



# **Internal and Regional Migration for Construction Work: A Research Agenda**

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## Abstract

This working paper reviews evidence from the literature on internal migration for work in construction in developing countries. The literature reviewed was found through a search of academic databases and selected by the authors. The review identifies cases and contexts in which migration for construction work leads to exits from poverty as well as those in which it entrenches poverty. We also focus upon migrant selectivity and discourses within the literature about migration for construction work. The review identifies gaps in the literature and important themes, in particular those issues and phenomena relating to poverty and development. The small and diverse set of literature, identified for the purpose of this paper, focuses mainly on South Asia. Several areas for future research are suggested throughout the paper and in the concluding section.

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	5
Literature Search Strategy .....	6
What Evidence is there and where are the Gaps? .....	7
Internal Migration for Construction Work.....	9
Discourses .....	11
Migration Selectivity .....	12
Migration for Construction Work: Entrenching Poverty? .....	13
Recruitment .....	13
Conditions of employment in destination areas .....	15
Outcomes.....	16
Migration for Construction Work: Facilitating Poverty Alleviation? .....	17
The counterfactual.....	17
Social relations in rural areas.....	17
Socio-economic outcomes.....	18
Conclusions .....	19
References .....	21
References on migration for construction work, found using systematic search .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
References on migration for construction work, found by authors	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Others sources referred to in this paper: .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Table 1: Studies reviewed .....	24
Table 2: Studies eliminated or unavailable.....	26

## Introduction

The Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium (RPC) researches the relationship between internal and regional migration and poverty in developing countries. The RPC conducts qualitative and quantitative research on migration. The qualitative research focuses on the link between migration and work in particular employment sectors: domestic work, construction work and in some cases manufacturing. In order to inform our research in these three areas, the RPC commissioned reviews of evidence about migration for domestic work and migration for construction work. The present review reviews the literature on migration for construction work and identifies gaps in the available evidence.

We focus on construction work for a number of reasons. Construction work is an important source of employment all over the world for poor and low-skilled migrants as there are few barriers to entry (BWI 2006). It employs some of the poorest and most marginalised people and is arguably the most important sector after agriculture, employing nearly 110 million people worldwide (ILO 2001). While construction is mechanised in rich countries, in poorer countries the majority of tasks are still undertaken manually because labour is cheap (ILO 2007). The construction industry employs a large number of migrants, many of whom are unskilled rural labourers. Some of these migrants get seasonal employment to supplement farm income, and in some contexts it employs large numbers of women. The majority of unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the construction industry are employed without formal contracts and social protection (Wells 2007). Construction work is an industry that exists in every country and is particularly active in many developing countries. Researching the same industry in several international contexts will allow us to make comparisons across countries.

The literature review focuses mainly on internal migration, with some focus on regional migration. We define internal migration as migration within the borders of a country and regional migration as migration within a region or group of countries. This definition helps to identify a type of migration that is relatively short distance, and often short term or seasonal/circular. Combining internal and regional migration captures the type of migration that might be classified as internal migration in large countries and as international migration within regions containing several small or medium sized countries (such as South East Asia, West, East and Southern Africa). In keeping with the research agenda of the RPC overall, the review does not focus on migration from developing countries to developed countries, nor does it focus on migration within developed countries.

The ILO convention on safety and health in construction (ILO 1988) defines construction work as broadly including the following:

(i) building, including excavation and the construction, structural alteration, renovation, repair, maintenance (including cleaning and painting) and demolition of all types of buildings or structures;

(ii) civil engineering, including excavation and the construction, structural alteration, repair, maintenance and demolition of, for example, airports, docks, harbours, inland waterways, dams, river and avalanche and sea defence works, roads and highways, railways, bridges, tunnels, viaducts and works related to the provision of services such as communications, drainage, sewerage, water and energy supplies;

(iii) the erection and dismantling of prefabricated buildings and structures, as well as the manufacturing of prefabricated elements on the construction site.

For the purposes of this review and the research of the RPC, we follow this broad definition of construction work. However, we focus principally upon rural-urban migration and therefore are most interested in construction work in cities rather than civil engineering projects that take place in rural areas. Whereas there is a constant (but fluctuating) demand for construction workers in cities, rural civil engineering sites may be temporary or mobile as infrastructure projects are built. We also limit our focus to the lower skilled professions and sectors of the construction industry, as these are the most accessible and significant to the poor.

A conspicuous aspect of many cities in rapidly urbanising and developing countries is a vibrant construction sector and the rapid emergence of new buildings. Millions of workers work on construction projects in large and small in cities across the developing world. Often a very high proportion of these workers are internal and regional migrants (IOM 2005b; ILO 2001). Construction work offers easy access to waged labour for agricultural workers. It is often the only form of non-agricultural waged labour available to the unskilled and is especially important to the landless. Construction work provides an entry point to the urban economy for rural to urban migrants (ILO 2001). Migrant labour benefits the construction sector, the construction companies and, ultimately, the development of cities and nations (Sepehrdoust 2013).

Nevertheless, the academic literature on internal and regional migration for construction work in developing countries is limited, as is the literature on the relationship between this form of migration and poverty and development.

## Literature Search Strategy

A search of the major academic databases – SCOPUS, Web of Knowledge, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA) and the International Bibliography of the

Social Sciences (IBSS) – was conducted.<sup>1</sup> The search terms used included ‘construction’, ‘building’, ‘work’, ‘labour’, ‘migration’, and ‘mobility’, as well as more specific terms like ‘seasonal’, ‘internal’, ‘development’, in various combinations. The search was limited to studies of internal and regional migration for construction work in developing countries and to journals in the social sciences. The total amount of relevant articles initially identified was 70, which was followed by two rounds of closer scrutiny. In the first round, some articles were identified as irrelevant and were removed from consideration. The main reasons for excluding these articles were: they did not focus on migration of people; they focused on migration to developed countries; or they did not focus on construction work. After this process the total amount of relevant articles was 40.

