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**Abandoned by the State: The Migrant Crisis and Public
Action in the Time of Covid-19 in India**

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List of Acronyms

APU	Azim Premji University
BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act
CBGA	Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability
CITU	Centre of Indian Trade Unions
CLRA	The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970
CPI-M	Communist Party of India, Marxist
DM Act	Disaster Management Act
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
IHD	Institute of Human Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INTUC	Indian National Trade Union
JHA	Jagnyachya Hakkacha Andolan (Right to live Campaign)
MDM	Mid-Day Meal
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Mission
MP	Madhya Pradesh
MPJAY	Mahatma Phule Jan Arogya Yojana
NCAS	National Centre for Advocacy Studies
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NHM	National Health Mission
PDS	Public Distribution System
PM	Prime Minister
PMGKY	Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana
Rs.	Rupees
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
SWAN	Stranded Workers Action Network
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

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This research is dedicated to millions of stranded migrant workers, who were fending for themselves under most challenging circumstances, owing to the Covid-19 lockdowns. The very idea to choose this topic was to contribute, in a small way, in solidarity, to the struggle for their rights.

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Abstract

The mass exodus of migrants from India's mega-cities induced by Covid-19 lockdowns brought their invisible lives to light. This paper analyses lives and livelihoods of the urban informal economy migrant workers in the state of Maharashtra amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The systemic faults in provisioning social protection, biopolitics of the pandemic and public action form the core of the analysis. Pre-existing precarity of informal migrant workers and the need for citizenship-based social entitlements are discussed in depth.

The findings of this study indicate that the migrant crisis is a culmination of several underlying issues in labour, social protection and disaster management policies in India. The migrants face multiple layers of exclusion from the social protection regimes due to their multi-locality, class and caste identity, and vulnerability caused due to economic insecurity. The uncertainty, precarity and invisibility of the migrant labourers in the cities can be systematically reduced with universal social protection, comprehensive labour regulations making the employers accountable and by creating and safeguarding democratic places for workers to raise and discuss their issues.

Relevance to Development Studies

This study tries to connect the migrant crisis during the pandemic to the social protection and labour regimes in Maharashtra, India. As the pandemic and its effects unfold, its impact on the lives of informal economy migrant workers is being discussed widely and this study investigates reasons of the migrant crisis and State and non-State responses. This comes at an opportune time as the exodus has visibilized the exclusion of migrant workers and the precarity of their livelihoods. It would be a timely contribution to the body of research on the effects of the pandemic on the informal economy in India. It critically analyses not just the reasons but also the responses to reveal the perception of the crisis and solutions to it by various actors. It would contribute to the discourse of inclusive urban planning and advocacy efforts toward universal social protection on the basis of citizenship.

Keywords

Migrant workers, urban informal economy, migrant crisis, social protection for informal economy workers, biopolitics of pandemic, public action, migrant exodus, precarious labour regimes, Covid-19 and informal economy.

Chapter 1 Covid-19 in India: Pandemic or a ‘panic’demic?

“As the lockdown unfolded it brought more uncertainty and fear to the people. They saw the police brutality, news of migrants dying on the railway tracks and many other news, the migrants felt that they were ‘na ghar ka na ghat ka’ (in limbo between their native places and their migrant workplaces).” – Dhorajiwala (Interview, 2020).

1.1 Introduction

In the months of April and May 2020 millions of informal economy workers left megacities in India and travelled back to their native places. The quote above describes the anxieties and pressures faced by the migrant workers during the Covid-19 lockdowns in India. This research aims to investigate further on questions such as: why are migrant workers more vulnerable? Why were they affected in such extreme ways? Why did they decide to leave the cities?

I set out to analyse the pre-existing precarities of migrant labourers and their implications to migrant crisis during the Covid-19 pandemic. My conclusion indicates that the pre-existing precarity of the informal economy migrant workers contributed to the socio-economic crisis during the Covid-19 lockdowns. The social vulnerabilities were, in fact, deepened owing to the crisis. A lack of comprehensive social protection made them most vulnerable during the crisis. The precarious migrant regimes and fragmented public action in the times of Covid-19 added to their vulnerabilities but also visibilized the plight of migrant workers and its implications for policy.

1.2 Background and Justification

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the informal economy adversely. A sudden halt in economic activity not only affected the macro-level economic indicators but the loss of employment affected livelihoods of thousands of informal sector workers. These workers often depend on the employer or the contractor for most of the formalities to do with their employment and livelihoods. The unprecedented and unforeseen crisis also threw the contractors off guard, and many of them abandoned the workers. Their meagre savings were declining with every passing day without work. No alternative source of income, the risk of infection, and fear of being evicted resulted in accumulation of insecurity and helplessness. Inability to transfer remittances back to families in their native places and the need for community support formed the basis for the decision of leaving the cities. The desperation to leave the cities and travel back to their native places was also caused by the mounting fears of starvation and eviction. The journey back home was not easy given the travel restrictions, but neither was staying back. Thus, began the mass exodus of migrant workers back to their native villages.

Figure 1: Migrants start their journeys back home on foot.



Source: Getty Images

As the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the containment measures employed by governments worldwide are unfolding and the uncertainty regarding the vaccine and socio-economic vulnerabilities prevail, this paper tries to capture the lives of informal economy migrant labourers in Maharashtra during these trying times, their journeys navigating the crisis and analyses those through the lenses of social protection, precarious labour regimes and public action. The paper tries to capture what was, what is and what lies ahead in terms of precarious labour regimes and implications on the social protection framework in the state of Maharashtra, India.

The impact of the pandemic has not been uniform across various sections of the society. Studies (Deshpande and Ramchandran 2020, Pandey 2020, SWAN a 2020) have shown that the pre-existing income and social inequalities in India have adversely affected certain individuals, families and social groups. The informal economy migrant workers form a group at an intersection of various angles of exclusion. Religion, caste, class, conditions of employment, access to social services, and language are some of the layers characterising this group. In this research I focus on urban informal economy migrant workers. This group in itself contains two layers of vulnerability: first, (mostly) unregistered nature of their migration for employment and second, the nature of their jobs wherein they are engaged in precarious and irregular work without any formal contract. The urban informal migrant workers are prominently employed at construction sites, factories, transportation, and as domestic workers.

These migrant groups contribute to the urban economies in numerous ways but their lives are often invisible to policy and society. The sudden halt of economic activity due to Covid-19 has adversely added to the pre-existing precarity of these workers. They not only struggled to make ends meet due to loss of livelihoods but were also forced to fight to keep themselves safe from the health risks caused by Covid-19. The driving force behind this mass migration was class (haves and have-nots). Those who could not simply afford to continue staying in the cities decided to leave. While the middle and rich classes were securely locked inside the safety of their houses, the working classes were left stranded.

It is pertinent to place the pandemic, lockdowns and lives of migrants in the larger socio-political environment in the country. While the issues of migrant workers in the cities are specific due to their unique positionality in the socio-economic fabric, their lives are also

affected by the larger macro level political and social incidents. The Covid-19 was announced as a global health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, the same day India reported its first case. Subsequently, Covid-19 was declared a pandemic by WHO on March 11.

The lockdown was imposed on 24 March 2020, with only 4 hours of notice to the citizens. While the lockdown was anticipated the sudden announcement caught many off the guard. Arundhati Roy in her article, *The Pandemic is a Portal* has argued that the outbreak was predicted and so was the lockdown but not only did the government suddenly impose it, they also did not plan well enough to foresee the possible challenges. “But there was too much to do in February for the virus to be accommodated in the ruling party’s timetable.” (Roy 2020: no page).

The deaths of migrants on railway tracks, due to starvation or other reasons went completely unaccounted for by the government. A portal named “Nonviral deaths during lockdowns” reported deaths of migrants due to starvation, exhaustion, police brutality, lockdown related crime induced death, suicides, deaths in quarantine facilities (Nonviral deaths during lockdowns 2020: no page). On the other hand, while responding to a question on whether thousands of migrant labourers lost their lives during the lockdown, the union ministry of Labour and Employment, in a written reply, said “No such data is available”.

It is important to analyse the emergence and spread of Covid-19 in conjunction with the political developments in the country to understand the measures employed to contain the spread of the virus. Figure 2, superimposes major political developments in India on the timeline of Covid-19 in India and proves that the political turbulence in the country led to central government’s ignorance to the threat posed by Covid-19. Later in this paper I will discuss the systemic factors with respect to citizenship rights and social protection, however, the lack of homework by the central government must also be acknowledged.

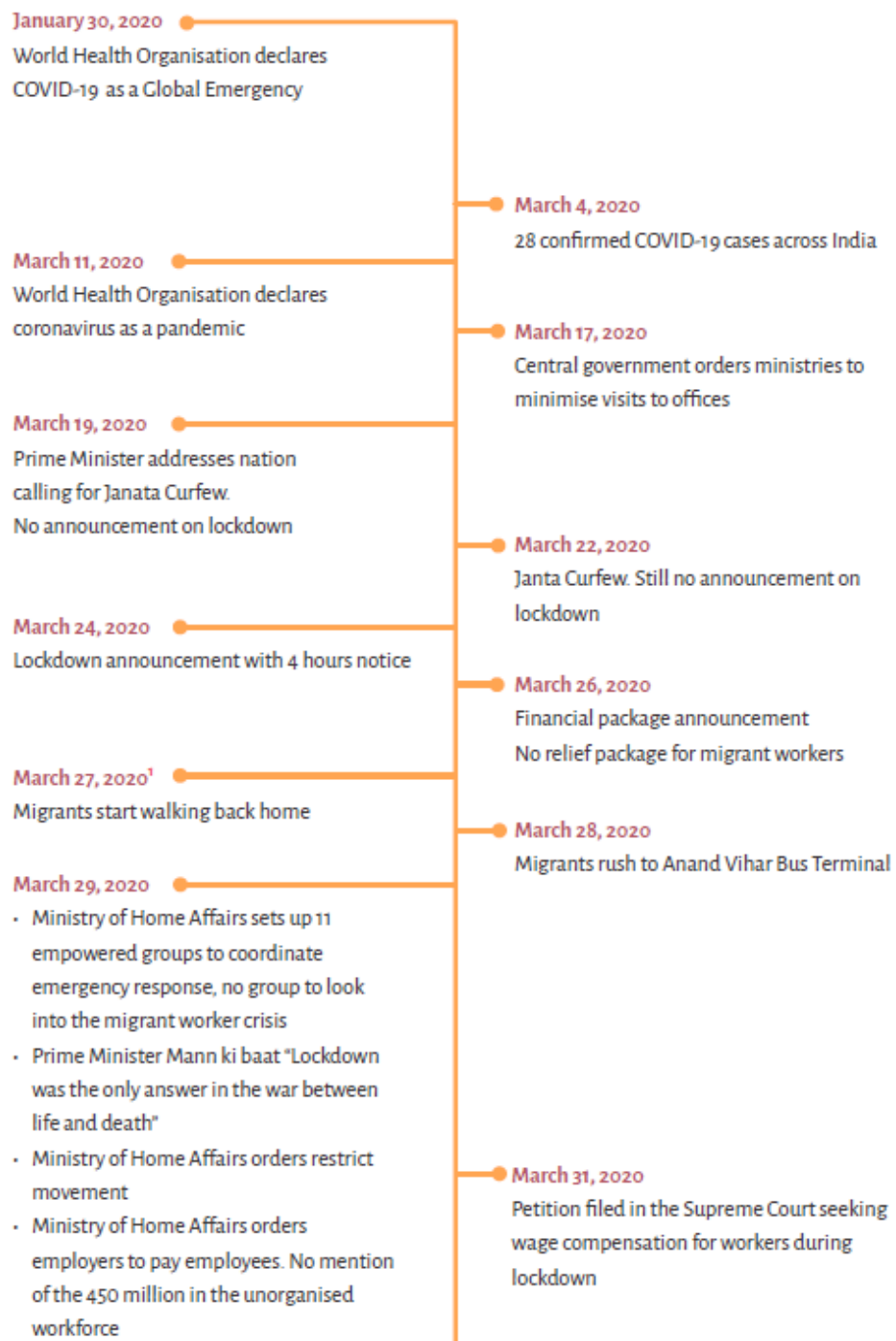
Figure 2: Major political developments in India and Covid-19 milestones

