



IMPROVING SOCIAL PROTECTION PORTABILITY FOR MIGRATION-AFFECTED CHILDREN

Snapshot of recommendations

1. Broad thrusts

- Strengthening existing data collection systems to enable real-time availability of disaggregated data on migration.
- Sensitizing multiple departments and ensuring effective inter-departmental coordination on the issue of migration.
- Improving access and infrastructure for facilitating the portability of existing schemes.
- Ensuring the continuity of education for migrant children.
- Signing bilateral Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with destination states to ensure the portability of social protection.

2. Actionable recommendations

- Expanding the existing pilot scheme of seasonal hostels for left-behind children to the remaining districts/blocks.
- Integrating and scaling up the existing palayan panji system for the management of migration data.

- Conducting awareness drives in out-migration-focused districts/blocks, to highlight the benefits of the registration and portability of schemes using the existing network of Shram Mitras.
- Improving internet connectivity and infrastructure at Fair Price Shops (FPSs) and Anganwadis and ensuring intrastate portability of Public Distribution System (PDS) for non- National Food Security Act (NFSA) beneficiaries.

3. Future directions

- Creating a nodal office on migration to coordinate between departments.
- Establishing bilateral arrangements with destination states to enable the portability of state schemes beyond the state.
- Exploring community-based kinship models for left-behind children.
- Creating migration cards to track children and pregnant women, and education cards to track the schooling of seasonal migrants.
- Ensuring language facilitation for the education of children in destination states.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 national lockdown in March 2020, India saw the mass movement of an estimated 11.4 million migrants back to their home states. Many more remained stranded at worksites and destination cities, and experienced hunger, indebtedness and sickness. The vulnerability of migrants was substantially exacerbated by their inadequate incorporation in social protection mechanisms, which have consistently failed to recognize circular and seasonal mobility patterns, despite being aimed at reducing the vulnerability of the poor. In particular, portability mechanisms that allow migrants to access entitlements across locations have remained inadequate.

The incorporation is more unequally skewed against women and children of migrant households. Pre-existing normative notions reinforce the already underrepresented migration of women and children through the silos of trafficking, marriage and associational migration, thereby underestimating them as beneficiaries in the social welfare infrastructure. Moreover, women have not been adequately enumerated as workers.

With reference to UNICEF's social protection framework, which aims to be shock responsive, the study investigates migrant incorporation and portability of benefits for social protection schemes that impact children directly, related to nutrition, maternal and antenatal care, immunization, primary healthcare and education. It also investigates food security, employment guarantee and worker welfare schemes that help migrant households cope with shocks, especially in the context of COVID-19. Based on qualitative data collected from five states (Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh), the study documents challenges and good practices, and explores avenues to improve portability and access to social protection and welfare services for migrants, especially women and children.

This policy note focuses on initiatives and measures to improve portability and access to social protection and welfare for women and children affected by migration in the state of Chhattisgarh. The study considered all children (up to the age of 18) affected by the migration process, including independent child migrants, those who accompany their parents and those left behind after their parents migrate for work.

Data and methodology

Of the 72 semi-structured key informant interviews conducted for the study – with state government officials, Civil Society Organization (CSO) representatives and experts on migration – 17 were focused on Chhattisgarh. The note also relies on secondary material, including data from the Census and National Sample Survey (NSS), policy documents, research reports, CSO studies and media articles. Authors acknowledge the limitations of purposive sampling as well as the degree of generalizability of official interviews, as respondents spoke about specific schemes within their domains.

Migration overview in Chhattisgarh

Despite a well-established statistical system, data on child migration in India is inadequate. Government data sources such as the population Census and NSS are useful for providing broad trends and patterns on child migration at the national level, but offer little scope for analysis at the state level. As a result, various international agencies, including UNICEF, have reiterated the need for better data.¹

According to 2011 Census data, there were 1.3 million migrants in Chhattisgarh aged 0–19 years (47 per cent boys and 53 per cent girls). Roughly 43 per cent of the total child migrants live in urban areas as against the urbanization rate of 23 per cent in the state. In terms of reasons for migration, 58 per cent of the total child migrants “moved after birth” or “moved with household”, and the share of employment-related migration was very low.

