

# Context, Needs, Aspirations, Challenges and Strengths of Migrant Workers

## **BASELINE REPORT**

06 March 2018



Gurugram

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Agrasar

## **1.) BACKGROUND**

Agrasar has been running migration support program for establishing individual as well as collective agency among migrant workers to access basic rights and entitlements as citizens in general and workers in particular. In the past decade of working with migrant workers and their families we have come to understand that “entitlements” like health insurance, medical facilities, skilling, and others which are supposed to “top up” the fundamental rights for an Indian citizen, often become equally vital to live and thrive as human beings. For instance, in many regions of the country, fully functional Aanganwadis are essential for raising physically and mentally healthy children. Therefore, we focussed equally on understanding the rights and entitlements of migrant workers without distinguishing between the two.

We have looked at access to rights and entitlements as people being citizens of the country and as workers in formal or informal jobs. Our main focus has been to understand the effect of being “a migrant worker” on social security and what can be done to negate that. It must be negated as the effect is always negative even when an Indian Citizen has the right to move to any state without hampering her/his fundamental rights.

Every citizen of India can open a Zero Balance account, started by the government to encourage savings and financial inclusion. Similarly, the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) - a life insurance policy, the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) – accidental insurance and the Pradhan Mantri Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (PMSSY) – directed towards saving money for the girl child, are all schemes that anyone in the country can benefit from. There are rights like “Minimum Wages” that are directed specifically to those who are working. In the informal sector, where contracts are non-existent or verbally agreed upon and power hierarchies make it difficult for workers to demand fair wages or benefits, these rights are essential to their life and livelihood.

The organisation has worked in the region in recent past and had a fair understanding of the problems faced by interstate migrant workers before

initiating the project. However, a baseline study was conducted within first few months of running the program, to ascertain the following:

- 1.) a.) Extent of awareness regarding rights and entitlement available to them as citizens of the country and workers in formal as well as informal economy. And, b.) Access to the rights and entitlements.
- 2.) Connect with agencies they can rely upon for support.
- 3.) Intrinsic and collective capability to stand for their rights and access entitlements.

## 2.) METHODOLOGY



The research started with visits in the community and general dialogue with varied stakeholders including the community members. The conversations that team members had when they conducted field visits led to some interesting insights about how “at home” migrants feel in Haryana. After brainstorming, we

came up with the survey form (that was conducted with **200** people) and also a questionnaire (conducted with **20** people) and Focussed Group Discussions (**50** people) to delve deeper into the themes of perceived identity, conflict and belongingness.

**500** Enquiry forms filled in first 03 months of program implementation were also used to ascertain some information.

**40** Companies were Interviewed regarding registrations under ESI and PF.

Field Observations were relied upon to understand complex issues like power imbalances.

The team took care of the language they used when conversing, avoiding words like home, locals, migrants, insiders, outsiders etc. so as not to bias the way they identify and refer to themselves.

### **3.) FINDINGS**

**3.1.) Workers and their families have nearly zero awareness, let alone connection with any Government Scheme. LIC and recently the eShram card Stands out though.**

**94%** of interstate migrant workers are found to be not linked to any government scheme. A few had LIC and that is the only government facility they were aware of. How could they be? Most popular way in which government spread awareness regarding schemes is through full page advertisement of their "achievements" which people are either unable\* to read or have no time or inclination towards.

**56%** women and **51%** men have studied till class 8 (One third of them illiterate). (\*As per ASER 2018 report about 50% students from class 5 and 25% students from class 8 cannot read a simple text which has a difficulty of class 2 level.) Other means of propagating information about the schemes to the last mile are clearly absent. Recently, there has been a craze among people to get the eShram Card mainly because the state government of Uttar Pradesh has created a buzz around it with the assembly elections approaching. (As per the research, nearly half of the migrant workers are from Uttar Pradesh). This also shows that

spreading of awareness regarding the schemes is possible and useful to motivate people to approach the agencies, if those exist.

### **3.2.) (Correct) Identity Documents themselves are unavailable.**

Proper identity documentation is a must for every citizen in India. These Ids are even more essential when they migrate to a new state, given correct documentation is essential for availing any government scheme, medical facilities, subsidised ration and other entitlements. Often, when shifting from one state to another, these Ids are lost, left behind or lack of awareness means the community members never got them made in the first place. In the course of our study we found that nearly **100%** of those surveyed have the Aadhaar card and **80%** have PAN Card but out of those about **30%** are found to be not correct, updated or linked to their mobile numbers. However, only **35%** have a Family Id or Parivaar Pehchaan Patra without which it is becoming increasingly difficult for residents of Haryana to avail any state government schemes, get their children admitted to schools or complete the paperwork necessary to start a new job.

Therefore, it is imperative that correction of ID documentation and making of family ID is must to move further towards deeper level goals of the project.

### **3.3.) Companies are highly resistant to register under ESI and PF. They find bypassing the compliances more viable than the compliances themselves.**

Only 11% of those employed work in the formal sector i.e., a share of their salary is deducted for PF/ESI. However, for the majority of the community members the question does not arise since they are homemakers/self-employed.

