



Indian female migrants face greater barriers to Post-Covid recovery than males

Originally published: THE LANCET

Introduction

This study by Lancet contributes to existing literature regarding labour market reintegration of migrants by surveying a large sample of displaced workers in two of India's poorest states – Chhattisgarh and Bihar, which account for 18% of pandemic-displaced migrants.

Key Highlights

The paper (1) tracks the evolution of economic outcomes through the pandemic and (2) quantifies emerging gender gaps in economic reintegration

- Marked by low and declining female labour force participation, it identifies gender gaps in labour market reintegration – as a marker of both women's vulnerability at times of crisis and setbacks in women's agency.
- Both Men and Women faced hardships as incomes plummeted. Women had to face more driven by lower rate of remigration and market re-entry.

Women were more likely to report cutting back on essentials in their household, with higher food insecurity index score and higher rates of distress

- The pandemic has differentially reduced Indian women's employment as it imposed additional childcare responsibilities, increased rates of mental distress and domestic violence.

This reflects prevailing **gender norms regarding work and marriage**: Women, especially those with young children, are often expected to stay home and take care of the household. Alongside, migration for work may reduce women's marital prospects as their chastity is called into question; therefore, women may be more likely to migrate once married.

- **The caste bias** - More than 85% of the migrants sample belongs to officially recognized marginalized groups as members of SC, ST or Other or Extremely Backward Class groups. Only 7% of male migrants and 3% of female migrants belong to the least disadvantaged "General Category" caste groups. However migrants are better educated and earn more.
- Following the lockdown, the majority of unskilled workers transitioned into agricultural work while skilled workers were most likely to transition into unemployment.
- Women who transition into unemployment are significantly less likely to transition back out in the following round and women who are working in a given round are significantly more likely to exit into unemployment than their male peers.
- Among those unemployed and not seeking work, 60% of women state the reason as due to "domestic duties or pregnancy" and 18% of women indicate "wages too low or no work available", compared to 6% of men. In contrast, only 15% of women state "health problems or fear of COVID", relative to 42% of men.
- **Remigration is critical to regaining income** – by January 2021, male re-migrants report earnings on par with their pre-pandemic incomes, while men remaining in rural areas earn only 23% of their pre-pandemic income.
- Looking across waves, 63% of men remigrated at least once, compared to 55% of women. This difference suggests women faced greater barriers to remigration than men, which could have important consequences for their labour market and socioeconomic outcomes.

- Post-pandemic struggles point to an urgent need to better understand the barriers faced by female job seekers and identify policies that facilitate women's access to high-return jobs

Read more : <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2589-5370%2822%2900361-3>

Author: Jahanavi Saini, PILOT at Pratham