

**Gulf Migrants' in the Indian Parliament**  
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**Background**

According to the Government of India, Question hour in parliament “allows the Government to quickly feel the pulse of the nation and adapt its policies and actions accordingly. It is through these questions in Parliament that the Government remains in touch with people in as much as members are enabled to thereby to ventilate the grievances of the public in matters concerning the administration. Questions enable Ministries to gauge the popular reaction to their policy and administration (India, Question Hour in Lok Sabha, 2016).”

India sends approximately 700,000 migrant workers to the Middle Eastern region annually and according to the UN there are approximately 6 million Indians in the region. This paper uses questions asked in both upper and lower houses of Parliament to analyse the importance of migration to the Gulf region amongst policy makers and analyses the main issues that are of concern.

Data is restricted to questions raised to MEA and those specific to the Middle East region. This paper therefore does not include more general questions that are asked regarding passport services etc. It has however included questions related to e-migrate, MADAD portal and other and the Indian Community Welfare Fund, even though they are not region specific, as they are mostly related to ECR category migrants that are found in large numbers in the region.

**Number of Questions**

A total of 98 questions were raised in parliament regarding Gulf migrants between 2014-2016 of the total of 1579 questions asked of MEA. This indicates that migration to the Gulf is not a very high priority issue for the parliamentarians.

Of the 98 questions raised, 55 were raised in the Lok Sabha and 43 in the Rajya Sabha. The parties that raised the largest number of questions in both houses combined was the Congress with 21 questions, closely followed by the BJP that raised 18 questions. The largest number of questions were raised by the BJP in the Lok Sabha (17 questions) and by the Congress in the Rajya Sabha (14 questions). The other significant party that raised questions was the CPI (9 questions combined in both houses).

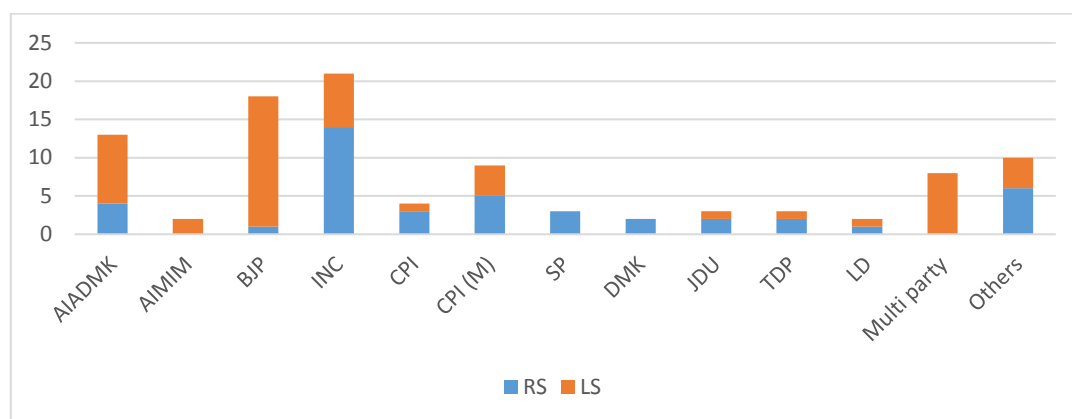


Table 1: Questions raised in both houses - by political party

### Issues Raised

As Diagram 1 and Diagram 2 below indicate, concerns regarding complaints from workers were the lead issue in both houses. This included issues from non-payment of wages, recruitment agents, detention etc. In the Lok Sabha however issues of mortality of workers and systems were equally significant. The largest variance between the two houses was regarding mortality where the RS had only 5% or only 2 questions on mortality whereas 11 questions were raised in the LS. Rescue/repatriation/ resettlement issues were comparatively more common in the Rajya Sabha.

Issues of women migrants got 9 questions, 3 of which were raised by AIADMK, the single largest party seeking answers on women. 6 of the 9 questions were in relation to domestic workers. Of the 5 questions, 4 were raised in the Lok Sabha and 4 in Rajya Sabha

Skills got equal relevance in both houses 9 and 10 % in Rajya and Lok Sabha respectively, mostly focusing on the Swarna Pravas Yojana.

In the Lok Sabha several questions were raised regarding the systems including e-migrate, ICWF, MADAD, data etc. Only 3 questions were raised in Rajya Sabha on the same.

