



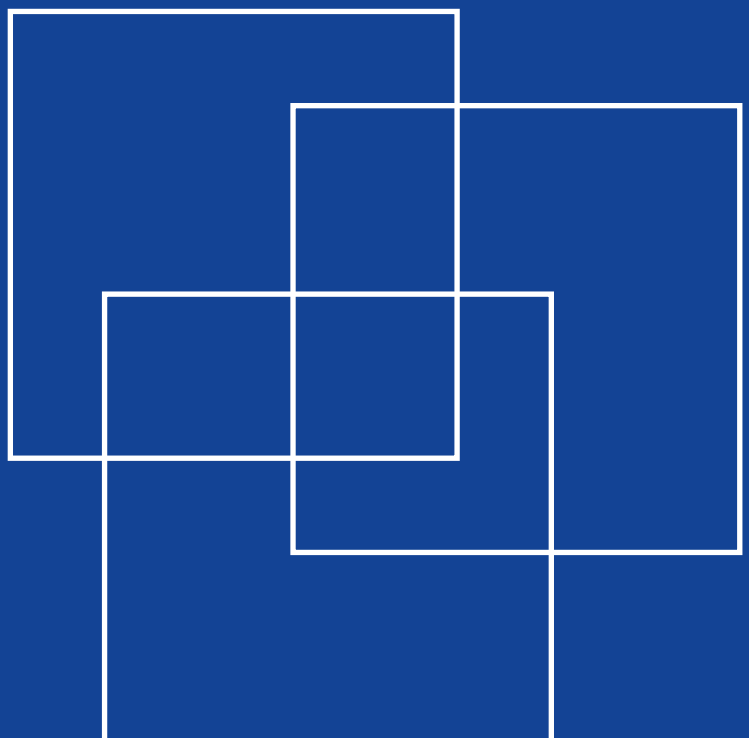
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ECONOMIC RE-INTEGRATION OF RETURNING MIGRANTS IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR IN INDIA

AVINASH KUMAR



Economic Re-integration of Returning Migrants in the Construction Sector in India

Avinash Kumar

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Executive summary

The discourse on labour migration in South Asia two significant benefits of migration for migrants and the countries of origin. First and foremost are the wages earned and the remittances sent home. These are quantifiable and unquestionably significant. The second benefit relates to the transfer of skills and knowledge, and in this area there is a dearth of information. A better understanding of skills transfer is essential in informing migrants' individual decision making, as well as government policy at the central and state levels.

This report examines the issue of re-integration of Indian migrants who had been working in the construction industry in the Gulf. The report assesses whether the skills gained through work experience abroad increases the employability of migrants once they return to their home country. It addresses the barriers and challenges that they face when they seek employment in the construction sector in India.

The report looks at the three stages of the migration experience: prior to departure, in destination and return. First, when the workers are looking for an opportunity in the Gulf. This is the stage at which the worker tries to obtain some skills, either through a private vocational training centre or by first working on a construction site in India. Second, while working abroad, migrants will upgrade their skills. The average period of stay in the Gulf of the respondents interviewed for this study is five years. Third, when workers return to India and seek employment in India. This report focuses primarily on this stage. The report looks into the employability for returning migrants vis-à-vis internal migrants, their wages and working conditions.

The report also examines how the construction industry in India views returning migrants and whether there is any preference for their skills, knowledge and experience. It also inquires into the associational factors that facilitate the re-integration of returning migrants. It is important to note that the Gulf countries only recruit male workers in the construction sector, and therefore, this study focuses only on men.

Some of the broad conclusions that can be drawn from this study are:

- There is no significant difference in the availability of work for workers returning from the Gulf and for internal migrant workers. Both groups face equal levels of under-employment. The level of wages, conditions of work and terms of employment is also the same.
- Most of the returning migrants have to choose between casual labour and self-employment, or remain unemployed.
- There is hardly any change in the amount of regular salary/wage employment before workers migrate to the Gulf and after their return.
- The majority of the returning migrants found employment through informal networks of contractors, family and co-workers. The government plays a minimal role in supporting migrants' economic reintegration.
- Most of those who are currently self-employed used to be self-employed even before they migrated. They are running micro enterprises (89 per cent are own-account enterprises) that give very low returns.
- Due to uncertainty in the domestic job market, nearly half of the respondents have expressed their desire to re-migrate to the Gulf.

- The study finds that there is hardly any evidence to prove that the construction industry in India values the skills gained by the workers in the Gulf. One of the main reasons for this lack of appreciation is the practice of sub-contracting. There is a complete disconnect between the workers at the bottom of sub-contracting chain and the construction conglomerates at the top. The sub-contractors demonstrate little concern about the skill levels of the workers they recruit.

The study recommends more research and analysis to inform policy on skills and migration, including for women migrants and migrants in other sectors. The current policy discourse in support of circular migration highlights the value of skills learnt in destination as part of the gains that accrue to migrant workers and origin countries. However, this discourse often does not take into account the realities of the domestic labour market. As shown in this study, the full and long-term benefits of skills development for migrants cannot accrue in the current environment until some of the following measures are taken:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT AT CENTRAL AND STATE LEVELS:

- Collect better data on the skills of migrant workers prior to departure and on return. This will strengthen understanding of the skills attained by the workers during their time in the Gulf, and facilitate placement into new employment opportunities within India or abroad.
- Invest in public employment services and access to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (skills testing and training) for migrant workers to enable them to find jobs that take into account their skills - either within the domestic labour market or overseas.
- Engage in a series of dialogues with construction industry associations, throughout the sub-contracting chain, to better understand the decision making around recruitment and employment of skilled workers – and increase opportunities for returning migrants with skills.
- Ensure that investments made into training migrant workers reflect the needs of the country to ensure those workers have longer-term career opportunities (at home or by re-migrating), rather than just being trained for a short-term contract overseas.
- Train returning migrants to be future trainers – within government and private institutions and on site. Returning migrants are more likely to have experience working on more advanced technologies that are increasingly being introduced onto construction sites in India.
- Further study the impact of migration on development, on the individual migrant, their families and communities of origin.
- Through bilateral agreements with countries of destination, call on the employers in destination to issue certificates of employment highlight the skills level and work tasks.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IN INDIA:

- Clearly articulate to local and central authorities the skills gaps that exist, so that efforts can be confined to have returning migrants fill them.
- Register all employees and provide experience certificate to all employees, specifying the terms of employment and work accomplished.
- Build a culture in which workers' skills and quality on site is respected
- From the highest levels, take on a more active, oversight role in the recruitment of workers. The sub-contracting chain de-values skills and experience, which has a direct impact on quality, safety and timeliness.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRADE UNIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN INDIA:

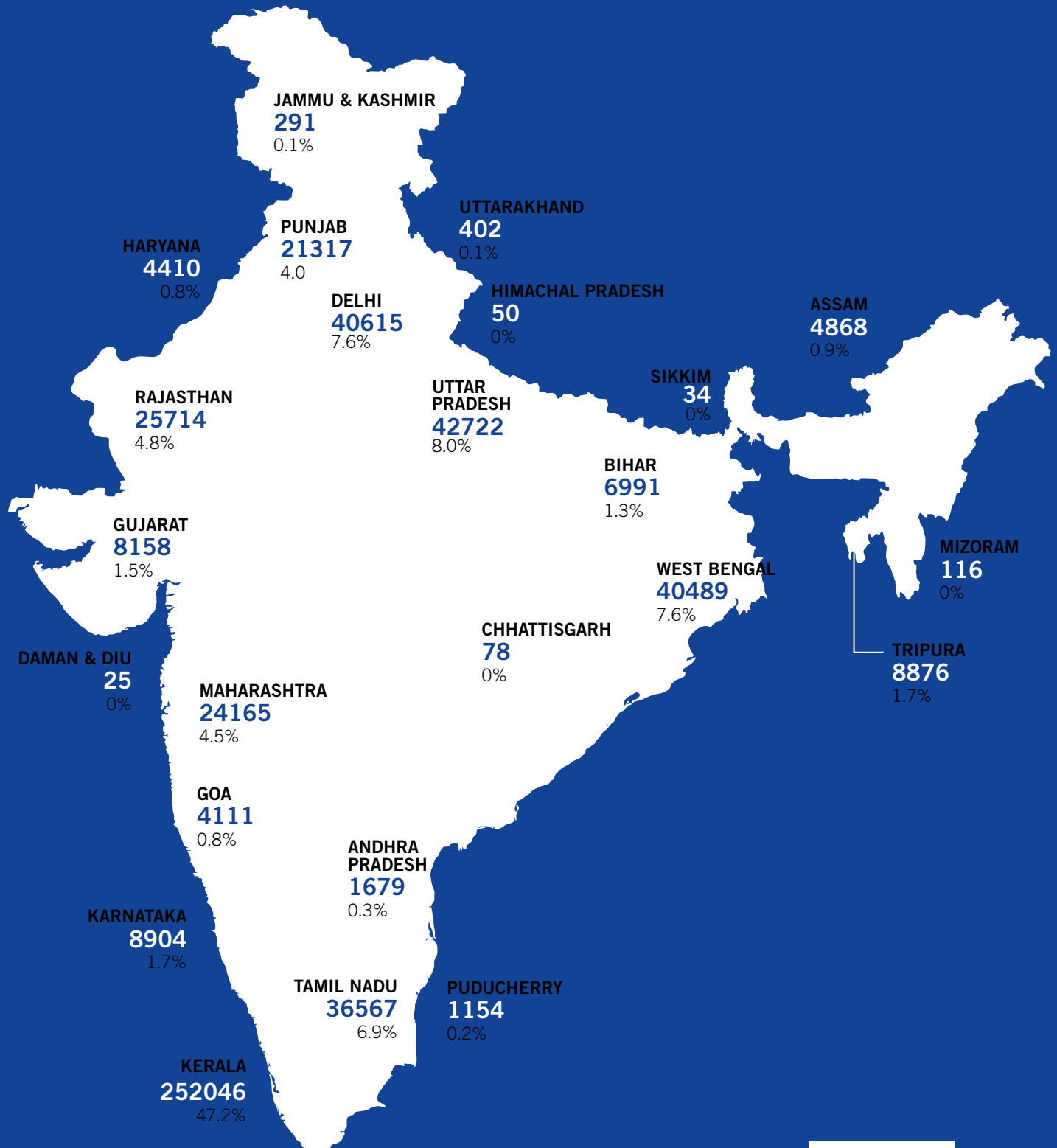
- Build partnerships amongst themselves to enhance services for migrants at all stages of the migration cycle. Trade unions should consider expanding membership to construction workers overseas.
- Encourage the formation of self-help groups that can also assist with information and support services in reintegration.
- Strengthen dialogue with government offices at all levels to introduce policy and programmatic responses around reintegration.



List of abbreviations

DLF	Delhi Land & Finance
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
ITI	Industrial Training Institute
L&T	Larsen & Toubro
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NBCC	National Buildings Construction Corporation LTD
NCR	National Capital Region
NSDC	National Skill Development Corporation
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office
OBC	Other Backward Caste
PDS	Public distribution system
PMKVY	Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana
SC	Scheduled caste
ST	Scheduled tribe

STATE WISE DISTRIBUTION OF RETURNING MIGRANT WORKERS



TOTAL
533784
100%

1. Introduction

This report examines whether the migrant workers who have been employed in the construction sector in the Gulf are absorbed into the construction industry in India after their return. In other words, it studies whether the skills acquired by them through work experience in the Gulf increases their employability in their home country. There is lack of knowledge about returning migrants in general and those working in the construction sector in particular. In addition, there is a lot of discussion about the increasing demand for skilled workers in the construction sector in India remaining unfulfilled. The global discourse on migration in the construction sector views migrant labour, particularly the short term migrants, as an important source of knowledge and skills, as well as an immediate solution to skills shortages in the labour-receiving countries.¹ Thus, if the returning migrants from labour-receiving countries face difficulty in getting re-integrated in the construction industry in their home country, then the argument about a deficiency of skilled workforce in the construction sector seems flawed.

The construction industry is one of the main employers of internal migrant workers in India and international migrants in the Gulf countries. According to the latest available data from the 68th Round of the National Sample Survey (NSS), *Employment and Unemployment in India, 2011-12*,² the share of construction sector workers in the total workforce – as measured by principal and subsidiary status (UPSS) – grew from 3.1 per cent in 1993-94 to 10.6 per cent in 2011-12. Despite the growing mechanization and automation in the construction industry, it still remains a labour-intensive sector. While Indian migrants have been finding work in the Gulf in large numbers since the 1970s, there have been dips at several points in the past decade. This has been due to the global financial crisis, the drop in oil prices, nationalization policies, political conflicts and increased competition from other countries of origin.

Thus, at a time when there is a greater demand for skilled workers in the construction sector in India, do migrants returning from the Gulf have better chance of employability? Do they get easily integrated in the construction sector or do they face constraints and challenges? Does the construction industry value the skills, knowledge and experience of returning migrant workers?

Keeping these questions in mind, this report addresses the existing research gap in scholarly literature on the construction sector. With an aim to provide the story of the economic re-integration of return migrants in construction sector, it includes data from interviews conducted with such migrants in the National Capital Region (Delhi, Gurugram and Noida), Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh), Jagtial (Telangana) and East Godavari (Andhra Pradesh) between April and July 2017.

1 Buckley, M. et al. (2016).

2 The National Sample Survey (NSS), which is conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, collects socio-economic and demographic information of households and individual members across all states except some remote and inaccessible pockets. The Employment and Unemployment surveys (EUS) of NSS are primary sources of data on various indicators of the labour force at the national and state levels. NSS surveys on employment and unemployment with large sample size of households have been conducted on a quinquennial basis from the 27th round (October 1972 - September 1973) onwards. However, the time period between the 66th round (2009-10) and 68th round (2011-2012) was only two years. Data in the EUS report is presented according to various measures – usual principal status (UPS: those engaged in work for the largest part of the 365 days before the date of the survey), usual status (UPSS: those employed under UPS as well as those that are employed for at least 30 days during the 365 days prior to the date of survey), current weekly status (CWS: employment status in the week preceding the date of survey), and current daily status (CDS: status of employment in each day of the week preceding the date of survey).