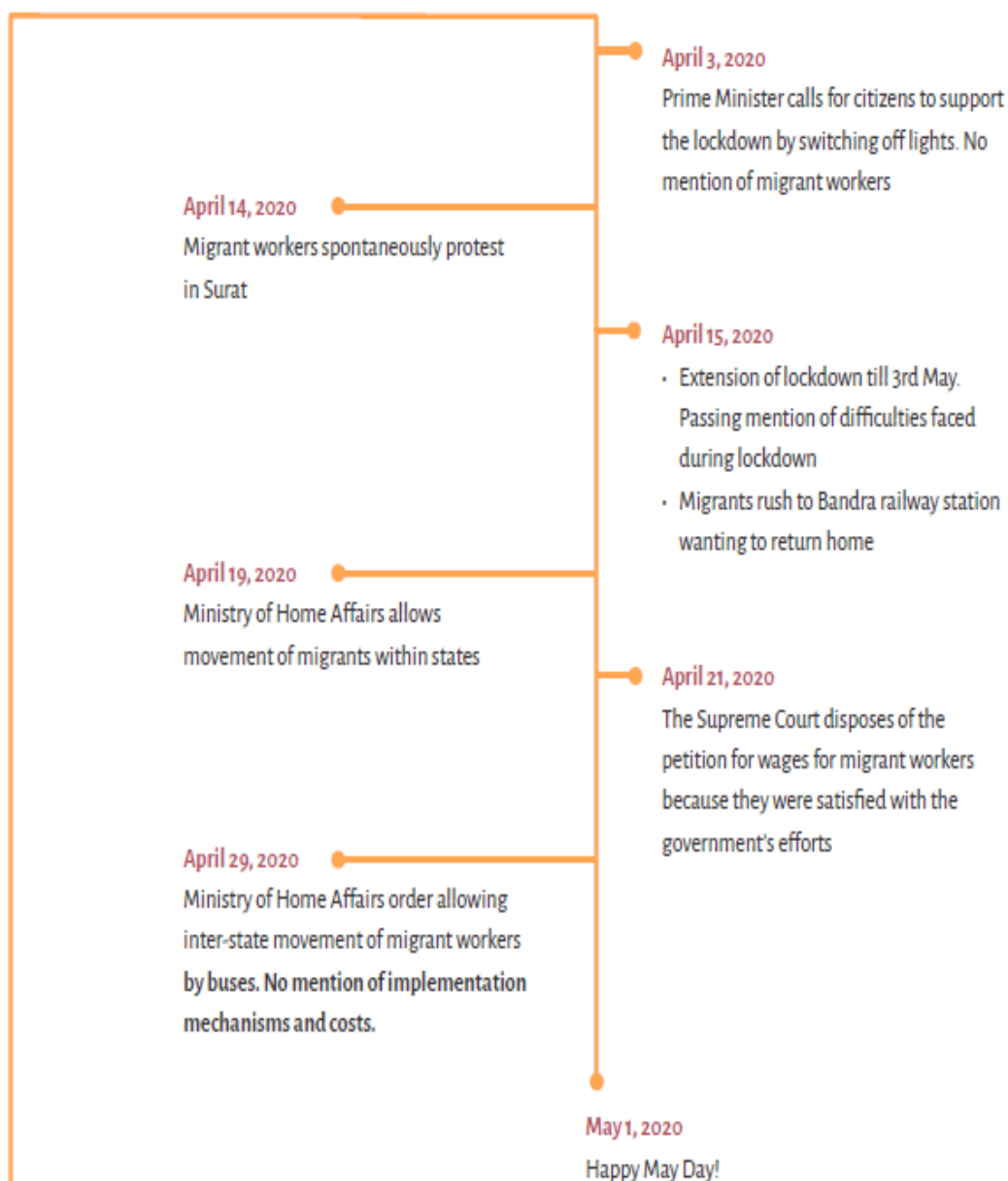


Source: Author’s compilation

As the above timeline shows the lockdown was enforced on March 24, 2020. But the specific issues faced by the migrants were not taken under consideration until it became a crisis when thousands of migrants took to the roads and started walking back home and the media began reporting their journeys. Figure 3, tries to capture the major milestones in Indian migrant workers’ Covid-19 journey.

Figure 3: Migrant workers navigating Covid-19 in India.





Source: SWAN b, 2020: 4

Migrants continue to navigate their lives through immediate threats of infection, starvation, policy brutality and uncertainty of traveling back to their native places and long-term challenges of permanent loss of livelihood, education of children, and fending for themselves during the socio-economically turbulent times.

Figure 4: Migrants gather in huge numbers at a bus terminal.



Source: Hindustan Times, 2020

Figure 5: 16 migrant workers from MP, died on the railway track in Aurangabad Maharashtra, as a freight carrier train run over them while they fell asleep on the tracks, exhausted from the journey.



Source: News 18 Network, 2020

Informal labour economy in Maharashtra

After analysing the macro-level politics and the timeline of migrant exodus, it is important to place it in relation to state-level socio-economic structure. There are several industrial and information technology clusters in the western part of the state. Mumbai, Pune, Aurangabad and Nashik are the four prime districts in western Maharashtra with highest concentration of industrial activity. The cities of Pune and Mumbai collectively account for 54.39% of Maharashtra's total population (Directorate of Statistics and planning, government of Maharashtra, 2019). The demand for labour in these areas is high, attracting millions of migrant workers to these cities. The Indian economy, in general, is characterized by informal employment and livelihoods in Pune and Mumbai are no exception. The incoming migrants from various parts of the country engage in various skilled and semi-skilled informal activities. The booming construction sector demands labour for arduous work which is mostly met by the interstate migrants. Other professions include jewellery makers, domestic

workers, plumbers, carpenters, painters, drivers, tailors, electricians, waiters and cooks, rickshaw drivers, and fruit and vegetable vendors. “Workers like domestic workers, building and other construction workers, garbage and solid waste workers, agricultural laborers, shall be included under unorganized¹ sector.” (Department of Labour and Employment, Government of Maharashtra 2020). According to the website of the Labour Department, 90% of the total workers are involved in the informal sector.

Most of these labourers are unregistered contract workers often dependent on the contractor. A contractor is a person who helps them find a job, communicates with the employer, pays them, and in some cases arranges for their shelter and food. Often, the contractors themselves are also migrants who have spent more time in the city and learnt the ropes of the business.

The state government requires employers to register migrant workers on their work sites according to the Interstate Migration Workmen Act of 1979. This is seldom done; the number of actually registered workers is not available on any government portal. The Department of Labour has established a Labour Welfare Board, Labour Commissionerate, Construction Workers Welfare Board, Mathadi and security guards’ Board for the welfare and grievance redressal of the issues of informal sector labourers in Maharashtra.

In the wake of the crisis, the state response needs to be evaluated at two levels, first at the level of preparedness, availability and/or lack of existing avenues and policies to ensure the welfare of informal migrants (preventive and promotional social security measures) and second at the level of new policies and initiatives brought in to combat the unique challenges posed by the pandemic (protective social security measures). The aspect of preparedness and pre-existing mechanisms would help to answer the question, what led to the higher vulnerability of the migrants to this crisis and the second aspect of new policies and mechanisms would help in answering the question of how and to what extent was the migrant crisis understood and managed by various stakeholders.

In terms of non-state organizations there are labour unions of waste and ragpickers, domestic workers, and construction workers. Additionally, Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU – affiliated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M)), Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (Affiliated with the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)), Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC - affiliated with the National Congress Party) and the labour wing of the Republican party of India are some of the political labour organisations with considerable presence in the state. Various non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) also work actively in ensuring the safety and welfare of informal workers.

While many accounts of the migrant exodus have been published during this pandemic describing horrid realities and issues faced by migrants during their journeys, the existing literature is fragmented between empirical and theoretical analysis of the exodus. The inherent policy gaps need to be re-evaluated in the light of this pandemic. This paper tries to bring the experiences of migrants and insights of non-state actors together with the existing policies and suggests possible ways ahead.

¹ the term unorganised sector is used to refer to informal economy.

1.3 Objective

An analysis of what caused this panic and state of chaos in the cities, what made the workers most vulnerable to these shocks during the pandemic and how various state and non-state actors responded during this time lies at the core objective of this research. A deep dive into the reasoning and dissection of underlying factors leading to the precarity of lives of migrant labourers aims to strengthen the advocacy efforts promoting universalization of social security and will also inform policy in ensuring social protection of those leading their lives on the margins. Since the topic is contemporary and evolving, this research will also open up avenues for further academic research.

1.4 Research Question

How did the state and non-state organizations respond to the ‘migrant crisis’ engendered by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns on migrants in Maharashtra? What are the critical issues these actions raise for the pre-existing precarious migrant labour regimes and the possibilities for labour and social protection entitlements for migrant workers?

Sub-questions

1. What was the nature of pre-existing migrant labour regimes and access to social citizenship entitlements which could have contributed towards migrant workers’ extreme vulnerability to the adverse impact of the lockdowns?
2. In what ways have the Covid-19 outbreak and the subsequent containment measures affected the migrant workers in Maharashtra?
3. What role has the state (national and regional) played in responding to the needs and vulnerabilities of migrant workers in Maharashtra in the times of lockdowns?
4. How have non-state actors responded to the challenges faced by migrant workers during the lockdown and Covid-19 pandemic?

With this background, the research objective and, of course, the limitations posed by the pandemic itself I set out on the journey to seek answers to my research questions. The next chapter discusses the analytical framework, methodology and ethical considerations. Chapter 3, covers the pre-existing factors contributing to the crisis and the impact of the pandemic on lives of migrants, while Chapter 4 and 5 respectively discusses the state and non- state responses to the migrant crisis and Chapter 6 provides concluding remarks.

Chapter 2 Analytical framework and Methodology

Figure 6: The pandemic and migrant crisis.



Source: CBGA, 2020; Artist: Vikram Nayak

The pandemic has been an event which is set to make a major dent in the course of geopolitics if not completely change its course. Researching an ongoing pandemic presents several challenges but it also presents with an opportunity to critically analyse the contemporary developments. In this chapter I discuss the analytical framework and methodology used in this research.

2.1 Analytical Framework

The larger purpose of this research is to understand the pandemic and subsequent migrant crisis through the lens of labour welfare and protection regimes. The research questions too, seek answers to what caused the crisis and who responded in what way.

In answering the question of what caused the migrant crisis during the pandemic there are necessarily two analytical considerations. First, places the urban migrant labourers in the frame of a ‘worker’, pointing at the regulations and laws pertaining to their nature of employment, migration for work as well as their rights and entitlements. The second consideration then places these migrant workers in the framework of universalistic social protection and citizenship-based entitlements and rights. Under these entitlements, factors such as the access to and quality of these public goods, changing definitions and interpretations of a ‘right’ would help in explaining the pre-existing and circumstantial vulnerabilities faced by the migrant workers. The following sections try to encapsulate the important definitions,

ongoing debates and discussions in these fields. These also form a basis for the analysis of findings from the primary data.

Social protection: definitions and approaches

The study adopts the broader framework of social protection. The idea and interpretation of the concept of social protection has evolved over time, institutions and frameworks. The residual and universal approaches towards social protection are widely debated (Kabeer 2014). In this section, I will briefly discuss what is social protection, various approaches to and debates on social protection, later focusing on the rights approach, elaborating on its significance in analysis.

Historically, the universal approaches of social protection were a tool for nation building for most of the post-colonial governments. But to what extent was the objective achieved?

Power of vested interests within largely unaccountable state structures gave rise to highly bureaucratic and dualistic welfare systems that subsidized a privileged minority while leaving poor and socially excluded groups reliant on their own meagre resources or the patronage of the more powerful (Kabeer 2014: 340).

Subsequently, the structural adjustment programmes were introduced by the World Bank and the role of the state as a primary provider of protection was reduced to mere regulation. The state expenses on social protection were also reduced (Cook and Kabeer 2010: 4). The structural adjustment programmes targeted poorest of the poor through social protection safety nets. Research shows this approach was not as financially viable as it was claimed to be, neither was it as effective in poverty reduction (Britto 2018, Koehler 2011). Despite the academic research proving the drawbacks in this approach the World Bank continues to advocate for this approach of poverty reduction through the Social Risk Management (SRM) framework of social protection. This framework imagines poverty in a very narrow sense and limits the role of governments to regulation, the market-based social protection strategies tend to not address the issues of chronic poverty. This targeted, means tested approach to social protection is also known as the ‘residual’ approach.

The International Labour Office (ILO) imagines social protection in a more enhanced way “the provision of benefits to households and individuals through public or collective arrangements to protect against low or declining living standards.” (ILO, 2001). The low and declining living standards mentioned in the definition can be further understood in terms of contingencies caused due to a cut or loss of income and employment resulting in need for support for health, education and other support (ibid). The principle of protection from poverty and vulnerability through various channels of risk reduction and capacity enhancement lies at the core of the concept of social protection. The eligibility and the need for social protection can be identified through 2 main principles discussed by Conway and Foster (2001: 7) - the needs and deprivation of those who fall in the category of poor and the risks faced by those who are currently not poor but can enter that strata owing to some shock/crises.

The next key area is that of provisioning. Here the fundamental questions are, who provides for which benefits for whom and on what basis? and who funds this provisioning? The debate of residual and universal approaches revolves around these two questions.

Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, build on the rights-based approach in their definition of social protection. They imagine social protection as entitlements drawing upon the principles of social justice. In this approach the entitlements address more deep-rooted systemic causes of poverty and deprivation. Social protection is defined as,

All public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalized; with the overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004: i).

The objectives and functions of rights based social protection can be best described in analytical framework provided by Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler (2004), where they divide social protection functions in four main categories.

- a) Protective – to address specific vulnerabilities (pensions for widows, destitute, old etc.)
- b) Promotive – Broad policies to increase incomes and reduce poverty (Employment Guarantee Programme)
- c) Preventive – measures taken to prevent deprivation (Healthcare, education, nutrition, social housing etc.)
- d) Transformative – Social inclusion, rights-based protection, to achieve social equity (eg. Right to food, right to education, labour laws)

In this paper I will focus on protective, preventive and transformative dimensions in relation to migrant workers. These are further conceptualised in relation to labour regimes and citizenship and employment-based entitlements.

Labour regimes

The concept of labour regimes is relevant to understand the nature of migrant workers employment and working conditions. Burawoy (1983) in his factory regime approach argued that a labour regime involves the specific labour capital relations in context of a broad range of social relations. In his work Burawoy develops three types of production politics with a focus on the national variations in hegemonic regimes and their relationship with capital-labour relations. The hegemonic, despotic and hegemonic-despotic regimes evaluate the level of state intervention in the light of capitalism. Ngai and Smith (2007: 7) describe the flexible regimes as a shift from Fordism (mass production and welfare state interventions) to flexible accumulation (privatisation, deregulation, casualisation of workforce, flexible production). They also describe it as the dynamic between productive and reproductive realms of the labour regime. The factors such as position of the enterprise in subcontracting chain, scale of production, nature of ownership of the enterprise also shape the labour-capital dynamics. In this paper I refer to the concept of labour regime as combination of both the

definitions above. Intersections of spheres of production and social reproduction do provide a more robust basis for the analysis. The labour regime approach discusses capital labour dynamics in a particular set up, in relation to broader issues of social reproduction (Mezzadri, Srivastava 2015: 5).