An analysis of those who migrated during 2001–10 shows that 84 per cent of child migrants in Chhattisgarh moved intrastate. The interstate child migrants (about 1,30,000) are concentrated in industrialized districts such as Raipur, Durg, Bilaspur, Korba and Raigarh (**see Figure 1**). Similarly, there were about 80,000 interstate child out-migrants during the same period and the regional pattern was broadly the same as total migration described in the following paragraphs (**see Figure 2**).

As in other states, the majority of migration in Chhattisgarh happens over very short distances, within the district or across adjacent districts. According to the NSS, around 0.33 million people from Chhattisgarh migrate seasonally every year for employment, and around 70 per cent of them are male. Most of these migrants are concentrated in the Mahanadi basin region and belong to rural areas with lower economic status.²

The 2011 Census data reveals that a large proportion of interstate migrants from Chhattisgarh move to the neighbouring states of Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Odisha. Of these, a large proportion of interstate migrants migrate to bordering districts. Though data from Census 2011 does not allow source-destination analysis at the district level, data from Census 2001 indicated that the major migration corridors were Raipur–Nagpur, Raipur–Wardha, Durg–Nagpur, Rajnandgaon–Nagpur, Bilaspur–Bhopal, Bilaspur–Shahdol and Bilaspur–Delhi.

Insights from primary data

Respondents in Chhattisgarh tended to classify migrants based on caste and tribe. These identities also map on to distinct geographies within the state. The first category they identify are illiterate scheduled caste (SC) populations, who migrate from districts such as Baloda Bazar, Mungeli, Janjgir–Champa and Raipur, mainly due to the lack of opportunity at the source area and caste-based discrimination. The nature of the migration is seasonal, and construction (including brick kilns) is the main sector of employment. Migration in this category starts in March and some major destinations are Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Karnataka.

The second category includes people from scheduled tribes (STs). Much like in Odisha, STs who are illiterate engage in seasonal family migration from southern districts of Chhattisgarh to Telangana for chilli picking, from Kabirdham district to neighbouring states for sugarcane cutting and from Jashpur district to Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh for agricultural labour. Children are also involved in chilli-picking work. However, the migration of educated STs is more aspirational and long-term, primarily from Bastar and surrounding districts in southern Chhattisgarh to major cities in India. The migration of single women to major cities in India for domestic work is also common across Chhattisgarh, more prominently among the ST population. These migrants stay at destinations for three to four years continuously and send remittances regularly. They are also prone to trafficking: while districts in northern Chhattisgarh (Jashpur and Surguja) are hotspots for such cases, it also happens across the Bastar region, where young girls and women migrate to metro cities through intermediaries on the promise of better employment, but end up being sold into prostitution.

In addition, highly industrialized places such as Raipur, Bilaspur and Durg attract in-migrants from other states, including Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh.

