

4. International Migrants Day 2025-Geography

International Migrants Day 2025- WHO works to advance migrant health and strengthen health systems across migration journeys for universal health coverage International Migrants Day 2025 marks a global narrative shift from viewing migrants as mere labor units to rights-bearing individuals, a critical evolution for India, which stands as the world's largest origin country for international migrants and where internal mobility is predominantly driven by marriage rather than employment.

International Migrants Day 2025

Date of Observance- 18 December annually.

Foundation- Proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000 to mark the anniversary of the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

Theme for 2025- "My Great Story- Cultures and Development"

Narrative Shift- Moves away from viewing migrants merely as economic labour units.

New Focus- Recognizes migrants as rights-bearing individuals, agents of cultural exchange, and contributors to inclusive development.

Significance- Highlights migration as a driver of global development through the transfer of skills, capital, and knowledge, fostering social resilience and diversity.

Definition and Typology of Migrants

Definition

General Definition- Any person moving away from their habitual place of residence, either within a country or across international borders.

IOM Perspective- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) uses a broad definition neutral to legal status, covering both voluntary and forced movements.

UN Classification- A Long-term migrant is defined as someone residing in another country for at least 12 months (temporal dimension).

Typology

Labour Migrants- constitute nearly two-thirds of international migrants.

Other Categories- Students, family migrants, and those displaced by conflict/disaster.

Forced Migration- Includes Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

Scale- 123 million forcibly displaced persons globally by 2024.

Legal Status- Migration encompasses both regular (documented) and irregular (undocumented) migrants.

Status of Migration- Global and India

Global Scale

Total Volume- 304 million international migrants.

Population Share- Nearly 3.7% of the global population.

Significance- A defining pillar of global geopolitics and economic resilience.

India's Central Position

Top Origin Country- World's largest source of migrants, with ~18.5 million citizens abroad (2025).

Top Destinations

1. United States (5.7 million)
2. United Arab Emirates (3.9 million)
3. Canada (3.6 million)
4. Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, UK.

Remittances- World's largest recipient; estimated ~\$135 billion (FY25). *Economic Role* buffers the Current Account Deficit (CAD).

Internal Migration

Scale- Nearly 38% of India's population are internal migrants.

Census Data- 2011 Census recorded over 41 million inter-state migrants.

IV. Classification of Internal Migration

Type	Description	Key Characteristics
Intra-State Migration	Movement within the same state (e.g., rural to urban, or village to city).	Most common form due to geographic and cultural proximity.
Inter-State Migration	Movement across state borders within the country.	More complex; migrants navigate differences in language, culture, and economy.

Drivers of Migration (Integrated Push–Pull Framework)

Migration results from the interaction between Push factors (compelling exit) and Pull factors (attracting entry).

Economic Drivers (Search for Prosperity)

Push– Income inequality, unemployment, low wages.

Pull– Higher earnings, labour shortages (healthcare, construction, tech). *Data* 10.8% of Indians migrate mainly for employment.

Environmental & Climate Drivers

Factors– Climate change, sea-level rise, resource degradation.

Projection– 216 million internal climate migrants globally by 2050 (World Bank).

India Hotspots– Sundarbans and Bundelkhand.

Social & Demographic Drivers

Factors– Family reunification, education, social mobility.

Demographics– Ageing Europe (25% aged 65+ by 2030) vs. Youthful India (Median age ~28).

Student Mobility– 1.3 million Indian students abroad in 2024.

Political & Security Drivers– Push Armed conflict, instability, human rights violations.

Technological Drivers

Factors– Digital connectivity, remote work (Digital Nomads), reduced information costs.

Marriage Migration– India's Unique Driver

While global narratives focus on economics, India's internal migration is socially driven.

Dominance– Marriage is the single biggest cause of women's migration in India.

Statistics (Census 2011)– Accounts for 69–70% of female migration. Women constitute two-thirds (66%) of all internal migrants.

Pattern– Primarily Rural-to-Rural (Patrilocal norms), followed by Rural-to-Urban.

Emerging Trend– Inter-state marriage migration is rising due to skewed sex ratios (e.g., Kerala/Bihar to Haryana/Punjab).

Issues

Undercounting– Women are classified as "associational" migrants, making their economic contribution invisible.

Vulnerabilities– Limited decision-making, social isolation, domestic violence, trafficking (bride buying).

Policy Blind Spot– Excluded from labour-centric laws; lack of targeted support in documentation or social security.

