



Labouring Lives: Hunger, Precarity and Despair amid Lockdown

**A Report by
Centre for Equity Studies *in collaboration with*
Delhi Research Group & Karwan-E-Mohabbat**

Supported by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

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New Delhi, June 2020

Cover image by Sandeep Yadav



Through the implementation of research and advocacy projects alongside the operation of homeless shelters, health and recovery clinics, the Centre for Equity Studies aims to create feasible and sustainable long term solutions toward the care and the protection of the rights of the underprivileged section of society striving to get closer to the idea of a more just, equitable and humane society.

Delhi Research Group

Delhi Research Group is an informal network of scholars that has come together to study, analyze and build creative perspectives and big picture thinking on issues that matter to ordinary people of India. Founder members include Sachidanand Sinha, Ayesha Kidwai, Sucharita Sen, Navsharan Singh, and Atul Sood. Many young scholars, listed in this report, joined the Delhi Research Group to conduct this study supported by Sucharita, Navsharan and Atul.



KARWAN-E-MOHABBAT

Karwan e Mohabbat (Caravan of Love) is a people's campaign devoted to the universal values of the constitution, of solidarity, equality, freedom, justice and compassion. We support survivors of hate crimes and injustice with legal, social and livelihood help. We also make short films to reflect our values.



Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung is a part of the grassroots movement of democratic socialism. Bearing the name of Rosa Luxemburg it works within the tradition of workers' and women's movements. It serves as a forum for debate and critical thinking about political alternatives.

LABOURING LIVES

HUNGER, PRECARIETY AND DESPAIR AMID LOCKDOWN

A RAPID SURVEY REPORT

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As we face one of the worst crises of our lifetime due to the pandemic, the people of our country witnessed the distance that separates the concerns of the government and those of the labouring poor. This naked distancing of the state from its responsibilities needed documentation so that the coming generations may remember how the state which takes oath in the name of people abandoned them at a time of crisis. We decided to conduct a survey to that end and we would like to share our findings here. This was a collaborative effort of the Centre for Equity Studies (CES), the Delhi Research Group and the Karwan-e-Mohabbat (K-e-M) campaign. The effort was supported by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. We are also grateful to University of York with whom we have had a long relationship in terms of working on the subject of circular migration.

On our call, a number of volunteers came forward to take part in this extensive exercise. Being largely from student backgrounds, they participated in this for conducting a phone survey of 1500 respondents between 25th May and 10th June 2020. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Aamir, Ashraful Hussain, Aditi Agarwal, Aditi Mudhol, Adishree Singh, Afreen, Anwit Shahi, Apporva Banerjee, Asma, Bhagya Raj, Bhavyansh, Bhumika Shivhare, Bhumika Kashyap, Catherine, Hridya B, Kaushiki, Kavya, Keona, Laksita Vohra, Majidul Islam, Mridula Kaintura, Mridula Raghu, Rajika Das, Rehna Sultana, Sayam, Shah Jamal Sheikh, Shaheen Vali, Smriti, S Neelagriva, Srishti, Syeda Sana Kausar, Tanu Shivnani, Tabassum, Zahra and Zehra Saman were part of the volunteer team. Varna Balakrishnan (of K-e-M) also helped us with the survey. On behalf of the Delhi Research Group, Aditi Pradhan, Adwitiya Mishra, Evy Mehzabeen, Indal Kumar, Lakshyayog, Mayur Kumar, Nian Paul, Raina Ghosh, Rajiv Khanna, Somashree Das, Subhadeep Mandal, and Uma Dey Sarkar conducted the interviews. We are grateful for the support of the Karwan-e-Mohabbat state teams and individuals and organisations working in Solan, Himachal Pradesh for supporting and facilitating the survey as we relied primarily on them for the database.

The list included people in dire conditions. So the exercise was not simply academic but also entailed providing follow up support for those particularly in distress. Our volunteers not only conducted the telephonic interviews for the survey but also forwarded contacts in dire needs to the relief teams.

On behalf of the Sankaran Unit for Research on Exclusion & Inequity at the Centre for Equity Studie (CES), Suresh Garimella coordinated the report as an anchor holding the efforts together from the outset. Dr Sucharita Sen & Dr Atul Sood guided the team of students from Jawaharlal Nehru University working as part of the Delhi Research Group. We depended on them particularly with the quantitative analysis and writing of the report. Dr Navsharan Singh from the Karwan-e-Mohabbat team supported the

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Finally, as part of the Research Unit at CES, Suresh coordinated this while also writing the report along with Balu Sunil, Dr Banojyotsna Lahiri, Sazid Ali, Misbah Rashid, Sagar Kumbhare, and Dr Anirban Bhattacharya. Dr Buddhadeb Halder helped us in developing the survey questionnaire and with the quantitative end in terms of analysis and oversight. In research support the above were helped by Mihika Chanchani, Jenny Sulfath, Madhurima Majumdar and Shirin Choudhary. Shirin also helped us with formatting the report. We thank Sandeep Yadav for sharing one of his photographs taken during the first month of the migrant exodus from Delhi. Cover design was done by Anirban Bhattacharya.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the humanitarian crisis of joblessness, intense food insecurity and massive dislocation of workers rapidly unfolded following the stringent nationwide lockdown in India in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many civil society organisations, humanitarian aid groups, common citizens and religious organisations stepped in to support the people in distress. One of these was Aman Biradari Trust under its Karwan-e-Mohabbat campaign. The Centre for Equity Studies and the Delhi Research Group came together to conduct a rapid survey among workers – mainly those who contacted and were reached food relief by Aman Biradari Trust and individuals and organisations working in Solan, Himachal Pradesh - to add to our understanding of various aspects of the impact of the lockdown on the lives, livelihoods and food security of the labouring poor. It attempted to cover both migrant and settled workers in both urban and rural India.

It was based on 1405 extensive interviews, mostly on telephone, with workers reached for food support by Karwan-e-Mohabbat volunteers of Aman Biradari Trust. Its relief work extended to under its Delhi-NCR, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, Rajasthan and Jharkhand, which defined the data base of the study.

The study attempted to understand the extent (and depth) of job-loss and hunger 45 days after the lockdown. Did this vary by income levels, social identities, locations and migration status; and between those working with contractors and those working on their own? It attempted to understand the extent and reach of food relief, and the coverage and reach of social security schemes. We also tried to understand the workers' perceptions about job-loss and how they saw their futures, what they felt were the medium to long term implications beyond the lockdown of their current experience of distress?

Some major findings are as under:

Pre-Lockdown Earnings:

- The respondents covered in the survey come from an economically under-privileged background, with **only 5.5% of them earning a monthly amount of Rs. 15000**. The modal monthly income is between Rs. 5000 to Rs 10000.

- Among our respondents, **Women** (compared to men), **Dalits, Muslims** (in comparison with other social groups) earned less pre-lockdown. **46.8% of women earned less than 5000 in the pre-COVID period** (compared to 14.8% of men).
- **Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims** were worse off in terms of income levels compared to other social categories pre-lockdown. The use of these identities in this report, prefixed to workers, reflects both the perception of workers to understand their social and economic experience and also shows how social identities continue to limit opportunities and capabilities. Taking into account these pre-existing inequalities is important as it is these fractures that the pandemic further cracks open and therefore important to be underlined in order to understand the impact of lockdown on workers.

During-Lockdown Job loss:

- The conventional wisdom has been that migrants are returning to their villages in the belief that it would provide them with limited employment opportunities to sustain themselves during the lockdown-period. Contrary to expectations, **rural and urban areas have very little difference in terms of job loss**. This indicates that without adequate state support, it would be extremely difficult for the poor to survive in the lockdown period, irrespective of location.
- Inter-state migrants are worse off in comparison with intra state migrants who seemed 10% less likely to lose their jobs (albeit with lesser pay) after lockdown.
- Government directives on March 29th to all employers/contractors that no worker be dismissed from their employment, has miserably failed. There has been widespread job loss. Nearly 90% of those working under a contractor were not getting paid. For those not working under a contractor, the figure goes up to 94%.

Post Lockdown Uncertainties

- A large share of the respondents (**43%**) is **uncertain** about their job prospects post-lockdown. 10% of the respondents are in fact sure that they will not get their old job back.
- This uncertainty about jobs in the future is higher among women, OBCs, and interstate migrants. Those who work in their native states are more optimistic about their job prospects post-lockdown.
- The **Muslims have higher share of workers reporting that they do not expect to get back their work** compared to the other social categories. On the other hand, a higher share of **Hindu advantaged caste (and mostly the men within this group) were sure about getting back** their work after lockdown.
- The **uncertainty** about going back to the old job is the **highest in urban areas**. The **certainty** of getting back the same job is **highest in the semi-urban areas**. And contrary to our intuitive thinking, the **surety of losing work, however, is the**

highest in rural. This points towards the need for immediate attention to the countryside as it would be burdened with a load of return-migrants.

- Among those who responded to a question about their future, most of them seemed to want to go back to their villages, a large section remains uncertain about the future, while others would start searching for new jobs.

Incidence of Hunger:

- Only **38.9%** (547) said that they never went completely out of food during the lockdown. **29.9%** (420) reported they **occasionally went out of food**, that is they had no food intermittently for 1-2 days. **20.5%** (288) people said they **frequently went out of food** for 4-7 days during the period of lockdown and 150 people (**10.7%**) said, they were out of food for more than 7 days facing an **extreme hunger** situation.
- The ones who reported never gone without food reported that they have **diminished their intake** and were often having one meal in a day. **21.8%** (119 respondents) said they were skipping meals, while **49.5%** reported that they **were eating less within the day**. At least 28 people (5.1%) reported that parents were skipping meals and they were only providing food for their children.
- Hunger is pervasive among all communities and cuts across caste. However, taking a closer look we can find that the workers who belonged to the **advantaged caste Hindus have suffered less in terms of going occasionally or frequently hungry compared to others. In the case extreme hunger also, the advantaged caste Hindus are relatively better off than the conditions of OBC/SC/ST or Muslims.**
- Though casual labourer earned more than self-employed and monthly wage earners among our respondents (as shown in earlier section), but it was always a trade off with stability which seems to make a difference to the hunger situation. **Casual labourers were worst hit in terms of incidence of hunger.**
- The situation of hunger is clearly **better among the non-migrants, and worse among the inter-state and intra-state migrants.**
- **The gross hunger situation in lockdown is not much different in cities and villages.** That further can imply that those returning will be reaching back home, where hunger and starvation is also a reality, much like the cities.

Source of relief/support

- Among our respondents, the source of food to quell hunger was traced maximum to **NGOs (43.3%)**, followed by **government initiatives (38.7%)** and also by **religious and community organizations which constitute 19.2%**.
- Maximum respondents i.e. 646 (**46%**) got support from any one source only, while **26.3% (369 respondents)** got support from two sources.

- A substantial section of **24.6% i.e. 346 respondents reported that they have not received food support from any source at all.**
- If the NGO's and Religious Organisations had not stepped in, for a large section of people, life during lockdown would have been far more testing.
- **Almost all respondents have no access to social security**

Indebtedness:

- **Most respondents during this time of dire need were supported by friends and relatives (40%).** The other sources were money lenders, local shops, contractor/employer, and landlords, in that order.
- However, the **majority of the respondents did not take any loans (50.7%). This has been due to a lack of opportunity and not due to a lack of trying.**

A stranded migrant in the course of the survey said that the government makes fool of the public by its play of words. Asked about his condition, he said *"Bhagwam bharose chal rha hai kyunki sarkar se koi umeed hai nahi; woh bas ghosana kr deti hai, mara jata hai gareeb"* (We are left to fend for ourselves because we don't have any expectations from the government; they just make sudden announcements, it is the poor who pay the price.) The anger and disappointment with the government was palpable.

The impact of the pandemic as we observed, are myriad. Some meets the eye, some don't. Some are obvious, some not so obvious. Some are immediate, some are long term even generational. Fatima from Delhi a garment/embroidery Worker has a 17-year-old daughter. Her daughter wants to continue studying, but with this unforeseen financial crisis, she is no longer sure if she can continue. Irfan is a garment/embroidery worker in rural UP. He is disabled and fears that he would not be able to earn enough to spend on his children's food, milk or education. The poorest already find it difficult to spend on their children's education. They tend to go out of their way with their meagre savings to avail education for their kids for a better future. But a crisis like this pushes them over the edge and one of the first casualties is education, particularly for girls. This often slips through our studies or surveys, but the impact of such life-events is generational.

Then again, there are steps taken by the government that have both intended and unintended meanings and outcomes. For a migrant family we spoke to, regular school meant that at least three of their kids would get meals served at midday. But now with the schools being shut, it has added to their hunger. The crowd and mismanagement at the government distribution centres have become a barrier in itself. Even if they are willing to toss physical distancing to the air, they are often threatened with eviction if they are found venturing to these centres as the landlord is afraid that they will bring back the virus.

In the domain of health, while several hospitals have been turned into COVID centers, all other critical patient care and their treatments have been put on hold. Patients with critical conditions like that of advanced stages of cancer, dialysis, etc., have been left in the lurch. The poor have been the worst sufferers as the emergency wards, OPDs and several other units of the public hospitals have been closed due to COVID. Shakeel is a

rickshaw puller in UP and his wife Farzana was suffering from jaundice when the lockdown was announced. They are not able to access hospitals or medical centres and it would be difficult for most like Shakeel to afford private healthcare. Lactating mothers in Himachal Pradesh were concerned about the health of their children, as they were starving and not eating nutritious food thereby producing less milk. Several of these consequences do not often meet the eyes but have far reaching impact on health, lives and livelihoods.

The workers' trauma during the lockdown throws up both a crisis and contradiction of the current model of development, which has been starkly growth-oriented and urban-centric, dependent on a migration stream from rural areas and an inexhaustible supply of a desperate surplus labour army willing to work anywhere, in any conditions. It was and is more evident now that this has been a model that has worked vastly in favour of capital against the interest of the labour, particularly informal labour. The study throws up the extremely fragile and nearly hostile work environments that the urban areas have turned into in the neo-liberal period, the character of which lie bare due to the COVID-19 crisis. Other than some extra earning, even that not substantially higher, the migrant workers have got little else from these workplaces by way of stability, social security, conditions of work and residence etc. For many of these workers facing the lockdown, the only future envisioned is to return home to an agricultural economy. These, ironically, were the same places from where they were pushed out of, due to a widespread agrarian distress and endemic hunger. The only financial support that many of the migrant workers got was from their homes dependent on agricultural incomes. That the urban environment is appearing far less acceptable to the workers compared to their native homes in rural areas, which are now further impoverished, is a telling commentary on the neo-liberal model of development.

The study also points to the complete collapse of the social contract embedded in the Constitution of India between the state and the working people. Without debating whether the lockdown was essential or not, the way it was imposed by the state, without a thought about how a large section of its own citizens will survive its severity, demonstrates on the one hand, a distinct distancing of the state from its responsibility towards the workers who fueled the very model of development it promoted, and on the other, the disastrous consequences of the lockdown leading to a complete loss of trust of the workers from the State, whose support they not only need but probably deserve the most.

1. CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY

On 24 March 2020, the Government of India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on a four-hour notice, announced a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, limiting movement of the entire 1.3 billion people as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic in India. While addressing the nation on 24 March, the Prime Minister said that the only solution to control the spread of coronavirus was to break the cycle of transmission through social distancing and asked people to stay at home while warning that the lockdown would be enforced more strictly than the Janata Curfew of March 21 which preceded the lockdown. On March 24, the confirmed Covid cases in the entire country stood at 564 and a death toll of 10.

Opinions differ on whether the lockdown on March 24 was useful to contain the spread of the contagion, but it is certain that for the working poor of the country, the stringent lockdown with social distancing and stay at home order meant a total disruption in their already precarious lives and conveyed state apathy, callousness and deep ignorance of their everyday reality. The gruelling everyday life, work and meagre earnings of the millions of working poor certainly didn't offer them the opportunity of physical distancing. A large number of the labouring poor in the cities are homeless, they sleep at night under the carts they pull during the day, their rickshaws double up as sleeping bench at night, they eat and sleep in the factories and at the construction sites where they work, they live in swarming slums and chawls and in congested houses in narrow lanes without much water and sanitation and none or little savings to dip into. How are they expected to maintain safe distance and follow frequent handwash order? How are they to feed themselves and their children if they didn't go out looking for daily labour? The casual daily-wage workers who search for work every day and who don't have employers who would pay them if they miss work? How will the transgender and others in entertainment work whose livelihood depend on interaction with the people make a living in times of physical distancing which means cutting them off from all? Poor working people remain hidden from our imagination, visible only in their service and labour they render. We even hide them from view shamelessly - we built a 1,640 feet wall in Ahmedabad to hide slums from view during 'Namaste Trump' event in February 2020. So when the citizens were asked to stay at home, poor labouring citizens were surely not thought about in this order.

The lockdown flung the poor into destitution as they lost livelihoods, were forced to face hunger, and displaced forcibly. Within days of the lockdown, it was evident that the sudden lockdown was a catastrophe rising on an already crippled economy. India was struggling with an economic downturn before the lockdown and a sudden closing of both demand and supply across the economy overnight, resulted in a massive shock. Only days before the lockdown, as the country faced the pandemic and an imminent economic ruin, the slowing down of growth, and macro-economic supply shock, everyone knew that the country was dealing not just with a health but also an economic

emergency. Economic Times analyses in the week of March 20 forewarned that the Rs 18 lakh crore tourism industry was expecting direct job losses of 1.2 million, the hotel industry was expecting revenue losses of \$1.3-1.5 billion and massive cut in jobs, the restaurant industry which employed over 7 million people was expecting job losses of 15-20% and aviation industry was expecting about 11 million job losses if the crisis continued for a few months. The slowing down within the first few days of the lockdown and the grim economic reality of vast majority of Indian working people was in full public discussion.

In this backdrop, the lockdown was announced without a word on government's strategy for the poor and how the poor were to make a living or access food in coming weeks. On the second day of the lockdown, on March 26, the finance minister announced a 170,000 crore stimulus package to help those affected by the lockdown. The package claimed food security measures for poor households through direct cash transfers, free cereal and cooking gas for three months and some additional benefits. However, experts and activists cautioned that a significant proportion of the affected people would be unable to avail the facilities. They also pointed out that the math was not transparent and after adjusting for the spending that was already done in the current budget the additional expenditure was perhaps far lower than what was claimed.¹ The distribution of even these meagre amounts were suspect amongst the experts who had been closely following the functioning of these schemes.² Even the usually conservative rating agencies which are the first ones to flag concerns on fiscal deficit, commented that the stimulus package was not enough to fight the slowdown and more than half of the 'package' was already budgeted.³

But the question which poor people confronted even if the package was delivered was that what would they do in the many weeks it would take to roll out the promised schemes? The package seemed totally oblivious on the kind of situation developing on the ground. Unsurprisingly it sparked off fear and insecurity, as poor people realised that they were on their own. So they packed whatever little belonging they had and began leaving the cities for their villages, marching silently hundreds of kilometres along the highways and railways tracks. Women migrant workers, some pregnant and lactating, without food and water walked for hundreds of kilometres, braving violence of the police, and thrown into increased risks of sexual violence by the state agencies. The workers were escaping the cities which turned their back on them, and a state which reneged with impunity on its own laws which make it obligatory for it to protect migrants. The Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and

¹ <https://theprint.in/economy/why-rs-1-7-lakh-crore-relief-package-may-not-mean-an-equivalent-fiscal-hit-in-2020-21/389420/>, March 27, 2020 Retrieved on May 21, 2020.

² <https://thewire.in/government/covid-19-india-government-package>, April 2, 2020, Retrieved on May 21, 2020.

³ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/covid-19-acute-ratings-pitches-for-rs-11-2-lakh-crore-stimulus-package-to-revive-economy/articleshow/75456541.cms>, April 29, 2020, Retrieved on May 21, 2020.

Conditions of Service) Act, 1979, for example, obligates the state to regulate the conditions of employment of the migrant workers which include wage payment and a journey allowance to and from the home state. Similarly, the Disaster Management Act, 2005, which is invoked in the country, lays down 'the mitigation of the effects of disaster' as the responsibility the National Executive Body constituted under the Act. The Act includes specific Guidelines for minimum standards of relief to be provided to persons affected by disaster, including provisions in the relief camps of food, drinking water, medical cover and sanitation. It also includes setting up the mechanism for early warnings and dissemination of proper information to public. All these provisions were flouted with impunity during the lockdown.

It was also no secret that the economic cost of lockdown was going to be significantly higher for the country's working poor, an overwhelming majority of which is part of the unorganised economy without much safety nets. CMIE's weekly survey of employment showed that by April, 114 million workers, were out of work, of whom 91 million were casual labourers and 17 million were salary earners.⁴

Hundreds were killed during the punishing journeys to home states, mainly on foot but also in crammed trucks, autorickshaws and small carriers. There were others who stay put not knowing how to make the journey home, women with small children, men with no prospect of work and wages in home states, small vendors, domestic help, agricultural labourers, sanitary workers, casual labourers and contract workers in the factories and workshops who lived in towns, small and big cities and rural areas whose livelihoods came to a screeching halt pushing them in a state of extreme vulnerability. For these hundreds of millions of marginalised Indians with no savings, social support or planning, the lockdown came as a deathblow.

Rapid surveys conducted during the early lockdown period reporting on the conditions of employment, job losses, experience of hunger and access to ration and other entitlements, highlighted the extreme precarity of working lives.⁵ Early reports also showed that the earnings of the workers from the past did not leave them with any savings to survive for more than a few days.⁶ International media reported how with businesses shut down in cities across the country, a large number of migrant workers, many of whom lived where they worked, were suddenly without food and shelter.⁷

⁴ The jobs bloodbath of April 2020, <https://www.cmie.com/kommon/bin/sr.php?kall=warticle&dt=2020-05-05%2008:22:21&msec=776>.

⁵ See Centre for Sustainable Employment web site for the link to summary of these Surveys https://cse.azimpremiuniversity.edu.in/covid19-analysis-of-impact-and-relief-measures/#other_surveys

⁶ Jan Sahas Survey on March 27th found close to 42% of the workers in their sample without ration. Voices of the Invisible Citizens, A Rapid Assessment on the Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on Internal Migrant Workers: Recommendations for the State, Industry & Philanthropies, April, 2020.

⁷ Slater, Joanna; Masih, Niha (28 March 2020). *"In India, the world's biggest lockdown has forced migrants to walk hundreds of miles home"*. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved 21 May 2020; Abi-Habib,

Pictures of thousands of migrants in Delhi, including whole families, packed with their pots, pans and blankets into rucksacks, some balancing children on their shoulders as they walked along interstate highways flashed all over the world.

Even in the face of this compelling evidence, the government of India told the Supreme Court in response to a PIL on the payment of wages and relief to migrant workers amid lockdown that the government was doing its best and it had extended all facilities to migrants⁸ and indeed that there were no migrants walking the roads.

As the humanitarian crisis began to unfold, many civil society organisations, humanitarian aid groups, common citizens and religious organisations stepped in to support the people in distress. During this time, a lot of organizations have assessed the impact of the lockdown, some specifically focusing on workers, others on poor or a section of the poor (PARI 2020; Gramvani 2020; Jan Sahas 2020; Saajha Manch 2020; SWAN 2020; APU 2020).

Aman Biradari Trust is one of the organisations that initiated relief measures, providing cooked meals in the initial days followed by the distribution of dry ration under its Karwan-e-Mohabbat campaign. The Centre for Equity Studies and the Delhi Research Group came together to conduct a rapid survey among workers – mainly those who contacted and were reached food relief by Aman Biradari Trust - to present a comprehensive account of various aspects of the lives and livelihood conditions of the working population of India. One of the key aspects dealt with in this survey has been the focus on hunger. The access to the workers via telephone was established from the data base based on the relief work done in Delhi-NCR, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, Rajasthan and Jharkhand. In these times of wide spread distress it may not be wrong to say that the respondents of this survey are workers with some social capital, who could reach out to these groups who were giving relief. We are well aware that thousands could not even get access to modicum of relief. The survey was conducted from May 5 to May 10, 2020.

Maria; Yasir, Sameer (29 March 2020). *"India's Coronavirus Lockdown Leaves Vast Numbers Stranded and Hungry"*. *The New York Times*. [ISSN 0362-4331](#). Retrieved 21 May 2020.

⁸ Even in the face of this compelling evidence, the government of India told the Supreme Court in response to a PIL on the payment of wages and relief to migrant workers amid lockdown that the government was doing its best and it had extended all facilities to migrants <https://www.mondaq.com/india/litigation-contracts-and-force-majeure/928584/migrant-workers39-covid-19-measures-pil-update>

2. THE FOCUS OF THE SURVEY

The impact of lockdown on the working population and the experience of the workers in terms of loss of income, employment and food shortage is something we get to know from this survey. It will be of interest to see what insights survey results and field experience gives us on the larger question of explaining these outcomes beyond the usual rhetoric of implementation failure.

Specific questions that this study attempts to answer are:

- ✓ What was the extent (and depth) of job-loss and hunger 45 days after the lockdown? Did this vary by income levels, social identities, locations and migration status?
 - Are there any differences in loss of pay or job loss between those working with contractors and those working on their own?
 - What is the workers' perception about job-loss?
 - Who underwent greater uncertainties (and certainty about loss of job) about future job prospects?
- ✓ What was the reach of support (food, ration, and loan) during this period of distress? What were the primary sources of support? Did the people who suffered from hunger and job-loss the most get the support?
- ✓ What is the coverage of social security schemes? How many people have potential access to institutional forms of support through bank account/ aadhar cards etc? Did access to these help the workers during the distress period?
- ✓ How do the workers see the medium to long term implications beyond the lockdown of their current experience of distress?

3. METHODOLOGY & RATIONALE OF THE SURVEY

The study was conducted through telephonic interviews with 1450 people across the states of Delhi-NCR, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, Rajasthan and Jharkhand. The respondents were asked questions from a closed questionnaire. The larger pool of prospective respondents were purposive as they were the ones the state relief teams of the Karwan e Mohabbat campaign of Aman Biradari got in touch with in the course of the relief exercise in the course of the first month since the beginning of the lockdown. The final list of respondents were randomly selected from this larger pool of people. Though not equally sampled, but we tried to reach out to people from both urban/semi-urban locations of work as well as rural and we tried to have a fair share of both among our respondents. The purpose of the study was not to make inter-state comparisons and hence the sample in the rapid survey are not divided in a manner so as to facilitate the same. The spread across the states was simply to achieve a broader sample so that the results of the rapid survey could be more representative. The primary coordinates of the study were to generate a quick assessment of the experience of the lockdown and its incumbent hardships based on area of location (urban/rural), status of migration, employment and socio-economic status, assessment of hunger, and extent of support.

The questionnaire collected details of name, age, caste, religion, region of the respondents. The questions asked in the survey pertained to a) migration, b) the condition of various working groups in the rural and urban areas, b) the working background of various categories of workers, c) the diversity of employment opportunities, d) the loss of jobs and wages during the lockdown, e) the state of hunger among the respondents f) indebtedness among the workers g) the extent of state/institutional support received by the respondents during the lockdown.

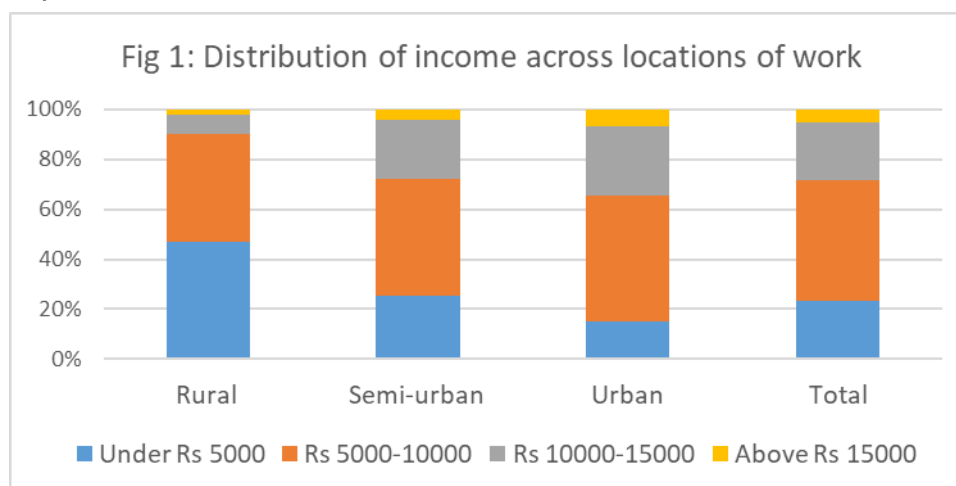
The respondents that we reached out to in our sample were from both the organized and unorganized sectors, although the latter was overwhelmingly in the majority. The samples included both workers who have migrated to other states as well as those who have not. The study touched upon various employment categories, including construction workers, sanitation workers, small shopkeepers, petty traders, street vendors, sanitation workers, rag pickers, sex workers, domestic workers, rickshaw pullers, agrarian labourers, garment workers, and even homeless people.

Along with the quantitative data that we extrapolated from the survey questionnaires we also asked some qualitative questions too to understand the status particularly of the more vulnerable sections in this lockdown and how they are coping up with the distress. From our interaction with the respondents, we came to know of the distress specifically faced by the more vulnerable sections like homeless, rag-pickers, single women, elderly people, persons with a disability, people with an illness other than COVID, refugee population etc. The survey also shed light on the exacerbated plight of the people owing to certain other factors like the continued effects of the Delhi riots that happened just before the lockdown, communal discrimination in relief distribution, police brutalities on the workers trying to migrate or even to get food etc. The report also shows how job-loss and lack of resources have led to mental stress and anxiety as well as massive drop out of children (particularly girl children) from education.

