

Status of Inter-State Migrant Workmen in India: Challenges, Legal Framework, and Policy Imperatives

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ABSTRACT

Inter-state migration constitutes a significant and enduring characteristic of India's labour market, reflecting deep-rooted disparities in economic development, employment availability, and living standards across different regions. Millions of workers primarily from economically weaker states migrate to more industrialized or urbanized regions in search of livelihood opportunities. This research undertakes a comprehensive examination of the lived realities of inter-state migrant workmen, shedding light on their demographic patterns, the socio-economic drivers prompting migration, the key industries employing them, and the conditions under which they live and work. It also assesses the legal protections extended to them, particularly under the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979, while critically analysing the persistent challenges in its effective enforcement, especially within the vast informal employment sector where most migrant labourers are concentrated. The study underscores how the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically magnified existing structural weaknesses, leading to mass reverse migration, widespread unemployment, and human distress, thereby exposing the inadequacy of existing institutional and policy responses. Despite the existence of welfare schemes and legal mandates, migrant workers continue to face marginalization, exclusion from social security mechanisms, and administrative neglect due to lack of documentation, poor interstate coordination, and insufficient awareness. In light of these findings, the paper advocates for an integrated, rights-based policy framework that addresses both the economic and social vulnerabilities of migrant workers. This includes strengthening the implementation mechanisms of existing laws, expanding the reach and portability of social welfare schemes, and developing comprehensive, real-time data systems to monitor and support this mobile workforce. Ultimately, the research calls for urgent institutional reforms aimed at ensuring the dignity, security, and inclusion of inter-state migrant labourers in the national developmental agenda.

Keywords: Inter-state migrant workmen, migrant labour, labour migration, informal sector, contract labour, labour rights, labour welfare, social security, occupational safety, Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979, labour law reforms, legal protection, exploitation, human rights, inter-state coordination, COVID-19 migrant crisis, labour market vulnerabilities, policy imperatives, labour mobility, National Database for Unorganised Workers (NDUW)

1. INTRODUCTION

India's internal migration landscape is deeply shaped by its immense socio-cultural diversity, uneven regional development, and entrenched economic disparities. Among the various forms of population movement, inter-state labour migration stands out as a defining force that sustains the country's rapid urbanization and industrial growth. A significant proportion of workers, particularly from underdeveloped and resource-poor states, are compelled to migrate in pursuit of better employment prospects, improved incomes, and a more secure livelihood. These migrant workers often relocate to economically advanced states and urban centres where their labour is crucial in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, services, and domestic work.

While this labour mobility contributes substantially to national economic growth and addresses labour shortages in host regions, it simultaneously exposes migrants to a spectrum of vulnerabilities. These include insecure employment relationships, poor living conditions, inadequate access to health care and social services, and systemic exclusion from legal entitlements. Language barriers, cultural alienation, and lack of identity documentation further exacerbate their marginalization. The precarious nature of their work often informal, unregulated, and underpaid leaves them particularly susceptible to exploitation and human rights violations.

This research paper undertakes a comprehensive examination of the socio-economic realities faced by inter-state migrant workers in India. It analyses the effectiveness of existing legal mechanisms, particularly the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979, and evaluates the extent to which policy frameworks and state-led interventions have succeeded in safeguarding their rights. By drawing attention to both the systemic barriers and fragmented nature of institutional support, the paper identifies critical gaps in governance and implementation.

Moreover, the study presents a set of evidence-based recommendations aimed at creating a more inclusive and rights-oriented framework for migrant labour. It calls for a reimagining of labour and welfare policies to ensure portability of benefits, enhancement of regulatory oversight, creation of reliable data systems, and the promotion of inter-state coordination mechanisms. Ultimately, this paper seeks to inform a strategic policy discourse that balances economic imperatives with the social and legal entitlements of one of India's most mobile and vulnerable working populations.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Migrant Workmen

A migrant workman is typically defined as an individual who relocates temporarily or seasonally from one state to another for employment. The ILO views a migrant worker as someone engaged in a remunerated activity in a country or region of which they are not a national or permanent resident. In the Indian legal context, under the 1979 Act, such workers are those recruited by contractors or establishments from one state to work in another.

