



UNDERSTANDING CHILD MIGRATION IN INDIA

Research Brief
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India has witnessed increasing trends in internal migration over the last three decades. The absolute number of internal migrants increased from 232.11 million in Census 1991, 314.54 million in 2001 to 455.78 million in 2011. The total population of migrant children also increased from 44.35 to 92.95 million between Census 1991 to 2011. In 2011, one in every five internal migrants was a child. In India, migrant children are not a homogeneous group and their reasons for movement and vulnerabilities vary. For some children, migration may open horizons and is associated with expanding social and economic spheres, but for many others it may bring serious risks. This research brief based on secondary data presents trends and patterns of child migration, its reasons and influence on the lives of migrant children, related to education, health and well-being.

Key Findings

- As per Census 2011, there are 455.78 million migrants in India. Women form a large majority of migrants (67.9 percent) and marriage is a prominent reason for their migration.
- India is home to nearly 92.95 million migrant children (Census 2011).
- Across India, every fifth migrant is a child (Census 2011).
- More girls constitute child migrants (50.6 percent) as compared to boys (Census 2011).
- Five out of 10 migrant girls constituting 6.39 million, in the age group 10-19 years, were reported to be married in Census 2011.
- Rural to rural migration is the most common stream of flow for child migrants, while urban to urban migration has emerged as a second preferred movement by child migrants in Census 2011, contrary to rural to urban migration in Census 2001.
- Larger number of migrant children are located in rural areas (56.0 percent) compared to urban locations (44.0 percent) in Census 2011.
- Vast heterogeneity exists amongst migrant households and migrant children.
- Young migrant children (0-5 years) are less likely to be stunted, underweight and less likely to suffer from diarrhea compared to non-migrant children (NFHS 4, 2015-16).

Introduction

Increasing numbers of children and adolescents are likely to accompany their parents as well as undertake independent migration while seeking employment and educational opportunities. Migration serves as a common economic coping or survival strategy for households and can provide families and their children with new opportunities or can make them more vulnerable. These vulnerabilities are disproportionately experienced by children.

This research brief is based on findings from the research entitled Understanding Child Migration in India that studied internal migration¹ in India, with

a specific focus on children. National level data sets – Census 1991, 2001 and 2011, along with NSSO-64th round (2007-08), NFHS-4 (2015-16) and IHDS-II (2011-12) – were analysed to understand child migration in India. The brief highlights important patterns in relation to migration of children, reasons for which they migrate and the nature of their vulnerabilities.

Overall In-Migration Trends

Internal migration in India is significant and has been showing an increasing trend. According to Census 2011, there are 455.78 million migrants in India, resulting in 223.67 million additional migrants since Census 1991. The percentage of

¹ In-migration or internal migration is defined as number of migrated people counted at their place of enumeration, while out-migration is defined as movement of people out of a place.

internal migrants has been increasing steadily from 27.7 percent (Census 1991) to 30.6 percent (Census 2001) to 37.6 percent (Census 2011) over the last two decades. It is important to note that the growth of internal migrants is significant compared to the growth of the general population over the span of two decades (1991 – 2011).

As per NSSO-64th round, out of the total migrant households, 62.7 percent of migrant households have at least one child aged between 0-18 years. Amongst migrant households, 56.6 percent and remaining 43.4 percent households are from urban areas. This indicates that more migrant children reside in rural areas as compared to urban areas. The need to focus on the situation and vulnerabilities experienced by migrant children becomes critical given the magnitude of the child migration.

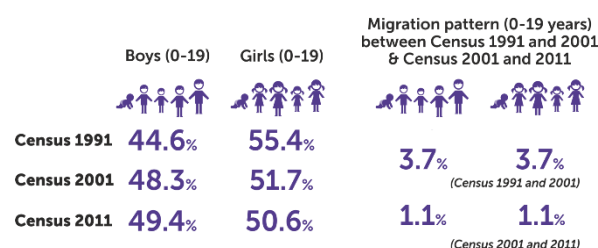
Trends and Patterns in Child Migration

As per Census 2001, child migrants (0–19 years) form around 13 percent (60.25 million) of the total population of children while it has increased to 18.9 percent (92.95 million) in Census 2011. Analysis of Census 2011 data reveals that nearly every fifth migrant is a child. Moreover, the decadal growth in child migrants for the Census period 2001 to 2011 is significantly higher (54.3 percent) than the growth for the Census period 1991 to 2001 (35.9 percent). It is also evident that the growth of child migrants was significantly higher than the growth of child population during the same period i.e. 18.5 percent between 1991-2001 and 6.3 percent between 2001- 2011.

