

MIGRANTS' HEALTH AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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The human migration is one of the oldest human activities across the world since the evolution of human civilisation. Perhaps with the evolution of the primitive society in early days, it seems all over the world people must have wandered to different places near to their habitations in search of their livelihood opportunities. In the different phases of social transformations, the human society has reached to the present stage of globalisation in the form of wider integration of polity, culture, economy and human activities. The rapid human transmission of COVID -19 all over the world has given us an opportunity to think and measure to what extent the entire world is socio-culturally, politically and economically integrated with each other amongst the nation states. The Covid-19 pandemic being the pandemic of the century caused a large impact on migrants' health, education, and livelihood across the world creating a vacuum in the international labour market due to Covid-19 restriction imposed by the different countries.

Introduction

In the history of our social development human civilization has passed through the different stages of social transformations popularly termed by scholars as ancient, primitive, medieval feudal, modern, post modern, industrial, and post industrial globalised society. The modern society is also called as the technology based machine driven knowledge society. In other words with the development of information technology and its popular uses and applications in different walks of our life, it is termed as information society. In the wake of Covid-19 pandemic the study of migration continues to be one of the important areas of the study across the discipline. People all over the world viewed that Covid-19 has brought about greater level of depression, fear, anxiety and loneliness. The deterioration of mental health and increased use of drug and alcohol is also seen among them.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director General, World Health Organization states that, "Refugees and migrants live and work in often-harsh conditions with

inadequate access to health, housing, water, sanitation and other basic services". Therefore he suggested, it is vital for all countries to reduce barriers that prevent refugees and migrants from obtaining health care and to include them in national health policy. There are many undocumented migrants who are often excluded from the host country's national health programmes or social protection scheme which could have facilitate their access to health care and social services. Many migrants also do not seek health care facilities even for Covid-19 protection because of their financial limit or fear of deportation.

The migrants particularly in lower paid jobs are more affected and became vulnerable to the spread of Covid-19 cases in almost all countries in the world. It is also true that migrants also play an important role in the response to Covid-19 by contributing their work in critical sectors of the economic development including health industry.

The Migrants: Who Are They?: In general understanding 'human migration' is the movement of people from one place to other in the different parts of the world. There may be several reasons for human movements and that type of migration include (a) internal migration – moving within a region, state, country, or continent (b) external migration – moving to a different state, country

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or continent (c) emigration – leaving one country to shift another (d) immigration – moving into a new country (e) return migration – returning back to a place where someone came from (f) seasonal migration – moving with each season or in response to labor or climate¹ (<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/introduction-human-migration> retrieved on 07.05.2021 at 9.30 pm). All the above types of movements fall under the broader umbrella of human migration. There is no universally accepted definition of the term migrant. Migrants may be granted a different legal status in the country of their stay. They may have different interpretations regarding their entitlement access to health care services as per the given law of the land covered under international law. Such as access to health for all in line with the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development Goal 3 i.e. ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages² (Apart Together Survey: Preliminary Overview of Refugees and Migrants Self-Reported Impact of Covid-19, 2020, WHO).

The UN Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration suggest an “International Migrant” as any person who has changed his or her country of usual residence, distinguishing between “short-term migrants” and “long-term migrants”. The time duration for both “short-term migrant” and “long-term migrants” varies from countries to countries. In some countries who have changed their countries of usual residence for at least three months but less than one year is considered as “short-term migrants”. Whereas people who have changed their usual place residence at least one year before is considered as the “long-term migrants”³ (World Migration Report).

The negative impact of Covid-19 on the health and living conditions of refugees and migrants may have impact on the families they have left behind in countries of their origin. The plight of migrants during this Covid-19 crisis has been made public by media, online stories, blogs, reports and posts. It is necessary to understand how the migrants have experienced this lethal pandemic and its consequences on them.

Methods

This is an exploratory study employs mainly the secondary sources of literature available from the newspaper articles and internet sources. Physically very few books have been referred due to Covid-19 restrictions and closure of the public libraries. The reports of World Health Organization, World Migration Report, reports of

International Labour Organization, World Bank, etc. are of immensely useful obtaining necessary information for completing this paper.

Results

The review of available literature in the form of reports, surveys have resulted the following findings substantiated with some facts and figures provided below.

The Impact on Mobility and Migration: Since knowing the severity of Covid-19 pandemic hit, with protective measures many nation states imposed travel restrictions prohibiting entry of residents from other countries, and some countries have closed their borders entirely. Labour migration has been temporarily suspended in many countries and migration processing and assistance to refugees are slowed down. Across the world this initiative has not only taken during the 1st wave of Covid-19 but also repeated with more stringent actions and restrictive measure in the 2nd wave of Covid-19 hit. These travel restrictions and concerns over exposing migrant workers, refugees to Covid-19 have forced the International Organization for Migration and the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees to temporarily suspend refugees resettlement travels.

