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## Internal migration in India: Trends, relationship with MGNREGA and policies

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### Abstract

People do migrate from one place to another for various socio economic or non-economic reasons. Census 2011 found 450 million people in India are migrants, a sharp increase of 45% from the previous census. The government of India launched MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) in 2005 to arrest out migration of unskilled landless labor force from the rural areas to urban areas by ensuring them 100 days of wage employment within their own areas. This paper actually reviews the trends and characters of internal migration in India and found that the migration is intrastate in nature and marriage is still the key reason behind it. MGNREGA couldn't become an alternative of traditional migration from rural to urban areas in India till now. While comparing among Indian states regarding their policies towards migrants by using Interstate Migrant Policy Index (IMPEX) score of 2019, this paper found Kerala in the top of the list followed by Goa and Rajasthan.

**Keywords:** Migration; MGNREGA; Intrastate; Marriage; IMPEX

### 1 Introduction

Migration refers to the mobility of people from one place to another, which may be a permanent or temporary, short or long term and involuntary or voluntary in nature [1, 2]. The reasons for migration are complex, ranging from a lack of opportunities in source locations, better wages at destination locations, a desire to experience a different life or escaping traditional caste hierarchies. It is now widely accepted that migration is not just an individual rational economic choice but a family decision, where costs and benefits are shared by the migrant and the family. Minimizing risk plays a key role in the migration decision, while wage differentials are not always the primary reason as was once believed [3].

Internal migration in India has been historically low [4]. The Indian census 2011 shows that the total number of internal migrants accounting for interstate and intrastate movement to be 450 million, an increase of 45% since the earlier census of 2001 [5]. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh are among the major origin states, while Delhi, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujrat, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are the important destinations for internal migrants in India [6].

Development-oriented theories of migration have mainly preoccupied with the expected and desired transition from an agrarian to an industrial or even post- industrial social and economic order, for which rural to urban migration is often seen as a rough proxy [7]. The government of India launched the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (henceforth, MGNREGA) on September 7, 2005, and one of its significant objectives is to arrest out migration of unskilled landless labor force from the rural areas to urban areas by ensuring up to 100 days of wage employment within their own areas [8]. Another important aspect of MGNREGA is the increasing participation of women in it. It not only provides employment to them but by giving wage rate equal to that of a man, it has empowered

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those women economically as well as socially [9]. However, the impact of MGNREGA on internal migration is an under studied area in India.

Hence, this paper has three objectives. First, I will describe historical trends of internal migration in India. Second, I will assess the impact of MGNREGA on rural employment and migration. Third, I will evaluate the effect of state policies by the 2019 score of Interstate Migrant Policy Index (henceforth, IMPEX) and discuss the role of government and civil society organizations regarding internal migration.

## 2 Data

Data for describing internal migration collected from 2001 and 2011 Census of India [10], 55<sup>th</sup> and 64<sup>th</sup> round of NSSO [11], Chandrasekhar and Sharma [12], Report of the Working Group of Migration [13]. Data for MGNREGA wages and average days of employment provided per household were collected from Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India [14]. An IMPEX 2019 report by India Migration Now [15] has used to compare among states regarding their policies towards migrants.

## 3 Internal Migration in India

### 3.1 Trends and Characteristics of internal migration in India

In India, the volume of migration has increased over the various census periods, from 159.6 million in 1971 to 201 million in 1981; 226 million in 1991 and 309 million in 2001 [1]. The number of migrants further increased in Census 2011 and became 454 million. Data from the National Sample survey (NSS, henceforth) in 2007-08 reveals that about 28.3% of the workforce in India are migrants [13].

As per 2001 census, Maharashtra stands at the top of the list with 2.3 million net migrants, followed by Delhi (1.7 million), Gujrat (0.68 million) and Haryana (0.67 million). Uttar Pradesh (-2.6 million) and Bihar (-1.7 million) share a large number of negative net migrants and both states considered as outward migrating state [1]. By analyzing 2011 census data, Brar and Seo [16] found that Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and West Bengal face outward migration and states like Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Gujrat and Karnataka experience inward migration. According to their finding, Bihar has the highest outward migration rate of -3.28. Delhi has the highest inward migration rate of 10.80, followed by Haryana, Gujrat, Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh.