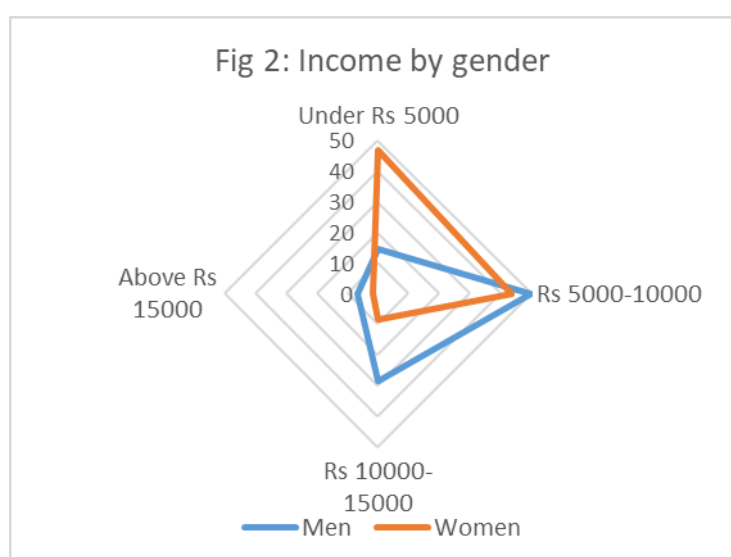
4. INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE PRE-LOCKDOWN PERIOD

To capture the impact on work during the lockdown it is important to compare it with work status pre-lock down, so that we can have a benchmark to compare and get a sense of the degree of lock-down distress.

The respondents covered in the survey come from an economically under-privileged background, with only 5.5% of them earning a monthly amount of Rs. 15000. The modal monthly income is between Rs. 5000 to Rs 10000 (Table A1). The survey found that rural workers earn less on an average than those located in semi-urban and urban areas (Figure 1). The urban workers have the highest average earnings (Table 1). Women (compared to men), Dalits, Muslim (in comparison with other social groups) earn less (Appendix Tables A1 and A2). In the survey it was found that women compared to men and workers who happen to be Muslims have migrated less for work compared to other social groups.



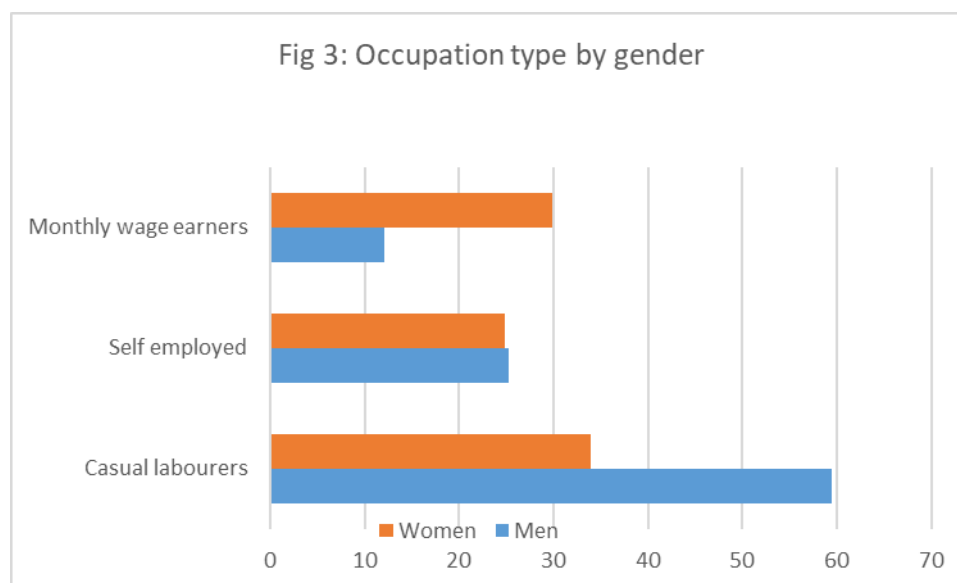
The study has loosely divided the workers into three occupational categories: casual labourers (55%), self-employed (27%) and monthly salary earners (18%) (Appendix 3).



Compared to men, women are employed largely in very low-income categories. 46.8% of women earned less than 5000 rupees in the pre-COVID period (Fig 2).

Only 1.6% of them earned more than 15000 rupees in the pre-COVID period. The share of men in these categories is 14.8% and 6.8% respectively.

However, while their income level is lower than men, women seem to have more stable sources of income. 29.9% of women are employed in monthly wage earning jobs while the respective share among men is only 12% (Fig 3). Compared to men, few women carry out-migration for job opportunities. 54.9 percent among them are non-migrants while only 26.2% of men are non-migrants (Table A3).



Box 1: No Country for the Old

***Rajendra** is an agricultural labourer in rural UP. Farming is severely affected by the pandemic and he is too old to take up any other kind of unskilled physical labour. He was earning less than 5000 a month before lockdown and without work the adults in his family including himself are having to skip meals to at least feed a few morsels to the young.*

***Veer Sen** is 70 years old, and the only earning member in the family of eight people in small town UP. He has not been well and does not have any access to hospitals and medical centres in the middle of the lockdown.*

Given that the virus is more threatening for those above 65 years age and those with comorbidities, the old are particularly vulnerable from both ends – loss of earnings and also being more susceptible to the virus.

Overall, this indicates the precarious conditions in which women work and their subordinate status vis-a-vis men. Unlike men, the mobility to look out for better employment opportunities in other states is not open to them.⁹ In our qualitative

⁹ Some of the women respondents were non wage workers, who have not been included in the job-loss segment of the analysis. However, the dependence of the women on their male counterparts and the inability to mediate with their constraints during the lockdown in their personal capacity was revealing.

narratives, several of these nuances came out even stronger. This was especially true for single women. Their experiences reflect a microcosm of the innumerable difficulties which women face. These have been summarized in Box 2.

Box 2: Single Mothers- Abandonment, Motherhood and Work

We spoke to several single mothers, abandoned wives, divorcees or widows. While life was no easier for them even in pre-COVID times, they have particularly been squeezed out of sustenance after the lockdown.

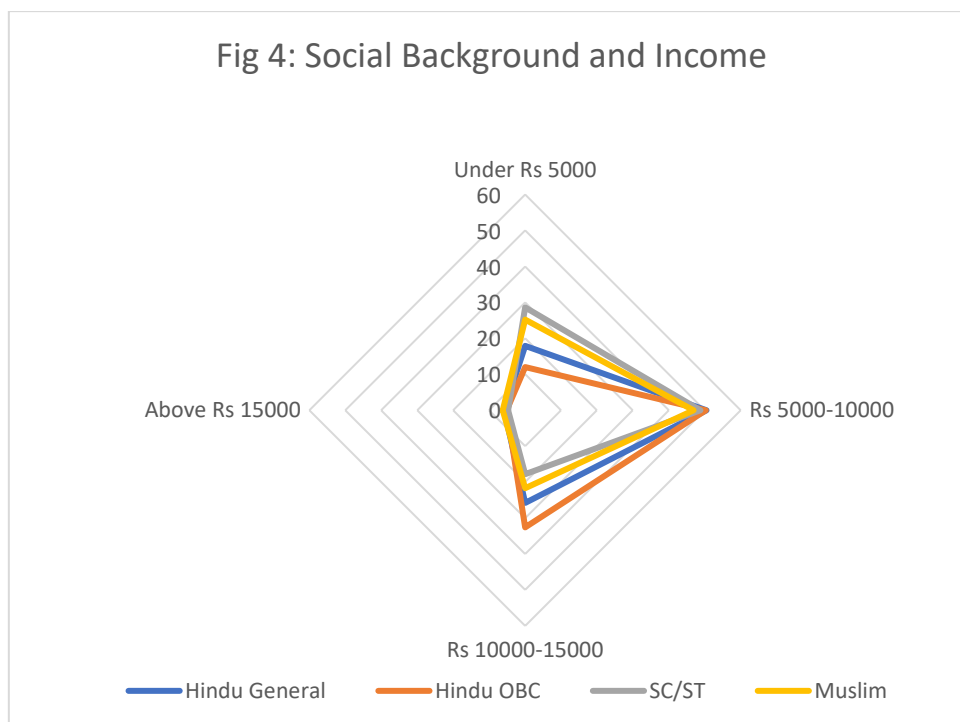
*Before lockdown, **Sonia** used to work in a cosmetic factory in Delhi earning less than 5000 rupees a month. Her husband was an alcoholic and abandoned her and her three kids. The lockdown has added an entirely new dimension to her stress. With no work and no pay, there have been days when she has failed to feed her kids since the lockdown.*

*Similarly, **Aziza** and her two kids were abandoned. Before lockdown she used to work at a tailoring unit in rural UP earning a meagre 2000 rupees a month. The onset of the lockdown has meant skipping meals regularly for this family. To provide full means for her kids, she is forced to skip her meals. Both Sonia and Aziza have not received any support from the government in terms of ration, cooked food, or money.*

***Reshma**, a widow, and mother of six children have been struggling to provide for her family during the lockdown in village in Haryana. She is in desperate need of help since it has been really difficult for her to feed her children. Being a construction worker she would earn less than 5000 a month, which was less than her male counterparts whose average income varied from 8000-10000 rupees a month. She pointed out there is absolutely no work for women in this lockdown at her place.*

***Suraya** from Delhi has 3 children – 2 daughters and one son. One is nine months old. She is the only working member of the family. The entire family is dependent on her. She has managed to arrange some food from the government school where her child studies. However, it is not sufficient for the entire family.*

Among the other social categories, the figures from our survey show that workers who happen to be Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims were worse off in terms of income levels compared to workers from other social categories in the pre-lockdown period (Fig 4). Figures lay it bare as to how caste continues to limit opportunities and capabilities. Dalits, despite similar occupation and migration composition, earn less than other Hindus. It is important to take into account these pre-existing inequalities as it is these fractures that the pandemic further cracks open. While the distress has been universal, but the extent and nature of it for various sections would be lost upon us unless we acknowledge the above (Boxes 1, 2 and 3).



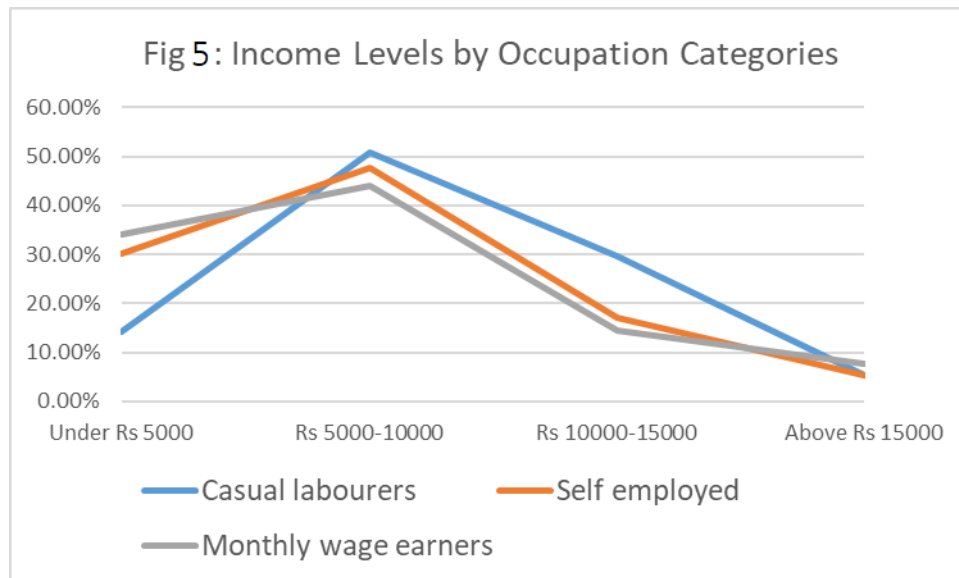
Box 3: Vulnerabilities of Dalit Workers

The survey team spoke to Dilip Kumar Das and Dev Kumar Das from Jharkhand who are sales men who used to earn less than 5000 rupees a month. Both are from the Dalit community living in the Harijan basti and Ravidas colony and almost none in their entire colony had received any government ration.

Both of them are already in debt as they have had to loan ration from nearby shops worth about 5000 rupees. Dev has also have had to borrow from friends even as they have reduced their food intake. Given that many aren't sure if in the ensuing slump whether there will be enough opportunities of earning in their line of work even after the lockdown, the loans may keep piling up.

Relationship Between Income and Occupation

If we look closely into our respondents we would find a counter-intuitive picture. Though the stability and autonomy of monthly wage workers and self-employed workers respectively should seemingly be greater than that the casual labourers, but that doesn't seem to be the case. This may be an over-simplification of complex realities, but the survey establishes that the casual labourers were better off than the other two occupational categories in terms of their pre-COVID incomes levels (Fig 5). What we are seeing here is a trade-off between relatively higher wages and security or continuity of work that the casual labourers often choose between. However, it is precisely this trade off that hurts when a crisis hits as they are more exposed to hunger and uncertainty.



From our survey characteristics we observe that the share of casual labourers are the highest both in urban work locations, as well as among the inter-state migrants. Since they earn more than the other categories of employment considered here, our survey results may explain that the migration could help possibly earning a few thousand rupees extra per month. However these few additional resources are at the cost of accepting conditions of employment that are volatile and will cease to act as a support for the worker the moment there is a minor fluctuation in the economy, particularly so when there is a deep shock as the on-going lockdown.

5. JOB-LOSS DURING LOCKDOWN AND PERCEIVED FUTURE ABOUT EMPLOYMENT

a. Job-loss during Lockdown

We may remember a government directive on March 29th stating that no employer should dismiss an employee due to lockdown. While it looked positive on paper and was given the appearance of a “thoughtful” government, it meant practically nothing for the vast pool of India’s informal labour. It in effect reduced workers to dependence on the goodwill or charity of their employers rather than the certainty and dignity of rights. In this section, we analyse the strength of this directive and also how different social groups have been impacted by job-loss.

The survey conclusively establishes that job loss is all-encompassing (Table 1). Social identity and location does not make a significant difference. There is a minor difference based on caste, but it’s too negligible to be deemed important.

