

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LABOUR MIGRATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

During the pandemic of Covid-19, the displacement of labour migrants in India due to unemployment and inadequate financial compensation by the central as well as the state government, has exposed the welfare system of the country. This present study focuses on the social and economic conditions of labour migrants who move from their native villages to urban spaces in search of a job. There are several theories that have been coined on migration, which help in gaining a broader perspective. During the pandemic, labour migrant's livelihood is at stake. This study tries to examine the current policies and programmes of the central and state governments in relation to labour migration. This study conducted semi-structured interviews with 160 people including women and labour migrants. The study concludes that the central and state governments must create a viable environment in the states so that migrant labourers get a job in their respective states in future.

KEYWORDS- Labour migrants, COVID-19, nationwide lockdown, reverse migration, unemployment.

INTRODUCTION

“All wealth is the product of labour.”— John Locke.

Migration can broadly be classified, as a relocation diffusion, which leads to the spread of ideas, inventions, notions, behaviour, culture, from one country to another, one region to another. Labour migrants refer to those individuals who move from one region to another to seek employment and attain better living conditions. India is the home of the second-largest workforce in the world and constitutes a labour force of 400 million people [Census of India, 2001]. This 39.9% of the population of India consists of 20% labour migrant who yearly generates around 10% of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) [Overseas migration patterns from India, 2016]. The Workforce Participation Rate at all India levels is 25.51% for females and 53.26% for males. While there is no rural–urban gap for males (53%), there is considerably rural-urban gap for females (rural -30%, urban- 15.4%). as per census of 2011,

The world is today battling with infectious disease caused by Coronavirus. The COVID-19 pandemic is truly defining the global health cum economic crisis of our time and has posed the greatest challenge that we are facing today. Although India has tried to manage in containing the spread of the virus by announcing nationwide lockdown on 25 March 2020, leading to disrupting all the economic activities

of the nation. But who knew that it would open the gates for the great labour crisis affecting more than 40 million labour migrants of our country(World Bank, 22 April 2020).

After Independence, this is the first time India saw the most massive reverse migration ever. Some migrants were seen opting for long arduous journeys back home by defying lockdown. While others were choosing between their health risk and dying out of starvation. It would be wrong to say that only migrant labours were solely affected, instead, their family was bearing the brunt of this crisis. This humanitarian crisis also became a mirror for projecting underlying pre-existing inequalities. Moreover, according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), approximately 122 million people lost their jobs in April and three-quarters of these were wage and migrant labourers [CMIE, 2020].

All these instances and images, of unfolding human tragedy along with the environmental crisis, intrigued us to take up this issue and analyze the impact of COVID-19 on labour migration in India.

It is too early to assess the impact of Coronavirus based on full statistical shreds of evidence. Thus, this study would be an analysis of the transition period and the heterogeneous impact of the pandemic on labour migration.

OBJECTIVES

- To find out the lockdown effect on migrated labour due to coronavirus.
- To find out the effect of increasing unemployment on migration and human mobility.
- To ascertain the impact of COVID-19 on health and the financial situation of labour migrants and their families.
- To explore the impact of reverse migration of workers on agriculture, trade, transportation, and other sectors of the economy.

THEORETICAL ASPECTS

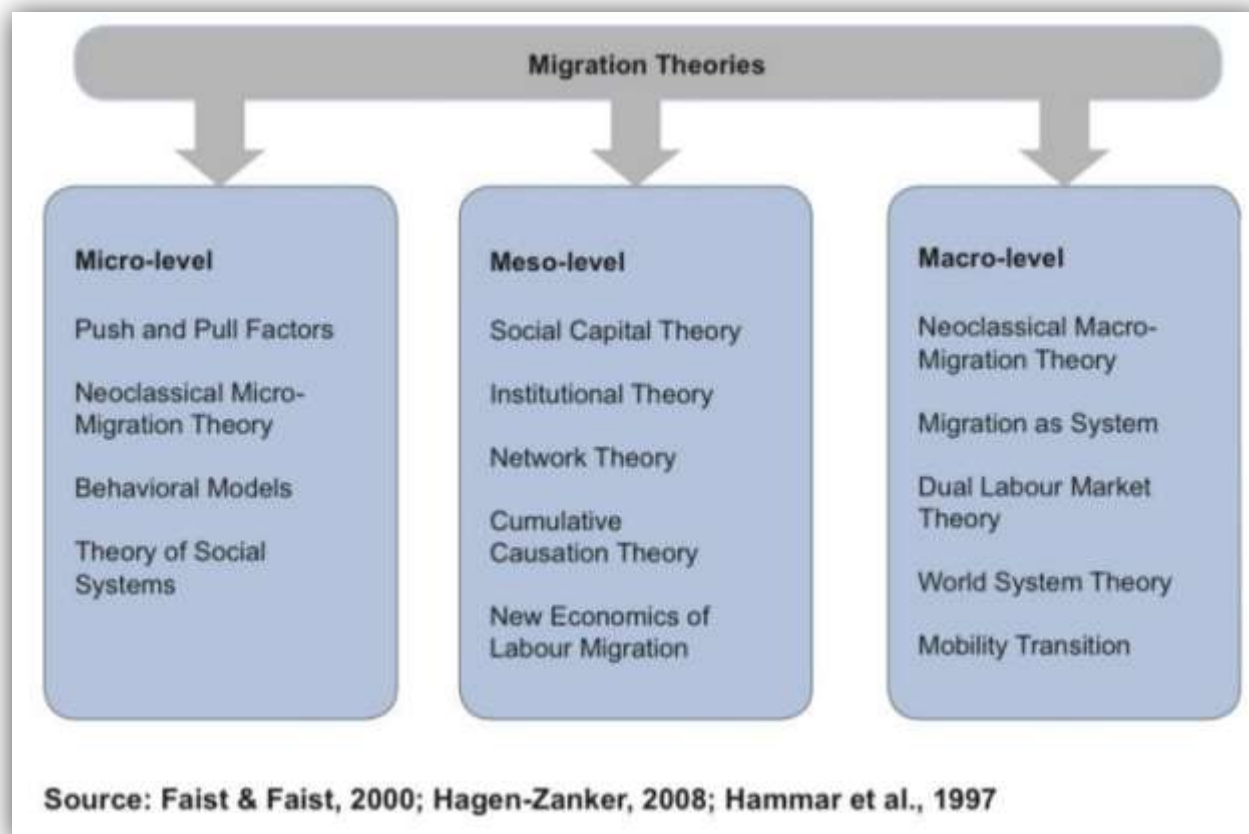
Migration is a highly complex and intricate phenomenon. Several social, economical, political, and environmental factors lead to migration of a population, but above all, it is the perception, instinct, and behaviour of an individual that determines his choice of migration.

