

Internal Migration Policies in the ESCAP Region

Although most Governments have recognized that allowing households some opportunity to enhance their economic security and welfare through spontaneous migration is harmonious with a national objective of economic growth, official awareness of the inevitability and desirability of massive population movements has not been accompanied by sufficient government efforts to protect the welfare of migrants.

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The movement of people between various regions of a country is one of the most important processes shaping its settlement system, the spatial structure of its economy and the spread of sociocultural attributes over its national territory. Because it assumes such a significant role, internal migration has been the focus of long-standing attention by those involved in policy-making and public interventions.

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In the Asian and Pacific region covered by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the last three decades have seen a substantial increase in the scale, diversity and complexity of population movements between geographic regions. That has resulted in a significant redistribution of the population from rural to urban areas, blurring the economic, demographic and social characteristics of rural and urban areas in the region (Hugo, 1992). Net rural-urban migration has contributed much to the growth of the urban population in the ESCAP region (ESCAP, 1998). In several countries, migration from the countryside has occurred in reaction to natural resource depletion, calamities, civil conflicts, poverty and other pressures on rural areas. Moreover, internal migration cannot be discussed without considering the upsurge of international movements within the region and to other parts of the world (Skeldon, 1992). The migration experience of the ESCAP countries and their government policies regarding migration and spatial distribution are so divergent that the experience of one country must be interpreted with caution if used to guide the formulation of appropriate migration and development policies in another country.

With these caveats in mind, this paper examines internal migration policies that are pertinent to an understanding of the interrelationship between migration and development in the ESCAP region. Four countries, China, Viet Nam, Indonesia and Thailand, sharing differences and similarities in their migration and development policies, are considered. They vary considerably in their stages in the demographic transition, system of government, level of economic development, culture, political ideology and other criteria that have distinguished their migration patterns and influenced policies. The degree of control of migration also varies from country to country. The countries are discussed separately without attempt to generalize about the region as a whole.

Migration policies

Policies established and used by Governments to influence migration have varied widely in terms of efficiency and cost-effectiveness (Weiner, 1975; Oberai, 1987). Migration policies can be implemented in an attempt to achieve a socially desired population distribution. Governments can have a major influence on the relative attractiveness of a particular area and may encourage potential migrants from other regions, by shaping the availability of various opportunities and the provision of social services in that area. In contrast, some policy instruments may have been designed without taking account of whether they are consistent with the individual goals of migrants. Consequently, macropolicies aimed at creating a socially optimal match between population and resources may not be consistent with, or even conflict with, the desires of migrants and hence limit the success of the policies.

Government policies which influence migration can be divided into two major categories with regard to their direct or indirect effects. Direct policies, explicitly aimed at altering migration flows, include bans on urban in-migration,

travel restrictions, resettlement and transmigration programmes. In contrast, indirect policies consider the impacts on migration to be secondary goals of the policy. They are implemented for some other reason than migration but are likely to have an impact on patterns of migration. In many cases, the effects of these policies on migration are not even considered in their design and implementation.

The policy instruments used by Governments to slow down the pace of urbanization have included the adoption of three kinds of policies: (a) rural retention policies aimed at transforming the rural economy and thereby slowing the rate of outmigration; (b) policies to control the growth of large cities through migration restrictions; and (c) policies that try to redirect migration flows to outer rural areas and small urban centres. These policies can be classified as accommodative, manipulative, preventive and negative in their impact. In practice, most population distribution policies have adopted a somewhat narrow approach, focusing either on controlling the growth of large cities or on retaining people in rural areas. However, it should be noted that policy implications are different for different migration forms which have significantly varying determinants and consequences (Goldstein, 1987). In other words, different forms of migration need to be adequately considered for policy purposes.

