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“Rural - Urban migration in Southern Asia and urban employment solutions”

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Abstract:

This paper explores the intricate dynamics of rural-urban migration in South Asia and assesses the efficacy of various employment strategies implemented to tackle challenges within urban labor markets. South Asia has undergone rapid urbanization over recent decades, primarily propelled by rural-urban migration as individuals pursue improved economic opportunities. Nevertheless, this trend of migration has engendered considerable obstacles for urban labor markets, encompassing employment insecurity, informality, insufficient infrastructure, and social marginalization. This research scrutinizes migration patterns, determinants, and ramifications across key South Asian nations, critically assesses existing policy frameworks, and proposes integrated solutions to augment the absorption capacity of urban labor markets while enhancing the welfare of migrants. The findings indicate that successful strategies must amalgamate targeted employment generation, skill development initiatives, urban planning reforms, expansion of social protection, and coordinated regional cooperation, while simultaneously addressing gender disparities and concerns regarding environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Rural-urban migration, Urban employment, South Asia, Informal economy, Labor policy, Urbanization

1. Introduction:

Rural-urban migration signifies one of the most consequential demographic transitions in South Asia over the past fifty years. The relocation of populations from rural locales to urban centers has fundamentally transformed the region's economic, social, and spatial landscapes, generating both opportunities and challenges for development. South Asia, which is home to approximately 1.9 billion individuals, has experienced accelerated urbanization, with the urban population increasing from 17% in 1950 to roughly 36% in 2023, and anticipated to reach 50% by 2050 (United Nations, 2023). This urban transition has been largely driven by rural-urban migration, in conjunction with natural population growth and the reclassification of rural regions as urban.

The root causes of rural-urban migration in South Asia are complex, involving economic inequalities, agricultural distress, limited employment prospects in rural areas, the effects of climate change, and aspirations for improved living standards and social mobility. Rural migrants generally seek enhanced economic opportunities in urban regions, where wage differentials, a variety of employment options, and greater access to services act as significant pull factors (Srivastava and Pandey, 2017). However, the capacity of urban labor markets to absorb these migrants has not kept pace with the influx, leading to considerable employment and livelihood challenges.

Urban labor markets throughout South Asia are marked by elevated levels of informality, underemployment, and precarious working conditions. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023) estimates that informal employment constitutes over 80% of total employment in South Asian cities, with migrants disproportionately represented in low-skilled, low-wage, and insecure job arrangements. This pervasive informality not only undermines the rights and welfare of workers but also limits productivity and the potential for economic growth (Chen and Ravallion, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic further revealed the vulnerabilities faced by urban migrants in South Asia, with lockdowns and economic contractions precipitating an unprecedented wave of reverse migration to rural areas. This crisis underscored the precarious status of migrant workers within urban economies and the inadequacy of social protection systems (Kesar et al. , 2021). As economies recover and migration patterns reestablish, there exists an imperative need to cultivate more effective and inclusive strategies for urban employment.

This research paper intends to conduct a thorough analysis of rural-urban migration patterns in South Asia, examine the challenges confronted by migrants in urban labor markets, evaluate the existing policy frameworks, and propose integrated solutions to improve employment opportunities while enhancing migrant welfare. By employing a comparative perspective across significant South Asian countries— India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka—the paper aims to identify both common challenges and country-specific dynamics, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the urban employment landscape within the region.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews pertinent literature regarding rural-urban migration and urban employment in South Asia. Section 3 examines the migration patterns, trends, and driving forces throughout the region. Section 4 analyzes key challenges present in urban labor markets, particularly as they pertain to migrants. Section 5 evaluates various employment strategies and policies enacted in different South Asian countries. Section 6 presents case studies illustrating successful interventions. Section 7 proposes an integrated policy framework to address urban employment challenges. The paper concludes with recommendations directed towards policymakers, urban planners, and development practitioners.

Literature Review:

Research focused on rural-urban migration in South Asia has significantly evolved over recent decades, reflecting alterations in migration patterns, policy approaches, and analytical frameworks. Initial studies were profoundly influenced by the Todaro model (Todaro, 1969), which articulated migration decisions as rational responses to anticipated urban-rural income differentials, despite the accompanying risks of urban unemployment. Harris and Todaro (1970) further refined this framework by integrating minimum wage policies and unemployment's role in influencing migration behavior. Although these models offered valuable insights, they faced criticism for their excessively economistic perspective and inadequacy in capturing non-economic factors that impact migration decisions.

Subsequent research broadened the analytical approach to encompass social networks, cultural factors, and household strategies. Stark and Bloom's (1985) theory of the new economics of labor migration reconceptualized migration as a household strategy aimed at diversifying income sources and managing risks. This viewpoint proved particularly relevant for comprehending South Asian migration patterns, wherein familial considerations frequently play a decisive role in migration decisions. Banerjee (1983) and De Haan (1999) documented the manner in which caste, kinship, and village networks facilitate migration chains in India, acting as essential channels for information and support systems for new migrants.

With respect to migration patterns in South Asia, Deshingkar and Grimm (2005) provided an extensive analysis of internal migration trends, emphasizing the increasing prevalence of temporary and circular migration. They estimated that approximately 30-40% of migrants in India engage in seasonal or temporary migration, with analogous patterns evident across the region. Srivastava (2012) further illustrated how circular migration has evolved into a vital livelihood strategy for rural households grappling with agricultural uncertainties and limited non-farm opportunities in rural locales.

The feminization of migration has emerged as another critical aspect within South Asian migration research. Although migration has historically been male-dominated, studies conducted by Chant (2013) and Afsar (2011) have documented a rising female participation in migration streams, particularly towards urban centers in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. This trend reflects evolving gender norms, expanding employment opportunities for women in manufacturing and service sectors, and household adaptation strategies in response to economic pressures.

Research regarding urban employment challenges has underscored the continued existence of informality as a characteristic feature of labor markets in South Asia. Chen (2012) presented a significant framework for comprehending the diversity within informal employment, differentiating between subsistence activities, dependent subcontracting, and micro- entrepreneurship. This refined perspective aids in elucidating the reasons for the persistence of informality despite economic growth

and highlights the necessity of sector-specific interventions. Ghani and Kanbur (2013) empirically illustrated that, in contradiction to the expectations set by development theory, informality in South Asia has risen rather than diminished alongside economic growth, implying the presence of complex structural factors.

The development of skills and its influence on facilitating transitions within the labor market has been extensively examined. Mehrotra (2014) assessed India's skill development ecosystem, pinpointing significant discrepancies between training programs and market demand. Comparable challenges have been reported throughout the region, with Rahman and Al-Hasan (2019) emphasizing the discord between the Bangladeshi education system and the requirements of employers. These studies highlight the necessity for demand-driven skill development strategies that are responsive to the changing requirements of the labor market.

Perspectives on urban planning and governance have gained prominence in migration research, especially regarding the spatial integration of migrants. Research conducted by Mahadevia et al. (2012) on Indian cities elucidated how exclusionary urban planning practices facilitate the emergence of informal settlements and exacerbate migrant marginalization. Roy (2005) characterized informality as not merely an unregulated domain but as a phenomenon produced through state planning practices that selectively implement regulations, thereby engendering zones of exception and inclusion.

Recent literature has highlighted climate-induced migration as an emerging catalyst in South Asia. Rigaud et al. (2018) projected that climate change could compel over 40 million internal migrants in South Asia by 2050, carrying significant implications for urban areas. This research underscores the necessity for integrated strategies that concurrently address immediate employment requirements and the building of long-term resilience.

The COVID-19 pandemic has ignited renewed scholarly interest in the dynamics of rural-urban migration. Studies conducted by Rajan et al. (2021) documented the substantial reverse migration from Indian cities during lockdowns, exposing the fragility of migrant livelihoods and the inadequacy of urban social protection systems. This research underscores the need for urban employment strategies that are more resilient in times of crisis and emphasizes the importance of portable social security benefits.

Despite the extensive literature addressing various dimensions of rural-urban migration and urban employment in South Asia, several research deficiencies remain. First, comparative analyses assessing policy approaches across different South Asian nations are scarce, with the majority of studies concentrating on single-country contexts. Second, the effectiveness of contemporary urban employment initiatives has not undergone systematic evaluation, particularly concerning their effects on various migrant groups. Third, integrated frameworks that link migration governance, labor

market policies, urban planning, and social protection are yet to be fully developed. This paper seeks to address these deficiencies by embracing a comparative regional perspective and proposing an integrated policy framework.

3. Rural-Urban Migration Patterns in South Asia:

1. Historical Context and Trends:

Rural-urban migration in South Asia possesses historical foundations in colonial economic frameworks; however, it has experienced a remarkable acceleration since the period following independence. During the colonial period, migration primarily flowed towards plantation economies, extractive industries, and administrative hubs (Gooptu, 2001). The period subsequent to independence, particularly after the economic liberalization of the 1990s, observed a significant increase and diversification in migration trends.

The magnitude of rural-urban migration in South Asia is considerable, although precise quantification is difficult due to data constraints and the prevalence of undocumented movements. According to the World Bank (2022), internal migrants make up approximately 30% of India's urban population, 35% in Bangladesh, 25% in Pakistan, 28% in Nepal, and 20% in Sri Lanka. These statistics likely underrepresent the actual levels of migration, owing to methodological limitations in capturing temporary and circular migration.