These articles were then combined with 22 articles, books and grey literature collected by the authors. The very limited amount of ‘grey literature’ from non-governmental organisations was included in the group if it was perceived to be particularly relevant or influential (Deshingkar and Start 2003; Deshingkar 2005; Mobile Crèches 2008), or in an attempt to find references on parts of the world where there was not much academic literature (IOM 2005a). This list of 62 sources was then categorised according to methodology, geographical area and attitude towards migration. The 62 articles were downloaded where possible and scrutinised further.

Of the 40 articles found through the database search, a further 12 were eliminated from the sample, mainly for being irrelevant, although 4 of these were also in other languages. The main reasons for irrelevance in this round were: they did not focus on development or poverty; they focused only the construction sector but not on migration; or they focused on migrants but not construction workers. Ten of the sources found by the systematic search were not available for downloading through the University of Sussex’s electronic library or freely available on line. Of those that were unavailable, four were in languages other than English, and one was from the 1970s. The final list of articles reviewed and categorised in this review is 42. These do not compile *all* the research ever conducted on internal and regional migration for construction work, but we are confident that they provide an overview of the most recent and relevant research in this area. These references are listed at the end of this paper, along with other references that were consulted and referred to while writing the paper.

## What Evidence is there and where are the Gaps?

Of the 42 sources reviewed here, 21 were found through the systematic search and the other 21 were found by the authors based on prior knowledge or by following references from other sources. Most of the sources in the sample were published in the last 12 years, but the oldest found through the systematic search is from 1977.

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<sup>1</sup> This search was conducted by Bridget Holtom from DFID.

All the sources found by recommendation were published in or after the year 2000. Sources found through recommendation were on average slightly more recent than those found by the systematic search, but clustered around a much narrower range of years (perhaps reflecting the knowledge of the recommenders). Sources found through the systematic search included a much wider range of years, including older material and very recent material that recommenders were perhaps not familiar with. This combination of search methods makes the sample comprehensive and biased towards more recent studies.

Out of these sources, 16 specifically sampled construction workers in their research strategy, while the remaining 26 made reference to construction workers through sampling migrant workers in places of origin or destination, or discussed issues about migration that are relevant to migration for construction work. **Despite the prevalence of the phenomenon, there is, in general, a very small amount of research literature that deals explicitly with the experiences or issues surrounding internal and regional migration for construction work. In particular, there is very little research evidence about the impacts this migration has on development and poverty.**

The sample of sources contains research on 19 different countries, with 4 studies being of multiple countries. Among these countries, research on India dominates the literature, with 18 of the 42 sources. Of these 18, only 5 were identified by the systematic search, so this dominance could reflect the expertise of the secretariat rather than the state of the literature. Nevertheless, the 5 found through the systematic search still represent more studies than any other single country among the rest of the references. After India, China and Indonesia, with 3 studies each, have the greatest amount of research focusing on them. This is not very surprising considering that these are 3 very large and diverse developing countries. Research on India and China provides many of the insights we have on internal migration for construction work, but these exceptionally large and diverse economies cannot be considered representative of most developing nations in terms of internal migration patterns. Many of the states of India are as large as individual nations in their own right. **There is a need for more evidence on internal and regional migration in more typically sized countries and regions and on poorer countries.**

The dominance of India in the sample means that when we look at the sources by region, South Asia dominates, with 19 of the sources, followed by South East Asia (6) and East Asia (5). Research on Asia comprises the vast majority of this sample. Research on internal and regional migration for construction work in Africa is conspicuously thin on the ground. North Africa (1), East Africa (1), Southern Africa (1) and West Africa (2) combined are the focus of as many sources in this sample (5) as East Asia alone, while Asia (excluding the Middle East) is the focus of 30 out of the 42 sources. Of the 5 sources from Africa in the sample, only 2 were found using the systematic search, which puts the dominance of India in the recommended papers into perspective. **There is, it would seem, a large gap in the evidence on internal and regional migration for construction work in Africa.**



There are very few studies that explicitly look at relations and/or the role of women in the construction industry (Ahsan 1997; Deshingkar and Start 2003; Gullette 2013; Jatrana and Sangwan 2004; Mathew 2005; Picherit 2012). Migration of women has in the past been categorised as ‘accompanying migration’ or ‘induced migration’ (Ahsan 1997). Ahsan (1997) and Pattenden (2012) reveal interesting gendered divisions of labour and inequalities in wages on construction sites as well as gendered patterns of remittance sending. Most of the research that touches on these themes is in South Asia, an exception being Gullette (2013) on Thailand. We can speculate that this is because it is common to have women working in construction in South Asia, but not in other parts of the world. **There appears to be very little research on women in construction work or gender relations with regard to migration for construction work outside South Asia, so this would be a fruitful area of further research.**

The 42 studies in the sample are fairly well balanced in terms of methodologies, with 13 employing quantitative methods (using large databases or conducting surveys) and 17 using qualitative methods (typically interviews and ethnographic methods with smaller samples); 6 of the studies were categorised as mixed methods and 6 as not being empirical studies, as they were reviews or conceptual pieces not containing original analysis of data. Of the 13 quantitative studies, 10 contained statistical analysis of the data sources, while the other 3 used descriptive statistics. Of the mixed methods study, only Fan (2008) used statistical analysis alongside qualitative analysis. Fan’s (2008) study on internal migration in China is perhaps unusual in the sample as it is a monograph length book. **There is a lack of mixed methods research using statistical analysis alongside qualitative approaches.**

## Internal Migration for Construction Work

It is impossible to know how many people work as construction workers in developing countries and how many of these are internal migrants. The informal nature of many migration flows and employment contracting means that there is no reliable data.

