

EMERGING TRENDS OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN INDIA – A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

An emigrant worker is someone who relocates from one place to another in hunt of employment to sustain themselves. In India, the challenges faced by similar workers have stressed the government's shy sweats in icing their safety, health, and overall working conditions. The COVID- 19 epidemic, which began in Wuhan, China, and snappily spread worldwide, revealed the dire circumstances of these workers numerous of whom were seen walking along roads and roadways trying to return to their native places. The civil lockdown assessed to check the contagion forced them to leave the metropolises, as their livelihoods and access to introductory musts were suddenly cut off. This study seeks to propose practical and implementable measures that governments can borrow to support migratory workers in the event of unborn lockdowns. More importantly, it emphasizes the need for long- term, sustainable results that would minimize the necessity for workers to leave their motherlands unless absolutely essential. The exploration adopts a doctrinal methodology and is predicated in core legal exploration principles. It primarily explores the rigors faced by migratory workers and proposes feasible remedies. The authors have conducted an in- depth review of scholarly literature, incorporating perceptivity and perspectives from established experts in the field.

KEYWORDS: Migratory Workers, Livelihood, Rights, Push And Pull Factor, Government.

INTRODUCTION:

Migration is a widespread phenomenon where individuals move from one region to another in search of employment. In India, approximately 140 million people are part of the migratory labor force, contributing around 10% to the nation's GDP. Economic aspirations, social marginalization, and increasing urbanization are the primary drivers of migration within the country. Migrant workers in India are predominantly engaged in the construction and mining sectors and are often employed as informal, casual laborers. Employment opportunities for migrant workers remain limited. This is evident in statistics showing that 53% of wage earners lack access to social security, 49% do not receive paid leave, and 62% work without formal employment contracts.

These vulnerabilities restrict migrant workers' access to essential welfare schemes and fair labor conditions.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these challenges, with around 11 million migrant workers returning to their home states during the crisis. Migrant laborers in India encounter difficulties at every phase of migration. They are often excluded from welfare programs due to the absence of individualized records and suffer from poor workplace bargaining power, as many are dependent on intermediaries who delay or deny wage payments.

Additionally, inconsistent policy definitions hinder migrant workers' access to institutional safeguards, such as the portability of social benefits. At a systemic level, lack of proper

housing, healthcare, and financial services further deepens their marginalization.

This study seeks to propose actionable and sustainable policy measures that governments can adopt in the event of future lockdowns. It emphasizes the importance of long-term strategies that would reduce the compulsion for individuals to migrate unless absolutely necessary. The research utilizes a doctrinal methodology, grounded in core legal research principles, and focuses on analyzing the conditions of migrant workers while proposing effective solutions to improve their livelihoods.

MIGRANT WORKERS:

DEFINITION:

Although there is no universally standardized definition of the term “migrant workers,” several international and national legal instruments offer a framework for understanding who qualifies under this category. The **1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families**, established by the United Nations, defines a migrant worker as any individual who is, has been, or will be engaged in remunerated activity in a country of which they are not a citizen. This definition emphasizes the cross-border nature of labor migration and the need to safeguard the rights of individuals working outside their country of origin.

At the national level, the **Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979** provides a more specific interpretation relevant to India’s internal migration dynamics. It identifies an inter-state migrant worker as a person recruited by a contractor in one state to work in another, irrespective of whether the principal employer is directly aware of this recruitment. This definition underscores the often complex labor arrangements that exist in India’s informal economy and highlights the vulnerability of workers who rely on middlemen or contractors for employment opportunities.

The **United Nations Convention** also reinforces this broader view by stating that a migrant worker is someone who is currently working, has worked, or is planning to work in a remunerative role in a nation where they do not hold citizenship. This reflects a global acknowledgment of the economic contributions of migrant workers, while simultaneously recognizing the legal and social protections they often lack.

Despite these legal definitions, the implementation and enforcement of migrant worker rights remain inconsistent. Migrant workers frequently fall through the cracks of national policies, facing issues such as wage theft, lack of job security, and inadequate access to healthcare and housing. The absence of a universal definition further complicates efforts to ensure uniform protection, especially for those engaged in informal or seasonal labor. As migration continues to shape labor markets around the world, it becomes increasingly important for both international and domestic legal systems to evolve and address the challenges that migrant workers face, ensuring that their rights are upheld regardless of their origin or destination.