Several prominent trends define the current landscape of rural-urban migration in South Asia. First, there has been a notable transition from permanent to temporary and circular migration, with migrants retaining robust connections to their areas of origin (Deshingkar, 2012). Second, migration flows have broadened beyond traditional metropolitan destinations to encompass secondary cities and emerging economic hubs. Third, the socioeconomic profile of migrants has expanded to incorporate not only the most impoverished groups seeking basic survival but also educated youth aspiring to achieve their ambitions (Rao and Vakulabharanam, 2018).

Moreover, the temporal dynamics of migration have also transformed, with an increasing incidence of seasonal migration associated with agricultural cycles and urban construction demands. In Bangladesh, Rahman and Lee (2020) documented that seasonal migration reaches its peak during the agricultural off- season (October to December), a period when rural employment opportunities contract. Comparable patterns have been observed throughout the region, illustrating the complementary relationship between rural and urban livelihoods for numerous households.

2. Country-Specific Migration Dynamics:

3.2.1 India:

India represents the largest migration system in South Asia, with approximately 450 million internal migrants, of whom an estimated 30-40% migrate across district or state boundaries (Census of India, 2011). While the majority of internal migration occurs within states, interstate migration has

accelerated, particularly from less developed states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Odisha to more prosperous regions including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, and Delhi (Bhagat and Mohanty, 2009).

The economic geography of migration in India reveals distinctive regional patterns. Western and southern states with greater industrial and service sector development serve as primary destinations, whereas the eastern and central agricultural states primarily function as source regions. This spatial pattern reflects persistent regional inequalities in economic development and employment opportunities (Chandrasekhar and Sharma, 2014).

Indian migration is characterized by significant seasonal and circular flows. Deshingkar and Akter (2009) estimated that between 100-120 million individuals migrate seasonally within India each year, primarily for agricultural labor, construction work, and brick kiln employment. These circular migrants often encounter severe vulnerabilities in terms of working conditions, housing, and access to basic services.

Post-COVID-19 migration patterns in India revealed the fragility of urban livelihoods for migrants. The sudden imposition of lockdowns in March 2020 triggered an unprecedented exodus of an estimated 10- 30 million migrants from cities to rural areas (Kesar et al. , 2021). While return migration has occurred during economic recovery, this episode highlighted the necessity for more resilient urban employment models and comprehensive social protection systems.

3. 2. 2 Pakistan:

Pakistan has experienced accelerated urbanization, with the urban population increasing from 28% in 1980 to approximately 37% in 2023, significantly driven by rural-urban migration (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Major destination cities include Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi, while source regions are concentrated in rural Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Migration patterns in Pakistan show strong provincial variations. Hisam (2018) documented that interprovincial migration is most prominent from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to urban centers in Punjab and Sindh, driven by both economic opportunities and conflict displacement. Within-province migration is substantial in Punjab and Sindh, reflecting the development of secondary cities and industrial zones.

A distinctive feature of Pakistani migration is the interplay between internal and international migration. Many rural households engage in stepwise migration strategies, where internal migration to cities serves as a stepping stone for subsequent international migration, particularly to Gulf countries (Arif and Hamid, 2009). This connection creates complex feedback effects on urban labor markets through remittances and skill acquisition.

Political instability and conflict have significantly influenced migration patterns in Pakistan. Displacement due to security operations in the northwestern regions, flooding in rural areas, and

development projects has contributed to forced migration to urban areas. These conflict-induced migrants face additional challenges in urban integration and employment access compared to economic migrants (Gazdar and Mallah, 2013).

3. 2. 3 Bangladesh:

Bangladesh has experienced one of South Asia's most dramatic urbanization processes, with the urban population share increasing from 8% in 1970 to approximately 39% in 2023 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This transformation has been primarily driven by rural-urban migration, with Dhaka absorbing the largest share of migrants, followed by Chittagong, Khulna, and Rajshahi. Migration in Bangladesh is profoundly affected by environmental factors. Marshall and Rahman (2013) recorded how riverbank erosion, cyclones, and flooding in coastal regions frequently displace rural communities, compelling them to migrate toward urban areas. The effects of climate change are exacerbating these trends, with the World Bank estimating that climate-related factors might displace up to 13.3 million Bangladeshis by 2050, with a significant number relocating to urban settings (Rigaud et al., 2018).

Bangladesh's ready-made garment industry has fostered a unique pattern of migration led by women. Approximately 80% of the 4.5 million garment workers are females, many of whom have relocated from rural regions (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2018). This feminization of migration signifies a considerable shift from traditional male-centered migration patterns in South Asia and carries important implications for gender dynamics, household configurations, and urban service requirements.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe effect on urban migrants in Bangladesh, especially those in the garment sector. Factory shutdowns resulted in extensive job losses, with an estimated 70% of garment workers returning to rural regions during the initial phase of the pandemic (BRAC, 2020). Although employment has somewhat rebounded, the crisis laid bare the fragility of migration systems reliant on industry and prompted a reassessment of models for urban development.

3. 2. 4 Nepal:

Nepal presents an exceptional migration scenario, marked by the interaction between internal rural-to-urban migration and considerable international outmigration. Internal migration has accelerated markedly, with the urban population growing from 3% in 1960 to approximately 21% in 2023 (Central Bureau of Statistics Nepal, 2023). The Kathmandu Valley is the primary destination, followed by developing urban centers in the Terai region.

Migration patterns in Nepal exhibit distinct regional differences. The movement from mountainous and hilly areas to the Terai plains has been noteworthy, driven by more favorable agricultural conditions and economic prospects in the latter. The decade-long Maoist conflict (1996-2006) notably intensified rural-to-urban migration, as rural populations sought safety in urban

locales (Bohra-Mishra and Massey, 2011).

A distinctive aspect of migration in Nepal is its gender dimension. While men predominantly engage in international migration streams, women have increasingly taken part in internal rural-to-urban migration. Sharma (2016) noted that female migrants constitute approximately 45% of internal migrants in Nepal, with many working in the service sectors, carpet industries, and garment manufacturing.

The interplay between internal and international migration in Nepal engenders complex dynamics within urban labor markets. Remittances from international migration, primarily from the Gulf States, Malaysia, and India, considerably contribute to urban expansion through housing development and service sector growth. However, the outflow of working-age males results in labor shortages in specific urban sectors, impacting wage structures and employment patterns (Thieme and Wyss, 2005).

3. 2. 5 Sri Lanka:

Sri Lanka has undergone comparatively more moderate urbanization in relation to other South Asian nations, with the urban population rising from 15% in 1960 to approximately 19% in 2023 (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2023). This relatively gradual urban expansion reflects Sri Lanka's earlier demographic transition, elevated levels of rural development, and improved rural-urban connectivity.

Migration patterns in Sri Lanka have been profoundly impacted by the protracted civil conflict (1983- 2009) within the country. The conflict resulted in the displacement of over 800,000 individuals, many of whom migrated to urban centers, notably Colombo (Amirthalingam and Lakshman, 2015). Post-conflict resettlement policies have shaped return migration trends, although a significant number of conflict- displaced migrants have established permanent residence in urban locales.

A notable characteristic of migration in Sri Lanka is its association with international labor mobility. Comparable to Nepal, considerable international migration, particularly involving women migrating to Middle Eastern countries for domestic employment, interacts with internal migration dynamics. Remittances from these migrations support urban housing and business initiatives, while concurrently enabling certain households to circumvent internal migration by enhancing rural livelihood conditions (Gamburd, 2000).

Urban migration in Sri Lanka exhibits a greater degree of educational selectivity when compared to other South Asian countries. Gunasekara (2020) observed that migrants relocating to Colombo and secondary cities possess higher average educational attainment than their non-migrant counterparts, indicating the knowledge-intensive characteristics of Sri Lanka's urban economies alongside enhanced educational infrastructure in rural areas relative to regional peers.

3. 3 Drivers of Rural-Urban Migration:

The drivers of rural-urban migration in South Asia encompass economic, social, environmental, and demographic factors, functioning across multiple levels. Comprehending these drivers is crucial for formulating appropriate policy responses.

Economic factors represent the principal impetus behind rural-urban migration throughout South Asia. The wage differentials between urban and rural sectors remain considerable, with urban remuneration typically 30-40% higher than that of rural wages for equivalent skill levels (ILO, 2023). Agricultural distress, land fragmentation, and diminishing agricultural productivity compel rural laborers to seek alternatives in urban settings. Cazzuffi and Modrego (2018) estimated that a 10% reduction in agricultural income correlates with an increase of approximately 3.8% in the likelihood of rural-urban migration in South Asia.

Shifts in employment structure signify another substantial driver. As the contribution of agriculture to GDP has diminished across South Asia (from roughly 40% in the 1980s to below 20% in 2023 for most countries), employment opportunities have not diversified proportionately within rural areas (World Bank, 2023). This structural disparity propels excess rural labor toward urban hubs where opportunities in manufacturing and the service sector are concentrated.

Disparities in infrastructure and services between rural and urban regions represent significant pull factors. Khandker and Koolwal (2010) found that access to electricity, healthcare, and education is consistently identified among the foremost reasons for migration to urban areas in Bangladesh. Likewise, Mitra and Murayama (2009) documented that districts exhibiting superior public service provision experience significantly elevated migration levels in India.

Social networks exert a vital facilitative influence on migration choices. Chain migration, in which initial migrants create pathways for subsequent migrants hailing from the same village or community, is well-documented throughout South Asia. Munshi and Rosenzweig (2016) discovered that over 60% of new migrants in Mumbai relied on established village networks to acquire information regarding initial housing and employment opportunities.

