

Mobile Childhood, Immobile Aspirations: A district level exploratory analysis on educational attainment and child migratory movements in India

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Abstract

Various facets of internal migration have been explored in the Indian context, but there has been paucity of literature that has explored the area of child migration. While field studies have shown the adverse effect of child migration on educational attainment, there are very few studies that have used secondary data to explore this relation. Using the Census 2011 data on 588 districts, we show that migrant children seem to fare lower on educational attainment with respect to non-migrant children. Further, the disaggregated analysis show an Inverted U shaped relation between age and educational attainment of migrants for the age groups 5-9 years, 10-14 years and 15-19 years. The analysis points that educational attainment is affected by shorter duration of migration in comparison to other durations of migration, with girls suffering more than the boys. We look at the participation of children in the workforce and conclude that elder migrant children are at risk of being inducted into the workforce if the migration is of shorter duration. This aspect of seasonal/short term migration and its impact on educational attainment is empirically tested using cross-section regression analysis. The disaggregated regression estimates suggest a negative relation between the migrant children's literacy rate and their participation in the workforce. Contrary to the intuition, we find a negative association between the number of educational institutions (district level) and literacy rate of child migrant. This suggests that mere addition of schools wouldn't help in arresting dropping educational attainment of the child migrant and that a targeted approach has to be undertaken to address this issue. We finally review field studies to ascertain the crippling impact of the pandemic on the child migrants. To this end, we conclude that certain policy imperatives if implemented could help in ameliorating the problems associated with child migration.

1 Introduction

Migration is a phenomenon rooted deep down in the history of the world, right from the time of man's birth. People moved around for various reasons. The paradigm shift that we see in the society from aboriginal humans to a civilized society can be majorly attributed to this movement of people. This mobility helped them to acclimatize with the new surroundings and gave them the wonderful gift of adaptability. It is this adaptability which enables them to grow with time and transcend themselves in their activities.

Various facets of migration involving the social, economic, political, legal aspects have been documented and well researched in the literature. [Tumbe \(2012\)](#) provides an excellent review of literature in the context of India. As adduced to the above point, in the case of internal migration, there is an abundance of literature in India which talks about the nature of migration, their associated characteristics, the reasons for migration and finally the economic well-being of the migrants vis-à-vis the non-migrants ([Keshri and Bhagat \(2012\)](#), [Mitra and Murayama \(2009\)](#), [Deshingkar and Akter \(2009\)](#)). Although these studies have focused on the migratory movements of the population, there has been a dearth of studies that have looked into the characteristics of migration, especially with regard to children. The necessity to look into this direction has been succinctly put forward by [Dottridge \(2013\)](#),

“Children have become an important part of large-scale population movements currently involving millions of people and are likely to be increasingly affected in the next decades as a result of globalisation, socio-economic change and climate change. Yet, in debates on both child protection and migration, children who move or are left behind are largely invisible. As a result, policy responses to support these vulnerable children are fragmented and inconsistent.”

In the Indian context, one would notice that migratory movement of children has an adverse effect on the various dimensions of their personality. For instance consider the educational attainment of the migrant children, [Chandrasekhar and Bhattacharya \(2019\)](#) using the Census data (2011) suggests that educational attainment is lower in high out-migration districts in comparison with districts otherwise. These are substantiated with various field studies which suggest that increased migratory movement leads to disruption in the academic calendar of the children thereby hampering the

educational attainment of the children.

Rajan (2021) has hinted towards this adverse impact of migratory movement by alluding to the discord between mobile childhood and immobile school. We extend this argument to talk about mobile childhood and immobile aspirations. Through this work we pose whether mobility has indeed led to mobility of aspirations, a pursuit of better life. While the first half concentrates on the mobility of childhood, the second part of this work explores whether there has been mobility of aspirations or a stagnancy resulting from the adverse effect of mobility.

In light of the above points, we seek to explore the relationship between educational attainment and child migration at a dis-aggregated district level using a nationally representative dataset - Census 2011. The analysis explores the various streams of migration and duration of migration in order to check whether there is any pattern that corroborates with the educational attainment of the migrant children. The rest of the paper is structured as follows, Section 2 briefly discusses the accumulated wisdom on child migration and its various aspects. Section 3 covers the data and the associated analytical framework, while section 4 describes patterns and trends of child migration, which is followed by an analysis into the different streams and durations associated with child migration. In section 5 we explore various policy implications, especially keeping in mind the current COVID pandemic and learning loss associated with the child migration.

2 Review of Literature

The bulk of literature in the field of migration studies has focused on migratory movement and its impact on the migrant household. There have been few studies that talk about child migration and the associated wellbeing on the children. For instance, one could take the case of short term migration (STM) or temporary migration, wherein the household frequently travels within a period of one year. This might lead to disruption in the academic calendar of the children belonging to these STM households. Rogaly et al. (2001) from their field surveys conducted in West Bengal note that seasonal migrants' households faced many obstacles in keeping their children in school, while Mosse et al. (2005) finds that children from the households belonging to marginalized communities faced discrimination and bullying after their admission in

urban schools, which has led them to drop out of school.

If we characterize these movements according to various streams of migration, then the movement from Rural area of enumeration to Rural area of destination is the most vulnerable stream when it comes to educational attainment of migrant children. [Smita \(2008\)](#) highlights one such aspect regarding the *distress seasonal migration* using a qualitative study conducted across states with remarkably high instances of out-migration. This happens due to the perilous condition in the place of enumeration induced by drought and lack of work in villages, which results in families migrating to alternative places for survival in search of work. Children accompany their parents to these places, leading them to drop out of school either due to a dearth of educational facilities in the destination, or are forced to work in the worksite as a helping hand to their parents. The study also highlights that migrant children are disadvantaged even at the source state of enumeration, since on their return they are unable to cope up with the academic calendar followed in school. Since the schooling curriculum would have been finished as there is a long overlap between the migration calendar and the academic calendar (8).

Another field study conducted by [Coffey \(2013\)](#) from the five districts from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan offers a quantitative assessment of the drop in the educational attainment of children belonging to the seasonal migrant households. They find that a child aged 3-13 years has a significant negative educational outcome if the child had migrated the year before, and it also has a negative effect on his/her chances to have ever attended school compared to the child who has not migrated before. Another primary study done by [Roy et al. \(2015\)](#) reveals that accompanying children in the seasonal migrant family is in harm compared to left behind children. These findings were made from extensive surveys conducted in various construction sites across Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which employ the bulk of seasonal migrants. The reasons for the precarious condition is that these workplaces lack various facilities to look after the children. [Majumder \(2011\)](#) from the field study from West Bengal, specifically the brick kiln industry, finds that children tend to follow the path of their parents and are trapped in the same low-skill profession early on in childhood.

The studies mentioned above are either constrained by the fact that they are qualitative in nature or are focused on certain regions (mostly primary survey based). Also there are only a few quantitative studies focused on secondary data based on a nationally

representative data. This lacuna has been filled by [Bhattacharya \(2019\)](#) who used the NSSO's Situation Assessment Survey (2013) to examine whether short term migration leads to lowered school attendance of children in agricultural households. Their findings based on the logit regression model show that after controlling for individual and family characteristics and other variables, a child aged 6-10 years belonging to a migrant family has 15% lowered probability of attending school in comparison with the child belonging to a non-migrant household. Also [Chandrasekhar and Bhattacharya \(2019\)](#) using the same survey notes that the national average of illiterate children is around 18% in the age group 15-19 years. But if one looks at the children belonging to the short term migrant family in the age cohort of 15-19 years, the illiteracy rate increases to 28%. This indicates the harmful impact of short term migration on the educational attainment of migrant children. Highlighting the vulnerabilities of migration on children, [Sharma and Dubey \(2022\)](#) using the sample of 39,297 father-son pairs from Indian Human Development Surveys found that migration experienced during schooling tended to increase downward mobility for children. They also find that upward mobility of children has a positive relationship with the educational qualification of the father, this at times could also act as a hindrance in the higher education of the children.

3 Data and Analytical Framework

The data used for the study is from the population enumeration data sourced from [Census 2011](#). The analysis is conducted at a dis-aggregated level, i.e, at the district level. The study has taken a total of 588 districts in India. Some districts have been dropped due to the constraints with respect to data collection. A detailed list of variables used in the study can be found in the Appendix. Now we shall proceed with the analytical framework used in this study.

