

Urbanisation, rural—urban migration and urban poverty

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# Urbanisation, rural–urban migration and urban poverty

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Cecilia Tacoli, Gordon McGranahan and  
David Satterthwaite

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## Partner organisation

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is an inter-governmental organisation committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits both migrants and society. As the leading global organisation for migration, IOM works with migrants, governments and its partners in the international community to provide humane responses to the growing migration challenges of today.

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Rural-urban migration continues to attract much interest, but also growing concern. Migrants are often blamed for increasing urban poverty, but not all migrants are poor. In many cities, however, migrants form a large proportion of the urban poor with whom they share income and non-income disadvantages, including difficulties in finding adequate housing and in accessing services. Like the majority of the urban poor, they work long hours in low-paid, insecure and unsafe jobs and are exposed to a wide range of environmental hazards because most low-income and informal settlements lack basic infrastructure. In many cases when urban governments try to reduce or control rural–urban migration, this also affects low-income residents and not just migrants.

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## 1

# Introduction

Migration and mobility continue to attract much interest, but also growing concern. The 2013 World Population Policies report states that “among 185 countries with available data in 2013, 80 per cent of governments had policies to lower rural to urban migration, an increase from 38 per cent in 1996” (United Nations 2013a). This proportion is highest in low- and middle-income nations in Africa and Asia – the regions that are currently undergoing urban transitions. In an increasingly urbanised world, substantial transformations in population distribution seem inevitable, although perhaps not as rapid or linear as often predicted. In most cases, urbanisation is closely linked to sustained economic growth, as nations’ share of GDP and employment moves from agriculture to industry and services, sectors that benefit from agglomeration in urban centres. In countries where most of the population is rural, agricultural production systems are increasingly based around large-scale, mechanised farming, and inadequate access to credit and technology put a strain on the capacity of smallholders to adapt to droughts and climate variability. Rural–urban migration is the result of these transformations, and a critical component of urbanisation.

The economic benefits of urbanisation are widely recognised at the national level, while the financial and sociocultural benefits of migration and remittances for rural areas are also recognised. Nevertheless, there is much concern about the pace of urbanisation and the capacity of national and local governments to cope with it. In low-income nations especially, rural–urban migration is seen as contributing to shortages in the

provision of adequate housing, basic infrastructure and services; also to overcrowding and congestion as well as increasing exposure to environmental hazards. There is no doubt that a rapidly growing urban population can present serious challenges to national and, especially, local governments. However, there is often confusion between urbanisation (the proportion of the total national population living in areas classed as urban) and urban growth (the absolute number of people living in areas classed as urban). While rural–urban migration is an important factor in urbanisation, it has a much lesser role in urban growth, which is typically dominated by natural population growth. As a result, policies of exclusion developed in an attempt to reduce rural–urban migration are often damaging to the interests of those living in poverty, regardless of their migrant status. Sections 2 and 3 in this paper discuss some of the common pitfalls in understanding urbanisation and urban growth, and the risks associated with the failure to plan and manage for these, which amplify poverty and social exclusion.

At the city level, local governments play perhaps the most important role in ensuring that urbanisation is inclusive and that its benefits are shared. Yet, a very large proportion of the population of many cities in the global South lacks access to adequate housing, basic infrastructure and services. This increases their vulnerability to hazards, both environmental and socioeconomic. Section 4 summarises the main elements of urban poverty, including its income and non-income dimensions.

One of the main assumptions underpinning antipathy towards rural migrants is the perception that they increase urban poverty. This neglects the fact that rural–urban migrants are not a homogenous group. From the rural perspective especially, the diversity of migrants as well as their destinations and the duration of their movements is obvious. Effectively, not all rural–urban migrants are poor. However, migrants often account for a disproportionate proportion of the urban poor, and face specific disadvantages, as described in Section 5. This raises the question of whether policies that specifically target migrants in urban centres are desirable and possible. The first and major obstacle is the lack of data on poor migrants – but this reflects the lack of data on the residents of low-income settlements, regardless of their migrant status. Initiatives and programmes that are inclusive of all low-income groups and that recognise the different needs of diverse households and individuals, including migrants, are more likely to be successful in reducing urban poverty. Collaboration between civil society and local governments is key to such success, as is the recognition of citizenship rights that is often the main reason for the marginalisation of the urban poor, migrants and non-migrants alike.

## 2

# The contribution of migration to urbanisation and urban population growth

Internal migration, and net migration to urban areas in particular, drives the urbanisation of a country's population. Rapid overall population growth often overlaps with rapid urbanisation, creating especially fast urban population growth. In order to better manage these transitions, it is important to understand them. In this section we start with some conceptual clarifications, then go on to provide some summary statistics on how these demographic and urban transitions are combining in different parts of the world. At the continental level, Africa has the highest rate of urban population growth, largely because it has the highest rates of overall population growth. Asia still has the highest rate of urbanisation, and in effect the highest net rate of rural-urban migration. In most parts of the world, both the rates of urban population growth and the rates of urbanisation have been declining, but the absolute number of people added to the world's urban population each year has been increasing, primarily because of the growth of urban populations in Africa and Asia. Looking forward, urbanisation and urban population growth are likely to continue to decline, with only Africa

still experiencing higher absolute increases in urban population every year, at least for a few more decades.

## 2.1 Some conceptual clarifications

Urbanisation is defined by demographers as the increasing share of population living in urban areas (Poston and Bouvier 2010: 307–311). Urban areas are defined differently in different countries, but are generally taken to be settled areas that are more populous and dense than rural settlements, and more suitable for locating administrative facilities and functions. Significantly more than half the countries providing data on urban population use administrative criteria in their definition, slightly more than half use population-related criteria, and very few use neither (Buettner 2014; United Nations Population Division 2012). The administrative and population-based criteria are interrelated since urban administrative status is generally conferred on larger settlements. Most of

the population-based cut-offs fall between 1,000 and 5,000 inhabitants, with a few significant outliers. However, there is sufficient variation and this variation is systematic and can affect perceptions of regional over- or under-urbanisation. Thus, in a recent attempt to make adjustments to provide more consistent population-based estimates of urban populations, Africa's relatively high level of urbanisation declines, given its level of economic output per capita, whereas South Asia's relatively low-level rises (Uchida and Nelson 2010).

Urbanisation is distinct from urban population growth, although the two concepts are often conflated, creating considerable mischief. Since urbanisation is defined as a rising urban share, if urban and rural populations are all growing at the same rate, there is no urbanisation. Alternatively, if the total population is not changing but the urban share is increasing, all urban population growth is the result of urbanisation, and the rate of urbanisation (the rate of increase in the share of the population living in urban areas) is equal to the rate of urban population growth. In most urbanising countries the overall population is also growing, and it is possible to distinguish the share of urban population growth that is the result of urbanisation from the share that is the result of total population growth (to a close approximation, the rate of urban population growth equals the rate of urbanisation plus the rate of overall population growth).

Urbanisation is primarily the result of migration, and it is reasonable to treat it as such. However, urbanisation is not just the result of rural–urban migration, particularly if rural–urban migration is taken to mean long-term rural dwellers moving permanently to urban centres. First, urbanisation is the net result of complex migratory movements between rural and urban areas, including circular migration back and forth. Indeed, net rural–urban migration can be as much the result of people delaying or not going back to rural areas as it is deciding to move to urban areas in the first place. Second, urbanisation involves both the net movement of people towards and into urban areas and also the progressive extensions of urban boundaries and the creation of new urban centres. Urbanisation can in principle also result from higher natural population growth in urban areas or from particularly high international out-migration from rural areas, although neither are considered very significant.

The added urban population that results from urbanisation is sometimes estimated as the sum of net rural–urban migration and the increase in urban population resulting from the expansion of urban boundaries. However, it is not only difficult to obtain the data for such calculations but presenting them suggests wrongly that the urbanisation is being driven by the extension of urban boundaries, when the reverse is

closer to the truth. In practice, the people accumulating in near-urban or nearly urban settlements have mostly come to be there as part of the net migration of people towards larger settlements or from the centre of urban settlements towards their peripheries. With urban densities declining around the world (Angel *et al.* 2011), the expansion of urban boundaries should not be taken to reflect urbanisation in the demographic sense.

Where the natural population growth in urban areas is greater than in rural areas, this can also contribute to urbanisation. However, with both age-specific mortality and fertility rates tending to be lower in urban areas, rural–urban differentials in natural population growth are not a significant driver of urbanisation. Similarly, international migration can influence urbanisation, if this affects primarily either rural or urban populations, but is rarely a significant factor during periods of rapid urbanisation and urban growth.

## 2.2 Overlapping demographic and urban transitions

One of the simplest ways of interpreting changing rural and urban populations is, as suggested above, in terms of two overlapping transitions. The first – the demographic transition – involves a period of rapidly increasing overall population. The second – the urban transition – involves a period of a rapidly increasing share of the population living in urban settlements. Historically, both of these transitions have been associated with economic development, although they are clearly also influenced by other factors, and their relations to economic development are contingent.

