

REPORT

**SAMVAD
CONVERSATION**

**MIGRANTS ARE
INTEGRAL TO THE
ECONOMY:
DESIGNING POST-
PANDEMIC POLICIES
AND PROGRAMMES**

18 DECEMBER 2021

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Samarthan
Centre for Development Support



IOM
UN MIGRATION



Sustainable urban future



CONTENTS

Key Take-Aways -----	02
Profile of the Panellists -----	03
The Conversation (SAMVAD) -----	06
Programme Design -----	15
PRIA@40 Events -----	16

- **Need structural reform to address migrant issues** – We have been ignorant and unaware of the issues of the migrants. We need to have a structural system to understand the numbers, patterns needs and concerns of migration. The whole system needs a structural reform when it comes to the identification of labourers, designing and delivering schemes. We need to address the anomalies in our scheme designs and address them to create an equitable system.
- **Strengthen the labor laws** – The issues of labor exploitation usually go unnoticed and unreported. Adequate media attention should be drawn towards these issues. We need to bring the domestic workers within the ambit of labour laws and employment regulations in India. We need more systems like the e-SHRAM portal. We also need to develop a different system to integrate their needs and issues.
- **Understand the dignity and value of labor** – We need to underline the importance of the dignity of labor which is often ignored and forgotten. Migrant laborers should be given access to basic protection measures which is often dealt with as a very mechanical process in this society.
- **Need to have a clear problem statement** – We need to have a clear problem statement with respect to the issue of migration to make any progress. Civil society organisations have an important role in collecting data from the grassroots level to showcase the problems of the migrants. We need to change the perspective of the government and the other stakeholders to increase their inclusion criteria of migrants in our policies. In this context, the biggest challenge is the delivery mechanism.
- **Need to set up a Migration Helpline Centre** – A helpline service needs to be set up so that the complaints and grievances of the migrant labourers can be addressed in a timely fashion. It will enable the labourers to get information about their rights and entitlements. This is equally important for international migration.
- **Need to collaborate** – Across borders, interstate migration and government collaboration are important. The academicians, civil society organisations, state, and central government need to come together to offer a comprehensive response to the different problems but at the same time, the role of industry and the investors is also very crucial.



Dr. Maria Nenette Motus, Regional Director for IOM in Asia and Pacific, oversees the activities of the IOM Regional Office and provides guidance and support to IOM country offices in the Asia-Pacific region. Under Dr. Motus' guidance, IOM in Asia and Pacific works with relevant governments, UN agencies, development partners, private sector, NGOs/CSOs, academia, migrant communities, international donor community among others, on conceptual approaches and programmes in the many priority areas like labour mobility and Human Development, Migrant Protection and Assistance (including Counter-Human Trafficking), Immigration and Border Management etc.

Prof. Chinmay Tumble, a faculty member in the Economics Area at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, has been a faculty member at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad. His first book, *India Moving: A History of Migration*, was published in 2018 and second book *The Age of Pandemics, 1817-1920: How they shaped India and the World*, was published in 2020. He is a member of The Lancet Covid-19 India Taskforce and was a member of the Working Group on Migration of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation in 2016-17.



Dr. Yogesh Kumar is the Executive Director and Founder, Samarthan Centre for Development Support and his work has been over a wide variety of themes to strengthen the capacities and institutional mechanisms of voluntary development organisations, development management and training of trainers in participatory planning, monitoring, and process documentation on development issues. He has written several papers on the issues of local governance, accountability, and transparency.

Mr. Alex Paul (IAS), Former Commissioner, Labor Dept., Govt. of Chhattisgarh, is a service-oriented individual with a passion in Rural Development, Public Health & Education. A transformational leader, Alex has developed innate interpersonal skills like team building, effective communication skills, negotiation, motivation, conflict resolving & resource management through his multiple innovative projects in Chhattisgarh in the most backward and Maoist Affected Districts.





Ms. S Palini Bharathi is a prog coordinator with the Garments & Fashion Workers 'Union, where Garments workers' cases are being monitored, workers are being trained on laws, workers are being coordinated, protests are being staged, reports are being compiled and petitions are being filed to press government officials.

Prof. S Chandrasekhar is Professor at Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai. In addition to internal migration and urbanization, his recent work focuses on household earnings and income inequality in India. He was a Member of the Working Group to Study the Impact of Migration on Housing, Infrastructure and Livelihood, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India.



