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Growth of Internal and International Migration in Mongolia

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1. Introduction

Mongolia a landlocked country located in Central Asia, is split in to 21 provinces (*aimags*); the municipality of Ulaanbaatar, the capital is given a provincial status. It covers an area of 1,564,100 square kilometers. The eighteenth largest country in the world by area, Mongolia stretches about 2,400 km from west to east and about 1,260 km from north to south. It is bounded on the north by Russia, and on the southeast and west by China. The Mongolian heartland consists largely of relatively flat steppes. The southern portion of the country is taken up by the Gobi Desert, while the northern and western portions are mountainous.

The population count of Mongolia is presently estimated at 2.6 million people. Two thirds of the Mongolian population are below 30 years old, half of which comprises those 14 years or below.

Throughout its history, Mongolia has been the land of nomadic people. During the 70 years of command economy, urban centres and industries have been established, and Mongolia became more urban than rural. Migration movements were controlled and associated with work opportunities. All this changed at the beginning of the transition: with the withdrawal of the subsidies and the market associated with the Soviet Union, part of the industrial sector and the agriculture collectives collapsed, and Mongolia saw a migration movement, reversed, from the urban to the rural areas. The rural economy, mainly based on herding was able to absorb this labour force, but it was not necessarily able to provide it financial security and adequate livelihood. The productivity of the livestock sector is low, and vulnerable to disasters, and we see an increasing socio-economic gap between the urban and the rural areas, as well as poverty. The Mongolian population adapts to this situation, and now that the right to freedom of movement within the country and to freedom to choose the place of one's residence is enshrined in the Constitution, people are moving freely, from the rural to the urban areas, but this time, in an uncontrolled manner.

Migration in Mongolia, like in most countries of the world, is a survival strategy. Migration is not a new strategy in Mongolia – it now takes a new form to face new

challenges, and is led by individuals' and families' choices, not by the state's plans. The present urban population is above one million. In recent years, Mongolia has experienced as continued rural to urban migration flows, particular to Ulaanbaatar, in search of better life. According to 2000 population and housing census (NSO, 2001), one third of the total population of Ulaanbaatar as migrants and representing almost a half or 965.3 thousand population of Mongolia live in Ulaanbaatar (NSO, 2006).

