

Migrant Workers in Goa: Survey Findings and Analysis

Zothan Mawii & Iona Eckstein

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Prologue

This report was written by Tandem Research based on a survey conducted with migrant workers in Goa affected by Covid-19 lockdowns. The survey was facilitated by the Goa Humanitarian Helpline volunteers. The report collates the main findings of the survey, before offering policy recommendations to support migrant workers in Goa in both the immediate and mid-long term. The survey data was collected between 19th and 29th May 2020, when many migrant workers were deciding whether to return to their home states (via the Shramik trains or independently), or to remain in Goa. We would like to extend our gratitude to the CSO volunteers who conducted the survey, as well as the respondents who gave their time during an extremely stressful period.

Since the survey was conducted, many migrants are still stranded in a state of limbo, hoping to return to work. Some did return home via the Shramik trains and buses in extremely poor conditions, whilst an unknown number attempted the journey on foot. In Goa, some industries are reopening and remaining migrants are being offered work in sectors, such as construction. However, in a bid to increase efficiencies and make a financial recovery, there is a risk that industries may drop labour standards forcing workers into poor conditions of work.¹ There also remains a significant problem with the dissemination of official government information, especially in languages spoken by migrant workers.

¹ TNN. (2020, May 10). Odisha, Goa go for 12-hr workdays, Karnataka may ease labour norms too: India News - Times of India. Retrieved June 19, 2020, from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/odisha-goa-go-for-12-hr-workdays-karnataka-may-ease-labour-norms-too/articleshow/75653258.cms>

As the situation for migrant workers is in constant flux, the challenges they face are also changing. However, our key recommendation around improving official communication channels between government and citizens, improving working conditions and creating decent and sustainable job opportunities in Goa, remain core areas for policy change moving forward.

Introduction

Covid-19 and the ensuing lockdown has had a devastating impact on informal workers and workers from economically weaker sections of society. The sudden implementation of the lockdown² meant that workers found themselves without jobs and earnings for an unknown period, as factories and construction sites were closed and the tourist industry came to a standstill. The lockdown was poorly planned and left workers in severe distress with few alternatives, while state transport services remained shut during the first stage of lockdown.³ In the days succeeding the announcement of the lockdown, the state government announced rent relief measures and directed employers to pay workers their salaries, but did not enforce these directives.⁴ The central government announced additional measures including free rations for 3 months, cash transfers to women and farmers, and free LPG cylinders.⁵ However, many migrant workers have not been able to access these measures. Eligibility depends on prior registration to certain schemes by the central or state government. For others, it is simply because they do not have the appropriate documentation to access the Public Distribution System (PDS) in a state other than their native state.

For the most part, migrant workers have been reliant on relief measures organised by the Goa Humanitarian Helpline along with other CSOs. In Goa, the Goa Humanitarian Helpline⁶, a collective of various CSOs have been organising aid for migrant workers and other informal workers in the state.

To better understand the issues facing migrant workers in Goa, a survey was designed by Tandem Research and carried out by volunteers of the Goa Humanitarian Helpline among 142 respondents over

² India went into lockdown on the 22nd March, 2020.

³ From March 22 - April 15, 2020

⁴ Rodrigues, S. (2020, March 29). Migrant workers must get salary and no demand of rent from landlords during lockdown: Centre. Retrieved June 19, 2020, from <https://goachronicle.com/migrant-workers-must-get-salary-no-rent-during-lockdown-centre/>

⁵ *21 Days and Counting: COVID-19 Lockdown, Migrant Workers, and the Inadequacy of Welfare Measures in India.* (n.d.). Stranded Workers' Action Network. Retrieved May 30, 2020, from <http://strandedworkers.in/mdocuments-library/>

⁶ Goa Humanitarian Helpline, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/GoaHumanitarians/about/>

3 weeks. The surveys were administered during food distribution activities in various clusters all over North Goa and South Goa (We surveyed in Colva as well). Respondents were picked at random by volunteers from those who came to collect relief supplies.

The aim of the survey was to collect data on the situation facing migrant workers in the state on account of the lockdown in order to make policy recommendations to the Goa government. The survey covered a few key areas – 1) respondents' basic demographic details, employment status and living situation, 2) respondents' access to relief measures announced by the government, 3) access to relief measures organised by CSOs, and 4) respondents' desire to return to their home states.

This report summarises the key findings from the survey along with policy recommendations to address some of the issues that arose through the results.

Demographics of Respondents

The survey was administered to 142 respondents, of which 63 percent were men and 37 percent were women (figure 1).

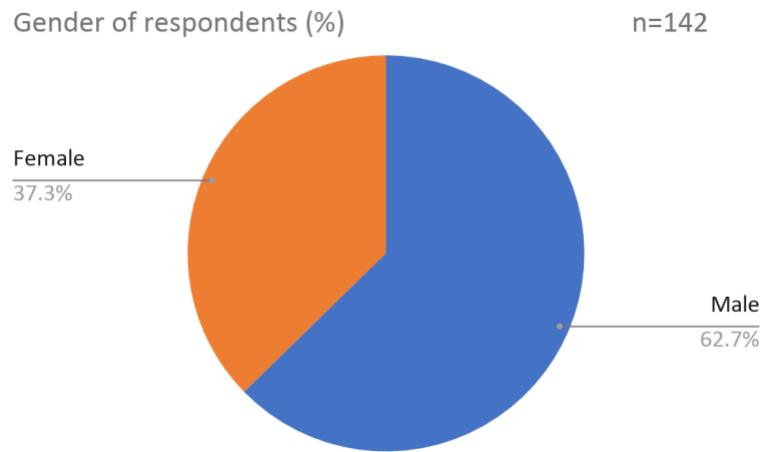


Figure 1

The vast majority of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 45, with the largest age bracket of respondents between 26-35 years (figure 2).

