

Voices of the Invisible Citizens II

One year of COVID-19

Are we seeing shifts in internal migration patterns in India?



Migrants Resilience Collaborative

June 2021

2B, Jangpura B-Block,
Mathura Road,
New Delhi: 110014
Tel: 011-43628209
Email id: info@jansahasindia.org
www.jansahasindia.org

Conceptualization and Research Design: Ashif Shaikh and Aarya Venugopal

Principal Authors: Aarya Venugopal and Parvathy J

Other Authors: Evlyn Samuel and Ameena Kidwai

Design: Nikhil KC

Cover page photograph: Ashish Ramesh

Back cover page photograph: Sumit Singh

Data collection team:

Banda: Gautam, Md. Danish Khan, Sarita Shukla and Seema Devi; **Delhi:** Anjali Sharma, Arun Kumar, Geetanjali and Kamal Kumar; **Hazaribagh:** Anand Kumar, Jarina Khatun, Reeta Devi and Soni Kushwaha; **Hyderabad:** Brahmam, Prashanth. Sandeep and Vijay; **Mahbubnagar:** Amjad Hussain, Basheer and Bhaskar Reddy; **Mumbai:** Komal Ubale, Nikhil Wede, Rekha Abhang and Yojana Manjalkar; **Tikamgarh:** Priyanka Ahirwar, Rajesh Vanshkar, Rekha Raikwar, Brajesh Ahirwar

Thanks for the valuable feedback, and efforts in coordination and training: Garima S, Vriti S, Nitish Narain, Arpita Sarkar, Varun Behani, Garima Dhiman, V S Daniel, Vishal Jairam, Akshay Mere, Dharendra Kumar and others.



Photo Credit: Dhiraj Singh/UNDP India

Voices of the Invisible Citizens II
One year of COVID-19

Are we seeing shifts in internal migration patterns in India?

Preface

When Jan Sahas released the report “Voices of the Invisible Citizens” in April 2020, about the mass exodus of migrant workers from cities, we thought we were witnessing and documenting one of the worst human tragedies in recent history. Little did we know that the pandemic’s second wave in 2021 is going to be this devastating and debilitating not just for migrant and informal sector workers, but for the Indian society as a whole.

This second report “Voices of the Invisible Citizens” is a result of conversations with 2342 workers across five states over the course of the last year. Unlike last year, where all the interviews were done telephonically, this time we met workers in source villages and destination areas like construction sites, labour *chowks/nakas*, community settlements and textile clusters. Our research shows that the slow churn from the lockdown and a crumbling economy is having multifold impacts on the lives of the workers.

One of the most interesting changes has been that of migration patterns. Workers based on the experience of being left to fend for themselves on account of the lockdown in 2020 have learnt quickly and intuitively. 57% respondents reported a decrease in migration in the past year. Major reasons cited for this decrease are fear of contracting COVID (71%), lack of job opportunities at the destination (54%), and fear of sudden lockdowns (47%). 55% of the migrant workers who are venturing out reported that they are now moving for shorter durations than before. The data also shows that in states where employment is available workers prefer intra-district migration and states with abysmal employment opportunities are pushing workers out to other states at their own risk. These shifts in choosing which place to go to work and what kind of work is available has a negative cost to their daily earnings.

Overall, 73% of respondents reported that it has become harder to secure jobs in the past year, leading to a drastic reduction in their monthly income. 40% reported that the wage rates have remained the same over the last year, while 36% reported a decrease in the wage rates. Around 60% respondents reported that fewer women are migrating now compared to before the pandemic. Lack of employment at destination or source, mounting debt, fall in female labour participation are all serious signs of distress. These indicators are likely to have a much deeper negative impact on nutrition, body strength and immunity, mental health making the workers prone to falling ill during the time of the pandemic.

This report features some examples of how states and industry have responded to protect migrant workers. The Delhi Government's campaign for registration under the Building and Construction Workers Act (BOCW) ensured over 1.05 lakh workers getting registered under the board. Chhattisgarh was one of the most successful states in terms of PDS coverage with over 97.8% respondents of the survey reported that they had received free or subsidized ration during the lockdown. Many private sector companies involved in both construction and gig economy are now vaccinating their workers. All these examples point towards the possibilities in protecting the informal sector workforce when private, state and civil society stakeholders come together to meet the immense challenges that face the nation.

This report is released by Migrants Resilience Collaborative (MRC). The 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 across India. Under MRC our aim is to sustainably support 10 million workers and their families in 100 districts and cities (across source and destination) over the next 5 years; and we aim to use this vast experience and data collaboratively with Government, Industry and Civil Society to improve the underlying systems that support migrant workers. Across our three thematic areas – social security, worker protection, and responsible recruitment – our ultimate goal is to ensure dignity for migrant families by reducing vulnerability to forced labour, child labour, and other forms of exploitation. With the devastating pandemic, and the trends in migration pointing to even more difficulty in securing livelihoods, working together to provide social protection for longer-term recovery is more critical than ever.

Ashif Shaikh
CEO – Jan Sahas

Naghma Mulla
CEO-EdelGive Foundation

Warren Ang
Managing Director - GDI

Contents

07	Key Recommendations to Build the Resilience of Migrant Families
14	Introduction
15	Objective of the study
15	Methodology
18	Patterns of Migration
19	What happened to migration?
20	Are migration cycles shorter, longer or the same?
21	Preference of destination: Where are they migrating for work?
23	Who is moving?
23	Female migration
24	Dependents
26	Patterns of Work
27	Ease of finding work
28	Recruitment pattern
29	Bondage situation
30	What is the situation of wages?
32	Access to Social Security
33	Registration of migrant workers
33	Information dissemination and coverage of welfare schemes
36	Efforts to Protect Migrant Workers
36	Central Government initiatives
37	An attempt to facilitate mass BOCW registrations - Delhi
38	Large drives to provide basic entitlement support - Chhattisgarh
40	Vaccination for migrant workers – CREDAI, Maharashtra
40	Key policy for migrant workers

Key Recommendations to Build the Resilience of Migrant Families

Reportage from the beginning of the 2020 lockdown highlighted that reverse migration was a consequence of the sudden disruption in livelihood, and the absolute lack of economic security and sense of community at destination locations.

“Forget COVID, we will die of hunger first”- this oft-repeated phrase that we heard while conducting our relief work and survey during the initial days of the lockdown is characteristic of the distress the community faced. A conservative estimate – that counts the ones who travelled by public transport arranged by the state - says that over [11.4 million migrants](#) travelled back to their native

places. Many more travelled homes on foot or by paying lump sums for vehicles-trucks, vans, etc.

As the lockdown was lifted in phases, [several surveys](#) by civil society organizations indicated that only about 50-60% migrants wanted to return to the cities for work. These reports further stated that employers were making arrangements to transport workers back to the workplaces, and were willing to pay more to retain workers. Our survey demonstrates a different story of distress both at the source and destination locations. Based on our findings we would like to recommend the following:

01

Invest heavily in creating livelihood opportunities at source and destination, with a particular focus on women: This is urgent for income generation in the face of further reduction in migrant incomes, and to remedy the dwindling drop in women labour force participation.

In our survey, 57% respondents reported a decrease in migration in the past year.

Major reasons cited for this decrease are fear of contracting COVID (71%), lack

of job opportunities at the destination (54%), and fear of sudden lockdowns (47%). However, only 8% reported that the decrease in migration was because they were able to find work in their native villages. The situation of unemployment is not any different at the destination. Overall, 73% of respondents reported that it has become harder to secure jobs in the past year, leading to a drastic reduction in their monthly income. An important data point here is that 85-87% workers who preferred to move within state (intra-district and inter-district) reported finding work was more difficult, suggesting significant lack of opportunities in source states. Further, among the respondents, it was seen that women's migration for work has reduced significantly, with 60% reporting that fewer women are migrating.

We recommend that efforts to generate meaningful employment opportunities at both source and destinations should be undertaken immediately. This can complement a drive to enforce and implement the existing livelihood support schemes, particularly in terms of ensuring that people are able to avail work days under MGNREGA and Garib Kalyan Rozgar Abhiyan (which were schemes with poorest access in the survey), and proper implementation of provisions under Forest Rights Act.

All livelihood generation programmes must have gender-disaggregated targets and should be designed to address worsening labour participation, mobility of women and gender wage gap.



Photo Credit: Ashish Ramesh/Jan Sahas

Focus on portability of key schemes and ensure strict implementation: Important to increase access by easing accessibility norms or supporting documents in times of a prolonged crisis:

Current efforts to ensure the portability of PDS under ONOR is commendable, however focus should be broadened to include portability of BOCW and its benefits that will directly impact more than 40 million migrant construction workers. Such portability should ideally be initiated by the central government or through inter-state collaborations between key source and destination states. Our research indicates that 30-32% of workers have access to BOCW-this momentum should be maintained and further schemes under BOCW should be made accessible irrespective of location.

