

# The Impact of Covid-19 on learning of Migrant Children in Tamil Nadu 2021



**Impact of Covid-19 on learning of  
Migrant Children in Tamil Nadu  
2021**

# Impact of Covid-19 on learning of Migrant Children in Tamil Nadu - 2021

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**Institute of Human Rights Advocacy and Research, Chennai**

**M: 86680 91451 | E: [sdgwatch@hrf.net.in](mailto:sdgwatch@hrf.net.in) | W: [hrf.net.in](http://hrf.net.in)**

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A study such as this is challenging at the best of times. These challenges multiply manifold during emergencies. We wholeheartedly thank all those who made this study possible through their active participation and support.

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The study was designed and guided by Dr. S. Venkataraman.

The field data collection was done by Coordinators A. Srinivasan, K. Muniyandi, S. Nagalakshmi, V. Pavithra, S. Sasikala, D. Rathna, K. Suseela, M. Tamilselvi, R. Malar, J. Usharani, S. Vidya, S. Sathrack Dhinakaran, and P. Dinesh Kumar, Selvi, Poongothai, R. Anandhi, B. Palanisamy from The Tamil Nadu Alliance, Programme Officer Ben Davis, and Field Coordinator, Migration Project, Chennai Region Lochan Sahu from Aide et Action (India), Field Organisers Bhagya and Tamilarasi from Arunodhaya, Head, Field implementation Niranjana Chater, Programme Associate Edward Prathap Singh, Project Coordinators J. Martin Philips and G. Sunil, from ActionAid Association, Senior Coordinator N. Chithra, and Associate Coordinators Divya, Namitha Jayashankar, and J. Murugesan from the *Human Rights Advocacy and Research Foundation* (HRF).

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Prof Bernad D'Sami, Senior Fellow, LISSTAR, gave comments on the preliminary draft, at short notice.

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**P. Tamilarasi,**  
Deputy Director,  
HRF



The Covid-19 lockdown has massively affected the lives of millions of informal migrant workers in India. Tens and thousands of migrant workers, men, women, adolescents, and children were displaced from the cities and trekked to their villages barefoot. India has never witnessed such despair and helplessness of people who had to suffer due to the proclamation of unplanned nationwide lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has hugely affected the life and lives of children of migrant workers who were living with their parents at the informal worksites. In India, we are yet to have a comprehensive database of migrant workers and their accompanying family members living in the vicinity of a worksite. As a result, the accompanying children face denial of basic entitlements and rights.

The current study which has been undertaken by the Human Rights Advocacy and Research Foundation in close collaboration with Aide et Action, Arunodhaya, Tamil Nadu Alliance, and ActionAid Association has made an honest attempt to capture the plights of migrant workers and the accompanying children who were living at the worksite during and after the pandemic.

The study has revealed as to how the children of migrant workers were invisible and excluded from accessing various government entitlements such as, nutrition, ECCE, education and child protection at the destinations, and their integration at the source villages. The greatest hurdle for children is to access education in their mother tongue and lack of better infrastructure, learning materials and quality learning. The living condition at the worksites is also quite deplorable and lacks common minimum services and infrastructure for a healthy living.

The study raises some fundamental issues pertaining to the Right to Education, food security and protection of migrant children at the destination states. The Sustainable Development Goals emphasise an equal and nondiscriminatory policy towards the migrants and their inclusion. The state of Tamil Nadu may come up with some effective policy direction to reach out to children who are affected by internal migration.

Aide et Action has been working in the brick kilns and at the building construction sites to facilitate safe and healthy environment, education, nutrition, and protection from child labour in Thiruvallur district. The Government of Tamil Nadu has been working in partnership with Aide et Action and the brick kiln owners and builders to make education accessible to thousands of inter-state migrant children. Labour migration is key to the growth of the economy of a country. However, India is yet to have an inclusive policy to create a win-win situation for the migrant workers. There is a greater need to have a national policy on migration and create a roadmap for the dignity, rights, and welfare of migrant workers.

**Umi Daniel,**  
Director Migration Education,  
Aide et Action South Asia, India





The Covid-19 pandemic is not just a health pandemic: it has affected the economy, employment, and livelihood of thousands of people across the world, pushing the marginalised into more vulnerable positions. The report by Oxfam GB ‘The Inequality Virus’ points out that the world’s poorest people will take over a decade to recover from the economic shock. The amelioration measures taken by the governments to arrest the spread of the pandemic such as the lockdown, school closure, physical distancing etc. has a long-lasting impact on the lives and development of children. It has placed the children at a heightened risk of exposure to violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect.

The nationwide lockdown announced in March 2020 made thousands of migrants who were rendered jobless overnight to flee to their villages. Thousands of migrants walked long miles to reach their destination, many of them facing death on the way. The tragic death of a 12 years old girl who walked all the way from her work place in Bhupalpally district of Telangana to her native village in Bijapur district in the neighbouring Chhattisgarh and the killing of sixteen migrant labourers who were returning to their home state Madhya Pradesh on foot when a goods train ran over them between Jalna and Aurangabad districts are some instances that expose the plight of the migrant workers. In spite of such incidents, the Government of India reported that no data was available on migrants’ death.

When there is a dearth of data available on adult migrants, the situation of the children of migrant labourers and children who migrated (trafficked) without adults is much more precarious as they remain invisible and out of sight. This study ‘A Study on the Impact of Covid-19 on learning of Migrant Children in Tamil Nadu’ seeks to highlight the impact of pandemic measures on the migrant children and propose recommendations to ensure the protection of children and facilitate their learning process. Covid-19 has put a halt to realising the SDGs. The report ‘Child labour 2020 - trends and the road forward’ released jointly by ILO and UNICEF on the International Day Against Child Labour 2021 warns that a further 8.9 million children will enter the labour force by 2022 due to poverty created by Covid-19. UNICEF data says that more than 1 billion children are at the risk of falling behind in education due to school closure.

Arunodhaya as an organisation working with the prime motive of elimination of child labour and promoting right to education, is happy to be part of this study. Through this study Arunodhaya highlighted children of migrant workers in North Chennai who are involved in doll making, horoscope, vendors, construction work and working in companies. These families have migrated from Rajasthan, Odisha, Maharashtra, and Bihar. Without any documentary proof they have no access to government schemes and education for their children. Covid-19 has worsened their situation with no income for many months. With no access to government benefits they were depending on help from NGOs and individuals.

This study is highlighting the situation of such voiceless, faceless migrant children across Tamil Nadu. It has attempted to reach the most unreached and the most discriminated and calls for action to enable these children to enjoy their rights to childhood and have the opportunities for education and development and realise the central promise of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals-Leave No One Behind (LNOB).

**Dr. Virgil D Sami,**  
Executive Director,  
Arunodhaya, Chennai



The Covid-19 pandemic has created a catastrophe on the living and working conditions of the unorganised workers and it has impacted heavily on inter-state and intra-state workers and their children in particular. The distressed inter-state migrant workers have lost jobs, wages, compensation and sources of alternate livelihood options while their children living with the families in migrant settlements and worksites have faced horrendous situations. The loss of learning, sudden switch over to virtual mode without much preparation, inaccessibility to basic health care, safety and nutritional food were the issues highlighted for the last 18 months. Inter-state migrant workers also were facing innumerable hardships while they returned to their native states.

At this critical juncture, civil society organisations came together to understand the impact of the pandemic on the lives of migrant children particularly to locate the loss of learning and access to basic services. This study on the Impact of Covid-19 on learning of Migrant Children in Tamil Nadu has highlighted the fact that migrant worker's children have faced many problems in learning - lack of resource materials, mother-tongue education, lack of subject specific teachers, and learning environment. Inter-state migrant children are entitled to access the common school system in their neighborhood with socio-culturally relevant pedagogy. The health seeking behavior of distress migrant communities and access to decent health care is also highlighted in the study.

We hope that this study will lead to positive changes in policy to create access to free, compulsory, equitable, and quality education for children of migrant workers in their neighborhoods and worksites, in particular in the textiles and garment sector. Neighborhood schools are critical to ensure education for all migrant children.

The Tamil Nadu Alliance expresses gratitude for having engaged in this important study which has provided a space to highlight the problems of migrant children and calls for collaboration and solidarity from business houses, government departments, and other stakeholders to create lasting change in the lives of migrant children and working and living conditions of migrant workers.

**Dr. P. Bala Murugan**  
Founding Member,  
Tamil Nadu Alliance



Children's health and development, education, behaviour, and their families' economic security including protection from violence, abuse and neglect have all been disrupted as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the unprecedented control measures imposed by the union and state governments since 22 March 2020. The pandemic has had a negative impact on all vulnerable groups, including children, adolescents, women, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and minorities. Children and adolescents from migrant worker communities have been the most severely affected, with their fundamental rights being jeopardised. The epidemic brought the harsh realities of migrant workers' and their children into the spotlight.

In Tamil Nadu, home to more than 20 million children, and boasts of having the finest infrastructure facilities in the country, comprehensive healthcare systems (both government and private), and 80.09% literacy (according to the 2011 Census of India), the sudden and unprecedented outbreak of Covid-19 has had a catastrophic effect on the rights of children and adolescents. Against this backdrop, there is a strong need to reinvigorate the rights of children and ensure their access to the basic rights as enshrined in the UNCRC, 1989.

As the crisis prolongs and takes newer forms, deepening fissures based on caste, religion, and gender, there is a pressing need for documentation of this unprecedented time. There is also an urgency for evidence from the ground to better inform policy. The initiative to document the impact of Covid-19 in the line of SDG is critical at this time.

The study has unravelled the adverse impact on children of migrant workers. ActionAid Association greatly appreciates the timely research on migrant workers' children. The contribution of ActionAid to this study is documenting the plight of children in both inter and inter and intra migrant workers' children covering in both brick kiln and construction work sites.

We hope that this report contributes further to our collective understanding of how the pandemic and the several crises it has precipitated are manifesting in the lives of children of migrant workers. The findings of this report have informed and echo the needs we have been trying to address through our response to the crisis in a limited way. We also wish to see the recommendations included in the report, which draw upon and reiterate what many players have been saying, put into action to protect and respond to the needs of informal workers.

Our continuing hope is that the study generates lessons about the policy choices we need to make, the tools we should deploy in crises, and the institutions and mechanisms we must build and strengthen to make our societies resilient. We expect stakeholders to disseminate any insights gained from this research on how we can move toward a more responsive policy framework that places the interests of the children of migrant workers.

### **Esther Mariaselvam**

Associate Director,  
ActionAid Association



According to Census 2011, there were about 93 million migrant children in India, and across the country every fifth migrant was found to be a child. NSSO-64<sup>th</sup> Round found that 62.7% of migrant households had at least one child in the age group of 0-18 years.<sup>1</sup> These figures point to the immensity of the phenomenon of child migration in India. A direct fall-out of child migration is learning loss since such children suffer from a break in their normal school attendance. Even if and when they resume school attendance at their destinations, the quality of teaching-learning raises several issues. What is worse, the situation is exacerbated with the advent of Covid-19 and its consequent adverse impact on education as a whole and on children belonging to disadvantaged groups in particular, which includes migrant children. The literate environment in the households of such groups is a further issue of concern as it may add to the woes of the migrant children.

It is commendable that HRF has taken up this study in collaboration with its partners, in pursuance of its proactive agenda of trying, *inter alia*, to secure the right to education of children. As this requires a clear understanding of what is happening to the education of migrant children, with focus on finding out the extent of education loss in them, HRF has conducted this study on the impact of Covid-19 on the learning of migrant children in the state of Tamil Nadu in India.

This study is timely and pioneering on two accounts, namely, first, it studies the impact of migration on education of such children and secondly, it focuses on the impact of Covid-19 on their education. The utility of a study like this depends upon the soundness of data collected. Similarly, the relevance of a policy or programme initiative is as good as the quality of data on which they are based.

The findings of this study will be useful not only for the education stakeholders at the micro level, but also of great value to the policy makers, since the study has adopted sound research methodologies for data collection, which includes questions on important aspects such as access to on-line classes, their quality, literate environment, parental assistance, access to education in mother tongue, attitudes to blended learning, attitudes to the pandemic and school closure, need to support family, assistance received from government and other stakeholders in the form of nutritious supplements and financial help, etc.

The different types of migrant children such as inter-state migrant children who have accompanied their parents, some of them who have not been accompanied by their parents, and similarly for intra-state migrant children, have been selected for the sample, stratified again by work places and their industrial affiliations.

This approach has made the sample representative across migration types and industries. Data collection and analysis have been done by partner teams consisting of dedicated field staff and researchers. These render the findings robust and reliable and thus helpful for policy making, programme planning and implementation in order to secure for the migrant children their right to education and that too of quality.