WHO IS A RETURNING MIGRANT?

This report works with the definition offered by the United Nations Statistics Division for collecting data on international migration (UNSD, 1998), embracing four dimensions for determining returning migrants: country of origin; place of residence abroad; length of stay in the host country; and length of stay in the home country after return. According to this definition, returning migrants are “persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (whether short term or long-term) in another country and who are intending to stay in their own country for at least a year.”³

OBJECTIVE OF THE REPORT

The aim of the report is to present the story of the economic re-integration of returning migrant workers in the construction sector in India, in order to make recommendations on how it can be improved. Some of the key questions it looked at are:

- Do returning migrants find jobs in the construction sector? Do they find it easier to get absorbed or do they face difficulties in finding work?
- Is there a difference in the length of the period of unemployment for returning migrants vis-à-vis that of internal migrants?
- How does the construction industry view the returning migrants and utilize their skills, knowledge, experience and expertise?
- Do employers prefer returning migrants over internal migrants? Do they pay the former better wages and provide better working conditions and other benefits because of the skills and experience they have? Do employers value certification of skills or are the skills assessed on the job?
- Do the skills and knowledge possessed by returning migrants benefit the other workers of construction sites and how do they pass it on to other workers? Are there any other spill over benefits?⁴

It is important to note, however, that there are tens of millions of internal migrants in the construction sector – those who migrate within a state or the country – and this has been the focus of study of several scholars in India. This report, however, does not dwell too much on internal migrants. It is also important to clarify at the outset that attempts to engage with firms working in the construction sector (whom we generally consider as employers) in India met with little success. This is a major limitation as it is important to understand their views on the demand and the value of skilled manpower, how they utilize the knowledge and skills gained overseas by the returning migrants and how these can be further harnessed to address local labour market needs. The firms claimed that since they do not recruit workers directly and are dependent upon sub-contractors, they will not be able to contribute much to the discussions. While conducting the study it became clear that there is complete disconnect between the manual construction workers at the bottom of sub-contracting chain and the construction conglomerates at the top. Thus, tracking the employers – who in several cases, was another co-worker – was not an easy task. The industry/employers’ views as reported in this study are based only on interactions with some of the contractors who could be contacted in the limited time available for the study.

In the following sections, this report briefly discusses the key characteristics of the construction industry and provides a broad overview of the migrant workers, employment and output relevance, informality and the debate on skills in the construction sector in India.

3 UNSD (1998). <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sconcerns/migration/migrmethods.htm>

4 Some of the related issues that the study attempts to address are: What are the other associational factors which play a major role in a returning migrant worker getting a job? What is the role of trade unions and other local organizations in promoting their rights and interests, including social security? What are the other employment options available for these returning migrant workers? Does their experience, knowledge and skills obtained in the Gulf countries help them explore entrepreneurship opportunities?

2. The construction industry in India: An overview

The construction industry in India is an extremely diverse sector. It includes a range of workers from highly educated professionals such as engineers and architects to skilled workers such as masons, carpenters, electricians, bar-benders etc. to semi- and low-skilled workers. The sector absorbs the bulk of the low-skilled and semi-skilled workforce in both urban and rural areas due to its labour-intensive nature. In terms of firm size, structure and market reach, the industry is fragmented. While a small number of very large Indian firms and some multinational firms dominate construction activities across all segments – industrial, residential and commercial⁵ - there are some medium-sized firms that specialize in niche activities. The actual work in the field is done by a large number of small sub-contractors who are rarely identified by the majority of the workforce as “employers”.⁶ The system works through further sub-contracting of work to various intermediaries such as recruitment agents or middlemen. These assignments, according to one manpower supplier at a construction site in East Kidwai Nagar, Delhi, could be as small as requiring 20-25 men to plaster six rooms. The subsection below highlights some of the important characteristics of the Indian construction industry.

2.1 GROWTH OF CONSTRUCTION SECTOR: EMPLOYMENT AND OUTPUT RELEVANCE

Among all the major sectors in the Indian economy, the construction sector has remained a major source of employment since the 1980s. With the agricultural sector experiencing a 0.36 per cent decline in employment during the period 1993-94 to 2011-12, it was the construction sector that absorbed a large portion of the workforce in non-farm employment. While overall employment growth fell from 2.16 per cent in the 1983 to 1993-94 period to 1.32 per cent in the 1993-94 to 2011-12 period, it was the construction sector which provided a boost to the employment. The rate of growth of employment in the sector increased from 5.58 per cent in the 1983 to 1993-94 period to 7.93 per cent in the 1993-94 to 2011-12 period. The average employment growth in the construction industry between 1983 and 2011-12, at 7.09 per cent, has been the highest among all sectors. The story of output growth in the construction sector during this period is similar (Table 2.1).

⁵ This oligopolistic nature and structure of the sector is in conformity with the trend witnessed in the construction sector worldwide. Large contractors have enormous influence over the production methods but the small and medium sized contractors do not have any say and thus they are unable to cut into the market (Gann 1996; Ofori et al. 2002). The Government of India allowed 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) in townships, housing and built-up infrastructure and construction developments in 2005 and further relaxed the conditions in 2015. See <https://goo.gl/vHkCyZ>.

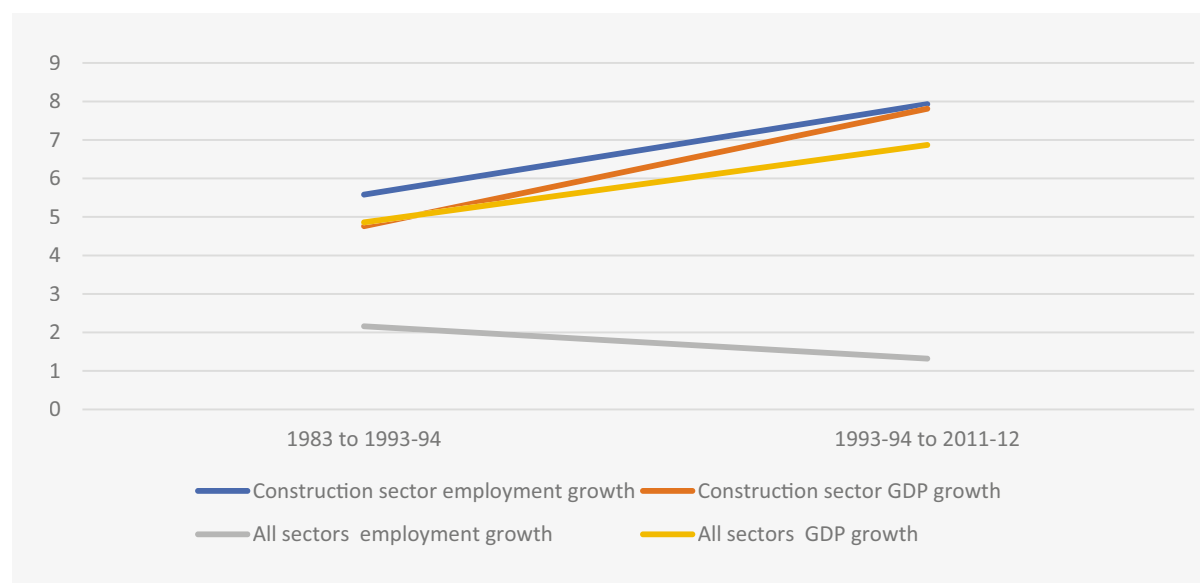
⁶ Srivastava and Sasikumar (2003); Srivastava and Sutradhar (2016). According to some estimates there are more than 100,000 Class A contractors registered with various government construction bodies and many more are operating informally (see <http://www.indianmirror.com/indian-industries/2016/construction-2016.html>).

Table 2.1: Growth rate of employment and growth rate of GDP (at constant 1999-2000 prices) across major sectors (in percentage)

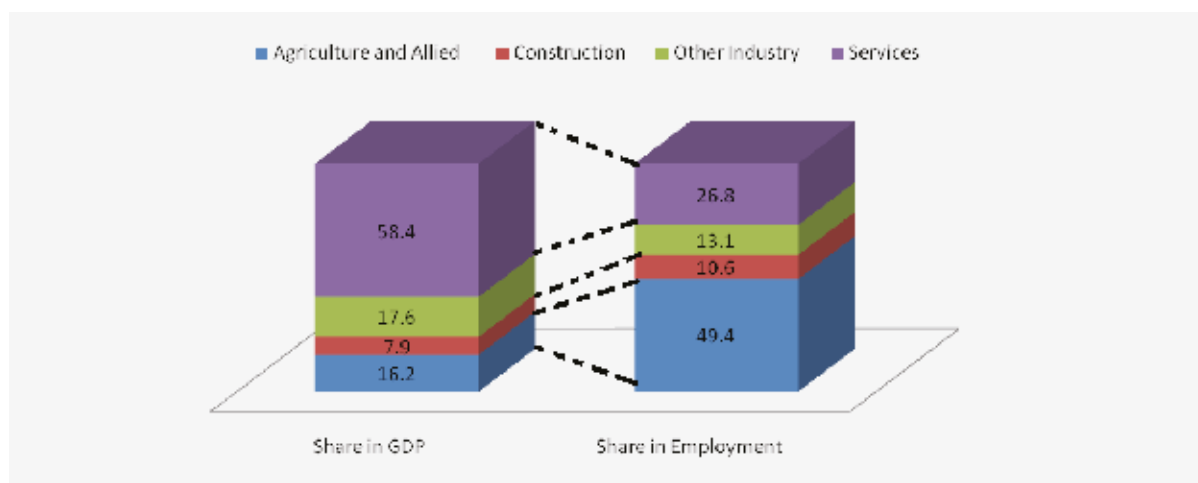
Major sectors	1983 to 1993-94		1993-94 to 2011-12		1983 to 2011-12	
	Employment	GDP	Employment	GDP	Employment	GDP
Agriculture	1.72	2.73	-0.36	3.01	0.38	2.91
Industry	2.66	5.19	4.12	7.03	3.60	6.37
Mining & Quarrying	3.67	5.96	-0.24	4.33	1.16	4.91
Manufacturing	1.80	4.82	2.45	7.28	2.22	6.40
Electricity etc.	4.51	8.34	3.58	5.92	3.91	6.79
Construction	5.58	4.76	7.93	7.81	7.09	6.72
Services	3.51	6.43	2.93	8.35	3.13	7.66
All	2.16	4.86	1.32	6.87	1.62	6.15

Source 1: Computed from Employment and Unemployment Survey, NSS (various rounds) and National Accounts Statistics, CSO (various years).

Thus, while, overall, there has been a structural mismatch in terms of growth in GDP being accompanied by decline in employment, in the construction sector there has been growth in both GDP and employment (Figure 2.1). Figure 2.2 projects the current sectoral share of GDP and employment in the Indian economy.

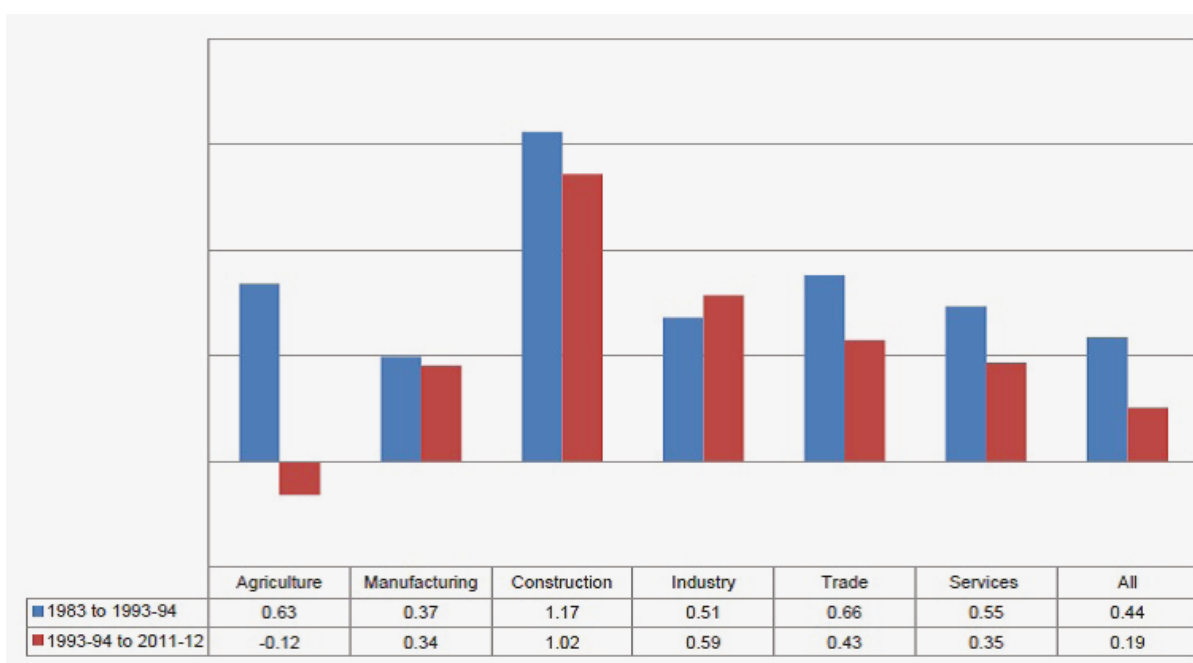
Figure 2.1: Overall growth rate of GDP and workforce vis-à-vis growth rate of GDP and workforce in the construction sector

Source 2: Computed from Employment and Unemployment Survey, NSS (various rounds) and National Accounts Statistics, CSO (various years).

Figure 2.2: Sectoral share in GDP and employment, 2011-12

Source 3: Same as figure 2.1

This can also be explained by comparing the employment intensity of key sectors over the same time period.⁷ Figure 2.3 shows that while the overall employment intensity has declined from 0.44 (1983 to 1993-94) to 0.19 (1993 – 94 and 2011 – 12), the employment intensity in the construction sector during both these intervals (despite registering a decline during the post-reform period) has remained the highest. It clearly indicates that the growth of employment in this sector is more than the per capita increase in the growth of output.

