

SOCIAL SECURITY AND HEALTH RIGHTS OF RETURN MIGRANTS DURING PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on return migrants. The rapid spread of the pandemic caught countries across the world off guard, resulting in widespread lockdowns that clamped down on mobility, commercial activities and social interactions. 5.52 lakh people returned to Kerala from abroad by loss of jobs. By the way the paper aims to analyse limitations of public policy in addressing return migrants and suggest recommendations for the way ahead and to shed light on the vulnerability of India's immigrants in terms of their health rights and social security. It is expected that, there could be 10 to 15% decline in remittance in the current fiscal (Irudaya Rajan, Chair Professor at the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs Research Unit on International Migration, at the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram). Finally the paper will be demonstrating every area of life of return migrants by poorly implemented or discriminatory government policies.

INTRODUCTION

It was clear, that even in the early days of the pandemic, like other marginalized communities return migrants were at greater risk of health and social security. Subsequently, however, it has become clear that the impacts of the crisis have extended far beyond the immediate health aspirations and financial loss. Their immigration will be disrupting well being of family, education of children, housing, mental health etc. More fundamentally, however, it is clear that much of the inequity and discrimination brought to the surface by the pandemic was present long before the outbreak – and is likely to remain in place without transformative societal change. Like other countries, Kerala also navigate the uncertain path towards recovery, it is vital that there is more than simply a return to normality. Without meaningful action to address the issues brought out by Covid 19, however, the world will continue to be exposed to the threat of further health crises in the years to come.

there are 20 million Indians anywhere in the world, in 210 countries. And half of them are in the Gulf in six countries--Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait. Return migrants have been undergoing various problems based on their triple oppression grounded in the joblessness in homeland, financial instabilities and restriction on mobility. Life of returnees cannot be reduced to the traditional understanding of immigration and spending of time with their family in homeland. It is a kind of economic recession and poverty and produces a kind of total rejection by the society as a whole. Return migrants have been waging struggles against the pandemic of caste and now they have to fight against silence of the sociopolitical institutions that carry out all forms of discriminations in the period of the lockdown culture. Even after one year, the World Health Organization declared COVID 19 a pandemic, its far reaching social, economic and political consequences are still unfolding. Although everyone is at risk of the virus, like minorities, indigenous people, jobless returnees are among the worst affected.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Kerala itself is a remittance economy and more than 36% of the state's GDP is funded by remittances from Keralites who live outside. Projection on return migration states that, millions of Keralites is expected to come back and it will be a serious threat on the local economy and remittance. Economic impact of return migration of Keralites is seriously estimated by negating their personal constraints. The pandemic has been

exacerbating existing inequalities from gender, to ethnic, racial, religious, social and financial and the discrimination ranging from the risk of contracting the virus and of dying from it to a reduced access to healthcare, education, employment, food and security. Returnees appear to be more at risk of contracting the virus, at their destinations being generally poorer, more likely to be living in overcrowded conditions and facing greater difficulties in accessing to healthcare. On top of the immediate health risks, jobless returnees can face acute difficulties in accessing the very basic supplies that are needed to combat the virus. Tragically, those who are worst affected by the pandemic are also those who are least likely to get the help they need as they had to leave their destinations unfortunately, it ranges between public health information and basic supplies and access to medical care. For populations affected forced or unforced displacement, the pandemic has overstretched under-resourced healthcare systems. The pandemic has been triggered by incompetent governance, often with tenuous political hold on their societies.

Study on **Social Security and Health Rights of return migrants during Pandemic**, will be exploring the status of immigrants during pandemic. Unemployment, poor health aspirations as well as omission by government and discriminations increased vulnerabilities of return migrants in Kerala. The study will be discussing the changeover of migrant's life during pandemic in general and returnees in particular. Apart from the status study of returnees it can be helpful in analyzing the impact of social security measure implemented by the state to protect the right to life of the poor.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the transition of life of Return migrants during pandemic
2. To study the effect of social security measures implemented by the state for the welfare of the poor
3. To study the conservation of Health rights by return migrants during pandemic

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. Life of return migrants is under transition due to Pandemic
2. Financial instability brought by Pandemic leads to poverty
3. Social security measures are ineffective
4. Health aspiration of return migrants is poor

METHODOLOGY

Writer adopted comparative study; by which global data and migration processes were analysed and made comparison with the trends in India in general and Kerala in particular.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Challenges faced by return migrants

Millions of migrants stranded across the world due to travel restrictions, closure of borders and lock down as impact of wide spread of COVID 19. Report of International Migration Organization Return Task Force says, the plight of nearly three million migrants stranded worldwide by mid of July 2020. Forced voluntary returns have been witnessed during the pandemic, and to support countries in addressing these challenges effectively, IMO established the COVID 19 Return Task Force. In 2020 IMO facilitated the voluntary return of more than 50,000 migrants worldwide, over 1000 migrants 53% female and 47% male were supported by the COVID 19 Return Task Force to return home in a safe and dignified manner. Among those returning were migrant workers and their families, travelers,

international students, unaccompanied children, pregnant women, elderly persons, persons with disabilities, others seeking medical attention and victims of human trafficking. The support covered ticket costs, pre-departure accommodation and food, medical assistance, psychological support, hygiene kit, personal protection equipments, medical screening and quarantine upon return along with issuance of travel documents, exit visas, counseling sessions, legal counseling, health checks and reintegration assistance.