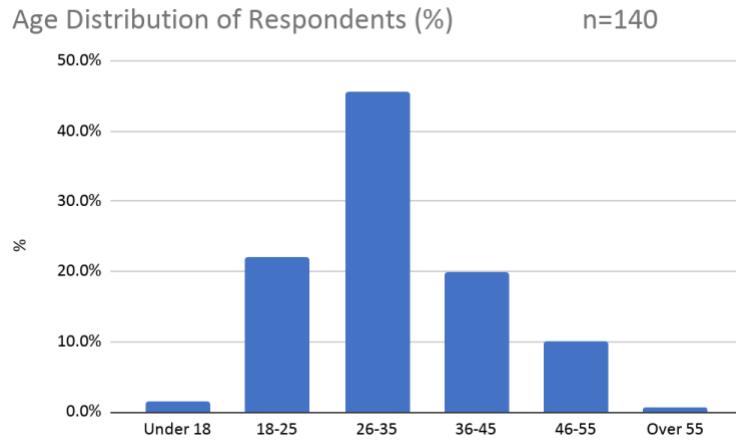


Figure 2

Regarding their home state or country, respondents came from a wide range of places, including Nepal and the North-Eastern states. However, as figure 3 shows, the largest group came from neighbouring state Karnataka (42 percent), followed by West Bengal (17 percent).

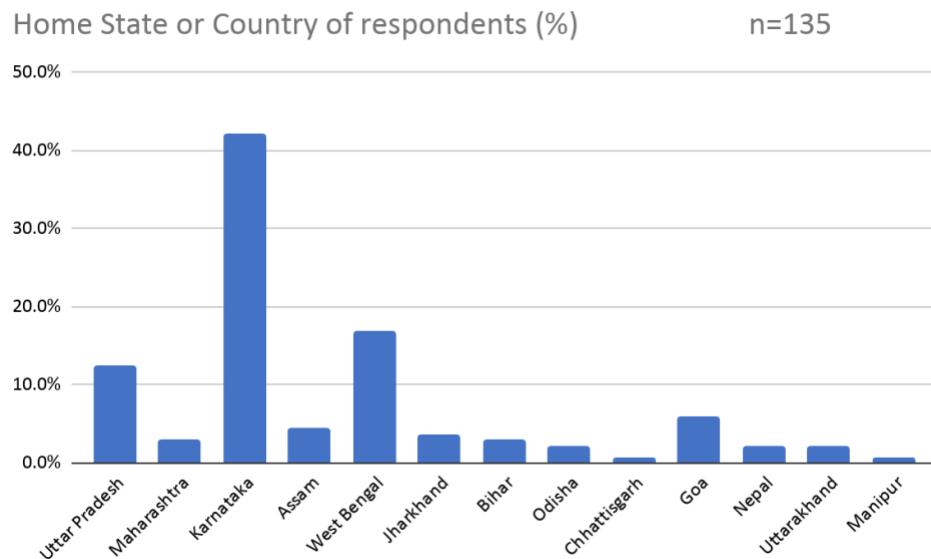


Figure 3

Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the size and importance of the tourist industry in Goa, 42 percent of respondents worked in hospitality-related activities, followed by 25 percent in construction (figure 4). Domestic work accounted for 10 percent of respondents, of which 85 percent were women.

Sector that respondent worked in Pre-Covid (%). (n=132)

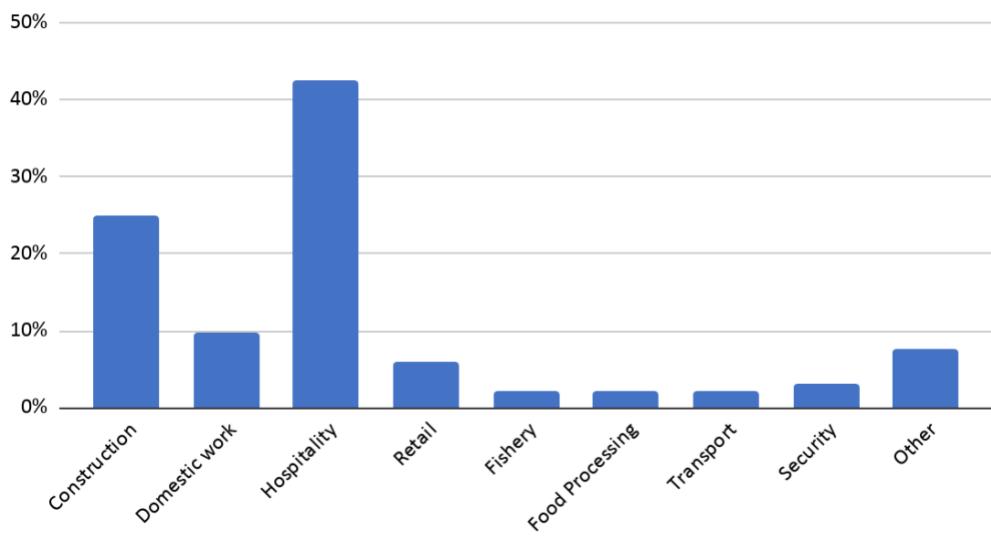


Figure 4

Living situation in Goa

The vast majority of respondents (66 percent) had been living in Goa for more than 4 years, with some long-term migrants living in the state for more than 10 years (figure 5). 16 percent had been in Goa for 2-4 years. The majority - 75 percent - lived with family members, such as their spouses, kids or parents.