Shri Ashif Shaikh is co-founder Jan Sahas and has a 20-year experience on working to towards safe migration, ending forced labour practices and violence against women through eradication of inhuman practice of manual scavenging, caste based commercial sexual exploitation of children and trafficking etc. Jan Sahas is liberated and rehabilitated 66,000 people from manual scavenging and other forms of forced labour and also supporting 24,000 survivors of rape and sexual violence.

Mr. Sanjay Awasthi has been the Head of IOM Office, India since April 2020 and has overseen a strategically important project with the Ministry of External Affairs on International Migration Data Management Framework along with the Assessment of European Labour Markets. He has also steered a private sector partnership promoting the ethical recruitment of migrants in the garment sector. Mr Awasthi served as the Country Director of Landesa, which globally partners with governments and local organizations to secure legal land rights for world's poorest families.





Ms. Nandita Pradhan Bhatt is the Director of Martha Farrell Foundation, where she's responsible for programme delivery and management of the Foundation. She also heads the gender programmes in PRIA (Society for Participatory Research in Asia). Nandita has trained over 20,000 employees across more than 40 national and international organisations and has been working with women domestic workers to train and support their advocacy efforts to strengthen institutional responses to tackle the issue of sexual harassment in their world of work.

Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Founder President, Participatory Research in Asia, India, is currently a UNESCO Co-Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibilities in Higher Education. He serves as chairperson of the Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research (GACER) network, which facilitates the sharing of knowledge and information worldwide to further community-based research.



Dr. Anshuman Karol, Lead, Local Governance, PRIA is a versatile and seasoned Social Development Professional with a strong academic background offering a multi-functional experience of over 20 years in Local Government Institutions, Decentralised Planning, Participatory Research & Evaluation, Community Development, Capacity Building and Training. He is a certified mentor on Community Based Research by Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium.

As Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) completes its 40 years, it re-commits to continue institutional strengthening and capacity development support to civil society and non-profits with a special focus on new-generation civil society and non-profit groups. Between August and December 2021, PRIA will be convening [PRIA@40 Conversations](#) with partners, associates, supporters, experts, investors and colleagues, drawn from civil society, government, business, media and academia, to share ideas and experiences that can help 're-imagine' PRIA, its interventions and the world in the coming period.

In this context, PRIA co-convened a conversation (samvad) on [Migrants are Integral to the Economy: Designing Post- Pandemic Policies and Programmes](#) in partnership with [Samarthan, India](#) and [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#) on 18th December, 2021. The conversation was held virtually and was attended by 55 participants. The session was co-moderated by **Dr. Anshuman Karol** (Lead, Local Governance, PRIA) and **Mr. Sanjay Awasthi** (Head of Office, IOM, India).

The conversation explored the following questions:

1. What are the structural gaps, environmental constraints and policy deficits that restrict safe, orderly and dignified migration?
2. What policies and programmes can facilitate the economic contributions of migrant workers in the national and global economy in South Asia?

The conversation began with a short presentation by **Mr. S. Ram Aravind** (Research Associate, PRIA) on PRIA's journey of the past four decades – a journey about sustaining an independent forward-looking and energetic civil society organisation in an otherwise rapidly disruptive and uncertain world. PRIA believes in supporting individuals, organisations, grassroots initiatives to learn, change, grow and sustain themselves. PRIA's support has been in the form of sharing information and ideas, generating new knowledge building linkages and relationships, providing intermediation expertise, and that times emotional support.

Mr. Aravind spoke about PRIA's intervention on the theme of a *Sustainable Urban Future*. PRIA recognised the emerging urban challenges as early as the 1980s. After the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) enacted in 1993 in India, PRIA tried to address capacity deficits in elected counsellors through innovative trainings and learning with donations. PRIA has established more than 50 urban resource centres to support both supply and demand sides of the issues. PRIA also facilitated the first-ever participatory town plans and participatory city development plans in India. For more than two decades, PRIA has been working towards sustainable urban development and inclusive urban governance keeping citizen engagement at the centre. We have remained faithful to our core values of working with the marginalised and vulnerable urban poor and enabling their voices in the city planning process. [Read more...](#)

Next, **Mr. Sanjay Awasthi** shared an overview of IOM. IOM is a 70 years old inter-governmental organisation. It is a leading UN agency that focusses on all aspects of migration. IOM started its operations in India post the Gujarat earthquake in 2001. Internationally its work is guided by the [UN Global Compact for Migration](#), which is the first inter- governmentally negotiated agreement prepared under the auspices of the United Nations. It covers all the dimensions of international migration holistically and comprehensively. It is a non-binding document that respects the state's sovereign rights to determine who enters and stays in the territory. It demonstrates a commitment to international cooperation on migration. The Global Compact presents a significant opportunity for

improving the governance of migration to address the challenges associated with migration in today's context. It strengthens the contribution of migrants and migration to sustainable development. The Global Compact provides a comprehensive menu of options for states from which they can select policy options to address some of the most pressing issues around international migration and give member states/ countries the space and flexibility to pursue implementation based on their own migration realities and capacities.