2.2 Literature Review

A substantial body of research has established that inter-state migration in India is primarily driven by persistent economic inequality, recurring agrarian crises, and the chronic unavailability of stable employment in rural regions. These structural deficits compel a large segment of the working-age population to seek livelihood opportunities beyond their home states. Empirical evidence drawn from official sources such as the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and decennial Census data highlights that the majority of these migrant workers are absorbed into low-skilled, labour-intensive sectors, including construction, small-scale manufacturing, and domestic services in urban and peri-urban areas.

Despite their critical role in sustaining urban infrastructure and contributing significantly to economic growth, inter-state migrant workers frequently encounter systemic exclusion from formal mechanisms of social security. They are often employed under precarious conditions, lacking written contracts, minimum wages, and occupational safeguards, which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation, wage theft, and abrupt termination.

Seminal works in this field, such as those by Deshingkar and Akter (2009), have pointed out the cyclical and distressed nature of migration, while Srivastava (2011) has highlighted the inadequacies in policy recognition and institutional support for migrant labourers. These studies collectively underscore the necessity of reinforcing legal frameworks to protect migrant workers' rights, ensuring access to dignified housing, and developing portable social welfare entitlements that are accessible across state boundaries.

The Working People's Charter (2020), among other recent contributions, has further emphasized the urgency of transitioning from temporary and crisis-driven interventions to a more coordinated, long-term policy architecture. However, most existing governmental responses have remained fragmented, sector-specific, and reactive largely shaped by immediate pressures rather than a comprehensive vision for labour mobility and inclusion.

In sum, the reviewed literature reveals a consensus on the growing indispensability of inter-state migrant labour in the Indian economy, while also exposing the significant policy and institutional gaps that continue to hinder their

full integration into the developmental framework. Addressing these shortcomings requires not only legislative reform but also the political will to implement inclusive, rights-based social protection systems that transcend administrative boundaries.

3. CAUSES OF INTER-STATE MIGRATION IN INDIA

The phenomenon of inter-state migration in India is shaped by a complex interplay of economic, social, and structural factors. Migratory decisions are rarely influenced by a single cause; rather, they emerge from the cumulative effects of multiple push and pull dynamics that influence individual and household choices.

3.1 Poverty and Unemployment:

A primary driver of out-migration is the acute poverty and chronic unemployment prevalent in several states, particularly in the economically backward regions of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh. These states often suffer from limited industrialization, poor infrastructure, underdeveloped agriculture, and inadequate employment-generating programs. The lack of sustainable livelihoods compels a large section of the rural and semi-urban population to seek work in other, more prosperous parts of the country. The seasonal nature of agricultural employment and the absence of alternative job opportunities further intensify this push factor.

3.2 Urban Demand and Economic Opportunities:

Conversely, the rapid pace of urbanization and industrial growth in metropolitan areas like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, Ahmedabad, and Hyderabad acts as a strong pull for migrant labour. These cities offer relatively better wages, a greater diversity of employment options, and the promise of upward socio-economic mobility. Migrants are often absorbed into labour-intensive sectors such as construction, hospitality, retail, logistics, and domestic services sectors that heavily depend on cheap and mobile labour. The visible economic prosperity and employment concentration in these urban centres serve as magnets for workers from less developed regions.

3.3 Infrastructure Development and Labour Demand:

Large-scale infrastructure and industrial development projects such as highways, metros, smart cities, and industrial corridors generate a massive demand for low-skilled and semi-skilled labour. These projects, often executed under tight timelines and with cost constraints, prefer to employ a flexible, migrant workforce. Employers and contractors also find it easier to hire migrant workers on informal terms, avoiding legal obligations such as minimum wages, provident fund contributions, or health benefits.