As of March 1st, 2021, emigrants from the 20 countries (mentioned in the Table No -1) with their highest number of Covid-19 cases accounted for 31 per cent of the total international migrant stock and they had sent an estimated 37 per cent of all remittances globally to their countries of origin in 2019 (GMDAC analysis based on UN DESA⁴; World Bank⁵; WHO⁶) the official figures based on tested cases and recorded deaths caused by Covid-19 using different criteria for counting deaths by different countries. The following table shows the highest numbers of Covid-19 cumulative cases in the 20 countries as of 1 March 2021.

Table no-1 indicates that immigrants accounted for at least 3.7 per cent of the population in 14 of the 20 countries with highest number of Covid-19 cases, and this share is more than 7 per cent in 9 of these countries^{4,6} (GMDA analysis based on UN DESA, 2020; WHO, 2021). In comparison to the global share of international migrants that comprising of 3.6 percent of the total population; international migrants are overrepresented in these 20 countries.

The border restrictions imposed by countries have a tremendous impact on the mobility of migrants and the role of humanitarian organizations. Between 11 March 2020,

Table 1: Migrants in Countries with the Highest Number of Cumulative COVID-19 Cases, as of 1st March 2021

Sl. No	Country	Confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 of the population, as of 4 Mar 2021*	Migrants as share of population (%), mid-2020	Share of working age migrants (20-64 years) in migrant stock (%), mid-2020	Share of persons 65 years and older in migrant stock (%), mid-2020	Share of persons 65 years and older in population (%), mid-2020
1	United States of America	8 581.02	15.3	77.2	14.5	16.6
2	India	808.47	0.4	70.7	21.6	18.7
3	Brazil	5 008.92	0.5	59.3	15.7	6.3
4	Russian Federation	2 931.97	8.0	76.7	16.9	21.7
5	United Kingdom	6 169.76	13.8	77.4	11.0	8.7
6	France	5 694.92	13.1	67.6	22.6	9.0
7	Spain	6 694.90	14.6	80.7	9.0	11.4
8	Italy	4 888.10	10.6	84.4	7.1	18.7
9	Turkey	3 229.01	7.2	70.9	5.9	9.6
10	Germany	2 936.16	18.8	70.2	21.4	20.1
11	Colombia	4 440.78	3.7	57.6	2.6	6.6
12	Argentina	4 705.15	5.0	68.4	14.2	5.5
13	Mexico	1 626.58	0.9	34.8	4.5	23.3
14	Poland	4 585.37	2.2	36.9	40.8	20.8
15	Iran (Islamic Republic)	1 972.43	3.3	51.4	2.5	16.9
16	South Africa	2 554.12	4.8	81.8	7.1	7.6
17	Ukraine	3 120.48	11.4	72.9	20.3	9.1
18	Indonesia	494.96	0.1	78.5	5.0	15.5
19	Peru	4 058.91	3.7	61.4	2.9	20.0
20	Czechia	11 850.41	5.1	87.6	5.5	6.6
Global Average		3.6	73.2	12.2	9.3	

Source: WHO, 2021 (accessed on 4 March 2021); GMDAC analysis based on UN DESA, 2020

* Note that these are prevalence rates, which are based on the total number of all confirmed cases of COVID-19 (including new and pre-existing cases). These are not to be confused with incidence rates, which are based on the number of new cases of COVID-19 during a particular time period.

when the WHO declared Covid-19 a pandemic, and 22nd February 2021, nearly 105,000 movement restrictions were implemented around the world⁷. At the same time, 189 countries have issued 795 exceptions to these restrictions for enabling mobility (ibid). As per the estimation, between 1 March and July 2020 there is a sharp decline of nearly 2 million international migrants all over the world in comparison to the expected estimate between mid-1990s and mid-1920⁴. Migration flows to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries measured by new permits issued are estimated to have fallen by 46 percent in the first half of 2020 and by the end of 2020 was historical low for migration to OECD

countries (OECD, 2020a). The drop in migration inflows suggest that the population in Germany did not grow for the first time in the last decade due to a decline in immigration. (German Federal Statistics Office, 2021). Similarly in Australia, net migration for 2020/2021 is expected to be negative for the first time since 1945 and this will lead to the lowest population growth in a century (Australian Government Centre for Population, 2020). The information related to Covid-19 pandemic is constantly evolving, the figures and other data are being updated in migration data portal on the regular basis⁸ (<https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/migration-data-relevant-covid-19-pandemic> retrieved on 29.05.2021).

