

32 Days and Counting:

COVID-19 Lockdown, Migrant Workers, and the Inadequacy of Welfare Measures in India

Stranded Workers Action Network



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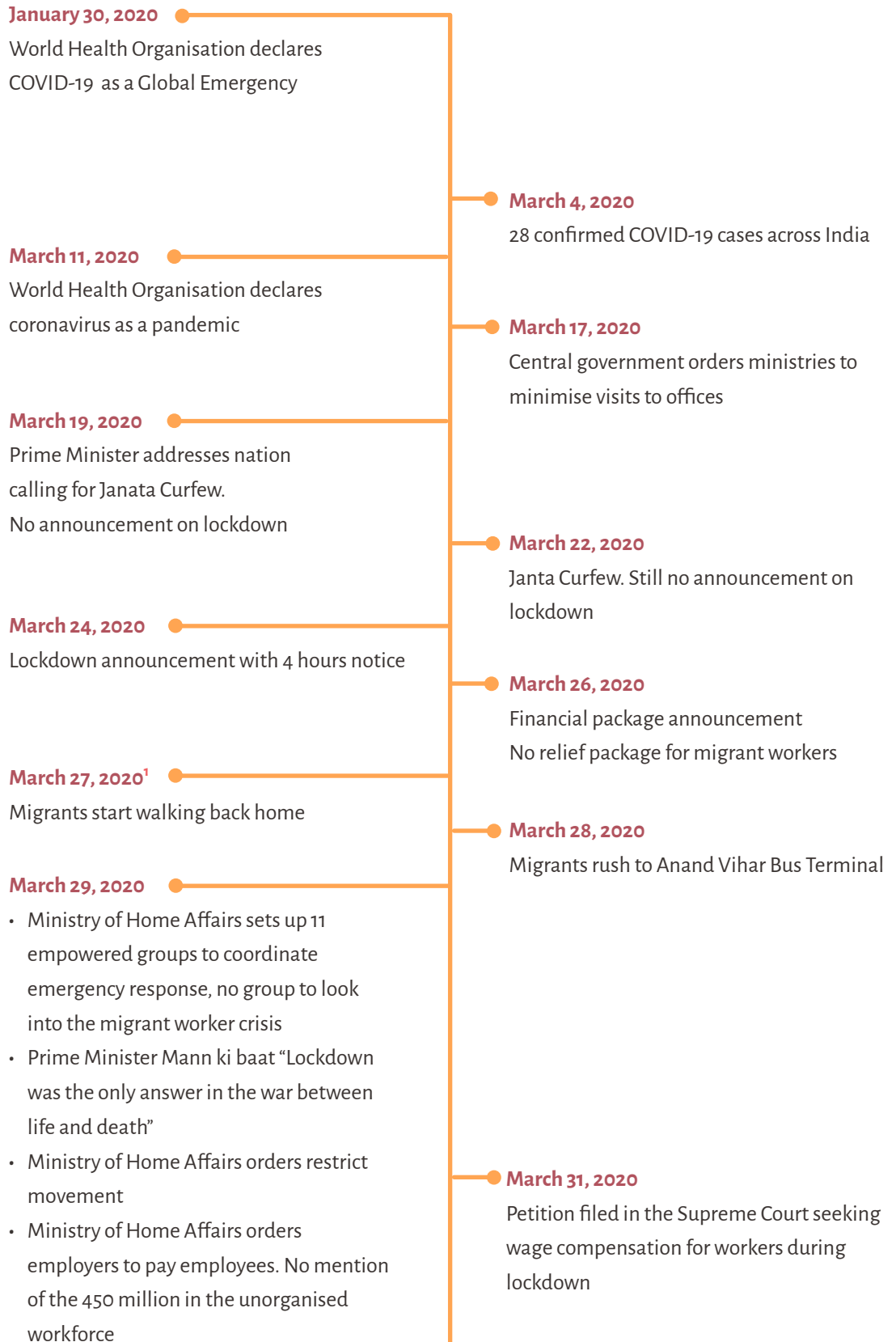
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The Lockdown and the Unfolding Migrant Worker Crises



April 14, 2020

Migrant workers spontaneously protest in Surat

April 19, 2020

Ministry of Home Affairs allows movement of migrants within states

April 29, 2020

Ministry of Home Affairs order allowing inter-state movement of migrant workers **by buses. No mention of implementation mechanisms and costs.**

April 3, 2020

Prime Minister calls for citizens to support the lockdown by switching off lights. No mention of migrant workers

April 15, 2020

- Extension of lockdown till 3rd May. Passing mention of difficulties faced during lockdown
- Migrants rush to Bandra railway station wanting to return home

April 21, 2020

The Supreme Court disposes of the petition for wages for migrant workers because they were satisfied with the government's efforts

May 1, 2020

Happy May Day!
International Workers' Day

Introduction

The Prime Minister (PM), Mr. Narendra Modi announced an extension of the lockdown on the 14th of April. The lockdown is expected to continue at least until the 3rd of May. The Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN) has been actively responding to the crisis of migrant workers across the country since the 27th of March. Based on ongoing relief work, SWAN released a report on the 15th of April titled **21 Days and Counting: COVID-19 Lockdown, Migrant Workers, and the Inadequacy of Welfare Measures in India.**

The report received widespread media coverage. However, in many places, it was misrepresented as a research study or a survey. We would like to clarify again that the report is NOT based on a survey of a random sample of workers, but comprises all those who reached out to us in distress. We explain this in more detail in the “About SWAN, Limitations and Assumptions” section of this version of the report. We wish to state upfront and own up to the “selection bias” in our findings. During a crisis like this, we strongly believe in and will continue to amplify the voices of those who are finding it the hardest to access relief.

This is an extension of the previous report based on continued work from April 14th till April 26th. SWAN’s work is still continuing. We are releasing this report on May Day to acknowledge the long history of workers’ struggles across the world and to highlight the plight of millions of stranded migrant workers across India. While they have been invisible in our collective consciousness, their emergence in such numbers from the shadows of our cities, is an urgent reminder to reimagine our society anchored in Constitutional principles.

On a positive side, albeit slowly, relief is trickling in. We have documented instances in this report where administration and civil society groups have responded promptly and with sensitivity. Nevertheless, this report, based on workers’ testimonies, continues to be an indictment of the unilateral decision taken by the Central government. The decision was taken without any consultation with state governments, let alone with the people (or organisations representing them) who have borne the maximum brunt of these decisions. SWAN has continued to provide direct relief, document migrant workers’ experiences and facilitate access to relief measures. As on 26th April, we have interacted with **1,531 groups of workers, adding up to 16,863 people.** Since the extension of the lockdown, there have been some important developments.

Institutional Response

A petition for wage payments to migrant workers during the lockdown was filed in the Supreme Court (SC)² in the first phase of lockdown. In accordance with various progressive legislations, among other things, the petitioners argued that “*the Central and State Authorities have the necessary power and consequential duty to direct that all daily wage earners be provided with their wages at the place where they are currently present under the lockdown.*” **However, the petition was disposed of on 21st April,** on grounds that the bench was satisfied with the governments’ efforts to provide relief.

Evidence of growing distress amongst migrant workers and the inadequacy of current relief measures including testimonies and data from the SWAN report were swept aside with the SC considering only government reports. In fact the credibility of **all studies** by “private bodies” itself was openly questioned. The Solicitor General, Mr. Tushar Mehta, arguing on behalf of the Union of India, filed a status report and submitted that various measures are in place to address the issues concerning the migrant workers.

The Government of India’s Status Report³ argues that “In view of the aforesaid package[sic: Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY)] which takes care of the daily needs of every poor person which includes migrant workers as well as their respective families in their original villages, there was no necessity for migration workers to rush to their villages who started shifting from their place of occupation to their place of residence. Their daily needs were being taken care of wherever they were working and the daily needs of their family members were being taken care of in their respective villages.”

The financial package (PMGKY), announced by the Finance Minister (FM), Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman, had nothing to offer for the migrant workers. While there was an announcement of some cash support for construction workers, in reality, most construction workers are not registered and hence not even eligible to receive any cash support.⁴ Moreover, the PMGKY also makes some incorrect claims. As numerous economists have argued,⁵ in reality, the actual amount in the relief package is much less than what was announced. According to the International Monetary Fund’s estimate,⁶ India’s actual spending announced so far by the Centre and states combined is Rs 1.42 lakh crores contrary to the Centre’s claims of Rs 1.7 lakh crores. On one hand, the Solicitor General’s responses demonstrate the uncaring attitude towards 90 percent of India’s 500 million strong labour force. On the other hand, being a respondent in the petition, his claims of “authorities attempting to address the same immediately” are vague and are not backed by the standards of evidence and rigour asked of the petitioner. As we highlight in this report as we did in the last, the migrant workers’ experiences and testimonies serve as counter examples to Mr. Mehta’s claims.

Addressing members of the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry, **the Principal Economic Adviser, Mr. Sanjeev Sanyal, warned that the economic downturn would last a long time.**

Supporting the PM’s lockdown measures prior to announcing any economic stimulus, he said “our first few efforts are to make sure you have enough working capital to keep yourself alive through this shock.” In response to the woefully inadequate announcement of a package of Rs 1.7 lakh crore after the first lockdown, Mr. Sanyal said “Of course, we are not going to solve poverty by giving Rs 500... But we are just cushioning the hit, so that everyone has some money and some food.” These remarks further underscore the continued indifference that the working class is being subjected to.

While there is a strong signalling towards ensuring “working capital”, there is no mention of the condition of the working class. Exclusion begins from the language used. The remarks by Mr. Sanyal regarding the poor having sufficient money were echoed by the Solicitor General, Mr. Mehta, in the Supreme Court as well. Responding to the workers’ testimonies in the first SWAN report, presented by Advocate Prashant Bhushan in the migrant worker petition case, Mr. Mehta remarked :

“Who told Mr Bhushan that no one is getting anything? There are direct benefit transfer schemes.”

However, the distressed stranded workers who reached out to SWAN neither seem to be able to “cushion the hit” and very few have benefitted from any cash transfer scheme of the government. **However, from the 259 that have received any cash transfer from the government, only 20 of them received ₹500 (the monthly amount for Jan Dhan Yojana account holders).**

Ministry of Home Affairs and Migrant Worker Movement

On 29th March the **Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order that restricted any inter-state movement of migrants with immediate effect.** With thousands who had started walking towards their homes soon after the lockdown was announced, many were stopped in their tracks and redirected to hastily set up shelters. Some were forced to walk back to where they started. Three weeks later, on 19th April, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a Standard Operating Procedure for the movement of migrants, this time allowing movement within states. State governments were directed to make transport arrangements for migrants to go back to “their places of work”. In some places, transport arrangements have been made for migrants in shelters to return home if they were stranded in border districts.⁷ In a recent video conference with the Centre there seems to be some demand amongst state governments for transport arrangements for migrants but only Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Rajasthan governments have submitted concrete proposals.⁸ After extensive coverage of the migrant worker crisis, some political leaders such as Sushil Modi acknowledged the acute distress associated with both hunger and “homesickness” that migrants are experiencing,⁹ but the response of migrant sending and receiving states has been extremely uneven. On 29th April, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order permitting the inter-state movement of migrants but only by road in a manner that is mutually agreed to by the receiving and sending states. Even while this order may ease restrictions, it raises several concerns as to how millions of migrants can safely make their way home if the mode of transport is restricted to buses.