The increasing population growth at the start of the demographic transition is the result of declining mortality rates as population health improves. The later decline in population growth is the result of declining fertility rates. There is a large literature on this demographic transition, what drives the declining mortality rates, the declining fertility rates and the lag between them (Dyson 2010). It has been argued that urbanisation is part of the demographic transition, with mortality decline as its structural driver (Dyson 2010: 125–126). While this greatly overstates the centrality of the demographic transition, it is clearly no coincidence that the demographic and urban transitions tend to overlap. Both are intimately tied up with a range of interrelated and largely self-reinforcing processes (including and sometimes conflated with economic growth), which came to be somewhat misleadingly called 'development' in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



The rising urban share during the urban transition is, as suggested above, primarily the result of more people migrating into or towards urban centres rather than migrating away. The net rural-urban migration is clearly linked to the economic success of cities and related livelihood opportunities, although there are also many other reasons for deciding to move to or stay in urban locations, including to be with family, for education or out of a preference for one or more other aspects of urban living. For most of its history, urbanisation has been associated with a combined shift in economy, culture and society, as well as a shift from low- to high-density living. Some of these associations are becoming decoupled. What would once have been considered urban culture, society and production systems are increasingly found in rural locations, while urban areas are declining in density to the point where urban 'suburbs' are often far less densely settled than traditional rural villages. Nevertheless, demographic urbanisation involving a shift from rural to urban dwelling is expected to continue, at least in Asia and Africa.

Summary figures related to both the demographic and urban transitions are provided in Table 1. The first set of rows are estimates of the percentage population growth per year, the second set are estimates of the percentage growth in the urban share per year, and the third set are estimates of the percentage growth in urban population per year.

The rates of population growth and urbanisation show that by the last quarter of the 20th century, all regions of the world were in the later phases of their demographic and urban transitions, with declining rates of population growth and urbanisation. Asia and Africa are currently the only regions with urbanisation rates still more than three per cent per year, with all other regions at less than half a per cent. Indeed, most of the world's population growth is taking place in Asia and Africa, and the bulk of this growth, especially in Asia, is urban. Only a minority of this urban growth is the result of migration, however.

## 2.3 The contribution of migration to urban population growth

The rates of urban population growth are, to a first approximation, equal to the sum of the overall population growth rates and the urbanisation rates. The contribution of migration to urban population growth is roughly equal to the share of the urbanisation rate in the urban population growth rate. Thus, from 2000 to 2010 slightly less than half of the world's urban population growth can be ascribed to migration. Moreover, migration only accounts for about one third of urban population growth in sub-Saharan Africa, the world region with by far the highest urban population growth rate (four per cent a year). The contribution of migration is considerably higher in Asia, where urbanisation is almost 60 per cent and is expected to continue growing, although at a declining rate. These patterns are likely to change if Asia's extremely rapid economic growth declines or if Africa manages to retain higher economic growth rates.

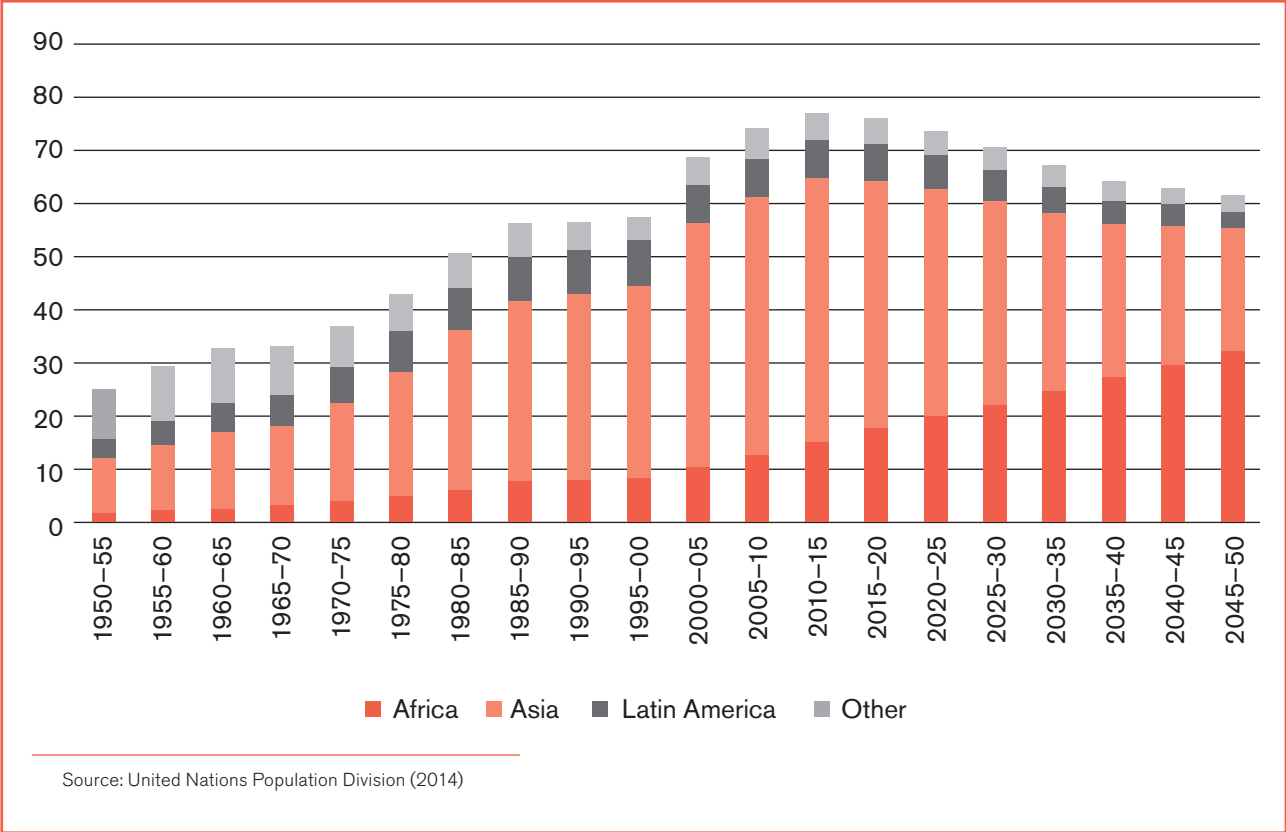
While urbanisation and urban population growth rates have been falling for some time in all the major world regions, the absolute number of people added to the world's population each year is expected to peak this decade at slightly less than 80 million a year, mostly in Asia and Africa. As illustrated in Figure 1, about 50 million people a year are being added to Asia's urban settlements, while only about 15 million are being added in Africa. However, Asia's share is declining and Africa's is growing, and if current trends continue, by 2050 about half of the 60 million people added to the urban population each year will be in Africa. From some perspectives, it is these large absolute numbers of people that pose a challenge to the urban settlements they are added to. Again, only about half of this increase will be the result of migration, even if as the result of circular migration there are considerably more migrants around than this net figure might seem to imply.

Table 1. Estimates of population growth rates, urbanisation rates and urban population growth rates (all in compound % growth per annum) by region, for the decades between 1950 and 2050

POPULATION GROWTH RATES										
	1950–1960	1960–1970	1970–1980	1980–1990	1990–2000	2000–2010	2010–2020	2020–2030	2030–2040	2040–2050
World	1.8	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.4	1.2	1.1	0.9	0.7	0.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.1	2.5	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.4	2.2	2.0
Northern Africa	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.6	1.9	1.7	1.6	1.3	1.0	0.8
Asia	2.0	2.3	2.2	2.0	1.5	1.1	1.0	0.6	0.4	0.2
Europe	1.0	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.0	–0.1	–0.2	–0.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	2.8	2.7	2.4	2.0	1.7	1.3	1.0	0.8	0.5	0.3
Northern America	1.8	1.3	1.0	1.0	1.1	0.9	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.5
Oceania	2.2	2.2	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.0	0.9
URBANISATION RATES										
	1950–1960	1960–1970	1970–1980	1980–1990	1990–2000	2000–2010	2010–2020	2020–2030	2030–2040	2040–2050
World	1.3	0.8	0.7	0.9	0.8	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.5	0.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.3	2.1	2.1	1.9	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.0	0.9
Northern Africa	2.0	1.6	1.1	1.0	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6
Asia	1.9	1.2	1.4	1.7	1.5	1.8	1.4	1.0	0.7	0.6
Europe	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	1.8	1.5	1.2	0.9	0.7	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2
Northern America	0.9	0.5	0.0	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Oceania	0.7	0.6	0.0	–0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.2
URBAN POPULATION GROWTH RATES										
	1950–1960	1960–1970	1970–1980	1980–1990	1990–2000	2000–2010	2010–2020	2020–2030	2030–2040	2040–2050
World	3.2	2.8	2.6	2.7	2.3	2.3	2.0	1.5	1.2	1.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	5.5	4.6	4.9	4.8	4.0	4.1	4.0	3.6	3.2	2.9
Northern Africa	4.7	4.4	3.6	3.6	2.5	2.1	2.1	1.8	1.6	1.4
Asia	3.9	3.5	3.5	3.8	3.0	3.0	2.3	1.6	1.1	0.8
Europe	2.0	1.8	1.2	0.8	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	4.6	4.2	3.6	3.0	2.4	1.7	1.4	1.1	0.7	0.5
Northern America	2.7	1.8	1.0	1.2	1.6	1.2	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.6
Oceania	3.0	2.9	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.1	1.0

Source: based on United Nations Population Division (2014)

Figure 1. Millions more urban people each year by world region



The tendency to conflate urbanisation and urban population growth, and to overestimate the share of urban population growth that is the result of migration, may be reinforced by the fact that the average number of migrants moving into urban settlements is higher than the net migration, since migrants are also moving out. In short, increasing mobility and migration back and forth between rural and urban areas can give the illusion that migrants are contributing more to urban population growth than they actually are.

