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Rural–urban migration and socioeconomic transformation in India's secondary cities: A systematic literature review

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Abstract
Background: India's urban transition is increasingly dispersed across small and intermediate settlements, yet scholarship and policy frequently privilege metropolitan migration.
Objective: This review synthesizes evidence on how rural–urban and circular mobility intersect with labour-market transformation, housing, social inclusion, land-use change and governance in India's secondary cities. Methods: A structured, transparent search and critical evidence synthesis was undertaken using retrievable journal-publisher records, indexed bibliographic pages and official statistical reports available up to October 2026. Sixteen directly relevant peer-reviewed articles were selected for the focused evidence matrix, government reports were used for context. The review is PRISMA-informed, but it is not represented as an exhaustive registered database review because full Scopus and Web of Science export histories, deduplication logs and independent dual screening were unavailable.
Results: Findings highlight heterogeneous migration pathways, high non-monetary costs of seasonal mobility, context-specific roles for small cities in employment and social mobility, informal, gendered and tenure-based exclusion, and urban growth arising from in situ transformation as well as in-migration. Some evidence is metropolitan and cannot be assumed transferable to smaller cities. Implications: Place-sensitive planning, migrant-inclusive services, portable entitlements, stronger municipal capacity and longitudinal city-level evidence are priorities.
Conclusion: Migration is one constituent of a broader socio-spatial urban transition rather than a sufficient explanation for urban growth. Future systematic reviews should test these relationships against a reproducibly enumerated database corpus.

Keywords: Internal migration, rural–urban migration, circular migration, secondary cities, small towns, urbanization, informal employment, socio-spatial inequality, India

Introduction

Migration and urbanization are commonly presented as a linear transfer of labour from agriculture to industrial and service centres. This representation captures an important component of structural transformation but often presumes a metropolitan destination, permanent residence and a straightforward relation between mobility and urban population growth. India presents a more differentiated geography: villages may acquire urban characteristics without substantial net in-migration, small cities mediate movement between rural and metropolitan economies, and many households maintain activities and social relations at multiple locations (Denis *et al*., 2012; Randolph, 2024; Naik, 2024) [3, 13, 19].

The stakes are large. According to the Census of India, approximately 377.1 million residents—31.16% of India's population—lived in urban areas in 2011 [2]; the number of towns rose from 5,161 in 2001 to 7,935 in 2011 (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India [ORGI], 2011; NIRDPR, 2015–2016). The urban share is a 2011 [2, 12, 16] census benchmark rather than an estimate of the population in 2026. The additional towns partly reflect classification and institutional changes; consequently, the observed increase cannot be attributed entirely to migration. Guin (2019) and Pradhan (2013) [6, 18] show that small-town growth and recognition are central to understanding this transition.

A purely aggregate reading also hides unequal mobility. The Economic Survey 2016 [12]–17 estimated that interstate work-related flows averaged approximately nine million annually during 2011–2016, based on railway passenger movement and alternative methods; these are estimates of movement rather than a current census enumeration of unique migrants (Ministry of Finance, 2017). Keshri and Bhagat (2013) [10] emphasize temporary labour movement and its association with socioeconomic disadvantage, while Imbert and Papp (2020a) [7] demonstrate that higher urban earnings may coexist with substantial costs of urban living and working. Such observations complicate a simple wage-differential explanation.

Secondary cities deserve independent attention because their economic bases, infrastructure capacities, labour recruitment networks and relationships with surrounding villages are distinct from those of million-plus metropolitan regions. Guin (2019) [6] argues that small towns are active urbanization sites yet disadvantaged in service delivery and policy attention. Naik's (2024) [13] study of Mangalore and Kishangarh demonstrates that smaller cities can shape migrant youth aspirations and employment trajectories through local networks; these opportunities may be accompanied by unequal access to supportive urban environments. The present article integrates these insights into a single analytical account of socioeconomic transformation.

Research objectives and questions

The objectives are to (i) classify the principal migration pathways connecting rural origins and secondary cities; (ii) synthesize socioeconomic changes in employment, livelihoods, housing, inclusion and land use; (iii) examine how institutions and settlement classification mediate these outcomes; and (iv) identify research priorities and practical policy responses. Four guiding questions structure the analysis: What induces or constrains rural–urban mobility? What forms of economic and social change are associated with receiving towns? How does spatial and social differentiation shape migrants' outcomes? What distinguishes transformation caused by migration from urbanization that occurs without net in-migration?

