

## Decent Work and Wellbeing in Modern World of Work: Empirical Evidence from Delhi NCR Region

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### Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has effectively forced the world into an economic meltdown. Interestingly, in midst of the first corona wave, the Indian Parliament passed three labour codes-the industrial code, the code on social security, and the code on occupational safety, health, and working conditions. In this paper, we examine the impact of the consolidation exercise of these labour codes in the construction industry. We attempt to analyze how these codes could affect the lives and rights of workers in the construction industry.

We focus on analyzing the existing conditions of work, safety regulations, and other welfare measures that could have improved the wellbeing of the workers during a pandemic. Using descriptive analytics, the analysis is derived from the primary data collected at the sampled large construction worksites of both public and private MNCs spread across the Delhi National Capital Region. The findings describe that a more flexiblecum precarious hiring process has weakened the compliance on conditions of work, health, safety, and other welfare measures. Further, de-facto reinforcing the traditional non- standard norms of labour mobilization has not only trapped the workers in neo-bondage kind of labour relations, but the spread of Covid-19 pandemic and inadequate social protection have also affected the safety at work and wellbeing of most of the workers. This is in complete contradiction to both what most of the organizations and governments committed to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and what neoliberal reforms often claim of 'free the agency of labour'.

Keywords: Covid-19, Work, Wellbeing, Social Protection, SDGs, Construction Industry

### Introduction

#### Covid-19 Pandemic and Construction Industry

The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), commonly known as the covid-19 pandemic has effectively forced the world into an economic meltdown. As observed, the coronavirus can be transmitted from person-to-person and causes symptoms that include fever, dry cough, fatigue, absence of taste, dysfunctional of sensitive organs and shortness of breath etc. The virus is continuing to spread around the world, as there have been 399,600,607 confirmed cases and 5,757,562 deaths of COVID- 19 reported across almost 200 countries. The US, India and Brazil have seen the highest number of confirmed cases, followed by the UK, France and Russia. In India, there has been 42,410,976 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with

505,279 deaths. More importantly, as of 31 January 2022, a total of 1,672,194,503 vaccine doses have been administered (WHO, Feb.9, 2022). The most critical part of the outbreak has been its rapid spread and long incubation period. In addition to the serious health emergency, the outbreak has resulted in a global economic decline. The construction sector, like many other sectors, has been affected the most in many ways. Since the pandemic began and subsequent lockdown announcement, construction activities were completely halted and, workers were rendered without any work as well as social protection [50].

### **Construction Industry and Employment Configuration**

Construction industry in India is the second largest employer of non-formal contracted workforce after agriculture [19, 20, 28, 45]. Over the decades, Indian Construction Industry has been continuously playing a vital role in development and contribution in the national economic growth [44]. Post 1990s, with pace of neo-liberalism, the building and construction industry has been the primarily reaped the material benefits of global integration via participation of private sector organizations, especially MNCs and subsequent flow of capital, technical services, and technology itself. The consistently contributions of around 8% of GDP and 8-10% of total employment, the industry has emerged as one of the key drivers of the economic growth in India (GOI, 12th five-year plan (2012-17)). The industry is a mix of public sector, joint ventures, and private sector corporate institutional players such as the Confederation of Real Estate Developers Associations of India (CREADI), the Builders Association of India (BAI), and Construction Industry Development Council etc. Interestingly, around 50 construction companies are in top 500 ranking as per their capital cap holdings (Economic Times, 2014:2016). The increasing scale of business beyond national or geographical boundaries, employing a huge army of labour, and growing economic power of corporate sector, construction industry has become very significant player in the development of Indian economy. Today Indian construction industry is valued at over US\$ 157 billion<sup>1</sup>. Apart from various government flagship program such as 'Housing for All', 'Smart Cities', 'AMRUT' and 'Make in India', 100% FDI is permitted through the automatic route for townships and development of commercial spaces. The industry accounts for second highest inflow of FDI<sup>2</sup> after the services sector and a priority destination for foreign investors. The increasing multi-level MNCs partnership at different level of work process and services are now resembling like the global production networks in construction industry. Further, due to strong sectoral linkages, the construction activities have multiplier effect across sectors and thus has a critical role in achieving some of the important Sustainable Development Goals [43] including good health and wellbeing (SDG 3), industry innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9) decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). Even during the ongoing Covid-19 global pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, when most of the economic activities halted, Construction development as well as infrastructure activities continued to attract more than 10% portion of the FDI equity inflow in FY21 (cumulative) till 2021 (DIPP/GOI, 2021)

<sup>1</sup> Infrastructure accounts for 49 percent, housing and real estate 42 percent and industrial projects 9 percent.

