

## IMPACT OF COVID -19 PANDEMIC ON MIGRATION IN ASIA

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*Migration is universal phenomenon. The international migration has increased significantly in the recent years. The number of international migrants is estimated to be 272 million globally, with nearly two-thirds being labour migrants. The COVID -19 pandemic has devastated the whole economy, social fabric and the life of poor, migrants and marginalized workers. In view of the global crises , many countries declared a complete lockdown which has left a deep impact upon the labourers, migrant workers and all those marginalized communities who struggle hard for their survival. With the lockdown and sealing of borders, withdrawal of transport services and closure of all economic and business activities, the panic situation emerged among migrants and poor. This proved to be a nightmare for large number of migrant workers, who lost their livelihoods overnight and became homeless. The immediate challenges faced by these migrant workers were related to food, shelter, loss of wages, fear of getting infected and anxiety. Though the migrant workers have returned to their native place, it is daunting task to provide them suitable job as a large chunk of labors and migrant workers are unskilled. Against this backdrop, present paper purports to assess the impact of COVID-19 on international migration in Asia Pacific Region. The paper is based on secondary data and pertinent literature, observations and discussions gathered from various conferences, workshops, consultations etc.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19, International Migration, Remittance, Policy Reforms

### INTRODUCTION

Migration and urbanization are an integral part of economic development and societal transformation while our experience shows that it cannot be stopped. The rising contribution of cities to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would not be possible without migration and migrant workers. People migrate on account of many reasons like economic, social, political, marital, educational and religious etc. The migrants come from the most marginalized and impoverished sections of society. A significant proportion of the migrants are employed in the informal sector like construction industry, brick kilns or as rickshaw pullers, etc due to the lack of education and skills. Seasonal migrants dominate the low-paying, hazardous and informal market jobs in key sectors in urban destinations like construction, hotel, textile, manufacturing, transportation, services, domestic work etc. A large number of migrant workers find work as unskilled labourers since they enter the job market at a very early age and remain stuck in the most unskilled, poorly paid and hazardous jobs for their whole work-life span.

The internal migration accounts for a large population. Internal migrants are generally excluded from the economic, cultural, social and political life of society and

are often treated as second-class citizens. Migration of labour is an important factor affecting the course of socio-economic development. Rural-urban migration has also historically played a significant role in the urbanization process. At the same time, the economic, social and political marginalization of these migrant workers has been an area of concern. The corona virus disease (COVID-19) pandemic risks have devastating impact on economies around the world, including widespread unemployment and lower incomes. Toward the end of June, 2020, workplaces were closed in majority of countries worldwide. Alongside the effects of the pandemic on international and domestic travel, trade, investment flows, and other productive activities, the employment in Asia and the Pacific was reported low due to outbreak of pandemic (ADB 2020). Job cuts in the region are reducing wage income, with estimated decline to range from \$359 billion to \$550 billion. Migrant workers are mostly vulnerable to the pandemic and they originate from Asia and the Pacific accounted for 33 percent of migrant workers worldwide in 2019. Major destination regions for Asian migrants are Asia (35 per cent), the Middle East (27 per cent), Europe inclusive of the Russian Federation (19 per cent), and North America (18 per cent). All of these regions have been devastated by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with economic output in these economies projected to contract from 6.7 per cent to 10.2 per cent in 2020. Remittances to Asia and the Pacific, amounting to \$315 billion in 2019 are major source of income and significant contributors in GDP of the nations (ADB, 2020). They boost general consumption as well as investment and help sustain government debts by contributing to the foreign currency revenue base. In general, remittance inflows are considered counter cyclical as migrants tend to send more funds to their families back home (Halliday 2006, Yang 2008). The COVID-19 is simultaneously hurting migrant source and origin countries. Globally, jobs and worker welfare are severely affected by the pandemic. But few sectors are hurt more than other sectors such as retail and wholesale trade, hospitality and recreation, manufacturing, and accommodation and food service sectors, which are engaged largely in nonessential service activities with frequent face-to-face interactions (ILO 2020). Migrant and informal workers are among those facing the most severe impacts, as they often do not have regular contracts nor strong bargaining power. Migrant workers are more vulnerable from layoffs once prolonged lockdowns and production breaks drive companies out of business. The wide-scale economic cost of the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to reach between \$5.8 trillion and \$8.8 trillion globally, equivalent to 6.4 per cent to 9.7 per cent of global GDP, reflecting the spread of the pandemic to Europe, the United States and other major economies (ADB, 2020). Employment in host economies of Asian migrants is contracting significantly. According to ILO (2020), the negative effects on jobs are expected to have hit during the second quarter of 2020 in the Americas and in Europe and Central Asia, with working hours likely down by 18.3 per cent and 13.9 per cent in the quarter respectively, relative to the quarter prior to the outbreak. In Asia and the Pacific, Arab states working hours are thought to have declined 13.5 per cent and 13.2 per cent in the quarter, respectively (ADB, 2020). Travel bans restricting international mobility are taking a toll on workers in transport sectors, including airlines and travel agencies, as well as seafarers and sea-based workers in passenger cruise and cargo ships. As of 21 June, 2020, the Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs had brought home more than 29,000 sea-based overseas Filipinos, who are known to account for

more than 30 percent of the global maritime workforce (Richter, 2016). The impacts of COVID-19 on cross-border labour mobility are likely to go beyond the temporary contraction of migrant jobs and remittances and reshape migration dynamics and governance.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER**

The present paper purports to examine the trends of global migration and assessing the impact of COVID-19 on international migration, particularly on migrant labourers in Asia Pacific Region, and suggesting policy measures to address their problems in global pandemic.

