

# **Impact of COVID-19 on Employment and Workplace**

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## **Introduction**

The lethal pandemic and its ramifications have greatly affected the employment and workplace in India along with economic, social, and political disruption. While the government is working to control the spread of the virus, office-holders, employers and employees are also obliged to take some pandemic mitigation measures that can cause significant changes. COVID – 19 has been announced as a pandemic by the WHO. Occupations alongside numerous lives are at serious risk.

The world economy has been hit as the novel Coronavirus spreads across mainland. All the major events and activities across the world have been delayed or cancelled. While the situation is getting worse leaving the offices around the globe slowing down, thousands of employees are working and taking care of the infected persons. On the hand, is the plight of migrant workers from unorganised sector, away from their families and homes, surviving in destitution. The question is who is responsible for their condition? How can their condition be restored?

Thousands of employees are facing different problems including unpaid leaves, this pandemic has increased the number of unemployed people. New hiring is also at halt and this is the hardest hit for candidates who are in search of work. Every sector of India especially the major sectors which contribute a large portion of GDP is slowing down. Meanwhile, the country can witness a steep strike in the e-commerce sector, also, work from home is encouraged. Infection related items, for example, sanitizers, cleansers, tissues, masks and more have seen an incredible climb sought after, several online shopping sites such as Amazon, Myntra, Flipkart, etc. are providing the same.

During lockdown and social distancing being the main arrangement, individuals are being constrained to remain inside. And find it easy and safe to order online rather than going out to buy essentials. Some specialists have also suggested that we're nearing a recession due to unemployment. And with this corona outbreak, the economy may grind to a halt. Albeit, sooner or later, it makes certain to ascend back, yet Coronavirus makes certain to leave a mark. Be that as it may, the online business sector can help in limiting its effect on the economy of India.

## The plight of migrant labourers amid COVID-19

While the rest of the country was quarantined, staying safe and staying home, thousands of labourers and workers from unorganised sector were homeless staying on the streets. When everybody was enjoying delectable food with their families, those labourers and workers were famished and alone. There were rumours that the Government is restarting trains for those who wants to go home, and later the workers had accumulated opposing standards of social separating, putting themselves as well as other people in danger. They demanded to send them home so they could be with their families. Instead of helping them, the police, to avoid risking lives, used sticks to settle them.<sup>1</sup>

Around a similar time, another protest took place in Surat, Gujarat where hundreds of textile workers demanded the authorities to send them back to their homes.<sup>2</sup> After a day, there was another shock in the capital, Delhi, a few hundred migrants were found living under a scaffold along the Yamuna waterway. The waterway here takes after a sewer and the bank is tossed with garbage. The men were unwashed and said were hungry for three days.<sup>3</sup> In the month of May, 16 migrant workers were killed when a goods train ran over them in Aurangabad, Maharashtra, they had nodded off on the track while resting after a long walk.<sup>4</sup>

These were the few major incidents that spotlight the plight of workers amid COVID-19 in India. This pandemic has left them with no home, work and money. The number of migrant workers in India is 40 million and such a big number makes it difficult for the authorities to provide proper facilities for everyone. Considering the severity of the problem, Government arrange shelter homes for those migrant labourers and made arrangements for providing them food.

Although these shelter homes provided roofs to thousands of migrant labourers and help spreading of Coronavirus during the period of lockdown yet they could not prevent spreading the virus in the shelter homes. When such a large number of people live together and everyone

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<sup>1</sup> Geeta Pandey, *Coronavirus in India: Desperate migrant workers trapped in lockdown*, BBC NEWS, (Apr. 22, 2020), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-52360757>.

<sup>2</sup> Damayantee Dhar, *COVID-19: Amid Shutdowns, Gujarat Workers Fear for Health and Employment*, NEWS CLICK, (Mar. 21, 2020), <https://www.newsclick.in/COVID-19-Coronavirus-Gujarat-Textile-Workers-Health-Employment>.