Citizenship-based and Employment-based entitlements

In addition to the specific nature of migrant labour regimes the framework of social protection can be operationalized further by looking at citizenship-based and employment-based entitlements. Drawing on Van Ginneken's (1998) conceptualisation of social protection is seen as a fundamental citizenship right under the larger goal of poverty reduction as also discussed by (Saith, 2004 and Chhachhi 2009). Citizenship based entitlements are rooted in needs and vulnerabilities faced at various stages of the life-cycle. They aim at providing protection as a right of every citizen, shifting the onus of provisioning largely to the state.

Employment plays a crucial role in income security of most of the population. Employment based social protection measures are meant to safeguard the workers from unforeseen vagaries of market and life risks by redistributing the risks and through compensation. While contributory forms of employment entitlements mainly benefit formal sector workers, non-contributory entitlements which are a blend of employment and citizenship principles, are crucial for informal sector workers (Chhachhi 2009). The regulation of rights through labour laws is a way of ensuring welfare of informal sector workers. In India the laws for the informal sector are poorly implemented and hence, despite legal regulation migrant workers, particularly, do not have legally backed employment entitlements.

In this research, for the case of the informal migrant workers in cities I will use the concept of rights based social protection. Given the nature of their employment and their vulnerability to socio-economic and other shocks, the extent of citizenship-based welfare regimes and that of market-based employment centric welfare regimes would help in identifying the possible fault lines in pre-Covid policies.

The notion of public action and responses to the crisis

The issue of social protection rights is critically related to the concept of public action. Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze conceptualise public action for social security in their book *Hunger and Public Action* as "...not merely the activities of the state, but also social actions taken by members of the public-both 'collaborative' (through civic cooperation) and 'adversarial' (through social criticism and political opposition)" (Dreze and Sen 1991: vii).

This understanding of public action is relevant for this research since it includes both-state and non-state actor responses. State action reflects the policies of social provisioning. The non-State action on the other hand can be two-pronged, which aims to ultimately influence and shape the state action. The collaborative action is observed through civic cooperation while the adversarial action reflects to political opposition and dissent. Together they contribute to the notion of public action where the non-state action pressurises state to address the pressing issues. In words of Patnaik (1998: 2857) the presence of free press and other democratic ways of dissent make it politically risky for the state to ignore these issues.

The role of NGOs, trade unions, political networks, media and other initiatives in crisis response will be analysed in the light of the concept of public action.

The concept of public action was formulated to suggest strategies to combat famines, however, it becomes relevant in analysing the crisis as well. As it addresses the inequality in distribution of resources due to market mechanisms and makes state intervention as a powerful tool to eliminate “dramatic forms of human misery” (Patnaik 1998: 2857).

Governmentality and biopolitics

The analysis of state’s public action and non-action particularly in creating the migrant crisis in India requires further reflection drawing on current discussions on the lockdowns and level of stringency of their imposition to contain the spread of the virus world over through the lens of concepts of governmentality and biopolitics put forth by Michel Foucault. These two concepts provide the basis for analysing the state’s political commitment and response to deal with the pandemic and subsequent crisis. Foucault defines governmentality as

..the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security (Foucault 1991: 102).

The security of the population is achieved directly through large-scale campaigns or indirectly without knowledge of the population, hence, governmentality is also a biopolitical project. The governmentality of various epidemics is explained by Foucault (2009: 24-25 and 85-91) which can be condensed in following three models of containment. The leprosy model proposes exclusion as a mechanism of containment, quarantine and disciplining are the key features of the plague model and the smallpox model uses vaccination and knowledge building through statistics.

Furthermore, Lorenzini (2020) describes biopolitics as politics of vulnerability, which De Cauwer and Christiaens (2020), develop further by arguing that, population is heterogeneous entity which is “internally fractured” (ibid) and various people face dangers differently. In other words, a person’s input to productivity decides their importance in society (ultimately determining the treatment they receive). The (lack of) policy prioritization of the vulnerability of migrant workers to the pandemic by the state can be analysed with this concept.

The relevant conceptual tools elaborated above help in the analysis of the primary and secondary data collected. The concept of labour regimes and rights theory of social protection would contribute in analysing the lives and livelihoods of workers before and during the pandemic, while governmentality, biopolitics and public action would aid in analysing the state and non-state responses to the migrant crisis.

2.2 Methodology

The field of social science research has undergone many changes in the times of Covid-19. Various methods of primary data collection have been limited due to the practices of physical distancing, travel restrictions and lockdowns. The secondary sources of data, especially datasets produced by the government are inconsistent, and as the situation still unfolds, the field of study is dynamic. Doing research on a Covid-19 related topic in these times is equally exciting and challenging. The limitations stated above along with ethical dilemmas of data and privacy protection, my own positionality as a researcher with respect to my access and contact to the subject (the informal migrant workers) of my research are some of the immediate challenges. However, as mentioned earlier the need and unique opportunity to be able to conduct research on this topic has helped me steer through the doubts due to these limitations. Due to the travel restrictions and lack of easy access to primary data, I opted for a mix of primary and secondary data collection methods.

Primary data sources

Given the travel restrictions and health risks involved in hiring field assistants I opted for semi-structured telephonic interviews as the fundamental method of primary data collection. I conducted a total of 12 telephonic interviews (with various state and non-state stakeholders involved in assisting the migrant workers during the crisis). Out of the 12 interviewees 2 were political activists, 2 trade union members, 1 representative of the government i.e. deputy mayor of Pune city, 1 academician, 1 frontline volunteer, 1 coordinator of SWAN, 3 NGO representatives (1 frontline worker, 2 from the NGO leadership), and 1 media representative (details in Appendix I). The interview participants were chosen with the principle of purposive sampling. The basis for sampling was the factors such as nature of their work, affiliation with the state and non-state organizations and diversity of experiences and insights they could bring to the discussion. I approached each of them over WhatsApp or Email, shared the questions with them in advance, made appointments and conducted the interviews. A few days later I also had to conduct follow-up conversations for clarifications with some of them. The Interviews were conducted in a mix of English, Marathi and Hindi languages. I made detailed notes during the conversations and they form the basis of the data.

The interviews were conducted telephonically through WhatsApp calls or Zoom meetings. The duration of an interview ranged from 45 minutes to 90 minutes. A set of basic questions were shared with some of the interviewees upon request, however all the conversations were free-flowing (semi-structured) based on responses, experiences, and insights shared. After the initial call, upon making detailed notes and conducting interviews with other participants, follow-up calls of 20 -30 minutes were conducted. They were mostly clarificatory in nature. The deputy mayor of Pune decided to provide written responses to the questionnaire (on condition of not publishing it) after rescheduling the interview multiple times, due to the mounting number of Covid-19 cases in the city, the political pressure, and her own health reasons. While discussing the situation in India and spread of the disease, I discovered that a third of my interviewees themselves tested Covid-19 positive and underwent treatment. All of them have recovered, but this in itself proves important in understanding their positionality in their work as well as this research. The lived experience of the health

threat, treatment, and a nuanced understanding of their own privileges as opposed to the vulnerabilities of the marginalized groups they worked with made their accounts more astute.

I decided to interview such a diverse set of stakeholders in order to understand their positionality, understanding, work and contribution during the migrant crisis. Provisioning of social services often takes place through formal (state) and informal (non-state) channels of provisioning (Gough 2014: 23). The role of non-state informal institutions and individuals has specifically been crucial during the crisis and disaster management. Hence, interviewing representatives from different backgrounds definitely helped in understanding various aspects of the crisis. Their narration of their telephonic or personal interactions also helped me to get a sense of the workers' situation through their lenses. This data along with the secondary data sources forms the foundation of analysis in this paper.

Secondary data sources

This study also relies on the insights from the secondary data available through various research studies, relief work initiatives, media coverage, and government policy documents. A comprehensive analysis of various small-scale primary surveys conducted in Mumbai and Pune and their findings is an important part of the analysis. These surveys include a survey of 600 migrants in Pune city by CITU and the consequent analysis (Kalhan, Singh, and Moghe 2020), a survey of about 5000 migrants by an NGO, Sewa wardhini, and insights from many pan-India reports such as the SWAN reports and other academic literature. At this point it is pertinent to mention that a lot of reference material used for this survey comes from non-academic research done by activists and NGOs etc. Since the topic is cotemporary and situation dynamic the academic work is still underway and not very extensive.

Additional sources

I attended a range of webinars, meetings and online discussions on this topic, which helped me in building a larger understanding of the issue. Discussions with ex-colleagues and professors back in India have also been helpful in getting a grasp of the situation in India.

Ethical issues and challenges

It is crucial to mention that none of the 12 interviews consisted of a direct communication with the informal migrants themselves. This was a conscious decision made due to manifold reasons. The situation of Covid-19 spread and lockdowns in India is still worrying: as of September 15, 2020, Mumbai and Pune are partially unlocked with heavy travel restrictions and increasing infections. While many migrants have either gone back or are still trying to get back, the harsh reality of economic struggles and material challenges largely persists. Under this condition, I found it ethically unwarranted to reach out to them and interview them over a call for the purpose of my research. I am aware of the serious limitation that brings to this study which I have tried to partially tackle through reaching to the grassroots activists and frontline workers who are constantly in touch with and are assisting the migrants in their daily struggles.

My positionality as a student researcher has been a challenge and an advantage both. Being a student made it easier to reach the deputy mayor of the city and get her to agree for

an interview, however, being outside India and interviewing those working on the ground over a call puts me in a disconnected position to the field. The insights from interviews, news reports and webinars helped me get a better grasp of the situation.

The case of the migrant crisis induced by Covid-19 lockdown provides a perfect opportunity to identify the gaps in the current system of entitlement-based protection of the migrant workers and to find possible ways ahead. The following chapters cover this analysis along with the findings and insights from primary and secondary data sources.

Chapter 3 A Health Emergency to the Migrant Crisis

“As an appalled world watched, India revealed herself in all her shame — her brutal, structural, social and economic inequality, her callous indifference to suffering” (Roy 2020: no page).

The spread and containment of Covid-19, a health care emergency, exposed the several socio-economic inequalities in Indian society. The lockdown unfolded vividly, exposing the most marginalized to the unimagined risks. The suddenness of the lockdowns and unfamiliarity of the virus and its treatment were no doubt the most important factors for the unfolding of the events. However, the impact of these shocks must be analysed in the light of pre-existing vulnerabilities that fed into intensifying their effect. Together they brewed an appalling crisis for the millions of migrants working in informal sector economy in urban areas. This chapter elaborates on the pre-existing migrant labour regimes.

3.1 Pre-existing migrant labour regimes: precarity, vulnerability, invisibility and deprivation

Before the pandemic the lives of migrant workers were characterized by precarity, vulnerability, invisibility and deprivation. These issues predate the pandemic but did play a crucial role in impacting migrants’ lives adversely during the pandemic.

Insecure income and precarious livelihoods

Informal sector activities are considered the backbone of the urban economy. The demand for these jobs in urban areas is high but the supply is inconsistent in nature. Many of these workers do not have employment in cities throughout the year leading them back to their native places for a few months every year. This kind of migration is called circular/cyclical migration in the literature (Bremner 1991, Srivastava and Jha 2014). Some of these workers also spend almost all their lives in the cities but do not have consistent employment; they tend to have highly unstable (‘gig’) livelihoods. Research shows that this kind of migration often takes place with an aspiration of earning better income and leading a respectful life in the city (Van der Loop 1992, Srivastava 2014).

The role of an employer is crucial to informal and migrant workers. Under many laws—The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition Act, 1970 (CLRA), The Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act 1979, Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Cess Act, 1996—the employer is supposed to register workers, ensure safety at workplaces, and comply with welfare regulations. The implementation of CLRA and migrant workers acts have been particularly inadequate, leading to exploitation of workers at worksites by the employers. Srivastava and Jha (2016:24) also highlight that it is in employer’s interest to employ migrant workers on the worksites as that helps to continue operating at lower production costs “without pushing up local wage rates and without taking responsibility of workers’ social reproduction costs” (ibid). Through the presence of contractors and sub-contractors as middlemen the workers often are not aware of the principal employer, who in turn is to be held

legally accountable for the wages and working conditions. The contractors act as local patrons of the workers ensuring the availability of jobs at certain worksites, shelter, emergency loans, and other needs (Srivastava and Jha 2014: 32).

The living and work conditions of the migrant workers and their access to welfare facilities are two main challenges faced by informal sector migrants in urban areas. Srivastava and Jha (2016) and Borhade (2012) discuss the unregulated hours of work, arduous and strenuous nature of work, inadequate sanitation facilities, meagre to dysfunctional housing facilities, and irregular and unregulated payment of wages as some of the challenges faced at work sites by the informal migrants. Although, these challenges are generic and applicable to informal sector migrant workers across Indian cities, Keshri and Bhagat (2012) confirm that these are also the characteristic features observed among the migrant workers in Pune and Mumbai regions.

