

Protection of Children Affected by Seasonal Migration - A Study in Jalna District, Maharashtra

Files Attached

1. Policy Brief
2. Release of Report and Dissemination of the Study “Protection of Children Affected by Seasonal Migration: A Study in Jalna District, Maharashtra.”

Policy Brief Protecting Children Affected by Seasonal Migration



Introduction

Seasonal migration is a growing phenomenon, especially in India's semi-arid regions. A livelihood strategy for many socio-economically marginalized families, seasonal migration is a complex issue that involves many sectors of work, a variety of migration corridors and a migration cycle ranging from 15 days to 9 months.

To find a livelihood and [earn] better wages, we go to work in sugarcane farms. It is the only source of livelihood and income.

- Migrant (male), 44 years

Moreover, the socio-economic and cultural contexts of seasonal migrants are also varied and this in turn influences the pattern of seasonal migration with entire villages resorting to seasonal migration in some cases while other villages have no seasonal migrant families at all. Families may also choose to migrate in their entirety or may leave children and senior citizens back in source villages when they migrate.

All these diversities need to be brought into the policy discourse for the creation of a comprehensive yet nuanced policy.

This study focuses on seasonal migrant families and their children in

the Jalna district of Maharashtra. It highlights the vulnerabilities and protection issues of these children from their own perspective as well as the perspectives of their parents, and the multilevel stakeholders.

The findings reveal that children who stay back when parents migrate are less vulnerable than those who migrate with parents, mainly because they continue to attend school/anganwadi, access services of health and nutrition, alive in familiar surroundings (their own homes with grandparents or with uncles/aunts), and remain protected to greater extent (teachers, anganwadi workers, ASHA workers pay special attention to stay back children) in their village. However, the absence of their parents' forces many of them to take on additional responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings and old grandparents, domestic chores and at times even taking up paid work to provide financial support. Children who migrate with parents are deprived of the basic entitlements like shelter, sanitation facilities, potable water and electricity. Their education is disrupted, access to health and nutrition services remain limited. They take on adult responsibilities of caring for younger siblings and domestic chores at destination worksites. Moreover, older ones are at greater risk of being engaged in work with their parents, albeit unpaid.

It is important to ensure that families who chose to migrate seasonally are able to migrate safely and avail of services of health, nutrition, education and protection at destination worksites. Strengthening child protection systems at the source villages to build a safety net for children by providing safe care arrangements to those who stay back when parents migrate is also critical. Ensuring that children remain safe and protected, while accessing services of nutrition, health and age appropriate education regardless of their migration status requires inter-departmental convergence at the state, district and sub-district levels.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of developing and implementing special programmes for raising awareness, and building sensitivity among stakeholder to develop inclusive practices for integrating seasonal migrants at destination.

The departments of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection, Labour, and Sugar Commission, School Education and Sports, Public Health as well as Women and Child Development, play a critical role in ensuring that seasonal migrants access services both at source villages and destination worksites. This policy brief provides recommendations for each of the above departments.

Department of Women and Child Development

Key Findings

For both migrants and stay-back children, seasonal migration increased the risk of becoming victims of abuse, violence, and neglect. Most of the vulnerabilities of migrant children stemmed from poor living conditions (makeshift temporary dwellings), lack of potable water, and absence of sanitation facilities and electricity. The absence of toilets increased the protection risks for women and girls who had to get up very early in the morning to find a safe place. The living areas at destination worksites were crowded, making the children feel unsafe due to the presence of a large number of unfamiliar people. Poor access to food and drinking water and safety issues made the destination worksites an unwelcome place for these children. Many children at the destination reported that they don't like to go to public places as people treat them as inferiors, calling them 'gawar' (illiterates).

At times, I felt scared as the local people used foul language, shouted, and abused us. They used to question us, 'Why did you come here?' and called us the names. Occasionally, my parents had to work in the sugarcane fields at night, leaving me and my siblings in the hut. We were scared of ghosts, and some local men.

-Migrant (Girl), 14 years

Other "hazards" such as injuries (deep cuts) due to cuts from the sharp edges of sugarcane leaves; bites from insects at the worksites and their dwellings heightened the vulnerability of children.