International Migration and Covid-19: With the emergence of capitalism and growth of industrial society all over the world, the population migration has been intensified. Now the Diaspora communities from different countries are scattered all over the world. The growth of industries have created livelihood opportunities for different set of unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled and highly skilled professionals in different countries of the world resulting short term, long term, seasonal and permanent migration. These professional migrants play a major role in the process of nation building of their host countries and their contribution to economic development of respective countries cannot be undermined. Most of the countries have their own emigration and citizenship rules and it has been abide by the international migrants.

Worldwide about 272 million international migrants (about 3.5% of the World's population) are more vulnerable than others because of personal, social, situational and structural factors. Their vulnerabilities may be understood in crisis situations like the case with the Covid-19 pandemic. Particularly the persons displaced internally and across borders are at risk. Among them majority of 25.9 million refugees and 41.3 internally displaced persons from developing countries are worst hit and badly affected by the pandemic. (World Migration Report 2020)

Table 2: International Migrants, 1970–2019

Year	Number of migrants	Migrants as a % of the world's population
1970	84,460,125	2.3%
1975	90,368,010	2.2%
1980	101,983,149	2.3%
1985	113,206,691	2.3%
1990	153,011,473	2.9%
1995	161,316,895	2.8%
2000	173,588,441	2.8%
2005	191,615,574	2.9%
2010	220,781,909	3.2%
2015	248,861,296	3.4%
2019	271,642,105	3.5%

Source: UN DESA, 2008, 2019a, 2019b.

Note: The number of entities (such as States, territories and administrative regions) for which data were made available in the 2019 UN DESA *Revision of International Migrant Stock* was 232. In 1970, the number of entities was 135.

Covid-19 Impact on Migrants Health: The Covid-19 response to health of an individual largely depends on their body immunity. Some migrants including both unskilled, semi skilled and high skilled workers may be healthier than their receiving communities and others may have their health vulnerabilities due to following reasons.

- Socio-economic status
- Living in slums and crowded unhygienic environments
- Restrictions to eligibility for access to health services due to migration status
- Socio-cultural, language barriers in timely receiving health related information in host countries.

There are other causes like the lack of appropriate health insurance due to inadequate financial resources negatively impact health of migrant workers ability to take preventive measures against Covid-19 and to receive necessary medical care if they become contaminated.

The closure of the boarders with countries' lockdown, many support and care services provided by civil society groups to irregular migrants has severely affected access to care because outside activity needs to be registered with authorities or they may be reluctant to enter medical for fear of being reported regarding data sharing and law enforcement authorities. The irregular migrants living in crowded environments like refugee camps and highly populated migrant labour camps become a major challenge for implementation of preventive measures such as social distancing. The rumors, misinformation and politicization of issues have been stigmatizing and excluding migrants to carry the risk of higher contamination when they hide potential symptoms rather than seeking for medical attention. This has caused the second wave of Covid-19 transmission in the society leading to long term consequences for migrants' assimilation and social solidarity. The huge economic depletion, the loss of control being felt across the communities due to closure of borders by nation states, restrictions of population and vehicular movement, maintaining social distancing and feeling of isolation provided insights into the great effort made to face by the marginalised migrant communities in their daily life across the world. The following figure shows the details of international migrants by major region of residence spanning between the periods 2005 to 2019. The plight of the international migrants increased to many fold because of Covid-19 restrictions.

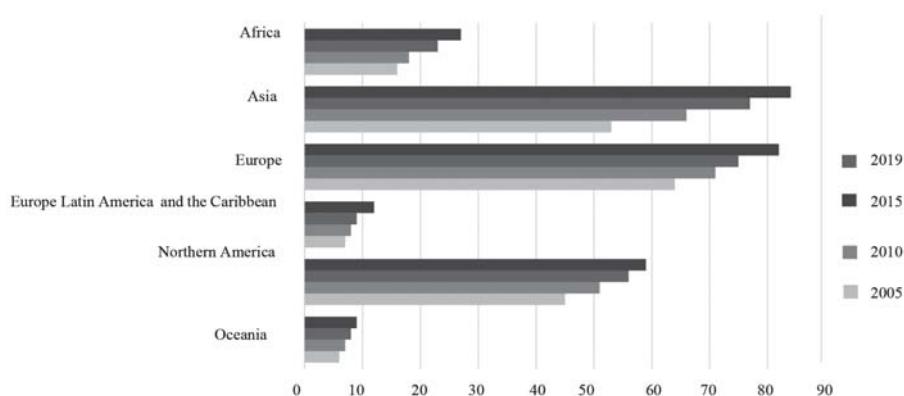


Fig. 1 International Migrants, by Major Region of Residence, 2005 to 2019 (Millions)

Source: UN DESA, 2019 a, data www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp (accessed 18 September 2019).