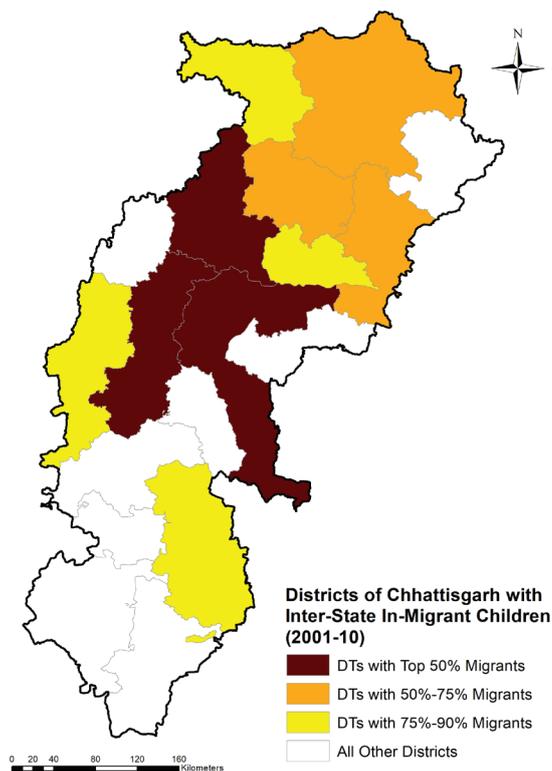


Figure 1. Districts in Chhattisgarh with interstate child migrants

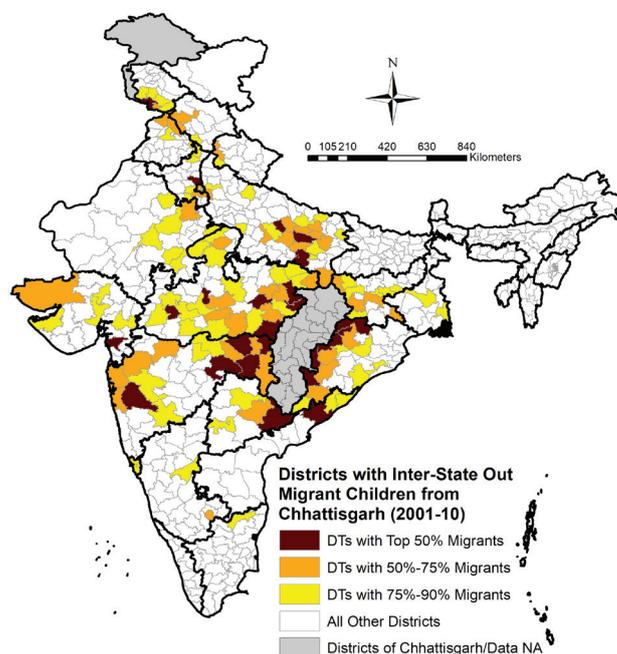


Figure 2. Districts in India with child migrants from Chhattisgarh

The work profiles of these migrants range from skilled and semi-skilled labour in factories to daily wage labour engaged in the construction sector.

Kinship care model for left-behind children

An alternative model for left-behind children exists in Jalna, Maharashtra, in the form of a Kinship Care Programme started in 2016 by a CSO for children of sugarcane migrant workers who used to migrate with their families for sugarcane cutting, leading to a break in education. The kinship care model involves persuading parents to leave their children with grandparents or other close relatives, supported by a network of village-level volunteers. Under this model, Anganwadi Workers were trained and encouraged to ensure at least one volunteer in each village. The success of the scheme was indicated by CSOs reporting that in 2019, around 4,000–5,000 children across the Jalna district stayed back, while their families migrated. This model may be considered if migrating parents are reluctant to leave their children in hostels.

Findings on access to social protection and welfare services for women and children

India's social protection and welfare landscape is complex and continually evolving. Some aspects, in principle, provide universal coverage, such as education and health. Others, such as the PDS (for food rations), while broad-based, have eligibility criteria, in this case income levels and residential location. Social protection and welfare are operationalized through a gamut of central and state schemes, missions and programmes.

The share of Chhattisgarh's total budgeted expenditure to broad social welfare programmes stood at 39 per cent in 2020–21 (₹39,124 crore), slightly higher than the 38 per cent in the revised expenditure of 2019–20.³ Education constitutes almost half of the budgeted expenditure in social welfare in 2020–21, followed by water supply and sanitation and health.

Chhattisgarh is primarily a source state for interstate migrants. As such, in this brief, we examine key areas of social protection and welfare in the context of seasonal family-based migration and left-behind women and children, focusing on education, health, and food security and nutrition. Under health, we examine COVID-19 interventions targeted at returning migrants. We also examine aspects of livelihood, where interventions are directed towards migrant households, especially relevant in the context of the COVID-19 migrant crisis. We do not explicitly cover child safety and protection services, because of a lack of primary data in this regard.

