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## In search of a better life: A comprehensive study of migration patterns and outcomes of migrants from Bihar in Delhi

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### Abstract

Migration has long been a critical demographic phenomenon, shaping economic, social, and cultural landscapes. This study focuses on the migration patterns from Bihar to Delhi, examining the socio-economic factors that drive people from rural Bihar to urban Delhi. Using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this case study delves into the push-pull factors influencing migration, such as economic hardships, employment opportunities, education, and infrastructure disparities between the two regions. The research highlights how poverty, lack of local employment, and inadequate agricultural prospects push individuals from Bihar, while Delhi's industrialization and economic growth serve as pull factors.

The findings suggest that while migration provides economic relief to families in Bihar through remittances, it also exacerbates issues of urban poverty and strain on public services in Delhi. By offering an in-depth understanding of the migration dynamics between Bihar and Delhi, this case study provides policy insights to address the challenges of rural-to-urban migration, improve livelihoods at the source, and create sustainable urban management strategies.

**Keywords:** Migration, migrant workers, Bihar, Delhi, socio-economic factors, labor market, marginalization, internal migration, push-pull factors

### Introduction

The migratory patterns of Bihar-born migrant labourers in Delhi are a complicated combination of structural issues, cultural assimilation, and socioeconomic considerations. Migrant workers from Bihar are primarily attracted to urban centres like Delhi due to the expectations of better employment opportunities, in various sectors such as construction, wholesale, and community services. However, they are often represented equally with the native population (Verma, 2020) <sup>[30]</sup>. A similar pattern is observed in urban migration, where people from the rural backgrounds aim to capitalize on the economic hubs that cities provide, thereby contributing to the urban labour force (Verma, 2020) <sup>[30]</sup>. It has also been observed that the integration of Bihar bound migrants into the socio-economic culture of Delhi is more or less influenced significantly by their social networks. However, the ability of these connections in promoting economic integration is limited, suggesting that while migrants may adapt culturally, however, their socio-economic status often lags behind that of the established urban residents (Yue *et al.*, 2013). This phenomenon is echoed in studies of other migrant groups, highlighting a common challenge faced by migrants in urban settings (Yue *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, the socio-economic status of Migrant workers from Bihar is often compromised by systemic barriers, including discrimination and limited access to social services. While the "hukou system" in China can be demonstrated as a parallel example of how registration status can affect access to essential services and job opportunities (Kuang & Li, 2012; Fan, 2002). A similar dynamics can be observed in India, where Migrant workers from Bihar often encounter social biases that prevent their full integration into urban life (Verma, 2020; Kuang & Li, 2012) <sup>[30]</sup>. The vulnerabilities of migrant workers specially from Bihar has been exposed by CIVID-19 pandemic. Few studies have found that socio-economically disadvantaged groups, including migrants, experienced health risks and economic instability during the pandemic (Gama *et al.*, 2022; Bojorquez-Chapela *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[32]</sup>.

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The lockdown measures disproportionately affected these migrants, leading to increased mental health issues and economic hardships, compounded by their already worse living conditions (Gama *et al.*, 2022; Bojorquez-Chapela *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[32]</sup>. The pandemic has emerged as an eye-opener to come up with the policies that address the challenges faced by migrant workers, ensuring that their rights and needs are prioritized in recovery efforts (Gama *et al.*, 2022; Bojorquez-Chapela *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[32]</sup>. To summarise, the travel patterns of migrant workers from Bihar to Delhi are impacted by various factors including economic goals, social connections, structural impediments, and sometimes some exigencies such as COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding these dynamics becomes crucial for formulating effective policies to support the integration and well-being of migrant populations in urban environments.

### A Historical context

The phenomenon of migration out of the state of Bihar has roots in both the colonial era and the Mughal Dynasty. Historically, the warrior communities and castes from western Bihar were recruited in the Mughal army. The recruitment of Migrant workers from Bihar in the British army continued during the British rule.