According to Census 2001 and Census 2011, migrant girls form a majority – 51.7 percent (31.16 million) as per Census 2001 and 50.6 percent (47.05 million) as per Census 2011, akin to the situation for female migrants across all ages. However, it is pertinent to note that the decadal changes are more dramatic for migrant boys (47.0 percent and 57.8 percent according to Census 2001 and 2011 respectively) as compared to migrant girls (26.9

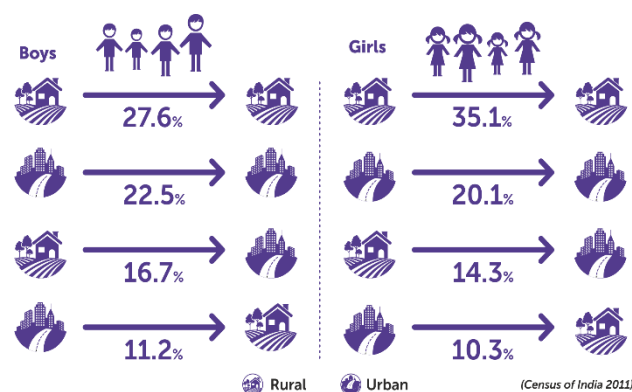
percent and 51.0 as per Census 2001 and 2011 respectively). The increasing trend of migrant boys becomes even more evident, when the decadal growth of migrant boys (47 percent between Census 1999 - 2001 and 57.8 percent between Census 2001 -2011) is compared to the overall growth in boys' population (19.4 percent between Census 1999-2001 and 6.1 percent between Census 2001- 2011).

Percentage of Child Migrants Across Age Groups (0-14 and 15-19 Years)



According to Census 2011, a majority of child migrants (0-19 years) were enumerated in rural areas (56.0 percent) compared to urban areas (44.0 percent), similar to Census 2001 (59.9 percent child migrants enumerated in rural areas). Rural to rural migration emerges as the most preferred movement amongst child migrants in both Census 2001 and 2011, accounting for a third (38.3 percent as per Census 2001 and 31.4 percent as per Census 2011) of all child migrants. According to Census 2001, rural to urban migration (17 percent) was found to be as second preferred movement while urban to urban migration (21.3 percent) emerges as the second preferred movement as per Census 2011. The flow of urban to rural migration forms the lowest proportion of child movement accounting for only 6.5 percent and 10.8 percent of all child migration according to Census 2001 and 2011 respectively.

Percentage of Child Migrants in India by Migration Streams



Note: Amongst migrant children, 14.4% rural and 7.6% urban boys and 6.8% urban girls did not cite final destination.

States with Highest Child Migrants

The state-wise disaggregation of Census 2001 data shows that Goa has the highest percentage of child migrants (53.7 percent, 0.24 million), followed by Maharashtra (26.3 percent, 10.68 million) Arunachal Pradesh (24.0 percent, 0.13 million), Kerala (21.3 percent, 2.40 million) and Gujarat (20.5 percent, 4.46 million). Maharashtra has the highest burden of child migrants in absolute numbers (10.68 million). Census 2011 analysis reveals that Goa continues to have the highest (80.7 percent, 0.38 million) percentage of in-migrants children (0-19 years), followed by Kerala (55.7 percent, 5.81 million), Maharashtra (37.2 percent, 15.08 million), Tamil Nadu (34.4 percent, 8.01 million), Andhra Pradesh (33.5 percent, 10.01 million) and Arunachal Pradesh (31.9 percent, 0.20 million). Maharashtra continues to have highest burden of child migrants in absolute numbers (15.08 million).