To ensure food security in such trying times, ration support must be extended universally to all citizens. Our field experience shows that the implementation of portability of PDS under One Nation One Ration (ONOR) is at its nascent stage. Research shows that while digitization and stringent ID requirements reduce corruption in PDS, they also pose significant risk of exclusion of target beneficiaries and increase in transaction costs. It is hence advisable to stall the digitization process and relax the ID requirements, particularly related to Aadhar linkage, to prevent any forms of exclusion. Further, evidence from Tamil Nadu suggests that universalization

of PDS, along with contributing to food security, reduces leakages and minimize exclusion errors. It is argued that improved access to PDS is one of the reasons for the consistent improvement in nutritional outcomes of the state over the past decades, especially in terms of reduction in malnutrition among women and children. Given that the impact of the pandemic will have long-term repercussions on the economy and in turn the food security of the country's citizen, it is highly recommended that the state universalize the PDS.

However, long-term efforts must take into consideration the specific nature of split-households. Our survey shows that currently people are moving for shorter durations (55%), and without their families (43%), leading to an increase in split-households across source and destination. Furthermore, the ones moving are the most vulnerable- belonging to SC/ST communities, landless, do not possess ration cards. Efforts must be taken to increase PDS coverage, build awareness on provisions of ONOR, and specific guidelines on how split-households would be able to access ration at source and/or destination locations should be formulated and widely disseminated.

03

Reactivate and strengthen relief measures from the past: Ensure existing social registry of migrant workers are immediately utilized and increase registration drives for targeted protection:

Even though we are not seeing an exodus of migrants from cities to their villages like the previous year, taking into consideration the prolonged distress and increasing lockdowns, it is advisable for the state to reactivate the relief measures (targeted DBTs, universal ration coverage and extra allowance) provided last year. To ensure coverage of benefits under BOCW and the insurance schemes introduced last year, intense registration drives must be carried out at block or district level.

While there was great emphasis laid on registering migrant workers in the past year, our survey shows that this process is yet to be completely operational. Only 15% of our respondents confirmed that they were registered prior to their last departure from source.

Given the importance of such a registry in implementing any social security measure, concerted efforts must be made in priority to build necessary infrastructure and initiate registrations.

04

Protect the mobility of migrant workers and their families, and ensure adequate provision of quarantine facilities

Our survey demonstrates that more migrants are now preferring to move either across states (inter-state migration 50%) or within districts (intra-district migration 25%). The migrants who continue to move, particularly with family (22%) in the middle of a pandemic are often the most vulnerable. Their protection should be of utmost priority.

As several districts and states are going under lockdown, due attention must be paid to facilitate the safe movement of migrant workers, protect them from

instances of violence and provide them with quarantine facilities. Our data shows that it is the most vulnerable who have migrated back to the cities in the past year, and it must be ensured that unlike last time, they are not forced to bear exorbitant charges for travelling back to their native places, if they wish to do so.



Photo Credit: Jan Sahas

05

Government stakeholders must combine efforts to monitor the incidence of bonded labour and exploitation, and further undertake registration and awareness drives of contractors and recruiters:

Internal data from the past three years shows that a vast majority of migrants have been migrating independently i.e., without contractors, although there are significant regional and sectoral variations. However, it was also observed that considerable numbers of workers were being transported to far-off cities by employers or contractors after the lockdown last year. Post-lockdown, we see 16% increase in the use of contractors/recruiters to find jobs amongst seasonal migrants in the Bundelkhand corridor.

Relevant stakeholders must undertake

strategic engagement with contractors and recruiting agencies at both the destination and source locations to prevent exploitation of migrant workers. Steps towards this must include registration of contractors across source and destination, awareness generation and orientation of contractors on responsible recruitment.

The conditions of distress highlighted in the findings are factors that can potentially increase the incidence of debt and bondage situations. The labour department, police and helplines must

work in synergy to actively monitor the situation within their jurisdictions and

carry out campaigns against bonded labour.

06

Robust measures must be taken to increase minimum wages, and further create forums for workers' grievance redressal or help desks to address rampant cheating of wages by providing workers with legal support

In the survey, 40% reported that the wage rates have remained the same over the last year, while 36% reported a decrease in the wage rates. Similarly, [the Yale survey](#) found that for migrants who moved to destination locations were able to earn 85% of the pre-pandemic income while those who stayed at source locations were able to earn a meagre 18% of the pre-pandemic income. This is a significant data point when read with the fact that 73% workers reported that finding work has become harder - it points to the potential increase in extreme poverty and distress in the near future.

Evidence also suggests that minimum wage mandates are most often flouted across sectors and migrant workers find themselves at the receiving end of wage-fraud.

With soaring unemployment, the migrant workers are seeing severe dent in their monthly income level. In such a situation, the government must immediately take steps to implement the NITI Aayog recommendation to increase minimum wage rates, and institute and implement stronger provisions for workers' grievance redressal to address the issue of wage theft or non-payment of wages.

07

Increase efforts on awareness drives of schemes benefits along with the processes to access the scheme

Efforts to disseminate information on the social security schemes and measures taken in the past year have been fairly successful. Newspapers, radio and television news were the major sources

of information for migrant households, followed by their social circle and NGOs.

This calls for strengthening the local governance mechanism and enabling

it to reach households with such critical information, and also shows that the push to disseminate information through digital mediums cannot be considered effective enough to reach the most vulnerable. It is recommended that the state use the most accessible mediums

to disseminate critical information about the pandemic, state responses and social security measures.



Photo Credit: Adan Abidi/Reuters

Introduction

A prolonged crisis such as a pandemic has the potential to shift, shape and re-shape the socioeconomic landscape – a pandemic is an epidemiological force with long-lasting effects that needs to be reckoned with.

It has been little over a year since the world saw one of the biggest public health crises of this century. In 2020, India not just grappled with the wrath of the pandemic but also a humanitarian crisis that directly affected about 140 million migrant workers and their families. This year, as the country is witnessing a deadlier second wave of the pandemic, a looming migrant crisis is slowly taking shape as migrants are moving back in anticipation of a similar distress situation as last year.

If we are to learn anything from past public health crises that have hit the world, it is that they cause tremendous aftershocks for the poor. With the spread of COVID-19, the subsequent mobility restrictions, and the enduring employment crisis, we are bound to see shifts in migration patterns. While some of these shifts may

be in the short-term, the crisis will have a disastrous and long-term effect on the invisible workforce of our country, i.e., the internal migrants who migrate in distress, year after year due to lack of opportunities back in their native villages, for mere survival. Therefore, it becomes key to track these patterns and trends closely, in order to ensure timely response and action.

Rationale of the Study

In the absence of standardized dynamic data from the ground, this brief is an attempt to build evidence on shifting features and patterns of migration.

As we are at this crucial juncture of both policy-building and the resurgence of the pandemic, it is necessary that we identify and prioritize issues that need to be addressed, to equip various stakeholders to respond to the situation better. This study was conceptualized as part of our efforts to work towards migrant welfare and generate evidence to facilitate informed strategy and decision making.

Objective of the study

To map the shifts in trends of internal migration in the past year after the onset of the pandemic.

- To understand the changes in patterns of labour mobility in the context of internal migration.
- To examine labour market attributes that underwent major changes in the past year.
- To explore migrant workers' access to social security measures that were rolled out as a response to COVID-19 crisis.
- To identify initiatives to protect and support migrants by state and non-state actors

Methodology

The study employed both primary and secondary research methods.

1. Secondary review

A rapid desk research was conducted on policy and programmatic responses by various states and the central government that addressed internal migration/ welfare of migrant households in the past one year.

2. Primary research

The study synthesized two sources of primary data:

