

## **Study of Socio-Economic Consequences of Pandemic on Migrants and their Communities**

**S. S. Gaherwar**

Head, Department of Sociology  
Dhanwate National College, Nagpur

### **Abstract**

In this article, an attempt is made to investigate the socioeconomic implications of the pandemic in India. The motivation behind this is to provide an overview of the loss that occurred to different sectors of the Indian economy and society to have a better understanding of the issues to the government. Due to lockdown reverse migration had started; which caused many socio-economic problems across the nation. This paper focuses on the study of various consequences of pandemic on socio-economic condition of citizens.

**Keywords :** Pandemic, migrants, socio-economic consequences

### **Introduction**

Migration, is an integral component of both regional and international processes, has a substantial impact on the contemporary world and the spatial mobility of societies, including family, social bonding, economy, politics, culture, and communication. In last few decades, India has witnessed the dynamic movements of its citizens. The movement of the migrants are visualized in both internal and external spheres, which grabbed the attention of the social think-tanks. Likewise, during pandemic, the practice of reverse migration in India has received significant attention and has become both a major concern and the subject of heated public debate.

Nation is constantly experiencing a growing trend of rural residents moving from their villages to metropolitan centers. This phenomenon is a result of the pull factor including better economic possibilities and push factors indicating the difficulties that rural residents confront, including an elevated risk of discomfort, rodenticides, illnesses, and erratic rainfall patterns. Consequently, rural families find themselves without the necessary resources to adequately withstand against these shocks. Furthermore, current intra-village informal insurance systems sometimes fall short of providing adequate protection, while formal insurance choices remain out of reach. They frequently opt to transfer migrants to metropolitan regions as a means of diversifying their income sources.

### **Pandemic**

Pandemic, outbreak of infectious disease that occurs over a wide geographical area and that is of high prevalence, generally affecting a significant proportion of the world's population, usually over the course of several months. Pandemics arise from epidemics, which are outbreaks of disease confined to one part of the world, such as a single country. Pandemics, especially those involving influenza, sometimes occur in waves, so that a post-pandemic phase, marked by decreased disease activity, may be followed by another period of high disease prevalence.

Infectious diseases such as influenza can spread rapidly—sometimes in a matter of days—among humans living in different areas of the world. The spread of a disease is facilitated by several factors, including an increased degree of infectiousness of the disease-causing agent, human-to-human transmission of the disease, and modern means of transportation, such as air travel. The majority of highly infectious illnesses that occur in humans are

caused by diseases that first arise in animals. Thus, when a new infectious agent or disease emerges in animals, surveillance organizations located within affected areas are responsible for alerting the World Health Organization (WHO) and for closely monitoring the behaviour of the infectious agent and the activity and spread of the disease. WHO constantly monitors disease activity on a global scale through a network of surveillance centres located in countries worldwide.

### **Pandemic and Reverse Migration**

COVID-19 is an existential threat to the health and livelihood of millions of people around the world as well as in India. The coronavirus pandemic has triggered massive reverse migration in the country. The COVID-19-led migration is the second largest mass migration in India's history after the country's partition, when 14 million people were displaced. Every year, a substantial number of people migrate to larger cities of different states to seek employment opportunities to earn bread and butter for their families. COVID-19, the country is beholding the second largest mass migration in its history after the Partition of India in 1947. Migrant workers are usually employed in informal, lowskilled, risky jobs in the field of agriculture, construction and domestic work. The Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS) 2017–2018 shows the estimated number of Indian workers in 2018 was 471.5 million, out of an estimated 1,358 million. There were 114.2 million workers earning regular wages or salaries, 115.0 million casual workers and 242.3 million remaining self-employed. Migration is an integral part of the Indian economy and constitutes a significant share of the country's GDP. Out of 482 million workers in India, about 194 million are permanent and semi-permanent migrant workers as per the 2011 Census. The pattern of India's migration is much skewed. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar constitute the highest out-migrants in India, while most of the migrated people moved to Maharashtra and Delhi (Acharya & Acharya, 2020). Some of the economically backward states of India are the major contributor to the migrant labour force. Migration is a prominent option for earning and livelihood in those state, for which people move to other states in search of work and better wages. The state suffers from distress migration, mostly from south-western areas, due to the unavailability of work in these areas. As per the newspaper, media sources within the state, many people from rural area as well as the coastal belt migrated to the urban part as well to the state capital and other cities largely in search of employment.