**Table 1** Reasons and streams of internal migration in 2001 (as % share)

	Work or Business	Education	Marriage	Family related	Others	Total
Rural to Rural	9.3	1.9	61.2	19.4	8.3	56.3
Rural to Urban	29.9	4.9	21.8	34.5	8.8	21.8
Urban to Rural	14.5	3.0	28.1	42.9	11.4	6.6
Urban to Urban	21.8	4.3	21.9	42.6	9.5	15.2
Total	16.0	3.0	44.4	27.8	8.8	100.0

Source: Census of India 2001, cited in the Report of the working Group on Migration (2017), Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India [13].

As per 2001 census data, Rural to Rural migration represented the highest share (56.3%) among all four streams, followed by Rural to Urban (21.8%). Marriage (61.2%) is found to be the key reason for migration under Rural to Rural migration. As expected, due to the more opportunities in cities, work or business and education got much more importance under Rural to Urban stream than Rural to Rural. Family related reasons were the most represented among all three types of migration (except for Rural to Rural), indicating that people are settling in destination areas with the help of migrant members of families. Among all the reasons for migration, marriage (44.4%) comes out to be the most important reason followed by family related reasons (27.8%) and work or business opportunities (16%). Education as a reason for migration represented the lowest share in total migration (3%), indicating people in India were less likely to migrate for study during the census period of 1991 to 2001.

Data from 2011 census (Table 2) shows that the share of Rural to Rural migration falls compared to previous census data but still holds the highest share (47.4%) in migration. The share of Urban to Urban migration stream in total migration increases by 48.68% from previous position while the other two streams show little difference. Just like previous census, Table 2 also confirms that marriage is still the key reason (59%) for people to migrate under the case of Rural to Rural migration while the share of marriage in migration falls under the streams of Urban to Rural and Urban to Urban. The share of family related reasons behind migration has increased heavily in the 2011 census compared to the previous census across all the types of migration. This trend describes that family members of migrants are getting settled in destination areas in larger volume than before.

**Table 2** Reasons and streams of internal migration in 2011 (as % share)

	Work or Business	Education	Marriage	Family Related	Others	Total
Rural to Rural	6.4	2.7	59.0	24.1	7.7	47.4
Rural to Urban	24.3	4.8	22.4	40.6	7.9	22.1
Urban to Rural	8.9	2.7	25.5	55.6	7.3	7.9
Urban to Urban	17.5	3.4	18.4	47.9	12.9	22.6
Total	13.1	3.3	39.1	35.6	8.9	100.0

Source: Census of India 2011, cited in the Report of the Working Group on Migration (2017), Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India [14].

Across all the streams of migration, marriage (39.1%) dominates all the other reasons to migrate followed by family related reasons (35.6%) and moving for work or business (13.1%). This pattern clearly shows that internal migration in India is mainly driven by various noneconomic factors such as marriage or moving with families.

Migration can be characterized as an intrastate phenomenon in India. Despite the significant increase in internal migration recorded in 2011, the nature of movement remains relatively unchanged since 2001. Bulk of the movement (62%) is within the same district. Another 26% is between districts within the same state and only 12% of movement is interstate [5].

**Table 3** Distribution of internal migrants by last usual place of residence for each component of rural-urban migration streams

Migration Streams	Intra district	Inter district	Intrastate	Interstate	All
<b>55<sup>th</sup> round (1999-2000)</b>					
Rural to Rural	75.3	20.1	95.4	4.6	100
Rural to Urban	43.8	36.5	80.3	19.6	100
Urban to Rural	46.5	33.5	80.0	20.0	100
Urban to Urban	36.6	43.5	80.1	19.9	100
<b>64<sup>th</sup> round (2007-2008)</b>					
Rural to Rural	72.4	23.2	95.6	4.4	100
Rural to Urban	41.2	33.6	74.8	25.2	100
Urban to Rural	48.8	33.8	82.6	17.5	100
Urban to Urban	27.9	49.2	77.1	22.9	100

Source: Chandrasekhar and Sharma [13]

