

THE PANDEMIC AND MIGRANT CRISIS IN INDIA

STORIES FROM THE HINTERLAND

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CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

- The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown that followed has brought to the fore the societal fault lines across the globe (de Haan 2020). In a country like India, where economic inequality is being added to a society that is already fractured along the lines of caste, tribe, gender and region, the pandemic and its accompanying policies have intensified these fault lines.
- If anything, the lockdown has disproportionately affected one large section of the population sans any social safety net, the circular migrant workers. In a few weeks of lockdown, the shocking visuals of arduous journey of migrant workers – hunger, deprivation, human rights violation, accidents and deaths – started emerging in the country.
- In many ways, the spectacle of mass grief of footloose labouring class rose the curtain to expose the spectre of the contemporary world of work (Srivastav 2020; Breman 2020).
- The painful movement of these migrant workers to their native places exposes an extreme structural inequality which is unabated since the adoption of neo-liberal economic order.
- According to SBI Ecowrap Report 2020, the states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal has accounted for 90 per cent of total migrants; and it is estimated that around 58 lakhs migrants have gone back to their home states following the lockdown.

CONTEXTUALISING CIRCULAR MIGRATION IN INDIA

- The uneven development in India, conditioned by neo-liberal capitalism, with growth taking place at urban and peri-urban centres at the cost of hinterlands, far from enabling the benefits of its growth rates to trickle down to all groups, has further entrenched inequalities based on pre-existing unequal social divisions” [Srivastav 2020, Shah & Lerche 2018]
- The ‘footloose’ circular migrant labour, who are disproportionately drawn from the historically marginalized social groups, namely Dalits and Adivasi (SC/ST), plays a substantial role in shaping the new growth poles of the country which is unabated since the new economic reform (Breman 1996, 2013).
- A whopping majority of the workforce are engaged in the ‘informal’ economy. The migrants comprise around 29% of the workforce; roughly add up to 45 million workers. Other estimates put the figure around 100 to 500 million (Srivastava 2020; Breman 2020).
- Indian labour market is both fragmented and segmented (Jha 2018). The entrenchment of social difference in the expansion of capitalism takes place through at least three inter-related processes: ***inherited inequalities of power***; ***super exploitation based on casual migrant labour***; and ***conjugated oppression***. [Shah & Lerche 2018; Mosse et al. 2005]

Occupation across Social Groups (last five years) (in percentage)						
Occupational Groups	Forward/ General	OBC	SC	ST	Muslims	Total
Professionals, Administrative, Executive, Managerial Workers etc.	10.3	1.3	0.3	0.0	1.1	1.6
Clerical and Related Workers	8.8	2.2	1.0	0.3	1.1	2.0
Agriculture and Allied Activities	10.6	18.0	20.2	38.0	8.2	19.6
Construction	15.2	26.1	33.8	22.8	26.1	27.1
Brickkiln	3.1	9.6	11.7	12.4	9.8	10.1
Mining & Manufacturing (Other than Textile)	11.4	10.5	9.9	11.8	8.5	10.3
Textile	4.2	5.2	3.2	1.5	10.0	4.5
Other Workers (n.e.c)	10.2	8.8	6.2	3.8	4.9	7.0
Menial & Other Services	17.6	12.6	9.1	8.1	19.3	12.2
Shopkeepers/Sellers/Vendors	7.8	5.1	4.0	1.3	9.8	5.0
Housewives, Student/too Young & Out of Labour Force	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.1	1.2	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Authors' Calculation Based on IHDS 2011-12

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LABOUR MIGRATION FROM ODISHA

- Based on history and intensity of outmigration, the Government of Odisha has officially recognized eleven districts as migration prone districts of the state.
- The KBK region, which is known for its high prevalence of poverty and malnourishment, has relatively high concentration of Adivasi (ST) and Dalit (SC) population, and figure disproportionately in the key indicators of deprivation.
- The distressed-driven seasonal/circular migration from this region is very much structural in nature and has its root in the historical processes of exploitation and marginalization (Deo 1990, Mishra 2020, and Ludden 1999).
- The colonial period that saw a massive reconfiguration of social and political power in favour newly established Zamindars (estate manager) and Thekedars (contractors) belonging to the upper castes, did not alter their dominance radically rather it went on unabated in the post-colonial India.
- Post-colonial development → Shift from 'Patrimonial' State to 'Neo-patrimonial State' → New Development Paradigm that caters the need of Neoliberal Capital → Dispossession and Vulnerability
- According to the estimates of Migration Information and Resource Centre (MIRC), Aide et Action South Asia, 5 lakh people migrate from the western and southern region alone (Srivastav 2020, p. 12). Nearly one-third of the total surveyed households have at least one or more members migrating for work (Ajeevika Bureau 2014).

DISTRIBUTION OF SC/ST POPULATION, LITERACY, NON-WORKERS AND WORKERS ACROSS VARIOUS CATEGORIES

Variables	Kalahandi	Koraput	Nabarangpur	Rayagada	Odisha
SC Population	18.2	14.2	14.5	14.4	16.5
ST Population	28.5	50.6	55.8	56.0	22.1
Literacy	50.9	41.2	38.5	42.1	73.4
Total Non-Workers	52.3	49.7	50.0	51.7	58.2
Total Workers	47.7	50.3	50.0	48.3	41.8
Main Workers	50.1	57.2	45.7	48.8	61.0
Marginal Workers	49.9	42.8	54.3	51.2	39.0
Cultivation	19.3	29.9	28.3	21.3	23.4
Agricultural Labourers	58.1	41.9	53.8	53.1	38.4
HH Industry Workers	2.5	2.1	2.4	2.1	4.5
Other Workers**	20.2	26.1	15.5	23.5	33.7

Source: Authors' compilation from Primary Census Abstract, Census of India 2011.

Note: *Percentage of SC/ST population, literacy rate, total non-workers and workers have been calculated as a percentage of respective state's total population; ** Main, marginal, cultivation, agriculture labourers, hh industry workers and other workers as percentage of total workers.