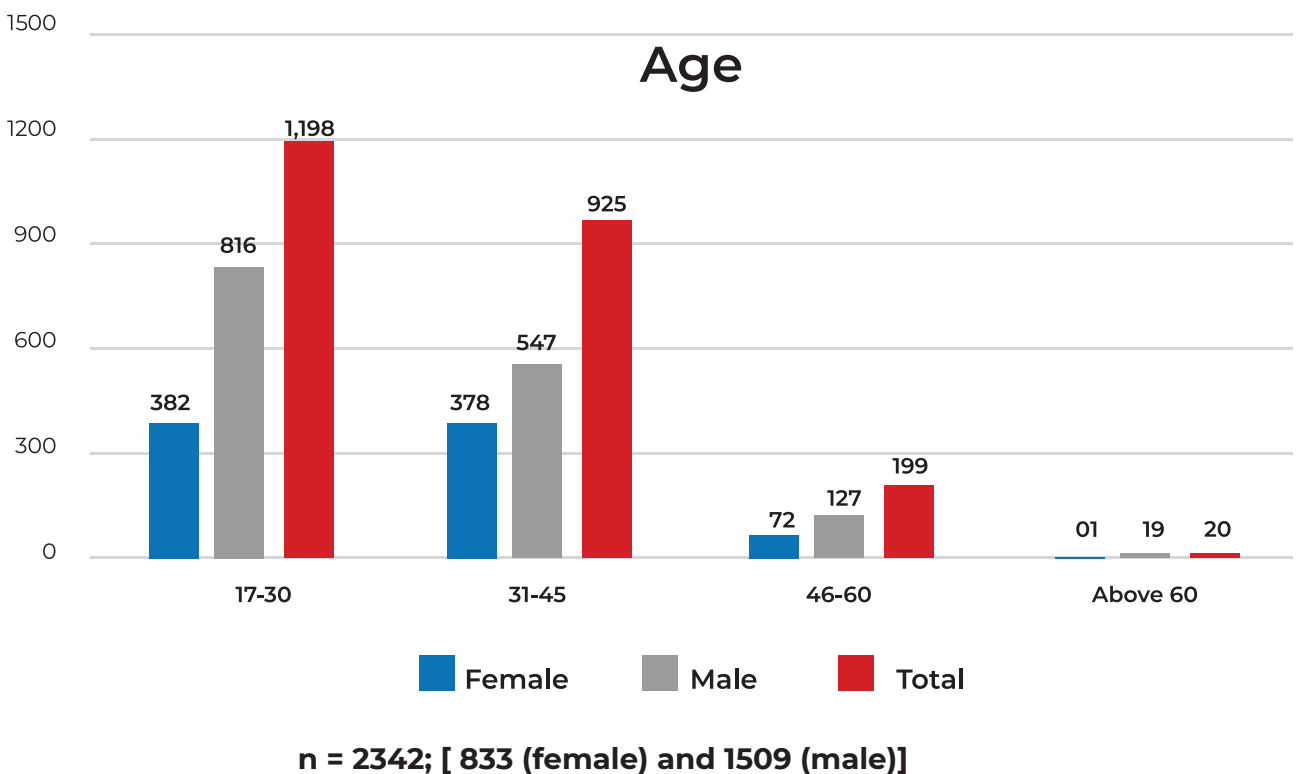
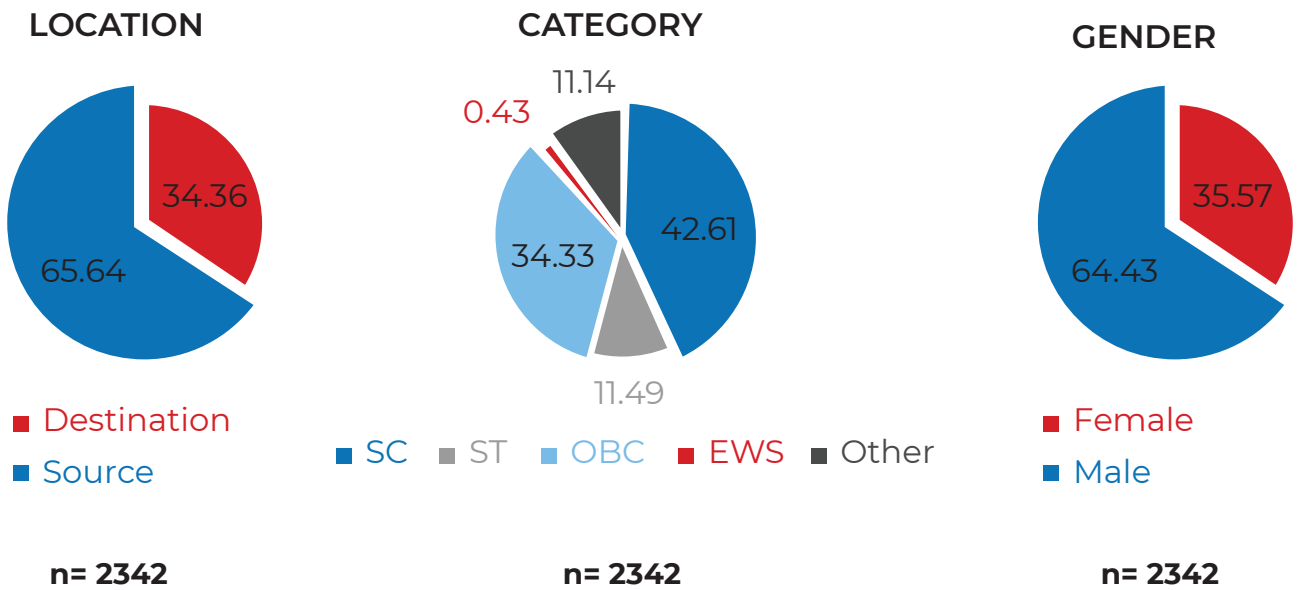
- **Perception Survey:** Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) were conducted during first week of April 2021 in 6 states, where we reached out to migrants themselves to inform us

of the changes they have observed in their own communities regarding various aspects of migration and labour. The surveys were conducted in 3 destination states (Delhi/ NCR, Mumbai, Hyderabad) and 7 source districts (Banda, Hazaribagh, Mahbubnagar, Tikamgarh) selected on basis of high-migration rate and on-ground presence of the organization.

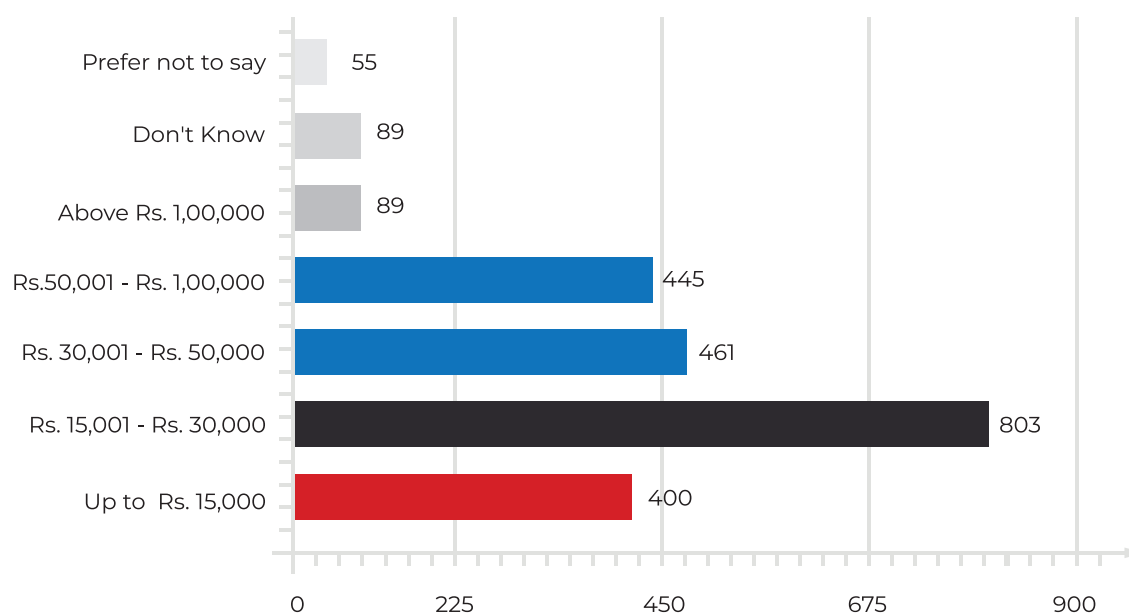
- **Sample:** 2342 workers (target sample 175 - 250 respondents per district). General socio-demographic information of the target sample are mentioned below.

- **Internal data** on migrant workers from the Bundelkhand region (10 districts falling within Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh). To enable better comparison, we have used the data collected during two distinct 6-month periods – 1) September 2019 to March 2020, and 2) September 2020 to March 2021.

Socio-demographics



Annual Income



Sampling methodology: Convenience sampling method was used to identify respondents for the survey, with the stipulation that 35% of respondents should be women.

At destination locations, surveys were conducted across construction sites, labour chowks/nakas, community settlements and textile clusters.

Location	Total Respondents
Delhi/NCR	309
Hyderabad	319
Mumbai	171
Banda	495
Hazaribagh	286
Mahbubnagar	321
Tikamgarh	441

At source districts, 2 villages in blocks with highest rate of out-migration were identified based on field experience.

Limitations of the study

- The survey was conducted during the initial days of the second wave of COVID-19. The team had to stall or reduce the number of surveys in certain districts, especially the destination locations due to surge in infection and localized lockdowns.
- Given the heterogeneity among the internal migrant community, the survey findings carry the risk of being not generalizable – however, attempts to ensure representation by gender, caste category and geographical location were made.

Patterns of Migration

Three major points stand out in respect to broad level shifts in migration: Reporting of overall reduction in internal migration (with significant reduction in female labour migration and reduction in family migrating with the worker), reporting of an increase in shorter durations of migration cycles, and a strong preference for inter-state migration followed by intra-district migration (with female migration being high in intra-district migration). These shifts in patterns could be short-term in nature, however if read closely with the data point on lack of job opportunities at source, we see a dismal state of affairs with potentially long-lasting adverse effects on migrant households.



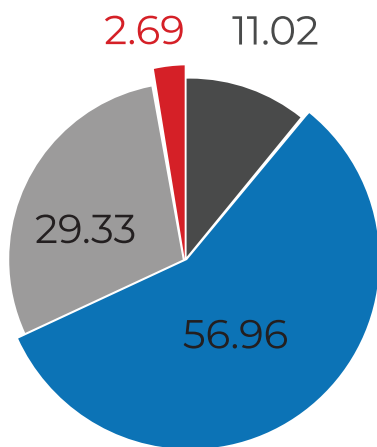
What happened to migration?

