



Managing migration in big cities and the growth of urban peripheries

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'Invisibility may act as a shield of protection, but it can also lead to increased exploitation. Visibility brings with it risks of deportation but provides opportunities to reshape urban outskirts and push for policy reforms'

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About the Research

In recent years, the focus of policing in international migration has increasingly shifted from exclusion and border control to migration management. This shift is apparent at globally and regionally, with migration management becoming an overarching term that emphasises the "quality" of individual migrants, a reduction in irregular migration, governance of recruitment processes, bi-lateral or multi-lateral agreements; and emphasis on the benefits for both states and migrants.

In East Asia, migration management is typically characterized by "migration without settlement" where the emphasis is on temporary labour market incorporation at the expense of other possibilities for social and cultural inclusion. Government practices often regulate the lives of these migrants (sometimes known as 'guest workers') in ways that push them to the urban periphery, potentially rendering them invisible.

South Korea's Employment Permit System (EPS) was established in 2004 and is based on government-to-government agreements with 15 countries in Asia to manage the number, quality, tenure, rights and departure of workers in Korea. The EPS legislates several rights to migrants including recognition as workers, minimum wages and conditions, and legal recourse. It also includes extensive monitoring and welfare management through fine-tuned arrival procedures, training programs and employment management systems. These arrangements help to establish minimum standards and focus on migrant wellbeing, but they also maintain the temporariness and social exclusion of guest workers.

Since its inception, the number of migrants arriving through the EPS has grown to 450,000 by 2014 with about 60,000 migrants arriving annually. Migrants are recruited for five sectors: manufacturing, agriculture, construction, fisheries and services. The annual quota is based on, among other things, the countries Korean employers favour, the transparency and efficiency of procedures in sending countries and the willingness of migrant workers to return to their home country.

The metropolitan region of Seoul includes several cities, and is home to a population of around 25 million people. Within this urban area, migrants live and work in the outskirts of the metropolitan region in spaces that are an intersection between urbanisation and rural-agricultural practices, factory zones and minimally formalized residential developments.

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Although sometimes only a few kilometres from residential, commercial and consumer districts, many of the spaces that migrants work and live in are disconnected from centres of urban life. Migrants invariably live on or near factories in accommodation assembled from light materials, shipping containers or in small dormitories. Without private vehicles it can take hours to reach urban centres because public transport rarely travels near these areas. In addition, the work hours are often long, spanning the entire week, leaving little or no time for non-work activities, while many find themselves on the periphery of social interaction within the workplace, and sometimes subject to racialised abuse.

In response, guest workers, and other migrants have created their own social networks and connections that enable the sharing of information as well as support and mutual care from those who have become long-term residents on the city periphery. New institutions have been created within and by these communities to address workers' rights, abusive employers, accommodation needs and other aspects of social and material wellbeing. These institutions are necessary in part because the invisibility associated with being on the periphery of the city makes the policing and surveillance of undocumented workers and their employers' practices more difficult. This can result in unpaid wages and substandard accommodation, but may also have an inverse effect whereby those who are undocumented may also be the more experienced workers able to command higher wages.

Migrants are not precluded from moving from the periphery to the centre, and in Seoul, markets, football matches and churches have become sites of socialisation. Sometimes governments have resisted migrant occupation of these spaces, not always with success. Instead, they have become places where public protest and policy advocacy flourish, in ways that challenge oppression and trigger important changes in the treatment of migrants in law, in workplace practice and by the Korean public.

Governments may want to control and manage migrants but the latter's presence on the periphery of cities complicates this, in ways that both enable and constrain the wellbeing of migrants and guest workers in particular. Invisibility may act as a shield of protection, but it can also lead to increased exploitation. Visibility brings with it risks of deportation but also opportunities to reshape urban outskirts and push for policy reforms.

The stories of the everyday lives of migrant guest workers in Seoul highlight the features and effects of migration in cities and have strong resonance for New Zealand. Here, the number of people issued temporary work visas each year has grown from 32,000 in 1998 to 192,000 in 2016 with many living in Auckland and working in key industries like health, hospitality and IT ([MBIE 2016](#)). They also often live and work in ways that can be invisible to other members of society and are subject to restrictions and control based on the particular visa that they possess. There are now moves to control migration with the NZ Government proposing three year maximum durations on migrant workers with lower incomes and restricting their rights to remain with family. Similar policy trends are evident in [Australia](#). These changing landscapes of migration demand attention be given, by academics and policy makers, to the impact on urban spaces in cities like Auckland, the wellbeing and rights of migrants who are located on the periphery, and the implications for building diverse and socially cohesive society.

E9 (EPS Work Visa)

Vietnam	44154
Cambodia	35409
Indonesia	33793
Nepal	25761
Philippines	25503
Sri Lanka	24175
Thailand	23732
Others	63515

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