The PM's lockdown announcement was justified by saying that “a period of at least 21 days is extremely critical to break the infection chain of Coronavirus”. However, a series of reports¹⁰ have revealed that **the advice of India's own, premier body of medical experts, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), which was ignored, was quite the contrary.** In a presentation to the government, the ICMR had made clear that a total lockdown would reduce the peak number of infections on a given day by 20-25 percent at best. To justify the extension of a total lockdown, the government released graphs to show that COVID-19 positive cases had been limited to 3.6 percent of what it could have been. With extremely poor testing rates, and lack of transparency of the models and underlying assumptions used to arrive at the counterfactual trend of infection spread, these numbers are questionable. Public messaging, including the PM's addresses to the nation only reveal half-truths in order to elicit compliance. A humanitarian crisis could have been averted by better preparedness (even if a limited lockdown of this kind were to be imposed), adopting a range of measures such as increasing testing and quarantining facilities, setting up nationwide monitoring mechanisms and arranging adequate protective resources for health-care workers.

As this report further elucidates, the situation of hunger, shortage of money and basic essentials and an overall sense of vulnerability among the large section of the migrant labour force is more dire than ever before. The SWAN team, among several others, wishes and hopes that the democratic pillars —

legislature, executive, judiciary, media — recognise the anguish and trauma faced by millions of the working class and take steps to ensure that Constitutional values of liberty, equality, fraternity, and dignity are restored at the earliest. It is already very late.

In contrast to the government neglect the picture is not entirely bleak from a civil society standpoint. We are encouraged to keep going by the outpouring of support for this small initiative. A total of about 300 donors have contributed to SWAN's effort with contributions ranging from ₹100 to ₹1 lakh. They have done this by transferring money directly to migrant workers. Till April 26th, due to the efforts of SWAN volunteers, a total of ₹22,40,500 has been transferred directly to the workers' accounts. While the governments' PMGKY relief package has gaping holes, and religious biases mar even food distribution in many parts of the country, countless acts of solidarity extended by ordinary people and civil society organisations during this time gives us hope and reassurance that our social fabric is not entirely in tatters.

About SWAN, Limitations and Assumptions

The relief work by the SWAN team began on the 27th of March. Within a few days, the number of distress calls increased significantly and more volunteers joined the SWAN team. We then created four zonal teams to respond to calls from workers stranded in different regions across the country. Given the increasing volume of distress calls and the increased decentralisation of the SWAN team to address the needs of stranded workers, it was decided to systematically collect some basic information from workers to better assess their needs so that the response to distress can be better.

We ask basic questions to the workers such as how many days of rations and how much money they are left with, whether the workers received rations from the government and some other questions. Once this process is completed, we respond with some cash transfer and/or connecting the stranded with local organisations for rations and food. Wherever possible, we have tried to ensure that government rations reach them. Till the 26th of April, SWAN has interacted with 16,863 stranded workers of whom 4,024 are women and children. Out of 7,235 people who have received money transfers from SWAN (43 percent of the total), around 19 percent of the workers have requested for a repeat transfer and 16 percent have received repeat transfers. The total amount of money transferred thus far is ₹22,40,500 .

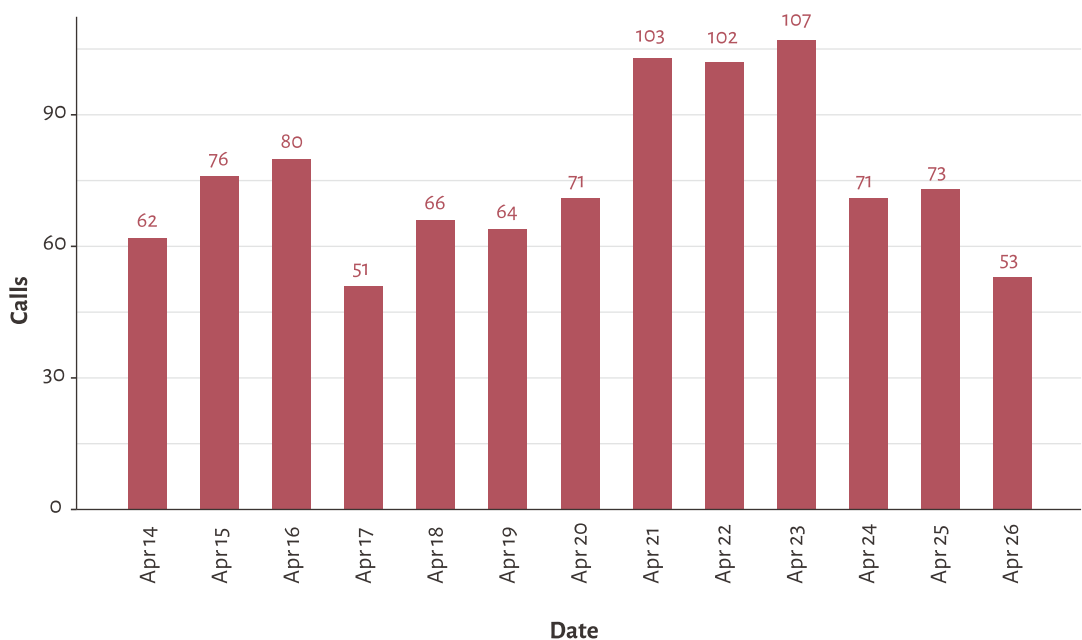
As mentioned earlier, this report is NOT an outcome of a sample survey and is not meant to be a research study either. For one, the SWAN volunteers have neither created any nationally representative sampling frame, nor set out to collect information from workers for the sake of a survey. While there are definite merits of such an exercise, we wish to clarify that this is not the case here. On the contrary, SWAN volunteers are responding to distress calls from stranded workers and as such there is a distinct “distress bias.” However, if consistency of distress calls (Figure 1) are any yardstick then it's an obvious inference that suffering and alienation are prompting the vulnerable

to reach out in any way they can. This report should therefore be understood as a compendium of testimonies of stranded migrant workers that have been systematically documented as part of the relief work.

We now present some assumptions and clarifications on the first version of the report.

- **First**, the systematic collection of basic information started only a few days into the relief work and as such we do not have complete responses for all those who have reached out.
- **Second**, we are considering only non-missing values for any aggregate data that we are presenting and consequently the response rates to different questions are different. In this version of the report, we present the number of responses for each aggregate data in parenthesis.
- **Third**, each call corresponds to a group of stranded workers or stranded families. The group sizes vary from 3 to 4 to more than 50. We make the assumption that the responses are reflective of a generalised position for the entire group. In this report, we also report data from two new questions which seek to assess what the worker intends to do after the lockdown ends. For these questions we treat the responses as only that of the caller and not the group. While lack of food and money holds true for a group and hence they reach out, post lockdown decisions, would largely be an individual's prerogative.
- **Fourth**, we wish to highlight that in the first version of the report, there were few instances of duplicate information and a few anomalies that have been rectified in this version. The total number of stranded workers as on 13th April should have been around 9,500 instead of around 11,000. We recalculated statistics based on the above changes for data as on 13th April and found that all the recalculated statistics, without loss of generality, are within two to four percent of the numbers presented in the earlier report.

Figure 1:
Number of calls
received by date

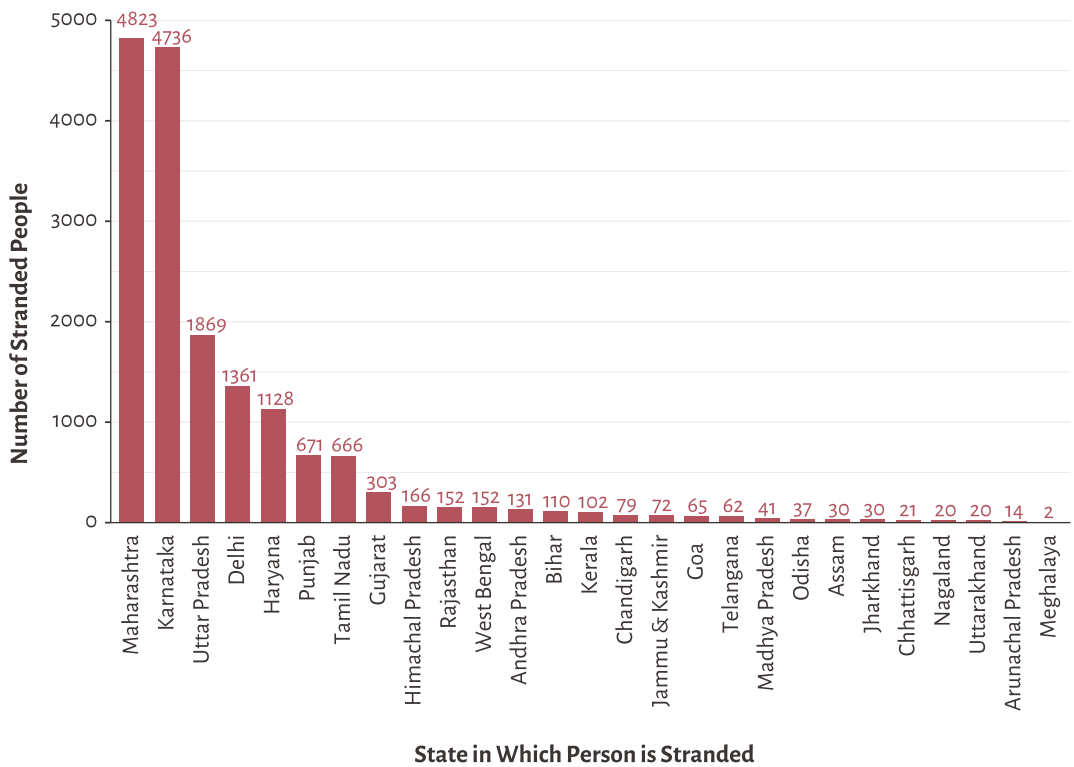


Coverage and Migrant Worker Profile

Figure 1 gives the distribution of where the workers are stranded. Among those who reached out to SWAN, the majority of workers are stranded in Maharashtra (4,823), followed by Karnataka (4,736) and then Uttar Pradesh (1,869) and Delhi (1,361). As we have already mentioned, this is not a nationally representative survey so we urge you to look closely at the state specific trends and figures in addition to the overall findings.

- Out of 16,863 workers who reached out to us, 4,024 are women and children.
- Roughly 59 percent of them are daily wage factory/construction workers, 11 percent are non-group based daily wage earners like drivers, domestic help etc and 16 percent are self-employed like vendors, zari workers etc. (This is out of 10,929 stranded workers for whom we have this data.)
- The average daily wages of those who reached out to us are ₹380. The median daily wages are ₹365.
- About 43 percent of those who have reached out to us are originally from Bihar, about 27 percent are from Jharkhand, about 12 percent are from Karnataka and about 6 percent are from West Bengal. (This is out of 16,673 stranded workers for whom we have this data.)

Figure 2:
Distribution of stranded workers across states







Rate of Hunger and Distress Exceeding the Rate of Relief: An Overview

As per a recent newspaper article by Jayati Ghosh, Prabhat Patnaik, and Harsh Mander,¹¹ about 77 million metric tonnes of food grains are in the Food Corporation of India (FCI) warehouses. The buffer stock norm to be maintained is 24 million tonnes. With the current Rabi harvest, the stocks are going to increase by another 40 million tonnes. The writers also present a cogent argument that holding costs are more than giving the rations to the needy. The impact of the lockdown has worsened the hunger situation given that India ranked 105th out of 117 countries in the Global Hunger Index¹² in 2019. In the light of such poor rankings, there is never a better time than now to universalise rations. Food security and provisions have been low and cash in hand also continues to be abysmally low.

