

Labour Migration trends and threats in Sri Lanka

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Introduction of Migration

Labour migration has in the 21st century, moved to the top the policy agendas of many countries of origin, transits and destination. Most of the world estimated 150 million migrants are people searching for improved economic opportunities abroad three key factors drive migration and will continue to fuel this kind of movement for many years

The concept of migrant is not a simple one. Over the years numerous typologies have been produced, normally based on distance moved, time spent away or motivation there is no consensus on what a migration is, although most definitions would assume a move of home.

Three key factors drive migration and will continue to fuel this kind of movement for many years. They are,

- The 'pull' of changing demographics and labour markets needs in many industrialized countries.

- The 'push' of population, unemployment and crisis pressures in less developed countries.

- Established inter-country networks based on family, culture and history.

An alarmingly large proportion of labour migration occurs illegally aided and abetted by a clandestine and often criminal industry. Increasingly governments of both sending and receiving countries are developing regularity mechanisms to manage labour migration. These include selective recruitment policies by country needing labour, and strong marketing and overseas employment strategies by countries supplying labour

For some countries of destination, labour migration, particularly of the highly skilled, is more than temporary manpower adjustment strategy; and can have long term implication for immigration. For countries of origin it can support development for example through remittances. The private sector can play a key role in making labour migration demand driven in destination countries, and in recruiting workers in countries of origin

The main aim of this identifies the chief characteristic of labour migration flows and the trends in recent years across the European theater, we do the term of series of question relating to nationality demographic and occupation / skill criteria our focus is the characteristics of those foreign workers who are in the process of moving and not on the stock of migrant already in the country. Most of the statistically and other information available on the subject refers to labour migrant stock, not flow. The study was with two fundamental difficulties.

The first is the lack of data available; both in the form of systematic statistical sources and survey, statistical problem are discussed in the next section. The second difficulty is the enormous variation across the contents, which means that generalizations are approximate and don't necessarily relate to all countries. Europe is highly geographically differentiated in its physical and human geography and its migrations, not only between East and West and North and South, but also between adjacent countries. The characteristics of labour migrants differ across the flow matrix, as do the trends over time. In part, these differences are related to the statistical problem, since different countries use different sources and

measure and collect different things in different ways. The matrix migrations flows further reflects differences in the nature of economics and place in the economic cycle at different times, cultural ties and political changes.

Objectives and goals of labour migration

During several decades of attention to the specialized field of labour migration, the international migration branch (MIGRANT) has evolved several main lines of activity. Its goal is to assist countries in policy formulation, and in establishing or strengthening legislation, administrative measures, structures and practices for effective management of labour migration

To achieve this goal, the activities of MIGRANT focus on three component objective.

- *Protecting the rights of migrant workers and promoting their integration countries of destination and countries of origin.

- *Foreign and international consensus on how to manage migration

- *Improving the knowledge based on international migration.

Impact of labour migration

In 1981 when the Middle East boom attracted an international labour force, the economic review published a comprehensive report on the situation of labour migration to the Middle East countries. Those countries with single resources economics encountered many problems associated with the shortage of labour at all levels from the exodus of migrant workers to the oil rich countries. Labour export to the Middle East was dominated by the private labour supply agents.

As these intermediaries adopted various exploitative and harmful means to maximize their profits, the insecurity of the migrant workers emerged as a sensitive human problem, with the increase of overseas migration. However in recent years, most Asian countries including Sri Lanka, have been promoting overseas migration as a new sector of export earnings. Apart from the direct economic repercussion, labour export had many social, cultural and psychological implications as overseas labour migration often disrupts established human and family relationships.

Many studies on impact assessment of labour exports have identified positive and negative implication of the fast growing overseas labour movements. Sri Lanka in the colonial era imported labour from India to develop export plantations in the country, such as tea, rubber and coconut. Since then, the plantation sector continued to play a dominant role in Sri Lanka's export earnings. However with the introduction of open economic policies in the late 1970s labour exports become more important than the export of agricultural commodities, as the inflow of foreign remittances to the country continued to increase. The share of tea, rubber and coconut exports in total earnings declined from 74.3 percent in 1977 to 17.8 percent in 1994. The share of foreign remittances in total export earning correspondingly increased from 1.3 percent to 22.3 percent during the same period.