Economic models can be used to model the consequences of COVID-19 on labour migration in India. The four economic principles of labour migration that is considered in this study are -

- 1)Push and Pull factors of migration
- 2)Neoclassical Migration Theory
- 3)New Economics of Labour Migration

4)Dual Labour Market

But In Indian context three theories are relevant pull and push factors , New economic of labour Migration and dual labour market It was observed that people have migrated because of pull and push factors



Push and Pull Theory

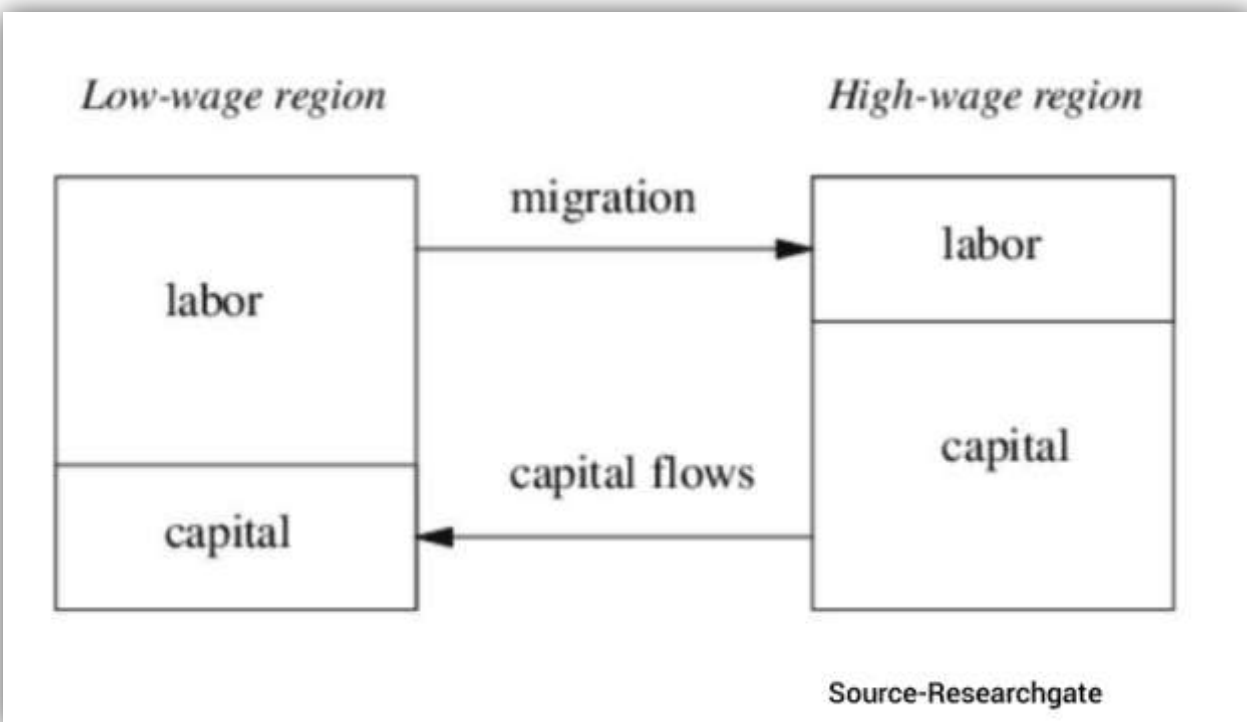
According to Lee, the push factors are those factors that induce a person to leave his domain and migrate to another. They may include factors like poverty, lack of employment opportunities, poor socio-political condition of a place, limited facilities, or adverse environmental conditions.

Pull factors are just contrary to push factors, they are the determinants that entice an individual to a particular region. They could either be better living conditions, better employment opportunities, sound socio-political conditions, stress-free environment, or favourable natural conditions.

These are the prominent circumstances that lead to a huge internal migration in India. Most migrants hail from states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, etc. who have relocated to cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Jaipur, etc. in search of better possibilities. As a result, it is seen that the labour migrants from here have opted for reverse migration by flouting the nationwide lockdown. It can conveniently be seen that their movement happened to be semi-permanent in nature due to the spill over effect of pull factors.

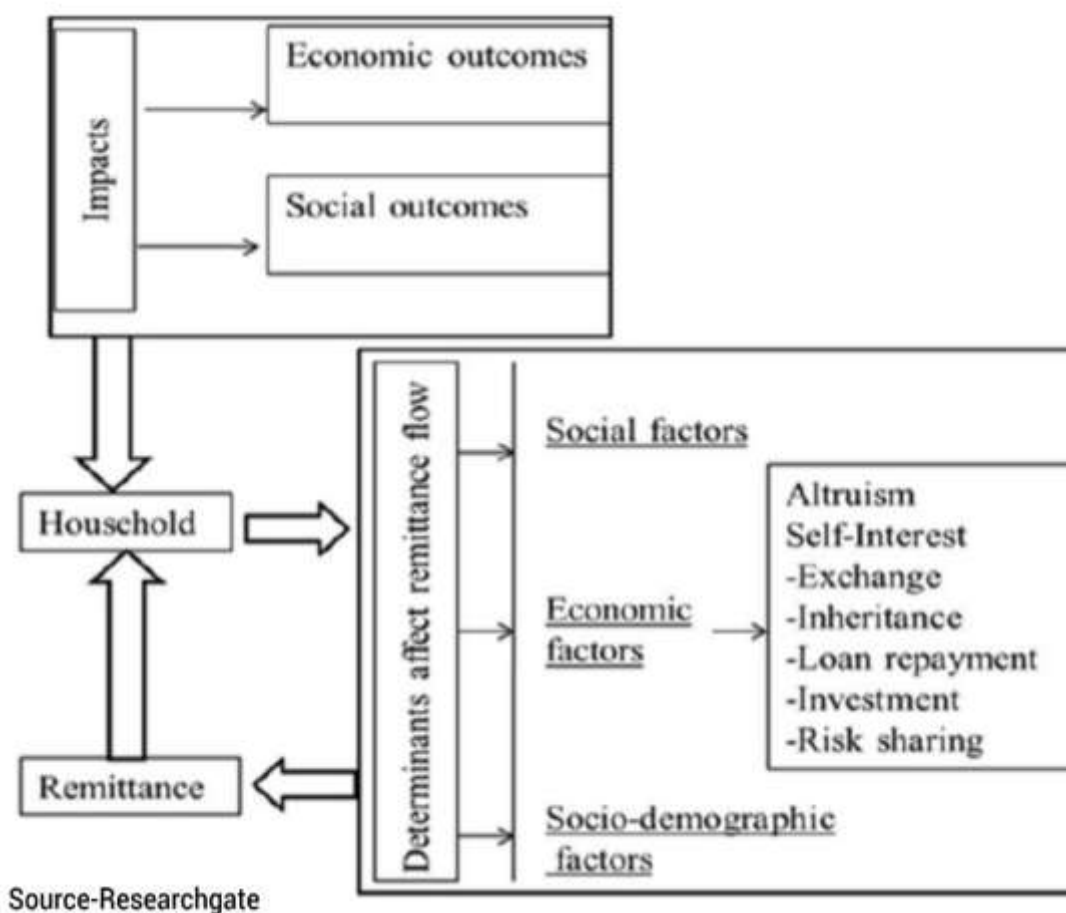
Neo-classical Economics Theory

Neo-classical economic theory is best used to explain transnational migration. It explores the possibilities where people migrate from a lesser income region to a higher one in search of better opportunities and its immediate impact on economic development. The great labour crisis of 2020 also depicts the complex workforce movement from various labour deficit states to labour surplus.



The New Economics of Labour Migration Theory (NELM)

The New-Economics of labour migration theory focuses on that it is not just an individual but the family's decision to migrate to increase their income and raise their living standard but also shows the risk-sharing behaviour of households. As per the official data of the 2011 census, around 455 million people are considered as migrants in India and around 45 million women migrated after marriage to provide support to their families financially [Census of India, 2011].



The Dual Labour Market Theory

Dual Labour Market Theory portrays that it is not the individual's decision that results in his migration, instead, it is the demand in the industrial sector of an urban area that results in their migration. The persistent demand for labour constantly fuels the migration from the economically weaker state.

