

# Changing Routes: India's Migration Patterns

## SANKHYA (संख्या)

“There cannot be a good plan for economic progress without adequate data and there cannot be adequate data without a good plan for collecting them...”

P.C Mahalanobis, Member, First Planning Commission of India & Scientist

## Overview of Migration in India

Migration in India represents a powerful force shaping its urban landscape and society. There is a correlation between urbanisation and migration. After independence, urbanisation rate has increased continuously; in urban population in India was 28.53 percent in 2001 which increased to 31.16 per cent in 2011 and they contributed 63% of the country’s GDP. By 2030, urban areas are expected to house 40% of India’s population and contribute 75% of India’s GDP.

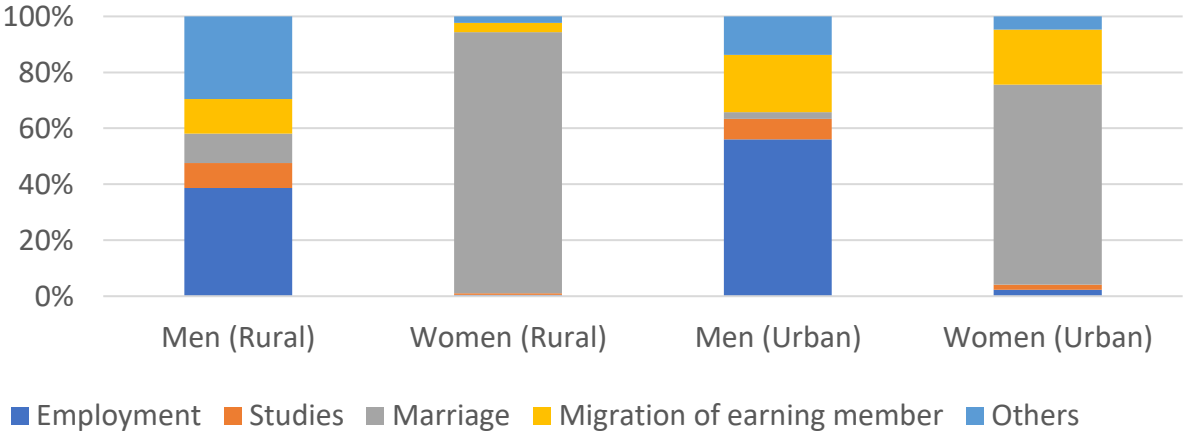
### Streams of Migration

Migration Stream	Share (%)	Description Source
Rural to Rural	55.0	Rural to rural migration remains dominant at 55% driven by marriage, family reasons, and local economic opportunities.
Rural to Urban	18.9	Rural to urban stands at 18.9% highlighting the steady movement toward cities for employment and education.
Urban to Rural	10.2	Urban to rural is 10.2% often due to family reunification or reverse migration.
Urban to Urban	15.9	Urban to rural is 15.9% reflecting intra-city and inter-city lifestyle or job changes.

Source: Economic survey of rural-urban population, PIB

### Reasons for Migration

Reason for migration (gender and sector)



Source: How India moves: Understanding patterns of migration within the country, Ceda.Ashoka.edu.in

## Migration in India

- In 2011, the migration rate in India was recorded at **33%**, as per Census data. However, this figure saw a decline in the following decade. According to the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)** conducted between **July 2020 and June 2021**, the migration rate dropped to **28.9%**. This downward trend suggests a shift in migration dynamics influenced by changing economic conditions, improved rural employment schemes and infrastructural stress.

### Impact

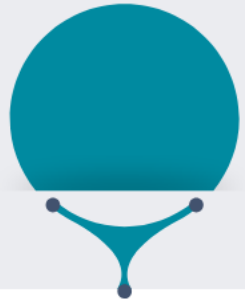
- Labour Market Dynamic
- Rise of the Informal & Gig Economy
- Income & Rural Transformation
- Urban Growth Challenges & Opportunities

### Migration Trends

- Urban India has a higher migration rate (34.9%) compared to rural areas (26.5%) as per the PLFS.
- While marriage remains the chief reason for migration (especially among women), male migration is primarily work-related.
- By 2023, the number of internal migrants had declined to around 40.2 crore , 28.88%.

# KEY CHALLENGES OF MIGRATION IN INDIA

Migration in India brings substantial opportunities but is accompanied by major challenges for both migrants and society.



## Informality and Precarity

Migrant workers often face informal employment with little job security, irregular wages, and poor work condition.

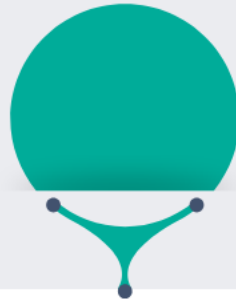
01



## Exclusion from Welfare

Administrative barriers often prevent migrants from accessing services such as healthcare and social protection.

02



## Housing and living condition

Many migrants reside in informal settlements with low-quality housing with limited access to sanitation, water and healthcare

03



## Gender-specific issues

Women migrants are overrepresented in low-paid, informal jobs, and both their economic and domestic contributions tend to be undervalued.

04



## Social Integration

Migrants frequently report discrimination, lack of political representation, and weak social support in their destinations, affecting integration and well-being.

05



## Policy and Data Gaps

Millions of seasonal, short-term migrants remain undocumented in official data like the PLFS, resulting in policy blind spots and intervention targeting.

06



## Policy Recommendation for Managing Migration in India

**Ensure Affordable and Inclusive Urban Housing:** Scale up Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC) and adapt PM Awas Yojana (Urban) to specifically meet the needs of migrants through flexible and location-neutral eligibility criteria.

**Promote Balanced Regional Development:** Develop Counter-Magnet Cities by improving infrastructure, education, healthcare, and job opportunities in smaller towns to ease pressure on major urban centres.

**Invest in Skill Development and Local Employment:** Strengthen Skill India Mission and PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana to provide targeted skilling for migrant and rural youth, while promoting rural enterprises to reduce forced migration.

**Expand and Integrate Social Security Systems:** Strengthen the e-Shram platform and ensure portability of benefits under the Code on Social Security, enabling migrant workers to access health, insurance, and pension services seamlessly across states.

**Guarantee Food and Welfare Portability:** Universalise the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) to provide uninterrupted access to subsidised food and welfare schemes, regardless of migrants' movement or place of work.

**Enforce Labour Rights and Worker Protection:** Strengthen labour law implementation to ensure fair wages, safe working conditions, and effective grievance redressal mechanisms for all migrant workers.

WANT TO SUBMIT IDEAS FOR  
SANKHYA OR GIVE YOUR  
VIEWS ON OUR PAST  
EDITIONS?

*Share your views, analysis, ideas and  
questions*

[appointments@bridgethinktank.com](mailto:appointments@bridgethinktank.com)



BRIDGE  
— THINK TANK —

Sankhya\* is an initiative of Bridge Policy Think Tank to create interface snapshots in statistics and policy analysis while promoting critical thinking and analysis.

*\* Sankhya means numbers and is also a school of rationalist Indian philosophy. According to Sankhya philosophy reliable knowledge comes from only three pramanas (proofs)- pratyakṣa ('perception'), anumāṇa ('inference') and śabda (āptavacana, meaning, 'word/testimony of reliable sources').*