## 3

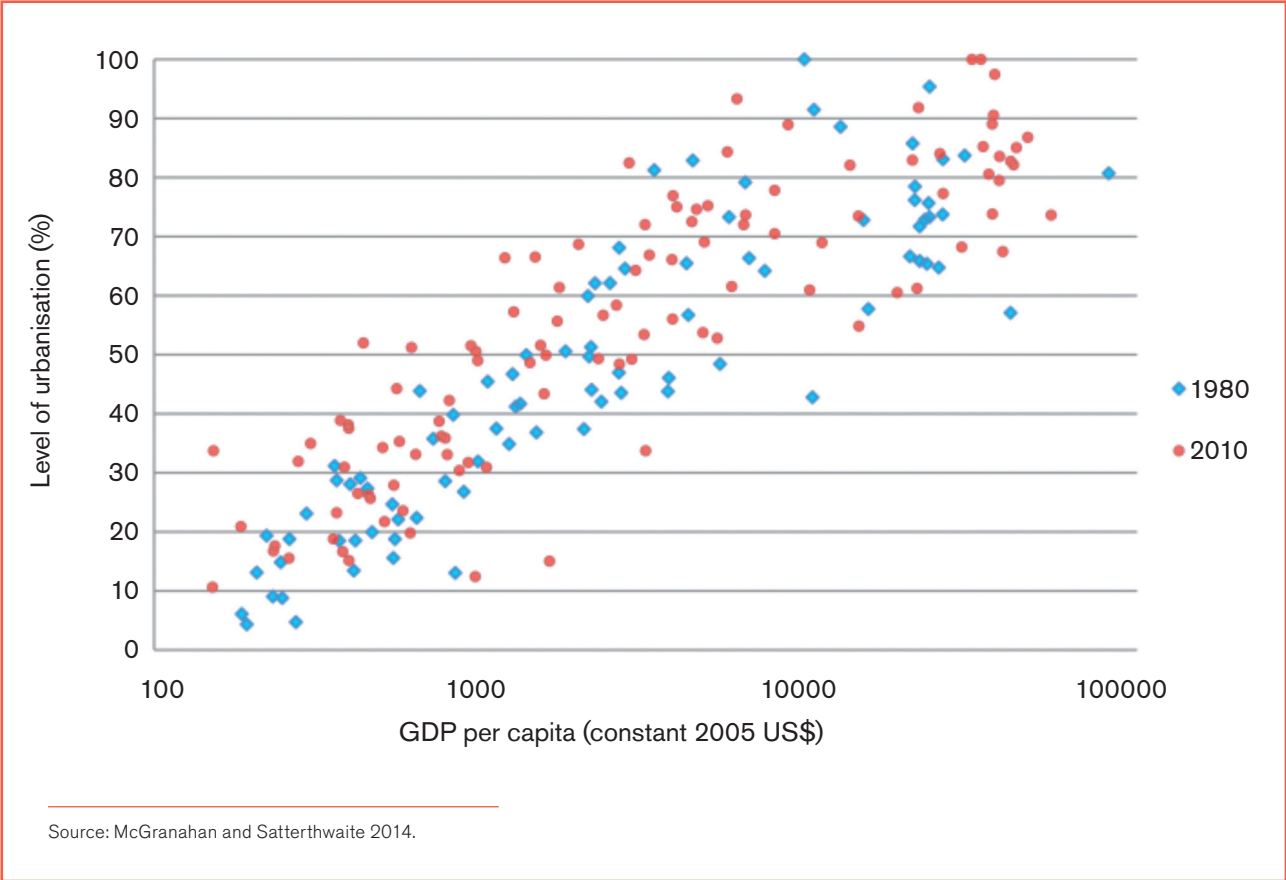
# Migration, urban capacities and the risks of exclusion

In low-income settings in particular, rapid rural–urban (net) migration can in principle contribute to infrastructure, housing and service shortages, and create financial and delivery problems for the responsible local governments and national agencies. It can also add to crowding and congestion, creating problems for other urban residents. But it is important not to exaggerate these problems or the role of migration in creating them. Urban capacities are increased by the economic growth that typically accompanies well-managed urbanisation, and if this capacity can be tapped the net effect of migration, particularly when assessed nationally, is likely to be positive. Alternatively, the negative pressures that result from rapid population growth are much more severe when urban expansion is poorly planned and urban governance is inequitable or ineffectual. Moreover, when urban governments respond to migration fears by trying to be less accommodating to low-income migrants, the results tend to be counterproductive – and ironically force low-income residents, and not just migrants, into the very sort of overcrowded and underserved informal settlements taken to reflect overly rapid urbanisation.

## 3.1 Urbanisation and economic growth

Net rural–urban migration typically accompanies economic growth until a country is predominantly urban. One of the obvious explanations for the net movement of people from rural to urban locations during the course of a country's development is that there are net economic advantages from doing so. As illustrated in Figure 2, which overlays the relationship between urbanisation and per capita income in 1980 and 2010, there is a strong and persistent relationship between urbanisation and economic status. The urban economics that explain why urbanisation would be expected to have economic benefits has progressed considerably in recent decades, and these benefits are more widely recognised (Glaeser 2011; Krugman 2011). Urbanisation clearly brings challenges as well as benefits, but it is hard to find sustained economic growth without urbanisation (World Bank 2009). In high-income countries, there is also evidence that larger urban settlements are more productive than smaller ones, and the same is likely to apply in lower-income countries, although the evidence is less clear (Turok and McGranahan 2013).

Figure 2. National levels of urbanisation and per capita income, 1980 and 2010



Many of the reasons economists give for why modern trade and production offer an economic advantage to people and enterprises who agglomerate in urban centres revolve around specialisation, the lower per unit costs of large-scale production, and clustering to reduce transport and transaction costs. In a simple account of industrial urbanisation, the shift from agriculture reduces the need for production to be dispersed across the arable landscape, returns to scale create the incentive for individual manufacturers to concentrate their production, and lower transport costs create the incentive for producers and workers to locate near large markets (Krugman 2011; Krugman 1991). For post-industrial economies, the less tangible benefits of agglomeration become more prominent, such as the better opportunities for informal knowledge sharing and networking that larger settlements provide (Storper and Venables 2004). Such benefits are also likely to be present at lower levels of income, but may be hidden by the importance of industry-related incentives to urbanise.

More comprehensive lists of the economic advantages of agglomeration have been formulated and classified (Chapters 1–4 in Rosenthal and Strange 2004; Spence *et al.* 2009; Turok and McGranahan 2013). In addition to the agglomeration economies already noted, others commonly mentioned include the ability of cities to

support large-scale infrastructure such as hospitals, airports and universities, the benefits for specialisation that the concentration of production and demand can provide, the benefits of matching supply and demand requirements that bigger markets can offer, along with various other benefits associated with large-scale processes and large markets. Alternatively, some researchers have argued that economic growth and urbanisation require support. Thus, a recent statistical review of spatial variations in India's economic growth noted the statistical significance of urbanisation in explaining rapid economic growth also the economic importance of facilitating migration, for example by providing more adequate transportation infrastructure and laws and welfare policies that do not discriminate against migrants (Das *et al.* 2015).

It should be kept in mind that few of the advantages and disadvantages of agglomeration are the inevitable outcome of economic and demographic concentration; they depend on how, where and which enterprises and people come together. Some of the advantages are more likely to arise through people coming together in the manner they choose and are difficult to achieve through centralised planning. Other advantages, such as large-scale infrastructure, can only be created through collective action and planning and are lost if people and enterprises are left to operate independently. Many rely

on the combined contributions of private, state and civil society actors. In effect, the benefits of size need to be seized, and much depends on cities being able to solve a range of governance and planning problems, while at the same time enabling markets to function efficiently and equitably. The challenge is not to create more and bigger cities but to create better cities, some of which can benefit by becoming larger.

## 3.2 Urbanisation and rural–urban migration as a policy challenge

Although urbanisation generally contributes to economic development and hence to urban capacities, growing towns and cities in low-income countries often face severe urban housing, infrastructure and service deficiencies as well as various forms of urban congestion. During periods of rapid urbanisation it is easy to blame these shortfalls on migration. When net migration is adding a couple of per cent to the growth in the number of people and households living in an urban centre, this can double the demand for new housing and infrastructure (depending on natural growth rates and the need for replacement). Helping to ensure these demands are met is a serious policy challenge, but taking measures to inhibit migration is unlikely to be a good solution and can easily cause severe hardship, not just for current and aspiring migrants but for low-income urban populations generally.

There are several reasons to be wary of attempts to improve urban conditions by inhibiting rural–urban migration, even ignoring the economic benefits of urbanisation. First, slowing rural to urban migration efficiently and equitably is very difficult. Second, in conditions of poverty and inequality it cannot be assumed that providers are simply falling behind: in part, the deficiencies are likely to reflect the lack of individual capacities among low-income residents to pay for adequate housing and services, combined with a lack of public willingness and capacity to make up this deficit. Third, there are many other factors that may be preventing the more deprived residents from securing access to land, services and other urban amenities, some of which are made worse by policies that make it more difficult for migrants to settle. Finally, if people have to stay in rural areas, where conditions are even worse, inhibiting migration may maintain urban average conditions, but national averages are likely to suffer.

For publically provided infrastructure and services in particular, it is important to plan for future demands and needs, which depend on migration but also on other demographic and economic factors (Heller 2010). For most public services, per capita capital costs are

higher in smaller than in larger settlements, and some are especially high in isolated rural locations (Foster and Briceño-Garmendia 2010, Table 5: 131). When demands and needs shift from rural to urban, costs go down, even if in some cases the need for provision increases and the costs reduce less (for example, the costs of on-site sanitation do not decline significantly but the consequences of not having sanitation facilities is particularly severe in urban locations). There is an important role for the public sector, including both local and national governments, in helping to take advantage of the urban benefits.