Literacy Rate Amongst Child Migrants

Contrary to common belief, both migrant boys and migrant girls (0-19 years) have higher literacy rates (58.7 percent as per Census 2001 and 63.4 percent as per Census 2011), compared to non-migrants (49.4 percent as per Census 2001 and 57.7 percent as per Census 2011). While literacy amongst child migrants in the age-group 0-14 years is greater (52.3 percent) compared to non-migrants (48.4 percent) as per Census 2011, the literacy rate amongst 15-19 years old migrant children is lower (87.5 percent) compared to non-migrants (89.2 percent). However, more migrant children (22.5 percent) are completing secondary schooling² in comparison to non-migrant children (15.0 percent) according to Census 2011 analysis.

Child Marriage Amongst Child Migrants

What is particularly alarming is that 39.3 percent and 33.5 percent of all migrant children (10-19 years) were married according to Census 2001 and 2011 respectively as compared to only 4.8 and 4.5 percent of non-migrant children. This was largely accounted by migrant girls with 61.7 percent married according to Census 2001 and 52.7 percent in Census 2011, compared to 7 percent and 6.2 percent of non-migrant girls married according to Census 2001 and 2011 respectively. It was observed

that almost equal percentage of migrant (3.9 percent) and non-migrant boys (3.1 percent) were married in the age group 10-19 years based on Census 2011 analysis. This points to the huge problem of child marriage amongst migrant girls which is likely to interfere with their education, skill development and work opportunities.

Share of Married Girls Amongst Migrant Girls of Age 10-19 Years



Five Out of 10 Migrant Girls Were Married in the Age Group 10-19 (Census 2011)

Understanding Why Children Migrate?

Moving with household or after birth, marriage, education and reasons associated with work/employment are the major reasons cited for migration of children. These reasons interact with other dimensions such as age, gender, social groups place of residence and streams of migration, thereby increasing the complexity of the phenomenon of child migration. It is relevant to note that the category of reasons for migration listed under 'others' is cited by 38.2 percent migrant children in Census 2011, however, no elaboration has been provided in Census data as to what is subsumed under this category of 'others'.

Share of Migrant Boys Who Moved with their Households



Approximately Five out of every 10 Migrant Boys (15 - 19 Years) Moved with their Households (Census of India 2011)

'Moved with household'³ emerges as the predominant reason for migration since 47 percent of migrant children (0-19 years old) in Census 2001 and 50.8 percent in Census 2011 cited this. Akin to this, more than half of under 15 migrant children moved with households. However, this trend declines (32.4 percent in Census 2001 and 38.5 percent in Census 2011) as children grow older i.e

² Please note that this does not include diploma, technical diploma and graduation degree.

³ Moved with household includes moved after birth as a reason for migration.

in the 15-19 years age group. ‘Marriage’ is another key driver of child migration. It is observed that 28.0 percent of 15-19 years old in Census 2001 and 20.0 percent in Census 2011 cited marriage as key reason for migration. A stark gender difference is noticed with 46.3 percent girls (15-19 years) as per Census 2001 and 34.9 percent girls as per Census 2011 migrating due to marriage compared to 0.3 and 0.6 percent boys (15-19 years) according to Census 2001 and 2011 respectively.

Share of Migrant Girls (15–19 Years) Who Cited Marriage as Reason for Migration, (Census of India 2011)



Nearly One of Every Three Migrant Girls Cited Marriage as Reason for Migration

NSSO-64th round also cites marriage as a significant reason for migration cited by 43.1 percent Scheduled Tribes (ST), 35.6 per cent Scheduled Castes (SC), 34.1 percent Other Backward Class (OBC), and 39.4 percent of those belonging to Muslim households (15-18 years). This points to the prevalence of the malpractice of child marriage among different social groups which require policy attention.

Education is cited by only 3.2 percent children (0-19 years) in Census 2001 and 3.4 percent children in Census 2011 as a reason for migration. On the other hand, NSSO-64th round, reports a much higher proportion of children (0-18 years) migrating for studies (16.8 percent). Gender difference is also noticed in migration for education, with almost twice the percentage of boys migrating for education compared to girls.

As per Census 2011, 0.26 percent of all migrant children in the age group of 0-14 years are engaged in work/ employment while an additional 0.05 percent are engaged in business. Though this appears to be a small percentage, this equates to significant number of children (i.e. 1,97,64,550) working in this age group of 0-14 years. Data from Census 2021 will be useful to analyse the impact of

the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 on the incidences of child labour.