PANDEMIC AND RETURN MIGRATION TO ODISHA

Figure 1. Travel Summary of Returnees to Odisha by Road

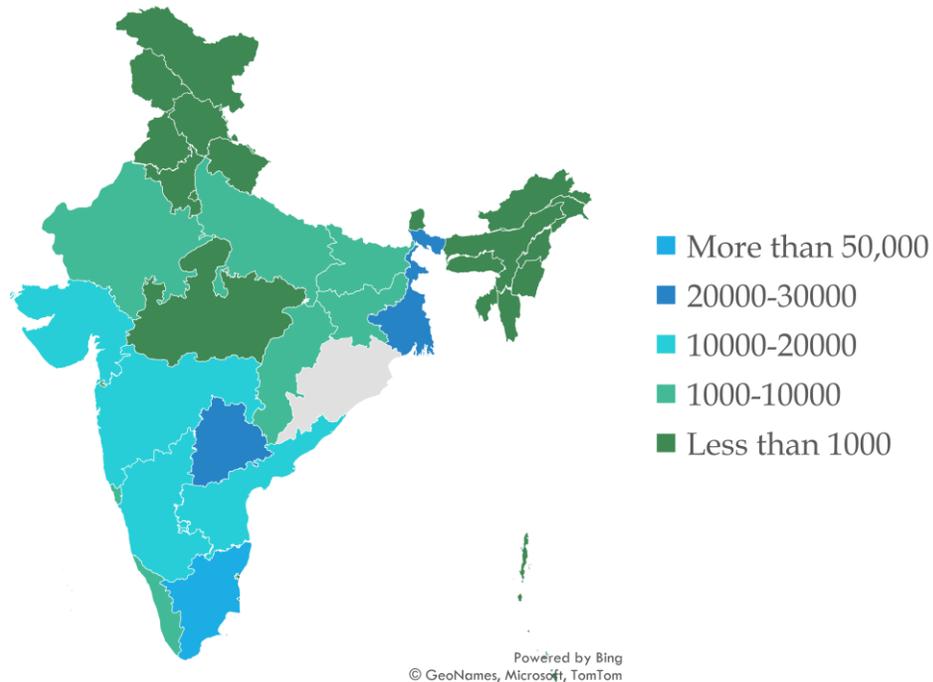
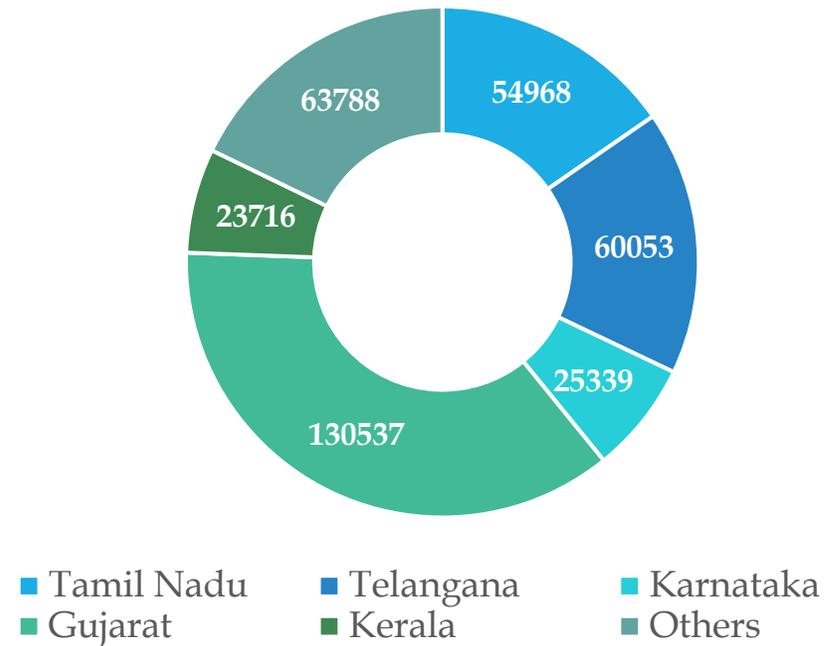


Figure 2. Travel summary of returnees to Odisha By Train (Shramik Special Train)



As many as 8,53,777 migrants returned to the state after the imposition of the lockdown (Odisha Govt.)

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

- On 10 March 2020, the state government declared COVID-19 to be a ‘disaster’ and empowered the government officials under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, and the Epidemic Disease Act 1897.
- In a historic move, on 19 April 2020, the Government empowered the Sarpanch with the power of a District Collector in their respective jurisdiction to fight back the pandemic.
- In Odisha] Panchayats emerged as central to the state’s communication and response strategy. Rs. 5 lakh was disbursed to each Panchayat to set up Temporary Medical Centres (TMCs) and to equip them for any unforeseen need for basic amenities.
- The government also ensured three months’ advance disbursement of transfer payments and ration stocks to the entitled beneficiaries. Moreover, students also received pre-matriculation scholarships and advance mid-day meal ration for three months.
- Rs 2000 per migrant as an incentive to the returnee migrants who have completed the mandatory institutional quarantine.
- Rs. 17,000 crore stimulus package under the “Special Livelihood Intervention Plan” to “provide employment and income generation opportunities to the worst affected section of the society, including migrant workers and farmers.”
- Rs. 6,440 crores for MGNREGA, which aimed to create 20 crore mandays for 46 lakh persons, and Rs. 140 crore for skill development of migrant workers.

MIGRANT WORKERS AND THEIR WORLD OF WORK

Migrants Last worked States before the Pandemic across Origin Districts and Social Groups (in percentage)

Destination States	KORA	KALA	NABA	RAYA	ST	SC	OBC	Total
Andhra Pradesh	100	-	3.3	6.7	54.7	6.1	5.6	27.5
Telangana	-	10	16.7	13.3	9.4	2	33.3	10
Tamil Nadu	-	6.7	53.3	10	13.2	26.5	5.6	17.5
Kerala	-	50	10	66.7	15.1	53.1	22.2	31.7
Karnataka	-	6.7	3.3	-	-	4.1	5.6	2.5
Goa	-	26.7	-	-	5.7	6.1	11.1	6.7
Maharashtra	-	-	6.7	-	-	-	11.1	1.7
Rajasthan	-	-	6.7	-	-	2	5.6	1.7
Odisha	-	-	-	3.3	1.9	-	-	0.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: KORA-Koraput, KALA- Kalahandi, NABA- Nabarangpur and RAYA-Rayagada

Source: Field Survey 2020.