Rations and Cooked Food

Food distress is still high, and 50% of workers had rations left for less than 1 day.

- About 50 percent of the workers had rations left for less than 1 day which has remained unchanged since the first phase of the lockdown. It increased to about 54 percent for a few days after 14th April but has been steady around the halfway mark throughout the period.
- About 72 percent of the workers said their rations will finish in 2 days. (These are out of 10,170 stranded workers for whom we have this data.)

32 days since the lockdown 4 out of 5 workers who reached out do not have access to government rations while 68% still do not have access to cooked food.

- About 82 percent (out of 12,248) had not received rations from the government and 68 percent (out of 9,743) had not received any cooked food. This is a 14 percent improvement in access to rations since April 14th, but only a 2 percent improvement in access to cooked meals. Figure 2 shows that this is largely driven by responses in Karnataka. It is important to point out here that even if workers have received rations or cooked food once, it is being counted as received. And, for cooked food, access from any source, i.e., government or civil society organisation is being counted.

Figure 3:
Percentage
of workers
who have
not received
rations from the
government

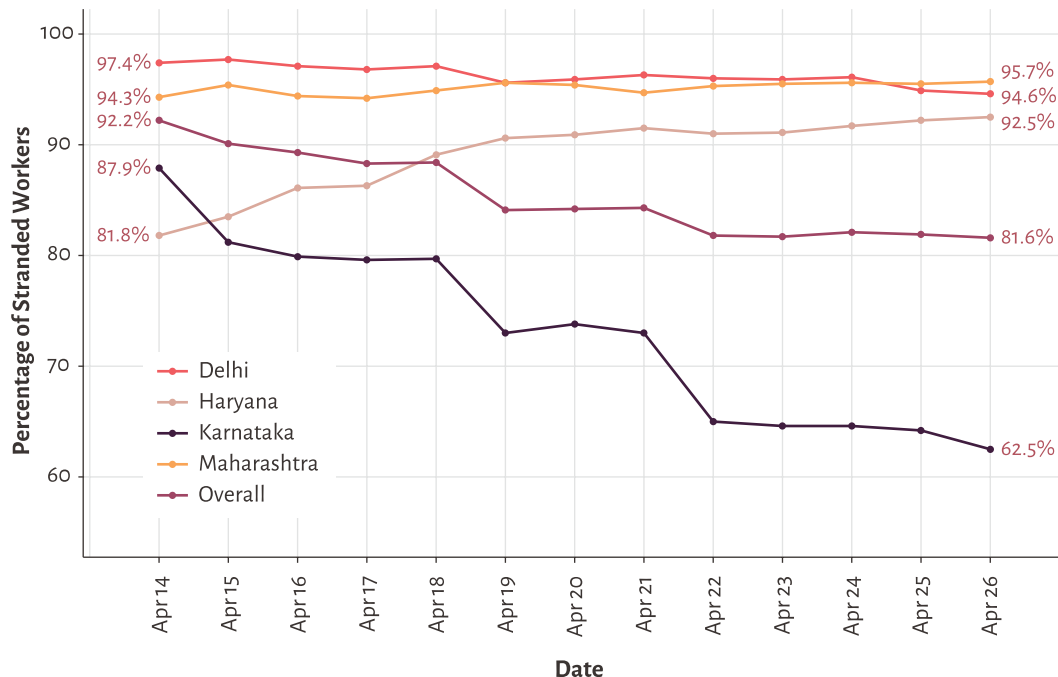


Figure 3 shows access to government rations in the second phase of the lockdown from April 14th till April 26th. It shows four major states (Maharashtra, Karnataka, Delhi, Haryana) and the overall picture of all the states from where workers have reached out to us.¹³ The light purple line (“Overall”) depicts the scenario over time for all the states combined. Overall, from about 92 percent not having access to government rations on April 14th, the number has decreased to about 82 percent on April 26th. This is largely driven by two factors — **(a) changing nature of people in distress reaching out to us (b) better partnerships between local administration and civil society organisations and better administrative response in Karnataka compared to the other states.**

It is also evident from Figure 3 that **access to government rations in Maharashtra has been consistently poor.** Till April 14th, more than 94 percent did not have access to government rations and by April 26th, this number worsened to around 96 percent. **Delhi has been equally poor in this respect and the situation has deteriorated in Haryana.** From about 81 percent not having access to government rations till April 14th, it has worsened to more than 94 percent not having access to government rations in Haryana. **Administrative response in Karnataka has been better.** Among all those who reached out to us till April 14th about 87 percent were not able to access government rations. However, by April 26th, among those who reached out to us, this had decreased by 25 percentage points to 62 percent. This is largely driven by two groups one of which contacted us from Kaveri Nagar in Bengaluru on 19th April and another group of workers from a coffee estate in Chikamagaluru who reached out on 22nd April. In both cases group sizes were relatively large and they were not migrant workers but workers who have been residents for a while in Karnataka.

Since the extension of lockdown, there is also a palpable change in the kind of people who are reaching out. While distress calls from circular migrant workers continue, there is also an increase in the number of distress calls from groups of people who have been residents in a place for a long time with ration cards in the state. They have received government rations but not continuously.

Figure 4:
Percentage
of people
who have not
received cooked
food from any
source

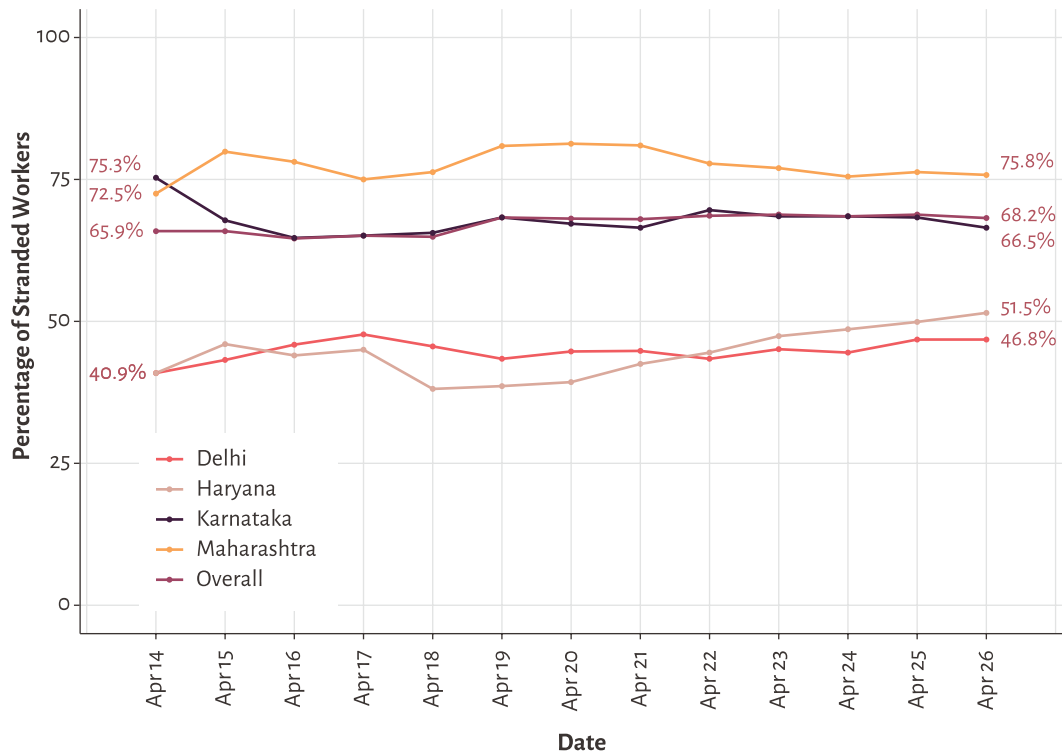


Figure 4 shows change in the access to cooked food in the second phase of lockdown. It must be clarified that for this we asked if the workers had got cooked food from any source, i.e., from the government and/or from any civil society organisations. Consequently, the numbers considered only for the government would be worse than what is represented. **Maharashtra seems to be comparatively worse off here as well.** On April 14th, roughly 73 percent of all those who reached out had no access to cooked food from any source. This worsened to about 76 percent on April 26th. **Karnataka shows a marginal 5 percent improvement** in this from about 72 percent not having any cooked food on April 14th to about 67 percent not having received any cooked food from any source till April 26th. In other words, about 28 percent of all those who reached out had cooked food from at least some source till April 14th, and this increased to about 33 percent on April 26th. The governments and civil society groups in **Delhi and Haryana have been marginally better in providing cooked food to stranded workers.** Roughly 53 percent of those who reached out to us from Delhi have had cooked food from some source till April 26th and roughly 48 percent of those who reached out to us from Haryana have had cooked food from some source.

Cash Availability

With no cash-relief for migrants, 64% have less than ₹100 left with them

- With no change since April 14th, about 78 percent of people have ₹300 or less left with them and 74 percent of people have ₹200 or less left with them.
- 64 percent of people have less than ₹100 left with them. (This is out of 9,981 stranded workers for whom we have this data.)
- **More than 97 percent (out of 10,383) have not received any cash relief from the government.** As per a highly conservative estimate, 258 of them have received cash support from the government. This is a massive overestimate because we are assuming that every member of the group that called us received cash support from the government even if only one of them got it.

In reality, somewhere between 49 and 258 people out of 10,383 have received some cash support. It is only a few migrant workers from Bihar who have received a ₹1,000 cash transfer and a few that have had ₹500 deposited in the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana accounts.

Precarity continues, with 46% of calls received being “SOS” calls (out of 1,385 groups of workers) with no money or rations left or had skipped the previous meal.

Figure 5:
Percentage of people having less than 1 day of rations

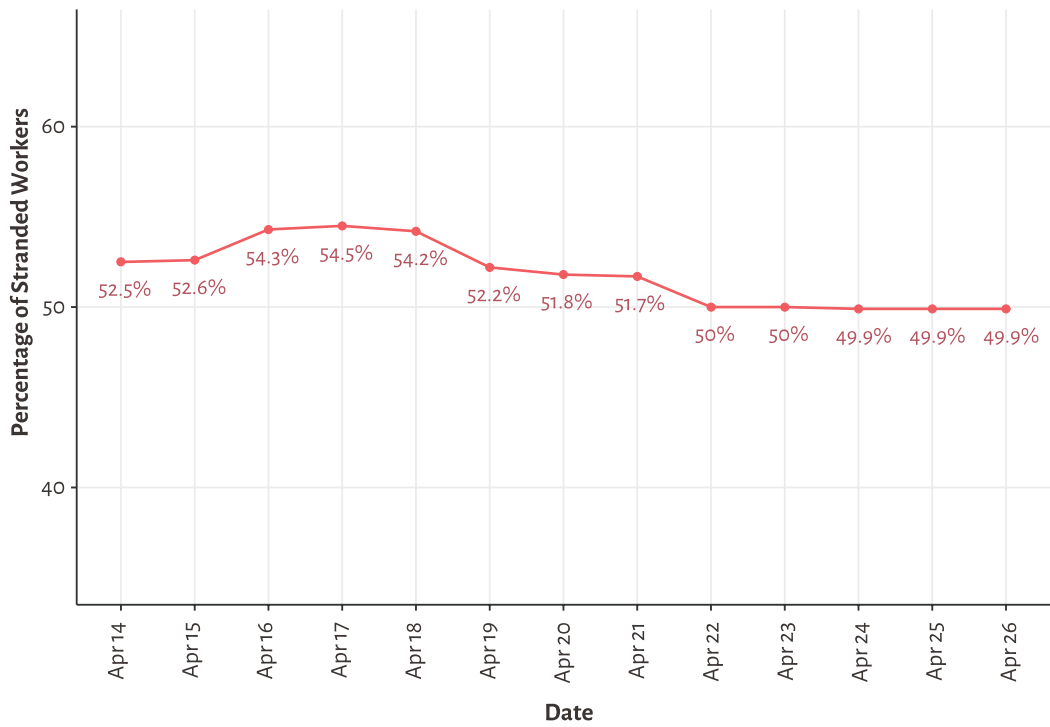


Figure 6:
Percentage of people making SOS calls with no food or money between April 14th and April 26th