China

For almost three decades after its revolution in 1949, China successfully controlled not only macro-level production and exchange but also micro-level consumption, employment and residence. Despite large differences in standards of living across geographic locations, spatial mobility was effectively blocked by the Government through the household registration (“*hukou*”) system (Goldstein and Goldstein, 1985b; Cai, 1999). Under this system, everyone was born with an official household registration, which determined eligibility for and access to the governmental provision of social services and benefits, including non-agricultural employment, education, medical services and pensions. In order to receive appropriate local social services and benefits, citizens must be officially registered as *de jure* residents.

Under the “*hukou*” system, rural residents were prohibited from moving into cities. They could not change residence or work unit unless these changes were part of the socio-economic plan formulated and managed by the State. Changes in official residence across administrative boundaries were strictly controlled. This did not mean, however, that people could not move. In fact, they could normally move where they wished, but without government approval, the migrants could not register at the new location, and without this registration, migrants could not find a job, buy food and other daily necessities, or have access to most social services. While in theory people could move freely, with no market alternatives in obtaining employment and social services, there were no noticeable labour flows among sectors and regions in China until the beginning of the rural reforms.

The profound structural changes that China has been experiencing since 1978 have greatly undermined the control mechanism of the household registration system and called into question the Government's control over consumption, employment and residence. The abolition of the people's commune system in the countryside, the reform of the food supply system and housing reform in urban areas have weakened the barriers that used to restrict labour flows. The more relaxed employment practices and the legalization of private businesses have resulted in an increasingly differentiated employment structure, which places more and more of the labour force outside the direct control of the Government (Cai, 1999). These simultaneous developments have provided a timely market alternative to government provision of employment and services, thereby allowing migrants to live outside the government allocation (ration) system. For the first time in decades, both the legal and market barriers to living in cities without a "*hukou*" have been considerably reduced.

A large surplus of agricultural labourers, estimated at 220 million excess farmers, were observed at the onset of the rural reforms. Concurrently, rapid economic growth in urban areas increased the income disparity between urban and rural areas to a historically high level in the 1990s. This increasing income gap provided a strong incentive to rural residents to migrate to urban areas in search of better lives. Not surprisingly, rural-urban temporary migration, which involves no change in migrants' official residence registration, increased rapidly, becoming part of rural households' strategy in reallocating labour through market opportunities. A large and continuously growing temporary migrant population has become a new addition to the landscape of cities in contemporary China (Goldstein and Goldstein, 1991).

Over 100 million Chinese peasants displaced from their native villages to cities now form a transient "floating population", the result of one of the largest internal migrations in China's recent history. Floaters do not have a household registration at their destination, regardless of the duration of their stay. Many floaters are rural migrant workers who search for a job in the urban areas without the urban "*hukou*". According to the State policy, a migrant residing in a city without an urban "*hukou*" is required to have a temporary registration with the public security agencies. However, most of the rural-urban migrants do not have such a permit. The official number of unregistered migrants in cities in 1994 was 105 million (Cai, 1999). Until recently, the Government has considered the "unregistered" rural-urban migrants illegal and has tried to control the "urbanward" migration by a number of measures in the cities.

Although every person in China is presumably registered and given a household registration booklet, holders of an urban residence household membership are still the only ones entitled to social benefits such as access to health care and education. Rural migrant workers and their family members remain "outsiders" in urban areas. The presence of large numbers of migrant children in cities, many of them without urban *hukou*, creates major problems for their

parents and challenges for policy makers. For example, school enrolment rates for temporary migrant children are reportedly lower than those of permanent migrants' children, local children and non-migrant children at the place of origin (Liang, 2001). The children who suffer most are those of temporary migrants with less than one year's residence in the city. As education becomes more and more important for socio-economic mobility in Chinese society, these disadvantages faced by temporary migrant children will have detrimental and long-term consequences for migrant children themselves and for urban society as a whole.

