

Current Coronavirus Crisis and its Effect on Migration Flows

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The current outbreak of the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) poses a challenge to migrant workers all over the world (The World Bank, 2020).

The pandemic has hit the **largest remittance sending countries** and major global economies of the EU, the GCC countries, USA, UK, Canada and Australia (Ranasinghe et al., 2020).

The current travel restrictions, together with lockdown measures implemented by majority of countries has **not enabled** many migrants **to return home** (The World Bank, 2020).

Remittance inflows decline in low- and middle-income countries about **20 %** in 2020 as a result of COVID-19 outbreak (The World Bank, 2020).

Countries highly dependent on remittances covering a significant share of their GDP will be **severely affected remittances drop**.

The economic crisis caused by COVID-19 outbreak is **more pervasive** than any other epidemic induced crisis since the 1900s (The World Bank, 2020).

Compared to financial crisis (2008-2010), COVID-19 outbreak will affect local economies as well as remittances flows more severally (The World Bank, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic is experienced unevenly by different groups of migrants (Bisong et al., 2020; UNDP, 2020; FAO, 2020).

Depending mainly on:

- the legal status of migrant workers
- work position and occupation sector
- type of work contract
- availability of protection policies
- inclusion of migrants as beneficiaries of these policies in the host country

Migrants working on positions such as **doctors, nurses, care workers or delivery drivers** are employed in sectors that are **crucial in dealing with the pandemic**



Majority of them is not losing the job regardless the type of contract (Bisong et al., 2020).

Migrants having **long-term or permanent contracts** are protected by labour laws

They benefit from social protection packages or another support programmes when losing their job (Bisong et al., 2020; UNDP, 2020).

The lockdown measures, implemented by majority of countries, most severely affected sectors such as:

- construction
- domestic and care work
- hospitality
- travel and tourism
- food and agribusiness

Leaving the majority of short-term migrant workers have become unemployed, either temporarily or permanently (The United Nations Network on Migration, 2020; UN Women, 2020).

A large number of migrants working in these sectors is facing some difficulties as they are being laid off with little or no legal protection (UNDP, 2020).

They usually do not have **formal work contracts** and works counting on verbal agreements with their employers → belong to the **most affected category**

From the first day of quarantine, they have become unemployed without any source of income and access to health care system, social protection packages or another support programmes (Bisong et al., 2020; UNDP, 2020; FAO, 2020; Devakumar et al., 2020).

Many of them risk to be evacuated by the owner of rented dwellings in the absence of funds (Bisong et al., 2020; UNDP, 2020).

Majority of undocumented migrants is living in unhealthy and overcrowded spaces → **exposed to the risk of infection** (Kluge et al., 2020; Devakumar et al., 2020).

A large number of international migrant workers, especially those working in the GCC countries, returned home to countries such as **India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh** (The World Bank, 2020).