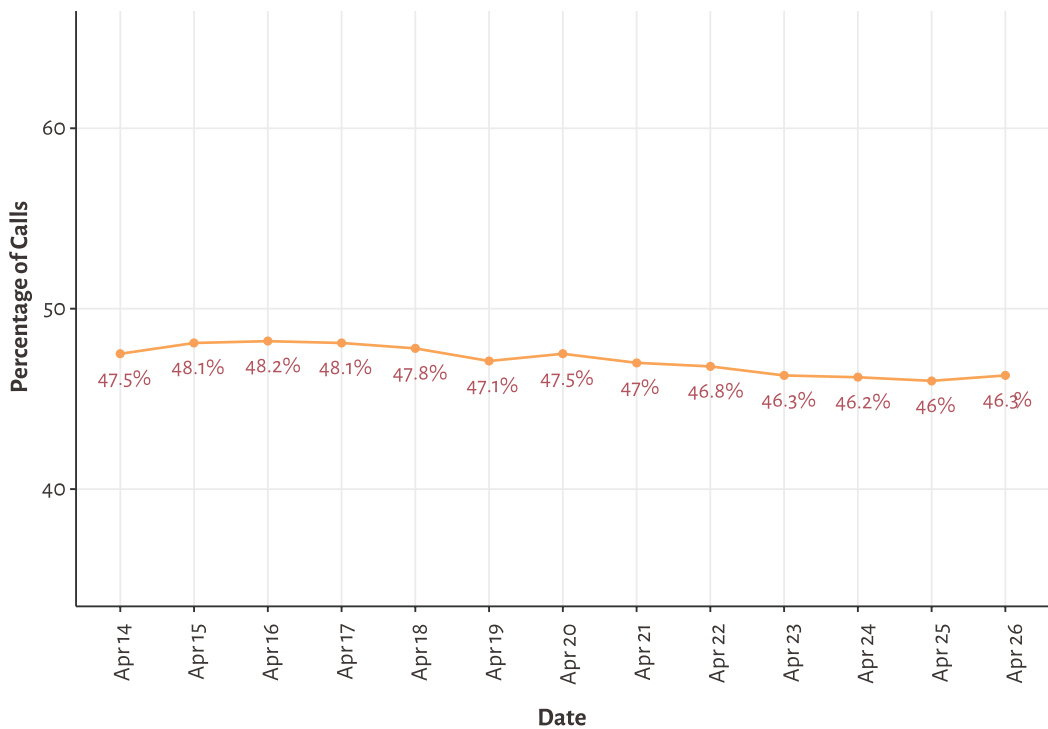


Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 5, and Figure 6, taken together, continue to demonstrate that the persistence of hunger is much more than the rate of access to government rations. Had there been political will, one month into the lockdown, we would have witnessed better reach and uptake of rations and a significant drop in the percentage of people making SOS calls for food and money.

Wages and Employers

As on April 26th, only about 6% of all those who have reached out to us have received their full wages during the lockdown. About 78% have not been paid at all. This excludes the self-employed workers.

- Compared to 11 percent who had been paid partially as in the previous report, 16 percent have been partially paid by their employers during the lockdown. Around 78 percent have not been paid at all. (This is out of 10,929 stranded workers for whom we have this data.)

More than 99% of the self-employed have had no earnings during this period. These include street vendors, rickshaw pullers.

Figure 7:
Percentage of workers who have been paid during the lockdown

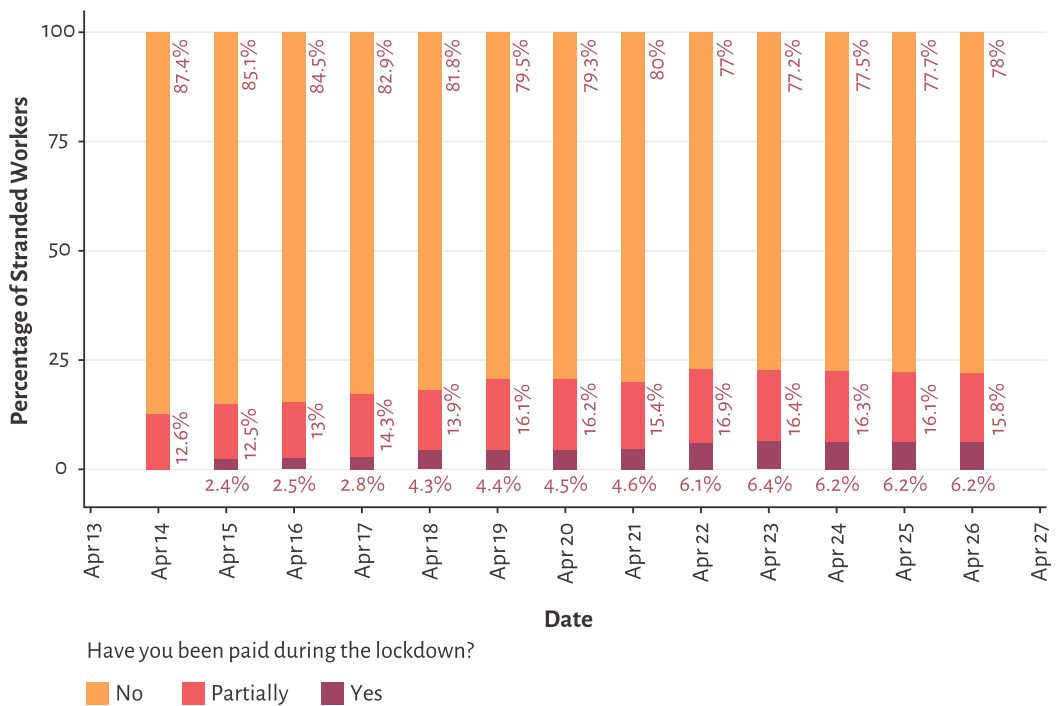


Figure 7 shows that till April 14th, more than 87 percent of the workers who had reached out had not been paid by their employers and about 13 percent had been partially paid. As of 26th April, only about 6 percent of all those who have reached out have received their full wages during the lockdown and about 16 percent have been partially paid.

Further, this also needs to be understood carefully. First, while it is welcome that some have been paid during the second phase of lockdown, to say that more than 7,000 workers out of around 9,000 workers (for whom we have this data) who are supposed to be paid during lockdown but have not been paid is deeply disturbing. Worse, about 1,748 of those who reached out to us are self-employed such as vendors, zari workers etc. Out of them more than 1,700 of them have had no income for more than a month now. Even among those who have received some payment, there is widespread concern among the workers that this would be deducted from their salary once lockdown ends. Moreover, for most of the daily wage factory/construction workers, their wages for the time they have worked has not been paid yet so they have to stay back till these dues are cleared. These constitute violations of several progressive labour legislations.

Post-lockdown Decisions to Stay or Go Home

Post-lockdown 41% said they will stay because they are anxious about unpaid rent, loans and no cash to travel or survive even at home.

- Around one-third of those who spoke to us in the second phase of the lockdown wanted to go home immediately after the lockdown ends and about 29 percent are unsure. Roughly 41 percent said that they are likely to continue work after lockdown ends. (To reiterate, we treat this as an individual response and not a group response. This is out of 580 stranded workers who called SWAN). Many responded to this question with a very quick,

“Only when we earn will we even be able to go home right?”

Some explicitly talked about the anxiety of returning loans they have taken during the lockdown period. Those who want to go home but have no cash left to return are making requests for small amounts of money to buy train and bus tickets.

- After the lockdown ends, around one-third of the workers plan to continue in the same line of work or with the same employer, another one-third are unsure about what to do. Roughly 16 percent plan to leave and then return after some time, and about 13 percent plan to find work back in their hometown and about 5 percent want to earn some money and leave. (This is out of 644 stranded workers who called us.)





Neither one Nation nor One Ration Card, Migrants Fall Between the Cracks

After the decision to impose a total lockdown was taken by the Central government, it is the state governments that have had to shoulder the burden of responding with substantial relief measures. The ruling dispensation has referred to the idea of ‘one nation’ (akhand bharat) in many contexts. However, the lockdown has also exposed the inherent fault lines of that narrative. A significant majority of the stranded workers are from poorer states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Odisha and West Bengal. They are the home states of migrants. But they are stranded in comparatively richer states such as Karnataka, Maharashtra and Haryana (host states). In such times of crisis, it's the state governments of Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, and a few others that have reached out to “their people” stranded in various host states. Home states have tried to come up with cash transfer programmes for “their people” while host states with some exceptions like Delhi, have taken few initiatives to this end. States that benefit from the labour of these migrant workers have done little to provide cash relief. For instance, Maharashtra (and Mumbai in particular) has not announced any cash support for daily wage workers, a large proportion of which are migrants. So far, Bihar and Jharkhand have spent ₹170 and ₹27 crores¹⁴ respectively on monetary support for stranded migrants through app-based transfers (more details on this in the box below). In all this, the Central government has continued to be silent on the matter.

The process of responding to migrant worker distress in a crisis like this has shown us first hand just how critical and complex the coordination between the home states of migrants and the state where they work is. A late realisation of the chaos unleashed without adequate planning is also perhaps what has led the PM to hold multiple video conferences with Chief Ministers in the second phase of the lockdown. Despite the scale of the migrant worker crisis that became apparent in the first two days of the lockdown, it is surprising that an empowered group to respond to the migrant worker crisis did make it to the list of 11 groups constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs on 29th March.

While the data in this report is sorted by the states that migrants are stranded in, our team has been coordinating with local and state authorities as well as civil society groups in the home states of migrants and host states. 70 percent of the workers who have reached out to us are from Bihar and Jharkhand. As we have already mentioned, a very small number are likely to benefit from the money from labour welfare boards and the migrants workers we have interacted with did not even know these existed, let alone having registered with these boards.

