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Socioeconomic Vulnerabilities of Migrant Labour Households in Delhi

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Abstract

The paper discusses the precarity of employment for vulnerable workers, and the laws and policies meant for protecting the interests of migrants. To provide a more complete picture of the migrants belonging to the marginalized and vulnerable sections, field work was carried out in two slums of Delhi to gauge their socioeconomic conditions, nature of employment, and living conditions. The employment structure in Delhi has also been examined, using secondary data, to gauge the pattern of informal employment. The figures reveal a very sordid picture, as a majority of the workers in Delhi do not have any social security or legal protection of their jobs, and work under terrible conditions. While the social security system has been expanded to cover informal workers, migrant workers are still excluded, as the institutional structure of these schemes is creating problems in being accessible to migrants. All these factors point towards the complete lack of visibility of migrants for decades from the policy framework. There is an urgent need to develop strategies that reduce the vulnerabilities of migrants in the cities and help alleviate their miseries.

Keywords: Migrants, Slumdwellers, Socioeconomic conditions, Vulnerabilities, Informal employment

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1. Introduction

Migration has been an integral part of the development process, particularly in large economies like India. However, the recent Covid pandemic brought to the fore the structural inadequacies in dealing with the problems encountered by low-skilled migrant workers. The vulnerability and insecurity of the migrant population during the pandemic revealed how the country's social protection system does not meet the requirements of migrant workers, who are a part of India's informal economy. It also highlights the need for putting in place sustained policy measures for generating robust data on migrant flows, understanding the characteristics of labour migration, and improving the access of migrant workers to social security schemes in order to maximise the developmental outcomes of migration.

In this context, this study attempts to show the social security issues for migrant labour households in Delhi, which is one of the major destinations for migrant workers in India. To understand the key concerns of the migrants, a field study was carried out in two slums of Delhi in 2018, to explore the living and working conditions of migrants, including their access to basic facilities and social security. Though the findings of the survey may not be easily generalised for all the slums in Delhi, they will help in examining the nature of employment, living conditions, and some of the major concerns of migrants living in the slums.

The main secondary data sources on internal migration in the country have been the Census of India and the National Sample Surveys. Additionally, the fourth annual report of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) that was released on 14 June 2022 by the National Statistical Office (NSO) also gives data on the employment situation, and additional data on consumer expenditure and migration. This has been a key data source for migration, as the 64th round of the NSS and the Census 2011 data seemed to be outdated when there was a mass movement of migrant workers during the pandemic following the lockdown announced by the government.

Along with this, some private organisations also collected data on migrants, as there had been no official data collection on migrants till 2020 (Srivastav, 2022). The PLFS 2020-21 collected data on the reasons for migration, the impact of Covid on migrants, and also tried to differentiate between Covid-induced migrants and migrant workers.

The problem with Census and NSS data is that they are best suited to capture permanent migration, and hence underestimate labour mobility (Srivastava, 1998). Though the NSSO did try to collect data on short-term migration (by asking if any person was away for more than a month but less than six months), there were divergences in the macro data and field studies. Hence, due to lack of data, a lot of migration ends up being invisible.

Other than these sources, there have also been several micro studies of migration, such as the India Human Development Surveys (IHDS), Kerala migration surveys, etc. These help in understanding the volume and extent of internal migration. Many of these studies have reflected on the idea of social networks and raised questions on the inability of migrants to progress in the direction of upward

mobility (Rajan, 2020). Rajan (2020) highlights how most micro studies give an idea of the labour conditions, working conditions, wages, remittances, etc to better understand internal migration. But these micro studies have been limited to specific regions. In order to get a macro perspective of migration, there is a need to conduct regular migration surveys at an all-India level.

An analysis of migration trends in the country shows rising migration after 1991, with employment opportunities reducing in the rural areas. There has been a rise in the migration to urban areas that offer more economic opportunities, and a decline in the migration to rural areas. Between 1991-2011, approximately, 50 per cent male migrants from rural areas belonged to the prime working age group of 15-39 years, revealing a lack of avenues for work in the rural areas.

With economic opportunities improving after 1980s, the costs of migrating have been lower than the benefits or economic gains from migration. The Economic Survey of 2016-17 has highlighted how the rate of growth of labour migrants doubled, from 2.4% in 1991-2001 to 4.5% in 2001-11 based on Census estimates; meanwhile, workforce growth fell from 2.4% in 1991-2001 to 1.8% in 2001-11. Hence, the share of migrants in the workforce increased in 2001-11, compared to the previous decade.