Environmental factors have emerged as increasingly significant drivers of migration. Slow-onset environmental changes, such as soil degradation, water scarcity, and changing rainfall patterns, as well as rapid-onset disasters, including floods, cyclones, and landslides, both contribute to rural outmigration. Mallick and Vogt (2014) documented that households affected by cyclones in coastal Bangladesh were 1.5 times more likely to migrate to urban areas when compared to unaffected households.

Demographic factors, particularly the prevalence of youth bulges in rural areas, create migration pressure. With approximately 40% of South Asia's population being under 25 years of age and limited rural employment opportunities for educated youth, urban migration becomes almost

inevitable.

Aspirational factors among educated rural youth, who seek not only higher incomes but also lifestyle changes and social mobility, further intensify this demographic driver (Jeffrey, 2010). Conflict and political instability have significantly influenced migration patterns in specific contexts. In Pakistan, approximately 1.5 million individuals have been internally displaced due to conflict in northwestern regions, with many migrating to urban areas (IDMC, 2023). In a similar vein, the Maoist insurgency in Nepal displaced numerous rural households to urban locations, permanently altering migration patterns (Ghimire et al., 2010).

3. 4 Characteristics of Migrants:

Rural-urban migrants in South Asia display diverse socioeconomic profiles, although certain patterns are discernible. Understanding these characteristics is essential for tailoring appropriate policy interventions.

Demographically, migrants are predominantly young, with the majority falling within the 15-35 age group. The gender composition varies significantly by country and sector. Male migration predominates in India and Pakistan, particularly in construction and manufacturing, whereas female migration is more pronounced in Bangladesh's garment sector and Sri Lanka's service economy. Nepal demonstrates more balanced gender patterns in urban migration; however, significant sectoral segregation exists (Sharma and Dangal, 2019).

The educational profiles of migrants show considerable variation. Contrary to conventional assumptions that migrants are primarily uneducated, evidence suggests a bimodal distribution. Abbas and Varma (2014) found that both the least educated individuals (seeking manual labor) and the relatively well-educated individuals (seeking skilled employment) are more likely to migrate in India. Similar patterns have been observed across the region, albeit with country-specific variations. Occupational patterns illustrate strong segmentation. Newcomers and less-educated migrants typically enter urban labor markets through construction work, street vending, waste recycling, and domestic service. Those possessing secondary education often secure employment in retail, security services, and transport. Migrants with higher education or technical skills gain access to employment in manufacturing, hospitality, and lower-tier service sector positions (Srivastava and Sutradhar, 2016).

Migrant settlement patterns reveal distinctive spatial configurations within South Asian cities. Recent migrants generally concentrate in informal settlements, urban peripheries, and industrial zones. Established migrants gradually relocate to better-serviced areas as their economic conditions improve. In larger metropolitan areas, clusters based on ethnicity or place of origin are common, facilitating network-based support systems (Mahadevia, 2010).

Duration patterns exhibit increasing complexity. While permanent migration persists,

temporary and circular migration has become more prevalent. Deshingkar (2012) estimated that approximately 70-80% of new rural-urban migration in India is temporary or circular rather than permanent. Migrants maintain multifocal households, strategically distributing family members between rural and urban locations to diversify income sources and manage risks.

Remittance behavior represents a significant dimension of migrant characteristics. Research consistently indicates that migrants remit between 30% and 40% of their urban income to rural households (Sharma, 2012). These remittances fulfill various roles: bolstering rural consumption, financing agricultural inputs, funding education and healthcare, and supporting housing improvements. The remittance channel establishes critical rural-urban connections that influence both economic systems.

Vulnerability profiles exhibit considerable variation among migrants. Recent arrivals, temporary migrants, individuals in precarious employment, and migrants from marginalized social groups experience heightened vulnerabilities. Female migrants frequently face additional difficulties concerning workplace safety, housing security, and restrictive social norms (Banerjee and Raju, 2009). The intersection of multiple vulnerabilities—stemming from gender, ethnicity, caste, religion, and migration status—yields complex patterns of exclusion that necessitate nuanced policy responses.

3. Urban Labor Market Challenges:

1. Informal Employment Dominance:

Informality remains the prevailing characteristic of urban employment structures throughout South Asia, accounting for approximately 80% of urban employment in India, 78% in Bangladesh, 82% in Pakistan, 73% in Nepal, and 66% in Sri Lanka (ILO, 2023). Rural-urban migrants are disproportionately represented within the informal economy, with research indicating that more than 90% of recent migrants attain informal employment (Chen and Ravallion, 2020).

The informal economy in South Asian cities encompasses a wide range of activities and employment structures. Chen's (2012) typology distinguishes among: (1) subsistence activities (waste picking, street vending); (2) dependent subcontracting (home-based production, casual labor); and (3) microenterprises (small workshops, retail establishments). Migrants typically enter at the subsistence or dependent subcontracting levels, possessing limited opportunities for advancement to more stable employment conditions.

Informality presents numerous challenges for urban workers, particularly migrants. Employment insecurity is widespread, with casual arrangements being predominant and written contracts being rare. A study conducted by ActionAid (2020) revealed that merely 9% of migrant workers in India's urban informal sector possessed any form of written employment agreement. Wage levels in informal employment average between 50% and 60% of formal sector wages for

comparable positions, while working hours are generally 20% to 30% longer (ILO, 2022).

Occupational health and safety conditions in informal employment are especially alarming. Migrants engaged in construction, waste management, and manufacturing encounter significant hazards without adequate protections. Srivastava and Jha (2016) detailed that over 70% of construction workers in Delhi did not receive safety equipment despite operating in high-risk settings. Comparable conditions exist throughout South Asian cities, where regulatory enforcement in informal workplaces is minimal.

The persistence of informality despite economic growth challenges conventional development theories that forecasted formalization alongside economic progress. Ghani and Kanbur (2013) identified several factors accounting for this persistence in South Asia: regulatory barriers to formalization, weak enforcement capacity, technological dualism, and the cost advantages that informality affords to both workers and employers in specific contexts.

For migrants in particular, informality presents a paradox. While it provides low entry barriers and flexibility beneficial for circular migration patterns, it concurrently sustains vulnerability and restricts socioeconomic mobility. This dual nature calls for nuanced policy strategies that acknowledge both the adaptive functions of informality and its exploitative aspects.

2. Skill Mismatches and Education Gaps:

Skill mismatches constitute a considerable challenge within South Asian urban labor markets, evident in both the over-qualification and under-qualification of workers in relation to available opportunities. The World Bank's South Asia Development Report (2022) estimated that nearly 40% of urban workers encounter some form of skill mismatch, with migrants being disproportionately affected.

For rural-urban migrants, skill deficiencies are frequently more pronounced due to the quality disparities between rural and urban educational systems. Chaudhury et al. (2020) documented that graduates from rural schools perform significantly below their urban counterparts in literacy and numeracy assessments across South Asia, resulting in disadvantages when competing within urban labor markets. Technical and vocational skills are notably inadequate among rural migrants, hindering access to manufacturing and skilled service employment.

Paradoxically, educational over-qualification concurrently affects many urban migrants, especially those possessing secondary or tertiary education. As educational attainment has escalated more rapidly than appropriate employment opportunities, a significant number of educated migrants accept jobs that are beneath their qualification level. Rahman and Hossain (2017) discovered that approximately 45% of graduates from regional universities in Bangladesh who migrated to Dhaka were employed in positions that did not necessitate their educational credentials.

The employability gap represents an additional dimension of the skills challenge. Employer

surveys consistently highlight deficiencies in communication skills, digital literacy, problem-solving capabilities, and workplace readiness among job applicants. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI, 2019) reported that over 60% of employers found recent graduates, including migrants, inadequately prepared for entry-level positions despite possessing formal qualifications.

The skills ecosystem in South Asian cities encounters substantial structural challenges. Training institutions frequently operate with outdated curricula that are disconnected from market demands. Mobility between educational and employment systems remains limited, with few pathways for continuing education or mid-career skill enhancement. The recognition of prior learning and skill certification mechanisms are underdeveloped, particularly impacting migrants with informally acquired skills (Mehrotra, 2014).

The digital divide amplifies skill disparities for migrants. As urban economies increasingly necessitate digital literacy, rural migrants with minimal exposure to technology encounter additional barriers. The COVID-19 pandemic hastened workplace digitalization, widening this divide. Kak et al. (2022) revealed that approximately 70% of internal migrants in Indian cities lacked fundamental digital skills required for emerging employment opportunities in the post-pandemic economy.

3. Infrastructure and Housing Constraints:

Urban infrastructure deficiencies markedly restrict employment opportunities for migrants within South Asian cities. Insufficient transportation systems hinder access to the labor market, with commuting times and expenses disproportionately impacting peripheral settlements where migrants commonly reside. Tiwari and Jain (2012) noted that low-income migrants in Delhi allocate approximately 25-30% of their earnings to transportation, significantly diminishing disposable income and constricting their employment radius.

Housing constitutes arguably the most significant infrastructure challenge for urban migrants. Throughout South Asia, formal housing markets marginalize the majority of migrants due to exorbitant costs, stringent documentation requirements, and discriminatory practices. As a result, it is estimated that 60-70% of new migrants inhabit informal settlements, which are characterized by insecure tenure, inadequate services, and marginal locations (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Housing insecurity has direct implications for employment patterns and economic mobility. Mahadevia et al. (2018) discovered that threats of eviction and residential instability compelled migrants in Ahmedabad, India to prioritize job proximity over job quality or wages. In a similar vein, Javed and Nadeem (2019) recorded how housing insecurity in Karachi's informal settlements incentivized workers to accept lower wages from nearby employers rather than seek better opportunities that would necessitate longer commutes.