Figure 2.3: Employment intensity of key sectors (1983 and 1993 – 94 to 1993 – 94 and 2011 – 12)

Source 4: same as Figure 2.1

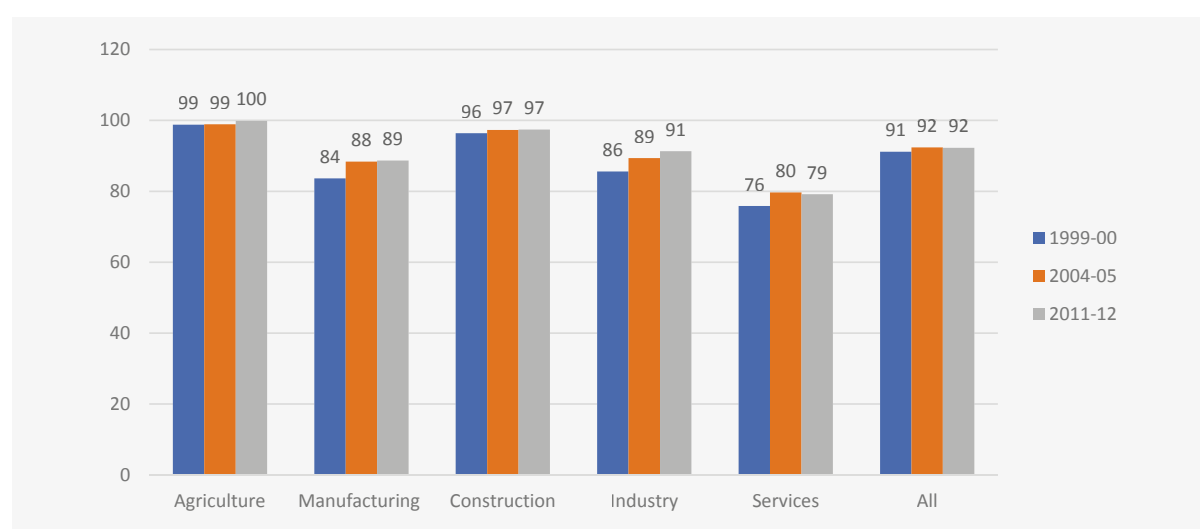
⁷ Employment intensity, as used in this paper, is the relationship between total output and total direct employment in a sector. Employment intensity is also used interchangeably as employment elasticity (see Kapsos, 2005)

Thus, despite technological developments, pre-fabrication technology and automation, the construction industry remains highly labour intensive and its growth is directly proportional to employment-generation.⁸

2.2 INFORMALITY AND MIGRATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

While the discussions in the previous section indicate that the construction sector is a significant contributor to both the economy and to employment, it is important to mention that a major part of this sector lies in the informal economy.⁹ A number of researchers suggest that most of the expansion in the construction sector is that of informal work.¹⁰ Of the total workforce employed in the construction sector, the share of the informal workforce is 97 per cent – the second highest among all sectors after agriculture (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: Share of informal workers across major sectors since 1999 – 2000



Source 5: Computed from NSS Unit-level Data on Employment and Unemployment Surveys, various rounds.

This demand for a highly informal workforce in the construction sector, as explained in the section above, is usually met by migrant workers – both seasonal and long-term. Workers from rural India who withdraw from the agricultural sector and migrate to cities have been often been reported to be working in the construction industry either as wage workers or informal builders constructing housing.¹¹ As per the 64th NSS Round on Household Consumer Expenditure Survey 2007-2008, much of the employment in the construction industry is for short-term migrants; the sector absorbs 36.2 per cent of total short-term migrants, followed by agriculture (20.4 per cent) and manufacturing (15.9 per cent).¹²

Though there are many factors behind this heavy reliance on migrant workers in the construction sector, the most important is the flexibilization of employment structures because of the project-specific and non-standardized nature of production.¹³ Local populations hardly engage in construction work because the working and living conditions for workers are very poor. Some of the operations in this sector are manual

⁸ A characteristic common in several other countries (for details see Wells 1996, 2012; Erlich and Grabelsky 2005).

⁹ International Labour Organisation and World Bank were, during 1980s and 1990s, among the early ones to have studied and grasped the significance and repercussions of the informal sector in the world of work. A consensus on understanding informality has not yet been reached though all agree that some of the main characteristics of informality are: decline in permanent engagements, increase in casual and temporary workforce and decline in social security. The size of the informal workforce in India is very significant (92 per cent of the total workforce in 2011-12).

¹⁰ For conceptual details on informality in construction sector, see Wells (2007).

¹¹ Deshingkar and Start (2003); Srivastava (2003), Bhattacharyya and Korinek (2007).

¹² Srivastava (2011).

¹³ Bosch and Philips (2003) have argued that long before the broad-based 'flexibilization' of industrial production systems (such as auto manufacturing), the construction industry was characterized by flexible and contingent forms of employment.

in nature and hazardous. There is a plethora of laws enacted by central and state governments to protect the rights of construction workers, but most of these are not adequately applied or enforced.¹⁴ Migrant workers undertake these tasks without adequate safety measures because their economic and social condition makes them vulnerable. Most of them are from the lower ranks of the caste hierarchy and they are generally stigmatized in their native place.¹⁵ Since most of them migrate from their native place in distress, they have very low bargaining power and hence are easily exploited by contractors and sub-contractors.¹⁶

Migration – both short-term and long-term – from the poorer states is very high. These states are mainly situated in the rain-fed regions of eastern and central India and suffer from low productivity in agriculture.¹⁷

However, work-related migration into the construction sector has not been limited to within the country. The surge in oil prices in the Gulf countries in the 1970s resulted in rapid urbanization and generated huge demand for migrant workers in the construction sector. A major portion of this demand was fulfilled by migrant workers from India as well as other South Asian countries. In fact, the old mercantile networks between the Gulf and southern India were revived through new networks of construction labourers from the southern states migrating to the Gulf. It is estimated that almost half the manual labour in construction in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is from Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.¹⁸ In the past two decades, evidence shows that workers from northern and eastern Indian states such as Punjab, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal have also started migrating to the Gulf (Appendix 1), while the flow from Kerala appears to be declining. This is primarily due to the shrinking wage differential between the increasing wages in the southern states of India, and the stagnated wages available to them in the Gulf.

2.3 SUB-CONTRACTING IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Another key characteristic of the construction industry in India is that the last two decades have seen increasing levels of sub-contracting. It is estimated that around 80 – 90 per cent of activities in the construction sector are carried out through sub-contracting.¹⁹ Firms outsource labour for functions across the construction site to informal networks of intermediaries, which includes contractors, sub-contractors,

14 Wages paid to unskilled workers are lower than the legislated minimum wage in the NCR. The working hours are usually longer than eight hours but the remuneration is paid only on the basis of a normal full day. Most of the employers deny overtime wage payments (Srivastava and Sasikumar, 2003; Srivastava and Sutradhar, 2016; Bhattacharya and Korinek 2007). The labourers do not get bonuses, provident fund, gratuity, medical benefits and maternity leave. Since the nature of job is contractual, the workers do not protest out of fear of losing their job (Jatrana and Sangwan, 2004). The living conditions of the migrants are also very poor. They are forced to live in temporary structures, commonly known as jhuggis (small huts made of plastic sheets with no electricity, toilets, or place for cooking) around construction sites. Sanitation and drinking water facilities are rarely provided and as such they are more prone to health hazards and hygiene problems. Those who live outside the construction sites are not provided any transportation and have to bear extra expenses for commuting. Their vulnerability is further compounded when they do not get any social security and other benefits such as the public distribution system (PDS), Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) etc. as the different locations of their stay and work create administrative and legal hitches (Rogaly et al., 2001, 2002; Smita and Panjari, 2007; Srivastava & Dasgupta, 2010).

15 The majority of these workers, who are non-literate, are engaged in casual work even in their native place and the chances of upward mobility in terms of employment and economic status are very low (Srivastava and Sutradhar, 2016).

16 Srivastava and Sasikumar (2003). Srivastava and Jha (2016) in their study of ten construction sites in Delhi, Noida and Gurugram (with 250 workers), found that a majority of the lower skilled construction workers belong to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes or are Muslims. Women workers also work at the bottom of the recognized skill hierarchy and are paid lower wages than the male workers. Khurana (2016) in his study reports that most of the unskilled work at the construction site in Delhi is carried out by women who are known as beldars. These beldars assist the mistri (mason) and no training is required for this. This gendered division of labour leads to differential payments, designations and social status. Women workers receive wages varying from Rs. 80 to Rs. 180 per day while their male counterparts receive Rs. 250 to Rs. 300. Working hours for women is 14-18 hours which includes only 8-14 hours of remunerated work and no weekly day off or any paid leave. The only way that women workers can resist such exploitative, insecure and discriminatory work practices is by withdrawing from the construction sector and becoming domestic workers.

17 As per the Census 2011 data on migration, the 10 largest flows of inter-state migration (including rural and urban migration) are in the north (Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi) and east (Bihar and West Bengal) with significant flows between Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In rural to urban, it is basically between the states in northern and eastern India, except for movement between Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

18 Buckley, Michelle, Adam Zende, Jeff Biggar, Lia Frederiksen and Jill Wells, (2016).

19 Saxena and Yadav (2013).

labour agencies and other middlemen. In some cases the workers are also directly picked up from places known as labour chowk, naka or mandi.²⁰

It has been argued that the practice of sub-contracting is the result of cut-throat market competition in the sector as firms compete to reduce their cost of production. Since, in the hierarchy of workers in the construction industry, the migrant labourers are the most vulnerable, resorting to the recruitment of unskilled and semi-skilled workers becomes an easy way to minimize costs by bringing flexibility in labour usage.²¹ Outsourcing enables contractors and sub-contractors to get only as much labour as they need and when they need it and hence labour becomes a variable, rather than a fixed, cost.²²

Studies on sub-contracting in the construction sector have pointed out that there is a decline in permanent workers or directly employed workforce and a corresponding increase in the number of workers employed through sub-contractors and middlemen.²³ Large contractors engage multiple small sub-contractors to meet the demand for labour as and when required. Workers with some experience and skills act as small sub-contractors or suppliers of labour to bigger contractors. Thus, approaching labourers is a task left to the lowest rung of sub-contractors, and no one higher up in the chain takes responsibility for their working and living conditions. As a result, there is complete disconnect between the manual construction workers at the bottom of sub-contracting chain and the construction conglomerates at the top.

As a part of this study, the human resource managers and recruiters of the Indian construction industry were approached in order to understand their views on the demand and the value of skilled manpower in the sector, to explore whether and how the knowledge and skills gained overseas by returning migrants is used by the firms and how it may be further harnessed to address local labour market needs. But this effort was in vain. The firms claimed that since they do not recruit workers directly and are dependent upon sub-contractors, they were not able to contribute to the discussions.

Experience over the last two decades also shows that sub-contracting prevents any kind of unionization and hence labour in the construction sector remains highly unorganized.²⁴ There are national federations of unions representing ordinary construction workers, but they are not known to have engaged in any collective bargaining at the industry or enterprise level.²⁵ This makes the migrant workers more vulnerable in the labour market. They move from one worksite to another, linked with the same middlemen until they are able to build their own networks or acquire new skills. The middlemen or the sub-contractors usually prefer a new group of people because the older groups learn the dynamics of the labour market over a period. Thus, to keep the chain of exploitation strong, there is a constant need for new migrants who cannot easily access the labour market without coming through some middlemen.²⁶ The sub-contracting of labour has a profound, negative effect on job security, safety and health and social security coverage of the migrant workers. It has also been argued that the level of skill in the construction industry in some countries has fallen significantly as a result.²⁷

20 These are points in towns/cities where labourers gather in the morning to wait for work from individual house owners or petty sub-contractors/middlemen.

21 Vaid (1999); van der Loop (1992); Abdul-Aziz (2001); Yoon and Kang (2000); Saboia (1997); Zylberstajn (1992); Connolly (2001).

22 Vaid (1999); van der Loop (1992); Abdul-Aziz (2001); Yoon and Kang (2000); Saboia (1997); Zylberstajn (1992); Connolly (2001).

23 Wells (2007); Mitullah and Wachira (2003); Jason (2005).

24 WIEGO (2017); Vaid (1999).

25 Vaid (1999); van der Loop (1992); Abdul-Aziz (2001); Yoon and Kang (2000); Saboia (1997); Zylberstajn (1992); Connolly (2001).

26 Verma (2013).

27 ILO. The construction industry in the 21st century: Its image, employment prospects and skill requirements. Geneva 2001.

2.4 VALUE OF SKILLS IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Since most of the labour withdrawing from farming, particularly the landless labour, does not possess any particular skill, it is the construction sector which is often the only significant alternative source of employment. Like in most developing countries, construction skills in India are mainly acquired through an informal system.²⁸ There are vocational training schools, but most of the workers, as was also expressed during the fieldwork for this study, usually find this expense unnecessary and unaffordable. They are worried for the wage loss or opportunity costs that they may incur while undergoing training.

The 66th Round (Employment and Unemployment) of NSS (2009 – 10) shows that the education level of over 50 per cent of the labour force in the 15 – 59 age group is extremely low. Of the total labour force on usual status basis, 29 per cent is not even literate. The proportion of non-literate workers is the highest in agriculture and allied activities (about 40 per cent), followed by the construction sector (33 per cent). The vocationally trained labour force in the age group of 15 – 59 is around 10 per cent. The vocationally trained labour force is highest in the services sector (33 per cent), followed by manufacturing (31 per cent), agriculture (27 per cent), and non-manufacturing and allied activities (9 per cent). However, among the vocationally trained labour force, only 2 per cent have had formal training and the rest received informal training.