3.4 Social Aspirations and Household Well-being:

Beyond economic compulsion, migration is also influenced by aspirational goals. Migrant workers often leave their native villages in search of better living conditions not just for themselves, but also for their families. The hope of accessing improved healthcare, quality education for children, housing, and modern amenities motivates individuals to relocate. In many cases, remittances sent by migrants become a crucial lifeline for the socio-economic survival and upward mobility of their families back home. Migration thus becomes a strategic choice, not merely to escape deprivation but to fulfil familial aspirations and improve the prospects.

1. Table: Socio-Economic Profile of Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Illustrative)

Parameter	Characteristics
Place of Origin	Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal
Destination States	Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu
Age Group	18–45 years
Gender Distribution	85% Male, 15% Female

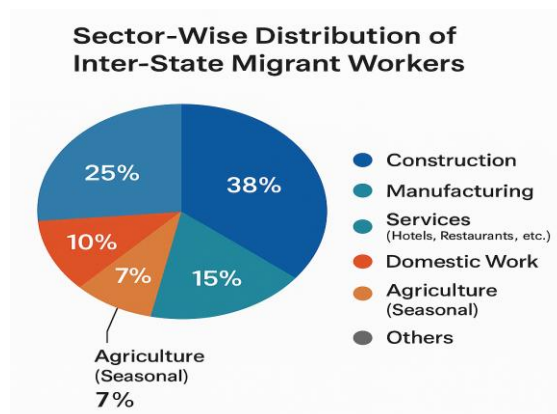
Primary Sectors of Employment	Construction, Manufacturing, Hospitality, Domestic Work
Educational Qualification	Majority: Below Class 10
Nature of Employment	Daily wage, Contractual, Informal

4. SECTORS EMPLOYING MIGRANT WORKERS

Migrant workers are predominantly engaged in low-wage, high-risk sectors, including:

- Construction and Real Estate
- Agriculture and Plantation Work
- Textiles and Garment Industries
- Hospitality and Domestic Services
- Street Vending and Informal Retail
- Mining and Quarrying

These sectors often lack formal employment structures, leading to informal contracts and absence of legal entitlements.



5. LEGAL FRAMEWORK: INTER-STATE MIGRANT WORKMEN ACT, 1979

The Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979, was enacted to safeguard the rights of migrant workers. Key provisions include:

- Licensing of contractors
- Registration of establishments
- Payment of displacement and journey allowances
- Equal wages with local workers
- Provision of suitable residential accommodation and medical facilities
- Redressal mechanisms for grievances

Despite these provisions, field studies and reports reveal poor enforcement. Many employers bypass the law through informal hiring, and workers are rarely aware of their entitlements.

6. CHALLENGES FACED BY INTER-STATE MIGRANT WORKERS

6.1 Absence of Formal Employment Contracts

A significant proportion of inter-state migrant workers in India are employed under informal arrangements, where terms of employment are neither documented nor legally binding. This lack of written contracts places workers in a highly precarious position, making them susceptible to wage delays, underpayment, or complete denial of wages. Without any formal agreement outlining working hours, leave entitlements, or termination conditions, workers are often dismissed without notice or compensation. The absence of contract documentation also impedes their ability to seek legal redress, reinforcing their dependence on intermediaries and leaving them exposed to routine exploitation.

6.2 Exposure to Unsafe and Hazardous Working Environments

Inter-state migrant labourers frequently work in sectors such as construction, mining, brick kilns, and manufacturing areas known for their high-risk and hazardous conditions. Safety norms are rarely adhered to, and personal protective equipment such as helmets, gloves, or harnesses is either unavailable or inconsistently provided. Additionally, employers often fail to offer any form of accident insurance or compensation in the event of injury or disability. This blatant disregard for occupational safety standards not only endangers workers' physical well-being but also reflects systemic neglect in ensuring dignified and secure work environments.

