

SOCIUM · SFB 1342

# Working Papers No. 23

Sony Pellissery  
Ravneet Kaur

## **The social question in urban- centric growth models: How durable inequalities in India exasperated COVID-19 interventions**

**Sony Pellissery, Ravneet Kaur**

The social question in urban-centric growth models: How durable inequalities in India exasperated  
COVID-19 interventions  
SOCIUM SFB 1342 WorkingPapers, 23  
Bremen: SOCIUM, SFB 1342, 2022



SOCIUM Forschungszentrum Ungleichheit und Sozialpolitik /  
Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy  
SFB 1342 Globale Entwicklungsdynamiken von Sozialpolitik /  
CRC 1342 Global Dynamics of Social Policy

Postadresse / Postaddress:  
Postfach 33 04 40, D - 28334 Bremen

Websites:  
<https://www.socium.uni-bremen.de>  
<https://www.socialpolicydynamics.de>

[ISSN (Print) 2629-5733]  
[ISSN (Online) 2629-5741]

Sony Pellissery  
Ravneet Kaur

The social question in  
urban-centric growth models:  
How durable inequalities in  
India exasperated  
COVID-19 interventions

SOCIUM · SFB 1342  
No. 23

---

Sony Pellissery ([sony.pellissery@stx.oxon.org](mailto:sony.pellissery@stx.oxon.org)), Institute of Public  
Policy, National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, India

Ravneet Kaur ([ravneet@catalysts.org](mailto:ravneet@catalysts.org)), Learning Catalyst at Swasti,  
The Health Catalyst, New Delhi, India

---

# ABSTRACT

---

Unplanned urbanization is an integral part of the economic growth story that took place in India since the early 1990s. While poverty was substantially reduced in absolute terms due to the emergence of urban agglomerations and opportunities there, inequality has risen. Social structures of durable inequalities such as caste, gender and land deprivation pushed the rural population to flock urban areas to seek alternate livelihood opportunities. However, unplanned living conditions, with higher propensity for virus infection in urban areas, forced the migrants to flee towards their native villages, when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. This paper is examining whether social policy responses are sufficient to deal with the social question emerging from India's urban-centric growth models. We empirically examine the social policy interventions during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic to find an answer to this question. The first wave of the pandemic (March-October 2020) created a livelihood crisis with the exodus of migrants from cities to rural locations. The second wave of the pandemic (March-May 2021) that created a health crisis which exhibited the shortage of health infrastructure in the country, is not examined as part of this paper.

History has shown that pandemics and humanitarian crises have provided opportunities to ignite ideas of social policy, and to build institutions for intervention. Examining the social policy interventions during the COVID-19 crisis in India, enables countries in the Global South to rethink the strategy of economic growth based on urban-centric models.

---

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

---

Die ungeplante Urbanisierung ist ein wesentlicher Bestandteil des indischen Wirtschaftswachstums seit den frühen 1990er Jahren. Während die absolute Armut aufgrund des Entstehens von urbanen Gebieten und den dort existierenden Erwerbsmöglichkeiten deutlich reduziert wurde, hat die Ungleichheit zugenommen. Sozialstrukturen geprägt von dauerhaften Ungleichheiten, wie beispielsweise Kaste, Geschlecht und Landarmut, brachten die Landbevölkerung dazu, in urbanen Gebieten nach alternativen Möglichkeiten für den Lebensunterhalt zu suchen. Doch als die Covid-19 Pandemie begann, führten die von ungeplanter Urbanisierung geprägten Lebensbedingungen, die eine größere Gefahr einer Virusinfektion in urbanen Gebieten mit sich brachten, dazu, dass die Migranten in ihre Heimatdörfer zurückkehrten. In diesem Beitrag wird untersucht, ob die sozialpolitischen Antworten auf die Pandemie ausreichen, um mit der aus dem stadtzentrierten Wachstumsmodell entstandenen sozialen Frage zurechtzukommen. Um diese Frage zu beantworten, untersuchen wir die sozialpolitischen Interventionen während der ersten Corona-Welle. Die erste Welle der Pandemie (März-Oktober 2020) führte zu einer Existenzkrise mit dem Exodus von Migranten aus den Städten in die Dörfer. Die zweite Welle der Pandemie (März – Mai 2021), die zu einer Gesundheitskrise führte, die die Unzulänglichkeit der indischen Gesundheitsinfrastruktur deutlich machte, wird in dieser Studie nicht untersucht.

Die Geschichte hat gezeigt, dass Pandemien und humanitäre Krisen Gelegenheiten für die Entwicklung sozialpolitischer Ideen und für den Aufbau von Institutionen bieten. Die Untersuchung sozialpolitischer Interventionen während der Corona-Krise in Indien ermöglicht es Ländern im globalen Süden, ihre stadt-zentrierten Wachstumsstrategien zu überdenken.



---

# CONTENTS

---

1.	Introduction .....	1
2.	India: A migrant polity .....	1
3.	'One nation, one virus': Impact on the migrant polity through manufactured lockdown .....	3
4.	Creation of cage cities .....	7
5.	Fragile employments in the urban labour markets .....	8
6.	Health care for informal sector workers .....	10
7.	Social policy for the creation of an alternative livelihood .....	11
7.1	Central government interventions .....	11
7.2	Regional state government interventions .....	13
8.	Conclusion .....	14
	References .....	14





---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

---

India, which houses the largest number of persons in poverty (about 218 million [World Bank, 2020]), has been a laboratory for social policy experiments. The primary driver behind the persistence of poverty lies in the social fabric of the country. The social question has been stifled by the dominant forces in a system in which inequality is justified through religio-philosophical traditions (Pellissery, 2021). However, crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic, have forced the country to come up with collective institutions that would rise above parochial interests shaped by traditional ideas and culture. In fact, fear of the spread of the Bubonic Plague and labour unrest in the factories of Mumbai in the first two decades of the twentieth century had played a central role to germinate labour welfare in Indian history (Ahuja, 2019). The present crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic could also be offering an opportunity to question the growth models adopted by India. In this context, the research question that is central to this paper is whether social policy responses could mitigate the perils emerging from disorganized urbanism. We use the COVID 19 pandemic and the relief responses by regional state governments and the Union government of India as an empirical case study.

Our method in this enquiry is to study the social policy interventions, announced by the regional state governments and the central government, to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. We pay particular attention to interventions designed to target the migrant population. The time period for examining interventions is March-October 2020. This was the time when the COVID-19 pandemic made an onset in India, and by the end of October 2020 the first wave had begun to subside. The first wave and the interventions created a livelihood crisis, and from the migrants' point of view, the first wave is more important. The second wave that took place from March to May 2021 and had a disastrous effect in terms of health (showing the inadequacy of the health infrastructure in India),

which is not included in this paper for analysis and conclusions.<sup>1</sup>

The focal concern of the paper is how migrant workers, who contributed to the growth and development of urban areas, were neglected when the pandemic unfolded. The restriction of movement, weak delivery of relief measures, precarious living conditions and loss of jobs and income constitute some of these predicaments. While explaining these predicaments using the analytical lens of inequality, the paper is outlining a framework to imagine the convergence of urban planning and social policy.

The paper is organized in six sections. In the first section, we will discuss how patterned inequality is the driver of mobility in India. How the abrupt announcement of the lockdown caused a human catastrophe in the context of COVID-19 is what is discussed in the second section. The third and fourth sections examine the operations of the informal economy in urban areas. The reasons behind poor living conditions for migrants in cities and their fragile labour conditions are dealt in sequential sections to show how such conditions led to a mass exodus when the lockdown was announced. Having described the conditions that created mass migration during the COVID-19 pandemic, the fifth and sixth sections of the paper examine how effective the social policy interventions by the Indian state were to deal with the migrant crisis. Here, first we look at health service provision for migrants and then, we deal with COVID-19-specific relief measures. Here, we show how existing inequalities made such interventions ineffective.

