

The image shows the silhouettes of four people against a twilight sky. From left to right: a man with a suitcase, a man with a shoulder bag, a woman carrying a child on her back, and a man holding a child's hand. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a soft orange and pink near the horizon. In the background, the faint lights of a city or town are visible.

**MIGRANTS  
RESILIENCE  
COLLABORATIVE**

# Internal Migration in Asia

*A comparative study exploring key drivers of migration, climate-induced migration, impact of COVID-19, labour laws, and social security measures in six Asian countries*

**BANGLADESH | CAMBODIA | INDIA | INDONESIA | NEPAL | THAILAND**



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# CONTENTS

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<b>Preface</b>	.....	06
<b>Key Findings</b>	.....	07
<b>Key Recommendations</b>	.....	11
<b>Introduction</b>	.....	14
<b>Study Design</b>	.....	16
<b>Key Drivers and Impact of Internal Migration</b>	.....	19
<b>Impact of Covid-19 on Internal Migration</b>	.....	38
<b>Climate Change and Migration</b>	.....	44
<b>Labour Laws and Impact on Internal Migrants</b>	.....	56
<b>Social Security Schemes</b>	.....	75
<b>Conclusion</b>	.....	85
<b>Appendix 1</b>	.....	86
<b>Appendix 2</b>	.....	88
<b>Appendix 3</b>	.....	94

## **TABLES**

Table 1: No. of internal migrants in selected countries

Table 1.1: Factors influencing duration of migration

Table 1.2: Predominant sectors of work for migrants in selected countries

Table 3.1: Estimated people displaced due to sudden climate events in sample countries

Table 3.2: Estimated climate migrants as a result of slow onset climate change in sample

Table 4.1: Country-wise list of labour laws

Table 4.2: Selected countries adherence to right to strike

Table 4.3: Legal regulations of termination in selected countries

Table 4.4: Work hours limit in selected countries

Table 4.5: Overtime payment in selected countries

Table 4.6: Minimum wages in selected countries

Table 4.7: Number of accidents and injuries at the workplace in selected countries

Table 5.1: Existing schemes in selected countries

Table 5.2: Portability provision in existing schemes in selected countries

## **FIGURES**

Figure 1.1: Hierarchy of needs for remittance

Figure 2.1: Unemployment rates in selected countries since 2019-2022

Figure 3.1: Slow onset of climate change leads to migration

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

Highlight 1.1: Positive impact of migration

Highlight 1.2: Examples of government push for digital payments

Highlight 4.1: Amendments were in favour of the industry rather than workers:

Examples from India and Indonesia

## **ILLUSTRATIONS**

Illustration 1: Push and Pull factors for migration

Illustration 2: Additional categories of internal migrants post COVID

Illustration 3: Double migration as a result of climate change

Illustration 4: Barriers to access schemes

## **NOTABLE POSITIVE TRENDS**

Notable Positive Trends: Key Drivers and Impact of Internal Migration

Notable Positive Trends: Impact of COVID 19 on Internal Migration

Notable Positive Trends: Impact of Climate Change on Internal Migration

Notable Positive Trends: Labour Laws and Impacts on Internal Migrants

Notable Positive Trends: Social Security Schemes

## **CASE STUDIES**

Mohsin\* - migrant working in food industry in Bangladesh

Raj\* - a migrant working as a waiter in Nepal

Chhaiya\* - a migrant working as a waitress in Cambodia

Savitri Devi\* - a migrant working as an agricultural labourer in India

Saira\* - a migrant working as a domestic worker in Indonesia

Aranya\* - a migrant working in a food processing factory in Thailand

# PREFACE

At the beginning of the first wave of Covid-19 in 2020, countries across the world announced lockdowns of varying severities. Millions of migrant workers were left to fend for themselves, with many forced to make their way home amid the struggle to make ends meet. The pandemic exposed the failure of our systems for migrant workers.

The report “Internal Migration in Asia” is a result of in-person conversations with 300 internal migrants at both source and destination locations across Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, and Thailand in the last year. This study was undertaken to understand and highlight the precarious lives of migrants and their increasing vulnerability due to factors like climate change and the pandemic. We see this as the first step towards starting a regional discourse on internal migration and how we can strengthen systems for migrant households in Asia.

740 million individuals migrate internally worldwide. Of this, 282 million internal migrants belong to Asia alone, which is one-third of the global internal migrant population. Internal migration across countries is driven by economic distress caused by failure of traditional livelihood options, and economic shocks caused or aggravated by social exclusion and climate change. The pandemic aggravated this distress at scale across the region. In the Southeast Asian region, 4.7 million were pushed into extreme poverty conditions due to Covid-19. Our analysis indicates that the number of internal migrants is set to grow as returnee international migrants resort to internal migration and the number of first-time migrants increases. We also found that the conditions of women and girl migrants worsened post Covid-19. For example, in India, it was found after the pandemic that women were eleven times more unlikely to return to work post job loss.

Internal migration has not received the attention it deserves from governments, despite the fact that globally it is four times more common than international migration. Laws addressing internal migration at the national or regional level are missing in most of the region. The data on the Labour Rights Index demonstrates the prevalence of poor working conditions across all countries covered in the study. In addition, access to social security schemes remains very low: less than 50% of the poor have access in lower-middle-income countries, while just 18% have access in lower-income countries. Furthermore, since most countries do not design schemes with internal migrants in mind, it becomes harder to meet their unique challenges. Exclusion among seasonal migrants is likely even higher. Their limited access to social security is characteristic of their ‘invisibility’, particularly in cities.

However, there are examples of positive government action from countries part of the study in terms of laws and policies to protect workers that we can build on. Cambodia’s labour laws have a special provision for piece-rate workers where if workers produce fewer pieces than the minimum wage rate, then wages should be adjusted. In 2021, the Indian government created the E-shram portal, a mechanism to register unorganised workers – with special reference to migrants; it is the first such database which aims to extend social security benefits to registered workers and has already registered over 27 crore workers till June 2022. Thailand has been able to increase access to healthcare for almost its entire population. The Bangladesh government launched various food security and employment generation schemes in the Monga-affected regions to help populations in distress. The governments of Indonesia and Thailand rolled out wage subsidy programmes to help low-income workers during COVID. All these examples point towards the possibilities and mechanisms in protecting the informal sector workforce in distress.

As the world deals with the challenges of inequality, climate change, and the after-effects of the pandemic, safe and fair migration must be given its due importance by formulating policies that specifically address the needs of internal migrants. It is essential to understand that migration will continue for the years to come as people seek better livelihood opportunities than what is available at source locations. Therefore, the focus has to be on providing workers with better opportunities, enabling fair working conditions, safe passage, and other basic support when they migrate.

We hope that this report enables an open conversation on ensuring the dignity of internal migrants in our respective countries and paves the way for meaningful collaborations between civil society organisations, governments, private sector, and communities in the region.

## **Ashif**

Convenor, Migrant Resilience Collaborative

# KEY FINDINGS

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*Internal migrants across Asia face challenges of underrepresentation and an implicit exclusion from social and worker protection measures. For the majority of internal migrants, seasonal migration is the primary means for survival. External factors such as climate change and COVID-19 are significant stressors that directly result in unemployment, loss in wages, a vicious debt cycle and potentially push already vulnerable migrants into extreme poverty. Across the board, compliance and implementation of existing laws and policies pertaining to labour rights are non-existent.*

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## Key Drivers of Migration



- **Migration is driven by economic distress caused by the failures in traditional livelihood options** such as agriculture along with a lack of alternative livelihood opportunities at source locations.

- **Decisions to migrate and where migrants move are largely defined by factors such as distance to the destination locations, the presence of social networks, and availability of higher wages in comparison to their places of origin.**

Duration of migration is defined mainly by the interplay of two factors – firstly, ‘land ownership’ - i.e. those with productive/ agricultural land tend to move for short-durations or seasonally, as land is an asset and a way to feel connected to their roots. Secondly, distance and cost of travel determined the number of times migrants travelled back to source locations. It is important to also note, other factors influence duration of migration such as – migrating with or without family may determine the duration of migration.



## Impact of Migration

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- **The positive impact of migration are remittances and the technical knowledge or skills migrants bring back to source locations.**
  - Remittances were primarily used for basic sustenance and debt repayment rather than for savings. In few cases, investments on assets have been observed.
    - Government incentives to help migrants shift to safer digital modes of money transfer has worked in Cambodia and Bangladesh.
  - In a few cases, it was observed that the technical know-how migrants learn over the years aid in the process of self-employment or to start businesses at source locations.
- **The negative impact of migration includes labour shortage created at source locations, poor mental health of migrants as a result of isolation, lack of access to social security schemes and deplorable working conditions at the destination locations.**

- As a result of migration, labour shortage is witnessed in rural areas. This gap is often filled by left behind families, particularly women and children. Evidence has shown that this burden often has negative impacts on their mental health too.
- In destination locations, isolation, deplorable working conditions and barriers to access basic facilities and social protection lead to a sense of alienation that has a grave impact on workers' mental health.
- Since most internal migrants end up working in the informal sector, they are not protected by labour laws, and thus are often faced with unjust working conditions such as delayed wages, lack of job security, jobs that are dangerous and unsafe.
- Furthermore, in most countries, schemes are not portable, and in cases where they are portable, implementation challenges have also been observed. Hence, most migrants find it hard to access social security schemes in destination areas.

## Covid-19 and Impact on Migration



- **Increase in internal migrants:** Our analysis indicated that there is and will continue to be an increase in the number of internal migrants with the increase in two categories of workers - returnee international migrants (who returned from foreign countries because of the pandemic) and individuals who never migrated in the past but are forced to now migrate (who have been pushed to extreme poverty).
- **Potential shift in sectors:** Experts believe the slow recovery of tourism and hospitality sector in Thailand could lead to many migrants shifting to different sectors altogether in the long-term. Such shifts need to be studied further to understand the sustained impact of the pandemic.
- **Cash-transfers:** All countries expanded cash allowance, food and employment schemes as part of relief measures. Thailand and Indonesia provide 50% wage subsidy to the private sector/ specific industries to ensure employees are not laid off.
- **Women bear the brunt:** Across all countries, it was observed that fewer women are entering the workforce, as a result of either fewer job opportunities or increased household responsibilities. In India, it was found that women were eleven times more unlikely to return to work post job loss.



## Climate change and Impact on Migration

India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Indonesia rank among the top 15 countries at highest risk of being impacted by extreme climatic conditions.

- **Climate-induced migration is the consequence of either sudden or slow-onset climate changes that disrupt existing populations' livelihood.**



- **Climate migration cannot be looked in isolation from migration as a result of economic distress:** Rural areas in developing countries are highly dependent on rainfall for agriculture. As a result of slow-onset climate change such as droughts, heat waves and erratic rainfall patterns, there has been an increase in agriculture failure. Therefore, people who practice subsistence farming are pushed into economic distress.
- **Women and girls are severely affected:** In the event of climatic events, the development of unsafe migration or displacement pathways, especially for women and girls, accelerates. For example, during the Assam floods in India, which has become an annual occurrence, instances of forced child labour and marriage have increased multi-fold. Similar increases in trafficking after sudden climatic events have been witnessed in other countries of Asia as well.
- **Worrisome predictions of climate impacts on destination locations:** Climate events will disrupt migration patterns, making it essential to explore the consequences of environmental impacts at both source and destination. For example, both Bangkok and Jakarta are expected to experience flooding because of rising sea levels that could result in mass out-migration.

## Labour policies found lacking in design and implementation



- **Non-existent law/ policy:** Law addressing internal migration at a regional or national level is missing in the region, except India. (However, the ISMWA, the law tackling inter-state migration, has been subsumed under larger labour codes)
- **Recent amendments causing more trouble to workers:** Amendments carried out during the first phases of the pandemic were largely in favour of industry.
- **Low compliance and unclear pathway to grievance redressal:** In relation to working hours limit, overtime payment, and minimum wage.
  - Employer is a key person in implementing the law, however because of complications around outsourcing and value chains, the definition of the employer is often unclear. Many exploit this ambiguity to forego their responsibilities.
- **Exclusion of the sectors from minimum wages:** Domestic workers are brought under the ambit of the labour laws by some states within India (Minimum Wage Act - however, even in India, domestic workers are excluded from several labour laws as the definitions of 'workmen', 'employer' and 'establishment' are limited). Cambodia's Minimum Wage Act is limited to garment and textile workers.



## Migrants lack access to social security schemes

- **Types of scheme access:**
  - All countries have existing schemes for health insurance and cash transfer.

- **South Asia:** Bangladesh and India are the only two countries that have schemes in place in relation to food, cash transfers, employment and health insurance. Nepal has existing schemes in place except for food assistance programmes.
- **South-east Asia:** None of the countries have schemes in relation to employment. Indonesia is the only country that provides access to food schemes.
- **Lack of portability, a major roadblock to access:**
  - Bangladesh was the only country that did not provide portability in any of the major types of social security schemes of ration/ food, cash transfers and health insurance – this was a result of its scheme design that covers vulnerable populations based on geographical area.
  - India and Indonesia provide portability in relation to scheme design in all major types of schemes.
- **Complex registration processes and illogical eligibility criteria mar the process even in countries that have portability features embedded in the scheme design:**
  - These complexities in accessing schemes occur because most schemes are not designed with a migrant lens. Therefore, issues such as lack of documentation and information of schemes which are higher among migrant workers are not taken into account.

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. **International organisations such as IOM and ILO along with regional level organisations such as ASEAN and SAARC must work on the issue of internal migration and play an important role in working with member countries to bring the issue to the forefront.**

Currently, the focus of majority of these organisations is international migration and an added lens of internal migration is equally important in relation to labour welfare and economy.

- These organisations must come together to form a platform where they work in collaboration to discuss and address the migrant issue at national, regional and international levels: For example, the Migrant Forum in Asia<sup>[1]</sup> is a regional level platform which brings together organisations, associations and unions working with international migrants in Asia. It acts as a regional facilitator and coordinator between member countries.

2. **Designing policies and interventions to address the unique challenges of migrant workers:**

Worker welfare to include social security, worker protection, responsible business and financial health during external shocks - particular focus on worker welfare could be brought into disaster relief measures.

Since we understand migration is an inevitable process, it becomes essential to design policies focused on safe migration of vulnerable populations. These policies must have special provisions for left behind women, elderly and children.

## **What can the key actors do?**

- **Domestic governments must be at the centre of addressing challenges and formulating policies related to internal migration:** With an increase in migration as a result of climate change, the pandemic and agricultural distress among other factors, the number of internal migrants across countries may continue to increase exponentially. Therefore, the onus of protecting internal migrants must fall on domestic governments.
  1. Design interventions to promote safer mode of payments for migrants to send remittance: A good example of this is Bangladesh, where the government provides monetary incentives to encourage people to use the digital payment app, Bkash
  2. A further lens of left behind women and children while designing policies is also important.
  3. Strong contingency plans for any future crises affecting the informal sector must be considered. Should ensure lens of internal migrants and worker welfare is taken into consideration during disasters or external shocks such as COVID-19.
    - a. International and regional level organisations can lead the way in regard to ensuring the lens of internal migration is included in labour laws and welfare measures. All member countries must ratify ILO Convention No.189 on Decent Work for Domestic workers<sup>[1]</sup> and Convention No.190 on Violence & Harassment in the workplace<sup>[2]</sup> in selected countries.

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://mfasia.org/>

**3. Robust and standardised datasets on internal migration is essential to ensure the development of inclusive and targeted policies that address the needs of migrants:**

These datasets must capture different trends and patterns of migration including socio-demographics of migrants, their occupational sectors, degree of vulnerability, type of migration, reasons for migration, access to social protection measures and important migration corridors. These could be collated to develop a regional level database, and further develop data-backed and context specific policies. The 'Migration Data Portal', an IOM dashboard on international migration is an example of a comprehensive dataset.

**What can the key actors do?**

- Governments must address the severe lack of recent data available on internal migrants by creating comprehensive datasets at a national level. This standardised data could be part of the country level census or any other national level data collection exercise. Such data must also be accessible to the public.
- Private stakeholders especially from sectors employing a high proportion of migrants should maintain records of workers along with the details of any intermediaries who may be hired by the industry to help create a more inclusive database.
- Non-profit organisations could work with governments to build a more comprehensive and inclusive database, ensuring wider reach with the migrant community.
- International and regional level organisations must work with member countries in developing standardised metrics across countries on aspects such as key sectors, access to social protection, migration corridors, etc.

**4. Ensure compliance of labour laws across countries and building awareness amongst workers:**

Labour policies ensuring the protection of workers across parameters [such as work hours limit, overtime payment, minimum wages (also in relation to piece-rate output remuneration), and occupational health and safety] are ridden with issues of low compliance because of implementation and monitoring related challenges.

**What can the key actors do?**

- Governments, private sector, trade unions and civil society must partner together to ensure compliance of labour policies and build awareness around it.
  - In cases of non-compliance, all stakeholders must work to strengthen grievance redressal systems and build awareness around the same.
- Governments must work towards bringing the informal sector under labour laws as they are highly unregulated and therefore witness maximum cases of exploitation.
- Private sector employers/ investors should ensure enforcement and monitoring of labour laws by intermediaries within workplaces.

- International and regional level organisations should initiate dialogue between member states for strengthening implementation of labour laws and learn from the best practices of each country.

**5. Migration as a result of climate change will be the leading cause of movement in the near future. Therefore it is important that policies specific to climate migration are formulated.**

**What can the key actors do?**

- Domestic governments should capture climate migration and migration corridors formed, especially as a result of slow onset climate change. Welfare schemes and policies must take into consideration climate migrants as a lens in design.
- There must be a strong focus on designing policies addressing climate migration for both source and destination to ensure safe migration.

**6. Efforts to improve access to social security schemes for migrant workers must be the primary responsibility of the national governments.**

However, given government administrative capacity to undertake the task might be limited in some developing nations – a collaborative effort between governments, industry and CSOs could be encouraged to ensure last-mile delivery of benefits.

**What can the key actors do?**

- Governments must ensure a migrant-friendly intersectional lens when designing social security schemes, and address the unique barriers internal migrants face in accessing schemes such as portability, complicated documentation process, etc.
- Private employers must take equal responsibility in enabling access to social security for casual workers.
- CSOs should support workers in receiving access to social security schemes: CSOs' existing presence and work within communities provide them with the means to reach the last mile. They should use this to build end-to-end programs that support migrants in accessing social security schemes.
- Capacity building trainings for awareness on rights at the workplace and social security schemes, its eligibility and registration processes with migrants by CSOs can be effective in empowering workers.

**7. Investors to promote innovations such as strong focus on measurement of “S” in ESG ratings especially within industries employing a majority of internal migrants; investors play a significant role in norming labour welfare expenditure and practices in supply chains.**

# INTRODUCTION

Internal migration is an ignored phenomenon despite the fact that globally it is four times more common than international migration.<sup>[3]</sup> Recent debates on national and global development trajectories, spatial inequalities, uneven growth, climate change, and the pandemic have brought the question of internal migration to the forefront.

International Organization for Migration(IOM) defines internal migration as “the movement of individuals within a state involving the establishment of a temporary or permanent residence.”<sup>[4]</sup> 740 million individuals migrate internally worldwide<sup>[5]</sup> with 282 million internal migrants belonging to Asia alone, which is one-third of the global internal migrant population.<sup>[6]</sup> However, this is a conservative estimate given the inconsistencies and absence of recent data.

Asia is the largest and most populous continent globally, home to two-third of the world’s population. In the past few decades, with rapid urbanisation, the region has witnessed an increase in internal migration.<sup>[7]</sup> It has increasingly been gaining prominence as an essential livelihood strategy among the economically disadvantaged.<sup>[8]</sup> The count of internal migrants from India and China alone exceeds the number of international migrants worldwide.<sup>[9]</sup>

Although internal migration data from national surveys across countries in the continent is not comparable because of inconsistencies in definitions and time period of data collection, the following data points provide us with an overview of the magnitude of migration across countries (this report will focus on the following 6 countries of Asia – rationale for the same is provided in subsequent sections):

Country	No. of internal migrants	Source
Bangladesh	13.7 million <sup>[iii]</sup>	Bangladesh Population and Housing Census (2011) <sup>[10]</sup>
Cambodia	3.3 million	Population Census (2019) <sup>[11]</sup>
India	140 million <sup>[iii]</sup>	Census of India (2011) <sup>[12]</sup>
Indonesia	5.4 million <sup>[iv]</sup>	Socio-economic national survey (2019) <sup>[13]</sup>
Nepal	10.5 million <sup>[v]</sup>	National Labour Force Survey (2017/18) <sup>[14]</sup>
Thailand	1.02 million	Annual migration survey (2020) <sup>[15]</sup>

Table 1: No. of internal migrants in selected countries

<sup>[ii]</sup> Lifetime internal migrants in Bangladesh

<sup>[iii]</sup> This is an estimated figure of internal migrants who move for work, it is obtained through calculations from the Census 2011. However, the overall figure is 453.6 million which includes all types of internal migrants such as marriage migrants. For more information: [https://m.timesofindia.com/india/30-of-migrants-will-not-return-to-cities-irudaya-rajan/articleshow/76126701.cms?utm\\_source=whatsapp&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=TOIArticleshowicon](https://m.timesofindia.com/india/30-of-migrants-will-not-return-to-cities-irudaya-rajan/articleshow/76126701.cms?utm_source=whatsapp&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=TOIArticleshowicon)

<sup>[iv]</sup> Recent internal migrants in Indonesia

<sup>[v]</sup> Lifetime internal migrants in Nepal

Temporary or seasonal migration is a prominent migration trend in Asia. In several countries such as Bangladesh and India, poor households adopt seasonal migration as a livelihood strategy during agricultural off-seasons.<sup>[16]</sup> However, since most national surveys look at migration over five to ten years, tracking seasonal migrants, who move for less than a year for work, becomes extremely difficult and often leads to them being undercounted. Some rough estimates exist, such as in India, there could be anywhere between 59 million<sup>[17]</sup> to 140 million<sup>[18]</sup> migrants who move seasonally for work. World Food Programme Report (2019) survey in Cambodia observed 33% migrant households moved seasonally or for short durations.<sup>[19]</sup>

Even though seasonal migration is a prominent coping strategy, specific risks and vulnerabilities are intensified by the migrant identity. Evidence from India suggests seasonal migrants are the most vulnerable as they experience hazardous working conditions, low wages, and inaccessibility to basic social security benefits.<sup>[20]</sup> Exclusion from social protection measures of internal migrants is common in many Asian countries. The reasons for their exclusion include the effects of direct and indirect policies such as portability constraints and exclusive eligibility mandates, to name a few.