DISTRIBUTION OF WORK UNDERTAKEN BY MIGRANTS ACROSS SOURCE DISTRICTS BEFORE THE PANDEMIC (IN %)

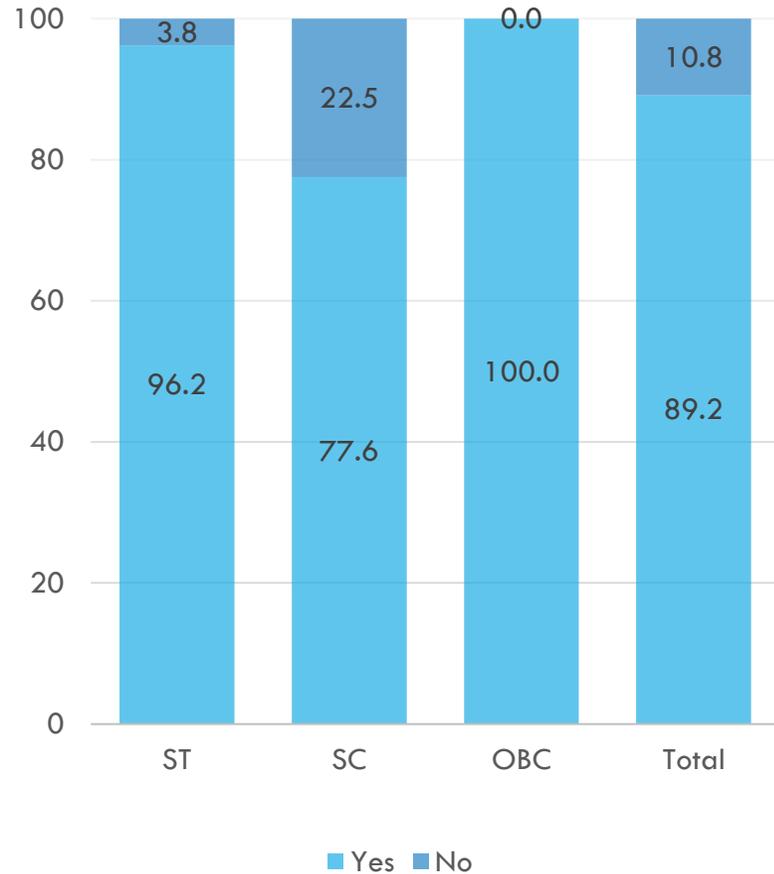
Type of Work	Koraput	Kalahandi	Nabarangpur	Rayagada
Construction Sector	0.0	63.3	60.0	16.7
Brickkiln Industry	96.7	3.3	16.7	10.0
Service Sector	3.3	13.3	6.7	36.7
Garment/Carpet Industry	0.0	0.0	13.3	10.0
Sea Food Industry	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.3
Miscellaneous	0.0	20.0	3.3	13.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Miscellaneous includes casual labour in odd industries as cement industry, water-packing, oil filling company, paper company, gas company, boating, automobile company, plastic manufacturing company, meat trade etc.

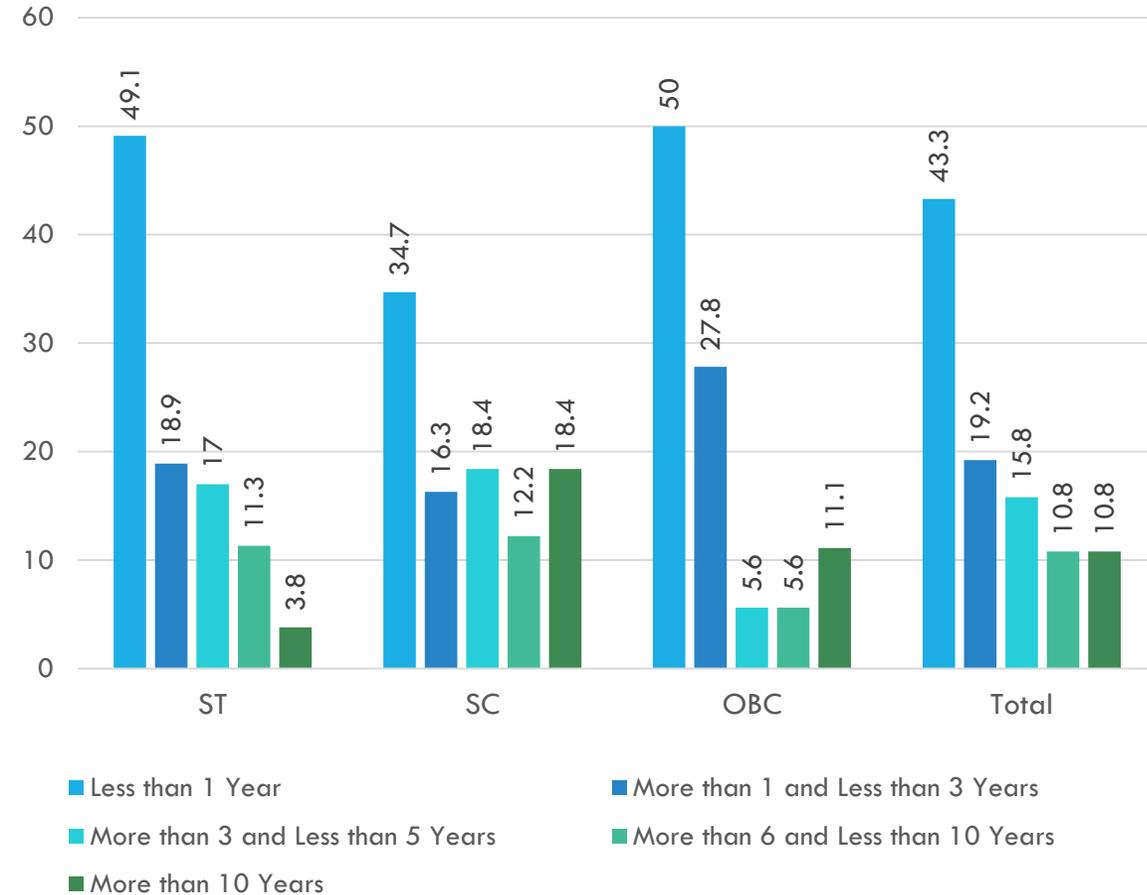
MIGRANTS LAST WORKED STATES BEFORE THE PANDEMIC ACROSS ORIGIN DISTRICTS (IN %)

Destination States	Koraput	Kalahandi	Nabarangpur	Rayagada	Total
Andhra Pradesh	100.0	0.0	3.3	6.7	27.5
Telangana	0.0	10.0	16.7	13.3	10.0
Tamil Nadu	0.0	6.7	53.3	10.0	17.5
Kerala	0.0	50.0	10.0	66.7	31.7
Karnataka	0.0	6.7	3.3	0.0	2.5
Goa	0.0	26.7	0.0	0.0	6.7
Maharashtra	0.0	0.0	6.7	0.0	1.7
Rajasthan	0.0	0.0	6.7	0.0	1.7
Odisha	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