About 40 companies were approached and **100%** of them expressed vehement opposition to "another headache" (in their words). Upon deeper enquiry it was found that the major reason companies were unwilling to register under ESI and PF is remuneration less than minimum wages. Therefore, working on registration of ESI and PF would need exponentially higher efforts and a consistent dialogue with the companies with considerable patience.

Also, only about one third of those surveyed have some knowledge of PF/ESI and its benefits. And that too is not sufficient to avail timely benefits.

**3.4.) "What is a conflict? What is injustice?" needs a comprehensive and serious dialogue. The question of accessing any agency is secondary at this stage.**

10% of the respondents said they had faced conflicts at the workplace, all to do with non-payment of the dues owed to them by the contractor/company owner. And in all but one case they tried to resolve the issues themselves, without seeking the help of the police or a lawyer.

However, more conversations with people lead to the understanding that the benchmark of satisfaction is quite low. "A few extra hours" in a day to complete the job is considered O.K.. Not receiving proper safety equipment from the employer is considered O.K.. Lack of basic facilities like hygienic washroom is considered O.K..

There is a clear power imbalance in Gurugram where locals are the landlords, contractors, and shop owners on whom migrants are dependent in almost every sphere of their life. There is minimum social engagement i.e. participation in each other's functions and celebrations. The

threat of eviction, late rent payments and coerced work all loom large over any interactions. Munna, a 36-year-old street vendor, recounted to us how a localite (Haryanvi) man takes money from them in the mandi and forces all the street vendors to buy plastic bags from him only. They tried to file complaints against him in the police station but to no avail.

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*"वह ज़बरदस्ती हमें प्लास्टिक बैग बेचता है और मंडी में पैसे भी लेता है। उसकी पुलिस में भी पहचान है तोह कोई उस से कुछ नहीं कहता। सब उससे डरते हैं और कोई उसके अगेंस्ट नहीं जाता।"-  
Munna*

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We also tried to understand how migrant workers resolve conflicts or if they are even able to raise their voice when issues arise at the workplace, with landlords or in social settings. While 60% of the people said they have not faced any major

conflicts at their workplace or in the neighbourhood, the others reflected on how difficult it is to resolve such issues when they do crop up. Some mentioned they prefer not to argue and just take the scolding meted out by the contractors or bosses since they have no other option. Complaints to the respective Ward Member/police officials do not lead anywhere.

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“ग्रुप बना तो लेते हैं पर ठेकेदार फिर भी पैसे नहीं देता। ग्रुप के लोग मुझसे पैसे मांगते हैं। इसलिए मैंने ग्रुप बनाना छोड़ दिया। ठेकेदार को पता है के उसके अलावा कहीं काम नहीं मिलेगा इसलिये वो हमारे साथ ऐसा करता है और हमें भी पैसे की जरूरत नहीं होती है तो हम उसे ज्यादा नहीं बोलते ।” – Manju Devi

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Manju Devi, who is involved in thread cutting in the garment sector mentioned how her contractor would never pay her the entire amount for the work she did. Discussing the issue with him did not yield any results so she tried to form a group of similar women. Even if they make a group, the contractor still does not give the money. And group members start asking her to pay. That's why she has stopped

making groups. This complete dependence on contractors for everything from work to support during health crises is also how the latter exploit the doubly marginalised people.

In another case, several employees of a large automobile manufacturing, working under a contractor, told the researchers that contractor was asking them for **Rs. 2,000** to get corrections done in their PF documents. When we went to the PF office to check the details of one such employee, we saw the information in his PF application and in his original documents was completely different. Within a week of our visit, a member of the PF office reached the factory for a follow up but nothing came of it. On conversing with the contractor, he kept making excuses but then agreed to make the necessary corrections without taking any money and has now started the process for the same.

### **3.5.) Collective bargaining is zero. Connect with the city even after years of residing is weak and that has significant consequences on this front.**

Through our baseline study we tried to gauge how people feel about their adopted state and how comfortable they are interacting with people that are locals or migrants from other states - suggesting emotions of belongingness which will determine whether they will be able to band together in the future.

When asked about where they consider home, the majority of people refer to the state/village they migrated from as home and not Gurugram. People from Bihar, UP, MP, Odisha and other states use the words 'ghar' 'gaon' or specifics like Bijnor, Pitthorgarh and Mathura to refer to their home and see Gurgaon as only a temporary haven and not their permanent home.

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“18 साल हो गए हमें यहाँ फिर भी मकान मालिक हमें अपना नहीं मानता, कभी कोई बीमार हो जाए तो मदद नहीं करता। ऐसी जगह रह के क्या मतलब जब कोई अपना ना माने। अपना घर तो अपना ही होता है।” – Manju from Bijnor

English Translation:

(We have lived here 18 years and yet the landlord doesn't consider us his own, if someone falls sick he never helps. What is the point of staying somewhere no one considers you their own. Home is home.)