Despite these vulnerabilities in living and working conditions, it is noteworthy that internal migration has improved migrant households' standard of living. A disaggregated analysis of human development indicators based on migration status across 16 low

and middle-income countries showed that internal migrants fare slightly better than non-migrants.<sup>[21]</sup> However, it is also important to note, improvement in living standards mainly depends on the working conditions of the migrant in destination location and duration of migration. Living and working conditions continue to suffer, and these have not been captured adequately. At the source, standard of living is still poor for migrant families as it is observed that remittance is largely used for personal consumption, thus, migration might only help with basic sustenance instead of helping a family move out of poverty.

Asia has the highest urban population across all continents, consisting of 54% of all individuals living in urban areas. Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Thailand and Indonesia have reported a significant increase in their share of the urban population in the last 15 years as a result of high rates of rural to urban migration driven by urbanisation, the associated boom in the manufacturing sector, and the relaxation of movement restrictions.<sup>[22]</sup> In this context, with the continuously growing rates of internal migration across Asia, it becomes imperative to understand the phenomena of internal migration at a regional level.

The first chapter delves into the main determinants of migration. The second and third chapters focus on understanding the role of climate change and COVID-19 on migration. Finally, the last two chapters provide a cross-country analysis of the labour laws framework and social protection landscape.

# STUDY DESIGN

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## Rationale of the study

Currently, there is a lack of recent studies that comprehensively examine and analyse internal migration to highlight key successes and failures in tackling internal migration at a regional level, particularly in Asia. Hence, this study was designed with a key aim for knowledge-generation around internal migration and social protection, and it must be viewed as a first step to set the foundation to an extensive task - ensuring safe migration of internal migrants.

## Aim

To carry out a landscaping exercise to map trends of internal migration, generate a comprehensive understanding of policies governing internal migrants' social protection coverage, focus on the impact of climate and COVID-19 along with an effort to map positive initiatives in countries across Asia.

An important sub-objective is to actively engage relevant stakeholders from government, industry and non-profits working with internal migrant populations through a platform at a regional level.

## Objectives

Based on our rationale and aims behind the study, five key objectives were formulated to be explored in the study through primary and secondary research.

- To understand country-specific trends and patterns of internal migration.
- To identify and analyse country-specific labour laws and policy measures governing migration, and social protection coverage of internal migrants.
- To examine the impact of climate events on migration and its future implications.
- To identify positive trends and initiatives by countries towards their internal migrant population and replicate them at a regional level.
- To explore the impact of COVID-19 on internal migration and migrant livelihoods.

## Methodology

- **Secondary Research:** An in-depth desk research of existing reports on internal migration trends and patterns and social protection coverage of internal migrants, published by international and national human rights agencies, academic journals, non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations was undertaken.
- **Primary Research:** Qualitative research was undertaken to gain country-specific insights on the status of migration and identify unique challenges and success models. Thematic analysis was carried out to analyse qualitative data using Dedoose, a web-based application.



### Sample Size:

**a) 300 migrant workers:** 50 migrant workers were interviewed in each country through In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

- One detailed interview on climate migration and forced labour was conducted in India.

**b) 36 stakeholders:** 6 IDIs were conducted with key stakeholders in each country with NGO leaders, civil society activists, labour department officials, academic experts working directly with internal migrant workers (from each country) to gain regional level insight.

### Country Selection:

The study focused on three countries each from the South and South-East regions of Asia respectively:



Figure 1

- South Asia: Bangladesh, Nepal and India
- South-East Asia: Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand

Detailed methodology such as the criteria based on which the countries were selected, district selection, sample demographics, please refer to **Appendix 1**.

\*Names of all respondents have been changed to ensure their anonymity.





## Key Drivers and Impact of Internal Migration

Internal migration is an important coping and livelihood strategy adopted by vulnerable populations in distress across countries. This chapter will attempt to understand the migration process itself, i.e. the numerous push and pull factors that determine why and where a migrant moves and how this move impacts a migrant household.

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## 1. What are the push factors of distress migration?

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines distress migration as “All migratory movements made in conditions where the individual and/or the household perceive that the only viable livelihood option for moving out of poverty is to migrate.” Some of the key causes for distress-driven migration include food insecurity, rural poverty, limited income opportunities and environmental degradation. [23]

Over 75% of the global population is food insecure and lives in rural areas. A considerable percentage of this population includes small landholding farmers and agricultural labourers who depend on farming and agricultural production for their subsistence. However, agriculture is failing to provide adequately – practicing farming for small landholders offers little to no profit leading to economic distress because of low agricultural productivity and constant crop failures. The culprit is often a combination of factors such as the inability to invest in expensive agricultural inputs (such as seeds and technology), size of the landholdings, adverse environmental impacts, and lack of favourable state support and policies. [24] Further, rural communities in Asian countries experience seasonal variation in poverty, owing to lean seasons. [25] The unavailability of alternate livelihood opportunities at source has led to livelihood diversification through internal migration as a coping mechanism. [26]

“Agriculture is a common livelihood in my village. It is the primary way of earning and my family has a small plot. There is usually no profit or loss in farming. However, for the past 2-3 years, we have only been bearing losses on our farm. Sometimes the produce is not even enough for our consumption and we have to buy food grains for ourselves. Due to this, our financial condition in the village has been bad. **There was no way we could only depend on agriculture. I couldn't find any other jobs in my village.** After consultation with my family members, I decided to migrate.”

Jayshna, waitress in hospitality, Nepal

It must be noted, not everyone from rural areas migrate in the event of agricultural failure. In the case of large landholding farmers, migration is less likely compared to small or marginal farmers. This was reiterated by primary respondents from India who mentioned how large landholding farmers rarely migrated for work outside rural areas and for those who did, it was not distress-driven.

Two critical factors that are the leading causes of forced migration and will be key drivers of internal migration in years to come are climate change and financial duress because of the pandemic. Considering its growing importance, these factors will be separately discussed in detail in Chapter 2 and 3.

## 2. What are the pull factors of distress migration?

### What influences the decision to migrate to specific destination locations?

The following factors are at the core of their decision-making process – distance, social networks that provide information about the destination and lucrative job opportunities, and wage differentials. For each country and migrant, these factors may differ in its importance.

**Distance** between source and destination can be considered an important reason for destination preference. As evidenced in Table 1.1, the cost of travel to destinations is an essential factor within it. [27] A survey conducted with migrants in Bangladesh found that 26% migrants chose to move to Rajshahi city because it was closer to their source location, making it easier for them to move and it drastically decreased travel costs. [28]

**Social networks** play a significant role in determining the choice of destination for internal migrants. They provide support, information about destination locations and availability of jobs [29] to new migrants. They also act as an insurance or safety net for migrants during their first move. The likelihood of finding employment within the first month of search increased by 8% for those who had existing networks. [30] According to a micro-study in Cambodia, 74% migrant workers had helped others (relatives, friends, fellow villagers) to find employment in their workplace, and were also willing to share

their accommodation with them. It is also noticed that when a family member or close friend migrates for work, they are often followed by other individuals from their villages.

“Around 7 years ago, my uncle who had migrated to Batam city was paying a visit to my hometown. He encouraged me to come along with him to the city. So I migrated with him.”

- Ramelan, labourer in construction sector, Indonesia

“I went to Batam because job opportunities in my hometown were very few. Also, my hometown’s minimum wage in Wonosobo was very less... only about IDR 1.1-1.2 million, while the prices of things were like other parts of Indonesia with higher minimum wages. I already had a family of my own back then, so it wasn’t enough. That’s why I moved here, as the wages were higher.”

- Adhiaraja, labourer in construction sector, Indonesia

**Higher wages** or wage differentials at certain destinations is another critical factor that encourages migrants to move to certain destinations.<sup>[31]</sup> For example, the monthly household income in the North and Northeast was less than half of the wages in the Greater Bangkok area.<sup>[32]</sup> In two other countries in our sample, i.e. India and Indonesia, similar differences in minimum wages were present.

These are some of the key reasons for moving to specific destinations, however, it must be noted that migration experience could vary based on each individual’s need, such as better infrastructure. For instance, Vishal from Nepal has an ailing mother who needs constant medical attention. He moved to Kathmandu with her because it had better healthcare facilities than his village. He has also found a job in the city.

What influences duration of migration?	
Short duration	Long duration
<p>Land owners (small and marginal) <sup>[33]</sup> <sup>[34]</sup> <sup>[35]</sup></p> <p>Evidence from India, Bangladesh and Indonesia suggests land is usually an intergenerational asset and an essential fallback for internal migrants, therefore making seasonal migration from rural areas more likely in cases where there is land possession.<sup>[36]</sup></p>	<p>No land <sup>[37]</sup></p> <p>Migrants without land return to source locations to maintain ties with their origin, but because they don’t have assets at the source holding them back, their propensity to migrate with family members is much higher.<sup>[38]</sup> Therefore, migration of landless families generally results in longer duration.</p>
<p><b>Proximity to destination locations and low cost of travel:</b></p> <p>For example, migration from Bundelkhand region to Delhi is prominent, in 2016 alone over 1.8 million migrated to Delhi. <sup>[39]</sup></p>	<p><b>Far away destination locations and high cost of travel:</b></p> <p>In Indonesia, long duration migration is prominent because of the archipelagic landscape of the country where travelling by air to reach hometowns is one the most prominent and fastest modes of transport, but also extremely expensive.<sup>[40]</sup></p>

Table 1.1: Factors influencing duration of migration





Illustration1: Internal migration of workers is driven by push and pull factors. The push factors include economic distress caused by agricultural failure, climate change or external shocks such as COVID-19 in source areas, while pull factors at destination locations include higher wages, better facilities, distance from source areas and the presence of social networks.

### 3. What are the predominant sectors of work for migrants?

Country	% of migrants in Construction	% of migrants in Manufacturing	% of migrants in Service Sector
Bangladesh	Not available	Not available	Not available
Cambodia	21% <sup>[41]</sup>	23% <sup>[42]</sup>	37.56% <sup>[43]</sup>
India	36.2% <sup>[44]</sup>	15.9% <sup>[45]</sup>	Not available
Indonesia	Not available <sup>[vi]</sup>	25.3% <sup>[46]</sup>	Not available <sup>[vii]</sup>
Nepal	12.6% <sup>[47]</sup>	9.9%	42.7% <sup>[viii]</sup>
Thailand	11.4% <sup>[48]</sup>	19.8%	45.66% <sup>[49]</sup>

Table 1.2: Predominant sectors of work for migrants in selected countries

### 4. Impact of internal migration

Internal migration has significant effects on left behind family members, and these can be both positive and negative. Migration provides those at source with remittances that may help improve their conditions, however, the departure of the migrant could also add to their existing responsibilities and increase their burden. Impact or effect of migration on workers and their families are discussed across other chapters, specifically about their working and living condition at the destination, violence experienced, etc.

In this section, we explore two specific effects of migration - conditions of left behind family members at source locations and the role of remittance in migrant households.

#### 4.1. Condition of left behind families:

##### 4.1.1. Labour shortage is an issue at source locations:

Evidence from five countries observed that due to migration, a labour shortage is created in the agricultural sector in rural areas leading to decreased productivity in land.<sup>[50] [51] [52] [53]</sup> For example in Cambodia, the CRUMP survey (2012) found a yearly loss of 4% of population due to migration which led to a reduced workforce in the agricultural sector and thereby, a decrease in agricultural production in the country.<sup>[54]</sup>

In slightly more developed countries such as Thailand, challenges of labour gap are addressed

<sup>[vi]</sup> Data on migrants in construction sector in Indonesia was available only in whole figures.

<sup>[vii]</sup> Data on migrants in service sector in Indonesia was available only in whole figures.

<sup>[viii]</sup> Includes retail and hospitality sector.

<sup>[ix]</sup> The Parma system in Nepal is a reciprocal exchange of labour. Households come together to conduct similar work such as sowing or harvesting on each household farm during agricultural season. There is no payment involved, but every contributing household is intended to receive the same service in return.



by increased employment of international migrants from neighbouring countries.<sup>[55]</sup> In some regions of Nepal, agricultural traditions of labour exchange system such as ‘parma’<sup>[ix]</sup> are used by rural communities to supplement the labour loss.<sup>[56]</sup>



*“I work in Kathmandu, while my father is working in Malaysia so there is no male family member at home. My mother stays in the village, she works alone on our agricultural field and relies on it for her income. I try to help her on the field whenever I go home. We are engaged in the labour exchange (parma) in the village, neighbours work on our land and we work on theirs without payment.”*

*- Sang, waiter in hospitality sector, Nepal*



In other countries, when migrants move, their departure is seen as the loss of unpaid labour by migrant households.<sup>[57]</sup> Multiple mechanisms exist that help migrant households cope in such circumstances - in cases where agricultural work is subsistence-based, this gap is usually filled by left behind family members such as women, other family members and children.<sup>[58]</sup>

In the case of women, the feminization of agriculture has become prominent across countries wherein women have taken on the burden of performing strenuous tasks in the field for meagre or no pay. It is important to note that this added responsibility has not empowered them as their role is mostly limited to undertaking physically demanding low-paid tasks.<sup>[59]</sup> In India,<sup>[60]</sup> Nepal<sup>[61]</sup> and Bangladesh,<sup>[62]</sup> it was observed at the household level that left behind women might find themselves in positions of decision making. However, stronghold of patriarchal traditions often limits the scope of this increased autonomy. In Cambodia<sup>[63]</sup> Indonesia<sup>[64]</sup> and Thailand,<sup>[65]</sup> on the other hand, internal migration has led to an increase in female-headed households.

#### 4.1.2.Children are severely affected:

Impact on left behind children is also significant. Evidence from India,<sup>[66]</sup> Indonesia<sup>[67]</sup> and Cambodia<sup>[68]</sup> suggests that parental migration

led to added domestic responsibilities for children. In cases of India and Cambodia, a majority of these children were girls. While in Indonesia, it was observed, adolescent boys were likely to work more hours as compared to younger children. Adverse impact on the psychological well-being of children as a result of migration of their parents was observed in all sample countries.<sup>[69] [70] [71] [72] [73] [74]</sup>

#### Highlight 1.1: Positive impact of migration:

Impact of migration on rural areas isn't always adverse - evidence from India and Thailand suggests migrants bring back knowledge, skills and innovation from cities which can lead to the social development of source areas. In India, this included increased awareness amongst migrants regarding better working conditions, increased bargaining power in relation to wages and feudal relationships.<sup>[75]</sup> In Thailand, education and acquisition of knowledge at the destination location have helped in improvement of land techniques and agriculture.<sup>[76]</sup>



*“I learnt new business skills by selling products in the city. As a result of this, I have been able to invest and grow additional crops on my land, sell them and increase my profit margins. I now have my own agriculture land and have also mortgaged land from others.”*

*- Rahman, construction worker, Bangladesh*



## 4.2 Remittances and migrant households:

Even though research has shown that remittances from internal migration have more impact on poverty reduction than international migration, there is a lack of global-level data on the subject.<sup>[77]</sup> Since internal migration in rural areas is distress-driven, remittances are important for supporting the livelihoods of left behind families. Internal migration remittances made up 17.28%, 50% and 38% of household income in Bangladesh,<sup>[78]</sup> Indonesia,<sup>[79]</sup> and Thailand,<sup>[80]</sup> respectively. In Nepal,<sup>[81]</sup> about 31% of income in migrant households comes from remittances both international and domestic, while in India, domestic remittances were up to US\$7.485 billion of which 80% went to rural households.<sup>[82]</sup> Comparable data is unavailable for Cambodia, however, it is estimated that on an average, internal migrants sent between 10 USD to 20 USD per month to support their parents/left behind family,<sup>[83]</sup> which is similar to Indian remittance patterns (approx. 150 USD annually).<sup>[84]</sup>

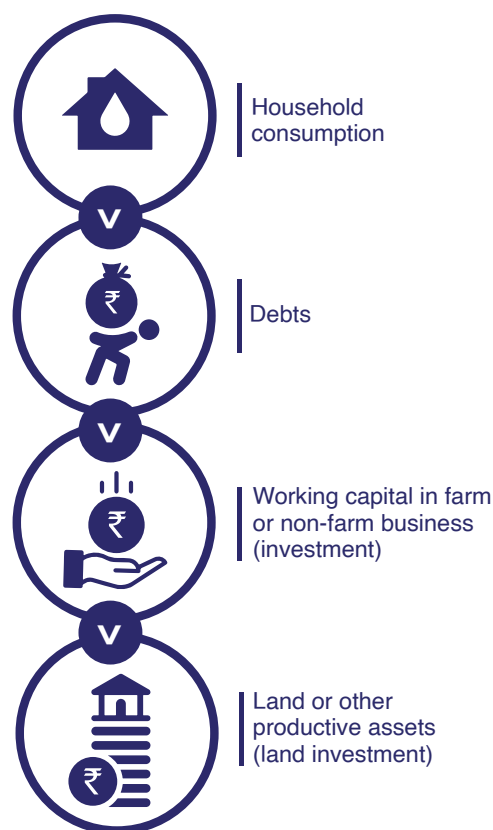


Figure: 1.1: Hierarchy of need for remittance

### 4.2.1. What are remittances used for?

Remittances are a major source of income for migrant households as their survival depends on it.

In rural households, it is largely used for personal consumption.<sup>[85]</sup> <sup>[86]</sup> <sup>[87]</sup> <sup>[88]</sup> This information was unavailable for Indonesia, however it was observed that personal consumption of the household is considered the primary responsibility of the migrant and in the long term, if the consumption of family increases, it often leads to workers migrating for a longer period of time to earn more wages.<sup>[89]</sup>

Debt payment is another crucial expense for which migrant households rely on remittances. In India<sup>[90]</sup> and Bangladesh,<sup>[91]</sup> it was observed that about 10% of rural households used remittances to pay off debts. In Cambodia<sup>[92]</sup> and Nepal<sup>[93]</sup> as well, a relationship between debt payment and migration was observed. This information was not available for Indonesia and Thailand.

*“Before I had migrated, we took a loan to build our house in the village. It became difficult to pay back the loan as we could not save much out of the income from agriculture. Now, after moving to Kathmandu, I send most of my salary to my parents to pay off the loan .”*

*- Soumy, waiter in hospitality sector, Nepal*

Owing to the aforementioned reasons of debt repayment (on both advances received before migrating and existing debt within the household) and household consumption, quite expectedly, the savings rate is low for migrant households. In India, only 6.4% of migrant households saved remittances<sup>[94]</sup> with similar observations in Nepal<sup>[95]</sup> and Thailand.<sup>[96]</sup> In India and Nepal, remittances are generally low as a result of little income security because of advance systems and forced labour situations. However, another possibility is that the remitted money was saved by the family members, and therefore not captured in these studies.

It is observed, migrant households have a higher consumption and savings pattern than non-migrant households of the same economic status.<sup>[97]</sup> The savings and accumulation of a migrant or his family primarily depend upon the nature of work.<sup>[98]</sup> For example, in Nepal, migrants working as agriculture labourers in Terai region earn more than the labourers in hilly regions while labourers in urban areas earn more than those in rural areas.<sup>[99]</sup>



*“We are unable to save money because the majority of our income is spent on our family’s basic consumption, including our children’s education.”*

*- Subhadra Devi,  
brick kiln worker, India*



In terms of investment, there is limited evidence that migrants invest in any assets, however, a few micro studies indicate that a small percentage of rural migrants use their remittance for the purpose of agriculture.<sup>[100]</sup> Patterns of remittance investment from Bangladesh indicate that migrant earnings provide a source of funds to invest in farming-based livelihoods.<sup>[101]</sup>



*“We didn’t save any money and instead leased farmland. Leasing land is considered an investment in our area.”*

*- Madiha Begum,  
domestic worker, Bangladesh*



#### **4.2.2. How are migrants remitting money?**

With the growth of technology, digital payments have become popularised globally. However, the impact of online money transfers is uneven, as usage depends on their gender, education and income level. There is very little research on how this digital divide has impacted migrant workers and their mode of remittance.<sup>[105]</sup> In Thailand, it was observed that male construction workers

were more likely to own smartphones than women while domestic workers were less likely to use smartphones because their employers thought that it will be a bad influence on them.<sup>[106]</sup>

In contrast, migrant workers we interviewed in India, Indonesia and Nepal, preferred sending money through offline banking services or individuals such as contractors. In Nepal, even though usage of the digital methods was present, they preferred sending large amount of money only through individuals.

It is also observed that the decision to send money through banks or a person is dependent upon the amount that had to be transferred, i.e., small amounts were sent through a person and larger amounts were sent through banks. A study (2017) found that this was because sending cash in-person offered greater control and trust.<sup>[107]</sup>



*“We send our money through our Sardar who often goes to the villages. He always gives the complete amount to our families. We don’t deposit money in the bank because the bank is very far away from our village. We don’t have smartphones and we are not aware of mobile app services.”*

*- Anuj Vada, brick kiln worker, India*



### Highlights 1.2. : Examples of government push for digital payments

In Cambodia and Bangladesh, payment apps are quite popular among migrant workers who wanted to remit money to their villages. <sup>[102]</sup> <sup>[103]</sup>

The Bank of Bangladesh offered incentives to people for sending money through digital means by providing 2% cash incentives on transactions.<sup>[104]</sup> Migrant workers we interviewed mentioned that these apps were “common among migrant workers” “convenient” and a “faster way to send money to their family”.

“I transfer money through the Wing money app once or twice a month to my mother and children at home. I never send money through other people because I am concerned about cheating or losing my money.”

- Sam Art, labourer in construction sector, Cambodia

### Notable Positive Trends: Key Drivers and Impact of Internal Migration

① **Government of Thailand** formulated policies that focused on decentralised growth: instead of formulating policies that encourage or discourage migration, the government of Thailand formulated development policies that were regionally balanced such as policies catering to rural development and reducing the growth rate of urban slums. This has helped Thailand reduce internal migration over the years.

② **Government of Bangladesh** has initiated monetary incentives to use the digital payment app Bkash: One of the safest ways to promote the safe transfer of remittances is through digital payments, government of Bangladesh’s initiative to provide monetary incentives to those who use digital payment apps has resulted in Bkash app being a popular mode of payment among internal migrants.

