

# WALKING WITH THE MIGRANTS BEYOND COVID-19 PANDEMIC

JOSEPH XAVIER



**Indo-Global  
Social Service Society**  
*Celebrating the Spirit of Humanity*

# **Walking with the Migrants Beyond Covid-19 Pandemic**

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was more than a coincidence. Deeply touched by the migrant crisis, Fr. Paul Moonjely, the Executive Director of Caritas India (CI), New Delhi and Mr. John Peter Nelson, the Executive Director of Indo Global Social Service Society (IGSSS) asked me whether I could take up a study on the future of the migrants, at the end of May. They felt that this study would help them in redesigning their ongoing engagements in accompanying the migrants in a number of north and northeastern states these organizations currently serve. As Director of Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru (ISI-B), which has Labour Migration Unit as one of the pillars, I was reflecting on how best the institute could be at the service of the migrants, walking with them in the post Covid-19 scenario.

The reach of ISI-B is primarily in South India. Whereas addressing migrant crisis requires whole-of-India approach. An action-research is incomplete unless it leads to changes in the lives of the migrants. To this end, I cannot find better partners than CI and IGSSS. Bypassing all procedural formalities, three of us agreed to work, bringing together the unique gifts of each organisation. The human resources and expertise available within these organizations were harmonized to complete this study in a short span of time. Both the organizations offered me valuable suggestions to improve the draft report with their grassroots experiences and we have collectively agreed to take forward the outcomes of the study to its logical conclusion by way of dissemination, redesigning operational strategies and engaging in advocacy actions. What I cherish

most is that the three organizations have collectively demonstrated a new culture of collaboration and the rich dividends such efforts could yield. This report is an ample proof. I am personally indebted to Fr. Paul and Mr. Nelson.

A study team was formed comprising of 8 staff from the three organizations, and the members gave me whole-hearted support throughout the study. They took up the responsibility to coordinate with field staff in collecting data, case narratives, photographs and conducting interviews. I am grateful to each one of them.

I must make a special mention of Mr. Julius Pascal Osta working with IGSSS, who helped me by introducing Kobo Collect, a mobile data collection platform. This app was extremely helpful in collecting data in a very short time that was very much needed in the current pandemic scenario when we had to maintain social distancing.

As part of the study, about 12 subject experts, with varied experiences were interviewed. Despite their commitments, all of them whom I contacted through email responded immediately and willingly spent sufficient time over phone and shared their knowledge and experiences. Their inputs helped me in preparing the theoretical framework for this study. I owe a lot to them.

The draft report was presented to an eminent panel, comprising of bureaucrats, academicians, heads of network, national level NGOs and implementing partners. Each one of them affirmed the analysis and recommendations of the report and offered some constructive practical recommendations. As a sign of gratitude, I am

mentioning the names of the study team, subject experts and members of the panel at the end of the document.

Data collection in 8 days, from 47 districts in 11 states would not have been possible but for the generous support of the staff of the three organizations. I was fortunate to get the assistance of 78 staff of the three organisations and trained them in administering interview schedule with sensitivity and compassion. Every one of them rose to the occasion and did a marvelous job. I am grateful to each one of them.

Mr. Peter Seidel, Asia Desk, Caritas Germany, Dr. Sylvia Karpagam, a public health professional and Prof. Paul Newman, who teaches in St. Joseph's College, Bengaluru, offered me with valuable inputs, to fill the gaps in the study.

Ms. Harshita is interning at ISI-B, as part of her MSW studies in St. Claret's College, Bengaluru. I am grateful to her for her constant support, especially in providing me with secondary resources and copy edit.

I approached Prof. Babu Mathew, a person with a unique combination of academic background with specialization in labour and vast experiences in

grassroots engagement as former head of Action Aid India, to pen a foreword to this study. I am grateful to him for his insightful foreword.

Mr. Patrick Hansda working with CI, was entrusted with the responsibility of designing the report. The title 'Walking with the migrants' reminds us of the journey of the migrants on the highways, pilgrimage to native or Exodus. It also invites us to join the migrants in their journey, intentionally. I earnestly hope this study will rejuvenate governments, policy makers, public intellectuals, activists, NGOs, CSOs, and all stakeholders to continue to accompany the migrants with renewed vigour, compassion and solidarity in the post-Covid pandemic era.



**Dr. Joseph Xavier SJ**  
Director, Indian Social Institute  
Bengaluru

# FOREWARD

On the occasion of Nelson Mandela's Birthday, the Secretary General of the UNO made a very sharp and incisive comment saying that the Covid-19 pandemic has been like an “X-ray revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the society we have built”.

The present study carried out by ISI-B, Caritas India and IGSSS is a very timely application of this X-ray to Indian reality. It is based on data gathered from eleven source states. The choice of these states itself is valuable since the crisis triggered the exodus back from the destination states to the source states and hence, it became necessary to understand the plight of those who had returned. It is not only an empirical study but is also one based on relevant literature review and consultation with experts from varied backgrounds. Through the study, it captures the pathos of the reverse migrants and exposes the root causes contributing to this humanitarian disaster.

The most invisible part of Indian Society was indeed this huge segment of migrant labour. We had very little knowledge of their numbers, their contribution to the GDP, their importance to keep the economy running and least of all, the sub-human conditions of their existence. This pandemic has suddenly reversed the condition of their invisibility into its opposite. For so many days our media-especially the electronic media was compelled to broadcast images of migrants on a historically unprecedented exodus from the city centre back to their homes in the villages.

Is it not interesting that the Indian state –both at central and state level-was indifferent and

unconcerned to the plight of those who were left stranded in city after city with so many additional lakhs stranded even on the highways? For more than two months India and the world witnessed this dehumanised journey of the social disadvantaged victims back home. Many were walking, some were cycling, some hitching a short ride and still others even climbed into the belly of a cement mixer-all determined to traverse hundreds of kilo meters without food and water.

What was the first response to this human tragedy? Migrants were treated like offenders. They were made to do frog jumps, or canned and sent back to nowhere or forced into dingy wayside shelters in the name of quarantine. Social distancing was thrown to the winds for the socially disadvantaged. It took very long for the Governments of the day to finally offer transport back to rural India with a reluctant Supreme Court issuing belated orders.

Why did this callous indifference manifest for so long? The answer lies in the coloured glasses which the policy gurus and decision makers were wearing. These were imported glasses. They subscribed to the ideological idea that all labour in India must be made “Flexible”. In common parlance, this meant that every form of labour protection-be it tenure of service, wages, social security, health, safety or housing all must be reduced to its bare minimum-nay it should be just left to the market-and what do we find after three decades of practicing flexibility?

When the Prime Minister announced the lockdown, the workers were left with no jobs, no wages, no shelters, no food, and no health

support-indeed nothing at all. Hence India witnessed the second biggest migration in our history-the first being when the British induced pauperisation and de-industrialisation during colonial rule. Another falsification of knowledge was the propaganda that for “Ease of doing business”-all labour laws should be done away with. The U.P and M.P government put this false belief into practice and proposed through an ordinance that these two states would be free not to apply any labour laws (except a few). The reason given was that if this is done new industrial capital would come racing in. Court proceedings appear to have put this threat on hold, at least for the time being.

Addressing the plight of those who have returned naturally involves search for available options at the village level. The report tries to understand the immediate needs of these migrants. Interestingly, it is those alternatives that were pushed by civil society organisations that offer some hope. These measures certainly include two people friendly programmes supported by laws like the MGNREG Act, 2005 and the National Food Security Act, 2013. But unfortunately, not all migrant households have real access to a PDS facility, and few have access to rural employment guarantee opportunities. These deficiencies must be set right and further supplemented with animal husbandry and development of skills which can provide concrete forms of livelihood.

The study also raises critically important questions relating to our model of development. It must be noted that the highest spread of the virus is in Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and now, Bengaluru.

This is where India's modern industry is concentrated. Both foreign capital and Indian big capital like to locate itself in the big cities-they do not patronise green fields. They prefer to huddle into a few spots of urbanisation. In these same cities, we have overcrowding and thousands of slums for workers in the informal sector. Already the return journey from the villages back to the cities has begun. Some employers are even providing railway reservation and re-deploying contractors for fresh recruitment. Failure on the rural front re-induces such re-migration in desperate search of livelihood. The pull and push factors are back at play and without learning lessons and searching for innovative alternatives, the story will repeat.

The present study which is now in your hands is a valuable document. It identifies multiple issues from the ground, gives valuable insights and comes out with a wide range of recommendations for the Central Government, State Governments, Trade Unions and Civil society organisations.



**Babu Mathew**

Director, Centre for Labour Studies and  
Chairperson, Masters Programme in Public Policy,  
National Law School, Bengaluru.

# ABBREVIATIONS

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| AAJ        | <i>Antyodaya Anna Yojana</i>                                  |
| AIUFWP     | All India Union of Forest Working People                      |
| APL        | Above Poverty Line  |
| BPL        | Below Poverty Line  |
| CBOs       | Community Based Organisations                                 |
| CSOs       | Civil Society Organisations                                   |
| CSR        | Corporate Social Responsibility                               |
| ESI        | Employment State Insurance                                    |
| GC         | Global Compact  |
| GDP        | Gross Domestic Product  |
| GEN        | General   |
| ILO        | International Labour Organisation                             |
| ISMW       | Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act                               |
| MGNREGA    | Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act        |
| MSMEs      | Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises                           |
| MSP        | Minimum Support Price   |
| NCEUS      | National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector |
| NITI Aayog | National Institution for Transforming India                   |
| NTUI       | New Trade Union Initiative                                    |
| OBC        | Other Backward Classes  |
| PDS        | Public Distribution System                                    |
| PF         | Provident Fund  |
| PPP        | Public Private Partnership                                    |
| PRI        | Panchayati Raj Institution                                    |
| PSU        | Public Sector Undertakings                                    |
| RTI        | Right to Information  |
| SC         | Scheduled Castes (Dalits)                                     |
| SC         | Supreme Court   |
| SDGs       | Sustainable Development Goals                                 |
| SEWA       | Self-Employed Women's Association                             |
| SRLM       | State Rural Livelihood Mission                                |
| ST         | Schedule Tribes (Adivasis / Indigenous Peoples)               |
| SWAN       | Stranded Workers Action Network                               |
| UDHR       | Universal Declaration of Human Rights                         |
| VRF        | Vulnerability Reduction Fund                                  |

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## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY



### Context

The plight of the migrant workers walking thousands of kilometres to their homes carrying their children on the shoulders and their meagre possession on their back, braving heat and hunger will haunt us for many years. Pathos, the identity of the vulnerable communities, hitherto unnoticed, unidentified and unrecognised, shook the conscience of the humanity. Throughout the lockdown periods, not a single day passed by

without heart-breaking narratives of migrants. India's story of Covid-19 has been marred with hunger, sufferings, blood stain and death of the migrant workers.

The disempowering realities in the source states - unemployment, joblessness, debt, drought, lack of minimum wages, caste atrocities, discriminatory and exclusionary practices on one hand and longing for a dignified living on the other, forced the poor and vulnerable to leave their roots, lands,

## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

kith and kin to join the bandwagon of informal and casual labour. Most of them were seasonal or circular migrants with no fixed destination at sight. While a majority of male folk travelled distant locations braving linguistic and cultural barriers, female folks largely moved around in various districts within the state.



Various studies estimate the number of migrants between 200 to 300 million, comprising of inter-state and intra-state. Census 2011 estimated these migrants to be 177.5 million. According to International Labour Organisation (ILO), about 400 million people working in the informal economy in India are at risk of falling deeper into poverty due to the coronavirus crisis (The Economic Times, April 8, 2020). However, the incontestable truth is that mass reverse migration was the direct result of untrustworthy, heartless and inconsiderate actions of majority of employers in connivance with governments. While many were longing to go back to see their kith and kin, the waiting period was too long, and many were left in lurch, completely helpless as there were no transportation facilities. On their way back home, some were stripped of the minimum they possessed. Free travel was costlier than normal travel cost. Every migrant needed

counselling support to be relieved from their experiences of trauma, caused by the bureaucratic bottlenecks, lack of coordination and communication gaps. Nonetheless, some philanthropic organisations, institutions, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and individuals despite their feeling of helplessness, extended helping hands to the migrants.

It is important to note that Covid-19 whirlwind has changed the academic understanding of push-pull factor concept. The so-called pull factors have become push factors. Infectious virus was overpowered by starvation and hunger. Tossed between source-destination and unpredictable future scenarios, most of the migrants decided to return to their native places by every possible means available, even if it meant bearing police brutality and/or paying commissions to their masters. As they lost hope in everything other than hope in themselves, they were ready to embark on hard and strenuous journey on foot and were prepared to face death on the way, if it were to happen, but eyes set on their native place.

While the politics of blame game will continue for a few more days and months, soon the plight of the migrants will be forgotten. No one is definitive whether the voices of conscientious citizens and civil society organisations, demanding those who govern the country to build the nation state from a bottom up approach adhering to the Constitutional vision, will be heard, and acted upon. Our governments and politicians are determined to push their agenda, adopting one size fits all Atmanirbhar Bharat agenda. Many growth strategies are being developed to set right the broken economy, focussing on MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) and infrastructure and by ushering in technology-based governance. What do these growth

strategies mean for millions of migrant workers who reached their homes looking for survival strategy? Are the home states in a position to absorb them and ensure that the migrants would have food on table, educate their children, basic health needs addressed, minimum incomes ensured and that they are able to live with dignity?

What do the migrants earnestly look for as they reach their homeland? How do they articulate their future dreams and what are they still holding on to? What do they expect their governments to do? What role do they feel that the citizens, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and CSOs could play? These are some questions that brought the three institutions – Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru (ISI-B), Caritas India (CI), New Delhi and Indo Global Social Service Society (IGSSS), New Delhi together to search for answers through a scientific rapid assessment study.

### Scope of the study

Migration is a huge and complex reality. Given the regional, economic, income and development disparities across different states in India it is nearly impossible to prevent migration from one state to another, notwithstanding intra-state migration. However, what is possible is to ensure safe, orderly and dignified migration that would affirm the freedom of movement of workers in designing their future which is non-discriminatory and inclusive. Protecting the rights of migrants and ensuring their wellbeing is imperative, as they contribute to economic growth of the nation substantially which is often forgotten or hidden. These measures require that the legislatures, policy makers, those in governance in source and destination states, implementors, judiciary, employers, worker unions and associations, media and civil society groups act in union in finding



ways and means to reduce the vulnerabilities of the migrants.

Migrant crisis has generated countless discussions, reports, studies and op-eds, which are available in the public domain. No one study can deal with the magnitude of this crisis, the root causes and the future way forward comprehensively. This study is intended to amplify the voices and concerns of the migrants who had returned to native states in the context of Covid-19 pandemic, not just to bring out the pathos narratives but to intentionally look forward towards their future. It concentrates on 11 states of north and northeastern states, which are considered as source or sending states, though some of these states are also receiving states. The study focuses on the experience of pathos of the reverse migrants and unearths the root causes which got exposed leading to unprecedented humanitarian disaster. It further examines current basic needs of the migrants and their families, gaps in social security measures, availability and accessibility of entitlements and livelihood opportunities, especially related to agriculture, animal husbandry and employable / income generating skill development in the native states. Based on the analysis of data, it articulates what the states could initiate in alleviating the plight of the migrants, by developing appropriate and strategic responses. It also proposes rights of migrants which are to be strengthened in the broader context of informalization of workers and challenges faced by them, which are applicable in the native states and destination states.

With regard to working of migrants in the destination states, this study limits its focus to states of working, nature of work, salary pattern and years of working. However, drawing insights from the work-related case narratives, some recommendations are articulated for possible

interventions in future in the destination states. Drawing insights from the data analysis, case narratives, interview with experts and secondary resources, general roadmaps are presented to protect the rights and entitlements of workers and migrants in particular, with recommendations to Central Government, State Governments, Trade Unions and Civil Society Organizations. Considering the urgency of the livelihood concerns of the migrants, short-term and medium-term strategies and action plans are proposed which could be considered by governments and different stakeholders in native and destination states.

The need to study the condition of the inter-state migrants and intra-state migrants is an important concern, especially their working conditions, wages, discriminatory practices, access to entitlements and public health. This is a potential area for next study.

### Literature Review

Migration is a huge phenomenon, globally. For the purpose of this study, inter-state migrants are defined as 'distress labour migrants who move from native state to another state, in view of employment to eke out a living'. This scenario is also called as outmigration, which has been normalised over several decades without adequate systems and policy measures for labour protection, exploitation and discrimination.

“Migration is a form of human mobility and encompasses different types of territorial movements, both temporary and permanent, over varying distances” (Zelinski, 1971). Labour migration takes places from economically underdeveloped states to relatively more developed states (Das and Saha, 2013).

### Type of migrants

There are many categories of migration. Chain Migration: A process that occurs after a small number of pioneering groups lead the way somewhere else and others from the same rural community follow. Forced Migration: Involuntary migration comprising of refugees, internally displaced persons and asylum seekers. Circular migration: Temporary and usually repetitive movement of a migrant worker between home and host areas, typically for the purpose of employment. Return or reverse migration: The voluntary movements of immigrants back to their place of origin. Seasonal Migration: It is the process of moving for a period of time in response to labour or climate conditions.

Distress migration is caused by vulnerability of existing livelihoods (Renaud et al., 2011). Distress migration occurs in areas where food security is low and the capacity of states is limited (Raleigh, 2010). The distressed condition denotes a sharp impact, increased vulnerability associated with an environmental shock and needed assistance to avoid further suffering and conflict (Suhrke, 1993).

In 1966, E.S. Lee proposed Push-Pull Model of Migration. He suggested four factors influencing the decision to migrate:

- 1) Factors associated with the place of origin,
- 2) Factors associated with the place of destination,
- 3) Intervening obstacles that lie between the places of origin and destination, and
- 4) A variety of personal factors.

From the perspective of poverty reduction, seasonal and circular migration may provide important insights, as these types of migration

appear to be more prevalent among the poor (Deshingkar and Farrington 2009; Srivastava et al. 2011). In the Indian context, Kohli (2010) identified push factors such as economic underdevelopment, low wages, unemployment, increasing number of landless workers in native states and pull factors as increasing demand for agricultural workers due to Green revolution, higher wages, and demand for skilled and unskilled labourers in urban industrial and informal sector of Punjab. Chakraborty and Kuri (2013) also identified rural indebtedness as a push factor.

Saxena and Bedi attempted to determine the causes of migration in Western Uttar Pradesh on the basis of a study of four sample villages. Their analysis was that the rural push factor was important and economic, social and demographic factors contributed to it (Saxena and Bedi, 1966). Lack of non-agricultural opportunities in rural areas also constituted a major 'Push' factor while many advantages and amenities in urban areas were the 'Pull' factors (Prothero, 1968). When workers do not get any option for livelihood and employment and there is expectation in higher economic improvement in the place of origin, labour migration takes place (Lall, Selod and Shalizi, 2006).

While 'pull' of the urban areas may include better employment opportunities and regular and high wages, these induce them to live, even in the substandard conditions of urban slums (Gosal and Krishnan, 1975). Srivastava (2005) notes that in India most poor internal migrants live in urban slums under unhygienic conditions. These living conditions lead to health problems and various diseases. Those working in India's quarries, construction sites and mines suffer from various health hazards, mostly lung disease. Workers in the tile factories and brick kilns often suffer from

occupational health hazards such as lung disease, body ache, sun stroke and skin irritation. Migration impinges the childhood development. Srivastava (2011) showed that in India, children accompanying seasonal and circular internal migrants do not attend school, as school systems generally do not allow children to be absent for prolonged periods.

The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) reports around 92 percent of India's workforce with informal employment are substantially drawn from migrant labour (NCEUS, 2007). Income to fulfil basic needs is the determining factor for migration. Yap (1976) stated that migration helps in reducing rural urban income differentials.

### **Contribution of migrants to GDP**

In the case of internal migration, Deshingkar and Akter (2009) calculate that there are roughly 100 million circular migrants in India, who contribute roughly 10 per cent to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In the Indian context, women in the migrant households do play an important role in family survival but unfortunately, they remain invisible in the official data because of the way the concepts are defined and data is collected (Sen, 2010). Remittances boosts the economy of the native states. Srivastava (2009) stressed the role of remittances and savings in improving the quality of lives and living standards, and income and growth in the origin areas of migrants. Deshingkar (2006) suggests that even if migration does not reduce poverty, it does help families from sliding into further poverty. However, migrants going through informal or licensed recruiting agents often have to pay hefty agent fees (Siddiqui 2011). This is the reality in many states in India.

### **Studies done during the lockdown period**

A study conducted by Jan Sahas in April 2020 during the Covid-19 lockdown period on migrants concluded that majority of the respondents did not have enough ration left, could not afford rent in the destination locations they were stuck in, and faced with inadequate access to appropriate health care. For the entitlements, the migrants either had no information or had no information on how to access those benefits. With a sudden lockdown, within 4 hours of the announcement, many were sacked out of job (Voices of the Invisible Citizens, 2020).

Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN) studied stranded migrant workers in April 2020 in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh and concluded that migrants faced a paucity of ration and were surviving only on one meal to conserve the quantum of ration left with them. Several were not paid by their employers at all during the lockdown period, leading to several other implications. The study clearly indicated the rate of distress was higher than rate of relief (21 Days and Counting, 2020). The same network in its study in May 2020 reported that there has been a decline in people not having access to government ration from 92 per cent to 82 per cent, and that could be attributed to better partnerships between local administration and civil society organizations in Karnataka as compared to other states (32 Days and Counting, 2020).

Yet another study has highlighted the complete loss of livelihood of women. Harassment of Muslim vendors was reported after the Tablighi Jamaat congregation (Tablighi Jamaat is an Islamic missionary movement which organised its annual religious congregation event in Delhi's Nizamuddin Markaz Mosque in early March 2020). Several of the vendors belong to the

migrant community and thereby, were concerned regarding payment of rent, both currently and post-lockdown (Impact of National Lockdown on Women Street Vendors in Delhi, 2020).