2. Patterns of Internal Migration in Mongolia

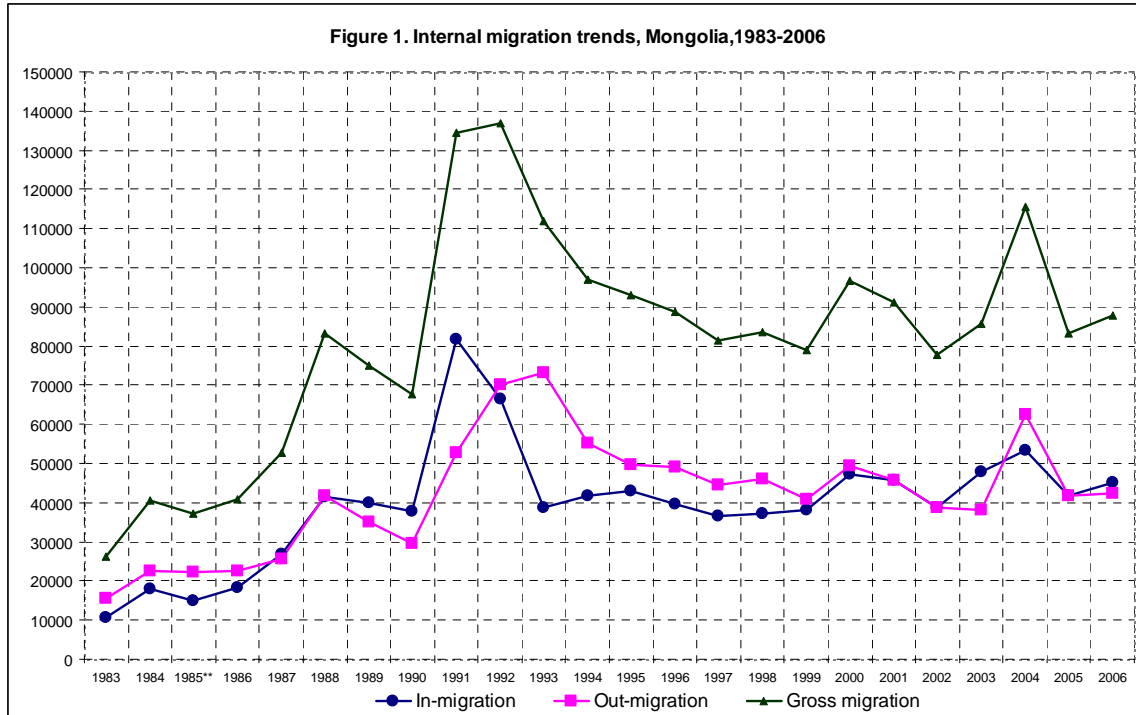
Migration trends at national level

Population is unevenly spread on the Mongolian territory, indicating its dual character of an urban population as well as a nomadic population relying on livestock. The overall migration and population distribution scenario dramatically changed due to the economic and development policies of the Government since 1950s.

Until 1980s it was a period of industrialization, collectivisation and the transformation into a modern industrial-agricultural society. During the introduction of collectivisation of livestock and initial industrialisation, the rural outflow to urban areas increased substantially. Industrialization, building of railroads and expanding of crop industry since 1960s had caused a visible change in the population resettlement. Thousands of people from all corners of the country moved to and settled in newly established towns and small villages along the railroad. Aimag (province) centres grew larger. Small and medium towns and soums with several thousand inhabitants were established. All of them developed into education, trade and administration centres. From 1956-1969 the urban population increased three times while the rural population grew only by 10 per cent. And in the mid of 1970s the urban population exceeded the rural population. In these days, the major industrial-urban concentrations proved as strong as magnets for migrants. These include the Capital city Ulaanbaatar, and newly established industrial-urban centres Darkhan, and Erdenet.

During this period (i.e. before 1980s), as a consequence of the industrialization policy, which created industrial complexes in existing urban locations and at new sites; marginal increases in rural production that could not absorb the growing rural population; and administrative channelling of job movement to urban areas where labour resources were needed, rural to urban migration was intensively increased.

The propensity to migrate within Mongolia has fluctuated appreciably over the last twenty years. Due to data availability trends of internal migration have illustrated for the period of 1983-2004 (Figure 1). Overall, the level of internal migration fell by almost 20 percent during the late 1980s after having increased during the mid 1980s except the year of 1985. During the 1980s, urbanization was significantly increased. Urban dwellers were rapidly becoming a majority of the entire population of the country. Almost 60 per cent of the total population lived in urban areas in that time. A growing population of urban population was living in three big cities (Ulaanbaatar, Darkhan and Erdenet) and aimag centres.



Source: Migration registers 1983-2006, State Civil Registration Bureau

These urban centres played a strategic role in the country's development, and the process of industrialization and economic development had been associated with considerable migration to the growing urban centres of labour demand. Although urbanization raised somewhat the massive migration to the new established industrial cities, its concentration in the Capital city decreased as the volume of migration heading for Ulaanbaatar was less that over before. Ulaanbaatar absorbed 42 per cent of the total urban population growth, and its share of total urban population decreased from 49.2 to 47.0 percent during this period. Migration to the new cities came from every corner of the country. During this period migration was regulated by the State plan, although people had a legal right to move. A little migration to the Capital city was permitted - but was almost prohibited. Only those officially sent by the state were allowed to re-settle in the capital city.

Since 1991 internal migration level has suddenly increased owing to the beginning of the transition period from a centrally planned economy to a market oriented one. In 1991, the total number of migrants reached to 134.6 thousands, it means 5 times higher than that for the early 1980s (Figure 1). There seems no doubt that the explanation for the increased migration level in the 1990s is to be found in the effects of changes in the economy, society, and political affairs. During this period economic development is accompanied by structural changes and the reforms been undertaken. Since the country embarked on a transition to a market guided economy, the normal patterns of development have been reversed. During the 1990s, the following migration patterns have been obviously observed in Mongolia. Those are:

- (i) During 1991-1996, the countryside was a recipient of migrants due to privatisation of livestock and people's recruitment into herding; urban-to-rural migration increased and thus the rural population increased in size; and
- (ii) During 1996-2000, rural-to-urban migration again predominated.