# IMPACT OF MIGRATION BANGLADESH



## Mohsin\* - migrant working in food industry in Bangladesh

*“My father and I used to work on other’s land as labourers, we did not own any farming land. As my father grew older, it became difficult for him to carry out physically exhausting tasks in the field, making me the sole earner of my six-member household consisting of my parents, wife and two young children. The wages I earned from the field were only 30 Takas (3.43\$), and was insufficient for the survival of my family. **Over the years, even work available in the fields has become less frequent, especially since the majority of the land eroded because of the Padma river in my village. As a result, I started migrating about a decade ago.** I work in the village for three to four months and then migrate to work at different potato cold storages in Paba sub-district, Rajshahi, Bogura, and Tangail districts.*

*I didn’t always work in cold storages, my first migration was with the help of a local contractor who took me to Dhaka and gave me a job as a construction worker. He promised to pay me a large sum of money. However, after the work was done, he cheated me. I returned to my village after 3 months and swore never to work in Dhaka city again. Since I hadn’t gotten paid for 3 months, the financial condition in my house became worse. A few villagers told me about the job opportunities available in a potato cold storage. From then on I started migrating there as a factory worker with a group of ten to twelve other villagers.*

*I earn Taka 8000 (91.39\$) per month working in the factory. I wish to purchase land in the village but it is impossible to do so with my city earnings, I do not have any savings as my income is completely consumed by household expenses. I don’t know if migration has been positive or negative for me but if I get money, I will work. It is my responsibility to provide enough food for my household and I will continue migrating.”*



*\*This story is anonymous and Mohsin is a pseudonym.*

# IMPACT OF MIGRATION NEPAL



## **Raj\*- a migrant working as a waiter in Nepal**

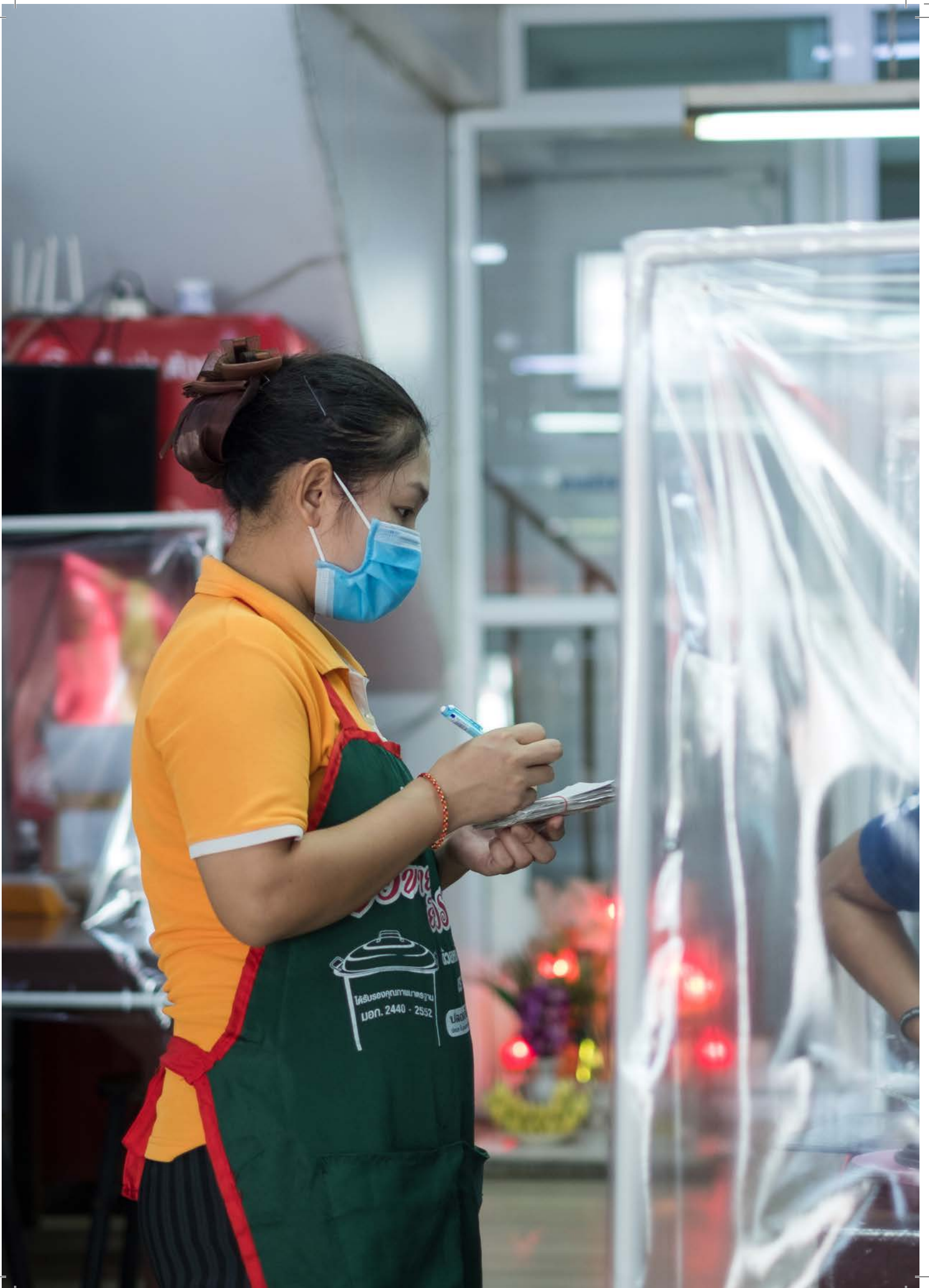
*“My family had taken a loan from the cooperative to build a house in the village but we were unable to pay off the loan, we could not save from the money we earned through agriculture. I decided to migrate to the city to earn a better income. I started working as a waiter at a restaurant in Kathmandu, the income that I earn here is helping me pay off the debt. Migration has helped me in other ways as well. I support my parents financially and pay for my brothers’ education. Personally, my health has gotten better, as in the village, we did not have access to hospitals and medicine but here I can buy medicines nearby whenever I feel unwell. Since coming to the city, I have also learnt how to speak to other people and deal with problems and difficulties on my own.*

*However, my migration has also made a few things difficult back home. As there is less manpower for agricultural work, my younger siblings have to take on my tasks. Sometimes my parents take the help of local villagers through labour exchange or on wages which is an extra cost they have to bear. Also, I am the only educated person in the family so I used to take care of all financial matters and now, my family often finds it difficult to take care of finances on their own. They try to reach out to me sometimes but I am not always available because of my work. If there is an emergency, they have to take the help of villagers but they contact me most of the time as they cannot rely on villagers and our relatives also live far away. Sometimes I also feel very lonely in the city, especially during festivals but I cannot even call them every day because my phone does not always have sufficient balance.”*



*\*This story is anonymous and Raj is a pseudonym.*









## Impact of Covid-19 on Internal Migration

Poverty rates had drastically reduced after decades of anti-poverty measures and efforts, however, we witnessed a reversal in these trends in the last two years of the pandemic with millions of people being pushed back into extreme poverty. In the Southeast Asian region, 4.7 million were pushed into extreme poverty conditions.

Internal migrants, usually the most vulnerable, working predominantly in the informal sector were one of the worst affected. They suffered numerous disruptions, including job loss and wage cuts because of domestic travel bans and shut down of industries during the lockdown. They continue to face several challenges such as increasing debt, hunger and a dire situation in the labour market with lack of job opportunities even as various sectors have restarted functioning. In this chapter, we explore the short-term impacts during Covid-19 lockdowns and how these could affect migration and employment patterns in the future.

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## 1. A potential increase in the number of internal migrants

Since 2021, economic activity has resumed, thereby leading distress-stricken internal migrants back to the cities. <sup>[108]</sup>

**Our analysis indicates that estimates for internal migrants have potentially increased as it currently includes two additional categories – international migrants who returned because of the pandemic and individuals who never migrated in the past but are forced to migrate because of lack of viable livelihood means at source regions and mounting personal debts.**

There is very little secondary research on the economic activities undertaken by international migrants when they return to their origin country. Evidence from the 2008 Asian financial crisis provides us a glimpse into their journey wherein international migrants, who were forced to return, had to take up odd jobs within the country. <sup>[109]</sup> However, it must be noted, they eventually migrated back internationally post economic stabilisation and recovery.



*“Due to COVID-19, the border between Thailand and Cambodia is closed. We decided to migrate to Phnom Penh for a job instead because we do not want to enter Thailand illegally.”*

*- Mony, labourer in construction sector, Cambodia*



The second category is first-time migrants who chose to migrate because of the increasing financial distress caused by the pandemic. Distress was found to be a key driver of migration in instances where there are no alternate livelihood options.



*“My family was severely affected by the pandemic lockdown, and we couldn’t make a living in our village. Therefore, they encouraged me to go to Batam city to work and earn an additional income.”*

*- Imran, factory worker in garment sector, Indonesia*



## 2. Impact of pandemic on employment:

### 2.1. Increasing unemployment rates that are projected to increase even further:

Unemployment rates are projected to decrease in 2022 for all countries, however it would still not be anywhere close to the pre-pandemic period. In the Table 3.3, a visible increase in unemployment rates was observed across countries except in Cambodia, it was the only exception which saw a significant improvement in its unemployment rates during 2020. This could be due to two reasons, firstly, as mentioned earlier, the first full lockdown in the country did not take place until 2021. Secondly, experts believe this increase in employment was because of the generation of extremely poor-quality and informal jobs such as street vending. However, post the first lockdown in 2021, projections suggest unemployment rates could be much higher in the country. <sup>[110]</sup>

*(Refer to the Figure 2.1: Unemployment rates in selected countries since 2019-2022)*

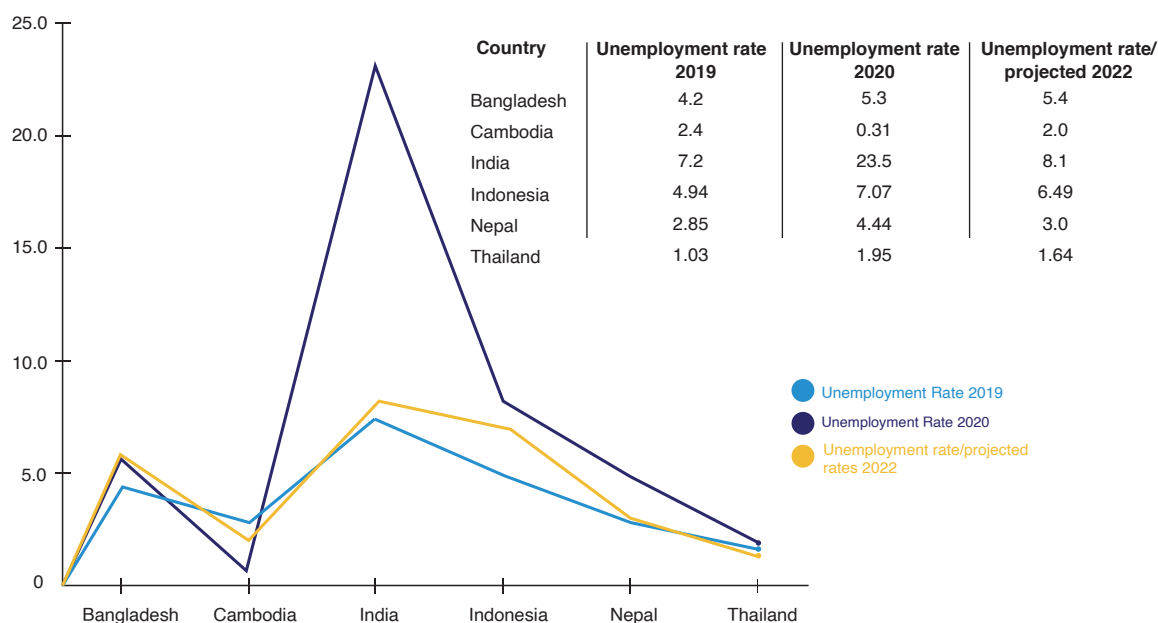


Figure1: Unemployment rates in selected countries since 2019-2022

Source: <https://tradingeconomics.com/>

Unemployment rates have continued to persist due to slow recovery of certain sectors. For example, the tourism and hospitality sector is a major contributor to the economies of many Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Cambodia. Even as restrictions lift and the sector becomes more active, full recovery could take more time. <sup>[111]</sup> In Thailand, experts suggest that the sector would only return to 2019 levels by 2024, thus impacting future employment prospects. <sup>[112]</sup>

“Everything was shut and the police were beating us with laathis (sticks) if we tried to go out. Later, we called a vehicle and 20 of us left together. Each person spent around 15,000 INR (196 USD) for the transport, and it took us three days to reach...”

- Iqbal, labourer in construction sector, India

## 2.2. What were the key factors that led to job loss?

### 2.2.1. Job loss driven by a combination of lockdown measures and distress stricken industries:

In Cambodia, India, Indonesia, and Nepal, lockdowns led to the shutting of public transport systems and shutdown of industries, and subsequently affecting employment rates. <sup>[113]</sup> India is one of the most well-known examples of how migrants returned to their native villages when faced with sudden lockdowns, job and wage loss in cities. <sup>[114]</sup>

Job losses also occurred as a result of a sector’s inability to function due to the direct economic impact of restrictions. Such instances were seen in Cambodia and Thailand. <sup>[115]</sup> In Cambodia, even prior to their first lockdown in 2021, industries were affected by global impacts of the pandemic in 2020. As a result of order cancellations by global retailers or requests for heavy discounts by suppliers, the garment sector suffered losses which led to layoffs. Over 600 garment factories in the nation’s capital were shut down due to economic reasons. <sup>[116]</sup> In Thailand, lockdown measures disproportionately impacted workers in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Owing to international travel restrictions, they returned to their hometown and relied on agriculture as they could not afford to live in cities. <sup>[117]</sup> In Bangladesh, internal migrants who were in the worst-hit sectors, such as garment, did end up going home due to job loss.

“In 2020, the ban on international flights affected us as around 80% of our customers were foreigners. Due to decrease in demand, we were unable to operate the hotel at full capacity, as it is a waste of both time and money. As a result, we closed down and laid off our employees. We have told our employees they should find other job opportunities as we aren't sure if we'll be able to start the hotel again.”

- Business partner, hospitality sector, Thailand

“Due to fewer job opportunities in my village, I decided to migrate with my sister to Phuket province. After four months, I received employment at a small restaurant. My family largely depends on my income as my husband's work is uncertain. During the pandemic, as international flights were shut and the restaurant wasn't earning as much, the employers decided to lay off the staff. I lost my job and income; I did not know what to do next. At the time, I was pregnant and since I was the one who was laid off, my husband and I moved back to my village. Currently in the village, I am trying to raise my child without any income. I am just waiting for the situation to become better and I hope I can get back to my previous job again. I am ready to go back to work if they re-start their business.”

- Suhalee, kitchen staff in hospitality sector, Thailand

### 2.2.2. Fear of contracting the virus led to job loss:

In some sectors such as domestic work, a major reason for job loss was the fear of contact with an outsider during the pandemic. Domestic work is extremely informal in nature and without any laws regulating domestic workers' employment, they are faced with constant job insecurity. The onset of the pandemic made their existing conditions more difficult, for example, in Bangladesh, fear of community transmission and economic

impact of lockdowns led many employers to let go of domestic workers without any notice or compensation. <sup>[118]</sup>

“I have been working as a domestic worker for more than a decade, I specialize in cooking. Prior to the pandemic, I used to work in as many as 13 homes. I start work at 5am and continue until 5pm, receiving salary monthly. The payment received by each household varies, some pay me IDR 600,000 (41 USD) and others, IDR 1 million (69 USD). Employers determine the salary as I don't have any rate card like other domestic workers. My employers trust me to the point of giving me access to their homes even when they're not at home. Since the pandemic, I've lost most of my jobs. I feel this could be because my employers are concerned about their health, so they restrict access to their homes. Moreover, they know that some of my employers are doctors, so they've become particularly careful. I guess they just want to protect their families. Now I work at 4 houses, down from 13.”

- Sarah, domestic worker in domestic work sector, Indonesia

### 2.2.3 Reduction in female labour force:

A worrying trend that also explains higher unemployment rates is the declining labour force participation of women. It is estimated globally that women are most impacted by job loss and unemployment. Comparisons between 2019 and 2020 find female employment to be lower by 13 million. Since 2019, it is said that over 73 million additional women have left jobs and aren't looking for employment opportunities. This could be due to fewer available opportunities or increased unpaid work in households. <sup>[119]</sup> In India, it was found that women were eleven times more unlikely to return to work post job loss. <sup>[120]</sup> During interviews in India, a few women working in the construction sector mentioned they were receiving lesser job opportunities than prior to the pandemic.

## 2.2.4 Loss of wages and cut in working hours:

In 2020, global labour income saw an 8.3% decline (3.7 trillion USD in monetary terms).<sup>[121]</sup> A 22.6% drop in wages was witnessed for informal sector workers in India.<sup>[122]</sup> In Bangladesh and Cambodia, both textile-dependent countries, wage cuts were prominent in the female-dominated garment sector during and after lockdowns.<sup>[123]</sup>

Asia witnessed a fall of 4.6% in the number of working hours was noted in 2021 in comparison to the 2019 average.<sup>[124]</sup> A decrease in hours directly impacted wages especially for those who worked overtime or additional hours to earn more wages. Our interviews in Thailand and Cambodia found automobile sector workers wages were significantly impacted due to cut in working hours and overtime, they suffered reduction of 20-30% at an average. However, in some sectors, a drop in wages regardless of working hours was witnessed. Though, it must be noted that this impact has been much more on women and low-income workers.<sup>[125]</sup> In India and Nepal<sup>[126]</sup>, wage cut was common among informal sector workers.

## 2.2.5 Shifts in major sectors of migrants' employment:

Another subsequent impact of lockdowns on employment is the shift in sector specific jobs for migrants. This impact can only be properly understood in the next few years through careful documentation. As some sectors recover slower than others, job unavailability and decline in wages could lead to workers switching sectors. In India<sup>[127]</sup> and Thailand, labour shortages across multiple sectors is already being witnessed. For example, experts believe the slow recovery of tourism and hospitality sector in Thailand could lead to many shifting to different sectors altogether.<sup>[128]</sup>



*“An issue post the pandemic is that workers such as flight attendants, tour guides, and tourist bus drivers cannot wait for the situation to improve and have changed their sectors. They have left tourism and hospitality sector to work in other jobs.”*

*- Dr.Roongroch Seeluangsawat,  
committee member of Tourism  
Council of Thailand*



## 2.2.6. A few sectors flourished during lockdowns:

In Bangladesh, a temporary increase was witnessed in daily wages due to high demand in the food-based sector.<sup>[129]</sup> Our research found those working in the potato cold storage and rice puff industries didn't miss a single workday during lockdowns. These commodities were in high demand leading to increased wages for labourers. In the construction sector in India, while a scarcity of labourers was observed after the first lockdown, a spike in wages was witnessed subsequently (in efforts to attract workers back to cities in order to make progress on much delayed projects).<sup>[130]</sup>

The threat of COVID-19 and subsequent waves still loom over countries, even as global economies have started functioning at capacity and are aiming to recover to 2019 levels. In the subsequent years, we may see more visible trends on migration and jobs.

INTERNATIONAL BORDER



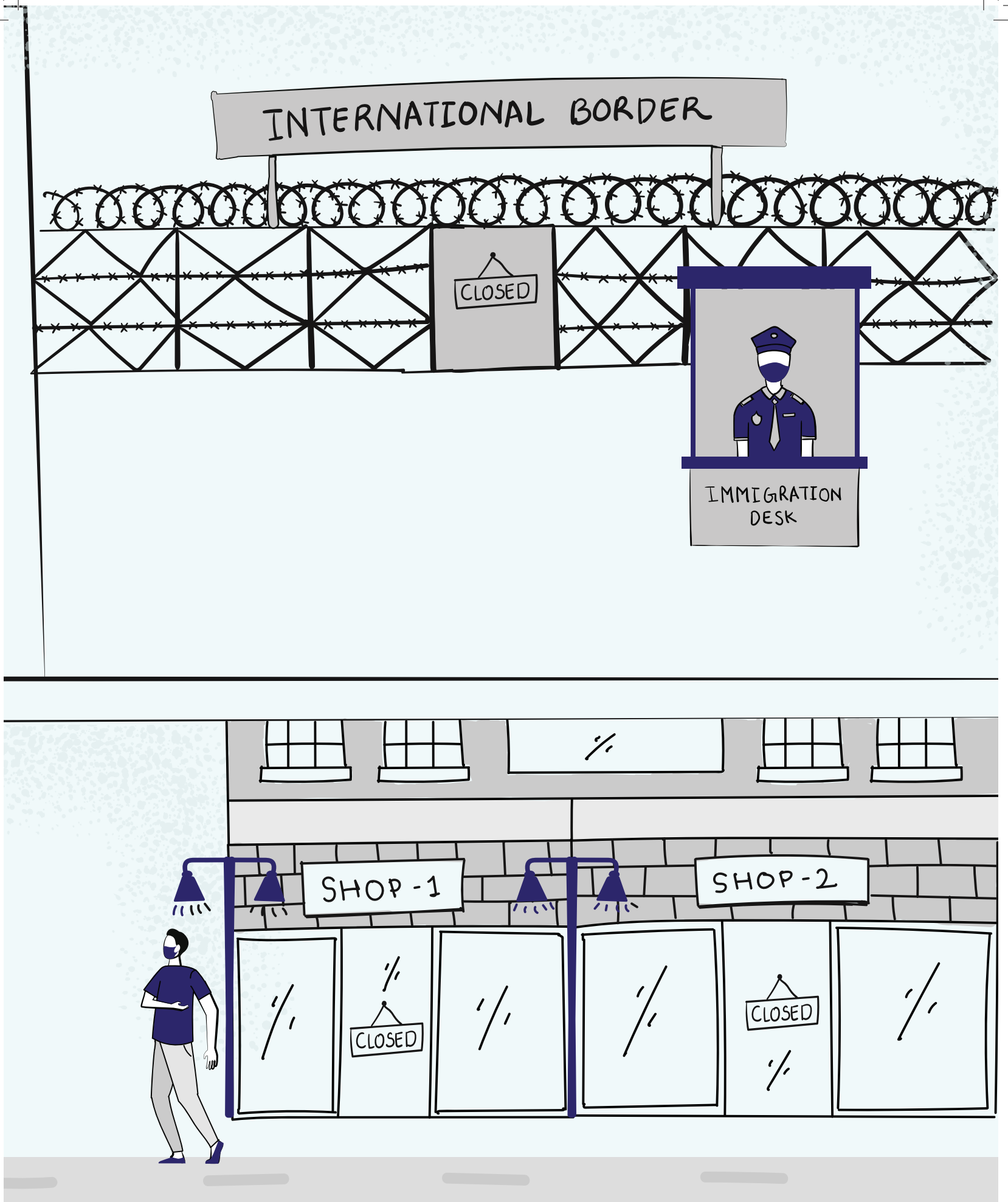


Illustration 2: The impact of Covid-19 has led to the potential increase of internal migrants in two categories. The first, previous international migrants now moving internally and second, those who were never migrants but are now forced to as a result of financial distress caused by covid-19.

