

Why does the Indian State have a stepmotherly attitude towards migrants?

A report released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) ---- [Migration and Its Impact on Cities](#) ---- has estimated at least 5-6 million migrants are on the move every year in India. Citing a recent study undertaken as part of [Economic Survey 2017](#), the WEF report said, the rate of inter-state migration has doubled between 2001 and 2011. This is not surprising: Despite years of the economic boom, inequities still persist between states, and rural and urban areas. For example, Bihar has a per capita income roughly equivalent to Somalia (approximately \$520) and a birth rate of 3.4 children per woman. On the other hand, Kerala has a per capita income that is four times more (approximately \$2,350) and a birth rate of 1.6 children per woman. This puts the state on a par with Denmark. Economic well-being, however, is not the only reason for mobility. People move to escape caste oppression or civil unrest. Marriage is also another common driver for migration.

Even though migrants add substantially to the economy, they are always not seen favourably by the recipient states/cities. They are considered a burden, often accused of indulging in criminal activities, and exploited for political gains. While such an attitude is wrong and unfair, it [creates roadblocks for](#) the migrants. Among these are lack of formal residency rights, lack of identity proof; lack of political representation, inadequate housing, low-paid, insecure or hazardous work and extreme vulnerability of women and children to trafficking and sex exploitation. Then there is exclusion from State-provided services such as health and education and discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, class or gender.

These problems arise because social and political rights in this country are based on the assumption that people are sedentary. Under the public distribution system, for example, people's ration cards are invalid in their destinations of work. These migrants depend either on their employer or labour contractor for food provisions or purchase food in the open market. The Aadhaar project seeks to remedy this basic problem of establishing identity and ensuring portability of entitlements.

While the socio-economic factors associated with international (cross-border) migration dynamics have been well documented, processes of internal migration, within developing countries in particular, are not as understood enough. In India, internal migration has been accorded very low priority by the government, partly due to a serious knowledge gap on its extent, nature and magnitude. This must change. National and state governments have a clear role and responsibility not only in protecting and promoting migrants' access to social services, but also in enabling migrants to become socially and politically active citizens.

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