

The vulnerability of migrants to HIV/AIDS in China and Mongolia

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Background

Countries of North East Asia have experienced an increase in the number of migrants in recent years, both internal and international. Flows across borders, especially from the North Korea to China and often ultimately to the South Korea, or other parts of Asia, and between China, Mongolia and Russia, have escalated markedly in the last decade. South Korea has become an important destination for many migrant workers, including commercial sex workers.

Little is known, however, about either the vulnerabilities of migrant workers to HIV/AIDS or the incidence of HIV amongst migrant populations. Surveillance studies in Asian countries are rarely carried out among migrant communities and, if they are, the risk of stigmatisation is high. Many migrants find themselves in situations of fear and poverty, denial of their rights, lack of services, evading the authorities and isolation from their families and support networks. A sensitive approach that identifies migrant workers' vulnerabilities, rather than their role in the spread of the epidemic, is largely lacking. So far this has been lacking in the area under study.

Hence in 2003, the UNDP Regional Programme based in Delhi, proposed a systematic process to:

¹ I wish to acknowledge the work of the other two authors who wrote the country reports on China, Mongolia and South Korea for the *No Safety Signs Here* report (UNDP, 2004).

review existing knowledge — migration routes and processes, trafficking routes (where applicable), vulnerabilities to HIV/AIDS, conditions of movement for men and women, living and working conditions in host countries, legal and policy environments, existing resources, etc. and identify gaps in knowledge and possible areas for action.

The goals of the project were to:

1. improve understanding of the relationship between HIV/AIDS and migration in the region;
2. analyse vulnerability factors related to migration and HIV, including the role of policy environments in this context;
3. provide practical information on existing services and resources in the region;
4. select countries that will assist service providers in designing and implementing responses;
5. develop recommendations for policy makers and public health practitioners;
6. identify gaps in knowledge and suggest future steps.

The project was undertaken by a team of in-country researchers (including Zheng and Ko), under the auspices of the Asia Pacific Migration Research Network (APMRN) — a network of migration-related researchers in 16 countries in the Asia Pacific region. The project was coordinated by Robyn Iredale.

There is limited research and activity in the regions but what does exist formed the basis of this report. Material from elsewhere was also useful. Where secondary data were lacking, domestic and international researchers, international agency workers, health officials and workers, and other relevant key informants were interviewed. Nevertheless, material on trafficking, commercial sex workers and irregular workers is notoriously poor or absent. HIV infection rates amongst certain mobile groups are not available but some data on the incidence of infection and patterns of living and working were used to hypothesise about vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Existing legal provisions, strategies and policies pertaining to HIV, migration and anti-trafficking were investigated to provide background information for understanding the political, social and economic frameworks for responding to issues. Current national responses and resources pertaining to migration, labour rights, trafficking and HIV were also reviewed in order to frame appropriate responses.

Summary of the Major Findings

China

China was not aware of the threat of HIV infection until recent years. The reported

number of cases has increased each year, and there is a possibility that the epidemic will gradually spread into the general population. According to the Ministry of Health², by the end of June 2005 the cumulative reported number of HIV positive cases nationwide was 126,808. However, due to the limited coverage of any surveillance system, it was estimated that about 840,000 were infected. Up to the end of June 2005, there were 28,789 AIDS patients recorded and a total of 7,375 deaths caused by AIDS.

There are four characteristics of the AIDS epidemic in China:

1. HIV positive cases are mainly found in rural areas;
2. intravenous drug use is the major cause of infection;
3. among the HIV positive cases, 75% of them are men;
4. more than 80% of cases are between the ages of 20-39.

HIV infection among drug users was only reported in one province before 1995 but was found in all 31 provinces/autonomous regions/municipalities by 2002. There is an increasing trend of drug use in China. About 901,000 drug use cases were recorded in 2001 and it is estimated that about 450,000 incidents of intravenous drug use happen each day in China. It is generally perceived that drug use is still the major cause of HIV infection in China. According to experts, infection through blood donation has been controlled and the probability of further spread is very small.

Meanwhile, infections among sex workers have increased drastically in the last few years and will become a major threat in the future. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has spread into the homosexual as well as the heterosexual population, thus it will almost inevitably spread to the general population.

(A) Internal migrants

The dramatic growth in internal migration since 1980 has resulted in a situation where an estimated 120 million people live away from their place of household registration. These informal internal migrants or 'floating population' are mostly from rural areas: they are often young, usually travel without their families and half of them are men. They are a group of people who are often excluded by the community at their destination and are treated as 'outsiders': they do not have registration and access to services.

