

Reverse Migration: Comparative Study Of Internal And International Migrant Workers And State Potential

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Abstract

The primary factors influencing migration within and between India and other countries are the current unemployment rate, the level of competition in the job market, and the improved opportunities for a better livelihood in the destination state or country. Conversely, the enforcement of a countrywide lockdown and the shutdown of interstate and international borders as strategies to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a decline in the movement of informal migrant workers. To successfully reintegrate individuals impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic into the economy after its conclusion, the central and state governments must collaborate and develop efficient strategies. This study examines the complexities of reverse migration among migrant workers from both domestic and international origins. It highlights the government's potential role in supervising and taking advantage of this migration trend. This research aims to evaluate the different approaches adopted by the Indian government towards its domestic and international refugees during the phases of reverse migration, repatriation, and reintegration that followed the declaration of the lockdown. The paper begins by conducting a comparative analysis of the difficulties encountered by domestic and foreign migrant workers during these stages and how different countries dealt with the situation through their policies, the existing data collected from social workers and migrants facilitates this comparison. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the obstacles encountered by Indian migrants during their economic reintegration to craft welfare policies specifically designed for this demographic and the government's different responses to repatriation.

Keywords: Migration, Migrant Crisis, COVID-19, Pandemic, Government Policies, Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Due to the exceptional disruptions created by the COVID-19 outbreak, there has been a significant increase in reverse migration. This refers to the movement of migrant workers returning to their home nations or areas of origin. Reverse migration has significant socio-economic consequences, especially for employment markets, urbanisation patterns, and community dynamics. Reverse migration is the term used to describe the situation in which migrants go back to their original location after having lived in a different place for a specific period of time. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a substantial reverse migration in India, resulting in major attention being drawn to this issue.¹ This phenomenon is defined by the migration of individuals or households from urban areas or foreign nations back to the regions where they were originally born and raised.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a worldwide crisis characterised by rigorous lockdowns, travel limitations, and economic decline. As a consequence, millions of migrant workers, both inside their own countries and internationally, experienced displacement and disruption. These workers experienced job displacement, which significantly impacted their lives. Internal migrant labourers encountered several obstacles, such as unemployment, substandard housing, and limited availability of healthcare. Oftentimes, they would move inside the confines of their own country with the expectation of discovering more favourable economic prospects. Similarly, international migrant workers employed abroad experienced unexpected disruptions such as job terminations, insufficient social protection, and uncertainty over their legal standing in their host nations.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on migrants in India. Their situation was worsened by the sudden enforcement of a statewide lockdown in March 2020, which aimed to control the spread of the virus. The implementation of security measures resulted in a significant decline in economic activity, particularly impacting businesses that rely significantly on informal workers, such as construction, manufacturing, and services. These disruptions had a greater impact on informal migrant workers, who often lack social benefits and employment security. They faced rapid economic instability and loss of their means of subsistence. Migrant workers, who often found themselves forced to live in unstable conditions in states or cities far from their homes, faced significant psychological discomfort and financial difficulties. A significant portion of the population was left without enough resources and support networks, struggling with uncertainty about their future and basic needs for existence.

The Fourth Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data clearly shows that the scale of reverse migration reveals the severity of the challenges faced by migrant workers. After March 2020, a substantial number of migrants decided to return to their

¹ 'What is Reverse Migration? UPSC Sociology, available at: <https://upscsociety.in/what-is-reverse-migration-discuss-its-features-causes-and-consequences-in-india/>

home nations in order to seek shelter and support during the economic turmoil caused by the epidemic. The data shows a substantial increase in the rates of reverse migration after the closure started, reaching a worrisome peak of 53%.²

Migrants who come back face several difficulties, including temporary joblessness and health problems, as well as longer-term impediments associated with reintegrating into their home country's economy. The absence of comprehensive governmental planning and support exacerbated these hurdles, leading to a scenario that may be described as a "crisis within a crisis" for the migrant community. The main drivers of migration triggered by COVID-19 after March 2020 are the economic recession and the loss of jobs due to the closure of businesses and reduced economic activity. Additionally, there is a lack of work opportunities in the states and cities where people are moving to. The aforementioned factors emphasise the crucial importance of implementing targeted interventions and policy policies to assist returning migrant workers in their reintegration and socioeconomic recovery.

In the context of this study, the term "internal migrant workers" refers to those who move from one region of the same country to another within the same country in the hope of achieving better economic opportunities. On the other hand, international migrant workers are individuals who cross national borders for the sake of employment or for other reasons that are comparable to those of domestic migrants. In order to determine whether or not the policies and interventions implemented by the government are effective in addressing migration that is caused by a crisis, it is essential to have a thorough understanding of the experiences of domestic and international migrant workers during episodes of reverse migration.

