

An Analysis of Problems and Challenges Faced by Migrant Labourers in Surat City

Heena Bhadouriya

Research Scholar (Economics), Sabarmati University, Gujarat

Abstract

Migration is a crucial component of economic development and urbanisation in developing countries like India. Rapid industrialisation and regional disparities have led to increased rural-to-urban migration, particularly towards economically vibrant cities. Surat City, one of Gujarat's fastest-growing industrial centres, has attracted a large number of migrant labourers due to employment opportunities in textile, diamond, construction, and service sectors. Despite their significant contribution to economic growth, migrant labourers face numerous socio-economic challenges.

This study aims to analyse the problems and challenges faced by migrant labourers in Surat City. The research is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires from migrant labourers, while secondary data were obtained from Census reports, government publications, and previous studies. The analysis reveals that migrant labourers face employment insecurity, low wages, poor housing conditions, health risks, and lack of access to social security schemes. The study concludes that inclusive urban policies and targeted welfare measures are necessary to improve the living and working conditions of migrant labourers and ensure sustainable urban development.

Keywords: Migration, Migrant Labourers, Socio-Economic Problems, Urban Economy, Surat City

1. Introduction

Migration has emerged as a significant socio-economic phenomenon influencing the process of urbanisation and economic development in India. It involves the movement of people from one place to another, often driven by economic, social, and environmental factors. Rural-to-urban migration is one of the most prominent forms of internal migration in India, where individuals move in search of better employment opportunities, higher wages, and improved living conditions.

In recent decades, rapid industrialisation and uneven regional development have intensified migration flows towards urban centres. Cities act as growth engines by providing employment opportunities and better infrastructure. However, this influx of migrants also poses challenges related to housing, infrastructure, and social services.

Surat City, located in Gujarat, is one of the most dynamic industrial cities in India. Known globally for its diamond cutting and polishing industry and as a major textile hub, Surat has experienced rapid economic growth over the years. This growth has attracted a large number of migrant labourers from states such as

Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. Migrant workers form a significant part of the city's workforce and play a crucial role in sustaining industrial production.

Despite their contribution, migrant labourers often face difficult living and working conditions. They are largely employed in the informal sector, where job security is minimal, wages are low, and working conditions are often unsafe. Additionally, migrants face challenges related to housing, health, and access to basic services.

This study focuses on analysing the problems and challenges faced by migrant labourers in Surat City. Understanding these challenges is essential for designing policies that promote inclusive and sustainable urban development.

2. Review of Literature

The issue of migration has been widely studied in economic literature. Todaro (1969) developed a model explaining migration as a rational decision based on expected income differences between rural and urban areas. According to this model, individuals migrate when they perceive that the expected benefits outweigh the costs.

Subsequent studies have highlighted that migration contributes positively to economic growth by providing labour to expanding industries. In the Indian context, migration has played a vital role in urbanisation and industrial development. However, the benefits of migration are not evenly distributed, and migrant labourers often face socio-economic disadvantages.

Empirical studies indicate that migrant workers are predominantly employed in the informal sector, which is characterised by low wages, lack of job security, and absence of social protection. Research also highlights issues related to poor housing conditions, overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, and limited access to healthcare services among migrant populations.

Studies focusing on Gujarat and Surat City suggest that migration has been a key factor in the growth of textile and diamond industries. Migrant labourers provide a flexible and cost-effective workforce, which enhances industrial productivity. However, these workers often live in slum areas or temporary settlements and face various socio-economic challenges.

Despite the growing body of literature, there is limited research that specifically analyses the problems and challenges faced by migrant labourers at the city level. This study attempts to fill this gap by focusing on Surat City.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

To identify the major problems faced by migrant labourers in Surat City.

To analyse employment and income-related challenges.

To examine housing, health, and social security issues.

To evaluate the socio-economic conditions of migrant labourers.

To suggest policy measures for improving their living and working conditions.

4. Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design. The geographical scope of the study is limited to Surat City.

4.1 Data Sources

Primary Data: Collected through structured questionnaires from migrant labourers working in textile, diamond, construction, and service sectors.

Secondary Data: Collected from Census of India reports, government publications, journals, and previous research studies.

4.2 Sample Size

A sample of 120 migrant labourers was selected using convenient sampling techniques.

4.3 Tools of Analysis

The collected data were analysed using percentage analysis and simple statistical techniques.

5. Socio-Economic Profile of Migrant Labourers

The majority of migrant labourers belong to economically weaker sections. Most of them have low educational qualifications and are engaged in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. The age distribution indicates that most migrants fall within the working-age group, contributing actively to economic production.

The income levels of migrant labourers are generally low and unstable. Many workers send remittances to their families in their native places, which further reduces their disposable income.

6. Problems and Challenges Faced by Migrant Labourers

6.1 Employment Insecurity

Employment insecurity is one of the most significant challenges faced by migrant labourers. Most migrants are employed in informal sectors where job security is minimal. They often face irregular work, seasonal employment, and sudden job loss.

6.2 Low Wages and Financial Instability

Migrant workers are often paid lower wages compared to local workers. Irregular payment and lack of formal contracts further contribute to financial instability.

6.3 Poor Housing Conditions

Housing is a major issue for migrant labourers. Many workers live in overcrowded slums or temporary shelters with inadequate sanitation and basic facilities.

6.4 Health Issues

Migrant labourers are exposed to various health risks due to poor working conditions, long working hours, and lack of access to healthcare services.

6.5 Lack of Social Security

Most migrant labourers are excluded from social security schemes such as provident fund, insurance, and pension. Lack of awareness and documentation further limits their access to welfare programs.

7. Findings of the Study

The study reveals that migrant labourers play a crucial role in Surat City's economy but continue to face multiple socio-economic challenges. Employment insecurity, low wages, poor housing, and lack of social protection are the major issues affecting their quality of life.

8. Suggestions and Policy Implications

Strict enforcement of labour laws and minimum wage regulations.

Development of affordable housing schemes for migrant workers.

Expansion of healthcare and insurance facilities.

Inclusion of migrant labourers in social security programs.

Awareness campaigns regarding labour rights and welfare schemes.

9. Conclusion

Migration is a vital component of economic development, and migrant labourers are essential for the growth of urban economies like Surat City. However, their socio-economic conditions require urgent attention. Inclusive and sustainable policies are necessary to address their challenges and improve their quality of life.

References

1. Census of India (2011). Government of India.
2. Todaro, M. P. (1969). A Model of Labor Migration.
3. Government of Gujarat Reports.
4. Surat Municipal Corporation Reports.