

# UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY MIGRATION: CHALLENGES, IMPACTS, AND RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF BIHAR AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## Abstract

Migration is an enduring facet of human history, shaping societies and economies worldwide. This research paper presents a comprehensive exploration of contemporary migration dynamics, with a focus on the state of Bihar, India, and its migrant population. It examines the driving forces behind migration, the diverse impacts on origin and destination regions, and the policy responses amid the backdrop of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. The paper delves into the theoretical underpinnings of migration, drawing insights from seminal works such as "The Age of Migration" by Castles, de Haas, and Miller, and "Theories of Migration: A Review" by Massey et al. By synthesizing these perspectives, the study highlights the diverse factors that influence migration decisions, ranging from economic disparities to social networks and environmental changes.

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the study examines the challenges faced by migrant workers during the lockdown, both in terms of loss of livelihoods and their subsequent journeys back to Bihar. It discusses the resilience demonstrated by both the migrant population and the Bihar government in coping with the crisis. Furthermore, the state's response in providing relief measures, digital platforms, and reimagining policies for migrant welfare is discussed. The abstract concludes by highlighting the significance of this research in promoting informed policies that acknowledge the complexities of migration and foster

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inclusive and sustainable approaches. By examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration patterns and responses, the study sheds light on the challenges faced by both migrants and the state. It underscores the need for evidence-based policies that not only protect the rights and well-being of migrants but also harness their potential for the overall development of Bihar. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on contemporary migration and inform strategies that ensure the well-being and resilience of migrant populations in a rapidly changing world.

**Keywords:** Contemporary Migration, COVID-19 pandemic, Challenges, Impact,

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, migration has emerged as a defining aspect of the contemporary human experience. People from different corners of the globe are traversing borders in search of new opportunities, safety, and a better quality of life. The dynamics of migration have evolved significantly over the years, shaped by complex social, economic, political, and environmental forces. As societies grapple with the implications of these population movements, understanding the multifaceted nature of migration becomes paramount.

This paper aims to shed light on the intricacies of contemporary migration patterns, the diverse impacts it has on both origin and destination regions, and the evolving policy responses adopted by nations worldwide. The study is motivated by the recognition that migration, while presenting numerous challenges, also offers immense opportunities for individuals and societies alike. As such, a comprehensive understanding of migration is essential for devising informed and effective policies that harness its potential and address its associated challenges.

Moving forward, the paper delves into the economic sociology of immigration, as proposed by Portes, which underscores the significance of social capital and networks within migrant communities. Additionally, the impact of migration on destination societies, particularly in the European Union, is analyzed using Boswell and Geddes' work on asylum seekers and refugee policies. With a specific focus on Bihar migration, the study evaluates the determinants of international migration, as outlined in the research by Hanson and McIntosh. This segment uncovers the push and pull factors influencing migration trends, including armed conflicts, economic opportunities, and social ties, which are crucial in understanding the patterns of migration from Bihar to other parts of India. Moreover, the research addresses the intersectionality of migration by exploring the gender implications, as presented in Kofman and Raghuram's paper. Understanding the distinct experiences of migrant women and their contributions to the migration process is imperative in formulating gender-sensitive policies that address their unique challenges and potentials.

## II. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

The scope of this paper encompasses a wide range of topics related to contemporary migration. It delves into the factors that drive migration, including economic disparities, environmental changes, and social networks, among others. By exploring the determinants of migration, the study seeks to identify key drivers and understand the patterns that emerge in response to various push and pull factors.

Furthermore, the paper examines the diverse impacts of migration on origin and destination societies. It delves into the social, economic, cultural, and political consequences of migration, with a particular focus on the experiences of migrants and the communities they become a part of. The paper also considers the role of remittances, cultural exchange, and transnational connections in shaping the outcomes of migration processes.

In addition to analyzing the complexities of contemporary migration, the paper assesses the evolving policy responses of governments and international organizations. Understanding the range of policy approaches, from restrictive measures to inclusive and rights-based frameworks, is crucial for evaluating their effectiveness in managing migration flows, promoting integration, and safeguarding the rights of migrants.