Data from the 2000 census indicates that 20.7 percent of the population lived outside their places of birth and 5.0 percent returned to their birthplace.

The mobility status of the population as a whole is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Number, percentages and sex ratios of the population by mobility status, Mongolia, 2000

Mobility status	Males		Females		Total		Sex ratios
	Number (000s)	Percentage	Number (000s)	Percentage	Number (000s)	Percentage	
Total	1178.0	100.0	1195.5	100.0	2373.5	100.0	98.5
Lifetime non-migrant	858.7	72.9	904.2	75.6	1762.8	74.3	95.0
Lifetime migrant	319.3	20.4	291.3	21.1	610.7	20.7	109.6
Of which: Return migrant	79.3	6.7	39.6	3.3	118.8	5.0	200.3

Source: 2000 census of Mongolia. Own calculations.

A similar pattern is found in the five-year period migration. Lifetime and five-year migration rates were higher for males than for females. Table 1 shows that the overall mobility rate is higher for males than females. The sex ratios of each mobility category show that males are more migratory than females particularly in the category of "return migrant". However, in general it is clear that in Mongolia males appear to be moving more mobile than their female counterparts regardless of the distance of migration. The higher male mobility rate in Mongolia may be attributable to several factors. First, it may largely be related to employment.

One study (MOSWL, PTRC&UNDP, 2004) shows that in 2000, the majority of migrants were found to be young and less educated. There were also lack of employment opportunities, poverty and unemployment in rural areas. Secondly, the higher mobility rate for male migrants may partially be explained by the fact that there are many industrial, trading and small and medium sized enterprises' jobs in urban areas available for young males.

Regional patterns

The incidence of migration varies substantially between sections of the population, between parts of the national territory and over time. Viewed in spatial perspective, before 1990s, in-migration has been characteristic of the following types of areas: urban-industrial concentrations and newly developed industrial centres.

The 2000 census data indicate that the main migration streams in lifetime migration and in the five years prior to the 2000 census were relatively long-distance or movement across regional boundaries. The population movement between aimags within region was a considerably low with range of 1.2-6.0 percent. The largest outflow during 1991-2000 was from the Western region to other regions, mainly to Ulaanbaatar and aimags (Darkhan-Uul and Tuv) in the Central region, which received the most number of migrants. It is common for areas of high in-migration also to record high out-migration (Tuv, Darkhan-Uul, Orkhon, and Dornogobi aimags). Some aimags, such as Selenge in the North near the Russia border and Dornogobi in the South near the China border, also witnessed an increase in in-migration. It could be said that migration from the regions to Ulaanbaatar and the Central region is unique. Places that migrants moved to were probably a transit stop before they reached Ulaanbaatar as their final destination. Also, migration to these regions is obviously caused by the social and economic development in the regions.

The census data also display large regional differences. Compared with other regions, a greater proportion of the population of Ulaanbaatar were migrants. Ulaanbaatar was closely followed by the Central region in the percentage of the population who were migrants. The West had the lowest proportion of their 2000 population who were classified as migrants. In fact the West, the far region of the country, is the major source of migrants to Ulaanbaatar and the Central. The largest stream to Ulaanbaatar was from the West region and smallest stream was from the East region.

Table 2 illustrates the net internal migration of the population by regions and aimags. Mobility of Mongolia's population has significantly been growing, particularly since the beginning of the 1990s. The Capital city Ulaanbaatar is the largest receiving place and followed by Darkhan-Uul and Orkhon aimags.

