

Key Messages

Internal migration is one of the defining megatrends of our time, and is a hugely important factor in the structural transformation of countries. UNDESA (2016) cites the number of internal migrants globally to be more than three times the number of those moving internationally (763 million internal migrants, compared to 244 million international migrants). This trend is expected to continue to continue into the foreseeable future, permanently shifting the population and spatial demographic of countries and posing fresh and urgent challenges to policymakers at all levels. Yet, despite the fact that internal migration is much more prevalent than international migration, few attempts have been made to systematically measure its effects. This relative neglect can be largely attributed to a lack of comparable data and inadequate summary statistics.

Within Southeast Asia, the reasons for moving in and between regions vary from country to country, though demand for labour in urban centres has often been a key pull factor. Rural poverty across the region remains obstinately high, which, coupled with a decline in agriculture, is a push factor for low-wage workers searching for economic opportunity in more economically reliable sectors. Other reasons for movement are as diverse as a desire to rejoin family members, marriage, access education, or escape political and environmental instability. Migrants also tend to be younger and more educated, with some form of already-established network in the new location (World Bank 2017, General Statistics Office 2016, Lao Statistics Bureau 2016, National Statistical Office 2016; 2012, National Statistics Directorate 2016, Department of Population 2015, Sukamdi and Mujahid 2015, Ministry of Planning 2012, Quisumbing and McNiven 2006).

In the absence of a comprehensive policy framework and strategy, internal migrants face social exclusion and discrimination, poor labour arrangements and working conditions, as well as obstacles in their access to basic necessities and public services, such as education, healthcare, sanitation, shelter, drinking water and food (Anderson et al. 2017, World Bank 2017; 2016, ILO 2015, UNTWG 2014, Ministry of Planning 2013, Singh and McLeish 2013). In accordance with the principle of “*Leaving no one behind*”¹, a coherent policy framework and strategy should be developed to ensure the safe internal movement of people and to maximise the benefits of internal migration. The opportunities for fast economic growth and poverty reduction that internal migration offer are substantial (ODI 2016, Deshingkar 2006), though the positive impacts of internal migration remain far from fully explored in this context.

¹ As articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2030.

Despite the challenges in documenting the precise nature, scope, and causes of internal migration, it is undeniable that such significant internal movement represents a permanent demographic shift in the structural make-up of every Southeast Asian country. These policy briefs are intended as a step towards understanding the long-term effects of internal migration on cities, migrants, and those who stay behind.

Main Trends in Internal Migration

Although the overall scope and nature of internal migration varies from country to country, the literature² reveals key trends across each of the countries examined. These trends are summarized briefly below.

- ◆ There are two types of internal migration in Southeast Asia:
 - *Long-term migration*, resulting in the relocation of persons or households.
 - *Short-term migration*³ (or seasonal and repeat/temporary migration), resulting in back-and-forth movement between an origin and a destination.
- ◆ A significant (and in some countries, growing) proportion of internal migration is rural-urban, contributing to rapid urban growth.
- ◆ Gendered trends exist in internal migration; males tend to dominate rural-rural and seasonal migration, whereas the majority of rural-urban and long-term migrants are females.
- ◆ Given that internal migration tends to be less costly and involves moving shorter distances than international migration, poorer households and individuals comprise a disproportionate number of internal migrants.
- ◆ Migrants tend to move during their 20s. This affects age distributions in both the source location (where there is a greater proportion of the elderly and children) and the destination (which

² The key surveys for each country from which the majority of these statistics are drawn are as follows: the report of the Cambodia Rural-Urban Migration Project (CRUMP) (Ministry of Planning 2012), the UNFPA Monograph on Internal Migration in Indonesia (Sukamdi and Mujahid 2015), the report of the Lao PDR Population and Housing Census 2015 (Lao Statistics Bureau 2016), the Internal Migration Reports of Malaysia's Department of Statistics (Department of Statistics 2017; 2012), the report of the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census (Department of Population 2015), the 2015 Philippines Population and Housing Censuses of 2010 and 2015 (Philippines Statistics Authority 2016; 2013; 2012), the Thailand 2010 Population and Housing Census and the 2012 and 2016 Internal Migration Surveys (National Statistical Office 2016; 2012, 2010a; 2010b), the Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2015 (National Statistics Directorate 2016), and Viet Nam's 2015 National Internal Migration Survey (General Statistics Office 2016).