<sup>3</sup> *700 migrant workers gather on Yamuna floodplains, Delhi govt to provide shelter*, HINDUSTAN TIMES, (Apr. 16, 2020), <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/nearly-700-migrant-workers-gather-on-yamuna-floodplains-looking-for-shelter-tweet-prompts-govt-to-act/story-Zr40ccngOxP4A7iGUslBeM.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Shoumojit Banerjee & Ajeet Mahale, *16 migrant workers run over by goods train near Aurangabad in Maharashtra*, THE HINDU, (May 8, 2020), <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/16-migrant-workers-run-over-by-goods-train-near-aurangabad-in-maharashtra/article31531352.ece>.

of them is from different place, it becomes really difficult to avoid spread of a virus and social distancing remains mere a process not a preventive measure.

The worst part of the situation is that these labourers are not provided wages which worsen their plight. Their lives are hand-to-mouth and they cannot afford such a long break from their work. A point which should be taken under consideration is that, whether the sudden announcement of lockdown was appropriate for the migrant labourers? Was it not necessary to send them back to their respective hometowns prior to the announcement of lockdown?

Whose responsibility is it to consider the plight of migrant labourers, who relocate from their home states to different states for work? Whose obligation would it be to arrange transport for them to have get back with wellbeing and insurances to forestall transmission? Is it the obligation of the sending state - where these vagrants' homes are, or the duty of the accepting state - where they work? All these questions come on board when the situation of migrant labourers is considered.

In India, migrant labourers are one of the most vulnerable groups. In this situation of crisis, the migrant labourers are not only facing the loss of income but also homelessness. with no food or travel office rendering little youngsters and the old, to starvation and desperation.

### **Hiring new employees halted: the hardest hit**

According to the Press Trust of India report, hiring activities for new employees are at halt from the month of March and facing a decline of 18 per cent as compared to the month of March in 2019 following the measures to control the spread of coronavirus amid lockdown.<sup>5</sup> This situation has greatly affected metro cities like Delhi and Chennai.

The recruitment activities are facing a substantial drop during COVID-19. Because of the nationwide lockdown, almost all entrance exams are also at halt, leaving thousands of candidates waiting for the lockdown to end. Employment fell pointedly in all significant industry areas, with especially substantial occupation misfortunes in leisure and hospitality. This pandemic has not only affected the already working employees but also refrained hiring of new employees.

The number of unemployed youngsters was already high and nowadays, this number is even high and the situation is worse now. A report published in The Hindu reads that the rate of unemployment is 27.11 per cent now. Furthermore, this rate is even high in the urban areas that

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<sup>5</sup> *Hiring activity declines 18 per cent in March: Naukri JobSpeak*, THE ECONOMIC TIMES, (Apr. 7, 2020 ) <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/jobs/hiring-activity-declines-18-per-cent-in-march-naukri-jobspeak/articleshow/75025327.cms?from=mdr>.

are corona hotspots and recognized as red zones.<sup>6</sup> On March 20, Federation of Surat Textile Traders Association (FOSTTA) declared that textile market and mills will remain act of action from March 21 to March 24.<sup>7</sup> And this incited several textile workers and they protested and demanded the authorities to give them passage to go back their homes.

This halt is an actual crisis because several employees are rendered unemployed and resulted a record increase in national unemployment. When the bulk of workforce comprises labourers from unorganized sector, it would be very difficult for the Government to normalise the condition after lockdown. This crisis not only demands preventive measures but also food and money for the poorest Indians. The condition when the nation is practising quarantine, several thousand migrant labourers are deprived of basic needs.

### **Sectors affected**

The sudden downturn in work has hit the economy of India hard. Different sectors are in a critical situation and the economy of the country is at stake. The pandemic quickened the emergency as well as finished the great run that a few sectors were getting a charge out of. Adding to the concerns in a precarious interest stun that specialists state named a drawn-out concern, referring to vulnerability in the post-pandemic scene. If not all sectors, at least the fundamental sectors are adversely affected, these sectors make up a large portion of India's GDP. These sectors are partially or completely out of action amid lockdown.

The Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) are the mainstay of Indian sectors and involved in manufacturing and export activities. Manufacturing and export are two main drivers of economy. During lockdown, almost all MSMEs are out of service, terminating all such activities of various sectors. Certain reports have stated that MSMEs are facing crisis and have no money to pay their employees. Moreover, the imports are also at halt, choking the economy.

Besides, tourism and hospitality sector are also affected by this pandemic. In a calamity, the fist sector to be affected is also tourism and also the last to resume. Hence, it can be said that tourism and hospitality are the worst affected sectors in a virus pandemic. A KMPG report from a month ago had just anticipated the Indian the travel industry and accommodation

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<sup>6</sup> *India's unemployment rate rises to 27.11% amid COVID-19 crisis: CMIE*, THE HINDU, (May 5, 2020), <https://www.thehindu.com/business/indias-unemployment-rate-rises-to-2711-amid-covid-19-crisis-cmie/article31511006.ece>.

<sup>7</sup> *No shutdown at textile market, says FOSTTA*, TIMES OF INDIA, (Mar. 17, 2020), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/surat/no-shutdown-at-textile-market-says-fostta/articleshow/74662981.cms>.

segment to lose more than over 3.8 crore employments.<sup>8</sup> India's aviation sector may lose as much as Rs 5 lakh crore alongside 4-5 crore work misfortunes, stated in an article on the Economic Times.

The essential sector that connects the countries is experiencing an uncertainty, a number of workers are forced to cope with unpaid leaves. Amid lockdown, there are certain news of global airlines, announcing layoff. CAPA India, a main travel and tourism consultancy firm, said that worldwide flight movement has sunk more than 66 percent in the wake of the Covid-19 emergency in a report a month ago.<sup>9</sup> The aviation sector also needs urgent measures for its employees. Another sector affected by COVID-19 is the automobile sector that makes a good financial support to the GDP. The lockdown has led to a sharp drop in manufacture and sales of automobile. Considering the situation, big companies have announced pay cuts and are also waiting for this lockdown to end so that they can resume the production and sales.

Moreover, RC Bhargava, an industry veteran and Maruti Suzuki Chairman, disclosed how the automobile sector is interlinked with numerous other little divisions that production key parts, which are then utilized for assembling vehicle segments.<sup>10</sup>

Real Estate Sector has also suffered a lot due to the lockdown, announced to avoid the spread of deadly coronavirus. ANAROCK Group, in a report, stated that housing sales will experience a fall of 25-35 per cent and on the other hand, office absorption will experience a fall of around 13-30 per cent per annum.<sup>11</sup> This range of reduction will surely hit the Real Estate hard. There is large number of corona hotspots in urban areas where some projects are under construction and due to lockdown, they are at halt.

This is also an issue for those labourers working at the sites rendering thousands of migrant workers unpaid and jobless. The Government has asked authorities of companies to not cut wages or lay off such workers, reports propose that organizations are left with no decision yet

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<sup>8</sup> *Coronavirus impact may render 3.8 crore people jobless in tourism, hospitality sector*, THE ECONOMIC TIMES, (Mar. 19, 2020), <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/jobs/coronavirus-impact-may-render-3-8-crore-people-jobless-in-tourism-hospitality-sector/articleshow/74709878.cms?from=mdr>.

<sup>9</sup> *COVID-19. By the end of May, most world airlines will be bankrupt*, CAPA CENTRE FOR AVIATION, (Mar. 17, 2020), <https://centreforaviation.com/analysis/reports/covid-19-by-the-end-of-may-most-world-airlines-will-be-bankrupt-517512>.

<sup>10</sup> *Most car companies in India suffering loss, says Maruti Suzuki chairman RC Bhargava*, INDIA TODAY, (Sep. 21, 2019), <https://www.indiatoday.in/business/story/most-car-companies-in-india-suffering-loss-says-maruti-suzuki-chairman-rc-bhargava-1601616-2019-09-21>.