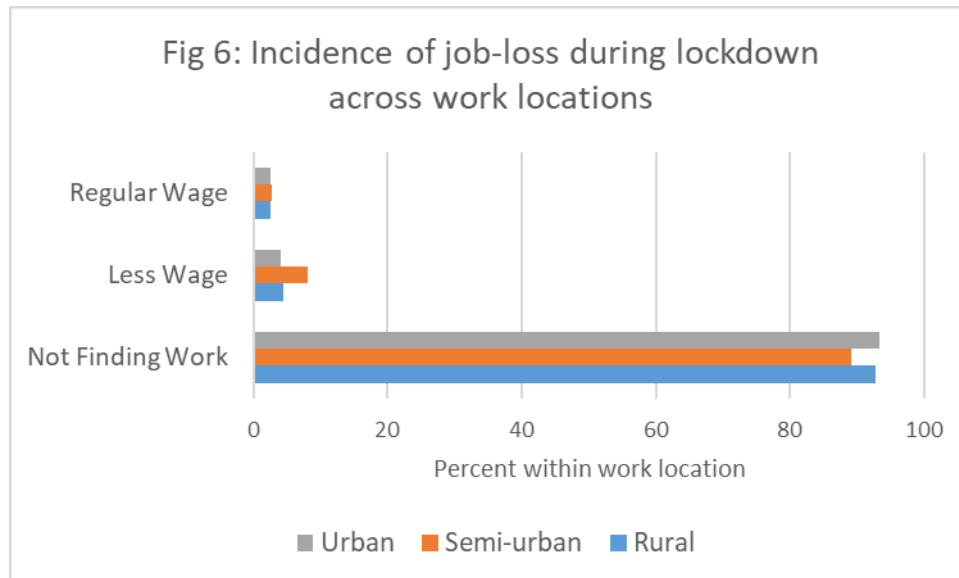
Table 1: Extent of Job-loss During Lockdown

Job-loss/Payment	Number of Respondents	Percent of respondents
Not finding work	1294	92.1
Less Pay	70	5
Regular Pay	37	2.6
Total	1401	100

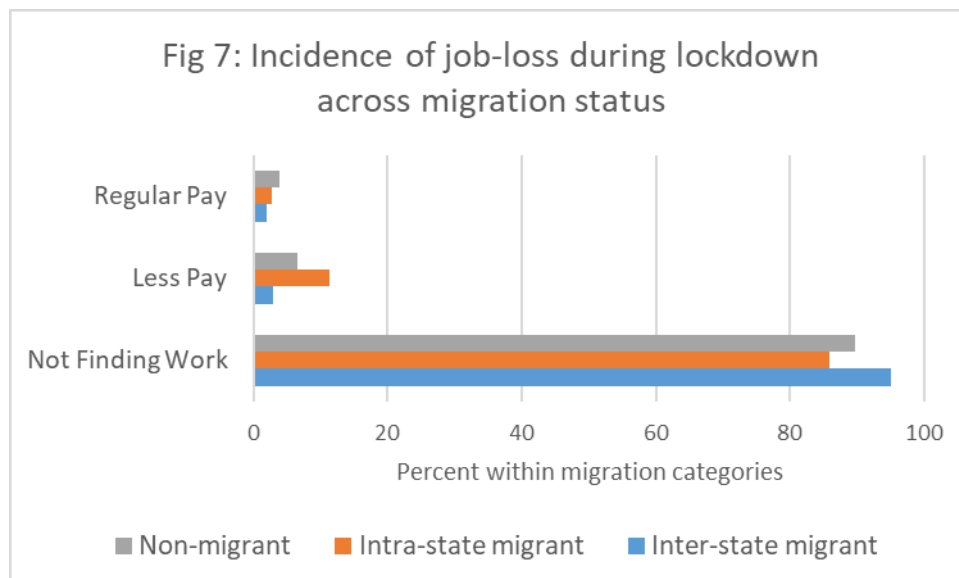
Contrary to expectations, rural and urban areas have very little difference so to speak when it comes to job loss¹⁰ (Fig 6). The conventional wisdom dictates that migrants are returning to their villages in the belief that it would provide them with limited employment opportunities to sustain themselves during the lockdown-period. However, that has not been the case from our survey findings. This indicates that without adequate state support, it would be extremely difficult for the poor to survive in the lockdown period, irrespective of location. The semi-urban areas, however, have done somewhat better, possibly because of the varied kinds (agriculture and non-agricultural) of work available in these places; around 3.5 to 4 percent more workers in

¹⁰ The lack of differences in job losses between rural and urban areas should be interpreted in the context of the coverage of the respondents in this survey. The survey covers very few farmers and most of the respondents in the rural areas are agricultural labourers and non farm workers. The commonality of experience of these sections of workers in the rural and urban areas suggest that those at the bottom of the workforce have suffered across the board. More robust comparison to capture the differences between rural and urban areas will require a more comprehensive coverage of workers both in rural and urban areas.

these work location are still doing some work, though with less pay compared to the pre-lockdown status¹¹.



Migration status (whether within or between states) does make some difference in the incidence of job loss. The inter-state migrants are the worst off and there is a 10% point difference in job-loss during the lock-down period within this category and the intra-state migrants, with the non-migrants being at the middle (Fig 7).



However, the intra-state migrants are working at wages lower than they used to get in the pre-lockdown period. The state-specific, possibly the social capital of socio-cultural networks make their position a little better so as to ensure some jobs even if low paying. That apart, what this lays bare is the fact that the urban areas have been hostile for the

¹¹ There is comprehensive recent literature which is revisiting the rural urban linkages and its implications for livelihoods to capture the new synergies of rural urban growth. See for instance, Tacoli, C. (2003). The links between urban and rural development: Environment & Urbanization Editorial. Vol 15 No 1 April 2003: 3-12. As mentioned in footnote 10 above for a deeper understanding of the rural urban dynamics more indepth exploration is required.

inter-state migrants during the period of the lockdown in terms of completely stripping the workers of their jobs. Some of the other forms of challenges faced by the workers have been captured in Box 4.

Box 4: Batons & Bruises

Along with job loss, people were also subjected to rampant police brutality. There were many a tale of police excesses when they stepped out in search of livelihood or in their quest to go home. Several such instances surfaced even in the course of the survey.

*While the poorest of the lot did not fly in with the virus from foreign terrains, but the brunt of the baton was disproportionately borne by them. While the lathi charges in Delhi or Mumbai still made their way to some headlines, the everyday harassment and adhoc/irrational or even illegal use of force went largely unreported. **Kurbaan** is a street vendor in Delhi. He shared that his vegetable thela was earning him a decent amount of money. But even though the government allowed the sale of essentials, he is afraid to go out since he came to know of police brutality on street vendors many of whose thelas were damaged.*

The above analysis also demonstrates the futility of the government's directives on March 29th to all employers/contractors that no worker be dismissed from their employment. However, this was predictable given the hyper-casualization towards which successive governments have pushed our labour force, with many workers without any identifiable employer, or rapidly changing employers, and the mediation of contractors between the worker and the principal employer. There is minimal data on employers in the informal economy and without pro-active steps from the government to correct this condition post-lockdown, the poor were left to their own.

The survey shows that nearly 90% of those working under a contractor were not getting paid at all during the period of the lockdown. For those not working under a contractor, the figure goes up to 94%.

Many of the respondents in our sample reported working with contractors. However, for some it was common to work for a few days with the contractor and a few days without them. With the limited information in the survey we examined whether working with contractors did make a difference.¹² Table 2 reveals that when we take all the occupational categories, there is a 4% point difference for those who lost their jobs, in favour of those that work with contractors. This is not a large difference. If we did this exercise only for the casual labourers, this difference reduces to only 2 percentage points. So there was no significant difference in the experience of job loss for workers when working with contractors and otherwise. It is also important to note that the payment of pre-lockdown wages was slightly larger for those not working with the contractors, even though the amount of such payments were miniscule (Table 2). This suggests that the government directives on payment of wages, as mentioned before, has made no impact on contractors. Anecdotal narratives from a few not working with the

¹² This analysis could not be done for the entire sample, as the information was available for only 618 respondents.

contractors revealed that the chances for them to hold on to their jobs may be better were they working with the contractors, as they would have been a part of a network.

Table 2: Job-loss and Role of Contractors

Payment during lockdown	Under Contractor		Not under Contractor	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Not getting paid	148	89.7	426	94.0
Reduced Income	14	8.5	13	2.9
Same as before	3	1.8	14	3.1
Total	165	100.0	453	100.0
For Daily Wage Labourers				
Payment during lockdown	Under Contractor		Not under Contractor	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Not getting paid	129	92.1	334	94.1
Reduced Income	8	5.7	9	2.5
Same as before	3	2.1	12	3.4
Total	140	100	355	100.0

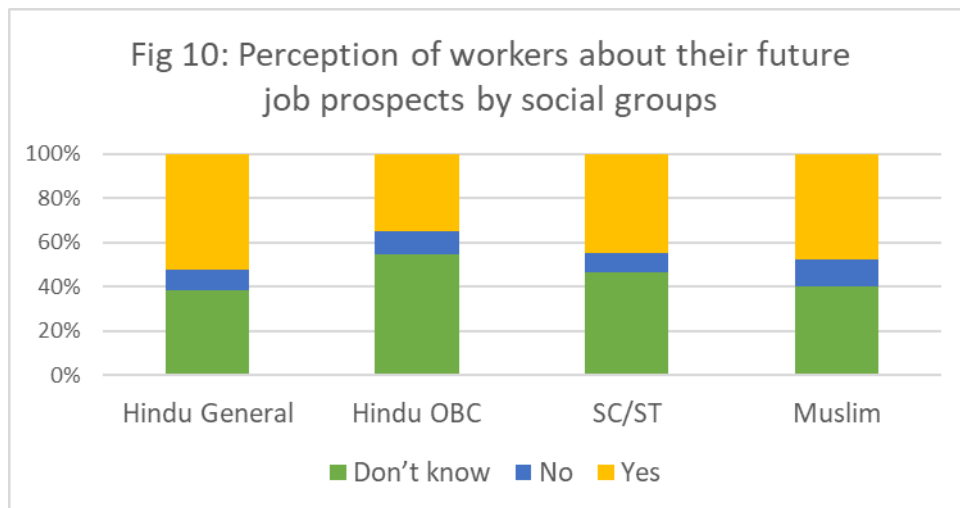
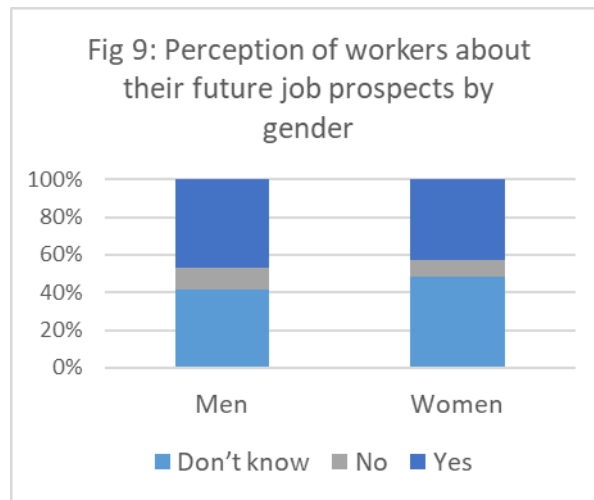
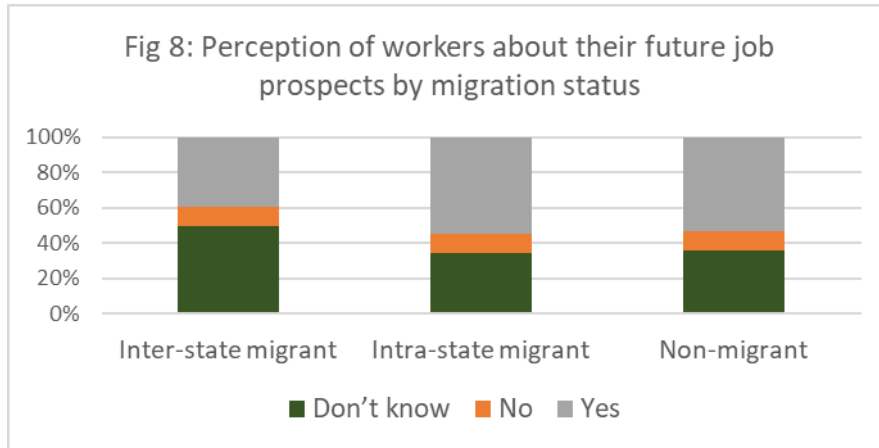
b. Perception of Job Status Post Lockdown

Perceptions about the future of these very vulnerable workers can to some extent shape their decision about return migration, or eagerness to look for a job in their native place, which for our sample was dominantly rural. The extent the workers can exercise their choices would, of course, be largely contingent to the economic and social environment of their native place. While at a certain level uncertainty was universal, but still in the course of the survey we tried to make an assessment of how different sections of the population were conceiving the future in the middle of the pandemic and the lockdown. Here we would deal with their expected future course of action.

Table 3: Uncertainty about Job Status in the Post Lockdown Period

Response	Frequency	Percent
Don't know whether the same job will be available	608	43.3
Will not get the same job (No)	151	10.7
Expect to get the same job (yes)	645	45.9
Total	1404	100

We find that a fairly large share of the respondents is uncertain (43%) about their job prospectus post-lockdown (Table 3). In fact 10% of the respondents are sure that they will not get their old job, while 46% are reasonably certain that they would. This uncertainty about the future of their jobs seem to be higher among women, OBCs, and interstate migrants (Figs 8- 10). Those who work in their native states seem to be more optimistic about their job prospectus post-lockdown (Fig 10).



The Muslims have higher share of workers reporting that they do not expect to get back their work compared to the other social categories (For other details see Box 5). On the other hand, a higher share of the Hindu advantaged caste, particularly men, were sure about getting back their work. This itself shows the cumulative impact of resources (land or assets), cultural capital and security that separates the advantaged caste Hindu men

from the remainder of the social categories. The pre-existing privileges cushion them to some extent in the event of a crisis while those without the cushion remain exposed to abject uncertainty.

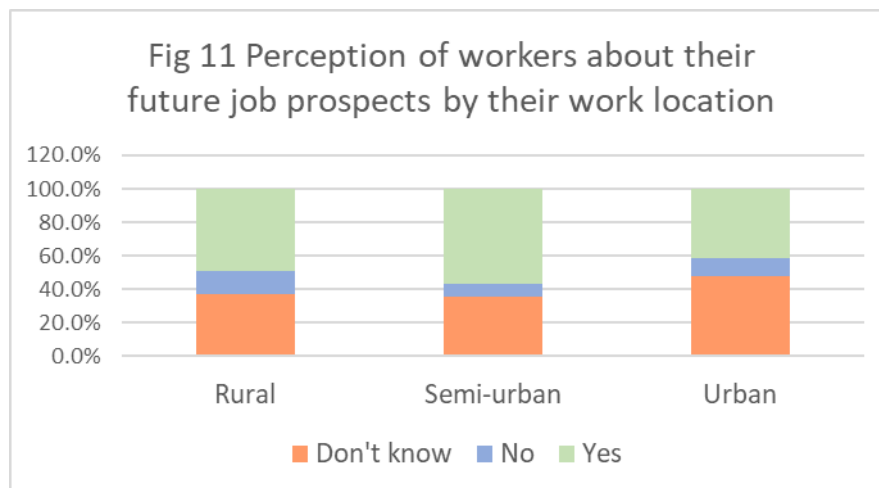
Box 5: Pandemic of Prejudice

Muslims in course of the lockdown had to deal with the added dimension of the communalization of the pandemic. This was an outcome of the vicious anti-Muslim hate campaign that the media started since positive cases were identified among participants of a Tablighi event in Delhi.

Some Muslim workers in Solan (Himachal Pradesh) reported being discriminated during relief distribution on religious grounds. They were branded as 'Tablighi Jamaat', faced hostility, and were denied relief.

