



## Supporting Migrants

This editorial is based on [“Push the Policy Needle Forward on Migrant Support”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 05/04/2022. It talks about the need for and the challenges to policy making for the migrant workers in India.

**For Prelims:** Migrant Workers and Migration, ONORC, Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC) scheme, e-Shram portal, draft National Migrant Labour Policy, ILO Convention on Domestic Workers

**For Mains:** Migrant Workers in India - Challenges faced by them, schemes launched for their welfare, Policy for Migrant Workers - Need, Challenges

In the wake of a **nationwide lockdown**, India was left shocked by the plight of [migrant workers](#) walking hundreds of kilometres, facing hunger, exhaustion and violence, to get to the safety of their home villages.

The dire circumstances of the migrants made them the focus of large-scale relief efforts by governments and civil society alike.

The ramping up of [One Nation One Ration Card \(ONORC\)](#) project and introduction of the [Affordable Rental Housing Complexes \(ARHC\)](#) scheme and [e-Shram portal](#) reflected a ray of hope. However, the story of migrants is still **a tale of distress** in India.

## Migration and Migrants

### What is its Significance?

- Migration **fills gaps in demand for and supply of labour**, efficiently allocates skilled labour, unskilled labour, and cheap labour.
- It **enhances the knowledge and skills of migrants** through **exposure and interaction** with the outside world.
- It also **enhances chances of employment** and economic prosperity which in turn improves quality of life.
- Economic well being of migrants provides **insurance against risks to households in the areas of origin**, increases consumer expenditure and **investment in health**, education and **assets formation**.

### What is the Present Situation of Migrant Workers?

- Currently, **a third of the nation’s workforce is mobile**. Migrant workers in India **fuel critical sectors such as manufacturing**, construction, hospitality, logistics and commercial agriculture.
- The Covid-19 Pandemic has **un-done the post-1991 poverty alleviation** of almost 300 million Indians, driven by migration out of farm work.

- Repeated surveys have found that the **incomes of migrant households continue to be lower than pre-pandemic levels**, even after returning to cities. Migrants are finding less work and their children eating less.

## What about the Policy Scenario for Migrants?

- Despite clear economic and humanitarian reasoning to bring migrants back into the policy discourse, the **current policy scenario is at best fragmented** and at worst waning.
- Recently, [NITI Aayog](#), along with a working subgroup of officials and members of civil society, has prepared a [draft National Migrant Labour policy](#).
  - The draft recommends to **acknowledge migration as an integral part of development**, and that government policies should **not hinder but seek to facilitate internal migration**.

## What Factors are Slowing the Migration Policy Momentum?

- **Politicisation of Migration:** Migration is a highly politicised phenomenon in **India**, states are highly influenced by the political economy of migration.
  - ‘Destination States’ experience a tension between **economic needs (which require migrant labour)** and **political needs (which promote nativist policies** of imposing domicile restrictions on employment and social security).
  - However, the ‘sending States’ are highly motivated to serve their “own people” because they vote in their source villages.
  - The **response to internal migration follows from State-specific calculations** on what political dividends might be reaped (or lost) by investing fiscal and administrative resources towards migrants.
- **Inaccurate Identification of Migrants:** Migrants are **located inside two larger categories** that have long troubled policymakers: **the unorganised worker** and the **urban poor**. Even the e-Shram portal has been **unable to accurately distinguish and target migrants**.
  - Policy interventions in major urban destinations continue to **conflate the urban poor with low-income migrants**.
  - Hence, **slum development continues as the primary medium for alleviating migrant concerns**, while in reality, most migrants live on worksites that are entirely out of the policy gaze.
- **Failure of Official Datasets for Migration:** Migration policy discourse is seemingly paralysed by the now well-acknowledged failure of official datasets to **capture the actual scale and the frequency of internal migration** in India.
  - Data systems designed to periodically record only one spatial location have posed great challenges to welfare delivery for up to 500 million people who are part of multi-locational migrant households.
  - Covid-19 pandemic placed a sharp focus on problems such as educating and vaccinating those children who accompany their migrant parents, or ensuring that migrant women avail maternity benefits at multiple locations.

## What Can Be The Way Forward?

- **Role of Centre:** Migrants would be well served if the Centre played a proactive role by **offering strategic policy guidance** and a **platform for inter-State coordination**.
  - State-level political economy constraints make the Centre’s role particularly crucial in addressing issues of inter-State migrant workers at ‘destination States’.
- **Bringing Migration Policy in Force:** At a time when economic recovery and inclusive growth are urgent policy goals, migration policy can hardly afford to be delayed.
  - NITI Aayog’s Draft Policy on Migrant Workers is a positive step forward in articulating policy priorities and indicating suitable institutional frameworks, and **deserves a speedy release**.
  - Strategic initiatives to **provide migrants safety nets regardless of location** as well as **bolster their ability to migrate safely** and affordably must keep up the momentum towards migrant-supportive policy.

- **Recognition of Migrants:** Recognition of **circular migrants as part of India's urban population** might compel authorities to at least consider how proposed policies might impact these communities.
- **Women Migrants:** Special Measures should also **take into account particularly the situation of migrant women**, who are mainly involved in domestic work.
  - Although the new policy aims to be inclusive of all kinds of marginalised migrants, it could do more to explicitly mention the challenges faced by domestic workers.
  - It would be very easy for them to remain excluded as **India has not ratified the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers** and **The Domestic Workers Bill 2017 has not become law.**

### ***Drishti Mains Question***

Discuss the key factors slowing the migration policy momentum in India and the role that the government shall play in addressing the issues of migrant workers.

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