

Migration in South Asia in Policy and Practice:
A Regional Overview

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Executive Summary

Scale of International Migration

The original hypothesis was: With globalisation, international migration is becoming increasingly important in South Asia in both economic and social terms.

The numbers of international migrants from South Asia and the amounts of money that they remit have grown steadily over the last two decades, except in Pakistan where both have declined. There are substantial and well-established populations of South Asian migrants internationally which maintain strong linkages with their place of origin.

The numbers of migrants from all parts of South Asia, except Pakistan, have grown in response to continued and renewed demands from existing destinations and new demands from an increasing range of destinations. It seems likely that international migration will continue to grow in importance in the next decade.

International migration from South Asia needs to be set in the context of long-standing and large-scale internal and regional movements of people, including refugee movements, which are of considerable importance to the livelihoods of poorer households.

There is a need to develop more reliable and comparable statistical data on international migration from South Asia. In particular, a better idea of the existing populations of migrants from South Asian countries in the main destinations would be of great value. All of these figures should be disaggregated by gender, skills and education level, occupation, and place of origin.

There is a need to focus specifically on the numbers of illegal migrants, although this will be a difficult task. There is a need for more informed estimates, based on a range of more reliable sources. Such information would give a better sense of the scale of illegal migration and would help in identifying where the main problems are.

Impact of Migration

The original hypothesis was: Migration is leading to increased inequalities within and between sending communities and regions and areas where there is less or no migration.

Migration can result in increased inequalities between sending and non-sending households, such as the concentration of land in the hands of migrant households, inflation in land values and increased landlessness for non-migrant households.

Migration has a generally positive impact on the households directly involved. Even for the poorest households involved in survival migration, there is evidence to suggest that it can prevent a further loss of assets and can result in improvements in quality of life.

Generally most research has reported positive impacts on local economies as a result of migration, including demand for labour, increased wage levels locally, increased levels of

consumption and demand for services, investments in local industries and improvements in linkages.

Specific sending areas are often a matter of demand and historical chance. However, once migration flows are established they tend to result in long-term linkages of various sorts between sending and receiving areas. This is an area with considerable potential for development and should be explored further.

Given the scale and importance of international migration, there is a need for a more detailed assessment of the impacts at a range of levels. The evidence available at present is both mixed in focus and reliability and patchy in terms of coverage. It would be particularly valuable to carry out assessments along the lines of Addleton (1992) on Pakistan, and Seddon et al (2000) and Seddon and Subedi (2000) on Nepal. Such assessments would: look at data from a country, district/province and local level together; would need to consider policy and statistical data alongside local-level studies, and; would potentially require further survey work and field studies to fill in gaps where information does not currently exist. These assessments would be useful for updating the work on Pakistan and for developing a similar picture for Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. A similar exercise for India would have to focus at a state level and so would have to be preceded by a more detailed assessment of the main areas of migration for the country as a whole.

It is often the poorest households which have the most limited choices in deciding to migrate. At the same time, migration can provide opportunities for long-term improvements in household quality of life. To better understand the linkages between migration and poverty, there is a need, then, to widen the scope of research to look at a wider range of policies, on language, economic development, agriculture, etc, and to consider the ways in which policies are implemented and their impact on household livelihood strategies.

Policy on Migration

The original hypotheses of the project were: Government policy, which aims to control migration flows, generally has the effect of making migration more hazardous for individual migrants, and; Policy-making is usually reactive, responding to changes and crises, rather than anticipating them.

State policies on emigration do have an impact on migration flow. Policies do not stop emigration, so that there seems to be little difference between policy which seeks to support emigration and laissez faire policy. Restrictive policies and the poor implementation of policies can, however, make migration more dangerous for individual migrants. In the case of women it can mean that they migrate in the worst circumstances. There are examples, such as Sri Lanka, of supportive and protective policy with regard to emigration which can encourage people to migrate safely.

The most important factor in determining migration flows into a country is demand for labour. Immigration policies do not have the effect of stopping migration flows. The implementation of policy which seeks to restrict immigration or the lack of policy on immigration usually has the effect of migrants resorting to illegal means to enter such countries. This in turn affects the conditions that migrants work and live under and has a severe impact on their rights. There have been attempts to negotiate bilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries as a means of improving the conditions of migrants.

Policy should, therefore, move away from a narrow focus on specific 'problems', such as trafficking, to take a wider perspective on migration as a whole. A better understanding of the reasons for and impacts of migration, can help in developing policy that is effective in supporting and protecting all types of migrants. The policy on migration in Sri Lanka should be used as an example in South Asia of how safe, legal emigration can be encouraged. Such an approach would fit in with proposals for a dialogue between governments of South Asian sending countries on ways of protecting nationals working abroad (Appleyard 1998: 15).

The main framework for the rights of migrants already exists in the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. However, few countries have ratified the convention and repeated calls from the UN for an international conference on migration have gone unheeded. One other possible way forward would be to develop examples of what works and what doesn't work, using the framework of the Convention. These examples could be used as a basis for negotiating bilateral agreements between major senders and receivers of migrants.

Introduction

The original proposal for research set out three groups of hypotheses

- Increasing importance of international migration
- Increasing inequalities due to migration
- Policy is reactive and increases hazards for migrants.

It was proposed that these hypotheses would be tested through the examination of statistical data and secondary literature on international migration in South Asia. The research looks at international migration from South Asia over the last thirty years. The data and literature used in the research are detailed in the introductions to each of the main sections.

The theoretical framework underlying the original proposal was based on models for a comprehensive approach to international migration, such as those of Kritz, Lim and Zlotnick (1992) and Appleyard (1998). These models consider migration between countries, in the context other linkages such as trade, and propose that these linkages be examined in their political, social, demographic and economic contexts. A major limitation of these models is that they consider international migration in relative isolation.

In the initial stages of work it was found that much research on migration is fragmented, looking at different 'types' of migration separately, from different perspectives and with a tendency to isolate specific issues such as illegal migration and the trafficking of women and children. This initial feeling was confirmed by the discussions at two workshops in 2001, the first at the University of Sussex on Migration and Modernity and the second at the University of Edinburgh organised as part of the research. It was felt that there is a great deal to be gained from taking a much broader perspective than is suggested in the existing models. For example, there are many similarities between factors affecting and the impacts of international migration and internal migration.

The report consists of three sections, each focused on the hypotheses put forward in the original research proposal and entitled:

- The scale of migration in South Asia
- The impact on social and economic development, and
- Policy and migration in South Asia

Each of the hypotheses are tested as originally proposed, through the presentation and analysis of the statistical data and research literature, looking as much as possible at the last three decades. In addition a number of examples are given of how a broader perspective could add to the analysis. In the first section, on the scale of international migration, the preliminary analysis is placed in the contexts of the history of migration, regional migration and movements of refugees. In the second section, on impacts, a comparison is made between participation in and impacts of international, and internal and regional migration to better understand the links between migration and poverty. In the third section, on policy, sending country policy is placed in the context of receiving country policies and the effects on the rights of migrants.

