

Review Article

AN ANALYSIS OF MIGRATION DURING COVID19 PANDEMIC

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. The migrants see no future in returning to cities; they want to go back to their homeland and are prepared to make the very minimum of money that is possible there. The COVID-19 pandemic has generally resulted in reverse migration, which has highlighted the importance of addressing migrant workers' socioeconomic needs and promoting inclusive and sustainable development in both urban and rural areas.

This paper analyses the scenario of migration in India during pandemic period and the evaluation of current policy responses by the central government and state government also. These initiatives supported the reintegration of returning migrant workers into the local economy, promoted sustainable livelihoods through employment and entrepreneurship, and helped offer immediate assistance to them. The welfare of millions of migrant workers and the management of the migration crisis depended heavily on cooperation between the central and state governments. Purpose of this article is to discuss the crises of reverse migration amid covid 19 and the initiatives taken by the Government of India. The article uses PLFS 2020-21 data to analyse the issue.

It observes that the female migration rates have been steadily increasing during the period 2020-21. The majority of migrants in intra-state movement are women, and the majority of migrants in inter-state migration are men. The primary causes of migration brought on by COVID-19 include health issues, the departure of a parent or other family member who earns money, job loss or a lack of work opportunities.

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). When an economy undergoes a structural change from unorganized to industrialized, and organized, labour must move from the former to the latter. Migration of labour has been identified as

the primary driver of these shifts. As a result, a large number of economists concur that labour mobility plays a significant role in shaping economic structural change.

“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).

“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. As per NSS 64th Round data collection, Return/Reverse migration refers to the trend, where the migrants return to their usual place of residence” (Wickramasekara, 2011). 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.

“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, according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' Statistics Division” (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).

The following section provides the background of this paper. The second section describes the literature reviews. The third section discusses the objectives. Section four described the data sources used in the analysis. Section five presents the results and discussing the findings and section six discussed government policies for migrate workers during pandemic. The last section presents the conclusion.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

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.

Mitra & Shrivastav (2024) stated “the pandemic and shutdown caused severe hardships for regular wage workers as well as casual labourers. The major causes of their reluctance to leave their existing locales in the future are the abrupt crisis and the severity of job loss, especially in urban regions, which compelled many to relocate to their hometowns”. “The pandemic and lockdown that followed decreased sources of income, especially in metropolitan areas, especially big towns that used to attract a lot of migrants” (Jeyakumar et al 2022; Mitra and Singh 2021).

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”.

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".

Kaur & Shubham (2021) 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's (2021) study compares "the plight of migrant labourers of both India and China in the current pandemic situation to contextualise the causes of this misery in the broader framework of land reform and the capability to absorb them in rural economies 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 migrant labourers for industrial and construction workers. The pandemic has worsened the condition of migrants both in India and China and has also put severe challenges to poverty eradication programmes and increased the 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's (2021) 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. Outmigration of males from the hill districts of Uttarakhand has 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 distressed 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

alarming 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 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) to be 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, and 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”.

Choudhury & Joarder (2020) “the surplus labour force who possess a low education level, and 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 a need for developing the rural areas and the adjacent small cities”.

According to Pandey et al. (2016), “primary objectives of the government program were to give villagers employment possibilities, uphold equality among different societal groups, and encourage a higher standard of life in order to support the financial well-being of those who reside in rural areas”.

iii. OBJECTIVES

- To understand the trends of migration in India during the pandemic period.
- To review the government policies related to migrant workers during the pandemic.

iv. DATA SOURCES

The secondary data methods are the foundation of the present research. The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), which is part of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) and the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, performed the National Sample Survey (NSS) and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020–21 in order to achieve that objective. The migration data is estimated using the current and last place of residence. The data has been collected from the internet, magazines, journals and newspapers from various official websites.

v. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

a. Migration Trends

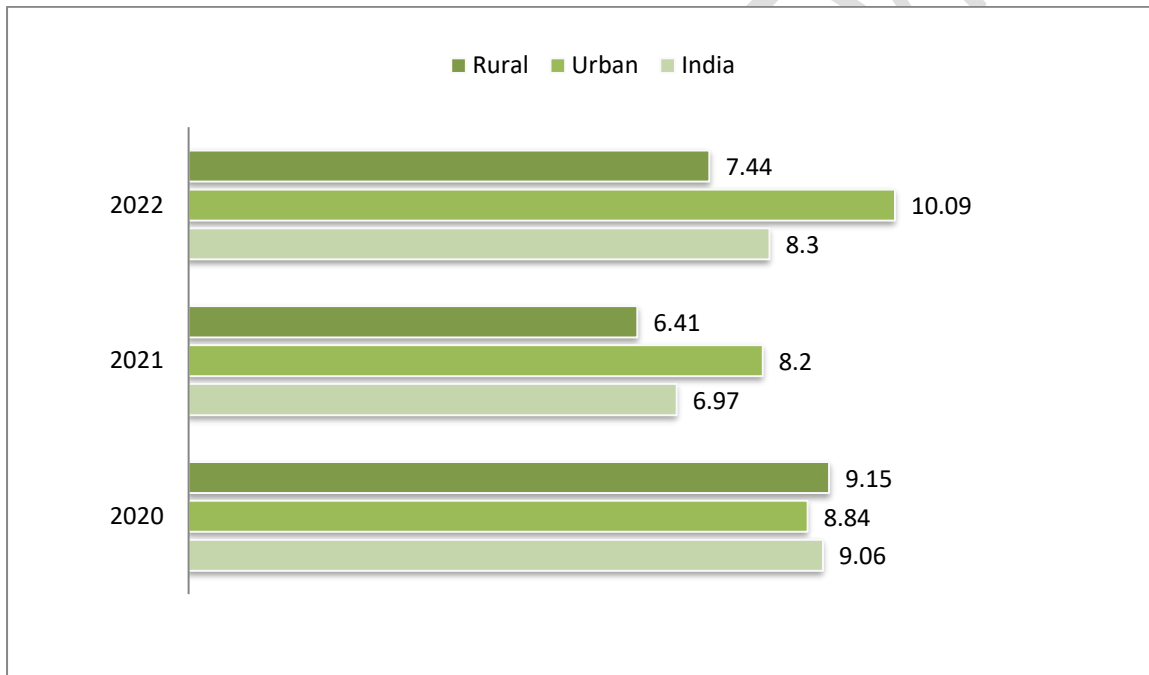
The pandemic period had a significant impact on people's quality of life, such as a rise in the unorganised sector's unemployment rate and a drop in labour force participation, which made the poor even more impoverished. Pandemic disease is harming the general populace on the one hand, while hunger and 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: CMIE (Unemployment Rate in 2020-21)