### **DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY**

The paper is based on secondary data and pertinent literature, observations and discussions which have been gathered from various conferences, workshops, consultations etc. The data collected through secondary sources have been arranged and compiled in tabular form. Their percentages have been calculated and have been classified into various grades for the purpose of interpretation. Cartographic techniques such as analysis of growth trend and presentation of data through Bar diagram have been used for easy understanding. The paper includes the information available in Internet, published and documented reports of Asian Development Bank, UN-International Organization for Migration, World Bank, International Labour Organization, UNDP Survey Reports, Books, Journals, etc.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

COVID-19 has emerged in a world tightly connected by local and international population movements, with more people moving for work, education and family reasons, tourism and survival than ever in the past (Skeldon, 2018). Intense population movements, in particular of tourists and business workers, have been a key driver of the global spread of the outbreak. Inclusive public health efforts will be crucial to effectively contain and mitigate the outbreak, reduce the overall number of people affected, and shorten the emergency situation (Berger et al., 2020). Following the movement of people along busy commercial and touristic routes, COVID-19 has initially affected China's neighboring countries, the United States and Europe. While the outbreak has since spread from these areas into other regions and back into East Asia, these patterns have resulted in many of the world's wealthiest and best-connected countries bearing the brunt of the early health impacts of the pandemic (Guadagno, 2020). As in many other crises, migrants may be particularly vulnerable to the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19. Their ability to avoid the infection, receive adequate health care and cope with the economic, social and psychological impacts of the pandemic can be affected by a variety of factors, including: their living and working conditions, lack of consideration of their cultural and linguistic diversity in service provision, xenophobia, their limited local knowledge and networks, and their access to rights and level of inclusion in host communities, often related to their migration status (Liem et al., 2020). These challenges, and related conditions of vulnerability, are shared with many citizens. Internally displaced persons in camps and non-camp settings, slum dwellers and homeless persons may also have

limited ability to respect social distancing and hygiene practices (Sanderson, 2020; Sobecki, 2020). All large economies and workers in the informal economy may face sudden income loss (Kinyanjui, 2020). In many countries, migrants, especially when in an irregular situation or on short-term visas, do not enjoy equal access to health care as citizens, and might not be covered for COVID-19 treatment (Collins, 2020; KFF, 2020; Vearey et al., 2019). Lack of awareness of locally recommended prevention measures, overreliance on informal communication channels, or adherence to culture-specific customs and practices can result in migrants adopting behaviors that put them and their communities at increased risk of transmission (Arfaat, 2020). In conjunction with increased likelihood to be affected by respiratory diseases linked with their travel or living conditions, these factors make some migrants highly vulnerable to the direct health impacts of COVID-19 (Holguin et al., 2017). Many countries were either providing universal health coverage before the start of the pandemic or have removed obstacles hindering migrants' access to COVID-19 testing and treatment since then (Ontario, Ministry of Health, 2020; Samuels, 2020). COVID-19 has affected the delivery of services and assistance upon which many migrants rely for survival and well-being. Humanitarian service delivery in camp settings has become increasingly difficult (Bhuiyan, 2020; IOM, 2020; Welsh, 2020), while many integration programmes have been interrupted (Wallis, 2020) and civil society-managed dormitories and community kitchens closed (Win, 2020). Inability to work remotely, limited access to private transportation, physical proximity with coworkers and customers and lack of adequate protective equipment and hygiene options make these occupations particularly risky (Gelatt, 2020). The migrants are more likely to be excluded from welfare systems protecting workers who lose their jobs and incomes due to lockdown-related closure and failure of businesses, layoffs and reduction in working hours – often despite their disproportionate contribution to welfare systems (Vargas-Silva, 2019). Migrants already working in exploitative conditions before the pandemic may have limited options to look for other jobs, limited ability to move internally or across borders, and limited savings available to cope with hardship (McCormack et al., 2015; Gavlak, 2020). Similarly, migrants who need to pay to renew their permits might not be able to do so if their income is reduced. Irregularity, in turn, further reduces entitlements to assistance and the availability of options for well-being, while it increases risks related and not related to COVID-19 (Nyein, 2020). Due to these constraints, migrants might be forced to work despite growing health risks, and sometimes despite showing COVID-19 symptoms, or might be trapped in host locations without access to income, opportunities, and support (Quinley, 2020). Almost all countries have responded to the spread of COVID-19 closing borders and tightening immigration regimes (IOM, 2020). As options for cross-border movements dwindle, incoming migrants and travelers are pushed back or quarantined at borders and forced to stay in informal, overcrowded and underserved transit sites, where they face threats to their health, dignity and survival (Yayboke, 2020). Border closures have made it virtually impossible for incoming asylum seekers to apply for international protection (Ahmed et al., 2020). Conversely, thousands of migrants and travelers worldwide have been stranded in countries that closed their borders. Prolonged travel bans might result in many of them having to overstay their visa (Bernal, 2020). Migrants who were on home leave or travelling out of their host country (including for visa renewal) when the bans came into place might be unable to return to their job, their studies, their homes and families (Charles, 2020). The pandemic