The United Nations Population Division defines irregular migrants (or undocumented migrants) as individuals who enter a country often in search of employment without the required documents or permits, or who overstay the authorized length of stay in the country.¹⁸⁵²

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**¹⁸⁵³ provides a nuanced classification of migrant workers by distinguishing between *economic migrants* and *labour migrants*, recognizing that migration for economic purposes takes various forms. According to the IOM, *labour migrants* are individuals who relocate specifically to engage in employment-related activities. These workers typically fall within the traditional understanding of migration for work, often occupying roles in

¹⁸⁵² United Nations

¹⁸⁵³ The International Organization for Migration (IOM)

sectors such as construction, agriculture, domestic service, or manufacturing—commonly through short-term or long-term employment contracts.

On the other hand, the term *economic migrants* encompasses a broader category. While it includes labour migrants, it also covers individuals who move to another country to engage in various economic activities that may not always involve direct employment. This group includes business travelers, foreign investors, entrepreneurs, and self-employed professionals who enter a country with the intention of contributing to or benefiting from its economic landscape. The distinction between the two terms lies primarily in the scope and nature of economic involvement—*labour migrants* generally participate as employees, whereas *economic migrants* may also include those involved in investment or independent economic ventures.

International Labour Organization:¹⁸⁵⁴

A “migrant worker” is defined in the International Labour Organization (ILO) instruments as a person who migrates from one country to another (or who has migrated from one country to another) with a view to being employed other than on his own account, and includes any person regularly admitted as a migrant for employment.

RIGHTS OF MIGRANT WORKERS:

Migrant workers in India, like all other citizens, are entitled to the fundamental rights guaranteed under the **Indian Constitution**. Most notably, **Article 21**, which ensures the right to life and personal liberty, extends to all individuals, including migrant laborers. This article has been interpreted to include the right to live with dignity, access to adequate living conditions, and the right to work in a safe and humane environment. Despite these constitutional protections, many migrant workers continue to live and work in harsh conditions, with limited

access to essential services and legal safeguards.

The question, “*Why do people migrate for work?*” does not have a straightforward or singular answer. However, one of the most pressing reasons is the **lack of employment opportunities and inadequate infrastructure** in their home states. This economic disparity pushes individuals to seek livelihoods in more developed regions. The 2011 Census reported that over **5.4 crore (54 million)** people migrated across the country in search of employment. States like **Uttar Pradesh** and **Bihar** are among the highest contributors to this internal labor migration due to persistent poverty, underdevelopment, and unemployment. It is important to note that if state governments in the regions with high out-migration implemented more effective policies focused on job creation, infrastructure development, and local skill enhancement, the need for large-scale migration could significantly decline. Migration, when it occurs at an excessive scale, can strain urban infrastructure in destination states and disrupt the **geographic and economic balance** between regions. Though the term “overburdening” is not meant to imply a negative view of migrants, it does highlight the pressure such movement can place on cities that may already be struggling with limited resources. India has enacted several laws aimed at safeguarding the rights and welfare of migrant workers. These include provisions related to **health, safety, employment conditions, and legal entitlements**. Acts such as the **Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979**, the **Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Act**, and other labor codes have sought to regulate recruitment practices, ensure timely payment of wages, and provide access to basic welfare services. These legal frameworks are intended to create a more secure and dignified working environment for migrant laborers, irrespective of the state they reside in.

¹⁸⁵⁴ International Labour Organization

Nonetheless, the reality on the ground reveals persistent gaps. A significant proportion of India's workforce is employed in the **informal sector**, where labor laws are often poorly enforced. According to recent data, **53% of wage workers lack social security, 49% are ineligible for paid leave, and 62% do not have formal work contracts.** lack both bargaining power and access to institutional support in the cities they move to.