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 during Pandemic

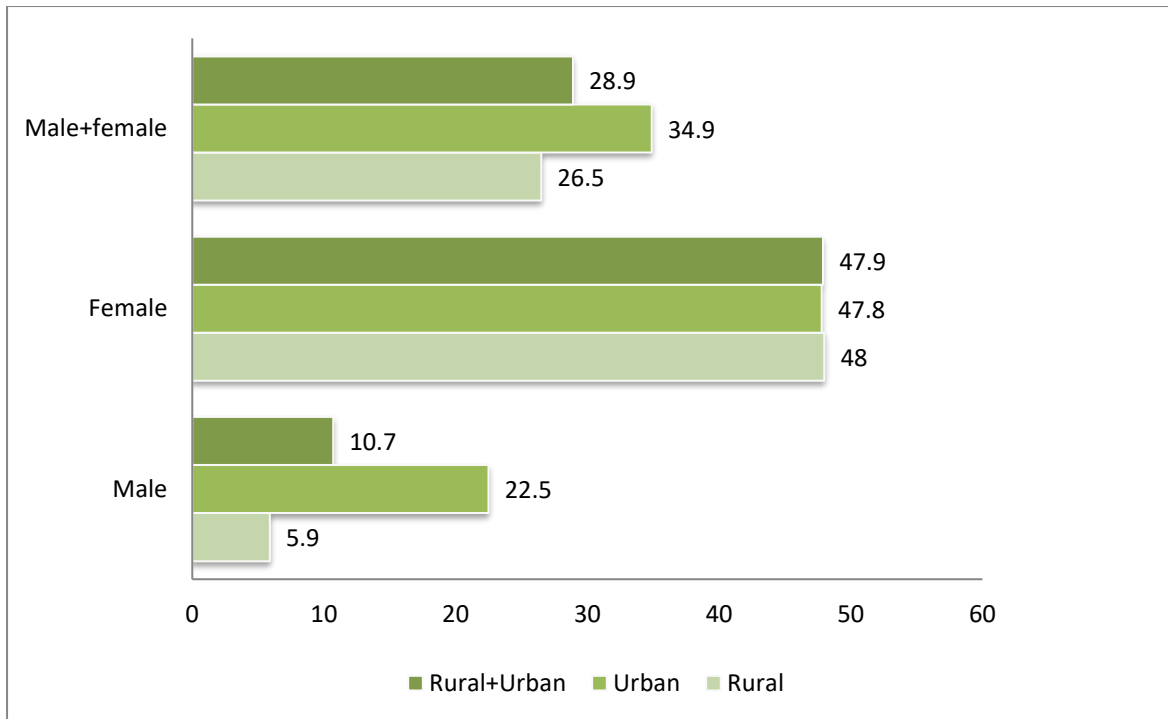
Category	Rural	Urban	Rural+Urban
Male	5.9	22.5	10.7
Female	48.0	47.8	47.9
Male+female	26.5	34.9	28.9

Source: PLFS (2020-21)

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 during the Pandemic



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 areas migration rates of males 10.7 percent and females 47.9 percent. It is observed that the male migration rates have shown a downward trend.

b. Inter-state migration in India during the Pandemic

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, urban cities act as the pull factors for 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% female. The share of inter-state migration was about 31.4% male and 7.2% female. Females are the 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 the 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 during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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

c. Reasons of Migration

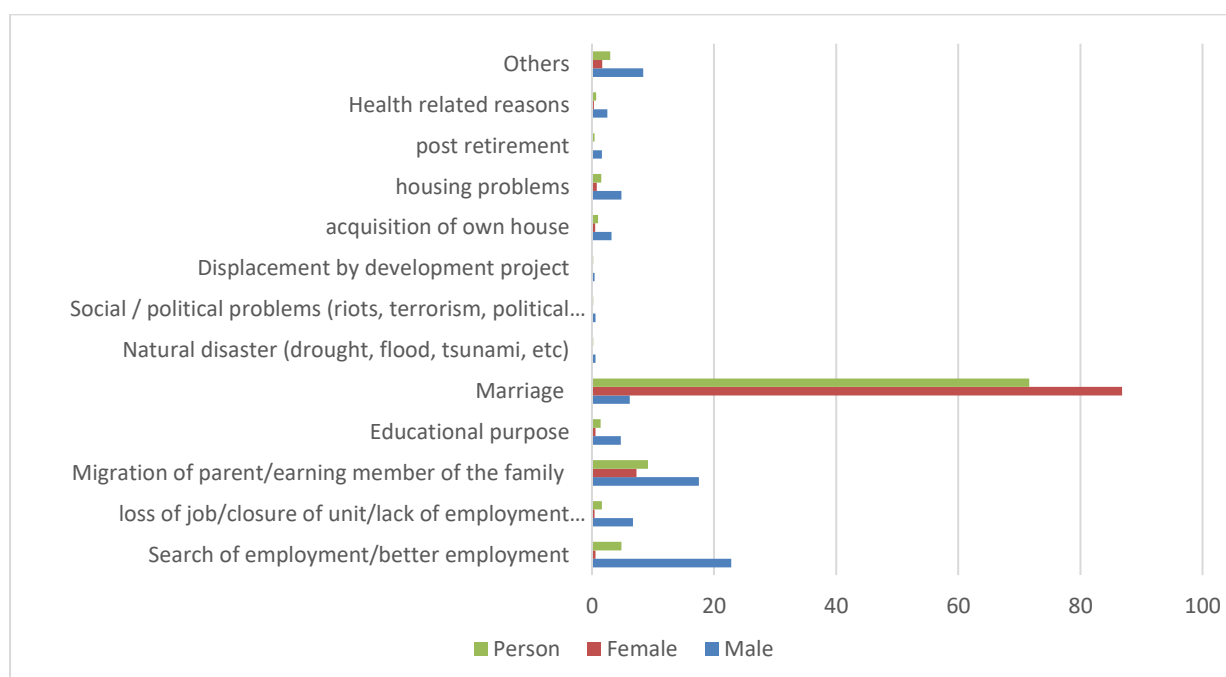
In Table 05, the percentage distribution of migrants by reasons for migration has been presented for PLFS 2020-21. The share of employment-related reasons in male migration is 22.8 percent, while for females the share of employment-related reasons is only 0.6 percent. Female migration is more prevalent 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 the pandemic

