



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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