REASON FOR MIGRATION:

As previously said, poverty, unemployment, or the inability to obtain the desired means of earning a living at their current place of employment are among the primary causes of worker movement. It is well known that people only leave their homes under very specific conditions. According to the International Labour organisation, people have been compelled to relocate in pursuit of employment due to the need for unskilled labour. According to the ILO's research, women make up half of all migrants worldwide, who account for 3.3% of the world's population.¹⁸⁵⁵

Early migration primarily stems from agro-ecological factors associated with population growth. There is a wealth of data regarding various migration patterns during the British era. One result of the demand for workforce replacement and the end of slavery was Indian immigration, often known as external migration. This was accomplished through an agreement, which is a form of contract work in which an individual binds themselves for a predetermined amount of time—typically four to seven years—in return for payment of their passage. They eventually relocated to Southeast Asia to work on tea and rubber plantations, after first working on sugar plantations in British Dutch and French possessions (Tinker, 1974). Between 1951 and 2001, the percentage of the workers that lived in urban areas increased from 17.3% to 32.8%, with 73.3% still residing in rural areas. The figures show a slight decline from 79.3% in 1981 and

77.7% in 1991. There have been regional differences because of India's size. From 2.6 in 1980 to 3.5 in 1997, the ratio of the top to lowest state per capita income of workers has grown (Srivastava, 2003). According to the Planning Commission, 26.1% of Indians are estimated to be below the poverty line (based on the National Sample Survey of 2000). The agricultural sector is less productive in these areas.

In addition, there are additional personal factors that influence a person's decision to relocate. In her piece, Madhunika Iyer mentioned "marriage."¹⁸⁵⁶ and relocating with the family are significant factors in a woman worker's migration. A woman must leave her home with her husband due to the difficulties of their marriage in order to follow him and receive a living wage. One of the most frequent causes of migration in India, according to Varun Krishnan's article in THE HINDU newspaper, is marriage. According to the results of the 2011 census, 97 percent of the migrants were women and 46 percent of all migrants migrated for marriage.¹⁸⁵⁷ Mumbai has taken in the most migrants, according to the census. The 2020–2021 Economic Survey has not yet determined the precise number of interstate migrants who lost their employment during the epidemic, but concentrated on the gig economy and its workers, pointing out that they were not receiving social security or their fundamental rights until the Code on Social Security was introduced.¹⁸⁵⁸ In their paper, Kailash C. Das and Subhashish Saha discussed how regional differences in development may cause workers to migrate and the strain that the population places on the little resources that are available, which drives some people to relocate in order to meet their fundamental necessities. Sometimes an imbalance in society is caused by poor

¹⁸⁵⁶ Madhunika Iyer, *Migration in India and the impact of the lockdown on migrants*, The Prs Blog (June 10, 2020, 10:20AM), <https://prsindia.org/theprsblog/migration-in-india-and-the-impact-of-the-lockdown-on-migrants>

¹⁸⁵⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸⁵⁸ Thehindu.com, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/lockdown-provided-a-boost-to-gig-economy/article61735156.ece> (last visited March 22, 2022).

planning and unclear regulations used to distribute the benefits of schemes, which prompts people to choose alternative means of survival, such as migration. The creation of job prospects in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Ludhiana, etc., is crucial to providing workers with financial advantages.¹⁸⁵⁹

MOBILITY OF POPULATION:

According to one perspective, India's population is not very mobile. The 1991 census, which used the notion of "change in residence," found that 17.4% of the population had migrated, a considerable drop from 31.2% in 1981 and 30.6% in 1971. For both male and female immigrants, this is accurate. From 18.1% in 1971 to 14.7% in 1991, it fell for men. From 41.6% in 1991 to 43.1% in 1971, it fell for women. Nonetheless, new data from NSS polls conducted between the 1992 and 2000 censuses indicates that migration rates have increased, rising from 24.7% in the late 1990s to 26.6%. This data also shows that throughout the final decades of the 20th century, a percentage of both male and female migrants lived in both rural and urban areas.

MIGRATION FOR WORK:

One key measure of how labour market conditions impact mobility is the main reason for migration. According to the 1991 census, 2.3% relocated for business, 8.8% moved for work, and 27.4% migrated for housing. Compared to women, who migrated for economic reasons at a rate of 1.8% and 0.5%, respectively, men were more likely to migrate for economic reasons (27.8% and 7.1%, respectively). Economic factors are the main cause of the large percentage of long-distance migrant labour. Economic factors account for the majority of male migration between states. Once more, economic factors—particularly for men—play a larger role in urban migratory trends. 69.2% of male migrants moved for work-related reasons, despite the fact that only 49% of them resided in urban regions.

