Review Article

REVERSE MIGRATION DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC: A REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has been negatively impacting the entire world economy. The plight of migrants and their struggle to return home in the period of lockdown has been the highlighted during lockdown. During lockdown the country witnessed economic slowdown, which forced reverse migration. The migrants do not see any future in coming back to cities, keeping their experience in mind they want to return to their land and are willing to sustain on minimum earning that can be earned over there. This paper analyzes the scenario of reverse migration in India during pandemic period and the evaluation of current policy responses by the central government and state government also.

Keywords: Reverse migration, Covid 19, Migrant Crisis, Pandemic, Government Policies, Unemployment rate

JEL Codes: J21, J48, J68

I. INTRODUCTION

The magnitude of the reverse migration necessitates a reconsideration of the country's development paradigm within the context of standard economic theories dealing with migration. For example, as many have predicted (Lewis 1954; Nurske 1953; Kuznets 1966; Harris and Todaro 1970; Thakur, 2020), a structural transformation of any economy from traditional/primary/informal/unorganized to modern/industrial/formal/organized necessitates a shift in labour from the former to the latter. The main driving force behind such changes has been identified as labour migration. Thus, many economists agree that labour migration is a major determinant of economic structural transformation.

Migration has always been a strategy in which a majority of workers in India used to fulfil their aspiration to uplift from poverty and to access livelihoods that promise decent work. There are many reasons for migration like climate change, political issues, economic issues include poverty & employment, religious persecution etc. For most of the migrants, their families, dependent on the remittances they send and lockdown have increased their difficulties and force them to move to their home states. This COVID-

19-triggered reverse migration was the second-largest mass migration in the recorded history of India, after the Partition. A vast proportion of these migrants are attached to the informal sector where employment is mostly casual/contractual and therefore, devoid of any job security. During the lockdown, the informal sector of the economy was severely hit, and employment options reached an all-time low for informal workers, forcing them to struggle for mere survival. Having no other alternative, many of these migrants had to move back home. Most of these migrants belonged to the states of UP, Bihar, MP and Odisha (Thakur, 2020).

In order to understand COVID-19-induced migration, it is important to understand the reverse migration.

Reverse Migration refers to the situation when labourers, workers and people start migrating back to their native place in the backdrop of non-availability of livelihood and job opportunities. In other word 'reverse migration' refers to the process of internal and international migrants returning to their place of origin from the destination state or countries. According to International Organization of Migration, UN (2019) Return is in general sense, the act or process of going back or being taken back to the point of departure. This could be within the territorial boundaries of a country, as in the case of returning internally displaced persons and demobilized combatants; or between a country of destination or transit and a country of origin, as in the case of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers. As per NSS 64th Round data collection, a phenomenon of Return/Reverse migration refers to the trend, where the migrants return to their usual place of residence. The International Labour Organisation (2020), said tens of millions of migrant workers who have been forced to return home because of the COVID-19 pandemic after losing their jobs face unemployment and poverty in their home countries. "This is a potential crisis within a crisis," said Manuela Tomei, Director of the ILO's Conditions of Work and Equality Department.

The return of migrant workers from a country of destination back to the country of origin. According to the Statistics Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, return migrants are "persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (whether short-term or long-term) in another country and who are intending to stay in their own country for at least a year" (UNDESA, Statistics Division, 1998). This refers to temporary movements of a repetitive character – either formally or informally – across borders, usually for work, involving the same migrants (Wickramasekara, 2011).

Migrant workers are usually employed in informal, low skilled, risky jobs in the field of agriculture, construction and domestic work. 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). Many migrant workers employed in the unorganised informal sector had returned to their home state due to different reasons during this COVID-19 pandemic. Loss of job, fear of coronavirus spreading and non-accessibility to general services were the important reasons for reverse migration all over the country. People flooded to their villages from the urban part in huge numbers.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that even in an optimistic scenario for recovery in the second half of 2020, globally, 34 million full-time jobs will be lost. The pessimistic scenario assumes that a second pandemic wave and the return of restrictions would result in a loss of as many as 340 million full-time jobs (ILO 2020a, 2020b).