In the case of Delhi as well, there was a rise in the migration in the period 1991-2001. Most male migrants come to Delhi in search of employment. A large percentage of the migrants to Delhi were from rural areas, though over time there was a rise in the proportion of migrants from other urban areas to Delhi. While 27.3% cent males migrated in search of employment in India as a whole, the corresponding figure for Delhi was 54.9% in Census 2011. As per Census 2011, 67% of the migrants who had come to Delhi to seek employment were from the states of U.P. and Bihar.

Rapid growth and development in Delhi has led to migration of people from rural, semi- rural areas, and urban areas into the secondary and tertiary sectors. The age profile of the migrants shows that 52.3% of the male migrants who arrived in Delhi in the period 2001-2011 were in the age group of 20-39 years. Also, a higher proportion of dependent population has been migrating to Delhi suggesting that people have not migrated out of distress. However, the high proportion of unemployed youth migrating to Delhi in the 1990s is a cause of concern, as it points towards the agrarian crisis facing the rural areas in the neo-liberal regime.

The employment trends in the country, and specifically in Delhi, show a sordid picture with a high level of informality of employment. The highly-urbanised nature of Delhi has put a lot of pressure on the civic infrastructure like water supply, solid waste management, sanitation, affordable housing, and services like health and educational facilities. According to Census 2011, 1.8 million people resided in slums in Delhi, which accounted for 10.6% of the population of NCT of Delhi.

Migration today is seen as a key factor contributing to urban surplus labour and urban unemployment problems. Though unemployment rates have decreased over time, these quantitative improvements do not signify an improvement in the quality of jobs as well. In some cases, decline in the unemployment rates could also be due to decline in labour force participation rates because of inadequate job creation and the 'discouraged worker effect'.

In poor economies, unemployment is not an option; they are often characterised by disguised unemployment or underemployment (Jha, 2016). Due to a dearth of opportunities in the formal sector, migrants join the informal sector, which consists of a wide range of activities. Informal sector workers earn low income, lack social security, and have limited possibilities of growth, forcing these workers to be stuck in menial jobs. However, it is difficult to ignore its role in enabling a substantial proportion of the population in escaping poverty, by providing them with a means of survival.

Migrants often face barriers in accessing housing, employment and other civic amenities (Bhagat, 2017). While it is true that migrants add to the presence of slums in the cities, it is also equally true that they have limited options for housing in the cities. Squatter settlements have now become a distinct feature of cities today. The slums in the cities are marked by squalor, overcrowded spaces, lack of water and sanitation facilities, poor housing, poor hygiene conditions, filth, and deprivation on many counts. Yet, these serve as the homes of people who are primarily engaged in informal work with limited social and job security.

Inclusive cities are an essential part of development agenda, to improve the socio-economic condition of citizens. Urban areas have been seen as investment hubs to improve the standard of living of the people residing there. Programmes like 'Make in India' and 'Skill India' are aimed at creating an increase in employment opportunities. However, there are deficits in infrastructure and sustainable development. Rapid urbanisation has led to a pressure on the dwindling civic amenities in the cities.

A substantial proportion of the migrant population in urban areas is attracted by economic opportunities, massive industrialisation, and better educational facilities in the metropolitan cities – which are already grappling with the problems of overcrowding. There is a need for inclusive political, institutions with state action to provide public goods such as universal education and healthcare, to reduce disparities or deprivations caused by inequalities. Socio-economic inequalities have increased, and there is a need to overhaul policies to serve the interests of the poor and marginalised.

The following sections of this paper are organised as follows: Section II is based on the field study, and examines the key concerns of the migrants in the slums with regard to their employment and living conditions. Section III discusses the precarity of employment for workers in Delhi. Section IV highlights the laws and policies meant for protecting the interests of migrant workers. Finally, the last section concludes the analysis by focusing on how Covid-19 affected the migrants in the country, and how vulnerable they were during the pandemic.

2. Inclusive Migrant Policies based on a Field Study in Delhi

In 2012, about 6,343 slums were in existence in urban Delhi, with approximately 10.2 lakh households residing in them (NSS, 2012-13). Approximately 29% of the slums had 20-60 households residing in them, and 71% slums had more than 60 households. The average households per slum was

161. Approximately 90% of the slums are on public land. As per Census 2011, 1.8 million persons – or 10.6% of the population of the NCT of Delhi – were living in slums.

