

Ensuring Inclusive and Equitable Education for Migrant Children: Overcoming Barriers and Creating SolutionDr. Shrutee Kanwar¹

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Abstract

Migration refers to the relocation of individuals from one area to another with the purpose of establishing themselves, either temporarily or permanently, in a different place. This kind of migration can occur between countries or as internal migration within a country, including movements like rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-urban, or urban-rural. People can move as individuals, in family groups, or in large numbers. A person who must relocate from their home to another location because of a natural disaster or civil unrest can be referred to as a refugee. Migrants consistently encounter challenges in integrating fully into the economic, cultural, social, and political aspects of society. This study seeks to comprehend the reasons and characteristics of migration, as well as the gender-specific migration trends in India and the issues associated with them. Children who migrate in India face numerous obstacles that prevent them from attaining education, healthcare, and social inclusion. Regular shifts in residence, language obstacles, and financial issues impact their education, resulting in elevated dropout rates and limited academic advancement. Many of them are dispatched to work, frequently facing exploitation and hazardous working environments while being deprived of the right to education. Socially, they face discrimination and exclusion, impacting their mental wellbeing and confidence. Inadequate health care and malnutrition additionally hinder their physical and mental growth. Gender discrimination exacerbates the situation, as girls in the migrant community encounter additional hurdles such as early marriage and restricted access to education. This study explores the challenges encountered by migrant children in India, evaluates the impact of these challenges on their development, and suggests inclusive strategies to close the gap. Concentrating on policy changes, community involvement, and fair educational systems, the document emphasizes ways to guarantee that migrant children obtain the assistance necessary to flourish and contribute effectively to society.

Key Words: Migrant, academic progress, policy reforms**Introduction**

Education is a fundamental human right and serves as the foundation for the development of both individuals and society at large. Nonetheless, a significant amount of migrant children globally struggle greatly to obtain quality education. Conflicts, financial issues, and natural calamities are the factors that drive people to relocate, which consequently takes children away from secure settings, like educational institutions. Additionally, it is language, culture, legal frameworks, and systems that further intensify migrations, resulting in the exclusion of many migrant children from educational prospects

The absence of educational opportunities also perpetuates the cycle of poverty, serving as an obstacle to individual growth. Furthermore, it complicates the process of integrating into new communities, leading to increased wealth gaps. To address these problems, inclusivity in educational initiatives is essential

Migration is a natural phenomenon that frequently occurs based on the socio-economic, demographic, cultural, political, and environmental influences affecting the migrant populations. Migration is not simply a movement of individuals from one living location to another (Bala, 2017). It is essential for grasping the continuously evolving spatial content and spatial connections of regions (Gosal, 1961), Bogue (1959) views it as a tool for cultural diffusion and social integration that results in a more significant redistribution of population. Smith (1960) has mentioned the three-fold effects of migration on (1) the region of out-migration (2) the region of in-migration

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and (3) the migrants themselves. The individuals in the regions of out-migration decline, whereas the population in areas of in-migration rises. The shift from countryside to city regions has been gradually rising due to industrialization and modernization in India (Bala,2017). The primary cause of migration is related to employment or business opportunities. The migration of men represents the largest portion of migration in India, primarily for job opportunities. Females typically migrate alongside males due to various reasons such as marriage or family relocation; however, recent surveys indicate that single females are gradually starting to move out in search of employment. There are numerous definitions of migration. As per Lee, "Migration refers to a permanent or semipermanent relocation of residence." Weinberg states that "Human migration involves a change of location, either permanently or temporarily, for a significant period, such as with seasonal workers." Safa states that "Migration is typically seen as an economic issue, although non-economic factors clearly influence it" (Singh, 1989).

This document highlights various policy-oriented suggestions that could assist in addressing the obstacles encountered by migrant children in their pursuit of the education they seek. Individuals can be supported simply by transforming the education system and making it more suitable and inclusive for everyone.