SHORT DURATION MIGRATION:

According to the 1991 Census of Migration in India, 56.2% of migrants had been there for more than ten years, while 21.4% had been there for less than nine years. Just 3.04% of the migrants were classified as having a brief duration (less than a year). 3.24 million of the 8.64 million short-term migrants who migrated in 1999 did so for economic reasons, according to NSS data. However, the total number of short-term migrants in 1992–1993 was predicted to be 16.75 million, suggesting a significant decline in the years that followed. The number of short-term outlier migrants in 1999–00 was calculated individually in the 55th round of the NSS. Due to migration for work, 10.87 million people were absent from their usual place of residence (UPR) for two to six months.

The number of short-term outlier migrants in 1999–00 was calculated individually in the 55th round of the NSS. Due to migration for work, 10.87 million people were absent from their usual place of residence (UPR) for two to six months. The urban population was 2.42 million, while the rural population was 8.45 million. 3.06 million women and 5.39 million men make up the 8.45 million short-term migrants living in rural areas. Many migrants worked at building sites, brick kilns, quarries, farming, plantation labour, and seafood processing. A rough estimate of seasonal migration in India was also offered by a number of studies conducted in the 1990s. Research on the scope and trends of seasonal labour migration to manufacturing areas has been done empirically.

CAUSES OF MIGRATION:

Because the types of migration to India are so diverse, the factors would inevitably differ as well. Social structures and developmental trends have an impact on migration. Seasonal labour movement has been accelerated by intraregional inequality, differences between various socioeconomic classes, and development programs implemented since independence. The majority of the research on migration distinguishes between push and pull

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https://iussp.org/sites/default/files/event_call_for_papers/Interstate%20migration_IUSSP13

variables, which are not mutually exclusive. When there are few good job options available to workers at their birthplace and there is some hope that things will become better through migration, mobility occurs. In addition to maximising household employment or smoothing out employment utilisation across time, the desired improvement could be better employment or higher income. The majority of migration literature distinguishes between "pull" and "push" forces, which are not mutually exclusive. When there are no viable job or livelihood possibilities for workers in the source areas and relocation is anticipated to improve their situation, mobility occurs. Better employment or higher salaries and incomes may be the desired improvement, but so may maximising family employment or balancing employment, income, and consumption throughout the year. This is known as the "pull" element that drives people to migrate.

PUSH FACTOR:

- **Economic Distress and Rural Unemployment:**

People in India's rural areas are compelled to migrate to the metropolis due to enduring poverty, covert unemployment, and restricted access to viable livelihoods. In April 2024, the rural unemployment rate increased to 7.8% (CMIE). Migration is also fuelled by declining farm revenues brought on by unpredictable monsoons, as agriculture employs 42% of the population but only contributes 16% of GDP. The agrarian economy's weaknesses are brought to light by recent farmer demonstrations over Minimum Support Prices (MSP).

- **Inadequate Access to Healthcare and Education in Rural Communities:**

Families in rural India are driven to metropolitan areas by a lack of access to high-quality healthcare and education. There is a 79.9% shortage of specialists in community health centres in rural areas. In addition, urban literacy rates (87.7%) are significantly higher than rural ones (73.5%).

- **Climate change and degradation of the environment:**

Internal migration is a result of an increase in climate-related disasters such floods, cyclones, and droughts. For example, according to the NDMA Report 2021–2022, 68% of India's arable land is susceptible to droughts, which has an impact on livelihoods. More than 2.4 million people were displaced by Cyclone Amphan in 2020. Coastal people are also under risk from rising sea levels, particularly in areas like the Sundarbans.

PULL FACTOR:

- **Urban Job Opportunities and Industrialisation:**

Higher-paying positions in the manufacturing, services, and construction industries draw people to cities. By 2030, up to 75% of India's GDP will come from its urban population (CMIE). The need for low-skilled labour has grown as a result of initiatives like the Make in India campaign and infrastructure projects like PM Gati Shakti. The flourishing IT industry in Bengaluru has also attracted highly qualified workers from all around India.

- **Better Facilities for Education and Healthcare:**

Urban areas with top-notch educational institutions and cutting-edge medical treatment include Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai. Urban hospitals have 63.5% of the total beds, whereas rural hospitals only have 36.5%, according to the National Health Profile 2022. Additionally, talent from far-flung areas who are looking for better health and greater education is drawn to institutions like IITs and AIIMS.

