



Migrant Workers and Urban Housing

This editorial is based on [“A Shelter In Pandemic”](#) which was published in Indian Express on 10/01/2022. It talks about the housing related issues of the migrant workers which is further aggravated by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

For Prelims: Migrant Workers, Urbanisation, Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT Mission, Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC) for Urban Poor, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, International Labour Organisation (ILO), Census of India.

For Mains: Issues faced by migrant workers, Affordable housing - a major challenge for good urbanisation, Urban housing and related issues of migrant workers.

[Urbanisation](#) and the growth of cities in India have been accompanied by **pressure on basic infrastructure and services like housing**, sanitation and health. The worst sufferers of unavailability of these basic needs are the [migrant workers](#).

The [Covid-19 pandemic](#) has further aggravated the poor housing conditions of the urban poor/migrant workers.

All these challenges point directly to the need of a sound policy framework that must also be viewed from the **lens of human rights, property rights and socio-economic development**.

These policy initiatives must be **in sync with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.8** which stands for providing a safe and secure working environment for all workers, particularly migrants.

Urban Housing and Migrant Workers

- **Homeless Urban Families:** The **2011 Census of India** reveals that the urban population of the country stood at 31.16% where there are about **4.5 lakh homeless families** and a total population of **17.73 lakh is living without any roof over their heads**.
 - **Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh** are the two states with an **acute housing crisis**.
- **Migrants and Urban Housing:** A vast majority of urban population, especially migrants, live under conditions of **poor shelter and in highly congested spaces**.
 - In India, more than half of the urban households occupy a single room, with an **average occupancy per room of 4.4 persons**.
 - In the case of migrants working in small units, hotels and homes, their **workplace is also their place of lodging**.
 - Such places are often unhygienic and poorly ventilated.
 - Most construction workers stay in makeshift arrangements. **Casual workers sleep under bridges** and on pavements, often living as a group in unhygienic surroundings.

- **Impact of Pandemic on Migrants' Housing:** Due to the [pandemic induced nationwide lockdown](#), most workers rushed back home leaving behind their temporary abodes and those **who were left behind lost their shelter** because workplaces were shut.
 - Migrants who lived in rented apartments **could not maintain social distancing**.
 - In suburban regions with a sizable number of migrants, the local population **insisted on them to vacate houses** citing the unhygienic conditions in the dwellings.
 - Even though most state governments appealed to house owners to waive two months' rent, the migrant workers continued to face **pressures for paying the rent**.
- **Initiatives for Urban Housing:**
 - **Smart Cities Mission:** The [Smart Cities Mission](#) identified 100 cities, covering 21% of India's urban population, for a transformation in four rounds starting January 2016.
 - Some of the core infrastructure elements in a smart city include **proper water supply, assured electricity supply, sanitation, and affordable housing** especially for the poor.
 - **AMRUT Mission:** Efforts like the [Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation \(AMRUT\)](#) launched in 2005 are intended to make the process of urbanisation smooth.
 - It aimed to ensure that every household has **access to a tap with the assured supply of water and a sewerage connection**.
 - The mission has now entered its second phase to make cities water-secure and provide better amenities for the marginalised.
 - **ARHCs Envisaged in Atma Nirbhar Bharat Package:** The Rs 20 lakh crore [Atma Nirbhar Bharat package](#) announced by the government in May 2020 included the provision of [Affordable Rental Housing Complexes \(ARHC\)](#) for **migrant workers/urban poor**.
 - The plan was to convert government-funded housing in the cities into **ARHCs through Public-Private Partnerships**, and provide incentives to various stakeholders to develop ARHCs on their private land and operate them.

Issues in Affordable Housing for Migrants

- **Ineffective Implementation of Housing Schemes:** The Government data shows that **49% of 5,196 projects of the Smart Cities Mission** for which work orders were issued across 100 smart cities in India **remain unfinished**.
 - This lag in implementation raises questions about the efficacy of innovative policy prescriptions.
- **Absence of WASH Facilities:** According to a 2020 [International Labour Organisation \(ILO\)](#) report on internal labour migrants, the absence of dignified housing is aggravated by a **lack of adequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities**.
- **Inadequate Public Toilets:** Even though there has been an installation of public toilets through [Swachh Bharat Abhiyan](#), their **availability is not adequate in migrant-dense clusters**.
- **Sudden Increase in Rents:** Migrant workers find housing in slums, which is often subject to a **sudden increase in rent**, and have access only to the **poorest infrastructure and services**.

Way Forward

- **Policymaking For Housing Sector:** The existing housing conditions indicate the necessity of **coordinated efforts of the state and the contractors** to address housing issues. It calls for long-term policymaking and analysis of the housing sector along with **necessitating more transparency in the case of contracts**.
 - Instead of an extreme condition where the owner suddenly increases a rent, the state can look into the matter to **ensure an optimal condition where the rent evolves for a competitive market** for houses.
- **Reducing Owner-Tenant Conflicts:** While developing social rental housing, the state should ensure that the location has **proper access to transport networks, education and healthcare**.
 - The working group by [NITI Aayog](#) constituted to study internal labour has recommended that rental housing in the public sector could be expanded through the provision of

dormitory accommodation.

- This would make public housing affordable and **reduce the conflict between owners and tenants.**
- Action-oriented policies alone can improve the lives of labouring migrants.
- **Redeveloping Small and Medium Cities:** There is no denying that even our non-megacities have inadequate planning, non-scalable infrastructure, unaffordable housing, and poor public transport.
 - In order to ensure **good urbanisation**, it is important to equally focus on the **small and medium cities** and **address the issues of inadequate housing and lack of basic facilities in these cities too.**

Drishti Mains Question

“The issue of inadequate and unaffordable urban housing is a major roadblock to good urbanisation”. Discuss.

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