3.1 Analytical Framework

The framework for analysis can be dis-aggregated into two strands. The first strand gives general trends in child migration the reasons for migration, various streams of migration, educational attainment of the migrants at an aggregated level using Census 2011 data. This involves looking at migration from the country's (*India*) perspective as well as that of the States and UT's perspective.

The second strand focuses on the issue of literacy of the child migrant at a dis-aggregated level. For this purpose, we have divided this into :-

1. At the first stage we try to look at the literacy rate of the individual districts for the overall population (*of children*) dis-aggregated in terms of age, gender and place of residence. We compare this literacy rate with that of the migrant children residing in that particular district. This analysis seeks to explore the magnitude of variation in the literary rate of the migrant and that of the base district to see whether migrant children are at risk of lower educational attainment.
2. After the comparison, we further look into the variation in educational attainment for migrant children. Apart from the parameters mentioned above, we add two more parameters. They are the streams of migration and duration of residence.
 - a) The streams of migration could be perceived as a migratory movement between two nodes, i.e Rural and Urban. Hence, these streams could be further be subdivided as Rural to Rural, Rural to Urban, Urban to Urban and Urban to Rural (*here the first node corresponds to the place of enumeration and the second corresponding to the area of residence*).
 - b) Duration of Residence denotes the total number of years a migrant is residing in the place of destination. For our analysis we have taken 3 durations of residence-Less than 1 year, between 1-4 years and between 5-9 years.

The inclusion of both the duration and streams of migration offers a deeper understanding of variation of literacy. From the accumulated wisdom, we hypothesize that vulnerability of lowered educational attainment is observable at the rural place of residence, and it is more frequent in shorter duration of migration.

3. We conjecture that educational attainment gets negatively impacted if the children are part of the work force. Hence, we look at the participation of the migrant children in the work force. We dis-aggregate the same in terms of age, duration, gender and streams of migration. Through the combination of second strand and the third strand, we seek to get some some meaningful inference into the facets of educational attainment of the migrant children.

4 Results and Analysis

In this section we shall reconnoitre the findings based on the analytical framework mentioned in the earlier section.

4.1 Trends in Child Migration

As per Census 2011, there are close to 92.95 million child migrants (aged 0-19 years). From the chart below, one could notice that the absolute number of child migrants has increased over the years from 1991-2011. A snapshot of the child migrant population (Statewise) as well as the child migrant share to the population of children is presented in the Appendix in the form of a heatmap. From the gender dis-aggregation of the child migrants, we notice that female child migrants seem to be higher than the male counterpart in absolute numbers. Another interesting observation is that if one compares the total migrant population with that of the child migrant population, we notice that every fifth migrant is a child.

Another important characteristic to look is the trends of child migration and educational attainment of the migrants. We compute the literacy rate as the total number of literate child migrants to the total child migrant population. According to Census 2011, 58.7% of migrants aged between 0-19 years are literate, further through a gender dis-aggregation we find that the literacy rates for boys and girls stand at 64.2% and 62.6% respectively. [UNICEF \(2020\)](#) notes that at an aggregate level, the literacy rate of child migrant (aged 0-19 years) is 63.40% which is higher than that of non-migrant children i.e. 57.70%. This conclusion holds at the aggregate level, but we show in latter sections that at the dis-aggregated level, this may not be the case.

We further analyze the case of literacy rate of child migrants in terms of place of last residence. The place of residence could be furthered dis-aggregated in terms of Rural and Urban area. From the chart (see [3](#)) we see that there is a significant difference between the educational attainment if one looks at from the place of last residence, where rural residence seems to have a lower educational attainment in comparison with the urban residence. This differing literacy rate, could be due to lack of educational facilities in the rural area as compared to the urban area. That being said, there seems to be little variation when it comes from gender variation.

Another stylized feature of the migration data is the dis-aggregation of the migrant

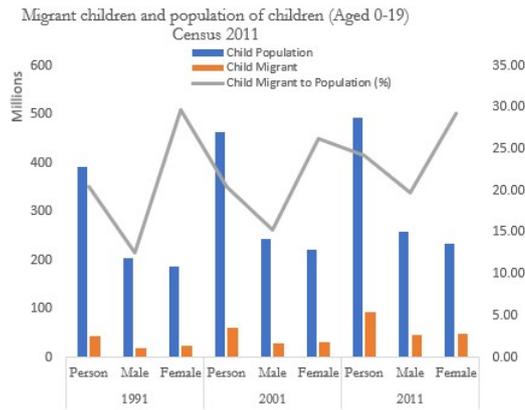


Figure 1: Migrant children and Population of children (Census 2011)

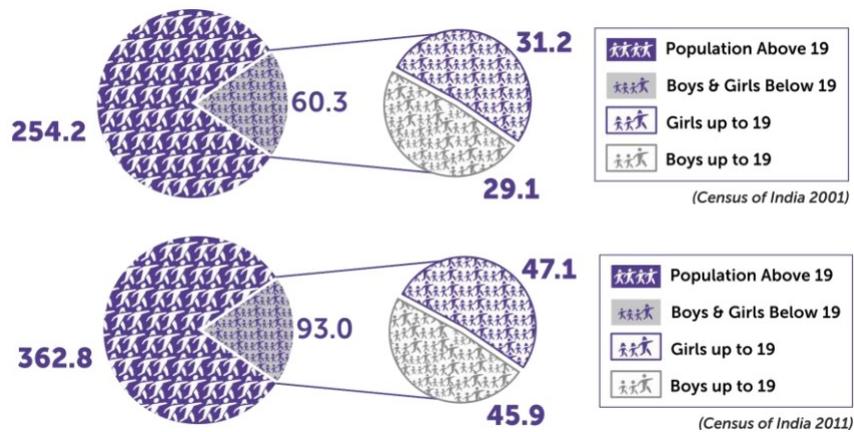


Figure 2: Share of Child Migrants (in Millions) Out of Total Migrant Population

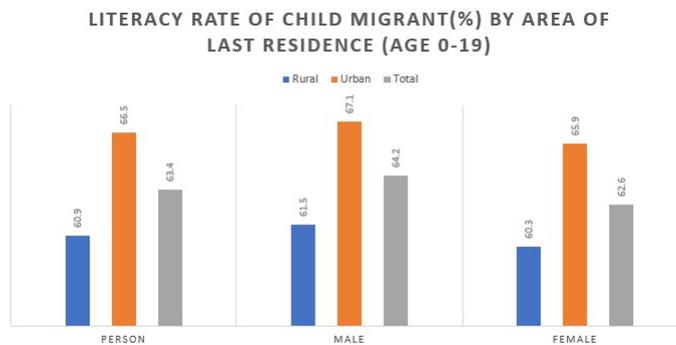


Figure 3: Literacy Rate of Child Migrant (%) BY Area Of Last Residence (Age 0-19)

population in terms of various streams of migration. As mentioned in the above section, there are four major streams of migration. UNICEF (2020) shows this distribution at a dis-aggregated level for both boys and girls (See 4). A common observation is that

for both boys and girls, Rural to Rural stream contains the highest number of child migrants. Though the order of the various streams holds the same across both the gender groups, but their magnitude is different.

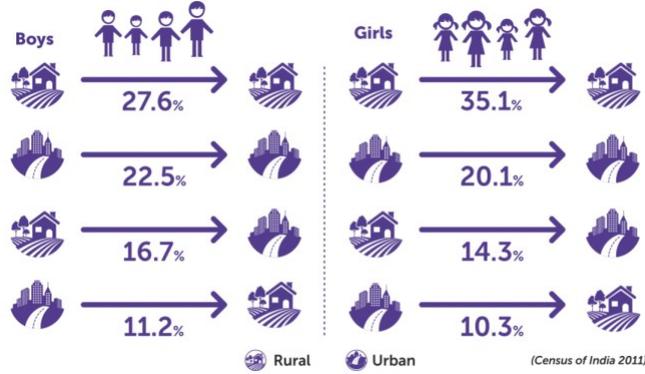


Figure 4: Percentage of Child Migrants (Boys and Girls) in India by Migration Streams in Age

We further proceed towards the second strand of analysis as mentioned in the analytical framework, where we look into a dis-aggregate district wise analysis into the phenomenon of educational attainment and child migration.

