



## PRESS RELEASE

New Delhi, 17 December 2020

### **Lack of Housing and Land Security Contribute to India's Migrant Workers' Crisis, Finds New Report**

#### **Urgent Need for Affordable Housing Options and Secure Access to Land**

On the eve of [International Migrants Day](#) (commemorated by the United Nations on 18 December every year), **Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN)** released a new report titled, ***In Search of Home: A Study on Migrant Workers' Access to Housing and Land***, based on the findings of interviews conducted with 248 migrant workers from Delhi who had returned to their villages during India's pandemic-induced lockdown (25 March to 31 May 2020). The study finds that migrant workers lack access to adequate housing and land, which results in their inadequate living conditions, violates their human rights, and also contributed to their mass exodus from cities during the national lockdown.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted, more than ever before, the critical link between adequate housing and the protection of health and life. As states imposed lockdowns and issued 'stay at home' orders to prevent the spread of the pandemic, those without homes were left without adequate protection. When cities shut down, migrant workers were stranded without work, income, food, and in many instances, housing. Despite the nationwide lockdown, in the absence of social protection and adequate state support, migrant workers felt compelled to leave cities to return to their villages, often at great risk to their lives, just to reach 'home.'

Given reports of the distress experienced by migrant workers, especially the sudden homelessness experienced by them on declaration of the lockdown, HLRN conducted a primary research study (between August and September 2020) to understand their housing and living conditions and needs.

#### **Main Findings of the Study**

- 1. Despite government orders, migrant workers were harassed for rent during the lockdown:** Nearly **16 per cent** of the study participants said they were **harassed by home-owners for rent** during the lockdown. This is also due to the unregulated nature of rental housing, absence of formal contracts, and the lack of tenure security over rental housing in Delhi.
- 2. Lack of access to affordable housing exacerbated the migrant workers' crisis:** Over **12 per cent** of the respondents indicated **direct loss of housing**, including through **forced eviction**, by home-owners, as one of the main reasons for leaving Delhi during the national lockdown.
- 3. Most migrant workers live in cities for a considerable period of their lives without access to adequate housing:** **44 per cent** of the workers had been living in Delhi for at least **10 years** or more, with or without their families.
- 4. A large number of migrant workers do not have access to adequate housing in their villages** as well as in the cities to which they migrate: While all migrant workers interviewed by HLRN reported having access to some form of housing in their village, nearly 70 per cent of them said this was owned together as a joint family. Over **74 per cent** of the respondents stated that their **houses in the village are constructed of mud** and other material (*kutchha*).
- 5. Landlessness is a major challenge faced by rural people and a significant reason for their migration to cities:** The majority of survey respondents (**56 per cent**) did not have access to much land in their villages. While land ownership is mostly joint with the extended family, the size of land plots is small and not sufficient for cultivation of crops or to sustain livelihoods.

6. **Unemployment and insecure housing and land rights are major challenges in rural areas:** Over **86 per cent** of the people cited **lack of work** as a major challenge in rural areas, while **31 per cent** highlighted the **absence of secure housing and land**.
7. About **88 per cent** of the migrant workers want the government to provide employment guarantee/livelihood security in rural and urban areas, while **62 per cent** of them want affordable, adequate housing options with tenure security in cities and villages.

## Recommendations

Based on the study findings and demands of the migrant workers interviewed, Housing and Land Rights Network proposes the following **recommendations** to the central and state governments, in order to improve living conditions of migrant workers and uphold their human rights:

1. Develop a **comprehensive right to housing policy** aimed at providing affordable and adequate housing for all, with a focus on the most marginalized and excluded. In particular, focus on developing low-cost housing options along a ‘housing continuum,’ including adequate hostels for single migrant workers/single working people, collective/shared housing arrangements, social rental housing, and affordable housing ownership models with access to finance. The scheme to create Affordable Rental Housing Complexes in urban areas must define ‘affordability’ based on income, prevent exclusion by privatization, and be accessible to all those in need.
2. Conduct extensive surveys and **collect accurate data on the number of migrant workers**, including data disaggregated by gender, caste, family size, state of origin, and other essential elements.
3. Impose a **national moratorium on evictions**, including on evictions related to the inability to pay rent. Assist low-income communities with financial support/rental vouchers to pay rent arrears.
4. Provide **security of tenure over housing and land** in urban and rural areas. Ensure **access to adequate and sufficient land**, with tenure security, for people living in rural areas, in order to overcome landlessness, guarantee livelihood and food security, and address forced migration. Focus on developing homestead legislation in states and implement human rights guidelines and standards.
5. Ensure that state housing schemes and the central government’s Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Urban and Gramin (Rural) are implemented properly and that homeless and landless people are able to access them.
6. Provide **stronger social protection measures** for the working poor, including through the provision of unemployment benefits, social security and pension, comprehensive health insurance, disability insurance, and a **universal basic income** for the entire country.
7. Address the **special needs of women, children, and older persons** who migrate to cities for work.
8. **Universalize the Public Distribution System** and ensure the provision of free food grains, cooking oil, spices, tea, sugar, and essential food items to all those in need—even those without ration cards—across urban and rural India.
9. Ensure **comprehensive policy linkages between rural and urban** issues and address them as two ends of the same habitat spectrum.
10. Make efforts to ensure that **all laws**—related to land, housing, agriculture, and farming aims at protecting the interests and **human rights** of affected communities, including women, and are developed in close **consultation** with them.

Migrant workers are largely responsible for building, and for the efficient functioning of, cities and industries across India. Their exodus from large cities during the pandemic-induced lockdown highlighted the precariousness of their living conditions in the city and persistent state neglect and apathy towards them, as also reflected in their places of origin in rural areas. Housing and Land Rights Network hopes that the findings of this report will inform state policies on migrant workers, including those related to housing, land, and associated rights. We emphasize the need for a strong **human-rights based COVID-19 recovery process**, with the rights to housing and land at its core, in order to guarantee the dignity, peace, security, and safety of all individuals, groups, and communities.

---

*For more information, please contact: 98319-43885 / 98182-05234*

**Housing and Land Rights Network**

G-18/1 Nizamuddin West, New Delhi – 110013, India

[contact@hlrn.org.in](mailto:contact@hlrn.org.in) | [www.hlrn.org.in](http://www.hlrn.org.in) | @HLRN\_India