

A photograph of a person sitting on a train track. The person is wearing a red long-sleeved shirt and grey trousers. Their feet are resting on the metal rails of the track. The background is a blurred landscape with a train visible in the distance. The overall mood is one of hardship and displacement.

# No Country for Workers

The COVID-19 Second Wave,  
Local Lockdowns and Migrant  
Worker Distress in India

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*A Report by the Stranded Workers Action  
Network (SWAN), June 16 2021*

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# 1. Abstract

*As the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic rages on, 92% of the country's workforce (who lack access to social safety nets) are experiencing a historic and unprecedented crisis. For the second time in a row in less than a year, the country witnessed a virtual lockdown. The effects of the restrictions in economic activity and the lack of any social security safeguards have hit the migrant and informal sector workers the hardest. The Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN), which began last year as a voluntary effort to mobilise relief for stranded migrant workers, relaunched its helpline on 21st April 2021. In this report we attempt to highlight the multiple dimensions of precarity experienced by migrant and informal workers during this second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. We find that the current crisis has been similar to last year's in terms of the dimensions of distress experienced, but also exceptional as it has compounded the problems of workers who now have little savings and limited access to safety nets. Through our conversations with around 8,000 workers and their family members we record the limited availability of food and rations, lack of access to basic healthcare, low levels of income and earnings, increasing levels of indebtedness, the struggles of surviving in the city, and the additional set of concerns with returning to life in the villages. In the context of these deeply alarming trends, we juxtapose and study the central and state governments' responses. The state governments' responses have definitely been inadequate. Many of the policy initiatives introduced thus far have been limited in terms of coverage, procedurally confusing and alienating, on the whole failing to account for the needs of migrant workers and their families. We find the central government's response to be the most disconcerting as it appears to have all but abdicated responsibility, instead expecting the states to respond to the crisis. There have been no budgetary extensions or policy announcements that cover migrant workers' distress. In the context of the government's feeble response, we propose a set of recommendations, many of which align with the long standing demands made by workers' unions, civil society organisations, labour activists, policy experts and academics. These specific recommendations have been arrived at in consultation with academics and civil society organisations. SWAN has actively participated in these consultations. We discuss the feasibility of these measures and underscore the urgent need for the government to provide a comprehensive policy response that alleviates the growing distress of migrant and informal workers—a group that has suffered disproportionately due to the impacts of the pandemic.*

## Key highlights<sup>1</sup>:

1. 1,396 worker groups contacted SWAN. These add up to 8,023 people, including 4,836 women and children who were a part of the worker's larger group or family.
2. 60% of the callers were daily wage workers, 6% were non-group based daily wage earners like drivers, domestic help and so on, and 16% were self-employed.<sup>2</sup>
3. The median daily wages of those who reached out is Rs. 308.<sup>3</sup>
4. 57% of the people had less than 2 days of rations left when they spoke with SWAN.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Data is from the 21st April to 31st May.

<sup>2</sup> This is out of 1,374 workers for whom we have this data.

<sup>3</sup> This is for 1,210 workers for whom we have the data.

<sup>4</sup> This is out of 7,960 workers and their groups/families for whom we have this data. (Volunteers asked how much ration the group cumulatively had)

5. 76% of the workers had less than Rs. 200 left with them<sup>5</sup> at the time they reached out.
6. 34% of the workers were not paid their pending wages for completed work, while 13% of them were paid only partially.<sup>6</sup>
7. 92% of workers have not received any money from their employer once restrictions were imposed and work had stopped.<sup>7</sup>
8. 56% of workers reported that their work had stopped for more than a month.<sup>8</sup>
9. 1,258 workers' groups or their families received money transfers from SWAN. This comprised of 7,050 people. 6% of these groups required an additional cash transfer due to the continued lack of external aid.
10. The total amount of money crowdsourced and transferred directly to workers' accounts is Rs. 3.30 million.

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<sup>5</sup> This is out of 1,370 workers for whom we have this data.

<sup>6</sup> This is out of 1,295 workers for whom we have this data.

<sup>7</sup> This is out of 1,262 workers for whom we have this data.

<sup>8</sup> This is out of 1,320 workers for whom we have this data.

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## 2. Introduction

*Gandhi and his family are part of a large group of workers, all of whom are expert tile makers. They hail from Bihar but have been coming to Bengaluru for so long that the city has become like a second home. When news of the rise in COVID-19 cases started to spread, some in the group made their way back home. Gandhi and his family decided to stay in the hope that restrictions would soon end, but once the contractor refused to pay his wages and the rations dried up, he wondered if he had made the right choice. Imran and three others are tailors in Mumbai who migrate each year, hoping that they will be able to earn enough money to support their families back in Jharkhand. Buoyed by the prospect of making up for lost income, the group had returned to the city only a few weeks before Mumbai declared a second lockdown. Unlike last year, they knew not to stay back in the city but have been struggling to cobble together the money to fund their passage back home. Asha and her husband are self-employed and have a nine month old baby. They sell pani puri to earn a living but their income has dried up since New Delhi announced a lockdown. Left with only a meagre amount of dry ration, the couple has been desperately searching for ways to buy milk for their baby.*

These are just a handful of examples of the various kinds of precarity that have afflicted millions of the working class during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the poor, the last few months have been a kind of syndemic; a crisis of livelihood and hunger that has been compounded by the ubiquitous healthcare crisis that has paralysed the country. Images of hungry and tired migrant workers making long journeys home were at the forefront of public discourse in 2020. This year, however, the impact of the crisis on the economically vulnerable and marginalised sections has received considerably less attention. Undoubtedly the scourge of the second wave has been unparalleled; crippling the country's health infrastructure and devastating communities and families. However, the localised restrictions combined with the lack of government response, have dealt a body blow to the majority of the country's workforce (90% in the informal sector), whose incomes have once again plummeted and whose livelihoods have come under increasing threat. According to the State of Working India Report (Azim Premji University, 2021), during the first wave, informality of labour increased. There was a severe decline in earnings for most workers and a resultant increase in poverty (15% points in rural and 20% in urban areas) (Ibid). This year too, the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), that measures the proportion of those who are employed or seeking work among the working age population, has dipped by similar levels (40%) and the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) (2021) predicts that the informal sector will feel a disproportionate burden. With no work, no wages and no access to health facilities, the situation for millions of migrant and informal sector workers, not to mention other vulnerable communities (transgenders, adivasi, women workers and so on), is particularly grim.

Taking note of the disquieting trends, Stranded Workers Action Network (SWAN), a voluntary effort that started in March 2020 to mobilise relief for stranded migrant workers, relaunched its helpline on 21st April, 2021. By 31st May we had received over 8,023 requests for ration support, medical assistance, transport help, rent, and other basic needs. Out of the total number of workers whom we have been able to interact with, 88% (7,050) have received money transfers and 6% of the group have received repeat transfers. SWAN has thus far transferred Rs. 3.3 million. Additionally, given the overwhelming level of need, SWAN has engaged in several advocacy initiatives aimed at raising awareness on the nature and extent of the crisis, highlighting the need for extending the coverage of



social security benefits, and holding governments accountable for their proposed policy actions.

The response of the central and state governments has, however, been far from adequate and there has been little to no action taken to extend relief to migrant and informal sector workers. The central government has deflected almost all responsibility towards the states, so much so that the judiciary has had to intervene. The Supreme Court, specifically, has taken an active role and issued orders directing states to introduce food security measures for migrant communities, including the distribution of dry rations via the Atma Nirbhar scheme (or any other state or central scheme) and the running of community kitchens for migrant workers. In states where some measures have been announced, there is a continuing trend of half baked policy initiatives that either leave out or do not fully cater to the needs of migrant labourers. Most states have reiterated hackneyed promises that mostly provide relief to a section of the working class and leave out the majority.

This report attempts to relay the struggles of the workers in their own words and through their own stories, and discusses the limited action taken by the central and state governments to arrest the continuing and alarming level of distress. It also offers a list of recommendations for policy action that draws on SWAN's findings and reinforces the demands of other civil society organisations, workers' unions and academics who have been championing change at the forefront of efforts to support migrant and informal sector workers.

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## 2.1 Pre-pandemic situation and the aftermath of the national lockdown

Before delving into the current situation, it is instructive to recall some facts concerning the informal sector and the conditions of the poor before 2020. Of the estimated 439.2 - 452.4 million in the 2017-18 workforce (Nath and Basole, 2020), only 4.2% are employed in what can be called a "good job" or "decent work" (Kapoor, 2020).

The following data from the State of Working India Report reveals more (Azim Premji University, 2021). Using earnings and access to social security as yardsticks, the hierarchical order of employment would be: regular formal employment (12.9% of the workforce), regular informal employment (11.6% of the workforce), self employment (51% of the workforce) and casual employment (24.4% of the workforce). The total number of those categorised as informal (regular informal+self employed+casual) without any social protection amounts to 415.6 million. So roughly 92% of the country's working class has no social security. The average monthly earnings of the regular informal category is Rs. 9,300, for self-employed it is Rs. 11,000 and for casual daily wage workers it is Rs. 6,000. In absolute terms, between 2011-12 and 2018-19, the working age population increased by 132.9 million but the numbers of those employed increased by merely 2.1 million. The LFPR decreased from 55.7% in 2011-12 to 50.3% in 2018-19. What this means is that employment generation has been much slower than population growth. This in turn implies increased informalisation leading to higher vulnerability and increased risk of being exposed to economic shocks.

According to Oxfam India (2020), the top 10% of India's population holds 77% of the country's wealth. The growing inequality mirrors a steady decline in the corporate tax to GDP ratio, from over 3% in

2010-11 to a meagre 0.9% in November 2020 (Dasgupta, 2021). In contrast, in 2019, consumption hit its worst in four decades (Subramanian, 2019). For a country grappling with such toxic levels of inequality, not only is increased social spending morally and constitutionally imperative, it is also based on sound economic rationale. However, instead of focussing on human development and increasing human capacities, the central government under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has routinely resorted to cuts in social spending. This, naturally, has severe adverse impacts on the poor.

The National Food Security Act (NFSA) provides some relief in the form of a legal right to food for the poor. The NFSA is also built on the fundamental pillars of human development such as the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), mid-day meals in schools and maternity benefits for children and women from poorer households. Even these progressive measures have been curtailed through routine cuts in budgetary allocation for nutrition programmes since 2015 (Drèze, 2020). Early results of the fifth round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) shows that **India is the world leader in the percentage of underweight children—36% of children in India are underweight.** Undernutrition among children has stagnated or worsened between 2014-15 and 2019-20 (Sinha, 2020a). Moreover, the current government has resorted to further undermining the constitutional mandates of a parliamentary Act and in the process further subverted women's rights. According to the NFSA, pregnant women are entitled to Rs. 6,000 per child. In 2017, the BJP government launched the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) which curtailed the NFSA provisions by reducing the entitlement of pregnant women to Rs. 5,000 and for only one child. Infant mortality rates in some states have increased in 2017-18 (Drèze et al. 2020).

It is in these conditions of heightened informalisation of labour, growing economic inequality and reduced social spending that the national lockdown was announced.

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## 2.2 Aftermath of the national lockdown 2020

The national lockdown announced in March 2020 further ravaged the economy with a disproportionate impact on the informal sector. Numerous surveys compiled by the Centre for Sustainable Employment, (Azim Premji University, 2021) assess the impact of the lockdown on the informal sector and paint a similar picture of assault on the lives and livelihoods of the informal sector. Drèze and Somanchi (2021) present a comprehensive review of these surveys and outline the extent of food insecurity and loss of livelihoods. They write, "Taken together, the 76 household surveys compiled by CSE-APU represent (along with CMIE data) an invaluable body of evidence on the humanitarian impact of the Covid-19 crisis, including many aspects we have not dealt with such as psychological damage, children's wellbeing and the predicament of marginalised communities." Despite shortcomings, access to food grains through the Public Distribution System (PDS) remained a lifeline for millions, owing to the provision of foodgrains till November 2020 under the Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY). A recent paper by the World Bank (Bhattacharya and Roy 2021) also finds that 74% of surveyed households received food through the PDS, but the paper places migrant workers beyond the scope of the analysis. The monthly report of the Finance Ministry from November 2020<sup>9</sup> referred to the agriculture sector as a "silver lining" during the COVID pandemic. It says: "India's food grains production is estimated at a record 296.65 million tonnes

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<sup>9</sup> [https://dea.gov.in/sites/default/files/MER\\_03122020%28F%29.pdf](https://dea.gov.in/sites/default/files/MER_03122020%28F%29.pdf)

in the 2019-20 crop year (July-June), beating the target of 291.1 million tonnes and 4.0 per cent higher than last year.” And this kind of hollow ebullience tinged the monthly report of April 2021<sup>10</sup> as well: “Agriculture continues to be the silver lining with record foodgrain production estimated in the ensuing crop year on the back of predicted normal monsoons.” And yet, additional foodgrains through the PDS was discontinued in November 2020 only to be restarted recently due to the second wave.

About 100 million people lost their livelihoods in April-May 2020 and out of these 15 million remained outside the workforce even in October 2020. Moreover, even among the informal sector, women were more adversely affected. Even as late as October 2020, less than one in five women remained employed and 47% of women permanently lost jobs (Azim Premji University, 2021). In just these two months, workers have suffered a wage loss of nearly Rs 653.53 billion which is almost the annual budget for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) for 2020-21 (Estupinan and Sharma, 2020). The inadequacy of the government’s relief measures in 2020 have been well documented (SWAN 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, Ghosh 2020, Ray and Subramanian 2020). And, by the government’s own admission, there was no data on the lockdown-induced deaths and distress of workers (Also see Aman, et al. 2021).

As a consequence of the woefully inadequate relief measures there was a sharp rise in hunger (Right to Food Campaign & Center for Equity Studies, 2021). As per this, the poor first gave up consumption of eggs/meat, then they gave up consuming green vegetables, then dal and then rice/wheat. Nearly 48% of the 4,000 respondents reported that they went to bed at least once without a meal. The need to borrow money for food increased for 45% and nutritional quality became much worse for 40% of them. Even assuming a highly conservative estimate, nearly 330 million people in the country are bereft of any basic social protection and have been pushed to the brink of hunger. This is akin to the combined populations of Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and Portugal being pushed to the brink of hunger.

The closure of schools and anganwadis due to the lockdown meant that the already undernourished children faced more disastrous consequences. Further, given the strong correlation between the economic poor and historically disenfranchised communities such as Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims, it seems that these communities will be pushed more to the margins in times to come.

The crisis presented an opportunity to fortify the working class through improved safety nets and legal protection. Instead, the government has pushed them into further precarity by passing three labour codes that subsume 29 labour laws (Shyam Sundar 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). The Union Budget also presented an opportunity to rectify the criminal negligence inflicted during the national lockdown in 2020. However, that was also squandered with enormous cuts to social spending (Dey, 2021; Sinha, 2021). What the government has therefore displayed so far is a textbook case of what the renowned journalist Naomi Klein calls “disaster capitalism” (Chowdhury and Narayanan, 2021). Between March and August, 2020, the average Indian household’s total income decreased by 17% compared to the same period in the previous years (Lahoti, Jha, and Basole, 2021). While the country was going through its most harrowing crisis since independence, the incomes of the top 25% of the population rose from 64% to 80% (Drèze and Somanchi, 2021).

