

## SEASON OF CREATION-1<sup>ST</sup> SEPTEMBER TO 4<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2020

### Factsheet 3-Migrants

**Introduction:** Mass migration which is a sign of our times and a world-wide phenomenon today has existed throughout history. It is a complex multi-faceted phenomenon which evokes images of violence, fear and hunger but it also reminds us of super human courage, resilience, solidarity and hope.

**I. Who is a Migrant?** Displaced, discriminated against and disillusioned, a migrant is often one who risks his or her own life to escape war, violence or persecution, poverty, environmental degradation or natural disaster. Forced to leave familiar ground and plunge, into unknown territory, they often fall prey to human trafficking and abuse or succumb to illness or death. There are three types of migrants 1. Internal migrants i.e. within the country i.e. from one state to another or from rural areas to cities. 2. Immigrants and refugees from other countries. 3. Emigrants who leave their homeland or return in search of better educational and job opportunities.

**II. Why do people migrate?** The roots of migration lie in the violence of humankind embodied in institutional structures due to the web of dysfunctional behaviours and world systems. The causes could be myriad i.e. ecological reasons, governmental policies to help the exports and urban sectors, rapid population growth, ethnic rivalries, global recession, political polarization, a struggle for survival or even the lure for greener pastures. However, many migrants end up being herded into camps, live underground and are occupied solely with survival.

**III. Reality Check:** Migrant peoples, especially the poorest among them reflect the world as it really is. Because of the rapacious exploitation of the earth's resources by the few, these often forgotten and oppressed people flee famine, flood and drought, in order to eke out a livelihood. Migrants are victims of a divided world. They pay the cost of division oppressed by poverty, exploited in the labour market and forced to be ever on the move in search of subsistence. Political decisions, employment legislation and oppressive regimes further discriminate against them. The myths of cultural domination, the lies of written history, prejudice, racist attitudes and unquestioned nationalism rub salt into the open wounds of these poor migrants.

#### **IV. The Indian Scenario:**

- In India family means anchorage, joy and companionship. The culture of India gives identity, roots, values and a wholesome view of life, fostering harmonic relationships within one's being, with kith and kin, with nature in God. In fact, relationships in India

form the warp and woof of the fabric of society where the sense of the religious, the spiritual and the Divine is an instinct, a longing and a passion.

- Yet many Indians become migrants and belong to the category whose fight for survival is the fiercest. Hunger, flood, earthquakes, famines, deforestation, harsh and insurmountable economic conditions, terrorism and harsh military regimes have been the compelling forces that have driven them from their family and homeland in search of new pastures, often mere survival.
- Migrants in India are part of the heartless dehumanizing system that has recently become more intensified and widespread within and outside the culture of poverty.
- India has all three types of migrants' i.e. internal migrants from rural areas to cities e.g. Haregaon and Kazli or Tehri-Garhwal where the Government has started colossal hydro-electric projects or from Southern states to the North for white collared jobs or vice-versa for blue collared jobs as laborers.
- India also has immigrants and refugees from other countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Nepal etc.
- Emigrants leave India or return. India thus suffers from 'brain-drain' as many Indians emigrate to the West for better educational or job opportunities, thus making India the international migration super power. Indians emigrate to Africa, Persian Gulf countries, North America, Europe and Australia. UAE employs laborers, while the US lures the educated, intelligent Indians.

## **V. The Lockdown and Migrants:**



Since March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the lockdown in India has severely impacted migrants, several of whom lost their jobs due to shutting of industries, and were stranded outside their native place. According to the 2011 census of India, 38% of India's population is migrant i.e. 45.6 crore. Of this 99% of total migration is internal i.e. inter and intra state and 1% is international migration. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are the largest source of interstate migrants, while Maharashtra and Delhi are the largest receiver states.

## **VI. Covid-19 has revealed the plight of the vulnerable Indian labour force.**

1. Business and industry is dependent on migrant labour that is paid less, work longer and harder and is more flexible than local labour.
2. About 100 million migrants in all work seasonally and circulate between their rural homes and faraway worksites for a part of the year.
3. Seasonal migrant workers are in turn supported by a further invisible economy-the household. Their bodies are overworked and often they are no longer fit to work. As

such their households too are exploited. Seasonal migrant workers are thus super exploited.

4. Workers from Jharkhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh have suffered most because their indigenous wealth i.e. minerals, forests and other natural resources have been extracted by outsiders, leaving behind high levels of poverty for the locals.
5. India's historically disadvantaged minorities i.e. the Dalits and Adivasis work the hardest in the worst living conditions. They are subject to the stigma of caste and region and are treated as *jungli* i.e. filthy or savage.

## **VII. The Silver Lining to the impact of Covid-19:**

It brought together thousands to provide relief for stranded migrant workers, find temporary shelters and provide basic amenities. Journalists, scholars and activists documented their flight. Labour migration appeared in mainstream policy discussions for the first time and scholars and activists who had been working with migrant works for years were, for once, listened to as online conferences, seminars and reports tried to understand what was going on. Sonu Sood for example offered accommodation to 20,000 migrant workers at Noida. He also started *Pravasi Rojgar* providing migrants with jobs in garment factories. Many prominent figures lent their voices and were part of interfaces. Fact finding teams too will emerge in the aftermath.

## **REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS/ACTIONS/ACTIVITIES:**

Now is the moment to harness all these efforts, unite them into a wider movement, to bring about social change, which will hopefully, better the terms and conditions for migrant workers.

1. Better conditions and pay must be adopted both for the workers households and for the workers in their place of work. How can we help to do this?
2. Tackling discrimination against caste, tribe and region-based migrants is a must to lift oppression. What are some innovative ideas of bringing about such a change?
3. Internal oppressive structures that drive country-wide uneven development and force people to move into such vulnerable conditions in their place of work, must be reversed. Any concrete suggestions for the way forward?

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