Employment-Driven Internal MIGRATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Case of Garment Industry Workers in Tiruppur



ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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UN MIGRATION

UN WOMEN
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

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Foreword

Labour migration has long been a defining feature of India's development trajectory, shaping both the country's economic dynamism and its social fabric. Within this movement, migrant women workers remain among the most underserved and vulnerable, despite their critical contributions to key sectors such as garment manufacturing.

Focusing on inter-state migrant women workers in the garment industry, the report sheds light on the diverse work settings in which these women are employed and the complex challenges they face. Drawing on primary research in Tiruppur—one of India's major garment hubs—as well as source areas in Jharkhand and Odisha, the study combines quantitative survey data with in-depth qualitative insights from workers, employers, and other stakeholders. In doing so, it provides a nuanced and evidence-based account of the migration experience from both destination and origin perspectives.

The findings reveal persistent challenges, including unequal and often wages that frequently fall below prescribed minimum standards, long working hours, and limited access to social protection, healthcare, and reproductive rights. These issues are compounded by the insecurities associated with migration, including informality, lack of documentation, and barriers in accessing public services. The study importantly highlights how gender and migration intersect to create distinct vulnerabilities for women workers, while underscoring their resilience and agency.

The report is forward-looking. It puts forth practical, policy-oriented recommendations aimed at improving working conditions and enhancing access to decent work for migrant women. It calls for greater alignment between labour, migration, and gender policies at the state level, and emphasizes the need for coordinated action among governments, the private sector, and civil society. In particular, the findings offer valuable insights for the garment industry in addressing labour shortages and reducing worker attrition by fostering safer, more equitable, and more supportive working environments.

As countries strive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including those related to decent work, gender equality, and reduced inequalities, it is essential that the voices and experiences of migrant women workers are placed at the centre of policy and practice. This study contributes to that effort in India and to the knowledge and learning of the broader Asia and Pacific region.

The collaboration between ESCAP, IOM and UN Women has enabled a deeper and nuanced understanding of the complex, interconnected dynamics and challenges for women migrant workers in the context of socio-economic development. Our appreciation goes to Dr. Indrani Mazumdar and Dr. Indu Agnihotri and their research team, ESCAP, IOM and UN Women team, all the women migrants, private sector, government officials and other stakeholders for their contribution and cooperation in completing the research.

It is our hope that this report will inform more inclusive and gender-responsive policies, further strengthen protections for migrant workers, and inspire further research and dialogue. Above all, it serves as a reminder that sustainable and equitable economic growth must be built on the foundation of dignity, rights, and opportunity for all workers.

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the spectrum of work settings and challenges faced by migrant women workers in the garment manufacturing industry, particularly focused on between-states migrants; to investigate their conditions; including women's access to employment, social security, health care, and decent work as migrant workers. The findings of this paper are based on a questionnaire-based survey of a purposively drawn sample of 153 migrant women garment workers in Tiruppur followed by tailor made detailed interviews with individual workers, employers, and other public and private stakeholders involved with migrating women garment workers. The survey covered women migrants from Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, Assam, and six other states, including Tamil Nadu. Fieldwork in Tiruppur concentrated on workers from Jharkhand, Odisha, and Bihar, while fieldwork at the source was conducted in Jharkhand and Odisha.

Building on some of the main identified challenges for migrant women, such as unequal and sub-minimum wages, long working hours, and poor provisions for health, leave, social security, and reproductive rights, the report provides policy and action-oriented recommendations for relevant stakeholders toward improving the condition of these workers and identifying longer-term solutions. This report will be useful for the policy makers at the State-level to use the findings and recommendations in modifying and gendering their policies for improving the quality of life and working conditions of women workers, and towards addressing the challenges and insecurities that they face as migrants. The evidence and recommendations may be of use to the garment industry/private sector in addressing attrition and labour shortages by creating the conditions for migrant women workers to stay at their destinations.

JEL Codes(s): R23; J61; J16; J81; O15

Key Words: Women migrant workers, garment industry, Tiruppur, labour, survey

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Abbreviations

AEPC	Apparel Export Promotion Council
AIADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress
ATP	Anna Thozhil Sanga Peravai
BEWG	Brand Ethics Working Group
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CITU	Centre of Indian Trade Unions
DA	Dearness Allowance
DDU-GKY	Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushal Yojna
DISH	Directorate of Industrial Safety Department and Health
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
EBC	Economically Backward Classes
EPF	Employees' Provident Funds
EPFO	Employees' Provident Fund Organisation
ERA	Equal Remuneration Act 1976
ESI	Employees' State Insurance
ETI	Ethical Trading Initiative
GBVH	Gender-Based Violence and Harassment
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GM	General Manager
GST	Goods and Services Tax
IC	Internal Committee
ICC	Internal Complaints Committee
ILO	International Labour Organization
INTUC	Indian National Trade Union Congress
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JSDMS	Jharkhand Skill Development Mission Society
LPF	Labour Progressive Front
MBC	Most Backward Castes
MDMK	Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
MFA	Multi-Fibre Arrangement
MIL	Modern Indian Language

MLF	Marumalarchi Labour Front
MoLE	Ministry of Labour and Employment
MoTA	Ministry of Tribal Affairs
NIFT	National Institute of Fashion Technology
OBC	Other Backward Classes
OSC	One Stop Centre
OSH	Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions
OT	Overtime
PHIA	Partnering Hope Into Action Foundation
PLFS	Periodic Labour Force Survey
POSH	Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law
RMG	Ready Made Garment
SBI	State Bank of India
SC	Scheduled Castes
SHG	Self-Help Group
SIHMA	South India Hosiery Manufacturers Association
SO	Standing Order
ST	Scheduled Tribes
TA	Travelling Allowance
TEA	Tiruppur Exporters Association
TSF	Tiruppur Stakeholders Forum
TU	Trade Union
TVPRA	Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act
UDISE	Unified District Information System for Education
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UP	Uttar-Pradesh
US DOL	US Department of Labour
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions
WHO	World Health Organisation
WRO	Withhold Release Order

Executive Summary



Internal migration is an important and prevalent feature of India's economy and society, with workers, over the years, increasingly moving beyond their home districts and states in their search for work and livelihoods. Despite low paid employment rates among women, their segregation into limited sectors of employment, and socio-cultural barriers to women's mobility, increasing numbers of women in India are also moving outside their home states for jobs that are low to medium-skilled in occupations and industries where women are preferred. Garment industries, as a labour-intensive segment of textiles in India, have emerged as an important avenue for women's employment, and centres of garment manufacturing are drawing in increasing numbers of women migrants from a wide range of states and regions of the country. While such labour migration often enhances women's economic opportunities and offers greater autonomy and empowerment, many women migrant workers, particularly those in low-wage occupations, face unique barriers to decent work, social protection, and sustained employment. This study tries to understand why and how women migrate from one State of India to another and the kind of challenges they face as migrant workers during their employment in the garment manufacturing industry. It focuses on women migrating to Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu, one of the most prominent garment manufacturing hubs in India, where a survey of migrant women workers has combined in-depth interviews with a range of stakeholders at the destination and the two source states.

Internal migration is an important and prevalent feature of India's economy and society, with workers, over the years, increasingly moving beyond their home districts and states in their search for work and livelihoods. Despite low paid employment rates among women, their segregation into limited sectors of employment, and socio-cultural barriers to women's mobility, increasing numbers of women in India are also moving outside their home states for jobs that are low to medium-skilled in occupations and industries where women are preferred.

Key Findings

1. Profile of Migrant Women Workers in the Garment Factories of Tiruppur

1.1. Over the past two decades, Tiruppur has seen an influx of long-distance migrants, men and women from northern and eastern Indian states, and workers whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds are significantly different from local Tamil language and culture. One of the key findings of this study is the multi-cultural sub-regional diversity within states of origin that has gone into the making of the migrant woman garment worker in Tiruppur. For example, the survey sample of 153 women workers hailed from 59 districts across 10 states, with those from Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand, Assam, and other districts of Tamil Nadu being in the most concentrated numbers. Further, six distinct ethno-regional languages were recorded as mother tongues, apart from 28 per cent Hindi speakers, 22 per cent Odia speakers, 12 per cent Tamil speakers, and 10 per cent speaking Assamese.

1.2. **Most of the surveyed workers were from rural areas, 95 per cent of them from landless or small farmer households**, although agriculture was not the primary source of their village household's income for more than half of them. Combined with the complete absence of artisanal manufacture as a source of livelihood, a breakdown of traditional ways and means of subsistence in rural India looms large in the background and context from which women are migrating to Tiruppur. The most prominent reason given by workers for coming to Tiruppur was to earn and support their family, whether due to poverty, debt, or other reasons, along with the expectation of availability of wage/ earning employment in Tiruppur determining the choice of destination. Noticeably, marriage was given as the reason for migration by very few workers, barely 4 per cent, which included some who had eloped and then married in Tiruppur.

1.3. **Socially disadvantaged communities are overrepresented among migrant women garment workers in Tiruppur**, with almost half of the surveyed workers from Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and two-fifths from Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs).[1] In comparison, there were just over a tenth of the upper castes, with two states (Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu) showing no workers of upper caste background, and a third (Bihar) with a negligible number. While the majority religion was Hinduism, a little over a fifth of the migrant women belonged to minority religious communities, with an almost equal share of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and tribal religion followers among them.

1.4. The female migrant garment workers in Tiruppur are predominantly young, with a majority in the 18-25 age group and less than a tenth having crossed 35, which correlates with a large share of the surveyed workers being unmarried (43 %), although more than half (55%) were married. Within these aggregates, a regionally differentiated pattern is discernible, with Bihari and Tamil migrants tending to be older and married, and workers from Jharkhand, Odisha, and Assam tending to be younger, unmarried, and predominantly residing in larger factory hostels.

1.5. More than half of the surveyed workers were secondary and senior secondary school products, among whom there were even 8 graduates. Only 9 per cent were non-literate.

[3] Census 2011 counted 16.6 per cent of India's population as SC, and 8.6 per cent as ST. Although census categories do not include other social groups, the National Sample Survey's Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2021-22 estimated the share of OBC persons to be 45.8per cent., and the General (upper castes)

Modes of Migration and Recruitment

2.1. **A striking finding was the phenomenon of couples migrating for work in Tiruppur.** One-third of the women said they came to Tiruppur with their boyfriends or husbands, both the first time and on their most recent journey. Most of them are, of course, married couples, although, across both the first journey to Tiruppur and the last/latest, some 10 to 14 per cent of couples were unmarried at the time of migration, of whom some were escaping social opprobrium due to choice based and inter-caste relationships.

2.2. **Larger factories tended to recruit mostly unmarried young women through skill development centres located in states of origin and/or offering incentive payments to their workers to bring in recruits.** Such modes of recruitment are most prevalent in factories that provide hostel accommodation. Nevertheless, attrition and departures within less than a year of arrival remain perennial issues in such modes of recruitment. Managements have engaged in several efforts to make staying on attractive to migrant girls, including trying to provide hostel food designed to cater to north Indian palates and offering special facilities for resident workers to acquire further educational qualifications while working.

2.3. For migrants seeking to find work on their own in Tiruppur, the most significant mode of accessing jobs within Tiruppur was through contractors. However, one-fourth of the workers said they got their current job by directly applying at the factory gates.

2.4. It is indeed noticeable that where the autonomous push to migrate from below is not marked by gender segregation as evident in the phenomenon of couples' migration, the organized modes of top-down recruitment by the larger garment factories through the mediation of skill development centres and incentivized intermediation promotes feminized and gender-segregated migration.

Managements have engaged in several efforts to make staying on attractive to migrant girls, including trying to provide hostel food designed to cater to north Indian palates and offering special facilities for resident workers to acquire further educational qualifications while working.

2. Conditions of Work and Wages

3.1. Migrant women garment workers in Tiruppur are almost all working in factories that cross the threshold of 10 workers required for factory law to be applied. Yet, their working in technically formal sector establishments does not guarantee decent work. For example, piece rate wages among workers who are brought into production lines in factories (big and small) through contractors, is one of the key mechanisms of inducing self-exploitation that has virtually normalised a 12-hour workday for contract workers in Tiruppur. Labour arrangements through contractors allows even some very large factories to combine 12-hour shifts by contract workers with their own regular workers who generally work 8-hour shifts and receive time rated wages. More than half of the surveyed workers were working 10-to-12-hour shifts.

3.2. Notwithstanding variations in wages across factories, most workers were found to be receiving wages below statutory minimum wage rates. For example, in comparison to the minimum wage rates for the tailoring industry for 2023, the average monthly wages by tailor/operators were ₹850 ($10.24

USD) less than the minimum wage, among checkers it was ₹2,711 ($32.65 USD) less, while ironers and packers received on average ₹1,820 and ₹ 1,256 ($21.92 and $15.13 USD) less respectively, while the difference was maximum for helpers who, on average, received ₹3,798 ($45.74 USD) less than the minimum wage.

3.3. Tiruppur has a tradition of wage revision through agreements between trade unions and industry level employers' organizations. Although wage rates in such agreements are usually higher than official minimum wage rates in the tailoring industry, bipartite wage agreements display a peculiarity of exceedingly low wages for checkers in comparison to tailor/operators, in contradistinction to the statutory minimum wages in Tamil Nadu, where checkers are placed in the same skill category as tailor operators with equal wages. The same peculiarity is observed in market determined wage rates where checkers, on average receive, ₹1861 ($22.41) less than tailors. Decades ago, the designation of checker was introduced as the first female dominated section in Tiruppur's otherwise male dominated workforce and which is hence characterized by especially low wages. The long shadow of such gender-based discrimination and inequality in wage rates is still falling on checkers in Tiruppur, even as the gender-based divisions on which it was based no longer exist, and tailors, who were earlier predominantly male in Tiruppur, are now predominantly female.

3. Health and Social Security

4.1. The overwhelming majority of the surveyed workers (85%) did not have statutory health insurance cards under the Employees State Insurance Act of 1948 (now subsumed under the Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020), although close to one third had access to a clinic in their factory premises.

Decades ago, the designation of checker was introduced as the first female dominated section in Tiruppur's otherwise male dominated workforce and which is hence characterized by especially low wages.

4.2. A weekly off day appears universal with few exceptions, but paid medical leave was rare. No contract worker has access to paid leave for medical and health issues, and even regular workers do not get medical leave sanctioned easily. Shockingly, less than 1per cent of the surveyed workers had availed of paid maternity leave

4.3. Less than one-third of workers had an Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) account, the principal labour law institution for social security in the form of accumulated savings and pensions as retirement benefits. EPFO account holders were concentrated in large factories with hostels, and most of them (71%) were unmarried. Going by the record, most of them would be leaving their jobs well before having completed 10 years of service, which is the pre-condition for entitlement to a pension or even having adequate savings to count as social security.

4. On sexual harassment and reproductive rights

5.1 Although almost half of the surveyed workers were aware of the law on the prevention of sexual harassment (POSH), there was little awareness about the mandated Internal Committee (IC) under POSH. Even as public campaigns have led to growing awareness

regarding gender-based violence, and many company notice boards display material on POSH, the indifference to the constitution or functioning of Internal Committees is quite marked.

5.2. On the other hand, there is little by way of public conversation on the key reproductive rights of migrant women workers or the curtailment of women's employment in their absence. In Tiruppur, the piece rate based pay system effectively negates the possibility of paid maternity leave for workers dependent on contractors, while unmarried residents of factory hostels find the hostel setting to be hostile if they marry and/or become pregnant. Functional creches are few and far between in an industry that employs hundreds to thousands of women workers. Lack of awareness or campaigns on reproductive rights effectively deters almost all young migrant women workers from even conceiving of the possibility of continuing in employment after marriage or the birth of children. Particularly for migrants who lack local family support. These are issues that merit greater attention in public campaigns on women's rights in Tiruppur than has hitherto been the case.

6. The residential world of migrant women garment workers

6.1. Factory hostels have led to the mass phenomenon of inter-state single migration by young women to Tiruppur. For skill development programmes and institutions in source states and for parents of migrating daughters, factory hostels appear to provide a safe setting for job placement. The hostels offer new friendships and collegiality for many young women themselves. Factory hotels have indeed been a major enabling factor facilitating the migration of thousands of young women from faraway and culturally diverse states to work in Tiruppur. One third of the workers were residents of hostels in Tiruppur among whom, only 4 were in a private hostel an industrial estate, but not attached to any one factory.

Lack of awareness or campaigns on reproductive rights, effectively deters almost all young migrant women workers from even conceiving of the possibility of continuing in employment after marriage or birth of children.Particulaly for migrants who lack local family support. These are issues that merit greater attention.

6.2. With all its advantages, the factory hostel model is structurally geared to the temporariness of employment. For unmarried women workers who constitute the majority in hostels, the link between hostel and employment inevitably suggests that they cannot continue such employment after marriage or parenthood. No factory has thought to provide married quarters. Government-sponsored skill development programmes that have been instrumental in the migration of young women to the garment factory with the hostel model in Tiruppur also seem to be blind to the short-lived nature of employment that the model offers.

6.3. Over half of the surveyed workers stayed in rented rooms with family (sometimes just the husband) or friends and co-workers. Some young and unmarried girls stay in such rented rooms rather than their factory hostels, although many of the workers in such accommodations are contract workers for whom there are no hostel facilities. Some contractors, however, house some of their workers either rented or constructed rooms.

7. The education of children of migrant women workers

7.1. An emerging issue that has implications for sustaining and prolonging the high employment levels for women migrants in Tiruppur's garment industry is their children's education. Assimilation in Tamil medium schools has been one option followed, but the absence of other language options in education or Tamil language learning support facilities places the children of migrant workers in a position of discriminatory disadvantage to native Tamil speakers in Tiruppur.

8. Stakeholders and their stakes

8.1. **The Tiruppur Stakeholders' Forum (TSF) is the most prominent multi-stakeholder initiative** in Tiruppur. Established by the Tiruppur Exporters' Association (TEA), its constituents include representatives of American and European Brands (Buyers), 'ethical' trade organizations associated with these Brands, local NGOs, Trade Unions, the labour department, and UN Women, apart from TEA members. However, trade unions in Tiruppur are skeptical of the role of TSF, where they believe unions are marginalized, although they are amenable to issue based participation. The tradition of tripartite negotiations between employers, unions, and state government provides another important forum for addressing labour law enforcement issues and building awareness among key stakeholders regarding the special issues of migrant women workers.

8.2. There are, however, no systems in place for dialogue between governments of source and destination states regarding the specific issues of migrant workers. Initiatives to establish links between the labour departments of source states such as Jharkhand and Odisha with their counterparts in Tamil Nadu have been oriented towards either facilitating placement of women workers or taking up



The Tiruppur Stakeholders' Forum (TSF) is the most prominent multi-stakeholder initiative in Tiruppur.

individual problems raised by male migrant workers. A sensitive awareness of gender in migration has yet to develop.

8.3. Government funded skill development centres in source states have been an important source for recruiting young women workers by garment factories in Tiruppur and elsewhere for well over a decade. Partnerships with the industry are well established in the new skilling and placement eco-system that has evolved over the past two decades. Worker rights, however, do not figure in the skilling and preparing for placement curriculum. Organizations that espouse labour rights and gender equality are not part of the institutional architecture of skill development programmes and/or their institutions.

9. Developments in Source States

9.1. Recently, the State governments of Jharkhand and Odisha have instituted several incentives/ subsidies for companies to set up garment factories within their state borders. Significant monthly wage subsidies, introduced as part of employment generation initiatives, have been implemented for durations ranging from five to seven years. If effectively realized, these subsidies could render labour costs virtually negligible for newly established garment factories in the respective states. While the impact of such policies remains in its early stages in Odisha, multiple garment factories have already been established in Ranchi, Jharkhand, though none currently offer hostel facilities.

9.2. A community/class of young women garment workers was seen to have indeed developed in suburban Ranchi, which includes many return migrants from Tiruppur. Besides those who commute from their family homes, young women whose homes are too far to commute from are staying in shared, rented rooms with co-workers their factories. Such arrangements have little by way of security, and safety becomes even more of a concern for workers working late shifts till 10 pm.

9.3. Most women returnees are, however, left without employment, facing additional constraints on mobility after marriage, as agrarian patriarchy regulates their lives. Their situation draws attention to the limited empowerment potential of short-lived migratory employment.

10. Agendas for Action and the Way Forward

Some core areas and issues raised by this study that are actionable in the coming period include:

1. Preliminary discussions regarding formulation of a 'Migrant Labour Policy Framework' (Niti Aayog, 2021) provide an opportunity for initiating a national level discussion on key gender issues and concerns raised by this study with Niti Aayog, the Ministry of Labour & Employment, and the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, that may be followed by inter-state dialogues.

2. The structurally inbuilt temporary employment for migrant women in the organized factory-hostel model may be mitigated by factory-hostel organized married quarters for migrant workers. Concerted efforts are required to discuss such possibilities with employers' organizations such as TEA, and with workers, trade unions, women's organizations, NGOs and policymakers.

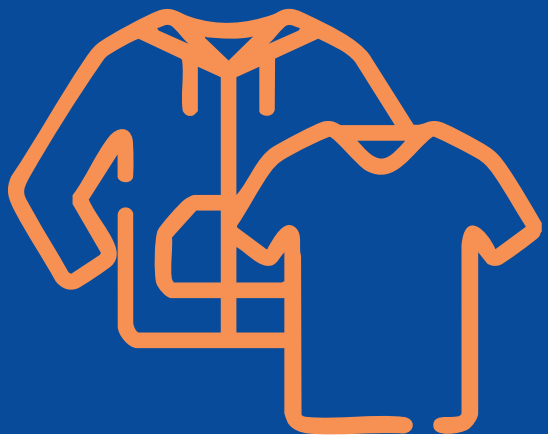
3. Just as public campaigns on sexual harassment and gender-based violence have led to enhanced awareness of the issues involved, so also facilitation of campaigns on reproductive rights of women as workers regarding paid maternity leave and childcare/crèche facilities could bring these issues into greater focus. They could then be more effectively placed on the agenda of multi-stakeholder forums and taken up with the state government for supportive actions and schemes. The Constitution and functioning of Internal Committees under the POSH Act can be better stressed if the labour law enforcement machinery is involved. State Governments may be engaged in ensuring that the District collector to whom IC reports are required to be submitted enforces such submission and, in so doing, identifies violations in the constitution/functioning of ICs, and accordingly impose prescribed penalties.

4. As piece rated contract work is a major hurdle in accessing health and maternity rights at work in Tiruppur, efforts may be brought to bear on the Central Government and the ESI Corporation to extend ESI applicability to contract workers in the garment sector, as has been done for contract workers employed by municipal bodies.

5. Organization of bilateral inter-state dialogues/ negotiations between states of origin and destination could facilitate introduction of various language teaching options, including involving personnel from states of origin to educate children of migrant workers. Further, special Tamil language tutors may be engaged with the support of TEA/TSF as well as the Tamil Nadu State Government to enable children of migrants to study in existing Tamil medium schools in Tiruppur.

6. TSF and the tradition of industry level tripartite and bipartite labour related negotiations are both important multi-stakeholder platforms for raising gender concerns among stakeholders and promoting dialogue on some of the core issues of women workers in their triple identities as workers, as women, and as migrants.

1. Introduction



Migrants, defined by change of last usual place of residence, and including men, women, and children, were estimated to be 30 per cent of the Indian population in 2020-21, numbering more than 403.5 million, among whom more than 80 per cent were female.[2] Those who gave employment related reasons for their migration were, however, 11 per cent of such migrants. Among women migrants, marriage was the reason for migration for 87 per cent, while employment related reasons were for less than 2 per cent. Labour migration is generally underestimated in such migration data, and critics have focused on the definitional erasure of short term and circular migrant workers as one of the causes. Less commented on is the effect of a monocausal approach to migration that has segregated social reasons such as marriage and economic or employment related reasons for migration, making it impossible to discern the numbers or proportions of migrant workers, particularly for women.[3]

Gender has long been invisible within standard framings of migrant labour in India. For decades, economistic development perspectives on migration remained overdetermined by the male bias to migration flows for modern industry. Consequently, there was little understanding of the significantly different trajectories and outcomes of work

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and migration for women or the developments therein. When women migrant workers and single women migrants, were focused on, a tendency to locate them within criminal law-based discourses on human trafficking often reinforced traditional stigma-based restrictions on women's mobility and employment rights and obstructed the growth of labour rights perspectives on women's migration. Married women, who constituted most women migrant workers, received almost no attention. As such, any study on women migrant workers must contend with the weight of several elements that have made for the protracted invisibility of core

[2] Data source: GOI, MOSPI, NSO, Migration in India, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2020-21. Absolute numbers calculated from migration rates (migrants to total population) upon population estimates for 2020.

[3] It may be noted that in the case of women, it is simply not possible to count all migrants who are workers as migrant workers since immobile village/peasant wives and daughters-in-law (whose change of residence would reflect village exogamous marriage) would then be counted as migrant workers

gender and labour issues that impinge on women's work and migration experiences and related outcomes.