Three major initiatives undertaken by IOM in India are: **First**, in partnership with the private sector and the civil society organisations, IOM focusses on the issues of migrant workers in the garment sector. It works with the entire supply chain starting from the internationally reputed clothing brands to the local manufacturers as well as labour unions and other representatives of the migrant workers. **Second**, in partnership with the Government of India's Ministry of External Affairs, IOM critically looks at the existing practices related to migration data management. A second part of the initiative is around labour market assessment in Europe. **Third**, in partnership with WHO and UNFPA, IOM is doing a research study on comprehending the factors related to the acceptance, hesitancy and accessibility of COVID 19 vaccination amongst migrants.

Meet our panellists...



[L to R: Ms. Palini Bharathi, Dr. Anshuman Karol, Prof. S Chandrashekhar, Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Dr. Yogesh Kumar, Mr. Alex Paul, Prof. Chinmay Tumbe, Mr. Sanjay Awasthi, Ms. Nandita Bhatt, Dr. Maria Nnette Motus and Mr. Ashif Shaikh]

Mr. Awasthi's presentation was followed by the keynote address by **Dr. Maria Nnette Motus** (Regional Director, Asia- Pacific Region, IOM).

Dr. Motus said that International Migrants Day is a day to acknowledge and embrace the significant contributions that migrants are making across all sectors that benefit economic development and resilience building of origin and destination countries. The prolonged COVID 19 pandemic has provided us with a unique opportunity to reimagine and reconceptualise human mobility as we strive to implement the vision of the Global Compact for a safe, orderly and regular migration. She quoted the honourable secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs of India's from the recent IOM Council Sessions High-Level Segment – *When global outrages take place, it is vulnerable who suffer the most in the disruptions that follow. Migrant workers are often among the most vulnerable. The international labour market was adversely impacted by travel restrictions and border closures. The socio-economic*

recovery from the pandemic will intrinsically require the relaunching of human mobility at the global, regional and national levels. We must, therefore, ensure that migrants are not only not left behind but also that their potential is harnessed to fully contribute to the recovery process in order to prepare them for any future pandemic.

Next, **Mr. Awasthi** invited **Mr. Chinmay Tumbe** (Assistant Professor, Economics and Migration Expert, IIM- Ahmedabad) to set the stage for the discussion.

Referring to the 19th century and early 20th century data on international migration, **Prof. Tumbe** said that currently the U.S.A. is the single largest country that is hosting Indians outside India. In addition, U.A.E, Saudi Arabia, Australia and Canada are increasingly absorbing migrants from India. In Europe, Italy hosts the largest number of Indians. Migration to Singapore and Malaysia has also been going on for a long time. These migrations are very important for India's macro economy because the remittances are huge, it is about \$80 billion. This money flows in two ways: one, is through the NRI deposits which are mainly located in cities and the other is the money that goes to villages. As per the data, Eastern UP and Bihar have increasingly become the hot spots of immigration to the Gulf, in the last few years. Kerala continues to be the remittance hotspot of India. Massive out-migration is also happening from Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Northern Rajasthan, and Telangana region.

In terms of the immigration numbers, the last two decades have seen a general upswing. Before the pandemic, more than a million Indians migrated from India. The upswing was partly led by better job opportunities in other countries. Gradually a more diversified workforce started migrating out of the country. During the 1970s- 1990s, the profile of work in the Gulf was changing towards a highly skilled workforce. The pandemic, however, has adversely affected the passenger traffic in the air. Due to the restrictions on travel, international traffic was much more affected in 2020- 21 compared to the domestic air traffic. But remarkably international remittances continued to flow because many people did not come back but had to support families back home. The role of international remittances in relieving some part of India's micro economy at the household level as well as at the macro economy in terms of the balance of payments has been quite remarkable.

Moving on to internal migration, the data shows that the broad hotspots of outmigration that have emerged in the last 10 years are the clusters of Eastern UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal. More and more districts in the Deccan which were historically locked out of internal migration circuits are now participating in such migrations. The broader story for what has been happening in the last 10 years and what will happen in the next 20 years shows a North-to-South migration, given the vast income differentials between the North and South.