Each of the sections is divided into three parts:

- A short introduction and examination of the main information sources used
- The presentation and analysis of the data to test the specific hypothesis and to draw conclusions
- Examples of how a broader perspective, drawing on a range of contextual material, might work in better understanding migration and movement within and from South Asia.

Section 1 - Scale of Migration in South Asia

Data on International Migration from South Asia

The original hypothesis was:

With globalisation, international migration is becoming increasingly important in South Asia in both economic and social terms.

There are a number of sets of data available from which to assess changing trends in international migration from South Asia. The most useful is the data collected and reported by the sending countries of the region on the annual outflows of legal migrants, with, in some cases, details of their gender, their destinations and skill levels and on the annual remittances received. Equally important, though considerably less reliable is data and many estimates of the numbers of illegal immigrants caught, leaving or resident in receiving countries. Finally, there is data on existing populations of migrants, in some cases collected by receiving countries and in other cases estimates of overseas populations. All of these data sets vary considerably in their accuracy and are often reported in a manner that makes comparisons between the sets difficult.

Data from sending countries is reported to and collated by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The ILO provides access to such data through the International Labour Migration Data Base. The data base aims to collate information on both regular (documented) and irregular (undocumented) migration, though at present only the former is available. The other main source of such data is the Asian Migration Atlas of the Scalabrini Migration Centre. The data is drawn from a range of sources, which are used to make overall estimates. However, in most cases there are few differences between the two sources and many of the differences are small.

The main limitation of the data provided is that the reporting from sending countries can vary considerably. For example, for South Asia, there are very detailed figures for Sri Lanka, broken down by gender, destination and skills levels, while there are virtually no figures available for Nepal, other than broad estimates of the numbers of Nepalis living abroad. In general terms, however, the figures reported on annual outflows are broadly comparable, as in the cases of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. A further limitation of this information is that there are no recorded statistics for returning migrants, so that it becomes difficult to make accurate assessments of the total numbers of migrants at any one time and of the populations of migrants in specific destinations.

The data on outflows of migrants is used in most analyses of international migration (see for example Stalker 2000, 2001; Appleyard 1988,1998) because of its availability and its comparability. This data is also often used in conjunction with figures for annual remittances, reported by the IMF in the Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook. The figures for remittances are derived from adding up three categories of payments, worker remittances, worker transfers and compensation income (Stalker 2000: 80). The main problems with these figures are the different interpretations of these categories in reporting and the fact that they only refer to official transfers (Stalker 2001: 109), an

issue I take up in more detail below. However, a comparison between these data can give some sense of the trends and importance of migration to the countries of South Asia.

The scale of illegal migration from South Asia is more difficult to assess. The sense from much of the literature is that illegal immigration is a problem of the developed rather than the developing countries. Certainly there are a range of sets of figures available for the developed countries, through the OECD (2001), from the National Intelligence Council of the USA (2001) and from US and Canadian statistics (see websites). International reviews of illegal migration, such as that of Ghosh (1998), give minimal figures for illegal migration to destinations in West and South East Asia. Yet, as Shah (1998a) suggests, the figures for South Asia are "an underestimate of the real numbers, probably by about 30 to 50 per cent" (Shah 1998a: 27). Backing up such a claim is more difficult as the sources of information are so diverse and are of questionable accuracy.

The main sources of data on illegal migration to the Gulf states are press reports on deportations and amnesties, compiled and reported in Migration News. The figures are considerable and yet only represent those illegal migrants who come forward during amnesties or who are caught by the immigration authorities. For South East Asia the Asia Pacific Migration Research Network (APMRN) has compiled a series of issues papers which consider both legal and illegal migration in SE Asia (Brownlee and Mitchell 1997). In addition there are some specific examples, such as Sellek (1994) on illegal migration in Japan. While these diverse sources of information do not give a comprehensive picture, they do give some idea of the scale of illegal migration relative to the scale of legal migration.

Data reported by receiving countries on the populations of immigrants is varied and is not comparable with figures for outflows of migrants. Figures for the migrant stock of countries are reported to the United Nations and published regularly in the World Population Monitoring series and the United Nations Population Department Demographic Yearbooks for 1977, 1989, 1985 and 1996. However, in some cases countries, such as Kuwait, report only total figures for entries of all categories of incomers, while others report tourists and labour migrants separately, in some cases distinguishing between categories of origin such as Asia and in others distinguishing specific country origin. The most detailed current reporting comes from the OECD countries which are produced through the Continuous Reporting System on Migration (known by its French acronym SOPEMI). There have also been a number of attempts to estimate populations of migrants from South Asian countries, such for Pakistan (Addleton 1992) and for India (Premi 1998).

The next part of this section looks at Trends in International Migration and is divided into three parts: legal migration looking at outflows of migrants from South Asia in the last three decades; illegal migration examining the various reporting of South Asian migrants, and; Populations of South Asian internationally.

In order to put this data on recent trends in international migration from South Asia in context, I look at a variety of sources of information on: historical trends in migration in

the region; internal and regional migration within South Asia, and; refugee movements in and from the region.

Finally, there is a brief examination of Future Demands for Labour, followed by conclusions.

Trends in International Migration from South Asia

Legal Migration

To get a sense of changes in migration in South Asia, it is necessary to look first at figures for annual outflows of migrants (Table 1) and remittances for the last three decades (Table 2), and then at the main destinations of migrants and how these have changed (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 1 - Annual Outflows of Migrants 1977 - 1997 showing percentages of females, where available (Sources: ILO Database: Scalabrini Migration Centre: SLBFE)

	1977	1980	1986	1990	1995	1997
Bangladesh	15,700	30,600	68,658	103,784	185,543	231,077
India	22,900	236,200	113,649	143,565	438,300	/
Pakistan	140,900	128,400	82,333	113,781	154,529	104,044
Sri Lanka	8,100	28,600 (50%)	16,456	42,625 (65%)	172,467 (74%)	179,114 (75%)
Total	187,600	423,800	281,096	403,755	950,839	/

Table 1 shows a substantial growth in the annual outflow of migrants for the region as a whole over the last two decades. Despite an overall growth for the region, there have been considerable fluctuations in the outflows for specific countries in the region. The availability of figures from the mid-1970s reflects the important growth in migration from South Asia to the Middle East from this period. The fluctuations for individual countries generally follow changes in the demand for labour in the Middle East and more recent changes in demands for specific types of labour. The only figures available for the proportion of female migrants are those for Sri Lanka, which show a growth in this proportion, again reflecting changing demands for types of labour.