Informal migrant workers are often involved in physically demanding, strenuous work. They often have long work hours and hazardous work conditions, with no insurance. Their income is irregular and they are highly dependent on the employer for various welfare needs. With most of the families earning less than Rs. 10000 per month and living in the cities without any social protection, they have no safety net. Emergencies are often met with loans from the employers but in case of the lockdowns due to complete work stoppage the employers did not provide any loans (SWAN volunteers, Moghe: interviews 2020). The demand and dependence of workers on these highly insecure and precarious professions points at the issues of unemployment and underemployment in India. Why would one choose to migrate out of their native place away from family, friends and cultural familiarities? Aspirations definitely play a role but the lack of decent work options at the source places also have a role to play. Moving to a city to earn money and support the family is often the most cited reason for migration. Once they migrate, the struggle of survival begins. One must take up any job available to keep up with the cost of living in the cities. Hence, the lack of adequate and suitable employment in rural as well as urban areas is a key reason pushing workers in the precarious labour professions. Hence, in the dire times of crisis many decided to go back to sustenance assuring work in agriculture.

“It will not be enough to tend to aspirations but it is enough to sustain in emergencies.” Mahajan (interview, 2020).

Vulnerability to exploitation

Urban migrant workers are prone to legal, social and physical exploitation. The nature of work in urban informal sector makes the workers vulnerable to exploitation as they are outside the purview of labour laws (paid less, irregularly, without benefits and harassed at the work place). Lack of registration not only deprives workers of the social benefits but also pushes them out of the ambit of the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 and Equal Remuneration Act 1970. Many workers are not paid their wages regularly, SWAN volunteers and reports mentioned that many workers were not paid the wages for the previous 3 - 4 months let alone the payments during the lockdown. There are hardly any spaces left for the workers to raise their voices given their dependence on the employers. Their contracts are often verbal and there is no proof of agreed remuneration. In the times of Covid-19 the unregistered

workers (which is the majority) were not eligible to receive the cash transfers offered by various labour welfare boards.

The trade unions for the informal workers are strong in the cities of Pune and Mumbai but the migratory nature of the informal migrant workers often leaves them out of the reach of these unions. The Mathadi Workers Union, Construction Workers Union and Rag pickers Union are three examples of the unions with some level of integration of the migrant workers but large chunks of people involved in these and other activities are left out of these organizations. In the time of the crisis the unions stepped up through relief work as well advocacy with labour welfare boards but non-members were left out.

Invisibility in policy

Being left out of several benefits, institutions and policies is also a characteristic feature of the lives of the urban migrants. Sedentary bias ignoring migrants' mobility and multilocality in urban policy can be observed through the invisibility of informal economy migrant workers in legislations and policies. Most of the labour laws and social protection policies are not portable leaving a major section of informal sector migrant workers out of the purview of these policies.

"In spite of years of efforts pushing for portability (and implementation) of ration cards and universalization of the social protection benefits, little has been done" (Mahajan, interview 2020).

"The labour laws are outdated, inadequate and do not take the needs of various sections of labourers in cognizance. The implementation of the existing labour laws is extremely lax and that puts the workers safety and security in danger" (Kulkarni, interview 2020).

It is also important to note that various labour legislations and social protection legislations (promoting economic activity and curbing labour rights) were pushed and passed hastily in some states (such as Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Gujarat).

The description of working conditions and denial of labour rights collectively point at a flexible and precarious labour regime as discussed in the classification by Burawoy (1983). It is pertinent to keep the cost of production low to maximise profits and it is done at the cost of reduction of wages and precarious working conditions (by reducing the cost of workers' social reproduction). The withdrawal of state can be observed through weak implementation of workplace regulation laws and revisions in labour laws that weaken the labour rights.

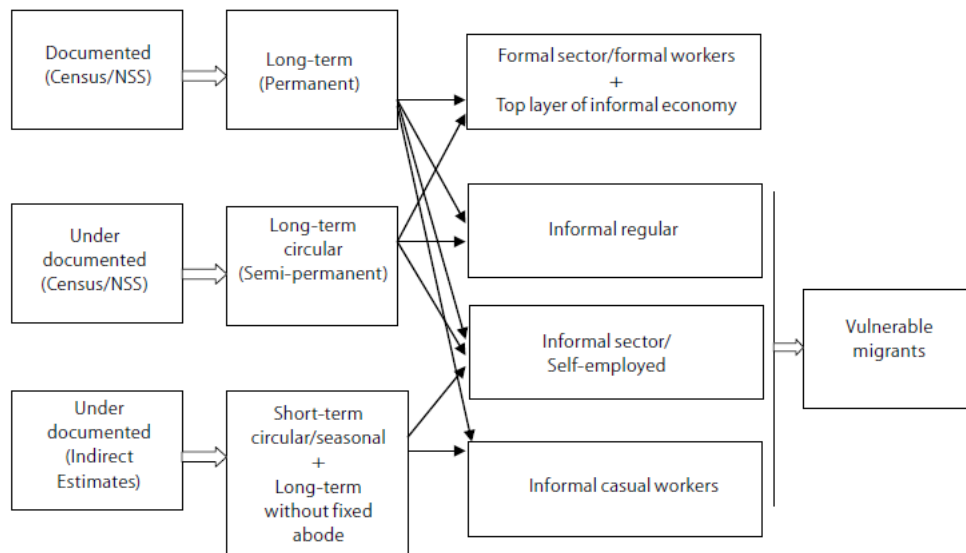
Deprivation of citizenship-based entitlements

Invisibility leads to deprivation of social citizenship rights of the migrant workers. Entitlements of food security, health care, education, social insurance and housing are denied due to lack of proof of urban residency. This proof is unavailable to workers because of lack of documentation of their migration. Many workers stay in slums, worksites and *bastis* (settlements) which are illegal constructions and hence cannot be documented. Unavailability of affordable housing leads them to choose these housing options ultimately ripping them off their citizenship entitlements. Lack of proof of urban residency (inability of migrants to prove domicile) is one of the major hurdles for migrant workers in accessing social protection

benefits such as Public Distribution System (PDS) (food), health care facilities, and social housing among others (Srivastava and Jha 2011, Borhade 2012, PUDR 2009). Srivastava and Jha (2016: 23) describe this as a situation of being non- citizens in cities and weak citizens in native villages. Employers and migrant workers are supposed to register with the state authorities according to the Interstate Migrant Workmen Act of 1979 and CLRA 1970. This is not done by the employer nor the contractor who often bring them to these worksites. *“This dependence on the employers disconnects them from the unions as well.”* (Moghe, interview 2020).

Hence, the migrants are pushed to the margins of urban society both literally and metaphorically. The life on the margins makes the migrants extremely vulnerable to both endogenous (systemic) and exogenous (circumstantial) shocks (Challam 2013: 6-7). The following figure from the Institute of Human Development, India webinar in June 2020 presents the various types of migrants, and how their documentation status and durations of migration affect their vulnerability. Mainly informal sector, long and short-term migrants engaged in regular self-employment as well as casual activities are vulnerable.

Figure 7: Types of migrants, according their documentation status.



Source: IHD, India 2020

While the migrant workers manage to survive in the uncertain and often exploitative living and working conditions, they are also often left out of the ambit of the provisioning by the state.

Many social benefits require a local address (such as PDS for subsidized food, admission to the local pre-primary schools) and a Jan dhan Bank account in order to receive direct cash payments. Many workers receive their wages in cash, even if they have a bank account it is not connected their social benefit cards (Aadhar card). In case of health care, *“Access to public health institutions in cities is extremely exclusive and the system itself is very weak.”* (Moghe, interview 2020). Too thinly spread public healthcare mechanisms and unaffordability of private hospitals make it difficult for the urban poor in general to access quality and low-priced healthcare. In times of a healthcare emergency this picture is definitely not an encouraging one for the migrants.

The increasing deprivation of migrant workers from their citizenship-based entitlements (PDS, ICDS, MDM and NHM) and limited reach of employment-based entitlements such

as lack of laws regulating workplace safety and wage regulation of informal migrants also reflect a shift in welfare priorities of the state. A shift towards targeting can be observed through limiting universal food security by targeting the PDS, introduction of Ayushman Bharat a market-based insurance scheme weakening the NHM frame of public health delivery. The accounts of lives of migrants highlight the necessity of universal citizenship-based and employment-based interventions to pull them out of the trap of deprivation induced precarity and vulnerability. This shift in policy principles can also be observed through the low wage rates of the workers. Low paid precarious workers have become a need of the urban economies to keep functioning at lower production costs. Mundoli, highlighted the point which was previously also raised by Srivastava and Jha (2016: 24), that low waged temporary/migratory labour is a systemic need of keeping the migrant labour at the perils of urban lives in order to maintain the wage rates and maintain the equilibrium of capital gains. *"However, at the time of the crisis they were the most ignored ones"* (Mundoli, interview 2020).

Pre-existing systemic faults in social protection policy, increasing level of targeting in poverty reduction programmes and the state's priority towards privatization have all played a role in escalating the adverse effects of the lockdown in case of urban informal migrant workers. The low level of state intervention/public action, in the flexible labour regimes, left the migrant workers with a no fall-back option. The next section tries to analyse their situation in time of the crisis with these pre-existing vulnerabilities.

3.2 Lockdown measures: effects on and lives of migrant workers

The migrant workers in Mumbai and Pune constitute millions of labourers from within and outside of Maharashtra. The actual number of workers is not available on any of the government platforms. The lockdowns meant a complete halt in any activity for these workers (given the nature of their jobs in gig economy or physical labour work). These professions require them to step out and work, they cannot conduct these tasks remotely. Hence, when the lockdowns were imposed and all the work stopped, the livelihoods of not just the workers but also the middlemen were lost. The duration of the lockdown was uncertain, it went on for more than 2 months. Supporting the employees for this duration became difficult for small employers and expensive for the larger ones and so began the dark night of the migrants' plight. Halt in economic activities pushed the people on the margins to struggle to keep their shelters and food flow alive. In many situations safety from the virus was also an issue as the sanitation facilities in slums/worksites (usual areas of residence of informal migrants) were not designed to handle the crisis.

"Baar Baar haath kaise saaf kare madame? Yaha 1000 log ek naal istemal karate hain" (How are we supposed to wash hands frequently when 1000 people share one tap in our slum?) a migrant living in a slum asked Bhakti, a SWAN volunteer from Mumbai.

The mounting pressure of the lockdown measures to contain the health emergency resulted in a social emergency of struggle for survival of the informal migrants. An increasing sense of uncertainty about the virus as well as the income and social insecurity along with the travel restrictions added to the desperation of the migrant workers. Many decided to commence their journeys back home on foot, while, others waited stranded in hope of

getting a place on the *Shramik*² trains. However, it is important to note that the migrant crisis emerged from the health crisis as a result of failure to understand and cater to socio-economic needs of informal economy migrants during and before the lockdown.

The following sections elucidate the effect of lockdowns on the lives of migrants. It not only resulted in loss of livelihoods and income security but also affected various other aspects of migrant workers' lives. Some of these effects were loss of shelter, fear of starvation, discontinuation of education of children, heightened health risks aside of Covid-19 due to lack of access to medicines and doctors. The scope of and reasonings for these effects have been discussed critically in context of respective lockdown measures in the following sections

Impact on livelihoods

Closure of shops, restaurants, businesses, factories and worksites impacted the informal economy workers directly. The workspaces were closed and those who could not work from home were at a risk of losing income in the short run and their jobs in the long run. This put their livelihoods in danger. Work is the main reason they migrate to the cities and that came under threat. The halt in economic activities also meant immediate loss of income for many, those dependent on their daily wages were hit immediately. It was just a matter of a few more days when the others with some savings also became vulnerable. SWAN volunteers mentioned that all the families which contacted them had less than Rs. 1000 left in their bank accounts.

It made them vulnerable to starvation. Many were not able to access the usual vendors who would provide groceries on credit and hence were left helpless. Contractors/employers also absconded/ did not help them and hence, due to no organisational back up to make sense of the situation or arrange for the immediate and basic needs of the family the workers were pushed to make the decision to get back to the villages they came from. That would at least provide for their basic needs. Many decided to not wait for the state provided transports such as '*shramik*' trains and opt for private (often charging exorbitant fees) transport or start the journey on foot. The Lack of social support from their local support systems was also a cause of the panic. Mahajan (interview,2020) noted that during the time of the pandemic the lack of feeling of "*belongingness*" that the migrants face resurfaced. The individualistic life in cities, no community support as opposed to villages where they came from played an important role during the times of the pandemic as it was not only the material support in terms of food and shelter but also emotional/mental support systems were lacking for the migrants. "*This vacuum of sense of belongingness was felt very strongly.*" (Mahajan, interview 2020). As discussed repeatedly the contractors and employers are the main support systems for the migrants and a sense of abandonment by employer was also shocking. The loss of employers' livelihoods along with the systemic issues of informal contracts and loopholes in labour protection laws together caused this phenomenon in case of small and medium scale enterprises. However, SWAN volunteers reported getting calls from construction workers working on sites of big construction groups such as the Jindal and Hiranandani groups.

² Trains arranged by the government for transport of migrant workers

Access to basic necessities

This state of panic and helplessness worsened due to the fear of starvation and eviction. According to the experiences of the SWAN volunteers the households that got in touch with them for relief had very little to no food stocks, did not have access to PDS benefits, they also faced issues like inaccessibility and/or inadequacy of the cooked meal programs provided by the state government.

“The centers for cooked food provision are too far, we have to go there with the whole family under the curfew with the police chasing us, and upon reaching there, the meal is not guaranteed, sometimes they say it is over.” An account of a migrant worker provided by SWAN volunteer (Bhakti, interview 2020).

Closure of all small utility shops, roadside food stalls, and vegetable vendors impacted the access to cheap, credit-based groceries and supplies. Low income families are highly dependent on the small grocery shops and vendors around the corner because they can buy small quantities as and when they can afford them and they can buy groceries on credit. Closure of these shops meant no supply of basic groceries and food, leading to starvation in some cases. Many had less than 2 days’-worth of ration when they called the SWAN or other civil society organisations for support.