Impact of Migration

Dimension	Impact on Source Regions	Impact on Destination Regions
Economic	Remittances reduce poverty (~\$135bn to India). High costs cause debt bondage.	Labour supply fills shortages in healthcare/construction; boosts GDP.
Labour Market	Brain drains in skilled sectors. Potential Brain gain via return migration.	Fills skill gaps (e.g., 1 in 8 nurses globally is a migrant).
Social	Family separation; but exposure to new norms improves education/gender outcomes.	Cultural diversity and dynamism; risk of xenophobia/social friction.
Urban/Dev	Rural depopulation and ageing workforce.	Rapid urbanisation; pressure on housing/transport; growth of slums.

Political	Political exclusion of migrants (voting rights issues).	Rise of nativist politics; debates on citizenship and welfare.
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Key Vulnerabilities and Challenges

Gendered Exploitation– High risk of domestic servitude and wage theft in informal care sectors (87% of victims are women/girls).

Recruitment Abuse– Migrants pay 4–5 times the legal cost due to unregulated sub-agents, leading to debt bondage.

Digital Exploitation– Rise of "Cyber-Slavery" where migrants are lured into cyber-crime hubs via WhatsApp fraud.

Deskilling– Lack of skill recognition leads to under-utilization of talent (Brain Waste).

Political Exclusion– Internal migrants often lose voting rights due to residence-linked systems; Remote Voting Machine (RVM) pilots are limited.

Urban Exclusion– Lack of migration-sensitive planning leads to exclusion from housing and basic services (Governance failure).

Data Gaps– Reliance on outdated data (PLFS 2020–21); surveillance concerns with new digital tools.

Institutional Backbone & Data Collection

NSS Surveys– The backbone of migration statistics since 1950.

Historical Tracking– Started with NSS 9th Round (1955); dedicated surveys in 1963–64 and 2007–08.

Upcoming– NSO Migration Survey (2026–27) to update estimates on rates, circular migration, and return migration.

Migration Governance– International & National

International Frameworks

Global Compact for Migration (GCM) 2018– Non-binding framework for rights-based, safe, and regular migration.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)– Established 1951; UN System since 2016.

India's Role– Member since 2008. Partners on ethical recruitment, data, and crisis evacuation.

1990 Convention– Protects migrant worker rights (India has not signed/ratified).

WHO Global Action Plan– Focuses on including migrants in Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

ILO Conventions– Promote fair recruitment and equal wages.

India's Policy Response

Legislative Reform– Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2025 (replaces Emigration Act 1983). Shifts focus from "control" to "facilitation/welfare".

Digital Governance

1. e-Migrate 2.0– Automates clearance and regulates agents.
2. eShram Portal– National Database of Unorganised Workers (welfare portability).
3. One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)– Food security portability for 80 crore people.
4. Crisis Management– Vande Bharat Mission set a benchmark for diaspora evacuation.
5. Insurance– Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana (PBBY) for low-skilled workers.

Alignment– SDGs and Indian Constitution

Global Goal (SDG)	Indian Constitutional Value	Connection
SDG 10.7 (Safe Migration)	Article 14 (Equality)	Ensuring orderly mobility aligns with equality before law.
SDG 16 (Access to Justice)	Article 21 (Dignity)	Right to life includes living with dignity.
SDG 8 (Decent Work)	Art 38 & 39 (Justice)	Social and economic justice for workers.
SDG 5 (Gender Equality)	Article 23 (Anti-trafficking)	Prohibition of forced labour and trafficking.
SDG 11 (Inclusive Cities)	DPSPs (Welfare State)	Creating inclusive urban spaces for migrants.

Way Forward

Rights-Based Approach- Shift from control to dignity; ensure legal aid and grievance redressal.

Reform Recruitment- Enforce the "Employer-Pays" model to eliminate debt bondage; hold recruiters accountable.

Political Inclusion- Scale up remote voting mechanisms to stop the disenfranchisement of internal migrants.

Urban Governance- Establish a statutory Inter-State Migration Council (NITI Aayog recommendation) for better coordination.

Climate Preparedness- Develop a national framework for climate-induced mobility and livelihood transition.

Skill Portability- Enhance international recognition of Indian skills and upgrade ITIs.

Ethos- Uphold Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (World is One Family) by fortifying human rights alongside labour facilitation.

Source- <https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/events/item/2025/12/18/default-calendar/international-migrants-day-2025--who-works-to-advance-migrant-health-and-strengthen-health-systems-across-migration-journeys-for-universal-health-coverage>

