

# Protecting the Internal Migrant Workers

*Policies for relief should be cognizant of the migrant workers and be based on minimising their movement. The current practice of local administration requiring people to register in their hometown for getting the unconditional cash transfers of Rs. 12000 under the Ehsaas programme should be reviewed. It will lead to unnecessary movement and run counter to the lockdown intentions for corona prevention.*

With the calls for social distancing and lockdown, the COVID-19 outbreak has shutdown business operations across the country. As projected, millions of people are facing potential layoffs (see PIDE COVID-19 Bulletin No. 4) but the situation is doubly bad for the internal migrant workers who are staying away from homes to earn a livelihood. While we worry about remittances from the overseas workers, these internal migrant workers remain largely ignored in all our discussions.

The official statistics show that around 8.51 million migrant workers are working across Pakistan (based on the Labor Force Survey 2017-18). Table 1 shows that of these 45% are engaged in informal activities including day laborers, construction workers, domestic helpers or factory workers. Furthermore, more than 65% migrant workers are residing in only 15 districts across Pakistan, with over a million workers just in Karachi, followed by major numbers in Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi and Islamabad (Table 1).

The closure of business activities would force the owners to lay-off their employees, some have already started doing that. We assume that informal workers, which comprise 45% of the total migrant labor force, would be the first ones to be laid-off. This means around 3.78 million migrant workers would be left without their source of livelihood.

Not all sectors would face a similar situation. Table 2 shows that majority of internal migrant workers are working in wholesale and retail, manufacturing, construction, transport and communication sectors, so employees in these sectors are expected to be hit the hardest. PIDE COVID-19 Bulletin No. 4 showed that vulnerability of these sectors would cause a massive layoff of daily wage workers. Many of these daily wagers reside in the factory dormitories, which being shut now leave them with no place to live. With the bus and train services halted, they are left stranded with no place to go.

**Table 1: Province-wise Internal Migrant Workers and Expected Layoffs<sup>1</sup> (in million)**

Province/District	Migrant Workers	Layoff Migrant Workers
<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>8.51</b>	<b>3.78</b>
<b>Punjab</b>	<b>5.33</b>	<b>2.37</b>
Lahore	1.14	0.51
Faisalabad	0.61	0.27
Rawalpindi	0.54	0.24
Gujranwala	0.38	0.17
Multan	0.30	0.13
Sheikhupura	0.19	0.09
Bahawalpur	0.17	0.08
Sialkot	0.12	0.06
Sargodha	0.11	0.05
Other Districts in Punjab	1.76	0.78
<b>Sindh</b>	<b>1.30</b>	<b>0.58</b>
Karachi	1.07	0.47
Sukkur	0.07	0.03
Hyderabad	0.04	0.02
Other Districts in Sindh	0.13	0.06
<b>KPK</b>	<b>1.38</b>	<b>0.61</b>
Peshawar	0.33	0.15
Other Districts in KPK	1.05	0.47
<b>Balochistan</b>	<b>0.07</b>	<b>0.03</b>
Quetta	0.03	0.02
<b>ICT- Islamabad</b>	<b>0.43</b>	<b>0.19</b>

Source: Author's analysis based on the Labor Force Survey, PBS 2017-18

Note: 1. Using the methodology given in PIDE COVID-19 Bulletin No. 4.

**Table 2: Sectoral-wise migrant workers and expected layoffs (in millions)**

<b>Major Sectors</b>	<b>Migrant Labour</b>	<b>Expected Layoffs</b>
Agriculture	2.02	1.66
Manufacturing	1.74	0.49
Construction	0.72	0.04
Wholesale and retail	1.34	0.93
Transportation and communication	0.68	0.31
Services Activities	0.79	0.16
Others	1.23	0.19
<b>Total Labor Force</b>	<b>8.51</b>	<b>3.78</b>

Source: Author's analysis based on the Labor Force Survey, PBS 2017-18

We must also remain aware that some of these internal migrants might also return home as they do after festivals. Reportedly, such return to the hometown did become an issue. With a prolonged lockdown there could be a possibility of a return migration.

### **Protecting the Intra-country Migrant Workers**

1. The social protection packages announced by the federal and provincial governments should include migrant workers while targeting the vulnerable workers regardless of domicile.
2. There should be a provision to accommodate the migrant workers in their current district of employment to reduce massive movement from the place of employment to their hometowns, as has been witnessed in India. The current practice of local administration requiring people to register in hometown for getting the unconditional cash transfers of Rs. 12000 for registration under the Ehsaas programme should be reviewed. It will lead to unnecessary movement and run counter to the lockdown intentions for Corona prevention.
3. Migrant workers, mainly the daily wage workers, need shelter during this period. Panahgahs should be open for them as well, providing them the much-needed shelter and food. Soap and other hand washing facilities should also be provided to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread.
4. In cases where the internal migrant has his/her family with them, and they want to remain in whatever humble abode they have, they should be made part of any public relief initiative. A huge proportion of children, among the seasonal migrants that travel with families, are malnourished and any loss of wages further accentuates that. To save that from happening, rations need to reach them.