

**[Sunil Kumar](#) & [Melissa Fernandez](#)**

## Urbanisation-construction-migration nexus | 5 cities | South Asia

### Briefing note

**Original citation:**

Kumar, Sunil and Fernández, Melissa (2015) *Urbanisation-construction-migration nexus | 5 cities | South Asia*. LSE Enterprise, London, UK.

Originally available from the [LSE Enterprise](#)

Research commissioned by the UK Department for International Development's South Asia Research Hub, New Delhi, India

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/64169/>

Available in LSE Research Online: October 2015

© 2015 [LSE](#)

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

# Briefing note

## Urbanisation-Construction-Migration Nexus | 5 Cities | South Asia

Dr Sunil Kumar and Dr Melissa Fernandez | London School of Economics and Political Science

Research commissioned by the UK Department for International Development's South Asia Research Hub, New Delhi, India



This briefing note is the outcome of a DFID-SARH commissioned research project<sup>1</sup> (March 2014 – October 2015) on the “*Urbanisation-Construction-Migration Nexus in Five Cities in South Asia (U<sup>c</sup>Mn<sup>SA</sup>)*”<sup>2</sup> – Kabul (Afghanistan), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Chennai (India), Kathmandu (Nepal) and Lahore (Pakistan). The country partners were: Ajmal Nimruzi, Qara Group (Kabul); Professor Nasir Uddin, University of Chittagong (Dhaka); K.Sudhir, People's Architecture Commonweal (Chennai), Bandita Sijapati, Social Science Baha, (Kathmandu) and Dr Rashid Memon, Lahore University of Management Science, (Lahore).<sup>3</sup>

It contributes to the literature on urbanisation and migration, as well as to the practice and policy domains by: (i) linking the growing power of *urban* consumption and investment with (ii) the demand for rural migrant contract construction labour (*transient* migrants) via (iii) large-scale urban construction projects (residential, commercial, industrial and infrastructure). The overarching research question is:

### **How do investments in large-scale urban construction and the demand for labour generated, give rise to varied forms of migration?**

*Transient contract migration* refers to migration undertaken to *join* a workforce (as opposed to traditional forms of migration that were predominantly in *search* of work). The use of such labour in large-scale urban construction is certain to increase as it provides a flow of *transient* migrant workers whose rural livelihoods are increasingly untenable and whose alternative income earning opportunities are elusive.

By working in large-scale urban construction, *transient* migrant workers are confronted with several trade-offs. These include: living in low quality “gated” labour camps with very poor services (something that is especially problematic for women and children); forgoing opportunities for collective action; being indebted, to varying degrees, to labour-contractors through monetary advances and withholding of wages during periods of absence; and accepting pay that was below the minimum wage.

The practice of housing these workers in “gated” labour camps with variable freedoms to move in and out makes this labour force *invisible* and *hard to reach* by state and non-state actors alike. This raises a range of *complex* challenges both for policy makers and activists seeking to address deprivation in the economic, social and political spheres.<sup>4</sup> It also has implications for the possibilities of workers to organise collectively.

Tangentially, but of equal importance, is the impact that large-scale urban construction has on rural and urban landscapes, albeit in different ways. Unfettered investment in urban real estate and infrastructure and the accompanying industrial appetite for resources are accelerating processes of enclosure and “dispossession”<sup>5</sup> in the urban-periphery, as well as in rural hinterlands several hundred kilometres away.

The policy challenges faced by internal rural-urban contract construction labour migrants are different to those experienced by international labour construction migrants. In both instances, they experience: wage exploitation; health and safety violations; and poor living (including sanitary) conditions. However, there is more data available on the latter in relation to nationality, scale of migration and their sponsors. Furthermore, nation-states are less able to absolve themselves of their responsibility to their “citizens” abroad. In comparison, the state is largely absent in honouring its responsibility to internal rural-urban construction migrants – a situation exacerbated by their invisibility.

### **Methodology**

Given the dearth of systematic secondary data on large-scale construction activity in the five cities, a mapping exercise, framed by two key questions, was conducted.



- *What are the forms and sources of investment in large-scale urban construction?*
- *Where is this construction being undertaken (in the centre or at the periphery) and what regulatory frameworks define it?*

In total, approximately 1,000 projects were mapped between June and November 2014. From that sample, 25 were purposively selected according to criteria including both construction type and size, as well as research accessibility.