Against this backdrop, and in order to provide a more complete picture of the migrants belonging to the marginalized and vulnerable sections in the NCT of Delhi, field work was carried out in June-November 2018 in two slums of Delhi, namely Kusumpur Pahari and Trilokpuri, using convenience sampling. The households chosen for the field survey were the ones where the head of the household was a migrant as defined by the 'place of birth' criterion of the Census. A total of 300 migrant households were interviewed, with 150 households selected at random from each of the two slums. Some of the key questions that were sought to be answered were regarding the socioeconomic conditions, the nature of employment, and living conditions of the migrants and their households.

The findings of the survey may not be representative of the entire slum population in the city, and cannot be generalised to represent all the migrant population in the city. In many cases, the findings in this survey may contradict some of the results of other studies. This is possible as the slums in Delhi are not homogenous; they differ in terms of the composition of their residents, their socio-economic profiles, and their problems. However, it does highlight some of the key concerns of the migrants living in the slums.

The typical migrant on arrival was young, and mostly compelled to migrate due to a paucity of employment opportunities in the rural areas. Informal networks helped rural migrants to access urban job market information. But the nature of employment of the migrants in the survey was primarily of a temporary nature. A majority of the slumdwellers did not receive the minimum wages as mandated by the government. They had little job security, and very limited scope for an improvement in their condition. Most of the migrant households in the slums were also found to live in miserable conditions, with limited access to basic amenities. Often, the migrants are excluded from various social welfare schemes of the government, due to a lack of residence proof, or a lack of awareness of the social welfare schemes.

2.1 Socioeconomic conditions

The socioeconomic characteristics that affect the wellbeing of the households are age composition, education, duration of migration, income of the household, and the availability of a token card (any form of recognised identity card). The surveyed slums have a relatively younger population group, and 96 percent of the heads of the households were in the 20-60 year age group, with a higher percentage of male than female migrants.

The higher number of males can be explained by the fact that it is primarily the male members who migrate, and the survey only covered migrant households. In some cases, only the male member migrates and stays in the city, while the spouse and other family members continue to reside in the rural areas. Longitudinal surveys in Bihar have revealed how most migration is circular, with the males migrating alone and aspiring to return to the villages after their working life.

In terms of education, 16% of the heads of the household in the survey were illiterate, and 60% had not passed the secondary level. The dismal education status of the heads of households in the slums gives an indication of the level of living of the people.

Income is one of the most important determinants of the socio-economic position of the migrant families. It is affected by several factors such as education levels of family members, nature of employment, years since they migrated, gender and age of the head of the household, caste, religion, number of dependent family members and the number of working members. There are variations in the level of income of the different migrants.

Another factor affecting the well-being of migrants is the duration of migration. There is a common notion that as the duration of migration increases, the migrants rise in the socio-economic ladder. While a study by Mitra (2006) has revealed an absence of a significant relationship between well-being and duration of migration, the field survey shows a significant value of the Chi-square statistic, indicating the presence of a significant relationship between the duration of migration and the level of per capita household income (

Table 1).

Table 1: Years of Migration and Average Household Per Capita Income (PCI)

Years of Migration	Number of households	Household PCI
0-1 years	2	1876.19
1-5 years	17	3458.33
5-10 years	30	4153.06
10-15 years	34	3508.33
Above 15 years	217	3905.15

Source: Field Survey

$\chi 2$=577.098, Significant, (p=0.000), p<0.05

The lowest PCI is of those households who migrated less than a year ago or less than five years ago. This can be explained by the fact that these households do not have secure employment, are mostly living in rented accommodations, do not have ration cards, and are not able to avail of the government's welfare schemes due to an absence of address proof.

Many migrants are excluded from various social welfare schemes of the government due to a lack of residence proof. Often, migrants do not have an address proof, which does not allow them to benefit from various schemes related to food security, free schooling, and cooking gas connections. Due to the importance of having identity proofs as a precondition to be a part of social sector schemes, the field survey asked migrants which documents they possessed for Delhi. It was observed in the field

survey that only 60 per cent of the migrants had a ration card of Delhi, 77.3 per cent had a voter card for Delhi and 86.7 per cent had an Aadhar card for Delhi.