---

## 2. INDIA: A MIGRANT POLITY

---

In an economy, where the freedom of movement is unrestricted,<sup>2</sup> inequality will shape the migration

---

1 Pellissery et al. (2021) examines the health crisis in the second wave in detail.

2 In contrast to the Chinese regulation of movement through the Hukou system (see details in Zhao & Pellissery, 2016). India introduced a legislation of Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act in 1979 to provide better working conditions for workers when they are taken

pattern (see theorisation by Todaro [1976] among others). There are three factors to this dimension of inequality. In this section, we will discuss each of them. How (1) inter-regional inequality and (2) rural-urban inequality drive migration; and how (3) social inequality due to the hierarchical structure of society forces migration. These factors are summarised in the causal loop diagram at the end of this section.

India's progress has been uneven across different regional states (Dreze & Sen, 1995). In a country with over a dozen agro-climatic regions, in which regionally elected leaders are taking economic decisions within the federal system,<sup>3</sup> economic development (and thus migration) is clearly a matter of political economy.

Regional (inter-state) inequality, measured in per capita Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), has gone up significantly since the 1990s (Kundu & Mohanan, 2009). This has been reflected in urbanisation rates as there is a strong correlation of the per capita income level and urbanisation rates. Relatively richer states such as Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat have urbanisation rates above forty percent, while poorer states such as Odisha and Bihar have urbanisation rates less than twenty percent (Tumbe, 2016).

Two types of policies aggravated the regional inequality, and led to migration from rural areas to urban areas. Agriculture, which is still the main livelihood opportunity in rural areas, witnessed rapid decline.<sup>4</sup> Those who depended on agriculture had

to seek alternatives for survival. Urban agglomerations were consciously pursued as centres of economic growth, providing livelihood opportunities. This is the second driver of migration.

In India, where over fifty percent of the population earned their livelihood in agriculture, and over sixty-five percent lived in rural areas, the neglect of rural development was visible early on. This was once considered as bias (urban bias) in development planning (Lipton, 1977). By the first decade of the twenty-first century, it became clear that India was following an urban-centric growth model (Kennedy & Zerah, 2008).

Who is migrating to the urban agglomerations? This is something unique to India, and a relatively less known story. This is the third driver of migration. The Indian rural society is structured hierarchically through caste and gender identities.<sup>5</sup> The lower on the hierarchy, the less will be the physical endowments such as land<sup>6</sup> (the most important resource for the rain-fed agriculture in India), and human capital endowments such as education (Haque, 2018). Faced with discrimination from households in the higher levels of hierarchy (as the lower-caste landless labourers depend on the landed aristocracy), the movement of the unskilled or semi-skilled young population to the cities is a forced/distress migration. In other words, patterned inequality, emerging from social relations, drives the migration. These characteristics of the migrants must be considered when we examine the numbers.

The National Sample Survey revealed that in 2008 about 28.5% of India's population (over 325 million of the total population of 1.14 billion)

---

to a different state by employers. However, the Act had been largely ineffective. This Act was replaced by the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code in 2020 when labour laws were overhauled.

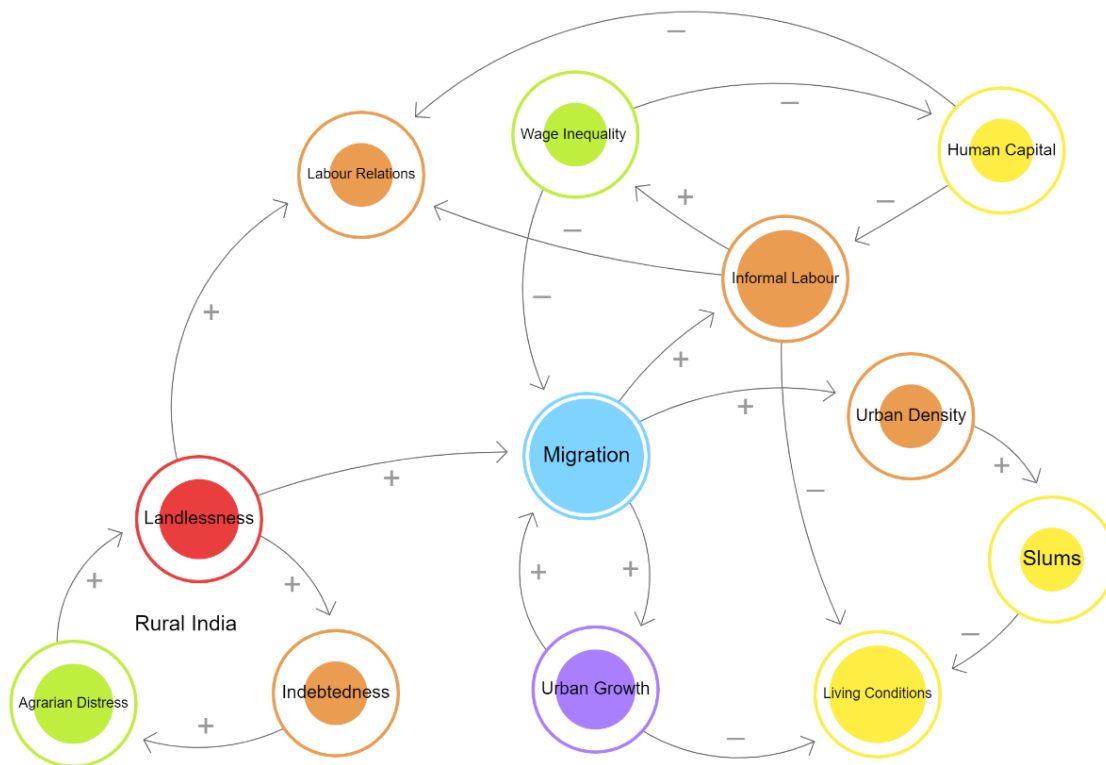
- 3 The Indian constitution divides the subjects of decision making to the **central list** (where the central government makes decisions), the **states list** (where regional states make decisions) and the **concurrent list** (where both the Central government and regional state governments have legitimate authority to make decisions). How these legislative opportunities create differences in the welfare sphere has been elaborated in Pellissery & Anand (2017).
- 4 At the time of independence (in 1947) agriculture contributed 54 percent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with little over sixty percent of labour force participation in agriculture. In 2017, the share of agricultural contribution to the GDP shrunk to 13 percent, yet the

---

labour force participation in the sector remaining as high as 54 percent (Economic Survey 2019-20 [Government of India, 2020]). This is a clear indication of poor predicament of the farming sector. This failure is demonstrated through farmers ending their lives (between 1995 and 2019, the number of farmers who committed suicide was 296,438 [NCRB, 2019]).

- 5 There is a large body of literature on the question of social discrimination through identities in India (see summary discussion in Pellissery et al. (2015).
- 6 56.1% of the households do not own any land in rural areas. 92.4% of the households own less than two hectares of land (Census of India, 2011). Lower educational achievement among lower castes and *adivasis* also have been reported by several studies (World Bank, 2012).

Figure 1. Causal Loop Diagram driving migration that shapes disorganised urbanism



were internal migrants.<sup>7</sup> Jan Breman (1985; 1996) through his in-depth observation of the migration patterns in India has shown that migration is circular in nature, i.e., temporary and repetitive movement between host city and home town/village.