caused by the corona virus disease (COVID-19), the gravest health emergency of our times, is poised to disrupt social, economic and political systems and lives worldwide. Worldwide, 81 per cent of all workers are affected by partial or complete lockdown due to the preventive actions taken to curb the spread of the pandemic. Businesses and enterprises face insolvency, and workers are facing loss of income and employment (ILO, 2020). But the impact will be the worst among informal workers, who are least protected among all types of workers (ILO, 2020). Millions dependent on the informal economy face survival crisis in India (UNDP, 2020). It is now widely recognized that COVID-19 has pushed the world economy into the worst recession witnessed since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Internal Monetary Fund (IMF 2020) projects a 6 percentage points decline in the world output from a +3.0 percent economic growth expected earlier to shrinking by -3.0 percent in 2020. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2020) expects the cumulative output loss during 2020 and 2021 to be nearly \$8.5 trillion wiping out nearly all output gains of the previous four years. World Bank (2020) has projected that remittances to South Asia would decline by 22 percent in 2020 due to loss of jobs and falling wages of migrant workers in the host countries induced by COVID-19 and the collapse of crude oil prices that affect economic activity in the Gulf countries. Severe recession in USA, UK, and EU countries has also rendered many migrant workers jobless. In many countries affected by COVID-19, presence of migrants is essential for services that they are key to the pandemic response, as well as longer-term recovery and development. This includes medical research and health-care provision, agricultural production, logistics and deliveries, personal care of the elderly and other individuals in need of assistance, as well as strategic infrastructural projects (Gelatt, 2020; Corrado, 2018; Bier, 2020). In many countries, migrants have even been among the frontline workers who have been infected or have died because of COVID-19 (Siddique, 2020).

### **TRENDS IN MIGRATION**

According to World Migration Report, 2020, International Organisation for Migration (IOM), UN Migration, there have been incremental changes in migration in the recent years. There has been increased level of international migration on account of opportunities created by economic growth and reform, trade liberalization and long-term stability in many countries. Migrants accounted for 3.5 percent of global population while Germany, U.S, U.K., Spain, France and Italy had more than 10 percent share of migrants against total population. There were 271.64 million migrant workers worldwide in 2019. Migrants as percentage of world's population accounted for 2.3 percent in 1970 which increased to 3.5 percent in 2019. There has been growth of 221.24 percent in international migration during the period of 1970 to 2019. More than half of international migrants were male while 48 per cent were female. About three fourth of all international migrants were of working age (20–64 years).

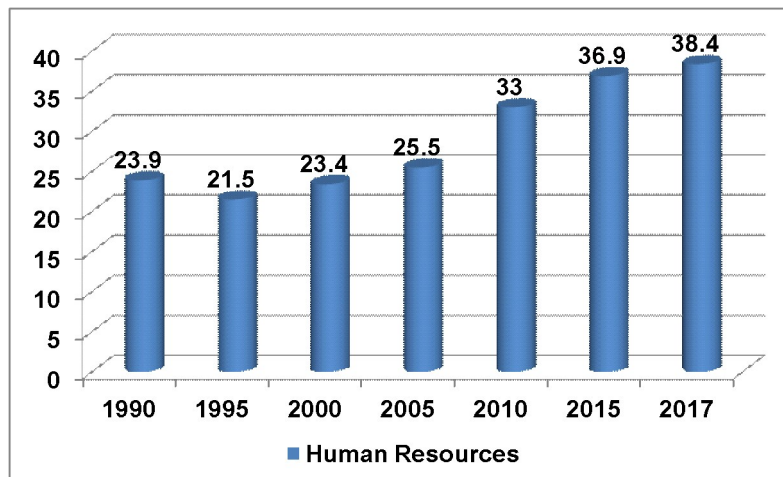
India had the largest number of migrants living abroad (17.5 million), followed by Mexico and China 11.8 million and 10.7 million, respectively (Singh et al 2020). The top destination country remained the United States (50.7 million international migrants). Between 2013 and 2017, high-income countries experienced a slight drop in migrant workers (from 112.3 million to 111.2 million). Upper middle-income countries observed

the biggest increase (from 17.5 million to 30.5 million). Globally, male migrant workers outnumbered female migrant workers by 28 million in 2017 (PHDCCI, 2020). There were 96 million male migrant workers (58 percent) and 68 million female migrant workers (42 percent). The global migration has reached to 272 million on 2019 from 174 million in 1995 and 221 million in 2005. The proportion of international migration has also increased significantly during the period of 1995 to 2019. The global migration constituted 2.8 percent against total population in 1995 to 3.5 percent in 2019 .

Migrants have made significant impact on socio-cultural, civic-political and economic spheres and contributions in origin and destination countries as well as communities. It is noted that immigrants tend to have higher entrepreneurial activity as compared to their native nations. The most recent global estimate for the total number of child migrants is approximately 31 million. There are approximately 13 million child refugees, 936,000 asylum-seeking children, and 17 million children who have been forcibly displaced inside their own countries. There is increasing evidence that the magnitude and frequency of extreme weather events are rising, and it is expected to affect migration. The last two years have seen substantial change in the global governance of migration, principally in the formation of the United Nations Network on Migration and the two global compacts on refugees and migration. During last 20 years, there has been tremendous increase in global migration, number of migrants workers, and number of refugees as well as internally displaced persons.