² Information source: China HIV/AIDS Information Network, www.chain.net.cn



Figure 1: The location and neighboring countries of Northeast China

Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

According to a recent report on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in China, more than 80% of people living with HIV/AIDS were found between ages of 20-39. Internal migrants make up the largest group of vulnerable migrants in China. Rural to urban migrants remain marginalized even if they remain in cities for years. The lack of information, knowledge and supportive policies makes them vulnerable sub-populations to HIV/AIDS infection.

Up to now, projects or programs specifically targeting migrants are few. There has been hardly any satisfactory investigation done to understand the size, status and potential risk of HIV infection for migrants, especially those migrants who work in 'illegal' jobs. The needs and preferences of different sub-populations of migrants are not clear and the services that can meet their needs are not yet available.

(B) International migrants from China

Although most migration in China has been internal, there is an increasing trend in international migration, including labour contract migration. About 12 million Chinese mainland citizens went abroad in 2001. The destinations included (listed according to declining proportions): Hong Kong, Macao, Thailand, Japan, Russia, South Korea, America, Singapore, Viet Nam, North Korea and so on (Luo, 2003). There are

different types of international migrants: (1) professionals/international students; (2) contracted labourers through legal recruiting agencies, who mostly go to Japan, America, Singapore, Korea, Israel, Mauritius, Russia, Germany, and the Netherlands; (3) short-term visitors either in business, short time work or visits to family; and (4) irregular migrants — their numbers are never clearly enumerated but a reasonable guess is about 400,000 (Luo, 2003).

There is a lack of clear and systematic information about short term and short distance cross border mobility. The information found was scattered in journal articles, mostly about cross-border trading. China actually has a long history of sending labour forces abroad, mostly from the south coastal area. After the opening up and economic reform, more young people went abroad from less traditional sending areas. In NE China, the major cross-border activity is as follows:

1. From Jilin Province (mainly Yanbian) and Heilongjiang Province to South Korea, North Korea, Russia, Japan, and Malaysia, for work and trade (Zheng, 1999).
2. From Jilin to Russia, mainly to work in agriculture, about 9000 person/trips³ each year (Yang and Yin, 1999).
3. In the border cities, short-term cross-border activity for the purpose of trading has been increasingly reported during recent years.

Table 1 lists the cities with the most frequent cross-border activity. The major sending place, that is, the exact city or county, still needs to be identified.

Table 1: Major ports of trading or of active cross border activity along the border of studied area

Province/Autonomy region	City/Port	Related countries
Inner Mongolia	Erlianhaut, Manzhouli	Mongolia Russia
Liaoning	Dandong	DPRK
Jilin	Tumen, Huichun	DPRK, Russia
Heilongjiang	Heihe	Russia

Source: Compiled by Zheng for the UNDP project, 2004.

In this paper, the focus is on the highly mobile cross-border traffic associated with trading, visiting relatives and friends or picking up short-term ‘illegal’ work. The major interactions covered here are with Mongolia, Russia, North Korea, Central Asia and

³ The data is usually reported by custom, which only enumerates number of passes, but does not identify those who passed several times.

SE Asia and returning Chinese contract labour migrants who have been working on government organised contracts offshore.

(C) International migrants to China

Most foreigners come to China as tourists and this means that they cannot stay for long or work legally. Most cross-border mobility recorded in the Chinese literature is related to trading and tourist travel, involving relatively short periods of stay. Reliable data regarding this mobility are scarce. Age and sex structures, as well as occupations, of the populations are not clear but it is known, as a general rule, that there are more men in these populations. The following information was mainly collected from journal articles, personal communications and other unofficial sources.

(a) Mongolia to China

It was reported that more than 220,000 person/trips were made across the border each year from Mongolia to China before 2000 (Aorenqi, 2000), and the number was possibly as high as 300,000 in 2003. This includes visitors from Mongolia, Russia, and other East European countries (Yang and Tumen, 2003).

It is clear that most Mongolian visitors come to China through the trading port in Inner Mongolia to do their trading business, and most of them stay for only a short time. According to the Yearbook of China Tourism, the two border cities of Manzhouli and Erlianhaut received 91% of cross border visitors in Inner Mongolia. Most visitors were from Mongolia and the second largest group was from Russia (China Tourism, 2002).

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There is a plan to build a free trading zone around Erlianhaut and Zamiin-Uud, as well as a new Trading Mall in Erlianhaut. Therefore, an increase in cross-border activity between Inner Mongolia and Mongolia is most likely to happen in the future. Casual sexual encounters increase the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission.