<sup>2</sup> 100% FDI through the automatic route is permitted in townships, housing, built-up infrastructure and construction-development projects (including, but not restricted to housing, commercial premises, hotels, resorts, hospitals, educational institutions, recreational facilities, city and regional level infrastructure)

On employment configuration, over the last one and half decades from 2004-05 to 2017-18, construction sector has emerged as the most employment generating subsector of the non-manufacturing sector. From 2004-05 to 2011-12, out of total non-agricultural employment, construction sector itself accounted for half of total increase (see Table 1)

<b>Table 1. Sectoral Employment as per various NSSO Rounds (Numbers in Million)</b>						
<b>Type of Industry and Sub-sectors</b>	<b>Total employment (million)</b>			<b>Youth employment (million)</b>		
	<i>2004</i> - <i>05</i>	<i>2011</i> - <i>12</i>	<i>2017</i> - <i>18</i>	<i>2004</i> - <i>05</i>	<i>2011</i> - <i>12</i>	<i>2017</i> - <i>18</i>
<b><i>Manufacturing Sector</i></b>						
<b>Manufacturing Total</b>	<b>53.9</b>	<b>59.8</b>	<b>56.4</b>	<b>22.4</b>	<b>22.1</b>	<b>18.5</b>
<b><i>Non-Manufacturing Sector</i></b>						
Mining and Quarrying	2.7	2.6	2.0	0.8	0.9	0.6
Electricity, water and gas	1.2	2.5	2.8	0.1	0.7	0.6
<b>Construction</b>	<b>25.6</b>	<b>50.3</b>	<b>54.3</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>16.6</b>
<b>Non-manufacturing Total</b>	<b>29.4</b>	<b>55.3</b>	<b>58.9</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>17.8</b>
<b><i>Authors' estimation based on various NSS and PLFS unit level data</i></b>						

As show in above table, during 2017-18, Construction sector employ about 54.3 million (about 92 percent) out of total 59 million jobs in non-manufacturing. Although the overall employment in construction sector has increased, but the absolute decline of youth employment from 17.8 million to 16.6 million indicate distress kind of employment preference and unattractiveness towards the sector. Further, one of the most labor-intensive work activities, the construction sector has suffered a lot due to lockdowns, shortage of workers, restriction on mobility of workers, disruptions of supply chains, social distancing, and other constraints of standard operating procedures (SOPs).

Further, with precarious cum flexi mobilization process of the migrant workforce without any formal employment and social protection, the construction sector has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and has been challenged to improve the work environment, safety, and wellbeing of its workforce.

This necessitates to examine how covid-19 environment have impacted further on the conditions of labour and wellbeing in modern construction industry. The next section describe the conceptual analytical framework followed by objectives, methodology, analysis and conclusion(s).

## Literature: The Conceptual and Analytical Framework

Over the last three decades, neoliberalism has dominated economic policymaking around the globe. Both the neoliberal scholars often argue that investment by multinational firms is not just economic expansion, their higher returns to coexist with improved conditions of work and worker's wellbeing along with rise in standard of living of all stakeholders over the long run. However, over the years, many research studies have highlighted that with the pace of globalization and subsequent policy pressure of flexibilisation, the informalization process such as engaging more temporary, casual worker, and contracted or skilled-self-employed have further exacerbated vulnerabilities across the sectors [8, 10, 11, 23, 27, 31, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42]. Such continuous exacerbation of the deficit of decent work along with stagnation and declining regular employment share across sectors have further questioned the efficacy of the state's free market reform process [1, 2, 3, 36].

However, India illustrates the contradictions of both current globalized and other neo-liberal economies, as the country has been traditionally a socially regulated economy and its labour market has remained highly informal as well as localized [12, 13]. The recent Periodic Labor survey and research reports have also highlighted that 91 percent of India's total labor force (495 million) is employed informally across the sectors. With rapid urbanization and industrialization and subsequently rise in flow of FDIs in construction sector has emerged as the largest employer within non-manufacture sector [28, 45, 46].

In September 2015, the onset of global crisis in the development paradigm, most of the United Nations member countries unanimously adopted the Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals [43] built on the principle of 'leaving no one behind'. In contrast to earlier development goals (MDGs), the SDGs aim to involve all stakeholders from North to South including governments, businesses, non-governmental organizations and social or community organizations to ensure sustainable development and inclusive wellbeing. The collective agreed Agenda 2030 with 17 universal goals to address the global development challenges such as end hunger, reduce inequality & poverty, promote decent work, health, safety of the planet and thus sustainable cum inclusive wellbeing for all [43]. Interestingly, the SDGs framework provides the construction industry with a new lens through which universal needs and targets can be translated into better business solutions, wellbeing of all stakeholders and sustainable humanities. The Goal (SDG 8) of economic growth and decent work specifically provide conceptual and analytical framework to address growth with productive employment, social protection, and collective bargaining to improve wellbeing of all stakeholders.