Some Hindu respondents in Himachal Pradesh were circumspect about the cooked relief food because they did not know who had cooked it. Moreover, they seemed to have believed in the rumor that Muslims are spitting in the food and therefore were reluctant to eat it.

The figures indicate that uncertainty about going back to one's old job is the highest in urban areas (Fig 11). The certainty of getting back the same job is highest in the semi-urban areas. And contrary to our intuitive thinking, the surety of losing work, however is the highest in rural. This points towards the need for immediate attention to the countryside as it would be burdened with a load of return-migrants.



As in case of actual job loss, we see that the semi-urban areas are better off. And though the situation in the urban and rural areas both are vulnerable, the nature of the distress is qualitatively different.

Overall, these uncertainties are ingrained in the very structure of the Indian informal economy which promises absolutely no job-security or any other benefits. The lockdown only served to bring it out to the open by nudging those who were already living on the very edges of existence even in so called normal times. With no social security or decent job the vast majority of these people only had their labour to count

upon. The lockdown snatched that away with a head start of just four hours. While for some the uncertainties will cease sooner, for others it will be longer haul (Box 6). A slowdown in the economy would for instance affect the real estate and construction sector which also happens to be the sector employing the biggest pool of labour today who would be plunged into uncertainty and despair. With the government package focused on credit rather than a direct transfer of funds which could have had an immediate multiplier effect on the economy, the state of these workers remain extremely vulnerable.

Table 4: Future Course of Action if Earlier Job is Not Available

Responses	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
Go back to village	68	33.2
Search for similar job	63	30.7
Uncertain	47	22.9
Shift to lower order job including self-employment (or do what is available)	18	8.8
Others	9	4.5

The survey attempted to find out from the workers what their future course of action would be in case their old job was not available. Due to the high degree of uncertainty, only 205 responded to this questions, which is only 14.6% of the total respondents. However, the responses, though limited, are revealing.

There is widespread uncertainty among workers who feel that they would not get their old jobs back. Most of them want to go back to their villages, a large section remains uncertain about the future, while others would start searching for new jobs. It has to be understood that the inter-state migrants in particular, at great economic and social costs migrated out of their native place, mostly from rural areas, in the backdrop of a huge agrarian distress. The current crisis has made returning back from where they were pushed out more desirable than the staying back in what they now see as an extremely hostile and fragile space. Around 8.8 percent of those that responded to this question said they would have to look for a job worse or at a lower level compared to the one they were working in. This response is an indication of the enormity of the perceived economic crisis that is in the offing. The inability of the Indian economy to absorb them could have a catastrophic impact at two levels. One, millions would be left without employment and pushed into extreme misery. Second, the economy as a whole would collapse since this would worsen the demand-related problems of the economy.

c. The Case of the Inter-State Migrant Workers

The majority of our sample of the people interviewed were migrant labours. Among our samples 785 were inter-state migrants, 143 were intra-state migrants and 477 were non-migrants (Fig A2). The workers interviewed had migrated from their native states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Assam to Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar

Pradesh, and Haryana. In the sample that we interviewed, intrastate migration took place in states like Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Himachal Pradesh (Fig A2). One of the major crisis that we are witnessing now is that of lakhs of migrants returning back to their places of origin.

Respondents in our survey who were migrant workers stuck at their workplaces, seem to be swinging between two options, to return home by any means, or to stay put. Both had their rationales. Most of them, however, seemed desperate to return. And the reasoning was strong. The dilemma struck them, because they had migrated out from their native place in the first place because of a lack of employment opportunities there (Boxes 7 and 8).

Box 6: Forced to Make Peace with the City

"We can only produce corn there and it does not give us much yearly returns to sustain the family and the 6-month-old child's needs", said a family willing to wait it out at the destination at Solan in Himachal Pradesh. Another respondent from Solan had in fact resumed his work on 8th May after going to the labour chowk. He received 500/- day wage for two days. His kids are not getting any ration at home via PDS and BPL card in his village in UP as it requires his thumb print. His wife, their mother, passed away and hence they were not eligible for direct cash transfer. "Gaon me jaake bhi kya karenge, 3 bachhe hai woh mere jaane se mar jayenge, idhar hi dukh dard se jiyenge, yeh hi majboori hai" (What use is it to return home, the three children are going to die if we go back; no matter what the difficulty and pain, we will be forced to continue living here).

Box 7: "Gaon Gaon Hota Hain"

We spoke to a worker who was on his way to village in Bihar along with other workers. They started off on 7th May in the buses that were arranged. Pradhan has arranged for their quarantine facilities at a nearby school building in his village. He can't sustain any longer with just one meal a day from the Gurudwara. He had received ration only once and that lasted him just the few days. He is aware that there will be no work in the village, but like others, his refrain was the same: "Gaon gaon hota hai" (The village is a home to us). This was a recurring response from many.

One of them, stranded at Himachal Pradesh, had taken a thousand rupees loan from a Seth Ji. When he asked for more, he was told that the Seth had no more to loan. He has so far managed with just one meal a day at the Gurudwara. But he can't go on any longer. At village he can avail his PDS card. "Ghar me kheti hai, toh ghar chale jaane se udhar baith ke kha payenge. Idhar kamayenge nahi toh khayenge kya. Bus waghera ke liye Aadhar number liya hai policewale. Agar kuch nahi krte hai who, toh hum paidal hi chal padhenge gaon, idhar rehne se mar jaeyenge" (There is cultivation at home, so we will get food even if there is no job. Here if we do not work, what will we eat? The police have taken our Aadhar card number, for making arrangements for us to return home by bus. That is the extent of desperation. One of them we spoke to had just returned to his native place and was in a school building converted into a quarantine facility. He sounded relieved as he is looking forward to starting to work on the fields as agricultural labourer soon after quarantine. "Solan me rehte toh mar jate. Jaan hai toh Jaahaan Hai" (If we stay in Solan, we will die; if you have life, the world is yours), he added.

The arduous journey to go back, without any proper vehicles, terrified many of them. Moreover, many were circumspect of the 14 days compulsory quarantine after they go back. Some feared the possibility of contracting the virus on the way. Yet there were plenty who were willing to risk this and go home and they had obvious reasons too. They hoped their villages will be more supportive in sustaining them than the hostile workplaces, where the possibility of survival seemed bleak with every passing day.

In Himachal Pradesh workers (mostly from Bihar), who have been working there for a long time (more than two decades), were not keen to go back permanently. They have after all, in all these years built their networks in their workplaces. The newer workers were desperate to go back. They were keener to explore community networks back. One for instance was aware that there will be no job prospects back in Chhapra District and someday or the other he has to again come to NOIDA or Delhi to look for work. But still for now, he was desperate to return home.

However, the uncertainty of employment loomed large on the inter-state migrants. Traveling to distant places and getting caught again in the hostile situation like that of the pandemic, being thrown out of work, living on charity in a distant alien place and then having to walk back hundreds, sometimes thousands of kilometers on foot to reach back home, made the inter-state migrants more unsure of the future.

We also noticed that people with some resources in their places of origin, like land or a strong kin-network that might provide them with a source of sustenance were sure of going back while the others were even unsure of their return. People with no absolutely resources back home found it difficult to embark on the journey back home.

6. HUNGER AND FOOD SECURITY

The lockdown has really tested our moral capacity to witness with occasional outrage but overwhelming apathy the abject hunger that we pushed the labouring poor into. Some we spoke to were proud workers who detested the fact that they were not being able to make an honest earning out of their labour to feed themselves. With no work and hardly any surplus many of them were reduced to penury within a week and were forced to seek support, plead, request and even face humiliation which has not been easy. Hunger was one of the reasons why the migrant workers were desperate to go back to their villages.

It needs to be remembered that our purposively selected sample, have had some support from the government, NGOs, religious charities etc. Thus, in this section, it would be reasonable to assume that there are other workers who would be in much worse situation than has been revealed by our survey.

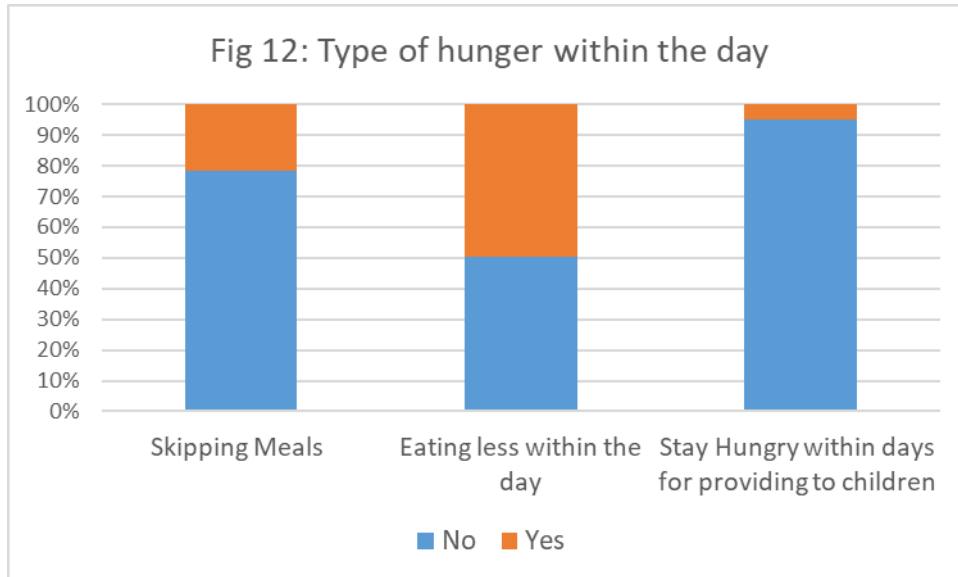
a. Incidence of Hunger - Patterns During the Lockdown

Hunger has taken an epidemic proportion in this pandemic. Only **38.9%** (547) said that they never went completely out of food during the lockdown. **29.9%** (420) reported they **occasionally went out of food**, that is they had no food intermittently for 1-2 days. **20.5%** (288) people said they **frequently went out of food** for 4-7 days during the period of lockdown and 150 people (**10.7%**) said, they were out of food for more than 7 days facing an **extreme hunger** situation (Table 5).

Table 5: Incidence of Hunger During the Lockdown

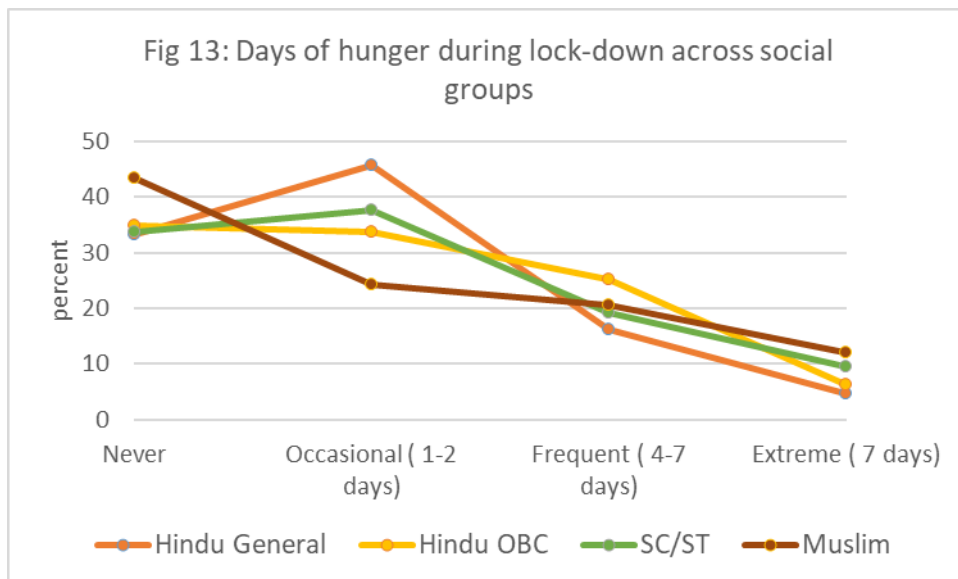
Degree of hunger across days	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Never	547	38.9
Occasional (No full meals intermittently 1-2 days)	420	29.9
Frequent (No full meals Between 4-7 days)	288	20.5
Extreme (No full meals More than 7 days)	150	10.7
Total	1405	100.0

The ones who never were out of food, reported that they have diminished their intake and were often having one meal in a day. As Fig 12 shows, 21.8% (119 respondents) said they were skipping meals, while 49.5% reported that they were eating less within the day. At least 28 people (5.1%) reported that parents were skipping meals and they were only providing food for their children.

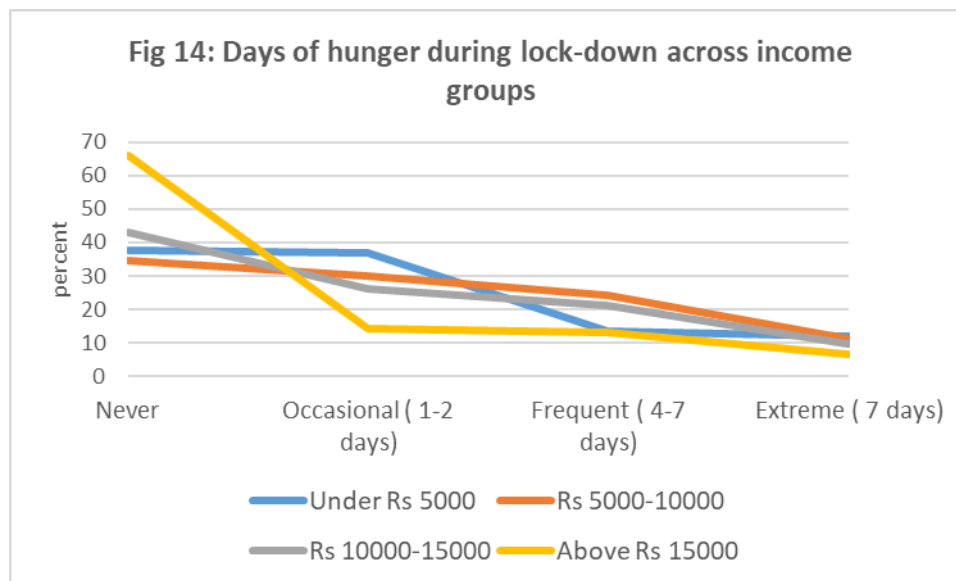


b. Hunger across Social Groups, Income, Occupation, Migration Status and Location

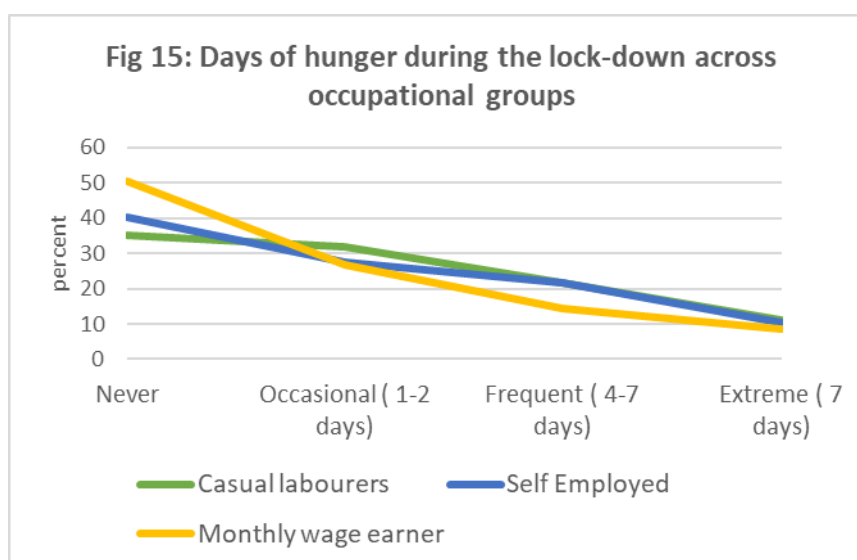
If one takes a cursory glance at the caste and religion divide of the sample on the question of hunger, the data is intriguing. It shows hunger is pervasive among all communities and cuts across caste. However, taking a closer look we can find that the advantaged caste Hindus have suffered less in terms of going occasionally or frequently hungry (Fig 13). In the case extreme hunger also, the advantaged caste Hindus are relatively better off than the conditions of OBC/SC/ST or Muslims. This again serves to demonstrate the overall material deprivation of the marginalised that gets pushed to the brink of starvation sooner than the advantaged caste population which has greater access to resources.