**Dr. S. Venkatraman,**  
Senior Consultant, UNESCO,  
Trustee, HRF

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/india/media/3416/file/Child-migration-India2020-policy-brief.pdf> [accessed 1 October 2021]



This report presents the findings of a study conducted overall from January 2021 to October 2021 by ActionAid Association, Aide et Action, Arunodhaya, Human Rights Advocacy and Research Foundation and Tamil Nadu Alliance to ascertain the impact of the lockdown due to Covid-19 on the learning of migrant children in Tamil Nadu. The study covers inter-state migrant children who accompanied their parents, inter-state migrant children who have been brought for work in specific industries, intra-state (inter-district) migrant children who have come for work in specific industries and intra-state (inter-district) migrant children who accompanied their parents. The data was collected from 27 March 2021 to 04 April 2021 using a mobile app.

The pandemic called for a complete rapid shift of teaching and learning processes. As our traditional schools moved to online learning virtually overnight, this transition was unplanned and resulted in severe disruptions in learning especially for the children of migrant workers. The student engagement, planning and execution of online classes, lack of teaching resources, and difficult access to technology was a major obstacle even to the children who study in top class international schools. The transition had unimaginable consequences for the children of migrant workers, who lacked the basic infrastructure, knowledge, and access to the online learning environment.

The lockdown brought into focus the worst kept secret of the Indian schooling system - that supplementary support is an essential component of the schooling, not an optional extra. While the children of the rich go for before- and after-school tuition, the poor depend on their families, most often mothers. In migrant families, the boys and men too pitch in. The lack of schooling for the families has an impact on the learning outcomes. This is a gap that needs to be addressed not only for migrant children but in the general schooling system itself, and is beyond the scope of this study.

Of the 466 respondents, 221 were inter-state migrant children who migrated along with their parents. These families were migrating for work primarily in brick kilns, spinning mills, garment industries, and construction and allied sectors, though there were also nomads such as fortune tellers and doll makers. The wage earners move to where livelihood opportunities are, and the children move along with them.

## Findings

The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 failed the children of migrant labourers during the pandemic induced school closures. It exacerbated the effects of the digital divide, of privilege, and of access. 'Free and compulsory education' became a mirage.

Though the RTE Act, 2009 includes the provision that - *'if the child is required to move from one school to another, such child shall have a right to seek transfer to any other school'*, this is not done in the best of times for children of migrant workers. The migrant workers generally stay at the worksite along with their family for limited periods of time



varying from three to six months and then move to another place. Though some of these children may be enrolled in their native village school, they have no access to education and remain absent for long periods of time and eventually drop out.

Of the 147 migrant child respondents, 97 (65.9%) reported that they do not attend any online classes during the lockdowns. Most (62, 63.9%) could not attend the online classes because they did not have android phones, 42% did not have a laptop or desktop at home, 39% had no TV, and 31% could not attend online classes because they had no money to recharge their prepaid phone. It is unfortunate that education is not accessible due to lack of cash availability to recharge.

Interestingly, the inter-state children seem to have had more access to learning during the lockdown and school closure than the intra-state children. 59% of the inter-state children had access to education during school closure, while only 28.7% of the intra-state children had access to learning during the same time. It could be that the inter-state children were not as dependent on the government system because they had developed their own alternative.

The study revealed that among 221 inter-state migrant children who have accompanied their parents, 74 (33.4%) migrate once in a year and 36 (16.2%) migrate more than once a year. And 46 (20.8%) of the children reported that they stay only for 6 months till their parents complete their work period. The migration has no connection with academic calendars of school education and can happen any time depending on the needs of the profession and the location of available livelihood opportunities. All these constraints contribute to various challenges, a major one being the mid-term admission of a child in school.

Of 221 inter-state migrant children in Tamil Nadu covered in this study, 176 (79%) stay with their fathers. Of these fathers, 68 (38.6%) father's are illiterate and 39 (22%) completed only the primary level of education. Only 0.5% of them are graduates. 14 (7.9%). Of the 161 (72%) children living with their mothers, 76 (47%) of the mothers have no formal education. The 'right to education' in India, at best, merely provides schooling. Even this bare minimum schooling has to be supplemented with tuition (if the family can afford it) or, as is more often the case, the mother has to help with the homework. The help of the family in 'homework' is a design element of the system, and if the family cannot help, the system fails. With 38.6% of the father's being illiterate and 22% having completed only the primary school (just 0.5% of fathers are graduates), and 47% of the mothers having had no formal schooling, the adverse impact on the children is a foregone conclusion.

Since India is a multilingual country, the medium of instruction in most government schools is in the state language - Tamil in Tamil Nadu. In this study, 288(69%) of 419 respondents were studying in government schools. Therefore, the



medium of instruction is a barrier for children of inter-state migrants. 101 (46%) migrant children have reported that they do not have access to language teachers to teach them in their mother tongue. All these challenges ultimately result in failure of the RTE Act, 2009 for this segment of society.

Though some civil society organisations are trying to address this issue through various programmes like imparting education at migrant worker's sites, the infrastructure of the sites is very basic. The children are often in a small room, with cement flooring and asbestos sheeted roofing located inside the industrial area due to the closure of the school. Drinking water and toilets were not available to the children. So the education imparted through these programmes can only be a rudimentary bridging course and not a substitute for formal education imparted in school.

During the pandemic the health and safety of the children of migrant workers were even more at risk. Of 466 respondents, only 49% reported that they wear masks while going out. Only 42% reported washing their hands with soap/sanitiser. Only 37% reported following physical distancing norms when they go out.

The majority of the migrant children rely on their schools to interact with their peers, seek support, access health and immunisation services, nutritious meals, and for a better infrastructure even though they lack access to materials and language teachers in their mother tongue. Whatever little they had access to is also cut off with school closure - more so for children of intra-state (inter-district) migrants.

Cumulatively, the failure of the state to fulfill its obligations under Article 21A of the Constitution of India which unambiguously states that '*the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the state may, by law, determine*' and the Right to Education Act 2009, has made it impossible for the '*parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years*' as demanded of them by Article 51A(k).

The longer the schools remain closed, the longer migrant children are cut off from these critical elements of childhood and will continue to be locked up in a congested place where sitting for more than an hour is impossible. Acknowledging that there is serious learning loss, scientific measurement to discover areas of concern and design curatives, and preparing a long term plan specific to the needs of migrant children is the way forward.

## Recommendations

Migration is increasing, and will only keep increasing, both in numbers and in the diversity of migrants in the foreseeable future. The recommendations are made keeping in mind both the short term and the long term needs. The crisis at hand has been a long time





coming, and the underlying causes need to be addressed to ensure the best interests of the child. The children deserve nothing less.

1. *Multi-state inter-governmental approach is the key to a lasting solution.* The home and host state governments need to work closely, and harmoniously, to ensure the best interests of the child. Several actions - from data collection to schooling, text books, entitlements, and protection - cannot be done at one end only, or even independently. Inter-state collaboration between the departments of education, labour, health, women and child development for convergence on education, child rights, and nutrition at the destination is a necessity.

Inter-state mechanisms of schooling equivalence, inter-state protocols to prevent disruption in the schooling of the migrant children, and inter- and intra-state communication and coordination among governments and departments should be strengthened and streamlined to ensure compliance with all the legal and constitutional provisions regarding education. The Right to Education is geo-agnostic, and should be guaranteed for all children, regardless of domicile. Synchronisation is a prerequisite for effective outcomes. It requires political will and administrative acumen, both of which are not in short supply in the states of this study.

2. *Institutional linkages:* Migrant Workers Welfare Boards should be constituted in each state to register the migrant workers along with family details, especially information on the children. They should coordinate with similar institutions in other states. Similarly the village child protection committees should be kept informed, both in the home and host villages, of the migration status of children. The state commissions for protection of child rights should have protection and promotion of the rights of migrant children as a specific responsibility, and the commission in the host state should regularly monitor that the statutory standards are maintained for all migrant children.
3. *Planned migration should be the norm,* and distress migration needs to be prevented. Host and home states should collect and share database information of migrant children, so that appropriate preparation can be made at both ends - including sensitising migrants to their rights, entitlements and social security provisions, database of schools, local migrant support systems and civil society organisations - before embarking on their journey.
4. *Collect actionable data:* Map child migration at the source and destination. A detailed mapping of migrant workers and their children should be done by the government throughout identified significant home and host areas, based on accurate information of migrants and worksites and inter-state cooperation. Children accompanying parents should be counted as child migrants, and independent labour migration of the children (below 18) should be treated as trafficking. Surveys conducted by the education department should collect data





on out of school migrant children and initiate measures to bring them to school. With the data, home states can pitch in to ensure schooling in the mother tongue. Ensure that the data collected is for inclusion in education and a specific set of entitlements for migrants. Use of this data for any other purpose, directly or indirectly, should be explicitly prohibited.

5. *Portability of entitlements* such as PDS, ICDS, health, insurance, and schooling in mother tongue for the accompanying migrant children should be the norm of both state and union governments. Make provision for transfer of entitlements across states with simple procedures which can be followed by migrants without the services of intermediaries.
6. *Ensuring the right to education*, in letter and spirit, is by far the most important gap identified. Therefore, schools with the mother tongue as the medium of instruction should be opened close to the workers' residence or place of work. Frame special rules, protocols, and guidelines to bring migrant children under the purview of the Right to Education Act, with enabling provisions for catering to their specific needs. Availability of learning material made a difference, and should be provided on time.
7. *Prepare for school reopening*: The already weak learning base has been aggravated, and some social skills and learning capacity may take years to be reacquired. A cold start will aggravate the situation and further traumatise the children. There is considerable learning loss compared to pre-covid times. A learning assessment before restarting, and periodic data collection on the learning outcomes, would greatly help in focusing recovery effort.
8. *Infrastructure*: Registered and fully functional schools should be set up close to settlements, and in workplaces such as the brick kilns and residential readymade garment factories, in the language of the migrant children. School infrastructure needs to be enhanced to conform to the health and sanitation requirements. This includes provision of educational and communications infrastructure where it is not commercially viable. Others, such as housing for migrants, which conform to the medical and sanitation requirements are equally critical. The physical infrastructure of the schools, including transit schools and seasonal hostels, where migrant children study should have secure recreational facilities and playgrounds. Teaching and reading material should be available regardless of school closure, round the clock if possible. Libraries and reading rooms should be accessible off school hours also.
9. *Pedagogic and psychosocial skills*: With not many children accessing online education, peer interaction is a major incentive for children to get back to school. Easing children back into class - back to boisterous learning - will need a different set of skills, mental makeup, and pedagogies, especially for senior classes. Teachers



need pedagogic and psychosocial skills to cater to the needs of children who have gone through trauma, sexual and other violence. The teachers need to impart these skills to the students, so that the children can cope with their uncommon experience and be prepared for the future. These are in addition to the skills needed to help children learn - children who have been at home for close to two years. 'Age appropriate' will need to be redefined.

10. *Multi-stakeholder partnerships of government, civil society and industry.* Since the issue at hand is huge and sensitive, the government needs to develop a whole of society approach, and work systematically with civil society and community organisations, at both source and destination areas. Only this can ensure uninterrupted learning despite any future disruptions. The state should engage with the industry platforms of MSMEs and SMSEs in sectors that employ significant numbers of migrant workers, and set up multi-stakeholder platforms to ensure that resilient systems are in place to prevent future disruptions in the education of migrant children. Infrastructure that supports such learning should be in place as soon as possible.



## 1. Context

The Covid-19<sup>2</sup> pandemic resulted in lockdowns of varying durations from March 2020 and continued well into May 2021. One of the consequences is its adverse impact on the learning of children. Though children in India do have a ‘right to education’ from the ages of 6-14, somewhere along the line ‘education’ became ‘schooling’ and then ‘schooling’ became ‘somehow complete the syllabus’. Due to the pandemic related lockdowns, even this is not done.

Lockdowns (curfews by another name) have disproportionately impacted the children from the socially excluded communities. Several studies have shown that it is these children who tend to fall back in learning when out of school - even during scheduled breaks such as annual holidays.

For safety reasons, the schools were closed from March 2020 to June 2021 (at the time of writing), and looks likely to be closed for the foreseeable future. This period straddles three academic years already. It closed before the end of the academic year 2019-2020, and the final exams were not conducted. They remained closed for the entire academic year 2020-21. They will not reopen for quite some time in the academic year 2021-2022 either. With terms such as hybrid and blended learning being tossed about, it is not clear when they actually will be opened and function in the pre-pandemic sense of the term.

