

A report titled 'Migration and its impacts on cities' by the World Economic Forum presents an interesting observation on how smaller cities are undergoing rapid expansion. While this development is promising, it also brings along massive challenges, particularly in terms of meeting the growing infrastructure demands as these cities face a downward trend in civic revenue resources.

A combination of attractive income potentials, ample job prospects, and lower cost of living compared to larger cities is pushing the inter-state migrant populations towards these smaller cities. These spaces thus serve as counter-magnets to the often overcrowded and pricier megacities.

Migration Defined and Notable Trends

The UN Migration Agency (IOM) defines a migrant as a person who moves across international borders or within a state away from their usual place of residence. This movement is irrespective of legal status, voluntariness, reasons for moving, or the length of the stay.

The Economic Survey 2016-17 indicates an evident growth in inter-state migration, with migrants favoring smaller cities for settling down. Cities like Jaipur and Chandigarh act as counter-magnet regions to Delhi, while Surat serves as a counter-magnet to Mumbai. Interestingly, Pune has also started attracting migrants from neighboring districts of Maharashtra.

Rising Urban Agglomeration

As per the 2011 Census, there is a surge in the population of Class-I cities (those with more than 1 lakh residents). In 2001, there were 441 such cities, which represented 62.29% of the total urban population. By 2011, the number rose to 468, constituting 70.24% of the urban populace.

It's noteworthy that the share of the workforce engaged in the agricultural sector has declined from 58.2% in 2001 to 54.6% in 2011. Cities such as Surat, Faridabad, and Ludhiana have witnessed an influx of more than 55% in-migrants.

City	Percentage of In-Migrants (approx.)
Surat	55%
Faridabad	55%
Ludhiana	55%
Jaipur	Growing

Challenges Confronted by Smaller Cities

Municipal bodies in smaller cities face a significant challenge in accommodating the surging populations due to inadequate revenue resources. The total revenues of the municipal sector account for only 0.75% of India's GDP, far less compared to countries like South Africa (6%), Brazil (5%), and Poland (4.5%).

Inefficient city planning and the inability to put plans into action impede the

growth of these cities. Moreover, smaller cities often fail to attract adequate investments and entrepreneurs necessary for infrastructure development.

Government Initiatives for Small Cities Development

The Government of India is implementing several measures to enhance living conditions in smaller cities. Some of the key initiatives include: Smart Cities Mission; Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT); Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban); Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY); Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission; and Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM).

An example would be the creation of rural urban agglomerates, which aim to provide urban amenities in rural areas. The government is also investing in rural development schemes to improve living conditions for the rural population to alleviate rural-urban migration.