With the consolidation of British rule in 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was an improvement in trade and commerce along with development of roads and railways. Additionally, there was a notable increase in irrigation infrastructure in the western region of India at this time and a specialisation of the cropping pattern which led to increase in agricultural produce that attracted migrant labours from the eastern part of India, especially from regions with high populations, like Bihar, that did not experience such agricultural development (Kumar and Bhagat 2012) <sup>[7]</sup>. The literature available suggests that the eastward movement was also witnessed during this period, specially towards Bengal and Assam, due to factors such as the Zamindari system of land settlement that gave meagre rights to the tenants, the greater land rent, a sizable percentage of peasants without land and the decreased agricultural productivity of the land resulting from indigo cultivation (Davis 1951; Sharma 2005) <sup>[3, 10]</sup>. Due to the wages difference between Bihar and the rest of eastern India, lower-caste landless labourers made up the majority of this migration, which was primarily seasonal in character. During this period, seasonal or circular movement assisted marginal farmers and agricultural labourers in meeting their basic needs (Yang 1979 de Haan 2002) <sup>[11, 5]</sup>.

There was a westward trend in the migration after Independence from Bihar. The green revolution saw the burgeoning of this phenomenon in the northeastern part of the country, on the face of the high demand created for agricultural labour in Punjab and neighbouring Haryana state (Bremner 1985) <sup>[1]</sup>. In the mid-eighties of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the change in agricultural practices marked by mechanisation and cropping patterns, led to peak demand of labour in the region of green revolution. The recent trends show that the migration from Bihar has been predominantly towards Industrial cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Surat, Bombay etc. (Karan 2003, Sharma 2005, Sarkar 2014) <sup>[6, 10, 9]</sup>. The number of migrants has also increased drastically and the migration is also witnessed in all sections of the state, across all castes, communities and economic groups. Earlier, the Migrant workers from Bihar migrated mostly to rural areas for agricultural wages, and their movement was more

seasonal in nature. However, in recent times, the movement has become more directed towards urban centres, and is more or less universal in its orientation (Karan 2003; Singh *et al.* 2005) <sup>[6]</sup>. The Migration of people and remittances earned therefrom are now viewed as a livelihood strategy for the people of Bihar (Dishankar *et al.* 2006; Sarkar 2019) <sup>[8]</sup>. In a study, it has been found that between 1951 and 1961, about 4 percent of Bihar's population migrated. Between 1971 and around 2 percent of its population migrated. In 1981, the total number of migrants more than doubled at around 2.5 million (Sharma 1997). During the inter-censal period between 2001 and 2011, around 9.3 million people migrated from Bihar (Census 2011) <sup>[2]</sup>.

## Review of Literature

### 1. Introduction to Migration Studies

Migration is a multi-dimensional phenomenon which is influenced by various social, economic, political and environmental factors. Migration theories such as Lee's Push-Pull Theory and Ravenstein's Laws of Migration have provided a comprehensive framework to understand why individuals and groups migrate. Lee (1966) suggests that migration decisions are based on push factors such as lack of opportunities and adverse conditions in the area of origin. Whereas, the pull factors, such as comparatively good opportunities along with better living spaces in the immigrated zone area also affect the decision of migration. Ravenstein (1885) proposed that the migration occurs in many stages and is influenced by factors like distance with urban areas acting as significant attractors due to perceived economic opportunities.

### 2. Internal Migration in India

India has a long history of internal migration. It is characterised by the movement of individuals from remote to towns and cities in quest of better economic opportunities. As per Census of India 2011 <sup>[2]</sup>, more than 139 million Indians were classified as internal migrants. The studies by Deshingkar and Akter (2009) <sup>[14]</sup> state that migration in India is derived by economic disparities between regions, with states like Bihar witness significant outmigration to economically prosperous regions such as Delhi.

### 3. Migration from Bihar

Bihar is marred with high poverty, low industrialization, and less employment opportunities, which becomes a reason for one of the leading sources of outmigration in India. Kumar (2016) notes that Migrant workers from Bihar are primarily driven by the lack of job opportunities, low agricultural productivity, and frequent natural disasters, which act as push factors. Mitra (2014) <sup>[28]</sup> also emphasizes that the migration from Bihar is circular and seasonal in nature, with labourers moving to cities like Delhi during the off-season in agriculture.