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<sup>10</sup>[https://dea.gov.in/sites/default/files/MER%20April%202021\\_0.pdf](https://dea.gov.in/sites/default/files/MER%20April%202021_0.pdf)



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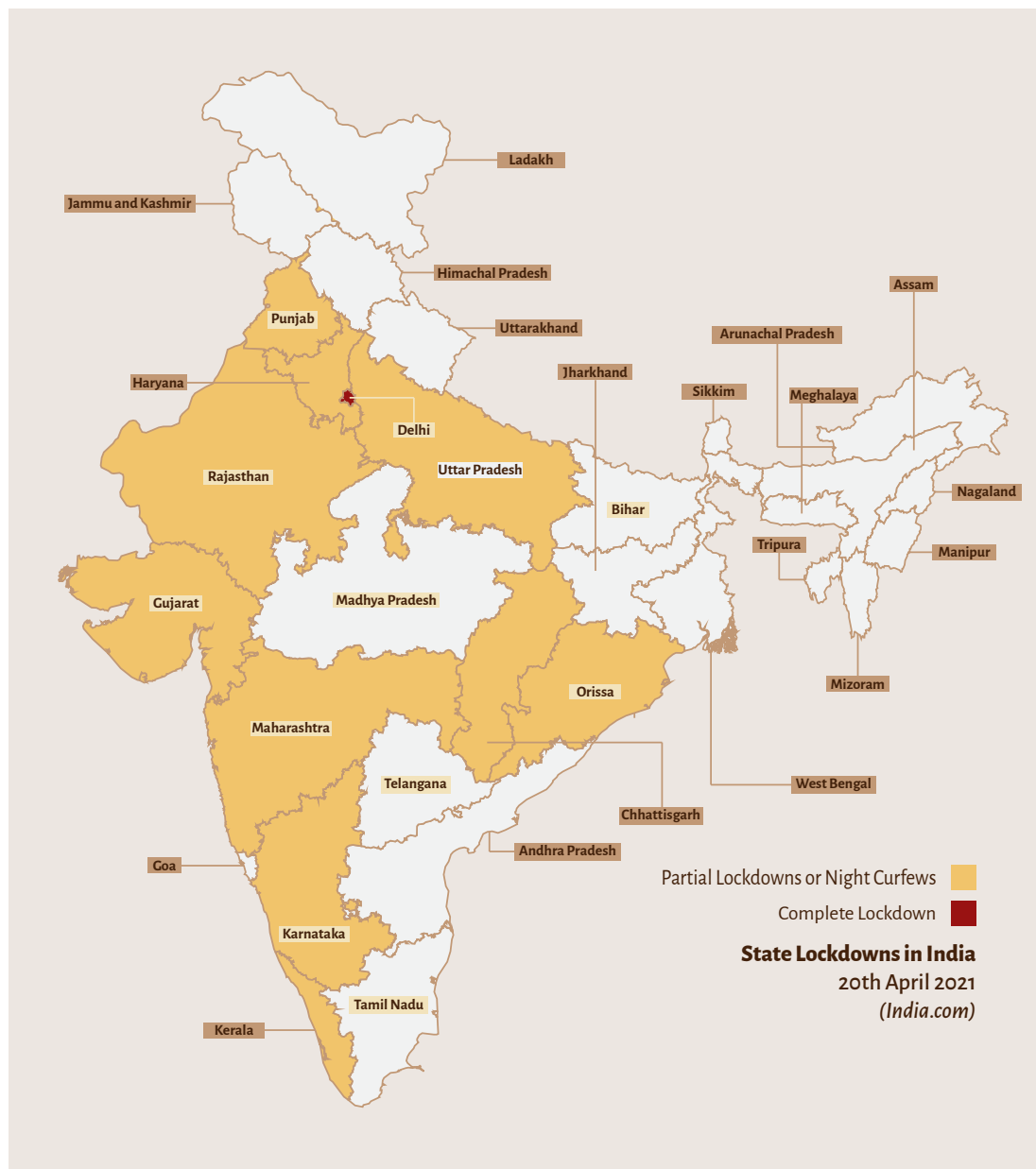


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## 2.3 The second wave and local lockdowns

The second wave entered the fray on the back of a battered workforce that was bruised well before the pandemic owing to insufficient social protections. Despite warnings of an imminent second wave by a committee of scientific advisers in early March (Ghosal and Das, 2021), the central government prematurely patted itself on the back for a job well done (Biswas, 2021) and openly endorsed super spreader events such as the Kumbh Mela (The Week, 2021). Elections were also held in five states in April 2021, and contesting parties including the BJP proceeded to campaign in ways that clearly flouted physical distancing protocols, most notably in West Bengal. On 17th April, at an election rally

**20<sup>th</sup> April 2021:** Partial lockdowns in 10 states across the country



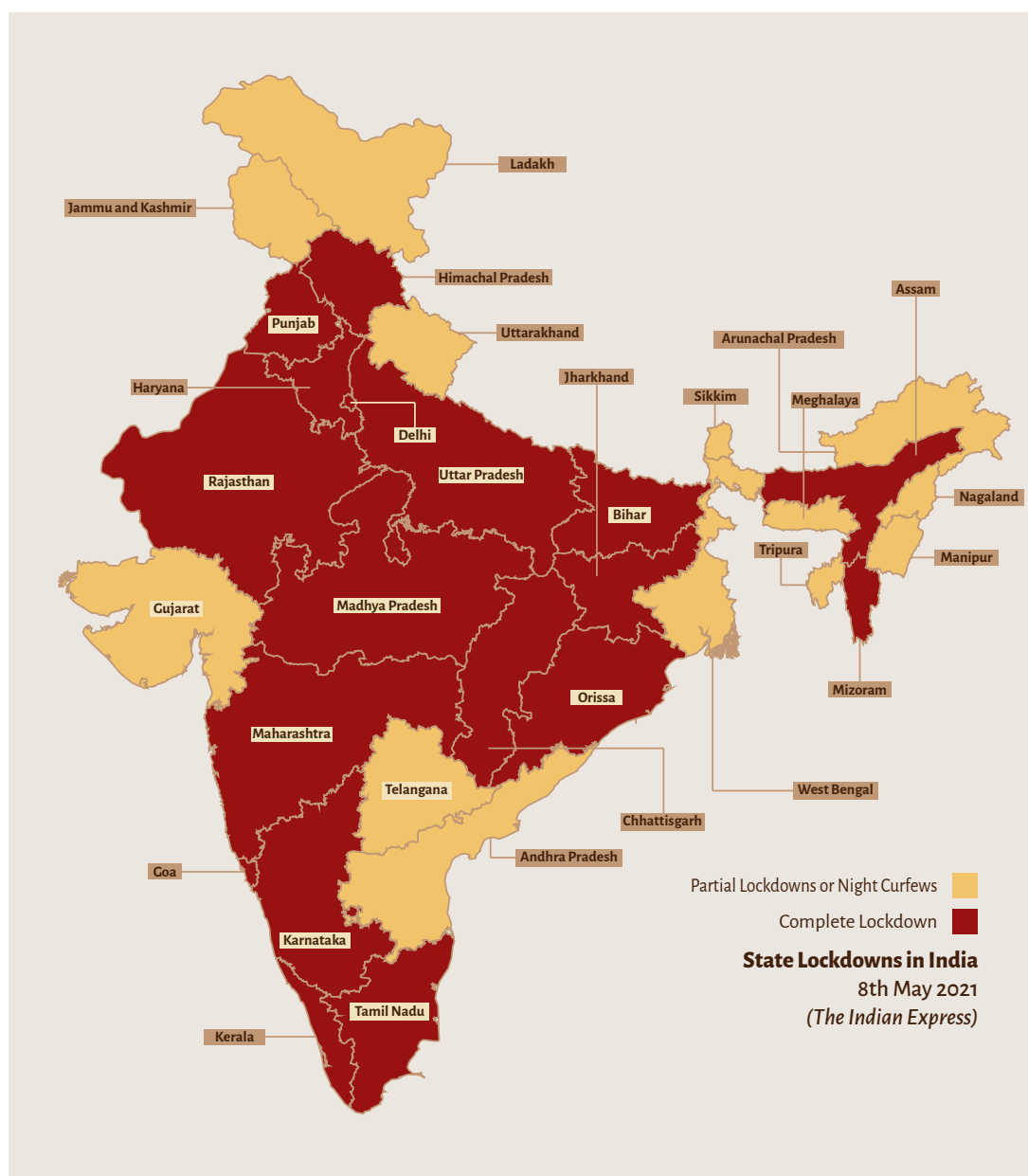
in Asansol, West Bengal, the Prime Minister boasted, “... but today, in all directions I see huge crowds of people ... have witnessed such a rally for the first time.... Today, you have shown your power” (Banerjee and Srinivasan, 2021). Meanwhile, on that very day, 261,500 new cases of COVID-19 and 1,501 deaths were registered in India while the positivity rate in Delhi touched 30% (Bhardwaj and

Kalra, 2021).

The reported number of deaths by the Government of India (GoI) as on 31st May is 331,909 while scientific estimates of the true number of deaths are orders of magnitude higher (Banaji, 2021). At the time of writing this report, the number of cases has crossed 29 million. While news channels and social media feeds were overflowing with cries for help, the already flailing State careened towards failure as central and state-level governments struggled to perform even basic logistical tasks that could help manage the situation such as oxygen supply and putting treatment protocols in place (Aiyar, 2021).

The second wave has been marked by the conspicuous absence of the GoI and the top-down

**8<sup>th</sup> May 2021:**  
Nearly the  
entire country  
under complete  
lockdown



instructions from the PM and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) that had followed the lockdown in March, 2020. During the first wave, the announcement of a nationwide lockdown was made without any consultation with the state governments. Such unilateralism meant that decisions were monopolised by the central government while the losses were borne by the states. Such actions stand

in sharp contrast to the principles of federalism, which is an integral part of the “basic structure” of the Constitution of India. This time round, the central government has refrained from announcing any all India restrictions. All restrictions have been imposed locally by different state governments

However, state governments are cash strapped and have limited fiscal capacities to deal with economic and health challenges resulting from local lockdowns. State finances have become increasingly dependent on the centre since the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017. Since the introduction of the GST the centre has been collecting the indirect taxes and is supposed to compensate states through a GST Compensation Fund. In the interim, the centre is supposed to cover the revenue shortfalls incurred by states till 2022. Issues concerning GST are taken up by the GST Council, a constitutional body composed of representatives from different states, union territories and members of the Finance Ministry. They are mandated to meet once every quarter.

In the 41st GST Council meeting held on 27th August 2020, on the grounds that the pandemic was an “act of god”, the Finance Minister refrained from giving compensation funds to the states. The states were asked to borrow money from the open market. Several states objected to this move and wrote letters to the Prime Minister citing the “unequivocal commitment given by the Government of India to compensate the States for any revenue loss” (Seshadri, 2020). Till the first week of March 2021, the centre owed Rs. 2.06 lakh crores to the states (Gulankar, 2021). In the first week of March, it released Rs. 2,104 crores (Business Today, 2021) while the revenue shortfalls continued to plague the states. The GST Council met on 28th May after a gap of two quarters with no concrete outcomes to deal with the current impasse of fund crunch faced by the states.

Till the recent announcement on 7th June 2021, the centre had completely abdicated its responsibility of procuring and administering vaccines, passing the buck on to states that were already strapped for funds and limited in their capacity. Moreover, having private players procure 25% of the vaccines will further fast track the access to essential health services for the rich. It is in this context that one has to understand how the principles of *cooperative federalism* have been trampled by the central government. Such a mechanism where authoritarian diktats have resulted in states being left to their own devices can at best be termed *convenience federalism*. The baton of accountability has been conveniently passed to the states and the centre is yet to announce any relief measures for the millions of Indians scattered across the country and steeped in multiple miseries.





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## 3. Methodology

SWAN restarted relief work on 21st April 2021, with a few volunteers responding to a few calls from workers. Within a few days, the number of distress calls increased significantly and more volunteers joined the group. The group then decentralised into five zonal teams, each running a regional helpline to respond to calls from workers stranded in the different regions of the country. Drawing on last year's experience, the process of responding to a distress call and mobilising relief was systematised. A structured needs assessment questionnaire (similar to the one used last year) was employed to elicit the necessary information about workers' circumstances and assess their level of need. Based on the assessments made by volunteers, workers either received a microtransfer or were connected to local organisations providing other forms of relief. At each step, several precautions were taken to protect the privacy of workers and their families. We did not share their personal information without their prior consent. Account details were only shared with individual donors to facilitate transfers.

### *How the helpline numbers spread*

Workers' access to relief is often determined by their social networks. The migrant workforce in India is not unionised and thereby in most instances news of help is communicated via friends and family. If even one person is able to get some support, they usually convey messages to their friends and family, including those who reside in other parts of the country. SWAN's helpline numbers therefore spread both locally as well as across state borders. In some instances we also responded to distress calls from workers who had been connected to us by a local or partner organisation. As a result of this SWAN's reach is idiosyncratic and reflective of the strength of these social networks. For instance, both last year and this year, an activist called Sanjay Sahni, based in Muzaffarpur, Bihar, was the source of a large number of SOS requests that SWAN received, verified and then responded to. It is not surprising therefore that a large proportion of stranded migrants whom SWAN responded to were from Muzaffarpur and a few adjoining districts.

### *Needs Assessment*

The Needs Assessment questionnaire has five main sections. The first section records the basic details of the location and demography of the group in distress. The second section covers questions about employment status and hence aims to understand levels of financial precarity. The third section includes two questions: the amount of money people are left with and the number of days their rations will last, which together help in determining the level of need. The fourth section records their bank details to facilitate fund transfers and the final section aims to understand whether they have a ration card and whether it's functional at the place they are currently in. It also asks whether they have an MGNREGA job card. In mid May an additional section was added to capture some basic information on vaccinations—workers were asked if they knew of the vaccination drive for COVID-19 and if they had been vaccinated or had tried to register for the vaccine.

### *Cash transfers and other forms of relief*

The money transfer team connects donors who have pledged their support with specific workers. After the needs assessment, if the volunteer assesses that a micro transfer must be made to a worker, then the recorded bank details are shared with a donor who directly transfers the money

into the worker’s account. If a money transfer is not recommended, then the volunteer tries to connect the worker to local organisations and NGOs who can help with ration supplies and other non-cash related needs. Wherever possible, SWAN also tries to ensure that government rations reach workers. In cases of workers who have returned home, SWAN tries to connect them to local organisations or NGOs for immediate help.

**Archive**

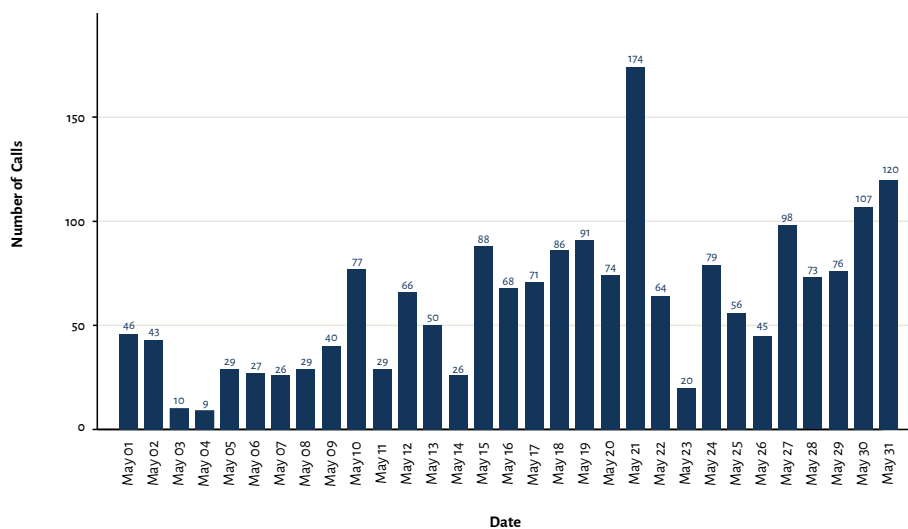
Sometimes, even after the primary interactions regarding necessary details, workers continue to send volunteers updates about their lives through pictures, videos, messages and voice notes. The pictures that they send highlight their vulnerabilities in a way that words seldom do. They are often a mark of the desperation of otherwise self-reliant workers who have been pushed to seek the help of strangers to meet their basic needs. Many of them call us with a heavy sense of shame in having to ask for help. The voice notes capture not just their desperation but also their resilient spirit, which they find at its breaking point given the situation they have been forced into. These messages differ in nature from conversations over phone calls, because this is what they want to convey to us and what they want us to understand about their situation. Considering the emotional and personal value held in these testimonials, SWAN has tried to build an archive of all such materials. It shall hopefully help retain the testimonies of the workers in public memory.