### **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Migration is a phenomenon that has shaped human societies for centuries, influencing cultures, economies, and politics worldwide. This dissertation aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of migration by conducting a literature review that synthesizes key concepts, theories, and empirical findings from influential papers on the subject. The selected papers cover a diverse range of topics related to migration, such as historical patterns, determinants, transnationalism, gender implications, and policy responses.

The seminal work by Castles, de Haas, and Miller, "The Age of Migration," provides a foundational understanding of international migration. By analyzing historical trends and contemporary patterns, the authors present a comprehensive view of migration's evolution, influencing factors, and global significance. The book's emphasis on both the macro and micro perspectives of migration sets the stage for the subsequent papers, providing a broader context for understanding this complex phenomenon.

Portes' work on the economic sociology of immigration delves into the role of immigrant networks, ethnicity, and entrepreneurship in shaping migration experiences. The study offers valuable insights into how social capital within immigrant communities influences the migration process, economic adaptation, and social integration. This paper provides a lens to examine the multifaceted nature of migration beyond economic factors, highlighting the importance of social ties and community support.

Focusing on the European Union's policies concerning refugees and asylum seekers, Boswell and Geddes' research sheds light on the complexities of addressing migration flows. The paper analyzes the challenges faced by the EU in managing migration, including legal and humanitarian considerations. Understanding EU policies and their implications is crucial for comprehending the broader dynamics of migration governance in regional and global contexts.

Kofman and Raghuram's work highlights the significance of gender in understanding migration. This paper emphasizes how migration experiences differ for men and women and how gender roles and social reproduction are impacted. The study offers critical insights into the vulnerabilities and strengths of migrant women, calling for gender-sensitive policies and practices in migration governance.

### **IV. METHODOLOGY**

This research paper adopts a mixed-method approach to explore contemporary migration phenomena. It synthesizes existing literature from diverse academic disciplines, including sociology, economics, political science, and geography, to provide a comprehensive overview of migration dynamics. By drawing on empirical studies, policy analyses, and case

studies from different regions, the study endeavours to present a well-rounded understanding of the complexities and nuances inherent in migration processes.

## V. MIGRATION: CONCEPT, VARIANTS AND IMPACTS

Migration represents the third influential factor contributing to population changes, the others being the birth rate and death rate. Unlike birth and death rates, migration uniquely shapes population size. It's distinct from biological occurrences like births and deaths, instead being influenced by social, cultural, economic, and political factors. Migration is determined by individual or group decisions. Unlike shifts in birth and death rates, which have limited effects on population size and structure, migration can lead to extensive alterations in these aspects.

Furthermore, understanding migration is of paramount importance as birth rates, death rates, and migration collectively determine population size, growth rate, and thus population structure. Additionally, migration significantly influences population distribution and labour availability within a nation. This makes the study of migration valuable for governmental, economic, sociological, political, and demographic policy-making. Migration also reflects trends in societal transformation. Historically, during industrialization and economic progress, people moved from rural to urban areas, from villages to cities, and even across countries. Modern times witness substantial migration from rural to urban regions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America due to technological advancements.

Economists are drawn to studying migration due to its impact on the supply of skilled and semi-skilled labour, industrial development, and alterations in employment structures for migrants. Crafting economic policies is closely linked to migration's effects on a country's social and economic advancement.

One significant outcome of population growth in developing countries, like India, is the considerable internal migration resulting from industrialization and economic growth. This migration has garnered attention from planners and economic policy creators. Thus, migration is a demographic occurrence, with long-term implications for the socio-economic and cultural progress of regions and countries. Migration involves the movement of people between regions or countries. It signifies changing one's place of residence to settle permanently in a new area or country. As per the United Nations Demographic Dictionary, migration encompasses individuals relocating from one geographical area to another. If people leave their original residence to permanently settle elsewhere, this process is termed migration. Migration can be either permanent or temporary, with intentions to return to the place of origin in the future.