Construction work is regularly mentioned as one of the most common occupations for rural to urban migrants (ILO 2001; IOM 2005b). In Morocco, de Haas (2006) found that 28 per cent of rural to urban migrants worked in construction. In India, Thorat and Jones (2011), amongst others, suggest that there are between 30-40 million migrant construction workers. The construction industry in India (and probably in many developing economies) is expanding rapidly (Pattenden 2012). In China, construction work is one of the biggest employment sectors for rural-urban migrants (Fan 2008; Li *et al.* 2007). Wells (1996) identifies East Asia and the Middle East as the most important destinations for international migration for construction work, but her review focuses mainly on international migration.

In India, the planning commission welcomes three important contributions of the construction industry to employment in the country, which summarises several key aspects from the point of view of migration and poverty alleviation: construction work employs a huge volume of unskilled rural labour; it provides seasonal employment supplementing farm income; and it employs large numbers of women (Picherit 2012: 144). These factors make construction work in cities particularly attractive for poor, rural households as a means to earn extra money. From the point of view of the employers, the relative lack of bargaining power or options for other employment make migrant workers a flexible and hardworking option for construction companies (IOM 2005b; Sepehrdoust 2013).

Neo-classical economic analysis postulates that migration is an inevitable part of rational development, through which labour moves to where it is most needed. An assumption of this approach was that the rational allocation of labour would even out wage differentials between rural and urban areas. Marxist analyses, such as that of Breman (1996), argue that no such equilibrium would be reached, as migration was part of a capitalist exploitation of cheap, vulnerable labour in which capitalists would get richer and workers would get poorer. It is clear that in most cases migration has not led to the equalisation of wage differentials in urban and rural areas. It is also clear that migration does offer opportunities for social mobility and is not structured entirely by rigid class exploitation. De Haas (2006) describes the new economics of labour migration (NELM) as a kind of third way, in which the household is the locus of decision-making and uses migration as part of a portfolio of options to increase income and mitigate risk. Policy approaches seem to subscribe rather too strongly to one ideological interpretation or the other, taking a normative approach rather than a more balanced, empirical approach.

Migration for construction work is cyclical and dependent on the health of the construction industry and the economy in general (Buckley 2012; Hugo 2000; Ratha et al. 2011). Many authors highlight the connections between the rural agricultural economy and the urban economy, of which construction work is one employment sector (Pattenden 2012). In times when weather conditions or harvests are poor, more migrants may be compelled to move (Hugo 2000; Mobile Creches 2008; Shah 2005). Seasonal migration usually takes place during times when there is not much agricultural work (Mosse *et al.* 2002; Smita 2008). During economic booms demand for construction workers in urban areas can rise, only to fall dramatically when there is an economic downturn (Buckley 2012).

The contribution of migration for construction to development and poverty alleviation is contested. Many researchers assert that rural-urban migration does not benefit the majority of those who migrate (Breman 1990, 1996; Mosse *et al.* 2002, 2005). Others, such as Deshingkar and Start (2003), draw a distinction between unskilled work for construction and skilled work for construction; whilst the former helps to cope with seasonal shortfalls in income, the latter is more remunerative and can lead to a reduction in poverty, which they term 'accumulative migration'. Migration flows are diverse and create a wide range of outcomes and experiences (Mosse *et al.* 2005). It is highly unlikely that any piece of research will demonstrate

conclusively that internal migration for construction work is a bad thing that only leads to exploitation and entrenched poverty, or vice versa, that it is universally good for the poor and leads to development and poverty alleviation. **Clearly one of the purposes of the RPC must be to identify the policies, contexts and conditions of migration that facilitate poverty alleviation and those that lead to problems and entrench poverty.** Where migration has little poverty impact, it is still useful to examine why this is and why people continue to migrate.

The next two sections pick up on the discourses used to discuss migration for construction work, and migration more broadly in the literature reviewed as well as the important issue of migration selectivity. After that the next two sections identify policies and conditions that facilitate poverty alleviation and those that lead to entrenched poverty. Finally the paper includes a conclusion including an agenda for further research in this area.

## Discourses

The dominant way in which governments and development agencies understand migration is as a problem. Public and development agency policies have repeatedly tried and failed to prevent migration. Due to the explicit framing of migration as a problem, acknowledging migration and working with it would entail an admission of programme failure, which is very difficult for many in development to accept (Mosse *et al.* 2005). Due to the powerful negative discourses around migration, migration in itself has become seen as a problem rather than the extreme poverty that it is a response to. Mosse *et al.* (2005) chart the shift in perceptions in a development project in India when it was realised that migration had become an irreversible and integral part of rural livelihoods. The project began to take a more pragmatic approach to migration, aiming to facilitate the benefits and mitigate against the dangers faced by migrants.

A common term used in India is 'distress migration' (Betancourt *et al.* 2013; Mobile Crèches 2008; Smita 2008). This is the type of language that positions migration as a problem rather than a potential solution to poverty. The same is true of the idea of 'migration-prone areas', which puts migration in a list of things like drought, flood or other types of disaster, that an area can be 'prone' to (Smita 2008). Understanding migration as a problem from the start leads to a poor understanding of strategic livelihoods decisions and misguided policies.