Governments in low-income countries generally receive a much lower share of their country's income than do governments in high-income countries, and almost none provide free or heavily subsidised housing and services to a significant share of their population. A recent review of changes in governance and service delivery in Africa describes the difficulties urban governments and service providers have encountered in different parts of Africa, trying to cope with housing and service deficiencies alongside rapid population growth and the structural adjustments being promoted internationally (Stren 2014). Despite important institutional differences in the early post-colonial period, particularly between Francophone and Anglophone countries, there is a general tendency for urban governments in Africa to have relatively small revenues, even as a share of national income. Moreover, most international financial institutions, including the development banks, have argued strongly against trying to provide subsidised housing and services at scale.

Where governments are unable or unwilling to provide services to those most in need, it is particularly important that they help people to provide for themselves. A historical review of water and sanitation infrastructure development in Kisumu (Kenya) during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Drangert *et al.* 2002) found that as the population started to grow rapidly after independence in 1963, the expansion of the formal water and sanitation infrastructure and related public service provision lagged behind. People turned to their own smaller-scale solutions, such as private wells and latrines. Unfortunately, the local council was more likely to harass those pursuing these small-scale alternatives than to accommodate and seek to improve them. This did not reduce population growth, and actually undermined service provision, although at least ostensibly the actions were taken in an effort to maintain standards.

As urban settlements grow, low-income groups (including low-income migrants) also benefit when the processes of settlement expansion and densification are suited to their needs. Well-located land tends to become more expensive. However, there are ways of providing more affordable yet liveable housing by



increasing density incrementally or in a participatory fashion. In Karachi, for example, small plot-based approaches have achieved high levels of density (Hasan *et al.* 2010). In Bangkok, housing designed and built with the participation of future residents has achieved levels of density comparable to public housing blocks, but has provided significantly more satisfaction to their residents (Usavagovitwong *et al.* 2013). At the same time, it is also important to open up land for development in response to expected growth (Angel 2008), and attempts at urban containment that ignore the need for low-income housing can be regressive (Angel 2012). In addition to creating housing problems for some of the most vulnerable residents, a lack of affordable housing can exacerbate tensions, where they exist, between existing low-income residents and new migrants.

Unfortunately, both the dominant planning paradigms and some powerful urban interests have a tendency to restrict the supply of affordable urban housing. In periods of rapid population growth and urbanisation, restrictive zoning and by-laws can limit the supply of affordable housing just when it needs to expand. Developer-led housing is often less restricted, but is rarely affordable to low-income groups without extreme overcrowding. In many urban areas of Latin America, Asia and Africa, formal restrictions have been accompanied by informal developments, where many low-income residents live. Such settlements are often a testament to human ingenuity, but services are often extremely limited, particularly when security of tenure is low and governments are restricting services on the grounds that the residents should not be living there. When later attempts are made to upgrade informal settlements, part of the urban cost advantage is lost as retrofitting infrastructure into informal settlements not designed to accommodate it tends to be expensive (Heller 2010: 9). Upgrading through retrofitting is generally greatly preferable to relocating informal settlements and lower-cost options are sometimes available (Hasan 2010), but all other things being equal, proactive planning of low-cost settlements is socially as well as economically preferable, at least from a national perspective.

The lack of proactive planning to accommodate rapid urban growth can come from policies intended to exclude migrants. As a well-known urban economist put it in a recent review of cities and development:

“While it is tempting to view slum development as an inevitable part of the urbanisation process, due to the strain on evolving local fiscal and land market institutions in the face of rapid development, it may be in part intentional, driven by local policies which intend to restrain in-migration through offering very poor living conditions for migrants.” (Henderson 2010) Such an approach may benefit a powerful segment of the urban

population, but it does not benefit the poorest urban dwellers whose populations are growing, the low-income migrants looking to find a foothold in the town or city, or the rural dwellers who remain behind. Moreover, it is an approach that is in danger of pitting different cities against each other, trying to attract capital and repel potentially burdensome or disruptive people. National regulation may be needed in order to overcome such nationally destructive urban competition.

More generally, contestation over urban land can limit the land available for low-income residents and migrants. While the ideal is often presented as one of planners selectively intervening in urban land markets in the interests of the public, reality is always more complex and usually far more problematic. A recent study of land contestation in Karachi revealed a wide range of power brokers, strategic land investments and dysfunctional markets, often involving migrant politics, but with no efficient or equitable provision of land for urban growth (Hasan *et al.* 2013). The struggles over the control of urban land were also central in China’s recent period of urbanisation, although these conflicts have so far been resolved in ways that favour economic growth, if not social equity (Hsing 2010; McGranahan *et al.* 2014). Such politics not only influence the life chances of migrants but also the consequences of rural-urban migration for urban and national development.

Especially in circumstances where ethnic conflict is already rife, one would expect migration to be a potential source of conflict. More generally, one can expect political consequences with migration. Care must be taken not to exaggerate the disruptive consequences of rapid urban population growth, however. A study of urban social disturbances in 55 major cities in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa found that urban social disorder was associated with a lack of consistent political institutions, economic shocks and ongoing civil conflict, but could not corroborate the claim that urban population pressure is a factor (Buhaug and Urdal 2013).

A recent study of urban growth in the emerging economies concluded that “cities and nations must anticipate urbanisation and accommodate urban growth proactively, so as not to be left with an enduring legacy of inequalities and lost opportunities” (McGranahan and Martine 2014). Efforts to curb rural-urban migration have generally not been successful at controlling the process, but have nevertheless created serious hardship and inequalities that often persist long after concerns about controlling urbanisation have past. The often difficult experiences of the BRICS provide ample lessons for other urbanising countries, and are especially relevant as they are located in quite different parts of the world (see Box 1).

## BOX 1. THE RISKS OF EXCLUSION AND THE FAILURE TO ACCOMMODATE URBAN MIGRATION AND POPULATION GROWTH – LESSONS FROM THE BRICS

Rural–urban migration has been contentious in South Africa for more than a century, with the apartheid system the epitome of an oppressive, racially discriminatory system of controls on movement whose negative impacts are still felt today (Turok 2014). When the apartheid system was disbanded, urbanisation speeded up but South Africa's cities are still economically fractured and socially segregated. The durability of the urban form and the power of vested interests have reinforced persistent inequalities between the races and imposed economic costs, well into the democratic era.

Rural–urban migration has also been contentious in Brazil, although resistance was more passive (Martine and McGranahan 2013). In a complex political compromise, many migrants and other low-income urban residents were left to occupy legally ambiguous informal settlements known as *favelas*, with very limited tenure security, access to services and other urban rights. More recently, as Brazil's urban transition has run its course, the country has experimented with various measures to reduce urban inequalities and has tried to enshrine urban rights in its Statute of the City (Rolnik 2013; Santos Carvalho and Rossbach 2010). Inequalities have indeed started to decline, but Brazil remains one of most unequal countries in the world and its *favelas* still reflect the inequalities built into its past urbanisation and the treatment of low-income migrants, which spilled over to affect almost all low-income urban dwellers.

Rural–urban migration of a sort has been actively encouraged in China since liberalization started in earnest, and China is still one of few countries that actively encourage net migration to urban areas (United Nations 2013a). An experimental and incremental approach to urbanisation – built in part around its approach to rural–urban migration – has been central to its immensely successful economic growth strategy (McGranahan *et al.* 2014). However, the *hukou* registration system that still persists in China once played a major role in controlling rural–urban migration and can still greatly limit the rights of those who cannot secure a local *hukou* registration. The *hukou* system was maintained in part to prevent

rural–urban migrants from gaining the rights conferred on registered urban dwellers and becoming a financial burden on local authorities or the central government. However, as even the Chinese central government recognises, phasing out the *hukou* system remains a major challenge, in part because of the social divisions it has helped to entrench.

Net rural–urban migration has been somewhat slower in India than one might have expected given its economic status and performance (Kundu 2014). This is creating problems in rural India, but is also reflected in increasingly harsh treatment of urban informal settlements and 'encroachment', particularly in cities aspiring to 'world city' status. India has been the home to some inspiring organizations of the urban poor (Appadurai 2001). Nevertheless, in Delhi the exclusion of relatively disadvantaged urban dwellers, including but not limited to low-income migrants, has been driven by 'public interest legislation' and participatory processes that might superficially be thought to support inclusive urbanisation (Bhan 2014). This may benefit the urban elites, or perhaps even a majority of existing urban dwellers, but tends to exclude the poorest groups.

Russia urbanised under a Soviet central planning model that favoured a pro-industrial and essentially pro-urban model of development. This places it outside of the conventional debates about urbanisation and excessive rural–urban migration. During the Soviet Union's period of rapid urbanisation between the world wars, the economy did industrialise successfully and growth was sufficient to raise fears in Western countries. However, throughout the Soviet era population movements were relatively tightly controlled, and costs arose from people and enterprises not being able to seek out more economically desirable locations (Becker *et al.* 2014). Cities are clearly not places where people and production facilities should simply be allowed to locate wherever they want, with only property rights and the free market to guide them. In economically successful cities, however, markets do play an important role in guiding location.



Overall, the experiences of the BRICS clearly point to the dangers of attempting to restrict the urban transition. Many of the most serious social problems in South Africa and Brazil stem from their attempts to inhibit rural-urban migration, of which Brazil's was far more passive but nevertheless very consequential. The current government of China has acknowledged the importance of addressing the current system that makes it hard for migrants to become true urban citizens, but it remains to be seen how successful they will be. India is earlier in its urban transition, but also exhibits a tendency to try to restrict its urbanisation, with potentially damaging social as well as economic consequences. Russia's problems are very different, as past controls on population movement did not revolve around attempts to inhibit rural-urban migration, but at least some relate to ill-advised attempts in the past to inhibit other population movements.