We summarise this discussion in Figure 1 with a causal loop diagram. The three factors of inter-regional inequality, urban-rural divide and social inequality in labour relations drive the migration and overcrowding of cities. Landlessness coupled with debt emerging from agrarian distress in rural India epitomises all the three drivers. This loop of migration from rural to urban India feeds to urban growth and urban density. Oversupply of labour force both in rural and urban contexts have incentivised employers to continue informal labour relations and wage inequality.

As discussed in the above section, we can see how different factors contribute to migration and

same has been illustrated in the causal loop diagram above. Resource depletion in rural areas as well as social structures of India's society play unique roles in explaining migration patterns. It is in the light of these internal movements, the lockdown measures that arose as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic need to be analysed.

### 3. 'ONE NATION, ONE VIRUS': IMPACT ON THE MIGRANT POLITY THROUGH MANUFACTURED LOCKDOWN

When the pandemic hit, the political regime in India used the virus as a tool to deepen the nationalist spirit.<sup>8</sup> Though 'health' is a regional state

<sup>7</sup> According to the national Census data, the total number of internal migrants increased significantly during the past decades, from 167 million individuals in 1971 to 315 million in 2001. The Census of 2011 shows the number of internal migrants was 450 million, having increased by 45% since 2001.

<sup>8</sup> On many occasions, the prime minister through TV messages asked India's citizens to act in a synchronized manner, for instance, to step out of their homes and clap together (in appreciation of health workers) at a specified time. Most importantly, as the vaccination drive began, the prime minister's photograph was printed on the certificates issued to citizens as proof of their vaccination, which was objected by some of the state

subject (see footnote 2), the central government introduced a national lockdown without consulting the regional state governments.<sup>9</sup> These measures, without considering regional differences in infection rates, led to an unprecedented livelihood crisis. Table 1 (p. 5) provides data on how COVID-19 was introduced to different states of India by travellers. As the table shows for most of the states, the travel history of the infected person from outside the country is traceable. Further, they were mostly travelling to urban areas.

India went for a nationwide lockdown abruptly on 24 March 2020 when there were a hundred cases being reported per day (mostly in cities).<sup>10</sup> This measure was appreciated internationally, especially by the WHO as a strong measure to contain the virus.<sup>11</sup> Unlike most of the countries, which

---

governments. In a speech addressed to the World Economic Forum Davos Dialogue dated 28 January 2021, the prime minister declared that India had defeated the COVID-19 virus while rest of the world had predicted India would be doomed under COVID-19 (in fact, the disastrous second wave of COVID-19 came three months after this speech).

- 9 Several initiatives of the Bharatiya Janata Party had already shown this inclination. Some of the policy initiatives to mention are 'one nation, one tax', 'one nation, one election', 'one nation, one ration card', etc. This over-centralization has been pointed out by several scholars and political leaders as going against the basic principles of the Indian Constitution, which emphasizes federal principles, and regional state autonomy on certain subjects.
- 10 The total number of confirmed positive cases was just around 500 at the time of the lockdown. Several people have criticized these measures, including a petition submitted in the Supreme Court of India on the lack of preparations prior to lockdown. There was a 'voluntary curfew' that was announced on 22 March 2020 as preparation for the lockdown. Within four hours of the Prime Minister's TV announcement, all transportation services were shut down on 24 March 2020. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has acted similarly before - on 8 November 2016 85 percent of currency was banned in a TV announcement, leaving only four hours to use the 'illegal'/demonetized currencies. These tendencies of abrupt policy decisions and direct announcement bypassing the institutions are patterns observed in other authoritarian democracies as well.
- 11 The Indian measure was appreciated since several European countries were hesitating to impose a lockdown despite of daily reported cases being above 1000. The Indian decision was also appreciated by many in the

had lockdown measures in place when the infection rate was peaking, India was forced to unlock after 52 days.<sup>12</sup> There were about 3,000 cases per day when the travel restrictions were eased. The peak was still far away. India hit the peak on 16 September 2020 with 93,617 reported daily cases. Why could India not maintain the travel restrictions and contain the spread of the virus? The explanation draws primarily on economic inequality. The push-pull theory of migration worked. As the virus was not reported in the villages, the native village was the destination that attracted the migrants living in the cities. Simultaneously, the deprivation from basic resources and job losses forced them out of the city. The urban economy started to crumble, as the migrant workers departed towards rural areas. Unlocking, without waiting for the virus to subside, was a logical step. In this section of the paper we detail the distress that was caused by the lockdown, and the effectiveness of the welfare measures undertaken by the government towards this distress. In the next section we will explain how the residential inequality in urban areas aggravated the distress caused by the lockdown measures.

The lockdown measures brought public recognition to the magnitude of the migrant problem. Deprived of basic necessities of life and employment, migrants based in cities, started walking towards their native towns and villages. Some ventured on bicycles. Families were walking thousands of kilometres, with the small children sitting on the shoulders of adults, often walking barefoot. A human catastrophe was unfolding. Television channels and newspapers were filled with visuals of the exodus of migrants who were heading back to their villages. It was for the first time in independent India, such a massive exodus towards rural areas was noticed due to reasons other than conflict.

---

country since the Indian health infrastructure was very weak, and an early lockdown measure would help to prepare the health infrastructure.

- 12 In fact, on 1 May 2020 special trains started carrying distressed migrant workers back to their home towns covering over 2,500 kilometres. Travel restrictions were eased from 15 May 2020. However, systematic unlock procedures started only from 31 May 2020.

Table 1. Infections and travel history of COVID-19 cases in different states of India

State (A)	Date of first reported COVID-19 case (B)	Person travelled from (C)	First reported death due to COVID-19 (D)
Kerala	January 30, 2020	Wuhan, China	March 28, 2020
Delhi	March 2, 2020	Italy	March 13, 2020
Telangana	March 2, 2020	Dubai	March 28, 2020
Rajasthan	March 2, 2020	Italian tourists	March 26, 2020
UP	March 5, 2020	Iran	April 01, 2020
Haryana	March 5, 2020	Italy	April 03, 2020
Bihar	March 5, 2020	Qatar	March 22, 2020
Tamil Nadu	March 7, 2020	Oman	March 24, 2020
J&K	March 7, 2020	Iran, South Korea, Italy	March 26, 2020
Ladakh	March 7, 2020	Iran	
Jharkhand	March 7, 2020	UK	March 08, 2020
Karnataka	March 9, 2020	US (via UK) + Dubai	March 12, 2020
Punjab	March 9, 2020	Italy	March 18, 2020
MH	March 10, 2020	Dubai	March 17, 2020
Andhra Pradesh	March 12, 2020	Italy	April 03, 2020
Uttarakhand	March 15, 2020	Spain	May 01, 2020
Orissa	March 16, 2020	Italy	April 06, 2020
WB	March 17, 2020	UK	March 23, 2020
Chhattisgarh	March 19, 2020	UK	May 29, 2020
Gujarat	March 20, 2020	Saudi Arabia	March 22, 2020
Madhya Pradesh	March 20, 2020	Thailand	March 25, 2020
Himachal Pradesh	March 20, 2020	Dubai	March 23, 2020
Manipur	March 24, 2020	UK	July 29, 2020
Mizoram	March 24, 2020	Qatar, Doha	October 28, 2020
Goa	March 25, 2020	Spain + Australia + USA	June 22, 2020
Assam	March 31, 2020	Delhi	April 10, 2020
Arunachal Pradesh	April 2, 2020	Delhi	June 25, 2020
Nagaland	April 12, 2020	Kolkata	July 24, 2020
Meghalaya	April 14, 2020		April 15, 2020

Source: Collated by authors from different medical reports and media

Several incidents were reported of migrants being crushed to death on railway tracks or on the road where they were resting after having exhausted themselves from tireless walking.<sup>13</sup> Many of these

<sup>13</sup> The most shocking incident of these accidents was when 16 migrants were ran over by a freight train on 8 May 2020. While there is no accurate data available, one study reported as of 30 May 2020, 198 migrants have died in different accidents due to lockdown measures in transit (Hindustan Times 2020).

migrants were arrested for violating the lockdown and were detained at inter-state borders. In some cities, migrants organized protests demanding means of transport to go back to their native villages, and this resulted in conflict with the police and district authorities. There is no reliable data on how many migrants have returned after the lockdown.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> In September 2020 when the Indian parliament convened, several members raised the question of mishan-

What is important to note from this description is the neglect that the State showed towards migrant workers, and the way their welfare was placed lowest in the priority list. Several other segments of the population received respectable treatment. For instance, four weeks after the lockdown had started, several states made special arrangements to evacuate students stranded in coaching locations by sending special buses (NDTV 2020).

