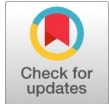


Accessible and Affordable Housing for Urban Migrant Workers: A Policy Perspective

Jaisuman K



Abstract: *Migrant workers face hardships in accessing better living conditions such as housing, water supply, and sanitation facilities. This is highly prevalent among construction workers and other manual labourers working in the manufacturing and service sectors. They live in poor conditions and face the threat of displacement and eviction. These people are vulnerable to harassment, especially women labourers and their children, who are often the victims of trafficking and begging. Migrants also bear harsh conditions like long working hours, the nature and toughness of the work, and are prone to injuries, without any medical benefits. They are neglected and isolated, without access to social security benefits. This paper aims to examine the policy issues related to housing for migrant workers and the challenges in their governance. To this end, this paper analyses the provisions about migrant workers in the Urban Housing Policy 2007, the National Urban Rental Housing Policy 2015, and the social housing policies of different state governments, as well as the various schemes supporting them. This policy analysis builds on the appropriate governance arrangements that can foster equitable, inclusive, and sustainable policies to address the issues faced by migrant workers.*

Keywords: *Migrant Workers, Migrant Housing, Social Housing, Urban Housing Policy, Urban Rental Housing Policy.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The living conditions of migrant workers, who sustain the Indian economy through their demanding and physically taxing work, have remained outside the purview of the government and other stakeholders for many years. Migration has long coexisted with population growth, and it is expected to continue doing so in the future, resulting in exponentially rising urbanisation [1]. When inter-state migration increases, population and household growth also increase, resulting in stronger demand for housing in urban areas [2]. Rising land prices in cities are forcing migrants and low-income individuals to settle on marginal lands with relatively poor and limited infrastructure. The 'National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy 2007' suggested additional rental housing for urban migrants and specified some action points to the state governments and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). In support of this, two schemes have been launched, 'Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Housing Mission' (JnNURM) and 'Rajiv Awas Yojana' (RAY) to increase the housing supply to low-income groups. The

'Draft National Urban Rental Housing Policy 2015' specifically mentions that rental housing for migrant workers is to be constructed by state/local governments in collaboration with the private sector. The 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan' also implemented a plan to provide affordable rental housing for guest workers and disadvantaged individuals in urban areas, offering reasonable rental space under the 'Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban' (PMAY-U). The scheme plans to deploy the existing collection of houses under the JnNURM to motivate public and private organizations to build quality houses for rent.

II. POLICY PROBLEM

There has been a shortage of housing in both the ownership and rental markets in urban areas. The primary issue is the provision of short-term accommodation to the migrant workers who stay for a limited period. The prevalence of slums in cities, particularly those with congested infrastructure, has been a longstanding concern for policymakers. According to the 'Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs' (MoHUA), India's housing scarcity was around 1.87 crore household units in 2012. This essentially means that 25% of the urban population is in urgent need of proper housing facilities. Add to this the various regulatory hurdles faced by the housing sector, like floor space index, rent control regulations, and property taxes. Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), operating within a weak financial system, are struggling to meet housing demands due to the increasing migrant population. The housing policies of central and various state governments do not adequately address the housing issues of migrants, and there is no special attention given to the housing and settlement needs of migrant workers. The issue of housing for migrant workers is closely tied to the broader problem of informal settlements, including slums. It is observed that there is an association between the urbanization and development of a city and the level of squatter settlements or shantytowns. In China, a decade ago, migrants were excluded from urban housing schemes and were provided with accommodation in factory dormitories or shared rental houses by their employers. The Chinese government has an ambitious plan to include more people in urban areas by opening urban amenities to migrant workers, including healthcare and education services. It plans to increase urban infrastructure and renovate informal settlements using tax and credit policies. The nationwide lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the migrant workers who lost their jobs and were unable to pay rent.