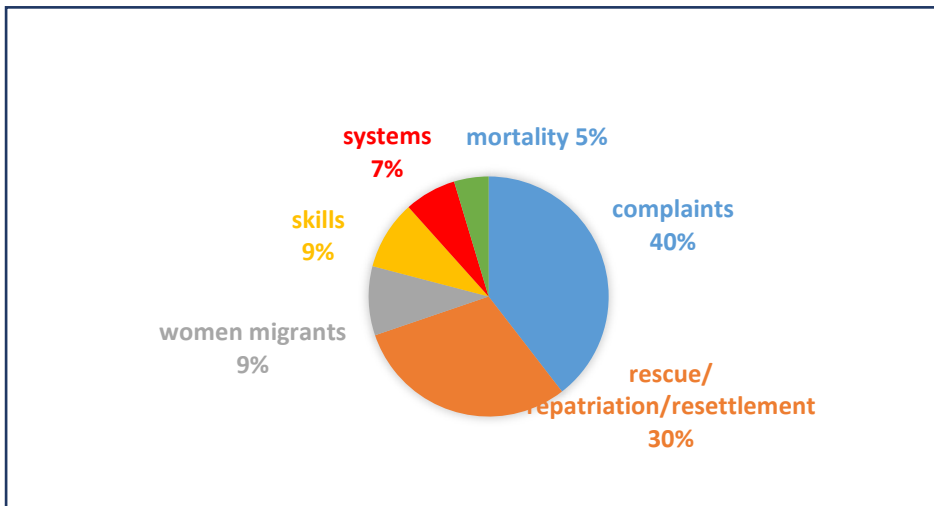


Diagram 1: Rajya Sabha – issues raised

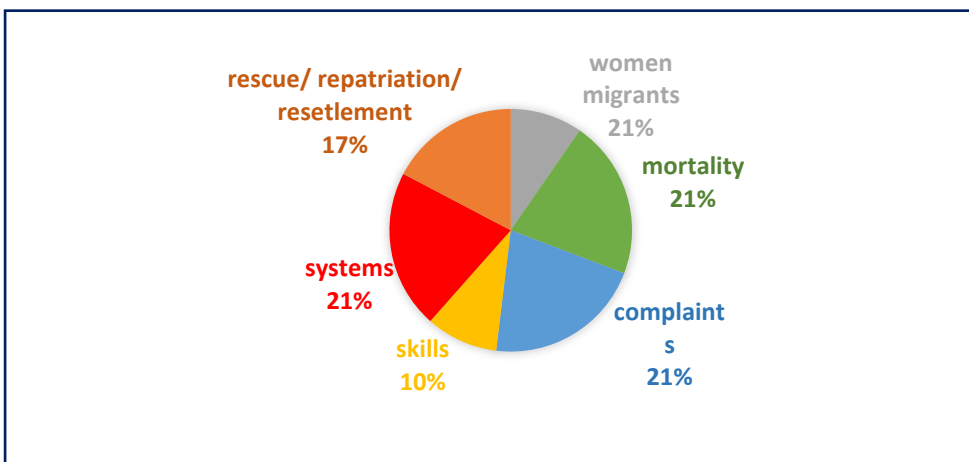


Diagram 2: Lok Sabha – issues raised

## **Conclusions**

Though migration to the Gulf features regularly in parliament, it is not a major issue; only 6 % of the questions addressed to the Ministry relate to this subject. This despite the fact that the Gulf region hosts the largest number of Indian diaspora (DESA, 2016) that contribute 52% of India's remittances (WB 2015) and PM Modi in his speech recognizing their contribution was limited not to remittances but to India's honour and pride (Saudi Arabia 2 April 2016).

Almost 80% of all questions were raised in 2016. It is not clear why this is so as the issues were just as urgent in the previous years. The higher level of interest could perhaps be attributed to the merger of the Ministries and the issue now being under the Ministry of External Affairs.

No questions were raised regarding the Emigration Act indicating the falling off of the agenda of a revision or new Emigration Management Bill which was being proposed earlier. This, despite the fact that India continues to function without a migration policy and 'a contemporary legislation can do justice to the twin objectives of promotion and facilitation of overseas employment coupled with preventing and penalizing misuse of the law' (Kumar and Rajan, 2015).

There was only one question linking FTA with workers benefits; no questions were raised on the bi-lateral agreements with these countries. The UN has stated that "trade liberalization has sometimes come at the expense of the human rights of migrants and that such agreements should be based on international standards and prioritize the full implementation of the human rights and labour rights of migrants and fully incorporate the voices of both migrants and civil society". However, no questions have been raised in parliament regarding India signing core international human rights treaties that recognize the rights of migrant workers such as the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the ILO fundamental conventions and the ILO migrant workers conventions. Engagement with migrants and civil society also finds no mention.

There were also no questions raised about the reasons for migration although it is clear that across the world migration remains one of the few options for people, particularly young people, to find decent work, and escape poverty, persecution and violence (UN 2015). Issues of social protection or occupational health and safety of workers were also not raised despite 5875 Indian workers dying in 2015. Zakir Husain in the World Bank blog site 'People Move' states that "the Indian government has not been successful in addressing migrants' core issues like safety and welfare". The only related reference to these issues can be inferred from the question raised regarding the use of the Indian Community Welfare Fund and its' coverage.

Nurses and domestic workers are the only occupational category of workers mentioned indicating a possible gender bias.

## **Recommendation**

The engagement of parliamentarians seems to be reactionary and in response to crisis issues. While it is important that these issues be raised in parliament, it is equally important that some of the more fundamental issues regarding the legislation and services, reasons for and trends of migration, bi-lateral agreements, and migrant workers' rights are raised in parliament.

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