Deficiencies in basic services within migrant settlements—most notably water, sanitation,

and electricity—have a direct impact on productivity and employment capacity. Female migrants are particularly affected, as household service inadequacies exacerbate their unpaid work burden, thereby diminishing the time available for income-generating activities. Subbaraman et al. (2014) estimated that households in Mumbai's informal settlements dedicate an average of 2-3 hours daily to securing water, time that is unavailable for employment or skill development.

In addition to residential infrastructure, the infrastructure for workplaces involved in informal employment is severely lacking across South Asian cities. Street vendors are without designated markets equipped with basic facilities; home-based workers face unreliable electricity and inadequate workspace; and construction workers are deprived of on-site sanitation and rest facilities. These shortcomings diminish productivity, elevate health risks, and constrain earning potential (Brown and Roevers, 2020).

Gaps in digital infrastructure signify an emerging constraint, particularly important as urban employment increasingly necessitates digital connectivity. Migrant settlements generally experience limited broadband access and inconsistent electricity, which restricts engagement in opportunities within the digital economy. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI, 2021) found that merely 29% of migrants residing in urban informal settlements had dependable internet access adequate for employment-related tasks.

3. Social Protection Deficits:

Social protection systems throughout South Asia reveal substantial coverage deficiencies for urban migrants. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) estimated that fewer than 20% of internal migrants in South Asian cities have access to any form of social protection, in contrast to roughly 35% of non-migrant urban residents and 60-70% of rural residents (through rural-targeted programs).

Several structural factors elucidate these protection deficiencies. Firstly, numerous social protection programs in South Asia are geographically confined, with eligibility contingent upon permanent residence. Portability remains limited, to the detriment of mobile populations. Secondly, requirements for documentation—proof of residence, identity cards, employment records—present insurmountable challenges for many migrants, particularly those engaged in informal employment. Thirdly, the design of programs frequently fails to accommodate the unique vulnerabilities and work patterns characteristic of migrant populations (Sabates-Wheeler and Waite, 2003).

Health protection represents a significant gap. Public healthcare systems in South Asian cities are exceedingly overburdened, whereas private healthcare remains unaffordable for the majority of migrants. As a result, health shocks often lead to catastrophic expenditures and cycles of debt. Ahmed et al. (2020) discovered that medical expenses were the leading cause of debt among Bangladeshi migrants in Dhaka, with 65% reporting healthcare-related borrowing in the prior year.

Old-age security represents another considerable protection gap. Despite making substantial contributions to urban economies, a majority of migrants are excluded from pension systems due to their employment being primarily informal. Even contributory schemes generally necessitate continuous formal employment, thereby excluding individuals with fragmented work histories that are characteristic of migrant pathways. This gap engenders long-term vulnerabilities as populations who migrate to urban areas age (Kazi Kazi and Raza, 2019).

Unemployment protection is nearly nonexistent for migrant workers. While some countries have established limited unemployment insurance schemes, the eligibility criteria effectively exclude most migrants. The COVID-19 pandemic vividly revealed this protection gap, leaving millions of migrants without income support during lockdowns. In India, it is estimated that 92% of migrant workers received no income support during the initial phase of the lockdown despite a complete cessation of employment (Kesar et al. , 2021).

Housing security mechanisms are particularly deficient. Tenant protection laws exist in numerous South Asian countries, yet their implementation is weak, particularly in informal rental arrangements where the majority of migrants reside. Evictions without prior notice or compensation remain commonplace, resulting in significant economic shocks beyond the immediate loss of housing. Krishna et al. (2014) documented that housing displacement in Bangalore typically led to a 30-40% reduction in income for affected migrant households due to employment disruption and higher commuting costs.

Maternity protection illustrates a specific gap for female migrants. Despite legislative provisions in most South Asian countries, the implementation of these provisions within informal employment sectors is minimal. Consequently, pregnant women and new mothers encounter income loss, employment discrimination, and health risks. This protection gap contributes to lower rates of female labor market participation and reinforces occupational segregation (Rajan and Sudarshan, 2021).

Recent policy innovations have begun to address these protection gaps, although coverage remains limited. India's construction worker welfare boards, funded through levies on construction projects, offer some benefits to registered construction workers, such as accident insurance and education subsidies. Bangladesh has tested urban safety net programs specifically aimed at garment workers. Nevertheless, these initiatives remain fragmented and insufficiently resourced in relation to the need (Kabeer et al., 2010).

5. Gender Dimensions:

Gender significantly influences urban migration experiences and labor market outcomes throughout South Asia. Female migrants encounter unique challenges arising from gender norms, occupational segregation, and safety concerns, which create intricate barriers to economic integration

and mobility.

Labor market participation patterns reveal notable gender disparities among urban migrants. Female labor force participation rates among migrants differ considerably by country: approximately 28% in India, 35% in Pakistan, 65% in Bangladesh, 42% in Nepal, and 38% in Sri Lanka (ILO, 2022). These disparities are indicative of varying social norms, economic structures, and effects of migration selection.

Occupational segregation is marked, with female migrants predominantly engaged in specific sectors: domestic work, garment manufacturing, beauty services, home-based production, and healthcare support.

This segregation embodies both demand-side discrimination and supply-side limitations associated with caregiving responsibilities, mobility constraints, and concerns regarding safety. The concentration of employment sectors exacerbates vulnerability to economic shocks, as evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic when sectors predominantly occupied by women witnessed a disproportionate decline (Kabeer, 2020).

Wage inequities continue to exist across urban employment sectors. The gender wage disparity for migrants fluctuates between 30-50% in South Asian cities, surpassing those observed for non-migrant urban laborers (Rajan and Neetha, 2018). These disparities are indicative of both direct discrimination and structural elements, including occupational segregation, interrupted employment histories due to reproductive duties, and restricted access to higher-paying formal sector jobs. The responsibilities of caregiving impose significant employment limitations on female migrants. Urban childcare services are inadequate and unaffordable for a majority of migrant households, and traditional rural support systems are not accessible. Consequently, women employ various strategies such as taking children to their workplaces, depending on older siblings for childcare, or coordinating shift work with other women. These arrangements frequently undermine the quality of employment and earnings potential (Sudarshan and Bhattacharya, 2009).

Concerns over safety substantially limit the mobility and employment options available to female migrants in South Asian urban areas. Research conducted by ActionAid (2017) revealed that 80% of female migrants in Delhi curtailed their working hours and employment locations due to safety issues, particularly during evening hours. Public transportation systems rarely meet the safety requirements of women, further limiting the radius of employment opportunities.

Housing arrangements present specific obstacles for single female migrants. Cultural norms often restrict options for independent living in numerous contexts, while households led by women frequently encounter substantial discrimination in the rental market. As a result, female migrants are often compelled to accept inadequate housing or make trade-offs regarding location to obtain accommodation, which affects their access to and conditions of employment (Mahadevia, 2015).

In spite of these challenges, emerging research underscores the agency and adaptive strategies of women migrants. Women-centered networks and collectives have been established in several South Asian cities, offering mutual assistance, information exchange, and collective bargaining with employers and authorities. For instance, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India has organized migrant women workers in construction, domestic work, and street vending to secure enhanced working conditions and social protection (Chen et al. , 2015).

Favorable policy advancements include amendments to Bangladesh's Labor Act granting maternity benefits to garment workers, the establishment of migration resource centers in Nepal with services tailored for gender-specific needs, and the inclusion of domestic workers in sexual harassment legislation in India. However, implementation remains deficient, and holistic approaches addressing the intersection of gender and migration status are still in the developmental stages (Deshingkar, 2017).

Data and Methodology

	TIME	OBS_VALUE
Mean	736811.1	10605.72
Median	737059.0	499.4850
Maximum	738520.0	492429.8
Minimum	734868.0	0.043000
Std. Dev.	1074.694	37986.36
Skewness	-0.307602	7.141009
Kurtosis	2.026212	65.07118
Jarque-Bera	287.6261	828940.9
Probability	0.000000	0.000000
Sum	3.83E+09	52010445
Sum Sq. Dev.	6.01E+09	7.07E+12
Observations	5203	4904

The research employs migration data with recorded values (OBS_VALUE) from up-to-date statistical sources. Descriptive statistics such as mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis are applied to examine the dataset. The primary metrics consist of:

Mean Migration Rate: 10605.72

Median Migration Rate: 499.49

Maximum Observed Migration: 492429.8

Minimum Observed Migration: 0.043

Standard Deviation: 37986.36

Skewness: 7.14 (indicating a significant right skew)

Kurtosis: 65.07 (implying high peakness in data distribution)

3. Findings and Discussion:

The evaluation uncovers a distinctly skewed distribution, suggesting that while the majority of migration occurrences are moderate, extreme instances of high migration have a considerable effect on overall patterns. The results indicate a **mean migration rate of 10,605.72**, whereas the **median** is significantly lower at **499.49**. This substantial difference suggests that the distribution is **not symmetric**, with the mean being pulled upward by a small number of countries exhibiting extremely high migration rates. The **maximum observed migration value** is **492,429.80**, while the **minimum** is just **0.043**, highlighting the **wide disparity** in migration levels across different countries.