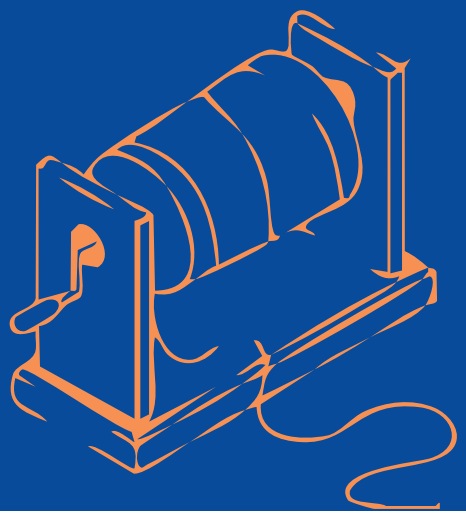
It was the mass homeward-bound movement of migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown of 2020 that highlighted the scale of internal migration with shocking suddenness. It sparked a new awareness of the magnitude of long-distance migration within India, highlighted the significant role played by migrant workers in the economy, and focused public attention on the need for special policy support for migrant labour. Nevertheless, even amid such indications of collective concern, the migratory experience and conditions of women migrant workers remained conspicuously absent in national and state-level discourses on migrant labour. Macro-level invisibility highlights the lack of a requisite body of micro-knowledge and informed perspective on the gender dimensions of labour migration in India. In such a context, this post pandemic era study on migrant women workers in Tiruppur, a hub of the ready-made garment industry (RMG) that has seen a major spurt in inter-state female migration in the new century, has a particular salience.

This study on migrant women working in garment factories in Tiruppur emphasizes the need to bring a gender aware perspective and lens to the centre of the analysis of the situation of women migrant workers as its first principle. The study is based on primary field research in Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu, which investigated the lives of women migrant workers and the issues and challenges they face as women, as workers, and as migrants. Specific questions that are addressed include 1) the social background of migrant women workers, their migration motivations/compulsions, modes of migration, and social barriers that women migrants face in pursuing and undertaking work and migration; 2) the range of labour arrangements and the systemic barriers women migrant women are exposed to concerning working conditions, their labour and wage standards, access to social security, prevention of sexual harassment, and other enforcement issues; 3) the various forms of residential arrangements in which migrant women workers are housed, the living conditions in which they are situated, and the particular problems and challenges therein.

The study is based on qualitative research methods for the collection of field data as well as in its modes of analysis. Field research in Tiruppur conducted in the second half of 2023 was supplemented by exploratory field work in Jharkhand and Odisha, major source states for women migrant workers. Field work in source states was conducted in the first half of 2024 and focused on outcomes of migration for some returnee workers, on family situations of current migrants in Tiruppur, and on state level policy contexts. The mode of analysis is interpretive, emphasizing correlations, interconnections, and historical context.

This monograph which lays out and discusses the study findings is presented in ten sections. Section 2 provides a context setting outline of key developments and features of the garment industry in Tiruppur, drawing on existing literature. Section 3 outlines the methodology followed for the primary study, including the sampling process for a questionnaire-based survey, and presents a profile of migrant women workers in Tiruppur, their social background, and their modes of migration. Section 4 discusses the perceptions and preferences of factory managements, particularly in large factories and their modes of recruitment of migrant women workers. Section 5 presents a quick outline of the demographic features of women migrant workers in Tiruppur's garment factories. Section 6 focuses on the survey findings regarding work conditions and related issues and problems for migrant women workers. It probes contextual developments and processes that have gone into the making and interaction of differentiated labour regimes for migrant women within Tiruppur's garment industry. Section 7 describes the residential world of the migrant women workers, providing qualitative insights into their interlinked experiences as migrants and as workers. It may be noted here that as per research ethics norms, names of respondents that are mentioned in this monograph are not their real names. Section 8 presents perspectives, policies, and practices of various stakeholders in women's migration to Tiruppur for both destination and source areas. Section 9 summarizes the main findings and discusses their social, programmatic, and policy implications, and Section 10 draws up recommendations for an actionable agenda as the way forward.

2. Socio-Cultural Context of Women Migrant Workers in Tiruppur's Garment Industry



2.1. Women Workers in India's Garment Industry

In the context of developing countries, the feminization of the workforce in the garment industry, which is shaped by export orientation and globalization, is a phenomenon that has long been accepted as almost axiomatic. In India, however, incorporating women as garment workers in modern factory settings has followed more regionally differentiated trajectories. Feminization remains more concentrated in RMG factories in the South than in the North, where the RMG workforce remains more male than female (Neetha 2002, Mazumdar, 2007). Women's migration is and remains central to the feminization story for Tiruppur in particular.

The subject of women working in India's RMG sector has been highly researched, and the main centres/clusters of RMG, such as Tiruppur, have thrown up several studies of both empirical and theoretical nature. However, what is less researched is the role of migration, its processes, and outcomes for women workers in RMG, even though most women working in the industry are indeed and have always been migrants. Feminization in the garment and textile workforce of the South was, after all, first fuelled by migration from areas within the cultural and linguistic regions in which the industry was located (Neetha 2002, Roy 2009, Mazumdar 2024).

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A marked development over the past two decades is the entry and increasing inflow of long-distance women migrants into the RMG/textile sector in the southern states. These workers often come from regions that are not only far away but also culturally and linguistically different from the areas where their factories are located. This has led to confusion in defining who is a migrant, as there is

a growing distinction between 'local' and 'migrant' workers, even though many 'locals' are also intra-state migrants. Nonetheless, this distinction highlights the fact that while both groups may work under similar conditions in industries like Tiruppur's garment sector, they face different challenges and experiences.

Since 2007-08, the long-distance migration of young girls for employment in the garment industry has received active policy support through government-sponsored skill development programmes. These initiatives have focused on facilitating the out-of-state placement of young women from rural hinterlands, particularly from states like Jharkhand and Odisha, where poverty remains widespread, and socio-economic development indicators lag. Girls from marginalized castes and tribes have been given priority under the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushal Yojna (DDU-GKY), a flagship example of the current skill development policy. Its model of skilling by private institutes with full funds from government has established channels for a regular supply of workers from for the garment industry hubs (Mazumdar, WiF/ILO, 2024).[4] At the same time, autonomous flows outside such officially sponsored mechanisms have remained important in meeting the labour demands of the industry, where the modes of intermediation are indeed harder to pin down.

Specialized female migration corridors for textile and garment factories in southern India were initiated at a time when a globally restructured apparel industry was moving from the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) system of quota restrictions on exports from developing countries to a buyer-controlled 'free trade' model. In India, such a changeover had seen a shift in the centre of gravity of export-oriented garment manufacturing from smaller-scale exporters with dispersed production processes towards the increasingly larger composite units that brought all or most RMG production processes in-house. Such consolidation was necessitated by the short lead times of just-in-time production for increased scales of output

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demanded by buyer brands who monopolized the markets of the developed countries and global sales - additionally facilitated by liberalization policies within India. In-house consolidation of production processes emerged as a distinct feature of the RMG sector through the 1990s and early 2000s, along with a more feminized workforce and greater concentration in the southern states (Mazumdar, 2007).

The globalized garment industry in India has come to be defined by the expansion of larger factories, intensified labour processes marked by increased production targets, extended working hours, stricter disciplinary measures, persistently low wages, and contract-based employment relations. The introduction of fixed-term employment has further enabled a hire-and-fire model, making job security increasingly precarious for workers. The same features also led to high rates of labour turnover. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, garment manufacturers began to voice the problem of labour shortages (Agarwala 2011; Muthiah, 2011). With the concentration of many of the larger garment factories in southern India. By 2005, 86 per cent of units with more than 1000 workers, and 67 per cent of units of 500-999 workers were located in southern states [Roy, 2009). It was perhaps inevitable that the imperative

[4] Under DDU-GKY and similar schemes, the government supplies funds that cover all boarding, lodging costs of trainees, expenditures on salaries of training personnel and mobilisation of trainees, plus placement costs and incentive stipends.

to actively recruit migrants directly from areas of origin across an expanded and cross-regional terrain was spurred from the south.

2.2. Growth of Tiruppur as a Garment Manufacturing Hub

Situated in the heart of Tamil Nadu's cotton belt, Tiruppur has served as the knitwear capital of India for nearly three decades. Often referred to as 'T-shirt City,' the town's garment industry traces its origins to the 1930s when it began producing low-valued cotton hosiery items. Cotton has played a pivotal role in the history of the Coimbatore or Kongunadu region, with Tiruppur remaining an integral part of this legacy. (Ramaswamy 1985). Originally a cotton market town on the outskirts of Coimbatore's textile hub, Tiruppur witnessed a shift of people from agriculture to industry, driven less by the traditional reinvestment of agricultural surplus and more as a response to the declining profitability of farming. Rising costs of well irrigation and falling water tables further accelerated this transition. (Mahadevan & Vijaybaskar, 2012). Until the 1970s, Tiruppur's garment industry primarily served the domestic market, with production units and mills refraining from subcontracting. This scenario shifted in the 1980s as the garment export market expanded rapidly, driven largely by the rising demand for knitwear products, which had lower unit costs and prices compared to woven garments. Building on its early expertise in hosiery, Tiruppur swiftly established itself as the country's leading exporter of cotton knitwear garments.

A significant body of literature exists regarding the nature of the entrepreneurial class in Tiruppur, and its domination by Gounders, an intermediate caste group with agricultural landed interests in western Tamil Nadu.[5] This is a specific characteristic of the garment manufacturing cluster in and around Tiruppur that sets it apart from other garment export hubs in the country where the capital side is more dominated by traditional business communities and trans-sub-continental mercantile castes that are not so culturally embedded in the local region. The literature underscores that Gounder entrepreneurs in Tiruppur primarily mobilized capital through family networks rather than formal financial markets or state support. Labour was similarly drawn from Gounder firm-family and firm-farm-family networks, creating closely interwoven ties described as 'Gounder toil and Fraternal Capital' (Chari, 2004). The remarkable success of Gounder entrepreneurs has since become part of local legend, contributing to broader economic theorization.

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In the neoliberal era, the glorification of private capital as the primary driver of economic growth often intersects with social conservatism. In India, it has even been suggested that caste structures can help preserve social stability by preventing the disruptions industrialization typically causes in neighbourhood societies (Gurumurthy as cited in Vijayabaskar & Kalaiyarasan, 2014). Critiquing modern-day defenders of the caste system, several scholars have argued that caste-based kinship networks do not eliminate economic differentiation or the unequal exercise of power within these groups. Vijayabaskar and Kalaiyarasan (2014) highlighted how, in Tiruppur, direct exporters and larger firms were often able to shift economic shocks onto smaller firms, with the impact of price-

[5] See Harish Damodaran (2013), India's New Capitalists: Caste, Business, and Industry in a Modern Nation, Chapter 5. See also Chari (2004). It should also be noted that the intermediate caste of Gounders was initially classified as a 'forward caste', but reclassified on request as OBC in the 1970s.

cutting disproportionately affecting subcontractors and job workers from the same caste group. Further strengthening this argument is the observation that broader gender-based inequalities and power dynamics remain deeply embedded in the social norms of caste patriarchy.

The dominant presence and political influence of Gounder entrepreneurs, who lead organizations like the Tiruppur Exporters Association (TEA) and the South India Hosiery Manufacturers Association (SIHMA), have certainly shaped the relationship between government and capital in Tiruppur. However, well-researched historical accounts suggest that the growth of the industry and the returns on capital also involved other agents and castes. Notably, post-nationalization public sector bank credit played a significant role (Mahadevan and Vijayabaskar, 2012).[6] Banerjee and Munshi (2000) also highlight the entry of 'outsiders'—Gujaratis, Punjabis, Marwaris, Sindhis from the north, and Chettiars from the south—who belong to traditional business communities and castes. In their sample firms, they found an even distribution of Gounder 'insiders' and 'outsiders' among direct exporters. In contrast, among indirect exporters and job workers, there were more Gounder insiders.[7] Arguably, there is much to be found in the empirical literature that indicates that the story of 'industrialism' in Tiruppur is more than just a regional caste story. Nevertheless, the significant role of the intermediate caste of Gounders in Tiruppur cannot be ignored. Further, the Gounder story is not just a capital side story, but also a story of upward mobility from worker to employer status and social networks crossing the labour capital divide, even as class differentiation over generations has increased intra-caste cultural distances.[8] The entry of migrant labour has, of course, significantly altered the caste and class dimensions of the Tiruppur's industrial story.

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Phases of worker migration into Tiruppur in the 1990s initially saw Tamil workers (men and women) belonging to a range of castes and communities from other districts becoming garment workers in Tiruppur, as did several girls/women from neighbouring Kerala. This was followed by the mass entry of long-distance migrant workers into Tiruppur's garment industry in the new century. As one of the first generation of workers from Bihar in Tiruppur, who had functioned as a contractor from 2000 to 2008 (when he maintained a kind of hostel - basically a set of rooms that housed a few dozensgirls) told the researchers for this study, *"Before 2004-5 girls came with contacts, with parents from Kerala, Palghat region. Then also from other districts of Tamil Nadu. From 2006-7 girls started coming from all the states…. They replaced the girls who used to*

[6] Chari (2004) for example, refers to the sudden growth in public sector bank lending in Tiruppur during the early 1980s in Tiruppur. when "all needs of industry were taken care of by SBI and other banks…. including very short-term loans." Notably, it was the 1980s that saw both the turn to exports and laid the foundations of the phenomenal rise of Tiruppur to its pre-eminent position among garment export hubs in India.

[7] Banerjee, Abhijit; Munshi, Kaivan, (2000) 'Networks, Migration and Investment: Insiders and Outsiders in Tiruppur's Production Cluster', William Davidson Institute (WDI) - Working Paper 313.

[8] Chari (2004) has particularly drawn attention to the masculinist cultures and cultural changes taking place with new generations of Gounder employers not having the same links with the rest of their caste brethren.

work here." He had once gone and fetched some 50-60 girls from Odisha mobilized through local brokers there and claimed that in that period, he had supplied some 400 girls to one company alone.[9] The social, cultural, caste, and gender dimensions of the political economy of Tiruppur's industrialization have thus become more complex.

Widespread use of contract labour (through in-contracting within factories or out-contracting to dispersed workshops and manufactories) has been a well-established feature of Tiruppur since the 1990s. However, there is no literature on non-Tamil contractors, whose emergence is associated with the influx of long-distance migrant workers. Little has also been written about the interaction between the wider tendency of consolidation of larger factories, which bring all processes in-house, and the in-contracting/out-contracting based production processes prevalent in Tiruppur.

2.3. Feminization of Tiruppur's Garment Workforce: Interlinkages with Wider Processes

An oft-cited ethnographic study of Tiruppur has pointed to some of the processes central to women being brought into the garment workforce in Tiruppur. The first was the shift to exports during the eighties, with Verona, an Italian garment importer, coming to Tiruppur via exporters in Mumbai in 1978, followed by the European retail chain C&A, which commenced operations in 1981.[10] This process began with Tiruppur factories producing for merchant exporters located in other parts of the country, like Mumbai, and then moving to more direct connections with export markets by Tiruppur-based manufacturers themselves.[11] By 1990, exports from Tiruppur reached 3 billion rupees, roughly equivalent to $423.4 million in 2024 dollars. It was argued that the turn to exports brought in new sections like checking and finishing in the production process, particularly to export units. It was in these sections, considered to be low-skilled and therefore low-waged, that 'ladies' were first brought in - although it is an arguable case that they were low waged and designated low-skilled precisely because women were brought in. In the early 1980s, women migrants were employed primarily in checking sections of a few export firms as temporary hires and paid time-rated wages. At the same time, piece rates prevailed in sections that were exclusively male sections, particularly in cutting and ironing. It was thus suggested that women's entry as such was not through any displacement of male workers (Chari, 2004). Others have pointed out that in the stitching operations, which accounts for 60per cent of the labour time in the garment industry, there was indeed a replacement of male workers as part of wage depressing, low-wage path of growth (Neetha N, 2002, Mazumdar 2007).

The template for actively seeking out and recruiting unmarried young girls from rural and less industrially developed areas within the state for a two to three-year period of employment and housing them in factory-run accommodations within or close to the production facilities had been developed by textile factories (particularly spinning mills) of Tamil Nadu in the 1990s.[12] Known as the Sumangali scheme, a lump sum of around ₹30,000 at the end of three years of work in the factory was promised to the girls and/or their families, purportedly for 'marriage assistance'.[13] The employment on offer was thus explicitly temporary and aimed only at unmarried

[9] Based on an interview (dtd. 11th December 2023) with a former contractor from Bihar, who now functions as a small trader, supplying garments manufactured in Tiruppur to retail outlets in various other cities. He and his family have settled in Tiruppur, his children have been brought up there and studied up to higher education levels in Tamil and English. The whole family speaks Tamil and Tiruppur is now their home.

[10] https://tea-india.org/about-tea/tea-achievements#2-commencement-of-exports

[11] Interestingly, the study (Chari, 2004), which indeed dwells on the role of the Gounder community in the making of industrial Tiruppur, still reports that a non-Gounder from a traditional business caste of Tamil Nadu claimed to be the first to 'bring in ladies' to the industry in 1975, as checkers and helpers (Chari, 2004, pp. 244-245.)

[12] Documentation before the Madras High Court covering eight districts in Tamil Nadu (which did not include either Coimbatore or Tiruppur, however did include Tiruppur's neighbouring district of Erode), had established that hundreds of rural girls (including minors) were being recruited by textile factories, which kept them in rudimentary hostels under the control of factory management.

[13] Sumangali is the commonly used word for a fortunate married woman.

girls, who were all expected to leave at the end of the two to three-year when they got married. Importantly, the scheme bypassed entitlements to statutory minimum wages and the right to become permanent employees after six to twelve months of work, which was provided for under the rules of the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act of 1946. Such de facto fixed-term employment was, of course, later made de jure by the central government when it rewrote the rules of the Standing Order Act.[14] In the heyday of the Sumangali scheme, however, the right of workers to become permanent after a period of probation not exceeding one year was still the settled law of the land.

Confined to residential camps run by the mill managements where conditions were notoriously harsh and restrictive, the Sumangali scheme came to be widely known as a 'camp coolie system'.[15] In 2007; the Madras High Court decreed the system as bonded labour due to the absence of minimum wages. Again in 2009, the Court dismissed a petition from factory managements who had argued that as trainees, the young women were not entitled to minimum wages.[16] Further, European pressure groups highlighted the case of Sumangali workers as a form of labour abuse in the supply chains of international buyer brands. Audit systems of buyer brands influenced by such campaigns also discouraged garment export companies from operating or in some cases, continuing with the Sumangali scheme.[17]

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Around this time, government-sponsored skill development programmes in states where the garment industry had little or no presence started focusing on training young women for the apparel industry, particularly following the adoption of a National Policy on Skill Development in 2009. A pool of young, mostly unmarried women from different parts of the country, mostly with high school education, thus became available for concentrated nodes of the industry such as Tiruppur, obviating the need for Sumangali type schemes. Then came the government's permission for fixed-term contracts, first granted specifically for garment manufacturing in 2016.[18] It was followed by the overturning of long-

[14] Ministry of Labour and Employment Notification New Delhi, 16th march, 2018, https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/fte_final_notification.pdf

[15] The absence of minimum wages and curtailment of free movement were reminiscent of colonial indentured labour for whom the term coolie is said to have been first used.

[16] Before the 2007 judgement on the camp coolie system, in February 2006, the State Textile Workers Federation had made a representation through the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), to the Government of Tamil Nadu alleging that the Textile Mills in Tamil Nadu were indulging in an exploitative practice of engaging adolescent girls under a scheme known as Thirumagal Thirumana Thittam (Bride's marriage plan) and that the same amounted in fact, to forced labour. Thereafter, CITU filed a writ petition before the Madurai Bench of Madras High Court, which was however, dismissed on the grounds that the grievance of the Union could be redressed by the concerned labour authorities.

[17] For evidence of the scheme being in operation at the end of the 1990s in Tiruppur, see John Samuel Raja D. (2007), 'Woman mill workers make most of education, a perk in Tirupur,'

https://www.livemint.com/Home-Page/GEGKNxdhSpQWB8t6LJmHYP/Woman-mill-workers-make-most-of-education-a-perk-in-Tirupur.html

[18] Fixed Term Employment introduced for Apparel Manufacturing Sector- win-win situation for both Employers and Employees, 7.10.2016, https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=151537

settled law regarding the entitlement of workers to permanent tenures after probation, through legalizing fixed-term contracts by tweaking the rules of the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act in 2017. The twin processes of feminized migration of young and unmarried women and de facto fixed-term contracts in the garment industry thus moved to a new level and became formalized.

As such, even as the Sumangali scheme waned, the model of combining hostels and factories for women workers continued to expand and develop. It was considered useful in dealing with labour attrition, and some Tiruppur companies added the perk of facilitating the attainment of higher education degrees while staying in the hostel to attract and retain their workers for some time.[19] Why the development of the factory hostel model was concentrated in the south perhaps requires some explanation. Most crucially, the explanation begins with the more feminized nature of southern India's garment workforce in comparison with the north from an earlier period, which necessitated the provision of women specific accommodation that was linked to the enlargement of production facilities required by the restructuring of India's garment industry around the turn of the century.

The context for restructuring was a changeover in the production systems and regional distribution of India's garment export industry under the influence

“The stage was thus set for expansion of the scope, scale, and widening of the terrain from which women migrants would be drawn into differentiated regimes of labour and gender in the garment industry of Tiruppur.

of a globally restructured garment industry. Developments in the globalized garment industry are too well-documented to require reiteration here. What is relevant to our study, however, is that modern-style large factories that feminized many more aspects of the production process rose amidst the dense agglomeration of networks of small and medium firms that was universally accepted as characteristic of Tiruppur. These larger factories needed a larger supply of workers than was available from within the local milieu. The stage was thus set for expansion of the scope, scale, and widening of the terrain from which women migrants would be drawn into differentiated regimes of labour and gender in the garment industry of Tiruppur.

[19] John Samuel Raja D. (2007) op.cit.

3. Profile of Women Migrant Workers in Tiruppur: Method, Social Background, and Modes of Migration



3.1. Data and Methodology

The primary research for this study aimed to understand the challenges faced by migrant women workers in the garment manufacturing industry, focusing on the following areas: 1) their social background, migration motivations, modes of migration, and the barriers they face in accessing work and managing migration; 2) the various labour arrangements and systemic barriers related to working conditions, wage standards, access to social security, sexual harassment prevention, and enforcement; 3) the different residential arrangements for migrant women workers, their living conditions, and the social dynamics within these settings. The research thus centers on a questionnaire-based survey of 153 women migrant workers conducted from October to December 2023 (referred to as 'the survey'). Purposive selection of respondents aimed to cover three key areas: a) various modes of residence, b) a range of factory sizes from small to large, and c) adequate representation from major source states. Purposive targeting and snowballing methods were used to construct the sample. The survey was conducted

> **The primary research centers on a questionnaire-based survey of 153 women migrant workers conducted from October to December 2023**

across 15 areas in Tiruppur and surrounding industrial zones. Size classes of factories were defined by the number of workers. Modes of residence included factory-run hostels (within or outside the premises of factories), a range of settlements in the city and its suburbs, and various social modes of residence, including living alone or with friends/partners, as well as living with family members, and non-factory run hostels. These modes of residence were identified by pre-survey pilot consultations held in September 2023 with key informants from Tiruppur workers, contractors, and trade unionists. The pre-survey pilot had identified Odisha, Bihar, and Jharkhand as being the most prominent source states for women

workers, and accordingly selection of respondents from these three states was prioritized. Migrants from within Tamil Nadu were also prioritized but were less easily distinguishable from non-migrant local workers.

Roughly one-third of the surveyed workers were approached through snowball sampling in residential areas, and another one-third were approached at bus stops, in buses, and other public areas where workers were known to spend the day out on Sundays. Slightly less than a third were approached within their factory premises, particularly residents of factory-run hostels, while a few workers were approached at the entry of a private-run hostel adjacent to an industrial estate.

The initial research plan targeted an equal number of migrant workers from Bihar, Odisha, and other districts of Tamil Nadu for the survey, within an overall target of 120. As it turned out, the sample became relatively less purposive in terms of the targets for states of origin and relatively more determined by the spread and range of residential arrangements and the size class of the factories. The sample's actual regional/linguistic distribution became more of an outcome rather than a rigidly targeted selection. One consequence was the emergence of Assam as a significant source state in the sample.

Given the purposive nature and methods of constructing the survey sample, the quantitative percentage figures presented here are indicative and not statistically validated. Percentages have nevertheless been used for easy descriptions, and the broadly representative nature of the sample is considered adequate for identifying major trends, patterns, and characteristics.

The survey findings are supplemented with insights into processes, intersections, exogenic pressures, and thematic variations, garnered from more open-ended interactions/interviews with individual workers, factory management personnel, contractors, trade union leaders, officials of labour departments at the destination, and two source states, a Tiruppur based journalist, representatives of the principal collective organization of garment factory owners/employers (Tiruppur Exporters Association, TEA), as well as the relatively recently reconstituted Tiruppur Stakeholders Forum (TSF), and representatives of some NGOs actively engaged with women migrant workers in Tiruppur/ Tamil Nadu, Ranchi/Jharkhand and Bhadrak/Odisha.