At the destinations, some children were left alone in their huts during the early hours of the day while their parents went to work making them more vulnerable to neglect due to long hours without adult supervision. Moreover, **the seasonal migration of parents impaired the social**

support systems of stay-back children, resulting in the basic needs, including safety and protection needs remaining unfulfilled.

Girls from seasonal migrant households were given more responsibilities than boys regardless of their migration status. Moreover, they were more likely to be married off at an early age, especially when not able to continue their education. In some cases, marriages were even arranged at destination sites to increase the numbers of koyta so that the family income could be augmented.

Recommendations

- Scale up the Maharashtra Migration Tracking System Application across the state. The Maha MTS App is a unique initiative by the DWCD to ensure that migration does not deprive children and their families of access to services at destination. It focuses on enumerating children, pregnant women and lactating mothers from seasonal migrant families and tracking their movement from one place to another in order to provide services of nutrition and immunization while linking them to services of education and protection at the destination worksites.
- Link anganwadi centres with day-care centres/ creches for the younger children (0 to 6 years) and supervised care for older ones (6 to 18 years). This will ensure that all children remain safe in the care of adults at the destination worksites when their parents are at work.
- Activate child protection committees (at village, block and district) and build their capacities for a nuanced understanding of the needs of children from seasonal migrant families.
- Create a safety net for children aged 6 years and above to facilitate their holistic development.
- Create awareness on family-based kinship care and community-based care options to encourage children to stay-back in the source village during the migration season. This will help to prevent unnecessary institutionalization and ensure that children remain safe and protected in their villages when their parents migrate.
- Strengthen the critical role of the balmitra within the kinship care model. The kinship care model is a laudable initiative with the potential to retain children of seasonal migrants in the source villages, and provide them with all necessary support.
- Ensure that stay-back children are connected to psycho-social support and schemes like Balsangopan where needed.
- Explore the feasibility of developing and using a migrant-child development index as a monitoring tool. The index could include indicators of health, education, nutrition, protection and mental wellbeing.



Public Health Department

Key Findings

The journey to the destination takes 2-3 days and is mostly undertaken on trucks or tractors. Children who accompany their parents reported that food was insufficient as cooking during the journey was challenging.

We ate only rice, bhakari and chutney for the three or four days we were travelling.

- Migrant (Girl), 16 years

Migration affects the nutrition of both migrant and stay-back children. **Migrant children often had to go without meals at the destination worksites because their parents did not have the time to cook.** Their diet which consisted mainly of carbohydrates is inadequate resulting in weight loss and malnutrition. **Children who stay back** also lost weight due to limited availability of groceries and food items. They also missed their mother's cooking which meant they ate lesser when parents were away.

Migrant children also faced other health challenges. Extreme heat caused sunburn. Moreover, poor living conditions, non-availability of potable water, and lack of sanitation facilities lead to frequent illness amongst children.

What happens is that the children work there (the sites) all day and they don't pay attention to their health; [moreover] they do not have meals on time. These affect the children's health.

- ASHA Worker, 28 years

In case of health emergencies, migrants take leave to visit a doctor, often travelling long distances. Seeking health care has multiple financial implications as they have to pay for doctor consultancy and medicines, they lose their wage for the day, and are also expected to compensate the group (toli) for the loss in production due to their absence.

Migration also has a negative impact on the psychosocial health of children. Many children did not like the conditions at their destinations and often felt sad, stressed, anxious, or depressed. Stay-back children also found it difficult to cope in their parent's absence. Since parents (followed by siblings) are the primary support, the children found it hard to discuss their problems or share their emotions with grandparents or other kin in the absence of their parents. Moreover, grandparents, relatives, or cousins cannot provide the same level of care and facilities that parents give their children resulting in children feeling lonely and neglected.