**Considerations and limitations**

This report is NOT based on a sample survey and is not a research study either. For one, the SWAN volunteers have neither created any nationally representative sampling frame nor set out to collect information from workers for the sake of a survey. While there are definite merits of such an exercise, we wish to clarify that this is not the case here. On the contrary, SWAN volunteers are responding to distress calls from stranded workers and as such, there is a distinct “distress bias”. However, if the consistency of distress calls (Figure 1) is any yardstick then it is an obvious inference that suffering and alienation are prompting the vulnerable to reach out in any way they can. This report should therefore be understood as a compendium of testimonies of stranded migrant workers, systematically documented as part of the relief work.

*We received a few calls in April and only started systematically logging information from 1st May. This explains inflated calls on 1st and 2nd May. We have adjusted the data from April for the rest of the figures. Of all the calls, needs were assessed for 76% (others did not require aid, were directly forwarded to an NGO or were subsequently unreachable).*

**Figure 1:**  
Number of calls over time to SWAN’s helplines.







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## 4. Governments and Courts Step In or Step Back?

### Central government

In 2021, not only has the central government passed the baton of implementing lockdown restrictions to the states, it has almost entirely abdicated its responsibility of providing any type of direct or indirect relief. This time the central government has underplayed migrant worker distress by declaring that inter-state mobility has not been restricted and key industries have remained open, but as the maps in Section 3 show, the entire country was practically under lockdown by 8th May 2021, and economic activity had come to a standstill. The only relief measure announced so far is the allocation of 5 kg of free grains per individual under the PMGKAY (Phase III) for those registered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), first for the months of May and June and then recently extended till November 2021. Migrant workers have once again been overlooked. The extension of the PMGKAY announcement excludes migrant workers who usually do not have a ration card for the place in which they are stranded. Moreover, since NFSA cards are still issued based on the 2011 Census, an estimated 100 million eligible people are left out (Indiaspend team, 2020).

In March 2020, the MHA had issued guidelines for employers to pay their employees during the lockdown. However, the absence of any mechanisms for enforcement, monitoring or oversight meant that there was hardly any compliance with the order. This year, no such guidelines have been issued for the payment of wages and the waiving of rents and electricity bills for the period of lockdown. The simple administrative assurances had tangibly alleviated some of the distress of at least a small fraction of informal and migrant labour last year. In 2021, the central government has been steadfast in denying the economic effects of the lockdown<sup>11</sup> (Kaul, 2021) claiming that state-wide restrictions have not had a similarly deleterious effect on the economy (when compared to last year). As such they claim that no additional legal assurances and social safety net measures are needed.

The budget for 2021-2022 leaned heavily towards capital expenditure with conservatism in spending, even towards coverage and expansion of social protection measures. In the case of MGNREGA, which had provided much needed emergency support to returning migrants, the real allocation was less than the revised estimates of 2020-21 (Dey, 2021). The utter, almost criminal neglect of informal, migrant workers in the (few) announcements of relief measures has spawned a chronic food security crisis, violating not just their right to livelihood but in many cases their right to life itself.

### Courts and state governments

Like last year, the courts had to be moved once again by petitioners, to intervene in the resurfacing of migrant worker distress following the second wave and the lockdowns/curfews imposed across the country.

Interim orders were first issued on 13th May, 2021, particularly for the governments of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana and districts included in the National Capital Region (NCR). This order, to be

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<sup>11</sup> As KV Subramanian, the Chief Economic Adviser to the Ministry of Finance, recently said: “We do think that the overall economic impact of the second wave is not likely to be very large” (Kaul, 2021).



actioned from May 2021, directed the state authorities to distribute dry rations to migrant workers via appropriate schemes, on self-declaration and without demanding an ID.

The second order instructed the state governments as well as the Ministry of Railways to take necessary and adequate measures for the transportation of workers wishing to go home, and the third order provided for the opening of community kitchens. Other states were asked to file affidavits listing the relief measures they had taken to address the distress of migrant workers. Most of the affidavits listed relief measures implemented last year. We have attempted to cull out the steps taken this year and summarise them in the table below:

State	Community Kitchens and Cooked Food	Dry Rations	Travel Support	Financial Assistance or Income Support	Assistance to Registered Construction Workers
Delhi	Community kitchens at construction sites +cooked food distribution at 250 locations	One-time 5 kg foodgrain to those without ration cards	Limited	Rs. 5,000 to auto and taxi drivers with para-transit vehicle badges	Rs. 5,000 to registered construction workers who test positive for COVID-19
Maharashtra	Two free meals to registered and unregistered construction workers at the construction sites in five districts	Free grain under central government's PMGKAY	None stated		Rs. 1,500 to registered construction workers and Rs. 5,000 to active registered construction workers until 31.03.2020*
Gujarat	Shramik Annapurna Yojana, which provided nutritious meals to workers at Rs. 10, closed with second wave of pandemic	Annam Brahma Scheme for persons not possessing ration card from very vulnerable groups** but in need of rations to be provided 10 kg of wheat and 5 kg of rice grain for 6 months, One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme in place	None		
Haryana	None reported in 2021	ONORC scheme implemented so migrant workers can get PDS ration from any shop in Haryana	Toll free helpline for migrant workers to facilitate travel		



State	Community Kitchens and Cooked Food	Dry Rations	Travel Support	Financial Assistance or Income Support	Assistance to Registered Construction Workers
Uttar Pradesh	Community kitchens have been set up and a list of these centers will be uploaded on the Rahat portal.	Directions issued to provide free rations for 3 months under PMGKAY to ration card holders (non ration card holders will not be denied)	Directions issued to provide buses for migrant workers.	District level committees for identification of workers other than registered workers for availing the benefit of the subsistence allowance scheme of Rs. 1,000.	Rs. 1,000 for those registered with Labour Ministry
Bihar	At least one community kitchen in each block; community kitchens for attendants of patients; community kitchens for labour, destitute, poor, disabled. Cooked food provided free twice a day (number not specified)	Under PMGKAY-III 5 kg of food grains per person per month free of cost for May and June 2021 (no pulses as in 2020)	Enabling migrant labour return to their destination through special trains, public transport and buses of the state		
Karnataka				Rs. 2,000 to workers in unorganised sector <sup>***</sup> , Rs. 2,000 to roadside vendors under Atma Nirbhar package	Rs. 3,000 to auto/taxi drivers and construction workers registered with the Karnataka Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board

**Table 1:** Summary of relief measures announced by states to alleviate migrant worker distress in 2021. Sources: Affidavits filed by state governments in the Supreme Court in *In RE: Problems and Miseries of Migrant Labourers*, and in the case of Karnataka (*Devaiah BP*, 2021)

\* Transferred in two instalments by the Building and Other Construction Workers Board (BOCW)

\*\* Patients suffering from AIDS and leprosy, beggars etc.

\*\*\* Barbers, washermen, tailors, porters, ragpickers, potters, goldsmiths, mechanics, blacksmiths, household workers, cobblers

From Table 1 it would appear that state governments have gone above and beyond their call of duty in responding to migrant worker distress by announcing a litany of measures like cash transfers to construction workers, special buses for workers who wish to travel, cooked meals and worker helplines. A comprehensive public audit of these measures is needed. However, the next section of this report, which details the nature of workers' distress following the 2021 lockdowns, can almost be read like an audit by migrant workers themselves. Before we get to the main findings from SWAN's relief efforts, here is a brief preview of some half-truths and claims made by the state governments in their affidavits to the Supreme Court:

- The Maharashtra government affidavit states that Rs. 5,000 will be provided to registered construction workers. However, while registration drives have been held for construction workers, the financial assistance is limited to beneficiaries who registered for the scheme before 31st March 2020.
- The Haryana government affidavit triumphantly states that it was the first state to implement the "distress ration token" scheme to give rations to non-PDS card holders and that Rs. 6.5 crore was allocated for this purpose. However, there is no data on how many tokens were distributed and how many actually got rations and in which areas.
- The Gujarat government affidavit states that toll free helplines were set up for informal workers and to facilitate travel for migrant workers. It also states that the toll free helpline received only one complaint from migrant workers on 7th May 2021, a complaint which got resolved by itself thereby indicating no major distress. The question is: how well was the number disseminated? On the contrary, a volunteer group like SWAN alone received 89 distress calls from Gujarat between 21st April and 31st May.
- The Uttar Pradesh government affidavit claims that community kitchens are operational in the state. But no list of locations could be found on the Raahat portal.

Several state governments were yet to file their affidavits at the time of writing this report, so Table 1 is not exhaustive but just indicative. The Supreme Court issued an order on 24th May 2021, extending relief to migrant workers across all states. The order directs all state governments to ensure distribution of dry rations via the Atma Nirbhar scheme or any other state/central scheme and to start running community kitchens for migrant workers who have lost their jobs and are in need of two meals a day.

In addition, some state High Courts too have passed orders. For instance, the Karnataka High Court order dated 11th May 2021, directed the state government to provide 10 kg of free ration to priority households and 10 kgs at Rs. 15 per kg to non-priority households. The Court also directed that Indira Canteens supply three packaged meals free of cost with immediate effect. The petitioners also made a request for the distribution of dry ration kits that would be sufficient for a 21 day period. However, the state government response was that this would not be necessary as the current lockdown would last only till 24th May 2021. The government then announced an extension of the lockdown to 14th June, 2021, but this was not followed up immediately with any relief measures.

**So what did the so-called relief measures of the state and central government, that too passed on the direction of the courts, amount to? Distress calls received by SWAN give the answer.**

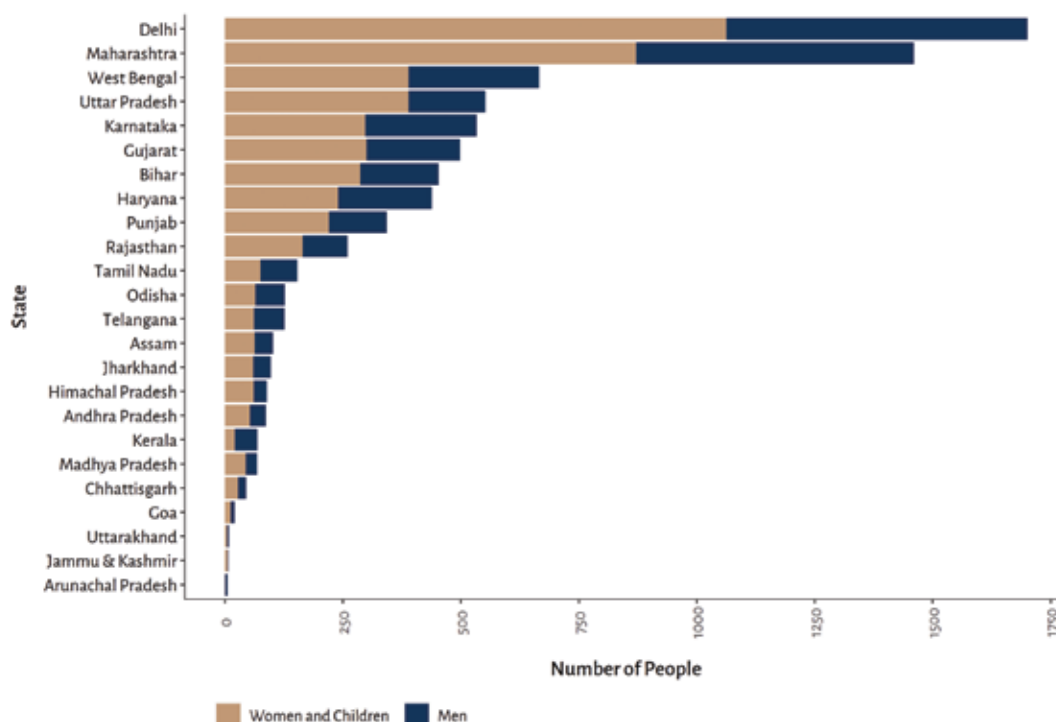
# 5. Mapping Migrant and Informal Workers' Distress: Findings

## 5.1 Coverage and migrant workers' profiles

Of the 8,371 workers and their families from whom we were able to get some information, the majority of workers were concentrated in a few key states – Delhi (1,760), Maharashtra (1,507), West Bengal (692) and Uttar Pradesh (581). These trends are similar to those reported in 2020, with the exception of Delhi, where fewer calls were reported last year as compared to this year. However, as previously mentioned, these figures are not nationally representative. All numbers in the graphs are rounded off.

Most of the calls SWAN received were from stranded migrants, stuck in their places of work. But this time round, approximately 9% of the calls we received were from migrants who had recently returned home as well as from those who were in their villages and hometowns without any savings and work.

**Figure 2:**  
Number of men, women and children who contacted SWAN's helplines from different states



Notably, there is a much higher proportion of women and children in the groups of workers in 2021 as compared to 2020. Figure 2 shows this distribution across states. While last year less than a quarter of those who reached out to us included women and children, in 2021 84% of those calling in were with women and children. There could be several reasons for this. One, that when the second wave hit and lockdown announcements were made, groups of male workers were able to make quick decisions to return home and those with families stayed behind. We do not have concrete

information to attest this, but anecdotal information suggests that the migrants calling us this year did not return home but chose to stay on in their places of work. Making the arduous journey back home with families that often included small children was perhaps perceived as too risky and these workers preferred to stay where they were.

**The concerns of the workers who stayed back in the city were many and there were no easy choices.**

The workers we spoke to had to make tough choices on whether to spend on rent and food for themselves or send to their families back home; stay on in the city or travel back home; stay on in the hope of work resuming while worrying about catching the virus in the city, or go home to rising cases and no work. Niraj Kumar, a factory worker from Bihar stranded in Delhi, had borrowed money to buy ration from a shopkeeper and told us he cannot travel back unless he pays the latter. Moreover, he had two small children and was fearful of the virus getting to them if he went back home to Bihar, where COVID-19 cases were rising and lockdowns had been announced.

**This year SWAN also received calls from large groups of migrant workers who were stranded in cities, particularly Delhi.** For instance, Abdul and approximately 60 other daily wage workers, who were stranded in Delhi and unable to access any type of ration support, reached out to SWAN.

In contrast, in Bengaluru, we got requests from 22 groups of workers, including 2,394 individual workers and their families all of whom lived in slums. Through other organisations we managed to deliver ration kits to 286 people as on 31st May, with a confirmation from organisations that the remaining need would be met in June.

**Table 2:** Type of employment and wages of workers who called SWAN (n=1,206)

Although each caller represents the status and conditions of the group, here we report only the amount stated by the caller.

Employment	%	Average wage	Median wage
Agricultural worker	2	260	290
Non group based employment (domestic work/driver)	6	318	300
Other*	8	315	300
Work in small shops	8	344	~310
Self employed (street vendors, tailors, electricians, zari workers etc.)	14	330	~310
Factory/company/construction worker	63	341	~310

\*eg. Teaching at a coaching centre, security guard, loading/unloading, intermittently employed for odd jobs

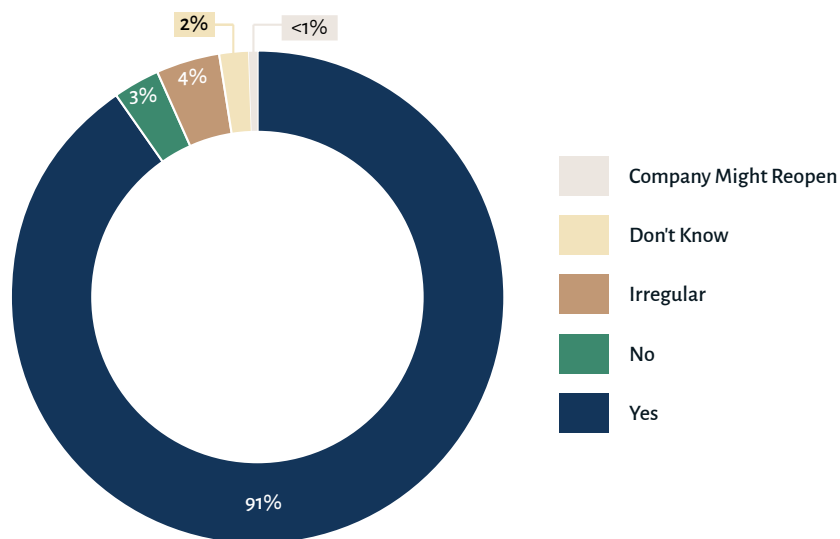
## 5.2 Employment interrupted and wages lost

A startling number of workers reported a range of challenges such as the cessation and intermittent availability of work, problems of pending wages and absconding contractors. The criticality of employment and wages is captured in the words of one worker who said, “We have food as we have work. No work means no food”. The anxieties around work were heightened in states where lockdowns were in progress or were imminent. And it is not just the daily wage labourers who have been impacted, workers employed in factories and employed on a monthly basis, as well as those who are self-employed, have also been deeply impacted.