4.2 Educational Attainment and Child migration: District wise analysis

4.2.1 Educational Attainment of the migrant population and non-migrant population

In this section, a comparative analysis between the educational attainment of the migrant and the non-migrant population is carried out with respect to literacy rate (See 1). Since at the district level it was difficult to find out the literacy rate for the non-migrant population, we have proxied it with literacy rate of the total child population. Further, we dis-aggregate the literacy with respect to place of last residence that-Rural and Urban Area, and age group - 5-9 years, 10-14 years and 15-19 years. The gender wise dis-aggregation is carried out, i.e. for both boys and girls.

We begin our analysis with the total population, and we notice that the literacy rate is lowest in the 5-9 age group, with the vulnerability higher in the rural area of residence. Urban literacy rate is higher than the rural literacy rate across all the age

groups. Initially the literacy rate seems to increase with the age group, but for the higher age group (15-19 age) it starts to decline. [Chandrasekhar and Bhattacharya \(2019\)](#) gives a possible reasoning behind this Inverted U shape behaviour of educational attainment and age, with the initial drop in literacy followed by a pickup in the literacy rate and then a fall in the literacy rate. They argue that by 2009, The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act was passed by the Indian Parliament which ensured the free and compulsory education of children from 6-14 years. This inverted U shape behaviour points to a positive externality of the program and would explain why educational attainment drops post 14 years.

Table 1: Educational Attainment of the migrant population and non-migrant population, Author's computation based on Census (2011)

Gender/Age/Place	Base District		Migrant Population		Difference
	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev	Mean
Person					
<i>Age 5-9</i>					
Rural	0.81	0.065	0.47	0.1	0.34
Urban	0.85	0.049	0.59	0.16	0.26
<i>Age 10-14</i>					
Rural	0.91	0.061	0.85	0.18	0.06
Urban	0.93	0.067	0.87	0.17	0.06
<i>Age 15-19</i>					
Rural	0.87	0.088	0.47	0.1	0.4
Urban	0.92	0.053	0.59	0.16	0.33
Girls					
<i>Age 5-9</i>					
Rural	0.806	0.065	0.47	0.1	0.336
Urban	0.848	0.049	0.45	0.1	0.398
<i>Age 10-14</i>					
Rural	0.89	0.07	0.85	0.83	0.04
Urban	0.92	0.05	0.87	0.82	0.05
<i>Age 15-19</i>					
Rural	0.84	0.84	0.82	0.77	0.37
Urban	0.91	0.91	0.77	0.86	0.32
Boys					
<i>Age 5-9</i>					
Rural	0.82	0.05	0.48	0.107	0.1
Urban	0.93	0.04	0.46	0.106	0.47
<i>Age 10-14</i>					
Rural	0.92	0.05	0.87	0.18	0.05
Urban	0.93	0.04	0.88	0.18	0.05
<i>Age 15-19</i>					
Rural	0.90	0.08	0.85	0.17	0.05
Urban	0.93	0.061	0.88	0.18	0.05

Now if we consider the child migrant's literacy rate, we find that the lowest attainment is in the 5-9 age group, especially from the rural region. Though this characteristic is similar to the base district, there is significant difference between both the groups, highlighted by the last column showing the difference. On an average for all the age groups, we find that the literacy rates seem to be lower in comparison with the base district. Also, the inverted U shape relation between educational attainment and age group is seen in the migrant population, but the burden of dropping literacy is higher in the migrants than in the base district. This drop in the secondary school education is also seen by the surge in the drop-out rates at the Secondary level (17% Boys and 15.1% Girls) as highlighted by the UDISE Report 2019-20.¹

From the gender wise dis-aggregate study, one would notice that girls are more vulnerable to lower educational attainment as compared to boys across all age groups, irrespective of being in migrant or non-migrant population. The existence of the Inverted U shape relation is seen for both the migrant and the non-migrant population. However, the magnitude of drop in literacy is much more pronounced in the migrant group, irrespective of the gender group (*could be observed from the last column in Table 1*). However, on an average, this difference seems to be more pronounced for the girls in comparison with the boys. We shall now proceed with the stream-wise as well as duration wise analysis as per the framework elucidated in the previous section.

4.2.2 Analysis of educational attainment through streams and duration of migration

As mentioned in the previous section, we add two more dimensions to further our understanding about the child migration. The additional variables taken for the study are being discussed in the table below (see 2). We begin our analysis with the child migrant population (See 5) . The literacy rate is the lowest in the age group 5-9 years, especially in the rural to rural network of migration. On further scrutiny, it is observed that across the age group, the literacy rate seemed to be the lowest in the shorter duration migration category (*where migratory movement is within duration less than 1 year*). This shorter term duration migration severely affects the literacy rate of the children in the age group of 5-9 years when in comparison with the other duration of migration.

¹Full report can be accessed from [here](#)

Table 2: Duration and Streams of Migration

Age	Streams of Migration	Duration of Migration
5-9 years (59ag.d)	Rural to Rural (r2r)	Less than 1 year (durLessThan1yr)
10-14 years (1014ag)	Rural to Urban (r2u)	1-4 years (durless14)
15-19 years (1519ag)	Urban to Rural (u2r)	5-9 years (durless59)
	Urban to Urban (u2u)	

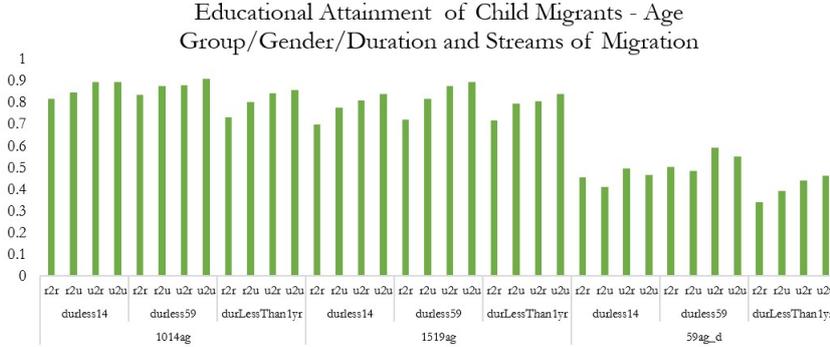


Figure 5: Educational Attainment of Child Migrants - Age Group/Gender/Duration and Streams of Migration, Author’s computation based on Census (2011)

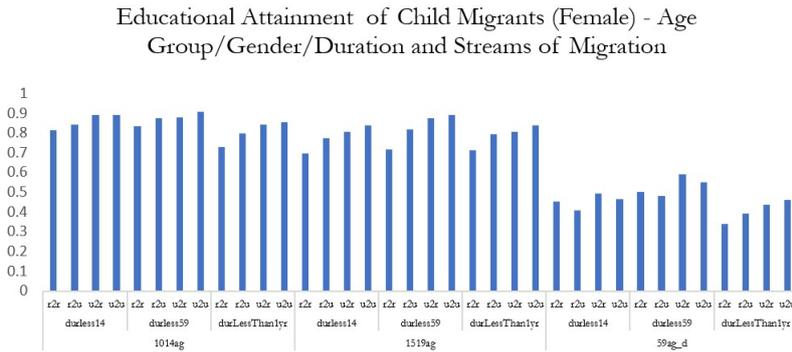


Figure 6: Educational Attainment of Child Migrants (Female)-Age Group/Gender/Duration and Streams of Migration, Author’s computation based on Census (2011)

If one does gender wise dis-aggregation, the inferences from the child migrant population hold irrespective of gender. That being said, literacy rates differs from boys to girls. The magnitude of the drop in the literacy rate seem to be much higher in the female cohort, in the lower age group. The literacy rates vary inversely with the increase in age group. This becomes more vulnerable as the duration of migration reduces. As noted by the [UNICEF \(2020\)](#), the chief reason behind child migration is “*Moved with Household*”. One intuitive reason for the lowered educational attainment with the

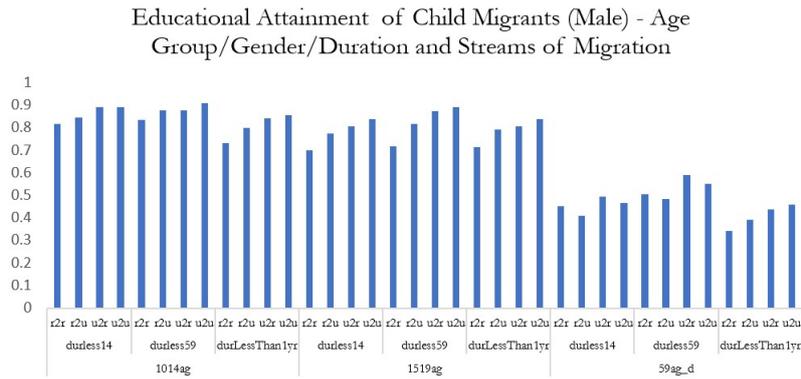


Figure 7: Educational Attainment of Child Migrants (Male) -Age Group/Gender/Duration and Streams of Migration , Author’s computation based on Census (2011)

lower duration of migration could be linked to the seasonal aspect of migration. [Smita \(2008\)](#) talks about the seasonal migration cycle. This happens predominantly in the agrarian/rural sector, wherein the farmers migrate during the lean period in order to search for new livelihood. But the harm in such migration is that it overlaps with the school calendar of children from the migrant household. Children can go to school only during the months of July to October, after which the children have to move along with their family members to these work places. The overlap between academic calendar and migrant calendar is shown in the below diagram (See 8).