Over the years, the construction industry has been a roller coaster in the building of modern India i.e., building of housing, institutions of governance, industry, development of other infrastructure facilities including education, health, and highway to airways across the regions. Traditionally, the industry has been a beneficiary of rural migrant workforce through the accelerated geographical mobility of labour by precarious ways. In functionality, Construction sector in India is most fragmented in terms of size and scale, with a handful of major companies engaged in all segments of the construction projects while medium size companies are engaged in some niche construction

activities and smallsize organizations are engaged as contractors or subcontractors at field level activities. Despite the tech-ecological transition, the sector remains the most labour intensive by employing millions of workers directly and indirectly [17]. The industry has consistently contributed around more than 8 percent of both GDP and employment generation and its present gross value is about 1,064,068 crores at the current prices [9]. The industry's labourprocess largely depends on the social interaction and regulations where social institutions such as class, caste, religions, and gender shape both the access to work and the conditionsof employment. Further, the nature of social regulations is heterogeneous and varies greatlyfrom one sector to another and from one region to another in relation to both strategies of capital and of labour. The industry has been a significant player in terms of bridging the gap between rural and urban while creating backward-forward linkages across the sectors such as cement, iron, and steel etc. As a result, the industry has emerged both.

With improved connectivity (both in terms of transportation and communication) and information about the wage and better job prospects, a large flux of the rural migrantsis strategically migrating towards the big metro cities like Delhi and NCR region, Mumbai,Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai and their satellite towns which have emerged as the pillarsof neo-liberal growth in 21<sup>st</sup> century. These metro cities and their expanded Urban Agglomerations have become the magnetic center for migrant workers due to high demandfor building and construction of housing, urbanization, commercial complexes, industries,SEZs and other infrastructural development activities like roads, flyover, Metro rail,etc. Further, participation by the global organization at various level in the construction industry could be seen as the integration with the global production network (GPN). This transition could have significant transformative effects both in the production relations andlabour standards. Further, because of its strong forward and backward linkages across thesectors, the construction activities have multiplier effect in development of an economy and thus has a critical role in generating more employment, and ensuring rights at work (SDG8) while achieving some of other important sustainable development goals includinggood health and wellbeing (SDG 3), industry innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9) decentwork and economic growth (SDGs 8), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG6), Climate action to Life on Land (SDGs 13 & 15), sustainable cities andcommunities (SDG11).

The construction activities around these urban satellite metro cities are booming atlarge to facilitate the massive housing, commercial and industrial space development. Asa result, the construction sector has emerged as the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest destination of FDI equity inflow after the IT sector (India Stat 2020). However, over the decades, the construction industry has a very poor social responsibility and ethical reputation in terms of labour andwelfare practices [33, 34, 35]. This has necessitated to examine the conditions of work inrespect to decent work (SDG8) and analyzing other work-labour conditions and labour relations to understand the workers' wellbeing. The paper continues from this section, followed by the objectives, overview of study area, data collection and methodology, analysis of the socio-economic profile of the sampled workers, and their conditions of workand labour relations. Finally, it concludes with the key findings and required policy interventions as well as some future research suggestions.

## Objectives, Universe of the Study and Methodology

### Objective

In this paper, we have focused to answer majorly two key hypothesis and questions. First, how the COVID-19 environment has impacted on the construction industry? How these codes could affect the lives and rights of workers in the construction industry? And to what extent it has impacted on the conditions of work and wellbeing of construction workers with respect to decent work (SDG8)?

### Universe of the Study

The fieldwork was carried out in Gurugram and NCT Delhi areas of Delhi NCR region. As per the National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB) Act, 1985, the NCR, the national capital region, is also called a mini-India and seen as a unique example of inter-state regional development planning for a region with NCT-Delhi as its core. The post 1990s, the massive urbanization and industrialization of the region, hundreds of small, medium and large construction organizations including both domestic and multinational companies are active in developing and building construction of large housing projects, commercial centers and industrial-SEZs complexes. The sampled workers across worksites belong to medium to large public and private multinational (MNCs) organizations have a presence in Delhi NCR and are also highly active with multiple construction sites across the continents. The NCR covers an area of about 51,144 sq kms falling in the territorial jurisdictions of four provincial Governments namely, National Capital Territory of Delhi, Haryana, UP, and Rajasthan and constitutes about 1.75% of the country's land area [47].

### Data and Methodology

For understanding the contemporary conditions of work and wellbeing in the construction sector, we require a holistic mix methodology approach in collection of primary data and interpretation of analysis. For collecting the primary data, we used telephone, mobile conversation, semi structured questionnaire to conduct the interviews with 400 workers and other officials employed at four large construction worksites of both public and private construction MNCs giants across Delhi NCR region. Finally, the descriptive data was interpreted and analyzed quantitatively through the SPSS. The obtained results were further cross verified and validated by focused group discussions and field observations.