Research Objectives and Scope

The primary objective of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the reverse migration experiences of internal and international migrant workers, with a particular emphasis on the following:

- Determining the incentives and obstacles encountered by migrant workers when they return to their countries of origin.
- The socio-economic effects of reverse migration on sending and receiving regions will be analysed.
- Assessing the efficacy of state interventions and policies in aiding migrant workers upon their return.
- An examination of the function of governments in facilitating and capitalising on reverse migration to promote social integration and economic growth.

The study's scope includes a comparative analysis of the experiences of internal and international migrants amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be achieved through the utilisation of empirical data, case studies, and pre-existing literature. Through an examination of the intricacies of reverse migration and the capacity of the state to regulate migration fluxes, this study aims to provide insight to development planning stakeholders and policy-makers engaged in migration governance.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIGRATION

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has had a significant influence on migration patterns and trends in India, with some main factors being noted below:

1. Domestic Migration Crisis: The epidemic was the impetus for a large crisis of domestic migration in India, which is reminiscent of the migration that occurred after the Partition in 1947. Because of the statewide lockdowns and travel restrictions, a significant number of migrant workers were compelled to return to their hometowns and villages, which resulted in a large-scale migration from densely populated urban regions to more rural areas³.
2. Economic Disruption: The abrupt unemployment and market failures that were caused by the epidemic led to the massive relocation of migratory labour. This move has the potential to have significant repercussions for the economy, particularly in industries that are highly dependent on the labour of migrants⁴.
3. Social and Psychological Impact: The reverse migration and disruptions have not only had an effect on the economic aspects, but they have also had an impact on the social and psychological elements of the migrant workers and the communities in which they currently reside⁵.
4. Policy Interventions: The difficulties that migrant workers encountered during the pandemic have brought to light the necessity of policy interventions and initiatives to improve inclusive recovery and reduce the adverse effects of the pandemic.
5. Long-term implications: It is anticipated that the pandemic's impact on migration will have long-term repercussions, including changes to labour mobility, remittances, the dynamics of the labour market, and sectoral ramifications within India.

² IAS Score, *available at*: <https://iasscore.in/current-affairs/mains/reverse-migration-and-its-impacts-on-indian-economy>

³ India's Coronavirus Migration Crisis, Jstor Daily, *available at*: <https://daily.jstor.org/indias-migration-crisis/>

⁴ Ajay Kumar Sharma, "Impact Of Covid-19 On Migration And Economy In India", 28 AMSJ 2 (2024)

⁵ J. Jemi Rooth Kanosa and J. Divya Merry Malar, "Challenges Faced by Migrant Workers in India during COVID-19 Lockdown and Reverse Migration", 14 Cross Res 1 (2023)

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, both domestic and foreign migrant workers faced numerous difficulties. The sudden implementation of lockdowns and travel restrictions resulted in a substantial decline in employment, leaving numerous individuals without a means of earning money and confronting financial instability. This was especially severe for individuals working in informal industries or daily wage occupations. The implementation of border closures and containment measures led to an unusual phenomenon of reverse migration, as workers returned to their home nations or rural areas, often experiencing terrible circumstances. The epidemic revealed the vulnerabilities of migrant workers, who often faced a lack of access to social protection, healthcare, and shelter, worsening their difficult situation. The problem of food insecurity intensified due to the closure of marketplaces and disruptions in supply systems. Furthermore, the crisis brought attention to the deficiencies in policy frameworks designed to safeguard migrant workers, leading to demands for stronger support networks.

Migrant workers faced severe psychosocial stress, which included worry related to health hazards, separation from families, and uncertainty about the future. The challenges they faced were exacerbated by instances of discrimination and social marginalisation. The combined effects of these difficulties not only impacted the welfare of migrant workers but also had wider consequences for economies and societies worldwide, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive and adaptable policy responses.

To address these problems, governments and humanitarian organisations implemented specific measures to safeguard the welfare and security of migrant workers throughout the crisis. The pandemic highlighted the necessity for inclusive policies that give importance to the rights and well-being of migratory communities, whether they be internal or international, during times of crisis.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF INTERNAL AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT EXPERIENCES

A study of the experiences of internal and international migrant workers during reverse migration demonstrates subtle distinctions in their underlying motivations, obstacles, and coping mechanisms in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. When describing their reasons for returning to their countries of origin, internal migrant workers frequently cited immediate job losses and economic insecurity. These individuals typically migrate within national borders in search of improved economic opportunities. Due to the sudden halt of commercial operations and inadequate social safeguards, a considerable number of internally displaced persons were compelled to seek sanctuary in their place of origin or rural villages, where they could depend on support systems comprised of family and community.⁶

Conversely, international migrant workers encountered an unusual number of obstacles throughout the process of reverse migration, which was further complicated by bureaucratic impediments and legal intricacies. A considerable number of international migrants faced challenges in obtaining essential travel documents, obtaining access to consular services, and navigating the processes of repatriation as a result of flight cancellations and border closures. Stress and anxiety among international migrant workers were made worse by the ambiguity regarding their legal standing in host nations and their incapability to promptly repatriate.