Returning migrant workers needed to be reintegrated into their communities at both the social level as well as in the job markets in the local economy. However, these migrant workers are returning to countries of origin where the labour market is also struggling under the effects of the pandemic and where social protection measures are inadequate. Examples of institutional response include India, which has launched a new skill-mapping initiative, the Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support (SWADES), to facilitate the reintegration of migrant workers in the domestic labour market. Similarly, the Philippines Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), supports displaced workers with free online courses for upskilling and reskilling (ILO 2020b). The importance of regional and multilateral cooperation was also recognized by countries in South Asia and ASEAN. A sub regional meeting on evacuation and repatriation to share experiences was organized by the Government of India in July 2020 with the participation of Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka and supported by the International Labour Organization. The 13th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour, "Supporting Migrant Workers during the Pandemic for a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community", comprising governments, trade union and employer organizations, and CSOs, in its recommendations called to "strengthen migrant workers' return and reintegration programmes with adequate resources." It also recommended that "if detention facilities are used as a last resort, safety and health standards should be ensured."

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Most of the researches on reasons and pattern of migration across the globe, but studies conducted on reverse migration are rare. Migrant populations within the country have been one of the most vulnerable sections in terms of access to health facilities and technology, uncertainty in earning livelihoods, lack of education, and variability in patterns of consumption and borrowing etc. Tripathi & Aggrawal (2022) evaluate the success of the Government of Uttar Pradesh in generating employment opportunities amid pandemic for reversely migrated workers in accordance with their respective skillsets via skill mapping makes their strategy worth emulating. Skill mapping, use of artificial intelligence in data capturing, establishment of migrant commission and realising true potential of MSME sector have emerged as key strategies for turning the crisis into an opportunity. ILO (2021) reported that returnees were then often stigmatized and subject to long periods of compulsory quarantine because they were considered to be carriers of COVID-19. Migrant workers were also often directly or indirectly excluded from COVID-19 social protection packages made available to national workers, such as basic healthcare and income security measures against sudden job and wage losses. This left them even more exposed to the pandemic. UNDP (2021) conducted a study analyses the short and medium term impact of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant workers in India. The report highlights the immediate impacts of the first wave of COVID-19 on migratory patterns, employment, income, food security and

uptake of social protection etc. among migrants from 6 states in India. Migrant populations within the country have been one of the most vulnerable sections in terms of access to health facilities and technology, uncertainty in earning livelihoods, lack of education, and variability in patterns of consumption and borrowing etc. Zhang et al. (2021) looked at the impact of COVID-19 on the Chinese migrants and find that the COVID-19 pandemic generated adverse effects on migrants and their families in hometowns through falling remittances. Declines in remittances have significant poverty effects because remittances enable many low-income rural households to stay out of poverty. About 70 percent of migrants were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and those working in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, and hotel and catering were most impacted. Nearly 50 percent of remittance-receiving households were affected, with remittances falling more than 45 percent on average during the lockdown. Jesline et al. (2021) highlight the different plight of the migrants, who had the pressing need to head back home to safety despite the acute financial crisis and the travel problems. The poor quality of the relief camps with meagre rations and lack of facilities especially put the women and children in distress and generated a lot of psychosocial issues. Chavan et al. (2021)'s study examined the various psychosocial factors associated with reverse migration among migrant workers during the COVID-19 lockdown in India. Reverse migrant workers had low self-esteem and were reluctant to participate in customs of their migration city. A large number of reverse migrant workers reported that they had no money to survive, worried about family back home at their village, felt pressured by family members to come back to the village, and had been terminated from their job. A study by Kaur & Shubham (2021) with sample 397 reverse migrants belonging to 35 districts namely, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Rajasthan, found that the primary reasons driving the reverse migration were lack of employment and danger of infection of coronavirus in the destination place. Apart from these, other reasons were shortage of money, peer pressure, desire to be with community in the time of crisis. For 3% of the respondents, motivation of employment guarantee programmes was also a pull factor towards the village. Ranjan (2021)'s study compares the plight of migrant labourers of both India and China in the current pandemic situation to contextualises the causes of this misery in the broader framework of land reform and capability to absorb them in rural economy in both countries. The informal sector was first to be hard hit by the strict lockdown and quarantine measures to control the virus. India and China, still developing, largely depended on the migrant labourers for industrial and construction workers. The pandemic has worsened the condition of migrants both in India and China and has also put the severe challenges to poverty eradication programmes and increasing income of farmers in both countries. Chowdhury & Chakraborty (2021) examines the impact of COVID-19 on the migrant workers and remittances flow to Bangladesh. Migrant workers have been playing an important role in the economic activities of the country for a vast majority of the low-income population. The effects of the current global COVID-19 pandemic (GCP) have brought significant socio-economic, financial, and health crises to a region or globally, which impacted the livelihood of migrant workers. Khan & Arokkiaraj (2021)'s study highlighted the involuntary and forced nature of reverse migration due to the sudden lockdown, lack of preparedness and planning among the government, the irresponsible behaviour of the employers and social hostility against the migrants. Lack of migrant data and registration in welfare schemes excluded