State-wise figures (The number in parenthesis in the table gives the number of workers for whom we have this information)

| State | Maharashtra | Karnataka | Delhi & Haryana | Punjab | Tamil Nadu |
|---|-------------|-----------|-----------------|----------|------------|
| Total number of stranded workers | 4823 | 4736 | 2489 | 671 | 666 |
| Number of women and children | 552 | 1790 | 859 | 244 | 110 |
| Average daily wage | 422 | 397 | 333 | 338 | 349 |
| Median daily wage | 400 | 385 | 346 | 350 | 350 |
| Percentage of Stranded Workers | | | | | |
| Rations left for less than one day | 69 (2291) | 31 (3132) | 57 (2069) | 55 (485) | 31 (640) |
| No rations received from the government | 96 (2361) | 63 (3506) | 94 (2104) | 98 (534) | 47 (640) |
| No cooked food received from any source | 75 (2193) | 65 (3037) | 48 (1987) | 72 (449) | 87 (623) |
| Less than ₹100 remaining | 75 (2176) | 53 (3251) | 68 (2032) | 84 (443) | 72 (601) |
| No cash received from the government | 100 (2273) | 98 (3411) | 98 (2081) | 93 (452) | 94 (638) |
| Not been paid by employers during lockdown | 81 (1749) | 70 (2973) | 80 (1708) | 81 (382) | 97 (562) |
| Percentage of SOS calls with no money/rations left or had skipped the previous meal | 51 (275) | 38 (310) | 44 (386) | 51 (101) | 37 (65) |
| Going Home Immediately After the Lockdown Ends* | | | | | |
| | n=160 | n=100 | n=177 | n=55 | n=11 |
| Yes | 38 | 31 | 23 | 11 | 73 |
| No | 21 | 50 | 53 | 70 | — |
| Unsure | 41 | 19 | 25 | 20 | 27 |
| Stranded Workers' Plans for Employment Post-Lockdown* | | | | | |
| | n=163 | n=136 | n=181 | n=58 | n=18 |
| Continue in the same line of work / same employer | 31 | 49 | 25 | 48 | 28 |
| Earn some money and leave | 3 | 1 | 12 | 3 | |
| Leave but return after sometime | 25 | 10 | 17 | 5 | 11 |
| Find work in hometown | 13 | 13 | 11 | 3 | 28 |
| Unsure | 29 | 27 | 35 | 40 | 33 |

*Considering only individual responses (not representative of the group)

Maharashtra, Gujarat and Goa

SWAN's experience in the states of Maharashtra, Goa and Gujarat differed especially in terms of government response with all three states having a different story to tell.

In Goa, most groups were looked after, as soon as the administration was informed of their situation. Responding to a tweet by SWAN, one group of 60 people received help from the North Collectorate of Goa and another group of 150 migrant workers also received rations. In Gujarat, the local administration in Junagadh responded to SWAN's request reaching out to 30 stranded migrant workers.

Civil society organisations and individuals have been at the forefront of relief work in both Goa and Gujarat arranging rations and cooked food. The Goa Humanitarian Helpline for workers in Goa, and Aajeevika Bureau, an organisation that works with migrant workers, helped workers in Surat, Gujarat. An independent activist with the help of a local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) provided cooked food and later ration to a group of 40 workers in Padra taluka, Vadodara, Gujarat.

In contrast, ensuring state response in providing relief has been the toughest in Maharashtra, especially Mumbai, which has one of the largest populations of migrants. SWAN has repeatedly received distress calls from migrant workers stranded in the Antophill and Nalasopara-Vasai areas, as well as slums within Mumbai. Reaching out to the local administration in Mumbai has been futile, with no response from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on the helpline numbers. The BMC's responses to our tweets were limited to asking for more information but initiating no action in terms of providing relief. The experience of other cities in Maharashtra has been no better. The helpline for stranded workers in Pune in one instance took down names and details promising ration, but not delivering any, and even disconnected the calls of workers reaching out in distress. Any positive stories for Maharashtra have come only from the efforts of organisations that SWAN reached out to. The organisations include Yuva that has provided relief in Raigad and Navi Mumbai, and Action Aid that delivered ration kits to people in Bandra and Andheri. Individuals and organisations such as the Jan Aarogya Abhiyaan have stepped in to deliver dry rations to workers in need in Pune, Satara and Kolhapur districts.

Patterns and complexities:

While the government response has been negligible in Mumbai, with the extension of the lockdown, the local organisations are now completely overwhelmed. Their ability and capacity to extend help to the large numbers of migrants is fast diminishing. Government response in Goa and Gujarat has been the result of tweets about specific groups, and while this has helped a few, the number stranded and in need are much larger requiring a more coordinated state response. The workers who reached out have expressed additional issues. For instance, in Mumbai, there have been concerns of hygiene in the slums we have received calls from. Toilets are few and it costs ₹20 to have a bath or ₹5 to use the toilet—an amount that the poor who have not received wages during the lockdown can ill afford to spend. Added to this has been the fear of police brutality, as testimonials from workers who reached out to SWAN indicate. The fear of police personnel was even present while trying to access toilets or to use ATMs. In Malad, one group was hesitant to step out because the police had beaten someone up in their area.

The group had said, “Andar rahenge toh bhi marenge, bahar jayenge toh bhi marenge.” (“If we stay inside they will beat us, if we go outside also they beat us”).

In Chembur, a worker told a SWAN volunteer that a little girl standing in line for cooked meals ran as soon as the police came. In the process, the girl fell and hurt her arm—thankfully it was only a scratch.

At times like this, it is also important to account for complexities of the conditions some of these groups are faced with. Some groups have little children, pregnant women and many who are fasting during the month of Ramzan who would prefer rations and gas over community kitchens. Some groups in the slums of Dharavi have no facility to cook and hence need cooked meals. Any relief should be sensitive to the lived realities of these groups. Migrants stranded in Goa, Ahmedabad in Gujarat, and Pune in Maharashtra also shared instances of discriminatory treatment, by virtue of them being from Bihar and Jharkhand.

Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala

In the south zone, most of the distress calls that SWAN volunteers have received have come from Karnataka followed by Tamil Nadu and then Kerala. Further relief efforts have predominantly come from non-government organisations in Bengaluru which has a large number of stranded migrants.

Consider the following cases. Five families from Yadgir district of North Karnataka, stranded in Bengaluru were in desperate need of rations. One of the families had a 10 month old baby. They did not have ration cards, as their families back in Yadgir were using the ration card. SWAN’s team reached out to Rahmat Trust, and the Trust ensured that rations reached the families in Bengaluru within a day via Swiggy (NGOs and local volunteers were facing difficulties in getting travel passes to move within the city). A group of eight in Nayandahalli, Bengaluru, had reached out to SWAN on the 15th of April. There were four children in this group including a 45 day old baby. Noting the urgency of the situation, SWAN immediately transferred some money and simultaneously reached out to an individual for help. Within the next day, the individual ensured that the group received rations. There were several other cases of intra-state migrants stranded in Bengaluru. For instance, a group of 20 people from Gulbarga stranded in Bengaluru had received some rations earlier but the rations were fast running out. Without any work for one and a half months, with four children in the group, their situation was of great concern. A people’s collective called Project Grain Basket ensured that rations reached them within a day of SWAN reaching out to the group of workers. While a couple of officials of the state administration in Karnataka have responded with immediacy, the SWAN team has felt that dependence on one official has limitations. Two officials have helped out in several cases where the number of people stranded in a group was large. However, in the following cases, state support has been hard to get. One such difficult case has been in Sunkadkatte area in Bengaluru. There are two distinct clusters of stranded workers in this region. One group are Kannada speakers and the other are Hindi speakers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh who have been living in Bengaluru

for more than 10 years. Owing to the large group size and a mixed population, we referred the case to the municipal corporation, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP). For those from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, their Aadhaar cards have their address in Bengaluru while ration cards bore the address in their home state. In follow-up calls, it was found that there had been a few visits by the BBMP officials to note down the details. However, rations were only distributed to those from Karnataka who possessed ration cards within the state. Despite having government issued identity cards in Bengaluru, the migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh were denied rations. While some milk and food was delivered after multiple requests, the anguish was distinctly palpable in the words of one of the residents from Bihar

“They gave two people, and clicked photos with 10. This is what happens. For one roti, one meal, our plight is being made fun of, photos are taken. Izzat ka mazaak udaa rahe hai (They have made fun of our dignity)”

Finally, after many frustrating attempts, one of the workers collected a list of 35 families out of the 200 plus families living there, and we were able to contact the Rajasthan Youth Association who delivered 42 ration kits to the families hailing from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh as well as to some Kannada families who had not got ration. Even then, there was some conflict within the community as some people were left out during the distribution, and it was also unclear whether they had received ration earlier.

In another instance, SWAN team received three separate calls from Teachers' Layout in Mysuru. Owing to large group sizes, we referred this to the Mysuru City Corporation. Officials from the Corporation checked twice, noted the details and photos of the stranded but did not distribute any rations. SWAN was told by the officials that the issue was taken care of, but in follow-up calls with the stranded, we discovered that rations were in fact not delivered. The Corporation had rejected the case on the pretext that the condition of the stranded was not “as bad” since the contractor was providing relief. The contractor, who lived 30 km away from where the workers were stranded, claimed on the other hand that he could not help as he did not have a pass to travel in the city. Upon contacting the property owner, we found that he had initially provided some rations but was no longer able to, because of strict restrictions on travel. He was willing to give money/ration, and agreed to come to Mysuru border from his town. The Corporation has still not taken any concrete positive action.

Outside of Karnataka, in the south zone, most of the calls were from workers stranded in Tamil Nadu, mostly in Coimbatore and Tiruppur. SWAN's experience in dealing with the district administration in both Tamil Nadu and Kerala has been positive. For instance, in the Sulur air force area of Coimbatore, there are multiple people working within the air force campus, and receiving meals from there. However, there is a large section nearby with people working for contractors, and the contractors have disappeared since the lockdown. Even on the days when cooked food by the government is brought, not all of them are able to access it. Even civil society organisations and volunteers were finding

it difficult to go owing to the strict enforcement of restrictions by the Tamil Nadu government. Members from an NGO, the Centre for Social Education and Development, visited and provided an estimate of the numbers, which were too large for SWAN or a local group to address. Finally we were able to arrange for cooked food through the Corporation. But the migrants also mentioned that they were hesitant to access cooked food, as the distribution was away from their homes, and they were embarrassed to be seen carrying the food home.

Cases from Kerala have been few, and were able to be resolved with help from the local administration. In one instance, around 140 workers from Bihar were stranded in Malappuram. They had received rations initially, but had run out. After contacting the local government, the Panchayat delivered ration to the people in the building. Similarly, another group of 12 workers, also from Bihar, were stranded in a difficult to access location in the outskirts of Kochi. When the workers reached out to SWAN, the volunteers first contacted the district administration control room but no action was taken even after follow up. The workers also said that they were reluctant to call the control room as they were afraid of being harassed. The SWAN volunteers escalated the issue by calling the District Collectorate, and informing that 8 days had elapsed but no help to the group had been provided. The District Collectorate responded by sending officials from the Labour Commission, who went to the site, took details of the contractor who had employed the workers and ensured that the workers were given rations.

Patterns and complexities:

As the lockdown has progressed, SWAN volunteers have been receiving an increased number of calls from the non-migrant urban poor in Bengaluru. Many of those who have called are also daily wage earners, but since the lockdown, they have been without work and wages. They often have some rations, but want money, for medical needs, or to buy vegetables or milk for young children in the family. Even among this non-migrant population, not everyone has ration cards adding another level of complexity in accessing rations and other basic necessities.

Government helpline numbers in the larger cities of Bengaluru and Mysore have been difficult to access when compared to numbers of district headquarters in towns such as Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu and Malappuram in Kerala. In Bengaluru the BBMP asks to call the helpline of wards where the workers are stranded. But workers do not know the ward numbers and the SWAN volunteers are unable to direct them to the correct helpline numbers. .