In order to capture the socio-economic status of these *transient* contract construction workers, their working and living conditions, migration pathways, recruitment processes and aspirations we interviewed them at their project sites, where they also live. This posed three key challenges.

*Firstly*, access to migrant labour proved to be widely problematic because developers were suspicious of workers speaking to outsiders. *Secondly*, interviewing all workers within any given construction project is not possible in a research project conducted at a single point in time: a wide range of different skills are used at various stages of construction and workers move to other projects after making their contribution. *Thirdly*, the study of *transient* contract construction labour, resident in labour camps, is particularly challenging given the temporal nature of their stay; in comparison, it is possible to interview city-born and resident migrant construction workers at several points in time. While access was difficult, the responses elicited from a total of approximately 500 migrant workers help address the main research question.

The issues identified in this briefing note should be of interest to a range of actors involved in, and/or with an interest in, the study of labour markets, as they relate to urbanisation and migration, as well as to those with an interest in policy. Policy issues, challenges and suggestions are discussed at the of this note after the key research findings have been presented.

### **Existing literature and the U<sup>c</sup>Mn<sup>SA</sup>**

The literature is largely silent on the dialectical relationship between urbanisation (framed in terms of the consumption power visible in large-scale



Dhaka | Bangladesh



Kabul | Afghanistan



Kathmandu | Nepal



Chennai | India

construction projects) and internal migration (arising from the recruitment of *transient* contract construction labour at their domestic place of origin). Despite the increased attention being paid to investments in urban infrastructure, the silence on the migrant labour that produces it is worrying.<sup>6</sup> Some of the findings of the U<sup>2</sup>Mnp<sup>SA</sup> are new; others reinforce the findings of independent studies relating to urbanisation, construction and migration.

### Urbanisation and migration

Although a range of push factors which contribute to internal population movement are still at work, they vary between the five countries; in some instances they are more nuanced than the literature suggests.<sup>7</sup> In relation to urbanisation, the generalisation of pull factors (such as improved employment opportunities and better access to physical and social infrastructure) refers to independent migration in *anticipation of finding work*. However, the U<sup>2</sup>Mnp<sup>SA</sup> researches a very specific pull factor: the recruitment of “pools” of migrant labour for construction – *transient* contract workers – who migrate to “take-up” work. As large-scale forms of urban construction continue to expand, this pull factor is likely to become an even greater force, something that is discussed later in relation to the policy implications.

It is important to note that *transient* migrant contract labourers are “not responsible” for taking away employment opportunities in construction from local or resident migrant construction workers; rather their recruitment is the result of labour employment practices adopted by large-scale construction firms, developers and contractors. Furthermore, such recruitment does not operate in a vacuum – existing policies and governance structures are silent on such practices of livelihood exclusion.

### Migration and construction

Previous studies have explored the role of independent rural-urban migration streams in petty construction, the operation of construction “spot” labour markets as well as the links formed between labour contractors and workers migrating independently to the city<sup>8</sup>. The main argument was that the informal economy exists as a “reserve army of wage labour”, at the beck and call of capital, maintained as such so as to avoid the payment of welfare benefits associated with permanent employment. The existence of “transient” construction migrants who are contracted at their home villages in the U<sup>2</sup>Mnp<sup>SA</sup> project is testimony to the continued relevance of this thinking.

Employment relationships between employers and employees (unskilled and skilled blue-collar trades) in construction as a whole are informal; large-scale projects are no different.<sup>9</sup> There are no formal contractual arrangements and wages are paid in cash, or in some cases, using mobile telephony.

Compared with workers residing in the city, *transient* contract construction labourers in large-scale construction projects are disadvantaged in bringing wage violations to the notice of groups representing construction labour (where they exist) because of their isolation in labour-camps, their fear of losing favour with their labour-contractor employers, or their lack of knowledge regarding rights. The political will to address violations in “minimum wage” payments was absent in all the five cities.