## VI. TYPES OF MIGRATION

Migration takes several forms:

- 1. Immigration and Emigration:** Immigration refers to individuals moving permanently from one country to another, such as Indians moving to America. For the U.S., this is immigration, while for India, it's emigration.

2. **In-migration and Out-migration:** In-migration denotes migration within a specific area, while out-migration involves leaving that area. Both are internal migrations occurring within a country. Migrating from Bihar to Bengal is in-migration for Bengal but out-migration for Bihar.
3. **Gross and Net Migration:** Gross migration signifies the total number of people entering and leaving a country for residence during a specific period. Net migration is the difference between the total incoming and outgoing individuals during that period.
4. **Internal Migration and External Migration:** Internal migration denotes movement within a country, between states or regions. External or international migration involves people moving from one country to another for permanent settlement.

## VII. KEY CONCEPTS OF MIGRATION:

In addition to the types, migration involves the following concepts:

1. **Migration Stream:** Migration stream refers to the total number of people migrating from one region or country to another during a specific period. It involves movement from a common origin area to a common destination area for instance, the migration of Indians to America within a given timeframe.
2. **Migration Interval:** Migration may occur over an extended period. To accurately measure it, data should be divided into intervals of one to five or more years. These periods are termed migration intervals.
3. **Place of Origin and Place of Destination:** The place left behind is the place of origin, and the person is an out-migrant. The destination is where the person moves, making them an in-migrant.
4. **Migrant:** A migrant is a labourer who moves to a region or country for short durations, spanning several months or a few years. This type of labour force is considered secondary.

## VIII. IMPACTS OF MIGRATION

Internal migration exerts effects on both the place of departure and the destination. When migrants move from rural to urban areas, they trigger positive and negative outcomes for society and the economy.

### 1. Effects on Rural Areas:

Migration influences rural areas (origin) in several ways:

- **Economic Effects:** Rural population migration eases pressure on land, enhancing per-worker output and productivity. Increased per capita income emerges, motivating farmers to adopt advanced production methods, subsequently boosting agricultural output.

Urban migrants, often aged 18-40, live independently, working and sending savings back to their rural homes. These remittances further elevate rural incomes, used to enhance farming practices, leading to more income growth. This trend is more pronounced for migrants to foreign countries who remit substantial sums. Migrants returning home intermittently introduce new goods and ideas, raising consumption and living standards. Urbanization-inspired changes also lead to increased participation of women, older individuals, and juveniles in farming.

Out-migration also amplifies income and wealth disparities in rural families. Large remittances lead to income growth, improvements in farming, and land acquisition. These factors contribute to wealth disparities, enriching some families and widening inequalities.

- **Demographic Effects:** Migration curbs population growth in rural areas. Separation and contraceptive use by migrants limit population increase. Young urban migrants delay marriage, focused on earning and settling before family formation. Urban living encourages health awareness, impacting fertility and mortality rates.
- **Social Effects:** Migrants' permanent urban settlement weakens rural joint family systems. Interactions with urban diversity reshape rural values and customs. Women play more prominent roles in rural society, given male migration to cities.

## 2. Effects on Urban Areas:

Migration affects urban areas (destination) in diverse ways:

- **Demographic Effects:** Migration increases the urban working-class population. Migrants are typically young unmarried males, often leaving families behind. This setup keeps fertility lower than in rural areas. The availability of healthcare and family planning facilities contributes to low fertility rates.
- **Economic Effects:** Migrants fill informal sector jobs like street vending, carpentry, tailoring, etc. Informal sector jobs, though low-paying, often prove economically efficient. Skilled migrants engage in small-scale trades, boosting income levels.

Higher education migrants enter the formal sector, acquiring good-paying jobs. Such migrants often remit substantial sums home, aiding rural development.

## 3. Negative Effects of Rural-Urban Migration:

Rural-to-urban migration spawns numerous challenges for host cities. Slums, lacking municipal services, proliferate. Housing shortages, inadequate transportation, pollution, congestion, and underemployment prevail.

