

# Challenges to be addressed for the remigration of migrants post lockdown imposed due to covid 19 pandemic in India

Nidhi  
student  
Dcrust university

**Abstract** - The imposing of the lockdown to stop the spread of the covid 19 created a problem of migration of migrant workers from destination to source. This has produced many challenges for the government to control such a large population to stop from fleeing to their origin villages in an unorganized manner. The stranded governments has created sense of misunderstanding between different state governments as well as between central and state government . the following paper deals with the challenges the government has to face post lockdown when the government has to deal with the remigration of labour force from source to destination to deal with the economic stress created in the whole world due to the pandemic.

**keywords** - remigration, migrants, Covid 19

## INTRODUCTION

The epidemics of the past were hardly concerned with migration and livelihood during the colonial India but the spread of Corona virus from the epicentre of Wuhan in China to worldwide is attributed to migration and mobility of people .The medical professionals largely believe that the control of this infectious disease is possible through immobility and confinement like lockdown and social distancing. In a globalised world, the lockdown is likely to bring unprecedented breakdown of our economic and social system. Migrants are most vulnerable to urban disasters and epidemics.

Migration is a livelihood strategy adopted by millions of people in India. Most of the migration for work and employment is directed towards the urban centres. About half of the urban population are migrants and one fifth of them are inter-state migrants (See Fig 1). Rural to urban migrants are mainly concentrated in 53 million plus urban agglomerations (with one million and more) that comprises 140 million out of 377 million urban population of the country equivalent to 43 % of total urban population as per 2011 Census.

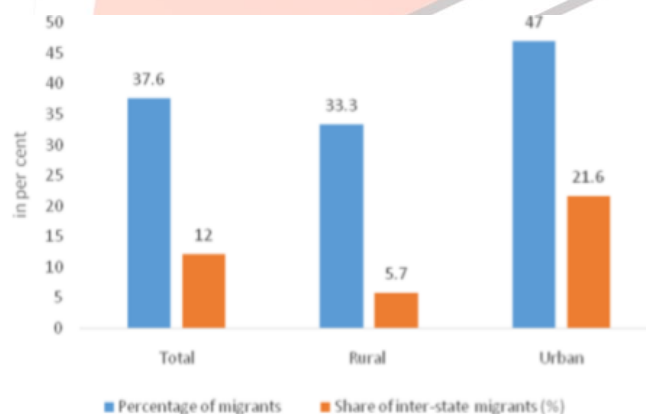


Figure 1: Migration Intensity and Share of Inter-State Migrants in Rural and Urban Areas, India, 2011 Source: D2 Migration Table, Census of India 2011

When workers do not get any option for livelihood and employment and there is expectation in higher economic improvement in the place of origin, labour migration takes place (Lall, Selod and Shalizi, 2006). In many cases, they work and stay in urban area for a long time while in other cases, short term or temporary migration become a livelihood strategies of the rural poor. The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) reports around 92 % of India's workforce with informal employment are substantially drawn from migrant labour (NCEUS, 2007). About 30 % of migrant workers are working as casual workers, are therefore quite vulnerable to the vagaries of the labour market and lack social protection. Only 35 % of migrant workers are employed as regular/salaried workers (NSSO, 2010).