Public Interest Litigations were filed against the government of India for causing serious human rights violations of this nature, and demanded relief measures. In an affidavit filed by the Central government in the Supreme Court, the government reported to have opened and run 22,000 relief centres in 578 districts as of 7 April 2020 (14 days after the start of the lockdown measures). However, an interest group<sup>15</sup> found that 98% of the migrants had not received any relief measures announced by the government.

The pandemic and the crisis of migrant movements brought an important principle of universalism to the Indian social policy debates. Residential status was a condition for receiving any welfare measures from local governments in India. For all welfare benefits (food relief, free education, health care, income support), the delivery agent of public benefits (both of the central government and regional state government) is the local government. Local governments were allocated relief goods depending on the number of registered people in these locations. Local governments requested a proof of residence in the location for the purpose of registration, and thus, typically migrants were deprived of welfare measures. It was a mechanism of targeting, and to avoid the leak of welfare benefits. The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown unveiled that a large number

of people were living in cities without being registered with the local government. Many of them were also in transit from their work place (in cities) to their home in rural areas. The only way to provide welfare to these migrants was to discard the principle of conditionality, and to provide services irrespective of being registered or not. The portability of welfare rights when migrants move from one state to another has been a long-standing demand (MacAuslan, 2011; Khandelwal, 2020). In a tight-strapped welfare state like India, this adoption of the principle of universalism may be a short-term measure.<sup>16</sup>

Within a few days after the lockdown had been announced, there was sense of desperation. To address this, the Central government directed the regional state governments to provide adequate relief measures (food), it directed the landlords not to charge rents, and directed employers to keep paying wages. Despite these exhortations, migrants continued to leave the cities. This can be explained through the living and working conditions of migrants in the cities. Three dimensions to these conditions are important to be understood for this paper: a) housing, b) informal employment, c) health facilities for migrants in cities.

---

ding of migrants during lockdown. A minister reported over 10 million migrant workers had returned to their home states after the lockdown had been imposed. However, the minister also added that no data was maintained on the movement of migrant workers (despite of the Inter-state Migrant Workmen Act [1979] requiring the State to do so), and therefore, no estimation on the job loss was available.

15 The Stranded Workers Action Network carried out a survey among 11,159 workers. Another study (Jan Sahas, 2020) also reached a similar result.

---

16 There had been a serious debate with regard to universal vs targeted measures with reference to the targeted Public Distribution System of food supply. Since the 1960s, after the green revolution, India became a food surplus country. However, food distribution has been a challenge ever since. Though targeted food relief intensified after a structural adjustment in 1991, in some of the states where universal food relief continued (such as Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh), the system was found to be less corrupt. Yet, the discourse on welfare state is hugely skewed against poor people in India, who are seen as engaged in cheating to get welfare benefits. Thus, targeting measures have great currency in the policy discourse. When the pandemic struck in 2020, India had sufficient food grants in its food godowns to feed everyone in the country for one and half years. However, food supply channels were defunct, and targeting withheld only for a short period.



Table 2. Top ten cities of India and migrant lives according to Census 2011

State	Population (in millions)	Population density (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	Share of inhabitants living in slums (Percent of total city population)	Share of migrant workers in the total city population (%)
Mumbai	18.4	26,357	41.80	63
Delhi	16.3	11,320	14.70	62
Kolkata	14.1	27,462	31.40	44
Chennai	8.7	26,553	28.90	39
Bengaluru	8.5	4,378	8.40	50
Hyderabad	7.7	18,172	32.70	53
Ahmedabad	6.4	11,895	4.49	47
Pune	5.0	11,304	22.10	59
Surat	4.6	13,304	10.46	72
Jaipur	3.1	6,285	10.62	36

Source: Columns 2-4 have used data from Census of India (2011). Column 5 has been deduced from Tumbe (2016).

#### 4. CREATION OF CAGE CITIES

The Census of India (2011) reported 377 million (31 percent) Indians were living in urban areas.<sup>17</sup> 17 percent (sixty-five million) of this urban population were living in overcrowded slums. As we have seen in the previous section, these were the parts of cities where migrants scrambled to make a livelihood escaping from the resource depleted rural areas. As the COVID-19 pandemic required physical distancing, it is these living conditions which turned to be cages. It is the density data (presented in Table 2, p. 7) which is critical to understand this.

What is important to note is that overcrowded slums existed close to rich/middle class gated communities. People living in the slums often provided services in these formal housing units as maids, running small food processing units, selling vegetables, or even collecting waste for re-

processing. The starkness of this spatial inequality becomes visible when we note that in Mumbai, where almost 42 percent of the population is living in informal settlements,<sup>18</sup> 15 percent of formal housing units are vacant.<sup>19</sup>

Mumbai also has Asia's largest slum area - Dharavi. Dharavi is one of the most crowded slums in the entire world, with eighty percent living in rental accommodation (Lewis, 2011).<sup>20</sup> Here, a 10 × 10 feet room is shared by 10–12 residents who usually work and sleep in shifts. These living conditions highlight the inequality which has exacerbated the vulnerability to the pandemic. The 2011 Census notes that in the slums the dominant

17 As per 2011 census, India has 7,935 towns. Out of which, 4,041 are designated municipalities. 3,894 are villages with more than 5,000 inhabitants, with a labour force of which more than 75% is engaged in non-agricultural activities, and with a population density of at least 400 inhabitants per square kilometre. India also has 475 urban agglomerations, i.e., continuous spreads of one or more towns.

18 These informal settlements, known in various names such as shanty towns, or favelas are infamous for the fragile housing arrangements provided to the citizens (Davy & Pellissery, 2013). Pellissery and Lodemel (2020) have reviewed the property relations in such settings across the world.

19 Note that in India, measures such as vacant housing tax are absent, which gives opportunity to invest in real estate and keep it off the market for value appreciation.

20 Note that dilapidated housing conditions is not the only depiction of these informal settlements. Across the world, literature (e.g. De Soto, 2000) has shown a high level of entrepreneurial spirit in such locations. Though it is extremely difficult to estimate the earnings in the informal economy, one report (Chandran, 2016) estimates annual sales in Dharavi pegs as high as one billion dollars.

household size was more than four members and around forty-five percent of the slum population was living in single rooms. It has been remarked that Dharavi has a population density of 227,136 persons per km<sup>2</sup> (PTI, 2020) which is twelve times denser than the already dense city of Mumbai and roughly thirty times denser than New York City (Patel, 2020). Sethi and Mittal (2020) in their study of fourteen Indian cities have corroborated a strong correlation of urban density and COVID-19 incidence.

In India, 43 percent of slum households do not have access to water on their premises, 34 percent do not have access to a toilet on their premises and share a toilet with other households (Census of India, 2011). In Dharavi estimates suggest one toilet per 1,440 people (United Nations Development Programme, 2006). Almost fifty percent of the population has a source of water outside their premises which forces them to travel to fetch water, and in almost every case it is the responsibility of women. This situation puts them at an increased risk of being exposed to the virus.

