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## **Ethical recruitment and employment in the construction industry in India: Perspectives and experiences of workers and micro-contractors**

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KG Santhya  
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## Executive summary

Projections indicate that China, India, United States, and Indonesia will account for 58 percent of global growth in construction during the period 2020–30, while the Indian construction industry is expected to grow at 7–8 percent annually. In India, the construction industry is the second-largest employer, with 51 million workers currently employed in it. The process of contracting and sub-contracting in the industry has contributed to the rise of intermediary labour contractors for hiring workers and has created a hierarchy of actors and participants in the employment process of the industry. These labour contractors typically provide migrants with information about labour markets in destination sites and bring them to construction sites for work. The migrant workers are initially placed at the periphery of the hierarchical organisational structure or at the bottom of the chain of command on work allocation. Engagement in physically demanding low-skill jobs, low wages, which are often lower than the legal minimum wage, harsh working conditions, and deplorable living arrangements characterise the lives of many migrant construction workers. Implementation of rules and regulations that can protect migrant workers from labour exploitations remains weak.

Ethical recruitment ensures legal compliance, eliminates recruitment fees, and adheres to codes of conduct that protect workers in the recruitment process and throughout the supply chain. Ethical recruitment has the potential to eliminate labour exploitations, but evidence on perceptions about and adherence to ethical recruitment practices remains almost non-existent in India in general let alone in the construction sector. We came across only a small number of studies that covered the topic of ethical recruitment in India.

The Population Council, in partnership with the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), undertook a qualitative study to explore the nature of the labour supply chain in the construction industry and the relationship between workers, micro-contractors, other contractors, and construction firms/companies. The study also explored vulnerabilities faced by migrant construction workers, perceptions of workers and micro-contractors about ethical recruitment and employment practices, and challenges faced by micro-contractors in following these ethical recruitment and employment practices. The study comprised semi-structured interviews with migrant workers and in-depth interviews with micro-contractors in selected construction sites in Bengaluru and Delhi in India. We purposively selected six sites each in Bengaluru and Delhi. Male and female workers aged 18–50 and micro-contractors (defined as those who employed fewer than 50 workers, directly supervised and managed workers at the worksite, and took labour-only contracts) were selected through a convenience sample based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. We successfully interviewed 236 workers and 25 micro-contractors during June–August 2022. The study protocol was approved by the Population Council’s Institutional Review Board.

## Key findings

### Workers’ and micro-contractors’ perceptions about recruitment strategies for work in construction sites in major cities

**Both workers and micro-contractors reported that contractors<sup>1</sup> were typically involved in procuring and supplying labourers to work in construction sites in major cities.** Sixty-eight percent of workers mentioned contractors and 20 percent reported representatives of contractors as the people who recruit. Hardly any workers or micro-contractors mentioned that construction companies were involved in recruiting workers.

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<sup>1</sup> We note that the workers and the micro-contractors who participated in the study had spoken about ‘contractors’ in general and did not use terms such as ‘labour contractors’ or ‘micro-contractors’.

**Workers reported that people in their village typically reached out to personal contacts to get work in construction sites in major cities.** These personal contacts include contractors, based in major cities, whom workers or their acquaintances may know (60%), and workers who are working or had worked previously in construction sites in major cities (49%). **Micro-contractors in both cities confirmed that workers typically approach them directly or through their acquaintances.** They reported that workers enquire through other workers and look for contractors whose reputation is good, who pay more, who do not behave badly, and who do not withhold payment or delay payment.

**Micro-contractors reported that they typically procure workers through social networks in their village, followed by a network of other workers who were satisfied working under them.** Micro-contractors rely on these networks because they trust workers who are from their own village, although the idea of trust implies some level of control. Also, they can communicate easily with them, as they speak the same language. Moreover, micro-contractors perceive that workers from their known network complete the work faster and without flaws than workers recruited from other sources, and they do not demand payments immediately. **Workers corroborated the narratives of micro-contractors about recruitment strategies used by contractors**—75 percent of workers reported that contractors typically reach out to their family and social networks to recruit workers.

### Relationship between workers and micro-contractors

**Workers and micro-contractors were closely related socially and geographically.** Eighty-one percent of all workers in the survey got work in the current construction site in Bengaluru and Delhi with the help of a contractor (78% in Bengaluru and 84% in Delhi). Some 56 percent of workers who got work with the help of a contractor reported that the contractor was from their own village or their neighbouring village. A larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru reported that the contractor was from their own village or neighbouring villages than workers in Delhi (68% vs 45%). Most workers had previously worked with the contractor in another worksite before they moved in the current construction site in Bengaluru and Delhi (56%). More workers in Delhi had such prior experience with the contractor than workers in Bengaluru (66% vs 46%).

### Relationship between micro-contractors and other contractors and construction firms/companies

**Most micro-contractors began working as manual labourers in the construction sector, particularly in Delhi** (13 out of 25 micro-contractors; 6 out of 15 in Bengaluru; and 7 out of 10 in Delhi), while a few others started as skilled labourers (7 overall; 5 in Bengaluru and 2 in Delhi), or as supervisors under other contractors (4 overall; 3 in Bengaluru and 1 in Delhi). **Fewer than half of the micro-contractors reported that they help each other in procuring workers** (10 out of 25 overall; 5 out of 15 in Bengaluru; 5 out of 10 in Delhi), while others said that they do not do so (14 out of 25 overall; 9 out of 15 in Bengaluru; 5 out of 10 in Delhi). Those who supported each other noted that they can get a commission for providing workers to other micro-contractors and this can help their workers get employment during lean periods. Those who did not support each other mentioned that they do not have enough workers to manage even their own work, and there is competition among micro-contractors.

**Half of the micro-contractors reported that they worked typically for other contractors, while some others reported that they worked typically for construction firms/companies.** More micro-contractors in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported that they worked typically for construction firms/companies (9 out of 15 in Bengaluru and 2 out of 10 in Delhi). **The relationship between micro-contractors and other contractors/construction firms/companies was informal for the most part**—there was no fixed duration or monetary value for the work given to them, there were no specific terms under which they received work orders, and there were no written contracts. However, most contractors reported that they received regular work from other contractors/companies. Micro-contractors typically approached bigger contractors or staff at construction firms/companies for work. They did not pay any commission to other

contractors/firms that gave them work nor did they share their profit with them, for the most part, although a few reported such practices. They received support from other contractors/firms for completing their work by way of equipment, accommodation and other amenities, financial advances, and social protection such as insurance and training. There were hardly any differences in the type of support received by micro-contractors in Bengaluru and Delhi, except with regard to social protection benefits and training, which a greater number of micro-contractors in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported. The major challenge that micro-contractors faced was delayed payments from other contractors/firms, subsequent delays in paying their workers, and lack of working capital to tide over delayed payments or to meet emergencies.

### Migrant workers' recruitment-related experiences

Findings show that almost all migrant workers knew about the work opportunity in the current worksite in Bengaluru and Delhi before they moved to the site (99.6%). **While almost everyone knew about the type of work and wages (96%), fewer knew about working conditions (56%) before migrating to the current worksite. None of the workers reported that they had paid any money for securing work in the current worksite, nor had they promised to pay.** Thirty-four percent of workers who found work with the help of a contractor reported that they had received advance payment in cash or kind from the contractor before starting work in the current worksite. Workers received on average of Rs 5,000 in both cities. **Almost no one had received a written contract (0.4%),**

### Migrant workers' experiences at work

**Almost all workers reported that they were given the work promised (99%) and wages agreed upon (98%).** Eighty percent of workers received wages on time always. **Ninety-six percent of workers reported that their wages were never withheld.** Ninety-five percent of workers had access to drinking water at the worksite, and 87 percent had access to toilet facilities at the worksite. Eighty-seven percent of workers were given safety equipment (for example, helmet, protective clothing, boots, gloves, welding safety glasses, and safety belts) in the current worksite. Ninety-six percent of workers reported that they received free accommodation with basic amenities in the current worksite.

However, just five percent of workers were given one paid rest day per week, and three percent were given one unpaid rest day per week. **The average monthly earning at the current location stood at Rs 11,200, which implies that most workers were paid below the legal minimum wage of Rs 12,241–13,671 in Karnataka and Rs 16,506–20,619 in Delhi.** Thirty-two percent of workers had experienced occupational health problems in the current worksite, and of these, only 58 percent had received support from the company/contractor. **Eight percent of workers perceived that they were given less wages than others on grounds of age, religion, caste, sex, state of origin, language, or temporary recruitment in the current worksite.** Two percent of workers perceived that they were given more work on grounds of age, sex, or state of origin in the current worksite, and one percent of workers perceived that they were given less work than others on grounds of age. Several more reported that they were not free to enter and exit the worksite without any restrictions (31%), and two percent of workers were escorted whenever they left the worksite. One percent of workers reported their having experienced physical violence (perpetrated by co-workers) and **16 percent of workers reported verbal abuse perpetrated by co-workers or supervisor/contractor in the current worksite.**

### Awareness of and registration with the construction workers welfare board

The state governments have constituted a construction workers welfare board in their respective states to regulate employment and protect workers. Those registered with the board are entitled to a number of social security benefits such as pension, disability pension, tool kit, training programme, cash assistance for building a house, educational assistance to children of the construction worker, medical assistance, and cash assistance in case of accidental death or



permanent disability. **Awareness among construction workers and micro-contractors about the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board was limited.** Just 28 percent of workers had heard about the welfare board. Five percent of workers reported that they had registered with the welfare board, and another six percent reported that they had submitted their application. Just three of the 25 micro-contractors reported that they had registered with the welfare board. While some reported lack of awareness about it, others were unaware of the procedure to register with the welfare board.

### Spatial differences in workers' perceptions and experiences

There were differences in the perceptions of workers in Bengaluru and Delhi about people usually involved in procuring and supplying labourers for work in construction sites in major cities as well as on the profile of such people. More workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi mentioned contractors as the people who recruit labour (74% vs 61%), while more workers in Delhi than in Bengaluru mentioned representatives of contractors (23% vs 16%) and family members/acquaintances (17% vs 11%) as the people who recruit labour. More workers in Bengaluru reported that contractors take care of labourers' accommodation and other needs (34% vs 25%) and work along with workers whom they recruit (21% vs 12%). More workers in Bengaluru than Delhi reported that people in their village typically reach out to contractors based in major cities, whom workers or their acquaintances may know, to get work (67% vs 53%), while more workers in Delhi than Bengaluru cited workers who are currently working or had worked previously in construction sites in major cities (58% vs 41%), local contractors (19% vs 7%), and family members or friends (27% vs 14%) as the people whom villagers approach for work. **Although most workers in both Bengaluru and Delhi got work in the current construction site with the help of a contractor, more workers in Bengaluru than Delhi reported that the contractor was from their own village or neighbouring villages (68% vs 45%).**

**Compared with workers in Delhi, fewer workers in Bengaluru faced difficulties at work.** A larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi received their wages always on time (88% vs 72%). Although only a few workers were given one rest day, paid or unpaid, per week, more workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi received a weekly unpaid rest day (7% vs none). Although workers in both Bengaluru and Delhi received wages below the legal minimum wage, it was far below the legal minimum wage in Delhi than in Bengaluru (Rs 9,000 vs Rs 12,000). A larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi were given safety equipment (94% vs 80%) and had access to basic amenities such as drinking water (100% vs 91%) and toilet facilities (93% vs 80%) at the worksite. Even so, fewer workers who experienced occupational health problems had received support from the company/contractor in Bengaluru than in Delhi (44% vs 70% of those who reported occupational health problems). More workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported restrictions in entering and exiting the worksite (45% vs 16%). A smaller proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi were aware of the construction workers welfare board (16% vs 40%).

A larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi perceived that practices that are considered ethical must be adhered to, perhaps because they were better educated and better informed about their rights. Similarly, a larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi perceived that practices that are considered unethical should not be done at any cost.

While it is difficult to discern the reasons underlying differences in workers' perceptions and experiences from data in the current study, we speculate that these could be because of differences in distance between workers' place of origin and the construction sites. Differences in the characteristics of workers and micro-contractors in Bengaluru and Delhi (for example, workers in Bengaluru were better educated than workers in Delhi, and more micro-contractors in Bengaluru than in Delhi entered the construction sector as skilled workers or supervisors under other contractors) or differences in labour-contracting processes in these cities (for example, more micro-contractors in Bengaluru than in Delhi typically worked for construction firms than for other

contractors) may also explain the differences in perceptions and experiences of workers in Bengaluru and Delhi.

### Gender differences in workers' perceptions and experiences

**While all female workers in the study were manual labourers, male workers comprised both skilled workers and manual labourers.** Therefore, any comparison between male and female workers needs to be interpreted with caution. Even so, there were differences in the perceptions of male and female workers about people usually involved in procuring and supplying labourers for work in construction sites in major cities as well as on the profile of such people. More male than female workers reported contractors (72% vs 58%) and family members/acquaintances (54% vs 35%) as the people who recruit workers. The perception that contractors take care of labourers' accommodation and other needs (32% vs 23%) and work along with them (19% vs 9%) was more prevalent among male than female workers. More male than female workers thought that people in their village typically reach out to workers who are working or had worked previously in construction sites in major cities (57% vs 30%) and also to contractors based in major cities known to workers or their acquaintances to get work in such construction sites (69% vs 39%). **Female workers faced more difficulties than male workers.** Male workers, for example, earned 1.5 times more than female workers (Rs 12,600 vs Rs 8,000). Moreover, a larger proportion of male workers than female workers reported access to safety equipment (93% vs 73%), drinking water (99% vs 86%), and a toilet facility (97% vs 62%) at the current worksite as well as support from the company/contractor when faced with occupational health problems (73% vs 28% of those who reported occupational health problems). More male workers than female workers had heard about the construction workers welfare board (32% vs 17%). A larger proportion of male workers than female workers perceived that practices that are considered ethical must be adhered to, perhaps because they were better educated and better informed about their rights. Moreover, a larger proportion of male workers than female workers perceived that practices that are considered unethical should not be done at any cost. It is possible that these gender differences could be because of differences in the type of work that male and female workers perform in the industry and the differences in the social networks of male and female workers.

### Differences in workers' experiences over the course of repeated migration

While nine percent of the workers had made only one migratory movement for work, the remaining 91 percent had made more than one migratory movement for work. Indeed, **20 percent of workers had made six or more migratory movements over their lifetime**, and a larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru reported so than in Delhi (28% vs 13%). **Migrant workers faced more difficulties during their first migration than during their later migration.** A smaller proportion of workers knew about working conditions before starting work in the first location than in the current location (44% vs 61%). Workers were given safety equipment more often in the worksite at the current location than in the first location (86% vs 67%), perhaps because seasoned workers might have been more aware of their rights. A larger proportion of workers had experienced verbal abuse in the worksite at the first location than at the current location (26% vs 15%) as also physical abuse (6% vs 1%) and wage discrimination (16% vs 8%). A smaller proportion of workers reported free accommodation in the worksite at the first location than at the current location (87% vs 97%). However, workers' experiences in the first and the current location did not differ in terms of getting promised work and wages, not getting a written contract, receiving wages on time, or getting a weekly paid rest day.

### Workers' and micro-contractors' perceptions about ethical recruitment and employment practices

**Workers and micro-contractors who participated in the study were not familiar with the term ethical recruitment and employment**, and so we probed them about their perceptions about specific practices that reflected or contravened the principles of ethical recruitment and employment.

**There were substantial misperceptions about such practices among workers and micro-contractors. There were considerable variations also in the acceptance of practices that are considered ethical.** Even when they perceived selected practices to be the right thing to do, they felt that it was not feasible to adhere to. Thus, 54 percent of workers felt that contractors must give a written contract to workers at the time of hiring them, but 37 percent reported that it was not feasible to adhere to, even though it was the right thing to do. Likewise, while 10 micro-contractors thought that giving written contracts to workers was the right thing to do and must be adhered to, three reported that it was not feasible to do, although it was the right thing to do.