Viet Nam

As in most countries in the ESCAP region, the distribution of population in relation to spatial patterns of development is considered a fundamental issue in Viet Nam. Although population size remains one of the central concerns of Vietnamese planners and policy makers, the more recent policies of the Government appear to be more oriented towards the nature of the migration process.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, three objectives of the post-reunification migration policy were identified. They aimed to reduce the long-standing population pressure in the Red River Delta, a place with excessively high population densities, and the coastal plains of central Viet Nam; to restrain the rate of population growth in urban areas, especially in the two large cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh; and to correct the population distribution within provinces and between regions, and at the same time to allocate labour for development and establish frontier regions to serve the interests of national security and defence.

The Government of Viet Nam has long been concerned with achieving what it considers a more balanced distribution of the population (Dang, 1999). Attempts to control population movements have been pursued for many decades. The rapid growth of urban places was considered detrimental to planning and orderly development. Thus, the Government's population and labour relocation policy was designed to directly affect population movements and urban growth. It focused on facilitating rural-rural and urban-rural migration rather than encouraging rural-urban migration. Migration flows involving changes of residence to urban places, especially to the largest cities, were strictly controlled through migration policies and the household registration system (*ho khau*). This system is a similar version of the Chinese model of "*hukou*" which aimed at controlling population mobility, especially spontaneous outflows of rural residents. Urban-rural and rural-rural migration was explicitly encouraged to avoid what was considered to be overurbanization, social insecurity and disorder. State jobs and the family reunion migration they occasioned became the main route to urban life. In practice, this system did not abolish spontaneous migration. It just made it expensive.

Immediately after the reunification of north and south Viet Nam in 1975, there were large-scale movements from the cities to rural areas. In 1976, 20.6 per cent of the population was living in urban places and this decreased to 18.6 per cent in 1981. Although reclassification of places from urban to rural was a factor in the declining levels of urbanization, urban-rural migration also played a role (Banister, 1993). Indeed, rural resettlement policies were promoted and viewed as an opportunity to benefit the resettled population by improving the quality of life of the rural poor from overcrowded regions. An agriculture-based policy of organized new economic zone development has been the main government migration policy over the decades. However, lack of facilities and infrastructure, poor health and schooling services and low and unstable incomes continued to prompt new settlers to leave the zones. Although the resettlement policy has been in place for several decades, the pace of resettlement has slackened and the achievements have been far from targets set (Desbarats, 1987; Do, 2000). As in the case of Indonesia, the implementation of the policies often created difficult problems. The Government has been making huge investments in the resettlement programmes, but at different times and in different places, the programmes have proved inefficient and achieved very limited success.

The economic renovations (*Doi Moi*) officially launched in 1986 have entailed increased economic opportunities and expanded migrant networks which have, in turn, greatly promoted the outmigration of rural labour (Dang, 1999). In essence, *Doi Moi* represents structural changes, shifting from a centralized planning system to a more market-oriented economy. As in the case of China, the increasing commercialization of agriculture and the replacement of labour with capital inputs have been of major significance in releasing the rural workforce and prompting it to leave rural areas. Regardless of migration status, people no longer have to depend on government subsidies and rationing to obtain their basic life needs, especially in urban centres. The household registration system, despite its continuation, no longer limits acquisition of essential goods and residence in the cities. Driven by extreme poverty and scarce resources, people are seeking locations where economic opportunities are perceived to be better, usually in major urban centres. Income inequality and rural-urban dual prices disadvantage rural residents and hence promote outmigration.

Today, household registration procedures no longer directly affect every aspect of people's lives the way they used to. Survey data and media reports suggest that rural-to-urban migration has fuelled the jump in levels of urbanization (Dang, 2001; Guest, 1998b). The fear of masses of rural poor flooding into the cities of Viet Nam has resulted in a number of policy suggestions to put in place some measures to control migration into major cities. Although these intended restrictions have not been implemented, perhaps because of the recognition that increased rural-urban migration is in part a response to the development policies adopted by the Government, concern over migration patterns remain. The result is a hybrid system operating in internal contradiction. A key interface is the issuance

of temporary residence. This is reflected in the statistics: by 1994, of those who had moved to Ho Chi Minh City after 1989, 62 per cent were accepted as “temporary long-term residents” based on an extendable three- or six-month stay (IER, 1996). Of 202,100 in-migrants to Ho Chi Minh City in 1990-1994, only 26.6 per cent had obtained a permanent residence permit (compared with 44 per cent of the 178,000 arriving in 1986-1990 and 64 per cent of 125,800 in-migrants in the early 1980s). There is little, however, that the Government can do to reverse or modify profoundly the direction of population flows through direct policy intervention on how or where people should migrate.