(b) Russia to China

Most Russians come to China as tourists and Heilongjiang is the province that receives most: 612,300 person/visits in 2001 (China Tourism, 2002). It was reported that 35,400 person/trips crossed a single port of entry (Heihe) in 2001, most of them for a one-day tour in Heilongjiang.

However, it is observed that some of them stayed longer than they were permitted and had a paid job — for example, there are Russian waitresses in some Harbin restaurants. Since such a stay is 'illegal', the exact number of them will never be known. There is a trend for more Russian travel to northern provinces other than Heilongjiang. For example, they were found in Beijing, Shanxi, and Shandong (Communication with Wang Binyou at Harbin Medical University).

Heilongjiang province identified 261 HIV/AIDS cases up to September 2005, and the infection channel has shifted from illegal blood sell to sexual infection, women cases increased from 19.6% in 1999 to 33.8% in 2005. It is believed that one of the factors of HIV/AIDS transmission is the frequent mobility between Heilongjiang and Russia, one of the countries with highest increase rate of AIDS incidence.

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The temporary and irregular nature of migration from Russia means that visitors or over-stayers are outside of the public health system and therefore not covered by any campaigns of public education.

A research team from the Department of Epidemiology, School of Public Health of Harbin Medical University, carried out an investigation among migratory workers in the service sectors in Harbin, Suihua, Mudanjiang, Daqing, and Heihe (Sun *et al*, 2002). The results of a questionnaire survey of 393 women show that migratory women lacked knowledge on HIV/AIDS prevention and they had very limited use of condoms. The team tried to distribute education materials among women workers in the service sector and they also developed material in Russian to distribute to Russian young women working in the service sector and tourists. The research team also interviewed more than 100 Russian girls to gauge their knowledge on HIV/AIDS prevention and it was found that Russian girls were more knowledgeable than Chinese migratory women on the issue.

(c) North Korea to China

Since the entry of North Koreans is not formally permitted, the distribution and size of this group is not clear. China refers to them as 'defectors' while the UNHCR defines many of them as refugees.

The situation escalated in the mid-1990s when a historic flood allegedly engulfed the whole country creating economic problems, especially food shortages. A massive number of people began to cross the border and people left for China, Russia and elsewhere. The Chinese government gives a number of 10,000 persons but international aid groups estimate that from 150,000 to 300,000 North Korean refugees are hiding in North East China, Russia and Mongolia. These numbers vary in part since different definitions are used (Ko *et al.*, 2002).⁴ Some of the defectors may be simple border-crossers who may return home when their economic needs have been met. Others may wish to stay rather longer outside their home country. Still others may not want to return at all, even hoping to enter South Korea.

The cross-border movement of North Koreans can be broken down into two parts

⁴ The term 'North Korean defector' has been widely used with no clear definition. In certain cases, it means a refugee in international convention. In other cases, it means any North Koreans who have moved out of North Korea with no official permit. The latter definition, which is adopted in this report, may include irregular North Korean migrants.

depending upon the origin of travel. One origin of migrants is Siberia where North Korean contract workers are engaged in cutting down trees (Suh, 1995). Thousands of North Korean workers have been working in the Siberian woods since the middle of 1970s. Timber cutting is conducted in cold weather in order to ensure the quality of the timber. Since workers receive few daily necessities, including food, they need to do additional work on farms in the warm weather, to earn extra income. Their work destinations may be located nearby or as far away as Uzbekistan, or they may move from place to place. These workers generally returned to timber cutting in the winter when the economic situation was relatively stable but an increasing number have not returned in recent times.

North Korean migrants who move directly from their home country may enter either China or Russia, but most prefer China. There are two major reasons why they prefer to go to China: geographical and socio-cultural (Ko *et al.*, 2002). North Korea shares about 90% of its inland border with China and the remaining 10% with Russia. Moreover, there are several spots on the North Korea-China border, where the depth of the river is so shallow that people can easily cross by swimming or walking, especially in winter.

The second reason North Korean defectors prefer China over Russia for their destination is the socio-cultural ties. Just over the Tumen river lies the Yanbian district of Jilin Province, where Korean Chinese are concentrated. Once North Koreans cross the border, they can relatively easily find people with whom to communicate. As a result, the chances for North Koreans getting into China are substantially higher than for them to get into other countries.

North Korean defectors tended to stay around Yanbian until 2000 but after this they began to move to other areas as the Chinese police intensified their search for them. The Chinese government informally tolerated North Koreans until 1999, when it launched a 'Strike Hard' campaign against them (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 2001). The Chinese police search homes, question workers and hand out penalties for harbouring North Korean defectors and rewards for those who report them. In some cases, the Chinese government even allows North Korean authorities to enter China and seize North Koreans.