- **Social Mobility and Diverse chances:**

By offering anonymity and lowering social barriers, urban areas empower underprivileged groups to seek out better chances. For instance, service industries like IT and hotels are the main drivers of the greater representation of women in the workforce in places like Mumbai. Between January and March 2023 and January and March 2024, the female labour force

participation rate in urban areas increases from 22.7% to 25.6%.

IMPACT OF MIGRATION:

- **Regarding the work and families:**

Poor migrant workers are entitled to specific benefits from their employers or local government officials. They suffer from deprivation in the destination location and have limited personal resources. For migrants and their families, moving to source areas can have both beneficial and harmful effects. Even while migrant workers receive better earnings as a result of the procedure, their well-being would be negatively impacted by disparities in living conditions, negative impacts on their health, education, and family members. The conclusion is therefore a little unclear.

- **On Living Condition:**

Both agricultural and non-agricultural migrant workers endure appalling living circumstances in society. Workers are not given access to clean drinking water or sanitary facilities. Despite the contract work statute, which requires the employer or contractor to provide appropriate housing, the majority reside in open areas or temporary shelters, accommodations for employees. In addition to seasonal workers, those who relocate to cities for work reside in parks and on sidewalks. The majority of the slum dwellers are migrants, and they live in appalling conditions with poor drainage and little water. For migratory workers, food costs are greater, and they are not eligible for temporary ration cards. (Shylendra and Rani, 2001)¹⁸⁶⁰.

- **On health and condition:**

Migrant workers are susceptible to illnesses and have major occupational health issues as a result of living in filthy circumstances and working in difficult settings. Workers at mines, quarries, and construction sites face a number of health risks, the most common of which are lung conditions. A migrant Because of their temporary status, workers are unable to access different health and family care programs.

Women employees are forced to return to work right away after giving birth because there is no maternity leave policy in place. Occupational health problems like bodily pains, sunstroke, and skin irritation are common among workers, particularly those employed in tile industries and brick kilns. Due to the lack of nursery school facilities, kids frequently accompany their parents to work, putting them at risk for health issues.

- **On areas sources:**

Changes in the labour market, income and wealth, and patterns of investment and spending are the primary ways that migration affects the place of origin. While the annual cycle may be smoothed by employment through seasonal out-migration, rural out-migration can under some Conditions make the labour market more competitive. However, this is rarely supported by empirical data from out-migrant areas. This could be as a result of the fact that external migration frequently occurs during periods of manpower surplus.

- **On remittance area:**

In certain parts of the nation, between 25% and 33% of households receive remittances, which is a rather significant percentage of total rural worker families. According to field studies, the majority of seasonal migrant workers save money from their jobs. Migrant wages are frequently responsible for a sizeable amount of household cash revenue. Nevertheless, a portion of the accrued cash income is used to settle outstanding debts and could not always expand the migrant households' asset base (Rogaly and Sengupta, 2001).¹⁸⁶¹

LABOUR RIGHTS:

Let's talk about decent work, which is a component of labor rights. Every human being who lives their own life and finds themselves unable to work, either temporarily or permanently, is entitled by law to social security, which is a fundamental right of labor. The

¹⁸⁶⁰ (Shylendra and Rani, 2001)

¹⁸⁶¹ (Rogaly and Sengupta, 2001).

Declaration of the Rights of Man, which was declared during the French Revolution, marked the beginning of social security. It functioned as an introduction to the 1793 French Constitution, which said, among other things, that helping the public is a religious duty (Singh, 1997).

Every member of society is entitled to social security under Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One significant move in this approach is the ILO declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work. People's living situations must improve as a result of development. Therefore, it ought to guarantee the fulfillment of all fundamental human needs. Nayar (2003).

Another international document that grants workers economic, social, and cultural rights is the United Nations' International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. In order for them to freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural growth while exercising these rights of self-determination (Shyam sundhar, 2004). Part II of the Indian Constitution (GOI, 1991) guarantees citizenship rights. Since they are crucial to achieving one's full intellectual, moral, and spiritual potential, citizenship rights are considered fundamental. People will be able to claim and realize a fair part of the wealth if the minimum rights at work are guaranteed. The process of converting economic expansion into social equality will be ensured by the protection of these rights. Nonetheless, citizenship rights are crucial to the nation's citizens' growth. Thorat (2008) argues that complete citizenship or the denial of civil rights (rule of law, freedom of expression, right to justice), political rights (the ability and means to participate in the exercise of political power), and socio-economic rights (right to work, education, and property) are important aspects of living in poverty. Furthermore, we must acknowledge that the freedom to travel across a nation's borders or the world is a fundamental right that should not be restricted for workers, according to Mishra (2001).