There are different opinions as to whether the closure is beneficial or the effects are worse than the likely impact of the pandemic itself, which by and large spared children in the first wave globally. School closure is considered beneficial for protecting the children and teachers from contracting the virus on the one hand but on the other hand it has caused a huge disturbance in the learning ability of children. They have lost a learning pattern because of the school closure.

It is important to assess such learning loss, as it can have a multiplier effect on the students’ future prospects. School is not only a place of learning but also plays an important role in every aspect of children’s life, especially socialisation and building lifelong relationships, and the ‘soft’ social skills needed as an adult for social interaction and healthy relationships.

Many of these cannot as yet be replicated by online classes, which became the preferred methodology during the lockdowns. Although online classes became the methodology of choice for ‘completing the syllabus’, questions on whether it reaches all the children were raised right at the outset. The stark digital divide became evident and visible in ways that could not be brushed under the carpet during the lockdown.

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<sup>2</sup> Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, SARS-CoV-2, popularly 2019 novel coronavirus or, in short, Covid-19.



With most of the scheduled tribes, and many of the most vulnerable - Dalits, migrant labour, fishers - not even having mobile phone or internet *coverage* in their areas, their exclusion was a foregone conclusion. This study was conducted to assess the impact of this exclusion, and its forms, especially among the children of migrant workers.

## 2. The Framework

### 2.1. Definitions

#### 2.1.1. Migrant worker

The term ‘migrant worker’ has been defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO), as a ‘the movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State’.<sup>3</sup> In India the legislation with the closest reference to migrants is the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 (replaced on 1 April 2021 with the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020) which defines inter-state migrant workmen as ‘any person who is recruited by a contractor in one state under an agreement for employment in an establishment in another state’.<sup>4</sup>

Implicit in both the definitions is the class character of migrant workers. It is only civilian workers from the more vulnerable communities who have claim to this label. Those at the higher end are often called expats (expatriates) and do not fall under this category. Neither are full time government employees.

From 1967 migration in India has been categorised in two ways - migration by birth place and migration by place of last residence. Out of the total internal migrants a staggering 70% are women.<sup>5</sup> Those with little prior social or economic capital, and are economic refugees or fleeing conflict are most affected by migration. There is a school of thought that the world of work is a carryover from the caste society, with the dominant social groups monopolising the 7% ‘formal’ sector, with precarity progressively intensifying for those in lower rungs of the caste system, with increasing casualisation and the lowest being in bonded labour and slavery. This school asserts that the language of class and economics is used to obfuscate the deeply caste-embedded present day work structure of India.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/migrants/about/definitions/en/>. The definition of a State under international law namely Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, 1933 which refers to State as a person of international law which possesses a) a permanent population; b) a defined territory; c) government; and d) the capacity to enter into relations with the other states [accessed 17 May 2021].

<sup>4</sup> [https://censusindia.gov.in/Ad\\_Campaign/drop\\_in\\_articles/08-Migration.pdf](https://censusindia.gov.in/Ad_Campaign/drop_in_articles/08-Migration.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/New\\_Delhi/pdf/Policy\\_briefs\\_full\\_low\\_01.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/New_Delhi/pdf/Policy_briefs_full_low_01.pdf)



### 2.1.2. Child

The word ‘child’ does not have a consistent definition under Indian law. Different legislations in India define a child in different ways according to its purpose.<sup>6</sup> Under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulations) Act, 1986 a child is a person who has not completed the age of 14<sup>7</sup> whereas under the Indian Majority Act, the age of majority is 18 even though contradictorily a ward (guardian) will be appointed for the protection of assets for any individual under the age of 21.<sup>8</sup> The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 (as amended in 2015), defines a child as an individual under the age of 18, except for heinous crimes, in which case it is 16 years of age. The National Policy for Children (NPC) defines a child as an individual under the age of 18. Added to this plethora is the age of marriage which is different for women and men (18 for women, 21 for men), and age for consumption of liquor (18 to 25, varies by state).

Under international legislation, namely the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which India has ratified, a child is defined as an individual under the age of 18. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) states that, in the case of hazardous work, a person below the age of 18 cannot be employed, and that the basic minimum age of work is not before the age of finishing compulsory schooling which is generally accepted as the age of 15.<sup>9</sup> From the various provisions stated above, it can be seen that a child is an individual under the age of 18 as it is the most common definition under international law.

### 2.1.3. Migrant children

The decadal census reveals a steady increase in internal migration with the Census of India 2011 revealing 92.95 million migrant children, nearly double the number in the 1991 census.<sup>10</sup> This means that one in five migrants are children. ‘Migrant children’ could be children of migrant workers or children who are migrant workers themselves. At the intersection of these two categories are children of migrant workers who work - either alongside their parents, or autonomously. Another axis would see categories of inter-district (or intra-state), inter-state (national), and international migrants. It generally refers to those from the low income working class, who are just about or below the poverty line and is more a factor of vulnerability rather than of distance.

Children who are migrants are often excluded from the basic economic and social protection measures cast by various legislations in India despite their increased susceptibility to abuse, poverty, and social exclusion.<sup>11</sup> When a parent is a migrant worker and they leave

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-346-laws-and-policies-for-protection-of-interest-of-children-a-critical-analysis.html>

<sup>7</sup> Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, Section 2(ii).

<sup>8</sup> The Indian Majority Act, 1875, Section 3.

<sup>9</sup> Minimum Age Convention, 1973.

<sup>10</sup> [https://censusindia.gov.in/DigitalLibrary/Archive\\_home.aspx](https://censusindia.gov.in/DigitalLibrary/Archive_home.aspx)

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/Access\\_to\\_Civil\\_Economic\\_and\\_Social\\_Rights\\_for\\_Children.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/Access_to_Civil_Economic_and_Social_Rights_for_Children.pdf)



their children in their state of origin (home state), with or without financial support, the children face a higher difficulty to access social welfare. Migrant children also receive lower support at the destination (host) state compared to other children even though laws allow for migrant children eligibility. Here we see a disparity between the laws that provide access to social welfare and the practical realities in which children are excluded despite their eligibility. Unicef has noted that the area of housing is also very problematic as housing support is limited for migrant families and totally not possible for children who are undocumented or who lack primary education. Even when housing has been provided, it tends to have poor living conditions, including a lack of adequate sanitation.

Migrant children, though a distinct group, are not homogenous. This is because there are varied reasons for their migration - from moving with household or after marriage, for education, employment<sup>12</sup> and the circumstances of such migration. Notwithstanding the reasons for migration, studies report that with proper management, migration can lessen poverty and encourage better living conditions.

The specific needs of different migrant children need to be better understood to craft customised responses to address individual needs and multiple vulnerabilities.

#### 2.1.4. Geo-specific rights

In India there are some rights and protections available depending on location, often the location of residence. One such is the protection available to the scheduled communities (scheduled castes and scheduled tribes). Those protections are withdrawn if they cross state lines.

On the other hand, most of the rights and entitlements in India are geo-agnostic (countrywide) rights such as the right to schooling in the mother-tongue for children in the age group 6-14. No matter where they are or go, they have that right. Since this right comes under the 'progressive realisation' clause, meaning that states can implement it according to their (financial) capacity, it is honoured more in the breach. Both the home state and the host state wash their hands off these families.

The right of the scheduled communities to subsidised educational loans is transborder - state and international - no matter which state or country they go to, the Government of India and/or the respective state underwrites their educational loans. Similarly, now there is a welcome move to make the right to subsidised food for those below the poverty line geo-agnostic. This is made possible by the technological advances, which can now easily allot ration entitlements based on the location. Earlier, governments hid behind the ostensibly challenging logistics to let these most vulnerable families fall between stools, as they just did not have the wherewithal to remove their ration cards from the home state and re-enroll themselves in the host state - with all its attendant risks.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/india/media/3416/file/Child-migration-India2020-policy-brief.pdf>, page 3.



In this report, we urge that all rights enshrined in the Constitution of India be geognostic for migrant children.

## 2.2. Constitutional rights and legal protections

### 2.2.1. Right to Education

The right to education has been contained and enumerated under Article 19(1)(g), Article 21 and Article 21(A) of the Constitution of India and is a non location specific right. The judiciary has also shown an interest in providing free and compulsory education to all children below the age of 14.

The case of TMA Pai Foundation was the first time that the concept of education was included as part of ‘occupation’ a term under Article 19(1)(g).<sup>13</sup> Here, the right to impart education is a fundamental right under this article and is subject to control by Article 19(6).<sup>14</sup>

The right to education which is directly related to Article 19 is Article 21 which enshrines the principle of the right to life. Article 21 states ‘no person shall be deprived of his life personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law’. The right to education is one of the umbrella rights that stems from, and is inherent in, the right to life. Under this article every child up to 14 years has a fundamental right to free education, subject to limits of economic capacity and development of the state.<sup>15</sup>

Article 21A declares that ‘*the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the state may, by law, determine*’. Under Article 21A, compliance means providing education to all children between the ages of six and fourteen, and enabling them to regularly attend school.<sup>16</sup> Curiously, Article 51A(k) makes it a duty of every citizen *who is a parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years*.

The right to education does not just end with free and compulsory education but should rather extend to quality education that is not reliant on the child's economic, social and cultural background. The courts have held that<sup>17</sup> financial incapacities cannot be stated as a ground for justification, let alone exoneration, if this right has been violated. The Tamil Nadu Uniform System of School Education Act draws from these guidelines for providing for a uniform system of education.

<sup>13</sup> Article 19(1)(g) states that all citizens shall have the right to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.

<sup>14</sup> P.A Inamdar v State of Maharashtra, (2005) 6 SCC 537.

<sup>15</sup> Unni Krishnan v State of A.P, (1993) 1 SCC 645; Mohini Jain case, (1992) 3 SCC 666.

<sup>16</sup> Ashoka Kumar Thakur v Union of India, (2008) 6 SCC 1.

<sup>17</sup> In State of Bihar v Bihar Secondary Teachers Struggle Committee (2019) 18 SCC 301.



### 2.2.2. Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009

This Act was passed on 4 August 2009. The act was implemented to provide schools and other education facilities with institutional instruction relating to education so that the fundamental right to education could be better realised for children between the ages of 6-14. Its purpose is to make formal education a non-negotiable for every child within that age group and to mandate private education institutions to reserve 25% of its seats till class I for those from underserved communities. Schools, including private schools, have to ensure that children are not segregated from the other children in the classrooms or have different timings. However, the act is not clear on the criteria for the reservation of seats.

Another important component of this act is the conceptualisation of ‘neighbourhood schools’. Under Section 6 of the act the government and the local authority are responsible to ensure a primary school for upto grade four within one kilometre of the neighbourhood and within three kilometres for children in class five and above.

The right to education and the implementation of the other provisions of this Act are to be monitored by the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)<sup>18</sup> or the State Commission for the Protection of Child rights (SCPCR).<sup>19</sup> They are tasked with the duty to review the safeguards of the rights and recommend areas of improvement as well as inquiring into any complaints related to the right.

## 2.3. Medium of instruction

### 2.3.1. Constitutional provisions

Article 29 of the Constitution of India, which is related to the protection of the rights of linguistic minorities recognises the right of all citizens to conserve their language and prohibits discrimination on the basis of language.

Article 350A states that it shall be the endeavour of every state and every local authority within the state to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minorities.

Since the right to education is a geo-agnostic right, it is incontrovertible that migrant children have the right to schooling in their mother tongue, no matter where they are.

### 2.3.2. National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Curriculum Framework 2014

This policy recognises the importance of the first six years of a child’s life in terms of the rate of development. ECCE encompasses the elements of care, health, nutrition, play, and early learning within a stable environment.<sup>20</sup> This policy emphasises the importance of

<sup>18</sup> Section 3, RTE Act.

<sup>19</sup> Section 4, RTE Act.

<sup>20</sup> National Early Childhood Care and Education, Policy by Rajeev Ranjan, available at: <https://www.rajeevelt.com/early-childhood-care-and-education-ecce-curriculum-framework-policy-india-ncert/rajeev-ranjan/>.





language in communication and information exchange. The ECCE notes that it is first important to encourage expression through the home/ mother tongue. This is important for migrant children who travel across linguistic boundaries often, which impacts on their modes of communication through writing and reading.

### 2.3.3. National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005

The NCF puts an emphasis on the implementation of a child's mother tongue to get an education. A child's mother tongue should be considered as the best medium of instruction. The primary school education of a child must be covered through the home language. It's an imperative that this is honoured. This ties in with Article 350A of the Indian constitution to offer adequate facilities for instruction in a child's mother tongue. It has been stated that 'children come to school equipped with basic interpersonal communicative skills, they need to acquire cognitively advanced levels of language proficiency. It is an imperative that we do everything to strengthen the sustained learning of Indian languages at school'.