The idea of families and households 'left behind' by migrants is common terminology in the migration literature (Betancourt *et al.* 2013; Coffey 2013; Mobile Crèches 2008; Smita 2008). The terminology deprives the families of migrants of any agency or involvement in the migration process, and conceptualises migration as something done by individuals. Yet research shows that migration decisions, strategies and processes often involve families, households or wider groups. Networks of support, information and recruitment are important, and those 'left behind' are often the

ones who have financed the migration or taken the decision to send a family member to work elsewhere (de Haas 2006; Deshingkar and Start 2003; Firman 1991; Picherit 2012). The NELM approach described by de Haas (2006) considers the household to be a core economic actor that uses migration as one of a range of strategies to increase income and mitigate risk. **Studies of migration for construction work (and other forms of migration) must take into account the household as an important unit of analysis in the decision to migrate, in migration financing as a strategic investment, and in the use of remittances.**

## Migration Selectivity

De Haan and Rogaly (2002), Mosse *et al.* (2005) and Thorat and Jones (2011) draw a distinction between migration by the extremely poor and migration by those whose households have basic necessities. There appear to be differences in the strategies of migration, the experiences of migration, and the outcomes. Rao (2001) describes this as 'migration for survival' versus 'migration for additional income'. Deshingkar and Start (2003) call this 'migration as a coping strategy' as opposed to 'accumulative migration'. Mosse *et al.* (2005) explain how young men from slightly better off families migrate 'opportunistically' in turns, while poorer families migrate together. It is the poorest families, who migrate together for work on construction sites or in brick kilns, saltpans and agriculture that are associated with entrenched poverty.

Thorat and Jones (2011) assert that migration by the slightly better off is more likely to lead to exits from poverty than the migration patterns followed by the poorest. It is easier for the relatively less poor to exit from poverty as they may be nearer to real or artificial poverty lines. Thorat and Jones (2011) also emphasise that migration by the poorest prevents the poor from sliding deeper into poverty and indebtedness. When discussing migration patterns in general, De Haan and Rogaly (2002) and Shah (2005) suggest that while the relatively wealthy are pulled towards better job prospects, the poor are pushed by poverty and desperation. These patterns and outcomes have the potential to increase inequalities as well as reduce them. They cite other evidence from a range of countries to suggest that international migration is more likely to increase inequality than internal migration.

Pattenden (2012) and Thorat and Jones (2011) found that migration for construction work in India is associated with landlessness. Meanwhile, Pattanaik's (2009) survey of 1,200 construction workers in Chandigarh found that the vast majority of them came from households that owned land, and many of them were not from the lowest castes. Shah (2005), working in Gujarat, found that the wealthiest who owned the best land participated in different forms of migration (longer distance and longer term) than the relatively less wealthy, with the poorest, landless group being the least likely to migrate. Deshingkar and Start (2003) found similar mixed results regarding the relationship between the decision to migrate and land ownership. Pattenden's (2012) investigation of the *maistries* (recruitment agents or sub-contractors) indicated that they needed land and assets in order to pay workers

and absorb a measure of risk. These recruitment agents are able to benefit from migration, earning significantly and investing in productive land or business interests.

These patterns may be important in determining who gains most from migration and why. Betancourt *et al.* (2013) reviewed evidence, including Deshingkar *et al.* (2008) that suggests that while many migrants do benefit from migration, the most deprived and socially disadvantaged cannot access the best jobs and remain in debt after migration. Similarly, Hampshire (2002) found that rural to urban migrants from Burkina Faso are selected from relatively wealthy households, who have examined the choices available to them and exercised agency to choose a strategy most likely to pay off. They are neither the poorest nor passive victims of their circumstances. **Understanding how the selectivity of migrants to construction work affects outcomes, compared to both those who do not migrate and those who migrate to other industries, is an important question that future research could look at.**

Pattenden (2012) and Pattanaik (2009) find that migration outcomes in construction are significantly related to the skill level of migrants, with more skilled construction workers able to earn much higher wages than the less skilled. Pattenden's (2012) analysis finds that of the households who did not benefit from migration, all of them accessed unskilled construction labour. While half of the unskilled migrant construction workers benefited, all the semi-skilled migrants benefited. **Examining the ways in which skills and education are related to both migration selectivity and the outcomes of migration might be an important part of studies of migration for construction work.**

## Migration for Construction Work: Entrenching Poverty?

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment practices are regularly cited as a problematic area that can lead to migrants becoming entrenched in debt. Much of the literature on internal migration for construction work in India highlights problems of debt bondage and bonded labour, which characterise internal migration patterns and recruitment practices in rural India (Breman 1996). Recruitment agents or labour sub-contractors often provide cash advances to migrants to pay for the costs of migration, and this relationship can become very exploitative (Smita 2008; Thorat and Jones 2011). Large cash advances to migrant workers and increasing indebtedness increases control of the workers. The system works on trust, as contractors pass on advances to labour sub-contractors who they trust to recruit workers that they know and trust, often with quite punitive rates of interest (Pattenden 2012).

Most of these recruitment agents or labour sub-contractors were once themselves migrant construction workers. Their position as a leader offers them power and significant potential to earn and move out of poverty. It also places them in a position of responsibility. They must retain the ability to recruit workers, keep

workers loyal by looking after them, be disciplined and hardworking in order to complete contracts on time and budget, maintain relations with large contractors, and absorb risk of slow or late work (which is often paid by piece rates) (Pattenden 2012).

Mosse *et al.* (2005) describe three mechanisms through which rural *adivasi* migrants in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are recruited. The first involves individuals travelling to cities or towns and being recruited as day labourers through informal labour markets. The second involves groups who have contacts with contractors or builders and travel in a group. The third mechanism is where recruitment agents or sub-contractors, usually former labourers themselves, recruit workers in their own villages. These agents (known as *mukkadams*, *maistries*, *sardars* or *jamadars* in different parts of India) are associated with both the functioning of migration flows and some of the most exploitative practices around the use of advances and debt bondage (Mathew 2005; Mosse *et al.* 2005; Pattenden 2012).

Picherit (2012) describes another type of *maistrie* relationship, different from previous debt bondage arrangements, where cash advances are not given, recruitment is done at informal labour markets, and the *maistrie* is not well known to villagers. This may be one of several layers of intermediaries in the construction industry recruitment and management processes. He describes a situation where *maistries* control access to urban construction jobs, water and rented accommodation. They also provide workers with protection from police harassment. In return they take 10 per cent of each worker's wages. Their power means that workers are extremely loyal to them, and function as disciplined workers, as ill-discipline or disloyalty means the cutting off of access to a key source of income. Here there is more agency involved in accepting the domination of the *maistries* who do not have a long history of relations with the villagers, thus the relationship is more transactional. In the construction sites and public spaces of the city, the migrants are ill-treated and keep a low profile to avoid trouble, whilst in their villages their increasing wealth and status is played out publicly.

