

Patterns in Internal Migration and Labour Market Transitions in India

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1. Introduction

From a demographic perspective, the central issue in the study of internal migration relates to the contribution of net rural-urban migration to growth in urban population. Beyond this aggregate, there are a host of important questions pertaining to the individual. Who migrates? Why does he or she migrate? Where do they migrate to? In addition to answering these questions, this paper focuses on the overall migration patterns and the pre and post migration work status of individuals. For reasons discussed later in this paper, we sidestep the issue of comparison of evolution of migration rates over time and the contribution of net rural-urban migration to urbanization in the decade of 2010.

While there is a large literature on the labour market transitions of migrant workers in the developed and some developing countries, this issue has received limited attention in the context of India¹. The objective of this paper is to fill this lacuna. We focus on the pre and post migration transitions of individuals along the following dimensions - principal work status and industry of work. Our analysis is based on the annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21 which had a module on migration particulars of all individuals from households that were surveyed.

Movement of workers from low to high productive sectors, rise of non-farm employment and urbanization of the workforce, and a decrease in informality in labour markets are considered to be among the central characteristics of economic growth. Migration of workers from rural to urban is a channel that facilitates this transition.

There are broadly three frameworks within which we can understand the process of migration. Ravenstein, a geographer, is recognized for his seminal work on understanding the

¹ The literature has focused on who migrates and why (Munshi and Rosenzweig 2016), the role of networks (Mitra 2010; Sharma and Das 2018), whether migrants are poorer compared to non-migrants (A Kundu and Sarangi 2007). In addition there is a literature on seasonal migration which has focused on the pre and post labour market transition of short term migrants (T. Agrawal and Chandrasekhar 2016).

distinct patterns that emerge when one analyzes migration data. He outlined a set of laws of migration (Ravenstein 1885, 1889). Within the economics literature, Lewis and Harris-Todaro models are the two standard frameworks used for understanding the process of rural-urban migration and labour market transitions (Gollin 2014; Harris and Todaro 1970; Lewis 1954). The Lewis model can be summarized as follows. In rural areas, there is a large pool of surplus workers, i.e. they are underemployed or disguised unemployed. These workers can be shifted from rural agricultural to modern secondary sector in urban areas where productivity is higher without a reduction in the output in rural areas. The Harris-Todaro model is useful for highlighting the fact that rural-urban migration can persist even in the face of unemployment, due to expected wages being higher in urban areas. Within these frameworks the empirical literature on migration and labour market transitions has evolved. There is also the larger literature on the labour market transitions of individuals (Natarajan et al. 2020) and changes in occupations across generations within households (Azam 2015; Anustup Kundu and Sen 2022; Motiram and Singh 2012).

Understanding the nature of transition and whether one observes an upward mobility in the labour market is important since the share of workers in the informal sector in developing countries continues to be high despite economic growth. The absence of jobs in the formal sector and in particular manufacturing is often traced to the phenomenon of premature deindustrialization. Premature deindustrialization is the phenomenon wherein the share of manufacturing in the gross domestic product of a country peaks at a much lower level of per capita income than that was observed in the case of the now developed countries. In the absence of jobs in labour intensive manufacturing, in many developing countries, and India is often used as an example, employment opportunities have emerged in the construction and service sector.

Given this context, it is important to understand whether there are differences between migrant and other workers in terms of sector of work.

This paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we provide a concise discussion on the extent to which India is unequal. Differences in employment opportunities and wage differentials should encourage mobility. In Section 3, we discuss broad patterns in mobility – both migration and commuting. In section 4, we provide a description of the information relating to migration available in PLFS 2020-21. Since this was not a standard migration survey, in section 5, we discuss the issue of comparability of estimates of migration rate from this survey with those from Census of India 2011 and the survey of employment, unemployment and migration conducted in 2007-08. The focus of Section 6 is on patterns in migration observed in the 2020-21 survey. In Section 7 we provide a narrative on internal migration and labour market transitions. Section 8 concludes with a discussion on policies aimed at reducing the direct and indirect costs of internal migration.

2. India is Unequal

During the period 2011-21, India's gross domestic product increased by over two times from US\$ 1.82 trillion to US\$ 3.81 trillion. However, this period did not see a narrowing of disparities within the Indian states. The divergence in the per capita state domestic product is best illustrated by focusing on Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. The per capita net state domestic product (PCNSDP) of Haryana, one of India's richer states, was 4.9, 2.6 and 3.3 times that of Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh in 2011-12. In the next 10 years the disparity increased. In 2021-22, Haryana's PCNSDP was 5.6, 3.5 and 4 times that of Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. Not only has the divergence in PCNSDP across the states persisted, if not worsened, intra-state disparities too have persisted. Consider the case of Maharashtra and Karnataka which unlike

Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh are not only more urbanized but also have a sizable share of output from manufacturing and services. When one considers the six regions of Maharashtra, five of them, viz. Amravati, Aurangabad, Nagpur, Nashik and Pune regions have always lagged behind the Konkan division (Government of Maharashtra 2013). Districts in northern Karnataka continue to lag behind other districts of the state. In 2020-21, Karnataka's state per capita gross state domestic was 2.1 times and 1.9 times that of the northern districts of Kalaburagi and Bidar (Government of Karnataka 2022). Estimates of household earnings from the PLFS confirm not only intra-state and inter-state disparities but also large rural-urban disparities in income at the national level and within states. From the PLFS it is possible to estimate the earnings of the household at the 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th and 90th percentile of the earnings distribution. The 75:25 and 90:10 ratios reflect the extent of inequality in earnings. The 75:25 ratios for rural and urban India are 2.3 and 3.0 respectively while the 90:10 ratios are 5.0 and 7.4 respectively. There are large variations within states (Chandrasekhar, Naraparaju, and Sharma 2021). One of the stylized facts is that a high level of inequality is detrimental for growth prospects.