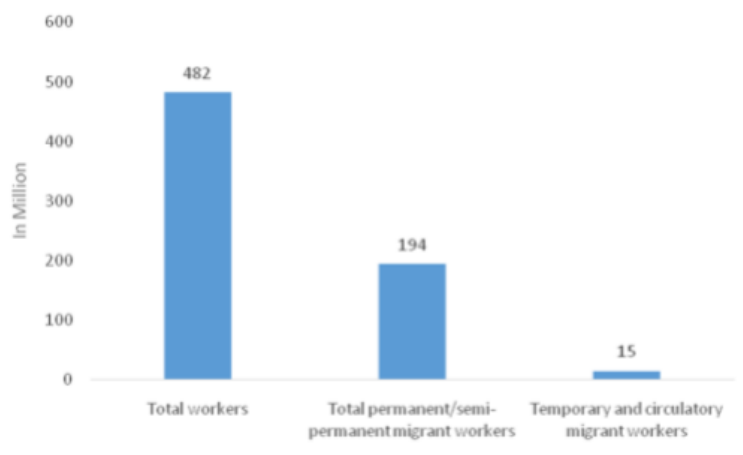


Fig 2: Stock of Migrant Workers (in million), India, 2011

Note: Total workers and total permanent/semi-permanent migrant workers are based on B1 Economic Table and D6 Migration Table of Census of India 2011. It includes both main and marginal workers. Temporary and circulatory migration is the short-term migration based on NSS 64th Round. Based on the rate of NSS 64th Round for the year 2007-08 it is projected for the census year 2011 (see also Keshri and Bhagat 2012).