Table 2. Net internal migration by regions and aimags, Mongolia, 1985-2004

Regions/Aimags/Cities	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005
West	1,538	430	-3,539	-11,067	-8,927
Bayan-Ulgii	393	-249	-55	328	-3,136
Gobi-Altai	377	-877	-1,091	-969	-1,350
Zavkhan	245	-70	-1,291	-3,981	-1,547
Uvs	331	592	-1,206	-5,059	-1,667
Khovd	192	174	-104	-1,386	-1,227
Hangai	902	-786	-1,411	-1,360	-7,375
Arkhangai	253	-714	-1,185	-1,215	-2,160
Bayanhongor	236	-598	-770	-1,231	-1,223
Bulgan	71	-195	-520	-298	-1,508
Orkhon	-843	1,238	2,414	3,277	-300
Uverkhangai	763	-345	-679	-469	-855
Khuvsgel	422	-172	-671	-1,424	-1,330
Central	-2,066	-1,135	-953	-5,060	-7,429
Dornogobi	-78	-288	-351	-590	161
Dundgobi	114	-439	-708	-1,347	-925

Umnegobi	91	-116	-224	-802	-1,181
Selenge	-792	-36	29	-410	-2,013
Tuv	-243	-11	-636	-2,367	-2,355
Darkhan-Uul	-1,158	245	734	514	-940
Gobisumber			203	-58	-175
East	131	-331	-1,269	-4,098	-3,527
Dornod	-73	-433	-705	-2,299	-1,116
Sukhbaatar	331	33	-170	-1,047	-1,157
Khentii	-127	69	-394	-752	-1,254
Ulaanbaatar	-2,873	2,619	6,911	19,369	27,258

Source: Migration registers 1983-2006, State Civil Registration Bureau.

If confining analysis to cities alone, it is found that the principal administrative, educational (particularly those with universities), and manufacturing centres (Ulaanbaatar, Darkhan and Erdenet cities) were the chief recipients of migrants from other places. In contrast, the largest net outflow is from aimags in the central and western parts of the country. Only Ulaanbaatar experienced a net gain of migrants over the period of 1990-2005 while the others experienced net losses. Compared to other regions, the Central region has the highest negative net migration at present. Migration from the Central region is obviously explained by its proximity to Ulaanbaatar. It should be also noted that aimags in the Central region might show the pattern of “stepping stone” for migration to the Capital city. This is supported by the fact that migration from Tuv aimag is higher in relation to other aimags. This aimag is the closest neighbour to Ulaanbaatar. Therefore, there is a high level of migration from this aimag to the city. However, due to many problems like migration cost, employment opportunities and housing availability, migrants from other regions may move first to one of the soums in Tuv aimag and after some time migrate to Ulaanbaatar.

3. International Migration

Out-migration of Mongolian nationals

Since 1990 Mongolian people have started enjoying their freedoms and travelled abroad extensively. The socio-economic situation in Mongolia, unemployment, low remunerations and income are the primary factors contributing to international migration.

Migration towards Asian countries

Large number of Mongolian citizens reside in countries such as South Korea, China and Japan. South Korea outranks the other countries in terms of accommodating Mongolian migrants. Out of the total of 19,500 Mongolian nationals living in South Korea, approximately 9,500 are illegal and 9,979 have legal status. Illegal foreign migrants mostly do the most difficult, dangerous, and dirty works or the 3Ds in small and medium scale factories. One third of those residing in South Korea live with their family members, 44% live with one of their family members (MPDA&UNFPA, 2005).

There have been many cases where Mongolian citizens suffered industrial accidents, or have been victims or accomplices to crimes. 72 people have lost their lives during the past four years. Currently, 16 of Mongolian citizens are serving sentences in South Korea. Mongolian Embassy in Seoul is taking such measures as covering illegal workers with work insurance, getting allowance for people in desperate need, assisting them with sending their children to school etc in collaboration with a social security fund under a prestigious Korean company. In addition to this, an advocate's bureau was established in Korea to defend our citizens' interests and has delivered good results (MOFA, 2006).