Longitudinal survey data has been the prime weapon of Datta's study in analyzing these factors. The findings show that the migration decision is being influenced by so many factors such as socio-economic status, landownership, caste, and educational background. For instance, big landholders such as zamindars are less likely to migrate, while landless, small and marginal landholders become ultimate prey of migration phenomenon in order to secure their livelihood.

#### 4. Migration to Delhi

Since Delhi is the capital city and an economic hub, It draws a sizable migratory population from rest of India, including Bihar. Kundu (2012) highlights that Delhi's rapid urbanization and industrial growth has created a high demand for semi-skilled and unskilled labourers, which is met by migrants from the states like Bihar. Bhagat (2009)<sup>[23]</sup> also observes that the migration to Delhi has an influence of established social networks, where the migrants who reached earlier help the new arrivals to find jobs and accommodation, thereby facilitating the migration process.

#### 5. Patterns of Migration

Mosse *et al.* (2002) give insights into the pattern of migration of labourers from Bihar, finds that migration from Bihar to Delhi is often cyclical and influenced by agricultural seasons. During the non-agricultural season, a handsome number of labourers from Bihar migrate to Delhi in search of work especially in construction, manufacturing, and other informal sectors. Sharma (2013) also highlights the role of informal networks in shaping migration patterns, where both familial and communal ties play significant function in decision making along with the process of migration.

A research by Tumbe (2016) observes that movement from Bihar to Delhi is not only seasonal but also long-term in nature, with many migrants eventually settling in the city permanently. The migration pattern is also characterized by chain migration, where one family member migrates at the first stage and is later followed by others, leading to the establishment of migrant enclaves in Delhi.

#### 6. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Migrants

The research by Srivastava (2005) finds that Migrant workers from Bihar in Delhi are mostly male, young, and belong to lower socio-economic class. The majority are unskilled or semi-skilled labourers, with limited education and access to resources. Datta (2012) notes that these migrants work in low wage and hazardous settings in the unorganized sector with job uncertainty and without social protection.

#### 7. Impact of Migration on Origin and Destination Areas

Migration from Bihar to Delhi has remarkable impacts on both the origin and destination areas. Jha (2017) notes how remittances sent back to Bihar by the migrants in Delhi contribute to the benefit of rural economy, improving household income and access to education and healthcare. However, Rodgers and Rodgers (2011) caution that migration can become a reason for social fragmentation and the erosion of traditional support systems in the place/villages of origin.

At the dwelling of migrants, Chandrasekhar and Sharma (2015)<sup>[29]</sup> highlight the challenges posed by the influx of migrants, including pressure on city infrastructure, housing, and other services in Delhi including high rents, rising crimes. Migrants live in overcrowded, informal settlements with poor living conditions, and also face discrimination and marginalization in the urban labour market.

There is extensive research on migration patterns and the socio-economic characteristics of migrants. However, it appears that there are still gaps in the research, especially in comprehending the long-term effects of migration on the migrants and their communities of origin. Further research is required to explore the changing dynamics of migration, the role of government policies, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration patterns.

The literature on migration from Bihar to Delhi reveals complex patterns shaped by economic, social, and demographic factors. As migration is cyclical and potentially harmful, strategies that address its underlying causes in Bihar and enhance the living and working situations of migrants in Delhi are imperative. Since migration continues to be a critical aspect of India's socio-economic landscape, understanding these patterns is crucial for informing policy and ensuring the well-being of migrants.

#### Reasons for Migration

The reason for migration reflects the overall development scenario of a region. The study of Sarkar (2014)<sup>[9]</sup> who used 64<sup>th</sup> round migration data of NSSO (National Sample Survey Organisation), revealed that the employment related factor has been the prime reason for the occurrence of outmigration for Bihar and other EAG (Empowered Action Group) states in comparison to the other Indian States. This pattern has been also verified by the D- series Census 2011<sup>[2]</sup> data, which suggests that outmigration from Bihar is primarily due to employment related reason.