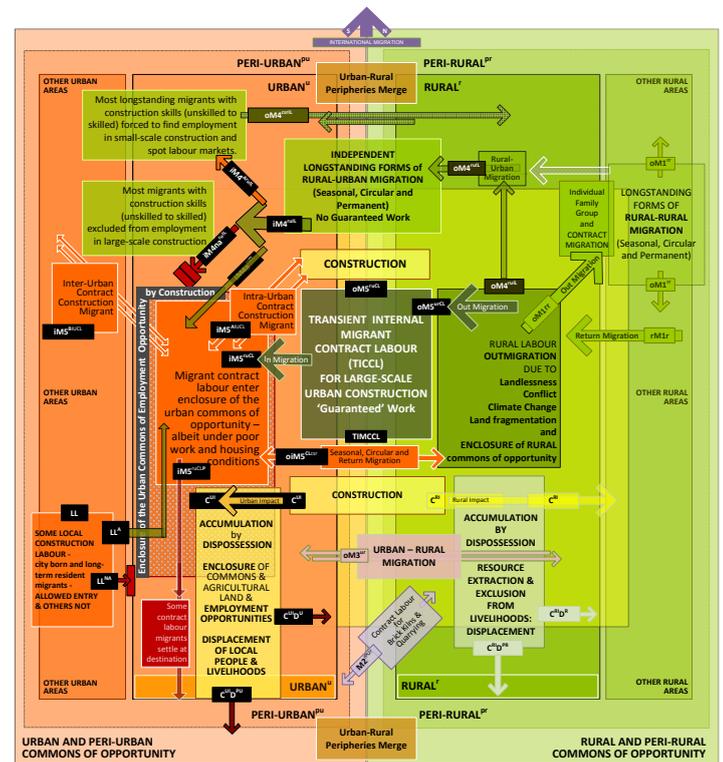
### CONCEPTUALISING THE U<sup>2</sup>Mnp<sup>SA</sup>

The U<sup>2</sup>Mnp<sup>SA</sup> explores the processes underpinning the presence of transient migrant construction labour in large-scale construction through the following inter-related concepts: (i) the “urban commons of construction employment opportunities”; (ii) the “enclosure” of such opportunities vis-à-vis local construction labour; (iii) the use of *transient* contract construction labour as a workforce with constrained mobility;<sup>10</sup> and (iv) the “dispossession” of peri-urban agricultural land and other commons peripheral to cities.

Although a range of push factors for internal migration, such as the “enclosure of the commons”, continue to operate in rural settings, the lack of alternative non-farm employment opportunities seems to be a major factor in *transient* migrants migrating to work in construction. At the same time, “guaranteed” work in large-scale construction projects, accessed via

labour contractors, acts as a key pull factor. Such “guarantees” are not that common for independent migrants.

The argument advanced here is threefold. Large-scale construction should, theoretically, open up employment opportunities for local, resident migrant and independent seasonal or circular migrant labour. However, large-scale construction projects exhibit a pronounced preference for *transient* migrant contract construction labour over local or long-term resident migrant construction labour. This, in effect, produces “enclosures” of work opportunities inaccessible to local labour. Apart from labour contractors, it is usually only the transient workers, through their social and kinship networks, that can bring other workers into these enclosures. Taking up residence in gated labour camps forms part of the informal verbal contract. This, in turn, can act to exclude local and resident migrant labour.



The concept of “enclosure” is used here as a metaphor for the exclusion of local construction labour from employment opportunities in large-scale urban construction projects as well as the material division imposed by walls or fences in most large-scale residential, commercial and industrial construction projects. However, this is not the case in most transport or water supply infrastructure projects.

In both cases, “labour camps” housing *transient* migrant construction prevail – some being more visible than others. Moreover, female workers face additional levels of exclusion due to socio-cultural and occupational structures, including employers’ reluctance to take on responsibilities for their safety.<sup>11</sup>

This conceptualisation of the U<sup>2</sup>Mnp<sup>SA</sup> enables one to position notions and situates the practices of exclusion along three fronts: the livelihood – economic - exclusion of local and long-term resident migrant construction workers; the physical and socio-economic exclusions experienced by transient construction labour, largely as a result of them being housed in labour camps; and the socio-cultural, personal and occupational exclusions female transient contract construction workers are subjected to.