Schools were closed, children had to stay home and did not receive mid-day meals at school. Online transfers to students’ accounts for mid -day meal costs were made in some districts. In many cases children of migrant workers did not receive the online transfers (due to absence of bank account or non-linkage of the account). This added a burden of securing meals for children in the times of food shortage.

Due to closure of schools, a possibility of permanent drop out, due to unaffordability of fees and tools to access online education offered by the schools also loomed over the education of children of the migrant workers.

Things were not much different when it came to housing. The fear of eviction due to inability to pay rent was an added burden to migrants’ worries.

“Although the state government appealed to the house owners to not evict any tenants for non-payment of rent, many labourers faced harassment by the landlords.” (Kulkarni, interview 2020).

Staying home became compulsory and many did not have a ‘home’ to stay at. Loss of income also meant inability to pay rent. Sanitation facilities are often inadequate and stepping out even for these became an issue with the fear of police brutality. Many were beaten up by the police for stepping out to access toilets/hospitals or community water pumps.

Lack of appropriate information

Even though the lockdown was announced nationally by the prime minister, each state and local administration had their own set of regulations in addition to the national rules. The detailed measures in each state/city were announced in vernacular languages. They were publicized mainly in Marathi (the language spoken in state of Maharashtra) which was unknown to many interstate migrants. *“The fundamental source of panic was misinformation.”* (Sakina,

SWAN). The panic due to the lack of information about the disease and sense of helplessness was observed in society. A lot of fake messages were being circulated on WhatsApp, government's notifications were too technical and inaccessible to the migrants and that in turn led to fear of being stuck in the cities.

“There was an information overload through changing government orders, media, social media and word of mouth, a lot of rumours were being spread and authentic information in a comprehensible language was not available for everyone. This was an unprecedented event and hence clear communication on the government's behalf was a must, which unfortunately was not the case.” (Lokhande, interview, 2020).

Newspapers were not being delivered/sold; news were mostly circulated online in the first phase of the lockdown. Migrants could not access reliable information in easy and accessible way. This lack of adequate information contributed greatly to the panic and chaos.

Transport bottlenecks

Public transport within and between cities was closed down, Movement for necessities or for work was constrained. This meant that the migrants staying on the outskirts of cities could not travel to arrange for food or access shelters/food camps by government or NGOs. Migrants from nearby areas and intra-state migrants could not go home (many travel to their native places over the weekends regularly). Most workers are primarily dependent on public transport because of its affordability, high priced private operators (charging even higher prices during the crisis) were just not an option.

Interstate and inter-district borders were closed and the movement of people and goods over these borders froze. Those who could not survive the lockdowns in city did not have an option of going back home. If they still decided to, they were at the risk of police brutality, accidents, and ostracization in the villages.

In the later stage of the lockdown special trains for migrant workers were organized. Workers finally had the opportunity to travel back to their native places. However, the workers were supposed to purchase their own tickets. Due to lack of income and exhaustion of savings to survive in the cities many did not have enough money to afford purchasing tickets for the whole family. The ticketing is dynamic (prices change according to demand and availability). There was a gap in demand and supply for the trains. Trains were functioning at lesser capacities given the Covid-19 distancing measures. This led to long waiting lists and formalities attached to the process of getting a ticket, causing confusion and chaos.

Upon arriving in the villages, returnees were required to quarantine for 14 days. Quarantine facilities and shelters needed to be created in rural areas. In many villages public schools were turned in to quarantine shelters, in many others the returnees had to stay in the open. In some instances, returning migrants were even sprayed with chemical disinfectants upon entering the villages.

Uncertainty and anxiety

The duration of the lockdown kept increasing and uncertainty prevailed, the regulations on closure of semi-essential services, and travel bans kept changing as well.

“The sudden announcement of the lockdowns and halt in economic activities led to a shock among the workers.” (Dhorajiwala, interview 2020).

“The question of survival was grave and the uncertainty about how long would this go on added to the panic and increasing need to go back to the villages, the feeling of not having a support system in the cities was very strong.” (Moghe, interview 2020)

She further added that, *“the lack of faith in public health system and lack of money to afford private healthcare in case of contracting the disease was another contributing factor to the uncertainty.”* The fear of contracting Covid-19 and not getting required treatment through public health system was a prime reason causing panic.

In the state of panic and fear the sense of being abandoned and ignored by the state was also strong. It rooted in the haphazard way of implementation of the lockdown and lack of access to benefits offered by the state. The feeling of not being noticed (or thought of) by the state, chaos and arbitrary nature of state advisories were the ways in which the migrants felt abandoned. *“There was a lack of confidence in the system”* (ibid). Left by the employers, abandoned by the state the migrants then sought the comfort of familiar environments. *“Need to be with the Family or the Familiar”* (ibid). The pandemic and the subsequent socio-economic shocks were physically and mentally taxing. Being around the near and dear ones and in 'safe', familiar or comfortable environments was a reaction or the need of everyone. The privileged ones could do that easily or stay put wherever they were but those on the margins had limited options.

“They were dependent on state facilities for the journey back home and there was a complete chaos and mismanagement in arrangement of proper transport for the migrants” (Lokhande, interview 2020).

It is clear that some of the impacts were solely due to the suddenness of the lockdowns, and would be reversed over the course of time. However, due to the precarious nature of migrant's livelihood there would also be several long-lasting impacts such as high risk of permanent dropouts, food shortage leading to starvation and malnourishment and long-term indebtedness.

A quote by one of my interviewees sums up the situation of migrants succinctly.

The migrants decided to leave the cities on the backdrop of ‘भूक, भीती आणि भ्रम’ (hunger, fear and delusion) (Mahajan, interview 2020).

Hunger gives rise to insecurity and fear (of starvation, eviction, destitution, death). And it is easy to deceive those living in fear. In many ways this is a systematic creation and then exploitation of people's desperation. This trinity of reasons is deep-rooted in socio-political situation, governance style and ideology of the government. While describing the lockdown Ghosh (2020: 27) describes it as a policy decision based on and exacerbating the existing

inequalities of caste, class and gender. The class divide was observed through the varying levels of impacts on middle-class and on the migrant workers. While the migrants were stranded and abused with no livelihood and social protection, and with limited or no means to travel, the government operated evacuation flights for citizens world over, prominently ensuring the safety of those who are comparatively better off. While analysing the adverse impact of lockdowns on the migrants it is important to note the sedentary policy bias and the interaction of pre-existing vulnerabilities (due to flexible labour regimes) with newly posed challenges during the pandemic.

It is not only reflected through the imposition of lockdowns but also through the response of the government to the migrant crisis, which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Shock, awe, and law and order: The state's crisis response strategy

In context of the migrant crisis, the decisions made and the facts considered while making them inform the priorities and perceptions of the government. After the health emergency culminated in the crisis through migrant exodus the response and role of the state and non-state actors also points at larger macro-economic and political phenomena. Their perception of the crisis and of reasons that led to the crisis reflect their previous knowledge of the migrant workers' issues or the lack of it and the priorities in macro-political sense. In a crisis situation, under the rights-based social protection framework, the response often comes in form of protective and preventive measures which respectively address specific vulnerabilities (through pensions and cash transfers) and provide for possible deprivation (through health, food and shelter provisioning). The following two sections analyse the responses of central and state government to the crisis.

4.1 Central government's decision making: setting the tone for crisis response

The government simply did not predict the social impact of the sudden lockdowns when they were implemented. Politically the initial lockdown was the responsibility of the central government alone, the states were not consulted over this decision (Patnaik 2020: no page). He attributes this shock and awe effect as the part of the governance model of the current ruling party. The abrupt nature of this decision is accompanied by lack of planning.

A part of the answer lies in Modi's penchant for 'effect', to 'shock and awe' people by the sudden and dramatic nature of his decisions. In this process, ironically, the more inconvenienced the people are, the greater the 'effect', the more striking the image of a prime minister who apparently does not shirk from taking 'unpleasant' decisions in the 'interest of the nation'. Such decisions being invariably unplanned, since planning is a prosaic act while 'shock and awe' is better for image-making, have disastrous consequences (Patnaik 2020: No page).

Ghosh (2020: 4) argues that imposition of lockdowns as the only measure of containment at an early stage when the cases were limited to certain regions was uncalled for.

The most extreme weapon that could be used against the pandemic was used first, with no strategy in reserve in case the virus continued to spread. Eventually, when such an aggressive lockdown became unsustainable because of the impact on the economy and livelihoods, the government was forced to lift restrictions precisely when it had become more dangerous to do so, because of prevalence of the disease and therefore greater chances of infection (Ghosh 2020: 5).

Legally, the lockdowns were reasoned to be the result of implementation of the Disaster Management (DM) Act, 2005 and imposition of Section 144 of the criminal procedure code (prohibition of assembly of more than 4 people). The most stringent lockdown in the world was imposed all across the country. The University of Oxford's Stringency Index measures government response based on 17 indicators, and India scored 100 on 100 on the Stringency Index (Government response tracker 2020). The imposition of lockdowns was sudden (with a 4-hour notice after a daylong Janata Curfew), leaving practically no time for the households, corporations as well as the local level governments to deal with the repercussions. All the shops, supermarkets, public spaces, and petrol pumps were closed down for 14 days initially which eventually was extended up to another 28 days. Additionally, the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 was also implemented, it required a quarantine period for all the international and national migrant returning home. Mobility within and across cities was highly restricted. As a result of this a sense of panic arose among especially those who depended on their daily wages for the basic needs.

On the administrative front, pandemic and subsequent social emergencies were to be 'controlled' and not addressed. In the initial 2 weeks of the lockdown majority of the government orders focused on measures to keep people at home and maintain law and order. As per the DM Act handling this disaster was the primary responsibility of the revenue department, putting the District Magistrate and police force in charge of maintaining the law and order. The possible social repercussions of the lockdowns and preparedness of the respective departments did not appear in the initial government notifications. In case of a socio-economic crisis such as this the social welfare department, food and civil supplies department and the health department should have been at the forefront.

In case of migrants, the lockdown reflected a complete lack of understanding of their lives and niche positionality on behalf of the executive and legislature (Patnaik 2020, SWAN b 2020). The lack of informed planning led to a situation of panic and chaos, the Indian government now had to respond to the death threat posed by the virus and the social crisis that was brewing as a result of the initial decisions made.

Three days in to the panic and disorder, union finance minister announced a package of Rs. 340 billion, it involved enhanced access to food grains and benefits to companies and firms during the halt in the economic activities. Various civil society organisations demanded cash transfers of Rs. 7000 per household per month for the duration of the lockdown for the households falling in the lowest income quintile. Most of these were informal labour households, the calculations provided by Patnaik, 2020 suggest a need for a comprehensive package of Rs. 366000 billion. The package announced by the government, is less than 10% of the need raised by the civil society organisations. This again, reflects the lack of clarity and knowledge of the demographic and its need during the crisis on the government's part.

The trio of Pradhanmantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) (This was an umbrella programme aimed at ensuring the minimum requirements of population. The reach and implementation of this programme was however limited.), Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) and Arogyasetu App sums up central government's response to the crisis. The following table captures the fiscal and policy interventions by the central government.

Table 1: Central government's response to the migrant crisis.

Intervention	Fiscal expenditure	Benefits announced
PMGKY (Accountability issues regarding the PM CARE fund were raised)	Rs. 170,000 Billion	Supply of food grains, Insurance for health workers, cash transfers (pensions), Support to farmers and MGREGA workers, Construction workers welfare fund contribution, Cash benefits for frontline workers, food and shelter for urban poor, MDM and Anganwadi cash smoothing and PM CARE fund for Vaccine development and medical equipment.
Atmanirbhar Bharat	Rs. 20000 billion	Liquidity for state governments, liquidity for farmers, and Micro, small and medium enterprises
Arogyasetu App	-	Covid-19 contact tracing App

Source: compiled from CBGA, 2020: 13-16

4.2 Lack of coordination between the centre and the states

Once the issues of starvation and loss of livelihoods started emerging as two important announcements were made - 1. Free PDS ration to all the cardholders and 2. house owners were asked to be 'sympathetic' towards their tenants. (decisions like free ration came in form of central government orders, however each state had their own set of rules/riders attached to its implementation. For example, Maharashtra government decided to provide free ration only after the beneficiary bought the minimum required ration according to previous rules). Local level governments like city corporations and Gram Panchayats (GP, villager councils) were caught off-guard with inadequate public health mechanisms for testing, treatment and quarantine shelter facilities. CBGA (2020: 34), Gadre (2020: no page) argue that the health care facilities were inadequate and needed fiscal and human resource revival even before corona and the sudden pandemic caught it off guard. The centre and the state were supposed to collectively support the frail public health system, however the increasing ideological push for privatisation of healthcare limited the efforts towards that (Marathe, 2020: no page).

Mahajan in her interview, also claimed that the central government's method of handling the health emergency as well as the subsequent migrant crisis set the direction and the tone for the state and the local governments as well. The coordination was lacking and several contrasting decisions were made but the attitude and apathy of the bureaucracy towards the problems of the migrants was constant.

The legal measures described earlier could have been used to initiate a meaningful collaboration with the states, however centralized decision making characterized by lack of planning and anticipation of the impact led to a haphazard and inadequate response by the state.

The DM act allows the central government and the National Disaster Management Authority to issue directions to any authority in the country and over-ride other laws.

However, the center did not use these additional powers to increase co-ordination; rather, it imposed often changing and sometimes contradictory decisions upon state governments without consulting them— including on the national lockdown, which they got no time to prepare for (Ghosh 2020: 4).