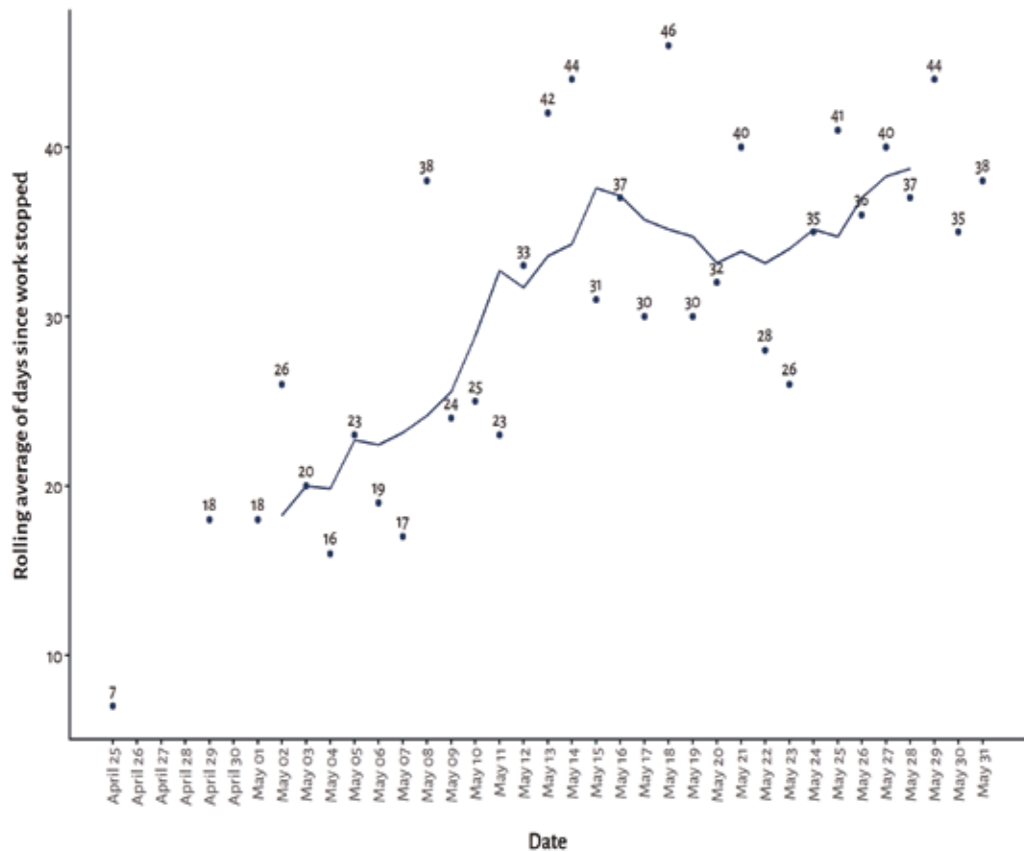
### Interrupted or stopped work

91% of the workers we spoke to reported that work (daily and contractual) has stopped due to locally declared lockdowns (Figure 3). The number of days since work has stopped has also steadily risen in the later weeks of May (Figure 4).

**Figure 3:**  
Percentage of people (worker groups/families) affected by the closure of work (n=7,928)



**Figure 4:**  
Rolling average  
of days since  
work stopped,  
as reported  
by the worker  
(n=999)



*Note explaining the graph: The average number of days since work stopped (represented by the points) varied day to day. To more clearly see the trend, we used “rolling averages”. That is, the average number of days since work stopped over the previous 7 days (represented by the line). The numbers on the graph represent the actual average of the number of days of work stopped based on calls as on that day. For example, on 31st May, the average days since work stopped among all those who called that day is 38.*

Suraj Kumar was in Haryana but returned to Bihar when the pharma company that he worked for shut and refused to pay him his dues. The family requested SWAN for help and is now being helped by local villagers for rations. Meera and her husband, from Bhadohi district in Uttar Pradesh, were working in the same factory in Mumbai. Together they would earn about Rs. 15,000 per month. When they called SWAN, they had been out of work for 20 days and cited irregular work for almost the entire season. With four children, they had very little savings left. In another instance, a worker in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, said that his work had stopped and that the person who was to pay him (most likely the contractor) had gone back home to Bihar, stating that pending wages would be paid after work resumes. The worker is currently managing with his previous month’s salary but will soon run out of money. He was left with rations worth only Rs. 500 when he spoke to a SWAN volunteer. Tehnaz from Jamtara in Jharkhand working in Mumbai was earning Rs. 3,000 a week contributing to a family of six, but with no work was struggling to make ends meet as her father, a tailor, had also lost work.

Other workers such as those who had returned to the city only a few weeks prior to the lockdown struggled to make ends meet. Manish from Rajasthan, currently in Mysuru, Karnataka, said that he had gone home when travel restrictions were lifted post the lockdown in 2020. But he had returned as the city was the only place where he could get work. However, a lockdown was announced once again. The few months he has been able to work for since their return from home were hardly enough

time to build any savings. Another worker, Irfan Khan, who ironed clothes for a living and had returned to the city only a few months prior, was prompted to leave Mumbai when business reduced due to rising COVID-19 cases. He has a large family to take care of and was worried about how he would manage if a lockdown was imposed.

Manav, a worker who called from Tamil Nadu, said they did not have a full day's work anymore. As supply chains were disrupted and goods were not moving out of Tiruppur, the textile hub, to Gujarat, they only had about 2 hours of work per day for which they got paid at the end of the month. Raja, another worker, reported that the company where he had been employed for a year now, was not working at full capacity. Others, such as Ranjit Kumar and his family, who are construction workers and are allowed to work (as per state restrictions), reported that the work at their site had come to a near standstill. Since then, he and his family have been living in the basement of the construction site. The contractor had switched off his phone and they had very little ration stocks left when they called SWAN. They only eat some rice and sometimes dal. The contractor had asked him to go back to Bihar since there is no certainty on when work will start.

Somu from Bihar sells balloons in Ludhiana. With no consistent sales he has no money left and rations have run out. Street vendors like Somu are badly affected and those who are employed by these small businesses are even more so. Ramkumar is a helper at a chowmein stand in Jaipur. When he called SWAN he said he had barely eaten in the last two days. A friend had given him and his family some ration that would last for a few days.

### Pending wages

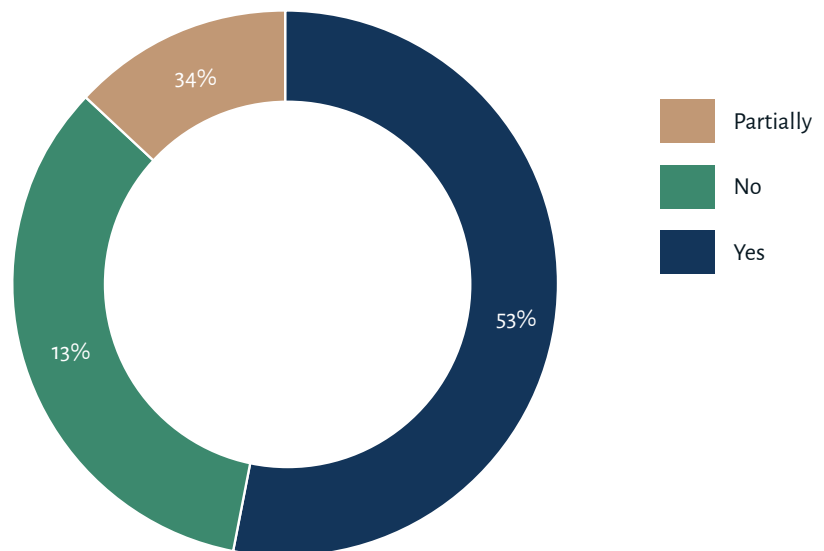
**About 66% of the workers (for whom we have this information) reported that they had not received their full wages or had been paid only partial wages for the previous month (Figure 5).** However, only 8% had received any money from their employer since the work had stopped (Figure 6).

A tailor who worked in a garment company in Surat, Gujarat, had pending wages of around Rs. 15,000. But the owner said that he will pay this only when the market reopens. Rajamma, working in housekeeping in Bengaluru, Karnataka, was also worried that she may not receive her monthly salary. She was a temporary worker with no ID card, and did not know if the office kept any account of the days she had worked in the month. She had been working for two months, but was only paid for one month. Her son had been working in a mall but lost his job when the mall shut down after the state went into a lockdown. Jane, whose husband worked in a small factory in Yeshwanthpur, Bengaluru, similarly wondered whether her husband would get his monthly wages as the factory had been closed for two weeks.

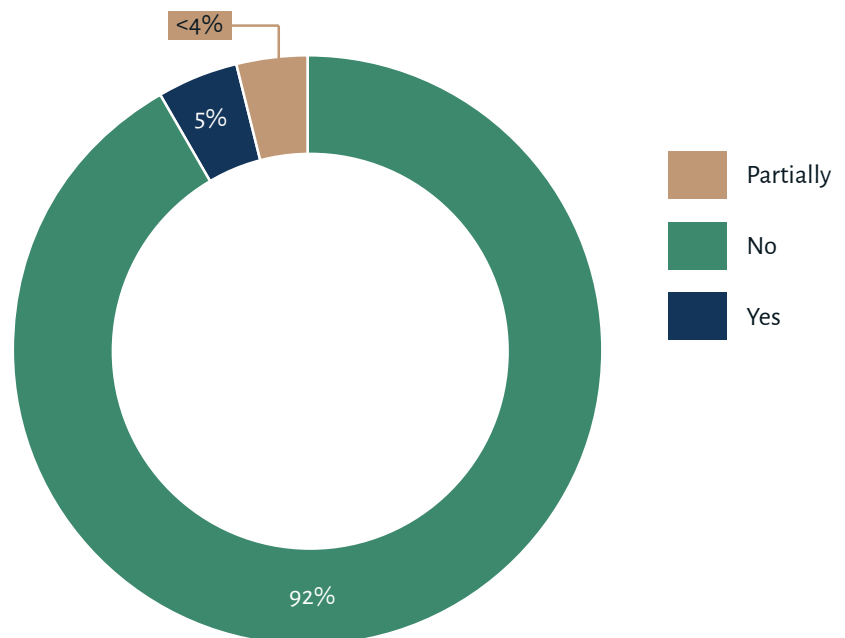
A few workers, however, had received some word from their employers but were yet to be paid. Ashish, a worker in Bommasandra, Bengaluru, originally from Muzaffarpur, Bihar, said that his contractor had informed all the workers that the pending wages could be paid only after he received money from the owner—possibly by 10th May.

**Some of the companies that have not paid employees their dues include Unitech, Elvy, Rudra Pvt Limited, Indian Polymert, Vijay Sales, Rahul Enterprises, Murtaza International, XOR Technologies LLP, Pratham Motors, SRS Enterprise and PNP Entertainment.**

**Figure 5:** Status of workers being paid their due wages for their work before the lockdown (n=1,295)



**Figure 6:** Status of workers receiving money from the employer after the imposition of lockdown (n=1,262). This has impacted 7,097 people, of which 6,512 people have not received any money after lockdown.



### Absconding contractors

**Our conversations with the workers revealed the levels of contravention and in some instances the complete absence of adherence to labour laws and standards.** A few construction workers in Gurugram, Haryana, told us of how they had been brought there from Bihar only a few days before the lockdown was announced. Their contractor had since abandoned them and had not even paid them for the days on which they had worked. Left without any income or support they were stranded in the city and had no means to return home. In another case, a group of factory workers in Gujarat were left with no money when their employer ran away without paying their dues.

On 20th April 2021, The Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), announced that 20 control rooms, set up during the 2020 lockdown and used by “lakhs of workers”, were being relaunched



to address grievances of workers through coordination with officials of the Labour Department in different states. In a video posted by MoLE, Secretary Apurva Chandra stated “*Agar kisi bhi migrant worker ko koi bhi zaroorat ho...kisi bhi tarah ki avashyakta ho...koi bhi madad ho...humaare adhikari uplabdh rahenge*” (If any migrant workers has any need...has any kind of need...wants any help...our officials will be available).

## Ministry of Labour’s Helplines are Not Helplines but Post Offices At Best

This list of “worker helplines” includes 20 states/zones with the contact details of 100 Labour Commissioners, including their email addresses. To understand the support being offered, SWAN volunteers called **80 officers** from across these 20 zones and enquired about the assistance being provided to migrant workers with regard to: non-payment of due wages, provision of rations or cooked food, financial assistance to meet basic needs, protection from eviction by landlords, and support for travel back to their home states. Here is a summary of responses:

- **Variation in responses across helplines:** Most officials listed in the notice answered the phone. However their responses varied tremendously across states and even within states. One commissioner in Karnataka even asked us where we got his number from. Another official in Karnataka categorically forbade us from contacting him again.
- **Not for any worker, only for those who work on central government projects:** The Secretary of Labour’s promise of “any kind of help to any migrant worker” stood in sharp contrast to the responses from the Labour Control Room officials. Most labour officials stated that they can only resolve cases of workers employed on central government projects such as railways and other public sector unit (PSU) projects. Other cases would be forwarded to respective state officers. An official from Rajasthan stated, “Send me details and I will ask the state labour official to take up the matter. I am at the centre so cannot directly intervene.” Another official stated that workers need to file a complaint in the state where the employer resides and not in their home state. Officials in most cases stated that the requests we were bringing to them were beyond their jurisdiction and they had no authority to intervene.
- **Worker-unfriendly system for submitting complaints:** Every single official asked for complaints to be submitted in writing so that they could be “forwarded” to concerned officials. While some officials were willing to take complaints over calls or WhatsApp, there were a few officials who insisted that the complaints should be sent over email. One worker who did not have a smartphone tried explaining this to the labour official from Haryana but to no avail. The helpline numbers are listed zone wise and there is no clarity on which districts fall under which zone. For example, when we contacted an official listed under the “Kanpur zone” for a case in Noida, we were redirected to call officials listed under Western Uttar Pradesh. While a convenient system is needed for officials to log complaints, it should be easily accessible to stranded workers.
- **No tracking method:** Even the few officials who were supportive and open to taking all complaints stated that there is no process in place to track the follow up action on these complaints. This is precisely why the public has no information on the grievances recorded by these helplines even in 2020, such as number of calls received by each state, categories of

grievances, proportion of resolved grievances. The Labour Control Room officials suggested that workers follow up with the respective state Labour Commissioners. When workers get no proof that their grievances have even been heard it is impossible for anyone to follow up and know the status of registered complaints.