Chennai | India



Lahore | Pakistan



Kabul | Afghanistan



Kathmandu | Nepal

## Key primary findings

- **Seasonality of migration was a common thread running through all the transient contract construction worker interviews.** However, it was much more nuanced than solely being determined by the agricultural cycle. Seasonal return migration is influenced by a range of factors at their place of origin and includes: the cost-benefit of employment opportunities in existing or new projects; and the labour-contractor – transient contract worker relationship.
- **“Gated labour camps” housing transient contract labour (on or off site) makes them “invisible” and “difficult to reach”.** This poses complex challenges for state and non-state actors. For the state, the challenges relate to both the enforcement of existing labour and wage regulations<sup>12</sup> as well as housing and services. In addition, government policies that recognise and support the links that *transient* migrants have with their place of origin, as well as overcoming some of the constraints that separation brings about, are of equal importance. Non-state actors, especially those with an interest in urban labour, are confronted with: how best to gain access to this invisible, difficult-to-reach and transient pool of contract construction labour. The lack of data about the scale and specificities of *transient* labour migrants hinders both state and non-state actors.
- **Transient migrant contract construction labour is heavily dependent on labour-contractor patrons, whether for cash advances or work opportunities.** Despite the range of exclusions and exploitations this migrant labour force faces, they value the “regular” and “guaranteed” work that large-scale construction offers, for the duration of, or the particular phase of, the project for which they have been employed. They also value the opportunity to be redeployed by their labour-contractors to other projects in the same or other urban areas. State and non-state interventions will need to be cognisant of this. Ill-thought through attempts to enhance wages beyond minimum wage stipulations could lead to other exclusions, and efforts to improve housing and services could lead to such costs being transferred to workers.
- **Transient contract migrant labourers do not integrate well with host communities.** This results from their living in labour camps with restrictions on when they are allowed to leave. In addition, they do not see the benefit of making contact with host communities due to the temporary and transient nature of their stay.
- **Transient migrant labourers find it difficult to collectively organise.** They fear retaliation from labour-contractors and the short-term nature of their stay means they also find it difficult to form a sense of community. They also lack of knowledge regarding their rights.
- **As long as large-scale construction remains a substantial part of this new form of urbanism, the recruitment and employment of contract migrant labour will remain and grow.** Construction is vulnerable to boom and bust cycles, especially in real estate. However, estimates of investment in infrastructure in Asia<sup>13</sup> will continue to result in the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects and thus the continued use of migrant labour.

## Key policy issues and suggestions

The U<sup>4</sup>Mnp<sup>SA</sup> identifies several areas of policy concern for country governments, civil society, DFID and the UN’s UN-Habitat and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Policy suggestions need to be tuned to the reality on the ground. For instance, improvements wages or living conditions can result in the emergence of other vulnerabilities, such as the rupturing of migrant workers’ relationships with their labour contractors. Furthermore, policy interventions should aim to be non-threatening to developers and labour contractors. The policy suggestions offered here are tempered to this reality.

Political will is critical for issues relating to contract migrant construction workers. Without this, it is difficult for the issues to even find their way onto the policy agenda, let alone formulation and implementation. National governments must commit themselves to recognising the significance of migration for construction in general and the link between contract labour and large-scale construction in particular. Utilitarian’s who view the trade-off between “guaranteed and regular” work on the one hand, and poor working and living conditions on the other, only serve to maintain the status quo.

## Policy Issue 1

**Transient contract construction migrants are a sub-set of independent construction migrants.**

### Policy Challenge

Recognition of transient contract construction labour as a sub-set of independent construction migrants.

Although transient contract construction migrants may benefit from the guarantee and regularity of work in large-scale urban construction projects, they are worse off on many other front compared to construction workers who migrate independently of labour-contractors.

### Policy Suggestion

In addition to developing policies on internal migration in general, a policy sub-set for *transient* migrant construction labour is required, as: this form of migration will increase in the future; and the challenges that these migrants face are different from those experienced by those migrating independently in “search” of work.

## Policy Issue 2

**The housing of transient migrants in “gated labour camps” ensures a labour force that serves the interests of large-scale construction capital. This makes them “invisible” and “hard-to-reach”. Transient contract construction workers make a trade-off between: (a) the “regular” supply of work large-scale construction provides; and (b) lower wages, longer working hours and poor working and living conditions. Questions relating to the enforcement of existing laws and regulations are not only to do with institutional capacity or resources but also the nexus between the state, land and construction as a hidden and influential force.**

### Policy Challenge

Violations of statutory minimum wage and working condition directives.