Checkley et al. (2016) have reported that nearly half of the slum residents suffer from non-communicable respiratory ailments, primarily due to poor household air quality. This increases their risk of mortality due to COVID-19 (Gully, 2020). In addition to this, unhygienic living conditions such as open drainage, unsafe water and open garbage dumping adds another layer of susceptibility to the virus as they are the breeding grounds of several types of diseases. It has been suspected that the coronavirus flourished in a lightly regulated municipal wet market in Wuhan and has parallels with the Surat plague (in western India) of 1994 which had foci of infection in overflowing cross-connected city sewers.

This section has demonstrated the primary reason for the mass exodus of migrants from cities, namely dense and appalling living conditions, which expose them to the danger of a COVID-19 infection. Migrants were ready to live in these poor conditions as long as they had a job. Once these jobs were gone due to the lockdown, there was no reason to put up with inhuman living conditions. Moreover, falling ill would mean a great personal loss, as there is no state-funded health

care (take up for discussion in the fourth section of this paper).

A second reason why there was a mass exodus from cities towards rural areas is related to the nature of informal job markets. We deal with this in the next section.

---

## 5. FRAGILE EMPLOYMENTS IN THE URBAN LABOUR MARKETS

---

In the preceding two sections we have elaborated the processes of the creation of urban informal economies through circular migration and spatial inequality that expose the poorest groups to the health challenges of informal settlements. In this section, we will examine how insecure employment pushed the migrants out of the city.

The informal economy provides tremendous opportunities for the semi-skilled migrants, who are seeking livelihood opportunities in the urban agglomerations.<sup>21</sup> However, one of the very defining features of informal jobs is the absence of social security.<sup>22</sup> Three characteristics of the informal economy with regard to social security are relevant for this paper: 1) Own-account workers, such as street vendors or household maids, rely on the urban density for their income. The pandemic directly affects these businesses; 2) In the absence of formal contracts (or weakly enforceable contracts), economic losses of firms directly lead to dismissals and job losses; 3) Informal workers cannot claim social benefits such as maternity leave, pension and public health care. In this section, we

---

21 Over ninety percent of the labour force is estimated to be operating in the informal economy. There is a wide range of literature on the informal economy explaining the mechanism of persistence of informality. See Chen and Carré (2020) for theoretical foundations; on the method of enumerating the size of the informal economy see International Labour Organization (2013), on social security policies for the informal economy see Pellissery (2013), on the Indian Informal sector, see National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS, 2009).

22 See Sanyal (2007) for theoretical foundations for the reasons of absence of social security in the informal economy.



will deal with the first two types of social security requirements. We will discuss how the pandemic added pressure on the workers' informal economy, and how the measures taken by the government responded to these challenges.

The contribution of the service sector to the Indian economy is estimated to be 55 percent. The service sector is primarily based on interaction. It is exactly this interaction that was restricted due to the pandemic. Most of the people engaged in informal labour found it very hard to earn a livelihood. People in certain sectors such as construction workers, street vendors, and domestic workers were significantly affected.

The estimated number of construction workers in India is five million. However, this is one of the unorganized worker groups in which social security measures were systematically introduced through a legislation in 1998. The legislation mandated the collection of cess from builders which will be deposited in a board that would give benefits to workers. However, implementation has been slow. The money collected from builders through cess is often diverted by the state for other purposes than social welfare of workers. Many builders are also commissioning separate labour contractors for employing construction workers, thus minimizing their possibility to be obliged to the worker. Therefore, in case of becoming unemployed or being in need of health care, a construction worker practically has to depend on his savings rather than social security programmes (read more on social security problems of construction workers in Rajput (2021)). As construction work came to a halt due to the pandemic, these workers without social security were severely affected.

The estimated number of street vendors in India is ten million. Street vending as a livelihood opportunity removed the barrier of capital investment to start a business. A variety of goods (vegetables, clothes) and services (repairing, eateries) are available on Indian streets (read Bhowmik [2007] for details of social security problems of street vendors). The Street Vendors Act 2014 protects the right to do business in some restricted areas. This was withdrawn when the lockdown was imposed. Resuming business has been extremely difficult, though the government lifted restrictions

four weeks after the lockdown had begun. The government announced a modest stimulus package including credit loans of Rs. 10,000 offered to vendors. However, less than ten percent of the vendors may have an official identification to claim such stimulus.

The official estimate of the number of domestic workers in India is 4.5 million. However, realistic numbers are above fifty million. The majority of domestic workers are women, who are engaged in short part-time work of one or two hours, serving multiple houses on a single day. The typical work involves cleaning, cooking and care work. Apart from the absence of social security measures, domestic workers are also often subjected to sexual violence in India's highly patriarchal social arrangements (read more on domestic workers issues in WIEGO, 2014). As the pattern of working for multiple households simultaneously is a cause for the spread of the virus, households immediately stopped arrangements with domestic workers. Some micro surveys conducted in the cities of Delhi and Bangalore have shown that over eighty percent of maids were told not to report for work.<sup>23</sup> Above ninety percent of them reported they had lost their salary for the month of April 2020.

The ability of the worker groups in the informal sector to demand their rights were completely dependent on how organized they were. For instance, groups such as street vendors and domestic workers were least organized. However, there was some penetration of trade unions in the construction sector. The builders lobbied with the state government to prevent the movement of construction workers back to their native villages.<sup>24</sup> Trade unions stepped in to demand for the basic freedom of movement, which was later prevailed. In other words, when the pandemic hit and income loss occurred, workers were denied basic civil rights, let alone supporting them with social benefits.

The second important issue in the informal labour market is job security. The court battle that

---

23 Report on a survey among 2,400 maids: *The Hindu* (page 12), 19 October 2020, Bangalore edition.

24 Most shocking of these negotiations took place when government of Karnataka cancelled a train at the request of builders on 6 May 2020 (Scroll.in, 2020)..

followed the lockdown is worth elaborating to understand the precariousness of these employment relations.

The Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India through a public letter on 20 March 2020 advised employers to neither lay off the employees nor to reduce their wages during the period of lockdown. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India through an order dated 29 March 2020 directed the authorities to ensure that all employers pay wages to their workers without any deductions for a duration of 50 days of lockdown.<sup>25</sup> The employers filed Public Interest Litigations in the Supreme Court challenging these directions. They argued that as businesses were closed, it was unviable to pay the employees. The court having heard the views of employees, employers and the government, directed the employers to engage in negotiation with employee associations to agree on the wages during lockdown period and beyond.<sup>26</sup>

In the informal economy context, the significance of the above episode is important. The implication of the court decision is not even relevant for a large number of workers for whom an employer is not identifiable (NCEUS, 2009). Even in places where the employer is identifiable, there is no bargaining relationship between employee and employer, due to the weak contracts defining the employment. A piece of evidence from the textile industry (a sector in which 45 million workers are estimated to be employed) would be useful to understand this.

The Alternative Law Forum (2020) documented the closure of a textile firm which employed 1450 workers in South India.<sup>27</sup> Most of the textile

production units produce garments for European brands. As the pandemic hit, the demand for branded garments fell sharply, and brands expressed their inability to support the production units. As the workers union engaged with the employers for job security and social protection, the strategy of 'union busting' was cleverly carried out by the factory owners as they made some workers resign from the job through offering small compensations, and laying off rest of the workers.<sup>28</sup>

This section has detailed on how own-account workers (self-employed) and workers with weak contracts were vulnerable to job insecurity, which prompted them to return to their native locations, where cost of living is low (no rent to pay, food may come from subsistence farming, etc.). The chances to find traditional livelihood opportunities are also high. COVID-19 interventions by the Indian government to respond to the negative consequences of the pandemic considered these dimensions. We will examine these in the next section.

