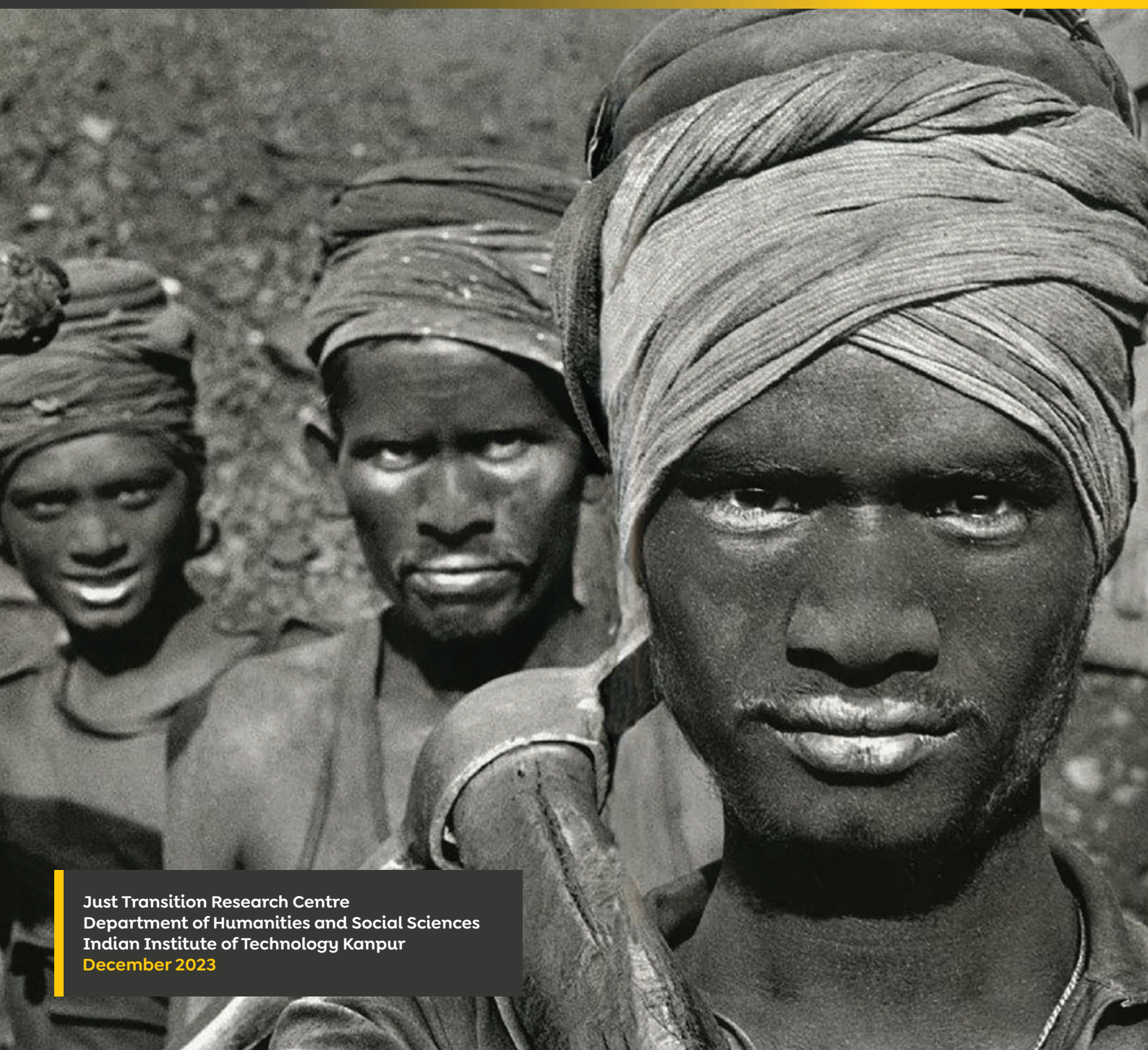


# Just Transition: Labour Migration in Indian Coalfields



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# Abbreviations

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**BCCL:** Bharat Coking Coal Limited

**CCL:** Central Coalfields Limited

**CIL:** Coal India Limited

**ECL:** Eastern Coalfields Limited

**ESZ:** Eco-Sensitive Zone

**GoI:** Government of India

**GW:** Giga-Watt

**JTRC:** Just Transition Research Centre

**MCL:** Mahanadi Coalfields Limited

**MT:** Million Tonnes

**NCL:** Northern Coalfields Limited

**OBC:** Other Backward Castes

**SECL:** South Eastern Coalfields

**WCL:** Western Coalfields Limited

# Executive Summary



India is the second largest producer of coal in the world with an annual production of 937 million tonnes in 2022 (see Appendix II), and coal revenue accounted for 1.28% of India's \$3,150.31 billion Gross Domestic Product in 2021. After signing the Paris Agreement (2015), however, the Government of India (GoI), has strived to reduce carbon emissions to 45% below 2005 levels by 2030 and achieve Net Zero by 2070 (Chandrashekhara, 2022). To achieve these goals, the GoI targets to install renewable energy infrastructure for 500 GW of electricity generation capacity by 2023 (Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, 2023). India is committed to energy transition and in this context, just transition has gained attention. According to the International Labour Organization, just transition refers to energy transition that is "as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind".

Migrant labourers are the cogs that run the Indian coal economy. Approximately 2 crore of them are employed in the coal sector. Collieries require massive workforces to carry out mining, transporting, washing, and other jobs that help run the coal sector smoothly. This demand for labour cannot be met by the local communities that reside near coalfields for three reasons. First, the local population is not able to supply the number of workers required. Second, they usually do not have the required skill set. Third, Adivasi communities (who live around coal mines) are not necessarily willing to participate in mining as it endangers their traditional land and livelihood. Labour migration is, thus, necessary for the functioning of the coal and related sectors, and by extension the local and district economy.

This report presents an overview of labour migration in the Indian coal sector focusing on the challenges and opportunities in the sector. The report devotes one section each to the importance of labour migration in Indian collieries, the role of contractors in recruiting migrant labourers, the social background of migrant coal workers, the factors that motivate migration, the consequences of migration for the place of destination and place of origin, followed by the most significant insights into labour migration, and the key governmental policies operating presently. The report provides a holistic picture to policymakers and suggests a set of recommendations that can be used as a practical guideline to help migrant labourers. These include:

1

**Thorough recording of migrant labourers to ensure that their employment needs can be addressed.**

2

**Identify social groups linked to the coal and related sectors to understand the multiple factors of their vulnerabilities.**

3

**Establish safeguard mechanisms to monitor the practices of contractors and save migrants from deceitful practices.**

4

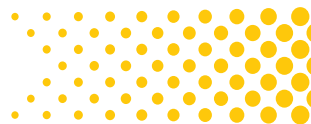
**Provide secure employment and safe living conditions to migrant labourers, particularly women.**

5

**Ensure rights among the children of migrant labourers.**



# Introduction







Munmun Khusro, a small shopkeeper in Assam, sits in her shop waiting for customers. After the mine closure in the Margherita coalfields and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, she lost many of her customers. They were mainly migrant labourers in the coal mines who have now left in search of jobs. Her eldest daughter had to migrate to Bangalore to work as a maid to support their family.

This story is not unique. There are over 45 crore informal labourers in the Indian labour force, and around 2 crore informal workers work in Indian coalfields. They are a crucial part of the workforce, and yet very little is known about these people. The migration of labourers draws attention to a variety of issues. It shows the unequal distribution of

job opportunities across regions and the unequal access to natural resources and infrastructure. It exposes the lack of social security for certain groups of people, and their marginalisation based on caste, tribe, ethnic and gender identity.

In Indian coalfields, migrant workers often work as low-wage contractual labourers and are engaged in activities such as mining, cutting, hauling, truck loading, transporting, and washing. Every stage of coal extraction, transportation, processing and distribution, is thus, reliant on these workers. It is, therefore, essential that a thorough investigation of the migrant labourers be carried out.

# What is Labour Migration?

Migration, or the movement of people from one place to another, is a common fact, which is caused by regional inequalities in development, and facilitated by improved communication, the spread of information about opportunities and advancements in transportation and communication technology. With the immense population growth, more and more people are migrating in search of employment opportunities or looking for better lives. Technological developments allow people to migrate farther than before. There has been an increase in migration in all socioeconomic strata, though in different classes people migrate for different reasons. The main reasons among labourers are employment, livelihood, and better standards of living. But others migrate for education, freedom and other reasons. Labour migration often involves the contractual employment of labour. It is, thus, necessary to take a closer look at labour migration.

Labour migration refers to the movement of people in search of employment opportunities. It is in reality a complex process involving domestic and international movement of people, responding to the global labour market and other push and pull factors. The United Nations International Organisation of Migration (Sironi, Bauloz and Emmanuel, 2019, p. 123) defines labour migration as the “movement of persons from one State to another, or within their own country for residence, for employment.” Figure 1 lists the major reasons that drive migration in India with job-related issues being the foremost. They are based on data collected in the Periodic Labour Force Survey, 2022. It is important to note that in 2021 census data was not collected and these figures describe the estimates for 2021.

**Table 1:** The Drivers of Migration in India

REASON FOR MIGRATION IN INDIA (2021)	MALE	FEMALE	PERSON
In search of (better) employment	22.8	0.6	4.8
For employment/work (business/proximity to the place of work/transfer, etc.)	20.1	0.7	4.4
Loss of job/closure of unit/lack of job opportunities	6.7	0.4	1.6
Migration of parent/earning member of the family	17.5	7.3	9.2
To pursue studies	4.7	0.6	1.4
Marriage	6.2	86.8	71.6
Natural disasters (drought, flood, tsunami, etc.)	0.6	0.1	0.2
Social/political problems (riots, terrorism, political refugees, bad law and order, etc.)	0.6	0.1	0.2
Displacement by a development project	0.4	0.1	0.2
Health-related reasons	2.5	0.3	0.7
Acquisition of own house/flat	3.2	0.5	1.0
Housing problem	4.8	0.8	1.5
Post-retirement	1.6	0.1	0.4
Others	8.4	1.7	3.0
<b>All</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (2022)

Note: 1,00,344 (55,389 in rural areas and 44,955 in urban areas) households were surveyed, and a total of 4,10,818 (2,36,279 in rural areas and 1,74,539 in urban areas) persons were surveyed. The total number of migrants surveyed was 1,13,998 (59,019 rural and 54,979 urban).