Increased labour supply outpaces job availability in urban areas, causing chronic unemployment and underemployment. This results from a surplus of unskilled rural migrants in a demand-limited urban formal sector.



marginal productivity of workers becomes  $N2D2$ , which means they're now making even more. More investments cause employment to grow, shown as in WP1N2 and OL1. Further investments continue to raise workers' productivity ( $N3D3$ ), and more jobs are created (OL2) until all the extra rural workers are employed in the factories.

However, if too many workers move from rural areas to factories, food production could drop because there won't be enough workers on farms. This also means that the productivity of the remaining workers is no longer zero. So, the line representing labour supply (WW1) will change, sloping up and to the right. This happens as more people are born and join the workforce over time.

In the Lewis model, the movement of workers from rural to industrial areas happens because the government makes a big effort to help this shift. They do this by making the industrial sector stronger, which creates more jobs and improves the overall economy.

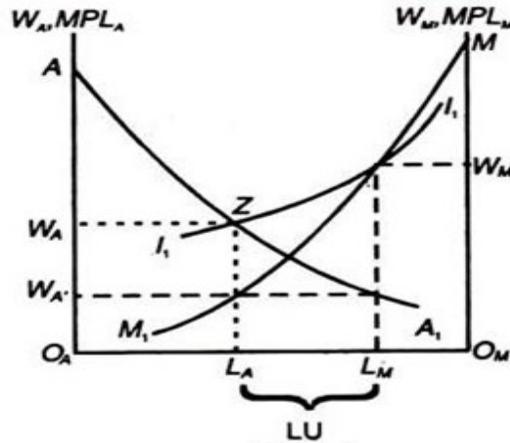
#### **Limitations of the Lewis Model:**

- **Variable Wage Rate in Capitalist Sector:** The Lewis model's assumption of a constant wage rate in the capitalist sector until the subsistence sector's labour supply is depleted has faced criticism. The real-world scenario witnesses rising wage rates over time in the industrial sector of underdeveloped economies, even when rural unemployment persists.
- **Inapplicability with Labour-Saving Capital Accumulation:** The model's foundation rests on the reinvestment of capitalist surplus into productive capital. However, Reynolds contends that if the productive capital emphasizes labour-saving techniques, the theory collapses.
- **Skill Shortage as a Long-term Issue:** While the model assumes an unlimited supply of unskilled labour, the challenge of skill formation is downplayed. Lewis regards skilled labour scarcity as a temporary hurdle, surmountable through training. Nonetheless, educating and training masses in underdeveloped countries is a time-intensive undertaking.
- **Unilateral Theory:** A notable critique is the model's unilateral nature, disregarding the potential for progress within the agricultural sector. Industrial sector growth and the subsequent demand for food and raw materials could foster agricultural sector expansion.
- **Complexities of Labour Mobility:** The assumption that higher capitalist wages will facilitate surplus labour's migration is criticized for oversimplifying labour mobility dynamics. Strong familial ties, cultural disparities, congestion issues, housing constraints, and high living costs in the capitalist sector inhibit labour mobility, weakening the theory.

- **Non-Zero Marginal Productivity of Labour:** Schultz challenges the assertion that marginal labour productivity in overpopulated underdeveloped economies is zero or negligible in the rural sector. Contrary to this notion, workers do receive subsistence wages, even if in kind rather than cash, making it challenging to ascertain the exact number of surplus labourers migrating.
  - **Agricultural Productivity Impact:** Lewis's assumption that withdrawing surplus labour from the subsistence sector won't affect agricultural production is scrutinized. Schultz contends that even a modest 5% labour force transfer from agriculture could diminish output.
2. **Harris-Todaro Model** - In 1970, Prof. J.R. Harris and P. M. Todaro published an article titled "Migration, Unemployment and Development: A Two-Sector Analysis," wherein they introduced a model concerning rural-urban migration in less developed countries. The central premise of the Harris-Todaro model asserts that labour migration in underdeveloped nations arises from disparities between average anticipated wages in rural and urban settings, rather than from actual wages. Migrants evaluate the diverse employment prospects accessible in both rural and urban sectors and opt for the one that maximizes their projected earnings resulting from migration.