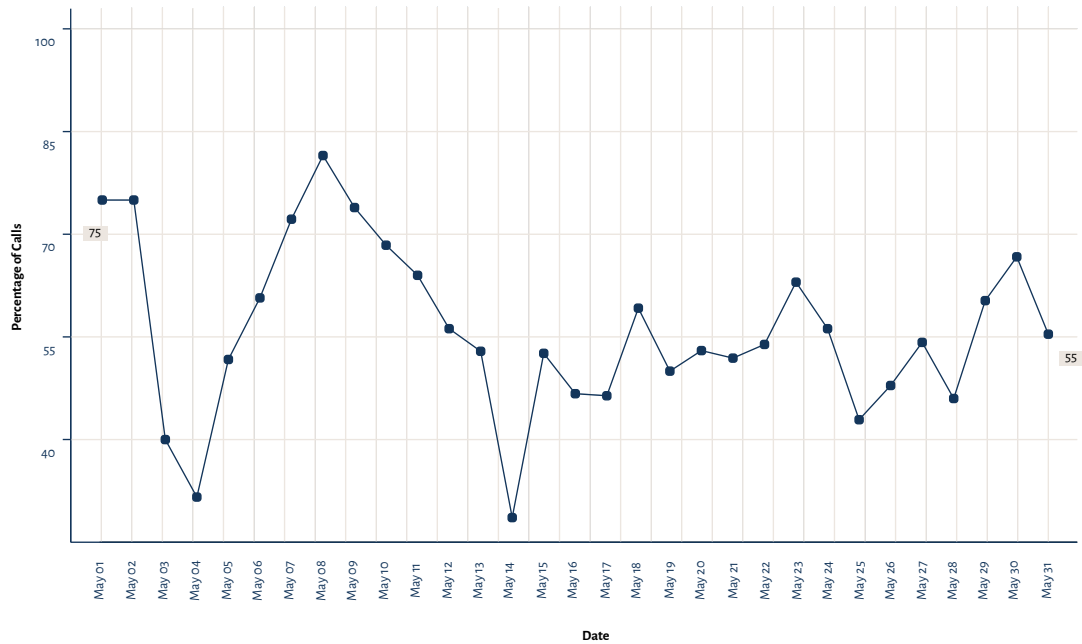
- **No assistance to address hunger:** Most officials did not offer any leads for ration support to address the hunger distress of migrant workers. Except in the cases of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, officials we spoke to suggested that it is within the state government's jurisdiction and they are not aware of functioning state helplines. Most officials suggested that support should be sought from district collectorates and directed us to find those numbers from respective district websites. One of the officials stated, "I have been getting numerous hunger calls too. I have been writing letters to the state government but to no avail." Another officer asked us to send him the details anyway and promised to look for support from NGOs.
- **No assistance to protect migrant workers from eviction and harassment by landlords:** Most of the officials were unaware about the provisions for protection of workers from evictions due to non-payment of rent during the pandemic. On 29th March 2020, the MHA had issued an interim order instructing the landlords to waive rent for a month. No such rent relief measures have been provided this year.

SWAN volunteers assisted two workers in registering their complaints with these helpline numbers. In the first case, Shamina Khatoon, a single mother of three children, was working in a factory that made automobile spare parts in Gurugram. Three weeks after the factory closed she reached out to us. A volunteer shared the number of the Additional Labour Commissioner of Haryana and asked her to report non-payment of due wages to the officials. The response of the labour commissioner was appalling: without even listening to her he said angrily, "*Mera number kahaan se mila? Aapko chahiye kya woh bataao - pati maarta hai? Paise nahi hai?*" (Where did you get my number from? Just tell me what you want - Does your husband beat you? You don't have money?) After she insisted that all she wanted was to be able to feed her children, he said, "*Aapko jinhone mera number diya hai unhi se madad maang lo*" (Why don't you ask the person who gave you my number for help, referring to the SWAN volunteer in touch with her). Finally he asked her to send her details to him on Whatsapp. Shamina Khatoon does not have a smartphone and does not know how to type but went to the local shopkeeper and sent the message across through him. She has not heard back from the Commissioner since.

Sofi (2021) followed up with the labour ministry on the helplines and the response was just as ambiguous. When asked about the concrete help provided through the helplines, one spokesperson from the ministry said "help was being provided but did not have the details about the number of requests resolved so far."

SWAN wrote a letter to the Ministry of Labour and Employment on 17th May 2021, seeking immediate redressal for workers terminated from employment and/or with unpaid wages due to lockdowns. The letter included the details of 23 specific cases across seven states. So far we have received a response only from the office of the Deputy Chief Labour Commissioner of Bengaluru (Central) which has followed up on the cases we sent to them.

**Figure 7:** Percentage of “SOS” calls, where groups required immediate help as they had no money and no ration (n=1,370). This corresponds to 7,918 people of which 4,565 (70%) needed immediate help.



## 5.3 Debt traps, cash struggles and dwindling food

### Debt traps

**Given how interrupted work has been over the last year and a half, approximately 76% of people had Rs. 200 or lesser than Rs. 200 left with them when they spoke to SWAN.** Many were unable to leave during the national lockdown in 2020 because of debts owed to landlords and shopkeepers. Those who were able to leave spent several months at home unable to find alternative employment even though several state governments promised work and loans to start small businesses. After their minimal savings were depleted, these workers were pushed to return to the cities once again in search of work. When the second wave and lockdowns hit, cash availability dipped precariously again. “*Hum toh kamaate-khaate hai, kitna bachta hai?*” (We earn, we eat. What remains as savings?) was the constant refrain we heard from worker after worker who called us.

**The precariousness of living without work and wages during this lockdown has led to accumulating debt.** Asim from Bihar works as a security guard in a mall owned by JMD in Gurugram and has not been paid for the months of April and May. He cannot pay his room rent and his credit at the local shop has also mounted. He is unsure of when work will reopen but also cannot leave without repaying his debts. Lal Babu, from Bhagalpur in Bihar, also lamented that he and his family are stuck in a constant loop of taking credit and paying it back. When SWAN spoke to him he was stranded in Ludhiana with his wife and four children, including one who is 4 years old. The older, teenage children work as domestic help and clean cars with their parents but their collective incomes are still not enough to feed the family.

**Debt burdens were also reported by workers who had more stable livelihoods and earned regular incomes.** Rajdev Sahni and his wife, from Samastipur in Bihar, worked in a mill in Coimbatore earning Rs. 12,000 a month—a relatively stable and comfortable salary. But when they called SWAN they

were desperate as they did not have any money left for buying rations or paying rent, and had been reduced to borrowing money from the watchman of the mill. Sonam Jha from Kolkata, who earned around Rs. 5,000 a month stitching pants, had no money to buy rations from the PDS shop even though she had a card. This shows the extent of the hunger and deprivation suffered by the workers.

### **Still no portability of access to PDS, no provision of rations to migrant workers**

**Access to PDS was an issue for migrants stranded in cities as well as for workers who had returned home.** One of the key reasons why food distress amongst migrant workers became so acute during the 2020 lockdown and again in 2021 is because of their exclusion from the PDS system in the places they migrate to. This exclusion is not restricted to migrant workers alone. Although the NFSA is supposed to cover 67% of the population, in reality this coverage is closer to 60%. This was reflected in the information collected from migrant workers who called SWAN too. More than half the workers (62%) did not have access to ration cards in either their home states or in their current locations. Even if these workers and their families possess a ration card, these are linked to their home addresses and to a specific ration shop. Unless the entire family migrates, the ration card is left at home with family members.

Following the migrant worker crisis last year, the central government began to tout the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme as a panacea to address food insecurity amongst migrant workers. According to the Finance Minister, by March 2021 “this system will enable migrant workers and their family members to access PDS benefits from any Fair Price Shop in the country.” The ONORC scheme was supposed to make PDS entitlements portable, which would be immediately advantageous to migrant workers.

**More than a year since this announcement, we found that 93% of the migrant workers had a ration card but this was not functional in the place where they were stranded<sup>12</sup>.** In Delhi, for instance, one worker reported how he had tried to apply for a Delhi government ration card but had not been issued one and therefore had been forced to borrow money to feed his family. Several other workers stranded in Delhi are buying groceries on credit—as their ration cards from other states such as Bihar are not valid in the capital. A worker from Mumbai told us how despite having a ration card in the city he was unable to use it in his village, which was located in the same state. Another worker from Rajasthan, at present with his family in Mysuru, Karnataka, where a state-wide lockdown was imposed on 27th April, had no access to work. With dwindling savings of just Rs. 1,200, he had no access to ration at affordable rates as his ration card with a Rajasthan address could be used in Karnataka. It was the same story in West Bengal. Gudiya Devi who called us from Kolkata told us her husband worked to load and unload thelas and had been out of work for 30 days. They are from Vaishali, Bihar, and although they have a ration card this was not functional in Kolkata. Dhananjaya Marik working in Faridabad, Uttar Pradesh, had three children below the age of six, but his name was included in his parents' ration card back home in Bihar and he could not access rations in the place he was living and working in now.

**Access to the PDS at home was also erratic and there were issues related to exclusion from the system, distribution of inadequate quantities of ration, and authentication issues.** As independent studies have pointed out, 100 million people are still excluded from the PDS. This was reflected in our conversations with workers as well—62% of those who had returned home said they did not have a

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<sup>12</sup> This is out of 4,859 people including workers and their families

ration card.<sup>13</sup>

One worker from Surat, Gujarat, who was in his village in Samastipur, Bihar, said that he had applied for a ration card thrice but had never received it. Speaking about the irregularity of ration availability one worker said, “The dealer doesn’t give ration regularly, just distributes it on certain days of the month and if you don’t collect it on those days then you have to wait until next month.” Mitra, who is a truck driver, used to work in Himachal Pradesh along with his brother. When lockdown restrictions were imposed they travelled back to Aurangabad, Bihar. With no land or work, his family of nine had little ration left when they called SWAN. Even though the family has a ration card, only his parents’ names are included in it and so they are only entitled to 10 kg of grain. He applied for a separate ration card after the 2020 lockdown but still had not received one and didn’t know the status of his application. One family working in Bengaluru, Karnataka, had returned to their hometown in Bidar, Karnataka, before the lockdown, and were told that ration cards were not being issued presently and they could not get one for themselves. Umesh in Bihar said he had applied for a card but was yet to receive it. Brinda from Mumbai, whose husband was a painter, said that their card had been cancelled for more than a year now. Niranjana Kumar from Paramanu in Himachal Pradesh had lost his card while moving house—but in a pandemic there was little chance of a replacement in the near future.

Quantity of ration too was an issue, whether in the cities or in the villages to which workers had returned. With no income, especially in places like Karnataka and Delhi where lockdowns had been imposed, the quantity of ration available through the PDS was inadequate, as one worker said, to meet a family’s food needs. A representative of the Domestic Workers’ Rights Union in Bengaluru, speaking about the issue of ration, said that they received 7 kg per person but after cleaning the rice only 5 kg of this was available for consumption—and that too for three meals a day. Ambar Kumar, who had returned to Vaishali, Bihar, did have a ration card in his village but only two members of his family were registered on it, making his family of nine eligible for just 10 kg. Sometimes the amount of ration that a store owner distributed was limited. Nirmal, who returned to Naigaon in Maharashtra from Delhi where he was working, had an unwell mother to take care of. While his sister-in-law did have a ration card, the store owner only gave a limited amount and not the entire quantity they were entitled to. Another worker said that while she had a ration card her brothers used it leaving no rations for her own family.

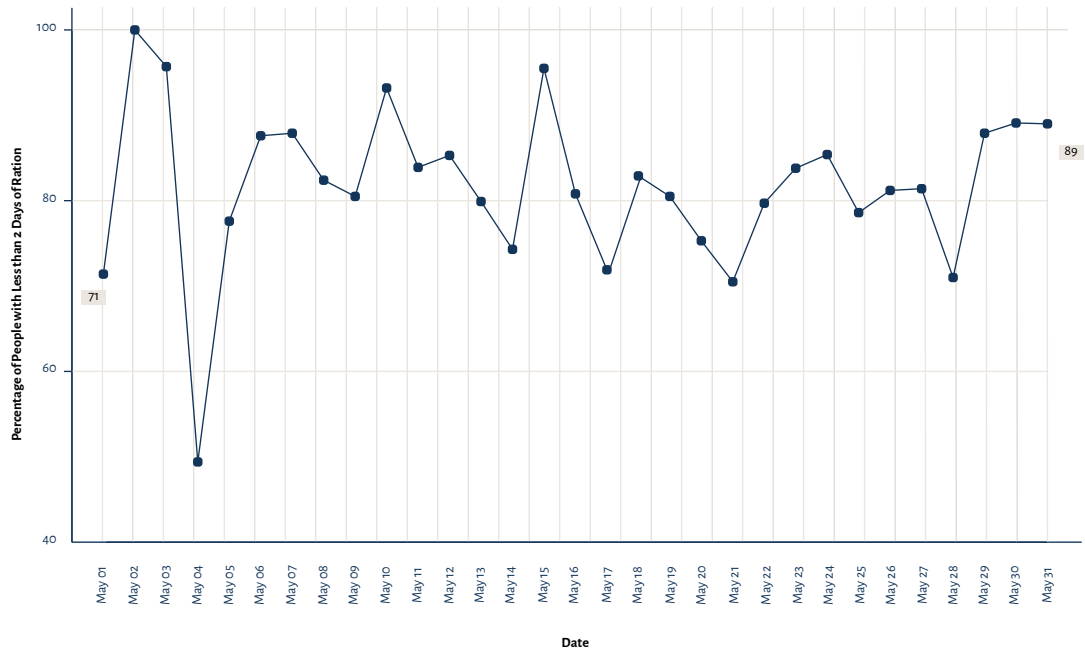
Other issues, like exclusions due to failed biometric authentication, also persist, compounding the distress. In one instance Alok, a worker in Bengaluru, said that the machine was not recognising his fingerprint, and with just Rs. 700 remaining in his pocket he was worried about how to make ends meet especially during the two week lockdown that had been announced. Beth from Ongole in Andhra Pradesh was unable to get a ration card because her Aadhaar was not working.

Given this level of exclusion from the food security net, the situation of food distress amongst migrant workers becomes extremely grim. More than half (82%) of the workers whom we spoke to (and for whom we have this data) had 2 or less than two days’ worth of ration. This is a staggering figure even if it is less than the figures reported last year when 72% of the workers reported that their rations would finish in two days. Figure 8 shows that the percentage of people (worker groups and families) with less than two days of ration has consistently been around half during the month of May.

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<sup>13</sup> This is out of 573 people including workers and their families.

**Figure 8:**  
Percentage of people with less than two days of ration (n=7,921)



### Scanty community kitchens and feeding centres

**Unlike last year when some state governments opened feeding centres that provided cooked meals to stranded migrants, this year there were very few such initiatives** by the government and civil society.

The Delhi government claims to have set up 265 feeding centres compared to 2,500 such centres set up last year. However, this list was not freely available to the public. Only in early May did SWAN come across a list of hunger relief centers (without any contact details) that were supposed to be operational across districts in Delhi. We learnt that these centres had been providing cooked meals since 23rd April to 300-350 people. However, when we directed a migrant worker to one such hunger relief center in Dwarka, he informed us that no cooked food distribution was happening at the center. The Delhi government helpline was also not able to provide accurate information on the location of these hunger relief centres. In the absence of adequate cooked food facilities, the gap was filled by some notable civil society initiatives such as worker-run community kitchens by Mazdoor Pahal, Hawkers Joint Action Committee and Working Peoples' Charter in Narela and other industrial areas in Delhi.

In Bengaluru, post the announcement of lockdown, the state government was directed by an order of the Karnataka High Court dated 11th May to distribute cooked food via the Indira Canteen. But there were several barriers faced in accessing these facilities. Canteens were situated far away from low income settlements that needed such support, making it difficult for elderly and single women caring for children or elderly relatives to access them. An app was also introduced where staff at the canteens have to upload beneficiary name, mobile number, and a photograph with the distributed food packets. This resulted in long queues and crowding around canteens, making it difficult for staff to maintain COVID-19 protocols. Often the app stopped functioning, leading to a long wait by which time the food became cold. Anyone needing more than three packets was also required to produce a ration card as proof of the number of members in the household. This is exclusionary as many do not have ration cards. The quantity of food in each of the packets was insufficient for even one meal for a person—and for many families this was often the only source of food.

# Delhi government drags its feet over distributing grain to migrant workers

**16th April 2021**

Delhi government announces weekend curfew which extends to a 7 week lockdown

**23rd April 2021**

Notice issued by Delhi High Court but did not cede to prayers, asked Delhi government to file reply by 13th May

**17th May 2021**

SWAN sent a letter to Delhi Chief Minister on urgently starting distribution of PDS for migrant workers. Other civil society groups like Delhi Rozi Roti Abhiyan also wrote to the Delhi Chief Minister.