Studies have divided the skill level of workers in the construction sector into four categories: no certified skill (no certified technical and no certified vocational training), low skill (no technical training, but some certified vocational training), medium skill (secondary school diploma or certificate) and high skill (tertiary education degree).²⁹ According to the 68th round of NSS (2011 – 12), 68.8 per cent construction workers in the 15-29 age-group have no skills and 25.2 per cent have low skills. The percentage share of medium skill and high skill construction workers are only 5.4 per cent and 0.6 per cent respectively. In the 15 – 59 age group, the percentage share of construction workers with no skill is quite high (71.9 per cent), followed by low skilled construction workers (22.3 per cent). Only 5.1 per cent and 0.7 per cent of construction workers have medium and high skill respectively in this age group. Around 85.1 per cent of construction workers in 15 – 29 age group and 85.8 per cent construction workers in the 15-59 age group do not possess any formal training.³⁰

It is a well-accepted fact that there is an acute shortage of skilled workers in the construction sector. A number of large firms have been very vocal about the fact that while India has a surfeit of unskilled workers, it does not have enough skilled workers such as masons, carpenters, and machine operators to construct roads, railways, and ports.³¹ One large construction firm reportedly brought in skilled carpenters, steel fixers and electricians from China, Indonesia and Philippines as they were cheaper and more productive than their Indian counterparts,³² and another reportedly brought in 4,000 Chinese workers for the construction of India's largest oil refinery at Jamnagar district in the state of Gujarat.³³

In response, the Government of India has drafted a National Skill Development Policy in 2009 and launched the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) with a target to skill 150 million people by 2022 in 20 high growth sectors, including the construction sector.³⁴ According to the report, *Human Resource and Skill*

28 In the Philippines, 95 per cent of construction workers acquire skills through learning by doing (Yuson, 2001). In Sri Lanka, 86 per cent of the skilled workforce, mostly men, has acquired skills only from informal training (Gunawardena and Jayawardane, 1998). A similar situation prevails in Brazil, Kenya and Mexico (ILO, 2001).

29 Sasikumar and Timothy (2015)

30 Sasikumar and Timothy (2015).

31 Pearson and Sharma (2011).

32 Dhall (2008), Hajela (2012).

33 Choudhary (2007).

34 Structured as a public-private-partnership, with government ownership restricted to 49 per cent of the equity capital, the National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) was set up to manage the funds required. For details see http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/12thplan/pdf/12fyp_vol2.pdf.

Requirements in the Building, Construction Industry and Real Estate Services, published by NSDC in 2013-14, the workforce (in the 15-65 age group) in the construction sector was projected to be 76.55 million by 2022, and 97 per cent of this was likely to have no training before starting work. In November 2014, the Government set up a new Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship to coordinate all skill development efforts across the country and launched the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) as its flagship scheme on July 15, 2015.

It has been widely claimed that NSDC adopted several initiatives on a public-private-partnership basis to impart skill development and training at the sub-sector level and has thereafter also provided them better employment. The Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (CREDAI), an apex body for private real estate developers, initiated an onsite training model to upgrade skills of construction workers and train them in plastering, masonry, plumbing, electrical works, tile laying, and other related activities. As per the latest information available on CREDAI's official website, during 2015-16 and 2016-17, it trained 5,437 and 8,506 construction workers respectively. However, there is limited evidence to date to show the results of the Skill India programme. The NSDC has been able to identify only 5 per cent of candidates who got placed after being trained under the PMKVY.³⁵ The report of the Committee for Rationalisation and Optimisation of the Functioning of Sector Skill Councils, set up by the Union Government, has observed that the schemes to impart vocational training have failed in their twin objectives of providing employment and creating a pool of skilled workers for industry.³⁶ In addition to that, some studies also seem to suggest that the skilling policy may even have had the opposite effect, as it may have led to an increase in the precarious situation of workers by keeping the wages down.³⁷

Vocational training is only one way of acquiring skills. Most of the workers in the construction sector interviewed for this study indicated that they find this method very expensive and unnecessary. Given that the jobs offered in the sector are overwhelmingly casual, short-term, insecure and poorly paid, almost all the workers expressed concern about the likely wage loss that they may incur while undergoing such vocational training. However, most of the workers claimed to have gone through some kind of informal training of "learning by doing". They further added that though many workers start as unskilled workers, after a few months they are generally asked to take up semi-skilled work. Thus, they start assisting in certain tasks and receive practical training for work on the site.³⁸

As such, workers who have migrated to the Gulf and worked there for two or more years qualify to be categorized either as semi-skilled or skilled. If, upon their return, these migrants find it difficult to get employment or are not integrated in the construction industry, then the question of unavailability and deficiency of skilled workforce in the Indian construction sector is open to question. However, the mapping of returning migrants and their story of re-integration in the Indian construction industry, and the transfer of workers' skills and knowledge in the domestic labour market has been under-researched. The second half of this report will explore in more detail whether skills possessed by returning migrants increases their employability, whether they easily get integrated in the construction sector or face constraints and risks, whether the construction industry in India values the skills, knowledge and experience of returning migrant workers and what role do returning migrants play in the construction sector. It is important to note that the findings reported are by no means exhaustive of

35 <https://goo.gl/XQRnLH>

36 The Union Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship had set up the committee, headed by Sharda Prasad, to suggest reforms in the Vocational Education and Training System. It observed at the outset that efforts at training were "half-hearted". Rajalakshmi (2017).

37 Ruthven (2017).

38 This type of informal training is not extended to women construction workers. Even the NSDC in its report, *Human Resource and Skill Requirements in the Building, Construction Industry and Real Estate Services*, did not mention the female skilled workforce. In such an environment, where skill development agencies are not even recognizing the requirement for skilled women in the workforce, it becomes very difficult to make progress on gender equality in employment and working conditions in the construction sector.

either the national situation, nor do they provide a comprehensive picture of the returning migrants in the construction sector in India. They merely highlight some of the complexities that skilled and semi-skilled returning migrant workers face, and the potential loss to India's construction industry.

3. Re-integration of migrants from the Gulf: Insights from the field

The search for work in the construction sector – both short-term and long-term – as explained in the earlier section, has not been confined to migration within the country. With the surge in oil prices in the Gulf since the 1970s, large number of workers from some states, mainly Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, migrated to work in the construction sector in the Gulf. Over the last two decades, workers from northern and eastern states such as Punjab, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal have also been migrating to the Gulf. This section of the report is focused on the issue of re-integration of returning migrants in the construction industry in India. It also assess whether the skills gained through work experience in the Gulf increases their employability. It addresses the barriers and challenges the returning migrants face when they seek employment in India.

The field work was carried out at four sites: Jagtiyal (Telangana) and East Godavari (Andhra Pradesh) in south India and the NCR (Delhi/Gurugram/Noida) and Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh) in north India. NCR (Delhi/Gurugram/Noida) was selected as it is a major hub of construction activity as well as a destination for internal migrants working in the construction sector. However, during the fieldwork we found that Delhi is also a nodal point for recruiters coming from the Gulf and workers from several north Indian states wanting to migrate to the Gulf. The other three locations were selected as they are major originating points for workers going to the Gulf.³⁹ Data was collected from a total of 252 returning migrants from all locations as well as from 60 internal migrant workers. Interviews were also conducted with contractors, recruitment agencies and trade unions working in the construction sector.

METHODOLOGY

One of the major problems we encountered during the study was finding the returning migrants in the selected sites. There is no information or record of returning migrants available with any individual, organization, or even agencies – both public and private. The available data with the Ministry of External Affairs only provide names of top 50 districts sending emigrants to ECR (Emigration Clearance Required) countries in the past several years. But tracking the returning migrant workers from a district of origin, especially those who have worked in the construction sector in the Gulf, was an extremely difficult task. Thus, the approach was to visit the construction sites, talking to the employers and also those trade unions who claimed to be working with the workers in this sector to get some leads about the profile of the workers. However, the same method could not be used for all construction sites and so different methods were adopted for different sites.

In Gorakhpur, the cluster sampling method was used. During the pilot fieldwork it became clear that there are certain pockets in Gorakhpur from where workers migrate to the Gulf in large numbers. Rasoolpur and Hathat hamlets were selected. Apart from speaking to returning migrants and internal migrant workers, visits were made to two private skill training and testing centres, one government-approved PMKVY centre, one recruitment agent and two petty labour contractors.

³⁹ The study originally had planned to conduct fieldwork in Hyderabad (Telangana), another hub of construction activities, but after conducting two weeks of pilot fieldwork, we could not find any returning migrant on the construction sites we visited. We, therefore, changed our research site to Jagtiyal.

Considering the size and the growth of the construction sector in the NCR, the first step was to map construction sites in Delhi, Noida and Gurgaon where large construction companies like Larsen & Toubro (L&T), NBCC, ETA Engineering Pvt. Ltd (ETA) and DLF Ltd. were working. However, not much difference was found in these sites vis-à-vis others with regard to employing Gulf-returning migrants. The human resource managers/recruiters of construction companies were approached, but they said they would be unable to contribute to the discussion in any meaningful way, as explained earlier in the report. Various skills training and testing centres were then approached to find the migrants returning from the Gulf. Seven skill training and testing centres, petty labour contractors and trade unions were also visited.

In East Godavari, the cluster sampling method was used in 12 villages. The selection of respondents within these cluster villages were done through snowball sampling.⁴⁰ In Jagtiyal, it was found that there were several associations active in mobilizing the construction workers, particularly among the returning migrants. Six workers' associations were approached to help locate returning migrant workers.

3.1 PROFILE OF THE RETURNING MIGRANTS

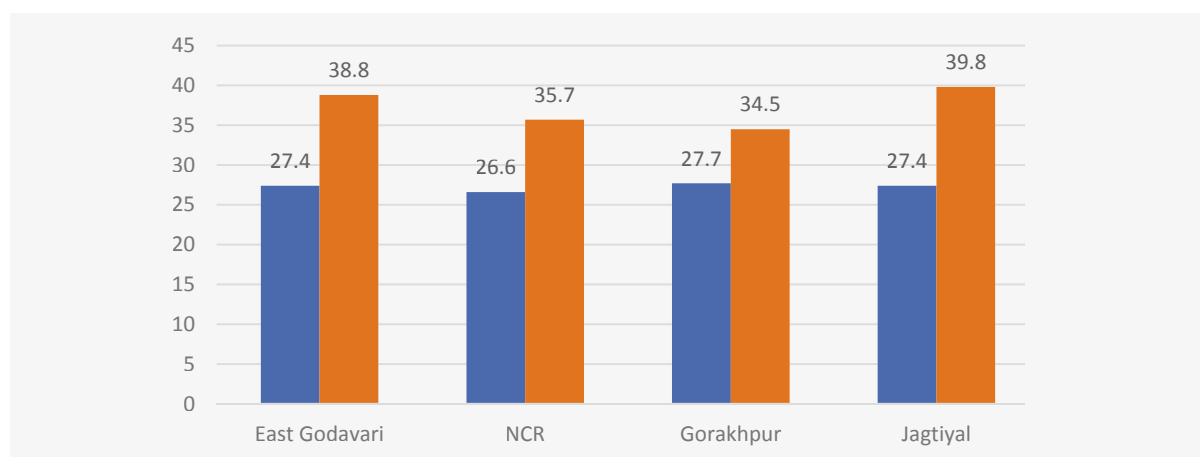
Before going on to discuss the re-integration of returning migrants, it is important to provide a profile of the sample of the returning migrants selected for this study. The distribution of the total sample of 252 returning migrants was: 52 from the NCR, 54 from Gorakhpur, 72 from East Godavari and 74 from Jagtiyal. The following sub-sections provide some of the main characteristics of the selected respondents.

3.1.1 Mean age and mean year of returning migrants

The mean age of respondents at the time of their return was 37.5 years. The mean age at the time of the first episode of out-migration was 27.3 years. There is no significant difference between the mean ages at the time of migration across the regions – almost all migrants appear to go out in their mid-twenties. But, as shown in Figure 3.1, those from the southern states – Andhra Pradesh and Telangana – appear to have stayed on for a longer period as compared to those from the northern region – the NCR and Uttar Pradesh. The mean age of respondents at the time of their return from the former is 39.6 years and that of the latter is 35.1 years. Further, the reference period of migration of respondents is between 2007 and 2012.⁴¹ Thus, the average period of stay in the Gulf is around five years. So the sample provides information of those respondents who have returned before 2012.

⁴⁰ This is a sampling technique where respondents recruit other participants for a test or study. It is used when there is lack of information on the participants and they are hard to find. It is called snowball sampling because (in theory) once you have the ball rolling, it picks up more "snow" along the way and becomes larger and larger.

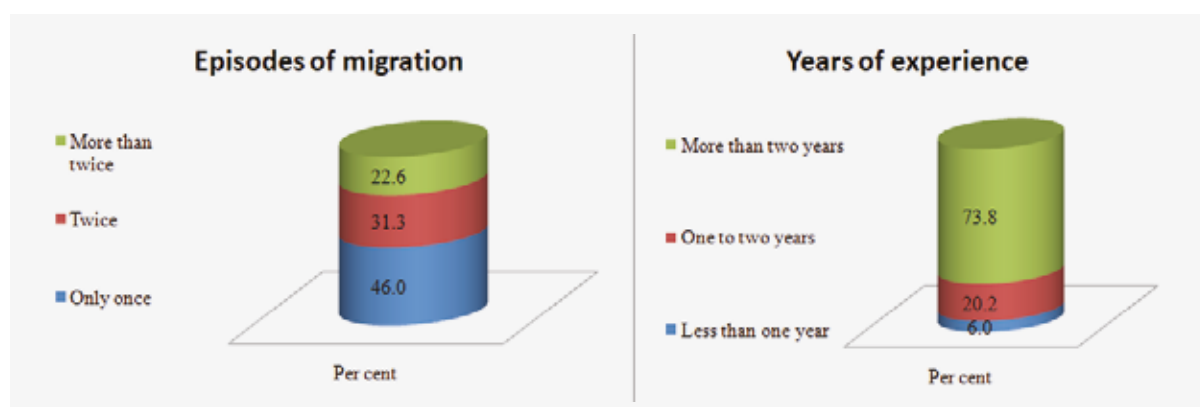
⁴¹ This period has been calculated as the mean year of their migration to the Gulf and mean year of their return to India. The returning migrants had migrated to the Gulf around 2007. The mean year of return is 2012. This means most of the returning migrants in our sample have come back to India in this year.

