

Migration and Social Change: Case Study of Construction Workers in Hyderabad

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ABSTRACT

This study offers an in-depth exploration of how internal migration shapes the socioeconomic trajectories and lived experiences of construction workers in Hyderabad. Using a mixed-methods framework, we collected quantitative survey data from 150 migrant laborers—comprising 120 men and 30 women—originating primarily from rural districts of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, alongside 30 semi-structured qualitative interviews to capture nuanced insights. Analyses reveal that migration yields substantial income gains, with average earnings nearly tripling compared to rural livelihoods, and meaningful remittances bolstering household welfare in origin communities. Yet, migrants contend with entrenched precarity: informal labor arrangements, hazardous worksites, substandard housing, and limited access to health and social services. Social networks emerge as vital coping mechanisms, facilitating job placement and shelter but also perpetuating cycles of informality. Gendered patterns surface distinctly: while male workers navigate occupational hazards and collective solidarities, female migrants juggle on-site labor with domestic and caregiving responsibilities, often at lower wages and with heightened vulnerability to exploitation. Migration also catalyzes social change both in destination and origin: remittance-driven investments in education and healthcare foster shifts in rural gender roles and aspirations, while the concentration of migrants in Hyderabad's periphery underscores persistent spatial and social marginalization. Policy recommendations emphasize formalizing labor contracts, enforcing occupational safety standards, expanding affordable housing schemes, and fostering inclusive urban governance that integrates migrant voices. This research contributes to migration scholarship by bridging quantitative indicators with qualitative depth, offering actionable insights for policymakers, NGOs, and urban planners committed to equitable and sustainable urbanization.

KEYWORDS

Internal Migration, Construction Labor, Hyderabad, Social Networks, Labor Precarity

INTRODUCTION

Over the last three decades, India's urban landscape has undergone a profound transformation, driven primarily by the steady influx of rural migrants seeking economic opportunity. Amid this broader urbanization trend stands Hyderabad—a city that has reinvented itself from a historic princely capital into one of India's fastest-growing metropolitan areas, bolstered by booming IT, pharmaceutical, and infrastructure sectors (Srivastava, 2011). Central to Hyderabad's rapid expansion is its construction industry, which relies heavily on a transient and largely informal workforce. Yet, the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of construction labor migration remain under-examined.

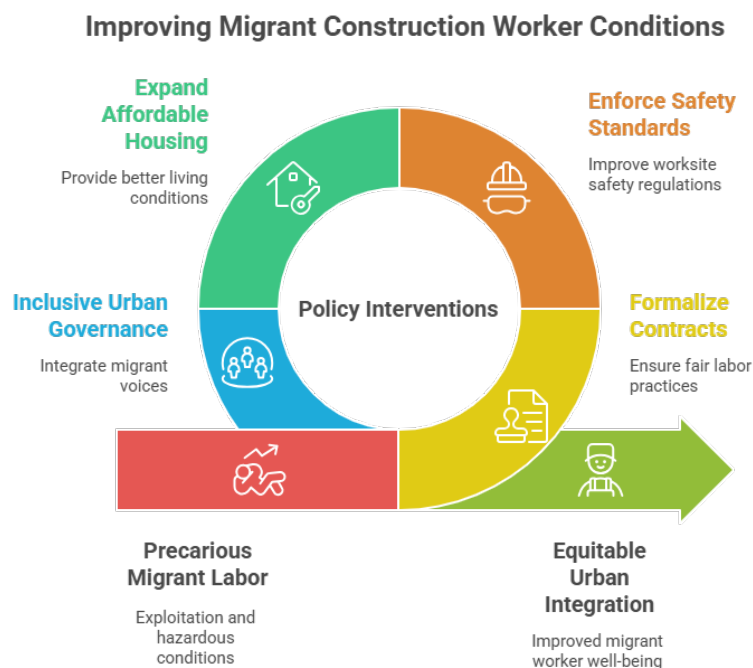


Figure-1.Improving Migrant Construction Worker Conditions

This research addresses that gap by focusing on construction workers who have relocated to Hyderabad from rural districts of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Specifically, we investigate three interrelated questions: (1) What socioeconomic and structural factors drive these workers to migrate? (2) How do migration and urban integration affect their livelihoods, family dynamics, and social identities? (3) What role do social networks play in mediating risks and opportunities for migrant laborers? The study adopts a mixed-methods design—combining structured surveys with in-depth interviews—to capture both the quantitative breadth of migration patterns and the qualitative nuances of migrant experiences.