## Who are migrants?

A 'migrant' refers to a person who moves away from their place of origin, temporarily or permanently, for a variety of reasons. It includes a range of categories of persons, but the most common is migrant workers. However, there is no universally accepted definition of the term 'migrant' (Sironi, Bauloz and Emmanuel, 2019, p. 132).

**Figure 1:** The types of migrants

<b>1.</b> <b>Migrant Labourers</b> migrate for jobs (like coal workers)	<b>2.</b> <b>Seasonal Labourers</b> migrate for some part of the year for work	<b>3.</b> <b>Highly Skilled Labourers</b> such as qualified professionals	<b>4.</b> <b>Return Labourers</b> return to their place of origin after some time
<b>5.</b> <b>Ethnic Labourers</b> preserve their traditional culture	<b>6.</b> <b>Marriage Labourers</b> especially women, migrate to be with their spouses	<b>7.</b> <b>Family Labourers</b> migrate to be with their family members	<b>8.</b> <b>Irregular or Illegal Migrants</b> without the necessary documents

### Is there any difference between migrant, informal and contractual workers?

<b>Migrant Labourer</b>  <p>It refers to a person who migrates from one country to another with a view to being employed otherwise than on his or her own account."</p> <p>They migrate from their native place to a place of destination to secure their livelihood</p>	<b>Informal Labourer</b>  <p>They do "remunerative work that is not registered, regulated or protected by existing legal or regulatory frameworks, as well as non-remunerative work undertaken in an income-producing enterprise."</p> <p>They do not have secure employment contracts, workers' benefits, social protection or workers' representation.</p>	<b>Contractual Labourer</b>  <p>It refers to all situations in which a person performs work for another person who is not their employer.</p> <p>Their work is ideally subject to a legal contract. But they are not permanent employees of the employer.</p> <p>Their labour is generally contracted for a limited period of time.</p>
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Migrant labourer, informal labourer and contractual labourer are different categories of workers. But in reality, these categories very often overlap. Poor, non-literate, low- or unskilled migrant labourers are unable to secure permanent jobs which require high levels of qualifications and skills. Thus, they get employed in the informal sector as contractual labourers. As mentioned above, they are unregistered and unregulated. They are employed for limited periods of time contractually, not permanently. They do not have secure contracts, workers' benefits or representation.



### Difference Between Migration and Tourism


Migration is not the same as tourism. Migration refers to a change in the usual place of residence. Those who migrate for less than a year are called seasonal migrants. Many of them migrate in search of work/employment for a part of the year, every year. It calls for setting up a residence and a household in the place of destination. They maintain a strong bond with their native place.

On the other hand, tourism refers to travelling to a destination for leisure and sightseeing and lasts for a relatively shorter period. Tourists spend time at the destination with the intention of coming back to their homes. They are temporary residents of the destination and do not set up residence there.

# What is Reverse Migration?

Reverse or return migration refers to the movement of people back to their homes after having moved away from there. Employment is a big motivator for people to migrate, and after earning money, they tend to return to their homes. Seasonal migrants return to their homes after spending a few months at the destination. Some people migrate for jobs, work at the place or places of destination and return at the time of retirement or when they are unable to work

due to injury, illness, unemployment or other reasons. During the COVID-19 pandemic, India witnessed a large-scale reverse migration of labourers who lost their jobs at the destination place. With the lockdown and the unavailability of transportation, they had to walk hundreds of miles to reach their home villages. Reverse migration is, thus, a crucial aspect of labour migration.



Mine closure, the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, and reverse migration coincided in 2020 in Assam. One report by the Just Transition Research Centre (2022) captures the narration of a local shopkeeper, Munmun Khusro, in Assam; she recalled that the buying capacity of people had declined due to the mine closure, in addition to which she had to close shop for two years due to the pandemic. Together they resulted in hundreds of migrant workers returning to their home villages; she lost about 70% of her customers, leaving her family impoverished and forcing her eldest daughter to migrate to Bangalore to work as a domestic labourer.

Source: Just Transition Research Centre



# Labour Migration in Indian Collieries

Coal fields in India are often located in remote and forested areas and bringing in migrant labourers is a necessity for developing the coalfield. Government-identified coalfields are auctioned off to the highest bidders by the Ministry of Coal. A clearance from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is required to ensure that National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Eco-Sensitive Zones, and Wildlife Corridors are not destroyed in the process (Ministry of Coal, 2023). Many of these regions are home to Adivasis who are a potential pool of labour, yet migration of workers is required to meet the labour demands of the coalfields. In some cases, Adivasis are opposed to coal mining which destroys their traditional home. The Hasdeo Arand forest in Chhattisgarh, which has been sanctioned for coal mining, is home to Adivasi communities and has faced bitter resistance from them (Ravi, 2022).

With the global concern for clean energy and climate change, the migration of coal workers will likely become an even more complex social problem. There are 13 to 20 million coal-dependent people in India (Dsouza and Singhal, 2021; Farand, 2021). Workers migrate to and between collieries and also migrate to other occupations due to a decline in coal jobs. The process of transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy has resulted in fewer jobs in the coal industry. In turn, this has led to distress migration out of coal regions to other cities and other jobs (Das, 2023). With mine closures and the imminent transition to renewable energy, exploring labour migration in the coal sector has regained its importance.

## Is labour migration inevitable for collieries?

Labour migration is inevitable for collieries because

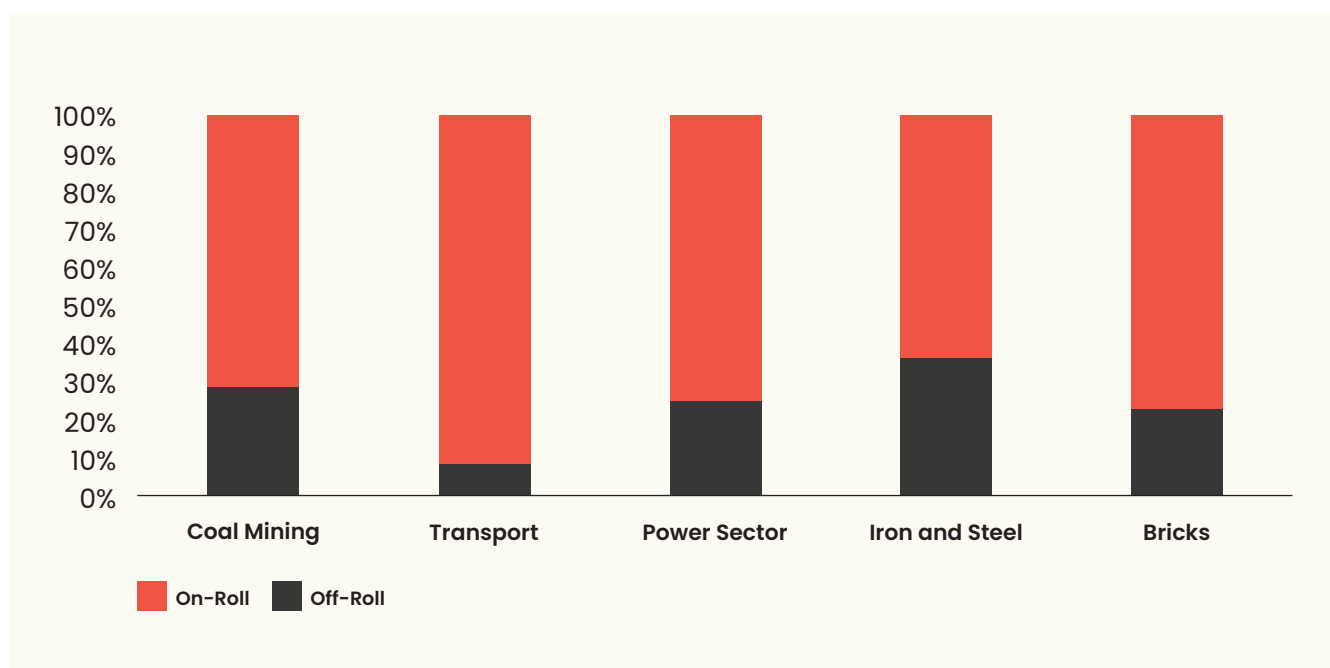
- Local communities might not be able to supply the sheer number of workers required
- Local workers might not have the required levels of skills and knowledge to perform certain tasks
- Local communities (such as Adivasi communities) might not want to work in coal mines because it destroys their land and traditional livelihood and lifestyle



Mithun from Margherita said that “the [mine] closure resulted in a huge loss to the local market and it caused a large amount of outmigration of youth. Around 20000 youth left for other states like Karnataka, Kerala as they could not see any scope of earning in Margherita. Many of them are working as chefs and drivers in other states.”

Source: Just Transition Research Centre



**Figure 2:** Share of Contract Labour in Coal and Related Sectors

Source: Dsouza and Singhal (2021), p. vi

Coal-dependent industries such as power plants also experience labour migration. Figure 2 shows the share of contract workers (who are often migrants) in coal and related sectors. The closure of plants and the introduction of technology are major reasons for the loss of jobs and outmigration from the area. Because the workers are mainly unskilled, they fail to

find alternative full-time employment for which they are unprepared. Employers favour skilled labourers who can operate at least some kinds of machinery. Migrant labourers who are technologically unskilled and unable to operate machinery are, thus, unable to secure jobs. Unskilled jobs are also often taken over by technology.

**Reverse or return migration** refers to the movement of people back to their homes after having moved away from there. Employment is a big motivator for people to migrate, and after earning money, they tend to return to their homes. Seasonal migrants return to their homes after spending a few months at the destination. Some people migrate for jobs, work at the place or places of destination and return at the time of retirement or when they are unable to work



Photo Credit: Ron Hansen (www.unsplash.com)



# The Role of Contractors in Labour Migration

**Low-skilled labour involves simple and routine tasks which require the use of hand-held tools and physical labour.**

(ILO, n.d.)