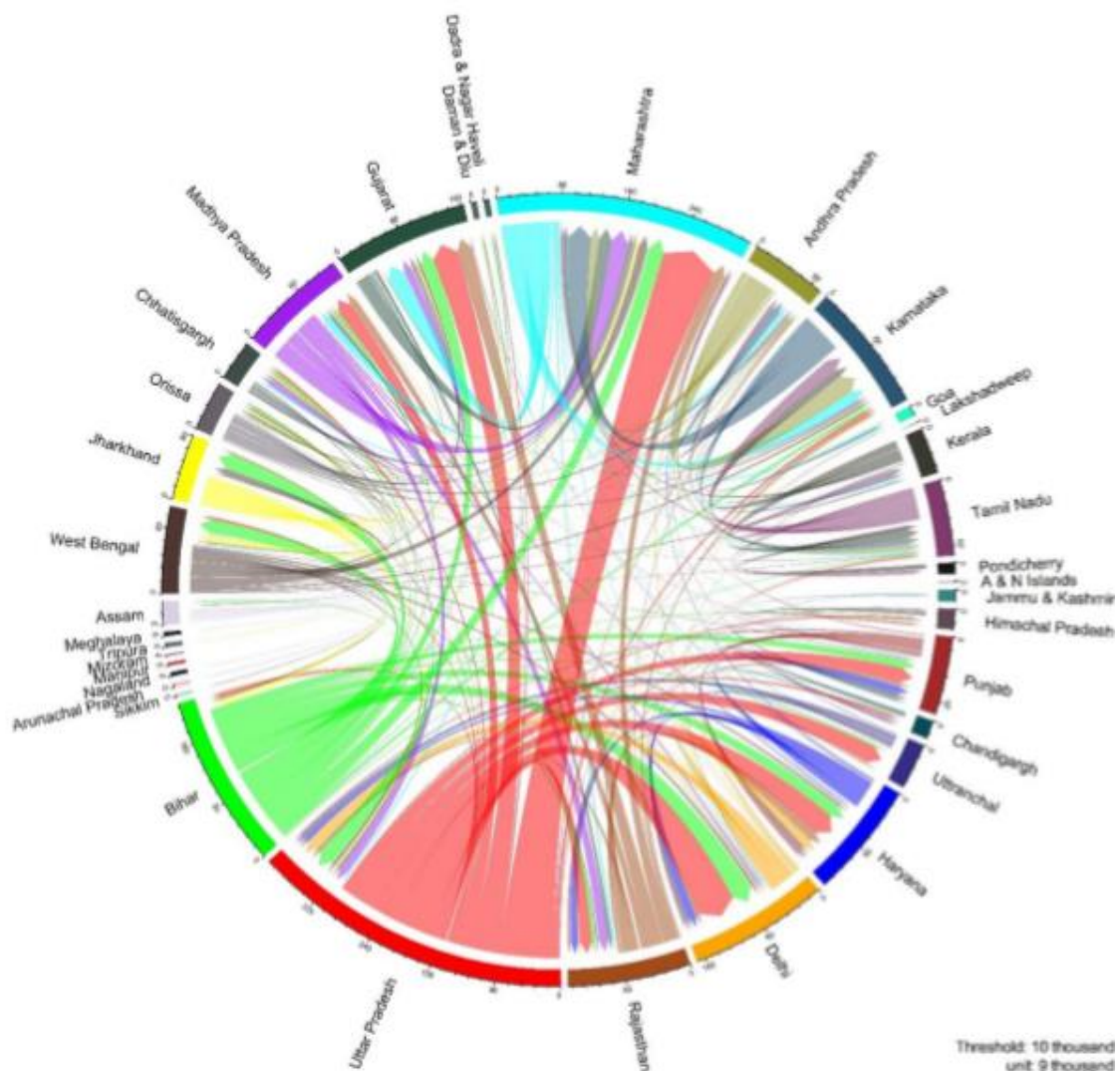


Figure 3: Bilateral flows between States and Union Territories, five-year interval, 2011 Census Source: Bhagat and Keshri (2020)

The first case of COVID-19 surfaced in India on January 30, 2020, and following the out-break. the lock down in the entire country was announced on 24th March for a period of 21 days. The lockdown is still imposed in the country as per may 18, 2020 with certain guidelines. Borders were sealed, transportation got stopped, factories, shops, restaurants and all type of the economic activities were shut, barring only the essential services. This proved to be a nightmare for hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, who lost their livelihoods overnight and became homeless. The immediate challenges faced by these migrant workers were related to food, shelter, loss of wages, fear of getting infected and anxiety. As a result, thousands of them started fleeing

from various cities to their native places. Many migrants lost their lives either due to hardship on the way, hunger, accident or comorbidity and some even committed suicide. A telephonic survey of more than 3000 migrants from north central India by Jan Sahas (2020) shows that majority of the workers were the daily wage earners and at the time of lockdown, 42% were left with no ration, one third was stuck at destinations city with no access to food, water and money, 94% don't have worker's identity card (Jan Sahas, 2020). Sudden lockdown also stranded many migrants in different cities of the country. Those who were travelling were stuck up at stations or state or district borders. Many were forced to walk hundreds of miles on foot to reach their home villages finding no public transport. Those who reached their native villages, were seen as potential carriers of the infection and were ill-treated by the police and locals. This is one of the biggest streams of mass return migration in the country. The very effort to stave off the pandemic turned into one of greatest human tragedy in India's recent history.

S. No.	Name of State / UT	Total Confirmed cases*	Cured/Discharged/Migrated	Deaths**
1	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	33	33	0
2	Andhra Pradesh	2407	1456	50
3	Arunachal Pradesh	1	1	0
4	Assam	101	41	2
5	Bihar	1262	475	8
6	Chandigarh	191	51	3
7	Chhattisgarh	86	59	0
8	Dadar Nagar Haveli	1	0	0
9	Delhi	10054	4485	160
10	Goa	29	7	0
11	Gujarat	11379	4499	659
12	Haryana	910	562	14
13	Himachal Pradesh	80	44	3
14	Jammu and Kashmir	1183	575	13
15	Jharkhand	223	113	3
16	Karnataka	1147	509	37
17	Kerala	601	497	4
18	Ladakh	43	24	0
19	Madhya Pradesh	4977	2403	248
20	Maharashtra	33053	7688	1198
21	Manipur	7	2	0
22	Meghalaya	13	11	1
23	Mizoram	1	1	0
24	Odisha	828	220	4
25	Puducherry	13	9	1
26	Punjab	1964	1366	35
27	Rajasthan	5202	2992	131
28	Tamil Nadu	11224	4172	78

28	Tamil Nadu	11224	4172	78
29	Telangana	1551	992	34
30	Tripura	167	85	0
31	Uttarakhand	92	52	1
32	Uttar Pradesh	4259	2441	104
33	West Bengal	2677	959	238
	Cases being reassigned to states	410		
Total number of confirmed cases in India		96169#	36824	3029
*(Including foreign Nationals)				
**( more than 70% cases due to comorbidities )				
#States wise distribution is subject to further verification and reconciliation				

Figure 4-covid19 State wise status

Source:covid19 state wise status,(<https://www.mohfw.gov.in/> accessed on may 18,2020.