Education

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act) provides free and compulsory education to all children aged 6–14 years. In response to the pressing problem of child trafficking and labour exploitation in the state, the Government of Chhattisgarh in 2019 extended the benefits of the RTE for children

up to the age of 18 years. There has also been a focus on school enrolment and prevention of dropouts among tribal children, especially in districts such as Sukma and Dantewada, where violence has been frequent. Starting in 2011, a programme of using porta cabin structures to set up schools was moderately successful.⁴ However, these initiatives did not have a focus on migration and the challenges faced by migration-impacted children in accessing education. In this regard, a CSO-led pilot project for seasonal hostels is proving beneficial for migrant children.

Drawing on the success of seasonal hostels in Odisha, Samerth Trust, a CSO, started seasonal hostels in Chhattisgarh in 2017, with support from American India Foundation. The first hostel was started in a rural school building in the Kabirdham district after getting approval from the district official. The CSO first conducted a survey in the area to identify potential migrant children and then convinced parents to leave their children in the hostel. In the first year, 15 students were enrolled in the hostels, but many withdrew their children at the last moment due to a lack of confidence in the system. However, regular interactions among the various stakeholders and the resultant improvement in the quality of education, including the attendance of teachers, led to increased confidence from parents, which was evident in the three-fold increase in enrolment in the second year. In 2020, there was an MoU with the government to scale up this experiment and open new hostels in other areas with high seasonal migration.

Food security

The Chhattisgarh Food and Nutritional Security Act, 2012 takes substantive steps towards universal coverage by broadening entitlements to subsidized food. The Act, which focuses on addressing hunger, is progressive in explicitly extending coverage to migrants in locations where they currently reside, and considerably

strengthens nutritional support to pregnant women and lactating children. Broader PDS coverage and widespread use of smart ration cards are perceived to have eased the hunger burden for returning migrants during COVID-19.

Following Chhattisgarh's example, the NFSA was brought into effect in 2013, under which foodgrain entitlements at subsidized rates are guaranteed to 50 per cent of urban and 75 per cent of rural households. The NFSA is implemented through the PDS, which is designed to be household-specific and deliver entitlements in a place-specific manner. The need for portability of this infrastructure was highlighted during the COVID-19 lockdown, when stranded migrants across the country were unable to access the PDS. In response, the Government of India expedited the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme, which enables portability through an IT-driven system that includes the installation of electronic point of sale (ePoS) devices at PDS shops, seeding ration cards with Aadhaar numbers, and biometric transactions. However, ONORC only covers entitlements under NFSA and does not extend to other beneficiaries covered by the state's universal scheme.

Under the Shaheed Veerananarayan Singh Labor Food Scheme, the state government provides subsidized cooked food to the poor and needy workers in selected areas. Workers registered with the Building and Other Construction Workers (BOCW) Welfare Board get a meal at a highly subsidized price of five rupees.⁵

Health and early childhood nutrition

The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) is an umbrella scheme comprising early childhood nutrition and health, and antenatal and postnatal care of pregnant and lactating mothers. While the ICDS is universal and can be accessed by migrants at their place of destination, significant outreach issues are reported for seasonal migrants who are multilocational and are usually engaged in activities in remote locations such as brick-kilns. Moreover, the existing ICDS infrastructure and staff support the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) for first-time pregnant and lactating mothers, which is an Aadhaar-based subsidy scheme, functioning through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) model.

Chhattisgarh operates a health insurance scheme, Dr Khoobchand Baghel Swastyha Sahayata Yojana (DKBSSY), which is dovetailed with the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) and is available to all residents of the state on the basis of their ration card. The scheme is portable

across Chhattisgarh. Guidelines indicate that the dovetailing with PMJAY will enable portability even outside the state. Chhattisgarh has been able to focus on maternal and early childhood health and nutrition through the Mitanin model, which started in 2001 to address infant mortality. The programme, under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), leverages a voluntary workforce of 60,000 women from local rural communities to strengthen existing government schemes through the Anganwadi system; an urban cadre has also been developed. Mitanins have been instrumental in bridging gaps in the current system of delivery. Studies show that the frequent counselling that Mitanins provided had positive outcomes such as improved breastfeeding and complementary feeding, immunization, and reduced infant mortality rates.⁶ Mitanins were also at the frontlines of COVID-19 relief work, including handling return migrants and integrating them into local health systems.