In our initial conversations with the workers, many mentioned wanting to return home. But more recently, workers are saying that if the lockdown ends, and work starts, they would continue with employment as this was the reason they had migrated to the city in the first place.

date 23.04.2020

AMBEDKAR WOMEN'S SELF HELP GROUP NULMB B M P # 7, Corporation Qtrs., Victoria Road, Shanthinagar BANGALORE-25

Dr AMBEDKAR WOMEN'S SELF HELP GROUP NULMB B M P # 7, Corporation Qtrs., Victoria Road, Shanthinagar BANGALORE-25

| SL.No | NAME | Family Num | Mobile No. |
|-------|------------------|------------|------------|
| 1. | M. Molcha Bai | 05 | 9535692570 |
| 2. | Selvi | 04 | 7204002497 |
| 3. | Josephine Stella | 03 | 8882875448 |
| 4. | Lowd Mary | 04 | 9845721778 |
| 5. | Magalen shantha | 04 | 8197422299 |
| 6. | Maria Inbanta | 03 | 7019739414 |
| 7. | Shamathi | 03 | 9845721778 |
| 8. | Shamala Devi | 05 | 8127089099 |
| 9. | Maria | 05 | 9164607312 |
| 10. | Salath Mary | 05 | 9611045677 |

date 23/04/2020

SRI RAMA WOMEN'S SELF HELP GROUP NULMB B M P # 9, Corporation Qtrs., Shanthinagar Bangalore-25

SRI RAMA WOMEN'S SELF HELP GROUP NULMB B M P # 9, Corporation Qtrs., Shanthinagar Bangalore-25

| SL.No | NAME | Mobile Num | Family No. |
|-------|-----------------|------------------------|------------|
| 1. | Venkatarathnama | 8553629535 | 04 |
| 2. | Kondansma | 9019592862 | 05 |
| 3. | Veena | 9738803097 | 04 |
| 4. | Rajeshwari | 8660121027 | 04 |
| 5. | Venkataravanama | 8310371589, 9845195209 | 04 |
| 6. | Selvi | 9901854106 | 04 |
| 7. | Kalavani | 8310359090 | 04 |
| 8. | Chandrakala | 9538624929 | 06 |
| 9. | Parween | 9880275517 | 04 |
| 10. | darisani | 8861373693 | 04 |

Date 23/04/2020

NAVAJEEVAN WOMEN'S SELF HELP GROUP NULMB B M P No. 9, Corporation Quarters, Victoria Road, Bangalore-47

NAVAJEEVAN WOMEN'S SELF HELP GROUP NULMB B M P No. 9, Corporation Quarters, Victoria Road, Bangalore-47

| SL.No. | Name | Family No | Mobile No. |
|--------|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Prema | 03 | 9731087972 |
| 2. | Maheshwari | 03 | 9900313228 |
| 3. | Beena | 02 | 9635692840 |
| 4. | Pranila Mark | 04 | 9986997075 |
| 5. | Dhanalakshmi | 02 | 9731087972 |
| 6. | Mary N | 04 | 9886454263 |
| 7. | Mythili Mary Stella | 05 | 8217370651 |
| 8. | Shanthi | 03 | 8050356682 |
| 9. | Pushpa Jijini | 06 | 9164991565 |
| 10. | Shamanthi | 02 | 9886649767 |

Date 23/04/2020

Sunflower Women's SHG NULMB B M P, # 8, Corporation Qtrs., Victoria Road, Bengaluru-47

Sunflower Women's SHG NULMB B M P, # 8, Corporation Qtrs., Victoria Road, Bengaluru-47

| SL.No | Name | Family number | mobile No |
|-------|---------------|---------------|------------|
| 1. | Rajeshwari | 05 | 636055761 |
| 2. | Vijayalakshmi | 06 | 9538620617 |
| 3. | Manthavi | 03 | 7353419482 |
| 4. | Simathi | 04 | 9845301268 |
| 5. | Mandhini | 04 | 8050058086 |
| 6. | Manjula | 04 | 8546914084 |
| 7. | Malavilli | 03 | 9739965283 |
| 8. | Sangeetha | 03 | 8103139170 |
| 9. | Simitha | 03 | 9886467092 |
| 10. | Rajkumari | 05 | 9740571915 |

Members of Self Help Groups (SHGs) under the National Urban Livelihoods Mission too reached out. According to one of the SHG members who contacted SWAN, she along with members from several SHGs, did have sufficient rations when the lockdown had been announced. But with the extension of the lockdown they were worried that their rations would run out and had called SWAN for assistance. The caller who was also a social worker asked if SWAN could arrange rations for her as well as all the members of the various SHGs in her locality even sending us lists with names and details. This is an indication of how groups that are non-migrants and with some level of security in terms of livelihoods are increasingly being pulled into the zone of vulnerability.

Delhi and Haryana

Civil society organisations and volunteer groups have been especially helpful in the Delhi/Haryana region in ensuring that rations were distributed equitably reaching the most needy, and in avoiding duplication and hoarding. A network of NGOs and individuals SWAN has reached out are helping groups of stranded workers, especially in Delhi and Gurugram. These include members from the United Against Hate Campaign, and Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch from Delhi, and Nagrik Ekta Manch in Gurugram who have helped by providing ration kits to workers in need.

As in the photo of the daal packet, it is reassuring to see that there are civil society organisations that are promoting the message of equality especially during this time of crisis.



After the Delhi government announced registration for e-coupons for non-ration card holders, our volunteers have assisted the migrants who reached out to us with filling the form and guiding them through the process. While migrant workers were able to successfully register, some have not received text messages with the location of the closest PDS shop and some are yet to receive rations.

In Haryana, volunteers are getting an overwhelming number of calls from certain industrial clusters especially in Sonapat, Khandsa and Sarhaul (in Gurugram). These are predominantly migrants from Bihar and we have reached out to the Bihar state government to open feeding centres in these clusters which is under consideration as this report goes to press. Considering the scale of the problem, the response of the Haryana government has been extremely poor.

SWAN volunteers have struggled to connect to some district helpline numbers for Haryana. The Faridabad Food Control Room is a case in point. The concerned person at the helpline had assured that ration would be sent once a request was registered. While the number was always busy making it difficult to register a request, those who managed to contact were unsuccessful in getting any relief.

On 25th March the Haryana government announced that daily wage workers registered on the district level portal will be given ₹1,000 per week. None of the workers who called SWAN from Haryana were aware of this cash transfer programme let alone having received it. When we called the district helpline, we were told that registrations had been closed since the 7th of April. However, numbers of successful registration and amount disbursed was not available.

Patterns and complexities:

The most common response given by the workers about the government relief measures in Delhi has been their fear and apprehension to stand in long queues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, food is only given for one individual at the centre. This makes feeding a family just through cooked meals distribution impossible.

In multiple cases, the workers have expressed that they were unable to get food even after standing in the queue for long hours. Moreover, workers have complained about the quantity and quality of food, and despite having access to the local relief/feeding centres, they have avoided visiting them.

There are other complexities. In one case, a group of 13 workers stranded in Bidhal village in Guhana, Haryana, had run out of cash and ration. The SWAN volunteer reached out to the government helpline in Sonapat and were in turn connected to the Sub Divisional Magistrate's (SDM) office in Guhana. The SDM's office informed the volunteer that earlier cooked meals were being provided, and a decision would be taken soon on whether rations could be arranged. While SWAN enabled a money transfer, the group also received some ration, but we continued with our efforts to get the SDM's office to respond. In our follow-up with the SDM's office we found that the patwari of the village had been directed to and had provided food grains to the workers. However, later in the day the SWAN volunteer received a call from the stranded workers saying,

“Madam vo pradhan anaaj to de gaye hai par unhone bahut kuch bola hume...ki hum tumse naali saafkarwyenge ye jo anaaj le rahe ho iske liye...hume achcha nahi laga madam...hum bhookhe rah lenge par unke paas nahi jayenge dubara”

(“Madam, the pradhan did come and give us grain but he also said several things... that we would be made to clean the drains in the village in exchange for the grain...we didn't like this..we will remain hungry but will not approach them for help again”).

In another documented instance, a worker fell prey to banking rules that are inherently anti-poor. Rekha Devi, originally from Kanpur, lives in Lalkuan, Delhi with her husband and four children. The youngest child is 5 years old and the eldest is 14. Her husband works as a daily wage labourer earning around ₹250 to ₹300 a day mostly doing loading/unloading work. The family lives in a small rented room, paying a rent of ₹2,000 that was also due. Rekha Devi applied online for ration on the Delhi Government portal, with the application registered in her husband's name. The family is yet to receive any ration from anywhere. Cooked food is being provided in the neighbourhood but it is a little far and remains crowded. She says she had to stand in long queues and sometimes the food finishes before her turn. Also, it is difficult for her to go leaving her children at home. In these circumstances, cash in hand is a boon because she can buy groceries from the local shop. Recognising the precarity of her situation, the SWAN team transferred ₹1,500 to her. However, since Rekha Devi did not have a minimum balance in her account, the bank deducted ₹499 from her account as penalty.



Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir

In these states, SWAN's attempts at reaching out to local administration met with some degree of success. However, it required several attempts, and often had to be done via multiple sources including local organisations. The speed at which relief was provided to workers who reached out to us was therefore often slow. For Uttar Pradesh the situation has been particularly challenging.

In Himachal Pradesh SWAN has largely been dependent on the support of People's Action for People in Need (PAPN), who have been forwarding our queries to the local administration. As a result, groups of daily wagers across Solan district and largely in Baddi industrial belt received government ration, albeit not promptly.

In Punjab in several cases the local administration had provided assistance though the resolution took more than a day, and SWAN had to reach out through local organisations. In Hoshiarpur district, SWAN had considerable difficulty in helping agricultural labourers stuck in sealed villages across multiple sites. The labourers were also stranded in locations distant from ATMs or banks making it impossible to do a bank transfer. SWAN was finally able to access the local administration through the local Red Cross, and the local administration then arranged for cooked food to be provided by the village, and rations where the workers had cooking equipment to be provided.

Similar response from the SDM in Morinder tehsil enabled 25 daily wagers and agricultural labourers to secure ration. In Ludhiana district, Punjab, around 90 labourers stuck in brick kilns on highways were provided immediate relief by SWAN via cash transfers. At the same time SWAN tried to reach out to the local administration. Nearly 15 days after the workers had reached out to SWAN, and after coordination with the SDM and tehsildar, the workers began receiving cooked food.

Calls of distress received from Uttar Pradesh too required SWAN to take the help of local groups. When six construction workers reached out to SWAN, we contacted a local NGO called Wish India who informed us that there were 100 construction workers in the same area in Transport Nagar, Noida. Owing to travel restrictions the NGO was unable to deliver ration kits, but as a result of tweeting about the situation of the workers, SWAN was able to ensure that the local administration in Noida made arrangements for cooked meals to be served twice a day. However, this supply has been erratic and efforts continue to provide rations through NGOs. NGOs such as Karma, Sai, Bhavishya have consistently responded to SWAN, helping with distribution of rations in Noida. However, they are also swamped owing to the large number of requests for help, and the situation has been made worse by a largely unresponsive and indifferent city administration.

In Jammu ration is being distributed by the administration if the worker possesses an Aadhaar card rather than ration card, enabling the inclusion of migrant workers, But local organisations are having to mediate or even supply ration themselves due to lack of promptness on the part of administration.

Patterns and complexities:

As the lockdown has progressed there have been some trends and complexities that have come to light. Cash in hand is becoming an urgent need as labourers need access to gas cylinders, milk or medicines apart from ration, and other essentials such as phone recharge, which enables workers to stay in touch with civil society or the government to avail of help. Due to this lack of cash, situations which could once be dealt with, especially medical, are becoming emergencies. While most landlords had deferred the paying of rent, there were also several instances of demands for rent mentioned by workers in the different states.