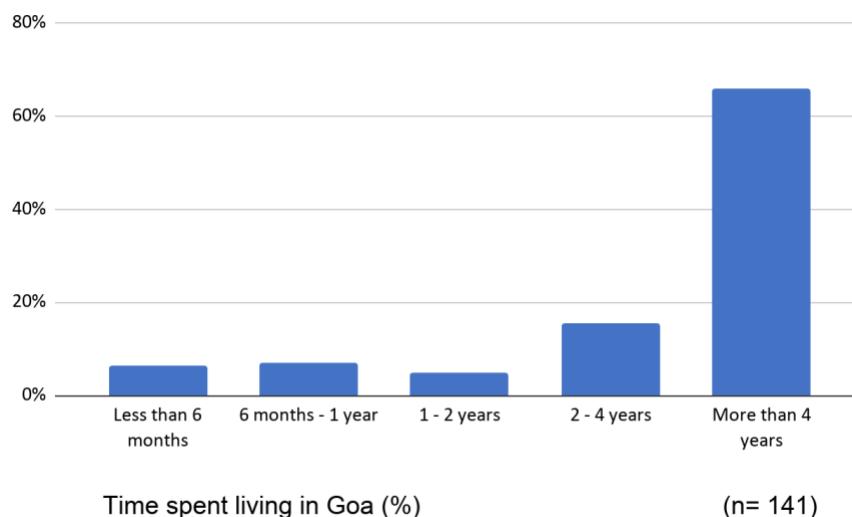


Figure 5

A few respondents got stuck in Goa when the lockdown was suddenly announced. One respondent stated that he had come to drop a family member who had come to Goa looking for work. Another had accompanied a family member to get a medical check-up.

Food security

The first round of a similar, but larger scale, survey of 4,000 workers conducted by the Centre for Sustainable Employment at Azim Premji University⁷ found that the PDS for food rations had been the most accessible and reliable source of food supplies for workers. However, in Goa, 90 percent of workers surveyed did not have access to PDS, as they did not have a ration card that was eligible to be used in the state (figure 6). This meant that the 3 month free PDS supplies announced by the government as part of its Covid-19 response remained inaccessible to them.

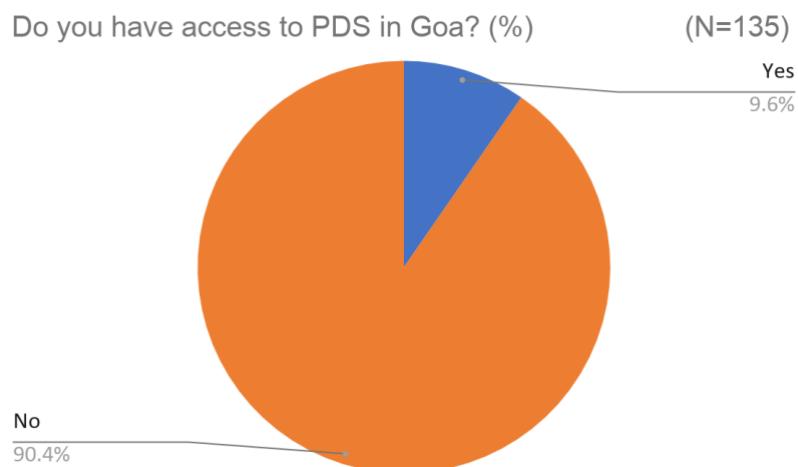


Figure 6

However, for the small minority that *did* have access to PDS in Goa, the majority - 77 percent - accessed food through this system (figure 7). This suggests that the system is effective as long as migrant workers are enrolled in the PDS in the state they are working in. This finding echoed that of the large-scale Azim Premji study which suggests that the PDS system should be expanded and universalised. The

⁷ COVID19: Analysis of Impact and Relief Measures. (n.d.). Retrieved June 19, 2020, from <https://cse.azimpromjiuniversity.edu.in/covid19-analysis-of-impact-and-relief-measures/>

government has announced plans to operationalise the One Nation, One Ration system that makes ration cards portable throughout the country in 2021.⁸

If you do have access to PDS in Goa, did you receive any food rations through the scheme? (%) (N=13)

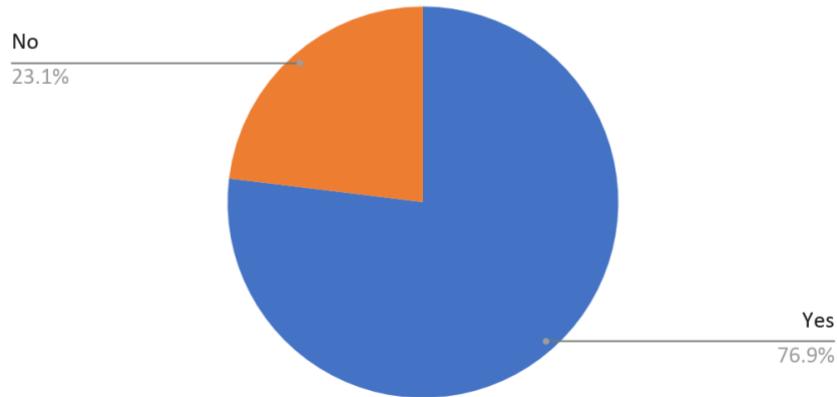


Figure 7

For those that did *not* have access to PDS in Goa, they relied on CSOs or their employer, for food supplies. Some employers had been distributing food supplies and cooked meals to their employees, with 26 percent stating they had received food stocks from their employers (figure 8).