Looking ahead to the future, internal migration is a key aspect of population change that continues to be associated with rapid economic growth and modernization in Viet Nam. As a driving force of population change, unequal development and land shortage will result in a large-scale redistribution of the population. In that process, internal migration is a viable option for people, especially the poor, to earn their livelihood. The Government should consider policy measures that seek to work alongside market forces. The elimination of urban subsidies that serve as an indirect incentive for rural-urban migration would be useful. Overcoming the separation of rural planning from urban planning will become an important factor for better articulating rural and urban development in a manner that can benefit rural regions. Effective policies to promote rural off-farm employment and social services would have a significant impact on reducing the pressure felt by the rural population to migrate to cities.

Indonesia

Like the Governments of Viet Nam and China, the Government of Indonesia has long supported explicit policies to direct internal population flows. While China has strictly controlled the movement of people to the cities, Indonesia adopted a relatively less tight system based on dissuasion rather than rigid prohibition. The Government tried to reduce the imbalance between Java and the outer islands, and reduce primacy and uneven urban growth through a transmigration programme, rural and urban development in the outer islands, restraints on Jakarta’s growth and industrial dispersal.

Around 1970, an attempt was made to control the growth of the largest metropolitan area, Jakarta, through the notorious “closed city” policy enforcement to restrict in-migration. Periodically, street vendors were forcibly removed from the city. Reasons for the failure of this policy, notably its inconsistency with the regional development disparities, were described in detail two decades ago by Simmons (1979). Overall, anecdotal evidence suggests that it was ineffective. The result is supported by the persistent high growth rate of Jakarta and all other urban agglomerations from the 1970s into the 1990s at well over 3 per cent per annum.

Transmigration was the Government of Indonesia’s noteworthy policy to redistribute population from Java, the most densely populated island, to other less densely populated islands, such as Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Irian Jaya

(Hugo, 1997). This policy was initiated by the Netherlands colonial Government in 1905 and following independence and has been continued by the Indonesian Government up to the present. The transmigration policy, although embracing many goals, is essentially a land settlement scheme to enable poor families in Java and Bali to become farmers on other islands. Transmigration has been voluntary even though sponsored migrants must meet certain criteria (e.g., being married, of good character and with farming experience).

The promotion of sponsored and spontaneous transmigration, as a part of five-year development plans, bears some resemblance to the resettlement scheme of Viet Nam, at least in the number of migrants targeted. While initial targets for resettlement were not achieved, higher subsequent targets were exceeded in the next development plan. This is largely because of the growth in the proportion of spontaneous movers, who do not receive land tenure or direct subsidized services. Indeed, the resettlement programme has increasingly relied on spontaneous movers to fulfil its targets (Gardiner, 1997). Despite the hardships encountered by these migrants on already-crowded islands such as Sumatra and Kalimantan, the desire to be close to relatives and family continues to lure large numbers of people. Java, Madura, Bali Lombok and other inner islands where economic growth has been more likely to take place continue to experience a high level of in-migration.