All these theories hold relevance in this pressing issue of the great labour crisis of 2020. The push and pull theory reveal that labour migrant from one region to others for better employment opportunities whereas the neo-classical economic theory explains that labour migrates from lower-wage regions to higher-wage regions for better possibilities. The new economics of labour migration theory emphasises that it is not the individual's decision to migrate instead of the whole family's influence leads to their migration. The dual labour market theory shows that demand from the industrial sector attracts labour migrants from different areas. All these theories are applicable in this research and play a major role in understanding labour migrant's decision to migrate and their wretched circumstances.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the labour migrants are so desperate to go home?
2. Do you think that the declaration of nationwide lockdown with just four hours' notice was a mistake?
3. Many migrants began to walk and defied the lockdown, this uncertainty and fear among them would become a threat in the near future?
4. Is this pandemic a depiction of underlying pre-existing inequality?
5. How far was allowing Home Ministry to supervise the lockdown, instead of health and treating the whole pandemic as a law-and-order situation correct in your eyes?
6. How will this increasing unemployment affect the near future human mobility?
7. How will the economic outcomes of the health crisis re-structure the labour market?
8. What will the COVID-19 affect future labour migration policies?
9. How useful do you find the financial packages announced by the government in solving this crisis?
10. Do you feel that this lockdown has opened the gate for a much new unseen crisis for our country?
11. Seeing this unprecedented labour migrant crisis turning into a blot on humanity. What all impacts do you think COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic would have on migrant labours and their families?

12. Why do you feel this ensuing humanitarian crisis has left the stranded labour with the difficult choice between health risk and dying out of starvation?
13. Do you feel there is a human right violation of labour migrants as they are disproportionately at risk from the impact of the pandemic?
14. To what extent do you think this immediate need for food, shelter, healthcare, fear of getting infected, loss of wages, etc. would affect their social, psychological, and emotional state?
15. As a consequence of invoking a sense of terror among the restless migrants do you feel that the industries in an urban area would face an acute labour shortage shortly?
16. To what extent do you think this reverse migration would help in boosting the rural economy and growth of MSME?
17. How will the lack of seasonal migrant workers impact certain sectors such as agriculture?
18. How far do you think the migrant workers in their home states have been affected by the absence of all non-farm work during this period of lockdown?
19. After seeing this whole scenario, you still believe that the labour laws have held back Indian industries?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research on this topic is a new one since it is a very current topic. The study of this topic is of utmost importance since this is one of the major crises that India is facing today. This labour crisis of 2020 has opened doors for numerous unforeseeable crises.

Research method

There are two ways to carry on research that is qualitative and quantitative. To achieve the objectives of the research, a mixed research technique involving both quantitative and qualitative methods of research has opted. Although the research is heavily influenced by quantitative research techniques, the qualitative technique also plays a pivotal role in accomplishing the objectives of the research. All aspects of the research are carefully studied that will unfold later in research. The primary data has been collected as it gives first-hand information. It is believed that rather than taking information from secondary data, which could be less specific, one should aim for original data directly from the main sources through surveys and in-person surveys. Further, the data would be a descriptive one since the observation is gathered without any intervention and has presented the same without any manipulations in the data.

The three hypotheses were generated to further analyze the impact better. The data collected through the survey is reduced and divided into various categories to further simplify the findings. Various statistical tools like pie charts, graphs, etc. were used to ease the study. The following are the hypothesis that is constructed for the research:

H1. Nationwide lockdown will more likely to take away labour migrant's socio-economic security.

H2. A higher rate of reverse migration will affect the sectors of the economy.

H3. The disconnect between policymakers and reality led to delay in decision making.

LOCKDOWN DUE TO COVID-19 AND IT'S IMPACT ON INTERSTATE MIGRANTS

The COVID-19 is a highly contagious and pathogenic viral infection that originated from Wuhan, China and disseminated around the world. This health pandemic soon turned into a health cum economic crisis. The unprecedented impact of this pandemic has been felt by every country, not even barring the world's most developed countries like the USA, Britain, and France, etc. This itself made evident that India would get deeply affected since it was earlier facing an economic slowdown, and now this pandemic has shoved us in the international recession.

As per the Barclays, the nationwide lockdown announced on 24 March 2020 has costed a total economic loss of \$234.4 billion to the Indian economy [Barclays,14 April 2020]. Since then the losses have increased manifold. Today India is fighting two battles, one is at the health front, and the other is on the economic front. This economic failure is not just because of COVID-19, but the government's policies played a significant role in crashing the Indian economy. In 2019 the country's economy grew at 4.2%, making it the slowest in 11 years.

This mammoth pandemic has made the Indian economy to swing in between hope and despair. it won't be wrong to say that it has pushed the nation much closer to the worst economic crisis it could face, even worse than the great depression of 1929. The three major challenges that haunt the economy today are-Containing the spread of this disease and managing the public health crisis. Protecting employment and livelihood of the most vulnerable section of society, majorly including labour migrants. Assisting the industries and corporate sector to revive the economy and prevent the supply chain from disruption.

Besides weakening the economy, there are several social and psychological impact that this pandemic has caused on society. The major consequence of this outbreak can be seen as people turning hostile. There are several instances of this hostility, which was witnessed in various housing societies towards Corona Warriors, whether it be doctors, nurses, police, etc. Numerous people have started facing some mental health issues, due to self-isolation like anxiety, depression, panic attacks, etc. Being on the

verge of having irreversible impoverishment, many labour migrants are in immediate need of social security since it deteriorates their mental health.

Interstate migrants before and after lockdown

Interstate migration comes under Article 19(1) of the Indian Constitution guarantees all citizens the fundamental right to move freely throughout the territory of India, as well as reside and settle in any part of India.

It is seen that interstate migration has helped in the overall development of a nation as it uplifts the socioeconomic status of underprivileged households. There is around 100 million migrant labour which constitutes almost 20% of the total workforce [UN News, 4 June2020]. There was a low level of interstate migration in India until 2019 due to less urbanization. Poor Interstate Migrants Policy whose promise of providing better education, health, sanitation, child welfare, housing, social welfare, etc. were just left written on the papers, and none was delivered. In 2011 it was observed that interstate migrants dropped by 33% since 2001 [Census of India, 2011]. Uttar Pradesh has the highest out-migrants, whereas Maharashtra absorbed the highest in-migrants.

But now their conditions have even worsened due to coronavirus lockdown, and this has made a vast number of migrant workers to vow to never return to their workplaces. This nationwide lockdown has left millions of labour migrants jobless. The irresponsible attitude of employers and the heedlessness of government toward their suffering hurled the countless migrants to walk thousands of miles back home. Around 80% of these migrants were men, and many were informally employed, who used to send their wages back home for the survival of their families [Census of India, 2011]. This indifferent attitude of both government and employers and the reluctance of labour migrants have started haunting the supply chain, which can disrupt in the near future. The labour migrants who earlier just managed to meet their ends have turned them into a beggar as they are now only dependent on charity for their survival. Today they are either found standing in a queue for food or tickets for traveling back to their homes. This has made them feel that being a migrant labour today is a curse for them as they have undergone the humiliation of their lifehealt.