Despite the increasingly pro-urban perspective among influential segments of the research community, policymakers in rapidly urbanising countries remain unconvinced, as indicated by the United Nations surveys cited above, which show an increasing aversion to urban

concentration, particularly in low-income countries (United Nations 2013a). Indeed, in the policy arena there has been a relatively constant refrain of concern when there is rapid urbanisation in relatively low-income settings. Part of what makes it difficult to resolve policy debates about whether urbanisation is taking place too fast is that the symptoms urban detractors cite to demonstrate that urbanisation is proceeding too rapidly are the same as those cited by urban supporters as evidence of insufficient investment in public services and of exclusionary policies that make it difficult for low-income groups to access the benefits of urbanisation. Thus, while urban detractors see in 'slums' a surfeit of people who should not have come to the city without a decent place to live, urban proponents see in the same 'slums' legitimate residents struggling in the face of planning failures and outright discrimination. While urban detractors see informal enterprises as places where the urban poor eke out an unproductive living in unacceptable working conditions, proponents see them as innovative endeavours contributing to the urban economy and receiving too little formal support in return.

## 4

# Urban poverty and exposure to risk

Our understanding of urban poverty has advanced much in the last 25 years. From being considered and measured primarily as inadequate income in relation to food costs, it is now understood to have many dimensions and many external causes (see Figure 3). However, there has been less progress in measuring and monitoring urban poverty. This is both in relation to income-based poverty definitions (where national or international poverty lines are still applied without attention to the actual costs of food and non-food needs in each urban centre) and in relation to the other dimensions of poverty listed in Figure 3. For instance, there are no statistics that measure who (within the rural and urban populations) has access to safe and sustainable water supplies (as discussed in more detail later). There are also no data for urban populations for many of the other deprivations listed in Figure 3.

## 4.1 The many dimensions of urban poverty

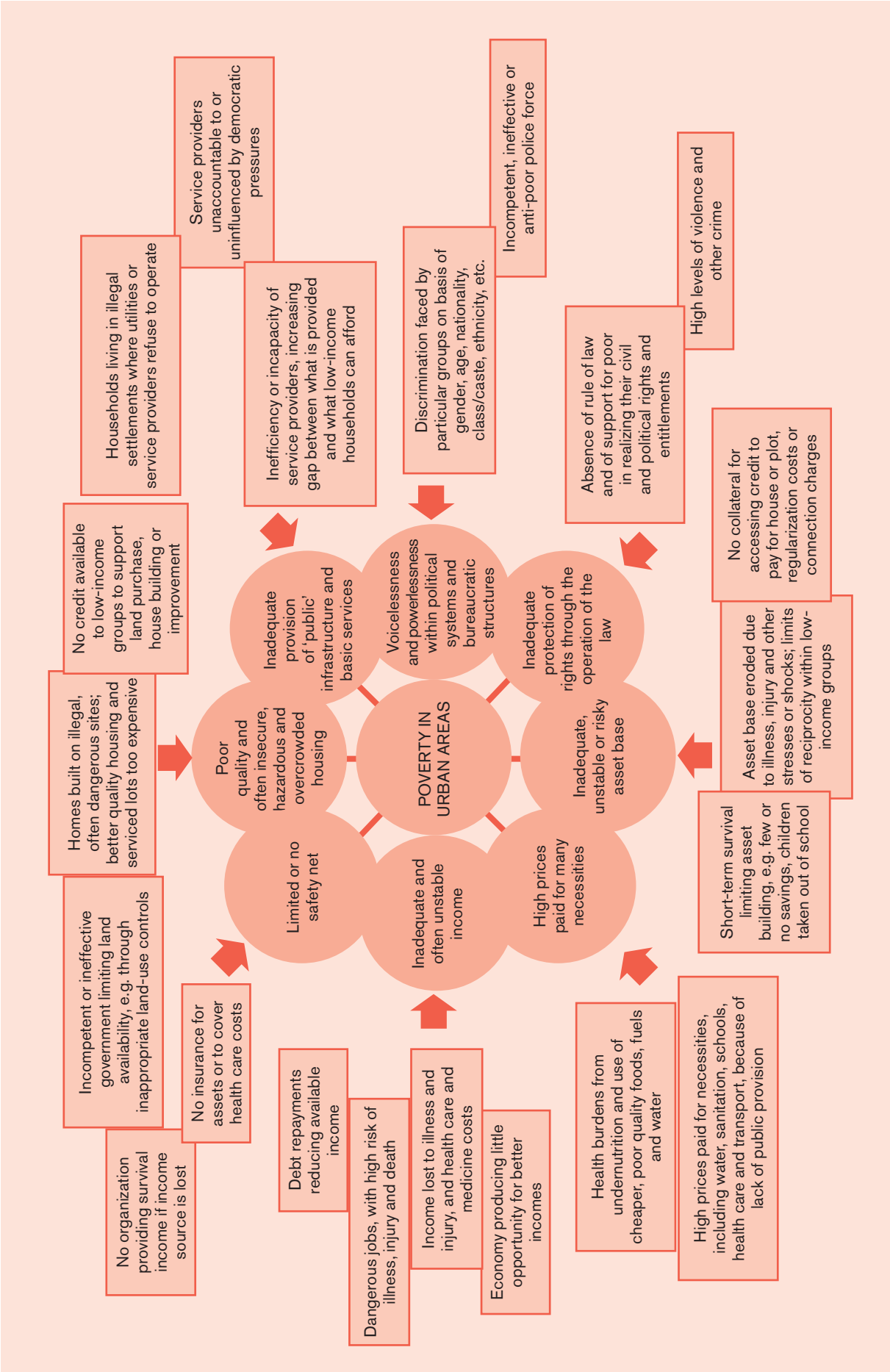
Although references are often made to those who 'live in poverty', it is rare for housing conditions to be considered within definitions of poverty. If monetary poverty lines are applied to urban populations or the population of a city, if these are based primarily on the cost of food they can suggest that there is little urban poverty – when, in fact, around a billion urban dwellers 'live in poverty' in overcrowded tenements or cheap boarding houses, informal settlements or temporary camps (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2013). Since most such housing is considered 'illegal', usually their inhabitants

do not have access to public infrastructure (all-weather roads, water piped to homes, sewer connections and drains) or services (including health care, emergency services, safety nets and pre-schools and schools). What is important here is the recognition that the basis for people's exclusion from infrastructure and service provision is on the basis of the settlements they live in, not whether or not they are migrants.

However, migrants may be disproportionately represented within some of the worst-quality informal settlements (for instance, temporary camps for construction workers or small temporary structures on public land or settlements set up by recent migrants often on the urban periphery). Migration flows to urban areas will generally include a range of income groups (including individuals and households that are not low income) but they will also often include rural migrants pushed to urban areas by drought, livelihood loss or debt and (in many countries) conflict. These groups may have particular difficulties finding accommodation they can afford. They may be concentrated in among the most insecure and worst-served settlements, often in peripheral locations (Khurshida *et al.* 2014).

However, it is important to stress that the rapid growth of those living in informal settlements is fuelled far more by the growing number of people (city-born, have been in the city for many years, recent migrants) who cannot afford to buy, rent or build formal housing. In addition, the growth in informal settlements is not so much related to the rate of a city's population growth (and the contribution of net in-migration to this) as to the competence, capacity and accountability of

Figure 3. Deprivations associated with urban poverty and their immediate external causes



its government. Many cities that have grown rapidly have a low proportion of their population in informal settlements, and are close to universal coverage for basic infrastructure and services (United Cities and Local Governments 2014).

Figure 3 also points to other deprivations associated with urban poverty. Many are in part a consequence of living in informal settlements where local governments and utilities are not allowed to provide services or choose not to do so. These deprivations include a lack of policing (often in areas with high levels of violence and other crimes), a lack of financial services (as these often require legal addresses and official land tenure documents) and no safety net. The lack of provision for public services also means higher prices (and often poor quality provision) for private services – for instance water vendors or kiosks, latrine-emptying services, schools and health care. Those who lack a legal address (and few informal settlements have legal addresses) may not be able to access state entitlements or get on the voter's register. So perhaps the most recent discovery in our learning about the multiple deprivations that low-income urban dwellers suffer is the lack of any influence on how poverty is defined, measured and acted on. But this is now one of the key discussions (ACHR 2014).

## 4.2 Urban poverty and risk

Most of the immediate external causes of the deprivations listed in Figure 3 are risks (for example, homes built on dangerous sites) or causes of risks (for example, incompetent or ineffective government limiting land availability for housing). Below, we highlight health risks, monetary/livelihood risks, shocks and inadequate government risks.

- **HEALTH RISKS:** Our knowledge of health risks associated with urban poverty is informed by the growing number of detailed studies in informal settlements that revealed the very poor living conditions, high levels of overcrowding and deprivations (for provision for water, sanitation, solid waste collection, health care, schools). Some studies show health outcomes associated with such living conditions, such as high infant and child mortality rates (APHRC 2002, 2014), but such studies are rare.
- **MONETARY/LIVELIHOOD RISKS:** Of course, one of the central characteristics of urban poverty is inadequate and/or unstable incomes, and Figure 3 highlights risks associated with this (debt repayments reducing available income; illness or injury reducing incomes and requiring expenditure on health care and medicines) or risks such as dangerous jobs. This may be compounded by discrimination in labour markets against particular groups on the basis of gender, nationality, class/caste or ethnicity.