Labour and livelihood

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA) provides at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in each financial year to all rural households whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work. It provides an important source of livelihood for a large number of families in rural areas. In the wake of COVID-19, the Government of India increased allocations to the scheme, envisaging that migrant workers returning to villages would benefit from this move. In 2020–21, Chhattisgarh provided 18.4 crore person-days of work under MGNREGA.⁷

During the lockdown in 2020, the Chhattisgarh Labour Department in Chhattisgarh collected data of 2.5 lakh returning migrants. As in other source states, Chhattisgarh State Rural Livelihoods Mission (CG-SRLM) conducted skills mapping of returning migrants and, along with the Labour Department, was able to find local employment for some of them in the industries within the state. Self-help groups (SHGs) under the SRLM prepared meals as well as disposable plates and bowls, for migrant returnees during COVID-19. In coordination with WCD, they prepared and delivered ready-to-eat Poshan (nutrition) kits to pregnant women in quarantine centres.⁸

Additionally, Chhattisgarh has programmes to support farmers and forest dwellers, such as the Rajiv Gandhi Kisan Nyay Yojana (RGKNY), to provide financial assistance

to small and marginal farmers, and emphasis on agro- and forest produce-based industries in its industrial policy. Respondents interpreted these as broad-based measures to augment rural livelihoods, with the potential to improve the economic security of seasonal migrants as well.

Institutional arrangements to facilitate migrant workers have been established, such as the Shram Mitra scheme, by which labour facilitators are appointed at the block level to facilitate workers' registration and access to government schemes.⁹ Furthermore, the state took measures to ease the registration of building and other construction workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, by waiving the stipulation of working under the same employer for 90 days, and introducing self-certification in place of certification by employers or contractors. Interviews revealed that the state government was planning to set up a two-way labour helpline to assist workers outside the state.

Analysis

Until recently, Chhattisgarh saw the issue of migration primarily through the lens of human trafficking. While there was an understanding of seasonal distress migration for labour in brick kilns and agriculture, as well as more aspirational youth migration to large cities, there were no concerted efforts to quantify or address migration per se. Instead, a broader thrust on welfare and poverty reduction had been assumed to address migration, revealing an inherent sedentary bias. However, the return of migrant labour during the COVID-19 crisis drew the state's government's attention to the poor working and living conditions and lived experiences of Chhattisgarhi migrants at destination locations.

Building on existing initiatives targeted at distress migrants and trafficking, the policy focus is now on enabling safe migration pathways. In March 2021, the state notified a new Migrant Labour Policy for safe and smooth migration, which envisages a dynamic system for enumerating and tracking migrants through a system of village-level registers and block-level labour resource centres at source, as well as helplines and nodal assistance points at destination.¹⁰

While Chhattisgarh's focus on the well-being of out-migrants is well established, scheme delivery does not explicitly deny access to in-migrants from other states

in the state's industrialized regions. However, even as schemes related to food security, health and education are visualized through the lens of universality, ground narratives reveal barriers in migrant incorporation. For instance, there was no major effort to facilitate portability in education for children moving to other states. While the establishment of seasonal hostels for left-behind children is promising, initiatives drawing from best practices in other states – such as language teachers in destination locations (Odisha) and migration cards (Gujarat) – would strengthen access.

Beyond the institutional barriers, respondents across states highlighted the issue of scheme uptake because of the lack of awareness within institutions and among beneficiaries, especially migrant women. A significant reason for this is the fragmented nature of schemes, as well as the uneven awareness of migration issues across departments. In Chhattisgarh, while labour is the nodal department for migration, the work of WCD and the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) in extending assistance to returning migrants has highlighted the need for inter-departmental collaboration and sensitizing all state departments and policy bodies on migration. The new state Migrant Labour Policy takes a step in this direction by proposing a special unit within the Labour Department as a nodal migration agency.

