

## Crossing the Seven Seas: Covid 19 induced migrant crisis with reference to Uttar Pradesh.

## Cruzando los siete mares: Covid 19 indujo la crisis migratoria con referencia a Uttar Pradesh.

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### ABSTRACT

Wars, conflict, and natural disasters displaced 14.6 million people in 127 countries from January-June 2020. To elaborate, humankind faces the worst pandemic ever, leading to massive loss of life and crippling the economy. Among these are the disadvantaged and poor, who are worst affected in the present times? Union government implementation of lockdown across the country to curtail virus transmission and protect people from COVID-19 threat turned into a significant socio-economic crisis for urban poor, mainly migrants. With lockdown 1.0, migrant workers from the big cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai started rushing back to their native place. Uttar Pradesh houses about 20 million people, provides most informal workers to all these large cities, and saw severe crises across state borders and within state limits. Health hazards coupled with sudden lockdown brought colossal fury and mismanagement across India. People started moving in large numbers without any planning in the hope of reaching their land. Very little did they know what lied ahead, with several migrants dead due to extreme heat, hunger, and thirst? On their way, home administration brutality towards them like complete body sanitization, lathi charge, hostility, and unwelcoming brought ore misery. Complete lockdown meant no vehicular movement and no public transport forcing a large flock of humans to walk back barefoot or any means possible. Present research looks to analyse the plights of the migrant movement with the idea of social justice amidst difficulties and hardships faced during the Covid-19 lockdown 1.0. The study is based on secondary data analysis, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It was concluded that despite the lockdown and hardship associated, the migrant workers were ready to travel any distance to reach their native place (sense of belongingness). They were hopeful of getting to their village in whatever way possible, prepared to march on cycle, walk back barefoot, on buses, trains, or any other means possible. The scenes of young people's dragging their parents and kids caught everyone's eye, women giving birth on the road, few individuals being run over by vehicles, indicating fighting against the

pandemic is secondary, and reaching home being primary. The mass movement also sent the government wary and frenzy, meaning unplanned preparations questioning migrants' very existence. More needs to be done by the democratic government both at the center and state to cope up during one of the most threatening crises to humankind and prepare for the future.

Keywords: Pandemic, Lockdown, Migration, Migrants, Discrimination, Hunger, and Social Justice.

## RESUMEN

Las guerras, los conflictos y los desastres naturales desplazaron a 14,6 millones de personas en 127 países entre enero y junio de 2020. Para elaborar, la humanidad se enfrenta a la peor pandemia de la historia, que provoca una pérdida masiva de vidas y paraliza la economía. Entre estos están los desfavorecidos y los pobres, ¿quiénes son los más afectados en los tiempos actuales? La implementación del gobierno de la Unión del bloqueo en todo el país para reducir la transmisión del virus y proteger a las personas de la amenaza de COVID-19 se convirtió en una crisis socioeconómica significativa para los pobres urbanos, principalmente los migrantes. Con el cierre 1.0, los trabajadores migrantes de las grandes ciudades como Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru y Chennai comenzaron a regresar rápidamente a su lugar de origen. Uttar Pradesh alberga a unos 20 millones de personas, proporciona la mayoría de los trabajadores informales a todas estas grandes ciudades y experimentó graves crisis a través de las fronteras estatales y dentro de los límites estatales. Los peligros para la salud, junto con el bloqueo repentino, provocaron una furia colosal y una mala gestión en toda la India. La gente comenzó a moverse en gran número sin ningún tipo de planificación con la esperanza de llegar a su tierra. ¿Muy poco sabían lo que les esperaba, con varios migrantes muertos debido al calor extremo, el hambre y la sed? En su camino, la brutalidad de la administración doméstica hacia ellos, como la desinfección completa del cuerpo, la carga de lathi, la hostilidad y la falta de bienvenida, les trajo miseria. El bloqueo total significó que no hubiera movimiento vehicular ni transporte público, lo que obligó a una gran multitud de humanos a caminar descalzos o por cualquier medio posible. La presente investigación busca analizar las dificultades del movimiento migrante con la idea de justicia social en medio de las dificultades y penurias enfrentadas durante el encierro 1.0 de Covid-19. El estudio se basa en el análisis de datos secundarios, utilizando enfoques tanto cualitativos como cuantitativos. Se concluyó que a pesar del encierro y las dificultades asociadas, los trabajadores migrantes estaban dispuestos a viajar cualquier distancia para llegar a su lugar de origen (sentido de pertenencia). Tenían la esperanza de llegar a su pueblo de cualquier manera posible, preparados para marchar en bicicleta, caminar descalzos, en autobuses, trenes o cualquier otro medio posible. Las escenas de jóvenes arrastrando a

sus padres e hijos llamaron la atención de todos, mujeres dando a luz en la carretera, pocas personas atropelladas por vehículos, lo que indica que la lucha contra la pandemia es secundaria y llegar a casa es lo principal. El movimiento de masas también envió al gobierno con cautela y frenesí, lo que significa preparativos no planificados que cuestionan la existencia misma de los migrantes. El gobierno democrático debe hacer más, tanto en el centro como en el estado, para hacer frente a una de las crisis más amenazantes para la humanidad y prepararse para el futuro.

Palabras clave: Pandemia, Confinamiento, Migración, Migrantes, Discriminación, Hambre y Justicia Social.

## INTRODUCTION

Stay home, stay safe, and 2-yard distance was the mantra when the nationwide lockdown was announced, an attempt to arrest the transmission of COVID-19 (Diamond, 2020). Several vulnerable groups in the country were not happy with this sudden and unplanned decision, and migrant workers were severely affected (Shakeel & Ramay, 2020). When the lockdown was announced, the factory owners told their workers that we could not give work, food, and shelter (Giammarinaro, 2020). Whenever the need arises then, we will inform you (Mehta, 2020). In this uncertain situation, the migrant workers are left with no option but to migrate to their homes (Press Trust of India, 2020). Within few days after the lockdown, a colossal migrant crisis was emerged in the whole country (Deshingkar, 2020). A giant crowd of migrant workers were gathered at the bus stop, national highways, state highways, railway tracks, and around the flyover with the single aim to reach their home (Narain, 2020). They dared to face every possible threat, either died on the way or clash with the police and the local authorities (Choudhari, 2020). All these incidences have shaken up our voice of conscience (Bandyopadhyay, 2020).

The crisis arises as the government has failed to communicate with the migrant workers so far (Goswami & Maurya, 2020). The government, to some extent, was unsuccessful in convincing the migrants not to go home (Sarmin, 2020). Migrant workers do not trust the government mantras like food and shelter will be provided to them as the trust deficit has deepened between the government and migrants so far (Mukhra et al. 2020). The migrant workers had already listened to such a fake Government claim in the past (Bohra, 2020). It includes labor rights extended to the informal workers if they return to the center or in a particular state but are never implemented (Kapoor, 2020). These announcements had been made either from the stage or lengthy Twitter statements, but no law is passed on the paper (Alluri & Nazmi, 2020).

The world-renowned Indian society is known for its hospitality since time immemorial (Kochhar et al. 2016). Again, it has shown an immense empathy towards the migrant workers amid COVID-19 (Abraham & Cherian, 2020). People around the railway

tracks and roads arranged some eatables and water for the migrant workers that show the strong relationship of our society (Barnard-Naudé, 2020). The service was arranged irrespective of caste, race, sex, place of birth, and religion (Govind, 2020). Crores of migrants are on the road, but the government has run only 50 to 60 trains for them (Deka, 2020). The migrant worker's crisis could not be solved with such a meager number of trains (Bhagat et al. 2020). The government needs to take some other concrete steps to solve the crisis that emerged in the country (Press Trust of India, 2020). The situation is massive, and different state governments could easily handle it, but they have failed to do so far (Rajagopal, 2020). One nation, one ration card scheme will take at least more than a year to implement across the country (Shah & Lerche, 2020).

COVID-19 gives great relief to our natural resources and improves the genuine revival of the environment, as amid the lockdown, none of the factories, industries were running (Al – Khashman, 2020). Very minimal transport facility was available with valid id and was limited to essential commodities, medical facilities, and emergency services (Lokhandwala & Gautam, 2020). Currently, the pollution levels in the entire country have dropped to the lowest levels in the last 30 years (Zambrano-Monserrate, 2020). Ganges' genuine revival capacity has registered improvement several times (Cheval et al. 2020). The number of fish in the rivers has increased, improvement in the groundwater was apparent in the country and the state (Miranda, 2020).

#### CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

Migrant workers are regarded as one of the most socially and economically discriminated sections of Indian society (Alagh, 2020). Somehow, when they reached their native village, they faced discrimination in their villages (Choithani & Roshania, 2020). The villagers thought they had come from the city and might carry Coronavirus (Watwe, 2020). There is a need to save the village from them and maintain a long distance from them, don't allow them to participate in any of the village activities (Das & Kumar, 2020). Not only the worker but their entire family was facing the outbreak of alienation in their own mother's soil (Dre'ze et al., 2020). Although, migrant workers play a vital role in the growth and prosperity of the state wherever they work (Krishnaprasad, 2020). But the form at the time of the pandemic has left them alone and suppressed their voice of conscience only for the sake of profit (Chang, 2020). Under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, the Labor Bureau doesn't have accurate and complete data of the migrant workers (Abrol et al., 2020). It shows how concerned and sensitive government is towards one of the poorest sections of society (Pankaj & Jha, 2020).