The age distribution too has implications for growth prospects. During the period 2011-2021, India also saw a marginal change in the age distribution of its population. In the absence of data from Census of India 2021, we compare the age distributions as evident from the labour force surveys. In both rural and urban India, the share of males and females aged 0-14 years declined in the decade of 2010. If one were to take a longer time frame, i.e. 2004-05 and 2020-21, then the change in the age distribution is appreciable (Government of India 2022a). The share of rural men and women in the working age population 15-59 years increased from 56 to 63 percent and from 58 to 65 percent respectively. There are differences in the age distribution across the Indian states. While the share of working age individuals increased, the decade of 2010 also saw an

increase in the unemployment rates. In every year since 2017-18, the year the annual periodic labour force survey was launched, the unemployment rate is highest among those who have completed secondary education or above. The unemployment rate is also the highest among those aged 15-29 years of age. In 2020-21, the overall unemployment rate was 4.2 percent while it was 9.1 percent among those who have completed secondary education or above and 17.8 percent among 15-29 year olds (Government of India 2022a). There are differences in unemployment rate across Indian states.

The logical conjecture is that large persistent intra-state and inter-state disparities in income, differences in age distribution across states, and high unemployment rate among the educated and the youth will be a catalyst for internal migration. It is then an empirical question whether people move within the same district, to other districts of the same state or across state boundaries.

3. Patterns in Mobility and Policy Stance

The aggregate picture would suggest that internal migration is an important phenomenon in India. In 2005, the total number of internal migrants, i.e. those who were living in their own country but outside their region of birth, was estimated to be 763 million (United Nations 2013). India accounts for at least 40 percent of these migrants.

Migration flows can comprise of the entire household moving or a member of the household out migrating. The moves can be permanent or temporary. Information on migration collected as part of Census of India pertains only to permanent moves. The number of internal migrants in India increased from 232.1 million in 1991, to 314.6 in 2001 and further to 453.7 million in 2011(Chandrasekhar, Naik, and Roy 2017). During the period 1991-2011, the share of migrants in rural India increased from 26.1 to 32.5 percent and from 32.3 to 48.4 percent in urban India.

There are some consistent patterns when one examines distribution of migrants by reason for migration in the successive inter-censal periods, i.e. 1981-91, 1991-2001 and 2001-11. Over half the migrants living in rural India moved for reasons related to marriage and these migrants are typically women². In contrast in urban India, nearly 45 percent of migrants moved with their families. Permanent inter-state moves for work is not the dominant migration stream. Another important statistic is that over 85 percent of the moves are within the same state. A multivariate analysis of district to district internal migration flows established the predominance of intra state migrant flows. The “average migration between neighboring districts in the same state is at least 50 percent larger than neighboring districts on different sides of a state border³ (Kone et al. 2018). Estimates from NSSO surveys too suggest that 4.4, 25.2, 17.5 and 22.9 percent of the rural to rural, rural to urban, urban to rural and urban to urban migrants move across state borders (Chandrasekhar and Sharma 2015). The key take away from the patterns evident from Census of India is that while the number of migrants did increase, the moves are intra state rather than inter-state.

While Census of India is useful for understanding permanent moves, it is from household surveys that we get insights on two different aspects of mobility, namely short term migration and daily two-way commuting between the rural and urban.

While recent estimates of short term migration or seasonal migration are not available, it has historically been an important phenomenon and is driven by economic conditions. There is a large literature based on the survey of employment, unemployment and migration conducted in

² While women move for reasons related to marriage, a fraction of them become part of the labour force post migration. In light of stark differences in migration by gender and reasons for migration, it is important to undertake a disaggregated analysis of migrant flows.

³ Although the impact of state borders differs by education, age and reason for migration, it is always large and significant. The authors argue that inter-state mobility is inhibited by state-level entitlement schemes, ranging from access to subsidized goods through the public distribution system to the bias for states’ own residents in access to tertiary education and public sector employment.

2007-08 (T. Agrawal and Chandrasekhar 2016; Chandrasekhar, Das, and Sharma 2015; Keshri and Bhagat 2012, 2013). The Report of the Working Group on Employment, Planning and Policy for the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) proffered an explanation for the phenomenon of short term migration along the following lines: “... workers do migrate from rural to urban but only for temporary periods. In the lean season of the labour market of rural areas they migrate temporarily to urban areas to engage in construction activities or pulling rickshaws, without ever severing their link to the land in the rural home land. This is not the kind of labour force who are likely to be available to work in manufacturing or modern services, mainly on account of their lack of skills, and often even primary education. Their migration is a reflection of rural distress, driven by the fact that 84 % of India’s farmers are small and marginal farmers, tilling only less than 2.5 acres of land (p. 87)”(Government of India 2011).

Unlike short term migration, estimates on rural-urban commuting are available for recent times. The PLFS as well as the earlier Survey of Employment and Unemployment have information on place of residence (rural, urban) and place of work (rural, urban, no fixed place of work). The place of work is relevant for the non-farm workers. Commuting for work is driven by spatial differences in level of urbanization and size of peripheral urban areas, distribution of jobs and concentration of jobs in secondary sector, rural-urban differences in wages and the unemployment rate (Sharma and Chandrasekhar 2014). The total number of non-farm workers residing in rural but working in the urban areas increased from 8.7 million in 2011-12 to 18.8 million in 2018-19. The total number of workers commuting from urban to rural decreased from 3.6 million to 2.3 million. In 2018-19, nearly 20 percent of the earnings of the rural non-farm earnings is on account of rural residents working in the urban areas (Bhatt, Chandrasekhar, and Sharma 2020).

The issue of mobility got prominence in the policy discourse when an entire chapter of Government of India's Economic Survey 2017-18 was devoted to internal migration⁴(Government of India 2017a). The chapter recognized the issue of “lack of portability of benefits, legal and other entitlements upon relocation” (p.277). It concluded that, “Portability of food security benefits, healthcare, and a basic social security framework for the migrant are crucial – potentially through an interstate self-registration process. While there do currently exist multiple schemes that address migrant welfare, they are implemented at the state level, and hence require inter state coordination of fiscal costs of migration” (p.277).