Contractors play an important role in labour migration in Indian collieries. Without contractors, migration and employment of informal low-skilled workers would not be as extensive as it is. Most low-skilled or unskilled labourers do not have the qualifications to enter the formal economy, and therefore, end up in the informal economy. The informal economy is characterised by small and undefined work, unsafe working conditions, low levels of skills and productivity, poor and irregular wages and long working hours (International Labour Organisation, n.d.). Informal work in collieries includes mining, coal cutting, coal washing, truck loading, etc. and a host of indirectly related occupations. Recruitment for such jobs is not carried out by the colliery itself; rather contractors are employed by the colliery who recruit migrant labourers. For example, the subsidiaries of Coal India Limited (CIL) employ numerous contractors to meet their labour demands. The actions of the contractors are not closely monitored by the CIL, making exploitation of migrant labourers common in Indian collieries.

Contractors also control the wages of migrant labourers. Employers transfer wages to contractors, who then pay the labourers. There are, however, incidences where contractors pay migrant labourers less than the minimum wage. Another common malpractice involves transferring the labourers' wages through a digital payment app and then taking back a portion of their wages in cash.



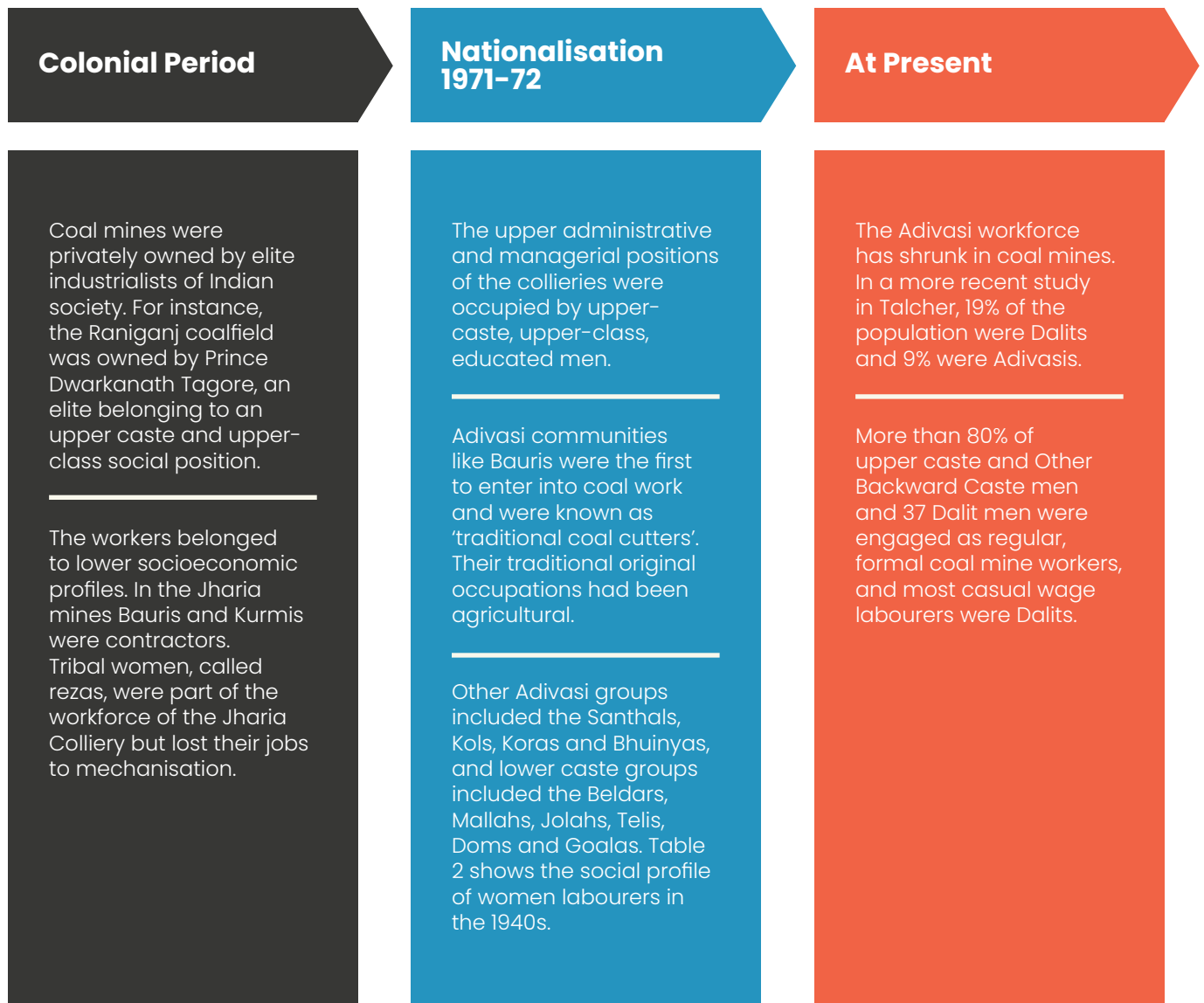
Photo Credit: Sanjoy Sadhukhan ([www.unsplash.com](http://www.unsplash.com))

# Social Profile of Coal Workers

Some caste communities are traditionally associated with coal work, and it could be said that these groups are more likely to migrate for coal work.

**Caste, ethnicity, tribal identity and gender are closely tied to discussions about migrant coal workers.**

**Figure 3:** Social Profile of Colliery Owners and Mine Workers



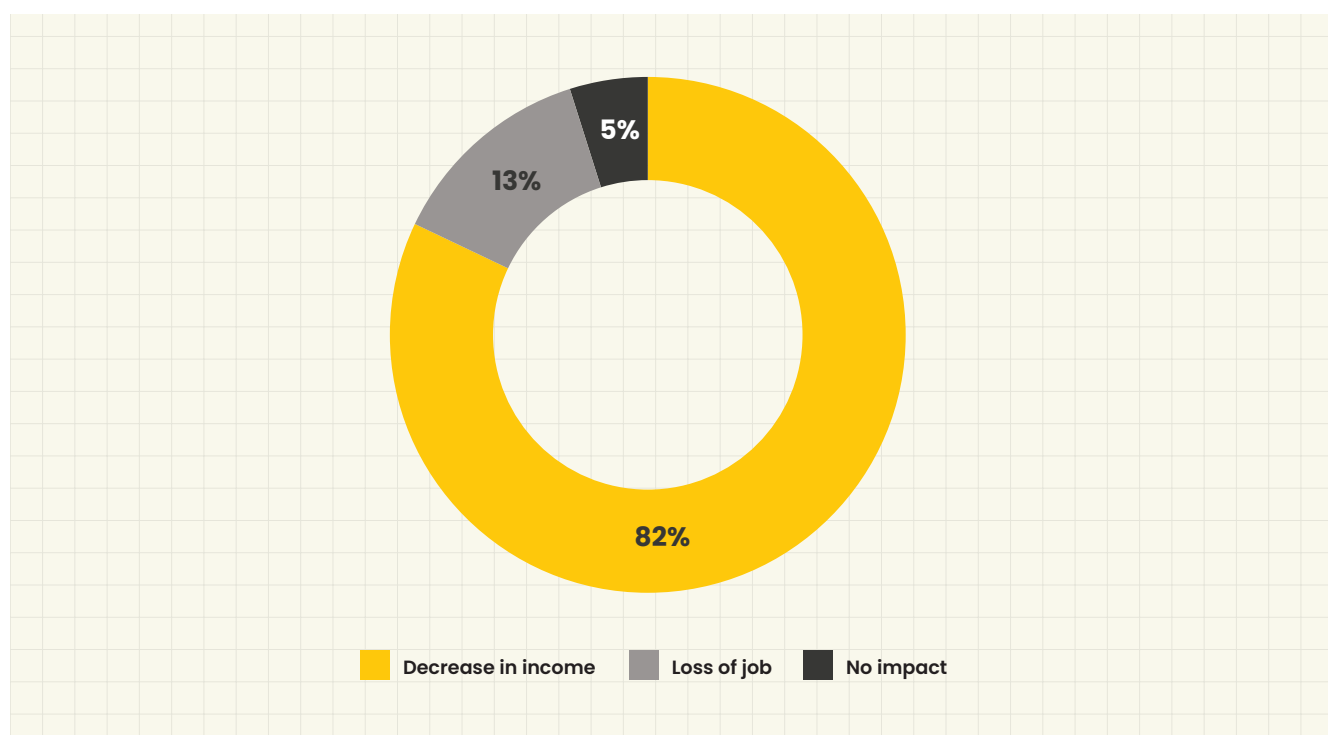
Source: Simeon (1996); Lahiri-Dutt (2006); Nayak (2022)



**Table 2:** Ethnic Division of Women Miners in Eastern India, Between the Two World Wars

Castes	Women/100 men of their caste	Castes	Women/100 men of their caste
<b>Doms</b>	111.0	<b>Kurmis</b>	67.5
<b>Jolahs</b>	59.4	<b>Bauris</b>	55.8
<b>Telis</b>	45.5	<b>Rajputs</b>	27.2
<b>Goalas</b>	24.5	<b>Beldars</b>	102.0
<b>Santhal</b>	87.9		
<b>Bhuinyas</b>	80.1		
<b>Mallahs</b>	79.5		

Source: Lahiri-Dutt (2006), p. 9

**Figure 4:** Impact of the Pandemic and Lockdown on Household Income (May 2020)

Source: Shukla, Srivastava and Tibrewala (2021)

Migrant labourers earn meagre wages which took a significant toll during the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 4). Approximately 27.69 crore informal labourers are registered on the e-Shram portal as part of the National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW). Of this, 94.11% of them earn a monthly income of Rs. 10,000 or less, and 4.36% of them earn between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 15,000 monthly (Mushtaq and Mahajan, 2023).