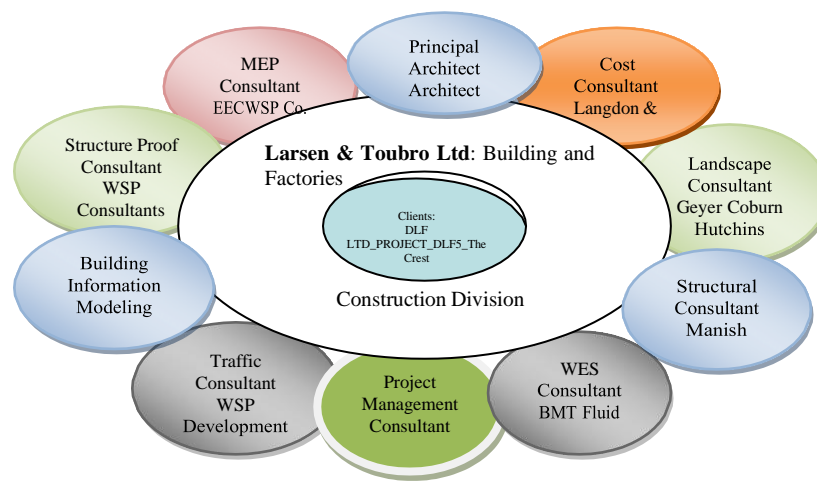
### Findings and Analysis

#### Global Value Multi Stakeholders Transformation

As shown in Fig.1, with increased inflow of foreign direct investment (FDIs), and participation of the global players such as investor, consultants, experts and technological up gradation, the 21st century Indian construction industry has become very much the part of Global Production Network (GPN). The industry encompasses a range of stakeholders including developer/client to chain of

consultants, and general construction contractor to multi-level sub-contractor and casual workers to potential customers at large. The operational scale of the construction projects is today amongst the largest and the presence of some of the construction companies are visible across the continents such as SPCL, DLF, L&T, NBBC etc. Further, expansion of the operation scale of these companies beyond national boundaries and participation of the global players such as investor, consultants, experts, and technological upgradation, the Indian construction industry is also now more prone to global disruption, as it has become very much the part of global production network (GPN) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: The Global Value Chain/Networks of Stakeholders in the 21st Century Construction Industry**



Source: Fieldwork\* Figure is only shown to give a real account of multi-stakeholders' network (GMSNs) in Global Value Chain (GVC/GVNs).

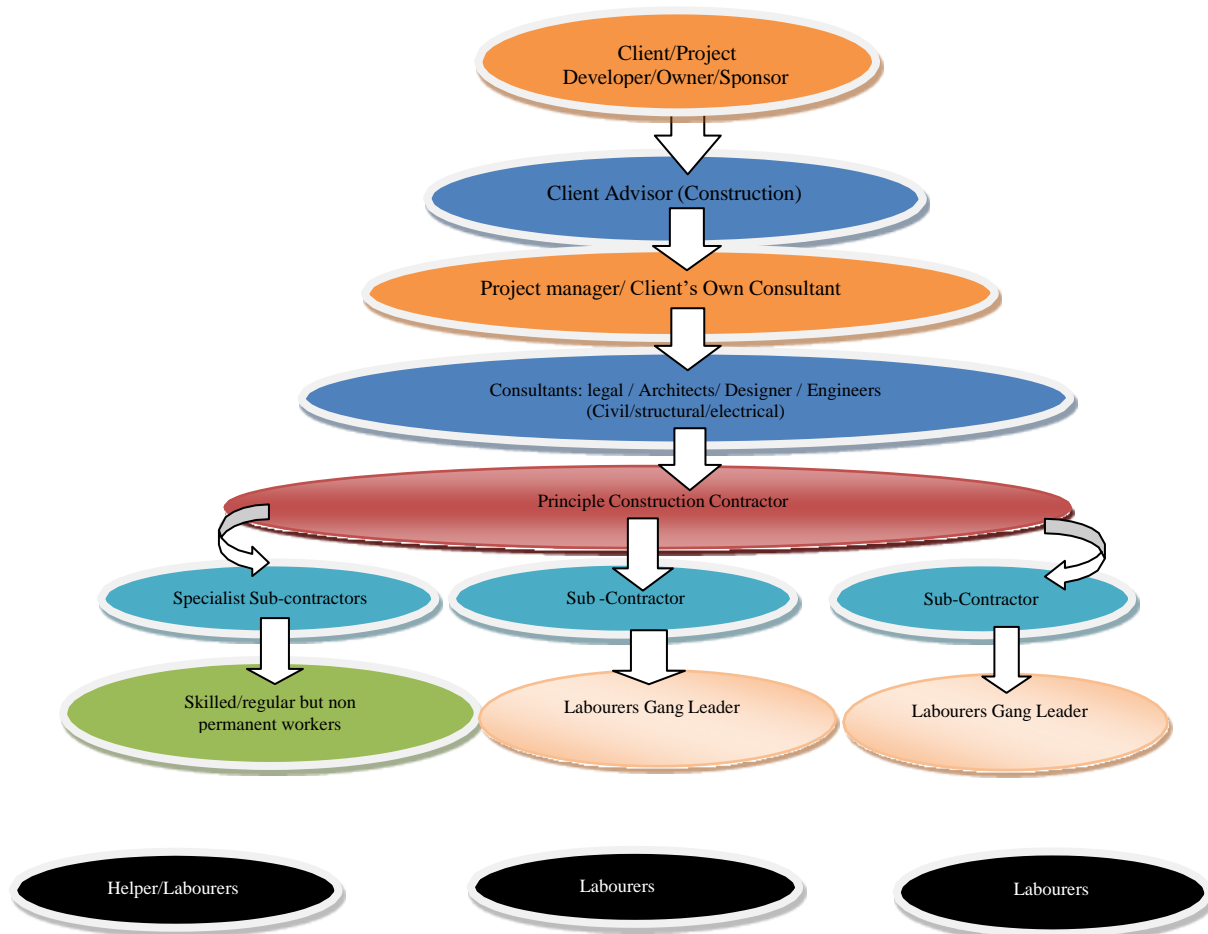
### Decency at Work and Conditions of Labour