Different cities have different profiles, in cities like Mumbai and Delhi, most migrants come from villages, whereas in cities like Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad most migrants come from other cities. It is imperative to note this substantial difference between rural to urban migration and urban to urban migration. As per census numbers, there are about 80 million rural to urban migrants and about 80 million urban to urban migrants. But of course, this is an underestimation. The number is more than 100 million circular migrant workers in India and more than 20 million immigrants outside India. If we were to look at the percentage of the workforce at the district level the number becomes even larger. In many districts around 30-40% of the workforce is situated in other cities and states.

The fact that we are talking about migration today is because the pandemic brought this crisis to the fore. For the first time, this huge invisible workforce was visibilised. People knew about them but never really saw them until they walked barefooted on the streets for hundreds of kilometers. Even during the plague in 1897, people packed up their belongings and went back

to their native place. But it was much more brutal last year because the borders were closed and to top it there was no means of transportation available. One may ask why so many people went back. It was because they were not economically capacitated to survive in the city without a source of income. If they would have been given rations and some social security at the destinations, they would not have had to go back amidst the risk of the pandemic. Moreover, there was also a psychological reason for people willing to walk back home and that is the comfort we receive with our families. It is simply the need to be back in your native place in a time of health crisis. Some of the responses from migrants were *agar marna hai toh gaaon mein marenge* (if we are destined to die, we better die in our villages). Therefore, we need to design our policies in such a manner to keep this back-and-forth movement of migrant workers in mind. Understanding migrants response during such crisis is crucial for policymakers. The public policy which worked as a shock absorber to relieve the stress in the labour market was MNREGA.

For the last 15 years, a big concern in internal and international migration has been the portability of social security. Although we have rolled out the policy of the One Nation One Ration Card. But the question is – is it working? Do migrants even know about it? Does the ration card cover services like health, education, insurance, etc? These are big policy questions. We are at a particular stage where a new agenda needs to be drawn integrating portability to broaden the ambit of our policies. The other concern that the pandemic brought forth was that of data. How many migrants are there from one state to another state? The politicians across political parties are increasingly drumming up the nativist rhetoric i.e., the states are imposing legislation, reserving jobs for locals which is blatantly anti-constitutional. We need to counter the rise in anti-migrant policy rhetoric across states and the political spectrum. The pandemic has also affected the countries like U.S.A., Western Europe and so on, fundamentally their labour markets. This presents a huge opportunity for India to enter into new labour markets.

Mr. Alex Paul (Former Commissioner, Labour Department, Govt. of Chhattisgarh) said that when it comes to migrant issues, we are ignorant Indians who are unaware not only about the issues of migration but also the data and the patterns of migration. For instance, in Chhattisgarh as per the Rural Development Department, there are around 7.1 Lakh migrants. The Labour Department with its meagre staff had put that around 5.2 Lakh migrants on trains and buses. However, when the Skill Development Department did a skill mapping during the crisis, they came up with the number as 3.2 Lakhs. This states our situation when it comes to actual data on migration.

To address the crisis of migration, we need to know the numbers, the patterns, the source and destination of migration. The registration forms on e-SHRAM portal must have all these questions but we don't have a system of registrations of the unorganised labour. In terms of benefits, mostly they are given to the family. There are very few things that are for an individual's benefit. For example, the Public Distribution Scheme (PDS) has a family benefit attached to the scheme. Many a time the individuals are tied to families and the registrations are done keeping the family in mind, even though the benefits are distributed individually. We need to address these concerns and the entire system needs a structural reform when it comes to the identification of labourers, designing and delivering schemes.

The Rural Development Department and the Panchayat Secretary used to maintain a migrant register where the details of every incoming as well as outgoing migrants were noted. However, there is no such system for the urban areas. We must make use of such registers so that there are some systematic means of tracking rural and urban migration. We must publish the data with due regard to the personal information of the labour and their families.

What is the definition of migration in our dictionary? Our understanding of migration today is only based on the definition of the Interstate Migrant Labour Act. The Act only speaks about migration from one state to another. So, for instance, does labour who migrates from an interior district suffer from the same indignities as opposed to the one who migrates across state borders. Does it qualify as an inter-state migration? We need to relook and review our definition of migration. Anybody who does not sleep in the comfort of their home is a migrant. Some people migrate for a week, a fortnight and seasonal jobs – there needs to be a system to track everyone's movement. This will give us a better idea of the pattern of migration. Consequently, we will be able to address the problems associated with it effectively. He emphasised creating a system of tracking migration monthly, which would keep data on in-migration and out-migration at the panchayat and at the ward levels. We need to look at the data and then design our policies to address the needs of the migrants. There is a need for interstate collaboration. Although the One Nation One Ration Card system has been proclaimed as one of the biggest interventions, there are a lot of flaws in its implementation. We need to address the anomalies in our scheme designs and address them to create an equitable system.

