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Media release

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**Royal
Geographical
Society**
with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning

Urgent need to improve our understanding of urban migration, says RGS-IBG

- **Responding to the impacts of urban migration will be a critical global challenge of the 21st century**
- **Major international research project now in the field**

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is today highlighting the urgent need to improve our understanding of the impacts of urban migration on both migrants and the cities they move to. In response to global urbanisation trends, the Society has launched a major international field research project to learn more about one of the most pressing global issues.

The RGS-IBG, the UK's learned society for geography, is stressing that responding to the impacts of urban migration will be a critical global challenge of the 21st century.

By 2050, it is predicted that 70% of people will live in cities, with almost all urban population growth in the next 30 years taking place in cities in Africa and Asia. The World Health Organisation estimates that the urban population of these continents will increase from 2.5 billion in 2009 to almost 5.2 billion by 2050. Much of this growth will be the result of migration from rural areas.

Many poor, rural migrants in Africa and Asia end up in the poorest neighbourhoods of cities, where it is all too easy to become trapped.

A consultation of the Society's 16,000 Fellows and members, followed by a unanimous recommendation by an expert Steering Group, identified the impacts of urban migration as a geographical issue in need of urgent field-based research.

Dr Rita Gardner, Director of the Society, said:

“Urbanisation is the defining feature of global population growth and distribution in the first half of the 21st century. City growth in the next 30 years is expected to be overwhelmingly concentrated in Africa and Asia, much of it the result of migration from rural areas.

“Responding appropriately to these movements, which are some of the most important and least studied migration patterns worldwide, is a critical global challenge. We just don't know enough about the impacts on both the migrants and the neighbourhoods and communities they move to.”

Migrants on the margins

In response to this urgent need, the Society has launched *Migrants on the margins*.

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Migrants on the margins is a three year collaborative project involving researchers from UK universities and international research partners, focusing on the vulnerability and opportunities of migrants in some of the world's most pressured cities, including Colombo (Sri Lanka), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Harare (Zimbabwe) and Hargeisa (Somaliland).

Fieldwork is now underway to explore the factors that determine the life chances of migrants and how urban migration impacts on neighbourhoods and existing communities.

In particular:

- What determines if migration to a city is a pathway into poverty?
- Does ongoing mobility provide a way out of poverty?
- How can the arrival of migrants be supported in sustainable ways to reduce the chances of them becoming trapped in poverty?

University of Sussex geographer and project lead, Professor Michael Collyer, said:

“It is crucial that we learn more about urban migration. It’s not clear what impacts migrants have on the places they move to, nor is it clear how cities should respond. Very little is currently understood about the life chances of the migrants themselves and the issue will only worsen as populations grow.”

The multidisciplinary project team includes geographers, anthropologists, climate scientists and planners. Collecting results over time from each study city, the team will go beyond the specific contextual factors of a particular neighbourhood or city, enabling a greater impact on policy and practice.

Dr Rita Gardner said:

“This is cutting edge research on an understudied global issue. Research findings will be shared widely to inform as many people as possible, including through a documentary film, an exhibition, lectures, and educational resources for schools.

“As well as seeking to improve lives in the areas of study, this project aims to build research capacity internationally and strengthen networks of expertise in Africa and Asia.”

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Notes to editors

1. **Download an image pack [HERE](#).** Interviews opportunities and further information available on request. Please contact the RGS-IBG's Senior Media and Communications Officer, Scott Edwards, at s.edwards@rgs.org or 020 7591 3019.
2. **The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)** is the learned society and professional body for geography. Formed in 1830 for 'the advancement of geographical science', today we