The initial research plan targeted an equal number of migrant workers from Bihar, Odisha, and other districts of Tamil Nadu for the survey, with an overall target of 120.

The core survey team consisted of three members: two bilingual PhD researchers (one fluent in Tamil and English, with experience as a garment worker in Tiruppur, another fluent in Hindi, Tamil, and English) and a trilingual graduate student from a Bihari family, with a background in the garment industry. Their multilingual skills, local knowledge, and social connections facilitated access to migrant women workers and ensured a representative sample. Their observations and multicultural backgrounds contributed significantly to the study.

3.2. Social Background of Migrant Women Workers in Tiruppur

The survey results show that significant proportions of migrant women workers in Tiruppur come from more dispersed origins than had been estimated at the start. Locals of Tiruppur tend to use the term 'Hindi workers' to refer to all the cross-regional migrants, including those who may come from other linguistic regions/states. This may be because of the dominant presence of north Indian Hindi speakers among the first wave of male migrant workers in Tiruppur, followed, or accompanied in the case of many of them, by their womenfolk. In the final composition of the sample of 153 women workers, close to 23 per cent were from Odisha; Bihar and Jharkhand were represented by 19 per cent each; close to 14 per cent were from Assam and a little over 13 per cent were from Tamil Nadu.

Other states included Uttar Pradesh (7%) and the remaining (5%) were migrants from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Kerala (see Table 1 in Annex 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of Surveyed Migrant Women Workers in Tiruppur by State

		States						Aggregate	
		Assam	Bihar	Jharkhand	Odisha	Tamil Nadu	Other States	Total #	Total
Age	18-20	6	4	6	9	3	5	33	21.6%
	21-25	9	6	13	19	3	5	55	35.9%
	26- 30	1	5	8	6	9	1	30	19.6%
	31-35	3	5	1	1	0	7	17	11.1%
	36-40	2	3	1	0	0	2	8	5.2%
	41-45	0	3	0	0	3	1	7	4.6%
	45+	0	1	0	0	2	0	3	2.0%
Marital Status	Unmarried	11	4	18	23	4	5	65	42.5%
	Married	10	23	11	11	16	13	84	54.9%
	Separated	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	1.3%
	Widowed	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	1.3%
Caste Category	UC	4	2	0	6	0	4	16	10.8%
	OBC	7	15	4	11	10	7	54	36.5%
	MBC/EBC	0	0	0	0	8	0	8	5.4%
	SC	0	6	6	9	1	4	26	17.6%
	ST	1	0	17	3	0	0	21	14.2%
	N/A	6	6	0	6	1	4	23	15.5%
Education Level	None	2	3	4	9	2	1	21	13.7%
	Primary	9	13	4	3	0	0	29	19.0%
	Middle	2	4	3	7	8	5	29	19.0%
	Grade 10	0	1	8	16	10	0	35	22.9%
	Grade 12	0	4	4	7	4	1	20	13.1%
	Graduate	1	6	6	3	2	1	19	12.4%
Total Distribution of Workers		**21 (13.7%)**	**27 (17.6%)**	**29 (19.0%)**	**35 (22.9%)**	**20 (13.1%)**	**21 (13.7%)**	**153**	

Notes: The age category refers to the self-reported ages of survey respondents. 'Other States' refers to Gujarat; Madhya Pradesh; Chhattisgarh; & Kerala. The Caste Categories are as follows: UC (Upper Caste); OBC (Other Backward Class); MBC/EBC (Most Backward Classes & Extremely Backward Classes); SC (Scheduled Castes); ST (Scheduled Tribes). 'N/A' refers to respondents who either did not know their caste or refused to disclose it.

3.2.1. Sub-Regional Diversity in Source States

The social backgrounds of the workers reveal significant diversity in sub-regions within their states of origin. The sample of women workers came from 58 districts across 9 states. Migrants from Odisha and Jharkhand were from 11 districts each, while those from Bihar and Assam came from 8 districts each. Tamil workers hailed from 9 districts in Tamil Nadu, and the 10% of workers from 5 other states came from 11 districts (see Table 1 in Annex 1 for district details). Migrant women workers in Tiruppur thus exhibit significant cultural and regional diversity. Among the 35 workers from Odisha, 14 were from 5 western Odisha districts, 15 from 3 coastal districts, and fewer from southern Odisha.[20] of the 29 workers from Bihar, 24 were from Maithili-speaking districts, with 23 citing Maithili as their mother tongue, while others spoke Bhojpuri. Jharkhand migrants were dispersed across various sub-regions, including tribal-majority and mixed districts. Migrants from Assam were mostly from tea plantation districts, with some from the Bodoland Territorial Region. Notably, the workers spoke six distinct ethno-regional languages, in addition to 28 per cent Hindi, 22 per cent Odia, 15 per cent Assamese, and 12 per cent Tamil speakers.

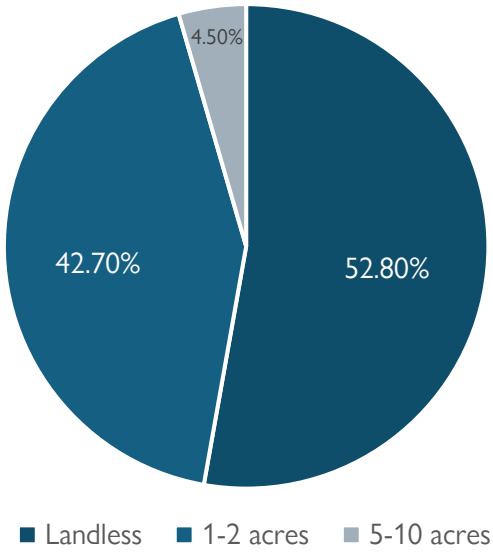
This diversity has been increasing over time. However, four districts across four states take the lead in sending higher than average number of workers, suggesting that along with increasing sub-regional diversity, there are also more concentrated migration corridors to Tiruppur from some particular districts of origin. The districts from where more concentrated numbers appeared in the survey were Vaishali in Bihar, Bhadrak in Odisha, Virudhunagar in Tamil Nadu, and Morigaon in Assam.

3.2.2. Economic Background of Women Migrant Workers

Most women workers (67%) originated from rural areas, though agriculture was the primary household income source for less than half (41%). Notably, 28 per cent of urban-origin workers also relied on farming, indicating ties to rural peripheries. Overall, 76 per cent of the workers had rural or semi-rural backgrounds.

Figure 1 shows land ownership patterns among women migrant workers of rural origin: 52.8 per cent came from landless households, while 42.7 per cent belonged to households with just 1-2 acres of land. Thus, 95.5 per cent of rural-origin women migrants were from landless or smallholder farming households. (Refer to Table 15 in Annex 1 for detailed economic characteristics).

Figure 1: Land Ownership of Rural Origin Migrant Workers



Note: Based on 89 responses. 14 responses were missing for land ownership from the rural cohort

[20] Malkangiri district for example has only 34 percent of Odia language speakers, 23 percent Koya speakers (Gondi Dravidian language of the Koya tribe, the bulk of whom live in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh), and 21 percent Bengali (mainly refugees from East Bengal who were settled there in the 1960s as part of the Dandakaranya project). Similarly, Rayagada has 33 percent Kui speakers (the language of the Kandha tribes). and some 10 percent Telugu speakers.

Some of the workers were from artisanal castes/communities such as *Badhais* and *Vishwakarmas*,[21] although none belonged to any of the traditional weaver castes/communities. Not a single worker reported artisanal manufacture as the main source of income for their households at origin, regardless of whether they hailed from rural or urban areas, suggestive of a decimation of artisanal production and its traditions.

The households of 15 per cent of workers coming from rural areas depended on local wage work (in agriculture and construction) as their main source of income, some 3 per cent on local service work (manual), and 10 per cent on small shops. Surprisingly, only 6 per cent said that migrant remittances provided the main source of sustenance for their village households.

Table 2: Main Source of Household Income for Migrants at Area of Origin

The main source of income/ sustenance of households	Rural origins	%	Urban origins	%
Farming	39	40.6	13	27.7
Livestock rearing	2	2.1	0	0.0
Local wage work	14	14.6	10	21.3
Artisanal Manufacture	0	0.0	0	0.0
Local Business (small shop)	10	10.4	12	25.5
Local service work (manual)	3	3.1	1	2.1
Local service work (white collar)	6	6.3	1	2.1
Migrant worker remittance	10	10.4	7	14.9
Other	12	12.5	3	6.4
Total	**96**	**100**	**47**	**100**
Missing	*7*		*3*	

Almost half (49.5%) of rural-origin workers lived in kaccha houses, while 40 per cent resided in semi-pucca houses. Among urban-origin workers, 28 per cent had pucca houses, 50 per cent semi-pucca houses, and 22 per cent kaccha houses. Over a quarter (26%) of urban-origin women migrants had experienced rural-to-urban migration during childhood, while the rest came from long-established urban families. More than half (58%) of urban-origin migrants lived in family-owned houses, with fewer in rented housing than those staying with relatives. Widespread agrarian crisis, evident in high landlessness, small farm holdings, and

[21] Badhais are a traditional carpenter caste across north India. Vishwakarma includes blacksmiths, carpenters, coppersmiths, and some communities of goldsmiths and stonemasons, the community named after the Hindu craftsman god Vishwakarma, considered to be the divine architect. Vishwakarma puja is usually observed on the day after Diwali by mechanics, smiths, welders, industrial workers, factory workers, when the tools of the trade or machines they work on are venerated.

limited agricultural income, alongside the collapse of artisanal livelihoods, has driven women to migrate to Tiruppur, primarily to support their families

3.2.3. Caste & Community

Tellingly, when it came to caste backgrounds of women migrants, the share of Other Backward Classes and castes (OBCs), Most Backward Classes (MBCs)/Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) among rural migrants far exceeded the share of these social groups among those of urban origin. In contrast, the share of upper castes among urban-origin women migrants was six to seven times greater than their exceedingly small share (3.1%) among women from rural areas. The share of women migrants with Scheduled Caste (SC) backgrounds was roughly similar across rural and urban origins. Table 3 below presents the survey findings on numbers and shares of the officially recognized caste/tribe categories among the surveyed workers - by state of origin.[22]

Table 3: Caste Category of Migrant Women Workers in Tiruppur by State of Origin

Caste Category	States of Origin							Percentage Distribution	
	Assam	Bihar	Jharkhand	Odisha	Tamil Nadu	others	All states	%	% after excluding refusals
Upper caste/ General	4	2	0	6	0	4	16	10.8	12.8
OBC	7	15	4	11	10	7	54	36.5	43.2
MBC/EBC	0	0	0	0	8	0	8	5.4	6.4
SC	0	6	6	9	1	4	26	17.6	20.8
ST	1	0	17	3	0	0	21	14.2	18.4
Refused/didn't know	6	6	0	6	1	4	23	15.5	
Total	18	29	27	35	20	19	148	100	100
Missing	3		2				5		

The caste backgrounds of workers may be of less significance as a determinant of conditions of work and life within the multi-ethnic community of women garment workers in Tiruppur, where caste anonymity is possible and might be explicitly preferred by workers and employers. In one large factory with a hostel, the management - which had otherwise allowed the researchers to conduct their survey within factory/hostel premises - told them not to ask about caste background. Even without managerial pressure, a significant proportion of workers refused to respond to the question on caste category. Overall, 15.5 per cent of the workers refused or said they did not know their caste or social group category while responses of 3 per cent were not recorded. Interestingly, some among them did mention their caste name, while some others who were reluctant to name their caste, were quite forthcoming on caste category.

[22] MBC/EBC are sub-categories of the OBCs. Tamil Nadu follows a sub-classification of MBC, while Bihar and Jharkhand use the nomenclature of EBC, although criteria for sub-classification varies across all three states.

Nevertheless, caste location remains an important marker of conditions in areas of origin, where caste anonymity is virtually impossible and where a live connection between caste location, economic status, and discrimination impinges on compulsions and motivations to migrants, and influences recruitment choices and practices.

Without a caste census, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of 2021-22 may be used as a reference point or benchmark of the aggregate distribution of the various caste/social group categories in India. According to PLFS, 2021-22, 10 per cent of the Indian population belonged to ST communities, 20 per cent to SC communities, close to 46 per cent to OBCs (inclusive of MBC/EBC), and a little over 24per cent were upper castes.[23] In this context, migrant women garment workers in Tiruppur are disproportionately from OBC, ST, and SC communities, with minimal upper caste representation.

Out of 125 workers (excluding refusals and missing data), nearly 50 per cent were OBCs, just under 21 per cent were SCs, and over 18 per cent were STs, while upper castes accounted for less than 13 per cent. OBCs and STs together made up 68 per cent of the workforce, exceeding their general population shares, while SC representation was only slightly higher. No upper caste workers were recorded from Jharkhand or Tamil Nadu, and those from Bihar were too few to be significant.

The higher proportion of OBC workers from Bihar and Tamil Nadu contrasts with their lower representation among workers from Jharkhand, while of the 21 ST workers in the sample, 17 were from Jharkhand, where nearly three-fifths of the surveyed workers belonged to ST communities. This was almost double the state's ST population share of 26 per cent. In Bihar and Tamil Nadu, where STs make up just over 1 per cent of the population, no ST workers were recorded in the survey. However, despite Odisha's ST population being 23 per cent, only 3 out of 35 workers from Odisha were from ST backgrounds, despite the prominence of ST women in migration narratives from the state.Among 21 workers from Assam, only one identified as ST, despite STs constituting 13 per cent of the state's population. The low representation may be linked to some workers being from the tea plantation belt, descendants of tribal migrants from Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, relocated as indentured labourers during colonial rule. Some who declined to disclose their caste identified as Adivasi.[24]

“The higher proportion of OBC workers from Bihar and Tamil Nadu contrasts with their lower representation among workers from Jharkhand.

SC women migrants were more evenly distributed, with 17.3 per cent from rural areas and 18 per cent from urban origins. No SC women were recorded among Assam migrants, possibly reflecting their low population share (7.1%) or the limited SC presence in tea garden labour.

Only one of 20 Tamil Nadu migrants belonged to an SC background, contrasting with earlier findings where 30 per cent of Tiruppur’s garment workers were SC (Neetha, 2002). While the sample size here is limited, a possible decline in SC representation among Tamil women migrants' warrants further research.

Most surveyed workers were Hindus, while 21 per cent belonged to minority religions, with Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and followers of tribal religions equally represented. Muslims were from Assam, Tamil Nadu, and Odisha, while Buddhists were primarily from Assam. Among 21 ST workers, 9 followed tribal religions (among Santhal, Ho, Oraon from Jharkhand, Kandha from Odisha) and 3 from Jharkhand (tribe unspecified) were Christians. Other Christians were from Tamil Nadu and Odisha.

[23] See Statement 33 in Govt. of India, NSSO, Annual Report, PLFS, 2021-22.

[24] While these communities have ST status elsewhere, in Assam they are known as tea tribes, but officially classified as OBC. This is a point of contention for Adivasi plantation labourers in the state, who have been demanding ST status.

3.3. Migration Compulsions, Motivations, and Processes

Migration drivers are complex, influenced by both social and individual factors. When asked why they first migrated, most workers selected a single primary reason despite being allowed multiple answers. The vast majority (81%) cited "to earn and support family" as their primary reason (See Table 4). Among them, 15 per cent also mentioned poverty, 14 per cent cited family debt, 4 individuals specifically mentioned supporting their children, and 2 cited higher wages. The choice of Tiruppur was largely driven by the availability or expectation of wage employment to support their households.

Table 4: Reasons for Migration to Tiruppur

Reasons for first journey to Tiruppur given by workers	No.	per cent
To earn and support family (inclusive of due to poverty, debt, and higher wages)	124	81.0
To earn/save for marriage	5	3.3
To support brother's education	1	0.7
No employment opportunities in the home state	1	0.7
Advised by father	4	2.6
Advised by agents	1	0.7
Marriage	6	3.9
Other reasons	11	7.2
All	153	100

Lack of employment in home states was an implicit driver. Long-distance migrants often suggested expanding industrial jobs in their states. Only 4 per cent cited marriage as a reason, including some inter-caste couples escaping social opprobrium.

3.3.1. The Phenomenon of Couples' Migration

Couple migration to Tiruppur's garment industry is common, with about one-third of women migrating with their boyfriends or husbands. While most were married, 10 to 14 per cent were unmarried when they migrated. Bihar leads in couple migration, followed by Odisha and Tamil Nadu, with Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Assam catching up.

Tapasi, from Sambalpur, Odisha, shared her inter-tribe elopement experience (see Appendix I, Box 1). Other examples include Santhal women from Jharkhand and older women from Bihar, who migrated with husbands, some of whom shifted to trade while the wives worked in garments, often through contractors.

3.3.2. Increasing Numbers of Women Migrants Travelling Alone

While only 2 per cent of workers travelled alone on their first journey to Tiruppur, nearly 18 per cent travelled alone on their latest trip, indicating growing confidence among women migrants (See Table 5). Some who initially travelled with friends or all-female groups travelled alone later, though 16 per cent continued to travel with friends.

Family migration remains significant, second only to couple migration. Surprisingly, fewer women from Bihar travelled with family compared to migrants from Jharkhand, Assam, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu. This may be due to more unmarried women from the other states, who may be reluctant or not

allowed to travel alone, while married women from Bihar, now seasoned migrants, show more confidence in solo travel. In Tamil Nadu, frequent family trips are more common.

Table 5: Companions of Migrant Women Workers on Their Journey to Tiruppur

	First-time journey to Tiruppur		Latest journey to Tiruppur	
With whom migrant women workers made their journey to Tiruppur	**No. of workers**	**Percentage**	**No. of workers**	**Percentage**
Alone	3	2	27	17.6
With family members	36	23.7	39	25.5
With agent	20	13.2	9	5.9
With friend(s)	28	18.4	24	15.7
With boyfriend/husband	50	32.9	49	32
In all-female group	5	3.3	2	1.3
With the trainer/placement officer	9	5.9	3	2
With company representative	1	0.7	0	0
Total	152	100	153	100

3.3.3. Intermediary Contractors and Agents

As shown in Table 4 and Table 5, the role of agents and training/placement personnel in the migration process appears less prominent than expected. However, agents may have a larger role than reflected in this survey due to the underrepresentation of workers in large factories, where a smaller number of units employ a larger share of the female workforce.[25] Interviews with management in two large factories revealed that they employed in-house recruitment agents, a practice confirmed by a contractor from Odisha.

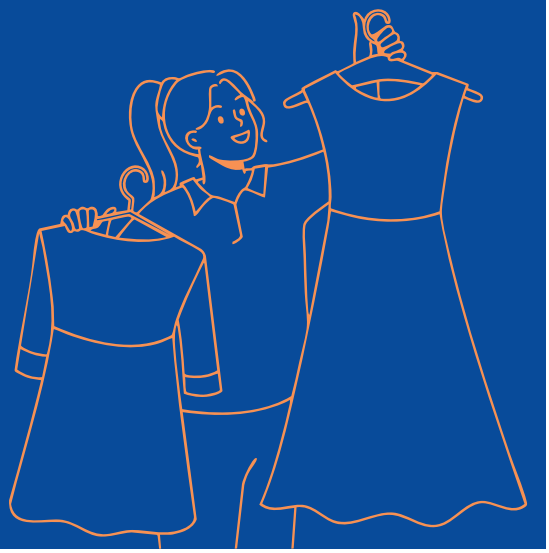
Some contractors from Bihar and Odisha, who started as workers, also played a role in recruiting. They provided training and placed workers in companies needing staff. One Bihari contractor-built rooms to house migrant workers, often housing girls from Odisha and boys from Bihar. The Odisha contractor, on the payroll of a large factory, acted as a paid recruiting agent, though he was hesitant to disclose his payment arrangement.

As shown in Table 4, the role of agents and training/placement personnel in the migration process appears less prominent than expected. However, agents may have a larger role than reflected in this survey due to the underrepresentation of workers in large factories, where a smaller number of units employ a larger share of the female workforce.

[25] It may be noted that over a third of the sample workers working in smaller-sized factories were drawn from a total workforce of 1500 to 2000 from 31 factories. Another third in medium-sized factories were drawn from a total workforce of 7000 to 9000 across 29 factories, while less than a third (31 per cent) of the sample workers from 8 large factories were drawn from a total workforce of well over 12,000.

4.

The Role of Agents and Contractors in **Migrant Women Workers' Recruitment**



While migrating as couples or with family members reflects bottom-up social processes, large garment factories have introduced top-down recruitment policies targeting young, unmarried women from distant states. These factories often set up hostels to accommodate workers. Interviews with management personnel from two large factories (Factory A and Factory B) provide valuable insights into these recruitment practices and the preferences and perceptions of factory management.[26]

4.1.1. Connections of Large Factories with Skill Development Centres in Source States

The HR manager of Factory A, with a workforce of around 3000, explained their recruitment process, which primarily relies on skill development centers in states like Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Assam.[27] Factory A has a dedicated recruitment person based in Assam. Employee records show that about 35 per cent of the workforce is from Tamil Nadu, 29-30 per cent from Assam, and 15 per cent from Jharkhand, with only 1.8-2 per cent from Odisha (where there are no tie-ups with skill centers). The factory has company-run hostels that can accommodate 2280 girls, with only 248 intra-state Tamil workers staying in hostels; the rest are "day scholars", a term suggestive of boarding school setup.

Factory A's HR manager outlined a recruitment 'referral system' where employees earn incentives for referring new hires: 6000 ($72.26 USD) for one candidate, ₹60,000 ($722.57 USD) for ten, and ₹300,000 ($3,612.83 USD) for fifty. The ₹6000 is paid as ₹750 ($9.03 USD) per month over eight months, contingent on the referred employee working at least 20 days per month. The scheme is conditional upon recruits working for a minimum of eight months. In similar vein, the HR manager of another factory (Factory B) with 1200 workers of which 900 women, predominantly residents of factory run hostels, were just in sewing alone, said that 60 per cent of the women in his factory come from Jharkhand, "as part of the Skill Development Program." He too referred to some of the bigger residential skill training centres in Jharkhand,

[26] Interviews with management personnel of Factory A began at 11 am on 9th December 2023 and carried on till 3 pm. The interviews at Factory B were mostly conducted that same day in the evening from 5 pm onwards, and supplemented with a revisit to the factory two weeks later on 23rd December.

[27] One of the skill centres mentioned was visited in the course of field work in Jharkhand.

Odisha, and Assam from where his factory recruited workers. At the same time, he added that "operators, helpers, packers, come only through referrals. Mostly they come through relatives, like mama-chacha, long extended families work here… there are two and a half lakh migrants in Tiruppur."[28]

Pointing to the size of the female workforce being drawn from some states, the HR manager of Factory B gave an informed guestimate that there were 4000 workers from Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh in yet another company that was among the very largest in Tiruppur. According to him, they too had mostly come through some of the same skill centres from where his own factory had recruited and suggested that a revolving door pattern of migrant worker turnover was at work in a *"circulating workforce, since they don't stay for more than a year. We are experimenting with Jharkhand. From Odisha, they come for routine jobs only… The tea garden labour which comes through [a skill development centre] in Assam is very skilled."*

4.1.2. Factory Management Preferences for Resident Workers in Assembly Line Production

Apart from motivating workers to bring in new recruits from their areas of origin, the 'referral' system was leading to relatively concentrated inflows from some village clusters, (i.e., from within the radius of villages with which the referring employees had social connections/contacts). The HR manager of Factory A mentioned concentrated numbers of girls from clusters of villages or zones located in Madurai, Ramanathapuram, parts of Karnataka and Kerala (girls from the south came mostly through the referral system). He added that his company recruited directly from places that are more than 200 kilometres distant, and gave the reason as, *"if they come from a long distance, then they do not take frequent leave. They live in the hostel, mostly because we have a late shift, so there are safety issues. Some leave at night. But 90 per cent stay in the hostel, only 10 per cent are day scholars."*[29]

> **While migrating as couples or with family members reflects bottom-up social processes, large garment factories have introduced top-down recruitment policies targeting young, unmarried women from distant states.**

Factory B's HR manager indicated a preference for out-of-state migrants, stating "the Tamils don't stay for long." He added that the local workers often take leave for festivals and marriage, disrupting the assembly line, which relies heavily on migrant workers. While 40 per cent of the workforce was local, it had reduced to 30 per cent, with 70 per cent now being inter-state migrants residing in factory hostels to ensure production continuity. A smaller pool of non-resident local workers, managed through contractors, serves as a backup for attrition. Notably, researchers were referred to Factory B by an Odia contractor who was recruiting in Odisha during the interview. *A captive workforce of migrant women in factory hostels, to work day and night shifts, is thus a defined management policy of companies with hostels.*

4.1.3. Worker Attrition

Despite investments in hostels, incentivised recruitment, and partnerships with government-supported skill development centres, attrition remained a significant challenge. Factory A's General Manager noted that while the company aimed for recruits to stay 4-5 years, 50 per cent left within a year. Retention was reportedly higher among Northeastern migrants, stating, *"the Assam–Meghalaya girls stay longer. These are second-generation migrants… But from Jharkhand, 50 per cent go back in*

[28] All quotations drawn from Interview with Factory B's HR Manager on 9th December 2023 at 5 pm

[29] Quotations from Interview with Factory A's HR manager on 9th December 2023, at 11 am.

less than a year. Jharkhand and Odisha both promoted out-migration. In fact, more girls are going out through the skill development centres there. *Usually, they are X-XII pass."*[30] It is already known from other studies that women outnumber men in out-of-state placements in the DDU-GKY skill development programme in Odisha (CWDS, 2018), although the composition of workers in Factory A, suggests that the skill development centres in Jharkhand and the north-east have a more significant role to play for that particular factory.[31]

Factory B's HR manager reported approximately 300 women from Jharkhand in the hostels, stating, *"they stay only for 8 months. Out of 100, 10 will come back after two months. There is early marriage, around 19-20. Only a few return for 1-2 years before leaving. The Odisha girls stay longer. Many have settled here with families. Some may have been in the hostel earlier, are married, and have stayed for 7-10 years, even 15. Their families are now here."* He noted that state-wise hostel groupings had reduced attrition, suggesting cultural familiarity eased alienation. Factory B operated three hostels—one on-campus and two in rented buildings 14 kilometres away. The hostel system, running for 10 years, ensured a captive workforce for uninterrupted assembly line production.[32] Interestingly, according to the HR manager, most of the women from Odisha come from Kalahandi and Balasore.[33] It should be noted that Kalahandi is in the drought-prone poverty-ridden belts in western Odisha, while Balasore is a coastal district, considered to be one of the more developed in the state.[34]

Factory A and Factory B both recruit through skilling centres and prefer migrant hosteller workers over local women. Factory A relies more on incentivised referrals, while Factory B uses contractor-supplied workers, including settled migrants. Factory A, set up five years ago outside Tiruppur, was designed for a large resident migrant workforce, unlike its older units with more local workers.[35] Factory B, operational for over 10 years, employs a larger male workforce, with some long-serving male workers acting as recruiting agents from Odisha, contributing to longer tenures of Odia workers. As an older unit, its workforce expanded from hundreds to over a thousand, alongside growth in its production units within the same industrial area.