During reverse migration, socioeconomic factors significantly influenced the experiences of both domestic and foreign migrant workers. The informal labour force's susceptibility was accentuated for internal migrants due to the dearth of formal employment prospects and social safety nets in urban regions. On the contrary, international migrants frequently encountered challenges pertaining to remittances, as their capacity to transfer funds to their families in their country of origin was impacted by the economic recession⁷. The circumstances of migrant workers determined the diversity of their coping mechanisms. Internal migrants sought solace in familial and communal connections, employing local networks to obtain fundamental necessities and investigate alternative means of subsistence in closer proximity to their place of origin. In the interim, diplomatic missions and international organisations were approached by international migrants seeking aid in navigating the intricate processes of repatriation and reintegration.

In a nutshell reverse migration instigated by the COVID-19 pandemic presented substantial obstacles for both domestic and foreign migrant workers. However, their circumstances were influenced by unique socioeconomic elements and required customised coping mechanisms to navigate the intricacies associated with repatriating to their countries of origin. Comprehending these disparities is essential for guiding policy interventions that are specifically designed to attend to the varied requirements of migrant communities during periods of emergency.

The decision-making processes, obstacles, and opportunities of internal and international migrant workers during reverse migration are profoundly impacted by an assortment of socioeconomic factors. These elements are of utmost importance in comprehending the intricacies of migration dynamics during the COVID-19 crisis⁸.

⁶ Asma Khan and H.Arokkiaraj, "Challenges of reverse migration in India: a comparative study of internal and international migrant workers in the post COVID economy", Springer open, available at: <https://comparativemigrationstudies.springeropen.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s40878-021-00260-2.pdf>

⁷ Rajan, S. I., Sivakumar, P., and Sirivasan, A. The COVID-19 pandemic and internal labour migration in India: A 'crisis mobility'. *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 2020; 63, 1021 - 1039. doi: 10.1007/s1027 - 020 - 00293 - 8.

⁸ Kumar, S and Choudhury, S. Migrant workers and human rights: A critical study on India's COVID - 19 lockdown policy. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 2021; 3(1), 100130. <https://doi:10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100130>

- 1. Economic Vulnerability and Job Losses:** Migrant workers, whether domestic or foreign, are susceptible to economic disruptions, including those that occur during crises such as the ongoing pandemic. As a result of the informal sector's instability and absence of social protections, internal migrant workers are frequently exposed to abrupt employment losses and income insecurity when economic activities cease. In a similar vein, employ in sectors such as construction, hospitality, or agriculture overseas, international migrant workers encountered workforce reductions in size and scope of work as a result of economic contractions and security measures in their host nations.
- 2. Social Service Accessibility and Support Networks:** Internal migrant workers who relocate within a nation may face obstacles when attempting to obtain fundamental services including housing, healthcare, and education, particularly in urban areas where they frequently reside in informal settlements. A lack of adequate access to social safety systems further amplifies their susceptibility in times of emergency. In contrast, international migrant workers might encounter obstacles such as language barriers, cultural disparities, and limitations on accessing public services in their host nations. These challenges could significantly hinder their capacity to manage urgent situations and navigate bureaucratic procedures.
- 3. Legal and administrative obstacles:** Complex legal structures regulate the residency status, work permits, and visas of international migrant workers in their host nations. Redirection and regularisation of status-related bureaucratic obstacles could extend uncertainty and exacerbate stress and anxiety during reverse migration. Upon repatriation to their home regions, internal migrant workers might encounter administrative obstacles pertaining to identification documents and eligibility for government assistance programmes.
- 4. Financial Support and Remittance Dependence:** A considerable number of international migrant workers rely on remittances to support their families back home. These remittances make a substantial contribution to the economies of their former nations. Nevertheless, remittance inflows were curtailed as a result of economic disruptions caused by the pandemic, which had an adverse effect on the means of subsistence for families whose members relied on migrant earnings. The reliance of internal migrant labourers on remittances to their families underscores the interdependence of migration and regional economic prosperity.
- 5. Distinction in Social Integration and Community Support:** Internal and international migrant labourers exhibit varying degrees of social integration and community support. Pre-existing familial and communal networks in the regions of origin of internal migrants may provide advantages such as facilitated reintegration and access to informal support systems. On the other hand, international migrants may encounter social isolation and cultural alienation in their host nations, which can hinder their capacity to manage the difficulties of reverse migration and reestablish social connections when they return.

Comprehending these socio-economic factors is of the utmost importance in order to develop effective policies and interventions that cater to the unique vulnerabilities and requirements of both domestic and foreign migrant labourers in times of reverse migration. It is critical to prioritise endeavours that bolster social protection, facilitate accessibility to vital services, and advance economic inclusion in order to provide assistance to migrant populations during periods of crisis and cultivate resilience within migration systems.