Figure 3.1: Mean age of the respondents across surveyed locations (in years)

Source 6: Field Survey, 2017

3.1.2 Number of episodes of migration and years of experience in the Gulf

More than half of the respondents reported to have migrated more than once to the Gulf (first panel 1 of Figure 3.2). They also reported to have migrated to multiple countries. Among the six Gulf countries – Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar – Saudi Arabia was the most common destination. Nearly 75 per cent of the returning migrants have more than two years of work experience in the Gulf. Another 20 per cent have work experience between one and two years. Only 6 per cent reported to have worked for less than a year (second panel of Figure 3.2).

Figure: 3.2 Episodes of migration and years of experience

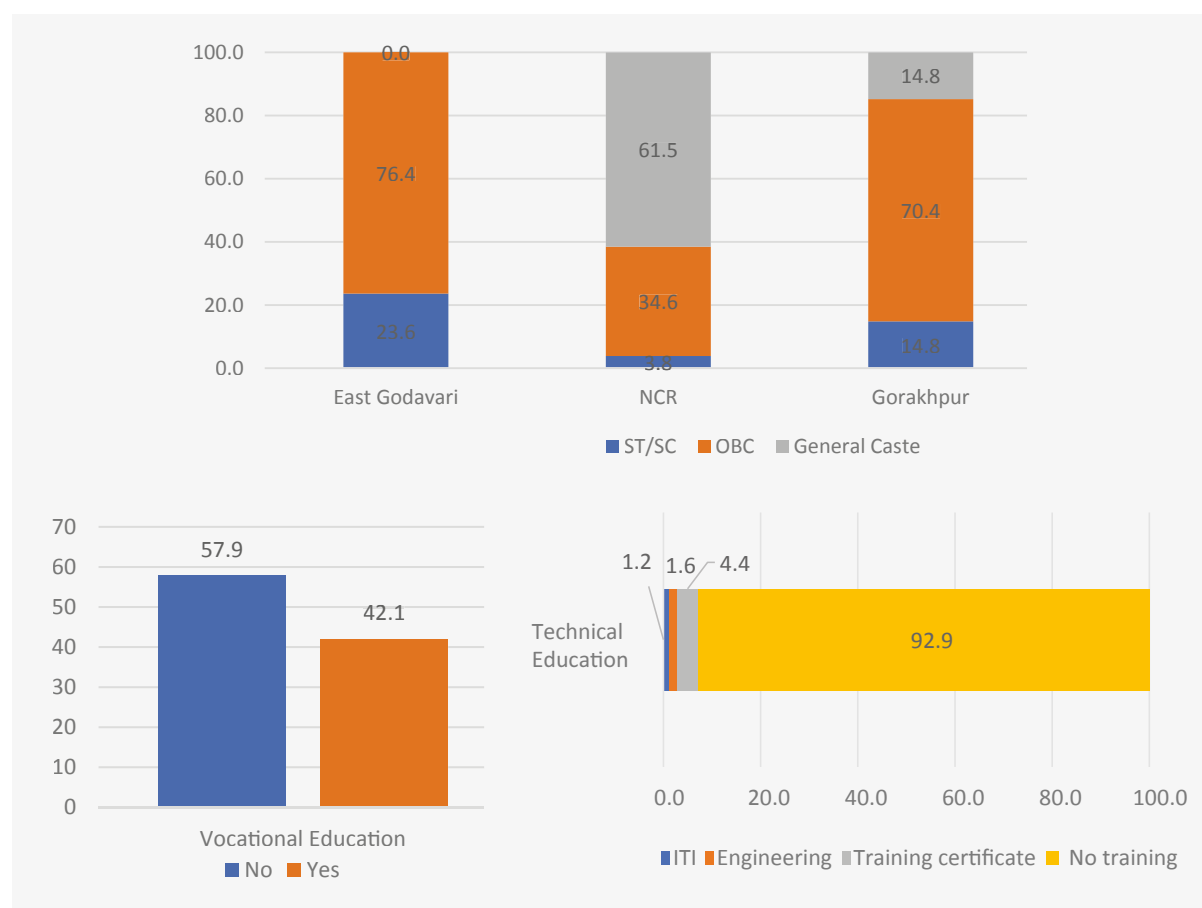
Source 7: Field Survey, 2017.

3.1.3 Social Background

More than 56 per cent of the respondents belonged to the other backward classes (OBC) category. Nearly one-fourth (24.6 per cent) belonged to scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs) and 16.3 per cent were from the general castes. A small number (3.2 per cent) did not reveal their social group. While OBCs dominated the sample in Gorakhpur and East Godavari, SCs/STs in Jagtiyal, the sample in the NCR was dominated by the general caste (Figure 3.3). In other words, returning migrants who were from groups higher in the social hierarchy were more likely to relocate themselves in the NCR. In the case of domestic

migrants, 75 per cent were from the OBC community, 11 per cent from SC, 5 per cent from ST and 9 per cent from the general castes.

Figure 3.3: Percentage distribution of returning migrants by social group

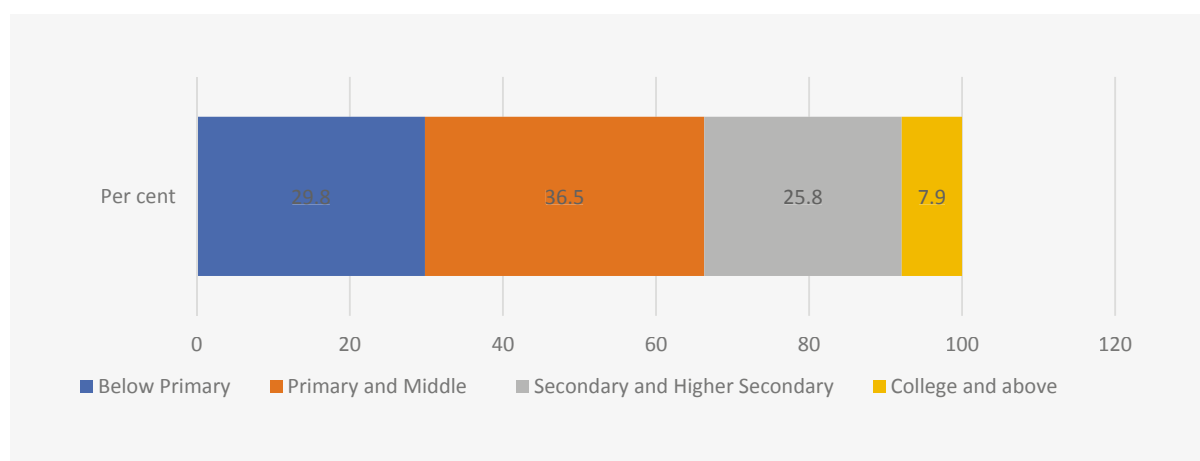


Source 8: Field Survey, 2017

3.1.4 Education Level of the Returning Migrants

A significant proportion (30 per cent) of the respondents were either non-literate or had an education below primary level. The majority studied up to primary or middle school (36.5 per cent), while 26 per cent had studied up to secondary and higher secondary levels. Only 8 per cent have either gone to college or higher. Further, 7 per cent of the respondents had received technical training and 43 per cent had a vocational education. Out of total 252 workers, only three have an Industrial Training Institute (ITI) certificate, four are trained engineers and 11 have been trained through other industrial training centres.⁴²

⁴² Technical education is formally imparted through educational institutes such as ITIs and other formal training centres. These institutions certify workers after providing theoretical and technical knowledge of various trades such as carpentry, electronics, computer hardware, plumbing etc. Vocational education is provided through both formal and informal channels. Respondents who reported to have received vocational education had done so either through apprenticeship or compulsory training in the company they worked for.

Figure 3.4: Percentage distribution of respondents by education levels

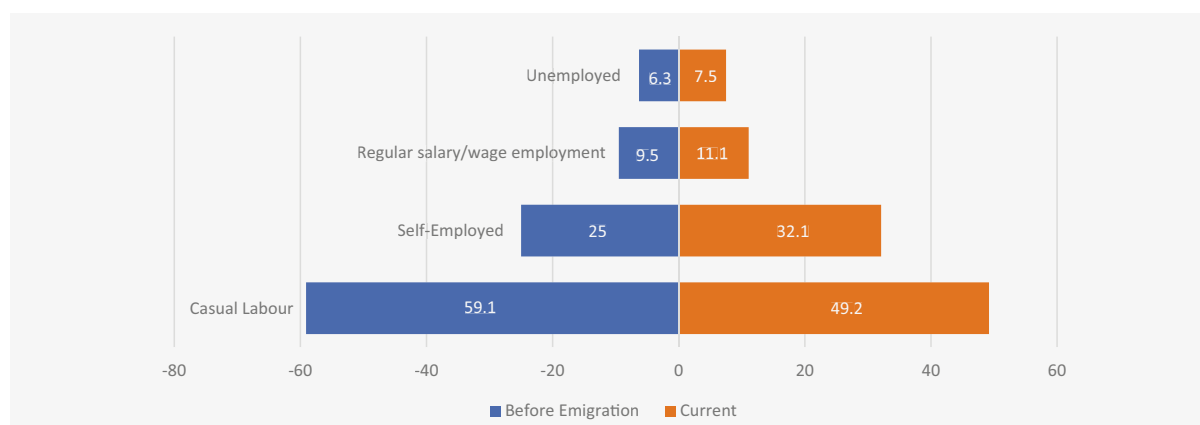
Source 9: Field Survey, 2017

3.2 TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN EMPLOYMENT AMONG RETURNING MIGRANTS IN INDIA

To understand the pattern of employment among the returning migrants, it requires to first look at the usual activity profile of the workers. At the same time, in order to understand the impact of migration and the skills gained during the period of stay in the Gulf on their employment status, their current activity status is compared with that of their stay in the Gulf and before they emigrated.

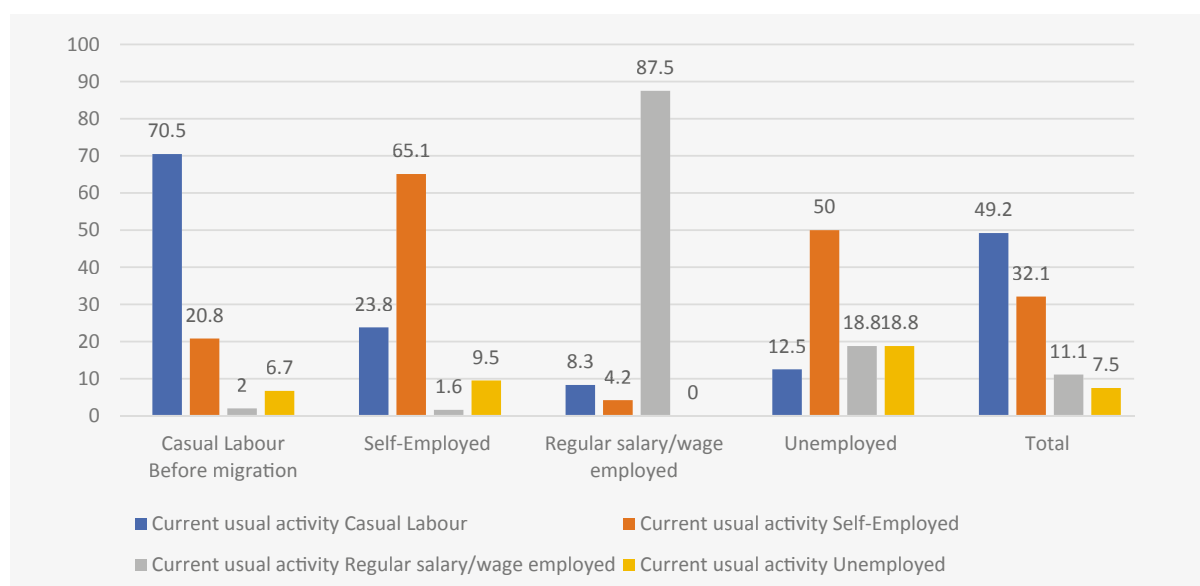
As Figure 3.5 shows, a little over 80 per cent of the returning migrants were engaged either in casual work (50 per cent) or self-employment activities (32 per cent). Only 11 per cent of the respondents were found to be engaged in regular salary/wage employment and 7.5 per cent are unemployed. This change in work status on their return to the home country is quite stark, as all respondents were working in regular/wage employment in the Gulf. Given the fact that their average work experience in the Gulf was more than two years, most of them would be classified either as semi-skilled or skilled in the Indian context. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that they should get absorbed in regular/wage employment and be offered better wages after their return from the Gulf. But that does not seem to be the case.

A comparison of their present employment status vis-a-vis that prior to migration clearly shows that their present employment status is actually worse than that in the destination countries (Figure 3.5). One important conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the skills acquired by workers in the Gulf make little difference to their employment status on their return. While the percentage of people engaged in casual labour has declined by 10 per cent (from 59 per cent before emigration to 49 per cent after return), they still constitute half the workforce who qualify to be counted as at least semi-skilled workers (on account of working for over two years in the construction sector in the Gulf). The share of workers engaged in regular salary/wage employment has increased only marginally by 1.6 per cent, which is almost equivalent to the 1.2 per cent rise in unemployment. The only significant shift is visible in the category of self-employed from 25 per cent before emigration to 32 per cent after emigration.