Migration towards North America:

About 9000 Mongolians live in the United States, and over 100 in Canada. The majority of our migrants are illegally residing in the United States, and are doing hard labor in small private companies, stores, restaurants of foreign immigrants (MPDA&UNFPA, 2005). Most of them possess relatively high education. Initially, 60% of them enter the United States on student visa, 34% on tourist visa and merely 3% on working visa. 47% of those working in the United States live with their family members. Lately, Mongolian citizens living and working in America are giving birth to their children in the US where the babies are granted US citizenship. So far about 300 Mongolian children have been born in the United States and it is estimated by the Mongolian Embassy in the United States that this number could grow to 1000 by 2015 and to 2000 by 2015. 50-70 people come for visa interview every day at the Embassy of the United States in Mongolia (MOFA, 2006). This shows that the number of Mongolians interested in migrating to the United States would remain high for times to come.

Migration towards Europe:

The European Union countries are maintaining a strict policy to only allow entries of major investors, highly specialized personnel, and a few best students to enroll in their colleges and universities. They are firm on not aggravating the existing social problems like unemployment, poverty etc.

Mongolians go to Germany, France, Norway and Switzerland with the intention of immigrating. When they realize they are not allowed to remain, some of them seek political asylum. Although difficult living conditions were the actual reason behind their intention to immigrate, they tend to make false claims about their country and government, pretend to have fled political repression, or lie that they are Chinese or Inner Mongolian nationals in an attempt to obtain political refugee status. In addition, Mongolia is internationally recognized as a democratic country that respects human rights. Applying for political refugee status is ill-suited both for the individual and Mongolia's reputation.

Advantages and disadvantages of international migration

The following aspects of international migration can be considered positive. They are:

At macro or national level:

- Diminishes unemployment rate to a certain extent, reduces budget expenses for social welfare.
- The money that migrants remit to their families help them make their lives better. The cash flow indirectly impacts currency resources and payment balances. In 2004 approximately USD 100 million was remitted through banks and other financial organizations.
- The conditions for sending people abroad for specialization have formed.

At micro level: migrants get to know foreign cultures, learn languages, acquire education and specialization, learn to live independently, save money etc. Not only migrants but also his/her family and relatives benefit.

These so-called advantages are not something that Mongolia should be proud of if we look at it from the standpoint of the country's level of development, reputation and economic capacity.

The following disadvantages related with international migration have been observed at the **macro level:**

- it creates shortages at the domestic labor market, due to losing out many young cadre to foreign countries; it has potential adverse impact on population structure such as divorce, and decline of population growth.
- Illegal migrants are easily exposed to various crimes and infractions. These cases get media coverage abroad and ultimately serve as negative publicity on Mongolia and the Mongolians.

The negative consequences at micro level are: postponing education and specialization for working abroad, late marriage and childbirth, having no possibility to work in their field of specialization, getting alienated from Mongolian lifestyle, and suffering from home-sickness, depression and tension. Additionally, the environment and difficult conditions negatively impact their children's up-bringing as well as their and their family's health (MPDA&UNFPA).

Government policy on international migration

The government has the duty to ensure people's right to free movement, settlement and employment abroad as per international human rights pacts and the Constitution.

However, article 33 section 8 of the "National Security Concept" of Mongolia stipulates that "immigration of qualified national cadre and work force abroad in large numbers is an external factor that could have potentially negative impact on the economic security of the country".

One of the components of international migration is acquiring education or upgrading one's qualification abroad. The government should support and promote this as much as possible. This type of intellectual investment would certainly contribute to the development of the country in a positive way.

Foreign migration into Mongolia

Government policy on foreign nationals and the legal environment

"The law on the legal status of foreign nationals" regulates issues related to travel and residence of foreigners in Mongolia. Apart from this, about 90 more laws contain specific provisions on foreign nationals. In accordance with appropriate laws, foreign nationals are entitled to enter Mongolia, get long term residential permission for both personal and official business purposes and to immigrate. The law imposes limits on their number. **The State Great Khural** exercises full authority to adjust this number if needed according to the prevailing situation.

The government ensures reinforcement of the laws on employment of foreign nationals, foreign investment, naturalization and immigration. Within the scope of their mandate, it exercises the authority to establish agreements with foreign countries, monitor their implementation, and reinforce the state policy on visa and consular affairs.