Increasing unemployment due to nationwide lockdown – A challenge

A devastating impact of COVID-19 on the Indian economy came in the face of increasing unemployment. It was observed that between February and April 2020, the household's income dropped by 40%, resulting in a decrease in demand by the households [The Reserve Bank of India,2020]. This subsequent decline of demand led to a decrease in supply as well. This led to a spike in the country's unemployment rate, which reached a record high of 27.11% on May 3, as per the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). It was reported that urban unemployment is worse than that of rural unemployment. It stood at 29.22% as against 26.67% of rural areas. As per CMIE,

the unemployment rate in March was 8.74%, whereas, in April, it went up to 23.52%. It was estimated that around 122 million people lost their livelihood due to nationwide lockdown in April alone, which included 27 million youth ranging from 20 yrs. to 30yrs. This new appalling unemployment data of India is approximately 4 times that of the U.S.A. [CMIE, 2020].

Out of these 122 million jobless people, 91.3 million were small traders and labour migrants, whereas salaried workers were only 17.8 million who have now been laid off and almost 18.2 million self-employed are left with no work [CMIE,2020]. It is not just the informal sector that has been hit by this nationwide curfew, rather, this uncertainty hasn't spared the formal sector either. It is predicted that one in every four in the rural area is unemployed today, and it would be not easy at all to come back to normal, despite the opening of the economy. Moreover, a shrink in demand in work would take place post-lockdown due to reverse migration.

It is said that the employability of men is worst affected because they are the ones who have been extensively employed in construction, manufacturing, textile, etc. This pandemic has resulted in a spike in women's unemployment rate. As a result, there is a drop in women's participation in the workforce. Although, over 100 million men lost their job as against 17 million women between March and April in 2020[CMIE, 2020]. But the percentage of employed dropped tells a different story. As the percentage of the number of men employed dropped by 29% whereas the change in the percentage of the number of women employed dropped by 39%. Another problem that haunts the dysfunctional economy is the signs of India heading into a recession. It is a well-known fact now that the global economy is heading into a recession owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Three major indications prove that an economy is slipping into a recession:

1. Negative real growth
2. Fall in aggregate demand
3. High unemployment rate

This itself makes it clear that India's GDP growth will likely remain negative in this fiscal year of 2020-21. Two of the major reason why India is highly expected to see a recession for the first time are:

1. Lack of domestic consumption due to loss of livelihood, economic and social security, health, and confidence in government by people.
2. This humanitarian and health crisis has brought economic activities at a standstill, worsening investment demand.

Consumer confidence has been dented, and this would last quite long, impacting the domestic demand. At this time, both demand and supply have collapsed. It is expected that supply would revive

much faster than demand, although the non-availability of labour migrants could pose a challenge to production. Whereas revival of demand is still a major problem since people don't have money in hand. This could create implications for potential growth.

Government's role during this covid-19 pandemic

India's first coronavirus case was reported in Kerala on 30th January, as confirmed by the Indian health officials. On 24th March 2020, Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, announced a nationwide lockdown for 21 days. Before the lockdown, there were 564 confirmed cases of coronavirus, and the death toll reached 10 in India [The Economics Time, 24 March 2020]. Since then, there have been five extensions of lockdown with some relief to orange and green zones. But this lockdown gave birth to "The Great Labour Crisis of 2020", which led to labour migrants opting for reverse migration.

On 12th May, the Prime Minister of India announced a special economic package for tackling COVID-19 menace, called Atam nirbhar Bharat. This ₹20 lakh crore package constitutes almost 10% of the nation's GDP. There are several measures listed by the government that they would be opting for helping the poor by providing Rs. 1.70 Lakh Crore relief package under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, by sanctioning Rs 15,000 crores for Emergency Health Response Package, extending loan limits for farmers, etc. The Central Government has released Rs 11,002 crore for State Governments to utilize the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). The government has promised to spend Rs. 3,500 crores in supplying free food grains to nearly 8 crore labour migrants. Shramik trains have been commenced by the government to facilitate the travel of labour migrants [National Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency, 15 May 2020].

The state governments have tried to tackle this issue of labour migrants in their ways. Some were innovative and proactive, while others failed to instil confidence among labour migrants. Kerala's pre-existing labour migrant's policies worked in their favour. They used their Ernakulam model to connect to their guest workers through migrant community kitchens to provide them food. It was observed that 69% of total relief camps and shelters were based in Kerala [Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020]. Odisha took timely and appropriate actions to help stranded workers launching helplines to reach out to them. They even appointed nodal officers for key migrant destination states to help labour migrants. Almost 1800 relief camps by this coastal state have been set up to assist labour migrants [The Odisha Government, 2020]. While other states have been altering their labour laws like Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh who have scrapped eight hours of work-day law and have allowed workers to be hired for a longer duration. Maybe these alterations in labour laws would result in more flexibility and higher employment, or higher labour exploitation. But for sure this would result in the initiation of a reformed India.

It would be too early to say whether these steps by the government would be propitious or not. But the measures opted by the state governments and the central government shows a disconnect between the policymaker and reality. Their policies would be inadequate in assisting distressed migrant workers. Making food grains free would help to improve their conditions. But besides this, labour migrants need money, not in forms of loan which would cripple them instead as direct cash transfers. And most importantly, a lot of focus is required to revive demand that can render stimulus to all other economic activities to uplift labour migrants.

DATA ANALYSIS

With an aim to attain a broad perspective of the labour crisis, a structured questionnaire is developed. The questionnaire consisted of questions intending to satisfy the objectives and research questions of our study. The questionnaire consisted of 41 questions, ranging from multiple-choice questions to rate on the scale questions. Further, to enhance the findings a survey is devised consisting of all these questions along with some personal information questions. Since the survey is one of the most reliable, authentic, and time- saving ways of gathering information. The survey was circulated on 1st June 2020 through various online mediums. To gain an opinion of labour migrants on this whole issue was the most important task as they are the ones who are the sole sufferers in this crisis. Some in-person surveys were conducted for labour migrants. Conducting an in-person survey aimed to magnify our knowledge about the impact of COVID-19 on labour migrants. This further helps in gaining some crucial insights into this issue.

The probability sampling was opted for enabling random selection. The accessible population included people ranging from 20 yrs. to 60 yrs., earning from rupees 20,000 to one lakh and above, living in different areas, etc. It was ensured that an actual human is being recorded for each response, and all due ethical standards were maintained while collecting the data sample.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Since all studies are confined to some kind of limitations, so is this research:

- > The size of the sample is comparatively small due to natural conditions.
- > Some people were unwilling to answer particular questions.
- > The online medium made it difficult for us to connect to a larger audience.
- > This pandemic has restrained us from directly interacting with a large number of labour migrants.

IMPACT ON LABOUR MIGRATION IN INDIA

Over 160 people responded to the survey. They constituted the study population and served with a deep insight into this topic. All the respondents came from different backgrounds and added new perspectives to the research. The survey was answered by 83 men constituting 51.9% of the total study population. Whereas 76 women composing 47.5% were total respondents out of 160. The responses received was from people of varying age groups, but the major contribution came from the age group 20 years to 30 years composing 30.8%, followed by the age group below 20 years and 30 years to 40 years comprising 23.3% each, and lastly by the age group above 40 years constituting 22.6%. The study population came from diverse occupational backgrounds. A fairly significant number of students have responded to the survey. They amount to 32.7% of the total study population. During this pandemic, some in-person survey of 49 labour migrants, comprising 30.8%. Their responses are very valuable for this study. Besides this, various responses were received from the public sector (10.1%), private sector (8.2%), self-employed (6.9%), and others (11.3%). A vast majority of 91.9% of the study population resides in the urban area. This shows that migration has played a great role in people's mobility and their choice of area of living. A majority of the study population, 35% of the total study population, earns up to ₹20,000, whereas 38.1% preferred to tick the Nil option. Over 7.5% of the total respondents earn between the brackets of ₹20,000 to ₹40,000 and above ₹100,000 each. Whereas out of the total respondents 5% earn between ₹40,000 to ₹60,000, 4.4% earn between ₹60,000 to ₹80,000 and 2.5% earn between ₹80,000 to ₹100,000.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Nationwide lockdown has seized the socio-economic security of labour migrants