Although all five countries have legislation relating to minimum wages, working conditions and levels of housing and service provision, enforcement is rare. Minimum wage violations are not unusual in general; construction is no different. The “invisibility” of migrant contract labour and their understandable reluctance to expose exploitative practices, together with the weak policing of these laws, is a challenge.

The “invisible” and “hard-to-reach” situation of transient contract construction labour, limits the efficacy of existing approaches adopted by non-state actors to improve the working and living conditions of the poor. This includes the “Decent Work Agenda” of the International Labour Organisation, the notion shelter deprivations promulgated by UN-Habitat and the very important work of “collective organising” by civil-society.<sup>x6</sup>

Unlike international construction migrants, internal migrants can leave easily. However, depending on their relations with the labour contractor, transient migrants may find it more difficult to do so compared to local labour.



Chennai | India



Kathmandu | Nepal



Lahore | Pakistan



Kabul | Afghanistan

### Policy Suggestion

Policy thinking can begin with “information flows” on: (i) who has migrated, where have they migrated to and where have they migrated next (step migration: information on step migration is vital to both the family and the state if a serious work accident or death befalls a transient contract construction migrant); (ii) wage exploitation (including overtime or lack of pay), health and safety and other excesses hidden from view. Whilst transient contract construction workers have restrictions placed on how often they can leave their labour camps, a large number of them possess mobile telephones. The development of applications that enable them to record and register the information flows identified above needs to be given very serious thought.

The use of social media could also assist in highlighting the plight of these workers. It is important to promote the message that whilst international construction migrants working in mega-city construction projects deserve the international attention on their exploitation and ill-treatment, there is comparatively little attention given to domestic migrant construction workers despite their numbers far exceeding international construction workers. Interest is only sparked when a major incident, usually causing death, takes place.

## Policy Issue 3

**Labour camps in all five cities were characterised by woefully inadequate provision of housing, water and sanitation. Electricity was less of an issue. Inadequate sanitation provision was particularly problematic for female workers. The findings support the need to separate the challenges relating to housing needs from water and sanitation.**

**Policy Challenge – Housing**  
Enforcement of existing statutory regulations in relation to housing standards.

The challenge here is twofold. First, labour camps are temporary, existing only for the duration of the construction project. Moreover, in real estate projects, labour is often moved into unfinished parts of the building, often violating existing legislation that prohibits such practices. Second, the provision of housing and services are not “free” as might be assumed; they are often deducted from wages.<sup>14</sup>

### Policy Suggestion

Existing laws and regulations need to be reframed in relation to contemporary practices of labour recruitment and deployment. Exploring the ability of new technologies to deliver improved portable housing is a good starting point. In addition, consideration needs to be given as to who would bear the cost of improved housing.

**Policy Challenge – Water and Sanitation**  
Enforcement of existing statutory regulations in relation to water and sanitation.

Water and sanitation are different in their flows: the former goes “in” the latter is taken “out”. This makes the provision of water less complex than that of sanitation.

*Transient* migrants, by themselves, are not in a position to hold employers to account for poor services. Non-state actors are confronted with “hard-to-reach” constraints. That said, employers recognise the importance of water and make some attempts to provide it; although its quality is another matter. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of sanitation; the population as a whole poorly understands the link between sanitation and health. As noted, sanitation involves the removal of waste. In real estate projects, sanitation is one of the last components to be completed; sanitation is not part of infrastructure projects.

Employers do not seem to be interested in providing adequate sanitation facilities on two grounds: the cost of provision vis-à-vis project duration; and assumptions that “open defecation” practices are common among *transient* migrants. In rare instances where sanitation is provided, maintenance is often the critical issue as the facilities depend on the use of water, which in turn is in short supply. It is interesting to note that site-offices for white-collar employees have adequate water and sanitation provision.

### Policy Suggestion

The provision of portable sanitation facilities by external actors for a fee is worth exploring as it would deal with provision as well as maintenance, culminating in improving health outcomes.

## Policy Issue 4

**Recruitment, working and living conditions have a gendered dimension that negatively impacts on women and especially those with children.**

**Policy Challenge**  
How best to ensure that female construction workers are valued - especially since men are overrepresented in the construction labour force.