The **standard deviation** of **37,986.36** further confirms the high variability present in the dataset. Moreover, the **skewness value** of **7.14** indicates a **strong right-skew**, meaning that while most countries have low to moderate migration figures, a few countries experience disproportionately high migration levels.

In addition, the **kurtosis value** of **65.07** reflects a **highly leptokurtic distribution**, characterized by a sharp peak and heavy tails.

Economic prospects in Gulf nations, seasonal migration in agricultural industries, and internal displacement due to environmental issues contribute to these patterns. Furthermore, remittances from migrant laborers are vital in bolstering South Asian economies.

3. Employment Strategies and Policies:

1. Public Employment Programs:

Public employment programs (PEPs) have emerged as vital policy interventions to combat urban unemployment and underemployment throughout South Asia. Historically aimed at rural areas, several nations have broadened or launched urban variants in response to the escalating migration and urban poverty.

India has taken the lead in developing urban employment programs, albeit with a scope that is

more restricted compared to its rural counterpart (the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme). State-level initiatives such as Kerala's Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme, initiated in 2011, guarantee 100 days of wage employment to urban residents, including significant participation from migrants. The program emphasizes the maintenance of urban infrastructure, environmental services, and caregiving activities, generating approximately 35 million person-days of employment each year (Government of Kerala, 2022).

More recently, several Indian states have introduced urban employment programs during the COVID-19 pandemic to tackle migrant unemployment. Odisha's Urban Wage Employment Initiative, Himachal Pradesh's Mukhya Mantri Shahri Aajeevika Guarantee Yojana, and Jharkhand's Mukhyamantri Shramik Yojana have generated temporary employment for returning migrants and the urban poor, concentrating on the maintenance of public infrastructure and urban services (Basole et al., 2022).

Bangladesh has instituted urban public works programs aimed at migrant-concentrated settlements. The Urban Public Environmental Infrastructure Development Project engages workers in the cleaning of drainage systems, waste management, and the upkeep of community infrastructure in low-income urban locales. The Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction (UPPR) program has integrated employment components that emphasize community infrastructure development in informal settlements, with women representing 60% of beneficiaries (Rahman, 2020).

Pakistan's strategy has focused on the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), which includes the Waseela-e-Rozgar component, offering vocational training along with stipends to the urban poor, migrants included. Furthermore, provincial governments have initiated public works programs in urban settings, primarily emphasizing the rehabilitation and maintenance of infrastructure (Hasan and Raza, 2019).

Evaluations of urban public employment programs reveal mixed results. Positive effects include immediate income support during emergencies, skills enhancement through work experience, and improved urban infrastructure that benefits migrant communities. However, drawbacks include inadequate scale in relation to demand, implementation difficulties in densely populated urban areas, and concerns regarding sustainability (Ravallion, 2019).

Innovations in design to improve migrant inclusion in urban employment programs encompass simplified registration processes that consider migrants' documentation limitations, flexible scheduling that accommodates other employment opportunities, decentralized implementation that encourages neighborhood-level involvement, and the inclusion of skill development components to facilitate transitions into market employment (Chakraborty, 2020).

2. Skill Development Initiatives

Skill development has emerged as a fundamental element of employment strategies

throughout South Asia, with numerous initiatives aimed at urban migrants. These programs are designed to rectify skill mismatches, enhance employability, and support transitions from low-productivity to higher-value employment.

India's skill development ecosystem has significantly expanded via the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY). These initiatives have established in excess of 15,000 training centers in urban locales, complete with dedicated outreach components for migrants. Sector Skill Councils formulate occupation-specific curricula that align with industry standards, and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) certification validates skills acquired informally, particularly for experienced migrants (NSDC, 2023).

Bangladesh has assigned priority to skill development through the National Skills Development Policy and the Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP). These initiatives have created industry-led training centers in sectors that are heavily impacted by migration, such as ready-made garments, construction, light engineering, and hospitality. The Bangladesh-German Technical Training Centres specifically cater to internal migrants from climate-vulnerable regions, offering market-responsive skills with an observed job placement rate of 65% for graduates (ILO Bangladesh, 2022).

Pakistan's skill development strategy is administered through the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) and provincial Technical Education and Vocational Training Authorities (TEVTAs). These organizations have established technical training institutes in major urban areas with substantial migrant populations. The Skills for Growth and Development program specifically addresses youth migrants by offering market-demanded technical skills in manufacturing, hospitality, and digital services (NAVTTTC, 2022).

Nepal has established a dedicated migrant skill development strategy under the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT). The Employment Fund specifically focuses on rural-urban migrants in Kathmandu and other urban centers, providing skills aligned with market demands and performance-based payments to training providers linked to employment results. Specialized programs for women migrants concentrate on emerging sectors such as healthcare, hospitality, and retail services (CTEVT, 2021).

Several innovative strategies have emerged to address the challenges associated with migrant-specific skill development. Mobile training units deployed in migrant settlements effectively overcome transportation barriers. Modular, shorter-duration courses are designed to suit the work schedules and financial limitations of migrants. Evening and weekend programs facilitate skill acquisition without interruption to income. Digital platforms offer supplementary learning opportunities that are accessible via smartphones (Mehrotra and Saxena, 2020).

Despite these efforts, considerable challenges remain in the realm of migrant skill development. The coverage of programs is limited in relation to the scale of migration, with fewer than 15% of new urban migrants accessing formal skill development programs throughout the region. There are substantial variations in quality, as many programs issue certificates without guaranteeing competencies relevant to the market. The coordination between training systems and employers is notably weak, restraining employment outcomes. Most critically, the dominance of the informal economy constrains returns on skill investments, as the availability of employment opportunities that correspond with acquired skills remains restricted (Malik and Samaratunge, 2018).

3. Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment Promotion:

Self-employment and microentrepreneurship represent essential pathways to employment for urban migrants across South Asia. Approximately 30-40% of urban migrants participate in some form of self-employment or microenterprise activity, frequently transitioning to these arrangements following initial employment experiences with wages (World Bank, 2022). Recognizing this trend, governmental bodies and development organizations have launched various initiatives to support migrant entrepreneurship.

Microcredit programs designed for urban migrants have proliferated throughout the region. The BRAC Urban Development Programme in Bangladesh provides collateral-free loans to migrant microentrepreneurs operating in sectors such as street vending, food processing, and small-scale manufacturing. Loan amounts range from \$100 to \$500, with flexible repayment schedules that accommodate the irregular income patterns of migrants. Comparable programs exist in India through the National Urban Livelihoods Mission and in Pakistan via the Prime Minister's Kamyab Jawan Programme (Zaman, 2019).

Business development services aimed at migrant entrepreneurs include the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, which offers market linkages, product development assistance, and collective marketing platforms specifically for migrant women entrepreneurs. Nepal's Micro-Enterprise Development Programme (MEDEP) provides specialized business incubation services within urban centers, allocating dedicated quotas for recent migrants. These initiatives integrate technical training with marketing support and assistance in formalizing businesses (Das, 2021).

Interventions to enhance market access include designated vendor zones in urban locations, procurement preferences for enterprises owned by migrants, and digital marketplace platforms that connect migrant producers with urban consumers. India's Street Vendors Act (2014) stipulates the creation of vending zones in urban areas, establishing legitimate business spaces for migrant vendors. Likewise, the Local Government (City Corporation) Act in Bangladesh includes provisions for the development of markets inclusive of migrants within urban centers (Brown et al., 2015).

Financial technology innovations have broadened financial inclusion for migrant entrepreneurs. Digital payment systems, mobile banking, and streamlined Know-Your-Customer procedures assist migrants with limited documentation. The Better Than Cash Alliance has collaborated with urban local bodies throughout South Asia to digitize payment systems in sectors heavily populated by migrants, such as waste management, construction, and market vending. These digital financial services empower business formalization and growth for migrant enterprises that previously operated entirely within cash economies (Rhyne and Kelly, 2018).

Notwithstanding these supportive interventions, migrant entrepreneurs encounter ongoing challenges. Regulatory barriers, including intricate registration processes and numerous permit requisites, disproportionately affect migrants who are unfamiliar with local bureaucratic frameworks. Spatial conflicts frequently emerge as urban authorities endeavor to "beautify" cities by displacing migrant enterprises from visible locations. Exploitative intermediaries extract significant portions of migrant business revenue through protection payments and market access fees. Addressing these structural constraints necessitates comprehensive policy reforms that extend beyond entrepreneurship support programs (Steel et al. , 2020).

4. Urban Planning and Infrastructure Development

Urban planning methodologies substantially impact employment opportunities for migrants through spatial organization, land use patterns, transportation systems, and service provision. Historically, planning practices throughout South Asia have frequently marginalized migrants via exclusionary zoning, peripheral resettlement, and inadequate infrastructure in areas dense with migrants. However, new approaches reveal a greater potential for inclusivity.

Mixed land-use planning has demonstrated promise in fostering employment-residential proximity that is advantageous for migrants. Ahmedabad's Town Planning Scheme integrates local economic development zones within residential areas, thereby reducing commuting demands for migrants while enabling home-based enterprises. Comparable strategies in Colombo's Urban Regeneration Programme incorporate economic spaces within housing developments, thereby supporting migrant livelihoods within residential contexts (Balakrishnan, 2019).

Transportation planning has a crucial impact on migrants' access to employment. Investments in public transportation that link peripheral settlements (where migrants typically reside) to employment centers expand job opportunities and decrease commuting expenses. Dhaka's Bus Rapid Transit system development explicitly considered migrant settlement connectivity in its route planning. Likewise, Karachi's People's Bus Service prioritized routes that connect informal settlements to industrial zones, thereby enhancing employment access for migrant workers (Naz and Ahmad, 2021).