Firman (1991) explains how in Indonesia a similar process of organising labour under a *mandor* (what he calls a 'labour sub-contractor') takes place. *Mandors* usually recruit from their own villages and it is very difficult for villagers to get construction work without being part of a *mandor's* gang. This helps construction companies to pass on a lot of the risk (such as adverse weather, availability of building materials and inflation) to *mandors*, who in turn pass them on to the migrant workers. As in India, *mandors* act as patrons to migrant workers, helping them with health, finances and family affairs, in return for what is quite an exploitative relationship. Firman (1991) compares the *mandor* in Indonesia to a similar figure in the Mexican context, the *maestro de obras*. These labour sub-contractors, or agents, perform two roles in the construction industry. Firstly, they reduce the direct and indirect costs of labour to construction firms and keep a flexible labour force. Secondly they make the relationship between capital and labour indirect, to the advantage of capital (Ball and Connolly 1987:164, cited in Firman 1991; Pattenden, 2012).

Mitra (2010) analyses recruitment practices using the notion of social capital. His findings suggest that, while social networks help poor people find work, recruitment of workers in this way can depress wages and prevent people moving out of poverty. Recruitment practices in India are the subject of discussion in a lot of the sources. They are often seen as problematic and in contravention of laws and regulations. **Recruitment practices and processes, and the ways in which these relate to poverty alleviation or entrenchment among migrants, would be a useful focus for research in other contexts.**

### ***Conditions of employment in destination areas***

Picherit (2012), Betancourt *et al.* (2013) and Mosse *et al.* (2005), focusing on India, and Ahsan (1997) in Bangladesh, describe how work on construction sites is extremely dangerous, often conducted in very poor conditions, with frequent accidents, and without access to adequate housing, drinking water, healthcare or social protection. Migrants are vulnerable to crime, violence, sexual abuse and harassment by police and other authorities. Urban migrant labourers have problems accessing government programmes that are available in rural areas, such as in healthcare, insurance, childcare, education and food rations.

Poor conditions for migrant construction workers reveal how hidden the sector is and how weak migrant workers are in relation to their employers. Migrant workers operate 'outside the law and beyond the benign reach of state agencies (and) subject to repression and exploitation in a capitalist framework remarkable for its nakedness and rawness' (Breman 2003: 284, cited in Mosse *et al.* 2005). That migrants continue to be willing to work under these conditions speaks volumes about the other options available to them and the nature of the lives they have chosen to leave in rural areas. **Research on the employment conditions of migrants on construction sites in other contexts, as well as on policy barriers or solutions to better employment conditions and access to services, would be useful.** It is important to recognise that whilst critiquing and proposing policy is one thing, proper implementation is another. Deshingkar and Start (2003), for example, illustrate how laws in India relating to migrant workers are routinely ignored. It is also important to consider whether conditions for migrant construction workers are better or worse than those for non-migrant construction workers, migrants working in other employment sectors, or the other available sources of waged labour in the source area. In many contexts, the problem of poor work conditions is probably not specific to migrant construction workers.

Mosse *et al.* (2005) and Picherit (2012) highlight the relationship between the poor living and employment conditions endured by low caste and *adivasi* migrants in India and their marginal social position. They suffer from prejudice in the destination regions, and their low social status adds to their deprivation, exploitation and lack of recourse to justice. **Qualitative research could explore the ways in which cross cutting forms of disadvantage, including ethnicity, gender, and language, interact with migrant status in ways that may entrench poverty.**

## **Outcomes**

Mosse *et al.*'s (2005) study of *adivasi* seasonal migrants in Western India finds that, for the majority, migration is linked to long-term indebtedness and does not yield cash returns; it perpetuates and entrenches, rather than alleviates, poverty. Studies such as Firman (1991) indicate that many migrants use their remittances for subsistence rather than accumulation. This is similar to the idea of migration as a 'coping mechanism' discussed later. While migration may not lead to measurable increases in wealth for many, it can be the factor that prevents further impoverishment.

Qualitative studies of migrants in India highlight the problems the children of seasonal migrants have in gaining access to education (Betancourt *et al.* 2013; Smita 2008). Coffey's (2013) quantitative work and review of evidence suggests that internal labour migration of families with children has negative effects on children's educational outcomes. By excluding the children of the most disadvantaged migrants from education, they are likely to inherit and 'entrench' their parent's poverty.

Betancourt *et al.* (2013) show how the health risks for migrants and their children in construction sites, as well as the high costs of health care, can take migrants further into debt or causes to extend their work contract period (to pay off the debt to the recruitment agent). Migrants who might qualify for 'Below Poverty Line' status, entitling them to certain subsidised health care, cannot get access to these entitlements in the city, so they turn to their *jamadars* or *thekadars* for loans for essential healthcare, which further indebts them to these recruitment agents.

Poor health and education outcomes for migrants and their families are a major concern in the literature. Poor health can lead to increased indebtedness and thus reduce the positive outcomes of migration (Betancourt *et al.* 2013). Interestingly, Jatrana and Sangwan (2004) found that women construction workers in North India perceive their own health to be better after migration, although poor health was a constant aspect of their lives. For these female construction workers, being relieved of water and firewood collection duties and having a constant supply of food made them feel healthier. The costs of accessing high quality medical attention were prohibitive for them, so improved access to healthcare is not the deciding factor. Jatrana and Sangwan attribute the improved perception of health to the urban lifestyle and social network support that the migrants encounter within cities.