### Women

The policy challenge in relation to sexism, including explicit discrimination and harassment faced by female construction workers at every stage of the construction process are both cultural and occupational in nature. They include the: (a) lack of training for both men and women regarding the work, and its gender-specific pressures; (b) traditional masculine networks of “word of mouth” recruitment strategies that disadvantage women; (c) sanitary and health concerns that pertain to women; (d) guarantee of their personal physical security and rights in a male dominated environment; (e) enhancement of their skills and thus wages (e) guarantee of equal pay; (f) guarantee of maternity leave/pay/rights (the right to return to work, for example); (g) access to education and training; and (h) improved job retention and possibilities for promotion.

### Policy Suggestion

Educating men and women on how eliminating gender pay gaps and valuing women improves competitiveness and enhances the social and cultural relations of people working within the industry, especially at construction sites. Valuing women in construction will benefit all members of the household. Men, women and children will be better-off economically, socially and culturally.

In particular: women should be made aware of the workplace culture and rights, and at the same time all workers - particularly recruiters and managers - should be trained in equal opportunities and gender-specific issues and pressures; where family migration is present, accommodation should be suitable for all members of a household and include any additional requisite space; security in both private and public spaces must be ensured, with adequate lighting and formal or informal security mechanisms; training and educational opportunities should be made available to suit their working and parenting schedules (eg, night-time); part-time work and flexible hours should be offered as incentives; traditional masculine “image” and male figures used to advertise construction work (including health and safety) should be made gender neutral.

Companies that improve standards by investing in the development of equal opportunities at all levels through developing training courses and improving image-making could be ranked and (or) rewarded by prizes, publicity and or “league tables” that value such achievements.<sup>15</sup> Non-state actors working on the frontline with migrant workers and their children should incorporate gender-positive images of women working in construction. Some of these

suggestions overlap with the other policy sections because there cannot be treated in isolation. For example, suggestions on the use of mobile communications and improved housing and sanitation facilities.

## Policy Issue 5

**Labour camps make transient construction migrants “invisible” and “hard-to-reach” because of where they reside and the need to bypass security personnel, respectively.**

### Policy Challenge

How best to access transient contract construction workers.

Civil society organisations, especially those with an interest in labour welfare, are at a particular disadvantage in accessing these workers as they are seen as a threat by developers and contractors alike. In comparison, those involved in education or health are perceived to be less threatening and find gaining access to migrant contract workers comparatively easier.

### Policy Suggestion

Support for non-threatening forms of welfare provision needs to be considered. The extension of health and education (where applicable) is not only important in itself; it can also act as a conduit for useful information.

## Policy Issue 6

**In comparison to independent migrants, transient migrants are more likely to experience greater exclusion from state welfare provision.**

### Policy Challenge

Access to state provided welfare.

Transient migrants are often excluded from state provided welfare services such as subsidised food as distribution is often linked to the worker's place of origin. Employment in large-scale construction reduces their ability to return home at specified periods to collect such provision. Transient contract labourers with children also face exclusions in relation to education if, for example, access is determined by registration at their place of origin.

### Policy Suggestion

State welfare provision, where it exists or is being planned, must take into account the mobility of migrants; in particular the employer induced constraints on the mobility of transient contract construction labour and the long distances that they travel.

## Policy Issue 7

**In comparison to independent migrants, transient migrants are constrained in their ability to collectively organise.**

### Policy Challenge

Collective organising.

Transient migrants find it difficult to collectively organise. Firstly, their temporary employment reduces the perceived need to organise. Secondly, the lack of community feeling, especially where groups do not share the same language, is another barrier to associating. Thirdly, and most importantly, they fear upsetting their relationship with their labour contractors as this may have an impact on both their current and any future employment opportunities.<sup>16</sup>

### Policy Suggestion

Attempts at collective organising have focused solely on workers. In the case of transient contract migrants, labour-contractors need to be included in conversations. Interventions should convey the message that labour contractors are not the focus of collective organisation; developers are. This would have to involve initiatives at places of origin (as this is the source of recruitment) and be followed at their destination.

## Policy Issue 8

**Residence at the workplace results in the underrepresentation of transient migrant workers in a range of official socio-economic surveys, which are conducted in residential locations unconnected to those of work (apart from home based enterprises).**

### Policy Challenge

The inclusion of transient migrant workers in official surveys.

### Policy Suggestion

Transient migrants should be included in such surveys. Partnerships with non-state actors providing non-threatening social welfare services would be worthy of further exploration.