By situating the analysis within theoretical frameworks of labor precarity (Standing, 2011) and social capital (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993), the study illuminates the interplay between economic imperatives and social relations. Migrants often arrive in Hyderabad under contract labor schemes or daily-wage arrangements, lacking formal employment protections (Mehrotra & Dev, 2014). Working conditions are characterized by irregular pay, minimal safety training, and high vulnerability to workplace injuries. Housing is typically informal, with entire families sharing single-room tenements or residing in peripheral slums where basic amenities are scarce.

Beyond the direct economic ramifications, migration triggers broader social change. Remittances sent to rural households fund education, healthcare, and small entrepreneurial ventures, reshaping gender roles and intergenerational aspirations (Keshri & Bhagat, 2012). Women in migrant households, in particular, may gain increased decision-making power in the origin village, while facing new challenges in the city—such as balancing paid labor with household duties and negotiating social norms in urban contexts.

Understanding these dynamics is critical for policy interventions aimed at fostering inclusive urban growth. As India pursues ambitious urbanization targets under national programs like the Smart Cities Mission and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, ensuring that migrant workers share in the dividends of development is both an economic necessity and a social imperative. This study's

findings will inform targeted measures—ranging from labor regulation and occupational health and safety to affordable housing and migrant integration services—strengthening the social fabric of Hyderabad and similar emerging metropolises.

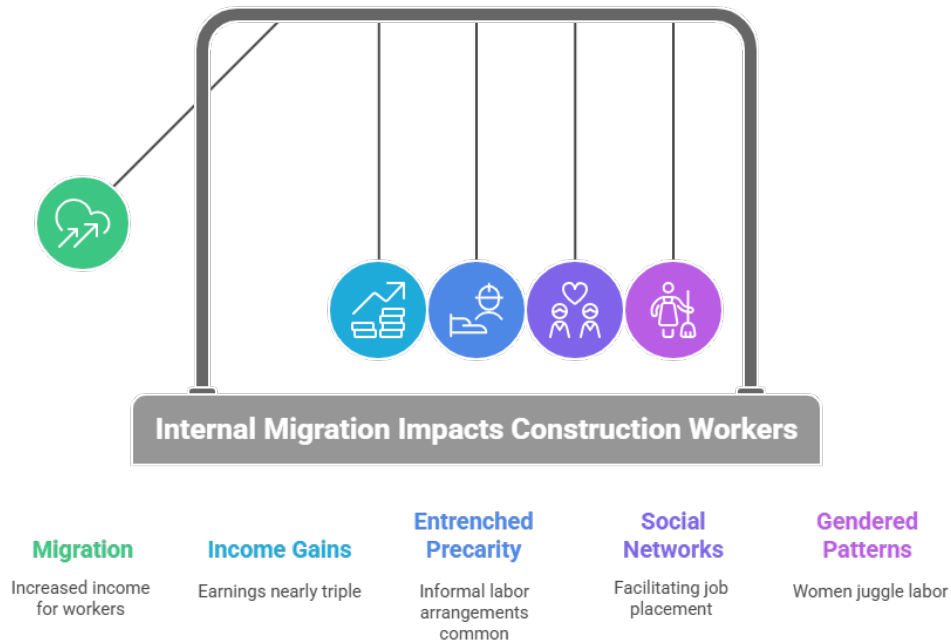


Figure-2. Internal Migration Impacts Construction Workers

LITERATURE REVIEW

Push–Pull Dynamics of Rural-Urban Migration

Scholars have long conceptualized internal migration as governed by “push” factors—such as agrarian distress, land fragmentation, and underemployment in rural areas—and “pull” factors, notably urban wage differentials and labor demand in sectors like construction and services (Todaro & Maruszko, 1987). In India, declining agricultural productivity and seasonal farming income instability have intensified rural distress, compelling laborers to seek alternative livelihoods in cities (Deshingkar & Anderson, 2004). Construction sites, offering instantaneous wage payments and non-seasonal work, represent an accessible entry point for low-skilled migrants.