Pattenden (2012) asserts that health costs are the single biggest barrier to household socio-economic gains through migration. Discouragingly, he finds that the policies and funds for migrant health protection *do* exist in Karnataka, but are not implemented, perhaps due to collusion between the construction industry and politicians, which has a disempowering and fragmenting effect on the labour force. He also finds that many of the factors that prevented migrant construction workers from benefiting from migration (such as poor health) were not related to migration. **Access to health and education services for migrants and their families is an area**



that could be researched in places other than India. An important question is whether migration enables poor households to access health and education where they could not before. Research could also explore policy failure, the political economies of policy implementation (and non-implementation), as well as solutions.

## Migration for Construction Work: Facilitating Poverty Alleviation?

### *The counterfactual*

One of the major gaps in most research that presents migration as something that entrenched poverty is the lack of consideration given to the counterfactual: what would have happened in the absence of migration? Saunders (2010) includes just such a case study in his book on rural-urban migration. He examines 'the village without a city'. He describes a village in rural India, with no history of migration or migration links and a moribund rural economy, where the desperate residents put their entire village up for sale. While in other villages farmers whose crops had failed would send one or more family members to the city to diversify their incomes, here, Saunders argues, farmer suicides were the only other form of escape from the trap of unsustainable rural livelihoods.

Hampshire (2002) examines the options of rural Fulani in Burkina Faso, other than circular rural-urban migration. These include, taking local wage labour or commerce, contract herding, gathering wild foods, gleaning after harvest, and soliciting gifts from kin. Alternatively, households could choose to permanently leave their rural area. In many contexts, no local wage labour or commerce options are available or accessible. In the Indian context, for example, Shah (2005) discusses the options available to the rural poor to sustain their livelihoods. Migration was the most common among several options, including leasing land, increase in livestock, mobilising resources to set up business for a son, land improvement, irrigation or selling land.

Similarly, when reviewing the reasons why entire families move from rural areas of India to Delhi to work on construction sites, Betancourt *et al.* (2013:7) report accounts of people who 'have problems or are suffering', are in debt, or with unproductive agricultural land. Ahsan (1997) reports that some women in Bangladesh start work in construction after they are widowed or deserted by their husbands. **The roles that destitution in the source areas and/or opportunities in urban areas play in migration decisions and outcomes is a useful area of research. Understanding the options available to potential migrants will help to understand the structural factors that encourage migration and the decision making progress in households.**

### *Social relations in rural areas*

Pattenden (2012) finds shifts in borrowing and employment patterns among rural-urban migrants in South India, reducing their reliance on local (rural) elites. It can also increase wages and employment rates. Migration can have a transformative

effect on relations between labourers and small-scale agricultural employers in rural areas. However, he finds that labour migration does not transform relations between the owners of construction companies and labourers in urban areas. In spite of the slim chances of poverty alleviation, migration remains the main route for upward social mobility for those in rural Karnataka.

In another research based in India, Rogaly *et al.* (2002) find that class relations in rural areas can shift in favour of workers, as the demand for labour in urban areas raises rural wages. Picherit (2012), too, charts the rising power of a caste-based group in India who have used migration for construction work in nearby towns and cities to increase land ownership, move out of debt bonded labour, and increase the political power and status of their group.

### ***Socio-economic outcomes***

Many studies of internal migration for construction work emphasise the positive economic returns (de Haas 2006; Oberai 1977; Mitra 2010; Pattanaik 2009; Picherit 2012;). Remittances from migrants play an important part in poor rural households' expenditure. National Indian data shows that migrant households have higher consumption expenditure than non-migrant households and spend more on health, education, and small business formation (Thorat and Jones 2011).

Other studies examine the ways in which migration has become deeply and inextricably linked to rural livelihoods in many places (Mosse *et al.* 2005). For the *adivasis*, studied by Mosse *et al.* (2005), migration was not just a way to supplement inadequate agricultural production, but the *only* way to sustain agrarian lifestyles. The dual economies of small-scale agriculture and construction are mutually dependent, both needing intense periods of work for part of the year, both cyclical and prone to booms and busts.

Thorat and Jones (2011) and Deshingkar and Start (2003) show how migration it is an important 'coping mechanism' that helps to sustain rural livelihoods and prevents further destitution and indebtedness, even though – in many cases – it may not lead to easy to measure increases in wealth or social mobility. Migration becomes a way of diversifying income, mitigating risk and improving security; it provides a household with multiple sources of income that do not all depend on the same economic and environmental systems. Households weigh up the options available to them and use migration strategically in an attempt to increase their income and security (de Haas 2006; Hampshire 2002).

A challenge for research is to identify where, how and why migration leads to economic and livelihood benefits. Some of the ways in which households may benefit from migration may not be classified as moving out of poverty. What is termed survival or subsistence migration may be the only way a household can maintain its current position and prevent further impoverishment. Household strategies need to be understood both alongside other economic and social activities and issues as well as over time. **Understanding poverty, social mobility and well-**

**being in objective as well as subjective ways is important to understanding the impacts of migration.**

## Conclusions

Searching for – and reviewing – the literature on internal and regional migration for construction work reveals a surprisingly small array of studies. The literature on the relationships between migration for construction work and poverty and development appears to be very limited. Most of the available literature is in India, with an obvious dearth of studies on this type of migration in Africa. The dominance of studies on India, China and Indonesia indicates that there is a need for more evidence on internal and regional migration in more typically sized and poorer countries and regions.

All of the research on the involvement of women and girls in migration for construction work is within South Asia. There is very little research on migration for construction work that explicitly tackles issues of gender relations or masculinities. Studies of migration for construction work (and other forms of migration) must take into account the importance of the household as a unit of analysis in the decision to migrate, in migration financing as a strategic investment, and in the use of remittances. This will help to avoid the trap of seeing migrants as individuals independent of the networks, households and communities to which they contribute and upon which they depend. It will highlight the important role of families in migration decision-making, financing and the use of remittances. It will also reveal the ways in which migration may change gender relations within households or groups of other kinds.