The available data indicates a widely differing reality about migrants in India. While, as per Census 2011, the total number of internal migrants would be 450 million—more than 30% higher than 2001—the actual numbers perhaps are higher than what is captured by the census. Field realities do indicate that Uttar Pradesh (uP) and Bihar are the biggest source states of migrants, followed closely by Madhya Pradesh (MP), Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal; the major destination states are Delhi, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Another marked change in the migration pattern in the last decade has been the interstate movement to new growth centres, especially in small and medium sized towns and million plus cities. However, the defining feature of who is a migrant is rather flexible, even in official records. Usually the migrants do get defined on the basis of place of birth or last place of residence and a deviation from it. Hence, such a characterisation puts severe constraint to understand the issue of migrants in this form of definitional context.

Compounding the issue is another limitation in the analysis as the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) as well as the census fail to capture the short-term seasonal movements, which form a large component of the migration process. Apart from the above, there are other issues too that relate to the problems of data. These are the inadequacies in capturing the extent of tabulating the migration of children of a particular age group as well as women who would accompany the household heads to the destination points. The data is also inadequate in terms of understanding the very large-scale migrations that occur from tribal areas and of tribal and Scheduled Caste people. We, however, do know that in the last two and a half decades, India has urbanised at a rapid rate, and this urbanisation is built on the labour of the migrant population as well as the services to a rapidly urbanising India. Hence, a very rough estimate would put India's migrant labour, which would include daily wage labour, local migrants, seasonal migrants and long-distance migrants, at a fairly large numbers than what is computed.

The imposition of the lockdown as a measure to contain the exponential progression of the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the unskilled and semi-skilled migrant labourers the most. In the last few weeks, we have all been witness to harrowing, nerve-wrenching and bone-chilling images of the exodus of these marginal and "invisible" drivers of the informal economy of urban India. Indian highways emptied of most vehicles were lined with bedraggled, poor pedestrians, many carrying all their worldly belongings in bundles on top of their heads walking to their home villages, hundreds or thousands of miles away across states. Add to that equally desperate attempts by small distance migrants to somehow reach their destination from medium-sized towns and cities and we have a scenario of crowding back villages that constitute the famished and dried up "source." Even as this is being written, there are field reports emerging about scarcity of food and water compounding the dried source. The issue of crop harvest for rabi and the sowing of kharif will create some relief in the short run but the source regions cannot be relied upon to take the additional load of the returning sons and daughters of the region. Rough estimates indicate that roughly more than 120 to 140 million are, at the moment, either walking back or are stranded in various camps. This number does not take into account the vast majority of slums that characterise our cities and house the migrants. The actual numbers wanting to return home would be fairly large. The post-coronavirus recovery of the shattered world of migrants would witness diverse and multiple realities. International Labour Organization estimates are that around about 400 million workers in the informal economy are at the risk of falling deeper into poverty during the crisis.