### Goal of the study

The goal of the study is two-fold. It would help NGOs, CSOs, field-based organisations, trade unions, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) wing of companies, government institutions and people's movements, specially Caritas India, IGSSS and ISI-B and their partners to realign and redesign their future interventions in the source and destination states. Secondly, the recommendations of the study could effectively be used by different stakeholders to engage in advocacy works and lobby with respective states and philanthropists to develop

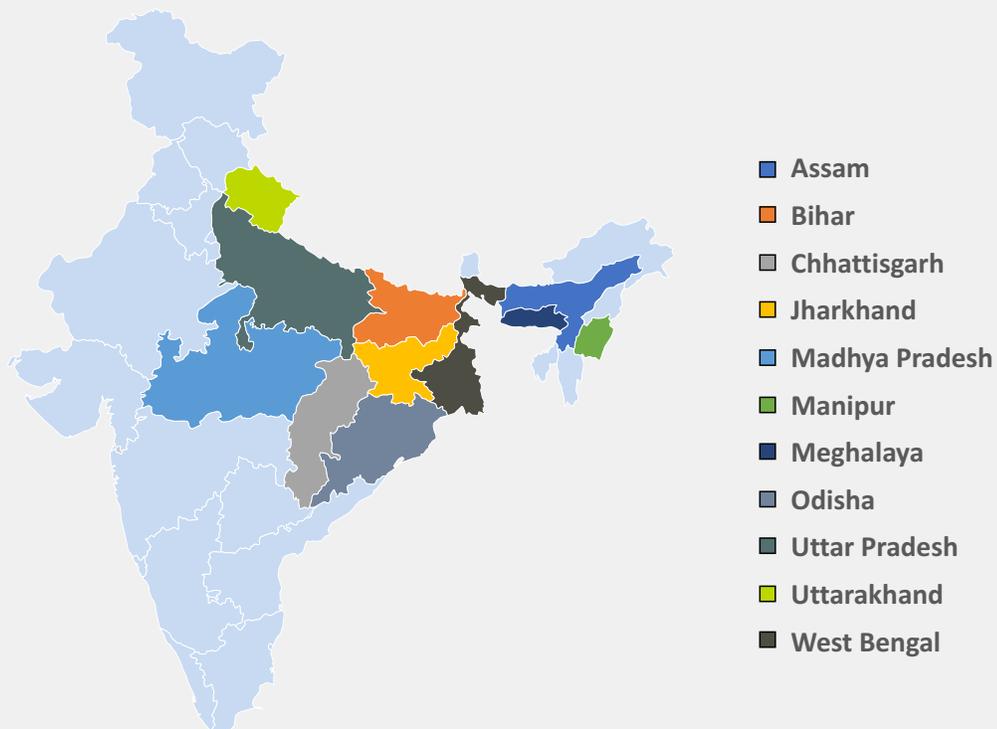
proactive and innovative strategic responses and those organisations working with migrants in the destination states, to engage proactively with migrants, states and employers in the destination states.

### Objectives of the study

To develop deeper understanding of coping strategies and protective mechanisms from the perceptions and understanding of migrants in view of:

- a. Addressing immediate needs and strengthening basic social security measures
- b. Enhancing livelihood opportunities, and
- c. Protecting rights of the migrants.

Chart 1.1: States covered under the study



### Areas of inquiry

1. To map the profile of the respondents – sex, age, native state, education, religion, social category, place of work, nature of work, salary pattern and number of years of work in destination.
2. To understand the experience of pathos of migrants, especially during lockdown, return to their native, in quarantine centres and in native places.
  - a. What is the level of assessment of satisfaction with regard to the relief measures provided by Central Government, native state, destination state and humanitarian agencies, NGOs/CSOs, public institutions, individuals and philanthropists.
3. To understand the immediate needs and analyse existing social security measures, gaps in their implementation and to identify ways to strengthen improved accessibility.
  - a. Do the migrants / their families possess various entitlement identity cards?
  - b. What are the immediate needs and challenges for sustenance?
  - c. What policy actions are suggested to enhance social security measures?
4. To map available, accessible and affordable livelihood opportunities that can be explored and strengthened in the native places.
  - a. What types of rural agronomy could be revived and strengthened?
  - b. What type of animal husbandry development would help in increasing income level?
  - c. What types of skills and capacity training will help the migrants / their family members generate employability opportunities locally?
5. What could be the charter of migrants' rights in native and destination states?



- a. What measures are to be in place to strengthen rights of migrants?
- b. What systemic / policy changes are needed to protect the rights migrants?
- c. What lessons can be drawn from Covid-19 pandemic scenario?

### Universe and sampling

The primary respondents of the study were migrants from north and northeast states of India. Hearing the voices of the migrants through personal interviews was considered non-negotiable for this study, whether they had reached home, stayed in quarantine makeshift places in their native states, were preparing for journey back home or continued to stay back.

Select key stakeholders who had good knowledge of migration scenarios and realities and opportunities at the source and destination states were also interviewed, to align their views with the perceptions and opinions of migrant workers. These are called stakeholder respondents comprising of academicians, activists, government officials, representatives of public and private institutions, leaders of workers, NGOs / CSOs, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Gram Sabha leaders, and philanthropists.

### Methodology, Data collection and Analysis

The study adopted mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative tools. Interview schedule was used to collect responses from primary and stakeholder respondents. Data collection was carried out from 4 – 10 June 2020 either through personal interviews or through mobile conversation, involving 70 field, district and state level staff of the three institutions, using KOBO Collect platform adhering to social

distancing norms. Snowball sampling was used to identify the respondents. In total, 700 migrants and 118 stakeholders were interviewed. About 51 case narratives of migrants capturing experiences of pathos, vulnerabilities and resilience were collected. Apart from these, telephonic unstructured interviews were conducted with a dozen experts to elicit their critique of the current Covid-19 pandemic crisis, core labour issues, futuristic perspectives and new orientations. Various writings available in the public domain were also used as secondary resources.

### Observations

1. This study is focussed on inter-state migrants and does not take into consideration the views of intra-state and intra-district migrants. However, it is believed that the outcomes of the study and recommendations would be applicable to all categories of migrants.
2. The fact that the staff of the three organisations were able to connect with 700 migrants and spent approximately 30 minutes with each person, was a moment of affirmation of ongoing accompaniment of the migrants. No one is sure of the beginning of post-Covid era. But the migrants cannot wait.
3. Using a mobile platform for administering the interview schedule was the only available and appropriate option under the current circumstances. Not being able to have a face to face meeting/interaction with migrants was a limitation.

In the following chapter, theoretical framework for the study is developed to understand the paradigm of distress migration in the broader context of development economy, labour scenario and Covid-19 pandemic.

## CHAPTER 2

# DISTRESS MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF LABOUR SCENARIO AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Every crisis can be seen as a challenge and also as an opportunity. Covid-19 has been a major threat to life but also provides enormous opportunities to review our past and reconstruct the future. It is important to critically look at our current ways of engagements, how apathy permeates public policy, ruling parties, governance mechanisms and so on. It is equally important to identify what we, as citizens are called to engage in expanding compassion, empathy, solidarity and fraternity and in building alliances to walk with the poor with renewed understanding of the complexities guided by principles of democracy, justice, peace, solidarity and reconciliation.

### **Covid-19 exposed dormant core labour issues and emergence of new variables**

More than ever, during Covid-19 lockdown period, a range of actors – academicians, activists, public institutions, media persons, judiciary, executives and public intellectuals, have deeply dealt with the issue of migration. Practically, not a day passed by without talking about core labour issues which focused on migrants. The number of webinars organized in this regard as political education was amazing. Discourses on Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Right to Food, Right to

Information (RTI), decent wage, labour rights violations, no dilution of labour protection laws, contract labour issues, implementation of Interstate Migrant Workmen (ISMW) Act, 1979 received unexpected welcome in many quarters. Rural employment guarantee programme was given a push with increased budget allocation.

New set of variables also emerged in the discourse. To name a few: Need to bring the migrants under the ambit of all labour laws, urban employment guarantee, One-Nation One-Ration Card linked to Aadhaar, universal minimum income, entitlements should walk before the migrants when they move from one place to another through portability of entitlements, online registration, public health concerns and nationalisation of health (Personal interview with Ms. Aruna Roy, 27 June 2020). Industrialists voicing their concerns for workers and IT (Information Technology) employees' contributing to relief were also seen as expressions of solidarity.

There was also recognition of some fundamental changes that have happened as impact of some irreversible failures. For instance, MGNREGA drastically brought down number of women interstate migrants as they had access to 100 days of employment. We also realised that 100 days of employment was not sufficient for a family to have a basic living. The intervention of ILO in reminding our rulers about India's commitment to International Labour laws was a clear indication that the governments and officers of labour departments were alienating the workers. In fact, these officers should have been the first to alert the government and guide them. ILO's intervention also reminded us of the importance of building international solidarity with workers. With all respect to the some of the states which did marvellous works to reach out to migrants,

especially Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, none of the other states followed ISMW Act. Rights provided in this act became matter of charity and at the good will of some governments.

### **Covid-19 uncovered the immensity of the migrant crisis**

Covid-19 can also be seen a double-edged sword. But for Covid-19 crisis, the public would not have known the hidden cost paid by the migrants in contributing to the national economy. That the migrants were sharing beds in rotation for rest in the slums shook our conscience. Demanding migrants who live in groups in a matchbox type single rooms to follow social distancing was either cruel or a joke. It brought to the fore, xenophobic practices by the locals and the plight of children between the age group of 7 – 16 working in brick kilns, restaurants and mechanic shops. The pandemic exposed the immensity of the migrant crisis which in no way one could hide. In normal circumstance, the pathos of migrants would have brought many to the road for peaceful protest, rallies and campaigns. Many migrants would have joined the peaceful struggles instead of returning home to leave a legacy for the future. Covid-19 curtailed our mobility and mobilisation process. Safety of individuals had preponderance over public and common good. Caught between the devil and deep sea, we, as citizens, also became voiceless in a democratic space. We failed to capture the agency of the migrants, articulate and take them to the public domain. It is in this background, this theoretical framework is developed, and the way forward is articulated based on the perceptions, understanding, opinions and expectations of migrants, stakeholders and views of experts who were interviewed.

To appreciate the analysis, interpretations, trends and insights of this study, it is important to locate

the issues of distress labour migrants in the broader context of labour concerns in the changing economic development scenario. A brief historical note is developed in three sections:

a. Pre-liberalization era b. Post-liberalization era and c. Corona pandemic period. It is said that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

### **Pre-liberalization era**

Industrial revolution in the 18th century was yet another turning point in human history. The process of change from an agrarian and handicraft economy to one dominated by industry and machine manufacturing had deep impacts in every aspect of human life. From need based production, we moved to mass production. However, the working conditions turned out to be terrible during the Industrial Revolution. As factories were built, businesses were in need of workers, with a long line of people willing to work, employers could set wages as low as they wanted because people were willing to work as long as they got paid. People worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day for six days a week. This situation gave birth to labour unions. These Unions demanded more pay, fairer treatment and did not want children to work in factories because of the danger involved. These organized strikes and protests. However, these unions could not see the desired changes as supply of labourers were more than the demand.

Karl Marx was an important figure during the industrial revolution in his anti-capitalist analysis of industrialization. Marx developed and published anti-capitalist literature and detailed how workers were particularly oppressed in the factory system. He understood that capitalism, including industrialized capitalism, would always mean oppression for the working class (<https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/why->

was-karl-marx-important-to-the-industrial-398198).

As early as 1919, at the founding of ILO, the guiding principle was clearly enunciated that that labour should not be regarded merely as a commodity or an article of commerce. Dignity of labour which emanates from recognition of inherent dignity of the human family, was at the core. Dignity of labour was articulated as guiding principles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Art 22 (right to social security), Art 23 (right to work, just wages, join trade unions), Art 24 (rest, leisure, working hours and holiday) and Art 25 (right to adequate standard of living) enunciated various key safeguards for labourers. Articles 7, 8 and 9 in International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966 once again brought to the attention of world community the rights of every worker. In 1990, UN General Assembly adopted International Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

The post-independent India adopted welfare model of development. The Nehruvian model of development was based on the four pillars: Parliamentary democracy, secularism, economic planning for establishing a welfare estate and the policy of non-alignment. Responding to a global call, India enacted a number of labour rights and welfare legislations – relating to wages, social security, working hours conditions of service and employment, equality and empowerment of women and prohibitive laws such as - Trade Unions Act 1926, The Industrial Disputes Act 1947, Factories Act 1948, Minimum Wages Act 1948, Employees' State Insurance Act 1948, Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act 1976, to mention a few. To regulate the employment of inter-state

migrant workmen and to provide for the conditions of service in 1979, Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) (ISMW) Act, was enacted.

Despite these legislations, appreciation for dignity of labour was always lacking. As much as owners were given privileges, the workers were deprived of the same. Workers, especially those who were engaged in hard physical labour, were considered as lesser human. Workers' contribution to economy was never duly recognised.

### Post-liberalisation era

The economic liberalisation in India was initiated in 1991 with the goal of making the economy more market- and service-oriented, reduction in import tariffs, deregulation of markets, reduction of taxes, and greater foreign investment. Post-liberalisation era was marred by anti-labour attitudes and approaches. The industries termed labour protection as 'license raj' and demanded the state to end license raj. The employers wanted free hand to hire and fire labourers, all in the name of contributing to economic growth and mass production, without any concern for masses that



produce. Trade unions, the guardians of workers succumbed to political ideologies of ruling parties. Every political party started a trade union to divide and decimate the collective bargaining power of the workers. The workers lost hope in the trade unions. Toothless trade unions became puppets in the hands of the employers.

Most of the Public Sector Undertakings (PSU) were considered to be sick and incurring loss and so the cycle of disinvestment began considerably reducing job opportunities in the organized sector. Consequently, employment in organized sector was fast depleting and employment in informal and unorganized sector was fast growing. This phenomenon too weakened the relevance of trade unions. Many trade unions could not accept those engaged in informal sector as workers.

Agriculture, considered for long to be the backbone of Indian economy and labouring class, was pushed to the back seat without adequate budget provisions. The collapse of agriculture deeply impacted the survival of marginal and small farmers, largely comprised of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Muslims and agricultural labourers, a majority of whom were from the excluded communities such as dalits, adivasis and other vulnerable communities. Having given up hope in agriculture, mass exodus began from villages to towns and cities (Interview with Prof. Babu Mathew, 21 June 2020).

In contrast, urbanized towns and cities were seen as growth destinations. There was very little thinking among the planners about the push and pull factors. No one realized the implications of mass exodus of millions of people to towns and cities. Even if issues had been raised, those never attracted the attention of the governments. Rural India never received any substantial financial

support from successive governments. As a result, population in shanties and slums in the cities grew multifold. The workers were forced to live in appalling conditions in the cities denied of basic amenities. In 2004, The Government constituted the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) under the chairmanship of Dr. Arjun Sengupta. The commission recommended a legislation for social security for unorganised workers and setting up of national security fund. In 2008, the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, was enacted and unorganised workers were made eligible to access 10 welfare schemes. However, this act was never taken seriously due to lack of recognition and appreciation of unorganised workers.

In order to usher in a 5 trillion-dollar economy, the present regime initiated labour reforms by introducing four labour codes – The Code on Wages, The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, The Code on Social Security and The Industrial Relations Code – without much broad-based discussion. Neither the workers nor the trade unions were taken into confidence. Amir Ullah Khan writes, “The unanimous feeling among labour is that the government only cares for the employer. Till this impression is turned around completely, there will be no lasting solution”. (Livemint, 6 January 2020)

### **Corona pandemic period**

Corona pandemic period was only an extension of the post-neoliberal era. However, during this period, the intensity and extent of apathy towards working class / caste, particularly of the migrant workers by all actors got exposed. Harsh Mander called it as 'A moment for civilisational introspection' and recognized 'collective culpability' as bottom line (The Hindu, May 30).

Corona as a portal brought to the fore hitherto unrecognized naked reality of the status of the migrants and working class. It is important to capture a few of these dimensions.

### **Migrants were out of the framework of Legislators, Bureaucracy and Judiciary**

While academicians and social scientists have been engaged in the issues of migrants, the three pillars of democracy – Legislature, Executive and Judiciary, adopted a policy of wait and watch for some weeks. 'Starvation virus is worse than Corona' as expressed by many migrants was an indication of a yearning for survival as well as the insensitivity of the government. Some argued that the situation of the migrant workers resembled the one of bonded labourers. Arguably, despite denial of freedom under Article 19 of the Constitution, the bonded labourers, in many cases, had food, shelter and some wages. In contrast, the migrant workers had 'freedom' but denied of food, shelter and wages (Interview with Prof. Babu Mathew).

For example, Chapter V of ISMW Act, clearly mandates payment of minimum wage rates (Sec. 13), displacement allowance (Sec. 14), journey allowance (Sec. 15) and other facilities such as residential accommodation, medical facilities free of charge, protective clothing (Sec. 16), holidays, hour of work and other conditions (Sec. 13). However, violation of these provisions has been the norm as the states colluded with companies. After so much delay when Shramik special trains were started, the migrants had to pay more than double the amount for travel. Various High Courts recognized the catastrophic scenario and passed interim orders and demanded accountability from the states. After repeated refusal, only on 26 May 2020, the Supreme Court

(SC) took up the matter and on 9 June 2020 passed a detailed order. When the SC demanded the states to submit data on relief, rehabilitation and employment related issues, many states went back to their drawing room to cook up the data, since no government took serious note of this issue, except for providing food and shelter. Suddenly, a bunch of data appeared. This was not unexpected. On 24 May 2020, the Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Seetharaman announced that the government would supply free food grains to 8 crore (80 million) poor migrants for the following two months. But on 23 May 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs stated that around 4 crore migrant labourers are engaged in various works in various parts of the country, and so far, 75 lakhs returned home in trains and buses since the nationwide lockdown was imposed.

Census 2011 has captured the data on migrants. Economic Survey of India 2017 stated that 'an average of nine million people migrated between States every year for either education or work'. The Working Group on Migration formed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation and headed by Mr. Partha Mukhopadhyay from the Centre for Policy Research submitted its report in 2017. No clear plan of action emerged.

Labour migration, especially distress labour migration, from less developed states to more developed is only natural. In India, migration from one state to another state is like crossing international borders. However, one must remember that large percentage of migrants always like to return to their native states whenever there is an opportunity. Migrants are displaced but not cut off from their roots. That is why many migrants travel alone to earn a living. When migrants hear that it has rained in their

native place, the natural instinct is to go back to their natives. When the lockdown was announced, it was only natural for the migrants to go back to their native places. This was not understood by the decision makers. This clearly indicates the social divide between the rulers and migrants. To cap it all, recently, the central government has gone for auctioning 41 coal mines to private miners. Koshy writes that gains from coal mine auction is uncertain and is likely to outweigh energy production and environmental compliance cost (Jacob Koshy, The Hindu, 19 June 2020).



### **Migrants considered as non-citizens by host states**

Host states, barring one or two, were not considering the presence of migrants seriously as they do not matter when it comes to electoral politics. Despite equality of citizens under Article 14 of the Constitution, migrant labourers were

considered as 'outsiders'. Differential treatment of local vs migrants was accepted as new normal, despite Article 15. For example, for the same type and hours of work, where the locals were paid Rs. 700, migrants were paid Rs. 400 – 500. Freedom of movement is guaranteed by Art 19. However, when the migrants moved to another state to eke out their living, they were stripped of their basic entitlements. Migrants were kept out of Public Distribution System (PDS), health, insurance and welfare boards. If a system of ensuring basic entitlements would have been put in place by portability of entitlements, many migrants would not have suffered for lack of food during pandemic.

There is also an inherent contradiction in ISMW Act. This act applies to every establishment in which five or more inter-state migrant workmen (whether or not in addition to other workmen) are employed or who were employed on any day of the preceding twelve months and every contractor who employs or who employed five or more inter-State migrant workmen (whether or not in addition to other workmen) on any day of the preceding twelve months. Sec. 8 of ISMW makes provision for recruitment of migrant workers in source states through licensed contractors approved by the competent authority. Both the source and destination governments never considered these provisions seriously.

The Act also makes explicit provisions for registration of establishments and subsequently registration of employees. In Karnataka, for example, only 30 per cent of establishments are registered. When establishments are not registered, how could one expect registration of workers? More than 90 per cent of migrant workers are in the informal sector and they are unregistered. They do not even know their

principal employers. They are governed by layers of sub-contractors who not only take big cuts in wages but also curb their cries not to be heard in public domain.

Even in the unorganized sector, conditions of those who migrate to rural pockets of different states is much worse. For example, lives of those who work in brick kiln in the rural pockets has been appalling. In the last 50 years, owners of the brick kilns have changed, migrants have been rotating but the working condition of the workers have remained the same (Interview with Prof. Virginius Xaxa, 25 June 2020). On 20 May 2020, the newspapers reported the barbaric act of some of the owners who thrashed migrant workers from Odisha near Salem in Tamil Nadu.

### **Ministry of Labour and Employment and Labour Departments**

In the post-liberalisation era, one of the ministries which lost its grip and direction in India has been Ministry of Labour and Employment. The labour departments at the centre and states have lost their steam and became ineffective. Whenever a worker approached the labour department there was lack of response, citing no staff and no resources (Interview with Prof. Xaxa). The vulnerability of this ministry was also compounded by the fact that employers and real estate mafias had direct access to corridors of power at the higher echelons which rendered the mission of this ministry vulnerable. Labour ministry should have raised their voices and protested when different states passed amendments in labour laws, through Ordinance route, to increase working hours from 8 to 12. It did not happen. On the contrary, some genuine officers were 'transferred' for doing their duty. On 11 May 2020, when food distribution was in full

swing by the Karnataka government officials to reach out to migrants and other vulnerable poor, the Principal Secretary Mr. Manivannan IAS was transferred. This sudden transfer raised eyebrows among other officials and CSOs (Deccan Herald, 11 May 2020). This case is only a tip of an iceberg.

Yet another example is a case of under-utilization of funds such as labour welfare fund and disaster management fund. Every state has developed labour welfare board under The Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) (BOCW) Act, 1996 and they collect contribution from employees and employers among the registered workers. Such funds are to be used for the welfare of employees. During Covid-19, with so much pressure from trade unions and CSOs, the state of Karnataka increased the relief amount from Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 5,000 which amounted to Rs. 1,050 crores, while the government was in possession of Rs. 8,000 crores. Kerala and Tamil Nadu spent substantial percentage of welfare fund. One does not understand the logic of the governments not releasing substantial amount of welfare funds which belongs to the employees during pandemic period when the workers need financial support desperately (Interview with Prof. Bernard D' Sami, 21 June 2020).

### **Challenges in the native states**

Could native states absorb reverse migration phenomenon? The regional disparities are so glaring owing to which a number of states in north and northeast still remain underdeveloped. There is a huge surplus of labour force in these states. Even if the native state governments intend to accommodate them by creating some job opportunities, the income levels are very low. Many migrants also want to escape from the



burden of feudalism and casteism. However hardworking a migrant may be in his native, it is almost impossible to get more than Rs. 200 for physical labour work. The same person would easily get Rs. 400 to 500 in any of the cities or Southern and Western states (Interview with Prof. Xaxa). The needs of the family have increased. There is an increasing desire to educate the children, health care of aged parents have become expensive and marriages require decent sum of money to fulfill basic obligations. Under these circumstances, the migrants have no options but to migrate to other states to tide over the financial crisis. MGNREGA has been a game changer in the lives of the ordinary. But for MGNREGA, at this point of time, some feel that there would have been riots for food (Interview with Mr. Nikhil Dey, 21 June 2020). However, when the choice is between Rs. 200 under MGNREGS and enhanced earning in other states, it was only natural that the migrants chose other states, despite the odds they had to undergo.

While it is important that native states find ways to provide employment opportunity, unless there is substantial increase in income level many migrants would return soon.

Despite providing relief support, no state took serious note of migrants caught up in transition and last mile connectivity. Even those who reached main stations by Sharmik special trains had to walk long distances to their native. Many who were kept in quarantine centres felt suffocated as there was lack of food, water, medical care and counselling. Some migrants reported that the ideal situation would have been to empower the gram sabha to establish quarantine centres and run them (Interview with Prof. Babu Mathew).

### **Principles of democracy and federalism were under severe strain**

In order to ensure that the virus does not spread and is contained effectively, the central government invoked Disaster Management Act,

2005 and Epidemic Diseases Act, 1977 and announced lockdown without much discussion. While everyone understands the logic of lockdown, the way it was planned and executed demonstrated lack of sensitivity to the migrants and poor. As much as we were concerned regarding personal safety - 'virus should not affect me', we did not care about the migrants who decided to walk for hundreds and thousands of kilometers. The government stopped the transportation without being sensitive to the migrants. Impeding the movement of migrants would have been justified if the migrants had been provided food, shelter, medical care and social security. Instead, the rulers spoke in platitudes – elders must be taken special care of, children should not come out, pregnant women must stay inside home. All these are understood. What about those who carried their little possession on their heads and children on their back walking towards their natives. These people preferred to die in their natives than in host states which exploited them, made use of their services and rejected them.