In assessing the impacts of migration, research must seek to understand poverty, social mobility and well-being in both objective and subjective ways. This will involve mixed methods and understanding migrants and households' own interpretations of poverty as well as using 'objective' measures of poverty. Focusing on both migrant sending households and the actual migrants can help to analyse how migration fits into a wider household economy.

The priority of the RPC is to investigate the ways in which migration for construction work (and other forms of migration) relates to poverty. All the research outputs from the RPC should aim to identify conditions, contexts and policies that lead to transitions out of poverty, as well as those that lead to no measurable change, the deepening of poverty, or entrenched poverty.

Identifying how decisions to migrate are made in migrant sending communities – who migrates, who doesn't and why (migration selectivity) – is important in order to understand migration strategies and differential outcomes. Understanding the ways in which migration takes place in response to destitution in the source areas and/or to opportunities in destination areas is useful and may be linked to outcomes from

migration. The ways that skills and education are related to migration selectivity and the outcomes of migration is a further factor that might be important in studies of migration for construction work. We have identified two principal ways in which this could be done. Firstly, research could examine the role of education in migration selectivity and outcomes. Secondly, research could examine the role of migration and remittances in changing patterns of educational access for boys and girls.

Investigating recruitment practices and processes, and the ways in which these relate to poverty alleviation or entrenchment among migrants, would be a useful focus. Recruitment has been the topic of a lot of important research on internal migration in India, which has revealed practices that are linked to poor outcomes for migrants and ways in which laws and policies are violated and/or not implemented.

Research on migrant construction workers could focus on their conditions of employment and the barriers to better employment conditions and access to services. With regard to where migrants move with their families, access to education and health care for children are of particular importance. An important question is how and in what circumstances migration enables households to access health and education where they could not before. In places where policies provide for migrant workers but they are not able to access resources allocated to them, research could also explore policy failure, the political economies of policy implementation (and non-implementation), and possible solutions.

Qualitative research needs to focus on the ways in which intersecting forms of disadvantage, including ethnicity, gender and language, interact with migrant status in ways that can entrench poverty. This type of research relates to studies of migration electivity, recruitment, conditions of work and access to services, providing nuanced understandings of the ways in which migrants are disadvantaged.

Mixed methods research on internal migration for construction work is rare but compelling. A mixed methods approach is needed to capture phenomena on scale and in detail, as well as to understand migrant household subjectivities and processes. Where possible in RPC research, small qualitative samples will be selected from within larger quantitative samples, so that detailed findings can be set within larger contexts. Trying to understand the specificities of construction work will be a challenge, however, and depend on the number of construction workers included in the quantitative sample.

Where secondary panel data is available (such as within the World Bank's Living Standards Measurement Survey), quantitative research could try to capture the longitudinal impacts of migration and attribute causality of changes in well-being to migration (or other factors). Linking this specifically to migration for construction work will probably prove difficult if migrant professions are not recorded, or if there are insufficient numbers of construction workers in the sample. Longitudinal data collection is beyond the scope and budget of the RPC.

Multi-sited research that looks at migrants in their places of work and within their households in source areas is desirable, as it can capture the ways in which they use various, linked strategies and engage with power relations, risk and economies in different ways in different places. Ideally, this should link migrants with their actual households and communities (see Buckley 2012; Pattenden 2012). Where possible, RPC will interview migrants in the destination areas from the same households studied in the sending area, in order to build up a more complete picture of migration strategies and experiences.

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**Table 1: Studies reviewed**

Reference	Year	Country	Region	Methodology	Statistical analysis	Found by search?	Samples construction workers?
Ahsan, R. M. (1997)	1997	Bangladesh	South Asia	mixed	No	Yes	Yes
Al-Maskari, F. (2011)	2011	UAE	Middle East	quantitative	Yes	Yes	No
Anugwom, E. E. (2007)	2007	Nigeria	West Africa	qualitative	-	Yes	Yes
Betancourt, T. S. (2013)	2013	India	South Asia	qualitative	-	Yes	Yes
Bhukuth, A. (2005)	2005	India	South Asia	review	-	Yes	No
Buckley, M. (2012)	2012	India	South Asia	qualitative	-	No	Yes
Coffey, D. (2013)	2013	India	South Asia	quantitative	Yes	No	No
De Haas, H. (2006)	2006	Morocco	North Africa	quantitative	Yes	No	No
Deshingkar, P. (2005)	2005	N/A	N/A	review	-	No	No
Deshingkar, P. and D. Start (2003)	2003	India	South Asia	qualitative	-	No	No
Fahys-Smith, V. (1983)	1983	USA	North America	quantitative	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fan, C. C. (2008)	2008	China	East Asia	mixed	Yes	No	No
Firman, T. (1991)	1991	Indonesia	Southeast Asia	qualitative	-	Yes	Yes
Guang, L. (2005)	2005	China	East Asia	qualitative	-	Yes	Yes
Gullette, G. (2013)	2013	Thailand	Southeast Asia	qualitative	-	Yes	No
Haan, De A. and B. Rogaly (2002)	2002	N/A	N/A	review	-	No	No
Hampshire, K. (2002)	2002	Burkina Faso	West Africa	qualitative	-	No	No
Han, S. H. et al. (2008)	2008	Korea	East Asia	quantitative	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hugo, G. (1993)	1993	Indonesia	Southeast Asia	quantitative	No	Yes	No
Hugo, G. (2000)	2000	Indonesia	Southeast Asia	quantitative	No	No	No
IOM (2005a)	2005	South Africa	Southern Africa	review	-	No	No
Jatrana, S. and S.K. Sangwan, (2004)	2004	India	South Asia	qualitative	-	Yes	Yes