STATE POLICY AND INTERVENTIONS

The efficacy and scope of government policies and interventions implemented in India to assist returning migrant workers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic were variable. The reactions to both domestic and foreign migration exhibited unique characteristics and factors to be taken into account.

1. Evaluation of Government Policies for Returning Migrant Workers:

a. Internal Migration:

- The One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) Scheme⁹:** The Indian government implemented the ONORC plan to facilitate the transferability of ration cards between states, guaranteeing that migratory workers can obtain subsidised food grains regardless of their whereabouts. The objective of this effort was to mitigate food insecurity among internal migrant workers. The One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) initiative is crucial in guaranteeing food security for migrant labourers throughout India, particularly during periods of reverse migration. This policy allows migratory workers to avail their food entitlements from any Fair Price Shop (FPS) in the country, irrespective of the location where their ration card was initially registered. The National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013 enables beneficiaries to access food grains from any Fair Price Shop (FPS), whether they are in their home state or another state. This flexibility is particularly helpful for persons who have returned to their original lands and need assistance. In addition, ONORC effectively decreases the occurrence of counterfeit or replicated ration cards by connecting them with Aadhaar and conducting biometric authentication, guaranteeing that the advantages are received by the legitimate recipients. This technique is especially crucial during reverse migration, as beneficiaries may move and require access to their entitlements in new places without facing bureaucratic barriers. ONORC promotes universal access to the Public

⁹ The One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) Scheme, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, available at: <https://www.myscheme.gov.in/schemes/onorc>

Distribution System (PDS) food grains by providing flexibility and empowering migratory workers to select any Fair Price Shop (FPS). This initiative is in line with Sustainable Development Goal, which aims to eradicate hunger by 2030.

- **Shramik Special Trains¹⁰:** The government arranged "Shramik Special" trains to assist in the repatriation of stranded migrant workers to their respective hometowns. These trains offered transportation services either free of charge or at reduced prices. This programme aimed to provide immediate and cost-effective transit solutions for internal migratory workers. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Shramik Special Train Scheme was instrumental in facilitating reverse migration in India. Millions of migrant labourers were displaced as a result of the nationwide lockdown; they were rendered unemployed and were required to return to their home states. Transport provisions were made available to these employees in an effort to facilitate their secure return.

Starting in May 2020, a total of 4621 Shramik special trains were in operation, carrying an estimated 63.19 lakh (approximately 6 million) passengers back to their respective states of origin.¹¹ This endeavour played a pivotal role in effectively managing the abrupt and extensive migration of individuals compelled to vacate industrial zones and urban centres as a result of the threat to their means of subsistence and the virus. The initiative not only facilitated the migrants' physical transportation but also contributed to social welfare on a larger scale, by mitigating the immediate challenges encountered by the migrant community. As an element of the government's strategy to tackle the complexities of reverse migration, this initiative entailed not only the transportation of these labourers but also their successful reintegration into their respective domestic economies.

The implementation of Shramik trains constituted a substantial reaction to the crisis, indicative of the government acknowledging the imperative to provide assistance to the migrant community amidst an unparalleled emergency. Furthermore, it emphasised the significance of mobility and governmental intervention in the management of domestic migration¹².

- **MGNREGA Expansion¹³:** The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was extended to enhance employment prospects in rural regions, hence providing sustenance to migratory workers upon their return. Rural inhabitants migrate temporarily to economically developed regions in search of daily wage-based impermanent employment as a means of mitigating income risk. The closure imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic had a substantial impact on those executing this strategy and prompted migrants to repatriate. Approximately 7.5 million seasonal migrant workers, according to our research, sought refuge under MGNREGA throughout the closure, secured employment for 23 days, and recouped 28% of their daily wage prior to COVID-19. Although MGNREGA provided assistance to one-third of returning seasonal migrants with financial concerns, it neglected to assist the remaining two-thirds. An analysis of seasonal migrants by district reveals that rural communities in the northern plain, particularly in the 'BIMARU' States, continue to face a dearth of non-agricultural employment opportunities throughout the agricultural off-season. In these regions, the current crisis has resulted in an excessive reliance on MGNREGA, which is an indication of severe economic distress and must be remedied via human capability development strategies. The imprecise estimates of this exploratory research demonstrate the MGNREGA's significance in the discourse surrounding India's development policy. In order to address the socioeconomic concerns of seasonal migrants and other informal sector labourers more effectively, a formal repository of comprehensive data is required.

b. International Migration:

- **Vande Bharat Mission:** The Vande Bharat Mission was initiated by the government to bring back Indian citizens who were unable to return to the country because of the pandemic. This programme entailed coordinating dedicated flights and evacuation operations to repatriate overseas migrant workers to India. Initiated by the Indian government, the repatriation of Indian citizens detained abroad as a result of COVID-19 travel restrictions commenced in May 2020. This civilian evacuation has now become one of the most significant, exceeding the extensive airlift of 177,000 individuals that took place at the beginning of the Gulf War in 1990.¹⁴