- **SHOCKS:** For many informal settlements or temporary camps, there is a high risk of eviction – and of disaster as the only land sites they could occupy were areas at high risk of flooding (in watersheds, along rivers) or on steep slopes (the land that middle- and upper-income groups don't want). Households are often reluctant to move to safer ground when flooding risks are high because they fear they will not be allowed back or that their homes will be looted (Hardoy and Pandiella 2009). There are also the shocks that disasters can bring and the absence of measures that reduce risks from these, including an asset base or access to credit or safety nets (including cash transfers).
- **INADEQUATE GOVERNMENT RISKS:** Many of the risks facing low-income groups living in informal settlements are the result of the inadequacies or failures in provision for infrastructure and services by local governments. These underlie many of the health risks noted above – and also the risks associated with a lack of policing.

## 4.3 Limitations in measuring urban poverty

The UN reports that are monitoring progress towards the MDGs almost always include a graph highlighting the very rapid fall in the proportion of the world's population suffering from extreme poverty (United Nations 2013b). Unfortunately, the basis for this graph is the US\$1.25 a day poverty line that is not only applied across all locations in each country but also applied internationally. This is a poverty line that is set so unrealistically low for many urban contexts that it makes urban poverty disappear in most nations and regions. Set a poverty line low enough and no one is poor. The measurement of other aspects of deprivation within the MDGs also fails to understand urban contexts. So what is classified as 'improved' provision for water (which is meant to measure who has safe water) includes public taps or standpipes, tube wells or boreholes, protected dug wells, protected springs or rainwater collection, as if these can greatly reduce health risks in urban contexts. It is still astonishing to have a global system for monitoring progress on water that does not assess whether the water is safe or reliable or accessible (public taps and standpipes are often very difficult to access in urban areas). Also a global system for measuring adequate sanitation that takes no account of living densities and hence whether or not pit latrines contaminate the water table. The UN admits that what it defines as improved provision includes large numbers of people who are actually using water sources that have faecal contamination (WHO and UNICEF 2014).

## 4.4 Data on urban poverty and migration

The conventional sources of data used to measure and monitor many aspects of poverty – the Demographic and Health Surveys and household surveys undertaken by national governments – do not show much interest in migration. So, for instance, the 538-page Demographic and Health Survey 2013 of Nigeria makes no mention of migrants and only one of migration (National Population Commission and ICF International 2014). Censuses generally include some coverage of migration but the data they provide are rarely disaggregated to the level of each city, let alone disaggregated to inform decisions in each district or ward in a city. Censuses are also conducted at best every ten years. And although, in theory, censuses are the one information source that is useful to local governments in helping identify exactly where key deprivations exist (as they should collect data from every household), in practice, local governments rarely get the census data in a form that they can use. In addition, the processing and analysis of census data is so slow that it is already out of date when published. There are also many countries that have had no recent census.

Ultimately, what we face is a massive lack of basic data about urban poverty – and subsequently, a massive lack of data about the characteristics of those individuals or households that have unmet needs, including those considered 'poor'. This includes data on differentials within those living in informal settlements in any urban centre – for instance, by tenure, by risk of eviction, by quality of infrastructure and services and by levels of risk from extreme weather (among many other possible factors). Some of these gaps in data have been addressed by the citywide surveys of informal settlements undertaken by organizations and federations of slum/shack dwellers (see, for instance, Pamoja Trust and Slum Dwellers International 2008; Lindstrom 2014; Dialogue on Shelter and Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation 2014). What you typically get from these city surveys is a lot of data on a large range of informal settlements that highlight certain shared characteristics (insecure tenure, poor quality housing, a lack of public provision for infrastructure and services) but also point to diversity – for instance, in their origin (many originally formed by migrants), their relationship with local government, the mix of tenants and 'owners', and their location with regard to labour markets. These city surveys will often highlight particular settlements with high concentrations of migrants but they do not focus on distinctions between migrants and non-migrants.

Politicians or government agencies often justify evictions that bulldoze informal settlements on the basis that they contained many recent migrants or many

unemployed persons, but enumerations often show that the settlements under threat have a high proportion of people who have been living and working in the city for many years and who are important to the city's economy (Farouk and Owusu 2012).

But data are also lacking on differentials among low-income urban populations on the basis of class, caste, ethnicity and migrant status. The two seminal surveys of informal settlements in Nairobi conducted by the Africa Population and Health Research Center did not include much detail on migrants vs non-migrants (APHRC 2002, 2014). They did, however, include duration of stay in the informal settlements for women aged 15–49 and this showed a highly mobile population. Only 6.4 per cent of the women in this age group had lived in the settlements since birth, although there was great variation in the figures across different settlements, ethnic groups and interviewees' religion.

## 4.5 How low-income groups find accommodation

One of the consequences of inadequate data on housing and living conditions is the unfortunate tendency to set up inaccurate housing categories – so the urban poor are said to live in 'slums'. There is even a UN definition of what constitutes a 'slum' household and statistics have been produced on how the population in 'slums' is changing for most nations and for the world. But since there are no data collected in nations each year on 'slum' populations using the UN definitions, and the data on the specified indicators are inappropriate, the credibility of these statistics is in doubt.

There is an alternative approach that has been in use for more than 35 years (Leeds 1974; Hardoy and Satterthwaite 1989; *Environment and Urbanization* 1989; UN–Habitat 1996). This focuses on the housing sub-markets through which low-income individuals and households buy, build, rent or otherwise occupy accommodation. This highlights the diverse forms of housing in terms of quality, size, price, location (especially with regard to labour markets) and extent of provision for infrastructure and services, and risk of eviction. From this comes a much more detailed understanding of housing issues that includes recognition of how diverse these housing sub-markets are – and how specific they are to each city. This detailed understanding will include some insights into which housing sub-markets are heavily used by migrants and those that are almost exclusively used by long-term or city-born residents. For instance, recent single migrants or migrants that come regularly to a city to sell wares are often housed in cheap boarding houses in central areas – which may include dormitories and 'hot beds' (where a person can rent a bed and, over a



24-hour cycle, two or more persons may sleep in that bed). Migrants whose main aim is to save money and/or remit it to their family often choose the cheapest and worst-quality accommodation to keep down costs – often rental accommodation. Those who are better off, with more stable income sources, will often seek land on which they can build accommodation – and achieve the best compromise between location, secure tenure and access to basic services in relation to what they can afford.

Our knowledge of housing sub-markets in cities is drawn primarily from studies of particular sub-markets in particular cities. These help highlight the groups and sub-groups whose needs and priorities are not easily identified, and the complex micro-politics that may act to exclude them. There are also all the complications of tenure when there are 'owners' and tenants – and often with the owners themselves not having legal tenure.

We have to acknowledge that urban poverty has many aspects, including those related to government failure to ensure service provision. We know that income-based poverty lines have to be set or adjusted for each location to reflect the real costs that low-income groups face. Of course, when applied, they need to be adjusted for household size. But now we also need to recognize the right of the urban poor to contest any poverty line or other poverty measures, and how this can make poverty lines far more useful (ACHR 2014). And beyond this, to recognize the failure of local governments to engage with and respond to the inhabitants of informal settlements as one defining characteristic of urban poverty. We also need to recognize how little data are available on conditions and trends in each local area (ward, borough) in urban areas and the deprivations that these should reveal – and how this limits effective development.

## 5

# Migrants' specific vulnerabilities

Policies that aim to curb rural–urban migration usually equate migration with growing urban poverty on the assumption that most, if not all, migrants are rural poor who 'transfer' their poverty to urban contexts. This does not take into account the diversity of the people who migrate, their reasons for moving, the directions in which they move and the duration of their stay in destination areas. It also does not account for the fact that a significant share of migrants to urban centres do not come from rural areas but from other urban centres. From a rural perspective, there is evidence that permanent migrants from rural areas are often from the wealthiest groups, moving for employment and/or education purposes. For this group, decisions to move are relatively unaffected by conditions in home areas, including the impacts of environmental change (Henry *et al.* 2004; Massey *et al.* 2007). The poorest rural groups, on the other hand, often move between rural areas on a seasonal basis to take advantage of demand for waged agricultural labour. This is, in many cases, to areas dominated by commercial farming or family farming specialising in high value production, such as fresh fruit and vegetables. In the latter case, migrants' remittances are often used to pay wage labourers and so compensate for shortages of family labour, thus creating a migration 'loop' where out-migration, often to urban centres, stimulates in-migration from other rural areas (Tacoli 2011; Hoang *et al.* 2008).

At the same time, poor rural people who lose their livelihoods due to escalating risks, including those related to climatic events, and limited prospects in rural areas, including declining returns from farming and indebtedness, are a growing proportion of rural–urban migrants (ACHR 2014; Krishna *et al.* 2014; Rigg *et al.* 2014). This, however, does not necessarily mean

that they intend to remain permanently in urban areas. Circular migration, that is, moving into urban centres but also out of them, is closely linked to widespread urban poverty and extreme levels of urban informality, both in economic activities and in housing and access to basic services and infrastructure, which are especially acute in sub-Saharan Africa (Potts 2013). For these temporary migrants, often a large proportion of all rural–urban migrants, vulnerability is often exacerbated by their exclusion from citizenship rights and access to social protection programmes. In India, ration cards, which ensure access to subsidised basic foodstuffs and fuel, require proof of residence and therefore a permanent address in the city. This is difficult for migrants, especially temporary ones who may be registered in their home village, and for illiterate migrants who find it difficult if not impossible to navigate the bureaucratic hurdles involved in getting a new card (Mitra and Singh 2011). Census data on net in-migration to urban centres can thus hide significant out-migration as well as temporary migration. The latter includes internally displaced persons (IDPs), the majority of whom do not live in camps, and a substantial proportion prefer to live in urban areas because of the opportunities and relative safety these provide; but in most cases, IDPs are highly mobile and tend to move in and out of cities (Metcalf *et al.* 2011; Brookings and LSE 2013).