Conceptual framework and definitions

1. What counts as a secondary city?

'Secondary city' has no universally agreed Indian statutory definition. For this review it denotes non-metropolitan urban centres that perform intermediary functions—trade, education, health, administration, processing and labour-market coordination—between rural hinterlands and larger cities. Settlement size alone is insufficient; functional connectivity, economic centrality and administrative status must also be considered. India's census distinguishes statutory towns, constituted by law, from census towns meeting population, occupational and density thresholds; it does not equate all census towns with municipalities (ORGI, 2011) [16]. Hence, empirical studies should state explicitly whether they examine statutory towns, census towns, district headquarters, small urban agglomerations or intermediate cities.

The 2011 census criteria for census towns are population of at least 5,000, density of at least 400 persons per square kilometre and at least 75% of male main workers employed outside agriculture; statutory towns are designated administratively (Government of India, Indian Economic Service, n.d.). This distinction matters because rural governance may persist after a settlement acquires urban demographic characteristics (Chakrabarti & Mukherjee, 2020) [1].

2. Migration pathways and the problem of measurement

Mobility may be permanent, temporary, seasonal, circular, stepwise, commuting or return-oriented. Permanent residence measures capture a different process from multi-local labour circulation, which can involve frequent trips without a change in habitual residence. Migration due to marriage also differs from migration for employment, but both appear in broad migration tabulations unless the analyst disaggregates reasons. The census D-03 series distinguishes last residence, duration, rural/urban origin and reasons for migration (ORGI, 2011) [2]. Seasonal migrants can be underrepresented in household-based destination surveys, while administrative records may not trace multiple trips by the same person.

Keshri and Bhagat (2013) [10] find that temporary labour migration in India is strongly associated with poorer socio-economic positions and differs from permanent mobility. A destination-oriented model which counts only new city residents will therefore miss people who reshape urban labour supply while remaining demographically registered or socially anchored elsewhere.

3. An integrated analytic model

This review uses a six-stage conceptual sequence: (1) origin conditions and aspirations; (2) household and network-mediated mobility; (3) destination labour-market entry; (4) housing, care and social incorporation; (5) feedback to origin areas through remittances, return and consumption; and (6) changes in urban form and institutions. Feedback runs in both directions: better town-level opportunities can encourage mobility, while weak services or high housing costs can produce circularity, exclusion or reverse moves. This model is an interpretive synthesis rather than a statistically tested causal pathway (Selod & Shilpi, 2021; Naik, 2024; Randolph, 2024) [13, 19, 20].

Review methodology

1. Search design and scope

The review followed an auditable structured-search approach through October 2026. Search terms combined migration concepts ('rural urban migration', 'internal migration', 'seasonal migration', 'circular migration', 'return migration') with settlement concepts ('small town', 'secondary city', 'census town', 'urbanisation', 'urban expansion') and outcome concepts ('labour', 'livelihood', 'housing', 'gender', 'social inclusion', 'informality', 'services') and the geographic identifier India. Publisher landing pages, bibliographic indexes, institutional research pages and official Census/Economic Survey sources were checked to verify titles, years, DOIs and substantive relevance. This is a focused, reproducible source-based synthesis, not a claim that subscription-only databases were exhaustively queried.

Eligibility required a peer-reviewed article with clear relevance to at least one of the three intersections: migration and rural–urban linkage; non-metropolitan urbanization and settlement change; or socioeconomic inclusion of migrants in Indian cities. Empirical, theoretical and review papers were eligible. Non-Indian studies were eligible only when directly useful for explaining migration mechanisms or evaluating review evidence. Official statistical and policy documents were used as contextual rather than peer-reviewed analytic evidence. The period emphasized 2010–October 2026 with one foundational pre-2010 methodological context treated separately when relevant.

2. Screening transparency and evidentiary boundaries

Sixteen journal articles met the targeted relevance screen and are summarized in **Table 1**. The count denotes the explicitly selected and verified analytical corpus in this document; it is NOT an estimate of all eligible studies in Scopus or Web of Science. Since database exports, a complete identification log, deduplication record and independent dual-review decisions were not available, identification-to-inclusion PRISMA flow counts cannot be substantiated. PRISMA 2020 informs the reporting structure and limitations, but a claim of full PRISMA compliance would require a fresh registered or archived search with reproducible database records (Page *et al*., 2021).

