

New LSE research project: South Asia's urbanisation-migration nexus

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An innovative DFID-funded research project investigates the economic, political and spatial relationships that result from the urbanisation-migration nexus in five South Asian countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.

Asia's urban population is predicted to double between the years 2000 and 2030. This presents policymakers, international development organisations and civil society with diverse and complex development challenges. Notwithstanding political differences in Asia and country-specific drivers underpinning these challenges, poverty, informal labour markets, housing, basic services and governance are often addressed in similar ways in the region as a whole. Moreover, policies and programmes, by and large, seem to address these challenges in isolation (for example treating urbanisation and migration, housing and livelihoods as distinct and unrelated entities).

The 'Urbanisation-Migration Nexus Project', a new research initiative at LSE, seeks to overcome this problem by exploring new economic, political, spatial and social relationships and outcomes generated as a result of the urbanisation-migration nexus in five South Asian countries. The project will also investigate how the working poor are negotiating these relationships in uncertain and potentially adverse urban environments.

The project is innovative in relation to two key aspects. First, it conceptualises urbanisation and migration as a fluid dialectic: on the one hand, urban economic growth and consumption fuel a demand for labour and, on the other, declining and precarious rural livelihoods make labour vulnerable to new urban demands. Second, it identifies and researches a number of 'new' forces and forms supporting contemporary rural to urban as well as small-town to urban migration. These new forces and forms are explored in five South Asia countries:

- Afghanistan, where the influx of development aid is influencing labour migration, at the same time as demographic shifts are precipitating new forms of social and cultural openness, the latter redefining aspirations, especially for young people.
- Bangladesh, where female migration into the textile and construction industries is increasingly being led by economic incentives rather than familial linkages (such as marriage).
- India, where the spending power of a rapidly growing middle class together with government policies are leading to unprecedented investments in construction and infrastructure, respectively, giving rise to not only the displacement of labour within the city and peri-urban areas, but also the growing use of contract labour from rural areas.
- Nepal, where government policy requiring aspiring international migrants to reside in the capital prior to any international move is creating a transient migrant class employed in the construction and hospitality sectors.
- Pakistan, where migration and identity formation are important factors.

The research project will utilise multiple methods to analyse the urbanisation-migration nexus, including literature reviews, quantitative analysis of datasets, and qualitative empirical case studies. The project is led by Dr Sunil Kumar (Principle Investigator, Department of Social Policy) with Dr Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia (Senior Research Officer, LSE London) and Dr Zlatko Nikoloski (Senior Research Officer, LSE Health and Social Care), and runs through March 2015.

For more information or to contribute to the project, please contact Dr Kumar (s.kumar@lse.ac.uk) and Dr Fernández Arrigoitia (m.fenandez1@lse.ac.uk).