## Notable Positive Trends: Impact of COVID-19 on internal migration

### How did governments across countries address the needs for those in distress?

- Governments expanded on their existing schemes to reach more beneficiaries
  - ① The Indian government expanded its employment (MGNREGA) scheme to generate employment in rural areas where demand for work had increased as a result of return migration of workers.<sup>[131]</sup> As the migrant crisis worsened, the government also expedited the process of making ration scheme portable (ONORC).<sup>[132]</sup>
  - ② During the lockdown period, the Indonesian government, as a part of its relief measures, instated its existing food scheme, Kartu Sembako and coverage targets were increased to reach a wider audience, from 15.2 to 20 million. The coverage of the existing cash allowance scheme was also expanded from 9.2 to 10 million, with benefit values increased.<sup>[133]</sup>
  - ③ In Bangladesh, the cash allowance scheme was expanded during this time.<sup>[134]</sup>
  - ④ Thailand has a robust cash assistance scheme system in place, and during the pandemic, when many lost their jobs, these schemes provided them immediate relief.<sup>[135]</sup>
- Countries where ration distribution wasn't the norm, ration was distributed to meet the ongoing demand.
- Even though Nepal <sup>[136]</sup> and Cambodia <sup>[137]</sup> do not have an active ration scheme in place, during the pandemic they initiated a ration scheme for immediate relief.
  - ① The Indian government keeping in mind the migrant crises, also started special trains for migrant workers to go back home. <sup>[138]</sup> While in Nepal, the government waived off charges of public utilities and transportation costs for the vulnerable and low income households.<sup>[139]</sup>
  - ② The governments of Indonesia <sup>[140]</sup> and Thailand <sup>[141]</sup> rolled out wage subsidy programmes to help low income workers during COVID.





# IMPACT OF MIGRATION CAMBODIA



## **Chhaiya\* - a migrant working as a waitress in Cambodia**

*"I used to work in Thailand with my family, however when the pandemic started, we were forced to return to our village in Thmorkol district. After my return, I initially worked with my parents on our small rice field.*

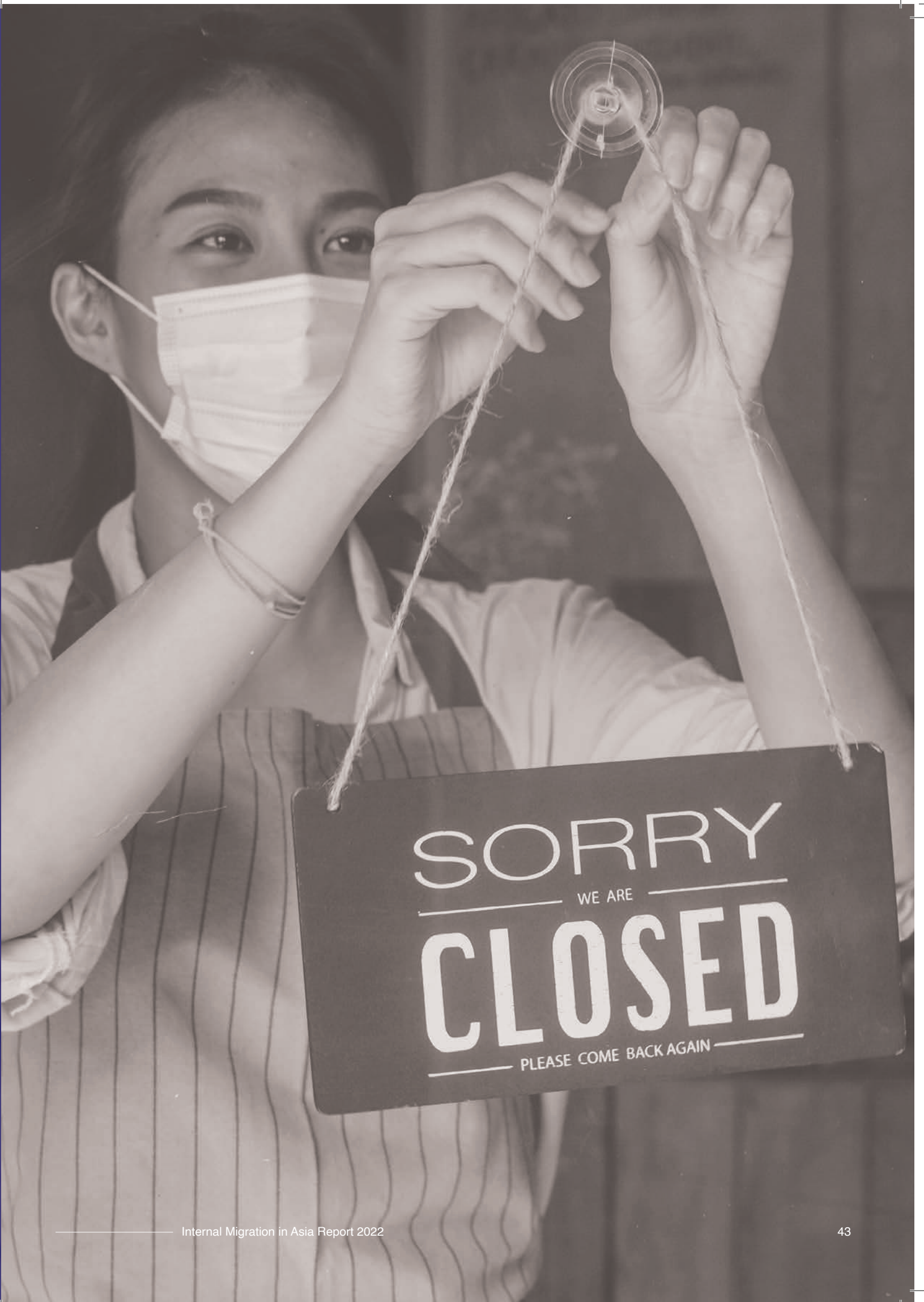
*Before the pandemic, I ran away from home to Phnom Penh, as my mother wasn't allowing me to go work in the city alone. I took a bus without any money for my travel, and in exchange I had to give the bus driver my ring. Once I arrived in the city, I stayed with a few people who lived on the street and sold recycled garbage to save my life. After months of searching, I finally found a job as a dishwasher in a restaurant.*

*After a few months, the country was struck by the first major wave of COVID-19. In the initial days when the infection rates were rising, the restaurant owner arranged a meeting and told us to clean rooms, tables, chairs, and spaces around the restaurant regularly to cut down on the spread of the infection. My wages saw a drastic decrease, earlier I used to receive 150\$ per month, but during this time, the owner only gave me 15\$ even though I continued to work the same hours as before. He stopped giving us any tips or bonus as well. A few weeks later, he finally decided to close the restaurant. As a result, I returned to my village again without any money. I did not receive any support from the government during the pandemic as my family didn't have an IDpoor card.*

*I am concerned about my parents livelihood as money from our rice field isn't enough to support them. Now that I have been fully vaccinated, I will go work at the restaurant again. Even the owner has asked me to come back, however, this time I will ensure my mother gives me permission."*



*\*This story is anonymous and Chhaiya is a pseudonym.*



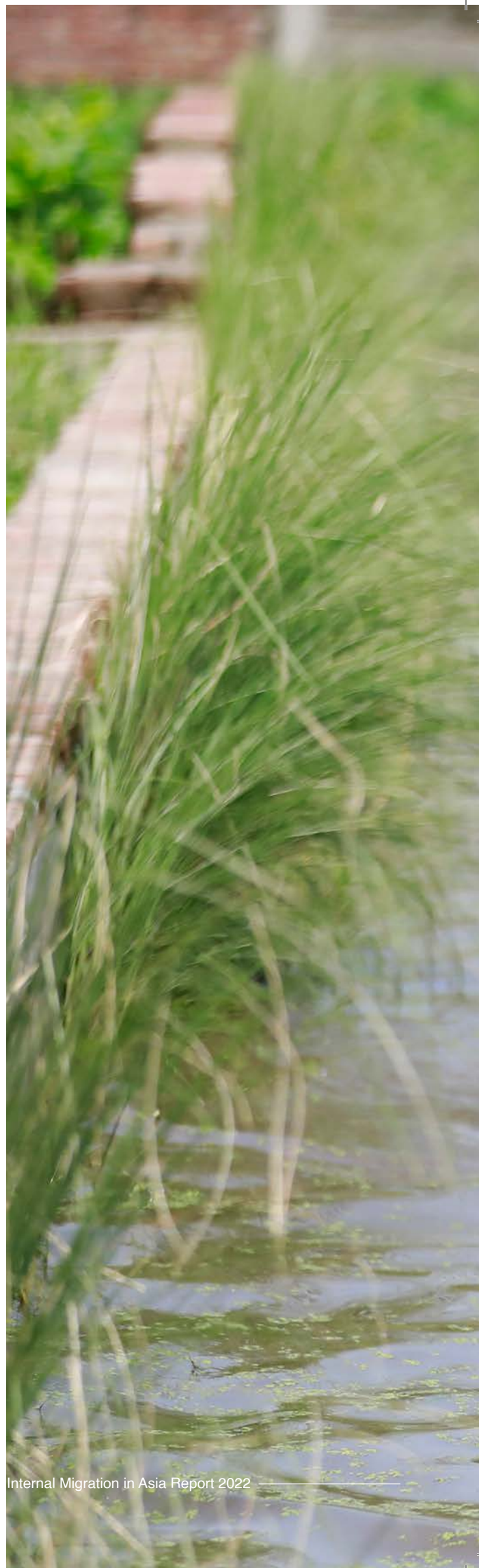
SORRY  
WE ARE  
CLOSED  
PLEASE COME BACK AGAIN

## Climate Change and Migration

Human migration as a result of climate change is considered the single greatest impact that could fall upon populations globally. Discussions around displacement or movement of people because of climate change have occurred since the 1990s.<sup>[142]</sup>

**Recent predictions claim the situation of climate has gotten dire, which could lead to 40 million climate migrants in South Asia alone by 2050, almost 2% of the entire regional population.<sup>[143]</sup>** The onus of protecting climate migrants fall mainly on domestic governments because often such movements are internal.

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Current situational assessments find that all parts of Asia, ranging from the mountainous peaks of the Himalayas to the low-lying coastal areas of Indonesia, are affected by environmental impacts. For example, in 2020, low rainfall, floods, and cyclones in East and South Asia led to the displacement and loss of life in many countries in the region, such as Cambodia, India and Bangladesh. Furthermore, such impacts affected agricultural activities and food security, which created distress for populations. [144] The Global Risk Index (2021), assessing the most impacted countries by extreme weather conditions, placed India (Rank 7) among the top 10, followed by Nepal (Rank 12), Bangladesh (Rank 13), Indonesia (Rank 14), Thailand (34) and Cambodia (84). [145]

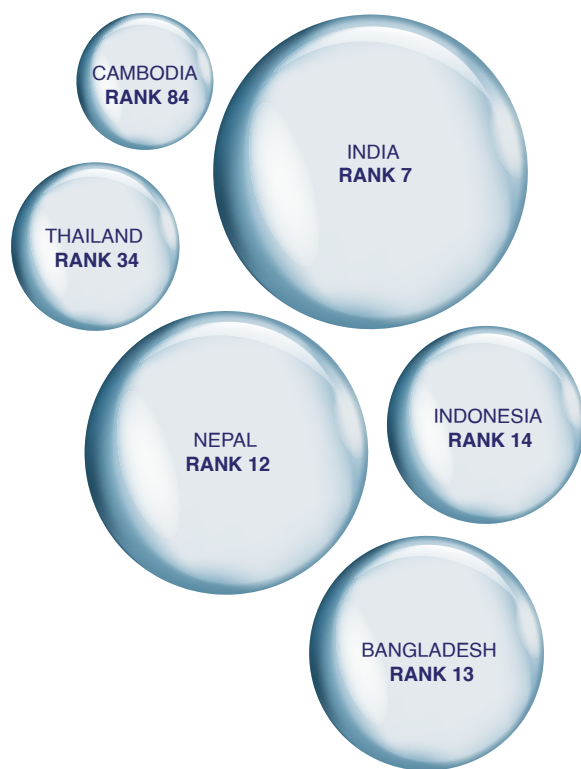


Figure 3.1: Global Risk Index (2021)

Extreme climate impacts is the dismal reality of the present and future, and as the intensity increases, climate-induced migration is bound to increase. [146] This chapter focuses on the different types of climate impacts, environmental drivers in rural areas that force people to migrate, and its implications at destination locations.

## 1. Who are climate migrants?

IOM defines climate migrants as “Persons or groups of persons who, for compelling reasons of climate-induced changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to move from their habitual homes, or choose to do so, within their country of residence or abroad.” [147]

## 2. Understanding types of climate migration [x]

Climate-induced migration is the consequence of either sudden or slow-onset climate changes that disrupt livelihoods. [148]

The first category, sudden climate events, cause widespread devastation and displace populations without warning. They include extreme events such as floods, earthquakes, cyclones, etc. [149] For example, Cyclone Amphan (2020) caused wide-scale devastation, which led to the displacement of over 2.4 million people in India alone. [150] Similarly, in Nepal, torrential rains in 2017 impacted over 35 districts and losses across sectors, including agriculture with millions being displaced. [151]

As we see in Table 2.1, India, Bangladesh, and Indonesia were among the top 10 countries where most internal displacements occurred because of natural disasters in 2019. India had the highest number of displacements among all nations, as it was hit by eight tropical storms and two droughts [xi] in the year. Cyclone Phani was the most powerful storm in 5 years that hit three states of India [xii] before it moved to Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, monsoon floods led to the displacement of 307,000 people in less than three weeks in July. Indonesia witnessed a massive earthquake that hit the Maluku province, which led to the displacement of 231,000 people. [152]

[x] We would like to thank Prayank Jain - his report on migration and climate change in India, developed as part of a strategy exercise for Jan Sahas, helped inform us of critical insights to write this chapter.

[xi] Drought displacements were recorded in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra of India.

[xii] Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and West Bengal

Country	No. of disasters	Estimate of people displaced <sup>[xii]</sup>
Bangladesh	14	4.1 million
Cambodia	NA	70,000
India	12	5 million
Indonesia	400	463,000
Nepal	NA	NA
Thailand	NA	61,000

Source: Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020 <sup>[153]</sup>

Table 3.1: Estimated people displaced due to sudden climate events in sample countries

The second type of climate migration is slow-onset climate change. This form of climate change leads to depleting water levels and erratic annual rainfall, which affect communities that depend on stable climatic conditions for their livelihood, such as agriculture. <sup>[154]</sup> Evidence from the Anantapur district of India, which has seen no rainfall in the past few years, found that over 42% of borewells had dried up, and crop loss in the region was estimated at 45 to 52 million USD, due to which approximately 4.87 lakh farmers had migrated out of the area. <sup>[155]</sup> In Table 2.2, we see recent estimates of slow-onset climate migration, India had the highest estimates.

It is also important to note that sudden and slow-onset climate changes cannot always be differentiated from each other. In some cases, they are interlinked. For instance, a slow rise in sea level might ultimately lead to storms in a location, making it uninhabitable. In some cases, repeated exposure to sudden-onset events along with slow-onset climate change can trigger the cyclical and temporary movement of

migration into permanent migration.

A concrete example is the melting of the Himalayan glaciers due to rise in global temperature. According to experts, the glaciers have been melting twice as fast since the start of the previous decade due to climate change. In 2019, a flood was triggered in Uttarakhand, India, after a glacier from the Himalayas broke

Country	Estimated climate migrants <sup>[xiv]</sup>
Bangladesh	455,491
Cambodia	NA
India	14 million
Indonesia	NA
Nepal	345,018
Thailand	NA

Source: South Asia Climate Migration Report 2020 <sup>[156]</sup> <sup>[114]</sup>

Table 3.2: Estimated climate migrants as a result of slow onset climate change in sample countries

<sup>[xiii]</sup> even though estimates of the people displaced in year 2020 have been released by the same organization, in some cases the numbers are extremely low due to the difficulty in data collection during the pandemic. Hence, statistics from 2019 have been included to get a more representative picture.

<sup>[xiv]</sup> These are estimated figure because it is more difficult to count migration due to slow-onset changes.

### 3. Understanding key drivers of climate-induced migration patterns in rural areas

In the past decades, distress directly affected rural livelihoods making environmental impacts significant drivers of rural to urban migration.

#### SLOW ONSET OF CLIMATE CHANGE LEADS TO MIGRATION



Figure 3.1: Key drivers of slow onset climate-induced migration

In rural areas, poor households with few resources such as land are more vulnerable to the shocks and negative impacts of climate change, leading to internal migration. <sup>[158]</sup> **Experts have argued that it is impossible to look at climate migration in isolation from migration caused by economic reasons.** In developing countries, agriculture is the primary source of employment

in rural areas and is heavily dependent on the environment. Therefore, in case of droughts or floods, workers/ small farm owners are not resilient enough to tackle agricultural failures. In these instances, migration may be the only coping mechanism particularly in the absence of alternative livelihood opportunities. <sup>[159]</sup>

“Due to lack of transportation and electricity in our village, we cannot use modern technologies like tractors on our agricultural land... because of the unpredictability in weather changes, farming is usually not very profitable, which is why we have to migrate to earn a living.”

- Shraey, driver in transport sector, Nepal

Based on evidence from Bangladesh’s northern region, which is highly dependent on agriculture, it used to be prone to heavy floods, riverbank erosion and cold waves. ‘Monga’ or ‘abhab’ <sup>[xv]</sup> is a seasonal event in this region, a near-famine situation between the periods of cultivation and harvest. People affected by Monga form 10% of the population and occupy 11% of the land in Bangladesh. <sup>[160]</sup> With climate change, the area is experiencing increasingly unpredictable weather conditions such as severe droughts and even more scanty rainfall, further exacerbating the existing problems of people living in poverty, and leading to increasing migration. <sup>[161]</sup>

“I come from the northern district of Bangladesh. I used to work as a day labourer in other people’s lands before migration. During the Monga period, it is very difficult in our village to find jobs. Therefore, I decided to migrate to Dhaka during this period to work in the garment industry and earn an additional income.”

- Jyoti, garment worker in RMG sector, Bangladesh

<sup>[xv]</sup> The state of not having enough money even for basic needs.



Migration as a coping strategy is also adopted to mitigate the impacts of sudden events that frequently disrupt communities and their livelihoods. In India, it was found that Odisha has experienced around ten cyclones in the past two decades which caused widespread devastation of land, low agricultural productivity and temporary displacement of rural communities.<sup>[162]</sup> A study on coastal districts of Kendrapada and Korda in Odisha found a large percentage of individuals migrate seasonally to other parts of the country to combat economic and environmental impacts such as cyclones and floods.<sup>[163]</sup>

Unsafe migration or displacement pathways especially for women and girls increase with sudden climate events. For example, during Assam floods in India, which has become an annual occurrence, instances of forced child labour and marriage have increased multifold. Similar rise in trafficking after sudden climatic events have been witnessed in other countries of Asia as well.<sup>[164]</sup>

As populations migrate to overcome distress caused by climate and economic impacts, migration corridors develop over the years. It is believed that the same migration corridors with the increasing stress of environmental impacts will be used by future migrants too.<sup>[165]</sup> For example, in the case of Bangladesh, it is predicted that climate impacts that directly affect agricultural output in the northeast region could lead to more people migrating to already prominent destinations – Dhaka and Chittagong.<sup>[166]</sup> In India<sup>[167]</sup>, Thailand<sup>[168]</sup> and Cambodia existing migration corridors have been used by climate migrants as well. The area around Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia has one of the highest out-migration rates in the country because a growth in population has led to lack of food, fertile and arable land and depletion of natural resources. People from this area mainly migrate to Phnom Penh to work in the construction sector, service sector and small scale businesses. Some also migrate to the Krong Pailin to work in mining and agriculture land.

#### 4. Climate impacts at destination locations

Climate change impacts are not limited to source or rural areas but are experienced in destination areas as well. Predictions on climate impacts

across popular destinations paint an extremely worrisome picture. For example, both Bangkok and Jakarta are expected to experience flooding because of rising sea levels which could result in mass out-migration.<sup>[169]</sup> Such future events could further disrupt migration patterns, making it essential to explore the consequences of environmental impacts at both source and destination.

Other than direct climate impacts discussed above, overpopulation is leading to further issues of water scarcity, high levels of pollution and waste disposal problems.<sup>[170]</sup> In fact, urbanisation is leading to irreversible impacts on the environment that further affects the global climate.<sup>[171]</sup> A strong linkage between internal migration and haphazard urbanisation exists, as it leads to stress on the natural resources of cities.<sup>[172]</sup> Uncontrolled urbanisation can be detrimental to the environment causing worsening water quality and air and noise pollution.

**Indonesia's Jakarta is a well-known example of the environmental impacts of rapid urbanisation. It has been projected that it is the fastest sinking city globally and is estimated to sink by 2030 completely. To combat this, the Indonesian government has shifted the capital to Nusantara.<sup>[173]</sup> The primary reason for this change in the capital is rapid urbanisation related environmental impacts and frequent flooding due to rising sea levels.<sup>[174]</sup>**

The living conditions of migrants at destination locations further display their precarity as they usually reside in areas which are already prone to climate related impacts. For example, during the 2018 Kerala floods in India, it was observed, areas where migrants lived were more prone to floods, landslides, etc. In many instances, this was accompanied with already unhygienic living conditions that could lead to epidemics such as waterborne diseases.<sup>[175]</sup>

As many destination locations face similar threats of climate impacts, those who migrate due to distress caused by the environment are twice as vulnerable. Anecdotal evidence from India found many migrants originally belonging to Sundarbans in West Bengal migrated to Kerala after the devastation caused by Cyclone

Aila (2009) to their livelihood. In 2018, when the Kerala floods occurred, they were faced with the same predicament and were forced to abruptly travel back to their homes without any likelihood of economic opportunities.<sup>[176]</sup> Even though this was a sudden climate event, with climate change threatening to make many of these destinations completely inhabitable over time, this could severely impact migrants and their families.

“I have a small piece of land in my village in Assam. I decided to migrate because I was under debt and agriculture was no longer productive in my village due to erratic weather conditions. I worked in Kerala for a few months to pay the debt, and then the floods occurred. I lost my job, so I decided to come to Mumbai to work. When I migrate for work, I usually go to Kerala and Mumbai. When it is raining in Kerala, I find work in Mumbai and vice-versa.”

- Sukwinder, labourer  
in construction sector, India

## Notable Positive Trends: Impact of climate change on internal migration

### How are countries addressing climate-induced migration?

Few countries have recognised climate change as a major driver of migration and have attempted to implement policies and interventions to deal with the distress.

- The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) - The Bangladesh policy also included a research agenda to monitor climate-induced migration for proper rehabilitation.
- The 10th Economic and Social Development Plan (2007-2011) of Thailand acknowledged climate-induced migration.