The stock of South Asian nationals living abroad was recorded 23.9 million in 1990 which increased to 38.4 million in 2017, indicating the growth of 60.69 percent. The growth of such nationals was witnessed high during the period of 2005 to 2017 (Chart 1).

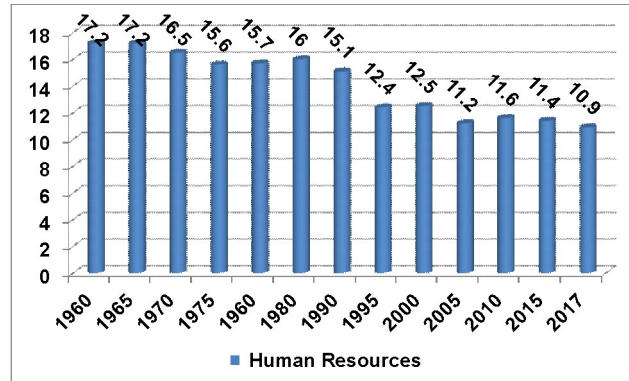
Chart 1: Stock of South Asian Nationals Living Abroad (No in Millions)



Source: UNDESA, Trends in International Migrant Stock

The stock of international migrants residing in South Asia has significantly declined during the period of 1960 to 2017, however, it has been stagnant since 1995 with declining trend. The number of international migrants living in South Asia was reported 17.2 million in 1960 which declined to 10.9 million in 2017 (Chart 2)

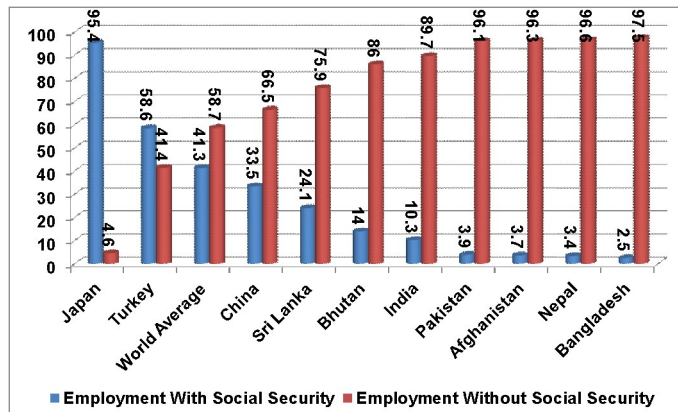
Chart 2: Stock of International Migrants Residing in South Asia (Millions)



Source: UNDESA, Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision, Datasets for the 2008

The social security coverage in employment is necessary for protecting the interests of migrant workers, however, the coverage of social security in employment has been found low in many countries. The social security coverage was recorded high in Japan (95.4 percent) followed by Turkey (58.6 percent), China (33.5 percent) and Sri Lanka (24.1percent). It was recorded as low as 2.5 percent in Bangladesh while in India the coverage of social security against employment was reported 10.3 percent (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Social Security Coverage in South Asia (Share of Total Employment)



Source: UNESCAP SSWA (2018) Based on World Bank Data

As per the Census, 2011, India had 45.6 crore migrants in 2011 (38 percent of the population) compared to 31.5 crore migrants in 2001 (31 percent of the population). Between 2001 and 2011, while population grew by 18 percent, the number of migrants increased by 45 percent. In 2011, 99 percent of total migration was internal and immigrants (international migrants) comprised just one percent. In India, internal migration accounts for a large population. The constraints faced by migrants are many such as lack of formal residency rights; lack of identity proof; lack of political representation; inadequate housing; low-paid, insecure or hazardous work; extreme vulnerability of women and children to trafficking and sex exploitation; exclusion from

state-provided services such as health and education and discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, class or gender (Singh et. al, 2020). Most internal migrants are denied of basic rights. Yet internal migration is given very low priority by the government in policy and practice, partly due to a serious knowledge gap on its extent, nature and magnitude (UNESCO, 2013). About 30 per cent of internal migrants in India belong to the youth category in the age group of 15-29 years (Rajan, 2013). Child migrants are estimated at approximately 15 million (Daniel, 2011; Smita, 2011). The intensity of migration is expected to increase in the future as a response to economic crises, political instability and global environment change (Deshingkar and Sandi, 2012). Estimates indicate that by 2050, 200 million people worldwide may become permanently displaced due to environmental factors such as sea level rise, floods, more intense droughts, and other climate driven changes (Myers, 2002). In such a scenario, migration should be seen as an appropriate and manageable adaptation strategy to cope with environmental, socio-economic and political stress (UNESCO, 2011; Foresight, 2011). Working hours can stretch as much as 16 hours a day (Joshi and Khandelwal, 2009; Guerin et. al. 2007). Typically, workers are tied to the contractor through an advance payment adjusted against wages and living costs at the brick-kiln, rendering them bonded for the duration of the season (PCLRA, 2012; Joshi and Khandelwal, 2009). This bondage could be mild, with the ability to leave the site temporarily during a production season (Guerin et. al., 2007) or, at the other extreme, workers and families remain tied to the same brick-kiln for years, with periodic adjustment of previous advances (Majumder, 2015; John, 2014). Poor access to healthcare and treatment facilities among migrants is a major issue (MoHUPA, 2017). Among women and child migrants, maternal and child health indicators can remain poor due to early marriages, early pregnancies, giving birth in the absence of a trained birth attendant, frequent childbirth, poor health after successive childbirths with little spacing, no exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, and no complementary feeding thereafter (Borhade, 2012). The internal migration in India accounts for a large population. Internal migrants are generally excluded from the economic, cultural, social and political life of society and are often treated as second-class citizens.