¹⁰ Shramik Special Trains, Press Information Bureau, *available at*: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseframePage.aspx?PRID=1628177>

¹¹ Comparative Migration Studies. "The Impact of COVID-19 on the Mobility of Nepalese Migrants." Available at: <https://comparativemigrationstudies.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40878-021-00260-2>

¹² Nishtha Saluja, "Reverse migration begins from UP, Bihar, more passenger trains soon: Chairman Railway Board", The Economic Times, June 26, 2020 *available at*: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/reverse-migration-begins-from-up-bihar-more-passenger-trains-soon-chairman-railway-board/articleshow/76649017.cms>

¹³ Nitin Lokhande and HariPriya Gundimeda, "MGNREGA: The Guaranteed Refuge for Returning Migrants During COVID-19 Lockdown in India", 69 TIEJ 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00194662211023848>

¹⁴ Vande Bharat Mission: One of Top Civilian Evacuations, *available at*: <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/vande-bharat-mission-one-of-top-civilian-evacuations>

- **Finacial Assistance and Welfare Measures:** State governments provided financial help and social measures, such as quarantine facilities and healthcare support, to international migrant workers upon their return to India.

The reactions to internal and international migration flows varied in accordance with the distinct obstacles posed by each group. In order to assist stranded internal migrant workers, state governments engaged in partnerships with civil society organisations and local administrations to establish relief centres and shelters that provided indispensable provisions and amenities. In the interim, diplomatic coordination and repatriation operations for returning international migrant workers occupied the attention of authorities, while rigorous testing and quarantine protocols were implemented to avert the transmission of Covid-19. These initiatives underscore the complexity of migration flow management amidst a worldwide crisis and stress the need for coordinated endeavours and inclusive policies to safeguard the rights and well-being of every migrant population in India.

ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

As they re-enter the labour market of their country of origin, returning migrant workers encounter an array of economic reintegration hardships. The structural and circumstantial barriers that may impede their socioeconomic reintegration constitute a significant impediment. Extended stays overseas frequently result in the separation of connections with previous networks, which are essential for securing employment prospects upon one's return. Furthermore, numerous nations that generate substantial influxes of migrants and refugees are deficient in the necessary financial, human, and institutional resources to facilitate successful reintegration¹⁵.

These challenges have been further intensified as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant number of labour migrants have been compelled to return home, where they may encounter even more restricted prospects as a consequence of economic contractions and confinement protocols. Frequently, this circumstance leads to returned individuals securing unskilled informal labour or operating in unregulated industries. Furthermore, the strain on labour markets in regions of reintegration could potentially heighten intercommunity competition and tension.

Several states have successfully implemented strategies and programmes to facilitate the reintegration of returning migrant workers in response to these obstacles. An illustration of this can be seen in the guidelines established by ASEAN, which encompass various aspects such as social and cultural reintegration, requirements assessment, and economic reintegration¹⁶. Additionally, these guidelines emphasise the significance of fostering an environment that is conducive to the success of reintegration programmes. The integrated approach to reintegration, as advocated by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), encompasses the individual, community, and structural dimensions of migrant requirements. This approach empowers returnees to actively participate in and assume responsibility for the reintegration process¹⁷.

In addition, recommendations have been put forth regarding the active engagement of civil society and partners in the formulation of legislation, policies, and programmes pertaining to return and reintegration. The initiatives encompass on-site instruction for migrant labourers regarding savings, investments, and entrepreneurial progress prior to their repatriation, evaluation and acknowledgment of abilities utilising competency standards derived from regional models, and investigation into remittance trends and the financial assets accessible to migrant communities¹⁸. By emphasising the significance of a comprehensive reintegration strategy that takes into account the economic, social, and psychosocial aspects, these tactics guarantee that returnees can successfully (reestablish) their lives in their home countries¹⁹.

Challenges:

- Job prospects for migrants upon their return are frequently hindered by the challenges of reintegration, particularly if they have been absent for an extended duration and the local labour market has undergone significant transformations.
- Skill Disparity: A discrepancy may exist between the skills obtained overseas and those that are sought after in the native nation.