Earlier, the government ordered to arrange buses for them to go to their home (Dey, 2020). Later, it was analysed that their total number was between 60-65 million, which became impossible for them to home by bus (Mojumdar & Banerjee, 2020). Later,

the government modified their previous order and allowed trains in the name of shramik special trains to carry them to their villages (Biswas, 2020). If the government had the correct and classified migrant data, such a crisis could have been avoided to save the wastage of national resources (World Health Organization, 2020). Out of 60 million workers, 50%, i.e., 30 million, went to other states for the job while the rest 50% migrate to the different prosper districts for the same within the state (Fig. 1). If we include migrant family members, then the total tally will reach 100 million. Nearly 40% of migrants work in construction activities, 15% in agriculture, and the rest 45% absorbed in some other actions (Department of Labour, 2020). Most of them are from poor states and poor regions (Kumar & Das, 2020). They belong to a particular caste, other backward classes (OBC), Scheduled Caste (S.C.), and Scheduled Tribe (S.T.) (Kishore, 2020). Several migrants were seduced and later trafficked in the name of high-standard jobs in metropolitan cities (Guadagno, 2020). It includes girls and children as very soft targets and easily seduced by the trafficker (Kaushik et al. 2020). Migrant workers face 4 D's wherever they take up the job- dirt, danger, difficulty, and discrimination (Basu, 2020). Where they do the job, the working environment is filthy like hell and compromises their fundamental right: The right to work with dignity and work in a healthy environment (Knomad, 2020). Some workers do jobs in the cracker and mining activities where they risk their lives every day (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2020). Recently, several accidents have occurred there, and several workers have died due to non-abidance of standard guidelines (World Bank Group, 2020). Migrant workers do a difficult task, e.g., painting and coloring significant buildings without any standard safety measures, putting their lives in danger (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2020). They face multiple kinds of discrimination at every stage of their life (Choudhary et al. 2020). The native laborer gets ₹100 for the same work in destination, but the migrated workers get ₹66 which is only 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the wages (International Labour Organization, 2020). If their female counterpart is working, she will get ₹60 of ₹55, 10% to 20% less than the male partner (Puri, 2020).

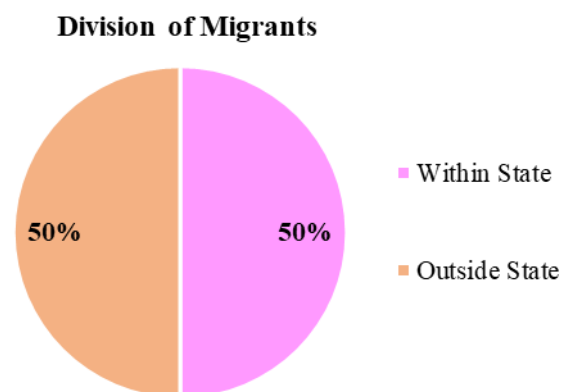


Fig. 1: Division of Migrants (Department of Labour, 2020)

## STUDY AREA

Uttar Pradesh is renowned as the cradle of the great Indian civilization since the time immemorial (National Human Development Programme, 2005). Geographically, the state extends between 23°-52' North to 30°-25' North latitude and 77°-3' East to 84°-39' East longitude (Uttar Pradesh Handbook, 2011). People from different castes, ethnicities, cultures, faith, language, country, community, and religions have been coming to this place and settled there (Mamgain and Verick, 2017). It is called the most populous state in the country and has the most significant number of statutory and census towns, i.e., 648 and 267, respectively (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2019). Poverty in the state is relatively high, i.e., 54.38% in 2004-2005, while it had gone down in the successive years, i.e., 37.24% in 2011-2012 (Maurya et al. 2015). The state has a vast divide between rural and urban, where 77.73% constitute urban, and 22.27% include urban (Census of India, 2011). Lucknow is the state's capital, while Ghaziabad, Meerut, Kanpur, Varanasi, Noida, Allahabad, Jhansi, and Agra are the major cities (Tiwari, 2015). The state can be divided into three physical divisions-Ganga-Yamuna plain in the North, the Bhabar-Tarai belt, and the Plateau region of the south, i.e., Bundelkhand (Mathur, 2018).

## DATABASE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present paper reviews research majorly based on a secondary database and very few primary narratives and observations. Some of the major secondary sources referred for the analysis are the World Health Organization (WHO), Labour Organisation, Press Trust of India (PTI), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and Census of India, 2011. No household survey was conducted owing to the nationwide lockdown and the WHO guidelines on social distancing norms. After the relaxation in lockdown process, a few labors' market survey was conducted to substantiate the insights of workers' conditions. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques have been used for the detailed analysis of the available secondary database. Also, various other secondary data published on multiple media and editorial sources, a non-conventional means were adopted to extract and generate data on the issue. Few excerpts and narratives from migrants have been used as per the availability over the phone and other means. Telephonic conversations were conducted with around 50 workers from UP, working in various cities across India. It was problematic and equally painful for the researcher to ask them to narrate their ordeal and journey back home. During the conversations, there were several breakdowns when they said we were fighting for survival and questioning our existence – "*humari koi kismat hi nahi ha sir*". The narratives were more frightening than the data shown. One respondent said, "They will die within few days as they are not getting any government *relief*". Also, the telephonic interview was later substantiated by normal interaction among migrant labors, as they

were not very comfortable in professional approach. Some quoted those days as “bhayankar sapna” – or scary dreams. The data collected from different sources have been adequately represented using Ms-Excel, and the maps are generated using Arc-GIS 10 based on the secondary data collected.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

When migrant workers reach their homes, they were greeted with new challenges, like they are not given any rights, social security- insurance, and security of tenure. They are fired on whims and moods of the employer, though labor laws do exist but to no relief. They were not granted leave; instead, they were fired during the emergency, negatively impacting the psychology of migrant workers and their families. Incidences of labor not receiving the outstanding payment were also found during the research making them economically more vulnerable. Some of the findings and outcomes find mention below.

The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases was reported highest in Gautam Buddha Nagar (GBN), followed by Ghaziabad, Lucknow, Kanpur Nagar, Meerut, Agra, Varanasi, Saharanpur, Muzaffarpur, and Bijnor (Fig. 2). All these top 10 districts, including the state's capital Lucknow, are economically well-off and have good health and other logistic facilities than rural counterparts (eastern UP) to handle the pandemic. The number of confirmed cases was highest in these districts as they conducted higher tests than any other district. The poverty level in these districts is also lower, especially in urban areas, and among the top Human Development Index HDI performing districts in the state. The bottom 10 districts are as follows: Lalitpur, Banda, Mahoba, Sonbhadra, and Kanpur Dehat, Kaushambi, Jalaun, Pratapgarh, Bhadoi, and all these are among the bottom 10 districts (Table 1). The probable reason for a smaller number of cases is that these districts could be due to the limited number of daily tests.

Table 1: Number of Confirmed Cases in Districts of Uttar Pradesh as of July 2020

S.N.	Top 10 Districts	Number of Confirmed Cases	Bottom 10 Districts	Number of Confirmed Cases
1.	Gautam Buddha Nagar	4352	Lalitpur	138
2.	Ghaziabad	2409	Banda	220
3.	Lucknow	2056	Mahoba	287
4.	Kanpur Nagar	1915	Sonbhadra	288
5.	Meerut	1848	Kanpur Dehat	360
6.	Agra	1785	Kaushambi	365
7.	Varanasi	1438	Jalaun	373
8.	Saharanpur	1250	Pratapgarh	401
9.	Muzaffarpur	1125	Bhadoi	494
10.	Bijnor	1098	Sitapur	492

Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2020 and Prepared by Researcher, 2021

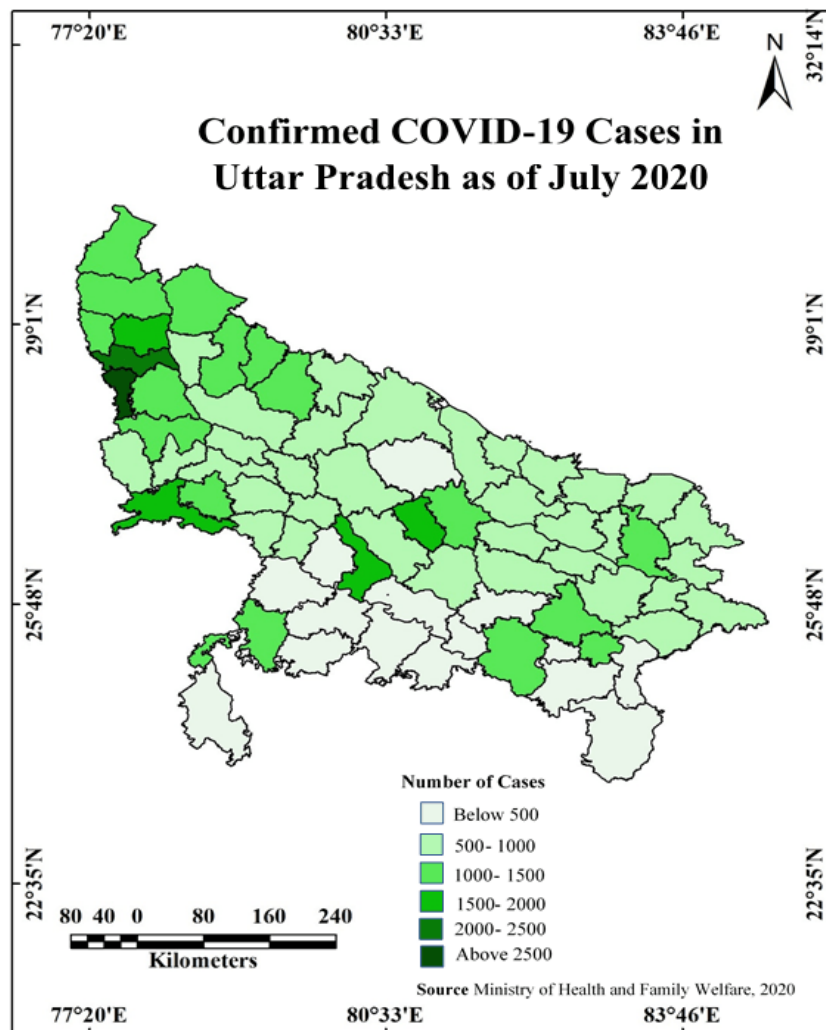


Fig. 2: Prepared by Researcher, 2020

The top 10 active cases of COVID-19 were reported from Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar (GBN), Lucknow, Kanpur Nagar, Meerut, Jhansi, Barabanki, Varanasi, Ballia, and Prayagraj (Fig. 3). One of the reasons for the large number of cases in GBN was administrative negligence as reported by different media houses. The chief minister himself took a note of it and ordered an inquiry. Among other top 5 districts, Jhansi is an exception, which falls under the high HDI category. The Bottom 10 districts were Chitrakoot, followed by Auraiya, Pratapgarh, Kaushambi, Fatehpur, Raebareli, Unnao, Sonbhadra, Lalitpur, and Ghazipur. In Chitrakoot, the total number of active cases was very low, while the rest have very few differences (Fig. 4). One of the reasons may be that the number of tests in these districts is also deficient due to the lack of health infrastructure and medical test kits.