Although the transmigration programme has been undertaken for a long time, only a very small proportion of the population has been transferred to the outer islands. The programme has, indeed, exerted a small influence on population redistribution (Hugo and others, 1987). It has been curtailed because of government budget constraints. A major cutback has taken place since 1986 as a result of a decline in oil revenues, which badly affected the programme's implementation. Transmigration is a complex policy that heavily involves various implementing agencies, at both the central and regional government levels. For this reason, bureaucratic coordination and the centralized top-down approach inherent in the administrative system have greatly hampered programme efforts. To complement the programme, more equal regional development may be an alternative and an even cheaper way to redistribute the population of Indonesia and optimize the development of natural resources over the islands, particularly those in the eastern part of the country.

Thailand

As the size of Thailand's population increased from 26 million in 1960 to over 62 million today, issues of population distribution became integral to the Government's population policy. Among the four countries examined in this paper, Thailand was the earliest to embark on a market economy and experienced particularly rapid social and economic change between 1960 and 1980 (Goldstein and Goldstein, 1986).

The determinants of migration in Thailand are related to the country's very large regional differences (Chamratrithong and others, 1995). In the period 1985-1990, rural-to-urban migration, especially to Bangkok, increased owing mainly to the Government's export-led growth policy and the expansion of the service sector (Phongpaichit, 1992). In 1980, Bangkok had 1.25 million lifetime migrants, who constituted 27 per cent of the population. The city also attracted a large number of seasonal migrants during the slack agricultural season. Problems faced by Bangkok owing to its rapid expansion have led the government planners to realize the urgent need for national policy instruments and development plans since the 1980s. Although the Government has tried to promote policies to reduce migration to Bangkok Metropolis, it has never introduced any absolute restrictions on population movement.

Although rural-rural migration continues to represent the bulk of migrants in Thailand (as in other countries of the region), the level of net in-migration to Bangkok more than doubled between 1975-1980 and 1985-1990 (Ritcher and others, 1994). Long-distance movement has increasingly occurred from the relatively poor North-East region towards Bangkok and its periphery in the central region owing to manifold income differentials between the regions. Although seasonal migrants in Bangkok have been viewed as an annoying and unorganized labour pool, seasonal migration from the North-East has taken place on a large scale. Indeed, North-Eastern households have depended on remittances from their family members who migrated to Bangkok. Such seasonal movement is facilitated by extensive networks of friends and relatives spread all over the country. It is the pervasiveness of the networks that has hindered policy interventions aimed at decentralizing urban concentration in Thailand.

In contrast to the other three countries, the Government of Thailand has acknowledged the need for rural development plans and the promotion of regional growth poles to discourage interregional migration. The development of the city's periphery and outer zones is one of the most important policies designed to reduce migration to Bangkok (Chamratrithong and others, 1995). In addition, the Government has also employed such measures as land-use and zoning regulation, taxation, industrial dispersal and, more recently, the development of the eastern seaboard as an industrial zone to accommodate migration. Recent policies, issued after the regional financial crisis, have mainly been aimed at limiting the size of Bangkok in response to regional disparities. Plans have included the promotion of new types of agricultural production to improve rural incomes and the extension of public services throughout the country, as well as heavily financed measures such as vocational training programmes and the provision of information on employment opportunities outside Bangkok.

However, policies implemented to divert migrants from Bangkok have been limited in their success. The above efforts cannot be seen as successful given that 55 per cent of the urbanites in Thailand reside in Bangkok. In the rural North-East, remittances accounted for almost a quarter of household income in the

mid-1990s and have probably contributed to an improved income distribution throughout the country (Guest, 1998a). Seasonal migration, despite its significant role in promoting rural-urban links, was largely ignored or suppressed by the policy, which placed greater focus on permanent migrants. These were assumed to contribute the most human resources to the economy. This policy gap was exposed by the time of the regional financial crisis in late 1997 and early 1998. The migration and development policy therefore failed to provide seasonal migrants with due support during the crisis, as they were disqualified from employment security and unemployment benefits.

In sum, the attempts by the Government of Thailand to develop regional centres to attract rural migrants have been faced with difficulties. Seaboard industries typically require higher skills than most rural-urban migrants possess. When industrial dispersal policies are being considered, the issue of economic efficiency is extremely important. Industrial deconcentration may not have a positive effect on poorer regions if other programmes do not accompany it. A potential consequence of labour shortages in the Northern region may be a continued or accelerated influx of illegal migrants from Myanmar and other poor neighbouring countries.