4. Data

India's National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) has periodically collected data on migration as part of an integrated survey on employment and unemployment and migration (EU&M). The integrated surveys were conducted in January - December 1983, July 1987 - June 1988, July 1999 - June 2000 and July 2007 - June 2008. Since 2017-18, NSSO has been conducting the Annual Period Labour Force Survey (PLFS). A set of questions related to migration were included in the PLFS conducted in 2020-21. As we discuss in the next section, the procedure for selection of households is different in the 2007-08 and 2020-21 surveys (Government of India 2010, 2022b)

The definition of who is a migrant is consistent across the surveys. A migrant is an individual “*whose last usual place of residence is different from the present place of enumeration*”. The “*Usual place of residence is the place (village/town) where the person stayed continuously for a period of 6 months or more or intends to stay for 6 months of more*”.

⁴ The survey provided alternate estimates of migration based on sales of unreserved railway passenger tickets. Not only was it a one off exercise, any further work was constrained by lack of availability of similar data in public domain.

Unlike the 2007-08 survey, the PLFS 2020-21 does not have information on short-term migrants⁵. However, the PLFS 2020-21 which was conducted at the time of COVID induced lockdown has information on temporary visitors. On account of the lockdown and disruptions in the labour market a larger number of individuals migrated back to their hometowns. Recognizing this, a set of questions were added to capture temporary visitors to the household. *“Temporary visitors in the household are those persons who arrived after March 2020 and stayed in the household continuously for a period of 15 days or more but less than 6 months”*.

Specifically in the context of migrants, a question was asked whether they had “moved to this present place of enumeration after March 2020”. Among all migrants, 3.1 percent of them reported changing their place of residence after March 2020. Given this small proportion, they do not affect the estimates of migration rate and migration streams as evident in the PLFS 2020-21.

5. Issues in Comparability of Estimates of Migration Rate across Datasets

The migration rate is defined as the percentage of migrants in the population. As per estimates from the 2020-21 survey, the proportion of migrants in the total population of India is 28.9 percent. The migration rate can be calculated by gender, by place of residence (rural or urban), state etc. The proportion of migrants in rural and urban areas is 26.5 percent and 34.9 percent respectively (**Table 1**). As is evident, the female migration rate is markedly higher than that of male. This is because women move after marriage. The survey has a question on whether the individual migrated to their present place of residence after March 2020. Among male

⁵ Unlike the 2007-08 survey, the PLFS 2020-21 does not have information on temporary out-migration. In the 2007-08 survey there was a question on whether a member of a household “stayed away from village /town for 1 month or more but less than 6 months during the last 365 days for employment or in search of employment”. The 2007-08 survey also sought information on out-migrants who migrated out any time in the past and details of remittances received from these individuals.

migrants living in rural (urban) India, 12 (6) percent reported moving post March 2020 (**Table 2**).

For the reasons outlined in the ensuing discussion, we refrain from comparing estimates from datasets available for earlier years. When comparing estimates across various surveys it is important to recognize the differences in the criteria for household selection across the surveys. Consider the two recent rounds, i.e. surveys conducted in 2007-08 and 2020-21. In the 2020-21 survey, households were selected based on the number of members in the household having a level of general education as secondary (10th standard) or above. In contrast, in the 2007-08 survey the following three types of households were selected - households having at least one out-migrant and received at least one remittance from him/ her during last 365 days, remaining households having at least one other type of migrants, including temporary out-migrants, for employment purpose and other households. As is evident the PLFS 2020-21 was not a standard migration survey. This brings to the question about comparability of migration rates from the 2007-08 and 2020-21 surveys.

If we do compare estimates of migration rate from the 2007-08 and 2020-21 surveys, then we find that the urban migration rate has hardly changed. The share of migrants in rural and urban India as per Census of India 2011 is 32.5 percent and 48.4 percent respectively. The estimated migration rate is lower in the 2020-21 survey by 6 percentage points in case of rural and nearly 14 percentage points in case of urban. One might argue that estimates from a survey and census need not be in the same ball park. However it is difficult to rationalize why migration rate might not have increased since 2007-08.

To summarize, there is one main reason why one might want to draw any conclusions based on comparing of estimate of migration rates from PLFS 2020-21 with that of estimates from

other datasets⁶. The estimates are far lower than those from Census of India 2011 and in the same region as that from the 2007-08 survey. For the same reason we should not use migration rates at the state level. In a state like Maharashtra, the migration rate calculated from PLFS 2020-21 is lower than that in the 2007-08 survey. This does not conform to stylized facts established from other datasets.

6. Patterns in Migration: Estimates from PLFS 2020-21

a. Migration Streams

Individuals could migrate within the same district, to another district of the state or to another state. Their origin and destination is either rural or urban. Thus we have 12 migration streams which can be aggregated to four streams, viz. rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-rural and urban-urban. Rural-rural migration is the dominant migration stream in case of women – 63 percent of women migrants within rural India. In case of male migrants, 34 percent move from rural to urban and 28 percent within urban (**Table 3**). When we unpack the 4 streams, we find that 45 percent of women migrants report moving within the rural areas of the same district while another 16 percent move to another rural area of a district from the same state. In contrast, among male migrants, only 15 percent move within rural areas of a state, 12 percent are inter-state rural-urban migrants and another 7 percent are inter-state urban-urban migrants. Overall only 12 percent of migrants moved across state borders.

