housing, water supply, sanitation and other basic civic amenities (Afsar, 2003; Acharya, 2010; Bhagat, 2012). It is evident through studies (Dupont, 2008; Afsar, 2003) that eviction and demolition of slums and squatter settlements is a common practice followed by planners and urban policy-makers in most South Asian countries. In India, around 200 slum cites were demolished in Delhi between 1990 and 2000, and around 64,600 households were relocated to the peripheral areas of the city without any facilities (Dupont, 2008). Most of these households were migrants from different parts of India who had migrated to Delhi in search of better livelihoods. A similar kind of story is found in Karachi, Pakistan, where at the time of military government many squatter settlements were bulldozed and the migrant population living in these settlements was shifted to storm-water-drain lands (UN-Habitat, 2003 as cited in Ansari, 2009). In the case of Bangladesh, Afser (2003) mentions that poor migrants living in slums or squatter settlements suffer from the constant threat of eviction.

Studies have found that poor migrants in urban centres of South Asian countries generally do not have access to the entitlements provided by governments as social security measures for the poor, because most often they lack the documents necessary to access them, such as identity cards, proof of residence, etc. (Srivastava, 2012b; Afser, 2003). In India, the central and state governments have taken some steps to extend the benefits of entitlements to migrants living in urban centres (Srivastava, 2012a, 2012b). But there is no integrated and comprehensive policy framework which can solve the various problems faced by internal migrants.

India is the only country in South Asia which has distinct legislation on internal migration, the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act 1979, which applies to every establishment/contractor employing five or more inter-state migrant workers, and provides for regulation of recruitment and working conditions of migrant workers. But this law has been found to be toothless because of poor implementation (de Haan, 2011). Most inter-state migrants in India are not aware of the law and its features. However, the Indian government has made provisions for the education of migrant children in its Right to Education Act. More importantly, the recently launched Skill India Mission has begun to come to grips with the problem of providing skills to its increasingly mobile workforce. The impetus given to financial inclusion has also made it possible for many recent migrants to open bank accounts. But issues remain regarding the inclusivity of the rapidly developing architecture of identification and financial inclusion (Srivastava, 2012b; Khandelwal et al., 2012; Chandrasekhar, 2014). The implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in rural areas in India is also expected to impact migration indirectly by reducing distress rural out-migration, especially for males (Mahapatro, 2012, Solinski, 2012).

The provision of credit during the agricultural lean season has proven effective for seasonal migrants in *monga*-affected regions in Bangladesh (Khandker et al., 2012). Therefore, introducing micro-credit institutions in rural areas can be effective in reducing distress migration in the agricultural lean season in South Asian countries.

It is evident from the above discussion that most South Asian countries lack proper regulations and policies specifically designed to protect internal migrants and to provide them with social security benefits and other entitlements. In the absence of regulations and policies, poor internal migrants remain one of most vulnerable societal groups in this region. Therefore, it is very important for every South Asian country to formulate a comprehensive policy for internal migrants to protect them from vulnerabilities and livelihood risks.

#### 8.4 Non-governmental organizations and migration<sup>14</sup>

NGOs provide an interface between migrants and policy-makers, giving the issues relating to the former visibility, while at the same time intervening through small-scale interventions which can also become prototypes for large-scale action. They have also formed coalitions and partnerships among themselves to scale up the impact of their interventions.

A large number of NGOs in South Asia work with internal migrants on issues relating to working conditions; urban identity and civic citizenship; registration of workers/issuing ID card; entitlements/social security benefits at the place of destination; education of migrants' children; migrants' health/HIV, etc.; housing and shelter; and knowledge and awareness regarding financial literacy, laws and entitlements. In Nepal, Biswas Nepal and Saathi work against the injustice, exploitation and violence faced by female migrant workers working in restaurants and clubs (entertainment sector), mainly in Kathmandu. In India, Aajeevika Bureau (in Rajasthan and Gujarat), Disha Foundation (in Maharashtra), and American India Foundation (AIF) are engaged in providing a dignified and respected work environment for migrant workers. Aajeevika Bureau and Disha Foundation run special centres for migrants, known respectively as Workers Support and Resource Centres and Migration Resource and Information Centres. These centres provide a variety of services to migrant workers, such as registration, ID cards, skills training for better employment, legal aid, awareness of financial inclusion, and health care. Rajasthan Shram Sarathi Association, in collaboration with Aajeevika Bureau, offers targeted financial services to migrant workers. Disha Foundation has helped migrant workers access rations through the Public Distribution System (PDS) by issuing temporary ration cards at the place of destination. It has set up a transit camp (Night Shelter) with the help of the district administration of Nasik, Maharashtra for seasonal migrant workers (Borhade, 2012).