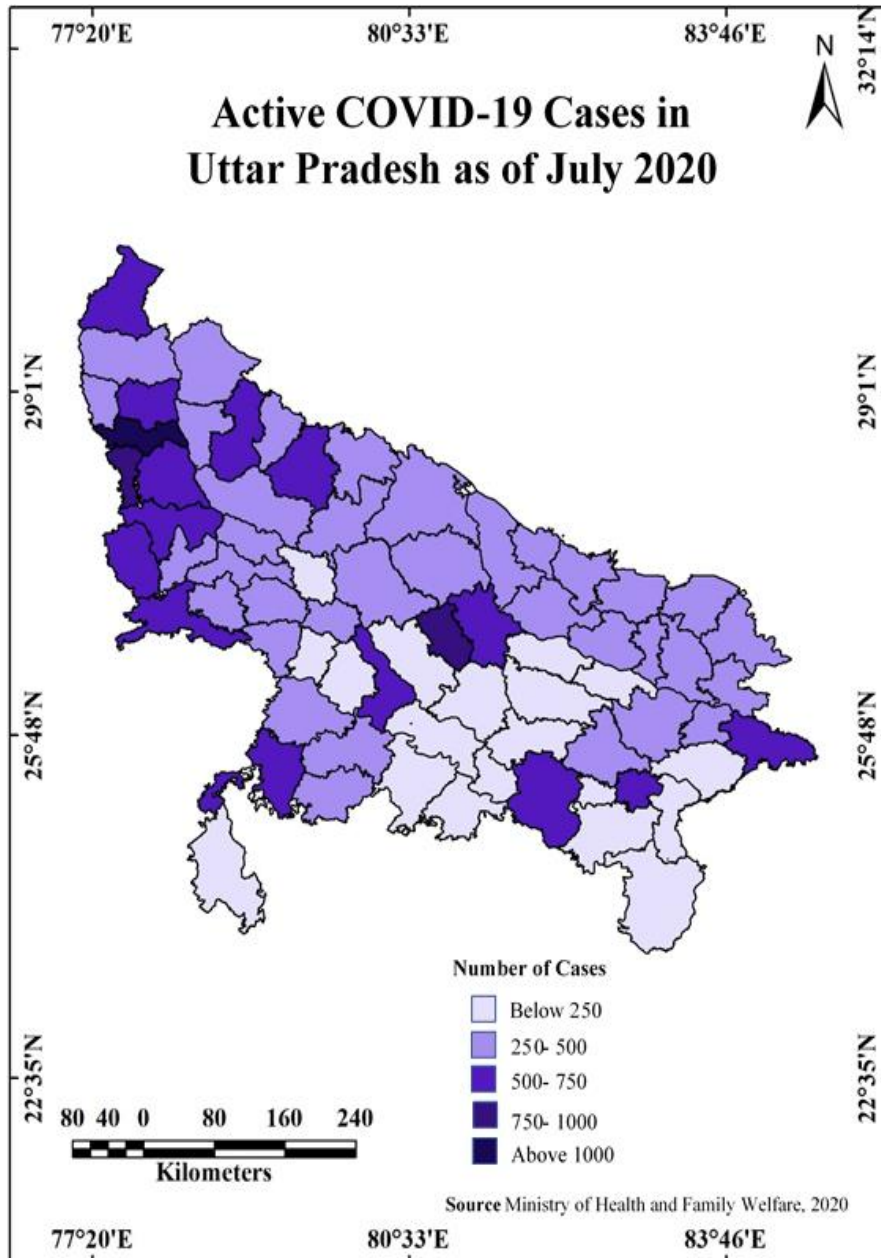


Fig. 3: Prepared by Researcher, 2020

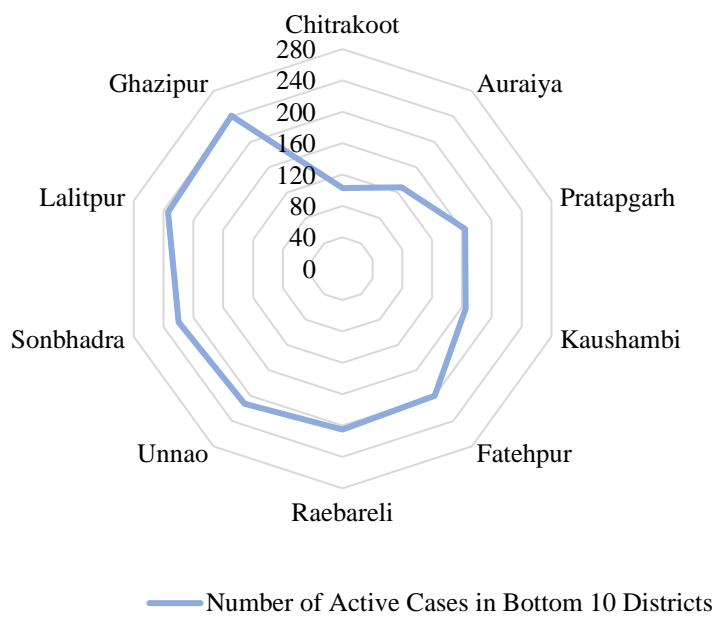


Fig. 4 (a): Number of active cases in bottom 10 districts of Uttar Pradesh as of July 2020, (Data compiled from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2020 and Prepared by Researcher, 2021)

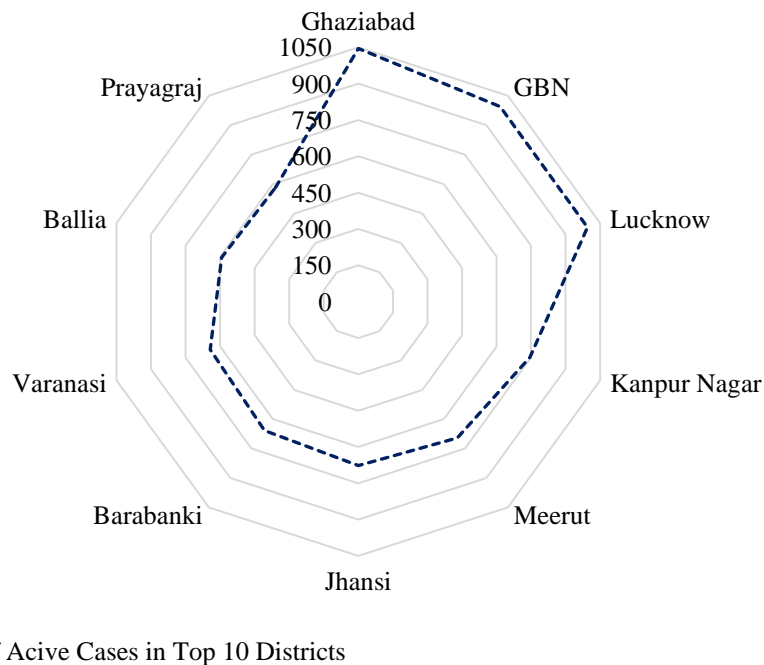


Fig. 4 (b): Number of Active Cases in Top 10 Districts of Uttar Pradesh as of July 2020 (Data compiled from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2020 and Prepared by Researcher, 2021)