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The incapacity of the migrant workers to manage rent was one of the key reasons to move back to their native during the lockdown, which was considered risky in terms of contracting and spreading the virus. A study on 'Migrant Workers' Access to Housing and Land' by 'Housing and Land Rights Network', identified that 62% of the migrant workers demand affordable and adequate housing options from the government in cities and their villages as well. They also identified that 31% highlighted the absence of secure housing, and 16% complained of harassment by homeowners for non-payment of rent. This shows that there is a lack of strong social security and right to housing policies addressing the issues faced by migrant workers.

III. ANALYSIS

A. Present Governance Mechanism

The government of India and other state governments are supporting migrants through schemes such as PMAY-U, the Rental Housing Policy, and women's hostels for working women. PMAY-U is a centrally sponsored scheme implemented by the Central Housing Ministry, which supports migrants and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) with housing facilities through private participation and credit-linked subsidies. The scheme is implemented through the states and urban local bodies. The predecessor of this scheme includes RAY for slum renovation and JnNURM, which funded the municipalities. The central housing ministry has also launched the 'Affordable Rental Housing Complexes' (ARHCs), a project under the PMAY-U. This can help migrant workers find affordable housing close to their workplaces. Housing being a state subject, various state governments have their schemes and programs to address the housing problem of migrants and slum dwellers. 'Odisha Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act, 2017' aims to grant land rights to slum dwellers with the security of land tenure and accessibility to decent housing. Rajasthan has focused on creating low-cost and budget housing units through its housing board, while Haryana has collaborated with private players to provide housing in prime city locations. The Kerala government recently launched the 'AALAY - Guest Workers' Friendly Residence' project, which helps migrants find a clean, comfortable, and safe lodging facility at a reasonable rent. Different state governments, such as Rajasthan and Odisha, have started to focus on rental housing policies to safeguard migrant workers from exorbitant rents charged by property owners. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) is actively funding the Working Women's Hostel Scheme, which has been established in cities as shared accommodation spaces for women migrants. A tiny number of hostels provide a kitchen and daycare facilities. The School of Gender and Development Studies at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) conducted an evaluation study and found that women's hostels are safe, accessible, and affordable, and are preferred by women migrants. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979 (ISMW Act), which is subsumed in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, stipulates that accommodation must be provided by the contractor/employer. Under the Unorganised Workers'

Social Security Act, 2008, the central and state governments can make schemes and rules related to the housing of migrant workers. This act also establishes a social security board for unorganised workers at the national and state levels to recommend suitable schemes and guidelines for the welfare of unorganised workers. During the nationwide lockdown, the union government issued a notification allowing residents to stay without paying rent for one month, and house owners were barred from demanding rent; violations were made punishable under the Disaster Management Act, 2005. Several state governments, after the direction of their respective High Courts, prohibited evictions due to non-payment of rent.

B. Challenges in the Governance Mechanism

The Government of India has set an ambitious target of providing housing for all by 2022; however, it now seems impossible due to the varying progress levels of states, the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, and the lack of a social rental market for migrants [3]. The lack of attention to migrant workers in the various housing policies of state governments demonstrates that migrants are consistently at the periphery of the government's vision. 'Tamil Nadu Affordable Urban Housing and Habitat Policy 2020' and the 'Maharashtra State New Housing Policy & Action Plan (Draft) 2015' mention affordable housing and social rental houses to the vulnerable sections of the population, but there is no specific mention of housing or rental accommodation for migrant workers. The participation of the private sector in PMAY-U raises questions about the government's role and ability to meet the housing needs of migrants. Historically, there have been conflicts and institutional challenges to the involvement of the private sector in housing schemes. There are specific issues, such as forced consent, fake allotment to beneficiaries, and a lack of community consultation, which raise concerns about the transparency of private players. The multi-stakeholder approach in the Mumbai slum redevelopment project impacted its implementation, as the needs and issues of the slum dwellers were not adequately addressed [4]. The needs and priorities of migrants can vary significantly and be tailored to local areas, making it necessary to be specific to a state or city. Schemes like JnNURM and RAY could not address the needs and aspirations of the urban poor households [5]. In certain circumstances, the newly allocated houses for migrants and the urban poor may be far away from their current location, making it impossible for them to relocate due to their existing employment and other facilities. In the 'Rajiv Awas Yojana' (RAY), it was identified that the houses provided were located in remote areas, which affected the livelihoods of the migrants. The scarcity of land has long been a concern in cities, exacerbated by dense populations and rapid urbanisation [6]. These issues are further exacerbated by land regulations and land acquisition by mafias, as well as illegal encroachments, often with the support of politicians. Scattered settlements in urban areas, combined with a scarcity of marketable land parcels, make it challenging to provide mass construction of housing facilities to migrants. Financing affordable housing