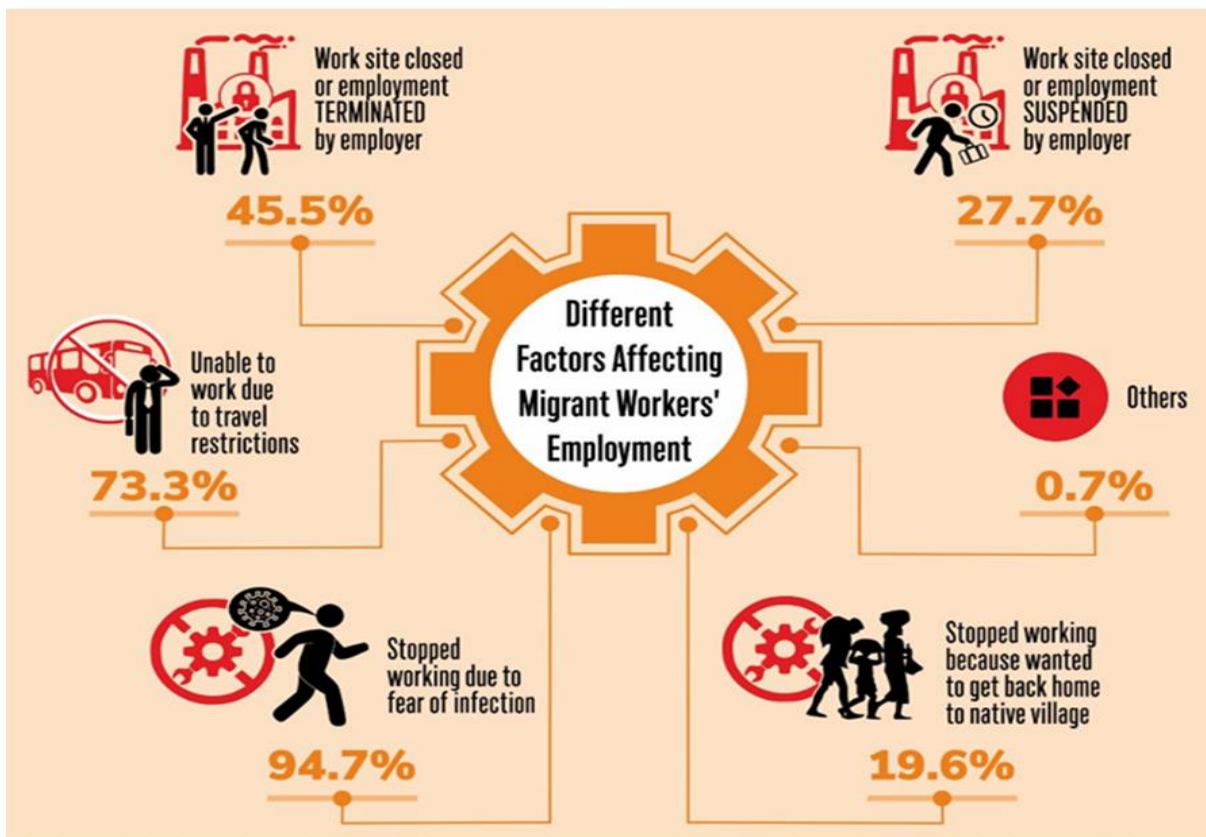
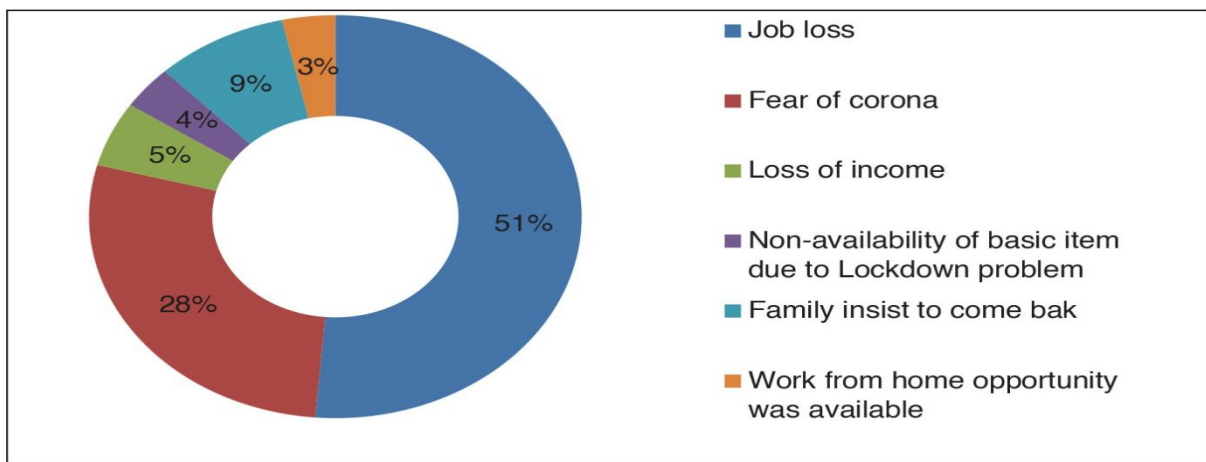
### **Socio-Economic Impact of Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic has translated into a significant decrease in the global growth rate of international migrants. This is due to the fact that pandemic responses have slowed down new migration, while return migration increased in late 2020 after initial periods of migrants being stranded in destination and transit countries. In this respect, return movements that occurred during, and as a result of, the crisis were complex and varied by the circumstances and motivations that caused them. In addition to forced returns, which several countries maintained despite the crisis, many voluntary returns were the result of the lack of economic alternatives and access to rights in countries of destination. This has been the case for many migrant workers in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In this context, large numbers of migrants returned at once to their home countries, posing specific challenges to these countries. While ensuring that nationals are received