Informal interviews with local Korean Chinese conducted by Ko for the study showed that North Korean defectors are seldom found in that area now. Previously, Yanbian residents frequently saw North Koreans begging for food and monies and looking for work but they 'disappeared recently'. They say that they can tell North Koreans from their appearance.

One interviewee said that recent defectors went only to those who would not report them to the police, not to ordinary local people. Those who are willing to help may be Korean businessmen and members of civil organisations. The prevailing view is that

North Korean defectors are now moving further into China, to both cities and the countryside. They may go to big cities, such as Shanghai, where they can move around more freely or to distant farms in search of both work and protection. This recent trend suggests that North Korean defectors are no longer concentrated in one or two places and they go to many places to find protection. This is undoubtedly due to the increased tension that has emerged in recent years.

Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

The vulnerability of North Koreans in China has increased: these 'defectors' are regarded as refugees but as 'economic floaters' to be sent back to their home country. China is also negative about the international agencies that engage in help and rescue efforts for these defectors. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) recognises North Koreans fleeing the country in recent years as refugees fleeing persecution under the *1951 Convention on Refugees*. China acceded to this 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol in 1982 but continues to insist that North Korean 'defectors' are economic migrants who have to be deported under the North Korea-China treaty.

Until 1999, China informally tolerated North Koreans but increasing numbers of North Korean asylum seekers during 1999 and 2000 saw China launch its 'Strike Hard' campaign. This campaign included searches of Chinese homes, questioning of workers, roadblocks, penalties for harbouring North Koreans and financial rewards for Chinese who reported North Koreans. Since 1999, the UNHCR has been denied permission to travel to border areas and *Medicines Sans Frontieres* (MSF) was refused permission to aid North Korean refugees. In some cases Chinese authorities even allowed North Korean authorities to enter China and seize North Koreans from Chinese prisons (Iredale and Coghlan, 2004).

North Korean defectors experience great hardship, both in running away from their country and at the destinations (Ko *et al.*, 2002). Whether they are simply border-crossers, economic refugees or political refugees, they have to find food and shelter. They may have to beg on the streets, knock on the doors of local Korean Chinese and sleep in makeshift houses in the mountains. In most cases, they work on farms such as cornfields, rice paddies and orchards. If they are lucky, they may receive help from Korean businessmen or non-government organisations.

In the case of women, marriage can be an instrumental way of making a living and avoiding arrest. Three respondents interviewed in Yanbian in September 2003 said that they heard of North Korean women having been 'sold' to local Chinese. Chinese husbands may not treat them as wives but as labourers and sexual partners. North Korean women may be sold and resold until they are handed over to local bars or brothels.

Economic exploitation is serious for North Korean defectors. Their payment is much

lower than the average local Chinese worker: North Korean workers are paid only 30 yuan per day while their Chinese counterparts are paid 50 yuan or more a day for the same kind of work. Some defectors are working more than full-time just for food and shelter, with no payment. At worst, their employers refuse to pay them and threaten to report them for illegal residence.

The second condition that North Korean defectors have to meet is physical protection. Those who go to Russia no longer have to run for their life from the police but the situation is different in China. In China they have to be alert not to be detected and arrested by the police. If they are arrested they are deported to North Korea, where they and their families may be tortured or even put to death. Thus they utilise various tactics not to be arrested. One tactic is to live in the mountains. In fact, many North Korean defectors are known to live in makeshift camps and 'mud caverns' near the tops of mountains so that they can watch the police coming from below and run away. Another tactic is, as mentioned already, to move farther from the Yanbian area.

Apart from the problems of economic and physical security, North Korean defectors suffer from various psychological problems. First, they live in constant fear of arrest and repatriation. This fear is different from irregular workers of other nationalities in that North Korean defectors would be treated as national traitors. They would be humiliated, tortured, sent to prison or even executed in public. Another type of psychological problem they frequently face is prejudice from local residents. The Chinese tend to treat North Korean defectors as if they are beggars. Prejudice and discrimination appear to be more deeply felt by North Korean women. The local Chinese think that North Korean women are women of easy virtue, willing to 'throw their bodies for a night for a bowl of rice' (Good Friends, 1999).

Most North Korean defectors living in China appear to be exhausted both physically and psychologically. This suggests that they are more vulnerable to any type of illness. First, caring much about their health is a 'luxury'. They have to care more about how to feed and protect themselves. Second, they are more likely to form casual relationships. Many of them may not have enduring sexual partners, since they have to keep moving. This suggests that they are more likely to have increased vulnerability to HIV.