AIF works in multiple states and has launched many programmes for migrant workers, including the provision of school education for their children. The Centre for Social Knowledge and Action (SETU) (in Gujarat), Janarth (in Maharashtra) and Lokadrusti (Odisha) also implement innovative programmes for the children of migrants. SETU and Lokadrusti run seasonal hostels for the children of migrant workers. Aide et Action works on issues related to the education of migrants' children in collaboration with the governments of India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan. In Bangladesh, Bangaldeshi Ovhibashi Mohila Sramik Association (BOMSA), BRAC and the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) work on migration issues. BOMSA provides skills training to female migrant workers and develops entrepreneurship skills among them. It also raises awareness about HIV. In collaboration with ILO, BRAC has developed an

<sup>14</sup> This section is based on the information provided on the websites of the respective NGOs.

information package for Bangladeshi internal female migrant workers working in the garment industry, at construction sites, rice mills and as domestic help about their rights at work, working conditions, job requirements and social security benefits.

Several NGOs in South Asia work on migrants' health issues, especially HIV. These include the Asian People's Alliance for Combating HIV and AIDS (APACHA) which is a platform of NGOs in India, Bangladesh and Nepal; Aajeevika Bureau and Disha Foundation in India; the AMAL Human Development Network (in Pakistan); and the Migrant Services Centre (MSC) and Community Development Services (CDS) (in Sri Lanka).

A number of organizations in the region work on issues related to cross-border migration. A focal area among several is to protect, prevent, rescue and rehabilitate women and children trafficked through cross-border migration. ABC Nepal, Saathi, Maiti Nepal, Sakti Samuha (in Nepal); Thengamara Mohila Sabuj Sangha (TMSS), Rupantar, BOMSA, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) (in Bangladesh); CHILDLINE India Foundation, Prayas, Bachpan Bachao Andolan, Shakti Vahini, Action Aid and Jan Jagaran Sansthan (in India) are among the main NGOs working on cross-border trafficking. The South Asia Professionals against Trafficking (SAPAT) and South Asia Forum against Human Trafficking (SAFAHT) are the two main collaborations of NGOs, activists and professionals, including lawyers and community workers, which work to increase awareness against trafficking in South Asia region. They also provide assistance to rescued girls and women. Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC) is another a platform formed by NGOs.

The South Asian Regional Trade Union Council (SARTUC) is a regional federation of national-level trade unions of South Asian nations which works for social justice for migrant workers and their equal opportunity to lead a decent life, and for work and choice of employment. It also works to improve their working conditions, social security benefits, health-related facilities and other benefits.

Several NGOs in the region work for the protection of the rights of emigrant workers. They work closely with government and other stakeholders so that governments, both at origin and destination, adopt the international conventions and other best practices for the rights of migrant workers and their families, and formulate better laws for their protection. Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) (across South Asia) and the American Centre for International Labour Solidarity (ACILS) (working in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) are two organizations which provide protection to emigrants at different steps of migration, from pre-departure to return migration. BWI works with trade unions at origin and destination countries to spread awareness against racism and xenophobia. These organizations facilitate the organization of migrant workers and build awareness of workers' rights.

The Pravasi Nepal Coordination Committee (Nepal), Action Network for Migrant workers (ACT FORM) and National Trade Union Federation (Sri Lanka), and RMMRU (Bangladesh) advocate a rights-based approach for emigrants and use specific interventions to build awareness among potential migrants. They also work closely with governments to formulate better laws and regulations for the protection and rights of emigrants by providing them with input from the grass-root level.