In line with what was observed in reality, the data does confirm that post March 2020, following the COVID-19 induced lockdown many individuals moved from urban to rural. Among those migrated post March 2020, the share of the four streams was as follows - rural-

⁶ There a couple of comprehensive reviews of trends and patterns in internal migration in India (Chandrasekhar, Naik, and Roy 2017; Chandrasekhar and Sharma 2015)

rural (29 percent), rural-urban (19 percent), urban-rural (34 percent) and urban-urban (18 percent) (**Table 4**). The lockdown majorly disrupted the urban labour markets but the rural areas, in particular agricultural activity, were relatively affected. So it is not surprising that when we focus only on those who migrated after March 2020, the dominant stream is urban to rural.

b. Return Migration

It was hypothesized that following the lockdown, a large number of migrants moved back to their villages or their earlier place of residence. A return migrant is an individual who reports their present place of enumeration as their usual place of residence any time in the past. The return migration rate is calculated as the ratio of the total number of return migrants to total number of migrants. When we consider all migrants, the share of return migrants in total migrants is 11 percent (Figure 1). When we consider only those who migrated post March 2020, return migrants accounted for 53 percent of migrants. Considering all return migrants 31 percent moved from urban to rural whereas among those who are not return migrants 8 percent moved from urban to rural. Among those who moved after March 2022 and were return migrants, a higher proportion - 51 percent - moved from urban to rural (**Table 5**).

c. Reasons for Migration

In line with the stylized facts, nearly 9 out of 10 women migrants move for reasons related to marriage. In contrast, half the male migrant move for work related reasons (**Table 6**). Similar to return migration, there are clear differences in reason for migration in the full sample and the sub-sample of migrants who moved post March 2020. In the full sample, 7 percent of male migrants moved for reasons related to loss of job/closure of unit/lack of employment

opportunities while this was higher at 12 percent among those who moved post March 2020. The share of migrants giving others as the reason increased from 3 percent to 11 percent (**Table 7**).

7. Labour Market Transition of Migrants

Before discussing the labour market transitions of migrants, we first focus on whether there are differences across migrants and non-migrants, aged 15-59 years, in the usual activity status and for those in the labour force the sector of work. Migration for work is supposed to lead to redistribution of workers across the rural and urban and also sector of work. If there is upward mobility one might see a transition from self-employment or casual labour to regular salaried/wage employment. Hence we focus on the transitions in principal status and sector of work pre and post migration. A data limitation that needs to be borne in mind is that we do not have the entire labour market histories of individuals. We only know the principal status and sector of work pre-migration and at time of the survey. Any changes in the principal status and sector of work between these two points are not captured in the survey.

a. Migrants and Non-Migrants in the Labour Force

The labour force participation rate of migrant women (34 percent) is higher than that of non-migrant women (24 percent). This pattern holds true for men also (Figure 2). The principal status of 38 (16) percent of male migrants (non-migrants) is regular salaried/ wage employee. The principal status of 63 (42) percent of female migrants (non-migrants) is domestic duties.

When we slice it by place of residence, we find that in urban (rural) areas 49 (22) percent of migrant men are engaged as regular salaried/ wage employees (**Table 8**). In contrast, the share of

the migrants engaged in casual labour is higher in rural than in the urban. Among women migrants in both rural and urban areas, a majority of them are engaged in domestic duties. Among migrant women living in rural areas, 15 percent are engaged in unpaid work while this lower at 3 percent in urban areas. In order to calculate the unemployment rate we need to exclude those who are not part of the labour force. Migrant women living in rural and urban areas have a lower unemployment rate than non-migrant women. Such differences are not observed in case of men (**Table 9**).

Of the male migrants (non-migrants) who are employed in rural India, 23 (16) percent and 30 (23) percent are in construction and tertiary sectors respectively. In contrast, nearly three quarters of rural women, irrespective of whether they are migrants or not are engaged in primary sector. There are no striking differences in the sector of work of migrants and non-migrants and even by gender in urban India (**Table 10**).

b. Marriage Migration

Unmarried woman typically live with their parents. Subsequent to marriage, a woman moves to where her husband is located. In recent times, migration for reasons related to marriage has received attention both in research (Rao and Finnoff 2015) and in policy discussions. In its report the Working Group on Migration, which was constituted by Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, pointed out that nearly 6 out of 10 women in the labour force were women who migrated on account of marriage (Government of India 2017b).

Additional insights are available if we look at the principal work status of individuals before and after migration. We find that 78 percent of women reported being engaged in domestic duties before they migrated for reasons related to marriage. Following their marriage, 64 percent of women reported being engaged in domestic duties. What we also observe is an increase in the

share of women engaged in self-employment, unpaid work and regular salaried/ wage work – from less than 10 percent to 25 percent (**Table 11**).

c. Work Related Migration

Among the various reasons for migration includes migration for work - in search of employment/better employment, for employment/work, and loss of job/closure of unit/lack of employment opportunities. The proportion of regular salaried/ wage employees increased from 28 to 50 percent post migration. The share of self-employed too increases post migration. Further, the proportion unemployed declined from 19 to 3 percent. We also find that two third of those who were unemployed and those attending educational institutions transitioned to salaried jobs (**Table 12**). Overall there is persistence in the sector of work among migrant workers. If at all we observe a change then it is the shift from primary sector to secondary and trade sectors (**Table 13**).

d. Informality

There is a large literature on formal and informal wage employment in developing countries (Fields 2011, 2019; La Porta and Shleifer 2014). In the absence of information on characteristics of employment before migration we do not know whether migrants transition from informal to formal jobs. What we can at best comment on is whether migrants are working in the informal sector or in informal jobs.

As per the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, “(T)he unorganised sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers. Unorganised workers consist of those

working in the unorganised enterprises or households, excluding regular workers with social security benefits, and the workers in the formal sector without any employment/ social security benefits provided by the employers (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector 2007) (p.3).

The survey has information on the type of enterprise where the worker is employed, the nature of job contract and availability of social security benefits⁷. We find that both migrants and non-migrants are unlikely to have a written job contract (**Table 14**). In rural India, nearly 8 out of 10 workers are not eligible for any social security benefits while in urban India over 50 percent of workers are ineligible for any social security benefits (**Table 15**).

A few legislations were formulated keeping in mind the welfare of unorganized and migrant workers (Rajan and Bhagat 2022). However, even in sectors like construction, with specific legislation like Building and Other Construction Workers Act, the implementation has been poor. This Act was “*enacted to regulate the employment and conditions of service of these workers and to provide for their safety, health and welfare measures*”. The government recognizes that “*building and other construction workers are the most vulnerable segment of the unorganized sector workers in India. They work under aggravating conditions with uncertain future. A large chunk of them are migrant labourers working in different states far away from their native places*”⁸. In March 2020, at the time of the nationwide COVID-19 related lockdown, a sum of Rs 52,000 crore was available due to inadequate implementation⁹, despite past directives from Supreme Court of India.