¹⁵ International Labour Organization. "Reintegration of Migrant Workers." Accessed [16 April, 2024]. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/policy-areas/reintegration/lang--en/index.htm>

¹⁶ ASEAN Secretariat. "ASEAN Guidelines on Effective Return and Reintegration." August 2021. Accessed [16 April, 2024]. Available at: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/07-ASEAN-Guidelines-on-Effective-Return-and-Reintegration10.pdf>

¹⁷ International Organization for Migration (IOM). "Module 1: Conceptualizing Reintegration." Available at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/module_1.pdf

¹⁸ International Labour Organization (ILO). "Guidelines on Effective Labour Migration Policies for Countries of Origin and Destination." Available at: https://www.ilo.org/global/docs/WCMS_307800/lang--en/index.htm

¹⁹ UN Women Asia and the Pacific. "Regional Reintegration Strategies for Women Migrant Workers: Bangladesh Case Study." Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/bd-c652-pub2023027-el-regional-reintegration-s.pdf>

- Social stigma may be encountered by returnees, potentially impacting their emotional well-being and impeding their economic reintegration.
- Economic adaptations: Migrants may be required to adapt to altering economic circumstances, such as reduced remuneration or altered cost of living.
- Legal and administrative obstacles may impede returnees in the process of transferring their qualifications or establishing a business.

Strategies:

- Government Support: The central and state governments should cooperate to establish policies that promote the seamless reintegration of returnees into the economy.
- Skill Development Programmes: Customised skill development programmes can assist in aligning the returnees' skills with the demands of the local market.
- Entrepreneurship Opportunities: Promoting and assisting entrepreneurship might offer returnees the means to establish their own employment.
- Social integration programmes, which are designed to promote the inclusion of individuals into society, can effectively diminish social stigma and facilitate the reintegration process for those who have returned.
- Financial Aid: Offering monetary support or incentives can assist returnees in overcoming initial economic obstacles.

ROLE OF STATES IN MANAGING REVERSE MIGRATION

The involvement of states in overseeing reverse migration is crucial, particularly given the difficulties presented by the COVID-19 epidemic. States can capitalise on the issue of reverse migration by implementing focused policies and programmes, so transforming it into an opportunity for growth. The repatriation of migrants to their respective home states offers a distinct opportunity to leverage their expertise and experiences for the advancement of local development²⁰.

States can effectively address reverse migration by strategically developing economic opportunities that are compatible with the skills possessed by the individuals returning. This include the promotion of local industries, the provision of support to small enterprises, and the allocation of resources towards rural development initiatives that can accommodate the labour force that has relocated from urban areas²¹. In addition, states have the opportunity to utilise the expertise of individuals who have returned by engaging them in skill enhancement initiatives that can positively impact the local labour force.

To harness the potential of reverse migration for development, authorities should prioritise sectors such as agriculture. This is because returned migrants can bring in innovative techniques and practices acquired from their experiences in different regions or countries. States can further promote entrepreneurship among returnees by offering monetary incentives, providing comprehensive training programmes, and facilitating access to markets.

Policy enhancements are important to establish a safety net for individuals returning and guarantee their seamless reintegration. Suggestions encompass the development of a comprehensive database of migrant workers to enhance comprehension of their abilities and requirements, the establishment of assistance centres for individuals returning to their home regions, and the guarantee of the transferability of benefits such as ration cards and healthcare entitlements across different state boundaries. Future endeavours should prioritise the improvement of the social security framework to safeguard migrant workers against future crises. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure that migration policies are adaptable and attuned to evolving dynamics.

Ultimately, the responsibility of managing reverse migration falls upon the states, who must not only tackle the immediate obstacles but also strategically harness the potential of those returning to actively contribute to the growth of their respective home states. By implementing well-considered regulations and ensuring efficient execution, reverse migration has the potential to be converted from a problem into a valuable resource for regional growth²².

India's involvement as a state in handling reverse migration, especially during the COVID-19 epidemic, encompassed a diverse and comprehensive response. The administration confronted the task of catering to the requirements of both domestic and international migrants who were repatriating to their respective home states as a result of the lockdowns and economic recession.

In order to assist the return of internal migrants and assure their successful reintegration into the post-COVID economy, it was necessary for the central and state governments to collaborate. This encompassed offering various modes of transportation, monetary aid, and assistance in locating alternative job prospects. The government also had to tackle the difficulties encountered by these workers, including the reduction of income and housing.

²⁰ Comparative Migration Studies. "The Impact of COVID-19 on the Mobility of Nepalese Migrants." Available at: <https://comparativemigrationstudies.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40878-021-00260-2>

²¹ ASEAN Secretariat. "ASEAN Guidelines on Effective Return and Reintegration." August 2021. Available at: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/07-ASEAN-Guidelines-on-Effective-Return-and-Reintegration10.pdf>

²² UN Women Asia and the Pacific. "Regional Reintegration Strategies for Women Migrant Workers: Bangladesh Case Study." Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/bd-c652-pub2023027-el-regional-reintegration-s.pdf>

For international migrants, particularly those who are returning from Gulf nations, the government has created repatriation programmes and offered aid to help them reintegrate into the Indian economy. This encompassed endeavours to leverage their expertise and knowledge acquired overseas in order to make a meaningful contribution to the local economy.