³ Short-term migrants are individuals who live away from their usual place of residence for employment reasons for a period of 1 to 6 months.

experiences a surge in its younger population). The decline in the youth labour force in rural areas can lead to an ageing rural population, an increased burden of care and a decline in agricultural production if there is no replacement or compensation for lost labour.

- ◆ Internal migrants are more likely to move before marriage and without children. The majority of unmarried migrants move alone, whereas most of those that are married move with a spouse and, less commonly, with both a spouse and a child.
- ◆ When children stay behind, they are often left in the care of their grandparents, creating “skip generation households” in rural areas. Some preliminary research in this area points to negative impacts of such households on the child’s development, which in turn contributes to persisting poverty (Institute of Population and Social Research 2012, Monserud and Elder 2011, Nanthamongkolchai et al. 2006)
- ◆ Individuals from larger households and with more working members are more likely to migrate. Furthermore, the healthier and more educated members of the household tend to migrate. Those with the highest levels of education generally move to the capital.
- ◆ The majority of migrants consider following family and employment-related factors as the primary motivation for migration. Other factors include marriage or education, as well as escaping environmental instability, violence or family pressure.
- ◆ In the new location, males tend to work in physically demanding sectors such as construction, agriculture and heavy manufacturing or as taxi/motor-taxi drivers, whereas females tend to work in light manufacturing, the garment industry, domestic employment or in the service industries.
- ◆ Migrants often find work in the informal sector, where they are vulnerable to low-paid jobs with little security, as well as systemic risk of exploitation and abuse.
- ◆ Female migrants are particularly at risk of being forced into the commercial sex industry or trafficked.
- ◆ Rapid urbanisation, coupled with increasing inflows of migrants into cities and a lack of matching governance capacity, has resulted in significant urban poverty and the emergence of informal settlements (slums) or peri-urban areas. Precise data on the number of internal migrants living in such areas is scant. However, it is likely that a significant number of internal migrants live in slums or peri-urban areas where they face obstacles in accessing basic necessities and public services, such as education, healthcare, sanitation, drinking water and food (World Bank 2017, Liu 2013, Yuen 2009, Ooi and Phua 2007).
- ◆ Nearly all internal migrants send remittances. However, the amounts vary significantly between gender groups. Some evidence suggests that female migrants tend to remit more often and a larger proportion of their salary. Remittances are generally sent to migrants’ parents and tend to

go towards daily expenses such as food, farming goods, healthcare and children's education.

- ◆ The transfer of new knowledge and behaviour when migrants return to their place of origin can be positive for rural communities. However, there are also risks associated with internal migration for those who stay behind: the loss of agricultural labour poses challenges for the agricultural sector, and returning migrants can also bring back negative behaviours such as drinking or gambling. HIV transmission from returning migrants has also been recorded.
- ◆ In general, the economic situation of internal migrants improves after migration, but remains worse than that of the local population in the destination.

Challenges

Challenges in defining internal migration characterize research on the subject in Southeast Asia.

- ◆ Although the United Nations has made an attempt to define internal migration (UN 1970)⁴, the wording is often broad and open to interpretation, especially with respect to duration of stay. Furthermore, the definitions of internal migrants used in national censuses and other official data sources in Southeast Asia vary. Two definitions are dominant:
 - Persons whose place of residence at the census date differs from their place of birth (*lifetime migrants*).
 - Persons who have been living in the current place of residence between one, three or six months (depending on the source) and five years (*recent migrants*).
- ◆ These definitions are restrictive as they exclude a large proportion of the migrant population:
 - The *lifetime migrant* definition excludes any movement between the departure from the place of birth and the arrival at the place of 'permanent' residence as recorded on the census date, and migrants that returned to their places of birth before the census.
 - The *recent migrant* definition excludes long-term migrants who moved more than five years prior to the census date, seasonal and repeat/temporary migrants, who generally move for less than six months, and migrants who have already returned to their place of origin before the census.
 - It should also be noted that definitions for internal migrants often start at the age of 15. Children under 15 years old who move on their own are, therefore, excluded from the data.