**There were also considerable variations in the rejection of practices that are considered unethical.** Thus, while 60 percent of workers thought that they should not be charged fees by labour contractors when hired, 27 percent felt that it could not be done away with, even though it was the wrong thing to do. Nine micro-contractors thought that retaining personal documents of workers with them was the right thing to do because this may deter workers from cheating the contractors or may help them locate the workers if they flee after any infraction they may commit at the worksite. On other hand, 15 micro-contractors reported that contractors should not retain personal documents of workers.

**Micro-contractors reported that they faced a number of challenges in following some of the ethical practices.** The major challenge that they reported was delayed payments from other contractors/firms, subsequent delays in their payments to workers, and lack of working capital to tide over the delays in payment or to meet emergencies.

## Recommendations for governments

Sustained action by the central government and state governments is critical for promoting ethical recruitment and employment practices. It is important to develop standards of ethical recruitment and employment, regulate and monitor private and public sector recruiters and employers, and demand compliance with these standards in their procurement processes.

Findings that the relationship between micro-contractors and other contractors/construction firms/companies was informal for the most part needs regulation from government bodies. There was no fixed duration or monetary value for the work given to them, there were no specific terms under which they received work orders, and there were no written contracts. These issues call for registration of contractors and employers and greater transparency in the contracts between the different tiers of employers/contractors/sub-contractors/micro-contractors. Government bodies therefore have an important role to regulate recruitment and employment processes in the construction industry. The Indian government has recently codified 29 laws into four codes so that workers can be provided with measures for their security along with health and other welfare measures with ease (Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India, 2022). These four labour codes include the Minimum Wages Code to ensure the Right to Minimum Wages for all workers; the Social Security Code to secure the right of workers for insurance, pension, gratuity, maternity benefit, and so on; the Occupational, Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code to provide a better and safe environment along with occupational health and safety to workers at the work place; and the Industrial Relations Code to safeguard the interests of trade unions as well as the workers. It is important that measures are taken to monitor the implementation of these codes.

Findings call for efforts to streamline the processes for worker registration with the welfare board by addressing barriers that migrant workers face and by having minimal registration requirements. Governments should encourage self-registration, streamline and localise verification processes, and engage civil society organisations to sustain registration drives on construction worksites, labour *chowks* (places for recruitment of labour), and in settlements where construction workers live.

Findings also underscore the need for strengthening measures by government bodies to inspect establishments to ensure compliance with labour laws and occupational standards and safety regulations.

## Recommendations for programme implementers

Findings show that there are several misperceptions about ethical recruitment and employment practices. Moreover, workers' experiences highlight violations of ethical standards, for example, almost no worker had received a written contract. These findings call for efforts to raise public awareness of ethical recruitment standards. Efforts are needed to inform aspiring and current migrant workers about their rights and ethical recruitment and employment practices and to empower them to demand such practices from their recruiters and employers. Such efforts must not only target workers but also micro-contractors, bigger contractors, and construction firms and companies.

Constraints such as inadequate and irregular labour contracts, delayed payment from their contractors/companies, and lack of working capital tend to prevent micro-contractors from adhering to ethical practices. This finding calls for innovative solutions to overcome these constraints, for example, capacity development and mentorship programmes for micro-contractors to enable them to succeed in the open market, financial support programmes, supporting the creation of a micro-contractors' association, and facilitating contacts with members of existing contractors' and employers' organisations to represent micro-contractors' interests.

Findings that awareness of and registration with the construction workers welfare board remain limited underscore the need for increased efforts to raise awareness among construction workers and micro-contractors about the procedure for registering with the board and the benefits of doing so. Given that a large percentage of construction workers are circular migrants, issuing them labour cards that are portable and linking these cards with wage payments and social security deductions are important.

Programme efforts by development partners and community-based organisations (CBOs) need to pay special attention to first-time migrants because of additional vulnerabilities experienced by them. Migrant helplines to provide information about the protections and benefits available to them and to connect them to support services that may be required to secure their rights may be considered. Physical migrant resource centres in locations with significant migrant populations can be established in association with civil society organisations for more personalised services. The helplines and resource centres need to provide information in languages which migrants are comfortable with. Multi-media channels can also be used to increase access to information for aspiring migrants.

## Recommendations for monitoring, evaluation, and learning practitioners

Research on perspectives and experiences of various actors in the construction industry about ethical recruitment and employment is scarce in India. Our study has made an exploratory attempt to fill this gap by looking at the perspectives of construction workers and micro-contractors. However, we acknowledge that the concept of ethical recruitment and employment was alien to most workers and micro-contractors, and several misperceptions prevailed about practices that are ethical and unethical. More research—methodological and empirical—is needed to gather nuanced insights into various actors' understanding of the concept of ethical recruitment and employment, how these can be translated into real-life practices in the industry, and how the challenges faced by various actors in adhering to ethical practices can be overcome.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background and objectives

Projections indicate that China, India, United States, and Indonesia will account for 58 percent of global growth in construction during the period 2020–30, while the Indian construction sector is expected to grow at 7–8 percent annually (Robinson et al., 2021). The construction sector is the second-largest employer in India; it currently employs 51 million workers (Invest India, n.d.). Of the total workforce in India, 12 percent of workers were employed in the construction sector in 2018–19 (National Statistical Office [NSO], 2020). The sector employed 14 percent of all male workers and six percent of all female workers in the country in 2018–19.

The Indian construction sector is broadly divided into two main sub-sectors, namely, the real estate sector and the infrastructure sector (National Skill Development Corporation, n.d.; see Annex 1 for a sub-sectoral overview of the Indian construction sector). According to a report by Deloitte and Kotra (2014), demand for construction activities in India is equally divided between these two sectors. The process of sub-contracting plays a major role in the production organisation in the construction sector in India (see Annex 2 for an overview of the organisation of production process in the construction sector). Sub-contracting practices have created a hierarchy of actors and participants in the employment process of the industry. A study of construction industries in the Delhi National Capital Region reports that there are generally at least three layers in the sub-contracting process, which may extend sometimes to further layers. The labour sub-contracting usually occurs below the first or second stage of sub-contracting<sup>2</sup> (Srivastava and Jha, 2016). Labour contractors include origin-based labour contractors, who procure labourers in the area of origin directly or through local agents, and destination-based labour contractors, who may be small- and medium-scale labour contractors or petty work contractors who bring along their work team. Micro-contractors, also known as petty contractors, form the lowest rung of the labour contractors. They are typically single persons who take labour-only contracts, minor repair works or routine maintenance, have a limited range of skills and capacities, and are often not registered or classified as contractors (ILO, 2019; GFEMS, n.d.).

Unskilled labourers (83%) and skilled labourers (9%) account for over 90 percent of people employed in the construction sector in India (National Skill Development Corporation, n.d.; see Annex 3 for a profile of people employed in the sector). A large proportion of these labourers are hired through labour contractors, although in some cases, a small proportion of workers may be directly hired by the construction firms. Studies of migrant construction workers in different geographies in India have documented that labour contractors typically provide migrants with information about the labour market in destination sites and bring them to these sites for work (Fernandes and Paul, 2011; Singh, 2016; Srivastava and Sutradhar, 2016). There are some workers who go back to their native place and provide information related to the labour market to their family members, relatives, friends, and fellow villagers, and who in due course may become future labour contractors. The migrant workers are initially placed at the periphery of the hierarchical organisational structure or at the bottom of the chain of command on work allocation. Migrant workers in the construction sector include long-term circular workers and seasonal workers. Long-term circular workers have a long migration history and move between sites and return occasionally to their places of origin. Some seasonal workers work for 4–9 months in a year and some others work for 50 to 60 days (Srivastava and Jha, 2016).

Difficult working conditions faced by migrant construction workers are documented in a number of studies in India (Bhattacharyya and Korinek, 2007; Dalmia, 2012; Dhal, 2020; Sarkar, 2021; Singh, 2016; Srivastava and Sutradhar, 2016). Engagement in physically demanding low-skill jobs,

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<sup>2</sup> In the first stage of sub-contracting, the main construction firm sub-contracts major parts of the production activities to many other firms involved in different stages of production, for example, excavation and preparation of the structures, finishing and services, and in the second stage of sub-contracting, the firms that received sub-contracts may sub-contract some part of the production to smaller firms (Srivastava and Jha, 2016).

low wages that are often lower than the legal minimum wage, harsh working conditions, and deplorable living arrangements characterise the lives of many migrant construction workers. Sexual harassment and exploitation of female workers, particularly by contractors, are common but widely under-reported (Parry, 2014; Patel and Pitroda, 2016; Action Aid, 2017). Migrant workers are often unaware of government rules and regulations that regulate employment conditions and that protect them from abuse by employers. Further, labour unions are typically not effective in this sector, while the implementation of rules and regulations remains weak (Roy et al., 2017; Mosse et al., 2005; Picherit, 2012; Srivastava, 2020).

The ILO's General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment and Definition of Recruitment Fees and Related Costs has laid out international standards for ethical recruitment of all workers (including migrant workers) directly by employers or through intermediaries, within or across national borders (ILO, 2019). These principles note that recruitment should take place in a way that respects, protects, and fulfils internationally recognised human rights and should take into account policies and practices that promote efficiency, transparency, and protection for workers in the process. These principles mention that regulation of employment and recruitment activities should be clear and transparent and effectively enforced, no recruitment fees or related costs should be charged to workers, and the terms and conditions of a worker's employment should be specified in an appropriate, verifiable, and easily understandable manner, and preferably through written contracts. These principles note that workers should have access to free, comprehensive, and accurate information regarding their rights and the conditions of their recruitment and employment and access to free or affordable grievance and other dispute-resolution mechanisms. Ethical recruitment ensures legal compliance, eliminates recruitment fees, and adheres to codes of conduct that protect workers in the recruitment process and throughout the supply chain.

Although ethical recruitment has the potential to eliminate labour exploitations, evidence on perceptions about and adherence to ethical recruitment practices remains almost non-existent in India in general let alone in the construction sector. We came across only a small number of studies that covered the topic of ethical recruitment in India. One such study in Uttar Pradesh, India, compared knowledge and migration-related decisions among a group of prospective overseas migrants. The comparison was between those who had received information on ethical recruitment and those who had not (Seefar, 2021). The study found that potential migrants who received information about ethical recruitment were comprehensively more knowledgeable about the migration process, requirements, and risks than those who had not receive the information. A qualitative study of Neev interventions funded by GFEMS reported that micro-contractors who received training in ethical business demonstrated greater awareness of ways to ensure worker well-being and worker safety, and they understood the importance of signing formal agreements for their work with their main contractors (GFEMS, n.d.).

The Population Council, in partnership with the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), undertook a qualitative study to explore the relationship between migrant workers and micro-contractors in the construction industry in India and to identify opportunities for ethical micro-contracting in the industry. Specifically, the study sought to shed light on:

- Nature of the labour supply chain in the construction industry and the relationship between workers, micro-contractors, other contractors, and construction firms/companies;
- Vulnerabilities faced by migrant construction workers; and
- Perceptions of workers and micro-contractors about ethical recruitment and employment practices and challenges faced by micro-contractors in following ethical recruitment and employment practices.

We note that workers and micro-contractors who participated in the study were not familiar with the term ethical recruitment and employment, and so we probed them about their perceptions about specific practices that reflected or contravened the principles of ethical recruitment and employment. We asked workers and micro-contractors to rate the following practices on a four-point scale with categories such as right and must be adhered to; right but not feasible to practise; wrong and should not be done; and wrong but cannot be done away with. The practices by contractors that we probed included: (1) taking license/accreditation from government office, (2) taking fees from workers for hiring them, (3) giving written contract with details of type of work, hours of work, wages, and so on to workers, (4) giving information about type of work, hours of work, wages, and so on orally to workers, (5) paying less than promised wages, (6) paying wages on time, (7) making legally permitted deductions in wages, (8) making wage deductions without informing workers, (9) giving safety training for workers before initiating work in a worksite, (10) retaining personal documents of workers with them, and (11) abusing workers.<sup>3</sup>

This report describes findings from this study. Following a description of the study design and limitations, the report describes the labour supply chain in the construction industry, as described by construction workers and micro-contractors, and it presents findings on the profile of people involved in recruiting labourers for construction sites in major cities and their specific roles. It describes channels or modes that migrant workers rely on to find a job in construction sites in major cities, recruitment strategies used by micro-contractors, relationships between workers and micro-contractors, and relationships between micro-contractors, other contractors, and construction firms/companies. The report, then, sheds light on vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers during their recruitment and employment. It also presents the differences in workers' experiences at the first migration location and the current location among those who had made more than one migratory movement for work. The report presents findings on the perceptions of workers and micro-contractors about ethical recruitment and employment in the construction industry, challenges faced by micro-contractors in following some of the ethical practices, and measures that can help micro-contractors overcome these challenges. The report concludes with recommendations for programme implementers, governments, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning practitioners.

## 1.2 Methodology

The study comprised semi-structured interviews with workers and in-depth interviews with micro-contractors in selected construction sites in Bengaluru and Delhi in India.<sup>4</sup>

We consulted academicians and researchers with knowledge in conducting research on experiences of construction workers and consulted also NGOs that run programmes for migrant workers, including construction workers, on approaches for selecting construction sites and recruiting workers and micro-contractors for the study. We consulted micro-contractors and construction workers from sites other than the study sites on approaches for recruiting study participants. Based on these consultations, we decided to approach the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board in Bengaluru and Delhi and to conduct a field mapping of construction sites in the real estate sector in these two cities for preparing the database to select sites for the study. The mapping exercise was also conducted to check when and how workers in these sites could be approached for interviewing them. Two research assistants visited construction sites in different parts of these two cities, observed the type of construction activity, and interacted with site supervisors to gather information about the number of workers at the site.<sup>5</sup> We received the list from the welfare board in Delhi (but not in Bengaluru). Thus, the list of

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<sup>3</sup> We drew on ILO's General Principles and Operational Guidelines for Fair Recruitment and Definition of Recruitment Fees and Related Costs (ILO, 2019) and the Dhaka Principles for Migration with Dignity (Institute for Human Rights and Business, 2012) for selecting these practices.

<sup>4</sup> Bengaluru and Delhi were selected in consultation with GFEMS.

<sup>5</sup> We note that the mapping exercise did not cover all construction sites in the two cities, rather, it covered construction sites in selected localities within these cities where major construction activities were ongoing at the time of the study, as informed by NGO representatives, micro-contractors, and workers whom we consulted in preparation for this study.

construction sites for selecting study sites comprised 132 sites in Delhi, identified through the mapping exercise and from the list shared by the welfare board in Delhi. In Bengaluru, 42 sites were identified through the mapping exercise. We purposively selected six sites in each of these cities. Types of construction activity in the study sites included construction of residential housing and non-residential structures such as hospitals, institutions, and commercial complexes. Construction activities were undertaken by large (employing more than 500 workers at a worksite) or medium organised-sector firms (employing 100 to 500 workers at a worksite). The sites were in different regions of Bengaluru and Delhi NCR.