There are some ground-level interventions that various governments have adopted to deal with climate-induced migration. A few examples:

- ① In India, under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), extra working days (50 days) are provided, which is in addition to the standard 100 days, and are given to drought-prone areas to help with distress migration.<sup>[177]</sup> Furthermore, the government is also working in the drought-prone region of Bundelkhand under the vision of ‘Har khet ko paani, har hath mein kaam’ meaning ‘water for every farm and work for every hand’ by launching irrigation projects under the MGNREGA scheme.<sup>[178]</sup>
- ② In Bangladesh, the government has launched various food security and employment generation schemes in the Monga-affected regions to help populations in distress.<sup>[179]</sup>





Illustration 3: Threats of climate impacts, like source locations are faced at destination locations too. Those who migrate due to distress caused by the environment can face similar impacts at destination making them twice as vulnerable.



# IMPACT OF MIGRATION INDIA



## **Savitri Devi\* - a migrant working as an agricultural labourer in India**

*"I used to work as an agricultural labourer in my village, however as a result of severe water shortage in the past few years, I was unable to receive any employment for half the year. While in the past I did find work for a meagre ₹100 to ₹150 per day in nearby villages, even that became difficult as a result of the drought.*

*This forced me to migrate to Solapur district, with a local contractor (thekedar) to work as an agricultural labourer on a sugarcane farm for one season. Prior to migration, I received an advance of Rs.30,000 (for all 4 family members). The thekedar promised that the rest of the wages (₹200-₹250 per day) would be given once the work was complete.*

*Along with my family, I migrated in the hope of earning a better income. However, once we arrived we were faced with terrible working and living conditions, we worked for 16 hours a day in the scorching heat with very few breaks. The owner provided us a small makeshift tin shed as accommodation on the field and gave minimal ration for sustenance. In case any of us fell ill we were given medicine by the farm owner and asked to continue work. If we protested, he verbally and physically abused us, and sometimes beat us up with sugarcane sticks. At the end of the season, we finally thought of collecting our money and going back to our village. However, the owner refused and made us continue working for two more years, without wages.*

*In 2022, we came in contact with the Jan Sahas (JS) field team who found out about our case from other locals. The team was in constant contact with us to help, however, lack of cooperation by the local authorities, our rescue was delayed. In the meantime, I was worried about my son's health as he wasn't receiving any medical attention after falling sick.*

*When the team finally came to rescue us along with the local police, the owner again refused to let us go. With the local authorities' intervention, we were finally released. We have still not received our wages and have had to take out a loan to buy ration. After this experience, we have no plans to migrate, we would rather prefer to earn the meagre wages available locally to survive."*



*\*This story is anonymous and Savitri Devi is a pseudonym.*



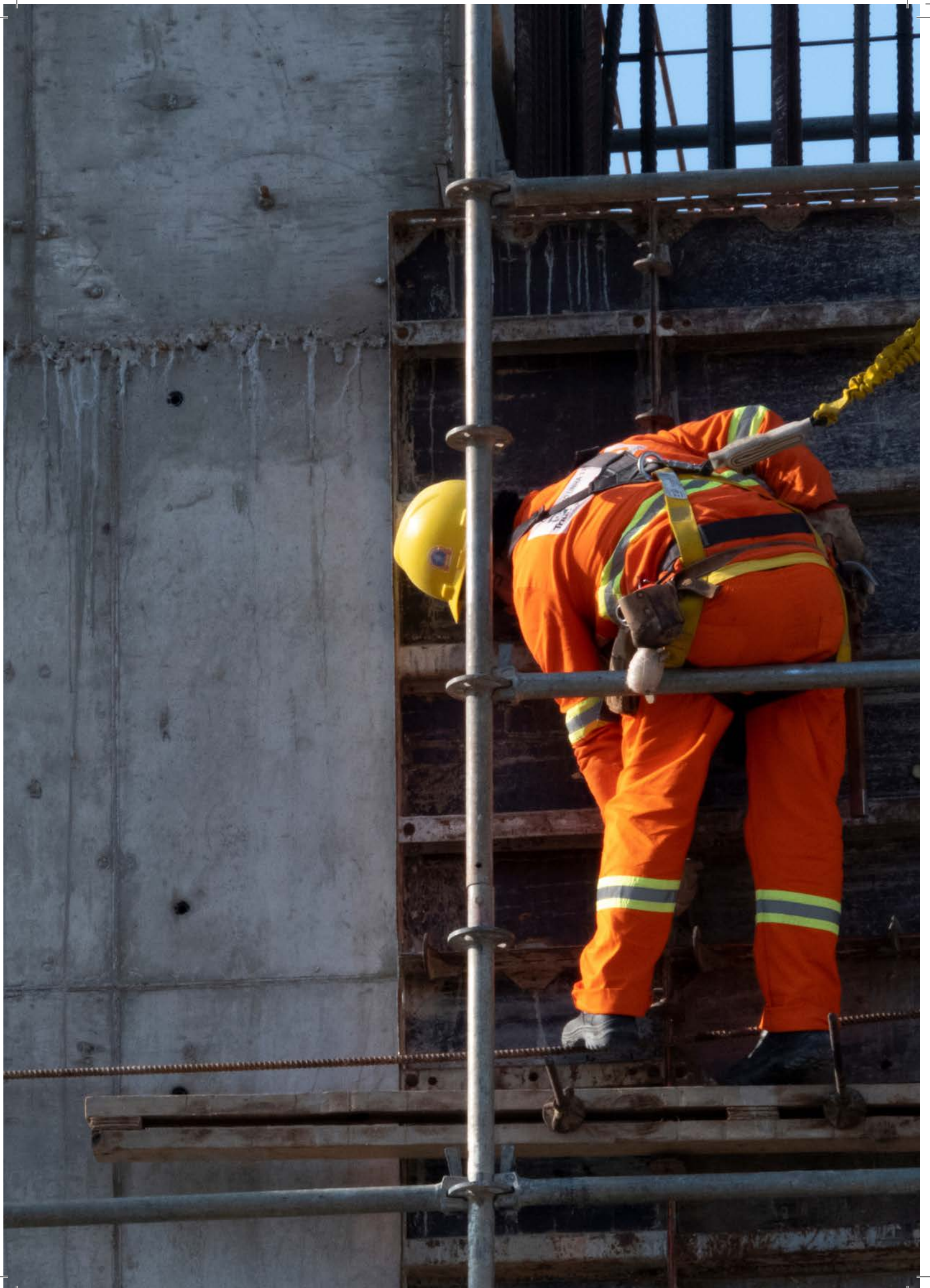
## Labour Laws and Impact on Internal Migrants

The unequal power dynamic between workers and their employers lead to instances of unjust working conditions. In such cases, effective labour laws help promote worker protection. If the informal economy is brought under the labour laws, it could lead to reduced poverty, favourable working conditions and improved productivity, and boost economic development.<sup>[180]</sup> In the case of internal migrants, who are the most vulnerable, labour laws and its implementation are even more essential.

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## 1. The need for laws and policies addressing the unique challenges of internal migrant workers:

Labour laws that govern workers exist in all countries studied in this report, however laws and policies specific to internal migrants or reviewing existing policies with an internal migration lens is completely missing. At the international level, policies formulated by organisations such as SAARC <sup>[181]</sup> and ASEAN have been limited to international migrants, and the focus on internal migration has been negligible. For example, the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Migrant Workers 2007 focuses on laying down the principles and norms for international migration between ASEAN countries. <sup>[182]</sup>

**At the country level, only India had a law aiming at the safe migration of internal migrants – The Inter-State Migrant Workers Act 1979 (ISMA). According to the act, each contractor or employer under whom more than five internal migrants work had to maintain records of the workers and provide travel allowances, proper living arrangements, medical facilities, and protective gear on site. However, it was never effectively implemented, and has now been subsumed under new labour codes <sup>[183]</sup>**

It is essential that organisations and individual countries acknowledge the unique needs of internal migrants and their contribution to the country's economic growth and design labour laws that cater to their requirements. <sup>[184]</sup>

Country	List of labour laws
Bangladesh	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 <sup>[185]</sup></li> <li>2. Bangladesh Labour Act 2013 <sup>[186]</sup></li> </ol>
Cambodia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Labour and Employment law of 1997 <sup>[187]</sup></li> <li>2. Amendment of 2007 <sup>[188]</sup></li> <li>3. Amendment of 2018 <sup>[189]</sup></li> <li>4. Amendment of 2021 <sup>[190]</sup></li> <li>5. The Minimum Wage Act 2018 <sup>[191]</sup></li> <li>6. Law on Social Security Schemes 2009 <sup>[192]</sup></li> </ol>
India	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wage Code 2019 <sup>[194]</sup></li> <li>2. Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions 2020 <sup>[195]</sup></li> <li>3. Industrial Relations Code 2020 <sup>[196]</sup></li> <li>4. Social Security Code 2020 <sup>[197]</sup></li> </ol>
Indonesia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Indonesian Labour law Act of 2003 <sup>[198]</sup></li> <li>2. Omnibus Law 2020 <sup>[199]</sup></li> <li>3. Trade Union Act 2000 <sup>[200]</sup></li> <li>4. Industrial Disputes Settlement Act 2004 <sup>[201]</sup></li> </ol>
Nepal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Labour Act of 2017 <sup>[202]</sup></li> <li>2. Labour Rules 2018 <sup>[203]</sup></li> <li>3. Industrial Enterprise Act 2020 <sup>[204]</sup></li> </ol>
Thailand	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Labour Protection Act 1998 <sup>[205]</sup></li> <li>2. The Labour Protection Act: Amendment of 2019 <sup>[206]</sup></li> <li>3. Labour Relations Act 1975 <sup>[207]</sup></li> <li>4. Labour Relations Act: Amendment of 2001 <sup>[208]</sup></li> <li>5. Homeworker Protection Act 2010 <sup>[209]</sup></li> </ol>

Table 4.1: Country-wise list of labour laws

## 1.1. Recent amendments to labour laws: <sup>[xvi]</sup>

Reasons for amendments vary across countries. However, most internal migrants don't benefit from many of these positive changes because it mainly applies to the formal sector.

1. In Bangladesh, the labour law was amended because of a major uproar following the collapse of Rana Plaza. <sup>[xvii]</sup> The amendment focused on strengthening the formation of trade unions and occupational health and safety. <sup>[210]</sup>

2. The Cambodian government has periodically amended certain aspects of its labour laws over the years. The amendments of 2007, 2018 and 2021 focused on overtime, seniority indemnity and provisions on work shifts and inspections, respectively.

3. In India, the government passed four new labour laws, which codified 29 older laws in 2019. These new codes aim to include a need-based minimum wage, improve non-hazardous working conditions, and provide universal social security entitlements. <sup>[211]</sup> However, even though these laws have been passed, they are yet to be implemented.

4. In Thailand, the amended Labour Protection Act of 2019 from the older 1998 law has introduced many positive changes such as increased maternity leave, severance pay and ensured equity of pay. <sup>[212]</sup>

5. In Nepal, the amendments to Labour Act in 2017 and Labour Rules in 2018, brought in positive provisions such as the act becoming applicable to firms with any number of employees, except in the case of forming collective bargaining, safety and health or labour relation committees. <sup>[213]</sup>

### Highlight 4.1: Amendments were in favour of the industry rather than workers: Examples from India and Indonesia

It is not always necessary that the change in labour laws is at par with the changing labour trends. As the world revives from the shocks of the pandemic, ILO advocated that keeping workers' rights and principles at the centre would help build back a better workplace in the post-pandemic era. <sup>[214]</sup> However, in some countries, such as India and Indonesia, a reverse trend was observed where labour laws were relaxed under the pretext of economic growth.

1. In Indonesia, the Omnibus Law passed by the Indonesian government in 2020 aimed to provide legal certainty to investors, which would ultimately boost the country's economic growth. However, to achieve this goal, workers' rights were taken away.

a. Firms were given the freedom to increase working and overtime hours beyond the standard set by the government.

b. Micro and small enterprises were exempted from adhering to the minimum wage

c. Rights of outsourcing companies were increased. <sup>[215]</sup>

d. It has been argued that this law breaches international law standards, thereby violating human rights. <sup>[216]</sup> It has resulted in large-scale protests by workers and activist communities. <sup>[217]</sup>

e. Since then, the Indonesian court has directed the government to revise part of the law and has given two years for the government to comply with this order. The failure to do so would result in the court deeming the entire law as "permanently unconstitutional". <sup>[218]</sup>

<sup>[xvi]</sup> For this report, 'recent' will be looked at from a time frame of 10 years

<sup>[xvii]</sup> Rana Plaza housed five garment factories in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Its collapse led to 1132 deaths and over 2500 injuries. Read more: [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/geip/WCMS\\_614394/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/geip/WCMS_614394/lang--en/index.htm)

2. In India, the state governments of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Tripura and Himachal Pradesh relaxed their labour laws.

a. The Uttar Pradesh Government passed the 'Uttar Pradesh Temporary Exemption from Certain Labour Laws Ordinance, 2020'. Under this ordinance, all labour laws, except three,<sup>[xviii]</sup> were relaxed in the state for a period of three years.<sup>[219]</sup>

b. The Madhya Pradesh Government, relaxed the Industrial Relations Act in eleven categories<sup>[xix]</sup> of industries for an indefinite period of time. The government also relaxed inspections in industries employing less than 50 workers and surprise inspections for all industries.

c. Other state governments such as Rajasthan, Tripura and Punjab increased the maximum working hours to boost their states' productivity.<sup>[220]</sup>

## 2.1. Unclear definition of who is an employer: contracting and sub-contracting

Employer-employee relationship in the informal sector is often a complex one as the role of an employer is often undefined in labour laws across countries. In some cases, such as the construction sector value chain, different levels of employers exist often owing to sub-contracting of work, and it ranges from principal employer → contractor → sub-contractor → micro contractor. In such cases, the ability to identify who should be complying with laws becomes even more difficult.

In India, under labour law, there are provisions for working hours, wages and overtime. The 'employer' is a key person in implementing this law. Their responsibility is to maintain and register records for overtime, wages and working hours.<sup>[221]</sup> However, in the construction sector, these responsibilities are often given to a contractor by the principal employer, therefore, he is often seen as the primary employer by the workers. Such a scenario sometimes leads private firms to forgo their responsibilities towards workers and non-compliance with regulations can often go unchecked.<sup>[222]</sup>

## 2. Gaps in existing labour laws and the need to adhere to the international standards

As mentioned above, all countries have labour laws in place. However, even though some recent amendments have brought positive changes for the workers, in countries such as India and Indonesia, existing labour laws were relaxed citing economic slowdown as a result of the pandemic as a reason. It is important that workers' rights are protected in this scenario and countries amend and adhere to the international standards set by ILO. In this section we will discuss these gaps in existing labour laws through three main factors: unclear definition of who is an employer in the informal economy, right to strike and rightful termination of workers.

<sup>[xviii]</sup> related to bonded labour, timely payments and ex gratia to workers in case of work-related diseases and disabilities

<sup>[xix]</sup> These include textile, leather, cement, iron and steel, electrical goods, electricity, public motor transport, engineering - including the automobile sector

“When we give a contract to a big contractor, we engage in a contract with them on a specific job and write down that they will abide by the Minimum Wages Act. Here compliance is higher. However, down the value chain, if a small contractor is hired (by the big contractor then it becomes difficult to manage) – traditionally, there will be a foreman and if there is a requirement of 50 masons, he will go around scouting in the neighbouring villages in search of those masons. This foreman will promise to work for 6 months against the amount of wages. During the work period, he will house them in the labour camp and provide them with basic food requirements and then he will give them pocket money for a week – minimum sustenance amount to survive for 1 week or 15 days. When they go home, say after 6 months or during festivals, this foreman will give them a lump sum payment of the time they have worked for – 4 months. Here non-compliance can be higher.”

-Harleen Oberoi, Vice President,  
Project Management, Tata Realty, India

In the garment factories of Cambodia, similar instances of non-compliance are observed. This is linked to the employers often being foreign companies that outsource employment, creating a gap in implementation of legal regulations.

“Our boss is a foreigner hence we face an issue communicating with him about working hours. We often have to work even during pregnancies and sick days because we don't get leaves.”

-Samnang, worker  
in garment manufacturing, Cambodia

## 2.2. Lack of strict penalties

To ensure worker protection, it is important that workers have rights in cases of non-compliance. However, this is not always the case. For example, in the event of non-compliance by the employer, the mechanisms for redressal are not

strict or properly enforced. In Indonesia<sup>[223]</sup> and India<sup>[224]</sup>, the penalty is significantly less for non-compliance with minimum wage, which further increases the chances of more instances of non-compliance. Meanwhile, in Thailand<sup>[225]</sup> and Nepal<sup>[226]</sup>, even though there is strict punishment for non-compliance with minimum wage, the implementation of the act is poor, leading to high cases of workers being paid less than the minimum wage. The lack of proper enforcement and monitoring of labour laws and limited awareness of workers are some of the reasons for continued violations. To tackle some of these barriers, practices globally can be considered. For example, Brazil's successful approach of dedicating additional resources and complete autonomy to labour inspectorates has effectively increased compliance with labour laws.<sup>[227]</sup>

## 2.3. Right to Strike

The right to strike helps workers safeguard their socio-economic interests and improve working conditions. When dispute negotiations between workers and employers fail, peaceful strikes are a democratic way of protecting workers' rights.<sup>[228]</sup> ILO Convention (No. 87) on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention state the guiding principles of the right to strike<sup>[229]</sup> According to ILO, the notice given to the employer by workers before the strike is vital as it acts as an additional stage for final negotiations. In its labour law, each country specifies what this notice period should be. It is essential that the period isn't too long as that might restrict the right to strike.

For most establishments except essential services or services of social or public interests, ILO has not suggested a specified time frame. However, it has stated that a period of 48 hours' notice before the strike is also reasonable.<sup>[230]</sup> For the purpose of this report, a maximum of 10 days will be taken, based on ILO guidelines and best practices, for the notice period.<sup>[231]</sup>

Country	What does the law say?	Is the country adhering to the international standard?
Bangladesh	According to the Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006, workers should provide a 7-day notice before going on strike. The strike should commence not before 7 days or later than 14 days of the notice.	✓
Cambodia	According to the Labour and Employment Law of 1997, a 7-day notice period is required from the workers before going on a strike.	✓
India	According to the Codes on Industrial Disputes 2020, workers are required to give a notice 60 days prior to going on strike.	✗
Indonesia	According to the Industrial Disputes Settlement Act, workers are required to give a notice of 7 days prior to going on a strike.	✓
Nepal	According to the Labour Act of 2017, a 30-day written notice should be given to the employer before workers go on a strike.	✗
Thailand	According to the Labour Relation Act of 1975, a 24-hour notice period should be given before workers go on a strike.	✓

Table 4.2: Work hours limit in selected countries

As seen in the above table, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Indonesia have adhered to the international standard, while India, Nepal, and Thailand have deviated from it. In India<sup>[232]</sup> and Nepal<sup>[233]</sup>, the provision has been criticised as solely working on making the labour market more efficient while dismantling worker rights as an extremely long notice period is not conducive to harmonious labour relations. In Thailand, the notice period is less than 48 hours, which might give less time for reconciliation.

## 2.4. Rightful termination

It is essential to strike a balance between employers' right to dismiss workers in valid situations and ensuring that dismissal is fair for the employee, as unfair dismissal can have negative economic consequences for the worker and their family.<sup>[234]</sup> The ILO Convention on Termination of Employment (No. 158) states a terminated worker should be entitled to a reasonable notice period or compensation. An exception to this is when the worker is guilty of serious misconduct. However, a time period for notice of termination

is not provided, leaving it to countries to define a 'reasonable period'. It also suggests that while terminating a contract, an employee should be given a valid reason.<sup>[235]</sup> This convention has not been ratified by any of the selected countries.<sup>[236]</sup>

According to the guidelines provided by ILO, we will be analysing best practices on three parameters: Does the law include a provision on a) giving a valid reason for termination, b) written notice to the employee, c) severance pay

(Refer to the Table 4.3: Legal regulations of termination in selected countries)

Country	What is the notice period?	Is the employer required to give a valid reason for dismissal?	Is the notification for dismissal written?	Is the employer required to give severance pay?
Bangladesh	According to the Labour Law 2006, a worker is entitled to a notice period depending upon the type of worker. A permanent worker is entitled to a) 120 days for monthly rated worker, b) 60 days in case of other workers. While in case of temporary worker a) 30 days for monthly rated worker b) 14 days in case of other workers	✗	✓	✓
Cambodia	According to the Cambodian labour law, the notice period is according to the tenure of the employee. 1. 7 days, if the worker's length of continuous service is less than six months 2. 15 days, if the worker's length of continuous service is from six months to two years 3. 30 days, if the worker's length of continuous service is longer than two years and up to five years. 4. 60 days, if the worker's length of continuous service is longer than five years and up to ten years. 5. 90 days, if the worker's length of continuous service is longer than ten years. 6. Method for calculating the length of service of workers, who are not employed on a monthly basis, shall be determined by a Prakas (ministerial order) of the Ministry in Charge of Labour.	✓	✓	✓
India	According to the Indian labour laws, the notice period is according to the type of worker. If a worker is Permanent monthly paid, then s/he is entitled to 30 days of notice while a permanent non monthly paid worker is entitled to 15 days.	✓	✓	✓
Indonesia	The Indonesian labour law does not have a provision for notice periods. If termination occurs, the employer should obtain an approval from the institution for the settlement of industrial relations disputes. This pre-termination statutory procedure often involves a delay between the employers, thus notifying the employee of the termination.	✓	✗	✓
Nepal	According to the labour law of Nepal, depending upon term of employment, workers have a right to a notice period of 1 day (employed for 4 weeks); 7 days (employed for 4 weeks to 1 year); 30 days (exceeding one year)	✗	✗	✗
Thailand	According to the labour law of Thailand, monthly paid worker should be given a notice for up to 30 days.	✗	✗	✓

Table 4.3: Legal regulations of termination in selected countries

In Bangladesh, the employer is only required to give a reason for termination in cases of misconduct, physical or mental incapacity, or retrenchment. In Thailand and Nepal<sup>[237]</sup> the reason is only necessary in cases of retrenchment or misconduct. In Indonesia, the employer is required to negotiate with the worker or the trade union to carry out the termination, even though they are under no obligation to state the reason for dismissal.<sup>[238]</sup>

For written notice, we observe that in Nepal<sup>[239]</sup>, even though the law states that a notice should be given to employees who are terminated, it doesn't specify if the notice should be written or verbal, while in Thailand, the law stipulates that the

employer 'may' give the notice in written form.<sup>[240]</sup>

### 3. Lack of adherence to labour laws

Apart from gaps in the existing labour laws, challenges in the form of access barriers/ coverage of workers, and compliance also continue to exist. The data on Labour Rights Index demonstrates the prevalence of unfortunate working conditions across countries such as in India, Cambodia, Thailand, and Indonesia. The index suggested that labourers in these countries have limited access to decent work while in Bangladesh they had a total lack of decent work. Thereby, indicating a

need for labour laws that are more favourable to internal migrants in these countries.<sup>[241]</sup>

In this section, we will discuss lack of adherence to labour laws through four factors: long working hours that are above the legal limit, no overtime payment, paying less than the minimum wage and unsafe working conditions.