Figure 3.5: Employment status before emigration and after return

Source 10: Field Survey, 2017

Figure 3.6 explains the impact of skills gained by migrants while working in the Gulf on their usual activity after migration. Among those who were working as casual labourers before migration, more than 70 per cent continue to remain casual labourers even after their return. Only 21 per cent of the casual labourers have moved into self-employment and a marginal 2 per cent to have gotten regular employment after their return from the Gulf. However, what is even more worrying is that a greater number of those engaged in self-employment before migration (34 per cent) reported that they are either employed as casual labour or are unemployed after their return. Sixty-five per cent of those engaged in self-employment before migration continue to be self-employed after their return. Thus, the returning migrants are moving back and forth between casual employment and self-employment. While no respondent employed as a regular/wage worker before emigration reported to be unemployed after returning from the Gulf, nearly one-tenth reported to be engaged in casual labour after return. There is hardly any change in the share of those in regular salary/wage employment. Half of those who were unemployed before migration seem to have opted for self-employment after return. However, the sustainability, quality and the size of self-employed enterprises is an issue and this will be discussed later in this section.

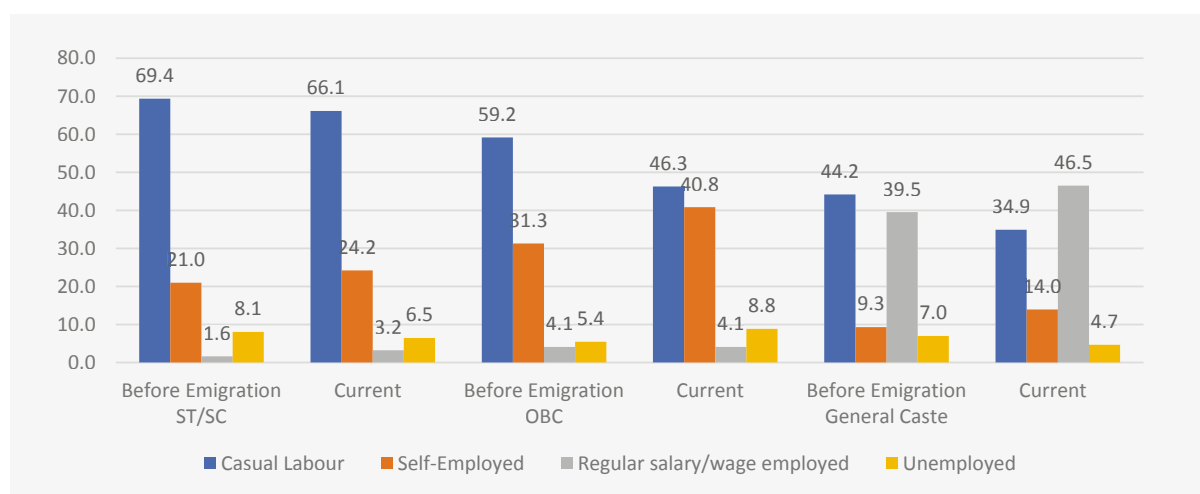
Figure 3.6: Employment status of returning migrants before going to the Gulf and after return

Source 11: Field Survey, 2017

One important conclusion that can be drawn from this is that due to very limited employment opportunities for returning migrants, most of them remain unemployed, or choose between self-employment and casual labour. Regular salary/wage employment opportunities are few and scarcely available. The employment status of migrants after their return, which is marked by increasing casualisation, self-employment and unemployment, is actually worse than what it was in the Gulf. Thus, it seems very unlikely that the skills learnt by them during their work experience in the Gulf is giving them higher returns or enhancing their employability.

Another revealing fact is that a majority of those engaged in regular employment belong to the upper castes. Out of a total sample of 43 upper caste returning migrants, 46.5 per cent are currently engaged in regular activity against only 3.2 per cent from SC/ST and 4.1 per cent from OBCs (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7: Change in employment status of returning migrants by caste



Source 12: Field Survey, 2017

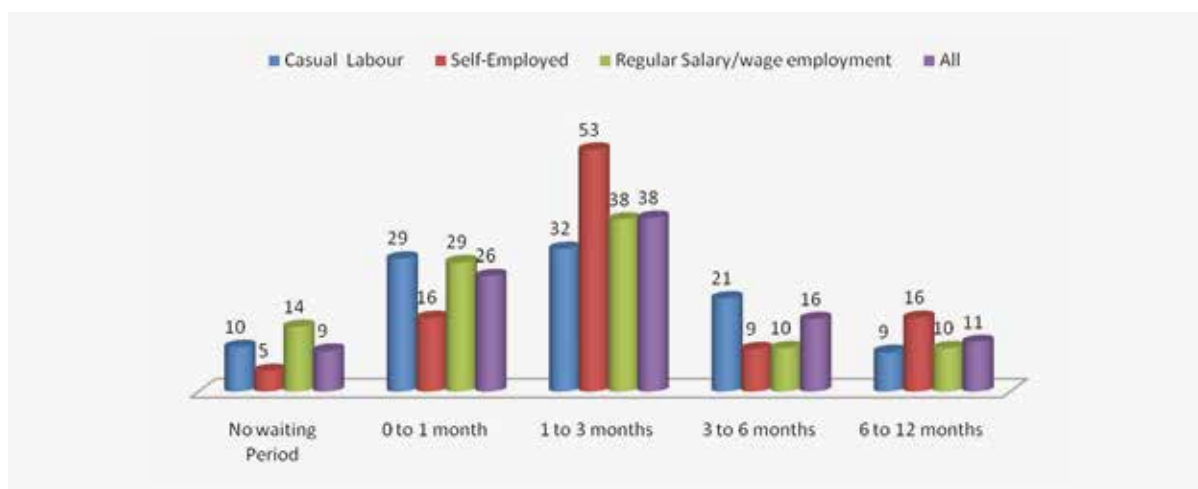
3.3 GESTATION PERIOD BEFORE RE-INTEGRATION

One of the core objectives of this report is to look into the gestation period of employability of returning migrants. The respondent workers reported that, on average, it took them one to three months to find some kind of employment. The distribution of the gestation period across different activities was 53 per cent among self-employed, 38 per cent among regular salaried/wage employment and 38 per cent among casual workers. The self-employed and regular salaried/wage employed had to wait less time as compared to casual labour (Figure 3.8).

The reason for the low gestation period for regular employment is that 65 per cent of these workers had returned because the company employing them had transferred them back to India. These employers are major construction companies such as ETA, L&T etc. who send their workers from one country to another. In the case of self-employment, a majority of the workers had their own small enterprises even before their migration, while some are engaged in business inherited from their family. Therefore, they too experienced a relatively shorter gestation period.

The practical way of looking into the re-integration of respondents in the construction sector in the home country after return is to observe the period of unemployment of casual workers. Among those who remained unemployed for three to six months, a significant proportion are casual labourers (21 per cent). It clearly indicates that employment opportunities available for returning migrants are very low.

Figure 3.8: Percentage distribution of current usual activity by period of unemployment after return



Source 13: Field Survey, 2017

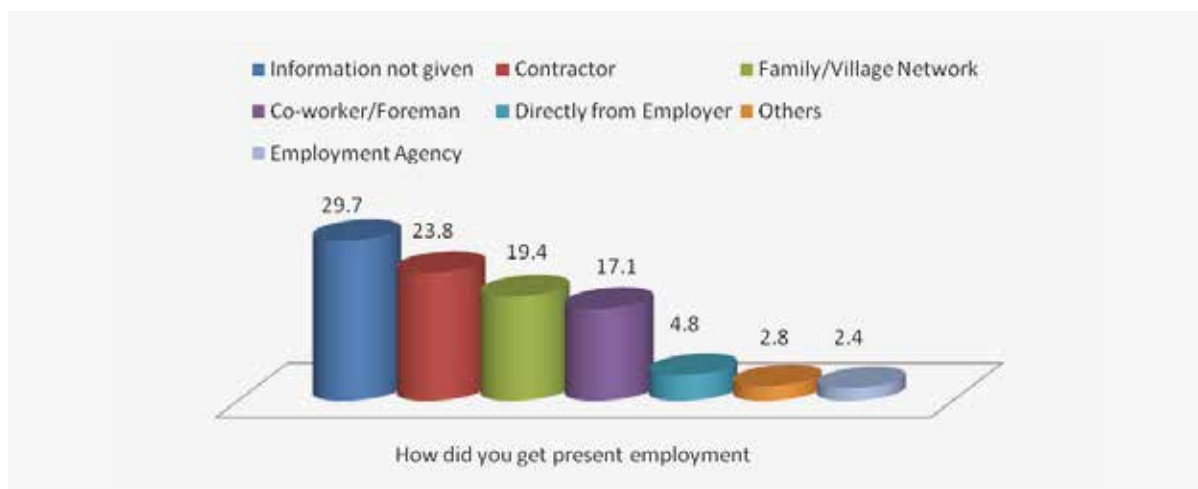
Those facing prolonged unemployment after their return constitute 12 per cent of the total returning migrants. Of these, 68 per cent belong to the OBC category and are from Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. These unemployed respondents had worked in the Gulf for more than two years on average.

Do the returning migrants find employment throughout the year? The average time of unemployment for a returning migrant worker is 3.86 months which is almost equal to the internal migrant workers (3.85 months). This indicates that their experience makes no difference to the availability of work for returning migrants.

3.4 ROLE OF ASSOCIATIONAL FACTORS IN GETTING EMPLOYMENT

Informal agencies play a significant role in finding employment for returning migrants. Figure 3.9 shows that among informal agencies, petty contractors (23.8 per cent), family/relatives/friends (19.4 per cent) and co-workers (17.1 per cent) play the most important role in finding employment. Among formal agencies, only 4.8 per cent of respondents are directly recruited by the employer and only 2.4 per cent of the respondents have benefited from employment agencies.

In the case of economic re-integration of returning migrants, it is the informal associations such as fellow workers, caste associations, petty contractors and villagers which have played a major role (Figure 3.10). Only 7.5 per cent of the respondents reported that they were helped by formal institutions, namely recruitment agencies (5.6 per cent) or the government (1.9 per cent). It should be noted that those who indicated that they have received government support in their re-integration have taken a loan from commercial banks for establishing their enterprises.

Figure 3.9: Role of various agencies in providing employment after return (in %)

Source 14: Field Survey, 2017

The situation is no different for the local migrants for whom informal contacts and social contacts also play a significant role in finding employment. Contractors play a major role in providing employment to local migrants and they often work as agents, who may also be workers themselves. Direct recruitment by employers is negligible.

Figure 3.10: Role of various agencies helping returning migrants in re-integration (in %)

Source 15: Field Survey, 2017

The government clearly has played a limited role in the re-integration of migrants in the domestic labour market.

It is also important to note that the consequences of sub-contracting in the construction sector are clearly identifiable. There is a decline in the directly employed workforce and a corresponding increase in the number of workers employed through petty sub-contractors and middlemen. Since the large contractors have stopped employing workers directly and are engaging in multiple levels of sub-contracting to meet the demand for labour as and when required, the experience and skills gained by the returning migrants in the Gulf is hardly valued.

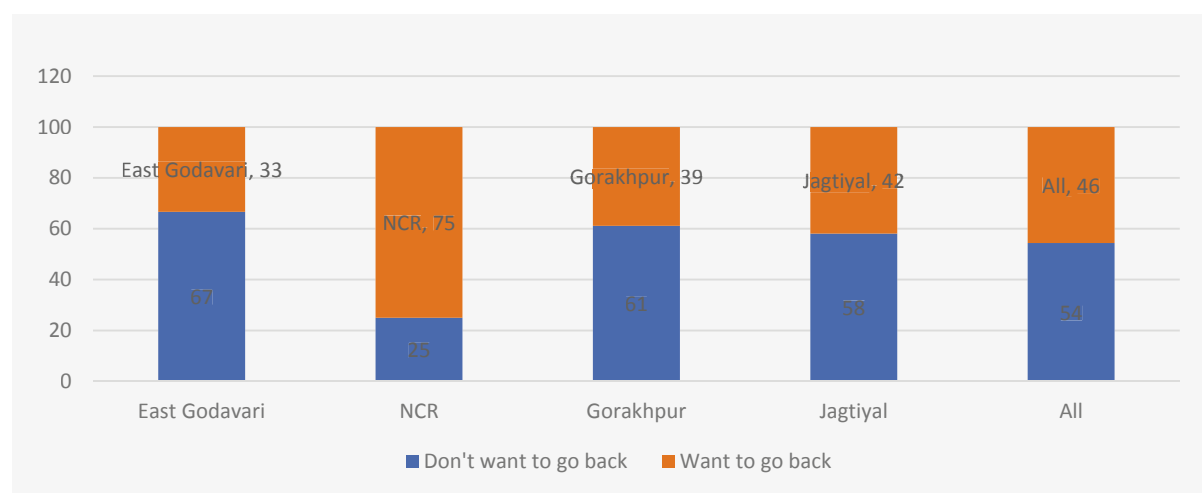
Sub-contracting also does not allow any kind of unionization and hence the workers are not able to put forth their demands in an organized manner. Though some of the central trade unions are working among the ordinary construction workers, very few are engaged in addressing the precarious conditions of work that the returning migrants are engaged in. There are hardly any demands being made by unions regarding better wages and working conditions, with special reference to the returning migrants and the skills they bring. With no organizational backing, the returning migrants have hardly been able to engage in collective bargaining either with the industry or the state. Of all the four research sites, the study only observed some attempts at collective bargaining by the returning migrants in Jagtiyal, which was dominated by masons. They have submitted memoranda to the district administration with demands related to work and welfare, but nothing concrete has been achieved as a result. They have also raised the issue of compensation for those workers who die in the Gulf due to accidents on the work sites or other reasons.

This makes the returning migrant workers more vulnerable in the labour market. They move from one worksite to another, either linked with the some middlemen or on their own. The middlemen, in order to keep their chain of exploitation strong, do not value their skills gained in the Gulf and keep their wages low.

3.5 FUTURE PLANS

Faced with such limited work opportunities, increasing casualisation and lack of formal support in re-integration, 46 per cent of the respondents reported to have plans to return to the Gulf in search for employment. While respondents from East Godavari (67 per cent), Gorakhpur (61 per cent) and Jagtiyal (58 per cent) have higher proportion of respondents who planned to re-emigrate, only 25 per cent of those working in the NCR had similar plans to re-emigrate. This also corroborates the earlier finding that a majority of the regular salaried/wage employment is found only in the NCR.