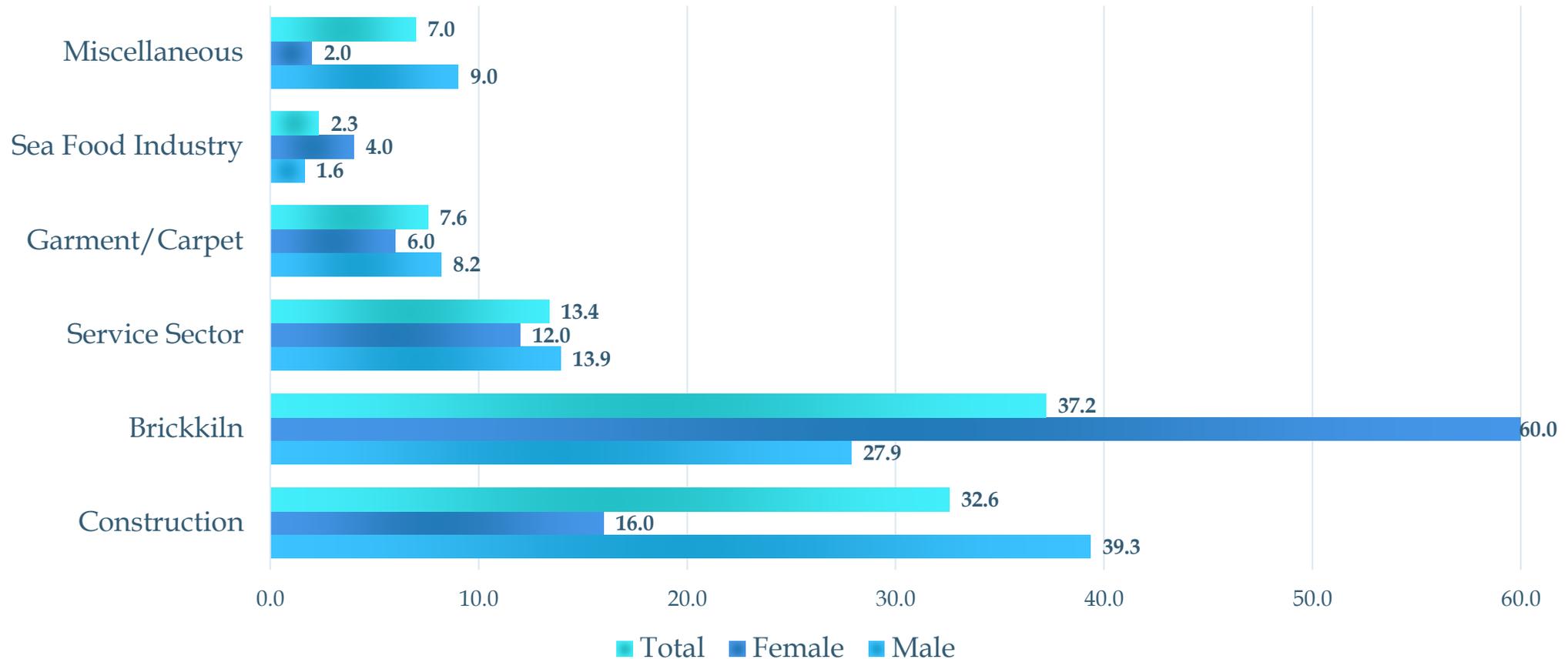
The First Generation Migrant Workers



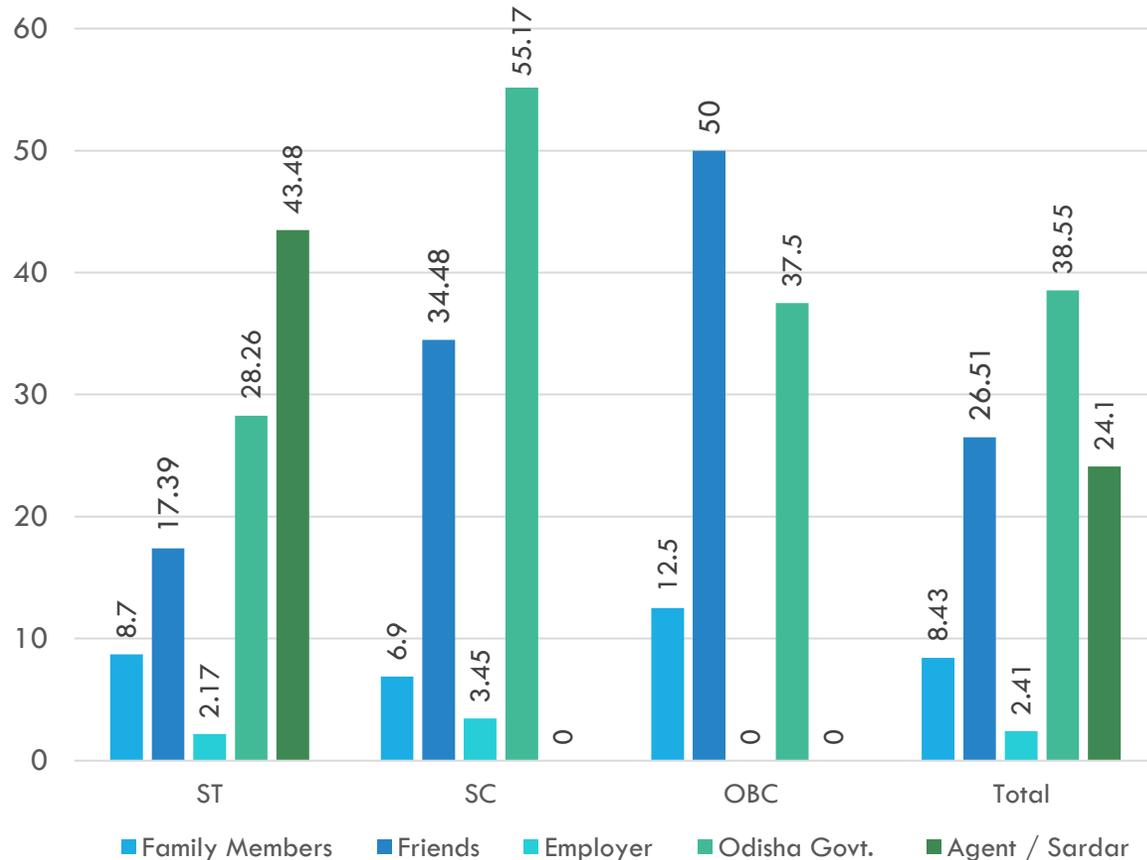
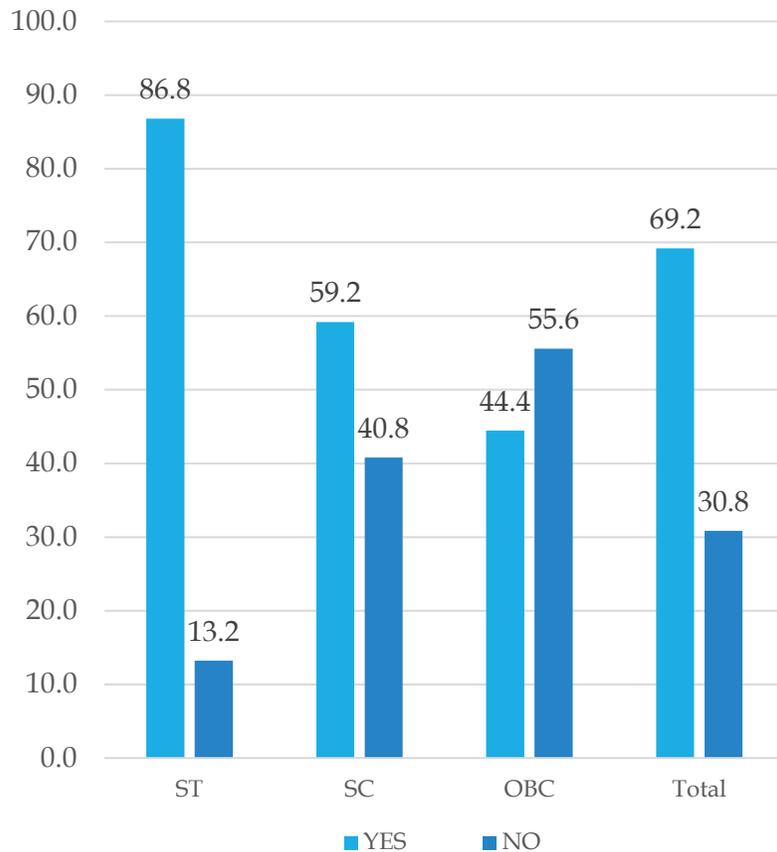
Since how long you have been working as a migrant labour?