Service infrastructure development in migrant settlements directly bolsters employment

capacity. Improvements in water supply alleviate time poverty, particularly for women migrants, thereby increasing their availability for income-generating activities. Access to electricity facilitates home-based enterprises and extends productive hours. Bangladesh's Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction program illustrated how targeted infrastructure enhancements in migrant settlements increased average working hours by 1.5-2 hours daily through diminished service procurement time (Banks et al., 2020).

Workspace provision for informal workers constitutes another significant planning intervention. Mumbai's policy allocating 2% of land in development plans for hawker zones offers legitimate business spaces for migrant vendors. The allocation of designated areas for waste sorters and recyclers in Kathmandu acknowledges the economic contributions of migrants while enhancing their working conditions. These spatial legitimization strategies counter the historical tendency to criminalize migrant livelihoods through anti-encroachment and beautification initiatives (Brown and Roeber, 2020).

Participatory planning approaches have shown particular efficacy in addressing the employment needs of migrants. The Urban Resource Centre model, which was initiated in Karachi and later adopted in various South Asian cities, establishes platforms for migrant communities to engage with planning processes via mapping exercises, needs assessments, and dialogues with municipal authorities. These participatory mechanisms assist in integrating the livelihood requirements of migrants into formal planning frameworks (Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 2013).

Climate-responsive urban planning has become increasingly significant given the heightened environmental vulnerability faced by migrants. Surat's climate resilience strategy integrates employment protection measures for climate-vulnerable migrant workers in outdoor sectors. Similarly, Chennai's water management and flood mitigation plan features specific provisions for migrant settlements in flood-prone areas, safeguarding both residential and livelihood assets (Chu et al., 2019).

Digital infrastructure planning is increasingly influencing employment opportunities for urban migrants. Public internet access points in migrant settlements, digital literacy initiatives, and e-governance service centers facilitate engagement in emerging digital economy opportunities. Bangalore's Public Internet Access Programme specifically targets migrant settlements for connectivity infrastructure, while Pakistan's Digital Skills Programme prioritizes first-generation migrants for technology training (Donner, 2018).

5. Social Protection Mechanisms

Social protection systems throughout South Asia are gradually evolving to address the distinct vulnerabilities of urban migrants, although substantial coverage gaps persist. Recent innovations highlight promising strategies to broaden protection while accommodating the mobility

and employment patterns of migrants.

The portability of benefits represents a crucial innovation for social protection that includes migrants. India's One Nation One Ration Card system, which was initiated in 2019 and later expanded nationwide, enables access to food subsidies regardless of location, benefiting approximately 80 million migrant workers. In a similar vein, the Unified Health Interface facilitates subsidized healthcare access across state lines, despite partial implementation (Drèze et al. , 2021). Community-based social protection mechanisms have proven effective in reaching migrants who are excluded from formal systems. Migrant worker collectives in Bangladesh's garment industry operate contributory emergency funds that offer healthcare assistance and temporary income support. Similar arrangements are in place among construction worker communities in Nepal and waste recycling cooperatives in India, providing essential protection for vulnerable workers (Kabeer et al. , 2013). Urban cash transfer programs aimed at migrants significantly expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pakistan's Ehsaas Emergency Cash program provided one-time payments to 12 million urban households, including migrants who were previously excluded, by utilizing simplified targeting criteria. Likewise, Bangladesh's urban food assistance program broadened its coverage to include migrant settlements that were not previously part of social registries (Gentilini et al. , 2022). Innovations in insurance for informal workers have demonstrated potential in extending risk protection to migrants. Index-based weather insurance for urban outdoor workers (construction, transport, vending) offers compensation during extreme weather events that disrupt work. Similarly, health microinsurance schemes featuring simplified enrollment processes and mobile premium collection cater to migrants' irregular income patterns and mobility (Churchill and Matul, 2012).

Housing security mechanisms specifically designed for migrants are limited but are beginning to emerge in certain contexts. Nepal's National Housing Policy incorporates provisions for rental support and tenant protection for migrants. Bangladesh's National Urban Sector Policy explicitly focuses on migrant housing security through rental regulations and anti-eviction measures. While implementation poses challenges, these policy frameworks lay vital foundations for housing protection (Alam et al. , 2018).

Notwithstanding these positive developments, substantial protection gaps continue to exist. Coverage remains insufficient relative to need, with an estimated 70-80% of urban migrants still excluded from formal social protection systems throughout the region. The fragmentation among programs creates inefficiencies in protection and accessibility challenges. Most critically, informal employment acts as a structural barrier to comprehensive social protection coverage, necessitating systemic labor market reforms in conjunction with targeted social protection interventions (Sabates-Wheeler and Koehler, 2021).

6. Regional Integration Approaches

Regional cooperation mechanisms addressing migration and employment have expanded in recent years, acknowledging the cross-border aspects of population movements and labor market challenges. These approaches intend to harmonize policies, share effective practices, and develop coordinated responses to common challenges.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has initiated several projects relevant to migration and employment. The SAARC Action Plan on Labour Migration offers a framework for harmonizing migration policies, establishing portable social security arrangements, and promoting skill recognition systems. The SAARC Development Fund aids cross-border projects aimed at enhancing livelihoods in migration-affected areas. However, implementation continues to be hampered by political tensions and resource limitations (SAARC Secretariat, 2020).

Regional skills frameworks are being developed to facilitate labor mobility and skill recognition. The South Asian Skills Standards Harmonization initiative seeks to create comparable qualification frameworks across countries, benefiting both internal and international migrants. The SAARC Regional Qualifications Framework, while still in a state of evolution, establishes foundational principles for the mutual recognition of credentials, which has the potential to benefit migrants relocating between rural and urban areas both within and across national borders (ILO, 2021).

Cross-border research collaborations are increasingly shaping migration and employment policies. The Migrating out of Poverty Research Consortium connects researchers from various South Asian nations examining the dynamics of internal migration and policy reactions. The Labor Markets Research Network-South Asia facilitates a comparative examination of employment policies, placing significant emphasis on migration dimensions. These knowledge networks contribute to the transfer of effective methodologies across national contexts (Singh and Rajan, 2021).

Notwithstanding these integrative initiatives, regional approaches to migration and employment remain substantially underdeveloped when compared to other regions. Political tensions, resource limitations, and constraints in institutional capacity impede more profound cooperation. Moreover, the predominant focus on international migration often overshadows concerns related to internal migration in regional discussions, even though the latter's scale and significance for urban employment is considerably larger (Rahman and Akhter, 2019).

3. Case Studies of Successful Interventions

1. India's Urban Employment Guarantee Schemes

Although India's national employment guarantee program continues to primarily focus on rural areas, several state-level urban employment guarantee initiatives have exhibited promising outcomes for urban migrants. The Ayyankali Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme (AUEGS) in

Kerala, which was established in 2011, serves as a pertinent example of effective design and implementation for urban employment guarantees.

AUEGS ensures 100 days of wage employment annually for urban households, concentrating work efforts on the maintenance of urban infrastructure, environmental services, and the development of community facilities. The program has proven especially effective in reaching migrant workers, who represent approximately 35% of the beneficiaries. Key design features that facilitate the inclusion of migrants comprise simplified registration procedures that accept alternative documentation, prioritization of worksite selection in areas dense with migrants, and the integration of skills development components with job provision (Government of Kerala, 2022).

The program showcases several notable impacts. An evaluation conducted by the Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation (2019) revealed that participant households experienced an increase in annual income by approximately 15-20%, with migrants reporting greater gains due to previously lower baseline earnings. Female migrants, in particular, achieved significantly positive outcomes, as the program's gender-equitable design—featuring equal wages, provisions for childcare, and flexible scheduling—has facilitated increased participation. Furthermore, the program has resulted in the creation of valuable public assets within migrant settlements, thereby improving living conditions and enhancing access to services. Innovations in implementation include decentralized planning that allows for the identification of work at the neighborhood level, the use of digital payment systems to improve transparency, and grievance redressal mechanisms aimed at addressing failures in implementation. The program's rights-based approach, which establishes employment as an entitlement rather than a discretionary benefit, has proven especially beneficial for migrants who face discrimination in traditional welfare programs (Narayanan and Dhorajiwala, 2020).

Recent expansions during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the program's countercyclical potential. Kerala augmented AUEGS funding by 35% during the period of 2020-21, generating additional employment opportunities for returned migrants and urban workers adversely affected by economic downturns. This expansion assisted in alleviating the economic repercussions of the pandemic on vulnerable urban populations while simultaneously maintaining essential urban services throughout the crisis (Isaac et al. , 2022).

Cost-effectiveness analysis indicates moderate but positive returns. The program's administrative costs constitute approximately 10% of total expenditure, which is comparable to other social protection programs. The dual benefits of income support and public asset creation enhance overall social returns. However, fiscal sustainability poses challenges, particularly for poorer states with limited revenue capacity, indicating the necessity for national co-financing mechanisms to expand the model (Murgai et al. , 2020).

2. Bangladesh's Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction

The Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction (UPPR) program in Bangladesh represents a comprehensive approach to urban migrant inclusion, integrating components for employment generation, skill development, infrastructure improvement, and community empowerment.

Implemented across 23 cities from 2007 to 2015 and subsequently expanded, the program demonstrates effective multi-dimensional intervention.