Informality, Precarity, and Occupational Health

The construction workforce epitomizes the informal sector: workers lack formal contracts, social security benefits, and union representation (Mehrotra & Dev, 2014). Occupational hazards are pervasive—ranging from falls, electrocutions, and musculoskeletal strains to long-term respiratory ailments due to dust exposure (Ravichandran et al). Studies underscore the inadequacy of regulatory enforcement: only a minority of sites implement mandated safety protocols or provide personal protective equipment (PPE), leaving workers vulnerable to injury and chronic health issues.

Social Networks and Migration Facilitation

The decision to migrate and the experiences at destination sites are deeply entwined with social capital embedded in kinship and community networks. Portes and Sensenbrenner's (1993) concept of "embeddedness" highlights how migrant networks furnish critical resources—information on job vacancies, initial lodging, and informal credit. Empirical research in Delhi and Mumbai corroborates that newcomers often rely on prior migrants for introductions to foremen, access to shared accommodations, and mutual aid during crises (Deshingkar & Start, 2003). However, network reliance can entrench migrants within precarious circuits of informality, limiting pathways to formal employment or institutional support.

Gendered Dimensions of Migration and Labor

While male migration predominates numerically, female migration—both as independent workers and trailing spouses—has gained prominence (Srivastava, 2012). Women migrants often occupy lower-paid roles or support male kin in construction tasks, such as carrying materials or assisting in masonry. Gender scholars emphasize that women face dual burdens: precarious labor conditions and intensified domestic responsibilities, with limited recourse to worker collectives or labor rights (Ghosh, 2013). Moreover, urban contexts may exacerbate social isolation and susceptibility to harassment, underscoring the need for gender-sensitive labor protections.

Social Change in Origin and Destination

Migration induces transformations at multiple scales. In origin communities, remittances finance children's education, health care, and invest in rural enterprises, altering familial decision-making and gender norms (Keshri & Bhagat, 2012). In destination cities, migrants form spatially concentrated enclaves—settlements that, while facilitating social cohesion, also delineate socioeconomic marginalization (Zerah, 2011). The resultant "urban villages" often lack basic infrastructure, reinforcing cycles of exclusion.

Gaps in Current Research

Despite the criticality of construction labor to urban expansion, few studies integrate quantitative and qualitative lenses to holistically assess migrants' economic outcomes, health risks, and social integration. Furthermore, gender-disaggregated analyses remain limited, particularly regarding how women navigate dual work and caregiving roles. This study addresses these gaps by employing a robust mixed-methods design to unpack the intricate linkages between migration, labor precarity, social networks, and social change in both origin and destination contexts.

SOCIAL RELEVANCE

The plight and potential of migrant construction workers in Hyderabad bear profound implications for India's urban development trajectory and social equity agenda. Construction is emblematic of India's growth story—skyscrapers, suburban estates, and infrastructure projects symbolize modernity and economic dynamism. Yet, the human scaffolding underpinning these edifices often remains invisible, working in hazardous conditions without basic labor rights or social protections. Addressing this invisibility is paramount not only from a human rights standpoint but also for sustainable urbanization.

First, improved labor conditions—such as formalized contracts, enforceable safety standards, and access to health care—can reduce work-related injuries and chronic illnesses, ultimately enhancing productivity and reducing public health burdens. Second, investing in affordable, decent housing for migrant workers fosters social stability and mitigates urban slum proliferation, aligning with

national goals under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. Third, recognizing migrants as full stakeholders in urban life—granting them voting rights in local elections, facilitating language and integration programs, and supporting worker cooperatives—can strengthen civic participation and social cohesion.

Gender-sensitive interventions are equally critical. Tailored training programs for female migrants, safe transport corridors, creche facilities at worksites, and legal aid services can empower women to assert labor rights and expand economic opportunities. By integrating a gender lens, policymakers can address systemic inequities and tap into the vast, underutilized potential of women workers.