The synthesis uses study-level narrative comparison rather than pooled quantitative meta-analysis because source designs include theoretical accounts, census analysis, econometric identification, surveys, comparative case studies and systematic reviews. These designs do not

estimate a single commensurate effect. Claims from direct smaller-city studies are distinguished from evidence drawn from major metros and from nationwide macro-analyses. Where only abstracts or publisher summaries were accessible, conclusions are restricted to findings supported by those materials.

3. Evidence matrix and methodological appraisal

Table 1: Focused analytical corpus (16 peer-reviewed journal articles). Studies are deliberately heterogeneous; their inclusion does not establish a population-representative sample of the full literature.

Source	Design / setting	Contribution to synthesis	Appraisal caveat
Guin (2019) [6]	Review / Indian small towns	Intermediary functions; infrastructural neglect	Review; heterogeneous definitions
Selod & Shilpi (2021) [20]	Review / developing countries	Returns, costs, barriers to rural–urban migration	Broad cross-country transferability
Naik (2024) [13]	Two-city qualitative study / India	Youth migrant incorporation and social networks	Small purposive case base
Randolph (2024) [19]	Spatial-demographic analysis / India	Urbanization may occur despite negative net migration	Regional pattern, not universal
Chakrabarti & Mukherjee (2020) [1]	Theory + state-level analysis	Economic origins of census towns	West Bengal empirical focus
Pradhan (2013) [18]	Census analysis / India	In situ urbanization; new census towns	Reclassification-sensitive
Denis *et al*. (2012) [3]	Conceptual-spatial / India	Subaltern urbanization and small settlements	Interpretative classifications
Keshri & Bhagat (2013) [10]	NSS-based regional study / India	Temporary migration and deprivation	Older labour mobility data
Imbert & Papp (2020a) [7]	Econometric / rural India	Non-monetary costs of urban work	Specific region and seasonal workers
Imbert & Papp (2020b) [7]	Econometric / India	Rural public works and urban labour supply	Policy identification, not all destinations
Srivastava (2020) [21]	Critical policy analysis / India	COVID disruption of circular migrant workers	Crisis-specific insights
Srivastava (2022) [22]	Structural labour analysis / India	Precarity in urban informal employment	Interpretative and macro focus
Iyer & Rao (2024) [9]	Survey + qualitative / Bengaluru	Gendered informal settlement inclusion	Metropolitan case; transfer caution
Desai (2025) [4]	Urban housing case / Ahmedabad	Diverse living arrangements of circular migrants	Metropolitan construction sector
Kusuma & Babu (2018) [11]	Systematic review / India	Internal migrant health and healthcare barriers	Mixed source populations
Chung *et al*. (2022)	Systematic review / global cities	Climate mobility and informality	Large-city and regional skew

Results: pathways linking migration and secondary-city change

1. Employment, aspirations and the economic calculus of mobility

Across studies, employment opportunities matter but do not translate mechanically into mobility. Selod and Shilpi (2021) [20] synthesize evidence that wages, labour demand, institutions, household insurance arrangements and environmental shocks jointly shape migration. Imbert and Papp (2020a) [7] document cases in rural India where workers preferred lower-paying local public works over migration to city construction sites despite a 35% differential in daily earnings; their analysis points to substantial non-monetary costs of destination life and work. Hence gross destination wages are a weak proxy for net household welfare unless housing, risk, travel, safety and separation costs are counted.

The employment profile of secondary cities is particularly mixed: small manufacturing units, transport, wholesale and retail trade, repair, hospitality, education, construction and public administration may coexist with farm-linked processing and commuter-based work. Guin (2019) [6] interprets this heterogeneity as an urbanization opportunity, while Naik (2024) [13] shows that employment, social networks and youth aspirations jointly shape inclusion in Mangalore and Kishangarh. The evidence suggests that smaller cities need not be merely temporary staging points for metropolitan migration; they can be independent livelihood destinations, although career progression and job security may remain constrained.

Public programmes at origins can alter destination labour supply. Imbert and Papp (2020b) [7] find that the rural employment guarantee affected short-term migration and urban labour-market outcomes; the effect depends on programme access and seasonal work patterns, not on a universal aversion to cities. These studies support a two-sided policy perspective in which strengthening rural livelihoods and improving destination work standards are complementary, rather than mutually exclusive, development goals.

