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**Title:** Registration Reform

<b>Name of Author</b>	Sonariddh Mao
<b>Name of University</b>	University of Melbourne
<b>Country of Study</b>	Australia
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## **MINISTERIAL BRIEF**

### **Sustainable Reform in Household Registration System in Shanghai**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The household registration system poses strong impositions on domestic migrants in Shanghai since its inception in the 1950s. Obtaining urban residential permits has been an uphill task to the domestic migrants despite the laxity on restrictions by the local and national authorities. This is due to the strict housing and high-income requirements imposed on domestic migrants who seek to move to Shanghai. Failure to meet these requirements is tantamount to not equally receiving essential public services such as schooling for children and healthcare with other residents. The household registration system imposes discriminative acts on poor domestic migrants in terms of stable residence and source of income in favour of the learned and affluent (Chen 2011).

I am advocating for reforms in the Household registration system by the Shanghai local authorities to build on optimistic steps already taken by putting in place measures aimed at the protection of domestic migrants and boost their upward mobility. My recommendations are the elimination of the household registration systems' restrictions that disregard domestic and international laws, elimination of structural barriers oppressing the voice of domestic migrants, support the provision of social services to domestic migrants by the private sector, placing emphasis on non-discrimination by liberalization of the Household Registration System and progressively abolishing current legislations that link HRS status to the access of public services (Jiang 2012).

The Household Registration System has classified locals according to both eligibilities for specified socioeconomic benefits and residential placement since its inception in the 1950s. Local authorities have put in place a registration process aimed at issuing Household Registration System identification to its citizens. Children inherit the Household Registration System identification from their parents, solidifying these categories of administration into hierarchical social identities. Traditionally, the HRS was meant for the control of migration, distribution of resources and monitoring of people of specific target groups. As a means of assuring china's industrial worker's loyalty and economic livelihood, the government accorded non-agricultural HRS identification holders with grain subsidies and food rations as well as granting the non-agricultural urban residents free education, health care and

retirement pensions, subsidized housing and better opportunities of employment (Afridi 2015).

Domestic migrants were restricted from receiving numerous public services, relative to their urban counterparts due to the strict regulations in place. This forced agricultural HRS identification holders to trade their agricultural wares at lower costs to the government in an effort to finance national plans of development. The HRS also posed strict controls on domestic migration to rural residents who wished to relocate to urban cities permanently. They had to make applications for both changes in their agricultural status as well as a permanent place of residence. More regulations also required travellers to apply for authorization from both their residential areas as well as temporary registration at their destination. This had an overall effect of blockage of their upward social mobility. The rigidity of the systems by 1970s ensured the arrest of domestic migrants upon entering new cities. Authorities also used HRS identification to monitor suspect citizens (Zhan 2011).

Surplus rural labour in the 1970s and 1980s was as a result of farming privatization by the government. Furthermore, urban areas faced increased labour demands due to economic development. This led to the Chinese authorities to reform mobility of rural residents as a means of dealing with these pressures. Rural labourers were accorded the freedom to move between their homes and urban job areas, with the extension of momentary systems of residence to cities and towns. By the year 1984, there was the introduction of self-supplied food grain to rural residents which meant they could reside in market towns provided they were locally employed and could house themselves as well as the provision of their own food rations (Zhang 2012).

The residential restriction on the wealthy and intellectuals was lifted by the government in 1992. These individuals could use their resources to invest in urban areas as a way of buying the “urban designation”. In spite of these reform measures, both holders of temporary residence permits and unregistered domestic migrants are faced with relentless limitations on obtaining public services such as subsidized education and medical care which are equivalent to those of permanent residents. In addition, the government has a repatriation system which has the mandate of holding and deporting rural migrants who lack in permanent housing, proper documentation and stable employment (Huang 2012).

HRS reforms have expanded and intensified since the late 1990s. Reforms have been in terms of reorganization of the HRS in cities, limiting restrictions on domestic migration and

institution of reforms aimed at curbing the abuse of domestic migrants. The migrants' limitations on urban employment have received numerous elimination efforts since 2004. Prior to that, migrants seeking to shift their HRS identification status were required to have permanent employment and residence for a period not less than 2 years. Upon achieving this, the migrants could access education and other public services on equal terms with other local residents (Wessler 2013).

Despite this sporadic reforms on the HRS identification, many regulations term stable income sources as formal employment by the government or private sector as well as establishment of private ventures receiving a stable income. Unstable jobs held by most domestic immigrants lack recognition by the law. Some if not local legislations bar low-income residents who have salaries below the officially determined limit. An educational or financial criterion is used in urban areas to grant HRS identification. Some areas award HRS identification to individuals who buy homes of a certain price and size. These regulations are preferential and bar poor domestic migrants from obtaining employment and housing. Additional requirements need residing in the cities for five years. In contrast, business owners receive HRS identification upon payment of 2 years taxes amounting to not less than 5,000 Yuan (Chang 2011).