There are no comparable figures available for Nepal and generally the official figures are inadequate. Figures from the national censuses of Nepal show that there were 400,000 Nepalis living abroad in 1981, and 660,000 abroad in 1991 (Seddon et al 2000), showing a steady growth in the number of international migrants, similar to the situation in Sri Lanka. There are no estimates available for the proportion of female migrants from Nepal.

Table 2 - Average Annual Remittances 1977 - 1999 (US \$ millions) (Source IMF Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook)

	1977	1980	1986	1990	1995	1999
Bangladesh	79	339	502	779	1,202	1,807
India	934	2,757	2,469	2,384	6,223	11,124
Nepal	/	/	/	/	57	443
Pakistan	868	2,038	2,525	1,997	1,712	/

Sri Lanka	18	152	292	401	801	1,068
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The data for remittances are a reflection of the migrant communities as a whole. They show that remittances have been an important source of income and foreign currency since the 1980s for Pakistan and India. While Pakistan, which continues to rely almost wholly on remittances from the Middle East, has shown a gradual decline since the mid-1980s, the figures for India reflect both the growth in demand for labour and the development of linkages with existing communities of Indians overseas. For Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and more latterly Nepal, remittances have been growing in importance over the last three decades. As an indication of how important international migration is in the region, the Top 20 developing country receivers of remittances for 1999, presented by Stalker, includes India at number one, Bangladesh in seventh position, followed closely by Pakistan in eighth, and Sri Lanka at number eighteen (Stalker 2001: 110). The impact of these remittances is discussed in Section Two.

Table 3 - Main Destinations of Migrants from South Asian Countries (Source: ILO Database)

Bangladesh (1996)	Saudi Arabia 70,734	Kuwait 21,042	UAE 23,812	Oman 8,691	Malaysia 66,631
India (1995)	Saudi Arabia 269,000	UAE 77,100	Oman 29,100	Kuwait 27,000	
Pakistan (1994)	Saudi Arabia 70,243	UAE 28,900	Kuwait 6,100	Oman 4,245	
Sri Lanka (1999)	Saudi Arabia 63,102	Kuwait 33,140	UAE 29,879	Qatar 11,410	Oman 10,406

Table 4 - Percentage distribution of Migrants from South Asia by region of destination (Source: Zlotnick 1999: 55)

Sending country/ receiving region	1975-79	1980-84	1985-89	1990-94
Bangladesh				
Western Asia	88.3	92.0	95.9	83.5
Other Asia	0.2	1.0	0.5	15.6
Outside Asia	11.5	7.0	3.6	0.9
India				
Western Asia		92.4	95.8	96.0
Other Asia		7.6	4.2	4.0
Outside Asia				
Pakistan				
Western Asia	87.3	97.2	99.9	99.6
Other Asia	2.7	0.0	0.0	0.2
Outside Asia	10.0	2.7	0.1	0.2

Sri Lanka				
Western Asia			94.5	95.4
Other Asia			4.3	3.3
Outside Asia			1.2	1.3

The figures in Tables 3 and 4 show that the Middle East remains the most important destination of migrants from South Asia. Within the Middle East Saudi Arabia continues to be the main destination for the majority of migrants from the region. For Nepal studies, such as that by Seddon et al (2000), show that the majority of Nepalis are still going traditional destinations such as India, but increasing numbers of migrants are heading for the Gulf. The figures for Pakistan and Bangladesh in the mid-1970s show the final stages of migration to the UK. After that Pakistan has relied almost entirely on migration to Western Asia, or the Middle East. The figures for Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka from the 1980s show the growing importance of other destinations in Asia, though these are still relatively small.

In order to better understand this range of data, the tables have to be read together in the context of demands for labour from South Asia. Migration before the 1970s will be discussed in the section on the History of Migration below.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were a period of rapid economic and infrastructural development in the Middle East, funded by huge growths in oil revenues throughout the Gulf. As is discussed by various analysts (Addleton 1992; Longva 1997; Seccombe 1988) in the 1970s there was both a growth and a change in demand for labour in the Gulf states, with a shift from Arab labour from Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, to the recruitment of mainly unskilled and semi-skilled labour from South Asia for construction. The first countries to respond to these new demands were Pakistan and India, as is shown in the figures in Table 1, with the peak in numbers coming in 1980.

As was predicted by some analysts in the 1980s (Appleyard 1988), as the period of rapid construction of infrastructure came to an end, demand for labour in the Gulf declined. This affected those countries involved in migration from the start, India and Pakistan, and is shown in the decline in numbers from 1980 to 1986. At the end of the 1980s, as investment began to grow again, demand increased, though this was demand for different types of labour. The results can be seen in the growth in the numbers of migrants from Bangladesh, providing a cheaper labour force for the service sector, and of female migrants from Sri Lanka, mainly as domestic labour. In the 1990s the demands for labour from the Gulf states for the service and domestic sectors continued to grow, again shown most clearly in the figures for migrants and their destinations from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, though also clear from the increases in numbers from India and Pakistan.

At the same time, migrants from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka have responded to new opportunities, particularly in South East Asia. Although the numbers are still small, more migrants are travelling to work in destinations such as Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Lebanon and Jordan. More detailed figures from sources such as the Scalabrini Migration Atlas and the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment also show evidence to suggest

that increasing (though still relatively small) numbers of migrants from South Asia of varying skill levels are heading for new destinations such as Cyprus, Lebanon and Italy. Similarly recent OECD figures show growing numbers of Asian migrants moving to a more diverse range of destinations in Europe (OECD 2001: 13), a fact that is commented on in the report. It would seem, then, that at the start of the millennium there are increasing demands for labour of all levels from South Asia from a greater range of destinations. This is an issue that will be taken up in more detail in the section on demands for migrants below.

Illegal Migration and Informal Remittances

It is certain that all of the figures for legal migrants and for remittances are an underestimate of the actual numbers of migrants and the amounts of money which they send or bring back. A recent NIC report has estimated that one third to one half of the entrants of most developed countries are illegal migrants (NIC 2001: 13). As was mentioned above, Shah (1998a) suggests that figures for emigration from South Asia underestimate the actual figures by about 30-50%. However, due to the very nature of illegal migration it is difficult to find accurate and reliable figures to work with. In this section, I look first at estimated figures for illegal migrants in the Gulf states, then at illegal migration to South East Asia.

