

Issues of Internal Migration in India: An Overview

DEEPAK

Research Scholar
School of Inter-disciplinary and
Trans-disciplinary Studies (SOITS),
Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi

PREKSHA DASSANI

Research Scholar,
Department of Commerce and Management Studies
Andhra University, Visakhapatnam,
Andhra Pradesh, India

Abstract

Migration arises due to socio-economic, political reasons. It is the movement of individuals for better opportunities and growth in terms of economic strength, access to medical facilities, education, or political stability. Migrant workers are widespread across the country and often engage themselves in the informal sector due to their weak education background and economic backwardness. These informal sector workers are engaged in works of low-paying or perilous jobs in crucial sectors in urban areas like the manufacturing industries, construction, hotel industry, textiles, transportation, domestic workers, etc. According to the Economic Survey of India, 2017, India's inter-state migration during 2011-16 was about 9 million annually and as per the Census 2011 report, the internal migrants (including intra and interstate migrants) was around 139 million.

This paper is an attempt to present an overview about migration, issues of Internal migration, IMPEX as a tool to understand the inter-state migrant policies and the way ahead for migrant workers to augment in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals designed by the United Nations.

Keywords : Migration, Inter-state Migrants, Informal Sector, SDG, IMPEX,

Introduction

India's informal economy still contributes to more than 80 percent of the non-agricultural employment. The less creation of employment in the formal sector has paved the way for people to seek employment in the informal economy. Informality is seen in the traditional informal economy as well as due to growing informality in the formal sector. The informality in the formal sector is rising because of the increase in the use of contractual labour and outsourcing of production (ILO, n.d.). The informal sector workers are more prone to poverty because they mostly work without formal contracts and are subject to less social security. Their poor educational background and ignorance cause such exploitations. The high rate of informal labour, especially in developing economies has been identified as an impediment to sustainable development (Deléchat & Medina, 2020). Migration is a long-standing phenomenon and is prevalent across the world. Migration arises due to socio-economic, political reasons. It is the movement of individuals for better opportunities and growth in terms of economic strength, access to medical facilities, education, or political stability. India is home to people with diverse backgrounds and displays internal migration i.e., either from rural-urban, rural-rural and also urban-urban. These workers form a part of the unorganized sector and experience severe distress at the workplace and residence, majorly because of their identity as migrant workers and also because of the informal nature of their employment. In an unorganized market, the workers often encounter conflicts at the

workplace. They commonly experience issues such as physical abuse, mental agony, sexual harassment, non-payment of wages, poor safety norms, ill-hygiene, accidents and at times even death.

Review of Literature

Most of the migrants enter the labour market at a young age and end up stuck in this vicious circle with hazardous jobs, insecurity and bleak growth prospects for the rest of their lives. The migrant workers' accessibility to good healthcare services is limited and adversely impacts their quality of life. Their strained work environment and inhospitable living spaces make it even more difficult for them. According to the Economic Survey of India, 2017, India's inter-state migration during 2011-2016 was about 9 million annually while the Census, 2011 showed the internal migrants (including intra and interstate migrants) to be around 139 million. Based upon the amenities provided by the destination states, individuals are attracted to such states and move out from their native states. Moreover, it was observed that the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are the out-source states for migration followed by Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal. The attractive destination states for the migrants were found to be Kerala, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat (Sharma, 2017). During the pandemic, the migrant workers have been exposed to extreme indifference and suffering due to their poor economic background, informal nature of work and lack of education. Many workers were laid off and so many remained homeless. It is disappointing to note that there is no proper mechanism to check if the employers or contractors are paying the migrant workers their dues timely and in full.

Coronavirus caused jitters and instability across all sections of society. This virus has made the informal sector workers fall deeper into the vicious circle of hunger, discrimination, poverty, and poor health conditions. A downtrend in economic activities has led to a drop in income of migrant workers and their limited skills have restricted their exposure to exploring possibilities. This has exacerbated their vulnerability to exclusion, inequality, and unemployment (Dassani & Behera, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic situation in 2020 saw a reverse migration pattern among the migrant workers where they left the urban areas and went back to their native places. This scenario was known to be a reason for urban to the rural transmission of coronavirus cases (Singh, Patel, Chaudhary, & Mishra, 2020). The fear of job loss, distress about the coronavirus situation, worry about access to general services led to reverse migration across the country. The panicked migrant workers rushed back to their villages in huge numbers which resulted in a spike in the working population in the rural areas. The authors identified that the lack of credible data regarding the migrant workforce is a major lacuna that hinders effective policymaking. The database available is obsolete. The authors insisted to create an updated database of migrant workers and suggested that registration of the migrant workers at the panchayat level should be created as an aid to the Government for assisting the workers in this crisis (Behera, Mishra, & Behera, 2021).

Objective

With this background, the purpose of this paper is to present an overview about migration, issues of Internal migration, difficulties of migrant workers, IMPEX as a tool to understand the inter-state migrant policies and the way ahead for migrant workers to augment in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals designed by the United Nations (UN). This paper is entirely based on secondary sources. The sources include government reports, several research papers and websites.