For instance, the e-SHRAM portal designers have no understanding of the nuances of family and individual registrations. They have not thought of unorganised and organised sectors. There is a fundamental flaw in the registration process. The registration process should include more than just the name and sex of the migrants, it needs to acknowledge their multiple skills, skill utilisation, income pattern basis their skills, the education of their children, etc. There are so many aspects to be understood during the registration itself. As of now, we are doing a piecemeal registration, the data of which is going to be of no use.

Ms. Palini Bharathi (General Secretary, Garment & Fashion Workers' Union (GAFWU), Tamil Nadu) drew attention to the deplorable conditions of the migrant labourers in the state of Tamil Nadu, where she is a labour activist. She emphasised that no attention has been paid by the state to address the grievances of the labourers. Speaking of a recent incident in a construction site in Sriperumbudur; she said that the condition of the internal labour in the state is as deplorable as that of migrant labour. Several construction labourers died of food poisoning at the site, but the numbers were underreported. Often the exploitation of labour goes unreported in the media. She urged for adequate media coverage of such issues of human exploitation in the state. A lot of migrant labourers are employed in different companies in and around the state who are mostly hired contractually and not employed by the contractors. Consequently, they do not qualify for any social or medical benefits. She said there should be more benefits for their health and safety. The labour code passed by the Tamil Nadu state does not adequately address the needs of migrant labourers. This law fails to satisfy the needs of the migrant labourers and the internal labour within the state. She concluded by saying that a helpline service needs to be designated so that the complaints and grievances of these labourers can be addressed timely.

Dr. Yogesh Kumar (Executive Director, Samarthan, India) spoke about the Migrant Labour Policy of Chhattisgarh as an important policy document. He said that It demonstrates a strong administrative will. The policy acknowledges that migrant labour is an important foundation of nation-building. People do not acknowledge migrants' sweat and hard work in building a \$5 Trillion economy in India. Therefore, this recognition in a policy document is significant. Last year, due to economic and psychological compulsion, when the migrant workers started walking hundreds of kilometres to go back to their native places, some civil society organisations pushed for declaring the situation as National Emergency. Had that happened, the migrants would have been the focus for policymakers.

He endorsed Mr. Paul's remark on the inconsistency of data. If we look at the pyramid of migrants, the top few who have high skills are high in demand. But the migrants at the bottom of the pyramid are still looking for state and market support to utilise their skills. We have not been able to utilise the skills of rural workers, this hints at our planning paralysis. We have enough resources for skill development, but they are not effectively used to enhance their skills. The government needs to review its policies to play its role effectively in addressing the migrant workers' issues.

The 73rd and 74th CAA has led to the formation of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and the Gram panchayat. This has further led to a rural-urban divide. Small cities and villages are infrastructurally not capacitated to provide an economic base to people. Consequently, they migrate to places that have a demand for their skills. MNREGA needs to be reviewed not just as National Rural Employment Guarantee but more as a National Rural and Small-Town Employment Guarantee Act. In this comprehensive planning, Gram panchayat and ULBs need to collaborate and work together. Drawing from his experience of working with Migrant Resource Centre, he emphasised that we need to set up a labour resource helpline at the source and destination of migration. It will enable the labour to get information about their rights and entitlements. This is equally important for international migration.

The livelihood colleges need to work towards developing the skills of the migrants and also ensure certification of the same. Livelihood colleges should provide on-the-job training. Therefore, we need to re-think and re-look at these livelihood centres. The migrant policy must ensure a fearless and safe work environment. It must enable them to avail their rights and entitlements. We need to respect the dignity of their labour. We need to be mindful that the migrants leave behind their families when they migrate to cities in search of jobs. We need to also work towards securing the rights of their families.

'According to ILO, one in twenty-five women workers in the world are domestic workers', said **Ms. Nandita Bhatt** (Director, Martha Farrell Foundation). According to UN estimates the sector is poised to grow as urbanisation grows. As labour force participation increases, the domestic worker sectors will expand. It is an important livelihood source for urban and poor women. While the official figure of domestic workers in Asia is 11% and 14% in Latin America, India has about 4 million domestic workers as per official estimate while the unofficial estimate places this number at 50 million, there is no exact figure. In 2010, the Minister of State for Labour and Employment accepted that there was no authentic data available. At the same time, it also recognised that domestic workers are the third-largest category of workers in India. On 22nd November 2021, the Labour and Employment Ministry flagged off an all-India survey on workers that would cover 37 States and Union Territories and 1.5 lakh households in 742 districts. However, there is no clarity to what end will this data be used.