LABOUR STANDARDS:

The promotion of International Labor Standards (ILSS) has been greatly aided by the International Labour Organization (ILO). International labor standards have been developed by the ILO in several conferences. The Declaration of Philadelphia, which was endorsed by the Philadelphia Conference in 1944, underlined the ILO's core goals and objectives. A number of acronyms, including fair labor standards, minimal labor standards, basic or core labor standards, and others, have been used to refer to labor standards. Unfair commercial and labor practices, a state of underdevelopment, a lack of workplace cooperation, and other variables have also been linked to nonobservance of labor standards (Mishra, 2001). The treaty was passed by the international labor union in June 1976 with the goal of improving labor conditions through the forum of tripartite committees.

There are four categories such as: There are eight core labour standards. There are four categories such as:

- i) Right to freedom of Association and collective bargaining
- ii) Elimination of forced labour
- iii) Elimination of child labour
- iv) Elimination of discrimination in matter of occupation and wages. (Mishra, 2008).

Nonetheless, there are seven significant conventions. (Chapters 29, 87, 98, 100, 105, 111, and 138 of the convention). Other names for these conventions include social clauses, labor clauses, social considerations, etc. These are the tools that the ILO has at its disposal to enhance the living and working conditions of the third-world working class. (Nath, 1998). To enact and implement international labor standards in its member nations, the ILO offers a tripartite system of agreements between companies, employees, and the state. Workers across a range of industries are protected by international labor rules. Freedom of association, equal pay for equal work, safe

working conditions, protection from sex-based discrimination and forced labor, employment protection, social security, migrant worker protection, and the eradication of sexual harassment of female employees are just a few of these.

LABOUR STANDARDS IN INDIA:

We will now talk about pertinent elements of international labor standards as well as India's stance on them. India is one of the ILO's founding members. Of the 181 conventions, 37 have been ratified by India. All of the essential values outlined in the seven main international labor standards are upheld by the Indian constitution. India has ratified three of the seven fundamental labor conventions: (i) Equal Remuneration Convention No. 100, Discrimination Convention No. 111, and Forced Labor Convention No. 29. The Indian government has ratified a number of treaties, including the Equal Remuneration Convention of 1951, the Right to Association of Agricultural Workers, the Hours of Work Industry Convention of 1919, the Night Work Convention for Women, the Minimum Age Convention of 1919, and the Workers' Compensation Convention of 1925 (Venata Ratam, 1998). However, due to technical issues pertaining to trade union rights for civil servants, India has not ratified the conventions on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining (convention No. 87 and 98). The Indian constitution guarantees freedom of association as a basic right, and the Trade Union Act of 1926 partially satisfies the convention's goals.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE THE MIGRANT WORKERS LIVELIHOOD AND OPPORTUNITIES:

India's migrant workers are essential to various sectors. In search of better opportunities, many leave their homes, often facing challenges along the way. The government is actively working to empower these workers by ensuring their rights are protected and providing essential support.

Migration is a common in, as workers move across states for improved livelihoods Migration in India is a dynamic process and the 2011 Census reported over 41 million interstate migrants. According to the 2020-21 Migration report, the overall migration rate is 28.9%, with 26.5% from rural areas. Around 10.8% migrate mainly for employment. To improve their lives, the government is committed to making their journey smoother through various initiatives. The eShram portal is one such initiative aimed at enhancing their quality of life.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment launched the eShram portal on 26th August 2021 to create a National Database of Unorganised Workers (NDUW), verified with Aadhaar. On 21st October 2024, the eShram "One-Stop Solution" was introduced, integrating various social security and welfare schemes into a single portal. This enables registered workers to access and track benefits from multiple schemes directly through eShram.

Welfare Schemes for the Migrant Labourers:

Employment schemes are designed to improve the lives of workers by providing access to opportunities for skill development, financial assistance, and social security. These initiatives aim to empower workers, offering support that enhances their livelihoods and ensures greater security for their future. Few such schemes include:

➤ PM Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi)

Launched on June 1, 2020, the scheme aims to provide collateral-free working capital loans to street vendors. This initiative was introduced to help vendors resume their businesses, which were severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, offering them financial support for recovery and self-reliance.