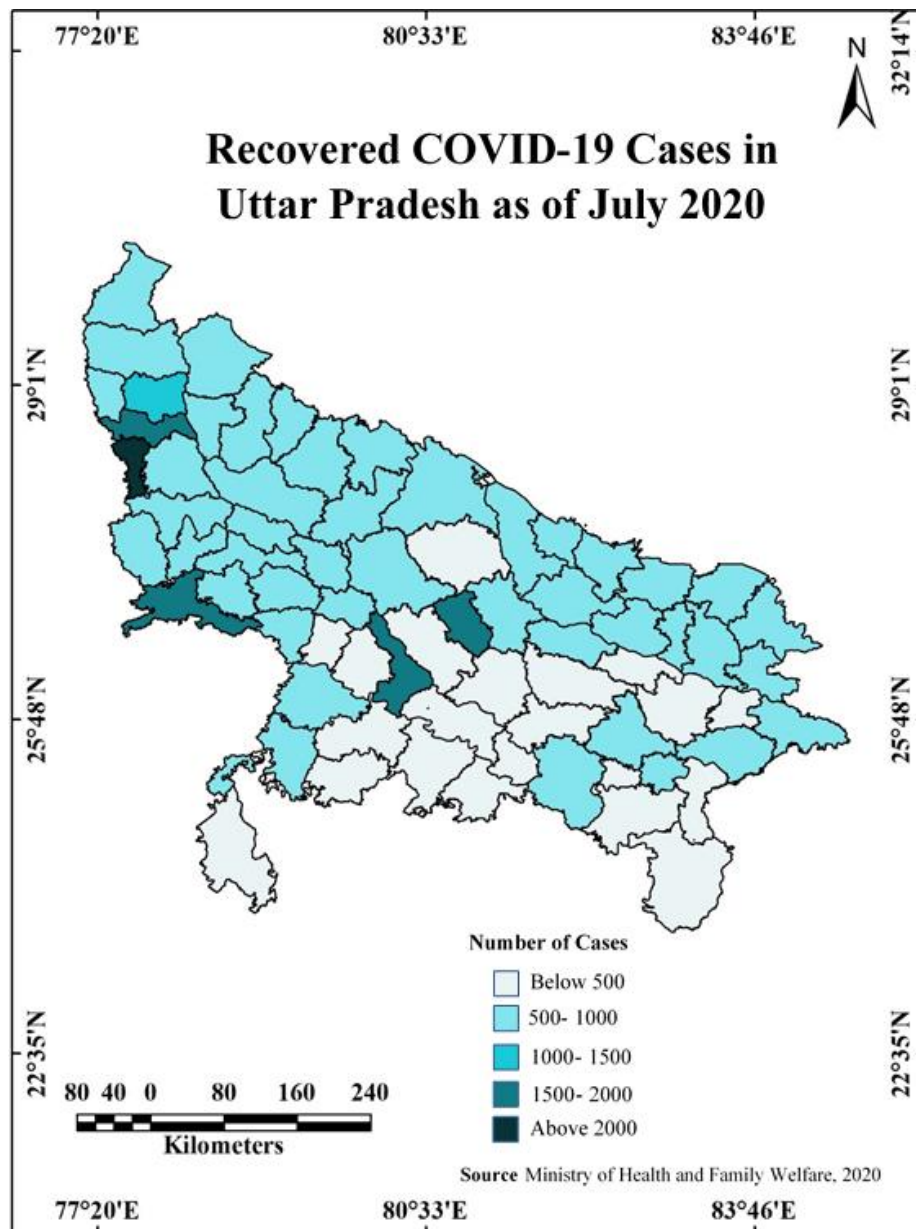


Fig. 5: Prepared by Researcher, 2020

The top 10 COVID-19 recovered cases were also reported from GBN, Ghaziabad, Agra, Kanpur Nagar, Lucknow, Meerut, Saharanpur, Varanasi, Ballia, and Ghazipur districts (Fig. 5). These districts are among the top confirmed and vibrant as the medical infrastructure in the communities is better and well developed. All these districts fall under the category of high Gender Development Index (GDI) except Agra. Poverty is closely associated with the source of livelihood, social identity, landlessness, and literacy level of the family head. In rural areas, poverty is associated with land ownership, while in urban areas, it depends upon market share. The bottom 10 recovered districts are Lalitpur, Banda, Kanpur Dehat, Bhadoi, Chitrakoot, Pratapgarh, Mahoba, Raebareli, Unnao, Kaushambi are also the districts in the bottom 10 confirmed cases. These districts are less

prosperous with high unemployment, poverty, and low literacy (Fig. 6). A common trend is that a region has fewer confirmed cases, then the number of recovered instances will also be less.

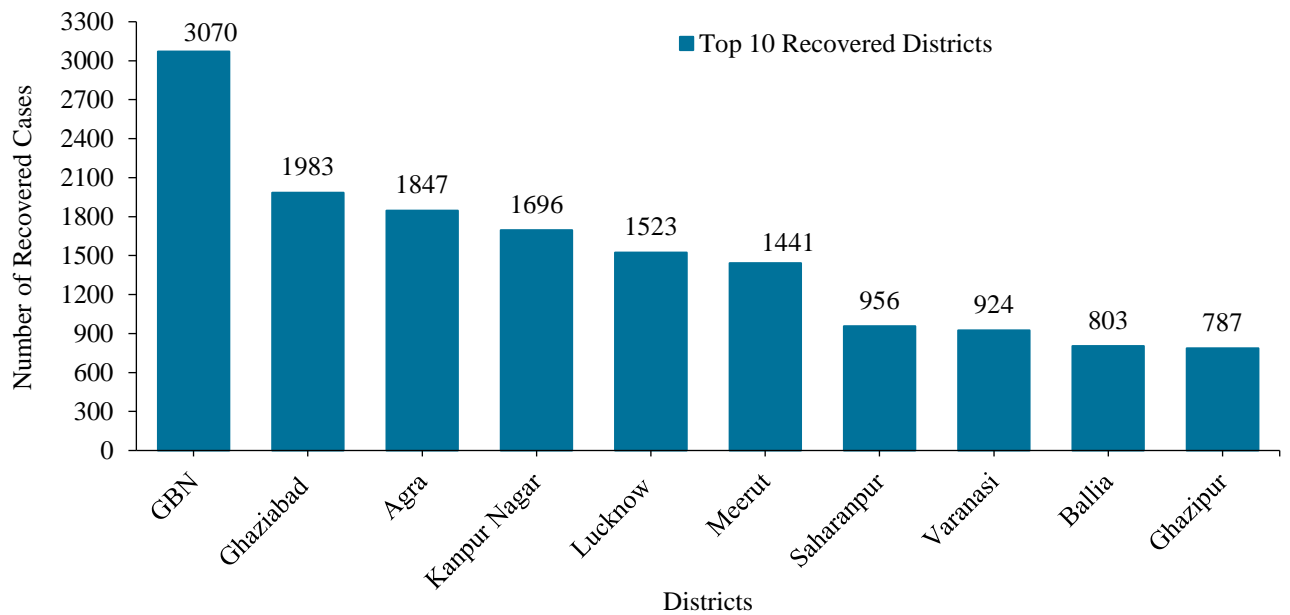


Fig. 6 (a): Number of Recovered Cases in top 10 Districts of Uttar Pradesh as of July 2020 (Data Compiled from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2020 and Prepared by Researcher, 2021)

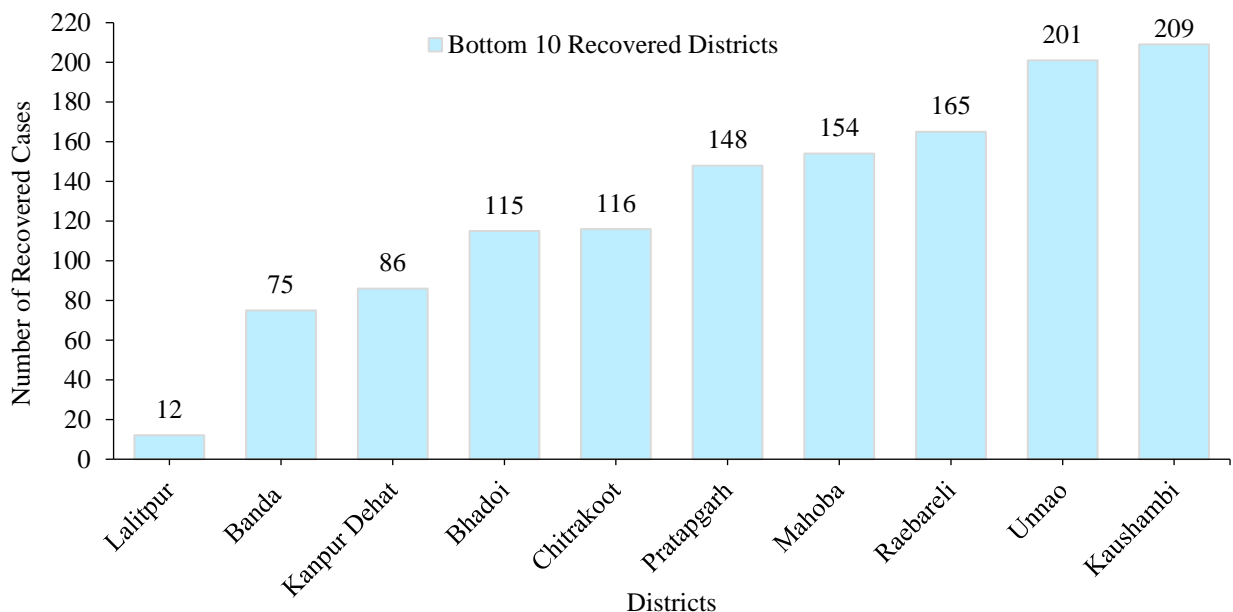


Fig. 6 (b): Number of Recovered Cases in bottom 10 Districts of Uttar Pradesh as of July 2020 (Data Compiled from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2020 and Prepared by Researcher, 2021)

The highest COVID deaths were reported from Agra, followed by Ghaziabad, Kanpur Nagar, Meerut, GBN, Varanasi, Prayagraj, Firozabad, Mathura, Hathras (Fig. 7). Analysis shows the highest number of active cases in these districts, showing a positive correlation between active patients and the number of deaths. According to the Union Health Ministry, around 63% of Coronavirus deaths are above the age of 60 years. The bottom 10 districts are Sonbhadra, Lakhimpur Kheri, Kasganj, Lalitpur, Pilibhit, Bhadoi, Shahjahanpur, Chandauli Ghazipur and Ballia, which registered almost an equal number of deaths. All the bottom districts have a high poverty rate, especially in the rural areas and COVID-19 cases are more inclined to the urban areas while rural areas are relatively safe from it (Fig. 8).