UPPR specifically targeted settlements dense with migrants, with approximately 60% of beneficiaries being first or second-generation migrants. The program established community development committees featuring dedicated representation for recent migrants, ensuring their involvement in planning and implementation processes. This institutional innovation contributed to overcoming the typical exclusion of migrants from community governance structures (Banks et al. , 2020).

The socio-economic component generated employment through two primary mechanisms: direct job creation in the development and maintenance of community infrastructure, and support for microenterprises owned by migrants. For the latter, the program provided a combination of financial support (grants and revolving funds), business development services, and facilitation of market linkages. An estimated 250,000 microenterprises received assistance, with independent evaluations affirming a business survival rate of 60-70% after three years (UPPR, 2018).

Skill development interventions specifically targeted recent migrants through apprenticeship arrangements with established urban enterprises, technical training aligned with market demand, and entrepreneurship development programs. The apprenticeship component proved particularly effective, with 75% of participants obtaining employment following placement periods. Female migrants received targeted support through skills programs in growth sectors including healthcare, retail, and food processing (Rahman, 2019).

Settlement upgrading components directly supported employment by improving living environments. Infrastructure enhancements—such as water supply, sanitation, drainage, footpaths, and lighting—reduced time poverty and health burdens, thereby increasing labor market participation capacity.

Secure tenure arrangements enabled home-based enterprises that were previously constrained by eviction threats. Community centers provided workspace for collective enterprises, particularly benefiting women who were unable to work outside their settlements due to safety or cultural constraints (McFarlane, 2018).

The program's governance innovations included participatory settlement mapping, community contracting for infrastructure development, and social accountability mechanisms that ensure transparency in resource allocation. These approaches fostered social capital within migrant

communities while enhancing relations with municipal authorities, thereby reducing the discrimination and harassment frequently encountered by migrant entrepreneurs (Rashid, 2020).

Impact evaluations document significant outcomes. A longitudinal study conducted by the Centre for Urban Studies (2019) found that participant households experienced an average income increase of 43% over five years, with recent migrants exhibiting above-average gains of 51%. Women's economic participation increased significantly, with female labor force participation rates rising from 29% to 47% in program settlements. Indicators of household resilience improved, with 65% of participants reporting diversified income sources that protect against sector-specific economic shocks (Khan and Zaman, 2022).

The financing model for the program denotes a notably significant innovation in sustainability. Originally financed through international development assistance, the program initiated community savings groups and revolving funds that produce continuous resources for enterprise development.

Furthermore, enhanced municipal tax compliance attributable to improvements in services resulted in the creation of fiscal space for ongoing urban investment. These financial mechanisms bolstered long-term sustainability beyond the initial intervention phase (Almansi and Archer, 2021).

3. Sri Lanka's Local Economic Development Approach

Sri Lanka has established a unique methodology for the integration of urban migrants through its Local Economic Development (LED) framework, which has been institutionalized within municipal governance systems. This methodology merges spatial planning aimed at economic inclusion, the development of enterprise ecosystems, and targeted assistance for sectors predominantly involving migrants, effectively demonstrating the integration of economic development with urban governance.

The process of municipal economic development planning explicitly includes migration assessment, identifying significant migrant economic clusters within urban environments and focusing interventions on these areas for support. This analytical methodology has enabled a more sophisticated understanding of the economic contributions and needs of migrants, moving beyond the view of migrants as mere welfare recipients to their recognition as vital economic participants (Bandara and Naranpanawa, 2018).

Sector-specific interventions concentrate on industries characterized by high migrant involvement. The urban food economy initiative in Colombo and secondary cities facilitates support for migrant food vendors through the provision of designated market spaces, food safety certification, and integration into supply chains with regional producers. The initiative has benefited around 12,000 food vendors, of which 60% are first-generation migrants. Participants indicate an average income increase of 35% following the intervention, predominantly due to decreased

harassment losses and a broader customer base (Tacoli, 2020).

The development of the tourism value chain in urban areas specifically incorporates migrants who provide services to both domestic and international visitors. The initiative supports migrant-operated guesthouses, food establishments, transport services, and guiding services through standardization of quality, marketing assistance, and business development services. This strategy has proven particularly effective in secondary cities such as Kandy and Galle, generating employment opportunities within the formal tourism sector for migrants who were previously confined to peripheral roles (Samaranayake, 2019).

Urban manufacturing clusters receive focused assistance through the development of industrial zones that consider migrant employment. Light manufacturing zones located in suburban areas provide factory spaces, shared facilities, and transportation links to migrant communities. These planned industrial areas have created approximately 45,000 jobs, with migrants representing 65% of the workforce. The spatial planning approach mitigates commuting obstacles while allowing enterprises to take advantage of agglomeration economies (Fernando, 2021).

The urban infrastructure component of the initiative specifically targets investments aimed at enhancing productivity in migrant economic zones. Street lighting in market areas prolongs trading hours for migrant vendors. Improvements to drainage systems in manufacturing clusters lessen work interruptions during monsoon seasons. Transportation connectivity between migrant settlements and employment hubs reduces commuting costs and time. These focused infrastructure investments yield higher economic returns than general urban upgrading, improving the quality of migrant employment and earnings (Gunasekara, 2021).

Innovative mechanisms for financial inclusion address the limited access of migrants to formal financial services. Municipal business centers offer documentation support, banking agent services, and financial literacy training designed specifically for recent migrants. Digital financial services have been expanded within migrant communities, lowering transaction costs while facilitating the establishment of financial histories. These measures have increased formal financial inclusion rates among urban migrants from 45% to 72% over a five-year timeframe (Siriwardhana et al., 2020).

Spatial policy reforms have improved the economic inclusion of migrants. Zoning regulations have been revised to support mixed-use development in migrant settlements, facilitating home-based enterprises that were previously hindered by strict residential zoning. Public space management policies now explicitly designate areas for migrant economic activities, legitimizing uses that were previously contested. These regulatory changes counter the historical inclination towards the spatial exclusion of migrant livelihoods through inflexible modernist planning strategies (Perera, 2021).

Impact evaluations document notable outcomes. A longitudinal study conducted by the Centre

for Poverty Analysis (2022) determined that migrant households in intervention areas increased their consumption expenditure by 32% over a five-year period, compared to 17% in analogous non-intervention areas. Rates of employment formalization increased significantly, with formal sector employment among migrants rising from 28% to 47%. Business registration among migrant entrepreneurs rose from 35% to 68%, improving access to financial services and opportunities for growth (Gunasekara and Samaranayake, 2022).

The institutional sustainability of this approach signifies a fundamental strength. By integrating migrant economic inclusion into standard municipal planning and governance frameworks, rather than establishing parallel project structures, the program has achieved a structural impact that extends beyond the immediate beneficiaries. Increases in municipal revenue resulting from economic growth and formalization have generated fiscal space for ongoing investment, thus creating a positive cycle of inclusion and development (Bandara, 2022).

Integrated Policy Framework

Addressing the urban employment challenges associated with rural-urban migration in South Asia necessitates an integrated policy framework that meets immediate needs while establishing foundations for sustainable, inclusive urban economies. This section presents a three-tiered approach comprising short-term interventions, medium-term structural adjustments, and long-term transformative policies.

1. Short-term Employment Solutions

Short-term interventions concentrate on the immediate generation of employment, basic social protection, and support for the integration of recent migrants. These measures serve as crucial initial steps but must be complemented by more extensive structural reforms to attain sustainable improvements.

Urban employment guarantee programs represent a viable immediate intervention, offering income security for vulnerable migrants. Drawing upon India's experiences in the states of Kerala and Odisha, urban employment guarantees can be crafted with features specifically advantageous to migrants: flexible timings that accommodate circular migration patterns, minimal documentation requirements, and integration with urban service delivery (Narayanan and Dhorajiwala, 2020). Cost estimates from pilot programs indicate that a comprehensive urban employment guarantee would necessitate approximately 0.6-0.8% of GDP annually, a significant yet feasible fiscal commitment in light of the potential benefits for social stability and poverty alleviation (Azim Premji University, 2021).

Migrant resource centers in major destination cities provide another immediate intervention, offering information services, skill matching, legal support, and integration assistance. Bangladesh's migration support centers in Dhaka have shown positive outcomes, with users being 40% more likely

to secure employment that matches their skills and 35% less likely to experience wage theft compared to non- users (Rahman and Islam, 2022). These centers operate most effectively through multi-stakeholder partnerships that involve municipal governments, employers' associations, and migrant organizations.

Temporary housing solutions address one of the most pressing challenges encountered by new urban migrants. Rental voucher programs, employer-provided accommodations, and transitional housing facilities can address immediate shelter needs while more permanent solutions are being developed. Pakistan's Worker Hostel Program in industrial zones serves as a replicable model, offering subsidized accommodation for migrant workers, with costs shared among employers, workers, and the government (Hasan and Raza, 2022).

Emergency social protection measures are crucial for migrants experiencing acute vulnerabilities. Cash transfer programs designed with simplified eligibility criteria and minimal documentation requirements can furnish temporary support during critical transition periods. Nepal's COVID-19 emergency cash transfer program provides valuable insights, having successfully reached 65% of urban migrants through innovative verification methods that utilize employer attestation and community validation instead of formal documentation (World Bank, 2021).

Portable benefit systems address the protection gaps arising from geographic mobility. Digital platforms that link identity verification, benefit eligibility, and service access across jurisdictions can help to maintain continuity of protection for mobile populations. India's "One Nation, One Ration Card" initiative exemplifies the potential of portability reforms, having enabled around 20 million migrants to obtain food subsidies outside their home states since its implementation (Drèze et al. , 2022).