Concept of a Migrant Child

Migrant children are viewed as particularly vulnerable individuals: displaced from their native countries and known educational systems, they experience psychosocial stress from the conflict of various cultural norms and values, their unfamiliarity with foreign languages (such as English or Russian) and the language of the host country, as well as their absence of social networks in a new living and learning context. During the move to a new country, they frequently bring with them trauma and difficulties stemming from war, violence, and separation. Insufficient (or absent) access to integration initiatives and culturally attuned education may result in multiple types of rights infringements, social disparities, exclusion, and segregation (Guo-Brennan and Guo-Brennan 2019; Parkhouse et al. 2019; Sedmak et al. 2021; Rivera-Vargas et al. 2021; Popyk 2023). The phrase migrant child denotes any child relocating from one geographical region to another. The child might be engaging in this either within a single country or across various nations due to factors largely beyond his or her control. Migration can happen for many reasons, including economic issues, conflicts, natural calamities, or the pursuit of improved living conditions. Children who migrate may do so with their families, as unaccompanied minors, or as part of forced migration movements such as refugees or asylum seekers. Kids frequently encounter various issues due to their transience: disruptions in education, disconnection from cultural and social groups, and challenges adjusting to a new setting. The legal status—as a registered migrant, refugee, or person without citizenship—can also significantly influence their access to fundamental rights: education, healthcare, and social services.

The idea of a migrant child extends beyond just physical movement, encompassing the social, emotional, and financial impacts of their migration experience. It advocates for more inclusive policies and measures that protect their welfare and support their integration into local communities. Migrant children should be acknowledged as a susceptible group to effectively meet their specific needs and foster equity and inclusion in every aspect of life.

Methodology

This paper is solely based on secondary information collected from different sources like books, journal articles, reports of various government organization and commission, websites etc.

Status of Migrant Children in India

The children of migrants in India constitute a significant and at-risk group. India hosts over 400 million internal migrants and a significant influx of international migrants, thereby encountering various challenges in meeting the needs of migrant children. Socioeconomic, legal, and systemic influences affect their condition, frequently hindering them from accessing their basic rights to education and healthcare. Internal migrants make up

approximately one-third of the urban population in India, with this figure rising from 31.6 percent in 1983 to 33 percent in 1999-2000 and reaching 35 percent in 2007-08 (NSSO 2007-08).

MIGRATION:

Migration denotes a lasting or semi-lasting shift in the residence of a person or a group from one area to another. Therefore, it differs from the broader term mobility, which encompasses all forms of people's movements (Rubenstein and Bacon, 1990:75). Since the start of economic reforms in 1990, India has been witnessing a swift movement of people from rural areas to urban centers. The growth of urban populations in developing nations outpaces overall population growth significantly; nearly half of this urban growth is due to migrants moving from rural regions. Migration and urbanization play a crucial role in economic growth and social change, and history has demonstrated that it is an unstoppable process. Internal migrants provide inexpensive labor for manufacturing and services, thereby boosting national GDP. Rather than being a strain and a liability, migrants are actually contributing a benefit. At this stage in the economic progress of a nation like India, analyzing the population shifts across various regions of the country aids in comprehending societal movements more effectively, particularly as numerous states experience rapid economic growth in fields like information technology, manufacturing, or services; thus, migration data has gained increased significance. Urban regions offer greater chances for job opportunities, education, and more. Employment has been a significant driving force drawing migrants from rural to urban settings and from smaller towns and cities to larger metropolitan areas across various states.

Migration and shifts in human populations have consistently been a crucial factor in economic growth and societal change throughout human history, which cannot be halted. It is plausible to think that among different categories of male migration patterns, the migration from one urban setting to another mainly involves skilled or semi-skilled professionals, while rural-urban migrants tend to be predominantly unskilled or semi-skilled individuals relocating for employment in urban or industrial areas. In contrast, rural-rural migrants are mostly unskilled laborers working in agriculture. For females, the rise in migration rates was attributed to marriage; recent statistics reveal that a significant number have entered the workforce, becoming part of the migrant labor pool. Certainly, there are inaccuracies in defining these categories of migrants solely based on their last place of residence and their place of birth.