Internal Migration and its issues

In the year 2015, the UN presented 17 Sustainable Development Goals aimed to be reached by 2030. Goal 8 and Goal 10 focuses on “Decent Work and Economic Growth” and “Reduce inequalities” respectively. Out of the many targets, the former aims to protect labour rights and attempts to promote a safe working environment for workers including migrant workers, particularly women and workers who work in the perilous work environment. The latter targets to facilitate an “orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people” via the effective implementation of migration policies (United Nations, n.d.). The lives of migrant workers are stuck in despondency as they yearn for a quality life and continue to remain underpaid and unable to be fully productive. The migrant workers are recruited via a network of contractors and eventually, these workers find themselves subjugated in a docile manner. This system has shaped to be so exploitative because of which the workers experience difficulty in working in their states when compared to other states. This migrant job market does not have a proper monitoring mechanism which has resultantly strengthened the unfair methods and practices. The migrant workers live in cramped spaces and inhospitable places. They are also forced to live in open spaces, slums, pavements or at worksites. Urbanisation is a result of the labour of migrant workers but they are considered to be problematic and aliens to the cities. The inter-state migrant workers do not have the privilege of voting which keeps them at a backdrop and remains to be one of the reasons why they are ignored by the political section. They are kept aloof or find a minor place in trade unions that keeps their voices unheard. Their mobile nature deprives them of having a place in the manifestos of trade unions. This makes it necessary that to ensure that policies are more migrant workers friendly, it is essential to have the data profile of these workers (Sharma, 2017).

The trend of internal migration in the country by default calls for a vital role of the government to eliminate the exploitations faced by migrant workers and also keeping in view that the human rights and labour laws related to migrant workers are not breached. This is needed so that migration empowers them with the opportunity to progress and not live in fear or insecurity. One major law which is related to internal migration is the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 (Remesh & Agarwal, 2020). This Act was passed “to regulate the employment of inter-State migrant workmen and to provide for their conditions of service and matters connected therewith”. Under this law, it is necessary for the establishments that have employed five or more five migrant workers to be registered with the local authority. On similar lines, this law is also applicable to the contractors who have employed five or more five inter-state workers. This system of registration helps to create accountability and record to formalise the labour workforce in the informal sector. Such a record will help the government to deliver a legal framework for refining the lives of migrants. This law also provides the terms and conditions regarding recruitment of workers including details about the pay, working hours, number of holidays, other amenities etc. It also mentions that the wages given to a migrant worker shall not be below the wages stated in the Minimum Wages Act (Chief Labour Commissioner (Central), n.d.).

IMPEX: A tool to measure the integration of inter-state migrant workers

The IMPEX (Inter-State Migrant Policy Index) is a newly developed index by a Mumbai based non-profit organisation that is used to measure the integration of inter-state migrant workers (Bhattacharya, 2020). Interstate migration is an avenue for the workers in developing countries to improve their income levels. The country has a high rate of internal migration but still encounters barriers in the integration of migrants in the destination states. This highlights the role of the policies at the state level for helping in the integration of

inter-state migrants in developing countries. This index helps to identify the state which has migrant-friendly policies and those which do not have. This index has been adapted from the Migration Policy Index (MIPEX) which is one of the most popular indices to measure migrant integration policies. Based on the MIPEX, eight areas were identified based on which India's migration integration can be evaluated i.e. children's rights, education, identity registration, labour market, housing, social benefits, political participation and health and sanitation (India Migration Now, 2019)

Discussion

This IMPEX index also measures if the state provides ad-hoc or additional policy measures for the migrant workers, wherever needed so that they have equality on par with the state residents. The results of IMPEX,2019 revealed that there is immense apathy and discriminatory behaviour towards the migrant from the state-level policymakers. Out of all the states, Kerala (IMPEX score 62) was identified to have migrant-friendly policies and was more considerate towards these workers when compared to the other destination states. Kerala's labour-friendly policy for migrants includes health policies, child policies and welfare schemes. Apart from this, the state issues alternative identity cards to this workforce to provide benefits of welfare schemes and education facilities. These workers are also referred to as 'guest workers'. Despite Kerala leading the scoreboard, there is scope for more improvement. There is a need to expand the political inclusion of migrant workers and also reduce the discriminatory behaviour towards migrants while accessing the housing facilities. Despite Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala and Tamil Nadu being the popular destination states for migrants, they experience severe challenges as the agencies in these states are constrained and are forced to depend their livelihoods on the mercy of their networks and employers. Moreover, Punjab, Maharashtra, and Haryana have slightly fared better in their migrant policies when compared to Delhi, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat. In the areas of housing policy, unlike Gujarat (score 17), Punjab (score 42) induces contractors to provide the migrant workers with accommodation. Additionally, the Shehri Awas Yojana also offers accommodation to slum residents which also benefits the migrant workers. In the state of Gujarat, migrant workers only receive assistance in building rest sheds and permanent residential housing with no measures for facilitating and ensuring the outcomes of this assistance. Sadly, the housing provisions remain unavailable for the migrants (Aggarwal, Singh, & Mitra, 2019) The results of IMPEX,2020 showed the average score for 28 states and NCT Delhi was 37 out of 100 which reveals that less attention is shown towards integration of efforts in destination states. The last year showed Kerala, Goa, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh were found to be better off in integrating migrant workers when compared to other states. On the contrary, it is disappointing to note that Delhi, which is a major migrant-receiving state, has performed poorly. Kerala, Goa, and Rajasthan scored 57,51 and 51 respectively and were the only three states to cross the 50 mark. The state of Kerala exhibited high scores in three aspects i.e. education, child rights and health and sanitation (Mitra, Singh, & Rawat, 2020) . The analysis of the results over the last two years shows that Kerala is the most inclusive and welcoming state for migrant workers but the other states have a long way to go to ensure that they favour the inter-state migrants.