As the lockdown was announced and further extended, it was witnessed that the labour migrants lost their composure and decided to undertake their torturous journey home. The heartrending images of the mass exodus of migrant labour explicate that they have lost their all hopes for the future. Having lost their livelihoods, surviving without food and shelter, and their savings coming to an end made these labour migrants desperate to take a thousand kilometres trudging on foot. This lockdown has raised a question on their socio-economic security. Unlike others, the labour migrants are not only exposed to this health crisis, but they are also battling for their unemployment to the loss of their employment. The Periodic Labour Force Survey conducted in 2017 by the National Sample Survey Office of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, had determined that there were approximately 1,49,53,750 urban workers who had unprotected and vulnerable jobs constituting bottom half of the wealth pyramid. It consists of over 81 lakh labour migrants among them [National Sample Survey Office, 2017]

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Source: -The New Humanitarian



Source: - The Wire

The COVID-19 has resulted in prolonged unemployment:

The economic activities have come to a grinding halt due to the commencement of nationwide lockdown. Almost 122 million people lost their livelihood in April alone due to this pandemic [CMIE, 2020].

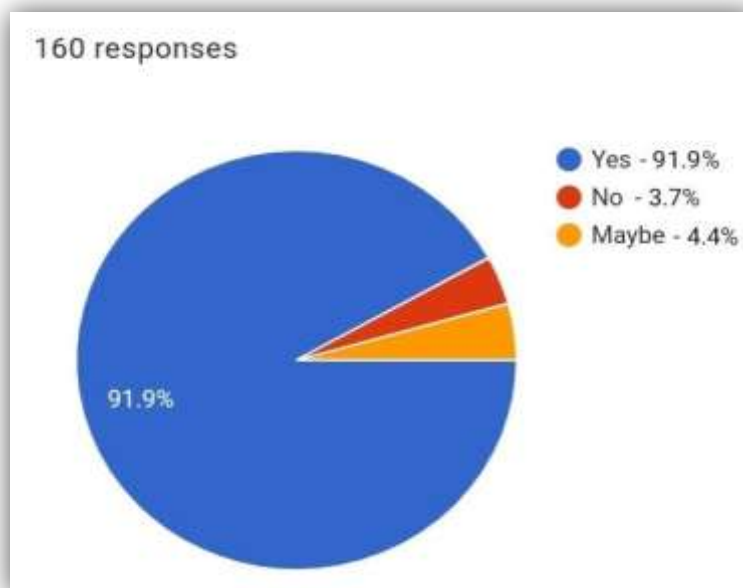


FIGURE 10.2. Covid-19 has resulted in prolonged unemployment.

An enormous section of the study population, 91.9% of it believe that this pandemic will result in prolonged unemployment. Whereas 3.7% refuted this argument and felt that the COVID-19 led lockdown would not take away employment or create a hurdle in generating employment. Over 4.4% were not sure of this whole relationship between the impact of COVID-19 and higher unemployment.

The Unprecedented lockdown has affected social, psychological, and emotional health of the labour migrants:

The loss of financial security undeviatingly affects the social, psychological, and emotional health of the labour migrants. This pandemic has developed several mental health issues for labour migrants as their social and financial security is at risk. Apart from physical sufferings, this pandemic has attacked the well-being of labour migrants. The following are the psychological impact of this COVID-19 led lockdown:

1. The feeling of being unheard and getting cornered has developed mass hysteria, anxiety, and distress among labour migrants.

2. The separation from families and the fear of being exposed to disease have intensified their irritability, anger, frustration, loneliness, denial, anxiety, depression, insomnia, and giving birth to extreme thoughts of suicide.
3. The continuous suspicion, long-drawn isolation, and uncertainty of the future have developed obsessive-compulsive symptoms and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in them.
4. The stigmatization, discrimination, and societal rejection consistently affect their psychological state.
5. The financial insecurity leads to depression and mental anguish and may lead to health crimes.

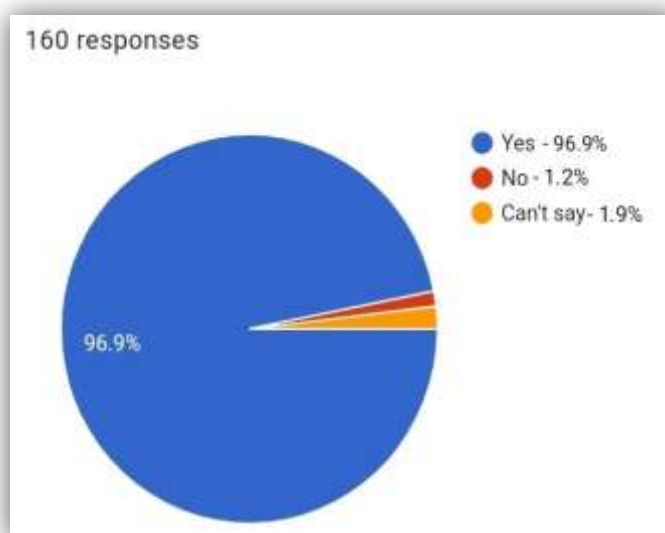


FIGURE 10.3. The lockdown has affected the mental health of labour migrants.

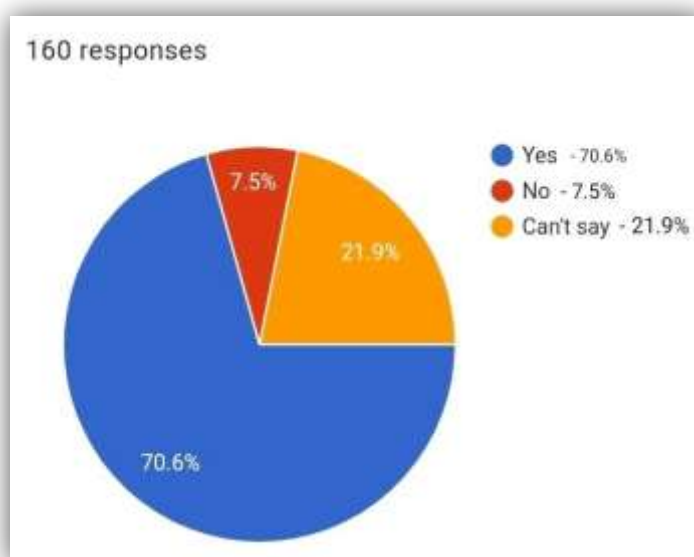
Even the respondents of the survey agree that this constant suffering, unfavorable circumstances, and disappointment in meeting their ends have affected their mental health. Almost 96.9% admitted that there has been a sweeping effect of lockdown on labour migrant's mental health. A small minority of 1.2% feel that there have been no repercussions on labour migrants. Whereas 1.9% were unsure of this whole circumstance.

The health cum economic crisis has widened the income disparity

This humanitarian crisis has left the labour migrants to choose between health risks and dying out of starvation. This has brought into our visibility gaze the deep rooted underlying pre-existing inequality. Labour migrants immediate need for food, shelter, healthcare, etc. point out income inequality existing in our nation. And now this ensuing crisis has brought their marginalization at the forefront.

