



Migration and Social Policy in Asia

Binod Khadria

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UNRISD, Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: (41 22) 9173020
Fax: (41 22) 9170650
E-mail: info@unrisd.org
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Abstract:

Regionally, Asia is a heterogeneous continent, comprising at least four distinctly different regions, each comprising more or less homogenous countries. This takes the scope of this paper away from treating migration in Asia with one broad brush, and towards highlighting its intra-sub-regional character. For analysing social policy in the region of Asia in the context of South-South migration therefore, the sub-region of South Asia has been focused upon because it presents a uniquely balanced case of accounting for half of all outward migration, the other half accounting for South-North migration: in fact, the sub-region presents a microcosm of complex social realities arising from an interaction between both South-South and South-North migration. Before addressing the implications of these complexities for social service provisioning and social policy, the paper hints at some quantitative as well as qualitative dimensions of South-South migration in this region.

Moving further towards analysis, the implications of these dimensions have been grouped into three distinct categories, namely, the remittance costs, safeguard nets, and post-return re-assimilation. These are elaborated in terms of explaining how the relatively smoother and lower-cost remittances between south countries of Asia would enhance the state's capability for better social service provisioning; what social safeguard nets are necessary for combating the negative effects of temporary migration and its corollary of return migration; and what social policy measures are available for re-integration of migrants and returnees in their home countries, communities and families. Policy initiatives in a number of select countries in Asia, namely, China in North Asia, the Philippines in Southeast Asia, and Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India in South Asia have been listed to highlight the "nuts and bolts" of social intervention for welfare.

Drawing from the Indian experience in particular, gender issues arising from fraudulent and failed marriages between migrant grooms residing abroad and unsuspecting brides residing in the origin country illustrate the primacy of social policy intervention. Similarly, the issue of sexual harassment and exploitation at workplace is highlighted. Among the other examples, social security measures, insurance against malpractices and uncertainties, provisioning for tracing one's roots in the country of origin as well as facilitation of higher education in the home country are cited.

The last section of the paper discusses the methodological approaches and tools appropriate for, from the viewpoint of social policy, undertaking meaningful empirical research on South-South migration and social policy in Asia. Two generic choices have been mentioned: a top-down engagement for economic growth through business and industry; and another, a bottom-up engagement for social development through education and health of the masses. The dichotomy between the principles of economic policy and social policy are spelled out in terms of the former being based on the bilateral trade-off of "give-and-take" or *quid pro quo*, and the latter on unilateral philanthropy or "charity" *without* the expectation of getting a direct return. What is recommended is a more holistic social policy aimed at establishing Asia's link with its diaspora for sustainable socio-psychological development in the region as a whole, alongside economic and political development. The need for the coming together of well-known regional economic groups

like Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation or SAARC, and other alliances within Asia for creating a special common platform for social development is hinted at in this context. To arrive at the proverbial “win-win-win” situation through such South-South cooperation for all the three stakeholders – the Asian South countries of origin, the Asian migrants as a regional diaspora, and the Asian South countries of destination, the “diasporic resources” could be consciously turned to the advantage of the South. These may entail a trade-off between the alternative approaches of promoting trade and business in the short run, and significant reduction in two kinds of social poverty in the region – the “poverty of education” and the “poverty of health” – both very potent areas for social policy to make sustainable contribution to overall development in the long run.

The vulnerabilities in the South countries of Asia do arise from the unstable migration policies of the North countries worldwide. They affect both the migrants and their families at the micro level and the societies and countries of migrants at the macro level. These can be ameliorated a great deal through social development resulting from the interventions of social service provisioning and social policy, without which the economic policies of growth are bound to always remain lopsided. The first concrete steps towards bridging this gap would perhaps be that the South countries must show South-South cooperation based on evidence-based research and guided by the principle of solidarity.

1. Positioning Asia in South-South Migration

While trying to understand “South-South Migration” in Asia in the context of social policy considerations, one should be conscious of the fact that from migration point of view, Asia cannot be characterized homogenously. There are at least four distinctly different sub-regions within Asia: Central Asia (Formerly Russian) including Armenia, West Asia (Middle East) including Israel, South Asia (the Indian subcontinent), and East and Southeast Asia (China to PNG). Table 1(A and B) present list of countries in Asia, one evolving during 1960-1985, and the other over the period 1990-2005, particularly after the break up of the Soviet Union into many smaller countries of the Russian Federation in Central Asia.