➤ Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan Yojana (PMSYM)

This scheme launched by the Ministry of Labour and Employment on 15th February 2019, aims to provide a minimum assured pension to workers

in the unorganized sector, including migrant workers, upon reaching the age of 60. The scheme, announced in the Interim Budget, targets workers earning less than ₹15,000 per month and offers a monthly pension of ₹3,000 after they turn 60, ensuring financial security for their future.

➤ **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya**

Launched on September 23, 2018 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) aims to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by providing health coverage to India's most vulnerable. Covering over 12 crore families (nearly 55 crore individuals), it provides Rs.5 lakh health coverage for secondary and tertiary health benefits to those migrant workers who are covered as eligible beneficiaries as per deprivation and occupation criteria. The scheme's portability feature allows beneficiaries to avail treatment at any empanelled hospital across India, regardless of their home state. Notably, 11.9 lakh hospitalizations worth ₹3,100 crores have been authorized under this portability feature, enhancing accessibility for beneficiaries nationwide.

➤ **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY)**

Additionally, the government's commitment to food security is strengthened by the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)**, which has been extended for the next five years starting from 1st January 2024. This scheme provides free food grains and direct cash transfers to families below the poverty line, including migrant workers. In addition, the **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)** scheme, launched in 2018, ensures food security through the portability of ration cards across India. Together, these initiatives create a robust safety net for migrant workers, guaranteeing access to food security no matter where they are in the country. Migrant laborers can easily access the benefits of the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme by following these simple steps:

1. Use Your Existing Ration Card: Migrant workers can use their existing ration card to get subsidized food at any Fair Price Shop (FPS) across India, regardless of their location.
2. Check Details on ePoS Devices: At FPSs, ration card details and entitlements are available through ePoS (electronic point-of-sale system) devices, ensuring a smooth and transparent process.

PANDEMIC AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE MIGRANT WORKERS:

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on migrant workers who travel from one place to another for earning purposes. All of us had indeed witnessed migrants moving from one place to the other compromising their human rights. I am using the word 'compromising' because they were devoid of basic facilities and means that are needed to support livelihood. Many of them had died while returning to their homes due to the lockdown imposed by the government. Their poor condition had not only created problems for them but also showed that India was not ready for the pandemic and it has not done enough for building basic infrastructural facilities for ensuring proper living for migrant workers. The government's response to the migrant crisis at that time was delayed and partial, said those who work in the migration sector. About 84 percent of the migrant workers were able to return to some form of employment in August 2020, with different experiences depending upon their age, gender, the industry of employment, etc. after the lockdown was lifted and nearly 133 million people demanded work through the rural jobs programmes or the MGNREGS¹⁸⁶². (ILO) report published in December 2020 said that migrant workers remain unrecognized at the local, regional and national levels. This is something that should concern the governments. Recognition plays an important role in laying down policies for the upliftment of a particular sector or group of

¹⁸⁶² Shreehari Paliath, *A year after the exodus, no reliable Data or policy on migrant workers*, Indiaspend.com, (March 24, 2021, 12:09)

people. We all saw the newspapers and TV channels flooded with scenes depicting the plight of migrant workers during the pandemic giving a message to the whole nation that their problems have been unaddressed for a long time as many of them were shunted by their employers due to the 'no work -no remuneration policy' which forced them to gravitate towards their hometowns. They were heard saying that they might not die due to COVID but will surely die due to hunger¹⁸⁶³. The government cannot be blamed for imposing lockdowns but it should have taken adequate steps for ensuring the smooth and easy return of migrant workers, from the beginning itself. However, the State Governments and the Central Government did play an important role in helping the migrants by ensuring the movement of buses, trains, etc. but it was a step that was taken a bit late. By then, the damage was already done which could have been avoided if the governments were vigilant enough to foresee the circumstances in which the workers were leaving their place.