**Table 1:** Migration reasons and regional comparison

Category	India level migration	Bihar level Migration
Work/employment	4,14,23,000	7,07,000
Business	35,90,000	84,000
Education	54,58,000	1,22,000
Marriage	21,11,86,000	2,04,40,000
Moved after birth	3,35,86,000	2,93,000
Moved with Household	6,59,60,000	12,68,000
Others	9,43,14,000	43,31,000
Total Migrants	45,57,88,000	2,72,45,000

In this section, the 'reasons for migration' for people from Bihar are compared with all-India figures. At the India level, the largest category driving migration is marriage, with a staggering 21.11 crore (211.18 million) people moving due to matrimonial reasons. This is a common social factor for migration across India. In comparison, Bihar sees a similarly dominant role of marriage-related migration, accounting for 2.04 crore (20.44 million) people, making it the largest reason for migration in the state as well.

Work and employment is another major driver of migration across India, accounting for 4.14 crore (41.42 million) people. However, in Bihar, the figure is notably lower at 7.07 lakh (707,000), reflecting either the state's more localized economy or limited opportunities pushing fewer people to relocate for work.

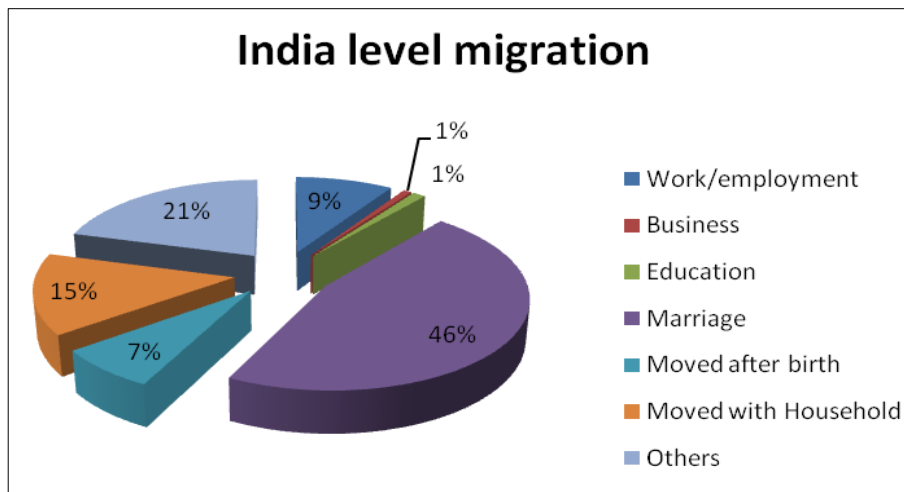
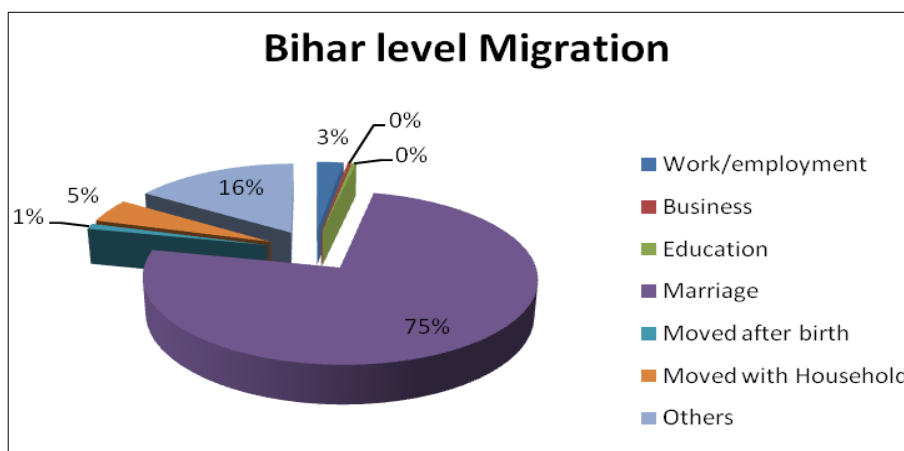