Lack of respect for federal form of governance also created huge gap between the states, the actual implementers and the centre, the decision makers. Many states openly stated discrimination in financial allocation for Covid relief by the central government. A state official mentioned that every day three different orders were received on what measures to be put in place and the officials were perplexed as to which order is to be executed. Moreover, no resources were supplied to put in a system. Such was the state of affairs. Even in determining coloured zones, there was data gap and decisions were imposed. Visibly, authoritarianism reached its new peak during pandemic period (Interview with Mr. Nikhil Dey).

### **Trade unions maintained respectable distance from the migrants**

There are about 12 recognised central trade unions in India, including Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA). It is alleged that in the post-liberalisation era, many of them have lost their relevance. Hardly any trade union took the migrants under their umbrella. Work and workers have been ideologically coloured by the instrumentalities of trade unions, sponsored by the divisive political parties, at the cost of protecting the rights of the mass of poor workers. In no circumstance did the trade unions reach out to migrants in a coordinated manner. It is unfortunate that trade unions treated the migrants as 'outsiders.' This weakened the collective bargaining of the working class and strengthened the hands of the employers. While it is understandable that the circular and seasonal nature of migration created many complexities in organizing the migrant workers, the trade unions should have developed appropriate strategies for engagement, considering the condition of the migrants. Trade unions also failed the migrants, barring some individual union leaders.

### **Most Migrants are SC/ST and economically vulnerable poor**

Evidence shows that nearly 90 per cent of workers are employed in informal sector, as per the report by Government of India – Employment in Informal Sector and Conditions of Informal Employment, 2013 – 14, though ILO puts it at 81 per cent (<https://thewire.in/labour/nearly-81-of-the-employed-in-india-are-in-the-informal-sector-ilo>). A big chunk of them are from excluded communities – dalits (Schedule Castes - SC), adivasis (Scheduled Tribes – ST) and economically vulnerable among other communities. These have been subject to class and caste oppression for

centuries. Believing in the goodness of the fellow citizens living in well-off states and that migration to another state would provide an opportunity to improve their quality of lives, they moved to distant lands leaving their kith and kin, land and forest and spirits, gods and goddesses. These were the group of people who built the roads, skyscraper buildings, built metro lines, cleaned the dirt, cooked food, gave their blood and sweat so that industries and companies may come up with strong foundations. The cities they built rejected them and chased them out labeling them as 'corona carriers.' Shame and fear were the lessons these migrants carried along with them, stripped of the minimum they had. The city dwellers did not want the migrants during distress times of corona virus. Social distancing became a tool for social discrimination and exclusion (Interview with Prof. Babu Mathew).

### **Ethical foundation**

All these dimensions raise a fundamental-ethical question related to human relationship. The contribution of migrants for economy was never considered with due diligence. We have constructed a mindset that migrants are the 'other' and 'outsiders' and not our own. We never considered them as co-citizens. The hard realities of the migrants that hit the newspapers and media, including 130 deaths of migrants on their way could kindle our inner spirits to the level of sympathy only. We really lacked empathy and compassion. As the labour force was available more than the need, we felt the migrants are easily replaceable. We have seen the migrants, but we never knew them. There never existed an employer-employee relationship. We treated them as 'disposables' with an attitude of 'use and throw'. We allowed ourselves to be ruled by utilitarian

agenda. As public memory is short lived, it is likely the spirit of sympathy will disappear from our memory soon. Many of us have already started talking about how we can live within the shrinking space (Interview with Mr. Nikhil Dey, 21 June 2020).

Virtual learning platforms, and online classes are seen as a boon by the middle and upper middle classes. While all efforts must be taken to use technology for effective human development, one should underline the fact that more than 70 per cent of our children will be out of school if virtual learning replacing classroom learning will become order of post Covid scenario. Many poor families will slip back into poverty and the worst affected will be children with regard to all basic indicators (Lives Upended: How Covid-19 threatens the future of 600 million South Asian Children, UNICEF). The talisman of Gandhi – look at yourself from the last and the least - must guide our thinking and development agenda. CSOs have launched a campaign on recital of the preamble of the Constitution. There is no other time better than post-Covid era to be reoriented and reenergized by imbibing the values of empathy, compassion, fraternity, justice and solidarity and to walk with the last and the least.

In the following chapter analysis, interpretation and insights drawn from the migrants and stakeholders is presented, focusing on coping strategies, social security measures and migrants' rights.

*(Note: The author is greatly indebted to Ms. Aruna Roy, Ms. Medha Patker, Prof. Babu Mathew, Mr. Nikhil Dey, Prof. Virginius Xaxa, Prof. Bernad D' Sami and Mr. Shabarinath Nair who shared their knowledge and helped in developing the theoretical framework for the study)*

## CHAPTER 3

# COPING STRATEGIES, SOCIAL SECURITY MEASURES AND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

First section consists of profile of the respondents – states, sex, age, educational status, place and nature of work, salary pattern, and number of years spent outside the native state. Second section consists of detailed analysis under seven thematic areas:

1. Challenges faced during lockdown and returning to native
2. Status of access to entitlements
3. Immediate needs and Social Security Measures
4. Covid-19 Risk Reduction and preventive measures
5. Regeneration of Livelihood Opportunities

6. Migrants' Rights Charter
7. Future employment scenario

### Profile of the Respondents

700 inter-state migrants, who were natives of 11 states of north and northeast India were interviewed. These respondents were from 47 districts. Out of 118 stakeholder respondents, except for 3, the rest were also natives of the 11 states.

### States, Sex and Age of the Respondents

State of Assam is considered separate as evidence shows more numbers from Assam are moving out

**Table 3.1: States and Respondents**

| S. No | States                                     | No of Districts | Migrant |       | Stakeholder |       |
|-------|--|-----------------|---------|-------|-------------|-------|
|       |  |                 | N       | %     | N           | %     |
| 1     | Assam                                      | 3               | 74      | 10.6  | 11          | 9.3   |
| 2     | Other NE States<br>(Meghalaya and Manipur) | 3               | 30      | 4.3   | 2           | 1.7   |
| 3     | Bihar                                      | 7               | 92      | 13.1  | 16          | 13.6  |
| 4     | Chhattisgarh                               | 3               | 60      | 8.6   | 10          | 8.5   |
| 5     | Jharkhand                                  | 7               | 82      | 11.7  | 15          | 12.7  |
| 6     | Madhya Pradesh                             | 4               | 65      | 9.3   | 12          | 10.2  |
| 7     | Odisha                                     | 9               | 93      | 13.3  | 17          | 14.4  |
| 8     | Uttar Pradesh                              | 6               | 101     | 14.4  | 12          | 10.2  |
| 9     | Uttarakhand                                | 1               | 21      | 3.0   | 6           | 5.1   |
| 10    | West Bengal                                | 4               | 82      | 11.7  | 14          | 11.9  |
|       | Other States                               |                 |         |       | 3           | 2.5   |
|       | Total                                      | 47              | 700     | 100.0 | 118         | 100.0 |

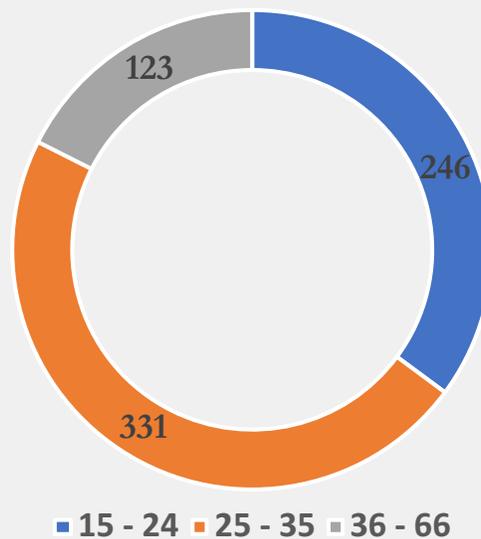
*Note: Under Other Northeast states, one district in Meghalaya and 2 in Manipur were covered. In total, samples were collected from 47 districts of 11 States.*

of the state. Out of 700 migrants, 629 (89.9%) were male and 71 (10.1%) were female respondents. Out of 118 stakeholders 82 (69.5%) were male and 36 (30.5%) were female respondents. Many studies show that in general male members of families go out to other states, leaving behind their family members in search of employment. Reduction in the migration of female members is attributed to 100-day employment scheme.

### Young, able-bodied, male is preferred Curriculum Vitae (CV) of the migrants

Chart 3.1 clearly indicates that the majority of inter-state migrants are youth. 577 (82.4%) of respondents are youth, between the age of 15 to 35. In this study, 4 respondents are below the age of 18 and only 2 are above the age of 55. The mean age is 28.58 and median age is 27. Many respondents stated that their plan was to work for

Chart 3.1: Age of migrant respondents



a few years and return to their native places. Age was mentioned as an important consideration, as mobility to different locations was a part and parcel of CV of migrant workers. The contractors preferred male youth.

Among the stakeholders, 44 are members of Panchayati Raj Institutions or Gram Sabha,

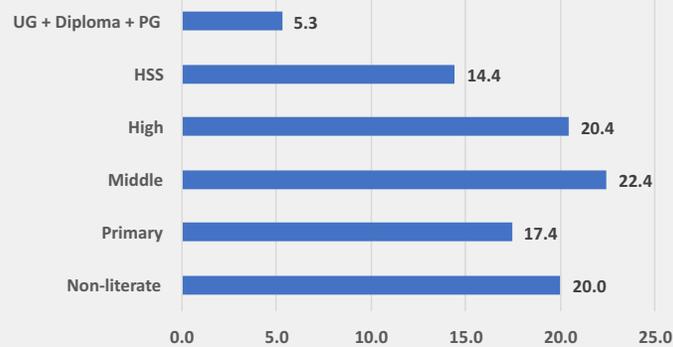
20 government officers, 14 from Non-Government or Civil Society Organisations, 13 social activists, 8 working in public or private institutions, 6 leaders of workers, 3 academicians and 10 belong to entrepreneurs, religious leaders and other categories.

### Education, Religion and Social Category

140 respondents (20%) are non-literates. Nearly 419 (59.9%) have not crossed middle school level. 37 respondents moved to university education, of

whom 5 had completed Post-graduation. Of the 37 university level respondents, 33 are from Northeast states, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal.

Chart 3.2: Educational Status



488 (69.7%) are Hindus, 87 (12.4%) are Christians, 65 (9.3%) are Sarnas (Indigenous religion) and 60 (8.6%) are Muslims. Among the Christian respondents, majority are from the Northeast, Jharkhand and Odisha; Those who follow Sarna religion are from Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and West Bengal and Muslims are from Assam, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

In terms of social category, 140 (20%) respondents are dalits (SC), 243 (34.7%) are adivasis / indigenous peoples (ST), 195 and 96 are from OBCs and General castes. For 26 respondents, social category is not available, 9 from West Bengal, 8 from Northeast states, 3 from Assam and Uttar Pradesh and one each from Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh. Among the dalits, 117 are from Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. 241 adivasis are from states other than Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. While respondents from OBC communities are spread out across 11 states other than rest of Northeast states and Uttarakhand, respondents of general castes are from Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and

West Bengal. Out of 21 respondents from Uttarakhand, 19 are from general caste. Among the 60 Muslim respondents, for 11 respondents, social category was not available. Of the 49 respondents, 21 were from OBC and 28 were from General caste.

Among the 71 female respondents, 37 (52.1%) are from Adivasi / indigenous communities, 15 respondents are from OBCs and 9 from dalits. 5 belong to general caste and for the rest of the 5 data was not available. This seems to indicate freedom, independence and respect for women in Adivasi / indigenous communities. Out of 71 female respondents, 64 are following either Hinduism or Christianity.

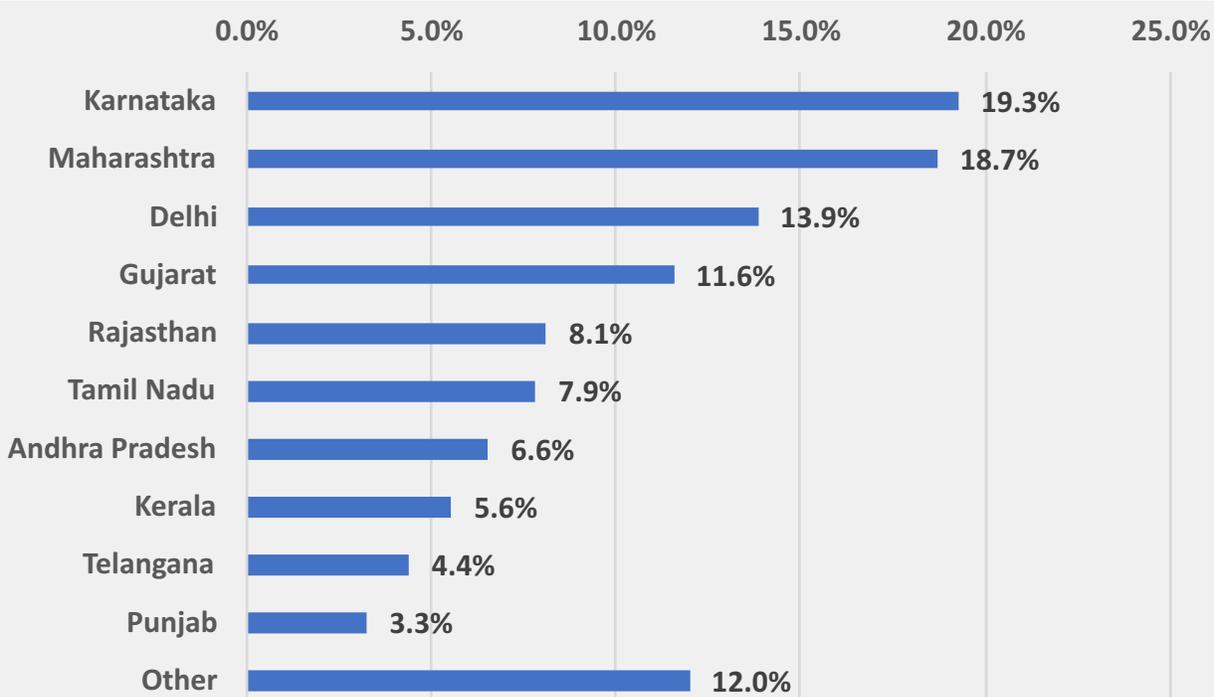
From the profiling of the respondents, it can be concluded that majority of the migrants are male, young, and with low level of literacy. Religion or social category do not matter much. However, more than 50 per cent of the respondents are either from dalit or Adivasi communities. One of the major criteria for migration seems to be physical stamina for taking up hard labour.

### Place and nature of work and Salary pattern (multiple choice)

10 probable destination states were identified, and the respondents were asked to choose the states in which they had worked in the last one year, with

three given options. There were 779 cases of responses. Only 79 have stated that they had worked in more than one state. The dominant attractive states for the migrants seem to be Karnataka, Maharashtra, Delhi and Gujarat. More than 5 per cent of cases of respondents have

Chart 3.3: States where the respondents worked in the last one year

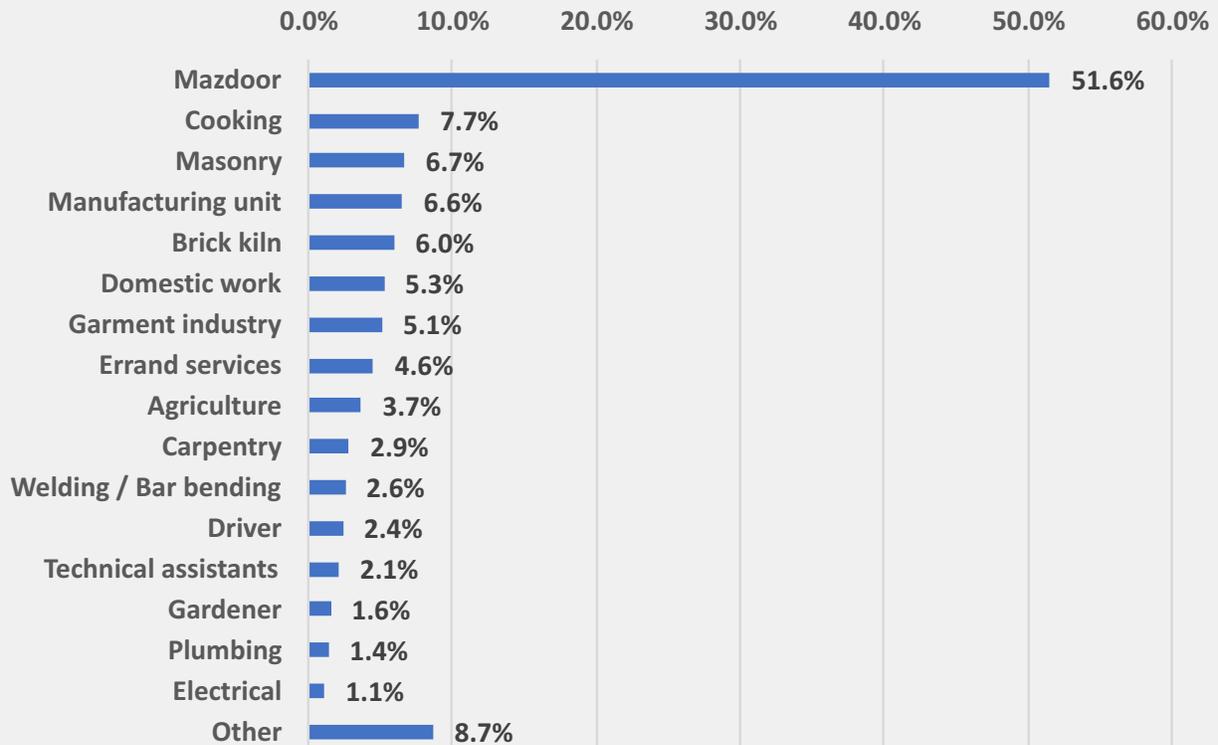


*Note: When a question has multiple choice the total per cent of cases will depend on total number of responses, in proportion to number of respondents. It could go above 100 per cent, since total number of responses are likely to exceed total number of respondents.*

worked in Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. The category 'Other' (12%), indicates that some respondents have worked in other Indian states, including north Indian states, other than their native states. For example, 19-year-old Damen Munda from Cachar, Assam

tea gardens worked as security guard in a coal mine in Dhanbad, Jharkhand earning Rs. 8,000 per month. Some respondents from Jharkhand have worked in Haryana and a few others worked in states like Odisha, Bihar and West Bengal.

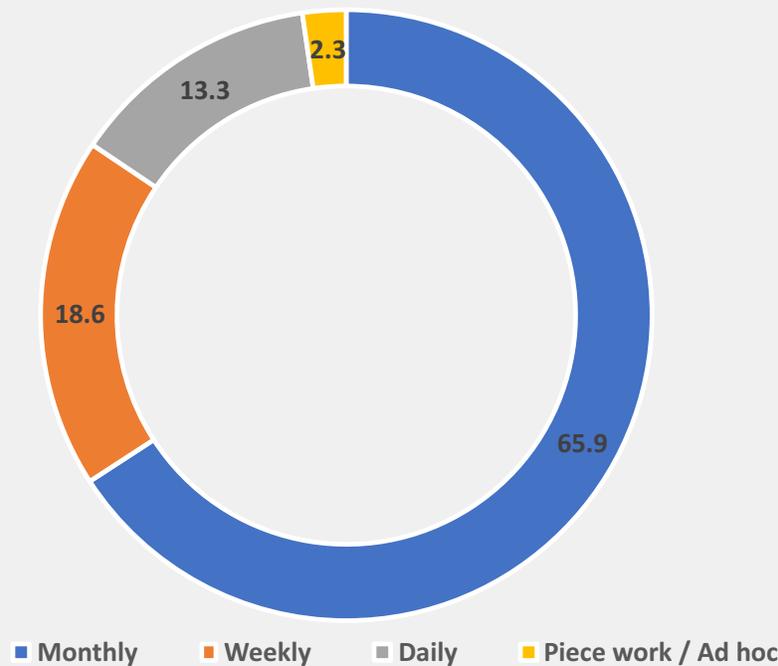
Chart 3.4: Nature of work



To identify nature of work among the migrants, 17 options were given requiring the respondents to choose two major occupations. 841 responses were recorded. This implies, only 141 respondents were engaged in two different types of works. Mazdoor work had 361 (51.6% of cases) responses. These responses were almost equivalent to number of respondents. In other words, those who were engaged in mazdoor work were mostly unskilled workers largely engaged in construction industry. This phenomenon is clearly linked to the profile that the migrants are largely male youth with low level of literacy and employability skills. More than 5 per cent of cases each (between 40 to 50

responses) were linked to, cooking in hotels, masonry, manufacturing units, brick kiln, domestic work and garment industry. About 135 responses were connected to masonry, carpentry, welding, bar-bending, driving, technical assistance, plumbing and electrical. Security guard was one of the major categories among the other, apart from many other odd jobs. There were 88 responses from 71 female respondents. Female respondents were generally working as mazdoor (24), domestic work (21), garment industry (10), errand services (8), cooking (4), agriculture (3), gardening (2), manufacturing (2), and other works (8).

Chart 3.5: Salary pattern



461 (65.9%) of respondents received monthly salaries and 130 (18.6%) received weekly payments. About 109 (15.6%) worked for daily wages or piece work. These numbers indicate that majority of the workers were hired for monthly or weekly wages. On an average, the male migrants received monthly income between Rs. 7,000 to Rs. 12,000. Female migrants earned much less, especially those engaged in domestic work received only a paltry sum of Rs. 3,000. Some women had to put in extra hours of work or worked in more than one family to survive. In the native, under MGNREGS, one was able to receive a maximum of Rs. 200 per day but only for 100 days with great difficulty.

Many migrants reported that as the lockdown was declared, the employers announced suddenly - No work, No payment. A few employers paid till the last day of work and asked the workers to manage themselves, without any guidance or security. Very few employers allowed the workers to stay in the work site and provided them with food. This sudden development could not be digested by many migrants who travelled long distances with heavy burden and dire family needs to be fulfilled. As the government did not have any data base about the workers, slowly the cry of the workers was captured by the media and portrayed in public domain. Very soon, pathos narratives of hitherto hidden, unnoticed and unrecognised millions of migrants occupied the front pages of the newspapers.