⁸ Times of India, (May 14th 2020) Government announces 'one nation one ration card' for migrant workers, retrieved June 19 2020 from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/government-announces-one-nation-one-ration-card-for-migrant-workers/articleshow/75738707.cms>

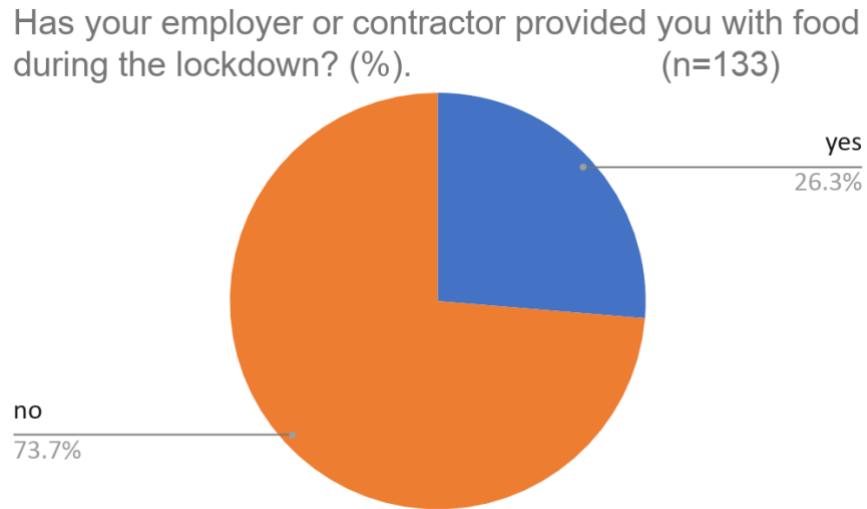


Figure 8

70 percent had received supplies from CSOs since the beginning of the lockdown. The supplies respondents received from CSOs or their employers lasted up to one week at a time.

Income Security

Regarding their pre-covid salary, 52 percent of respondents reported a monthly income of between INR 5,000 – 10,000, followed by 30 percent who earned between INR 10,000 – 15,000 per month prior to the lockdown (figure 9).

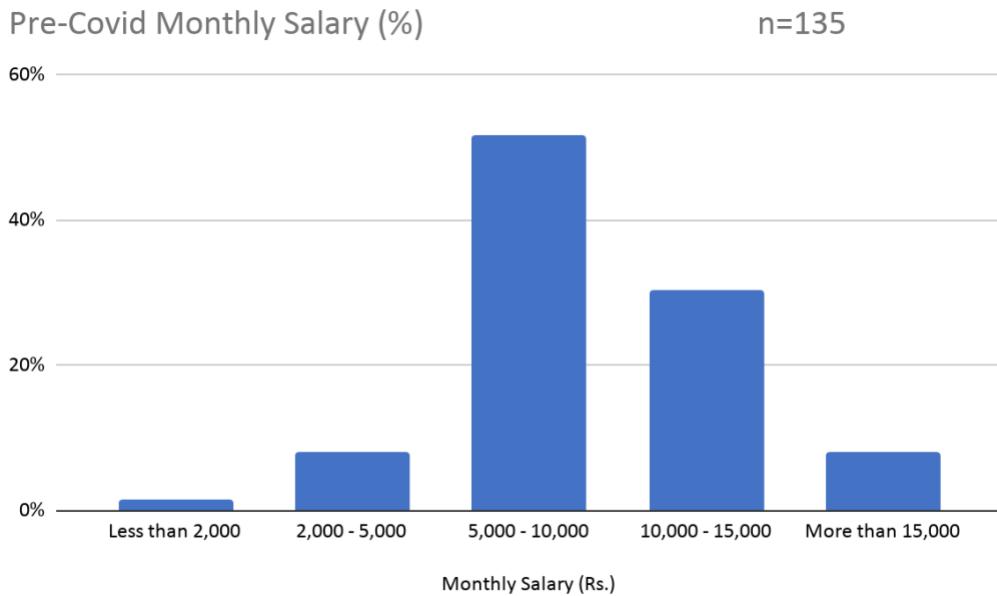


Figure 9

89 percent of respondents no longer receive a wage from their employers, whilst a lucky few - around 11 percent - continued to receive wages, in some cases, a reduced amount, through the lockdown, as shown in figure 10.

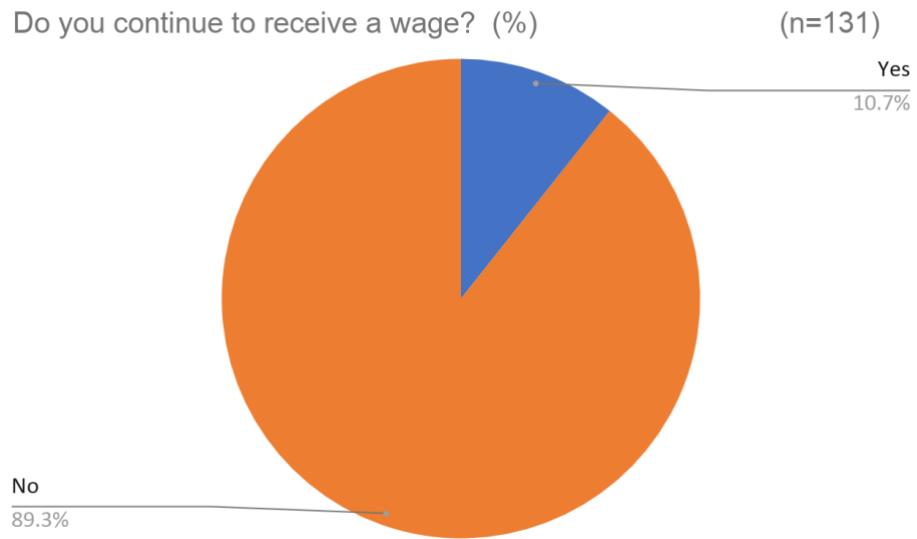


Figure 10

73 percent stated that their employment had not been officially terminated, but in the face of business closures and the termination of construction work, they had been unable to earn any money.

Regarding accommodation provisions, the vast majority of respondents (89 percent) reported that they continued to live in their rented accommodation. However, of those who stayed in rented accommodation, only 30 percent were actually aware of the rent relief measures - where the government of Goa had instructed landlords not to collect rent for one month on April 8th. Only a small minority - 5 percent - knew someone who had been evicted from their accommodation.