Migration and census in India

Migration information was documented during the initial census in 1881 according to the birthplace. In 1961, alterations were implemented to add place of birth and length of residency. In 1971, more details regarding the last residence and the length of stay at the enumeration location were added. Data regarding migration reasons was included in the 1981 census and adjusted in subsequent censuses. According to study of Bala, 2017 in the Indian census, migration is calculated based on two criteria: (1) Place of birth: if the birthplace differs from the enumeration location (referred to as lifetime migrant) (2) Place of residence: if the last residence differs from the current place (known as migrant by last residence). In India, migration mainly occurs in two forms: (1) Long-term migration, which entails the permanent relocation of a person or family; (2) Short-term migration, characterized by movement back and forth between the origin and destination. Primarily, short-term migration is associated with socially and economically disadvantaged communities, including scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, who have minimal educational qualifications, restricted assets, and resource shortages.

Causes of Migration

Urbanization: Internal migration has been significantly influenced by urbanization. Urbanization rates impact the wage disparities between rural and urban areas. A rise in the demand for workers in cities can drive up urban wages and boost migration. The enticing elements of improved job opportunities, higher wages, and increased earnings, along with medical and educational services, are drawing rural individuals to relocate to urban areas (Kundu, 2012). The driving forces of insufficient job opportunities, low wages, minimal income, drought, and inadequate healthcare and education drive individuals to urban areas.

Marriage: Marriage plays a crucial role as a social element of migration. Every girl must move to her husband's family's home. Therefore, the complete female population of India must relocate over varying distances. In 2011, approximately 49.35 percent of individuals changed their residence following marriage.

Employment

Individuals move in significant numbers from countryside to city regions seeking jobs in industries, commerce, transportation, and services. The countryside does not offer jobs to everyone residing there. Even the village's small-scale and cottage industries are unable to employ the entire rural population. In 2011, approximately 10.22 percent of migrants moved for job opportunities (Table 1).

Education

As a result of insufficient educational resources in rural regions, individuals relocate to urban centers for advanced education. A lot of them establish themselves in the cities to earn a living after finishing their studies. In the 2011 census, roughly 1.77 percent of individuals relocated for educational purposes. **Absence of Safety:** Political unrest and ethnic tensions force individuals to flee from their residences. A significant number of individuals have left Jammu and Kashmir and Assam in recent times due to the troubled situations in those areas. Individuals also relocate temporarily in pursuit of improved opportunities for leisure, medical services, and so on.

'Pull' and 'Push' Factors: Migration is influenced by two main factors: push and pull. The reasons for leaving include poverty, insufficient job opportunities, unemployment and underdevelopment, poor economic conditions, limited prospects, depletion of natural resources and disasters, shortage of arable land, unequal land distribution, low agricultural yield, etc. Pull factors draw migrants to a location (destination area), such as job and advanced education opportunities, higher wages, and improved working conditions. Countless individuals moved from their distant hometowns to the major cities of Kolkata, Mumbai, or Delhi. The dreadful living conditions such as slums, scarcity of safe water, lack of sanitation, overcrowding leading to higher crime rates, insecurity for women, sexual abuse, and vulnerability to frequent epidemics and AIDS are the direct result of this population movement (Bala, 2017).

Main Issues Facing Indian Migrant Children

Limited educational access: Children of migrants frequently face interruptions in their schooling as their families frequently relocate to seek seasonal or short-term employment. Numerous migrant children do not possess essential documents, like a birth certificate or residency proof, which hinders their access to formal education. Language obstacles, particularly for children relocating between states with varying language backgrounds, worsen the issue.

Child Labor and Exploitation: Economic hardships compel numerous migrant children to engage in child labor to support family earnings, particularly in agriculture, construction, and household tasks. They remain susceptible to mistreatment, exploitation, and dangerous work environments.

Health and Nutrition: Migrant children experience limited access to healthcare and nutritious food, which heightens their risk of malnutrition, infectious diseases, and mental health issues. Without portable health plans, families lose their benefits when relocating from their home states.