# Drivers of Migration

Labour migration can be the result of many complex and interrelated factors. These factors are separated into push and pull factors. Push factors are defined as the factors that force people to move from their native place; pull factors are defined as the factors of attraction

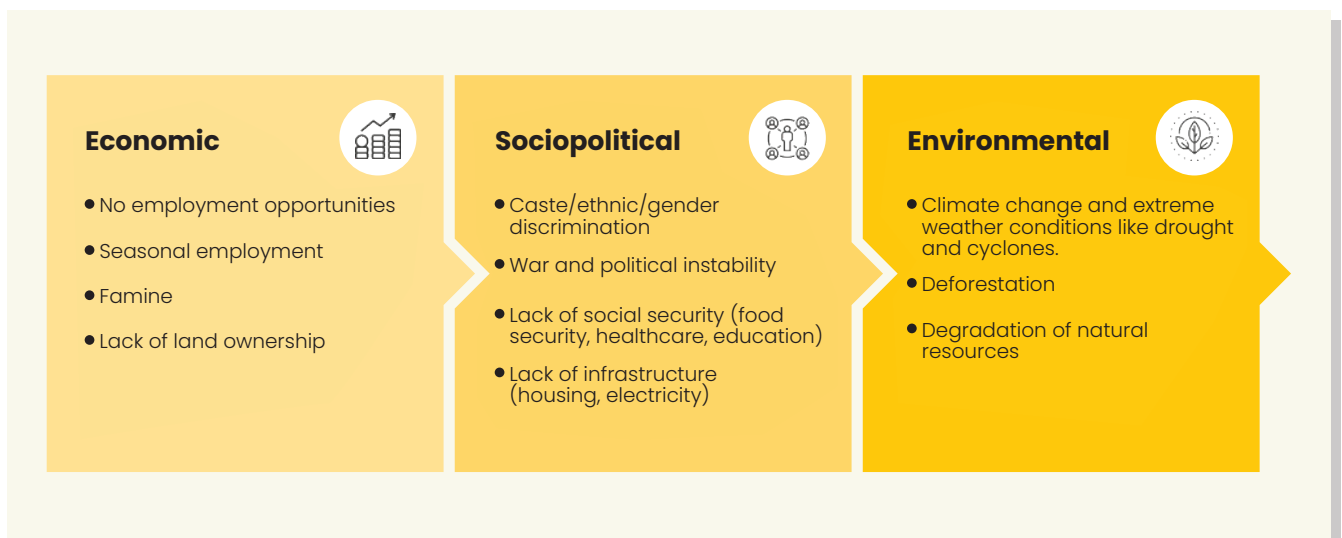
at the places of destination. Push and pull factors can be further classified as economic, sociopolitical and environmental (International Organisation for Migration, n.d.). As the term suggests, push factors 'push' people out of an area, encouraging them to migrate elsewhere.

**Figure 5: Push and Pull Factors of Migration**



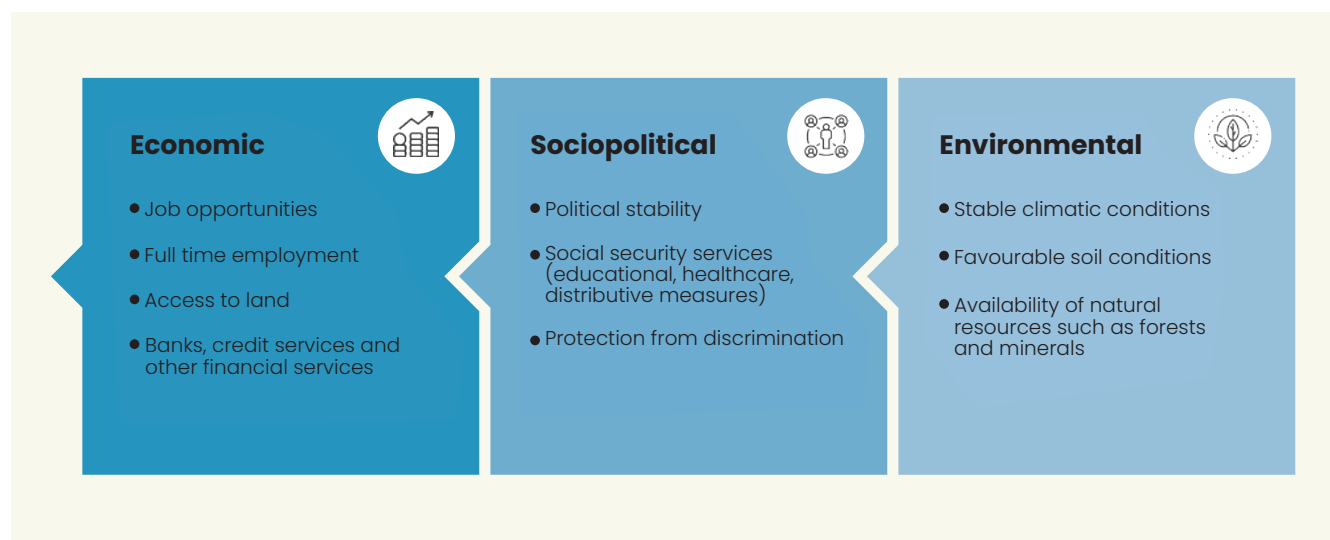
Source: Northern Europe (n.d.)

**Figure 6: Push Factors of Migration in India**

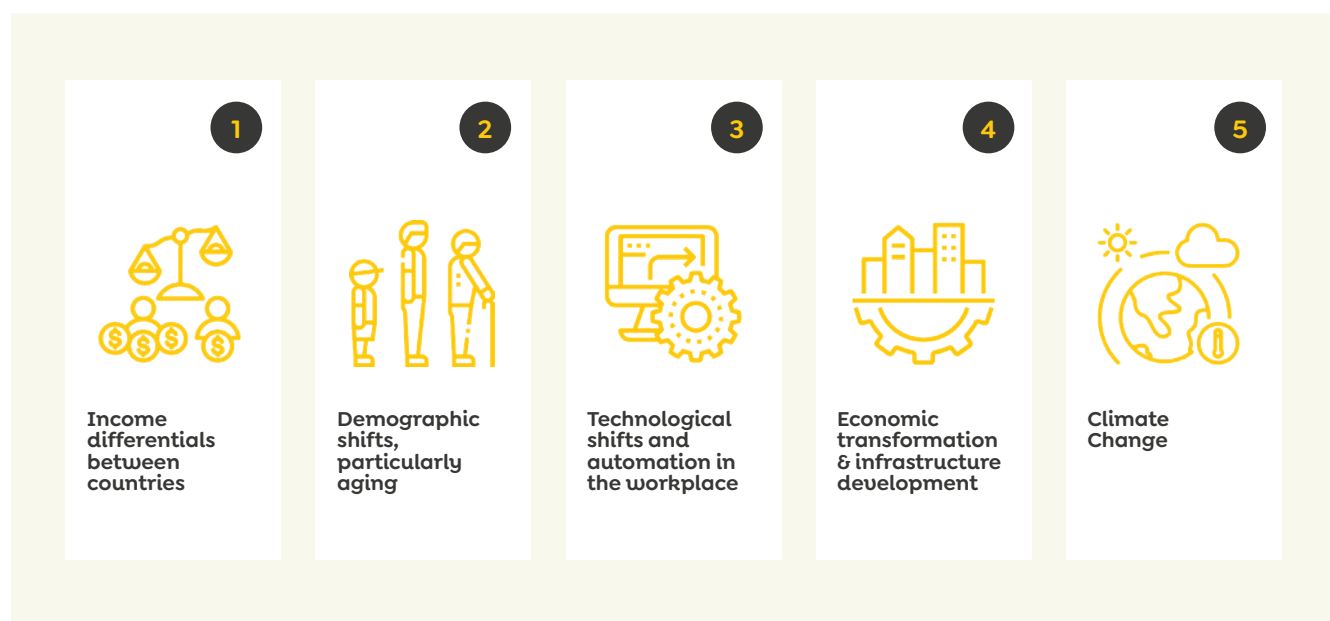


While push factors are characteristics of the place of origin of the potential migrant, pull factors are the desirable characteristics of the place they intend to migrate to. Pull factors, then, tend to attract migrants to a particular location temporarily or permanently.



**Figure 7:** Pull Factors of Migration in India

A combination of push and pull factors determines the pattern of labour migration experienced in the coal industry. Caste-based occupation with its hereditary nature tends to be passed down from generation to generation; thus, members of specific caste groups that have come to be traditionally linked to coal work will be more likely to migrate to coal regions. With the transition to renewable energy, it is quite likely that castes traditionally linked with coal work will be threatened the most, and eventually pushed out of both coal work and coal regions.