A year after the lockdown, migrant workers still prefer to stay back in villages. Our survey shows that in the past one year, 57% migrants believe that the rate of migration has decreased.

When we further probed into possible reasons for decrease in migration, we found that the majority of workers

mentioned fear of contracting the virus, fear of lockdowns and lack of jobs at destination. These responses are consistent with the Action Aid survey, where similar reasons were cited for the strong preference to stay back at the source.

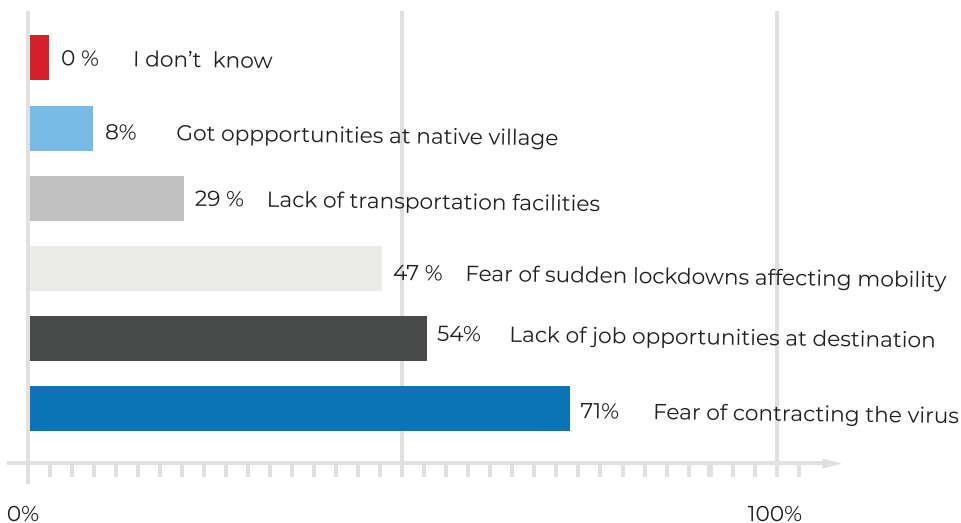
Rate of Migration



- It has increased
- It has decreased
- It is the same
- I don't know

However, a worrisome aspect is that only 8% (11% women and 2% men) reported that having found alternate employment at the source was the reason for decrease in migration, thus indicating the increasing distress of migrant households

Reasons for decrease in migration



The [survey](#) conducted at the source locations at different periods in the past year shows a similar trend of unemployment too - either people have lost their jobs or now work for less hours

than they used to before the pandemic. This could be indicators of worsening distress and poverty caused by disruption in migration and unemployment at the source.

Are migration cycles shorter, longer or the same?

Has the pandemic affected the duration of migration, particularly owing to consistent localized lockdowns? Are workers migrating for lesser or longer durations?

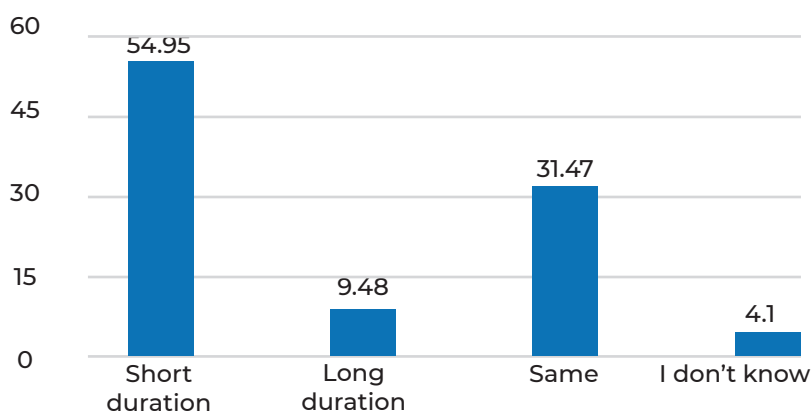
55% respondents reported that people are now moving for shorter durations than before.

Female workers¹ are more likely to mention that movement is for shorter durations in the past one year.

Among the heterogeneous category of migrants, short-term circular migrants or seasonal migrants (particularly female

migrants) constitute one of the most [vulnerable](#) groups owing to the typical traits of such distress movement. Hence, the increase in shorter terms of migration as indicated in this survey must be read as a sign of distress.

Duration of Migration



(n=2342)

¹ Women are 9 percentage points more likely to mention that movement is for shorter durations, and the difference in means is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level (p-value=0.000)

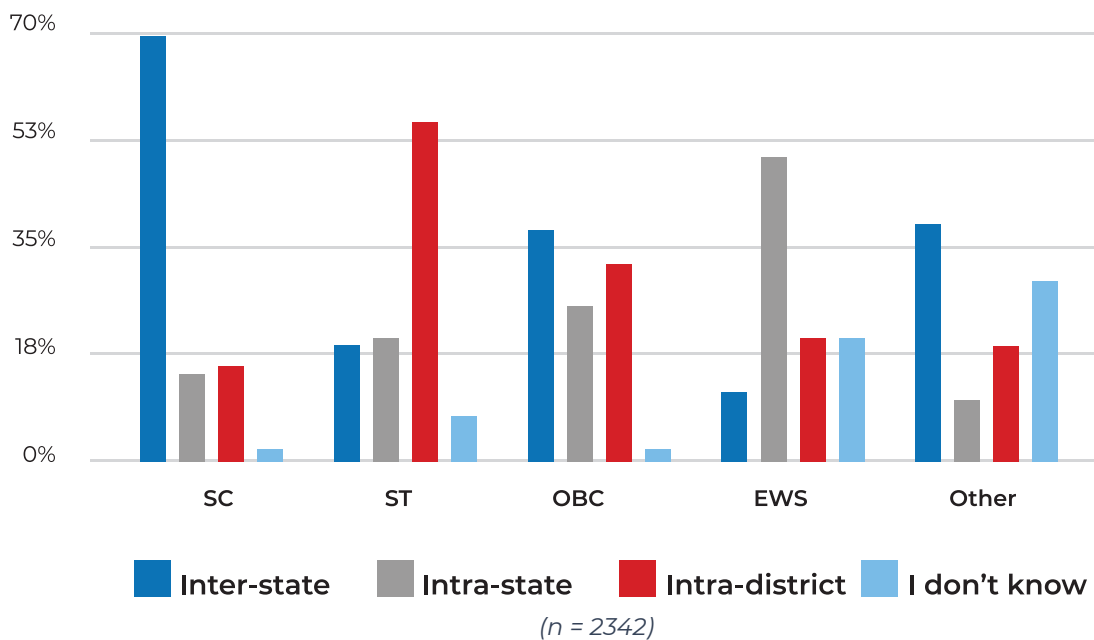
Preference of Destination: Where are they migrating for work?

There is a clear preference for inter-state movement, as the majority of survey respondents both at destination and source mentioned inter-state migration as their preference (45% and 54%, respectively). Workers from ST and OBC categories had a strong preference to move within their districts,

i.e., intra-district movement. Further, 33% respondents at the source reported that people were moving within their districts for work.

Among the source districts, Bundelkhand districts of Banda (UP) and Tikamgarh (MP) showed negligible preference for

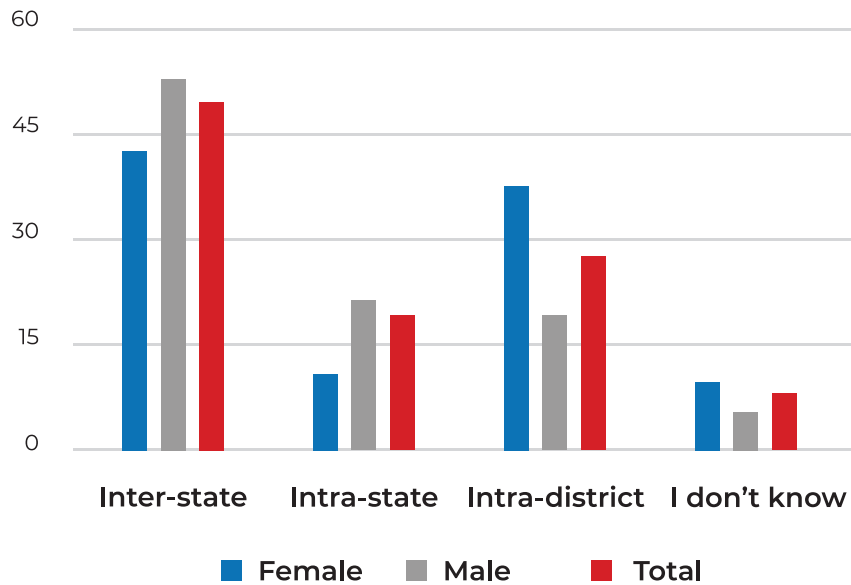
Movement of workers



intra-district movement (1% and 7%), and high preference for inter-state migration (94% and 77%). Possible reasons for inter-state movement could be the historical socio-economic deprivation and agrarian crisis in the [Bundelkhand region](#) and ease of commute and proximity to Delhi.