Figure 3.11: Willingness of returning migrants to re-emigrate to the Gulf (in %)



Source 16: Field Survey, 2017

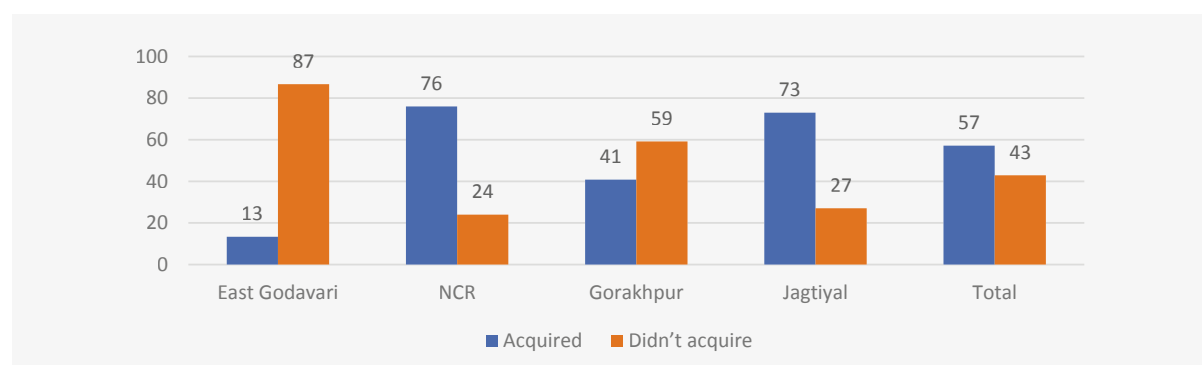
Internal migrants also want to move to the Gulf for higher wages but are unable to do so due to lack of finances.

3.6 SKILLS ACQUIRED IN THE GULF AND ITS SPILL-OVER IN INDIA

One of the other important objectives of the study was to examine whether the skills and knowledge possessed by returning migrants benefit other workers in the construction sites and how these returning migrants pass it on to other workers. The study also inquired into whether there were any other spillover benefits.

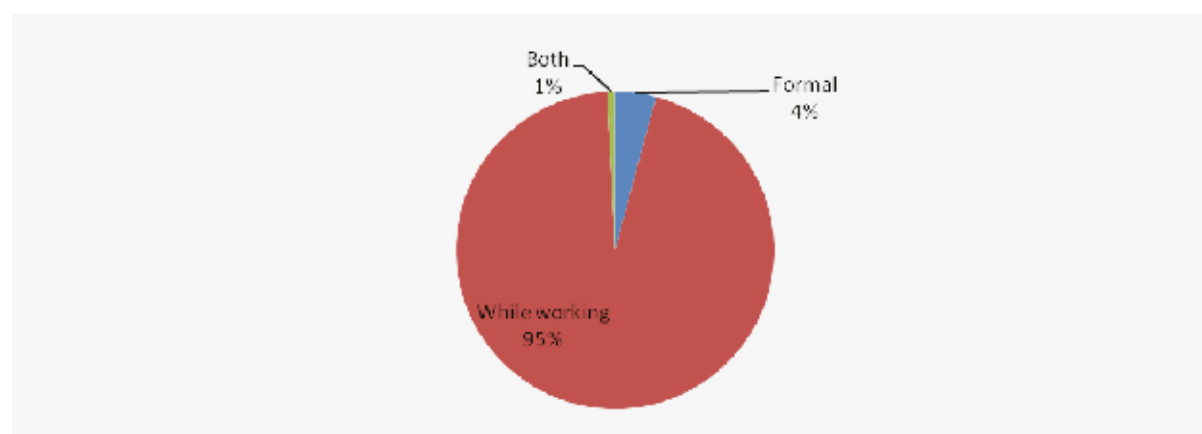
The study found that 57 per cent of the respondents claimed to have acquired new skills while working in the Gulf (Figure 3.12), beyond those skills they already possessed before migration. The highest proportion of such respondents was from the NCR (76 per cent) followed by Jagtiyal (73 per cent) and Gorakhpur (41 per cent). The proportion of respondents from East Godavari reporting to have acquired new skills in the Gulf was low (13 per cent). Of those who have acquired new skills, 95 per cent gained them ‘on the job’ and only 4 per cent have undergone formal training (Figure 3.13). Regarding the perception of returning migrants about their skills as compared to those of internal migrants, more than 39 per cent said that they are better skilled than internal migrant workers (Figure 3.14). In fact, nearly two-third of the respondents are reported to have helped other co-workers to learn new skills (Figure 3.14).

Figure 3.12: New skills acquired while working in the Gulf

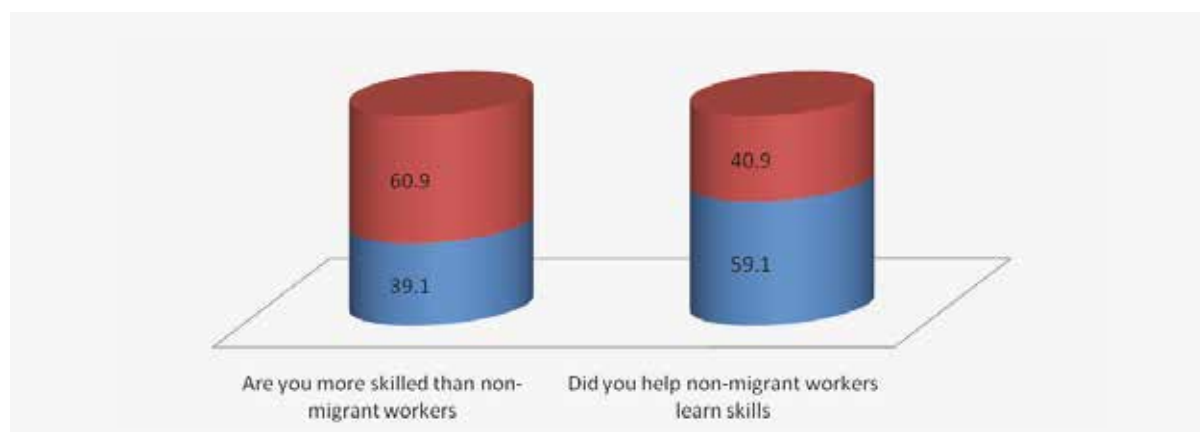


Source 17: Field Survey, 2017

Figure 3.13: Means of acquiring new skills (%)



Source 18: Field Survey, 2017

Figure 3.14: Perceptions about skill acquired and spillover (per cent)

Source 19: Field Survey, 2017

Most of the returning migrant workers reported that they had helped more than one worker in acquiring new skills (Table 3.1). Most of these returning migrant workers are engaged in structure building activities such as shuttering, bar-bending, and carpentry as casual workers. Because of the difference between high-end technological activities in India and the Gulf, the skills relating to finishing and interior preparation is of limited use in India and, hence, the spillover of these activities seems to be limited.

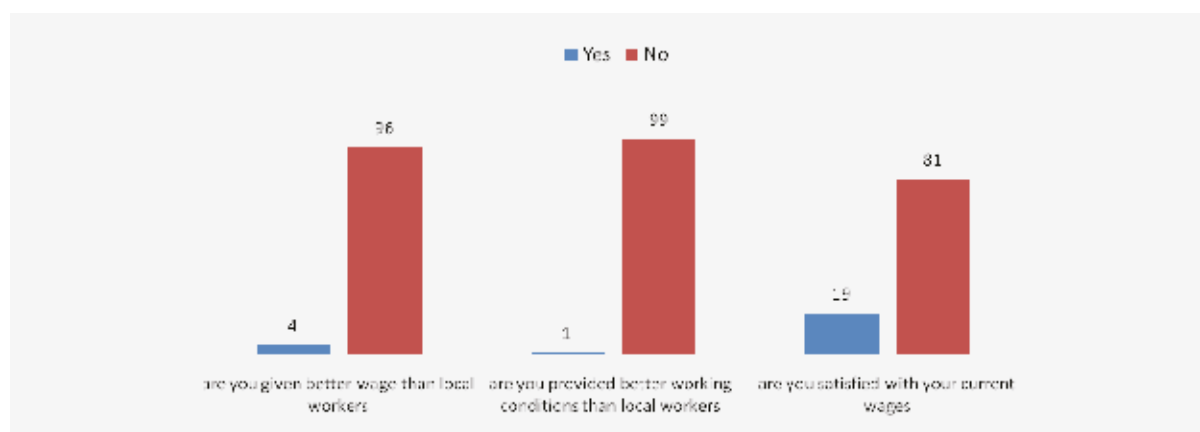
Table 3.1: Number of workers helped by returning migrants in India

Number of workers helped	Number of returning migrants
1 to 3	40
4 to 10	40
11 to 20	17
more than 20	6

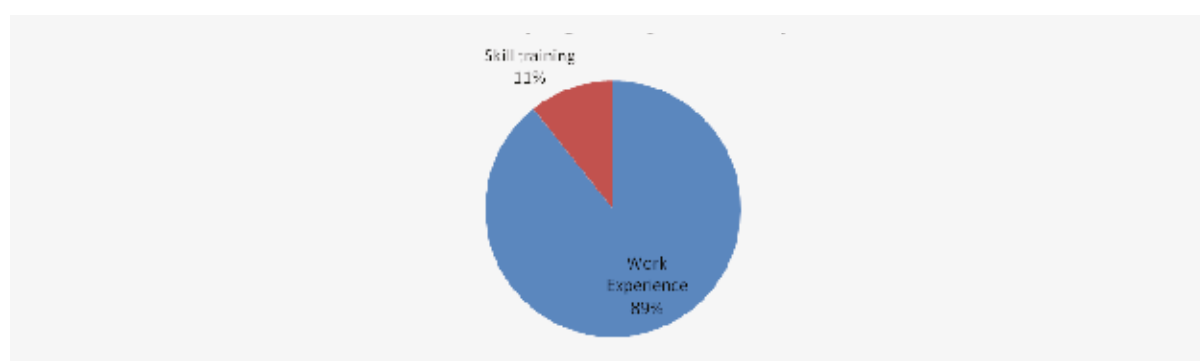
Source 20: Field Survey, 2017

3.7 SKILL PREMIUM: DOES BETTER SKILL LEAD TO BETTER EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES?

It has been found that in most of the cases, skill training before migration is the pre-condition of migration. The surveys of skill training centres that are operated by private agents provide the aspirants with the basic information needed for work in the desired trade. Each candidate has to undergo a selection process that involves practical as well as theoretical knowledge. The recruitment agents from construction companies recruit workers for desired trades at these centres after testing their skills. Therefore, it can be assumed that the returning migrants had some skills in a particular trade before their migration. Further, a majority of the sampled returning migrants have worked in the Gulf for more than five years, where 57 per cent of them reported to have acquired new skills. Therefore, it is fair to assume that returning migrants are comparatively better skilled and able to command better wages and working conditions. The skill premium of returning migrants is measured in terms of their perception about working conditions, wages and level of satisfaction. Surprisingly, the study finds that 96 per cent of the respondents reported no difference in their wages as compared to the internal migrants (Figure 3.15). Further, 99 per cent of respondents have said that there is no special advantage at the work site. As a result, 81 per cent of the workers have said that they are not satisfied with their current employment.

Figure 3.15: Perceptions of returning migrants about skill premium in India

Source 21: Field Survey, 2017

Figure 3.16: Perception of returning migrants about skill training and work experience

Source 22: Field Survey, 2017

When asked what, according to them, is more important in finding a better job, 89 per cent of the respondents cited work experience as a significant factor in determining the type of employment. Only 11 per cent responded that skill training is more important. This clearly shows that a majority of the jobs available in the construction sector value work experience over skill training. Only highly technical jobs such as engineering, architect, foreman etc. need skill training prior to work engagement. However, the proportion of such jobs is very low.

These findings also corroborate the earlier finding that a majority of the respondents have attained work training through informal channels such as on the job training or with the help of co-workers rather than formal training

3.8 ASPECTS OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT

As a significant proportion of returning migrants are currently engaged in self employment, it is essential to examine the quality of self-employment opportunities. Self-employment can be viewed as an independent source of livelihood, but most literature on this issue shows that these activities are done on a very small scale, with very low remuneration.⁴³ Subsistence entrepreneurship forms a major part of such activities in India where a large segment of population (52 per cent) is self-employed.⁴⁴

⁴³ Cho et al. (2016)

⁴⁴ This data has been taken from the report on Key Indicators of Employment and Unemployment in India, 68th round of Employment and Unemployment Survey of NSSO, 2011-12.

Table 3.2 provides the type of self-employment activities reported by returning migrants. A majority of them are engaged in farming, small trading, grocery, confectionary, running an eatery, etc. The rest are engaged in activities that need some construction-related skills such as welding, repair, carpentry etc. A few own relatively better businesses that need investment, such as shuttering stores etc. As Table 3.3 shows, the size of investment in a majority of the enterprises is less than Rs 100,000. Only a few enterprises have investment of more than Rs 500,000. There has been little change in the size of the enterprise from the time it was set up to the present. This suggests that the enterprises are not just small but the prospects of their growth are also very low.