---

## 6. HEALTH CARE FOR INFORMAL SECTOR WORKERS

---

Informal employment and its pervasive nature, as explained in the previous section, had a huge impact on the access to health care in cities. In the COVID-19 pandemic context, the most important area of social security is access to health care services. From the perspective of inequality, it is important to note that formal workers (less than ten percent of the workforce) have access to excellent health services through the Employee's State

---

of these, the factory owners were able to systematically lay off employees and eventually closed the company giving the reason of lack of demand from brand owners.

28 For workers, particularly migrant workers without support from local political groups, labour laws had been extremely important for their welfare and livelihood protection. In this context, it is also important to note that in the month of October 2020 the Indian parliament repealed 23 labour legislations and brought in five labour codes in an attempt to simplify complex labour laws in the country (more on this, see Mani et al., 2021).

---

25 MHA invoked the Disaster Management Act, 2005 even though the act does not explicitly vest any power to the Centre/State government to direct wage payments.

26 WRIT PETITION (C) DIARY No. 10983OF 2020

27 The production unit in the case study, based out of Mandya town of the Southern state of Karnataka, had been working since 2010, and unionization of workers took place since 2015. The unit was producing garment exclusively for the Swedish brand of H&M. H&M had contractual relationships with Gokaldas Exports (a registered Indian company). H&M was a signatory to the ILO's principles on Business and Human Rights. Despite

Insurance Scheme. The absence of similar health insurance and access to institutional hospital care puts informal workers at great risk of being pushed to poverty, since they have to rely on disposable income and savings, once they fall sick.

An assessment (National Commission on Macroeconomics and Health, 2005) reported although India is predominantly rural (as per census 2011 over 68% of the population is living in villages), over 80% of the health infrastructure and personnel are available to the 31% of the population living in urban areas. Over 75% of health expenditure was out-of-pocket expenditure from citizens (Duggal, 2007). Health care expenditure has been identified in many studies as the single most important factor driving poor workers to extreme debt (Balarajan et al., 2011).

The backbone of India's public health are 30,045 Public Health Centres (PHC) and 1,047,324 Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA). ASHA workers facilitate people's access to health and related services. Although the norm is one ASHA per 1000 inhabitants, this has never been achieved—largely because public health care expenditure is very low (in the annual budget of 2020-21, India set aside only 0.34% of its GDP for health). These patterns of limited expenditure on public health have a huge impact on the poor households. The population in the lowest income quintile spends about 14% of their income on health care whereas the population in the top quintile spends only 0.65% (Barik & Thorat, 2015).

The Indian constitution places health as a subject to be administered by the State government (see footnote 3). This is the reason why the performance of some of the states like Kerala is excellent in fields of health and education (Dreze & Sen, 1995), while some states like Uttar Pradesh are performing poorly.<sup>29</sup> Even under such conditions, a migrant prefers health services in the source state (rather than in the destination state), since falling ill leads to job loss, and requires family support. Therefore, for a migrant, travelling back source state became important.

---

<sup>29</sup> A comparison of social policy outcomes through such a governance approach is presented in Pellissery and Anand (2017).

In the light of the three challenges faced by migrants in cities – housing, informal employment, health services – what is required is to analyse is how far interventions by the government met these requirements.

---

## 7. SOCIAL POLICY FOR THE CREATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD

---

In this section, we will look at how different measures announced by the central government and state governments addressed the precarious situation created by the pandemic.

---

### 7.1 Central government interventions

---

The macro-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been significant across different countries as reported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF projected that the growth of the Indian GDP would decline from 4.2% (2019) to 1.9% (2020) due to the COVID-19 lockdown (the growth projection for India is 7.4% as per IMF World Economic Outlook released in 2020). In fact, during the quarter of April-July, it was reported that the Indian economy contracted by 25%.<sup>30</sup> The reported reduction in tax collection was 12% compared to the previous year. It is under these severe macro-economic pressures social policy interventions could be assessed. Apart from these economic losses, India was under severe social stress prior to the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the government's response had to deal with issues outstanding prior to COVID-19 and those created by the pandemic.

Both on the societal front as well as the economic front, India had been under severe pressure prior to the pandemic. The pressures resulted from the government's reluctance to deal with the question of inequality. Societal pressures were visible through violent protests against divisive citizenship legislations that were taking place in

---

<sup>30</sup> This is a conservative estimate by the rating agency ICRA as reported by the Business Standard (2020).

most Indian cities prior to the pandemic.<sup>31</sup> The second type of social pressure was emanating from farmer groups that were speaking up for decent livelihoods.<sup>32</sup> The pandemic offered a cover-up for these deep flaws in India's governance. As the lockdown measures were imposed through the Disaster Management Act, police cracked down on the protesters, and the pressures fizzled out. However, these structural issues posed challenges to deal with negative consequences created by COVID-19 through policy responses.

On 26 March 2020, a couple of days after the lockdown, the Finance Minister announced a relief package amounting to 0.8% of the GDP. This package included measures such as cash transfers to low-income households, food, cooking gas, insurance coverage for workers in the health sector, and income support for low-wage workers.<sup>33</sup> These relief measures were short-term. Most of the migrants, whom we discussed in the previous sections, would not receive these benefits. As an economic category these migrant workers are eligible for the income support offered. However, since migrants miss documentation to prove resi-

dency citizenship in the given locality, they would be excluded from these benefits. A long-term stimulus measure to boost the economy was needed.

Towards the end of May 2020, the government of India announced a stimulus package<sup>34</sup> claiming to be worth 10 percent of the GDP. After careful analysis of this package, it has been pointed out that the actual package is less than one percent. The rest of the package is appropriation of liquidity measures announced by the Reserve Bank of India (the repo rate was lowered by the central bank to help the banking sector to infuse money into the economy through lending), loans for different sectors (small industries, farmers), and government investments (see Dey & Kundu [2020] for a detailed analysis). In fact, the Indian economy had been performing poorly due to demand related factors even prior to the pandemic<sup>35</sup>. The government had not heeded the policy advice to increase demand. Rather, the government has been taking supply-driven measures particularly supporting the industry – to deal with economic losses incurred by corporate houses.

Bringing together a set of already existing measures (such as resources already allocated under the annual budget, liquidity measures of the central bank, government investments, loans) and few relief measures, the government labelled the package 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' (translated literally as Self-reliant India). The government was able to market this idea as an alternative.

An analysis of the stimulus package announced by the government will show how social policy is construed with a strong class bias. We will show two instances where the class bias is evident.

The first case are relief measures towards the asset-owning class compared to the labouring class. One of the key announcements was a moratorium on those who had taken institutional bank

31 The Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 that was passed in the Indian parliament for the first time used religion as a criterion to determine citizenship. The Act was being protested against as a direct attack on the secular fabric of Indian society. The Hindu nationalist government of the Bharatiya Janata Party was being opposed not merely by Muslims, who were targeted specifically, but also by those who believed in the secular constitution, which gave equal importance to all the religions.

32 It is important to note that a comprehensive legislation to address the farmers' concerns about market access was introduced in October 2020. However, this is being criticized as corporatization of agriculture. Particularly since the majority of Indian farmers are small holders (67% farmers holding less than one hectare of land; the average land size in India is 1.5 hectares), bargaining capacity with corporate power while accessing the market would be hugely unequal.

33 Over the last two decades, India had created a digital infrastructure for the banking system. Over last five years, most of the benefit transfers had been taking place through digital transaction mode. Though there are shortcomings, the unique identification for citizens called Aadhar also had been created over the past decade. For relief transfers this infrastructure became very useful. In April 2020, the government transferred relief cash to over 400 million citizens through the digital system.

