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Despite drop, India No. 9 in number of immigrants

Rukmini Shrinivasan, TNN | Mar 2, 2012, 05:43AM IST

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The number of foreign immigrants living in India is steadily declining, but India continues to be among the 10 countries with the highest in-migration in the world.

NEW DELHI: The number of **foreign immigrants** living in India is steadily declining, but India continues to be among the 10 countries with the highest in-migration in the world. At the same time, India sends the fourth largest number of emigrants to other countries.

In 2010, there were 5.4 million foreign-born people living in India, according to new estimates released by the Population Division of the **United Nations** Department of Economic and Social Affairs. These numbers make India home to the ninth largest number of foreign-born people in the world.

But this number has been in decline since post-Partition migration and an influx of refugees from **Bangladesh** following the 1971 war.

There were 7.5 million foreign-born persons living in India in 1990. By 2000, this number was down to 6.4 million on account of the death of these older immigrants and refugees.

While a source country-wise break-up is not available for immigrants in India in 2010, past trends indicate that the likes of French diplomats in Delhi, American investment bankers in Mumbai and British techies in Bangalore form a tiny part of this diaspora. In the 2001 census, 97% of all immigrants were from south Asian countries. Three million were from Bangladesh alone, followed by a million from **Pakistan** and 600,000 from **Nepal**.

These numbers are de facto, and should cover both legal and illegal immigration, a **UN Migration Team** spokesperson said. However, unnaturally high growth rates for some border districts indicate that undocumented immigration does exist. Arif Mohammed (name changed on request), a Bangladeshi rickshaw-puller living in east Delhi, gave some insight into why some Bangladeshis might not state their immigration status. "We are a big community in east Delhi and many of us live and work together. Some of us have proper papers and some do not. But either way the police harass you," he said.

"There is difference between historical migration, such as that from Bangladesh, and new migration flows which we in India need to acknowledge," says Binod Kharia, chairperson of the Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies at JNU and director of the International Migration and **Diaspora** Studies Project, co-sponsored by the Government of India. "We need to start looking at these unskilled immigrants from Bangladesh, often undocumented, as potential human capital and invest in them," says Kharia.

The US remains the biggest destination for immigrants and this number continues to grow.

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