## Policy Issue 9

**Datasets containing migration information vary hugely between countries, both in terms of the extent to which they include questions about construction related migration and the level of detail they contain in terms of the reasons for migration.**

### Policy Challenge

Harmonisation of official surveys on migration across the region.

### Policy Suggestion

Attempts should be made to harmonise questions relating to internal migration, across the region wherever possible. Such attempts will depend on national surveys initially recognising the importance of migration and construction. Information that currently exists is very broad with limited variables relating to migration and construction.

In the short to medium term, consideration should be given to including more disaggregated questions relating to the reasons for migration. Questions on migration for construction should be given particular attention.

### Additional challenges

#### *Impacts on rural and peri-urban areas*

Although these findings, policy challenges and suggestions derive from the focus of this study - namely the situation of transient contract migrants in large-scale construction projects - the drivers of migration and the impact that large-scale construction has on contemporary urbanism, should not be ignored. Policy should thus include consideration of:

- The specific drivers of migration – meeting daily expenses, repayment of debt, investment in business or improvements to housing at the places of origin. An in-depth and more nuanced review of interventions at “places of origin” is needed.
- Current practices of allowing unfettered investment in large-scale construction (especially residential) and the serious impact this has on a number of fronts: the dispossession of peri-urban livelihoods and commons; environmental outcomes; and the stress on resources, especially water.

#### *Sharing of information and practice at the regional level*

- Information sharing between South Asian nations on the urbanisation-construction-migration nexus does not exist – this would be a good starting point. Attempts should be made to forge links between the ministries of urban development and labour, for example.
- Links could also be forged between non-state organisations working on labour issues in general and construction labour in particular.

#### *Information collection and dissemination*

Currently, DFID commissioned research outputs are made publicly available via its Research for Development (R4D) portal. Two additional options are worth considering.

- DFID's country offices could create or support a portal (with the necessary caveats pertaining to research quality), which contains information on research outputs not funded by DFID, but related to internal migration in general and construction in particular. Linking up with UNDPs Solution Exchange is worthy of further exploration.
- DFID could also benefit from commissioning its own quantitative data collection on migration and construction for countries in which it has an interest.