Fig 1: India level migration



Source: Calculated using data on migration of D-Series census 2011 <sup>[2]</sup>

Fig 2: Bihar level migration

Table 2: Primary Destination for Bihari Migrants (distribution measured in per cent)

Migrants from Bihar		Migrants from Rural Bihar		Migrants from Urban Bihar	
Delhi	19.34	Delhi	20.05	Jharkhand	18.64
Jharkhand	14.12	West Bengal	13.81	Delhi	16.24
West Bengal	13.65	Jharkhand	13.1	West Bengal	12.97
Maharashtra	10.55	Uttar Pradesh	10.61	Maharashtra	12.38
Uttar Pradesh	10.24	Maharashtra	10.14	Uttar Pradesh	8.62
Haryana	7.06	Haryana	7.86	Gujarat	4.21
Punjab	6.89	Punjab	7.54	Punjab	4.02
Gujarat	4.79	Gujarat	4.92		
Rest of India	13.35	Rest of India	11.98	Rest of India	22.93
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

The above tables represents that Delhi stands out as the top destination for overall migrants from Bihar, attracting 19.34% of all migrants. It draws an even higher proportion, 20.05%, of migrants from rural Bihar, demonstrating its strong pull as a hub for employment opportunities for those leaving villages. For migrants from urban Bihar, Delhi is the second most common destination, with 16.24% moving there.

On the other hand, Jharkhand, which shares a border with Bihar, is a significant destination, particularly for those from urban areas. About 18.64% of urban Bihari migrants move to Jharkhand, which makes it the most popular destination for this group. It also attracts 13.1% of rural Bihari migrants and 14.12% of the total migrants, making it an important destination state overall. West Bengal is another key

destination for migrants from Bihar, with 13.65% of all migrants heading there. Its appeal is notably stronger among rural migrants (13.81%) compared to urban migrants (12.97%), suggesting its relevance to people from less urbanized areas. Maharashtra is especially popular among urban migrants (12.38%) and holds significance among rural migrants as well (10.14%), placing it in the top five destinations for both groups. Overall, it accounts for 10.55% of all Bihari migrants. Uttar Pradesh, a neighboring state, attracts 10.24% of total migrants, with similar appeal among both rural (10.61%) and urban (8.62%) migrants from Bihar. Other states like Haryana, Punjab, and Gujarat also feature in the migration patterns, with Haryana being more attractive to rural migrants (7.86%) and Gujarat standing out for urban migrants (4.21%). Meanwhile, Punjab holds



significance for both rural (7.54%) and urban (4.02%) migrants. Lastly, a considerable share of migrants (13.35% of total, 11.98% of rural, and a large 22.93% of urban migrants) head to a diverse array of states categorized as the "Rest of India," reflecting the wide dispersal of Bihari migrants across the country.

### Methodology

**Aim:** To understand the pattern of migration from Bihar to Delhi in order to find the reasons for the migration.

### Objectives

To understand push and pull factors driving migration from Bihar to Delhi.

To understand the demographic features like age, gender, education and occupation of the migrants.

### Procedure of Sample Selection

The investigator conducted interviews with migrant labourers residing in Munirka JJ Cluster, and surrounding area which is inhabited by migrants and explained them about the objective of study. The doubts of the workers were cleared before interviewing them for the research. Their verbal consent was taken before asking the questions and it was assured to them that their identity will not be revealed.

### Description of Sample

The sample comprised of migrant workers specifically from various districts of Bihar. The sample of 20 workers included both men and women in it. The selection of the sample was based on voluntary participation and withdrawal.

### Research design

**Quantitative Analysis:** Use of semi structured interview to

analyze demographic data, migration patterns, and correlations between push-pull factors and migration trends.