**Figure 8:** Five Key Factors Will Continue to Drive Labour Migration in the Future

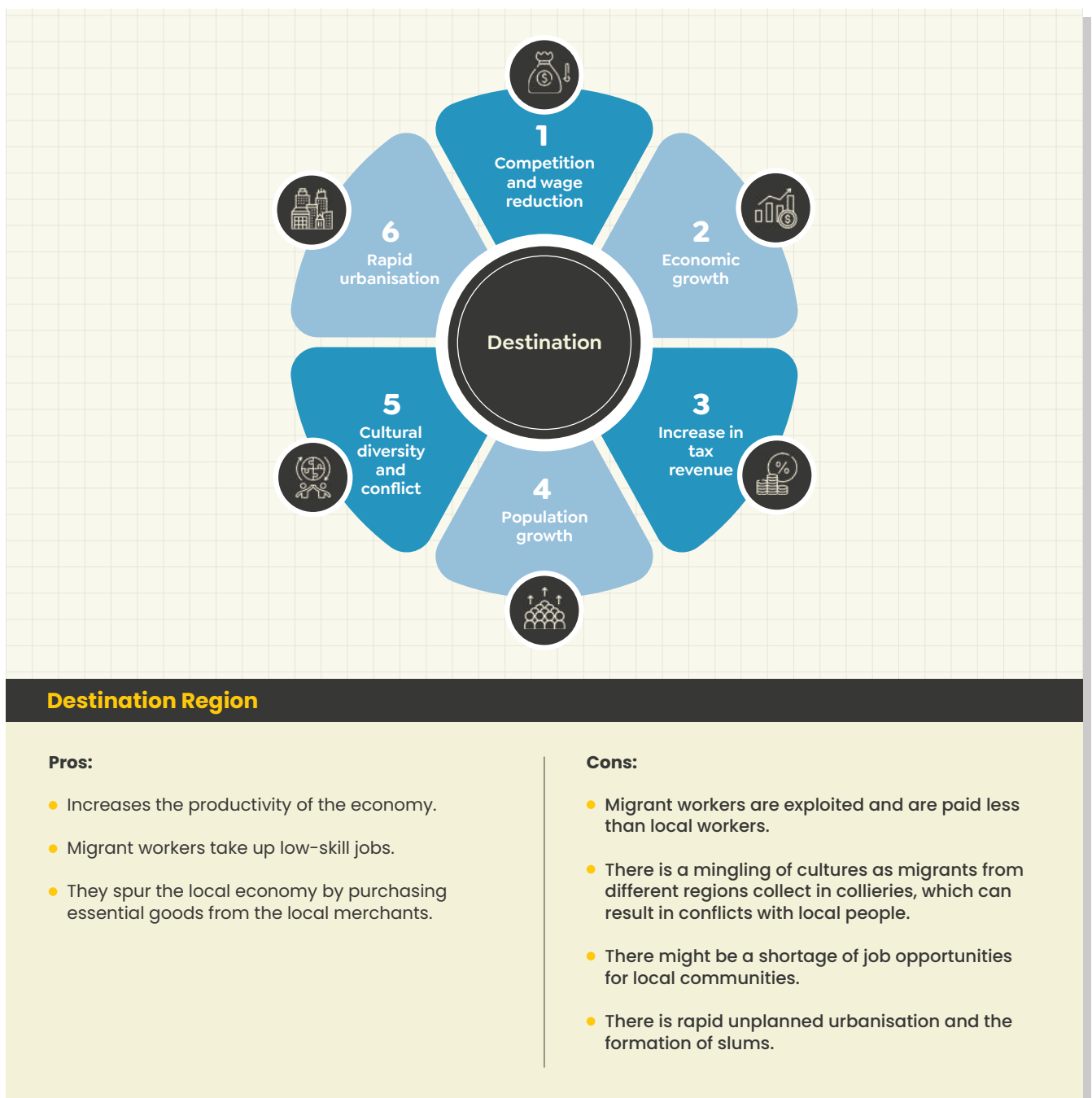
Source: Source: International Organisation of Migration (n.d.)

# The Consequences of Migration

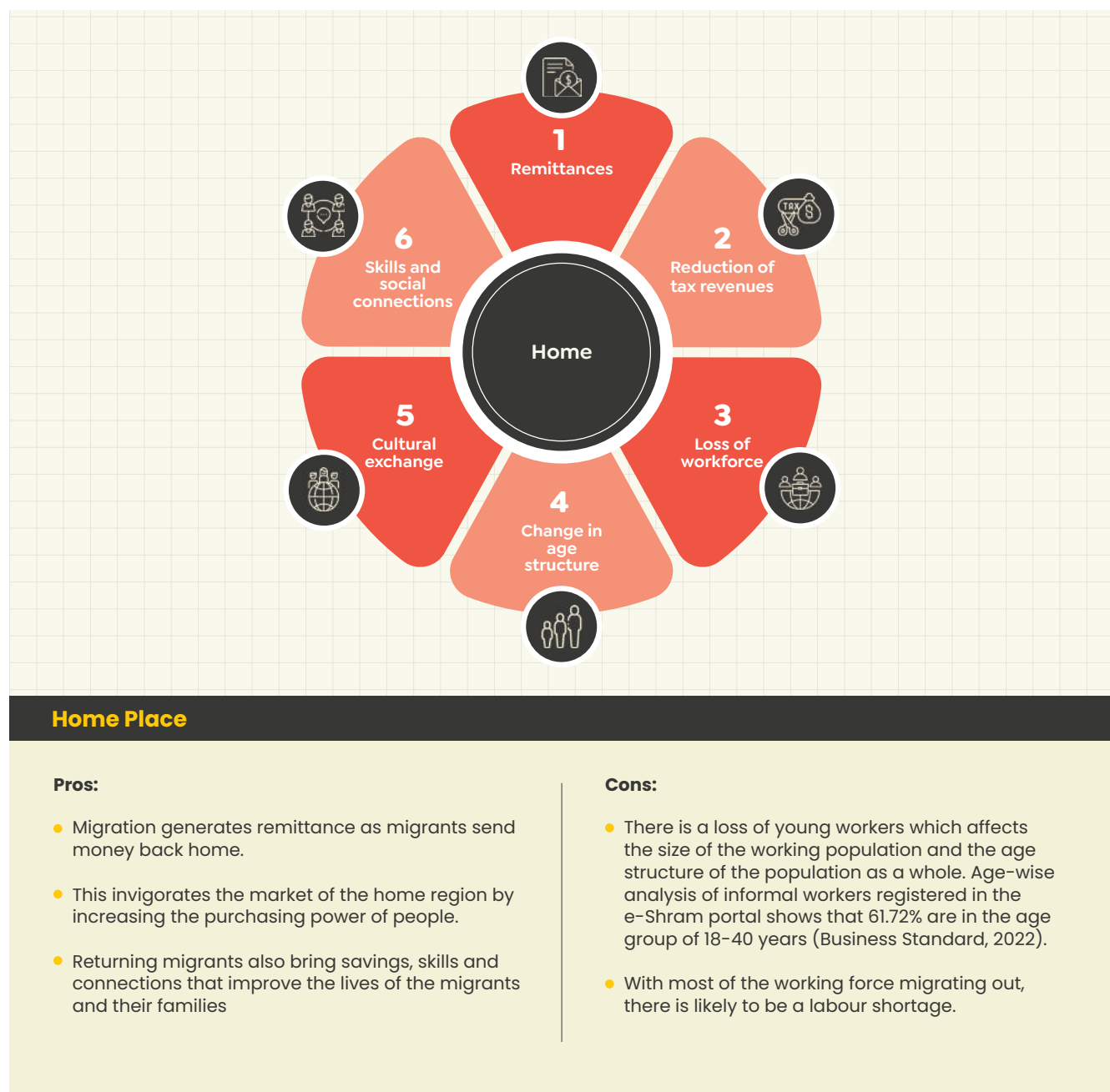
Migration is of two types – internal and external. Internal migration or domestic migration involves the movement of people within a country in search of employment and residence. On the other hand, international migration refers to the movement of people

across national borders. In this discussion on coal work-related migration, it is generally domestic migration that is more important. Migration has significant consequences for both the region of origin and the destination region.

**Figure 9:** Effects of Migration on the Place of Destination





**Figure 10:** Effects of Migration on the Place of Origin

# Key Findings





1

The migration of ethnic minorities in search of work in coalfields has a long history. Labour shortage has been a concern for all collieries across the world, and collieries have resorted to recruiting part-time peasant miners and the system of forced labour. There are ethnic differences in the possession of skills leading to the migration of labour to collieries along ethnic lines. The Jharia mines employed 'seasonal' workers – normally peasants and landless labourers from nearby villages – apart from the 'settled' migrant labourers (Knotter, 2015).

2

Das (2020) notes that there has been an increase in the number of informal migrant workers since the 1990s in collieries. Informal migrant labourers are preferred by contractors because they can be paid low wages, lowering the overall wage rate. Further, contractors and employers feel no obligation to provide them with housing, sanitation, clean water, or healthcare.

3

The precarious existence of migrant coal workers is emphasised by Nayak (2022) through her ethnographic work in Talcher Coalfields, Odisha. She has argued that migrant workers are effectively 'invisibilised' due to three primary reasons: first, through contracting systems into the informal labour force; second, through exclusion from local land and labour politics; and third, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdowns. Table 3 shows the share of migrant workers in Talcher.

**Table 3:** Composition of Contract Workers (including migrants) in a Coal Mine in Talcher

Activity/Category	Workers from within the District of Angul	Odia Migrant Workers (Out of the District of Angul)	Non-Odia Migrant Workers (Out of the State of Odisha)	Total Workers	Total Odia Workers
Mining	88 (40.93)	25 (11.62)	102 (47.45)	215 (100)	113 (52.55)
Transport	711 (84.74)	113 (13.47)	15 (1.79)	839 (100)	824 (98.21)
Security	111 (59.36)	66 (35.29)	10 (5.35)	187 (100)	177 (94.65)
Civil	270 (90.91)	27 (9.09)	0	297 (100)	297 (100)
		<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>1538</b>	<b>1411</b>

Source: Nayak (2022), p. 211

4

Migration in the Northeastern Coalfields in India assumes a different pattern with large numbers of Nepalese migrating to the Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya, in the 1970s. Upadhyay and Ranjan (2016) note that the political instability of Nepal, economic decline, the formation of the Gurkha regiment in British India, and the porous border between the two countries have facilitated immigration from Nepal. Migrants from neighbouring regions also worked in the mines including Bodos, Assamese, Tripuri, Khasi and Garo (Table 4). McDuié-Ra and Kikon (2016) focus on the politics of migration. Meghalaya has witnessed violence against Nepalese migrant workers; locals feared that migrant Nepalese labourers take away their jobs, threaten their tribal culture and settle on their traditional land.

**Table 4:** Distribution of Migrants Coal Workers in Meghalaya

S. No.	Working Population	Number	Percentage
1.	Nepalese	90	60
2.	Bodo	25	16.67
3.	Assamese	15	10
4.	Tripuri	10	6.67
5.	Khasi/Garo	10	6.67
	<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Upadhyay and Ranjan (2016), p. 91

# Labour Migration Fact Sheet

1

The 2011 Census of India stated that 45 crore internal migrants were part of the overall labour force of India.