We must be mindful of their contributions to our lives, cities and the nation? They provide cooking, cleaning and other household services in addition to providing care to the children, elderly, or persons with illnesses. During COVID, they were the ones who were called upon to provide care to COVID positive patients in many homes. Desperation was such that they offered to do so because they had lost their jobs and hence their source of income. Their contribution to the economic growth of a country is immensely significant. It enables employers to invest in leisure and paid activities. But the non-recognition of their contributions takes away some of the basic facilities that they are entitled as citizens of the country such as not having address proofs, being migrant workers, living in congested urban spaces with no hygiene, or water, also the rents are high and hence the living expenses are very high.

There are high levels of informality in terms of long hours of work, fewer wages, distant workplaces and so on. They are excluded from the national legal protections and are vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence. There are no integrated policies on labour

and social rights. There is a dependence on recruitment agencies – we have no way of knowing who these recruitment agencies are? Where do they come from? What is their registration process?

Further, these workers have no bargaining power and when the vulnerabilities of domestic workers increase, it pushes them to various forms of sexual harassment in their everyday lives. They are in our homes, but they are invisible when it comes to policies.

When the first wave of COVID hit us there was an official notification that said, '*Do not let your domestic workers enter your complexes*'. During the second wave, there was no official notification, yet the domestic workers were the first ones to lose their jobs. In terms of data, out of 4463 domestic workers, 3424 had lost all forms of employment. 1039 were working but 201 of them were working in 2 or 3 homes compared to 5 to 6 houses pre- pandemic times. Only 1039 domestic workers were paid fully in April 2020 whereas more than 1500 did not receive their salaries.

There has been no advocacy or lobbying by domestic workers themselves or their unions. The civil society organisations have been working but the response has been tepid. There needs to be a ratification of the ILO conventions 189 & 190. We need to bring the domestic workers within the ambit of labour laws and employment regulations in India. There has to be a minimum wage for domestic workers. The Health and safety of domestic workers also need to be prioritised. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace 2013 Act is the only law that mentions domestic workers but that too is ineffective and often not implemented. She concluded with a domestic worker's narrative and said, '*The laws are only for the rich. We don't want your sympathy; we want you to take action when you hear our stories and how we live*'.

'Migrant workers are historically victims of social, economic and cultural exclusion', said **Mr. Ashif Shaikh** (Co-Founder, Jan Sahas, New Delhi). They are excluded from the social protection because most of the time the focus is on their livelihood-related issues or economy-related issues, which of course doesn't give a complete picture. The pandemic exposed the vulnerability and exclusion of migrant community. Although they have been subjected to these challenges for many decades. But due to social media these issues have come to the fore. Often their contribution to the economy is not recognised. The academicians and civil society organisations need to work towards this end. There is no real-time tracking system that is available in India to track the migrant population or their numbers. We need more systems like the e-SHRAM portal. We also need to develop a different system to integrate their needs and issues because they are different from the overall unorganised sector population.

He shared an example from the Longitude Migration Tracking (LMT). In the Chhattisgarh to Delhi corridor, about 132,000 migrant worker households were tracked. 93% of these migrant worker families come from socially excluded communities like SC/ STs and OBC. Migration further increases the vulnerability of these communities in addition to their social status. They often fall into the bonded labour practice, trafficking and many other exploitative practices that are prevalent in the migrant community in India. It is the responsibility of every state government to ensure the safety, security and protection of the migrant community because they are also citizens of this country.

Why are political parties not serious about migrant workers? It is because the migrant workers vote at the source state and then migrate from the source to the destination state. Therefore, the destination state does not care about these communities. Recently the government of India introduced the *One Nation One Ration Card* programme. It is India's first 'portable' programme. If we include 'portability' in people's Right to Vote, that way the destination state will care about the migrant communities because they will vote for the political parties in the destination state. However, this requires a strong political will, which is a very big challenge.