Migrants are thus not a homogenous group, making it difficult to devise specific policies for 'migrants'. At the same time, while not all migrants are poor, in many cities and towns they form a disproportionate share of the urban poor. A large number of urban residents, both migrants and non-migrants, rely on low-paid, insecure jobs, and in some cities one half to three quarters of the population live in settlements that lack

adequate basic infrastructure and access to services, and where housing and shelter are greatly inadequate. Understanding the disadvantages faced by migrants in urban areas requires taking into account the wider context of poverty in cities of the global South, as described in Section 4 in this paper.

Analyses of disadvantaged groups within urban areas tend to be based on income (and/or assets), housing conditions and access to basic services. Data are in many cases disaggregated by sex, age and sometimes by ethnic origin. However, migrant status is rarely taken into account. The limited data available suggest that while there are no significant differences between migrants and non-migrants among non-poor groups, migrants are over-represented among the urban poor, and in many cities they constitute a substantial proportion of the poorest groups. This is also the case in rapidly growing economies such as Vietnam (see Box 2).

Unstable, low-paid jobs in the informal sector are common among the urban poor, but the situation is often exacerbated for recent migrants who lack skills, education and especially the social networks to gain access to better employment. Again, it is difficult to make generalisations: among residents of low-income settlements in 11 cities in Southern Africa, about half of both migrant and non-migrant workers do not earn their incomes from regular wage work (Crush 2012). However, non-migrants are more likely to run their own businesses, either in the formal or informal sectors, and are also more likely to engage in some form of urban farming, suggesting somehow easier access to land and capital (Crush 2012). The same study shows that levels of food insecurity among the urban poor is disturbingly high, but even higher for migrants at 78 per cent, compared to non-migrants at 65 per cent. Recent migrants tend to maintain close links with relatives in rural areas, and while this constitutes a safety net

## BOX 2. MIGRATION AND URBAN POVERTY IN VIETNAM

The introduction of *doi moi* (reform) in the mid-1980s has had a substantial impact on rural–urban migration and poverty in Vietnam, as well as on emerging inequalities. The opening of the economy to foreign investment has created employment in manufacturing and attracted large numbers of migrant workers, often young women, while at the same time, the erosion of Vietnam's 'iron rice bowl' policy and the de facto privatisation of farming, together with declining terms of trade between farming and non-farming, has effectively reduced rural livelihood opportunities and pushed rural residents towards the expanding urban areas. But while controls over personal mobility have loosened and access to opportunities has grown, the persistence of the household registration system penalises migrants in several ways.

Rising levels of prosperity are reflected in steeply declining aggregate rates of poverty: the poverty headcount fell from 58 per cent in the early 1990s to less than 10 per cent in 2010. Poverty is still seen as a predominantly rural issue, especially among ethnic minorities in remote mountain areas, and urban centres tend to show much lower rates of poverty. However, censuses and household surveys usually miss out temporary and unregistered migrants, especially in urban areas. One exception is the Urban Poverty Survey conducted by UNDP in 2009, which includes all households, regardless of their length of stay (thus including temporary migrants), as well as individuals moving independently, who were previously excluded from household surveys. Findings show that the proportion of migrants is especially high in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) (more than 20

per cent) and Hanoi (more than 11 per cent). In both cities, migrants account for about two thirds of all poor, using the national 2006 poverty line and the international US\$1.25/day poverty line. Moreover, the most vulnerable migrants – those who rent shared accommodation and work in informal sector jobs, often moving frequently within the city – are less likely to be included in the 'poor lists' compiled annually by local officials, and which determine eligibility to targeted poverty reduction programmes and public social welfare benefits.

Multi-dimensional measurements of poverty show that while income-based poverty is low in both HCMC and Hanoi, poor groups face high levels of disadvantage regarding access to social security, to adequate housing and infrastructure and access to education and health services. This is higher for migrants than for non-migrants. One particular concern for all poor groups is the limited access to health services. Especially for low-skilled migrants, labour is often the only source of income, and informal sector work often involves significant risk. An accident or illness can result not only in a lack of income but also in substantial expense for treatment, even for quite minor illnesses, and compromises families' and individuals' long-term prospects by forcing them to sell assets or to become indebted.

Sources: Hoang *et al.* 2013; Rigg *et al.* 2014



it is also often a drain on their resources, since the remittances they send are often essential for repaying debts. Indebtedness is an often overlooked but growing concern for migrants, including those engaging in cross-border and international movement, and is the result of rising economic pressures in both home and destination areas and of the escalating costs of moving (Basa *et al.* 2012; Krishna *et al.* 2014).

Access to housing is a major concern in urban areas. For migrant workers moving without their families, renting a room or indeed a bed and sharing facilities is common, especially when incomes are low and shelter is expensive. For single migrant women, sharing accommodation is important since, in most cases, they are under the moral obligation to send remittances to their relatives in home areas. As well as reducing costs, sharing can also increase their safety. Renting accommodation and sharing space with non-relatives is,

however, not limited to migrants, and a large proportion of residents of urban informal settlements in Africa, Asia and Latin America are tenants who rent rooms from people who may be as poor as them (Kumar 2010; Rakodi 2010). With time, migrants are able to build assets and invest in education and skills. This, however, typically takes several generations, and the differences in access to opportunities between recent migrants and those who have settled for several generations can be striking (see Box 3). Duration of migration and 'age' of low-income settlements somehow overlap: older settlements are often home to the descendants of migrants rather than to people who moved. More recent settlements, on the other hand, tend to be home to recent migrants and people displaced within the city – as in the case of Old Fadama in Accra (Awumbila *et al.* 2014). In many cases they are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards, as the need to

### BOX 3. COMPARING 'FIRST' AND 'FOURTH' GENERATION 'SLUMS' IN BANGALORE, INDIA

In India, low-income urban settlements are officially divided in two categories: 'notified' or 'recognised slums' and 'non-notified slums' – effectively a residual category. However, this distinction does not reflect the vast differences between settlements. A recent study compares long-established notified 'slums' and recent, non-notified ones in Bangalore. In the notified 'slums', hardly anyone has recently arrived in the city: indeed, more than 70 per cent of residents have lived in Bangalore for four or more generations. This is reflected in the settlements' housing and infrastructure: permanent constructions prevail, and electricity and drinking water connections are commonly available. Residents are better described as settled lower-middle-class rather than poor, and most of them have house appliances and own mobile phones. Education and home ownership are the main categories of expenditure.

The contrast with the 'first generation slum' is striking. These are home to recent migrants from rural areas who retain strong links with their villages, with many families split between the two locations. Migration is primarily a response to the growing uncertainty of rural livelihoods, with droughts and erratic rainfall resulting in the accumulation of debts, and residents represent some of the poorest people in rural India. The typical shelter is a tent shared between tenants who pay rent in cash, with no written leases and

the constant fear of eviction. About 40 per cent of residents had been in Bangalore for between one and five years, and another 40 per cent between five and ten years. The vast majority belong to Scheduled Castes – between 70 and 100 per cent, compared to 11.4 per cent of Bangalore's total urban population – and are mainly landless or own very small plots in their villages. Infrastructure in these settlements is non-existent: there is no connection to the electricity network, water is purchased from vendors, and garbage removal and security services are unknown. Bus stops are located more than three kilometres away, as are health centres, and there is no trace of government, NGO or other outside support. The primary category of expenditure is the repayment of debts and supporting relatives in home areas, leaving very little for education and housing – and thus for opportunities to access better employment. These kinds of settlements hardly serve as locations to build a better life for newly arrived migrants. Lacking identity papers in the city and not being registered as voters, they are unable to attract political patronage or official support. From being the poorest groups in rural areas, they have become the poorest in urban centres. At the same time, however, migration remains an important survival strategy even though it does not result in the accumulation of assets.

Source: Krishna *et al.* 2014.

secure access to employment opportunities, combined with limited availability of land, means that these settlements are often in relatively central locations – but typically unsuitable if not downright dangerous, which is why they are ‘available’. This, in turn, is exacerbated by the lack of basic infrastructure and services.

## 5.1 Migrant women in the cities

Risk is not inherent but, rather, socially constructed as it is the result of exposure to hazards, and the vulnerability of different groups is based on their ability to cope and adapt to such hazards (Cardona *et al.* 2012). Risks and disasters happen when vulnerable people are unable to cope with hazards. Women are often portrayed as being especially vulnerable because of their socially constructed roles, and women-headed households are also generally depicted as being the poorest and, as such, most vulnerable to both environmental and non-environmental hazards. However, this is not necessarily the case, as women – not unlike migrants – are not a homogenous group and several factors that cross-cut with gender need to be taken into account (Bradshaw 2013; Chant 2013). Nevertheless, as women migrate to urban centres in increasing numbers and as the proportion of women-headed households is typically higher in urban areas, gender is an important dimension of migrants’ vulnerability in the cities.

The number of women migrating to cities in the global South has generally been growing in recent decades, albeit with substantial regional variations that reflect specific socioeconomic and cultural contexts. In many cases, migration means greater independence for women, with better opportunities for paid employment outside the family, better access to services, and lower fertility rates, as well as less rigid social norms and values. But while migration and urbanisation involve often profound changes in gender relations, benefits can be minimal for the large number of women living in low-income settlements and working in low-paid, insecure jobs.