These restrictions have limited the impact of reforms granting HRS identification based on investment criteria have limited impact since most investors lack the necessary requirements. Despite reforms regarding labelling of HRS identification, migrants still have to fulfill requirements set by the local authorities in obtaining them. In 2003, a national outcry sparked by the beating of a young migrant to death lead to the abolishment of coercive custody system which was employed to detain unregistered domestic migrants. An automatic sign-in system for migrants was implemented as a means of eliminating the short-term residence permit system. Reforms prohibiting migrants from renting office spaces and residential apartments as well as exclusion from certain occupations have intensified (Freeman 2015).

## **ISSUES**

The issues that require your consideration are aimed to reforms of the HRS identification system. Current HRS is ingrained in cultural, economic and political rights associated with the permit of residence. The conclusions of my research and analysis clearly outline that the major bottleneck is the linkage of the HRS to access of public services. Options would be to maintain or peel away the association of cultural, economic and political rights to the HRS

system. This would have the upside of equality being resource allocation. The downside would be the permanent residents developing feelings of invasion since many rural migrants would move to Shanghai. Despite this, it is a compelling course of action since it caters for the rights of domestic migrants (Castles 2013; Bretell 2014).

Another issue to be considered is educational barriers posed by children who are not permanent residents of Shanghai. From my research and analysis, it has become apparent that education in Shanghai is based on HRS registration instead of the place of residence. Upward mobility of migrant children is limited, as they cannot access educational opportunities in the same way as locals. The residents are prioritized on in terms of college admissions regardless of whether migrants perform better. The options would be to make efforts in providing migrant children with an essential education based on their jurisdiction or maintaining the current system. The former would ensure proper education of migrants without the levying of additional school fees. The cons of this would be resistance from the local government due to their lack of interest in incurring costs of educating migrant children. The compelling option is the provision of essential education to migrants to increase the overall literacy levels of the country at large (McKowen 2013).

Another issue to be considered is the access of medical healthcare access to domestic migrants who lack HRS identification. From my research, I can conclude that Shanghai local authorities base access to health insurance programs on the HRS registration. Options would be to allow access to healthcare by migrants, which would decrease their mortality and improve their wellbeing. The con of this would be exerting pressure on the health sector prompting expansion. The most compelling course of action would be to allow access to healthcare for domestic migrants, hence allowing for overall positive effect on Shanghai as a whole (Jin 2012).

The issue of political and structural barriers is also to be considered. Inefficient representation of rural residents by the local people's congress (LPCs) is a major drawback. These lack significant power although they allow the limitation of active participation in Shanghai's political arena. Conclusions drawn from my analysis and research, showing that the structures in place have led to the discrimination of domestic immigrants. Since LPC deputies have to represent constituents spanning an area greater than four times their urban counterparts, they lack focus on important issues. This has a negative effect of leaving their welfare underrepresented. Migrants are also restricted in accessing their voting rights as

voting rights are only allowed to individuals who possess HRS identification. The options would be for an increase in LPCs to ensure rural residents are properly represented and revision of the voting rights of migrants. The downside of this would be the unwarranted competition with their urban counterparts. The compelling reasons for choosing the proper representation of rural residents and giving migrants voting rights would be to eliminate discriminations brought about by these legislations (Betts 2011; Gallagher 2008).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Continued liberalization of urban HRS identification requirement, emphasizing on non-Discriminatory Criteria**

The shanghai authorities should implement reforms which grant local HRS identification based on criteria which are not economically discriminative. One measure would be granting HRS identification based on the time frame of residence in shanghai. Another move would be the granting of HRS identification to children of long-term domestic migrants such as gaining short-term residential permits. This would have the long-term effect of preventing the emergence of a population, which is socially excluded. The local authorities may form guidelines such as providing disability benefits to domestic migrants equally with their urban counterparts (Lan 2011; Pieke 2012).

### **Progressive Elimination of HRS identification Barriers Linked to Public Services**

Access to public services such as education and healthcare has been linked to HRS identification placing domestic migrants at a disadvantage. There should be an abolition of education barriers that domestic immigrants and their generations face. There should be reforms in the education sector of Shanghai to be able to accommodate equal education of both rural and urban residents. This should also be implemented in providing of disability benefits to both residents and non-residents of shanghai. The Shanghai local authority should put in place structures to provide public services to migrants equally with their urban equals (Van 2013).

### **Support of Private Efforts in Provision of Social Services to domestic Migrants**

The emergence of private schools and healthcare facilities to cater for domestic migrants should not receive opposition but instead, should be accorded the necessary support. Local

authorities' hard-line stand of closing these facilities should be discouraged. They should instead focus on assisting them to improve in terms of quality (Kim 2014).

### **Engaging in International Dialogue regarding the HRS identification System and Issues of Migration**

Shanghai should place particular interest reforming the HRS identification system by engaging in substantive international exchanges. They should put in mind that these issues are not unique to Shanghai but also present globally. They should concentrate on efforts that evade the emergence of migrant populations that are disadvantaged.

### **Elimination of HRS identification Restrictions that disregard Domestic and International Law**

The present laws restrict the freedom of international movement by the domestic migrants. They require revision (Leighton 2011).

### **Elimination of Structural Barriers that Limit the voice of Domestic Migrants and Rural Residents**

Measures of elimination of barriers pertaining education and politics should be put in place. Structural biases, in particular, should be eliminated in congressional representation and higher education admission to enhance upward mobility of domestic migrants (Jin 2012).

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