most of them from the relief package benefits. The COVID-19 crisis has magnified several pre-existing problems faced by the migrant communities which led them to suffer invariably at different stages of their reverse migration. According to Joshi (2021) COVID-19 induced return migration to Uttarakhand showed that the low income migrants suffered financial, physical, and mental stress due to the closure of industrial and infrastructural activities. Out migration of the males from the hill districts of Uttarakhand had been prevalent for the past several decades. Initially, it involved the male population and was aimed at acquiring higher education and better employment. Pande (2020) this crisis arising out of COVID and resulting in a distress reverse migration from destinations to the source areas is rooted in a much deeper problem ailing the internal migration of workers in India. The present crisis arising out of the pandemic induced reverse migration has alarmingly increased the vulnerabilities of women migrants and has also deprived them of future economic opportunities. International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that more than 400 million workers in the informal economy are at the risk of falling deeper into poverty during the crisis. Dhandekar and Ghai (2020) estimated the number of migrants that travelled back to their homes (during the first wave) being between 120 and 140 million. This reverse migration is also associated with health concerns and with disruptions in livelihoods. Mukra et. al. (2020) highlighted that many migrants including “infants, pregnant women and the elderly” walked thousands of kilometres barefoot without food and money to reach their villages. Many of these migrants were left stranded midway, facing starvation, misery, and a few even died before they could reach their destination. According to the Parveen and Mamgain (2020) study, unemployment was the primary reason for outmigration from the rural areas of Uttarakhand. The Uttarakhand government should try to persuade reverse migrants to stay in the hills after the lockdown by effectively implementing various rural development and job-generating government schemes. The state government must make arrangements for interest-free loans, substantial endowments, and free electricity for individuals. Azim Premji University, in collaboration with 10 civil society organizations, conducted a telephonic survey of 5,000 respondents between 13 April and 20 May 2020. The findings highlighted that more than 8 in 10 migrants had lost their jobs during the nation-wide lockdown, 83 percent of urban migrants reported consuming less food as compared to pre-lockdown, and that 7 in 10 migrants did not have enough money for a week’s worth of essentials. Eighty-eight percent of migrants reported being unable to pay the next month’s rent and more than a third (36 percent) of the respondents reported taking loans to cover their expenses during the nation-wide lockdown. Choudhury & Joarder (2020) the surplus labor force who possess low education level, have negligible ownership of assets are forced to migrate and get employed in the low-paying, hazardous and informal market jobs in key sectors in urban destinations, such as construction, hotel, textile, manufacturing, transportation, services, domestic work etc. The exodus of these workers from the urban cities will increase the labor supply in the rural areas and hence there is need for developing the rural areas and the adjacent small cities. According to Pandey et. al. (2016), the main goal of the government scheme (MGNREGA) was to provide job opportunities for villagers, maintain equality among various groups of society, and promote a higher standard of living, thereby contributing to the economic well-being of people living in rural areas.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand and examine the situation of reverse migration in India during pandemic period.

2. To review the government policies related to the migrants workers.

IV. DATA SOURCES

This study is based on the secondary data. For the purposes of above objective the National Sample Survey (NSS), and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21 conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) and Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy. The migration data is estimated using current and last place of residence. The data has been collected from internet, magazines, journals and newspaper from various concerning official website.