**Qualitative Analysis:** Analysis of interview transcripts to identify common themes and narratives about the migration experience.

### Semi-structured Interview

An interview was undertaken to understand the patterns of migration from Bihar to Delhi. It helped us in gaining insights into the reasons behind migration, the challenges faced, and the overall experience of living and working in Delhi. Some of the questions included in the Questionnaire are given below:

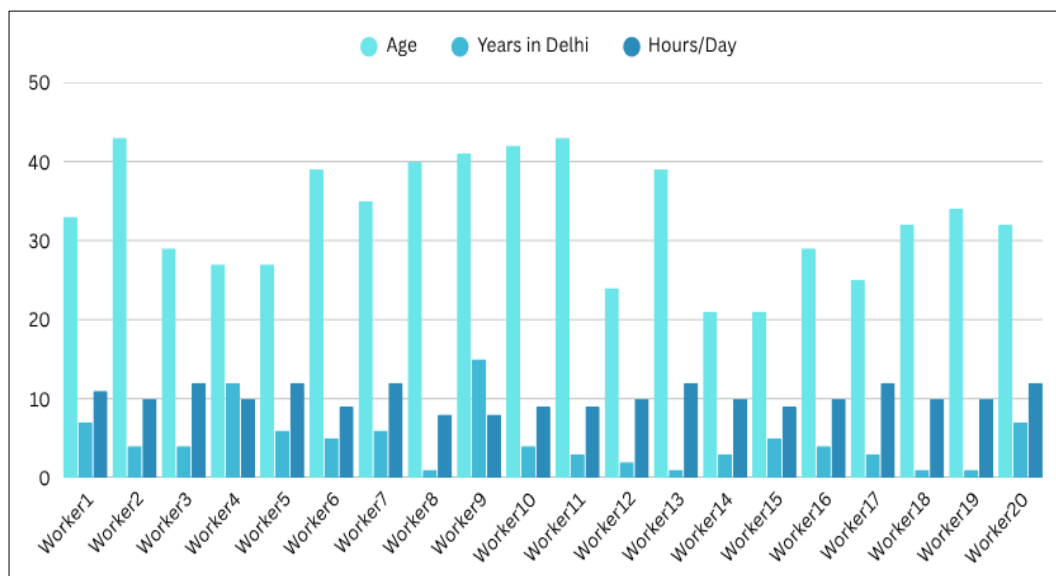
- Demographic details like name, age, gender, marital status, education and occupation.
- Reasons for migration, and past references.
- Income sources, expenditure and increment.
- Challenges faced during the stay in Delhi.

### Result and Analysis

The data collected from the twenty Migrant workers from Bihar in Delhi reveals many key patterns and insights into the migration process, socio-economic conditions, and future plans of these individuals. Here's a detailed analysis based on the responses:

#### 1. Demographic Characteristics

**Age and Gender:** The study finds that most of the migrants are male, with age ranging from 25 to 45 years. This suggests that migration is undertaken mostly by working-age men to find employment opportunities outside their state. However, some women are also part of the labour migration process, often in domestic work or accompanying their spouses.



**Fig 3:** Year age and hour

**Education:** The study also notes that most of the migrants have low levels of education with the majority having completed only up to metric level or less. This low education limits their job opportunities in Bihar as well as Delhi, compelling them to migrate in search of unskilled or semi-skilled labour jobs.

#### 2. Migration Details

**Reasons for Migration:** A lack of job opportunities in Bihar, better job prospects in Delhi, and higher wages are some of the primary reasons for Migration. Some respondents also cited family connections and natural disasters (like floods) as influencing factors. This aligns with the push-pull theory, where economic hardship in

Bihar (push factors) and the promise of better income in Delhi (pull factors) drive migration.

**Social Networks:** Most of the migrants reported that their relatives or friends migrated before them, providing essential information and support during the movement. It indicates the importance of social networks in facilitating migration, as they play a critical role in securing accommodation and employment for new migrants.