> **"if they come from a long distance, then they do not take frequent leave. They live in the hostel, mostly because we have a late shift, so there are safety issues. Some leave at night. But 90 per cent stay in the hostel, only 10 per cent are day scholars."**

Factory A, a 100 per cent export-oriented unit, is locally owned by a third-generation business family and has units in Sri Lanka and Ethiopia. Factory B, originally founded by a Punjabi family from Ludhiana, was fully acquired by a US-based private equity firm (60 % in 2017, 40 % in 2019) and merged with a Bangalore-based portfolio company in 2021. Unlike Factory A, Factory B primarily serves the Indian domestic market, reflecting new portfolio finance influences in Tiruppur's traditionally industrial capital-driven garment sector.[36]

[30] Source: Meeting with General Manager (GM) of Factory A, on 9th December 2023 at 3 pm. The GM's remark by second generation migrants of course refers not necessarily to children of former migrants, but also to younger relatives of workers of longer duration.

[31] CWDS, Women migration in India: Evidence from Odisha,

[32] It may be noted that a contractor from Odisha, has particularly referred to Factory B as having large numbers of Odia workers

[33] All quotations in preceding four paragraphs are drawn from an interview with Factory B's HR Manager on 9th December 2023 at 5 pm.

[34] Interestingly, the present-day district of Bhadrak was earlier part of Balasore.

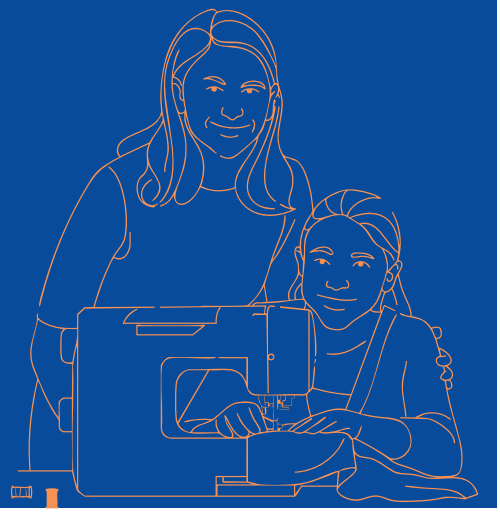
[35] It is possible that the small proportion of Odiya workers in Factory A had links with Odiya workers in the more longstanding unit of the same company in the heart of Tirupur

[36] Based on data from Private Equity International (PEI), the private equity firm in question is ranked among the top 10 private equity firms worldwide.

Both Factory A and Factory B depend on long-distance migrant women as their core workforce, essential for sustaining production. Large garment units have diversified Tiruppur's women workforce, supported by hostels and government-backed skill development centres. The preference for young women is a strategic labour policy shaped by global trends in garment manufacturing. In Tiruppur, this policy also weakened trade unions influential in the 1980s that were male-dominated as was the workforce at the time.

Recruitment strategies that prioritise single women through skill centres. This capital-driven focus have created a structurally gender-segregated workforce, sustained through cycles of temporary migration. This is in contrast to autonomous migration that displays no such structural segregation.

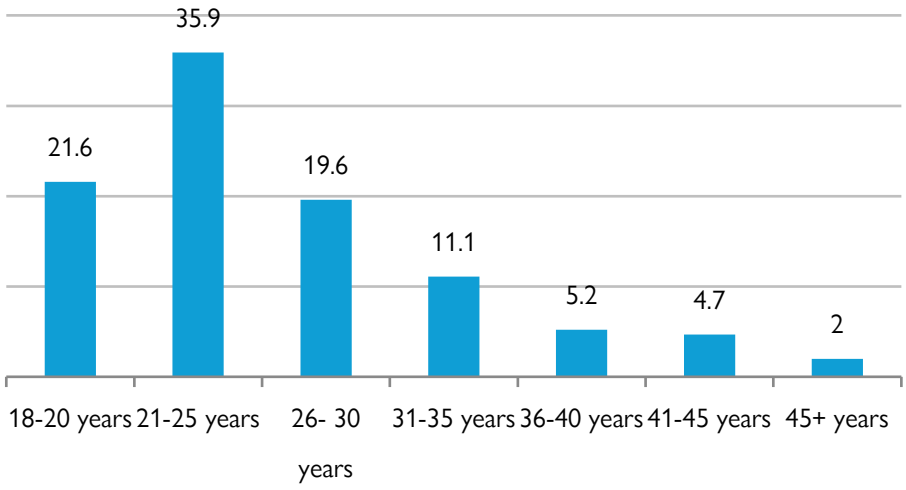
5. Demographic Characteristics of **Migrant Women Workers**



Over half (57.5%) of the surveyed workers were aged 18-25, with another 20 per cent in the 26-30 age group, together comprising over three-fourths of the total. Only 6.8 per cent were above 40, including just three individuals over 50, the oldest being 60. The migrant women garment workforce in Tiruppur is predominantly young, with a small presence of middle-aged women.

> **Over half (57.5%) of the surveyed workers were aged 18-25, with another 20 per cent in the 26-30 age group, together comprising over three-fourths of the total.**

Figure 2: Distribution of Migrant Women Workers in Tiruppur Garment Industry by Age Groups (%)



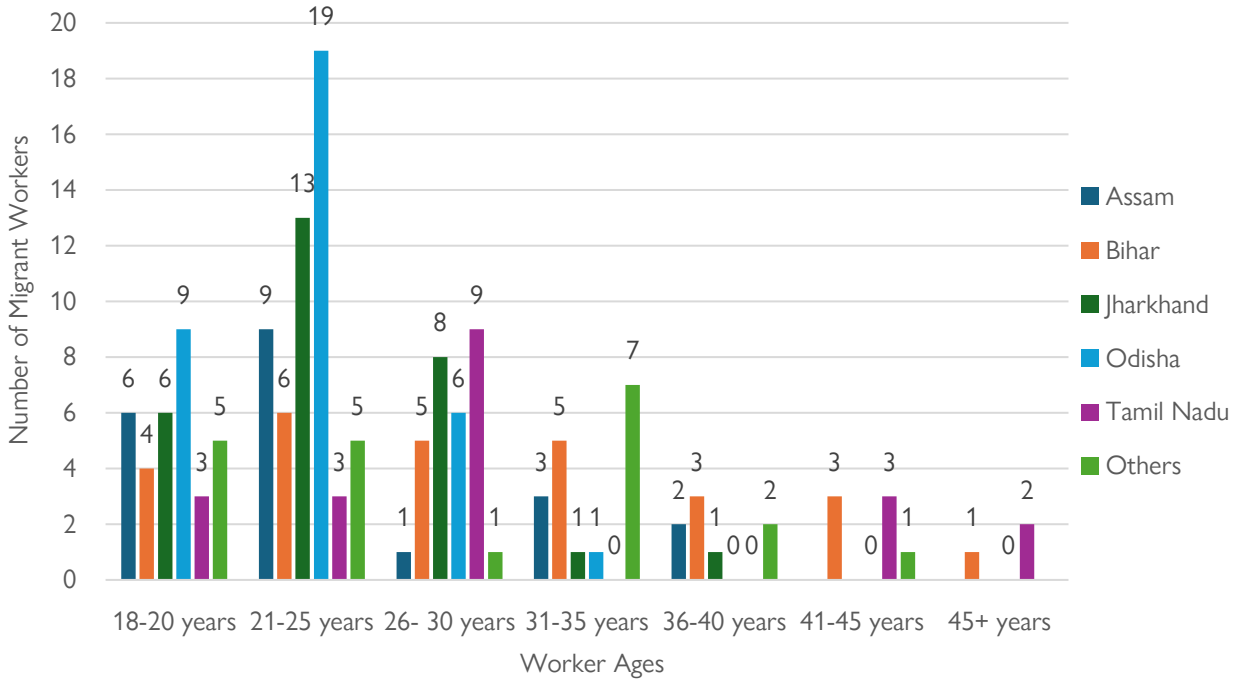
Although factory law does not specify a retirement age, the Employees' Pension Scheme under the EPFO, now part of the Code for Social Security, 2020, entitles workers to a pension from age 58, when retirement is expected. The Industrial Establishment (Standing Orders) Act of 1946, now part of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, also requires employers to set the retirement age at 58 or above.[37] However, survey findings reveal that women garment workers in Tiruppur rarely reach this age. While expanding production and recruitment may be increasing the proportion of young workers, it does not fully explain the very low presence of workers over 40 in a town where the workforce has rapidly feminized since the 1990s.

5.1.1. Age Composition of Migrants by State of Origin

Workers from Odisha, Assam, and Jharkhand tend to be younger, while those from Bihar and Tamil Nadu are older. Among workers, 80 per cent from Odisha, 70 per cent from Assam, and over 65 per cent from Jharkhand were aged 18-25. In contrast, fewer than 40 per cent from Bihar and only 30 per cent from Tamil Nadu fell in this age group. All surveyed workers above 40 were from Bihar and Tamil Nadu.

Although factory law does not specify a retirement age, the Employees' Pension Scheme under the EPFO, now part of the Code for Social Security, 2020, entitles workers to a pension from age 58, when retirement is expected. The Industrial Establishment (Standing Orders) Act of 1946, now part of the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, also requires employers to set the retirement age at 58 or above. However survey findings reveal that women workers in Tiruppur rarely reach this age.

Figure 3: Age Composition of Migrant Women Workers in Tiruppur Garment Industry by State of Origin



[37] After being subsumed in the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, there is no clarity on the continuance of this provision).

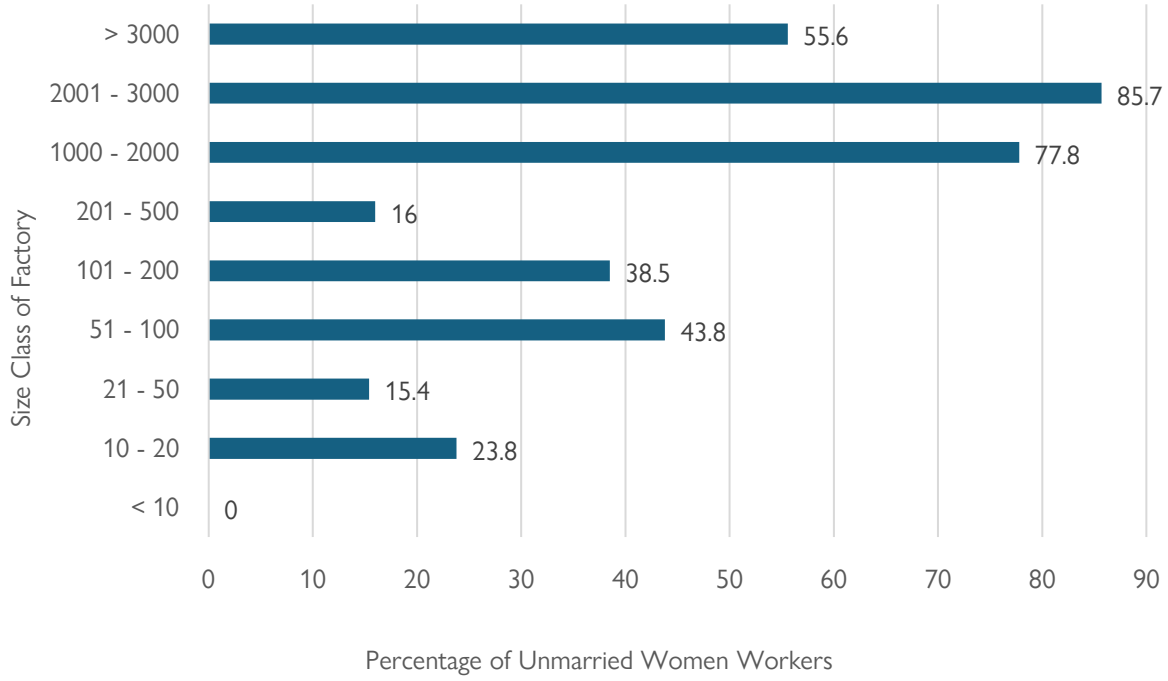
The presence of older women among migrants from Tamil Nadu and Bihar reflects their association with earlier migration phases to Tiruppur. Half of the women from Tamil Nadu and nearly 40 per cent from Bihar first migrated to Tiruppur over five years ago. Interviews with four longstanding women workers from Bihar, who migrated to Tiruppur between five to fifteen years ago, reveal that most Bihari women migrated with husbands or family members rather than alone. While Tamil migrants' settlement reflects typical industrial urbanization, the presence of long-term women workers from Bihar indicates a mixed-gender migration trend navigating linguistic and cultural differences.[38] Migration from Tamil Nadu and Bihar has been less female-dominated and more family-oriented, unlike the highly feminized streams from Jharkhand, the northeast, and Odisha. The latter has been driven by recruitment through large factory-hostel models and skill development center placements.

When asked where they felt most free, most workers living with their families in Tiruppur (married or unmarried) stated that they felt most free in Tiruppur. In contrast, most girls staying in employer-run hostels were emphatic that they felt freer in their native homes (see Table 23 in Annex 1).

5.1.2. Correlating Marital Status & Factory size Class

Just under 55 per cent of the surveyed workers were married, 43 per cent were unmarried, and the remainder were widowed or separated. The regional variation in the age profile of migrant women workers in Tiruppur aligns with their marital status. Older women migrants tended to be married, while younger women were more likely unmarried. Of the 29 workers from Bihar, 23 were married, while 18 of 29 from Jharkhand, 23 of 35 from Odisha, and 11 of 21 from Assam were unmarried. Similarly, Tamil women migrants were predominantly married (16 out of 20). Notably, the highest proportion of unmarried women migrants was found in larger factories (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Share of Unmarried Women Migrant Workers in Tiruppur by Size Class of Factories



[38] See Bharani Vaitheesvaran (2014), 'Textile hub Tirupur back on resurgence path', for a report on some of the earlier male migrants from the north in Tiruppur

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/cons-products/garments-/-textiles/textile-hub-tirupur-back-on-resurgence-path/articleshow/45236230.cms

In factories with upwards of 1000 employees unmarried women made up 56 per cent to 86 per cent of the female workforce. In comparison, in units with fewer than 10 to 50 workers, the proportion of unmarried women ranged from none to less than 25 per cent. Where workforce sizes range from above 50 up to 500, the share of the unmarried ranges from 16per cent to 44 per cent.[39]

The higher proportion of unmarried women in large factories is linked to the factory-hostel model and associated recruitment practices, as discussed earlier.

5.1.3. Education Characteristics

52 per cent of workers had education up to secondary level or beyond, including 5 per cent graduates, 18 per cent with Class 12, and 29 per cent with up to Class 10. 29 per cent had only primary education, including 9 per cent non-literate. 19 per cent had middle school education. Education levels were notably lower among Bihari women workers, with 22 of 29 not having gone beyond primary school, and only 3 having reached Class 10. Bihari women's lower education levels were not age-related.[40]

No non-literates were found from Odisha or Tamil Nadu, while only 2 of 29 from Jharkhand and 2 of 21 from Assam were non-literate. Of 20 women from Tamil Nadu, 12 had secondary school education or beyond, including 1 graduate; similarly, 12 of 21 from Assam had secondary or higher education. In Odisha, 26 of 35 had completed Class 10 or 12, while in Jharkhand, 20 of 29 had studied up to Class 10, 12 or graduated.

[39] In the present sample, only 9 of the netted workers were working in factories with more than 3000. The relatively lesser proportion of unmarried workers out of that small sample of 9 compared to factories with between 1000 and 3000 workers, is partly explained by the fact that 8 of the 9 were non-resident workers. Arguably, hostel workers in the largest factories were not adequately represented in the sample.

[40] Interestingly, while Bihar indeed had the lowest secondary and senior secondary GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) for girls among the five major states of origin for migrant women workers in Tiruppur, like all the other states, GER for girls was higher than for boys. According to Unified District Information System for Education or UDISE, which is a database about schools in India, in 2021-22 GER for girls in Bihar was 66.8per cent for Classes 9-10, and 36.3per cent for Classes 11-12, for Assam the same was 81.3per cent and 42.2per cent respectively, for Jharkhand, it was 70.5per cent and 48per cent, for Odisha it was 80.6per cent and 45.4per cent, while for Tamil Nadu it was 95.5per cent for Classes 9-10 and 85.9 for classes 11-12.

6. Working Conditions for **Migrant Women Workers in Tiruppur**



In 2023, the Tamil Nadu Assembly passed the Factories (Amendment) Act, allowing 12-hour workdays, which was welcomed by the Tiruppur Exporters Association (TEA) which claimed it was beneficial for women workers. However, following strong opposition from trade unions, the Chief Minister withdrew the amendment on May Day.[41]

The attempt to extend working hours reflects a broader labour policy debate, with employers advocating for longer workdays and trade unions resisting. Despite neoliberal trends diminishing union power, the withdrawal of the bill highlights a potential towards defense of workers' rights.

6.1. Normalization of Extended Working Hours

In Tiruppur, an extended workday is common. Over 46 per cent of migrant workers worked 12-hour shifts, 7 per cent worked 10-11 hours, and 29 per cent worked 9 hours.[42] Around 7 per cent worked 6-7 hours a day. Overall, 54 per cent of the surveyed migrant workers worked well beyond the statutory 8-hour workday.

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A common belief is that garment export factories are becoming more formalized, granting workers their full legal rights, particularly in larger, well-equipped factories.[43] Tiruppur and nearby industrial estates

[41] Scroll Staff, Tamil Nadu withdraws law allowing 12-hour workdays in factories; May 01, 2023. https://scroll.in/latest/1048322/tamil-nadu-withdraws-law-allowing-12-hour-work-days-in-factories

[42] Of those who mentioned a 9- hour shift, some workers clarified that they worked 9 hours over and above any time spent on breaks for lunch, etc. although the same was not the case for all.

have seen the growth of large factories, attracting workers from states like Odisha, Jharkhand, and Assam through government-sponsored skill programs. During the survey, researchers visited modernized factories with cutting-edge machinery, where hundreds to thousands of women worked under organized assembly lines. Despite social audits and expectations of better conditions, the survey found that even in the largest factories, some workers were still engaged in 12-hour shifts.

Around 35 per cent of the surveyed workers were employed in small factories (up to 100 workers), 33 per cent in medium-sized factories (101-500 workers), and 31 per cent in large factories (1,000+ workers, including those with 3,000+ workers). The survey covered 68 factories, including 31 small, 29 medium, and 8 large factories.

Table 6 cross-tabulates workday hours with factory size. It reveals that migrant women work 12-hour shifts in both small and large factories. Of 105 workers in small and medium-sized factories (up to 500 workers), 61 (58%) worked 12-hour shifts. In large factories (over 1,000 workers), more than three-fourths worked 8–9-hour shifts, yet over one-fifth still worked 12-hour shifts, indicating a significant pattern.

Table 6: Workday Hours of Workers by Size Class of Factories

Size class of Factory	6-7 hours	8 hours	9 hours	10-11 hours	12 hours	Total Workers	per cent of 12-hour Shift workers
< 10	0	1	0	0	3	4	75.0
11 – 20	1	6	0	2	12	21	57.1
21 – 50	1	3	0	1	8	13	61.5
51 – 100	1	4	1	2	8	16	50.0
101 – 200	3	3	2	2	16	26	61.5
201 – 500	4	4	0	3	14	25	56.0
1000 – 2000	0	3	13	0	2	18	11.1
2001 – 3000	0	21	0	0	0	21	0
>3000	0	0	0	1	8	9	88.9
All	10	45	16	11	71	153	46.4
Percentage	6.5	29.4	10.5	7.2	46.4	100	

The widespread use of 12-hour shifts in Tiruppur, spanning small to large factories, remains undeniable. Central to this practice is the piece-rate system, which leads workers to self-exploit to increase their earnings. This system is interlinked with contract labour and has become so normalised that workers seldom question it. Although aware of the health toll, such as one 35-year-old migrant worker from Bihar who suffers from piles due to prolonged sitting, workers continue, despite the pain. She critiqued her contractor, stating, "he looks only to his interest... always scolding," but stays with him

[43] It is such a perception that underlies a strong orientation towards training young women for employment in the garment sector in government supported skill and placement programmes in several states where, sending them out of state for the garment industry, is considered to be aspirational rather than distress migration.

due to past negative experiences, including with another contractor who ran off without paying her. Despite limited education, she clearly felt exploited, stating, "he ran off with my money."

6.2. Interlinked Systems of Piece Rates, Weekly Wages, & Contract Labour

Labour arrangements using contract labour (workers employed through contractors) is a prime method through which even the larger and richest factory owners, have been able to combine piece-rated 12-hour shift workers with their regular 8-hour time rated workers. The link between contract labour and the 12-hour workday becomes most tellingly evident in the fact that of the 71 surveyed workers working a piece-rated 12-hour shift, 63 (89 %) were associated with contractors.

As Table 6 makes crystal clear, piece rates were found to be completely dominant among workers in small and medium-sized factories, while time rates predominated in the larger-sized factories. What is also quite strikingly evident is that piece rates are inevitably linked to weekly payment of wages, and time rates more with monthly salaries. As may be seen, there is congruence between the share of piece-rated workers and the share of those receiving weekly payments. Once again, the table makes it evident that it is not only the smaller units that use the combined practice of weekly payments and piece rates, but such a combination has a place even in the largest of factories.

Table 7: Modes of Payment of Wages (Monthly/Weekly & Time Rate/Piece Rate)

Size class of Factory	Monthly Pay	Weekly Pay	per cent Share of Weekly pay	Time Rated wages	Piece rated wages	per cent Share of Piece rates
< 10	0	4	100	0	4	100
11 – 20	6	15	71.4	6	15	71.4
21 – 50	1	12	92.3	1	12	92.3
51 – 100	1	15	93.8	1	15	93.8
101 – 200	5	21	80.8	5	21	80.8
201 – 500	4	21	84.0	4	21	84.0
1000 – 2000	13	4	22.2	13	3	18.8
2001 – 3000	21	0	0	21	0	0
>3000	1	8	88.9	1	8	88.9
All	52	100	65.4	52	99	65.6
percentage	34.0	65.4		34.4	65.6	
Missing	1		2			

Arguably, given a general tendency towards ever-increasing production targets per day for time-rated workers in the garment industry, the distinction between piece-rated and time-rated work might become somewhat blurred. More importantly, high targets can intensify the pace of work for time-rated workers to extraordinary levels through a combination of incentives and coercive bullying.[44]

[44] See for example, PUCL, Karnataka et al (2019) Production Torture- Working Conditions Faced by Garment Workers", and Mazumdar (2024), Gendering internal labour migration corridors: migrant women workers in southern India's garment industry, ILO.

In large factories, assembly lines are linked to electronic monitors to track production speed, pressuring workers to meet targets. However, only 10 per cent of surveyed workers felt production targets were too high, and 8 per cent reported excessive pressure. The more common method in Tiruppur remains the 12-hour piece-rate work shift through contractors.

60 per cent of migrant workers received cash wages, typically associated with informal employment, enabling evasion of labour laws. Smaller factories predominated in cash payments, while medium to large factories used cash mainly for contractor-supplied workers.