The minimum urban wage substantially surpasses the rural wage. When more job opportunities are generated in the urban sector at this minimum wage level, anticipated wages will escalate, consequently boosting rural-urban migration. Projected wages are gauged by the discrepancy between real urban income and rural agricultural income, coupled with the likelihood of a migrant securing an urban employment position. Essentially, a migrant contrasts their foreseen income in the urban sector, within a given timeframe, with their existing average rural income. If the former outweighs the latter, migration becomes a viable choice.

- **Assumptions:**
  - The economy features two sectors – rural/agricultural (A) and urban/manufacturing (M).
  - The model functions within the short term.
  - Marginal labour productivity in agriculture (MPLA) and industry (MPLM) is shaped by their respective technologies.
  - Fixed quantities of capital are present in both sectors.
  - The economy comprises L workers, with LA and LM employed in rural and urban sectors respectively.
  - The total urban labour force (LM) is predetermined; rural migration supplements L-LA for the urban workforce.
  - Urban wage (WM) and rural wage (WA) are set at  $WM > WA$ .
  - Rural wage aligns with rural marginal labour productivity, while urban wage is externally determined.
  - Migration persists as long as the expected urban real income surpasses real agricultural income.



The diagram shows two groups of jobs: one in farming (A) and the other in industry (M). The horizontal axis represents the total number of workers. The vertical axis on the left side measures how productive workers are (MP) and how much they earn (wages). On the right side, it indicates the same for industry jobs. As more workers are hired in farming ( $L_A$ ), the farming's productivity and wages go down ( $AA_1$  slope). Similarly, as more people work in industry ( $L_M$ ), the industry's productivity and wages decrease ( $MM_1$  slope).

The wage ( $W_M$ ) is fixed for industry jobs, where  $O_M L_M$  workers are employed. The remaining  $O_A L_A$  workers have farming jobs at  $O_A W_A$  wage. This wage difference ( $W_M - W_A$ ) attracts rural workers to cities, even if urban jobs are scarce. Rural job seekers take the risk of finding a preferred job in the city's "job lottery."

The equation  $W_A = (L_M / L_u) * W_M$  represents when a rural worker is okay with urban wages. This happens where the  $I_1$  curve intersects. The point Z is where unemployment is balanced. Before migration,  $O_A L_A$  workers were in farming, but after migration, some moved to the city ( $O_M L_M$ ). These city migrants ( $O_M L_M$ ) work in low-wage jobs, making less than what they would have earned in farming ( $O_A W_A$ ).

- **Limitations:** The primary limitation of this model is its failure to consider the expenses associated with migrating from rural to urban areas, including the comparatively higher costs of urban living that migrants have to bear in the city.
- **Significance:** This paper contributes to the existing body of knowledge on migration by offering a comprehensive analysis of contemporary migration trends and their implications. By elucidating the diverse factors influencing migration, the study provides valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders involved in migration governance. Furthermore, understanding the impacts of migration on both origin and destination societies can aid in developing inclusive policies that harness the potential benefits of migration while addressing the challenges it poses.

- **Labour Demand and Supply:** Migration acts as a responsive mechanism to address the imbalances in labour demand and supply, effectively allocating skilled and unskilled labour where needed. Stark (1991) in his "New Economics of labour migration" theory discusses how migration serves to optimize labour markets by filling gaps in specific sectors or regions. This reallocation of labour contributes to the efficient functioning of economies and industries.
- **Skill Development:** The exposure and interaction that migration offers to migrants often lead to enhanced skills and knowledge. Massey et al. (1993) emphasize that migration can be a means of acquiring human capital through experiential learning. This exposure to new work environments, technologies, and cultural contexts enriches migrants' skill sets, which can subsequently benefit their home communities upon return.
- **Quality of Life:** Migration's potential to improve quality of life is underscored by Portes and Borocz (1989), who discuss how the pursuit of economic opportunities and upward mobility can lead to enhanced living standards. Migrants' increased income levels, and improved access to education, healthcare, and housing contribute to an overall better quality of life for both themselves and their families back home.
- **Socio-Economic Remittances:** The significance of socio-economic remittances in the migration process is highlighted by Taylor (1999), who examines how migrants' remittances provide vital financial support to their places of origin. These remittances contribute to local economies, alleviate poverty, and facilitate investments in infrastructure and development projects, as discussed in Adams and Page (2005). The exchange of socio-economic remittances, as discussed by Levitt (1998), is a less tangible yet equally important aspect of migration. Migrants returning with new ideas, values, and cultural practices promote cross-cultural understanding and tolerance. This concept aligns with Raghuram's (2009) discussion of how migration leads to the enrichment of social experiences and the cultivation of transnational identities.