It is estimated that by the end of June 2020, approximately 139 million people would run out of their savings[Livemint,16June2020]. This would make it unmanageable for them to meet their essential consumptions. Thus, the immediate need by labour migrants for food, shelter, healthcare, etc. is undoubtedly a sign of income disparity. After seeing this increased income inequality due to lockdown resulting in their starvation and destitution, the government announced a relief package to help them. Almost 8 crore labour migrants will be given free food.

FIGURE 10.4. The Covid-19 Pandemic has widened the income disparity.



The study population to a large extent agrees that there is income disparity, and now the gap has widened, as 70.6% have given an affirmative response. Almost 7.5% did not come across any sign of income disparity and the rest 21.9% felt doubtful.

Impact of sudden lockdown on labour migrants and their families:

It is not just the labour migrants who have lost their socio-economic security, but their family is also bearing the brunt of this crisis. The inability to reach their home has not only bewildered labour migrants their families as well. This nationwide lockdown raised a question on labour migrants constitutional rights of having a safe and secure life. The loss of livelihood has resulted in a decrease in money transfer from urban to rural areas. This resulted in a contraction of demand from the labour migrant's family as well. Further, damaging the sluggish rural economy.

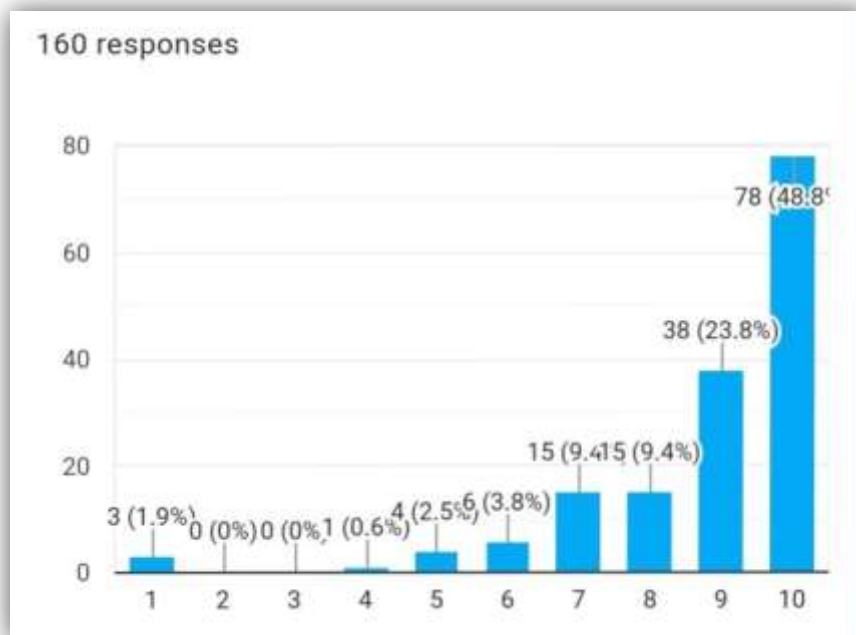


FIGURE 10.5. Impact of sudden lockdown on labour migrants and their families.

During the survey, the responses received stated that there would be an adverse impact of COVID-19 on labour migrants. As the majority of the study population gave them 5 or above on the rating scale, and almost 48.8% rated it 10 on the scale

Reverse migration has disrupted economic activities:

Reverse migration refers to the process of the decision-making that migrants undertake to relocate back to their native places. Ever since 1947, this is the most sweeping reverse migration that took place. The Solicitor General of India, Tushar Mehta, stated that over 97 lakh labour migrants had been transported back to their native homes [The Solicitor General of India, 28 May 2020]. It was witnessed that 21.69 lakh labour migrants had returned to Uttar Pradesh, whereas Bihar received over 10 lakh migrants as a result of reverse migration [The Solicitor General of India, 28 May 2020]. All these internal migrants traveled from rural areas to urban ones in search of better jobs, improved living standards, higher wages, etc. In return, they also facilitated the production and economic growth of several sectors of the economy. Now, this reverse migration will adversely impact the sectors of the economy like agriculture, trade, etc. More than 50% of the workforce employed in the ceramic industry, construction, textile sector, etc. are interstate migrants who have opted to migrate back [Times of India, 7 May 2020]. This has brought the economic activities of these sectors at a halt.

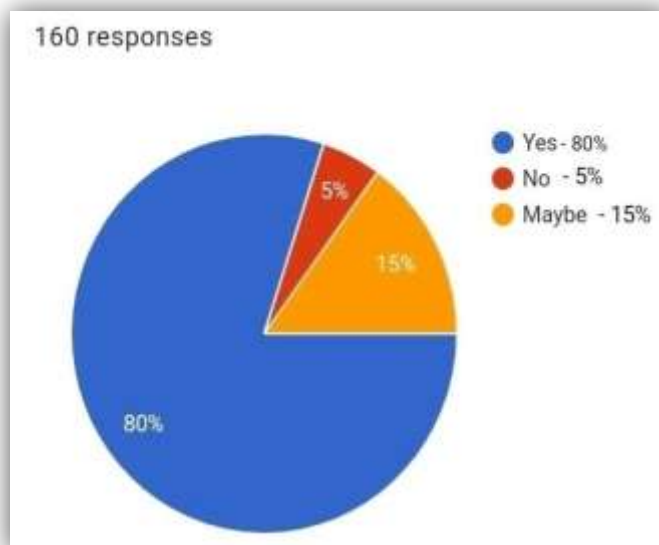


FIGURE 10.6. Reverse migration has disrupted economic activities.

Over 80% of the study population admitted the fact all these sectors of the economy run smoothly just because of the labour migrants as most of them come from their home state to host state just to secure more stable livelihoods and increase the production resulting in profiting the host state economically. Only 5% refuted it and the rest 15% felt uncertain about the fact.

The unplanned lockdown has resulted in acute labour shortage :

The Chief Labour Commissioner asserted that 26 lakh migrants are stranded across the country, and out of which 10% are in relief camps, 43% on worksites, and 46% in other clusters [The chief Labour Commissioner, 4 June 2020]. Over 20.5 lakh labour migrants have left Gujarat and gone home on the other hand nearly 11 lakh interstate migrants have left Maharashtra. Even Uttar Pradesh saw 1.35 lakh labourer's reverse migration [CLC Website, 4 June 2020]. Their reverse migration points out to the fear and uncertainty instilled in them due to the indifferent attitude of employers. This sense of skepticism would result in an acute labour shortage in the future. It would be a tedious task for the industries is to convince the startled labour migrants to return to work as once the trust is lost it is strenuous to regain it. Since the time lockdown has been uplifted, and the economy is sputtering back to life, the employers are trying to woo back the labour migrants. They are willing to pay three times for labour migrants travel, and even some are arranging for air travels to bring back the workforce who had lost to the exodus in the past.