The vulnerability of North Koreans would come also from their status of being a defector. Even if they suspected that they were infected with HIV, they would hesitate to report to health authorities. Though the Chinese health care system is well developed, most defectors would not be able to afford to pay the hospital fees. More importantly, they could be afraid of being reported by the hospital staff. In fact, North Korean defectors say that they never go to hospital. Instead, they go to the local pharmacy and ask for medication they believe to be effective. This is especially so in the Yanbian area, where the police are more active in search of defectors.

Young women are more vulnerable than men. They keep changing their residences and may move with male defectors. This increases the chances of having casual relationships. In fact, male defectors, with limited financial resources, are known to move with female defectors to satisfy their sexual needs, aside from the psychological satisfaction. Because a woman marries a local Chinese does not mean that they have stable sexual partners. They are sold to man after man and tend to be treated as sexual objects, not wives. Moreover, the number of North Korean women working at bars and brothels is increasing. Many North Korean women who defected to South Korea via China are known to suffer from gynaecological diseases while the case of HIV infection among them is so far unreported.

The incidence of HIV infection among North Korean defectors is unknown in China. Based upon the lives of the defectors, however, vulnerable groups may be identified.

(1) youths appear to be most vulnerable. Most of them have no stable partners, have little knowledge about the seriousness of HIV and 'safe sex' may not be a priority.

(2) young women in particular may be at the highest risk of being infected with HIV. They may move around with male defectors for physical protection as well as emotional support, thereby increasing their chances of having casual relationships. They may be treated as sexual objects by Chinese 'husbands' and sold and resold to other Chinese men. They may work at bars and provide sex for financial return. The situation could potentially become worse in the future as defectors increasingly spread into remote areas and do not access health services.

(D) Returning international Chinese contract labour migrants

International contract labour migration is a growing phenomenon in China. It started in the late 1970s, with the opening up of the economy, and has surged in recent years. It doubled in 1995-99 compared to the period 1990-1994 (Iredale *et al.*, 2003). The growth in 'Other Asia' and European migration is noticeable.

The related information about international migrants is very limited. Basically there is some pre-job training to contract outgoing labourers, and they are usually taken care of by recruiting agencies. Little research has been done in order to have a better understanding of their lives abroad. Some scholars have started to investigate by interviewing returned international migrants in southern coastal provinces (Personal communication with Han Jialing, Beijing Academy of Social Sciences).

Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

Early cases of HIV/AIDS were reported among returned labour migrants from abroad. Those who go out are often young, single and unaware of risks, and they are usually unlikely to practice self-protection. It is reported that relatively more cases of HIV infection were found among returned labour migrants who used drugs in Yanbian, Jilin (Cui *et al.* 2002).

However, there is very limited knowledge and related research on the life and health vulnerability of overseas Chinese, either contracted labours or unregistered. It is important to explore this further, in order to understand their status better and to enable effective preventive strategies among them.

Mongolia

A study conducted between 1987 and the mid-1990s found that although only one HIV infection case was present among 176,000 people tested for HIV, the prevalence of STDs was rising. The majority of cases were found in the 15-44 age groups and there was a 150-300% higher rate of syphilis for people aged 15-24 than for other age groups (Purevdawa *et al.*, 1997).

In 2004, Mongolia had had only four officially reported cases of HIV/AIDS. However, the community is aware of their possible vulnerability to the HIV epidemic. In the 2001 annual report of the National AIDS Foundation (NAF) of Mongolia, the following challenges in HIV prevention were stated:

- There is a large adolescent population with 50% of the total population below 23 years of age, and the pattern of sexual activity among young people is changing;
- The prevalence of sexually transmitted infection is high and condom use is low;
- Recreational drug use is starting to increase and there is early evidence of illicit drug injection (NAF 2001b);
- Widespread poverty (36% in the LSM survey 1998) is resulting in greater ill health, homeless children and adults, school dropouts and an increasing number of sex workers;
- The regional HIV epidemic is already on the northern border of Mongolia and is approaching the other borders;
- Internal migration is increasing since the rural areas lack amenities and infrastructure, and are facing climatic changes that make herding less productive.

Attention to migration and issues surrounding migrants has begun to attract the attention of researchers in the last few years. In 2001, *A Micro Study of Internal Migration in Mongolia* (Population Teaching and Research Center) was released and this focussed on the movement patterns and the adjustment and consequences for migrants. This was followed by a survey report on Urban Poverty and In-Migration (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare *et al.*) in 2004 and in 2005 the first study of international labour migrants from Mongolia was released (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare *et al.*).