Reasons for migration	All India		
	Male	Female	Person
Search for 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 disasters (drought, flood, tsunami, etc)	0.6	0.1	0.2
Social/political problems (riots, terrorism, political refugees, 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 the pandemic



vi. GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR MIGRATE WORKERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Government's Policies: Period specific

Return migrants frequently deal with immediate issues such as psychological stress, social reintegration, unemployment, and loss of income in the short term. Government policies aimed at addressing these immediate concerns focused on emergency assistance and prompt support, food and shelter programs, financial support, access to healthcare, psychological assistance etc.

In the long run, the emphasis switches to guaranteeing long-term employment prospects, financial autonomy, and effective social reintegration. The effects are possible with government policies such as supporting entrepreneurship through grants, low-interest loans, or subsidies to launch companies that produce steady revenue is one aspect of economic reintegration, offering long-term training programs to improve employability in cutting-edge industries like technology or green energy is known as skill development and reskilling, housing and infrastructure development, regional development: measures to alleviate urban overcrowding and absorb returnees by distributing jobs to rural or neglected areas etc.

Key Differences in the Impact of Government Policies

Aspect	Short Run	Long Run
Focus	Stabilization and urgent needs	Long-term, sustainable growth and livelihoods

<i>Key Policies</i>	Relief, employment, and medical treatment	Development of skills, integration, and entrepreneurship
<i>Challenges</i>	Lack of resources and ignorance	Market changes and financial concerns
<i>Outcomes</i>	Initial reintegration and temporary alleviation	Financial independence and social integration

Impact of Central and State Government's Initiatives

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 creation 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 in funding to speed up social protection support, in part through the PMGKB. These supports were worked alongside pre-existing measures such as the Public Distribution System (PDS). The government announced an additional 5kg of wheat or rice per person on the Public Distribution System list, 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 one-time cash transfers for returning migrant workers. UP government declared a maintenance allowance of Rs 1,000

for returning migrants who were required to quarantine. The 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). States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, and Jharkhand launched skill-mapping drives to understand the capabilities of return migrants and match them with local job opportunities. Some states like Kerala and Telangana provided free transportation and quarantine facilities for returning migrants.

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 locations. 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.

Reverse migration has manifold implications for Indian primary and secondary sectors, the rural-urban areas and the 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.

It is necessary to take both short-term relief efforts and long-term plans that tackle social, economic, and infrastructure issues to improve the lives of return migrants. It should be create agro-processing facilities, small businesses, and rural industries to take in resettling migrants. Encourage industries that require a lot of labour, such as infrastructure development, textiles, and construction. Extend MGNREGA's coverage to encompass skilled and semi-skilled labour and to make the program more appealing, raise daily earnings and make sure payments are made on schedule.

Provide funding and subsidies for programs involving self-employment and micro businesses. To increase employment and enhance living standards, fund rural development initiatives like houses, irrigation, and roads. It is also important to encourage digital connectivity to make online learning, medical, and e-commerce possible and provide mobile-friendly websites that link return migrants to government assistance, training courses, and employment prospects.

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