When it comes to income, there appears to be no linear relationship between income groups and degree of hunger, as observed earlier in this section. However, as may be expected, earnings above Rs 15000 a month did make a difference to the hunger situation (Fig 14).

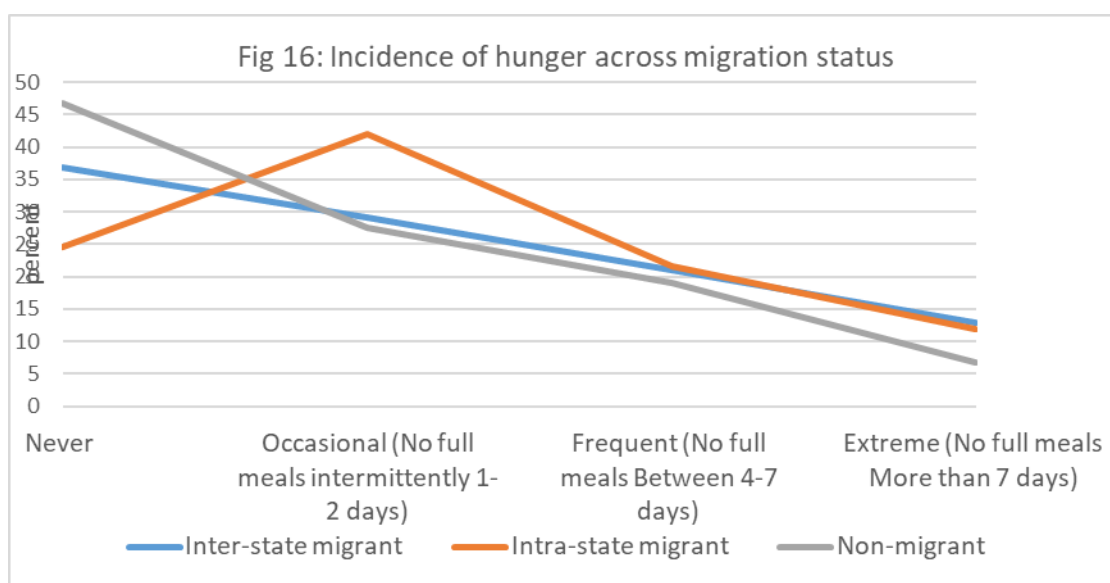


As may be expected (Fig 15) people with monthly wage earning job were better off on the hunger situation than workers who were engaged in self-employment and daily wage work. The casual labourers, primarily located away from home went hungry more often; their proportion in extreme situations of hunger was also more. Though casual labourers earned more than self-employed and monthly wage earners among our respondents (as shown in earlier section), but it was always a trade off with stability which seems to make a difference to the hunger situation.



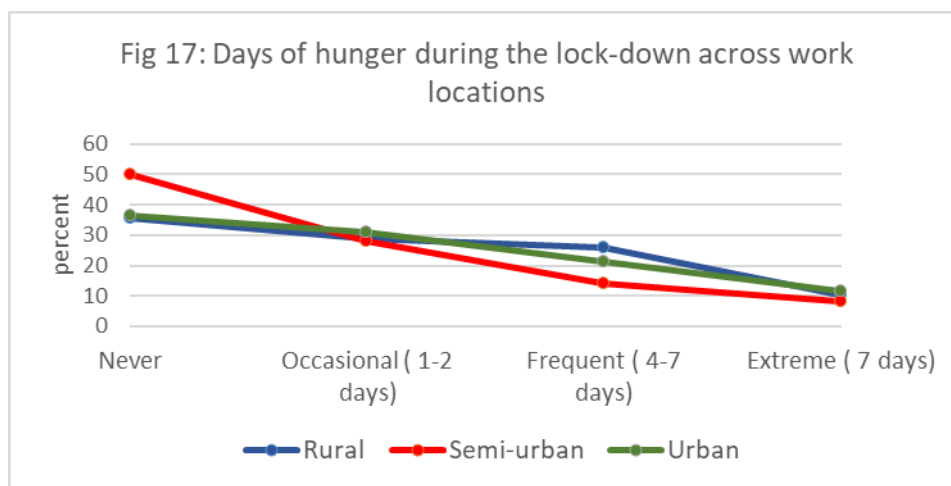
The casual labourers in our interviews also noted that they hardly had any savings and therefore their situation started deteriorating as soon as the lockdown was

implemented and they went out of work. They were much more dependent on ration or cooked foods provided by governmental and non-governmental sources and were in no position to buy food on their own as they had almost no savings. The self-employed workers, too, have no other resources to fall back on, other than their own.



The situation of hunger is clearly less severe among the non-migrants, and worse among the inter-state and intra-state migrants (Fig 16). But between the latter two categories, the intra-state migrants are worse off compared to the inter-state migrants. Though the job-loss situation and the associated uncertainties were the worst in case of the inter-state migrants their income levels however were higher. The survey results thus throws up no one to one correspondence between the two axes of distress during the lockdown analysed in the report. Notably, the differences in the job-loss status are quite muted across group as there is a widespread loss everywhere. Also, the incidence of hunger had close relationship between the nature of support by way of distribution of cooked food and dry-ration in the respective areas, as in most cases, the personal savings of the workers, save probably those in rural areas, had mostly run out after 45 days of the lock down, which is when the survey was conducted.

The support in terms of cooked food and dry ration is going to be discussed in the next sub-section.



As we look at the rural-urban divide on hunger, our responses do not yield much difference. The hunger situation seems better in semi-urban areas (Fig 17). A similar pattern was observed in case of job-loss. The mix of rural and urban seem to be providing a more resilient base in the crisis situation. The rural and urban areas on the other hand yielded similar responses to extreme hunger, as well as on the question of never going hungry. It indicates that the gross situation in lockdown is not much different in cities and villages. That further can imply that the reverse migration of workers that are taking place may add immense pressure on the countryside to cope with the increased demands. They will be reaching back home, where hunger and starvation heightened by the lockdown is also a reality, much like the cities. It has to be noted here, however, that we have very few farmers in our sample; the feed security condition of farmers are expected to be better, with the Rabi crops having been harvested.

Box 8: Hungry But No Place To Go

One of the migrant worker family has no ration card at destination (at Sonal, Himachal Pradesh), has a Jan Dhan account that has bounced and has no hope of finding any work back in the village either. "Lockdown badte hi ja raha hai, hum bhukhe hain- maa, biwi, bachhe bhi hai, sab hairan hai, rote rehte hai. Ghar se bolte hai wapas aane ki liye, lekin paisa nahi hai bilkul bhi. Baat yeh hai ki, hum gaon jaye ya idhar rahe, kahin bhi jayenge dookhi hi rahenge". (The lockdown is going on extending and I am running out of food; I have my mother, wife and children in the village, all of them are in distress; they are asking me to come back, but I have no money left. The truth is wherever I go, I have to be under a great degree of stress). This is the bleak reality that stares at many of those stranded between source and destination.

7. SOCIAL AND STATE SUPPORT

a. Sources of Support to Alleviate Hunger and Food Security

Stories of hunger and hunger-related concerns were replete in the interviews that we took (Boxes 9 and 10). There were workers who received ration only once from the government in the entire period of the lockdown. Cooked food was distributed in many cities, but availing them was a problem due to long queues, crowds, and harassment by police. While the rich and middle classes stocked, the poor were faced with abject hunger even as grains have been rotting at government stockpiles.

The source of food to quell hunger was traced maximum to NGOs (43.3%), followed by government initiatives (38.7%) and also by religious and community organizations which constitute 19.2%. (We found anecdotally that people often assumed that supplies were being sourced from government, even when these were being distributed by NGOs, so the proportion of food supplied by government maybe even lower). Maximum respondents i.e. 646 (46%) got support from any one source only, while 26.3% (369 respondents) got support from two sources (Table 7). A much smaller section 2.9% said they have received support from three sources, while just 3 respondents said they have received support from at least four different forces. A substantial section of 24.6% i.e. 346 respondents reported that they have not received food support from any source at all. 46% of respondents of received support from only one source. If the NGO's and Religious Organisations had not stepped in, for a large section of people, life during lockdown would have been far more testing.

Table 6: Sources of Support for Food During the Lockdown

	Frequency	Percent
NGO	609	43.3
Government	544	38.7
Community members/Religious Charities	270	19.2
Relatives	95	6.8
No support	346	24.6
Support from 1 source	646	46.0
Support from 2 sources	369	26.3
Support from 3 sources	41	2.9
Support from 4 sources	3	0.2
Total	1405	100

Our analysis shows that this one fourth of the sample respondents who did not receive any support at all have a disproportionate share of the following groups of people:

- Muslims
- Non-migrants

- Women
- Monthly wage earners
- Workers earning less than Rs.5000 per month.

Box 9: Liberal with Lathis

Muzammil and Asifa residents of two different locations in Delhi, both reported that they are scared to go out and receive food from the government relief that is being distributed in local schools. They are wary of long queues and police lathi charge that is so common on the people who gather to collect relief.

One complained that they get beaten up by the police every time they tried to go near the van. Policemen say “Aadhar check karwao, mobile pe message ayega, message ke bina idhar ana mat, kanoon se chaloge toh bach jaoge nahi to danda khaoge”. (get your Aadhar linked and you will get a message on your mobile. Without that message you cannot come this side. If you are law abiding you will be spared or else we will beat you up). Shargun retorts, “pet me jab bhookh lagta hai, itna kanoon nahi dikhta hai hum logon ko”. (With so much hunger in the belly we are not in a position to follow so many legal hassles). He feels that the police serve the interest of only the rich.

If we pose the question ‘Have the people who needed the food support the most got it?’ Yes, for the most part, with a few exceptions. People with income below Rs. 5000 and workers who happen to be Muslims could have been covered better. Also, our qualitative insights reveal that single women have been particularly vulnerable and perhaps lack network to access such support systems. The inter-state migrants have been left out from the loop of food support who emerged as one of the most vulnerable groups (Also see boxes 11 and 12).

Box 10: Left with no Refuge

Some of the respondents we interviewed were Rohingya refugees, some of whom lived in various camps across Delhi and Haryana. As a stigmatized, disenfranchised, and vilified community, they in any case tend to slip through the cracks. The refugees staying in camps had received help from NGOs, but the refugees who had moved out of the camps had not received help from any source.

*While the Indian citizens could avail certain facilities from the government by possessing the essential documents, the refugees cannot claim these facilities. **Sultan Ahmad**, a Rohingya refugee resides in a private refugee camp in Nuh (Haryana) and used to run a petty shop before lockdown. He doesn't have any Indian identity cards because of which he didn't get a job here. He was even denied loans. 15 days earlier he received a ration from a NGO which was depleting. With no entitlements and social security, it is only their labour that they can rely on for a living. And the lockdown has even taken that away.*

Box 11: Food Without Dignity

“Cooked food from the Government reaches our area, but the quantity is nowhere close to adequate. Some people are sugar patients, some can’t eat rice and such problems affect the overall utility of the cooked food system.” ---- Mohammad Idris (Delhi)

In UP, Himachal Pradesh and parts of Delhi, cooked food received once in a day from Gurudwaras were the only sources of food for many. Stories of people standing in a line for the day and then returning empty-handed because the food got over before their turn was also frequent.

In the states that were primarily covered by our survey, i.e. Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Assam and Haryana collectively do not seem to have performed as well as they could have in terms of food support by government during the lockdown, because NGO’s, in spite of far greater financial constraints have reached out to more workers.

b. Sources of Debt During Lockdown

The workers during the period of lockdown were in desperate need for financial support since most of them had run out of savings within the first week of the lockdown. This support was not only required for their essential needs, but for the migrant workers, money was needed for them to take on the journey home. The stress and levels of indebtedness that the pandemic would end up pushing people into would be at a level that would have life changing, even generational consequences for the poor given the hard choices they would have to make.

Most respondents during this time of dire need were supported by friends and relatives (40%). The other sources were money lenders, local shops, contractor/employer, and landlords, in that order¹³. However, the majority of the respondents did not take any loans (50.7%) (Table 8). This has been due to a lack of opportunity and not due to a lack of trying. In our conversations with them, many respondents expressed their helplessness in availing loans. For several respondents who live in urban locations, lack of contacts in the city provided limited or no option in accessing loans. Easy access to loans in their native place was stated as one important for them to go back to their native villages. We could also understand that many considered deferred rents as loans (Also see Box 13). In rural locations, people have been buying things on credit from the local shopkeepers.

Table 7: Sources of debt/ financial support during the Lockdown

Sources	Frequency	Percent
Relatives/friends	560	39.9
Money Lender	100	7.1
Local Shop	88	6.3

¹³ The nature of support from local shops came mostly in terms of supply of provisions in credit.

Contractor/Employer	29	2.1
Landlord	8	.6
No loan	712	50.7
Debt from one source	606	43.1
Debt from two sources	82	5.8
Debt from three sources	5	.4

Box 12: Desperate and Hounded

Jamil is an E-Rickshaw puller in Delhi NCR earning less than 5000 rupees a month. And as is expected with such meagre earning in a city, there is hardly any savings that can sustain them through a leaner period. “Jo kamata tha woh kharch jo jaata tha, kuch bacchta nahi tha”(All that I used to earn would be spent, nothing was saved) says Jamal as he is struggling to tide over the lockdown.

