

Migration Trends in India

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Migration Trends in India: Post-Pandemic Shifts and Emerging Challenges

Context

Migration is a key aspect of India's socio-economic fabric, driven by factors like employment, education, and climate change. The **Covid-19 pandemic** severely disrupted migration patterns, leading to a large-scale **reverse migration** from urban to rural areas. **Five years later**, migration trends have largely returned to pre-pandemic levels, but new challenges such as **climate change, economic transformations, and policy gaps** continue to shape migration in India.

Reverse Migration During Covid-19

- The pandemic triggered an **unprecedented urban-to-rural reverse migration**.
 - Government estimates indicate:
 - **44.13 million** people migrated back to rural areas during the first lockdown.
 - **26.3 million** people returned during the second lockdown.
 - Migrants faced severe hardships, including:
 - **Wage theft, food insecurity, and lack of healthcare and education.**
 - **Discrimination, police brutality, and loss of employment.**
 - **Severe economic strain for families dependent on remittances.**
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Return to Urban Migration and Rural Economic Challenges

- The rural economy struggled to absorb the returning workforce.
 - **MGNREGA** provided temporary relief but failed to sustain long-term employment.
 - **Key drivers of return migration to urban areas:**
 - **Rural distress and low wages.**
 - **Better economic opportunities and urban aspirations.**
 - **Climate change's impact on agriculture and allied sectors**, leading to distress-driven migration (as observed in Odisha by **FAO and IOM studies**).
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Urban Migration Trends and Government Initiatives

- **Urbanization in India is projected to rise, with 40% of the population expected to live in cities by 2026.**
 - Government initiatives encouraging migration for economic growth:
 - **Smart Cities Mission** - Aims to develop **100 cities into modern urban hubs.**
 - **PM Awas Yojana (Urban)** - Provides affordable housing for urban poor, influencing migration patterns.
 - **National Urban Transport Policy** - Improves mobility infrastructure, facilitating economic migration.
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Impact on International Migration

- **Challenges faced by Indian emigrants during the pandemic:**
 - Job losses, wage cuts, and poor living conditions.

- Increased **health risks and travel restrictions**.
- Despite hardships, **remittances remained resilient**, sustaining many Indian households.

Post-Pandemic Migration Trends:

- **GCC countries** remain the primary destination for Indian migrants.
- **Europe** is attracting more skilled professionals, with **Indians being the largest recipients of the EU Blue Card in 2023**.
- **African nations** are emerging as employment hubs in IT, manufacturing, and healthcare, though challenges persist (e.g., **47 Jharkhand workers stranded in Cameroon**).
- **Healthcare workers from India** remain in high demand globally.

Surge in Student Migration:

- **Kerala Migration Survey 2023:**
 - **Student emigrants from Kerala nearly doubled, from 1.29 lakh (2018) to 2.5 lakh (2023).**
- **RBI data:**
 - **Outward remittances for studies abroad peaked at \$3,171 million in 2021.**
- **Geopolitical impact:**
 - The **Russia-Ukraine war** led to a major student crisis.

Challenges in Migration Governance and Policy Interventions

Data Gaps in Migration Governance:

- **2021 Census delay** has hindered accurate assessment of post-pandemic migration trends.

- **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21** recorded a **28.9% migration rate** (a marginal increase from **28.5% in NSS 64th Round, 2007-08**), but does not reflect long-term trends.
- **Lack of a comprehensive Indian emigrant database** limits policy effectiveness.

Social Security and Welfare Measures:

- **e-Shram Portal (2021):**
 - Aims to create a **National Database of Unorganised Workers (NDUW)** and provide social security benefits.
 - However, **lack of awareness and digital access** hinder its success.
- **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme (2018):**
 - Helps migrants access **subsidized food grains** across states.
 - Many **still remain excluded** due to documentation and implementation gaps.

The Kerala Model and Future Policy Directions

- **Kerala Migration Surveys** (conducted every five years since 1998) have significantly improved migration policies.
- Several states, including **Odisha, Goa, Punjab, Gujarat, Jharkhand, and Tamil Nadu**, have replicated this model.
- **Expanding this approach nationwide** would enhance migration governance and improve policy responses.

Conclusion

- **Five years after the Covid-19 crisis**, India's migration landscape is evolving.

- While urban migration is resuming and **international migration patterns are diversifying**, new factors such as **climate change, global economic shifts, and policy interventions** continue to influence movement trends.
- **Strengthening migration governance through data-driven policies and improved social security mechanisms** is essential for ensuring migrant welfare and economic stability.



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