34 Read Kothari (2020) which argues for self-reliance as opposed to the spirit of the contents of the stimulus package. In other words, the stimulus package viewed India as a production factory for the globe rather than producing things that would benefit Indians or the idea of self-reliance. The use of the very word Atmanirbhar was meant to communicate a religion-based national aggrandizement.

35 India's GDP growth rate in 2019 was 4.04 compared to 6.53 in 2018.

loans to buy homes and vehicles. The government declared a six-month moratorium on loans, and waived the interest for the six months period after a court battle. In this way, government's stimulation package reduced the asset risk significantly. Compared to this, towards the working class, when they experienced wage loss since factories were closed, the government asked the employers to pay wages from personal provident funds. Provident funds were savings for future.<sup>36</sup> All these savings were lost personally for workers due to the pandemic.

The second case is the stimulus package in rural areas. One of the important commitments by the government was to support farming in the rural areas. For several crops, the government announced support in terms of subsidised seeds and fertilizers. As the migrants headed towards the villages, the government aimed to create opportunities to support agriculture. However, it is important to note that such a scheme would benefit those who own land in rural areas. Most of the migrants may benefit indirectly through labour opportunities that open up. Compared to this, the demand was to generate jobs in urban areas. Since 2005, the Indian government has successfully implemented the Rural Employment Guarantee programme, which ensures 100 days of guaranteed employment for households in the lean agricultural season. This programme was being neglected in the past few years. COVID-19 has prompted the government to take this job-generation programme more seriously. There is a demand for a similar

---

36 Without adequate social security arrangements, the Provident Fund remains one of the main savings that workers in informal economy could rely on. Both the employer and employee contribute to the saving scheme which is managed by the central government through a registered Employee Provident Fund Organisation – EPFO (since 1952). With an interest rate of 8.5% this provided substantial cash to take home when a person retired from a job. Any employer who has more than 20 employees is mandated to register under the EPFO and make contributions to this fund towards the employee. Prior to the pandemic any money withdrawn from the EPFO had to be refunded. Only after the age of 54, one could withdraw money. As the pandemic hit, the government changed the EPFO rules to allow withdrawals of up to 75% without any obligation to pay the money back to the fund.

Urban Employment Guarantee programme since the pandemic has struck. Four regional state governments have already taken steps in this direction. For the workers without assets, opportunities for better working conditions is what is required.

---

## 7.2 Regional state government interventions

---

We have explained in the paper, why in India's federal arrangement the regional state governments had a much more important role in the social policy formulation and delivery than the Central government. Through several measures (reduction of states' budgets, introduction of the uniform Goods and Services Tax across the country), this importance had been reduced in last two decades. Yet, the Constitution assigns state governments the responsibility for providing several social policy services and benefits. In this regard, there were considerable differences in the responses of the state governments when the COVID-19 crisis unfolded.

Typical responses of regional state governments were cash support for workers who had stranded during transit between states, temporary accommodation, and additional food grains for those who were in the government list eligible to receive food subsidy. In a few states there were cash support (as low as Rs. 1000) provided to registered migrant workers (ref. Kühner et al. [2021] for a documentation on state-wise relief measures).

There was infrastructural support such as deferred payment on electricity charges for the public. State governments issued directives to landlords not to force payment of rents for a specified duration.

Sending states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Orissa had developed mechanisms to receive returnee migrants. These states prepared quarantine centres (for 14 days from the date of arrival), and provided food and residence at no cost to facilitate reverse migration. A few states also provided free transportation from these quarantine centres to the native villages back in the states.



A few states like Assam, Kerala and Karnataka intensified the registration of returned migrants in the employment guarantee scheme, so that alternative livelihood could be provided. It was also worth noting that in the state of Kerala, an insurance scheme was rolled out for migrant workers after the pandemic broke out.

An analysis of these responses indicates that protective responses were highest among different regional state governments. Measures that provided alternative sources of livelihood, which would foster resilience among poor migrant workers, were very limited.

---

## 8. CONCLUSION

---

This paper attempted to answer the research question as to whether social policy responses could mitigate the perils emerging from disorganized urbanism. Using the case of relief operations during the COVID-19 pandemic, the paper provided evidence for social policy interventions aimed at migrants in terms of food relief, cash transfer and health assistance. However, as shown in the paper, the key concern of spatial inequality remains unaddressed through social policy interventions. Three drivers for migration identified in the paper, namely a) inter-regional inequality, b) urban-rural divide and c) the social structure of labour relations are least touched by social policy instruments. In the context of wide spread inequality, social policy instruments, particularly used for relief at the time of COVID-19, have only an ameliorative function. From a structural point of view, social policy interventions need to aim at the drivers that create inequality.

The analysis of interventions by the central government and regional-state governments show that economic investment and growth was prioritized. Although there are some regional states which responded to the migrant question more effectively than others, it fell far short given the magnitude of the problem. In June 2020, the Supreme Court of India had to pass a suo motu order to the central and to the state governments to address the concerns of migrant workers.

The paper has dealt with a missing interdisciplinary lens in the social policy literature: how urban planning directly impacts human welfare. India may be the most fitting example for crowding its cities with migrant workers, but in turn providing no welfare measures for the workers living in such conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the magnitude of the problem, with a massive exodus towards rural hinterlands after the national lockdown. As we have shown in the paper, migration and overcrowded cities are symptoms of wider inequalities that prevail in the Indian society, especially in its rural areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic offers an opportunity to create secure jobs in cities as well as to plan decongested cities. The pandemic that has challenged both health (social security) and jobs (since the lockdown affected the macro-economy leading to unemployment) simultaneously, forces us to think of policy options which will bring both of these together. In the informal labour market, segregation of these two has been the single most important problem that had been unaddressed. By considering the intricate linkage between the informal labour market and informal settlement, it enables us to imagine alternative liveable cities.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Ahuja, R. (2019). A Beveridge plan for India? Social insurance and the making of the "formal sector". *International Review of Social History*, 64(2), 207–248. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859019000324>.
- Alternative Law Forum (2020). *Protesting workers in Covid-19 world*. Bangalore: Garment Workers Trade Union.
- Bhowmik, S. K. (2007). Street vendors in urban India: the struggle for recognition. In J. Cross, & A. Morales (Eds.), *Street entrepreneurs: people, place and politics in local and global perspective* (pp. 92–107). London: Routledge.
- Balarajan, Y., Selvaraj, S., & Subramanian S. V. (2011). Health care and equity in India. *Lancet*. 377(9764), 505–515. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(10\)61894-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(10)61894-6).
- Barik, D., & Thorat, A. (2015). Issues of unequal access to public health in India. *Front. Public Health*, 3(245), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2015.00245>