and readmitted, in accordance with the human right to return to one's own country and the obligation of States to readmit their own nationals, mass returns have made additional vulnerabilities among returnees difficult to detect and manage (for example, identifying children in need of protection, including unaccompanied child migrant workers and the children of migrant workers in situations of vulnerability, and victims of trafficking or forced labour, including among domestic workers), leading to the risk of further victimization and exploitation. In addition, non-payment of wages and other worker entitlements is particularly hard to address in these conditions, compounding the lack of access to justice frequently experienced by migrant workers (UN Network on Migration, 2021a). Job losses were the main motivation for return migration. Such trends were observed, for example in the context of the GCC countries, from which thousands of migrants returned to countries of origin like Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. India repatriated more than 600,000 migrants through special flights and boats by October 2020 (World Bank, 2020b), while more than 230,000 Filipino workers were repatriated to their country by October 2020. Around 120,000 migrant workers returned from Thailand to Cambodia and around 2 million Ukrainians abroad returned to their country due to COVID-19. Furthermore, around 2 percent of the 4.3 million Venezuelans in South America returned. In this context, the Organization of American States reported an estimated 6,000 returns from Brazil and 105,000 from Colombia between March and September 2020. Such a sudden increase of return migrants put pressure on the communities to which they returned. Initially, returnees need quarantine facilities and, in many cases, assistance upon arrival such as reintegration counselling, psychosocial support, food provision, onward transportation and accommodation, and medical screenings.

In the case of children, return must be a sustainable solution in the child's best interests. During the pandemic, thousands of children of all ages (unaccompanied, separated and with their families), have been sent back using approaches that lack child sensitivity, including child safeguarding protocols, with no screening of asylum, protection and family reunification claims, and without conducting best-interest procedures, vulnerability assessments or family tracing (UN Network on Migration, 2021). This situation puts children at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation before, during and upon their return, as well as stigma and exclusion in their communities of origin. Moreover, the high number of returns in the context of COVID-19 has resulted in little follow-up of returned children due to limited availability and capacity of child protection and social services in countries of return, coupled with a lack of access to services for reasons including increased insecurity and mobility restrictions in the context of lockdowns. It is important to recognize that many migrant workers bring skills and talent that can help economies in their countries of origin rebuild better after the pandemic. However, the key to unlocking this potential is the establishment of rightsbased return and reintegration systems, access to social protection and proper skills recognition. In addition, policies on return and reintegration should be compatible with existing economic, employment and labour market policies. This can facilitate better skills and jobs matching and increase productivity for national industries. At the same time, there is often a lack of human and financial resources to provide targeted employment support for return migrants. Existing policies should create labour market opportunities that are inclusive of return migrants and their skills, avoiding the necessity for specific support measures. Many return migrants also faced stigmatization and exclusion besides shame at the self-perception of being a failure for not having secured an

income, which increases the importance of enhancing psychosocial support for migrants. At the early stages of the pandemic, for example, many Senegalese migrants returned because they feared being stranded in Europe without an income. Because Senegal closed its borders, returnees either travelled through Mali or paid fishermen to bring them into their home country via sea. Yet, in some cases, residents tried to prevent the boats from docking because of the stigma that return migrants were bringing COVID-19 into the country. Such issues are also common in other countries, including a number of South Asian countries and Venezuela. As another example, UNICEF reports that as of May 2020, more than 2,000 unaccompanied children returning from the United States to Mexico and northern Central America had been victims of acts of violence and discrimination



### Some of the impact of Reverse Migration

- Unemployment
- Barriers to self-employment
- Reduction and loss of income
- Food and nutrition insecurity
- Increased vulnerability and aggravating social, environmental and economic factors
- Loss of livelihood

### Conclusion

The workable population has increased due to huge reverse migration, for which labour supply has increased in the rural economy. After returning, those people are facing many problems, one of the important of them is lack of job opportunity. And many of them are working at a low-level wage rate. The dimension of the vulnerability of returned migrants is numerous. Those people's average monthly income has drastically declined, which is a matter of concern from the standard of living point of view. Migrants having less income by own or by family persons suffered the most in this unpleasant period. Not only economically but also at the mental level, those migrants are surviving under heavy pressure. Greater unemployment among those is a serious matter of concern from the economic and social point of view. Many returned migrants also remain excluded from government benefits for 'neither here, not there' status.

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