

## CHAPTER 140

### The Evolving Landscape of Construction Migrant Labor: Identifying and Overcoming Key Industry Challenges

*Vaishnavi Shrikant Shinde<sup>1</sup>, Sharad Singh Malik<sup>2</sup>,  
Swapnajeet Nayak<sup>2</sup> and Naman Singh Bhadouria<sup>2</sup>*

---

#### ABSTRACT

In India's burgeoning construction industry, migrant laborers are essential yet frequently undergo difficult living and working environments. Although many arrive with the expectation of a better future, in reality, they are confronted with low pay, high-risk working conditions, miserable housing, and questionable legal status. Along with tackling financial difficulties, they face job insecurity, workplace harassment, and restricted access to social security and healthcare, which makes day-to-day living difficult. In this study, a dual research approach—doctrinal and non-doctrinal—is adopted to fully understand their struggles. Analyzing current labor regulations and collecting direct testimonies through survey forms, interviews, and in-person observations of around fifty construction workers. The outcomes reveal that innumerable workers encounter unsafe working conditions and unstable earnings, which badly affect their overall well-being. A lack of proper safety training increases workplace hazards, while discrimination against female workers remains a notable issue to date. This study suggests skill-enhancing programs, stern laws, and unbiased policies to acknowledge the contribution of migrant workers, which will serve as solutions to these challenges. The study highlights the importance of establishing a more sympathetic yet equitable workplace; it also emphasizes the importance of public support programs to create an unbiased work environment. The country is significantly growing from the contributions of migrant laborers, yet their hardships go unnoticed. To protect their dignity and livelihoods, this research calls for comprehensive policy reforms, stressing the need for immediate legal changes to improve their working conditions and ensure a better future.

**Keywords:** Interstate migration; Construction industry; Migrant worker challenges; Labor laws; Socio-economic impact.

---

#### 1.0 Introduction

##### 1.1 Background

Construction in India relies significantly on manual labour since it is less expensive, and other reasons include the fact that construction work in the country relies less on automation.

---

<sup>1</sup>*Corresponding author; School of Construction, NICMAR University, Pune, Maharashtra, India  
(E-mail: P2370486@student.nicmar.ac.in)*

<sup>2</sup>*School of Construction, NICMAR University, Pune, Maharashtra, India*

The labor force accounts for 60-80% of the overall construction workforce in India, and is hence regarded as the backbone of the sector. Maharashtra have long been a place of aspiration looked up to by migrant labours seeking better prospects. Cities such as Mumbai and Pune, with their flourishing construction sector, have attracted skilled and unskilled workers from all over the country. This migration has massively influenced the state's politics, economy and demographics as the years inched on. The workers in hope for stable jobs, quality education and better living conditions migrate across states right from Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Karnataka each with a migration story seeking for better living conditions. In addition to the specific obstacles that migrants across state lines encounter in their hour of need, these individuals are also subject to a number of challenges and problems that prevent them from integrating and thriving. Despite their significant contributions to the business, they are denied all basic rights, are frequently exploited by contractors, their safety is jeopardized, they are denied social security and benefits, and are discriminated against based on gender, among other issues. This eventually takes its toll on their physical and emotional health. In addition to the specific obstacles that migrants across state lines encounter in their hour of need, these individuals are also subject to a number of challenges and problems that prevent them from integrating and thriving.

The global organisations like for instance the ILO which aims to create laws that maximize the benefits of labour migration for everyone involved. However, the COVID-19 lockdown highlighted the harsh realities migrant workers face. With no jobs and no financial support, many were forced to rely entirely on their contractors' goodwill just to survive. They also struggled with limited access to social benefits, long periods of separation from their families, and constant anxiety about their loved ones' well-being back home. These issues have taken a toll on their mental and physical health but remain largely overlooked in policy discussions (Blan 2020), "Public Private Partnership in India Database, Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India, (2019)", (*mahades.maharashtra.gov.in*). Even though there are policies in place to help workers in India, they are often unaware of their rights and fail to contact departments such as Labour and Employment, which are established to understand their problems and provide them with the best possible solutions. In this research study, we sought to comprehend the gap that keeps expanding between the labours and their rights and propose solutions to uplift the labor sector in the country.