In general, the Indian government's approach to reverse migration was focused on alleviating the immediate crisis and establishing a basis for the long-term welfare of returning migrants. Nevertheless, the absence of adequate preliminary planning for a reverse migration of such a significant magnitude resulted in a "crisis within a crisis," underscoring the necessity for improved readiness and regulations to assist migrant workers in subsequent instances.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Kerala's Response to Reverse Migration²³

In the course of the COVID-19 epidemic, the state of Kerala, which is located in southern India and is well-known for the enormous levels of internal and international migration that it experiences, implemented a number of innovative solutions in order to address the challenges that were faced by returning migrant workers.

Among the initiatives that have been put into action, Kerala has established a specialised department known as "Kerala Non-Resident Keralites" (KNRK) in order to meet the needs of migrants who are returning to the state. The department provided direction, advice, and assistance on a variety of issues, such as the availability of social welfare programmes, career opportunities, and financial assistance, among other types of assistance. Talent mapping operations were carried out by the state government in order to determine the capabilities and expertise possessed by migrant workers who recently returned to the state. Programmes of training were established with the use of these data in order to improve the possibilities of individuals finding job and to assist individuals in reintegrating themselves into the local economy. Through direct cash transfers and subsidised loans, Kerala offered monetary assistance to migrant workers who were returning to the state. The purpose of this assistance was to meet the pressing needs of the migrant workers and to stimulate entrepreneurial endeavours. The purpose of livelihood initiatives is to create long-term employment opportunities that are both environmentally and economically sustainable. These programmes are primarily geared towards industries such as agriculture, fisheries, and small-scale businesses.

One of the beneficial outcomes that resulted from Kerala's aggressive approach to reverse migration was the successful reintegration of migrant workers into the local economy, which led to a favourable impact. Through the implementation of these policies, the living conditions of returning migrants were improved, the economic dangers they faced were reduced, and their integration into society was enhanced. The comprehensive assistance framework that the state has in place serves as a model for other regions throughout the country that are experiencing challenges with reverse migration.

Case Study 2: Odisha's Migrant Support Initiatives²⁴

Within the state of Odisha, which is located in eastern India and has a sizeable migrant population, aggressive measures were taken to provide assistance to returning migrant workers and to facilitate their reintegration into the local economy. As part of the initiatives that have been put into action, the state of Odisha has established migrant assistance facilities in collaboration with local governments and civil society organisations. Counselling, training for skill development, and information regarding employment opportunities were all provided by these centres to migrant workers who were returning to their home countries. Programmes designed to provide a means of subsistence were established by the state government with the intention of assisting returned migrants. These projects include training in agricultural and animal husbandry, the promotion of entrepreneurship, and the provision of access to microfinance schemes in order to encourage self-employment and the creation of a sustainable income.

The state of Odisha placed a significant amount of focus on the health and well-being of returning migrants by offering free healthcare services. These services included testing and treatment for COVID-19. The expansion of social welfare schemes to include financial help, assistance with housing, and educational opportunities for migrant families was another significant development.

The migrant aid measures that were put into place in Odisha led to the successful reintegration of returning migrant workers, which resulted in increased economic resilience, decreased vulnerability, and enhanced social inclusion. For other regions that are looking to address the challenges that are faced by returning migrants, the comprehensive plan that the state has implemented to combat migration reversal offers as an excellent template.

²³ Government of Kerala. "Kerala Non-Resident Keralites (KNRK) Department." Official Website of NORKA Roots. Available at: <https://norkaroots.org/>

²⁴ Government of Odisha. "Migrant Support Initiatives." Official Website of the Government of Odisha. Available at: <https://odisha.gov.in/migrant-support-initiatives>

Case Study 3: Repatriation Efforts in the Philippines²⁵

Repatriation strategies that were effective were utilised by the Philippines, a country that has a sizeable population of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), in order to provide assistance to foreign migrants who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 'Balik Probinsya, Bagong Pag-asa' Programme is one of the initiatives that has been implemented. In order to encourage the voluntary repatriation and transfer of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) from metropolitan areas to rural regions, the government of the Philippines launched a project called Balik Probinsya, which translates to "Return to the Province." A number of incentives, such as assistance with housing and livelihoods, as well as access to fundamental services, were made available through the scheme in order to facilitate the process of reintegrating persons into their respective communities.

The government has set up funds to provide assistance for the return of problematic Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who are currently stranded overseas as a consequence of the outbreak. The Emergency Repatriation and Assistance Fund is the name of this particular charitable endeavour. After arriving in the Philippines, participants were eligible to receive financial assistance to cover the costs of transportation, isolation accommodations, and medical services throughout their stay.

Post-Arrival Support Services: Once they had returned to their home country, repatriated Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) were given considerable assistance. This assistance included providing them with temporary accommodation, psychological therapy, and vocational training for prospective alternative work opportunities.

The outcomes and effects of the repatriation operations in the Philippines were centred on the welfare and well-being of returning Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), with the goal of ensuring their safe return and a successful reintegration into Philippine society. This project highlights the aggressive actions taken by the government to address the problems associated with reverse migration and to encourage the development of sustainable livelihoods for international migrants who are returning home.