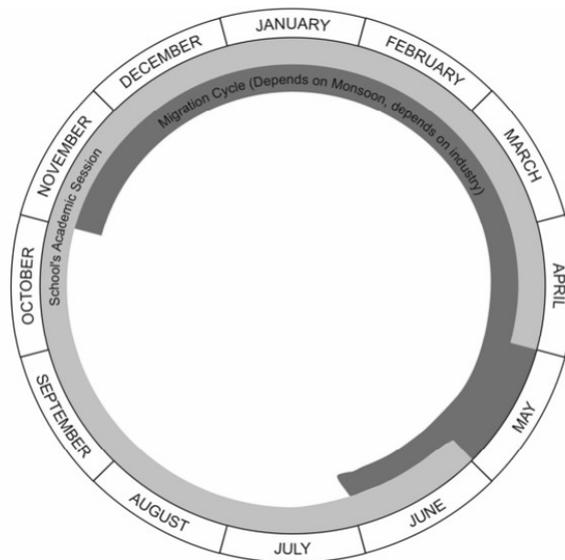


Figure 8: Overlap of Migration and Academic Calendar

This disrupts the academic calendar of the child migrants. In many cases these work-sites (*brick kilns, construction sector or sugarcane industry*) lack the basic educational facility which could help the children continue with their education. Another aspect to the falling educational attainment could be linked to the participation of children in the workforce.

4.2.3 Economic Activity of Child Migrant

In the previous sections, we got a glimpse on the educational attainment of the child migrants. Subsequently, we have noticed that the educational attainment is more vulnerable when it comes to the migrant children vis-à-vis the non-migrant children. One stylized observation is that this vulnerability gets further exacerbated if one takes into account the streams and duration of migration. Probing further on this issue, we shall now look into the participation of children in the workforce. Though various international conventions and domestic rules like Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 talk about the ban on child labour, there is a prevalence of child associated with migration. In order to analyse this we look at the Main worker composition (See 9, 10 and 11)² In each of the age group we dis-aggregate the migrants with respect to gender, duration and streams of migration. (*the nomenclature for the diagrams remains the same as 2*).

From the general population, we observe that the participation in the labour force is highest in the 15-19 age group. This also coincides with the group where the drop in literacy rates seems to be taken place. Also, the economic activity rate seems to be more prominent in the Rural to Rural stream of migration across all the age groups (or places where Rural is the last node of destination). Further, the evidences suggest that the duration within 1 year (*short term migration*) as compared to the other duration seems to be more vulnerable since it has the highest participation of workforce for the majority of the age groups. This could be corroborated from the analysis of migration in terms of educational attainment (*as discussed in the previous section*) where educational attainment seemed to be the lowest in the shorter duration of migration.

²Main Workers are those workers who had worked for the major part of the reference period i.e. 6 months or more.

If one tries to dis-aggregate the analysis in terms of gender, especially for the boys, the participation rate seem to be higher in the 15-19 age group. The participation rate of boys seemed to be much higher across a majority of age group. The inference regarding the boy’s work participation rate seems to be at peril in the short term duration, a common observation from the general population. But the magnitude is much higher when in comparison with the general population. If one looks at the gender dis-aggregation with respect to girls, the participation rate is much lesser compared to boys. While the other patterns remain the same.

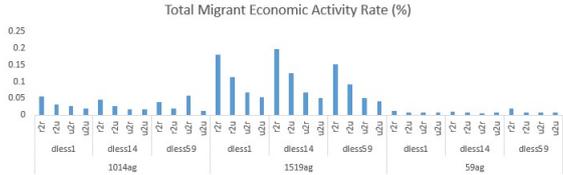


Figure 9: Total Migrant Economic Activity (%), Author’s computation based on Census (2011)

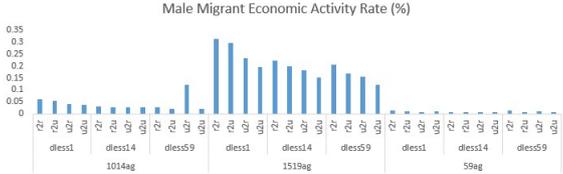


Figure 10: Boys Migrant Economic Activity (%), Author’s computation based on Census (2011)

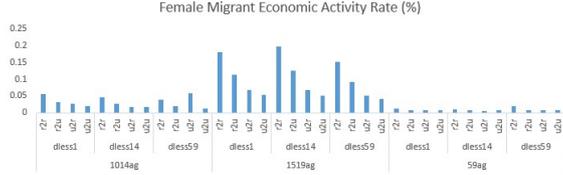


Figure 11: Girl Migrant Economic Activity (%), Author’s computation based on Census (2011)

One possible explanation for this phenomenon is the need for the family to have an extra helping hand in the workforce. This is worsened if the family moves frequently. For instance, as we see in 12, [Smita \(2008\)](#) notes that if the migratory movement is of short term duration, families would ideally be making trips to worksites between the

sowing, harvest or transplantation activities from the place of residence. This usually contains smaller family groups travelling over short distances, since their movement is very frequent, it becomes very difficult to trace them. In many cases, the elder children accompany the migrating family, since they are suitable to work in the labour force in comparison to the children in the lower age group. Elaborating on the case of agriculture [Jha and Jhingran \(2005\)](#) notes that in the Dang district (*also one of the most distressed district in India*) most migration involves children. It is related to various activities such as sugar cane cutting, agriculture and grape picking. Hence, these frequent movements coupled with participation in the workforce robs the child migrant his/her basic right to education.

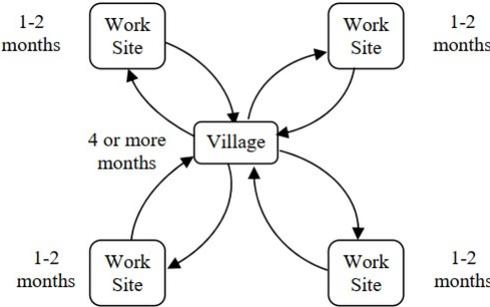


Figure 12: Short Term Duration Work Flow

4.2.4 Short Term Migration and its association with Educational Attainment

From the earlier subsection, we concluded that educational attainment of child migrants is lowest in short term migration (*less than 1 year of duration*) and this is predominantly seen in the higher age group i.e. in 15-19 years (this point is concurred by [Chandrasekhar and Bhattacharya \(2019\)](#)). Also, from the analysis of the participation of child migrants in the work force, the vulnerability is seen in the above-mentioned age group and duration. In this subsection, we further probe into the determinants of this educational attainment disaggregated in terms of gender. We further see how these determinants vary over different streams of migration.

These associations are checked in the cross-sectional OLS regression analysis on the district level data obtained from the Census (2011). We estimate 8 equations with equations from 1-4 for boys and equations 5-8 for girls. The dependant variable indicates the literacy rate of the gender in each of the 4 streams of migration. While the regressors are rate of participation of children as part of the work force disaggregated across various duration of migration. The nomenclature remains the same as mentioned in [Table 2](#). We introduce control variables such as the total number of secondary and senior schools (*SchoolNo*) and the In-migration rate (*InMigRate*) which is disaggregated in terms of both boys and girls. We define In-migration rate as the ratio of the total child migrants to the total child population in that particular age cohort.