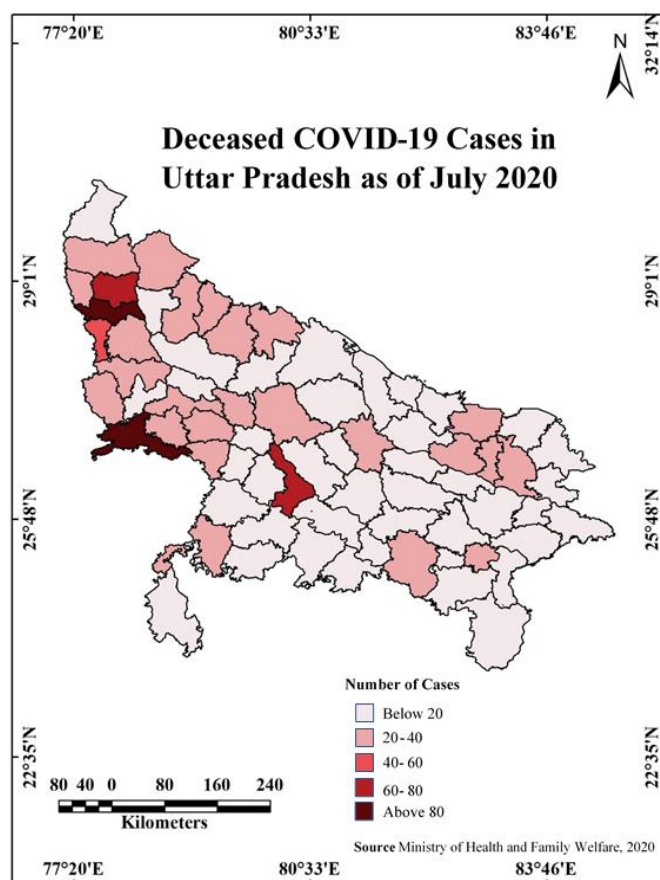


Fig. 7: Prepared by Researcher, 2020

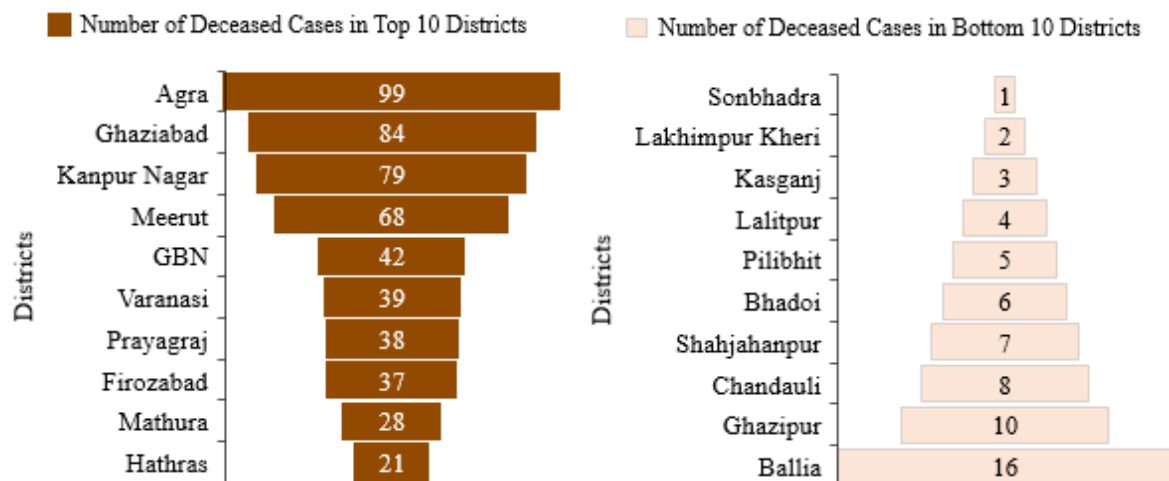


Fig. 8: Number of Deceased Cases in Districts of Uttar Pradesh as of July 2020 (Data compiled from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2020 and Prepared by Researcher, 2021)

After the analysis, it was concluded that poverty, rural area, and HDI have an inverse relation with COVID-19 cases (Fig. 9). Those districts have a low level of poverty, more urban towns, and high HDI than the number of COVID-19 tests, conformed, active, recovered, and deaths are also high and vice versa. In these districts, medical tests and other facilities like dedicated beds, personal protective equipment kits, ICU, ventilators, and trained medical staff is few. For example, in Uttar Pradesh, only 1 doctor is available for 19962, the second-lowest after Bihar (1: 28391) (Fig. 10).

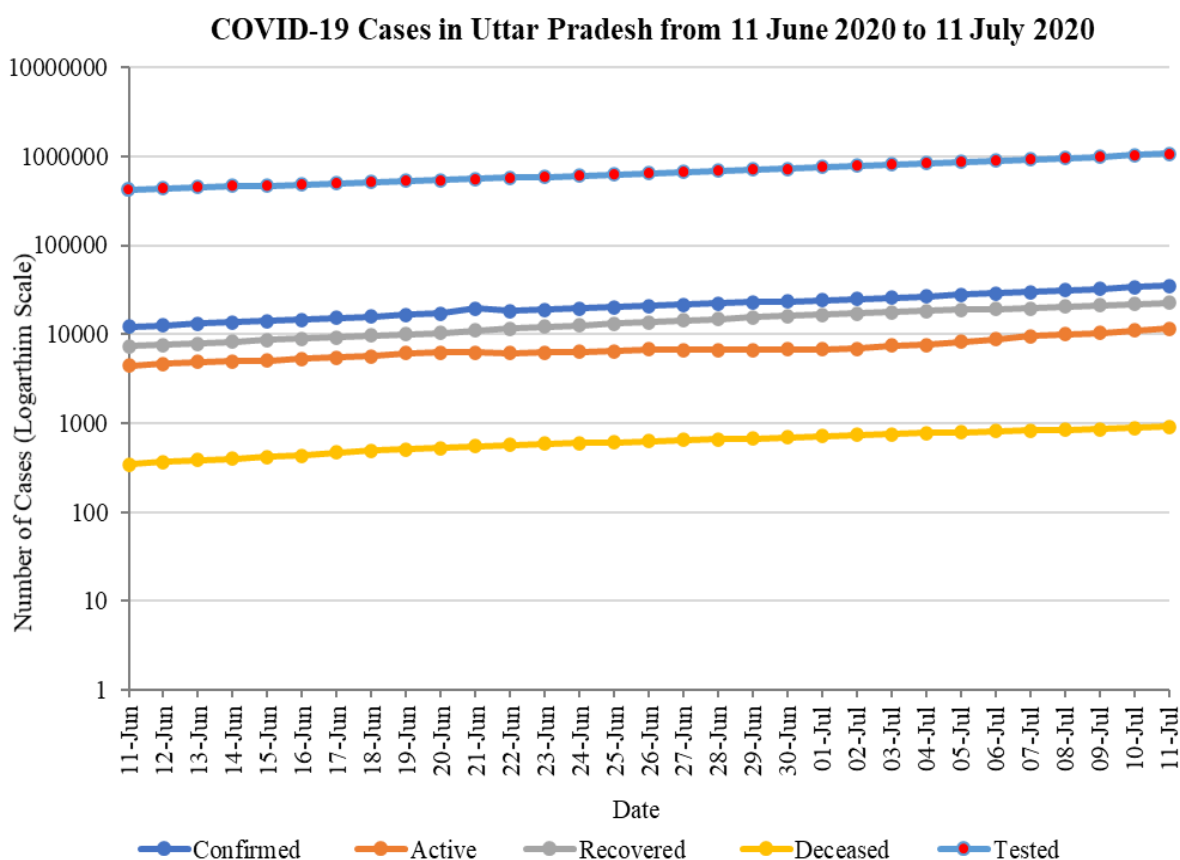


Fig. 9: COVID-19 (Data compiled from COVID19 India.org, 2020 and Prepared by Researcher, 2020)

In the past, the mass exodus of migrant workers was reported during disasters like cyclones, floods, and drought. But this time it is COVID 19, which is leading the mass exodus of migrant worker (though have been classified as disaster under D.M. act, 2005).

In the uncertain scenario, vulnerable sections of the society like migrants and the poor pay the cost by their precious life. They were never part of such kind of societal polarisation. In modern times, it has become an election norm of polarization of votes in the name of poverty and hunger. The leaders would have to rethink and work on strengthening the poor and marginalized.

## 2. End of the road for Masses

Sudden lockdown announced by the union government was the end of the rope for masses, as nobody knew how long the situation would remain strained. The government declaring it a health disaster (NDMA, 2005), sudden unemployment, and fear of hunger worsened the situation. The anxiety and panic within aroused the feeling of attachment and sense of belongingness to their home, leading to a mass exodus in the migrant crisis. The feeling that they did not belong here and belonged somewhere else made people come out, creating a massive wave of reverse migration. They say they will earn less or will die, but will die among our people. The apathy does not end here because the fear of not being welcomed at their native place also fear mongered the migrants. Corona is a highly contagious disease, whereby the locals fear they may get infected if they come in contact with returning migrants.