Large number of migrants all over the world stranded due to COVID 19 mobility restrictions. Women as well as men have returned from their destinations as they lost their job got psychological problems; due to the length of the journey back to home land, disruptions of ongoing flights, exorbitant cost of available flights, remoteness of locations, quarantine measures and also visa requirements. Due to health issues in destinations, lots of migrants were left under medication with no income and a good number of them were not able to continue in their previous job. Unfortunately not only the restriction on travel but also not having a valid passport or financial resources to return home were the major problems faced by the migrants initially during the pandemic. Another group of migrants directly or indirectly victimized for human trafficking who were mistreated, forced to work extra hours, paid poorly or not also faced lot of constraints during the pandemic. During the pandemic, another group of migrants were affected were those who lost their jobs after employment contracts were terminated due to the overall economic situation. The pandemic can be expected to continue increasingly, as well as accelerate the disparities in migration, many visas and stay permits has been suspended on the onset of outbreak, significant numbers of migrants continue to find themselves stranded and in vulnerable situations due to their uncertain migratory status. The poorest and most vulnerable migrants face toughest barriers in accessing mobility channel as they lost their job, suspended permit or visa and victims of forceful migration. More over by slowing down and complicating immigration processes, the pandemic has reduced access to regular migration pathways, which might lead to an increase in irregular migration. It is found that the shift from travel ban to complex conditions for authorized entry can also serve as the foundation for increasingly restrictive immigration such as closure of boundaries has seriously affected the returnees.

Initially global leader thought that, corona virus infection was a little more than the regular flue, however, as soon as a massive number of deaths started occurring by the middle of March 2020, mobility was severely restricted and the problem of exodus of migrant labour became a burning issue in almost all countries around the world. Closure of public and private limited companies as well as the suspension or cancellation of a large number of existing orders and agreements left many of the migrants impoverished. Thousands of these migrant workers had to go back to their native place without any pay. Even multinational companies or large scale producers also could not offer any financial assistance in case of lay off and many migrant workers have been compelled to return to their native places, cut back on food, and borrow money for survival. The plight of migrants is severe not only in makeshift camps but also in many countries that have hosted a large number of displaced persons. The vulnerability of migrant workers has also alarmingly increased in destination countries like Middle East due to insufficient sanitary conditions in labour camps and pre existing health issues of migrants. Migrants have lost jobs

worldwide in this COVID 19 disaster as their employers have either closed shops or stopped business activities.

Even in the second year, as COVID 19 continues to disrupt global mobility, its management has high lightened some of the existing shortcomings within national immigration system, including their lack of resilience. The pandemic has prompted states to develop conditional entry requirements and continuously modify immigration procedures to adapt to shifting health imperatives. Vaccination become sharp focus for travel and immunization has become a key part of governmental policies towards recovery. The mobility requirements include vaccination and it will be implemented to respond to the challenges surrounding cross border along with serving as a critical turning point in to health and travel. The most commonly required entry conditions are centered on medical requirements in the form of PCR tests and quarantines which are not easily enforceable for states and are not necessarily accessible or affordable to some groups of migrants. The roll out of vaccinations risk further exacerbating existing global mobility disparities and exclude certain travelers and migrants, particularly those in vulnerable situations. Mobility divide will sustain for a long period and the digital and health related measures under development need comprehensive safeguards and data policies. There should be proper modification and management of migration to avoid further discrimination and widening of mobility divide. It is found that, majority of respondents were not able get vaccinated on time and still some of them are waiting for the second dose. Many of them lost their permit and have expired visa, as there is a delay in the inoculation. They were also beaten with the charges for PCR tests and arranging quarantine. Some of the respondents are of the opinion that, it was not easy to follow the recommendations of WHO, that to cover the cost of PCR tests and other medical requirements directed as travelers for the protection of public health. Finally they have been included in the priority list of the state for vaccination, without considering their reverse migration status. Dominant observation is that, it is important to ensure that migrants have access to affordable and equitable COVID 19 diagnostics, testing, treatment and vaccination services. Gradually testing and quarantine requirements have been replaced with proof of COVID vaccination, maybe the effectiveness of these vaccination certificate remains unclear to prevent the spread of the virus, and cannot be treated as part of immunity passport. Lot of positives cases are reported even after administration of both dose of vaccine. Very few of the returnees are aware about the health passport, smart vaccination certificate, immunity certificate and related travel apps which would help to trace travellers' vaccination status. There is another problem of data privacy and authentication capacity. The technological solutions are not inclusive for returnees who have financial incapacibilities.

Closure of borders and mobility restrictions has directly affected the immigration and visa processes worldwide at the same time in many countries it is seemed as admission and stay application were interrupted still. The presence of global mobility restrictions reduced the issuance of visa has direct impact on the work of different departments and companies worldwide. Most of the national immigration systems operate on fee based funding model by the revenue from visa and permit applications and it also has a direct impact on the visa applications. From the primary data it is found that, 47% of the respondents had to return forcefully from their destinations and a good number among them lost their job and not able to pay again for visa and permit applications. Another problem faced by the returnees

was the blockage of visa applications. Decision on visa application will take months or years to action and existing blockage has worsened the condition of returnees. During the pandemic, procedures as part of immigration process has been a major issue and migrant left stranded due to the irregular solutions with limited access to immigration services as there is no alternatives for submit applications and documents for renewal and extension of visa or permit applications. New trend of mobility corridor has been emerged as part of pandemic which deals with the implementation and limitations and challenges in determining who can travel.

Suggestions

- State should speed up the evolution of their relevant systems by establishing more flexible, remote and virtual solutions that consider and safeguard the rights of migrants.
- Introduction of Flexible visa scheme includes seasonal permits, healthcare and essential worker permit

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