In post reform periods, the Indian labour market has seen a structural transformation. As a result, construction industry has become one of the largest employers in recent times [9, 28, 29, 30, 45]. Despite of the 2nd largest employers, laborers are at the bottom of the construction industry's process pyramid (Figure 2). The labour process could be seen as the most flexi-cum precarious or 'a race to bottom' in nature, where a large numbers of intermediaries or subcontractors/agents are part of the recruitment and deployment chain. Inspire of technological advancement, the labour process in construction industry still largely depends on tradional way of mobilization such as kinship or local agents who often brings rural migrants from poor region in India.

The industry could be matched at the global parameter in terms of operation, technology, and overall management of the investment as well as product development. But despite of that, the labour practices and standards remain not only highly localized but largely traditional. With growing technological advancement and demand for flexi-specialist workforce, today the sector is

full of sub-contractors. Further, emerging concept of bottom-line contract, the sector has more contractors in form of self-employed workers rather than contractual workers. Though the industry has become more organized, but the labour process is largely remain flexible and facilitated by the multilevel intermediaries through the pyramid of subcontracting (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Employer-Employee Relations and Labour in the Construction Industry**



Source: Based on the Author's own observation during fieldwork

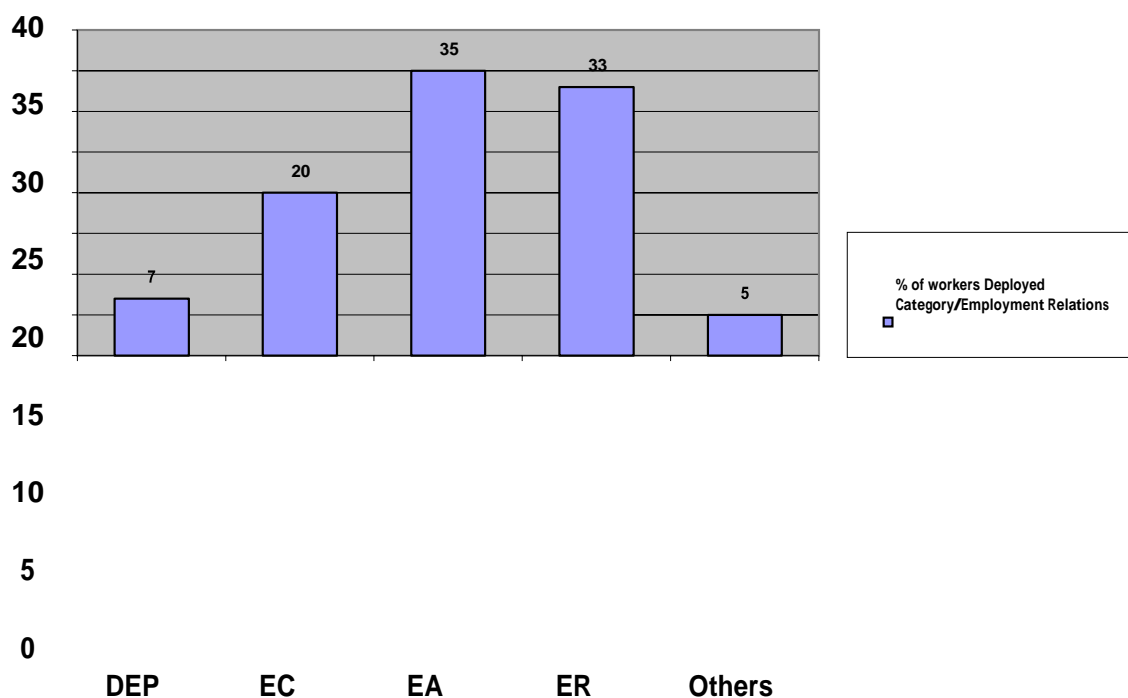
The above figure 2, the modern industry has multi-contractual chain of production process and labourers falls at the bottom of the hierarchy. Most of the large construction organizations have almost same typology of labour deployment and management process, where bottom line labourers and their mobility are handled by the low level of supply chain at the margin of the whole process. Because of multi-level sub contractual layer and precarious way of hirings, there is no direct relationship and responsibility of principle employer towards the workers. These field observations clearly show the continuity of precarious labour mobilization practices that result in blurring the employer-employee relations as well as denial of Workmanship rights.