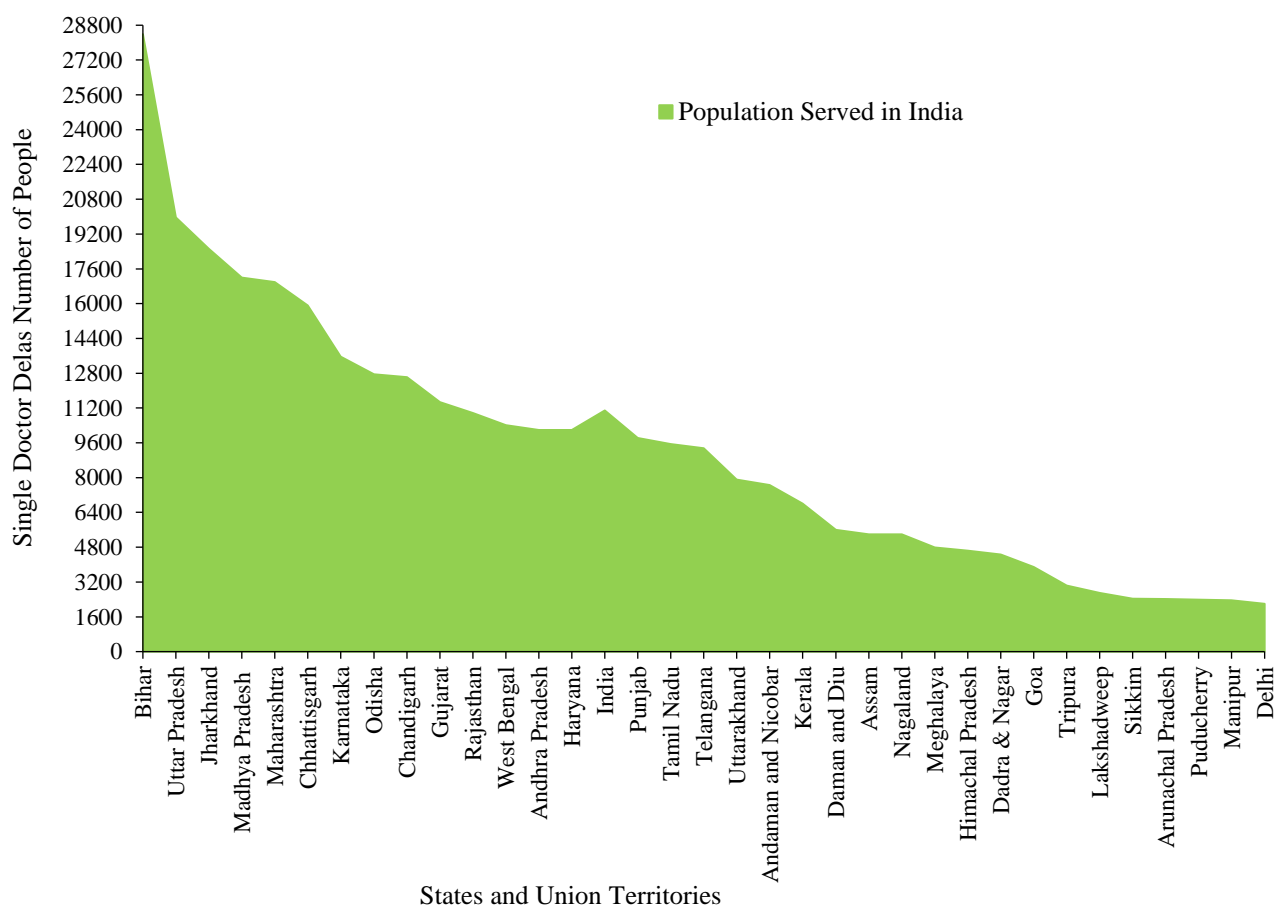


Fig. 10: Average Population Served by Each Government Doctor in India (Adopted from Mautya and Goswami, 2020 and Prepared by Researcher, 2021)

The pandemic brought economic and demographic disaster and gave birth to a social stigma apart from the existing caste system. Initially, corona affected were socially outcasted and look upon as second-class citizens. Such massive and unplanned movement from different parts of the country amid pandemic lead to panic, fear, and deaths of the large migrant population. It was not only their death but the death of their hope of leading a better life in the city. They had already lost their informal job in the city with little money, followed by no means of transport and a sealed border, which worsened the situation.

Immediately the state borders were sealed to curtail the spread of disease among states, followed by the closure of the forests, wetlands, canals, and rivers to stop any flow of virus or infection. Sealed border with the massive crowd waiting on either side and struggling to cross over due to sealed-border saw a lot of backlashes from the international community. The eastern border of Delhi with U P saw a massive exodus where large numbers of migrants assembled without following the government protocols, leading to fear of community transmission. However, with the mounting criticism and backlash, borders were selectively opened for the movement of domicile citizens. But, the damage was done, and the loss has already been incurred in one of the most severe migrant crises in India.

### 3. Massive Layoff and Unemployment

Migrant labor is employed in informal sectors on a day wage system (Fig. 11). Sudden closure followed by the rush to reach home due to fear and panic led to massive layoffs and lakhs of unemployed workers. Sudden closure of construction activities and factories was followed by leave without notice or pay. According to the Labour Bureau, around 3 million unemployed migrant workers are from Uttar Pradesh (UP) alone, and more than 20 million have lost jobs to date from March. The other important factor leading to the migrant crisis is unemployment. They wanted to return as they had no means to sustain themselves in the city. Limited savings were spent in the last few days were clueless about their future. One of migrants replied "*hum kya kare, kaha jaye, kaise jaye, samajh nahi araha*"- meaning he does not know where to go how to go and what to do? However, everything was suspended, and the government's orders to stay wherever they are made them more anxious, confused, and chaotic, signaling a trust deficit in the elected government. From the migrant's perspective, they were stuck at an economic standstill. Many were stranded between Delhi and Uttar Pradesh with money as little as ₹ 10 and nowhere to go for help, clearly showing disbelief in the administration.





(a) Varanasi District, Uttar Pradesh (b) Chandauli District, Uttar Pradesh (c) Gonda District, Uttar Pradesh

Fig. 11: Labour in different parts of UP seeking and looking for employers for employment Construction Activities (Primary Survey, 2020-2021)

#### 4. Lack of Coordination and Inefficient machinery

It is commonly said that the coordination between government departments is very poor, becoming more evident during the crisis. There was a lack of effective coordination among the states sharing borders like Delhi and U P, with the migrants bearing the burnt. Initially, the UP govt refusing to allow its citizen to enter its borders caused a lot of panics, fury, and a sense of betrayal from their own elected representative. After much criticism and backlash, the UP government could make arrangements for thousands of buses for migrants from Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi, which was chargeable. At this hour of panic, when migrants were finding it hard to meet their end, the state government charging them fares was highly irresponsible, signaling minimum efforts by state and central government. Parallely, orders to stop the migrants from destroying wherever they are created more problems in the bordering areas, citing prevention of community transmission. The state authorities had no record of incoming migrants, unlike Delhi, who had no outgoing, flooding quarantine centers with people beyond capacity, multiplying the fear of community transmission.

#### 5. Reverse Migration

In a normal situation, the wave of migrants would be from rural areas to urban areas, but we see rare reverse migration due to pandemics. Every city or a place has the carrying capacity based on the population it houses and resource base. Large cities have more and vice versa. Reverse migration would put back the pressure on the native town from the migrants belongs to and is intended to go. Here, UP has to bear the responsibility of their family members. Unlike everyday situations where migrants send remittances to their families, facilitating the exchange of goods and services, thus contributing to national income, the case is reversed. The state must take up its responsibilities and look to generate immediate employment opportunities and livelihood options. This would also

burden the state's exchequer, which already sought a revenue shortage because of COVID-19.

#### 6. Living Condition and temporary shelter

The living condition of migrant workers is pathetic in whichever cityscape they live, devoid of basic amenities of health and hygiene. They provide the best facilities in city life. Still, they have no access to open spaces, playgrounds, or parks. Electricity and drinking water are supplied at the behest of people above them in normal circumstances. Unlike the middle class, migrant labor or informal workers don't have the option of working from home. They do the physical job, which needs a physical presence on a day-to-day basis. Their little earned money serves bread to his family back home, which is never sufficient. As an immediate relief, the government developed temporary shelter camps outside human settlements, beside the highways and railway tracks as quarantine centers. However, the camps' condition was pathetic, and it was challenging for the migrants to stay there. Overcrowded camps, violation of social distancing norms, inadequate sanitation facilities, and subpar food quality with minimum hygiene were visible. The ceiling of their temporary shelter made up of husk or plastic keeps leaking, and stagnant water becomes the breeding ground for mosquitoes' water-borne diseases like dengue and malaria. The non-availability of any separate room and proper washroom for female migrants violated their privacy. They were more worried about health and their family's safety, which propelled some migrants to flee the shelter camps and quarantine centers to reach home.

#### 7. Transportation Infrastructure

Scenes on various media highlighted that migrants were ready to travel back home with their expenses, with a sense of frustration and disappointment. A case from the press could be cited where a group of 20 hire a goods carrier auto rickshaw, and we can imagine how it would be for those 20 migrants to travel miles. They accommodated and adjusted like cattle van with three divisions, top tier for their belongings, middle and lower for themselves occupying every inch available, with social distancing going in the air. Such overloaded vehicles are highly prone to accidents. They also met the same fate after traveling a few kilometers, with the driver losing his life and migrants suffering minor injuries. Their journey back home had three hurdles, coronavirus, Lockdown, and accident, with all being life-threatening, but they were sure to reach their village. Although the state government arranged bus and truck for them, the exact condition prevailed: overcrowding and no safety measures were followed as everyone was in a hurry. A 5-year girl fell from the bus roof in such a rush scene and died on the spot. The question remains unanswered? What was her Fault? Who will take responsibility for her untimely death or murder?

### 8. Agrarian crisis and food security

It is well-known that agricultural states like Punjab and Haryana are heavily dependent upon migrant workers from Up and Bihar to harvest Kharif crops like Paddy. These migrants are seasonally employed with better wages. However, the lockdown and sealed-border have hit them in terms of income and sustainability. It was a harvest season in the North and north-western parts, where paddy and other crops were ready to be harvested, but the lockdown was in motion.