4.3 Too little, too late: Maharashtra state government's response to the crisis

As mentioned earlier the issues of crisis, migration, and labour are collectively decided upon by the state and central governments as per the concurrent list of Indian constitution. Some states like Kerala responded to the crisis with great planning and pragmatism. The migrants were supported with food, shelter and jobs to prevent panic reverse migration, authorities collaborated with the civil society to identify, reach and assist those in need (Nair 2020: 2). In case of government of Maharashtra, the challenge was to manage and tend to the varied needs of containment of virus and the social emergencies in rural as well as urban areas in the state and to coordinate travel of interstate migrants to their respective states.

In this situation the state responded to several needs of the lower income groups through revised provisions under existing social welfare schemes and additional announcements pertaining to transport and quarantine of the workers. It is important to note that the implementation of the 'curfew' part of the lockdown was handled by the police and the provisioning part as and when it was announced was carried out by respective departments and ministries. The lack of coordination and communication within departments was also a hinderance during these times. Moghe (Interview: 2020) stated that the lack of coordination between the railway and the police, the food security department and the district administration created practical hurdles for the workers to access the benefits announced. Moghe, Mahajan, Dhorajiwala, Lokhande, Abhyankar, Waghmare and Pandit all voiced their discontent with the nature and timeline of these announcements in interviews. To put succinctly, the relief measures for the migrants came as 'too little and too late'. The following section tries to present the social protection announcements by the government of Maharashtra. Along with the impact of the announcements on migrant workers the section provides details of responsible department and the date on which certain benefits were announced. It is important to note that many of these measures came in the second week of April, which marked almost more than 15 days after the lockdowns were announced. This affirms the claim by Mahajan that the state governments too were not well versed with the issues of the migrants and the tone set by central governments and the suddenness of the lockdowns affected the decision making and implementation of the states.

Healthcare

Covid-19 began as a healthcare emergency. The healthcare facilities both public and private did not have enough mechanisms to deal with the rising cases. The migrant workers

were indeed more vulnerable to infection given the living and working conditions described earlier. In this case, planned and quality healthcare provisioning was necessary by the state.

On 30 March, free treatment for any Covid-19 positive individual in government healthcare facilities was announced. Payments were to be made according to Ayushman Bharat norms. However, as mentioned earlier the government hospitals were stretched beyond their capacity. They also did not have enough implements to cater to mounting number of infections. The private hospitals charged exorbitant amounts to treat the patients which was not covered under the Ayushman Bharat payments.

On Labour day, 1 May, Mahatma Phule Jan Arogya Yojana (MPJAY) - free and cashless health insurance to all citizens of Maharashtra was announced by the chief minister of Maharashtra. However, the lack of awareness about availing the benefits, required documents and formalities led to under usage of this scheme by the migrant workers (Pandit, Interview 2020).

Apart from insurance and free treatment in public hospitals the responsibility of quarantining of asymptomatic and mildly symptomatic patients was on the patients themselves. The stranded workers did not have adequate facilities to stay with their families, isolation in such a case was impossible.

Housing

The living situations of the urban poor in general and migrant workers in particular are highly precarious. They live in meagre to dysfunctional housing facilities, with inadequate sanitation facilities in many cases like Dharavi slum in Mumbai the initial lockdown proved counterproductive.

“Workers live in extremely crowded and congested dwellings, in very small rooms with five or more people. Staying at home, washing hands frequently become nearly impossible with shared sanitation facilities” (Waghmare, interview 2020).

Additionally, loss of income led to fear of eviction for many migrants, inability to pay rents led to harassment by landlords in some cases.

In that light, on 16 April, all the house owners in the state were directed to postpone the collection of house rents for at least three months and were also directed against taking any action resulting in eviction of the tenants for not paying the rent on time. This came 21 days after the announcement of lockdown, many were already evicted or harassed by the landlords by then.

Food security

On 30 March, the central government announced free ration to all, through PDS. Supplied covering for 'Three-months' worth of ration were to be provided free of cost to all the card holders. Maharashtra government initially issues orders requiring cardholders to purchase the minimum required ration for one month and then avail the free of cost supplies. This decision was reversed after advocacy efforts of JHA (Mahajan, interview 2020).

Additionally, the ration was available to those in possession of the ration card³. Migrants often have ration cards from native places, which are not accepted in cities despite portability on paper.

“Lack of implementation of portability of ration cards and too much focus on avoiding inclusion error at the time of a crisis made it almost impossible for the migrant workers to access food grains through PDS” (Mahajan, interview: 2020).

Dhorajiwala of SWAN also noted that 96% of workers who approached them could not access free food grains announced by the state.

On 29 March the price of the Shiv Bhojan Thali, a cooked meal, was reduced to Rs. 5 per plate from Rs. 10. And 100000 plates of food were to be cooked and distributed per day to cater to the food insecurity of the urban poor. However, the centres providing food were not many, walking to these centres involved risk of police brutality. Receiving food was not guaranteed once reaching the centres, many times it got over too soon. In case of getting the food carrying it back home for other family members was not possible. Due to closure of schools the number of people requiring food at home also increased as children under the age of 14 receive free meals at school under the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) scheme.

On 30 March, the state government announced that the MDM costs were to be deposited in the accounts of students (primary and upper primary). Many students did not have their accounts registered with the schools, and hence did not receive the money. In other cases, even after receiving the money some families could not access banks to withdraw and grocery shops to buy food.

Employment and cash transfers

The sudden nature of stoppage of work and uncertainty about resumption led to a dire economic problem for the workers.

As per the court order on 30 March, regulations were issued directing no termination of employees or reduction of wages on account of closure of establishments. Employers took advantage of the loopholes due to lack of legal contracts in case of migrant workers and the lack of knowledge about this order. Many did not have access to unions and NGOs who would have informed them about this.

On 17 April (23 days in the lockdown) the Construction Workers Welfare Board announced a package of Rs. 2000 per worker in the Jan Dhan accounts of registered construction workers. The official number is 12 million, however there are many unregistered workers. Those who are registered faced delays up to 2 months in receiving the transfers. The eligibility of interstate migrants in this case was unclear.

Transport and quarantine of the migrants

Some innovative initiatives were carried out by departments like the tribal development department. They decided to provide point to point travel for the tribal workers stuck in

³ Card required to be eligible for PDS benefits

cities requiring transport to remote native areas (announced on 13 April). However, the reach and impact of this scheme was limited to the tribal people requiring to go back to remote areas within Maharashtra, and only catered to the transport requirements of these migrants. Interstate migrants and the ones with other than transport needs experienced bottlenecks in provisioning. Many resorted to private options, some walked, and those who could wait took *Shramik* trains to reach their native places.

When the migrant exodus to their native places became apparent, on 16 April, the rural development department announced the GP fund to be used for provision of food and shelter to families in need and those quarantined in public shelters.

Fragmented State response

The PRS legislative research report (2020: 32) shows that there were a total of 2277 government orders in India (central and state) during the time of the lockdown. These were specifically meant for public notification and do not include internal communication. This information barely reached the migrant workers. Lack of access to the information sources, and language barriers led to many migrants being left out of the benefits provided by the government. This reflects the haphazard manner and lack of planning on government's behalf.

While the various tiers of the state responded in their respective capacities and understandings of the issue, whether the benefits reached the migrants or not remained unknown. In a crisis, the role of immediate relief through existing social protection mechanisms is of utmost important. Too much emphasis on avoiding inclusion error in implementation of PDS and social security transfers reflected a shift in the state's welfare approach. The State focused on making its citizens *Atmanirbhar* (self-reliant) in times of distress instead of provisioning for their fundamental right to a dignified life.

The above section paints a picture of the fragmented response of the state government to the crisis. Certain pieces of the puzzle were missing owing to the centralised nature of decision making and lack of coordination as well as the weak and underprepared public health mechanisms. Lack of planning was reflected through the disjointed responses to the needs of the several social groups. Crisis management policies, which came as the government grappled to get a sense of the impact of the lockdowns, had many policy level and implementation level gaps in them. In some instances, the non-state stakeholders played a crucial role in crisis response either by trying to address these gaps or by raising them with the appropriate authorities. NGOs, charitable trusts, networks, religious organizations, labour unions and individuals responded to the migrant crisis. The next chapter presents analysis of their response.

Chapter 5 Collaborative and Adversarial Public action by Non-state Actors

According to the notion of public action, social welfare is not the result of the state but also non-state actions. The direct and indirect ways of non-state influence on policies observed in the time of crisis is analysed in this chapter.

The non-state actors consist of a broad category of organisations and individuals each with their own understanding and perspective on the crisis. However, in time of a humanitarian crisis the intent of helping the under-privileged was seen across all the charity and rights-based work.

“In these times anyone and everyone willing to help, irrespective of their political, social and ideological background is welcome. The crisis is much bigger than all of these differences” (Moghe, interview 2020).

The public action of non-state actors was mainly two-pronged, first to fill the immediate gaps through relief work and second, to bring necessary issues to attention of the government. The strategies employed can also be analysed under the framework of collaborative and adversarial ways of public action.

5.1 Collaborative Public Action

Direct support in form of relief work, assisting the government in arrangement of trains, documentation and delivery of benefits are some of the collaborative initiatives of the non-state actors. Before the crisis, religious organisations provided free of cost cooked food, NGOs and trade unions helped the workers in accessing social welfare programmes and some NGOs aided the government in implementing several schemes. This nature of work as an extension in form of an implementing agency is described as an “indispensable ingredient” of large-scale public welfare schemes by Sen and Dreze (1991: 259). The localised nature of non-state cooperation helps in strengthening public participation in public action towards delivery of essential public goods. In the time of crisis, the functioning of these actors sometimes in collaboration and sometimes in place of the state provisioning systems was overwhelming. While it was the need of the hour in the crisis; the adversarial (in many cases advocative) initiatives become crucial to pressurise the government to be accountable, and act appropriately through informed decisions.

Direct support

The direct support provided through relief work consisted of delivering ration, cooked food, connecting workers to state/non-state initiatives, transport related assistance in terms of help in translating information, informing workers about availability of trains, coordination with railway department etc. NGO volunteers and individuals in their own capacities were in contact with workers telephonically or in person to help them with travel

arrangements. The provisioning of immediate food and other needs was done by NGOs, charities, and religious organisations through delivery of grocery packets to the residence of workers or through distribution of cooked meals to those who needed it.

Notably, SWAN emerged as a unique example. The Stranded Workers Action Network consists of hundreds of volunteers panning throughout the country, assisting the migrant workers with food, transport coordination, monetary transfers and health care coordination. It initiated as a labourer in Delhi contacted his NGO friends from Bangalore for help. The network emerged as a collaborative effort of students, professors, NGOs and workers themselves. They collected donations, transferred them to those in need, and linked local food delivery initiatives with the workers. Many workers sought their support to interpret and navigate transport services provided by the state. The volunteers helped in translating government orders and information on required documents to access services. In some cases, they used Twitter and Facebook to reach to the government officials with issues of workers stranded in their constituencies. They also documented their survey data in form of three reports spread over the span of official lockdown in India. SWAN was an initiative that emerged during the lockdowns to cater to the needs of the stranded workers, they also raised issues with media and academic journals but their primary objective was direct relief.

5.2 Adversarial public action

The adversarial action involves activism, journalistic pressure and informed public criticism (Sen and Dreze 1991: 259) The role of political activists, networks, trade unions, and NGOs becomes crucial when it comes to adversarial action. The collection and dissemination of information, building public knowledge through use of social media, legislative and judicial advocacy to raise issues of migrant workers, and social media activism are some of the ways through which the non-state actors nudged the state towards appropriate action. This involved raising the demands through democratic ways, following up with legislators and the bureaucracy. While many of these actors do that in non-crisis situations too, the crisis pushed them to resort to innovative ways of raising demands as the virus put limitations on traditional ways of resistance. Greater use of Twitter, Instagram, building pressure through various channels, and crowd sourcing of funding were some of the new ways employed by NGOs and trade unions.

Pressure for State support

Policy advocacy/advisory was another important function that the non-state actors, specifically labour unions, networks and NGOs performed. Their main agenda was building pressure on the state through various channels (keeping in touch with policy makers, using judicial means, social media campaigns) to address specific issues of social protection of migrant workers, and pushing for additional transport facilities. Informing media about ground realities and building larger understanding and pressure on the government was also another way of advocacy.

They consistently critiqued and resisted incoherent advisory by local governments. This was done through ways of judicial, media and direct communication. In some cases, the state government was pressured to change the advisories. For example, the Maharashtra

government revoked the previous rules to provide free ration only after the beneficiary bought the minimum required ration.

“The strategy of approaching and pressurizing from various channels helped.” says Mahajan (interview: 2020). In many cases the use of Twitter and Instagram was crucial. The limitation on physical movement put by lockdown was overcome through this to some extent. The Dalit Human Rights Defenders Net, Pari Network, and Youth ki Awaz are some of the Instagram pages that shared stories of stranded workers plight raising public (especially) youth awareness about the issues. The trending hashtags on twitter and direct tags by activists also helped to pressurise the bureaucracy.

Presenting innovative solutions for transport blockages, demanding additional budgetary allocations, raising practical and systemic issues in PDS delivery and cash transfers with respective ministries and departments were some of the tasks carried out by non-state stakeholders.