Li, L., et al. (2007)	2007	China	East Asia	quantitative	Yes	No	No
Mathew, A. (2005)	2005	India	South Asia	qualitative	-	No	Yes
Mitra, A. (2010)	2010	India	South Asia	quantitative	Yes	No	No
Mobile Creches (2008)	2008	India	South Asia	mixed	No	No	Yes
Mosse et al. 2005	2005	India	South Asia	qualitative	-	No	No
Mosse et al. 2002	2002	India	South Asia	qualitative	-	No	No
Oberai, A. S. (1977)	1977	Sudan	East Africa	quantitative	No	Yes	No
Pangsapa, P. and M.J. Smith (2008)	2008	N/A	Southeast Asia	qualitative	-	Yes	No
Pattanaik, B. K. (2009)	2009	India	South Asia	quantitative	Yes	No	Yes
Pattenden, J. (2012)	2012	India	South Asia	mixed	No	Yes	Yes
Picherit, D. (2012)	2012	India	South Asia	qualitative	-	Yes	Yes
Rogaly et al. (2002)	2002	India	South Asia	qualitative	-	No	No
Sepehrdoust, H. (2013)	2013	Iran	Middle East	quantitative	Yes	Yes	No
Shah A. (2005)	2005	India	South Asia	quantitative	Yes	No	No
Smita (2008)	2008	India	South Asia	qualitative	-	No	No
Sonmez, S. et al. (2011)	2011	UAE	Middle East	review	-	Yes	No
Thompson, E. C. (2009)	2009	Singapore	Southeast Asia	qualitative	-	Yes	Yes
Thorat and Jones (2011)	2011	India	South Asia	mixed	No	No	No
Tierney, R. (2007)	2007	Taiwan	East Asia	mixed	No	Yes	No
Wells, J. (1996)	1996	N/A	N/A	review	-	Yes	Yes

**Table 2: Studies eliminated or unavailable**

Reference	Year	Country	Region	Methods	Found By Search?	Samples Constructio n workers?	Eliminated or unavailable?	Reason
Anand, V. (1998)	1998	India	South Asia	-	Yes	Yes	Unavailable	Indian Journal of Social Work not available at Sussex
Cheng C. and X. Ni, (1983)	1983	Indonesia	South-east Asia	-	Yes	No	Unavailable	In Chinese
Choi, J. H. (2001)	2011	Korea	East Asia	-	Yes	Yes	Eliminated	About migration and human resource development policies in South Korea
Connell, J. et al. (1976)	1976	India	South Asia	-	Yes	No	Eliminated	Old and on a country from which there is much more contemporary research.
Diarra, S. (1991)	1991	Mali	West Africa	-	Yes	Yes	Eliminated	In French
Guntuk, C.R. and E. Koehn (2010)	2010	India	South Asia	-	Yes	No	Eliminated	About construction industry production rates.
Imdad, N. (1985)	1985	Pakistan	South Asia	-	Yes	No	Eliminated	In French
Jim, C.Y. et al. (2010)	2010	China	East Asia	Mixed	Yes	-	Eliminated	In French
Kendall, D. (2012)	2012	UAE	Middle East	Qualitative	Yes	Yes	Unavailable	Journal South Asian Diaspora unavailable at Sussex
King, S. R. (1995)	1995	Ghana	West Africa	-	Yes	No	Unavailable	Journal Trialog unavailable at Sussex (German Journal)
Koh, D. and J. Jeyaratnam (1998)	1998	Singapore	South-east Asia	Quantitative	Yes	No	Unavailable	Journal International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health unavailable at Sussex.
Kumari, T.A.H. and U. Tataji, (1998)	1998	India	South Asia	-	Yes	No	Unavailable	Indian Journal of Social Work not available at Sussex
Kurian, R. and D. Thakore (1979)	1979	India	South Asia	-	Yes	No	Unavailable	Business India magazine unavailable at Sussex.
Li J. and L. Zhang (2012)	2012	China	East Asia	-	Yes	-	Unavailable	In Chinese and unavailable at Sussex

Lin Y. H. Et al. (2008)	2008	Taiwan	East Asia	Quantitative	Yes	-	Eliminated	Historical paper about Korean migration and immigration
Marfaing, L. (2009)	2009	Mauritania	West Africa	-	Yes	-	Unavailable	In French and unavailable at Sussex.
Picherit, D. (2009)	2009	India	South Asia	-	Yes	-	Unavailable	In French and unavailable at Sussex.
Serpell A. and X. Ferrada (2007)	2007	Chile	South America	Qualitative	Yes	No	Eliminated	About construction worker competencies not migration.
Tanle A. and K. Awusabo-Asare (2012)	2012	Ghana	West Africa	Quantitative	Yes	No	Eliminated	Not about construction workers.
Yeoh B. et al. (2013)	2013	Singapore	South-east Asia	Qualitative	Yes	No	Eliminated	Not about construction workers.

## About the Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium

**Migrating out of Poverty** is a research programme consortium (RPC) funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). It focuses on the relationship between migration and poverty – especially migration within countries and regions - and is located in five regions across Asia and Africa. The main goal of **Migrating out of Poverty** is to provide robust evidence on the drivers and impacts of migration in order to contribute to improving policies affecting the lives and well-being of impoverished migrants, their communities and countries, through a programme of innovative research, capacity building and policy engagement. The RPC will also conduct analysis in order to understand the migration policy process in developing regions and will supplement the world renowned migration databases at the University of Sussex with data on internal migration.

The **Migrating out of Poverty** consortium is coordinated by the University of Sussex, and led by CEO Professor L. Alan Winters with Dr Priya Deshingkar as the Research Director. Core partners are: the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) in Bangladesh; the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) at the University of Ghana; the Asia Research Institute (ARI) at the National University of Singapore; the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa; and the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Kenya.

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