## 1.2 Objectives

This study will have following broad objectives:

- To identify issues and challenges related to inter-state migrant labours in Maharashtra, India: Explore the socio-economic factors driving migration and examine the difficulties workers face.
- To understand daily struggles and working conditions of migrant workers.

- To analyze the relation between migrant workers, contractors, and employers, highlighting issues of exploitation and unfair practices.
- To make recommendations with practical solutions for change to help policymakers and employers better support and protect migrant workers.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

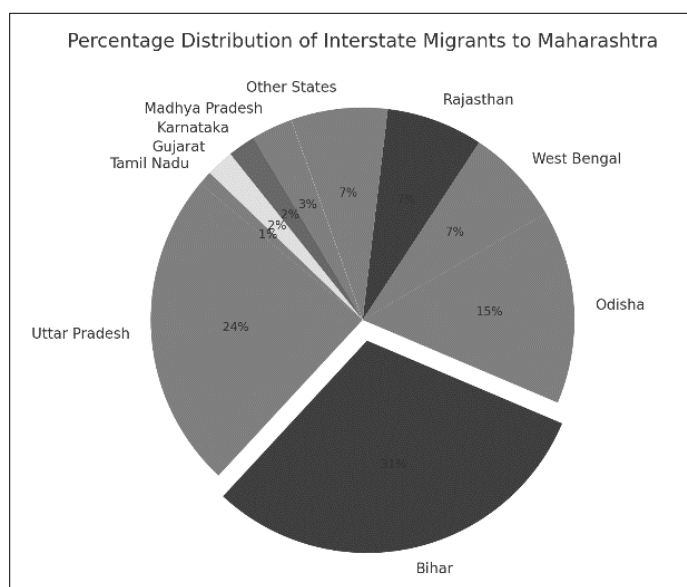
Worldwide construction Industry functions as biggest employer of inter-state migrant workers particularly in India where unskilled and semiskilled workers depend on this industry to find jobs. Studies continuously demonstrate that migrant workers in these conditions experience dangerous working conditions which include substandard pay along with unstable job positions and social isolation and restricted legal protection (Mukherji 2020). Male dominance persists within the industry while research indicates that inclusivity of women would diversify employees and enhance productivity. Research by Husam (2015) demonstrates that inclusive workplaces among construction companies create more efficient operations yet women continue to face barriers because of gender discrimination.

Safety challenges represent a significant problem that threatens migrant workers during their construction work. Based on their systematic review Peiró (2021) determined that migrant workers face elevated workplace risks because they receive insufficient safety training while working in dangerous job environments. Such acute deficiencies in existing safety instruction for unskilled workforce members produce extensive workplace injuries. Choi and Lee (2021) establish that unsafe workplace conditions continue mainly because of insufficient compliance with safety regulations. The combination of cognitive and behavioral safety training leads to substantial construction site accident prevention but migrant workers fail to access these programs because employers lack financial responsibility and training costs prove expensive. These work-related conditions inflict substantial mental strain on affected workers. Work pressure together with financial stress and hazardous working environments drive up the levels of anxiety and depression among construction workers according to the research by Rouhanizadeh & Kermanshachi (2020). Migrant workers go through significant life experiences which are strongly affected by their social circumstances alongside their safety and economic challenges. Women migrants in India struggle with dual discrimination because of the combination of gender bias and general workplace limitations coupled with insufficient maternity protection as Sengupta (2021) demonstrates. According to Aggrawal (2021) the reforms of labour code through streamlining regulations did not satisfy the unique requirements of informal workers especially in construction jobs. Saini (2009) points out that several labour laws exist but poor enforcement capabilities allow construction workers to face ongoing exploitation. The advance of stronger labour rights along with legal protections for workers has progressed at a slow pace whereas experts suggest adopting a comprehensive system to solve the labour laws' systematic inequalities.