## Compliance Conditions of Labour Regulations and Practices

Most of workers are hired through kinship, relatives (33%), and intermediaries (34%) and followed by petty/subcontractors (20%). Only a small (7%) number of workers (specialist/skilled specific) are hired by the main contractor/subcontractor organization directly. However, most of these workers hired directly or through relatives and agency of workers are treated as non-permanent or casual regular and paid on daily person days or measurement rate basis without a formal agreement or contract. Except, who are directly employed by the main contractor/subcontractor, they themselves are responsible for their work, remain most vulnerable in every aspect, as company never takes their responsibility and petty contractor/agent or kinship does not take much responsibility (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Process of Workforce Employment (Percentage-wise)**



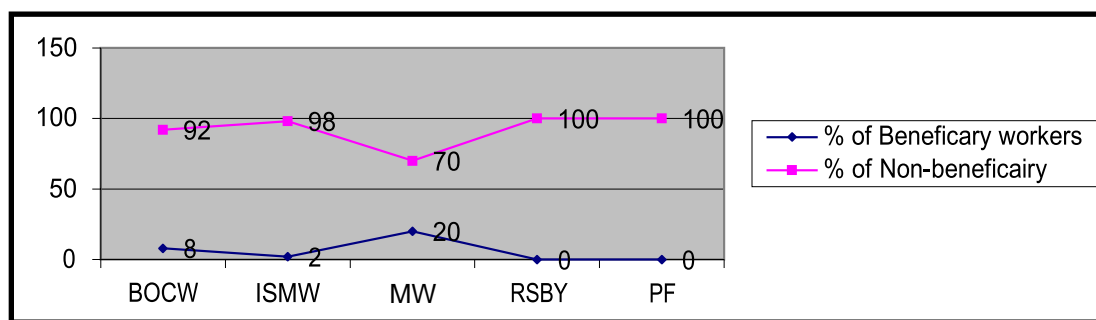
Note: DEP (No of workers employed Directly by the main contractor/principle employer), EC (Employed through petty/subcontractors), EA (Employed through agents), ER (Employed through relatives). Source: Author's Primary survey

There are around more than 44 regulations in general and some more specific regulations such as Minimum Wage Act, Payment of wages Act, Inter-State Migrants Workers (Regulations of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act, Maternity benefits, Equal Wages Act, National Holidays Act, Building and other Construction Workers (Regulations of Employment and Conditions of Work). Most of the workers are hired in unskilled to semi-skilled categories and paid around 100-180 while asked to work around 8-10 hours per day, which shows that they are paid even less the minimum wages. Further, female workers, who even treated at the marginal end of the skilling pyramid usually face more discrimination in wages.

## Compliance Conditions of Labour and Welfare Regulations

Despite of number of labour and welfare regulations applicable in the construction industry, the miserable conditions of construction workers tell different story of compliance status. Though, looking at the status of labour and welfare regulations, India, apart from around 44 labour and welfare regulations, as a founder member of International Labour Organization (ILO), has altogether ratified about 333 labour laws and number of related Conventions including Decent work guidelines [18] and Goal 8 [43]. Further, since its independence, India has enacted several legislations that prohibit discrimination due to gender, caste, religion, region etc. (for example Minimum Wage Act, Equal Remuneration, Maternity Benefits Act, Payment of wages Act, Contract Workers Act, Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, Fair Compensation Act and more construction sector specific Building and Other Construction Workers Act [4] etc. But at the implementation and enforcement level, these acts are usually lack of proper accountability and transparency. Across worksites, organizations are often seen to violate acts like the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) convention [18] such as different wages, conditions of work and labour conditions, and in case of female labour deployment, more vulnerability as well as injustice has been found to be practiced across sites. Despite as a mandatory code of conduct to put notice board about the minimum wages and day of the payment at ever worksites, the companies lacks in transparency of their process of payment of wages, and more discriminatory wages for women. Except a few, most of them are illiterate and their lack of regulatory awareness is a big concern in construction Labour market, (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Status of Regulations Awareness of Workers**



Note: BOCW (Building and other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment & Conditions of Service) Act, 1996, ISMW (Inter-State Migrant Workers (Regulation of Employment & Conditions of Service) Act 1979, MW (Minimum Wages Act 1948), RSBY (Rastriya Swasthya Bima Yojna), PF (Provident Fund a/c). Source: Primary Survey.