For the Gulf states, one possible means to estimate illegal migration from South Asia is to look at the frequent reports of deportations and numbers leaving during amnesties (Migration News various dates). For Saudi Arabia there are rough estimates that of the 10 million workers in the country, 7 million are foreigners (Migration News June 2001). In 1999 it was reported that there were an estimated 1.7 million illegal foreigners, of whom 900,000 left in a six month amnesty in 1997-8, most of whom were from South Asia (Migration News Jan 1999). In 2001 Bahrain had a foreign population of 220,000, out of a total of 660,000. There have been a number of amnesties in recent years when large numbers of illegal foreigners left the country: in 1995, 10,000 left; in 1997, 52,000 left, and; in 2000, a further 40,000 were expected to leave (Migration News Dec 2001). A consideration of the estimated numbers of legal workers with the numbers leaving during these amnesties would suggest that the foreign populations in the Gulf states could be in the region of 25% bigger than the official figures suggest.

The reports from the Gulf states seem to indicate that the majority of these illegal foreigners are from South Asia. Abu Dhabi, in the UAE, reported that of 14,000 illegal foreigners detained in 1999, the largest numbers came, in order, from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh and India (Migration News Jan 2001). In an amnesty in Oman in 2001, 15,000 foreigners left the country, 7,000 from India, 4,000 from Bangladesh and 2,300 from Pakistan (Migration News Dec 2001). While the figures are somewhat piecemeal, it is clear that the largest proportion of illegal migrants in the Gulf states are from South Asia.

The situation is similar in neighbouring states such as Jordan. The Jordanian Ministry of Labor reported that in August 2000, there were 25,656 foreign females employed in the country, including 21,322 Sri Lankans and 4,334 Filipinas. However, the Sri Lankan and Philippine embassies estimated that there were between 35-70,000 women from their countries were employed in Jordan, suggesting that about half of the women were illegally employed, usually in private homes (Migration News Feb 2001).

The Asia Pacific Migration Research Network (APMRN) has compiled a series of issues papers for the countries of South East Asia, some of which include estimates of the numbers of illegal migrants and their origins (Brownlee and Mitchell 1997). In addition various editions of Migration News have reported on estimates of both legal and illegal

workers in these countries. Though it is difficult to get an overall perspective, the figures that are reported can give some sense of the scale of migration to the region.

In Malaysia in 1995 it was estimated that there were around 600,000 legal foreign workers, with the largest proportion coming from Indonesia (65%), while 21% came from Bangladesh (Brownlee and Mitchell 1997). In other reports the total number of legal foreign workers was estimated at just over 550,000 with over 82,000 from Bangladesh (around 14%) (Migration News December 1995). The estimates for the numbers of illegal migrants in Malaysia for this period have varied from 340,000 to over 1 million (Migration News February and December 1995). In the issues paper, the number of illegal aliens registered between 1992-4 was over 480,000, of which 5% were Bangladeshis, while the number of apprehensions of illegal migrants between 1992-5 is recorded as around 190,000 of which 13% were Bangladeshis (Brownlee and Mitchell 1997). In 2000 the Malaysian government reported that there were around 700,000 registered foreign workers in the country, with 129,000 from Bangladesh and 3,000 from Pakistan (Migration News April 2000). There were estimates for this period that the number of illegal migrants was between 0.5-1 million (Migration News August 2000). It can be assumed that the proportion of illegal migrants from Bangladesh was roughly 15-20%, based on previous figures.

There is less detailed information and estimates available for the other countries in the region. The issues paper for Thailand suggests that there are relatively small numbers of legal migrants, while illegal migration is becoming a major problem, with estimates of 525,000 illegal migrants in 1994, of which 81,000 (15%) were South Asians (Brownlee and Mitchell 1997). By 2001 it was estimated that there were between 0.5-1 million illegal migrants in Thailand, the majority from Burma, though with some from Bangladesh (Migration News October 2001). A similar situation existed in South Korea where there were few legal migrants and illegal migration was a growing problem. During a 1992 amnesty 68,000 migrants who had overstayed their visas came forward, of whom 9,000 were Bangladeshis and 5,000 were Nepalis, roughly similar proportions (15-20%) to the estimates for Thailand. In 1995 it was estimated that there were 84,000 overstayers (Brownlee and Mitchell 1997).

Large numbers of migrants are travelling to countries such as Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand, attracted by the demand for labour and the relatively higher wages. The general consensus in the issues papers is that all of these countries have not yet put in place a comprehensive policy on immigrant workers. All of these countries have large numbers of illegal migrants, most of whom are tolerated because of labour shortages in the countries. The figures quoted above would suggest that the total population of foreign workers in Malaysia and Thailand is between 150-270% larger than the official numbers. South Asians, especially from Bangladesh form a sizeable proportion of both the legal and illegal workers.

Much attention has recently focused on the illegal/ informal money transfer system widely used by South Asian migrants all over the world, known as hawala or hundi. Again, it is difficult to obtain or even estimate figures for remittances transferred outside

of the regular banking system, though there have been some attempts made. A recent ILO working paper (Puri and Ritzema 1999) draws together some of the material available. It is suggested that including remittances sent through informal channels would double or triple recorded figures (ibid: 3-4). Drawing on a range of work, estimates are made for the 1980s of unrecorded remittances as a percentage of total remittances: India, 40%; Pakistan, 43%; Bangladesh, 20%, and; Sri Lanka, 13% (ibid: 5). The reasons given for the widespread use of this informal system are the lack of or unfamiliarity with formal banking facilities, and, particularly, the overly restrictive and inefficient banking system in the region (ibid: 6-7).

Addleton suggests that informal marketplaces grew in importance in Pakistan alongside the growth of migration to the Gulf, so that in 1985 Pakistan's parallel markets were estimated to represent as much as 10% of the entire economy (Addleton 1992: 127). Again, the main reasons for the widescale use of these informal systems were that they were "simple but effective" (ibid: 128). The system was particularly used in the NWFP, with one survey suggesting that one third of migrants from the NWFP used the hundi system (ibid: 129). Given the scale of illegal migration from South Asia and the transfer of remittances through informal channels, migration is of even greater importance to the region than the growing official figures would suggest.

Populations of Migrants from South Asian

There have been three major international movements from South Asia since 1947:

- the migration of South Asians to UK in the 1950s to 1960s;
- migration to the Gulf states from the mid-1970s;
- to North America since the 1980, and.

Addleton (1992) provides an estimate of the overseas Pakistani communities for 1982, while Premi (1998, drawing on Visaria and Visaria 1995) estimates the number of people of Indian origin overseas for 1993-4. There are no similar estimates for Bangladesh, Nepal or Sri Lanka. These figures at least give a sense of the scale and relative importance of these existing populations and provide a backdrop for the more recent figures discussed below.

Table 5 - Estimated size of overseas communities for Pakistan (1982) and India (1993-4) by Region (Sources Addleton 1992, Premi 1998).