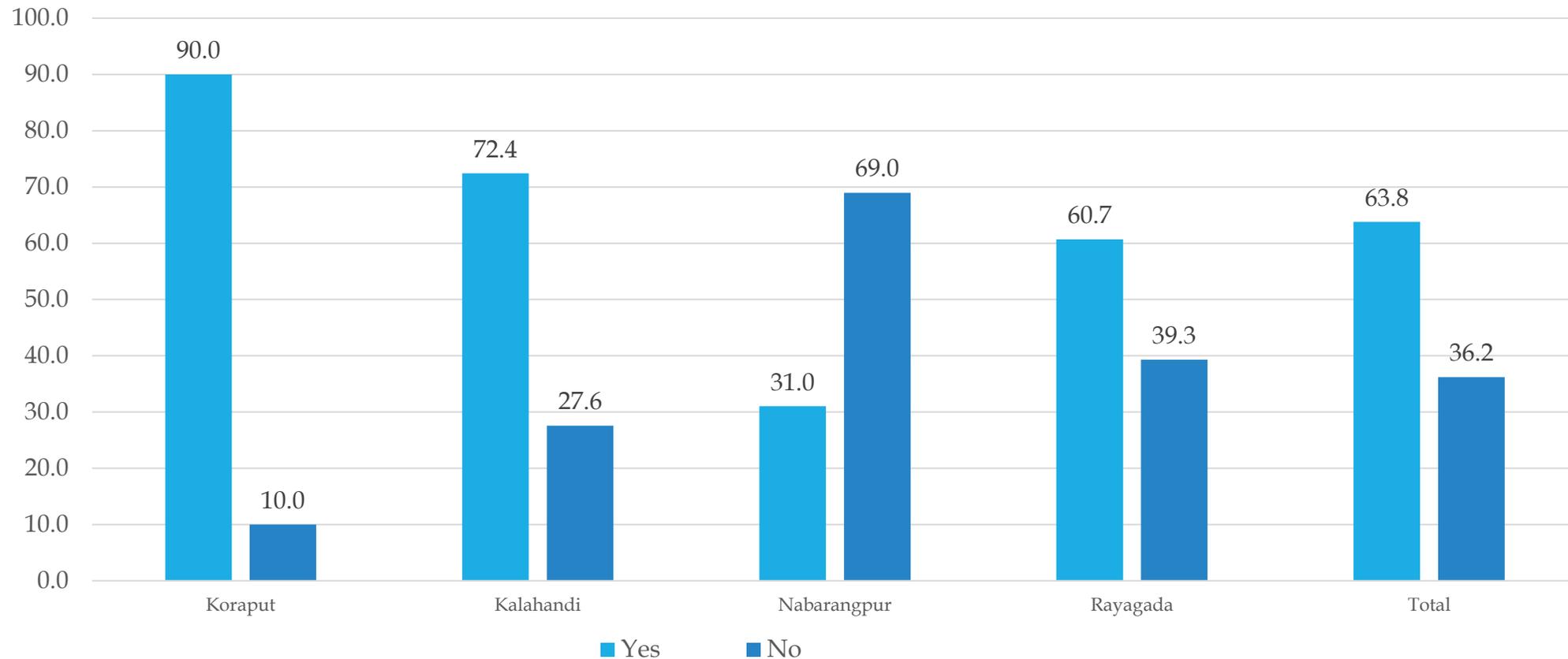
DISTRIBUTION OF WORK UNDERTAKEN BY MIGRANTS ACROSS SEX BEFORE THE PANDEMIC (IN %)