The second concern is about the single window. We have multiple programmes for the social security or entitlements of the migrant workers. To avail one entitlement, they need to go to the Labour Department, for another to the Women and Child Department and for yet another, to the Social Justice or Social Welfare Department, and so on. This is a tiring process for the migrant community. We need to establish a comprehensive service delivery mechanism or a single-window system where the migrant worker can access all the social security benefits. We need to change the perspective of the government and the other stakeholders towards the migrant community to increase their inclusion criteria in our policies. The biggest challenge is the delivery mechanism. In this context, we need to engage the industry to ensure accountability and transparency in the recruitment mechanism of the migrants. Even though we have an Interstate Migrant Workmen Act, but it is three decades old and hardly implemented.

Jan Sahas runs a national toll-free helpline and every month they receive between 3000 to 3500 calls. These calls are mostly related to sexual violence, violence at the workplace, wages-related cases, labour-related cases, and so on. Every month they rescue about 200 to 300 bonded migrant labour from various kinds of industries. As far as women are concerned, we need to add different kinds of provisions to secure them at the workplace and ensure equal wages. Social security benefits and entitlements increases their negotiation power. State and Central government need to come together to offer a comprehensive response to the different problems but at the same time, the role of industry and the investors is also very crucial.

Most of the time we blame the industry or the government for not doing enough for the migrant community, but the role of society is also very crucial because these migrant workers build our nation, hospital, road, airport and so on. When they face difficulties during the pandemic, society must collectivise to help these migrant workers. Before we make the government or the industry accountable, society needs to become more accountable towards the migrant community. While economic entitlement is important at the same time the dignity and respect of the migrant worker are also crucial.

Prof. S Chandrashekhar (Professor, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR)) said that data may have been an issue 10 years back but today it is not an issue. If we continue to focus intensively on data, we will lose sight of the problem. Civil society organisations are constantly filling in the gaps between the government and the market. When we talk of data, for instance, the registration on e-SHRAM portal, it is one thing to register on the portal, but we need to ask what do these registrations lead to? The registration on the e-SHRAM portal is only generating data. If we collect the migrant worker data without connecting them to their employer, the data set will not have any insight. He said, *'While we may feel we have achieved a lot with the data, the reality is that we have not achieved much'*. Do we need survey data? National Sample Survey (NSS) data and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFA) data states that 80% of the workers don't have a written contract. Hence, they don't have social security benefits or benefits of any kind. Civil society organisations have an important role to play in this context. Unless we have a clear problem statement, we are not going to make progress. He highlighted another issue that we often talk about civil society organisations, but we don't talk about the organisations that fund civil society organisations. There needs to be a convergence of programmes between these funders.

For instance, the 15th Finance Commission Report (2021- 2026) states that a lot of roads were constructed under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). The central government guaranteed the maintenance of the roads for three years. But what happens after those three years? In this context, the Finance Commission made a direct grant for the

maintenance of the roads. If we care about a bottom- up approach, we need an agenda that speaks about the financial allocation for different programmes. The 15th Finance Commission Report mandates every urban local body to present its budget to avail grants. We need a clear picture of financial allocation and the processes. Counting the number of migrants is a pointless exercise. For too long we have spent time trying to count migrants. The nature of migration is going to change because the next round of migrants will be of educated migrants. After the Right to Education, 95% of children are in school till the age of 14 and this trend will continue. Consequently, the nature of migration will change. We need to work towards addressing this concern. Government should stop collecting data and focus on finding a common problem statement.

Dr. Karol requested **Dr. Rajesh Tandon** (Founder- President, PRIA) to give his closing remarks and share some key takeaways from the discussion.

'We do not yet understand the dignity and value of labour', said **Dr. Tandon**. We continue to be a Brahmanical society that ranks professional services according to the degree and not the economic contribution that one makes. So, the PhDs and digital scientists are at the upper end of the totem pole while the technical experts or high-quality masons or drivers are at the bottom end of the totem pole. The alignment between gender and caste at the bottom end of the totem pole continues to exist in India even today. The disconnect between economy and labour has been sharpened in the last 20 years. So much so that Prof. Thomas Piketty in his report on Inequality has particularly highlighted India saying that the bottom half of the society only contributes about 10% of the GDP whereas the top 20% contribute about 60%. The top 20% take away all of it. The reason is that digitalisation and globalisation reinforce each other, and this further leads to the reduction and devaluing of the labour market.