Region	Pakistan (1982)	India (1993-4)
Middle East	1,183,877	1,820,000
Europe	422,760	1,297,000
Americas	150,059	2,710,000
Asia	29,883	6,729,000
Africa	103,085	2,032,000
Australia	2,000	99,000
Total	1,891,664	14,687,000

In the 1991 UK census it was estimated that there are 835,000 Indians, 474,000 Pakistanis and 161,000 Bangladeshis living in the country (Ballard 1999: 5). The bulk of migration from South Asia took place immediately after the Second World War and Independence. However, since the start of increasing restrictions on immigration to the UK from the Commonwealth, migration from South Asia has continued. This migration to the UK and the ongoing links to 'home communities' has been studied by a number of social scientists including Werbner (1990) and Ballard (2001). Both Werbner and Ballard have looked particularly at the ongoing linkages between the UK and South Asia. Werbner (1990) has examined the history of immigration of Punjabi Muslims to the Manchester area and the importance of gifts and marriages in maintaining links. Ballard (2001) has recently looked at the different marriage patterns in the development of transnational networks. He emphasises the importance of maintaining links with the place of origin for Mirpuris from Kashmir in Pakistan, quoting figures of around 10,000 spouses coming to UK annually and remittances to Pakistan of between £2-300,000 (Ballard 2001: 41).

Migration to the Gulf states is perhaps the most significant movement from South Asia in terms of the number of migrants and the volume of remittances. In 1981-2 it was estimated that there were a total of 2 million South Asians in the Middle East: 1.2 million Pakistanis, 800,000 Indians, 160,000 Bangladeshis and 130,000 Sri Lankans (Appleyard 1988: 111). By 1994-5 it was estimated that there were 4-5 million South Asian workers overseas, mainly in the Middle East (Appleyard 1998: 26).

It was estimated in 1980 that there were 350,000 persons of South Asian origin living in the USA and a further 250,000 in Canada (Appleyard 1988: 111). In the 1990s the US Census Bureau estimated that the foreign-born population in the USA originating in India rose from 450,000 in 1990 to 748,000 in 1997 (US Census Bureau 1999). In the 1996 Census of Canada it was estimated that there were 353,500 persons of South Asian origin in the country (Statistics Canada website 2001). Ghosh provides figures on resident irregular population in the US in 1996 by origin; 41,000 Pakistanis and 33,000 Indians (Ghosh 1998: 11).

The figures show substantial existing populations of migrants originating in South Asia around the world.

Conclusions

Although there are difficulties in comparing the three sets of figures, viewed together they do give a sense of the importance of international migration from South Asia.

There are a number of well-established populations of South Asians, particularly Indians and Pakistanis, in Europe and the Americas. These populations have continued to maintain linkages with their place of origin, as can be seen by the steady flow of new migrants and the return flows of remittances. Some of these established destinations are beginning to grow again in importance.

Migration to the Middle East has dominated in terms of scale and importance since the 1980s. While the demands for labour have fluctuated, the Gulf states continue to be the most important destination for all of the countries of South Asia. While the immigration and labour policies in the Gulf states seek to discourage long-term settlement by immigrants, it would seem that there are now well-established populations of South Asians, particularly in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE.

New opportunities are opening up for South Asian migrants in a range of new destinations. Most important in terms of numbers are the states of South East Asia, particularly Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong. In more recent years there are signs of new demands in places such as Cyprus, Jordan and Lebanon. While it is impossible to predict how these migration flows will develop, it is likely that if labour demands persist and grow, similar established populations of South Asians will develop in these new destinations.

Contexts of International Migration from South Asia

In order to better understand current trends in international migration in the region, three contexts are examined:

The history of migration in the region

Internal and regional migration within the region, and

Refugee movements within and from the region.

The Historical Context of Migration in the Region

In order to understand movements in and from South Asia today it is important to look at the historical background of migration in the region. The rich historical records and analysis in the region add a long-term perspective to an area which has often considered individual migration flows in isolation. The long-term importance of movement in the region has been recognised by writers such as Abu-Lughod (1989), who records the significance of the region in terms of global trade before the arrival of the Portuguese and the start of colonisation. There are a range of studies that examine the trade linkages between various parts of South Asia and the rest of the world at a more local level including Perera (1998) on Sri Lanka, and Simpson (2001) on Gujarat.

Under British administrative control detailed census records were collected and collated and there is much evidence from local level administration and record keeping. Writers such as Davis (1951) have been able to make estimates of migration to and from India, based on census data, from 1834 to 1937 (Davis 1951: 99). The records show that by the 1850s there were substantial numbers of people (over 500,000) leaving the region annually, while by the 1870s the number had increased to over 1 million. At the same time the numbers of returned migrants were almost as great, so that in this period net annual emigration was between 100-250,000 (ibid: 99). Much of this recorded migration is by sea and the greatest proportion (99.6%) travelled to other ports in the British Empire (ibid: 99).

The British colonial authorities encouraged a range of 'official' movements, including recruitment for the British Army, the establishment of canal colonies, plantations and other forms of agricultural development and, perhaps most significant of all the system of indentured labour. Tinker describes the development and impact of what he describes as 'a new system of slavery' (Tinker 1974 and 1977). The first recruitment took place in the 1840s and 1850s among the tribal people from the Chota Nagpur area of what is now Bihar for work as labourers in the new estates of Mauritius and Demerara (Tinker 1974: 49). The system operated from the 1850s until the world depression of the 1930s, recruiting initially from northern India and latterly in substantial numbers from the south (ibid: 375-9). Large populations of Indians, many from the lower castes, were taken to work in other parts of the empire, in East and South Africa, Sri Lanka, Malaya, Burma and Fiji, where many of them remained (Tinker 1977: 6).

Other studies of specific areas record the importance linkages between movement in the colonial period and later migration to the UK. Ballard, for example, describes the way in which migration from Mirpur in Pakistan to the UK is linked to the employment of Mirpuris in the British merchant navy during the colonial period (Ballard 2001: 5-6).

Kessinger (1974) provides a detailed history of migration from the village of Vilyatpur in the Punjab from 1848 to 1968. He records four major periods of migration from the village: migration to the canal colonies in western Punjab and to Australia in the 1890s; further migration to the canal colonies in the 1920s; migration to India during Partition in 1947, and; overseas migration to England from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s (Kessinger 1974: 163). There were similar movements from other parts of South Asia to take advantage of the opportunities that were available under colonial rule, for example the movement of Pathans as moneylenders to various parts of India.

Perhaps the most significant and traumatic movement in the South Asia took place with independence and the partition of the subcontinent into India, and East and West Pakistan. It has been estimated that around 8 million refugees fled from Pakistan, with the same number fleeing from India, with approximately 5.5 million fleeing from, and the same number to, West Pakistan (Kiernan 1995: 356). The authorities concerned, the departing British administration and the new Indian and Pakistani governments, were ill-prepared, in the main because they did not anticipate a major exchange of population (Butalia 1998: 55). Transport was provided, but the poorest were unable to access it and up to one million of the refugees to India crossed the border on foot (Butalia 1998: 58-9). In particular the authorities were unable to provide adequate protection for those attempting to cross the border in both directions. It is estimated that around 1 million people died and 75,000 women were abducted and raped in the appalling violence that accompanied Partition (Butalia 1998: 3).