Social Exclusion: Children of migrants frequently face bias and labeling within the local community. They also face challenges in adapting to their new cultural and social environments. They feel isolated and emotionally distressed.

Legal and Policy Deficiency: While India has laws regarding children's rights, the enforcement, particularly for migrant children, is compromised by administrative issues and insufficient coordination between states.

Government Initiatives for Migrant Children

The Indian Government has implemented various measures to address the requirements of migrant children, including:

- a. Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009: This guarantees that every child aged 6-14 receives free and obligatory education. The legislation includes provisions for migrant youth.
- b. Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan: This initiative aims to connect children who are out of school and those who are migrants. This program encompasses corrective education and specialized training initiatives.
- c. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS): Providing health, nutrition, and early childhood education for at-risk populations, including migrant kids.
- d. National Child Labor Project (NCLP): Assisting child laborers through educational and vocational training programs. A large number of child laborers originate from migrant families.

Challenges and Way Forward

In spite of these initiatives, gaps in implementation, insufficient coordination between states, and limited data on migrant children continue to pose major challenges. There is an urgent requirement to:

- a. Create portable benefits systems in education, healthcare, and social protection that accompany migrant families.
- b. Set up mobile schools or temporary hostels for children of seasonal migrant laborers.
- c. Offer programs for language and cultural integration to assist children in adjusting to new environments.
- d. Enhance data gathering and tracking systems to guarantee that every child is included. Promote collaborations between the public and private sectors to enhance educational and welfare services aimed at migrant children.

Barriers in Education of Migrant Children

Children who migrate encounter numerous obstacles that hinder their ability to obtain an education. The difficulties are systemic, social, economic, and cultural, maintaining cycles of marginalization and inequality. Below are some of the main obstacles highlighted:

Language Obstacles: Children from migrant backgrounds frequently encounter difficulties in grasping the instructional language in their new educational institutions, making it harder for them to understand lessons and interact with both educators and classmates. No bilingual education initiative or language support services add to this issue.

Ongoing Migration: Often, migrant children are abandoned in various locations as their parents pursue job opportunities or seek to improve their financial situation, which consequently interrupts the educational continuity for these children. The elevated level of migration prevents children from completing the school year and creating a stable learning environment.

Lack of Documents: Numerous migrant families lack essential documents like birth certificates, proof of residence, or past academic records that most schools require for admission. This is especially relevant for the offspring of refugees or undocumented immigrants.

Financial Obstacles: The financial strain forces numerous migrant children to work for their families, leaving them with minimal time for education. The expenses for schooling, uniforms, transportation, and other costs often render education inaccessible for migrant children.

Social Exclusion and Discrimination: The presence of xenophobia, bullying, and discrimination in educational settings complicates their social integration. Cultural variances can result in the alienation of migrants, which may cause isolation and diminished self-worth.

Inadequate School Facilities: Schools in areas with significant migration frequently do not have sufficient infrastructure and resources to accommodate extra students. Overpopulated classrooms, insufficient teaching staff, and scarce educational resources do little to enhance learning outcomes.

Insufficient Policy and Coordination: Weak policies meant to aid the education of migrant children, especially across state or national borders, lead to significant access disparities. Inadequate collaboration among different states or regions frequently results in migrant children being neglected by educational systems.

Gender Inequalities: Migrant girls encounter greater obstacles, such as gender-based bias, safety concerns, and cultural norms that prioritize domestic labor instead of education.

Health and Nutrition Concerns: Inadequate health, malnutrition, and limited access to healthcare services hinder migrant children's capability to attend school consistently and concentrate on their education.

Psychological and Emotional Difficulties: Child migrants frequently encounter trauma, anxiety, and stress resulting from their unstable and uncertain circumstances. Social isolation and the stress of adjusting to a new culture and surroundings influence mental well-being and academic achievement.

Consequences of migration

Migration affects both the area of origin of migration and the areas of destination of the migrant population. According to Bala, 2017 the consequences of migration can be defined as.