The results in [3](#) offers insights into the association amongst the variables. Although we find a positive and significant association between the in migration rate of migrants with the literacy rates, the other results offer interesting insight into the determinants of educational attainment for short term migrants. We find a negative association between literacy rate and the labour force participation rate across all streams of migration and gender. Incidentally, in the case of boys this association is significant in the streams of migration with rural area of destination (From column 1 and 3 in [3](#)). This relationship is intuitive, since children are deprived of educational facility if they are subjected to child labour. A gender based disaggregation of this association shows that in the case of boys, a drop in literacy is significant in the Rural to Rural stream (*coefficient is the highest in comparison with other streams*) while in the case of girls it is significant in the Rural to Urban stream (*coefficient is the highest in comparison with other streams*). As pointed out earlier, we show that in the case of boys the participation in economic

activity was highest in the Rural to Rural stream, which could possibly explain the negative relation. In the case of girls, this issue is prevalent in the Rural to Urban stream (*magnitude is the highest across all the models*). Elder girl child who migrate not only engage in labour in the urban work site but also doubles up as the caregiver for the younger siblings in the absence of parents. This phenomenon has been called as children acting as the 'deputy home manager' by Roy et al. (2015). Due to this it becomes very difficult for the elder girl child to concentrate on their studies and this could possibly substantiate the large magnitude of fall in literacy rates.

Table 3: Educational Attainment and its determinants for Short Term Migrants

	Boys (15-19 years)				Girls (15-19 years)			
	RuralToRural (1)	RuralToUrban (2)	UrbanToRural (3)	UrbanToUrban (4)	RuralToRural (5)	RuralToUrban (6)	UrbanToRural (7)	UrbanToUrban (8)
MigMwR2R	-0.230 (-4.28)				-0.24 (-3.68)			
MigMwR2U		-0.0761 (-1.52)				-0.536 (-6.53)		
MigMwU2R			-0.124 (-2.25)				-0.152 (-1.13)	
MigMwU2U				-0.1148 (-1.86)				0.011 (0.09)
SchoolNo	-0.0001 (-3.80)	-0.00010 (-3.52)	-0.00010 (-3.68)	-0.00014 (-5.08)	-0.00005 (0.085)	-0.00012 (-4.25)	-0.0001 (-3.94)	-0.0013 (-4.86)
InMigRateMale	0.6284 (5.26)	0.1397 (1.16)	0.0157 (-3.68)	0.02 (0.18)				
InMigRateFemale					0.81 (5.08)	0.571 (3.96)	0.300 (2.01)	0.1377 (0.97)
Constant	0.8022 (38.63)	0.8762 (39.73)	0.914 (51.27)	0.9410 (51.05)	0.6962 (33.97)	0.834 (44.64)	0.822 (44.80)	0.86 (46.92)
R^2	0.08	0.028	0.031	0.0471	0.0544	0.106	0.030	0.04
No of Observation	588	588	588	588	588	588	588	588

The association between absolute number of secondary schools and the literacy rates is negative. This result is quite counterintuitive, since the common notion behind falling literacy rate is the lack of educational facility. However, this result shows that despite having educational institution, one might not have a higher literacy rate amongst migrants. This point has been raised by Rajan (2021) where she contends that migrant children often feel excluded since they are unable to be in the same pace as the non-migrant children in the classroom, due to frequent breaks in the academic calendar induced due to migratory movement. Eventually this leads them to drop out of school. In order to arrest this dropping educational attainment, one would need a concerted action not only in terms of building educational infrastructure but a targeted approach, for example construction of bridge schools, seasonal hostels etc. These issues are discussed extensively in 16.

5 Policy Perspective

After understanding some of stylized features of migration, we conclude from district level analysis that migrants are in more harm of lowered educational outcome in comparison with the non-migrant children. This is aggravated when the migratory movement is quite frequent (*Short term migration prevalence*), when the place of residence is rural and when the gender is female. While Census 2011, seems to be the last complete enumerate survey of the population, it seems to suffer from the problem of being old series. However, one could draw these insights from the previous section to look into the current pandemic situation, to assess the status quo for better policy inference. On these lines, this section is structured as follows :-

1. In the first subsection, we analyse the current status of child migration in the time of pandemic and look at the various issues revolving around it.
2. We look at the existing rules and regulation that protect the rights of child migrant, especially from the perspective of educational attainment.
3. After identifying the current issues and lacunae in the policies governing the right of child migrant. We offer some perspectives/insights into policies that could help in strengthening the rights of the children from the existing survey of literature.

5.1 The Pandemic and the Migrant children

5.1.1 General Impact on Child Migrants

The pandemic situation has opened up the pandora's box, unleashing a plethora of new problems affecting the migrant children. These fault lines have been underway playing out in the global landscape, for instance, [Sanchez and Achilli \(2020\)](#) points out in the EU area that Child migrants (*accompanied by family members or unaccompanied, whoever is seeking asylum, family reunification or other migration-related goals*) have found their journeys blocked. This border closure, such as the total shutdown of the Balkan route across the Mediterranean and Southern Europe, have been a direct result of the stringent lockdown which has led to children being stranded in hazardous condition. These cases are not just a phenomenon in EU but could be seen in countries like Bangladesh, USA, Africa etc. Another issue is the worsening situation in most of the refugee camps and humanitarian shelter which accommodate these child migrants. [Kelly et al. \(2020\)](#) cites various reason like shortfall of humanitarian workers, paucity of essential supplies etc.

The situation back home in India doesn't seem to be much different, as Bhabha (2020) gives a recapitulation of the pandemic situation back in India,

“A particularly egregious situation facing internal child migrants has arisen in India, where a draconian and sudden lockdown precipitated an enormous humanitarian emergency. Millions of migrant child labourers in India’s informal economy were laid off work without notice and forced to improvise a survival strategy without any form of social protection. The tragedy was epitomized by the reported death by dehydration and hunger of 12-year-old Jamlo Makdam, an agricultural child migrant labourer, as she embarked on the 150 km journey from Telengana to her home village in Chhattisgarh in the scorching heat. Childline 1098, the national helpline for children, received close to half a million calls from children in distress, many of them migrant workers far from home, within 21 days of the announcement of the lockdown. ... Reports have emerged of situations of debt bondage where families are offering their children to moneylenders to repay loans taken during the lockdown.”

A study conducted by civil rights organization in Tamil Nadu, Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL) showed that child labour increased to 280% amongst the vulnerable communities in Tamil Nadu (Narayani (2021)). From the children surveyed, 94% of the respondents stated that the economic crisis induced due to pandemic has forced families to send their children to work. Pandey T (2021) reports the sudden spike in the child labour induced due to pandemic in the bangle making industry in Rajasthan. The report talks about the Dickensian conditions to which the children are subjected to,

“Each child sits bent over the work, without masks, without observing social distancing protocols, making 400-500 bangles a day. Each bangle fetches between Rs 10 and Rs 50 in markets across Rajasthan. The children work 16-18 hours a day, making a mere Rs 50, well below the minimum wage of Rs 252 per day in Rajasthan.”

These children are usually from families who are subjected to distress migration mostly from low income states like Bihar, UP, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand etc. Another offshoot to this problem has been the increase in the instances of child abuse and domestic violence. A field survey conducted by Protsahan India Foundation³ in various slum communities in West Delhi notes,

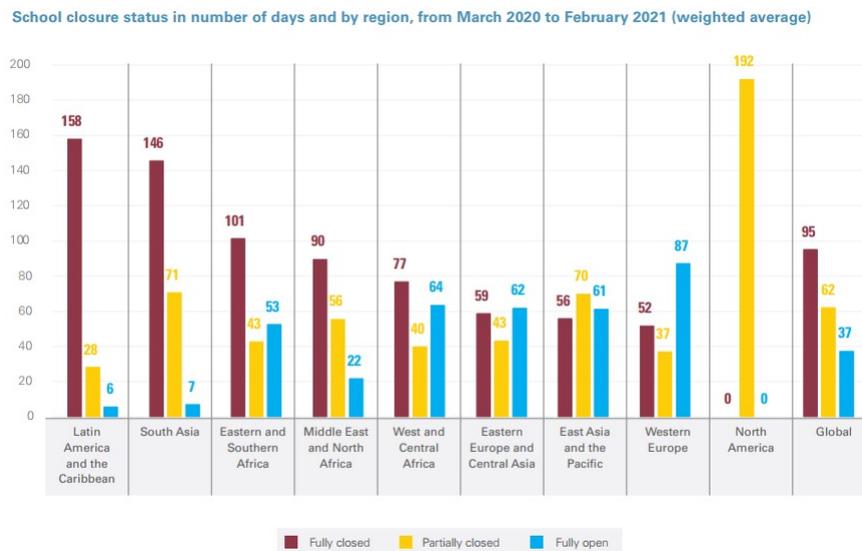
³The full report can be accessed through [here](#)

“Rising cases of child sexual abuse, child labour and transactional sex only heighten the need for intervention: both short-term as well as long-term, societal-based reforms in tackling issues such as vaccine hesitancy and COVID orphans without caregivers..... It becomes never-ending as children are forced into manual labour and sexual exploitation in a desperate bid to overcome poverty. Girls are selling their bodies or being sexually exploited at homes through reported cases of ‘transactional sex’ and boys are working at tea stalls or small shops to feed their families.”