On the other hand, both Hazaribagh in Jharkhand (75%) and Mahbubnagar in Telangana (86%) that had a higher number of workers from ST and OBC categories showed higher preference for intra-district movements. Possible reasons for this preference of moving

Gender



(n= 2342; [833(Female), 1509 (Male)])

within the district in Mahbubnagar could be the availability of agricultural labour work in nearby cotton farms. And in Hazaribagh, the sample size included a high number of Adivasi migrants who have been moving locally to find work for generations.

Even though inter-state migration was reported as the most preferred by both women (44%) and men (53%), there was a clear gendered trend when it came to intra-district movement- 37% women reported people were moving within the district compared to 20% men. This trend calls for a deeper focus on rural-rural migration and short-distance migrations. **Given that female migration is highest in rural-rural streams, a shift in narrative from that of rural-urban migration to metropolitan cities would also make visible women’s labour and mobility trends. Such a narrative-shift would also bring to light the gender wage gap**

and understand the stark contrast in wages male migrants receive and the paltry amounts women agricultural labourers receive as daily wages.

The major takeaway here is that one needs to be mindful of regional, gendered, caste-based variations in migration patterns while working with the migrant community.



Who is moving?

Female Migration

Delving deeper into the migration trend, the survey shows that women's migration in particular have taken a hit in the last one year. Around 60% respondents reported that lesser number of women are migrating now compared to before the pandemic. Even though women's migration has always been underestimated in the Census, NSSO and other macro-studies, various estimations from micro-studies points to the fact that women migrate in large numbers to sectors such as agriculture (in rural areas), construction, textiles, domestic work that engage considerable numbers of migrant women.

It is possible to argue that the reduction in women's mobility is characteristic of the poor shape of the economy, where women are getting pushed out of the labour market as they are replaced by men who have lost their employment.

According to UN Women's report, by 2021 the pandemic was expected to worsen the gender poverty gap, with more women pushed into extreme poverty than men. The reduction in mobility, loss of income and unemployment seem to add weight to the findings of the report. Compared to November 2019, the labour force had shrunk by 13.5 million workers (6.8 million men, 6.7 million women) in November 2020. However, the labour force shrunk only by 2% for men, while 13% women were flushed out of the labour force. The multi-fold increase in women's domestic burden due to the pandemic and the large-scale loss of employment and destitution have been pointed out rightfully by several stakeholders.

Given that labour force participation tends to improve autonomy of women, delay marriages and pregnancy, and enables access to nutrition and health in varying degrees, it is evident that the current crisis will negatively impact the over-all well-being of women. Since households cope with stressors by purchasing less food and decreasing number of meals, this could lead to increase the gap in intra-household resource distribution which would mean women end up consuming least nutrition. Acceleration

60%

reported fewer women
are migrating in
comparison to before

of undernutrition increases the risk of anemia and other health issues among girls and women, and can also have serious repercussions on maternal health and mortality status. Economic insecurity can also increase the risk of gender-based violence, and pose the threat of surge in

sexual exploitation and trafficking. Hence it is also imperative to put efforts into urgently understanding more deeply this declining trend of women's labour mobility and what it means to women of different ages, across communities, and taking action to address the same.

Dependents

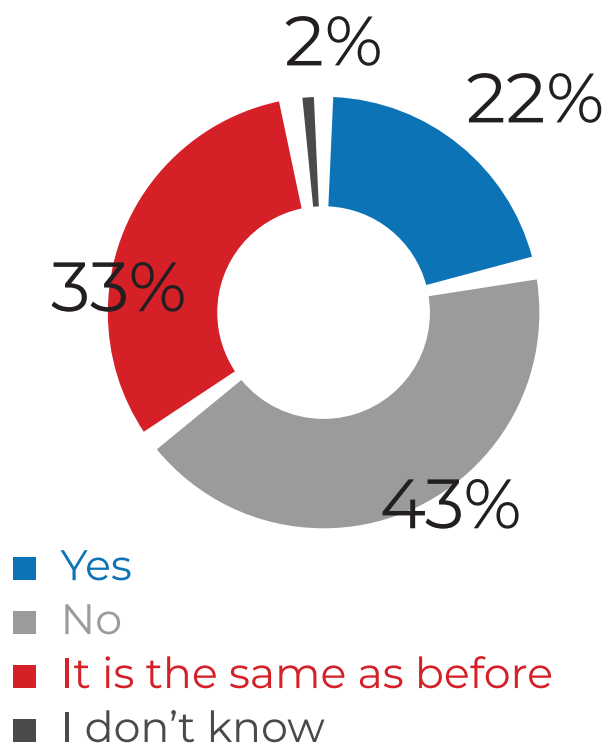
Another aspect the survey probed was whether dependents (family members who do not contribute to the family income) accompany migrant workers like they used to do previously.

The decrease in migration of dependents could be understood as a strategy to reduce costs at the destination, and also should be read along with the fear of sudden lockdown and contracting virus.

Further, through our field experience, we observed that young men (less than 45 years old) were now migrating without their families, in higher numbers.

43%
reported that people are moving without their families in the past one year.

Dependents accompanying workers



Workers from SC/ST category are 2.7 percentage points more likely to mention that they migrate with dependents than workers from other categories, and the difference in means is statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level (p-value= 0.060)

About 22% workers mentioned that they migrate with dependents, and it is clear that the most vulnerable tend to migrate

Our field experience indicates that workers who continue to migrate are often landless and homeless at source, those without ration card at source (who move as a family in order to minimize expenses of a split HH), elderly/ women with smaller children, women as helpers to husbands, etc.

Further, we also found that workers who are assured accommodation at the worksite also tend to move with their families.

There is also a sectoral pattern when it comes to families migrating – in brick kilns, families continue to migrate as a unit, particularly owing to group recruitments, in comparison to construction and other sectors where recruitment is often on an individual basis.

The increasing trend of split-households is a significant factor that needs to be taken into account while planning for migrant support measures at destination and source, such as portable ration provision.



Patterns of Work

There are clear-cut shifts in the labour market that are of concern and require immediate attention. Two-thirds of the respondents mentioned they find it hard to find jobs, and majority of daily wage workers at labour chowks head back home without work. While wages have largely remained stagnant, number of work days have significantly reduced, which inevitably leads to reduced income. In the past decade or more, we witnessed a shift in recruitment patterns with seasonal migrants moving independent of contractors – however, with the pandemic and rampant unemployment, we have begun to see a further shift with an increase in migrants who move with contractors.

This calls for increasing registration drives of contractors both at the source and destination. With rising unemployment, increasing debt, stagnant or no income, there is a need to read signs of distress carefully and track workers to ensure their safety.

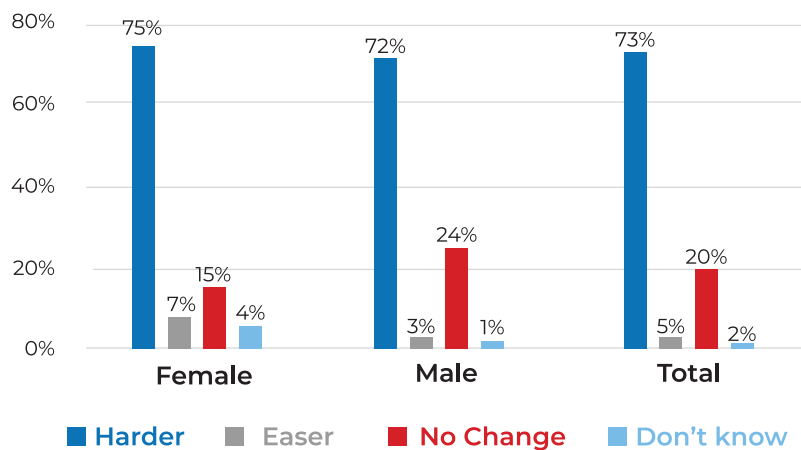


Ease of finding work

Consistent with the reports on unemployment and lack of job opportunities, 73% of the respondents (75% women; 72% men) mentioned that it has become more difficult to find work at the destination compared to before the pandemic. [Reports](#) from

labour chowks reveal that availability of work has plummeted post the lockdown, drastically shrinking the monthly earning and workdays of migrant workers.

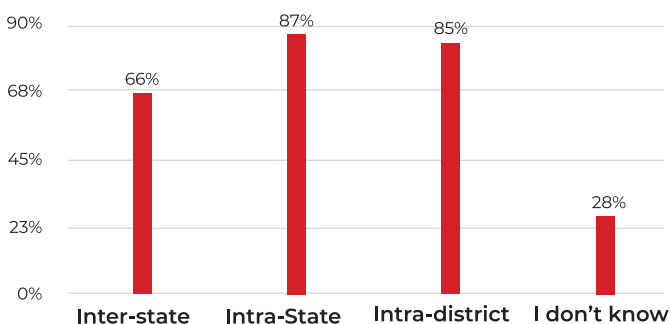
Job Search



n= 2342; [833(female); 1509 (male)]

In our conversations with workers, they mentioned very disturbing facts about how a majority of workers return without finding work every day *“earlier if 10 people returned without work from this chowk, now it has become 15 to 20 workers on a daily basis.”*

Harder to find jobs



85-87% workers who preferred to move intra-state and intra-district mentioned that finding work has become harder demonstrating lack of employment in source states.