Chart 3.6: Number of years worked in destination

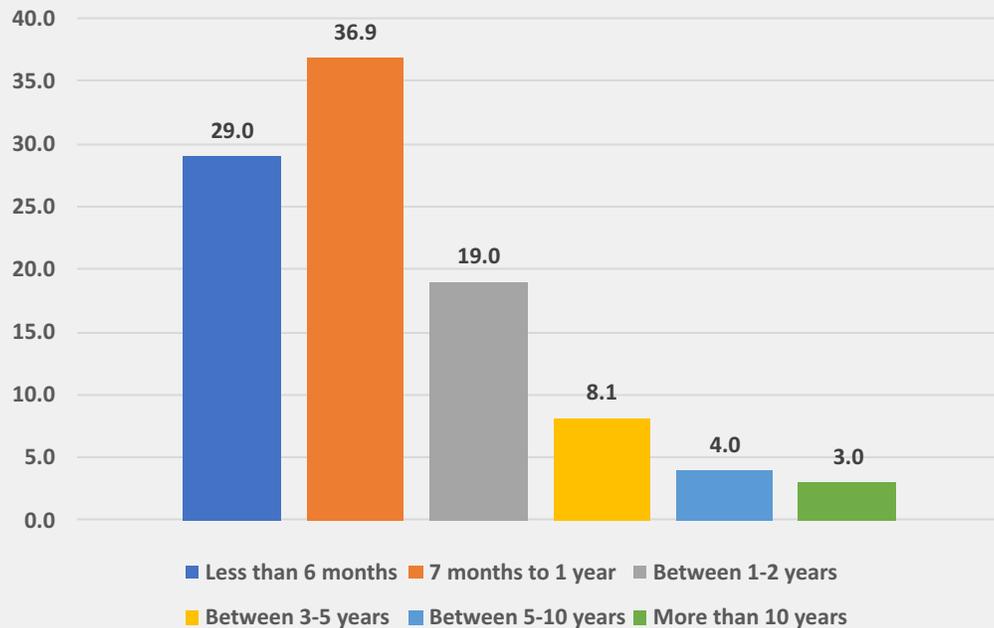


Chart 3.6 brings out the phenomenon of migration in terms of years spent in destination. As the chart clearly indicates, nearly 65.9 per cent of respondents have spent less than a year. There is progressive decline after two years. This means, hardly a few migrants left their native to another state, in view of permanent residence. All that they desire is to earn some money to address some basic family needs, such as, education of children, pay the debts and health needs of elderly. Moreover, in many native states only seasonal works were possible, which was not sufficient to address basic needs. In states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, many migrated due to caste atrocities. For people like them, migration is evidently a forced survival option than earning for future.

## 1. Challenges faced during Lockdown and Return to native

### The Exodus of Stateless Citizens

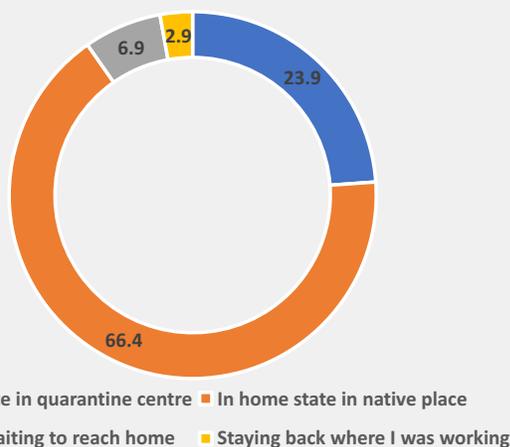
Migrants faced multiple challenges during lockdown periods, from 24 March 2020. Initial hopes to stay in states where they were working vanished when the second lockdown was announced on 15 April 2020. In the first three weeks, many managed with the little savings they had and what they received in the form of food. 'We want you to be back and we want to see you', was the distress call from family members. Fear of life and desire to be connected to family members gripped everyone. It was a period of trauma and agony. The governments were too busy in lockdown strategies without being mindful of the

traumatic experiences of the migrants and did not come out with any concrete plans to help the migrants. There was lack of sensitivity. While many citizens locked themselves, adhering to the call of the Prime Minister, the migrants were forced to unlock themselves and look for ways and means to return home.

The migrants knew that their journey back home was not going to be easy as there was no train or

bus facilities. Everyone imagined as if they had reached home and seen their kith and kin. This gave them energy and determination to embark on a hard and strenuous journey. They reached home somehow was predominant in their minds than how to reach home. The exodus began. By all Human Rights standards, the migrants became 'stateless citizens' in their own country.

Chart 3.7: Location of respondents during data collection



By 10 June 2020, when the data was gathered, about 167 (23.9%) respondents were in quarantine centres in their native states and 465 (66.4%) reached home. Guddu Rajbhar, aged 19 and a resident of Buxar district of Bihar said, “The quarantine centre was worse than the shanties I had lived in Gujarat. No food, bedding, sanitation facility or drinking water. I did not mind these, as I was hopeful of reaching my native village soon”.

Out of 700 respondents, about 48 (6.9%) were waiting at the destination with desire to return and 20 (2.9%) stayed in the place of work and did intend to travel during data collection. Of the 48 respondents, only 31 respondents registered

themselves in the governmental portal for travel and waiting. Others were struggling to register themselves. Of the 20 respondents who decided to stay back, 15 were engaged in some work. Hence, the following sections of this part will be applicable only to 632 migrant respondents.

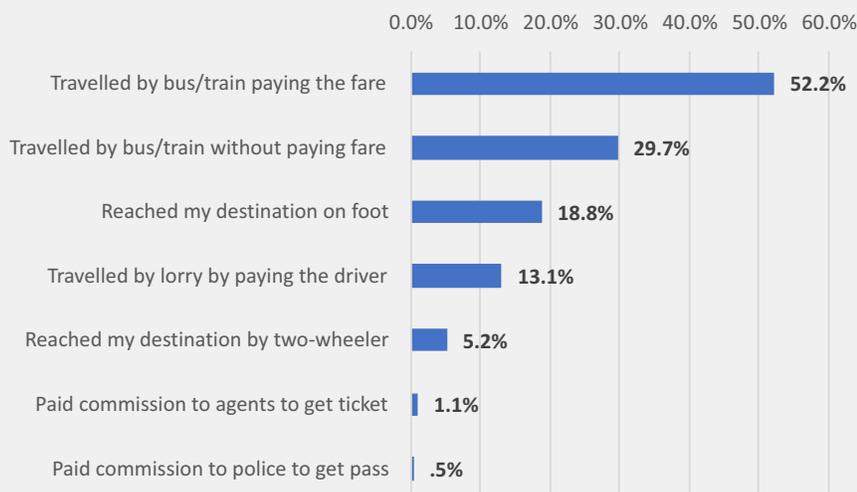
### Experiences during journey

No single mode of transportation was available even for long travels, since the train services were suspended. Migrants adopted combination of different modes as the situation warranted. Travel arrangements created political storm. The centre and state governments could not agree on

whether the travel was free for migrants or who pays for what. While the message in public domain was 'cost-free travel for migrants in trains', many migrants were forced to pay, even double the amount of normal fare. Online registration was a mess. Even those who travelled by train had to walk for some distance as trains were organized only from select locations. For example, workers from Mysore had to walk to Bengaluru, about 150 km to board a train. While some migrants traveled free many had to dole out. Some decided to walk for thousands of kilometers, and a few travelled

by cycle or two-wheelers. Some got into lorries and containers. It is to be noted that despite many petitions being filed in the Supreme Court, only by 9 June 2020, the Court ordered for free and orderly transportation and asked states to formulate employment schemes after conducting their skill mapping to rehabilitate them and report back. This move was welcomed by many, though it was too late. Those who were caught in transit were the worst affected and lost. Literally no one cared for them except for some humanitarian agencies who provided them food and water.

Chart 3.8: Mode of reaching home



There were 763 responses from 632 respondents. Chart 3.8 shows that 330 (52.2%) respondents paid for their long travel. Only 188 (24.6%) respondents, which is less than one fourth, indicated that they had free of cost travel by train or bus. It is shocking that 119 (18.8%) walked the entire distance of thousands of kilometers on foot. 83 respondents managed to travel by lorries and containers by paying the drivers. 33 reached the native either by cycle or by two-wheelers. About 10 respondents admitted that even in a

helpless situation, they had to dole out bribe to middlemen and police. Many respondents narrated the trauma experienced during journey, particularly recollecting days spent during transit and hardships experienced for lack of last mile connectivity transportation to reach home. Despite traveling by Shramik special trains, some had walked upto 100 kms to reach home. Some who got into the train in view of getting down in Bhubaneswar finally landed up in Hatia, Jharkhand.

On further probing, harassment was reported by 20.7 per cent of cases, cheating by middlemen by 6.6 per cent of cases, abuse by 5.9 per cent of cases and beaten up by police by 5.5 per cent of

cases. Some had gone through multiple harassments. However, 450 responses (71.2 per cent of cases) reported that they did not face any harassment or abuse.

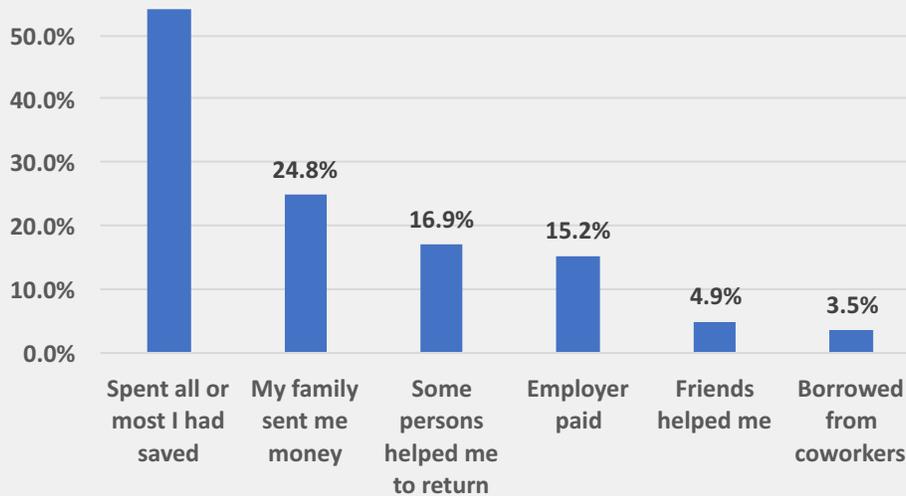
*‘I am from Bagepalli, a small town near the border of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. When migrants started walking along the highway towards Anandpur, in collaboration with the staff of Agriculture Development and Training Society (ADATS), I reached out to them. On 16 May 2020, when a few young migrants saw us, they ran to the bushes to hide themselves. We chased them and assured that we came to help them. The youth fell to their knees with folded hands and begged us, “Kripaya hume mat maaro” (Please don't beat us!). They told us that the police beat them up near Devanaballi airport toll. Some of our Staff suspending 'social distancing' for a few minutes put their arms around their shoulders. The team distributed loaves of bread, bananas and water packet. All broke down with a rare mixture of relief and disbelief. We also offered them Rs. 500 each for their journey, which we had collected through generous contribution of many. One of them said, “Aap jaise logon ki wajah se manavta bachi hui hai, dil se aap ke liye meri duayen” (It is because of people like you, humanity is alive. My prayers for you), described Mr. Shujayathulla, a staff of ISI, Bengaluru.*

*“The journey back home was not pleasant. As there was no other alternative, I opted to travel by bus. We were 28 men and 3 women from Sundergarh district, Odisha. The youth of Sundergarh district working in Bengaluru made the necessary arrangements. I suffered a lot mentally and physically due to stress. Two and half days of travel in a bus made my health condition bad. ISI Bengaluru facilitated to complete the procedures required for travel and religious sisters took good care of us in Sundergarh at a quarantine centre”, said Ms. Poornima Kerketta, who was earning Rs. 9,000 per month in Bengaluru and sent home with Rs. 6,700 every month.*

Mr. Rabi Rai, age 48, native of Dasamantapur, Koraput, Odisha left for Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh in October 2019. He was employed as cook in a private company with a monthly income of Rs.12,000. He used to send a minimum of Rs. 3,000 every month to his family. When lockdown was extended, he started his journey from Kakinada on 5 May 2020 on foot and reached Dasamantapur on 20 May 2020. Currently, he is not doing anything in the village and thinking of starting a tiffin service in his own village at Dasamantapur. His wife is working as daily labourer in the village.

*It was not only during journey, for some, the workplace itself was a nightmare. Five Adivasi migrants from Siliguri, Darjeeling district, West Bengal, recruited by a middleman with tall promises, came to Coorg in Karnataka to work in a coffee estate in January 2020. "In a month, we realized that we had landed up in a slavery like situation. On the very first day, the estate owner asked us to deposit the original voter identity card and Aadhaar card. We were not allowed to go out of the estate. The estate owner promised to pay per month Rs, 6,000 for female and Rs. 7,000 for male workers. But payments were not made. The owner demanded extra hours of work. Resistance resulted in verbal and physical violence. We could not seek help from anyone as we were not conversant with local language. A relative of us from Siliguri contacted the staff of Indian Social Institute, Bengaluru. The Labour Migration unit staff contacted us. After intense negotiations, the estate owner agreed to free three of us since I was 6 months pregnant. We reached Bengaluru, on 22 June 2020. We were assisted to go through medical examination to ascertain fitness for travel. Whitefield Rising Trust, Bengaluru came forward to assist in the safe return by booking our flight tickets. On 24 June, we were dropped at the Bengaluru airport. I will not return to Karnataka to work, since I experienced violence and harassment at workplace", the pregnant woman said.*

Chart 3.9: Financial sources for journey



Most of the respondents spent almost all their savings during lockdown period which they were hoping to send back home to fulfill their basic needs. 755 responses were stated, by 632 respondents. 342 responses (54.1% of cases) indicated the respondents had to live on what they had saved and in three weeks' time, and by the first week of May they had nothing left. This reality was corroborated by other indicators. It was

not a question of reverse migration alone, where huge population of migrants from place of work travelled to their native places. There was also 'reverse money transfer'. 157 (24.8% of cases) indicated that the respondents asked their families and 31 (4.9% of cases) requested their friends to make arrangements for some financial assistance. Some families borrowed from the money lenders to bring back their loved ones back home.

Personal request to known persons, well-wishers and friends seemed to have worked as indicated by 138 responses. Another 22 responses indicated that they borrowed money from colleagues and co-workers. Respondents who worked in Maharashtra (20), Tamil Nadu (15), Gujarat (12) and Delhi (10) stated that their employers had borne the travel cost. It is ironical that in Maharashtra the sugar cane cutting migrants were not only paid for their journey and but also denied payment of pending wages before lockdown period (Interview with Ms. Medha Patkar, 21 June 2020).

### Suspected of carriers of corona

Of the 632 respondents, 428 (67.7%) stated that they were received magnanimously by their communities in the native place. However, 204 (32.4%) expressed that they were not received well by the village community. Of these 204 respondents, 176 clearly stated that they were suspected of carrying corona virus, which is about 27.8 per cent of the total returnees. This indicates that a substantial number of migrants experienced multiple rejection, in the place of work, during journey and by native community members.

*This is the story of Ramdhani age 40, who worked in a factory in Mumbai from the last one and half years. "Due to pandemic, I lost my job and was finding it difficult to survive in Mumbai. I was left with no option other than returning to my native village in eastern Uttar Pradesh. As I was running short of money, I decided to walk along with my two friends. After 72 hours of tiresome 200 KM journey on the Nagpur highway, we stopped a truck which was going to Kanpur from Mumbai. Truck driver demanded Rs. 15,000/- to reach us to Prayagraj. Somehow, we collectively managed the amount and paid it to the truck driver. After reaching Prayagraj, I had to go for another 45 KM to reach our village. Once again, I started walking towards my village. I was telling myself that I am safe and will meet my near and dear ones. When I stepped into the village, the villagers stopped me. I was not welcomed by my family members and villagers. I was forced to stay at Ramlila ground outside my village. I showed them the certificate I had received in Mumbai that I was tested for Covid-19 and the result was negative. I was surprised by the fact that the entire village community was gripped with Covid-19 fear. Everyone called me 'corona'. I completed 21 days of quarantine period and then showed the medical certificate I had received that stated my Covid-19 test was negative to my village leaders. Then the villagers allowed me to stay in their village".*

### Awareness on cash support by source states

Realizing the plight of migrants, a number of the state governments came out with cash transfer relief support. Online registration was initiated asking for proof of residence, address of the native place and bank details. Among the states under consideration for this study during data collection, the following states provided

assistance: Assam – Rs. 2,000, Other northeastern states (Meghalaya – Rs. 3,000, Manipur – Rs. 2,000, Nagaland – Rs. 4,000, Sikkim – Rs. 2,000, Arunachal Pradesh – Rs. 3,500), Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal – Rs. 1,000 each. Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Uttarakhand did not have this scheme.

Out of 700, respondents about 526 respondents were from the states which provided cash support.

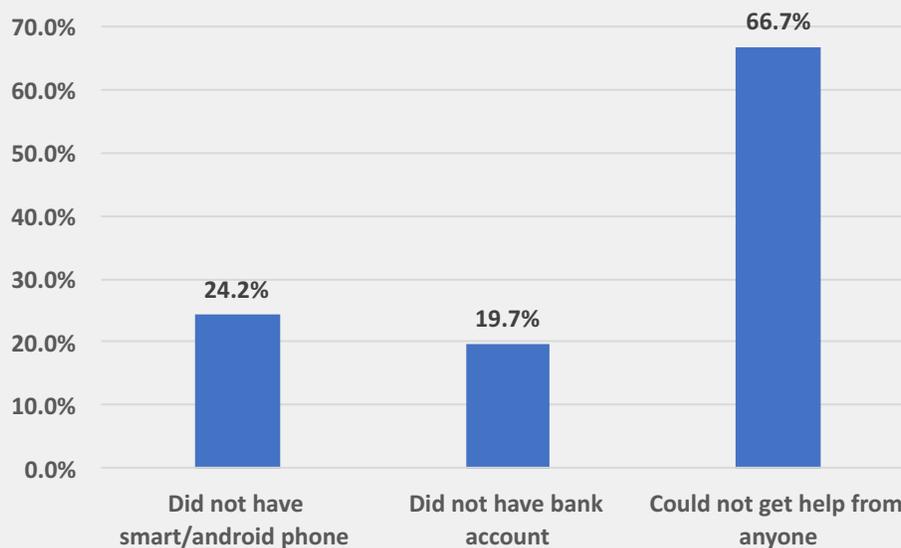
**Table 3.2: Awareness, registration and cash transfer support received**

|  | N   | %    |
|--|-----|------|
| Knowledge about source govt. providing cash transfer | 186 | 35.4 |
| Migrants who registered                              | 120 | 22.8 |
| Migrants who received the support                    | 71  | 13.5 |

As per Table 3.2, out of 526 respondents, only 186 (35.4%) were aware of cash transfer support. However, only 120 (22.8%) registered themselves. Finally, only 71 (13.5%) migrants received cash

support. The respondents were asked, despite being aware of this opportunity why some did not register.

**Chart 3.10: Reasons for not registering**



Some scholars presume that many migrants possess mobile phones which could be effectively used for registration and to access welfare benefits. Mobile phones will be helpful, with technological advancement. Still the data showed that only 564 (80.6%) respondents possessed mobile phones and of these only 393 respondents had smart or android phones. The data also showed that among the respondents from dalit communities, 24.3 per cent and among the

adivasis 21.4 per cent did not possess mobile phones. It was also identified that if there had been a group of migrants working in a same place coming from a same village, only the group leaders had mobile phones which was shared by the members. Individual's possessing mobile phones was not considered as necessity.

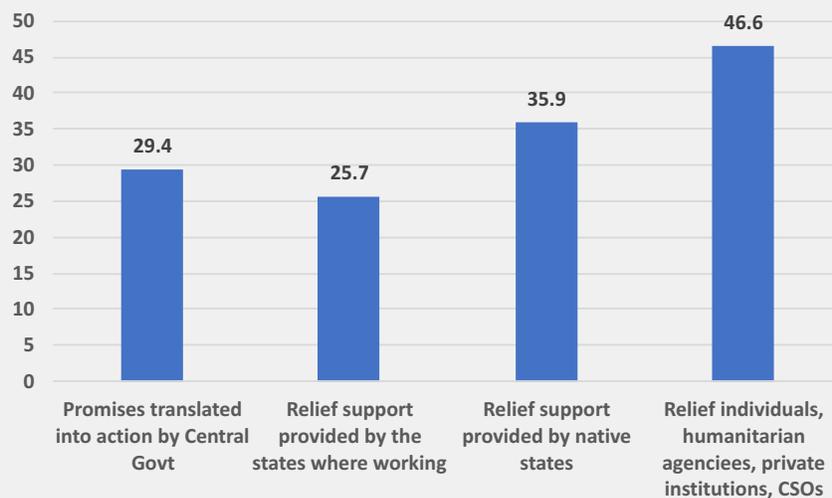
Chart 3.10 shows that the reality is nearly 24.2 per cent of cases stated non availability of android mobile phone as reason for not registering. For

migrants, mobile is for communication and they do not use it as digital platform. Some cases indicated non-availability of bank account. Some of them needed help and they could not receive help. In this regard, many CSOs helped migrants to register under different state governments portal so that they could get some cash assistance.

### Interventions by governments, humanitarian agencies – Satisfaction level

The respondents were asked to measure their levels of satisfaction due to interventions by different entities.

Chart 3.11: Various governments and humanitarian agents



The Prime Minister asked the states to take care of the migrants, by providing food and shelter. These promises remained as platitudes at the ground level. Many went hungry and spent all their savings on food or travel. There was no access to health care or a decent place to stay. The governments knew their status and their living shanties. Whenever they made distress calls over mobile phone to someone, the automatic message was telling them about hand washing and social distancing. They could not practice them as much as they wanted to.

Chart 3.11 clearly brings out the fact that the respondents' level of satisfaction due to support received from individuals, private agencies and CSOs was much higher than central and state

governments. While everyone was under lockdown, the humanity of the public was not under lockdown. Despite all odds, various humanitarian agencies reached out to the migrants, with food, water, cash support, counselling, guidance and various other assistances. Mr. Abhinandan Rishidev from Goalpara village, Madhepura district, Bihar said, "I was fortunate that I had no problem for food during my travel. Local residents, social workers, and Non-government organisation supplied food in many places". As on 26 June 2020, Caritas India along with its partners have reached out to nearly 75,00,000 persons, primary interventions being distribution of face masks, cooked food supply, dry ration and hygiene kits.

*“On 25 May 2020, we stopped a big lorry and requested the driver to take 12 Assam migrants upto Hyderabad. Mr. Prashant, the driver told us “Let all the 12 kids climb in. I will tie a tarpaulin since it is thundery and may rain on the way”. We offered some money to pay toll fees en route, but the driver took serious offence at this and said, “If you give me money, I will offload everyone from my lorry. I am doing this because I have to help as many of these young migrant kids. My father and grandfather were also drivers. That must be the reason why their grandson is on the road in these troubled times.” When we asked him to join us for a cup of tea he replied with a smile, “Of course I will have a chai with you. I was wondering when you would ask!” - staff of ADATS, a NGO. The following day morning at 7.40 am the driver promptly called Mr. Shujayathulla and informed that he had dropped all at Jadeberla Bus Stop, which is 87 kms away from Hyderabad.*

The respondents also expressed higher level of satisfaction of the initiatives by their respective native state governments, when compared to governments at the workplaces and central government. However, the chart also clearly brings out there were more than 50 per cent migrants who were completely out of the purview of all actors, all by themselves.