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Only **20%** of the people we interviewed said they consider Gurgaon their home and have no plans of moving back to their state of origin. Feelings about home do not change depending on the length of their stay in the city.

Among our interviewees is Rizwana who moved here a year ago when her husband lost his job during the first lockdown as well as Ramesh who came to the city as a child and has now spent 27 years here. Regardless of the number of years they have lived in the city, the desire to go back to their native place seems to be equally strong for individuals on both extremes of the range.

Availability of better opportunities and facilities, whether fiscal, educational or medical is the main reason people continue to live here. They prefer interacting with people from their home states or other migrants and not the local Haryanvis.

The consensus among our interviewees was they are more comfortable around and prefer interacting with people that belong to their home states as opposed to those who call Haryana home.

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“अपने घर की तो बात ही अलग होती है।”

- Countless Voices

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Nothing compares to our home was a common refrain even among those who admitted going to parks, temples and other festive gatherings in Gurugram. It is mostly migrants from different states who get together at these socio-religious events, and not a mix of locals and migrants.

Festivals end up being nostalgic for many as here they have to celebrate them alone, or with neighbours while back home the whole family would be together. High costs, in terms of money and time, prevent them from travelling home for the same. About 20% of people said they do not find any difference when visiting temples/parks/social gatherings here versus back home. When asked who they turn to in times of difficulty, again the overwhelming majority stated it was relatives and neighbours - all fellow migrants - who come forward. In the words of Nirmala Pandey from Pitthorgarh, Uttarakhand, “परेशानी में तो घर के लोग ही काम आते हैं।” (In times of distress, we can only rely on our fellow migrants, living away from their homes just like us.)

Another aspect we were interested to understand from the perspective of collectivisation was the experiences of the women in these migrant communities, and how involved they are in making decisions when living in nuclear families in their adopted states. **23%** of surveyed women are illiterate, **31%** have studied upto class 8 and 46% have completed secondary education and above. **38%** of the

women are employed whether in factory or home-based work in various industries.

There seems to be a division of responsibilities and decision-making in migrant families. While the male members in most homes are responsible for running the household's expenses as they earn more, **70%** of the women interviewed said they have a say in taking decisions in the family.

Anita, from Siwan, Bihar mentioned, "वह तो पैसे देते हैं, ज़िम्मेदारी तो मैं ही निभाती हूँ।"

(He gives the money, but the responsibility is mine.)

However, when the same question was posed to the men though, only **33%** said they take family decisions together with their wives - reflecting a disjunct between what the two genders consider important decisions or perhaps overestimating the weightage accorded to their respective opinions.

### **3.6.) Aspirations are there but hopelessness is overwhelming.**

The interviews as well as discussions with people in groups revealed that people surely aspire to benefit out of government schemes. Even though a majority of them are saving in one form or the other, they are unsure about interest they are making.

They are also doubtful whether they will ever get their money and hence not able to save more. Reliability of government mechanisms is certainly there. Need to get a Jan Dhan Account and a "reliable" health insurance clearly came up during our discussions.

Upon being informed about ONORC, people expressed high keenness to get ration in Gurugram. "When most of our family members are here, what use do we have for a ration card in village. Moreover, in our absence some random people withdraw the ration of our part without us being even knowing about it." - says Rakhi.

They have tried to access the schemes but unable to do so because only avenue they have are Common Service Centres (CSCs) which normally misinform them

and are not very efficient. They charge high and cover only the Identity Documentation, booking for railway tickets and other such work. More often than not they make errors in the Identity cards. Such experience with the CSCs and absence of any other support lead them to a position where they have stopped hoping to draw any benefits in the city. Government entitlements work better for them in villages rather than the destination city. And that is not surprising to us anymore.

**3.7.) Possibility of building on strengths needs more investigation and consistent & long-term attempts.**



We met 3 women doing home-based garment work, who had not been paid in 5 months by their “thekeedar” (contractor). They got together and tried talking to him to release their money to no avail; even told him that they had given his contact details in their e-shram card applications and submitted it to the Labour office to scare him into the paying. But when that did not work either, they asked us to talk to him. After stalling and saying that this was not a salaried job and the employees could not expect their money on the first of every month, and that

some delay in payment is inevitable, he finally agreed and within a week did release their pending wages for all the previous months.

There have been a few more such observations through the baseline study. As shared in the report above people from different states come together, atleast during the festivals. We could also see some festival societies.

Such associations and natural aptitude of people to connect with each other can be leveraged to achieve objectives of the project.

#### **4.) FURTHER ENQUIRY**

Understanding the context, needs, aspirations, challenges, and strengths of Migrant Workers should be a continuous exercise. The best way to understand that is by working with people on varied issues, keep evolving and adapting the program as per new knowledge. This baseline study has helped us to understand varied aspects of their lives and working. However, there are certain questions that need further enquiry over next few months:

4.1. How much supportive would the government and employers be towards the collective/ union?

4.2. What could be the leverage(s) for functioning of CSCs to function as per the mandates they were set up for?

4.3. Are there more organisations working on similar issues in and around Gurugram? What is the scope of collaborative effort?

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