The research team approached project managers or site supervisors first to get introduced to the micro-contractors and workers that they engage. Following this, the research team met the micro-contractors and workers individually to seek their consent for participating in the study and asked those who consented to suggest a venue and time convenient for them to participate in the interview. While the project managers/site supervisors knew the micro-contractors and workers who were approached by the research team, they did not know who among them were interviewed. Male and female workers aged 18–50 who consented to participate in the study were interviewed till we reached the pre-decided sample of 20 workers per site. The interviews took place outside work hours, for example, during lunch break or in the evening at the work site, near-by locations where workers gather, or at the worker's camp where they resided. We provided a token compensation of about \$2.5 to workers for taking part in the study. We successfully interviewed 236 workers from the two cities together, using a semi-structured questionnaire<sup>6</sup> that gathered information related to workers' migration patterns, their work experiences, including difficulties and exploitations faced in the construction industry, their perceptions about labour recruitment in the industry, and their perceptions about ethical recruitment and employment practices. The questionnaire was finalised after pre-testing. The interview lasted for 45 minutes to one hour. The research assistants called upon fellow research assistants to conduct parallel discussions with bystanders in order to provide privacy for the interview. We note that all the workers whom the research team approached for interviews consented to participate in the study. We note further that we had originally planned to examine the differences in work experiences of migrant and non-migrant workers;<sup>7</sup> however, we found only one non-migrant worker in the 12 worksites where we had conducted the fieldwork. Univariate and bivariate analysis of the data were conducted.<sup>8</sup>

Drawing on definitions of micro-contractors/petty contractors used by ILO and the Neev study (ILO, 2019; GFEMS, n.d.), we defined micro-contractors as those who employed a small number of workers, that is, fewer than 50 workers, directly supervised and managed workers at the worksite, and took labour-only contracts. Micro-contractors for in-depth interviews were identified with the help of project managers, site supervisors, and workers who participated in the semi-structured interviews. We also asked micro-contractors who were interviewed in-depth to connect us with other micro-contractors. Thus, the micro-contractors who participated in the study were from sites where workers were also interviewed as well as from other sites. We successfully interviewed 25 of the 54 micro-contractors who were approached. The main reasons for non-response were that their phone numbers were not reachable, or they did not meet the study definition of a micro-contractor.<sup>9</sup> The qualitative guide, used for interviews with the micro-contractors, collected information about their work experiences in the construction industry, their modus of recruiting and managing workers, challenges faced, and their perceptions about ethical recruitment and employment practices. The micro-contractors were interviewed over phone, and all interviews were

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<sup>6</sup> Questions were largely close-ended, but a few were open-ended. The interviews were conducted face-to-face on paper in the local language of the workers, i.e., Hindi.

<sup>7</sup> Workers were asked how long they have been living in the place of residence at the time of the interview, and all those who reported that they have been living here since birth were categorised as non-migrants, and others were classified as migrants.

<sup>8</sup> Responses to open-ended questions were reviewed and coded. Thus, all data were analysed quantitatively in STATA.

<sup>9</sup> Of the 30 micro-contractors in Bengaluru whom the research team approached, three were not eligible. Of the remaining 27 micro-contractors, 17 were successfully interviewed, eight did not receive the call from the research team, and two refused to participate. Of the 24 micro-contractors in Delhi whom the research team approached, seven were not eligible. Of the remaining 17 micro-contractors, eight were successfully interviewed, seven did not receive the call from the research team, and two refused to participate.



recorded with the consent of the study participants. Each interview lasted for an hour. The interviews were transcribed and translated into English. We developed a coding scheme based on the topics covered in the interview guide. We coded the transcripts using this coding scheme. The coded blocks of text, related to specific themes, were analysed to capture typical patterns and exceptions.

A team of six male and female research assistants, trained by the Population Council staff, completed the data collection during June–August 2022. The study protocol was approved by the Population Council’s Institutional Review Board.

### 1.3 Study limitations

Findings presented in this report should be interpreted with some limitations in mind. First, the mapping exercise did not cover all construction sites in Bengaluru and Delhi. It covered construction sites in selected localities where major construction activities were ongoing at the time of the study, as informed by NGO representatives, micro-contractors, and workers whom we had consulted in preparation for this study. Moreover, the sites were purposively selected. Therefore, findings from the study cannot be generalised to the construction industry in Bengaluru and Delhi. Second, the workers and micro-contractors were conveniently selected, and workers and micro-contractors in the selected sites were Hindi-speaking, and, therefore, findings cannot be generalised for migrant workers from different states and regions. Third, the possibility that workers and micro-contractors may have given socially desirable responses to questions relating to difficulties experienced and those relating to their perceptions about ethical and unethical practices cannot be ruled out. Finally, we had planned to examine the differences in work experiences of migrant and non-migrant workers; however, we found only one non-migrant worker in the 12 worksites where we had conducted the fieldwork.

### 1.4 Profile of the study participants

Table 1 presents a profile of the construction workers who had participated in the study. Almost 60 percent of the workers were aged 30 years or below; a larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru were aged 30 years or below than in Delhi (67% vs 52%). Twenty-five percent of the workers had no education (21% in Bengaluru and 29% in Delhi), while 21 percent had completed Grade 10 and above (26% in Bengaluru and 16% in Delhi). Female workers were less educated than male workers; for example, 52 percent of female workers compared with 13 percent of male workers had no education. Fifty-two percent of the workers were manual labourers, with little difference between the two cities. All female workers were manual labourers, while only 32 percent of male workers were manual labourers. The workers were predominantly male (71%), more so in Bengaluru than in Delhi (80% vs 61%). Over 80 percent of the workers were Hindu (87%), with little difference between the two cities. While there were more male workers than female workers who were Muslim (13% vs 4%), there were fewer male workers than female workers who were Christian (none vs 7%). Forty-seven percent of the workers belonged to socially disadvantaged castes and tribes (that is, scheduled castes/tribes), and a larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than Delhi belonged to these castes and tribes (57% vs 38%).

Most workers were currently married (66%), particularly workers in Delhi (77% of workers in Delhi and 55% of workers in Bengaluru), as were female workers (75% of female workers and 62% of male workers). Seventy-two percent of workers reported having five or more dependent family members, with workers in Bengaluru reporting so more than those in Delhi (78% vs 67%) and male workers reporting so more than female workers (94% vs 77%). While 41 percent of the workers had been residing continuously for less than one year at the current place of residence, 19 percent had been residing five years or more. A larger proportion of female workers than male workers reported that they had been residing continuously for less than one year at the current place of residence (62% vs 32%). While nine percent of the workers had made only one migratory

movement, 20 percent had made six or more migratory movements over their lifetime, and a larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru reported so than in Delhi (28% vs 13%).

Table 1: Background characteristics of construction workers, worker survey

Characteristics	Overall Mean or percentage	Bengaluru Mean or percentage	Delhi Mean or percentage	Male Mean or percentage	Female Mean or percentage
<b>Age</b>					
Below 20	7.6	10.8	4.3	5.4	13.0
20–30	51.7	55.8	47.4	52.1	50.7
31–40	29.7	23.3	36.2	30.5	27.5
41–50	11.0	10.0	12.1	12.0	8.7
<b>Years of education</b>					
No education	24.6	20.8	28.5	13.2	52.2
1–7	33.9	30.8	37.1	36.5	27.5
8–9	20.3	22.5	18.1	24.6	10.1
10–11	9.8	11.7	7.8	11.4	5.8
12 or more	11.4	14.2	8.6	14.4	4.4
<b>Sex</b>					
Male	70.8	80.0	61.2		
Female	29.2	20.0	38.8		
<b>Type of work in the current site</b>					
Manual labourer	51.7	50.8	52.6	31.7	100.0
Masonry	21.6	22.5	20.7	30.5	0.0
Electrical work	2.5	1.7	3.4	3.6	0.0
Plumbing	2.5	2.5	2.6	3.6	0.0
Crane operator	0.4	0.8	0.0	0.6	0.0
<b>Religion</b>					
Hindu	87.3	86.7	87.9	86.8	88.4
Muslim	10.6	10.0	11.2	13.2	4.4
Christian	2.1	3.3	0.8	0.0	7.3
<b>Caste</b>					
Scheduled caste	34.3	40.0	28.5	32.9	37.7
Scheduled tribe	13.1	16.7	9.5	9.0	23.2
Other backward caste	44.1	31.7	56.9	47.9	34.8
General	6.4	10.0	2.6	9.0	0.0
Do not know about caste status	2.1	1.7	2.6	1.2	4.4
<b>Marital status</b>					
Currently married	65.7	55.0	76.7	61.7	75.4
Divorced/separated/widowed	3.8	5.8	1.7	1.2	10.1
Never married	30.5	39.2	21.6	37.1	14.5
<b>Number of dependent family members including in native place</b>					
1–4	27.5	22.5	32.8	6.6	23.2
5–9	66.5	74.2	58.6	73.7	63.8
10 or more	5.9	3.3	8.6	19.8	13.0
<b>Number of years living continuously in the current place of residence</b>					
<1 year	41.1	42.5	39.7	32.2	62.3
1–4 years	39.4	39.2	39.7	46.7	21.7
5 or more years	19.1	18.3	18.8	21.0	14.5
Since birth	0.4	0.0	0.9	0.0	1.5
<b>Number of migratory movements, including return migration for work</b>					
			*		

Characteristics	Overall Mean or percentage	Bengaluru Mean or percentage	Delhi Mean or percentage	Male Mean or percentage	Female Mean or percentage
1	8.5	9.2	7.8	6.6	13.0
2-3	37.3	30.8	44.0	35.3	42.0
4-5	33.9	32.5	35.3	35.9	29.0
6 or more	20.3	27.5	12.9	22.2	15.9
<b>Type of construction site</b>					<b>***</b>
Large firm's site	50.9	50.0	51.7	43.1	69.6
Medium firm's site	49.2	50.0	48.3	56.9	30.4
<b>Number of workers</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>69</b>

Note: \*, \*\*, and \*\*\* indicate that the workers in Bengaluru and Delhi or male and female workers differed significantly at  $p \leq 0.05$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ , and  $p \leq 0.001$ , respectively.

Most micro-contractors were aged between 20 and 30 years (13 out of 25 overall; 9 out of 15 in Bengaluru; 4 out of 10 in Delhi), and had completed secondary education, that is, Grade 10 (14 out of 25 overall; 9 out of 15 in Bengaluru; 5 out of 10 in Delhi; Table 2). They came from northern and eastern states and had been in the construction work for more than five years (19 out of 25 overall; 10 out of 15 in Bengaluru; 9 out of 10 in Delhi). Most had employed more than 10 workers (15 out of 25 overall; 8 out of 15 in Bengaluru; 7 out of 10 in Delhi).

Table 2: Background characteristics of micro-contractors, in-depth interviews

Characteristics	Overall (Number)	Bengaluru (Number)	Delhi (Number)
<b>Age</b>			
20-30	13	9	4
31-40	4	2	2
41-40	5	2	3
Above 50	3	2	1
<b>Education</b>			
No education	1	0	1
1-7	6	3	3
8-9	4	3	1
10-11	7	6	1
12 or more	7	3	4
<b>Native place</b>			
Bihar	6	2	2
Uttar Pradesh	4	3	1
Orissa	3	3	1
Madhya Pradesh/Chhattisgarh	3	0	3
West Bengal	3	2	1
Jharkhand	2	2	0
Rajasthan	2	1	2
Assam	2	2	0
<b>Number of workers employed</b>			
0-4 workers	1	1	0
5-10 workers	9	6	3
11-15 workers	4	2	2
More than 16 workers	11	6	5
<b>Number of years in construction work</b>			
0-4 years	6	5	1
5-10 years	10	5	5
11-15 years	6	2	2
More than 15 years	3	3	2
<b>Number of micro-contractors</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>

## Chapter 2: Construction labour supply chain

This chapter describes the labour supply chain in construction sites in major cities, as described by construction workers and micro-contractors. It begins with a discussion of workers' perceptions about people involved in recruiting labourers to work in construction sites in major cities<sup>10</sup> and their perceptions on the profile of such people. It then describes channels or modes that workers usually rely on to find a job in construction sites in major cities and recruitment strategies typically used by micro-contractors. The chapter then describes relationships between workers and micro-contractors and relationships between micro-contractors, other contractors, and construction firms/companies.

Findings highlight that contractors were typically involved in procuring and supplying labourers, as reported by both workers and micro-contractors. Workers and micro-contractors reported that people in the village typically reach out to personal contacts to get work, and these personal contacts include contractors based in major cities, whom workers or their acquaintances may know, and workers who are working or had worked previously in these sites. Micro-contractors reported that they typically procure workers through social networks in their village, followed by networks of other workers who were satisfied working under them, which practice was confirmed by workers as well. Workers and micro-contractors were closely related socially and geographically. The relationship between micro-contractors and other contractors/construction firms/companies was informal for the most part.

Findings show that there were differences in the perceptions of workers in Bengaluru and Delhi about people usually involved in procuring and supplying labourers and the profile of such people. More workers in Bengaluru than Delhi mentioned contractors as the people who recruit labour, while more workers in Delhi than Bengaluru mentioned representatives of contractors and family members/acquaintances as the people who recruit labour. Although most workers got work in the current construction site in both Bengaluru and Delhi with the help of a contractor, more workers in Bengaluru than Delhi reported that the contractor was from their own village or neighbouring villages. While it is difficult to discern the reasons underlying differences in workers' perceptions and experiences from data from the current study, we speculate that these differences could be because of differences in distance between workers' place of origin and the construction sites. Differences in the characteristics of workers and micro-contractors in Bengaluru and Delhi (for example, workers in Bengaluru were better educated than workers in Delhi, and more micro-contractors in Bengaluru than in Delhi entered construction sector as skilled workers or supervisors under other contractors) or differences in labour-contracting processes in these cities (for example, more micro-contractors in Bengaluru than in Delhi typically worked for construction firms than other contractors) may also explain the differences in perceptions and experiences of workers in Bengaluru and Delhi.

Findings also show differences in the perceptions of male and female workers about people usually involved in procuring and supplying labourers as well as on the profile of such people. More male workers than female workers reported contractors as the people who recruit workers. Male workers more than female workers perceived that people in their village typically reach out to workers who are working or had worked previously in construction sites in major cities and to contractors based in major cities known to workers or their acquaintances to get work in these sites. It is possible that these gender differences could be because of differences in the type of work that male and female workers perform in the industry and the differences in the social networks of male and female workers.

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<sup>10</sup> We asked workers about people involved in recruiting workers to work in construction sites in cities like Delhi and Bengaluru to corroborate workers' experience in these cities.

## 2.1 Workers' perceptions about people involved in recruiting labourers

The workers reported that contractors were typically involved in procuring and supplying labourers to work in construction sites in major cities;<sup>11</sup> 68 percent of workers mentioned contractors as the people who recruit (Table 3). Workers also mentioned that representatives of contractors and family members/acquaintances were involved in procuring and supplying labourers (20% and 14%, respectively). Just two percent of workers mentioned that construction companies were involved in recruiting workers.

A greater proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi mentioned contractors, but a smaller proportion reported representatives of contractors and family members/acquaintances as the people who recruit (74% vs 61% reported contractors; 16% vs 23% reported representatives of contractors, and 11% vs 17% reported family members/acquaintances). Likewise, a larger proportion of male workers than female workers reported contractors (72% vs 58%), but a smaller proportion mentioned representatives of contractors as the people who recruit (9% vs 45%).

Sixty-six percent of workers noted that contractors are typically males. Seventy-two percent of workers reported that contractors typically have at least 5–10 years of experience in the construction industry, and 21 percent reported that contractors are those who know how to manage workers. They also mentioned that contractors typically operate from their home or village (70%) or from construction sites (43%). A larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi mentioned that contractors operate from their home or village (81% vs 59%) and labour *chowks*<sup>12</sup> (13% vs 3%), but a smaller proportion reported that contractors operate over phone (7% vs 22%) and from their office (2% vs 17%). A larger proportion of male workers than female workers reported that contractors operate from construction sites (54% vs 17%), but a smaller proportion mentioned that contractors recruit workers over phone (8% vs 29%).

Table 3: Workers' perceptions about people typically involved in recruiting labourers to work in construction sites in major cities, worker survey

Workers' perceptions	Overall (%)	Bengaluru (%)	Delhi (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)
<b>People involved in recruiting labourers to work in construction sites in major cities#</b>					
Contractors	67.7	74.1	61.2	71.9	58.0
Family members/acquaintances	14.0	10.8	17.2	13.8	14.8
Representative of contractors	19.5	15.8	23.2	8.9	44.9
Construction company	1.7	0.8	2.5	2.3	0.0
<b>Workers' perceptions about the profile of contractors who recruit labourers</b>					
<b>Sex@</b>					
Male	65.7	65.0	66.3	59.8	79.8
Female	1.3	1.7	0.8	1.2	1.4
Did not respond	33.1	33.3	32.9	39.0	18.8
<b>Experience#,@</b>					
At least 5–10 years in construction work	72.2	71.0	73.3	74.2	66.5
Experience in managing labourers	20.9	22.8	18.9	20.9	20.3
No response/don't know	7.8	6.6	8.9	6.0	12.0

<sup>11</sup> We note that workers and micro-contractors who participated in the study had spoken about 'contractors' in general and did not use terms such as 'labour contractors' or 'micro-contractors'.