NSSO data (from Table 3) clearly shows that most of the migrations in India are intrastate. Interstate Rural to Rural migration remains approximately same in both the rounds (4.6% in 55<sup>th</sup> round and 4.4% in 64<sup>th</sup> round). Interstate Rural to Urban migration has increased from 19.6% in 55<sup>th</sup> round to 25.2% in 64<sup>th</sup> round while interstate Urban to Rural migration falls from 20% to 17.5% during the same time period. Urban to Urban migration shows an increase of 3% from 55<sup>th</sup> to 64<sup>th</sup> round of NSSO data. Kone et al. [17] also found state borders in India to be barriers of migration and

they have mentioned of inadequate portability of social welfare benefits, a significant home bias in access to education and policy employment as a possible explanation of the intrastate nature of the internal migration in India.

### 3.2 MGNREGA, Rural Employment and Migration

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is the first guarantee employment program implemented in the country. The National Rural Employment Guaranteed Act came in August, 2005 and came into force in February 2006. It was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2009. The main objective of the Act is to enhance livelihood security of household in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed employment in a financial year to households, whose adult member volunteers to do unskilled manual work [18]. MGNREGA is different from earlier employment programs launched by the Government of India as on one hand it is a demand driven scheme while on the other hand it treats employment as a right of rural household. This scheme provides income directly to unskilled workers in rural areas [19]. It was expected that as people in rural areas will start to get jobs in their native places, the flow of migration towards destination areas would fall.

Majumdar [20] conducted a study in two villages in West Bengal (Bindol and Dakshin Bhabanipur of Uttar Dinajpur district) to find the impact of MGNREGA on rural households. He finds that 71% and 46% of total population has migrated from Bindol and Dakshin Bhabanipur respectively in 2001. But after implementing MGNREGA in 2008, the percentage of migration started falling in both the villages and finally became 62.5% in Bindol and 32.2% in Dakshin Bhabanipur in 2015. By collecting data from Participatory Focused Group discussion with migrant and non-migrant families, the research shows that the wage rate under MGNREGA was Rs. 110 per day in 2011, which is much lower than the wage rate of destination areas of Rs. 130 per day. The difference of wages increased in 2015 and became Rs. 150 per day under MNREGA and Rs.180 per day in destination areas. For this variation in wages, male family members have migrated to destination areas (for higher wage) and female members come to work under MGNREGA scheme. Though field data shows that both the villages benefitted after the implementation of MGNREGA in terms of housing and sanitary condition, income level, social security, house asset and standard of living.

Singh [19] conducted another study on MGNREGA and migration in a small village in Andhra Pradesh (Dokur of Mahbubnagar). Her paper revealed that, despite the presence of MGNREGA scheme, 50% households have at least one member who had migrated. In discussions with the villagers, it was found that people are migrating due to low wages and delayed payment from MGNREGA. People from that village had migrated to cities like Hyderabad, Mumbai or Pune for higher wages.

**Table 4** Comparing average wage rate and employment days per household in top origin and destination states of migrants

	Average wage rate per day per person			Average days of employment provided per household		
<b>Origin states of migrants</b>						
	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20
Uttar Pradesh	203.84	200.87	181.79	40.24	41.82	46
Bihar	197.92	193.87	176.97	36.58	44.66	42.03
Odisha	210.29	221	186.99	55.49	55.51	47.9
Rajasthan	182.58	169.51	144.87	56.69	61.06	58.95
Madhya Pradesh	185.53	179.03	167.46	56.31	61.84	53.3
<b>Favourite Destinations of Migrants</b>						
Maharashtra	237.23	224	198.8	36.79	40.34	40.96
Gujrat	205.04	196.71	178.57	48.61	42.52	43.19
Karnataka	284.28	270.83	245.53	46.07	49.09	49.99
Punjab	263.15	257.55	236.62	36.74	39.52	31.22
Haryana	312.67	308.29	286.37	34.44	39.31	35.37

Source: Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India [15] (as of 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2022)