### 3.1. Long working hours that are above the legal limit

The ILO Convention 1919 (No.1) states working hours limits should not exceed 8 hours in a day or 48 hours in a week. <sup>[242]</sup> The above prescribed working hour limits are the same in all countries, except Indonesia, where they have been further limited to 7 hours per day.<sup>[243]</sup> Even though the working hours limits align with the international standard, only in Bangladesh and India the convention is ratified and in force. <sup>[244]</sup> However, it has been observed that compliance rates are usually low and actual working hours tend to be much higher. <sup>[245]</sup>

Estimates suggest one-third of the global workforce work more than the prescribed working hours, seen more commonly in developing countries. Long working hours can have disastrous impacts on workers' overall health, well-being, and productivity. It is also observed that male workers are twice as likely to work excess hours than women across developing countries.<sup>[246]</sup> Women, on the other hand, are almost exclusively responsible for most unpaid labour in the household and unpaid care work, which gives them less freedom to engage in paid labour or paid work longer hours.<sup>[247]</sup> Evidence has shown that this burden increased manifold during the pandemic.<sup>[248]</sup> (Refer to the Table 4.4: Work hours limit in selected countries )

In the RMG sector in Bangladesh, long working hours are a common practice, and it was found that about 50% of the workers in 18 factories exceeded the overtime limit even with clearly defined legal limits.<sup>[249]</sup> In Cambodia, 36% of those employed worked more than 48 hours per week. The average hours and actual hours worked were found to be much higher than the legal limit in some sectors such as retail and wholesale trade (57.8hrs), construction (51.7hrs) and manufacturing (50.1hrs).<sup>[250]</sup>

Estimates from India found that in urban areas both self-employed workers and regular employees worked over the legal limit, i.e. 55 and 53 per week respectively, while casual workers worked 45 hours per week.<sup>[251]</sup> The fact that casual workers in India had fewer than 48 hours of work could indicate loss of work rather than abiding by the law. Nepalese workers were working more than 50 hours across all sectors with hospitality being the highest (56hrs).<sup>[252]</sup>

Problems were far worse for sectors not falling under the labour laws.

“Working over the working hour limit set by the government is the most common challenge faced by domestic workers in Indonesia. Some of them work from 4 am to midnight, and they only make around IDR 1.2 million (8 USD) which is far from Batam’s minimum wage of IDR 4.2 million (29 USD).”

- Irwan, Director,  
Yayasan Embun Pelangi (NGO), Indonesia



Country	Working hours limit as per law	What does the primary data say? <sup>[xx]</sup>
Bangladesh	The 2006 Labour Act states that daily working hours shall be 8 hours with an interval under section 108.	92% were working more than 8 hours per day.
Cambodia	Cambodia Labour Law, Article 137 states that working hours cannot exceed 8 hours or 48 hours per week.	70% were working more than 8 hours per day.
India	The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 states, “No worker shall be required or allowed to work, in any establishment or class of establishment for more than eight hours in a day and the period of work in each day shall be so fixed, as not to exceed such hours.”	38% were working more than 8 hours per day <sup>[xxi]</sup>
Indonesia	According to the Manpower Act, the standard working hours are arranged either as 7 hours per day and 40 hours per week for six working days in a week or 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week for five working days in a week.	86% were working more than the 7 or 8 hours per day
Nepal	According to the Manpower Act, the standard working hours are arranged either as 7 hours per day and 40 hours per week for six working days in a week or 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week for five working days in a week.	70% were working more than 8 hours per day
Thailand	The Hours of Work: Labour Protection Act, 1998 states regular working hours of 8 per day and 48 per week. The regular workday cannot exceed 7 hours for hazardous work, and the regular workweek cannot exceed 42 hours.	38% were working more than 8 hours per day

Table 4.4: Work hours limit in selected countries

<sup>[xx]</sup> We are aware that our sample is small and not representative, however we have provided our findings to give a glimpse to a wider problem.

<sup>[xxi]</sup> 42% of India’s sample was from Brick Kilns where most labour policies are not regulated. Most respondents told us that they decided their own working hours, since payment is on a piece-rate output.

### 3.2. Overtime payment

Based on the principles of the ILO convention, overtime wages must be 150% of the hourly wage in the first hour plus 125% of the hourly wage for every additional hour. It is also essential that overtime hours don't exceed 270 hours in a year.<sup>[253]</sup>

In developing countries, overtime work is considered a common practice to supplement low wages, and, in some cases, employment is taken up based on the availability of overtime. For example, overtime work in the garment and textiles sector across Asia is taken up to help supplement their basic wages. However, this should not be seen as a choice but as a coping mechanism for increasing their low income, even if it means sacrificing their free time.<sup>[254]</sup>

(Refer to the Table 4.5: Overtime payment in selected countries)



*"My salary is 1,200 USD, but I earn around 1,500 USD in one month if I work overtime. I do overtime work for 2 hours per day. And sometimes, on Saturday and Sunday as well. The factory gives us three times of actual salary for overtime work, which helps me increase my monthly income."*

*- Serto, worker in automobile sector, Thailand*



In Bangladesh, a survey on garment factories observed those working on lower wages worked the most overtime hours. It was also found that in 9 of the total 18 factories which were a part of the study, workers weren't paid the full amount for overtime payment.<sup>[255]</sup> 36% employees in Cambodia were working more hours than the limit.<sup>[256]</sup> During interviews, it was observed that even in prominent sectors such as the construction sector in India<sup>[257]</sup>, garment sector in Bangladesh<sup>[258]</sup> and tourism sector in Thailand<sup>[259]</sup>, longer working hours, lesser or no overtime payment, and non-compliance with

safety standards were common occurrences.



*"My boss often forces me to work overtime without pay even when I do not want to. I don't dare to refuse him because I fear losing my job. On some days, I feel so tired, but I still have to do overtime and if not my boss will cut my one day salary."*

*- Bora, labourer in the construction sector, Cambodia*



Country	Regulations on overtime as per law	What does the primary data say? <sup>[xxii]</sup>
Bangladesh	The Labour Act 2006 states, in respect of overtime work, the worker will be entitled to an allowance at the rate of twice his ordinary rate of the basic wage for hours worked.	76% respondents did not mention receiving any overtime payment for additional working hours in Bangladesh
Cambodia	Cambodia Employment Labour law states employers are required to pay at least 150% of the usual wage to employees who work overtime in the day. However, for those who work overtime during the night (22:00 to 05:00), the overtime rate is 200% of the wage.	66% respondents did not mention receiving any overtime payment for additional working hours in Cambodia
India	The Wage Code states that when a worker works in excess of a normal working day, he is entitled to overtime, which must be at least 200% of the normal wage rate.	48% respondents did not mention receiving any overtime payment for additional working hours in India. Most of them worked in Brick Kilns, where overtime isn't a practice.
Indonesia	The Manpower Act states an employee is entitled to overtime pay if the work time exceeds the 7 hours in a six-day workweek or 8 hours in a five-day workweek. Overtime is paid at 1.5 times the hourly wage for the first hour and double the hourly wage thereafter.	72% respondents did not mention receiving any overtime payment for additional working hours in Indonesia.
Nepal	The Labour Act of 2017 states for overtime, the employee shall not be employed more than 4 hours a day and 24 hours a week, paying to the labour remuneration at a rate of 1.5 times the basic remuneration received during regular hours of work.	94% respondents did not mention receiving any overtime payment for additional working hours in Nepal
Thailand	The Law Protection Act, 1998 states for monthly staff overtime on a normal working day is 1.5 times the normal hourly rate. However, on a weekly holiday (such as Saturday or Sunday, depending on what is declared as the weekly holiday) or a public holiday, the overtime rate is 3 times the employee's normal hourly rate.	20% respondents did not mention receiving any overtime payment for additional working hours in Thailand

Table 4.5: Overtime payment in selected countries

<sup>[xxii]</sup> We are aware that our sample is small and not representative, however we have provided our findings to give a glimpse to a wider problem.

### 3.3. Minimum wage

Minimum wages play an essential role in helping reduce poverty and inequality across countries. Minimum wages exist in over 90% of the ILO member states.<sup>[260]</sup> Set by governments, minimum wages could either be uniform or defined based on different factors such as the sector of work, region, or skill level. It is observed that uniform wage rate systems usually do not include the complexities of a country as they do not account for factors which determine their difference; therefore, a complex wage system might be more inclusive. However, it must be noted, the likelihood of discrimination can be more prominent under complex wage systems, such as lower minimum wage rates being instated for female-dominated sectors.<sup>[261]</sup>

In India, Thailand, and Indonesia, a mixed system of wage rates is present by region, sector, and level of skills. In Bangladesh, the wage system is defined according to the sector of work; Nepal has a uniform wage rate system set up with one national minimum wage, and Cambodia has a set uniform wage rate system for only garment sector workers.<sup>[262]</sup>

Exclusion of certain sectors from minimum wage is a highly debated issue as globally, many countries exclude certain professions such as agricultural and domestic workers. For example, only some states in India include domestic workers in its Minimum Wage Boards. However, even in India, domestic workers are excluded from several labour laws as the definitions of 'workmen', 'employer' and 'establishment' are limited.<sup>[263]</sup> Even though Nepal has a provision to provide a separate minimum wage set for domestic workers, it is yet to do so.<sup>[264]</sup> Since they are unregistered and unregulated, their working conditions entirely depend on the employer. As a result, they work long hours with little pay and limited access to social protection schemes.<sup>[265]</sup>



*"I worked there for about 3 months, but I was only paid IDR 1.7 million. I was promised a salary of IDR 1.8 million (124 USD) per month, but when I arrived, my employer told me that they'd only pay IDR 1.5 million (103 USD) monthly. I was also surprised to know that I had to do a lot of tasks. The employment agency only told me that I would be required to cook and do a little bit of cleaning, but in reality, I had to do everything from A to Z."*

*- Puji, domestic worker in Indonesia*



Similarly, Cambodia's Minimum Wage Act is limited to garment and textile workers.<sup>[266]</sup> In Bangladesh, agricultural labourers employed in fields with less than 10 workers are excluded from the minimum wage act.<sup>[267]</sup> Such exclusion can lead to the exploitation of workers. For example, exploitation is prominent in the construction sector of Cambodia as it isn't covered under the Minimum Wage Act.<sup>[268]</sup>

In certain sectors, wages are fixed according to the number of pieces produced by workers. These workers, called the piece-rate workers, usually belong to excluded sections of the society and are women.<sup>[269]</sup> **According to Cambodia's labour law, if workers produce fewer pieces than the minimum wage rate, then wages should be adjusted according to the minimum wage. Such a provision is not mentioned in any other labour law. The compliance with labour laws in Cambodia has been attributed to their garment factories. In 1999, they entered a bilateral agreement with the United States wherein it was decided that if Cambodia complied with its labour laws and maintained international labour standards at the workplace, the quota for garments exports to the US would increase.**<sup>[270]</sup>

Country	Minimum wages as per law	Minimum wages in USD	What does the primary data say? <sup>[xxiii]</sup>
Bangladesh	General Worker, Ready Made Garment Sector (RMG) worker: Taka 8000 per month General Worker, Rice Mill: Taka 7810 per month General Worker Cold Storage: Taka 6050 per month Except workers engaged in agriculture and domestic work, all privately-owned industries unskilled workers: Taka 3000 per month	RMG: Approx. 93 USD per month Rice Mill: Approx. 91 USD per month Cold storage: Approx. 70 USD per month Others: Approx. 31 USD per month	18% of migrant workers earned below the minimum wage in Bangladesh
Cambodia	The Minimum Wage Law 2018 states a wage shall be at least equal to a minimum wage which is the statutory lowest wage and is determined by Prakas of the Minister of the Ministry in Charge of Labour	(1) Regular workers - USD194 per month; (2) Probationary workers - USD192 per month.	52% migrant workers salary was below the minimum wage in Cambodia
India	Wage Code, 2019 established that no employer shall pay wages less than the minimum rate of wages notified by the appropriate state government	Construction sector: Maharashtra-Unskilled: USD 137 Semi-skilled: USD 144 Skilled: USD 153 Himachal Pradesh-Unskilled: USD 117 Semi-skilled: USD 124 Skilled: USD 135 Brick Kilns (per 1000 bricks) <sup>[xxiv]</sup> : Bihar: USD 3.72 Jharkhand: USD 3.56 West Bengal: USD 3.18	48% migrant workers salary was below the minimum wage in India
Indonesia	In destination location (Batam): IDR 4,130,279/month (starting 2020) (Indonesian Bureau of Statistics, Riau Islands Province). In source location (Banyumas): IDR 1,970,000/month as per 2021 (Indonesian Bureau of Statistics, Central Java Province).	Destination location (Batam): Approx. 287 USD per month Source location (Banyumas): Approx. 137 USD	78% migrant workers salary was below the minimum wage in Indonesia
Nepal	NPR 17310 per month (for the current fiscal year - 2021/22)	Approx. 145 USD per month	64% migrant workers salary was below the minimum wage in Nepal
Thailand	9,900 Baht/month for Chachoengsao Province 9,390 Baht/month for Pattani Province	Chachoengsao Province: Approx. 330 USD per month Pattani Province: 312 USD per month	6% migrant workers salary was below the minimum wage in Thailand

Table 4.6: Minimum wages in selected countries

An estimated 266 million workers globally are paid below the minimum wage rate in their country either because of non-compliance or lack of coverage in certain sectors. A survey conducted with the garment sector in Asia found non-compliance rates with minimum wages highest in India (50.7%). While in others, such as Indonesia, Thailand, and

Cambodia, they were 39.1%, 37.5% and 25.6%, respectively.<sup>[271]</sup> In Bangladesh, 64% of those working in RMG, Construction, Tea Plantation and Leather sectors were paid at or above the minimum wage.<sup>[272]</sup> In India, 14% of informal workers, 50% of self-employed and 24% casual workers earned the same or less than the prescribed minimum wage.<sup>[273]</sup>

<sup>[xxiii]</sup> We are aware that our sample is small and not representative, however we have provided our findings to give a glimpse to a wider problem.

<sup>[xxiv]</sup> Minimum wage for Brick Kilns where some workers had migrated was unavailable for some work.

### 3.4. Unsafe Working Conditions

In Asia, working conditions have been defined as dismal with unsafe workplaces.<sup>[284]</sup> Unsafe working conditions in developing countries can be attributed to the extra production cost as firms believe that the financial cost to prevent an occupational accident is higher than the cost of accidents.<sup>[285]</sup> A key responsibility of employers across countries is to ensure the safety of their workers. However, in many, this regulation is the least implemented. For example, piece-rate workers are highly precarious. Incidents of injuries are higher in such sectors because they might end up injuring themselves to achieve targets. Another instance is that of sugarcane farming in India, where the wage is decided according to the piece-rate system. Evidence from sugarcane fields of Aurangabad district in Maharashtra observed farmers get a mere Rs. 250 (3.26\$), for cutting and wrapping a ton (1000kg) of sugarcane, irrespective of the number of people involved in the work. Farmers work endlessly to meet such targets, even in extreme weather conditions. They are engaged in such tasks as a family where even children are employed to meet the targets.<sup>[xxv]</sup> Similar instances are observed in brick kiln, where piece-rate system is followed.



*“Sometimes bricks would fall on us, and we get badly injured. The employers didn’t pay for our medical expenses. So, we had to manage it from the little money we earned.”*

*- Raj, worker in brick kiln, India*



**However, evidence from rubber plantations in Indonesia has suggested that investing in workers’ health increases productivity and the resulting benefits are higher than the costs employer had to invest. A cost-benefit analysis of the intervention indicated that the ratio of cost to the benefit of investing in workers’ health was a whopping 1:280.<sup>[286]</sup>**

Unsafe working conditions in the informal sector are common, leading to injuries and deaths at workplace. Even though each sample country has a law for occupational health and safety at workplace, data shows that non-compliance has led to multiple injuries and deaths across countries.

Occupational health and safety are one of the core principles set forth by ILO. It states that injuries leading to losses in terms of compensation, lost workdays, interrupted production and health care expenditure represent almost 4% of the world’s annual GDP. Workplace accidents and death are preventable and can be achieved by implementing sound reporting and inspection practices. **ILO Convention no. 155 states the guiding principles for occupational health and safety at the workplace.<sup>[277]</sup> However, none of the countries have ratified this convention.<sup>[278]</sup>**

*(Refer to the Table 4.7: Number of accidents and injuries at the workplace in selected countries)*

The global workforce sustains up to 370 million injuries and 3 million deaths in the workplace every year. It has been argued that this number is higher since many injuries or accidents go unreported. The working conditions are worse in developing countries where every 4 out of 5 workers work in hazardous conditions without proper safety equipment. Migrant and seasonal workers, women and children are most likely to work in the most hazardous and toxic work environment.



*“We do not provide any safety and security measures to the worker. We only provide them with helmets for protecting themselves while working on the construction site. We ask them to be safe while working on the site. In case of an accident, the house owner provides help for the treatment. We have not provided the worker with the insurance facility since they do not work with us for a long time. However, I have told them about the insurance scheme and its benefits.”*

*- Vishal Rai, contractor in the construction sector, Nepal*



<sup>[xxv]</sup> This information was gathered from a field visit by Garima Sahni, Jan Sahas team member.

Country	What does the law say?	Number of occupational deaths (attributable) (2016) <sup>[279]</sup>
Bangladesh	According to the amendment of 2013 which focused on occupational health and safety made creation of safety committees in factories with more than 50 workers mandatory, time period of compensation for work related death was reduced and inspections were given high priority.	49234
Cambodia	According to the labour law of Cambodia, an employer must maintain a working environment which is safe for all workers. All establishment and workplaces must be clean and maintain standards for hygiene and sanitation.	3179
India	According to the Occupational Health, Safety and Working Conditions Code, every employer should ensure a workplace which is free from hazards which cause or are likely to cause injury or occupational disease to the employees.	416910
Indonesia	According to the labour law in Indonesia, occupational safety and health initiative should guarantee safety and increase the level of health of workers/ labourers and prevent occupational accidents and diseases, control hazards in the workplace and promote health, medical care and rehabilitation.	102523
Nepal	According to the law in Nepal, the main employer should take the responsibility of making arrangements of workplace safety and health.	9726
Thailand	According to the labour law in Thailand, the employer should provide safety tools and equipments and set the standards of occupational safety in their establishment according to the standards prescribed by the government.	19559

Table 4.7: Number of accidents and injuries at the workplace in selected countries

### Notable Positive Trends: Labour laws and impacts on internal migrants. What have countries been doing to protect their workers?

#### What have countries been doing to protect their workers?

- ① A provision exists for interstate migrants in India where in case of death of migrant workers, authorities of source and destination location as well as next of kin need to be informed.
- ② Cambodian labour law has a special provision for piece-rate workers where if workers produce fewer pieces than the minimum wage rate, then wages should be adjusted.
- ③ All countries have special provision for working women. For example, in Indonesia, the employer is required to provide roundtrip travel to women who work between 11:00 pm to 7:00 am, while in Bangladesh, consent from women is required in case they are required to work after 6pm. However, it is also important to note that many times as a result of these special provisions, employers are hesitant to employ female workers as they add on extra production cost. *"We usually don't hire female construction workers on site. According to the Indian labour law, we are required to give them special provisions such as creches for their children, feeding rooms etc. All of these are extra costs and also take up a lot of space on the construction site. Hirers don't say it directly but we usually make it clear that we won't hire female workers."* An employee from a construction company in India.





# IMPACT OF MIGRATION INDONESIA



## Saira\* - a migrant working as a domestic worker in Indonesia

*"I migrated to Jakarta and received employment as a domestic worker with the help of an employment agency. They informed me that I would live with the family and cook for them. In reality, I had to do all household chores from mopping the floor, doing laundry, sweeping the yard, the first and second floors, tidying up the rooms, making the bed, cleaning up the swimming room and bringing some food to the second floor. Even after making me do so much work, I was given very little food and no rest. I lost over 10kgs in 3 months! My employers were extremely loud and violent. If I didn't know how to do a task, they would scream at me. Once, I broke a vase by mistake and they threatened me with a salary cut.*

*After the first month of working there, I asked for my salary but they refused and said they would give it later as they are going to Bandung. I just kept silent and waited patiently. The next time I asked, they said as you aren't going home right now, we will give it to you later. I couldn't do much and all of this was getting unbearable so I asked if I could leave after one month but they didn't allow me to go and asked me to pay them IDR 2.5 million (170\$) if I insisted on leaving. After working there for three months I finally convinced them to let me leave. Even then, they handed me my salary only a few minutes before my bus departed. Earlier they had told me that I would get IDR 4 million (272\$) for 3 months but I was only paid IDR 150,000 (10.23\$). They said they had deducted my salary to pay for the recruitment fee to the employment agency and the WiFi even though I didn't even own a phone.*

*I sold satay before migrating, and it was also exhausting but when you work under mental pressure, that makes a huge difference. I think I would've stayed if they'd been nice to me but there was a lot of mental burden so I just went home."*



*\*This story is anonymous and Saira is a pseudonym.*





## Social Security Schemes

Social protection schemes build resilience for underprivileged communities and reduce inequalities when implemented correctly. However, access to social security schemes is a challenge globally. Social protection schemes' coverage and benefit level are lower in developing and middle-income countries than in developed countries. Data shows that less than 50% of poor people have access to schemes in lower-middle-income countries, while only a staggering 18% in lower-income countries. Seasonal migrants, who comprise one of the most vulnerable sections of society, are often the most neglected in terms of access to social protection.<sup>[280]</sup> Thereby, aggravating their already harsh conditions in the destination location. Their limited access to social protection can be associated with their 'invisibility' in the cities and high mobility. Furthermore, since most countries do not design schemes with internal migrants in mind, it becomes harder to meet their unique challenges.

This chapter focuses on social protection schemes in the six sample countries and analyses them in the context of internal migrants' predicament. Our findings aim to shed light on access and awareness to social protection schemes for migrants across the countries and how their deplorable working conditions make them more in need of a safety net.