Conclusions and recommendations

Policies aimed at influencing migration are well known and have become a regular component of national policies. However, many migration policies have only partially been based on existing migration theories and have too often not taken into account the numerous empirical studies carried out on migration processes. Even more significant is the fact that migration policies have not been examined and assessed in many cases. This paper is an attempt to fill the gap. The four countries' policy experiences provide a better understanding of migration and development dynamics. Policy effectiveness varies from country to country, as discussed above. There appears, however, to be a common objective in the above spatial policy goals and instruments, which is to slow or reverse urban population concentration.

This paper reviews and points out the failure or limited effectiveness of migration-centred policies to directly control or to stem the heavy flow of migrants to urban centres. In all countries of the ESCAP region, recent migration has been influenced to a varying extent by the following important conditions: (a) perceptions that income-earning opportunities (wages or job probabilities), prospects for children and services (e.g., schooling) are superior in urban than in rural settings; (b) growth of modern transport and communication, most notably an increase in telephones and motor vehicles per capita, that generates greater interface (or “blurring” between rural and urban and areas; (c) dispersion of industry and accompanying job opportunities from the core of metropolitan areas to more remote areas; (d) primary concern for the welfare of households and

families rather than individuals in migration decisions and outcomes; (e) increased income-earning opportunities for women in cities and export-processing zones as economies integrate globally; (f) strengthening of informal migrants' support networks and recruitment channels that facilitate migration; and (g) persistence of circular mobility and seasonal migration as a common strategy for farmers. The main point is that the features above suggest that future internal migration in the region will occur at an accelerated pace, at higher volumes over both short and long distances and with decreased selectivity of migrants. The proportion of urban growth contributed by net migration will substantially increase in all countries in the future.

Although most of the Governments in the region have recognized that allowing households some opportunity to enhance their economic security and welfare through spontaneous migration is harmonious with a national objective of economic growth, official awareness of the inevitability and desirability of massive population movements has not been accompanied by sufficient government efforts to protect the welfare of migrants. This neglect is particularly disturbing in so far as the promotion of individual migrants' well-being can alleviate perceived negative costs of spontaneous migration for society. Enforcement of legislation and regulatory policies to ensure safe working conditions in female migrant-dominated export industries could secure and enhance levels of remittances to the rural places of origin and thereby contribute to agricultural development. Similarly, general education should be provided equally for children regardless of their registration status. And outreach programmes that teach young girls effective negotiation techniques, and that readily provide boys with condoms, presumably could modify the diffusion of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

- The aforementioned policy measures suggest that the success of future migration policies, beyond achieving an appropriate spatial distribution of the population in relation to resources and economic objectives, will be evaluated first by how well they respond to the primary needs of migrants.
- Different types of migration require different policies. In addressing the issue of migration and making policies, caution should be taken not to combine migrations of various types into a single category. Indeed, specific policies with particular objectives and implications should be formulated specifically for different migrant groups.
- It needs to be reiterated that migration policies should be formulated and implemented as a functional part of a national development strategy, so that conflicts with other policies are minimized. Most important is a determined policy to improve basic social services in rural areas and small towns, because such a policy will reduce the rural-urban gap, increase equity and raise living standards.

- Unless such a policy is pursued vigorously, it will continue to address merely the symptoms of a broader malaise. A sound population distribution strategy should strive to be holistic. Rural development programmes should not seek population retention alone. They should be directed primarily towards increasing non-farm incomes as well as rural welfare.
- Last, but not least, development activities in rural areas can increase the benefits of migration by making rural residents ready to participate more effectively in urban activities. Rural development associated with the improvement of levels of occupational skills, education and information enable rural migrants to make better use of urban economic opportunities.

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