### 3.0 Research Methodology

This study is based on primary data obtained from several work-sites, largely in Pune and Maharashtra, since the state has roughly 31% from Bihar, 24% from Uttar Pradesh, and the balance of the labor force from other north-eastern states, according to Census India 2011 statistics. As part of a study on migrant labourers working in the construction industry, an interview was conducted with a group of workers at a construction site. The primary objective was to understand their working conditions, wages, safety measures, and awareness of legal rights. The interview was carried out under the supervision of their contractor, which may have influenced the responses of the workers, as they might have felt apprehensive about speaking freely.

**Figure 1: According to the 2011 Census Data, Maharashtra Attracted Approximately 2.44 million Net Migrants from Other states, Making it one of the Top Destinations for Interstate Migrants in India**



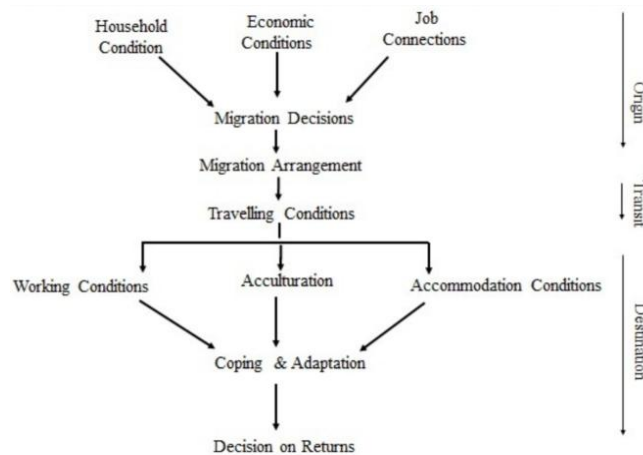
Source: [ipc2021.popconf.org](http://ipc2021.popconf.org), [statista.com](http://statista.com)

### 3.1 Data collection

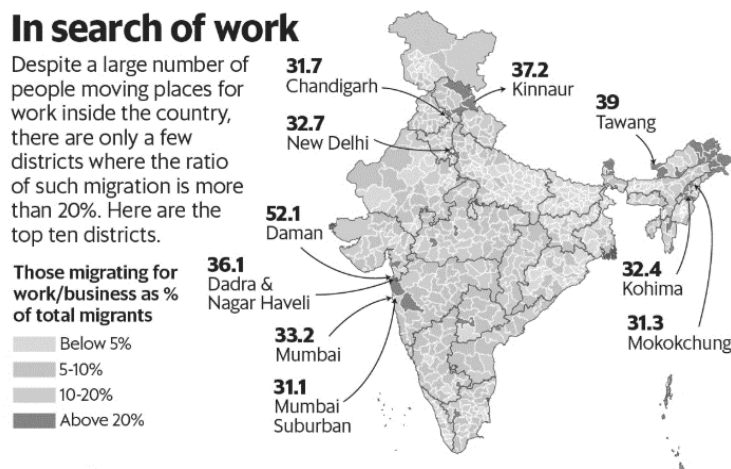
We obtained data from approximately fifty skilled and unskilled workers. First and foremost, individuals interviewed came from all districts in numerous states, illustrating the range of migrant laborers' experiences in the construction industry. The majority of them spent varying lengths of time on the construction site, ranging from a few months to several years.

Their principal responsibilities included manual labor such as bricklaying and scaffolding, among others. When asked about workplace issues, employees were cautious to provide specific responses, most likely due to the presence of the contractor. However, some have complained that the positions are too physically demanding, and there are insufficient sanitation and drinking water facilities. The workers' general worries were never detailed, and other issues, such as mistreatment and wage problems, did not appear to disturb them enough to warrant raising them.

**Figure 2: Flow Chart of Migration Process by Bernard Attha & Angan Sengupta (2024)**



**Figure 3: Percentage of Migrants in States with Proportion more than 20% in India**



Source: [dhrishtiiias.com](http://dhrishtiiias.com)

- Key Source States: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh.
- Key Destination States: Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab and Karnataka.
- Internal Migrants in India constitute a large population of 309 million internal migrants or 30 percent of the population (Census of India 2001).