The central government's relief measures include cash transfers to female holders of Jan Dhan bank accounts and senior citizens, and free LPG cylinders under the Ujjwala scheme. Of the migrant workers surveyed, only 21 percent had a Jan Dhan account, or a household member who did (figure 11).

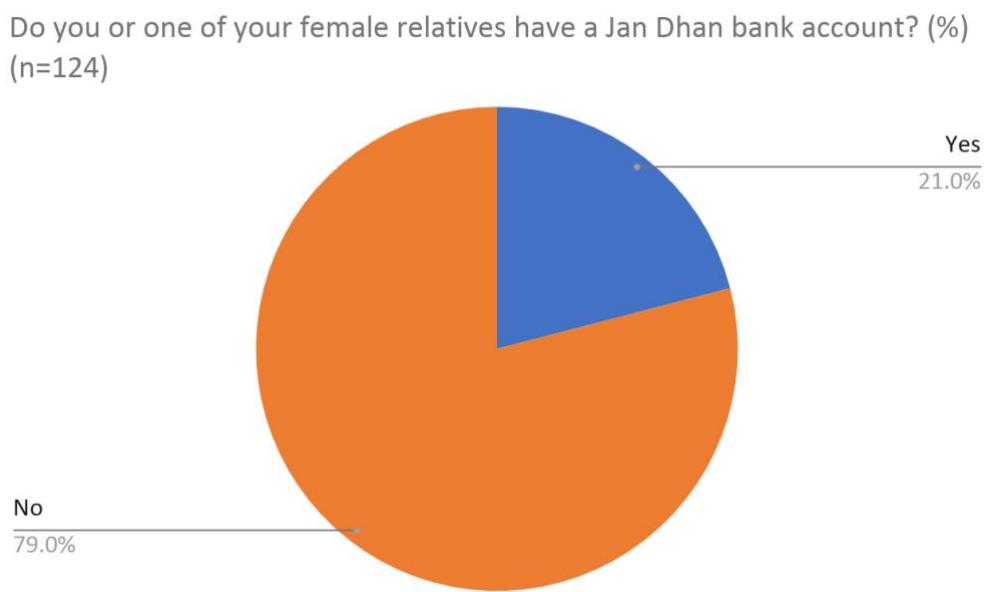


Figure 11

Of the minority who *did* have a Jan Dhan account, only 40 percent received the INR 500 cash transfer from the national government, as shown in figure 12.

Of those who answered 'Yes' to having an account, did you receive INR 500 to your account from the national government? (%) (n=25)

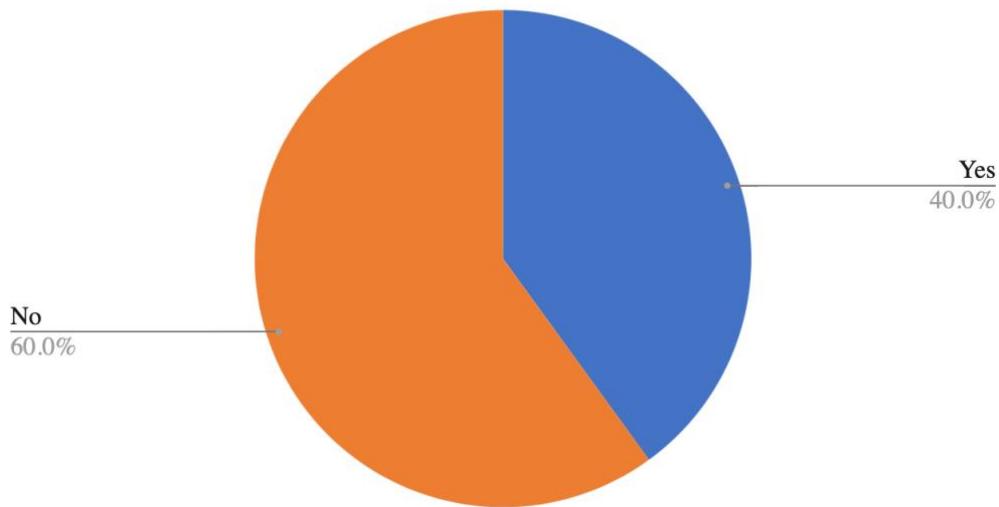


Figure 12

Only 17 percent of respondents were actually aware of the Ujjwala LPG cylinder scheme, and only 8 percent had accessed this scheme in Goa.

The survey was conducted 2 months into the lockdown, making it likely that respondents would have had to spend their savings (if they had any), or borrow money to make ends meet. 20 percent reported having to borrow money. Just 3 percent of respondents had resorted to selling their possessions for money. Of these, three respondents had sold their mobile phones in order to cover the cost of essentials, which were mostly food items.

As similar surveys have pointed out, access to cash is crucial for workers at this time. Cash is required to purchase mobile recharge packs, water, baby formula, milk, medicine, transportation and other essentials that may not be included in food packets. The Stranded Workers Action Network⁹ has been helping callers with micro cash transfers (average amount INR 205) to cover these essential costs.¹⁰

⁹ Stranded Workers' Action Network, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Charity-Organization/Stranded-Workers-Action-Network-113233390361026/>

¹⁰ *21 Days and Counting: COVID-19 Lockdown, Migrant Workers, and the Inadequacy of Welfare Measures in India*. (n.d.). Stranded Workers' Action Network. Retrieved May 30, 2020, from <http://strandedworkers.in/mdocuments-library/>

The Goa Board of Construction Workers had announced financial relief measures of INR 4,000 or INR 16,000 for workers registered with them. However, most of the respondents were not aware of this scheme, nor had they availed of this financial relief.