Following Brar and Seo [16], Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh came under the list of top origin states of migrants whereas Maharashtra, Gujrat, Karnataka, Punjab and Haryana came under the list of top destinations. It's clear from the above table that irrespective of the origin or destination status, all selected states have failed to provide the households 100 days of work in a financial year as promised under MGNREGA scheme. Rajasthan provides highest number of average days of employment provided per household (56.69) and Haryana offers the lowest (34.44) among these ten selected states in the financial year of 2021-22. In the previous financial year of 2020-21, Madhya Pradesh gave the highest days of employment on average (61.84) followed by Rajasthan (61.06) and Haryana again provided the lowest days of work (39.31). As per the data, the average employment days under MGNREGA fall in every state (except for Gujrat) in 2021-22 compared to the previous financial year. Prasad [18] did his study in Telangana (Bandamidipally village, Pedumul Mandal in Ranga Reddy district) and found that very few households of that village actually received 100 days of employment under MGNREGA. Only 2 out of 50 participated households (4%) completed 100 days of work in 2006-07, though this increased to 96 out of 239 participated households (40.17%) in the final years of data collection 2013-14. The village witnessed MGNREGA's best performance in 2008-09 where 162 households got 100 days of employment out of 227 participated households (71.36%).

According to a study by the Centre for Economic Data and Analysis affiliated to Ashoka University, an average of just 22 days employment was provided to registered households on a pan India basis in 2020-21. Only 4.1% of the registered families find 100 days of employment under MGNREGA in 2020-21. Of course, as per government data, the average employment days per household in each year has been much higher, but this is because only those families which obtained at least one day's employment constituted the base. The government says on average of 51.52 days' work was provided under the scheme in 2020-21, 48.4 days in 2019-20 and 50.88 days in 2018-19. Ideally, all families registered must be the base of determining the level of employment provided, as all of these households are eligible for work and volunteered to take it up [21].

Apart from providing 100 days of guaranteed employment, MGNREGA's another important objective is to create sustainable assets that strengthen the livelihood resource base in rural areas. But MGNREGA has faced criticism regarding the quality and sustainability of assets created under it. Critics of the scheme argue that since employment generation is the primary objective of the act, the works undertaken are labor intensive and these works tend to be non-durable and have limited use [19]. Ambasta et al. [22] also stated that quality of works undertaken under MGNREGA was uniformly reported to be poor. Prasad [18], in his primary survey, experienced that many respondent households felt that the same activities took place in the name of MGNREGA over the years. As per the households, these activities were neither useful to the village nor to the farmers. Their view is that instead of engaging in building temporary structures and recurrent activity, MGNREGA labor must be used to create permanent assets that can absorb productive labors over the time.

Vasudevan et al. [23] came with the following extract (Section 1.54) from the 42<sup>nd</sup> Report of the Standing Committee on Rural Development (2012-2013) presented to the 15<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha which can describe the problems of this act in a nutshell.

"The Working Group on MGNREGA have also mentioned that findings related to quality, durability and rate of work completion suggest that the problem is not the design of the Act but the usefulness of the Scheme is dependent on the strength of its implementation at the field level. For instance, lack of planning in areas like potential demand and need for MGNREGA works, participation of villagers and prioritization of works in Gram Sabha (GS), and focus on creation of productive assets based on principles of watershed, etc., can greatly reduce the development potential of MGNREGA. Taking up of planned works, relevant to the need of the region and demand of the beneficiaries is also vital for ensuring ownership of assets and their development utility in the long run."

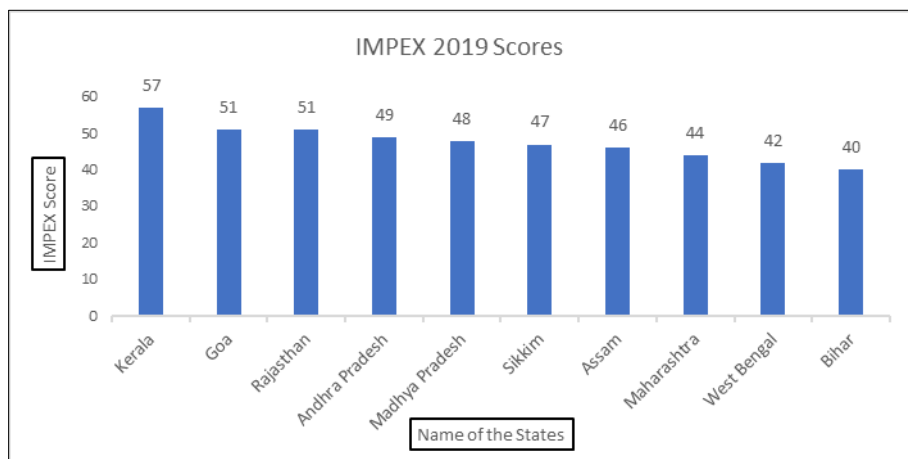
### 3.3 Policies towards migrants and civil society organizations