Kathmandu | Nepal



Dhaka | Bangladesh



Lahore | Pakistan



Chennai | India

## Notes

- 24 March 2014 to 31 October 2015. We would like to acknowledge the critical insights and support provided by Dr Nupur Barua throughout the project. Anirban Ganguli provided useful input into the quantitative aspects of this project. Anuradha Rajan, Assistant Programme Officer, was magnificently efficient in dealing with the paper work. We would like to thank DFID's South Asia Research Hub for funding this project, as it is a very under-researched area.
- The acronym U<sup>C</sup>M uses the notation C underscore in superscript (C) to emphasise the link it plays between the forces of contemporary urbanisation and transient migration. The 'n' that follows the acronym UCM denotes 'nexus' whereas the use of the letter 'p' stands for project.
- Primarily, our thanks go to the 500 or so transient contract construction migrant interviewees who not only gave up their time but also told us their personal stories. Without them, this research would not have materialised – our obligation is to continue to see how their work and lived lives can be improved. We are grateful to the following people contributed to the project at various points in time. First, for the literature search and review by country: Matt Birkinshaw, PhD candidate, Geography, LSE (Afghanistan and India); Taneesha Mohan, PhD candidate, Geography, LSE (Bangladesh), Dr Feysi Ismail, SOAS and UCL (Nepal); and Zoha Waseem, PhD Candidate, Kings College London (Pakistan). Second, members of our Steering Group: Professor Athar Hussain, Director, India Observatory, LSE; Dr Alpa Shah, Anthropology, LSE; Dr Ayona Datta, University of Leeds; and Dr Naysan Adlparvar. Third, Dr Zlatko Nikoloski, LSE Health, worked in the initial stages on broad quantitative aspects of the project. Fourth, Ms Pagniyota Kastritis, who worked extensively on the available secondary quantitative surveys from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal. Fifth, thanks also to Rachita Mishra and Josie Lloyd for their formatting and editing inputs, respectively. Fifth, Dr Sarabajaya Kumar for her edits to the final report. Sixth, to all of those who gave their time in Bangladesh, India and Nepal during our inception mission in July-August 2014. Finally, We would also like to thank our respective families for their support and forbearance throughout the project.
- NCEUS (2007), 'Report on Conditions of Work and Promotions of Livelihoods in the Unorganised Sector' [National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector], India: New Delhi.
- D. Harvey (2003), *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See also, D. Harvey (2004), 'The 'new' imperialism: accumulation by dispossession'. *Socialist Register* 40: 63-87.
- Government of India (2011), *High Powered Expert Committee (HPEC) for estimating the investment requirement for urban infrastructure services*. New Delhi: Gol. Also see, I. J. Ahluwalia, R. Kanbur and P. K. Mohanty (2014), *Urbanisation in India - Challenges, Opportunities and the Way Forward*. London: Sage.
- There have been studies that have explored migration and development – for Bangladesh, see R. Afsar (2003), *Internal migration and the development nexus: the case of Bangladesh*. *Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia*, Working Paper 6. Dhaka, DFID and Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMR); T. Siddiqui (2003), *Migration as a livelihood strategy of the poor: the Bangladesh case*. *Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia*, Working Paper 5. Dhaka, DFID and Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMR). IOM (2015) *World Migration Report 2015 Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility*, Switzerland: Geneva. <http://unitedkingdom.iom.int/launch-world-migration-report-2015-migrants-and-cities-new-partnerships-manage-mobility> Accessed: 28 October, 2015.
- N. Harris, C. Rosser and S. Kumar (1996), *Jobs for the Poor: A Case Study in Cuttack* Cuttack. London, UCL Press.
- In one project visited in Chennai (a large Indian developer based in Mumbai), we witnessed workers recording the beginning and end of shift by punching a time card at the site office. It is clear that developers and (or) contractors have information on the number of labourers working on a project at any point in time and over the construction period but are reluctant to disclose this information.
- J. Lerche (2011), 'The unfree labour category and unfree labour estimates: A continuum within low end labour relations', Working paper No. 10, Manchester Papers in Political Economy, University of Manchester. [http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/14855/1/Lerche\\_unfree\\_working\\_paper\\_2011.pdf](http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/14855/1/Lerche_unfree_working_paper_2011.pdf). Accessed: 24 October, 2015.
- The Chennai Metro Rail project is a prime example. In addition, during our inception mission visit to Dhaka, Bangladesh, we asked a project manager if he would consider employing women. He replied that the burden of ensuring their security was the reason for not doing so. This must be placed in the context of residing in on-site labour camps where control over workers reporting for work is exercised.
- J. Lerche (2012) 'Labour Regulations and Labour Standards in India: Decent Work?' *Global Labour Journal*, Vol. 3, 1. pp. 16-39.
- For instance, the ADB estimates that "between 2010 and 2020, Asia needs to invest about \$8 trillion in national infrastructure and about \$290 billion in regional infrastructure to connect its economies to each other and the world." See, ADB (2009), *Infrastructure for a Seamless Asia*. Manila: Asia Development Bank. <http://www.adb.org/publications/infrastructure-seamless-asia>. Accessed: 24 October, 2015.
- For instance, the BBC reported that Monsoon Accessorize (based in the UK) topped the list of the 115 companies that were found to have paid less than the legal minimum wage of £ 6.70 per hour for those aged 21 and over. The report notes that "Monsoon Accessorize's wages dipped below the minimum because it had a policy of offering staff discounted fashions to wear at work. The cost was taken off their wages, taking them below the legal threshold. The company says the issue came to light when the tax authorities reviewed its payroll system, it took prompt action to end it and that basic wages have been raised to prevent any repeat." <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-34608028>. Accessed: 24 October, 2015
- For example, see the non-profit United Kingdom Considerate Constructors Scheme established in 1997 to improve the image of construction. See <http://www.ccscheme.org.uk/>. Accessed: 24 October, 2015.
- P. Ngai and L. Huilin (2010) 'A culture of violence: The labor subcontracting system and collective action by construction workers in post-socialist China', *The China Journal*, No. 64, July, pp. 143 -158.

The briefing note is now available through LSE Research Online <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/64169/>

For further information please contact:  
Dr Sunil Kumar | [s.kumar@lse.ac.uk](mailto:s.kumar@lse.ac.uk)  
Dr Melissa Fernandez | [m.fernandez1@lse.ac.uk](mailto:m.fernandez1@lse.ac.uk)