- Breman, J. (1985). *Of peasants, migrants, and paupers: Rural labour circulation and capitalist production in West India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Breman, J. (1996). *Footloose labour: Working in India's informal economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Business Standard (2020). India's Q1FY21 GDP may shrink by 25%, says ICRA; flags distress in MSMEs, August 25. Retrieved from [https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/india-s-q1fy21-gdp-may-shrink-by-25-says-icra-flags-distress-in-msmes-120082501450\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/india-s-q1fy21-gdp-may-shrink-by-25-says-icra-flags-distress-in-msmes-120082501450_1.html) [accessed 25 September 2020].
- Census of India (2011). *Census*. New Delhi: Registrar General of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
- Chandran, R. (2016). This is place, October 11. Retrieved from <http://www.thisisplace.org/i/?id=7f6614e4-b139-4db2-9dd7-e0cf4f38f2d3> [accessed 11 October 2020].
- Checkley, W., Pollard, S. L., Siddharthan, T., Babu, G. R., Thakur, M., Miele, C. H., & Van Schayck, O. CP. (2016). Managing threats to respiratory health in urban slums. *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*, 4(11), 852–854. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600\(16\)30245-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600(16)30245-4).
- Chen, M. & Carré, F. (2020). *Informal economy revisited*. London: Routledge.
- Davy, B. & Pellissery, S. (2013). The citizenship promise (un) fulfilled: The right to housing in informal settings. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(1), 68–84. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12033>.
- De Soto, H. (2000). *The mystery of capital: Why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else*. New York: Basic Books.
- Dey, S., & Kundu, A. (2020). Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan: Putting the cart before the horse. *Ideas For India*. Retrieved from <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/macroeconomics/atmanirbhar-bharat-abhiyan-putting-the-cart-before-the-horse.html> [accessed 20 September 2020].
- Dreze, J., & Sen, A. (1995) *India: Economic development and social opportunity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Duggal, R. (2007). Healthcare in India: Changing the financing strategy. *Social Policy & Administration*, 41(4), 386–394. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2007.00560.x>.
- Government of India (2020). *Economic survey 2019-20*. Delhi: Ministry of Finance.
- Gully, A. (2020). Coronavirus in the city: A Q&A on the catastrophe confronting the urban poor, April 1. *The New Humanitarian*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/interview/2020/04/01/coronavirus-cities-urban-poor> [accessed 11 October 2020].
- Haque, J. (2018). *Land, caste and power in circular migration*. NIAS Working Paper No. WP9-2018. Bangalore: NIAS.
- Hindustan Times (2020). 198 migrant workers killed in road accidents during lockdown: Report. Retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/198-migrant-workers-killed-in-road-accidents-during-lockdown-report/story-HTWzAWMYnOkyyckW1dyKqL.html> [accessed 15 October 2020].
- International Labour Organization (2013). *Measuring informality: A statistical manual on the informal sector and informal employment*. Geneva: International Labour Office.
- IMF World Economic Outlook (2020). *World Economic Outlook Database*. Retrieved from <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/SPROLLS/world-economic-outlook-databases#sort=%40imfdate%20descending> [accessed 12 November 2021].
- Jan Sahas (2020). *Voices of the invisible citizens*. New Delhi: Jan Sahas.
- Khandelwal, R. (2020). Across India, workers complain that employers used lockdown to defraud them of wages they are owed. Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/article/959428/across-india-workers-complain-that-employers-used-lockdown-to-defraud-them-of-wages-they-are-owed> [accessed 30 June 2021].
- Kennedy, L., & Zerah, M. H. (2008). The shift to city-centric growth strategies: Perspectives from Hyderabad and Mumbai. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(39), 110–117.
- Kothari, A. (2020). The various avatars of self-reliance. *Wall Street International Magazine*, July 31.
- Kühner, S., Nakray, K., & Neff, D. (2021). *India's social policy response to COVID-19: Temporary relief in a rigid welfare landscape*. Bremen: The Collaborative Research Center 1342: Global Dynamics of Social Policy, University Bremen. <https://doi.org/10.26092/elib/968>.
- Kundu, A., & Mohanan, P.C. (2009). *Employment and inequality outcomes in India*. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University/Indian Statistical Service.
- Lewis, C. (2011). Mere 100 families own Dharavi slum sprawl. *Times News Network*, December 17.
- Lipton, M. (1977). *Why poor people stay poor: A study of urban bias in world development*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

- MacAuslan, I. (2011). Crossing internal boundaries: Political and physical access to the public distribution system in India. In R. Sabates-Wheeler, & R. Feldman (Eds.), *Migration and social protection. Claiming social rights beyond borders* (pp. 183–209). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mani, M., Mathew, B., Pellissery, S., & Bharadkar, K. (2021). L'histoire des nouveaux codes du travail en Inde. *Revue de droit comparé du travail et de la sécurité sociale*, 2021(1), 46–57. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rdctss.623>
- National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) (2009). *The challenge of employment: An informal economy perspective Vol. 1 & 2*. New Delhi: Government of India and Academic Foundation.
- National Commission on Macroeconomics and Health (2005). *Report of the National Commission on Macroeconomics and Health*. New Delhi: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.
- National Crime Records Bureau (2019). *Crime in India*. New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs.
- NDTV (2020). 5 states to evacuate students stranded in Rajasthan's coaching hub Kota. Retrieved from <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/5-states-to-take-back-students-stranded-in-rajsthans-coaching-hub-kota-amid-lockdown-says-chief-min-2215101> [accessed 1 October 2020].
- Patel, A. (2020). Preventing COVID-19 amid public health and urban planning failures in slums of Indian cities. *World Medical and Health Policy*, 12(3): 266–273. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wmh3.351>
- Pellissery, S. (2013). The informal economy: dilemmas and policy responses. In R. Surender, & R. Walker (Eds.), *Social policy in a developing world* (pp. 81–100). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Pellissery, S., Pampackal, A., & Bopiah, P. (2015). Caste and distributive justice: Can social policies address durable inequalities? *Social Policy and Administration*, 49(6): 785–800. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12169>
- Pellissery, S., & Anand, V. (2017). Social investment regimes in India. Development Research Seminar at the International Institute of Social Studies (Conference Proceedings). Hague.
- Pellissery, S., & Lodemel, I. (2020). Property and social citizenship. *Social Policy and Society*, 19(2): 271–273. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746419000551>
- Pellissery, S. (2021). Social Policy in India: One hundred years of the (stifled) social question. In L. Leisering (ed.), *One hundred years of social protection: The changing social question in Brazil, India, China and South Africa* (pp.121–156). London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Pellissery, S., Vijay, P., Srivastava, K., & Dhrishti, R. (2021). Quality of health care in the largest democracy: A moral foundation Theory view on societal impact due to COVID. *International Journal of Social Quality*, 11(2): 63–84. <https://doi.org/10.3167/IJSQ.2021.11010206>
- PTI (2020). Dharavis journey to becoming Mumbai's covid-19 hotspot, May 14. Retrieved from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/dharavis-journey-to-becoming-mumbai-s-covid-19-hotspot/articleshow/75737341.cms?from=mdr> [accessed 11 October 2020].
- Rajput, K. (2021). Social security for workers: Problems of access. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 56(17).
- Sanyal, K. K. (2007). *Rethinking capitalist development*. London: Routledge.
- Scroll.in (2020). Coronavirus: Karnataka cancels special trains for migrant workers after meeting with builders. Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/latest/961161/coronavirus-karnataka-cancels-special-trains-for-migrant-workers-after-meeting-with-builders>
- Sethi, M., & Mittal, S. (2020). Improved rental housing to make cities COVID safe in India. *Cities*, 106.
- Tumbe, C. (2016). *Urbanisation, demographic transition and the growth of cities in India 1870-2020*. Working Paper, C-35205-INC-1, London: International Growth Centre.
- Todaro, M. P. (1976). Internal migration in developing countries: A review of theory, evidence, methodology and research priorities. Geneva: International Labor Office.
- UNDP (2006). *Beyond scarcity: Power, poverty and the global water crisis*. New York: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- WIEGO (2014). *Domestic workers' laws and legal issues in India*. WIEGO Law and Informality Resources. Cambridge: WIEGO.
- World Bank (2012). *Poverty and social exclusion in India*. New Delhi: World Bank.
- World Bank (2020). *Poverty and equity brief*, October 2020. Retrieved from [https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2020/Global\\_POVEQ\\_IND.pdf](https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2020/Global_POVEQ_IND.pdf) [accessed 09 November 2020].
- Zhao, F., & Pellissery, S. (2016). Hukao and Caste: The right to have rights in India and China. HKU-USC-IPPA Conference on Public Policy (Conference Proceedings). Hong Kong.