Note: Categorization based on UN DESA geographic regions

Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected every section of the population across the world but it has a very worst impact on poor migrants and marginal sections of the society. It was anticipated that the disease will come to an end soon and normalcy will return. When the imposed lockdowns by respective countries at different phases began to initiate the unlock process, it was believed that the Covid-19 situation is getting improved. But all of sudden many countries in the world have witnessed the hard hit second wave of Covid-19. The second wave of pandemic has further worsened the business, market, economy, livelihood as well as huge number of loss of life. The expectation of getting quick relieved from Covid-19 positive around the world was not so simple rather the world has to go a long way along with Corona virus in its environment until and unless human civilization is coming out with an effective vaccine to permanently resist the virus in human body.

The New Normal, Migration and Second Wave Covid-19 Pandemic: The new normal is a state of social condition in which economy, society, etc. started to settle following a crisis when this differs from the earlier social situation that prevailed prior to starting of the crisis. The term new normal has been employed in relation to World War I, financial crisis of 2007-2008, September 11 attacks, the aftermath of the 2008-2012 global recession, the Covid-19 pandemic and other event. (“There’s nothing new about the ‘new normal’ – and here’s why”, World Economic Forum⁹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/theres-nothing-new-about-this-new-normal-heres-why/> retrieved on 09.04.2021.

The framing of the word new normal contends that things will never be the same as they were before – so welcome to a new world order. By using this language, we reimagining where we were previously relative to where we are now, appropriating our present as the standard.

The concept of ‘new normal’ is not deployed for the first time to understand the uncertainty posed due to novel corona virus and aftermath. Especially the challenges posed with no cure in sight, every sections of the society including politicians, businessman, industrialist, bureaucrats, academicians, policy makers, media persons, and different occupational groups including migrant workers perpetuated this rhetoric of new normal and imagined for settling a new life.

The normal way of societal functioning is governed by standard principles as determined by society across the world. But in a current situation, the social custom, values, normative orders etc. are different during these Covid-19 restrictions imposed by nation states. It was expected to become usual and typical in point of time when we were thinking post Covid-19 hit normalcy will return with new set up of social arrangements. But the ongoing second wave of Covid-19 infection cases and casualty all over the world was giving strong messages which compel us to think there is nothing like new normal

Box 1: The Covid-19 Social Impact Assessment by OXFAM

- Oxfam warns that Covid-19 could push half a billion people in poverty.
- The impact will be most deeply felt in the poorest regions of the world
- The UN warns that \$2.5 trillion is needed to support developing countries through the crisis.
- Oxfam has warned that a recession caused by Covid-19 could push an extra half a billion people into poverty – 8 percent of the world population – unless urgent action is taken.

Source: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-pandemic-half-a-billion-people-into-poverty> retrieved on 09.04.2021 at 10.09 pm

for both regional as well as international migrant workers. Therefore, the new normal cannot be seen and examine along the line of Covid-19 hit social restorations at this current juncture. Because post Covid-19 normalcy has not worked for major sections of the world's population and a new paradigm is yet to return until the time we imagine and realise for a Covid-19 virus free world.

The second wave of Covid-19 has diluted the term 'new normal' social conditions where people were thinking to start living with a hope to adjust the changing time. People have accepted that as long as the world has not found a cure or vaccine for Covid-19 we may have to adjust a new way of living and going about our lives with other social activities. We have learned to adapt our lifestyles to live with them most probably for a longer period of time. (<https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/health/2020/05/21/covid-19-what-does-the-039new-normal039-mean> retrieved on 09.04.2021 at 10. 17 pm)

The Covid-19 second wave hitting many countries and in this context of current global economic conditions, the UN special rapporteur on trafficking Siobhan Mullally reported the UN General Assembly that second wave of Covid-19 has increased the risk of exploitation for weaker sections in the society especially women, children, migrants and other vulnerable groups.

In many countries across the world, the closure of non-essential retail establishments, including shopping malls, bars, restaurants, multiplexes, amusement parks, gardens, auto dealerships, food centres and eateries in different metropolitan cities have triggered the both national and international migrations. (https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/the-second-wave-migrant-crisis-looms-again-as-covid-19-curbs-expand-121040700095_1.html retrieved on 09.04.2021 at 11.26 pm)

Covid-19 Impacts on Migrants' Labour Market: The closed business, empty roads, calm streets in the city and towns, closed airport, railway stations, amusement parks, cinema halls, closure of educational institutions, people with mask in the public place have become the symbols of the Covid-19. The Corona Virus crisis and subsequent restriction has brought issues of inequality and injustice into the limelight.