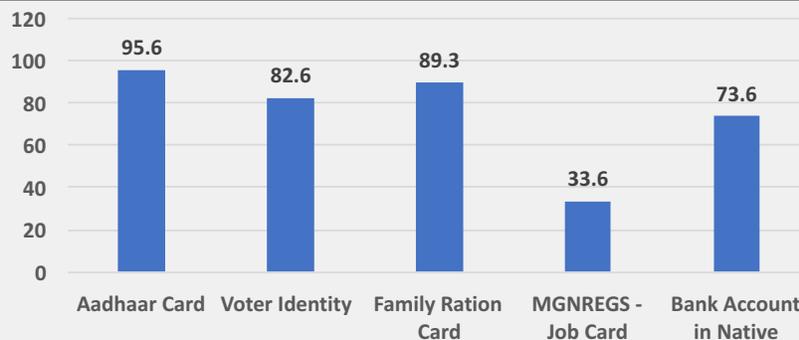
Many host states reached out to migrants in different forms. The Government of Kerala organised 15,541 relief camps for migrant workers and initiated community kitchens at the panchayat level to ensure that no migrant worker goes hungry. The Government of Tamil Nadu kept the transit migrants in marriage halls and provided food. Still, the migrants felt as outsiders in their host states. Karnataka government reached out in a big way to feed the construction workers, and

slum dwellers, a majority of these were migrants. A portion of Construction Workers' Welfare Fund, under Building and other Construction Workers (BOCW) Act, was spent for relief. Despite some initial hiccups works of charity was visible. However, barring some cases, compassion and empathy were missing in general. Also, the local population considered the migrants as menace and outsiders. Some even considered them as carriers of corona. The negative message literally created stress and trauma among the migrants and most of them wanted to leave, with a clear agenda, 'even if I die, let me die in my native state'. Migrants felt as unwanted during lockdown in the host states.

## 2. Status of access to entitlements

Chart 3.12 reveals that if the government has political will to implement a scheme it could reach

Chart 3.12: Possession of various entitlement identity cards

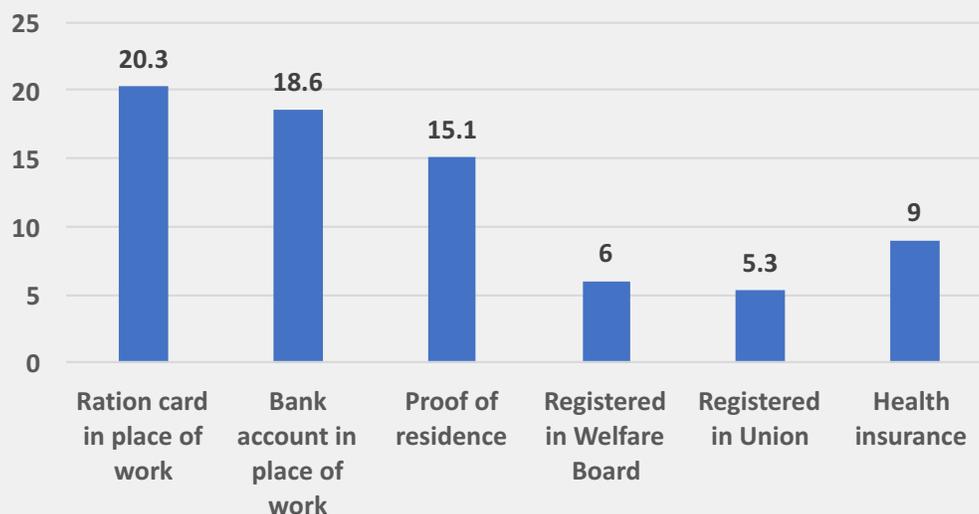


out to the masses. In recent years, the government pushed its agenda of Aadhaar card, and it linked up this card to access various basic needs. This card should have been put into better use during the pandemic period. Over 10 per cent of the respondents did not possess family ration card. Among the respondents belonging to dalit community, 8.6 per cent and among the adivasis, 11.1 per cent did not possess ration cards. Among those who possessed ration card, 625 respondents, 14.4 per cent possessed Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) card, 66.1 per cent Below Poverty Line (BPL) card and 19.5 per cent Above Poverty Line (APL) card. About 142 respondents (20.3%) stated that they possessed personal ration cards in the place of work.

One-Nation One-Ration Card concept is picking up momentum, propagated by noble laureate,

Abhijit Banerjee and many CSOs. PDS is a state subject. However, new strategies must be developed so that no one goes hungry, one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to which India is a signatory. It is shocking to note that only 33.6 per cent of the respondents had job card. Among the respondents from dalit community, 99 respondents (70.7%) did not possess job card and among the adivasis it was about 50.6 per cent. Is it because these people are migrants? Is it because nearly 45 per cent of the respondents are from economically poor and vulnerable communities, other than the dalits and adivasis? As many respondents stated that MGNREGS seems to be the sign of hope to fill the stomach. The government has finally recognized the importance of this scheme and has promised to pump in resources.

Chart 3.13: Possession of entitlement cards in relation to workplace



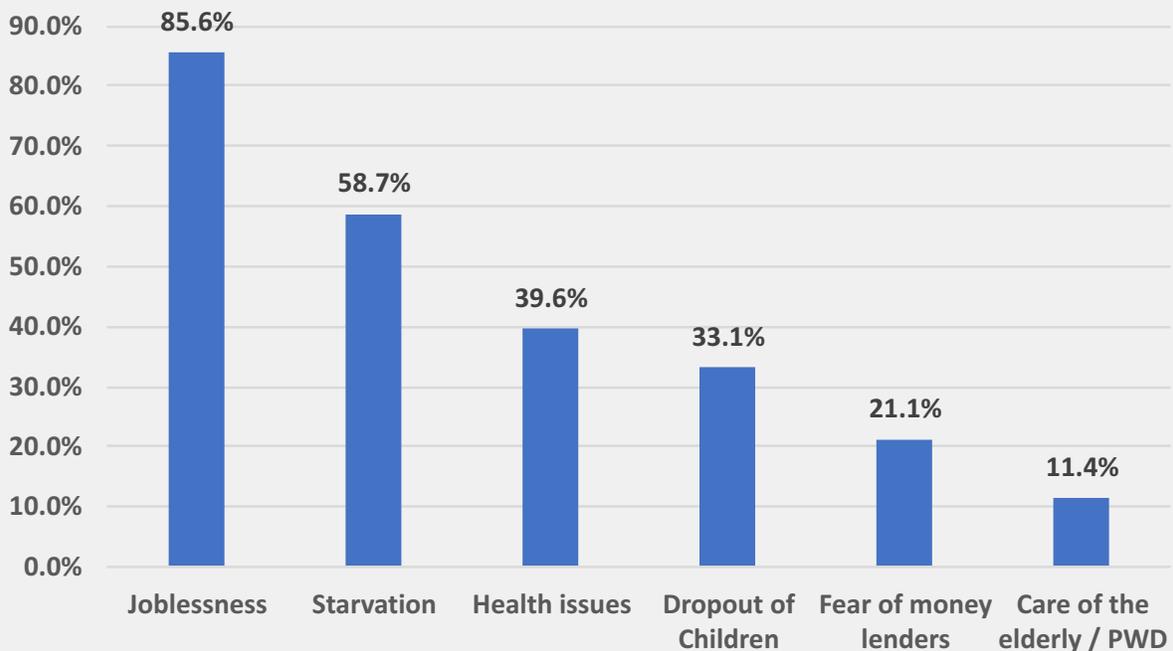
Nearly one-third of the respondents do not possess bank accounts. A substantial number of respondents from the Adivasi communities did not possess bank accounts. Among the 515 respondents who had bank account in the native, only 190 (36.9%) had account under Jan Dhan Yojana scheme. Only about 130 respondents (18.6%) had bank account in the place of work. This also had serious implications since some states provided immediate relief cash support through online transactions. In fact, many migrants could not receive this support due to non-availability of bank accounts neither in native state nor in destinations, as depicted in charts 3.10 and 3.12. The chart also brings out clearly neither the trade unions took serious note of the migrants nor the migrants were included in the welfare boards. Only a few states like Kerala has

introduced State health insurance scheme 'Awaz' for the health protection migrant workers to the tune of Rs. 25,000 coverage per year in government hospitals and over 1 lakh migrants have registered (The Hindu, 6 March 2020). Public health has been a concern for long which has been gravely neglected. The worst sufferers are the excluded communities, the dalits and the adivasis.

### 3. Immediate needs and Social Security Measures

Out of 6 major concerns for the migrants and their families, the respondents were asked to choose maximum three. A total of 249.6 per cent of cases of responses were received which show that about 50 per cent of respondents opted for 3 options and another 50 per cent for 2 appropriate options.

Chart 3.14: Immediate family concerns



**Table 3.3: State-wise priorities of immediate concerns**

| S. No | States          | Priority 1  | Priority 2             | Priority 3             |
|-------|-----------------|-------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1     | Assam           | Joblessness | Starvation             | Health care challenges |
| 2     | Other NE States | Joblessness | Starvation             | Fear of moneylenders   |
| 3     | Bihar           | Joblessness | Starvation             | Health care challenges |
| 4     | Chhattisgarh    | Joblessness | Starvation             | Dropout of children    |
| 5     | Jharkhand       | Joblessness | Starvation             | Dropout of children    |
| 6     | Madhya Pradesh  | Joblessness | Health care challenges | Starvation             |
| 7     | Odisha          | Joblessness | Starvation             | Health care challenges |
| 8     | Uttar Pradesh   | Joblessness | Starvation             | Dropout of children    |
| 9     | Uttarakhand     | Joblessness | Health care challenges | Dropout of children    |
| 10    | West Bengal     | Joblessness | Starvation             | Fear of moneylenders   |

From Chart 3.14 and Table 3.3, the primary concern is joblessness, which is also the reality across 11 different states. Many feared that due to reverse migration, many able-bodied persons have returned to villages, and unless and until, new jobs are created, many will be forced to remain idle at

home. Starvation emerged as the next major concern. Concern for health care, dropout of children and fear of money lenders were also stated as key priorities. However, it is to be noted that these are not mutually exclusive priorities but are inter-related.

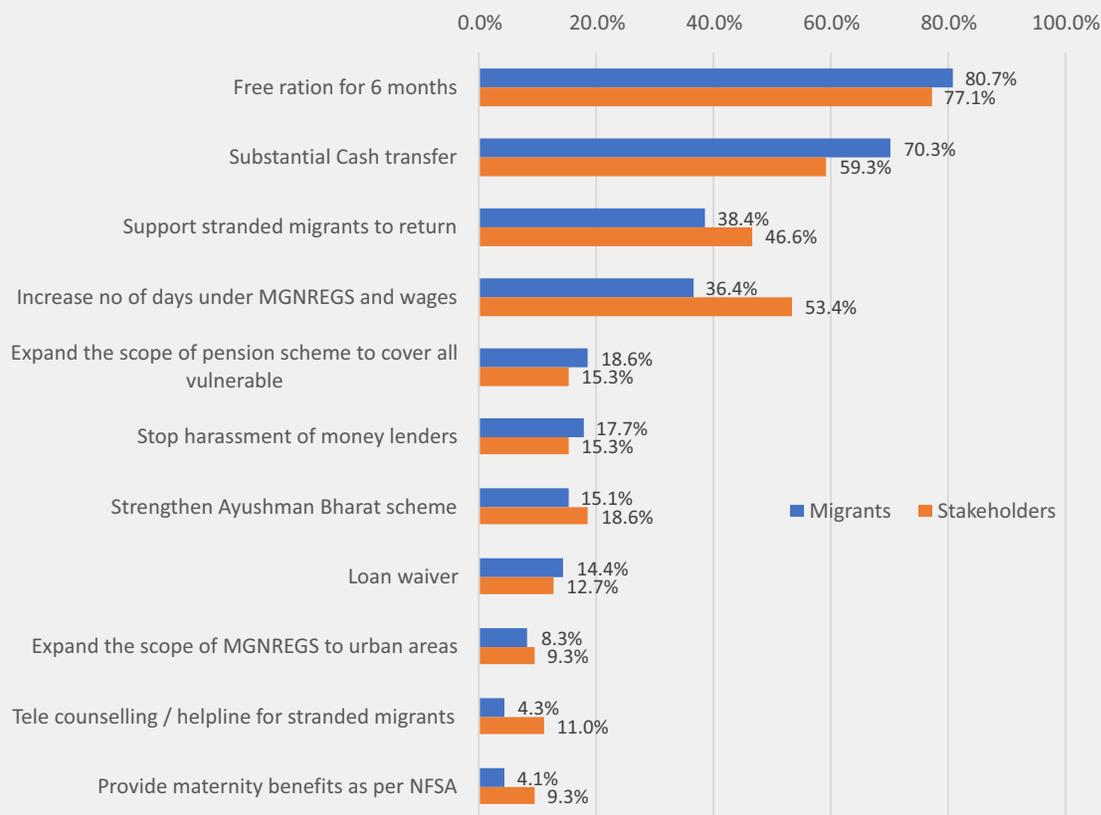
*Guddu Rajbbar a resident of Buxar district, Bihar narrated his story. "In 2019, I went to Ahmedabad, Gujarat. When lockdown was announced, I waited for 45 days and spent my savings to buy food. When the lockdown was extended, I had no other option but to return to native. I borrowed some money from my friends. I managed to reach Ahmedabad railway station on foot. I found long queue of migrants to board the Shramik train. I offered Rs. 1,500 to a policeman and a political party leader to enter in train and I was allowed, though the actual fare was only Rs. 700. There were no facilities for food and water in the train. I survived on biscuits. When I reached Patna, I was kept in a quarantine center with no food, bed, water or sanitation facility. When I reached home, I found no aid was provided to the community. The villagers had to wait for three days to get ration from PDS shops. Panchayat did not initiate work under MGNREGS. No one was ready to give loan". He said, "Hum log kbushi se nabin jaate bein dusre rajya, yahan kaam ki kami hai aur Sarkar majdooron ke liye kuchh karta nabin hai." (We do not migrate to other states for pleasure; there is no work in the native and the government does nothing for the labourers.)*

### Proposal to states to address immediate concerns

Out of 11 options, the respondents were asked to choose four options. The same question was also

addressed to the stakeholders. Except for change in priorities of couple of options, the perceptions of the migrants and stakeholders remained the same.

Chart 3.15: Proposals to state to address immediate concerns: Migrants - Stakeholders



Note: In developing comparative perceptions / suggestions / recommendations chart of the migrants and stakeholders, the data of migrants is kept in descending order.

Free ration and cash transfer have been the top proposals from the migrants and stakeholders. It will be a shame if people die of hunger when our go-downs have enough food grain in stock. Moreover, it is also expected that rich rabi crops of this year will add to existing pile of stocks.

Without any delay, a decision must be made to address the hunger issue of the migrants and other vulnerable poor. 'Money in the hands of the people is necessary to revive the economy' has been the voice of not only of developmental and Civil Society Organizations but also of the

industrialists and businesspersons. Demand must be created, and this could be done only by augmenting purchasing power of the general public.

Demand for safe return of the migrants who are still in various destinations is the 3rd priority proposal of the migrants. One can understand this from an emotional and psychological point of

view from the traumatic experiences of those who have returned. The fourth priority is increase in number of days of work under MGNREGS and increase in wages. Clearly there are two major proposals: Need for immediate measures to fulfill survival needs – ration, cash and employment under MGNREGS and safe return of the migrants from destinations.

**Table 3.4: State-wise proposals to address immediate needs**

| S. No | States          | Priority 1                         | Priority 2                            | Priority 3                            |
|-------|-----------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1     | Assam           | Free ration for 6 months           | Cash transfer to all poor families    | Support stranded migrants to return   |
| 2     | Other NE States | Cash transfer to all poor families | Free ration for 6 months              | Support stranded migrants to return   |
| 3     | Bihar           | Free ration for 6 months           | Cash transfer to all poor families    | Expand the scope / amount of pension  |
| 4     | Chhattisgarh    | Cash transfer to all poor families | Free ration for 6 months              | Increase days and wages under MGNREGS |
| 5     | Jharkhand       | Free ration for 6 months           | Increase days and wages under MGNREGS | Cash transfer to all poor families    |
| 6     | Madhya Pradesh  | Free ration for 6 months           | Cash transfer to all poor families    | Support stranded migrants to return   |
| 7     | Odisha          | Cash transfer to all poor families | Free ration for 6 months              | Support stranded migrants to return   |
| 8     | Uttar Pradesh   | Free ration for 6 months           | Cash transfer to all poor families    | Support stranded migrants to return   |
| 9     | Uttarakhand     | Free ration for 6 months           | Support Stranded migrants to return   | Strengthen Ayushman Bharat Scheme     |
| 10    | West Bengal     | Cash transfer to all poor families | Free ration for 6 months              | Increase days and wages under MGNREGS |

*Note: Only three priorities with maximum responses are considered. When two priorities are too close in number of responses, both are accounted.*

Free ration and cash transfer have been given either as first or second priority by the respondents from all states, except Uttarakhand. Support to stranded migrants to return is stated as a priority by respondents from 5 states,

MGNREGS is identified as one of the priorities for three states. Harassment of moneylenders was also identified as a concern by respondents from Odisha and Uttar Pradesh.

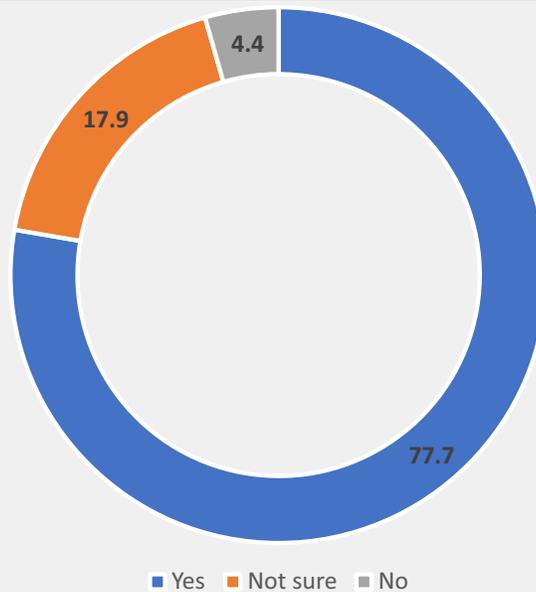
Saqidul, a 27-year-old woman from Goudwa Gwari village, Barabanki District, Uttar Pradesh worked in Mumbai as a maid servant. Her husband, Shahbaz, was a daily wage labourer involved in loading and unloading of scrapes. She has four children. The entire family moved to Mumbai to earn some money to pay back the loan received from a money lender for an operation for Saqudul the previous year. She says, “Returning the loan is my worry. The money lender is after me”.

#### 4. Covid-19 Risk Reduction and Preventive Measures in Workplace

Most of the migrants have been medically tested for Covid-19 before they embarked on journey to native. However, as the virus spread has been

increasing all over India and might continue haunt the humanity for months, the respondents were asked about the importance of Covid-19 risk reduction strategies.

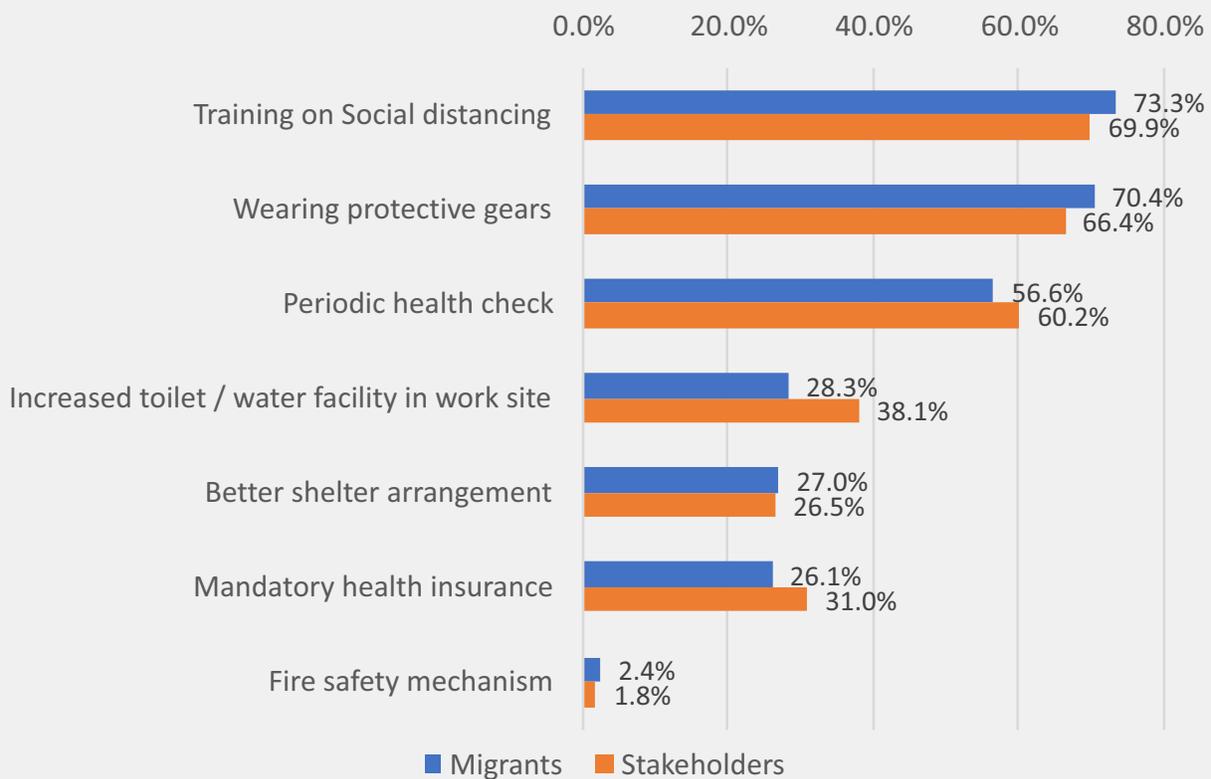
Chart 3.16: Mandatory Covid-19 Risk Reduction



Nearly 77.7 per cent of respondents agreed that Covid-19 risk reduction must be mandatory in order to protect one's life and avoid spreading. About 125 (17.9%) respondents were not sure. However, when the same question was asked among the stakeholders, 113 (95.8%) out of 115

categorically mentioned that risk reduction strategies must be made mandatory. This clearly indicates that the migrants are, in general aware, of the fact that serious measures must be put in workplace, both in source and destination.

Chart 3.17: Preventive measures in workplace: Migrants - Stakeholders



Training on social distancing (Physical Distancing is the right terminology), wearing protective gears and periodic health checkup are considered to be necessary by migrants and stakeholders with high priorities. In the same breath, at another level, migrants and stakeholders agree that toilet/water and shelter facility and health insurance must be also looked into. The migrants are concerned about everyday life and the importance of basic facilities required. They know that they could no more live in congested one-room houses, which could impinge on risk reduction. Can migrants in future expect these facilities from their employers

and state in places of work in both in native and in destination?

### 5. Regeneration of livelihood opportunities

One of the ways to address joblessness is to restore employment opportunities locally. Given the nature of the respondents and available resources, three major areas of livelihood restoration were considered, namely, revival of agricultural works, which includes agricultural labour and agronomy, animal rearing and skills training.

