

CHALLENGES OF REVERSE MIGRATION IN INDIA

UCSD PROJECT RISHI | Insiyah Merchant

Internal & International Migrant Workers in the Post-COVID Economy

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India has a predominant share of internal migration and is the top origin country of international migrants. The major drivers of internal and international migration in India are the current rates of unemployment, competitive labor markets, and enhanced livelihood prospects. COVID-19 and the nationwide lockdown of inter-state and international borders triggered a mass reverse migration of informal migrant workers. Inter-state migrants in India and returnee migrants from Gulf countries account for two-thirds of Indian migrants living abroad.





Research Methodology

- Telephone interviews with 65 reverse migrants were conducted during May–August 2020 in India.
- Internal migrants from states like Bihar, UP, MP, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh who were returning from destination states were interviewed.
- All the workers in the study are low-skilled and semi-skilled workers
- 'Internal migrants' refers to inter-state migrant workers who were stranded in different destination states within India.
- 'International migrants' refers to Indians who had migrated to one of the Gulf countries in search of work.



Study Findings

- Due to the pandemic-induced lockdown, the working class, especially low-income migrant workers, have been the worst affected ultimately by unemployment.
 - Migrant workers were treated as a means to an end and not as citizens whose welfare matters.
- Few internal migrants reported that they received work under the same employer after the lockdown but complained of non-payment of wages during the lockdown period and were forced to return to their villages with no place to live and no basic facilities such as electricity and water that were provided by the contractor/employer.
 - A few international migrants reported that their employers paid their due wages, arranged for their return, got their Covid tests done, and did not face any problem as far as their return to their village was concerned.
 - Many social challenges were faced as well. The migrants interviewed reported instances of discrimination against them and being viewed as the spreaders of the virus in the destination city/state, during their journey back home, in quarantine facilities, and in their villages.