Information Gap

One common factor across all relief measures was the lack of official information reaching migrant workers. At 91 percent, an overwhelming majority of workers reported that they had not received **any** helpful information from the Goa government regarding the lockdown, its impact on their rights as workers or access to rights and entitlements, nor had they received communication regarding relief measures from governments that they could access (figure 13). A small minority mentioned receiving information from other state governments, such as their home state.

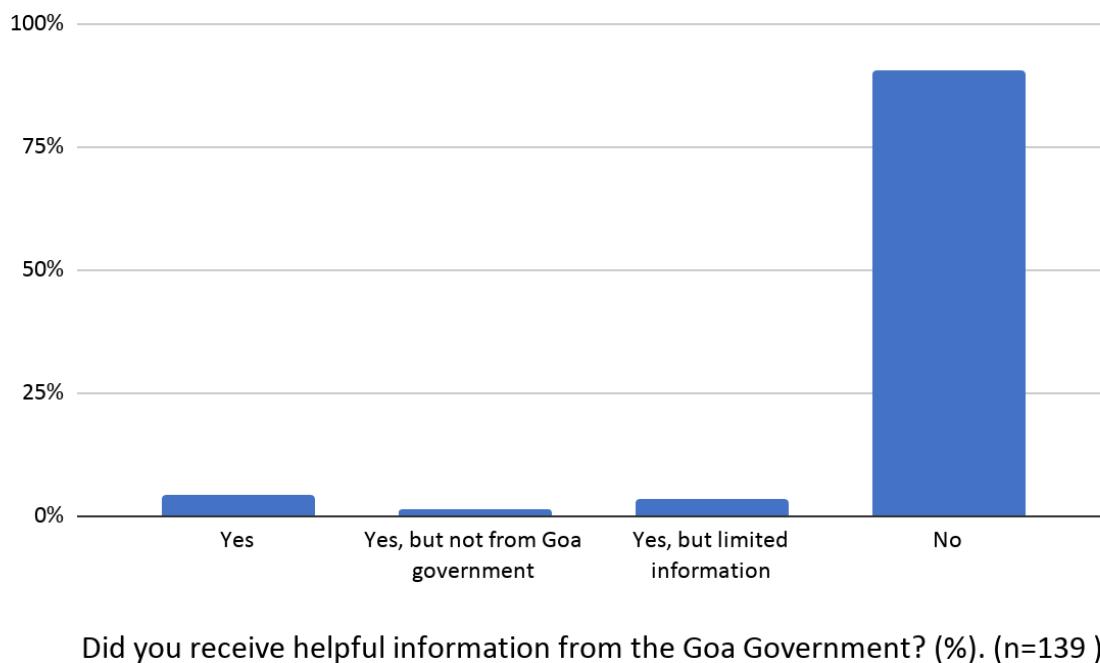


Figure 13

As mentioned above, just 30 percent knew about rent relief measures offered by the government (figure 14).

Of those who rented, do you know about the rent relief measures from the Goa government? (%). (n=132).

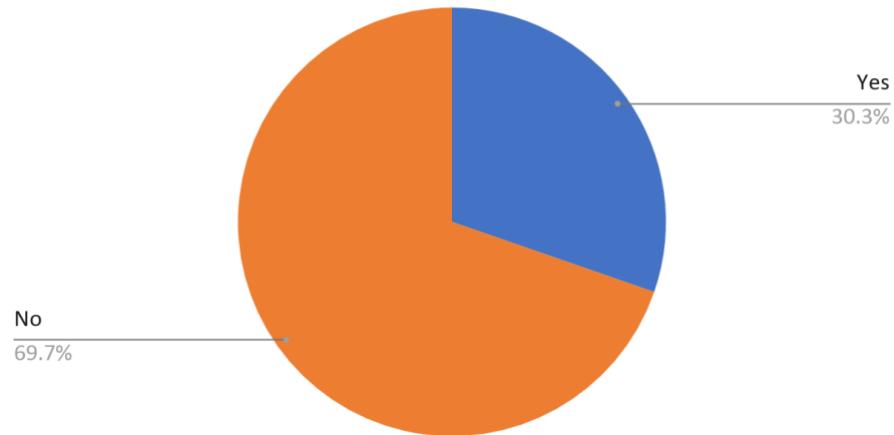


Figure 14

When asked about information regarding Shramik trains and safe passage home, 86 percent of respondents had not received any information from the government (figure 15). Some respondents had tried to find information for themselves – from online sources or other people who'd be in the know.

Have you received information about trains to take you home? (%) (n=101)