V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

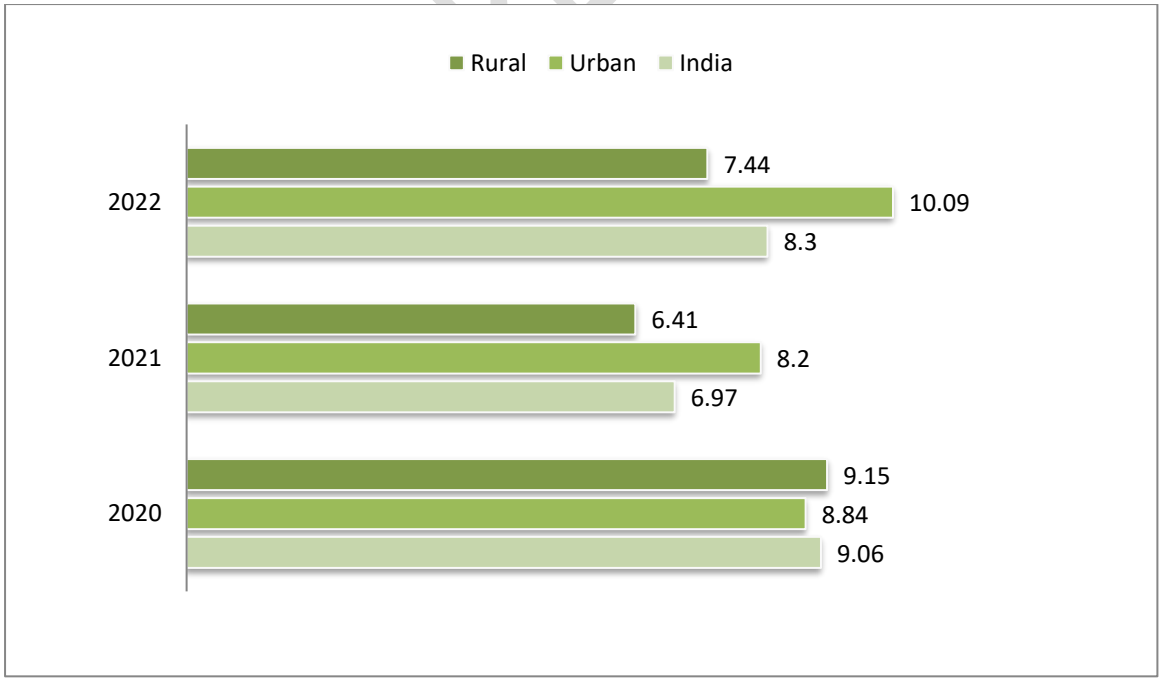
The pandemic period had a significant impact on people's quality of life, such as a rise in the unorganised sector's unemployment rate and a drop in labour force participation, which made the poor even more impoverished. Pandemic disease is harming the general populace on the one hand, while hunger and poverty are upsetting migrants and the poor.

Table 1: Unemployment Rate in India during Pandemic

Month	Unemployment Rate (%)		
	India	Urban	Rural
2020	9.06	8.84	9.15
2021	6.97	8.20	6.41
2022	8.30	10.09	7.44

Source : Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy

Figure 01: Unemployment rate (%)



To examine the migration status, researcher uses the PLFS 2020-21 data table. The following table focuses on different aspects of migration rates, inter-state migration, reasons of migration, etc.

