Circular Migration

Why in News?

Recently India and Israel have signed a circular migration labour agreement.

What is Circular Migration?

- **Circular Migration** – It is a repetitive form of migration wherein people move to another place (the destination country) and back (country of origin) according to the availability of employment.
- It means that people move to different locations for a brief period of time when work is available.
- It is a phenomenon mostly among low-income groups who migrate to avail of seasonally available jobs in another country, city, place etc.
- **Circular Migrant** - As per the report on measuring circular migration by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Task Force, one is called a circular migrant if you have completed at least 'two loops' between two countries.
- Circular migration became quite popular in the 60s and 70s with the advent of globalisation and development.
- **Characteristics of Circular Migration**
    - Temporary residence in the destination location
    - Multiple entries into the destination country
    - Freedom of movement between the country of origin and the country of destination during the period of residence
    - Legal right to stay in the destination country
    - Protection of migrants' rights
- **Driving factors of Circular Migration**
    - Increased access to modern forms of transport and communication.
    - Social networks
    - Growth of multinational corporations
    - Ageing population in developed countries such as Western Europe and Japan.

What is Circular Migration within India?

- **Internal Migration** - In India, internal migration, which is migration within a particular country or State, has almost always been circular.
- **Rural to Urban** - With the advent of jobs in the manufacturing, construction and services sector, there has been a huge flow of migrants from rural areas to urban cities.
- Between 2004–2005 and 2011–2012, the construction sector witnessed one of the largest net increases in employment for all workers, specifically for rural males.
- **Rural Urban Collapse** – Due to this migration Rural populations and their economy

dwindled and urban spaces witnessed infrastructural collapse as they are unable to properly house incoming populations.

- **Uneven development post-liberalisation** - It led to a lot of inter-State migration, with States like West Bengal, Odisha and Bihar having some of the highest rates of out-migration.
- Initially, while most of the migration was to Delhi, nowadays it has increased to southern States as well.
- Most of the rural migrants were occupied in agricultural jobs in their origin States and when they migrated a majority of them were engaged in low-skill jobs.
- **Positive Outcomes** - Higher paying jobs when compared to origin States, better household welfare due to remittances, ease of mobility etc.
- Women get more autonomy and decision-making power in the family due to the absence of men who migrate.
- **Issues** – As Language barrier is a big obstacle, Rural circular migrants are often at the mercy of middlemen or brokers.
- They are made to work in unhygienic and unsafe conditions with little to no protective equipment.
- They are routinely exploited and suffer significant 'unfreedoms' in host States.
- Indigenous wage groups and unions resent these migrants as they are seen as taking away their jobs by agreeing to work for lower wages.
- **Bare Minimum** - The migrants are able to barely provide for themselves and their families, with no scope for further asset creation or savings.
- Uncertainty - There is also a certain precarity associated with these jobs as they are seasonal and often irregular.

What are the Benefits of circular migration?

- **Balanced migration** - It looks at migration not only from the point of view of the receiving country but also of the sending nation.
- **Human Capital Development** - Enhanced experience of working with sophisticated construction machinery and advanced management protocols
- **Prevent Brain Drain** – The negative effects of brain drain will reduce and a sort of brain circulation will be encouraged, wherein the migrants can use their talents in both countries and still contribute to remittances.

Brain drain is the permanent out migration from home country to foreign country of highly-qualified human resources like doctors and engineers.

- **Improving Quality of Life** - The ageing demography of the developed world has created the greatest opportunity for India to enhance the quality of life of many Indians in a single generation.
- **Win Win solution** - Government-to-government agreements safeguard the wages and social security of migrant workers in destination countries and their guaranteed return.

What are the challenges?

- Even though India has the requisite numbers, fulfilling the global skills gap is not an easy proposition.
- **Language barriers** – Communication becomes challenging, since since moving across different countries with short period stay doesn't let learning the language.
- **Legal compliance challenges** - G-to-G agreements for circular migration require exact skill-matching and many legal compliances.
- **Procedural challenges** - Acquiring a passport and the ability to demonstrate skills in a format required by the receiving country are challenges for rural people.
- Though Indian workers may have the requisite skills, they may not be able to demonstrate them in the pre-defined manner with the use of specific tools.
- **Identifying the resources** – It is a challenge to identify, at scale, youth with the exact required skills.

What are the government initiatives?

- **Demand Aggregation** - National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has aggregated the skill gap demand for many of India's partner countries.
- **State level SOPs** - Maharashtra Institution for Transformation (MITRA) worked closely with the NSDC to evolve SOPs and policy norms so that skilled youth could access higher wage markets.
- **Skill Development** - Launched in 2015, this mission aims to provide vocational training and skill development to Indian youth, making them more attractive to employers abroad.
- **Booster Training** - NSDC has developed a four-day course on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to upgrade the existing skills.
- **International Cooperation Agreements** - India has signed bilateral and multilateral agreements with various countries to facilitate labor migration and protect the rights of Indian workers.
- **Overseas Employment Cell (OEC)** - The Ministry of Labor and Employment has established Overseas Employment Cells in various states to provide assistance to migrants and their families.

What lies ahead?

- Establish comprehensive bilateral agreements that outline the rights, responsibilities, and expectations of both migrants and host countries.
- Simplify visa processes, reduce costs, and increase the efficiency of obtaining work permits.
- Offer vocational training and skill development programs to migrants, equipping them with the necessary qualifications for specific job roles.
- ensure secure and affordable remittance channels to encourage migrants to send money back to their home countries.
- Collaborate with employers in both countries to identify skill gaps and develop tailored training programs.

References

1. The Indian Express | Circular Migration to Meet Global Skill Gap
2. The Hindu | Circular Migration