⁷ There is some work using the earlier rounds of survey of employment and unemployment to understand compliance with the employees provident fund act (Naraparaju and Sharma 2017).

⁸ <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1633546>

⁹ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1607911>

What is apparent is that even in 2020-21 whether we view it from the lens of enterprise (type and number of workers employed) or from the lens of social security benefits a majority of migrant and non-migrant workers can be deemed to be engaged in unorganised sector or be classified as unorganised workers. This is despite provisions for providing social security benefits in the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 wherein the responsibilities of the central¹⁰ and state governments are clearly mentioned.

e. Key Takeaways

With the Census of India 2021 delayed and in the absence of any integrated survey of EU&M, the PLFS 2020-21 is the only source of information which can provide insights on migration in recent times in India. This paper is an attempt to present some facts that emerge from this data set. While it is not possible to conjecture how our findings will differ if the PLFS 2020-21 had followed the sampling strategy adopted in an integrated EU&M were available, we believe that the broad patterns other than migration rates are likely to withstand scrutiny.

The six takeaways from the analysis presented are as follows. First, how reliable are estimates of migration rates from PLFS 2020-21? We pointed out that PLFS is not an integrated survey EU&M. Unlike the latter, the PLFS does not purposively select migrant households. Comparison of the estimates from the EU&M 2007-08 survey and PLFS are best avoided. One might reasonably conjecture that the PLFS underestimates the migration rates. A blind spot in the literature is the absence of an estimate of the contribution of net rural-urban migration to urbanization in the decade of 2010.

¹⁰ The central government will deal with the following matters - (a) life and disability cover; (b) health and maternity benefits; (c) old age protection; and (d) any other benefit. The state governments will address matters related to (a) provident fund; (b) employment injury benefit; (c) housing; (d) educational schemes for children; (e) skill upgradation of workers; (f) funeral assistance; and (g) old age homes.

The next two questions pertain to whether PLFS picks up the effects of the post March 2020 nationwide lockdown which also saw large movement of workers. Second, does the PLFS document an increase in urban-rural migration stream post March 2020? In line with reality, PLFS does document an increase in the share of urban-rural migration stream post March 2020. In the full sample the share of the urban-rural migration stream is 10 percent while in the sub sample of migrants who moved after March 2020 it is 34 percent. Furthermore, in the sub sample, 12 percent moved for reasons related to loss of job/closure of unit/lack of employment opportunities while in the full sample this is markedly lower at 2 percent. Third, does the PLFS document increase in return migration rate post March 2020? Yes. In the full sample 11 percent of the migrants are return migrants while in the sub-sample it is 53 percent. Employment related reasons is an important driver of return migration and the sizable number of return migrants requires detailed information in order to get a clearer picture of this phenomenon.

The fourth and fifth questions related to change in the principal status pre and post migration while the sixth question related to change in the sector of work. Fourth, what do we know about labour market transition of women who move after marriage? There is an increase in the share of women engaged in self-employment, unpaid work and regular salaried/ wage work. Fifth, if we focus on those moved for reasons related to work, does migration lead to an upward mobility (as reflected in change in principal status)? While 28 percent of migrants had a regular salaried/ wage job pre-migration this proportion increases to 50 percent post migration. Sixth, do we see workers shift away from primary agriculture and construction post migration? Yes, we do see a reduction in the share of male workers engaged in primary and construction sectors post migration.

In the absence of panel data it is not possible to answer the issue related to earnings of migrant workers¹¹. Whether migrant workers are better off requires information on their earnings before migration. To the extent to which information is available, we highlighted that a majority of migrants and non-migrants can be classified as unorganized workers. There is another question that we are unable to address. Does the act of migrating improve job prospects or are migrant networks and individual characteristics equally if not more important than the decision to migrate in determining post migration prospects in the labour market?

8. Facilitating Migration

Two issues came to forefront of policy discourse following the COVID-19 induced nationwide lockdown and disruption in the labour market. Both issues pertain to reducing the costs of migration and facilitating inter-state migration of workers. The first was the reiteration of the fact that majority of the workers did not have any social security benefits and that something ought to be done about it. What became apparent was that even in sectors like the construction sector, where workers were entitled to pre-defined benefits under the Building and Other Construction Workers Act, there was a problem in terms of implementation. The second issue related to portability of benefits. Issues related to domicile needs to be addressed in all discussions on portability of benefits across state borders. Central to this discussion was eligibility and ability to access government schemes. Since then some state governments have become proactive. For example, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have appointed nodal officers in destination states to address the concerns of migrants(Deshingkar, Naik, and Ahmed 2022).

¹¹ In the literature on labour outcomes of migrant workers, there are two strands in the empirical literature on India that are relevant to our discussion - role of networks and probability of migrants finding a job (Sharma and Das 2018) and difference in the wages of migrant and non-migrant workers (M. Imran Khan 2016, 2017; Mohd Imran Khan and Baruah 2021).

There was a ray of optimism in light of NITI Aayog's decision in February 2021 to constitute a sub-group to prepare a National Action Plan for Migrant Workers. It was noted that the government could prefer to address the issues from a rights based perspective. An early draft of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) did state that the "migrants and their families shall be able to claim their entitlements under this Act, at the place where they currently reside." However, the final version, NFSA 2013, did not assure portability of benefits. In contrast, The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 does mention the need to include hard to reach children including migrant children. There has been limited progress on food security. A beginning has been made with 'one ration one ration card'. There is evidence to suggest that there is an increasing trend in inter-state and intra-state migrants being able to access the fair price shops (S. Agrawal and Agnihotri 2022).

In recent times, the central government has taken steps to encourage formalization of the workforce. The key policy lever that it has sought to use is by making sure unorganized workers come under the ambit of Employment Provident Fund Organisation. The primary objective is to improve social security of unorganized workers. Whether it is the issue of portability of provision of social security, what we need to acknowledge is the importance of proper implementation.