Apart from the increased inflow of foreign remittances overseas migration had a positive impact on easing domestic unemployment pressures. The problem of unemployment in Sri Lanka therefore has to be solved by creating greater employment opportunities in



the manufacturing sector and in main sub sectors like the processing of tea, rubber and coconut and the increase of small industries. Exporting labour is believed to be an important means of easing pressure on the major sectors of the economy. The total number of overseas migration in 1994 was more than the number of workers employed in the factory industry including the free trade zone.

Mothers who have played a critical role in caring and educating children left their families to fend for themselves, thereby creating post migration adjustment difficulties. Overseas migration was characterized by unregulated and supply driven labour movements. Push factors associated with economic crises at the family level, exploitation and malpractice of illegal agent and physical problems encountered once separated from the family unit are some important negative implication of overseas migration. The majority of women migrants as domestic servants have been identified locally as having been unemployed housewives.

Sri Lankan labour migration trends and threats

The first instance of outflow of Sri Lanka's foreign employment is expertly in the first half of the 20th century under the British rule, when the Sri Lankan Tamils emigrated to Malaysia in small numbers. However it was only after gaining independence in 1948 that this country had clear experiences in the sphere of international labour migration. It has also been reported during the period 1960 and 1968. 188 Sri Lankan doctors were given resident permits in Britain. Doctors, accountants and university lecturers being among them.

The two decades following 1972 showed a definite advancement in the labour migration from this country. In the middle of 1973, the oil exporting OPEC countries decided to increase the price of oil to US \$ 33 per barrel. Airport survey unit was introduced to in March 1990 by the foreign employment Bureau in order to obtain more organized data.

One of the important facts revealed here was that total migration is higher percentage-wise when compared with migration through official channels.

Accordingly while the total number of migrants in 1992 was 1, 24 494 those who migrated through registered agencies was 55,673 or only 45 percent. The cause for this high rate of participation had been the social conditions that emerged in the Middle East countries, along with economic development. Sri

Lanka was in an advantageous position, since other Asian countries (Bangladesh, Pakistan and India), which have Muslims abundantly to meet the demand, were reluctant to send their women.

Sri Lanka thus enjoyed a monopoly in the supply of housemaids for foreign markets. Another special feature after 1986 is the demand for female garment factory workers. The female migrant was strengthened by this and by 1992 it exceeded 50,000. The reasons for the above were the tendency among Tamils to dislike Sri Lankan politics after the predominantly Sinhala policies in 1956. The cultural environment in the gulf countries facilitated the migration of Muslims and specifically, Muslim women workers. According to the 1994 survey, the majority who went abroad for employment were in the 30-35 age groups. The material status of those employed abroad is an important factor in relation to the population increase. The birth rate could decline due to factors such as the migration of married persons, delay in the age marriage etc. another influence in the declining birth rate has been that the workers who go for employment abroad in two years contracts, often tend to get their contract extended many times and overstay their legitimate stay in these countries. The majority of migrants at the initial stages were from urban areas.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka in its 1992 report has stated that foreign employment is a factor which contributes towards reducing the unemployment problem in the country. It also emphasized that the annual supply to the foreign labour market has increased to 125,000 persons. Therefore the argument that the impact of these numbers on the labour force and unemployment should be lower must be taken in to consideration. Another social benefit of foreign employment has been its impact on reducing the income disparity. Several surveys reveal that, those employed in Middle East countries were mainly from low-income countries.

The government policy after 1977 was one of permitting the private sector to spearhead the sourcing of employment overseas, but although the supply of employment opportunities was handled by private sector, in order to exercise a degree of control over private employment agencies, the overall policy for migrant labour was laid down by the state. As is the case in Sri Lanka, labour low in host countries, especially in middle east do not protect domestic labour. There is an aspect of domestic labour akin to medieval slavery, where employers, especially in the gulf countries assume that they own the house maids body and soul, merely because they hold the purse strings.

The many instances of exploitation violence and abuse of Asian worker abroad, especially in the middle-east lend weight to this observation and warrant a tightening up of the rules and regulations that govern their overseas employment coupled with a closer security of the institutions set up to monitor migrant welfare. Sri Lanka has more than her fair share of tragic deaths in the Middle East, several of them could be due to misunderstanding or the lack of understanding of the Middle East culture. However the labour migration plays a vital role in developing countries as well as developed countries.

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