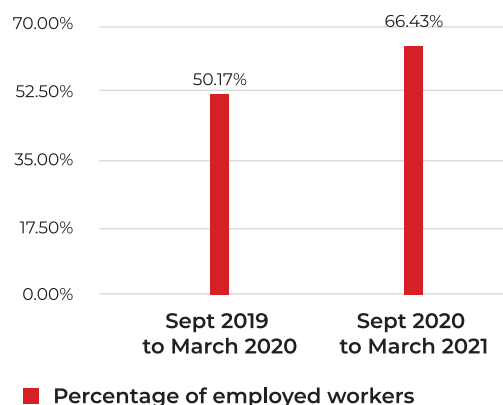
Further, it was found that women are also more likely to mention that it is harder to find jobs in comparison to men². In our interaction with one such female worker, she mentioned how finding work alone is even more challenging owing to safety issues, “I haven’t had a job for the last 10-15 days now, as I don’t want to go

to the labour chowk alone. My husband got a one-month contract somewhere in Palwal so he has gone for work. I prefer to stay here in the jhuggi till he returns, because it is not safe to look for work at labour chowks as there is no guarantee where these contractors may take us.”

Recruitment Pattern

The policy discourse around migration for the past 10-15 years or more has been centered around the complicated, multi-layered and often malevolent recruitment practices by contractors from source regions. However, our data from the past 3 years attests to a different story particularly for seasonal workers migrants in construction. A majority of

Use of Contractors/Recruiters



(n= 3892 employed workers pre lockdown (1953 employed through contractors), n=7663 post lockdown(5091 employed through contractors))

them migrate independent of source contractors and their movement and employment is instead facilitated by their social circles or destination contractors. This phenomenon has been [steadily growing](#), and we need to pay careful attention to this shift in patterns.

91%

construction workers migrate independently. This shift in recruitment pattern is a significant opportunity for destination states, as they have control over the contractors who recruit workers from nakaas and community spaces.

² Women are three percentage points more likely to say finding jobs at destination was harder than men and the difference in means is statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level (p-value= 0.057)

However, it is critical to note that our 3-year long tracking system of employed construction workers indicates that there is a 16% increase in the use of contractors to find employment post-lockdown. It is important to note that since the 2020 lockdown and the employment crisis, there is a slow shift back to finding employment through destination or source contractors.

Our field insights further reveal that there are regional differences in recruitment patterns: workers from West Bengal and

other states where seasonal migration is less common, recruitment through source-based contractors or recruiters is higher.

In relation to shifts in recruitment patterns over the past one year, our survey demonstrates mixed results. 41% of respondents reported that there was no change in mode of recruitment, 26% felt that more workers were migrating independently to find work, and 29% reported that people were now migrating with contractors from source.

Bondage Situation

For many migrant workers who enter the labour market from a position of dispossession and desperation, [bondage situations](#) of one kind or another is often an inevitability. It is argued that intergenerational deprivation and structural barriers to access means of mobility, or even basic financial services and entitlements lead to incidence of bonded labour. As the pandemic continues to deepen the existing asymmetries and push the migrants further into the margins, it was contended that the incidence of bondage is bound to [increase](#) following the lockdown.

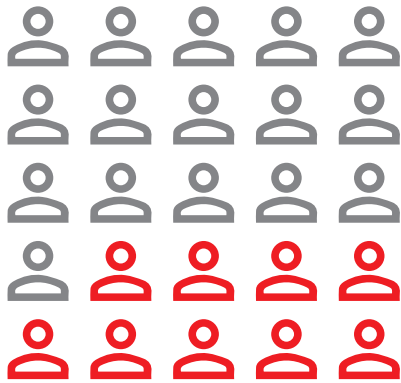
However, the current survey demonstrates mixed results. More than a third of our respondents (37%) mentioned that

incidence of bonded labour continues to be the same as before the pandemic, 28% respondents mentioned that it has reduced while 14% reported that it has increased.

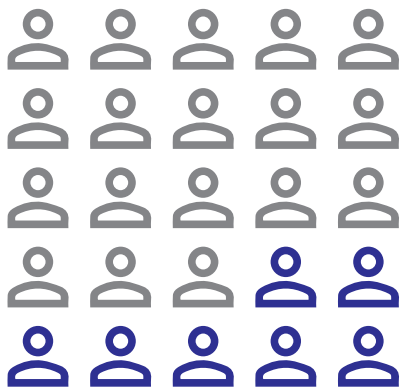
We should not be quick to dismiss the incidence of bondage with the above results, instead, look deeper into situations of high debt and widespread unemployment as precursors to an impending disaster.

Given the extent of unemployment and income-poverty, we should carefully read these signs of distress and constantly be agile to prevent incidence of bondage.

What is the situation of wages?



9 out of 25 workers reported decrease in wages



7 out of 25 female respondents reported increase in wages

In the current survey, about 40% respondents reported that the wage rate continues to be the same as before the pandemic. In this instance, it is important to read this data point along with the decrease in livelihood opportunities (73% mentioned finding work has become harder). Even though wages might

remain the same, they are working fewer number of days, which essentially translates to [lesser income](#).

Further when laws on payment of minimum wages are openly flouted by most migrant-dominant sectors, the data point on 'wages continuing to remain the same' should be read with skepticism. [According to ILO](#), from 2010-2019, India's labour productivity increased 5.5% annually on an average, while the growth in real minimum wage was 3.9%, implying denial of their fair entitlement to workers.

In relation to increase in wages, quite surprisingly, about 28% female respondents as against 16% male respondents mentioned that wages have increased.

Further analysis revealed that about 80% of female respondents who mentioned wages have increased were from Telangana (62% from Mahbubnagar and 34% from Hyderabad). A probable reason could be rise in wages in Telangana in the last one year, however more research needs to be carried out to

41% female workers reported working overtime with no benefits is the norm.

were quite mixed with 32% respondents reporting that more workers are now having to work overtime without benefits than before the pandemic and 33% felt there is no change in the situation. An important factor here is that 41% of the female respondents reported that more workers are now having to work overtime without benefits.

Workers often cited that a major issue they face regularly is the rampant incidence of wage-cheating and fraud. When asked if and why they choose not to complain, the response painted a picture of absolute lack of bargaining power. Threat of violence and the lack of a grievance redressal mechanisms was so critical that the workers feared that reacting to any instance of wage cheating would only endanger their lives and livelihood.

As a worker from a major labour chowk in NCR said, "we will have to leave Faridabad itself if we dare to complain."

Again, since these are largely local contractors at destination, this presents organisations working in destination locations and the government with a good opportunity to work more closely with contractors at destination.

In the absence of institutional support, workers have developed few strategies of their own to protect themselves from wage theft such as taking up daily wage jobs so as to avoid getting cheated of lump sums and taking advance amounts from contractors before starting work in order to avoid getting cheated of the full amount.



Photo Credit: Jan Sahas

Access to Social Security

Registration of workers continue to be a challenge across states with less than a third of respondents having been registered prior to departure. With fresh lockdowns and new waves of reverse migration, efforts must be taken to understand if there are databases of workers and their families at a district level in order to ensure they are provided with ration and other emergency relief support.

Compared to last year, about 88% respondents seem to be aware of the schemes that were announced specifically for them. However, the concerning aspect is that its access seems to be limited to short-term emergency support schemes in comparison to livelihood schemes.

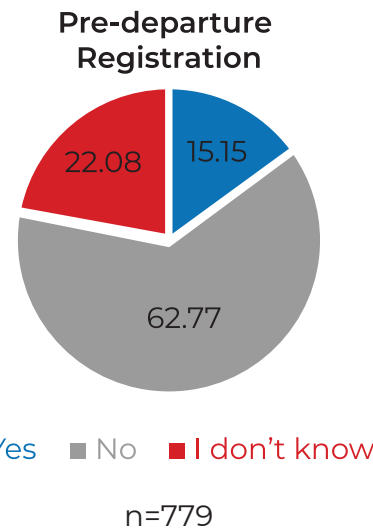


Registration of migrant workers:

The lack of comprehensive data on migration due to the [weak implementation](#) of the ISMWA, 1979,³ was cited as one of the most important barriers to reaching migrant households and ensuring their welfare. To address this gap, creation of a migrant registry has been recommended time and again

³ ISMWA, 1979 lays down provisions for registration of migrant workers

by [experts](#), [courts](#) and [government commissions](#), and was also recently endorsed by the central government and NITI Aayog.