Migrant workers occupy a special position in the debates around development and social protection. They have driven the engine of globalization, though not reaped great benefits from the process. In the wake of COVID 19, the very factors that made them desirable as a workforce have turned against them [24]. On 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2020, in order to contain the virus, a strict nationwide lockdown was imposed by India with immediate sealing of the interstate and international borders within four hours of its announcement. This incident shocked the unprepared migrant workers, both internal and those working abroad. The lack of governmental planning to ensure the wellbeing of migrant workers within India and abroad led to a "crisis within a crisis" [25]. This lockdown due to the COVID 19 pandemic shows us the importance of suitable policies of receiving states to integrate migrants. It should also be noted that integration is a multidimensional process which includes a variety of areas: employment, education, health, civil rights, social welfare, housing etc. [26]. This present section of the discussion will compare policies of various states by using the Inter State

Migration Index (IMPEX 2019 score) which was developed by India Migration Now, a Mumbai based research nonprofit organization.

According to Aggarwal et al. [26], the areas on the basis of which migrant integration in Indian states can be evaluated through IMPEX are the following- education, labor market, children’s right, political participation, identity and registration, social benefits, housing and health and sanitization.

India’s average IMPEX 2019 score for 28 states and the Union Territory of NCT Delhi is 37 out of 100, reflecting the limited attention paid to the integration efforts in destination areas. Kerala (57), Goa (51) and Rajasthan (51) are the only three states to score over 50 in the index. Kerala additionally leads the states on three out of eight indicators – child rights, education and health and sanitation [27]. Andhra Pradesh (49), Madhya Pradesh (48), Sikkim (47), Assam (46), Maharashtra (44), West Bengal (42) and Bihar (40) also secured positions in the list of top ten (Figure 1).



Source- Business Standard [27]

**Figure 1** Top 10 states in IMPEX 2019

The government of Kerala undertook several projects to undertake child migrants in education sector and the most well-known are- Project Roshni and Project Changathi. Project Roshni is a pilot project in Ernakulum district in which migrant children learn Malayalam, English and Hindi through code switching as a learning tool, in 90 minute morning classes before school [28]. A performance analysis by SCMS at the end of 2018-19 academic year had noted increased proficiency of migrant students in Malayalam and English language. Post Roshni, students were generally found to secure better grades in English reading, writing and speaking compared to their grades prior to it. The beneficiaries were mostly from West Bengal, followed by Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Assam and Rajasthan with a smattering of students from Lakshadweep, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab and Nepal. The analysis observed that proficiency in Malayalam was 83% in the 10 to 12 year old age group and 84% among those between 13 and 15 years of age and attributed the trend to a great deal to Roshni as most children aged between 10 and 15 years were part of the project for more than 10 months [29].

Project Changathi, which was also a state level initiative in Kerala and implemented by the Kerala State Literacy Mission, targeted at migrant children for learning Malayalam. A special text book called “Hamari Malayalam” was created for these students and study centers were made at schools, libraries, workplaces and shelters of migrant workers [28]. As of 24th February, 2020, nearly 4000 workers have acquired proficiency in Malayalam [30]. Government of Kerala also announced a health insurance scheme for guest workers in the state named Awaaz Health Insurance. As many as 56 hospitals, including medical college hospitals and the regional cancer center, have been empaneled under the scheme. Members between 18 and 60 years of age will get free treatment worth Rs. 25,000 and life insurance coverage of Rs. 2 Lakh [31]. All these policies of Kerala helped the state to secure the top position in the IMPEX list of 2019.