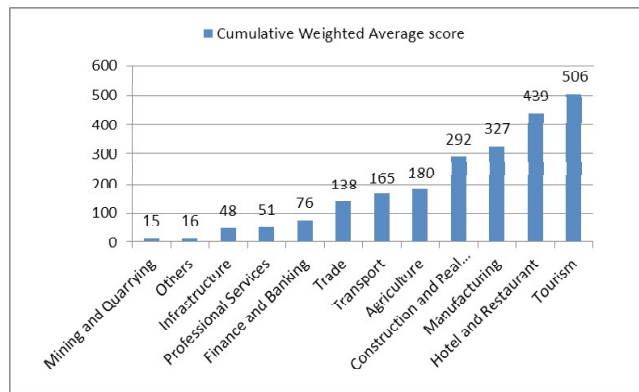
### **IMPACT OF COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been considered as the most crucial global health calamity of the century and the greatest challenge that the humankind faced since the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. It has rapidly spread around the globe, posing enormous health, economic, environmental and social challenges to the entire human population. The corona virus outbreak is severely disrupting the global economy. Almost all the nations are struggling to slow down the transmission of the disease by testing & treating patients, quarantining suspected persons through contact tracing, restricting large gatherings, maintaining complete or partial lock down etc. The corona virus crisis is likely to produce unprecedented levels of effects on the migrant economy. The social distancing and the lockdown, businesses were mostly shut and only a few people were allowed to work. This resulted in mass unemployment of migrant workers while many people were stranded during the lockdowns as governments imposed travel restrictions, cancelled transport services and sealed borders. The migrants are not able to send money home because they have either lost their jobs or are not earning as much as they used to. The migrants are often subject to discrimination in many parts of the globe, even in normal circumstances.



With the current fear of contagion, societies are not very welcoming of strangers and foreigners. Those moving from one city to another are held in fear, that they might be carrying the virus. Under these circumstances, the likelihood that discrimination against migrants would increase is very high. Governments have to make sure that discrimination does not increase and lead to social tension. COVID -19 has widely impacted on economy, society and polity of all the countries. However, most affected sectors are tourism, hotel and restaurants, manufacturing, construction and real estate, agriculture, transport and trade. The less affected sectors were reported to be mining and quarrying and infrastructure (Chart 4).

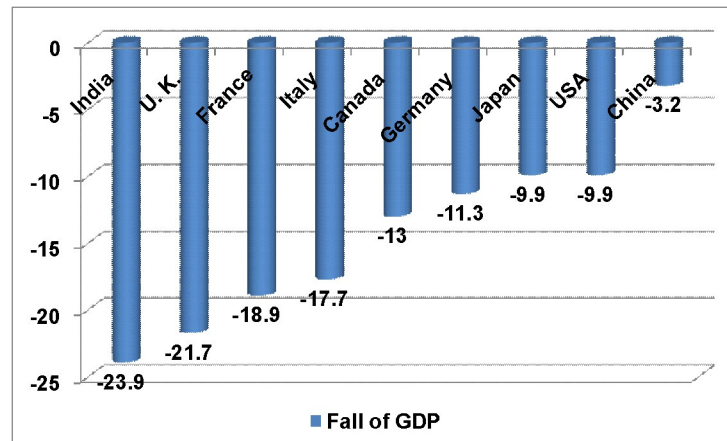
Chart 4: Most Affected Sectors Due to COVID-19 in South Asia



Source: UNESCAP- SSWA Online Survey

China, India, Germany, Korea, Vietnam are most affected countries due to COVID -19 pandemic. It is reported that GDP has contracted to -23.9 percent in India which is highest as compared too many Asian countries. United Kingdom, France, Italy, Canada, Germany and Japan also witnessed the shrunk of GDP by more than 10 percent, however, it was recorded as low as -3.2 percent in China (Chart 5).

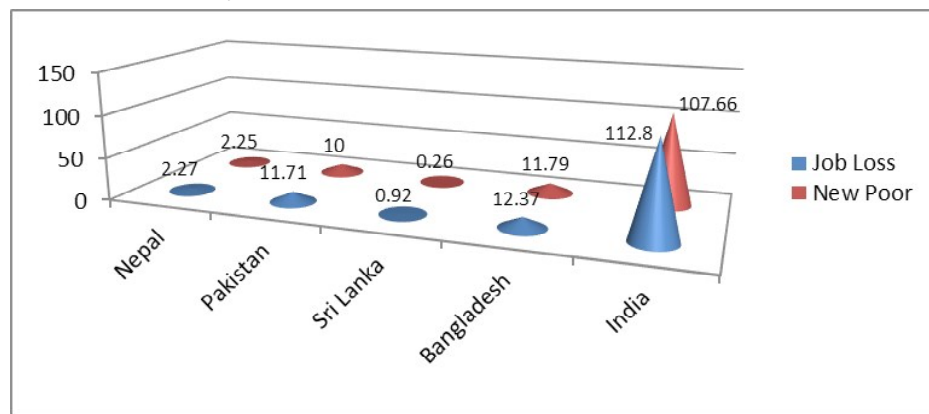
Chart 5: Shrunk of GDP by COVID Pandemic