Table 8: Modes of Payment of Wages by Size Class of Factories & by Whom

Size class of Factory	Wage paid in Cash	Wage paid In Bank	per cent Share of those paid in cash	Company Pays	Contractor Pays	per cent Share of those paid by Contractor
< 10	4	0	100	2	2	50
11 – 20	18	3	85.7	12	7	36.8
21 – 50	12	1	92.3	8	5	38.5
51 – 100	13	3	81.3	14	2	12.5
101 – 200	15	11	57.7	12	14	53.8
201 – 500	20	5	80.0	10	15	60.0
1000 – 2000	2	16	11.1	14	2	12.5
2001 – 3000	0	21	0	21	0	0
>3000	7	2	77.8	7	2	22.2
All	91	62	59.5	100	49	32.9
Percentage	59.5	40.5		67.1	32.9	
Missing				*4*		

A contract worker explained that wage payment varies by company policy: some pay contractors, who then distribute wages, while others pay workers directly. This explains the discrepancy in Table 8, where fewer workers are paid by contractors than in cash.

Out-contracting to job work units is common among large factories. At the same time, fluctuating market conditions, including high GST rates, rising yarn prices, and order slowdowns, have led to underutilization and worker layoffs, especially in small job working units.[45] The HR manager of Factory

[45] See 2017 report 'Tiruppur MP requests revision of job work GST & MMF yarn' in https://texprocil.org/ibtexnewsclipping/5f50d7e0cba4a871565f4b71bdd633e0.pdf. Apart from GST issues, slowdown in growth of Tiruppur exports over the past decade have meant less orders for job work units, and reverse migration during Covid have affected them most adversely. Job work units who do not generally have accommodation for women, also appear to be facing labour shortage. See Saravanan M (The New Indian Express, 23 Aug 2022) https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2022/Aug/23/garment-units-in-tiruppur-fall-silent-as-high-yarn-prices-spin-trouble-for-them-2490395.html

Also see N. Madhavan (12 Mar 2023)

https://www.livemint.com/industry/retail/why-india-s-knitwear-capital-is-in-doldrums-11678641306695.html

B stated, "Post-covid, the situation has changed. Vendors did not have labour, so we increased our in-house capacity." The use of contract labour in garment factories in Tiruppur remains a contentious issue between trade unions and employers. Trade unions blame contract labour for poor working conditions and diminished worker representation, while contractors argue that factories rely on contract workers to meet buyer deadlines. Abolition of the contract labour system is a core demand of unions, but ambiguities in the Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970 (now part of the OSH Code) and contradictory court rulings have weakened its enforcement.[46] Labour policy is shifting as even government institutions increasingly replace permanent employees with contract labour in core and perennial work.

6.3. Contestation & Settlement: Minimum Wages & Tiruppur's Bipartite Agreements

Tiruppur has a long tradition of tripartite wage fixation for garment workers through agreements between trade unions, employers' organizations, and the government, which lasted until 2014.[47] These agreements, inherited from a time when unions had more influence over a smaller workforce, may now reflect political memory, history, and rhetoric rather than any balance of class power within the industry.[48] Over the past three decades, industrialists' power has grown significantly, while trade unions, though still morally significant, lack the industrial action influence they once had. A key factor in this shift was the move from time-rated wages and direct employment to piece-rated contract labour arrangements from the 1990s, incorporating migrant workers through contractors.[49]

Despite this, tripartite wage negotiations continued, and wage rates remained higher than official minimum wages until 2014.[50] 'Thereafter, the government stayed out of such negotiations which continued as bipartite. Few employers' however, complied with agreed wage rates. Trade unions claimed factories often kept fictitious records showing adherence to minimum wages instead of negotiated rates.

6.3.1. Link Between Redesignating Industry with Minimum Wages

For over 25 years, minimum wage rates for the tailoring industry were applied to garment factories in Tiruppur and shown to be complied with to shown to international buyers.[51] Some companies however challenged the revised rates, claiming to

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[46] Mitra, S. B., & Ghosh, P. (2022). Engaging Contract Labour: Learnings from Landmark Judgements. Management and Labour Studies, 47(1), 97-118. https://doi.org/10.1177/0258042X211026166

The core questions in relation to contract labour, is that court judgements that had decreed that contract labour cannot be employed for perennial work, had been reversed, and in the event of the government abolishing contract work in any particular industry (without which contract labour remains legal under the Contract labour Act, unless the contract workers already in those jobs are absorbed as regular workers, abolition would mean they would lose their jobs. On this key question of regularisation of contract workers, there are too many contradictory judgements, apart from the direction of labour policy being towards perpetuation rather than abolishing contract labour.

[47] Under the dispute resolution process as laid down in the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, such agreements stand binding on employers and employees, for the period agreed upon.

[48] The phenomenal growth of Tiruppur through exports is an oft- told story. According to TEA, in 1990, Tirupur exports was Rs.300 Crores ($423.4 million USD), which rose to Rs.23,000 Crores ($4.77bn USD) in 2015-16. By 2019-20, the sales turnover of Tirupur knitwear business was Rs. 42,750 Crores ($7.63bn USD), out of this, although a slowdown in the growth of exports is evident in that the contribution of exports and domestic business was Rs. 24,750 Crores and Rs. 18,000 Crores ($4.42bn and $3.21bn USD) respectively in 2019-20. Where TEA grew initially out of the export segment, with the slowdown in exports growth, the share of the domestic market has risen, although a section of the brand buyers for the domestic market are the same international brands that are supplied through exports, and their modes of auditing supplier factories in Tiruppur, remain in common.

[49] However, among the formalized hostel- based factory recruits, time rated systems were more prevalent, although even among them, working for 12 hours (as confirmed by our survey), had been observed even earlier. See Rukmini Srinivasan (TOI, 2012) https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/the-piecemeal-life-of-tirupur's-female-workers/articleshow/16717613.cms

[50] In the early years, wage rates as per the tripartite agreements reflected some increases in real wages, and although later such increases were less visible, but at least real wages in the agreements were not allowed to fall.

[51] Trade unions claimed that companies maintained 2-3 wage registers/records: one set showing a certain number of workers and adherence to official rates and shown where needed to factory inspectors and buyers; and another set for actual payments made as wages to workers on and off their official books. See Sowmya Sivakumar (2017), Towards a Living Wage: A Study of the Minimum Wage Struggle of Workers in Tiruppur's Garment Sector, SAVE, Tiruppur.

be hosiery manufacturers, for whom wages hadn't been revised since 1960. Increased minimum wage rates were stayed as a result for two years. The Madras High Court vacated the stay in 2016. Before the stay ended, Tamil Nadu notified lower wages for hosiery, below market rates in Tiruppur. The 2014 minimum wages were ₹1500 ($18.06 USD) higher for tailors and checkers, and over ₹3000 ($36.13 USD) higher for unskilled workers.

As of October 2024, legal uncertainty over statutory minimum wages for garment workers in Tiruppur persists. The state government issued draft notifications for revised wages in the tailoring industry (Nov. 7, 2023) and hosiery/knitwear manufactories (Jan. 31, 2024), but neither had legal force. The draft rates for tailors, checkers, and helpers in hosiery remain below those in tailoring, with a difference of over ₹500 ($6.02 USD) for tailors and checkers, and over ₹3000 ($36.13 USD) for helpers.[52]

After the 2014 wage revision, the government withdrew from tripartite negotiations, and the last two agreements (2016 and 2023) were based on bipartite negotiations. Given the minimum wage imbroglio, bipartite wage rates have gained greater relevance for setting standards. Table 9 presents the negotiated wage rates from the 2023 agreement.[53] These rates are for an 8-hour workday, although many piece-rated contract workers think of wage rates daily wages for 12-hour shifts.

Table 9: Wage Rates, Dearness Allowance (DA), Travelling Allowance (TA) for Garment Workers in Tiruppur as per Bipartite Agreement, 2023*

Divisions/Sections	Basic salary (Rs)	4 % hike	DA (Rs)	TA (Rs)	Total
Cutting, tailoring, ironing, packing,	270.35	10.81	206.30	25	512.46 (13,323.96)
Checking	154.36	6.17	206.30	25	391.83 (10,187.58)
Labelling (semi-skilled tailor)	139.03	5.56	206.30	25	375.89 (9,773.14)
Hand folding/helper of tailors	135.24	5.40	206.30	25	371.04 (9,647.04)
Damage/trimming	108.05	4.32	206.30	25	342 .47 (8,904.22)
Layering/general helper	77.40	3.09	206.30	25	311.79 (8,106.54)
Machine (Fabric making)	251.91	10.00	206.30	25	493.21 (12,823.46)

** The agreement came into operation on 1st October 2023 and thus covers the period of the survey.*

Source: Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) leaflet in Tamil (2023). Monthly salary rates (Figures in brackets) have also been calculated by the authors (@ 26 days and added). Translated from Tamil.

[52] For recent draft proposals for the tailoring industry and hosiery/knitwear manufactories respectively, see http://www.stationeryprinting.tn.gov.in/extraordinary/2023/378_Ex_II_2_2023.pdf https://www.datocms-assets.com/40521/1709358387-draft-tamil-nadu-minimum-wages-notification-1.pdf And, For the 2014 and 2016 minimum wage notifications for tailoring industry and hosiery manufactories respectively, see https://dish.tn.gov.in/assets/pdf/go/GO2D_59_2014.pdf https://dish.tn.gov.in/assets/pdf/go/G.O.(2D)per cent20No.5.pdf

[53] It is indeed interesting that all the cutting, tailoring, ironing, packing and Singer machine (single needle) stitching, all involving some technical skills, are clubbed in one category in the agreement. This is unlike in minimum wage notifications where there are more gradations and hierarchies.

6.4. Wages of Migrant Women Garment Workers: Analysis of Subtext and Context

The wages actually received by migrant women workers in Tiruppur show significant discrepancies compared to the negotiated wage rates. Among 63 tailors/operators, 5 reported daily wages of ₹450-750 ($5.42-$9.03 USD) for 12-hour shifts at top export companies. The largest group of 16 earned ₹10,000-13,000 ($120.43-$156.56 USD), with 7 on 12-hour shifts. Only 6 per cent of tailors/operators earned at or above the negotiated wage rates, with a mean monthly wage of ₹9,664 ($116.38 USD).

Among 49 checkers, all 44 provided wage data, with 45 per cent working 12-hour shifts. The majority earned ₹6,000-13,000 ($72.26-$156.56 USD), with 45 per cent working 12 hours. *All checkers were paid below the agreed rates, with a mean monthly wage of ₹7,803 ($93.97 USD).*

For 10 ironers, the mean wage was ₹8,311 ($100.01 USD), with 2 working 12-hour shifts, all earning below the agreed rates.

Among 6 helpers, the average wage was ₹6,333 ($76.27 USD), with 4 working 12-hour shifts.

Thread-cutters (6 workers) had a mean wage of ₹10,000 ($120.43 USD), with 3 working 12 hours.

Among 9 packers, the average wage was ₹8,875 ($106.88 USD), with 5 working 12-hour shifts.

Other miscellaneous workers (9 workers) had varying wages, with 4 working 12 hours and one earning ₹17,000 ($204.72 USD) for an 8-hour shift.

6.4.1. De Facto Wage Gaps: Exceptions and the Rule

The wage data reveals significant discrepancies between the wages of migrant women workers and the agreed-upon wage rates in Tiruppur. Tailors/operators were earning ₹3,660 less than the agreed rates, checkers ₹2,385 less, helpers ₹3,314 less, packers ₹4,448 less, and ironers ₹5,012 less. Only thread-cutters earned more than the agreed rate, with an average wage ₹1,096 higher, though this was due to exceptional cases, including one worker earning ₹14,000 ($168.60 USD) and another ₹12,000 ($144.51 USD).[54] These exceptional cases aside, most migrant women workers were underpaid by a significant margin. Further, their wages were also considerably below the old minimum wage rates from 2014. For example, tailors/operators were earning ₹850 less than the minimum wage, checkers ₹2,711 less, ironers ₹1,820 less, packers ₹1,256 less, and helpers ₹3,798 less. Only thread-cutters had wages close to the minimum wage, explained by the exceptional cases discussed.

6.4.2. Anomaly of Low-Skilled Wage Rates for Checkers

Before concluding the wage analysis, the low wage rates for checkers in the bipartite agreement and the wide gap between tailors/operators and checkers are notable, with checkers' rates resembling those of unskilled helpers. The mean monthly earnings for checkers in Tiruppur were among the lowest across all designations. Checkers are generally regarded as skilled workers, requiring knowledge of defects, education (including English literacy for specifications), and experience.[55] The skilled nature of checkers is acknowledged even in the minimum wage notifications for the tailoring industry. In both the 2014 notification and the draft of 2023, the minimum wage rates for checkers are the same as for tailor/ machine operators. In such a context the gap that is seen in the wage rates of these two categories of workers in the Tiruppur bipartite agreement stands out as an outlier for the garment sector.[56] This may stem from the feminization of checking in Tiruppur's garment sector, as noted by Chari and Neetha, which may have led to lower wages for this role in an otherwise masculine industry.[57]

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[54] For the base 2014 minimum wage rates for the tailoring industry, see https://cms.tn.gov.in/sites/default/files/go/labemp_e_59_2014_2D.pdf . For notification on DA for 2023, see https://www.datocms-assets.com/40521/1679110620-tamil-nadu-minimum-wages-notification-april-2023.pdf

[55] See Sushila, garment worker, Delhi (1997), 'My Story', Seminar 452: April 1997

[56] Garment Industry in Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu, India - Global Living Wage Coalition, https://www.globallivingwage.org/case-studies/garment-industry-in-tiruppur-tamil-nadu-india/

[57] See Chari (2004), Neetha (2002)

Gender based lowering of wages for feminized checking in comparison to male dominated tailoring of an earlier period seems to have sustained even after feminization of tailoring. Initial gender based inequality has thus metamorphosed into wage inequality among women workers themselves.

6.4.3. To address this historical overhang of gender based inequality in wage setting, trade unions must move beyond routine increments in unequal wage rates. A gender-sensitive course correction is needed, using the equivalence in wage rates for tailors and checkers in official minimum wage notifications as a starting point.

6.4.4. Earnings Differentials & Factory Size Class

Among 36 workers in a higher wage bracket of ₹13,000 to 23,000, only one in a large factory (2000-3000 workers) earned ₹23,000. 20 workers earning ₹13,000 to 18,000 were in smaller factories (up to 50 workers). Conversely, of the 35 in the lowest wage bracket of ₹3000 to 6800, 4 were in large factories, 17 in medium-sized, and 13 in small-sized units. The survey suggests formal vs. informal sectors is not a key determinant for access to entitlements or better wages. 60 per cent of workers received bonuses, with 40 per cent in smaller units (up to 20 workers), 26 per cent in medium units, and 34 per cent in large factories. Among the 56 without bonuses, 20 per cent were in small units, 31 per cent in medium-sized, and 5 per cent in large factories.[58]

6.5. Health and Leave Entitlements

Only 15 per cent of migrant women workers had ESI cards, with less than 3 per cent using ESI health facilities in the past year. ESI is mandatory for establishments with more than 10 workers, but 85 per cent of workers lack this benefit, highlighting widespread violations of labour laws. 6 ESI dispensaries exist in Tiruppur, and in March 2024, a 100-bed ESI hospital was inaugurated. 10

> **Among the 36 workers in the highest wage bracket of ₹13,000 to 23,000, only one in a large factory (2000-3000 workers) earned ₹23,000. 20 workers earning ₹13,000 to 18,000 were in smaller factories (up to 50 workers).**

per cent of workers reported salary deductions for ESI without having a card. 31 per cent of workers had access to a clinic on factory premises, which is convenient for treating routine ailments, although some workers complained about medication costs being deducted from wages, unlike under ESI. Factory-run clinics lack regulation in the labour law framework. In contrast to low medical entitlements, 96 per cent of workers reported having one weekly off day, a systemic practice vital for managing the gruelling pace of work. However, long-distance migrant women workers often struggle to adjust to the limited legal entitlement to annual leave, as time spent at home may exceed available leave days. More experienced workers, take leave only once every two to three years for more time at home. 12 per cent of workers had taken paid medical leave, while 15 per cent reported taking unpaid medical leave.

6.5.1. Illusory Social Security Benefits Under Provident Fund Law

The Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 (EPF Act), now part of the Code on Social Security, 2020, aims to ensure mandatory savings for workers in establishments with 20 or more employees. However, only 31 per

[58] As is well known, bonus time is usually a moment when workers are collectively at their most restive, and their sense of not being paid enough coalesces around the bonus question, which is seen as deferred wage. Such restiveness indeed has an impact on employers, large and small.

cent of surveyed migrant women workers had an EPFO account. Among those, 64 per cent were in large factories, while only 6 per cent of non-EPFO holders worked in large factories. The majority of EPFO account holders were unmarried (71%), and most withdraw savings upon leaving their jobs, making the system ineffective as social security. The possibility of pension benefits under EPFO is unlikely, as many workers leave before completing 10 years of service.

6.6. Labour Law and Administration in Flux: Enforcement Deficits

The role of labour law enforcement machinery in improving the conditions of work of migrant women workers is in urgent need of greater clarity. In Tamil Nadu, what was earlier the Factories Inspectorate is now reorganized/relegated to one of the functions of a Directorate of Industrial Safety Department and Health (DISH). Accordingly, the designation of Deputy Chief Inspector of Factories in Tiruppur was changed to Joint Director of Industrial Safety and Health in 2013. From labour department officials, including at DISH, it was learnt that there are two officers at the Joint Director level in charge of ensuring that factory law is implemented across Tiruppur, and lack of staff to carry out the various functions was reported by all levels of labour department personnel. The context for the changes that are taking place is of course the ongoing restructuring of labour policy and its administration towards curtailment of inspections, a shift towards emphasising self-certification of compliance with labour law, and in such manner promoting ease of doing business. To this must be added, the problems of lack of clarity regarding the administration and implementing agencies for the new Labour codes. So far, the default option has been continuation with the pre-existing procedures and systems, which are already in disarray as restructuring is accompanied by understaffing.

Accordingly, the designation of Deputy Chief Inspector of Factories in Tiruppur was changed to Joint Director of Industrial Safety and Health in 2013.

In December 2023, the information with DISH officials was that the total number of registered factories/ functioning units covered by the Factories Act (now subsumed under the OSH Code) in Tiruppur was 2100 with 300,000 workers, of which 60 per cent of workers in the garment factories are women. There was no information on the number among them, who were migrants.

The consensus, among the officers involved in labour law enforcement, was that there was just not enough staff in the labour department. Then, there was an awareness of the industry in Tiruppur going through a difficult period. One official said *"Business is not good. It is presently only 30 per cent of the actual business. As compared to a 100,000 crores business now it is only 3000 crores. There is no expansion. It is a global issue."* As such, *"the focus of enforcement is on areas, not on companies,"* since the *"companies are giving livelihood."* Explaining what was meant by the focus being on areas, the official said, "For example, if registers of the ERA [Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, now subsumed under the Code on Wages] *are being maintained, an inspection is done. The focus is on enforcement of the provisions of the Act in the area as a general approach, not on the companies.*[59] The distinction between the labour department, which traditionally focused on workers' conditions, and the department of industries, which prioritized industrial growth, has blurred, with industrial growth now taking precedence over labour rights.

[59] For decades, the Labour Ministry's reports on implementation of ERA have followed a technical line to record whether registers were maintained as per the format of ERA, without reference to the substantive issues of whether same or similar work is being performed by men and women, and are wages equal.

[60] Tiruppur is divided into two sub-regions, each under one joint director.

Regarding migrants, DISH officials believe people migrate for higher earnings. As for gender composition, one official noted: *"In yarn to fabric (knitting), more men; in dyeing, more men; in cutting, stitching, checking, ironing, and packing, the ratio is Male 40 to Female 60."* In the last quarter of 2022, one jurisdiction of Tiruppur had 1.5 lakh workers, with 1 lakh women.[60] They estimated that *50,000-60,000 workers* would be in larger factories (more than 100 workers), with an estimated 40,000 workers in the 100 factories with 500+ workers. 60 per cent of workers, both men and women, were in smaller factories numbering around 1,500-1,600.

Regarding hostels run by factories, it was stated that labour department officials do not visit factory hostels since they *"do not fall under the premises of the factory."* On paper, the factory area only includes manufacturing activities. Most factories in Tiruppur have hostels built or rented in areas with more space available, as factories in the city center lack space for hostels. However, creches are covered under factory law. Most factories are within the city corporation limits, while hostels are in the outer areas. Factories in the heart of the city lack space for hostels.[61]

6.7 Accessing Jobs and Grievances of Workers

The most significant recruitment mode for workers was through contractors (38%), combined with Tiruppur-based agents (4 %), totalling 42 per cent (see Table 24 in Annex 1). Most Odisha workers relied on contractors, while less than half of Bihari and a third of Tamil migrants did. Only 2 workers from Jharkhand used contractors. Bihari women migrants (mostly married) were more independent in travel, while Odisha women (mostly unmarried) depended on intermediaries.

25 per cent of workers applied directly at factory gates, indicating independence, especially among Bihari women.

13 per cent found jobs via referrals from friends or co-workers, and 7 per cent through skilling and placement programs. Together, 20 per cent of workers were recruited from home states, though actual numbers may be higher.

Regarding grievances, *30 per cent cited wage deductions and 25 per cent mentioned long workdays.*

Table 10: Grievances of Workers

Grievances of workers	%
Wage deductions	30.3
Workday/shift too long	25.2
Wages not paid on time	25
Backache/neck ache	23.5
Wages too low	15.1
Work is not enough nowadays	14.7
Changing shift times causes body stress	10.2
Production targets too high within the shift	10
Don't receive protective gear for the nose & throat	9.2
Pressurized beyond the limit to achieve the target	8.1
Too little rest time between shifts	7.5

[61] All statements and quotations from labour department officials who did not want to be named.

Grievances of workers	%
Fluff gets caught in hair	6.5
Too much overtime work	6.1
Disrespect due to not understanding instructions	5.4
Speed injuries	2.7
Difficulties during menstruation	2.6
Muscle cramps in legs	2.6
Continuous shifts	2

The third most common grievance was backache/ neckache (24%), an occupational hazard due to manual, repetitive tasks. Most workers faced career stagnation, with only 6 per cent ever receiving a promotion.

6.8 Sexual Harassment & Reproductive Rights.

Close to half of the workers (49 %) were aware of the law on prevention of sexual harassment (POSH), but only 14 per cent knew of an Internal Committee in their factories, and no one had sought such a committee. 5 per cent knew of complaints or incidents of sexual harassment, though details were unclear. Larger, established companies seem to comply with the POSH law, with annual reports mentioning internal committees, and awareness posters displayed in factories and hostels.

6.8.1 The Case of the Dindigul Agreement

A large Tiruppur company, signatory to two interlinked agreements to "end gender-based violence and harassment" (GBVH), implemented these in its spinning and apparel units in Dindigul, near Tiruppur. The agreements followed the shocking murder of a young Dalit woman worker by a male supervisor of a higher caste, which sparked public outrage. The first agreement was signed by the company and a local all-women trade union, which evolved from NGO-organized village committees originally formed to combat child labour among young girls.[62]

The Dindigul agreement committed the company to end gender-based violence and harassment by: a) allowing the all-women union to train management, supervisors, and workers on GBVH during paid working hours; b) training shop floor monitors; c) protecting monitors from retaliation; and d) reconstituting POSH Internal Committees to include at least three union-selected members.[63]

A related second legally binding agreement, subject to arbitration, was signed by the same union and two international labour campaign groups, partnering with European and US multinational companies. The agreement obligates brand signatories to impose business consequences on the exporting company until it complies."[64]

The background to the agreement involved a U.S. Customs Withhold Release Order (WRO) against the Dindigul factory and other units of its parent company in Tiruppur, following allegations of forced

[62] See Beverley Hall (2018), Charting the rise of a women-only trade union in India at https://www.ethicaltrade.org/insights/blog/charting-rise-women-only-trade-union-india#:~:text=Theper cent20story%20of%20the%20TTCU,Common%20Labourers%20Union%20(TTCU

[63] For text of the agreement, see Annex 1 of AFWA, TTCU, GLJ-ILRF (2023), 'Dindigul Agreement: Year 1 Progress Report', available at: https://labourrights.org/sites/default/files/publications/DINDIGULper cent20AGREEMENTper cent20YEARper cent201per cent20PROGRESSper cent20REPORTper cent202023_0.pdf

[64] See Fact Sheet: The Dindigul Agreement to End Gender-Based Violence and Harassment at https://labourrights.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dindigul%20Agreement%20Fact%20Sheet%20Jan.%202023.pdf

labour after the murder case.[65] Within a month of the agreement, the WRO was withdrawn, raising doubts about the true purpose of the concord and agreement between the management and the NGO style trade union.

A year later, a review report claimed that 98 per cent of 185 grievances were resolved, with 95 per cent raised by women workers, and 90 per cent resolved within a week. The report also claimed a 16 per cent increase in worker efficiency and a 67 per cent reduction in attrition between 2021 and 2022.[66] However, the report's tone and claims suggests a promotional and exaggerated slant. Among the grievances, 80 per cent were related to basic amenities, with GBVH cases following at around 25 per cent.