Recommendations

- Create Mobile Outreach Services through the Primary Health Centres. These would visit every destination site at least once in a month and offer basic health-care, ANC, essential diagnostics services and treatment. The outreach services can include monitoring of growth, development, well-being and overall health of all members from seasonal migrant families, with special focus on pregnant and lactating mothers, and young children.
- Extend health services to adolescent girls and pregnant women at the destinations. These services may include counselling on adolescent health, pregnancy, and menstrual hygiene and the distribution of sanitary napkins, folic acid tablets and iron supplements, haemoglobin and calcium tablets.
- Provide psycho-social and counselling services to seasonal migrant families through village-based counsellors. The focus of such services must be on the stay-back children and their caregivers at the source villages.
- Maintain records of incidences of gender-based violence, nutrition-deficient children and those with mental health issues in need of additional care and medical support.
- Extend provision of nutrition and growth monitoring services to children from seasonal migrant families (at both source villages and destination worksites), who are aged 6 years and above, to strengthen the nutritional foundations for ensuring that children do not slide into malnutrition during the migration season.



School Education and Sports Department

Key Findings

Seasonal migration has an adverse effect on the education of children who accompanied their parents as it disrupts schooling for more than six months. Children migrate with their parents in October and return in March-April towards the end of the academic year. Despite these children being physically absent from school, the school records do not acknowledge this in many cases.

At the destination, children and parents reported that long distance to local schools and frequent movement of families between sugarcane fields made it difficult for children to avail of education. The change in the medium of instruction for inter-state migrants, especially those travelling to Karnataka was yet another factor that hindered the education of migrant children. Moreover, many children helped their parents in harvesting sugarcane and in household chores which meant that they had no time to study. On returning home, some of these children found it difficult to adjust in the school and cope with their studies, eventually discontinuing their education entirely.

I accompany my mother to the field and help her tie the sugarcane into bundles. After returning, I help my mother to cook and wash clothes. My mother makes vegetables, and I make poli. There is no time to study or play... When I am in the village, I go to school till Diwali. By the time I return, school is closed. I can read and write but I find it difficult to understand the concepts being taught in class.

- Migrant (Girl), 13 years

Children who stay back faced a different set of challenges. Many took on adult responsibilities such as household chores and sibling care which had a negative effect on their school attendance. Teachers also reported that some children also did not have study materials (books, pens, etc.) or proper uniforms which

they were unable to replace when their parents were away.

The Education Department has initiated special programmes like the *balrakshaks*¹, Shiksha Hami Card or the Education Guarantee Card to support children affected by seasonal migration. The study also found that committed teachers and active school management committees may serve as anchors for the children bringing stability and a degree of emotional balance to their daily lives.

Recommendations

- Ensure State-wide rollout of the Seasonal Hostel Guidelines ((Circular/ MPSP/SSA/ Seasonal Hostel Guideline/2018-2019/ 2737 dated 26th October 2018). This provides Rs 8500 for every migrant child (both stay back and those who migrate with their parents) for the duration of the six months of migration. This financial support will undoubtedly help stay back children and their families by providing them with two meals, stationary materials and toiletries but can also be used to scale up existing good models for children at the destinations.
- Set up temporary schools at destination worksites through public-private partnerships. Two sugar cooperatives in Kolhapur have set up Education Trusts through which they run schools for children who migrate with their parents. The Block Education Officers visit these schools regularly and have linked the schools with the Zilla Parishad school closest to the factories. At least one teacher from the ZP school visits the school on a daily basis. The Trusts set up by the factories pay the salaries for the additional teachers employed in the school, provide hot meals and a safe environment for the children.

- Develop training curriculum/modules for balrakshaks on supporting children affected by seasonal migration at source and destination.
- Innovate inclusive practices for integration of children affected by seasonal migration at destination schools.
- Encourage parents to use options of temporary care and set up temporary seasonal hostels only those children from seasonal migrant families who have no family based or kinship care.
- Activate SMCs and village panchayats to monitor the education status of children from seasonal migrant families with a special focus on girls.
- Explore the possibility of inter-state cooperation and coordination for providing education in the migrant children's mother tongue.



1. *Balrakshaks* (protector of children) are teachers who have undergone training on child protection for sensitization on problems and challenges faced by different groups of vulnerable children. Every government school has at least one balrakshak.

Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Department

Key Findings

The diet of the seasonal migrants is monotonous and lacks diversity. Food is cooked only once a day and is dependent on the groceries that they carry with them from their source villages.