1. Demographic effects: Migration alters the attributes of the population in areas experiencing out-migration and areas experiencing in-migration. It alters the age and sex distribution of the population alongside the population growth rate. The ratio of the elderly, children, and females rises as a result of out-migration in the origin area. The elevated sex ratio is observed in the origin areas due to the fact that primarily the young male demographic participates in migration. As a result, these regions lack a young population, leading to reduced birth rates and slower population growth rates.

2. Social implications: Migration causes the blending of various cultures, resulting in the development of a mixed culture. It shatters limited thinking and expands the mental perspective of individuals. Throughout history, India has welcomed migrants from various cultural backgrounds, leading to a blend of different cultures; however, migration can also lead to social voids and feelings of despair among individuals, which may result in criminal behavior and substance abuse (Khullar, 2014).

3. Economic effects: Migration alters the resource-to-population ratio. When individuals relocate from a densely populated region to one with low population density, it leads to a more balanced resource-population ratio. If the migration occurs from a region with low population to one that is overpopulated or optimally populated, it adversely affects both regions. Migration influences the job composition of the population. The population in receiving areas becomes more efficient, leading to a dependency ratio in the source areas. Another result of migration is brain drain. Talented individuals move from less wealthy nations to developed ones in pursuit of improved economic prospects. Individuals who migrate send money back to their families, contributing to economic well-being.

4. Environmental impacts: The mass relocation of individuals from countryside to urban regions results in congestion in cities and places substantial strain on resources. It leads to random urban expansion and results in slums deficient in essential infrastructure like clean drinking water, electricity, and sewage systems. Overpopulation also contributes to various environmental issues including air, water, land, and noise pollution, as well as waste disposal and management.

5. Additional effects: Migration increases remittances to the origin area but significantly depletes the human resource, particularly in skilled labor. Women who are left behind experience the benefits of empowerment through greater societal engagement, which includes their roles as workers and their involvement in household decision-making. Policies for Migration With the rising trends of migration from rural regions to urban centers, cities are facing numerous challenges including slums, high population density, overcrowding, and insufficient infrastructure. The government has initiated various Rural Development Programmes, including the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Indira Aawas Yojana (IAY), National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP), National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP), Swachha Bharat Mission (SBM), and National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). While these initiatives are essential for advancing rural development, they alone are inadequate to prevent rural-urban migration. The Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA) is one of the five key elements of former President Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam's aspiration, his vision 2020 for an advanced

India. The PURA diverges from traditional concepts of rural economic development in various ways (Bala, 2017). Its goal is to achieve thorough development of rural regions to create urban-level income rather than just alleviate poverty. It aims to attract contemporary industrial investment as the shift from rural to urban areas within the state is gradually rising due to industrialization and modernization in India.

Solutions for Overcoming Obstacles of Migrant Students

To guarantee that all migrant children attain inclusive and equitable education, a cohesive strategy must be created. This should entail addressing systemic, social, and economic obstacles by implementing adequate interventions and strategies. Some proposed solutions to the difficulties that migrants encounter in the classroom are presented below:

Language Assistance Programs

Bilingual Education: Establish bilingual education and language transition initiatives to aid migrant children in navigating language obstacles during their learning journey.

Language Courses: Offer concentrated language courses, particularly for newly arrived students, to facilitate their smooth integration into regular classrooms.

Translation Services: Employ interpreters and develop multilingual educational resources to assist non-native speakers.

Mobile Learning Solutions

Adaptable Enrollment Regulations: Enable migrant children to join schools with minimal documentation needed.

Digital Learning Platforms: Create mobile digital education tools that facilitate ongoing learning during migration.

Bridge Programs: Offer initiatives that help reintegrate children into school after prolonged absences.

Monetary and Resource Assistance

Scholarships and Grants: Provide financial assistance to cover tuition, transportation, and supplies.

Complimentary Meal Initiatives: Establish free or subsidized meal offerings to mitigate hunger-related obstacles in education.

Donations of School Supplies: Collaborate with NGOs and community groups to provide educational materials and uniforms.

Inclusive Policies and Legislative Changes

Widespread Access to Education: Guarantee that policies provide education for every child, regardless of their migration or documentation status.