Major trade unions in India, including those in Tiruppur and Dindigul, avoid participation in buyer brand or trade-determined compliance mechanisms, preferring more autonomous forms of worker protest and negotiation. Support for punitive business measures against Indian exports by foreign buyer companies and their arbitration mechanisms (so-called legal enforcement) is not in the strategic interests of the community of women garment workers, which is perhaps why the Dindigul Agreement has found little traction with major trade unions or women's organisations in the country, and is more talked about abroad.

6.7.1. Implementation of POSH the Importance of Public Campaigns & Emerging Gender-based Challenges

VM, representing an NGO active on gender issues in Tiruppur critically characterised the Dindigul Agreement process as non-representative of women workers. She added that several workers in the Dindigul garment factory had lost their jobs because of the import restrictions on the company's products, and that the Agreement had not ensured their reinstatement.[67] She noted that the signatory organization in Dindigul was not a trade union and lacked a representative base in the factory when the agreement was signed. Since then, the management has allowed only this organization to engage with employees, conduct workshops, and appoint monitors.

Discussing the broader issues of harassment of women workers VM shared that factory workers are often afraid to speak up due to fear of retaliation, though more migrant women tend to speak out. She observed that incidents of sexual harassment were more common with supervisors and managerial staff, with co-worker harassment arising mostly from conflicts in mutual relationships.[68]

Regarding Gender-based challenges for Migrant Workers VM highlighted problems faced by migrant women workers with respect to reproductive health, especially if they were in non-conventional relationships. She cited the case of a pregnant woman from West Bengal who was deserted by her live-in partner six months into her pregnancy. She faced difficulties accessing medical care and maternity leave due to her contract worker status. In a medical camp for women workers staying in a factory hostel, a young married woman worker, was afraid to disclose that she was married and pregnant for fear of being thrown out of the hostel. VM noted that the factory-hostel model, although effective for unmarried women, creates a difficult environment for married workers.

[65] A series of internationally oragnised events were organised around the murder, in which the most prominent face of the all-women NGO/TU travelled across the United States on a speaking tour about the case.

[66] AFWA et al (2023), op.cit

[67] The Dindigul Agreement helped the company since U.S. Customs and Border Protection modified the Withhold Release Order (WRO) against Apparel garment imports from the Dindigul factory, which for a time prevented shipments entering the U.S. market. Workers who lost their jobs during the operation of the WRO, were, according to VM, not reinstated and the Agreement was silent about their job concerns.

[68] Indeed, as explained by her, this was also the case in the incident in Dindigul that constituted the backdrop to the Dindigul Agreement. A local dalit girl in a relationship with an upper caste man of the locally dominant caste in her factory, had been murdered by him when she started pressing for marriage. The murder caused a great disturbance in the local villages and

7. Residences of **Migrant Garment Workers**



Tiruppur's factories of various sizes are surrounded by residential areas, with migrant housing located both in city lanes and on the outskirts near industrial estates. Larger factories and hostels extend into neighboring districts. Many workers, housed 10-15 km away from their workplace, rely on company buses. Of the workers, 31 per cent have been in Tiruppur for five or more years, while 28 per cent are fresh migrants having come a year or so before.

> **Tiruppur's factories of various sizes are surrounded by residential areas, with migrant housing located both in city lanes and on the outskirts near industrial estates.**

Table 11: Distribution of Migrant Women Workers in Tiruppur by Their Type of Residence

Mode of residence in Tiruppur	Unmarried	Married	Widowed/ Separated	All surveyed workers	Percentage Distribution
Rented place with family	2	48	0	50	32.7
Employer-provided Hostel	40	6	1	47	30.7
Rented place with friends or co-workers	17	15	1	33	21.6
Rented room alone	4	7	1	12	7.8
Own house with family	0	7	0	7	4.6
Private hostel not provided by the employer	2	1	1	4	2.6
Total	65	84	4	153	100

Only 7 women workers owned their homes in the city, with 4 of them from Bihar and 2 from Tamil Nadu.[69]

One-third lived in rented accommodation with families, with some deeply settled, while most were temporary workers with roots in their home states. Most unmarried workers stayed in employer-run hostels, but many also shared rent and domestic chores with friends and co-workers. A smaller group preferred single-occupancy rooms. Over half of the women migrants (57%) stayed in single-women residencies (all female accommodations): 31 per cent in employer-provided hostels, 8 per cent in rented rooms alone, and 11 per cent with friends or co-workers. Among hostel residents, 17 per cent were married, and there was little difference in numbers of married and unmarried among those in rented places

7.1. Rented Rooms for Unmarried Workers

An example of such rented places was seen some 30 km from Tiruppur, in Perumanallur (see Fig. 5). Here three young women were staying with friends or sisters in rented rooms on an elevated platform, protecting them from water and field animals. It was dark when the research team arrived at 8 pm, and some rooms were locked as the women had not yet returned from work. One woman was from Sambalpur, Odisha, another from Bargarh (Odisha), and the third from a tea garden in Assam.

Figure 5: Typical Row of Rented Rooms Where Migrants Stay



Photograph taken in Perumallur on 23rd December 2023 by authors

Interviews with these women reveal the broader migration experiences and modes of residence in Tiruppur (see Appendix I, Boxes 2-5 for detailed extracts). The locked doors at such a late hour speak to the long hours of work because of which even single migrant women workers seem to be returning to their rented rooms late at night. There was no mention however, of any feeling of being unsafe, perhaps because of safety in numbers, since there are so many others also returning at that late hour. The same pattern was also observed closer to the centre of Tiruppur such as in Parappalayam (see Fig. 6), which is located within 3 kilometres of Tiruppur's old bus stand.

[69] The other worker living in owned house was from Uttar Pradesh.

Figure 6: Typical Accommodation in Parappalayam, Tiruppur





Photographs taken on 10th December 2023 by Leila Salarpour Goodarzi

7.2. Challenges faced by married workers and their children.

Many married women migrants in Tiruppur have stayed on for fairly long periods, some of whom leave their children back in village of origin, others bring them and try to settle in as a family. However, they face challenges, especially with children. For example Anita, a 35-year-old from Vaishali, Bihar, had left her 7-year-old daughter and 6-year-old son with her mother. She supports her children financially, but the couple relies on her natal family for childcare. Anita rents a room for ₹2500 ($30.11 USD) per month.[70]

In contrast, Chanda, who keeps her son with her, faces difficulties with his schooling in Tamil, while Rinju's children study in Tamil medium schools without issues. The lack of native language education options creates a dilemma for many migrant families, highlighting the need for employer and government attention to childcare and education facilities.

7.3. Unsuitability of Employer-Run Hostels for Long Term Employment

In a large factory with over 2000 girls housed in company-run hostels; one of which was located within the factory walls.[71] It had dormitory rooms on three floors with their doors facing inside and two windows outside, but no balconies. Each room accommodates up to 16 girls in 8 two-level bunk beds, with 4 fans. The company provides almirahs and bedding and offers quality food catering to the diverse workforce's tastes and cultures. (See Figure 7 for the hostel building and dining room.)

Figure 7: Inside a Factory Hostel





Taken in December 2023 by the authors

[70] Interview at Parappalayam, Sunday, 24th December 2023, 6.30 pm.

[71] Some were staying in company-run hostels outside and were ferried to the factory and back to their hostels in buses.

The hostel, though praised by some workers in videos for its facilities, has a closed, prison-like atmosphere. Despite this, according to a manager of a skill development centre in Ranchi said it had the best reputation, with a 70 per cent retention rate, higher than the 40-50 per cent average in other factories. Workers report feeling relaxed and unpressured compared to other factories. However, the factory's General Manager noted a high attrition rate, with 50 per cent of girls from Jharkhand leaving within a year. Ethnographic studies on hostel life in Tiruppur's garment factories are needed for better insight into feelings of alienation and homesickness among young women migrants.[72]

The survey found that 60 per cent of hostel residents felt freer at their place of origin, and only 17 per cent felt freer in Tiruppur, a lower proportion than among migrant women staying in other quarters. Over two-thirds of long-term hostel residents (3-7 years) felt less free, indicating it's not just an initial adjustment issue. Only 6 per cent of young women in hostels desired long-term settlement in Tiruppur, compared to 16 per cent among non-hostel workers. Most hostel residents viewed their employment as temporary, with 74 per cent planning to leave in 2-5 years or when marriage was arranged. Hostels cater mainly to unmarried women, with temporary employment and high attrition built into the system. This model limits opportunities for long-term and durable employment, leading to a perpetual cycle of gendered labour migration, with unmarried women coming, working, for relatively short stints and returning at marriage, and being replaced by another batch of unmarried women migrants.

7.4. Educational Support Incentives to Combat Attrition

Not all hostels are the same, and company policies to reduce attrition vary. One large company, which recruited under the Sumangali scheme, lacks the modern amenities of newer factories but has offered educational incentives for over 20 years, helping workers acquire additional qualifications. This has attracted women with families, like Mini from Sambalpur, Odisha, who has worked at the factory for 3 years, passed her 12th class, and is pursuing a degree. Despite her education having failed to contribute to any awareness of the factory's markets, profits, or economic impact, the education incentive has kept her with the company, reducing attrition.

The general trend for hostel workers is to return home after marriage, but in Tiruppur, where the garment industry's demand for large concentrations of migrant workers remains strong, there is a need to explore future possibilities for married quarters for hostel workers. However, the overhang of long-standing male centric migration pattern amidst the feminization of labour in the garment industry have led to neglect of challenges in social reproduction, such as maternity. Maternity benefits and creches remain largely unavailable, and the same is true of creches for children of workers.[73] Hostels also isolate workers from local society. Trade unions in Tiruppur report being denied access to hostel residents, citing a case where a girl's suicide led to a strike, but they were not allowed to speak to the workers.

7.5. Regulatory Framework for Hostels

As noted, labour law do not regulate factory hostels, even those within industrial estates. Instead, the Tamil Nadu Hostels and Homes for Women and Children (Regulation) Act, 2014 governs women's hostels. Enacted after the rape of two minor girls in Coimbatore, the Act prioritizes security and safety.

[72] Orlanda Ruthven indeed provides some ethnographic insights into how neophyte workers, products of skill centres, were pressured by family, skill centre, as well as employer, although her ethnographic experience is less of actual factory to hostel to factory life, and more on the skill centres and conditions at origin. See Ruthven, Orlanda (2016), 'All Aboard the Job Train: Government funded Training and Recruitment in India's

Apparel Industry' in Bina Fernandez et al (eds) Land, Labour and Livelihoods: Indian Women's Perspectives, Palgrave Macmillan.

[73] Since a 2017 amendment to the Maternity Benefit Act, for first and second births, women workers are entitled to 6 months, or 26 weeks of paid leave, more than double of the 12 weeks of leave to which they were entitled earlier. Unfortunately, for subsequent pregnancies, the provision for only 3 months, or 12 weeks of paid leave remains in place. Further, any establishment that employs 50 or more women is legally bound to provide crèche facilities. Yet such crèche facilities are hardly in demand if the majority of workers, particularly in large factories, are unmarried. It is often the case that creches in such factories remain on paper.

The Act mandates licensing, registration, and the appointment of a resident manager for every fifty inmates, with duties covering cleanliness, infection control, and security. If the number exceeds 50, CCTV or DVR installation is required. It also specifies an average norm of 120 sq. ft. per woman but lacks provisions on toilets or other facilities, unlike factory regulations that specify toilet-to-worker ratios.

Mr. V. Elangovan, Vice-President of the Tiruppur Exporters Association and Chairperson of the Tiruppur Stakeholders' Forum, explained that factory hostels require a license from the district administration. His company's hostel must comply with brand-specific standards, with audits ensuring adherence to regulations. Each brand has its own compliance norms, including restrictions on room occupancy.[74]

It appears that brand requirements are variable, making it difficult for one company to meet the conditions of multiple brands it exports to. Thus, state government regulations seem to be the primary framework for setting standards and regulations for factory hostels, rather than brand-specific requirements.

7.6. Government-Constructed Hostels

An alternative to factory-run hostels was attempted through a state government-constructed hostel in Tiruppur, leased to a consortium of garment companies before the pandemic. However, it now lies vacant, with creeper weeds overtaking the building. Located in Samathuvapuram, a model housing project aimed at fostering social equality, the hostel, built in 2019, has been closed for months.[75] A lone guard at the gate confirmed it as a government-owned building. A nearby provisions store owner, who migrated from Madurai 30 years ago, lamented the loss of business due to the hostel's closure.

Figure 8: Deserted Government Working Women's Hostel at Samathuvapuram, Neruperichal Village, Tiruppur



Taken in December 2023 by authors

Locals provided additional details about the hostel, stating it had been leased to premier garment factories for ₹300,000 ($3,612.83 USD) per month and housed 500 women working at the factories. These women were later relocated to a company building in New Tiruppur, with buses transporting them to and from work daily. The hostel hosted workers from Odisha, Bihar, Punjab, and Bangalore, with only a few Tamil women, while the staff was entirely Tamil. The hostel is listed on the Social Welfare Department website. Inside, there is a board for the TEA-NIFT Knitwear Fashion Institute and DDU-GKY Ministry of Rural Development, but the facility now lies disused, raising questions about its neglect.[76]

[74] V. Elangovan during a discussion on 7th December 2023.

[75] In 1997, then Chief Minister M Karunanidhi introduced the concept of Samathuvapuram — a village where the government would provide free housing to people from different castes, who would live together with shared civic amenities.

[76] NIFT-TEA Knitwear Fashion Institute was established by TEA in 1997. See website at https://www.nifttea.ac.in/

8. Stakeholders & Their Stakes: **Destination and Source States**



The Tiruppur Stakeholders Forum (TSF), which came into existence when Tiruppur exporters were facing targeted import restrictions in some countries, had become defunct for some years.[77] TSF was relaunched on 12th October 2023, with V. Elangovan, Vice-President of the Tiruppur Exporters' Association (TEA), as Chairman. Participants included TEA, Brands, NGOs, Trade Unions, Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), the Labour Department, Department of Industrial Safety and Health (DISH), Government of Tamil Nadu, and UN Women."[78]

Could the multi-stakeholder forum TSF be a key platform to address the issues of migrant women workers in Tiruppur identified in our study? Can TSF improve the working and living conditions of these workers? Is it the right forum to raise the specific vulnerabilities of diverse migrant women workers? These questions were central to this study, requiring an outline of TSF's composition, its approach to migrant labour, the nature of its stakeholders, and its formation for valuable insights.

> **Participants included TEA, Brands, NGOs, Trade Unions, Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), the Labour Department, Department of Industrial Safety and Health (DISH), Government of Tamil Nadu, and UN Women.**

8.1. Tiruppur Stakeholders' Forum (TSF)

TSF was formed when Tiruppur's growth faced challenges. Between 1989 and 2007, exports grew at a compounded rate of 26.18 per cent, but from 2007-2012, growth dropped to 2.59 per cent.[79] Labour This was due to the 2007-08 financial crisis, market troubles, rising yarn prices, and job losses in small units. Additionally, European campaigns

[77] Report in Apparel Resources dated 18-September-2023, available at https://apparelresources.com/business-news/sustainability/focusing-workers-welfare-tirupur-stakeholders-forum-will-relaunced-soon/

[78] Report in Knitting views magazine dated Oct 13, 2023, available at https://knittingviews.com/tirupur-stakeholders-forum-tsf-relaunched-in-tirupur/

[79] G. Yoganandan (2015), 'Growth of Apparel Export Industry in Tirupur, India', International Journal of Research (IJR), Issue 3, March 2015

against child labour in India's garment supply chains led the US DOL to include Indian garments on the TVPRA and Executive Order 13126 lists in 2009.[80] The Sumangali scheme, criticized for exploiting young girls in Tiruppur's hosiery/knitwear industry, led to the formation of TSF by TEA leadership."[81]

One submission highlighted exploitation, mandatory hostel stays, wage deductions, restricted outings, and rampant sexual exploitation. The scheme's link to importing country restrictions influenced TSF's creation.[82]

AEPC's presentation to the US DOL referred to TSF as the first industry-led multi-stakeholder platform. The initial meeting in 2010 included brands like GAP, Walmart, and H&M, along with trade unions and NGOs. AEPC later created a similar forum to address social compliance issues, especially child labour.[83] After initial activity, TSF became inactive until 2014-15, when export growth revived by 18 per cent. Chairperson V. Elangovan now sees TSF as a platform for resolving industry issues, with increased focus on gender-based violence, especially with UN Women's involvement.

8.2. Structures, Leadership, & Approaches to Women & Migrant Workers in TSF

Mr. Elangovan emphasized that TSF, although under TEA, is a separate forum with distinct stakeholders, including NGOs, Trade Unions, brands, UN Women, and some exporters. Government officials are invitees, but they do not set the agenda. The Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI), a UK-based organization, is also part of TSF.[84] Elangovan emphasized the role of NGOs in TSF, *noting that while TUs and management handle factory issues, NGOs bring hidden community problems to light. He also mentioned plans to involve migrant labour representatives from Jharkhand, Bihar, and Odisha to address their specific issues. He explained the industry's labour shortage, citing socio-economic changes, education, and the appeal of white-collar jobs over factory work. The pandemic compounded the situation, reducing business by 35%per cent, but recovery began in recent months.*

Regarding migrant workers during COVID, he explained that TSF provided welfare measures, including transportation and food. The forum responded proactively to a false social media message that led to panic among migrants, offering confidence-building measures and police interventions to reassure them.[85]

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[80] TVPRA refers to Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act in US and EO refers to the US President's Executive Order (1999) on "Prohibition of Acquisition of Products Produced by Forced or Indentured Child Labour" that prohibits import of goods that are deemed to have been produced "wholly or in part by forced or indentured child labour." For US Department of Labour list under TVPRA for 2009 which includes garments from India see Table 1 (p. 16) of USDOL (2009): The Department of Labour's List of Goods Produced by Child Labour or Forced Labour, available at https://respect.international/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2009-List-of-Goods-Produced-by-Child-Labour-or-Forced-Labour-US-Department-of-Labour.pdf For letter sent by the then chairperson of the AEPC, to the US Department of Labour asking for removal of Indian garments from the list of TVPRA and EO 13126, in 2012, along with a presentation by AEPC which gives a timeline of responses from India, and especially mentions the TSF as performing a 'Stellar role in effectively eradicating employment of child labours in garment exporting units with the help of trade Unions', see https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/legacy-files/submissions/20120410.pdf

[81] Macro International Inc. (2009), 'In-country Research and Data Collection on Forced Labour and Child Labour in the Production of Goods: India' Submitted to: U.S. Department of Labour Bureau of International Labour Affairs, Office of Child Labour, Forced Labour, and Human Trafficking, available at https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/research_file_attachment/Macro%20International%20In-Country%20Research%20in%20India.pdf

[82] News reports show that the company in question, was operating the Sumangali scheme since the late 1990s, although it was much extolled for facilitating educational advancement of its sumangali workers. See John Samuel (2007) In Mint, dtd. 23 Nov 2007

[83] See AEPC presentation at https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/legacy-files/submissions/20120410.pdf

[84] ETI, headquartered in London, has member companies of mostly UK based major retailers with a combined turnover of over £166 bn. Its trade union members comprise of Britain's Trades Union Congress (TUC), and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which itself is the result of a merger of the American AFL-CIO led ICFTU, and the World Confederation on Labour (WCL) led by trade unions of Europe that were called Christian trade unions till 1968. ETI's NGO members include British founded charities, such as Oxfam and Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), Anti-Slavery International, Homeworkers Worldwide, Fairtrade Foundation and Transform Trade.

[85] This refers to a series of fake videos alleging attacks on Hindi-speaking migrants in Tamil Nadu, that were circulated in February 2023, causing widespread fear among north Indian migrant workers in the state.

During an NGO meeting on 5th December 2023, the issue of migrant children's education and the need for Hindi teaching was raised. Elangovan discussed societal change, noting that long-term migrants often learn Tamil. He explained that Tamil workers still commute daily, but many migrant workers, especially women, leave after marriage. Tamil Nadu offers significant welfare schemes, including free rice, transport, and financial assistance.

He noted that girls in hostels are more disciplined, while boys prefer to stay outside due to fewer restrictions. The industry provides training, including soft skills, to meet brand demands. A grievance redressal mechanism exists through Workers' Committees, which include migrant and female representatives. TSF also collaborates with UN Women on women's empowerment in textiles.

Elangovan downplayed the Dindigul Agreement, attributing it to mishandling by one company, mainly regarding gender bias and sexual harassment issues. He emphasized that TSF is not connected to it, and each factory has Standing Orders (SO) to address such matters.

While TSF provides a platform for discussing migrant women workers' issues, its focus on brand-driven agendas may not effectively represent workers' interests, especially those of migrant women. Trade unions in Tiruppur remain skeptical about TSF's role.

8.3. A Trade Union Perspective on TSF

In contrast to the TSF's claims of being a platform for raising garment workers' issues, Trade Unions in Tiruppur, like CITU, view it skeptically. G. Sampath, a prominent union leader, expressed that TSF lacks democracy, only presenting one-sided views, and does not prioritize workers' welfare. He believes its goal is to become a certification body for brands, with the TEA leadership seeking union participation to support SA8000 and Social Compliance Audits.[86] The TSF's role remains contentious, with trade unions, particularly CITU, criticizing it for lacking democracy and serving as a rubber stamp for companies' needs. While TSF aims to become a certification body for brands, the absence of mass membership-based organizations further fuel skepticism. TSF leadership fails to account for the diverse allegiances of local and international trade unions, marginalizing certain stakeholders. This lack of understanding hinders meaningful engagement and highlights the challenges of harmonizing varying perspectives, especially given the political affiliations of many local unions.

A deeper engagement and shift towards local sovereignty are necessary for a more effective multi-stakeholder forum. Overreliance on European and US markets and compliance mechanisms may be outdated in the face of evolving global dynamics. The challenges for workers and employers in Tiruppur are distinct from those of brands, and tripartism or 'tripartism plus' may offer better solutions. Despite these issues, the TSF remains crucial for engaging employers in Tiruppur, and its efforts in supporting migrant workers, especially women, through initiatives like returning home support and combating misinformation, are significant. However, the current TSF structure may struggle to integrate the perspectives of state origin institutions and interstate dialogue necessary for migrant worker welfare.

8.4. Source Area Policy Stakes & Developments in Jharkhand & Odisha

Fieldwork for this study was conducted in Jharkhand and Odisha, which together represent 42 per cent of the migrant women workers surveyed in Tiruppur. The following discussion on stakeholder perspectives and policy developments focuses on these two states.

8.4.1. Source Area Skill Development Programmes & Out-of-State Placements

In Jharkhand and Odisha, the DDU-GKY scheme, implemented through private and non-governmental agencies with full government funding, is a key model for skilling, placement, and out of state migration for the apparel industry. It offers free training, lodging,

[86] The SA8000 Standard is a certification standard for application of "socially acceptable practices in the workplace". It was developed by the US based NGO, Social Accountability International.

and support for young women from targeted social groups, countering social restrictions on women's mobility and employment.[87] In Jharkhand, skill centers are funded by the Jharkhand Skill Development Mission Society (JSDMS), while in Odisha, the scheme is managed by ORMAS (Odisha Rural Development and Marketing Society), which also operates Migration Support Centres in key destinations like Tiruppur.[88] [89]

At a skill development center in Ranchi, trainees learned industrial sewing machine operation, finger dexterity exercises, and soft skills like behaviour and hygiene.[90] However, the training lacked content on workers' rights, labour laws, and workplace sexual harassment, focusing instead on productivity and discipline. While the training emphasized wage potential at job destinations, it did not inform workers about their legal entitlements.

Despite these gaps, the DDU-GKY model has provided crucial opportunities for women in a male-dominated labour migration context. It facilitated the feminization of labour migration from Jharkhand and Odisha.[91] Prior to the pandemic, 75 per cent of placements were out of state, with women comprising 51 per cent of placements, surpassing their 41 per cent share of trainees. Without state-backed skill development and migration, such widespread recruitment would have been unlikely.[92]

8.4.2. Policy Incentives for Setting-Up Garment Factories in Jharkhand & Odisha

Recent policies in Jharkhand and Odisha have shifted towards developing local textile and apparel industries to generate in-state employment. This transition includes offering significant incentives to investors, with a notable feature being high wage subsidies for garment manufacturers.

In 2016, Jharkhand introduced a Textile, Apparel, and Footwear Policy offering incentives such as land availability, tax concessions, and subsidies. The key addition was an Employment Generation Subsidy (wage subsidy) of ₹5,000 ($60.21 USD) per worker per month for seven years. A higher subsidy of ₹6,000 ($72.26 USD) per month was provided for SC/ST women workers. The government also reimbursed employers for ESI and EPF expenses up to ₹1,000 ($12.04 USD) per worker for five years, effectively covering 80-90% of the statutory minimum wage for semi-skilled workers in 2016. By 2022, the subsidy covered 65-75 per cent of the minimum wage for semi-skilled workers.