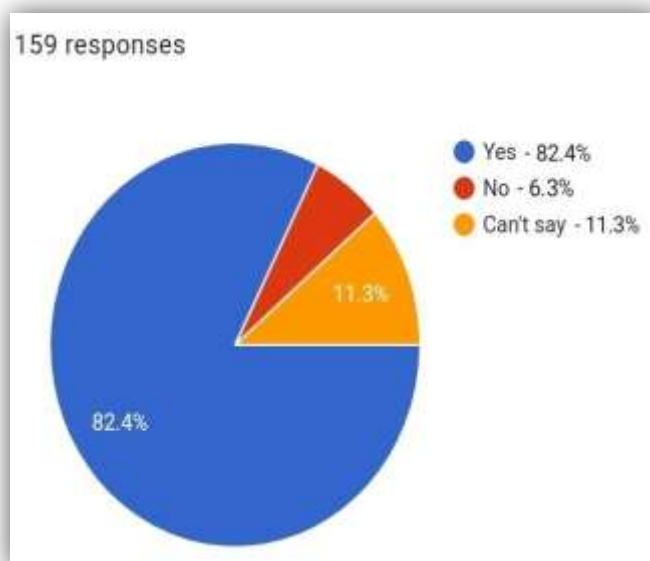


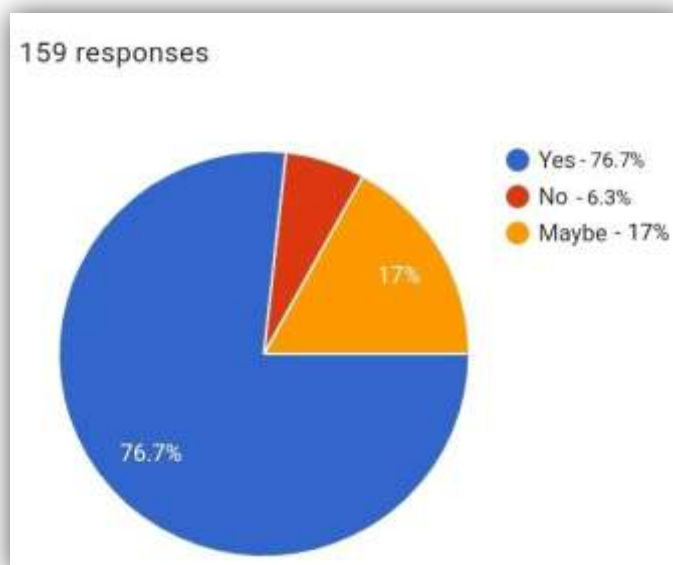
FIGURE 10.7. The nationwide lockdown has prompted an acute labour shortage.

Even the study population felt the same as out of the total respondents, 82.4% perceive that the industries in an urban area would face an acute labour shortage shortly. Around 6.3% negated this fact, and the rest 11.3% were unsure of an acute labour shortage in the future.

The lockdown has created a deficit of seasonal migrant workers:

The labour migrants are not just workers but also a factor of production. This nationwide lockdown has led to an immense displacement of labour migrants, and it would not be easy for industries to attain normalcy soon. It would take time as the migrants are in no mood to forget their sufferings and afflictions, and return. It is assumed that over 15% of businesses would be shut down the post-lockdown as a majority of interstate migrants are not willing to return [Scroll, 30 May 2020]. The labour migrants are the backbone of various sectors of the economy, for instance, a major section of labour employed in the construction sector is labour migrants from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Agriculture sectors all across the country employ labour migrants from Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. Power loom sectors have witnessed labour migrants from Odisha. People from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand are employed in urban informal sectors. Almost all the sectors of the economy have heavily relied on labour migrants and now their reverse migration will undermine their productions resulting in extreme losses.

FIGURE 10.8. The lockdown has created a deficit of seasonal migrant workers.

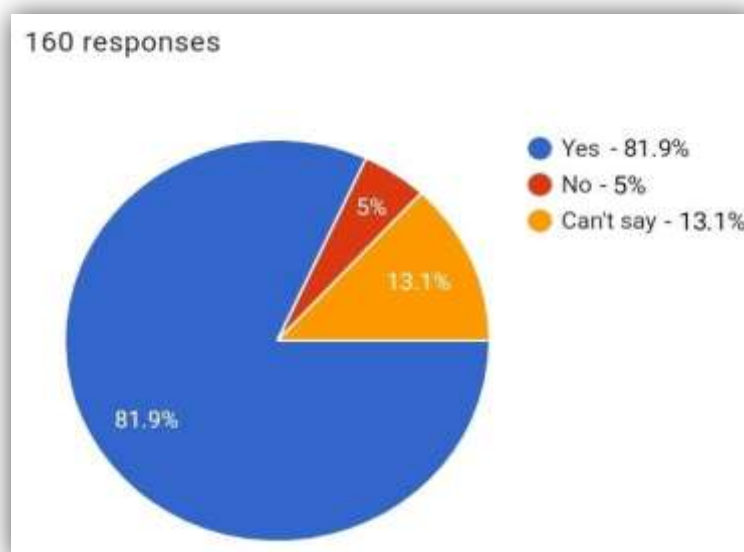


. A vast majority of 76.7% of the respondents answered in affirmation that labour migrants would certainly impact the economy. Approximately 17% were uncertain about it, and the remaining 6.3% opposed it

Lockdown prompted the chaotic and painful process of mass return by labour migrants:

India is a labour- intensive country, and as per census 2011, there are over 402 million workers out of which 127 million are females, and 275 million are males [Census of India, 2011]. It would not be wrong to say that out of every four labourers is a migrant. They are the most quintessential pillar of India's economic development. The COVID-19 led lockdown has made labour migrants realize that the government, despite considering them the currency of economic growth, does not even respect them as humans. Their actions say it all. It took them almost initial 40-odd days of lockdown to understand labour migrants' problems, agony, and sheer desperation to return to their native homes. This pushed the migrant workers to take a long arduous journey back home on foot. The policymaker's negligence resulted in migrants still being on the roads despite 55 days of lockdown. This occurred because the government misunderstood the whole pandemic as a law and order situation instead of a health emergency. Thus, this sudden lockdown resulted in a chaotic and painful process of mass return for labour migrant.

FIGURE 10.9. Lockdown prompted the turbulent mass migrant exodus.



A great percentage of 81.9% of the respondents agreed that lockdown was the reason behind this painful process of mass return by labour migrants. On the other hand, only 5% felt that this was not the reason, whereas 13.1% had mixed feelings about it.

The financial relief package shows a disconnect between policymakers and reality:

Despite a prolonged delay in taking action, the government finally announced a financial relief package worth ₹20 lakh crore. It is roughly 10% of the GDP, which mainly focused on four key areas i.e. Liquidity, labour, land, and law. The following are the relief to the migrant workers that this economic stimulus package provides [National Investment Promotion And Facilitation Agency, 15 May 2020]. -

1. Free food grains for labour migrant costing over ₹3,500 crores.
2. Cheap rental housing for migrant workers under PPP mode.
3. Cheap loans for small businesses costing over ₹1,500 crores.
4. Cheap loans for small vendors costing over ₹5,000 crores.
5. Over ₹3 lakh crore of credit guarantee for micro, small and medium enterprises.
6. ₹2 lakh crore concessional credit for 25 million farmers.

This economic stimulus fell short in providing recovery for an economy pummelled by COVID- 19. The whole financial package just focused on providing credits and loans, whereas right now, the need

is to make money available to the vulnerable section of the society, which cannot be done by providing loans. Instead, to ensure labour migrants financial security, the government should have aimed at directly transferring cash to them. The disconnect between policymakers and reality was quite evident as they made provisions for free food, but they do not even have money for cooking oil, vegetables, etc. Over 78% of the labour migrants have not been paid since lockdown, and almost 64% are sustaining themselves with less than ₹100 since lockdown [Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN), 1 May2020].