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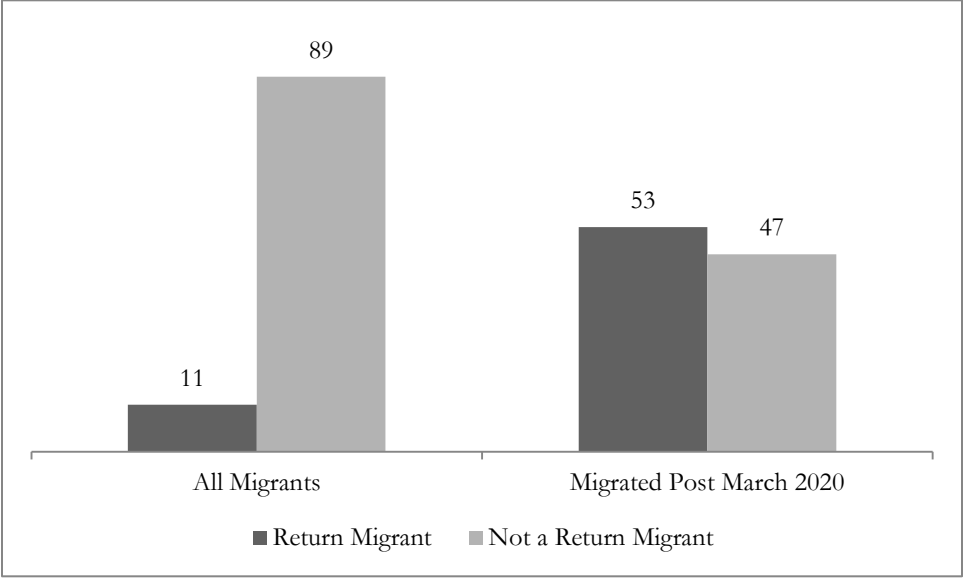


Figure 1: Composition of Migrants (Figures in Percentage)

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

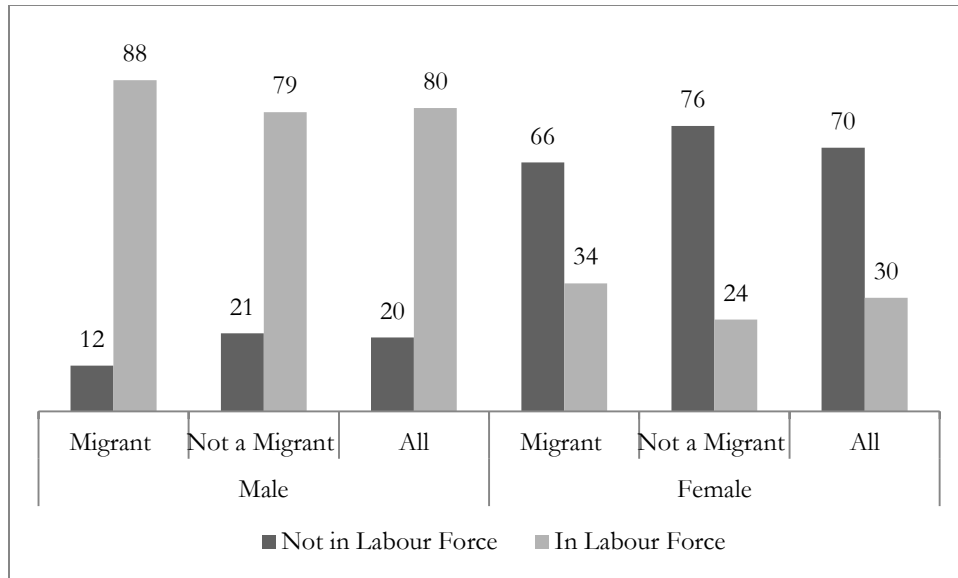


Figure 2: Labour Force Participation Rate of Migrants and Non-Migrants Aged 15-59 years by Gender (Figures in Percentage)

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

Table 1: Migration Rate (All India) from different Surveys Conducted by NSSO

	Category of Persons		
	Male	Female	Persons
Rural			
PLFS (2020-21)	5.9	48.0	26.5
64 th Round (2007–2008)	5.4	47.7	26.1
55 th Round (1999–2000)	6.9	42.6	24.4
49 th Round (1993)	6.5	40.1	22.8
43 rd Round (1987–1988)	7.4	39.8	23.2
38 th Round (1983)	7.2	35.1	20.9
Urban			
PLFS (2020-21)	22.5	47.8	34.9
64 th Round (2007–2008)	25.9	45.6	35.4
55 th Round (1999–2000)	25.7	41.8	33.4
49 th Round (1993)	23.9	38.2	30.7
43 rd Round (1987–1988)	26.8	39.6	32.9
38 th Round (1983)	27.0	36.6	31.6
<i>Migration Rate = Proportion of migrants in total population</i>			
<i>Source: Various Reports</i>			

Table 2: Distribution of Migrants in Rural and Urban India

Gender	Current Place of Residence: Rural			Current Place of Residence: Urban		
	Migrated Post March 2020	Migrated Pre March 2020	Total	Migrated Post March 2020	Migrated Pre March 2020	Total
Male	12	88	100	6	94	100
Female	2	98	100	2	98	100
Persons	3	97	100	3	97	100

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

Table 3:: Share of Migration Streams by Source and Destination

		Male	Female	Persons			Male	Female	Persons
R-R	Inter State	3	2	2	R-R	18	63	55	
	Within District	10	45	39					
	Within State	5	16	14					
R-U	Inter State	12	3	4	R-U	34	16	19	
	Within District	9	7	8					
	Within State	13	6	7					
U-R	Inter State	11	1	3	U-R	21	8	10	
	Within District	4	5	5					
	Within State	6	2	3					
U-U	Inter State	7	2	3	U-U	28	13	16	
	Within District	9	7	7					
	Within State	11	5	6					
Total		100	100	100	100	100	100		