## X. BIHAR'S CONTEXT ON MIGRATION: PUSH AND PULL THEORY

In the context of Bihar's migration patterns, the push and pull theory provides a comprehensive framework to understand the complex dynamics behind the movement of people from Bihar to other parts of India. This theory highlights the interplay of push factors that compel individuals to leave their place of origin and pull factors that attract them to new destinations. These factors collectively shape the migration trends observed in Bihar.

1. **Push and Pull Interaction:** The push and pull factors are not mutually exclusive; rather, they often interact to shape migration decisions. For instance, when economic opportunities in destination cities align with the lack of prospects in Bihar, the push factors become more compelling. Similarly, established Bihari migrant communities in destination areas can serve as social networks that pull newcomers by offering guidance, assistance, and potential employment connections.

- 2. Pull Factors in Bihar Migration:** The pull factors drawing migrants from Bihar to other regions encompass better economic opportunities, improved living standards, and access to education and healthcare. The allure of metropolitan cities, such as Delhi and Mumbai, lies in their potential to provide higher wages and diverse employment opportunities. These cities serve as magnets for Bihari migrants seeking a chance to escape poverty and secure a brighter future.
- 3. Economic Opportunities as Pull Factors:** The allure of economic opportunities in destination regions is another compelling pull factor driving migration. Stark's (1991) new economics of labour migration theory emphasizes the role of income differentials in motivating migration decisions. In the case of Bihar, where economic prospects might be limited, migrants are drawn to regions with better job prospects and higher wages, such as urban centres. The seminal work of Harris and Todaro (1970) underscores the role of urban-rural wage disparities in driving rural-to-urban migration. This theory is particularly relevant when analyzing the movement of Bihari migrants to major Indian cities for improved economic prospects.
- 4. Social Ties and Networks as Pull Factors:** The significance of social ties and networks in migration decisions is highlighted by the works of Massey et al. (1993) and Portes (1995). These scholars emphasize the role of information-sharing, community support, and established social networks in influencing migration choices. In the context of Bihar's migration patterns, the presence of established Bihari migrant communities in destination regions can act as a pull factor, facilitating the movement of newcomers through shared information, job leads, and social support networks. This social capital aspect becomes crucial in the decision-making process, as highlighted by Portes' theory of "cumulative causation."
- 5. Urban Amenities as Pull Factor:** Access to better infrastructure, healthcare, education, and other urban amenities in destination cities serves as a pull factor for those seeking an improved quality of life.
- 6. Remittances and Economic Mobility:** Successful migrants often remit money back to their families in Bihar, contributing to the region's economy and enhancing the prospects for those considering migration. Proximity to educational and skill development institutions in destination areas can attract migrants seeking to upgrade their qualifications and skills.
- 7. Push Factors in Bihar Migration:** Bihar's history of socio-economic challenges, including limited economic opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and high population density, has contributed to the prevalence of push factors driving migration. Agrarian distress, often exacerbated by factors such as floods and crop failures, has rendered traditional livelihoods in Bihar less sustainable. These challenges have been cited as major drivers for individuals seeking better prospects beyond their home state.
- 8. Agrarian Distress as Push Factor:** The state's agricultural sector has often been plagued by factors such as floods, droughts, and inadequate irrigation facilities. Crop failures and unpredictable incomes drive rural populations to seek alternative livelihoods in urban areas.