⁴ The UN Manual defines internal migration as "a movement from one migration-defining area to another or a move of some specified minimum distance that was made during a given migration interval and that involved a change of residence".

- ◆ Some of the literature uses both generic definitions (*lifetime* and *recent*) to avoid the exclusion of certain types of migrants from the dataset, making it difficult to ascertain an accurate representation of groups migrating.
- ◆ The literature frequently refers to the dominance of female migration. However, careful consideration of the data reveals that males are dominant in *short-term* migration and hence are often excluded from the definition of internal migrant.
- ◆ Such inconsistency in definitions of internal migration further compounds concerns over the reliability of the data. All comparisons should be taken with careful consideration of the limitations of disaggregating internal migration datasets.
- ◆ The well-being of internal migrants excluded from datasets is of particular concern, especially since these groups are likely to be particularly vulnerable and inadequately catered-for in government planning.

Internal Migration in Southeast Asia: *Towards Better Inclusion of Internal Migrants:*

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Recommendations

General:

1. It is important to recognize *internal* migration, distinct from *international* migration, as a huge transformational force in countries. Much of the information available on internal migration is either old or insufficiently disaggregated. Accurate and timely data focused specifically on internal migration will greatly enhance governments' capacity to engage in evidence-based policymaking.
2. It is important to recognize internal migration as a potential positive force for development. Internal migration is not, by itself, a development strategy; in order for its benefits to be fully realized, it needs to be paired with policies aimed at social inclusion, and incorporated into wider development strategies at all levels of government. Countries should adopt policy and institutional frameworks that facilitate migration inflows and outflows to the benefit of migrants, their families, and communities at both origin and destination

Data Capture and Disaggregation:

1. Across the region, censuses should adopt consistent methodologies, and definitions of "internal migrant" should be harmonized where possible, so that information from multiple countries is readily comparable. Current variations in methodology and definition mean that comparisons between countries must be made with extreme care.
2. Census and national data should be as granular as possible. Data disaggregation is necessary to account for the diversity of internal migrants, who come from and live in a variety of contexts which shape their migratory behavior and experiences. Important axes of disaggregation include (but are not limited to):
 - a. Periodicity

Seasonal or repeat migrants are a distinct population from one-time migrants. Evidence suggests that repeat migrants migrate for different reasons from one-time migrants and have specific patterns of employment and remittance. However, since repeat migrants do not always change their official place of residence, they risk being excluded from government surveys of internal migrants.
 - b. Length of stay.

Definitions of long-term and short-term migration are often extremely broad. For instance, a 60-year old who migrated to a city as a young child and a 40-year old who moved into an urban center at the age of 30 might both be classed as long-term migrants, even though their reasons for migration and experiences of integration might be very different. Greater differentiation within "long-term" and "short-term" categories will generate data that will better inform effective policy.
 - c. Gender.

Research consistently indicates that men and women face different challenges when migrating internally, move for different reasons, and are subject to

different social pressures when they choose to migrate. Consistent disaggregation by gender, including gender groups beyond the man/woman binary, is crucial to fully understanding the causes and effects of internal migration.

d. Ethnicity.

A growing body of evidence indicates that ethnic minorities face particular barriers to effective employment and social integration in urban centers. They are particularly vulnerable to feelings of isolation and loneliness, and are less likely to access government services. Given the ethnic diversity of South-East Asia, ethnicity must be taken into account to fully understand the struggles of internal migrants.

e. Age.