Source-Destination: Rural-Rural (R-R), Rural-Urban (R-U), Urban Rural (U-R), Urban-Urban (U-U)

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

Table 4:: Share of Migration Streams by Source
Sample restricted to those who migrated after March 2020

		Male	Female	Persons			Male	Female	Persons
	Inter State	3	3	3					
	Within District	5	29	17	R-R	11	46	29	
R-R	Within State	3	14	9					
	Inter State	11	6	9					
	Within District	4	6	5	R-U	22	17	19	
R-U	Within State	6	5	6					
	Inter State	32	6	19					
	Within District	5	7	6	U-R	49	21	34	
U-R	Within State	11	8	9					
	Inter State	7	4	5					
	Within District	6	7	6	U-U	19	16	18	
U-U	Within State	6	5	6					
	Total	100	100	100		100	100	100	

Source-Destination: Rural-Rural (R-R), Rural-Urban (R-U), Urban Rural (U-R), Urban-Urban (U-U)

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

Table 5:: Migration Streams of Return Migrants

	All Migrants			Those who Migrated Post March 2022		
	Return Migrant	Not a Return Migrant	Total	Return Migrant	Not a Return Migrant	Total
R-R	35	57	55	16	43	29
R-U	17	19	19	16	23	19
U-R	31	8	10	51	16	34
U-U	16	16	16	16	19	18
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source-Destination: Rural-Rural (R-R), Rural-Urban (R-U), Urban Rural (U-R), Urban-Urban (U-U)

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

Table 6: Reason for Migration by Gender

	Male	Female	Total
In search of employment/better employment	23	1	5
For employment/work	20	1	4
Loss of job/closure of unit/lack of employment opportunities	7	0	2
Migration of parent/earning member of the family	17	7	9
To pursue studies	5	1	1
Marriage	6	87	72
Natural disaster (drought, flood, tsunami, etc)	1	0	0
Social / political problems (riots, terrorism, political refugee, bad law and order, etc.)	1	0	0
Displacement by development project	0	0	0
Health related reasons	3	0	1
Acquisition of own house/ flat	3	0	1
Housing problems	5	1	2
Post retirement	2	0	0
Others	8	2	3
Total	100	100	100

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

Table 7: Distribution of Migrants by Reason for Migration

	Migrated Post March 2020	Migrated Pre March 2020	All Migrant s
In search of employment/better employment	8	5	5
For employment/work	6	4	4
Loss of job/closure of unit/lack of employment opportunities	12	1	2
Migration of parent/earning member of the family	14	9	9
To pursue studies	5	1	1
Marriage	29	73	72
Natural disaster (drought, flood, tsunami, etc)	2	0	0
Social / political problems (riots, terrorism, political refugee, bad law and order, etc.)	0	0	0
Displacement by development project	1	0	0
Health related reasons	8	0	1
Acquisition of own house/ flat	2	1	1
Housing problems	3	1	2
Post retirement	0	0	0
Others	11	3	3
Total	100	100	100

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

Table 8: Usual Principal Activity Status of Individuals Aged 15-59 Years

Male	Place of Residence: Rural			Place of Residence: Urban		
	Migrant	Not a Migrant	Total	Migrant	Not a Migrant	Total
Self Employed	30	36	35	22	26	25
Unpaid Family Worker	5	8	8	1	4	3
Regular Salaried / Wage	22	11	12	49	31	35
Casual Wage Labour	26	21	22	9	12	11
Unemployed	7	4	4	5	6	6
Attended Educational Institution	7	18	17	10	19	16
Attended to Domestic Duties	2	1	1	1	1	1
Others	2	2	2	2	3	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Female	Place of Residence: Rural			Place of Residence: Urban		
	Migrant	Not a Migrant	Total	Migrant	Not a Migrant	Total
Self Employed	8	5	7	6	4	5
Unpaid Family Worker	15	8	12	3	2	2
Regular Salaried / Wage	4	3	4	12	11	12
Casual Wage Labour	10	7	9	3	2	2
Unemployed	1	2	1	2	4	2
Attended Educational Institution	1	32	13	4	28	15
Attended to Domestic Duties	60	40	52	70	47	60
Others	2	2	2	2	2	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: The usual activity status relates to the activity status of a person during the reference period of 365 days preceding the date of survey. The activity status on which a person spent relatively long time (major time criterion) during the 365 days preceding the date of survey was considered the usual principal activity status of the person.

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

Table 9: Usual Principal Activity Status of Individuals Aged 15-59 Years and in Labour Force

	Place of Residence: Rural			Place of Residence: Urban		
	Male	Not a Migrant	Total	Migrant	Not a Migrant	Total
Self Employed Unpaid Family Worker	33	45	44	26	34	31
Regular Salaried / Wage	6	10	10	2	5	4
Casual Wage Labour	25	13	14	57	39	44
Unemployed	29	27	27	11	15	14
Total	7	5	5	5	7	7
	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Place of Residence: Rural			Place of Residence: Urban		
	Female	Not a Migrant	Total	Migrant	Not a Migrant	Total
Self Employed Unpaid Family Worker	22	19	21	23	18	21
Regular Salaried / Wage	40	32	38	11	8	10
Casual Wage Labour	10	13	11	50	49	49
Unemployed	26	29	27	10	9	10
Total	1	7	3	6	16	10
	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: The usual activity status relates to the activity status of a person during the reference period of 365 days preceding the date of survey. The activity status on which a person spent relatively long time (major time criterion) during the 365 days preceding the date of survey was considered the usual principal activity status of the person.