It was found that often migrants faced problems in accessing the benefits provided to them under the National Food Security Act, 2013. It was observed in the field survey that only 60% of the migrants in the sample had access to subsidised food grains, while 21% were entitled to subsidised ration in their native places only, and 20% did not possess a ration card.

The One Nation, One Ration Card (ONORC) Scheme became operational in 2021. At the time of the survey in 2018, due to lack of PDS portability of benefits, migrants were unable to purchase subsidised ration in Delhi if they had ration cards from their native places. However, studies have shown that despite the ONORC scheme, technology failures at Fair Price Shops, fear of stockouts, and the unwillingness of PDS dealers to use any exception-handling mechanism in case of technology failure are some of the key reasons for denial of service (Nayak and Nehra, 2017).

The migrants who have recently moved into the city, and are living in most deplorable conditions are often the ones who are deprived of these benefits. To make ONORC more meaningful and inclusive, there is a need to create more awareness about the possibility of portability of benefits across states, and have technology upgradation for the PDS dealers.

2.2 Employment status of migrants

Employment is a key measure of the well-being of migrants, as it is a primary reason for their migration. There was a rise in the proportion of men migrating for employment, from 30% in Census 1991 to 37% in Census 2001 at the all-India level. However, this figure went down to 27% in Census 2011.

In the field survey, nearly 80% of the migrant heads of households had migrated in order to secure "Employment". More than 54% of the migrants in the field survey worked as farmers on their own land in rural areas prior to migration; another 20% were unemployed before migrating, indicating the lack of avenues for regular employment in rural areas. This explains why people choose to migrate to urban areas. While 37.3% of those who migrated more than 10 years ago were farmers before migrating, this number had increased to 58.8% for those who moved less than five years ago.

Table 2: Occupational Status before migration

Occupation Before Migration	Percentage
Farmer	54.3
Labour	20.3
Small Business	5.4
Unemployed	20
Total	100

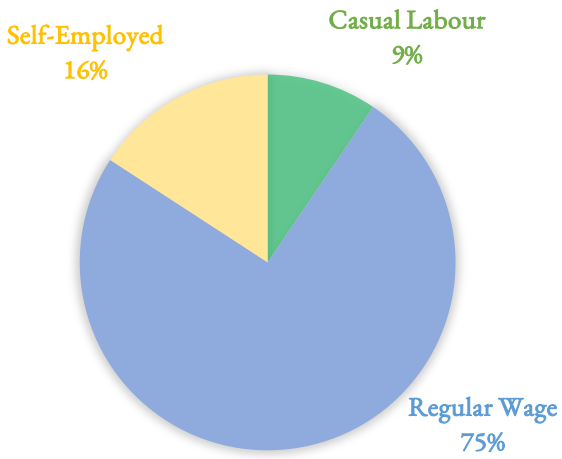
As per Thomas (2020), there has been a gradual movement away from agriculture, with young people being anxious to move away from rural areas. There was a fall in the employment in the agricultural and allied sectors (percentage of workers in agriculture and allied activities to total workers), from 64% in 1993 to 56.5% in 2004-05, 47.5% in 2011-12 based on NSS data, and 41.9% in 2017-18 as per PLFS.

Studies highlight how the construction and service sectors have been attracting people out of agriculture. One finds using data from various rounds of NSS and PLFS, that the share of construction in employment was 3.2% in 1993, 2.2% in 2005, and increased to 10.6% in 2011 and 11.6% in 2018. The manufacturing sector is increasingly becoming more capital intensive, and has not been able to provide a source of employment for people moving out of agriculture. Thomas (2020) has pointed out that, based on NSSO and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data, the manufacturing employment declined from 61.3 million in 2011-12 to 60.3 million in 2017-18 (even as the overall size of the workforce and working-age population increased).

Concerns have been expressed about not only the high level of unemployment, but also the poor quality of employment, as a large proportion of the jobs created require low levels of skill and give commensurately low returns. Most of the employment is contractual, offering little job security to the workers.

In order to gather information about the employment status of each household member in the field survey, a six-fold classification was made. The categories were – casual labour, regular wage, self-employed, unemployed, student, and home-maker / voluntarily unemployed. Nearly 66% of the heads of the households were employed earning regular wages, 12% were working as casual labour, and 19% were self-employed. A smaller proportion were unemployed (0.7%) or voluntarily unemployed (1.3%).