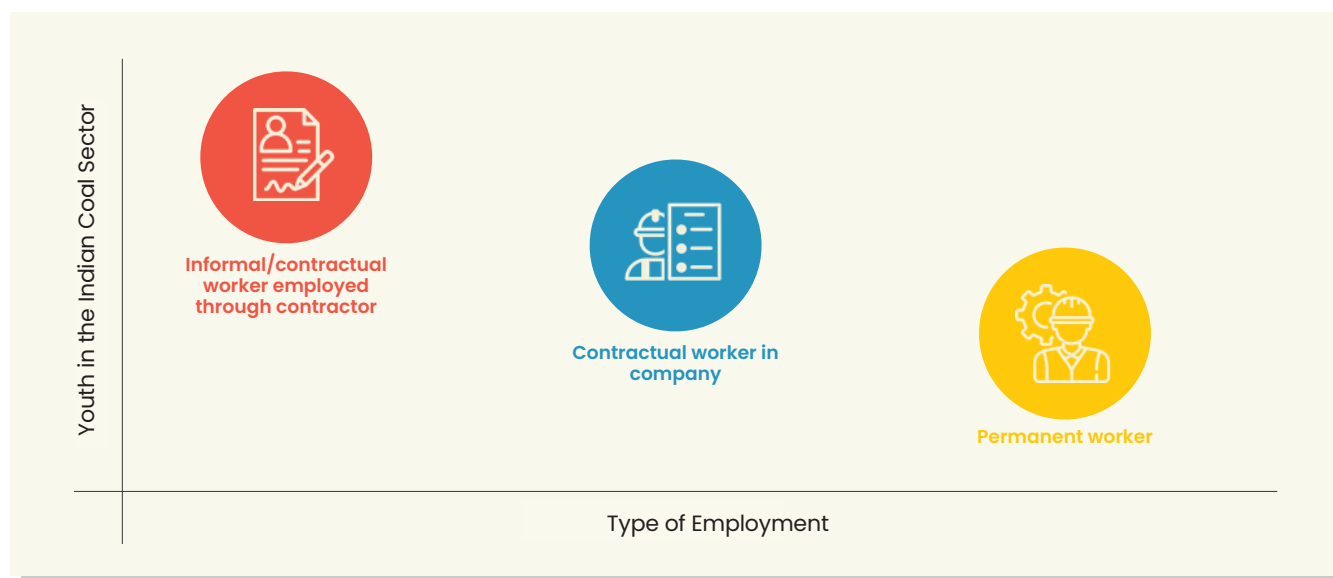
2

The Economic Survey of 2017 claimed that between 2001 and 2011 there were 6 crore interstate migrants.

3

Data on seasonal migrants released by the Ministry of Labour and Employment reveals that of their total population, approximately 84% are men and 15% are women.

**Figure 11:** Intensity of Different Types of Employment Among the Youth in the Indian Coal Sector



Source: Chatterjee and Swarnakar (2023), p. 17

4

A recent report titled Just Transition and the Youth (2023) by the Just Transition Research Centre found that the majority of the youth migrant labourers were contractual labourers, and thus, have very little social security. Figure 11 shows the type of employment that the youth in the coal sector are engaged in. Most migrant youth are employed through contractors, while relatively few are permanent workers in collieries.

5

1.1 crore people are seasonally employed in the coal sector for six months a year. Migrant labourers commonly migrate along with their entire families; the majority are engaged in contract labour and some instances of bonded labour.

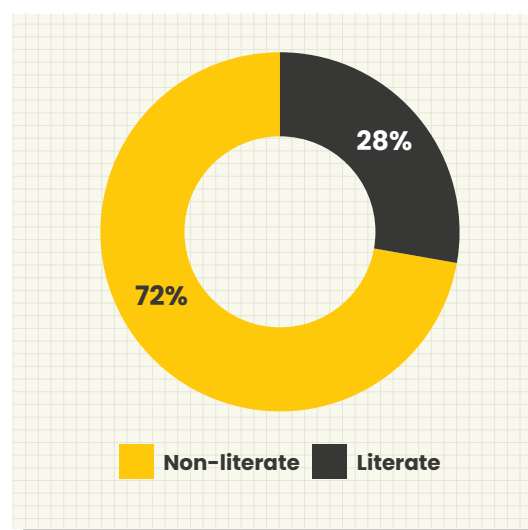


6

High levels of non-literacy (Figure 12) have been recorded among them making them vulnerable to fraudulent contracts (Dsouza and Singhal, 2021). Figure 12 shows the overall literacy rate in Margherita coal block indicating that the vast majority of the population is non-literate.

**High levels of non-literacy have been recorded among women working in coal and its related sectors. Approximately 80% of women workers in the brick industry are non-literate (Dsouza and Singhal, 2021).**

**Figure 12:** Overall Literacy Rate in Margherita Block



Source: Chatterjee et al. (2022), p. 54

7

A survey of tweets posted by the official Coal India Limited Twitter handle shows the absence of any mention of migrant labourers. There is only one mention of them in a tweet posted in May 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding distribution of essentials to migrants returning home by train.

**In Ranchi and Asansol, CIL arranged for food and water packages for distressed migrants labourers during the COVID-19 pandemic as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility.**



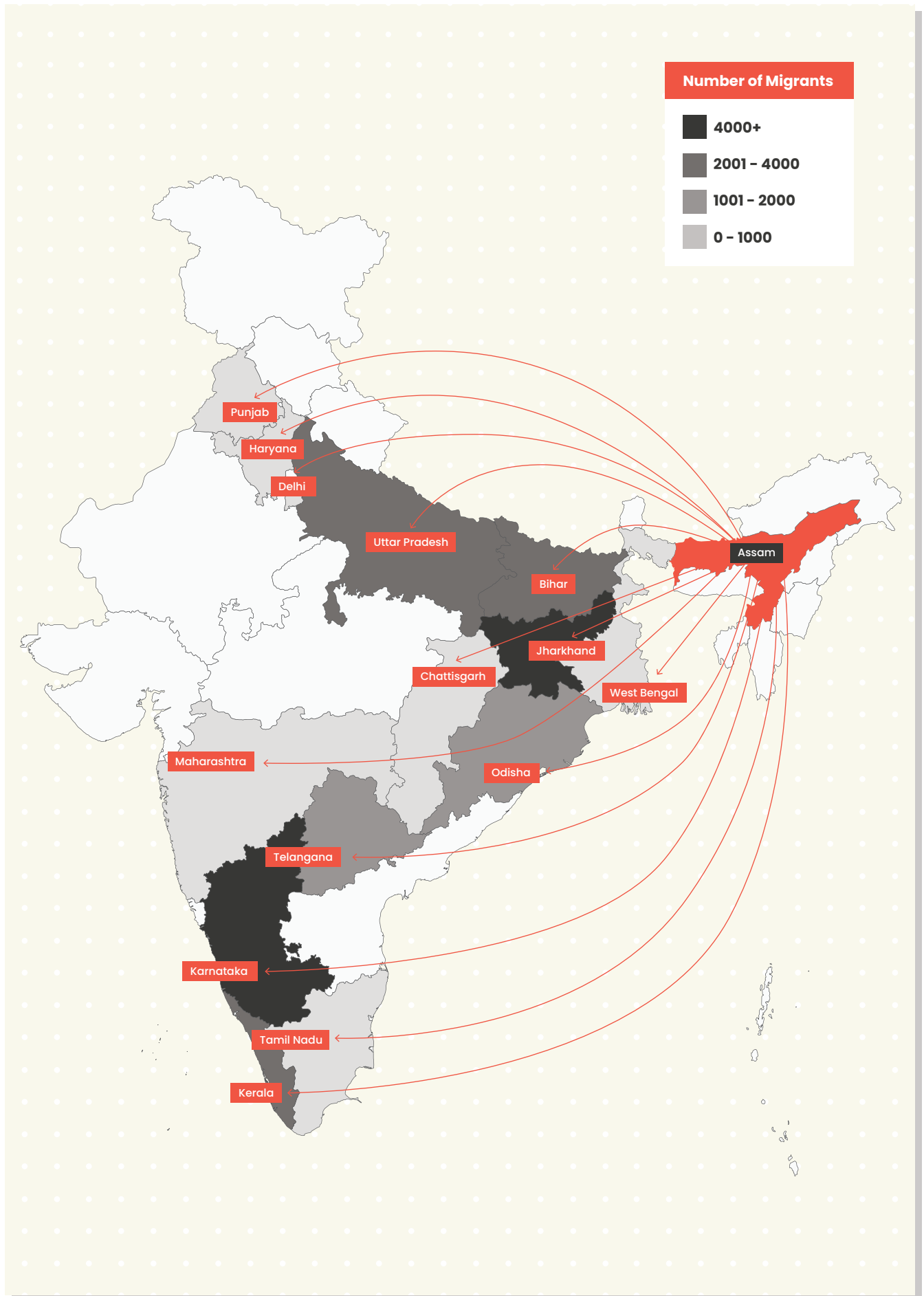
Source: Coal India Limited [@CoalIndiaHQ] (2020, May 30), [Tweet]

8

The CIL subsidiaries' Annual Report for the year 2020 incorporated very brief comments on the distribution of masks, food packages, water, etc. as part of their sections on Corporate Social Responsibility. However, after 2020 discussions about migrant labourers dwindled once more. Some subsidiary annual reports do estimate the number of contractual workers; the Annual Report 2022-23 of BCCL, for instance, lists the number of schedule caste, schedule tribe and OBC "contractor's workers".

9

With energy transition becoming a reality, the Margherita coalfields in Assam provide a look into the possible future. The Just Transition Research Centre (2022) reports that after the mine closure in Margherita local communities engaged in the coalfields were forced to migrate to other states such as Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha and Bangalore; one estimation of the number of emigrants coal workers pins the number at 10,000 people. Figure 13 shows the pattern of outmigration from Margherita coalfields in Assam.