Chhattisgarh also saw increased collaboration between the state government and CSOs in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. These linkages can be leveraged to implement stronger systems to respond to migrants, who often experience multiple intersectional vulnerabilities.

The absence of credible data has been a longstanding problem for policy response towards internal migration in India, particularly to incorporate marginalised migrants. The interviews from all five states, including Chhattisgarh, have highlighted that the COVID-19 experience has established a demand for more calibrated and functional data that reflects the complexities of migration. The Chhattisgarh government's plans to survey and dynamically track migrants is a welcome step in this direction. Further, the village-level palayan panji migrant register system, which provides a more grounded sense of migrant reality, can be scaled and integrated across the state to strengthen data systems on migration.

Policy recommendations

Education

- The Chhattisgarh government must consider expanding seasonal hostels for left-behind children across the state. Districts and blocks with high seasonal migration should be targeted. In line with the state's education policy, they should be accessible for all children up to the age of 18 years.
- The state may also examine the feasibility of community-embedded kinship care models that involve supporting caregivers of left-behind children, similar to the Maharashtra model.
- The state government must coordinate with non-Hindi speaking states for providing study materials and teacher training so that children of seasonal migrants can access education at the destination in their native language.
- Education tracking of migration children through cards or IT systems may be considered to ensure continuity.

Food security

- The state government may initiate bilateral conversations with destination states to facilitate the extension of ONORC for Chhattisgarhi migrants who are not covered under NFSA.
- The state must ensure PDS portability for intrastate migrants in practice, to enable access to ration at the destination. Efforts must be

made to deal with issues such as FPS with poor internet connectivity and split families.

Health and child nutrition

- The departments dealing with health and nutrition, including WCD, must be sensitised to think about scheme design and delivery from the migration angle.
- Introduction of mother and child tracking cards may be considered to ensure the portability of ICDS benefits for migrant women and young children.

Others

- The palayan panji system at the gram panchayat level must be integrated and scaled up across the state as an effective source of migration data.
- The state government must conduct awareness drives among migrants to highlight the benefits of registration. The Shram Mitras may be used for this.
- To successfully achieve universal social protection, Chhattisgarh needs to consider mainstreaming migration across various line departments. The new Migrant Labour Policy proposes a nodal office under the Labour Department to address overlaps, which can play a proactive role in achieving convergence of schemes to address migrant incorporation in social protection and welfare.

Endnotes

1. UNICEF, *A Call to Action: Protecting children on the move starts with better data*, 2018.
2. Calculated from NSS data on 'Employment, Unemployment and Migration', 2007–08. In 2007–08, 97 per cent of total seasonal migrants were from rural areas.
3. Calculated from '[Chhattisgarh Budget Analysis 2020-21](#)', PRS Legislative Research. This estimate includes education, sports and culture, social welfare and nutrition, health and family welfare, water supply and sanitation, and rural development.
4. NITI Aayog and UNDP, *Social Sector Service Delivery: Good Practices Resource Book*, 2015, p.8.
5. See G.O. No. F 3-1/2017/16, dated 17.01.2018 and G.O. No. 883/600/2019/16, dated 01.03.2019, Government of Chhattisgarh.
6. See Vir, S.C., et al., 'Impact of community-based Mitani programme on undernutrition in rural Chhattisgarh State, India', *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2014.
7. Data from the MGNREGA public data portal.
8. Tankha, R., *Community and Institutional Response to COVID-19 in India: Role of Women's Self-Help Groups and National Rural Livelihoods Mission*, KREA University, 2020.
9. See G.O. No. F 10-1/2020/16, dated 27.02.2021, Government of Chhattisgarh.
10. '[Notification of Chhattisgarh State Migrant Workers Policy 2020 issued](#),' Asian News Service, March 2021.

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