

CRG Media Programme, 2021

What Happened to Refugees and Migrants in the COVID Year of 2020?

Concept Note

As the prolonged lockdown which accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic brought the wheel of life to a standstill throughout the country, migrant workers encountered severe — even unspeakable — hardships. In 2020, the Media Workshop of the Calcutta Research Group (CRG) devoted itself to understanding this disheartening impact which the pandemic inflicted on the lives and livelihoods of migrant workers. While examining the precarious existence of migrant workers, the Workshop questioned whether their predicament was not aggravated by the absence of appropriate government interventions. Even the Supreme Court and a number of High Courts had demanded that the government take a more proactive role in ameliorating the condition of migrant workers affected by the pandemic and the restrictions which followed in its wake. Please **click** on the link to view the report on last year's workshop.

In 2021, as the pandemic situation remains critical, it may be proper to revisit the precarity of migrant workers by widening the scope of the previous year's study and focusing on the following themes:

- a) The impact of the pandemic on the lives of the frontline COVID 'warriors' at village, panchayat, block and municipal levels. (e.g., ASHA workers, paramedics, nurses, doctors, etc.);
- b) Initiatives of solidarity taken by various civil society organisations, local clubs, municipal councillors, small groups of people, private or government employees, political workers and humanitarian activists — their linkages and histories;
- c) Dynamics of slum (*bustee*) level protection;
- d) Situation of returnee migrants, their reception in native villages and towns, fear of migrant workers as carriers of the virus, migrant workers' prospects of getting jobs on their return, their return to old jobs, responsibility of the state governments and local bodies, perception of the media about the returnee migrants, also the returnee migrants as an election issue;
- e) The role of social media in the migrant crisis during the lockdown period;
- f) The 'data crisis' around the migrant workers during the pandemic and the lockdown;
- g) Court judgments and other legal aspects such as the efficacy of the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979;
- h) The rehabilitation of the Rohingya refugees;
- i) Also, 2021 being the fiftieth anniversary of the Bangladesh refugee crisis, one may like to revisit the situation of the refugees in India in 1971, around issues of life in camps, disease, violence, politics, and the return of the refugees.

The Media Fellowship

CRG had announced, on the basis of this year's topic for its media programme, a short-term media fellowship to provide an opportunity for selected individuals to do some creative assignments and reports on the subject. An expert committee tasked with the selection process has awarded five fellowships for 2021. The fellows will be required to write a creative report or produce a photo essay or documentary.

The 2021 Media Fellows are:

Sl. No.	Name	Affiliation	Bio Note	Topic of Research
1.	Sukanta Sarkar	Ei Samay (Bengali daily from Times of India Group)	CV	Migrant labourers in the sinking islands of the Sundarbans
2.	Devika Singh Shekhawat	Ambedkar University, Delhi	CV	Work, Health and Labour: ASHA Workers in Tea Plantations of Assam
3.	Nivedita Manpoong (Nellie)	Arunachal Times	CV	Arunachal Pradesh's response to migrant workers during COVID- 19 lockdown: A case study in Itanagar
4.	Aman (Siddhant) Gupta	Newslick	CV	Bundelkhand jaise elakon mein corona ke baad majdooron ki sthiti
5.	Shuvankur Ghosh	Commissioned Photographer, Roli Books	CV	How migrant workers from the Sundarbans are reimagining their future at a time of uncertain work prospects during the pandemic