### 2.3.4. Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009

Section 29(2)(f) of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 states that the 'medium of instructions shall, as far as possible, be in the child's mother tongue' which is a right enshrined upon all citizens. On 15 April 2020 High Court of Andhra Pradesh struck down a government order<sup>21</sup> which made English the compulsory medium for education from classes I to VI, upper primary and high schools under all managements from 2020-21. Here the high court was in agreement with the petitioners and stated the government order goes against the provisions of the RTE Act, 2009 and was further violative of Article 14, 21 and 21-A of the Constitution of India. The division bench of the supreme court refused to stay the order of the high court.

### 2.3.5. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The National Education Policy of 2005 defines home language or mother tongue as languages that include the languages of home, larger kinship, groups, street and neighbourhood that children acquire naturally from their home and societal environment. Even if a school does not have provisions for teaching in the child's mother tongue at the higher education level, it must still at a primary school level provide for education through the mother tongue. The NEP 2020, proposed that education upto class V and preferably until class VII be in the students' mother tongue or the local/ regional language.

### 2.3.6. United Nations and language

The Special Rapporteur on minority issues had prepared a report on education, language, and human rights of minorities in March 2020. It states that 'education in a minorities mother tongue, combined with quality teaching of the official language, is more cost-

<sup>21</sup> GO No. 85 Dated November 20, 2019



effective in the long term; reduces dropout rates; leads to noticeable better academic results, particularly for girls; improves levels of literacy and fluency in both the mother tongue and the official language; and leads to greater family and community involvement.

UNESCO has encouraged mother tongue instruction in primary education since 1953 (UNESCO, 1953) and UNESCO highlights the advantages of mother tongue education right from the start: children are more likely to enroll and succeed in school (Kosonen, 2005); parents are more likely to communicate with teachers and participate in their children's learning (Benson, 2002); girls and rural children with less exposure to a dominant language stay in school longer and repeat grades less often (Hovens, 2002; UNESCO Bangkok, 2005).

In international law, the non-fulfilment of using the minority languages where reasonable is considered to be discriminatory and violative of the 'human rights obligations such as the right to education'.

### 3. Scope and Methodology

#### 3.1. Objective

To assess the impact of the pandemic related measures (both supportive and restrictive) among the children of migrant workers. While focusing on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, it will also look at the external environment to identify contributing and restricting factors.

#### 3.2. Participating individuals and organisations

The following organisations participated in the design and execution of this study. Aide et Action, ActionAid Association, Tamil Nadu Alliance, Arunodhaya Centre for Street Children, and the Human Rights Advocacy and Research Foundation.

#### 3.3. Timeframe

##### 3.3.1. Design

The study was designed collectively in multiple rounds of design spread over a month. Once the design was finalised, then the field researchers were trained and the tools developed, field tested, and then the study was launched. The study report followed the same collective process until it was finalised and then translated. The samples were taken from the settlements where the partner organisations work. So, the sample size was drawn based on a proportion of coverage by the partners.

##### 3.3.2. Data collection

Field testing was done from 21 to 25 March 2021. The researchers collected the data from the settlements of migrant children through interviews from 27 March 2021 to 04 April 2021 using a mobile app.



### 3.3.3. Limitations of the study

This study was conducted for the limited purpose of understanding the impact of the pandemic - its resultant lockdowns, school closures, and enforced homestays - on the learning of children of migrant workers. But for exploring child labour as a consequence of the pandemic induced lockdown, and therefore the loss of learning, the study does not explore the general condition, nor the general prevalence of, bonded labour or child labour. The aim was a quick, comprehensive, study within this focussed framework.

There are some inherent challenges to conducting any study due to the pandemic related restrictions, the most obvious being mobility. The data was collected when the schools were closed. So, the surveyors could not do a comparative analysis or explore the scenario of the schools where migrant children study.

Most of the inter-state migrant children don't know Tamil. Though interpretations were arranged, direct interaction with the respondents in their native language was lacking. It also made the interviews that much more time consuming.

In places like brick kilns, the children were unable to respond to the questions comfortably due to the rather basic infrastructure, which made it difficult for them to stay for any length of time in the cramped room.

Though the study was made possible in large part due to technology, it was not always smooth sailing. Technology brought with it its own challenges and idiosyncrasies. Since the questionnaire was uploaded on a digital platform, difficulties were encountered during the data collection due to some errors.

### 3.4. Tools

A two part questionnaire, with four modules (A, B, C1, and C2) in part II, was prepared for the study. Both parts of the questionnaire, including all four modules, were translated into Tamil and uploaded into a digital survey tool Kobo.

To streamline the questionnaire and to avoid complex IF-THEN forks, the questionnaires were designed with a filter (Part I) and three modules (Part II).

Part I is on *identification particulars* and the *filter question*. This was gathered from all the respondents. Depending on the inputs, the tool would move to one of the 3 modules of Part II.

Part II consists of three modules (A, B and C) developed for administration to three categories of migrant children, namely:

- a) inter-state migrant children who have accompanied their parents (Module A),
- b) inter-state migrant children brought into the state for work in specific industries (Module B) and
- c) intra-state migrant children (Module C), which consists of two submodules - one for children who have come for work in specific industries and another for those who have accompanied their parents.



So the modules in Part II are:

Module A: Inter-state migrant children who accompanied their parents.

Module B: Inter-state migrant children who have been brought for work in specific industries.

Module C1: Intra-state (inter-district) migrant children who have come for work in specific industries.

Module C2: Intra-state (inter-district) migrant children who accompanied their parents.

### 3.5. Training

Researchers were given a one day training on 20 March 2021 on how to use the mobile phone based tool and the questionnaires were explained to them. Post the field testing, there was a round of feedback and training on 26 March 2021, and the tool was finalised based on the feedback.

### 3.6. Sampling

A two-stage random sampling method was used for sampling. Four categories of migrant children (see below) from five districts were considered for sampling purposes.

#### 3.6.1. Sample selection

This study covers the following categories:

1. Inter-state migrant children accompanied their parents.
2. Inter-state migrant children who have been brought for work in specific industries.
3. Intra-state (inter-district) migrant children who have come for work in specific industries.
4. Intra-state (inter-district) migrant children accompanied their parents.

Within this, there was selection based on occupation (20% of the sample universe). They were children of street vendors (17), construction workers (20), factory workers (16), doll maker (13), fortune tellers (2), cotton pickers (101), garments companies (88), casual labour in industrial area (37), bricklin (131) Daily wage workers - 55. Total = 480. The study had a 97% response rate, i.e, 466 responded out of 480.

#### 3.6.2. Geographic area

The survey was done in Chennai 24 (5.1%), Dindigul 48 (10%), Erode 78 (16.7%), Namakkal 49 (10%), and Tiruvallur 267 (57%), districts of Tamil Nadu.

#### 3.6.3. Sample Distribution

Out of 480 samples selected, data were obtained from 466 children. Among them 252 (54%) were male and 214 (46%) were female.

**Table 1. District wise population of the respondents**

Chennai	24	5.1
Dindigul	48	10
Erode	78	16.7
Namakkal	49	49
Tiruvallur	267	57
<b>Total (n) = 466</b>		



Of these, 221 (47.4%) inter-state migrant children accompanied their parents (covered in Module A) and 23 (4.9%) had been brought for work (covered in Module B), 24 (5.1%) intra-state (inter-district) migrant children who have come for work in specific industries (covered in Module C1), and 198 (42%) children who accompanied their parents (covered in Module C2).

Age group distribution was: children below 9 years 44 (9.4%), 9 years 52 (11.1%), 10 years 58 (12.4%), 11 years 39 (8.3%), 12 years 53 (11.3%), 13 years 51 (10.9%), 14 years 31 (6.6%), 15 years 40 (8.5%), 16 years 32 (6.8%), 17 years 43 (9.2%), above 17 and below 18 years 26 (5.5%).

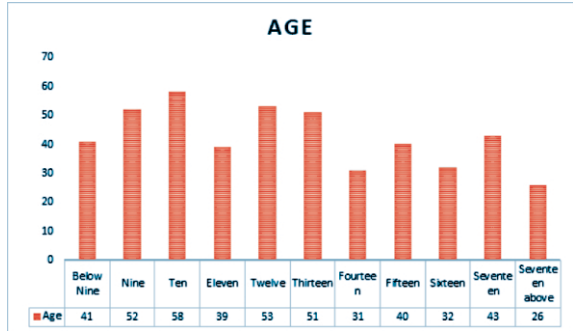


Figure 01. Age wise population of the respondents

### 3.6.4. Social Composition

The social composition of the respondents (total respondents 466) shows that 25.5% of them belong to the scheduled tribes and 9.8% of them belong to the scheduled castes. The rest of the respondents belong to most backward classes (18 %) and backward classes (14.8%), and other backward classes (1%). Many of the children are not aware of the community they belong to, as 23.6% of them said they don't know their community. 7% of the children refused to answer the question.

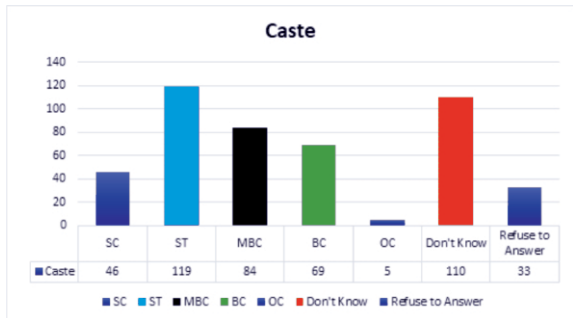


Figure 02. Caste wise population of the respondents

The religious composition is Hindu 380 (81%), Muslim 60 (12%), and Christian 7 (1.5%), which is roughly the composition in the Indian society.



## 4. Findings

### 4.1. State of origin

Among 466 responses, 419 of the children have migrated with their families. In these, 198 are intra-state migrants. 10% of the children have migrated without their family only to work. 4.9% of them are intra-state migrant children.

The majority of the children are from five states, namely, Rajasthan, Odisha, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. Among them, children from Odisha comprise 40% of children overall (245 respondents). 25% of them are from Bihar, 15% are from West Bengal, 8% from Uttar Pradesh and 5% belong to Rajasthan. A few reported that they have migrated from Chattisgarh, Assam, and Jharkhand.

There are three major modes of migration. 40% of the migrant families were brought by their peers (other workers), 24% by agents and 22% reported being brought here by contractors.

### 4.2. Housing

The lockdown resisted in confining everyone to their houses for the duration. Apart from children not being able to stay inside for long periods even in the best of times, housing - the quality of the house, number of rooms, privacy, and infrastructure (primarily electricity, mobile coverage, internet connection, and water and sanitation) - become critical for the online classes, when the school was beamed into the household for the better part of the day. With a majority (62%) of the respondents living in single room residences, most of this was compromised.

The fundamental right to adequate housing emanates from the right to life protected by Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The stated goal of the Government of India is housing for all by 2022. Vision 2023 of the Government of Tamil Nadu is housing for all by 2023, with all required infrastructure including 24 hour piped water to each

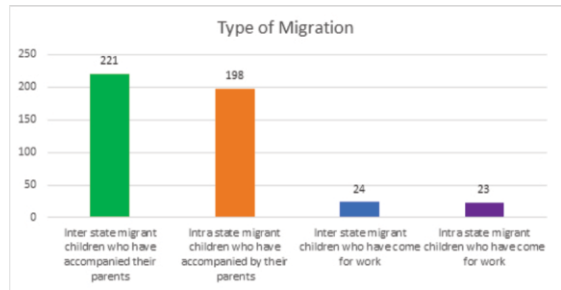


Figure 03. Type of Migration

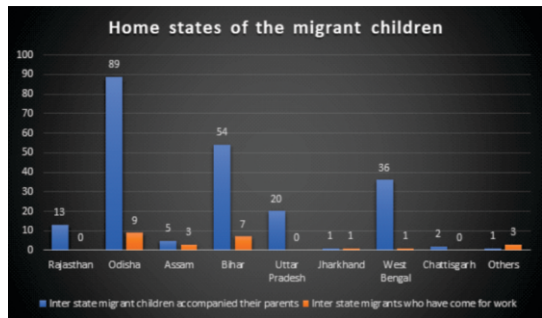


Figure 04. Home states of inter-state migrant children accompanied their parents and the inter-state migrant children who have come for work



house. Sustainable Development Goal 11, target 11.1, is for adequate and decent housing to be provided to all by 2030.