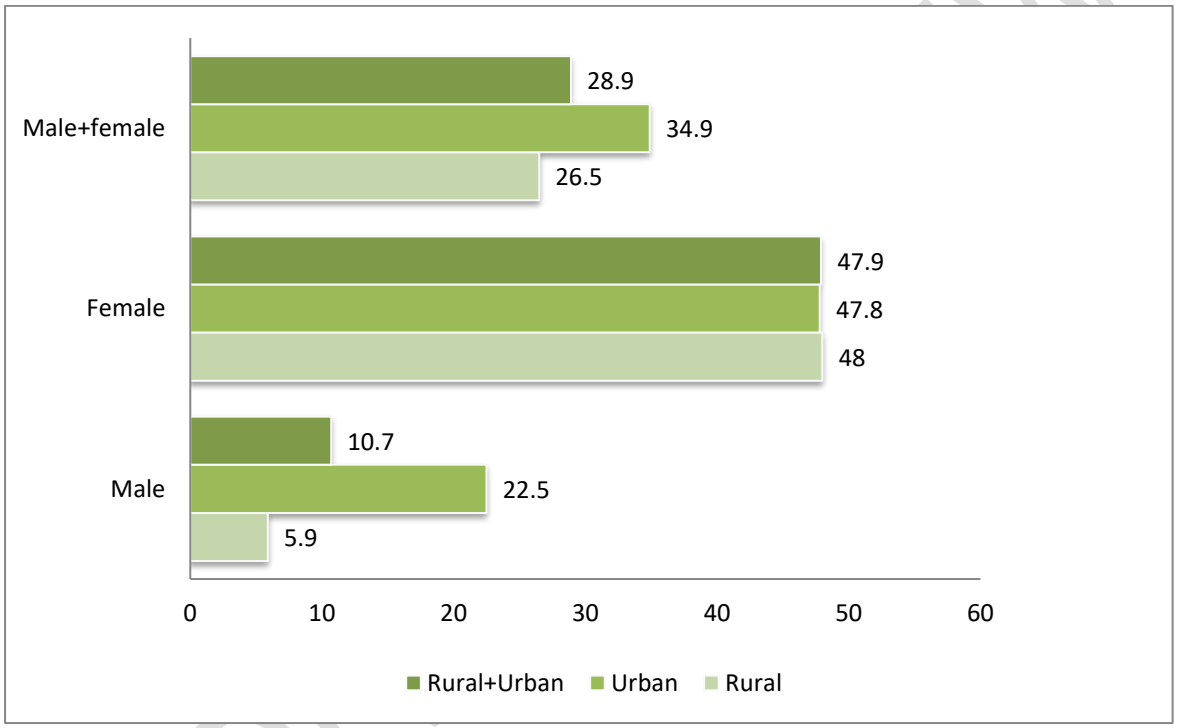
Table 2: Migration rate in India, 2020-21

Category	Rural	Urban	Rural+Urban
Male	5.9	22.5	10.7
Female	48.0	47.8	47.9
Male+female	26.5	34.9	28.9

Note: a. The figure in parenthesis shows the percentage of total migration within India.

b. 2020-21 refers to the period July 2020- June 2021.

Figure 02: Migration rate in India



In Table 02 migration rates, for all-India, rural and urban areas have been presented for the period 2020-21. It is seen from the table that in both the rural and urban areas, female migration rates have been steadily increasing during the period 2020-21. In rural-urban area migrations rates of male 10.7 percent and female 47.9 percent. It is observed that the male migration rates have shown a downward trend.

Inter-state migration in India

In the past, increasing urbanisation trends have revealed a greater migration from rural to urban areas of India. Various push and pull factors, resulting from regional disparities among Indian states, are the causes of rural to urban migration. Push factors are those in the origin state that cause people to migrate to another state, whereas Pull factors are those in the destination state that draw people to it. In general, the urban cities act as the pull factors to the people living in rural areas in terms of both higher wages as well as the standard of living offered by these developed cities. This wage gap insists they migrate

even if they are reluctant to. Not only has this but the change in the occupational structure caused migration too. According to PLFS 2020-21, it is clearly seen that migration was predominantly in intra-state. The share of intra-state migration was about 65.6% male and 92.6% of female. The share of inter-state migration was about 31.4% male and 7.2% female. Females are major migrant population intra-state migration and the males are major migrant population in inter-state migration. The distribution of the migrants in terms of same state, another state or other countries has been presented in table 2.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of migrants in terms of same State, another State or other countries for each category of migrants

Category of Migrants	Same state	Another state	Other countries	All
		Rural		
Male	62.5	33.7	3.9	100.0
Female	95.8	4.0	0.2	100.0
Person	92.1	7.3	0.6	100.0
		Urban		
Male	67.9	29.9	2.3	100.0
Female	84.7	14.9	0.4	100.0
Person	79.0	19.8	1.0	100.0
		Rural + Urban		
Male	65.6	31.4	2.9	100.0
Female	92.6	7.2	0.2	100.0
Person	87.5	11.8	0.7	100.0

Table 4: Migration by location of last usual place of residence

Category of Migrants	Rural	Urban	Other countries	All
		Rural		
Male	44.6	51.6	3.9	100.0
Female	88.8	11.0	0.2	100.0
Person	83.8	15.6	0.6	100.0
		Urban		
Male	53.7	44.1	2.3	100.0
Female	54.0	45.6	0.4	100.0
Person	53.8	45.0	1.0	100.0

		Rural + Urban		
Male	50.0	47.0	2.9	100.0
Female	78.8	21.0	0.2	100.0
Person	73.4	25.9	0.7	100.0

Source: PLFS 2020-21

In Table 05, percentage distribution of migrants by reasons for migration have been presented for PLFS 2020-21 The share of employment related reasons in male migration 22.8 percent, while for female the share of employment related reasons is only 0.6 percent.. Female migration is more prevalent in rural and urban areas of India than male migration. The main reason for this high percentage of female migration is marriage or related reasons. (Rajan et al., 2020). The main reasons for Covid-induced migration are loss of job/closure of unit/lack of employment opportunities, health, migration of parent/earning member of the family, etc.