Re- emphasising Prof. Chandrashekar's remark that 80 to 85% of the workforce does not have a written contract, **Dr. Tandon** said that unless this reality begins to change, the overall condition of any worker is unlikely to change. The employers have become more organised than the workers. This further hints at the relative relevance and weakness of workers' organisations, trade unions and their movements in the last two decades. Therefore, the migration problem within the country is not merely about shifting one responsibility to another. Essentially, it is a problem of labour vis-à-vis the employee and employers' accountability. This trend is universal be it New York, Paris, Mumbai or Bangalore. Employers are held accountable by the strong collectivised voice of the workers and a vigilant public institution that monitors their compliance with the laws of the land. The Minimum Wages Act was passed in 1948 in this country. Unfortunately, even today the workers are not paid their minimum wages.

The union movement needs to be strengthened. The labour department – its competence, its staffing, its system of monitoring and compliance needs to be at district, provincial and national levels. In this process, civil society's role is complementary. It enables the voices of the migrant workers, domestic workers and informal workers but it does not become their voice. We need a bottom-up approach to planning, all the data collection mechanisms, census, monitoring processes in this country are top- down. This top-down approach tends to fragment the system further. There is no way of knowing who fits in which box of the fragmented system. The decentralised planning and implementation will necessitate decentralised bottom-up data gathering.

The conversation ended with a vote of thanks by **Dr. Rajesh Tandon**.

11:00 am to 11:15 am

Welcome and Introduction to PRIA@40 Programmes and Conversation

Moderators: Dr. Anshuman Karol, Lead, Local Governance, PRIA, India
Mr. Sanjay Awasthi, Head of Office, IOM, India

11:15 am to 11:25 am

Keynote Address -

Dr. Maria Nenette Motus, Regional Director, Asia Pacific Region, IOM

11:25 am to 11:50 am

Setting the Stage -

- Mr. Chinmay Tumbe, Asst. Professor, Economics and Migration Expert, IIM, Ahmedabad
- Mr. Alex Paul (IAS), Former Commissioner, Labor Department, Govt. of Chhattisgarh

11:50 am to 12:50 pm

Deep Dive Conversations -

- Ms. Palini Bharathi, General Secretary, Garment & Fashion Workers' Union, Tamil Nadu
- Dr. Yogesh Kumar, Executive Director, Samarthan, India
- Ms. Nandita Bhatt, Director, Martha Farrell Foundation
- Mr. Ashif Shaikh, Co-Founder, Jan Sahas, New Delhi
- Prof. S Chandrashekar, Professor, IGIDR

12:50 pm to 01:00 pm

Key Takeaways Vote of Thanks and Closure

Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India

DATE	TITLE	THEME
12 August 2021	Youth Participation and Active Citizenship	Citizen Participation
20 August 2021	Planning for Urban Informalities	Sustainable Urban Future
31 August 2021	Accelerating Capacities in Civil Society and Non-Profits	Empowering Civil Society
2 September 2021	Nurturing Civil Society Partnerships in Uncertain Times	Empowering Civil Society
15 September 2021	Redesigning Civil Society Ecosystem: From Local to Global	Empowering Civil Society
28 September 2021	Unlearning Patriarchy: Expanding Impacts of Gender Training	Making the Gender Leap
30 September 2021	Investing in Civil Society Innovations	Empowering Civil Society
01 October 2021	Community-led Adaptations: Water is Life	Decentralised Community Governance
06 October 2021	Inspiring Leadership of Mayors and Councillors for Inclusive Urbanisation	Sustainable Urban Future
12 October 2021	Trajectories of Participation: From Development to Governance	Citizen Participation
20 October 2021	Scaling up Citizen Engagement for Inclusive Urban Governance	Sustainable Urban Future
01 November 2021	Gender Transformational Organisational Renewal: Towards Gender Equality	Making the Gender Leap

17 November 2021	Participation, Representation & Accountability: Strengthening the Movement	Decentralised Community Governance
23 November 2021	Making a difference: Adapting Impact Measurement	Empowering Civil Society
25 November 2021	Young Scientists Learning Open Science	Knowledge Democracy
26 November 2021	Institutionalising Online Citizen Participation in Public Policymaking in India	Citizen Participation
29 November 2021	Changing Contours of Development Cooperation: What Roles for Civil Society?	Empowering Civil Society
30 November 2021	Local Knowledge, Social Movements & Participatory Research: Indian Perspectives	Knowledge Democracy
8 December 2021	No Time to Waste! Building Resilient Urban Communities and Cities through Locally Led Climate Adaptation	Sustainable Urban Future
9 December 2021	Gender in Governance: Pathways for Women's Political Leadership	Making the Gender Leap
16 December 2021	The Story of Participatory Research: History and Future	Knowledge Democracy
18 December 2021	Migrants are Integral to the Economy: Designing Post-Pandemic Policies and Programmes	Sustainable Urban Future