In urban areas, gender-selective rural–urban migration is a significant factor affecting urban sex ratios, and one that is influenced by both socioeconomic and cultural transformations. While rural–urban movement has long been male-dominated, a growing number of women have moved to urban areas in recent decades, looking for employment, better health care or as a result of conflict (Hughes and Wickeri 2011). Nevertheless, regional variations are such that few generalisations can be made. For example, in sub-Saharan African nations for which data are available, men tend to outnumber women in urban centres. In some cases, the imbalance has increased: in Kenya in 1999, there were 120

men for 100 women in areas classed as urban, and that increased to 146 in 2005. But at the same time, in Burkina Faso the number of men for 100 women declined from 103 in 1999 to 93 in 2008, reflecting an overall regional trend towards more balanced urban sex ratios (UN Statistics Division 2008). In Central and South America, on the other hand, more women live in urban areas and more men in rural areas. This relates partly to long-standing high levels of urbanisation, whereby sex ratios are determined mainly by natural population growth – which tends to be better balanced – rather than rural–urban migration. But it also relates to more women than men moving to urban areas, where they can find employment opportunities in domestic service, restaurants and retail employment (Barbieri *et al.* 2009). In Asia, urban sex ratios are significantly unbalanced and reflect national ones, with the traditional preference for a son being the main cause: in India, the urban sex ratio remained unchanged between 1999 and 2008, with more than 111 men for 100 women. In much of Southeast Asia, however, selective migration of women to cities to work in export-oriented manufacturing has influenced urban sex ratios (Hoang *et al.* 2008; Rao 2011).

It should also be kept in mind that while employment opportunities in urban areas are a key driver of gender-selective migration, in many cases the decision to move is equally the result of discrimination against women regarding access to rural land and inheritance. This is especially problematic for women-headed households, who risk losing critical assets as described below. Among younger women, abusive family relations are also often a reason for moving to the city (Mabala and Cooksey 2008).

The proportion of urban-based, women-headed households is generally higher than in rural areas, and in many cases significantly so. The key factor is the availability of local income-generating activities for separated or widowed women. It is still difficult for women to claim land when their marriage ends, as land is traditionally still seen as belonging to men; even when this is not the case, there is the need for labour, which can be provided either by grown-up children or wage labourers – but children are often too young or in education and paid workers are affordable only by better-off farming households. Even when women have equal land rights, cultural constraints, lack of labour and capital and the need to provide for unpaid care work make it difficult for women-headed households to rely on farming, and wider income-generating opportunities in urban areas are a main reason for migrating. These constraints explain the much higher prevalence of women heading their households among rural–urban migrant women in such diverse nations as Honduras, Tanzania and Ethiopia (Bradshaw 1995; Baker 1995, 2012).

The concentration of employment opportunities in the industrial and service sectors in urban areas is the root cause of urbanisation and rural–urban migration. Employment in these sectors is also deeply gendered: women constitute a high proportion of workers in export-oriented manufacturing and domestic services, which helps explain the generally growing proportion of women migrating to cities of the global South (Tacoli and Chant 2014).

Recent estimates also show that women are more likely than men to be employed in the informal sector outside farming, with most of this type of work concentrating in urban areas. In sub-Saharan Africa, 74 per cent of women who are non-agricultural workers are informally employed, compared to 61 per cent of men, while this proportion is 54 per cent of women and 48 per cent of men in Latin America. In South Asia, the proportion is similar – 83 per cent for women and 82 per cent for men, while in urban China women account for 36 per cent of informal sector workers, compared to 30 per cent of men (Vanek *et al.* 2014). Defining the informal sector is notoriously difficult, as it includes a wide range of diverse activities. For poor urban residents, and many poor migrants, its main characteristics are perhaps irregular and low earnings, often on a daily basis and depending on whether work can be found on that day; also, often dangerous working conditions, which can result in injury and exposure to additional financial insecurity as a result of not being able to work and earn and to the costs of health treatment. On the other hand, finding employment in the informal sector is certainly easier.

Domestic service is the other major category of employment for women in urban areas in low- and middle-income countries. In South Africa in 2004, domestic service was the second-largest employment sector for black women, employing some 755,000 workers, a large proportion of them internal migrants from rural areas (Peberdy and Dinat 2005). Work in private households is also a major source of employment for rural–urban migrant women in Vietnam (Hoang *et al.* 2008) and in Tanzania (Mabala and Cooksey 2008). In Latin America, an estimated 7.6 million people are employed as domestic workers, the majority migrant women (Tokman 2010). Wages are low, and while accommodation provided by employers makes it relatively attractive, especially for migrants, long working hours, potential abuse by employers and social isolation increase workers' vulnerability.

But gender disadvantage is more evident in the non-income dimensions of poverty, which are more likely to affect women than men. Inadequate and expensive accommodation, limited access to basic infrastructure and services, exposure to environmental hazards and high rates of crime and violence are deeply gendered dimensions of urban poverty. Caring responsibilities, including cooking, washing and looking after children and sick relatives can be extremely demanding in contexts such as the 'first generation slum' described in Box 3. Women's primary responsibility for the majority of unpaid care work is an additional, considerable burden, and significantly increases the vulnerability of recent migrants who do not have the support of family and friends and who do not have access to national and municipal support services.

The specific sectors of the urban labour market where unskilled migrants with limited social networks tend to concentrate are a source of vulnerability, as they rarely enable workers to establish an asset base, including housing, that can reduce their exposure to hazards – either economic, social or environmental. Urban poor groups who are not recent migrants also have to cope with such disadvantages; however, recent migrants in most cases seem to account for a disproportionate share of the urban poor, and of the poorest groups among them. In keeping with the notion that it is important to avoid thinking of migrants as a homogenous group, and indeed of the urban poor as a homogenous group (ACHR 2014), disaggregating disadvantage along gender lines shows the significance of both income and non-income poverty.

## 6

# Conclusions: managing migration or addressing urban poverty?

In this paper, we have argued that in many cases when urban governments try to reduce or control rural–urban migration, this also affects low-income residents and not just migrants. Blaming urban poverty on migrants is not realistic, as not all migrants are poor. In many cities, however, migrants form a large proportion of the urban poor with whom they share income and non-income disadvantages, including difficulties in finding adequate housing and in accessing services. At the same time, like the majority of the urban poor, they work long hours in low-paid, insecure and unsafe jobs and are exposed to a wide range of environmental hazards because of the lack of basic infrastructure in most low-income and informal settlements.

Cities and municipal governments have a huge importance in addressing the needs of their residents. But in many cases, they lack resources and capacity and, perhaps most importantly, political will, as described in Section 3. There is also an underestimated lack of information on who lives in informal low-income settlements; more accurate data, including migrant status, is clearly a priority, since in many cases migrants make up a considerable share of those groups. One key disadvantage for migrants is the lack of registration in the destination area. But lack of full civic rights is in

many instances linked to the place where people live rather than to their migrant status. In India, approximately half of all ‘slums’ are not recognised by the government, with huge implications for their residents, ranging from lack of access to basic services and infrastructure to difficulty in accessing official documents because informal residential arrangements make it impossible to prove residency. This, in turn, has wide-ranging impacts on low-income groups, including poor migrants, who cannot access social protection programmes and compensation after disasters and calamities (Subbaraman *et al.* 2012).

It is also difficult to understand migrant-specific policies in isolation from the wider context of economic growth models and their social and political corollaries. In China, the public rental housing scheme, implemented throughout the major cities, is the only programme that, since 2010, explicitly addresses the housing needs of migrants who are not entitled to the local household registration (*hukou*). However, few migrants have benefited from it. In Shanghai, there is a considerable gap between the policy and its implementation, and low-skilled migrants are deliberately ignored despite their contribution to the city's economy. This is consistent with the city's development strategy, which seeks to

reduce labour-intensive manufacturing in favour of high-level services and is therefore making an effort to attract highly skilled migrants while at the same time discouraging low-skilled ones from extending their stay in Shanghai (Shen 2015). Widespread evictions of low-income households are increasingly commonplace in cities of the global South that aspire to a status of 'world city', with prestige projects funded by international investors and inhabited by predominantly middle-income residents. In this framing, the status of migrants – even after several decades – contributes to the marginalisation of low-income residents of informal settlements (Bhan 2014).

Inclusive urbanisation that addresses the needs of diverse low-income groups, be they migrants or long-term residents, remains elusive in many fast-growing cities of the global South. There are, however, several examples of initiatives and programmes to reduce urban poverty that build on the capacities of the residents of low-income settlements to work

with local governments in providing the necessary but generally missing information. One example is that of enumerations conducted by local grassroots organisations (Karanja 2010; Farouk and Owusu 2012). These enumerations include temporary residents, people sharing accommodation and all those who are typically 'invisible' in official censuses and surveys – that is, a large proportion of migrants. Collaboration between organisations of residents of low-income urban settlements and local governments is also essential in the long term with regard to the provision of adequate and affordable housing and basic services to reduce deprivation (Satterthwaite and Mitlin 2014). Overall, however, perhaps the most important element in successfully managing fast-growing cities is ensuring full citizenship rights to all groups. The lack of this is often a key disadvantage for migrants; but it is also a root cause of the marginalisation of many low-income groups.



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Rural-urban migration continues to attract much interest, but also growing concern. Migrants are often blamed for increasing urban poverty, but not all migrants are poor. In many cities, however, migrants form a large proportion of the urban poor with whom they share income and non-income disadvantages, including difficulties in finding adequate housing and in accessing services. Like the majority of the urban poor, they work long hours in low-paid, insecure and unsafe jobs and are exposed to a wide range of environmental hazards because most low-income and informal settlements lack basic infrastructure. In many cases when urban governments try to reduce or control rural-urban migration, this also affects low-income residents and not just migrants.

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