<sup>12</sup> A place in a market where workers assemble daily to offer their services to those who potentially requires labour

<b>Workers' perceptions</b>	<b>Overall (%)</b>	<b>Bengaluru (%)</b>	<b>Delhi (%)</b>	<b>Males (%)</b>	<b>Females (%)</b>
<b>Place of operation for recruiting labourers#,@</b>					
Home/village	69.7	80.9	58.6	71.8	65.2
Construction sites	43.3	40.0	46.6	53.8	17.3
No physical location but over phone	14.1	6.6	21.5	7.8	28.9
Office place (typically big contractors)	9.4	1.6	17.2	10.7	5.7
Labour <i>chowks</i>	8.4	13.3	3.4	5.9	14.4
<b>Roles#,@</b>					
Supervise labourers' work	32.2	30.0	34.4	33.5	29.6
Mediate between labourers and construction firms/companies	18.3	14.1	22.4	15.7	23.7
Take care of labourers at worksites (accommodation, other needs)	29.6	34.1	24.9	32.1	22.8
Work along with workers	16.4	20.8	12.0	19.1	8.9
Do not know	7.2	4.1	10.3	4.2	14.5
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>69</b>

Note: # Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple responses. @ These categories were generated from responses to open-ended questions.

Workers reported that, besides supplying labourers to construction firms/companies, contractors perform many other tasks such as supervising labourers' work (32%), taking care of labourers' accommodation and other needs (30%), mediating between labourers and construction firms and companies (18%), and working along with workers whom they recruit (16%). More workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported that contractors take care of labourers' accommodation and other needs (34% vs 25%) and work along with workers whom they recruit (21% vs 12%), but fewer reported that contractors mediate between workers and construction firms/companies (14% vs 22%). A larger proportion of male workers than female workers reported that contractors take care of labourers' accommodation and other needs (32% vs 23%), and work along with workers whom they recruit (19% vs 9%).

## 2.2 Recruitment strategies

We asked construction workers about channels that workers typically use to secure work in construction sites in major cities. We also asked micro-contractors about how they and other contractors typically recruit workers and about channels workers typically approach for work in construction sites in major cities.

### 2.2.1 Workers' and micro-contractors' perceptions about sources and strategies used by workers to get work in construction sites in major cities

Workers in the survey reported that people in their village typically reach out to personal contacts to get work in construction sites in major cities (Table 4). These personal contacts include contractors based in major cities known to workers or their acquaintances (60%) and workers who are working or had worked previously in such construction sites (49%). A smaller proportion reported that people in their village approach family members or friends (20%), local contractors, that is, those who are based in workers' own village or neighbouring villages (13%), and company staff (1%).

A larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported that people in their village typically reach out to contractors based in major cities known to workers or their acquaintances to get work in construction sites (67% vs 53%). On the contrary, a smaller proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi mentioned that people contact workers who are working or had worked

previously in construction sites in major cities (41% vs 58%), local contractors (7% vs 19%), and family members or friends (14% vs 27%).

A larger proportion of male workers than female workers reported that people in their village typically reach out to workers who are working or had worked previously in construction sites in major cities (57% vs 30%) and contractors based in major cities known to workers or their acquaintances to get work (69% vs 39%). On the contrary, a smaller proportion of male workers than female workers mentioned that people contact family members or friends (14% vs 35%).

Table 4: Workers' perceptions about people whom workers typically approach for getting work in construction sites in major cities, worker survey

Workers' perceptions about people whom workers typically approach <sup>#,®</sup>	Overall (%)	Bengaluru (%)	Delhi (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)
Contractors in cities whom workers/their acquaintances may know	60.0	66.6	53.4	68.8	39.1
Current workers/workers who had worked previously in construction sites in cities	49.3	40.8	57.7	57.1	30.4
Local contractors at origin	12.8	6.6	18.9	11.9	14.4
Family members/friends	20.4	14.1	26.7	14.3	34.8
Company staff	1.3	0.8	1.7	1.1	1.4
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>69</b>

Note: # Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple responses. ® These categories were generated from responses to open-ended questions.

When probed about channels that workers use for getting work in construction sites in major cities, micro-contractors in both cities reported that workers typically approach them directly or through their acquaintances. They reported that workers enquire through other workers, and look for contractors whose reputation is good, who pay more, who do not behave badly, and who do not withhold payment or delay payment.

*They take my number from others. They call me and ask whether any work is there for them to do. [Micro-contractor\_SI#2, typically works for construction firm, Bengaluru]*

*If a guy works here with me, others will ask him where he works and if the payment and everything is right, he will tell them, and they will automatically connect with me. So, that is how it works. [Micro-contractor\_SI#5, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]*

*I am working with 10 people in the village here. So, the people in the village know that I have taken them to work. So, if they need work, they will call me. If I need, I will call them. [Micro-contractor\_SI#23, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]*

## 2.2.2 Sources and strategies used by micro-contractors to recruit workers

Interviews with micro-contractors in both cities show that micro-contractors typically procure workers through social networks in their village (17 out of 25 micro-contractors), followed by network of other workers who were satisfied working under them (5 micro-contractors). Micro-contractors elaborated that workers who received payment on time and other support, for example, food, would inform others in their network about their good experience and bring other workers to them. A few micro-contractors reported that contractors also approach family and kin, labour *chowks*, and networks of other contractors for procuring workers (2 each). They mentioned that micro-contractors approach other contractors in an emergency only when they are under pressure from their contractors to complete the work on an urgent basis.

*If a boy from my village had worked under me, and when he goes to the village, he would tell others that he had worked for me, that I used to give him money for food and I had paid his wages on time. He would tell that he worked under me for 1–2 years and he would convince others to come with him for work. There are lot of unemployed workers in Bihar, and they seek work where they will get good amount of money. They will find out which contractor is good, and which one will give two rupees more. When it is urgent, we will approach other contractors.* [Micro-contractor\_SI#1, typically works for construction firm, Delhi]

*I call them from my place. My workers call their relatives too if there is work.* [Micro-contractor\_SI#3, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

Micro-contractors listed a number of reasons for relying on social networks within their village or networks of their workers. They mentioned that they could trust the workers who were from their own village. Although not stated explicitly, it appeared that the idea of trust comes with some level of control, because workers cannot run away, they can be tracked down easily and punished, and there can be reputational risk for the workers' families as the contractors are also from their villages/communities. Another reason was that they could communicate easily as they all spoke the same language. They also mentioned that workers sourced from their or their workers' networks worked more and their quality of work was better, compared with workers procured from labour *chowks*. They elaborated that they assessed the quality of the workers by observing their work for a few days and that workers from their known network completed the work faster and without flaws. They mentioned further that workers who came from sources other than their/their workers' social networks demanded payment immediately. They noted that it is easy to recruit workers from their villages because of high unemployment in their villages and that potential workers are ready to go to construction sites where they can earn more.

*If they are skilled, we will know it within a few days, we test them to see what they know. We make them work for a few days and then, we will know how they work. The labourers contact us and we contact them too. I don't take workers from labour chowks because they don't work much, and they are not able to maintain quality. Workers from our native place maintain the quality. If we don't know them, how we will trust them? That is the biggest thing.* [Micro-contractor\_SI#5, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

*They speak our language, so it is good.* [Micro-contractor\_SI#19, typically works for other contractors, Bengaluru]

*The issue is that new ones want cash immediately, but the company doesn't pay like that.* [Micro-contractor\_SI#21, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

*No one trusts labourers from other places. If I give you Rs 20,000 and you run away, where I will find you? There are agents who promise you workers and take advances from you and then will switch off their phone. A lot of scams happen. If you run after them, your work will go to another contractor.* [Micro-contractor\_SI#23, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

A few micro-contractors spoke about brokers who supply workers from labour-supplying states.

*I hire labourers from my village, we know each other. If there is need for more workers, I have contacts of labourers who are just 15–20 kms away from my neighbourhood. There is a man who provides workers and he will take Rs 450 from me and he will give Rs 350–400 to workers. It goes like this.* [Micro-contractor\_SI#9, typically works for construction firms, Bengaluru]



*I have one person back home and I contact him for labourers and he always gets them. There is trust and I give him money. [Micro-contractor\_SI#14, typically works for both construction firms and other contractors, Bengaluru]*

Some others mentioned that labour recruitment practices differ from state to state and alluded to deceptive practices by contractors.

*There are contractors who bring labourers from Malda in West Bengal. They 'buy' them by paying some advances and bring them here. [Micro-contractor\_SI#3, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]*

*They hire from West Bengal where they can get cheap labour and their contract is for 50 days and they make them work 12 hours a day for 50 days, and they give a fixed amount to them. They won't get paid according to the number of days they work. They fix their pay for 3 months and they will give Rs 20,000 for three months and will provide food to them. It is not like that in Bihar; they will provide workers money and workers have to buy their own food. [Micro-contractor\_SI#9, typically works for construction firms, Bengaluru]*

*There are many contractors who bring labour from station and make them work for 10 days and then kick them out even without paying. [Micro-contractor\_SI#10, typically works for construction firms, Bengaluru]*

Findings from the worker survey corroborated the narratives of micro-contractors. When probed about the strategies used by contractors, 75 percent of workers reported that contractors typically reach out to their family and social networks to recruit workers, send advances and/or tickets for them to travel to worksites, give them training related to work, and verify their documents (not shown in Figure or Table).

### 2.3 Relationship between workers and micro-contractors

Eighty-one percent of all workers in the survey got work in the current construction site in Bengaluru and Delhi with the help of a contractor (78% in Bengaluru and 84% in Delhi, and 81% of male workers and 83% of female workers, not shown in Table). We probed workers who got work with the help of a contractor about their relationship with the contractor. Such workers reported that the contractor under whom they were working in the current worksite was from their own village (29%), neighbouring villages (27%), or an outsider<sup>13</sup> (44%; Table 5). A larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported that the contractor was from their own village or neighbouring villages (68% vs 45%). Some 44 percent reported that they had not previously worked with the contractor, while 33 percent of workers had previously worked with the contractor for two or more years in another worksite. More workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported that they had not previously worked with the contractor (54% vs 34%). The majority of workers reported that they had been working with the contractor in the current worksite for less than a year (67%), with little difference between workers in Bengaluru and Delhi.<sup>14</sup> A smaller proportion of male workers than female workers reported that they had been working with the contractor in the current worksite for less than a year (62% vs 79%).

Almost half of the workers reported that contractors usually give priority to workers who had worked with them before, who were from their village, and belonged to their religion (not shown in Table or Figure).

Table 5: Relationship between workers and micro-contractors, worker survey

Relationship between workers and micro-contractors	Overall (%)	Bengaluru (%)	Delhi (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
<b>Place of residence of contractor</b>			**		
Own village	29.2	37.2	21.4	30.4	26.3
Neighbouring villages	27.1	30.9	23.5	29.6	21.1
Outsider	43.7	31.9	55.1	40.0	52.6
<b>Prior work experience with the contractor</b>			**		
First time	43.7	54.3	33.7	38.5	56.1
<12 months	11.5	9.6	13.3	11.1	12.3
12-23 months	11.5	13.8	9.2	14.1	5.3
24 months or more	33.3	22.3	43.9	36.3	26.3
<b>Duration of work with the contractor at the current site</b>					*
<12 months	66.7	67.0	66.3	61.5	79.0
12-23 months	16.2	14.9	17.4	17.0	14.0
24 months or more	17.2	18.1	16.3	21.5	7.0
<b>Number of respondents who got work with the help of a contractor</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>57</b>

Note: \* and \*\* indicates that there were statistically significant differences between workers in Bengaluru and Delhi or between male and female workers at  $p \leq 0.05$  and  $p \leq 0.01$ , respectively.

Workers reported that taking commission for recruiting is common (Table 6). When we probed workers whether contractors usually take commission from workers, 57 percent of workers reported that contractors do take commission by giving less than due salary or by deducting the commission from their wages. Some others reported that contractors take commission from other contractors (32%) or make workers work overtime to finish the work before time (8%). While there were no differences in the perceptions of workers in Bengaluru and Delhi, a larger proportion of male workers than female workers perceived that contractors take commission by giving less than due salary to workers or by deducting the commission from their wages (62% vs 45%).

Table 6: Workers' perceptions about contractors' practices of taking commission for recruiting workers, worker survey

Workers' perceptions <sup>#,®</sup>	Overall (%)	Bengaluru (%)	Delhi (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Give less salary/ make deductions from workers' salary	56.8	57.5	56.0	62.0	44.7
Take commission from other contractors	32.2	34.6	29.4	30.6	35.4
Make workers work overtime to finish the work before time	8.3	6.2	10.6	8.9	6.6
Do not know	17.9	16.6	19.1	10.4	35.6
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>69</b>

Note: # Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple responses. ® These categories were generated from responses to open-ended questions.

## 2.4 Relationship between micro-contractors and other contractors and construction firms/companies

We probed micro-contractors about their progression into micro-contracting, their relationship with other contractors and construction companies, including the typical duration and monetary value

of the contract that they get, terms under which they typically get contracts, regularity in getting contracts, the kind of support they get, and the challenges they faced.

Most micro-contractors began working as manual labourers in the construction sector (13 out of 25 micro-contractors; 6 out of 15 in Bengaluru; and 7 out of 10 in Delhi), while a few others started as skilled labourers (7 overall; 5 in Bengaluru and 2 in Delhi), or as supervisors under other contractors (4 overall; 3 in Bengaluru and 1 in Delhi). Only one micro-contractor directly entered into micro-contracting. Some mentioned that they got motivated into becoming a contractor after seeing that their contractor was making a good profit (3). Some others mentioned that they had worked as a default contractor (that is, doing all the work of a contractor under some contractors), but were not paid for their work and, therefore, decided to start their own contracting work (3). Some were encouraged by co-workers (2), and some others mentioned that they got acquainted with site supervisors and engineers and started getting work from them over time (4). Some were helped by family members who were already into contracting (2), and some others reported that they got acquainted with workers and gained confidence over time and thus got into contracting (5).

*My sister's husband is a contractor in Maharashtra, and he told me once that if I know workers, take them for work there. That's how I got into this line of work. [Micro-contractor, SI#1, typically works for construction firm, Delhi]*

*Most of us start as helpers. Then, we get into craftsmanship, we keep interacting with workers, and we get into contracting with experience over time. [Micro-contractor, SI#5, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]*

*I started working under a contractor. He would not come to the site, there were 25–30 people, and I would manage all of them. But he did not give me my salary properly. I did all the work, so I left him after two years. The engineer and the general manager started calling me. When I came back, I brought men with me and directly started working as a contractor. [Micro-contractor, SI#6, typically works for construction firm, Delhi]*

*The contractor for whom I used to work always had bills of 100,000 rupees or more. So, I decided to start on my own seeing that. [Micro-contractor, SI#15, typically works for other contractors, Bengaluru]*

*What happens is when you work together, there are people around you, like friends and neighbours. They asked me why not we make our group and start working separately. That's how I started working as a contractor. [Micro-contractor, SI#14, typically works for both construction firms and other contractors, Bengaluru]*

While fewer than half of the micro-contractors reported that they helped other micro-contractors in procuring workers (10 out of 25 overall; 5 out of 15 in Bengaluru; 5 out of 10 in Delhi), others said that they did not do so (14 out of 25 overall; 9 out of 15 in Bengaluru; 5 out of 10 in Delhi). Those who mentioned that they supported other micro-contractors noted that they can get a commission from the micro-contractor to whom they supply workers. They also mentioned that supporting each other can help their workers get employment during lean periods. Those who reported that they did not support other micro-contractors mentioned that there is no reciprocal support between contractors, as they do not have enough workers to manage even their own work, and they fear losing workers because there is competition among micro-contractors.