(A) Internal Migrants

The 2000 national census records lifetime ('permanent') migration, during 1995-2000, and during the previous year of the census. As for China, many short-term moves are not captured in the census. The largest flow during 1995-2000 was from the western region to other regions, mainly to Ulaanbaatar and the central region. The south had the second largest number of people who migrated to the central region.

More men migrate than women. For example, there were 7,000 more male migrants in 1999 than females (42,900 versus 36,100). Most migrants were in the 15 to 25 year age group for both men and women. However, it is not clear what proportion of migrants were travelling with their family.

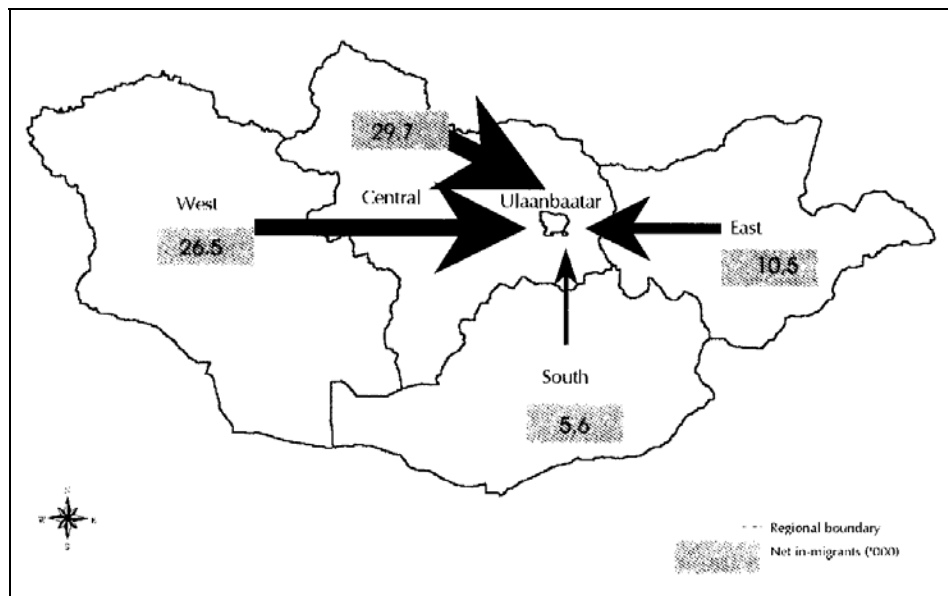


Figure 2: Number (x1000) of net in-migrants to Ulaanbaatar by region, 1995-2000

Figure 2 shows net in-migration to Ulaanbaatar during the five years 1995-2000. For example, with a population of 760,100 in 2000, the five-year in-migrants to Ulaanbaatar were 95,435, and the one-year in-migrants were 41,985. The smaller towns such as the border towns of Zamiin-Uud in the South near China and Darkhan-Uul in the North near the Russian Federation near the Mongolian railway also experienced rapid growth in recent years. Urbanisation is expected to become more rapid after the cross-state (from east to west) railway is constructed, since most towns will be near the railway.

Vulnerability

The 2001 study found that 80% of rural-urban migrants live in *gers*, the employment participation rate is only 42.4% and unemployment was 23%, education levels are low, access to health services is low, and 37% of migrants were assessed as living in poverty. The 2004 study paid more attention to policy recommendations and stressed the need for adequate education, employment, health insurance — the need for comprehensive policies to address the situation currently facing many rural-urban migrants. Like China, the household registration system has curtailed access to services in the cities if people moved without permission. This aggravated their situation as they left rural areas in order to make a better life than they had.

Mongolia has an active Human Rights Commission and a recent landmark ruling opened up the possibility of urban registration for more people. This will help but many migrants still remain highly vulnerable.

(B) International migration

The 2005 report relies on sample surveys in three countries, the Czech Republic, Republic of Korea and the USA, and has no national data on the number of workers abroad. However, according to the national census, both the number of foreign residents in Mongolia and out-migrants from Mongolia is small, as shown in Table 2. However, the numbers are believed to be under-estimated due to poor information on mobile populations and the fact that many people are irregular migrants.

Table 2: Recorded migrants in Mongolia, 2000

Country	Out-migrants	In-migrants
Total	26,178	8,128
Russia	3,224	3,374
China	866	2,020
DPRK	8,631	338
Germany	2,478	61
Japan	1,204	150

USA	2,324	303
UK	466	80

Source: Mongolia Population and Housing Census 2000.

The report on overseas labour migrants (2005: 81-2) was based on sample surveys in the three countries and concluded that:

Most Mongolian labour migrants were irregular migrants. Survey respondents reported that weak language skills, finding a job, invalid documents, money and homesickness were the most difficult problems they faced living abroad. ...

