

Plight of Internal Migrants

What is the issue?

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- The plight of “inter-State migrant labourers” is not very different from that of refugees who lack citizenship rights.

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- While the later is been widely debated, the former has slipped focus altogether.

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What is the situation of internal migrants in India?

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- Lack of citizenship is indeed a big blow to people’s lives, as it deprives them of belongingness and some critical rights bestowed by the state.

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- But, even with valid citizenship, a person uprooted from his domestic setting (district or state) might actually lose out many of his citizenry entitlements.

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- Notably, India’s 14 crore “rural-to-urban migrant workers” face a constant sense of anxiety with little control over their special or temporal existence.

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- A large chunk of migrant labourer “shelters and workplaces” are deemed illegal within Indian cities and they are condemned to the margins.

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Does state play in role in the lives of migrants?

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- While the state largely appears to be a dormant player, in reality, state is actually a negative influence on their lives in most cases.

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- It is proactive in allowing the absorption of cheap labour into cities, to serve the bulging demand of the urban middle class.
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- Sometimes these labourers are exploited, required to work below subsistence levels, and reside in subhuman conditions.
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- Further, while state's bureaucratic machinery consciously allows migrants to settle in certain zones, the same area is then perceived as encroachment.
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- The onus of documenting the workers to provide them with public utilities lies on the state, but it consciously works to derecognise them.
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- Further, it conveniently brackets them as "illegal", which in turn, results in them getting labelling them as "criminals" by law enforcement agencies.
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- These actions are clearly to exclude them from the larger democratic stream in order to not dilute the funding and public goods for locals.
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What is the attitude of our city planners?

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- "Smart Cities Mission" of 2015 proposed an investment allocation of Rs. 2,039 billion to convert 99 Indian cities into smart cities.
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- While a mere 8% of the intended projects have been completed so far, forced eviction of slum dwellers have already been recorded in many cities.
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- Interestingly, many smart city proposals identify slums as a "threat" to the city plan outlook, and totally fail to account for migrant labour in the schemes.
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- All this is because, politically, inter-State migrants do not matter at all as their votes do not count in the destination city.
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- Nonetheless, it is desirable for democratic governments to ensure equality, dignity, and provide minimum social security to all people within its territory.
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Source: The Hindu

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