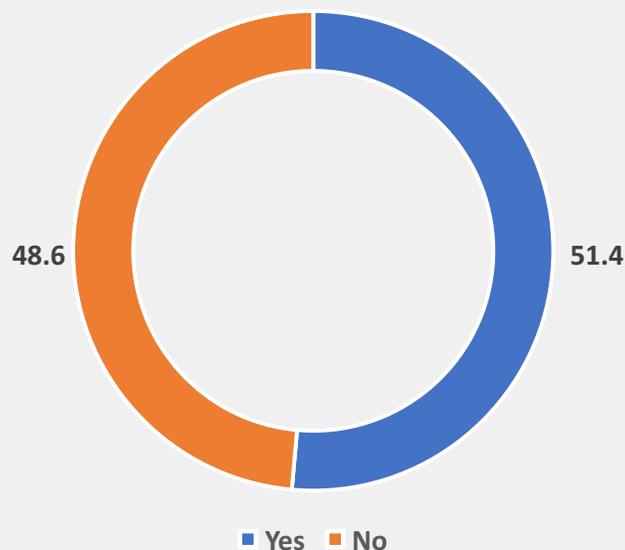
### Revival of agricultural works, agronomy, and opportunities for agricultural labourers

Only 360 (51.4%) respondents stated that they own a piece of land. Among the Adivasis, about 65.4 per cent had a piece of land, followed by 49.7 per cent among OBCs and 40.7 per cent among the Dalits. Among the general caste, 36.5 per cent owned land. Among the 360 respondents who have a piece of land, only 65 admitted good yield from the land will be good enough to address food security of the family. Another 218 said 'partially' and 77 said 'no'.

340 respondents who did not own land were asked whether regeneration of agriculture would provide agricultural labour opportunity in the native. 94 landless respondents said, 'yes', 141 said 'to some extent' and 105 said categorically 'no'. Revival of agriculture is likely to benefit those who own lands, especially the adivasis. Landless

dalits and OBCs do not feel confident that they could earn their living through agricultural labour works. To a question whether state government should invest more in rural agronomy, only 62.3 per cent stated emphatic 'yes'. To another question, whether investment by government in agriculture would yield reasonable income, only 185 (26.4%) said 'yes'. Another 280 (40%) respondents stated 'yes' provided governments fix reasonable minimum support price. This clearly indicates that land and land related allied works could only partially fulfill the income needs of the migrants. Apart from agronomy, a science and technology of producing and using plants in agriculture for food, fuel, fibre, and land restoration, substantial number of respondents also suggested promotion of agri-based consumer products linked to market chain. For example, potato could be used for producing chips, snack pellets and flour. Such by-products could attract youth with employment opportunities.

Chart 3.18: Owning Land



*Raju Oraon was hopeful of reviving agriculture. "I have land. I was unable to make good use of it due to untimely monsoon. There will be many challenges to revive agricultural production in the coming season. I am determined to restore agriculture and rear animals and have decided not to go outside Jharkhand for a job for a year or two."*

### Rearing animals

Rearing animals is considered one of the sources of income by the poor. In many cases, rearing of animals provides constant additional income, especially when other agricultural works are not available. To a question whether the respondents are interested in rearing animals, 366 (52.3%) said 'yes' and 124 (17.7%) stated that they are

interested now as they returned to native and they see rearing animals as good opportunity. 63 per cent of respondents confirmed availability of common grazing grounds near their native places. However, only 37.6 per cent stated that they possess skills in rearing and 66.1 per cent acknowledged that they are in need of training. Income through animal rearing is seen as reliable additional source.

Chart 3.19: Interest, skills and training in animal rearing

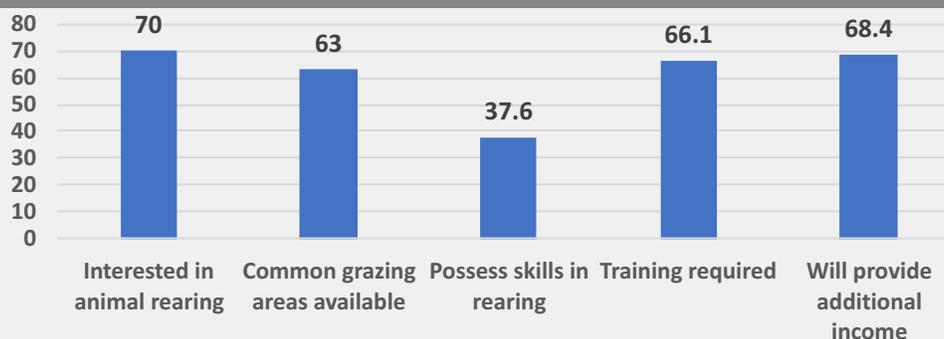


Table 3.5: State-wise preferences in rearing animals

| S. No | States          | Priority 1 | Priority 2    | Priority 3    |
|-------|-----------------|------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1     | Assam           | Cows       | Chicken       | Sheep/goat    |
| 2     | Other NE States | Pigs       | Chicken       | Cows          |
| 3     | Bihar           | Cows       | Sheep/goat    | Bulls/Bufalos |
| 4     | Chhattisgarh    | Cows       | Chicken       | Sheep/goat    |
| 5     | Jharkhand       | Sheep/goat | Cows          | Chicken       |
| 6     | Madhya Pradesh  | Sheep/goat | Chicken       | Cows          |
| 7     | Odisha          | Sheep/goat | Chicken       | Cows          |
| 8     | Uttar Pradesh   | Cows       | Bulls/Bufalos | Sheep/goat    |
| 9     | Uttarakhand     | Cows       |               |               |
| 10    | West Bengal     | Sheep/goat | Chicken       | Cows          |

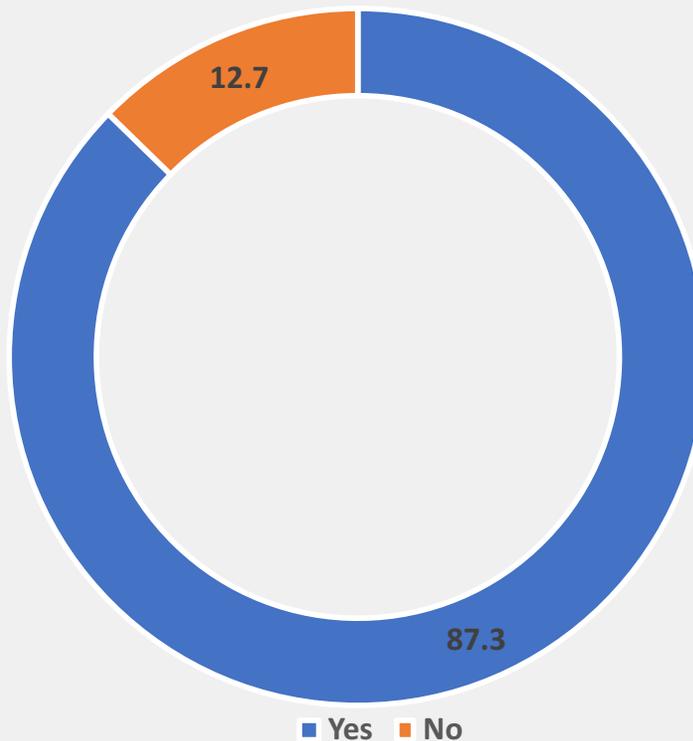
*Note: Uttarakhand respondents had only one key priority.*

In general, the preference was to cows (61.8 per cent of cases), sheep/goat (52 per cent of cases) and chicken 45.9 per cent of cases. The Adivasis seem to prefer sheep / goat to other animals. Dalits and OBCs prefer cows. Many those opted for cows were open for buffalos. Uttarakhand has high level of samples from general caste and they prefer only to rear cows. Rearing chicken is seen as highly beneficial as it does not require big capital. A number of respondents also suggested formation of milk cooperatives and training on milk products at the PRI or Gram Sabha levels.

### Skill Training

There is a huge demand for skill training among the respondents. 87.3 per cent are looking for some kind of skill training. Some youth expressed reluctance to get back to agricultural farming. The Central government has initiated Skill India programme. This is an opportune time to invest in skill development programmes and provide hands on training on variety of skills which would provide employment locally to the migrants. The respondents also desired to have short-term and multi-skill training.

Chart 3.20: Need for skill training



**Table 3.6: What kind of training would provide employment opportunity**

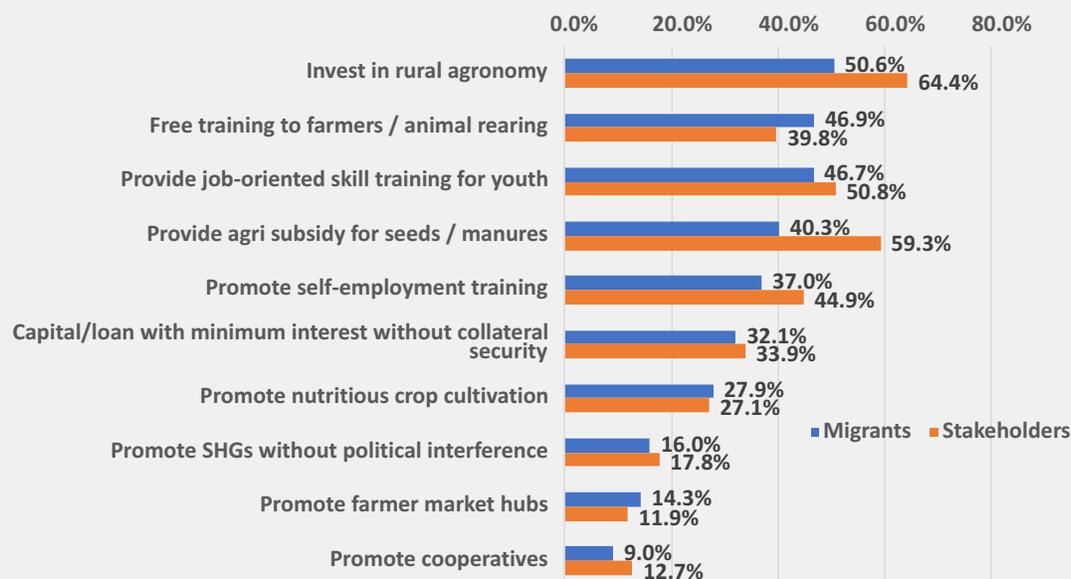
| S. No | States          | Priority 1         | Priority 2        | Priority 3         | Priority 4          |
|-------|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1     | Assam           | Tailoring          | Electrical wiring | Mobile repair      | Two-wheeler repair  |
| 2     | Other NE States | Tailoring          | Mobile repair     | Motor repair       |                     |
| 3     | Bihar           | Mobile repair      | Cycle repair      | Two-wheeler repair | Electrical wiring   |
| 4     | Chhattisgarh    | Brick making       | Motor repair      | Electrical wiring  | Cycle repair        |
| 5     | Jharkhand       | Two-wheeler repair | Mobile repair     | Electrical wiring  | Carpentry           |
| 6     | Madhya Pradesh  | Two-wheeler repair | Tailoring         | Electrical wiring  | Cycle repair        |
| 7     | Odisha          | Mobile repair      | Tailoring         | Two-wheeler repair | Electrical wiring   |
| 8     | Uttar Pradesh   | Electrical wiring  | Mobile repair     | Motor repair       | Solar light/repair  |
| 9     | Uttarakhand     | Mobile repair      | Electrical wiring | Motor repair       | Two-wheeler repair  |
| 10    | West Bengal     | Two-wheeler repair | Plumbing          | Motor repair       | Mobile/cycle repair |

About 16 types of skills were listed and the respondents were asked to choose three appropriate skills that would help them to generate local employability with reasonable income. While identifying the skills, the

educational background was considered as a determining indicator. Table 3.6 lays out priorities as expressed by the respondents.

**Suggestions to the State to improve income level**

**Chart 3.21: Suggestions to improve income level: Migrants – Stakeholders**



Out of 10 given options, the respondents were asked to choose four. The percentage of cases of migrants was 320.7 per cent and of stakeholders was 362.7 per cent. This indicates that most of the migrants indicated three priorities and most of the stakeholders indicated four priorities. Some of the priorities are interrelated and are not to be treated as mutually exclusive. Clearly 6 indicators received higher ranking – investing in rural agronomy, free training for farmers on farming and animal

rearing, job-oriented skill training for youth, agricultural subsidy for seeds and manures, self-employability training and capital / loan with minimum interest and without collateral security. Nutritious crop cultivation, in the place of cash crops is also recommended by substantial number of respondents. Promotion of farmer market hub and agricultural cooperatives, though appear to be the last priorities, these two depend very much on first set of necessary indicators.

**Table 3.7: State-wise priorities to improve income level**

| S. No | States          | Priority 1         | Priority 2        | Priority 3         | Priority 4          |
|-------|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1     | Assam           | Tailoring          | Electrical wiring | Mobile repair      | Two-wheeler repair  |
| 2     | Other NE States | Tailoring          | Mobile repair     | Motor repair       |                     |
| 3     | Bihar           | Mobile repair      | Cycle repair      | Two-wheeler repair | Electrical wiring   |
| 4     | Chhattisgarh    | Brick making       | Motor repair      | Electrical wiring  | Cycle repair        |
| 5     | Jharkhand       | Two-wheeler repair | Mobile repair     | Electrical wiring  | Carpentry           |
| 6     | Madhya Pradesh  | Two-wheeler repair | Tailoring         | Electrical wiring  | Cycle repair        |
| 7     | Odisha          | Mobile repair      | Tailoring         | Two-wheeler repair | Electrical wiring   |
| 8     | Uttar Pradesh   | Electrical wiring  | Mobile repair     | Motor repair       | Solar light/repair  |
| 9     | Uttarakhand     | Mobile repair      | Electrical wiring | Motor repair       | Two-wheeler repair  |
| 10    | West Bengal     | Two-wheeler repair | Plumbing          | Motor repair       | Mobile/cycle repair |

Two strong emerging indicators are agrarian revolutions and job-oriented skills – self-employable and skills which can be absorbed local industries. Both must go hand in hand and not one at the cost of the other. This is the new India where the migrants are looking for 'self-reliance'. People oriented investment in development is the need of the hour. The pile of food stocks must be converted into other consumable market products. There are also stories of resilience emerging from the field: Rajvijay and his wife Meena Devi migrated from Uttar Pradesh to Ludhiana, Punjab

and worked as a welder and a daily labourer. During lockdown, Rajvijay started selling vegetables in his locality as he had to find some money to address the medical needs of his son. This effort did not bear much income. When he moved to his native, he borrowed loan from his relatives and began selling plastic home need items by cycle. On the first day, he earned Rs. 300 as profit. He is happy. He hopes that that the state government will create job opportunities for the migrant workers, to work in their own areas and live happily with their family. Interest free loans to small vendors is yet another option.

Rewla Mehta from Gonda District in Madhya Pradesh migrated to Akola District Maharashtra and worked as a farm labourer. He has returned to his native with great difficulties. He is determined to put the farm skills he has learnt in Maharashtra and hopeful of increasing his income level. Makan Bhabor, from Navinavapada village, Jhabua district, Madhya Pradesh received 8 kg of maize seed from IGSSS, New Delhi as Covid-19 relief and livelihood restoration. He is hopeful this yield will bring much needed relief.

### Blocks in the implementation of programmes by the government

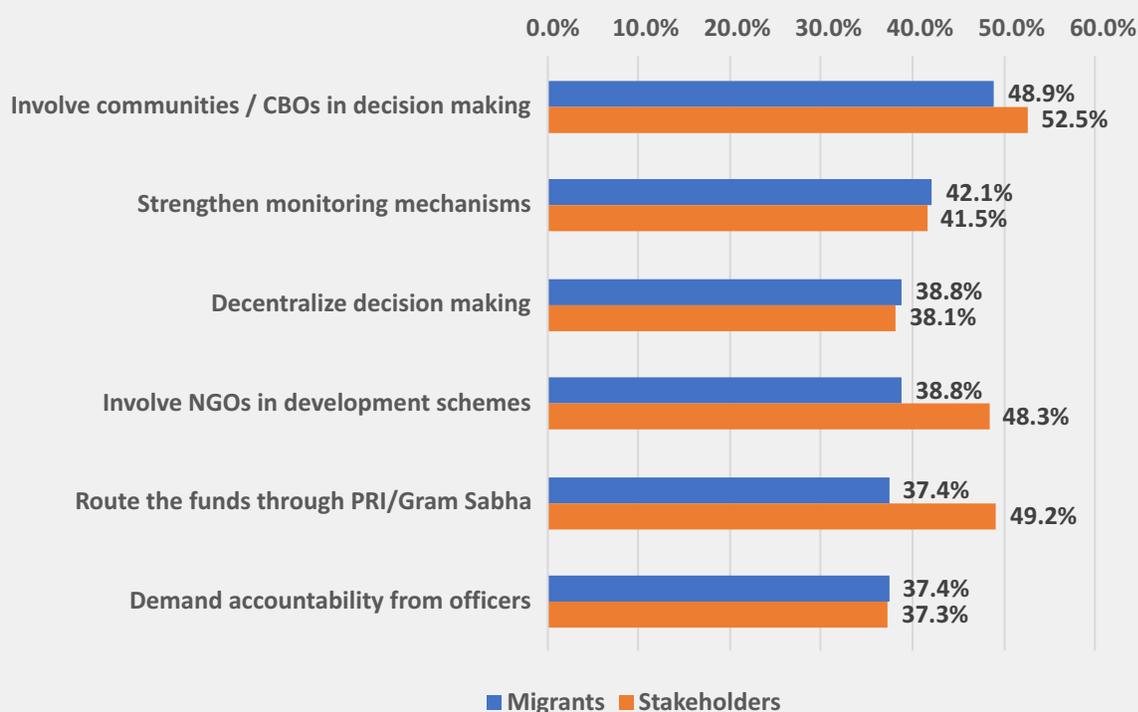
Bureaucratic and governance deficits in programme implementation is prevalent. The

respondents were asked to articulate blocks in the implementation of the programmes of the government which they consider important that need to be addressed. Migrants and stakeholders agreed that the major blocks are Corruption (Migrant 76.9 % of cases and stakeholders 72.9%), Commission (Migrant 57.4% and stakeholders 50%), Political favouritism (Migrant 44.9 % of cases and stakeholders 45.8%) and involvement of middleman (Migrant 38.1% of cases and stakeholders 38.1%). Stakeholders also emphasized the aspect of delay in decision making (40.7%).

### Measures to be taken to reduce the blocks

From Chart 3.22, it can be concluded that all indicators are important and interrelated, as this

Chart 3.22: Recommendations to reduce bottlenecks: Migrants - Stakeholders



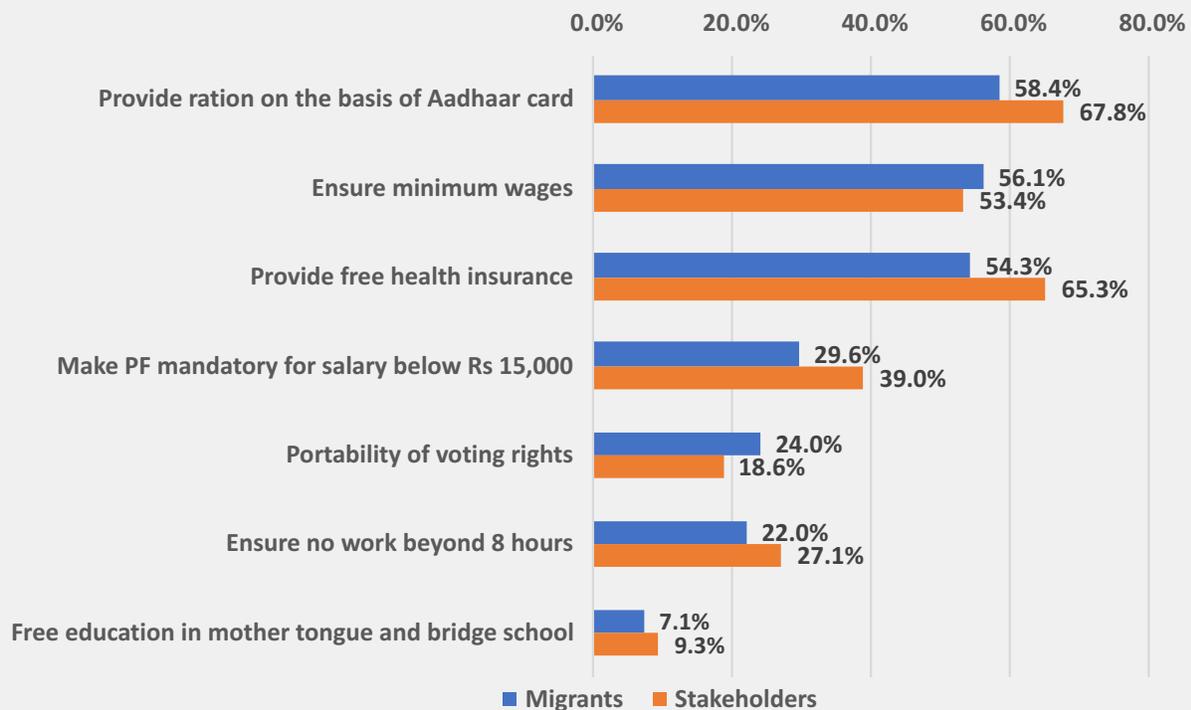
question has received equally distributed number of responses for all options. Moreover, if one indicator is seriously taken and addressed, it will have ripple effects on other indicators. However, what emerges is the importance of participation of communities and community-based organisations in decision making processes. Local governance systems, PRI and Gram Sabha must be empowered to function as foundations of bottom-up development models. This means, development funds must be routed through these institutions where local villagers, become watchdogs of development processes. Training on RTI and collective community approach in monitoring the implementation of the programmes will help in making the governments and other duty bearers accountable.

## 6. Migrants' Rights Charter

One of the research questions of this study is to come out with charter of migrants in the perceptions and understanding of migrants and stakeholders. Two questions were asked in this regard: 1. What do the migrants and stakeholders suggest in order to strengthen the rights of migrant workers; and 2. What systemic or policy changes do these sections of people propose?

Out of 7 given options, the respondents were asked to choose three for the first question and out of 8 options a maximum of four were to be chosen for the second question.

Chart 3.23: Suggestions to strengthen the rights of migrants: Migrants - Stakeholders



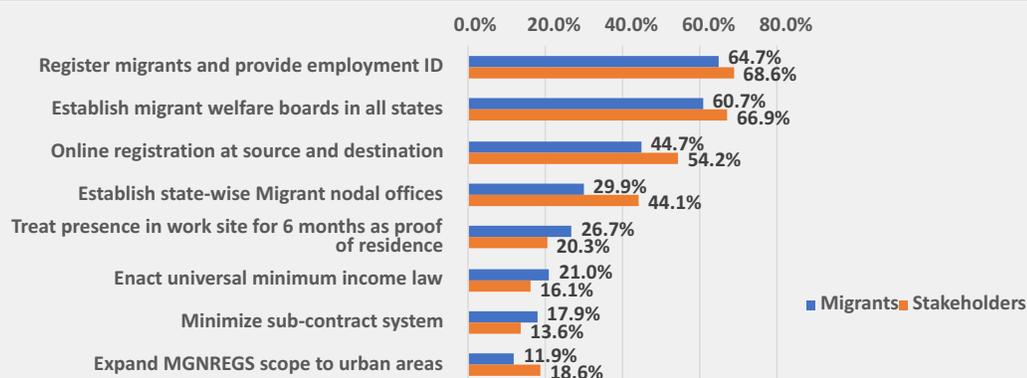
**Table 3.8: State-wise priorities to strengthen rights of migrant workers**

| S. No | States          | Priority 1                   | Priority 2               | Priority 3               |
|-------|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1     | Assam           | Free health insurance        | Make PF mandatory        | No work beyond 8hrs      |
| 2     | Other NE States | Free health insurance        | Ensure minimum wages     | Ration linked to Aadhaar |
| 3     | Bihar           | Ration linked to Aadhaar     | Ensure minimum wages     | Free health insurance    |
| 4     | Chhattisgarh    | Ensure minimum wages         | Free health insurance    | Ration linked to Aadhaar |
| 5     | Jharkhand       | Ensure minimum wages         | Ration linked to Aadhaar | Free health insurance    |
| 6     | Madhya Pradesh  | Portability of voting rights | Ration linked to Aadhaar | Free health insurance    |
| 7     | Odisha          | Ration linked to Aadhaar     | Free health insurance    | Ensure minimum wages     |
| 8     | Uttar Pradesh   | Ration linked to Aadhaar     | Ensure minimum wages     | Free health insurance    |
| 9     | Uttarakhand     | Ensure minimum wages         | Ration linked to Aadhaar | Free health insurance    |
| 10    | West Bengal     | Free health insurance        | Ensure minimum wages     | Ration linked to Aadhaar |

From Chart 3.23 and Table 3.8, three indicators, namely, provide ration on the basis of Aadhaar, minimum wages and free health insurance or with minimum premium emerge as one set of indicators with more than 50 per cent of cases by migrants and stakeholders. The second set of indicators with substantial number of cases of responses according to Chart 3.23 are: making Provident Fund (PF) mandatory, portability of voting rights and no work beyond 8 hours. Free education of children in mother tongue and establishing bridge school was considered as the

last priority among the given options. These trends are easily understandable from the perspective of migrants – first need is basic - food, wage and health, then the rest. Many migrants leave their children in native place and go alone for work. Revla Mehta who worked for a year in Maharashtra said, “If we would have had voting rights, we would have been treated with care. If not one political party, another one would have come to help us”. It seems the importance of adult franchise is understood by the migrants.