Butalia (1998) examines the effects of Partition on those not covered in the 'official' history, women, children and the lower castes. In many cases, groups such as the untouchables felt a lack of involvement in the violent events that surrounded them, to them they were conflicts between Muslims and the Hindus (Butalia 1998: 234-5). To both sides of the conflict the untouchables were 'invisible' (ibid: 236). While this 'invisibility' protected them from much of the violence, it also meant that were unable to access the assistance that many other refugees received. The authorities provided assistance only to those refugees in relief camps and the officers in charge of these camps refused access to scheduled caste refugees (ibid: 227). Later, when it came to compensation, the Indian government made the decision to provide compensatory land only to those who owned it, not to those who had worked it (ibid: 230).

The lasting impact of Partition is still felt in Pakistan, north India and Bangladesh today. The census of Pakistan in 1951 showed the importance of muhajirs (refugees) in Sindh and in the major urban areas of Pakistan, where they formed between half and two-thirds of the population (Addleton 1992: 32-3). To counter the discrimination that the muhajirs felt they were suffering, they organised politically and the main party, the MQM continues to play an important role in Pakistani politics today. Similarly in many urban areas of north India Punjabi originally from Pakistan Punjab are dominant, both in terms of population and, particularly entrepreneurship. Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, was treated as a internal colony of Pakistan as a whole, an area of agricultural production with resources being transferred to West Pakistan (Faraizi 1993: 151). The period from 1947 until independence in 1971 saw an increase in levels of poverty and landlessness and few

opportunities for migration, due to the lack on industrial development in urban areas (ibid: 153). The impacts of this lack of development are still evident today, with large-scale illegal migration from Bangladesh.

In conclusion it can be said that:

- Movement within the region and migration out are of long-standing importance in South Asia
- The effects of previous movements affect current movements and migration flows.

Internal and Regional Migration

Addleton has described Pakistan as a "highly mobile society" (Addleton 1992: 3). This is something which could be said of most parts of South Asia at all levels (see for example de Haan 1997: 37; and Seddon et al 2001). There are considerable movements of people within the borders of each state, both rural to rural seasonal movements and more long-term, but often still circulatory rural to urban movements. As important, and often indistinguishable, are the large-scale cross-border movements in the region. Movements of refugees will be examined in the next section, and I will concentrate here on the varying attitudes to cross-border migration. In this section I will look first at internal movements and then go on to consider regional, cross-border movements.

Internal Migration

The focus in studies of internal migration in the region has often been on rural-urban migration and the rapid growth of cities such as Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Calcutta, Dhaka and Karachi. However, a more limited number of studies have focused on the equally important rural-rural seasonal migration. Whilst internal migration in South Asia has been and continues to be very important, there is virtually no official data available on the scale and importance of the movements that take place. Two key studies of such movements in India are Breman's (1985 and 1996) long-term work on seasonal rural-rural migration in Gujarat, and the work of Rogaly et al (2001) on rural-rural migration in and to West Bengal. There are a number of points which are worth highlighting from each of these studies.

Breman (1985) looks particularly at the links between the impoverishment in the tribal areas of Gujarat and northern Maharashtra and the rapid agricultural development of the plains areas of Gujarat. Many tribal people have been forced to take part in seasonal migration for agricultural labour due to the inadequacy of their land holdings (Breman 1985: 210). In the case of the poorest, those without land and other resources, their mobility is very limited and they are unable to migrate to urban areas, falling back on seasonal agricultural labour (ibid: 322-3).

Rogaly et al (2001) makes similar links with the agricultural development in rice-growing areas of West Bengal, which requires the labour of 500,000 seasonal migrants from the surrounding districts and the neighbouring state of Bihar. A reflection of the official attitude to such movements is fact that seasonal migrants are unable to access basic services, such as health and education, in the work area, an issue of considerable concern to them (Rogaly 2001: 27-8).

Seddon and Subedi (2000) make similar conclusions for Nepal. They suggest that "Over half of all the remittances, which were identified as such an important part of the total income of rural households, came from household members working away from home elsewhere in Nepal, in the towns or in other rural areas" (Seddon and Subedi 2000: 2). More importantly they argue that "the poorest and most socially disadvantaged groups in rural Nepal appeared not to be heavily involved in foreign labour migration, but depended more critically on.... seasonal migration to secure paid employment and/or 'self-employment' away from home during specific periods within the year, and longer

term migration to obtain income from paid employment and/or 'self-employment' elsewhere in Nepal" (Seddon and Subedi 2000: 2).

Rural-urban migration in South Asia has been a focus of research, though again, official data on the growth of urban areas is more difficult to come by. Here I will consider three studies: Selier's (1988) examination of migration to Karachi; Mortuza's (1992) study of migration to Dhaka, and; de Haan's (1997) overview of rural-urban migration in India. Selier considers rural-urban migration in Pakistan as circulatory, with people moving to urban areas, such as Karachi, on a temporary basis, whilst maintaining links with their rural homes (Selier 1988: 14). He suggests that the poor in rural areas have, over time, become more marginalised as a result of laissez-faire attitude of the authorities (ibid: 9); that is pursuing policies which have discriminated against the poor, such as the agricultural policies of the Green Revolution (ibid: 39-42), or not seriously pursuing policies which might have aided the poor, such as land reform (ibid: 35-9). As a result, one of the main household livelihood strategies for rural areas is temporary migration for employment in urban areas such as Karachi (ibid: 42-3).

Mortuza, points to the lack of data and research on internal migration in Bangladesh, though it is suggested that, at the start of the 1990s, more than half of the population of Dhaka were migrants (Mortuza 1992: 68, 96). It is argued that impoverishment of a large part of the population is the most important cause for movement from rural to urban areas, with the rural poor serving as a reserve pool of cheap labour for the cities (ibid: 56). For the poor who migrate, the movement is a survival strategy, "which the poor adopt, to escape the growing poverty and its concomitant devastating effects" (ibid: ix).

De Haan (1997), considering rural to urban migration in India, concludes that it has been and remains circulatory, a pattern that changed little during the twentieth century (de Haan 1997: 37-8). He goes on to explore the reasons for this and suggests both positive factors, such as a well developed communication system and the possession by most migrants of some land (ibid: 38) and negative factors, such as poor living conditions in urban areas and the irregularity of work (ibid: 38-9).