The growing uncertainty and lack of consistent and reassuring support by governments has meant that distress of migrants is not being addressed. Local organisations are overwhelmed and their resources too are dwindling which means they are unable to reach out to as many as before. This has also impacted the contents of the ration kits. For example, earlier, organisations in Noida had the capacity to supply a variety of essentials such as wheat flour, dal, rice, oil, salt, masalas, and soap. However, this has changed as the lockdown period progressed to supplying only dal and rice, which again increases the demand for money to buy other essentials such as oil, salt and masalas. The quantity per kit has also been reduced forcing workers to reach out to SWAN for more rations as these were quickly exhausted. Where cooked food is provided it is insufficient to meet the needs of the workers resulting in several having to skip meals. In Transport Nagar, Sector 69, Noida, small quantities of turmeric rice is distributed twice a day, but this is not enough to meet the needs of the workers.

One of the things the SWAN volunteers kept hearing from most workers is how helpless the lockdown and forced unemployment has made them; it is their dignity which is attacked over and over when they have to keep asking and waiting for basic 'help'. For instance, 18 year old Rahul Kumar said that he has not had food for over 24 hours. Rahul's friend Vikku got some help from SWAN. But Rahul did not want to ask Vikku for help because Vikku has a 18 month old brother and a widowed mother. Rahul Kumar said "Chota baccha hai unka ghar mai. Accha nahi lagta" (They have a small child. It doesn't feel good to ask them for help")

A learnt sort of helplessness due to delayed responses and rejection has led to a reluctance to approach the government, out of despair and fear. Workers instead rely on SWAN to speak to the government hoping the government will listen to SWAN.

In Punjab, there was a distinction in state response to workers stranded in rural and urban areas with administrative as well as social support better in rural areas. But what seemed common was the anxiety among the workers for sending money back home. This meant that in the rare instance where the employers were providing food but no wages, the workers were reaching out to SWAN asking for money to send back to their families in Bihar. In Punjab, it has also been particularly challenging to

provide relief to groups stranded in the suburban areas. In Ludhiana, in Jugiana, initially 10 families were able to get ration with the SDM's help. But calls to SWAN showed that there were more than 80 families who needed help. Calls were made to the SDM and local organisations, and as a last option SWAN even tweeted about the condition of the workers. But no help has been forthcoming. In other suburban areas too local contacts have mentioned that the distress of migrants is very high, but there has been no relief provided.

The extreme vulnerability of inter-state migrants was evident in the discrimination in distribution of ration as was faced by migrant workers from Bihar in parts of Ludhiana, Punjab. Some of the calls received mentioned discrimination of migrant workers by the locals, administrative apathy and harsh treatment by the police.

Social Solidarity in the Times of Physical Distancing

Even in the time of a crisis due to the pandemic and lockdown, religion continues to be used to splinter the community. In different pockets of the country a blame game is going on. The spread of COVID-19 is being attributed to one community—the Muslims in India. This is despite knowing that a virus makes no distinction on the basis of religion, caste, class, race, gender and region.

In the midst of this chaos, one of the SWAN volunteers received a call from Abdul* from Bhatapara district in Chhattisgarh on 18th April 2020. Abdul and his friend, Rahul* had a small puncture repair shop. In the call to SWAN, Abdul mentioned that they did not have sufficient ration or money to last them through the lockdown. Their request to SWAN, however, was to help them with their travel back to their village in Bihar. To address their immediate need of food, SWAN initiated a bank transfer, for which Abdul shared the bank account details of Rahul who was also his roommate in the rented accommodation they shared. When the SWAN volunteer enquired about their staying together Rahul replied, *“Hum toh bachpan se dost hai madam ji! Abhi saath rahne me kya dikkat hai! Abhi mushkil waqt me hum ek dusre ka saath nahi rahenge toh kab rahenge?”* (*“Madam, we have been friends since childhood! What is the trouble of living together now! In these difficult times, will we not be with one another?”*).

The response, in these times of communal discord exacerbated by the blame game around the virus, is indeed a glimmer of hope.

**Names changed*



Stranded in Other States

While the south, west and north zones (barring Rajasthan) constitute the majority of the stranded workers who have reached out to us, there are also quite a few stranded in other states such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Nagaland and Bihar. We have a dedicated team of SWAN volunteers catering to distress calls from those stranded in these states. In terms of government response from these, Rajasthan has been the most consistent, while Bihar and West Bengal the least consistent. The cases also bring out why cash transfer schemes offered by some states such as Jharkhand are unable to benefit these workers stranded. They also highlight the stress the migrants are facing not only due to lack of food, rations and money, but also the emotional toll on them. Since the calls are fewer compared to the south, west, and north zones, we present short case studies from these states.

Rajasthan

A group of workers from Jharkhand working in a dupatta making unit in Jodhpur had not been paid by the employer in two months. While the factory owner provided them with some rations, the workers wanted to be paid for the work they had already done. Miffed with the insistence of the workers to be paid, the owner withdrew all cooperation, and left the workers to their fate. The workers then called the SWAN volunteers after hearing about the group from another worker stranded in a different state. With a cash provision of ₹1,000, they were able to get gas cylinders in the black market (since they did not have a gas connection in their name), and some essentials. Since the area they were stranded in was sealed off, civil society organisations were not allowed to enter the zone. After multiple calls through the day by the workers, SWAN volunteers and members of People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) Rajasthan, to the helpline 181 and Municipal Corporation control room, wheat flour, cooking oil and other essentials were delivered by evening to the workers. The group desperately wants to go back home and is worried that the factory owner may not pay their pending wages. The group has not been able to apply for the cash transfer scheme of the Jharkhand government since they do not have bank accounts in their name in Jharkhand. A bank account in the home state is a required condition to access the cash transfer extended by the Jharkhand government to workers stranded outside the state.

In another instance, Dharendra from Bihar, along with 11 others were stranded in a village near Jaipur, Rajasthan. They had approached SWAN for help with money for buying vegetables and essentials. Prior to this, Dhiren had proactively contacted the Patna Control Room, that in turn coordinated with Jaipur helpline and successfully delivered ration (wheat flour, rice, dal, oil, and salt) to the group. However, they were confronted by the village sarpanch who asked Dharendra and the group why they were looking for help when they were being provided with cooked food twice daily. The sarpanch said that:

“Hamara gaon ka naam kharab ho sakta hein” (“Our village might get a bad name”).

Dhirendra explained to the Sarpanch that they were finding it difficult to eat the same food every day, and they preferred ration since then they would be able to cook their own food. Dhirendra had also tried accessing the money transfer of ₹1,000 from the Bihar government through the app, but had been unsuccessful. However, he was able to connect around 50 others in the area to the helpline in Patna.

Madhya Pradesh

A group of 11 people from Mungeli district in Chhattisgarh (including 2 women and 3 children) were stranded in a village in Baheradaabar gram panchayat, Mauganj tehsil, Rewa district, Madhya Pradesh. They had reached out through a hand written letter asking the Transport Department to either provide transport for them to go home or at least give them the permission to leave. The working members of the group were employed in a stone crushing unit with salaries ranging from ₹10,000 to ₹27,000, but had not been paid by the company for the last 2 to 3 months. Their ration cards were not from the state, and although the PDS dealer had taken their Aadhaar numbers, no ration had been provided. Since the area was remote, it was difficult for organisations to provide rations, and hence the request came to SWAN to explore cash transfer options. We realised that even cash transfer would not be an option, since the families were carrying only ATM cards (and not the account pass book) and the nearest ATM was in the tehsil headquarters which was around 17 km away. Since, government machinery was the only option, the team got in touch with the District Magistrate and through them the Rewa District Control Room which was very positive and prompt. After assurance of help, the contact details were passed onto the stranded families. Although the government machinery responded by providing the families rice through the PDS and essentials, it took 2 days to do so. The families want to head back home as soon as the lockdown is lifted, but are worried about payment of pending wages.

West Bengal

A group of 20 daily wage labourers from Bihar employed in the Kolkata Leather Complex, situated in the South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal reached out to SWAN. The workers who had been earning upto ₹200-300 a day were stranded in a rented accommodation near the factory. Since the lockdown they were only eating one cooked meal a day, and the women and children in the group were especially in distress. The group had neither received ration nor any money from any source. In order to help the group buy vegetables and ration a money transfer was made by SWAN. But this was also followed by connecting to the West Bengal government, after which the workers received two meals a day in addition to the rations. The workers were eager to return to their hometown both because they were traumatised as a result of the lockdown and also because the contractual nature of their employment made them feel insecure post the lockdown.

Assam

A group of seven workers, originally from Bihar, reached out to SWAN saying they are stranded in Dibrugarh district, Assam. Before lockdown, they were working as daily wage labourers, earning around ₹300 per day. They had ration left for less than 2 days. Since the lockdown they were left to fend for themselves, with no work, and little money and ration left. They tried reaching out for help to the local government, resulting in an official arriving to collect information but without following it up with any relief. On further clarifying, we got to know that the workers were part of a larger group of around 400 people living in similar circumstances of distress with no money and rapidly running out of rations. While a few with ration cards had accessed food grains through the PDS, those without ration cards were not given anything.

SWAN contacted the local MLA who promised help asking the migrants to reach out to the MLA directly and collect rations. But when the worker called, the MLA was upset over the fact that migrants had requested for outside help. The MLA, however, promised that he would send ration to the group, and a representative did visit the settlement, but yet again only to collect information. The MLA claimed the ration had not arrived even after 2 days. A money transfer was provided to help the smaller group by SWAN, but unfortunately in spite of efforts that continue there has been no support from the local administration.

Odisha

A group of 8 workers originally from Bihar were stranded in Paradeepgarh, Odisha. They were working as daily wage construction workers earning upto ₹300 a day. The group included a woman and her 3 year old girl who were in extreme distress as they had very little food to eat since the lockdown started. The mother and daughter both needed medicines too. The workers had booked tickets to return home before lockdown with the money they received, but with the lockdown the train had been cancelled. No refund has been made to them and they were left with only ₹60. They received no money or ration from the government or local organisations. The request came to SWAN and since it was an SOS case a money transfer was made to provide immediate relief. Later the group was linked with the government authorities and it was ensured that food and other essentials reached them. The stranded workers are desperate to go home, and appear emotionally distressed and helpless.

Patterns and complexities:

Although the call volumes in this zone are less compared to other zones, the nature of calls received were from two groups: calls from migrants who have run out of money to buy rations or essentials like salt, oil and vegetables that ration shops do not supply *as well as* families of migrants living back in the village with similar needs. Those stranded workers needing cash are those who either did not get paid before lockdown, or had just migrated to the city or had sent most of the money earned back home or those who have run out of money. Those calling from the villages for cash transfer are those who successfully made it back without pay or whose husbands are stranded and were not able to send back cash. But since the volume of calls is not very high, this should be treated as an emerging trend as opposed to a stable pattern.

App-Based Financial Assistance for Migrants

Bihar was the first state to introduce an app based transfer of ₹1,000 to migrants stranded outside the state. Jharkhand introduced a similar app through which stranded migrants can get upto ₹2,000. The apps are clunky and resolving technical issues takes time. But when time itself is of essence, conditions for relief should be kept to a minimum. For instance, in the Jharkhand app, in the absence of a stable network, the additional step of entering a one time password (OTP) just adds another layer of complication. The requirement of a selfie and Aadhaar card match requires a smart phone with a good working camera which is not within reach of those most in need. To overcome this issue, the Bihar app allows for multiple registrations on the same mobile number which has increased accessibility. There has been a time lag between migrants getting payment confirmation messages on their phones and money being credited in their accounts, as a result of which many have had to make multiple trips to ATMs under difficult conditions before they are actually able to withdraw any cash. That being said, these two states have been able to provide some immediate relief to stranded migrants and despite the difficulties, 13 lakh people have successfully registered on the Bihar government app.¹⁵







Recommendations

In the previous version of the report, the recommendations were hinged on immediate relief measures. The immediate relief measures are still critical because businesses and economic activity will take at least a few months before they can resume original capacity of production. In addition to measures to ensure food security, we had made a case for providing wage compensation and other social security nets. Numerous academics, economists and activists have appealed to the government to provide rations by using the stocks from the FCI godowns, universalise food security and provide cash relief to workers at the least.¹⁶

Amartya Sen , Raghuram Rajan , Abhijit Banerjee recommend that the government suggest a food and cash model. They remind us that:

“We need to spend wisely given the enormous likely demand for fiscal resources in the coming months, but skimping on helping the truly needy is the surest way to lose the plot.”