#### **4.0 Analysis and Discussion**

The interview revealed several concerning aspects of the lives of migrant construction labourers, including low awareness of legal rights and inadequate social security provisions. The workers' lack of information about their rights, along with their hesitation to speak openly in front of the contractor, emphasizes the need for increased awareness and empowerment of interstate-migrant labourers in construction sector. It will not only better be working conditions, but also assurance that workers are well-informed of their legal rights and have the means to express themselves without fear of reprisal.

Considering the data from the research conducted by various authors the major issues and challenges faced by the migrants labours in construction industry are related to low wages and discrimination this is one of the most important challenges in the Indian construction sector is the pitiful pay obtained by laborers, personnel, and workers. Many of them are struggling to make ends meet, living hand to mouth despite their best efforts. The lack of solid job contracts adds to their problems, leaving them in a constant state of worry about their future. Urgent reforms are required to secure equitable compensation and job security for these dedicated workers.

The lack of social security provisions exacerbates the difficulties encountered by workers, staff, and employees. Many of them do not qualify for benefits like health insurance, retirement programs, or provident funds. This lack of support makes them financially vulnerable during times of crisis, hence it is critical that industry and government work together to implement comprehensive welfare programs for these workers.

Exploitation and discrimination are unfortunately frequent in the construction sector. Contractual workers are frequently exposed to unfair treatment, with limited access to essential services and amenities. Furthermore, the industry's labor is frequently separated by class, caste, and gender, exacerbating the marginalization of particular populations.

Eliminating discriminatory practices and ensuring equitable treatment for all should be the main goal. The Indian construction industry is primarily based on unskilled and semi-skilled workers. This maintains a cycle of low earnings and limited career opportunities for workers. Encouraging skill development and training programs can help laborers, workers, and employees improve their talents, potentially leading to better career opportunities and higher earning potential.

The major categories can be classified as mention in the table as shown below:

**Table 1: Factors Influencing Migration of Workmens**  
**drishtias.com Humam Migration in India**

<b>Push-Factors State of Origin</b>	<b>Migrants</b>	<b>Pull-Factors State of Destination</b>
Population growth, young age structure, Inadequate educational institution, medical care and social security	Demographic factors and social infrastructure	Stable population, population decline' demographic ageing, Welfare state benefits, educational institutions, medical, scoail security.
Unemployment , low wages, poverty, low consumption and living standard	Economic Factors	Labour demand, high wages, welfare, high consumption and living standards.
Dictatorships, shadow democracy, bad governance, political upheaval, Confilcts	Political Factors	Democracy, rule of law, pluralism, political stability, peace, security, protection of human and civil rights.
Ecologic disaster, desertification, lack of natural, resources, water shortage, soil errosin, lack of environmental policy	Ecological Factors	Better environment, protection of natural resources and environmental protection.
Decesions of the family clan, Information flows	Migrant flows and migrant stocks	Diaspora, ethenic community, information flow, media

The surveys were conducted in cities like Pune, Mumbai, Nagpur, and Chandrapur of Maharashtra state to study the socio-economic conditions of interstate-migrant labours, especially in the state of Maharashtra, who have relocated from states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Rajasthan. The interviews were conducted via forms, questionnaires, and video interviews to understand the living conditions of the labours, to examine if they have been denied basic facilities or accommodation. During the interviews, the workers provided structured responses that were insufficiently persuasive. One important likely explanation was the presence of a sub-contractor during the interviews, and it appeared that they were under pressure to provide answers.

One case from the Chandrapur area of Maharashtra (2014) had young children working on a construction site who had allegedly developed the habit of sniffing turpentine. This was merely a breach of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act. This scenario was brought to light by the Office of Labour Welfare Chandrapur Division. The children were rescued, taken to rehabilitation centres, and returned to normalcy. Another case was regarding an incidence from a well-known construction company in Mumbai, Maharashtra of death of a worker due to falling from height in a metro project and justice was denied for nearly two years due to the ongoing COVID situation, the Sion branch of Labour Welfare Association barged in and made sure the family was compensated as per the rule set by the government, and justice was delivered. Hearing sessions are established in labour offices at the district level, where the Assistant Labour Commissioner/Labour Welfare Commissioner acts as a judge, hearing both parties' arguments and passing judgment to expedite and facilitate the resolution process.