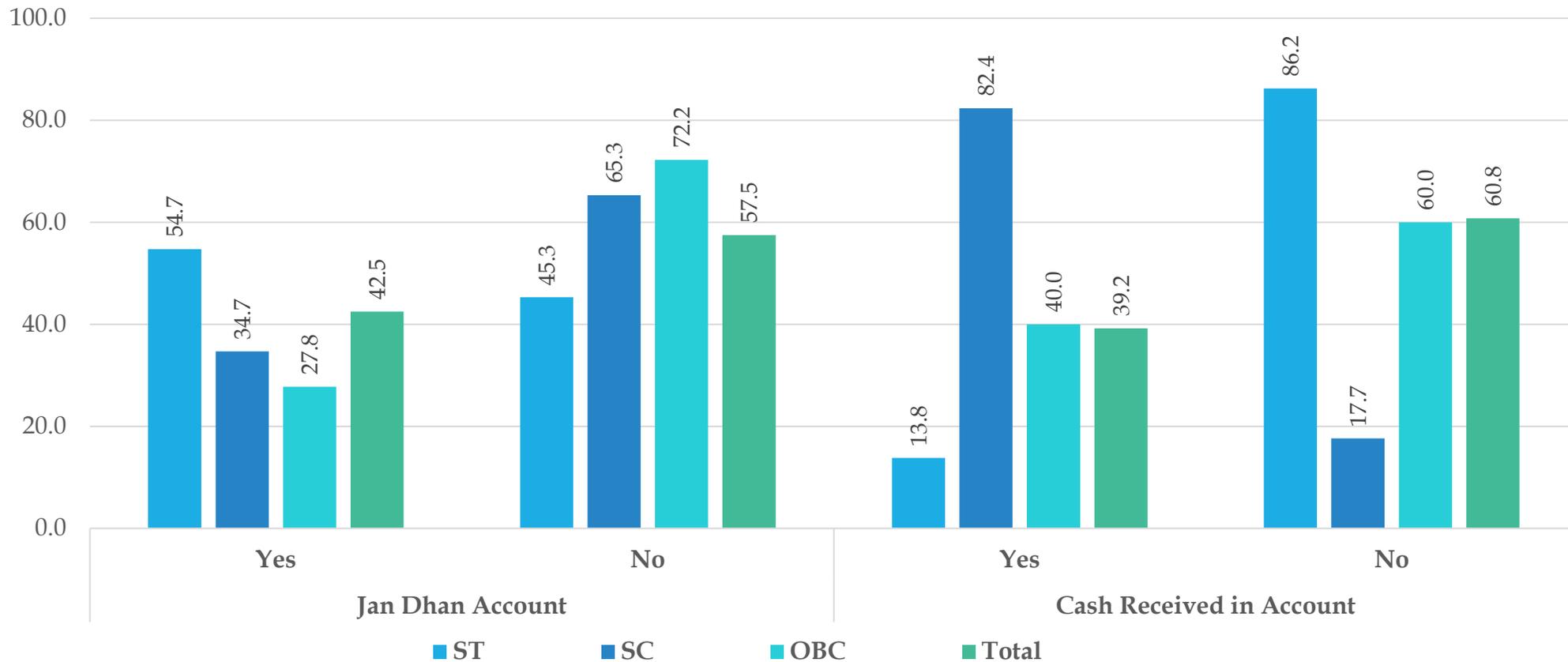
HELP SOUGHT BY THE MIGRANTS ACROSS SOCIAL GROUPS (IN %)