6.3 Inadequate Housing, Water, and Sanitation Facilities

Migrant workers commonly reside in overcrowded and unsanitary settlements, including slums, temporary hutments, and makeshift camps near worksites. These dwellings are often erected without basic civic infrastructure such as clean drinking water, electricity, drainage, or toilet facilities. In many cases, families live in congested, single-room units that compromise privacy and hygiene. Poor living conditions exacerbate health risks, increase vulnerability to communicable diseases, and contribute to social exclusion within host communities. Moreover, the lack of secure tenancy rights exposes migrant households to frequent evictions and displacement.

6.4 Limited Access to Health Services and Increased Health Risks

Healthcare remains an unmet need for most inter-state migrant workers, who often lack access to both preventive and emergency medical services. Barriers such as lack of identity proof, language differences, unfamiliarity with the healthcare system, and exclusion from state-specific welfare entitlements hinder their ability to seek treatment. The nature of their work increases their exposure to occupational illnesses, respiratory ailments, musculoskeletal disorders, and work-related injuries. Additionally, high levels of stress, social isolation, and inadequate nutrition contribute to mental health challenges, which are rarely diagnosed or addressed due to stigma and insufficient support mechanisms.

6.5 Exclusion from Social Security and Welfare Entitlements

Migrant labourers are frequently left out of the ambit of social security schemes such as the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), and the Public Distribution System (PDS). This exclusion stems from multiple factors, including the informal nature of employment, lack of awareness,

and the non-portability of benefits across state boundaries. Many do not possess required documentation like Aadhaar-linked ration cards or employment registration, making it difficult to access subsidized food, healthcare, or pension benefits. As a result, even during crises like the COVID-19 lockdown, many migrants were left without state support.

6.6 Prevalence of Discrimination and Systemic Exploitation

Social discrimination against migrant workers is deeply entrenched and manifests in several forms, ranging from exclusion from community spaces to denial of services based on linguistic, regional, or caste identity. Workers from particular states are often stereotyped and subjected to social hostility and harassment. Exploitation takes various forms, including non-payment or underpayment of wages, excessive working hours without compensation, physical abuse, and even instances of bonded labour. Legal remedies are either inaccessible or ineffective due to fear of retaliation, lack of legal literacy, and the absence of union representation.

6.7 Educational Discontinuity Among Migrant Children

Children of inter-state migrant workers are disproportionately affected by their parents' mobility and the economic precarity of their households. Constant relocation disrupts the continuity of their education, as they often move between states with differing curricula, languages, and admission requirements. In many cases, children are compelled to drop out of school to accompany their families to new worksites or to contribute to household income through child labour. Even where schools are accessible, poverty, social exclusion, and lack of support systems reduce the likelihood of sustained enrolment and academic success. The cumulative effect of these factors perpetuates intergenerational cycles of poverty and marginalization.

6.8 COVID-19 Impact

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent nationwide lockdown in India in 2020 brought to the forefront the precarious conditions under which inter-state migrant workers live and work. As economic activity came to a sudden halt, millions of migrant labourers employed largely in informal sectors such as construction, manufacturing, hospitality, and domestic services were rendered jobless overnight. With no social safety nets, formal contracts, or savings to fall back on, these workers faced an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

Stranded in cities far from their native villages, many were left without food, shelter, or transportation. In the absence of timely and coordinated government intervention, large numbers of migrants were forced to embark on perilous journeys on foot, cycling or hitchhiking across hundreds of kilometres to return home. These scenes of mass exodus and distress powerfully illustrated the structural vulnerabilities and social invisibility of this vast workforce.

The pandemic not only disrupted livelihoods but also underscored the absence of a comprehensive and inclusive policy framework for migrant workers in India. Many were excluded from state relief measures due to the lack of identity documents, non-portability of ration cards, and inadequate data systems to track and assist mobile populations. Health risks were amplified by overcrowded living conditions and lack of access to healthcare services.