2. Circular migration, multi-local households and uneven social mobility

Temporary and circular mobility produce outcomes that are often missed by permanent residence statistics. Keshri and Bhagat (2013) [10] distinguish seasonal economic survival strategies from more selective permanent relocation. Workers may retain land, family care and social identities in villages while earning wages in towns, financing education and household consumption, or diversifying risk. The resulting transformation is simultaneously rural and urban: secondary cities provide work and markets, while origin

villages continue to provide reproduction, security and social support (Keshri & Bhagat, 2013; Srivastava, 2022) [10, 22].

Yet mobility cannot be equated with upward mobility. Srivastava (2022) [22] links circular migration with broader informalization and insecure employment, arguing that economic growth can coexist with precarious labour institutions. The COVID-19 shock exposed those vulnerabilities: workers without durable housing, savings, contracts or portable benefits faced abrupt loss of livelihoods and difficult return journeys (Srivastava, 2020) [21]. These observations concern a major crisis and cannot be read as typical annual patterns, but they reveal structural vulnerabilities that destination towns may reproduce at smaller scales.

3. Migrant incorporation, caste, gender and differentiated opportunity

Access to opportunities is stratified by gender, age, caste, occupation, origin networks and prior residence. Naik (2024) [13] finds that youth mobility and incorporation in smaller Indian cities are mediated by patronage-based social networks; the same informal networks that ease labour-market entry may restrict opportunities for migrants who lack influential contacts. Thus economic dynamism does not necessarily imply inclusive social mobility.

Evidence on gendered urban incorporation from Bengaluru adds a cautionary perspective. Iyer and Rao (2024) [9], using survey and qualitative material from informal settlements, find that length of residence influences inclusion and that migrants' strategies differ by gender. This is not direct evidence of conditions in every secondary city. It nevertheless identifies mechanisms to investigate there, including residential stability, childcare, access to public space, safety, documentation and connections to local institutions. Analyses that treat all migrants as a single employment category obscure these differences.

4. Housing, tenure and basic service access

Migration raises demand for low-cost accommodation near labour sites, transport nodes and informal economic clusters. But receiving settlements may lack affordable formal rental stock and inclusive planning. In Ahmedabad, Desai (2025) [4] identifies informal rental housing, squatter and homeless settlements, and employer-linked worksite housing as distinct arrangements for circular construction migrants. Such arrangements are strongly shaped by labour recruitment and urban governance and vary in shelter quality, tenure and service provision.

Although Ahmedabad is a large city, the causal mechanisms are relevant as hypotheses for smaller municipalities where planning capacity can be more limited: fragmented rental regulation, incomplete documentation, developer-led expansion, uneven sanitation and limited water-service financing. Guin (2019) [6] reports persistent small-town deficits in basic services and planning. Kusuma and Babu's (2018) [11] systematic review documents barriers to healthcare access among internal migrants in India and argues for migrant-sensitive health systems. The combined evidence supports service planning around de facto population and mobility patterns, not only formally enumerated permanent residents.

5. In situ urbanization and the limits of migration-led explanations

Urban population change has at least four analytically distinct components: natural increase, net migration, settlement reclassification and boundary expansion. Failure to distinguish them can misattribute built-up growth or rising urban population to rural–urban migrants. Pradhan (2013) [18] finds that new census towns accounted for an important share of India's urban growth in 2001–2011 [2] and that many were outside the immediate influence of large cities. Chakrabarti and Mukherjee (2020) [1] explain the emergence of census towns through local labour-market relationships, using West Bengal evidence. Denis *et al*. (2012) [3] characterize 'subaltern urbanization' as a network of economically active smaller settlements not reducible to metropolitan spillover.

Randolph (2024) [19] provides a stronger empirical challenge to the in-migration assumption, documenting cases of urbanizing regions with negative net migration alongside densification, built-up development and occupational transformation. In this view, remittances and circulation can affect consumption and construction at origins even as net out-migration persists. The inference for secondary-city research is methodological: measures of urban change must separately test destination migration flows and local economic transitions rather than infer one from the other.

6. Climate stress, migration and secondary-city exposure

Climate-related mobility is relevant to agriculture-dependent hinterlands, particularly where droughts, floods or heat affect rural earnings. Chung *et al*. (2022), in a systematic review of climate mobilities into cities, identify urban informality, labour movement and interventions as important but conceptually complex topics; their review also finds a geographic emphasis on large cities. Environmental conditions cannot be used as a stand-alone causal attribution of an observed migrant flow without accounting for employment, credit, household assets, governance and existing routes.