Regional Migration

There are considerable numbers of migrants involved in regional cross-border movements, and there is little to distinguish these from internal migration in the region. For example, Samaddar (1999) suggests the "perennial and persistent" nature of the flows across the border between Bangladesh and India. However, attitudes towards movements across borders within the region vary according to relations between neighbours. For example, India maintains open borders with Nepal and Sri Lanka, through bilateral agreements, and with Bhutan. The border between India and Pakistan is closed, and is a considerable source of tension. The relationship between India and Bangladesh has changed over time, from a welcoming attitude to refugees from East Pakistan and to most cross-border migrants, to a more hostile approach with attempts in the 1990s to close off the border and concerns about the levels of illegal migration into India.

Nepal and India signed a bilateral agreement in 1950 which provides for free passage and trade in both directions across the border. As the movement of people is free, there are no available figures for the scale of this movement. It has, however, been estimated that there are between 1.8 to 3 million Nepalis working in India in the mid-1990s (Dahal 1997). It has been further estimated that there are between 800,000 and 3.2 million Indians working in Nepal (ibid). The lack of accurate figures suggests both the 'unproblematic' nature of these cross-border movements to the two states concerned and the lack of interest and concern in the migrants involved.

External concerns have been raised about some aspects of these movements, in particular the trafficking of Nepali women and children for prostitution in India (Human Rights Watch 1995). Given the nature of the bilateral agreement between the two countries and the corruption and lack of political will on both sides of the border, it is difficult to find ways to deal with trafficking in a satisfactory way. This is an issue that will be dealt with in more detail in the section on Gender and Migration below.

In strong contrast to the open border between Nepal and India, the border between Bangladesh and India is increasingly a matter of concern to the Indian state. There are very large cross-border movements of Bangladeshis into India, to West Bengal, the North East States and further afield to cities such as Delhi. It has been pointed out generally that, while such movements are tolerated there is little concern about their scale, but when they become of political concern, they are termed illegal (Hugo 1995: 397). Given the uncertain nature of these movements the estimates of their scale are to be taken with caution. It has, however, been recently estimated that there are 12 million illegal Bangladeshis in India's North East States and 1.6 million in Pakistan (Migration News 2000, 2001). As a comparison, it was recently stated that the US has the most illegal immigrants, around 6 million, while Western Europe is thought to have around 3 million (Stalker 2001: 11).

The alarming estimates that have been made recently are more a product of political concerns being raised by the government in India than of accurate assessments of actual numbers. Samaddar, in his book *The Marginal Nation* (1999), attempts to examine the problems that the Indian state has encountered in trying to impose authority over what is seen as a fixed unit of sovereign space, surrounded by well-defined borders. These attempts to impose authority run up against long-standing historical and 'natural' migratory flows across these imposed borders. Attempts by the Indian state to quantify these flows result in further confusion over numbers and scale, and to establish who are legitimate asylum seekers in turn produce vast numbers of illegal migrants who then need to be dealt with (Samaddar 1999: 62). At the same time as the state attempts to exert authority, Samaddar suggests that it is often in the interests of local politicians to assist 'illegal' migrants in obtaining official documentation, entitling them to some rights of citizenship, in return for political support (ibid: 115).

At the end of the scale is the border between Pakistan and India which, due to mutual distrust is closed. Over the years, and particularly in recent months, security along this border continues to be tightened.

From looking at internal migration and regional cross-border migration it is clear that:

- In relative terms these types of migration are of considerable importance, especially to the poorest;
- Seasonal, circulatory and more long-term migration plays an important role in the household livelihood strategies of many rural families, in the main because there are few viable livelihood opportunities in the rural areas;
- Policy on such movements is either lacking, unclear or restrictive, all of which have a negative impact on the lives and working conditions of those who migrate.

Refugee Movements in the Region

South Asia has seen some of the largest refugee movements in the world. The huge movements of people and the appalling communal violence that accompanied Partition in 1947 are seen as a defining moment in South Asian history. The largest recent movements of refugees in the region have been Afghans to Pakistan and India and Tamils from Sri Lanka to India. Overall, UNHCR has made the following estimates for the number of refugees currently in the region.

Table 6 - Refugees in South Asia in 1999 (Source, UNHCR website)

Bangladesh	250,000 Muslim refugees from Myanmar in 1991-2, 22,000 remain in camps
India	100,000 Tibetan refugees 66,000 Sri Lankan refugees 15,000 Afghan refugees
Nepal	96,000 refugees from Bhutan
Pakistan	1,200,000 Afghan refugees Unknown number of unregistered Afghans in cities
Sri Lanka	650,000 estimated internally displaced people

As a starting point it should be noted that none of the countries in the region are parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees or to the 1967 protocol. Perhaps as a result attitudes towards refugees in and from the region vary. The remainder of this section will focus on Afghan and Tamil refugees and on some of the issues that their circumstances raise for the region and more generally.

UNHCR has estimated that one third of world's 12 million refugees are from Afghanistan. The majority of these refugees have been given asylum in the neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan, each with around 2 million refugees. One contrast between Iran, which is a party to the convention on refugees, and Pakistan, which is not, has been that Iran which has housed 95% of refugees in the community, has received one tenth of the international assistance that Pakistan has, in part because the majority of refugees are confined to highly visible camps (The Road to Refuge, World Service radio series, 29 June 2001).

Of the 3.6 million registered refugees from Afghanistan, 2.2 million are resident in Pakistan (Migration News 2001). At the same time there have been varying estimates of the number of unregistered or unrecognised Afghan refugees in Pakistan, with figures from 500,000 to 2 million (Migration News 2000, 2001). In many cases it has been reported refugees in Pakistan have been able to obtain Pakistani passports, which has enabled them to work in the Gulf (Migration News 2001). Recent concerns in the West and Australia have highlighted the fact that many Afghans are using Pakistan and India as a route out to move illegally to industrial countries (see for example Maley 2001). In recent years concerns have begun to be raised in Pakistan too, with proposals in 2000 to set up an Alien Registration Authority to attempt to regularise the increasingly large numbers of illegal immigrants (Migration News Jan 2000).

Despite the enormous numbers and their long-term residence in Pakistan there are a limited number of micro-level studies of Afghan refugees. Edwards (1990) has written about Ghilzai Pakhtun Afghan refugees living in NWFP, Pakistan. He describes the existing links that many of the refugees already had to Pakistan, in many cases travelling to work on a seasonal basis as herders and running transport businesses. The most important change is the increasing importance of Islam to the refugees as a focus of communal identification and the accompanying shift in power away from traditional leaders to religious leaders, giving them increased status and authority in the camps and the resistance movement (Edwards 1990: 93-4). In general there is a sense that while the Afghans in the camps had ongoing linkages to the host society in Pakistan, they remained separated from it.