Evidence suggests that life-cycle effects have a significant influence on decisions to migrate, and that migrants of different ages choose to move for different reasons and face distinct challenges in integrating into urban life. Distinguishing between migrants by age will allow governments to target policies to groups who most need assistance.

f. Geographical location.

Examining the profile and causes of migration at the local level will allow governments to more precisely identify the impacts and drivers of migration.

3. In censuses and national data, governments should aim to capture more detailed data on migrants' reasons for movement. In most surveys, the lists of reasons provided for migration are narrow and restrictive. This might hide underlying push factors, such as development problems in rural regions.
4. Coordination between national and local governments, civil society and migrant-led organizations, as well as the private sector, can aid significantly in gathering much-needed data on internal migration. Given the challenges city governments face in monitoring their large internal migrant populations and the fact that the impacts of migrants are felt most strongly at the local level, it is especially important that local authorities in out-migrating regions are integrated into data-gathering processes.
5. Most research on internal migrants focuses on the challenges they face and their economic contribution to urban centers. However, relatively little data has been collected on the impact of internal migrants on those they leave behind, in particular children who are brought up in 'skip-generation' households, or the elderly who are forced into agricultural work to compensate for lost rural labor. In particular, data on internal remittances sent by internal migrants is very limited, which restricts governments' ability to measure their impact on reducing poverty or inequality.
6. The effects of climate change on internal migration are both complex and insufficiently explored in academic literature and government studies. Governments should encourage or undertake research in this increasingly important area. For example, governments might consider implementing climate risk assessment into decision-making procedures, where municipal authorities work to identify communities particularly vulnerable to climate change and which might need to migrate as a result.

Policy:

1. To more fully discern the causes, benefits, and challenges of internal migration, migrants need to be fully integrated into policy-making and consultative processes at all levels of government, and their concerns taken seriously. Migration priorities should be mainstreamed into national and sub-national development plans, policies and strategies. For accurate, inclusive, and well-targeted policies to be developed, governments need to work together with civil society and the private sector, drawing upon their expertise and experience. Policymakers also need to keep in mind that migrants represent a very diverse population, so public policies should give special attention to the most vulnerable (LGBTI migrants, women migrants, child migrants, and disabled migrants) to ensure that their specific needs are addressed.
2. Policymaking will be at its most effective when the semi-formal or informal aspects of internal migration are taken into account. Specifically:
 - a. Urban planning should take into account actual migrant populations, even if migrants are unregistered, have moved illegally, or are only short-term residents.
 - b. Many internal migrants work in the informal economy, without formal written contracts. This exposes them to abuse and exploitation, and it is important to encourage migrants to move into the formal economy by removing barriers to decent employment and increasing oversight of informal labour practices. Governments should also consider decoupling access to services and poverty-reduction schemes from official residency status.
 - c. Since many migrants live in unofficial or peri-urban settlements, governments should consider modifying zoning laws or municipal boundaries so that local authorities have a clear mandate to tackle the unique challenges that such settlements pose.
 - d. Migrants mainly remit via informal channels. The creation of legal and transparent mechanisms for sending remittances will both aid in information-gathering and in making remittance transfers more reliable and secure.
3. Governments should consider creating legal mechanisms through which migrants can seek help/redress or express their concerns. It should be noted, however, that a significant body of evidence suggests that even where such mechanisms exist, many migrants are either unaware of their legal rights or lack the confidence to engage with government services. Legal mechanisms should, therefore, be paired with efforts to inform migrants of their legal rights and make government services migrant-friendly (for example, by employing front-desk staff who can communicate with ethnic minority migrants in their native language). Local authorities might also create legal assistance centers for migrants in areas where they concentrate
4. To maximize the benefits of internal migration, governments should explore the creation of support schemes for migrants at pre-departure, departure, and post-departure states. This might include providing programs to equip migrants with marketable skills, vocational training, or financial literacy. Another option to explore would be the creating of information channels that link migrants to potential

employment opportunities and aid both integration and re-integration. This would help fight human trafficking, which has been a persistent problem in the region.