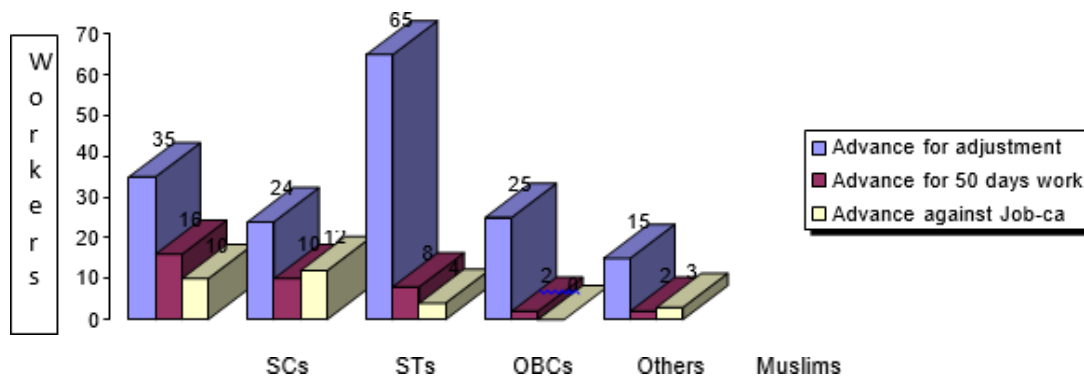
Thus, the lack of awareness of regulations and registration at welfare boards clearly show their adversity at worksites. Most of workers often face vulnerabilities in terms of employment, work conditions, job, further skill, welfare benefits, citizenship identity, living conditions and double excluded such as welfare benefits at the place of origin and social security at the workplace. Except a few know about Minimum-wage, Most of the workers are even not aware or informed about other social protection or benefits such as Labour Card, RSBY, PF, ESI, and recently launch PM Jan Dhan/ Bima Yojna scheme.

More importantly, if the recently passed and notified labour codes such that the Code on Social Security (SS), and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHC) Code, 2020 are brought into force, it would mean a death knell to the historical struggled won labour gains entitled through Building and Other Construction Workers' (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) (BOCW) Act, 1996 and the companion legislation, Building and Other Construction Workers Cess Act, 1996 (cess act). The BOCW Act is a remarkable piece of legislation that not only carves out the term of employment, workmanship rights and measures for working conditions for the construction workers, but also ensure wellbeing and welfare measures by providing the financial stimulus in the form of a cess to fund the welfare schemes.

**Emerging Conditions of Advance Taken and other Bargaining Strategies by the Workers**

As traditional trade unions are missing from the construction sector and thus no collective bargaining. However, aftermath of the Right to Act (MGNREGA, 2005), most of the, Contractor, subcontractor and agent told that the labour process hiring has completely changed. Many workers either paid or demanded advance at least equally the wages paid in NREGA to ensure their migration and mobility in the construction industry. In a more interesting findings it shows that across the social structure, many workers i.e. OBCs (65%), SCs (35%), STs (24%), others (25%) and Muslims (15%) have been paid advance/demanded, even a job card of NREGA also empower the workers to demand in advance before migrating with construction agents or contractors (Figure 5)

**Figure 5: No of workers, their Conditions of Migration and Joining Construction Industry**



**Effects of COVID-19 on Gender and other vulnerable groups**

Although COVID-19 has impacted the entire construction industry and its workforce. But there is growing evidence that it has had more severe impact on certain groups of workers. Older workers, whose immune systems are compromised by aging, are more vulnerable to the virus. This has further created more vulnerabilities as well as disparities in the workforce (Brown et al., 2020). Further, Men and women have been affected differently by the COVID-19 pandemic. It has had a much more serious impact on female workers than on male workers, which has intensified the gender disparities throughout the workforce. Since the pandemic has caused widespread shutdowns in childcare facilities and schools, women suffered the most with increased family care

responsibility with loss of income. The stress of balancing family and job obligations has caused women to experience more health problems than men (Wenham et al.,2020; Azcona et al., 2020). Further, more deployment of technological equipment, the lower ladder of workers, especially women who often find employment at the lowest ladder, like helper, loader etc.has been largely replaced by the machines such as loaders, cranes and earth movers etc. It has resulted in poor compliance of minimum wages and other regulatory provisions such as Crèche, accommodation, health checkup, drinking water and separate toilet facilities under formal employment agreement of Interstate Migrant Act [22], Maternity Benefits Act, and BOCWA [4]. The private MNC like L & T run a health clinic during the workinghours and public sector MNCs like NBCC made an arrangement like with local hospitals, but there was no women labourers deployed on their worksites there. On analyzing covid-19, most of the workers are found to be rendered without any social protection system including facilitating food, return travel to their natives etc. (Table 2).

**Table 2: Compliance Conditions of Labour Welfare, Social Protection and Covid-19 Protocols/SOPs**

	Percentage (%) Of Workers
Do you have any Insurance Policy	0
Social Security (BPL)	10.6
Separate toilet facility for women workers	0
Maternity Benefit claimed by female workers	0
Social distancing and Mask wearing followed as per SOPs at worksites	5.5
Mask and hand sanitizers provided at sites	5.1
Paid for Testing for corona	0
Loan/advanced provided for managing food and medicines during lockdown	6.5
Facilitated /paid to go to native	0
If tested covid-19 positive, any help provided by contractor/employer/agent	2.4