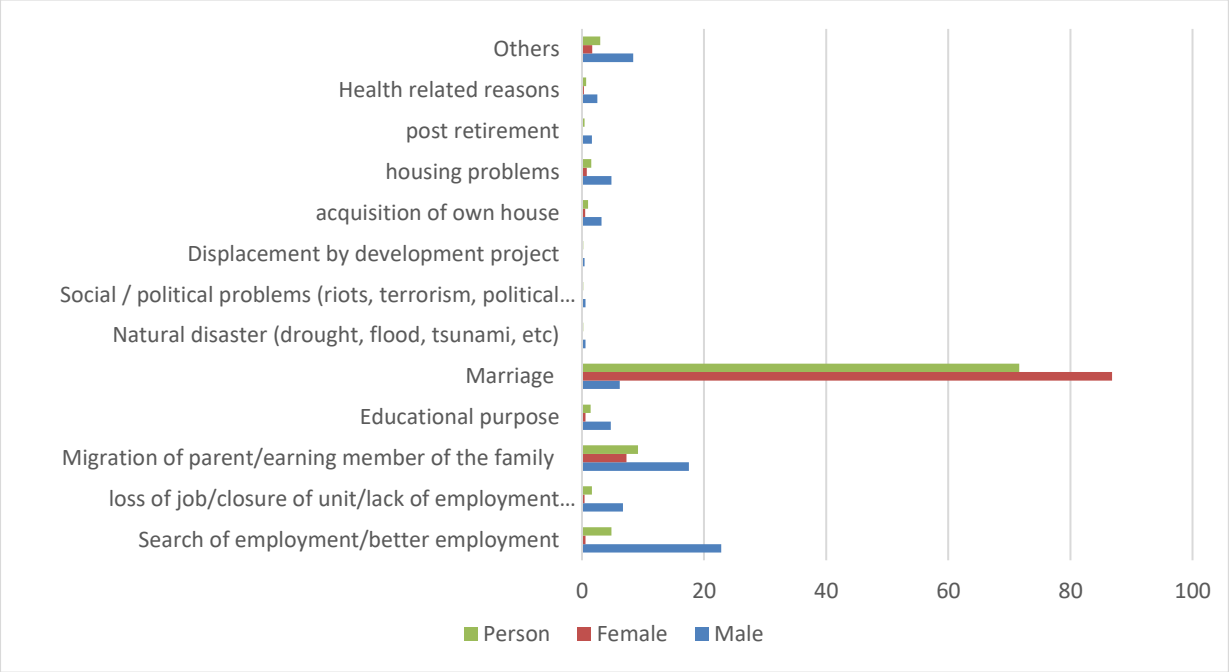
Table 5: Reasons for Migration during pandemic

Reasons for migration	**All India**		
	Male	Female	Person
Search of employment/better employment	22.8	0.6	4.8
loss of job/closure of unit/lack of employment opportunities	6.7	0.4	1.6
Migration of parent/earning member of the family	17.5	7.3	9.2
Educational purpose	4.7	0.6	1.4
Marriage	6.2	86.8	71.6
Natural disaster (drought, flood, tsunami, etc)	0.6	0.1	0.2
Social / political problems (riots, terrorism, political refugee, bad law and order, etc.)	0.6	0.1	0.2
Displacement by development project	0.4	0.1	0.2
Acquisition of own house	3.2	0.5	1.0
Housing problems	4.8	0.8	1.5
Post retirement	1.6	0.1	0.4
Health related reasons	2.5	0.3	0.7

Others	8.4	1.7	3.0
All	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source : compiled from PLFS 2020-21

Figure 03: Reasons for Migration during pandemic



VI. RESPONSES OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON MIGRATION

The outbreak of Corona Virus and the consequent lockdown decision of the government as a preventive and protective measure have a greater impact on the livelihood as well as socio-psychological status of the migrants working in different cities. Challenges for the State with regard to the migrants and reverse-migrants, there were several policies announced by the government at both central and state-levels.