The study finds that the housing conditions of migrant workers are marked by overcrowding, poor infrastructure, and absence of water, electricity, and sanitation. 182 (39%) children in our sample reported that they were staying in the houses with brick walls, cement flooring, and asbestos roofing. 157 (33.6%) are in houses made of brick walls, cement flooring, and concrete/tiled roofing. 205 (43%) stayed in rental houses, and 138 (29.6%) had been provided housing by their employer. 40 (8.5%) have reported that they are squatters (i.e staying without getting permission from the house owner). Only 70 (16.3%) have their own houses. Most of the children (288, 62%) reported that they live in a one room house.

These figures point to the congestion in living spaces, which is seemingly quite common. It reduces the quality of living conditions and is dangerous to the health and well-being of children. It is particularly concerning in the context of the pandemic since a majority (288, 62%) reported living in a single room, with many having more than five people in the household. 115 (24.6%) of them have two rooms in their residence, 43 (9%) have three rooms, and just 20 (4%) have four rooms.

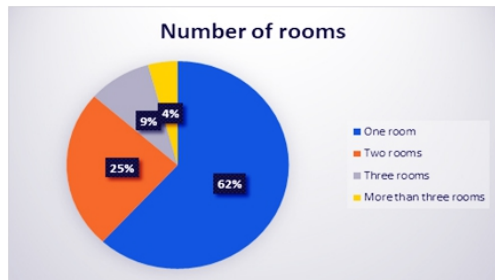


Figure 05. Number of rooms

#### 4.3. Type of school

A majority (288 of 419, 69%) of respondents were studying in government schools in their host state, and 11% in private schools. 27(6%) said that they were not attending any school at present, though they went to school until just before the lockdown. They had to drop out from school due to the financial crisis that has arisen due to the lockdown. 14 (51%) of the dropouts are between the ages of 9 and 14.

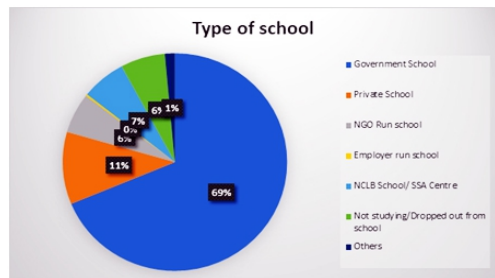


Figure 06. Type of school where they are currently studying

#### 4.4. Education of respondents

Since the respondents of module B (inter-state migrant children who have come for their work) and C1 (intra-state migrant children who have come for work) are not continuing their studies, we decided to collect this data only from module A and module C2. 162



(38.6%) of the migrant children are currently in primary school. 134 (31.9%) are studying in middle school. 71 (16.9%) are in secondary school and 38 (9%) of them are pursuing higher secondary education. 12 (2.8%) of the respondents are not studying or not enrolled in school (Figure 07).

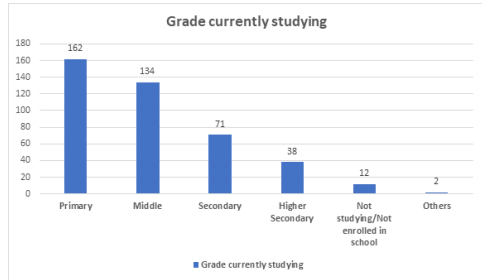


Figure 07. Grade of the respondents currently studying

#### 4.5. Host state learning context

The children who accompany their inter-state migrant worker parents to Tamil Nadu return to their home states after their parent's working period. Due to this seasonal migration, especially of the brick kiln workers, the education of their children is seriously affected. One in five (46, 20.8%) reported that they stay in a place only for six months till their parents complete their contracted period of work. The interviews revealed work in the brick kilns is for six months, after which they tend to go back to their home states. After a while they migrate from there to another state or come back to Tamil Nadu.

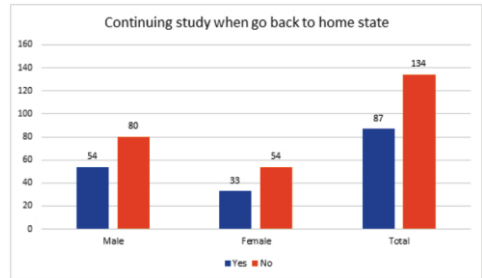


Figure 08. Continuing study when they go back to their home state

Among the 221 inter-state migrant children who have accompanied their parents, almost half (110, 49.6%) migrate once (74, 33.4%) or more than once (36, 16.2%) a year. The frequency of migration adversely affects schooling, with greater impact on the children who migrate more frequently. So the children are denied education and are not able to attend school properly due to this frequent and erratic migration. Consequently, many children drop out of school and sometimes are forced to work in brick kilns beside their parents.

A quarter of them (55, 24.8%) reported that they go to their home state only once every couple of years or even less frequently. On continuing schooling on return to their home states, 134 (60.6%) of the children answered that they would not continue their studies (Figure 08). Among them 80 (59.7%) are boys. The interruption rate is higher for boys when compared to that of girls. Only 87 (39%) children go to school when they return to their home state from Tamil Nadu.

#### 4.6. Education status of parents

Parental educational levels are an important predictor of children's educational and behavioral outcomes. We have attempted to bring out the education status of the migrant





family and the impact of illiterate parents on their children. Several studies have found that the role of the father and the mother is extremely important in the child's education. Parents are able to coach their children up to their own level of academic accomplishment, or arrange supplementary tuition for their wards. Those parents with few academic accomplishments do not realise the value of education due to lack of guidance and inspiration, or maybe they do but are afraid of encouraging their children to dream dreams they see the children have no reasonable chance of attaining, and not dreaming is a coping mechanism. Either way, the children of parents with less formal schooling tend to have more obstacles to their own schooling.

Of 221 inter-state migrant children in Tamil Nadu 176 (79%) live with their fathers. Among them, 68 (38.6%) fathers are illiterate, 39 (22%) completed the primary level of education and only 0.5% of them are graduates. 14 (7.9%) children did not know the educational qualifications of their father. Among 221 responses, 161 (72%) children live with their mothers - 76 (47%) of whom have no formal education.

**Table 2. Education status of parents of inter-state migrant children**

	Father	Mother	Guardian	1st sibling	2nd sibling	3rd sibling	4th sibling	5th sibling
Illiterate	68	76	3		9	4	2	3
Primary	39	35		30	23	11	1	
Middle	28	15		34	15	4	1	
Secondary	23	11		21	9		2	
Higher secondary	3	5		8	4	1		
Graduate	1	1			0			
Professional		0			0			
Don't Know	14	18	3		1			
Others					3	1	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>

**Totals do not add up as multiple choices were permitted.**

On the other hand, of 198 intra-state migrant children who have accompanied their parents, 186 (93%) live with their fathers. 54 (29%) of the fathers are illiterate and 56 (30%) fathers have completed primary school level. 26% of the children reported that their fathers have a middle level of education. None of the fathers were graduates nor had any professional qualification. 178 (90%) of the intra-state migrant children were living with their mothers. Of 178 responses, 46 (25%) of the mothers are illiterates, and 73 (41%) of them have completed primary education. The illiteracy percentage is higher among parents of intra-state migrant children compared to parents of inter-state migrant children.



Table 3. Education status of parents of intra-state migrant children

	Father	Mother	Guardian	1st sibling	2nd sibling	3rd sibling	4th sibling	5th sibling
Illiterate	54	46	1	-	-	-	7	3
Primary	56	73	-	15	10	2	-	-
Middle	50	27	-	14	2	-	-	-
Secondary	22	23	-	4	-	-	-	-
Higher secondary	1	3	-	2	-	-	-	-
Graduate	0	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Professional	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Don't Know	3	5	1	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>

#### 4.7. Type of work or sector where parents work

Of 419 children who have migrated with their parents, 13% of the parents are working in spinning mills, 36% in brick kilns, 14% in garments manufacturing and 12% are industrial workers.

#### 4.8. Daily Routine

Children are one of the more prominent victims of the rapid changes in pandemic response strategies. The unpredictable lockdowns and ever changing restrictions and behavioural codes were unsettling and made them vulnerable to various mental health problems.

The children found easy and lazy ways to while away the time. In our study, of 419 responses, 215 (51%) of the children have reported that they used to roam around their settlement during lockdown.

40% of them developed the habit of sleeping at home for most of the time.

Only 6.5% of the migrant children have reported that they have attended online or TV education programmes during lockdown, though 32% reported that they watch TV at home during the lockdown. 40% of the respondents have said that they got a chance to play with their friends. Only 16% of the respondents have reported that they have studied in the last month.

Child labour made inroads into the lives of children. Nearly 10% of the children reported that they accompanied their parents to the workplace and helped them in work. 4% reported that they were going for work during the lockdown to financially support their

Table 4. Type of work/sector where parents work

Spinning mills	57
Brick kiln	132
Traditional crafts	13
Traditional fortune teller with ox	2
Construction	23
Garments	59
Industry	52
Vendor	18
Daily wage workers	16
Carpenter	16
Painter	2
Farmers	19
Basket making	2
Fishing	7
Others	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>419</b>



families. 3.3% of them are boys and 3% of them are children below the age of 14. Going to work out of compulsion leads to stress. Added to the mix is the high probability of permanently dropping out of school once they enter the workforce.

**Table 5. Daily routine of migrant children**

Activity	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Attend school	16	3.8%	29	6.9%	45	10.7%
Roam around the settlement	114	27.2%	101	24.1%	215	51.3%
Attend to domestic chores	57	13.6%	56	13.4%	113	27.0%
Take care of younger siblings	23	5.5%	23	5.5%	46	11.0%
Attend to elderly family members	9	2.1%	7	1.7%	16	3.8%
Sleep	98	23.4%	68	16.2%	166	39.6%
Watch TV	73	17.4%	61	14.6%	134	32.0%
Listen to radio	4	1.0%	3	0.7%	7	1.7%
Study (doing homework, read books)	35	8.4%	32	7.6%	67	16.0%
Talk on mobile/or use it for messaging, etc	20	4.8%	9	2.1%	29	6.9%
Attend online or TV education programmes	16	3.8%	11	2.6%	27	6.4%
Accompany parents to workspace and help them in their work	20	4.8%	20	4.8%	40	9.5%
Play with friends	96	22.9%	75	17.9%	171	40.8%
Going for work to financially support family	14	3.3%	3	0.7%	17	4.1%
Others	7	1.7%	1	0.2%	8	1.9%
<b>Total Responses (n) 419</b>						

## 4.9. Mother tongue

### 4.9.1. Access to teachers in their mother tongue

In this sub-section we analyse the importance of mother tongue being the medium of education (see 2.3 above). We have considered 221 inter-state migrant children who have accompanied their parents and responded to the questionnaire. The objective was to find out whether the migrant children have access to teachers who could teach them in their mother tongue. This is important to analyse because when children learn in their mother tongue, a simultaneous development of other essential skills such as critical thinking and literacy takes place and it is a medium through which a child's social, personal, and cultural identity develop.

Children enjoy learning more when taught in their own language. They enjoy school more and feel at home being surrounded by pupils and teachers speaking a familiar language. They are confident in themselves and pick up new concepts with ease, which leads to better academic performance.

In the study, 101 (46%) of 221 migrant children reported that they have access to language teachers to teach them in their mother tongue. 62 (61%) of them are located in Tiruvallur district and all of them are the children of brick kiln workers. 55 (54%) are studying in primary school and 30 (29.7%) are studying in middle school. Only 11 (10.8%) children



studying in secondary and higher secondary schools and 5.9% of the children of spinning mill workers have access to native language teachers. 29.7% of the children of garment workers and 61.3% of brick kiln workers have such access. Children of brick kiln workers are way better than the children of spinning mills and garment workers.

**Table 6. Migrant children having access to learning in mother tongue by grade**

District	Total	Sector	Total	Grade	Total
Erode	32	Spinning mills	6	Primary	55
Namakkal	5	Brick kiln	62	Middle	30
Tiruvallur	62	Construction	1	Secondary	6
Dindigul	2	Garments	30	Higher Secondary	5
		Others	2	Not studying/ Not enrolled in school	3
				Others	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>

#### 4.9.2. Consequence of non-mother tongue teachers

The data below shows that there is a dearth of schooling in a child's mother tongue. This needs to be rectified to fulfil the right to education and to provide for quality education to the child.

29 (13%) of the respondents reported that they do not have access to a teacher to teach them in their native language and, consequently, have dropped out from

**Table 7. Lack of access to learning in mother-tongue of migrant children by grade**

District	Total	Sector	Total	Grade	Total
Erode	2	Spinning mills	24	Primary	9
Namakkal	15	Brick kiln	3	Middle	11
Tiruvallur	3	Construction		Secondary	6
Dindigul	9	Garments	2	Higher Secondary	2
				Not studying/ Not enrolled in school	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>

school. They were going to school in their home state and the interruption is only because of the lack of access to native language teachers. 82.7% of the children of spinning mill workers reported that they have dropped out of school due to this reason.