This public health and socio-economic emergency revealed deep-rooted governance failures and administrative indifference toward migrant workers, despite their significant contribution to the national economy. It brought renewed urgency to the demand for institutional reforms aimed at ensuring the protection, inclusion, and dignity of migrant labourers. The crisis served as a wake-up call for policymakers to move beyond ad-hoc responses and to develop structured, long-term strategies that prioritize the rights and welfare of internal migrants in India's development narrative.

**2. Table: Challenges Faced by Migrant Workers**

Absence of Formal Employment Contracts	Many migrant workers lack written agreements, leading to job insecurity and exploitation.
Exposure to Unsafe and Hazardous Working Environments	Workers often face dangerous conditions that threaten their health and safety.
Inadequate Housing, Water, and Sanitation Facilities	Migrant workers live in poor-quality housing with limited access to clean water and sanitation.
Limited Access to Health Services and Increased Health Risks	Difficulty accessing healthcare increases vulnerability to illness and injury.
Exclusion from Social Security and Welfare Entitlements	Migrant workers are often denied social benefits and protections available to formal employees.
Prevalence of Discrimination and Systemic Exploitation	Discrimination based on origin or status leads to systemic abuses and unfair treatment.
Educational Discontinuity Among Migrant Children	Migrant children face disruptions in schooling due to frequent relocations and lack of support.
COVID-19 Impact	The pandemic has worsened job loss, health risks, and social vulnerabilities for migrant workers.

7. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND POLICY MEASURES:

Recognizing the critical role of inter-state migrant workers and the vulnerabilities they face, both the central and state governments have introduced a range of policy measures and welfare initiatives in recent years. These efforts aim to enhance access to social security, improve living conditions, and institutionalize protections for migrant labour. However, the success of these initiatives is often hindered by implementation challenges, infrastructural gaps, and exclusionary practices. The following subsections detail the key government interventions:

7.1 One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)

The ONORC scheme is a flagship initiative of the Government of India designed to ensure food security for migrant households irrespective of their location. Through this mechanism, eligible beneficiaries can access their subsidized foodgrain entitlements from any fair price shop across the country using their Aadhaar-linked ration cards. This

portable entitlement system is particularly significant for migrant families that relocate frequently, as it reduces dependency on local documentation and ensures continuity in food support. Despite its potential, the scheme faces operational difficulties, including inadequate internet connectivity in rural areas and lack of awareness among workers.

7.2 e-Shram Portal

Launched in 2021, the e-Shram Portal serves as a centralized digital platform to register unorganized workers, including migrant labourers, with the objective of extending social security benefits. The platform collects key demographic, employment, and skill-related data to facilitate policy formulation and the delivery of targeted schemes. Registrants receive a Universal Account Number (UAN) that is intended to serve as a portable identity across employment sectors and locations. While the portal represents a major step toward formalizing India's vast informal workforce, challenges such as digital illiteracy, lack of access to smartphones, and limited outreach have curtailed its reach, particularly among the most vulnerable workers.

7.3 Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs)

To address the chronic housing insecurity faced by migrant workers in urban centres, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs launched the ARHC scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Urban (PMAY-U). This initiative promotes the development and operation of affordable rental accommodations near employment hubs through public-private partnerships, conversion of vacant government buildings, and incentives for private real estate players. The goal is to reduce the dependence of migrant workers on informal, unsafe, and overcrowded settlements. While promising, the uptake has been uneven due to limited awareness, administrative delays, and issues related to maintenance and affordability.

7.4 Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY)

In response to the unprecedented crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the government introduced PMGKY as an emergency welfare package. The scheme provided financial assistance and food subsidies to low-income households, including inter-state migrant workers. Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT), free LPG cylinders, and an extended supply of food grains were key components of the initiative. While the relief package offered short-term reprieve, coverage gaps due to exclusion from existing beneficiary lists and poor documentation highlighted systemic flaws in the welfare delivery architecture.