#### **4.1 Key issues**

- The major issue was identified that there was no data available for the migrant workers after 2011 considering all the research studies.
- The consequence of which being no tracks available in number of people those who have left their homes to find better opportunities
- Another issue recognized was that labourers do not know about their rights. While no respondent interviewed said that he has ever faced legal complaints, the unconscious nature of unawareness is critical.
- The better workers are informed, the quicker they get to identify and deal with potential violations such as unfair wage practice, unsafe working conditions, and discrimination.
- The systems fails altogether when it comes to take responsibility of these workmen who are the backbone of the construction industry yet are treated like cattle stocks

#### **5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

##### **5.1 Conclusion**

A holistic approach through legal education, structural changes in the process of communication, and cultural changes in the workplace would address these gaps. With these recommended strategies in place, stakeholders can develop a more informed, empowered, and engaged workforce that can help make the construction industry safer and more equitable. For the construction sector to thrive, there are large numbers of interstate migrant laborers that Maharashtra establishes to be a key destination for. Yet, like any other population, these workers encounter very painful aspects such as insecurity of their job, poor living conditions and lack of social security. The aim of the introduction is to pinpoint the gap of policies that do not deal with their vulnerabilities and urgent need for better mechanisms of integration. The analysis shows that migrant labourers in Maharashtra find their work difficult conditions and do not even know their rights. A large number are underpaid, have no means of social security and work long hours without the adequate measures in place. Their quality of life should be improved through tougher government policies and tougher employer responsibility.

Construction labourers are indispensable in the constantly changing construction sector, and thus their challenges should be understood and addressed to create better working conditions and increase productivity. Recent interviews with construction labourers have opened a window of understanding their lives, especially relating to legal rights awareness and possibly communication problems at the supervisory level. Lack of awareness reduces the chances for taking recourse to legal action. Dependent on Informal Networks: Labours seek information from peers, which creates the circulation of myths. Another important point that was noted here is that employees may not raise their concerns without hesitation because the supervisors are watching them all the time. Thus, the attendance of supervisors at the interview time may have curbed the effective communication as they might fear getting sacked, fewer working hours, or bad treatment.



## 5.2 Recommendations

Several initiatives can be used to help migrant laborers overcome the challenges they encounter. Strengthening legal literacy is critical, and it can be accomplished through regular workshops and training programs led by legal specialists to educate workers about their rights. Additionally, issuing concise, bilingual brochures outlining the most essential legal provisions might help raise awareness. Collaborating with worker unions to assist awareness campaigns is also important for reaching a larger audience. Another critical step is to promote open communication by developing anonymous feedback channels like as suggestion boxes or digital platforms where employees can raise problems without fear of being identified. Independent interview sessions without supervisors present can promote open communication, whilst supervisor training programs can assist them in creating a more supportive and non-threatening work atmosphere.

## References

Bhattacharya, D. (2024). *Child labour in India: A socio-political problem*.

Deshingkar, P., & Sandi, R. (2011). Migration in India: Challenges and opportunities for human development.

Deshingkar, P., & Shaheen, A. (2009). *Human development and migration in India* [Working paper]. United Nations Development Programme.

Husam, A., (2024). Migrant labour in construction engineering: Industry impact and risk factors.

Mukherji, R. (2020). *Impact of migrant labor on worker rights: A study of the economic and social conditions of migrant workers*.

Peiró, J. M., (2020). A cross-cultural study on migrant labor: Social and economic determinants of well-being.

Rajan, S. I., & Bhagat, R. B. (2022). Internal migration in India: Social security and labor rights perspectives.

Rajan, S. I., & Sivakumar, P. (2020). Uneven economic development and internal migration in India.

Rajan, S. I., Sivakumar, P., & Bhagat, R. B. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and migration disruption in India.

Rouhanizadeh, B., & Kermanshachi, S. (2020). Organizing labor for migrant workers: Case studies in construction and domestic work in India's National Capital Region.

Sengupta, A. (2020). Anthropology of migrant labor in India. *Anthropology of Work Review*, 41(1).

Sengupta, S. (2020). Migrant labor in the Indian labor market. *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 63(4),