Over a third (36%) of the children reported that they do not have access to native language teachers but they still manage to continue their studies. For the 102 of 221 inter-state migrant children who study in government schools, most of the subjects would be taught in Tamil. Instruction in their mother tongue may not be an option for these children since Tamil is the medium of instruction in government schools in Tamil Nadu.

**Table 8. Lack of access to learn in mother-tongue but managing to continue the study: by grade**

District	Total	Sector	Total	Grade	Total
Erode	20	Spinning mills	8	Primary	23
Namakkal	2	Brick kiln	2	Middle	24
Tiruvallur	58	Traditional crafts	13	Secondary	20
Dindigul		Construction	10	Higher Secondary	10
		Garments	11	Not studying/ Not enrolled in school	2
		Others	36	Others	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>



Alternate or supplementary means should be explored for native language instruction. If there are enough children in a locality to start schooling in a particular language, that could be tried, with the help of the home state government, provided the host state government agrees.

#### 4.10. Access to learning during lockdown/school closure

##### *Inter-state migrant children who accompanied their parents*

A majority (59%) of the children had no access to education during school closure (table 9). The lack of access to education is severely detrimental to the progression of a child's learning as it leads to unscheduled and indefinite interruptions of schooling. This further demonstrates how access to education during the pandemic is directly related to privilege.

**Table 9. Access to learning during lockdown / school closure**

Yes	90
No	131
<b>Total</b>	<b>221</b>

**Table 10. Access to learning during lockdown/school closure by grade**

Response	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher secondary	Not enrolled / studying	Others	Total
Yes	37	29	15	8	1		<b>90</b>
No	53	37	18	10	10	3	<b>131</b>

The lack of access did not show any significant variation across grades (table 10).

The gender-wise access during lockdowns is very skewed towards boys. Of the 90 children who had access during the school closure, only 38 (40%) are girls. Of the 131 who did not have access, 82 (62.5%) are girls.

**Table 11. Access to learning during lockdown / school closure by gender**

Response	Male	Female	Total
Yes	52	38	<b>90</b>
No	49	82	<b>131</b>

##### *Intra-state migrant children who have accompanied their parents*

Intra-state migrants are those who have migrated within the state. Though they would also have disruptions, it was expected that the disruption would not be in the magnitude of the inter-state migrants, due to the cultural affinity and administrative consistency.

**Table 12. Access to learning during lockdown/school closure**

Yes	57
No	141
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>

However, it is found that, of the 198 intra-state migrant children, only 28.7% have had access to learning during school closure.

**Table 13. Access to learning during lockdown/school closure by grade**

Response	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher secondary	Not enrolled / studying	Others	Total
Yes	17	22	12	6			<b>57</b>
No	53	46	26	14	1	1	<b>141</b>

Table 14 correlates with Table 11 denoting very clear gender disparity with access to education. Here, 55.3% of girls did not have access to education.



These students did not have the means for digital access during the pandemic. The full extent of the impact of this lack of education on the children in terms of social skills and future prospects will become evident only gradually. The school closures brought to the forefront the ever increasing imbalance of the universal right to education and the privilege needed to even access education in the first instance.

**Table 14. Access to learning during lockdown/school closure by gender**

Response	Male	Female	Total
Yes	34	23	<b>57</b>
No	63	78	<b>141</b>

#### *Inter-state and intra-state migrant children who accompanied their parents*

35% of the respondents said that they had access to learning during school closure. Of them, 61% are inter-state migrant children. The rate is very low in intra-state migrant children compared to inter-state migrant children. It could indicate that the intra-state children are more likely to be dependent on the government infrastructure than the inter-state children who may have their own systems that are not as reliant on the host state.

**Table 15. Access to learning during lockdown/school closure**

Yes	147
No	272
<b>Total</b>	<b>419</b>

#### **4.11. Online education**

Since early 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted people's lives, the online world has come to be the lifeline of those who could access it. Everything that could move online moved online—from work to leisure to education, rituals, weddings, and family feuds. The pandemic profoundly affected education all over the world. As schools and universities were closed down to arrest the spread of the virus, many turned to technology in an attempt to keep the teaching and learning process going. Schools shifted classes online. Consequently, online education emerged as an alternative to in person classes, right from the pre-primary to the university level.

**Table 16. Online education**

Yes	50
No	97
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>

However, the weakness of online education is clearly visible in the lack of access of vulnerable communities including the children of migrants to the technology and in the gaps in infrastructure. Many of them lack teaching-learning infrastructure, and have very limited access to technology. 97 (65.9%) of the migrant children have reported they are not attending any online classes. 43% of the respondents study in primary schools and 43% of them are girls.

**Table 17. Number of children attending online classes by grade**

Response	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher secondary	Total
Yes	12	14	16	8	<b>50</b>
No	42	37	11	7	<b>97</b>

The digital divide is not new, but the consequences have



been brought out starkly during the lockdowns. The digital divide even locked out some children who otherwise had access to schooling. Some of the remote villages do not have internet or mobile coverage, meaning that even if mobile devices are made available by charitable organisations, they would still lack access without the investment in infrastructure. Since this infrastructure would be commercially unviable, the market will not provide it, and state investment is a necessity.

**Table 18. Number of children attending online classes by gender**

Response	Male	Female	Total
Yes	31	19	50
No	55	42	97

#### 4.12. Reasons for not attending online classes

Of the 97 children who reported that they did not attend online classes, 62 (63.9%) did not have android phones. 46% of them are girls. 42% of the children have reported that they don't have a laptop or PC at their homes. There was no TV in 39% of the households. 31% of children reported that they could not attend online classes because they could not afford to recharge their phone. It is unfortunate that education is not accessible due to lack of cash availability to recharge.

**Table 19. Reasons for not attending online classes**

	Male	Female	Total
No PC/laptop	20	21	41
No TV (or absence of cable TV connection)/	16	22	38
No android mobile phone	29	33	62
Financial difficulties of recharging pre-paid phones	10	21	31
Signal problems (like poor access to mobile towers)	4	9	13
No power connection	2	8	10
Classes were boring/didn't like the teaching	1	6	7
Had to go out for work	1	0	1
Had to attend to urgent household chores	3	4	7
Due to frequent power cuts	1	3	4
Fell sick/prolonged illness	1	1	2
Could not follow the medium of instruction because it was not in my mother tongue	1	3	4
Absence of conducive environment at home	2	8	10
No online classes were conducted	4	4	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>238</b>

#### 4.13. Literate Environment

Only 13% of the children (64 of 466) have books other than textbooks or religious books at their homes/places of stay. Only 168 (36%) have textbooks with them. Other reading materials which help to gain general knowledge such as newspapers, periodical magazines, children's magazines, children's illustrated story books, and comic



books are available only for a few children. 204 (43%) children reported that they do not have any of the reading materials in their home. 52% of them are boys. 53% of the girls have books (other than text or religious books) at their home. More households with girls have a literate environment than households with boys.

Of the 204 children who have reported that they do not have any of the reading materials at their home/place of stay, 14% belong to a scheduled tribe. 15% of the children were not aware or not sure that they have these reading materials at their home. Out of 27 respondents who said that they have newspapers at their homes, 15 belong to a community classified as most backward class (MBC). In total, less than 6% of the children have reading materials like periodical magazines, children magazines, children's illustrated story books, comic books, dictionaries etc, and this proportion consists of not only SCs and STs, but includes the children belonging to other communities as well.

	Male	Female	Total
Books (not textbooks or religious books)	34	30	64
Textbooks	71	97	168
Newspapers	14	13	27
Periodical magazines	1	1	2
Children's magazines	2	4	6
Children's illustrated story books	3	7	10
Comic books	3	2	5
Reference books like dictionary	2	3	5
Others	1		1
No reading materials available	96	108	204
<b>Total (n) 466</b>			

	SC	ST	MBC	BC	OC	IDK	Refused	Total
Books (not textbooks or religious books)	3	28	11	2	3	13	4	64
Textbooks	15	50	34	23	4	41	1	168
Newspapers	5		15	5		2		27
Periodical magazines	1	1					2	
Children's magazines	1			1		3	1	6
Children's illustrated story books	1		1			7	1	10
Comic books	1		1			1	2	5
Reference books like dictionary	2			1	1			5
Others	1						1	
No reading materials available	6	30	9	10		31	28	204
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>492</b>

## 4.14. Reading

### 4.14.1. Frequency of reading

*books/magazines/newspapers (apart from academic/textbooks/religious books)*

For the question of how often they used to read books/magazines/newspapers other than textbooks 45% of the children have said that they do not study these books at all in their





homes or places of stay. 33% of the children have reported that they rarely study. Only 11% of the migrant children have the habit of reading books/ magazines / newspapers daily. The habit of reading daily is higher among male children compared to female children. 7% of them said they used to read them a few times a week.

**Table 22. Migrant children reading habits by frequency of reading**

	Male	Female	Total
Daily	29	25	54
Few times a week	14	20	34
Rarely	75	82	157
Not at all	91	123	214
No response	4	3	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>466</b>

#### 4.14.2. Help from others in reading

Parent involvement in early literacy is directly connected to academic achievement. Children need parents to be their reading role models with daily practice in order to navigate successfully through beginning with literacy skills. Several studies denote that involvement with reading activities at home has significant positive influences not only on reading achievement, but also on pupils' interest in reading, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom. Research also shows that the earlier parents become involved in their children's literacy practices, the more profound the results and the longer lasting the effects are.

This study found (table 2 and table 3) that two thirds of the migrant children's parents are illiterate. For the select question, 58% of the inter-state and intra-state migrant children (No. of respondents are 244 out of 419) living with their parents have reported that they

**Table 23. Migrant children receiving help from others in reading**

Response	inter-state	%	intra-state	%	Total	%
Read by myself	78	35.29%	94	47.47%	172	41.05%
Mother	27	12.22%	32	16.16%	59	14.08%
Teacher	32	14.48%	0	0.00%	32	7.64%
Sibling (Female)	19	8.60%	5	2.53%	24	5.73%
Facilitator	18	8.14%	0	0.00%	18	4.30%
NGO	8	3.62%	9	4.55%	17	4.06%
Sibling male	9	4.07%	4	2.02%	13	3.10%
Friends	1	0.45%	11	5.56%	12	2.86%
Relatives female	3	1.36%	7	3.54%	10	2.39%
Peer children	2	0.90%	9	4.55%	11	2.63%
Father	9	4.07%	2	1.01%	11	2.63%
Neighbours male	1	0.45%	6	3.03%	7	1.67%
Relative (Male)	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
None of the above	14	6.33%	19	9.60%	33	7.88%
<b>Total</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>100.00%</b>



are illiterate. So it will definitely have a significant impact on the learning outcomes. About 41% of the children read on their own. Only 16% of the children have reported that their fathers/mothers helped them with reading. This rate is quite the same among both the inter and intra-state migrant children.

Most of the children (35% inter-state, 47% intra-state, and 41% overall) had to study by themselves, or depended on their mothers or sisters. Fathers and brothers of inter-state migrants took more interest in helping their children and siblings than intra-state migrants. Though mothers helped their children most, intra-state migrant mothers fared a little better, possibly indicating that inter-state migrants have less formal schooling, capability, or opportunity (many were working in brick kilns where work hours were almost round the clock) or a combination of all these factors.

#### 4.15. Textbooks for the current academic year

Text books play a vital role in students' lives. Books increase the knowledge of students and improve their intellect. The textbook, in fact, is the heart of the school and teaching-learning activities and without text, there would be no schools. Textbooks carry a wide range of new and interesting facts and open the doors to a world of a whole new experience. Teachers can play an important and crucial role in nurturing and supporting each child's creative potential by the proper use of textbooks. Textbooks also help teachers to become more inspirational and motivational. It is quite obvious that teachers would be able to make effective use of textbooks, only if they realise the value of textbooks as an important teaching and learning resource.

The quality of the education system entirely depends on the quality of interaction between teachers and students through use of textbooks in the classroom. They not only provide structure to lessons and students' progression but also encourage clarity regarding key concepts and core knowledge. The textbooks are the only source materials for learning of migrant children.