Similarly, Odisha's 2016 Apparel Policy offered incentives, though at a lower scale. In 2022, Odisha revised its policy to provide ₹6,000 ($72.26 USD) per female worker and ₹5,000 ($60.21 USD) per male worker per month for five years, along with ₹1,000 ($12.04 USD) monthly subsidies for employer ESI and EPF contributions.

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[87] See Ruthven, Orlanda, Ruthven (2013) Chapter 6: Skilling India, in The State of India's Livelihood

Report 2013. Access Development Services. New Delhi, Sage for the first phase of the new private organization implemented skill and placement model.

[88] Interestingly, among nine employer partner companies of the JSDMS are three garment manufacturing companies, of which two are Tiruppur based, while the third whose manufacturing units may be found from north to south India, had a unit in Tiruppur which it closed down in 2017.

[89] At the time of the inauguration of the Migration Support Centre in Tiruppur, the ORMAS post placement officer has been quoted as saying that more than 5,000 DDU-GKY candidates from Odisha had been placed in knitwear units in Tiruppur of which more than 80% were women, many of whom had been working there for more than two years. See report by Rajasekaran RK, 'Odisha government opens migration support centre in Tirupur' at https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/coimbatore/odisha-govt-opens-migration-support-centre-in-tirupur/articleshow/67949155.cms

[90] In Odisha, particular stress is laid on preparing and encouraging rural girls to accept and adjust to initial difficulties encountered when first placed in work environments that are different from what they are used to as seen in publicly available documentaries on one of the most well-established skill development centres in the state.

[91] For a full discussion on falling rates of employment for women, the See Mazumdar & Neetha (2012) 'Gender Dimensions: Employment Trends in India, 1993-94 to 2009-10' in Economic and Political Weekly Vol. 46, Issue No. 43, 22 Oct 2011, and Kannan and Raveendran (2019) 'From Jobless to Job-loss Growth Gainers and Losers during 2012–18' Raveendran, in Vol. 54, Issue No. 44, 09 Nov 2019

[92] See CWDS (2018) research report, Women migrating in India: Evidence from Odisha, p. 121 at https://www.cwds.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Women-Migrating-in-Inida.pdf

Thus, both states are now competing with each other, offering wage subsidies to attract investors towards their states.

8.4.3. Returnee Migrants from Tiruppur: Employment in New Factories in Ranchi District

The impact of Odisha's enhanced wage subsidy regime was still unfolding at the time of this study. However, a major Hong Kong-based company, initially planning to invest in Jharkhand, shifted its planned manufacturing unit to Odisha in 2023.[93] In contrast, since the introduction of Jharkhand's 2016 policy, several garment factories have emerged, primarily around Ranchi, established by leading garment manufacturers from across the country.[94]

Despite the 2016 policy's substantial subsidy for dormitory construction, no hostels have been established. Instead, women from nearby districts, too far for daily commuting but reachable within a few hours, have independently arranged shared accommodations in peri-urban villages.[95] Fig 9 exemplifies one such arrangement. Here, a young women shared rooms and domestic chores (as was also seen in Tiruppur). All the rooms in the building were rented to such workers, and in this case, it was located on a highway, just five minutes walking distance from their factory.

Figure 9: A glimpse of the nature of shared accommodation of intra-state migrant women garment workers in Ranchi, Jharkhand



Photographs taken on the outskirts of Ranchi next to a newly established garment factory on 8th March 2024 by authors

The Tiruppur returnees staying in the mentioned accommodations had 2 pm to 10 pm shifts, making commuting from their previous lodgings exhausting. Many reported falling asleep without eating, prompting them to seek housing closer to their workplace. However, researchers noted that while their earlier accommodation was in a densely populated urban village, the new quarters, though closer to the factory, are near a highway in a relatively open, less protected area. Though the workers currently feel safe moving in groups, the lack of security raises policy concerns for both the government and factory management.

[93] See report in Apparel Resources, dtd 03-October-2023 at https://apparelresources.com/business-news/manufacturing/epic-groups-largest-facility-to-be-established-in-odisha/ One of the topmost garment export companies in India (Shahi) with factories spread out from NCR to Bangalore, has been in Odisha since 2015-16, and has recently announced that it was going to add 3000 more employees to its 6000 strong workforce. Shahi has been engaged in skill development programmes in both Odisha and Jharkhand, mostly catering to its own hiring needs.

[94] Major companies such as Arvind (headquartered in Gujarat) but with major manufacturing units also in Bangalore, Orient Craft, based in NCR, which was among the top garment exporters from the1980s, Matrix (also NCR based), and Cotton World in Bangalore, etc. have established garment manufacturing units along with some smaller companies.

[95] Such sets of rooms have been the standard manner in which villages near industrial estates have created accommodation for migrant workers in so many parts of the country. The difference is that generally these have been for male workers, whereas many such accommodations have appeared in Ranchi that are exclusively for women workers, precisely because of the preference for young women in the newly established garment factories.

While both accommodation types remain affordable for now, rising costs are expected as the area urbanizes. Workers commuting from nearby villages in company buses reported wage deductions for bus fares. These living and travel costs reduce women's net earnings compared to Tiruppur, while company profits benefit from wage subsidies. However, the ability to stay closer to their families, especially during festivals, is a strong incentive for intra-state migration to Ranchi. Some workers also pursue higher education while working, though without factory support.

A common grievance among workers was the increasing production targets: "Yahan ek din mein 300-400 maangte the. Ab ek ghanta mein 100 pees to hona hi hai." The absence of childcare facilities was also noted, with unmarried workers often leaving jobs post-marriage and married workers exiting upon pregnancy. Pregnant women appear unwelcome in garment factories, both in home and destination states, often confronted by family pressures combined with workplace exclusion.

While International Women's Day was observed in some Ranchi factories on 8 March 2023, with visible notifications on POSH, the Internal Committee, and statutory minimum wages, reproductive rights—including paid maternity leave and crèche facilities—remain neglected despite the higher proportion of married women in Ranchi's garment workforce compared to the hostel-based setups in Tiruppur.

8.4.4. Returnee Migrants from Tiruppur: Unemployed in Jharkhand & Odisha

Most returnees to Jharkhand from Tiruppur have not secured jobs in local factories, especially those from distant districts like Sahibganj, East Singhbhum, and Dumka, where one-third of Jharkhand's surveyed Tiruppur workers originated. Unmarried returnees around Ranchi reported former co-workers being either self-employed or unemployed (see Annex 2, pages 51-59).

In Bhadrak, Odisha—sending the highest number of women migrants to Tiruppur (over one-fourth of the surveyed workers from Odisha)—interviews with two married returnees and families of current migrants reflected similar patterns of return, marriage, and unemployment. Despite autonomy in marriage decisions, both women faced isolation and patriarchal restrictions due to joblessness (see interviews with 'Shubha' and 'Usha' in Annex 2).

No organised support exists for returnee migrant workers in Jharkhand or Odisha. Limited connections among unmarried returnees in Ranchi's garment sector help with shared housing but lack the wider social solidarity needed for collective action, despite focused labour efforts in Odisha and Jharkhand, particularly post-pandemic.

8.4.5. Labour Policy Initiatives for Out-Of-State Migrant Workers (Jharkhand & Odisha)

In Jharkhand, the pandemic shifted policy focus on migrant workers. Pre-pandemic, public debate on women's migration was largely framed around anti-trafficking, particularly for single tribal women in live-in domestic work through private placement agencies. Though the conflation of women's work migration with trafficking persists, it has become somewhat muted due to the skill development push and increased awareness that grew out of the trials of the pandemic.[96]

Shikha Lakra of PHIA, associated with Jharkhand's labour department initiatives, shared that a migrant workers' database, a state portal, and a dedicated IT wing have been developed. "We have been running a Helpline since Covid times. It will complete 4 years on 27 March 2024, also built a database on migrant workers; a state portal." Originally run by NGOs like PHIA from the Ranchi labour department premises, the Helpline has since evolved into a State Migrant Control Room under the Department of Labour, Employment, Training and Skill Development. The

[96] The raising of the age of consent from 16-18 and the insertion of Section 370 Indian Penal Code (IPC) defining trafficking through the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, had brought the child rights NGOs into the leadership of the anti-trafficking rhetoric. Interestingly, the skilling program, which earlier used to target to the 16+ age group, also shifted its target to the 18+ age group. It may be also mentioned here that a 2016 amendment to the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act had created a category of adolescent labour (aged 14-18) who could not be employed in hazardous industries (the list of hazardous industries includes processing and manufacture of hosiery goods).

unit, led by Shikha for PHIA. It handles grievances under the Factories Act, Building and Construction Workers Act, and Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act (ISMWA), while managing the migrant database.

With four years of specialized engagement, the unit effectively negotiates with destination states for migrant cases and collaborates with Jharkhand's skill development nodal agency, JSDMS, under the same department. However, despite an all-female staff, gender-disaggregated data is lacking. Day-to-day caseloads, mainly from male migrants, and gender-blind labour laws have limited a strategic gender approach.[97] The Safe and Responsible Migration Initiative (SRMI), launched in 2021 with Omidyar Network India and Niti Aayog support, continues the Helpline's efforts for low-income interstate migrants. However, SRMI addresses only Kerala and Leh, overlooking female-intensive migration corridors.[98] Odisha's migration policies predate the pandemic, with the Orissa Dadan Labour Act, 1975 influencing the central ISMWA, now under the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020.[99] These primarily target mass seasonal migration tied to debt bondage, persisting in sectors like brick kilns and construction. Odisha's State Action Plan for Safety and Welfare of Inter-State Migrant Workers focuses on migrant tracking, welfare links, and IEC but lacks a gender focus. Issues like non-payment of independent wages for women in family-based work remain unaddressed.[100] The Odisha government's 2011 MoU with Andhra Pradesh, facilitated by the ILO, introduced initiatives like sending Odiya teachers to brick kilns for children's education. This could be expanded to Tamil Nadu, with Odiya teaching support in Tiruppur schools to aid the integration of migrant workers' children.

Migrant women in the garment sector remain excluded from Odisha's State Action Plan, as their migration is labelled 'aspirational' rather than distress-driven, despite evident economic distress. Limited-duration employment for young unmarried women and the state's focus on incentivizing retention overlook structural constraints. However, Bhadrak labour officials have shown openness to the study's findings, while maintaining a focus on ISMWA compliance.

The absence of a gender lens in migration policies—whether preventive or promotional—persists in both Jharkhand and Odisha. However, the cooperative stance of labour officials in both states offers potential for addressing the challenges faced by women garment workers, both during migration and after their return.

[97] The consortium includes PHIA, PDAG, both of which worked together during the pandemic, and CMID in Kerala, as well as the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad.

[98] See https://www.omidyarnetwork.in/blog/safe-responsible-migration-initiative-srmi The Omidyar Network India is part of the Omidyar Group supported by Pam and Pierre Omidyar, founder of eBay.

[99] The Odisha law was superseded by the Inter-State. Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service), 1979, which, in turn has been superseded and incorporated in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020.

[100] As it happened, following the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, the MOU process was not taken further. Since then, discussions between labour departments of Odisha, and of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka have moved towards establishing Help Desks for migrants from Odisha through institutional cooperation between the labour departments of Odisha and the destination states.

9. Summary & Discussion



This study on migrant women workers in Tiruppur highlights key aspects of their migration, work conditions, and policy gaps, emphasizing the need for a gender-responsive labour framework. The Covid 'migrant crisis' spurred Niti Aayog to draft a 'Migrant Labour Policy Framework' in 2021, yet to be finalized or opened for public consultation, but offering insights into its evolving policy direction. (Niti Aayog, 2021).[101]

The preliminary draft highlights the 'migrant labour sector's economic contribution and the need for enhanced government collabouration. It advocates viewing labour migration through a human right, economic, and social development lens, promoting migrant workers' agency, dignity, and autonomy over aid. Key objectives include fostering an environment that supports workers' enterprise.

The draft lists nine labour laws, focusing on seasonal migration and contract labour in construction, and recommends creating special units under MoLE to collabourate with other ministries.[102] The draft focuses on tribal migrant workers in states with large tribal populations (Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh) and emphasizes gender-specific approaches to address the feminization of labour migration. It proposes technical cooperation with agencies like ILO, IOM, WHO, and UNAIDS but places this under migration data management with MoTA. While acknowledging key sectors like apparel and domestic work, it overlooks their role in driving female migration and echoes a tendency to conflate women's migration with trafficking, especially among tribal women. (Niti Aayog, 2021; Deshingkar, 2021).[103]

> **This study on migrant women workers in Tiruppur highlights key aspects of their migration, work conditions, and policy gaps, emphasizing the need for a gender-responsive labour framework.**

[101] Although Niti Aayog's draft for a 'Migrant Labour Policy Framework' dated 01.06.2021 is neither finalized nor available in the public domain, it was made available for discussion to a few commentators on labour migration in India. This paper refers to that unfinalized draft for the purposes of understanding elements that have so far entered policy thinking for the purposes of advancing the discussion.

[102] The laws relate to Minimum Wages, Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition), Inter-state Migrant Workmen (which also deals only with contractor mobilized labour), Equal Remuneration, Building & Construction workers, Workmen's Compensation, Payment of Wages, Child Labour, Bonded Labour.

[103] Deshingkar, P., (2021) An effective migrant labour policy must consider where existing labour laws fail; Indian Express; 21.07.2021. https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/national-migration-policy-labour-laws-niti-aayog-7261732/

The discussion on a migrant worker policy presents an opportunity to highlight the unique vulnerabilities of women migrant workers, for which this study on female migrant workers in Tiruppur, a key RMG hub, is especially relevant.

While the survey data is indicative, combined with field observations and interviews, the study offers valuable insights into migrant women's background, migration, recruitment, work conditions, and challenges, all grounded in a gendered historical context.

9.1. Diversity of Cultural Backgrounds

9.1.1 The migrant women workforce in Tiruppur's garment industry is highly diverse, with workers from 59 districts across 10 states. Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand, Assam, and Tamil Nadu account for 88 per cent of the surveyed workers, speaking six different ethno-regional languages, with Hindi, Odia, Tamil, and Assamese being the most common.

9.1.2 Despite this diversity, migration corridors from districts like Vaishali (Bihar), Bhadrak (Odisha), Morigaon (Assam), and Virudhunagar (Tamil Nadu) are more concentrated.

9.1.3 95 per cent of workers come from rural or semi-rural areas, often facing landlessness, small farms, and an agrarian crisis. This context explains women's migration to support their families economically.

9.1.4 Most migrant women belong to OBC, SC, or ST communities, with notable variations across states. The migration of women from disadvantaged backgrounds reflects a lack of opportunities in their home states, where government schemes could be better utilized.

9.1.5 The majority of women migrants are young, with 57 per cent aged between 18-25. Those from Bihar and Tamil Nadu tend to be older, often married, while workers from Jharkhand, Odisha, and Assam are younger and unmarried.

9.1.6 Over half of the workers have completed Class 10 or higher, with fewer than 10% being non-literate, mostly from Bihar. Graduates are primarily from Jharkhand.

9.1.7 More than half (55%) of the migrant women are married, with regional patterns showing married women from Bihar and Tamil Nadu, and unmarried women from Jharkhand, Odisha, and Assam. The largest factories have higher proportions of unmarried workers.

Discussion:

A) The diverse composition of female garment workers in Tiruppur requires tailored social interventions. Sensitivity to regional diversity should be promoted at the local level, especially among employers, civic bodies, and trade unions. Information in Tamil on the diverse backgrounds of these workers would be useful.

B) Districts with concentrated migration flows should receive special attention. Institutional linkages between labour departments and civic bodies at both origin and destination could help address migrant women's issues, guiding the development of policies that consider them as women, workers, and citizens.

C) Women migrating for economic support represents a cultural shift that could lead to greater independence. However, unmarried women's migration is often temporary, reverting to confinement upon marriage. Despite this, their transition to factory work signals changing gender relations in family contexts. A socially progressive direction to such change could be supported by organizing solidarity communities of current and former migrant women workers, which could foster agency, support education, and link returnees to employment schemes, advancing gender justice.

9.2. Top-Down Recruitment, Skill Development Centre Mediation & Feminized Migration

9.2.1 A notable trend was the migration of couples, with 10-14 per cent migrating unmarried. Some couples, particularly from conservative backgrounds, eloped due to gender, caste, or community restrictions.

9.2.2 Migration with family members was another common mode. More married women, particularly from Bihar, migrated alone, while unmarried girls

often travelled with family members already working in Tiruppur. Overall, women showed increasing independence in cross-cultural migration.

9.2.3 While higher wages were not a primary draw, the availability of consistent year-round employment in Tiruppur influenced the choice of destination.

9.2.4 Large factories with hostels recruit workers primarily through skill development centers in source states, with 100 per cent financial support from the Indian Government for training and placement. These centers, often supported by state institutions, train several batches of women annually, overcoming mobility restrictions through networks and local administration facilitation.

9.2.5 A second major recruitment method, the 'referral system,' incentivizes workers to bring in recruits from their communities, resulting in more concentrated migration patterns compared to skill center trainees.

9.2.6 New migrants entering Tiruppur via autonomous routes often find jobs through contractors, while seasoned migrants typically apply directly at factory gates

Discussion:

A) While women's migration driven by autonomous impulses, both single and in family units, contrasts with the more gender-segregated, capital-driven migration mediated by recruitment practices in large factories, government-supported skill centers are primarily geared towards young, unmarried girls for factory work with hostels.

B) The structured migration of unmarried girls, supported by skill centers and large factories with hostels, raises questions about the sustainability of their migration and employment. Will these women return to traditional roles as dependents upon marriage? These issues require policy-level consideration, particularly in skilling frameworks.

C) The gender-segregated nature of migrant inflows poses questions about the future integration of these women into the local working class and their potential to drive gender equality in the workforce. Further longitudinal research is needed to explore the long-term impacts, especially in relation to work conditions in Tiruppur.

9.3. Working Conditions in Tiruppur

9.3.1 Long Hours of Work: The debate over work hours is contentious, with Tiruppur's situation reflecting the larger push for a 12-hour workday. While Tamil Nadu's state Assembly passed a bill legalizing it in April 2023, the bill was later withdrawn, showing that trade unions can still wield influence. In practice, however, a 12-hour workday is normalized in Tiruppur, especially in larger factories. This gruelling schedule is sustained by a youthful workforce, which explains the absence of workers over 40.

9.3.2 Prevalence of Piece Rates and Contract Labour: The 12-hour workday is linked to piece rates, which incentivize longer working hours through self-exploitation. The widespread use of contract labour, even in large factories, allows employers to combine piece-rated workers with legally compliant, time-rated workers. Piece rates and weekly payments dominate in small to medium-sized factories.

9.3.3 Wages Below Statutory Minimum: Three factors influence wage determination in Tiruppur: 1) A history of tripartite/bipartited agreements on wage rates, 2) the classification of garment manufacturing as 'tailoring' for minimum wage purposes, and 3) attempts to reduce wages by reclassifying the industry as hosiery or knitwear manufacturing. These processes have led to wages below both bipartite agreement rates and statutory minimum wages.

9.3.4 Unequal Wages: The Equal Remuneration Act mandates equal pay for similar work, yet wage inequality persists in Tiruppur due to gender-based job segregation. Male-dominated roles historically had higher wages than female-dominated ones. Even after feminization has swept through male dominated jobs such as tailoring, strikingly lower wages continue to persist for the first female dominated task of checking.

9.3.5 Lack of Provisions for Health, Leave, and Social Security: The absence of health insurance, provident fund coverage, and social security for most migrant women workers highlights the failure of labour law enforcement. Although larger factories provide some benefits like onsite clinics, the enforcement of labour laws remains a significant issue. Migrant women also face challenges in securing adequate leave, especially given the long travel times for those returning home.

9.3.5 Enforcement Matters: The lack of enforcement is not even seen as a grievance by most workers, with only 4 out of 153 surveyed having been union members. Reorganization of the state labour department and staff shortages suggest that labour law enforcement has declined, leaving workers unaware of or unable to access their rights, such as an 8-hour workday, ESI, and PF.

9.3.6 Temporary Formalization: Many workers in large factories with hostels are part of the provident fund system, but this is only meaningful if they stay long enough to benefit from it. The temporary nature of hostel employment for unmarried girls undermines the social security provisions, as these benefits are meaningful only with long-term employment.

Discussion:

A) The widespread use of contract labour, long hours, piece rates, and low wages is a hallmark of Tiruppur's garment industry. Even large factories depend on contract workers, which blurs the lines between formal and informal labour. This system binds workers to exploitative conditions across both sectors.

B) The temporary nature of formalized employment, particularly for young, unmarried women, makes social security benefits like health insurance and provident fund largely illusory. The expectation of short-term employment undermines any long-term benefits from formalization.

C) The lack of enforcement of labour laws remains a critical issue, particularly for contract workers. There is a need for a network of facilitation centers to provide migrant workers with information and access to benefits that are currently unavailable to them.

D) Regarding minimum wages, it is essential to standardize wage rates for garment manufacturing, whether classified as tailoring or hosiery and knitwear. Engagement with state authorities, including the Labour Welfare and Skill Development Department, is needed to ensure wage consistency, prevent wage drop and address legal concerns regarding unequal wages for the same work.

E) Despite wage equality in official minimum wage notifications, market forces continue to perpetuate lower wages for historically female-dominated roles like checking. Employers and trade unions in Tiruppur need to review and rectify this inequality in their current approach and practices.

9.4. Sexual Harassment & Reproductive Rights

9.4.1 Awareness of POSH Law: Workers in Tiruppur, particularly in larger companies, are generally more aware of the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace (POSH) law, largely due to public campaigns. Many managements display relevant information about POSH on company notice boards. However, when it comes to constituting Internal Committees (ICs), there is indifference. In some places where ICs are constituted, they tend to remain non-functional. Surveyed workers did not mention any specific cases of sexual harassment, though a few said they were aware of such instances.

9.4.2 Reproductive Health Rights: The denial of reproductive health rights, especially for migrant women workers, is a significant issue in Tiruppur. Migrant women face even more acute problems, such as desertion by partners during pregnancy, which forces them to return to their natal homes due to inadequate care and support. There have been reports of pregnancy among factory hostellers, with workers reluctant to inform management or the warden about their condition. Pregnant workers may face difficulties staying in factory hostels, and their accommodation options may be limited during and after confinement.

9.4.3 Paid Maternity Leave: Despite the legal entitlement to six months of paid maternity leave for the first two children, the contract labour system, which follows a no work/no pay policy, undermines this right for many migrant women workers. Women workers in factory jobs with hostels, who are mainly young and unmarried, face a hostile environment when they become pregnant. Additionally, 85 per cent of migrant women workers lack access to Employees' State Insurance (ESI), which is crucial for paid maternity leave. Another challenge is the lack of creches in factories, with few establishments providing this service, even though the law mandates it for factories with 50 or more workers.

Discussion:

A) Despite management's involvement in POSH awareness campaigns, they are often reluctant to address complaints, and as a result, ICs are either non-existent or non-functional. The term "Internal Complaints Committee" was changed to "Internal Committee" in the POSH Act to emphasize its prevention role. However, in Tiruppur, the focus remains more on awareness-raising than addressing complaints.

B) The Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the workplace has not been included in the POSH Code, effectively leaving it out of the purview of labour laws. For women's safety, POSH should be included in labour law enforcement so that additional institutional pressure can be applied for constituting and activating ICs.

C) Public awareness campaigns have made POSH widely known, which underscores the role of such campaigns in advancing agendas. While campaigns for maternity leave might not receive as much support, they are just as crucial. Combining the issue of reproductive rights and maternity leave with campaigns against workplace sexual harassment could generate significant public pressure on employers and contractors to address these problems.

While the POSH Code mandates the provision of creches in factories with 50 or more workers, it offers flexibility in implementation. Factories can avail of common crèche facilities from various sources. The rules for implementing this provision have not yet been finalized, making it an opportune moment for engagement with government bodies and industry representatives to prioritize the establishment of accessible crèche facilities for all workers, including contract workers.

9.5. Heterogenous Living Arrangements

9.5.1 Accommodation of Unmarried Women Migrants: Unmarried women migrants primarily stay in employer-run hostels or shared rented rooms. Hostels located near factories, providing easy access to work, are a key factor in attracting young women to migrate alone.

9.5.2 Factory-Run Hostels: Though not regulated by labour laws, factory-run hostels are licensed by Tamil Nadu's Social Welfare Department based on health and security standards. Over time, conditions have improved due to competition among employers, with efforts like offering different cuisines and grouping workers by state to reduce attrition.

9.5.3 Accommodation for New Migrants: New migrants increasingly live on the outskirts of Tiruppur in peri-urban settings. These accommodations are often locked late at night, but workers feel safe despite the late hours. However, some accommodations lack toilet facilities.

9.5.4 Challenges for Married Women: Married women, especially those with children, face difficulties accessing paid maternity leave and managing child-rearing. Some leave children in their home state, while others bring them to Tiruppur, facing challenges like language barriers in Tamil-medium schools.

Discussion:

A) Factory hostels, once criticized for issues like bonded labour, have improved as employers compete to attract workers. However, the model of single women workers limits long-term employment opportunities and economic empowerment.