<sup>11</sup> Kailash Babar, *COVID-19 to reduce housing sales by 25-35%, office absorption to fall 13-30%: Report*, THE ECONOMIC TIMES WEALTH, (Apr. 2, 2020), <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/wealth/real-estate/covid-19-impact-housing-sales-may-fall-35-in-2020-demand-for-office-space-may-shrink-30/articleshow/74947019.cms>.

to release their laborers because of income issues.

While the shutters of almost every shop are down, e-commerce is flourishing, these are deploying the same mechanism. Though there are delayed deliveries but in this tough situation, online orders are doing a lot. Besides, apps that provide online meeting, gaming apps, other online courses and competitions are doing great. E-commerce and digital marketing will be two exceptionally compelling apparatuses in recouping the business.

### **Workplace and employers' toil**

COVID-19 has affected the workplace both for employers and employees. Certain guidelines have been issued by the Government for the employers to maintain proper functioning amid coronavirus outbreak. Some organisations are completely shut while others are partially working. The Government has also declared that some offices will not be sealed, instead they will serve as shelter homes for migrant labourers and COVID-positive patients.

Furthermore, the employers are working as per the guidelines and orders of the government. And will also follow the advice of health experts. Pool testing is one of the measures to reduce the severity and spread of coronavirus and was a unanimous decision of the health and family welfare ministry and the Indian Council of Medical Research. Pool testing is a process which detects whether a person is infected or not despite making a period of isolation of 14 days mandatory.

While uninfected people are there to keep an eye on infected people, an advisory is also there for the employers of the respective buildings or organizations. Employers have been encouraged to work with half the staff strength at some random time and guarantee social distancing, cleanliness and sanitation. In the case of feeling unwell, the employee ought to quickly leave the work environment and illuminate his revealing position and home isolate for the remainder of period. Representatives who are in the high hazard zones like more seasoned and pregnant ladies ought not be uncovered in any cutting-edge work, requiring direct contacts. The government is additionally relying on its "Aarogya Setu" app. The application becomes an integral factor here. This will help in contact following and just the individuals who are in close contact can be asked to self-isolate. The rest can keep on working. Such systematic work demands great management for ensuring proper functioning and simultaneously keeping a check on preventive measures to avoid the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile, government has also advised work from home to continue the work. This practice has given chance for technology to flourish more. Professors are teaching their students online,

telecommunication is also flourished, moreover, doctors are also using the option of tele consultancy to help patients amidst corona outbreak.

### **Conclusion**

This pandemic has led to unemployment among millions of workers from organised as well as unorganised sectors. But the migrant labourers remain the worst affected, especially those who are involved primarily in construction activities. Barely anybody of these workers, who live on every day wage, have extra reserve funds to see off the lockdown time frame. The Covid-19 pandemic has halted crisp employing across segments as well as wrecked many, particularly the ones that work on slender overall revenues. The extension of lockdown will further show impact on India's already beleaguered economy.

E-commerce is working as a trailblazer for the economy, providing platform to the young minds involved in technology. Though e-commerce can limit the effects hiring a number of employees but the condition of labourers from the unorganised sector is at stake. It is crucial to take necessary steps for them so that they could be prevented from facing extreme hunger and destitution. The Government has reported a few help measures for them, yet it is difficult to guarantee whether the advantages are arriving by any means or not. A job security scheme for the individuals who have been laid off could be the best way to ensure influenced citizens. The pandemic has just given us that what we need more is certifiably not an exacting lockdown or asset designation, rather an aggregate activity. To win against the deadly coronavirus, we have to join each and every area, each splendid psyche, and each fearless heart. The point isn't to control individuals' liberty severely, rather in a composed way. Like lockdown, implementation of home isolation plan needs to fit with our socio-economic structures. We can let this pandemic exasperate our current divisions or let it join us to spare mankind.