**Table 24. Percentage of children receiving textbooks for the current academic year**

Response	inter-state	%	intra-state	%	Total	%
Yes	130	58.82%	117	59.09%	247	58.95%
No	91	41.18%	80	40.40%	171	40.81%
No response			1	0.51%	1	0.24%
	<b>Total (n) 221</b>		<b>Total (n) 198</b>		<b>Total (n) 419</b>	

About 41% of the inter-state migrant children have reported that they haven't received any learning materials from their school, due to the pandemic. The average is also the same with the intra-state migrant children. While considering both inter and intra-state migrant children (the number of respondents is 419) 38% of the children who have reported that they didn't receive their textbooks for the academic year belong to primary school and 31% of the children belong to middle school. Shortages of textbooks or



delays in distributing them to schools and children hugely affect teaching-learning activities, especially to migrant children.

**Table 25. Number of children received textbooks for the academic year by grade**

	Primary	Middle	Higher Secondary	Higher Secondary	Not studying	Others	Total
Yes	94	76	44	30		3	247
No	66	58	27	7	12	1	171
No response				1			1
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>419</b>

Until and unless the government and concerned stakeholders understand the gravity of lack or shortage of textbooks and its trickle-down effect, education quality of community schools cannot be improved, which will mean making children deprived of their right to education. All concerned authorities must work proactively to make quality textbooks available on time so as to enhance the quality of education as a whole. And they must think about the migrant children as well to make the textbooks available in their native language, since they lack the access to language teachers, and it might help them to read the books at least by themselves.

## 4.16. Accessibility to Materials

### 4.16.1. Dry rations

During the pandemic, the Ministry of Human Resource Development had told State Education Ministers that to meet the nutritional requirements of the eligible children under the midday meal scheme and to safeguard their immunity during the Covid-19 outbreak, hot cooked midday meals or a food security allowance comprising grains as well as cooking costs or its equivalent in provisions may be provided to eligible children, even during summer vacations.

But it is clear from our study that the children of migrant workers didn't avail the provision. 61% of the inter-state migrant children don't get any dry rations from their school. 47% of the intra-state migrant children have reported the same. But the rate is very high in inter-state migrant children compared to intra-state migrant children.

**Table 26. Accessibility to materials for inter-state migrant children (Dry rations)**

Response	#	%
Yes	85	38.46%
No	136	61.54%
<b>Total (n) 221</b>		

**Table 27. Accessibility to materials for intra-state migrant children (Dry rations)**

Response	#	%
Yes	103	52.02%
No	94	47.47%
No response	1	0.51%
<b>Total (n) 198</b>		



#### 4.16.2. Child centric relief

The impact of Covid-19 on migrant children affected not only the delivery of education but also that of additional entitlements such as the provision of food materials and health checkups by the government. The Government of India issued<sup>22</sup> guidelines which advised all states and UTs about providing hot cooked meals or food security allowance consisting of foodgrains and cooking costs (or its equivalent pulses, oil, etc), to all eligible children covered under Mid Day Meal Scheme during closure of schools. Following the continued closure of schools, the measure was extended to continue till the time schools reopen. But the study found that only 61 percent of the inter-state and 69 percent intra-state migrant children had received the food materials during school closure. 27 percent of the inter-state migrant children only 9.5 percent have undergone health checkups.

**Table 28. Inter-state Children receiving child-centric relief**

Food materials	135
Health check-up/	61
Health (Vitamin) supplements	22
Others	96
	<b>Total (n) 221</b>

**Table 29. Intra-state Children receiving child-centric relief**

Food materials	137
Health check-up/	19
Health (Vitamin) supplements	8
Others	1
	<b>Total (n) 198</b>

#### 4.17. Learning behaviour

##### 4.17.1. Interested subjects and their ratings

52% of the inter-state migrant children have reported that mother tongue classes are being taught at their schools. Among them 72% have said that the mother tongue classes are the least favourite to them. Mathematics is taught only for 47% of the children and it is a most favourite subject for 52% of the children who have reported that they do have a mathematics subject in their schools. Science classes are being taken only for 33% of the children. But it is the most favourite subject for 52% of the children.

**Table 30. Interested subjects and their ratings of inter-state migrant children**

Subjects	Least Favourite	Most favourite	Not sure/ No opinion	Total
Mother Tongue	83	21	11	115
Mathematics	41	55	9	105
Science	26	39	9	74
English	57	57	9	123
Other languages	13	20	7	40
Social Sciences	16	24		40
Vocational(craft, art etc)	1	1		2
Sports activity	15	3	1	19
Computer class	1	1		2
Others	1	2	14	17
	<b>Total (n) 221</b>			

<sup>22</sup> [http://mdm.nic.in/mdm\\_website/Files/OrderCirculars/2020/JS\\_DO-Letters/D.0%20Letter-29-04-2020.pdf](http://mdm.nic.in/mdm_website/Files/OrderCirculars/2020/JS_DO-Letters/D.0%20Letter-29-04-2020.pdf)



Physical Education & Sports form an important part of the educational system even though it has never received the importance it deserves. Even though it is included as part of the curriculum from the early stages of education, it has never been taken seriously by the educational administrators. Sports inculcate qualities like leadership, discipline, sharing, team work, honesty, team spirit, tolerance and many more among the students. In our study only 8% of the children have reported that they play in their schools. Less than 1% of the children have computer classes in their school. All the rates are very less for inter-state migrant children compared to intra-state migrant children.

**Table 31. Interested subjects and their ratings of intra-state migrant children**

Subjects	Least Favourite	Most favourite	Not sure/ No opinion	Total
Mother Tongue	89	67	6	162
Mathematics	64	65	11	140
Science	31	57	20	108
English	32	35	15	82
Other languages	3	2	3	8
Social Sciences	11	45	6	62
Vocational(craft, art etc)	1	12		13
Sports activity	5	21		26
Computer class	3	1		4
Others	1	4		5
<b>Total (n) 198</b>				

#### 4.17.2. Learning activities in last one month

Decline in learning activity is a consequence of lockdown, the study states that most of the children haven't spent much time on learning activities. Only 3.1 percent of the inter-state migrant children reported that they studied for more than 4 hours in a day. 20.3 percent said they read textbooks, story books, magazines, and newspapers in only less than half an hour. The situation is quite the same for all the other activities like practicing writing, doing maths, doing creative activities like drawing and painting etc.

**Table 32. Learning activities in last one month by inter-state migrant children**

	Less than half an hour	Less than an hour	1 to 2 hours	2 to 4 hours	More than 4 hours	Not sure	Total
Textbooks, Story Books, Magazine, Newspaper	13	19	22	7	2	1	64
Practicing Writing (notes, letter, etc.)	16	22	23	1	1	2	65
Doing Maths (homework, general interest)	11	13	6	1	1	4	36
Doing creative activities like drawing, painting, etc.	12	9	17			1	39
Attending online teaching sessions	7	7	5				19



**Table 32. Learning activities in last one month by inter-state migrant children**

	Less than half an hour	Less than an hour	1 to 2 hours	2 to 4 hours	More than 4 hours	Not sure	Total
Watching TV (Education programme)	2	3	1	3		1	10
Listening to the radio- Education programmes		1				1	2
Teaching younger sibling		2		1		1	4
To do group study with friends	5	1	10	4			20
To attend tuition classes (in-person)		1	8	8	3	1	21
To learn Vocational Skills (NGO/Govt/Private)	2	2	7	4	1	16	32
Special coaching class (in-person)	0						0
Other activities				1		6	7
<b>Total (n) 221</b>							

40.6 percent of the intra-state migrant children said they read textbooks, story books, magazine and newspapers for only less than half an hour.

#### 4.18. Health

Out of 466 respondents, 353 (76%) have reported that they go to government hospitals for health checkup/treatment for their illness. 30% of the

children have said that they go to private hospitals. 3% of the respondents have said that they would not go to hospitals and that they would directly buy medicines from pharmaceutical shops. 2% of them said that they would do self medication rather than going to hospitals.

**Table 33. Health seeking behaviour of migrant children**

Responses	#	%
Government Hospital	353	75.8%
Private Clinic	142	30.5%
Private Charitable/non-profit Hospital	4	0.9%
Private medical practitioner of Indian medicines	2	0.4%
Taluk/District Hospital	2	0.4%
Pharmaceutical shops	16	3.4%
Self-medication	10	2.1%
Others	1	0.2%
<b>Total responses (n) 466</b>		

**Table 34. Learning Activities in last one month by intra-state migrant children**

	Less than half an hour	Less than an hour	1 to 2 hours	2 to 4 hours	More than 4 hours	Can't remember/ Not sure	Total
Textbooks, Story Books, Magazine, Newspaper	39	31	19	1	2	4	96
Practicing Writing (notes, letter, etc.)	21	21	12	1			55
Doing Maths (homework, general interest)	2	3	9	1			15
Doing creative activities like drawing, painting, etc.	3	8	10	1			22
Attending online teaching sessions	1		3			1	5
Watching TV (Education programme)	1	1	1	1			4



**Table 35. Learning Activities in last one month by intra-state migrant children**

	Less than half an hour	Less than an hour	1 to 2 hours	2 to 4 hours	More than 4 hours	Can't remember/ Not sure	Total
Listening to radio- Education programmes			1				1
Teaching younger sibling		3		1			4
To do group study with friends		6	8	1	1		16
To attend tuition classes (in-person)		2	10				12
To learn Vocational Skills (NGO/Govt/Private)	5	5	12	3		1	26
Special coaching class (in-person)			3	1			4
Other activities						1	1
Didn't do any of the above	54						54
<b>Total (n) 198</b>							

#### 4.19. Safety

Economic recessions of migrants have a significant impact on the increase of violence against children. In the current Covid-19 crisis, there have been reports from all over the world about a significant increase in child abuse. A notable increase in physical, emotional and sexualised violence against children during pandemic has been reported in every place. Due to lack of social control and impaired ability to communicate, this risk can increase.

**Table 36. Percentage of migrant children facing abuse during pandemic**

Responses	#	%
Nothing like that	197	42.3%
Verbal (or by gestures/facial expressions) abuse by parents	110	23.6%
Physical abuse by parents, like beating	98	21.0%
Physical abuse by other elder siblings or other caregivers/others sharing accommodation	79	17.0%
Refuse to answer	40	8.6%
Interpersonal conflicts with other siblings	37	7.9%
Verbal abuse (or by gestures/facial expressions) by other elder siblings or other caregivers/others sharing accommodation	25	5.4%
Interpersonal conflicts with parents	17	3.6%
Interpersonal conflicts with other caregivers/others sharing accommodation	1	0.2%
Other forms of abuse (specify)	1	0.2%
<b>Total responses (n) 466</b>		

Adverse childhood experiences is associated with higher risk for mental health problems. The table below clearly shows that the children have experienced all kinds of abuse. Based on this, we conclude that the pandemic has stressed the urgent need to advance both



theory and practice relating to children's safety in order to ensure migrant children's rights to safety and security during any pandemic, so that children could be better protected from maltreatment amidst any pandemic in the future.

#### 4.20. Protective measures against pandemic

The World Health Organisation stresses upon wearing face-masks as a key measure to suppress transmission of Covid-19 and thereby to save lives. Masks should be used as part of a comprehensive 'Do it all!' approach including physical distancing, avoiding crowded, closed and close-contact settings, good ventilation, frequent cleaning of hands, covering sneezes and coughs, and more. But here, from the data we are able to understand that the migrant communities are not very much aware of the importance of following the guidelines in order to effectively contain the spread of Covid-19. Though as many are aware of the importance of such proactive measures, the data shows the negligence in practice existing among them. Only 49% of the children reported that they used to wear masks while going out. And only 42% of them have said that they use to wash their hands with soap/sanitiser. 37% of the children have said that they are following physical distancing norms whenever they go out or even at their homes/hostel rooms at times.

**Table 37. Protective measures against pandemic**

Response	Self	%	Parents/ Others	%	Room mates	%	None	%	Total
Wear masks (while going out)	232	49.8%	215	46.1%	71	15.2%	150	32.2%	668
Washing hands with soap/sanitizers	175	37.6%	105	22.5%	71	15.2%	222	47.6%	573
Keep Physical distancing at home/hostel room	201	43.1%	185	39.7%	72	15.5%	191	41.0%	649

#### 4.21. Lockdown

##### 4.21.1. Views of Lockdown and Expectations

Researchers have identified multiple factors responsible for the alarming rise in the incidence of domestic violence at the time of Covid-19. These include health anxieties, financial difficulties, confinement in homes. India's children's helpline, ChildLine,

**Table 38. Views of lockdown and expectations**

Response	inter-state	%	intra-state	%	Total	%
Child marriage	11	2.6%	53	12.6%	64	15.2%
Child labour	50	11.9%	56	13.4%	106	25.3%
Violence on children – physical and psychological	13	3.1%	54	12.9%	67	16%
Domestic violence	13	3.1%	38	9.1%	51	12.2%
Others	10	2.4%	1	0.2%	11	2.6%
Don't Know	154	36.8%	100	23.9%	254	60.7%
<b>Total responses (n) 419</b>						





received 92,000 calls reporting child abuse and violence in 2020. The table below reveals the ugly face of lockdowns and the ramifications it can have on a community. The lockdown has shown that there has been a steady increase of violence at home and an increase in child labour, with many families not being able to make ends meet.