Possibilities

It is essential to spread the stories of these migrant workers with the intent to sensitize the public that there is a need to have a behavioural change among the general population. People need to unlearn their biased opinions and rote thoughts with adaptive nature.(Rao, Narain, Chakraborty, Bhanjedo, & Pattnaik, 2020) cited the work of (Srivastava &

Sasikumar, 2003) that the Inter-state Migrant Workmen Act is inapplicable to establishments or contractors with less than five migrant workers which leave behind a large number of workers from exercising the law.

The present legal mechanism is not sensitive to disputes of the unorganised sector. The local authorities must stand in support of these workers as their intervention will help to voice their views and bridge the gap between the migrant workers and others. Issues of migrant workers are countless but to begin with, empathy needs to be imbibed in people so that they take charge of their power and position to work for the welfare of this section and act in line with the laws framed. Moreover, due to lack of awareness of laws and evidence in some cases, the migrant workers' issues seldom find their way to courts.

Summary

There exists an ample amount of literature on the topic of Migration. This research paper is an addition to the existing literature with its focus on the inter-state migration policies and the IMPEX which is a newly adapted index in India. The states must actively and effectively adopt the successful policies and schemes of other states to ensure that their policies are migrant-friendly. With the prevailing hardships of the migrant workers, it is the need of the hour to urgently address the issues of inter-state migrant workers as their pains are often undermined. A united effort from all segments of people is needed i.e. collaborations from the corporates, NGOs, local bodies, state government, contractors, employers, public and the central government to dedicatedly work for the upliftment of migrant workers.

References

- Aggarwal, V., Singh, P., & Mitra, R. (2019, August). *indiaspend.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.indiaspend.com/how-state-governments-disenfranchise-interstate-migrants-in-india/>
- Behera, M., Mishra, S., & Behera, A. R. (2021, May). The COVID-19-Led Reverse Migration on Labour Supply in Rural Economy: Challenges, Opportunities and Road Ahead in Odisha. *The Indian Economic Journal*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F00194662211013216>
- Bhattacharya, D. (2020, November). *newsclck.in*. Retrieved July 2021, from <https://www.newsclck.in/Most-Indian-States-Fail-Integrate-Migrant-Workers-Index>
- Chief Labour Commissioner (Central). (n.d.). *clc.gov.in*. Retrieved July 2021, from <https://clc.gov.in/clc/acts-rules/inter-state-migrant-workmen#INTRODUCTION>
- Dassani, P., & Behera, M. (2020, September). Coronavirus Pandemic and Informal sector workers In India: Impact and Possible road ahead. *Man & Development*, XLII(3), 59-76.
- Deléchat, C., & Medina, L. (2020, December). *imf.org*. Retrieved from <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2020/12/what-is-the-informal-economy-basics.htm>
- ILO. (n.d.). *ilo.org*. Retrieved from <https://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/areasofwork/informal-economy/lang--en/index.htm>
- India Migration Now. (2019). *indiamigrationnow.org*. Retrieved from indiamigrationnow.org/impex-2019/
- Mitra, R., Singh, P., & Rawat, C. (2020, November). *indiaspend.com*. Retrieved July 2021, from <https://www.indiaspend.com/kerala-on-top-delhi-near-bottom-in-new-migrant-policy-index/>
- Rao, N., Narain, N., Chakraborty, S., Bhanjedo, A., & Pattnaik, A. (2020, October). Destinations Matter: Social Policy and Migrant Workers in the Times of Covid. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 1639-1661.
- Remesh, B. P., & Agarwal, T. (2020, July-December). Changing contours of Internal Migration in India : Centrality of poverty and vulnerability. *Manpower Journal*, LIV(3&4), 1-18.
- Sharma, K. (2017, October). *weforum.org*. Retrieved July 2021, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/10/india-has-139-million-internal-migrants-we-must-not-forget-them/>
- Singh, S., Patel, V., Chaudhary, A., & Mishra, N. (2020, August). Reverse Migration of Labourers amidst COVID-19. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 55(32-33).
- Srivastava, R., & Sasikumar, S. (2003). An overview of migration in India, its impact and key issues. *Migration Development and Pro-poor policy in Asia*. Dhaka.
- United Nations. (n.d.). *un.org*. Retrieved July 2021, from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.html>