Table 1A: List of Countries in Eastern and South-central Asia-1985 and 2005

Asia	1985	2005
Eastern Asia	China	China
	China, Hong Kong	China, Hong Kong
	China, Macao	China, Macao
	Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
	Japan	Japan
	Mongolia	Mongolia
	Republic of Korea	Republic of Korea
South-central Asia	Afghanistan	Afghanistan
	Bangladesh	Bangladesh
	Bhutan	Bhutan
	India	India
	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
	Maldives	Kazakhstan
	Nepal	Kyrgyzstan
	Pakistan	Maldives
	Sri Lanka	Nepal
		Pakistan
		Sri Lanka
		Tajikistan
		Turkmenistan
		Uzbekistan

Source: United Nations 2006, World Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision Population Database, United

Asia	1985	2005
South-eastern Asia	Brunei Darussalam	Brunei Darussalam

Nations Population Division.

Table 1B: List of Countries in South-eastern and Western Asia-1985 and 2005

	Cambodia	Cambodia
	Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste	Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
	Indonesia	Indonesia
	Lao People's Democratic Republic	Lao People's Democratic Republic
	Malaysia	Malaysia
	Myanmar	Myanmar
	Philippines	Philippines
	Singapore	Singapore
	Thailand	Thailand
	Viet Nam	Viet Nam
Western Asia	Bahrain	Armenia
	Cyprus	Azerbaijan
	Iraq	Bahrain
	Israel	Cyprus
	Jordan	Georgia
	Kuwait	Iraq
	Lebanon	Israel
	Occupied Palestinian Territory	Jordan
	Oman	Kuwait
	Qatar	Lebanon
	Saudi Arabia	Occupied Palestinian Territory
	Syrian Arab Republic	Oman
	Turkey	Qatar
	United Arab Emirates	Saudi Arabia
	Yemen	Syrian Arab Republic
		Turkey
		United Arab Emirates
		Yemen

Source: United Nations 2006, *World Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision Population Database*, United Nations Population Division.

Most of Asia in the list would seem to be part of the South, barring a few late-developed countries like Japan and other late-comer Newly Industrializing (“Tiger”) Countries (NICs) like Hong Kong (now part of China), Republic of Korea, Taiwan Province of China – all in East Asia, and Singapore in Southeast Asia, which would actually qualify to belong to the North. Even the Middle East (or Western Asia) now comprises countries with very high per-capita income and developed-country-like standards of living. For analysing social policy in the region of Asia in the context of

South-South migration, however, one could perhaps find a rationale for not attempting to cover the whole of the Asian South. Of the three world-regions experiencing large South-South migration, South Asia is a unique region in the sense that it accounts for half of all outward migration, the other half accounting for South-North migration (Figure 2 and Table 2). A study of social policy in Asia could, therefore, be largely focused on South Asia, as we have done in this paper.

2. Main Issues of South-South Migration in Asia and their Implications

South-South migration in general is overwhelmingly intra-sub-regional within each continent. The share of migration to other developing sub-regions within a continent is likely to be negligible for all sub-regions, with the unique exception of South Asia. (Figure 2).

Table-2
Intraregional and Interregional Migration

(in millions)	Migrants in									
Migrants from	Latin America & Caribbean	East Asia & Pacific	South Asia	Europe & Central Asia	Middle East & North Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	High-income OECD	High-income non-OECD	Total	South-North As percent of Total
Latin America & Caribbean	3.40	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	22.30	0.20	25.92	86.80
East Asia & Pacific	0.06	2.54	0.11	0.04	0.01	0.02	9.70	5.30	17.78	84.40
South Asia	0.01	0.29	7.60	0.02	2.11	0.09	4.50	5.60	20.22	49.90
Europe & Central Asia	0.07	0.01	0.00	27.81	0.01	0.00	13.70	1.90	43.50	35.90

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