#### 4.21.2. Overall feel about lockdown

The data reveals that the experience of being quarantined tends to be mostly negative (758, 79% of the respondents). It is revealing that more than a third of the children have missed classes and want schools to reopen at the earliest (355, 37%). Many have faced the brunt of the pandemic with restricted access to friends (207, 21%) and restrictions to their freedom of movement (43, 4.46%). A few responded that the pandemic related restrictions were positive in terms of their having a long holiday (75, 7.78), being able to spend more time with their families (39, 4%) and having more time for recreational activities (32, 3.32%).

**Table 39. Overall feel about lockdown**

Responses	#	%
Missed meeting friends and playing with them	207	44.4%
Would be happy if the school reopens at the earliest	189	40.6%
Not happy about long break in going to school and missing learning in school	166	35.6%
Enjoyed the lockdown as it was like a long and indefinite holiday	75	16.1%
It has been boring to be at home all the time	68	14.6%
Travel restrictions prevented return to home state, faced difficulties due to fall in income of family	65	13.9%
Not happy because opportunities of going out to meet friends, visiting malls, watching films in theatres and eating in restaurants were absent	43	9.2%
Since there was no school, there was no need to study or do homework	41	8.8%
Able to spend more time with family members	39	8.4%
Able to spend more time watching movies on TV/mobile and chatting with friends on mobile	32	6.9%
School has since re-opened, but I feel I have missed out considerable learning	20	4.3%
Lockdown was good as a preventive health care measure, even though learning was affected	19	4.1%
Others	0	0.0%
<b>Total responses (n) 466</b>		



## 5. Recommendations

### 5.1. Foundational

1. *Multi-state inter-governmental approach.* The home and host state governments need to work closely, and harmoniously, to ensure the best interests of the child. Several actions - from data collection to schooling, text books, entitlements, and protection - cannot be done at one end only, or even independently by the home and host states, without losing much of the efficiencies of harmonisation. Inter-state collaboration between the departments of education, labour, health, women and child development for convergence on education, nutrition, and child rights at the destination is a necessity. Synchronisation is a prerequisite for effective outcomes. It requires political will and administrative acumen, neither of which are in short supply in the states of this study.
2. *Finance:* Allocate adequate budget to properly implement laws relating to protection of child rights, especially the right to education. This should be reflected in the budgets of both the home and host governments. Financing schools (teachers and infrastructure were found to be critical to outcomes) will be contentious, given the stressed treasury and humongous budget deficits run by state governments. An equitable formula for sharing resources will need to be evolved between the home state (textbooks and teachers) and the host state (uniforms and physical infrastructure). The funds collected for the welfare of the workers or a special cess on the employers would be another option. Mid-day meals can be covered under the portable 'one nation one card' public distribution system.
3. *Align policy, finance, and execution.* A comprehensive relook at the policy framework, and the alignment with execution and budgetary support, especially regarding geo-specific and geo-agnostic rights, is long overdue. Geo-specific rights - especially the protections and support for scheduled communities - need a major overhaul. In 1955, when the presidential order was passed, there was not much inter-state migration, and the system could not track migration to deliver the services. Now technology makes it not only possible but also easy. These rights should also be made geo-agnostic. Geo-agnostic rights - such as the rights of a child, right to education, right to work - need to be integrated into policy interventions and budgets, factoring in the new reality of migration.
4. *Portable entitlements* where the home states pay for the services in the host states, should be made the norm. It is easy to forget that the poor are also document poor, and cannot afford to take the risk of deregistering in one place before they are registered in another - even assuming that the local officials in the host state are not xenophobic. Technology has made some entitlements portable such as rations, health (insurance), scholarships (internationally and nationally). These entitlements are essential for the children and the migrants, and therefore should be implemented in letter and spirit.



5. *Frame special rules, protocols, and guidelines* to bring migrant children under the purview of the Right to Education Act, with provisions for catering to their specific needs. This includes building infrastructure to ensure coverage of children in commercially unviable areas. The Right to Education is geo-agnostic, and should be guaranteed for all children, regardless of domicile.

## 5.2. Restarting schools

1. *Ensuring the right to education*, in letter and spirit, is by far the most important gap identified. Therefore, schools with the mother tongue as the medium of instruction should be opened close to the workers' residence or place of work. This will lead to clustering of workers (and their children) with the same spoken language, and will lead to better provision of state services, security, and a community social security network. However, ghettoisation should be guarded against, especially since community 'enforcers' often take over policing and turn oppressive in closed communities.
2. *Preparedness* for school reopening. The already weak base has been aggravated, and some social skills and learning capacity may take years to be reacquire. A cold start will aggravate the situation and further traumatise the children. There is considerable learning loss compared to pre-covid times.
3. *A learning assessment* before restarting, and periodic data collection on the learning outcomes, would greatly help in focussing recovery effort.
4. *Infrastructure*. School infrastructure needs to be enhanced to conform to the distancing and sanitation requirements. Other physical infrastructure such as housing for migrants, which also conform to the medical and sanitation requirements is also equally critical. Availability of learning material made a difference, and should be provided on time. The physical infrastructure of the schools where migrant children study should have secure recreational facilities and playgrounds.
5. *Pedagogic and psychosocial skills*. Teachers need pedagogic and psychosocial skills to cater to the needs of children who have gone through trauma, sexual and other violence. The teachers need to impart these skills to the students, so that the children can cope with their uncommon experience and be prepared for the future. These are in addition to the skills needed to help children learn - children who have been at home for close to two years. 'Age appropriate' will need to be redefined. With not many children accessing online education, peer interaction is a major incentive for children to get back to school. Getting them back to sitting in one place and learning will require new skills, especially for teachers of senior classes.



### 5.3. Inter-state coordination

1. *Inter-state mechanisms of schooling equivalence* at the home and host states should be made so that migrant children can re-enter school in the home state on returning to their own village. Similarly, birth certificates issued at the place of birth in the host state should be accepted by the home state for domiciliary benefits such as community certificates for concessional fees, scholarships, and other education support.
2. *Develop inter-state protocols to prevent disruption* in the schooling of the migrant children. It could cover providing teachers, counselors, and text books and longer term issues of seamless transition from one state to the other multiple times during an academic year without the need for transfer certificates or with minimum documentation. Strengthen and streamline inter- and intra- state communication and coordination among governments and departments to ensure compliance with all the legal and constitutional provisions regarding education.
3. *Mapping*: A detailed mapping of migrant workers and their children should be done by the government throughout identified significant destination areas and in highly concentrated sending areas. Create a database of migrant workers, their families and accompanying children both at source and destination locations, based on accurate information of migrants and worksites and inter-state cooperation.
4. *Portability of entitlements* such as PDS, ICDS, health, insurance, and schooling in mother tongue for the migrant children should be initiated as policy by both state and union governments. Make provision for transfer of entitlements across states with simple procedures which can be followed by migrants without recourse to intermediaries.
5. *Work with civil society and industry*. Since the issue at hand is huge and sensitive, the government needs to work systematically with civil society and community organisations who are already providing relief and services to the migrant population, at both source and destination areas.

### 5.4. Protecting inter-state children

1. *Collect actionable data*. Out of sight is out of mind. Migrants are not visible and more so the children of migrant workers and migrant children. There is a dearth of information on the number of migrant workers and this increases their vulnerability and marginalisation. Surveys conducted by the education department could collect data on out of school migrant children and initiate measures to bring them to school. Children from other states should have the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue. With the data, home states can pitch in to ensure schooling in the mother tongue.
2. *Data for inclusion*. Tamil Nadu is the first state in India to announce that a digital databank will be set up for the migrant workers employed in industries to identify the



illegal immigrants and anti-social elements, and to build a data portal on industry-wise employment scenarios. This data could be misused to prevent or be a deterrent to families, especially the children, from accessing various schemes related to food, healthcare, and education. Unless carefully designed to be inclusive, it would hamper attempts to devise customised interventions to strengthen educational inclusion of children affected by migration.

3. *A migrant workers welfare board* should be constituted to register the migrant workers along with their family details, especially information on the children. The responsibility of registering the workers and their families in the home states should be with the contractors, and in the host states the responsibility should lie with the employers. Provision should be made to register all migrant children, with 100% coverage as the goal.
4. *Pre-school care*: Children below 5 years lack proper care and protection. Provision should be made to enrol the children in anganwadis and, if needed, start new anganwadis closer to their habitation.
5. *Village child protection committees*: CPCs should be activated in all villages. Each village level CPC should have details of the children in the village and monitor children who migrate.

### 5.5. Home states (source area)

1. *Be proactive in protection and promotion of migrant children's rights*: No matter how long the children stay in a particular place, they retain a special bond with their home state, their home. The pandemic proved incontrovertibly where their heart was, and where they wanted to return to, when the chips were down. The home states need to take the initiative to coordinate with the host state to secure their welfare.
2. *Transit schools and seasonal hostels*: There are many seasonal migrants. Home states should establish transit schools and seasonal hostels in the source area so that parents who need to migrate without children can admit their children in them when they are migrating for work.
3. *Planned migration* should be the norm, since that enables the host states to prepare the requisite infrastructure for protection and promotion of the rights of the out of state child. Distress migration needs to be prevented by multiple policy interventions, since this results in loss of childhood at the destinations, with its resultant long term consequences.
4. *Register all migrant workers*, and all members of their family migrating with them, at the registry closest to their residence, in accordance with the Inter-State Migrant



Workmen Act. These records should be maintained by the labour department in the district and the labour commissioner's office at the state level, and shared with the corresponding department in the host states.

5. *Sensitise migrant labourers to their rights*, entitlements and social security provision, especially those connected to children. The database of schools, local migrant support systems and civil society organisations should be shared with them before they embark on their journey.

## 5.6. Host state (destination area)

1. *Develop migrant children specific protocols*, rules, regulations, and service delivery standards to provide proper ration, education, shelter and sanitation facilities. This would involve provision of educational and communications infrastructure where it is not commercially viable.
2. *Schools*: Registered fully functional schools should be set up close to settlements, and in the brick kilns, in the language of the migrant children. Libraries and reading rooms should be accessible off school hours also. Child rights centres run by CSOs for inter-state migrant worker's children with the support of NCLP Ministry of Labour and Employment should be converted into NCLP schools with salary support to teachers, midday meals and Rs 500 per month per child.
3. *Data and classification*: Children accompanying parents to seasonal migration should be counted as child migrants, and their labour should be banned in all worksites. Adequate provision for their schooling should be ensured (by the state or the employer) as a precondition for employment of migrant labour. Independent labour migration of the children (below 18) should be treated as trafficking. Host states should take strict action against child labour to deter migrant children from work and encourage the parents to send them to schools.
4. *Multi-stakeholder partnership*: The government should work in concert with the industry (mill management, brick kiln owners) and civil society in all settlements to ensure uninterrupted learning despite any future disruptions. Engage with the industry platforms in sectors that employ significant numbers of migrant workers, and set up multi-stakeholder platforms to ensure that resilient systems are in place to prevent future disruptions in the education of migrant children. Infrastructure that supports such learning should be in place as soon as possible.
5. *Institutional vigilance and monitoring*: The State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights should regularly monitor that the statutory standards are maintained for all migrant children.



## 5.7. Civil society organisations

1. *Map child migration* at the source and destination. Document and disseminate, through print, audio-visual, and social media, in-depth research, and findings in a systematic approach to various stakeholders.
2. *Rights awareness*: Inform migrant children and their parents of their rights and entitlements. Support them to deal with contractors/employers and government officials to ensure these are fulfilled, and to get justice when they are not.
3. *Resilient social support systems*: Develop social support mechanisms for children to keep in touch with their families and friends especially when normal communication systems break down.
4. *Work with labour contractors* and sensitise them on the issue of migration in general and child migration in particular.
5. *Sensitise decision makers and opinion leaders*: Engage with the political class, bureaucracy, and the media on the plight of migrant communities with proper data and analysis.















**Institute of Human Rights Advocacy and Research, Chennai**

**M: 86680 91451 | E: [sdgwatch@hrf.net.in](mailto:sdgwatch@hrf.net.in) | W: [hrf.net.in](http://hrf.net.in)**