**24th May 2021**

Supreme Court extends relief in the form of dry rations based on self certification to migrant workers across states

**28th May 2021**

Delhi government issues guidelines on one-time distribution of rations to non-PDS card holders

**20th April 2021**

Petition filed in the Delhi High Court by Delhi Rozi Roti Abhiyan to ensure emergency rations for people without ration cards, after the Delhi government announced a curfew-lockdown in response to the sharp rise of COVID-19 cases

**13th May 2021**

In continuation of the hearings on the June 2020 suo moto case on migrant workers, Supreme Court directs GoI and Governments of Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to provide dry rations to migrant workers in Delhi NCR

**18th May 2021**

Delhi government announced rations for non-PDS card holders

**27th May 2021**

Delhi High Court resumes hearing on Delhi Rozi Roti Abhiyan petition

**5th June 2021**

Distribution of rations begins but many distribution centres quickly run out of stocks

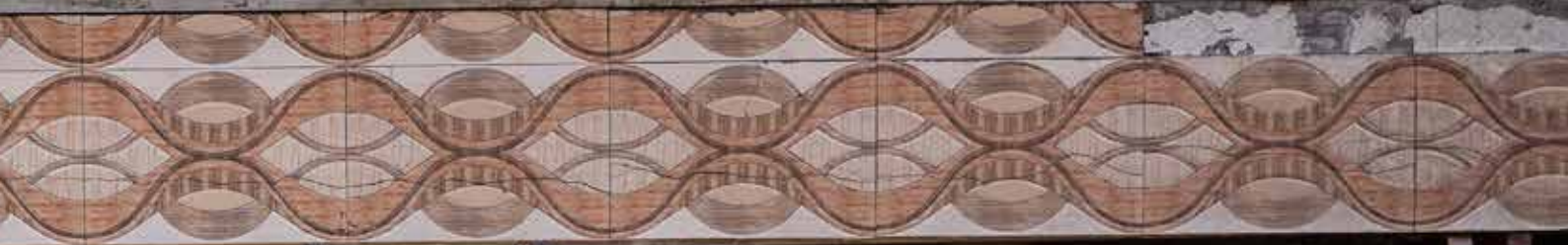
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۴۳۱۱ اردو بازار جامعہ مسجد ندوی ۶  
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عَمْرَه وَلَذِيذِ كَمَا تُولِ كَامرکز



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## 5.4 A health crisis that is not just COVID-19 related

**Migrant workers, in addition to the fear of contracting the virus, have had to deal with existing medical concerns in the absence of wages and depleted savings.** Unlike last year when the rates of transmission were considerably lower, this year we also asked workers about their medical status and specifically if they or members of their family were experiencing COVID-19 or similar symptoms. Hearteningly, most workers (86%) did not report experiencing any such symptoms. However, 12% did report other non-medical conditions that ranged from fever, chronic conditions, tuberculosis (TB), disability due to accidents, and so on. And while there may not have been any immediate health impacts on the workers, the fear of falling ill with the virus was palpable.

Vinod Sharma is from Samastipur, Bihar, and was working at a construction site in Bengaluru. When the initial state lockdown was announced at the end of April, he decided to stay back in Bengaluru because he did not want to fall ill travelling home to his village where there were no health facilities. Added to it was his fear of how the villagers would perceive him—a migrant returning from the city as a carrier of the virus. He chose to stay on at the site, without work or wages, living off credit from a ration shop, with a ration card he could not use, and staying indoors masked except for the 8 hours when he was asleep. Mallik from Raichur, working in Bengaluru, said he had COVID-like symptoms but was afraid to go to the hospital. The plight of Reena from Patna, Bihar, working as a domestic worker in Delhi, was far worse. Her daughter had tested positive for COVID-19 and had high fever, but also suffered from a pre-existing kidney condition. So in addition to needing money to buy a gas cylinder, Reena was desperate for help to treat her daughter and her in-laws and husband, who were also unwell. Dharam, stranded in Jalandhar, Punjab, had lost his son and daughter-in-law to COVID-19 and was caring for his two grandchildren while simultaneously worrying about rent. Ramnarayan and his entire family, from Banka in Bihar, were suffering from breathing issues and cough. Two others who called for help were recovering from COVID-19 and too weak to start work but still had families to support.

**The 12% non-COVID-19 related health issues were also wide ranging and underscored the precarious situation that many who reached out to SWAN were in.** Ranjeet's wife reached out to SWAN for help as he was suffering from TB and unable to continue his work as a vegetable seller. They were from Chhattisgarh but stranded in a town in Uttar Pradesh. Bikram Kumar, working in Delhi, needed money to buy medicines for his father suffering from TB. Dileep Rana from Bihar, stranded in Punjab, had run out of money and had not been able to take his medicines for 10 days. Treating TB requires timely and uninterrupted medication, rest and a healthy diet, already luxuries for workers struggling to survive in normal times but an unimaginable misery during this period of the pandemic with its interruptions to work and wages.

Another group that SWAN received several requests from were families extremely worried about young children who were ill. Girish Kumar, from Bhagalpur in Bihar and working in Bengaluru city in Karnataka, had just Rs. 400 in hand and a day of ration left when he reached out to us on behalf of three of his children who were all unwell. When Kaushik, from Vaishali in Bihar and stranded in Beed, Maharashtra, reached out to us, his phone had been stolen and he had borrowed money for his sick child's treatment. Some children required specialised care that was increasingly unaffordable. Ranveer Paswan was employed doing small tasks in shops in Okhla, Delhi. His child required

medication that cost Rs. 2,000 per month as he had been undergoing medical treatment in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences for a neurological issue since birth. Sanjay who worked in National Aluminium Company Limited, Angul (Orissa), had only been paid partial wages and wanted help to treat his child's heart ailment.

Accidents had left some unable to work even before the second wave had started, especially where the principal breadwinner of the family was the one who had suffered the injury. Khadija from Varanasi approached us for help as her husband, a labourer, had injured his leg. A nail had pierced her husband's leg two months back, leaving him unable to work. Khadija then had to take care of the family (that included four children) and also raise money for her husband's medical expenses. Similarly, Shamli's husband, from Delhi, who worked as a rickshaw puller earning Rs. 400 per day, had been unable to work for more than two months owing to an injury—they had no money or rations left when they reached out to SWAN. The burden was no less where the expenses were for accidents suffered by family members, as was the case with Madan, working in Noida, whose wife had suffered a fracture that needed to be treated.

## The host of ailments and the struggle to get them treated seemed unending

Workers reaching out seeking help for wives, husbands, nieces, siblings, in-laws, parents and entire families from locations across the country—an indication of the dire conditions that families were facing in these times.

**Virendra**, an Uber driver from Delhi with a wife suffering a heart ailment

**Rajinder** from Delhi, seeking help to settle a debt incurred due to his wife's eye surgery

**Maria** from Nagpur, with an unwell husband, herself suffering from diabetes

**Meena** from Jaipur, seeking help for her ill niece

**Bushan** from Nagpur, seeking help for his son's illness

**Seetha**, working in Rajkot, with a younger brother recovering from illness in Durgapur, West Bengal, and an ill mother back home in Bihar

**Amar**, working in Faridabad, taking care of the family after his father suffered a heart attack

**Sreeram**, working in Kolkata with pain in his knees and suffering from cataract while trying, along with his wife, to support their family of six

**Brijesh** from Muzaffarpur, Bihar, having exhausted all his money to treat his daughter's typhoid

**Salman** from Mumbai, with an ulcer

**Hari**, stranded in Dibrugarh, Assam, with a group of workers and children who needed medical help

**Badrinath** from Banka in Bihar, worried about medicines for his mother

**Sheela**, who travelled to Nasik to care for her unwell in-laws

**Pavani** from Kazipet, visually impaired herself and in need of money for an eye operation, with a husband suffering from mental health issues

**Visakha** from Faridabad, struggling to make ends meet even as she tries to meet the expenses of her brother diagnosed with emphysema and her mother suffering from stomach related issues

**Uzma** from Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, with a paralysed family member to care for

**Amit** in Pune, suffering from painful sciatica

### Access to rural healthcare

While much of the public attention, particularly of the urban middle class, has been on the oxygen crisis in big cities, the coverage on the state of rural healthcare during this deadly second wave of the pandemic has been limited. There are notable exceptions in the English media, such as reports on the COVID-19 deaths in rural Uttar Pradesh, why people in rural India are hesitant to go to healthcare facilities even if COVID symptoms are detected, and misdiagnosis of COVID as typhoid in Jharkhand (Yadav, 2021, Masih, 2021, Angad, 2021). There is better coverage in the Hindi media.

Six migrant workers who have been fellows with the SWAN Fellowship programme since January 2021 shared moving personal accounts<sup>14</sup> of the rural health care crisis during the pandemic. Mobility restrictions during the second wave have made functional rural healthcare facilities even more inaccessible.

Sima, a trained nurse, returned to her home in Simdega district of Jharkhand. She lost her uncle to what she is certain was COVID-19. Even though he showed all the symptoms the tests came back negative. In the absence of a COVID-19 positive test result, hospitals in her own district as well as in a neighbouring district in Odisha refused to admit him. A private hospital in Odisha demanded an upfront payment of Rs. .1 million. Unable to pay that much, Sima had to take her uncle back home. His health deteriorated further as a result of this back and forth and without any treatment he died a few days later.

As the variant of COVID-19 that is at the root of the second wave often remains undetected in conventional nasal-throat swab tests like RT-PCR tests (Dasson, 2021), revised national policy (Perappadan, 2021) for hospital admission since early May 2021 has made it non-mandatory to have a positive result to acquire admission to a hospital. Policy technicalities implemented chaotically in incapacitated and ill equipped rural health facilities would mean not one but multiple such avoidable fatalities that occur because of policy-led denial of care and the absence of any other feasible

<sup>14</sup> Listen to their accounts here:

Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lk2jK9Rn3ns>

Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSHCfXPicFs>

alternatives.

Nicholas and his entire family, who are part of the adivasi community in Dumka district, Jharkhand, fell sick with COVID-19 like symptoms. The nearest hospital was 28 kms away and no tests, medicines or even timely consultations from doctors were available in the government facilities accessible to them. Hence, they had to seek treatment in a private hospital where they were given the misdiagnosis of typhoid and treated accordingly. They were billed at more than Rs. 20,000.

As Angad (2021) finds, the misdiagnosis of COVID-19 as typhoid had become rampant in rural Jharkhand at the peak of the second wave, when conventional tests failed to detect the new COVID-19 variant and unreliable typhoid tests showed positive results. The social stigma and fear of contracting the virus, caused by lack of proper messaging in villages, may also have contributed to the rise in misdiagnoses of typhoid and the unwitting response to these “typhoid” cases by local governments and officers. But the consequent result for many such patients has been complications and fatalities due to inappropriate and delayed treatments.

Raunaq, a migrant worker who returned to her home in Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand, lost her grandparents and her uncle to COVID-19. She mentioned the consistently high number of deaths in her village, caused by the lack of facilities and the compounding effect of mobility restrictions which prevented patients from reaching district hospitals in time and added to their transportation costs. She also mentioned the unavailability of oxygen in district hospitals as the cause of many preventable deaths.

Gulzar, a returned migrant worker in the Godda district of Jharkhand who has been fighting to recover his unpaid wages from a contractor in Goa, mentioned that until last year government facilities were not doing tests and the doctors were suggesting that patients get tests done privately. He flagged the possibility that there might be some monetary commission involved in giving out such referrals. He too mentioned the high number of COVID-19 deaths in his village.

Tahir, a worker who returned to the Silchar district of Assam and who is an orphaned oldest child responsible for younger siblings, has been dealing with multiple issues stemming from lack of employment and social security in the region. He told us that the nearest PHC was 3-4 kms away from his village and while medicines and tests were available, people had to wait all day to just get their tests done and wait a few more days to get their results. The ambulance was unreliable and people had to arrange for their own transportation to reach the PHC.

During a session on COVID-19 awareness where they learnt about oximeters, thermometers and basic medicines like paracetamol, some of the SWAN fellows mentioned that the ASHA workers of their villages did not have such instruments even as late as mid-May. The extreme delay in procuring basic health essentials in rural India affected the very first stage of discovering and monitoring the spread of any infection. This is in contrast to cities where such instruments are easily available, even at the gates of public institutions like railway stations and banks where everyone entering these facilities is checked.

# SWAN FELLOWS

## **Mohd. Muslim, Bihar and Orissa**

### **Present occupation: Works at a puncture repair shop**

Mohd. Muslim is a part of the recently formed Pravaasi Majdoor Group- a migrant workers' group in Muzaffarpur, formed for addressing their issues and advocating their rights. Being a circular migrant, he has previously worked in major cities like Delhi and Kolkata. He hopes to help and empower other migrant workers to start small local businesses and access various welfare schemes.

## **Raunaq Parveen, Jharkhand**

### **Present occupation: Seeking employment**

Raunaq is a young graduate from Hazaribagh, Jharkhand. She has been very expressive about her experiences as a migrant worker stuck in Uttar Pradesh during the COVID-19 lockdown and has actively engaged and articulated migrant workers' issues in a SWAN Worker's Webinar. Raunaq is currently looking for employment. She hopes to work as a teacher.

## **Nicholas Murmu, Jharkhand**

### **Present occupation: Seeking employment**

Nicholas, who used to work as a construction worker in Bengaluru and Chennai, has been actively involved in assisting fellow migrant workers in accessing their due entitlements. He has also played a critical role in supporting the survivors of a human-trafficking and bonded-labour case. Nicholas has made valuable contributions to SWAN's Worker's Webinar and the Janta Parliament.

## **Mohammad Gulzar, Goa**

### **Present occupation: Daily-wage labourer**

Gulzar and his co-workers were working in Goa as mandap decorators for various event management companies before the lockdown. Unfortunately, one of the companies had not cleared their wages. Gulzar, on behalf of his co-workers, had taken the initiative to raise the complaint with the Goa labour department. He strongly believes in community building and collectivisation. Gulzar actively fights for workers' rights and is vocal against the dowry system.

## **Sima Kumari, Jharkhand**

### **Present occupation: Frontline health worker / Seeking employment**

Despite being a frontline health worker, Sima is currently unemployed and is looking for work in the health sector. Having worked in a private hospital in Goa before the COVID-19 lockdown, she has exhibited strong leadership skills by supporting her coworkers to claim their rights. She is determined to advocate and voice migrant workers' issues through her experiences.

## **Tahir, Assam**

### **Present occupation: Seeking employment**

A migrant worker who was working in a theatre in Bengaluru before the lockdown, Tahir has extensively spoken about their struggle for full payment of their wages. Coming from the flood-prone regions of Assam and being the sole earning member of his family, he is currently looking for employment opportunities.

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## 5.5 Compounding the vulnerability of the marginalised

**While the calls received reflect the extreme distress of workers across the country, the condition of vulnerable groups within the workforce was even worse.** Some groups were more adversely affected than others, especially women, a group from whom we received many calls. Some women who requested money/ration had husbands at home but the latter had lost their jobs. Other women had husbands who were stranded in places they had migrated to for work and who then found themselves unable to send money home during the lockdown.

Sneha's was an SOS call for help as her husband was stuck in Haryana—she had no ration card but also no money or ration left and was evidently in distress. Shanam was living in her father's house in Delhi. Her husband had travelled to the United Arab Emirates for work but had not received a salary for the last three months and hence was unable to send money home. She had four children, one of whom was unwell. She was managing by taking ration on credit from the local shop.

**Single women especially faced the brunt of the loss of employment and wages.** Amina, a single mother from Haryana, used to earn Rs. 8,000 working in a motorcycle parts manufacturing company in Gurugram. But since the lockdown she had been struggling to make ends meet. Mehar's husband had passed away and she herself was ill, having vomited blood; but with no money for even rations, there was no way she could afford the ultrasound that the doctor had recommended. Deeksha, a domestic worker in Delhi living with her son, was separated from her husband and was bearing the expenses of rent (Rs. 3,000) and running the house all by herself. Pramila from Bihar, working in Delhi, was a single mother of four children, one of whom was ill at the time she called our helpline. Tanaaz from Noida, a single mother, had left her job to take care of her ill sister. The lockdown had made it impossible for her to find new work but at the same time had pushed her into a precarious situation of debt. Khairunissa from Meerut had lost her husband, an auto driver, and had a young baby to take care of by herself.

