

Though under MGNREGS 100 days of paid work a year is guaranteed to those who need work, yet women respondents said they did not get sufficient days of work under the scheme. The study shows only 11.7 percent got some work under MGNREGS. If government wants to stop distress migration (which is the purpose of MGNREGS) it is important to ensure sufficient days' of work.

NAWO recommends -Those who need work must get at least eight to 10 days of work per month. Government must also think beyond earth work under MGNREGS.

5. We also recommending for Skill mapping of migrant workers, especially migrant women:

It may be time consuming but undertaking skill mapping of migrant workers and opening up other job opportunities beyond earth work near home is the need of the hour.

6. Safe migration must be ensured

Both men and women should migrate if they want to. However, the government should ensure safe migration as well as safety and security of workers in the workplace. Laws may be in place for this but effective implementation seems lacking.

We recommend the existing rule for pre- departure orientation to migrant workers need to be effectively implemented by labour department.

The POSH act, especially the Local Complaint Committee which is meant for women of the unorganized sector should work effectively. There should be regular orientation on POSH Act both for workers and for LCC members.

7. Review of Labour Codes from a feminist perspective

We recommend for Review of the labour codes for migrant women. This is especially necessary for those working in the unorganized sector, who have migrated but are involved in home-based work (gota and sequin fitting in sarees in Surat for example).

8. Women must know what they are entitled to

Women migrants are unaware of their entitlements. Many do not even have a bank account. They miss out on the few benefits they are entitled to, at a time when every paisa counts. Besides, according to the World Bank's Global Index Database 2017, 20% of Indian adults lack a bank account and 54% of women's Jan Dhan accounts are inactive. Unregistered women informal sector workers, single, widowed and deserted women, women-headed households, and women with disability often fall between the cracks of social security mechanisms for lack of appropriate documents. So NAWO recommends :

- a) A concerted effort by state and central government agencies to ensure women are properly informed and to help them get their benefits.
- b) Those who could not read had no access to media information, especially on pandemic, employers, medical staff and heads in villages must provide better information to ensure that myth and superstition do not endanger the lives of returning migrants, particularly women who are the usual targets.

About NAWO :

National Alliance of Women (NAWO) is a network of women's groups and institutions, women workers, individual women. NAWO envisions a gender just, democratic and humane society where women and men can in partnership fulfil their responsibility to build a peaceful society .

NAWO plays the role of watchdog for pressuring government to be accountable towards the UN commitments through appropriate government policies and programmes for women. To ensure its mission, NAWO has been working as a policy advocacy group for bringing gender equality through collective action.

National Alliance of Women Odisha Chapter
N-6/474, IRC Village, Jaydev Bihar, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-15
Phone No-0674-2362094, Email.Id:nawoodisha@gmail.com

Policy Brief

On

Impact Of Covid 19 Pandemic On Migrant
Women In India - Visibilizing The Issues
and Concerns of Female Migrant
Workers



National Alliance of Women (NAWO)

The Covid--19 pandemic has impacted people not only on health front, but on all fronts – social, economic and psychological. The impact, for very understandable reasons, has not been uniform for everyone. While clearly women have been impacted differently than men, different sections of women have also been impacted differently.

The sudden and severe lock down measures in India to contain spread of the pandemic exposed the precarity of current labour migration regime within the country. Migrant workers from the cities of India started returning to the villages in their home states. They had lost their jobs almost overnight and in the absence of any savings, they had to deal with hunger and homelessness. Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children were seen walking back home which were hundreds of kilometres away.

With the steady erosion of agrarian economy, many people in India have moved from the countryside to the towns and cities to find employment in the informal sector. The work that internal migrant workers do are wide ranging. Construction, small and medium industries, brick kilns, garment sector, domestic work and many others. The common thread that connects these different types of work is their precarity, temporary nature and lack of state protection. While certain sectors of work such as domestic work and garment sector work have predominantly or exclusively women workers, women also work with men in brick kilns, factories and at construction sites. They also do home based paid work (alongside their unpaid work).

Against this backdrop, National Alliance of Women (NAWO) to understand and highlight the challenges faced by women migrant workers in the wake of Covid-19, social and economic. The study looked into the impact of Covid-19 in both urban and rural context.

Data was collected from 500 women migrant workers covering three states – Jharkhand, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh

In India, the total number of internal migrants, according to the 2011 census, is

45.36 crore or 37% of the country's population.

According to National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) data, in 2008, women made up 80% of the 327.7 million (32.77 crore) migrant population of the country (IDRC-CRDI, 2013) There is no further data available of this large number in terms of the sector of employment, migration routes, pull and push factors, etc. Despite here being such an overwhelming number of female migrants, they have never been considered as a relevant category for which data should be collected in order that a gender balanced policy could be developed.

Patriarchal norms and values force women to work in informal sectors and migrant women are not exceptions. It is roughly estimated that around 93 percent women work in the informal sector, are thus invisible in national accounting, and lack dignity of labour, social security, decent and timely wages and, in cases like domestic work and certain home based work, even the right to be called a 'worker'.

Government of India has many laws and policies for the betterment of workers. But there are hurdles for implementation in terms of information, resources .

In this context, the National Alliance of Women recommendations for Government are :

1. Registration of women migrants

Migration is a complex phenomenon and female migration is usually analyzed through the lens of “independent” or “dependent” migration: their relation to men defines women (for example, as a wife or daughter). They are also defined by their “family role” rather than by their “market role”. This problematic definition of “migration”, and capturing of only one reason for migration during enumeration, and putting most of the female migrants who migrated with family or because of marriage as “associated migrants”, absolutely invisibilizes the migrant female work force, especially those who are married and migrated along with their spouses. Even the seasonal migrants are not counted as migrants under this definition. Recognize migrant women who are involved in informal sector as migrant labourers. In order to recognize the economic role women migrants play,

they need to be registered as migrants and not as associate or dependant. After the pandemic, there was an attempt to register all migrants. However, this must be done systematically and in a gender-disaggregated manner.

2. Effective functioning of migration support centres

The study showed none of the returnee migrants got support from Migrant Facilitation Centres during the pandemic. The Migration Facilitation Centre run by the Odisha Government in Tamil Nadu (Tirupur) does not have an Odia speaking person on the staff. How can the problems of a girl or boy who cannot speak any other language than Odia be understood? Again, if the migration support centres had been running effectively, perhaps the migrants would not have faced such gigantic problems during the pandemic/ lockdown.

Migration support centres in big cities and in industrial areas must work more efficiently and the existence of such centres should be advertised aggressively so that Migrant people, especially women migrants can take advantage of such facilities..

3. Recognizing domestic work as work and including it under labour legislation and ratify ILO convention 189 on decent working condition for Domestic workers

A sizable number of migrant women work as domestic help. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18 estimated that 31.7% of women were engaged as helpers in households. They are absolutely without any social security benefits.

NAWO Recommends a domestic workers' welfare board which should have enough resources to cater to the social security needs of domestic workers.

We also demand for Ratification of the ILO convention 189 on decent working condition for domestic workers.

4. Take steps to augment gainful employment opportunities for women beyond daily wage work under MGNREGS