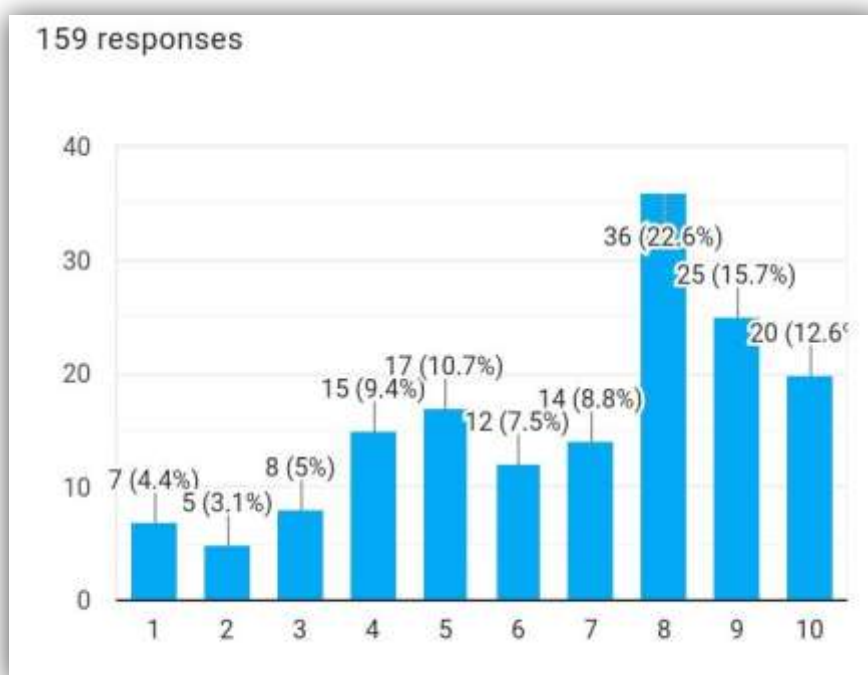


FIGURE 10.10. The financial relief package shows a disconnect between policymakers and reality.

A large section of the study population did not find financial packages useful for the labour migrant as they gave them 5 or less than that on the rating

The overall central government's response in tackling the whole pandemic:

An economy without labour is impossible to imagine. But the government's response to the plight of the labour migrants makes us feel as if they are imagining a labor-intensive country's future without labourers. The paralysis of politics and virulent media has led to a delayed decision- making process making the labour migrants as the sole sufferer. The labour migrants could not wait for the government to arrange transport, mainly due to starvation. When the government finally arranged

transportation, their mismanagement, and chaotic travel orders just added to the labour migrants' miseries. Around 85% had to pay for free travel, and an overwhelming number of labour migrants did not receive any rations [Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN), 1 May 2020]. This certainly depicts that it is the politics that has kept the labour migrants as a hostage. The overall role of the central government has been poor in handling this COVID-19 pandemic as the defying of lockdown by labour migrants is an outcome of the government's thoughtless policies.

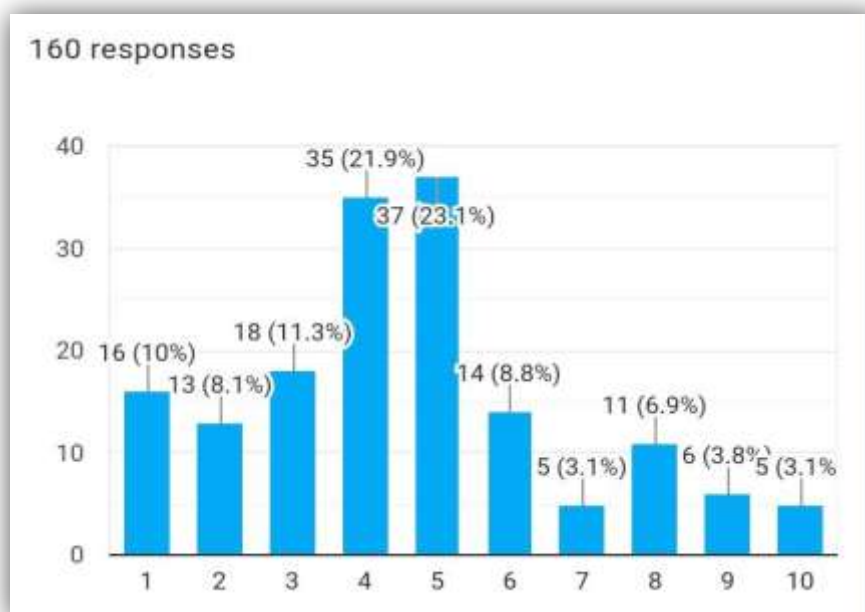


FIGURE 10.11. The overall central government's response in tackling the whole pandemic

Even the vast majority of the respondents were dissatisfied with the government's work and rated their inefficiency more than 5 on rate scale.

CONCLUSION

Indian migrants have encountered multiple hardships due to nationwide lockdown, during this pandemic. Empathy and compassion are the two most indispensable virtues that everyone must bestow in this time of the pandemic. Since the advent of the lockdown, labour migrants have been the worst sufferers. The government's and employer's depthless understanding and inconsiderate attitude have shoved them to trudge hundreds of kilometres back home. The government must ensure that no Indian citizen is deprived of their socio-economic rights. But the government is itself not able to address the basic needs of labour migrants. Their callous approach to not pay wages and laying off labour migrants during such a difficult time has led to social malaise. They are one of the reasons

behind the anguish and pointless deaths that labour migrants are facing and resulting in an unpardonable tragedy.

Through various secondary data that it was studied and interpreted along with the survey that was conducted, which gave us first-hand information. This study found that Nationwide lockdown took away labour migrants socio-economic security. It also proved that a higher rate of reverse migration has affected the sectors of the economy. This study showed the disconnect between policymakers and reality that led to a delay in decision making.

These conclusions show us that there were faults and several misjudgments that led to this great labour crisis of 2020. The government can still control the damage done to the labour migrants by taking immediate actions. The profound analysis of various scenarios explains to us that it was not just the government's indifferent approach but also the employer's insensitive attitude that snatched labour migrants socio-economic security and impacted their mental health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

“Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety, and a better future. It is part of the social fabric, part of our very make-up as a human family”. — Eighth General Secretary of United Nations, Ban Ki-moon.

After seeing labour migrants struggling for wages and livelihoods, grappling with physical and sexual exploitation with safety and security, it feels that migration has lost its true essence. Living away from home is never easy yet to ensure better living conditions, not for themselves but for their families as well they migrate. However, when an unprecedented pandemic like the outbreak of coronavirus hit the country, it is seen that the invisible hands which constructed the economy were left exposed to it, not just the pandemic but also starvation.

After examining all the facts and theories, it can be concluded that this pressing issue requires immediate attention before India completely misses the bus. Nevertheless, several measures can still be taken to avoid further deterioration of labour migrant's condition :

1. Expansion of MGNREGA will help in generating employment and aid in improving the financial health of labour migrants.
2. Direct cash transfers of a decent amount a month should be provided for at least three months.
3. Universalising the Public Distribution System (PDS) and facilitating the supply of food grains free of cost for at least 6 months.
4. The social safety fall-back must be offered to labour migrants as the health cum economic crisis has utterly shaken them.

5. The urgent setting up of mental health organization, and sensitization and awareness programs to reduce the psychological impact of this crisis.

6. The government must opt for some stringent steps and strong labour reforms to monitor and repress labour exploitation.

The government must opt for some rigorous measures to revive demand and supply chains, as this would automatically uplift all other sections of the economy. Further, there should be some steps taken to support the labour migrants and their families to encourage them socially, economically, culturally, and psychologically.

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