at current price levels can be a challenge for the government, and the involvement of the private sector exacerbates this challenge.

IV. CASE STUDY

A. Migrant Housing in Chongqing, China

China, with its New Urbanisation Plan, started to treat migrants fairly, providing them with access to urban amenities, including affordable housing. Chongqing city was the first to implement these reforms. The motive was to permanently settle the migrants in the community settlements in small towns and cities. The city planned to construct approximately 400 million square feet of public rental housing by 2013, which would account for around 670,000 houses [7]. The entire project involved building new homes, rather than renovating existing ones, and was entirely under government authority. The municipality of Chongqing had planned for an ambitious expansion of the community housing. They have supported rural-urban migration and aim to absorb 10 million migrants between 2011 and 2020.

By the end of 2013, Chongqing had opened the biggest community housing program in China and completed the 17th allotment of rental housing by 2016. It enables a stable lease agreement with low and affordable rent suitable to the area, and a scheme that encourages ownership in the housing system, which is advantageous to migrants. They also provide incentives and better payments if migrants sell their rural assets, including exchange benefits in the urban area and other benefits such as job training, school transfers, and social insurance. This will boost the urban growth, and the local government can concentrate on improving and developing the city's periphery through these programmes.

Research shows that formal housing leads to better socio-economic outcomes and improves the dignity and stability of the migrants in the community at the city level [8]. Community rental housing has enhanced the preferences of migrant workers to settle permanently in cities due to its lower cost compared to commercial housing. The preferences of migrants to pay with their families and consider public housing as a means of accumulating family wealth through ownership have also increased due to its lower cost compared to commercial housing.

B. Aarusha Homes Rental Accommodation Scheme

Aarusha Homes is a private company that has constructed hostels and dormitory facilities for migrant workers at a very low cost, especially for people who migrate for a short period. They offer plans ranging from Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 5,000 per month, which include services such as food and laundry, depending on the chosen package. First, it started operating in Hyderabad, targeting rural youth who migrated for work or education. Currently, it operates in Bengaluru and Pune, targeting rural migrants. Aarusha Homes finds potential landowners who can build rooms and lease them out to them for a fixed period of between three and nine years [9]. Aarusha identifies plots/buildings near the workplaces of migrants, and it has de-risked its customer profile by operating in Metropolitan cities where the income of migrant workers ranges between Rs. 6,500 and Rs. 15,000.

V. DISCUSSION

The 'Construction Workers Welfare Board' (CWWB) funds can be utilised to provide better facilities and enhance the quality of housing. The CWWB funds can be utilised to provide affordable housing to migrant workers in the construction and related industries [10]. The state and local governments should identify informal settlements, upgrade infrastructure, and provide formal services with the financial assistance of the central government and through scheme-specific funds. Public hostel and dormitory facilities shall be established in all parts of the city, especially for women. The housing ministry can encourage voluntary NGOs willing to provide hostels for women employed in low-income jobs. The working group of the MoHUA recommended granting free ownership of housing in cities to a limited number of beneficiaries. This shall be provided to the disadvantaged and urban poor first, preferably to people who do not have any land or property in their native country. This scheme can be implemented along the lines of the public rental housing scheme of the Chongqing municipality.