Remittances flows will be **severally affected** by COVID-19 outbreak

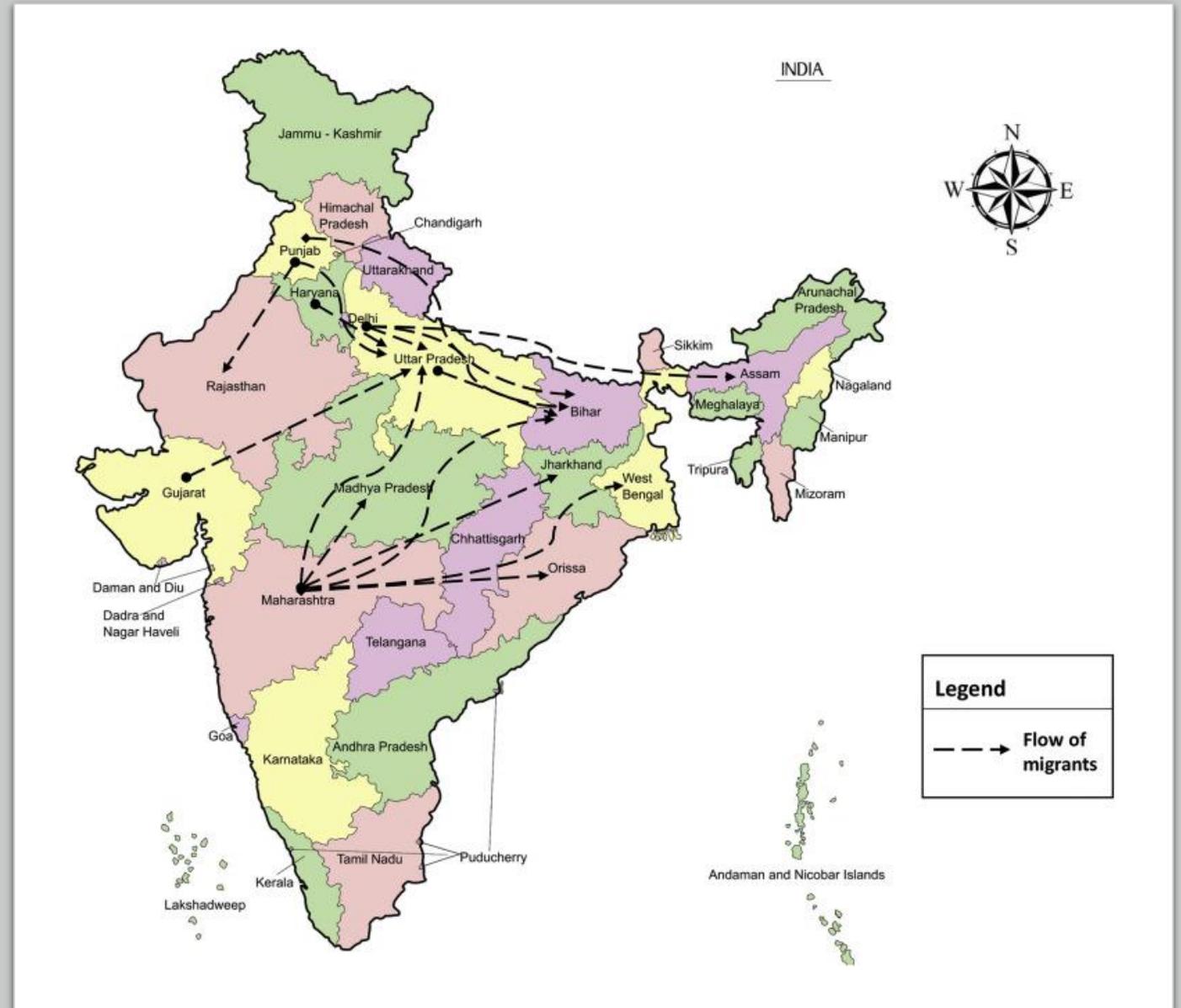
The largest decline of remittances is projected for India and Pakistan (23%), followed by Bangladesh (22%), Sri Lanka (19%) and Nepal (14%) (The World Bank, 2020).

The lockdown measurement in India affected the wellbeing of nearly **40 million of internal migrants**

The government established **camps with basic provisions** to provide shelter to these migrants (Bindra and Sharma, 2020 in The World Bank, 2020).

Similarly, more than 11 million Bangladeshi citizens left the capital city Dhaka and return to their home districts after the announcement of partial lockdown (Bodrun-Doze et al., 2020).

In the absence of transport facilities, during lockdown, the labourers and their families including infants, pregnant women and the elderly walked thousands of kilometres barefoot without food and money to reach their native places (Mukhra et al., 2020).



Currently, there is around **7.8 million** of Bangladesh citizens and between **2 million** of Nepali citizens working abroad (KNOMAD,2020).

Many of them have become jobless or receive delayed or no wage - the majority of migrant were employed in **sectors hardly hit by the crisis** (Mannan et al., 2020; The Himalayan Times, 2020; Sumon, 2020; Bhuyan 2020).