Some NGOs provide pre-departure and post-departure training, including awareness about the rights of migrant workers in destination countries so that they can protect themselves against exploitation. They also run programmes for re-integration of returning migrants. Pourakhi (in Nepal); Shikkha Shastha Unnayan Karzakam (SHISUK), BOMSA, BRAC Centre,

WARBE Development Foundation (in Bangladesh); and HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation (in Sri Lanka) are among those organizations which have opened resource centres for migrants to provide counselling, skill training, including language training for destination countries, and information about working conditions, job requirements and rights in destination countries. They also inform migrant families about the proper and development-friendly use of remittances by providing them with financial literacy. Another focus area of these organizations is return migrants.

Since NGOs' actions, by their very nature, are small and specialized, they tend to focus on specific issues and specific segments of workers. But their focus on migrants' rights and protection cuts across migrant status. In addition, many NGOs, especially regional and international trade unions, such as SARTUC, BWI (across South Asia) and ACILS, have used migrant rights and workers' rights as cross-cutting issues to approach the issues of migrant workers in both domestic and international settings. Similarly, other organizations, such as RMMRU in Bangladesh, have used rights-based frameworks to carry out their interventions and advocacy among migrants across all the different settings (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012)

## 9. Towards a more integrated policy framework for migrant workers

As discussed at the beginning of this paper, national policies on labour migration must be seen in the context of the goals of development and the perspective of migrants themselves. The specific goals of development may vary for different countries, but in general countries strive for high growth and employment, along with improvement in basic indicators of development, reflected in the human development indicators. From the standpoint of migrants, development must also be able to institute the basic rights of migrant workers and their families.

High rates of voluntary emigration allow national citizens to exploit opportunities in the global labour market, and their remittances help to stabilize foreign exchange earnings and speed up investment, although such emigration can also be disruptive to national economies. In order to maximize gains from emigration, countries must take a number of steps in coordination with the destination countries. As seen in Section 8, these policies (covering emigrants and return migrants) have been evolving in South Asian countries, but they cover only *identified* emigrants and returnees, and not *potential emigrants*. Simultaneously, source countries in South Asia have also taken a number of steps to ensure that migrant workers are not exploited in the recruitment process and at destination, and that their basic rights can be respected.

The same proactive response is not available for intra-regional migration in South Asia. Most countries do not have bilateral agreements about the mobility of citizens or workers across borders and are not signatories to the UN and ILO conventions. As a result, poorer cross-border migrants remain undocumented and unprotected and are treated as illegal migrants.

Similarly, countries in South Asia do not accord much priority to the treatment of internal migrants. This is based on the incorrect premise that internal migrants do not suffer any special disadvantage or discrimination. It is only recently that some governments have started formulating specific policies to deal with issues arising from internal migration. The lack of a comprehensive framework on internal migration means that poor migrant workers bear asymmetrically high costs of migration; urban centres suffer from squalor and congestion; countries cannot maximize the gains from migration; and migrants' rights are not protected.

Going beyond a segmented approach to migration, some countries in the region, notably India, have initiated active labour-market policies in the area of skills development and labour-market information which take an integrated approach to internal and international migration.

Based on the analysis in this paper, an integrated policy approach to migration can be spelt out, having the following components:

- A rights-based approach to migrants in all categories (inter-regional, intra-regional and internal), as outlined by the UN and the ILO through their various declarations and conventions. This approach will be based on the principle of non-discrimination between migrants and non-migrants, whether on the basis of origin, ethnicity or other characteristics. This should extend to non-discrimination in matters relating to civic rights, social-sector programmes, social security, housing and other basic amenities, working conditions and wages. Countries in the region should reach bilateral agreements on the status of cross-border migrants, who *en masse* are treated as undocumented and illegal in several cases, and become part of the most vulnerable segment of the population.
- All countries in the region, except Sri Lanka and some of the southern states in India, have a window of opportunity in the form of the demographic dividend. But exploiting this dividend will mean investing in the health, education, and skills of the young, and ensuring that they find employment, whether within the country or outside. A large job potential exists outside the sectors/regions/countries of origin and can be exploited by workers through migration, provided there can be sufficient investment in reducing job-search costs and in skills training. The Government of India now sees the global labour market as an integrated one (both national and international) and is prepared to invest in skills and labour-market information through the Skills Mission. All countries in the region need to formulate an integrated active labour-market policy focusing on education, skills development, labour-market information systems, and other appropriate interventions which can prepare the young labour force to participate productively in national and global labour markets. Such a policy must also address specifically the rampant gender and social discrimination.
- Improving formal financial intermediation can lower the cost of migration and facilitate the transfer of remittances through formal channels, bringing additional resources in the ambit of financial savings and investment. Both India and Bangladesh have taken a number of measures to improve the structure of formal financial intermediation.
- Inclusive urbanization should be a crucial plank of migration policy. Migration contributes to economic development and growth, but can also lead to unplanned urbanization, urban congestion and large-scale deprivation for migrants in terms of housing and basic amenities. These can be addressed through investment in inclusive models of urbanization.