### 3. Economic and Social Conditions

- **Occupation:** Most of the respondents found work in labour-intensive sectors such as construction, security, domestic work, and rickshaw pulling. These jobs are low-paying and unstable reflecting the limited job opportunities available to low-skilled migrants.
- **Income:** The migrants reported their earning between ₹8,000 and ₹20,000 per month, which they considered a

significant improvement over their earlier incomes in Bihar. However, this income is not enough to provide for a decent standard of living in Delhi, where the cost of living and inflation is high.

- **Living Conditions:** Overcrowded and congested housing, inadequate sanitation and high rent are common challenges faced by the migrants. While some of them have access to basic amenities like electricity and water, however, their overall living conditions remain sub-standard reflecting upon the issue of poor housing for low-income migrants in urban areas.
- **Remittances:** Most of the respondents regularly send remittances to their families in Bihar primarily for household expenditure, education of children and healthcare services. This indicates that remittances play a crucial role in supporting the families of migrants and contributing to the economy of their home state.

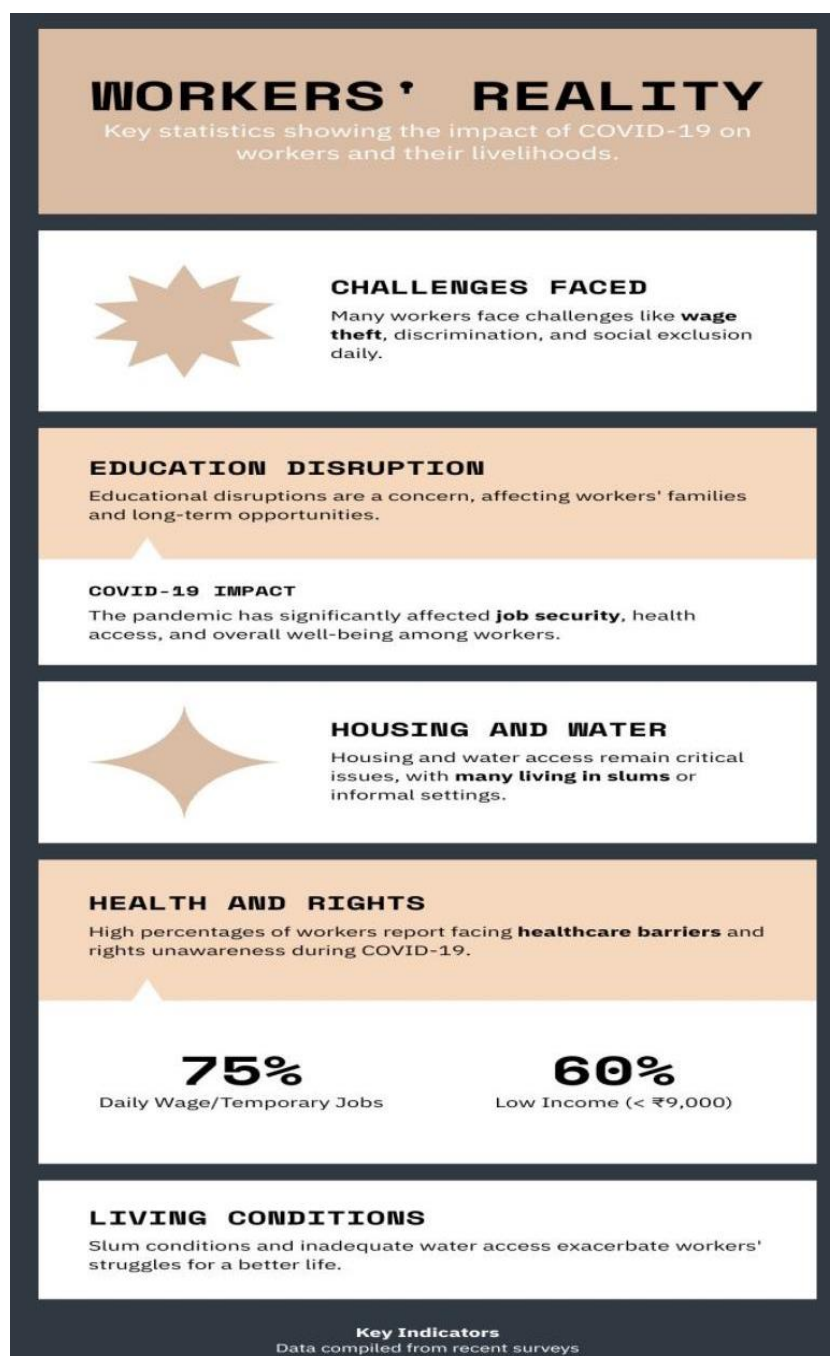


Fig 4: Working reality

#### 4. Future Plans

**Permanent settlement in Delhi:** While some of the migrants are uncertain about their long-term plans, a notable number of migrants intended to stay in Delhi due to better economic opportunities. However, others desired to return to Bihar primarily due to family ties, the intention to build a house, or retire. It, therefore, reflects a common trend where migrants plan to return home after achieving specific financial goals or once their work life concludes.

#### Improvements Needed

The Migrants were of the opinion that better housing facilities, job security, and access to education and healthcare services would encourage them to stay in Delhi. It highlights the need for improved living conditions and social infrastructure to retain migrants in the city. In a nutshell, the result of the survey can summarised in the following table:

**Table 3:** Aspect finding percentage

Aspect	Finding	Percentage (%)
Aware of Govt Schemes	11 workers	55%
Used Any Govt Service	10 workers	50%
Satisfied with Services	9 workers	45%
Faced Job Loss or Income Reduction During COVID	16 workers	80%
Faced Healthcare Barriers During COVID	14 workers	70%
Received Any Aid (Govt/NGO)	11 workers	55%