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

Table 10: Broad Industry of work of Individuals Aged 15-59 Years and Employed

	Place of Residence: Rural			Place of Residence: Urban			
	Male	Migrant	Not a Migrant	Total	Migrant	Not a Migrant	Total
Primary		33	52	51	3	6	5
Secondary		14	8	9	25	20	21
Construction		23	16	17	11	14	13
Trade		8	9	9	19	25	23
Transport		5	6	6	9	9	9
Accommodation & Food Services		2	1	1	4	3	4
Other Services		15	7	8	28	23	24
Total		100	100	100	100	100	100
	Place of Residence: Rural			Place of Residence: Urban			
	Female	Migrant	Not a Migrant	Total	Migrant	Not a Migrant	Total
Primary		75	70	74	9	7	8
Secondary		7	9	8	24	21	23
Construction		5	5	5	4	4	4
Trade		3	4	3	13	14	13
Transport		0	0	0	1	1	1
Accommodation & Food Services		1	1	1	3	2	3
Other Services		8	11	9	46	51	48
Total		100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Primary (NIC Division 01-09), Secondary (NIC Division 10-39), Construction (NIC Division 41-43), Trade (NIC Division 45-47), Transport (NIC Division 49-53), Accommodation & Food Services (NIC Division 55-56), Other Services (NIC Division 58-99)

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

**Table 11:: Labour Market Transition of Women Aged 15-59 Years
who Moved for Reasons Related to Marriage**

Principal Status at the Time of Survey										
Pre Migration Principal Status	11	21	31	41	81	91	92	100	Total	Share
Self Employed (11)	40	9	2	3	1	0	44	1	100	1.9
Unpaid Family Worker (21)	15	49	2	7	0	0	25	1	100	6.5
Regular Salaried / Wage (31)	6	2	47	1	5	0	37	1	100	1.3
Casual Wage Labour (41)	6	16	3	54	0	0	19	2	100	4.3
Unemployed 81)	3	3	26	3	33	0	30	2	100	0.3
Attended Educational Institution (91)	5	6	10	2	2	3	70	1	100	7.6
Attended to Domestic Duties (92,93)	7	11	4	6	0	0	70	2	100	78.0
Others (94-97)	3	19	1	2	0	0	17	58	100	0.1
Share	7.9	12.7	4.7	8.1	0.5	0.4	64.2	1.6	100	100

Note: The usual activity status relates to the activity status of a person during the reference period of 365 days preceding the date of survey. The activity status on which a person spent relatively long time (major time criterion) during the 365 days preceding the date of survey was considered the usual principal activity status of the person.

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

**Table 12: Labour Market Transition of Individuals Aged 15-59 Years
who Moved for Reasons Related to Employment**

Pre Migration Principal Status	Principal Status at the Time of Survey								Total	Share
	11	21	31	41	81	91	92	93+		
Self Employed (11)	68	2	22	4	0	0	1	2	100	13
Unpaid Family Worker (21)	20	16	46	13	1	0	3	1	100	2
Regular Salaried / Wage (31)	15	2	68	6	6	0	1	1	100	28
Casual Wage Labour (41)	20	4	18	54	2	0	1	1	100	18
Unemployed 81)	21	1	66	9	2	0	0	1	100	19
Attended Educational Institution (91)	16	1	66	4	5	3	4	2	100	14
Attended to Domestic Duties (92)	8	4	31	5	1	0	48	3	100	6
Others (93+)	29	3	22	20	15	4	1	6	100	1
Share	24	3	50	15	3	0	4	1	100	100

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

**Table 13: Labour Market Transition of Individuals Aged 15-59 Years
who Moved for Reasons Related to Employment**

	Primary	Secondary	Construction	Trade	Transport	Accommodation & Food Services	Other Services	Total	Share
Primary	29	24	10	15	7	4	11	100	22
Secondary	13	72	6	4	2	0	3	100	17
Construction	16	7	65	4	4	2	3	100	21
Trade	7	8	6	69	2	2	5	100	10
Transport	11	5	2	6	71	1	5	100	6
Accommodation & Food Services	15	4	4	6	1	66	4	100	3
Other Services	4	2	1	4	2	1	87	100	21
Share	15	20	18	13	7	4	23	100	100

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

Table 14: Type of Enterprise and Contract

	Rural			Urban		
	Enterprise Type					
	Migrant	Not a Migrant	All	Migrant	Not a Migrant	All
Proprietary: Male	47	77	70	44	65	57
Proprietary: Female	24	3	8	9	3	5
Government/Local Body	17	9	11	14	9	11
Public/Private Limited Company	5	5	5	19	14	16
Other Types	6	6	6	14	9	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
	No of Workers					
	Migrant	Not a Migrant	All	Migrant	Not a Migrant	All
Less Than 6	67	69	68	50	59	55
6 and Above but Less Than 10	10	13	12	10	11	11
10 and Above But Less Than 20	6	6	6	7	6	6
20 and Above	15	11	12	31	21	24
Not Known	2	2	2	2	4	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Job Contract					
	Migrant	Not a Migrant	All	Migrant	Not a Migrant	All
No Written Job Contract	74	84	82	65	72	69
Written Job Contract for 1 year or less	6	4	4	7	6	6
Written Job Contract more than 1 year to 3 years	3	2	2	5	3	4
Written Job Contract more than 3 years	18	10	12	23	19	20
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Whether Eligible for Paid Leave					
	Migrant	Not a Migrant	All	Migrant	Not a Migrant	All
Yes	32	21	23	51	41	45
No	68	79	77	49	59	55
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data

Table 15: Availability of Social Security Benefits

	Rural			Urban		
	Migrant	Not a Migrant	All	Migrant	Not a Migrant	All
Eligible For: Only PF/ Pension	6.4	4.9	5.2	10.1	8.2	8.9
Only Gratuity	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.6
Only Health Care and Maternity	1.4	0.5	0.7	0.8	0.6	0.7
Only PF/ Pension and Gratuity	1.2	1.7	1.6	4.3	3.6	3.9
Only PF/ Pension, Health Care and Maternity	3.7	2.5	2.7	6.5	5.0	5.6
Only Gratuity, Health Care and Maternity	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.7	1.2	1.0
PF/ Pension, Gratuity, Health Care & Maternity	11.0	6.6	7.6	21.6	15.5	17.8
Not Eligible for any of Social Security Benefits	73.3	78.5	77.4	52.6	62.3	58.6
Not Known	1.9	4.3	3.8	2.8	3.0	2.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Calculations based on PLFS 2020-21 Unit Level Data