Jayati Ghosh , Prabhat Patnaik , Harsh Mander also wrote recently with the same demands and use a more self declaration approach for rations and cash transfers. The need for such wage compensation can also be backed by the government's own data. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of 2017-18, about 82 percent of the households earn less than the minimum living wages of Rs 18,000 per month as arrived at in the 7th Pay Commission; 69 percent of the households earn less than Rs 400 per day (average daily wage). Therefore the recommendation in the previous report of a wage compensation of Rs 7,000 per month is roughly one-third of the monthly minimum living wages

Rohini Pande, Simone Schaner, Charity Troyer Moore, Elena Stacy make a case for universal PDS.

Jean Dreze writes about how the FCI godowns are full while people are likely to starve.

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Aside from a moral and humanitarian imperative, not providing adequate food and not providing adequate wage compensation is perhaps tantamount to a violation of Article 21 of the Constitution—the fundamental Right to Life.

We have reiterated the recommendations here to stress their importance.

Food Security

1. **Double the PDS ration for 3 months** (April, May, June) and provide it free in advance through doorstep delivery along with cooking oil, pulses, salt, masala, sanitary pads and soap **to be distributed in advance to all**. There is an urgent need at this moment to universalise access to food grains, pulses, cooking oil and soap, and provide it to everyone desirous of obtaining these, irrespective of whether they have a ration card or not, because a lot of the very poor including the homeless and circular migrants in cities have no cards. Self declaration by families and persons in need should be sufficient and no additional documentation requirements should be imposed. The grain requirement for this can be easily provided by the Government of India using current FCI stock, and state governments should top up with pulses, masalas and oil.
2. **Home delivery of rations and other basic necessities** including medicines, as well as cooked food packets by volunteers who could be paid minimum wages for the period (as is happening in Kerala). The Kerala example is worthy of emulation because it is trying to deliver food to the homes of the aged, disabled and sick, and those in quarantine, through local bodies and volunteers.
3. **Feeding centres must not be closed immediately after the lockdown ends but should continue until food distress reduces**. Government should ensure *a minimum of two cooked meals at conveniently located sites* at a minimum density of 70 feeding centres open 12 hours a day (to include Anganwadis, government schools, government colleges, army areas and community halls) per 1 lakh people. A 1 km road next to each feeding centre needs to be cordoned off, and an indelible white line marked at 10 m intervals for the stretch of 1 km. One person to stand at every white line.
4. **Supply of clean drinking water and free water tanks in all colonies** (notified and non-notified) which do not have piped water supply, to allow people to regularly wash hands.

Wage Compensation

5. Emergency cash relief of **₹7,000 per month for at least 3 months as cash** (without biometric authentication) to each poor household/migrant worker.
6. **Minimum wages for 25 days per month to be released into Jan Dhan accounts** of all urban residents for the period of the lockdown and 2 months following the end of the lockdown. State governments should collaborate and ensure that cash relief reaches the stranded in case people do not have Jan Dhan accounts.
7. The state government must **pay the full wages of all workers in the informal sector**, at the minimum wage notified for the area, for the entire period of the lockdown, and 3 months after as the economy recovers. This must be paid as far as possible at the doorstep of all adult workers who are not in the formal sector.
8. Pay all registered Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) workers (job-card holders) their **full daily wages throughout the lockdown period**, even though they are not allowed to work at the worksites due to the lockdown. The Ministry of Labour's orders stating that all workers should be deemed to be "at work" during this period and be paid accordingly must apply to MGNREGA workers as well.
9. The state government must ensure that **every primary employer strictly adheres to paying the wages** to their contractors and to the workers.

10. This livelihood support must include **all segments of the population**, including those both in stigmatised professions like sex work and begging, and in unseen unpaid work such as domestic work.

Social Security

11. Ensure **advance payment of double pension for 6 months** released in cash to be delivered to each pensioner immediately at her doorstep.
12. Provide **full entitlements unconditionally, in advance**, for all the eligible mothers under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana and Janani Suraksha Yojana.

Shelters and Housing

13. **No immediate closure of hostels, relief camps, and shelters** or at least until all stranded migrants have been provided safe transit home or to their workplaces, depending on the preference of workers. Provisioning of large spaces such as stadiums, army cantonment areas with adequate facilities for temporary stay for migrant workers, daily wage earners, and others requiring shelter.
14. There should be **no eviction of tenants by landlords as already mandated by the Home Ministry**. Under no circumstances should any private or public institution forcefully vacate people living therein for 2 months beyond the lockdown. Instead they should support and facilitate their stay.
15. For children without adult caregivers, such as street children, **voluntary spaces in public colleges, army areas, and stadiums need to be created**. In case a child is unwilling, they should not be forced and instead they should be **paid a daily allowance** of half the state's minimum wages. The State Commission for Protection of Child Rights should monitor implementation of the above.

Transport Facilities

16. The Ministry of Home Affairs order issued on 29th April needs much more clarity. The order as it stands only mentions travel by road. **Special trains should be organised for inter-state migrants** instead of buses because of the large number of migrants and long distances. Also trains will be less costly and must be done on Indian Railways/ Central government expenses and not by state governments. Stranded migrant workers should be allowed to travel for free. **Full autonomy should be provided to stranded labourers in deciding their travel plans**. No one should be forced either to stay back or to return to their home states. There should be multiple medical teams in each train throughout the journey.

Rural and Urban Employment Guarantee

17. Unemployment levels in India had hit rock bottom well before the pandemic started. The situation has worsened much more since the lockdown. This in conjunction with the extremely low consumption patterns as per the leaked Consumption Expenditure Survey indicates that there is an urgent need to boost demand. One way towards this is to have a National Employment Policy, through which MGNREGA needs to be strengthened. Budgets for MGNREGA must be increased by at least four times and make MGNREGA works applicable for the entire year and not just for 100 days. Since a lot of migrant workers in big cities are from small towns, there is an urgent need to **boost employment opportunities in small towns**. To this end, there is a need to strengthen small towns through a sustainable urban employment guarantee programme.¹⁷

Social Security as a Right¹⁸

Food Security, Wage Compensation, Shelters, Housing and Transportation are important relief measures which will help alleviate some of the problems faced by migrants in the short to medium term. However, it is important to deliberate on the dignity of the lives of the workers and migrants in the longer term. This crisis has shown us that a large percentage of our population lives on the brink of vulnerability. Most workers are not being able to make ends meet beyond a few days into the lockdown. Such a large proportion of workers are left with no support from their employers. This pandemic has shown us that India needs social security for all, and needs it urgently. As far as safety nets for workers and the migrant population are concerned, the reports of the National Commission for Enterprises in Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) continue to be an important source to begin the discussion on social security for workers in the Unorganised Sector.

With regard to social security, the NCEUS proposed a universal minimum threshold through a legal entitlement. It had a simple system of registration based on self-certification and the issuance of social security cards, complete portability, and an administrative framework to facilitate this. The Draft Bill was considered by the Cabinet thrice, it was also sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee. However, the final Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act (2008) passed by the government did not do any justice to the recommendations of the NCEUS or the parliamentary committee.

The Draft Code on Social Security is currently pending with the Parliamentary Standing Committee for recommendations. If passed this law would replace nine existing laws including the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act (2008). It is critical that the government pays attention to the plight of the workers during this pandemic and passes a strong law to ensure that millions do not continue to suffer the after effects. Food security, healthcare, housing, maternity and old age benefits are the rights of workers. Any law that is formulated must - in its letter and spirit - treat social security as the right of workers. Anything short of that would mean we care only about the work and not the workers.

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://qz.com/india/1826384/indias-coronavirus-lockdown-has-triggered-mass-migration-on-foot/>
- ² (Writ petition (civil) Diary no 10801/2020) by Harsh Mander and Anjali Bharadwaj vs Union of India. The petition sought wage compensation for migrant workers in addition to food. Referring to the arbitrary order of the lockdown of 24th March, the petition argued that it resulted in large scale loss of wages and livelihoods and was a violation of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution—the right to life. In accordance with various progressive legislations such as the National Disaster Management Act (2005), the Inter State Migrant Worker Act (1979) among others, the petitioners further argued that “If in violation of the necessary statutes, the governments have not maintained records of such workers, it would be necessary to immediately put in place a mechanism for workers to self-identify and self-attest based on which the government can release wages.”
- ³ (Diary no 10789 of 2020) ,Alakh Alok Srivastava vs Union of India in n the Supreme Court of India, Status Report
- ⁴ <https://www.newslandry.com/2020/04/23/covid-19-relief-how-india-doesnt-count-the-poor-as-workers>
- ⁵ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/what-must-india-do-now-to-address-the-coronavirus-crisis/story-Gue-Mxig2vrXCyqJj6BzFN.html>
- ⁶ <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/FM/Issues/2020/04/17/Fiscal-Monitor-April-2020-Chapter-1-Policies-to-Support-People-During-the-COVID-19-Pandemic-49278>
- ⁷ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/after-month-s-wait-migrants-in-haryana-finally-on-way-home/story-9bTUKp88i8lBg3omlpS5VK.html>
- ⁸ <http://epaper.patrika.com/m5/2646159/Patrika-Raipur/Raipur-Patrika-News#page/1/1>
- ⁹ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/wont-blame-any-other-govts-as-all-doing-their-best-bihars-deputy-cm-sushil-modi/articleshow/75192137.cms>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.article-14.com/post/govt-knew-lockdown-would-delay-not-control-pandemic>
- ¹¹ <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/coronavirus-india-lockdown-food-relief-for-poor-mass-exodus-essential-commodities-supply-6380515/>
- ¹² <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/india-facing-severe-levels-of-malnutrition-climate-change-to-further-worsen-undernutrition-11571207482952.html>
- ¹³ Uttar Pradesh is excluded in this graph because the presence of a few large groups that have not received rations are driving the lack of ration uptake. Hence, it will not be a realistic representation of administrative response.
- ¹⁴ Information provided by state officials as on 29th April 2020
- ¹⁵ <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/economy/covid-19-44-5-bihar-cash-transfers-10-lakh-workers-delhi-haryana-maharashtra-6368673/>
- ¹⁶ https://covid19socialsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2020/03/urgent-appeal-for-relief-of-migrant-labourers_march28.pdf
- ¹⁷ https://cse.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SWI2019_Urban_Job_Guarantee.pdf
- ¹⁸ We are thankful to Prof. Ravi Srivastava for insightful discussions about long term social security for workers. For further reading on social security refer to Ravi Srivastava. (2012). Social Protection For Workers In India: Struggling For Basic Rights Under Increasing Labour Market Flexibility. Indian Journal of Labour Economics, 55(2). We are also thankful to Prof. Jayati Ghosh for helpful suggestions.