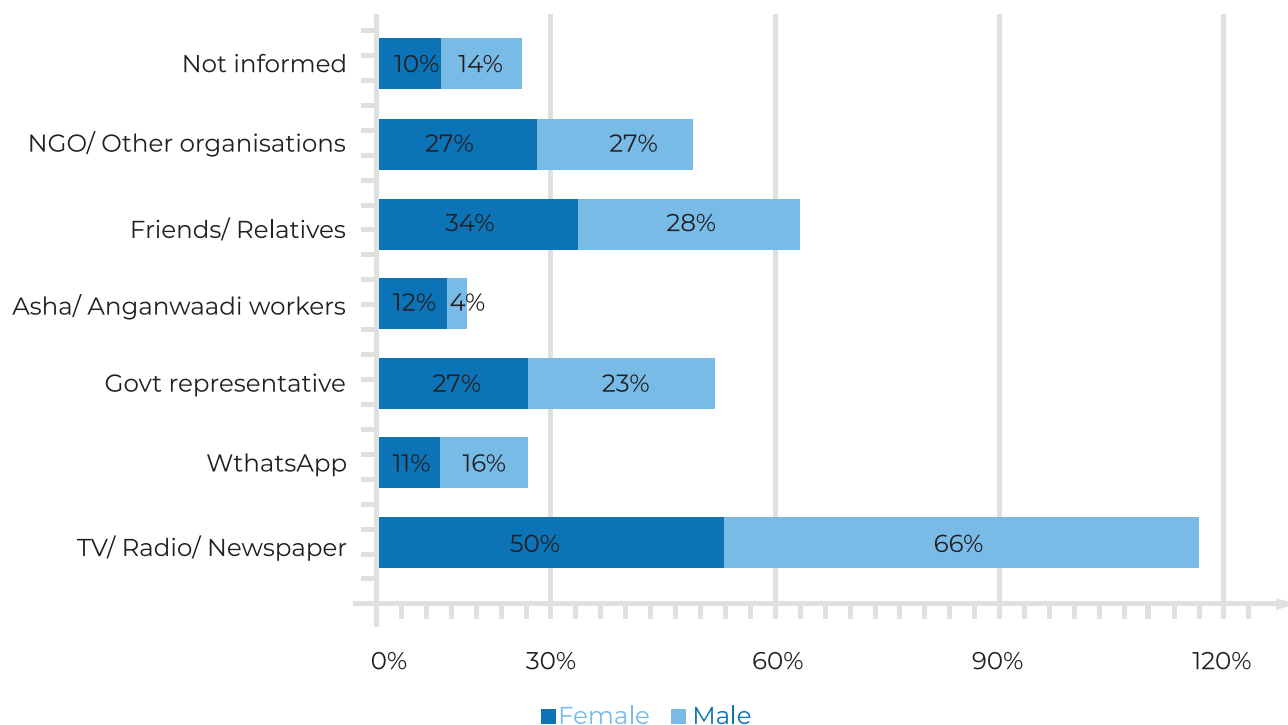
Our survey results demonstrate that only 15% of our respondents surveyed at the destination (n=779) confirmed that they were registered prior to their last departure from source.

Information dissemination and coverage of welfare schemes

The central government and various states responded with a number of measures, particularly targeted-schemes for the migrant community in the months following the lockdown. Several state governments especially took [commendable action](#) to implement these measures and support migrant households through livelihood-creation and extension of social security provisions.

In our last [rapid assessment](#), we identified a critical information gap regarding schemes and processes to access the benefits. 62% of the respondents were not aware of the schemes at all and only a mere 5% confirmed that they were aware of the provisions and knew how to access them. However, after a year, there has been a notable shift.

Source of information



n = 2342 [833(female);1509 (male)]

This survey focused on two aspects of the response measures - information dissemination and coverage.

Only 12% of our total respondents reported that they were not informed about the schemes and provisions. Such high levels of awareness should be counted as a success and we must build on this momentum to ensure full access to support schemes.

Our field experience indicates otherwise, with majority of workers still lacking awareness about schemes they are eligible for. One factor that could have driven this data point is that workers who were surveyed were from areas with better presence of NGOs such as Jan Sahas, and hence had the necessary

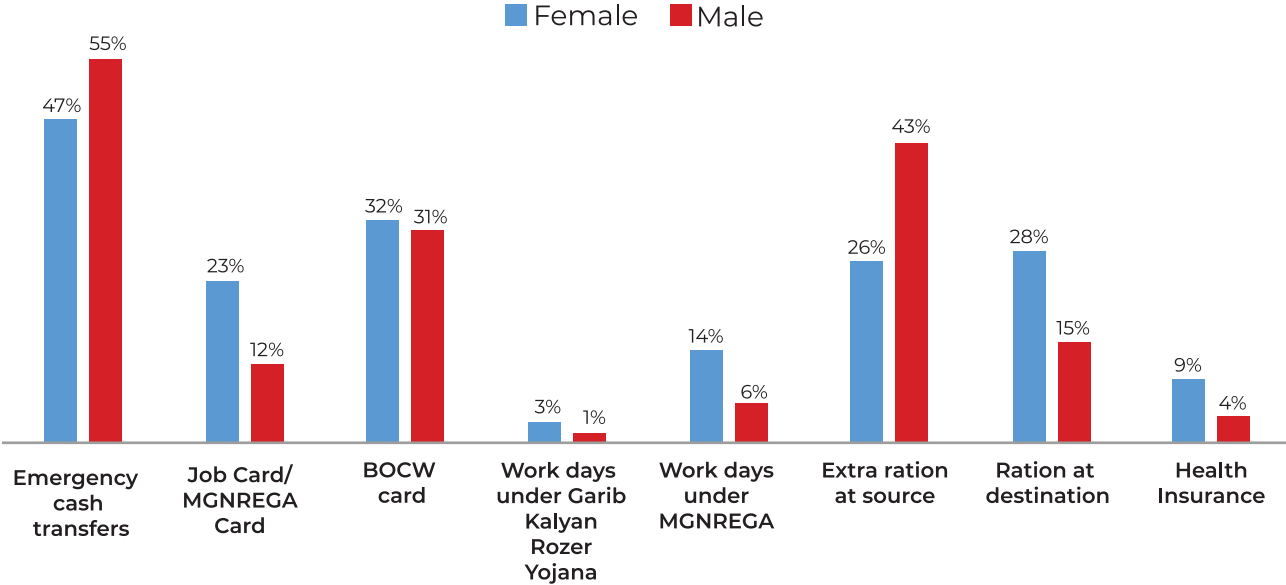
basic information.

The results also show the importance of leveraging multiple resources and mediums for information dissemination, and the need to strengthen communication strategies to reach out to the most vulnerable. Newspapers, radio and television news were the major sources of information for migrant households, followed by their social circle, NGOs and government functionaries at the grassroots.

The importance of social security measures cannot be stressed enough, especially in such times. While a [detailed analysis](#) of the impact of these measures is beyond the scope of this report, a quick look at the type of schemes migrants had access to reveals a grim reality.

It is seen that more migrants were able to access short term measures- extra ration provision, cash transfers when compared to the long-term measures, except for the BOCW card. The coverage is paltry in the case of employment opportunities under Garib Kalyan Yojana and MNREGA, and insurance schemes.

Access to Government Schemes



n=2342 [833(female);1509 (male)]

However, there is a marked gendered difference in access to emergency cash transfers and extra ration at source with fewer women accessing these support schemes. When further analysis was carried out, it was noted that the regional difference in access is not marked in any location except UP with only 10 women mentioning they received extra ration at source and 30 women mentioning they received emergency cash transfers.

While the high access to immediate or emergency welfare support should be seen as a success, we should be concerned

of the long-term impact of localized/ regional lockdowns, lack of employment at destination or source, mounting debt, fall in female labour participation as serious signs of distress. Such a prolonged crisis will have devastating consequences for migrant households without the active long-term support of governments, civil society and the industry. As the pandemic and distressed economy continue to wreak havoc in the country, the survey results highlight the need for urgent action.

Efforts to Protect Migrant Workers

A year since the announcement of the lockdown that triggered reverse migration, we see concerted efforts being made by various actors to ensure migrant welfare and protection of their rights. Different stakeholders responded to this crisis by taking up extensive relief work,, research and documentation, advocacy and strategic resilience-building work.

As we map the changes in migration trends and attempt to understand conditions of migrant households, it is necessary to also identify the response measures that addressed this crisis. Taking

stock of the work that has been done in the past year, we believe, would enable us to identify good practices and strengthen our future strategies. In the following section, we look at key measures- focused on or benefited the migrant community- taken by various state governments and other stakeholders in the past year that could be replicated across the country.

The impact of the following initiatives is yet to be wholly captured, and more concerted efforts need to be taken to understand the implementation status and its long term impact.

Central Government Initiatives

In addition to the short-term measures to provide immediate relief to the migrant community, several initiatives seeking to evaluate and address their long-term needs were also introduced by the government ,last year. The [Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour](#)

constituted to look into the matter provided its recommendations to Lok Sabha in July 2020. Key recommendations included implementation of an inter-state migrant welfare fund, creation of a national database for organized workers, and establishment of a Social Security

Fund to minimize the risk of economic distress brought forth by the pandemic. As of March 2021, the central labour ministry is in the process of creating a [national database](#) of unorganized workers to provide social security and welfare schemes.