7.5 State-Level Innovations and Interventions

Several state governments have implemented unique models tailored to the needs of their migrant populations:

- Kerala has established the Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme (commonly known as the "Apna Ghar" scheme), which provides housing, insurance, health care, and educational support for migrant labourers residing in the state.
- Odisha has introduced mandatory registration for inter-state migrants under its Odisha Interstate Migrant Workmen (OIMW) Act and operates a dedicated toll-free helpline to assist migrant workers and their families.
- Jharkhand's Safe and Responsible Migration Initiative (SRMI), launched in collaboration with civil society organizations and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), focuses on pre-departure orientation, registration, skill mapping, and the creation of migration support centres in high out-migration districts.

These state-led efforts have demonstrated the importance of context-sensitive governance models and proactive engagement. However, their effectiveness varies depending on the level of political commitment, administrative capacity, and community participation.

7.6 Persistent Challenges in Implementation

Despite the progressive intent of these initiatives, several structural barriers continue to impede their impact. Digital exclusion, limited literacy, and lack of multilingual outreach constrain enrolment in central schemes like e-Shram

and ONORC. Bureaucratic red tape, under-resourced labour departments, and weak interstate coordination hamper the delivery of services. Additionally, many migrant workers remain unaware of their rights and entitlements, while employers and contractors often bypass compliance with regulatory requirements.

In sum, while the introduction of these schemes reflects growing policy recognition of the issues faced by migrant workers, there is a pressing need to move beyond tokenistic or crisis-driven interventions. Strengthening intergovernmental coordination, investing in last-mile service delivery, promoting awareness, and leveraging technology effectively are key to ensuring that welfare provisions translate into tangible outcomes for migrant workers across the country.

3. Table: Key Government Schemes and Their Scope

Scheme Name	Objective	Coverage
One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)	Food security portability	All NFSA beneficiaries across India
e-Shram Portal	Database of unorganised workers	Over 28 crore workers registered
PM Garib Kalyan Yojana	COVID-19 emergency relief (cash + food)	80 crore beneficiaries
Affordable Rental Housing (ARHCs)	Rental housing for urban migrant workers	

8. RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Addressing the multi-dimensional challenges faced by inter-state migrant workmen in India requires a shift from piecemeal interventions to a well-coordinated, systemic, and rights-based approach. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to ensure the protection, empowerment, and dignity of migrant workers while strengthening the institutional frameworks governing their welfare:

8.1 Strengthening Legal Enforcement Mechanisms

Despite the existence of the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979, its implementation remains sporadic and largely ineffective. There is an urgent need to enhance legal enforcement by establishing robust monitoring systems, dedicated labour inspection mechanisms, and time-bound grievance redressal platforms. The registration process for contractors and workers must be simplified and digitized to increase compliance and transparency. State labour departments should be equipped with adequate resources and trained personnel to oversee enforcement and address violations proactively.

8.2 Ensuring Universal and Portable Social Protection

A universal and location-agnostic social security framework is critical to protect migrant workers who frequently move across state boundaries. Government schemes such as health insurance (e.g., Ayushman Bharat), pension (e.g., Atal Pension Yojana), maternity benefits, and the Public Distribution System (PDS) must be made portable and interoperable nationwide. This requires harmonization across state systems and integration with digital platforms such as the One Nation One Ration Card scheme. Efforts should be made to remove bureaucratic hurdles that exclude migrants from availing benefits due to lack of local address proof or documentation.

8.3 Improving Housing and Urban Infrastructure

Migrant workers often reside in overcrowded and unsanitary settlements due to unaffordable or inaccessible urban housing. Inclusive urban development models should be promoted through public-private partnerships to create affordable rental housing, temporary transit shelters, and dedicated labour hostels. These should be equipped with basic amenities like clean drinking water, sanitation, electricity, and public transportation. Urban planning must also

incorporate spaces for community engagement, childcare facilities, and accessible healthcare to improve overall quality of life.