STEPS TO IMPROVE THE STANDARD OF MIGRATING LABOURS:

Even though we have clear statutes protecting foreign labor, the courts have occasionally set an example by rendering rulings in many things still need to be done in their favor. The primary goal of Indian state governments should be to prevent their citizens from traveling to other states in pursuit of employment, businesses, etc. by offering them all of these things within their borders. However, if this isn't always feasible, the state that takes in these migrants should make sure they have access to the necessities for survival, such as adequate housing, clothing, food, and drinking water. Chapter V of the 1979 Inter-State Migrant Worker (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act For example, Sections 14 and 15 stipulate that the contractor must provide each interstate migrant worker with a journey allowance at the time of recruitment, as well as a displaced allowance equal to 50% of his monthly wages or 75% of his wages, whichever is higher. However,

these provisions must be properly implemented. In 2014, the government promised to register 47 crore unorganized workers and provide them UWINs (Unorganized Workers Identity Cards) connected to Aadhaar so that benefits could be provided to everyone in an easy and transparent manner. However, this promise has only been kept 21 years later.¹⁸⁶³ It should take the appropriate actions to provide these cards to those in need as quickly as feasible. It is occasionally regrettable to observe that the regional linguistic thought in India procedure takes precedence over human values, rendering the migrants victims.¹⁸⁶⁴ To provide medical care to employees hurt in factories or elsewhere, the health infrastructure should be strengthened by charging them modest fees. Nominal in this context refers simply to the amount that they can readily afford. In the event that a migrant worker is unable to pay the full cost of the medical treatments they have received, the government should cover additional costs. There should be a strong structure that establishes minimal living standards for migrant workers, and its execution should be successful. The state governments ought to develop a clear and open strategy to improve migrant workers' working circumstances and adaptable. The government should provide subsidies to the MSME sector since it draws a large number of workers and encourages their involvement in the production process. Employees' overall growth will guarantee a higher quality of life. Working circumstances for female employees should be appropriate for both them and their kids. Employers who take advantage of workers in their factories, workshops, etc. should face criminal penalties from the state governments of emerging nations. Circumstances that are appropriate for both them and their kids. The governments of emerging nations ought to enact laws that employers who take advantage of their employees by using their factories,

¹⁸⁶³ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-edit-page/what-government-agenciescan-do-to-ensure-safety-and-security-of-migrant-workers/>

¹⁸⁶⁴ Neelam Pandey, 'Will live on salt- UP, Bihar migrants refuse to return to cities

workshops, etc. Stated differently, the government should develop a well-thought-out strategy for controlling factory workers' working conditions and making sure it is properly implemented. It wouldn't be incorrect to state that India's labor laws are clearly stated, but correct application of them is necessary. By preventing corruption and making sure that taxpayers' hard-earned money is going toward development initiatives like building factories and supporting small businesses, among other things.

CONCLUSION:

Compared to other economic, social, cultural, and political challenges, this one is fairly understudied in the economic literature in that many aspects are still unknown. Thus, the article aims to provide a concise overview of the causes, consequences, and patterns of India's labor migration. We believe that this would greatly assist researchers in carrying out additional research in areas that have not yet been covered in the literature. Both male and female immigration rates decreased between 1971 and 1991. However, we expanded so quickly in the final ten years of the 1990s. The rapid growth and expansion of the unorganized sector, which has drawn many workers from rural regions, is the cause of this trend. Short-term in-migration is trending downward in duration. The short length of migration has a downward tendency in terms of duration. The majority of short-term external migrants were men and lived in rural areas. Lastly, trend analysis reveals that a greater percentage of men migrate over an extended period of time, distance, and their type ranges from rural to urban. Women, on the other hand, are typically rural to rural and migrate over short distances. The primary cause of short-distance migration is marriage. The primary cause of labor migration, according to the research, is unequal development. In addition to differences in socioeconomic circumstances, people are also motivated to move by differences in development policies and incomes. The report concludes by outlining the likely effects of labor

mobility on migrants. examines the circumstances, origin, and destination of his or her family members. We conclude that the livelihoods of migrants are negatively impacted by migration. They and their loved ones lack access to health care, education, and other necessities, public assistance. They are particularly denied access to necessities like drinking water and sanitary services. Remittances from migrants are frequently utilized to support higher spending and settle outstanding debts. The report concludes by outlining the likely effects of labor mobility on migrants. Evaluates the health, origin, and destination of his or her family members. We conclude that the livelihoods of migrants are negatively impacted by migration. Health, education, and other vital public services are denied to them and their families. They are particularly denied access to necessities like drinking water and sanitary services. Remittances from migrants are frequently utilized to settle unpaid bills and fund higher spending.

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