Corona virus outbreak can lead to a loss of livelihood for those who either work on short term contracts or those who are without any job contracts. This includes several jobs in different industries. For example, in tourism industry, guide, employees of parking contractors, cleaners, waiters in restaurants, suppliers of vegetables and flowers to the hotels and so on. A similar scenario would likely to prevail in other industries (like manufacturing and non-manufacturing) mainly because of the falling demand. Manufacturing industries such as cement, plastics, rubber, food products and textiles would reduce substantial jobs. Transportation sector is also badly affected. This will lead to the cut down of job market (especially those who are employed) and also make hardship for job creation. Besides, this will also have an effect on pay-cuts and late increments. India is likely to face the job crisis because of the COVID 19. Migrant workers and workers in informal sector are likely to be badly hit (ILO 2020).

The most vulnerable section would be those migrant workers who are employed in informal sector, those who do not have either security of employment or any social protection. In urban areas, average wage earnings per day by casual labour engaged in works other than public works ranged between Rs. 314 to Rs. 335 among males and nearly Rs. 186 to Rs. 201 among females during 2017-18 (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2019). A large number of migrant workers and workers in informal sector just have been surviving on subsistence wages. The Corona virus outbreak and subsequent lockdown is going to affect them badly leading to their further impoverishment due to loss of livelihood. It may also affect hugely their food and nutritional intake, access to health care and education of children.

**RESPONSE OF CENTRAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS FOR THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION OF MIGRANTS DURING THE CRISIS.**

(as per may 18,2020.)

The spread of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), and subsequent nationwide lockdown to control its further outbreak brought turmoil in the lives of millions who are primarily involved in the informal sector. In the initial days of lockdown, To mitigate the effect of the lockdown on the vulnerable groups, Government of India on 26 March 2020, announced a Rs. 1.70-lakh-crore package under the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Yojana. It has within its ambit health workers, farmers, MGNREGA workers, economically vulnerable categories, especially women, elderly, and unorganised-sector workers, Jan Dhan account holders and Ujjwala beneficiaries. The scheme entails an additional 5 kg of wheat or rice and one kg of preferred pulses every month to 80 crore beneficiaries for the next three months. Central Government also gave an order to the state governments to use Building and Construction Workers Welfare Fund of Rs.52000 crores to provide relief to Construction Workers through direct benefit transfer (DBT) (DHNS, 2020; Government of India, 2020a). The RBI also joined later with a sharp cut of interest rate along with a series of unconventional measures to lend to besieged businesses (BloombergQuint, 2020). However, the fear of loss of livelihood sparked into the mass exodus of millions of these migrant labourers in some parts of country, who started on a long ‘barefoot’ journey with their families, in the absence of the transportation facilities, to their native places (Bindra and Sharma, 2020). Looking at the gravity of the situation, many states, i.e. Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Karnataka arranged special busses to drop these workers and their families to either state borders or to their districts. Special trains were also routed between different destinatons to reduce risk of spreading coronavirus during the process of migration.(Bhora, 2020., NDTV, 2020; Press Trust of India, 2020a; Press Trust of India, 2020b). This massive migration has led to the chaotic situation on national highways, bus stops and railway stations and raised misunderstandings between states. As this was the violation of and a threat to the benefits of lockdown and was risky for them and for people in the villages, Government of India several time to time measures are being done.