Holding a mirror: information collection and knowledge dissemination

Additionally, the NGOs and networks also generated a lot information and data on the ground realities through surveys and documentation of their work. Although this was not the principle motive, most of these actors collected and documented the data with the primary need of following up with workers, and evidence for future advocacy with the government. This data was pertinent to many advocacy campaigns as well as academic research studies including this research paper. For instance, the publications such as the SWAN reports, CBGA report, CITU report, Sewawardhini survey and many others were a great source of information for this study. Networks such as JHA plan to use this knowledge generated during this time for future advocacy for the need for universalisation of basic social protection. Many media houses and independent journalists (Faye D’Souza, Chinki Sinha) used the information from these surveys in media advocacy with the policy makers for the safety and protection of the migrant workers. Videos, photographs, testimonies and of migrant workers would not only evoke public sympathy but also pushed the executive to work.

Long term strategies

Political Activists and NGOs working in this area look at this as an incident made the marginalized lives of informal sector migrant workers visible. They plan to use this opportunity to further the advocacy work with the state while the issue is still a 'hot iron'. At the same time state level networks (such as JHA) see this as an opportunity to build a stronger narrative around universalization of social services - 1. through a larger organization (mobilization) of informal sector workers and 2. Through building stronger support for the universalization argument by building solidarity and greater public knowledge about the need for the universalization.

Many unions plan to build on this push generated by the lockdown and aim for greater membership. Reaching to the migrant workers and their inclusion in workers’ unions has gained a new importance due to the crisis. Many political activists and labour unions during my data collection expressed the need for integration of migrant workers in larger collectives. Collective voices are also seen as a good way of drawing attention of the state. Many bottom-

up initiatives such as SWAN highlighted the importance and effectiveness of collective action in the times of a crisis.

State responsibility

Finally, since social protection is government's responsibility, service delivery at the time of crisis by the civil society should not be confused as their primary task. Their existence marks the space for critique and advocacy.

“The reach, impact and quality of mass provisioning can only be achieved through state provisioning mechanisms. Our work is supplementary and most importantly that of filling the gaps by identifying and raising them” – Mahajan (interview, 2020).

The efficacy of non-state responses to the crisis is also characterised by the limited scope of their work and close ties and understanding of local contexts. While it served as a great supplement to the frail state response, the responsibility of large-scale provisioning of social protection during and after crisis is principally the State's responsibility.

While the knowledge and reach of the non-state actors help the government in making informed policy decisions and effective implementation. The government needs to realise and embank on the potential of non-state actors. The shrinking democratic spaces, increasing violence against journalists and political activists, police brutality at peaceful protests does not provide for a healthy environment for adversarial action.

In times of the crisis it has come to light from local experiences that collaborative and adversarial public action is possible and effective. The regional and national governments need to draw upon these learnings and strengthen the democratic spaces for cooperation and dissent.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The journey of this research began with the migrant exodus from cities in Maharashtra and I followed that journey trying to uncover the deeper reasons behind the exodus. It is clear the pandemic added another layer to the pre-existing issues of the migrants but it also exposed the fault lines in the social protection provisioning. The lockdowns could have been executed in a more planned and phased manner depending on the local needs, however the one-size fits all strategy in disaster management had grave impacts on the livelihoods of millions of workers.

Summary of Findings

The pre-existing precarity of the informal economy migrant workers contributed to the socio-economic crisis during the Covid-19 lockdowns. The social vulnerabilities were in fact deepened owing to the crisis. Flexible migrant labour regimes limit the level of state intervention in labour welfare, making the informal migrant workers vulnerable. In addition, a lack of comprehensive social protection that provided for fundamental needs via citizenship-based entitlements pushed them further on the margins of the society.

Once the crisis unfolded the pre-existing vulnerabilities started intensifying. The state response to the pandemic came in a fragmented, centralised and unplanned manner. The principles of surveillance, control and discipline formed the core of government response to the health crisis. Raja (2020: 1), describes the government response as a “*Sovereign injection that was not*”. According to her,

Covid-19 provided governments around the world with an unprecedented opportunity to practice biopolitics, or what Foucault describes as a modality of power aimed at turning citizens into docile and disciplined bodies (Raja, 2020: 2).

The rush of the Indian government to impose the most stringent lockdown in early stages of the disease spread and the passage of many controversial bills around the time of panic and pressure suggest disciplining attitude of the government. Many previously resisted bills in the fields of forest land distribution, land acquisition, corporate farming; arrests of dissenters of CAA were observed between the months of April – July. “*The government didn’t just create the chaos because of their unplanned decisions they exploited it to push for anti-people legislations*” said Mahajan (interview: 2020). In the months of August and September as well, controversial farm bills and labour codes were passed in the parliament, putting small and marginal farmers and informal sector workers in more insecure life conditions (the wire staff: 2020). Opposition parties and unions blamed the government as using the migrant crisis as a leeway to pass these exploitative, pro-market legislations.

Abram and Joy (2020: 2) and Raja (2020: 2) analyse PM Modi’s speech while announcing the lockdown comparing 21-day lockdown to the 18-day war of Mahabharata (ancient Sanskrit scripture) and the terminology of ‘*Atmanirbhar*’ (self-reliant) as the government transferring the responsibility of crisis management to the citizens. Disciplining the

population through police (sometimes leading to instances of brutality) and the push for self-discipline through social distancing too point at the Foucauldian idea of disciplinary project. Literature (Abram and Joy 2020: 2-3, Raja 2020: 2, Sarasin 2020, no page), also relates the surveillance, control and disciplining principles in lockdowns to the panopticism of the plague model discussed by Foucault. While comparing the leprosy model with the 17th century plague response model Foucault noted,

If it is true that the leper gave rise to rituals of exclusion, which to a certain extent provided the model for and general form of the great Confinement, then the plague gave rise to disciplinary projects (Foucault 1995: 198).

There is a distinct resemblance between methods adopted by countries world over to contain Covid-19 and the plague model.

Additionally, in the context of migrant workers and the lockdown measures, the feasibility and affordability of the lockdowns is also contested. While the privileged class could lock themselves inside the houses, migrant workers were left stranded on the streets at the higher risk of infection. The so-called responsible citizens that were imagined by the government were necessarily those with class privileges. In fact, those who could stay inside the safety of their houses could do so at the cost of millions who were stranded on the road. “The Foucauldian injunction that translated as ‘making live’ for some, in short, simultaneously translated as ‘making die’ for others across the class divide” (Raja 2020: 2).

Hence, the social crisis observed through the exodus reflected uninformed and unplanned policy decisions, leading to the abandonment of vulnerable migrant groups. State’s lack of knowledge of the issues, lack of coordination among various tiers and departments of governments and underexploited space of collaboration with the civil society can be seen as complete abandonment of the workers by the State through fragmented response. While the exodus was an act in desperation it was also a silent revolt against the ignorance.

The non-state response on the other hand was characterised by solidarity and overwhelming empathy. On one hand the trade unions of which the workers are members opted for various adversarial measures of public action by raising the urgency of issues publicly and pressurising the state to act by demanding immediate cash transfers, transport facilities and food relief. On the other hand, NGOs, religious organisations and other initiatives played a supporting role. They engaged in ensuring the relief was provided through state or other means. This was a collaborative way of working towards arranging transport and supporting the migrants by coordinating with government authorities.

While the effects of crisis unfold, the abandonment of migrant workers by the state can be clearly observed through fragmented public action. The crisis visibilized the invisible plight of migrant workers to the policy it also had long term impacts on their welfare and wellbeing. A more decentralised, informed and consultative policy for the welfare of the backbone of the urban economy is a need of the hour.

Recommendations

Need for universalization of the social protection benefits

The current social protection regime clearly leaves out a majority of migrant workers out of its purview. The increasing privatization of healthcare, insurance-based schemes and weakening of labour organizations have further diluted the mandatory social security provisions (Pandey 2020: 24). This trajectory also shows a steady shift from universal to more residual and regulatory regime of protection (Pandey 2020: 22). Hence, there is a need of extensive, universal social protection regime which does not leave anyone behind. India indeed has a basic structure for social protection, the problem, however, lies in implementation and increasing tendency of dismantling of this framework.

This research shows the uncertainty and insecurity of livelihoods stems out of flexible labour regimes. Effective and well-functioning mechanism to register the migrant workers and their worksites will help the migrant workers in accessing their social rights effectively. This will also help in regulating exploitation by the employers. It is required to recognize and reduce the patron-client relationship between the employer/contractor and the workers. Currently the workers are highly dependent on the employers or the contractors and that not only impacts their income and social rights but also their relationship with trade unions, NGOs and other organizations that might be in a position to help them. Mobilization of workers in form of unions to be able to build their own support structure in the cities which will not only serve in cases of legal disputes but also provide a sense of belongingness among the workers.

Additionally, formal and informal institutions and spaces for grievance redressal and for the workers to raise their issues at the state and local level would improve the functioning of welfare boards and ensure effective implementation of labour laws.

Need for Decentralized, pro-people decision making

Response of the government in courts and parliament has been disappointing, in order to make all the legal, institutional and implementation related changes the underlying issue of lack of effective public action needs to be addressed. The decision making has been very centralised, as decisions are being made without consultations with other stakeholders, the specific needs of certain groups are hence left out. Asadullah (2020: no page) describes this as a time when the government should not only acknowledge the potential of civil society in addressing the immediate aftermath of the crisis but also needs to foster a more longer-term engagement for informed decision making.

At policy level, the labourers need to be brought back to the centre of labour laws. Their welfare cannot be sacrificed for higher economic outputs. Rights of labourers as workers and as citizens need to be considered in policy making.

Similarly, it is a need of the hour that the urban development policies imagine better lives and livelihoods for the migrant workers, they need to include this section of society in planning and implementation of various development programs. The larger governance structure needs ensure their political participation.

Review of Pandemic response strategy

Finally, in order to protect the citizens from similar crises in the future a review of the disaster management strategy is required. The DM Act puts the district magistrate (revenue department) and the police force in charge to keep the law and order of the region intact, whereas the immediate response is ought to come from social welfare, food and civil supplies, public health departments. This conceptual flaw in the act gives rise to chaos and mismanagement on behalf of the government. This needs to be reviewed and amended. Some of the key areas for improvement are - coordination between various tiers of government, planning and execution of preventive and protective measures and meaningful collaborations with non-state actors.

What remains to be explored?

As the pandemic still unfolds and lockdowns are being partially lifted, the impact of this shock on the migration pattern and urban mobilities remains to be seen. Further investigation is required on the question whether this pandemic will have a long-lasting impact on the inflow of workers from rural areas? The demographic composition of workers is diverse and an intersectional analysis of the impact on various groups of workers within the migrants is also warranted. A comprehensive primary research on impact of lockdowns on the backdrop of various identities of migrants such as gender, caste, tribe, age, disability is a big gap in data and existing literature on this issue.

The impact of contemporary developments in terms of systemic changes which will affect the way of organization as well as nature of employment of the workers also remains to be explored. On 23 September 2020 the government of India merged 29 central labour laws in to 4 labour codes. Broadly, these reforms give more flexibility to the industries on hiring and firing, it clamps the workers' right to strike and promise wider social security provisioning. The industrial relations bill takes the right of workers to resist collectively, adding to precarity of their livelihoods. Implementation of these codes is state government's responsibility and some states including Maharashtra have declined to implement these codes. What happens next remains to be seen. The livelihoods and citizenship rights of informal workers under the light of new labour codes remains to be studied.

Final remarks

Growing inequality between urban and rural areas, increasing precarity of jobs, and lack of urban citizenship (through residency) are some of the underlying causes of vulnerability of migrants to crisis. Covid-19 demonstrated the scope of damage a crisis can cause to the lives and livelihoods of informal economy migrant workers. The pandemic also proved that although the lives of informal economy migrant workers are invisible to policy and society, they are not marginal in numbers - Roughly more than 60% of urban informal workforce is migrant and are prone to be uprooted at the face of the shock of the lockdowns (Srivastava, 2020).

While larger economic implications of the exodus in addition to the lockdowns remain to be explored, the need for robust citizenship-based social rights has very clearly emerged. The social protection policies are invariably designed to cater to the needs of sedentary populations, leaving the multi-local circular migrant workforce out of it. This exclusion of migrants from access to citizenship rights happens not only on the grounds of location/residency but also on the grounds of identity and eligibility. As key contributors to the urban economy, the migrants have a right to universal, portable and quality social protection through effective public action.

Appendices

Appendix I: List of Interviewees

The following list provides a list of names of the interviewees with the details of their affiliations.