Faced Discrimination	11 workers	55%
Felt Socially Excluded	10 workers	50%
Community Participation Problems	11 workers	55%
Faced Exploitation or Abuse	8 workers	40%
Aware of Legal Rights	Only 9 workers	45%
Harassed by Authorities	11 workers	55%
Living in Slums/Informal Settlements	12 workers	60%
No Access to Clean Water	8 workers	40%
Inadequate Housing Conditions	9 workers	45%
Faced Eviction Threats	9 workers	45%
Informal Sector Workers	Construction, Domestic Work, Street Vending, Garment Units	100%
Type of Contract	Daily Wage/Temporary	75%
Permanent Employment	Only 5 out of 20	25%
Earning less than ₹9,000/month	12 workers	60%
Working >10 hours/day	11 workers	55%
Faced Wage Theft or Delays	11 workers	55%
Key Indicator	% Affected	
Daily Wage/Temporary Jobs	75%	
Low Income (< ₹9,000)	60%	
Wage Theft	55%	
Slum Housing	60%	
Inadequate Water	40%	
No Healthcare Access	45%	
Education Disruption	55%	
Rights Unawareness	55%	
COVID Income Loss	80%	

#### Conclusion

The research highlights that Migrant workers from Bihar in Delhi primarily move in search of better economic opportunities, often facilitated by existing social networks. Despite earning higher incomes than they would in Bihar, these migrants face significant challenges, including poor living conditions and job instability. The study acknowledges that the Social networks play an important role in their migration and settlement processes, providing all support in navigating the urban environment. However, the decision to stay in Delhi or return to Bihar is highly influenced by a combination of economic and social factors with many migrants weighing their options based on the future opportunities and the quality of life in the city. The complicated phenomena of migration from Bihar is influenced by a range of socioeconomic factors and propelled by economic need. Even while it provides migrant families with substantial financial benefits, there are drawbacks that must be addressed by extensive legislative initiatives. The research concludes that there is a need for targeted interventions in housing, employment security, and

access to basic services to improve the well-being of these migrants. Bihar's migration dynamics underscore the necessity of policies that support social integration and equitable growth in urban as well as rural settings. Policymakers may better address the needs of migrant workers and their families by comprehending the traits, causes, and effects of migration. This will result in a society that is more prosperous and equitable.

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