Differences in the reasons for migration are also noticed across different streams of migration, i.e. rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-rural, and urban-urban.

Vulnerabilities Amongst Migrant Children

Migration is known to influence the lives of children. Various researchers have highlighted that migrant children lose the protection of their social networks back home and that their well-being is often jeopardized as they migrate⁴. For the purpose of this study, economic well-being of migrant children has been studied on the basis of their household’s monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) and the vulnerabilities they experience. A comparison by MPCE tercile between migrant and non-migrant households suggests that the migrants are significantly better-off than non-migrants if they belong to top MPCE tercile households. This gap narrows as household size increases from one to three children. This difference between migrant and non-migrant households diminishes when comparing middle and bottom tercile households, highlighting the inequity between the richest and poorest migrant households.

The NFHS-4 data shows that migrant children in early childhood (0-5 years old) are 8 percent less likely to be stunted, and 15 percent less likely to be underweight and suffer from diarrhea. This indicates that migrant children are significantly better off than non-migrant children in terms of health-related outcomes. However, migrant children in the age group 0-5 are less likely to be immunized in comparison to non-migrant children. It is important to highlight that this finding should not be viewed in isolation, as many linked factors such as household wealth, location (urban or rural) and the education level of their mothers are known to have a correlation with health and developmental outcomes for children.

For older children, vulnerability was assessed on the basis of their engagement in work. A comparison based on the NSSO-64th round data shows that migrant children aged 6-14 years and 15-18 years

⁴ Lee YJ. (2013). Social vulnerability indicators as a sustainable planning tool. Environmental Impact Assessment Review. 44 pp 31–42.

were more likely to be engaged in paid work as compared to non-migrant children.

Cluster analysis shows that children living in the least poor cluster are substantially better off than children from the poorest cluster in terms of wealth, educational attendance and less engagement in work. Conversely, children in the poorest migrant households, are more vulnerable because of being engaged in more work and limited educational opportunities. Regression analysis also reveals that boys, children from poorest tercile, ST and Muslim households from rural areas are more likely to be working. Early transition of these children to the labour market may imply that children do not get opportunities to acquire the skills needed for entering workforce, thus perpetuating the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Recommendations

Prevention of Child Marriage Needs Policy Attention

Child marriage which is a major reason for migration amongst poorest rural girls requires particular policy attention.

Prevention of Child Labour is Essential

Given that 19.76 million migrant children in the age group 0-14 years were involved in child labour, it is important to ensure effective implementation of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 as well as Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2010.

Develop Multi-Pronged Strategy to Address Diverse Needs of Child Migrants

It is critical for stakeholders including Government departments at Central, State and District level, child rights organisations and Panchayati Raj Institutions to come together to pay special attention to emerging needs of child migrants of different ages and ensure access to services. There is a need for targeted intervention for migration hot-spots as well as vulnerable migrant social groups e.g. SC, ST as well as Muslim children to ensure that these children in specific get access to services. For example, with respect to education it is critical to provide them residential schools, particularly if their parents are constantly involved in seasonal migration. Furthermore, rural children must be provided incentives to continue secondary education and the curriculum in schools should be ‘vocationalised’ to curb intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Address Data Gaps

National and micro surveys need to specifically gather data on child migrants so that better planning can be undertaken to address their needs.

Research on Child Migration

There is an urgent need to focus on and develop a mixed-methods research agenda for child migration. The aforesaid agenda must recognise children as active agents in the migration process and aim to capture diverse facets of child migration including vulnerabilities of children across different wealth terciles and contexts.

Key Policy Implications

The key policy implications emanating from the secondary analysis from various data sources such as Census, NSSO and NFHS are as follows:

- 1. Need for Better Planning & Governance Focussed on Child Migrants.**
- 2. Targeted Interventions in Migration Hot-Spots.**
- 3. Address Data Gaps Related to Child Migrants in National Surveys.**
- 4. Need to Focus and Collect Data on Independent Child Migrants.**
- 5. Multi-pronged Strategy to Address Diverse Needs of Child Migrants.**
- 6. Prevention of Child Labour.**
- 7. Prevention of Child Marriage.**
- 8. Address Vulnerability of Migrant Children.**
- 9. Develop A Research Agenda for Child Migration.**



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