8.4 Promoting Education and Skills Development

The educational needs of migrant children are frequently disrupted due to mobility and economic instability. To address this, mobile schools, multilingual digital education platforms, and bridge learning programmes must be introduced to ensure continuity in education. Simultaneously, skill development initiatives tailored to current labour market demands should be scaled up. These should include vocational training, apprenticeships, and certification programmes that recognize prior learning. Emphasis must be placed on training in sectors where migrant labour is prevalent, thereby enhancing employability and wage security.

8.5 Framing a Comprehensive National Migration Policy

India urgently requires a holistic, rights-based National Migration Policy that addresses the full migration cycle from pre-departure planning and recruitment to post-migration reintegration and crisis response. This policy should codify migrant workers' rights, streamline access to welfare schemes, promote inter-state cooperation, and set up institutional mechanisms for coordination among central, state, and local governments. The policy must also include provisions for emergency relief, such as during natural disasters or pandemics, and ensure that migrant labour is treated as a key stakeholder in India's growth strategy.

8.6 Awareness Generation and Stakeholder Sensitization

A significant barrier to migrant welfare is the lack of awareness among workers about their rights and entitlements. Regular awareness campaigns should be conducted using print, digital, and community media in multiple languages. Simultaneously, employers, labour contractors, and government officials should receive training on ethical recruitment practices, non-discrimination, and humane working conditions. Promoting a culture of dignity and respect for migrant workers is essential to reducing instances of exploitation and abuse.

8.7 Enhancing Data Systems and Labour Mobility Mapping

Effective policy-making depends on the availability of accurate and real-time data. A centralized, dynamic, and interoperable database of migrant workers should be developed, integrating Aadhaar, e-Shram, and other national identification systems. This would facilitate better targeting of welfare programmes, enable rapid response during emergencies, and support evidence-based planning. The data should capture sector-wise distribution, skill profiles, demographic details, and mobility trends, while ensuring data privacy and consent.

8.8 Towards Inclusive and Equitable Integration of Migrant Labour

The preceding recommendations collectively aim to establish an inclusive ecosystem that honours the dignity of labour and reinforces the constitutional principles of equality, justice, and human rights. Realizing this vision necessitates a coordinated and sustained effort involving all key stakeholders including central and state governments, employers, trade unions, civil society organizations, and migrant workers themselves. Each entity must actively participate in reshaping the landscape of migrant labour governance to produce long-term, structural transformation rather than temporary relief.

India's demographic dividend, industrial growth, and urban expansion are deeply intertwined with the invaluable contribution of inter-state migrant workmen. These workers constitute a significant portion of the informal labour force that powers construction, manufacturing, services, agriculture, and various other critical sectors. Yet, their invisibility in policymaking, legal frameworks, and urban planning has allowed cycles of socio-economic exclusion, vulnerability, and exploitation to persist.

This study concludes that the recognition, inclusion, and protection of inter-state migrant labour is not only a statutory responsibility but also a socio-economic necessity. Migrant workers are not passive beneficiaries of welfare but active contributors to the nation's growth and prosperity. As such, their integration into development frameworks must be intentional and well-supported.

Looking ahead, as India aspires to become a \$5 trillion economy and strengthen its global economic footprint, the future of work must be founded on the core values of dignity, fairness, and justice. This requires a paradigm shift from reactive crisis management to anticipatory institutional reform; from disjointed welfare schemes to seamless, portable, and integrated social protection systems; and from marginalization to mainstream inclusion.

In this reimagined labour ecosystem, policies must be driven not merely by economic pragmatism but by empathy and human rights. A rights-based and cooperative governance model must prioritize workers' voice, agency, and participation. Only then can inter-state migrant workmen transition from being invisible, vulnerable labourers to empowered, equal stakeholders in India's development journey.

Conflict of Interest:

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest pertaining to the publication of this research paper. The study has been conducted independently, without any financial, professional, or personal relationships that could be perceived to influence the findings, interpretations, or conclusions presented herein. No external funding or sponsorship was received that could affect the objectivity or integrity of the research.

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