The Covid-19 pandemic further highlights the widening gaps in the treatment of low paid and low skilled workers who build cities, farm foods, deliver products, and perform a wide variety of essential services. These categories of workers are generally migrants and often hired to perform jobs that can only be performed at the site

Box: 2: Covid-19 Impacts on Migrant Workers, Women and Children

- Taking advantages of vulnerability human traffickers adapting new strategies rapidly
- Women have been hard hit by collapse of informal economies
- With closing down of schools children are increasingly at risk of sexual exploitation and the worst form of child labour
- All over the world many migrant workers remained stranded with no way home and no access to social benefits
- Low income group of workers have been hard hit by rising unemployment.
- Governments and civil society are struggling to provide effective protection to victims of trafficking
- Identifying the traffickers and their agencies and assist the victims became difficult as governments divert their resources other areas during this pandemic.
- The discrimination, poverty, and limited enforcement of workers' rights have increased the risks of exploitation.

Source: <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/28251/un-women-kids-and-migrants-at-greater-risk-in-second-covid-wave> (Retrieved on 09.04.2021 at 10.23 pm)

itself such as farming, slaughter house, mines, oil fields, factory, industries, sweeping and cleaning, construction works, etc. among the hardest hit by the pandemic have been the millions of migrant workers. (<https://www.ihrb.org/focus-areas/migrant-workers/covid19-migrant-workers-overview> retrieved on 28.05.2021 at 9 pm)

The Covid-19 pandemic has specific factors significantly affecting immigrants' labour market integration. In general almost all the subcontinents immigrants tend to be overrepresented among the employees with temporary contracts and particularly in European and Middle-east countries. The work permission conditions also enhance their vulnerability in terms of a job loss, if they do not allow for either change of their employers or their profession according to the labour market. The poor migrants also have fewer networks and the importance of such networks likely to be increased when the labour market conditions are worsen.

The above factors have been experienced in several occasions such as the global financial and recession of 2008. At this current juncture also there are several factors that specifically enhance vulnerability of migrants' labour market. It is undoubted that the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic occurred following record high inflows of migrants to European and Middle-east countries, among which many of them are refugees and asylum seekers. In this crisis situation, the new arrivals tend to hard hit with lasting negative impact on their long term employment prospects. Across the world the pandemic has particularly affected employment in a number of services sectors where immigrants are largely overrepresented. Particularly this is the case with security, cleaning, tourism and hospitality industry, which have been hard hit during this lockdown. For example in the European Union, immigrants account for a full quarter of employment in the hospitality industry, twice their share in overall employment. In Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Switzerland and Sweden, they even account for at least 40% of Employment in this sector. (<https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de/> retrieved on 09.04.2021 at 10.35 pm)

The international migration largely affected due to global lockdown declared by the countries to break the chain of spread by the Covid-19 virus. During this crisis time people are having strong nostalgic mood to return to their home countries so that they can able to meet their near and dear one. Causing the huge loss and declined trend to world economy because of lockdown the reverse migration have seen all over the world both within the country and as well outside all over the world. Most of the countries in the world who are under lockdown sending back to migrant workers to their respective countries may have to think of about the role of migrant workers for the growth of their economy.

It is expected that, once the pandemic subsides, the restrictive border policies of the countries with governments practice of hard-line migration policies which is tough to change may not do much for the flow of migrant workers. However, the policy makers may have forced to rethink how they are going to view about migrant

workers who play a decisive role in the functioning of their economies. (<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/covid-19-coronavirus-migration-migrant-workers-immigration-policy-health-securitization-risk-travel-bubbles/>). If the labour market is not migrant friendly how their psychological conditions will remain stable. For the physical and mental wellbeing of migrants a secure and sustainable livelihood is very much essential. But the Covid-19 restrictions and emerging crisis due to the pandemic has created a vacuum for the livelihood opportunity and mental health of migrants.

Concluding Remarks

It is truth that with the shutting down of various sectors of economies, closure of their borders by different nation states due to fear of invisible enemy Covid-19 is leading to the hardening of migration policies all over the world. In such a situation the demand for the rise of new health security in the form of medical benefits, ex-gratia payment in case of death in working place, health insurance, etc. for the migrant workers are likely to be the major cause of concern. □

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