Women in Migrant Urban Workforce

What is the issue?

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- While women constitute a considerable share of urban migrants, but governments seems blind to their concerns.
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- Our policy makers need to model plans for enhancing the lot of migrants in general and urban-women migrants in particular.
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What are the trends in women migration?

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- A recent UN report says India is on the “brink of an urban revolution”, as its population in towns and cities are expected to reach 600 million by 2031.
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- Fuelled by migration, megacities of India (Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata) will be among the largest urban concentrations in the world.
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- Interestingly, the 2011 Census reveals that women constitute a major share of the urban migrant population, which is a new trend.
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- Marriage-induced migration continues to be the predominant reason for the overwhelming presence of women among migrants.
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- But its importance has declined post liberalisation as export-oriented economic development has created demand for women labour.
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- An “Indiaspend analysis” shows that women migrating for work grew by 101%, which is more than double the growth rate for men, which stands at 48.7%.
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- However, both the Census and National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) have failed to capture this growing trend of women’s work related migration.
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- Consequently, such surveys treat women as secondary earners and ignore her other motivations for migration and her labour participation post migration.
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What are the concerns?

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- **Overall -** Internal migration is currently very high but governments continue to exclude migrants from urban development policies.
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- Even the enactment of "Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act" hasn't yielded desired results.
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- **Women -** Female migration trends has not yet recognised women as economic actors, thereby their experiences in migration remains unexplored.
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- They are largely seen as either secondary labour force or mere family baggage that is merely accompanying their male counterparts.
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- Migrants in general are faced with challenges in getting basic documentation done, accessing social entitlements and financial services.
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- Women migrants are further disadvantaged as they are underpaid at work, vulnerable to sexual crime, and face maternity related complications.
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- Hazardous work environments further their woes, and a good percentage of women workers face "respiratory illness, ergonomic problems (body aches), mental and reproductive health issues.
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What is the way ahead?

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- Recognising that women migrants have a right to equal access to employment, adequate income and social protection is primarily needed.
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- There should be better data collection to capture the complex dynamics of gender-specific migration to help the state respond better to their needs.
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- We need to enhance vocational training programs to improve employability of women migrants and their access to support services.
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- Kerala has initiated to provide insurance and free medical treatment for its 30 million migrant workers, which needs to be emulated by others.
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- The political inclusion of migrants would also democratise urban governance and ensure the building of cities on the basis of gender equality.
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Source: Indian Express

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