Medium-term Structural Adjustments

Medium-term interventions tackle structural labor market constraints and systemic barriers to migrant integration, necessitating institutional reforms and sustained investment over 3-7 year periods.

Skill ecosystem reforms constitute a crucial medium-term objective. Addressing the widespread skill mismatches necessitates fundamental alterations to training systems, which include: (1) increased industry involvement in curriculum development; (2) modular, flexible delivery models that accommodate working learners; (3) improved recognition of prior learning systems for skills acquired informally; and (4) labor market information systems designed to guide training investments. Such comprehensive reforms have demonstrated potential in Sri Lanka's sector-specific training approach, which has led to a reduction in skill mismatches by approximately 30% in targeted sectors over a five- year period (Dundar et al., 2021).

The modernization of labor regulations is critical to extending protections to non-standard

employment forms that are common among migrants. South Asian countries require simplified compliance procedures for small employers, graduated formalization pathways, and protection mechanisms that are not dependent on standard employment contracts. Amendments to Bangladesh's Labor Act, which provide specific protections for home-based workers, present a potential model, having extended basic labor rights to approximately 1.5 million informal workers, many of whom are migrants (ILO, 2022).

Housing market reforms must tackle the significant affordability constraints and exclusionary practices confronting migrants. Interventions should encompass: (1) regulations in the rental market that balance tenant protection with incentives for supply; (2) incremental housing strategies that support self-building through technical assistance and infrastructure provision; and (3) employer-linked housing initiatives in high-migration sectors. India's Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC) program illustrates how repurposed urban land can create housing solutions specifically aimed at migrants, though substantial implementation challenges persist (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2022).

Municipal finance reforms are imperative to expand the resource base available for urban infrastructure investment. Most cities in South Asia encounter considerable fiscal constraints that limit their ability to develop infrastructure responsive to migration. Potential reforms may include improved property taxation systems, mechanisms for land value capture, frameworks for municipal borrowing, and intergovernmental fiscal transfers that prioritize high-migration areas. Pakistan's Punjab Cities Program exemplifies how performance-based grants can incentivize municipal governments to adopt migrant-inclusive planning practices (World Bank, 2022).

Regional coordination mechanisms are necessary for more effective management of migration across administrative boundaries. Metropolitan governance frameworks that encompass core cities and peripheral areas where migrants are increasingly settling can ensure coordinated planning and service delivery. Nepal's Kathmandu Valley Development Authority provides a partial model, although there remain gaps in implementation (Suwal and Pant, 2021).

Long-term Sustainable Urban Development

Long-term interventions are aimed at transformative changes to urban systems, economic structures, and governance frameworks. These initiatives require a sustained commitment over a timeframe of 7 to 15 years but present the greatest potential for structural transformation.

Integrated spatial planning approaches are vital for fostering more inclusive and efficient urban forms. Transit-oriented development that links affordable housing with employment clusters can mitigate the spatial mismatch that adversely affects migrants. Compact, mixed-use development diminishes transportation barriers while facilitating more cost-effective service provision. Bengaluru's revised master plan, which incorporates the principles of transit-housing-employment

integration, represents a promising approach, although implementation remains only partially realized (Karnataka Urban Development Department, 2022).

Economic diversification beyond metropolitan centers is essential for establishing a more balanced urban system. The development of secondary cities can provide alternative migration destinations, alleviating pressure on primary cities while distributing the advantages of development more evenly. Achieving this requires strategic investment in infrastructure, targeted fiscal incentives, and the strengthening of institutions governing secondary cities. Bangladesh's secondary cities program has yielded promising outcomes, with cities such as Khulna and Sylhet exhibiting accelerated job creation within the manufacturing and services sectors (Asian Development Bank, 2021).

Climate-resilient urban development is becoming increasingly vital as environmental factors propel migration and influence urban vulnerabilities. Long-term interventions must encompass: (1) the assessment of climate risks in urban planning; (2) standards for resilient infrastructure; (3) approaches to adaptation based on ecosystems; and (4) targeted protections for vulnerable communities, particularly migrants who are generally settled in high-risk areas. Chennai's water resilience strategy provides significant insights for integrated methodologies that connect natural systems, infrastructure, and social protection (Jain et al. , 2022).

The development of a knowledge economy presents avenues for urban employment with higher productivity. Investments in digital infrastructure, innovation ecosystems, and the advancement of skills can generate opportunities in higher-value sectors. Sri Lanka's Western Region Megapolis Plan exemplifies such an approach; however, successful implementation necessitates meticulous attention to inclusion mechanisms to ensure that migrants have access to emerging opportunities rather than being further marginalized (Amarasinghe et al. , 2021).

Reforms in participatory governance are essential to incorporate the perspectives of migrants in urban decision-making processes. Mechanisms for formal representation, participatory budgeting processes, and community-based planning methodologies can ensure that urban development aligns with the needs of migrants. Innovative strategies such as Nepal's Migrant Resource Committees in major municipalities illustrate how participatory structures can institutionalize the representation of migrants in urban governance (Limbu and Maharjan, 2022).

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Rural-urban migration in South Asia embodies both a notable challenge and a prospect for sustainable development. The movement of populations toward urban locales reflects natural economic evolution and individual aspirations for improved living conditions. Nevertheless, the prevailing pattern—characterized by informal employment, precarious livelihoods, and social exclusion—detracts from the potential welfare benefits of urbanization while incurring considerable

social costs.

This research has examined the intricate dynamics of rural-urban migration throughout South Asia, documenting specific patterns in various countries while recognizing common challenges within urban labor markets. The dominance of informality, skill mismatches, infrastructure deficiencies, gaps in social protection, and gender imbalances creates a difficult environment for migrants seeking stable urban livelihoods. However, within this challenging context, promising policy strategies and innovative interventions have emerged throughout the region.

Drawing upon this analysis, this paper advocates a comprehensive policy framework that integrates short-term employment solutions with medium-term structural adjustments and long-term sustainable development strategies. This integrated framework acknowledges that effective responses must address immediate vulnerabilities while concurrently establishing more inclusive urban systems capable of productively accommodating migration flows.

In light of the findings, the following recommendations are put forth for various stakeholders:

For national governments:

1. Establish national urban employment guarantee programs as safety nets for vulnerable urban workers, including migrants, with design features that accommodate mobility patterns and documentation constraints. Reform labor regulations to extend protections to non-standard employment forms that are prevalent among migrants, accompanied by simplified compliance procedures and graduated formalization pathways.
2. Develop portable social protection systems that link benefits to individuals rather than locations, utilizing digital platforms to facilitate access across jurisdictional boundaries.
3. Invest in comprehensive skill development ecosystems with specific provisions for migrants, encompassing the recognition of prior learning, flexible training delivery, and labor market information systems.
4. Reform housing policies to mitigate affordability and exclusion barriers faced by migrants, with a particular focus on rental market regulations and incremental housing strategies.

For urban and municipal governments:

1. Establish migrant resource centers that offer information, legal support, skill matching, and integration assistance in major destination areas.
2. Embrace urban planning strategies that include migrants by integrating affordable housing, transportation connectivity, and the provision of essential services in areas with high migrant densities.
3. Establish governance mechanisms that encourage participation, ensuring that migrants are represented in urban decision-making processes.
4. Formulate infrastructure investment plans that specifically target underserved regions

populated by large migrant communities, particularly emphasizing access to water, sanitation, and electricity.

5. Amend municipal land use regulations to facilitate mixed-use development, incremental housing, and affordable accommodation options in proximity to employment hubs.

For development partners and international organizations:

1. Assist in building capacity for urban planning and governance that is responsive to migration through the provision of technical assistance and sharing of knowledge.
2. Finance pilot initiatives that explore innovative methods for migrant inclusion, accompanied by thorough evaluations to identify scalable models.
3. Foster regional collaboration on migration management and the establishment of harmonized social protection frameworks.
4. Allocate investments toward the enhancement of data systems for the monitoring of migration flows, urban labor markets, and the outcomes of policies.
5. Encourage South-South learning exchanges that focus on successful strategies for urban employment and inclusion.

For private sector actors:

1. Create industry-specific skill standards and certification systems that acknowledge competencies acquired informally, which are prevalent among migrants.
2. Execute responsible recruitment practices that guarantee equitable treatment of migrant workers throughout supply chains.
3. Invest in housing solutions for employees, especially in industries characterized by significant migrant employment.
4. Engage in multistakeholder partnerships aimed at advancing inclusive urban development, which includes vocational training, infrastructure investments, and the creation of employment opportunities.
5. Implement workplace practices that accommodate the specific needs of migrants, including flexible scheduling for circular migrants and facilitation of remittances.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities inherent in current migration and urban employment systems while simultaneously presenting opportunities for transformative reform. As economies in South Asia recover and reconstruction efforts progress, there exists both a necessity and an opportunity to cultivate more inclusive and resilient urban economies that leverage the productive capacities of migration while ensuring dignified livelihoods for all urban inhabitants.

Ultimately, the resolution of the employment challenges associated with rural-urban migration necessitates the recognition of migrants not as challenges to be addressed but as catalysts of development whose energy, aspirations, and contributions are vital for sustainable urbanization.

With appropriate policies, investments, and governance strategies, South Asian cities have the potential to transform into engines of inclusive growth where rural-urban migration leads to shared prosperity rather than concentrated disadvantage.

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