B) Government skilling programs overlook the short-term nature of employment in the garment industry. Most women return home within a few years, lacking economic leverage to escape traditional gender roles. Employers should be encouraged to provide accommodation and facilities for married workers.

C) Introducing married quarters and focusing on childcare and education could help address challenges faced by migrant women. Employers, the State Government, and social institutions must collaborate to meet women's care needs.

D) While shared accommodation is affordable and safe for now, densification of Tiruppur's outskirts could lead to insecurity on both fronts in the future.

9.6. Multi-stakeholders Initiatives: Opportunities and Constraints

9.6.1 Tiruppur Stakeholders Forum (TSF): Revived after a period of inactivity, TSF includes brands, NGOs, trade unions, ETI international brand supported organizations, Tamil Nadu's Labour Department, DISH, and UN Women, alongside TEA members. The forum has shifted focus towards gender-based violence, and discussions on issues like migrant workers' children's education and the need for Hindi-language teaching.

9.6.2 Trade Union Skepticism: Trade unions are skeptical of TSF, viewing it as a potential certification body for brands, revealing differing stakeholder perspectives on its role.

Discussion:

A) TSF, being industry-led, is an important platform for addressing migrant women workers' welfare, with potential for leveraging state-government partnerships for inter-state dialogues to improve conditions. However, its employer-driven nature limits its effectiveness in representing migrant women's labour rights.Core labour issues could be addressed through tripartite dialogues with trade unions, the Additional Commissioner of Labour, and employers, fostering autonomous campaigns that promote migrant women's agency and address labour and gender concerns.[104]

9.7. In Source States: Jharkhand and Odisha

9.7.1 **State Support for out of state placement of Women Workers:** Jharkhand and Odisha promote young women's placement in garment hubs like Tiruppur through Skill Development policies, with incentives for staying on in employment there for a minimum period.

9.7.2 **Wage Subsidies:** Both states offer wage subsidies to within state garment factories, making labour costless for companies. Ranchi saw new factories following introduction of such subsidies in 2016, while Odisha introduced similar incentives in 2022.

9.7.3 **Returnee Migrants:** Some returnee migrants have found work in Ranchi factories, but most remain unemployed and uncertain about their future. Single returnee workers have established a practice of sharing rented rooms with colleagues or friends near their factories.

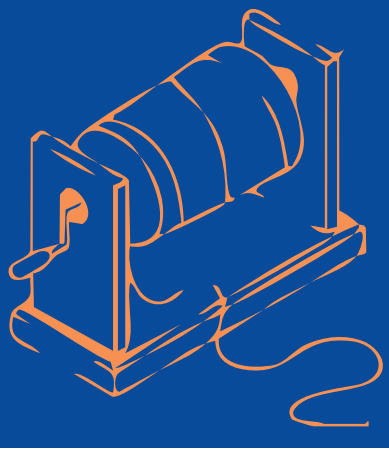
9.7.4 **Gender Blind Policies:** Labour policies in both states lack a gender focus, especially regarding out-of-state migrant women workers.

Discussion:

While both states' labour policies lack gender considerations, a perceptible openness of labour officials offers potential support for programs addressing the challenges of migrating and returnee women workers.

[104] The Additional Labour Commissioner based in Coimbatore has jurisdiction over eight districts that includes the contiguous belt of garment factories across Tiruppur and Erode, along with

10. Key Agendas for **the Future**



Gendering the national policy framework for migrant workers

This study suggests a need to integrate gender considerations into national migrant labour policies. Engaging with Niti Aayog, the Labour Ministry, and other key ministries, particularly the Ministry of Skill Development, can initiate discussions based on these findings. This should extend to inter-state dialogues addressing gender issues in the RMG sector.

A key issue identified is the lack of maternity benefits and childcare facilities for migrant women workers in Tiruppur. The absence of paid maternity leave and adequate childcare, especially for contract workers, limits women's economic empowerment. Extending ESI applicability to contract workers and initiating campaigns for maternity rights and childcare facilities could raise these concerns in forums like the Tiruppur Stakeholders Forum (TSF) and state government platforms. The scope of programmes and campaigns on sexual harassment and gender-based violence by various institutions and agencies in the region in and around Tiruppur should incorporate the centrality of maternity benefits and childcare facilities for migrant women workers. *Extending the scope of programmes and campaigns on sexual harassment and gender-based violence to incorporate the centrality of maternity benefits and childcare facilities for migrant women workers in Tiruppur.*

This study suggests a need to integrate gender considerations into national migrant labour policies. Engaging with Niti Aayog, the Labour Ministry, and other key ministries, particularly the Ministry of Skill Development, can initiate discussions based on these findings.

Education for children of migrant women workers

The education of migrant workers' children, particularly the need for Tamil language tuition and broader second-language options, emerged as another key issue. Engaging with the Tamil Nadu School Education Department and employers could help address this by offering Tamil tuition and teaching Hindi, and other languages spoken by major contingents of migrants. Additionally, inter-state dialogue with origin states like Odisha, Jharkhand, Assam, and Bihar can help cater to migrant children's educational needs.

Conditions of work

The study highlights poor working conditions and wage inequality, particularly between skilled categories in Tiruppur. Promoting local tripartism and utilizing ILO's social dialogue framework could improve work conditions. Additionally, invoking Equal Remuneration provisions can address wage disparities, with specific attention to wage inequality between industries and skills.

Multi-stakeholder forums and platforms

The Tiruppur Stakeholders Forum (TSF) plays a crucial role in addressing issues for migrant women workers, such as access to maternity benefits, childcare, and children's education. Engaging employers and other stakeholders within TSF can facilitate discussions on improving conditions for migrant workers.

In states of origin of migrant women workers

While initiatives for migrant workers from Jharkhand and Odisha are in place, gender perspectives and attention to women migrants' needs, especially returnee migrants, remain absent. Sharing this study's findings can help shape a more gender-sensitive approach to address returnee migrant issues in their home states.

10.1. Areas for future research

This study highlights the rapid changes in the garment industry, necessitating longitudinal research to track developments over time. A panel for ethnographic research in Tiruppur could provide real-time data on caste, class, health, reproductive rights, and occupational issues, facilitating more adaptive policies and programs for migrant women workers.

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12. Appendix

Box 1: Voices of migrant women workers

Tapasi's tale: Of elopement, migration, life in Tiruppur

"My family has around 2 acres of land close to the dam. Hirakud. We grew vegetables and paddy…. There is no need to purchase from the market. I speak Koshali bhasha. I knew Kui bhasha as a child but have now forgotten.[105]

I am an Adivasi, my husband is Kondh.

I am a lower-status Adivasi, and he is upper…. the family did not agree to our marriage. So, we ran away together. He remembered he had a friend here, so we came. I got on to the Dhanbad Express at Sambalpur. I was in the ladies' bogey. For 3 days on the train, I had no food. My husband gave me tea at some station. I couldn't get up since then I would lose my seat…. When I finally got off at the station here, I started crying.

We got married in a mandir here - the Murugan temple.[106] We were scared we would not get a house. Then we found a room here. His friends paid for the rent initially, and then we worked and repaid. For a long time, I did not tell my family that I was here. Later I did. We have been home 3 times in 5 years…. No one supports us, only my sister… and my brother to a lesser degree. There is not much conversation, he is now 21.

I have lived in this same room for 5 years now. Earlier the rent was Rs. 1500/- [$18.06 USD] now it is 1800/- [$21.68 USD]. It was kachha, water would drip…. I worked for Rs. 220/- [$2.65 USD] for 1 shift from 8.30 to 5 pm - Trimming; thread cutting. It was a small company…. Earlier, most other workers were Tamil. There were fights. I could not understand, and did not follow the language….

My present duty is from 8.30 in the morning till 9 at night. Today I came back early because it is market day. The people living around here are mostly all Tamil, not many from my district. Here 1 Re/- rice is available. There are 5 rooms in this cluster…there's a give and take amongst ourselves.

Tamils get better paid than us, especially in the big companies. They differentiate between different people. The difference would be, say Rs. 30 per day [$0.36 USD].

[105] Interview with Tapasi on 8th December 2023 at 8 pm

[106] Murugan is a popular deity of the Tamils.

There are lots of thekedars (contractors). The contractor fixes the rate with us. He gets the profit.

What is life? Go to work, cook, do your housework, go to sleep, it feels bad (kaam jao, khana banao, ghar ka kaam karo so jao, kharab lagta hai)

If there is a child…. we don't have the finances to support it. We are still to decide about our future."

Experiences of Unmarried Migrants

Tripta, a Santhal tribal from Sambalpur, was staying with her elder sister in one of the rooms (Figure 5). Her story highlights the experiences of the residential and work community of migrants.

Box 2: Voices of migrant women workers

Coming from village to city with a didi (sister)

"We are Santhals, Christians, Baptists…I returned from my village some 7-8 months ago. ….. Didi log behan log - chacha aur bade papa ki beti log (Elder sisters, uncle's daughters), are all coming to Tiruppur. They came together from the centre.

The Centre was in Khurda Jatni.[107] I did not go but my sister went… She stayed in the hostel there. The training centre people said come [to Tiruppur]. A whole group came together, some 25-30. They paid the fare, khana peena (food, etc.) in 2021 and got them the work…

If you come from the Centre, you have to work and stay for six months in the hostel before they let you go. Suppose a girl says there is an emergency in the home, only then they will allow her to leave. Here also one of my didis stays in the hostel. My other didi has gone to the market. I did not come through the Centre, so I did not live in the hostel. Didi came first through the centre and lived in the hostel, but she did not like the food/ arrangements. So, when she came back to the village, I came along with her. She works in the same company. At present, we are two, but when those who have gone to the village come back, we will be 5. There are men with families here and then 4-5 of us. No bachelors, boys. The toilet bath is there.

My family has land in the village. It is a big village with several small hamlets. It is a slightly hilly terrain, and we depend on the rain, otherwise, water is a problem. I went to school but after that, I started to work in the fields, apne khet mein (our own fields) …. we do not get labour from outside for payment. Our neighbours work with us, we call them in for one day and we also do the same for them. By mutual arrangement. No payment is done. …

[107] Khurda Jatni (Khurda Road Junction) is a suburban area of Bhubaneswar, the capital of Odisha.

I first came in 2022 after Corona. I did not want to come here, but the kheti bari work would get over and then there was nothing to do. Didi had come home to the village, and I accompanied her. She got me to work in her company… First, I started as a helper. Hand trimmer, thread-cutting... Sometimes I help the tailor. … Sometimes I'm a helper, sometimes a tailor. I learnt all while working.

I get a salary slip and PF is deducted.... I go by bus; it takes 30-40 minutes. We live here because this is the place we are familiar with. It is a bit far, but we decided to live outside. Earlier I used to work in a company nearby. Then as I made friends around, one of them said there's good work there.

I work on a 12-hour shift. I get 450/- per day for 6 days, Sunday is a holiday. We work till evening and then sometimes night also. Yesterday, I did a night shift. Full night. Then I leave at 7.40 pm and then take the bus to reach by 8.20…. We start duty at 8.30, At 12.30 there's a break…We work as we are given. It is of course tiring. But we have to do it. The company sends 3-4 buses. They pick up the girls from various places. Around 25-30 go from here. Right now, since some have gone to their village, there are 12. Most are from Odisha, Bihar. Those from Bihar are mostly married." …

Tripta's residence, typical for migrant workers, involves shared rooms where girls, some with families, feel safe despite late hours. Linked to a skilling centre, many girls opt to stay together outside factory hostels, integrating into the wider migrant community in Tiruppur. In contrast, Bitiya lives with family members, offering a different migration experience.

Box 3: Voices of migrant women workers

Bitiya: A Daughter with her family

"I first came here three years ago with my father and jeeja (sister's husband). Jeeja came here first. Papa did company work, in the cutting section. He learnt the work here.

You see there was a financial issue. My didi got married. So, there was a loan to pay off, Rs.60-70 thousand [$722.57 to $842.99 USD]. My jeeja said I should come here and work, to pay off the loan. He did checking.... First, I worked as a helper then I learnt tailoring… Didi too worked here for two years but is pregnant, so she has gone to the village…… Last year I went to the village for a month, after a gap of two years.

I have stayed in this very place, with my family. The company bus comes at 8.20 am. Work begins at 8.45 am. It goes on till 8 pm. We reach by 8.15 /8.20. The company makes T-Shirts for export. Fifty percent of those who come by bus are married. Two Hundred or maybe 100-150 live in the hostel, which is inside the company. I never lived in the hostel. So, I can't say for sure…

The rent here for 4 people is Rs.3000/- [$36.13 USD]. Now there are 5 of us living here so it is 3500/-. There is no water problem, electricity is included in the rent. I do the cooking, but if I have the night shift then the men also do it. I wash bhai's clothes. Sometimes his daughter washes them... The men also help but mostly we girls do the housework…

My shift is from 8.40 am. I work till 5 pm for Rs.370/- [$4.46 USD] for tailoring. If I work extra till 8 pm, then I get OT, which is half extra, so around 550/- [$6.62 USD] per day. I don't take leave, and I work till 8 pm. If there is an emergency and there is urgent work then we go on Sunday, otherwise

not. I am paid weekly, Rs. 300/- [$3.61 USD] is cut for PF. ESI is also there. I am paid on Saturday. The money comes to my bank account. Rs. 3100/- [$37.33 USD] or so.

At 12.30 we get a break for lunch. There is a canteen where the hostellers eat, but I take a packed lunch. The lunch break is for 30 minutes, teatime 10.30-10.45 am then evening tea from 3.15 -3.30 and then 3rd tea break at 5.30-5.45 pm.

The hostellers get Out Passes on Sundays. They seem to be happy; food, etc. is good. .... We are not so stressed. Neither me nor them. There have been many working in the factory for the last five years. The others are from Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Assam, and West Bengal. There are more Tamils, also in the hostel. Yes, there is mixing. Discipline mein rahte hain. I have learnt some Tamil to be able to speak to the Supervisor. He is a man. There is only 1 woman Supervisor.

When more work is done, the body feels feverish, and tiredness. I have a paracetamol once a month or so. I work during my periods also. I rest if there is a problem. In the restroom, a coin is needed to get a pad. If you don't have a coin, you can get one from HR.

In my company there are rules. No conversation is allowed with the boys in the company, even if they are relatives. We can talk outside, but not there. I know about the ICC. They have told us. The auditor comes. They check and ask about the shift. Also, if there are any complaints.

The owner is from Tiruppur. He comes daily. 3 units are running close by. In my unit, there are up to 400 working, mostly girls. The maalik goes around in the unit. He talks to us. Asks if there is any problem. No torture.

At present my papa and younger brother are in the village. The loan has been paid off. Now they are saving money for my marriage. I have sent Rs. 30,000 [$361.28 USD] home. I got a bonus of 20 thousand [$240.86 USD] for one year, on this Diwali. I don't want my parents to be burdened with saving for my marriage. So, I will work for another two years or so. Ab gaon jaisa hi lagta hai (It feels like my own village), I feel happy living here with my family. I like it in the village back home, but I am used to being here. I feel good when the salary comes into my account."

Bitiya, staying with her family in Tiruppur, feels more at home compared to her native place, but the burden of domestic chores, including cooking and laundry, falls on her, shared by men only during night shifts. Her account also highlights a factory policy restricting interaction between genders, indicating moral policing. In Parappalayam, near Tiruppur's city center, migrant workers live in shared rooms, like Meena, who arrived in January 2022. Meena's story reflects financial hardship, family debt, and the mutual support among migrant girls, sharing domestic tasks and finances. She was interviewed on 10th December 2023.

Box 4: Voices of migrant women workers

From domestic worker in Mumbai to garment worker in Tirupur

"I first came with two friends from Jharkhand. My father is from Jharkhand, but we live in my mother's village in Sambalpur [Odisha] because we have some land there. It is a small village next to a jungle, with less than 200 homes. We are lohar [blacksmith caste].[108] My mother collects kendupatta [used for making beedis] and gives it to the Sarkari [Government] shop. At home, we speak Sadri.[109]

[108] Lohars, traditional blacksmiths, often nomadic in earlier times, are generally classified as OBC. In Jharkhand one group of blacksmiths are also ST. They are called Lohra.

[109] Sadri is often used as a kind of lingua-franca among tribal groups, particularly from Jharkhand, and evolved as several tribal labourers were mobilised and became part of labouring communities, particularly in tea gardens of Assam and in construction within Jharkhand.

I studied in the Adivasi school, I had to get a certificate, to get a stipend. I don't know what it was, SC or ST.

How did I come here? You see there are financial problems in the family. We had debt. So, I needed to work. My family bought 2 cars, a Bolero and a Sumo. On loan. The (business) plan did not work and we could not pay the instalment….. There is also a loan from the SHG (Self-Help Group). My brothers said we did not take the loan so why should we pay? Every week I pay Rs.3000-4000 [$36.13 to $48.17 USD], for the loan. That is how it is for the last two years. My brother pays a little bit, but I pay more. That is why I came here. How will my mother pay, I thought?

I work for a local company. I have passed X class. I share the room with 2 others.

My friends from Jharkhand - four of us planned to come together. They were working here earlier. They had lived here so knew where to go. They lived in this same room…. I came without telling my parents. There are 3 of us now. We share the room.

I walk to the factory. It is a local company, and I get weekly payment. I work on piece rate. I can get up to 2-3000 per week, but sometimes there is no work. … The room rent is 2300/-. My friends are working a shift from 9 am -9 pm for Rs. 290/- [$3.49 USD] …They go by bus.

I do the housework. We have cooking gas and a Bharat cylinder. There is another family here from Bihar from earlier on. They have been here for the last 10 years. We use their connection. So, we pay Rs. 2400 [$28.90 USD] for 2 months. The toilet bath is there. We have to carry water.

I found work through a contractor. I met him in the market. I have been working with him for 3 months. When I first came it was very difficult. No work, no money, I didn't like it…. It was 2-3 months before I got to work. I stayed here in the same room. When I did not have work, they [friends] got the rations. I used to cook, clean etc. Later, when I found work, then I paid them, meaning I got the rations and paid for the gas. We all pitch in for the work. We pool in every week.

We keep hisaab (accounts). I still wash my clothes when I am here and cook. They do it when they are here. If they won't do it, then I too won't do it for them.

Once, in one week I got 7000- [$84.30 USD] as payment. I worked day and night. No rest, I used to take my food that is all. But there is less work now, so earning goes down.

But I prefer this to shift work because in shift work there is more work and less pay. Only it is regular. If I work for 8 hours at a piece rate I will earn more. The main problem, you see is to choose between less work or less payment.

Before coming here, I went to Mumbai to work, for a year. To look after a dadi maa. I earned 13000/- [$156.56 USD] per month. They did not give us proper food. I didn't like it. No one cared for me….

In the hostels here, the girls don't get time even to eat. No time to take off even if they are not well.

Do I have any views on how this can change? I say that Patnaik [Odisha Chief Minister at the time] should give us work, close to our homes. The factories in our state have only boys working, so we won't get work there. The women do only sweeping and mopping!"[110]

[110] Interview at Parappalayam on 10.12.23 at 10.30 am

Meena's preference for non-shift work with irregular hours over regular shifts is revealing. Her roommates, earning ₹290 per day, make around ₹7500 a month for 312 hours. Meena, who once earned ₹7000 in a week, felt she could earn in one week what her friends earned in a month, despite the continuous work. However, she admits that work and earnings have reduced. Her comparison highlights how many migrant women workers prefer irregular contract work over regular shifts, despite the lower pay for more work.

In contrast, 22-year-old Manju from Chhapra, Bihar, has been in Tiruppur for 2 ½ years and occupies a small room in a shared row of five rooms. While others share rooms, Manju prefers single occupancy. She finds companionship in her neighbors, mostly girls from Odisha, Ballia (UP), and Andhra Pradesh. The only male worker in the house stays with his family. Manju feels comfortable in this arrangement.

Box 5: Voices of migrant women workers

An odd one out? Staying alone: of choices and quandaries

"My didi's son worked here. His friend said lots of women work here, why don't you come too? I travelled by train, for 3 days. ….. So, two of us came, one boy and I. I got work immediately after coming here. Slowly I got used to this place, and now I come and go. For some time, I stayed with friends, in other rooms. Then I moved here. I have stayed in this room for some time now. It has some open areas.

I had gone home and came back about 1 ½ months back. Now all my friends in the village are married. Man nahin lagta (don't feel interested/involved). Now the only friends I have are those here. No there is not such a financial problem in my house/ family. My brothers look after all that. One works in the plywood in Kerala and the other operates a JCB in Delhi…

In this set of rooms, I alone am from Bihar. I cook for myself within the room. But at night we share. Today is Sunday but they are all at work. There is urgent work for Pongal, so all are working.

All this while I worked with a big company. But I left it a month ago. Now I plan to work with a tailor.

I used to be a Helper. I would take the samples. For 2 ½years in the same company. Earlier I was paid 2200/- [$26.49 USD] per week, then it rose to 2500/- [$30.11 USD] per week, 10K [$120.43 USD] per month. The rent for this room is Rs.1000/- [$12.04 USD]. Then I spend on my food etc. zyaada nahin bachta (nor much is saved), maybe 2-3 thousand [$24.09 USD]. Sometimes I send money home. Nahin to uda dete han (otherwise I just spend. I do not have a bank account. But I do have an Aadhar card, though this company does not ask for Aadhar. But when I first joined, I had to show since they said no girls come here from Bihar, only those who are married come. So, I had to show my Aadhar card to the Manager. The bhaiya who I came with showed it. One of the bhaiyas I came with is married. The other one I just know from back home.

All these years I went to work regularly. I used to walk, a long way, nearly 20 minutes or so. In my factory there are lots of Tamil-speaking women, I alone speak Hindi. The sir has come from abroad. It has a four-storey building. It is in the export line. T-shirts, pants, Bermudas, woollens also. Foreigners come to the company, men and women.

On Sunday [overtime] he gives breakfast, lunch and evening tea-snacks. On Sunday the work stops at 5 pm.

I want to do tailoring work. No, I have not learnt formally. I started as a Helper. I want to learn. I will have to pay Rs. 3000/- [$36.13 USD] to learn.

Presently I get Rs. 2000/- [$24.06 USD] per week but that will be given if I work on Sundays also. Sir is angry because I did not go. Company mein man nahin lag raha hai.

In the big companies they give PF, ESI etc. Some gave a Diwali bonus for 3000/- [$36.13 USD], but mine did not give. No, there is no doctor in the company, but some first aid is available.…There must be some 15-20 in checking. The Tamilians go by their own scooty or walk. They are in tailoring mostly and are married.

Tang nahin karte. koi kuchh nahin bolta [They don't harass. No one says anything]. But if I join the company again, I will have to leave by 8 am. I prefer to go after finishing my daily chores, cleaning the house etc. I like to cook what I like to eat: pasta, chowmein, sevaiyan, sooji halwa… I don't cook or eat non-vegetarian; the other girls also cook as per their choice. We sing and dance a lot, when not at work, on Sundays, especially.

… I have no plans to get married for now.

The boys here are not good. They are from Bihar too, but they marry back in the village and then hitch up with someone here. Some time ago, a girl committed suicide. She fell in love with a boy who went off with his friends. For 2 days the door was closed. Then someone peeped inside from a glass window and saw her dead. The other girls here are also not planning to marry here. But who knows?"

Manju feels alienated in both her village and Tiruppur, losing a sense of belonging. Stagnation in her work life makes her feel stuck.

An Experience of Educational Incentives

Box 6: Voices of migrant women workers

Studying and working in Tiruppur

"My company has 5000 girls living in the hostel. They are mostly from Odisha, Jharkhand…. ….. After duty, we have music classes…. I am studying there. I am doing a BA in Arts at the company-run University. There is a college there. We study for free. I am in II year. The medium of instruction is English.

In the morning, I do ironing…. till 5 pm. At 7 pm I go for tuition. On Sunday, I go to the college for classes. It is a 2- hour class. The subjects are History, MIL (Modern Indian language), and English. There are 10 subjects, for which 5 exams are held in the first semester and 5 in semester II. I enjoy English. I also study British literature from the 15-18th centuries as well as the 19th-20th centuries. There is a Foundation course in English.

We don't have classes on Saturday, otherwise daily from 7-9 pm…. An examination fee of ₹ 2000/- has to be paid.

I work for 6-9 hours a day for which I am paid ₹ 380/- per day…. the shift is 8.30- 5.30 pm, sometimes till 6 pm…. In one month I earn ₹ 8-10 thousand. I do ironing….

During the first 2 years, I worked and also did Class XII…. The education is free. I joined the hostel at 18, which is when I was allowed to join…. Before that I was in Sashapur, in a hostel, while my mother was working here. It was a residential school and I had stayed there from class VIII onwards.

In the hostel room, 20 girls are staying together, all sleep on the floor; there are 2 toilets, and 2 bathing areas. Subah se line lagti hai (From the morning there are lines/queues). I get up at 6 am. It takes about half an hour to get to the front of the line. The other girls on my floor are from Odisha… The second largest group is from Jharkhand, and then from Assam.

The company makes T-shirts and pants. I don't know whether this is exported. My mother says we will go back after I finish my studies."


ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission
for Asia and the Pacific


IOM
UN MIGRATION


UN
WOMEN
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women