Mongolian migrants worked in very bad and insecure conditions with limited hygiene. Especially migrants who were living in the Republic of Korea, reported that they worked in worse conditions ...

... most Mongolian migrants were living in critical situations without health insurance and few possibilities of obtaining health care and treatment. ...

Migrants often reported that they suffered mental stress and as a consequence some abused others. In addition, there were negative implications for children's behaviour and the health of migrants and their family members.

The report concluded that the escalation in labour export has not been matched by the provision of adequate support and many receiving countries do not adhere to conventions and the observance of human rights standards. Most Mongolian migrants do not know the laws of the countries where they are working.

The following section is quoted from the assessment report by NAF (2001b) in order to provide another picture on local cross-border activity:

Ulaanbaatar, Dornogobi, Selenge, Orkhon and Khovd are particularly vulnerable to drug use because these provinces lie along a major transnational transport route and have a very high rate of internal and international mobility. A review of findings indicates that the border towns of Zamiin-Uud in Mongolia and Erlian in China both function as major transit points. Erlian is also a market town where traders from Mongolia come to purchase goods and Chinese bring goods from all over the country to sell. The town offers a number of entertainment outlets to visitors with commercial sex work involving Mongolian girls. This mobility allows for introduction to new substances into Mongolia and opportunities for networking among drug users in different areas. The trans-Mongolia railway also acts as a potential drug trafficking route; in other countries, drug use among local populations has been known to grow rapidly, accompanied by related HIV epidemics, along new drug trafficking routes.

An example of the increase in travel: 4 million passengers travel annually with the Mongolian railway. According to local data in the year 2000, a total of 23,186 people traveled through the five temporary border points in Bulgan soum of Khovd aimag to China and Russia. The Assessment Team noted that when these temporary border points are open, the consumption of spirits increases as does the incidence of STIs. It was also noted that Kazakhs form a part of the population of Khovd aimag. Since 1990, the movement of Kazakhs to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan has increased substantially. Of these, some have re-turned to Mongolia. The Assessment Team met with young people who had studied in Kazakhstan. It was reported that they had injected morphine into each other while studying in Kazakhstan. In 2000, 52,3% of all of the Mongolian citizens who traveled abroad passed through the Buyant Ukhaa border crossing (Ulaanbaatar Airport), for the purpose of undertaking private business in China. The second most frequently used border crossing is that of Zamiin Uud – the border town in the Dornogobi province.

Most reported cross-border cases from Mongolia to China were for the purposes of trading. There is a trading zone near the border by the railway, with the cities of Erlianhaut and Zamiin-Uud on each side. It is reported that before 2000 more than 220,000 trips were made across the border each year from Mongolia to China (Aorenqi, 2000). By 2003, the number could as high as 300,000 a year, including visitors from Mongolia, Russia and other East European countries (Yang and Tumen, 2003).

There is a plan to build a free trading zone around Erlianhaut and Zamiin-Uud as well as a new Trading Mall in Erlianhaut. Therefore, an increase of cross-border activity between China and Mongolia is most likely to happen in the future.

Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

Again the section below is quoted from the assessment report by NAF (2001b) to identify the groups vulnerable to drug use and HIV infection in current Mongolian society.

The vulnerability of the population to drug use and HIV is exacerbated by a number of factors including:

- age (50% of the population are 0-21 years)
- high levels of poverty and unemployment
- widespread heavy alcohol use
- an increase in sex work
- an increase in internal and international mobility
- a rapid increase of IDU with the accompanying high rate of HIV in neighboring countries — Russia, Kazakhstan and China

- a limited experience with drug use and associated problems leading to misperceptions, misinformation and inadequate responses to emerging problems
- a low level of awareness and understanding on drug use related problem and its consequences among the policy makers and general public
- a lack of trained staff and facilities and the predominance of supply and demand reduction approaches
- widespread injecting culture supported by traditional approaches to public health lack of low threshold friendly services available to vulnerable communities including drug users
- very limited knowledge of young people about drugs and drug-related harm
- condom use among vulnerable population is low
- condom supply in the countryside is limited.
- considerable stigma associated with drug use.

Discussion and Conclusions

(a) Concept of vulnerability and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS in particular

'Vulnerability of migrants' is clearly a complex and contested issue. Many migrants appear to be in vulnerable situations but in reality they may be less vulnerable than they were in the regions that they originated from. 'Vulnerability' needs to be dissected into various elements, as some aspects may improve with migration while others could deteriorate. An index of vulnerability is perhaps one way of thinking about the component parts.