Figure 1: Nature of Employment



Source: Field Survey

A substantial proportion of the migrants (75%) were employed as regular wage earners. Around 16% were self-employed, and only 9% worked as casual labour. However, a closer look at the working conditions is necessary to be able to understand the access to various social security measures.

Nearly 9% of the respondents to the survey worked as casual labour in various capacities, such as carpenter, painter, labour, mistry, etc. The working conditions of the casual labour in the field survey paints a very grim picture of their terms of employment.

- Approximately half (53.3%) of these workers visited the labour market on a regular basis;
- The average waiting time for a job was 2.22 days;
- 71% of them were working on an independent basis, without a contractor;
- All respondents who were working as casual labour earned daily wages; the average wages per day is a measly 413.33 rupees.
- Being a member of a trade union improves the bargaining position of the workers, however, none of the people working as casual labour were members of trade unions.

Table 3: Casual Labour profile

	Frequency
Visit labour market regularly	53.3%
Average waiting time	2.2 days
Working with a contractor	29%
Average daily wages	413.3 rupees
Average monthly wages	9789 rupees
Member of trade union	Nil

Source: Field Survey

A majority of the migrants receive regular wage or salaries. This is a broad category; it includes skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled people employed in private organisations in various capacities, such as cooks, tailors, load pickers, peons, accountants, office assistants, office boys, data entry operators, and helpers in shops.

Out of 354 persons who worked as regular wage employees, 332 people were regularly employed, and 22 were contractually employed (**Table 4**). Though only 6% were contractually employed, approximately 90% of the sample could be removed from their jobs without any notice. This is an indication of the temporary nature of employment for a majority of the people, even those who receive regular wages.

Table 4: Regular Wage Employees Profile

Proportion of contractually employed	6%
Could be removed without notice	90%
Received bonus/extra payment	10.1%
Received pension/ PF/ Retirement benefits	16%

The category, 'Self-Employment' includes people working on their own. This broadly includes people employed in petty trade and vending, services, and transport. The self-employed operate their enterprises in different circumstances. While 56% operated their enterprise outside their homes and in the open air, 35% operated outside their homes but in closed surroundings, and 9% were operating from home.

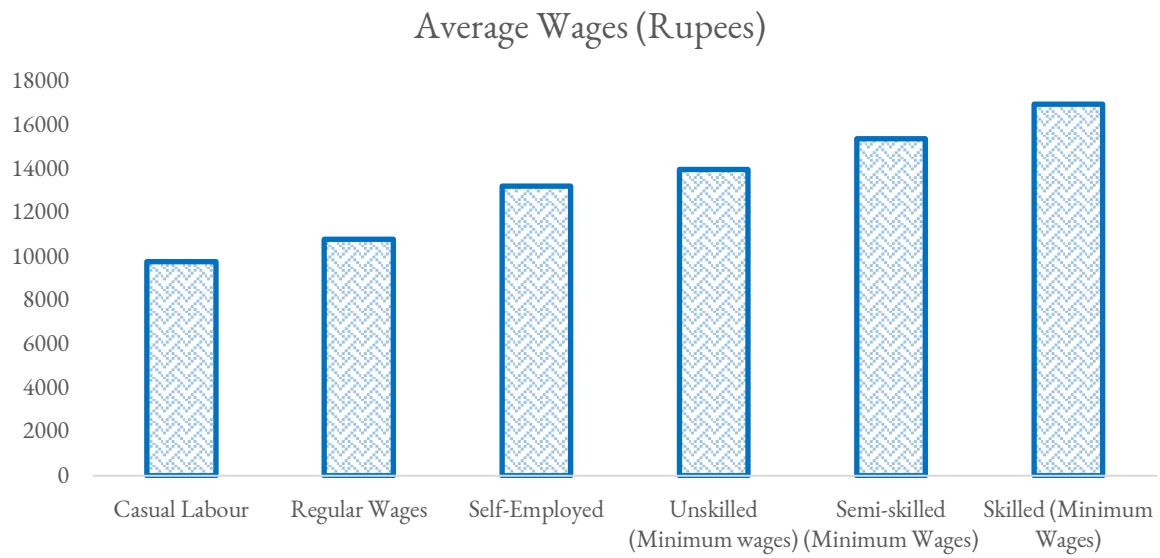
Often, the person involved in running the enterprise is assisted by other family members as well. They work in different capacities, such as employee or helper. Only 12% of the self-employed were a part of any trade union or workers' association that can help them in collective bargaining for their rights. These 12% are primarily auto drivers or taxi drivers.