No.	Name	Association	Stakeholder	Date of Interview
1	Ulka Mahajan	Jagnyachya Hakkacha Andolan (JHA) (Right to live Campaign) Maharashtra.	Non-state – Political Activist	25/08/2020
2	Kiran Moghe	Member Center for Trade Unions (CITU) Pune, Chairperson, Domestic workers' Union, Pune	Non-State – Trade union member	11/09/2020
3	Sakina Dhorajiwala	Coordinator of Stranded Workers' Action Network (SWAN), Maharashtra	Non-state – relief Network	03/09/2020
4	Bhakti G.	Volunteer, SWAN, Mumbai	Non-state – relief Network	02/09/2020
5	Seema Mundoli	Professor, Azim Premji University	Non-state – Academician	27/08/2020
6	Pramod Kulkarni	CEO, Sewawardhini, Pune	Non-state - NGO	22/08/2020
7	Johanna Lokhande	National Coordinator, National Centre for Advocacy Studies, Pune	Non-state - NGO	19/08/2020
8	Saraswati Shendge	Deputy Mayor, Pune City (Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP)	State -Deputy mayor	Telephonic conversation and a letter
9	Amol Waghmare	Adivasi Adhikar Manch, Pune	Non-state - NGO	17/08/2020
10	Ajit Abhyankar	member of Communist party of India (Marxist)	Political activist,	12/08/2020
11	Neelam Pandit	Social worker, Pune	Non-state - NGO	03/09/2020
12	Praveen Rathod	Special reporter (Navi Mumbai and Pune area)– Lokmat, Marathi newspaper	Non-state – Media	20/08/2020

Appendix II: Questionnaires prepared for interviews

A. Political Activist/Labour union representatives

1. Name
2. Associated with
3. What in your opinion was the most compelling reason/s that caused the exodus?
4. What could the state have done to stop it?
5. What could the state have done to facilitate the reverse migration smoothly?
6. What in your opinion were the best practices that were observed during this lockdown exodus by the state?
7. What were the gaps?
8. Why do you think these gaps exist?
9. In what way did your work contribute in filling those gaps?
10. Do you think this crisis will bring about any change in the nature of migration of unorganized workers?
11. If yes, in what way?
12. If no, why not?
13. What in your opinion should be the immediate task of the NGOs after the lockdowns?
14. What (apart from the lockdowns) pre-existing policy level failures do you think caused the migrant crisis?
15. What would be the three (at least) policy recommendations would you have for the government to strengthen the policy to ensure welfare of the unorganized migrant workers?
16. In what way could these changes be brought out by the government?
17. Which other stakeholders played an important role in the migrant crisis, in your opinion?
18. How do you perceive the migrant crisis?
19. What were the motivating factors that played in while designing your response to the migrant crisis emergency?
20. What limitations do you face during your work in these times?
21. What are your thoughts on the civil society's response to the exodus? What could have been done differently?
22. What are your thoughts on the response of the government to the efforts of non-state actors?
23. If satisfactory, why?
24. If unsatisfactory, how could they have been more responsible?
25. Why did Maharashtra Government fail to tackle the immediate challenges faced by the unorganized migrant labourers? (was it apathy, inability to foresee the impact or mere lack of political will, or something entirely different?)
26. What lies ahead? How in your opinion has the pandemic changed the nature of unorganized labour employment, in which direction are we headed and what efforts should be made by NGOs, Unions and the government to ensure labour rights of these labourers?
27. Do you think this exodus was an expression of migrant worker's agency (autonomy to decide this is enough and take the narrative in their hands) or was this an act out of desperation (the workers would have stayed back if minimum requirements and welfare was taken care of by the government)?
28. What do you think about the package declared by the Maharashtra government? Is it sufficient? If not, how much more is required?
29. Do you think the relief work through various channels is also making the workers more vulnerable? (privacy – data in public domain)
30. What are the various intersectional layers within the category of unorganized migrant workers and did they face any particular problems?
31. How were these particular problems addressed by the government?
32. How did you/ other organisations try to cater to the special needs of these people?
33. Do you think the judiciary could have been used more effectively to pressurize the government in to carrying out its responsibilities?
34. In what ways was it currently being used?
35. What more could have been done?
36. If not, why not? Are there problems with the way the judiciary approaches these problems?
37. What were the responses of the Judiciary, beaurocracy and legislature respectively and what was lacking in your opinion?
38. According to certain reports the government of Maharashtra was the least cooperative (most apathetic) in coopting with the non-state actors, what are your thoughts? How was your experience?

39. Do you think creation of more employment opportunities at the source would change the volume and pattern of migration?
40. What can be done to reduce the precarity of the unorganized migrant workers especially in urban areas?
41. It is said that the crisis has visibilised the invisible lives and struggles of the unorganized migrant workers and highlighted the importance of robust social security mechanisms. How will this play out in the long-term advocacy efforts? To what extent can this help in creating a dent in existing policies?
42. What could they have done differently? How could the media have been used more effectively?
43. Any other insights, information, case studies or issues that you would like to share

B. Media representatives

1. Name
2. Affiliation
3. How do you perceive the migrant crisis during the corona lockdowns?
4. What was the nature of your work during the crisis?
5. What in your opinion was the most compelling reason/s that caused the exodus?
6. What could the state have done to stop it?
7. What could the state have done to facilitate the reverse migration smoothly?
8. What in your opinion were the best practices that were observed during this lockdown exodus by the state?
9. How was the response of the state, was the system approachable?
10. Were you in direct touch with the migrants?
11. If yes, how did you get the contact details?
12. What was the role of various state and non-state actors in this crisis in your opinion?
13. Was the media encouraged to cover more optimistic news than the lived realities of the migrants?
14. What are your thoughts on this action of the government?
15. The crisis also saw a communal angle when the Tablighi Jamaat gathering happened? A lot of fake news as well as biased journalism was observed during this time. What are your thoughts?
16. What role do you think print and digital media has played in visibilising the lived realities of the unorganised migrant workers?
17. Would you continue to take up this issue after the crisis as well?
18. If yes how?
19. If no, why not?
20. The social media has both been a boon and a curse during this time. But it has also been used innovatively to bring forward various issues by those experiencing it. What do you think of such forms of citizens' journalism?
21. What has been the role of the three main pillars of democracy, Judiciary, legislature and the executive? What more could they have done?
22. Do you think the right to free press has come under threat during the time of this crisis?
23. Any other additional experiences, information or insights that you would like to share.

C. Academician

1. Name
2. Academic institution
3. Work done in recent times
4. What in your opinion was the most compelling reason/s that caused the exodus?
5. What could the state have done to stop it?
6. What could the state have done to facilitate the reverse migration smoothly?
7. What in your opinion were the best practices that were observed during this lockdown exodus by the state?
8. What were the gaps?
9. Why do you think these gaps exist?
10. In what way did your work contribute in filling those gaps?
11. Do you think this crisis will bring about any change in the nature of migration of unorganized workers?
12. If yes, in what way?
13. If no, why not?
14. What in your opinion should be the immediate task of the NGOs like yours after the lockdowns?
15. What (apart from the lockdowns) pre-existing policy level failures do you think caused the migrant crisis?
16. What would be the three (at least) policy recommendations would you have for the government to strengthen the policy to ensure welfare of the unorganized migrant workers?
17. In what way could these changes be brought out by the government?

18. Which other stakeholders played an important role in the migrant crisis, in your opinion?
19. How do you perceive the migrant crisis?
20. What were the motivating factors that played in while designing your response to the migrant crisis emergency?
21. What limitations do you face during your work in these times?
22. What are your thoughts on the civil society's response to the exodus? What could have been done differently?
23. What are your thoughts on the response of the government to the efforts of non-state actors?
24. If satisfactory, why?
25. If unsatisfactory, how could they have been more responsible?
26. Why did Maharashtra Government fail to tackle the immediate challenges faced by the unorganized migrant labourers? (was it apathy, inability to foresee the impact or mere lack of political will, or something entirely different?)
27. What lies ahead? How in your opinion has the pandemic changed the nature of unorganized labour employment, in which direction are we headed and what efforts should be made by NGOs, Unions and the government to ensure labour rights of these labourers?
28. Do you think this exodus was an expression of migrant worker's agency (autonomy to decide this is enough and take the narrative in their hands) or was this an act out of desperation (the workers would have stayed back if minimum requirements and welfare was taken care of by the government)?
29. What do you think about the package declared by the Maharashtra government? Is it sufficient? If not, how much more is required?
30. Do you think the relief work through various channels is also making the workers more vulnerable? (privacy – data in public domain)
31. What are the various intersectional layers within the category of unorganized migrant workers and did they face any particular problems?
32. How were these particular problems addressed by the government?
33. How did you/ other organisations try to cater to the special needs of these people?
34. Do you think the judiciary could have been used more effectively to pressurize the government in to carrying out its responsibilities?
35. In what ways was it currently being used?
36. What more could have been done?
37. If not, why not? Are there problems with the way the judiciary approaches these problems?
38. What could they have done differently? How could the media have been used more effectively?
39. Any other insights, information, case studies or issues that you would like to share.

D. SWAN (Stranded Workers' Action Network)

1. Name of the interviewee
2. Role in SWAN
3. We all know how SWAN came in to being – would you like to share more about it? What brought everyone together? Who played a central role, what set the ball rolling?
4. It is a very prompt and organized effort which not only brings together a lot of stakeholders but also shows tangible results? – apart from the need of the time what else do you think were the contributing factors?
5. What in your opinion was the most compelling reason/s that caused the exodus?
6. What could the state have done to stop it?
7. What could the state have done to facilitate the reverse migration smoothly?
8. What in your opinion were the best practices that were observed during this lockdown exodus by the state?
9. What were the gaps?
10. Why do you think these gaps exist?
11. In what way did your work contribute in filling those gaps?
12. Do you think this crisis will bring about any change in the nature of migration of unorganized workers?
13. If yes, in what way?
14. If no, why not?
15. What (apart from the lockdowns) pre-existing policy level failures do you think caused the migrant crisis?
16. What would be the three (at least) policy recommendations would you have for the government to strengthen the policy to ensure welfare of the unorganized migrant workers?
17. In what way could these changes be brought out by the government?
18. Which other stakeholders played an important role in the migrant crisis, in your opinion?
19. How do you perceive the migrant crisis?

20. What were the motivating factors that played in while designing your response to the migrant crisis emergency?
21. What limitations do you face during your work in these times?
22. What are your thoughts on the civil society's response to the exodus? What could have been done differently?
23. What are your thoughts on the response of the government to the efforts of non-state actors?
24. If satisfactory, why?
25. If unsatisfactory, how could they have been more responsible?
26. Why did Maharashtra Government fail to tackle the immediate challenges faced by the unorganized migrant labourers? (was it apathy, inability to foresee the impact or mere lack of political will, or something entirely different?)
27. What lies ahead? How in your opinion has the pandemic changed the nature of unorganized labour employment, in which direction are we headed and what efforts should be made by NGOs, Unions and the government to ensure labour rights of these labourers?
28. Do you think this exodus was an expression of migrant worker's agency (autonomy to decide this is enough and take the narrative in their hands) or was this an act out of desperation (the workers would have stayed back if minimum requirements and welfare was taken care of by the government)?
29. What do you think about the package declared by the Maharashtra government? Is it sufficient? If not, how much more is required?
30. Do you think the relief work through various channels is also making the workers more vulnerable? (privacy – data in public domain)
31. What are the various intersectional layers within the category of unorganized migrant workers and did they face any particular problems?
32. How were these particular problems addressed by the government?
33. How did you/ other organisations try to cater to the special needs of these people?
34. Do you think the judiciary could have been used more effectively to pressurize the government in to carrying out its responsibilities?
35. In what ways was it currently being used?
36. What more could have been done?
37. If not, why not? Are there problems with the way the judiciary approaches these problems?
38. Any other insights, information, case studies or issues that you would like to share.
39. How do you manage the funds in this network?
40. What are your main sources of funding?
41. It may appear as a premature question, but in what way do think SWAN could continue working on this issue?
42. SWAN is a unique platform that brings together and connects various stakeholders on an important issue, although it came in to being during the crisis, do you think it will be able to continue working on these issues (may be at policy and meta level) as well once the crisis starts to subside?
43. The reports mention that documentation was never the primary objective of the whole exercise but what came out of it was a touching narrative of the crisis? Do you think SWAN as a network has a role to play in terms of such research and meaning making data generation for advocacy and policy makers?
44. What are your thoughts about the role of media during this crisis? How could it have been used more effectively during the crisis?

E. NGO

1. Name of the Interviewee
2. Name of the Organisation
3. Position of the interviewee at the Organisation
4. About the organization – how old?
5. Vision
6. Mission
7. Ongoing work
8. Did you start working with migrant workers during the lockdown?
9. If yes, why?
10. What kind of work do you do?
11. If no, how long have you been working with the migrant workers?
12. What kind of work have you been doing?
13. Did the nature of your work change during the pandemic?
14. If yes, how?
15. If no, why not?
16. What in your opinion was the most compelling reason/s that caused the exodus?

17. What could the state have done to stop it?
18. What could the state have done to facilitate the reverse migration smoothly?
19. What in your opinion were the best practices that were observed during this lockdown exodus by the state?
20. What were the gaps?
21. Why do you think these gaps exist?
22. In what way did your work contribute in filling those gaps?
23. Do you think this crisis will bring about any change in the nature of migration of unorganized workers?
24. If yes, in what way?
25. If no, why not?
26. What in your opinion should be the immediate task of the NGOs like yours after the lockdowns?
27. What (apart from the lockdowns) pre-existing policy level failures do you think caused the migrant crisis?
28. What would be the three (at least) policy recommendations would you have for the government to strengthen the policy to ensure welfare of the unorganized migrant workers?
29. In what way could these changes be brought out by the government?
30. Which other stakeholders played an important role in the migrant crisis, in your opinion?
31. How do you perceive the migrant crisis?
32. What were the motivating factors that played in while designing your response to the migrant crisis emergency?
33. What limitations do you face during your work in these times?
34. What are your thoughts on the civil society's response to the exodus? What could have been done differently?
35. What are your thoughts on the response of the government to the efforts of non-state actors?
36. If satisfactory, why?
37. If unsatisfactory, how could they have been more responsible?
38. Why did Maharashtra Government fail to tackle the immediate challenges faced by the unorganized migrant labourers? (was it apathy, inability to foresee the impact or mere lack of political will, or something entirely different?)
39. What lies ahead? How in your opinion has the pandemic changed the nature of unorganized labour employment, in which direction are we headed and what efforts should be made by NGOs, Unions and the government to ensure labour rights of these labourers?
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44. How were these particular problems addressed by the government?
45. How did you/ other organisations try to cater to the special needs of these people?
46. Do you think the judiciary could have been used more effectively to pressurize the government in to carrying out its responsibilities?
47. In what ways was it currently being used?
48. What more could have been done?
49. If not, why not? Are there problems with the way the judiciary approaches these problems?
50. What role do you think the media played in this crisis?
51. What could they have done differently? How could the media have been used more effectively?
52. Any other insights, information, case studies or issues that you would like to share.

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