These repercussions on women and children were called aptly as the “shadow pandemic” by former UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

5.1.2 Learning Loss associated with Pandemic

The pandemic has stirred up the hornet’s nest by means of disruption of many things. Out of which, the learning loss, or the drop in educational attainment induced by closure of schools has been very prominent. From the below chart (See Figure 13) one could notice that the South Asian region has the one of the highest number of school closure (in terms of *Fully Closed*) in comparison with the other region⁴.



Source: UNESCO Global monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19

Figure 13: Status of Global School Closure UNICEF (2021)

⁴The numbers in the chart represent number of days students did not receive in person classroom instruction

UNICEF (2021) notes that while most of the developed nations were able to adapt resiliently to the school closures by shifting to digital platforms, there were nations who lacked access to basic infrastructure to conduct these classes. For instance, from Figure 14, one would notice that South Asia falls in the first quadrant with large instances of school closures coupled with poor access to internet for children at home. India, being a part of the South Asian region, has a similar story to offer.

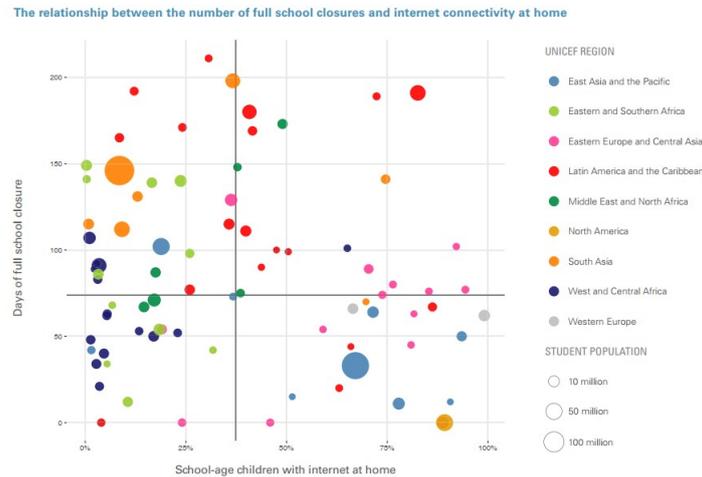


Figure 14: Number of full school closures and internet connectivity at home from UNICEF (2021)

Some of these issues in the Indian context were brought forward in a special parliamentary standing committee on education, women, children, youth and sports - *Plans for Bridging the Learning Gap caused due to School Lockdown as well as Review of online and offline Instructions and Examinations and Plans for re-opening of Schools* (Parliament (2021)). The committee notes that the pandemic has affected roughly 24 crore school children, which could be roughly split into children from Class 1 to 5 and Class 6 to 12. Learning loss has been accentuated in India since Indian education system has been dominated by classroom study and an abrupt shift to the digital platform has put pressure on the availability of technical/digital infrastructure. Another study conducted by Azim Premji University for 44 districts (in 5 states - Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand) with the sample of students from Class 2 to 6 note that 92% of the children lost at least one specific language ability and 82% lost at least one specific mathematical ability which they had acquired from the previous classes⁵.

⁵Full Report can be accessed [here](#)

Though very few studies have been conducted to look into the learning loss induced on the migrant children due to the pandemic, the committee do highlight the adversity faced by these children. In the previous sections, we were able to show that migrant children seemed to be much worse in terms of educational attainment in comparison to the non-migrant household. This is even more severe in case of the short term migration. Hence, one could possibly, with a tinge of pessimism, imagine the debilitating impact of the pandemic on these migrant children.

5.2 Legislative Mechanism to protect Child Migrants

Though the migrants forms a vulnerable section of the society, there has been very scanty legislation in India that protect the rights of the migrant workers. For instance, despite migrant workforce making a substantial part of the workforce there is only one piece of regulation protecting their rights - the Interstate Migrant Workmen's Act (1979). [Rajan and Bhagat \(2022\)](#) provides a brief overview of various legislation that are meant to protect the welfare of the unorganized sector and migrant worker. However, global bodies such as [Unicef et al. \(2013\)](#) note that the laws are more ostentatious and there have been flagrant exclusion of the internal migrant's right.

Hence, on this note, it has been an arduous task to actually look up for legal provisions that protect the rights of the children. We look into these rights of children which provides them education that they deserve and protects them from the exploitation in the labour market. [Bhattacharya \(2019\)](#) notes that with the passage of RTE in 2009, elementary education received legal backing and aimed to educate the hard-to-reach children, this includes the migrant children. Though it has been aimed at ensuring equitable education to all the children, there have been various issues that endanger the vision. [Rajan \(2021\)](#) from the field surveys in various schools (*Karnataka*) that cater to both migrant children and non-migrant children observe that the procedure of enrolling older migrant children is hindered due to the huge learning gaps between migrant and non-migrant children. The reason as mentioned earlier could be due to the break in the academic calendar since migrant children acts as a laggard for their academic performance thereby placing them in a disadvantaged position compared to their peer non-migrant children.

Another problem that had been discussed earlier is with relation to the children being

part of the workforce. Abolishment of child labour has been envisaged by the International Labour Organisation Convention 138 and Convention 182. Along with this, the amendment of Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 [CLPRA] in 2016 has led to the interdiction of employing children below 14 years. However, adolescents in the 14 to 18 years age range are authorized to work in notified non-hazardous workplaces. Such caveats in the law are exploited, thereby subjecting students to work for inhumane hours in a non-hazardous workplace. These instances have been highlighted in the previous sections, from the field investigation of Pandey T (2021). Another issue is the lack of awareness of fundamental rights amongst migrant family member and migrant child which often leads them to paroxysm of exploitation. Adding to this, another woe has been paltry allocation of funds for existing schemes like National Child Labour Project [NCLP]. NCLP was initiated in 1998 with the aim to eliminate child labour through - *“the identification, withdrawal, and rehabilitation of working children”*. However KSCF (2021) notes that despite the increased prevalence of child labour the budget allocations to NCLP have declined by about 52%, ie from 250 crore in the financial year 2015-2016 to 120 crore in 2020-2021. One reason for the lack of devolution of funds could be due to the severe underreporting of the cases of child labour, which gives the false perception that the problem of child labour has gone down over the years. Mukesh (2019) points out that, based on the figures from a starred question raised in the Lok Sabha to the ministry of labour and employment ⁶, notes that - , *“In 2015, only 61 violation cases were reported in West Bengal while 22,689 children were rescued. In the next three years (2016-18), no case of violation of Child Labour Act was registered in West Bengal. Despite this, 45,635 children were rescued from and rehabilitated.”*. This is not just the case with respect to West Bengal, even in Madhya Pradesh 11,400 children were rescued or rehabilitated in 2018, but there was not a single reporting the violation of the Child Labour act. Another issue is the rising divergence between the reporting of violation to the final conviction. In most cases, as seen in Figure 15, only 25% of the cases get convicted. These reasons could explain the lack of funding for the schemes, since the numbers otherwise suggest a optimistic figure.

With this analysis of the status quo and the current legislation, the next subsection looks at the various dimension through which one could address these issues in a more holistic manner.