9. **Unemployment as a Push Factor:** The lack of employment opportunities in Bihar, particularly for skilled workers, prompts individuals to move to regions with thriving industries and a higher demand for their skills.
10. **Educational Deficiency as a Push Factor:** Limited access to quality education and higher education institutions in Bihar compels many young people to migrate in search of better educational opportunities.

The push and pull factors influencing migration trends from Bihar to other parts of India are multifaceted and interconnected. Economic opportunities as pull factors underscore the aspiration for better livelihoods, while social ties and networks play a pivotal role in easing the transition to new environments. Drawing from the insights of Hanson and McIntosh, Stark, and Portes, this analysis reveals the complex interplay of these factors in shaping migration patterns, shedding light on the dynamics of Bihar's migrant population within India.

## **XI. COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND REVERSE MIGRATION IN BIHAR: CHALLENGES AND RESILIENCE**

Reverse migration, also known as "return migration," refers to the movement of individuals or groups of people back to their place of origin from a location where they had previously migrated. This type of migration often occurs in response to changing economic, social, or political conditions in the destination area, which might make the migrants reconsider their decision to stay there, (*International Organization for Migration, 2020*). Reverse migration can result from factors such as economic downturns, job losses, lack of social integration, or other adverse circumstances in the destination region.

The state of Bihar, located in the eastern part of India, has been witnessing a significant migration phenomenon for several decades. A large number of Biharis leave their home state in search of better economic opportunities, mainly in urban centres across the country. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 brought this migration trend into sharper focus, presenting both challenges and opportunities for the state and its migrant population. This segment explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Bihar migration, examining the challenges faced by migrants and the resilience demonstrated by both the state and its people during this unprecedented crisis.

Because of the lockdown measures triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the segment of society known as the working class, particularly those migrant workers with low incomes, has experienced the most severe repercussions (Pandey, 2020). A substantial number of them lost their jobs and faced unemployment without receiving their owed wages in the states they had migrated to, which ultimately compelled them to go back to their home states.

Some internal migrants stated that following the lockdown, they managed to secure employment with the same employer or contractor, yet they raised concerns about not being paid their wages throughout the lockdown phase. The lack of compensation, the absence of proper living conditions including essential amenities like electricity and water provided by

the employer/contractor, and the absence of immediate government assistance, compelled them to leave for their villages.

- 1. Challenges Faced by Migrant Workers during the Pandemic:** When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, a nationwide lockdown was implemented abruptly, disrupting livelihoods and mobility for millions of migrant workers across India, including those from Bihar. Migrant labourers, who form a substantial portion of the state's population, found themselves stranded in unfamiliar cities with limited access to resources. Many lost their jobs as economic activities ground to a halt, and without adequate social safety nets, they faced hardships in meeting even their basic needs. The closure of public transportation further compounded their difficulties, leaving them with no option but to undertake arduous journeys back to their home state on foot, often covering hundreds of kilometres. The exodus of migrants walking back to Bihar received widespread media attention and brought the issue of migrant worker rights to the forefront of public discourse.
- 2. State Response and Resilience:** The Bihar government faced a monumental task in managing the influx of returning migrants during the pandemic. It had to ensure the safe return of its citizens while also addressing the challenges of quarantine, testing, and providing essential services to those arriving from various parts of the country. Despite limited resources, the state government displayed resilience in organizing transportation, setting up quarantine facilities, and distributing food and relief packages to returning migrants. The crisis also prompted the government to revisit its policies related to migrant welfare and explore ways to create sustainable livelihood opportunities within the state, reducing the necessity for outward migration.
- 3. Digital Shift:** The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a digital transformation across sectors, and Bihar was no exception. In response to the crisis, online platforms played a critical role in facilitating the transfer of funds, the provision of government services, and access to educational resources for migrants and their families. The adoption of digital tools and platforms, albeit with some challenges related to digital literacy and connectivity, opened up new avenues for remote work and skill development, potentially reducing the need for physical migration in the future.
- 4. Challenges to Long-Term Resilience:** While Bihar demonstrated remarkable resilience in coping with the initial impact of the pandemic, long-term challenges remain. The state faces the dual responsibility of reabsorbing its returning workforce and creating avenues for sustainable livelihoods within its borders. Addressing issues of skill development, healthcare, education, and infrastructure becomes paramount to retaining human capital and promoting inclusive growth.