When we go to the destination, we take 2 kattha (sacks) wheat, 1 kattha bajra, 1 kattha jowar- we take 3-4 katthas of grain per jodi/ koyta (pair). When our food grains and masalas are used up, we buy our needs from nearby shops. We take along with us some money [left] from the advance, about Rs. 5,000-10,000, with which we buy vegetables and food grain.

- Migrant (Male), 35 years

Parents reported facing difficulties in providing sufficient grains and groceries to their children who stayed back in source villages. This is because migrant families are split in two: the part (the parents) that leaves the source village and the other (the children) that stays back. **Some children who stay back are unable to avail of ration through their grandparents' ration card since their names were not on this card.** Other families leave ration cards at home so that children could avail of ration through the PDS shops in their absence. Migrants added that getting rations from the PDS shops at the destination was extremely difficult.

Recommendations

- Ensure intra-state portability of Public Distribution Services (PDS) benefits to the destination worksites on the lines of the 'One Nation One Ration Card' (ONORC) scheme, prioritizing the needs of women and children.
- Ensure PDS benefits for children and senior citizens who stay back in source villages when other adult members of the family migrate seasonally.



Labour Department and Sugar Commission

Key Findings

Lack of employment opportunities in the source village emerged as one of the primary drivers of seasonal migration. Village stakeholders added that MNREGA was not a viable option due to the low number of days of work, delays in payment and low payment rates.

Seasonal Migrants earn about Rupees 500 – 600 as a daily wage when they harvest sugarcane. MNREGA and other government projects only pay Rupees 200–300. Why will they work in MGNREGA?

-Gramsevak (male), 35 years

People prefer to migrate for sugarcane harvesting than working in MGNREGA schemes in the village. There is no continuity in the work. The work is only for 10 to 15 days after which, there is a long gap.

-Sarpanch (male), 52 years

Several stakeholders and children reported that both girls and boys aged 10 to 15 years migrate with their parents to help them at the destination. They collect the leaves of the sugarcane, tie the cut sugarcane into bundles and help load these on tractors.

Sugarcane harvesters are paid wages on the basis of the tons of sugarcane harvested and not on hours worked. Such wage calculation puts an additional burden and pressure on the family to maximise their earnings to clear their debt or advance received, forcing them involve their children in work to meet the daily targets. However, as the children are neither employed nor paid, they neither come under the purview of the labour department or the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation Act), 1986. Even children at source villages sometimes took on paid work to supplement the family income.



Recommendations

- Review and modify employment generation schemes like MGNREGA (increase daily rate, number of days of work etc) to make it a viable option of livelihood for seasonal migrant families.
- Create and roll out training programmes and financial support schemes for local social enterprises for women and youth to provide alternative employment opportunities.
- Develop packages that provide alternative employment opportunities for seasonal migrant families in source villages.
- Create awareness regarding E-shram portal so that seasonal migrants can register and benefit from it.
- Converge with allied departments such as Sugar Commission and Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board to set up mechanisms for provision of essential entitlements and basic amenities (shelter, water, hygiene facilities etc) to seasonal migrants and their families at the destination sites and ensuring accountability of employer for this. Engagement with employers and contractors is essential to promote registration of seasonal migrant workers so that they can avail of the services and entitlements due to them.

Conclusion

The dissemination of the study report included presentations on the findings and recommendations followed by a policy dialogue on addressing safety and protection of families, particularly children and women affected by seasonal migration and their access to services.

The deliberations resulted in some important directions and decisions, as below:

1. Development of a State Policy for Migrant Workers led by Department of Labour with the Departments of Women and Child Development, Education, Public Health, Rural Development, Tribal Development, Sugar Commission, other relevant departments; academic institutions like IIPS and UNICEF.
2. Creation of an Apex Committee at the State level, chaired by Chief Secretary for convergence to address the unique vulnerabilities arising out of distress migration and access to services for migrant families on the move, particularly women and children. The Apex Committee would include senior bureaucrats from the Departments and organisations mentioned above in point 1.
3. Creation of an interdepartmental Task Force in all districts with high in-coming and out-going migration. The proposal on the composition and roles of the District Task Force put forth by Principal Secretary, Women and Child

Development were reviewed and agreed upon. This would promote decentralized decision making and interdepartmental convergence both of which are essential for portable services.