Inter-State Coordination: Strengthen collaboration among states and regions to ensure smooth educational access for internal migrants.

Acknowledgment of Prior Learning: Simplify procedures for recognizing past education and placing students in suitable age classes.

Community and Parental Involvement

Programs for Parental Engagement: Involve migrant parents in school events to build trust and motivate them to take part in their children's learning.

Community Schools: Create schools in migrant communities to help students feel more connected to their school and foster a sense of belonging.

Cultural Sensitivity Workshops: Provide sessions for parents and educators on cultural misinterpretations and methods to integrate them.

Instructor Preparation and Assistance

Cultural Awareness Training: Provide educators with the tools necessary to manage a varied classroom and cater to the needs of immigrant students.

Trauma-Informed Approaches: Train educators on recognizing and assisting children who have experienced trauma or face emotional difficulties.

Specialized Educators: Hire instructors who are specialists in language acquisition and inclusive teaching methods.

Mental and Emotional Assistance

1. Counseling Services: Offer mental health support to assist children in managing stress, trauma, and feelings of isolation related to migration.
2. Peer Assistance Initiatives: Establish mentorship or peer support initiatives to assist new students in adapting to a school environment and forming friendships.
3. Extracurricular Activities: Involve the children in sports, arts, and cultural events to enhance self-esteem and foster social connections.

Mobile and Seasonal Learning Centers

a. Mobile Schools: Create educational facilities that move alongside migrant populations, especially for the offspring of seasonal workers.

b. Temporary Educational Centers: Establish short-term learning spaces in regions with high migrant populations to address the immediate educational needs of uprooted children.

Technological Incorporation

a. E-Learning Platforms: Employ technology to enable continuous education via online courses and materials.

b. Digital Resource Kits: Provide tablets or laptops equipped with educational content for migrant children to use while traveling.

c. Language Applications: Encourages the usage of mobile applications designed to assist children in learning the language of their new surroundings.

Public-Private Collaborations

a. Collaborate with NGOs, private sector entities, and international organizations to finance and implement creative educational initiatives for migrant youth.

b. Engage local enterprises in providing resources and assistance for community educational facilities.

Suggestions

1. Enhance financial and human resources in regions vulnerable to migration.
2. Encourage collaboration between public and private sectors to enhance safe internal migration.
3. Offering banking services for migrants to facilitate safe and secure remittance transfers.
4. Increased emphasis on national development initiatives (Five Year Plans, Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, and City Development Plans).
5. Creation of a comprehensive national minimum social security framework that ensures minimum wages and labor standards, while also allowing for the portability of benefits across all governmental social protection programs and public services.
6. Develop targeted outreach approaches for migrants in public services and government initiatives.
7. Implementing development strategies in underdeveloped regions like sustainable livelihood initiatives, food security projects, and providing access to credit opportunities.
8. Amend the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act (1979)

Conclusion

Children from migrant backgrounds are among the most at-risk and underserved groups in society, encountering considerable obstacles to accessing quality education. These obstacles—ranging from cultural and language issues to economic hardship and systemic discrimination—hinder their academic success and sustain cycles of

poverty and inequality. Addressing these obstacles is essential for guaranteeing that each child, irrespective of their migration status, can entirely fulfill their right to education.

A comprehensive approach is needed, integrating inclusive policies, financial support, and creative strategies to address these obstacles. Language programs, adaptable enrollment processes, mobile learning organizations, and culturally aware teaching methods can close gaps in accessibility and education. Additionally, including communities, involving parents, and preparing educators to meet the distinct needs of migrant children can foster a nurturing and inclusive educational setting.

Through integration, migrant children in educational frameworks wouldn't merely address an equity issue; rather, by investing in the educational potential of each child and striving for overall well-being, we support these children, arming them with the abilities to enhance communities and escape becoming mere statistics, preventing poverty and marginalization. This objective will require collaborative efforts from governments, educators, and NGOs alongside society to prevent any children from being excluded from gaining such knowledge and opportunities.

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