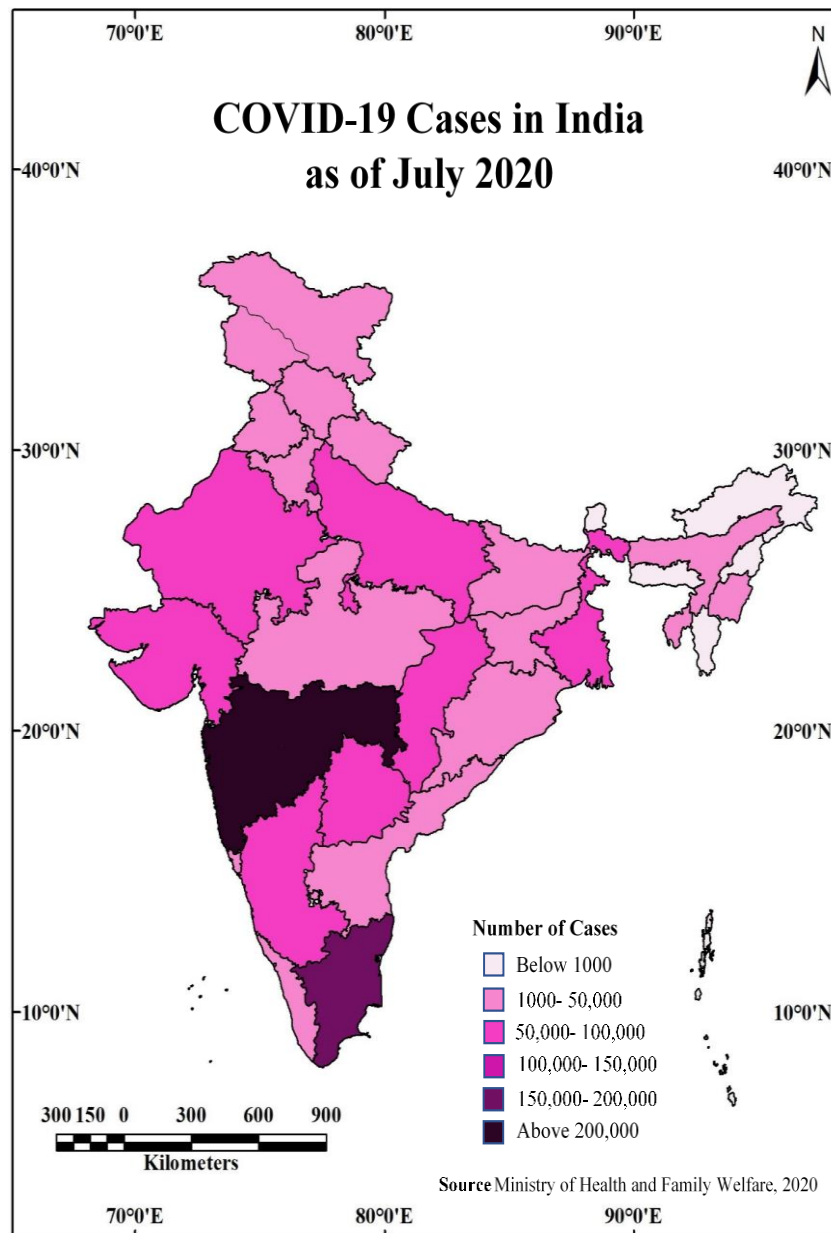


Fig. 12: Prepared by Researchers, 2020

As a result, those standing crops were damaged, fetching low yield, incidents of crop failure, and migrants became more vulnerable to livelihood security. Large farmers with bank loans suffered the most, and the agricultural activity was allowed to resume

with restrictions in the later part. Farmers were heard saying "*fasal katni ke liye tayaar ha khet mein, par aadmi nahi ha aur nahi hi sarkar humari sun rahi ha*"- meaning the crop are ready to be harvested but we are helpless. During that time, the number of COVID-19 cases increased rapidly by overtaking Russia and second only to the USA. The top five states/union territories reporting the highest number of cases were Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh (Fig. 12). Except, UP others are economically prosperous and perform well in all the national indicators like urban population, HDI, and poverty level (Fig. 13).

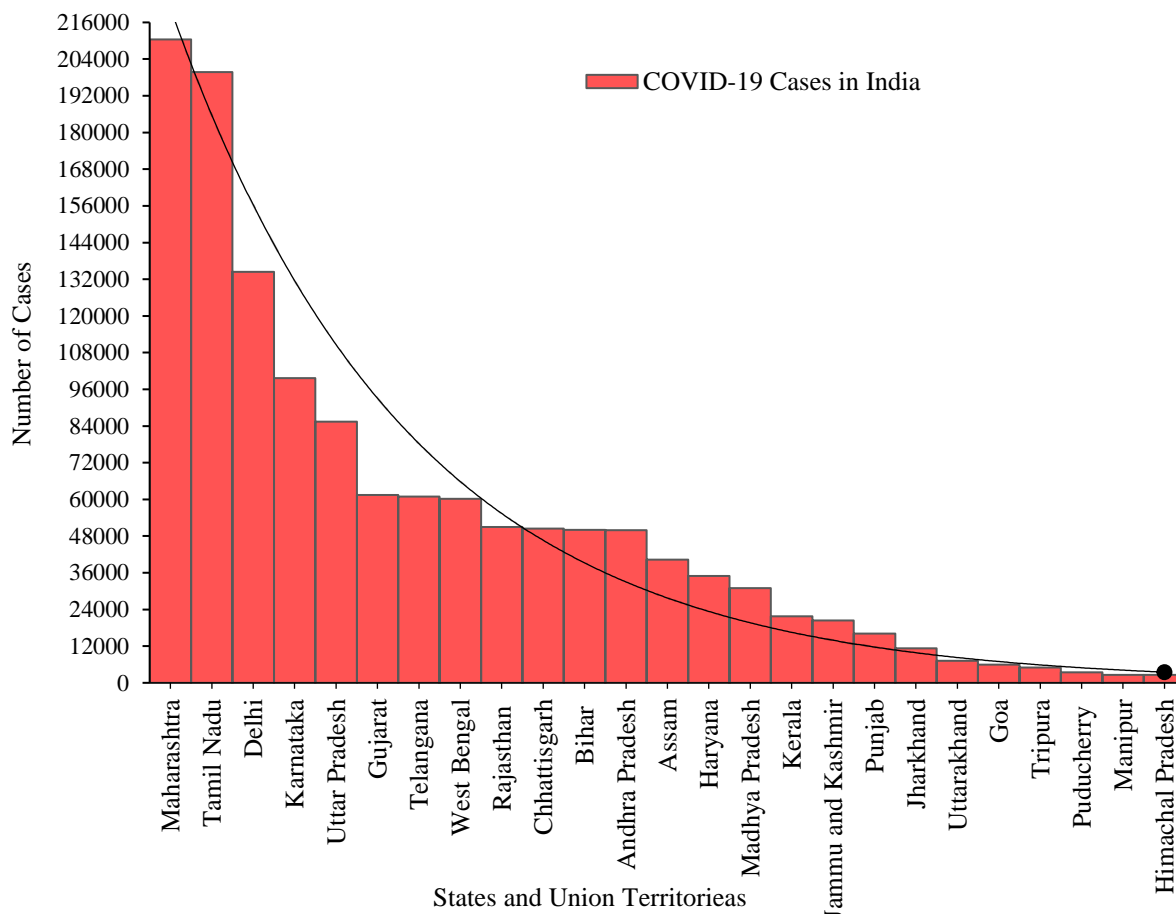


Fig. 13: Number of COVID-19 Cases in India as of July 2020 (Adopted from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2020 and Prepared by Researcher, 2021)

### 9. Mockery of Health Guidelines and Education for Children

As stated in opening lines, two yards and stay home was the basic mantra for all with particular operating procedures and orders per the health need. But, during the migrant exodus, no health measures followed. Instead, there was a mockery of health measures issued by the government. There were no difference between children, elderly, old, sick, or pregnant ladies, exposing them to serious health risk. The movement was propelled by the idea of "*Jaan ha to jahaan ha*". *Barring health, school, and college education* hanging in limbo, with students stranded across states. The nation was not

infrastructurally well equipped to address the issue of other means of teaching and learning. So, masses among the migrants were devoid of their fundamental rights, i.e., education. Moreover, many children were forced to leave their school education due to movement and some due to financial strain, posing a serious question on the welfare nature of the nation, where people would be devoid of education due to the social divide.

#### 10. Psychology of Migrants

In every challenging situation, it is the psychology that makes or breaks someone. The COVID 19 has psychologically impacted people across the Globe. Mass deaths, unemployment, hunger, and associated challenges have brought the world to a standstill. Migrants across the Globe, both from the developed and developing world, have been severely affected, Indians being the worst hit. The existing situation of COVID-19 and lockdown broke down the backbone of migrant laborers. Though efforts were made at different levels to provide food and shelter, they were reluctant to go back home despite the government's announcement of assistance. Here we need to be compassionate and try to fit our legs in their shoes to understand their psychology better. Migrants came to urban areas searching for jobs and income, leaving their families back home. This cycle had continued for a long time, season-wise, year-wise, and so on.

This time around, they were stuck in the urban area with their families back home in the village. Now, they are unemployed, and whatsoever money they had earned would finish soon. The longer they stay in the city, difficult it would be to finance their mounting and travel expenses. One of the laours says "*bhaiya ye to pardes ha yeha kon dekhega, gaon me to sab log apne ha, jo v hoga ab gaon me hi hoga*". They were psychologically strained and worried about themselves and their family as the majority of these migrants were the only working members of their families. They were the only hope for the family, and the time was such that that hope had no hope in himself due to the ongoing pandemic. If they don't return home among their family members (emotions that bind them together) now, it would be difficult for their family to survive and reach. Some migrants reported that their families were starving for days, and financial strain made it even more challenging to cope with. If we talk of general human psychology that whenever one is in any trouble-like situation or some danger, we only think of our parents and family, so this psychology propelled such mass exodus and movement among the migrants.

#### WAY FORWARD

Migrant workers in large numbers are returning to their native state will negatively impact several industries soon. Many migrants complained about non-payment of their wages last month and even the previous months of March and April. Many sectors will not work at their total capacity because there will be a massive labor shortage. We can only fight efficiently with COVID-19 when our society is inclusive, equitable, and non-

discriminatory. We need a universal labor market and universal social security system that ensures all laborers' safety, security, and dignity. We need to promote labor law, awareness, and other social welfare schemes to prevent such catastrophes in the future-some of the suggestive measures noted below.