*We sometimes do. If our labourers can't come, we ask for help. They will get commission. [Micro-contractor\_SI#3, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]*

*Because they don't help us, we won't help them. I won't break your labourers and you won't break mine. That is how I work. [Micro-contractor\_SI#4, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]*

*It is because I have also taken work and if I give my labourers to someone else, I will have fewer men and my work will get hampered. [Micro-contractor\_SI#10, typically works for construction firms, Bengaluru]*

Of the 25 micro-contractors, 13 reported that they worked typically for other contractors, 11 reported that they worked typically for construction firms/companies, and one reported that he worked for both construction firms/companies and other contractors. More micro-contractors in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported that they worked typically for construction firms/companies (9 out of 15 in Bengaluru and 2 out of 10 in Delhi). Narratives of micro-contractors suggest that the relationship between micro-contractors and other contractors and construction firms/companies was informal for the most part, regardless of whether they worked for other contractors or construction firms/companies—there was no fixed duration or monetary value for the work given to them, there were no specific terms under which they received work orders, and there were no written contracts. Most contractors reported that they received regular work from other contractors/companies.

*There is no fixed duration, we must work till the time the work completes. The amount is also not fixed. There are no terms. I have worked here for eight years and they all know me and they know that I can work and I can get the work done. When we see that the work is about to finish, we start looking for another project. [Micro-contractor\_SI#10, typically works for construction firms, Bengaluru]*

*I don't know much about the terms under which the company gives contract as I am new. I was to be given work letter, but I have not got it as yet. [Micro-contractor\_SI#11, typically works for construction firm, Bengaluru]*

*There is no signed contract, but it is that we have to work with safety. We should not fight with anyone at the site and if someone has drinking habit, he should not be allowed to do so. If someone is drunk, but he should be sent back that day, all this must be seen. [Micro-contractor\_SI#8, typically works for construction firm, Bengaluru]*

*We don't get any contract. The builder files a tender and when his site is finalised, he calls us. They give food expenses and transportation, and we go there. I just bring the labour and it depends. We work as long as we are there and there is no contract. The engineer, GM tells us that this is what needs to be done and we do it. There are no terms. They show us the work and we do it. There is no contract. Whatever work we do, we are paid accordingly. They give work regularly. [Micro-contractor\_SI#6, typically works for construction firm, Delhi]*

*We bring labour for two months, then pay them and send them back. Then we bring a fresh set of labour. They [contractors] pay based on labour we bring. We get regular work. Once we finish one work, we get another. [Micro-contractor\_SI#24, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]*

*We just have to work. The big contractors get fixed duration and amount for their work, but we don't. We get it on the basis of labour. We do get work regularly. We keep in touch with the contractors. [Micro-contractor\_SI#22, typically works for other contractors]*

Twenty micro-contractors reported that they typically approach bigger contractors for work, and the remaining contractors reported that others recommend them or that the bigger contractors approach them. Most micro-contractors reported that they do not pay any commission to other

contractors/firms that give them work or share their profit with them, although a few reported such practices.

*Why will we pay commission?* [Micro-contractor\_SI#21, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

*If you take work from company, you have to give some commission. Mostly 10 percent of the contract value is usually cut. They will find some flaws and that happens.* [Micro-contractor\_SI#5, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

*The architect takes five percent commission from us. But there are few architects who don't take and they only want good work.* [Micro-contractor\_SI#25]

Micro-contractors mentioned that they receive support from other contractors/firms for completing their work (Table 7). The support received include equipment (20 micro-contractors), accommodation and other amenities (19), financial advances (13), social protection such as insurance (7), and training (2). There were hardly any differences in the type of support received by micro-contractors in Bengaluru and Delhi, except with regard to social protection benefits and training, which a greater number of micro-contractors in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported. The differences in social protection benefits and training could be because a larger number of micro-contractors typically worked for construction firms in Bengaluru than in Delhi.

Table 7: Support received by micro-contractors from other contractors/firms, micro-contractor interview

Type of support	Overall (Number)	Bengaluru (Number)	Delhi (Number)
Equipment	20	12	8
Accommodation	19	11	8
Financial assistance	13	8	5
Social protection (e.g., insurance)	7	5	2
Training	2	2	0
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>

Note: # Percentages add to more than 100 because of multiple responses. ® These categories were generated from responses to open-ended questions.

The major challenge that micro-contractors faced was delayed payments from other contractors/firms, subsequent delays in paying their workers, and lack of working capital to tide over delayed payments or to meet emergencies. They spoke about resorting to strikes, borrowing from others, and informing workers in advance about chances of payment delays.

*The challenge is that if someone has an emergency, the company doesn't pay. So, we have to manage it on our own.* [Micro-contractor\_SI#3, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

*The biggest issue is related to payment on time, and secondly, we don't get work regularly. The third thing is if we don't get money on time, we can't further give it to the workers on time.* [Micro-contractor\_SI#5, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

## Chapter 3: Vulnerabilities faced by workers

This chapter, drawing on interviews with workers, presents findings on vulnerabilities faced by migrant workers during their recruitment and employment. The chapter also highlights the differences in workers' experiences in the first migration location and the current migration location among those who made more than one migratory movement for work.

Findings show that almost all migrant workers knew about the type of work and wages in the current worksite in Bengaluru and Delhi before they moved here. None of the workers reported that they had paid any money for securing work in the current worksite. Almost no one had received a written contract. Migrant workers' experiences at work were mixed. On a positive note, almost all workers were given the work promised and wages agreed upon, and their wages were never withheld. Most received wages on time always. They had access to basic amenities such as drinking water and toilet facilities at the worksite and free accommodation with basic amenities. They were given safety equipment. However, very few were given one weekly rest day, paid or unpaid. Most workers were paid below the legal minimum. A noticeable minority of workers perceived that they were given less wages than others on grounds of age, religion, caste, sex, state of origin, language, or temporary recruitment in the current worksite and experienced verbal abuse perpetrated by co-workers or supervisor/contractor in the current worksite. Findings also show that workers in Delhi faced more difficulties than workers in Bengaluru as did female workers compared with male workers. Moreover, workers faced more difficulties during their first migration than during their later migration.

### 3.1 Recruitment-related experiences

We asked workers about how they came to know about the work opportunity and how they got work in the current worksite in Bengaluru and Delhi (99.6%). Almost all the workers reported that they got this information before they moved here (Table 8). Contractors were the most frequently cited source of information about work opportunity in the current worksite, with 62 percent of workers reporting them in the interview.<sup>15</sup> Other important sources of information about the work opportunity in the current worksite included relatives (29%), acquaintances (27%), and immediate family members (4–12%).

A larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported contractors as the source of information about work opportunity in the current worksite (67% vs 58%), but a smaller proportion of workers reported relatives (23% vs 36%) and immediate family members (1–6% vs 7–18%). Similarly, a larger proportion of male workers than female workers reported contractors (67% vs 52%), but more female workers than male workers reported their spouse (40% vs none), as their source of information about work opportunity in the current worksite.

Table 8: Awareness of and sources of information about work opportunity in the current worksite in Bengaluru and Delhi, worker survey

Sources for information about work opportunity in the current worksite	Overall (%)	Bengaluru (%)	Delhi (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Knew about the work opportunity before migrating	99.6	100.0	99.1	100.0	98.5
<b>Number of respondents who were migrants</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Sources for information about work opportunity</b>					
Labour contractors	62.3	66.7	57.8	66.5	52.2*
Acquaintances	26.5	30.0	22.8	25.7	28.4
Relatives	29.2	22.5	36.2*	28.7	30.4
Spouse/partner	11.5	5.8	17.5**	0.0	40.3***
Parents	3.8	0.8	7.0*	3.6	4.5

Sources for information about work opportunity in the current worksite	Overall (%)	Bengaluru (%)	Delhi (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Employer	3.4	1.7	5.3	4.8	0.0
Co-workers from other locations	1.3	0.8	1.8	1.2	1.5
Employment agency	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Content of information</b>					
Kind of work	96.2	98.3	94.0	97.6	92.8
Wages	95.8	97.5	94.0	97.6	91.3*
Working conditions	55.9	49.2	62.9*	58.1	50.7
<b>Number of respondents who were aware of work opportunity before migrating</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>114</b>

Note: \* and \*\* indicate that there was statistically significant difference between workers in Bengaluru and Delhi or between male and female workers at  $p=0.05$  and  $p\leq 0.01$ , respectively.

While almost everyone knew about the type of work and wages (96%), fewer knew about working conditions (56%) before migrating to the current worksite. More workers in Delhi than in Bengaluru reported that they knew about working conditions at the current worksite before migrating here (63% vs 49%). Differences in the awareness of terms of work did not differ by sex of the workers for the most part. However, fewer female workers than male workers reported that they knew about wages before migrating to the current worksite (91% vs 98%). Micro-contractors in both cities reported that they typically informed workers about type of work (14 micro-contractors), working hours (12), wages (11), and safety measures (10) when they hired workers. Few mentioned that they told workers about overtime (6) and wage deductions (4).

*We tell them about the rate, hours, and the work. If they are satisfied, they will say yes to the work, else they refuse [Micro-contractor\_SI#21, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]*

*We tell them about wages, work hours, and we check their personal documents such as Aadhar card [identity card]. [Micro-contractor\_SI#24, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]*

A comparison of channels used for finding work in the first migration location and current location among those who made more than one migratory movement for work indicates that these channels differed somewhat for the first and current locations (Table 9). A lower proportion of migrant workers came to know beforehand about the work opportunity in their first migration location than in their current location (97% vs 100%). A higher proportion reported acquaintances and relatives as their source of information about work opportunity in the worksite at the first location than at their current location (41% vs 25% for acquaintances and 36% vs 25% for relatives). The proportion who reported their source as contractors was lower in the worksite at the first location than at their current location (40% vs 65%), and no one reported a construction company as the source in the first location, while five percent reported so in the current location (0% vs 5%). More migrants reported awareness of kind of work (93% vs 98%), wages (93% vs 98%), and working conditions (44% vs 61%) before starting the work in the first location than in the current location.

Table 9: Channels through which workers found work in the worksite, first migrant location and current migrant location, worker survey

Indicators	First location (%)	Current location (%)
Knew about the job opportunity in the worksite before migrating*	96.8	100.0
<b>Sources of knowledge about work opportunity</b>		
Acquaintances***	40.5	24.8
Labour contractors***	39.9	65.4
Relatives*	35.9	24.8

Indicators	First location (%)	Current location (%)
Spouse/partner	12.4	15.7
Parents	3.3	1.3
Company**	0.0	5.2
Co-workers from other locations	0.0	1.3
<b>Awareness of terms of work before started working</b>		
Kind of work*	92.5	97.5
Wages*	92.5	97.5
Working conditions***	44.0	61.0
None*	5.0	1.3
<b>Number of respondents who reported more than one migratory movement for work</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>158</b>

Note: \*, \*\*, and \*\*\* indicate that migrant workers' sources of knowledge and awareness of terms of work differed significantly at first migrant and the current migrant locations among those who made more than one migratory movement at  $p \leq 0.05$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ , and  $p \leq 0.001$ .

None of the workers reported that they had paid any money for securing work in the current worksite, nor had they promised to pay (Table 10). We note that this contrasts with what workers reported in general about contractors' practices, such as taking commission by giving less than due salary, or by deducting the commission from their wages, or making workers do overtime to finish the work before time (see Table 6). It is possible that workers might have been reluctant to acknowledge payment of any money to contractors for fear of retribution or embarrassment.

Table 10: Monetary transactions between workers and contractors prior to joining the work in the current worksite, worker survey

Monetary transactions	Overall (%)	Bengaluru (%)	Delhi (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Paid money, that is, recruitment fee, to the person who gave work	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Promised to pay money, that is, recruitment fee, to the person who gave work	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Receipt of advances before starting the work</b>					
Received advance payment in cash or kind from the contractor before starting work	34.4	42.6	26.6*	34.1	35.1
Cash	32.3	41.5	23.5**	33.3	29.8
Kind	2.1	1.1	3.1	0.8	5.3
Average cash received (median in Rs)	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	3,000*
<b>Number of respondents who found work with the help of a contractor</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Repayment of advances that were received before starting work</b>					
Repaid	71.2	75.0	65.4	71.7	70.0
Still paying	22.7	20.0	26.9	21.7	25
No need to repay	6.1	5.0	7.6	6.5	5.0
<b>Number of respondents who received cash or advances in kind before starting the work</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Mode of repayment</b>					
Deductions from wages	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	95.8
Overtime work	16.1	13.2	20.8	20.9	5.3
Savings	3.2	2.6	4.0	4.7	0.0
<b>Number of respondents who repaid/still repaying advances</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>19</b>

Note: \* and \*\* indicate that there was statistically significant difference between workers in Bengaluru and Delhi at  $p = 0.05$  and  $p \leq 0.01$ , respectively.



Thirty-four percent of workers who found work with the help of a contractor reported that they had received advance payment in cash or kind from the contractor before starting work, particularly cash, in the current worksite. A larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported having received advance payment (43% vs 27%), particularly cash (42% vs 24%). Workers received on average Rs 5,000 in both cities. Female workers received significantly less than male workers (Rs 3,000 vs Rs 5,000). Those who received cash advances reported that advance payments were made to cover travel expenses (65%), expenses of workers' family at origin (56%), and workers' initial expenses at the destination (25%; not shown in Figure or Table). Of those who received advances in cash or kind, 71 percent reported that they had repaid the advance, while 23 percent reported that they were still paying at the time of the interview. They reported that repayment was made through wage deductions and working overtime.

A comparison of monetary transactions other than wages between workers and contractors prior to joining the worksite at the first migration location and current location among those who made more than one migratory movement for work indicates that workers had received advances prior to joining the work more in the current location than in the first location (41% vs 30%; Table 11). It is possible that this difference could be because of trust built up over time, differences in the distance between native place and first and current migrant locations, or emergency support during COVID-19 times.

Table 11: Monetary transactions between workers and contractors prior to joining the work, first migrant location and current migrant location, worker survey

Indicators	First location (%)	Current location (%)
Paid money, that is, recruitment fee, to the person who gave work	0.0	0.0
Promised to pay money, that is, recruitment fee, to the person who gave work	0.0	0.0
Received advance payment in cash or kind from the person who gave work before starting work**	30.2	40.8
Amount of advances received before joining the work (median in Rs)	2,000	5,000
<b>Number of respondents who reported more than one migratory movement for work and found work with the help of contractors</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>76</b>

Note: \*\* indicates that migrant workers' reports of monetary transactions between workers and contractors differed significantly at the first migrant location and the current migrant locations among those who made more than one migratory movement at  $p \leq 0.01$

### 3.2 Experiences at work

Findings related to terms of conditions of work in the current worksite in Bengaluru and Delhi are presented in Table 12. Almost all workers reported that they received the same work as promised (99%), regardless of the city in which they worked or sex of the worker. Almost no one received a written contract (0.4%), although 96 percent of workers reported that they were told about the kind of work and wages (see Table 8). Almost all workers reported that they received promised wages (98%), regardless of the current city of work or sex of the worker. Eighty percent received their wages always on time (and 17 percent received their wages on time sometimes). A larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported that they received their wages always on time (88% vs 72%). Most workers reported that their wages were never withheld (96%). Just five percent of workers (that is, 12 workers) were given one weekly paid rest day, and three percent (that is, eight workers) were given one weekly unpaid rest day. More workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported weekly unpaid rest day (7% vs none). The average monthly earning at the current location stood at Rs 11,200, which implies that most workers were paid below the minimum wage stipulated by the government.<sup>16</sup> While the average monthly earning of workers was Rs 12,000 in Bengaluru, it was Rs 9,000 in Delhi. Male workers earned more than female workers (Rs 12,600 vs Rs 8,000). Skilled workers earned more than the unskilled workers, particularly in Delhi (Rs 12,600 vs Rs 9,000 overall; Rs 13,500 vs Rs 11,100 in Bengaluru; Rs 12,600 vs Rs 8,000 in

Delhi). However, the differences in the average monthly earning of skilled and unskilled male workers were minimal (Rs 12,600 vs Rs 12,000). Workers' experiences in the first and current locations did not differ significantly on any of these indicators (not shown in Table or Figure).