If the stress of the times was in itself a form of violence experienced by the families of workers struggling to make ends meet, there was also the looming worry of domestic violence that some callers addressed. Sajida from Jharkhand called from Antop Hill, Mumbai, where she lived with her husband and two children. We are not sure what her husband was doing but she said that she faced violence from him and needed monetary and ration support.

**Another group under stress were pregnant women and nursing mothers.** Geetha from Bengaluru, Karnataka, was extremely worried as her delivery date coincided with the date that Karnataka had announced as the start of the initial lockdown for two weeks. She was worried about not having transport to the hospital, and the additional costs of arranging for an ambulance. Lockdowns meant difficulty in accessing hospitals for regular check-ups. Saira has two children and was pregnant with a third. Her ultrasound, paid for with borrowed money, had revealed a complication and she was worried. Added to this was the fact that her husband was out of work and the family was dependent on her mother-in-law's ration card for a supply of wheat. Farida, who reached out to SWAN, had a baby just 20 days old. Her husband had lost his employment since the lockdown and they had run out of rations and savings. Sangeetha was pregnant with a check up pending but also needed

medicines for a urinary tract infection. Another call we received was from an eight month pregnant Janaki whose husband had married someone else and was no longer supporting her. She has been taking help from her sister-in-law who lived next door.

**The differently abled were another vulnerable group.** Prasad from Delhi was handicapped with no source of income. Ganesh in Delhi was himself handicapped and receiving a pension of Rs. 200, a pittance with which he had to support his elderly parents and meet his own medical needs. His wife, who worked as a construction labourer, was out of work. Gulabo from Jaipur, Rajasthan, had lost her son as they had been unable to raise money for a surgery he needed. Her husband was handicapped and she herself needed money for medicines. She had already taken loans, and the small cash transfers that SWAN made could only cover a part of her expenses.

**Children too have not remained unaffected.** They have been forced to work to make ends meet for the family. Puja, from Hisar in Haryana, had called SWAN but we spoke to her daughter who said that since her father had passed away a year back there was hardly any income being earned. Her mother did odd jobs in homes and her 10 year old brother worked in a tea shop. The income was not steady and they survived on ration, essentially wheat and rice, which they bought using their card. Where there was no money to even buy ration it was extremely difficult for families with young children to buy milk. Rita and her husband used to make a living making puchkas. Work stopped and the money ran out. They had a nine-month-old baby and could not even afford gas.

Padmini earned Rs. 150 a day doing threadwork. She had one year old twins for whom she had to buy milk, a husband out of work and an unwell mother-in-law for whom they needed medicines.

Sana, from a group of transgender persons, reached out for help with rations as they had been stopped by the police from collecting kits that were being distributed, with the warning that they would be put in jail if they ventured outside.

In a crisis such as this vulnerable groups are exposed to even more distress than normal, as was seen from the calls we received from women, especially single women and those facing the threat of violence, children, the differently abled and trans gender communities.

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## 5.6 Journeying back and travel within the city: Both a struggle

**Like last year during the nation-wide lockdown when many decided to trek back to their villages, this year too many migrants were trying to make their way back home.** The sight of workers with weary children and meagre belongings trudging through the heat of the summer is still a recent memory. This year the localised lockdowns led to some hesitancy and confusion and many were unsure as to whether they should return to their villages or wait in the cities till the lockdown measures were lifted. However, it was increasingly clear that as the lockdown was extended week by week, more and more workers were desperate to make their way back to their villages. In all, 11% of the migrant workers and their families returned to their village (out of 6,693 people that we have data for).



There was considerable confusion in the minds of workers who called us about what to do. Should they take the first opportunity to travel back home? Should they stay in the city paying rent and food expenses hoping for work to restart or return home with the savings they had? A group of nine families from Bihar who were stranded in Punjab told us of how they were desperate to return home to Samastipur where they would at least find some means of sustaining themselves. One group of five eighteen year olds from Bihar, stranded in Delhi, desperately asked for help to just get back home; even if it was to go back and survive only on “namak pani” (salt water) it would still be better than being stuck in Delhi with no work.

**But costs of travel were an issue as trains, the cheapest mode of transport, were not available to all destinations.** Saira wanted to travel from Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu to Patna but there was only one train running in a week between the two cities, and any other mode of travel was unaffordable. Somesh, working in Mumbai, had no money as work had stopped. He wanted to return to his hometown, Allahabad, but needed nearly Rs. 3,200 for a bus ride. Jitendra had come to Bihar to do waterproofing work but he was stuck in Sakoli living in a tent under a bridge and wanted Rs. 1,100 to pay a private truck company that said it could take him back to Maharashtra.

In some instances the decision to travel back was the result of threat or force. One worker reported being coerced into making the choice to travel back home by his landlord who threatened them with eviction if they were unable to pay the rent. An ice-cream seller in Neemrana, who reached out to SWAN, desperately reported that he was being threatened by his landlord who had also involved the local police.

**While movement between states was restricted, local movement within cities was subject to other kinds of risks.** Arnab, a fruit seller with a rented cart, was beaten up by the police when he went to sell and earn some money during the lockdown. Another caller said that their family’s only source of income had been impacted because the police had beaten up her husband who was working, selling undergarments on a handcart. Bhanu from Bengaluru said they had trouble even stepping out to buy ration as the police stopped them even though it was before 10 am in the morning when movement to buy essential commodities was allowed during the lockdown.

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## 5.7 No roof over the head: The burden of rent and the threat of eviction

**With no earnings, rents were of concern as they constituted a considerable proportion of the family expenditure.** Work-from-home is a much-used phrase during this lockdown. But for workers living a hand to mouth existence there was no work and they lived under constant fear of having no home either. Raman, a daily wage worker in Delhi, used to earn Rs. 400 a day and paid a monthly rent of Rs. 3,500. This till the extended lockdown in Delhi prevented him from working. How to pay the rent was a huge concern for him as he had no savings and rations left for just seven days. SWAN received many such requests for help with payment of rent, some of them from people in the most distressing situations. Pari, who has four children and used to earn a daily wage of Rs. 200, was one of them. The choices were hard—whether money was to be spent on dwindling rations or to prevent

eviction—choices far removed from the work-from-home situation of the more privileged. Whether to stay on and pay rent hoping for work to start or return home was the question for Kamala in Jharkhand, whose landlord was charging a very high rent.

**Evictions, while a worry for some, were an immediate concern for others.** Renu, a single mother from Delhi, had an uncooperative landlord. While Kamini in Kolkata, with savings wiped out and unable to pay rent, was being evicted by her landlord when she reached out to SWAN. Jeevan's wife from Pune was alone with the two children, as he had left home 10 days ago after a fight. The landlord was threatening to evict his wife and children and she reached out for help with getting home. The 14 year old daughter of Sanjay, a rickshaw puller in Wardha, spoke to the SWAN volunteer and said that they were struggling to pay rent as Sanjay's work had stopped. An especially distressing call came from Swati, in Chandigarh. Her husband had been beaten up by the landlord because of his inability to pay rent. Another worker from Noida too was beaten up by his landlord, his IDs (Aadhaar, bank passbook and marksheets) and phone were snatched, and all his other belongings (clothes, utensils) were withheld from him. When SWAN reached out to the Labour Commissioner's office for redressal, they said that the worker should go to the police because they were not the authority that could deal with rent issues. When the SWAN volunteer asked them if they could help the worker file a complaint with the police or give them the contact details of a police officer, the Labour Commissioner refused.

There were rare exceptions as in the case of Vikram from Jaipur whose landlord said they could pay rent when work restarted; but they still had to pay the electricity bill.

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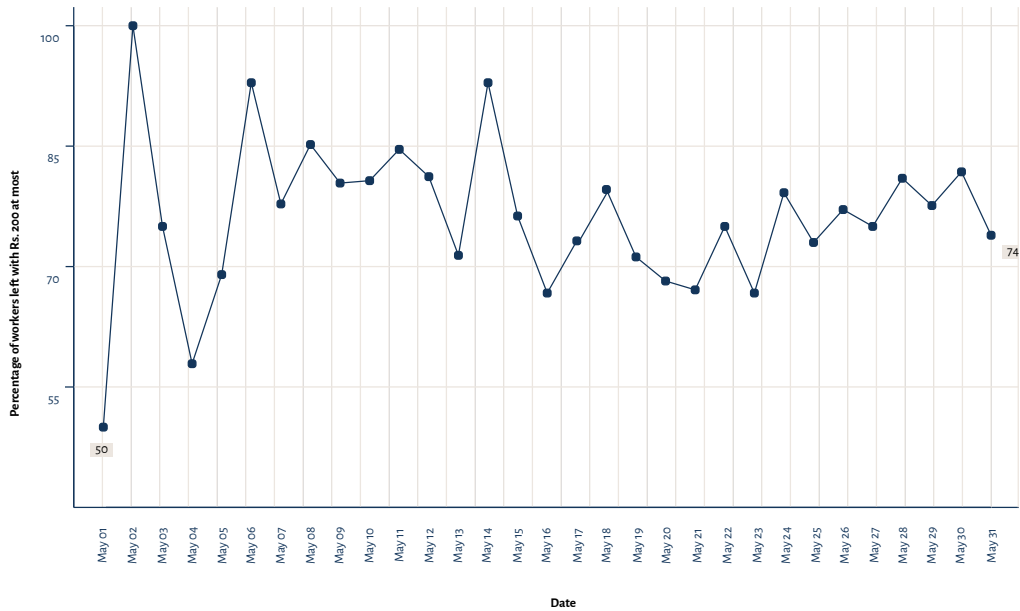
## 5.8 No work in the city, no work back home in the village: Challenges of MGNREGA

**With intermittent work available and lockdown in effect in many cities, migrant workers were reluctant to return home because there were no employment opportunities in the village** and securing work under MGNREGA had proved difficult for many last year. It has been widely reported that MGNREGA employment in May this year has [seen a sharp decline](#). Last year when all alternative employment came to a standstill during the national lockdown, MGNREGA played a crucial role in providing income support to workers in rural India, many of whom were returned migrants. State governments made efforts to ensure that recently returned migrants were provided job cards soon after they returned. Work was proactively opened, providing much needed financial relief. More than 11 million new families registered for MGNREGA and 20 million more families worked under MGNREGA in 2020 when compared to the previous year. However, this year MGNREGA has practically come to a standstill across states. None of the workers who were back home and reached out to SWAN had gotten any MGNREGA employment in April or May. This was corroborated by several civil society organisations SWAN has been in touch with as well.

When we asked workers who reached out to SWAN about MGNREGA, they mentioned a range of issues with getting work back at home—many preferred to go to the cities in search of work. When he contacted SWAN Nirmal in Banka said, “NREGA waale paise barabar milta nahin” (We don't get the NREGA money properly). Ahmed, from Gomoh in Jharkhand and working in Mumbai, had a

job card but now this was in the hands of the village mukhiya (headman). Tilak, from Muzaffarpur in Bihar and working in Kolkata, said there was no work available under MGNREGA in his village. Other workers said that they had applied for the card but had not received it. MGNREGA is especially important for women, but Malini from Vaishali in Bihar said she had got no benefit from the scheme (but could not elaborate). Bharati, from Banka in Bihar and working in Delhi, had faced issues while even trying to get a card. According to her she had been asked to work for 15 days first by the contractor, only after which she would get a job card.

**Figure 9:**  
Percentage of workers left with Rs. 200 at most (n=1,370)



While this is represented only for the callers, this is likely to be representative of the whole group that the caller is part of.

In summary, the workers who reached out to us are among the poorest and most vulnerable, as



revealed by their insecure economic status. More than half (60%) were daily wage factory workers and 6% were non-group based daily wage earners like drivers, domestic help etc. The median daily wages of workers was Rs. 308.

Approximately 74% of the workers earned Rs. 200-400 per day and 14% earned less than Rs. 200 per day.

- **In Delhi, can buy :**  
8 kilograms of Atta, or 4 kg Rice, or 2 kg Dal, or 1.5 litres Cooking Oil
- **On BigBasket:**  
2 packets of Doritos, or 4 Apples, or 5 bottles of Thums Up
- **A month-long subscription to Netflix**

The distress from accumulated debts and erratic employment started with the lockdown in 2020 and has been prolonged this year, severely impacting the economic status of the workers. In the absence of any social security benefits, approximately 76% of them had Rs. 200 or lesser than Rs. 200 left with them when they first contacted SWAN. This

is somewhat similar to trends reported last year during a similar period (one month into lockdown) when 74% of the workers had Rs. 200 or less than Rs. 200 with them.

Added to these miseries is the mounting levels of debt, the uncertainty of surviving in the city, the dilemma of returning to the villages where there is no work even under the MGNREGA, and the continuing health challenges.





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## 6. Vaccination Woes: Scarcity and Hesitancy

**The data is quite preliminary but we find that while there was some knowledge of vaccination for COVID-19, relatively few workers had been vaccinated.** The pre-call message on mobile networks heralded a COVID-19 free 2021 with the discovery of a vaccine for the virus. The message urged everyone to take vaccines while continuing with other precautions. But very soon it was clear that the first hurdle to vaccination was the availability of the vaccine. India, the largest manufacturer of vaccines in the world and known as the world's pharmacy, had failed to produce vaccines for its people (LiveMint, 2021). The rate at which vaccination is happening in the country indicates that India will be able to vaccinate 75% of its population only over the next 2.5 years (Annapurani, 2021). But even here it will be the poorest and most vulnerable, ie. those who need the vaccination the most, who will be the last to be covered. The barriers to vaccination (Baruah, 2021) are not just scarcity of vaccines but also the government's pricing and prioritisation of who gets the vaccine.

From 22nd May, SWAN began capturing some information on vaccinations and by 31st May had collected 452 responses from workers. In particular, we asked the workers if they knew of the vaccination drive for COVID-19 and if they had been vaccinated or had tried to register for the vaccine. Of the 452, only 10% (45) of the workers who called us had been vaccinated. The majority of them had received their vaccination in a PHC or a camp held in their village, while 14 of them had received their vaccine in a private facility, either a clinic or a hospital. Vaccination had been free for all but three who had to pay between Rs. 200 and Rs. 3,000. Meenal in Beed, Maharashtra paid Rs. 3,000 while Ranju in Ludhiana, Punjab, paid Rs. 2,200. Of the 452, only 6% said that they did not know what vaccination was, while 59% had not tried to get vaccinated.

Those who tried to get vaccinated but could not made up 18% (82). The reasons ranged from not having information, trying to register but failing, non-availability of vaccines and crowded PHCs. There were others who said that they had no knowledge about the vaccine or registration process or how to get the vaccine. For Shivani from Bengaluru, who had two unwell family members, it was impossible to go anywhere far off for vaccination. Highlighting the digital divide that exists in the country, one of the workers said that he had a "small" mobile and was apprehensive about how he would even get the vaccine. Saroj of Chhattisgarh, talking about the multiple barriers, said, "*Process simple hona chahiye, humare pass mobile bhi nai hai toh hum app sab nai use kar paate. PHC ka bhi pata nahi hai*" (The process has to be simple, we don't even have a mobile so we can't use the app. We don't have information about PHCs). One of the workers also said that given their current state and suffering, vaccination was not something workers could prioritise.

**While on the one hand there was scarcity, on the other there was also some hesitancy expressed.** One worker said he was afraid of falling sick. Nitish, from a village in Bihar, said that he understands the importance of vaccines but a few people in the village (3-4 out of 200) had died 2-3 days after vaccination and the programme had stopped in the village after these incidents. They hear that more vaccinations will start from July onwards.

One of the most surprising replies we received was from Suresh, who, when asked whether he or anyone in his family had been affected by COVID-19, said, “*Gareeb logo ko yeh sab nahi hota hai. AC waalo logo ko hota hai. Jo araam mein rehte hai, unko beemari hota hai. Humaari saari beemari dhoop mein jal ke khatam ho jaata hai*” (The poor do not get this [COVID-19]. Only those who need air conditioning get it. Those who live in comfort get this illness. All our illnesses burn and die in the heat of the sun).