The some organizations, shows the extensive use of capital in terms of technological advancement mechanization such as earth movers, loaders, lifters, concrete mixer etc. Theynot only reduced the hiring of manual or unskilled workers but also almost denied the entryof women at construction work sites. Thus mobility of neo-liberal capital and subsequent extensive use of technology have a catastrophic kind of effect especially for low skilled labourers and women workers in construction labour market. Many skilled workers feel stressed about their job stability due to pandemic and unskilled felt more vulnerable to losetheir job due to automation as well. Further, despite of sector specific regulations like Inter-State-Migrant Act [22] and Building and

Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of service) Act. 1996, where registration of the contractor and workers are mandatory with the district welfare boards. The construction contractors or firms lack in endorsement of standards laid down under these regulatory framework. Thus most of the workers even do not have a workmanship identity (Labour Card) and thus not eligible to register with the local welfare board which issues a labour card under the BOCW Act. [4] (See Table 3)

<b>Table 3. Conditions of Work across Different Worksites</b>	
<b>Conditions at Work across sites</b>	<b>% age of Workers</b>
Advance Taken from Contractor	66.4
Labour /Workmanship Card	12
Forced to work beyond 8 hrs	90.4
Wages less than Minimum wages	95.6
Female workers paid less than male for the same work	74.4
Long Delay in Payment	97
Flexi-work hours due to covid-19	4.2
Accommodation facility	28
Crèche facility for children	0
Contractor used abusive language	67.4
Work Security ( Accidental)	2.4
Occupational Illness/Health facility	1.6
Written Employment Contract	0
Any Union/work association affiliation	0
Any labour inspector you meet so far	0
Safety Training provided before induction	4.5

As the above table (3) clearly shows that, irrespective of a public or private organizations, there is a lack of basic amenities, poor compliance at worksites and no proper covid-19 guidelines prepared for flexi-work also. The vulnerability of migrant workers have become even more apparent during the pandemic as multiple issues have made them even more vulnerable to these problems. Except a few, most of the workers and especially who have migrated with their families, are living in Juggi either at construction sites or in nearby slums where their health and safety are the major issues. Further, their conditions of work and payment of wages found to be more precarious. Most of the petty workers often keep working for a long period of time as their work (to be adjusted), in terms of advance, to either pay the journey of labourers or some advance to their agents who brought them. Most of the contractors/ subcontractors neither pay any advance nor loan to workers to manage during the lockdown nor facilitated to return their native. Most of them are unable to isolate or social distance because of nature of work, lack of resource as well as space constraints. The separation from their families, loss of group or family members further caused to develop anxiety, distress, fear and post-traumatic disorders. These socio- environmental

adversities impact both their economic status and wellbeing [49,50].

Most of the workers, OBCs (100), SCs (55), STs (40), Muslims (24) and others (20) have still do not have any account, and still exchange money through either contractor/ agent or relatives / or village landlord account to transfer their money. Some of them told they have opened bank account while working under MGNREGS scheme but there is no bank nearby to their home and village bank agent often have electricity or machine problem.

### **Free Labour or NEO-Bondage?**

As most of the construction laborers are mobilized by multi-level sub contractual networks. As most of the workers across the sites found to be the migrants but unaware about the Inter-State Migrant Act [22]. Further, mobilization with advance payment and keeping them 'ghetto' kind of conditions often put them in neo-bondage labour conditions where they do not have any free voice or capacity of bargaining and social dialogue. Further, non-enforcement of the standard labour and welfare regulations strictly, especially sector specific acts [4, 22, 24], question the efficacy of the state in implementation of their international commitments towards SDG8 (ILO, 2002:2008:2012). The onset of pandemic and subsequent waves has a catastrophic effect as it rendered most of the construction workers without job and wages that ultimately forced them to return their home of origin as well as face survival. Adequate awareness, training and educating workers about the COVID-19 behaviour could be useful tools to convey right informations for preventing mental, physical, and emotional problems.

## Conclusion

The paper concludes that the consolidation of labour codes seem to promote ease of doing business and turn the entire country into a giant sweatshop without addressing the concerns of social protection and occupational health and safety. Such labour flexibility promotes the neo-liberal agenda and provides firms a free hand to exploit the workers. The codes have taken away various rights of workers that are presently sanctified in the BOCW Act. It enables the governments to rule by decree and suspend labour laws, as per their own liking. Findings describe the positive impact of equity inflow on development activities through more public private MNC partnership. However, multilayer sub contractual chain of labour mobilization has completely blurred the employer-employee relationship. The poor compliance on conditions of work, welfare, and labour standards have caused distress kind of employment and poor wellbeing in the sector. With more automation, women and other low skilled workers are found missing in sampled large scale projects, thus, there is an urgent need for interventions by both the state, global partners, and other labour market stakeholders to properly enforce the universally agreed guidelines on decent work (SDG8) and sustainable development Agenda of 2030, irrespective of the sector and region. Further, with precarious cum flexi mobilization process of the migrant workforce, the construction sector has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, due to its strong forward and backward linkages across sectors, the MNCs in construction industry has a great potential to part with global institutions and play an instrumental role in achieving SDGs while improving the conditions of work and wellbeing including health, drinking water, and skill development.

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