⁶The detailed answer could be read [here](#)



Figure 15: Violation, Prosecution and Conviction of Child Labour Cases from 2015-18, Source [Lok Sabha Starred Question](#)

5.3 Policy Imperative

Though the pandemic had an enervating impact on the nation, there has been efforts taken by the government and other civic bodies that have helped to ameliorate the stress imposed by the pandemic. For instance [Parliament \(2021\)](#) talks about various steps :-

- Under the Centrally sponsored scheme, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, financial assistance were provided to reduce the number of out of school children drop-outs.
- An online portal has been launched i.e. PRABANDH portal has been launched to generate a unique ID for each of the migrant children. This will help to track the child until they are mainstreamed to regular schools.
- There have been other initiatives like DIKSHA app, Manodarpan, using local TV channels for digital education, QR code based textbooks etc. which have helped to bridge the learning loss.

While the above policies seems to be laudable there needs to be more effort in addressing the core issue of falling educational attainment especially due to seasonal migration. However the results from [4.2.4](#) show that a mere addition of educational infrastructure wouldn't be sufficient to address the issues of child migrants. To address this, [Smita \(2008\)](#) proposes a comprehensive model (*See 16*) to tackle the issue. This

model is unique in two ways, as it provides provision for both children who are migrating with the family and also for the children who are staying back. Children who are seasonally migrating with their family have the privilege to have on site schools at the destination site. If they have a such a facility, they can join back their village schools once they return.

If the migration site does not offer any particular educational facility at the site, then they (returned short term migrant) can join the bridge school, before they re-enrol back to their village schools. The courses undertaken in the bridge schools can effectively link the children to the village school curriculum. Also, seasonal hostel could be established for the left behind migrant children whose parents who go to work at these sites. Once the distress period is over, the children can join back to the local government school. Thus, the critical role played in the framework is that of the local schools, which needs to address all of these problems comprehensively.

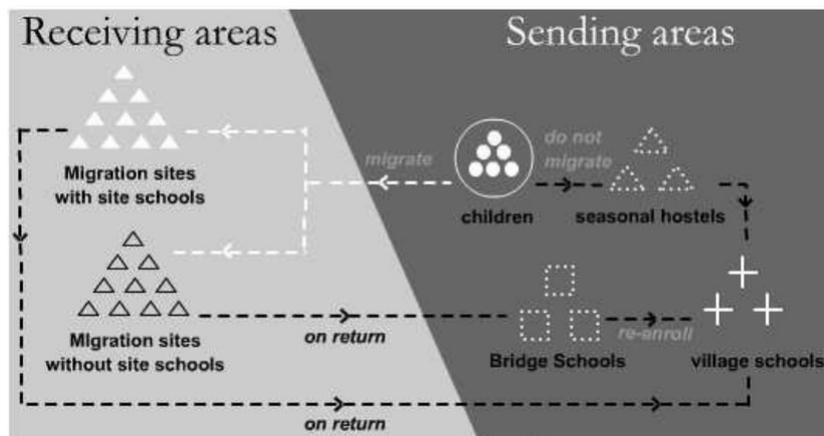


Figure 16: Proposed Intervention to address Falling Educational attainment [Smita \(2008\)](#)

These models have been put to practise by some civil rights organization in heavy out-migration districts in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Orissa⁷. But the current pandemic has led to the closure of many of these seasonal hostels, for instance [Muskan \(2021\)](#) talks about the case in Odisha where many seasonal hostels (started under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan) catering to many migration prone districts (both source and destination) had shut down due to the onset of pandemic. Also, another field study by the Aide at Action⁸, points out that as soon as the first wave of pandemic had moderated, the

⁷For a detailed review of the experience of these organization one could refer to [Smita \(2008\)](#)

⁸Detailed report can be read [here](#)

migrant labourers migrated for work but this time the children had also accompanied the family due to closure of many of the seasonal hostels. They find an increase in the number of migrant children at these brick kilns (*one of the largest absorber of seasonal migrants*) have risen significantly over the pre-pandemic years.

Hence, from the explication from the previous sections we could look into the solutions from a short term perspective (*addressing the losses due to the pandemic*) and medium to long term perspective (*addressing the vulnerabilities of seasonal migration on children*). This is explained in the next subsection.

5.3.1 Short term solutions

- State governments should be supporting, thereby helping in opening of various seasonal hostels. Also, hostels should ensure that there are adequate resources needed for the overall welfare of the child migrants
- Child care and learning centres should be established with the help of various civil rights organization in areas of migrant workers (*destination state*). Parents should be trained to help to support the holistic development of the child.
- Language often becomes a barrier in school education for the migrant children at destination location. For instance, in Kerala, the migrant children (travelling from North East States) drop out by the middle of the year since majority of the schools are Malayalam medium. The government then came up with Project Roshni⁹ that targets the problem by employing educational volunteers who are proficient in Malayalam, English and Hindi in the school. These volunteers would then use a code switching strategy of teaching the students so that language no longer become the barrier for them to learn. Such schemes have the possibility to scaled to the nation level.
- Once the children resume back to their villages at the destination they should be mainstreamed with various government services such as nutrition, immunization and education. Also, the Gram Panchayats and other village level bodies should take up additional responsibility in the re-enrollment of these children in the schools.
- Education Guarantee Cards (EGC) is another unique initiative rolled out by the select state governments in the early 2010. These cards are fitted with a chip

⁹More details on the scheme can be read [here](#)

developed to track the out-of-school children belonging to a migrant family, especially to those migrant children who do not have a permanent address. It contains the essential details of the student such as name, class, course progress as well as details regarding the school. The benefit of such a card system is that once the children migrates to another region, he can resume his education there without dropping out or taking a year off. The reason being that the card contains all the student details and even the academic progress. Thus, when he/she joins a new school, the authorities can tailor the teaching to ensure that he/she can continue his/her education. This could be linked with the PRABANDH platform for better integration of schemes.

5.3.2 Medium to Long term solutions

- Availability of reliable data on migrants has been a legacy issue. Better policy decision-making can happen with robust data. Barring the Census (*only decadal*) and few rounds of NSSO there is a lack of data on internal migration in India. Hence, this ought to be brought in the forefront. Data should be based on parameters like Geographies (*addresses questions regarding the characteristic of the sending area-is it an agriculturally distressed place as well as the receiving area*), Sectors (*which are all the sectors that is attracting the migrant family and the children*), migration flows (*intra-block, inter-block, inter-district, inter-state etc*) and magnitude of migration (*work site surveys conducted during migration period and village surveys during non migration period*)
- Models mentioned in Figure 16 could be scaled to the nation level with greater devolution of power in the local level since they are acquainted with the various nuances and problems of migration in that place of residence
- There needs to be joint planning between the districts and states. Since the states and district are much acquainted with the needs of the migrants as compared to the state.
- School system at the district level needs to be more responsible in accommodating the in migrant children and ensure that a smooth regularization of their education. Remedial classes could be conducted by teachers/education volunteers so that migrant children don't feel left out with their peer non-migrant children.

- Also, higher devolution of funds and activities permitted under schemes like MGN-REGA should be increased. This could help to curb the incidences of distress migration.

Finally collating the policy perspectives, we proceed to the final section, where we discuss the general findings of the study.

6 Conclusion

We began in the introduction by posing whether mobility of childhood has resulted in the mobility of aspirations. The evidence has been mixed and has attained a more sombre shade with the ongoing pandemic. The pandemic has pushed child migrants and their families into abject poverty. We conjecture that such situations leads to the painful snuffing of an individual's aspiration. The results from the district wise analysis (4.2) show that migrant children are more at harm compared to the non-migrant children. This problem gets accentuated with shorter duration of migration. We also find incidences of higher participation in the workforce in the shorter duration of migration. While the later sections, (5) gives a preliminary analysis of the afflictions faced by child migrant induced by pandemic. A systematic review of various field reports, shows the various steps taken forward to assuage the problem. One of the results from the cross-sectional regression results points out to a targeted approach for solving educational loss faced by migrants. Hence, we conclude with various policy imperatives (5.3) to tackle these issues. To this end, the study makes an attempt to analyse the issue of child migration, but somewhere has been constrained with the robustness of data on migration. Finally, with new census data due, it will provide with an opportunity to look into the problem in a comprehensive way, with insights into the latest trends and related issues.