Vulnerability Index for Migrants = Economic security + Social status + Emotional security + Health protection

Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS falls under the latter, health protection. It is of particular importance because it can be anticipated — if people, and migrants in this case, engage in particular behaviours or activities known to increase the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Migrants' heightened vulnerability is due to the fact that the situation they face after migration may lead them to engage more readily in risky behaviours.

The size of the mobile population is increasing within China and the increase is expected to continue in the future. Above all, the fact is clear that the population of migrants or travellers, both within a country and across borders, is of an age that is most active in social, economic, as well as sexual activities, and they often live in isolated, marginalised and ostracised situations. With little knowledge of HIV/AIDS or how to prevent it, they are open to contracting the virus, which is beginning to spread in China.

Little information is available on cross-border movements out of China but returning Chinese workers are beginning to return with the virus. The itinerant traders and travellers who visit China's border cities may increase the spread of the virus through their visits to sex workers and drug-related activities. North Korean refugees are potentially at very grave risk of contracting and spreading the virus as they are forced to live in the most precarious conditions and disperse throughout China to evade the authorities.

In Mongolia, there is an increase in mobility both internally and across borders but there is limited information available on the potential HIV vulnerable sub-populations. Internal migrants have till recently been denied urban registration but recent challenges from the Human Rights Commission have changed this. Nevertheless, many rural-urban migrants live in poor and marginalised situations. These people are particularly at risk if the virus becomes more widespread.

Thus it is fairly easy to identify factors increasing vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and this needs to be done quickly. Migrants may be more vulnerable away from home but if and when they do return home, and many in China do, they run the risk of taking the virus back with them. This has begun to happen in China — just as it has happened in Africa, India and Sri Lanka, to name a few examples.

(b) Reasons for lack of information and research on this topic

Overall, there is limited knowledge about the studied area, Northeast China and Mongolia, on cross-border mobility — such as strength and frequency of activity, age, sex, occupation and education structure of the migrants or travellers, travelling status, whether or not they travel with their family or alone, how long they stay in the destination, how frequently they change places, living and working conditions, social support in destination, incomes that they make in their destination, what they do and where they go after work, what kind of health services they have used and prefer to use, what they know about the service and opinions about it. Numerous questions need to be answered and this is an important task to be taken before any programs can be designed.

Questions need to be asked as to why the situation of migrants has been an area of research that has not attracted much attention. Some possible reasons are:

- general unwillingness to acknowledge or recognise the increasing levels of internal mobility in North East Asia, as this often goes against systems of registration and indicates a failure or breakdown of these systems;
- cross-border mobility is often irregular, unwelcome and 'hidden', and acknowledgement of such movements would indicate a failure of the national system for controlling borders;

- some mobility is contracted or 'formal' whilst most of it is informal or irregular, and therefore outside of any state or other controls and not seen as worthy of study or investigation;
- the attitudes of governments may be that people who move without permission do not deserve protection or attention;
- there is a general unwillingness to discuss sensitive matters, especially to do with sexual behaviour, sex workers, use of condoms, etc;
- the characteristics of the mobile population, the context in which it occurs and the behaviour of the movers influence the prospect of HIV infection but this is not highlighted;
- groups with a higher risk of HIV infection have not yet been identified in China and Mongolia;
- refugees and highly mobile groups, such as traders, trucker drivers, have received barely any attention from researchers in these countries for political or social reasons;
- there has been little research into the behaviour of migrants, using the Behavioural Sentinel Surveillance⁵ or a similar system;
- geographic locations that are potential 'hot spots' for the contraction of HIV/AIDS are emerging and need to be mapped and investigated, but such research has not been a priority for governments;
- national capacity for preventing or alleviating an HIV/AIDS epidemic is very varied and some states are totally unprepared or unwilling to allocate the resources required;
- there is no collaboration or regional mechanisms for inter-state activity to address the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Given this situation it has been very difficult for domestic researchers to work on these issues and on some groups of migrants. It has often been the international organizations and NGOs that have prompted and funded such research and programs. The situation with HIV/AIDS has introduced an element of urgency and alarm and has enabled outsiders to urge the Chinese government, in particular, to begin to focus on the situation facing many internal migrants. It has not yet turned its attention to vulnerable international migrants. The last five years has seen a rise in interest demonstrated by the Mongolian government but much still remains to be done and the limited resources make research and policy development difficult.

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⁵ Behavioural Sentinel Surveillance approach involves locating and mapping areas where migrant workers gather, select a random sample and conduct structured and in-depth interviews using trained interviewers (Hugo, 2001).

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