Table 12: Work experience in the current worksite in Bengaluru and Delhi, worker survey

Work experiences	Overall % or mean	Bengaluru % or mean	Delhi % or mean	Male % or mean	Female % or mean
Received same work as promised	98.7	98.3	99.1	98.2	100.0
Received written contract	0.4	0.8	0.0	0.6	0.0
Received promised wage	97.9	98.3	97.4	98.2	97.1
Received wage on time always	80.1	87.5	72.4**	79.6	81.2
Wages were never withheld	96.2	96.7	95.7	97.0	94.2
Was given one paid rest day per week	5.1	5.0	5.2	7.2	0.0
Was given one unpaid rest day per week	3.4	6.7	0.0**	4.8	0.0
Average monthly earning (median in Rs)	11,200	12,000	9,000***	12,600	8,000***
Skilled worker	12,600	13,500	12,600	12,600	NA
Unskilled worker	9,000	11,100	8,000***	12,000	8,000
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>69</b>

Note: \*\* and \*\*\* indicate that there were statistically significant differences between workers in Bengaluru and Delhi or between male and female workers at  $p \leq 0.01$  and  $p \leq 0.001$ , respectively.

Most workers reported that they were given safety equipment (for example, helmet, protective clothing, boots, gloves, welding safety glasses, and safety belts) in the current worksite (87%, Table 13). Almost all workers had access to drinking water at the worksite (95%), but somewhat fewer workers reported access to a toilet facility at the worksite (87%), and considerably fewer reported access to a childcare facility (31%).

A larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported that they were given safety equipment (94% vs 80%), that they had access to drinking water (100% vs 91%), and access to a toilet facility (93% vs 80%) at the worksite. However, a larger proportion of workers in Delhi than in Bengaluru reported access to a childcare facility (48% vs 14%). A larger proportion of male workers than female workers reported access to safety equipment (93% vs 73%), drinking water (99% vs 86%), and a toilet facility (97% vs 62%) at the current worksite. However, more female workers than male workers reported childcare facility at the worksite (48% vs 24%).

Table 13: Health and safety conditions in the current worksite in Bengaluru and Delhi, worker survey

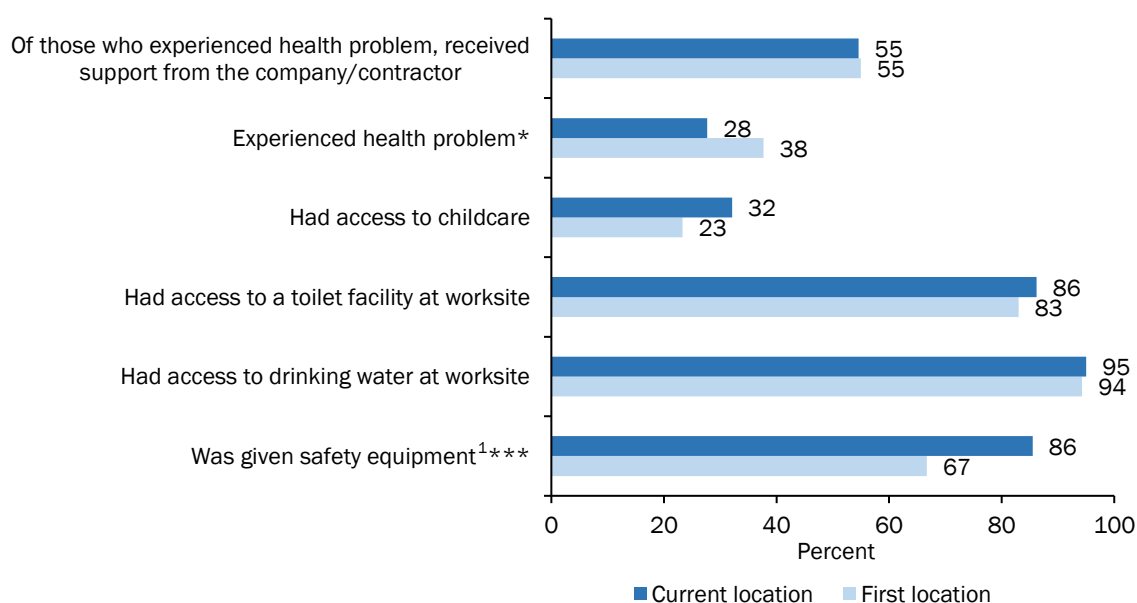
Indicators	Overall (%)	Bengaluru (%)	Delhi (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Was given safety equipment	87.3	94.2	80.2**	93.4	72.5***
Had access to drinking water at worksite	95.3	100.0	90.5***	99.4	85.5***
Had access to a toilet facility at worksite	86.9	93.3	80.2**	97.0	62.3***
Had access to childcare facility at worksite <sup>@</sup>	30.9	14.2	48.3***	24.0	47.8***
Experienced health problem	32.2	31.0	33.3	30.5	36.2
Of those who experienced health problem, received support from the company/contractor	57.9	44.4	70.0*	72.5	28.0***
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>69</b>

Note: \*, \*\*, and \*\*\* indicate that there were statistically significant differences between workers in Bengaluru and Delhi or between male and female workers at  $p \leq 0.05$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ , and  $p \leq 0.001$ , respectively. <sup>@</sup>No information was collected whether the worker personally needed childcare facility at the worksite.

Thirty-two percent of workers had experienced occupational health problems in the current location.<sup>17</sup> Of those who experienced occupational health problems, 58 percent had received support from the company/contractor.<sup>18</sup> There were no statistically significant differences in the proportion of workers who reported occupational health problems by the city in which they currently worked or sex of the worker. However, more workers in Delhi than in Bengaluru reported that they had received support from the company/contractor when faced with a health problem (70% vs 44% of those who reported occupational health problems). Similarly, more male workers than female workers reported support from the company/contractor (73% vs 28% of those who reported occupational health problems).

A comparison of health and safety conditions in the worksite at the first migration location and current migration location among those who made more than one migratory movement for work indicates that more workers were given safety equipment in the worksite at the current location than in the first location (86% vs 67%; Figure 1), perhaps because seasoned workers might have been more aware of their rights. Findings also show that a lower proportion of workers reported occupational health problems in the worksite at the current location than in the first location (28% vs 38%). Other differences were not significant.

Figure 1: Health and safety conditions in the worksite, first migrant and current migrant locations, worker survey



Note: <sup>1</sup> Indicates percentage of workers who were given three of the following safety equipment—helmet, protective clothing, boots, gloves, welding safety glasses, and safety belts; \* and \*\*\* indicate that differences between first and current locations were statistically significant at  $p < 0.5$  and  $p < 0.001$ , respectively. Based on workers who reported more than one migratory movement for work (N=159).

Three percent of workers felt that they were given more wages than others on grounds of age or temporary recruitment in the current worksite (that is, six workers overall, and three workers each in Bengaluru and Delhi; Table 14).<sup>19</sup> On the contrary, eight percent of workers (that is, 18 workers) perceived that they were given less wages than others on grounds of age, religion, caste, sex, state of origin, language, or temporary recruitment (11 workers in Bengaluru and seven workers in Delhi).<sup>20</sup> Two percent of workers (that is, four workers) perceived that they were given more work on grounds of age, sex, or state of origin in the current worksite (one worker in Bengaluru and three workers in Delhi).<sup>21</sup> One percent of workers (that is, two workers) perceived that they were given less work than others on grounds of age. Several more reported that they were not free to enter and exit the worksite without any restrictions (31%), and two percent of workers (that is, five workers) were escorted by an agent of the employer whenever they left the worksite.<sup>22</sup> More

workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported restrictions in entering and exiting the worksite (45% vs 16%). One percent of workers (that is, two workers) reported their having experienced physical violence (perpetrated by co-workers) and 16 percent of workers (that is, 38 workers) reported verbal abuse in the current worksite (perpetrated by co-workers in the case of 28 workers and supervisor/contractor in the case of 21 workers).

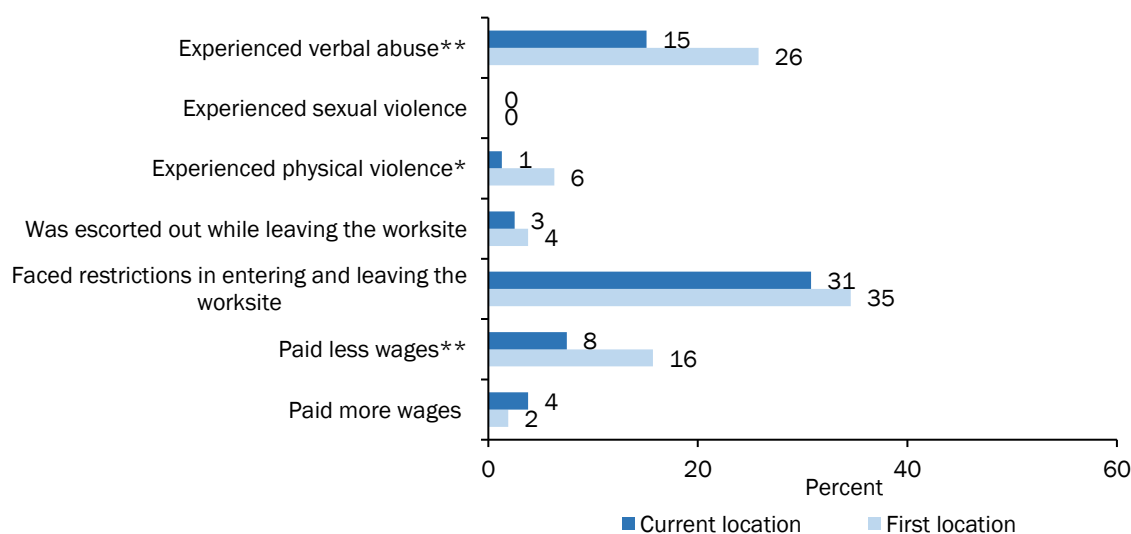
Table 14: Experience of discrimination, restrictions, and violence in the current location, worker survey

Indicators of favouritism, discrimination, restrictions, and violence	Overall (%)	Bengaluru (%)	Delhi (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Perceived that they were given more wages than others	2.5	2.5	2.6	1.8	4.3
Perceived that they were given less wages than others	7.6	9.2	6.0	6.6	10.1
Perceived that they were given more work than others	1.7	0.8	2.6	2.4	0.0
Perceived that they were given less work than others	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.2	0.0
Faced restrictions on entering and leaving the worksite	30.9	45.0	16.4***	33.5	24.6
Was escorted out while leaving the worksite	2.1	2.5	1.7	1.8	2.9
Experienced physical violence	0.9	0.8	0.9	1.2	0.0
Experienced sexual violence	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Experienced verbal abuse	16.1	16.7	15.5	19.2	8.7*
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>69</b>

Note: \*, and \*\*\* indicate that there was statistically significant difference between workers in Bengaluru and Delhi or between male and female workers at  $p \leq 0.05$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ , and  $p \leq 0.001$ , respectively.

Findings presented in Figure 2 show that a larger proportion of workers had experienced verbal abuse in the worksite at the first location than at the current location (26% vs 15%) as also physical abuse (6% vs 1%) and wage discrimination (16% vs 8%).

Figure 2: Experience of discrimination, restrictions, and violence in the worksite, first and current migrant locations, worker survey



Note: \* and \*\* indicate that differences between first and current locations were statistically significant at  $p < 0.5$  and  $p < 0.01$ , respectively. Based on workers who reported more than one migratory movement for work (N=159).

Most workers reported that they received free accommodation in the current worksite, regardless of the city in which they worked or sex of the worker (96%; Table 15). They also reported that they had basic amenities such as toilet facility, drinking water, and electricity at the accommodation given to them (96–100%). A larger proportion of workers in Delhi than in Bengaluru (100% vs 92%), and female workers than male workers (100% vs 94%) reported access to drinking water at the accommodation. A smaller proportion of workers reported free accommodation in the worksite at the first location than at the current location (87% vs 97%, not shown in Table or Figure).

Table 15: Living conditions in the current worksite in Bengaluru and Delhi, worker survey

Living conditions	Overall (%)	Bengaluru (%)	Delhi (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Free accommodation	96.3	97.5	95.7	96.4	97.1
Had toilet facility at accommodation	99.5	99.2	100.0	99.4	100.0
Had access to drinking water	95.7	91.7	100.0**	94.0	100.0*
Had access to electricity	99.6	99.2	100.0	99.4	100.0
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>68</b>

Note: \* and \*\* indicates that there were statistically significant differences between workers in Bengaluru and Delhi or between male and female workers at  $p \leq 0.05$  and  $p \leq 0.01$ , respectively.

### 3.3 Registration with the welfare board

The state governments have constituted a construction workers welfare board in their respective states to regulate employment and protect workers, and those registered with the board are entitled to a number of social security benefits.<sup>23</sup> However, awareness of the welfare board was limited among the workers—just 28 percent had heard about it (Table 16). A larger proportion of workers in Delhi than in Bengaluru were aware of the welfare board (40% vs 16%). Similarly, more male workers than female workers had heard about the board (32% vs 17%). Awareness of benefits that workers can avail from the board was also limited, particularly among workers in Bengaluru. Of those who had heard about the board, 37 percent reported that they did not know what benefits a worker can get after registering with the board. Among workers who had heard about the board, a larger proportion in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported that they did not know about the benefits (68% vs 24%). The benefits that the workers spontaneously listed included cash assistance for children’s education (26%), disability pension (26%), cash assistance to the family in case of a worker’s death (23%), cash assistance for their children’s marriage (20%), and medical assistance (15%). Of those who had heard about the board, a larger proportion of workers in Delhi than in Bengaluru spontaneously listed such benefits as education assistance for children (37% vs none), cash assistance for children’s marriage (28% vs none), and medical assistance (22% vs none).

Table 16: Awareness of and registration with construction workers welfare board among workers in the current worksite in Bengaluru and Delhi, worker survey

Indicators	Overall (%)	Bengaluru (%)	Delhi (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Aware of the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board	27.5	15.8	39.7***	31.7	17.4*
Registered with the welfare board	5.1	4.2	6.0	7.2	0.0*
Applied for registering with the welfare board	6.4	0.8	12.1***	7.2	4.3
<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Awareness of benefits that workers can get if registered with the welfare board</b>					
Cash assistance for children’s education	26.2	0.0	37.0**	18.9	7/12
Disability pension	26.2	10.5	32.6	30.2	1/12

Indicators	Overall (%)	Bengaluru (%)	Delhi (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Cash assistance to family in case of a worker's death	23.1	15.8	26.1	28.3	0.0
Help during Covid-19 lockdown	21.5	26.3	19.6	26.4	0/12
Cash assistance for children's marriage	20.0	0.0	28.3**	15.1	5/12
Medical assistance	15.4	0.0	21.7*	13.2	3/12
Maternity benefit	7.7	5.3	8.7	7.5	1/12
Pension	3.1	0.0	4.3	3.8	0/12
Advance for purchase/construction of house	3.1	0.0	4.3	1.9	1/12
Ex-gratia payment (for permanent disability)	3.1	5.3	2.2	3.8	0.0
Family pension	3.1	0.0	4.3	1.9	1/12
Cash assistance in case of miscarriage	1.5	5.3	0.0	1.9	0/12
Loan for the purchase of work tool	1.5	0.0	2.2	1.9	0.0
Funeral assistance	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0/12
Do not know about the benefits	36.9	68.4	23.9***	37.7	33.3
<b>Number of respondents aware of the welfare board</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>12</b>

Note: \*, \*\*, and \*\*\* indicate that there were statistically significant differences between workers in Bengaluru and Delhi or between male and female workers at  $p \leq 0.05$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ , and  $p \leq 0.001$ , respectively.

Only five percent of workers reported that they had registered with the welfare board, and another six percent reported that they had submitted their application for registering with the board.<sup>24</sup> There was hardly any difference in the proportion of workers already registered with the board in Bengaluru and Delhi (4% and 6%, respectively). However, a larger proportion of workers in Delhi than in Bengaluru reported that they had applied for registering with the welfare board (12% vs 1%). While seven percent of male workers were already registered with the board, none of the female workers were. Another seven percent of male workers and four percent of female workers reported that they had applied for registering with the board.

Just three of the 25 micro-contractors reported that they had registered with the welfare board. The remaining 22 micro-contractors stated that they were not aware of the welfare board or the procedure for registering with the board. Five micro-contractors reported that some of their workers might have been registered with the welfare board.

