



Governments should prepare for migration surges by providing housing, schools, roads, transport

Urbanization has accelerated in the past few decades as thousands daily move to towns and cities in search of a better life, or better education opportunities for their children. Economic development is a natural spur to internal migration, but other factors may be in play in recent rapid demographic shifts, not least wider access to information over the Internet.

Slums, overcrowding, traffic congestion, and pollution are familiar signs of urban decay in many major cities. We ask Yang Zhang, ADBI research project consultant, whether these are signs that migration and urbanization have grown too rapidly for urban authorities to handle.

Yan Zhang: Yes. Urbanization is accelerating much faster than cities can cope. People have moved from rural to urban areas in never-before-seen numbers in the past few decades. While London took 130 years to grow from 1 million people to 8 million, Bangkok's population grew at the same rate in only 45 years, and Seoul, 25 years. Governments are unprepared to deal with large-scale internal migration, and policies and public services are not enough to support the rapid migration.

Why is this happening?

Yan Zhang: Rural migrants are drawn to cities in their search for a better life. Firms save on communication and transportation by moving to urban areas. Also, high-tech industries need an educated workforce. Cities with a higher average education level offer higher wages, which attract people of all education levels to migrate to cities.

Trade also boosts urbanization. It encourages growth in transportation hubs, which are usually in cities. The setup and maintenance of international trade connections increase demand for marketing and financing, which are also concentrated in cities.

Better infrastructure in cities can be a reason for household and business to move. Better infrastructure usually means lower transport costs, encouraging businesses to locate themselves within such cities.

Are there any other factors that contribute to this rapid migration?

Yan Zhang: One unforeseen factor that has accelerated urbanization and migration is information and communications technology, or ICT.

ICT has seen unmatched development in the last decades. The telegraph, telephone, radio, and most recently the Internet enable communication over great distances.

More importantly, the advent of the Internet marked a new era. It provides unlimited information and allows people to interact no matter where they are. The Internet lets people share multimedia messages such as pictures and videos, which are easier to understand and often more informative than text.

Potential migrants use information to reduce uncertainty and it plays an important role in their decision whether to migrate.

Through ICT, it is much easier for a potential migrant to obtain all kinds of information at very little cost. For example, information on job opportunities is crucial. Information on weather and the environment can help gauge physical living conditions. Information on rental properties, schools, and healthcare services are important for the choice of where to live. Communication tools such as social networking sites help migrants maintain contact with family and friends, reducing emotional burdens for new migrants.

How does this rapid urbanization affect government policies?

Yan Zhang: Governments should be alert to this fast trend and prepare for migration surges by providing public services and implementing necessary policies. Housing and education facilities should be provided to accommodate migrants. Roads and appropriate transportation infrastructure should be built to solve the problems of potential congestion.

Unplanned urbanization can threaten sustainable growth.

More importantly, this trend is likely to continue. The ICT sector development will always reduce the information cost and stimulate migration. This acceleration will be seen not only in developing countries but also in developed countries, because technology innovation occurs all over the world.

That was Yan Zhang, ADBI research project consultant, talking about [research](#) she did with Guanghua Wan, principal economist at the Asian Development Bank.

Listen to podcast

- <https://soundcloud.com/adbinstitute/governments-should-prepare-for-migration-surges-by-providing-housing-schools-roads-transport>

Read the working paper

- <https://www.adb.org/publications/accelerating-urbanization-explained-role-information>

Know more about ADBI's research on urbanization

- <http://bit.ly/2B1ByVS>