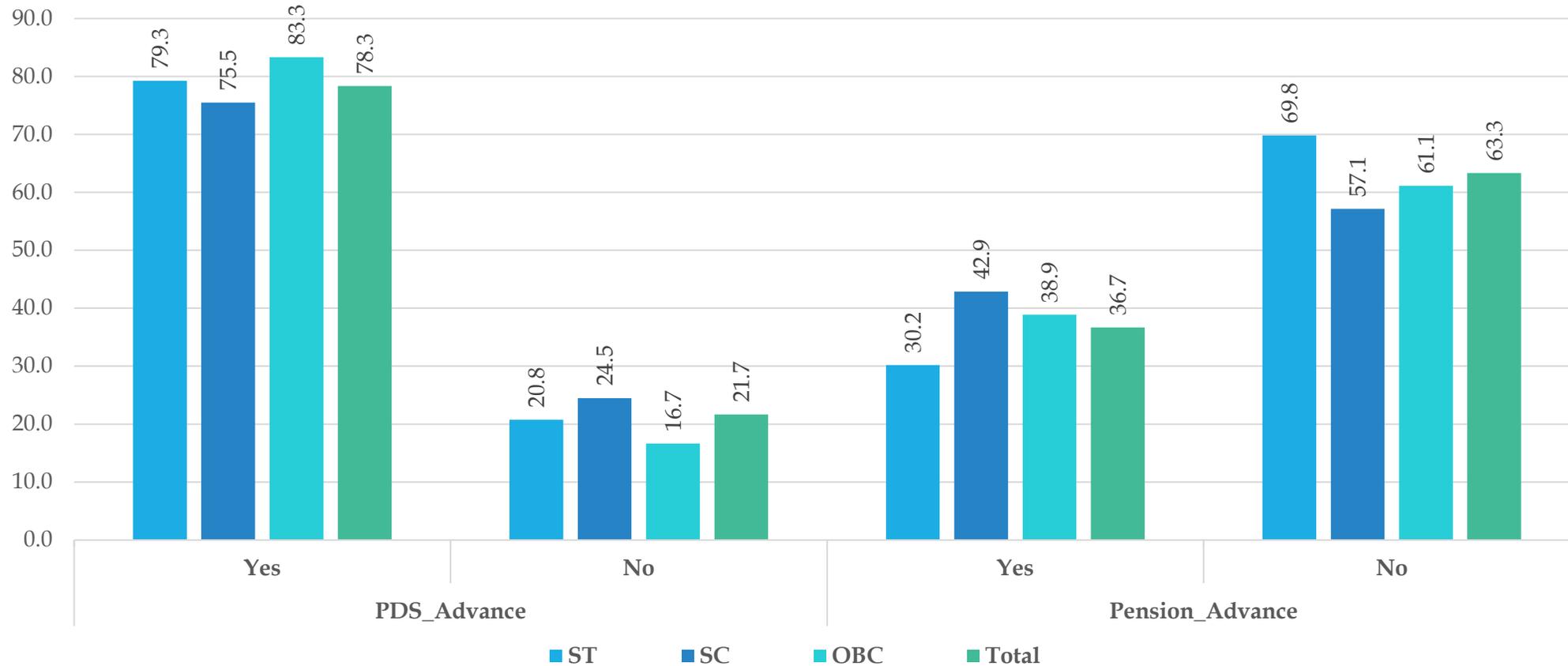
INCENTIVES MADE AVAILABLE AFTER THE INSTITUTIONAL QUARANTINE ACROSS DISTRICTS



AVAILABILITY OF PM JAN DHAN ACCOUNT AND CASH RECEIVED BY THE MIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS

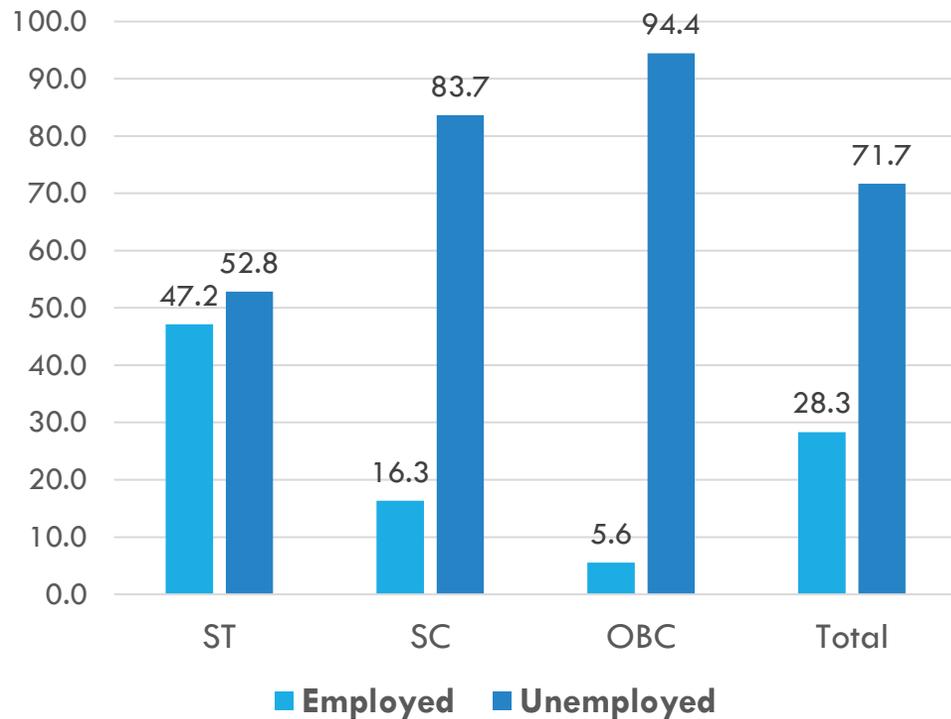


MIGRANT HOUSEHOLD'S ACCESS TO ADVANCE PDS AND PENSION

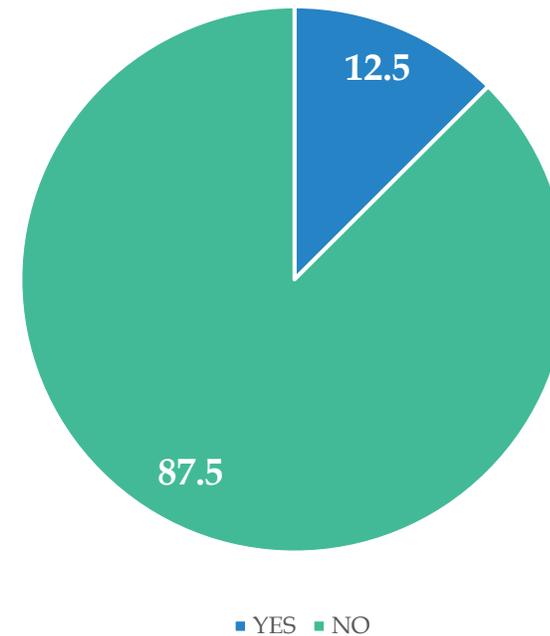


CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF THE MIGRANT

Current Employment Status of the Migrant and Non-Migrant Respondent

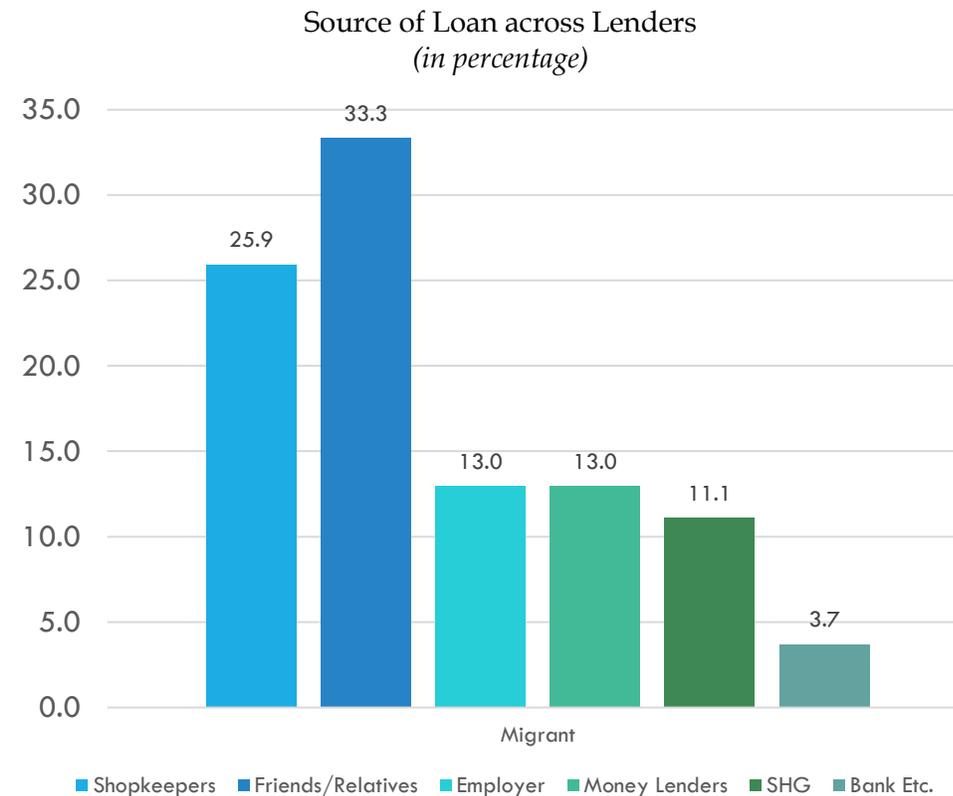


Employment under MGNREGA

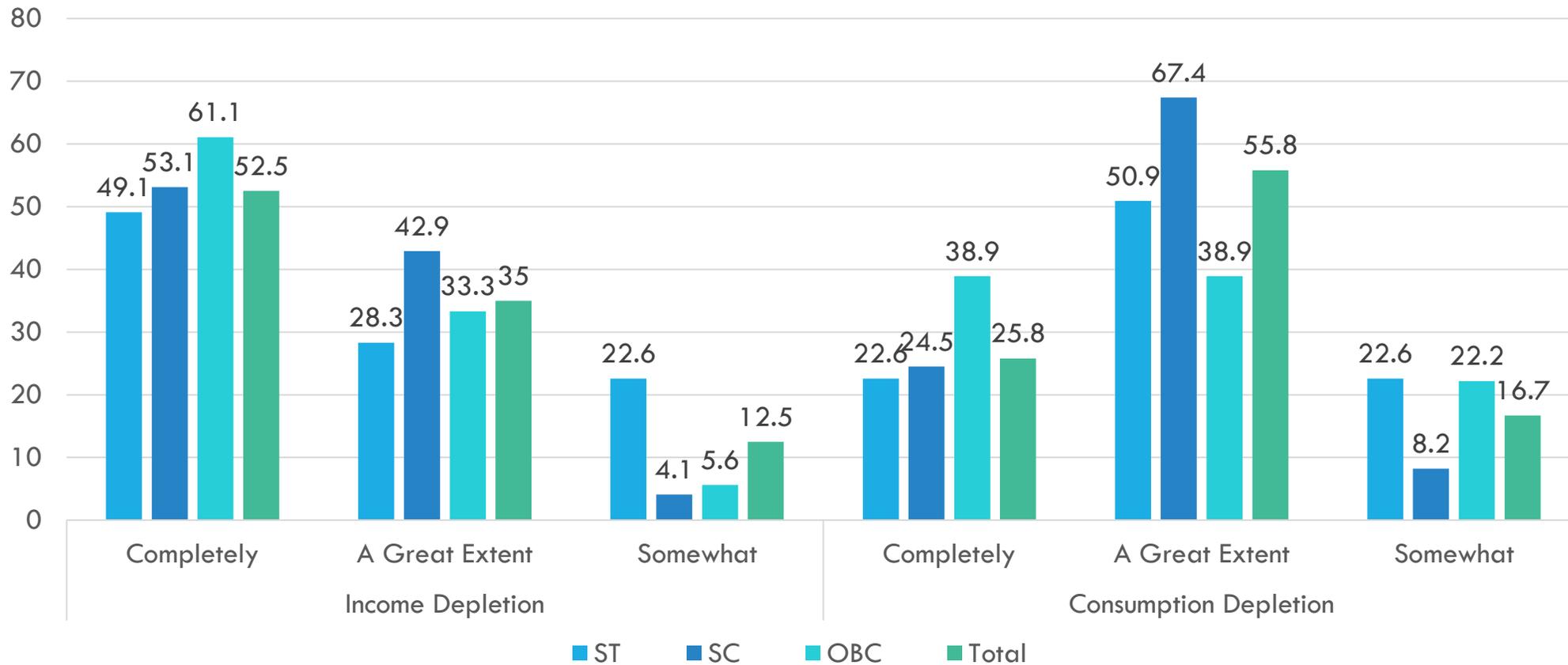


DEBT PARTICULARS OF MIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS

Debt Particulars of Migrant Households (in percentage)				
Social Groups	Indebted	Less than ₹5000	₹5000-₹10000	More than ₹10000
ST	43.4	56.5	30.4	13.0
SC	53.1	42.3	26.9	30.8
OBC	27.8	40.0	40.0	20.0
Total	45.0	48.1	29.6	22.2

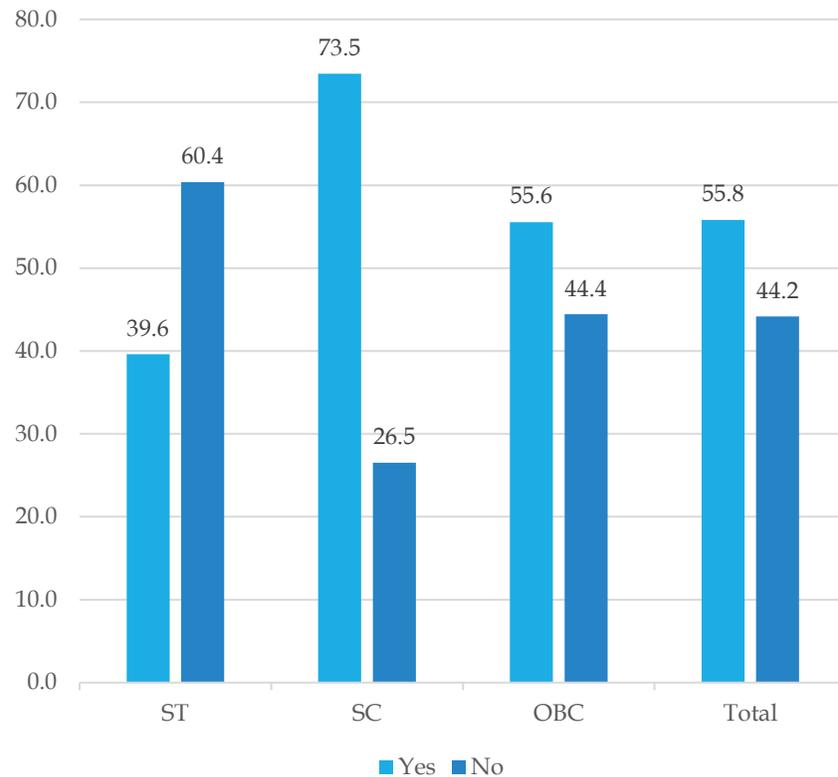


IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON INCOME AND CONSUMPTION OF MIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS (IN %)



FUTURE MIGRATION

Possibilities of Future Migration



Approximate Time for Future Migration



THE FUTURE OF MIGRATION: SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

- More coercive laws have been introduced by the Centre and State Govts. to further exploit labour in the guise of recovery.
- Policy supports during the pandemic in India was “more cosmetic than heralding a genuine policy shift”
- For any policy to work, the politics needs a complete overhauling.
- What is going to happen once this health crisis has burned itself out? The stalwarts and profiteers in the current regime of exploitation, with the ruling power elite and owners-cum-managers of big capital as its stakeholders, are determined to firmly stay on the course of neoliberalism and resume business as usual. In that eventuality, the workforce made footloose would have no option than to take to the road once again. (Breman 2020)
- The only way to lift the condition of proletariat is through “phasing out of neo-liberal policy is of imperative urgency”. [Breman 2020]