*I don't know a lot about it. I have been wanting to get it done for long, but I don't know whom to ask. Sometimes when the company doesn't pay up, I don't have the option to challenge them. Had I have been registered, I could approach the board. [Micro-contractor, SI# 11, typically works for construction firm, Bengaluru]*

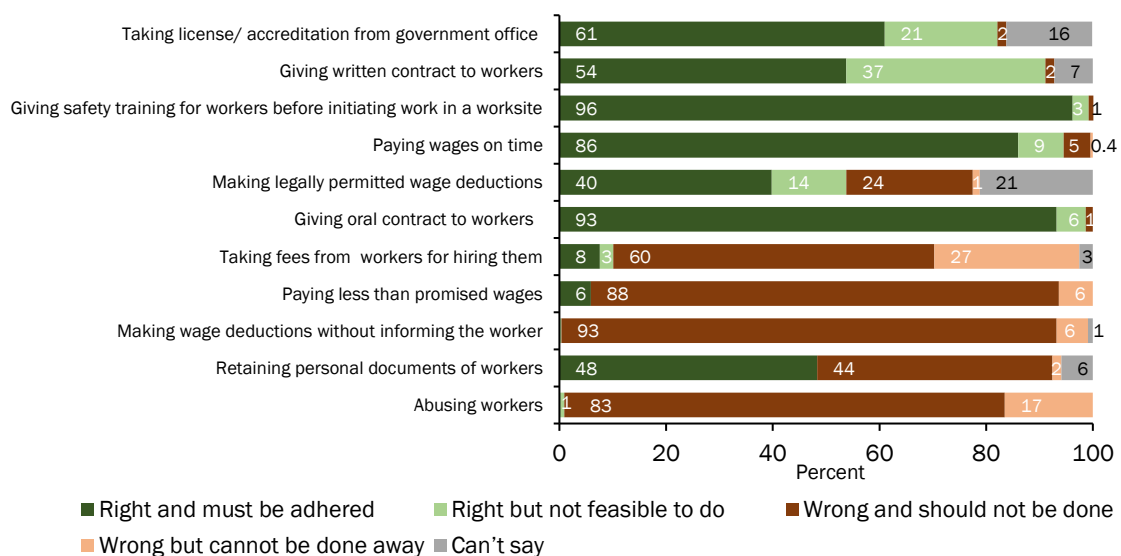
## Chapter 4: Workers' and micro-contractors' perceptions about ethical recruitment and employment practices

Ethical recruitment ensures legal compliance, eliminates recruitment fees, and adheres to codes of conduct that protect workers in the recruitment process and throughout the supply chain (ILO, 2019; Open Working Group on Labour Migration & Recruitment, n.d.). As noted in Chapter 1, workers and micro-contractors who participated in the study were not familiar with the term ethical recruitment and employment, and so we probed them about their perceptions about specific practices that reflected or contravened the principles of ethical recruitment and employment. This chapter presents perceptions of workers and micro-contractors about such practices in the construction industry. It describes challenges faced by micro-contractors in following some of the ethical practices, such as paying workers living wages, establishing decent working hours, and ensuring their safety. Measures that can help micro-contractors overcome these challenges are also discussed. Findings presented in the chapter indicate that there were substantial misperceptions about ethical and unethical recruitment and employment practices among workers and micro-contractors.

### 4.1 Workers' perceptions about ethical recruitment and employment practices

There were considerable variations in the acceptance of practices that are considered ethical among workers (Figure 3). Moreover, even when they perceived selected practices to be the right thing to do, they felt that it was not feasible to adhere to.<sup>25</sup> Thus, 61 percent of workers thought that contractors must obtain government accreditation, 21 percent felt that it was not feasible, even though it was the right thing to do, and 16 percent did not have any opinion about it. Some 54 percent of workers felt that contractors must give a written contract to workers at the time of hiring them, and 37 percent reported that it was not feasible. On the contrary, 93 percent thought that telling workers about the kind of work and work conditions was the right thing to do and that contractors must adhere to this practice, although a small percentage of workers felt that it was not feasible to do so (5%). Almost all workers reported that workers must be given safety training before initiating work in a worksite (96%). While 86 percent of workers reported that contractors must pay wages to their workers on time, 13 percent reported that it was not feasible to do so.

Figure 3: Workers' perceptions about ethical and unethical recruitment and employment practices, all workers, worker survey

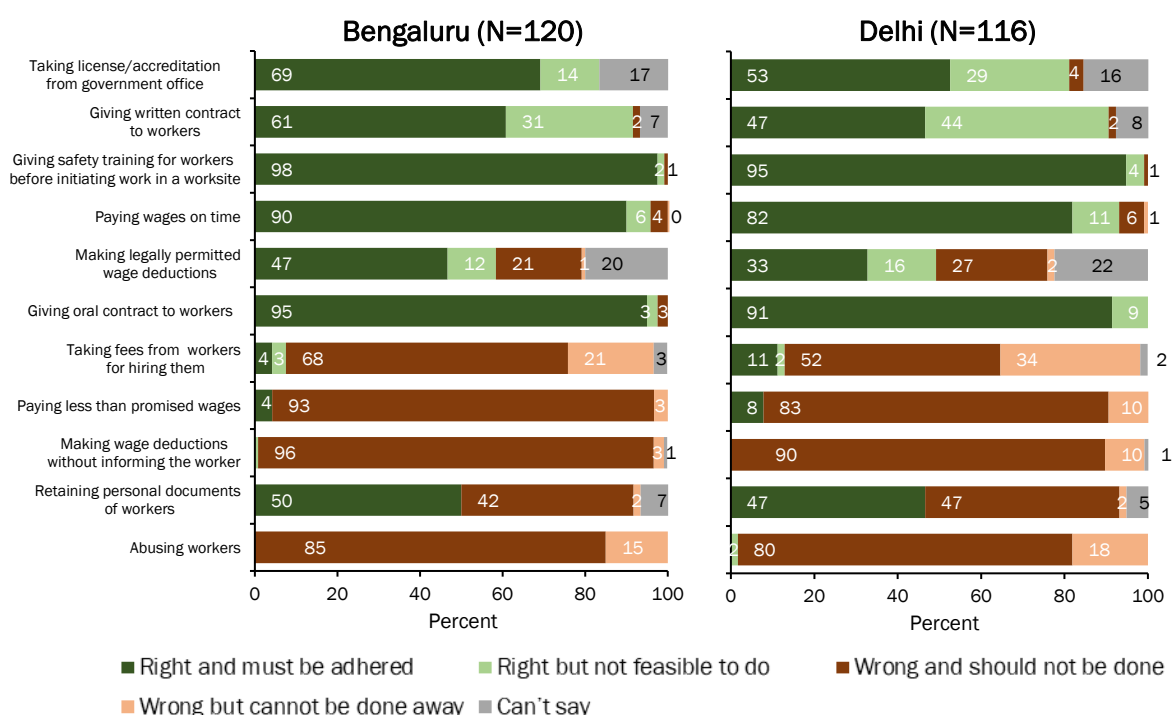


Note: Number of respondents (236)

There were also considerable variations in the rejection of practices that are considered unethical. Thus, for example, while 60 percent of workers thought that they should not be charged fees by labour contractors when hired, 27 percent felt that it could not be done away, even though it was a wrong thing to do. Some 48 percent of the workers thought that the contractor must retain personal documents of workers with them, while 44 percent felt that it should not be done. While 83 percent of workers reported that the contractors should not abuse their workers, 17 percent thought that contractors could not do away with this, although it was wrong. Similarly, 88 percent of workers felt that the contractors should not pay less than the promised wages to workers, but six percent thought that contractors could not do away with it. Again, 93 percent of workers felt that the contractors should not deduct wages without informing workers, but six percent thought that contractors could not do away with it.

A larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi perceived that practices that are considered ethical must be adhered to, perhaps because they were better educated and better informed about their rights (Figure 4). Thus, more workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported that contractors must obtain government accreditation (69% vs 53%), contractors must give a written contract to workers at the time of hiring them (61% vs 47%), contractors must pay wages to workers on time (90% vs 82%), and contractors must make legally permitted deductions in the wages (47% vs 33%). Moreover, a larger proportion of workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi perceived that practices that are considered unethical should not be done at any cost. Thus, more workers in Bengaluru than in Delhi reported that they should not be charged fees by labour contractors when hired (68% vs 52%), the contractors should not pay less than the promised wages to workers (93% vs 83%), and the contractors should not deduct wages without informing workers (96% vs 90%).

Figure 4: Workers' perceptions about ethical and unethical recruitment and employment practices, workers in Bengaluru and Delhi, worker survey

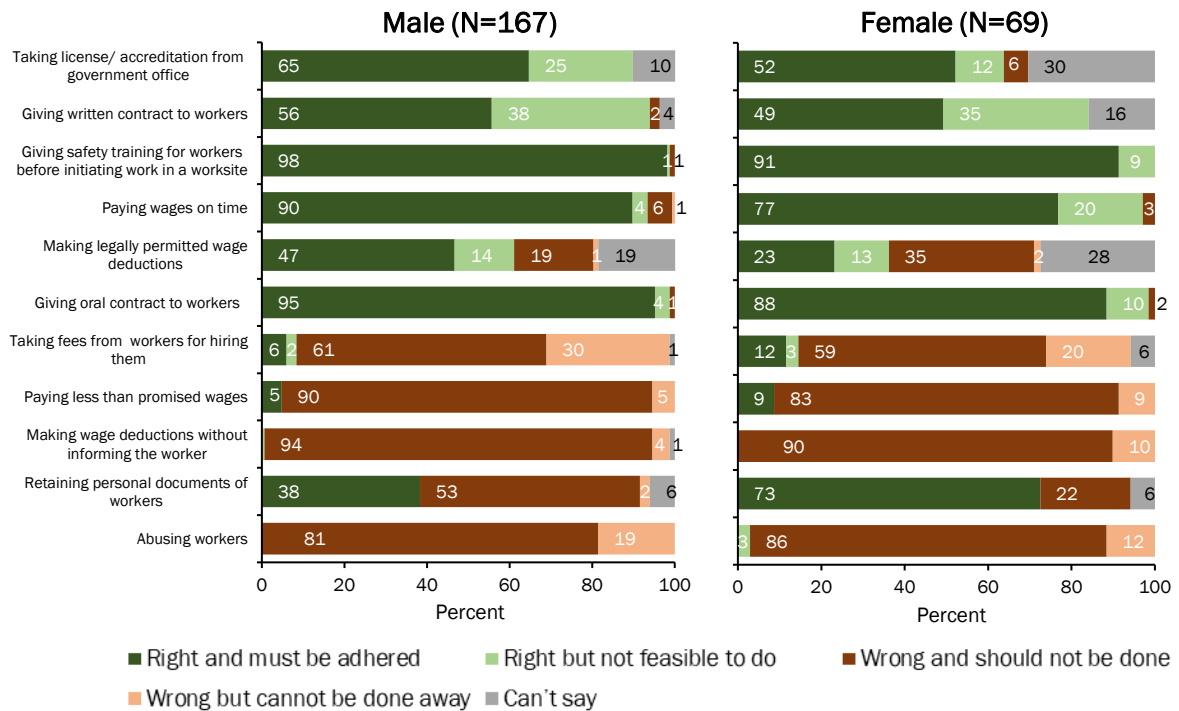


A larger proportion of male workers than female workers perceived that practices that are considered ethical must be adhered to, perhaps because they were better educated and better informed about their rights (Figure 5). Thus, more male workers than female workers reported that contractors must obtain government accreditation (65% vs 52%), contractors must give a written contract to workers at the time of hiring them (56% vs 49%), contractors must pay wages to workers



on time (90% vs 77%), contractors must make legally permitted deductions in the wages (47% vs 23%), and workers must be given safety training before initiating work in a worksite (98% vs 91%). Moreover, a larger proportion of male workers than female workers perceived that practices that are considered unethical should not be done at any cost. Thus, more male workers than female workers reported that the contractors should not pay less than the promised wages to workers (90% vs 83%), and the contractors should not retain personal documents of workers with them (53% vs 22%).

Figure 5: Workers’ perceptions about ethical and unethical recruitment and employment practices, male workers and female workers, worker survey



## 4.2 Micro-contractors’ perceptions about ethical recruitment and employment practices

We posed the same set of questions to micro-contractors as were posed to workers to explore their perceptions about ethical recruitment and employment. We note that the chances of giving socially desirable responses were more among micro-contractors than workers.

All micro-contractors mentioned that contractors must pay wages to workers on time and provide safety training to workers before they start working on the site. They felt that contractors should not pay less than the promised wages to workers and should not abuse their workers (Figure 6).

*It is wrong and should not be done. There should be no deductions without telling the worker. [Micro-contractor, SI#16, typically works for other contractors, Bengaluru]*

*It is necessary as safety is first. When they enter the site for the first time, they go to safety room first, and there is a safety in-charge who trains them about how the work is done. In some companies, training is conducted every week for them. They are told to wear helmet, mask, gloves, etc. [Micro-contractor, SI#8, typically works for construction firm, Bengaluru]*

*No one works with abusive people. If you abuse, they will abuse you back. If you don't behave well, your workforce will be zero, and if you behave well, it will be 50. Nowadays, even*

*workers don't work with such people.* [Micro-contractor, SI#23, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

Almost all micro-contractors reported that the contractors must get government accreditation (22 out of 25), although some mentioned that getting accreditation costs a lot of money and therefore, it was not feasible. They also said that they lacked knowledge on the procedure for getting accreditation.

*It is right and must be adhered to. License-taking is right so that if the company doesn't give money, you can file a case against them. But it costs a lot of money, so it is not feasible.* [Micro-contractor, SI#19, typically works for other contractors, Bengaluru]

*It is right and must be adhered to. It is possible but the small contractors don't know the procedures.* [Micro-contractor, SI#21, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

Almost all micro-contractors felt that giving oral contracts was the right thing to do and must be adhered to (21 out of 25). Micro-contractors' perceptions were inconsistent about the practice of giving written contracts to workers—while 10 micro-contractors thought that it was the right thing to do and must be adhered to, three reported that it was not feasible to do, although it was the right thing to do, and 11 did not give any opinion about it.

*Yes, it is right and must be adhered to, but it is not always possible.* [Micro-contractor, SI#4, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

*If we are giving them in writing, it is good. If we will tell them orally, it is also fine.* [Micro-contractor, SI#9, typically works for construction firms, Bengaluru]

*It is right and should be adhered to. But there is no such thing in writing, so, it is not feasible.* [Micro-contractor, SI#21, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

Similarly, their perceptions were inconsistent about contractors' retaining personal documents of workers with them—nine micro-contractors thought that retaining personal documents of workers with them was the right thing to do because this may deter workers from cheating the contractors or may help them locate the workers if they flee after any infraction they may commit at the worksite. On other hand, 15 micro-contractors reported that contractors should not retain personal documents of workers.