**Chart 3.24: Systemic or policy changes required: Migrants - Stakeholders**



**Table 3.9: State-wise priorities on systemic or policy changes required**

| S. No | States          | Priority 1                      | Priority 2                      | Priority 3                         |
|-------|-----------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1     | Assam           | Employment identity card        | Establish migrant welfare board | State-wise migrant nodal office    |
| 2     | Other NE States | Employment identity card        | Online registration             | Establish migrant welfare board    |
| 3     | Bihar           | Employment identity card        | Establish migrant welfare board | Online registration                |
| 4     | Chhattisgarh    | Establish migrant welfare board | Employment identity card        | Online registration                |
| 5     | Jharkhand       | Employment identity card        | Establish migrant welfare board | State-wise migrant nodal office    |
| 6     | Madhya Pradesh  | Establish migrant welfare board | Employment identity card        | Online registration                |
| 7     | Odisha          | Employment identity card        | Establish migrant welfare board | Online registration                |
| 8     | Uttar Pradesh   | Employment identity card        | Establish migrant welfare board | Online registration                |
| 9     | Uttarakhand     | Employment identity card        | Establish migrant welfare board | Enact universal minimum income law |
| 10    | West Bengal     | Employment identity card        | Establish migrant welfare board | Online registration                |

Chart 3.24 and Table 3.9 demonstrate registering migrant workers and providing employment identity card as the top priority, followed by establishment of welfare boards in all states and simple online registration in source and destination for better tracking and monitoring of migrants. For India, which has made huge technological progress, this should not be an issue. It is a question of priority and political will. Second set of priorities, as per Chart 3.24 are, establishing nodal offices that would coordinate, listen to the issues of migrants and help them in redressal of non-compliances of law and violations of rights, providing proof of residence after 6 months which can help the migrants to access entitlements and give them identity and

enactment of minimum income law. The last two policy changes are minimizing sub-contract system which will help the migrants to have recourse to principal employer and strengthen employer-employee relationship and expanding MGNREGS to urban areas.

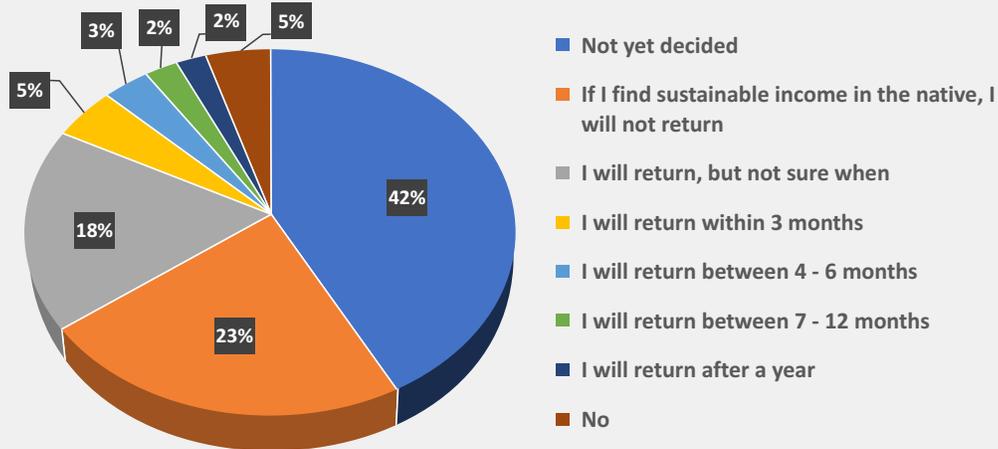
### 7. Future employment scenario

Many believe unless drastic changes happen in the native states, many migrants will go out of native in search of employment. This might be an opportune time for the governments to put in place systems, policies and mechanisms so that safe, orderly, regular and dignified migration could be ensured. This has been the calling of Global Compact, which is framed in a way consistent with

target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in which Member States committed

to comprehensive approach to human mobility and enhanced cooperation at the global level.

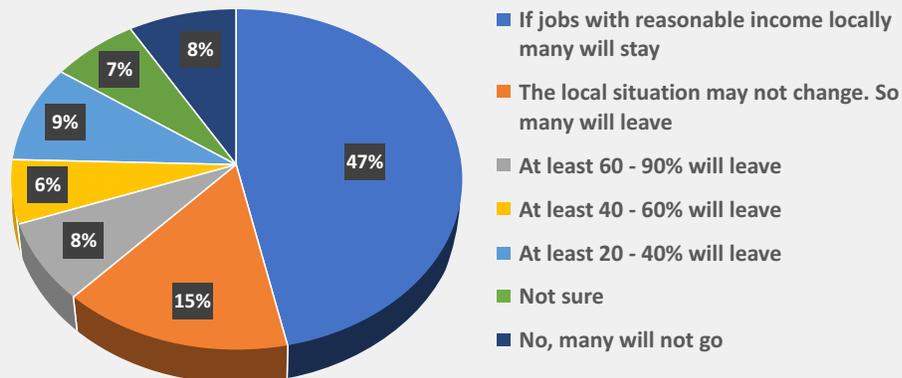
Chart 3.25: Future plans – Migrants



This question was analyzed only for those who returned to native, in quarantine centres or in destination but planning to return. The number of respondents here is 680. In the understanding of migrants only 32 (4.7%) have decided not to go out of state for work. 206 (30.3%) have decided to

go out of native in a few months or after a year. About 286 (42.1%) respondents have not yet decided. 156 (22.9%) respondents adopt wait and watch policy. If the state ensures sustainable income, the migrants might stay back.

Chart 3.26: Future plans of migrants in the perception of Stakeholders



The same question was also posed to the stakeholders but with different options. 55 (46.6%) stated that if there are jobs locally with reasonable income, many migrants will stay back. About 18 (15.3%) respondents were less optimistic and chose the option, the local situation may not change and consequently many will leave native in search of employment. 10 (8.5%) respondents categorically stated that migrants will not leave their native state. Only 8 (6.8%) were not sure as they had not yet made up their minds. In contrast, in the perception of migrants (Chart 3.25) about 42.1 per cent fall under 'not yet decided category'. About 27 (22.9%) stated migrants will go out of native and it is only a question of time.

From the understanding of migrants and stakeholders, one can conclude that many migrants are likely to move out of native states sooner or later, unless some drastic changes

happen which results in migrants getting employment locally with reasonable and sustainable income. It is in the hands of the native state governments to act decisively in terms of policy changes, increase in wages, investment in agriculture, agricultural products related allied skills, employable skill training and creating local employment opportunities. Already discussions are on to link MGNREGS to supply labour force for local industries. This agenda should not be pushed. If at all, it must happen with the consent of the labourers (Interview with Ms. Aruna Roy).

In the concluding chapter, after presenting a brief summary of the findings of this study, based on discussion with experts on the findings of this study, emerging narratives are captured as road maps with specific recommendations for Central Governments, State Governments, trade unions and CSOs.

## CHAPTER 4

# MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND THE WAY FORWARD

Analysis of data of 700 respondents, 118 stakeholders and 51 case narratives brought out the following findings:

- Migration was a result of combination of multiple push and pull factors. Among them, the push factors had been joblessness, increasing educational, health needs, care of the elderly, indebtedness and failure of agriculture in the native places and the pull factors had been better wages for unskilled and skilled works in destination states.
- From the profile of the migrant respondents, one can conclude, that generally inter-state migrants are male, young and less educated. A good percentage of them are from the excluded communities, dalits (20%), adivasis (34.7%), religious minorities (30.3%) and economically poor, across religious and social categories.
- More number of adivasi women seem to be moving to other states when compared to other communities.
- Nearly 57 per cent of the respondents worked in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Delhi and Gujarat. These states seemed to be preferred destinations.
- About 50 per cent worked as mazdoor or as unskilled labourers and the rest worked as skilled labourers.
- Two third of the respondents were employed on monthly salary basis. Male members

received salary in the range of Rs. 7,000 to Rs. 13,000 per month, barring a few and female members earned between Rs. 4,000 to Rs. 6,000.

- Native states do not provide an opportunity to earn much regular income for the migrants. MGNREGS was a big help but 100 days in a year was too less. This scheme helped female workers and to some extent migration of females declined.
- Very few migrants worked for more than 2 years continuously in different destination states. Whenever there is an opportunity for employment in agriculture-related activities or other opportunities, migrants liked to return to native.
- During Covid-19 lockdown, the respondents felt unwanted as they were treated as 'outsiders' and 'corona carriers' by the destination state governments and local population.
- Lockdown announcement shattered the trust between the migrants and locals / employers overnight. This caused trauma and mental health issues. 'Stay at home' turned out be a tool for oppression and abuse by the police in some instances as they were going out to find food to survive. Many were thrown out of the workplace. Though some employers provided food, many contractors disappeared from the scene. They did not know the way to the labour department. There was no guidance or

support. Exodus to native place was only a manifestation of rejection by the host state and employer / contractors / local communities.

- Though they were working day and night and saw big buildings coming up, metro trains plying and roads getting expanded, they were not treated neither as contributors to nation building nor as workers. They could not take recourse to labour laws that would protect their wellbeing. The only person they knew was their local contractor. No other system of governance existed for them.
- They hoped that the host governments would come forward since lockdown was unprecedented and it was getting extended. There was no timely response. Only after three weeks of lockdown, some governments provided food. It was too little and too late. But for the interventions of humanitarian agencies and people of goodwill, many would have had tough time filling the stomachs.
- Some states provided cash relief support. Governments of Northeast states provided more cash support than the other states. So they believed that only governments in native places could help them.
- “Our instinct was telling us to go back home. The governments did not understand our emotional needs”. As they were planning to embark on travel, transportation was stopped. There was chaos at many levels - in distribution of food. When Shramik special trains were organized, migrants had to pay double the amount, apart from commissions to jump the queue for the travel. This continued for many days, until the Supreme Court intervened.
- There were many problems in transit and last mile connectivity to return to their respective places. Cases narratives stated how

respondents walked to their native from main stations.

- Many quarantine centres in the native were in horrible state of affair. There was no food, water and medical care. They just whiled away the time. The only consolation was that they were close to their families. Many felt Village Panchayats and Gram Sabhas could have done well if quarantine centres would have been created at local levels.
- They used mobiles mainly to call their families. Online platform was used for cash transfer and registering for travel, which they were not familiar with.
- The entitlement cards – aadhaar, voter identity card, ration card and bank account were useless in the destination. They felt lesser as human and more as unwanted citizens in destination states. “Lockdown bolted our citizenship”.
- Many did not have job card, as they were always out of the native. They hoped that they would be provided job card, increase in number of days of work and more wages. There were still a good number of migrants without a ration card and bank account.
- Health insurance and welfare board in destination states would have made a big difference in their lives, as it was done in some states. Trade unions never responded to their request. There was a disconnect between workers in organized sector and in informal sector.
- Many went back home believing that their native governments would provide ration, job under MGNREGS and create employment opportunity to ensure that they have food on table. They recommended investment in

revival of agriculture, agricultural by-product skills, animal husbandry and training on self-employable trade as possible future course of action. They were also concerned about those who wanted to return but could not as there was only limited number of seats in the trains.

- Despite many good intentions and plans of the government they feared that corruption, commission and political favouritism would block their development. They expressed that grassroots democracy must be restored to strengthen *Atmanibhar*. Gandhi's vision of *Swaraj* must be translated into action by strengthening self-governance.
- Return of the migrants was one the concerns of those who had already returned. Single workers, especially women migrants must be identified and facilitated to return to their native.
- Many said they might be forced to go out of native states if there were no employment opportunities.
- Many stakeholders and those interviewed stated that the core issues of migration got exposed during lockdown. Every day the migrants appeared on papers. Their only hope was that migrants would be treated as workers who contribute to economy, as citizens in a democratic country and in a dignified manner with compassion and empathy wherever they would go. They hoped that one day all these would become reality.

These concerns were presented to some experts and incorporating their views, 'The way forward' section is developed. The purpose of the way forward section is neither to provide a long list of to-do items nor recommendations only to the 'other'. A number of recommendations are already in the public domain.

The primary focus of this section is to bring to the fore, matters concerning all citizens, by capturing emerging big narratives as roadmaps and conclude with some specific recommendations for different stakeholders. This fulfils the goal of the study, to give voice to the migrants who participated in the study and other stakeholders who shared their thoughts and insights. It must be noted that these roadmaps are neither exhaustive nor to be construed as exclusive strategies. These are highly interrelated. Also, as there is an urgency to address short-term and medium-term concerns of the migrants some possible strategies and plans are developed for NGOs/CSOs and native and destination states.

### Emerging big narratives

#### a. Reconstructing the welfare state

The fundamental new narrative is that the welfare state must assume greater responsibility for the protection and development of its workers and citizens, and it cannot pass the buck totally to market forces. On 3 April 2020, the British-based Financial Times, widely read by the richest and the most powerful players in global politics published an editorial titled – Radical reforms are required to forge a society that will work for all. “Radical reforms - reversing the prevailing policy direction of the last four decades - will need to be put on the table. Governments will have to accept a more active role in the economy. They must see public services as investments rather than liabilities and look for ways to make labour markets less insecure. Redistribution will again be on the agenda; the privileges of the elderly and wealthy in question. Policies until recently considered eccentric, such as basic income and wealth taxes, will have to be in the mix”. This message indicates that neo-liberalism collapsed like a pack of cards. In the Indian context, we need to go back to the

Constitutional paradigm of development founded on principles of democracy, welfare state, and social justice and the policy makers direct the market forces to become responsive and not dictating. An inclusive, decentralised form of governance focussing on grassroots democracy and self-reliance by adopting whole-of-society approach that enables partnership and contributions by a wide range of stakeholders to collective impact is the need of the hour.

Whole-of-society approach demands development of human economy, a reproduction of human beings and of whatever sustains life in general. Such an economy would serve the needs of whole persons and communities, not just a narrow individualism. It would express human variety in its local particulars as well as the interests of all humanity (Keith Hart, et al, 2010).

#### **b. Covid-19 has given us back Gandhi**

We have not forgotten Gandhi, but we have put aside his teachings of *Swaraj*. Covid-19 is reminding us of Gandhian principles. The Prime Minister emphasized the importance of *Atmanirbhar Bharat*, in the post-Covid era. Gandhian *Swaraj* can be meaningful only when it is seen from his talisman: "Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a control over his [her] own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melt away" - One of the last notes left behind by Gandhi in 1948, expressing his deepest social thought. The call today is to

increase the work potentials and production of masses than mass production. That every labour enjoys the beauty of her/his hard work and feels that democracy works at all levels of governance, especially at the grassroots.

#### **c. Need for dialogue among all actors**

At all levels of governance, from the grassroots to New Delhi, constructive dialogue space must be initiated. Everyone must feel and participate in the process of development through structurally developed dialogue space. Moving away from the concept of 'we' and 'other', collective consciousness and responsibility must lead the individuals. During Covid-19, industrialists raised their voices in favour of workers, media took it upon itself to expose the plight of the masses and IT employees came forward to engage in relief work through financial contribution and physical labour. Are these not good times? A space that would bring all actors together – workers, activists, academicians, policy makers, officials, Trade Unions, including non-party unions, like New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) and All India Union of Forest Working People (AIUFWP), CSOs, industrialists, entrepreneurs, market forces, representative of tech companies and media must be created to look at positive agenda for development and revival of economy.

The primary purpose of this space could be to strengthen old variables – core labour laws, redressal mechanisms, implementation structures and strategies, monitoring mechanisms and financing and also to capture, new variables that are emerging and look for out of the box strategies. Some of these are: 5th code for the migrants, cash transfer, free ration for some months, expanding the scope of MGNREGS to urban areas, portability of entitlements,

technology based data gathering, analysis and monitoring, welfare boards and nodal offices, skill-India geared towards rural and urban vulnerable youth, protection measures of workers, especially women and children, and public health issues. Every citizen has the right to critique various policies and programmes of the government and express one's opinion. However, dialogue space is critical to develop broad-based the strategies. Such dialogue space will also build up a strong ownership and buy-in among all stakeholders. The requisite demand here is the ability to leverage and get all actors on board for policy engagements.

#### **d. Political education**

There can be no better period than post-Covid-19 era to reengage in political education of masses and mass political education. Virtual communications have changed the course of spending time for many. The amount of online conversations and webinars that go on is unprecedented. However, one must note that we have not developed strategies to reach out to the masses. Community radio could be one of the best mediums to reach out to the poor. Political education must result in increased critical awareness of the realities, search for meaningful alternatives and collective actions based on collective consciousness. Charity is important but charity encompassed by compassion and empathy will take us to the root of the problems, including structural, governance, and policy issues. One of the basic requirements for political education, given the complexities and varieties of India, is that such education must happen in local languages and dialects. Could technology help us towards this? Such people-based technology platform must be developed and implemented.

#### **e. Agro-based industrialization and revival of rural economy**

Indian economy is largely based on agriculture and addresses livelihood issues of a huge population. While the 'unorganised' informal economy accounts for roughly half of India's GDP, it accounts for 80 - 90 per cent of the workforce. It includes agriculture, non-farm economy and vast services sector. Nearly 70 per cent of farmers are marginal and small, apart from yet another big chunk of agriculture dependent labourers. A vast majority of these labourers are from the excluded communities. In fact, one of the reasons for migration is collapse of agriculture. Failure of monsoon and lack of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for agricultural products have made agricultural production and subsequent by-products, economically unviable. In the same manner, management of Non-timber Forest Product with minimum support price, and interest of the forest-dwellers, who rely on these for livelihood, must be protected.

We need to look for alternative model of development which will provide decent employment and sustainable income for millions of poor in the country. Agro-based industrialisation, which would include cotton textile, silk textiles, and jute industries and large-scale animal husbandry might turn out to be good opportunities, if investments could be assured. It will have double effect of reviving rural economy and addressing the livelihood needs of the excluded communities.

Agro-based industrialisation must be also rooted in green ideas. Our understanding of environment and ecology has come a long way. Environment issues and social justice are interconnected. Go green, reduce – recycle - reuse, environmental care, eco-audit, energy audit, pollution-free planet, herbal gardens and reviving depleted aquifers

cannot be considered as slogans or expensive agenda anymore. These require urgent action, investment and policy measures to save the mother earth and humanity.

**f. Migrants to be brought under the ambit of all core labour laws**

The pathos of migrants also brought core issues of labour laws. While ISMW Act 1979, provides necessary framework and legal protection for migrant workers, it is also necessary to bring the migrants under the ambit of all core labour laws. Employment State Insurance (ESI), Minimum Wages, no reduction of overtime charges, working hours, rest and leisure, health and hygiene and social security measures are critical areas that would serve as labour protection measures for the migrant labourers. There is a thinking among some sections of Government officials regarding the need for a 5th Code, to address migrants' issues. This could be one of the key takeaways from the Covid-19 pandemic. The Government of India and the State governments must stop anti-labour policy approach. In this regard, the Ministry of Labour and Employment has a crucial role to play. As a custodian of labour protection and welfare, it must initiate a dialogue with all stakeholders, Trade Unions, migrant workers, industrialists, civil society groups and other stakeholders and ensure workers' voices are amplified and reflected in various discourses with regard to labour laws and programmes.

**g. Adopting the principles and objectives of SDGs and Global Compact (GC) in future labour frameworks**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and

prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. Goal 8 articulates the need for 'Promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all' and Goal 10 enunciates the importance of 'Reducing inequality within and among countries'. 'Leaving no one behind' is the pledge made by all member countries of UN and India is a signatory to SDGs.

In pursuance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in adopting the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, in 2016, the 193 UN Member States recognized the need for a comprehensive approach to human mobility and enhanced cooperation. The Global Compact for Migration is the first-ever UN global agreement on a common approach to international migration in all its dimensions. This needs to be adopted to inter-state and intra-state migrants as the Compact is premised on responsibility-sharing, non-discrimination, and human rights, and recognizes that a cooperative approach is needed to optimize the overall benefits of migration, while addressing its risks and challenges for individuals and communities in states of origin, transit and destination.

The global compact comprises of 23 objectives for better managing migration at local, national, regional and global levels. The compact:

- aims to mitigate the adverse drivers and structural factors that hinder people from building and maintaining sustainable livelihoods;
- intends to reduce the risks and vulnerabilities migrants face at different stages of migration by respecting, protecting and fulfilling their human rights and providing them with care and assistance;
- seeks to address the legitimate concerns of states and communities, while recognizing

that societies are undergoing demographic, economic, social and environmental changes at different scales that may have implications for and result from migration;

- strives to create conducive conditions that enable all migrants to enrich our societies through their human, economic and social capacities, and thus facilitate their contributions to sustainable development at the local, national, regional and global levels. (Adapted - <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/migration-compact>)

The list of 23 objectives could be a basis for developing strategies and programmes of action for migrants.

#### **h. Recognition for CSOs and need for positive engagements between governments and CSOs**

On 30 March 2020, Mr. Amitabh Kant, CEO of NITI Aayog wrote, “At this critical juncture, it is necessary for us to take a whole-of-India approach (emphasis added). Stakeholders with immense expertise like you need to come together and channelize efforts to fight this threat together. There is nobody better placed than you to work closely with communities, spread awareness in the areas of prevention, protection, and fighting stigma. We have greatly benefitted from our preliminary discussions with some partners from Civil Society organisations. Based on today's interactions, we strongly believe that CSOs have a pivotal role in joining forces with the local district and state administration in several critical areas. Our team in NITI Aayog is committed to working in close collaboration with CSOs working at the grassroots and with the vulnerable communities.” A number of NGOs and CSOs welcomed the appeal of Mr. Kant and wanted to see collective planning, collaboration, implementation of

programmes and monitoring. Though there had been some level of cooperation from the government bodies, it was far less than expected.