A recent series on the World Service, entitled *The Road to Refuge*, has looked at a range of issues relating to refugees in the world today. In a programme examining Afghan refugees in Iran, a number of issues were highlighted. Although Iran has been generous in taking in such a large number of refugees, it has placed restrictions on their rights to receive education and on the types of work which they are able to take. In 1999, Iran began to impose further restrictions and deported around 100,000 refugees. Those wishing to enter Iran now have to rely on smugglers to get in. The majority of refugees interviewed for the programme wished to seek asylum in the West, again relying on smugglers to get them there.

The other main source of refugees in South Asia has been Sri Lanka. UNHCR has estimated that there were 650,000 internally displaced people, with a further 65,000 Tamil refugees resident in India. There are also large numbers of Tamils overseas, not necessarily seen as refugees, but forced out of Sri Lanka because of government policies and the conflict in the north-east of the country. Some have estimated that there are up to 700,000 Tamil refugees around the world, approximately one third of Sri Lanka's entire pre-war Tamil population (Fuglerud 1999: 1).

The main studies on Tamil refugees focus on those who have sought refuge in the West. One of the most interesting is Fuglerud's study (1999) on Tamil migrants and refugees in Norway. There are two particular areas that are worth drawing attention to. First, the similarities between migrants and refugees in the use of networks of family and friends, both to obtain information about the complex means of gaining access to the West and assistance in moving (Fuglerud 1999: 65). Fuglerud also points out that many of these asylum seekers have extremely detailed knowledge of the best routes, down to the best police stations to be approached (*ibid*: 62). The second point is, that the categorisation of individuals has depended on when they arrived in the Norway; in the 1970s as legitimate migrants, in the 1980s as students, and in the 1990s as refugees (*ibid*: 56). As Fuglerud concludes, "Categories like 'migrant', 'student', 'asylum seeker', etc. reflect the social and political climate in host countries, not a difference between people accorded these statuses" (*ibid*: 89).

Work on Afghan and Tamil refugees has emphasised the importance given to maintaining links with the home country. These can be links of various kinds. In the case of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, most households would regularly send one family member back to Afghanistan to check on the condition of houses and fields and meet with family members who remained there (IOM project worker, pers. comm). In the case of Tamil refugees in Norway, many of whom were of marrying age, one of the main concerns was with finding a spouse in Sri Lanka and bringing them to Norway (Fuglerud 1999: 98-104).

In other cases refugees and migrants maintain links which are more political in nature. Fuglerud describes the ways in which the LTTE extended its control over refugees living outside the country (ibid: 85-6). On the internet a large range of websites are maintained by various Afghan political groups, providing news, analysis and the opportunity for Afghans all over the world to contact one another.

The main conclusions that can be drawn from these works are:

- The similarities between refugees and other types of migrants, in the ways that they move, live and work.
- The main differences in the conditions under which refugees move and live are directly influenced by policy decisions in receiving countries
- The importance to refugees of maintaining links with their home country, and the variety of these links.

Future Demands for South Asian Labour

Recent analysis (for example Stalker 2000), had predicted that, as GDP per capita rises, emigration increases. At a certain point, depending on skill levels and the costs and distances of migration, emigration peaks and then starts to fall again, what has been described as the migration hump (Stalker 2000: 104).

Across the developing world, per capita GDP has grown steadily at a rate of 2.1% per year from 1960 to 1997 (World Bank 2000: 14). In South Asia, poverty rates have fallen gradually, and, although there are concerns about slowing rates of decline, the population below the poverty line has generally continued to fall in the last decade. Over the same time period, migration rates have grown rapidly, as was shown above. The likelihood is, then, that as the economies of South Asia continue to grow and poverty rates continue to fall, the numbers of those wishing to migrate will continue to grow rapidly.

At the same time and more importantly, there has been a continuing growth in demand for labour from South Asia, from a wider range of countries. There has been little change in the scale of demand for unskilled and semiskilled labour from the Middle East and the numbers migrating there from South Asia continue to grow. At the same time similar demands have developed in South East Asia, and though these demands have fluctuated, it seems likely that more and more South Asians will seek opportunities there. In western Europe and North America there has been an increasing recognition of the likelihood of and need for increased immigration (OECD 2001; NIC 2001). In recent months the UK and Germany have sought to recruit highly skilled labour in the health, education and IT fields from around the world and have looked particularly to South Asia. The likelihood is that such international demands will continue to grow as globalisation progresses. At the same time as demands grow there has been an international reaction against the free movement of people by national governments.

Again, demand is the major factor in the increases in numbers of migrants and the increases in the numbers of illegal migrants. In many receiving countries there is a tacit recognition of the demand for illegal workers, demonstrated by the lack of implementation of existing policy. The demand exists workers who will accept wages below local levels to carry out the so-called '3D' jobs, that is jobs that are difficult, dirty and dangerous (ibid: 205). While demand is strong, migrants will respond, even if it means moving and working illegally.

The most recent Trends in International Migration records that Asian migrants are going to an increasing range of destinations in the OECD. In particular South Asian migrants are going in increasing numbers to a range of destinations in western Europe, including Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden (OECD 2001: 67). The report also confirms that there are increasing numbers of South Asians, particularly Indians in Canada and the USA, as well as in Australia (OECD 2001: 65). Many more of these migrants are now qualified or highly qualified workers, in areas such as health, education and IT. Similarly the numbers of illegal migrants in these destinations are growing (NIC 2001; Ghosh 1998).

Countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka have been keen to promote emigration and have become economically increasingly reliant on remittances. Nepal has recently begun to officially reflect the importance of migration from the country in development planning (see Seddon et al 2000). For Sri Lanka, recent analysis by Dunham and Jayasuriya (1998) has highlighted the increased economic reliance on remittances.

All of this would seem to suggest that migration from South Asia will increase and grow in importance in the next few years.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In response to the original hypothesis:

The numbers of international migrants from South Asia and the amounts of money that they remit have grown steadily over the last two decades, except in Pakistan where both have declined. There are substantial and well-established populations of South Asian migrants internationally which maintain strong linkages with their place of origin.

The numbers of migrants from all parts of South Asia, except Pakistan, have grown in response to continued and renewed demands from existing destinations and new demands from an increasing range of destinations. It seems likely that international migration will continue to grow in importance in the next decade.

International migration from South Asia needs to be set in the context of long-standing and large-scale internal and regional movements of people, including refugee movements, which are of considerable importance to the livelihoods of poorer households.

There is however:

A need to develop more reliable and comparable statistical data on international migration from South Asia. In particular, a better idea of the existing populations of migrants from South Asian countries in the main destinations would be of great value. All of these figures should be disaggregated by gender, skills and education level, occupation, and place of origin.

A need to focus specifically on the numbers of illegal migrants, although this will be a difficult task. There is a need for more informed estimates, based on a range of more reliable sources. Such information would give a better sense of the scale of illegal migration and would help in identifying where the main problems are.