During our phone survey we spoke to many who in fact said their landlords have not really waived the rent, but have merely postponed the collection. So in a way these also remain debts that they have to clear sooner than later. “Ghar ka maalik aake bar bar gali deke jata hain. Abhi paisa nahi le raha lekin lockdown khatam hoke ke baad nahi diya toh mar peet bhi kar sakta hain,” (The landlord comes and curses me; for now he is not taking the rent, but if I cannot pay him after the lockdown, he may become aggressive) said Radheshyam, a garment worker working in the Delhi NCR. His demand is simple: “Sarkar bas ghar pahucha de, utna hi kaafi hain.” (It’s enough if the Government helps me to go home, I have no other expectation). That is the only way he can rid himself of this mounting debt. In Himachal Pradesh for instance, many workers said they were staying with overdue rent and were buying ration from local shops with overdue payment. Sanjay a daily wage earner used to earn on an average 6000 rupees per month, out of which 1000 rupees was paid as rent. In the lockdown he not only is borrowing ration for the shops but he is also indebted to his landlord. In fact this explains partly the desperation of the migrant workers in cities across the country to return. Every passing day without work means an addition to the debt.

Those who were already indebted are worse off. We spoke to one who has to pay back debts he had incurred to arrange for her daughter’s diary just months back. He was somehow paying them out of his meagre income in instalments, but now he has no disposable income left due to the crisis. We spoke to one whose son a pneumonia patient is leaving them in debt for treatment cost even before lockdown. “Rozgar se kisi tarah kaam chalta tha..abhi woh bhi khatam ho gaya”,(I was somehow managing with my meagre earning, now even that has dried up) he said.

8. MECHANISMS TO ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES

An analysis of the lockdown crisis end up being an indictment on the misplaced priorities of our rulers over the years. Had there been a robust social security and public services network, it would have cushioned the impact of a distress like this. Pre-existing institutional support and social security can be extremely important in ameliorating the suffering and accessing government support. In the absence of which the uncertainties added up. Even to get basic access to ration that was distributed, most workers needed to provide their Aadhar card number.

Table 8: Documents to access public services

Ids/cards	N	%
Bank Account	1107	78.8
Aadhar Card	1226	87.3
PDS Card	438	31.2
NREGA card	167	11.9
Labour Card	103	7.3

Most workers had an Aadhar cards (87%) followed by bank accounts (79%). Only 129 respondents (4%) have multiple cards (Table 8). Majority of the people who have bank accounts did not have access to it in their place of work but in their native location. Even among those with bank accounts, most have dormant accounts. Also, the very few (7%) had a labour card in a sample which has a high share of construction workers indicating the failure of the Building and Other Constructions Workers Act, 1996 (BOCW) (also see Boxes 13 and 14).

Box 13: Almost There, but Not Quite

A stranded migrant in Himachal Pradesh said that he could not access his bank account since it needs to be linked with Aadhar Card. He said he lost his Aadhar card and had no back up of the Aadhar number. He somehow wants to reach back home saying “bhookhe rahne se pahle nikal jaana hai” (I want to reach home before I go hungry). Similarly, another woman migrant in distress does not have any disposable income and could not access her own savings in the bank as it was not linked to Aadhar. This appeared to be a recurring problem as another migrant worker from Bihar could not access the cash transfer from Bihar government for the same reason. He has no money to pay for the travel back to Sitamarhi with his wife and two little kids.

Shakur Ali is a resident of Assam working as a ragpicker in Faizabad (eastern UP). He has a PDS card in his native state and thereby hasn't been able to procure any ration from the government in UP. So far he has had to rely on NGO and religious charity. Out of work and with no support from the government, the likes of him are in dire straits.

Many of the migrants stuck in Himachal also reported that they have ration card in their native places on their names, but with that they could not avail any ration in Himachal.

Ramesh from Rajasthan works as a loading/unloading worker. He was very grieved when we asked him about his social security entitlements. He said, “maine 1200 rupay do baar diya mazdoor union ko, lekin abi tak mujhe labour card nai mila hai” (I paid Rs. 1200 twice to the mazdoor union but have not got the labour card till not).

a. The Question of PDS Portability

The Covid-19 lockdown has exposed the human and economic costs of several failed steps. One of these is the failure to implement the universal portability of PDS cards. While the Centre had announced a full roll-out of ration card portability from June 1, 2020—this has been talked about for over half a decade now. Had it been rolled out earlier, perhaps migrant workers stranded in metros would have been able to access their entitlements. Lack of portability of ration cards has meant enhanced hardships for the stranded migrants. That this step would have significantly improved the food security during the lockdown, is clear from the better positions of the non-migrants in this respect.

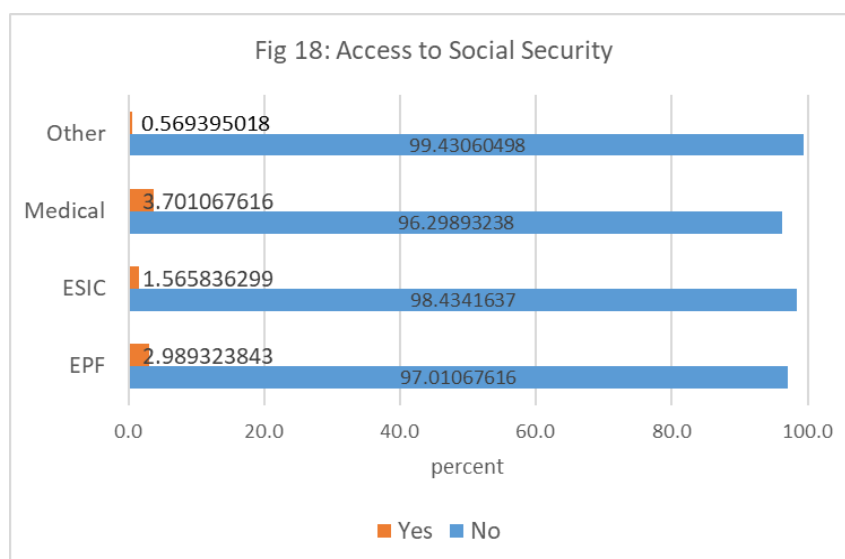
b. Social Support

Almost all respondents have no access to social security (Fig 18). This indicates that there is no institutional support for the workers not just in the time of a pandemic but even during normal circumstances. The overall impact of this has been inadequate mechanisms to enforce government directives.

Box 14: The Disabled Left to Fend for Themselves

COVID-19 has hit people with disabilities hard. Not many of the respondents we spoke to had Unique Disability Cards which are to be issued by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Among the respondents who possessed this card, some of them have received government help. Rajan from Delhi said "I am physically challenged and I am getting some help from the NGOs who work for us but I am scared that I will not be able to find a job after the lockdown due to my physical disability."

We spoke to one Waseem in UP. He earns for a day, then he has to stay home for the next 3 to 4 days as one his legs is weak. The lockdown has even taken away that one earning day. They had tried contacting various organisations for ration but there has been no response. There was no money to refill their gas cylinder. There was no support from the government.



This survey was conducted after approximately a month and half of the lockdown, a direct consequence of a health pandemic of unprecedented proportions. However, the lockdown with a mere four-hour notice created a condition of similarly unprecedented dimensions, particularly for the labouring people of India. Their plight, also like never before, became visible in the media reports, with images circulating that were hard to make peace with. This rapid survey, aimed to focus on two axes of distress, namely, job-loss and food security/hunger during the lockdown. The survey also dealt with the nature of support that the workers received from both formal and informal networks during the lockdown. Finally, this report attempted to assess the potential for the workers to take advantage of the public services meant to alleviate their worsening condition in the backdrop of a weakening economy and deteriorating social environment.

The survey reveals the conditions of the workers approximately after 45 days of the lockdown. The degree of distress thus revealed in our survey is likely to have become worse now, particularly in case of food security and hunger. Though the purposively selected sample size (1405) is not particularly large, this study contributed to expanding and deepening the knowledge and evidence base which the earlier surveys had begun building.

- The survey covers a wide range of workers, migrant and non-migrant, and allows us to compare the impact of the lockdown on both groups in diverse settings.
- The survey respondents come from a range of states. While the numbers were not statistically significant to make state-wise comparisons (not attempted in this report), the varied spatial representation gives us a good glimpse of the situation in the country.
- The survey expanded the scope of earlier rural and urban surveys by including workers from semi-urban areas, and as findings suggest, this is an important addition.
- The mixed methods approach in the rapid survey which included open ended questions to document the lived experience in their own voice. The survey thus brings together dimensions of the crisis in both qualitative and quantitative terms. While the quantitative analysis has defined the larger scope of the study, the qualitative insights have been complementary to the former, enabling us to understand the complexities of the problems at hand.

a. Loss of livelihoods

The study found that irrespective of gender, social group, migration status, location and nature of occupation, job-loss after the lockdown was all pervasive, i.e. around 92% of the respondents were faced with the reality of job-loss. However the inter-state migrants and daily wage workers were even more vulnerable than their respective counterparts. Notably, though the daily wage, inter-state migrants, and urban workers earned more than the non-migrant workers, the study uncovered the very highly fragile nature of their jobs which could hardly withstand the lockdown shock. Contrary to expectation, rural and urban work locations have no difference in terms of job-loss (with the rider that there were few farmers in our sample). Workers in semi-urban locations experienced relatively less hardships which is possibly explained in terms of the spread of increased economic activities in the neighborhood of urban/peri-urban areas highlighted in recent literature which explores peri-urban areas as engines of new growth.

Since social networks seemed to have worked in this period of distress, the study attempted to find out whether working with contractors helped the workers to tide over the crisis somewhat better. The survey revealed that an association with contractors provided marginal relief in job-loss if all kinds of jobs were taken into account, but this difference becomes almost non-existence, when a comparison is made with daily wage workers. In fact, the share of those who were paid some wage during the lockdown, though very low, is somewhat higher for workers who were not working through the contractors.

The survey revealed that the perception of uncertainty about future of work was the highest among women and inter-state migrants, and certainty of job-loss highest among Muslim workers. These uncertainties gave rise to a lot of mental stress among a whole range of workers. Discrimination against Muslims workers in connection with the Tablighi Jamaat issue came up in the interviews. A greater share of the Muslim workers sure of losing the job post-lockdown is consistent with such stories of discrimination. Expectedly, uncertainties about the employment future are lower among regular salaried workers.

b. Hunger during lock-down

More than 60% of the workers in our sample reported that they have gone hungry for entire days, ranging from one to more than 7 days, during the 45 day period of the lockdown. Out of the 41% that reported to have had some food on all 45 days, 57% had faced episodes of hunger during the day. This was evident in skipping meals, eating less than usual, and adults skipping meals to feed the children. But suffering hunger is just one aspect of the experience. The indignity heaped on poor people as evident in narration of standing in long queues, not getting food even after standing for long hours, getting infrequent and inadequate ration, and not getting it when they expected it, is an evidence of violation of a fundamental right of all citizens – the right to food. The right

to food is enshrined in the constitution, and the National Food Security Act, 2013 provides for legal rights and entitlements of persons to food. As is evident from the survey, poor citizens of this country were denied their fundamental right in this time of a national calamity.

The survey points to similarities in the patterns of hunger when we compare it with job-loss trajectories. As in the case of job losses, inter-state migrants (in this case also the intra-state migrants), particularly those in the urban areas, have had to face the greatest hardships. The non-migrants were relatively better-off. Just as in case of job-loss, workers in semi-urban areas and those in regular salaried work coped a little bit better. Importantly, workers having income above Rs 15000 are distinctly better off compared to those with lower incomes.

However, while a threshold of income is important for the workers to escape hunger, it is also clear that the relationship of income with hunger is not entirely linear. The conditions of work such as regularity of work, work stability and working in an environment where social networks are strong are equally significant for achieving food security. Given that an overwhelming majority of working people do not work under conditions of work which make them food secure, we are left with important questions for food security policy.

c. Reach of support: Food and loan

The survey findings show that to a very large extent, the workers depended on cooked food and dry ration, and loans and/or financial support to tide over the crisis of loss of livelihood and food. The survey findings suggest that roughly a fourth of them were not able to access any kind of food support. NGOs were a bigger source of food support compared to the government among the sample respondents. Among other sources of support, the Gurudwaras in general were exemplary in the way that they pitched in during this time of need in supplying free cooked food. In some cases, there were examples of the NGOs working in co-ordination with the states, but this needed to be a wider model.

The finding on dependence for food on NGOs is a matter of concern though, as the NGO resources are much more limited. The fact that the mode and method of lockdown was a state action, it was incumbent upon the government to plan actions to mitigate the risks. It was incumbent upon the government when it invoked Disaster Management Act 2005 to also follow the administrative set up for disaster preparedness and mitigation. The government ordered a nationwide lockdown, but a “national plan” to deal with the pandemic detailing all the coordination and consultative mechanisms for structured decision making to deal with crisis remained limited, confusing and ill-defined. The DMA was used to disproportionately punish people who broke the curfew or did not follow safe distancing but the provisions of DMA which required the government to put in place a rescue, relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction mitigation plan to reduce the risk, impact or effects of a disaster, were conveniently overlooked. It required the government to constitute a National Executive Committee, a National Plan for disaster management for the whole of the country, set the minimum standards of relief to be provided to persons affected by disaster, which include, shelter, food, drinking water, medical cover and sanitation, special provisions for widows and orphans.

The DMA makes it obligatory on the part of Central Government to take measures without prejudice. Section 61 of the Disaster Management Act of 2005 which says, 'while providing compensation and relief to the victims of disaster, there shall be no discrimination on the ground of sex, caste, community, descent or religion' stands comprehensively suspended.

Did the food support reach the ones who needed it the most? Yes, for the most part. For example, the inter-state migrants in urban areas were supported by strong networks of NGOs, as well as the government. The coverage of the workers having income below Rs. 5000 and women, mostly single women, however, were unsatisfactory.

For loans and financial support, relatives and friends are by far the most important source. It was common for the inter-state migrants in urban areas to have taken money from homes in their native villages; this support was indispensable for them to return home. Many migrants revealed that they could not make the journey back home though they wanted to, due to lack of funds.

d. Social security and potential access to public services in future

Coverage of social security among the sample respondents is practically non-existence. For those who have access to some form of social security, job-less severity was less compared to others. Having a bank accounts and aadhar cards is fairly common among the respondents. However, those who have these did not necessarily experience lower levels of stress in terms of hunger. Many who did have their names in the PDS cards, could not avail of the support since they were not in the place of domicile.

It needs emphasis at the end that even if the lockdown became the preferred strategy to battle the COVID-19 pandemic, a great part of the intense distress faced by the working poor could have been prevented had the state taken a few necessary steps to secure their food and livelihood security from the first day of the lockdown. The humanitarian crisis is not the result of the pandemic, but of public policy choices and omissions. By the same token, the humanitarian crisis can still be mitigated even at this late stage again by suitable public policy choices. What could and should the state have done, and what can it still do at this stage? A comprehensive answer would require a much larger study ad canvas. But we give here a few essential pointers.

Firstly, at a time when the number of infectious cases as low as just over 500, on the first day of the lockdown, if workers had been given the freedom to return to their villages, and trains and buses continued for a week or 10 days, the intense distress which followed of stranded workers travelling perilously hundreds of kilometers could have been avoided, with very little danger of spreading the infection in the countryside.