To address the massive reduction in livelihood opportunities and to improve the situation of income-poverty, in November 2020, the [Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship](#) announced a skill training program for 3 lakh migrant workers from 116 districts across UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, Odisha, MP

and Jharkhand. The key objective of the initiative was to equip migrant workers and rural population with demand-driven skilling and orientation under the component of the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY 2016-2020). The skill training has begun across the identified districts after accreditation by the training providers on Skill India Portal. As per figures indicated in the [Standing Committee Report of 2021](#), data of 60 lakh migrant workers have been collected from 116 selected districts under GKRA, of which 2.64 lakh workers have been shortlisted in 93 districts for training.

An attempt to facilitate mass BOCW registrations - Delhi

Delhi is one of the most important migration destinations, and the capital region's construction sector employs a large number of migrant workers. The pandemic and the consequent lockdown highlighted the need to bring migrant workers within the ambit of the social security measures constituted under the BOCW Welfare Board. The CAG notified the states that Rs.2636.74 crores was accumulated by the board until March 2020, further encouraging the welfare boards to increase efforts to provide welfare measures to workers.

Responding to this need, the government took efforts to increase registration of migrant workers engaged in construction

in the city. In July 2020, as migrant workers started returning to destination locations after the lockdown, Delhi government initiated their first round of mass BOCW registration campaign for migrant workers. In the first drive, 40,000 workers were registered with the board and provided benefits worth Rs.10,000 in two installments. However, the footfall at the camps were impacted by the pandemic, which pushed the government to hold a second registration drive. This [registration campaign](#) that took place between August and September saw over 1.05 lakh workers getting registered under the board.

Further, the government in the past year also initiated different strategies



Photo Credit: Jan Sahas

to increase BOCW registrations. In May 2020, a [website for online registration and renewal of BOCW cards](#) was launched and material for applications were made available on the website. Through this facility, workers could directly set up appointments through the portal and get physically verified at the camps.

In recent times, the Delhi BOCW for registration documentation has further allowed workers who are not in possession of employment certificates by employers/ contractors/ trade unions, to submit [self-attested certificates](#) in a prescribed format.

These steps improve the ease of registration, making the scheme more accessible for workers while cutting out middlemen who otherwise used to illegally charge money for facilitating the process. This welcome step by Delhi government can act as a model for other state boards to take the onus of actively facilitating registration of workers at destination locations. Adopting similar strategies could ensure that the migrant workers are brought within the ambit of the BOCW welfare measures and improve the rate of registrations and workers' access to the scheme.

Large drives to provide basic entitlement support - Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh, like many other source states, witnessed an increased influx of its citizens who were working in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh mostly in the brick kiln industries.

According to the Census 2011, there

are approximately 1.2 crores inter-state migrant workers who migrate to states like Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Gujarat and Haryana to work in the brick-kiln industry. Based on the data released by the Chief Labour Commissioner, Ministry of Labour and Employment,

Chhattisgarh had the largest number of stranded migrant workers at [10.85 lakh](#), and nearly [3.75 lakh](#) migrant workers managed to return to the state.

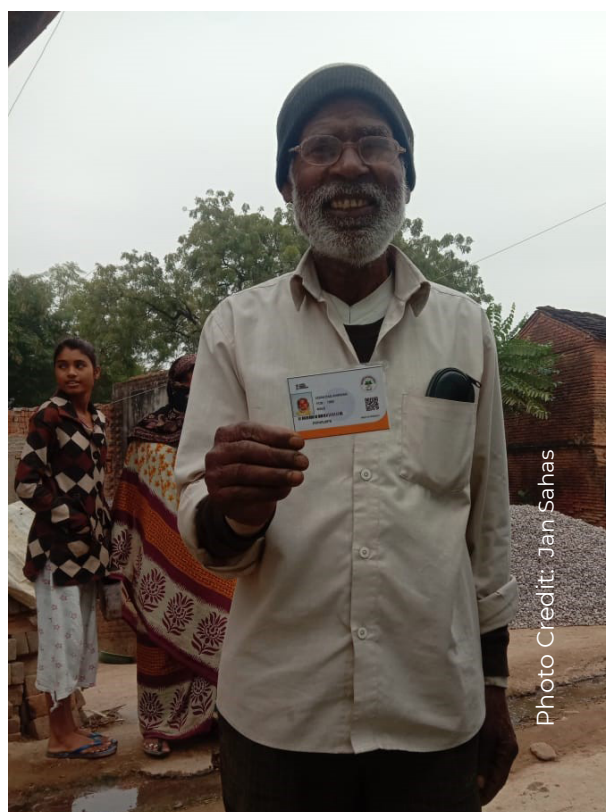
This crisis created immense pressure on the state government, who in the aftermath of the lockdown, immediately focused on developing quarantine infrastructure at the grassroots level and expanding income-generating opportunities under MGNREGA. The state issued 21,84,291 MGNREGA cards between April-June 2020. According to a survey by Inferential Survey Statistics and Research Foundation (ISSRF) that looked at the impact of reverse migration on livelihoods of migrant workers, Chhattisgarh was one of the [most successful states](#) in terms of PDS coverage. About 97.8% respondents of the survey reported that they had received free or subsidized ration during the lockdown.

Creation of a workers' database was identified as a priority and the state labour department initiated the creation of a comprehensive database for all workers including agriculture, migrant workers etc., that would help the department to systematically identify and reach target beneficiaries for social security benefits/entitlements. In addition, this exercise was also aimed at helping the department address the existing shortcomings around duplication of data.

It is in this context that the Department of Labour renewed the Shram Mitra Scheme. As per this scheme, a Shram Mitra is allotted in each block to survey migrant

workers and their families. They would then register and align beneficiaries with social benefits, support the workers in understanding the scheme and inform workers about State Workers Protection Helpline to address their grievances and update the database on a yearly basis. This initiative is part of the [Chhattisgarh State Migrant Worker Policy 2020](#) formulated by the Labour Department. Further, as per the Policy, a Migrant Workers Assistance Centre (Labour Resource Centre) is also to be established at block and district levels to support workers.

These measures are expected to bring lakhs of migrant workers into the government's social safety net by identifying them and connecting them to appropriate benefits. As a result, this will alleviate the extreme vulnerability of inter-state and intra-state migrant workers in the informal sector.



Vaccination for migrant workers – CREDAI, Maharashtra

Maharashtra, the worst hit state in the country, was amongst the first few states to impose a complete lockdown to curb the second-wave of infections leading to a number of migrant workers returning to source locations in fear of indefinite extension of lockdowns and loss of livelihood.

The [president of Pune Metro CREDAI](#),⁴ Mr. Anil Pharande stated even though migrant workers from their construction sites had not left, the fear of job loss and health is looming large. The company had taken several measures to reassure migrant workers and make them feel secure during this crisis. They provided their workers with full wages, accommodation, groceries, medical and sanitation facilities and isolation rooms wherever possible.

As most workers were below 45 years of age, CREDAI had petitioned the government to make vaccination available to all construction labourers above 21 years, even before the government order for vaccination of those above 18 years. After the order, the company is planning to facilitate free mass vaccination for labourers with the assistance of local governance bodies from 1 May onwards across their sites.

More initiatives like this by employers in partnership with local government bodies at worksites could be beneficial in making vaccines accessible to this marginalized community, reduce the risk of contracting the virus and prevent a major exodus like that in the previous year.

Key policy for migrant workers

In the past year, as part of their efforts to systematize their response to internal migration and the needs of the internal

migrant children's education and issues of night shelters, short stay homes and seasonal accommodation for migrant

⁴ The Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (CREDAI) consists of over 13,000 developers across 217 cities and towns, employing approximately [2.5 crore construction workers](#) at their sites across the country.

migrant community, governments attempted to formulate specific policies. While at the central level NITI Aayog was entrusted the role of conceiving this policy, it is also commendable that a couple of state governments came up with comprehensive policies to address the issue on their own volition. Once these policies are available for public review and feedback, it is important to carry out a detailed comparative study on the strengths and gaps to provide detailed recommendations on the way forward.

NITI Aayog: The draft Migrant Labour Policy by NITI Aayog adopts a rights-based framework to address migration as an integral part of development. [According to experts](#), despite its [shortcomings](#), the draft is a step in the right direction. Similar to the [2017 Working Group Report](#), the draft policy discusses the creation of a database of migrant workers, and further goes on to talk about the need to raise minimum wages, creation of migration resource centres and grievance handling cells to address issues of non-payment of minimum wages, workplace accidents and abuses. The draft also calls on the parts of the Ministry of Education and Housing and Urban Affairs to take measures to address mainstreaming

workers respectively.

Telangana: In the wake of the migrant exodus in 2020, the Telangana government issued a draft policy which called for the need of maintaining a database of migrant workers through a mechanism of unified registration, in addition to recommending steps to ensure accurate and timely enumeration of migrant population, increased coverage of food security, shelter, health and financial services, education for migrant workers and their families.

Chhattisgarh: A similar policy draft was also formulated by the Chhattisgarh labour department in coordination with various other departments like Revenue, Panchayat, and Rural Development Department, Skill Development Authority, Employment Planning, Department of Industries, Health, Finance and Home in an attempt to create a fear-free working conditions to protect the dignity and welfare of migrant workers. The main objectives of the policy included providing adequate local employment opportunities, simplification of existing operations thus increasing accessibility, strengthening management of information related to workers.





For more details: www.jansahas.org/mrc