For intermediate towns, climate stress may operate both as an origin push factor and as an urban infrastructure challenge, especially where seasonal in-migration coincides with water scarcity, flooding or informal peripheral construction. Evidence specific to secondary-city climate-migration pathways remains limited in the reviewed corpus; this is a research priority rather than an established generalizable finding.

Socioeconomic transformation: a cross-theme interpretation

A synthesis across the evidence indicates that the relevant unit of transformation is the rural–urban region, not the bounded city alone. Labour circulation can support remittances and diversify household risk while increasing local demand for affordable rental housing, transport and services. In turn, town-level access to education, banking, healthcare and markets can affect rural livelihoods without permanent migration. OECD (2018) [11] emphasizes the growing role of India's small towns as service centres within rural–urban linkages.

However, migration-induced changes may be distributively unequal. New opportunities can be captured disproportionately by property owners, credentialed workers

and migrants with strong destination networks, while casual workers incur housing insecurity, wage volatility and weak social protection (Naik, 2024; Srivastava, 2022; Desai, 2025) [4, 13, 22]. Observed changes in a city's employment composition also cannot be interpreted as proof of migrant causality without accounting for local educational transitions, sectoral change, commuting and boundary shifts (Randolph, 2024) [19].

1. A typology of transformation pathways

Table 2: Analytical typology synthesized from the cited literature. Relationships are hypotheses or context-dependent mechanisms, not pooled causal effect estimates.

Pathway	Likely socioeconomic mechanism	Potential distributional risk	Suggested indicator
Labour-market deepening	Jobs in services, construction, processing and trade	Informal wages, unstable contracts	Sector by migrant status; days worked; real earnings
Household risk diversification	Seasonal income and remittances complement farming	Debt and reliance on contractors	Income sources, trip frequency, remittance use
Housing-market expansion	Rental and peripheral settlement demand	Crowding, insecure tenure	Rent-to-income, shelter type, occupancy
Social incorporation	Networks, education and access to institutions	Gender/caste-based exclusion	Service utilization, network ties, safety
Urban reclassification	Shift to nonfarm work and census-town status	Urban needs under rural administration	Classification status, built-up land, governance
Environmental adjustment	Climate-linked mobility and city service demand	Exposure of informal residents	Hazards, water access, vulnerable settlements

Critical appraisal and evidence limitations

The literature offers more agreement about the heterogeneity of mobility than about the magnitude of migration's causal effect on secondary-city transformation. Direct research on smaller Indian cities, such as Naik (2024) [13], is highly informative about lived experiences but covers a limited set of sites. Broader spatial-demographic research, such as Randolph (2024) [19], distinguishes urbanization pathways but does not by itself identify every municipal policy mechanism. High-quality econometric studies (Imbert & Papp, 2020a, 2020b) [7] provide identification for specified interventions or worker groups; external validity across diverse secondary cities remains to be established.

There is also a geographical mismatch in the available evidence. Studies of gendered inclusion, migrant housing and healthcare can be methodologically strong but disproportionately draw on major cities (Iyer & Rao, 2024; Desai, 2025; Kusuma & Babu, 2018) [4, 9, 11]. Transferring their estimates to smaller towns is unwarranted; they are most defensible as sources of mechanisms and survey questions. Reviews with wider coverage (Guin, 2019; Selod & Shilpi, 2021 [6, 20]; Chung *et al*., 2022) provide synthesis but vary in whether the object is small towns, all developing-country migration or climate-related urban mobilities.

Data limitations are material. The latest comprehensive Indian census migration cross-tabulations used here are from 2011 [16]; they are historically important but not contemporary 2026 counts. Migration-by-last-residence can misrepresent repeat travel, hidden workers and multi-local households. Municipality boundaries change over time, and new statutory towns or census towns alter the numerator and denominator of urban growth. Finally, cross-sectional association between migrant concentration and socioeconomic change does not prove that migration caused the change. An adequate causal study would use comparable boundaries, a pre/post timeline, origin–destination links and plausible counterfactuals.

Research gaps and future agenda

First, a harmonized, longitudinal panel of secondary cities should connect the census town directory, ward-level land use, satellite built-up indicators, employment measures and origin–destination mobility. Cities must be selected using a predeclared functional or population threshold, and results stratified by statutory versus census-town status. Reclassification and boundary adjustments require explicit controls; otherwise apparent growth may be administrative rather than demographic (Pradhan, 2013; Randolph, 2024) [18, 19].