The status of foreign nationals residing long-term in Mongolia

According to the Foreign Citizen and Naturalization Office report, as of January 2005, 21,518 foreign nationals from 95 different countries are living in Mongolia. Out of this 8500 are from China, 4,200 from the Russian Federation, and 1,400 from South Korea.

Long-term foreign residents are classified as the following:

- Personal business /up to 5 years/
- Official business/ above 90 days/
- Permanent residents /those married to Mongolian citizens/
- Immigrants /above 5 years/

In 2005, there are about 245 citizens from 28 foreign countries on long-term residence for personal business in Mongolia. This represents an increase of 53,8% compared to 2001.

There are about 996 permanent residents. Marriage of Mongolians to foreign nationals and residence in their spouses' country constitutes the basis for the increase in the number of permanent residents. Marriage to foreign nationals is increasing by the year. According to research a total of 1847 marriages have been registered within the last 5 years. Compared to 2000 and 2005, it has multiplied five fold, and more than half of them have married to Korean nationals.

It can be concluded from the above that there is a tendency for continuous increase in the number of permanent residents and long-term residents on personal business, and not so much for that of immigrants. Nonetheless, the number of permanent and long-term residents on personal business is not projected to reach the limit set by law within the next 4 years.

Status of foreign long-term residents on official business

The number of foreign students, workers and investors has reached almost 14,000 constituting the majority of the foreign residents in Mongolia. The “law on importing labour and experts from abroad, and exporting labour abroad” regulates employment, and it allows the family members of those granted permission for long-term residence on official business the same status.

As of today, 7757 foreign citizens from 61 countries under employment, and 3520 foreign investors from 53 countries are on long-term official business in Mongolia. They work according to intergovernmental agreements, on projects and programmes, in NGOs, in the education, culture and science sectors, as well as for private business entities and organizations. Although their number fluctuates throughout the year depending on the number of those employed, it has increased regularly for the last few years (MOFA, 2006).

Some foreign nationals commit administrative such as not registering at the relevant authority, overstaying the period stated in their visa and residence permission, and taking up employment without the requisite permission.

The Foreign citizens and Naturalization Office has taken measures for halting and preventing such administrative 5540 foreigners and 605 foreign business entities and organizations have been imposed administrative penalties between 2001– 2004 for breaking the law. Apart from administrative breaches, foreigners also commit crimes, though the number is relatively less. According to the General Police Agency, foreigners were linked to 313 crimes within 2000 to 2004.

Conclusion

The paper has demonstrated that significant migration flows are leaving those hardship regions to migrate to urban areas and the central region, including in Ulaanbaatar because of inequalities exist among the region and between the urban and rural areas. It also demonstrated that reasons for migrating are related to lack of opportunities, be they for markets, for jobs and income, for education, and for a better living environment.

Regional development strategy, if translated into actions to not only improve the live of all Mongolians, especially those in regions where socio-development is lower, but can also contribute to a reduction of migration.

To stimulate the local economies and offer to the residents what they are looking for in migration would not stop migration – there are other reasons to migrate, like being close to relatives, but it would certainly contribute to reduce the disparities among the regions and contribute to reducing the causes of migration, and possibly migration itself.

While further ensuring Mongolian citizens' human rights and freedoms to education, employment and residence abroad, there is the necessity to conduct thorough research on the scope, nature, potential negative and positive impacts, both long and short-term, on the development of the country.

It is growing more and more important to steadfastly protect the legal interests of Mongolian citizens residing abroad, and to provide them the possibility to maintain connection with home. Measures such as expanding consular representation abroad, recognizing double citizenship to a certain extent, and extensively employing information technology could be taken in this respect.

It is essential that the government place the issue of foreigners' settlement in Mongolia under special consideration and control. The two neighbouring countries clearly surpass us in terms of population size, and politico-military and economic capacity. Thus, arrival and settlement in large numbers of their nationals in Mongolia should be limited and prevented to the extent that is possible. As for the nationals of third countries, differential treatment is a possibility. If necessary, countries could be ranked in order of preference within a policy framework.

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