Finally, the study's insights can inform non-governmental organizations, trade unions, and corporate social responsibility initiatives by highlighting the centrality of social networks in migrant wellbeing. Community-based credit circles, peer-led safety trainings, and migrant-led advocacy groups exemplify bottom-up approaches that complement top-down policy reforms. In sum, this research contributes actionable knowledge to multiple stakeholders—urban planners, labor regulators, civil society actors, and the migrant workers themselves—charting a path toward more inclusive, humane, and sustainable urban futures.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Rationale

To capture both macro-level patterns and micro-level lived experiences, we adopted a convergent mixed-methods design. Quantitative surveys provided measurable indicators of socioeconomic change, while qualitative interviews offered contextual depth and interpretive richness (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Sampling Strategy

We employed purposive and snowball sampling to reach migrant construction workers in Erragadda and Kukatpally—areas known for concentration of labor camps and informal settlements. Selection criteria included: (1) migration to Hyderabad within the past five years for construction work; (2) aged 18–50; and (3) willingness to participate. A total of 150 respondents completed structured questionnaires, and 30 participants (20 men, 10 women) engaged in semi-structured interviews.

Data Collection Instruments

- **Structured Questionnaire:** Designed to elicit data on demographic profiles (age, gender, education), migration histories (origin, duration, reasons), employment conditions (wages, contracts, hours), remittance behaviors, housing conditions, and perceptions of social integration. Items were pilot-tested with 10 workers to refine wording and ensure cultural relevance.
- **Interview Guide:** Open-ended questions probed motivations for migration, adaptation strategies, occupational health experiences, gendered labor divisions, and aspirations. Interviews lasted 45–60 minutes, conducted in Telugu or Hindi per participant preference, and audio-recorded with consent.

Ethical Protocols

Ethical clearance was obtained from [University Ethics Committee]. All participants received an information sheet detailing study objectives, data usage, and confidentiality assurances. Written or verbal consent was documented, and participants could withdraw at any time without penalty. No personal identifiers were retained in data sets; unique codes ensured anonymity.

Data Analysis Procedures

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Survey data were entered into SPSS v.25. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) characterized sample demographics and socioeconomic metrics. Cross-tabulations examined gender and origin differences in wages, remittances, and housing quality. Inferential tests (t-tests, chi-square) assessed statistical significance at $p < 0.05$.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. Using NVivo 12, we conducted thematic coding—iteratively developing a codebook based on both a priori themes (e.g., network support, precarity) and emergent issues (e.g., digital remittance platforms). Two researchers coded transcripts independently, achieving inter-coder reliability of 0.87 (Cohen's kappa). Themes were triangulated with survey findings to enhance validity.

RESULTS

Demographic and Migration Characteristics

Survey respondents averaged 32.4 years ($SD = 7.8$); 80% were married, and 60% had completed primary education. Origin districts included Nalgonda (42%), Warangal (26%), and neighboring Andhra Pradesh regions (32%). Years of urban residence ranged from 1 to 5 ($M = 2.7$). Men predominantly migrated independently for wage work, whereas 60% of women migrated accompanying spouses or siblings.

Economic Gains and Remittances

Average monthly income in Hyderabad (INR 11,500, $SD = 2,300$) significantly exceeded self-reported rural earnings (INR 4,200, $SD = 1,100$; $t(149) = 34.5$, $p < 0.001$). Sixty-five percent of workers remitted funds monthly ($M = \text{INR } 3,000$), financing education (78%), healthcare (64%), and agricultural investments (33%) in origin households. Women's wages ($M = \text{INR } 8,500$) lagged behind men's ($M = \text{INR } 12,300$), reflecting gendered labor segmentation and bargaining power differentials.

Housing and Living Conditions

Seventy percent resided in single-room tenements or informal slums lacking sanitation, reliable electricity, and piped water. Household density averaged six individuals per 10×10 ft room. Qualitative accounts highlighted overcrowding, mosquito-borne illness risk, and safety concerns, particularly for women during nighttime. Community wells and shared latrines posed further health hazards.