Rajasthan scores well because it does not have state employment restrictions based on domicile certificates, which are granted to people born in the state, people who have resided in the state for 10 years or to women married to Rajasthani men. The state also has favorable educational policies for all children, irrespective of their migrant status. Similarly, Goa also has favorable policies for migrants under the Interstate Migrant Workmen Rules, which specify that all information to migrants must be disseminated in their native language and that contractors for migrant workers must bear their healthcare costs [28]. Bihar, Assam and Rajasthan score well in the housing, Punjab receives highest score in identity

and registration of migrants. All the states (except for few states like Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura) score relatively the same in the political participation indicator for the migrants. Low scores of traditional destination states like Delhi, Gujrat or Tamil Nadu are extremely worrying given the magnitude of migration into these states. Migrants in these states face barriers in almost every policy area evaluated: accessing formal housing, employment, social benefits, healthcare and education [26].

In this regard the role of civil society organizations are becoming increasingly important. These organizations are supporting migrants by providing them financial services, social securities, health services or education facilities throughout India. Some of the noted civil society organizations and their services are noted below.

**Table 5** Some of the noted civil societies and their initiatives across India

Organization	Geography	Type	Initiative
Aajeevika Bureau	Rajasthan, Gujrat, Maharashtra	Financial Services	Shram Sarathi A nonprofit incubated by Aajeevika in 2007 which aims at providing financial services to migrant workers including savings instruments, digital wage payments, affordable loans, term life insurance, contributory pensions and remitting services. Part of a larger ecosystem of services and support mechanisms provided by Aajeevika to migrant communities in these states.
Jan Sahas Development Society	Madhya Pradesh, Delhi NCR, Uttar Pradesh	Social Security	Migrants Resilience Collaborative Grassroots led multi-stakeholder collaborative of non-profit, philanthropic and private sector actors focused on ensuring safety, security and mobility for vulnerable migrant families across India. MRC will support 10 million migrants and their families in 100 districts and cities over next 5 years to deliver social security entitlements, provide access to responsible recruitment and strengthen tracking, worker protection, welfare and redressal.
Tata Trusts	Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh	Social Security	Migrant Resource Centers: The MRCs serve as a one-stop shop, delivering labor-friendly services that addresses migrant vulnerabilities. These services including providing linkages to government entitlements and schemes, legal assistance in wage and worksite issues and accident-related cases, along with employment opportunities and banking services.
CMID	Kerala	Health	CMID's Bandhu Clinic implemented in collaboration with the National Health Mission in Ernakulum, Kerala is a mobile health van initiative that provides medical screenings and checkups to migrants at their site of work. Started during the lockdown in March 2020, the screenings also focus on COVID symptoms. The initiative was supported by ESAF Small Finance Bank and has served over 17000 people since it was started.
LABOUR NET	Pan India	Skilling, education	Recognition of Existing skills. Education facilities for construction workers who had dropped out of the formal system under the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) is a new scheme of Government of India.
Nirman Mazdoor Sangathan	Maharashtra	Skilling, education	Recognition of prior Learning Program Skill training and Certification Program for informal migrant construction workers.

Source: Omidyar Network India [28]

#### 4 Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to describe internal migration in India, the impact of MGNREGA on migration and how governments and civil society organizations are trying to support migrant workers. Following the previous discussions, it can be concluded that most of the India's internal migration is of Rural to Rural and until now marriage has been the key reasons for most of the internal migration. State borders are also playing a key role as a barrier of internal mobility in India. It was also found that states have actually failed to keep their promise to provide 100 days of full employment under MGNREGA scheme. The wage of MGNREGA is lower compared to the jobs in urban areas and male members of families are migrating for jobs in cities to earn more money. Therefore, MGNREGA couldn't become an alternative of migration for poor people.

By using IMPEX 2019, it was found that government schemes are not equally distributed among all states. Kerala, Goa and Rajasthan scored well in the index because of their migrant friendly policies whereas traditional destination states like Delhi or Gujrat didn't score well. Though some of the civil societies are working hard to help poor migrants but their capacities are also limited. Ultimately, to help more migrants, the central and state governments must come forward and implement the right policies to address the problems of migrants of this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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#### Compliance with ethical standards

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