## 10. Conclusion

Internal and international migration is an important part of the livelihood and employment strategy of individuals and households in South Asian countries. The process of internal, cross-border and international migration can be distinguished by the legal status, regulatory issues, cost of migration, type of labour markets at destination and the policy framework. But there are certain threads which link each type of migration to the others.

It is known that a change in administrative boundaries changes the status of a person as migrant. Most South Asian countries have a colonial heritage. Colonial rulers created many boundaries without taking into consideration the ethnicity, socio-cultural similarities and trade routes shared by populations on both sides of the borders. Therefore, cross-border migration between India and Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Bangladesh and India has features common to internal migration. In internal migration as well, when the government decides to create a new state, district or province from the existing one, the migration status of many persons changes. Internal and international migration are also related in the sense that one type of migration can lead to another. More importantly, similar factors act as barriers and drivers for internal as well as international migration, although the intensity of these factors may differ across migration types. Poverty, unemployment and spatial inequality in economic development are the main economic drivers for internal as well as international migration in South Asia. Political unrest in some countries of South Asia, like the Maoist insurgency in Nepal (1996–2006) and armed conflict between Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka, forced thousands of people to migrate towards other areas. South Asia is a region with a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons. Illegal/undocumented cross-border migration is a major issue in this region which leads to trafficking and the sex trade.

Both internal and international migration lead to broadly similar consequences. Internal as well as international migrant workers, who are at lower end of the labour market, lack social security at the place of destination. They suffer from a range of vulnerabilities and deprivations. But both types of migration have positive consequences for employment, poverty reduction and economic growth.

Most of the countries in this region have a range of policies to regulate and protect their emigrants, with varying degrees of coverage and effectiveness, but there are very few policies which focus on internal migrants. India is the only country in the region with a regulation (the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979) to protect its inter-state migrant workers. In the absence of migrant-specific policies, poor migrants living in urban centres face discrimination. Illegal/undocumented cross-border migration in South Asia constitutes a huge volume of migration and is a major cause of trafficking. Unfortunately, there is no dialogue between countries on this issue, and the SAARC, which is a regional platform of South Asian countries, is also not playing an important role in curbing it.

The argument set forward in this paper is that, given the common drivers and consequences of migration, its link with national development, and the need to respect the human rights of migrants, South Asian countries need an integrated rights-based approach towards different types of migration. This will enable them to forge a stronger link between migration, employment, growth and development and help them achieve national and global development targets.



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United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

**New Delhi Office**  
Cluster Office for Bangladesh,  
Bhutan, India, Maldives,  
Nepal and Sri Lanka

## The Gender Youth Migration Initiative (GYM)

The Gender Youth Migration Initiative (GYM) is a UNESCO Online Initiative on Migration, launched in 2013 within the framework of UNESCO's Internal Migration in India Initiative (IMII).

UNESCO GYM ([www.unescogym.org](http://www.unescogym.org)) aims at linking students, researchers, practitioners and decision-makers working on or interested in migration, enabling them to learn from each other and keeping them updated on new research and developments.

The web-portal now contains over 400 resources on migration, internal and international, with a primary focus on India and South Asia. These resources include research, data, policy, best practices, audio-visual, and lists of institutes and networks.

## What are the objectives of UNESCO GYM?

- Raise awareness on the need to prioritize migration, especially internal migration, in policy-making
- Advance knowledge on undocumented research areas on migration in order to support the design of better informed inclusive policies
- Support the development of a coherent legal and policy framework on migration
- Promote existing policies and creative practices that increase inclusion of all sections of the migrant population in society, particularly children and women
- Contribute to changing the negative perception of migrants in society