4. Data Sharing, upscaling Maha MTS 2.0 for enumeration and reach of service. It was proposed that information about seasonal migrant families from the Maha MTS 2.0 application be shared with Departments of Labour, Public Health, Education, Tribal Development and Rural Development to enable departments plan delivery of services based on actual numbers, locations. Moreover, data is also collected by the Department of Education and the Sugar Commission. Sharing of data collected by the different departments can provide comprehensive, full proof information on migration and corridors of migration thus supporting better service delivery. Schemes and programmes, financial allocations of different department including Department of School Education & Sports, Sugar Commission can be effectively coordinated when information of enumerated migrant families is available.

There is also an urgent need for public private partnerships given the economics of scale and the efficiency of delivery of services. Specific role of sugar cooperatives, construction boards and other similar associations in ensuring a certain level of services and quality needs to be defined.

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Dissemination of the Study “Protection of Children Affected by Seasonal Migration: A Study in Jalna District, Maharashtra”

The findings of the study conducted by IIPS titled "**Protection of Children Affected by Seasonal Migration: A Study in Jalna District, Maharashtra**" was disseminated and the study report was released on 22nd November 2022, by the Chief Secretary, Maharashtra at Mantralaya, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, India. Following the release of the report, the findings of the study were presented and followed by a panel discussion of Principle Secretaries and other government officials of the concerned departments. Two major decisions were taken: (i) formation of an Apex committee to look at migration issues in Maharashtra and (ii) setting up a task force at state and district levels to develop a policy for migrants.

The study was a collaboration between the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, Government of Maharashtra, and UNICEF, Mumbai. The project aimed to study the issues, vulnerabilities, needs, and challenges related to education, health, nutrition, and protection of children affected by seasonal migration and to recommends sustainable solutions for strengthening policies and programmes for seasonal migrant families. The study adopted a qualitative approach and the study is unique as it places the voices and perceptions of children affected by seasonal migration at its core. These children face multi-dimensional issues, whether they stay-back or migrate with their parents, and are at increased risk of school dropout, malnutrition, child labour, child marriage, abuse, violence, and neglect. The seasonal migration of parents aggravates the already existing vulnerabilities of their children, raising concerns for their safety and protection of children especially for the girls.

The dissemination program, was attended by government officials including Mr. Manu Kumar Srivastava, Chief Secretary, Ms. Sujata Saunik, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary, General Administration, Ms. I. A. Kundan, Principal Secretary, Women and Child Development, Ms. Vinita Vaid Singal, (IAS) Principal Secretary, Labour, Mr. Nand Kumar, Secretary of School Education and Sports, Mr. Shekher Gaikwad, Sugar Commissioner, Divisional Commissioner, Aurangabad, District Collector, Jalna, CEO of Chandrapur District; and other government officials attended the programme. Team of International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai included Prof. K. S James, (Director), Prof. R. B. Bhagat (Former professor and HoD), Prof. K. C. Das (professor and HOD), Prof. Archana K. Roy (professor), and IIPS research team. Team of UNICEF India Included Ms. Rajeshwari Chandrasekar (Chief, MFO).

Ms. Hyun Hee Ban, (Chief, SPME), and Ms. Vandana Kandhari (Child Protection Specialist), Ms. Alpa Vora (Child Protection Specialist), and Dr. Yamini Suvarana (UNICEF Consultant).

Some pictures of the dissemination programs are given below



Figure 1 : Official Launch of the Book by the Chief Secretary Mr. Manu Kumar Srivastava, Ms. Sujata Saunik, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary, General Administration Department, Principal Secretary, Women and Child Development, Secretary, School Education and Sports, Prof James, Director and Sr Professor, IIPS, Ms. Rajeshwari Chandrasekar, Chief, UNICEF MFO, Prof R.B Bhagat, Former HoD, Dept of Migration and Urban Studies, IIPS.



Figure 2 : Panel Discussion on the recommendations of the study, policy directions



Figure 3 : Panel Discussion with the WCD, Labour , Education Department



Figure 4 IIPS and UNICEF Team