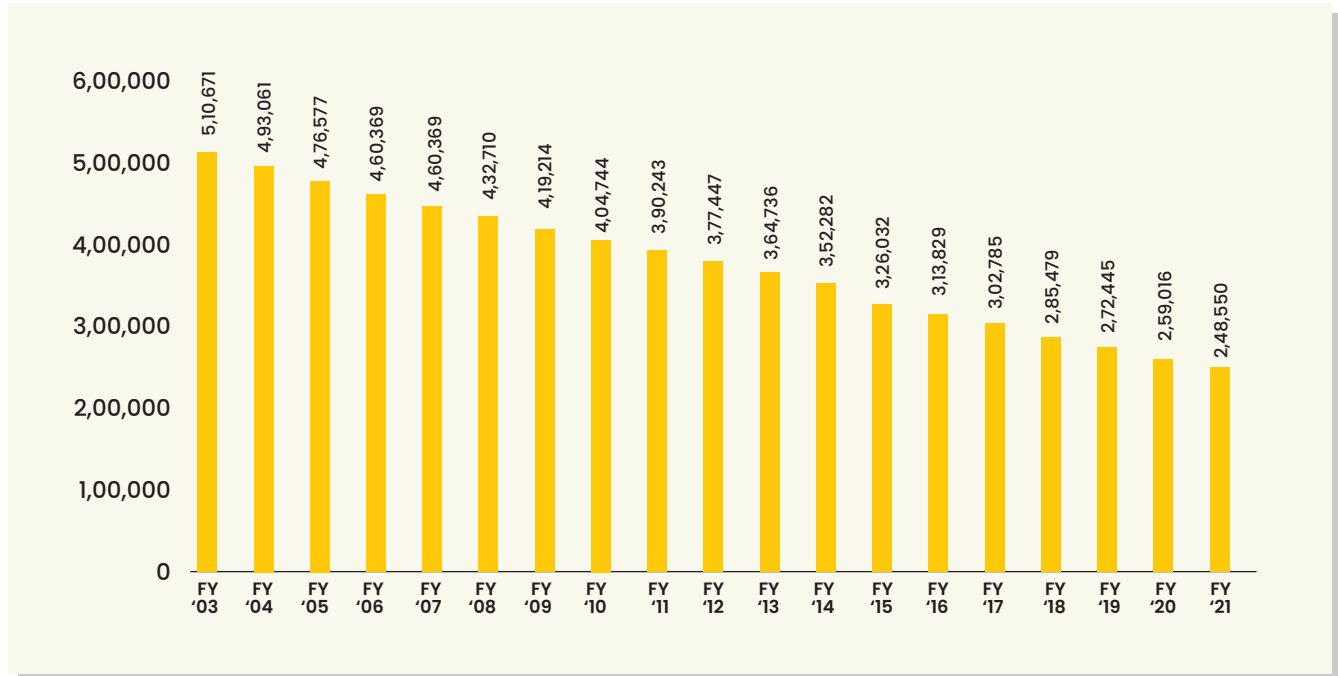
**Figure 13:** Outmigration Map of Margherita, Assam

Source: Chatterjee et al. (2022), p. 38

10

Coal India Limited has cut down on the number of official employees. In 2003, the number of official employees was 5,10,671 which was reduced to 2,48,550 official employees in 2022.

**Figure 14:** The Number of Official CIL Employees

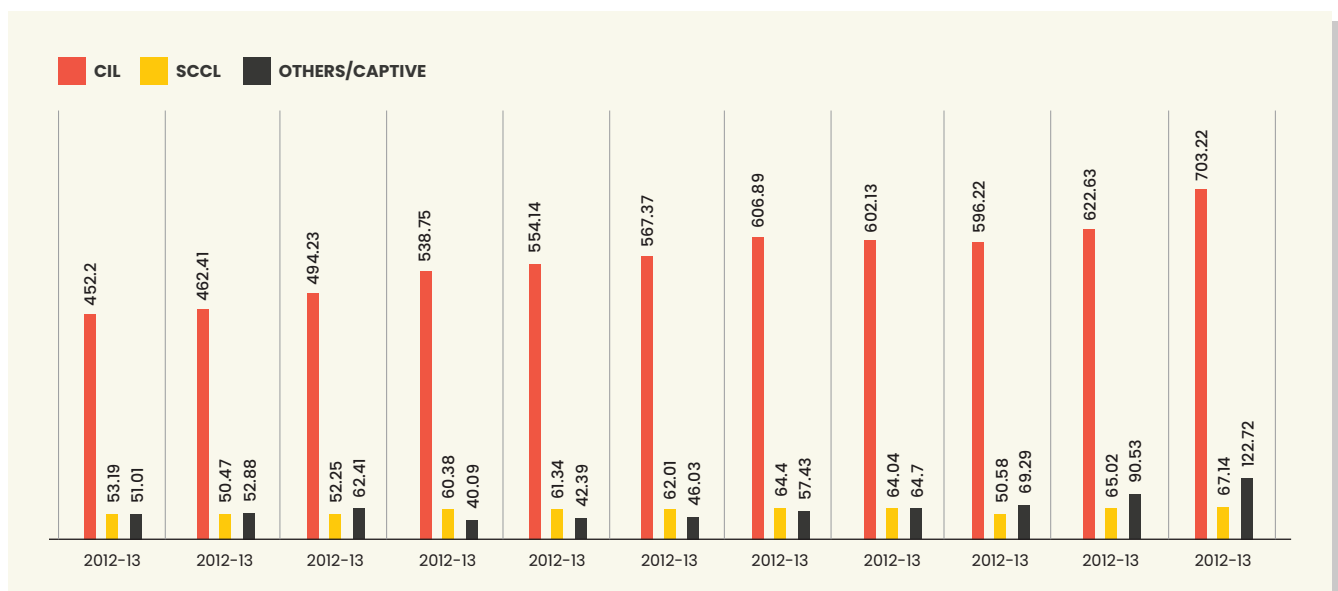


Source: Garside (2023). ©Statista

11

But over the same period production of coal has increased. This can be attributed to technological advancement along with an increase in the informal migrant labour force working in Indian collieries. Employing migrant informal workers has allowed CIL to reduce its overall cost and political risks, and improve its competitiveness and profit margin.

**Figure 15:** Company Wise Production of Raw Coal (in MT)



Source: Ministry of Coal (2023)



# Governmental Policies

The Government of India has implemented certain policies that intend to improve the condition of migrant workers. These policies are aimed at providing safe and healthy working conditions, food security, skill development and the creation of livelihood opportunities.

Many of the policies were implemented by the government after the COVID-19 pandemic when many migrant workers lost their jobs and migrated back to their native villages. The following are the most relevant policies implemented by the government.



## Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act

- In 1979 the Government of India implemented the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act.
- This Act is now part of the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, and aims to ensure decent working conditions, minimum wage, build grievance and redressal mechanisms, protection from exploitation, skill enhancement, etc.



## One Ration One Ration Card (ONORC)

- This scheme was enacted in August 2019 to ensure food security for migrant labourers and their families.
- It was enforced under the National Food Security Act, and beneficiaries can claim food grains from any Fair Price Shop in the country through their Aadhaar identification. With 45 crore migrant workers in the Indian workforce, the ONORC extends food security to a massive portion of the population.



## Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PM-GKAY)

- This is an auxiliary scheme to the Atmanirbhar Bharat scheme, which supplied food grains to migrant workers and other impoverished citizens in multiple phases from April 2020 to March 2022.
- Under this scheme a public distribution system was set up, providing 5kg of free food grains per month and subsidised ration under the National Food Security Act.



## National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW)

- The Ministry of Labour and Employment created the National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW) and launched the e-Shram portal in 2021. It is the first national database of informal workers including migrant labourers.
- It seeks to create a centralised database that is to be linked to the Aadhaar information of the labourers to improve the efficiency of the implementation of social security services.



## National Skill Development Programme

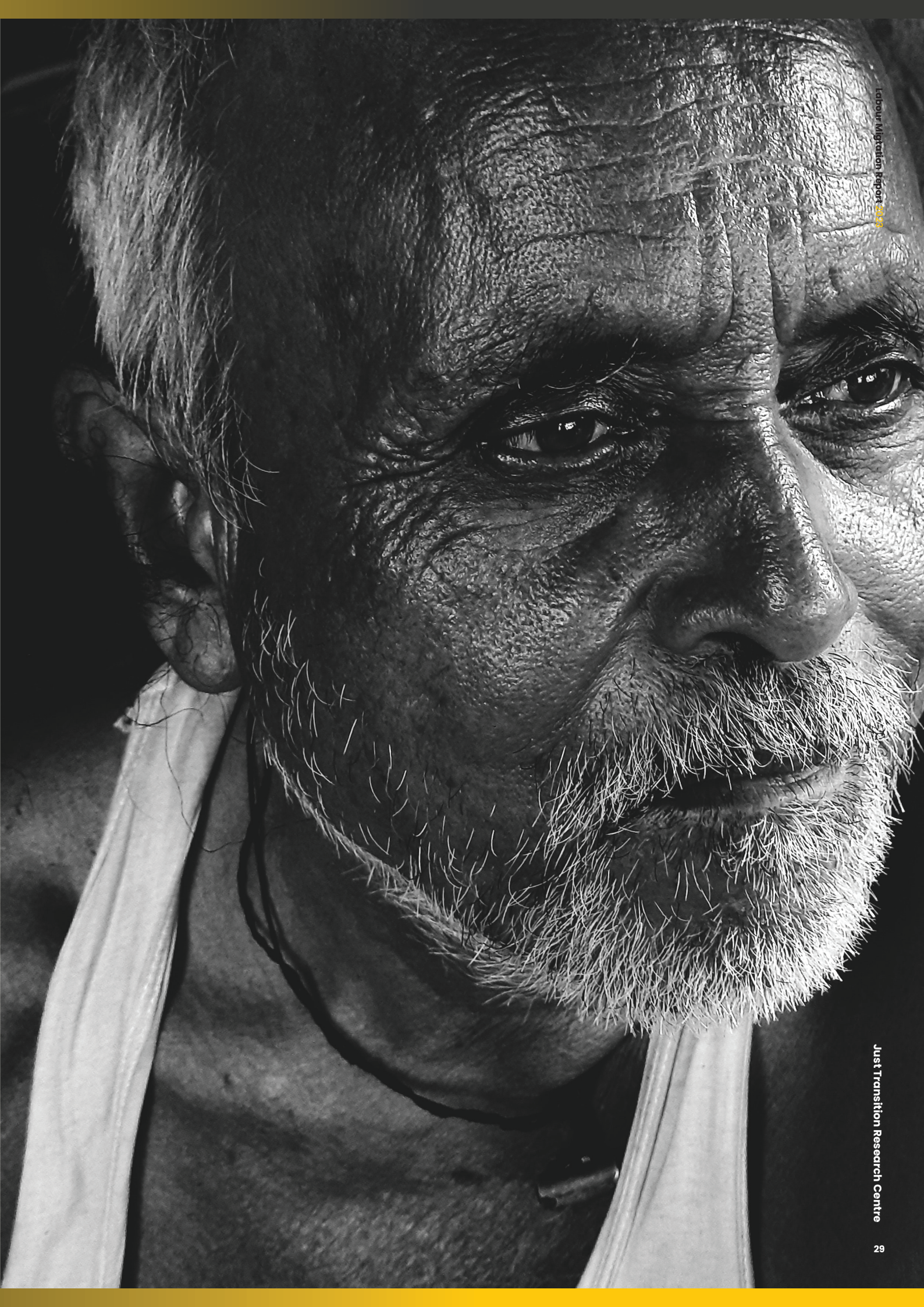
- The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship initiated the National Skill Development Programme in 2020, which incorporated 3 lakh migrant workers from the 116 districts as mentioned earlier.
- This initiative was coupled with the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan (GKRA) and the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) 2016-2020.



## Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan (GKRA)

- This scheme was launched during the COVID-19 20th June 2020 for 125 days. The scheme allotted Rs 50,000 crore for creating livelihood opportunities for returning migrant workers in rural areas.
- The scheme was effective in 116 districts in Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. It ended in October 2020, and 50.78 crore person-days of employment were created with a total expenditure of Rs. 39,293 crs.







# Recommendations

1

A thorough record of migrant labourers must be compiled by employers, whether they be private contractors or a public sector undertaking like Coal India Limited. Without knowing the number and characteristics of the migrant population working in the Indian coal sector, it will be difficult for the government to formulate and implement policies. Some efforts are on at the national level. For example, the National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW) and the e-Shram portal are commendable endeavours on the part of the Government of India.

2

Energy transition is bound to affect some caste groups, ethnic communities or tribes in particular as they are traditionally linked to coal work. Migrants from Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), some Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and tribal groups will require greater attention because of their marginalisation in multiple terms – socioeconomic, cultural, environmental and political. These migrant labourers will be first to face the threat of losing their livelihood in the near future.

3

Migrant labourers must be protected against fraudulent practices adopted by contractors to recruit them and retain them in the casual labour framework. Casualisation of work is associated with precarity. For this, migrants have to be made aware of deceitful practices and word-of-mouth contracts. Signing contracts should be made protocol for migrant workers, and there must be some safeguard mechanism to ensure that the migrant workers sign fair contracts. This mechanism should also guarantee that contractors and subcontractors are reliable.





4

More research should be focused on the subsidiaries of Coal India Limited. Presently, most academic research is concentrated on subsidiaries such as the Eastern Coalfields Limited, the Mahanadi Coalfields Limited and the Northeastern Coalfields Limited, and on some collieries like Jharia, Raniganj, Dhanbad, Margherita and Talcher. Coalfields in other Indian states have their unique challenges, and the communities of people traditionally linked to coal work are also be different.

5

Women migrant labourers are a group that faces exploitation due to their gender, in addition to caste/class/ethnic/tribal identity and occupational position. Secure employment opportunities must be ensured for them as they are the first to lose their jobs to mechanisation or during economic stress. There is a need to form self-help groups and protection against violence, sexual abuse, and bonded labour. Basic healthcare and maternal healthcare should be extended to them.

6

Children of migrant labourers must also be given special care because of their precarious position in society. Laws related to child rights should be extended to them including the right to equality, primary education, healthcare and nutrition, protection from discrimination, bonded labour and trafficking, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.



# Conclusion

Labour migration is inevitable. In the Indian coalfields mining depends on migrant labourers. Local communities are not always able to meet the labour demands of collieries. Migrant labourers are engaged directly or indirectly in coal and coal-dependent sectors. Most are informal contractual labourers who earn a wage lower than the minimum wage fixed by the government and face exploitation. Many reasons drive migration including push factors like lack of agricultural land, lack of employment, infrastructure, social conflicts, power dynamics, change in climate conditions, and degradation of natural resources. Pull factors such as job opportunities, banking and financial services, political stability, social security, stable climatic conditions and access to resources draw migrants to new areas.

Migrant labourers often belong to marginalised ethnic communities. Studies have shown that Indian collieries attract migrant workers

from different parts of the country and ethnic communities such as Santhals, Bhuinyas, Bauris, Kurmis, etc. as well as Dalit and OBC communities. Women from these communities are also employed in collieries, although they are at a higher risk of losing their jobs when new technology is introduced. Many unskilled workers lose their jobs to mechanisation and are forced to migrate to other places. Reverse migration is common when mines are closed down and many unskilled informal workers find it difficult to secure alternative jobs.

Migrant labourers in coal mines are among the most invisible and neglected groups of people, and accurate estimates about their number and their working and living conditions are difficult to find. More research needs to be conducted on this group of people to understand what their needs are, which can then be addressed through appropriate policy interventions.





# Further Readings

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# Appendix I: Methodology

This policy brief attempts to call attention to the process of labour migration and migrant workers who power coal and its related sectors. However, obtaining data regarding migrant labourers is challenging because most Indian migrant workers are engaged in the informal or unorganised economy which lacks any systematic or comprehensive documentation. Moreover, in 2021 population census was not conducted due to the pandemic. Various secondary data sources have been used to piece together a picture of migrant labourers in the Indian coal sector. The search was limited to documents about the Indian coal sector with some exceptions.

## Data Sources

**Definitions taken from ILO website and the IOM Glossary on Migration (2019)**

**Coal India Limited (CIL) Annual Reports (2019 to 2023)**

CIL subsidiaries' Annual Reports (2020 to 2021) were examined because migrant labourers were in focus during the COVID-19 lockdown. Subsidiaries included: BCCL, CCL, ECL, MCL, NCL, SECL and WCL.

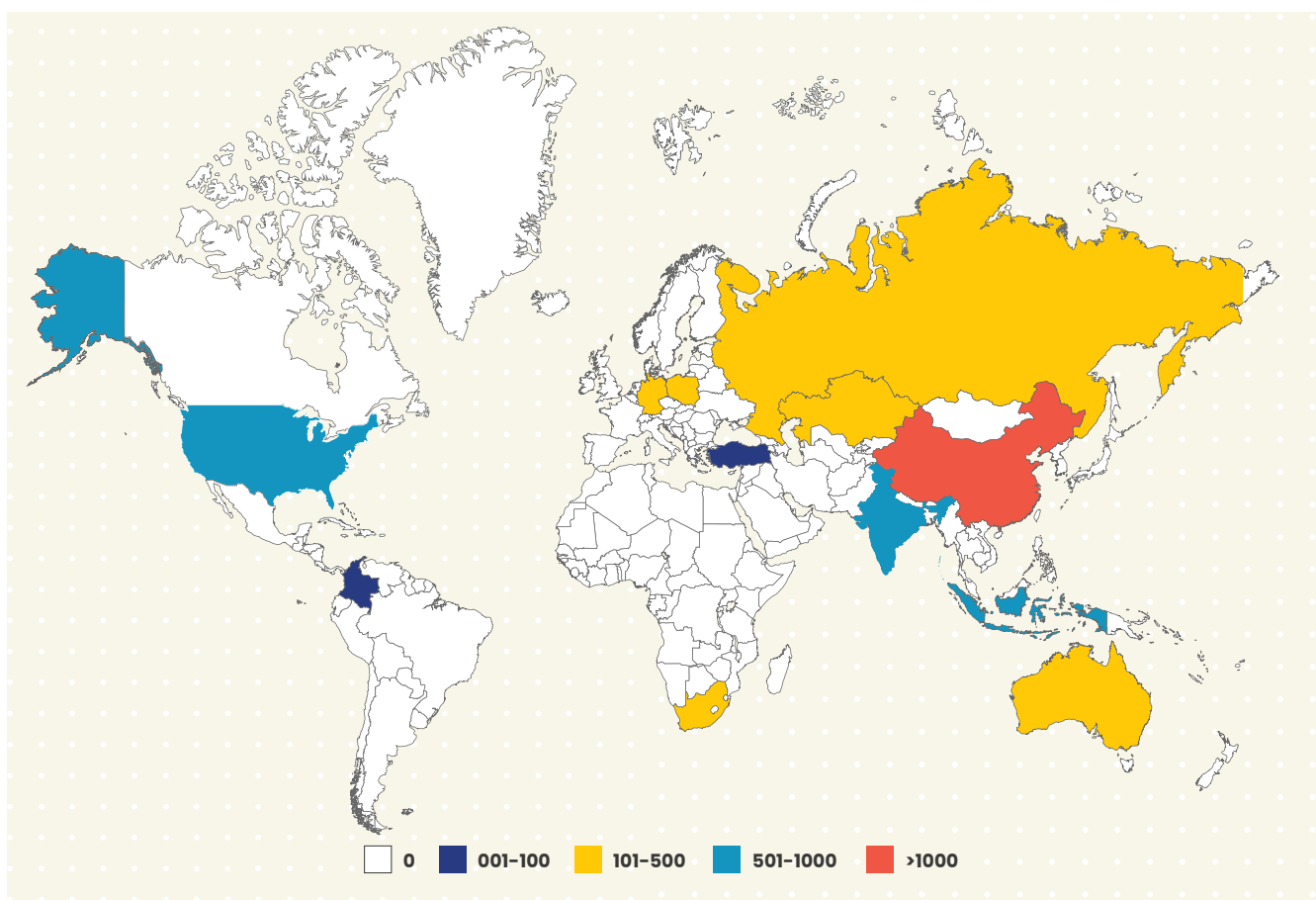
**Keywords for non-academic articles: "migrant worker", "migrant labourer", "migration of labour" and "informal workers"**

**Keywords for academic article: "contract labour", "caste", "ethnicity", "tribal identity" and "Adivasi"**

**Newspaper articles analysed**

# Appendix II:

## Country-wise Production of coal in 2022



Source: Enerdata (n.d.)

Country	
China	4,430
India	937
Indonesia	690
United States	540
Australia	459
Russia	440
South Africa	225
Germany	131
Kazakhstan	109
Poland	107
Turkey	96
Colombia	54



Just Transition Research Centre (JTRC) leverages high quality academic environment to conduct cutting edge research to address the academic and policy requirements of the national and sub-national levels. The centre's aim is aligned primarily with the seventh sustainable development goal of the United Nations: affordable and clean energy for all.

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