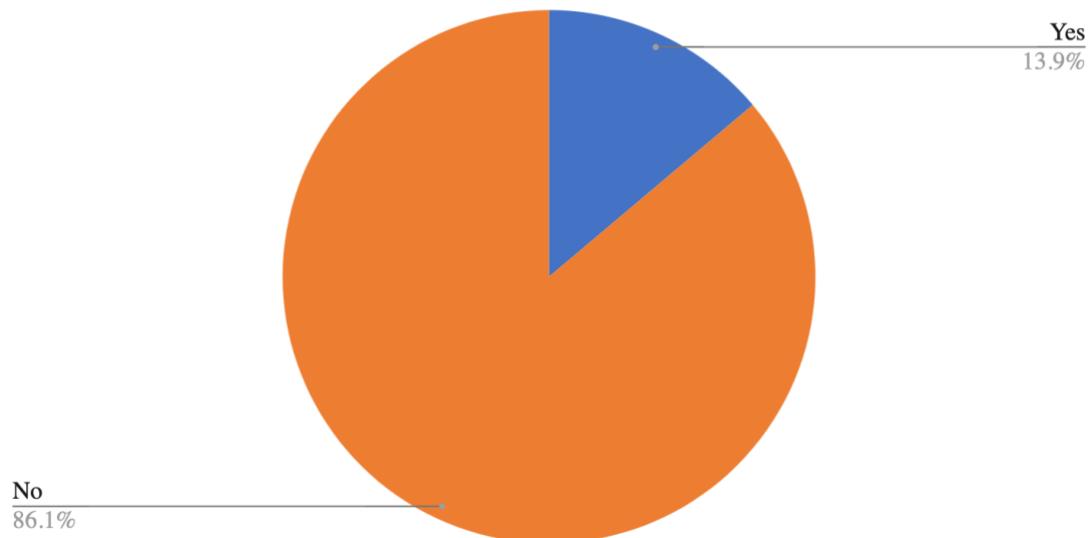


Figure 15

As is clear from this data, the communication and information gap that exists between the government and citizens has become stark. The government, in this time of crisis, has been unable to effectively communicate its processes, relief measures, and announcement to those who need it to the most. Information that does filter through is unreliable and incomplete, some workers stated that they had had very limited information such as *“Only got info that something will be provided to go home. But nothing after that.”* Additionally, sources stated different things, leading to confusion and panic. The confusion caused by inefficient communication has had a severe impact on many people during the lockdown.

Better work

When asked if they would like to return to their native homes, 43 percent of migrant workers responded that they would prefer to return home, while around 57 percent said they would rather stay in Goa (figure 16). Many stated that their livelihoods are in Goa, so they can not return home where they may struggle even more to earn an income. For many respondents, they had moved to Goa in search of better work opportunities and, having found them, preferred to remain in the state.

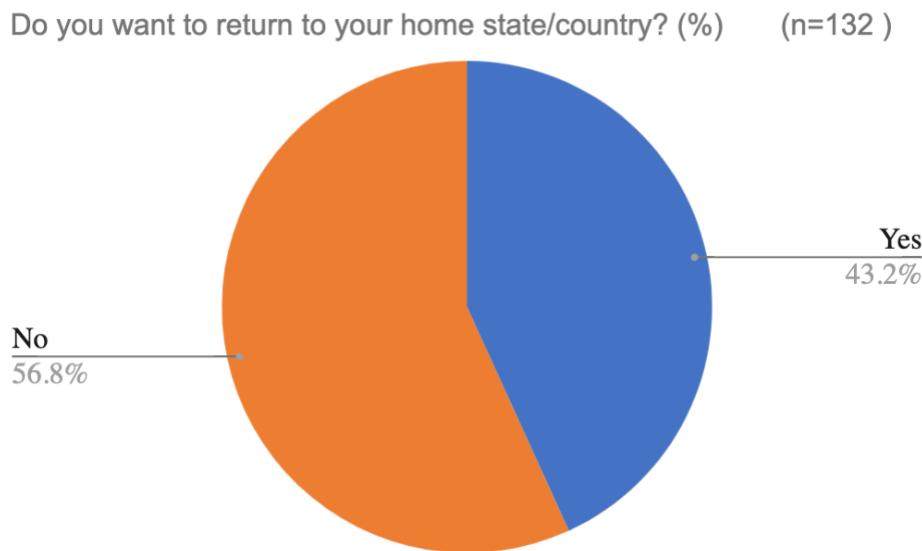


Figure 16

This decision seemed to depend on several factors including, the availability of safe passage home, pre-Covid migration patterns and household situation. Several respondents explicitly stated that they were seasonal workers, coming to Goa in the drier months and returning home during the monsoon season.

With the monsoon season approaching, they knew they would have difficulty finding work and therefore preferred to return to their home states. Conversely, several respondents stated that they wanted to stay in Goa because their children are enrolled in schools here.

Although the majority - 62 percent - stated that they would not make their own arrangements to return home, the remaining 36 percent stated that they “would” or “maybe would” attempt the journey themselves which could involve walking back to their home state or country (figure 17). This is particularly troubling, as some of these long journeys have shown to be life-threatening to migrant workers.¹¹

If the Goa Government does not provide transport, will you attempt the journey yourself? (%)
(n=85)

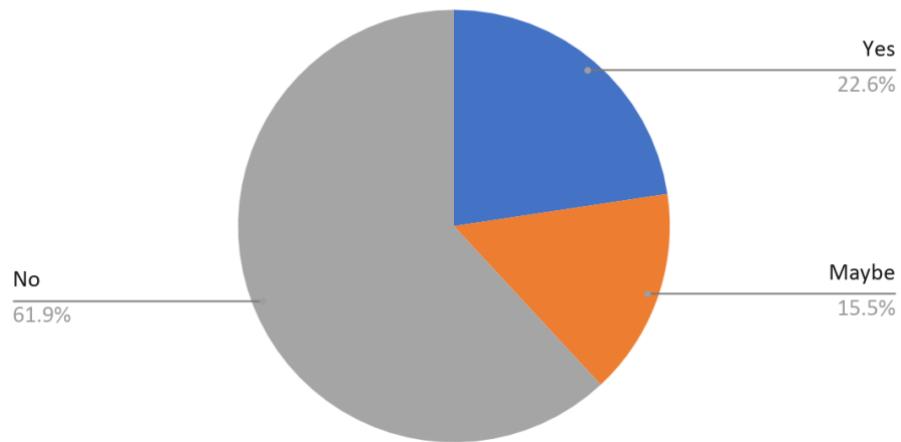


Figure 17

Nearly 72 percent said that if they went to their home state or country, they would return to Goa again after things settled down to find work (figure 18).