In the whole-of-India approach, the NGOs and CSOs have a definitive and complementary role to play. On 7 March 2020, the Supreme Court in its Order distinguished between political action and engagement with party politics by the NGOs / CSOs. Under weary cover, successive governments took up anti-civil society positioning which in fact had derailed healthy democratic process and practices. As a first step, the prevailing stigma between the government and CSOs must be removed and healthy interactions must be promoted. Not withholding relief interventions of central and state governments during pandemic, the contribution of humanitarian agencies, CSOs, public spirited individuals and private institutions has been huge. As Mr. Kant put it, these agencies are close to the communities and they have the capacities to build on the agency of the migrants, more than government structures in some areas. Collaboration and complementarity must be the basis for the new roadmap.

#### **I. Specific Recommendations**

##### **a. Central Government**

- Labour is under Concurrent List. This means, Central government must take on board the State governments in dealing with this subject. Any form of isolated approach will be counter-productive. Genuine concerns expressed by the states must be duly considered and cooperative federalism must be strengthened.
- The report of the Working Group on Migration formed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation and headed by

Mr. Partha Mukhopadhyay must be soon implemented.

- It was soothing that during Covid-19 scenario, some industrialists raised their voices for the wellbeing of the workers and mooted the idea of cash transfer to the poor to revive the economy. The Legislature, Executive and Judiciary must allow themselves to be permeated by sensitivity, compassion and empathy towards the migrants.
- A number of new affirmative action variables have emerged, such as, establishment of welfare fund as it is done for construction workers under BOCW Act, Universal Minimum Income, portability of entitlements including voting rights, One-Nation One-Ration card, expansion of rural employment guarantee to urban areas, investment in public health, and recapturing the spirit of Gandhian *Swaraj* to strengthen local governance. These variables will address not only the concerns of the migrants, but also workers at large. In enacting new legislations related to labour, all stakeholders, especially trade unions must be taken into confidence. Development must be viewed from a bottom-up approach and recognition must be given to masses that produce and contribute to national economy.
- The Central government must ensure autonomous functioning of the Ministry of Labour and Employment and ensure sufficient allocation of finance to function as vanguard of labour protection, welfare and to redress labour violations.
- When the Prime Minister announced *Atmanirbhar Bharat*, he laid emphasis on technology. The challenge is to take the technology to the villages. To transform the

lives of rural youth, technology is imperative. The huge financial support by the Central government to MSME must have a rural thrust.

- A 5th code on migrants must be initiated to protect the rights and entitlements of migrants. To begin with, national level Toll Free Helpline number must be set up with appropriate implementing, monitoring, redressal, accountability and reporting mechanisms, digitally connected to state, district and PRI/Gram Sabha governance structures, to send out a message of solidarity, compassion and action.
  - The immediate challenge for Central and State governments is obviously taking all efforts to stop the spread of Corona virus and save the innocent lives and at the same time reviving the economy. In this regard, a delicate balance must be maintained. Any deviation will derail both efforts.
- b. Coordination between source and destination state governments**
- This study clearly shows that the migrants expect close coordination between source and destination state governments, to ensure safe and dignified migration. Covid-19 exposed the disconnect between these two entities. The destination states must realise that the migrants bring with them unique gifts and skills which can enrich not just the local economy, but also enrich cultures, values systems and human sensitivity.
  - Those who have returned to native states have huge expectations that their governments will take proactive measures to revive agriculture with nutritious crops and offer employability training to ensure sustainable income. State Rural Livelihood Mission (could focus on

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establishing district level skills training centres to initiate training on SRLM) agricultural cooperatives, livestock management, employability skills and maintenance and repair of consumer products in collaboration with PRI and Gram Sabha. Vulnerability Reduction Fund (VRF) could be geared towards this. Moreover, to realise livelihood development at the village level, public-private partnership model (PPP) could be put in place. Bank loans for self-entrepreneurs must be easily accessible with minimum interest and without collateral security. This is again a new challenge and opportunity for these states to fulfill the aspirations of migrants, especially the youth.

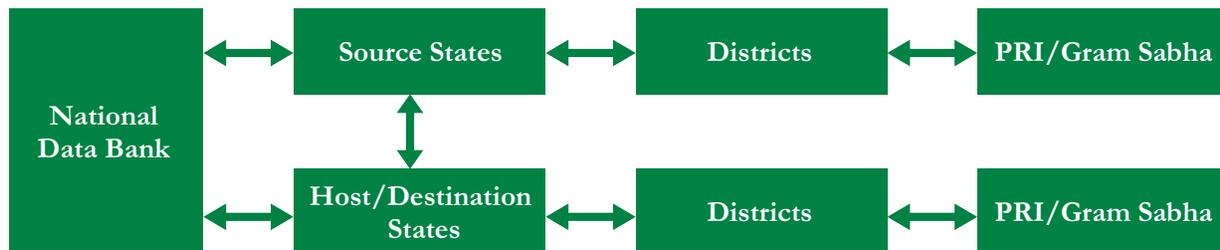
- As immediate measures free ration to be provided to all citizens below poverty line and reasonable cash transfer must be ensured.



Dropout of children, health care, care of elderly and fear of moneylenders are other major concerns of the migrants. UNICEF has warned us of the impending danger to children in the post-Covid-19 scenario. Effective strategies must be developed to address these concerns.

- Many migrants have gone through mental trauma and they are in need of psychosocial care. Source states must realise that the migrants have so much faith in their native states despite these having low level of social and economic indicators. If these states could work in coordination with other stakeholders, collectively many issues could be resolved.
- The destination states must educate their population to have better and human relationship with migrants. The contribution of migrants must be highlighted, especially their contribution to the economic agenda of the state, in the areas of construction, services, manufacturing and garment industry, metro works, domestic work and various infrastructural projects. Many migrants might return soon. Will the migrants be made to feel as outsiders once again?
- Still a large number of migrants are staying in destination states. As the fear of virus spread is increasing, many would like to return to native. Both source and destination states must coordinate and ensure their safe return.
- Taking advantage of the technological development, pooled data bank on migrants must be developed making online registration mandatory in source and destination states, bereft of political interference. This will also help in issuing employment identity card and monitoring the welfare of the migrants.

Chart 4.1: Registration Process



- Following the model of State of Odisha, nodal offices and welfare boards must be established in all states, which could become rallying points for migrants in providing identity and dignity. Establishment of nodal office could address many issues, including exploitation by the contractors.
  - Both source and destination governments must ensure effective implementation of ISMW Act 1979, The Unorganised Sector Social Security Act 2008, The Building and other Construction Workers' (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1961 and other labour laws, especially Minimum Wages, Working hours, Employment State Insurance (ESI), health insurance and PF.
  - To implement these, appropriate accountability systems and mechanisms must be developed from bottom to top, and decentralized decision making must be promoted to protect the dignity of the migrants and their livelihoods expanded.
- c. Trade Unions**
- Trade Unions have huge potentials to organize the workers and effectively face the onslaught of anti-labour policy regimes. Somehow, historically, they have restricted themselves to organized labour and left the

unorganized to others. The unions have sidelined the concerns of migrants for long and kept them out of labour purview. This has paved way for ruling class and industrialists to have unholy alliance with the corridors of powers to exploit the labouring class. The brewing discontent against existing labour policies, emerging labour legislations and apathy of the state must be effectively garnered to strengthen workers' rights and entitlements.

- It is time that the central trade unions find new ways of engaging with migrant workers in collaboration with state level trade unions, especially with unions which are not affiliated to political parties.

**d. Civil Society Organizations**

- The Civil Society Organizations are harbingers of social change. They are in close contact with communities. Moving beyond charity approach, these must adopt political education as their new way, engaging the masses with community-led organisation model, facilitating local leadership and strengthening rights-based approach to development.
- In this regard, CSOs must contribute to whole-of-society approach in building peoples' alliances as workers beyond narrow

identity politics. It is imperative that open space dialogues and network platforms are created to bring together CSOs to develop collective strategies and plans.

- CSOs could enormously contribute for the inclusion of migrants in the local governance bodies, by organizing them, by following SHG model in the destination states, with clear focus on primary health, education, awareness and livelihood to promote inclusion in local communities.
- Many migrants will return to destination states sooner or later. An appropriate ecosystem must be created to receive the migrants. Sensitizing the local population in the cities and towns, to welcome the migrants with recognition and positive affirmation of their contribution and ensuring improved dwelling with basic facilities must be negotiated with governments, establishments, contractors and employers.
- Covid-19 taught CSOs that by continuing to raise concerns of the masses even relentless hearts could be transformed. Even if one door is shut there are many other doors which could be opened. The proactive Orders of various High Courts are clear examples.
- Covid-19 is a huge opportunity for innovative strategies and campaigns at the national and global levels, as one would have noticed recently campaign against torture on Sathankulam issue and Black Lives Matter. Collaborative approaches in amplifying the voices of the masses in partnership with small vendors, trade unions, like minded media fraternity, industrialists need to be explored.
- Covid-19 scenario provided space for many old and new CSO to redefine their mission,

especially with regard to the migrants. It is time they move on from being 'providers', to 'facilitators' of development processes engaging in community mobilization to rebuild citizenship and livelihood.

- CSOs need to have continuous research and data of the migrant workers, their issues and laws that are benefitting them.
- As Mr. Kant, CEO of NITI Aayog put it, “CSOs working in a district must collaborate with each other, so that there is no duplication of work and could themselves appoint one CSO as the nodal to coordinate with the District Administration”. There are already existing networks and Institutions working with migrant workers at city, state and national level. Working together is the need of the hour.
- CSOs need to have continuous dialogue with migrant workers, both at source and destination and engage with them on safe, orderly and regular migration as explicitly stated in Global Compact.
- This is an opportune time to resurrect the Gandhian principle of Swaraj to strengthen grassroots democracy by spreading the Constitutional values to build inclusive new India.
- While there are significant progresses in rural grassroots democracy in the form of PRI / Gram Sabha, there is lot more to be done in the urban areas which could safeguard migrant workers.
- The organisations which jointly carried out this study, will explore all opportunities in collaboration with partners, well-wishers, CSR and government agencies to respond to the post-Covid challenges.

### Short-term and Medium-term strategies and plan of action for all stakeholders

This study is carried out at a time when the migrants are still gripped with fear of Covid-19 trauma, anxiety about future and concerned about immediate needs. The aforementioned suggestions provide directions for advocacy works, for policy changes and general long-term perspectives for community development actions. However, migrants cannot wait for structural or policy changes or long-term strategies.

Considering the short-term and medium-term needs, the following concrete strategies/plans are recommended from the analysis. Flexible time duration for short-term and medium-term must be adopted according to the context and type of people served. As the sample size is not large and there are huge variations across districts within the states, these recommendations must be locally discussed and prioritized, so that the communities own up the plans

and design their future course of action. Samples are collected primarily where CI and IGSSS are already working. If they move to new districts those areas must be studied to develop appropriate strategies. Moreover, as the sample is very low for Uttarakhand, Meghalaya and Manipur, the recommendations are made only for rest of the states.

### Mapping key variables

For generating action plans in the short-term and medium term the following key variables are mapped for the migrant respondents:

1. Level of education
2. Type of social category of inter-state migrants
3. Type of work migrants are engaged in host states
4. Job card in possession and other entitlements.
5. Owning piece of land / animals
6. Type of skills that would generate immediate employability

**Table 4.1: Mapping key variables of the study**

| States         | Education           | Movement of migrants | In host states      | Job card | Piece of land | Animals | Skills             |                    |
|----------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------|---------------|---------|--------------------|--------------------|
|                | Below Middle School | Social Category      | Mazdoor (Unskilled) | Yes      | Owning        | Owning  | Majority           | Small group        |
| Assam          | 68.9%               | OBC/ST/GEN           | 33.8%               | 25.7%    | 40.5%         | 48.6%   | Repair/maintenance | Tailoring/wiring   |
| Bihar          | 64.1%               | SC/OBC               | 66.3%               | 17.4%    | 29.3%         | 67.4%   | Repair/maintenance |                    |
| Chhattisgarh   | 48.3%               | ST/OBC               | 70.0%               | 73.3%    | 61.7%         | 55.0%   | Brick making       | Repair/maintenance |
| Jharkhand      | 58.5%               | ST                   | 67.1%               | 40.2%    | 85.4%         | 80.5%   | Repair/maintenance | Wiring/carpentry   |
| Madhya Pradesh | 98.5%               | ST                   | 89.2%               | 44.6%    | 60.0%         | 32.3%   | Repair/maintenance | Tailoring/wiring   |
| Odisha         | 54.8%               | ST/SC/OBC            | 33.3%               | 32.3%    | 50.5%         | 53.8%   | Repair/maintenance | Tailoring/wiring   |
| Uttar Pradesh  | 52.5%               | OBC/SC/GEN           | 40.6%               | 17.8%    | 42.6%         | 44.6%   | Repair/maintenance | Wiring/solar       |
| West Bengal    | 63.4%               | ST/SC/GEN            | 47.6%               | 43.9%    | 48.8%         | 41.5%   | Repair/maintenance | Plumbing           |

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- OBC/ST/GEN implies – High number of OBC respondents followed by ST and General. SC/OBC implies – High number of dalits followed by OBC. ST means – High number of adivasis /indigenous peoples.
- Trauma care and counselling is to be considered as cross cutting component.
- Large number of respondents of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh are unskilled workers.
- Except in Chhattisgarh, access to job card is minimum in other states. Access to all entitlement cards is a must – ration, bank account, aadhaar and Voter identity.
- Adivasis seem to be having land when compared to the dalits.
- Animal rearing is high in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha.
- Poultry is suggested across all states and all categories.
- Brick kiln is mainly for less educated and physically able persons
- Repair/maintenance includes cycle, mobile, motor, two-wheeler and solar for those educated above middle school.
- Training in tailoring, wiring, carpentry, solar and plumbing for those educated above middle school.
- Training in advanced skills - computer related, marketing and production of consumer products could be offered persons educated above 10th standard to promote village level entrepreneurs.
- Education, primary and public health, livelihood and access to rights and entitlements remain critical issues.

**Table 4.2: Short-term strategies and plans in native states**

**Strategy:** Organizing, training, maximizing available resources – human, land, animal and skills and accessing government programmes

| States         | Short Term – up to 1 year  |   |   |  |   |
|----------------|--|---|---|--|---|
|                | Formation and Training   | Sex and Age group   | Areas   | Plans  | Financial access  |
| Assam          | Formation of inclusive small groups - across sex, caste and religion - location based<br><br>Sensitization of district and state | Male and Female 30 and above - Focus on Agri and animal husbandry | Agri + Animal + skills related  | Nutritious crops, vegetable cultivation, cows, skills training, access to job card | Micro-credit, repayable revolving fund, access to govt schemes. |
| Bihar          |  |   | Animal related  | Cows, buffaloes, job card  |   |
| Chhattisgarh   |  |   | Agri + Animal related   | Nutritious crops, vegetable cultivation, kitchen garden, cows/buffaloes            |   |
| Jharkhand      |  |   | Agri + Animal related   | Nutritious crops, vegetable cultivation, kitchen garden, sheep/goat, job card      |   |
| Madhya Pradesh |  | Agri + Animal related   | Nutritious crops, vegetable cultivation, kitchen garden, sheep/goat, job card |  |   |
| Odisha         |  | Male and Female between 15 - 30 - Focus on skills                 | Agri + Animal + skills related  | Nutritious crops, vegetable cultivation, sheep/goat, skills training, job card     |   |
| Uttar Pradesh  |  |   | Agri + Animal + skills related  | Nutritious crops, vegetable cultivation, cows/buffaloes, skills training, job card |   |
| West Bengal    |  |   | Agri + Animal + skills related  | Nutritious crops, vegetable cultivation, cows/buffaloes, skills training, job card |   |

**Table 4.3: Medium-term strategies and plans in native states**

**Strategy:** Mobilizing collective bargaining with rights-based development and linkage with government / bank resources.

| States         | Medium Term - 1-3 years   |   |   |
|----------------|---|---|---|
|                | Formation and Training  | Plans   | Financial access  |
| Assam          | Formation of Agri-clubs, milk cooperatives, animal clubs and technical training resource hubs<br><br>For the educated above 10 std, technical, marketing and entrepreneurial skills<br><br>Partnering with govt / private entities. | Milk and allied products, expanding skills training     | Linkage with NABARD, Access to Bank loans, Access to govt. Schemes, CSR |
| Bihar          |   | Milk and allied products, skills training               |   |
| Chhattisgarh   |   | Brick making, milk and allied products, skills training |   |
| Jharkhand      |   | Meat processing, skills training                        |   |
| Madhya Pradesh |   | Meat processing, skills training                        |   |
| Odisha         |   | Meat processing, skills training                        |   |
| Uttar Pradesh  |   | Milk and allied products, skills training               |   |
| Uttar Pradesh  |   | Milk and allied products, skills training               |   |

*Note: For the type of appropriate skill training, refer to Table 3.6 and Table 4.1.*

**Table 4.4: Strategies and plans for the host / destination states**

**Strategy:** Organizing, mobilizing to build awareness, care for the vulnerable, for inclusion, collective bargaining of rights and entitlements

| Short-term   | Medium-term  |
|--|--|
| Organizing inclusive groups – locality based / trade-based.  | Mobilization for collective bargaining.  |
| Awareness generation on rights and entitlements.   | Skills in writing of petitions, access to government offices.  |
| Awareness on health, hygiene practices, skill-based training.  | Strengthening local governance and interface with local authorities.   |
| Trauma and counselling care; health checkups and education of migrant children.                      | Sensitize, collaborate and engage with govt. and private for policy and programme development.                         |
| Exploring access to entitlements - ration, primary and public health care and education of children. | Monitor the implementation of provision of ISMW Act and basic labour protection measures.                              |
| Initiate dialogue with contractors, employers, institution and others.                               | Increase the ability for dialogue with employers.  |
| Sensitizing district and state govt., private and public about migrant issues and contribution.      | Inclusion in various state and central government schemes, especially in health (Eg. Awaz in Kerala, Ayushman Bharat). |

### Recommendations for the states to speed up short-term and medium-term plans

- A designate portal for migrant labourers both at source and destination states, to update and strengthen database which would include details of family members migrated and family members who are residing in the native states. Such portal should have all-in-one dashboard, for information regarding migrant and the family members, tracking circular migration, monitoring, schemes for the migrants, list of beneficiaries, programmes for women and children and other relevant information. Odisha government has initiated a dashboard in this direction. (<https://statedashboard.odisha.gov.in/>)
- Destination states should direct industrialists and employers to register their workers with the government. Such a list will be helpful for risk reduction measures for now and in future emergencies.
- Native states could consider setting up a special commission to promote jobs and social security measures for migrants. This commission could closely work with CSOs in facilitating participation of the communities in the development agenda of the states.
- State Rural Livelihood Missions may consider the use of the Vulnerability Reduction Fund (VRF) to the NGOs/CBOs for extending soft loans.
- Considering the continuing pandemic scenario, skill training for youth who are digitally literate on agriculture marketing, processing, participation in value chain by facilitating digital financial inclusion through interest free loans or with minimum interest without collateral security, entrepreneurship training and providing insurance cover.



- Migrants who were given job card under MGNERGA, were deactivated as they migrated to other states. Those who do not possess job card must be identified, registered and fresh job card to be provided to access employment.
- Special focus must be given to health care of the migrants through Ayushman Bharat in all destination states or under state health insurance scheme as done in Kerala.

Covid-19, as a portal, opens new opportunities along with fresh challenges to usher in new India, which might be very different from what our political leaders have conceived before Covid-19. Looking at the enormity and complexity of the scenario and the excruciating experience of pathos of the migrants during their recent exodus, we may not find absolute solution soon. But for those who believe in compassion, empathy, solidarity and social justice, interesting time is awaiting.

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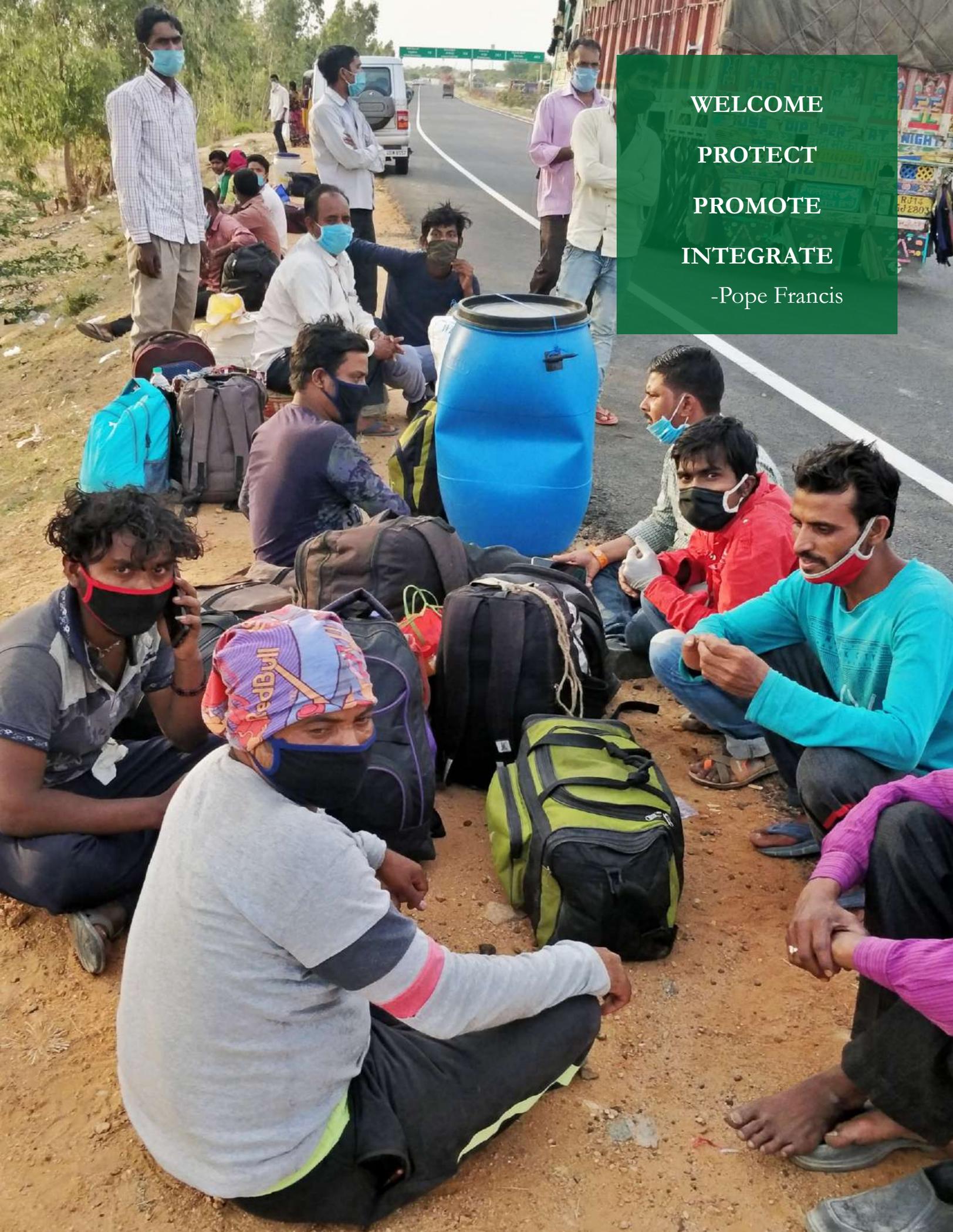
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