

MANAGING MIGRATION



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Integrating Migration in the response to COVID 19



Source: The Wall Street Journal

International migration especially that of labour migrants, contributes immensely to economic growth along with the movement of capital, goods and services. According to the United Nations, in 2019, international migrants constituted around 272 million people, around 3.5 per cent of the world's population and contributed to nearly 10 per cent of the global GDP. International migration and mobility have been affected by the current outbreak of COVID-19 and will continue to remain for a considerable period. Pandemic has severely impacted the migration flows and lives of migrants and refugees in a large way to include lack of access to healthcare resources, mental well-being and economic conditions of migrants and refugees which has led to changes in the social norms and practices related to migration. This poses an unfavourable situation for migrants. Limitations on the movement of people have made it difficult for the migrants to seek protection and avoid discrimination, exploitation and inequality.

Migrants form a vital part of global communities and continue to provide services as essential workers across the globe. However, they are often forgotten in the government's responses to the pandemic. COVID-19 has brought forth the vulnerability of migrants in different parts of the world in the form of forced migration and social exclusion. It is the responsibility of the governments to ensure that migrants are included in the comprehensive response to the pandemic. A toolkit published by International Organisation for Migration (**IOM**) mandates the following ways in which migration can be integrated into the socio-economic response to the pandemic:

- Ensure equitable access to quality healthcare to migrants
- Provide social protection and basic service
- Protect jobs and informal sector workers
- Proactively prevent the stigma and xenophobia linked to COVID-19
- Address specific needs of the migrants in vulnerable situations
- Promote community cohesion towards migrants.

During times like this, institutions such as the International Migration Centre-Karnataka (**IMC-K**) a flagship project in Public Affairs Centre (PAC) can play a crucial role in bridging the gap between the government and migrants. IMC-K intends to provide handholding support and enhanced welfare and protection throughout the migrant lifecycle. IMC-K is an initiative of the Department of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and Livelihood (**SDEL**), Government of Karnataka established to create sustained overseas employment pathways for people in Karnataka and make international migration safe, orderly, humane and efficient.

COVID-19 unravels the helplessness of migrant workers



Source: Al Jazeera

It has taken India, an entire pandemic to realise the crucial contributions made by migrant workers and their invisible nature in the economy. As the pandemic intensified and the lockdown prolonged, stories of migrant workers travelling by foot back to their home states and the dismal conditions that they were facing came to light. The situation has highlighted the sheer volume of migrant workers in the country along with the conditions that they work in and the lack of institutional support for such an important part of the country. Contrasted with the treatment provided to international migrants, the plight of domestic migrants is much worse.

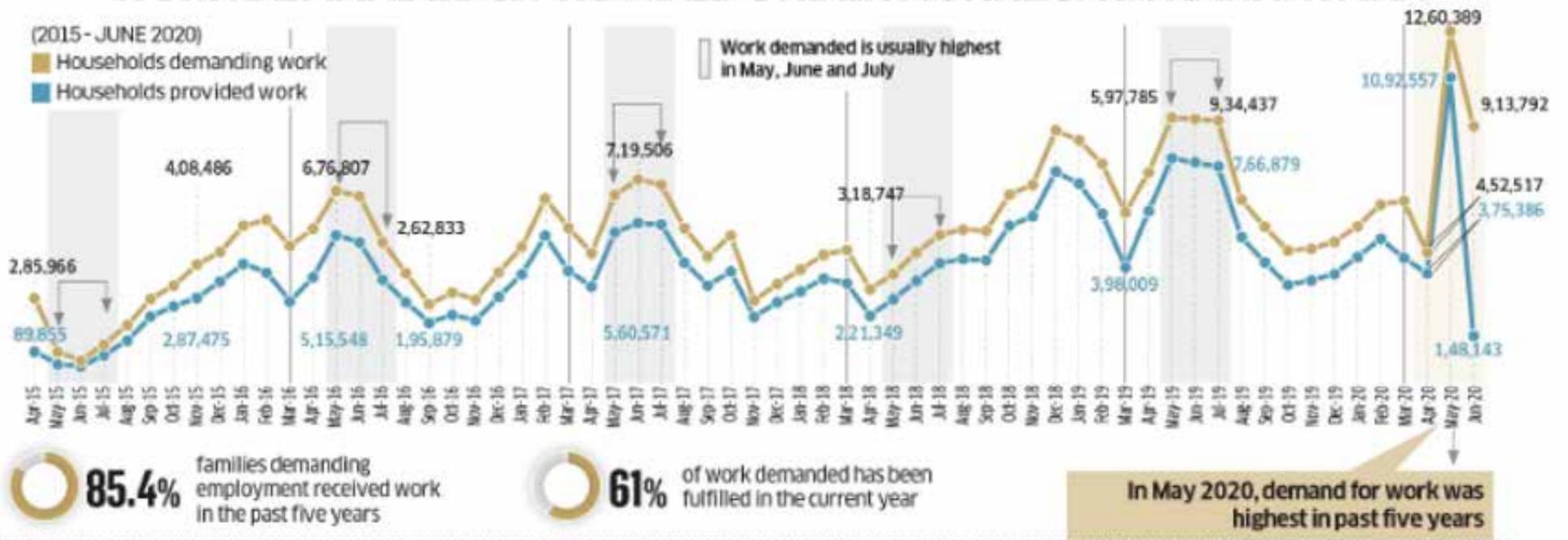
While migration within and outside the country is not new, the lack of data on the nature and trends of internal migration, along with the strict enforcement of policies is what makes the situation difficult. Our most recent data on migration is from the 2011 Census and this lack of timely data poses a challenge as it hinders effective policymaking and action. Without having a credible estimate of the number of migrants, we are already going down a slippery slope. This is only exacerbated by the fact that most domestic migrants are employed in the informal sector with close to no access to decent pay, proper working conditions and social security benefits. While there is legislation to protect the rights of such workers, they are rarely enforced, with the rights of the migrants being tossed between the Centre, the state of origin and the destination state. With the pandemic, as several state governments begin to amend labour laws, the condition of these workers is further threatened.

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Reverse Migration and Joblessness

WORK DEMANDED & PROVIDED UNDER MGNREGA IN KARNATAKA



Source: Deccan Herald

The national lockdown in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced lakhs of migrants to return to their villages and towns. The continued return migration would leave the migrant workers unemployed for months to come. Forced reverse migration has brought people right back to the place from where they have started. Returnees are finding it difficult to look for livelihood opportunities to put their skills to use especially in the rural centric economies in northern Karnataka, as compared to the big cities such as Bengaluru. Employment opportunities in the rural sector are mainly in agriculture. The agrarian sector has limited capacity to absorb people and therefore leading to disguised unemployment.

May 2020 has recorded the highest demand for work under **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA)** in Karnataka in the last five years. The demand indicates both the intensity of

joblessness and the trust of the people in the act at the same time. MNREGA has been performing relatively better in Karnataka than other states in India. However, a lot of people are still left to be provided with job cards, Kalaburgi and Chamrajanagra having the highest number of pending applications. To provide better employment opportunities to the migrants, the state government is trying to diversify the nature of the work by planning to converge National Rural Livelihoods Mission and MNREGA. While MNREGA provides a reasonable solution in the short term, a more sustainable approach should be adopted by the state governments to empower the rural economies. Encouraging entrepreneurship and conducting skill mapping are some of the ways to ensure sustainable livelihood opportunities in rural societies. Apart from this, to integrate the returnees in rural economies, skill development programmes should also be promoted.

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