Second, comparative studies should track circular migrants and the receiving communities simultaneously. Worker panels could record seasonal trip histories, origin-household welfare, recruitment terms, injury risk, access to rented space and public benefits, distinguishing short visits from formal residence. Mixed methods are essential to capture non-monetary migration costs documented by Imbert and Papp (2020a) [7], informal employment systems described by Srivastava (2022) [22] and social incorporation processes emphasized by Naik (2024) [13].

Third, research should stratify gender, caste, occupation and age, measuring both opportunities and exclusions. Intersectional city-level analyses could test whether education and networks improve job access while limiting mobility for those without local sponsorship, and whether secure rental accommodation mediates employment stability. Iyer and Rao (2024) [9] provide one model of combined household and qualitative evidence, but a broader small-city sample is needed.

Fourth, policy evaluations should measure actual service and income outcomes rather than programme enrolment alone: continuity of food security benefits across states, health access without destination documents, labour grievance resolution, rental affordability, transit reliability, sanitation and municipal responsiveness. A difference-in-differences design may be possible when eligibility or programme rollout has plausibly comparable treated and untreated towns; otherwise transparent descriptive comparison and process tracing are preferable to unsupported causal claims.

Fifth, studies should model climate and mobility jointly, combining weather anomalies, agricultural shocks, remittance networks and secondary-city infrastructure exposure while treating climate attribution cautiously. Chung *et al*. (2022) demonstrate that definitional consistency and accounting for multiple causes remain central to this research.

Policy implications

A first priority is to plan for mobile populations rather than only registered residents. Municipal data systems could incorporate seasonal occupancy, informal rental clusters and changing service loads through ethical, anonymized community surveys. Transparent city definitions and harmonized boundaries would also improve transfer allocation and infrastructure planning (Guin, 2019 [6]; ORGI, 2011).

A second priority is decent-work and housing policy tailored to smaller cities. Local governments, employers, contractors and labour departments should coordinate on safe worksite accommodation, affordable rental options, grievance redressal, registration assistance, occupational safety and accessible public transit. Desai (2025) [4] shows why worksite housing and informal rental markets require different policy instruments; Imbert and Papp (2020a) [7] show why improving the living and working environment can change the net payoff from migration even without changing wages.

A third priority is service and entitlement portability. Health and food access should be designed around mobility, with simplified documentation, interoperable enrolment and local outreach, subject to privacy safeguards. Such recommendations follow the access problems documented in the systematic review by Kusuma and Babu (2018) [11], but city-specific implementation effects should be evaluated rather than assumed.

A fourth priority is to treat rural development and urban development as a connected policy space. Rural employment programmes can alter migration decisions and city labour supply (Imbert & Papp, 2020b) [7]; small-town investment in education, health, markets and digital connectivity can improve opportunities for both residents and rural hinterlands (OECD, 2018). Policy should not frame all movement as a failure of rural development or all urban growth as progress: the relevant objective is expanded choice under safer and more inclusive conditions.

Finally, municipal fiscal capacity matters. The Indian Institute for Human Settlements (Verma *et al*., 2023) [23] documents dependence on intergovernmental transfers and challenges around operations-and-maintenance spending across urban local bodies. Migrant-inclusive ambitions therefore require recurrent financing, not merely new physical projects. An explicit metropolitan bias in funding formulas would risk leaving intermediate towns responsible for regional functions without adequate revenue capacity.

Conclusion

The literature portrays India's secondary cities as distinctive, consequential nodes of rural–urban transformation. They can attract youth, enable income diversification and expand nonfarm activities, but they also reproduce labour precarity, exclusionary networks, insecure shelter and inadequate services. The direction and distribution of these effects depend on social relations, employment institutions and municipal capacity. More importantly, population growth and built-up expansion may arise from in situ transformation and settlement reclassification, not only from permanent rural–urban in-migration (Guin, 2019; Naik, 2024; Randolph, 2024) [6, 13, 19].

A useful research agenda must move beyond migration counts and single-city snapshots toward city-comparable, longitudinal, origin–destination designs that identify mobility types, institutional mechanisms and material outcomes. The present synthesis supplies a transparent thematic and conceptual foundation for that work; completion of a publication-grade PRISMA systematic review would additionally require comprehensive database exports, documented screening decisions, double-review quality procedures and a preserved search audit trail.

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