## XII. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

NITI Aayog, in collaboration with a working subgroup comprising officials and members of civil society, has formulated a preliminary National Migrant Labour policy. In December 2020, the Indian government decided to establish a database encompassing migrant workers, including those in the informal sector.

1. **Key Highlights:** The latest official migration data hails from the 2011 Census. As per the Census figures, India had 45.6 crore migrants in 2011, accounting for 38% of the population, a rise from 31.5 crore migrants (31% of the population) in 2001.
2. **Contemporary Challenges Regarding Migrants:**
  - **Independent Migrants:** The Inter-State Migrant Workers Act of 1979 solely addresses labourers migrating under a contractor's purview, omitting independent migrants.
  - **Community Building Organizations (CBO):** The absence of CBOs and administrative staff in source states has impeded access to development programs, propelling tribal communities toward migration.
  - **Middlemen:** Due to resource constraints, local administrations struggle to oversee migration, creating opportunities for intermediaries to exploit migrants' situations.

### XIII. APPROACH OUTLINED IN NITI AAYOG'S DRAFT

The draft articulates two approaches for policy formulation:

- Emphasis on cash transfers, special quotas, and reservations.
  - Augmentation of community agency and capacity, thereby eliminating hindrances to individuals' inherent ability to prosper.
1. **Facilitating Migration:** Migration should be recognized as an integral facet of development, and governmental policies must foster rather than obstruct internal migration.
  2. **Enhancing Wages:** However, the draft urges source states to elevate minimum wages to drive notable shifts in local tribal livelihoods, potentially curbing migration to some extent.
  3. **Centralized Database:** A centralized database is necessary to aid employers in bridging the gap between demand and supply, ensuring the maximum utility of social welfare initiatives.  
It calls for Ministries and the Census office to maintain consistency in the definitions of migrants and subpopulations, encompassing seasonal and circular migrants, and introducing migrant-specific variables into existing surveys.
  4. **Migration Resource Centres:** Ministries of Panchayati Raj, Rural Development, and Housing and Urban Affairs should utilize Tribal Affairs migration data to establish migration resource centres in high migration regions. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship should concentrate on skill development at these centres.
  5. **Education:** The Ministry of Education should enact measures under the Right to Education Act 2009 to integrate migrant children's education into mainstream systems,

mapping out migrant children, and supplying local-language educators in migrant destinations.

6. **Housing and Accommodation:** The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs should address concerns regarding night shelters, short-stay accommodations, and seasonal lodgings for migrants in urban areas.
7. **Grievance Resolution Units:** The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and the Ministry of Labor should establish grievance resolution units and expedite legal responses for trafficking, violations of minimum wage standards, workplace abuses, and accidents concerning migrant workers.

**Prior Recommendations:** The Working Group on Migration's report, released in January 2017 by the former Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, suggested a comprehensive law for these workers, establishing the legal foundation for a framework of social protection. This aligned with the 2007 recommendations of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector under the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises.

#### XIV. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected Bihar migration, exposing the vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers and presenting the state with an opportunity to revamp its policies and infrastructure. The crisis demonstrated the resilience of both the migrant population and the Bihar government, as they navigated the challenges together. As the state moves forward, a comprehensive approach is essential, encompassing measures to safeguard the rights and well-being of migrants, harnessing digital tools for economic empowerment, and fostering an environment that provides opportunities within the state. By addressing these challenges, Bihar can emerge stronger, more equitable, and better equipped to deal with future uncertainties while securing a brighter future for its migrant workforce.

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