The Central Government announced a scheme called the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Yojana, for providing wage employment, particularly in districts witnessing massive outmigration. It has within its ambit health workers, farmers, MGNREGA workers, economically vulnerable categories, especially women, elderly and unorganised sector workers, Jan Dhan account holders and Ujjwala beneficiaries.

The state were effectively engaged the self-help group (SHG) members by leveraging the collateral free credit of Rs 20 lakh extended to them as part of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY). In line with the government of Uttar Pradesh, it can instruct the SHGs to concentrate on producing items/commodities that have local demand; one-district-one-product model were followed. Using the locally available raw material, supply chain disruption can be addressed and demand creations have been planned for rural areas (Acharya & Acharya, 2020).

Migrant workers accessed the Public Distribution System (Ration) from any Fair Price Shop in India by March 2021 under the Scheme of “One Nation One Card”. The scheme gave the inter-state portability of access to ration for migrant labourers. The World Bank announced $1 billion funding to speed up social protection support, in part through the PMGKB. These supports were work alongside pre-existing measures such as the Public Distribution System (PDS). Government announced an additional 5kg of wheat or rice per person on the Public Distribution System list, and 1kg of pulses per PDS household, for 3 months and Free Liquefied Petroleum Gas cylinders for 86 million Ujjwala scheme beneficiaries (who are all Below Poverty Line families) for 3 months.

The Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan also launched a scheme for affordable rental housing complexes for migrant workers and urban poor to provide affordable rental housing units under PMAY. The scheme aims to use existing housing stock under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Housing Mission (JNURM) as well as to motivate public and private agencies to build new affordable houses for rent. The migrant labour and urban poor provided living facilities at affordable housing for rent (Bhattacharya, 2020).

Some state governments (like Bihar, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh) announced onetime cash transfers for returning migrant workers. UP government declared maintenance allowance of Rs 1,000 for returning migrants who were required to quarantine. Government of India announced Rs.500 per month, for 3 months, Jan Dhan Yojana female account holders (50% of them are held by women) and cash transfer of Rs.2000 to 87 million farmers under the PM Kisan scheme, and payment of Rs.1000 to poor senior citizens, widows and disabled persons. Collateral-free loan of up to Rs. 2 million for female self-help groups (Srivastava & Srivastava, 2020).

VII. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has had a particularly negative impact on India's economy. The government imposed a severe lockdown on a fragile society with a large informal and poor sector, which had already become vulnerable due to the economic slowdown in 2017. People moved to cities in search of better job opportunities that were not available to them in their previous location. The lockdown imposed to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic left these migrant workers without work, wages, or resources to deal with the situation. They were forced to return home due to a lack of savings from their meagre income. It's ironic that they're now looking for shelter in the home they left for better opportunities and income.

Government’s Poor strategy related with the Implementation of various government welfare schemes is a big challenge in economic development of rural areas. Reverse migration has manifold implications for Indian primary and secondary sectors, the rural-urban areas and overall economy. In the near future, migration could slow as the PLFS unit level data reveal that 60 per cent of returned migrants are not interested in moving out to their last UPR or any other place. On the other side, the urban economy is facing a shortage of skilled and unskilled labour especially in the secondary sector; and the absence of technological development of the secondary sector may hit industrial production.

Undoubtedly, the government took several steps to combat the pandemic's negative effects on migrant workers during the first wave. Among these initiatives, the government has initiated cash transfers, public distribution of rations to migrant workers, transportation arrangements, and other forms of short-term assistance in order to alleviate the suffering of migrants. Furthermore, migrant workers had no savings and no access to welfare programmes in cities, leading to reverse migration to their home countries. In order to ensure the sustainability of migrant labourers' livelihoods in the future, the government must generate more employment opportunities for them in their home countries through substantial public investments. Along with the supply side, one could argue that the demand side should not be overlooked; thus, it is critical for the government to generate additional demand through pump-priming activities in order to achieve balanced growth in the Indian economy. The Indian economy will face more challenges even after the Covid-19 pandemic is eradicated, implying that ensuring adequate job opportunities is a necessary step, as we have seen that growth alone will never ensure jobs. As a result, more investment may be desired, particularly in labour-intensive sectors.

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