## Tried but could not get vaccinated? The reasons given by workers

- I don't know where to go.
- I tried registering on the Cowin App but the app didn't work.
- I tried registering using my neighbour's smart phone but couldn't book an appointment.
- The Cowin App was working but I was unable to get a slot.
- I registered on the app but I haven't got a slot yet, plus I can't afford to pay for a private hospital's vaccine.
- I registered with the help of neighbours and am waiting for my number for vaccination.
- My neighbours helped me register. I don't know the process.
- My thekedar (contractor) got me registered. I don't know the process.
- I went to the PHC but it was overcrowded.
- I cannot afford vaccines. The hospital was charging Rs. 700 per dose.
- Vaccination was to be done in a school but no vaccine was available.
- I'm waiting for PHC workers to come door to door.
- I went to the center but was required to fill forms and didn't have the necessary documents, so I decided to register back in my hometown.
- I went to get the vaccine but the policeman stopped me saying, “You're too young. You don't need a vaccine.”
- I'm waiting for the company to give me the vaccine.
- The builder said that he will arrange for vaccination from the Gram Panchayat, but I did not receive any.
- I'm in contact with a vaccine provider, I will get it in a week's time.
- My neighbour told me that he will inform me about vaccination.
- The factory person said he will arrange for it.

## In their own words: Workers' charter of demands for vaccination

- **Consider the plight of laborers on a priority basis.**
- **Improve vaccine supply in centres.**
- **Registration should be easier: The procedure should be simplified. Even if the process is simple it is difficult to access and someone needs to explain it to workers.**
- **Improve the manual/in-person registration system, since workers do not have a phone where the Cowin app can be installed.**
- **Vaccination should be made available for all free of cost.**
- **Make it more accessible for the 18-44 age group.**
- **Have more free vaccination drives and camps.**
- **Spread vaccination awareness in villages.**
- **Do the vaccination quickly, as without work there is no food.**

*(From workers who called SWAN and were asked for suggestions for the government with regard to vaccination)*

Ajay, working in Vani, Maharashtra and hailing from Bihar, perhaps best expressed the state of affairs when he said, “*Migrant ko kaun dega vaccine*” (Who will give the vaccine to migrants?). Sunil, stranded in Bengaluru and hailing from Bihar, said that when the locals themselves were not getting vaccines what chance did the migrants stand. Their abandonment by the state was evident in the words of Rajat who said, “*Sarkar humari fikar nai karti hai, apne marzi se lockdown lagate hain aur hum garib hi pareshaan hote rehet hain. Voh humari madad karna hi nai chahte*” (The government does not care about us, they impose lockdowns as they please and we poor keep getting affected. They [the government] do not want to help us at all).



# Vaccination Messages Sent by SWAN

## Message 1:

(Sent on 17th May 2021: 2,737 workers picked up the call)

भारत में दो तरह की कोविड वेक्सीन उपलब्ध है - कोविशील्ड और कोवेक्सी। आपको इस में से कोई भी एक वेक्सीन के दो डोज़ लेने होंगे, तभी आपका शरीर कोरोना वाइरस से बचने की रोगप्रतिकारक शक्ति पैदा कर सकेगा। कृपया ध्यान रहे की आप किसी एक ही वेक्सीन के दो डोज़ ले। हालाँकि इसकी कोई गैरेंटी नहीं है की वेक्सीन लेने के बाद कोरोना वाइरस का इन्फेक्शन नहीं ही होगा, पर मेडिकल सायंस ने ये बताया है की वेक्सीन के दोनों डोज़ लेने के बाद अगर कोरोना वाइरस का इन्फेक्शन होता है, तो इसकी असर जानलेवा नहीं होगी। इसलिए वेक्सीन ज़रूर ले। धन्यवाद

Covid vaccine in India is available in the form of either Covishield or Covaxin. You have to take two shots of any one vaccine – only then will your body form a full immune response against the disease. While there is no guarantee that you will not contract the disease after you have taken both the shots, it has been medically shown that those who caught the disease after taking both shots had a milder version and significantly less chances of dying. Please make sure that you get the same vaccine for your first and second shot.

## Message 2:

(Sent out on 25th May 2021: 3,741 workers picked up)

नमस्कार दोस्तों। आपने सुना होगा, कई लोग कहते हैं की वेक्सीन की ज़रूरत नहीं है, क्योंकि ज़्यादातर लोग वैसे ही ठीक हो जाते हैं। पर सच तो ये है की ठीक होने के बाद भी कोरोना वाइरस से कई और मुश्किलें हो सकती हैं जैसे हृदयरोग, डाइबिटीस, सांस लेने की बीमारी, लिवर डेमेज या जानलेवा आँख का इन्फेक्शन। कई बार हलके इन्फेक्शन से भी लम्बी हृदय की बीमारी हो सकती है। कम उम्र के कोरोना पेशेंट भी अल्पकालीन पैरालिसिस और दौरे पड़ने जैसी बीमारी का भोग बने हैं। वेक्सीन के दोनों डोज़ लेने से कोविड इन्फेक्शन और इस तरह की गंभीर बीमारी के मौके कम हो जाते हैं। इसलिए आप और आपका परिवार वेक्सीन के दोनों डोज़ ज़रूर ले। धन्यवाद।

People say that you do not need a vaccine for coronavirus because most people recover. But coronavirus can result in many complications after recovery, including heart disease, diabetes, acute respiratory disorders, liver damage and fatal eye infections. But this is not all. Even mild cases can cause lasting heart problems. Even young corona patients have suffered temporary paralysis and seizures. Taking both shots of the vaccine significantly reduces the chances of long-term complications, even if you get the disease.

## Message 3:

(Sent out on 1st June 2021: 3,172 workers picked up)

यह जानने के लिए कि आपको कोविड है या नहीं, आप दो टेस्ट कर सकते हैं, आरटी-पीसीआर टेस्ट और रैपिड एंटीजन टेस्ट। आरटी-पीसीआर टेस्ट शरीर में संक्रमण का सटीक और तेजी से पता लगाता है। इस टेस्ट के लिए

आपके नाक और गले से एक पट्टी द्वारा सेम्पल लिया जाता है और परिणाम 4-8 घंटों में दिया जाता है। यह टेस्ट व्यक्ति के संक्रामक होने से पहले ही संक्रमण का पता लगा सकता है। दूसरा रैपिड एंटीजन टेस्ट है जो नाक के स्वाब के माध्यम से किया जाता है और परिणाम 30 मिनट में पता चलता है। यह सटीक टेस्ट नहीं है, आप यह टेस्ट करवा सकते हैं यदि आपको तुरंत यात्रा करने की आवश्यकता है या एक कोविड-मुक्त प्रमाण पत्र प्राप्त करना है। हालांकि, अगर आप में कोई लक्षण या सिम्पटम दिख रहे हैं तो आरटी-पीसीआर टेस्ट कराएं, अगर आप यह टेस्ट करते हैं तो कोई और टेस्ट कराने की जरूरत नहीं है।

To know if you have Covid or not, you can undergo two tests, the RT-PCR test and the Rapid Antigen test. The RT-PCR test allows accurate and rapid detection of infection in the body. It is done with a simple swab from inside the nose or throat and results are given in 4-8 hours. This test can detect infection even before the person becomes infectious. The second is the Rapid Antigen Test which is done through a nasal swab and results are known in 30 minutes. This test is not accurate, you can get this test done if you need to travel immediately or to get a covid-free certificate. However, if you are showing symptoms, get the RT-PCR test, if you do this test there is no need to do any other test.

## 7. Recommendations

The continued prevalence of hunger and loss of livelihood calls for a more comprehensive relief response. Families who managed to earn meagre amounts in the intervening period have had to once more rely on their savings and the support of civil society groups. Multiple studies have indicated that more than half the workforce have lost work and incomes and over two-thirds are suffering increased hunger (Azim Premji University, 2021; Drèze and Somanchi, 2021). Women, children and socially disadvantaged groups, in particular, are at a higher risk of falling behind over the long term. This will have a debilitating impact on our society's nutrition, well-being and the economy at large.

India was already experiencing high levels of unemployment and wage stagnation well before the onset of the pandemic. Beyond the necessary focus on vaccination and health systems, therefore, a rapid macroeconomic recovery requires an urgent response in the form of a **National Relief and Recovery Package** to: (a) protect life, (b) partially compensate for lost livelihoods and income, and (c) boost demand in the economy for faster overall recovery. Without the **direct support** of such a package, simply unlocking the economy will not lead to a balanced recovery. Advanced and developing economies across the world are investing in similar state-led recovery programmes that seek to boost household income and spending, recognising the need for large scale relief and recovery interventions into the economy. India must do the same.

Initiated by the Working People's Charter, a blueprint for such a package has been arrived at based on consultations with various academics, lawyers and civil society organisations. SWAN volunteers contributed to the development of the blueprint, which is also endorsed by the wider team. Some of the key proposals included in the blueprint are highlighted below.

### A CALL FOR A NATIONAL RELIEF AND RECOVERY PACKAGE: If Not Now, When?

This statement focuses on three minimum and necessary elements of this package: **food, income, and work**. The near-universal impact of the second wave means that we focus on both poor and relatively non-poor households while retaining a focus on the former. The Package must thus cover **270 million households** in all, which is about **82% of all households** in the country (see Table 4). Building on and expanding the 2020 national relief package, its key components may include:

**Table 3:**  
Proposed Relief  
Measures

<b>Food</b>	The extension of expanded food rations to PDS card holders till November 2021 is welcome. We should further leverage the 100 million tonnes of food grain (over three times the buffer stock norms) for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Expanding PDS food distribution to non-PDS card holders till November 2021</li> <li>· Specific expansions of ICDS delivery for families with children, and additions to rations as well as meals (including eggs) at schools and anganwadis</li> </ul>
<b>Income</b>	Undertaking crisis cash transfers of Rs. 3,000 per month for 6 months
<b>Work</b>	Expanding NREGA work entitlements to 150 days Initiating immediate public works programmes for urban employment

Clear delivery mechanisms exist with precedence for recommendations on Food and Work, with known and accepted fiscal allocations. For Income, the proposed crisis cash transfer must leverage **existing direct benefit transfer systems** (NREGA, PM-KISAN, PMJDY, NSAP) with new **decentralised systems of direct distribution** from ration shops, post offices, panchayats and other local institutions. We anticipate, as detailed in the subsection titled “Resource Mechanism”, that the proposed income transfer will cost the GoI an additional **Rs. 4.44 trillion, or 1.97% of the projected 2021-22 GDP**. The centre must lead in this package, with minimal cost sharing with states who will focus on delivery and use their own funds to expand the reach of the package, particularly in urban areas.

It is essential that the GoI recognise the need for directed, equitable and dignified economic recovery for India’s workers and citizens. We urge it to act immediately, following its constitutional obligations as well as global best practices. If not now, when?

### Entitlements and coverage

There are 328 million households in India (202 million rural and 126 million urban)<sup>15</sup>. How many must a crisis response cover? We detail coverage by type of entitlement. Overlaps in entitlement will aid an integrated response for each household and cover the most vulnerable.

<sup>15</sup> The population census households and amenities table from the 2011 census shows that there were 247 million households – 168 million rural and 79 million urban, up from 187 million in 2001 with a 23% rural growth rate and 51% urban growth rate. Assuming a 60% urban and 20% rural household growth rate, we have estimated India to have 328 million households.

**Table 4:** Relief Package Calculations

Type	Entitlement	Coverage
Food	<p>Noting the extension of currently increased entitlements within PMGKAY till November (230 million households), the state should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide dry rations to non-PDS holders, with special delivery schemes for migrants, till November (40 million households)**</li> <li>• Specific expansions of ICDS delivery for families with children and additions to rations as well as meals (including eggs) at schools and anganwadis</li> </ul>	<p>270 million households, with 260 million within the NFSA and 40 million additional vulnerable households and migrant workers</p> <p>This covers about 82% of all households in the country.</p>
Income Support	Cash transfers of Rs. 3000 per month for 6 months	All 150 million households with NREGA job cards with provision to provide additional job cards as per requirement
Work	Increase NREGA work entitlements to 150 days, using the extra 50 days mandated by NREGA guidelines during disasters.***	

\* From [nfsa.gov.in](https://nfsa.gov.in), accessed 30th May, 2021. See also: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1713821>

\*\* Under NFSA, there are 230 million ration cards but these are based on 2011 census. Roughly 100 million eligible individuals are not covered under NFSA. Considering a household size of 4, there are 25 million households that should be in NFSA but are current not. The 2020 Atmanirbhar scheme for food support to migrant workers outside NFSA reached at least 28 million individuals, with demand estimates from states closer to 80 million individuals. We therefore estimate at least an additional 15 million households that should be eligible for assistance.

\*\*\*NFSA covers 75% of rural households and 60% of urban households. For the additional 70 million households, we assume a concentration in urban areas. Therefore, the total 330 million households cover about 80% of all rural households, and 70% of all urban households, including migrant households.

\*\*\* There is precedence for this during drought and the pandemic is a national disaster.

To reach these households, there should be multiple channels of distribution including bank transfers as well as modes of direct distribution.

### Resource mechanism

- PM-KISAN and the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) are two existing household cash transfer programmes. The annual budget of PM-KISAN is Rs. 750 billion and the annual budget of NSAP is Rs. 92 billion. For 6 months this adds up to Rs. 421 billion. The crisis cash transfer should be a top-up over these existing transfers.
- A transfer of **Rs. 3,000 per month** (which is less than one-third of the national minimum wage threshold of Rs. 375 per day) **for 6 months to 270 million households** amounts to a total spending of Rs. 4.86 trillion. Subtracting the PM-KISAN and NSAP budget for the next 6 months

from this implies additional spending of **Rs. 4.44 trillion, which is 1.97% of the 2021-22 GDP**.<sup>16</sup>

- The resource responsibility for the above proposals should be taken up by the centre.
- However, for income transfers a 90:10 and 80:20 formula can be devised for states above and below the median per capita income level.
- Several states have already initiated specific schemes. These should be expanded.

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<sup>16</sup> Table 2 from the CSO Press Release gives the nominal GDP as Rs. 197 trillion. Assuming a projected real growth rate of 9% and an inflation of 5% the '21-22 GDP is estimated at Rs. 225 trillion..

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## 8. Acknowledgements

The **521 donors** who generously pledged a total sum of Rs. 4,928,325 (as on 14th June) and also painstakingly transferred amounts to the workers who reached out to SWAN: We thank you, both for your pledges and your investment in our process, without which SWAN could not have supported so many families and groups

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11. Centre for Environment Education
12. Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development (CMID)
13. Cohesion Foundation
14. Collaborative Covid Action Support Team (CoAST)
15. Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre
16. Delhi Rozi Roti Abhiyan
17. Giants Group of Chowpatty
18. GiftAble Foundation
19. Harshini
20. Hope Foundation
21. Hunger Collective
22. Jagannath Food For Life
23. Jagori Rural Charitable Trust
24. Jan Sahas
25. Jan Swasth Abhiyan
26. Jones Manikonda
27. Khaana Chahiye
28. Khudai Khidmatgar
29. Koshish: A Tata Institute of Social Science Field Action Project
30. Mercy Mission
31. Migrant Workers Solidarity Network (MWSN)
32. Namratha, Ravi, Subbu, Jogi, Amith, Nishant, Yeti Surya and Pankaja
33. Neev Shikshan Sanstha
34. People's Action for People in Need (PAPN)
35. Rashtra Chenetha Jana Samakhya
36. Rasoi On Wheels
37. Saad Pratishthan Pune Trust
38. Sang - A Young India Fellows Initiative
39. Setu Abhiyan
40. Shalini Rao, Rhea Rodrigues Mukherjee, Nisha Abdulla
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43. The Rotaract Club of Mumbai Downtown
44. Uma Mahadevan Dasgupta
45. Veera Raghav
46. Youth Feed



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### **Affidavits**

Affidavit filed by Govt. of NCT of Delhi in Re: Problems and Miseries of Migrant Labourers. W.P. civil no. 6/2020. Filed on 21.05.2021.

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