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Appendix

Note on Data

We have taken data for 588 districts in India from the Census 2011 data. The exclusion of some districts has been due to unavailability of data. We compute the literacy rate for the migrant as the ratio of literate migrants to the total migrants. In the same way, we have calculated the participation of the migrant as the ratio of total main workers to the total migrant population.

For the analysis carried out in [4.2.2](#) we have disaggregated the literacy rate over the variables mentioned in [2](#). Similarly, we look at the participation rate of child migrants in the labour force disaggregated in the variables mentioned in [2](#).

Child Migration in India: A bird's eyeview

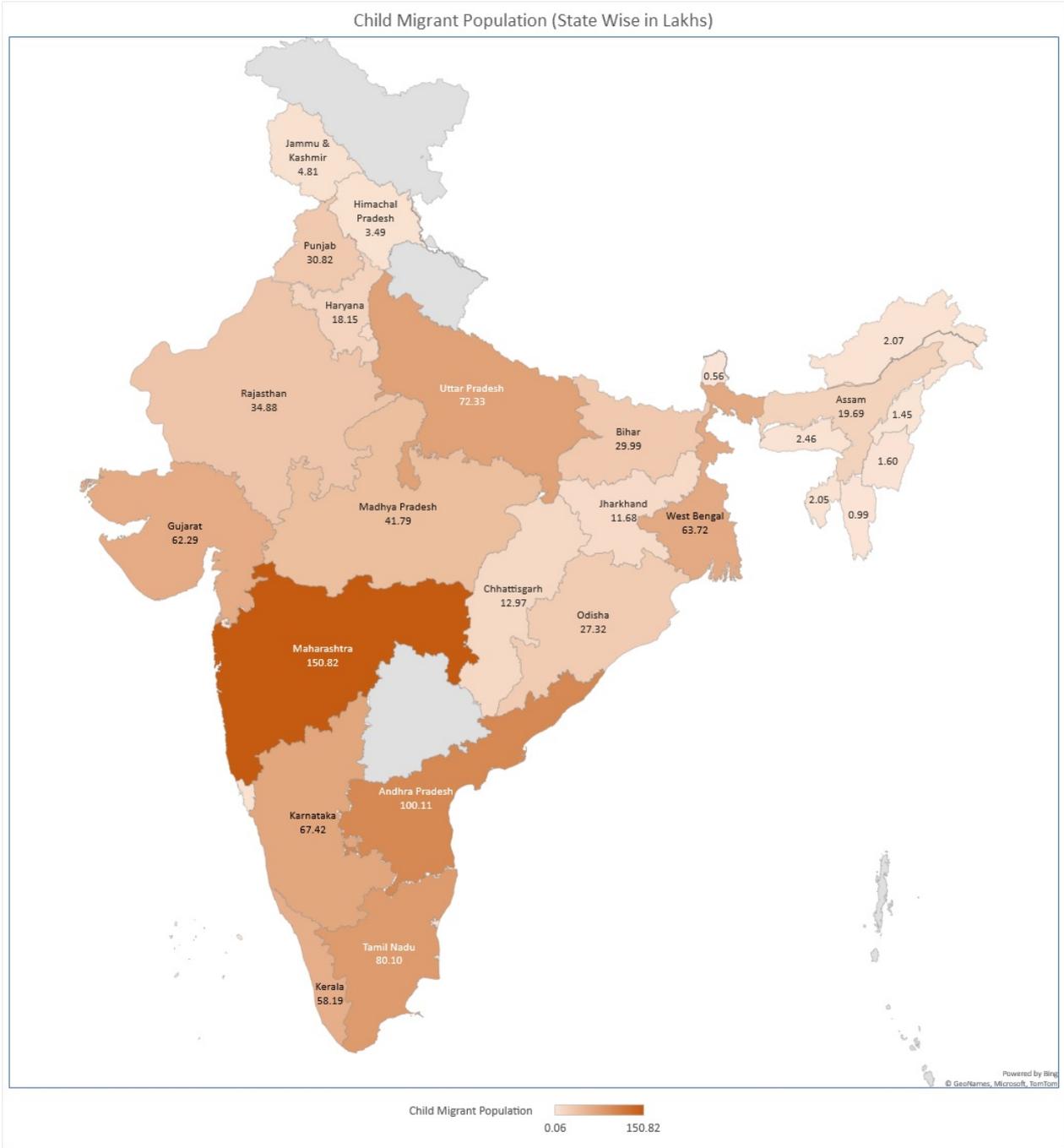


Figure 17: Child Migrant Population State wise based on Census (2011), Author's computation

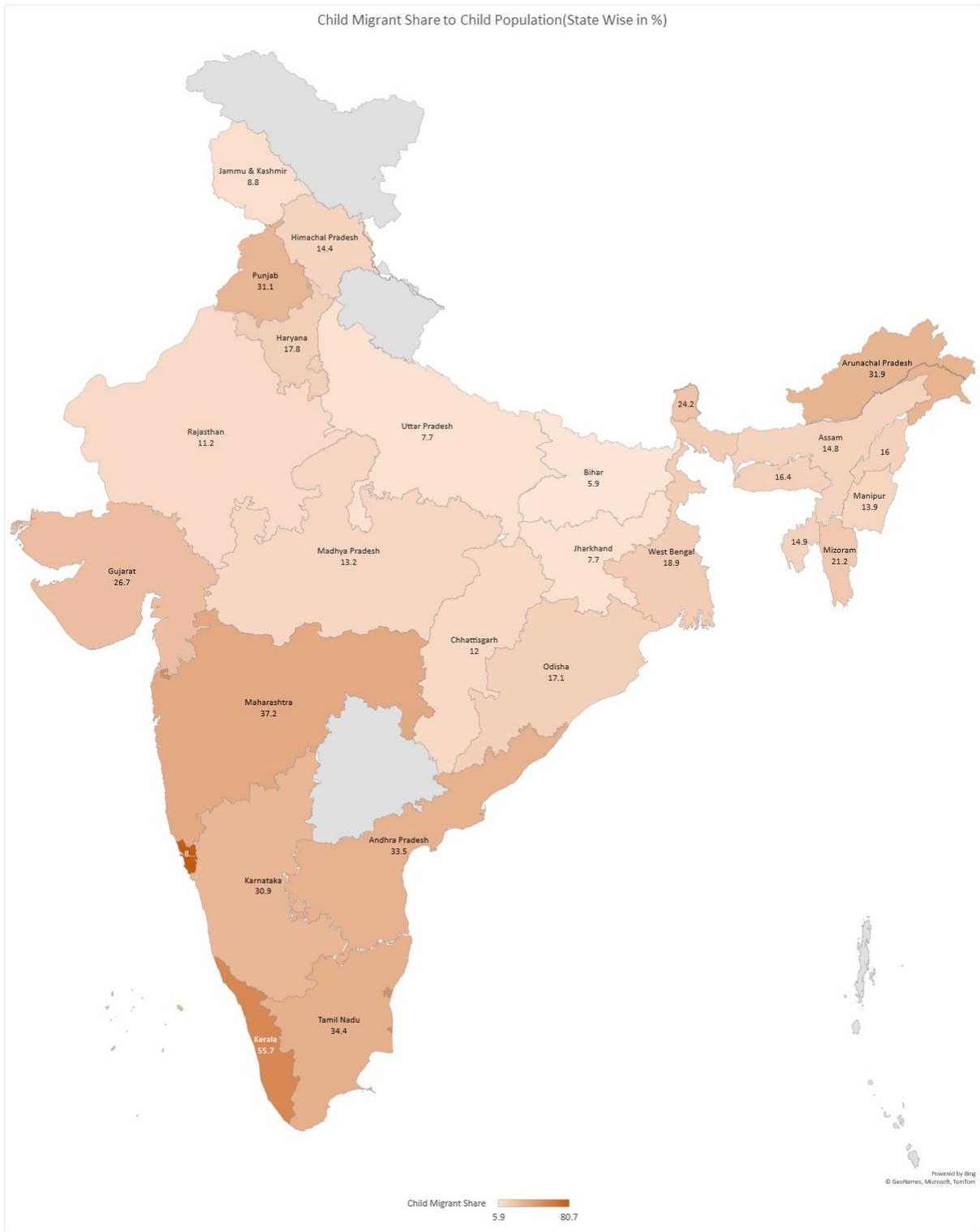


Figure 18: Child Migrant share State wise based on Census (2011), Author's computation