Source: Official GDP Release, CEIC, 2020

About 50.8 million people were displaced by the end of 2019 and most of them were affected by conflict, disasters and insurgency. In view of the global crises, Government of India declared a complete lockdown which has left a deep impact upon the labourers, migrant workers and all those marginalized communities. As on August 31, 2020, there were 25.24 million cases at the global level, with recovery of 16.63 million cases. U.S. Brazil, India, Russia, and Peru are the worst affected countries. In India, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and West Bengal continue to remain the worst-affected states by the Covid-19 pandemic. As per a study of ILO, worldwide 81 per cent of all workers are affected by partial or complete lockdown. But the impact will be the worst among informal workers, who are least protected among all types of workers. Millions dependent on the informal economy face survival crisis in India. As per UNESCAP- World Bank, 2020 , 112.8 million persons are likely to lose their jobs while 107.66 million persons will join as new poor due to COVID-19 This much high as compared to other South Asian countries ( Chart 6).

Chart 6: Potential Job Losses and New Poor Due to COVID (Number in Millions)



Source: UNESCAP Based on World Bank, 2020

### FISCAL MEASURES

The policy reaction to the Covid-19 has brought together prompt responses from governments, international funding agencies and civil society organization all over the globe. Fiscal measures and policy initiatives have played critical role in prevention and mitigation of pandemic as well as providing relief to victims and sufferers besides provision of health care, treatment of patients , protection of frontline workers and care givers. Governments have intensified their fiscal policy actions and have adopted stringent containment measures as the pandemic has spread around the globe. In advanced economies, fiscal actions peaked in late March, 2020 while emerging market economies have responded later. A new round of fiscal stimulus more focused on supporting economic recovery of the loss from lockdowns, relaxing the lockdowns and resuming economic and business activities progressively. The aggregate fiscal packages include both budgetary and non-budgetary measures .The response channeled through the budget has a direct negative impact on fiscal balances. Budgetary measures include spending on health care, transfers to firms and households, wage and unemployment subsidies and tax cuts

or deferrals. The non-budgetary part consists of funding and credit guarantees. Funding includes loans by governments – or their financial agencies to firms, with a focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and other financial support, including equity injections to strategic firms. Government credit guarantees, including fiscal support to maintain the flow of credit to the economy in a high uncertainty environment (Baudino, 2020). The fiscal policy reaction to the corona virus emergency has been quick and powerful at the global level; however, the fiscal measures in many countries were reported grossly inadequate.

Many countries adopted fiscal measures to respond the COVID pandemic and revival of their economy. The fiscal measures as percentage of GDP accounted highest in Japan (42.2 percent) followed by Singapore (19.7 percent). It was reported higher than India (10 percent) in Bhutan and, Korea and Magnolia (Chart 7). On May 12, the Honorable Prime Minister, *Mr. Narendra Modi*, announced a special economic package of Rs 20 lakh crore (equivalent to 10 percent of India's GDP) with the aim of making the country independent against the tough competition in the global supply chain and to help in empowering the poor, labourers, migrants who have been adversely affected by COVID. There are five pillars of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (Self Reliant India) viz. economy, infrastructure system, vibrant demography and demand special economic and comprehensive package. It is time to become vocal for our “local” products and make them global. There has been focus on land, labour, liquidity and laws. Central Government has consistently extended generous support to states in this hour of need. Government devolved of taxes Rs 46,038 crores in April ,2020 besides, revenue deficit grants to states Rs 12,390 crores as SDRF funds in first week of April ,2020. Rs. 1.70 lakh crore relief packages under *Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana* were provided for the poor to help them fight the battle. The *Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana* has been launched in 116 districts in India and 31 districts of Uttar Pradesh have been included under the scheme. The districts where more than 25000 migrant workers have returned have been selected under the scheme. However, state of Uttar Pradesh has selected.

In order to mitigate the effect of the lockdown on the vulnerable groups, Government of India on March 26, 2020, announced a Rs. 1.70 lakh crore package under the *Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Yojana*. It has within its ambit health workers, farmers, MGNREGA workers, economically vulnerable categories, especially women, elderly and unorganized-sector workers, *Jan Dhan* account holders and *Ujjwala* beneficiaries. The scheme entails an additional 5 kg of wheat or rice and one kg of preferred pulses every month to about 80 crore beneficiaries for the next three months. Central Government also gave an order to the state governments to use Building and Construction Workers Welfare Fund of Rs. 52000 crores to provide relief to Construction Workers through direct benefit transfer (DHNS, 2020). The RBI also joined later with a sharp cut of interest rate along with a series of unconventional measures to lend to besieged businesses (Bloomberg Quint, 2020).