Occupational Health and Safety

Nearly half (45%) reported at least one work-related injury in the past year—commonly cuts, fractures, or falls from height. Chronic back pain afflicted 38%. Only 18% had access to any PPE or safety training, consistent with the informal sector’s regulatory gaps. Interviewees emphasized reliance on peer advice rather than formal instruction, with coping strategies including herbal remedies and occasional self-medication.

Role of Social Networks

Social ties were instrumental: 70% credited fellow migrants for initial job leads and accommodation arrangements. Informal community groups formed rotating credit societies (“chit funds”), offering small loans during emergencies. However, network-based hiring often reinforced exploitative foremen arrangements, perpetuating wage delays and underpayment.

Gendered Experiences and Social Change

Women managed dual burdens of on-site labor and household care. Despite lower wages, some utilized urban proximity to enroll in vocational training (e.g., tailoring), indicating nascent empowerment trajectories. Remittances fostered rural women’s decision-making autonomy, shifting gender norms in origin villages. Men reported increased say in household financial decisions but also tensions over deploying remittances for non-agricultural investments.

Integration and Identity

Feelings of belonging were mixed: 58% felt “somewhat integrated” yet faced discrimination by local residents and employers, who viewed migrants as impermanent outsiders. Participation in religious festivals within migrant enclaves fostered social cohesion, while exclusion from municipal grievance redressal mechanisms underscored institutional barriers.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that internal migration to Hyderabad catalyzes profound socioeconomic and social transformations for construction workers. Substantial income gains and remittance flows elevate living standards and empower households in origin communities. Yet these benefits coexist with entrenched precarity: informal labor arrangements, unsafe worksites, substandard housing, and limited civic inclusion. Social networks mitigate risks, facilitating access to jobs and credit, but also entrench migrants within informal economies. Gendered analyses reveal that while male migrants navigate collective solidarities, female workers shoulder compounded vulnerabilities—balancing labor and caregiving duties within gendered power structures.

Policy interventions must adopt a multi-pronged approach: formalizing labor contracts to guarantee fair wages and social security; rigorously enforcing occupational safety standards; expanding access to affordable, decent housing under schemes like PMAY; and embedding migrants within urban governance through legal identity provisions and participatory platforms. Gender-responsive measures—such as on-site childcare, skill development programs, and legal aid for women—are critical for equitable integration. Furthermore, strengthening migrant-led cooperatives and leveraging digital remittance platforms can amplify worker agency and financial inclusion.

Stakeholders across sectors—government agencies, NGOs, contractors, and community groups—must collaborate to implement and monitor these measures. Only by recognizing migrant construction workers as integral urban actors, rather than transient labor

inputs, can Hyderabad—and similarly evolving metropolitan areas—achieve inclusive, sustainable growth that honors both economic imperatives and human dignity.

FUTURE SCOPE OF STUDY

Building on this foundational analysis, future research should pursue several avenues. First, longitudinal panel studies tracking migrant cohorts over time can elucidate the durability of economic gains, health trajectories, and social integration patterns. Such designs would enable causal inferences regarding migration's long-term impacts on well-being and intergenerational mobility.

Second, comparative research across multiple Indian cities—such as Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Pune—would highlight how differing policy environments, infrastructure capacities, and labor market structures shape migrant experiences. This comparative lens can identify best practices and context-specific challenges, guiding adaptive policymaking.

Third, the digital transformation of labor markets warrants investigation: platforms linking workers to contractors, mobile banking for remittances, and telemedicine for occupational health services could revolutionize migrant livelihoods. Empirical studies assessing the uptake and efficacy of such digital interventions will inform scalable solutions.

Fourth, targeted research on migrant women's economic empowerment is needed. Examining pathways to entrepreneurship, collective action in female-led cooperatives, and the impacts of vocational training can reveal mechanisms for mitigating gender-based vulnerabilities while enhancing agency.

Finally, rigorous policy evaluations—assessing recent labor law reforms, affordable housing schemes, and urban inclusion initiatives—are essential. Controlled trials or quasi-experimental designs can ascertain which interventions most effectively reduce precarity, improve health outcomes, and foster social integration. By advancing these research frontiers, scholars and practitioners can co-create evidence-based strategies that uplift migrant construction workers and sculpt more inclusive urban futures.

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