The next alternative could be the effective implementation of the PMAY-U, which allows for the participation of the private sector in slum redevelopment. The emphasis on slum redevelopment could be more effective than slum upgradation and has the potential to transform the lives of people with low incomes. The dependency on the private sector does not reduce the role of the government, as it must monitor the quality of housing provided and ensure that the needs and aspirations of the urban poor are satisfied.

The Housing and Land Rights Network [11] proposed recommendations in their study on housing for migrants, including the development of a comprehensive right to housing policy that encompasses social rental housing and hostel facilities, as well as ensuring the security of ownership over housing and land for all disadvantaged people in urban areas. Furthermore, they recommended that the government implement strong social protection measures for migrants, focusing on a universal basic income for all and assured, legislated urban employment, equivalent to the 'Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act' (MGNREGA). Recently, during the pandemic, the central government introduced the 'One Nation, One Ration Card scheme', universalising the Public Distribution System that helps migrant workers get rations at their workplace.

We have the right to housing laws in some of the states, for example, 'Madhya Pradesh passed a housing guarantee law' in 2017 for low-income groups, which provides land to landless migrants in the city for housing. In Punjab, the 'Slum Dwellers (Proprietary Rights) Act 2020' and the 'Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act, 2017' in Odisha ensure the security of tenure over property and land. Matters of Land Rights and Tenure and Urban Development have been specified under the state list in the 7th schedule of the Indian Constitution. Every state shall enact legislation related to property and land rights for migrant workers, similar to the laws in the states of Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. The Affordable Rental Housing Complexes, a sub-scheme under the PMAY-U, is a positive development and



should be effectively implemented to ensure all migrants have access to affordable housing nationwide.

Furthermore, there is a need to study the migration pattern, and a comprehensive rural development policy should be prepared to develop rural areas and create sufficient employment opportunities, thereby limiting migration to cities. As per the direction of the 'Draft National Urban Rental Housing Policy 2015', all the states, preferably states that receive a greater number of migrant workers, shall come up with a 'Social Rental Housing Policy' addressing their housing needs. The policy can lead to schemes such as Rent-to-Own, converting slums into rental housing units for Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), and providing dormitories and hostels through the involvement of the private sector, as recommended in the 'Draft National Urban Rental Housing Policy 2015'. Recently, NITI Aayog has prepared a 'draft National Migrant Labour Policy' [12] which focuses on facilitating migration, increasing migrant workers' wages, granting them special quotas and reservations, and creating a comprehensive central database of migrant workers to help employers and maximise the social security benefits. It further recommends education to migrant workers' children and advises the central housing ministry to address the shelter and accommodation of migrant workers. This is a good start, especially after the nation witnessed its citizens' suffering during the lockdown. It can help create an inclusive and compassionate society and build a competitive economy.

VI. CONCLUSION

The departure of migrant workers to their native countries during the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown highlighted their living conditions and the vulnerable nature of their jobs. There could be several reasons for their exodus, but a lack of assured housing in the city with basic facilities was the primary motive. Addressing their issues requires stable policy measures and a political commitment, as well as providing budgetary support and scheme-specific funding for low-cost housing projects, which can lead to long-term welfare benefits. As several states have already suitable legislation in place to address migrant workers' issues, other states are also expected to follow suit after the mass exodus episode during the lockdown. Now, all states shall prepare a social rental housing policy tailored to the conditions and needs of migrant workers. The central government's measure to help migrants during the lockdown do not mean their difficulties will go away. Migrant workers have remained in the periphery of the state's vision, who have built all the necessities to live with comfort and convenience today. It is time for the government and other stakeholders to envision a long-term policy that addresses their concerns and ensures accessible and affordable living conditions.

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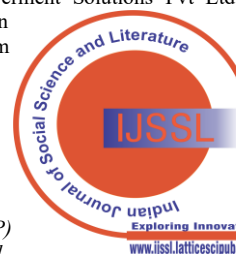
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Before this paper, he had published a paper on Social Policy Responses to Migrants during the COVID-19 lockdown.

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