Table 3.2: Type of self-employed activities of returning migrants

Activity	Absolute Number	Per cent
Farmer	5	13.9
Grocery	6	16.7
Carpentry	3	8.3
Confectionary	5	13.9
Eatery	3	8.3
Welding	2	5.6
Shuttering	2	5.6
Repair	4	11.1
Small trader	6	16.7
Total	36	100.0

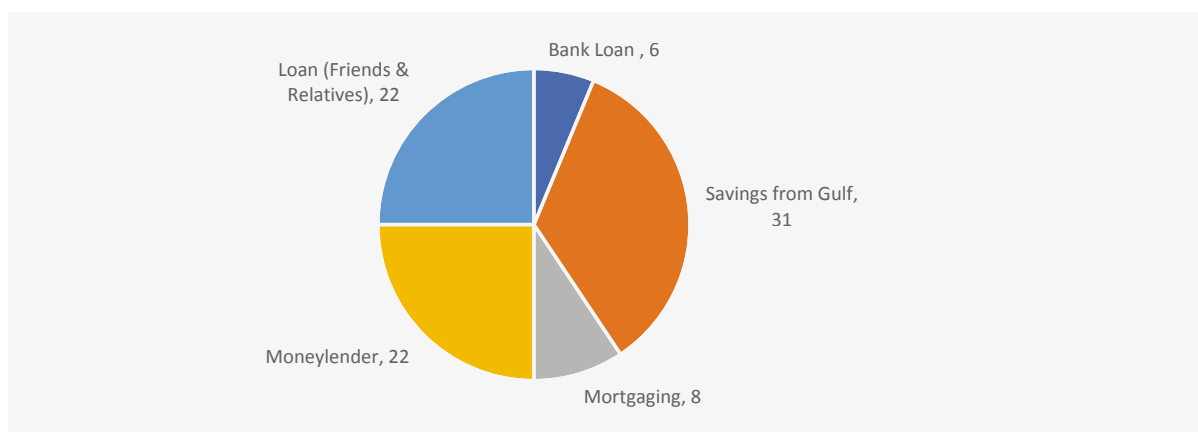
Table 3.3: Comparison of the size of enterprise from time of starting to present

Size of working capital (in INR)	Number time of starting	Present number at
Less than 100,000	20 (55.6)	17 (47.2)
100,000 - 200,000	3 (8.3)	6 (16.7)
200,000 - 500,000	10 (27.8)	9 (25.0)
500,000 to 1 million	2 (5.6)	3 (8.3)
more than 1 million	1 (2.8)	1 (2.8)
Total	36 (100)	36 (100.0)

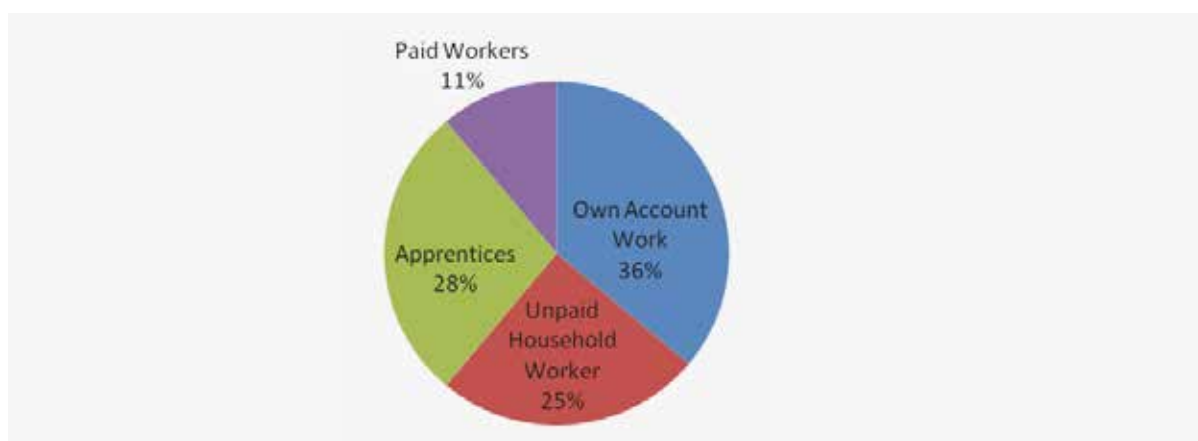
Source 23: Field Survey, 2017

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages.

The majority of the self-employed respondents (65 per cent) have availed credit from some source to start the enterprises. Only 35 per cent have used the savings from income earned in the Gulf. The sources of credit are largely informal such as friends and relatives (25 per cent), moneylenders (25 per cent) and mortgaging (9 per cent). Only 6 per cent have taken credit from formal institutions. The size of enterprises in terms of number of persons employed indicates that a majority (89 per cent) do not use hired labour. Nearly one-third (36 per cent) are own account enterprises, while 28 per cent use apprentices and 25 per cent use unpaid household workers. This further confirms the argument that majority of the self-employment activities are small-scale and not remunerative.

Figure 3.17: Sources of funds for self-employment

Source 24: Field Survey, 2017

Figure 3.18: Percentage distribution of enterprises by number of workers employed

Source 25: Field Survey, 2017

3.9 DETERMINANTS OF CURRENT USUAL ACTIVITY OF THE RETURNING MIGRANTS

To understand what determines the status of returning migrants as being integrated or not integrated in the domestic economy, we estimate a Logistic model with the choices of available usual activity that the returning migrants are engaged in currently, namely: regular salary/wage employment (Model I), casual labour (Model II), self-employment (Model III), unemployment (Model IV). We also need to keep in mind that the labour markets in India are characterized by the presence of a large informal sector, which work within the framework of social structures such as caste and gender and other labour market institutions, information asymmetries and segmentations.

Table: 3.3 Estimates of Logistic Regression Model

Variables	Model-I Regular Emp=1	Model-II Casual Emp=1	Model-III Self-Emp=1	Model-IV Unemployed=1
Age	2.125 **	1.002 *	1.099	0.956
Age-square	0.991 **	0.850 *	0.999	1.000
Social group (ref-SC/ST)	0.234	0.653	1.960 **	0.555
OBC	2.578	0.255 ***	2.178	0.440
General				
Basic Edu.(Less than Primary)	7.659 *	0.308 ***	1.719 *	2.231
Primary to HS Degree/Diploma	123.749 ***	0.062 ***	1.381	1.140
Technical Edu. (Yes=1)	0.074	299.51	0.056 ***	5.070
Vocational Edu. (Yes=1)	9.265	0.033	16.219 ***	0.404
Times of migration (more than 1=1)	2.550	0.898	1.755	0.361
Work Exp in Gulf (more than 2 years=1)	0.813	1.006	0.909	2.826 **
Location (Ref-East Godawari)	8.482 **	4.891 ***	0.017 ***	0.586 ***
NCR	0.025	0.708	0.509 *	4.948
Gorakhpur Jagtiyal	0.016	59.227	0.021 ***	0.004
Model Information				
N	252	252	252	252
Log -Likelihood	57.409	257.946	258.489	97.883
Pseudo R ²	0.746	0.402	0.287	0.329
Prob>Chi ²	118.403 ***	90.113 ***	57.994 ***	36.877 ***

Source 26: Computed from Field Survey Data, (2017).

***, ** and * indicate significance at 5%, 10%, and 15% level.

Age: The positive sign of age of the returning migrants supports the hypothesis that older workers have more experience and hence demand for them would be higher than for younger workers. However, statistically the variable is significant only for Model I and Model II. It indicates that the older returning migrants are more likely to adopt regular salary/wage employment as well casual labour. However, this relationship is not significant for self-employment (Model III) and unemployment (Model IV).

Age squared: is the square of the age of the workers. It indicates that beyond a threshold age, returning migrants have lesser probability of adopting wage work, both regular and casual. Their reduced physical abilities reduces the demand for older workers, even if they are experienced.

Caste: does not emerge as highly significant. The most significant relationship of caste that comes up shows that returning migrants from the OBC category are more likely to adopt self-employment activities as compared to those from the SC/ST category (Model III) and that those belonging to the general castes are less likely to work as casual labour (Model II).

Education and Skill: Returning migrants who have been educated up to primary and higher secondary level are more likely to adopt regular employment and self-employment. As the education level increases

to degree-level, the probability of having regular employment becomes very high. Returning migrants with technical education are more likely to either engage in casual employment or remain unemployed but the results are not found to be statistically significant. Also, they are less likely to adopt self-employment activities. Likewise, vocational education does not influence the wage work (both regular and casual) activity of the returning migrant, but those who have vocational training are more likely to adopt self-employment activity.

Work Experience and Skill: Work experience of more than two years in the Gulf does not ensure any kind of employment activity after return. However, the probability of unemployment is found to be higher and statistically significant. This indicates that the construction sector is not providing sufficient employment based on the specific skills of the returning migrants. Further, even the number of times a worker has migrated also does not ensure any type of employment activity.

Regional Dynamics: Returning migrants who are working in the NCR have more chances of taking up both casual as well as regular work as compared to that of returning migrants from East Godavari. While their chances of regular employment are higher than casual work, the chances of engaging in self-employment are very low. Returning migrants in Gorakhpur and Jagtial show lesser chances of taking to self-employment activities as compared to those from East Godavari. Further, the probability of being unemployed becomes higher if a returning migrant is based in Gorakhpur.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

The study challenges the perceived notion that the skills and experience gained abroad have an impact on return, and contribute to the development of a country of origin. It may be true in certain labour markets, perhaps where labour shortages are apparent and higher skills genuinely in demand, or where there is a shift from labour-intensive to higher productivity and technological approaches.

Most of the returning migrants interviewed are shifting between casual labour and self-employment because of a lack of regular employment options. As a result of this uncertainty in the job market, nearly half of the respondents (46 per cent) are willing to re-migrate to the Gulf. While the shift from casual labour to self-employment seems encouraging, it is important to note that 89 per cent are own-account enterprises and 60 per cent of them have taken credit from informal sources.

Some of the broad conclusions that can be drawn from this study are:

- There is no significant difference in the availability of work for workers returning from the Gulf and for internal migrant workers. Both groups face equal levels of under-employment. The level of wages, conditions of work and terms of employment is also the same.
- Most of the returning migrants have to choose between casual labour and self-employment, or remain unemployed.
- There is hardly any change in the amount of regular salary/wage employment before workers migrate to the Gulf and after their return.
- The majority of the returning migrants found employment through informal networks of contractors, family and co-workers. The government plays a minimal role in supporting migrants' economic reintegration.
- Most of those who are currently self-employed used to be self-employed even before they migrated. They are running micro enterprises (89 per cent are own-account enterprises) that give very low returns.
- Due to uncertainty in the domestic job market, nearly half of the respondents have expressed their desire to re-migrate to the Gulf.
- The study finds that there is hardly any evidence to prove that the construction industry in India values the skills gained by the workers in the Gulf. One of the main reasons for this lack of appreciation is the practice of sub-contracting. There is a complete disconnect between the workers at the bottom of sub-contracting chain and the construction conglomerates at the top. The sub-contractors demonstrate little concern about the skill levels of the workers they recruit.

The study recommends more research and analysis to inform policy on skills and migration, including for women migrants and migrants in other sectors. The current policy discourse in support of circular migration highlights the value of skills learnt in destination as part of the gains that accrue to migrant workers and origin countries. However, this discourse often does not take into account the realities of the domestic labour market. As shown in this study, the full and long-term benefits of skills development for migrants cannot accrue in the current environment until some of the following measures are taken:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT AT CENTRAL AND STATE LEVELS:

- Collect better data on the skills of migrant workers prior to departure and on return. This will strengthen understanding of the skills attained by the workers during their time in the Gulf, and facilitate placement into new employment opportunities within India or abroad.
- Invest in public employment services and access to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (skills testing and training) for migrant workers to enable them to find jobs that take into account their skills - either within the domestic labour market or overseas.
- Engage in a series of dialogues with construction industry associations, throughout the sub-contracting chain, to better understand the decision making around recruitment and employment of skilled workers – and increase opportunities for returning migrants with skills.
- Ensure that investments made into training migrant workers reflect the needs of the country to ensure those workers have longer-term career opportunities (at home or by re-migrating), rather than just being trained for a short-term contract overseas.
- Train returning migrants to be future trainers – within government and private institutions and on site. Returning migrants are more likely to have experience working on more advanced technologies that are increasingly being introduced onto construction sites in India.
- Further study the impact of migration on development, on the individual migrant, their families and communities of origin.
- Through bilateral agreements with countries of destination, call on the employers in destination to issue certificates of employment highlight the skills level and work tasks.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IN INDIA:

- Clearly articulate to local and central authorities the skills gaps that exist, so that efforts can be confined to have returning migrants fill them.
- Register all employees and provide experience certificate to all employees, specifying the terms of employment and work accomplished.
- Build a culture in which workers' skills and quality on site is respected
- From the highest levels, take on a more active, oversight role in the recruitment of workers. The sub-contracting chain de-values skills and experience, which has a direct impact on quality, safety and timeliness.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRADE UNIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN INDIA:

- Build partnerships amongst themselves to enhance services for migrants at all stages of the migration cycle. Trade unions should consider expanding membership to construction workers overseas.
- Encourage the formation of self-help groups that can also assist with information and support services in reintegration.
- Strengthen dialogue with government offices at all levels to introduce policy and programmatic responses around reintegration.

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Appendix 1:

STATE WISE DISTRIBUTION OF RETURNING MIGRANT WORKERS

States	Returning Migrants	% Share of Returning Migrants
Kerala	252046	47.2
Uttar Pradesh	42722	8.0
Delhi	40615	7.6
West Bengal	40489	7.6
Tamil Nadu	36567	6.9
Rajasthan	25714	4.8
Maharashtra	24165	4.5
Punjab	21317	4.0
Tripura	8876	1.7
Karnataka	8904	1.7
Gujarat	8158	1.5
Bihar	6991	1.3
Assam	4868	0.9
Haryana	4410	0.8
Goa	4111	0.8
Andhra Pradesh	1679	0.3
Puducherry	1154	0.2
Jammu & Kashmir	291	0.1
Uttarakhand	402	0.1
Himachal Pradesh	50	0
Sikkim	34	0
Arunachal Pradesh	6	0
Mizoram	116	0
Chhattisgarh	78	0
Daman & Diu	25	0
Total	533784	100.0

Source 27: Unit Level Data of 64th Round, 2007-08.

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Economic re-integration of returning migrants in the construction sector in India

This report examines the issue of re-integration of Indian migrants who had been working in the construction industry in the Gulf. Based on primary interviews with over 250 returnee migrants, the report assesses whether the skills gained through work experience abroad increases the employability of migrants in their home country. The report also examines how the construction industry in India views returning migrants and whether there is any preference for their skills, knowledge and experience.

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