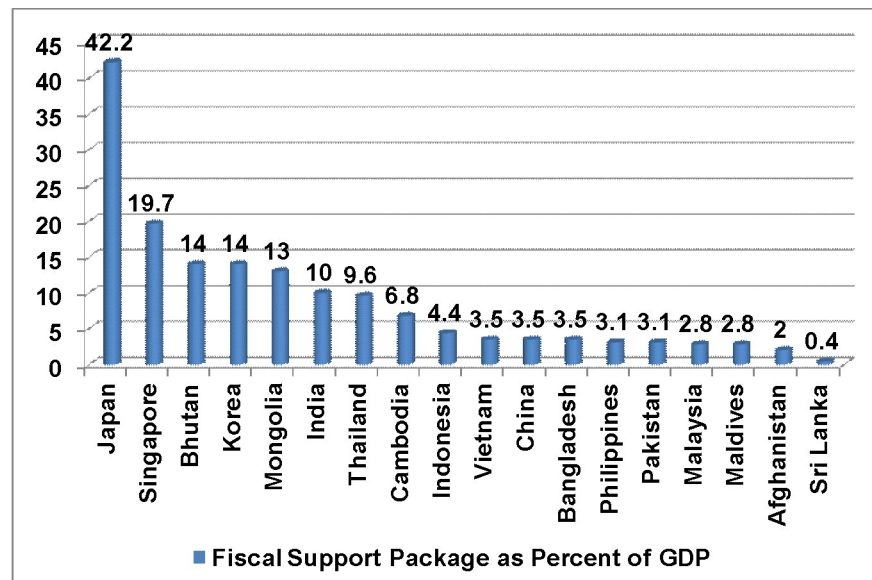
Looking at the gravity of the situation, many states, i.e. Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Karnataka arranged special busses to drop these workers and their families to either state borders or to their districts (Bohra, 2020; NDTV, 2020). This massive migration led to the chaotic situation on national highways, bus stops and

railway stations and raised misunderstandings between states

In the context of COVID- 19 pandemic, the role of civil society organizations has enormously increased for prevention from the spread of infection and rehabilitation of affected persons. In view of the global crises, Government of India declared a complete lock down in the country which has left a deep impact on the labourers, migrant workers and all those marginalized communities who struggle hard for their survival. These people are unable to do something for their livelihood due to the complete lock down and a constant fear from the uncertainties. It is expected that even after the lock down period is over, the venerable population such as migrant workers and laborers will be in extreme crisis and jobless. There will be a deep impact on their livelihood which may lead to hunger and starvation.

The role of civil society organizations in quarantine, isolation, social distancing sanitation, regular cleaning of wastes, relief distribution, and humanitarian assistance has massively increased in the recent times. As prevention from COVID 19 has been the national priority which demands for disaster management strategies to cope up with the emerging situation, rehabilitation of affected people and reconstruction of the affected areas is essential. The fiscal stimulus needed to mitigate socio- economic impact of COVID-19 in South Asia has been higher than the fiscal measures adopted. The gap was reported high in Sri Lanka followed by Bangladesh and Pakistan. India's fiscal measures were about 71 percent of the stimulus financial requirements ( Chart 7).

Chart 7: COVID-19 Related Fiscal Measures as Percent of GDP, Selected Countries



Source: Based on UNESCAP COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker ADB COVID-19 Policy Database and Various National Sources

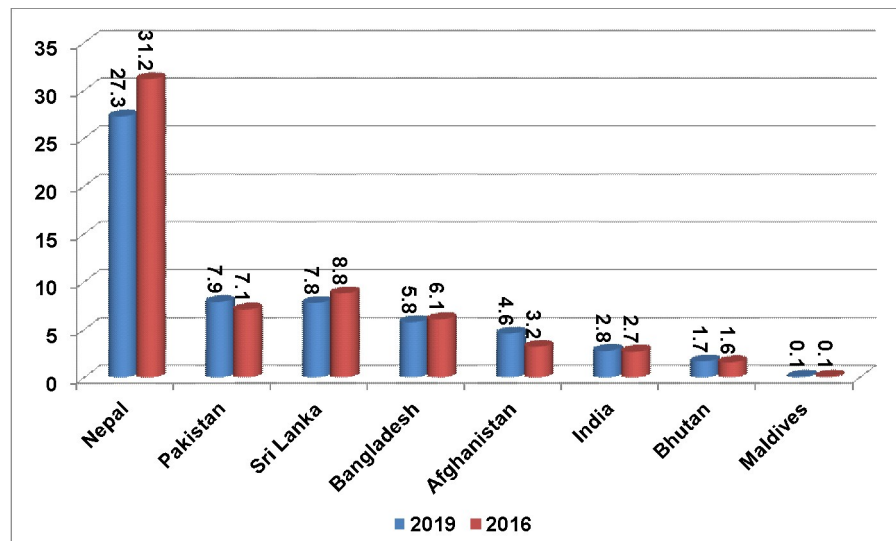
In the baseline scenario, global remittances are expected to decline by \$57.6 billion in 2020, equivalent to 9.7 percent of total remittances globally. Global remittances to Asia and the Pacific will fall by \$31.4 billion, equivalent to 11.5 percent of the baseline

remittances in 2018. The larger hit to remittances in the region reflects the region’s larger share of migrant workers globally. By sub region, South Asia recorded the largest fall in remittances, at \$18.3 billion (58.3 percent of Asia’s total loss), followed by Southeast Asia \$6.2 billion (19.7 percent), and the PRC at \$3.5 billion (11.1 percent). Remittances in Central Asia also fell by \$2.2 billion, while remittances in the Pacific fell by \$116 million. As a proportion of the 2018 baseline remittances to the region, South Asia, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia experienced the largest falls, at about 15.8 percent, 15.7 percent and 9.9 percent respectively.