Some of them as ,Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) also asked the landlords not to charge rent during this crisis and employers to make the payment of wages of their workers without deduction for the period of closure (Government of India, 2020b). MHA

set-up a control room to monitor the situation 24X7 to ensure the access to essential commodities to anyone (Press trust of India, 2020d). States were allowed to utilise money in the State Disaster Relief Fund (SDRF) to provide food, accommodation and medical care to homeless, including migrant workers, stranded due to lockdown and sheltered in relief camps and other places (Joy and DHNS, 2020; Press Trust of India, 2020c). In another order, Ministry of Home Affairs issued an advisory for health actions at place of congregation of migrant workers (Government of India, 2020c), which included the three types of migrant workers and their health risk management:

1. Migrant workers who are still in the cities of local residence, if they are found to be forming any congregation in bus station/railway stations or any other place of the city, recording of details of such people and following them up for 14 days and risk screening by district health authorities.
2. Migrant workers who are on their way and are yet to reach their destination city/village, for them the quarantine centre were to be set-up with proper amenities and basic requirement. Thermal screening will be carried out with appropriate actions for suspected or confirmed cases. They will be encouraged to be in contact with their families.
3. Migrant workers who have reached their destination will be identified by the district administration and IDSP will follow them up at their residence.

Time to time orders are making the process of migration of migrants an organized process. Certain issues are being considered and tried to be solved immediately. Though the lack of proper guidelines to implement the strategies posed several challenges in front of state governments in form of lack of preparedness, however in line with orders given by central government, majority states have devised their own strategies and taken substantial measures to protect the lives and rights of migrants during this time. States have also initiated the involvement of Non-government Organisations (NGOs), Jail mates and volunteers to support them in this endeavour. NGOs have now started crowd funding efforts to find a way out to help those in need and they are making substantial efforts to feed people, provide them meal kits, hygiene kits, family kits of essentials. Additionally, many high end restaurants and IT companies are also chipping in to meet the target of supply food. As mentioned earlier there are more than 200 million migrant workers in India, however there is no estimate of migrants stranded at different locations. The relief provided by the government and non government organization may bring some relief to the migrants, but looking into the huge migrant population, the amount of services provided proved highly inadequate.

### **CHALLENGES FOR THE REMIGRATION OF THE MIGRANT WORKERS**

From time to time, Indian government has somehow neglected the contribution of the process of migration in the development of economy of the country. The huge migration of the migrant from source to destination. The removal of lockdown in certain time will again give a start to all the economic activities all are around the country.

Migrants cannot be neglected as a stakeholder in development for a long time. Integration of migrants with development is the need of the hour. Government should seriously look into the recommendations UNESCO-UNICEF and the Working Group on Migration and implement them at the earliest (Bhagat, 2012; Working Group on Migration, 2017).

### **THE INSTANT CHALLENGES FOR THE REMIGRATION OF LABOURERS**

Post lockdown when economic activities will start, the need of labour force will be on its peak. On the other hand, the workers who have reached homes after facing so many problems will be highly against the thought of fleeing back to urban areas.

1. How to provide counselling and psychological support to the migrants under the distress who would be highly against to the process of remigration post lockdown.
2. Arranging methods and finalizing norms for the remigration of large amount of crowd that would be interested to flee back post lockdown.
3. How to quick the process of remigration for the least loss of economic activities post lockdown
4. how to inspire entrepreneurial activities post lockdown with such distress situations of the migrant labour force in different sectors? Due to the contagious nature of the virus. The hospitality and tourism sector will have a great impact post lockdown for certainly long duration due to the presence of fear of getting infected in the major section of the society. How to manage the livelihood and health of the migrant workforce who is engaged in hospitality and tourism department?
5. How to maintain the social distancing for the migrants to check the spread of infection post lockdown during the process of remigration? How to provide basic health care and preventive kits (like mask, sanitisers, and gloves etc.).
6. how to assist the work of labour post lockdown since some state governments have decided to suspend all the labour laws for some duration of time?
7. how to facilitate different NGO contribution for the process of remigration of the migrant workers?
8. How to generate the opportunities for migrants who decide not to flee back in their origin villages. In the origin villages, where resources are scarce and opportunities are limited, how state government would meet the expectations of the people?

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