Communities have to deal with increasing number of returning labour migrants, unable to find work in countries of destination (Mobarak and Vernot, 2020; Bhattarai, 2020; Paudel and Bhandari, 2020).

More than **660,000 migrant workers returned** to Bangladesh after the coronavirus outbreak and two million can be deported during or after the pandemic (TBS, 2020).

Thousands of Nepali migrant workers were caught by a police force and treated brutally when tried to return home from various Indian regions. Many of them had to spend several months in quarantine centres (Shakya, 2020).

- The economic slowdown and fall in remittances severely affect conflict-affected states such as **Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon** and other countries in the region.
- Millions of refugees are struggling to protect themselves from the virus in refugee camps (The Arab Weekly, 2020; Syria Direct, 2020; Kluge et al., 2020).

Syria

- The remittances are vital for many Syrian households
- Syrian migrant workers in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey are facing financial constraints due to lockdown and quarantine measures implemented by these countries (COAR, 2020).
- Large number of Syrian migrant workers in those countries are engaged in informal or low-skilled occupations such as construction, hardly hit by the ongoing lockdowns (Syria Direct, 2020).
- The drop in remittances will have immense impact on Syrian households, as majority (83%) of Syrians is living below the poverty line (UNICEF, 2019).

Remittances flows to the region dropped significantly, by **about 28%**, as a consequence of COVID-19 outbreak and falling oil prices (The World Bank, 2020).

The most affected countries are those highly dependent on remittances inflow such as **Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Moldova and Ukraine** which is a top recipient of remittances in Europe (The World Bank, 2020, Reliefweb, 2020).

Globally, it is estimated that estimated 7.6 million international migrant workers came from Central Asia working mainly in **Russia, Turkey, and Kazakhstan** (BEARR,2020).

Ukraine is the largest recipient of remittances in the region with the largest share of remittances flowing from Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia, USA, UK (IOM, 2020).

As a consequence of COVID-19 outbreak, remittances can decrease by \$4 billion in 2020 (Kyiv Post, 2020).

It is estimated that between 3–4 million people was challenged to find employment due to lock-down measures and border controls

Large number of seasonal Ukrainian migrant workers in Italy, Poland and Russia, were trapped behind a nationwide lockdown, unable to return home despite having expired visas (The World Bank, 2020).

About **¼ of Ukrainian** migrants working in **construction in Poland** already left the country and return to Ukraine (Bloomberg, 2020).

Provision of access to social protection packages, employment-related support, health care and emergency relief programs (regardless of migration or employment status) is crucial to improve safety of migrant workers in host countries (Takenaka et al., 2020; FAO, UN and ECLAC, 2020; The United Nations Network on Migration, 2020).

Governments in migrant sending countries should **extend support for the return of their citizens** home and to assist distressed migrants who are not able to return by providing of all necessary humanitarian, health, legal, and administrative support (Takenaka et al., 2020).

The local governments may use the **skills of the returning migrant** workers in various sectors and they should ensure return migrants to find viable and well-paid jobs at home destinations and facilitate their reintegration to the community (Karim et al., 2020; Takenaka et al., 2020).

Faster adoption and use of digital platforms (**such as E-Wallet, WorldRemit, Remitly, TransferWise, XE, OFX and many others**) may ensure that the sending remittances will be more convenient for a migrant workers and their families (Das et al., 2020; Takenaka et al., 2020; The United Nations Network on Migration, 2020).

The rapid transmission of COVID-19 made a million of migrants workers and their families vulnerable.

A large number of migrant workers worldwide is nowadays facing uncertainties due to loss of job or delayed wage in host countries, risk of infection, stress and depression with no or little access to health care system and social services.

Therefore, provision of access to social protection packages, employment-related support, health care and emergency relief programs targeted to the workers affected by a crisis (regardless of migration or employment status) is crucial nowadays.

Remittances flows decrease in many countries worldwide lowering capacity of already poor and vulnerable households to secure affordable food and basic needs and pushing them back into poverty.

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