Social protection policies provide a much-needed safety net to the most vulnerable population of a country. Asian Development Bank (ADB) defines social protection as a “*set of policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labour markets, diminishing people’s exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against hazards and interruption/loss of income.*”<sup>[281]</sup>

Countries with high coverage and benefit of social protection schemes can reduce poverty gaps by 45%. Therefore, social protection schemes not only assist in building resilience during times of external and internal shocks, but also benefit by reducing poverty gaps and inequalities, increasing productivity and quality of life.<sup>[282]</sup>

Social security schemes are essential in helping migrants supplement their income and ensuring they remain resilient even in times of a crisis. This section attempts to understand access to social protection and associated barriers for migrant workers.

## 1. Types of social security schemes

Across countries, four main types of social security schemes exist which assist vulnerable populations. These include – food assistance, cash transfer (conditional and unconditional), employment and health insurance schemes.

Food assistance schemes provide the most basic level of social protection, and it takes a multifaceted approach to support and empower food insecure communities. Scheme access addresses short-term challenges and further aid individuals to find solutions for long-term causes that lead to hunger.<sup>[283]</sup> A robust food assistance scheme for internal migrants can therefore be helpful in providing the most basic level of assistance. For example, the Indian government formulated a scheme ‘One Nation One Ration Card’ through which internal migrants can procure ration from anywhere in the country.<sup>[284]</sup> However, it must be noted, ONORC is still in its nascent stages with numerous implementation challenges, both at the supply and demand side.<sup>[285]</sup> Nepal added ‘The Right to Food’ as a

part of its new constitution only in 2015<sup>[286]</sup>, and the Right to Food Act was passed in 2018.<sup>[287]</sup> However, since then, it has failed to make any concrete headway in policies and interventions for the same. Even though the law includes provisions to identify priority households and design food-related interventions, Nepal’s food schemes have been limited to mid-day meals for children and have failed to recognise and formulate an action plan for vulnerable households.<sup>[288]</sup> Cambodia and Thailand <sup>[289]</sup> do not have universal food assistance schemes in its social protection framework. In Cambodia, there is an existing National Food Security and Nutrition policy for food assistance. However, the scheme has followed a sectoral approach with food distribution in only a few provinces and investment in agricultural output through farmers, as Cambodia is primarily an agrarian economy. The policy is limited to targeted groups such as IDPoor<sup>[xxvi]</sup> households.<sup>[290]</sup> In Thailand, schemes such as school lunch programs are specific to priority groups that have helped the country drop child malnutrition drastically from 36% to 8.42% as of 2014.<sup>[291]</sup> Additionally, it has a pro-producer food security policy, which includes massive investment in agricultural infrastructure, tax relief and agriculture credit to farmers that has helped drop hunger ratios drastically.<sup>[292]</sup>



*“I never got any support from the government during COVID-19 as I do not have IDPoor card. Due to extreme financial distress, some workers even tried to illegally migrate back to Thailand because no jobs were available in their hometown. During lockdowns when I had lost my job, some support from the government in the form of food assistance, such as uncooked rice and others, would have been very helpful.”*

*-Chanthou, construction worker, Cambodia*



Cash transfer schemes in countries are designed to uniquely cater to their poor population. Conditional cash transfers provide cash directly to households if specific conditions are met such as

<sup>[xxvi]</sup> IDPoor is a poverty identification program in Cambodia, schemes for the economically disadvantaged are often linked to. For more information check: <https://www.idpoor.gov.kh/>

attendance at health clinics. Unconditional cash transfers, on the other hand, focus on grants to all vulnerable populations, for example, pensions to senior citizens, widows and disabled.<sup>[293]</sup> All countries provide either conditional, unconditional or both types of cash transfer schemes to their vulnerable populations.<sup>[294] [295] [296] [297] [298] [299]</sup>

Further, even though all selected countries have health insurance schemes, only Thailand has been successful in its implementation of providing universal health coverage to almost its entire population.<sup>[300]</sup>

Employment schemes, another critical safety net for the poor in times of crises, exist only in countries within South Asia. In Bangladesh,<sup>[301]</sup> India<sup>[302]</sup> and Nepal<sup>[303]</sup> employment generation schemes provide guaranteed employment of 100 days in a year to their population, however, they

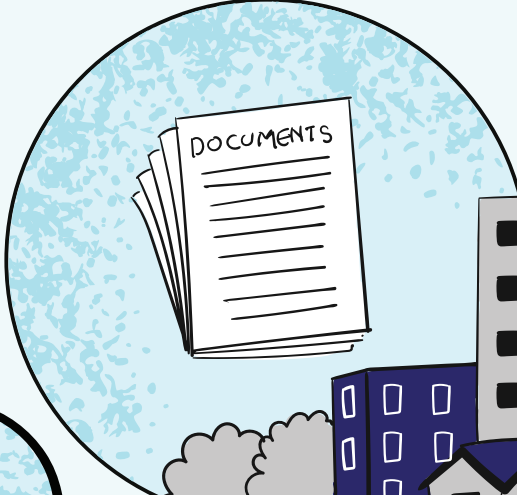
are only limited to rural areas in Bangladesh and India. While Indonesia doesn't have employment-generating schemes, the government provides skilling courses to workers in formal sector jobs under the Program Kartu Prakerja (Pre-Employment Card Programme). Recipients of this scheme also receive monetary benefits after completion of the course.<sup>[304]</sup> Cambodia and Thailand<sup>[305]</sup> do not have employment generation schemes in its social protection framework. In Cambodia, employment generation schemes have focused on a skill-based approach by initiating a government-run program for formal and informal sector workers.<sup>[306]</sup>

Country	What type of schemes are provided across countries?			
	Food assistance schemes	Conditional or unconditional cash transfer schemes	Employment schemes	Health insurance schemes
Bangladesh	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cambodia	✗	✓	✗	✓
India	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indonesia	✓	✓	✗	✓
Nepal	✗	✓	✓	✓
Thailand	✗	✓	✗	✓

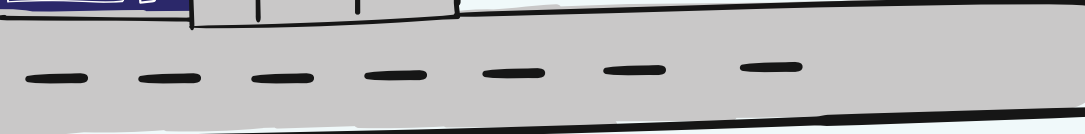
Table 5.1: Existing schemes in selected countries



Illustration 4: Internal migrants face numerous barriers in accessing social security schemes, which include, lack of portability, residential documents, complex registration procedures and lack of information on schemes.



DOCUMENTS



LACK OF RESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS



LACK OF INFORMATION

## 2. Access barriers in social security schemes for internal migrants

Access to social security schemes is a major challenge globally. More than half of the world population lacks access to any kind of social protection scheme, and most of them are from the informal sector in developing countries.<sup>[307]</sup> Despite the expansion of social security coverage during the pandemic, 4 billion people globally still lack access to any scheme.<sup>[308]</sup> This section tries to understand the different access barriers that affect internal migrants across countries. However, it is important to note that majority of studies have looked at access barriers for vulnerable communities more broadly, and few of them have directly looked at access for internal migrants as a separate category.

### 2.1. Portability constraints:

Portability benefits, i.e., the ability to access schemes regardless of location, exist in many countries. However, implementation gaps create significant barriers for migrants. Where portability doesn't exist, migrants become 'ineligible' by default owing to their transitory nature of jobs. For example, in Bangladesh, portability in social security schemes was not available. This was a result of scheme design in the country as their coverage of vulnerable populations is based on geographical area.<sup>[309]</sup>

“We received no assistance from the government, non-governmental organisation, or any other entity. Government agents offered assistance when we resided in Dhaka, but we did not receive it since we were not residents of the city. However, because we stayed in Dhaka, we received no help from the village.”

- Abdullah, garment worker in RMG sector, Bangladesh

Country	Portability of schemes		
	Ration schemes	Conditional and unconditional Cash Transfer schemes	Health insurance schemes
Bangladesh	✗	✗	✗
Cambodia	NA	✓	✓
India	✓	✓	✓
Indonesia	✓	✓	✓
Nepal	NA	✓	✗
Thailand	NA	✓	✓

Table 5.2: Portability provision in existing schemes in selected countries

Evidence from Cambodia<sup>[310]</sup>, India, Indonesia, and Thailand<sup>[311]</sup> suggest that benefits from schemes can be availed regardless of the migrant's location. However, challenges exist because of complex registration processes and limited knowledge of social security schemes.<sup>[312]</sup> For instance, in India, portability exists for ration and health insurance schemes. However, it has been estimated that only 48% of migrant households were even aware of the portability of ration cards.<sup>[xxvii]</sup> Further, it was observed that among those who reported access, most were intra-state migrants and the rural poor.<sup>[313] [314]</sup> Under Ayushman Bharat, a health scheme, only 40,000 people availed the portability benefits of the scheme in the first year of its launch.<sup>[315]</sup> Limited access can be attributed to a lack of awareness<sup>[316]</sup> mainly because authorities do not provide any effective information about social protection schemes and proper documents amongst migrants.<sup>[317] [318]</sup>

**Schemes in Indonesia have similar portability constraints, such as the healthcare insurance scheme where access is conditional outside the area of registration.<sup>[319]</sup> Migrants can only use the scheme in the destination location three times, after which they are given two options – pay for the healthcare just as regular patients or change the place of registration in the system to destination location. Even**

<sup>[xxvii]</sup> The study primarily focused on the experiences of intra state migrants and this stat might not be reflective of the awareness among inter state migrants

[https://policyinsights.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ONORC-report\\_April-2022-2.pdf](https://policyinsights.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ONORC-report_April-2022-2.pdf)



**if they opt for the second option, they must wait for a month before they can continue availing the insurance. For other schemes that provide direct government aid, the lack of migrant registries and the ability of local government bodies to keep track of migrants' current residence has restricted access for them.**

“No, I didn't receive any support. I think it's because I move around a lot, so the head of the neighbourhood doesn't have my data.”

- Siti, domestic worker, Indonesia

## 2.2. Lack of residential documents and other eligibility challenges

Social security schemes by design is often exclusionary that lead to restricted access for migrants. Schemes tied to eligibility criteria such as local residential certificates and proof of employment in specific sector are a couple of examples.

Even in cases where portability exist, one of the key challenges faced is the lack of residential proof required for registration at destination locations by migrants.<sup>[320]</sup> For example, in India, during the pandemic, it was observed that many migrants were unable to access ration at subsidised rates in cities as they had left their existing ration card with their families in source locations and did not have local residential or identity proof to access government benefits.<sup>[321]</sup> Similar issues are faced when inter-state migrants try to avail benefits of state schemes.

Schemes designed for certain sectors or types of employment can lead to the exclusion of migrants.<sup>[322]</sup> Such as the case of Cambodia, where informal sector workers do not have coverage under the National Social Security Fund (NSSF). The NSSF provides healthcare support to only formal sector workers. Ongoing debates in Cambodia suggest that the inclusion

of the informal or unorganised sector would help support a large population, as 93.1% of the country's workforce is in the informal sector.<sup>[323]</sup>

“We are negotiating with the NSSF department in order to expand their insurance coverage to those who work in other sectors, especially informal sectors such as construction, family-owned restaurants/café or bar, and resorts. Up to present, there is low interest among workers in the informal sector to pay from their pocket to buy health care insurance (NSSF). Without employers' support, workers would not want to buy. This is also the challenge that we are working on. The recent problem is with construction site, specifically small-scale private contractors. When a worker on a small site gets into an accident, the contractor is not willing to pay for his medical cost.”

- Huon Soeur, Deputy Director of the General Department of Labour, Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training of Cambodia

## 2.3. Challenges related to complex registration processes

Complex registration procedures include different stages from a challenging application process to availing of benefits. For example, prerequisites such as the presence of migrants in source locations during the application procedure. In Cambodia, one of the key reasons for them being left out from receiving access to the IDpoor program is because of their high mobility. One in every four migrant in the country is impacted by exclusion under this program.<sup>[324]</sup>

The Building and Other Construction Workers' (BOCW) card, designed to benefit construction workers in India, is another critical example of complex registration procedures. Lack of uniformity in application procedures and eligibility exist since state boards issue the document. Additionally, to obtain the card, the worker is required to furnish a minimum of five documents,

which can increase in different states. Unavailability of documents such as the proof of employment certificate<sup>[xxviii]</sup> hampers their chances.<sup>[325]</sup> In other countries, similar instances of limited access because of complicated processes were observed.<sup>[326] [327]</sup>

## 2.4. Lack of information

Migrants tend to have lesser awareness of schemes in comparison to non-migrants. This could be because of limited information on schemes, registration procedures or benefit

claims.<sup>[328]</sup> Studies focusing on migrant workers' access to social protection schemes are largely unavailable except in India<sup>[329]</sup>. Therefore, we have looked at lack of information as a barrier for excluded groups here. Evidence shows that lack of awareness of a scheme is a primary reason for most not having access to schemes.<sup>[330]</sup> For example, the Nepal government's Social Security Fund, launched in 2018, received criticism for not reaching coverage targets. The main reason behind this was poor knowledge dissemination of application and benefit delivery procedures among the target audience.<sup>[331]</sup>

### Notable Positive Trends: Social security schemes

#### What have countries been doing to provide their workers with social security?

- ① Thailand has been able to increase its access to healthcare, almost its entire population is covered under the scheme. Notable provisions which has made this possible include: a) increasing geographical access by giving priority to primary healthcare centres and increasing the supply of primary health care providers outside of large urban centres and improving the rural health infrastructure, b) expanding financial access: schemes which were specially designed for lower income groups such as the 30 Baht scheme where citizens had to pay a meagre 30 Thai Baht (0.86\$) for each visit.<sup>[332]</sup>
- ② In 2021, the Union Government of India created the Eshram portal, an Aadhaar linked database of all unorganised workers including migrants. It is the first such database which aims to extend social security benefits to registered workers. Over 27 crore workers have been registered on the portal as of June 2022.<sup>[333]</sup>

<sup>[xxviii]</sup> To be obtained from employers however becomes difficult because of the nature of short-term employment in the construction sector



### **Aranya\* - a migrant working in a food processing factory in Thailand**

*“After completing my schooling, I went to a vocational school for two years but decided to leave in between as I wanted to earn an income for my family. At that time, my mother was the sole earner, she worked very hard but her health was deteriorating, so I wanted to support her. After working in my village for two years, I finally migrated in 2014 as I received employment in Lad Kwang at a food processing factory. I had heard about this job through villagers. At the beginning I moved alone, then eventually I met my husband and now we have an 11 year old son.*

*I work in quality assurance at the factory, assisting in detecting the quality of all processes: mixing the materials, hygiene and packaging. I took the job as it provided me with good benefits and the trade union is strong. Since this job is in the formal sector, I am covered under the Social Security Fund. The company provides all the mandated benefits such as health insurance, social security, provident fund, transportation, etc. We also receive direct food assistance in the form of money (40\$ per month), free rice and drinking water from them.*

*Even during Covid-19, we received support from the government via the 3,000 Baht (87\$) scheme. Under this, we received cash allowance on a mobile application for 6 months. We were able to buy items by paying only 50 percent of the price and another 50 percent was contributed by the government. Even the health insurance during the pandemic helped us a lot as it covers my husband and my son. We can access private hospitals nationwide. When my son and I got COVID last year, we were able to go to a private hospital. My job and migration here has been beneficial, I am doing better financially and the additional benefits have helped me save to buy a house.”*



*\*This story is anonymous and Aranya is a pseudonym.*



# Conclusion

Human mobility within domestic boundaries for work, marriage or as a result of natural disasters has been taking place since time immemorial. The mass exodus during the pandemic brought the dismal conditions and plight of migrant workers to the forefront, even though internal migration has been a reality in all countries for decades. To address internal migration at a regional level, this report attempted to understand the causes, processes, impacts and challenges of migration across six countries in Asia.

Research has shown that agriculture failures and climate change have made rampant changes to rural life in the past few decades. Low crop productivity, lack of job opportunities, an increase in natural disasters and slow-onset changes have pushed those in rural areas into extreme financial distress. On top of this, the pandemic has further exacerbated workers' economic conditions as a result of job loss, decrease in wages and mobility restrictions. Migration has been a common coping strategy for these excluded groups. Remittances earned by migrants have been at the centre of addressing financial distress resulting from these factors. However, it must be noted that migration also has adverse impacts on migrants and their households. At the source, evidence suggests, women and children are burdened with extra responsibilities because of labour shortage as a result of migration that often affects their emotional well-being.

At destination, since several migrants are unskilled and without formal education, they end up working in informal sectors in poor working conditions receiving extremely low wages. Even in sectors where labour laws are applicable, evidence has shown that compliance across countries is questionable. Furthermore, as there is a lack of policies specifically catering to internal migrants, the unique challenges they face in destination locations often go unaddressed. Social security schemes can provide relief to the deplorable conditions of migrants at destination locations; however, access is often low because of several factors such as excessive conditionality, lack of documents, constant mobility of migrants, and issues with portability provision in schemes.

As the world deals with the dual challenge of climate change and the after-effects of the pandemic, safe and fair migration must be given its due importance by formulating policies that specifically address the needs of internal migrants. It is essential to understand that migration will continue for the years to come. It is inevitable. Therefore, the focus has to be on providing workers with better opportunities, conditions, safe passage, and support when they decide to migrate.

# Appendix 1

## Country-wise Methodology:

A country-wise methodology was developed to ensure standardisation across all the countries. First, two districts were selected in each country. Then, within each, a high migration source<sup>[xxx]</sup> sub-district and a high migration destination<sup>[xxx]</sup> sub-district were chosen (Figure 1).

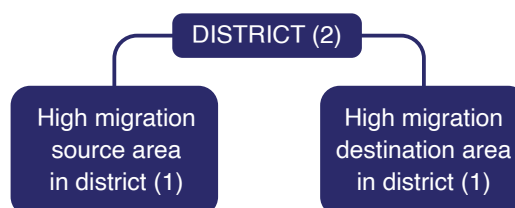


Figure:1

Based on the above methodology, the following districts<sup>[xxx]</sup> were chosen in each country:

Country	Source Location	Destination Location
India	Jharkhand, Gumla District	Maharashtra, Mumbai
Thailand	Sai Buri District	Ban Pho District
Cambodia	Sangkae district	Phnom Penh
Bangladesh	Dhaka District and Rajshahi District	Dhaka district and Rajshahi district
Indonesia	Banyumas regency	Batam city
Nepal	Kavrepalanchowk	Kathmandu district

<sup>[xxx]</sup> A source area was defined as a region which saw high levels of 'out-migration'

<sup>[xxx]</sup> A destination area was defined as a region which saw high levels of 'in-migration'

<sup>[xxx]</sup> Due to different geographical landscapes and administrative structures across the six countries, a district level sample was decided upon. 'District' as in the Indian context is termed differently across our sample countries - district (India), district (Nepal), District/municipality (Cambodia), Cities and Regencies (Indonesia) and Amphoe/district (Thailand).

### **Sample Design Methodology:**

While choosing our sample of migrants in each of the countries, different variables were pre-decided which needed to be considered in the primary data collection of internal labour migrants:

- **Gender:** Both female and male migrants were interviewed.
- **Duration of migrants:** Only seasonal/ circular labour migrants (less than one year) were interviewed.
- **Spatial patterns:** Since rural-urban migration was a prominent form of migration across countries, only migrants who moved to urban areas were interviewed in the sample.
- **Sectoral patterns:** 2-3 sectors were selected in each country after carefully examining census data, national surveys and micro studies to understand which sector employed most internal migrants. An attempt was made to find similar sectors across the countries for comparability. (For sector breakdown list, please look at Appendix 1)

*\*Names for all migrant workers in the sample have been changed to protect their identity*

