Need for an Internal migration policy

What is the issue?

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Internal migration in India is rising in recent times and there is a demand for framing a policy in this regard.

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What are the factors driving internal migration?

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- Internal migration can be driven by push and/or pull factors.
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- In India, over the recent decades, agrarian distress (a push factor) and an increase in better-paying jobs in urban areas (a pull factor) have been drivers of internal migration.
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- Also, distress due to unemployment or underemployment in agriculture, natural calamities, and input/output market imperfections serves as the contributing factors.
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- Data show that **employment-seeking** is the principal reason for migration in regions without conflict.
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What are the problems faced by internal migrants?

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- **Informal growth** - A migrant's lack of skills presents a major hindrance in entering the labour market at the destination.
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- Further, the modern formal urban sector has often not been able to absorb the large number of rural workers entering the urban labour market.
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- This has led to the growth of the **'urban informal' economy**, which is

marked by high poverty and vulnerabilities.
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- The ‘urban informal’ economy is wrongly understood in countries such as India as a transient phenomenon, even though it has expanded over the years and accounts for the bulk of urban employment.
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- **Jobs** - Most jobs in the urban informal sector pay poorly and involve self-employed workers who turn to petty production because of their inability to find wage labour.
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- There are also various forms of discrimination which do not allow migrants to graduate to better-paying jobs.
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- Migrant workers earn only two-thirds of what is earned by non-migrant workers.
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- **Cost of living** - Further, they have to incur a large cost of migration which includes the ‘search cost’ and the hazard of being cheated.
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- Often these costs escalate as they are outside the state-provided health care and education system.
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- This forces them to borrow from employers in order to meet these expenses.
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- However, frequent borrowing forces them to sell their assets towards repayment of loans.
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- **Source Factor** - Employment opportunities, the levels of income earned, and the working conditions in destination areas are determined by the migrant’s household’s social location in his or her village.
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- The division of the labour market by occupation, geography or industry (labour market segmentation), even within the urban informal labour market, confines migrants to the lower end.
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- Also, such segmentation reinforces differences in social identity, and new forms of discrimination emerge in these sites.
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What are the benefits associated with migration?

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- Internal migration has resulted in the increased well-being of households, especially for people with higher skills, social connections and assets.
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- Migrants belonging to lower castes and tribes have also brought in enough income to improve the economic condition of their households in rural areas and lift them out of poverty.
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- **Circular migration** or repeat migration is the temporary and usually repetitive movement of a migrant worker between home and host areas, typically for the purpose of employment.
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- Data show that a circular migrant's earnings account for a higher proportion of household income among the lower castes and tribes.
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- This has helped to improve the creditworthiness of the family members left behind where they can now obtain loans more easily.
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- Thus, there exists a need to scale-up interventions aimed at enhancing these benefits from circular or temporary migration.
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- Also, short-term migration to urban areas is a part of a long-term economic strategy of the rural households to improve their rural livelihoods.
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- Hence, local interventions by NGOs and private entrepreneurs need to consider cultural dimensions reinforced by caste hierarchies and social consequences while targeting migrants.
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Why there is need for a national policy?

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- The need for a national policy towards internal migration is underscored by the fact that less than 20% of urban migrants had prearranged jobs.
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- Nearly two-thirds managed to find jobs within a week of their entry into the city.
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- The probability of moving to an urban area with a prearranged job increases with an increase in education levels.
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- Access to information on employment availability before migrating along with social networks tend to reduce the period of unemployment

significantly.
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- Social networks in the source region not only provide migrants with information on employment opportunities, but are also critical as social capital in that they provide a degree of trust.
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- While migrants interact with each other based on ethnic ties, such ties dissipate when they interact with urban elites to secure employment.
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- The bulk of policy interventions for the migrants are aimed at providing financial services and directed towards poverty reduction.
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- However, there is a dearth of direct interventions targeted and focussed on regions.
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- Hence, a national policy should aim at reducing distress-induced migration on one hand and address conditions of work, terms of employment and access to basic necessities on the other.
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What should a national policy contain?

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- It should facilitate the **integration** of migrants into the local urban fabric, and building city plans with a regular migration forecast assumed.
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- Lowering the cost of migration, along with eliminating discrimination against migrants, while protecting their rights will help raise development across the board.
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- Delhi is a classic example which has changed its focus from limiting urban migration to revitalising its nearby cities such as Meerut in building transport links and connectivity to accommodate migrants.
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- It should distinguish between the interventions aimed at ‘migrants for survival’ and ‘migrants for employment’.
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- It should also distinguish between individual and household migrants, because household migration necessitates access to infrastructure such as housing, sanitation and health care more than individual migration does.
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- It should provide continued dynamic interventions over long periods of time

for seasonal migrants, instead of single-point static interventions.
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- It should provide more space to local bodies and NGOs which bring about structural changes in local regions.
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- It should focus on measures enhancing skill development would enable easier entry into the labour market.
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- Skill development can be supported by market-led interventions such as microfinance initiatives, which help in tackling seasonality of incomes.
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- It should consider the push factors, which vary across regions, and understand the heterogeneity of migrants.
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- Remittances from migrants are increasingly becoming the lifeline of rural households.
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- Hence, the policy should improve financial infrastructure to enable the smooth flow of remittances and their effective use require more attention from India’s growing financial sector.
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Source: The Hindu

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