Incidentally, none of the respondents who were self-employed were assisted by the government in any way in setting up their enterprise. This can also be understood when one sees that only 2 respondents were aware of skill training and credit societies under the Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY). The unawareness of the people regarding the various employment assistance schemes of the government is the primary reason for people not being able to benefit from them.

It is important to make a comparison of the average wages earned in the different employment categories.

Figure 2 has made a comparison of the average wages earned by casual labour, regular wage employees, and self-employed persons. These have been compared with the minimum wages mandated by the Delhi Government. The minimum wages specified by the government vary depending on the skill level. It is evident that the average wages earned by each of the categories of labour are well below those mandated by the government, even for unskilled labour. This shows the disparity in income actually earned by people versus the mandated wages.

Figure 1: Comparison of Average Wages



Source: Field Survey; Labour Department, NCTD

The growth in post-1991 period has been largely jobless (Kannan *et al.,* 2009; Aggarwal, 2016) with only a few sectors experiencing employment growth with low employment elasticity, use of temporary and contract workers. While a majority of the migrants receive regular wages, they are employed in the informal sector, or informally employed in the formal sector. Informal workers are excluded from any kind of social protection and legal security that workers in the formal sector are entitled to. The wages and employment benefits of informal sector workers are much lower than formal sector workers.

Papola and Sharma (2015) have shown that, since 1991, there has been a tendency to employ contract workers instead of regular ones, as it is advantageous for the employers. Contract workers make production flexible as their numbers can be varied, they are not a part of labour unions, can be paid lower wages, and are not entitled to non-wage benefits that regular workers enjoy. Other field studies have also shown similar results about the level of informality of work in developing countries.

Middlemen often play an important role in mediating employment. Their role varies across the countries. A survey in developing countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, and India revealed the role of contractors or intermediaries due to the localized nature of the job market (Srivastava *et al.*, 2014). There were differences in the mode of payment of migrant workers who accessed employment through contractors.

3. Precarity of employment in Delhi

The glamourous lifestyle of Delhi attracts people, adding to the pressure on the service providers of health, water, housing and education. Delhi, which is mostly urban, has had a substantial manufacturing sector and retail sector growth. This has made it one of the favourite destinations for young adults looking for work, from all over the country.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the population of Delhi was a mere 0.2 million. After independence, there was a sudden rise in the population of Delhi when in 1951, the population crossed a million to reach 1.4 million. Since 1951, the population growth of Delhi has been very high, nearly doubling from 8.5 million in 1991 to 16.3 million in 2011, with 40% of them being migrants.

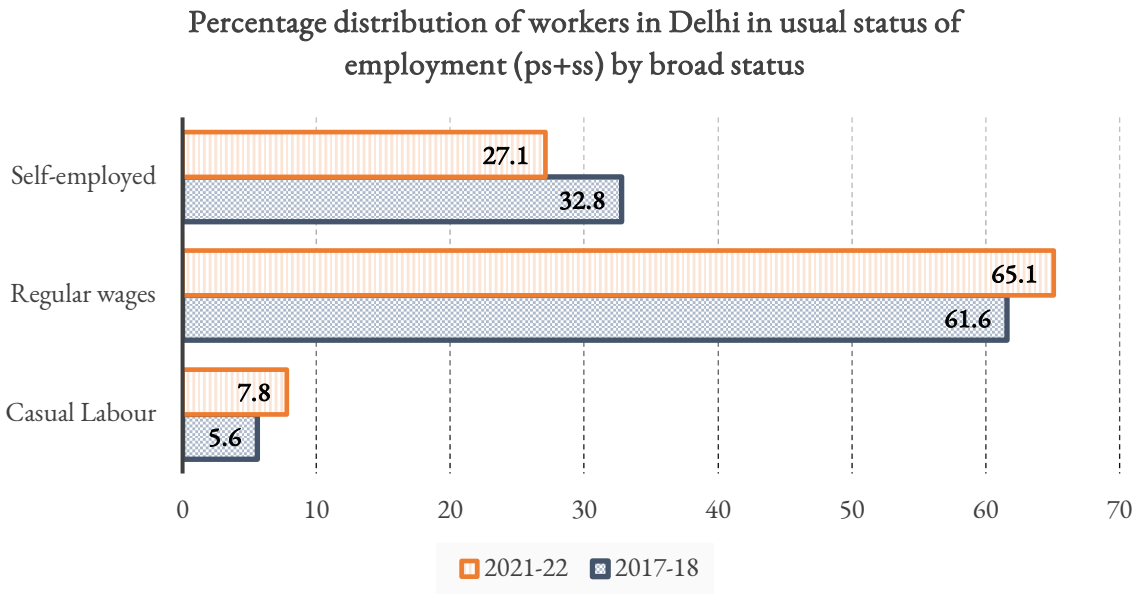
Approximately 12% of Delhi's population lives in slums (Census 2011). This figure is alarming, as Delhi has been contending as a smart city or a globalised metropolitan city. A survey by Das and Bhusan (2017) in 13 slums of Delhi revealed that 95% of the slumdwellers were migrants. Of the remaining 5% who were not migrants, it is said that though they were not first-generation migrants, their ancestors might have been migrants.