# Appendix 2

## Socio-Demographics of sample

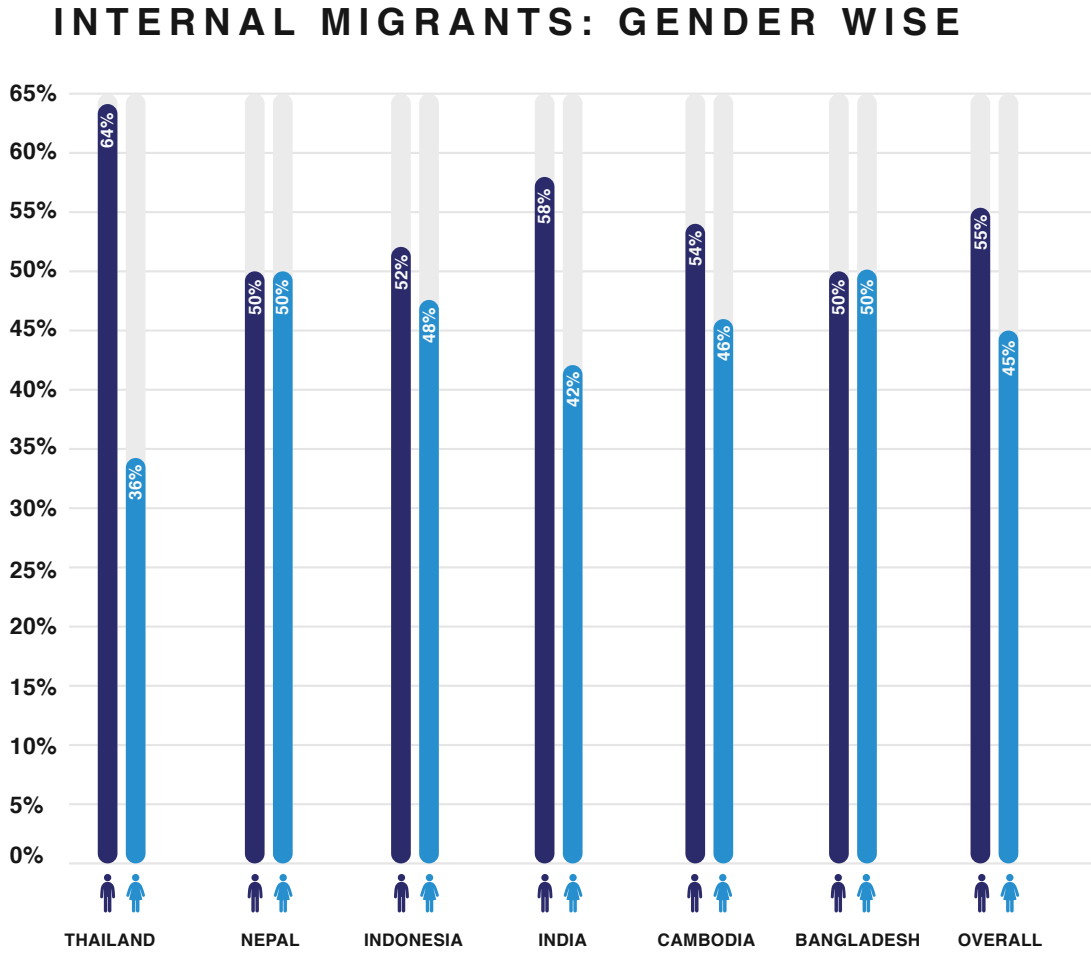


Figure 1: Gender wise distribution of sample



## INTERNAL MIGRANTS: RELIGION

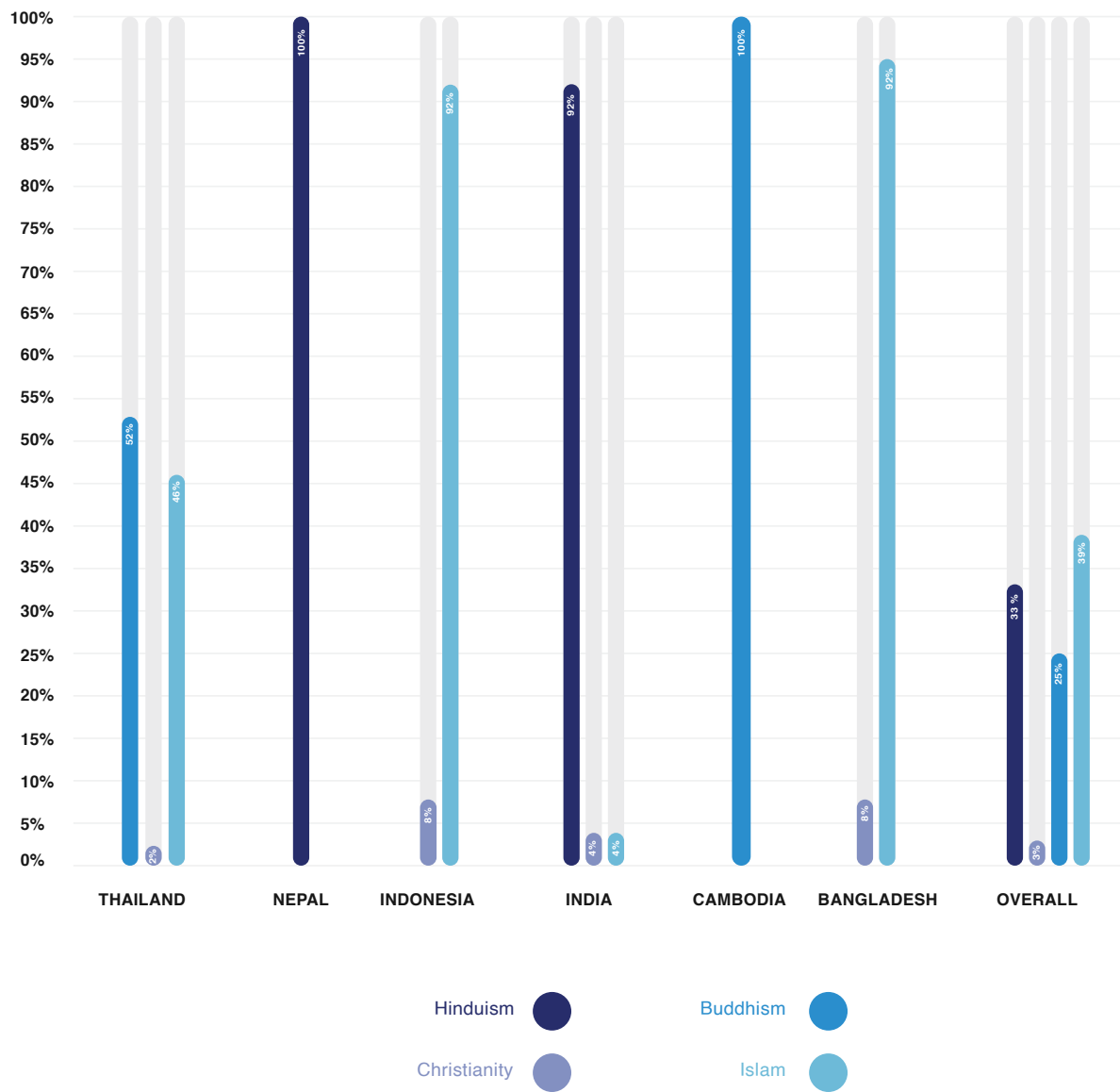


Figure II: Religion wise distribution of sample

## INTERNAL MIGRANTS: EDUCATION LEVELS

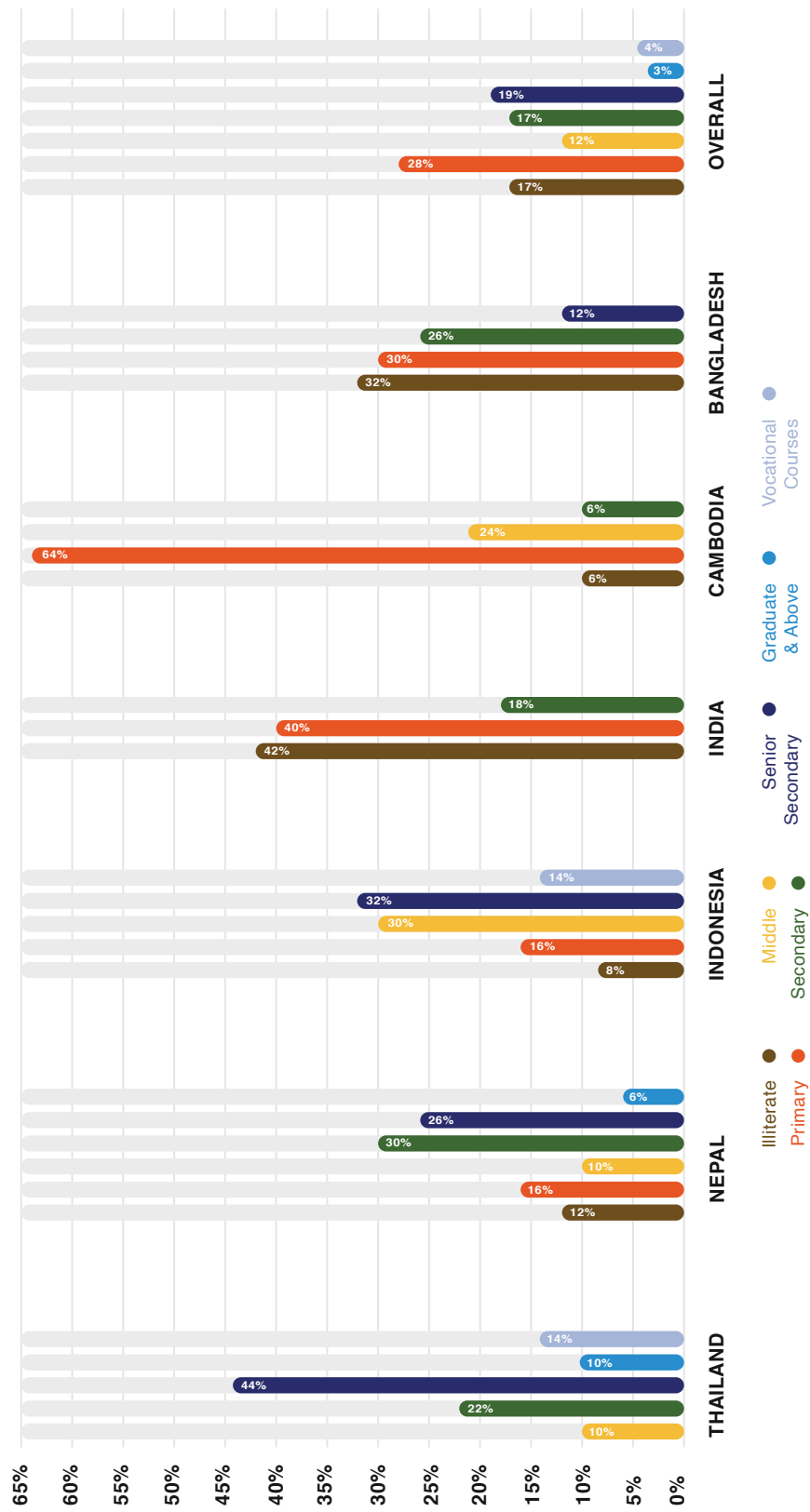


Figure III: Education level wise distribution of sample

# INTERNAL MIGRANTS: SECTOR OF WORK

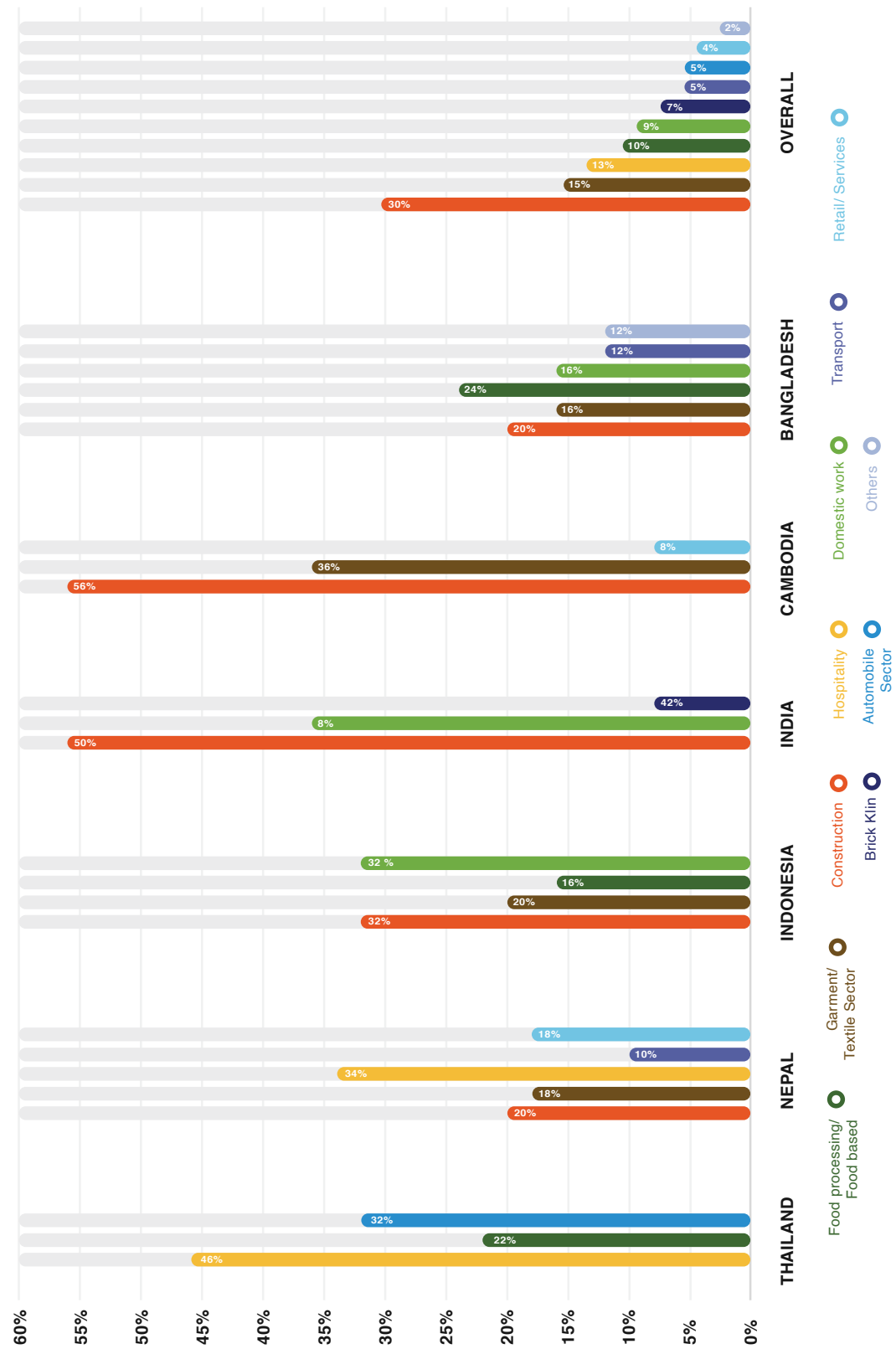


Figure IV: Sector of work wise distribution of sample

# INTERNAL MIGRANTS: MARITAL STATUS

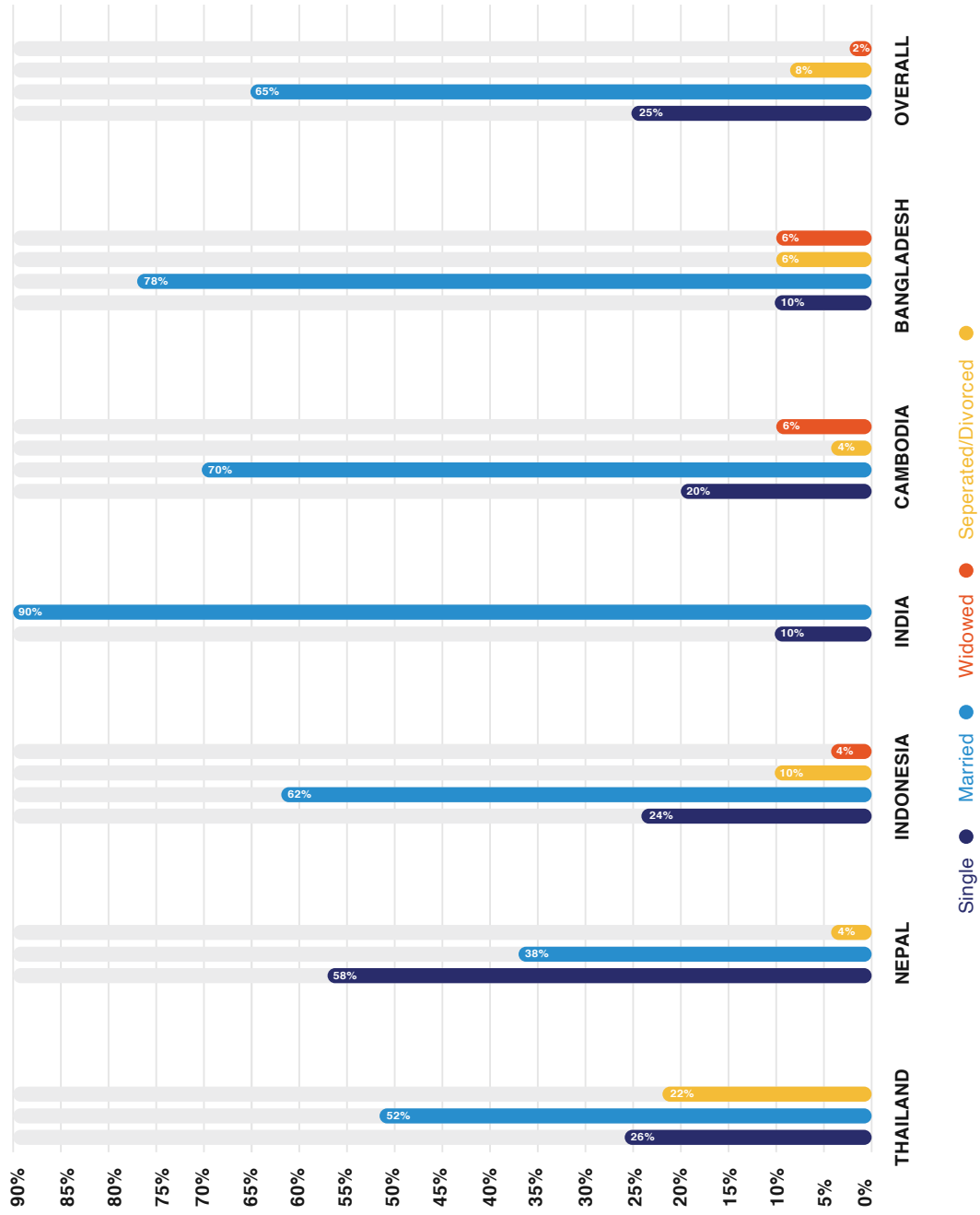


Figure V: Marital status distribution of sample

## INTERNAL MIGRANTS: AGE

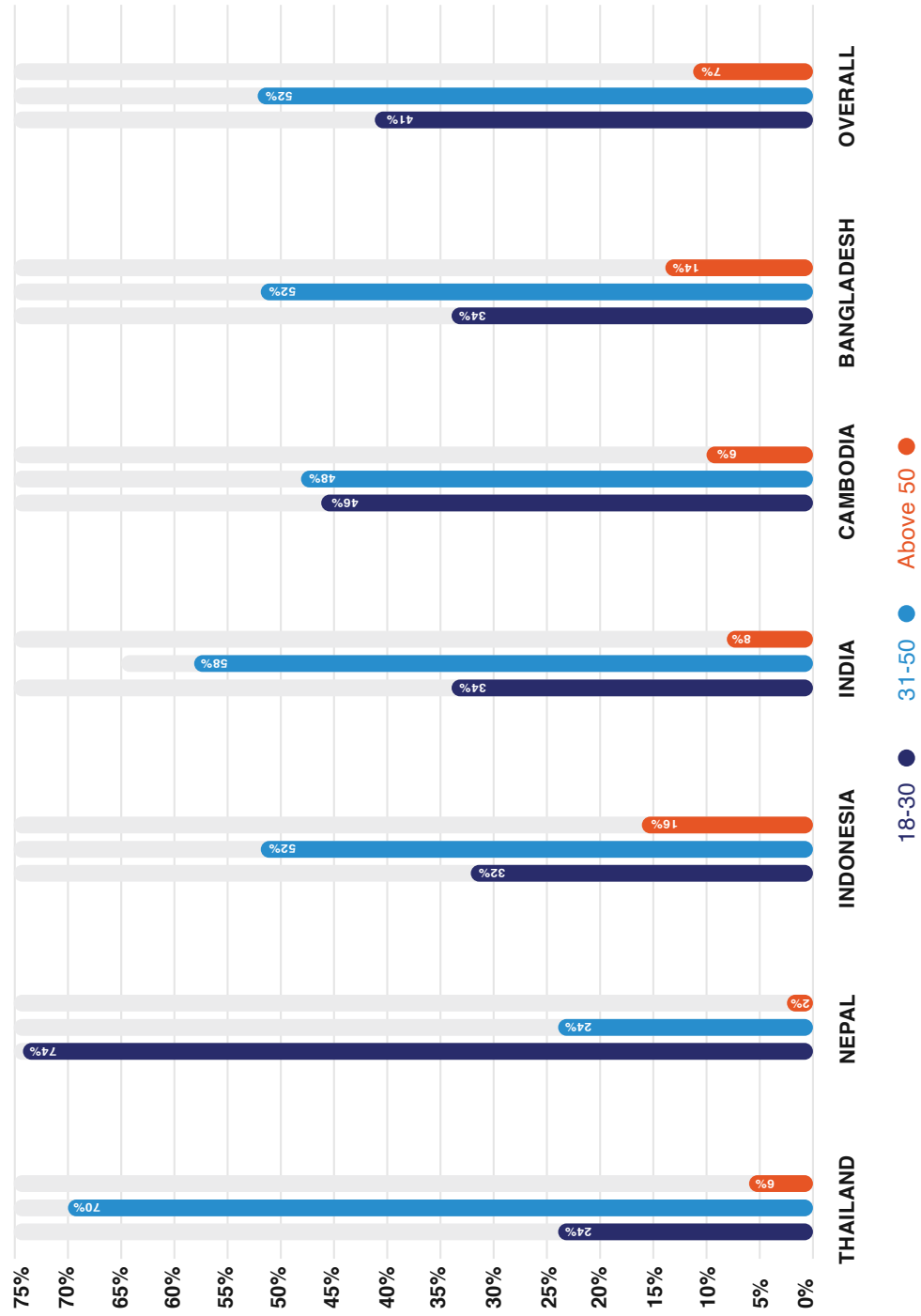


Figure VI: Age wise distribution of sample

## Appendix 3

Country	Estimated job loss due to pandemic (first wave)	Note
Bangladesh	12 to 17 million <sup>[334]</sup>	All workers without sector/ type of work differentiation – March and April 2020
Cambodia	390,000 to 570,000 <sup>[335]</sup>	All workers without sector/ type of work differentiation – July 2020
India	91 million <sup>[336]</sup>	Estimate of daily wage workers and hawkers – April 2020
Indonesia	2.56 million people <sup>[337]</sup>	All workers without sector/ type of work differentiation – November 2020
Nepal	1.6 to 2 million <sup>[338]</sup>	Informal sector workers – June 2020
Thailand	7-8 million <sup>[339]</sup>	All workers without sector/ type of work differentiation – July 2020

Table I: Job loss during first wave of covid-19

Country	Dates for first regulations/ lockdown imposition in each country (first wave)	Type of regulation <sup>[162]</sup>	Were domestic mobility restrictions in place?	Estimated internal return migrants' figures
Bangladesh	22 <sup>nd</sup> March to 30 <sup>th</sup> May 2020	Public transport limited	No	620,220 internal migrants <sup>xxxii</sup> <sup>[341]</sup>
Cambodia	15 <sup>th</sup> April to 1 <sup>st</sup> November 2021	Travel across provinces and between districts outside the capital of Phnom Penh restricted	Yes	No data available
India	24 <sup>th</sup> March to 30 <sup>th</sup> May 2020	All transport services were suspended	Yes	11.4 million <sup>[342]</sup>
Indonesia	24 <sup>th</sup> April to 31 <sup>st</sup> May 2020	All transport services were suspended	Yes	Around 14,000 internal migrants from the Wonogiri district of Central Java left Jakarta and its satellite cities. <sup>[343]</sup>
Nepal	24 <sup>th</sup> March to 21 <sup>st</sup> July 2020	All transport services suspended	Yes	600,000 migrants left Kathmandu. <sup>[344]</sup>
Thailand	26 <sup>th</sup> March to July 2020	Travel between provinces was limited	No	2 million workers <sup>[345]</sup>

Table II: Estimated return migrants because of lockdown

<sup>[xxxii]</sup> Based on data from key informants in 29 districts

# End Notes

- [1] International Labour Organization. "C189 - Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)". Retrieved from [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C189](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C189)
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- [4] International Organization for Migration. "Key Migration Terms." Retrieved from <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>.
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## **About Migrants Resilience Collaborative**

Migrants Resilience Collaborative (MRC) is a grassroots-led multi stakeholder collaborative of non-profit, philanthropic, and private sector actors focused on ensuring safety, security and mobility for vulnerable migrant families. Jan Sahas leads the collaborative with the Global Development Incubator (GDI) and the EdelGive Foundation as strategic partners. MRC aims to strengthen the resilience of 10 million migrant households across 100 districts and build the roles and systems required to enable social security and broader protections for 10s of millions more.

For more information, visit: [www.migrantresilience.org](http://www.migrantresilience.org)

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