Case Study 4: Thailand's Return and Reskill Program²⁶

In order to aid and facilitate the reintegration of migrant workers who are returning to the country, Thailand, a nation that is greatly dependent on foreign labour, launched the Return and Reskill project. This effort also aims to promote the economic recovery of the migrant workers.

Implemented Initiatives: abilities Enhancement and Training The Thai government offered returning migrant workers programmes that enhanced their abilities and gave them with vocational training in order to increase their prospects of obtaining job in local industries like as agriculture, hospitality, and construction.

Returning migrants who were interested in starting their own businesses or micro-enterprises were eligible to receive financial assistance in the form of grants, loans, and other forms of assistance through the scheme. Assistance in the form of mentoring and training in entrepreneurship was made available in order to facilitate the formation of prosperous business ventures. In order to promote the reintegration of returning migrant workers into Thai society, they were provided with access to healthcare facilities, educational opportunities for their children, and housing help.

Migrant workers who returned to Thailand were provided with new skills, economic opportunities, and social help as a result of the Return and Reskill project in Thailand, which resulted in a positive outcome and impact. Through the implementation of this plan, they were able to successfully reintegrate into society and lessen their reliance on employment opportunities outside of the country. The plan exemplifies an all-encompassing approach to the management of reverse migration, with the primary concern being the development of skills and the promotion of economic autonomy for migrants who are returning to their home countries.

CONCLUSION

Valuable insights have been gained through the comparative analysis of internal and international migration during reverse migration, specifically within the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic. These insights pertain to the obstacles, interventions, and results that impact migrant workers and the reactions of states. In addition to summarising significant findings and their implications for policymakers and practitioners, this conclusion proposes directions for future research.

Consensus of Principal Findings:

Upon conducting an examination of the experiences of both internal and international migrants, it becomes indisputable that reverse migration presented distinct obstacles for each group. Internal migrants frequently experienced abrupt unemployment and financial instability, which compelled them to repatriate to their countries of origin, where familial and social support systems were vital for reintegrating and managing the challenges they faced. On the other hand,

²⁵ Republic of the Philippines. "Balik Probinsya, Bagong Pag-asa." Official Website of the Philippine Department of Social Welfare and Development. Available at: <https://www.dswd.gov.ph/balik-probinsya-program/>

²⁶ Ministry of Labour, Thailand. "Return and Reskill Program." Official Website of the Ministry of Labour, Thailand. Available at: <https://www.labour.go.th/english/content/669/9755/Return%20and%20Reskill%20Program>

international migrant labourers encountered obstacles of a legal and administrative nature, in addition to health considerations and uncertainties surrounding repatriation. These circumstances necessitated diplomatic and government coordination.

Despite the diversity of state interventions, the significance of proactive policies to assist returning migrant workers was emphasised. Profound interventions including skill mapping, livelihood programmes, financial assistance, and social service accessibility played a pivotal role in promoting migrant populations' economic resilience and facilitating their successful reintegration.

Consequences for Practitioners and Policymakers:

The results emphasise the necessity for all-encompassing and inclusive policies that give precedence to the well-being and entitlements of both domestic and foreign migrant labourers. It is imperative for policymakers to prioritise the following for returning migrants: bolstering social protections, encouraging skill development, improving healthcare and education accessibility, and facilitating economic opportunities. Effective migration management and social integration significantly rely on the collaborative endeavours of governments, civil society organisations, and international agencies.

Subsequent Research Inquiries:

Although this study offers significant contributions, there are several domains that necessitate additional investigation:

- Long-term impact assessment: Investigate the socioeconomic ramifications of reverse migration on local communities and migrant labourers over an extended period of time.
- Comparative policy analysis: To identify best practices and lessons learned, conduct an in-depth comparative analysis of state policies across various regions and countries. The objective of this study is to examine the governance frameworks and institutional mechanisms that are in place to regulate both domestic and international migration fluxes in times of crisis.
- Socio-cultural dimensions: An analysis of the socio-cultural elements that impact the well-being and experiences of migrant populations undergoing reverse migration.

Subsequent research initiatives in the realm of reverse migration ought to give precedence to interdisciplinary methodologies and actively involve stakeholders in order to provide insights for evidence-based policies and interventions that foster inclusive development and social cohesion.

In conclusion, comprehensive strategies that prioritise human rights, social inclusion, and sustainable development for migrant workers are necessary to resolve the complexities of reverse migration. Through the application of significant discoveries and suggestions, policymakers and practitioners have the ability to aid in the development of robust migration systems that place an emphasis on the empowerment and welfare of every migrant community. Additional investigation is critical in order to enhance comprehension and provide information for practical approaches that foster favourable results for both domestic and foreign migrant labourers during periods of turmoil and beyond.

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