

What is the issue? | [

- Extent of domestic migration
- Migrant workers continue to suffer despite the existence of many welfare schemes

Extent of domestic migration

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Shortly prior to the onset of Covid, there were an estimated 11.1 crore migrant workers in urban India (as of 2017-18). These workers are a mix of short-term seasonal (4.4 crores) and long-term/semi-permanent (6.7 crores) workers who are also occupationally vulnerable. A little less than half of these 11.1 crore workers i.e., 5.2 crores were interstate migrant workers in 2018.

States that primarily contribute to short-duration out-migration for employment are Bihar (32%), Uttar Pradesh (19%) and West Bengal (10%), Madhya Pradesh (8%), Jharkhand (7%) and Rajasthan (6%). These states also had the highest shares in interstate outmigrants reflecting their low levels of income. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar also have more than 50% share in long-term out-migration.

Migrant workers continue to suffer despite the existence of many welfare schemes

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Governments at the Central and State level have introduced several welfare schemes backed by law that entitle the poor and the marginalized access to various forms of social security. However, as was recently evidenced by the suffering that various poor/migrant urban dwellers had to endure during Covid19, migrants find themselves excluded from these schemes and entitlements. Possible reasons include poor policy design without keeping in mind the realities of lives of migrants in the urban workforce and poor on-ground implementation.

Migrant workers are primarily engaged in the informal sector, in occupations such as construction work, domestic work, driving, other daily wage work such as that of head-loaders, garment factory/ other factory work, street vending, waste picking, manual scavenging etc.

Many people migrate from rural areas to seek work and escape poverty, but often lose their entitlements in their home state. Despite numerous government schemes for the marginalized and the poor, effective implementation is lacking, irrespective of the ruling party.

Faulty design, funding issues, and strict eligibility criteria hinder the intended improvements in people's lives.

Migrants bear the brunt of these challenges. However, life in the cities proves to be difficult for these workers as they often accept inadequate wages, face exclusion from government schemes due to lack of required documentation and become vulnerable to various forms of exploitation. While some CSOs work to improve access to social security schemes, their efforts are limited to specific worker groups.

Most migrants belong to the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and minority communities. Often, they face difficulties because they are not familiar with the local language.