The employment structure in Delhi has been examined in this section based on the PLFS 2021-22 to gauge the pattern of employment for the workers in Delhi, as there is no specific data on the employment status of migrants in the city. The economic structure of Delhi has been largely based on the tertiary sector. As per the PLFS 2021-22, the tertiary sector accounted for providing employment to 60.2% of workers, followed by the secondary sector at 35.5% and the primary sector at 4.3%, according to the current weekly status by broad industry of work.

A comparison of the PLFS data for 2017-18 and 2021-22 based on the distribution of workers in usual status of employment (ps+ss) is explained in Figure 3, which reveals that there was a rise in the proportion of regular wage workers and casual labour, and a decline in the self-employed workers.

Despite a substantive proportion of the workers earning regular wages, the nature of their employment has been largely informal, with no security of tenure. In order to have an idea about the extent of informal employment among the workers in Delhi; data was collected as part of the PLFS on the conditions of employment of the regular wage workers in usual status (ps+ss) in the non-agricultural sector in 2017-18 and 2021-22. Information was collected on whether they had any written contract, paid leave or social security benefit.

Figure 2: Percentage distribution of workers in Delhi in usual status of employment (ps+ss) by broad status in 2017-18 and 2021-22



Source: PLFS, 2017-18 and 2021-22

Data revealed a very dismal state of workers when it comes to security of tenure, as revealed in Table 5. A matter of concern is the rising level of informality of employment in India. While there was a decline in the proportion of regular wage workers who did not have a written job contract, from 65.3% in 2017-18 to 46.8% in 2021-22, there was a rise in the proportion of workers who were not eligible for paid leave. There was a substantial rise in the workers who had no written job contract, were not eligible for paid leave, and did not have a social security benefit – from 31.6% to 45.7%.

The figures in the table reveal a very sordid picture for a majority of the workers in Delhi. A majority of the workers do not have any social security or legal protection of their jobs, and work under terrible conditions. Such workers suffer the most in the event of any economic crisis, as they are the first ones to lose their jobs. It is imperative to put in place a growth process that is based on the principles of equality and inclusivity in labour market outcomes. Some of the interventions need to focus on livelihood protection for a large mass of the population.

Table 5: Conditions of employment of regular wage workers in Delhi

	2017-18		2021-22	
	Males	Total	Males	Total
No written job contract (%)	66.9	65.3	42.4	46.8
Not eligible for paid leave (%)	44.8	44.6	44.8	48.9
Without any social security benefit (%)	57	56.7	52.8	55.9
Not eligible for paid leave, without written job contract and without any social security benefit (%)	31.5	31.6	41.1	45.7

Source: PLFS, 2017-18 and 2021-22

4. Laws and Policies for the Protection of Migrants

The migrant crisis during the Covid pandemic revealed how the country's social protection system does not meet the requirements of the migrant workers who are a part of India's informal economy. While social security systems have been expanded to cover informal workers, migrant workers are still excluded, as the institutional structure of these schemes is creating problems in being accessible to migrants (Srivastava, 2020).