As per assumption of ADB, August, 2020, the economies take about a year to get their domestic outbreaks under control and bring economic activities back to normal, global remittances are expected to decline by \$108.6 billion in 2020, equivalent to 18.3 percent of the baseline remittances globally . The table 4 reveals that remittance receipts in Asia will fall by \$54.3 billion, equivalent to 19.8 percent of the baseline remittances in 2018. By sub region, remittances in South Asia will record the largest fall, by \$28.6 billion (24.7 percent of 2018 baseline), followed by remittances to Central Asia (\$3.4 billion, 23.8 percent), Southeast Asia (\$11.7 billion, 18.6 percent), and East Asia excluding the PRC and Japan, (1.7 billion, 16.2 percent). Remittances to the Pacific will also fall (\$267 million, 13.2 percent).

There has been significant fall in remittance as percentage of GDP in 2019 as compared to 2016 in many Asian countries. The decline was reported high in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. However, it has marginally increased in India, Afghanistan and Pakistan (Chart 8).

Chart 8: Remittances As Share of GDP in South Asia

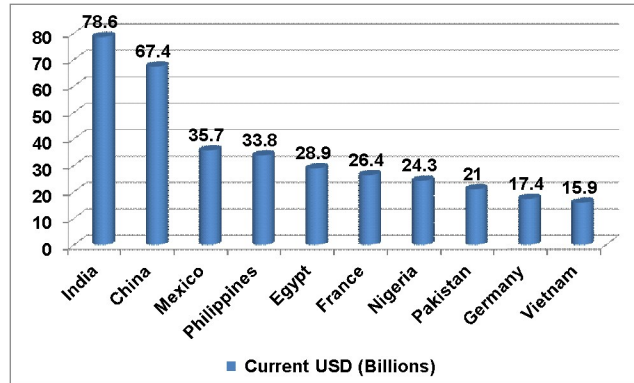


Source: UNESCAP Based on World Bank, 2020

India, China, Mexico, Philippines, Egypt and France are the top countries that receive high amount of remittance (Chart 9). The top 3 remittance recipients were India (USD 78.6 billion), China (USD 67.4 billion) and Mexico (USD 35.7 billion).The United States

remained the top remittance-sending country (USD 68.0 billion) followed by the United Arab Emirates (USD 44.4 billion) and Saudi Arabia (USD 36.1 billion).

Chart 9: TOP Countries Receiving Remittance (Current US\$ Billions)



Source: PHD Research Bureau, PHDCCI Compiled from IOM

The health expenditure as percentage of GDP was reported low in South Asia as compared to global average. In South Asian countries, it was recorded low in Bangladesh followed by Afghanistan. South Asia spends less than one percent of GDP on health compared to the global average of 5.8 percent and 4.5 percent for East Asian countries. Poor investments in the health sector seem to have resulted in poor public health infrastructure measured in terms of number of beds and health personnel as many countries in the sub region fall much below the world averages on these indicators. Gaps in public health infrastructure have been exposed in addressing the pandemic. Also, the sub region does not provide sufficient access to basic sanitation facilities, and broadband connectivity to facilitate alternative working arrangements during the containment phase. However, on an average Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka are better equipped in terms of these basic amenities than other countries in the sub region (UN – ESCAP, 2020).

The health expenditure as percentage of GDP was found higher than India in Maldives, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. The health infrastructure in terms of hospitals, beds and health staff was also reported grossly inadequate to respond COVID -19. As global pandemic has forced us to work online, however, internet connectivity and speed of internet has been found to be poor in many South Asian countries. The hinterlands are likely to worst affected as they lack basic infrastructure of communication. There are a number of pre-existing gaps in public health infrastructure and access to basic amenities such as sanitation and broadband connectivity, gender inequalities, pervasive informality, and inadequate social protection in many South Asian countries. However, there is less scope to invest massively on public health infrastructure and other facilities required to address the daunting challenges of COVID pandemic due to fiscal deficits and public debt.

## CONCLUSION

The COVID -19 pandemic has devastated the whole economy, social fabric and the life of poor, migrants and marginalized workers. Though the migrant workers have returned

to their native place, it is a daunting task to provide them suitable jobs as a large chunk of labour and migrant workers are unskilled. The governments are no doubt striving for creating suitable business and policy environment for migrant workers, however, job opportunities are limited while agriculture sector has already absorbed for additional employment and employment avenues under existing rural development and employment schemes are overexploited, hence, governments are looking towards Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector for large employment opportunities for migrant workers. In view of the increasing employment opportunities for them, skill up gradation is called for. In view of the holistic development and empowerment of the migrant labour and their dependents, multiple approaches and multi pronged strategies are required. The effective implementation of social security and social welfare schemes besides effective enforcement of legislations and laws. Mitigating these extra-ordinary challenges would also require equally extra-ordinary responses. These include large people-centered relief and stimulus packages; community participation and whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to be effective.

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