#### 1. Migrants, their dignity and welfare

Migrant workers are an integral part of the democratic system and propeller of the growth engine of any economy. About an estimated 3 million migrant workers migrate to different states every year from UP, working across various sectors. Key sectors like construction, mining, agriculture, garment manufacturing, and household help are heavily dependent on them, and now, these sectors are suffering the most. The biggest question will be to bring back these workers to urban areas after the lifting of lockdown to reenergize the slowing economy. However, over time things have improved, and slowly the quality of food and shelter have improved. Gradually initiatives like teleconsultation centers, health condition reports, and psycho-social care were initiated as a part of coping mechanisms. In addition, confidence-building measures promoting dignity were started like a general helpline number, food supply, and essential items on call. Realizing the potential of labor for nation-building they must be given their due is the only way to address the situation. The government should look for special provisions under existing welfare schemes like Public Distribution System (PDS), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), and Pension schemes, which was done in the latter part. Through PDS, free ration can be effectively distributed. MGNREGA could be used as an excellent livelihood generator in rural regions. A pension scheme could help by making advance payments for locally registered migrant workers. Much said than done, migrants stuck in urban and semi-urban areas cannot avail of the free ration, as PDS provision is within the state limits. So, in this hour of need, we can develop one nation-one card like some innovative ration card and delivery system (like Aadhar), which would enable you to receive PDS facility across the country.

Reports of migrants losing life to hunger and starvation came up as they were denied ration due to unavailability of ration cards or non-linkages of official documents like Aadhar cards. Many such deaths could have been prevented by providing them their entitled allocation based on Aadhar (which has a provision of ration distribution under section 7). However, one nation – one-ration is a project in the pipeline project, expected to be implemented by the end of March 2021 at the earliest. Such schemes would have done a lot of good during the pandemic and benefit a large chunk of the migrants. However, the government looks clueless on enhancing social security infrastructure, which is not justifiable given the severity of the pandemic. We should improve security infrastructures to provide welfare schemes as it is the essence of Indian democracy.

## 2. Collective Responsibility

Pandemic is the time to learn and calls for a collective responsibility from various stakeholders, be it an individual or the prime minister. The state should accept the reality and look to addressing health and social welfare among the migrant masses. If we hold back in making responsible decisions now, we would be making roads ahead more challenging to traverse. Act now or be ready to battle hunger, poverty, health hazards, food security, and economic slowdown. Hence, it is the collective fight for the entire human civilization and not of a single state or country, and it is everybody's responsibility to play their part. Fake news' circulation and misinformation on various media platforms need to stop, whereby government machinery of information and technology would play a vital role. Effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can help track fake news, which could complicate the existing situation. Panic and misinformation were some of the very reasons for the migrant exodus to their homes. Regular press briefing and meetings with all the officials should be initiated to spread accurate and correct information and confidence-building. The decision and the future preparedness hold on careful analysis and handling of the situation, which could help India build back better. The comparative analysis of ailment receiving care in rural and urban areas both at the state and national level is discussed below (Fig. 14 and 15). After the analysis, it was concluded that there is an urgent need to increase the number of government/public hospitals in rural as well as urban areas as these hospitals are within the reach of downtrodden sections like workers.

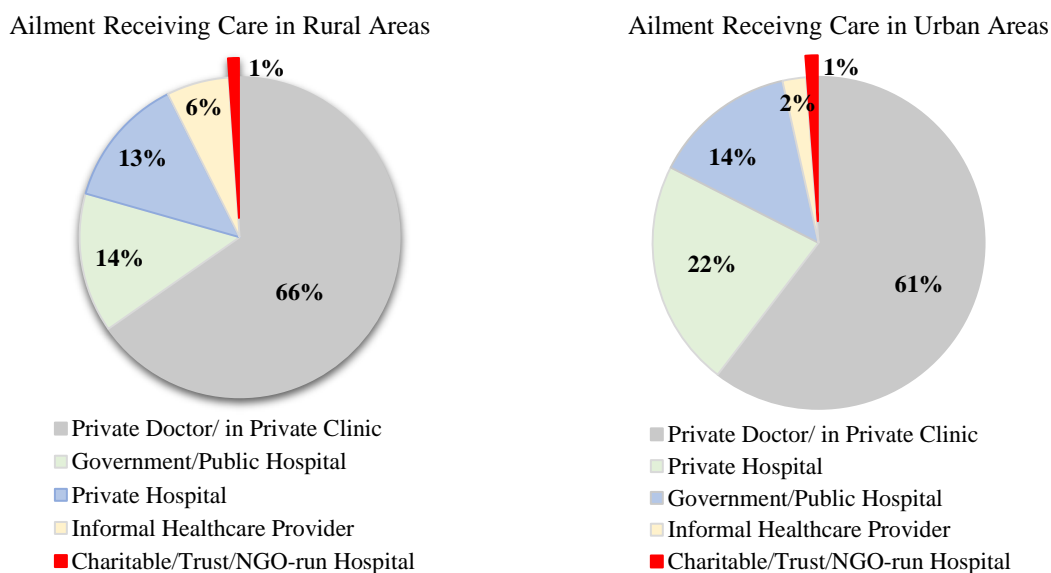


Fig. 14: Percentage of Ailments Treated by Healthcare Service Providers in Rural and Urban Areas of Uttar Pradesh

(Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2019-2020 and Prepared by Researcher, 2021)

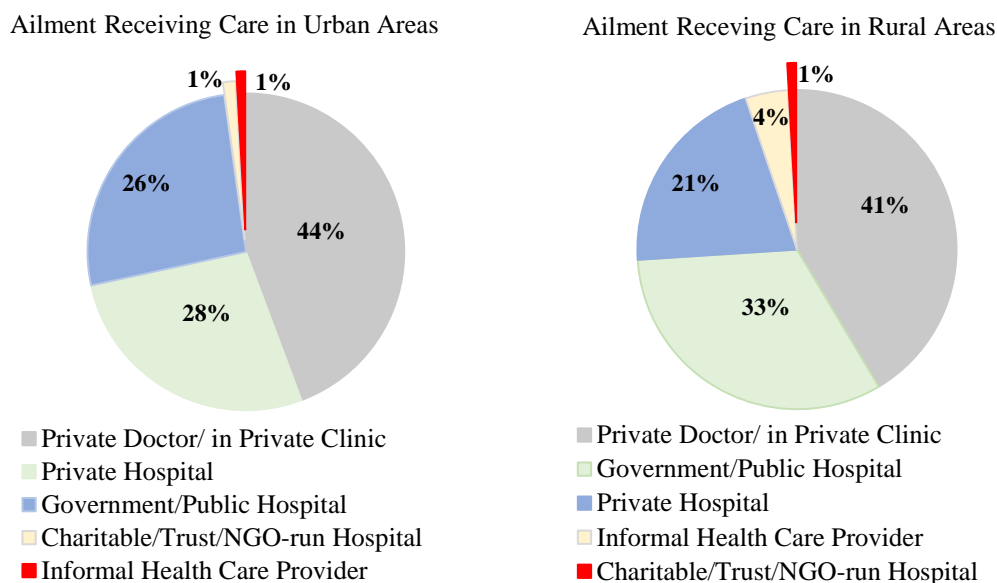


Fig. 15: Percentage of Ailments Treated by Healthcare Service Providers in Rural and Urban Areas of India (Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2019-2020 and Prepared by Researcher, 2021)

### 3. Adaptive Capacity and Preparedness

In a short period, the novel coronavirus became a significant threat to human existence, and we do not have sufficient data to prepare or respond to the ongoing health and migration crisis. But every disaster should be learning and lesson for the next. So, we as a people and government must learn from the migrant crisis during the first wave and prepare ourselves better for the next wave or peak. The nature of the virus is very mutating, and with every passing day, the transmissibility of the virus is increasing. So, we must learn to respond and execute our plans for the second and possible third wave from the recent exodus. To better prepare ourselves, we need to develop proper coordination among the various government machinery at the state and central levels. The inter-departmental functioning needs to become more coordinated and smoother to keep track of the amount of outmigration from a place and in-migration to another. In the present crisis, various government sources lacked reliable data to track the migrants, causing chaos and mismanagement.

Further, the government should look to execute their plans and policies more systematically rather than make sudden decisions. Historical learnings suggest that humanity comes first before anything, so promote labor welfare schemes to the fullest. In addition, documentation and paperwork should be eased up for smooth transfer and conduct of various activities during the pandemic. Efforts should be made for an inclusive approach at multiple levels from top to bottom, focusing on daily wage earners and migrant laborers.



## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the government has tried and made the provision to help the needy through the announcement of ₹20 lakh crores under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package. However, in the package, there is nothing much for the migrant workers. Although the government has increased the wages to ₹202 in MGNREGA, 100 days limit should be increased to 200 days for the pandemic period. The government needs to take timely and responsible steps and initiatives to compensate their wages as their condition is very pathetic. Most of the migrants belong to poor state's impoverished regions, and the capacity of their native state is not good to provide them relief package. It is true that either today or tomorrow, we would have control over the COVID-19. If we have a collective decision and responsible leadership on time, then the loss of monetary loss and human life can be curtailed. Hence, the Union government and other state governments have to develop ideas, initiatives, and relief packages to help the poor states and provide adequate relief to migrants during the pandemic. State's statesmen should come forward to arouse the sense of conscience at all the societal levels. However, things have changed a lot, and initiatives were taken to normalize things, bring the economy on track, and the people of India build back better; the research looks to focus on the migrant crisis during the 1<sup>st</sup> Covid lockdown.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest in the research paper.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are grateful to the University Grants Commission for financial assistance. They are equally thankful to the Department of Geography, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi for providing me the required resources like software and Wi-Fi connection.

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Received: 03<sup>th</sup> July 2021; Accepted: 01<sup>th</sup> September 2021; First distribution: 16<sup>th</sup> March 2022.