¹¹ Dutta, A. (2020, June 02). 198 migrant workers killed in road accidents during lockdown: Report. Retrieved June 19, 2020, from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/198-migrant-workers-killed-in-road-accidents-during-lockdown-report/story-hTWzAWMYn0kyyckW1dyKqL.html>

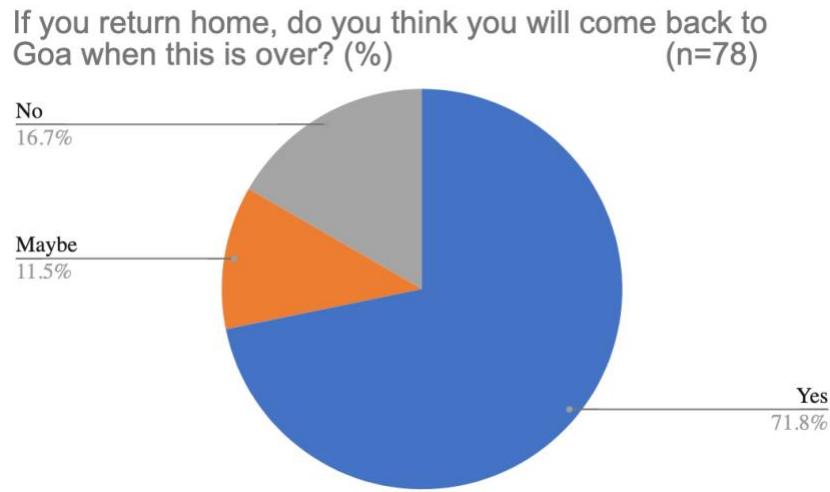


Figure 18

The loss of employment during Covid-19 has been huge. Almost 67 percent of informal workers have lost their source of employment.¹² Experts estimate that this crisis will be followed by a period of slow economic growth and more job losses.¹³ Therefore, there is an urgent need to create sustainable employment opportunities for the workforce that has been deeply affected by this pandemic. This would be an opportune moment to think about alternatives to create better working conditions, environmentally sustainable alternatives, and a more gender equal world of work. In this regard, nearly 71 percent of workers stated that they would stay in Goa if the government offered a guaranteed minimum wage (figure 19).

¹² COVID19: Analysis of Impact and Relief Measures. (n.d.). Retrieved June 19, 2020, from <https://cse.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/covid19-analysis-of-impact-and-relief-measures/>

¹³ PTI. (2020, May 13). India's growth rate projected to slow to 1.2% in 2020: UN report. Retrieved June 19, 2020, from <https://www.financialexpress.com/economy/coronavirus-covid19-pandemic-indias-growth-rate-projected-to-slow-to-1-2-in-2020-un-report/1958261/>

If the Goa government offered a guaranteed minimum wage salary, would you stay? (%).
(n=88)

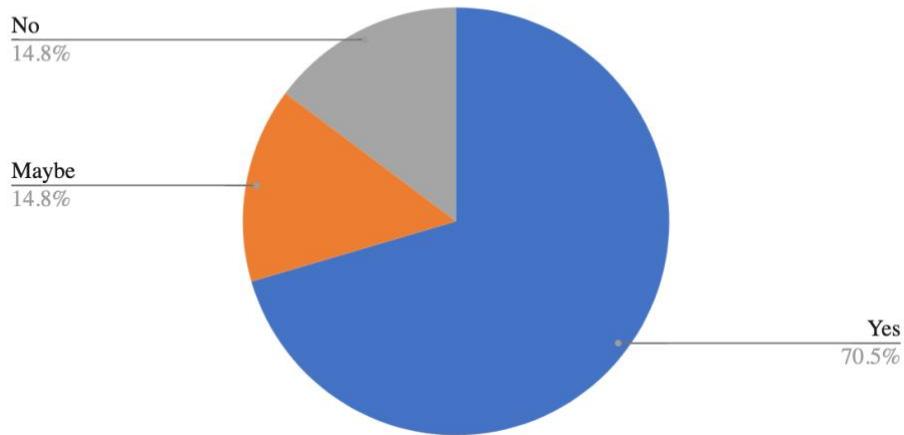


Figure 19

Conclusion: Recommendations for the way forward

The aim of this study was to conduct a rapid assessment of the impact of the lockdown on migrant workers in Goa. Based on this, we suggest the following set of policy pathways. Each requires further examination and related capacities for implementation. As a next step to our work, we will continue to work with CSOs to help fill information gaps. We will also look deeper into the green economy livelihood opportunities in Goa.

Immediate/ short term action

1. Extend the purview of PDS and implement One Nation, One Ration with immediate effect. PDS has been the most effective at reaching essential food supplies to those in need during this time of crisis. There is an urgent need to enable workers to access PDS, even when they are not residing in their home state.
2. Relief material must be distributed in the form of cash and food supplies, and not just food supplies, as is commonly the case. The state government themselves should implement an effective direct cash transfer for vulnerable migrant workers.

Mid-term action

3. The information gap that exists between the government and citizens needs to be addressed with immediate effect. While the crisis exacerbates existing inefficiencies, the impact of poor information is amplified as well. The Information and Broadcasting Ministry must set up processes to communicate reliable, accurate information to citizens in a timely fashion. IVRs targeting mobile users in the state should be set up to reach as many as possible. Coordination between ministries, departments, and other stakeholders is equally important regarding effective and clear communication with citizens.
4. Implement a minimum job guarantee program in urban areas that will ensure that workers will have access to employment opportunities for a specified number of days, much like the MNREGA functions in rural areas. This should be bolstered with a programme for universal access to services so that workers have safety nets to absorb the shock of crises like this one. Social protection measures must be untangled from formal employment since non standard forms of work are increasing, and are common amongst migrant workers.

Long-term action

5. The majority of workers surveyed expressed their desire to return to continue working in Goa or return to Goa to find livelihood options. This points to the need to create sustainable and decent livelihood opportunities for workers. The government has indicated plans to re-start mining and other large-scale construction projects in the state to address the state's income deficit. However, the environmental cost of these projects are high and pose a risk to biodiversity in the state. Green economy opportunities should be pursued, such as sustainable and organic farming, drip irrigation, solar energy and other green jobs. These jobs should be prioritised over more harmful sectors.