This was prominent in the pandemic when the migrants were the worst affected in the country. Rajan (2020) points out that internal migration in India has been low, due to non-portability of benefits, and constraints on jobs because of domicility restrictions. It was only in 2019 that the government realized the need for 'One Nation, One Ration Card' to bring about ration card portability. All these factors point towards the complete lack of visibility of the migrants for decades from the policy framework.

Srivastava (2020) has pointed out that there are some fundamental issues regarding the implementation of the social protection programmes. They are primarily based on domicile, and are targeted for a certain section of the population. Also, the implementation of many of these programmes varies across the states.

Till recently, social security has been primarily limited to the formal sector. Though social security has been expanded to cover the informal sector, it is yet to reach the migrants, who remain neglected due to institutional barriers (Rajan *et al.*, 2020). Many provisions, which are available to in-state informal workers due to their domicile status, are not available to the migrant workers (Rajan, 2020).

Due to rising informality of work, many organisations are outside the purview of formal oversight structures. Hence, the workers are not protected by any social benefits or legislation. Many of the Acts are limited in their application. India has not yet become a signatory to ILO Convention No. 102, which guarantees social security benefits to all workers.

Most of the problems of the migrant workers in India are covered by law, as they are for other workers. However, implementation of most of the labour laws has been limited. There is only one law, namely, the Inter-State Migrant Workmen's Act (ISMWA), 1979 which was formulated to safeguard the interests of migrant workers and provide for their conditions of service.

The ISMW Act was enacted because it was felt that the Contract Labour Act did not adequately protect the interests of the workers. However, the Act is poorly implemented, as it only covers those migrant workers who came through a contractor. This definition is discriminatory, as it does not include in its purview those who left rural areas in a more distressed condition without a contractor, relying on informal contacts or kinship ties, which have a key role in helping migrants secure employment.

Similarly, only those who are formally employed are covered by the Act. However, many inter-state migrants are employed in petty economic activities or are self-employed. In all such cases, the ISMW Act is not applicable. Finally, this Act only covers inter-state migrants, leaving a significant proportion of the migrant population (who may be intra-state migrants) outside its purview. The field survey showed that none of the migrant heads of households came to Delhi through a contractor, and were thus outside the purview of the ISMW Act.

The enforcement of this Act and other labour protection laws lies with the union and state governments. However, enforcement of these laws has been limited, with most laws only being on paper. Often, there are no records of migrant workers, and the inspections carried out are also limited. There have also been gross violations of these laws in several cases.

Recently, the 44 labour laws have been proposed to be subsumed into four labour codes, with an aim to provide more flexibility to industries in employment. The government has hoped that through the Labour Codes, there would be more flexibility given to industries and an increase in the ease of doing business. Lawmakers have supported the demands of the employers in introducing the codes in the name of improving the ease of doing business and increasing investment by raising labour flexibility. However, this move has drawn criticism from several quarters, as it is felt that labour flexibility should be supplemented by universal social protection. The existing labour legislation needs to be strengthened by improving its enforcement, rather than legitimising labour cheapening.

5. Conclusion

There is primarily no social security net to address the problems faced by migrants at the places of destination. The lockdown showed the vulnerability of the urban poor, as they were the worst affected. Many of the informal migrant workers faced multiple hardships and had to even leave the city at a few hours' notice, as they were unable to bear basic living expenses such as rent and food. This highlights the need to develop strategies that reduce the vulnerabilities of the migrants in the cities and help alleviate their miseries.

A significant proportion of people are employed in the informal sector in India, and without any social protection. There is also a need to integrate migrant labour with local labour to ensure that they are paid the wages as per the minimum wage legislation. Though there have been several social security schemes by the government for the informal workers, they have achieved limited success.

People always migrate due to certain similar conditions like poverty, slavery, forced migration, war, expulsion, and labour demand caused by capitalist development. Often, labour migration is not only a response to labour scarcity, but a labour control strategy, which is a key feature of the development of capitalist accumulation.

In India as well, massive migration to the urban areas started with the development of modern enterprises. Capitalists prefer to use inter-state and intra-state migrant labour for better labour control, than surplus local labour. The poor living conditions of the migrants in urban areas, with no safety net, points at the inadequacies of migration in improving the well-being of the migrants. It ends up being a survival strategy for them, given their pauperisation in the places of origin. There is an urgent need to address the problems faced by migrants, by having a social security net for them at the places of destination.

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