*It is right. If there is a labourer and he does something wrong and runs away, where will we go to find them?* [Micro-contractor, SI#4, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

*It is right, because there might be some assurance by the labourers that they will not cheat the contractors. So, it is right.* [Micro-contractor, SI#8, typically works for construction firm, Bengaluru]

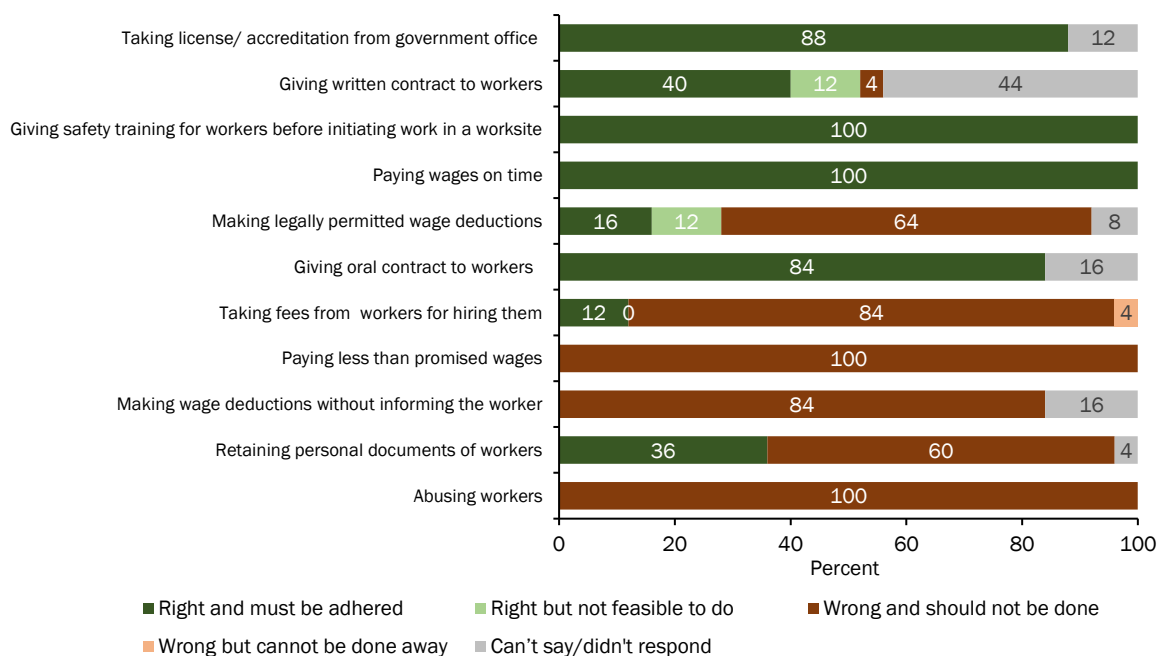
*It is wrong and should not be done. If you keep it, it is as bad as not paying wages.* [Micro-contractor, SI#20, typically works for other contractors, Bengaluru]

Several micro-contractors reported that making wage deductions without telling workers was wrong and should not be done (21 out of 25), but they also thought that making legally allowed wage deductions was wrong and should not be done (16 out of 25). Although most micro-contractors thought that it was wrong to take fees from workers when they hire them (22 out of 25), others felt that it was the right thing to do.

*Charging fees to workers for hiring them is wrong and should not be done. Some take but it should not be done.* [Micro-contractor, SI#4, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

*I don't take any money because the labourers know what they will be paid by the company.*  
 [Micro-contractor, SI#10, typically works for construction firms, Bengaluru]

Figure 6: Micro-contractors' perceptions about ethical and unethical recruitment and employment practices, interviews with micro-contractors



Note: Number of respondents (25)

### 4.3 Challenges faced by micro-contractors in following ethical practices

Micro-contractors faced a number of challenges in following some of the ethical practices, such as paying workers living wages, establishing decent working hours, and ensuring their safety. They mentioned that some of the challenges that they faced were because they were not getting enough labour contracts and regular contracts. Challenges arose also from delayed payments from their contractors/companies, deception perpetrated by workers, requests for advances from workers, and financial constraints, including their having to meet expenses during emergencies faced by their workers. Micro-contractors felt that they would be able to keep their workers happy if their contractors/companies would pay them on time and would give regular labour contracts. They added that the government should strengthen social protection measures such as health insurance and provident fund for all workers.

*The difficulty that we face is that money is not paid on time. If the worker has done the work and he is not paid on time and if there is an emergency, he calls me. Even I am not paid by the company, the labourer won't work, and this leads to the labour force breaking. If we get the money on time, I won't face difficulties and I would be able to pay my labourers and they will work happily.* [Micro-contractor, SI#4, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

*There are difficulties like the labourers too are cunning nowadays. Some labourers don't come without an advance, and you give them advance, but some never turn up. There is no regular work. There can be only one way to help which is that we get regular work according to agreement and the payment should come on time. We should get support, maybe from the government too so that we are not stuck. We are not able to give health insurance. The*

*government must ensure provident fund registration and health insurance for all workers.*  
[Micro-contractor, SI#5, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

*If the company pays on time, between 15th and 20th of every month, I will not face any problem and I can pay my workers on time.* [Micro-contractor, SI#11, typically works for construction firm, Bengaluru]

*The labourers will ask advance for travel. If he has been sitting at home for six months, he will demand Rs 10,000.* [Micro-contractor, SI#14, typically works for both construction firms and other contractors, Bengaluru]

*It is difficult to find skilled workers and I have less work.* [Micro-contractor, SI#1, typically works for construction firm, Delhi]

*We have to pay them from our pockets if the workers have an emergency and the company has not paid us.* [Micro-contractor, SI#23, typically works for other contractors, Delhi]

## Chapter 5: Recommendations

Findings presented in the previous chapters describe the informal labour recruitment process in the construction industry in India and workers' vulnerabilities. This chapter presents recommendations for governments, programme implementers, and monitoring, evaluation and learning practitioners.

### Recommendations for governments

Sustained action by the central government and state governments is critical for promoting ethical recruitment and employment practices. It is important to develop standards of ethical recruitment and employment, regulate and monitor private and public sector recruiters and employers, and demand compliance with these standards in recruitment and employment processes.

Findings that the relationship between micro-contractors and other contractors/construction firms/companies was informal for the most part needs regulation from government bodies. There was no fixed duration or monetary value for the work given to them, there were no specific terms under which they received work orders, and there were no written contracts. These issues call for registration of contractors and employers and greater transparency in the contracts between the different tiers of employers/contractors/sub-contractors/micro-contractors. Government bodies therefore have an important role to regulate recruitment and employment processes in the construction industry. The Indian government has recently codified 29 laws into four codes so that workers can be provided with measures for their security along with respect, health and other welfare measures with ease (Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India, 2022). These four labour codes include the Minimum Wages Code to ensure the Right to Minimum Wages for all workers; the Social Security Code to secure the right of workers for insurance, pension, gratuity, maternity benefit, and so on; the Occupational, Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code to provide better and safe environment along with occupational health and safety to workers at the work place; and the Industrial Relations Code to safeguard the interests of trade unions as well as the workers. It is important that measures are taken to monitor the implementation of these codes.

Findings call for efforts to streamline the processes for worker registration with the welfare board by addressing barriers that migrant workers face and by having minimal registration requirements. Governments should encourage self-registration, streamline and localise verification processes, and engage civil society organisations to sustain registration drives on construction worksites, labour *chowks*, and in settlements where construction workers live.

Findings also underscore the need for strengthening measures by government bodies to inspect establishments to ensure compliance with labour laws and occupational standards and safety regulations.

### Recommendations for programme implementers

Findings show that there are several misperceptions about ethical recruitment and employment practices. Moreover, workers' experiences highlight violations of ethical standards, for example, almost no worker had received a written contract. These findings call for efforts to raise public awareness of ethical recruitment standards. Efforts are needed to inform aspiring and current migrant workers about their rights and ethical recruitment and employment practices and to empower them to demand such practices from their recruiters and employers. Such efforts must not only target workers but also micro-contractors, bigger contractors, and construction firms and companies.

Constraints such as inadequate and irregular labour contracts, delayed payment from their contractors/companies, and lack of working capital tend to prevent micro-contractors from adhering to ethical practice. This finding calls for innovative solutions to overcome these constraints, for example, capacity development and mentorship programmes for micro-contractors to enable them to succeed in the open market, financial support programmes for them, supporting the creation of a micro-contractors' association, and facilitating micro-contractors' contacts with the members of existing contractors' and employers' organisations to represent micro-contractors' interests.

Findings that awareness of and registration with the construction workers welfare board remain limited underscore the need for increased efforts to raise awareness among construction workers and micro-contractors about the procedure for registering with the board and the benefits of doing so. Given that a large percentage of construction workers are circular migrants, issuing them labour cards that are portable and linking these cards with wage payments and social security deductions are important.

Programme efforts by development partners and CBOs need to pay special attention to first-time migrants because of additional vulnerabilities experienced by them. Migrant helplines to provide information about the protections and benefits available to them and to connect them to support services that may be required to secure their rights may be considered. Physical migrant resource centres in locations with significant migrant populations can be established in association with civil society organisations for more personalised services. The helplines and resource centres need to provide information in languages which migrants are comfortable with. Multi-media channels can also be used to increase access of information to aspiring migrants.

## Recommendations for monitoring, evaluation, and learning practitioners

Research on perspectives and experiences of various actors in the construction industry about ethical recruitment and employment is scarce in India. Our study has made an exploratory attempt to fill this gap by looking at the perspectives of construction workers and micro-contractors. However, we acknowledge that the concept of ethical recruitment and employment was alien to most workers and micro-contractors, and several misperceptions prevailed about practices that are ethical and unethical. More research—methodological and empirical—is needed to gather nuanced insights into various actors' understanding of the concept of ethical recruitment and employment, how these can be translated into real-life practices in the industry, and how the challenges faced by various actors in adhering to ethical practices can be overcome.

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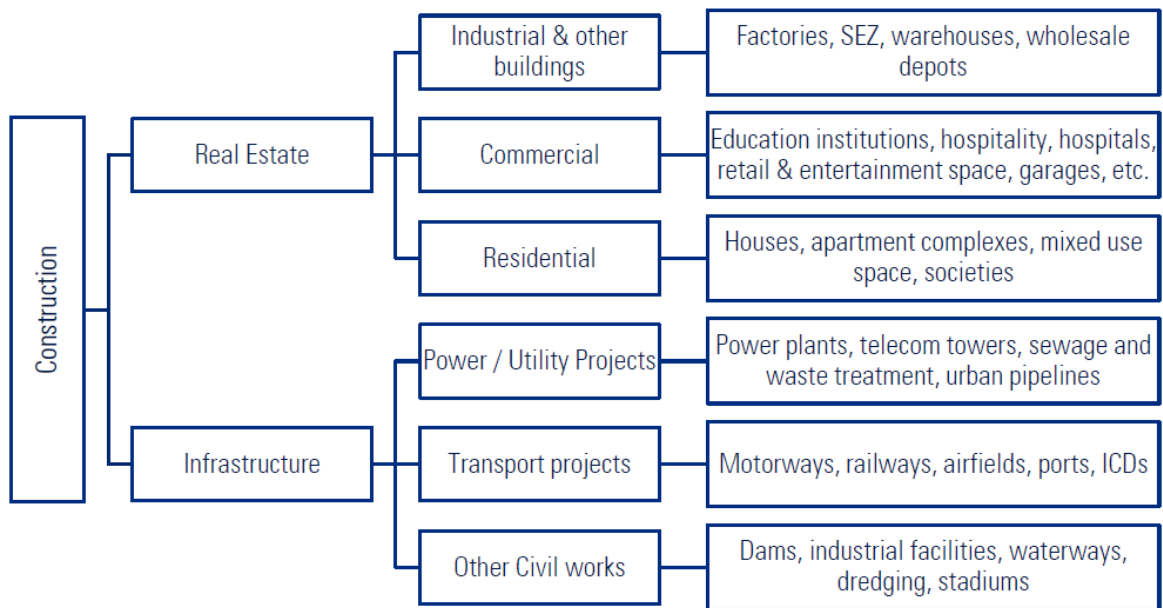
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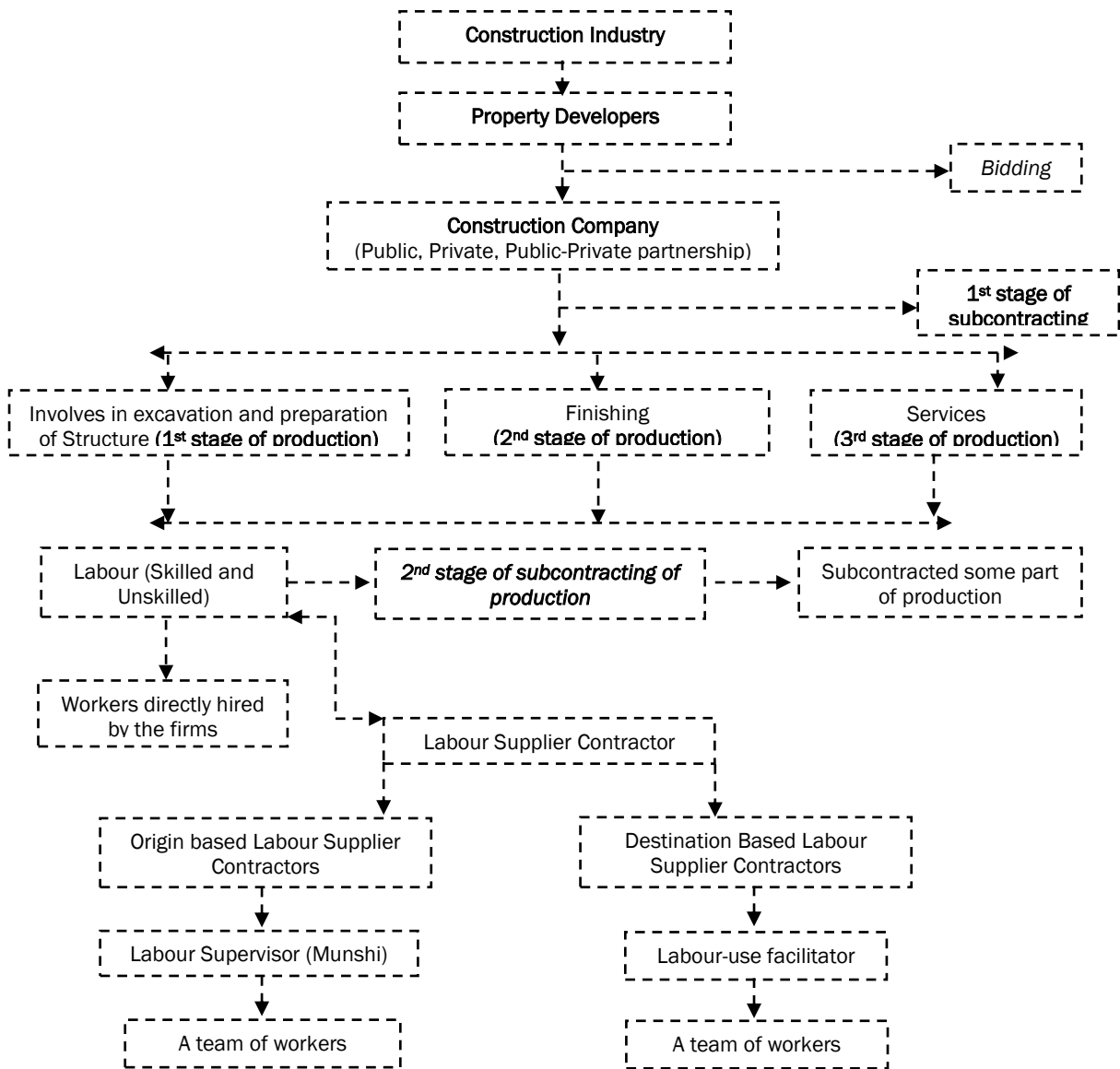


## Annex 1: Sub-sectoral overview of Indian construction sector



Source: National Skill Development Corporation, n.d. <https://nsdcindia.org/sites/default/files/Building-Construction-Real-Estate.pdf>

**Annex 2: Organisation of production processes in the Indian construction sector**



Source: Srivastava and Jha, 2016

### Annex 3: Profile of people employed in the construction sector and their job roles

Profile of personnel	Cadre	Job role
Graduate engineers/post graduate engineers	Managers	Shoulder responsibilities for completing construction project on time & within the budget
Mainly graduate civil engineers	Engineers	Survey land before project starts, plan & advise the contractors
Diploma engineers/ITIs with experience	Supervisors/foremen/operators	Supervisors analyse a problem and complete the job through interaction with labourers; foremen understand the drawings and design-related aspects; operators mainly consist of machine operators, e.g., motor grade or crane operator
Diploma engineers/ITIs with experience	Semi-skilled workmen	Carpenters, plumbers, welders and fitters, bar benders and scaffolders etc.
Minimally educated (mainly contractual employees)	Unskilled workmen	Provide physical effort to accomplish a variety of unskilled tasks

Source: National Skill Development Corporation, n.d. <https://nsdcindia.org/sites/default/files/Building-Construction-Real-Estate.pdf>



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