The second step which the state should have announced from the first day of the lockdown was a universal and expanded PDS, and cash transfers equivalent to statutory minimum wages (roughly 7000 rupees per household) would have prevented the massive outbreak of hunger, food uncertainty and job losses. It was not reasonable to expect employers to bear these costs, many of who were themselves micro, small or medium; and the state had no mechanism to ensure this. Our survey underlines that more than 9 out of 10 workers were not paid wages during the lockdown. Substantial cash transfers as indicated could have significantly mitigated this immense human distress, and prevented the peremptory closure of the entire economy. Economists Prabhat Patnaik and Jayati Ghosh have calculated that this would not have costs more than around 3% of GDP.

They write (along with Harsh Mander) in the Hindu:

Providing every household with Rs.7000 per month for a period of three months and every individual with 10 kilogrammes of free food grains per month for a period of six months, has been estimated to cost around 3 per cent of our Gross Domestic Product (assuming a 20 per cent voluntary dropout rate). This would have to be financed immediately through larger borrowing by the Centre from the RBI. The required cash and food have to be handed over to state governments (along with outstanding GST compensation) for effecting the actual transfers.

This is not burdensome for several reasons: first, the Food Corporation of India had 77 million tonnes food grain stocks till recently, to which a further 40 million tonnes are likely to be added through Rabi procurement, so that food-supply is plentiful. Second, because of the lockdown restrictions, the multiplier rounds of such expenditure are heavily truncated at present and hence would not generate as much demand as they normally would have done.

Third, cash transfers in many spheres will only enable current demand to continue (such as enabling payment of house-rent to continue occupancy) and not create any fresh demand.

Fourth, when we do move towards greater normalcy and the pent-up demand from truncated multiplier rounds appears, output too can then expand because precisely of the greater normalcy. Hence, a programme of transfers is perfectly feasible and must command the highest priority.

We believe that even at this late stage, a universal regime of PDS and significant cash transfers is imperative if an immense humanitarian crisis is to be averted. As our survey indicates, job losses have occurred massively not just in cities but also the countryside. Villages will have even more reduced capacity to absorb the massive influx of returning migrants. Those who were providers have suddenly become dependent on those persons who survived with their support.

We also cannot stress highly enough the imperative for a massively expanded and revamped MG National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MG NREGA), and an Urban Employment Guarantee Programme, like the New Deal that helped lift the American economy in the 1930s from the Great Depression. Its outlines are also described in the same article by (ibid.):

The 100-day limit per household has to go; work has to be provided on demand without any limit to all adults. And permissible work must include not just agricultural work but also work in rural enterprises and care work.

Panchayat-owned rural enterprises could be started whose wage-bills should be covered, until they can stand on their own feet, by the Central government through the MGNREGS. This can be an alternative strategy of development, recalling China's Township and Village Enterprises. Nationalized banks have to give credit to such panchayat-owned enterprises and also assume a nurturing role vis-à-vis them.

The second change is the palpable unsustainability of the earlier globalization, which means that growth in India in the coming days will have to be sustained by domestic markets. Since the most important determinant of growth of the home market is agricultural growth, this must be urgently boosted.

The MGNREGS can be used for this, paying wages for land development and farm work for small and medium farmers; apart from government support through remunerative procurement prices, subsidized institutional credit, other input subsidies, and redistribution of unused land with plantations. Agricultural growth in turn can promote rural enterprises, both by creating a demand for their products and by providing inputs for them to process; and both these activities would generate substantial rural employment.

In urban areas, it is absolutely essential to revive the MSMEs. Simultaneously the vast numbers of workers who have stayed on in towns have to be provided with employment and income, after our proposed cash transfers (if installed) run out. The best way to overcome both problems would be to introduce an Urban Employment Guarantee Programme, to serve diverse urban unemployed groups, including the educated

unemployed. Urban Local Bodies must take charge of this programme, and would need to be revamped for this purpose. “Permissible” work under this programme should include, for the present, work in MSMEs. This would ensure labour supply for the MSMEs and also cover their wage-bills at the Central government’s expense until they re-acquire robustness. It should imaginatively also include care work, including of old, disabled and ailing persons, educational activities, and ensuring public services in slums.

These measures are in direct contrast to those that seek to entice private investors by easing labour laws. The humanitarian crisis of the lockdown reveals the imperative for more, not less labour protection. Such measures, far from reviving investment or employment, would also further reduce domestic demand.

The pandemic has underscored the extreme importance of a public healthcare system, and the folly of privatization of essential services. The post-pandemic period must not again see government abdicating its responsibility: public expenditure on education and health must be substantially stepped up, with a focus on primary and secondary health.

The “care economy” provides immense scope for increasing employment. Vacancies in public employment, especially in such activities, must be immediately filled. Anganwadi and ASHA workers who provide essential services to the population, including during this pandemic, are paid a pittance and treated with extreme unfairness. We must treat them as regular government employees, give them proper remuneration and associated benefits, and greatly expand their coverage in settlements of the urban poor.

These could easily come within the total package announced by the Prime Minister, which is presumably to be financed immediately by printing money. But in the medium term public revenues must be increased, this is not because there is a shortage of real resources which therefore have to be snatched away from other existing uses through taxation. Rather, since much unutilized capacity exists in the economy, the shortage is *not* of real resources; the government needs the political will to get command over them.

A combination of wealth and inheritance taxation, and getting multinational companies to pay at the same rate as local companies, will garner substantial public revenue. They will also reduce wealth and income inequalities which have become horrendous. A 2 per cent wealth tax on the top 1 per cent of the population, together with a 33 per cent inheritance tax on the wealth they bequeath every year to their progeny, can finance an increase in government expenditure to the tune of 10 per cent of GDP.

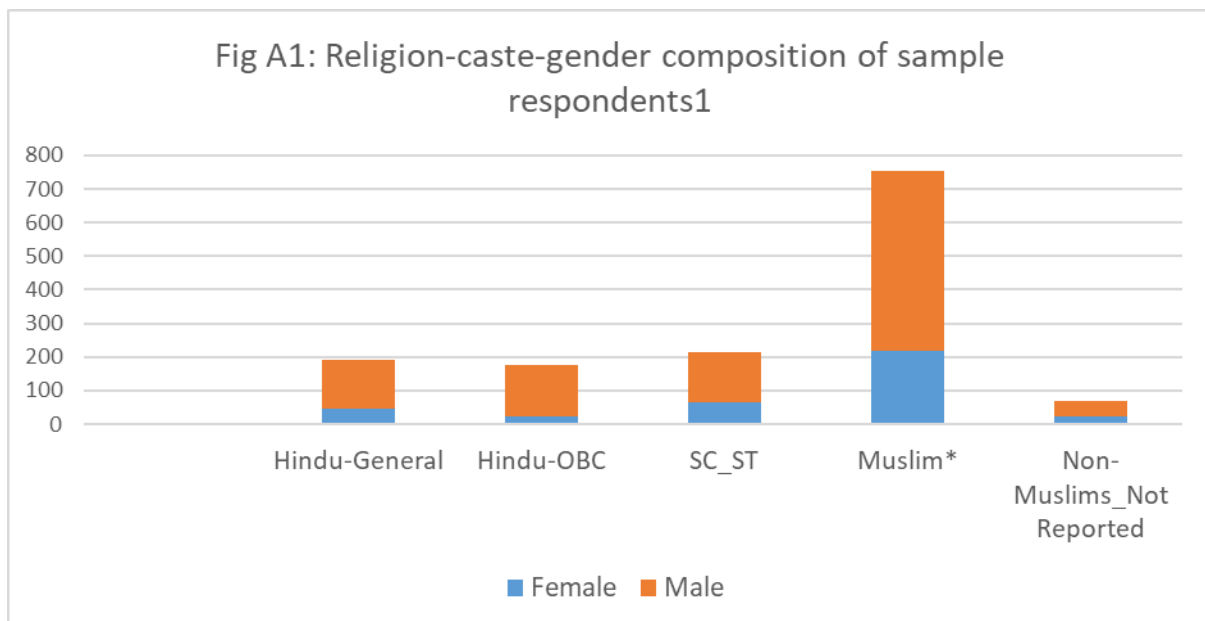
APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Sample Characteristics

Out of purposively selected sample of 1405 respondents was interviewed for the survey. 45% (637) follow Hinduism while 54.1% (760) respondents follow Islam. There were only 8 respondents, who followed other religions like Christianity and Buddhism.

If one looks into gender compositions, as seen in Table 2, among 637 respondents who happen to be Hindus, females constituted 156 (24.5%) and the males 481 (75.5%). Among respondents who happen to be Muslims 221 women (29.1%) were interviewed while 537 male respondents (70.7%) were interviewed. Among those following Christianity and Buddhism, responses were collected from 2 females and 6 males. In total 328 women and 1044 men were interviewed in the survey. The survey represents a highly vulnerable section, 94% earning below Rs. 15000 per month. As we can see from Table 3, the majority of respondents belong to the marginalised and discriminated sections. 175 respondents belong to the Hindu OBC category, 201 respondents belong to Scheduled Castes, and 12 respondents belong to Scheduled tribes. Within the respondents, predominance of casual labourers (52%). Most of the respondents are originally from the rural areas (72%), but working in semi-urban and urban areas (81%). And 96% within the working age group of 18-55, men on an average younger than women.



Most respondents belong to Uttar Pradesh followed by Bihar, Assam, Jharkhand, and Delhi. Most of the respondents are have moved from their native state and gone to other states to work. Share of interstate migrants is the largest amongst the respondents of this survey, other large chunk of respondents are working at their native places and only a small section of respondents are working within their native state though not at their place of usual residence (see Fig 2).

Fig 2: Sample representation by migration status

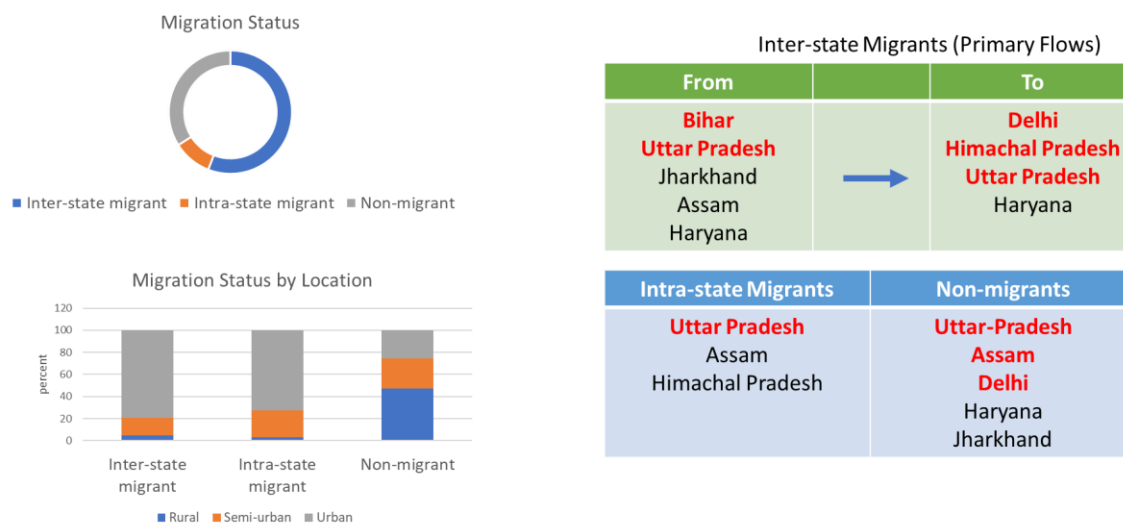


Fig 2 shows that in our sample, the destination for the inter-state migrants primarily urban. For intra-state migrants, this share decrease somewhat. The place of work for most of the non-migrants however, is in the rural areas. When considered by native place, it is primarily the rural workers who move. The obverse is the case with an urban location. This is consistent with the distinct pattern of internal migration that the country follows. 'Semi-urban' occupies a middle ground, both in terms of retaining and moving out.

Appendix 2

Table A1: Distribution of income slabs across gender

Monthly Income Categories	Men	Percent within men	Women	Percent within Women
Under Rs 5000	151	14.8	177	46.7
Rs 5000-10000	509	49.8	164	43.3
Rs 10000-15000	293	28.6	31	8.2
Above Rs 15000	70	6.8	7	1.8
Total	1023	100.0	379	100.0

Table A2: Distribution of income slabs across social groups

Average Monthly Income	Hindu General		Hindu OBC		SC/ST		Muslim	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Under Rs 5000	34	17.9	21	12.0	61	28.6	190	25.2
Rs 5000-10000	96	50.5	88	50.3	104	48.8	354	46.9
Rs 10000-15000	49	25.8	57	32.6	38	17.8	164	21.7
Above Rs 15000	11	5.8	9	5.1	10	4.7	47	6.2
Total	190	100.0	175	100.0	213	100.0	755	100.0

A3: Distribution of migration status across gender

Migration Status	Men		Women		Total	
Inter-state migrant	659	64.4	126	33.1	785	55.9
Intra-state migrant	97	9.5	46	12.1	143	10.2
Non-migrant	268	26.2	209	54.9	477	34.0
Total	1024	100.0	381	100.0	1405	100.0

Appendix 3

Note on Classification of Occupation Adopted in the Report

The report covers a range of workers, with the connecting thread that all of the respondents come from a low income level. The occupational coverage, in spite of this commonality, was varied and complex, and it was somewhat challenging to group them into neat categories. However, for sake of the analysis, we were compelled to use our judgement to group them loosely into three categories, which are

1. **Casual Labourers:** These are the workers who were paid daily wages for their work (dehari majdoor). The main characteristic of this group is that they are not paid for the days that they did not work. The four main sectors that our sample has been able to capture within this group are construction, garment, agriculture and transport; however, about 19% of the workers in this category come from a variety of other sectors. About one fourth in this category work only through contractors, while the rest work either on their own, or use both mechanisms.
2. **Self Employed:** The first sub-type within this category are people who have petty businesses, mostly own account workers, that either they run alone or with the help of one or two family members. The other kind are part of a network, and while working under someone, get paid by the quantum of work they do, while a fixed amount is deducted from their earning by the person they work with from their earning. The reason that they are classified under this group and not in the other two categories is because other self-employed people too have to hire equipment, space etc. and have to make fixed payments for it; also, they earn by the quantum of work they are able to do like the other sub-type of self-employed people. The first category has a greater degree of economic independence compared to the latter and the other two groups. However on the same count, in the situation of a pandemic, they have practically no professional network to fall back on. The first sub-type includes street vendors, petty shop owners, while the second subtype includes rag-pickers, beggars; rickshaw pullers and drivers could fall on either sub-type depending on whether they own the vehicle they drive.
3. **Monthly Salary Earners:** For this category, there could be a varied degree of stability of the work they are employed in. However, what distinguishes them from casual labourers is that they get a monthly payment, and have a greater possibility of getting paid even if they do not work than a Casual labourer. Examples of this category in our sample are employees/ helpers in various shops and small businesses and domestic/ care workers, the latter being almost exclusively women.

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Labouring Lives: Hunger Precarity and Despair amid Lockdown

*A Report by Centre for Equity Studies in collaboration with
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